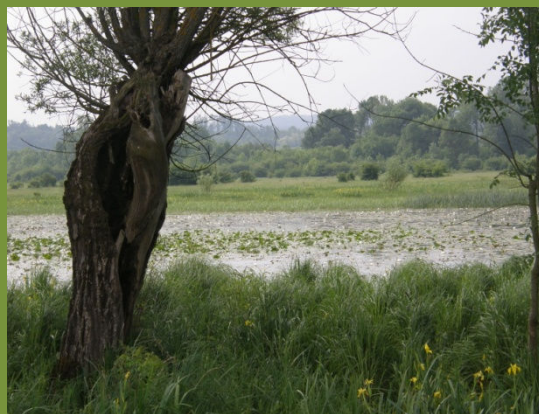



# Common pastures in Croatian floodplains – oases of cultural and natural heritage



Iris Beneš, Brod Ecological Society – BED/ICCA Consortium

Supporting High Nature Value Farming in Europe , Burren, Ireland

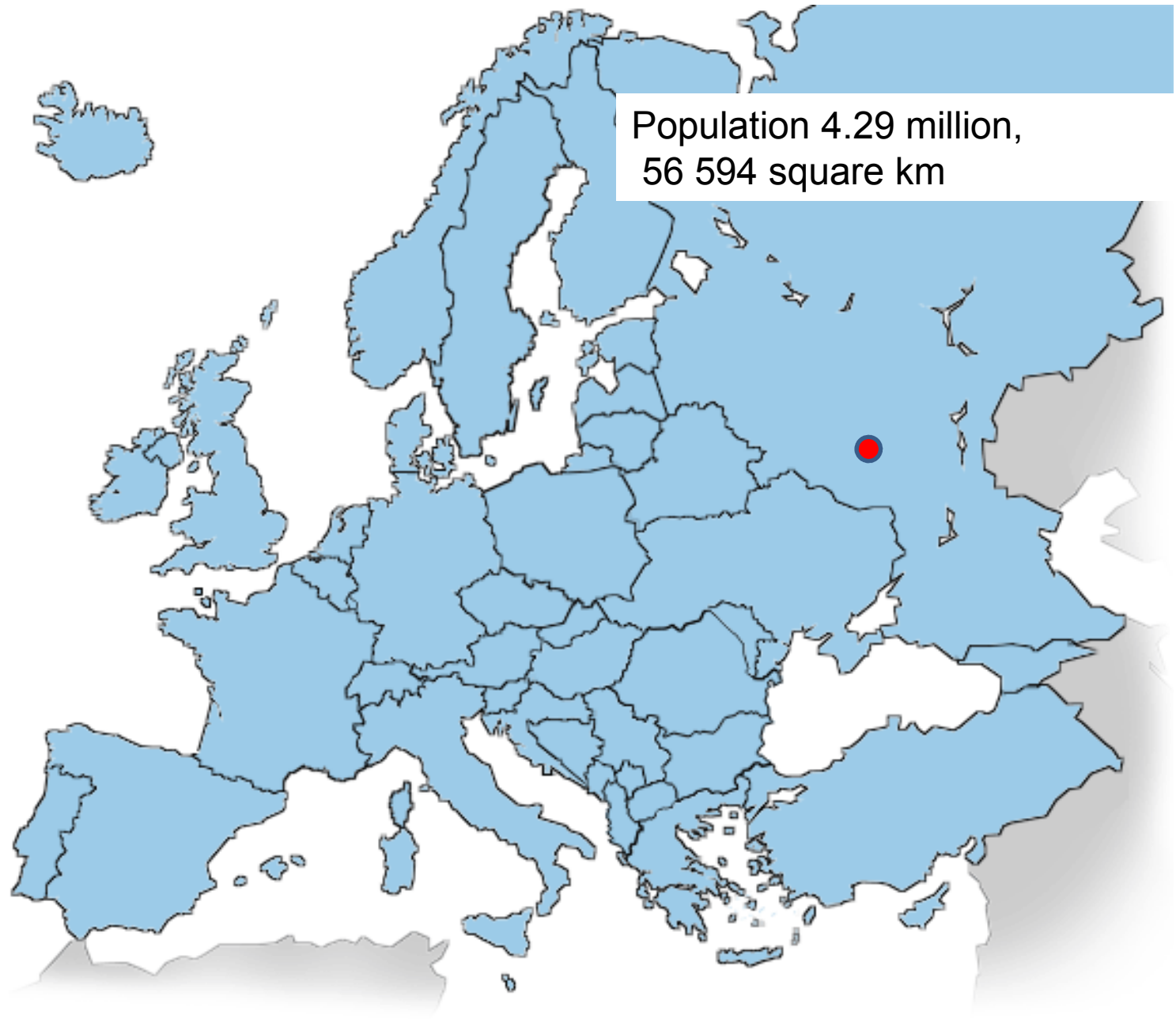




Introduction  
Agricultural land  
Legal framework  
Gajna, Croatia – example of  
sustainable grazing as  
prerequisite for nature  
protection  
Problems/solutions/joint actions

## Geography of Croatia :

- plains, lakes and rolling hills in the continental north and north-east (Central Croatia and Slavonia, part of the Pannonian Basin);
- densely wooded mountains in Lika and Gorski Kotar, part of the Dinaric Alps;
- rocky coastlines on the Adriatic Sea (Istria, Northern Sea coast and Dalmatia).



Population 4.29 million,  
56 594 square km



## Few facts and figures about Croatia – from the RDP - statistics from 2008-2012

- Predominantly **rural area** - **close to 80% of Croatia's land area** , (EU -27 51,3%) covering 75,08% of total population and 99,24% of total territory
- Average agricultural holding** in Croatia utilises 5,6 ha of agricultural land – (EU -27 14,4 ha)
  - 52,5 % under 2 ha
  - 89,4 % being less than 10 ha
- Categories of utilised land** -
  - arable land and gardens (67,9 %), - dominant crops maize, then wheat and barley
  - permanent grasslands (26,0 %),
  - permanent crops (5,9 %)
- Approximately 144.655 head of cattle were imported annually to Croatia and 18.245 exported
- Natura 2000 covers 36,67 % of land surface – and nearly one third of that is agricultural land
- Negative impact on social infrastructure - depopulation, the impact of the war and the long term economic crisis - the employment rate in age15-64 in Croatia was 50,7 %

# Legal framework – common pastures

Act on proclamation of land and similar communities and property communities' common property, 1953 – common pastures formally transferred to State ownership

Croatia omitted the “social ownership” and passed a property restitution law in 1990, and subsequently amended that law in 1991 and 1993 and the 1996 “Law on Restitution/Compensation of Property Taken During the Time of the Yugoslav Communist Government” However, due to series of reason it was mostly not applicable to the land communities since, to simplify it, the State claimed they lacked unbroken continuity and in many cases just transferred the social ownership of the land to the state ownership.

**Agricultural Land Act 152/08** – ammended 21/10, 124/10 and 63/11

Municipalities have been given the right to decide on the lease of the formerly common and now State owned land

Amendments 63/11 introduction of so called *Pasturing communities*. *PCs* - a cooperative – only with people with residence of that or neighbouring municipalities. The Ordinance on Conditions for Submitting Requirements and Criteria for the Lease of Communal Pastures (OG 135/11)

**Agricultural Land Act 39/13** - Pasturing communities kicked out between two readings in the Parliament, Agency for agricultural Land taking over the tenders and all procedures from municipalities

Newest **Agricultural Land Act amendments 48/15** – returned Pasturing communities (cooperatives) as eligible to lease common pastures – users paying double rents



# Flooded common grasslands of Sava river

Lonjsko Polje Nature Park 50,650 ha, is one of the largest wetland areas in the entire Danubian basin.

The most significant ecological process in the Lonjsko Polje Nature Park is flooding

In the area of the Park, approximately 12,000 ha are used by all inhabitants to graze their livestock. Most of these pastures are formally in the state ownership but *de facto* managed by the local community through the customary rules of common grazing. Highest concentration of indigenous breeds (horses, pigs, cattle) in Croatia - a unique way of managing pasturelands and are, at the same time, one of the most important habitats for a large number of rare and endangered plant and animal species.



Outside Lonjsko polje Nature park there are many similar landscapes along Sava River

Outside Lonjsko polje Nature park there are many similar landscapes along Sava River



Two main ecological process – flooding and grazing

Biggest threat is  
*Amorpha fruticosa*  
– invasive plant  
specie



- 0 - Original coral
- 1- Test field 1
- 2 - Test field 2
- 3- Test field 3
- 4 - Test field 4
- 5 - Test field 5

10/24/2015

Supporting High Nature Value Farming in Europe , Burren, Ireland







## Case study - GAJNA

In densely populated and intensively cultivated agricultural area close to the Sava River, there are places extremely valuable for nature and directly dependent on traditional land use (common pastures, flooded grasslands and alluvial floodplain lowland forests)



## Similar grazing practices throughout centuries – continuous communal governance of the land



Late Bronze Age



1970's



1980's



2010's

Local community and NGO BED founded in 1989 - managing the area together - revitalization, biodiversity protection and protection of cultural and natural heritage



Protected as a significant landscape since 1990, 280 ha of typical flooded pasture, alluvial depressions and elevations,

Supporting High Nature Value Farming in Europe - Beyond the Field  
Directly dependant on activities of local community for its survival as a valuable habitat



Indigenous and protected breeds – best caretakers of the pasture – low input, high stamina, natural and cultural heritage, gene pool, best for extermination of invasive plant species, adaptation qualities



**Black Slavonian Pig**



**Slavonian  
Syrmium  
Podolian  
Cattle**



**Tsigai sheep**



10/24/2015

**Posavina Horse**



**Croatian Shepherd Dog**

Supporting High Nature Value Farming in  
Europe , Burren, Ireland



# Gajna - Pool of biodiversity- Networks – Emerald, Natura 2000 (SPA and SAC), ELBARN

Four leaf clover– *Marsilea quadrifolia* – EU red list



Numerous alluvial depressions harbour over 250 plant species of marshy and pasture flora. It is important bird feeding and fish spawning area.

Sand martin – *Riparia riparia*



Black stork– *Ciconia nigra*



Invasive plant species poses a major threat, particularly *Amorpha fruticosa* – grazing is the only efficient way of controlling it !!!



Podolians grazing on amorpha

10/24/2015

Supporting High Nature Value Farming in Europe, Burren, Ireland

## Gajna – place of the first Pasturing community in Croatia

Eco-cooperative Gajna was founded in 2007- re-registered as Pasturing community in 2012. Management plan created for Common pasture Gajna in 2012.- approved by Ministry of Environment and Nature Protection



*Pašnjačka zajednica osnivanje 25.02.2012.*





## Most important threats for common grazing in Croatia

1. Unclear **legal regimes in governance and land tenure** of former common grounds + overlapping of jurisdictions (water and forest companies, municipalities, nature protection bodies, local communities...) impeding eligibility for subsidies

Without a solution of land eligibility rules for CAP support in particular, even the most perfect set of EU or national subsidies would be wasted. An organizational structure that can administer the agrienvironment measures and payments to farmers is still undercapacitated.

2. Disappearance of the last generation of pastoralists, **population decrease and isolation** in the rural areas , **social stigma**

Economic and the the social conditions in areas where common grazing still exist are very unfavourable, most of them being in the so called Areas of special state concern. These areas are in most cases also affected by the war in the 1990's and have suffered additional war related depopulation. The traditional knowledge of extensive grazing regimes and conditions is disappearing since there is no transfer of knowledge to the younger generations. Shepherdin wears social stigma as a practice of the poorest.

3. **Climate change** – traditional adaption measures no longer sufficient in extreme floodings

# Through the barricades....

## Nature Conservation

- Agriculture is the biggest threat to biodiversity
- Rural people always look after economic interests first
- Communities do not have knowledge necessary for nature conservation – only experts can guide the process
- Nature has to be protected from people



## Agriculture

- Greening is more work and less profit
- Are we gonna eat bees, birds and butterflies ?
- Traditional practices are ineffective, that is why they disappeared in the first place
- Protected areas are hijacking land from better use



**RED ALERT** – The knowledge collected in the last generation of pastoralists will be gone if we do not react jointly

10/24/2015 Supporting High Nature Value Farming in Europe, Africa, Ireland  
**QUESTION** - How do we learn each other's languages and find common grounds ?



# Future – uncertainties and certainties



## What is uncertain?

- Legal – How will the new Ordinance on Conditions for Submitting Requirements and Criteria for the Lease of Communal Pastures shape the future of common grasslands ?
- Financial – How will Agrienviroment measures for Croatia in 2014-2020 look like?

## What is certain?

Links , mutual understanding and sync between policies and actors involved are very weak but pivotal for finding viable solutions. Economic support most important and urgent but should be followed with sets of measures aimed at support towards sustaining social and cultural values connected towards common grazing.



Thank you for your attention