

Shepherding the Wild: Unmaking and Remaking Hungarian Wood Pastures

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Unmaking and remaking nature constitutes the basis of human livelihoods around the world. For the environmentalist, coming from a Western scientific conservation framework, wilderness is the wished-for stage of nature. This view has influenced conservation movements in many parts of the world. For local people, in contrast, formally conserved wilderness constitutes an un-wished-for and inaccessible landscape. Highlighting these sharply opposing values of wilderness encourages me to frame my questions about the role of conservation within the human-environment relationship. *What are the activities and policies that influence “remaking/unmaking” processes of wood pastures? What are the relationships of different stakeholders to these processes in this ecosystem and management type? What are the traditional and local knowledge which related these activities?*

I selected wood pastures (silvopastoral systems) as a case study environment to examine this relationship because, by definition, this ecosystem needs human activity to maintain its habitat type. However, for decades, ecologists were unable to recognize this co-creative relationship. Shortly before I started my research, wilderness and rewilding became highly current topics for conservationists and ecological scientists, with wood pastures the reference point for many European researchers to understand and try to remake wild landscapes.

During my research, I uncovered detailed histories of human management activity and policy influence on wood pastures, which combined to create the landscape viewed as wilderness by contemporary environmentalists. My research showed that wood pasture management, part of silvopastoral work, could be seen as ‘shepherding the wild.’ Generally, these activities are influenced not just by herders, but also by policy changes, which may support traditional or non-traditional practices, and depend on innovations and trends in forestry, agriculture and conservation.

To understand unmaking and remaking nature, we must consider processes of separation and connection, and how differently these affect different demographics and personal histories. The proposed book will tell the story of the Bakony-Balaton region’s herding community and wood pastures, which were heavily influenced by abandonment. The last decade’s remaking of wood pastures was paralleled by a rebuilding of the local herder community. The book will demonstrate how shepherding the wild could revitalize socio-ecological production landscapes. I will use data from my doctoral work, additional unpublished data, and elements from a community-based writing methodology. The book will be edited and written with the local herder community and folk researchers from Bakony-Balaton. One of my planned articles focuses around the question of how changes to policy and forest law affected the activities of shepherding the wild, and drove the unmaking and remaking of wood pasture habitats in Hungary. I will prepare a journal article comparatively analyzing the 150-year-old Hungarian Forestry Journal, and contemporaneous agronomy and conservation journals. The second paper focuses on the living traditional and local knowledge of the Pannonian biographical region. The

third planned article will highlight an essential issue in conservation, the connection and reconnection of children to their local biocultural values.