

Great Milic Nature Park

– The world of the preserved values –

The *Tokaj Mountains*, which extends in North-South direction, is the most eastern and youngest volcanic part of the North Hungarian Mountains, it is actually the southern part of the (*Prešov*) *Eperjes-Tokaj Mountains* or the *Tokaj-Eperjes (Prešov) mountain range*, it borders on the river Hernád from the West and the Bodrog River from the East.

The North Hungarian Mountains are located within the Carpathian Basin. The *Tokaj- Eperjes mountain range* consisting of three mountain units with its 150 km long ridge is located on the eastern side of the region. Its southern part is called Tokaj Mountains, the middle part is the *Szalánci Hills* (Slanské vrchy) and its northern part is the *Eperjesi Hills* (Prešovské vrchy). The Szalánci Hills or Mountains, which form the southern part of the middle section, are located in Hungary. The Great Milic mountain group and the region Hegyköz – with its subsection named Felső-Hegyköz – are situated within these hills. (PÁLYI Z. JR; 2002)¹

If you turn towards the Hegyköz after Sátoraljaújhely, the road turns to the West among the tent-like hills and if you look towards Filkeháza after you have left Pálháza, on the horizon you can catch a sight of the silhouette of the Füzér Castle and the connected andesite top. The village Füzér is the historic centre of Hegyköz. According to the latest research “*Blind*” *Andronicus*, a member of the clan *Aba* might have been the owner of this place: this region is located isolated, far away from the procession routes (Hernád- and Bodrog valley), thus it could be easily protected and integrated into the area and its villages as symbolic starting point of the Hegyköz Basin. There were five stone castles in the county *Abaúj* in the era of the Grand Prince of the Hungarians, *Árpád*: *Boldogkő*, *Füzér*, *Regéc*, *Gönc* and *Szalánc* – the latter four were in the possession of the clan *Aba*. The register of the villages that belonged to the *Füzér* estate shows from the 18th century a great correspondence to the – historic – cultural landscape that is called *Hegyköz*

The area located in the south-eastern corner of the former *Abaúj* County was mentioned under the name *Hegyköz* in the visitation records of the *Abaúj* Reformed Diocese for the first time. The name occurs in agricultural texts originating from the first part of the 19th century and the first comprehensive



¹PÁLYI Z. JR. (2002): *A Szalánci-hegység (Slanské vrchy) hazai területre eső erdeinek természetvédelmi szempontú jellemzése [The nature protection oriented forests description concerning the Hungarian side of the Szalánci Hills (Slanské vrchy)]*, Manuscript, Debrecen

monograph of Abaúj County. Later records also mention Hegyköz – the area between Hollóháza and Vágáshuta – quite often (BALASSA 2000)².

The establishment of the Great Milic Nature Park is connected to Felső-Hegyköz: The idea of the nature park originates from the local governments of the settlements (Hollóháza, Füzér, Pusztafalu) situated on the southern side of the Great Milic mountain group and at its hilly forefront. The Slovakian villages on the northern side of the Milic (Szalánc (Slanec), Szalánchuta (Slanská Huta), Eszkáros (Skároš), Újszállás (Nový Salaš)) joined this initiative and they were followed by Füzérkomlós and Kéked from the Hungarian side.

The public associates the notion of nature parks preliminary with tourism in today's Hungary. The reason for this is the fact that the associations and organizations that are called nature parks are often founded in the course of sponsoring tourism organizations of a certain region. The nature park initiative was facilitated by the cooperation of settlements near and across

the border as well. Exemplary are the authorization and establishment of the border crossing points in the Austrian-Hungarian cross border nature park Írottök / Geschriebenstein by an intergovernmental agreement, the organization of ecotourism and the expansion of ecotourism programs.

The instruments of PHARE common micro-projects and the cross-border tenders for protecting the environment and the nature provided the framework for drafting a regional development concept, which was then complemented by the preparation of the related plan documentation. Within the Great Milic mountain group – rich in environmental/natural attractions – and in the hilly regions in the surroundings of the above settlements, the aim of the initiative

is to promote the sustainable use of the environment and ecotourism as pulling forces of the region in term of rural development.

According to its self-definition, the Great Milic Nature Park does not intend to highlight a few segments (e.g. ecotourism), but aims for a much more extensive synthesis. The aims formulated by the genius loci (spirit of a place) include the protection of the values of this marginalized region. We must also put a halt to the destructive affect of regional integration that has been ongoing for decades and must face modernization challenges at the same time. The emotional element of the above thoughts is very strong. The strong cohesion of the community contributed to the establishment of the initiative and the cooperation to a great extent. The environmental and the natural values as



²BALASSA I. (2000): *A Hegyköz földművelése [Land cultivation of the Hegyköz]*, Száz Magyar Falu Könyvesháza, Budapest (in Hungarian).

well as the traditions are still in the air and meanwhile it became evident that the incapable system of sectoral divisions is history. In such a situation local initiatives and local governments that consider environmental protection and conservation an inspirational idea have a realistic room for development.



The saddle of Slanec, in the background the Slanec Hills.

The aim of the JOINT PROGRAMMING DOCUMENT (2000-2006³) concerning the Hungarian-Slovakian borderline was to exploit the potentials of the border area cooperation in order to establish a social-economical environment that is capable of retaining the population of these rural areas. Sustainability is considered paramount while preparing and implementing development strategies for rural areas.

The Great Milic mountain group is a smaller geographical, one could say, ecological unit. In this respect, the general and unique environmental features unify the landscape. The tent-like hills that were shaped in the course of post-volcanic activity give this mountain group, belonging to two counties, a specific landscape image, e.g. the uniquely attractive Izra “Tarn”. Additionally there are numerous historic monuments in the area: The castles Füzér and Slanec (Szalánc) are popular tourist destinations.

Nature parks are organizational units of sustainable rural development, preferably large natural and cultural landscapes and exemplary recreational areas at the same time. These regions:

- ❖ can be characterized as varied, unique and rich in natural and environmental beauty;

³ KÖZÖS KÖZÖS PROGRAMOZÁSI DOKUMENTUM (2000-2006), MAGYARORSZÁG – SZLOVÁKIA PHARE HATÁRMENTI EGYÜTTMŰKÖDÉSI PROGRAM.



- ❖ thanks to their physical geography they are perfectly appropriate for spending an effective and actively relaxing time here;
- ❖ the basic principles and objectives of the use of land and environment aim to conserve these values.

The nature park is established with the cooperation of local settlements, enterprises and civil organizations as a unit of rural development. The phrase nature park is not a term from the Environmental Protection Act; in practical terms it is a rural development category.

In order to remedy this deficiency, the term nature park has been defined in Subsection p Section 10 of Act LXXVI of 2004 on the General Rules of Environmental Protection.

“Nature park: a bigger area of the country that has been established according to the provisions of the law, is rich in characteristic natural, environmental and cultural historical values and is suitable for active relaxation, recreation, healing, sustainable tourism, environmental protection education, disseminating information and environmentally friendly agriculture in the nature.” Section 16 says that the minister “may approve of the use of the title nature park”.

Nature parks are defined in France as follows:

“An area that has a delicate balance and a rich natural and cultural heritage is considered to be a nature park if it:

- ❖ protects the natural and cultural heritage;
- ❖ contributes to the economical and social development;
- ❖ provides accommodation and information to residents and visitors;
- ❖ experimental projects are among its activities, the scientific research of the area is supported and
- ❖ it has been given a status as such for 10 years.”

Scope of activities of French nature parks:

- Protection of the environment and the landscape;
- Development of the society and the economy, which includes agriculture, fishery, handicraft, heritage protection and tourism services;
- Scientific research of the area;
- Education, training, providing information;
- Experimental projects;
- Modernization of villages and regional planning.
- The importance of the different activities may alternate.

The definition of nature parks in Germany is as follows:

“Large areas that are to be developed in a uniform way and

- ❖ consist preliminarily of agricultural land or nature reserves,
- ❖ are suitable for recreational activities thanks to their landscape features,
- ❖ are suitable for recreational and tourism activities based on the basic principles of rural development and the territorial laws. The aim of the recreation has to be selected and planned suitably.”

Scope of activities of German nature parks:

- Protection of the environment and the landscape;
- In line with the law, another important objective is to provide rest places and to maintain an organization supervising the park;
- Cooperation related to the conservation of built and environmental heritage.
- Public and educational activities are new objectives. These were introduced in 1984 by the association of nature parks (VND).

Previous nature park programs in Hungary launched with the aid of PHARE resources are the following: in Western Transdanubia in Kőszeg and Kőszeghegyalja Írottkö – the Geschriebenstein Nature Park, the Hármashatár Nature Park (Hungarian-Austrian-Slovenian) and the associated Kerka-mente Nature Park. The Sopron-hegyvidék (Soproni Hills) Nature Park has been launched on the western border of Hungary. The Körösök Völgye (Körös Valley) Nature Park was established on the Rumanian-Hungarian borderline. The Vértes Nature Park is the only one that has not been opened near the country’s border. The Ipoly-mente Börzsöny Nature Park has been established alongside the Slovakian-Hungarian borderline and the Great Milic Nature Park informed us in 2003 that they would like to open at the same borderline.

Scope of activities of the Hungarian nature parks:

Protection of the nature and the environment: conservation

- to protect, manage and develop the nature and the landscape;
- to support sustainable use and the marketing of local products as well as strengthen regional identity;
- to support an environmentally conscious attitude and education.

Recreation and leisure:

- to facilitate recreational activities in the peaceful nature;
- to establish sustainable tourism and ecotourism;
- to establish the management of recreational activities and sustainable management;
- to organize eco-mobility.



The local governments of Hollóháza, Füzér and Pusztafalu initiated the launch of the “NAGY-MILIC NATURE PARK” in the summer of 2003 based on their potentials in terms of natural values, history and the capacity of the local population. They were joined by the villages Skároš (Szkáros), Slanec (Szalánc), Slanská Huta (Szalánchuta) and Nový Salaš (Újszállás) from the Slovakian side of the border. In 2004 two Hungarian villages, Kékéd and Füzérkomlós joined the initiative.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Signed on July 15, 2003 by the mayors of Füzér, Hollóháza, Pusztafalu, Szalánc (Slanec), Szalánchuta (Slanská Huta), Eszkáros (Skároš) and Újszállás (Nový Salaš) and on June 23, 2004 by the mayors of Kékéd and Füzérkomlós.

The signatories of the above named declaration express their intention to establish the “Great Milic Nature Park” in line with the objectives that have been agreed upon jointly with the population and the representatives of the local governments.

The crags of the Great Milic mountain group and the surrounding hilly landscape are located within the borders of the above listed settlements.

This area situated on the Hungarian-Slovakian border is full of potentials and possibilities for activities and is characterized by numerous natural, environmental and cultural attractions due to the environmental protection and not the least its peripheral location.

The intention to maintain this untouched originality sets the direction for the concept of future rural development plans.

The region could support and retain its population if we manage the resources based on the conservation of local values and develop ecotourism.

The idea of establishing the nature park is based on a European scheme that aims to keep the rural features of landscapes and subjugates every future development to this aim.

Consequently, the Nature Park is established with the cooperation of local settlements, enterprises and civil organizations in the spirit of sustainability as a regional development unit.

Based on the above mentioned values, the mayors of the founding villages and those settlements that joined the project at a later time express their intent to establish the “Great Milic Nature Park”.

The theory behind this intent: the territorial and dimensional potentials of the planned Nature Park are presently not sufficient to reach the objec-

tives (natural, historical, economical-geographical and social environment) without having a supplementary impact on the region. We would like to uncover these supplementary effects as the basis of the cross-border, institutional regional cooperation.

In addition to the vegetation, the architectural heritage within the natural environment of the region – which does not include only the sights well-known in Hungary – like Sárospatak, Füzér, Regéc, the castle of Boldogkő, or the cultural heritage of Gönc and Vizsoly, but other buildings and houses located in the empty, stagnating villages, which might also attract people who – for at least a short period of time – would like to leave their hasty lives.

In the course of our work, we would like to take stock of the potentials and opportunities of this marginalized rural environment and raise awareness for the processes that affect it adversely. The role of this small region in facing the challenges of the future should be in compliance with the following aspects: to protect the characteristic features of the environment, to protect the natural and cultural values and to support the livelihood of the local population.



State border along the northern range of the Tokaj-Zemplén Mountains in the former cadaster district of the village Füzér.

Visiting this relatively untouched nature and seeing the eye-catching and amazing panorama is a good opportunity for modern people who wish to recharge their batteries and relax also in order to raise their spirits. The fundamental interest of the population of Hegyköz is to encourage others to follow their example in protecting and conserving the original features of the environment.



Potentials of the Nature Park:

The establishment of a nature park, the intention of fulfilling high quality standards concerning nature parks and the efforts to do so are in compliance with today's paradigm shift.

This favorable paradigm change puts the idea of sustainability / maintainability in the foreground. These objectives could be facilitated within the Nature Park in the following fields:

- ❖ the nature and the environment;
- ❖ agriculture;
- ❖ free time relaxation and tourism;
- ❖ rural development.

The nature park enables us to draw additional resources into the region, builds the basis for the optimal use of these instruments, and motivates people to be innovative, creative and to become more willing to invest (i.e. LEADER programs).



The Tolvaj Hill above Pusztafalu

The institutional cooperation and the joint forum of the nature park support the harmonization of the “areas of opportunities”, conflict solving and the adoption of development-related experiences of other regions. To conclude, the model of nature parks requires a dialogue and joint action, which is based on the harmonization of local interests – establishing the theoretical background of an effective regional cooperation

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