



Photo: Monika Kyřlicová

# Maintaining the vitality of our landscapes

The natural resources and historical heritage that make up our landscapes are an essential part of our regional identity. Yet development in much of Europe seems to take place with a limited appreciation for the importance of cultural landscapes. VITAL LANDSCAPES undertakes a range of activities to make this issue a focal concern of regional and international discourse.

The VITAL LANDSCAPES project includes eight partners, from academia and the professional sphere, who share a desire to preserve the quality, beauty and diversity of our landscapes. The project tests innovative forms of citizen involvement, including transnational events, like conferences, working-group meetings and study tours. The approach gives locals responsibility for their immediate surroundings while bringing in international expertise. Stakeholders from around central Europe discuss approaches for landscape preservation, so they can learn from one another and increase their pool of potential solutions.

## Acceptance through participation

VITAL LANDSCAPES gives special attention to involving the local populace in decisions about the future development of their own landscape. In Unteres Saaletal in Germany, the project trains cultural landscape guides who act as ambassadors for the region, informing the public about the scenic qualities of this area. The team in Unteres Saaletal also works with local experts to identify suitable sites where the natural environment can be supported, as a counter-balance for nearby areas undergoing more intensive land

development. In the Austrian Mühlviertel region, the project organises landscape dialogues to ascertain the expectations of locals concerning the development of their village and surroundings. Project experts collect opinions and conduct meetings where participants are invited to formulate priorities for their community and to discuss development scenarios. In the Sumava Mountains in the Czech Republic for example, regular meetings help to strengthen local citizens' connections with the newly created biosphere reserve. In Ljubljansko Barje in Slovenia, local farmers teach suburban families about the value of local food and explain to children the importance of an intact natural landscape.

## Making landscape change visible

The changes that affect our landscapes often occur so slowly that they can be difficult to perceive. We can more clearly demonstrate the process of change through images or simulations that help stakeholders visualise threats to the landscape. The project uses a variety of visualisation techniques to provide an objective basis for discussion. It examines advanced methods for visualisation along with using conventional methods – like comparison of historical images, maps and orthophotos – as was done in Male Karpaty, Slovakia. More cutting-edge techniques include developing GoogleEarth apps that make it possible to create 3D representations of changes to landscape elements in the Nagyberek region of Hungary. In Mściwojow in Poland, the project works together with local stakeholders, using the modelling tool 3dsmax to help residents formulate a vision for their village after rehabilitation.

In its efforts to preserve cultural landscapes, the project is communicating ways to connect the diverse needs of economic development, nature protection and social welfare. It encourages dialogue between landscape maintainers – including farmers, investors, environmentalists and residents – at the regional and European levels.

With the help of VITAL LANDSCAPES we completed our database of areas and landscape maintenance measures in Unteres Saaletal. In addition, numerous workshops with citizens and stakeholders produced new ideas on how to develop our landscape.

Dr Gerd Villwock,  
Vice Chairman of Unteres Saaletal Nature Park, Germany

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Movies produced by children documenting how farmers contribute to landscape preservation

25

Graduates of training to become cultural landscape guides

1 050

Square km of central European cultural landscapes worthy of being managed sustainably

Photo: Ines Pożmiski



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