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ISSUES AND
CONCEPTS IN
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The Past and Future of Landscapes and Regions



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4 - Rural Communities and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

from Part I - Challenges: Time and Memory

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4 Rural Communities and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

Rural communities, where the population is dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry, have developed in close relationship with the local environment. Such interaction may be expressed in local and traditional knowledge, beliefs, land-use practices, and other forms of intangible heritage, but also tangibly in the landscape as imprints in ecosystems. Local knowledge is a vital part of culture, actively used in the adaptive management of natural resources, and although some parts may have lost their usefulness, they may be remembered in the community.

In this chapter we explore the importance of such traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) (Berkes et al. 2000) in rural agricultural communities. Our focus is placed on the emergence, transformation, and disappearance of this knowledge in relation to ecological and socio-cultural conditions. Examples of current and past TEK from Romania and Sweden are used to illustrate: (1) how today's Romanian TEK can provide insight for historical ecology in other contexts, such as Sweden; (2) the implications of change and loss of TEK; and (3) current re-evaluation of TEK, by farmers and by society as a whole.

The presented results are based on the integration of ethnological, anthropological, ecological, and historical fieldwork and experiences from Sweden and Romania (mainly the mountainous Maramureş County). Chapter 7 in this volume explores links between rural communities and their environment using the concept of biocultural diversity, while the practical and ethical aspects

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