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Semi-natural hay-meadow reliance on ecological sound management and preserving farming cultures

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This project aims to assess whether management plans implemented through the Action Plan for Hay Meadows (APHM) address the best management strategies based on both ecological and social aspects.

During the first year of the project (2014) ethnobotanical surveys, interviews (total number: 14; 20 farmers and/or owners) and botanical surveys (30 hay meadows) have been performed. In the ethnobotanical survey we detected seven vascular plant species traditionally used as indicator of mowing date (TEK-indicators). Information obtained through the interviews showed a general positive attitude to the APHM; local stakeholders found preservation of both open landscapes (not totally encroached by scrubs and forest) and the hay meadows as important. Some would however, have managed the meadows different from what defined in the management plans. A problem is the age of the users, as many were in their late 60s and few of them thought the next generation would manage the meadows in a sustainable way. The number of vascular species in the meadows ranged from 35 to 76, while the number of species associated with semi-natural grassland ranged from 6 to 22. Most of the TEK-indicators (6 of 7), several of the species with a clear associated with semi-natural grassland (11 of 19), but only a few of the species with a strong association with semi-natural grasslands (3 of 9) had reached the mature seed stage one week before suggested mowing. There were only a few significant and positive correlations of number in this phenological stage of the TEK-indicators and the species associated with semi-natural grassland (2 occurrences).

Based on these preliminary results we conclude that the APHM is legitimated by local stakeholders and of importance to the preservation of the threatened vegetation type semi-natural hay meadow. However, the aspects of “correct” management to preserve the species of particular interest (species associated with semi-natural grassland), and farming recruitment, have to be discussed and evaluated.