

# Internal colonization of traditional knowledge holders triggers biodiversity loss

Internal colonization as a lens...



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF  
**RANGELANDS AND  
PASTORALISTS**  
2026



**LEGELŐK ÉS PÁSZTOROK**

NEMZETKÖZI ÉVE

2026

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# Colonization of people and land often leads to intensification AND abandonment

**1950-60s  
in Eastern Europe**



**2000-2020s  
in Eastern Europe**  
**Extensive land-use disappears**  
**Invasive species spread**  
**Loss of biodiversity**



## WHAT IS INTERNAL COLONIZATION?

**Internal colonization** is the colonial-type subordination and exploitation of a country's **own** regions/land and inhabitants, primarily by central and regional **governments**, as well as by **urban elites**.

We, ecologists and conservationists, usually don't even notice that **we ourselves also contribute** to internal colonization, so it would be good to become aware of it and change our behaviour, our research and conservation approaches.



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# Biological Conservation

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**Need for decolonisation  
in Europe**

## Social justice for traditional knowledge holders will help conserve Europe's nature

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**Lack of respect**

**Misrepresentation**

**Misunderstanding**

**Invisibility**

**Vulnerability**

**Alien regulations**

**Bureaucracy**

**Unethical research**

**Disrespect for human rights**

**Isolations**

**Lack of knowledge co-production, co-management**

## An Example from the Age of Enlightenment

According to **Sámuel Tessedik (1786)**:

- the Hungarian herder is **uneducated**,
- manages land and livestock in a **disorderly** and **wasteful** way,
- considers extensive, free-range grazing to be natural,
- **resists innovation** (e.g., stabling, foddering, crop rotation),
- in his view, this is an **obstacle** to the country's economic development.

Tessedik regarded **Western European-style, intensive**, stall-based animal husbandry as the model to follow, and from this perspective described pastoralism as a “crude,” “primitive,” and “disorderly” system.

But it is important to note that:

- Tessedik was an **Enlightenment-era reformer**, not an ethnographer;
- his writings are **programmatically texts**, not ethnographic descriptions;
- what he criticizes is **economic rationality**, not cultural value;
- for him, the herder is often a symbol: that of an “**unreformed Hungary.**”



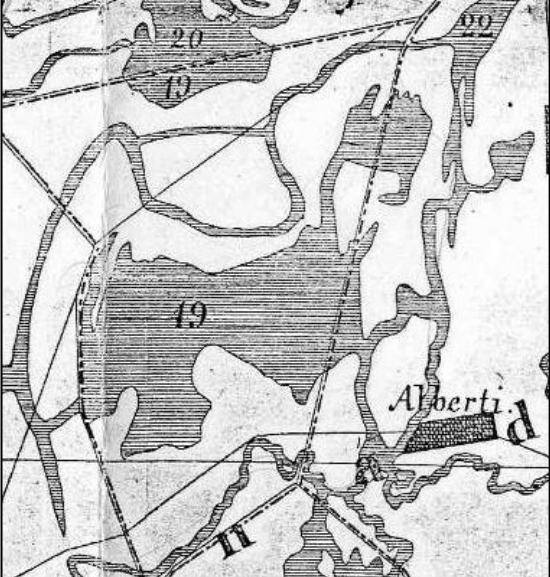
**My personal story (to avoid blaming others...)**

Time of no contact ... (we said hello, though)



József Attila University  
(1985-1990)

Unexpected encounter  
with local 'data providers'



Pub in Csanádalberti  
(1994)



**We interviewed locals, but did not yet really understand them...**

**1996-2010**

We asked: how the landscape has changed, but not what herders' aims were, what knowledge they used for making a change



Traditional ecological knowledge as a concept and data  
**source for** historical ecology, vegetation science and  
conservation biology: A Hungarian perspective

Zsolt Molnár, Sándor Bartha & Dániel Babai

**Abstract**

*Historical data are crucial in understanding landscape dynamics and in planning nature conservation management. The present knowledge of botanists, ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and foresters, however, seems to be insufficient for reliable planning and realization of nature conservation management in Europe. One reason for this is that we know little about the traditional relationship between nature and humans. In the past, knowledge of people working in nature was ample for sustainability, since they managed their environment in order to sustain their communities for the long run. Although this knowledge is decaying rapidly with modernization, it still exists in Central-Europe. It exists in such a quantity that there will not likely be enough (historical) ecologists and botanists in our countries to collect, “sustain” and use the related scientific ecological, botanical knowledge, which is commensurable in quantity to traditional ecological local knowledge.*

# Természetkímélő gazdálkodás szikeseken



MOLNÁR ZSOLT ÉS CSÍZI ISTVÁN



Written: 2011  
Published: 2014

## One step forward:

- Herders were studied, we discussed pastoral management for conservation with them, we understood them quite well
- Herders were not asked to comment & review the text of the book...
- No herder co-author (though an agricultural expert/farmer was invited as a co-author)

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge(ILK) of Hungarian Herders  
A Film For The IPBES Europe-Central Asia Assessment**

**Magyar Pásztorok Ökológiai Tudása  
Az IPBES Európai-Közép-Ázsiai Értékeléshez készült Film**



**The first film with a  
decolonial approach 2016**

**(I became a member of  
IPBES in 2014....)**

**FPIC**



**Máté János**



**Barta Sándor**



**Sáfian László**



**Miskolc University  
Cultural and Visual Anthropology Department**


Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC)

2016



## Knowledge co-production with traditional herders on cattle grazing behaviour for better management of species-rich grasslands

**Co-authorship**

Zsolt Molnár<sup>1</sup>  | András Kelemen<sup>2</sup> | Róbert Kun<sup>3</sup> | **János Máté<sup>4</sup> | László Sáfián<sup>5</sup>** |  
Fred Provenza<sup>6</sup> | Sandra Díaz<sup>7</sup> | Hossein Barani<sup>8</sup> | Marianna Biró<sup>9</sup> | András Máté<sup>10</sup> |  
Csaba Vadász<sup>11</sup>

## A decolonised exhibition

- Knowledge in the focus
- Two herder curators



## Slow films



Egy délután a legelőn  
Sáfián László juhasszal

## Co-presentations: Rangeland Congress, Australia



## Herders fora (2023-)



## Hungarian Women in Pastoralism group



# Mechanisms of internal colonisation of TK holders in Europe

## Political-institutional mechanisms

- Political subjection, and marginalization
- **Exclusion from decision making** (e.g. in land management, conservation management decisions)
- **Criminalization of traditional practices** (e.g. banning transhumance, forest grazing, curing)
- Abolition of commons (common grazing lands)

## Economic mechanisms

- Economic exploitation (e.g. unethical competition of industrial meat production)
- Market-driven intensification
- **Harmful subsidies** (many..., many unnecessary...)

## Cultural-epistemic mechanisms

- Cultural domination and propaganda ("backward", science/elit knows better)
- **Domination of knowledge production, and what counts knowledge** (e.g. regenerative farming)
- Cultural appropriation (e.g. herding dog selection – for outlook only)
- Disrespect in education and media (herding is primitive)
- Moralisation of human-nature relationships (e.g. **agressive veganism**)

# Lost and missing rights of TK holders in Europe (very similar to Indigenous Peoples...)

Rights to:

- equality and freedom from discrimination, prejudice, and epistemic superiority
- **participate in decision-making** through representative institutions
- maintain, develop, and revitalize cultural traditions
- **practice traditional livelihoods and knowledge**
- culturally appropriate education and respectful media representation
- **dignity and self-determination**
- **lands, territories, and resources, including protection from dispossession**
- maintain traditional animal-healing practices
- maintain spiritual relationships with land
- **Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)**

## How do locals experience internal colonization, what do they say about it?

- With these (EU) regulations, we can now only be servants in our own country.
- I can accompany the little skylark all the way to Budapest (if that's what they're paying for).
- Television: there is nothing in it that is really about us (traditional herders' everyday life).
- The ranger speaks from the paperwork; I speak from reality.
- They want to teach us, but they do not want to listen to us, or learn from us.
- If we talk, we agree on 90% of things (herder and conservationist).
- Wine has advertising, but lamb does not (cf. markets).
- Some rangers do not even say hello to us!

# Consequences of internal colonization for traditional herders, nature and nature conservation in Europe

Changed knowledge generation

Abandonment of trad. practices

Decreased mobility

Woody encroachment

Agr. intensification

Spread of invasive alien species

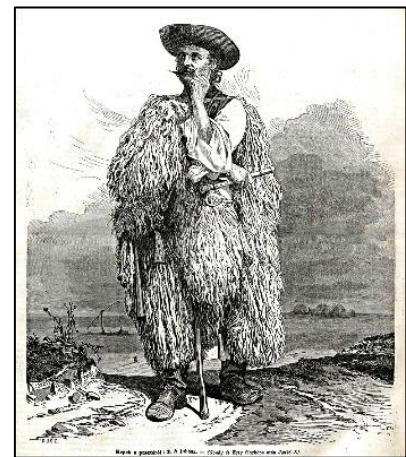
Loss of culture

Loss of cultural autonomy

Biodiversity loss

Knowledge erosion

Loss of traditional herders

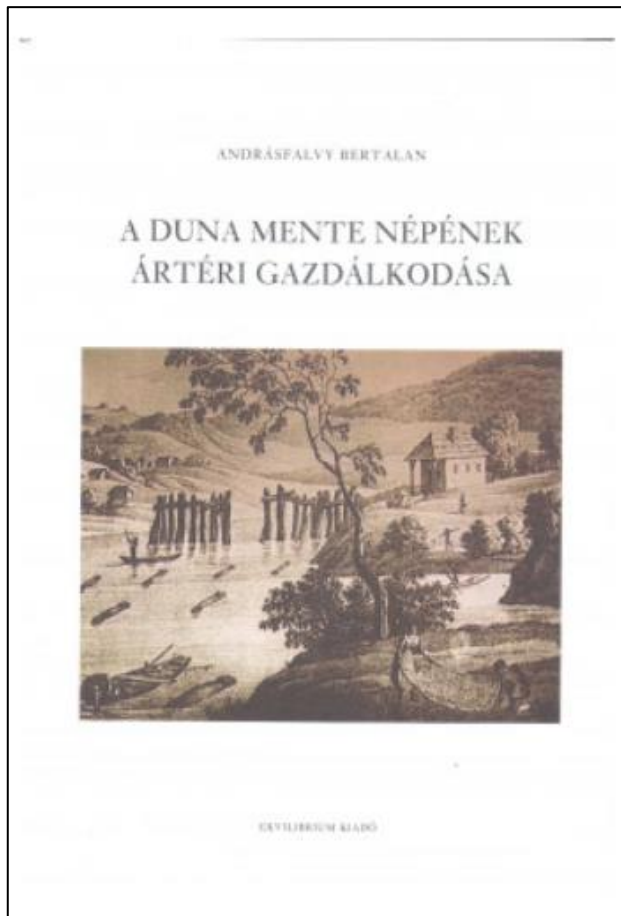


18th century

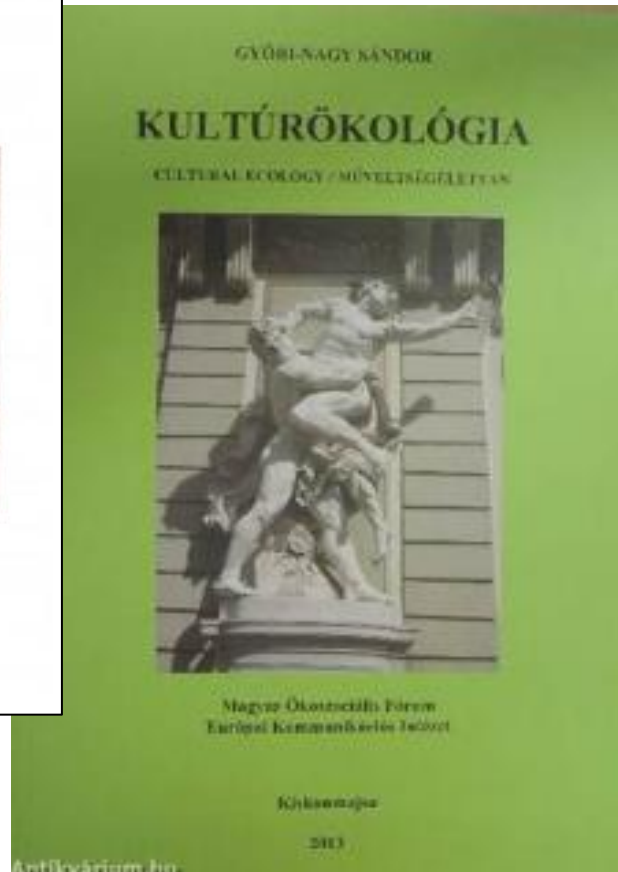


21st century

# Books about internal colonization processes in Hungary



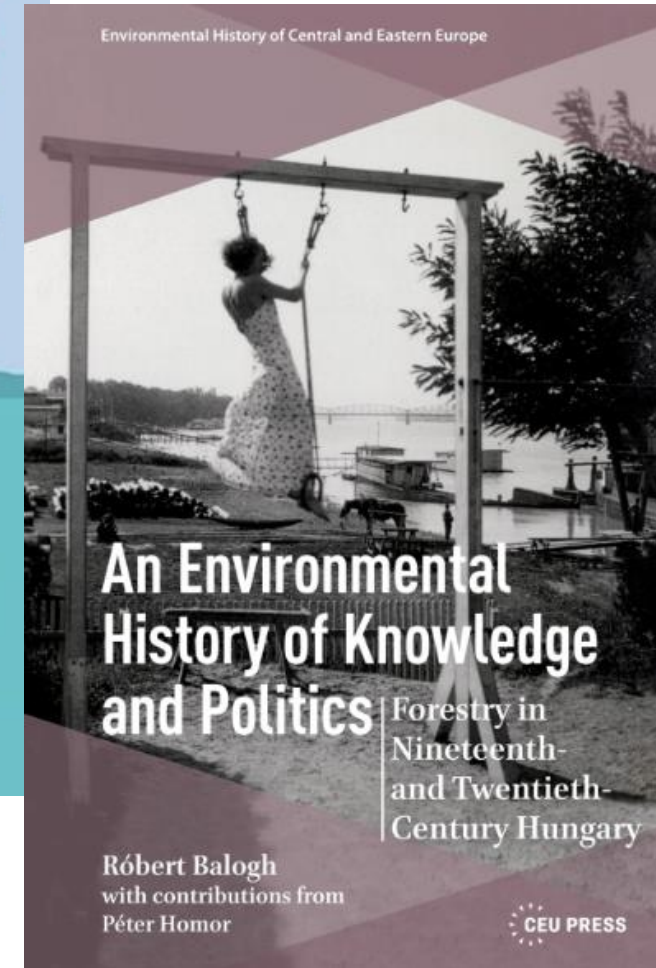
1976/2007



1999/2013



2014



2026