

An ethnobotany survey of the Rahovec municipality, Kosovo

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Introduction

Kosovo is rich in biological diversity, currently are around 1,800 plant species known to make up the flora of Kosovo. However, the actual total flora of Kosovo is estimated to comprise more than 2,500 plant species (Krasniqi, 1998). In the other hand, Kosovo is rich in cultural aspects too. Actually in Kosovo are living six ethnic groups, Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Bosniaks, Gorani and Roma (REA) community, respectively. This biological and cultural richness in Kosovo represents a unique hotspot in Europe, which allows interesting cross-cultural ethnobotanical studies. Rahovec municipality is a small town located in south-west Kosovo. It is a rural area, inhabited mainly by Albanians and other communities including Serbs. The Albanians are speaking Gegë dialectal of the Albanian language, while Serbs are speaking the Serbian language. Many inhabitants of Rahovec town, apart from the Albanian language are speaking Rahovecjanje, or Rahovec's speech too, which is community language with the predominance of Slavic linguistic elements (Hoxha, 2019). This community language is known as Ravëqki, Rahovecianshe, Gjuha e Rahovecit, etc. too.

Small-scale agro-pastoral activities especial viniculture still represent the pillar of subsistence

economies for local inhabitants who lives in this region. Except that, the economy of the many families in the study area is depending on the remittances sent by relatives living abroad.

Local populations have been negatively affected by migration due to displacement of peoples from rural areas to urban areas and abroad too. Migration patterns contribute to the rapid decline of traditional knowledge of plant species used as medicine, food and handicrafts; it has also contributed to a decrease the vertical transmission of traditional oral knowledge from one generation to another (Mustafa et al., 2015).

This ethnobotanical study aims to document the ethnobotanical knowledge of plant uses for food and medicine and to compare the findings among Muslim Albanians (speaking Albanian language and those using Rahovec's speech) and Christian Orthodox Serbs living in Rahovec municipality.

Materials and methods

In this study, traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) use of local plants in 14 villages situated in the territory of Rahovec municipality were investigated. The field study conducted in 2017. Snowball sampling techniques used to recruit 145 elderly informants (95 Albanians and 35 Serbs),

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while semi-structured interviews used, in which the respondent asked for food and medicine uses of local plant resources. Interviews conducted in the Albanian and Serbian languages. Informed consent from all participants verbally obtained before conducting interviews and ethical guidelines prescribed by the International Society of Ethnobiology (ISE, 2008) followed.

Results and discussion

Overall, 72 species (belonging to 33 families) we recorded to be used by locals. The predominantly quoted plant families were Rosaceae (13 species) and Lamiaceae (10 species). In total fifty species used only for medicinal purposes, eighteen specie only for food, while five species used as food and medicine.

The most important species traditionally used were: *Achillea millefolium*, *Artemisia absinthium*, *Crataegus monogyna*, *Cornus mas*, *Calendula officinalis*, *Hypericum perforatum*, *Juglans regia*, *Malus sylvestris*, *Matricaria chamomilla*, *Prunus spinose*, *Plantago major*, *Rosa canina*, *Urtica dioica*, *Vaccinium myrtillus*, etc.

The most common wild species used for food were: *Urtica dioica*, *Cornus mas*, *Corylus avellana*, *Chenopodium album*, *Fragaria vesca*, *Malus sylvestris*, *Plantago major*, *Rumex acetosa*, etc.

Collected plant species for medicinal purposes mostly were used to treat gastrointestinal troubles (58%), nervous system illness (20%), respiratory system illnesses (19%), urinary and genital system (17%), blood circulation system disorders (16%), endocrine system (15%), skin inflammations (13%), to increase immunity (10%), etc. Mainly decoction (64%), followed by maceration (11%), infusion (7%), etc.

Comparison of the data recorded among the studied group's results of: 15 species used only from Albanians, 25 only from Serbians, and only 4 species used by Rahovec's speaking people; 18 species used by both Albanians and Serbs, 20 by Serbs and Rahovec's speaking people, 16 from Albanians and Rahovec's speaking people, and 28 by all groups. Members of the two ethnic groups ubiquitously mentioned the majority of the cited taxa; however, the specific uses of taxa differed between the groups.

Conclusion

The study showed that this area located in south-west Kosovo still represents an important reservoir of traditional ecological knowledge. Cross-cultural ethnobiological studies are crucial to better understanding the cultural factors that may affect plant perceptions and uses. Thus the similarities on using the plant species show that different groups living together share the same experiences of the uses of natural resource. At the same time, differences confirm the importance of cultural, religious and ethnic divisions in shaping divergent traditional uses of natural resources.

The tradition ecological knowledge on using plant natural resources can help for proposing of the new ways of their uses, as well as could contribute in the sustainable local development of the region (e.g. on eco-tourism and small-scale trade of medicinal herbs, food niche and handicrafts products) but also for fostering collaboration and reconciliation among diverse ethnic and religious communities.

References

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