

DAGENE Short history and activity

Imre Bodó

DAGENE as an NGO was established in 1989 at Bugacpuszta Hungary. In those days it was a breakthrough because earlier it was not allowed to create such a non governmental association and even together with east and west countries.

The aim of establishment of such an association was the promotion of cooperation among the breeders of neighbouring countries giving prominence to the conservation of genetic resources of domestic animals. In that time it was not so popular as it is nowadays.

Its name in English : *Danubian Countries Alliance for Conservation of Genes in Animal Species*. Prof Schleger gave this name, for abbreviation the name of Austrian ÖNGENE served as a model. The name was given without marking the „domestic animals” because prof Schleger’s idea was to involve some games, for instance red deer as well.

The members, after a quick joining became Austria, Croatia, Czechland, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Serbia, Bulgaria.

The first president was late prof Walter Schleger (1989 – 1998) (Austria), the second and actual president is prof Imre Bodó Hungary (1999 - 2010).

The activity of DAGENE:

1. Conferences
2. Field visits
3. Discussion of actual questions
4. Data collection on genetic resources of domestic animals
5. Publications
6. Projects

Some examples :

1.

Assemblies, Conferences and workshops were organized on different topics nearly every year as follows :

Bugacpuszta 1989

Krems 1990

Üllő 1992

Kosice 1993

Zagreb 1994

Prague 1996

Sibiu 1997

Budapest 1998

Kosice 1999

Domžale 2000

Budapest 2001

Linz–Wels 2002

Budapest 2003

Bled 2004

Nitra 2005

Debrecen 2006

Irving 2007

Kozárd 2008

Zagreb 2009

Brazi 2010

The official **General Assemblies** were organized in all the second years, according to the statutes of the Alliance combined always with a conference and field visits etc.

Topics : problems of conservation of genetic resources of domestic animals, the production of different products, special situation of some endangered breeds, comparison of theoretical concepts of breed and type, advantages and disadvantages of subsidies etc

The actual (2010) General Assembly at Brazi, in Transsylvanian part of Romania, should be considered the jubilee 20th reunion of DAGENE.

2.

Field visits were always joined to the conferences and workshops.

In Croatia the visit of podolic cattle and the local sheep breed of Pag island was interesting, however in Hungary the survey on the Tzigai was meaningful matter with the uncertain origin and statement of different types.

The three color varieties of Mangalitza were also an important topic of field visits, even because swallow bellied Mangalitza are also in Austria, Romania and Switzerland and the blond color in Germany. The DNA comparison proved that the Mangalitza color varieties might be considered as different breeds as well.

A visit at the Simbata Lipizzan Stud gave good experiences to all conservationists about the preservation of a many years old traditional horse breed.

These common visits made possible the acquaintance of breeders and friendship among the conservationists of neighbouring countries. The result was the change and purchase of breeding animals and passing-on the work experiences.

3.

Discussion on actual questions seems to be one of the most important items of DAGENE meetings. Some examples

* Preservation of Animal Genetic Resources in saved breeds

- Breeding goals for further conservation must be fixed
- Selection criteria are always important
- Nucleus herd must remain with preservation measures
- Breeding in foreign countries must be regulated and herd book system is important
- Example : Hungarian Grey cattle with its multiplied herd size.
- Participation in rescue stations program seems to be difficult due to veterinarian regulation.

* There are big differences between the situation of several breeds The examples of the Mezőhegyes horse breeds and the Tzigai sheep breeds were compared.

* The FAO register, the World Watch List is a good compilation, but without responsibility for the breeding of the breeds, the endangered ones included. An unanswered question : Which organization can or should register or officially list the breeds over the borders of countries?

EU, FAO, DAGENE, SAVE, RBI ?

No answer up to this moment.

The products of animals can be registered and protected in European level, but the breeds not.

4.

Data collection on endangered genetic resources of domestic animals was going on in national level in all the DAGENE countries.

Now all these countries have a more or less elaborated programme for conservation of animal genetic resources.

The amount of more or less existing national or EU subsidies could be used for data collection, for registration and stud/herd/flock book edition of endangered domestic animal breeds in national level.

Papers were presented and discussed at the conferences and during the field visits practical problems could be presented, discussed and solved.

5.

Publications

The activity in the member countries of DAGENE increased very much during the decades of collaboration. Nice books, small booklets, scientific articles and other technical issues were published not only in national languages but also in English.

There were publications about the endangered breeds in all the member countries, these were not direct DAGENE publications, but influenced by the international cooperation of the region and distributed at the reunions to the colleagues of neighbouring countries.

Proceedings, national preservation programmes were published and circulated among DAGENE members.

The activity of DAGENE took certain impact to the function of governments in order to subsidize more or less the maintenance of valuable, endangered genetic resources of domestic animals as part of the national heritage.

6.

Projects

In the frame work of common data collection an international project proposal was submitted to ERFPP on the **Murinsulaner horse breed** based on the following arguments :

- Nearly extinct
- In 4 countries : Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia
- Different breed character
- Possible solution
- Impact on the other transboundary breeds

The project proposal at the first time was unsuccessful, but the second proposal of DAGENE was accepted and subsidized by ERFPP.

The work is going on successfully and it will be finished June 2010.

According to the difference among the other cold blooded horse and the Murinsulaner type the lighter, nicer and faster Murinsulaner type horses were selected and registered in Hungary and Slovenia. In Croatia the Murinsulaner as an accepted horse breed was officially recognized and exists. The Austrian Noriker breeders don't want to take part in the project.

The score table for the type character of Murinsulaner was elaborated and used for data collection. Data of 157 horses were collected and 92 mares and 11 stallions were selected and accepted for the registration in the first volume of an international register.

The effective contact with the national cold blooded horse breeders is an important aspect of this project with emphasis on the differentiation from Noriker, Posavina, Haflinger, Freiburger and other coldblooded breeds of the region.

This project affords a good example for international cooperation of breeders of transboundary breeds of other species included.

* A short conference was organized with the collaboration of FAO in Budapest on the legal aspects of conservation of genetic resources of domestic animals. The most important items were :

- The question of owner country
- The cradle of the breed
- The original /stud/herdflock book
- Types or breeds.

It was decided that not the name of the breed but the given type i.e. the genes of traditional breeds should be conserved.

Summary of results of 20 years and future plans

Acquaintance and a good collaboration and friendship developed among conservationist breeders of neighbouring countries. The possibility of change of breeding animals in the case of common breeds happened as well. Now the conservation of genetic resources and saving the endangered breeds seems already an international duty of nations because it is a non negligible part of biodiversity of the World with increasing cultural aspect.

The field visits, the meeting and conferences strengtened not only the knowledge about the special questions of conservation, but also the general opinion in animal breeding. The imporantce of it must not emphasized, because the decline of animal production is a consequence of world wide financial crisis.

Lists and books on traditional breeds of our countries are available for everybody who take interest in traditional animal breeding, professionals and tourists as well..

The yearly DAGENE fora were good for training of young researchers and breeders in inernational contact and discussion.

A DAGENE home page is planned and will be produced according to the possibilities in the future, starting with the proceedings of the Brazi meeting..

Besides the small membership fee in the future the contact with other sponsors should be developed in order to finance DAGENE in a higher level. Our alliance has an increasing position as an NGO in govermental frame work. Now it is already possible to exploit better the fact that biodiversity is in fashion and also to look for sponsors also in private sphere seems more and more expedient.

In order to develop the cooperation with other international institutions dealing with the same topics DAGENE has a contract of collaboration made with SAVE (Savegarde for Agricultural Varieties in Europe).

A plan can be developed for monitoring the autochtonous animal breeds of the region according to the financial possibilies of DAGENE. It is perhaps easier to find sponsors for such a production then for the simple function of an NGO..

It is important to follow the contact with universities and scientific institutions. Usefulness of DNA and summarizing similar scientific results can be the next topic of DAGENE

It can be stated that DAGENE had and will have its role in the future in increasing popularity of the concept of valuable genetic resources and the biodiversity of the world.