

Appendix 8: Legnicko-glogowski (Romania, NE1)

Organising partner:	Ecoruralis	Innovation Type
Practice:	Farma Martynika: an ecotourism farm showing that changing from urban to rural life is difficult but possible (PL2A)	
Practice context:	Legnicko-glogowski sub-region (NUTS 3), Intermediate	
Confrontation context:	Alunisu village, Sancaiu commune (NUTS 3) - Predominantly rural	
Workshop location:	Alunisu village	
Date:	November 25th 2021	

Summary

Exploring the replication of the Farma Martynika as a new entrant settling good practice in a predominantly rural north-western Romania proved an appropriate confrontation due to its background and typology of local stakeholders, on a similar journey and facing similar hurdles with the example case. The main difference consists in the level of community involvement and diversified activities that are much lower in the confrontation region. While at Farma Martynika the newcomers are engaged into various agro tourism, farming and community building activities, Sancaiu commune, while rooted in tourism based on folklore and biodiversity, still lacks more social cohesion and the development of more holistic approaches connecting different isolated but growing initiatives.

Context

Sâncraiu commune is located in the western part of Cluj county, Romania, in the immediate vicinity of Huedin town in a historical-geographical region also known as Tara Calatei (RO) or Kalotaszeg (HU). In the vicinity of the commune there is an European road, respectively the national roads linking several communities. The commune is composed of Sâncraiu village, as a commune centre, respectively the belonging other villages: Alunişu in the western part of the commune territory, Brăişoru in the northern part, and Domoşu and Horlacea in the eastern part.

The distance between Sâncraiu and Huedin, the nearest town, is 6 km, and between the commune and Cluj-Napoca, the county seat, is 56 km.

Sâncraiu commune has an area of 5714 hectares, of which the largest area (4448 hectares, 78% of the total territory) is agricultural land. According to the form of ownership, the agricultural land is owned in proportion to over 83% by private owners, 16% is property of the commune and less than 1% of the agricultural land is public property. The non-agricultural land ownership is by 54% private owners, 21% owned by the commune and 24% is public property.

The total agricultural area consists mainly of pastures and hayfields, arable land and vineyards and orchards in a smaller percentage. This distribution of agricultural land is related to the poor quality of arable land, compared to soils with increased agricultural productivity, so animal husbandry is a more suitable agricultural activity for soils and climate. from the commune.

The forest fund covers 922 hectares, occupying the second place in the structure of the administrative area of the commune (16% of the total administrative area) and is represented by forests and other lands with forest vegetation.

The commune counts almost 2000 inhabitants, the majority of them belonging to the Hungarian ethnic group (90%) and the Romanian one (9%) most of them rooted in farming and agro-tourism but with an age average of 58, also targeted in the last few years by new-comers with different origins (Dutch, Belgian, UK) and coming mostly from an urban backgrounds. These newcomers started to engage into innovative agricultural practices like permaculture and peasant agroecology but also setting up agro-touristic enterprises, diversifying their activities by holding practical workshops, artisan activities and building restoration.

One of the villages of the commune, Alunisu, has become an informal hub for newcomers and new-entrants into farming. The Provision Transylvania farm is located here: a farm, a living and learning centre in agroecology rooted in regenerative practices and nonviolence, offering training and workshops. Thus, this area was chosen to confront the Farma Martynika case study due to the similarities that the two contexts hold, but also due to the perspectives and inspiration that the case can offer to local stakeholders.

Results

Organized as a workshop in the village of Alunisu and hosted by Provision Transylvania, this confrontation involved three brainstorming sessions and one focus group. The participants were very diverse, from local farmers and artisans to rural development experts, local authority representatives and citizens.

Acceptance and interest in implementing the practice

The stakeholders found the case of Farma Martynika very inspirational and many of them recognized similarities with their “life journeys”, especially in leaving behind the urban landscapes and setting up activities rooted in rurality. The case managed to generate a lot of interest as it successfully related with the stakeholders, either through the farming, training or community building examples that it holds. Participants found very useful the multilateral approach that Farma Martyninka took, recognising that in both contexts this approach would offer more economic and social stability as well as resilience. There was a widespread acceptance that the case can be replicated successfully in the commune and promoted as a success story that has a lot of potential to inspire.

Identified critical factors related to the implementation of the practice in the context

The brainstormings highlighted a strong factor in *available infrastructure* that is needed at an affordable price. While being an attractive destination for newcomers, San Craiu commune is a very expensive one to settle and start a project like Farma Martynika.

Also, *cooperation with different stakeholders* was identified as important: having a constructive dialog with local inhabitants welcoming an idea as such, even if not actively supporting it from the start. Setting up *local community networks to support social life* also seemed important in the discussions, especially like the Rural Housewives circle exemplified in the Farma Martynika case. Female participants especially recognized the importance of social connection and mutual inspiration and support when being a newcomer in the rural space.

Synergy of actions was referred several times too. While different initiatives set up and are running independently in San Craiu commune, from Provision Transylvania to a network of agroturistic guesthouses and farming activities, more coordination and synergy would ensure more economic possibilities securing larger tourists groups, producing more local food and planning events around a commonly agreed timeline.

Institutional support was mentioned as crucial, from support in identifying available land and facilitating transfer, official promotion and highlighting opportunities in accessing EU funds to upscale the activity.

Key issues and barriers for implementing the innovative practice in the context

Stakeholders mentioned several key issues that revealed strong barriers in developing the case practice in this specific region:

Geographic and historic Location

From a macro-regional perspective, it has been outlined several times that though both contexts come from Eastern Europe, the social and economic development backgrounds are very different. It was observed that generally in Romania, the concept of “complete life-change” mostly refers to moving away from rurality not to embrace it, thus it only still appeals to a niche society (nonetheless observed as a growing one in the country and recognising that out-migration is still lower than national average in the commune).

Agroecology and regenerative farming

The uptake of agroecology and regenerative farming methods are poor in the region and farmers mostly practice intensive agriculture which generates monocultures and deplete local natural resources.

Access to Land

Access to land was identified as a main barrier by many participants. Land concentration has gotten high in the area of the confrontation, with a few large farmers upscaling intensely their activities. New entrants in farming have a hard time in identifying available land and the local land market is high and prone to speculation.

Access to Market

There are few opportunities in the region to market out agricultural products, though participants recognized that with more synergy in action such cases as Farma Martynika would have stronger chances to take roots. An example was given through making sure – with institutional support – that local agroturistic guesthouses mainly supply themselves with foodstuff from local farms. Given the high number of these guesthouses in San Craiu, the market would intensify.

Ageing population but expensive housing

Several times throughout the conversation this factor was brought forward. Given the aging population and lack of extra-family farm succession, housing possibilities along with land are locked in the property and inheritance rights.

Transit-tourism

The issue of transit-tourism was identified by local experts and authority mostly considering that many tourists don't plan for longer stays in local guest houses but rather just visit for a couple of days as a layover towards their final tourism destination.

Identified measures and actors that need to be involved to overcome the obstacles and succeed in the implementation of the practice

- Local social networking
- Development of farming cooperatives and mixed cooperation with agrotouristic guesthouses;
- Creating transparency and access to local land and property registry to facilitate access to land and housing;
- Limiting large monocultural farming and land concentration through a more holistic and inclusive local authority strategy in attracting newcomers and new entrants in farming;

Further innovative ideas to foster rural regeneration and development in the context

- Promoting agroecology as an overarching concept in food production and landscape management;
- Exploring more and making best use of the local commons (mostly pastures);
- Facilitate networking of local agro tourism initiatives and linking them with initiatives like the Global Ecovillage Network.

Lessons learned and recommendations

While the discussions revolved a lot around the aspects of agro-tourism and how to overcome local barriers in setting up initiatives like Farma Martynika, the aspect of financial planning for such an endeavour were not sufficiently covered. Some participants highlighted the opportunity of accessing European Funds through Local Action Groups.

Also, brainstorming about marketing ideas that would attract events, tourists and food consumers alike, were not sufficiently learned.

Further consequences for the context and next steps

Inspired by the debate and by the positive action and energy behind the Farma Martynika, stakeholders have put the basis of an informal network having its scope to take local action in promoting the region especially in the lines of potential new entrants.

Also, channels of dialog were opened up with the local authority to support transparency around access to land opportunities and creating a new strategy for the commune based on several

targets: biodiversity enhancement, social revival and upscaling economic opportunities for new entrants.

Contributors

Workshop facilitation: Szocs-Boruss Miklos Attila, Brandusa Birhala, Lars Veraart, Raluca Elena Dan (Ecoruralis)

Reporting: Szocs-Boruss Miklos Attila (Ecoruralis)