

## Appendix 18: Timis Region (Rumania, SC3)

Organising partner:	<b>Ecoruralis</b>	<b>Innovation Type</b>  
Practice:	<b>Training in “nature professions”: a driving force for the rural regeneration of Pays Coutançais (France, FR6B)</b>	
Practice context:	<b>Coutance, Manche department (NUTS3)- Predominantly rural</b>	
Confrontation context:	<b>Sanraiu commune, Timis Region - Predominantly rural</b>	
Workshop location:	<b>Online</b>	
Date:	<b>November 28th 2021</b>	

### Summary

In this confrontation the cases of “Pays Coutançais” and CSA Hof Pente GbR have been confronted with community initiatives on education, rural development and farming in the Timis county area of Romania. The activities and presence of an intentional community was important in this confrontation where some aspects of the CSA farming and educational approaches from the cases were already present.

While the complexity of the “Pays Coutançais” case was hard to comprehend by the confrontation participants, the CSA Hof Pente GBR initiative was very well received as an inspirational case and blueprint to follow.

Certainly, the confrontation has undergone in a moment of strong Covid-19 related limitations so discussions and brainstorming resumed to an online meeting, but despite of this, a lot of the limitations impeding the successful uptaking of the cases were outlined and an appetite was created for further developing and connecting the educational activities with agroecological farming and community supported agriculture.

## Context

Stanciova Village is located in Timis County, 35 km far from Timisoara and 12 km far from Recas, the nearest town. The village is surrounded by forest and biodiversity. The population (approximately 450 people) is mainly Serbian (60-70%), the rest are Romanians and few Hungarians. The Serbian population came originally from Montenegro in the XV century.

Agriculture is the main income generating activity in the village. The traditional gardening methods, working the land with horses, common work, these are habits still alive in this community.

Ecotopia Romania Association was set up in 2000 as a local organisation supporting the development of the area and ever since its members are active in the community, running projects of common interest together with the villagers. The mission of the association is to develop in Stanciova a model of a sustainable rural community, including the environmental, social, cultural and economical aspects whilst respecting the local traditions. The house owned by the association is regularly hosting many foreign volunteers that wish to experience the traditional lifestyle in a Romanian village and learn about it.

ASAT is the first Community Supported Agriculture network in Romania, promoting direct partnerships between solidarity groups of responsible consumers and small local agricultural producers. ASAT local solidarity partnerships refer to the collaboration between a small local agricultural producer and solidarity consumers, in order to ensure a natural local food, made during at least one agricultural season. Central partnerships are centered on vegetables, to which are added other locally produced and transparent food products. The local partnership of solidarity between small farmers and consumers is a mutual commitment in which people equally and fully benefit from the harvest of a certain area cultivated by the farmer. A commitment from a group of citizens to support a farm and fair remuneration for the work of the vegetable grower, which guarantees a natural or organic production. A form of cooperation between consumers and small agricultural producers in order to ensure access to locally produced healthy food.

ASAT (Association for the Support of Peasant Agriculture) is the form which developed in Romania, starting with 2008, an approach of CSA (community supported agriculture) focused on vegetable production. The model used for Romania is that of AMAP in France, aiming to develop local partnerships in solidarity between urban and rural.

Ferma Urzica, from Stanciova is a CSA farm affiliated to the ASAT movement, producers of organic vegetables for local food with a passion for regenerative agriculture. They produce vegetables and raise birds in their own household, which they have been developing since 2013.

## Results

Organized as an online workshop, this confrontation involved three brainstorming sessions and one focus group. The participants were local farmers involved in CSA networks and citizens which

are local inhabitants or partners of the local CSA initiative. Also some local and regional NGO members participated in the discussions.

### Acceptance and interest in implementing the practice

The stakeholders found the cases very interesting, most importantly they felt that the two independent case studies that were presented complemented well and elevated the local interest in implementing the practice. While the CSA Hof Pente GbR generated a widespread acceptance and was generally considered to be more easily implementable in the region due to similar local initiatives, the case of Pays Coutançais was less accepted and considered too rooted in the local and historical specificity of the case region and not easy to replicate in the Romanian context.

### Identified critical factors related to the implementation of the practices

The brainstormings highlighted the **human capital** mobilized as a main critical factor. Both cases rely on the capacity and experience of this human capital and participants agreed that to attract human capital in the region would be primordial.

Also, the **relationship with local communities** was found very important. Both cases and the confrontation landscape share this critical factor. Local NGOs and CSA initiatives from the confrontation region were especially created to intensify this relationship and bet their successes on this factor.

**Agroecology and regenerative farming** was mentioned as a crucial approach as it seems an important meeting point for both consumers and producers when it comes to agricultural systems to be based on.

**Alternative, natural and community oriented education** was identified as a common thread both when it comes in replicating parts of the Pays Coutançais case and some local NGOs already engage in this work development but recognise the long road to be taken until reaching the level of organisation presented in the case study.

**Nature conservation and landscape preservation** both in education and practice was witnessed as important in both cases, moreover a factor that the local community and local NGOs already up-took in their current activities.

### Key issues and barriers for implementing the innovative practices in the context

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

**Land concentration and land grabbing** is an accentuated problem in the area. Mentioned both by farmers and NGOs present in the confrontation process as a critical limitative factor due to its high prevalence in the region. The agricultural lands of Timis county are one of the most speculated and concentrated in the country. Due that the majority of investors are overtaking land either using abusive practices or legal loopholes, this is creating a lot of lack of transparency, eroding the integrity of local authorities and limiting access to land for agroecology and small-scale farming in general. It is important to mention that while participants recognize that a replication of the cases would bring important benefits for the future of the context, they also mentioned access to land and land availability as a whole as a key bottleneck.

**Industrialization of farming and large-scale monocultures** goes hand in hand with the above point. The prevalence of large monocultures transformed Stanciova into an oasis of biodiversity while the region has generally a homogenised landscape with a few prevalent crops and reduced biological diversity. Local authorities are seen more as drivers of this trend and their general lack of vision represents a great barrier in implementing more holistic and long-term approaches.

Participants identify the **lack of rural educational institutions** also as an important bottleneck. Stanciova is a village (and that can be extrapolated to the region) with a very reduced young generation and children are turned towards the urban schools. Education is very mainstream following the national curricula and with little opportunities to introduce educational pathways in conserving the natural landscape and especially a connection with local rurality.

**Local social cohesion** is fragile. While some local new-comers and new entrants in farmers started the base of an intentional community with common values in agroecology, others, especially farm successors are only very loosely connected to the social life, more only pursuing only their local economic activity in farming.

Also, out-migration from the community and generally in the region is very high. While depopulation was identified also as an opportunity for new-comers and new members of the intentional community to arrive, still most participants consider a great threat the migration from the local rural region towards the urban areas or to other countries and economic opportunities.

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

- the involvement of the local intentional community in the development of educational opportunities in the region based on the narrative and good examples of the two cases, linking nature professions, agroecology and the CSA movement.
- development of activities linking non-formal education and on-farm educational courses by local NGOs.
- Linking the local farming community with citizens through creating more CSA initiatives and peer-to-peer learning from more established CSA farmers from the region (and other regions).
- More in-depth witnessing of the cases through study trips and visits to their sites.

- Approaching local authorities and asking for support, but also offering proposals for an alternative local development.

### 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 the local implementation of the “food sovereignty” concepts, with more participation in decision making and rural political visioning, connecting constituencies (farmers, citizens, civil society) in an over-arching regional network.
- Linking with like minded communities from other regions of Europe, building up the sense of belonging and being “on the right path”.

## Lessons learned and recommendations

Participants expressed that more aspects could be learned about the synergies and networking that enabled the development of especially the CSA Hof Pente GbR where the "Transparenz schaffen" project was mentioned.

The local NGOs and the CSA farms showed great interest in intensifying their collaboration on the educational aspects and to establish educational farms as main pillars of practical education while promoting natural professions.

Also, as a next step, participants agreed that it is important to map out the policy frameworks that could enable the upscaling of their activities and uptake of the cases in the region. For this a good policy analysis was proposed as an activity of the local network.

Funding opportunities coming through LEADER and national agencies will also be taken in review so that they could be approached either by local farmers for diversifying their activities with an educational factor, or by NGOs to support the networking efforts.

### Contributors

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

**Reporting:** Szocs-Boruss Miklos Attila (Ecoruralis)