Contribution of NGOs to sustainable rural development in Southern Transylvania, Romania


Keywords: NGOs, CAP, economic diversification, landscape conservation, sustainable rural development

The number of NGOs active in various sectors in Romania has been increasing continuously post 1989, with over 62,000 registered in 2010; however, less than 30% are active in rural areas. In Southern Transylvania, Târnava Mare area, spanning 85,000 ha farmed by 5,000 families (over 27,000 people) in 24 small-scale farming communities is an example of successful NGOs implication in rural development projects.

In this area, extensive mixed farming over the centuries has created one of Europe’s last surviving High Nature Value farmed landscapes, protected as Natura 2000 areas since 2008. Continued traditional management of these landscapes is vital for their conservation, but key to this is the socio-economic regeneration of villages.

Farming remains the backbone of local economy, with most households continuing small-scale, traditional, largely (semi)subsistence agriculture. Over 250 SMEs are active in various fields (food processing, retail, etc), while natural and cultural landscapes (including World Heritage Sites) attract increasing numbers of tourists.

The NGOs active in the area have been working along local authorities on implementing a coherent, integrated strategy of sustainable rural development, linking landscape conservation with improved incomes for locals, based on the new opportunities offered by CAP funding.

Foundation ADEPT Transylvania, is one such example. Based in the village of Saschiz since 2004, it is active at 3 levels:

At the local level, it is directly involved in the management and implementation of pilot projects in various fields:

- research on local biodiversity and conservation
- implementation of sustainable farming by:
  - knowledge transfer – publications targeting farmers on CAP measures, farming etc
  - advising, consulting and supporting farmers to apply for CAP payments
  - support for organic farming
  - support for setting of food processing capacities at EU standards of hygiene
  - development of new, added-value products
  - setting up milk collection centers
- marketing of produce: creation of the Tarnava Mare brand, participation at national & international events (Slow Food etc)

- projects for rural diversification:
  - facilitating local entrepreneurs’ access to CAP funds and offering training programs
  - promoting rural tourism, eco-tourism:
    - promotion of the area as a tourist destination (www.discovertarnavamare.org)
    - creation of walking trails and over 80 km of cycling routes which link the 24 rural communities
    - training programs for guesthouse managers etc

- environmental education programs for school children

At a regional level, it works on facilitating access to CAP and other non-reimbursable international funds available for different projects, in close cooperation with the Group of Local Action Tarnava Mare (which it helped create as a partnership of public and private organizations), and Mihai Eminescu Trust, another NGO active in the area, involved in the historic conservation of natural and cultural heritage and economic regeneration of local rural communities.

At a national and EU level, ADEPT is lobbying to revamp the CAP, enlisting support of high profile sponsors and personalities (Prince of Wales, EU High Commissioner for Agriculture); ADEPT has been instrumental in improving the system of financial support for small (semi) subsistence family farms in Eastern Europe. As a result, local farmers receive agro-environmental payments for 18,000 ha of farmland.

The synergy between local authorities and NGOs operating in the area has been positive so far, resulting in marked socio-economic progress over the past 10 years, a slow increase in population and in the number of SMEs.

www.discovertarnavamare.org / www.tarnava-mare.ro
www.mihaieminescutrust.org / www.experiencetransylvania.ro

Acknowledgment: This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number26580144.