

Pilot Romania



Connecting farming communities

**Saschiz
8-9 Nov. 2022**



Context

The social innovations identified in close cooperation with the farming communities covered by the FARMWELL project come in line with responding to the challenges identified through the national mapping report: out-migration (esp. women), low-household income, low education level - impacting the wellbeing of farmers and of their communities directly.

Given the nature of the project, with networking as a red line, we decided to split the piloting activity into two phases:

1) focused on the **processes** that enable and support the development of the farming community: *local governance and community engagement* (Saschiz Women Association and LAG)

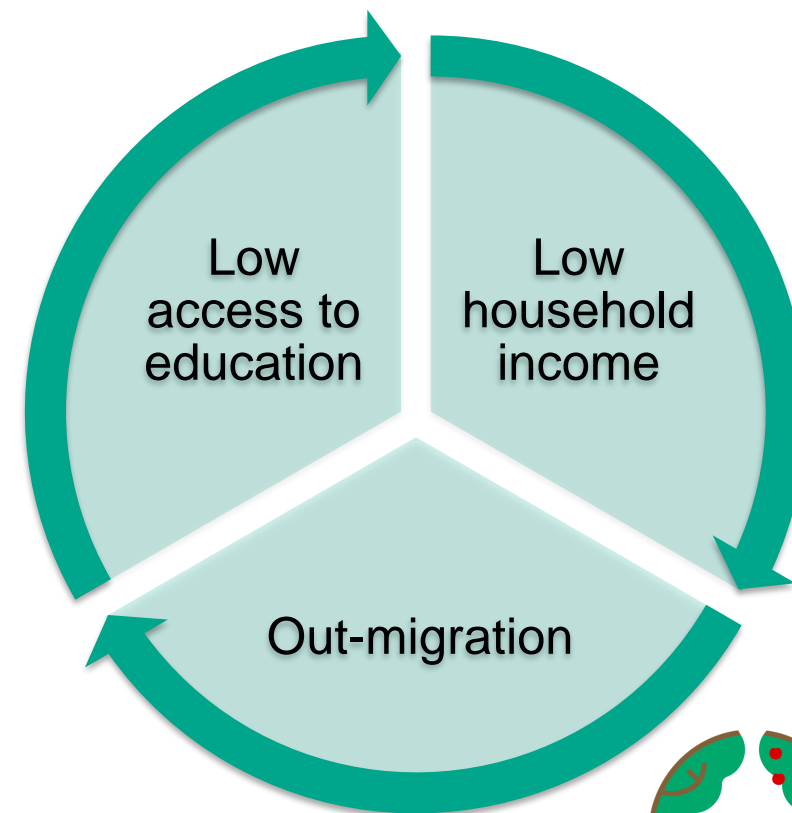
and

2) **adding value** to the farming activities (peer-to-peer exchange with Open Farms Network in Greece). More details about this phase are in the **And now section**

The first phase of the piloting happened beginning of November 2022 and consisted in having a group of full-time and part-time farmers from **Bod and Vulcan** visiting Saschiz Comune for two days to learn and connect with the stories and initiatives run by the Women's Neighbourhood Association, Transylvanian Highlands Ecotourism Project, mayor of Saschiz and the Târnava Mare Local Action Group (LAG) that Saschiz is part of.

The goal of the visit was to inspire the participants to reflect and consider what they can do in their own communities for reactivating the identity, mobilize women and young people to engage better with the community's life, to diversify the farming activities leading to resilience of farming communities - initiatives that contribute to a positive impact on the well-being of farmers, farmers' families and the community.

Challenges identified in the Romanian Mapping Report



Social innovation

- What social innovation have you been testing and has been implemented as a result?

The focus of the first piloting activity was to **highlight and promote the importance (role) of women in farming communities**. We learned directly from the founding members of the Women's Neighbourhood Association about the processes of setting up the association, how are they working together, events initiated by them for promoting their village and local gastronomy, but also the impact that the women's association has in the community and the plans for the future of the Association.

In addition, we had the opportunity to meet the manager of the Transylvanian Highlands Ecotourism Project, which Saschiz is part of, and to learn how such a project can contribute to mobilising the farming community by promoting the cultural and natural values of the village, bringing knowledge and information to strengthen the local identity and encourage small businesses to start (biking, pottery, food preservatives, tea house).

- What concrete practice have you seen emerging as a result of the pilot?

The two days spent in Saschiz inspired the participants coming from Bod and Vulcan. They seemed particularly interested in ways to build the community spirit and how to revive the old practices or traditions in their area in order to preserve the rural identity and contribute to the well-being of farming communities.

- What is the logic of your social innovation?

Women's Neighbourhood Association and the LAG Târnava Mare are an example of local governance and engagement of the small farmer's communities. When the community is vibrant it creates the enabling environment for individual farmers to thrive, to be mentally well and have the feeling of safety and belonging to a place with a positive perspective of the future.

Transylvania Highlands project is an example of an integrated approach for the sustainable promotion of rural communities and collaboration that adds value to the local governance.



Target group

- What farmer group did test and may implement the social innovation?

Farmers communities from Bod and Vulcan

- women and farmers from Bod community
- young people from Vulcan

- What other groups (e.g. farming organisations) were involved in the pilot?

Social innovation communities

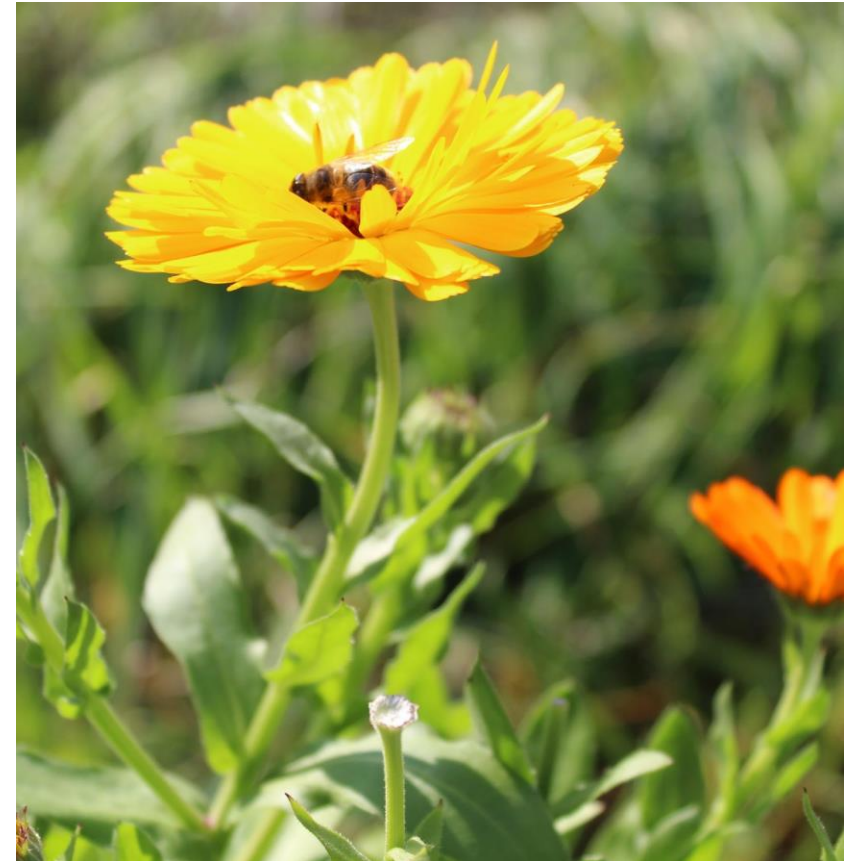
- ❖ Women Association of Saschiz
- ❖ LAG Târnava Mare
- ❖ Volunteer Center of Sighișoara
- ❖ Manager of the Transylvania Highlands project

- What partnerships did emerge through the pilot?

The pilot activity connected the three mentioned communities (Bod - Vulcan - Saschiz) and facilitated the networking and interactions between participants. There are some possibilities to extend this to a formal partnership, but nothing concrete emerged after the two days in Saschiz.

- How many farmers reported that they (very likely) will implement the innovation you piloted?

The discussions we had with the participants coming from the two communities showed that the Bod community is closer to the existing model of Saschiz (they share the same Saxon roots) and they would like to revitalise the old Saxon traditions in Bod that could help them to increase the economic, social and physical well-being of the community.



Methodology (I)

- Which methodology did you use for piloting the social innovation to farmers?

Given the methodology for this activity and the context of our piloting, we used the **peer-to-peer exchange** between the members of our Practice Group and the Social Innovations identified. We used this methodology in order to learn more, inspire and build capacity and exchange knowledge for women and young people in farming communities on natural values and cultural identity through co-learning (farmers' communities and social innovations identified).

- What basic data collection have you carried out in relation to the forecasting SROI to anticipate long-term impact?

Data collection for the forecasting SROI was mostly collected from the Women's Neighbourhood Association, and partly from the farmers/participants coming to the piloting.



Methodology (II)

Piloting activity in Saschiz took place on the 8th and 9th of November 2022. We started on the 8th of November with lunch, during which we got to exchange some preliminary thoughts and information with the people coming from our focus area: Bod and Vulcan. After lunch, the founding members of the Women's Neighbourhood Association joined us, as well as representatives from the LAG Târnava Mare and from the Volunteering Centre of Sighisoara (a nearby town).

The focus of the piloting was to provide a space for open discussion and sharing of knowledge. The theme of the pilot concentrated on the processes behind (farming) community engagement and development, local governance and the relationship between local administration and NGOs, as well as how to add value to farming activities and how to enhance the general well-being in the farming communities.

The outcomes of our second Practice Group meeting made us consider the scope of the pilot to be exploring the processes behind the social innovations that we selected, in order for our targeted communities to understand how they can mobilise changes in their communities.



Methodology (III)

Finding your own place in a community gives you perspective to grow and feel important.

Out-migration can be reduced by help increasing the feeling of pride and social recognition of the farmers (esp young and female ones)

Good local governance can make a difference in shifting people's minds towards growth and progress;

Networking and collaborating with different stakeholders and initiatives (NGOs) can help attract opportunities, opening new perspectives for farming communities to diversify and progress, to bring educational and medical services closer to the village and farmers;

Extract from the outcomes of the second Practice Group meeting.

We started the meeting with a brief introduction of *'why are we here'* and then we invited the women from Saschiz to share some insights on their activity from the start until the present.

The farmers and representatives coming from Bod and Vulcan were very interested and engaged in the conversation and kept asking questions about the entire activity of the Women's Neighbourhood Association. They were also very interested to find out what was the key driver of change for the community.



Methodology (III)

The representatives of the LAG told us how the entire project with the Women's Neighbourhood Association was formalized and how they are supporting the WA through the LAG. We also learned about the activities that the Volunteering Centre of Sighisoara are implementing in Saschiz and how are those contributing to the well-being of farmers and farming communities.

After the discussions ended, we visited a local TeaHouse (Ceainaria Tei), where we tasted some local products such as apple juice, gin and *henklesch* (a specific pastry from the area). We heard the story of Marianne, the owner, who is also a member of the WA, about how and why she decided to move to the countryside, and she told us that she is very proud to be part of the Saschiz community.

The first day ended with dinner, where we had the chance to listen to the first impressions of the group and to collect some feedback (to be detailed in the learnings and remarkable findings section).

On the second day, we met with the mayor of Saschiz and with the manager of the Transylvania Highlands project. Discussions started with the mayor explaining how the local administration supports the activities implemented by the community. The manager of the Transylvania Highlands shared with us the experiences of having 44 different administrative units collaborating on a common project that leads to the development of the region, the promotion of cultural, natural and local values and enhancing the economic and social well-being of the communities.

The day ended after a visit to a local pottery barn where we learned how the entire business started and what are the benefits of being part of the Saschiz community.









Learnings (I)

How did the Women's Neighbourhood Association (WA) start?

In Saschiz there was an old Saxon tradition to have the neighbourhoods as a way of engaging the community. The women were informally meeting to develop different activities or just to talk among each other about their day-to-day life challenges so the process of formalising the Association came organically when the LAG had to be formed and they needed in the partnership a women's association. They established the Association legally in 2015 and since then they implemented several projects that led to the development of the social fabric of the community.

What was the driver of change for Saschiz?

The question came from Bod and they were interested in finding out how the WA started and why is Saschiz so well-developed at the moment. The ladies from Saschiz all together said that everything changed when the [ADEPT Foundation](#) came to Saschiz.

„They brought knowledge and information to Saschiz and they had different views on how the local values could be promoted. ADEPT were the ones that said: you have a local product that can bring you immense benefits. And this is how we started the Rhubarb Fest.” Florentina Călugăru, LAG and WA representative



Learnings (II)

How is the WA supporting the development of the community?

There are different aspects of the support in the development of the community that come from the WA activities:

- ✓ **Social aspects:** WA created a space where women feel heard and empowered. Having different generations between the WA members gives them the feeling that they have unconditional support when needed. Being part of the WA enhances the feeling of being proud to be part of a farming (rural) community.
- ✓ **Economic aspects:** The festivals that are organised by the WA bring people in the community (they started small with 20 participants, but in 2022 they had over 2000). In this way, the local economy is being supported, local products and producers are present at the festivals and the community comes together.
- ✓ **Physical well-being:** After all the festivals, WA organises a Health fair with minimal non-invasive tests for the elderly, keeping track of any health issues that may appear.

What changed since the WA started for the community and for the members of the WA?

The entire community of Saschiz benefited from promotion and recognition both nationally and internationally. This was both a result of the activity of WA, but also an opportunity for WA to develop further projects that will bring added value to the community. During the pandemic, the WA implemented a project called *Bucate din Vecinătate* (Goods from the Neighbourhood). Through this project they collected the products from the small farmers in the community and created a Food Box to be ordered online and delivered at home, ensuring that the producers sell their products, and the community keeps eating healthy and tasty products.



Learnings (II)

How is the local administration engaged?

The discussion we had with the mayor of Saschiz revealed that the local administration supports all the activities that the WA, the LAG or the NGOs in Saschiz are implementing from a logistic point of view (offering a space, ensuring the cleaning infrastructure after an event). The mayor specifically told us that is very important to have an organism outside of the local administration to build the community spirit, to animate the community and to keep the community engaged. Local administration should focus only on administering a community.

How to build community spirit?

„Food brings people together!“ said the members of the WA.

The first and most important step is to assess the status of the community, the assets and the opportunities that lay ahead in the way of the development. After that, comes the need for education, information, and animation of a community. You cannot change something in your community if you do not know how to start. Community needs should be surveyed yearly. These needs should be the driver of all strategic approaches that are planned for the development of an area.



Feedback

Participants from Bod identified the most common points with the community in Saschiz. They said they learned a lot during the two days and they have some ideas on how to continue the development of their community. They immediately identified the need for external community facilitation to extract the real needs of the community.

Participants from Vulcan are interested and concerned about the future of their community. This meeting was an eye-opener for them that showed how they can act now so they would not lose their rural identity.



Impact (I)

What do you anticipate as a longer-term impact of this pilot activity?

We were happy to see that the pilot activity was an opportunity for the WA too. At the end of the day, they said that they never had the time to settle down and reflect on the activities they did and how far they got.

For the communities of Bod and Vulcan, the long-term impact we anticipate is to:

- ✓ create stronger collaboration between local actors
- ✓ have different initiatives emerging following the WA model in Saschiz
- ✓ have a bottom-up identification of needs

What is the expected impact in terms of improved physical, mental and social wellbeing of farmers?

Given the initial challenges and the context of farming communities in Romania, the expected impact in terms of improved wellbeing of farmers relates to the adoption and implementation of such innovations that can improve all aspects of wellbeing in a community (physical, mental, social and economic)



Impact (II)

What are the direct and indirect impacts?

Direct impact: networking and creating collaborations, building capacity, hearing new ideas and learning about new development opportunities, and being aware that they need to act now in order to preserve what they still have.

Indirect impact: creating a network of actors interested in supporting the development of farming activities in the community (local authorities, entrepreneurs, schools etc).

What are the 'institutional' impacts (i.e. expected change in the practices of support organisations/ networks etc. that is likely to positively impact on farmers' wellbeing in the longer term)?

Participants coming from Bod (representing the municipality) said that the most important change that needs to happen is to identify an NGO that can take over the community animation and facilitation in order to identify the real needs.



Impact (III)

What possibilities do you see to scale up the social innovation?

The WA model is easily replicable in other countries or contexts. The most important step in scaling up this innovation is to properly understand the processes behind the model, how long did it take to be successful and what are the day-to-day challenges to overcome as an innovation model.

Disseminating the model is important too, in order to reach as many communities as possible, but in the end, it depends on the people/farmers/support organization that this model reaches to try and succeed in implementing it.



Key messages

- ❖ It is crucial to have a driving force coming from the community; if there is no local driving force, it is important to have an open-minded administration to support or attract NGOs in the community.
- ❖ Rural development directions should be set up by following clear needs coming from the community.
- ❖ Recognising the role of women in a farming community is important. Empowering communities through entrepreneurship leads to the uptake of social innovations that can improve communities' well-being.

