

# Case Study

## How can women rebuild social fabric in a community? (Romania)



*Improving farmers' wellbeing through social innovation*



*This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101000797.*



# FARMWELL!

## Empowering women in Saschiz

The story takes place in the village of Saschiz, Romania, where a group of women has harnessed their extraordinary ability to reconstruct the social fabric of their small farming community through a shared love for cooking. This revelation prompted the establishment of the Saschiz Women Neighbourhood Association in 2016, marking the commencement of a distinctive initiative that exemplifies the transformative influence of collaboration and cultural identity. The Saschiz Women Neighbourhood, moving from an informal gathering around coffee and rhubarb pie to a formalized initiative, is illustrating how collective action and community engagement can breathe new life into a rural area. It explores the challenges encountered by small farmer communities in Romania, highlighting issues such as economic hardships, out-migration, and a low level of education.

How did the **Women Neighbourhood Association in Saschiz** emerge as a social innovation?

What are the **key challenges faced by small farmer communities** in Romania and how do initiatives like the Women Neighbourhood Association address these challenges?

In what ways did the **FARMWELL project** contribute to identifying and supporting the **Saschiz Women Neighbourhood** to improve the economic and social wellbeing of farmers?



## GET INSPIRED!

Read the **longer version** of the FARMWELL case study [here!](#)

Watch the **'Easy as a pie'** short documentary [here!](#)

Check out **other exciting social innovation** cases [here!](#)



*This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101000797.*



# Empowering women in Saschiz to rebuild the social fabric of the farming community

The story is about a group of women who came to realise that they can rebuild the social fabric of their small (farming) community by doing what they do best: cooking. A series of enabling conditions led to the formalisation of the Saschiz Women Neighbourhood Association back in 2015. Saschiz is a small village (~1500 inhabitants) in Mures County, in Transylvania region (Romania) that has deeply embedded Saxon roots, like the concept of neighbourhoods.

The Transylvanian villages have always been a point of interest for foreigners due to their landscapes with high natural values, fortified churches and traditional (local) gastronomy. The most relevant example being the nearby Viscri village (in Braşov county) which was often visited by British tourists, especially by H.R.M King Charles.






What started out as a group of women gathering informally around coffee and rhubarb pie, is now a formal example of how a small rural community can be revitalised if you work together. The openness of local people, their capacity building and access to resources and knowledge have led to a strong partnership that contributes to the harmonious development of the farming community in Saschiz.

## Inspiring aspects of the social innovation

The entire community of Saschiz benefited from the promotion and recognition both nationally and internationally. This is a result of the activities of Women Neighbourhood Association, but also an opportunity for them to develop new projects.

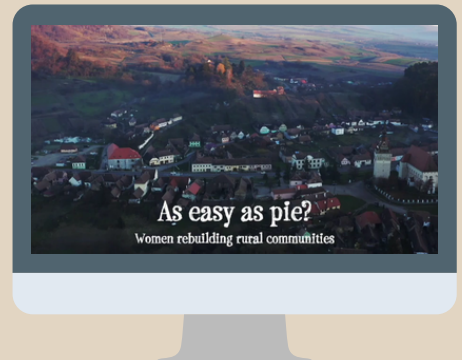
The most inspiring aspects of the social innovation for the Romanian context relate to:

-  creating a space where **women feel heard and empowered**. Having different generations between the Women Association members gives them the feeling that they have unconditional support when needed. Women are proud to be part of such an active farming community
-  increasing the **local economy** by organising various festivals where the entire community comes together and local products and small producers are promoted
-  organising a **Health Fair** with minimal non-invasive tests for **elderly people in the community**



## Easy As Pie? - Women rebuilding rural communities

The movie captures the story of the Women Neighbourhood Association in Saschiz, Romania, showcasing the impact that collective action can have on a community. Their journey reflects the strength found in unity, highlighting how a shared vision and collaborative effort can breathe new life into a small community, fostering resilience and a sense of vibrancy for generations to come.



[Watch the short documentary!](#)

The FARMWELL project methodology called for a mapping report of the main challenges that the small farmers in Romania have when talking about wellbeing. In the national mapping report we described that many of the social challenges of the farming communities reside in economic challenges. The simple reality is that rural Romania – although richly endowed with natural resources – continues to be plagued by poverty and a huge gap in living / social standards between rural and urban areas.

[Read the mapping report on the wellbeing of Romanian farmers and the challenges of the FARMWELL project!](#)



The Romanian partnership of FARMWELL, Highclere Consulting (representing research and policy) and the Local Action Group Ținutul Bârsei (representing small farmer communities) worked together looking at the small farmer communities overlapping the LAG territory. LAG territory covers 14 localities, 12 of which are in Braşov county and 2 in Covasna. Based on LAG knowledge of most active stakeholders in the territory and on our initial attempt of contact, only 4 responded openly to the idea of being involved in the FARMWELL project: Bod, Poiana Mărului, Şinca Veche and Vulcan.

We had an **initial assessment of their challenges** during the first Practice Group meeting that aimed to closely engage farmers in identifying the most relevant challenges. The main challenges identified were: out-migration (especially women), low-household income, low education level - impacting directly the wellbeing of small farmers and of their communities.

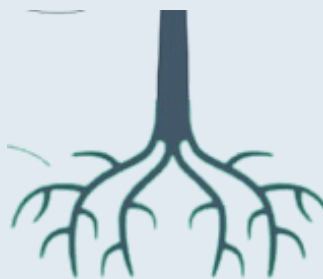


We looked for solutions responding to the above-mentioned challenges in the counties nearby Braşov. The immediate inspiring innovations we found were the:

- Women Neighbourhood Association in Saschiz – women focused on rebuilding the social fabric of their rural community.
- Transylvanian Highlands project - a project covering 44 administrative units in three counties, promoting the cultural, natural and gastronomic values of the farming communities.
- EduBuzz – a private initiative supporting children in farming communities to prevent them from dropping school.

Based on the FARMWELL problem-solution tree model, the Romanian team together with the farming communities and the stakeholders involved in the Practice Group analysed the root causes of the problems and the social innovations that can address them, having a positive impact on the social wellbeing of farmer communities.

The **root causes identified** with the farmers and stakeholders relate to:



- Out-migration (especially women) of people from rural communities looking for (social, educational and economic) opportunities abroad or in the cities;
- Low household income due to the limited economic activities in rural areas;
- Low education level - impacting directly the wellbeing of small farmers and of their communities.

The **social innovations we identified** together respond to the root causes in different ways:



- Women Neighbourhood Association – empowering women (tackling out-migration)
- Transylvanian Highlands – diversifying the economic activities in rural communities and contributing to the children education (tackling low household income)
- EduBuzz – contribution to children education (tackling low education level)

During the second practice group meeting we invited both the people from **our focus area** and the **innovations** identified to create connections and explore how FARMWELL can support (locally) the exchange between the innovations and the small farmers communities.

Poverty, low access to education and out-migration reduction, as well as creating conditions to grow small businesses or attracting investors for increasing the income level in farming communities are strongly connected (if not conditioned even) by the quality of local governance, by the communities being encouraged to get engaged and come together for jointly develop actions.

In response, the second practice group meeting was focused on introducing initiatives of farming communities that succeeded to be in control of their own growth and progress, that are based on working partnerships, or which they brought opportunities for increasing the income and build on a strong identity. The farmers and the stakeholder resonated with the women initiative in Saschiz and it was commonly agreed that we will explore it more in the Piloting actions.

The **pilot actions** of FARMWELL aimed to bring social innovations closer to farmers. The pilot carried out in Romania consisted in having a group of full-time and part-time farmers from **Bod and Vulcan** visiting Saschiz Commune for two days to learn and connect with the stories and initiatives run by the Women Association, Transylvanian Highlands Project, mayor of Saschiz and the Dealurile Târnavelor Local Action Group (LAG) that Saschiz is part of.



[Read more on the Pilot Exchange!](#)

The focus of the piloting activity was to highlight and promote the importance (role) of women in farming communities. The pilot participants learned directly from the founding members of the Women Neighbourhood of Saschiz about the processes of setting up the association, how they are working together, events initiated by them for promoting their village and local gastronomy, but also the impact that the Women's Neighbourhood has in the community and the plans for the future of the Association. In addition, the participants had the opportunity to meet the manager of the Transylvanian Highlands Project, that Saschiz is part of, and to learn how such a project can contribute to mobilize 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).

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.

In order to bring these inspiring solutions closer to farmers (and policy-makers) it was important to better understand their impact and effectiveness. Given that the social impact (women feeling more empowered) is hard to quantify, the FARMWELL project used the so-called Social Return of Investment (SROI) method that can help estimate the financial value of social benefits generated by a given social solution.

The evaluative SROI focused on the women that are active members of the Women Neighbourhood association and consisted in applying a couple of questionnaires and face to face discussions with the founding members.

The SROI findings demonstrate the success of the WA is deriving positive outcomes for members with respect to empowerment, confidence, self-esteem and quality of life – with just under 20% of all value relating to these impacts on personal wellbeing. WA activities have also been successful in deriving health benefits for members through more varied diets and secondary economic wellbeing impacts through improved life and work skills, and a greater prevalence for adding value to local produce. Over the longer term, both are likely to generate substantially more value for farmers and the wider community than is demonstrated here.



The experiences we had and what we learned from both Bod and Saschiz, contributed to the **policy recommendations** that capture the essence of what a social innovation should represent.

In the Romanian context it is crucial to **consider the enabling conditions for a social innovation**, as well as **building capacity for fostering that social innovation** in order to have an impact.



### FIND OUT MORE!

Check out the full case study: [here!](#)

Watch the 'Easy as a pie' short documentary [here!](#)

Check out the FARMWELL Toolkit for more information & inspiration [here!](#)

Contact:

Highclere Consulting: [office@highclere-consulting.com](mailto:office@highclere-consulting.com)

GAL Ținutul Bârsei: [tinutulbarsei@gmail.com](mailto:tinutulbarsei@gmail.com)



*This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101000797.*

