

Project: Rural development for employment

Project code: 2019-1-BE01-KA204-050550

Partner: Monomyths Association

Authors: Luminita Elena Ene; Alina Theodora Dumitru

Research best practices of rural development in Romania

Intro

In order to identify a collection of relevant best practices in rural development, Monomyths Association has been applied the methodology of desk research in the first phase and interviews with the initiators of the best practices afterwards.

In the initial phase we have analysed data through an internal desk research, identifying existing projects and initiatives in Romania such as – Made in Rosia Montana, [Intelligent village](#), [Bihor couture](#), Cultural Festivals (e.g. Garana Jaz Festival, Brezoi Festival, Pelican Film Festival), [Fratii Jderi Holiday Village](#), [Brunch by Fundatia Comunitara Valcea](#), Career Bus, [English Village](#), Adopt a peasant programme, IT solutions for farmers [CBN Agro Tech](#), Nod Verde.

In the next phase, an external desk research has been carried out by Monomyths team, by browsing specific information from rural development sector and extracting the information directly from the websites of the projects mentioned, but also to search for government published data and relevant statistics. For all the data that wasn't available, we have contacted the initiators of the 2 projects selected – Made in Rosia Montana and Nod Verde and sent them a set of questions to complete the profile of the case studies.

Case study 1: [Made in Roşia Montană](#)

Digital resources

1. https://www.vice.com/en_nz/article/9k4za3/meet-the-guy-who-helped-save-a-town-from-actual-gold-diggers
2. <https://www.nesst.org/rosia-montana>



Aims and objectives

- To present a good practice and a solution that could help the prevention of unemployment and depopulation
- To promote young entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship in rural areas
- To build an intergenerational bridge between the seniors who have the know-how related to traditional handicrafts and the younger generation.

Top highlights:

Most important aspects of the case study, or take-aways that could be shared with other communities:

- The initiative to create awareness about the gold mining project that proposed to destroy Roșia Montana as a village has generated more actions that eventually led to the launch of the social enterprise.
- Made in Roșia Montană helps the community by bringing additional income to 35 local families of women who carry on with the tradition of knitting.
- Additional incomes allow locals to obtain a higher standard of living.
- The small business contributes to the economic development of the village and it brought national and international attention on the region.
- In the last years, more than 200 locals were involved in the activities of business.
- With the help of the women from the community, local traditions are carried on and the cultural heritage is preserved.

Description and benefits of the intervention:

Background

Roșia Montană generated one of the most controversial subjects in Romania in the past years. The reason was the mining project proposed by the Romanian Canadian Company, Roșia Montana Gold Corporation which, announced an extraction project plan for over 300 tons of gold and 1,500 tons of silver. Also, a few mountain peaks around the village would disappear, as well as the village itself, as it was going to be relocated to make room for a cyanide lake. Over the almost two decades that followed, successive Romanian governments couldn't decide what to do. Some pushed for the project, while others tried to ban it completely. But Tică Darie, a student who pedalled from Copenhagen to Roșia Montana in order to create awareness about the gold mining project in 2013, pushed the story from being a local issue into a national one. With the usage of Internet and social media, huge protests started to spread across the country. In 2016, this movement eventually led to the Romanian government declaring Roșia Montană a "historic site of national importance", protecting it from any mining activities.

Actions

In order to generate even more awareness on the potential of the area and to highlight the reasons why the community should not be removed, in 2013 Tică Darie, a youngster with valuable determination and not many resources, decided to move there and to become directly involved in the community. At the end of the year, right before Christmas he was gifted a pair of woollen socks from a local woman who was passionate about knitting. The picture of the socks was then posted on Facebook. In two days, more than a hundred pairs of socks were ordered. In a span of two weeks, 20 women from the village took to knitting the socks. Within three months around 300 pairs of socks had been delivered. A year later, MADE IN ROȘIA MONTANĂ was founded and in January 2015 the online shop was launched. The social enterprise sells handcrafted wool clothing products, including socks, caps, gloves, scarves and yoga socks. The products are knit by women in Roșia Montană, providing them with income and allowing them to obtain a higher standard of living.

How does it work

Every spring and autumn, Tică and the creative women that are working with him brainstorm new ideas of fashion design that will eventually become the new products of the business. All the products are 100% natural and 100% handmade from Merino wool, just with the help of the skilled hands of the ladies and Tică's laptop. He is in charge with taking the

orders, marketing strategies and the process of delivery. The wool products are also available worldwide, not only in Romania. Meanwhile, women work from their own homes and enjoy flexible schedules, so they are able to continue to be involved in the life of the local community.

Also, the small social business reinvests 90% of the profit in the development of the company, and 10% is invested in education, encouraging and supporting the Scouts of Roșia Montana, another project of Tică Darie created to show young people in the area how to respect nature and each other. Of the nearly 70 children in the village, 15 are currently enrolled in Darie's scouts. He puts on hiking orientation classes, book clubs and other activities that are "typical of mountain life".

Local, regional, national, and international impact

"Made in Roșia Montană" is not only about selling products, but also a civic act from the founder, the locals and other Romanians who were inspired by the movement. Roșia Montană was saved from the cyanide and poverty thanks to the empathy of people who were brought together to make great changes. The business idea was massively shared in the regional and national media. Tică Darie's actions were the pillars of an awareness campaign surrounding the possible negative effects of the events that could have happened în Roșia Montană. Also, international media was interested in the story from Roșia Montană and the impact of the social enterprise and the active movements from the region are worldwide known.

Conclusions:

In the present, the business is growing and more women from the local community are becoming a part of the project. Next up, the entrepreneur hopes, will be a bistro, serving organic, locally sourced products. From there, he wants to set up a range of B&Bs which – in conjunction with the restaurant, music festival and Made in Roșia – will fall under the umbrella initiative Visit Roșia Montană, offering weekend breaks around these mountains. More entrepreneurs around the country were inspired by the model of Roșia Montană and are willing to implement similar social enterprises in other rural communities.

Case study 2: [Nod Verde](#)

Digital resources

1. <https://nodverde.ro/>
2. <https://civitas.ro/en/>
3. https://issuu.com/fundatiacivitas/docs/civitas_raport_2018_-_en
4. <https://www.rafonline.org/en/programe/food-hub-development/>



Aims and objectives

- To present a good practice and a solution that connect the local farmers and help them reach the final consumers
- To encourage local/rural entrepreneurship and small farmers
- To encourage the consumers, build a healthy relationship with clean food product
- To develop the cooperative sector in Romania

Top highlights

Nod Verde has the following main purposes:

- to act as an intermediary for small farmers to reach the market, as well as a resources center for farmers, providing help to increase their competitiveness;
- to ensure fair market access to small local food producers and individual small farmers;
- to provide small farmers with a valid local economic model;
- to contribute to the economic development of rural Romania by offering access to two critical elements: markets coupled with basic business know-how and access to capital;
- to support small farmers to promote their products;
- to provide a healthy alternative to consumers;
- to contribute to the well-being of rural communities.

Description and benefits of the project

Background

Nod Verde (eng. Green Knot) is a food hub coordinated by Civitas Foundation and the Romanian-American Foundation that provides a new retail channel for local producers from the region of Cluj-Napoca and a healthy alternative solution to consumers. The initiative started from the producer's needs with whom the Civitas Foundation collaborates. Most of them produce small quantities on small areas which significantly reduce their chances of getting into the market – the big chain stores do not work with them and the local markets are not a proper alternative either. Therefore, the small producers remain outside the market, a fact that generates multiple social effects: the agricultural production is decreasing, the export dependency is increasing, the rural areas are becoming depopulated.

Actions

Therefore, everything started from an identified need on the Romanian market. The clients' access to local products was limited because a modern form through which they could receive directly organic products did not exist. Nod Verde appeared to bring consumers one click away from these products, through online orders and home delivery.

When it comes to the relation with the producers, besides being a commercial partner, the food hub is also a development partner. Nod Verde invests in events for the producers, in promoting and counselling on packaging and labelling.

How does it work

The business model adopted by Nod Verde
Civitas Foundation visited the USA in 2014 and analysed different operational models from which they have chosen the one that better fits the Romanian realities – an initiative of young people from Philadelphia which worked closely with community farmers whose products were primarily consumed by collective beneficiaries. Its market share was mostly made up of collective clients like hospitals, schools, restaurants, instead of individuals. Another reason that makes the model suitable for the Romanian market is the way collective clients (especially schools and hospitals) tend to choose their suppliers, the choice being heavily based on price.

Nod Verde's business model is based on a web platform where the clients can place their orders, choosing from the listed products. This business model has a strong educational component for both farmers and consumers. The producers are helped to obtain

authorization or to have a better marketing strategy. Simultaneously, consumers have a better understanding of the benefits of local products.

Nod Verde focuses on creating a community and a good relationship between the producers and clients. Among the challenges that the food hub faces there is people's reluctance to this type of commerce – the reluctance can be observed both in consumers and producers.

Having said that, the initiators of the project strongly believe that the relationship between local producers and consumers can be strengthened through direct contact and meaningful dialogue. In this sense, brunches with local products have been organized at different local farms, where consumers visited the producers' holdings, tasted local products and were left pleasantly surprised by the whole experience. For a fruitful relationship, after these events, both the producers and the consumers are encouraged to listen and accept each other's recommendations, as productive communication must be bidirectional.

Trends and predictions for the next years

More and more people are preoccupied by a healthy lifestyle, consuming more local products and using less plastic or other materials likely to give rise to environmental pollution. In this sense, Nod Verde is fighting against pollution and uses environmental-friendly measures, like the cardboard boxes in which the products are delivered. Furthermore, each box has a label through which the clients are asked to return the box and the glass bags at the next delivery. The products – the vegetables and the fruits – are delivered unpacked, in order to reduce the volume of packages that Nod Verde introduces on the market. Currently, Nod Verde is also analysing other initiatives that could be implemented in the future – environmentally-friendly delivery, creating a pick-up point, increasing the number of partners, greater development and closer connections between producers and customers.

Nod Verde plans to reinvest in the community the money from the sale of products. In the near future, a share of the profits from Nod Verde will be directed to social projects that can benefit the development of the community, which will be implemented by Civitas Foundation for Civil Society, the NGO which started this initiative. Ștefan Barteș, the manager of Nod Verde considers that the above-mentioned represents a very important step that must be taken after ensuring the sustainability of the project. „Giving something back to communities who support us is a way to show our gratitude and appreciation”.

At the moment, beside Nod Verde, there are several other food hubs coordinated by the Romanian-American Foundation, each of it with its own strategy: Nord Natural (products from Bucovina delivered across the country), Roade și Merinde (Iași), Magazinul produselor locale – Helyénvaló (Odorheiu Secuiesc) and Merindar (apiculture products from Criș, delivered across the country). These initiatives represent a strong pillar for forming national models which can be replicated in other regions and can have a good influence on their development.

Local, regional, national, and international impact

At local and regional level, Nod Verde connects rural farmers from Cluj-Napoca region, who wish to increase their operations or diversify their market channels, with large food retailers, institutions, schools, and other buyers.

Food hubs such as Nod Verde exhibit innovative business models that are financially viable and are capable of making a difference not only in the communities that they service, but also at national level if the model is correctly multiplied.

Conclusions

Organic products register in Romania and internationally a tremendous growth and recognition. People are more careful with their sources of food and they prefer to be adopters of the concept “from farm to table”. Nod Verde successfully connects the rural farmers directly with the end-consumers and ensure an optimized marketplace platform for their clients.