

Project Information Sheet
Conference Project Brief number 1



Improve the governance of the Saxon “triangle” area

Intercommunal cooperation in the Transylvania Region

Description:	Development of specific policies to support development of local areas
Beneficiaries:	The villages from the Saxon “triangle” area
Project Implementer:	Mihai Eminescu Trust Foundation and UNDP
Co-implementer:	Association of villages willing to participate at this project
Timespan:	12 months
Estimated Cost:	111,000 dollars for each workshop to be improved
Partners:	Local Councils from the area
Origin:	Mihai Eminescu Trust, Gaia Heritage Sal, Center for Urban Development Studies – Harvard University

Project Brief

1. Title of the Project

Inter-communal cooperation in the Transylvania Region.

2. Location of the Project and Area of Coverage

The communes considered will fall within or in the region defined by the roads connecting Brasov, Sighisoara and Sibiu.

Communes and villages will participate on a voluntary basis in the project. The first micro-region for promoting cooperation could take place in the area surrounding Sighisoara given that most of the World Heritage villages are located within this zone which also includes other rural/urban functional linkages structured in part by the transportation corridors defined by the road network of Brasov, Sighisoara and Sibiu.

3. Justification

Saving the cultural heritage of the villages needs to be part of a wider rural development approach that increases the quality of village life for residents. Living conditions are low and people are struggling. Given the lack of economic opportunities, educated youth are leaving and housing as a cultural asset is vulnerable from the inability of families to improve and maintain the housing. The current economic activities in the area do not provide enough resources and the present contribution of tourism, while growing in importance, should be viewed as a component of a more diversified economy. Various approaches, tailored to the specificities of the villages and their locations should be developed. The development of the villages can only be achieved by a coherent set of activities compatible with the desired protection of the natural and build environment that are economically strong enough to provide jobs and generate income.

Within sub-regions such as the area around Sighisoara, an understanding of the rural/urban linkages and the network of economic activities is important to identifying economic activities. Studies in Romania on rural development have found that non-farm employment is an important source of rural incomes and that high-value agriculture in close proximity to urban areas were also an important source of rural income. In addition to rural urban linkages based on agriculture, others potential activities supported by a network of urban-rural linkages include: work force transfers; education and training; social services; administrative services; health care; recreation and sport; culture and religion; municipal services including solid waste, water and sewerage, natural gas,

public transportation and road connections; housing and urban planning and land management.¹

4. Objectives of the Project

The promotion of diversified economic activities in rural areas and SMEs in towns and surrounding communities; developing common projects between and among communes and small and medium towns and the exchange of experience between public administrations are important steps in promoting and strengthening urban/rural linkages.

Development of specific policies to support development of local areas (defined by current or potential economic or social linkages) include:

- Area specific strategies that account for more diverse agricultural activities;
- The development of associations and networks to increase cooperation of local governments within micro-regions and to help them assume a regional role;
- Cooperation in the fields of cultural heritage and management, education, vocational training and job creation focusing particularly on skills relevant to non-agricultural work;
- Development strategies at the county level that are linked to spatial planning and infrastructure investments;
- Flexible frameworks for planning and implementation of services within micro-regions that cut across jurisdictional boundaries, including joint planning and financing of infrastructure;
- Proactive use of NGOs and associations to support local initiatives.

An association of villages, starting around the Villages with Fortified Churches inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO and around that are already cooperating through the Mihai Eminescu Trust activities, can provide the initial framework through which cooperation and critical mass can be achieved.

One of the major difficulties encountered by the villages of the region is depopulation and, as a consequence, reduced agricultural production and revenues. In spite of the positive efforts undertaken by residents of the villages with the assistance of NGOs and others, the descending spiral of diminishing revenues, employment, investments and population is still very present.

An objective of the project is to create an association for villages so that they are better able to reverse this trend and make for effective use of use of the internal resources available and to leverage external cooperation.

¹ This brief draws upon visits to the Saxon villages and Sighisoara and the recommendations coming out of a workshop on emerging practices in “self-associating” governance frameworks among communes forming micro-regions in Zalu in January 2002.

5. Activities of the Project

The identification of development strategies at the communal level, with assistance from the county, can be an important element in building consensus for local development strategies and enforceable building regulations and land use controls.

The program would be divided into four major activities:

1. Identification of Micro-region and general assessment

- Identification of Micro regions based on existing and potential functional linkages;
- Short field assessments conducted in association with the communes, urban centers and counties on existing development challenges and priorities; economic activities, future activities; financial resources and the understanding of the potential role of natural and cultural heritage in economic development. The field assessments would be prepared as background material for a series of workshops.
- Identification of relevant best practices in micro-region (Romania and EU).

2. Workshops/Networks

As part of developing larger-scale area strategies within a defined micro-region that would involve multiple communes and counties, a series of one day workshops and shorter working sessions will help local officials at the county and the commune develop a better understanding of:

- The linkages between protecting the natural and built heritage and the rural economy;
- The poverty issues and how a multi-dimensional LED program can improve the incomes and standard of living for rural residents;
- The functional linkages between rural and urban areas.²
- The benefits and risk on non-cooperation

An outcome of the workshops would be to mutually agree on: principles and goals of cooperation; program areas for cooperation; and possible inter-municipal/communal compacts (bilateral and multilateral) in common priority areas (infrastructure, cultural heritage training and projects, tourism, agriculture and services. A proposed structure for cooperation, preferably one that is designed for incremental growth, would be developed and agreed upon by the participating councils.

² The rural communes are linked to the smaller urban centers and their respective county capitals by different functional activities including: jobs commutes, high school attendance, health care access, consumer services and participation in social and cultural events.

3. Parallel Studies and Supporting Activities

In priority program areas chosen through the workshops, a series of parallel and highly focused activities would begin in order to jump-start cooperation activities and incrementally develop working procedures and cooperation among the partners.³ Funding for these activities would come from various sources with the goal to use local in kind resources and funding or special requests for central government and external funds.

Potential activities include:

- Communal development strategies that integrate social, environmental, and local economic development with the protection of the cultural and natural heritage. Develop a pilot program for a broader development strategy to protect the built, cultural and natural environment with local officials and stakeholders. With the full involvement of civil society, the process and structure can provide a good example for other communes or groups of communes.
- Develop Communal urban plans (PUGs) as consensus documents that are linked to development policies and supported by mechanisms to manage development. Identify incentives for promoting compliance.
- Define a forum or alternative institutional mechanisms that can provide support to communes for development strategies and protection of the built environment. The forum would identify and develop innovative practices for common planning, environmental and service provision issues in the sub-region among the three counties. Within a defined micro-region and with different partners, develop a shared regional technical expertise to plan and provide selected technical assistance to local communes (local economic development; urban planning land use controls; infrastructure, financing of protection of the built heritage; social services).

4. Final Agreement on a three year plan of activities among the cooperating partners.

This agreement will allow the partners to link to financing cycles and provide a timeframe for monitoring, assessing and redirecting activities to support the strategic initiatives and adjust to the realities of project implementation.

6. Inputs

The project will require the availability of national specialists with an experience in capacity building and networking of villages and/or communes. This staff will be technically supported by foreign consultants the involvement of whose will be limited because of the previous similar project conducted in the region of Oradea.

There will be limited need of equipment and it is assumed that local authorities will be able to provide such support (see 7 below).

³ For example, identify and develop thematic circuits linking Sighisoara and villages including hiking and biking trails between villages for those interested in hiking along extended routes.

Other inputs are composed of training activities, coordination meetings, discovery sessions abroad for local leaders and travel of project personnel. There will also be some management fees involved and the usual operating expenses.

7. Requirements from outside for the project

A one-year commitment from Sighisoara and participating villages and communes to participate in all the capacity-building activities.

In-kind, local logistical assistance for venues to hold larger meetings and working sessions. Provision of office space and of secretariat support for the team.

8. Calendar of Activities

The project can be undertaken in one year as outlined below.

- Identification of the initial micro-region and general assessment (2 months)
- Workshops and Initial Networks (5 months)
- Parallel Studies and Supporting Activities (4 months)
- Final agreement of a three-year plan of activities.(1month)

9. Summary Budget (in USD)

Component	Identificati on	Workshops - Networks	Support	TOTAL
1. Personnel	10,000	26,000	18,000	54,000
2. Travel	4,000	9,000	6,000	19,000
3. Grants		4,000	2,000	6,000
4. Support contracts	1,000	6,000	1,000	8,000
5. Workshops supplies	0	2,000	0	2,000
6. Equipment	0	0	4,000	4,000
7. Administration	1,500	3,500	3,000	8,000
8. Unforeseen (10%)	1,500	5,000	3,500	10,000
TOTAL PROJECT	18,000	55,500	37,500	111,000

Other issues:

What is the scope of the project? Local, regional?

The project is mainly regional since it will attempt to bring together several villages and communes to cooperate.

It is also local since its impact will be at local level, in each village.

How does the project fit into the global strategy?

This project is primordial for the success of the development strategy. It is the major instrument for the bringing together of villages sharing the same conditions and the same issues. In creating an active network of villages, the project will enable these villages to put together resources and needs and to address the authorities and the economic actors with a reinforced voice. The project will give the villages strength and ability to contact and cooperate with partners on large-scale projects and funding.

How does it contribute in improving the situation?

The development of the villages is presently hindered by several factors: depopulation, lack of income generating activities, difficult communication means, and lack of adapted investments.

In creating a network of villages sharing a common goal and common issues, the project will provide these villages with the ability to address together these issues: it creates a larger entity, a larger production capacity, a larger market for labour and products and a large population. Several of the bottlenecks preventing these villages of developing will then be resolved more easily.

Who are the actors to be involved in its implementation and who are the direct beneficiaries?

The actors of this project are primarily the locally elected/ mayors and councilors. At a second level, though more importantly, it will be the population of the villages that will benefit from this project and that can ensure its success.