

Rural Livelihoods for Sustainability

*Stories of rural regeneration
from Central Europe*



This book is dedicated to Jan Pivečka, who inspired many in Central Europe to use their heritage to generate rural livelihoods.



Jan Pivečka – In Memoriam The Jan Pivečka Foundation has been one of most active grassroots NGOs in the Rural Livelihoods Program thanks to the personal hands-on involvement of its 84 years old founder. To the sorrow of the whole region Jan Pivečka died in January 2004 and will be sorely missed.

The ascertained family tree of Pivečka's family starts 1583 with Jan Pivečka (called Pivko), shoemaker in Valašské Klobouky. The family members earned their livelihood by farming, tanning, shoemaking and as drapers of traditional cloth. Jan Pivečka (1919–2004) was an entrepreneur and independent counsel for the shoe industry. After an international career with Bata, running his own shoe company in Frankfurt and consulting to the German Government, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and other international institutions, Jan Pivečka returned to his home town Slavičín in the White Carpathians in 1990 after 44 years in exile. In recognition of his work for the Federal Republic of Germany in the Developing Countries he received "Das Bundesverdienstkreuz" (Federal Cross of Merit) from the President of the German Federal Republic in July 1993.

Jan Pivečka established his foundation in 1996 to motivate entrepreneurial young people, provide support for them and create opportunities both in the Czech Republic and internationally. Back in 1990, he sought to reposes the Pivečka family shoe factory in Slavičín which was confiscated by the communist authorities in 1948. He proposed establishing and financing a foundation, to support and promote young entrepreneurs from (then) Czechoslovakia from revenues generated by the shoe plant. After prolonged negotiations, he succeeded in restituting only a nominal number of shares and was not able to secure any influence over operations. Unperturbed, he set up the foundation all the same.

When you want to make a pair of shoes that are beautiful and comfortable to wear, you have to put a piece of your heart into the job.

Jan Pivečka

Connecting with young nature conservationists, he became involved in a frog rescue project aimed at saving them from being crushed by cars as they moved across busy roads around the Luhačovice Dam. Through the Jan Pivečka Foundation he sought to inspire young people to take on practical projects aimed at linking environmental concerns with a rediscovery of local heritage and economic revitalization. As his Foundation took over ruined houses and the forest park in the White Carpathians, he made them a focus for a range of practical projects, organizing creative art competitions for young designers – students of SUPŠ Uherské Hradiště (Secondary School of Applied Art) and VŠUP Praha (University of Applied Art Prague).

Jan Pivečka felt obliged to help others. At every step, he tried to create exciting work opportunities for as many young people as possible in ways that tied them to their home places. He wanted to contribute to building a grassroots movement for using heritage to revitalize rural economies. The Jan Pivečka Foundation continues the mission of its founder and exemplifies the creative spirit that came to permeate the rural livelihoods program over the past two years.

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Retzow/Ganzlin
Zempow
Lenzen

Brodowin
BERLIN
Schöneiche

Debrzno

WARSZAWA

Ostritz-St. Marienthal
Röttelmisch/Reinstädt
Frýdlantsko

PRAHA

Slovácko

White Carpathians

Babia Góra

Kraków Jura-Bochnia

Babia Hora

Ramža

WIEN

BRATISLAVA

South Sitno

Ipoly Valley

BUDAPEST

LJUBLJANA

ZAGREB

Boronka

Zselic



***Time to learn
from Central Europe***



photo © Stanislav Skoupy

Time to learn from Central Europe

Something special is taking place in rural areas across Central Europe. In the White Carpathians, a rolling patchwork landscape along the Czech and Slovak border, dozens of small local initiatives involving civic associations, local farmers, and community leaders, are re-engineering the local economy to create income and jobs in an area that has been buffeted by poverty and high unemployment. In Debrzno in northern Poland, known until recently for its acute social problems linked to the highest unemployment rate in the country following collapse of state farms and downsizing of military bases in the area, people have taken to building nature trails, branding local products, organizing organic agriculture and marketing a green business park to attract inward investors.

A remarkable network of inter-related ‘home-grown’ initiatives is emerging. Feeding on each other, these initiatives range from the development and marketing of local heritage products and the application of cost-saving renewable energy technology, to organisation of regional festivals and eco-museums that attract visitors and inspire locals to become even more active in shaping the future of their communities. All this activity is serving to redefine local economies. Involving people in cultural and natural heritage conservation is proving essential for rural regeneration.

What is happening in the White Carpathians or Debrzno is not unique in Central Europe. Indeed, the stories of rural regeneration from twelve regions across the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary that are contained in this volume show how local people are breathing new life into rural communities across Central Europe. Starting with small-scale, practical environmental initiatives and projects, they are creating rural livelihoods to safeguard what is precious in their communities. In the process, people are regaining their confidence, self-respect and most important of all—an opportunity to try to shape their own future. They are contributing to making sustainable development a practical reality, but doing so without expensive subsidies, grants or large-scale technical assistance programs.

Striving for sustainability

Central Europe boasts rich biodiversity and landscape resources which, if protected and managed responsibly, will significantly add value to the natural and cultural heritage of the expanded European Union. The difference between Central Europe and the European Union in terms of richness of biological resources is symbolized by a comparison of the size of the white stork population in Poland and Germany, which is roughly 10:1 (40,000 vs. 4,000). The two countries are comparable in terms of territory, which is similar (312,000sq km vs. 357,000sq km) and other geographical and natural features.

But will the EU enlargement process introduce a similar path of development in Central Europe resulting in dramatic losses in biodiversity as has been the case in Germany and other EU countries?

Experience of the past decade suggests that maintenance of Central European biodiversity and landscape resources will not depend on more effective policing of existing national parks and more funding to expand the geographical coverage of protected areas. The critical factor will be the extent to which revitalization of rural economies can generate livelihoods for people already living and working in rural areas, especially those characterized by high natural values.

With the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia joining the European Union (EU) in 2004, the pressure is on to find new ways of generating rural livelihoods which will ensure Central Europe's rich biodiversity and landscape resources are safeguarded in the enlarged European Union. The experience of the White Carpathians, Debrzno and other rural areas in Central Europe suggests that there are ways of preventing the negative patterns of unsustainable development seen in many rural areas of Germany, the United Kingdom and other EU countries being repeated in Central Europe. The lesson is that people living in rural areas must be seen not as the problem, but as the solution.

This book highlights vital lessons from Central Europe on generating rural livelihoods in ways that make environmental and social justice priorities an integral part of revitalizing local economies. But are those in the European Union ready to take stock of **their own** situation by learning from these Central European experiences? Are **they** prepared for EU enlargement and for changing their unsustainable ways?

No more business-as-usual

There is growing recognition among policy-makers across Europe that ‘business-as-usual’ in rural policy and planning is not a long-term viable option in the present EU, let alone in an expanded Union of 25 member states. The current arrangements cannot be easily extended to cover an enlarged EU due to the high costs, environmental impacts and food safety concerns involved. There is little question that the most important part of rural policy, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), must be radically overhauled not only to reduce its cost to the EU budget, but also to ensure that it contributes to rural sustainability—a type of development consistent with what the Brundtland Commission defined as sustainable development: “meeting the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” What is not yet clear, however, is just how such rural sustainability is to be achieved.

In planning reform of the CAP, the EU has already declared that land uses and rural livelihoods must be compatible with the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological services, processes and functions (i.e. natural capital in the form of soil, water, biodiversity, and ecosystem health). The central plank of proposed reforms is an overall reduction of the CAP in the EU budget, coupled with a move to reducing emphasis on direct payments to agricultural producers (the so-called Pillar 1 of the CAP) in favour of financial support for rural infrastructure and development (the so-called Pillar 2 of the CAP), which is to include provisions for a safety net for needy farms, improved environmental quality, biodiversity conservation, animal welfare, food quality and food safety. The move is to cross-compliance performance indicators, rather than to food production alone, to stabilisation of agricultural income and to rural sustainability more generally.

In Central Europe, rural sustainability demands a reversal of the decline of agriculture and stagnation of rural economies of recent years. This means environmental sustainability must be about not just environmental awareness and sensitivity, but also about poverty alleviation, infrastructure improvement, social justice, jobs, inward investment and income diversification.

According to O’Riordan, other proponents of sustainability and sustainable development, the terms are often used synonymously, but refer to quite different things*. Sustainable development is a **process** which describes the journey that must be taken to arrive at the destination, which is sustainability—securing the life-support capability of ecological systems upon which economy and society depend. Sustainable development is driven by an interplay of political, social and economic forces motivated by a human desire to achieve economic and social improvement that is:

- Continuous and permanent,
- Durable and reliable,
- Proactive and just,
- Enterprising and sharing.

The transition to rural sustainability must be rooted in generating rural livelihoods in line with three fundamental principles:

- Maintaining and protecting essential life support processes,
- Using renewable resources to the point of precautionary replacement,
- Pricing the cost of living according to its natural burdens and social disruption.

But how is a new kind of rural sustainability to be achieved? How are we to move away from the present system, which favors agricultural over-production, mechanization and rural un-sustainability, to one that favors production of good food and a healthy diet, environmental stewardship, and an active engagement of those living and working in the countryside?

The answer from Central Europe is to see those living and working in rural areas, such as the White Carpathians or Debrzno, not as problems, but as opportunities—as the **social capital**—essential for generating rural livelihoods, which, in turn, are essential to achieving rural sustainability.

*) See:

O’Riordan, T. and Stoll-Kleemann, S. (2002). *Biodiversity, sustainability and human communities: beyond the protected*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press;

O’Riordan, T. (ed) (2000). *Environmental Science for Environmental Management*, Harlow: Prentice Hall;

Kates, R. et al. (2001). *Sustainability Science*, Science Vol. 292 No. 5517: 641–642.



The challenge is to find ways of building up social capital in towns and villages in rural areas, which will enable all citizens to effectively engage in shaping their own healthy and viable livelihoods. Implementing sustainable development demands that citizens have opportunities to develop the skills and personal confidence needed to design reliable livelihoods and evolve workable partnerships that lead to more efficient use of resources and waste reduction in the local economy. Energy schemes, local food production, competing, recycling and eco-tourism all fit into these categories, as do energy conservation projects for poor households, redesigning public buildings for non carbon futures, and creating opportunities for linking crafts and heritage products to biodiversity conservation.

Building sustainable rural communities requires a fresh, people-oriented approach to valuing and caring for ecosystem-based services, which must be treated as integral to the process of regenerating rural economies. But it is local people who must be allowed to take on more responsibility for defining, discovering, and crafting these sustainable livelihood futures as it is they who will have to play an active role in protecting the landscapes in which they live and work.

The opportunity of EU Enlargement

EU enlargement offers an historic opportunity for re-thinking the whole approach to rural development across Europe. Whether we like it or not, EU enlargement will reconfigure the politics of not just the European continent, but also transatlantic and north-south relationships. Just what will be the impacts and implications on biodiversity, rural development, and agriculture of this geopolitical reconfiguration is unclear?

One thing is certain, however. Rural development programs based on subsidies for agricultural production of the kind delivered through the CAP in the European Union and the Farm Bill in the USA will be insufficient to assure real progress towards safeguarding biodiversity and moving towards rural sustainability. This is because the current farm support system in the EU and USA is both costly and ineffective, soaking up annually approximately 1.3% of the GNP of all OECD countries or approximately twice Poland's GNP.

There is little question that the future of rural sustainability in Central Europe will be determined to a large degree by the structural economic and institutional reforms implemented at the macro-level by Central European governments in anticipation of European Union membership, CAP reforms and liberalization of global markets under the World Trade Organization (WTO). Yet looking back through recent history, there is much evidence to suggest that the scope, scale and direction of economic and institutional reform depends on the climate of public support secured for new ideas and initiatives at the local or grassroots level.

The key to generating public support for difficult macro-level reforms lies at the grassroots or community-level because this is where the costs (and the benefits) of reforms are experienced at first hand. At the local level, small-scale initiatives and projects provide scope for experimentation with new ideas and approaches, and most importantly help generate a sense of sharing in the responsibility and costs of rebuilding rural economies in line with sustainability objectives. But such activities are typically disconnected from the macro-level reforms formulated in distant ministries by anonymous experts. The lessons and experience of grassroots environmental projects and initiatives are seldom taken into account in policy and planning at the national and international level.

Clearly, there is need for developing new and more effective ways of linking local or community-based experiments in sustainability to the national and international level of policy and planning, including debates on reform of the CAP and European Union sustainability policy and planning. At the same time, the local implications of macro-level reforms have to be better understood by those working at the local or community level. This is because failure to anticipate and prepare for macro-level reforms in agricultural markets, nature conservation initiatives, international trade and regional development programming can stifle or make irrelevant bottom-up initiatives, leading to economic disruption and associated frustration and despair among local communities.

Advocates of rural sustainability call for reconnecting farming to the rest of the economy and environment; for reconnecting nature and society in ways that are mutually beneficial and reinforcing. Not only must conservation strategies address human economic needs, but new types of management systems are needed that are able to generate rural livelihoods without degrading ecological systems—their structure, function, services, diversity, and resilience. Experience from North America and Europe with implementing rural sustainability was reviewed at a NATO Advanced Research Workshop on the role of biodiversity conservation in rural sustainability, held in November, 2002 in Krakow, Poland*. Case studies presented at the workshop showed that successful conservation requires the integrated development of ‘working landscapes’ in which human land uses and livelihoods are compatible with the maintenance of biodiversity and ecological services, processes, and functions. Such human-modified landscapes should be viewed as generating rural livelihoods that contribute at the same time to both development and conservation.

Central European landscapes like the White Carpathians or Debrzno provide a glimpse of what the transition to rural sustainability is all about. The stories of rural regeneration from twelve areas contained in this volume are intended to provide a starting point for learning directly from those involved at the grassroots in making rural sustainability a reality in Central Europe.

*) Light, S. (ed) (2004). *The Role of Biodiversity Conservation in the Transition to Rural Sustainability. Volume 41. NATO Science Series: Science and Technology*, Amsterdam: IOS Press.

Rural Livelihoods

In 2001–2003, the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE), a consortium of five not-for-profit foundations committed to supporting grassroots environmental action in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania, teamed up with The German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt to initiate a project entitled: **Rural Livelihoods: Model Environmental Projects for Rural Sustainability**. The motivation behind the project was to explore how encouraging learning and experience exchange between small geographical areas in four Central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) with important local or community-based environmental projects could help generate a wider movement for promoting **economic, social and environmental sustainability** in the rural areas of Central Europe in line with the sustainable development priorities of the European Union and Local Agenda 21.

More specifically, the program responded to four needs:

- 1. A need to build new learning networks for rural sustainability**—local initiatives and projects contributing to rural sustainability are undertaken in isolation and are seldom well documented. New types of learning networks are needed to enable those involved in pioneering practical action at the local level to communicate, to share experience and expertise and to support one another.
- 2. A need for input into national and international level policy and planning**—the twin global forces affecting the future of rural areas in Central Europe are European Union expansion and the associated introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and reform of agricultural trade under the World Trade Organization (WTO). To date, little effort has been made to assess the impact of these forces on the local or community level in any systematic way. The experience, expertise and ideas related to rural sustainability generated at the local or community level have not been communicated in any systematic or concerted way to national and international policy-makers.

3. A need to assess progress towards sustainability—many local or community-based initiatives focused on environmental protection are often seen as important because they bring tangible social and economic benefits in a specific geographical area. For this reason, they are seen as important in their own right. But what is the contribution of such small and dispersed activities to moving economy and society towards sustainability? The need is to advance understanding of the ways in which ecological, economic and social factors come together through many individual initiatives and projects to affect the life support functions of rural ecosystems and so the longer term sustainability of rural communities.

4. A need to promote sustainability success stories—not all local level environmental initiatives and projects can be easily replicated and scaled-up to contribute significantly to sustainability at national and international levels. The need is to identify and promote local sustainability success stories that can be replicated or scaled up or else be used as benchmarks or points of reference and sources of inspiration for encouraging others to turn national and international policy declarations into practical action that benefits economy, environment and society.

The program identified rural initiatives and projects, which are model or exemplary in promoting progress towards sustainability in four thematic areas:

- sustainable agriculture,
- sustainable tourism,
- energy efficiency and
- renewable energy.

These four thematic areas were selected as they offer the greatest potential for generating economic, social and environmental benefits at the community scale. Initiatives or projects developed within one theme are capable of also generating synergies and benefits with projects developed in other themes. The motivation was to generate linkages between established projects and initiatives within specific micro-regions and to generate new ones to enhance progress towards sustainability.

As part of the process of identifying important environmental initiatives and projects developed with the active involvement of local or community-based civic groups, the EPCE foundations provided support through:

- **Technical assistance**, including program development, expert assistance, partnership-building as well as fundraising from other sources;
- **Delivery and exchange** of technology, know-how, and experience between participating projects in Central Europe and with German partners through study tours, seminars and workshops, publications, expert assistance and consulting as well as reference to relevant expertise in the USA,
- **Seed funds** for development and realization of exemplary projects.

Twelve micro-regions where the EPCE foundations have consistently supported environmental projects and initiatives involving civic action in past years provided the focus for the program. Three micro-regions were selected in each of the four EPCE countries (i.e. three in Poland, three in Slovakia, three in the Czech Republic and three in Hungary—see map), covering over 130 towns and villages and a total population of approximately 100,000. These micro-regions were defined as bio-regional areas of approximately 100 km² encompassing a single or at most, two or three municipalities. The actual geographic extent of the micro-regions varied from country to country because of differences in specific local needs, opportunities and circumstances as well as varied administration structures. The geographical influence of local and regional NGO and local government partners and their activities also helped to define the micro-regions.

The motivation was to bring together and otherwise connect local leaders, their ideas and energy into a learning network and so help create a grassroots movement for rural sustainability.

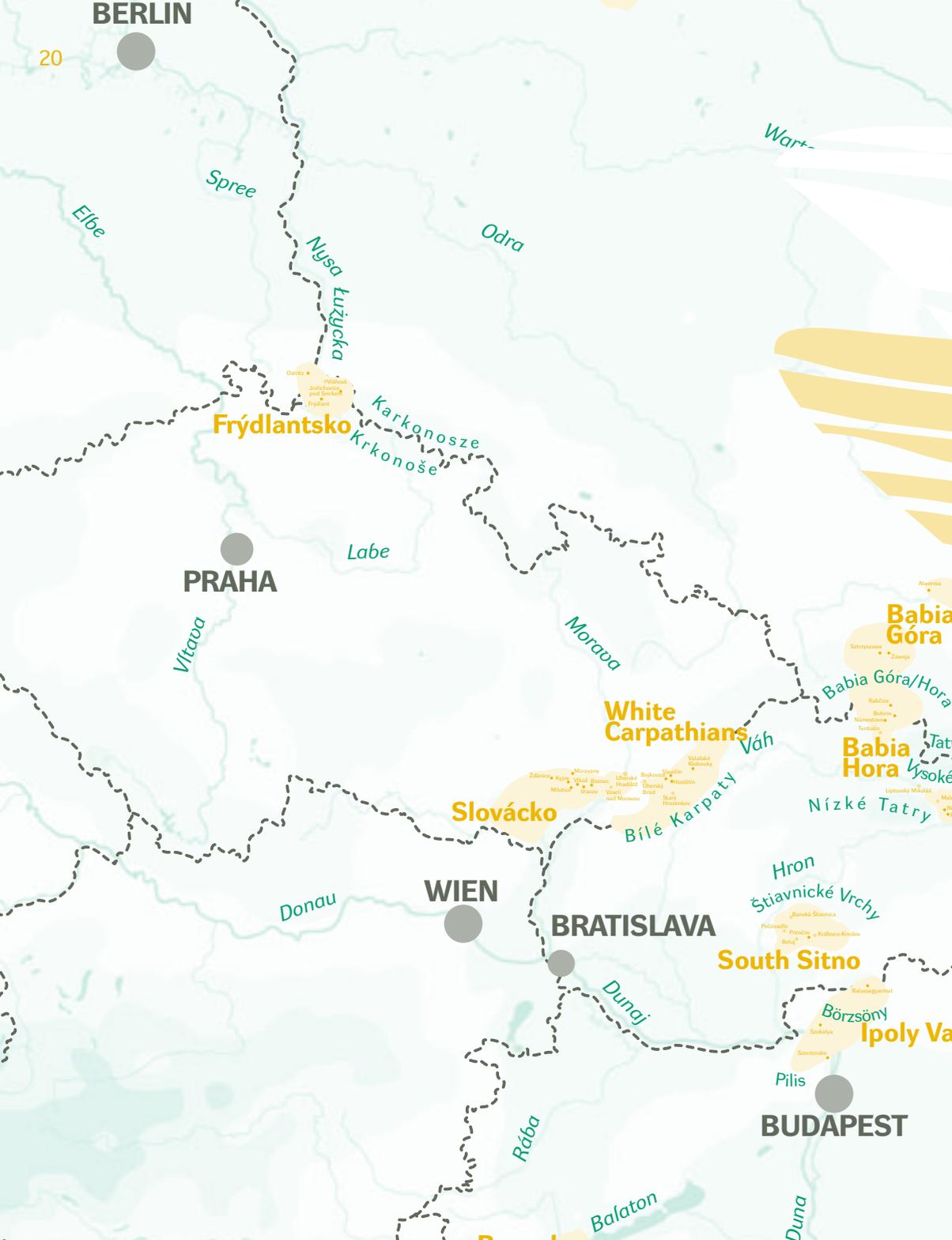
Areas participating in the program were:

- **Czech Republic:**
Central White Carpathians, Slovácko Region, Frýdlantsko Region.
- **Hungary:**
Amber Trail Region (Lower Ipoly Valley), Boronka and Zselic.
- **Poland:**
Krakow Jura and Bochnia, Central Pomerania (Debrzno) and Babia Gora region (Zawoja).
- **Slovakia:**
Babia Hora region (Horná Orava), Sitno South and Ramža.

The initiatives and projects identified and supported through the program actively involved *45 NGOs, 87 Local Governments, 35 educational institutions, 21 companies and 5 other types of organizations*. To enable and enhance further learning and experience sharing, the network of 12 Central European micro-regions was linked to 6 micro-regions in the Neue Bundeslaender, the provinces of former East Germany. The German areas, which had all participated in the *Tatorte* program, an initiative to promote and recognize environmental problem solving in rural communities supported by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, included:

- Brodwin
- Lenzen
- Ostritz
- Reinstadt
- Retzow
- Zempow

The experiences described from the twelve micro-regions in the chapters that follow are not intended to be a comprehensive overview of what was achieved in the Rural Livelihoods program. Rather, the intention is to introduce small geographical areas that are not widely known or visited and to draw attention to local or community-based initiatives, which have successfully mobilized local resources, participation and enthusiasm for sustainable development as a practical approach for generating rural livelihoods in a globalizing world.



BERLIN

20

Elbe

Spree

Odra

Warta

Nysa Łużycka

Frýdlantsko

Karkonosze
Krkonoše

Labe

PRAHA

Vltava

Morava

White Carpathians

Slovácko

Białe Karpaty

Babia Góra/Hora

Babia Hora

Nizké Tatry

WIEN

Donau

BRATISLAVA

Štiavnické Vrchy

South Sitno

Dunaj

Börzsöny

Ipoly Vá

Rába

Pilis

BUDAPEST

Balaton

Duna

Rural Regeneration Stories from

Czech Republic



Slovácko

Revitalizing local economies through wine trails

The region of Slovácko is situated in the southeastern corner of the Czech Republic, near the country's borders with Austria and Slovakia, and is bounded by the forests of **Ždánický Les** and the **Chřiby Mountains** in the north and the **Morava** and **Kyjovka** river in the south. The region is home to 60,000 people, of which 13,000 live in the main town of Kyjov. Other centres are Ždánice, Bzenec, Vracov and Milotice.

Huge fields sweep over Slovácko's mainly flat countryside. Lighter patches on the fields reveal the effects of erosion, the legacy of more than half a century of intensive farming practices. The factory farms that were established under Communism have gone bankrupt since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, throwing many of the people in this agricultural region out of work. Unemployment in 2003 reached 13–16% in the main population centres, and even higher in small communities of the region. Older generations have lost their former connections to the land. For younger people, farming and rural living are no longer attractive.

In addition to crop farming, Slovácko has a long tradition of wine growing supported by extensive vineyards. The vineyards and centuries-old wine heritage together with the rich folk culture present attractive features for the development of sensitive tourism. However, development of the area is limited by lack of infrastructure, including places to stay and services, as well as involvement of local residents.

An Association of villages of the region called ‘Severovýchod’ has been working for the past several years to address many of these shortcomings and to give the area a more sustainable base for development. Villages in four local areas in the region have joined together to develop initiatives to cut unemployment, improve the condition of the landscape, develop sustainable tourism and create a more attractive image for the region for both residents and visitors—all in line with sustainable development.

The central focus for rural regeneration in Slovácko is the the Moravian Wine Trail initiative, a network of tourist trails focused on restoring and promoting the region’s rich wine heritage through the active involvement of local people.

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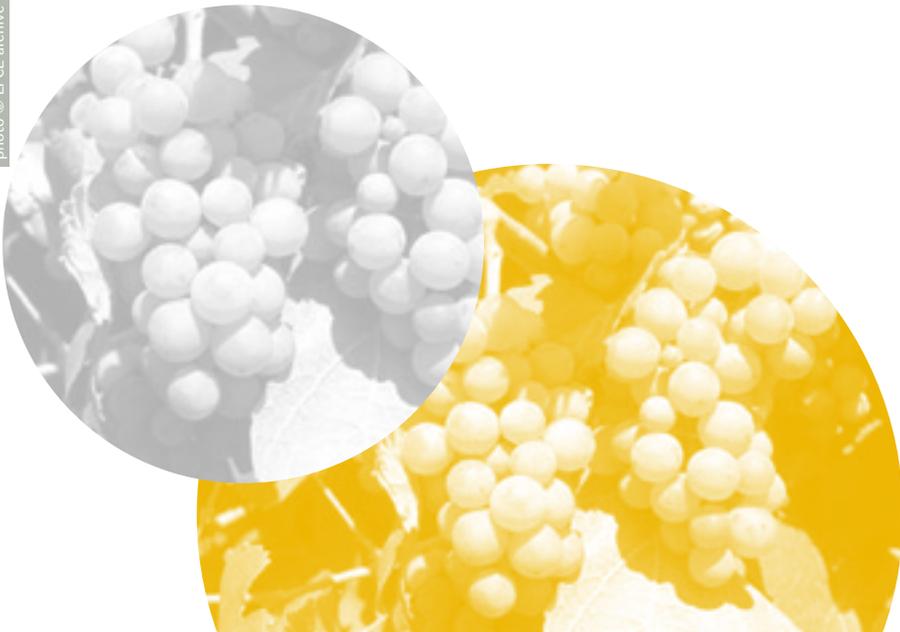
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Moravian Wine Trails

Standing with friends in a cool wine cellar, sampling local varieties of home-made wines, is a cornerstone of the unique wine culture of southern Moravia. Situated in the hottest part of the Czech Republic, the region has had a long tradition of winemaking dating back to the Romans. Villages of the area have almost as many wine cellars as homes, often located along a ‘wine street’ or concentrated in an area separate from the community. Festivals celebrating the wine harvest take place throughout the autumn. Following decades of neglect under the previous Communist regime, this rich heritage is now being cared for and once again turned to economic gain for those living and working locally—thanks to the **Moravian Wine Trails**.

Initiated in 1998 as part of the **Greenways program** organized by the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation, the Moravian Wine Trails is a long-term project focused on developing small-scale wine production and tourism in South Moravia. Today, the Moravian Wine Trails include some 1000 kilometres of marked trails for cycling and hiking that trace the rich natural and cultural wine heritage of the region.

photo © EPCE archive





The Brno-Vienna cycling trail, which is currently under development will pull visitors and residents out of the large city onto the wider Wine Trails. Links to similar wine trails in Austria and Slovakia are also planned

photo © Archive of Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation

The development of cycling and hiking routes is a simple concept that has had far-reaching implications in an area beset by high-unemployment and little tradition of co-operation and local initiative. In a very physical sense, the trails have served not only to bring together people and communities, but have proven a powerful force for re-awakening a sense of pride and identity among local people.

The first step was to encourage local leaders and existing groups to come together and establish the **Association of Wine Growing Villages of Southern Moravia**, as a joint initiative with a shared goal of developing sustainable wine tourism in the area in ways that would generate benefits to local people in the first instance.

Design and development of the trails served to link the communities in a common vision and a very practical undertaking. Mayors of neighbouring communities, many of whom scarcely knew one another, were suddenly confronted with the need to work together to plan the route, make decisions on where to place signs, and divide responsibility for trail maintenance. More than 220 local villages, NGO's and individuals have been involved in what has become broad-based grassroots partnership focused on revitalizing the local economy.

The growing stream of tourists using the routes has pushed local leaders to think seriously about ways to improve services and enhance the aesthetic qualities of their villages. Parks in many villages have been renovated and communities have planted hundreds of trees along the Moravian Wine Trails. Twenty villages in the region have also built 'resting places' for cyclists. In one village, historical research followed by a series of town meetings has helped local residents re-discover and appreciate the unique architecture of traditional wine cellars. A publication produced by the Greenways program highlights the different styles of wine cellars in different areas as a guide for local mayors and other community leaders.

The kind of small-scale tourism that is growing with the wine trails is very different from that known previously, which involved busloads of people spending an evening in a wine cellar and then leaving the area. *"The idea is to get tourists to touch our wine culture"*, points out **Anna Čarková**, the Moravian Wine Trails co-ordinator and 'wine angel', according to the Chairman of the Association of Wine Growers.

The Greenways program, co-ordinated by the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation, has served as the main motor behind development of the Moravian Wine Trails, providing the long-term vision, co-ordination, and practical support needed by local partners, from technical assistance to help with accessing funds from the EU or national sources. Greenways support has responded to local needs, opportunities and circumstances by organised training for development of small scale tourism services. A club for entrepreneurs along the wine trails has been established. A CD on How to do Business on the Wine Trails, was produced in 2001 with the idea of motivating wine growers, providers of accommodation services, entrepreneurs, mayors, local representatives and officers of public authorities to work together on developing the local economy as a wine heritage region.

Seminars and excursions have presented Austrian and German experience with wine tourism, including operation of Bed and Breakfasts, which hardly existed on the Czech side of the border. Know-how on accessing EU funding programs was also introduced. An Internet database of tourism services along the Wine Trails is under development. One result of this is the Wine Pension in the village of Svatobořice-Mistřín, established by **Josef Dudek**, which now boasts an extensive wine cellar with over 17 types of wine.

Another crucial feature of the Wine Trails project is the ongoing support for small-scale wine producers. There are as many as 40,000 small wine growers in the region. Most produce wine as a hobby, or for limited sale 'on the side'. Only 5–6% of the growers actually make a living from wine production. In the enlarged European Union, Czech wine producers are no match for the large and well-established vineyards in France, Spain and Italy. But they do have a chance to develop their presence in niche markets, and especially in connection with wine tourism and heritage conservation. The Greenways program is encouraging smaller wine growers to obtain licenses for commercial production. They are being helped to meet quality standards and organize into co-operatives in order to share costs of production and marketing.

Anticipating the future, local producers are being encouraged to turn to organic production as the most sustainable manner of using the Earth's fertility. Many are already practicing what is known as Integrated Wine Production, which significantly reduces unnecessary application of chemicals and so generates considerable cost savings.

The Moravian Wine Trails have been adopted as part of the official regional development strategy for the south Moravian region and have attracted considerable attention from regional and rural development as well as national authorities in Prague. As the Czech Republic prepares for drawing down EU funding for regional development, the Moravian Wine Trails is being seen as a potential model for using local heritage to generate rural livelihoods, which can be replicated in other areas.

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photo © Archive of Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation

The opening of the Moravian Wine Trails in Petrov was celebrated with bike rides and wine tasting.



photo © Archive of Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation

The fact that the Moravian Wine Trails Co-ordinator, Anna Čarková, was proclaimed 'Wine Angel' by Blažej Ingr, the Chairman of an association of local wine growers, is a telling example of just how the activities surrounding the Moravian Wine Trails are affecting local people.

Biomass heating in Moravany

Two schools, the village hall and the cultural centre in the village of Moravany are warmer and cleaner during the winter thanks to installation of a small biomass heating plant. While the rest of the village switched to gas, these few buildings were left to rely on coal for heating.

The biomass heating plant was the idea of pioneer mayor Josef Marčík, who has worked for eight years to build the plant. Other mayors in the region could not understand why he did not just switch the remaining buildings to gas.

The biomass plant is now attracting national and international attention as a model for renewable energy in rural areas. Biomass—wood or plant material that is burned as fuel—represents one of the greatest potentials for renewable energy throughout Central Europe. In terms of greenhouse emissions, biomass has a net effect of zero: carbon dioxide absorbed by the tree or plant in growing is emitted in burning. While biomass has applications for heating on a larger scale (e.g. part of the Bystrc housing estate near the city of Brno is heated with biomass), it represents an attractive heating option especially for smaller rural communities.

Construction of the plant in Moravany followed a long process of evaluating various energy sources, including biogas. One clear advantage of biomass is that fuel for the plant can be gained from local forests, sawmills, and woodworking shops, reducing costs and keeping money needed for fuel purchases in the local economy. Study tours were organised to communities already using biomass, both in the Czech Republic and in neighboring Austria. Representatives of the village of Hostětín shared expert knowledge about their biomass plant, which has been in operation since 2000. In turn, Hostětín has been visited by study groups from Poland, Slovakia and Hungary.

Most (80%) of support for construction of the plant has come from the State Environmental Fund, in the form of a grant of 78,625€ and a further 78,625€ as an interest-free loan. The remaining 20% of the cost has been covered by the village itself. The 7,500€ that was previously spent on purchasing coal can now be used for loan repayment. A village-owned company, Biteb, was set up and is responsible for selling the heat generated by the plant and acquiring wood fuel. The company has created three jobs in the village.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

The Mayor of Moravany has bigger plans for the modern biomass plant that heats two schools, the village hall and a culture house in the village.

In the winter of 2001, the first tests of the biomass plant were carried out and operation began. The plant can produce 350 Kw, burning a ton of wood chips and sawdust each day. Operation is almost entirely automatic with automatic feeding of the wood fuel to the burner, but requires the services of an operator for one hour per day.

With 120 tons of wood to collect to last out the winter, work does not stop in the summer, when the plant is not in operation. Wood for the plant comes from the 20-hectare forest owned by the village. So far, only fallen trees and other wood waste have been used. But in spring 2002, three quarters of a hectare close to the village were planted with fast growing poplars to ensure future supplies.

*“Our village is unlikely to get the large amount of funding we got for the biomass plant again. So our efforts to expand our activities and convert more homes to biomass will take another form. A plan for the longer-term is to collaborate with a company which would build small biomass boilers for individual homes to get people to switch to biomass”, says **Josef Marčík**. The mayor continues, with a hint of pride: “Meanwhile our village is continuing to inspire others and we are doing what we can for the environment.”*

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Frýdlantsko

Using local heritage to regenerate economies

The area of Frýdlantsko pokes up from northern Bohemia, surrounded on three sides by the border with Poland. To the south, separating the region from the rest of the Czech Republic, are the **Jizera Mountains**. Their northern foothills, covered in deep beech forests, open out onto the **Lausitzer Lowlands**, to what is now Poland to the east, north, and west. The German border is not far away, scarcely seven kilometres across a thin tongue of Polish territory to the west.

Thanks in part to its relative isolation from the rest of the Czech Republic as well as a difficult past, the area of Frýdlantsko is faced with a number of challenges. The area is considered one of the most economically depressed areas in the Czech Republic. The unemployment rate, between 15 and 18% (in 2001–2003), is one of the country's highest. The area has also one of the country's lowest population densities, with ca. 69 people/km². Frýdlant, the largest of the area's three towns and fifteen villages, has a population of just 7,600.

The fabric of historical and cultural memory in Frýdlantsko is frayed. The original, predominantly German people living in the area were expelled following the Second World War and replaced by new settlers from across what was then Czechoslovakia. As a result, the ties between the region and the people living there do not have a long history. Only recently have the people begun calling the area their home and begun re-discovering the region's rich cultural and natural heritage.

Like other parts of the so-called ‘Black Triangle’ between northern Bohemia, southern Saxony, and eastern Silesia, Frýdlantsko still bears heavy scars from over half a century of intensive coal mining, power generation, and heavy industry. Large swathes of the Jizera Mountains have been deforested by years of air pollution and acid rain. The situation has improved considerably, thanks in part to the collapse of the mining industry in Frýdlantsko, and a switch away from coal to renewables, including wind power in German Saxony, and retrofitting and pollution control in power plants in Lower Silesia on the Polish side of the border. The persistence of coal and lignite mining for the giant power plants in Poland remains a major problem.

Modifications and destruction of natural watercourses have led to increasing problems with flooding. The Smědá river, which flows through Frýdlantsko from the Jizera mountains into Poland, floods regularly in the summer and after heavy rains. Mounting joint responses to flooding has spurred co-operation between towns and villages situated along the Smědá river valley. This has resulted in growing informal co-operation between the communities of the region and with those across the border in Poland.

Several dynamic local leaders have emerged in recent years with an interest in mobilizing local people to build a new future for the region. Some of the most active have come together in the eastern part of the region through **Secese**, a local NGO seeking to promote sustainable development through increasing cross-border contacts with Poland and Germany, mostly around issues of common interest, from business development and recreational opportunities to sports rivalry through to schools exchanges.

With an external image of an area scarred by pollution, community initiatives for developing environmentally-oriented recreation and tourism in the region are helping local people to regenerate the local economy, and so take an interest also in re-discovering, re-connecting to and learning from the area’s rich natural, cultural and historic heritage.

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Cultivating identity through tourism

Many tourists flock to the Liberec region in northern Bohemia to enjoy recreational and sporting activities. The flat crests of the nearby Jizera Mountains attract tourists year round, from hikers in the summertime, to downhill and cross-country skiers in the winter. Yet although the highest peak of the Jizera Mountains lies in the Frýdlantsko micro-region, the area receives proportionally fewer tourists and offers few tourist activities. Until recently local people derived few benefits, but were left to deal with most of the problems. For example, the main attraction is Frýdlant Castle, which receives 80,000 visitors a year. *“People just go there and then leave the region”*, says **Jitka Doubnerová**, the Director of the **Association for the Jizera Mountains**, a local NGO.

Recognising tourism potential for developing the local economy, as well as fostering a sense of regional identity, the Association has been developing ‘tourist packages’ that engage local people in providing services to visitors, thereby ensuring that benefits return to the local community. The main objective is to network local providers of tourism services, producers and civic initiatives, and bring them together with natural, historical and cultural features into a comprehensive offering for visitors. *“The basic idea behind the regional tourism package is to make visitors stay a little longer, respect the environment here at the same time, and to spend their money in the area”*, explains Doubnerová. The emphasis is on activities as well as places to go as this stimulates not only local development but also encourages communication and co-operation between communities in planning for dealing with visitors.





photo © Jackson Griffiths

Tourism has a big potential for developing the local economy of the remote region. Signs guide visitors around the 'relaxer' and 'smuggler' bike trails.

One challenge faced by the Association for the Jizera Mountains is a consequence of the numerous population shifts the area has experienced, especially the expulsion of German inhabitants and their replacement by newcomers following the Second World War. The result is a lack of connection for many local people to the area and its history and landscapes. 'Local memories' have been forgotten and old stories from family members about the region and its traditions hardly exist. Cultural heritage in the region, in the form of physical structures and landscapes remain, but the heritage connected with them, including local customs, traditions, crafts, festivals and other events, has been largely lost.

The regional tourism package that has been developed addresses this challenge by building on the success of previous projects, such as the cycle trails that have been developed throughout the micro-region. They include the so-called 'smugglers' trail, which documents old smuggling routes and techniques and links to cycling trails in Poland and Germany. Other tourist activities include a Summer Jazz Workshop in Frýdlant, the Wallenstein festival (named after Wallenstein, a local duke and military commander from the 17th century), nature trails, and meadow mowing in the 'sustainable village' near Jindřichovice.

Much of the development, co-ordination and promotion of the tourist package is handled by the Frýdlantsko Information Centre, which was established by the Frýdlantsko Civic Association with support from the Association for the Jizera Mountains and the Frýdlant local government. It serves as the first point of contact for tourists to the region, providing information about local features and contacts to tourist service providers.

Training in local history has also been organised for local volunteers with a keen interest in the area and they act as regional tour guides. The Association for the Jizera Mountains is now also co-operating with the Regional Chamber of Commerce to train small- and medium-sized businesses on how to expand their activities to include soft tourism and meet environmental, quality and customer care standards.

The border that surrounds Frýdlantsko on three sides has a significant impact on local attitudes. Many see it as a barrier, cutting them off from the neighbouring countries. The Association for the Jizera Mountains has been working with the mayor of the village of Višňová, **Marie Matušková**, to try to convince people that they are in fact “at the beginning of the Czech Republic” and not in some ‘backwater’ region. They have been working to develop closer ties with Polish and German partners, and to present Frýdlantsko as part of a larger cross-border region that extends into the neighbouring countries.

The co-operation with Poland and Germany is crucial as the borderland regions in all three countries share a common history. There are many inspiring activities and projects in Germany and Poland connected to sustainable regional tourism and there is much potential for more partnerships and exchange. In turn, local leaders from nearby German and Polish communities are increasingly interested in visiting Frýdlantsko to learn how sustainable tourism can be developed by mobilizing volunteers and stretching limited budgets—something the Association for the Jizera Mountains has been very successful in doing.

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White Carpathians

Regenerating economies through local traditions

The White Carpathians form the western edge of the **Carpathian Mountain Range**, the great arc of mountains that stretch from the eastern Czech Republic (**Moravia**) across Slovakia and south into Romania. Look at the White Carpathians from the top of one of the area's rolling hills, and you will see what looks like a beautiful patchwork quilt spread out over an unmade bed. Patches of orchards, fields, forests, and brilliant flowering meadows cover the rolling countryside that straddles much of the Slovak-Moravian border. The human settlement that helped to create this colourful tapestry, developed a rich and varied culture, extending from the scattered settlements of Wallachian immigrants in the north to the clustered, often brightly painted villages in the south.

Located far from major population centres and poor in minerals, for centuries the White Carpathians have remained poor and underdeveloped. Today, the region suffers many of the same problems faced by other rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe. Agriculture, the traditional mainstay of the region, is in crisis. Industry is struggling, if it has not yet closed down. As a result, unemployment is in places over 20%, and growing. Population figures in the region are dropping as younger people move away to larger towns or away from the area altogether in search of a better future. As they leave, social ties are loosening and the cultural fabric of the White Carpathians is becoming frayed.

The curse of underdevelopment does have its blessings, though, in the well preserved natural and cultural heritage in the region, which has been recognized internationally. Today, the region is protected as both an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a Protected Landscape Area. Social ties and connection to the land continues to be relatively strong among people living in the region. A dense network of civic associations, local leaders, farmers, business people and other stakeholders has developed with an interest in promoting local development while preserving the region's rich store of natural and cultural heritage.

Numerous environmental organisations have been active on both sides of the Czech-Slovak border in promoting sustainable development through practical action. Their initiatives in the region range from organic farming, development and marketing of local crafts and products, 'soft' and agro-tourism, land trusts, activities focused on maintaining and promoting cultural and natural heritage of the area, and a variety of community development projects.

Thanks to the efforts of **ČSOP Veronica** (chapter of the ČSOP—the Czech Union of Nature Conservation), the **Veronica Foundation** (owner of the farm land and juice plant in Hostětín), and others working in co-operation with the local government, the small village of Hostětín is becoming a living model or reference for those wanting to see rural sustainability in practice. The community of 207 people now boasts a biological reed-bed sewage treatment facility, a biomass heating plant, a small juice factory that produces high-quality organic apple juice and supports the cultivation of local varieties of fruit, do-it-yourself solar collectors on local homes. A centre for rural development has also been established and is housed in one of the first low-energy buildings in the Czech Republic.

In Valašské Klobouky, some 30 kilometres from Hostětín, the traditional St Nicholas Day celebration that was revived by **ČSOP Kosenka** in the mid 1990's has become a major annual event and an important focus for regional pride and local economy. Further south, ČSOP Bílé Karpaty has spearheaded efforts to protect and maintain the rich flowering meadows of the region through landscape stewardship. Across the border in Slovakia, local information centres have been set up to serve visiting tourists and to provide local people with access to information technology to local residents.



photo © archive of Veronika

Thanks to the efforts of several NGO's working in co-operation with the local government, the small village of Hostětín is becoming a living model and reference for those wanting to see rural sustainability in practice.

Several environmental groups have come together with local farmers and communities to establish the **Traditions of the White Carpathians Association** to promote and market local products and handicrafts, including dried fruit and the organic apple juice that is produced in Hostětín. Both products are now marketed throughout the Czech Republic though the long-term aim is to sell primarily to a regional market. While product sales contribute to the local economy, they also promote the region and help foster a sense of regional identity. The original motivation for their development was a desire for environmental improvement. Production and marketing of the juice and dried fruit was the logical next step in efforts by environmental groups to preserve the rich genetic resources of native fruit varieties that have developed in the region over centuries of cultivation. Environmentalists are hoping that the relatively high prices offered for local fruit will encourage area residents to revitalize and care for the traditional orchards in the region.

Taken together, local initiatives are creating an increasingly viable vision for the sustainable development of the White Carpathians region.

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The sweet taste of success



The apple juice from the juicing plant in Hostětín tastes different every time. Sometimes it is honey-sweet, other times it is slightly sour. One thing is for certain however: the juice is 100% pure, non-filtered and contains no additives. The taste is even sweeter when one realizes that the juice is contributing to preservation of the rich landscape and local economy in this beautiful part of the Czech Republic.

The juicing plant is run by **Tradice Bílých Karpat** (Traditions of the White Carpathians), an NGO established by environmental groups, farmers, fruit producers and processors as well as communities to promote small-scale processing and marketing of products as a way of preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage. The Association's special trademark is carried by the apple juice as well as other local products such as mutton, beef, dried fruit, tea and handicrafts. The idea is to develop a clear connection between the region and its high-quality heritage products.

Centuries of cultivation in the White Carpathians have produced over 200 varieties of apples, pears, cherries and plums that grow in the area, mainly in the orchards and gardens of private growers. The local varieties have a natural resistance to disease, which makes chemical treatment unnecessary. The fruit also has a rich variety of flavours and uses, and grows well in local conditions. The fruit has not only enriched biodiversity in the White Carpathians, but also helped shape the area's distinctive landscape, cuisine and culture.

Until recently, local fruit varieties were gradually disappearing. Demand for local apples dwindled under competition from more 'perfect' apples and juices from abroad, lessening the incentive for local people to maintain their traditional orchards. *"The local people were saying 'our apples are worth nothing as one can buy cheap apple juice from Spain in the shops' and were prepared to cut down their orchards"*, says **Mojmír Vlašín** from the Veronica Ecological Institute, one of the partners in Traditions of the White Carpathians.



photo © archive of Veronika

The juice plant in Hostetín creates one full time and eight seasonal jobs. Production of organic juice has steadily increased from 53,500 litres in 2000 to 87,300 litres in 2003, with production of non-organic juice at 23,500 litres in 2003.

By building a juicing plant, the Association wanted to provide local inhabitants with a clear economic incentive for maintaining and caring for their traditional fruit orchards, and thus preserving local heritage and landscape. Local fruit cannot compete with foreign imports that are bigger and more attractive in appearance. But they can hold their own as a local, organically-grown product. Only a small number of small juice plants existed in the White Carpathians and almost all had old equipment, which did not meet Czech Health and Safety standards.

Major support for construction of the juicing plant, including expert and practical advice as well as fundraising, came from the Luxembourg Foundation for Nature Conservation, Hëllef fir d'Natur, which has supported fruit tree conservation in the White Carpathians since 1995. In 1999, a grant of ca. 120,000 € from the Luxembourg Ministry of Environment supported reconstruction of an old barn juice plant into a new one. The technology for the plant was purchased second-hand from Germany, and repaired by local workers from the village, who now maintain plant operations.

Within its first season of operation in 2000, the plant created eight seasonal and one full-time job. Production of organic juice has steadily increased from 53,500 litres in 2000 to 87,300 litres in 2002. Premium prices are offered by the plant for local fruit varieties, especially when certified organic.

The apple juice with its distinctive label, created by the Czech artist **Rostislav Pospíšil**, has found a niche in the Czech Republic as a pure natural product. The juice, which was selected as Czech Organic Product of the Year in 2002, is sold in Carrefour supermarkets as well as health food shops throughout the country.

The apple juice plant receives around 1000 visitors a year, including representatives of projects in other micro-regions in the Rural Livelihoods Program, like Ramža in Slovakia, where fruit processing for juice production has been also initiated. Many of the visits are guided by **Radim Machů**, the enthusiastic young manager of the juicing plant. He notes some lessons learned from development of the plant and subsequent production and marketing. One lesson is that it can be difficult for a community NGO to muster the hard-headed business sense that is essential for marketing a product successfully. For this reason, the Traditions of the White Carpathians Association has established a limited company to take over sales and marketing for the juice.

Thanks to the support of the Rural Livelihoods Program, among others, Traditions of the White Carpathians is now diversifying production of the juicing plant to include vegetable and other fruit juices as well as cider. A few test runs have been carried out mixing apple/beetroot and apple/carrot juices. The results have been tasty—and promising for strengthening protection of the area's rich heritage.

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Green energy for the White Carpathians

Dozens of solar collectors have been installed on homes and public buildings in the White Carpathians thanks to a project, called Sun for the White Carpathians, which was developed by the ČSOP **Veronica Ecological Institute**.

In 1996, physicists associated with Veronica developed a simple, low-tech solar panel system for hot water heating as well as a training programme for their installation. The first solar collectors appeared on buildings in the village of Hostětín in July 1997, encouraged by a grant from the Czech Environmental Partnership Foundation which underwrote half of the 937€ price tag for the collectors. Others have followed suit, not only in Hostětín but in other parts of the region as well. The simple, do-it-yourself solar collectors are designed to be built and erected by the owners and neighbours. Only limited assistance is needed from experts.

Annual energy savings amount to 2,000kWh per system unit, a saving of around 1,500kg of CO₂ emissions per year. At current, state-subsidized energy prices, the collectors pay for themselves within about seven years. Returns on investment should improve as prices for home heating rise.

The solar collectors are yielding benefits not only in terms of saved money and carbon dioxide, but also in terms of awareness of the benefits of energy conservation. *“When some of my neighbours saw that (the system) works and makes warm water even in winter, they installed it as well,”* said **Jaroslav Boleček**, the first Hostětín resident to install a solar panel on his house. *“Now, when I get together with other guys from the pub, we show off whose system works better,”* he said. Homes located in the east register warmer temperatures in the mornings, as the sun rises. In many cases, installation of solar technology by households has led to the introduction of further measures for energy saving, including changing the entire heating systems, insulation and upgrading of doors and windows.

So far, around 40 energy saving installations on public and private houses have been realised within the area of the White Carpathians, including solar collectors on ten private homes in Hostětín. Around 100 people have been trained to install the solar panels, including ten craftsmen who have further specialised in their installation.

The installation of solar panels in the White Carpathians has shown that renewable energy can be simple, cheap and appropriate for rural regions. Over the past few years, Veronica has been taking the White Carpathians example to other rural areas around the Czech Republic, and beyond. Since 2001, the organization has been working with an Austrian renewable energy organisation, ARGE Erneuerbare Energie, to promote do-it-yourself solar technology throughout the Czech Republic. The initiative, called SolarNet, involves development of a new, somewhat more sophisticated solar panel than the first developed by Veronica. Training in its construction and installation is also provided. The project has been featured as a model project in the European Sustainable Energy network (INFORSE—www.inforse.dk/europe/su_cz_sol.htm). Through the Rural Livelihoods Program in particular, Veronica's solar technology has also been spread to neighboring countries, including Babia Góra in Poland and South Sitno in Slovakia.

The SolarNet project have established Veronica as one of the Czech Republic's leading NGOs active in renewable energy. The organisation is now helping to develop new policy and legislation to support the development of renewable energy.

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photo © archive of Veronica

Recently, a large solar system (36 m²) using advanced TiNOX technology was installed on the roof of the apple juice plant.

Today Hostětín has 100 m² of solar collectors, saving in total 35,000 kWh per year (3,700 € based on 2003 pricing).

Solar panels in Hostětín not only save electric energy, but also contribute to CO₂ emissions reduction by saving 27 tons of CO₂ each year. Education and training is an integral part of the Sun for the White Carpathians program.

Veronica has also played a key role in assisting the community of Hostětín in developing a biomass heating plant, one of the first in the country. The heating plant, which is fueled with wood from local forests as well as wood waste from local sawmills and furniture factories, produces heat for most of the village's homes and public buildings. The project was developed with support from the Dutch and Czech governments as part of a Joint-Implementation project. The plant, which is fueled by waste wood from nearby forests and sawmills (500–600 tons of woodchips per year), produces 3,500 GJ heat for 90% of all homes and buildings in the community connected in the grid. Savings of CO₂ in the Hostětín biomass heating plant are calculated for 1,500 tons of carbon dioxide per year. A low-energy building is also now under construction next to the juicing plant at the village centre. The passive solar building, one of the first such buildings in the country, will soon house Veronica's new centre for rural development.

A Wallachian St. Nick

Stand on the marketplace of the small Czech town of Valašské Klobouky in early December, and there is a good chance that you will see not only a stately St. Nick, but also some angels, not to mention more than a few wild devils running around with cow bells on their belts and thrashing people with thrush brooms.

All are part of an annual event, the *St. Nicholas Day Fair* which has become the focus of regional pride and identity in this special part of the White Carpathians in eastern Czech Republic. Increasingly, the Fair—which in 2002 drew 15,000 visitors from the region and even abroad—is also becoming a significant factor for development in the region.

The St. Nicholas Day Fair is the product of a partnership between ČSOP Kosenka, an environmental NGO, and the Folklore Society Důbrava. The two organisations share an interest in fostering and preserving the traditional culture and crafts of Valašsko (‘Wallachia’), the area around Valašské Klobouky that has a rich heritage connected with the shepherds and their herds of sheep that migrated here from Wallachia (present-day Moldavia) centuries ago. *“Our idea was to create a living town of cultural crafts and traditions and not a living museum”*, **Mirek Janik**, the charismatic director of ČSOP Kosenka explains.

The initiative also reflects Kosenka’s wider aspirations to foster sustainable development in the region together with local people—integrating socio-economic and community development with preservation and enhancement of the area’s unique cultural and natural heritage. Since its establishment in 1992, the Fair has grown into a major regional event, involving a diverse group of civic and cultural associations, various public sector bodies, and as many as 72 small business sponsors. Around 200 local volunteers are involved in putting on the event, doing everything from craft demonstrations to running around with face paint and cow hides dressed up as devils.



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photo © Petr Francín

The rich folklore heritage of the region is especially apparent at the St. Nicholas Fair. The market attracts over 15,000 people every year.

The annual fair spreads out over the entire town, with different ‘centres’ of activity. Traditional handicrafts are a prime feature, including everything from wood-working and joinery (wooden toys, decorative Christmas figures, musical instruments and kitchen utensils) to textiles (needlework and embroidery, lace making, sewn goods, glove making, carpet-weaving). Women in traditional dress sing folk songs as they prepare goose down for pillows and duvets. Others work the manual wooden flax beaters, which make a ‘clacking’ sound as they expose the weaveable inner part of the plant.

Outside, a blacksmith demonstrates his craft by re-shoeing a working farm horse. Nearby, school bands and folk groups from around the region play music and sing. A large variety of different traditional foods and drinks are served, not least the slivovice (plum brandy) for which the region is justly famous, and which fires up the wild devils running around with their cowbells and thrush brooms.

Surveys conducted by Kosenka and students of sociology at Masaryk University in 1999–2000 reveal that three-quarters of the marketeers come from the region, and a third are local; half of the raw materials in products sold at the fair are from the local area, and 65% of all money spent stays in the local economy.

Of all the partners, the business sector has been most difficult to involve in long-term co-operation. Usually they are willing only to sponsor some money or donate space. Janik stresses the importance of their involvement in the event, whose future success he sees very much in terms of ever closer co-operation between the non-profit, public, and private sectors.

A timber house for felt slippers

A prominent feature of the St. Nicholas Day Fair in Valašské Klobouky is the traditional *Wallachian timber house* located at Brumovská 11. During the Fair, the house is the site of musical performances of the *Fujara* (a shepherd's flute), children's singing, sampling of local cakes and plum brandy and demonstrations of traditional shoe-making.

The 200-year-old building with its traditional split-timber and chink architecture is one of only ten such examples of Wallachian architecture that remained standing in Valašské Klobouky. Renovation of the house, which has recently been added to the State register of protected sites, has been undertaken by a local philanthropist, **Jan Pivečka**, founder of the **Pivečka Foundation** in nearby Slavičín. It has been a labor of love for Pivečka, whose family lived in a house on the same site as early as 1593.

Restoration of the structure, which was in ruins when work began, was undertaken by craftsmen using only traditional techniques and was overseen by experts from the Institute for the Preservation of Historical Monuments in Brno and the Office of Culture and Care of Historical Monuments in Zlín. Individual steps of the process of preservation and reconstruction were documented by the Institute of Folk Culture in Strážnice, which engaged a film crew to shoot a documentary.

The renovated house has been refurbished like that of a poor manufacturer of felt slippers and will serve as a museum of Wallachian handicrafts. In its time, the felt slipper was a high-quality product that was a source of living for a great part of the population of Valašské Klobouky and surrounding villages. Indeed, the saying has it that “in Valašské Klobouky, with the exception of the municipal office, the pharmacy and vicarage, all the inhabitants are sewing felt slippers.”

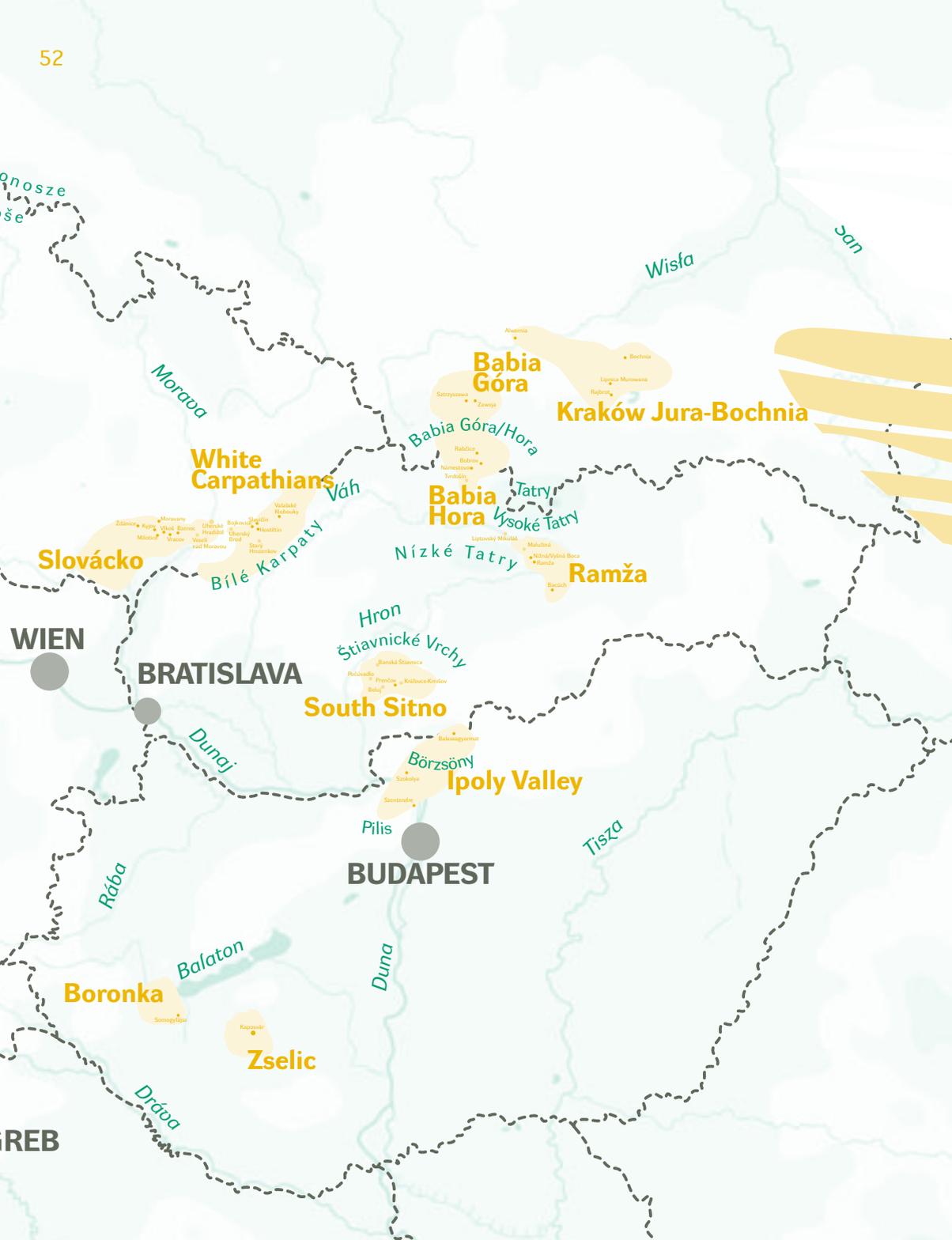


photo © archive of Jan Pivečka Foundation

Everything about the house, including the interior, was constructed using materials and techniques of the time the 19th century house was built. The renovated house has been furnished like that of a poor manufacturer of felt slippers and will serve as a living museum of Wallachian handicrafts.

The museum doubles up as a centre for teaching young people the Wallachian craft of producing leather footwear and woollen slippers. Workshops offer young people the chance to learn the traditional craft of shoe-making, which is recently enjoying a surge in interest and demand. Together with the Traditions of the White Carpathians Association, the Jan Pivečka Foundation is now investigating how best to market the local products—and thus generate incomes for local people while cultivating their crafts and traditions.

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Kraków Jura-Bochnia

White Carpathians

Babia Góra/Hora

Babia Hora

Tatry
Vysoké Tatry

Slovácko

Bílé Karpaty

Nizké Tatry

Ramža

WIEN

Hron

Štiavnické Vrchy

BRATISLAVA

South Sitno

Börzsöny

Ipoly Valley

Dunaj

Pilis

BUDAPEST

Tisza

Rába

Boronka

Balaton

Duna

Zselic

Dráva

REB

Rural Regeneration Stories from

Hungary



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Ipoly Valley

Regenerating local economies through bicycle tourism

The Ipoly region, located just 45 kilometres up the **Danube** north of Budapest and stretching to the border with Slovakia, is blessed with a rich store of natural and cultural heritage and an active population. The **Danube-Ipel National Park**, established in 1997, covers much of the region, featuring the picturesque Danube river bend and **Szentendre island**, the **Pilis and Börzsöny Mountains**, and the wide expanse of surrounding forests. Hungary's second highest peak, **Csóványos**, rises to a modest 938 metres in the Börzsöny Mountains.

The Ipoly region is home to some 20,000 people living in 20 municipalities, including Vác, Nagymaros, and picturesque Szentendre. Unemployment in the area is lower than the country's average, thanks to the area's proximity to the nation's capital as well as high quality of life, which have made Ipoly an attractive place for many businesses. These features have also been key ingredients for development of tourism in the region.

The **Göncöl Association in Vác** is working with local municipalities, including Nagymaros and Szentendre, to develop environmentally friendly forms of tourism in the area. They include links to the Amber Trail Greenway, a tourism route that follows a historical trade route stretching from Budapest through Slovakia to Krakow in Poland. There are several initiatives along the Ipel River to organize cross-border water, bicycle and trekking tours. Such developments are welcomed by the authorities of the Danube-Ipoly National Park, who encourage tourism development at the park's fringes in order to ease pressure of visitors on the national parks relatively pristine core areas.



A wide array of activities and civic associations indicate that local people are strongly attached to the area, its communities and natural features. The **Forest School Association**, an NGO focusing on environmental education, runs a youth camp and is developing eco-tourism programs. The **Foundation for Railway Protection** in Rakoskert is working to preserve an old railway station as a bicycle centre and inform the public about the positive effects of rail transport. **Kacar**, a family-managed agro-tourist farm, organises programmes based on local traditions and crafts.



A small farming house where bread dough is prepared, animal shelters and a windmill comprise many of the features of the Lénhárts farm. Each year, more than 3,000 schoolchildren come to see and participate in the traditional Hungarian farming techniques and crafts that the couple practice and maintain.

photo © Jackson Griffiths

Cycling along the Danube

Thanks to the Ipel Union and its partners among municipalities and civic associations, visitors can now follow cycling routes along the bends of the Danube and up the Ipoly river valley toward Slovakia. The cycle route, the longest such route in Hungary, is bringing an increasing number of tourists to the Ipoly valley, enriching the local economy in the process.

Planning for the cycle route began more than a decade ago. In 1996, the Balassagyarmat office of the **Ipel Union**, together with the “**Two Wheels Less**” Association from Vac, prepared a feasibility study for the Ipolydamas-Losonc regional bicycle route. Two years later, more detailed technical planning began. At the same time, the Vac office of Ipel Union started working with the communities along the Danube to secure public funds for construction of the Danube route.

A tourist guide for the Danube Bend and Lower Ipel Valley, published by the Ipel Union in 1998, highlights the area’s cultural and natural heritage. The guide has paved the way for development of a comprehensive information system for cyclists visiting the Lower Ipel Valley, which is maintained and regularly updated by the Ipel Union. Further investment is planned along the route to improve infrastructure, including signage, resting places, repair stations, shops and accommodation.

The success with cycling has inspired railway enthusiasts to join together to campaign for restoration of the Sahy-Dregelypalank railway line running along the Ipel river. In 2001, the first “Symbolic Train Ride” was organized to draw attention to the need for restoring the rail line as a cross-border initiative between Hungary and Slovakia. A walk along the rail route was organized together with a Slovak partner, Ipeľská Únia. Active support was secured from local municipalities of Dregelypalank, Hont and Sahy, local civic organizations and small businesses. The event has been repeated each year on August 31st with volunteers documenting the technical status of the rail line and generating public attention through displaying banners at Balassagyarmat, Vac, Dregelypalank and Sahy train stations and organizing celebrations and exhibitions of local railway heritage.

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Kacar Farm – Inspiring tourism

In 1996, when **István Lénárt** and his wife bought some land on a hillside in the countryside around Szokolya, their aim was to ‘get away from it all’ and find some peace and quiet. These days, however, more than 3,000 schoolchildren a year come to see and participate in the traditional Hungarian farming techniques and crafts that the couple practice and maintain.

The idea of hosting children at Kacar, the Lénárts’ farm, came from visitors and friends. The couple adapted their original plans for a quiet life in the countryside and in 1999 opened their farm to tourists and other visitors. *“I am like a virus”,* says Lénárt. *“I want to infect people with interest and enthusiasm about the traditional farming way of life and practises.”*

Traditional Hungarian farm life was hard. One had to know as many as 22 distinct crafts to be able to survive. Lénárt knows around 15 of these crafts so far. Just building a house involves five, including stone masonry, mud work, and brickmaking for the walls; woodcarving; roof laying and building the oven.

The agro-tourist farm is centred around an old farmhouse that was taken apart in the village, transported up to the land on the hill and reconstructed. A small bread oven, some horse stables, a blacksmith’s workshop and windmill to draw water out of the ground, were all constructed by the Lénárts themselves, to round out the farm’s infrastructure. Particularly interesting are the eight different traditional shepherd huts that Lénárt constructed just by looking at pictures and studying diagrams of old structures. These traditional shepherd huts are made from mud, with branches and reeds for the roof. Eventually, the Lenarts want to build copies of all 14 different kinds of huts native to Hungary.

The range of activities that are available on the Lénárts’ farm is broad, including crafts (pottery, blacksmithing, weaving, spinning, felt, basket weaving, working with corn husks, wood carving, stone masonry and folk architecture) and a wide selection of agricultural tourism activities, including breadmaking, straw-making, field work, animal husbandry, growing vegetables and fodder, as well as horse-back riding.



photo © ajackson Griffiths

School children from the Waldorf school in Budapest
make felt balls as part of farm activities.

The activities are targeted at specific groups. The greatest number of visitors to the farm consists of school groups, for which the Lénárt organise a specific package of activities following consultation with the teachers. The farm is particularly popular with Waldorf Schools in Hungary as the activities on the farm are in line with the emphasis on ‘education using the hands as well as the head’ in the school curriculum. At times, the children’s reactions reveal the realities of modern life, with some children perplexed that eggs are kept under hens and not in the refrigerator.

Many families also come to the farm. *“The children learn better from their parents than from me,”* notes Lénárt. *“When the parent is learning a craft at the farm, the child often picks up where the parent has left off.”* He stresses the importance of this intimate and personal relationship between himself and his visitors as well as between the visitors and the farm.

At first, the local people of the village of Szokolya thought the Lénárts were crazy for starting such an initiative, but they have slowly come around to the idea. Craftspeople from the local village help the Lenarts with presentations for the school groups. The local municipality has helped the project by providing the raw materials for a gravel road to be constructed to the farm, which Lenart built with help from friends. The new road has greatly increased access to the farm, even though many difficulties still remain.

Lénárt has been surprised at the number of enquiries he has been receiving via the Internet. The fact that Waldorf Schools favour his teaching style means that he is getting talked about in school circles and has appeared in a few school newsletters. His story has been included in short documentaries made by visiting Hungarian and international TV crews.

For the future, the Lénárts aim to continue improving their services. There is an old traditional house in the village, which the couple intends to purchase and rebuild on the farm, and which will hopefully be classified as a historical building. They also plan to develop renewable sources of energy, including wind, for the farm, which is not connected to the electricity grid. The couple also wants to specialise in the traditional culture and heritage from the local region and not Hungary as a whole, as is the case at present.

The Lénárts want to keep visitor numbers stable at their present level. Theirs is a small-scale tourist product. Too many tourists would damage the land and limit the personal relationships between themselves and the visitors that are a central element for the couple's approach to small-scale tourism. *"The best part of the job is seeing the children get so emotionally attached to Kacar, crying when they have to leave,"* says Lénárt. *"If I did not have this, then I would not do it at all."*

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Zselic Region

Rural regeneration through wine, local heritage and energy saving

Located south of **Lake Balaton**, Zselic is a hilly area covered by a rich patchwork of agricultural fields, orchards, pastures, forests and vineyards. The area is predominantly rural, with little industry. Much of the rich landscape is under nature and landscape protection.

The 60,000 people living in Zselic face a number of challenges typical of many rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe, including unemployment, limited opportunities for education, an migration of young people from the area and consequently an aging population among those who remain.

The **Zselica Association** (Zselica Szovetség), an NGO, was established in 1996 to respond to these challenges by engaging local people in the design of sustainable development initiatives in the region as a whole. The local partners involved in bringing together representatives from all the villages in the area are the **Banya Panorama Association**, a local NGO focused on tourism development, and the **Zselic Innovacios Kht**, an agency with expertise in agricultural business development.

The Zselica Association has become a focus for development of a wide range of environmental initiatives in the area, which are slowly but surely bringing back confidence to local people and generating new types of rural livelihoods.

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Energy Brigades

‘Energy brigades’ are bringing cost savings to communities in the Zselic micro-region, and in the process doing the climate and environment a good turn.

Pooling support from various grant programs, the Hungarian Energy Club established energy brigades in three communities of the Zselic micro-region: Szentbalázs, Kadarkút, and Szenna. These groups of volunteers trained and experienced in energy saving have helped draw peoples’ attention to the cost saving opportunities offered by energy efficiency and provided advice on how to implement appropriate measures in the home.

A series of energy ‘open days’ were organised to provide local residents practical information about energy efficiency. The events also helped identify interested local people, who had the opportunity to join the energy brigade and learn new practical skills. Recruits included the maintenance staff of the local authority and teams of enthusiastic parents. Training activities included participation in a seminar in Gömörszőlös in central Hungary, a village noted for its sustainable energy initiatives, including solar panels developed and installed by the locals themselves. Such events help inspire and mobilize those who have not been confident about their own abilities or convinced of the practical benefits of energy-saving initiatives.

The energy brigades in the three communities have insulated mostly public buildings used by the community, such as schools, town halls and kindergartens. Yet many of those involved have also gone on to apply the lessons learned in their own homes. The insulation of doors and windows of local school buildings in all three communities have led to cost savings on heating bills of around 15–20%.

To involve schoolchildren, programs to insulate school buildings have included a month-long environmental education and awareness scheme. During this ‘Energy Month’ held at different times in the three village communities, the **Energy Club** worked together with teachers of local schools, providing educational materials (videos, publications, and worksheets) and project advice. Class time was used to give students an insight into the energy and related problems involved in the planning and implementation of the building insulation program.

The small scale and practical action dimension of the energy brigades’ initiatives in the area helped persuade local mayors, school managers and educators in all the three village communities that environmental initiatives offer a real opportunity for regenerating the local economy. Project leader Nelli Tóth is confident that the program will serve as a pilot for the launch of similar projects elsewhere in the country, which will help the Energy Club’s long-term plans to develop a community-based solar panel factory in Kadarkút.

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Village Managers inspiring communities

There is no lack of ‘witches’ in Zselic. At the annual ‘Witch Festival’ held every February in Zselic, local people who have done most for the region are elected as ‘witches’. A steady supply of candidates for the honor is being turned out by a project developed by the **Banya Panorama Association** in cooperation with the Zselica Association, which seeks to stimulate interest in local heritage and create job opportunities and income generating opportunity for local people. As many as 22 small villages have now become involved in the scheme, which seeks to directly involve at least 200 families and generate employment for at least one person in each family.

The project began with the recruitment of 10 local ‘village managers’ from among local people living in the area. These people, ranging from teachers to a traffic engineer, photographer, and an handicrafts expert, were selected from different backgrounds in order to bring different perspectives to the project. They had all been previously unemployed themselves and understood well the motivational issues involved in working with rural communities plagued with long-term unemployment. The village managers participated in a two-month training in community development, with emphasis on tourism and rural issues, and were paid salaries by the Regional Labour Office of the Hungarian Government.

Gaining the trust and co-operation of local families and establishing good working relationships with them has been critical. *“Being sensitive about good meeting times and first impressions, the village managers visited the local families individually to undertake surveys about the unemployment situation and to map specific, interesting natural and cultural features in the village”*, **Melinda Keleman**, one of the village managers, explains.

The village managers helped local residents draw out their local knowledge and come gradually to a new appreciation of their communities and their local heritage resources as opportunities for development. Families were encouraged to propose their own program of activities for visitors, especially school children. Village managers gave advice on how to ensure a high standard of tourism service and helped write micro-grant applications to access funds to actually put the ideas into practice.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

The village managers helped local residents draw out their local knowledge and come gradually to a new appreciation of their communities and their local heritage resources as opportunities for development.

Micro-grants of 50–100€ were provided by the Zselica Association for such things as improving local facilities for hosting groups of children, including chairs and tables, improvements to outbuildings and rain shelters. Thanks to the high level of craftsmanship already available within the village communities, funds were used for purchase of raw materials with local people undertaking the necessary work themselves.

After two years, as many as 130 families continue to be involved in the project, with 25 families now regularly hosting visiting school groups. Activities on offer include opportunities to learn about traditional varieties of pigs; bee keeping with honey tasting; and herbal tea production from garden herbs. The families offer these activities as part of a two-hour program at a cost of less than 1€ per person. A visiting school group, which typically visits the area for a day-long programme, can now choose from many different activities on offer.

The project has not only provided a boost for unemployed families in the area, but has also provided quality nature and handicraft education for teachers and their pupils. Enthusiastic school groups are coming to the area in increasing numbers, both from the region and further afield. They have had a positive influence on the whole community, helping to involve especially older members in passing on stories and crafts to the younger generation.

Local successes have led the Banya Panorama Association and Zselica Szovetség to organize local host families into a tourist product. This has helped to ensure quality, sustain development and draw down additional funds from government-run rural support programs to restore local buildings and other heritage sites as additional visitor attractions.

The village manager project has helped generate several other more ambitious activities in the village of Banya, including the development of a youth centre, a hotel/activity centre as well as a small handicrafts training centre for locals. Signs and interpretation materials have been also put up across the village to help visitors find their way around. The **Youth Centre** can accommodate up to 30 children and is now encouraging longer-term stays for visiting school groups and more ambitious programming. An indicator of success is that the Centre is fully booked as each school year approaches.

The challenges ahead are linked to ensuring the area continues to be attractive to visiting schools through appropriate marketing and quality control, while at the same time helping local families to continue to refine their services and not get left behind. *“All these measures are part of a larger vision of an integrated tourist product involving hiking and biking trails throughout the region. They are serving as catalysts for further development of the region”,* says **József Marticsek** from the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation. *“This can be seen in terms of commercial development as increased numbers of B&B’s are being set up in the micro-region.”*

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Wine for development

The warm hillsides of the Zselic micro-region are checkered with small vineyards and dotted by wine cellars. Zselic's long tradition of winegrowing is still cultivated by many of the area's residents, most of whom produce wine for private use, to enjoy with their families or share with friends.

In an effort to generate additional income for local residents, the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation has been working closely with local winegrowers to improve the quality of local wines and marketing them to tourists and other visitors to the region, which is not far from the popular Lake Balaton. A key partner for the Program in this work has been **József Spiegl**, director of the **Zselic-Somogy Vidékfejlesztő KHT**, an organization focused on agricultural business development.

It all began with meetings with local winegrowers to ascertain interest in producing wine on a commercial basis. As many as 48 local winegrowers expressed interest in working together on a wine production and marketing project. In response, eight seminars were organized on different aspects of wine production, including techniques of harvesting, pruning, pest management, quality improvement. Specialists from universities were engaged, including Kaposvar University, which subsequently developed a partnership with the local vintners group. The seminars and frequent meetings involving predominantly amateur winegrowers generated an awareness that the key to their future success lay in working together to improve the quality of their wines and to market their wines under a common label or brand.

The next steps involved gaining official accreditation for the local wines and then marketing them commercially. Accreditation is a lengthy process, one which each of the winegrowers will need to undertake on his own. Additional motivation has been provided through a regional competition for the most promising local initiatives, where the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation provided awards in the form of fifteen, 300 litre metal wine storage tanks. This is an important piece of equipment for a winegrower as storage space in accordance with official guidelines is something they are short of in their small cellars. However, conditions were attached to the award. The regional wine competition winners each received a storage tank – initially for a year, with the condition that they accredit their wines for quality. If they are successful, they will be able to keep the tank for an additional three years. If they manage to sell their wine on the market, they will get to keep the tanks.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the next steps in bringing the local wines to market are already falling into place. The winegrowers made it clear at the start that they eventually would need a bottling plant for their wine—a costly investment. During the course of training and seminar activities, however, word got around, and a local entrepreneur is now interested in the construction of a small bottling plant in the area in co-operation with the **Somogy County Regional Development Council**. A common wine label under which local wines will be eventually be promoted is now being developed. József Spiegl has also had a team of biologists test the soils in the area to see if the region could be classed as an official ‘wine region’, a distinction that could help in promoting the wine as a local heritage product. So far, the tests have been positive.

According to **József Marticsek** of the Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation, *“this wine will never be able to compete with the other 22 more famous wine regions in Hungary, never mind wine regions in the EU, so the emphasis in the project must be on encouraging local tourism and selling wine to visitors”*. This is why co-operation with local restaurateurs and hoteliers is so crucial. Many of them attended a recent wine tasting event in the village of Kadarkút, organised through the project. They were pleased by the improved quality of the local wines. The hotels also confirmed that tourists regularly enquire about local wines and possibilities to visit wine cellars. This represents the next opportunity but also the next challenge for local winegrowers, as they must improve visitor access to their wine cellars, many of which are only accessible by dirt tracks and do not have electricity.

*“We are interested in creating a wine trail”, says **József Spiegl**, “But this is a long-term plan, perhaps five to ten years into the future”, he adds. “We do not have any problems at the moment—we have found willing winegrowers and identified the market. Now we must be persistent.”*

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The wine cellar of Gyula Szente, a wine grower in the program developed by the Banya Panorama Association in co-operation with the Zselica Association to stimulate interest in local heritage while creating job opportunities and income for local communities.

photo © Jackson Griffiths



In the vineyards... (left to right: Gyorgy Nagy, secretary of the Zselica Association, Janos Hando, mayor of Szena and winegrower and Attila Pokos, organiser of the winegrower training).

photo © archive of Hungarian Environmental Partnership Foundation



photo © Dominka Zárba

Boronka Region

Rural regeneration through nature conservation

The Boronka micro-region takes its name from the **Boronka River**, which flows through the area south of **Lake Balaton** in western Hungary. The river forms an important ecological corridor connecting Lake Balaton to the **Drava River** in the south. Along its riverbanks, fishing ponds and wetlands offer nesting and resting places for migratory birds. Several of the ponds are designated as important nature protection areas.

Boronka is home to 10,000 people living in 10 municipalities, including the towns of Somogyfajs and Mesztegnyo, located within the river's watershed. Although it is a third of the size of neighbouring Zselic micro-region, Boronka has a similar natural and cultural background.

The main force for sustainable development in the Boronka region is the **Somogy Provincial Association for Nature Conservation**, which manages a large protected area, including lakes and grazing forests. Established in 1980, the Association has been working for more than twenty years to protect Hungary's rich natural and cultural heritage in the area. Following the collapse of communism and central planning in 1989, the Association's efforts have focused on purchase and management of precious conservation habitats. Over the past decade, the group has gradually acquired the most significant natural areas in the Inner Somogy region, an area totalling 8 km². The group also maintains an ecological corridor that stretches 80–100 kilometres from Lake Balaton to the Drava river as well as the Boronka Protected Landscape Area, which it has managed on behalf of the Hungarian government since 1991.

To meet its nature conservation mission, the Somogy Association has become progressively more and more involved in rural regeneration activities, such as promoting extensive livestock farming and tourism development among local people. The Association now runs a farm to demonstrate that wildlife and agricultural activities can co-exist. An Otter Centre run by the organisation is a magnet for visitors to the region. With 80 active volunteer members and 10 full-time employees, the Association has also become involved in conservation of historic buildings and in reviving traditional cultural activities.

Grey cattle, carp, otters and energy

The sight is reminiscent of Hungary in past centuries: long-horned Grey cattle and shaggy, horned Zakel sheep pick their way through the open forest with its dry meadows and scattered trees. The traditional breeds of cattle and sheep belong to a herd of around 100 animals kept by the Somogy Provincial Association for Nature Conservation that are drawing visitors to the Boronka micro-region while maintaining the special 'grazing forest' that once comprised much of Hungary's landscape. Thanks to their roaming and grazing, the forests are kept open, enabling certain endangered wildflowers, such as the Dog's Tooth Violet, to make a comeback in the region.

Rare breeds of sheep and cattle have been the most important source of income for people living in the area. Today, the livestock is also an important attraction for visitors, and the income from selling animals (1,154€ for a live animal) and meat (1.15–1.50€ per kilo) contributes significantly toward the cost of maintaining the conservation activities in the area.

The Somogy Association has added fish farming to cattle herding as a way of managing landscapes to generate local livelihoods. The 5.3 km² of wetlands and fishponds that the Association manages teem with wildlife, from black storks to river otters. A small company established by the Association breeds fish in some of the ponds, harvesting over 10 tons of mainly carp per year. With state subsidies, the annual turnover is as much as 200,000€, which generates approx. 50,000€ for nature conservation activities. Revenue from the fish harvest pays for the maintenance of the fishponds. Additional income and employment for local people is generated from harvesting the fish.

A growing stream of revenue is also coming from local tourism. Besides nature conservation, the Somogy Association is devoted to preservation of cultural heritage. A museum built by the Association on the site of a medieval weapons manufactory shows the old charcoal and slag from metal smelting that can still be seen in the earth along with spear and arrowheads. A small, neo-classical chapel, once the burial site of the wealthy Kund family, has been restored.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

The shaggy, horned Zakes roam around the grazing forest.

A renovated narrow-track train has been refurbished and is used for transporting tourists into the area. Horse riding trips are available, some organised for up to seven days. Hidden observation points have been installed near some of the fish ponds for visitors to observe the wildlife. At the fish ponds in Petesmalom, southeast of Kaposvár, the Somogy Association has established an Otter Centre which has become a major tourist attraction. Plans are also underway to turn the differential in water levels between the ponds to practical use, as a sustainable source of energy. A small-scale turbine that is being installed at the site is the first of its kind in Hungary.

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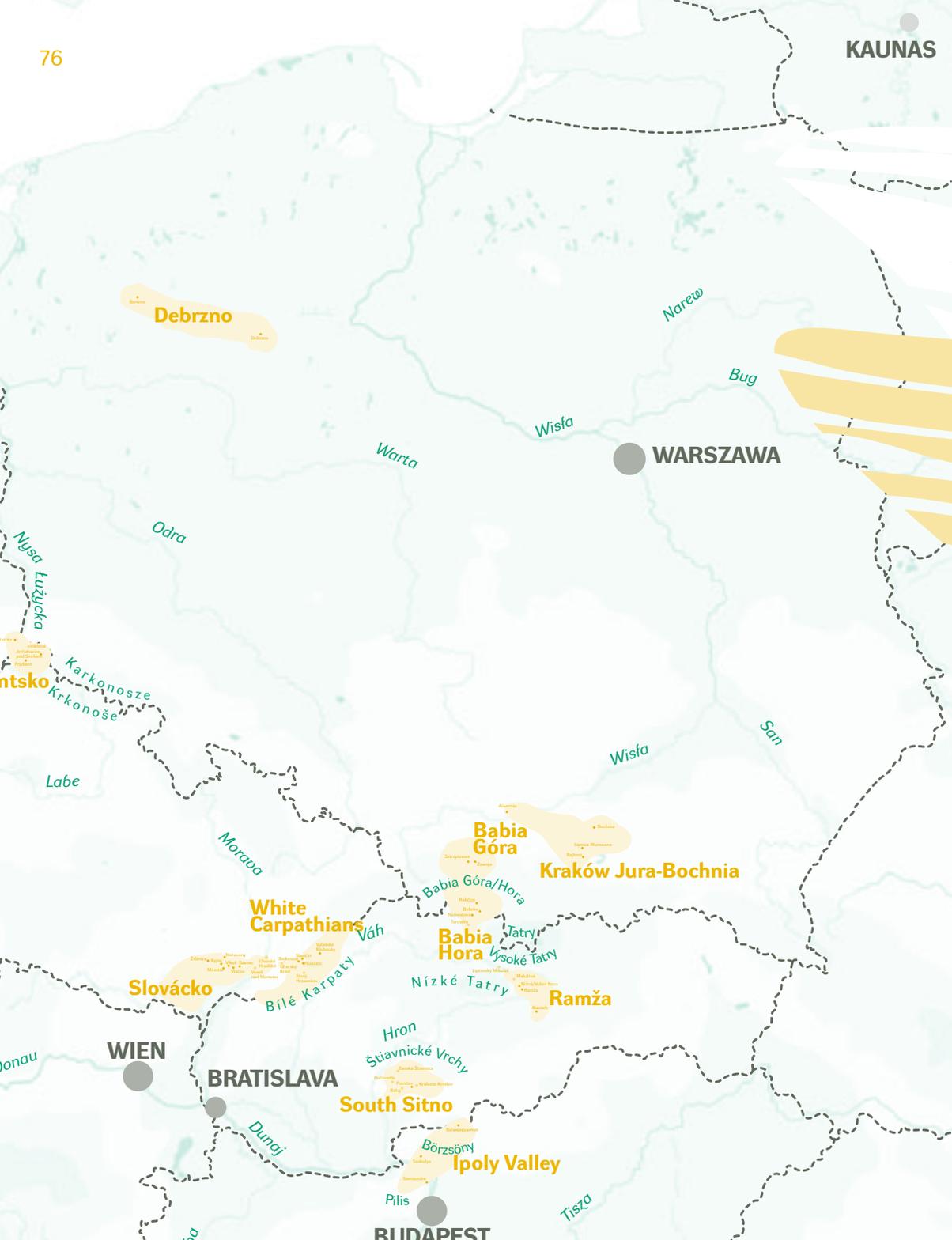
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Babia Góra

Local partnerships for rural regeneration

Mount Babia Góra is referred to by local residents as the ‘Queen of the **Beskidy Mountains**’. Located astride the Polish-Slovak border, the 1725-metre peak is the focus and namesake of the Babia Góra micro-region, which is located amid the valleys and mountains on the Polish side of the border.

The area nestled in the shadow of Babia Góra is of high natural value, home to the most diverse collection of flora in the entire Beskidy mountains, including Carpathian beech forest, patches of Carpathian primeval forest, Carpathian spruce as well as alpine meadows. There is also a rich cultural heritage, including architecture and local traditions of different Carpathian ethnic groups. Such outstanding features have been recognized through establishment of the Babia Góra National Park in 1954 and designation of the area as an UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1977.

Forestry and sheep breeding and herding were the mainstays of the local economy into the late 19th century. Small-scale farming began to put its mark on the landscape in the late 19th and early 20th century, as shepherding went into decline. In the last century, self-employment through small-scale farming became commonplace, although prospects for improvement of land-use practice and output have been limited, due the small size and highly fragmented nature of local farm holdings.

Today, the Babia Góra region shares a similar fate to many rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe. Farming, the traditional mainstay of the local economy, has been declining over the past decade, with more and more of the younger generation looking for employment opportunities, either in urban centres or abroad. The official unemployment rate in the region was 12% in 2002, and even double that figure if unregistered jobless are included.



Local events integrate all members of local communities and are an occasion to celebrate partnership achievements. Children enjoying the Toy Festival in Stryszawa.

photo © Dominika Zaręba

Development of local products and tourism in the region has been picking up some of the slack left by the decline of agriculture. A substantial part of the Babia Góra region's arts and crafts, for which it is well known, are made of wood. Poland's traditional wooden toy centre is in the town of Stryszawa, which produces a wide array of toys. Another branch of wooden artwork in the region is sculpture, which represents various traditional as well as religious themes.

A local NGO called the **Jordanów Artists Association 'Passion'** initiated creation of a regional **Babia Góra Unites Us** brand, which is a vehicle for promotion of heritage products. At the same time a distribution system is being built, based on a network of Babia Góra Shops. Local communities and civic groups have begun actively developing tourism offerings based on local heritage and culture. Festivals such as the 'Babia Góra Autumn Festival' in Zawoja, the Shepherding Festivities in Lipnica Wielka, and the Toy Festival in Stryszawa, have revived old traditions.

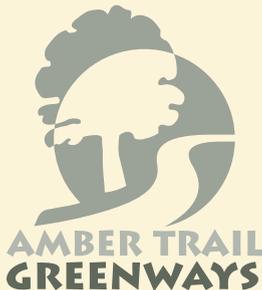
A more recent element of the tourism infrastructure in the region has been development of hiking trails, thematic heritage trails as well as natural and cultural educational trails. Notable among these is the **Amber Trail Greenway**, running along the historic amber trade route, which links together community-based natural and cultural heritage initiatives into a larger integrated whole. Examples of cross-border initiatives initiated by local leaders include the **Copper and Salt trail** in Sidzina and Jabłonka, an international bicycle trail looping around Mount Babia Góra, and **Polish-Slovak Babia Góra Ecomuseum**.



photo © Barbara Kezior

Cultivating old tradition in Wysoka manor is a special attraction of the Babia Góra Ecomuseum for tourists traveling along the Amber Trail. Antoni Pilch is a leader of the Brotherhood of Lute revitalizing old music.

In 2002, representatives from 17 non-governmental organisations, local government bodies, schools and national government agencies, including Babia Góra National Park, established the **Local Partnership for Sustainable Development of the the Babia Góra** region called 'Babia Góra Unites Us'. Within the framework of the Local Partnership, several working groups have been established to identify and promote new initiatives and secure additional partners for their implementation. Important priorities include energy saving and renewable energy, development and marketing of local heritage products and tourist services involving local people in providing cultural and natural heritage interpretation built around an eco-museum concept.



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Toys of our Parents



The small villages and hamlets around Stryszawa in Southern Poland have a special cultural heritage in the form of wooden toys. The toy making tradition in the area is 200 years old. Toy making skills have been passed down from generation to generation. Wood in the forested mountain regions has always been the major resource for crafts of the region, which include furniture-making and carpentry.

Toy making families have developed their own individual signature styles. Different toys have evolved, including *Klepoki*, toys that ‘flap’ their wings when pushed with a stick; *Chodaki*, toys which walk or waddle down a slope; *Bryczki*—horse and carts; and *Karuzelki*, toys that spin like carousels when pushed with a stick. Many other toys are shaped like birds and other animals. In the past, the toys were painted quite simply, but nowadays they are brightly painted with ever more sophisticated designs.

An interest in cultivating local heritage, spurred the municipal Culture Centre in Stryszawa to revive and promote the traditional crafts related to toymaking. The idea was to inspire a sense of value, confidence and pride among local people by turning the wooden toys associated with the area into a local heritage product. The aspiration was to generate local livelihoods for local people through local crafts, tourism and promoting Stryszawa as a special place to visit.

Monika Zawada-Miska, director of the Culture Centre in Stryszawa says: *“One of the best ways to continue the toy making tradition is to encourage locals to play an active part in handing the skills on to the next generation. This is why we organise toy-making workshops for local children. Instructors from toy making families teach children and teenagers to make simple birds, progressing on to more difficult toys.”* In Stryszawa, everyone gets involved.

“An experienced toy maker can carve out the shape of a bird from wood in as little as five minutes”, says **Tadeusz Lesniak**, one of the trainers who has a family toy-making tradition stretching back to the beginning of the 19th century. Another target audience for the courses are adults, especially those who are unemployed. The courses, which are attended by about 50 people each year, last 34 hours over a two month period. Besides organising training and workshops for toymakers and promoting their work, the Culture Centre provides consultation on how to become certified as a ‘local artist’ by the **Association of Local Artists**—a status which offers tax incentives and start-up capital for prospective toy makers.



photo © Dominika Zaręba

During the toy-making trainings 50 local unemployed people gained a new profession. Toy-making workshops has also become an attraction for tourists coming to the Babia Góra Region.

Monika Zawada-Miska is also the main person behind the annual Folk Toy Festival, the only public event of its kind in Poland. Organised since 1997, this two-day event promotes the region as a centre for wooden toy making. The event is organised in collaboration with the **Jordanów Association of Folk Artists 'Passion'** and enables local toy makers, including workshop participants, to exhibit and sell their toys. The festival attracted about 5,000 visitors in 2003 and has diversified to feature also regional food and entertainment by folk musicians from different countries.

Stryszawa wooden toys are now promoted as an environmentally-friendly product. They are made from wood, a renewable resource, and only non-toxic paints and glazes are used. In August 2002, a catalogue presenting the toys was produced in three languages and features the local people behind the toys, including photographs of toy makers of the past. These publications have helped to inspire young people to get involved.



photo © Olga Galek



Local products from Babia Góra on display during the Local Products Fair in Reinstedt, Germany.

“Handicrafts and local artisans are both a great treasure and a great resource. They cultivate genuine tradition, underscoring the importance of local identity and the need to pass this on to the next generation. Crafts and arts provide a stepping stone and an escape from the problems of everyday life.”—says Stanisław Szeliga, a sculptor from Wysoka and the leader of the Jordanów Artists Association ‘Passion’. The toys are included in a special catalogue presenting a range of locally branded products, which have been selected by the Local Partnership. The catalogue provides a basis for using the internet to promote, select and sell Babia Góra heritage products. An important step forward has been the setting up of four shops in the region, specifically for selling traditional Babia Góra heritage products. Two of the shops are in Stryszawa and operated under the watchful eye of **Piotr Pochopień**, a university student, who apart from his role as shop manager is also actively involved in marketing the Babia Góra region. The toys all bear the logo of the Amber Trail, a historic trade route stretching from Krakow to Budapest that is now serving to develop community-based tourism and promote local development and identity in the Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian communities that are now connected through the Trail.

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A monk, a school – and a new future for Zawoja Przysłop

The small hamlet of Zawoja Przysłop (population ca. 500) in southern Poland, not far from the Slovak border, is a very special place. Part of that uniqueness is related to the Carmelite Monastery, whose current abbot, **Father Romuald Wilk**, has led the way in bringing the village to the forefront of public attention through a range of sustainable development projects.

When Father Wilk first arrived to Zawoja Przysłop and noticed just how windy it was, the idea of harnessing wind for energy sprang to his mind. With the help of numerous foundations, scientists and a grant awarded from the EcoFund, Poland's debt-for-environment facility, a full-size 160kW wind turbine was built in 1996 on a hill-side close to the monastery. Contacts made during this time lay the basis for future sustainable development projects in the hamlet, which over the years have come to engage everyone living in the area.

In 1999, national education reforms put into question the viability of the Zawoja Przysłop primary school, with only 64 pupils. Under the new educational system, the small school was judged to be uneconomic and scheduled for closure. Rather than resign themselves to this fate, the teaching staff, including Father Wilk, then the school's religion teacher, decided to work out a way of keeping the school open.

drawing © Szymon Babiarczyk

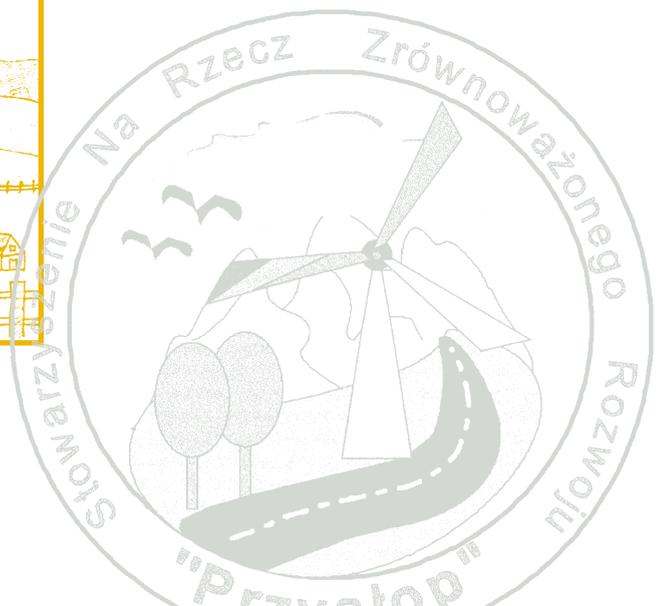
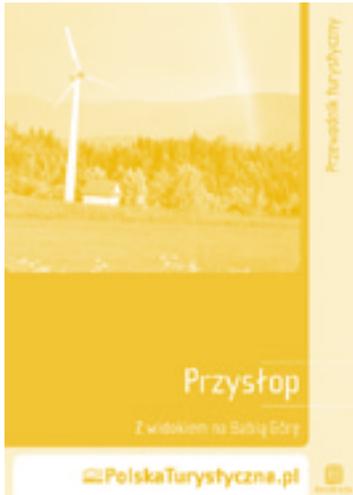




photo © Dominika Zaręba

Stop on the Amber Trail: Przyslop—Environmental Education Center.

The teachers, parents and the monks set about turning the school into an environmental education and community center. The school's first environmental project involved participation in the Precious Energy Program, organized by the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation in 2000. Under this program, the school children and parents carried out simple energy audits and the school was able to replace all light bulbs with energy-efficient ones, install eleven thermostatic valves on the heaters and install two heat-insulated windows. The measures were not only practical in that they brought cost savings, but also provided an important educational experience for parents, teachers and the school children themselves. More importantly, the project generated a conviction among local people that the school could be saved.



The first energy project marked the first step in the creation of a Centre for Renewable Energy at the school. More ambitious energy-saving projects followed, including modernization of the heating system and the installation of energy-efficient appliances in the nearby Carmelite Monastery in Zawoja Zakamień. Biomass fuel replaced coal as new boilers were installed. Heat pumps (reverse refrigeration)

and solar heat collectors were also installed. These initiatives were all financed with funds generated by the local monastery, and served to infect local people with the idea that much could be done by making better use of existing local resources and opportunities.

A comprehensive energy audit focusing on installing insulation across the hamlet was undertaken and a program to bring energy-saving to all buildings in the hamlet was introduced. To facilitate these and other initiatives, local residents, teachers, parents and business people set up their own NGO—the **Association for Sustainable Development ‘Przystop’**. The Association provided a means for more systematic planning, as well as for drawing down external funds for further local initiatives, such as waste separation and reduction schemes. A small capital grant from the small grants program of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) provided national and international recognition.

The Przystop school has led efforts, joined by two other schools, to identify illegal waste dumps in the area and push local authorities to have them cleaned up. “An aluminium can collection contest was a success in motivating local children”, says Father Wilk with a touch of pride. The recycling program has even begun providing some additional income for the school, contributing around 125€ per year to the school’s small budget. Such initiatives have helped the Association for the Sustainable Development ‘Przystop’ gain the top award in the 2002 Hewlett-Packard Ecological Competition, including prize money of 5,000€ with which the school has purchased a can-crushing device.

photo © Dominika Zareba

The EcoFund helped set up a full-sized wind turbine, which now symbolizes a brighter future for Przysłop.



Through its environmental center, the Przysłop school became involved in the Amber Trail initiative and established links with the Babia Góra National Park Authorities. The co-operation led to the creation of a 13km educational trail, which links the Przysłop school to another school in Golyń. The two schools use the trail to provide educational programs related to local natural and cultural heritage for visiting school groups. Local people get involved in trail maintenance and in organizing practical learning opportunities for such things as breadbaking, local history and crafts, as well as folk songs and dances. Plans are afoot to expand the trail network to include a ‘wayside shrine trail’ so as to provide a focus on local religious heritage and also to network other village schools in the area.



photo © Dominika Zareba

Father Wilk sharing the Przystop experiences
with Bill Moody from Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Today there is little talk of closing down the school, which has become an important community centre for the whole Babia Gora area. The school has expanded its capacity by improving sewage and water treatment facilities, organized a kitchen and cafeteria, as well as an after-school program for children and adults based on a library and computer centre. The Zawoja Local Government has become one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the school. It is worth remembering that only a few years ago, local authorities were intent on closing down the school altogether.

Father Wilk of the Carmelite Monastery reflects on some of the challenges faced by the local initiatives. *“Small projects such as ours have small problems”,* he says. *“But by making small steps, we can get everyone involved and start dealing with big problems faced by the region.”*

Project leaders:

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Wiesława Krzeszkowiak, principal, Elementary School No. 4

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Debrzno

Creating local leaders for rural regeneration

The Debrzno micro-region is located in **Central Pomerania** in northern Poland at the intersection of four counties, far away from urban areas. The mostly flat features lakes and woodlands, which are home to deer, foxes, boar, and other animals. The area's chief natural features are protected in the **Debrzynka River Valley** Protected Landscape Area and the Miłachowo flora reserve. The main towns and villages include Debrzno, Barwice, Chojnice, Lipka, Polanów, Przechlewo, and Człuchów.

Debrzno is predominantly rural, without any substantial industrial infrastructure. Some two-thirds of the roughly 50,000 people living in the area are connected with agricultural production, which is now in a prolonged crisis. State Farms, formerly the backbone of the local economy, collapsed soon after the fall of the Communist regime in the early 1990s, throwing many people in the area out of work. The withdrawal of an Army unit stationed in the area has led to further job losses. In 2002, the unemployment rate in some villages was as high as 40%.

Food processing continues to be an important development opportunity for the region. Products that are now being successfully promoted from the region include organic flour, traditionally baked bread and other goods. Tourism also holds some promise for development. A promising initiative in this respect is the **Necklace of the North Greenway**, which is connecting together many different local initiatives and model projects. This is helping to generate a more positive image for the area and running against the popular image of Debrzno that comes from being associated with the highest unemployment in Poland.

photo © Dominika Zareba



Necklace of the North brand helps to promote and sell together local products from small producers.

The **Necklace of the North Local Partnership for Sustainable Development**, which was established in June 2001, brings together more than 30 different stakeholders from eight different counties in the region, including local governments, civic organisations, national government agencies, and private companies. The motivation and aspiration is to foster sustainable development for the region. Under this initiative, local producers have participated in development of a common brand to identify and market local heritage products from the region. A logo has been developed and promoted within the region to sensitize local consumers and attract new local partners to participate in the initiative.

The Necklace of the North Brand project has been a tool in the promotion of self-help within the community. Local leaders have inspired others to develop their own business activities by using the support of the Necklace of the North Partnership. The most recent work has included preparing criteria for use of the Necklace of the North Brand for local heritage products as well as a competition in which the first three companies were awarded the Necklace of the North Brand. The Partnership has also established 870 km long Necklace of the North Greenway, linking local community initiatives, drawing attention to the sites where local heritage products are made.



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Nurturing enterprise in Debrzno

The town of Debrzno in Poland is using sustainable development ideas to nurture local business initiatives, which are to generate local jobs and livelihoods. In 1998, local leaders including established an NGO to work with the local government in implementing the development plan for the municipality and surrounding area. The NGO called **Association for the Development of the Municipality of Debrzno** received a start-up grant of approx. 2,000€ from the local government and given the task of turning an old building into a business incubator. To date, the Association has realised 80 projects in co-operation with the municipality and other partners, focused mostly on dealing with unemployment by developing job-creation schemes involving small- and medium-sized businesses, environmental protection and local civic associations (NGO's).

One of the main initiatives of the Association to help small and fledgling businesses has been a Business Incubator, which provides advice, technical help, start-up funds and low-interest loans. For example, the incubator helped one local resident, who collects rosehips, elderberries and mulberries for drying, build a small drying plant, thus expanding the range of local products he can offer for sale. A small business, which makes bags from used clothing, has taken off thanks to a product catalogue and getting 15 local people trained in basket making. A local pottery business was able to build a strong network of foreign customers. *“Making birch osiers items does not bring a high income, but I do not have to wait for help and can maintain my whole family”*, says proudly **Maria Wójcik**, local artisan from Skowarnki. Birch osiers products are now sold all over Poland and provide an inspiring example of how to set up a successful small business in a rural area. These and other small initiatives are creating a more stable economic base for the region, where the unemployment rate in some villages can be as high as 40%.

The Necklace of the North has encouraged and inspired several environmentally-oriented local business initiatives. For example, Debrzno and the surrounding region have a long-standing history of flour milling, but only recently has there been emphasis on organic production. Today, Debrzno has one of only a few commercial mills for producing organic flour in Poland. The small mill, which uses traditional quern stones cannot keep up with demand among local farmers who want to grind their organic grain.

The mill in Debrzno processes the organic grain, producing two tons of flour and grain flakes a day. There are educational opportunities both for groups of school children learning how the mill works and vocational trainings for professionals.



The mill can process two tons of grain in an eight-hour shift. Local organic farmers are now able to process their organic grain on the spot in Debrzno and so make processed products wholly from their own grain, such as flour and grain flakes. The mill has 30 farmers as regular customers who pay for the grinding service. The price is set at a reasonable 3.5 € for every 100 kilos processed. One of the long-term customers is the organic bakery in Debrzno, which has taken a lead in developing educational projects aimed at raising awareness of organic food and nutrition.

The mill is owned by the Association, but leased to **Eugeniusz Suchowiecki** who runs the operation through his Grain Purchase and Flour Production Company. Suchowiecki could not afford the capital investment involved in organizing organic flour milling. But by teaming up with the Association, he was able to develop his idea as a cross-sector partnership initiative. The Association was able to bring the mill to the area thanks to the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation, and was able to develop the organic milling initiative as part of a larger educational project, involving also the local government and other partners. The organic mill, which has featured in local and regional newspapers, now provides one full-time job in Debrzno, combining the services of an operator and promoter. There are also several seasonal and part-time employment opportunities for local people related to educational and tourist visits to the mill and associated recreational trails. The project shows how NGOs and local businesses can work together to make sustainable development a reality.

Project leaders:

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Our Daily Bread

“Making bread is hard work!” says **Kazimiera Kula** of the **Barwice Agro-tourist Farms Association** as she kneads bread dough with her hands. Whey, flour, pumpkin seeds, raisins, wheat, bran, flax seeds and crushed garlic are included in the four types that she is making today. She is proud of her work. *“Home-made bread is becoming increasingly rare in Poland”*, she says.

Our Daily Bread was a project initiated by the Barwice Agro-tourist Farms Association (BAFA), an association of 16 different local farmers who have set up their farms as agro-tourism ventures for tourists. They all offer a wide range of activities from hunting and fishing to horse riding, learning about farm animals as well as local plants and wild animals. The three-year-old NGO was set up by **Joanna Grzymkowska**, a local resident, as part of an effort to generate extra income through tourism. *“People in this region need extra money, but they have difficulties in finding ways of working together”*, she says. BAFA provides a clear way for additional money for farms without drastically altering the way of life of farmers in the region.

BAFA has connected individual agro-tourist farmers through a network of local trails that introduce the landscape around Barwice. In consultation with local people, the Association has marked out about 100 kilometres of trails for bicycles, walkers and horse riders. BAFA runs its activities from its office in the Barwice municipality building, provided free of charge by the municipality. This space also includes a small kitchen/café. Everything that has been achieved can be attributed to partnership action involving volunteers from BAFA working in close cooperation with the Barwice Local Government. The Housing and Communal Association has helped BAFA with promotional leaflets, while the Association for the Development of Debrzno Municipality has provided business development advice.

In discussions with the farmers, BAFA hit on the idea of producing traditionally baked bread as an additional tourist attraction. **Zygmund Kula**, one of BAFA’s members and husband of Kazimiera Kula, had an old breadbaking oven on his farm that was in disrepair. A small grant of 2000 € from the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation enabled BAFA to renovate the bread oven and repair three others on farms in the area.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

Kazimiera Kula is one of the two women privy to secrets of baking traditional Barwice bread.

There was no need for any training in bread-baking or use of the ovens thanks to the strong local traditions and knowledge. “*People should come to learn from us*”, says **Joanna Grzymkowska** proudly. This is exactly what has happened since. Bread baking demonstrations from dough kneading to the finished product—and, of course, tasting—are conducted for visitors to the agro-tourist farms. “*They always say it is very good,*” smiles Kazimiera Kula and **Stanisława Lewicka**. Local youths in Barwice have also learned how to make bread in a series of four summer workshops. Besides preserving a local tradition by passing this onto the next generation, breadmaking provides a livelihood in a place that has seen many young people leaving.

Zygmund Kula fires up his low and wide oven for another daily batch of bread. The correct temperature must be around 250 °C. Every day, he and his wife make 30 loaves. Although the bread takes an hour and a half to bake, the preparation and standing of the dough and cooling of the baked bread takes much longer. While the other farmers bake bread two or three times a week, the Kulas get their main source of income from the traditional bread baking so bake every day. The farmers receive 1.25 € for a large loaf and 0.62 € for a small one. The loaves are sold in the BAFA office/kitchen to local townspeople. Although the bread is a little more expensive than normal, the 50–60 loaves that are baked daily sell out within a few hours.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

Barwice bread is based on a traditional recipe, but enriched with various additions like pumpkin or flax seeds, raisins, crashed garlic. Kazimiera Kula bakes 30 loaves every day.

Barwice bread is now promoted as a healthy, organic product from one of the least polluted areas of Poland. It is one of the three local heritage products, which have been awarded with the “Necklace of the North” brand. Our Daily Bread has been featured on regional radio, journals and newspapers and has attracted regional and national TV coverage. The bread has also been promoted at a number of public events such as ‘Barwice Day’ and many tourist and local product fairs in Krakow and Warsaw.

BAFA plans to set up a farm shop where the bread and a variety of other products from local agro-tourist farms will be sold. A home-basket delivery system is also planned.

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Kraków Jura-Bochnia

Bringing farming back into the mainstream

The Jura-Bochnia micro-region is a rural area in the foothills and highlands **north of the Carpathian Mountains** in southern Poland. The Jura is located **north-west of Kraków** and is one of the country's most valued historic landscapes. The Bochnia region is an agricultural area bordering the Kraków metropolitan area to the east. The main towns in the micro-region include: Bochnia, Lipnica Murowana, Żegocina, Rzezawa, Stary Wiśnicz and Nowy Wiśnicz

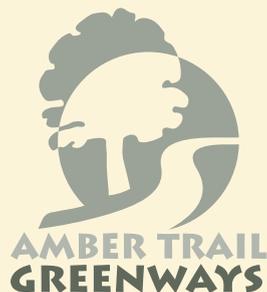
Significant natural areas in the Jura are the Ojców National Park as well as the Jura Landscape Park System, characterized by a mosaic of natural and cultural landscape features formed by limestone and karst. The area also features thick wooded gorges, caves and the remains of a 700-year-old castle in the village of Rudno. Forests cover over a quarter of the Bochnia micro-region. Natural features and landscapes are protected by two Protected Landscape Areas, one landscape park as well as numerous nature reserves and monuments.

Bochnia is a traditional farming area. Arable land makes up nearly two-thirds of the land use. About 18% of the people living in the area are connected in some way to agriculture; some of the farms have been turning to organic production. But as in many other rural areas, agriculture has been in decline in recent years.

The most important natural resource present in the region is salt, which has been mined here for the past seven and a half centuries. Aside from salt mining, major employers include a steel processing plant in Bochnia, refrigeration companies, and food processing operations. From an economic standpoint, the Jura is tied to the coal industry in neighbouring Upper Silesia as well as mining and other industrial sectors in the Kraków metropolitan area. Limestone is still quarried in places.

The Jura Ring is a tourist route running through the Jura Landscape Park System and is based on linking together community initiatives focused on the interpretation of heritage resources. The Jura Ring initiative has played an important role in creating the Kraków-Moravia-Vienna Greenway, a heritage route that is to be developed into the longest tree alley in Europe. The major attractions in Bochnia are networked through a system of bicycle trails linked to another Greenway—the **Amber Trail Greenway**, which links Kraków to Budapest. In Bochnia, the network connects many community initiatives from across the region and has developed an identity and constituency of its own called the **Eco-museum of Bochnia Land**.

The Partnership for the Bochnia Region was established in November 2001 by 28 stakeholders from the area, including farmers, civic groups, development agencies, agrotourism and environmental associations, local governments, schools, landscape park authorities; as well as businesses. The Partnership has chosen to concentrate its efforts on organising joint projects that bring together tourism, business development, environmental protection and learning opportunities.



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Baskets of Local Heritage Products

“I want the local people to love their area and live on what they can make themselves”, says **Stanislaw Paprota** of the Gmina Culture Centre in Lipnica Murowana. Paprota is the driving force behind a local project focused on organising a local heritage product home delivery system. The idea is to collect together the wealth of produce that local people and farmers make themselves, from jams to juices and candles to carrots and offer them for sale through home delivery. Creating such additional markets for local produce is a promising way of generating rural livelihoods in an area where 18% of the local population still depends on agriculture.

Inspiration for the project comes from Lipnica Murowana, where **Edward Barr**, a local farmer, has been running an organic vegebox scheme for a number of years. The basket home delivery system builds upon Edward Barr’s organic vegebox scheme by adding a wider selection of home-produced items, including handicrafts. Customers can choose from a local product inventory, place their orders by telephone or Internet and receive deliveries in their home.

Given that internet access in the area is still limited, Stanislaw Paprota, is co-ordinating the scheme by means of a central ‘order processing centre’. *“We want to be ready when we get access to the internet!”* he says. The ‘basket’ has become a symbol of joint action and local pride. The products will not be sold to a large retail store, but delivered directly to customers. The main idea is to cut out the middleman and so decrease costs so as to allow locals to sell their products directly from their homes. Information on the producers of the local products comes with the delivery, making the scheme both customized and personalized.



photo © Olga Gajek

All products to be sold in the Basket come from traditional farms, part of which were turned into certified organic ones.

A first meeting promoting the Basket was an opportunity to assess the variety of products available in the region to build an attractive offer for customers.



Thanks to the **Partnership for the Bochnia region**, a diverse range of partners is involved in the project. Support has been secured from local council members of the municipality of Lipnica Murowana, the Agricultural Extension Service in Bochnia, the Landscape Park Council in Tarnów, Lipnica Murowana Parish, a school in Rajbrot, the Podgórze Cultural Community Association. All have a stake in the success of the project, in addition of course to the local farmers and craftspeople who grow or make the local heritage products.

The idea for the *Lipnice Basket* came on a study visit to Brodowin in Germany in February 2003. Representatives from Bochnia were able to see first-hand how a ‘green box’ home delivery system called ‘Oekokorb’ actually works. German partners provided insights on the mechanics of how to organise and co-ordinate such a system. They pledged further support, which subsequently led to the signing of an official co-operation agreement between the two regions to promote basket delivery programs in the two areas.

The project has been promoted at the Local Heritage Product Fair in Kraków and featured in local and regional media as well as the leading national newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. A TV appearance on the popular morning program ‘Coffee and Tea’, has done much to heighten the profile of the project and the Bochnia micro-region as a whole. This is critically important because the basket home products delivery system is targeted at the inhabitants of Kraków (population 750,000), just 50 kilometres away.



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www.lipnicamurowana.prv.pl

Eco-museum of Bochnia Land

A diverse range of local activities in Bochnia micro-region have been brought together through the **Eco-Museum of Bochnia Land**. Originating in France, the Eco-museum concept differs from those of traditional museums and even open-air museums. An Eco-museum is a 'museum without walls' where the natural and cultural heritage and history of an area are interpreted where they occur or occurred in the past. This contrasts starkly with the closed institution displaying relics of the past that is the traditional museum and to the open-air museum that displays items, crafts and activities, which may have no historic relationship to the actual place where they are exhibited.

The main focus of Eco-museum initiatives is on the interaction of nature and people. Thus, Eco-museums are attuned to conserving both noble and vernacular architecture, protecting plant and animal species, natural landscapes as well as those that have been modified by human action. Precious articles and memories associated with a place make local crafts, stories and folklore special and alive.



photo © Jackson Griffith

Tadeusz Nowak collected a wide range of farming equipment in his traditional wooden house. He brings them back to life by showing they work



photo © Stanisław Paprota

Palm Festival in Lipnica Murowana—a living tradition bringing people from the region and tourist.

Ecomuseum encourages maintaining folk events as a significant element of the heritage.

The inspiration for the Eco-museum of Bochnia Land came from a Rural Livelihoods Program study trip organized back in 2001 to the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. On returning, a group from Bochnia set about establishing the Eco-museum of Bochnia Land as a way of bringing together a wide range of interesting cultural, historical and environmental conservation initiatives into one common theme. **Barbara Urban** of the Polish Environmental Club, who is co-ordinating the Eco-museum project, is a seeker of local people doing interesting things which could be included into the Eco-museum. Helping her are local priests, farmers, schoolchildren and others in towns and villages of the region—anyone who knows of interesting local people and features. Bochnia Regional Museum and Landscape Park Staff assists in assessing potential sites and heritage interpretation.

The Eco-museum of Bochnia Land has 17 different local partners with individual projects ranging from nature and geological trails to guided tours of local woodlands and to seeing how bread and cheese are made on an organic farm. The local partners have united under a common idea and a common logo that is now linked to the Amber Trail Greenway.

One of the sites featured in the Eco-museum is the organic farm **Chatka u Tadka** owned by **Tadeusz Nowak**. Nowak has been offering activities on his eight hectare farm as a tourism product for the past eight years. He has hosted weddings, folk festivals, school trips as well as day-trips. Groups can stay overnight or even for a few months and grow their own food. He exhibits old farming equipment and demonstrates farming traditions from the milling of wheat using stone grinders to the traditional way of making grits.

Another interesting Eco-museum project is the nature trail leading to Brodziński's Rocks, an outcrop of sandstone rocks in a forest. The rocks were declared a national historical monument at the beginning of the 20th century because over the centuries they provided hiding places for Polish resistance movements. A grant from the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation supported development of a signed trail leading to the Rocks. Information panels detail historical and geological features of the Rocks. Picnic tables provide places to rest. Increased interest in the site has led to the opening of a new restaurant in the area.

Other initiatives in the Eco-museum of Bochnia Land include the environmental centre and nature trail in Borówna, one of the smallest villages in the region. The trail highlights eight interesting natural and geological features of the region, including the endangered ivy (*Hedera helix*) and soils rich in iron deposits. The initiator of the trail was a local priest, **Father Kras**, who convinced local people to join together to turn the idea a reality. The Landscape Park administration has helped route the trail and prepare necessary technical information to enable signage and interpretation. Local people have volunteered to put up signs, build sheltered rest areas and help maintain the trail. Local people provide also an interpretation service along the trail.

Project leader:**Barbara Urban**

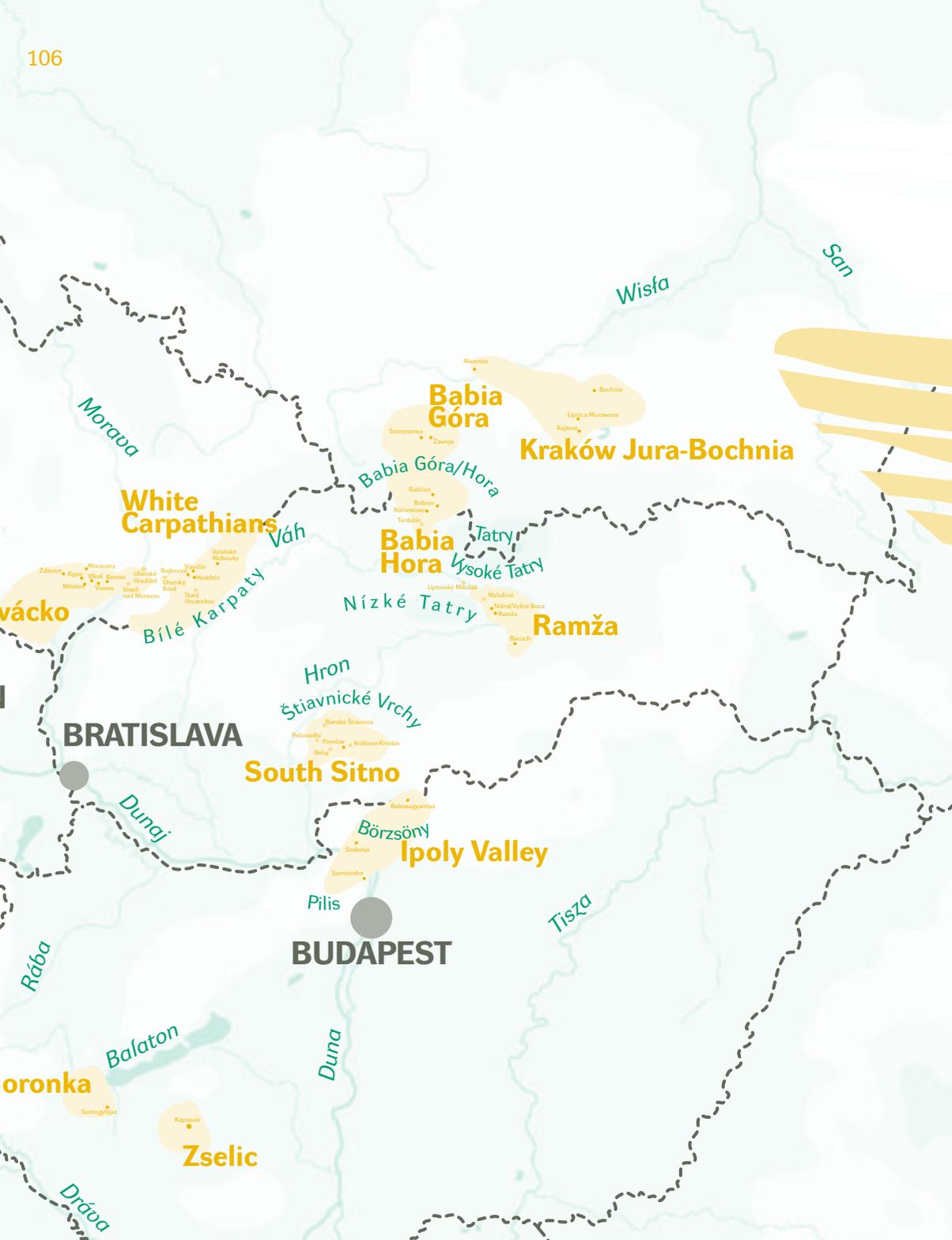
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Wisła

San

Morava

Babia Góra

Kraków Jura-Bochnia

White Carpathians

Babia Góra/Hora

Babia Hora

Tatry

vácko

Bílé Karpaty

Nízké Tatry

Ramža

Hron

Štiavnické Vrchy

BRATISLAVA

South Sitno

Dunaj

Börzsöny

Ipoly Valley

Rába

Pilis

BUDAPEST

Tisza

Balaton

ronka

Duna

Zselic

Dráva

Rural Regeneration Stories from

Slovakia



Babia Hora

Cross-border trails for rural regeneration

The Babia Hora micro-region lies in the foothills of **Babia Hora mountain**, known as Babia Góra on the Polish side of the border. The seven villages that are scattered throughout the foothills of Babia Hora, together make up the micro-region (Bobrov, Klin, Rabča, Rabčice, Oravská Polhora, Sihelné and Zubrohlava), which lies more than 600 metres above sea level. The entire micro-region is part of the **Beskydy Euroregion**—a cross-border co-operation agreement between local governments from adjoining mountainous areas in Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic.

Part of the Babia Hora micro-region belongs to the Horná Orava (Upper Orava) Protected Landscape Area. The Protected Landscape Area on the Slovak side of the border complements the national park on the Polish side. The Slovak-Polish cross-border region is rich in protected flora and fauna, including bears, wolves and lynx. Some of the most interesting habitats in the Protected Landscape Area are the peat bog in Klin, Bird Island on Orava Lake and Zubrohlava Bay. There are deep forests and scattered farm holdings. In the past, the most important contributors to the local economy were agriculture and small businesses such as wooden shingle production, woodcarving, pottery, sheep husbandry, sheep cheese production and, in particular, linen making and stonemasonry. Linen-making workshops provided the basis for the local economy in nearby Bobrov, Zubrohlava and Námestovo and there are several efforts under way to revive this traditional activity.

The first decades of the 20th century were characterized by massive outward migration due to the poverty and high unemployment in the region. Today, the unemployment rate hovers at around 23% for a total population of 16,500. In terms of industry, there are several textile-manufacturing companies and also wood and metal processing industries in the area, mostly focused around the town of Námestovo just outside of the micro-region.

Established in 1999, the **Babia Hora Association of Villages** has sought to promote development of the member villages through cross-border co-operation with Polish partners. The Babia Hora Association works closely with the 'Babia Góra Unites Us' Partnership on the Polish side of the border. There is also close co-operation between authorities of the administration of the Upper Orava Protected Landscape Area and the administration of Babia Góra National Park in Poland.

Some of the most promising initiatives in terms of joint action include development of marked cross-country skiing trails in Klin, an educational trail from Slaná Voda to the summit of Babia Hora and certified production of traditional cheese—*syrové korbáče*. Private businesses have been set up in the region. One specialises in local hand-made shingle production and the other grows and dries local herbs. In the small village of Rabčice an agro-tourist farm is now up and running.

The area of Babia Hora has great potential for tourism development. The challenges for the future are to increase the number and quality of tourism services, encourage co-ordination between B&B owners and inn-keepers and broaden the availability and variety of local products and souvenirs, which highlight local traditions and identity.

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A Week in the World of the 'Gorals'

The village of Rabčice is nestled in the sweeping, wooded hills around Babia Hora mountain near the Slovak border with Poland. The woods are host to a range of wildlife and are locally famous for the amount of bilberries and mushrooms that grow there. The lofty Tatra Mountains can be seen to the southeast.

It is in this idyllic setting that **Štefan Turác** and his wife Katarína Turáčová embarked on an agro-tourism venture, based on opening up their small farm to tourists. Turác is a local craftsman, and his passion for horses becomes quickly apparent when he introduces visitors to blacksmithing and shows off his carved wooden horse statues. **Katarína Turáčová** grew up in Bratislava and has always wanted to work in tourism. Their combined skills make for a perfect match in the agro-tourism business. Since 1998, the couple has lived in an inherited 150-year-old wooden cottage in Rabčice. In 2000 they received a grant from a major telecommunications company who wanted to support interesting ideas in the countryside. This initial grant enabled the couple to buy a pair of horses and a few sheep and reconstruct the roof of their barn in the traditional way using wooden shingles.

“Five years ago, local people did not care about old things that are beautiful”, explains Turáčová about the many old items in her home, which include a spinning wheel and traditional farm tools. Local people living around Babia Hora traditionally made felt clothes, rag rugs as well as shingle roofs. Artisans made wooden sculptures and painted landscape.

To make their farm more attractive for visitors, the couple renovated part of their barn and converted it to a living space. They then moved out of their wooden cottage, making the whole cottage available to visitors. They bought six outdoor wooden tables thanks to a small grant from the Amber Trail Greenway program. The next step was to develop an offer of activities for visitors, including such a things as horse-riding and learning how to make cheese from milk from their own sheep and cow. They built a traditional shepherd's smoke-hut to smoke their cheese and cook meat. The agro-tourist farm is open all year round with activities to suit the different seasons, including horse-drawn skiing in winter.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

Štefan Turáč and his wife Katarína Turáčová are embarking on an agro-tourism venture, offering their small farm for tourists. They built a shepherds cheese smoke-hut according to traditional designs

In the future, the Turáč's are planning to offer visitors activities ranging from handicrafts to horseback-riding. *One week in the world of the Gorals* will visitors a chance to take part in a week of activities based on the traditions of the Gorals, the people who live around Babia Hora. Štefan and Katarína have been developing contacts with many local artists, craftsmen and businesses to prepare the activities. A local folklore group has already played at the farm for visitors. Visitors have also made trips to see the wooden shingle factory and sampled local cheese products. Felt production is also now on offer since Štefan attended a Rural Livelihoods Program workshop on the subject. Co-operation with hotels ensures that the agro-tourist farm is one of the 'must things to do' in the area.

The Turáč's efforts are benefiting the local population in terms of additional income and providing an example for others. Surprisingly, the possibility of generating additional income from traditional crafts and skills practiced for generations is new to many people in the area.

Support from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation has helped the Turáčs to convert half of the old barn into a hall for welcoming large groups of visitors. The hall serves as a community space for the local population as well. For example, the annual Rabčice accordion festival is to be held here. A longer-term plan is to convert the hall into a café for the local community.



In Babia Hora, traditional agriculture and landscape management are still alive.

So far, the farm has had about 100 visitors per year, most of them coming from Bratislava as well as a smaller number from Poland. Katarína Turáčová has been working to expand this number through marketing for the farm. She has been promoting the farm through two travel agencies in Bratislava, as well as in the nearby town of Námestovo. She uses the internet and personal presentations at tourism fairs in Slovakia and abroad in Poland, and the Czech Republic. A seminar on sustainable tourism organised by the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation included a site visit to the farm by representatives of Rural Livelihoods projects in Hungary and Poland. As a result, a two-day felt-making workshop for the growing number of people interested in local crafts is now being offered several times a year.

Over the longer-term, the Turáč's plan to further develop a local NGO set up in 2002 to assist local craftsmen, businesses and other agro-tourist farms. The main idea is to promote the region and its special heritage, combining local services as part of larger tourist packages. It is a bold step and a counter-point to the Babia Hora Association, which was established by the mayors of seven local communities and has been primarily concerned with development of infrastructure in the region.

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Educational Trails

Tourism and education is helping to develop closer ties across Babia Góra mountain and the border between Slovakia and Poland. The Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation has helped **Róbert Trnka**, director of the Upper Orava Protected Landscape Area and partners on the Polish side of the border in their efforts to develop an educational trail winding up Babia Hora mountain and linking to a Polish trail that will continue on to Zawoja on the other side. A special Information Centre has been established at the very beginning of the trail to provide orientation to visitors crossing over to Slovakia from Poland.

The trail begins at Slaná Voda, a former salt water spa that closed in 1918 when the Hungarian owner was forced to leave the country after the end of the First World War. There is a plan to re-open the spa. The salt water is good for treating rheumatism and other bone complaints. A newly established information centre provides first hand information about the area to tourists, who are mostly Slovak and Polish.

The trail itself leads to the summit of Babia Hora through mountain meadows and forests in the Upper Orava Protected Landscape Area. Newly designed information panels inform visitors about special natural and cultural features along the way. One sign introduces the diverse species that thrive in a nearby peat bog, while others detail which plants and animals one would expect to find at different elevations along the trail. The signs, which are in both Slovak and Polish, were designed as a joint venture with authorities of Babia Góra National Park in Poland to ensure the same design on both sides of the border.

One signed 'culture' stop along the trail route includes two musea dedicated to two nationally famous Slovak writers. One is *Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav*, whose most famous work is *The Gamekeepers Wife*, a story which is set in the area and based on the lives of local foresters. The other is *Milo Urban*, who comes from the neighbouring village of Rabčice. His museum is the original house where he lived. Further up the mountain, where ecosystems are most fragile, the trail contributes to landscape conservation by keeping people on the planned route and preventing them from walking on the alpine meadows around the summit.



Local carpenters and volunteers construct a shelter. Tourism and education are helping to develop closer ties on the mountain Babia Hora, which straddles the border between Slovakia and Poland.

“I was surprised by the enthusiastic response of the local community of Oravská Polhora”, says Trnka. “Meetings with local people in 2001 to present the idea of the trail showed that there is a lot of pride among local people in the region. The educational trail project was welcomed because we wanted to involve everyone in promoting the region to outside visitors”, he adds.

To build the trail, Trnka and his colleagues mobilised volunteers including students from a local school. They helped to clean and reconstruct old and damaged paths. They also helped a local carpenter make wooden benches and bad weather shelters. Small huts have been built according to the designs of traditional Slovak shepherd shelters. Local businesses have provided shingles for the rooves and are contributing financially to their maintenance. The owner of the hotel in Slaná Voda provides free rent for the Information Centre. Other support and consultation for the project have come from the community of Oravská Polhora; the **Association of Babia Hora micro-region**, a civic association; the **Slovak Tourist Club** and the State Forest Association.



Schoolchildren help to reconstruct one of many springs, which run out of Babia Hora.

photo © archive of Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation

“We want to change people by creating new learning opportunities. We hope that the trail will foster a deeper awareness and concern for the environment”, explains Róbert Trnka, who believes that conservation is intimately linked with education and economy. *“People should take care of nature themselves—we do not want to be a watchdog”*, he adds. In this light, Trnka and his colleagues are developing exchanges between schools, especially cross-border exchanges between schools in Slovakia and Poland that focus on understanding and promoting Babia Hora as a common heritage.

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Ramža

Preparing for the future by learning from the past

The Ramža micro-region lies on the border of two regions, Liptov and Horehronie. The area comprises five villages: Kráľova Lehota, Malužiná, Nižná Boca, Vyšná Boca and Bacúch, which are scattered over a segment of the **Lower Tatras Mountain** range. The area ranges from 680 to 1,723 meters above sea level. The 143.02 km² micro-region is home to approx. 2,500 people. Half the population commute to jobs outside of the region. Almost the entire area of the micro-region is part of the Lower Tatras National Park, which is rich in flora and fauna, including chamois, bears, wolves and lynx.

The history of the area dates back to the 13th century, when Hungarian kings roamed the landscape on their hunting trips. Remains from iron, copper and gold mines can still be found in the area. They were the mainstay of the local economy in medieval times and helped shape land use and landscape patterns. The region has since experienced successive shifts in land use. Wood processing and agriculture, especially cattle and sheep breeding became the mainstay of the local economy following the demise of mining. Nowadays, tourism is coming to play an ever more important role in the region.

Historic landscapes and traditional folk architecture are still well preserved in both Vyšná and Nižná Boca. In fact, part of Nižná Boca village has been designated a protected area for vernacular architecture. The architecture is very special, dating back to the original German settlers in the region.

The **RAMŽA Civic Association** was established in 2000 to bolster civic initiatives in the area. Based in Nižná Boca, the NGO seeks to promote co-operation between the five communities of the area, including projects to renovate existing tourist trails connecting Bacúch village with the Liptov side of the region. Ramža's activities have focused on bringing practical benefits to local people. Projects have included reconstruction of a water well, development of a sports pitch, as well as planting an orchard with traditional varieties of apples and apple juice production in Bacúch. In Nižná Boca, a local playground is being constructed, including organisation of activities for local children and revival of *Fašiangy*, a traditional annual festival. The NGO itself also serves as one of the Communication Centres for the Slovak Rural Parliament.



Part of Nižná Boca village is a protected area of vernacular architecture. The three windows and large roof are indicative of early German architecture.

photo © archive of Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation

In 2002, Nižná Boca started preparation of a Community Profile. A graphic information database (www.boca.sk) providing basic information on each village, as well as on the micro-region as a whole. The information collected was used as a basis for preparation of a Land Use Plan and a strategy to attract inward investments. Another Community Profile is now also under preparation in Malužiná. The goal is to have such profiles developed for the entire micro-region.

Ideas and projects proposed by local people include fruit processing, the use of scrap wood as a material for souvenirs and small decorative products, heating, and production of wooden shingles. There is growing interest in using existing buildings to promote heritage oriented tourism and broaden the number, variety and quality of experiences for tourists. Cycling and educational trails are already being developed with this in mind. There are now plans to open up old mining galleries to visitors.



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Discovering Mining History

In the forested and mine-riddled hillsides of the the Ramža region in north-central Slovakia, a local initiative links three complementary projects together—an educational trail, carpentry craftsmanship and a website promoting the region.

The idea behind the project had been around for a while. Local land use plans for the villages of Vyšná Boca and Nižná Boca have emphasized the importance of promoting local architecture, but without stating what actually constitutes local architecture and what does not. *“When local residents were consulted, many did not know much about local architecture or about the distinguishing features of the local landscape”* says **Ján Pavlík**, an employee of **A-project**, a local NGO working to preserve the natural environment through building partnerships among rural communities in Northern Slovakia. With the help of **Martina Mäsiarová**, a local leader from Nižná Boca, he decided to employ some heritage interpretation professionals and to get them to help local people re-discover their heritage.

Local meetings and workshops involved brainstorming and information sharing through land use maps, pictures, and photographs to identify existing structures, points of interest. People were made to feel important and part of the history of the area. *“First mining brought people to the area, then their activities changed to cattle breeding and now our activities are in transition once again,”* says Pavlík.

The Ramža area has a long heritage of mining. Since the 13th century, the surrounding hills and mountains have been pockmarked with mines. The rich seams of gold fuelled many of the early primitive mines and were the primary resource exploited by people in the area. There are now few signs left of this golden age. Mine entrances have been filled in and have been overgrown by trees. The waste rock and ore that was once piled upon the hillsides have been covered with grass and trees. But spend a little time talking with Pavlík, and the traces of the past come back into focus. The network of paths to and from the mines as well as waste heaps can be readily spotted in the landscape, that is if you know what to look for.



In the children's playground, bumps and depressions in the land indicate past mining activity.

photo © archive of Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation

Each of the regions of the Lower Tatras has its own distinctive mining heritage which is reflected in the style and shape of special belfries used once to announce the start and end of the working day for miners. Gun parts were also produced in the area from the metals mined in the Lower Tatras. A famous outlaw, Liptovská Maša, is believed to have acquired his weapons from the region. Settlers who were drawn to the area by its mineral wealth came mostly from Germany. Their influence can still be seen in local architecture, especially in the use of roof shingles. Much of the historical architecture in Vyšná Boca and Nižná Boca has survived to the present, and is now under official preservation.

Cattle farming has also left its mark on the area. To help people better understand and appreciate the dynamics of landscape change, specialists in heritage interpretation guided locals in using local photographs from 50 years ago to compare with contemporary ones. Many hillsides that were once completely bare are now thickly wooded. Old hay barns and winter shelters for the cattle still dot the landscape. It's a question of knowing what to look for and a little imagination.

The workshops and information collected helped generate several new local initiatives, including the development of an 11 kilometre educational trail featuring some of the most important local heritage. The trail is to become one of the main attractions of the Ramža micro-region, which sees an influx of tourists during the winter for winter sporting activities, but has had little success in attracting summer visitors. Working with a diverse range of partners, a core group of local people has been working to establish the trail routing between Vyšná Boca and Nižná Boca, and linking the route to an existing trail between Vyšná Boca and Bacúch. The trail follows an old road connecting the two villages and is suitable for walkers, cyclists as well as pushchairs and wheelchairs.

Eleven signs have been located along the trail, featuring information on mining, architecture and natural heritage. A local carpenter, **Milan Pastucha**, made the signs for the trail along with the outdoor benches and picnic tables. Pastucha received funds from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation for wood-working equipment and tools for making and repairing outdoor infrastructure and has promised to organize volunteers to undertake maintenance work.

Ján Pavlík points out the difficulties in a project of this kind. *“The core group of eleven local people were very enthusiastic, but when the time came for action, a few of them became afraid and were unwilling to commit to anything. Also, there always seemed to be the same people at the meetings, and it was difficult for the core group to influence other people to participate.”* However, says Pavlík, *“Seeing the enthusiasm of local people and the surprise of heritage interpretation specialists at the amount of information collected has made the whole project worthwhile. We now have a groundswell of public support and can plan more confidently for the future.”*

Project leaders:

Milan Pastucha (signs), **Róbert Gejdoš**
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Fruit for Health

People living in the village of Bacúch in northern Slovakia are blessed with apples—lots of them. Many local residents have their own apple orchards. They also have access to a two-hectare orchard with 65 different rare varieties of apple trees. This is the result of a partnership between the village and the Agricultural University of Nitra, which uses the orchard for research in protecting traditional apple varieties.

Until recently, local apples went to waste. But now, thanks to the efforts of **Ján Turošík** and **Marek Nikel**, local apples are being turned into high quality natural juice that is enjoyed by young and old. Turošík, a former mayor of the village, and Nikel, who works at a nearby European Institute for Vocational and Social Education, have been working together for two years to develop a community juicing plant, which would be available to local people. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. *“Now people who own orchards at least have somewhere close by to process their apples”*, explains Marek Nikel.

In developing their plant, Turošík and Nikel profited from experience gained on a study trip organised by the Rural Livelihoods Program to the juicing plant in Hostětín in the White Carpathians (see case study apple juice plant in Hostětín, Czech Republic), where they learned about the technology of running a juicing plant as well as promotion of the end product.

The greatest challenge in developing the plant was not so much an issue of fundraising, but the need to find a suitable press at a reasonable cost. After a long search, Turošík and Nikel negotiated a special price on a suitable press from an Italian company. A grant from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation helped pay for a chopping machine, which is used to prepare the apples for pressing. Additional support from the Jan Hus Foundation allowed them to purchase a filling machine. All these efforts came together and the first apples were pressed in October 2002. The wooden press juices apples under a pressure of 400 atmospheres and produces 320 litres of juice per hour. The apple pulp is given to local farmers as a good feed for their cattle.



photo © archive of Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation

Pressing the juice under the pressure of 400 atmospheres, the juice press is providing a nearby facility for orchard owners to press their apples.

Marek Nikel presses the juice at his home on a voluntary basis, and the service he provides is free. Juice pressing times are on Wednesday afternoons and all day on Saturday. The juice press has catered to young and old in the village. As the main owners of local orchards, elderly people bring their apples to be juiced—usually 5–6 sacks of apples or 200–300 kilos. The press also provides free apple juice to the local nursery school. *“The 37 children there were drinking bad juice mixed with water,”* says Nikel. *“They needed something better.”*

An old barn owned by Nikel has been reconstructed to house the juice press and provides a permanent location for apple processing. Local people helped in the reconstruction and plans are now under way to install a solar panel on the roof of the reconstructed barn to generate heat for drying apples. A series of pipes through the roof will distribute the heat so that the roof of the juice plant will become a drying space. In the autumn, this drying space will produce a delicious batch of dried apples as well as mushrooms and herbs from local forests and gardens. The juicing plant in Hostětín in the White Carpathians has also diversified its activities in this way, but uses biomass for drying.

The local Land Use Plan foresees the establishment of plum and pear orchards, which should provide further demand for fruit pressing and drying and fill out the range of local products from the area. One problem with the fresh juice, however, is that it has a shelf life of only a few days or a week at most. This contrasts with the juice that is produced in Hostětín in the White Carpathians, which is pasteurised before bottling. To overcome this problem, Nikel and Turošík plan to purchase or rent a refrigerated trailer, which will keep the juice cool and provide enough space for the larger quantities of juice that will be produced.

The juicing plant is expected to generate permanent full-time employment for at least one person in the village and seasonal employment for several others. However, at the moment, Nikel and Turošík need more local volunteers to help out with key aspects of the project, such as the upcoming construction work on the barn. Marek Nikel has managed to infect his employers with the project and the company provides a small van to deliver the apple juice to the school, elsewhere in the village, and further afield.

It is this ‘further afield’ that is the biggest challenge for the Fruit for Health project, because this involves incurring the costs of marketing and promotion—a major challenge for any rural project. To date, promotion has been largely informal, through seasonal tastings and coverage in radio and even national TV. Next steps will inevitably include developing a distinct brand and marketing plan for the juice.

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South Sitno

Regenerating rural areas by listening to local people

Located in **central Slovakia**, South Sitno is surrounded by the **Štiavnické Vrchy Protected Landscape Area**. The area is characterized by a rich landscape of mixed oak, beech and hornbeam forests and rolling green fields among stunning mountain vistas, ranging from 264 to 1,009 metres above sea level. The region is small, just over 99 km² and home to 1,336 people. There are six villages: Baďan, Beluj, Kráľovce-Krnišov, Počúvadlo, Prenčov and Žibritov, which are located in the Banská Štiavnica and in the Krupina districts.

The area has a rich history and heritage. Germans came to the area in the 12th century and left their mark on the architecture in the region. All the villages have fine examples of vernacular architecture, especially in Kráľovce-Krnišov and churches that are protected as cultural monuments.

Forestry and agriculture are the mainstays of the South Sitno economy. As in many rural areas, unemployment is high, hovering around 17–20% in 2003. As result, most locals commute to nearby Banská Štiavnica or elsewhere outside the region for employment.



The **Civic Association for South Sitno**, based in Prenčov, has been a powerful force for co-operation and development of the micro-region. Established in 1999, the NGO is dedicated to promoting sustainable development by identifying, mobilizing and using local potential to the maximum extent possible. The challenge has been to find ways of creating a favourable climate for small business development, especially in rural tourism and services; preservation of the area's traditions and heritage; and sustainable use of local resources. The strength of the NGO lies in its capability of bringing about co-operation between the five villages in the area and in helping to involve locals in community based development activities.

One of the most important projects initiated in South Sitno has been a 'listening project' that involved community residents in interviewing each other to survey the community's special features and map out a vision for the future. A community micro-grant scheme involved 110 inhabitants of the micro-region in designing, managing and implementing small community projects. As a result, the Civic Association was able to contribute constructively to the Land Use Plan and the Micro-regional Development Plan.

Tourism initiatives have included educational trails in Prenčov and Baďan. In time, these will link together all the villages in the region and connect them to mount Sitno. A traditional folklore festival was re-established three years ago. Under the title *Podsitnianske dni hojnosti (Sitno Harvest Festival)*, the six villages now prepare each year a series of cultural events related to the harvest and traditional crafts. In addition, the NGO has helped local villages and local leaders to build working relationships on environmental projects with neighbouring districts, including waste reduction and recycling initiatives.

Thanks to the Association's efforts, Prenčov has one of 30 Communication Centres of the Slovak Rural Parliament, a platform for lobbying and information exchange among rural stakeholders. This generates opportunities for generating new ideas and projects, such as development of fishponds for fish breeding or renewable energy.

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Getting Water Back to Nature

Villagers in Prenčov will be even cooler this summer as a result of a community bathing area and fishpond that is being developed. Such reservoirs used to dot the landscape of South Sitno in southern Slovakia, but nearly all were destroyed over the past half century to make way for large state farms.

Getting Water Back to Nature was a project aiming to enhance the surroundings of Prenčov by establishing a small-scale fish pond and swimming hole for local residents to bathe in during the hot summer. Launched in 2002, the main idea and driving force behind the project came from two local leaders, **Jaroslav Bačík**, a member of the local fishermen's association, and **Janka Bačíková**, who works for the Association for South Sitno, a local NGO. The two have built up a special partnership of several NGOs, local authorities, and individuals to develop and implement the project.

The municipality of Prenčov (630 inhabitants) has provided funds to purchase the land for the pond, and in-kind contributions to the scheme have been secured from local people, such as loan of equipment and machinery from local farms to dig the pond. The local Association of Fishermen is in charge of the work. Local people have also helped out as volunteers. Janka Bačíková has been very active, especially in fundraising for the project from local businesses.

The major obstacle was locating an architect to prepare the plans. *"We tried environmental NGO's, the State Water Authority and a few National Parks, but all of the architects were beyond our budget"*, explains Janka Bačíková. *"Some were charging as much as 2,500€ – the size of the entire grant from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation for the project – that was just for the paperwork."* In November 2002, the micro-region was featured on Slovak TV on a program concerned with rural areas called Eurovidiek. Brief mention of the project led to a phone call the next day from **Pavel Sýkora**, an architect who said he would take on the project at a reduced rate.



photo © archive of Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation

A fish pond and a community bathing area—the pond serves the village in two ways.

The architect Pavel Sykora designed the pond at a carefully chosen site to cause minimal disturbance to the local environment

A site for the pond was chosen in a beautiful field situated between two streams and construction work was completed in 2003. The pond is two metres deep. The bottom and sides are lined with stones with a gravel ‘beach’ to minimise the water being clouded with soil. A local resident and expert in alternative medicine, Teofil Nechuta, is planting medicinal herbs around the pond, and there are plans for local schoolchildren to plant and ‘adopt’ trees around the site.

Janka Bačíková notes that the project has generated widespread enthusiasm throughout the village. *“Of course the children are very excited about the pond and cannot wait to go swimming. They are constantly asking if there is any work they can do so that they have an excuse to visit the pond. The childrens’ grandparents are also very pleased because they can now tear their grandchildren away from TV and get them interested in local history.”*

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Energy for All

The village of Prenčov in South Sitno in southern Slovakia is dependent on coal and electricity for energy production. But efforts of the mayor, **Alena Ciglanová**, and her husband, **Filip Ciglan**, are putting the village on the map as a center for renewable energy solutions. The two want their village, which has some of the best conditions for solar power in the country, to break free from the monopoly that coal and electricity companies have on the area and to become a living model for renewable energy initiatives in Slovakia.

Filip Ciglan notes that *“in the Czech Republic, a project called SolarNet is currently negotiating for government subsidies of up to 50% for private and 30% for commercial renewable energy projects. In Slovakia there is no such help. This is because promotion and marketing of coal and gas is excellent, but the same cannot be said for renewable energy.”*

The original aim of the *Energy for All project*, which has been developed with support from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation, was to teach people in the village how to make solar panels and related heating systems. As with similar initiatives in the Czech Republic which Alena Ciglanová had learned about, it was expected that a few motivated people in the village would install the systems on their homes. The logic was that such practical examples would motivate their neighbours to follow suit. Locals would also help to construct a solar panel system for the primary school in the village.

Renewable energy is not new to the village. Many area residents have solar panels on their roofs, but these are little more than space heaters painted black to heat up water. They are based on the same principle that underpins the solar shower in Ciglan’s garden. To learn how to make and install a solar hot water panel on his roof, Ciglan attended a two-day training in the village of Gömörszőlős in Hungary. *“It was very inspiring and a great promotion for solar panels”,* he says. *“However, the materials given were appropriate for different systems and this made it seem difficult for us to transfer the experience to our village.”*

Ciglan realised that there is a world of difference between the actual solar panel to heat the water and the system to transport and store the water once it is hot. The latter is much more difficult to install. New hot water tanks may be needed depending on the system, and the pipe work is complicated. Ciglan was not to be discouraged. Skilled in plumbing and hardware, he made everything himself, including the solar panels. This was hard work and others with less skill and dedication might have given up earlier. He calculates the return on his investment, according to current energy prices and conditions will be around ten years. The return for hotels or old peoples homes would be less as they use a lot of hot water.

Ciglan's experience in constructing his own solar collector led to a shift in focus for the Energy for All project. In the course of designing and installing his system, he came across a private company called Thermosolar, located within 20 kilometres of his village. The company quickly became interested in the project, recognising the opportunity for future sales and promotion. But rather than build the solar panels and heating systems from scratch, the company decided to sell solar panels and to let local residents focus their efforts on building the heating systems. The relationship with Thermosolar has proven mutually beneficial—helping the village to bring in up-to-date solar technology and promote the benefits of renewable energy. In turn, the company has been able to expand demand for its products.

Three solar panels were purchased thanks to support from the Slovak Environmental Partnership Foundation and installed on the local primary school in May 2003. The solar panels supplement but do not fully replace the school's energy needs. This is because the peak period for the solar energy is in the summer months during school holidays. The solar panels also serve an educational function and helps raise awareness and understanding of solar power among local residents and visitors. The interest generated has led to instalation of three further solar panels private houses with more to follow.

In addition to free installation of the systems, Thermosolar is offering a free seminar on how to better promote solar technology as well as training in solar panel and system construction and appraisal for locals people. The training will enable participants to gain official certification in installation of solar panels that is valid throughtout the Slovak Republic. Those who decide to become self-employed after receiving the certificate will be entitled to discount parts from Thermosolar.



photo © Jackson Griffiths

The roof of mayor of Prenčov, Alena Ciglanová has a Rural Livelihoods Program solar panel built and installed by her husband Filip Ciglan.

Although funding came also from the local council, which co-financed the solar panel for the primary school, the project has attracted many in-kind benefits and donations such as those from Thermosolar. The project is cited as a model project under the Local Agenda 21 scheme by the local council. *“We are ready to advise others on solar technology projects now”*, says Ciglanová.

Returning to promotion, Filip Ciglan says that the objective of the project is to change things for the better in the village. *“There are two ways that a person can change. The first is to change under pressure; the second is to change under pressure of information.”* Thanks to the Ciglans and others, the Energy for All project is delivering information to local residents and helping them to change and be more confident about the future.

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***Learning lessons from
Central Europe***



The variety of experiences with generating rural livelihoods presented in this volume share one important feature. Each story shows that to be effective, sustainable development must involve local people sharing in the responsibility, costs, risks and benefits of implementation. This means emphasizing openness and transparency in decision-making, increasing public engagement and responsibility, and delegating accountability to the appropriate level of responsibility and competence.

An important ingredient in all the cases described was the active involvement of volunteers and NGOs or civic groups supported by the foundations making up the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE) Consortium. Support came in various forms. In some cases, support was in the form of coaching, advice and consultancy. In others, timely and flexible financial support for leveraging additional funding and partners was of critical importance. In still other cases, the main support provided was the opportunity to connect to and learn from the experience of others, especially from those struggling with similar problems and dilemmas.

Support was always provided in response to local needs and tailored to local opportunities and capabilities. This was possible on account of the fact that the Environmental Partnership Foundations have been actively working in the areas described for several years and so have established local constituencies of partners and local leaders. By linking those working in the twelve areas to each other and to counterparts in German micro-regions, a new network of local interaction, information exchange and learning has been created as a basis for involving local people on a continuous basis in generating new ideas and opportunities for rural livelihoods.

Focusing on people

Experiences with rural development in Central Europe suggest that the cost and speed of progressing towards sustainability is linked directly to the degree to which local publics, local governments, community and NGO groups, scientists and business leaders become aware, informed and ready to co-operate with one another on specific sustainable development activities.

The lesson is clear—moving Central European rural areas towards sustainability will require much more than inputs of technology and infrastructure, more readily available financing and improved specialized advice and technical assistance—these are all important, but will be ultimately insufficient for implementing sustainable development. What is largely missing today are programs to support the kinds of initiatives and projects animated by volunteers, NGOs and civic groups described in this book.

To be successful, support programs must be motivated by a desire to build up the social capital of local communities—the capability of local people to make sense, and take advantage of, the changes taking place around them in terms of interacting ecological, economic and social processes. Creating an awareness and understanding of the changes taking place in the local economy, community and landscapes is what provides a basis for designing and implementing practical action for dealing with local needs, opportunities and circumstances. Such awareness involves also the need to build up a local capability for taking into account the changing external influences of economy, technology and culture.

In the twelve areas that have provided the focus of this book, engaging local people in sustainable development activities has helped generate a climate of public support for change and reform and has translated into a readiness among local people to experiment with new ideas and initiatives. NGOs and other types of civic and volunteer groups have been central to this process. It is community-based NGOs, created or strengthened through the Rural Livelihoods Program, that have provided each of the 12 project areas with a capability to mobilize local people and local resources.

The examples show also that dealing with social environmental and economic challenges is more effective where democratic practice and market economy are developed—where people have both the opportunity and the capability to participate and there is little room for apathy to take root. In such circumstances, mistakes in policies or management practices will not be ignored for long. People will be ready and willing to intervene with modifications and corrections to policy and practice.

Small-scale and practical sustainable development projects responding directly to local needs, opportunities and circumstances are successful because they deliver tangible benefits to local communities. Such locally-driven projects and initiatives need to be an integral part of any rural development program that seeks to promote sustainability. What is more, it is essential that such activities are not promoted locally or internationally as attempts to “catch-up to the city” or “catch-up to the rural areas of the European Union”. The need is to use small local projects to demonstrate the distinctiveness, value-added and competitive advantage of Central European rural areas in such things as organic agriculture, renewable energy, agro-tourism, landscape and nature conservation.

Successful sustainable communities

The key lesson and challenge from Central Europe centers on how to design projects which will help increase the attractiveness of rural areas both for those living and working in them and those from the outside, including investors. Such projects may even help rural economies overtake urban ones as desired places for living and working. Rural Livelihoods sought to build local capability among local communities for taking practical action and promoting success stories to inspire others to take action. But the activities generated need continued support, if they are to contribute significantly to the transition of rural areas to a more sustainable future. In each of the Central European countries, government can do much more to create more favourable institutional, legal and tax conditions for the activities of NGOs and business development initiatives in rural areas.

In November 2002, some of the grassroots experiences referred to in this volume were discussed at a NATO Advanced Research Workshop on *The Role of Biodiversity in Rural Sustainability* organized in Krakow, Poland by the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation, the Centre for Nations in Transition of the University of Minnesota and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (USA). The Central European experiences prompted participants to propose a definition of what is meant by a successful sustainable community, as follows:

A successful, sustainable community fosters and celebrates healthy people and biodiversity, and the linkages between them. Asserting those linkages, it invests in capacities, institutions and partnerships that restore, enhance and monitor natural, social and economic capital and widely communicates status and trends. It willingly shares knowledge and know-how. It promotes inclusive, stakeholder-driven planning and collaborative adaptation to changing conditions. Products and services generated locally are preferred and produce triple bottom-line profits, social economic and environmental. Citizens understand and avoid detrimental impacts of their decisions locally, regionally, globally and intergenerationally.

While not one of the twelve areas described in this book approximates the ideal described in this definition, it is possible to detect and provide support for several features of trends that are clearly identifiable in each case.

The countryside in the Enlarged EU

Successfully integrating rural areas of Central Europe into the European Union will require reinventing the local economy in both East and West in a way that secures social and economic development on the one hand, while strengthening communities and preserving natural and cultural heritage conservation on the other. The conventional or ‘business-as-usual’ response to the challenge of revitalizing rural economies—evident in many regional development plans drafted in anticipation of drawing down EU structural funds—has been to emphasize large-scale and capital intensive initiatives, including construction of factories, highways, ski-lifts and amusement parks. But experience from both the old and new EU countries suggests that in many cases, such large projects are insensitive to the local context and risk doing as much harm as good.

In fact, large-scale projects designed and implemented without appropriate public consultation and consideration of needs of the local population have too often failed. This is because local communities have been overwhelmed. In such situations, local ideas and initiative are too often stifled. Local traditions and economic and social ties are unnecessarily disrupted, eroding cultural and natural values that help define and promote local identity and a sense of belonging. In many cases, large investment projects do little to build up social capital in rural areas. They do little to generate a sense of local responsibility, risk-taking and leadership that is so essential to competing successfully in a globalizing economy.

The value of community-based, ‘bottom-up development’ is gaining increasing recognition in many of the existing EU member states and EU funding programs—most notably the EU’s LEADER program, which is specifically focused on involving local stakeholders in decision-making and mobilising community-based resources. But such programs have not been promoted in Central European countries and are still treated as marginal to existing EU rural policy. The emphasis has been on direct payments to farmers and infrastructure projects, which contribute little to building up social capital.

Both European Union and Central European policymakers continue to favor top-down, large-scale projects. As a result, local and external resources are not being used effectively in local and regional programs for generating a people-oriented rural development. Nor are they strengthening rural communities and preparing them to face the challenges of a global economy, which will come with EU expansion. Roads, sewage plants and waste disposal facilities will not be sufficient to increasing the competitiveness of rural economies. They will not be sufficient to making rural communities places where people want to live, work and raise their children. What is also needed to deal with the global economy is the social capital that encourages local initiative, experimentation, entrepreneurship, leadership and self-responsibility.

Lessons for revitalizing rural communities

How do you spark the initiative of local stakeholders, strengthen communities, mobilize and develop local resources, create local jobs and revenue, and at the same time preserve and promote cultural and natural heritage? The initiatives and projects presented in this book suggest that the following are important ingredients and so, have to be delivered from the outside:

- * **The importance of people**—their vision, ideas, enthusiasm and their initiative to put these ideas into practice is essential for any project or initiative to succeed. But skills, technical and organizational are also needed. And in many cases these are not available locally. All of the initiatives described in this book underline the ultimate importance of aware and skilled people prepared to work jointly (social capital) as the basis for sustainable development.
- * **The importance of partnership**—a common feature of the initiatives described in this book is partnerships between different sectors and stakeholders, from environmentalists and businessmen to farmers and community leaders. Joint action provides opportunity to identify priorities, mobilize resources, share risks and ensure benefits are shared by all sectors of the community.
- * **A key role for NGOs or civic associations**—local leaders acting on their own get frustrated and need to create NGO or civic organizations to organize cooperation with others, mobilize resources and build a constituency of support for rural sustainability. They have a key role to play in helping to generate, organize and exchange ideas and experience that give local leaders, be it from government, business or the community, to cooperate with one another as partners. The absence of the NGO sector as an active partner can mean slower progress towards rural sustainability because outreach to the wider community and emphasis on joints action is neglected.
- * **A key role for the public sector**—in all the cases described, local governments and other public agencies, such as national parks, have played an important role in generating initiatives and projects. In some cases, this was because NGOs or other types of civic groups simply did not exist or were too weak or ill-prepared to play a constructive role. In other cases, public agencies were able to counterbalance or otherwise temper strong or well-established NGOs intent on pursuing a single concern. The absence of the public sector as an active partner slows down progress towards rural sustainability, as it is local government that has ultimate responsibility for land use and economic planning.

- * **Small initiatives can make a big difference**—Local initiatives will have little impact if they are fragmented and isolated from one another. The model regions suggest that individual projects and initiatives can be powerful, if they are integrated into a vision that is common and shared by all sectors of the community. Mobilizing local initiative and resources leads to local ownership. Local initiatives can achieve greater and more sustainable change because they are by definition oriented to meeting local needs and responding to local circumstances.
- * **Local leadership and responsibility**—Small, but tangible initiatives and projects, which make a real difference in a local community help generate new local leaders and build a sense of sharing in the responsibility, costs and benefits of making a difference. Local project organizers very quickly transform into local leaders.
- * **Concern for heritage**—the natural and cultural heritage of an area is too often taken for granted by local people. Local initiatives and projects, which focus on the importance of local history, traditions and places, are crucial to building local pride and self-confidence. Such projects also draw attention to the economic value of environmental quality and so generate an impetus for protecting local heritage.

Is it possible to encourage, replicate and scale-up initiatives and projects of the kind described in this book to bring about speedier change towards rural sustainability?

Whereas the initiatives documented here are all by their very nature home-grown, they have profited from various kinds of external support. They have been successful because the demand for external support has been driven by local needs, opportunities and circumstances as articulated by local leaders rather than external experts. Networking and training opportunities have helped develop visions, share ideas and know how, and develop necessary skills. Practical support, including technical assistance and small grants, have helped enable and nurture, without smothering, local initiative and ownership. Adopting this type of approach provides ongoing opportunities for replicating, scaling up and making available relevant experience.

Lessons for policy-makers

Experience with generating rural livelihoods in Central Europe suggests that the most important thing is to focus on quality of life issues for the large number of people living in rural areas. It is well to remember that rural areas populated by more than 180 million residents will make up over 80% of the land area of the enlarged European Union.

Industrial farming is frequently proposed as a response to rural poverty, yet experience from Western Europe and North America suggests that this business-as-usual approach does not lead to revitalization of rural economies and fails to secure environmental services, such as soil quality maintenance, protection of genetic resources, intercepting precipitation, flood control and mediating water quality. Too often, rural poverty is disguised and displaced as farmers and other rural residents are driven off the land to add to the social stresses of urban areas. For this reason, achieving rural sustainability requires not only preserving biodiversity but also development of rural communities and the economies that sustain them.

The existing multi-functional role of agriculture as part of the cultural landscapes of Central Europe needs to be acknowledged, protected and used as a resource for learning how to achieve the transition to rural sustainability.

Rural sustainability is threatened by extension to accession countries of an unreformed EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with its emphasis on direct subsidies for agricultural production (Pillar 1) rather than financial support for rural infrastructure and development (Pillar 2). The current CAP maintains the dependence on subsidies required by industrial farming, which drives unsustainable development patterns in rural areas. This is because the industrial farming model leads to negative environmental impacts, especially biodiversity, soil and water quality, and social impacts, especially inequalities in income, education and the provisioning of social services. The CAP in its current form is destroying opportunities for the development of multi-functional agriculture in the new EU countries.

The experiences with rural livelihoods described in this book clearly show that it does not have to be like this. Central Europe brings to the European Union both a real alternative and invaluable resource for learning about rural sustainability.

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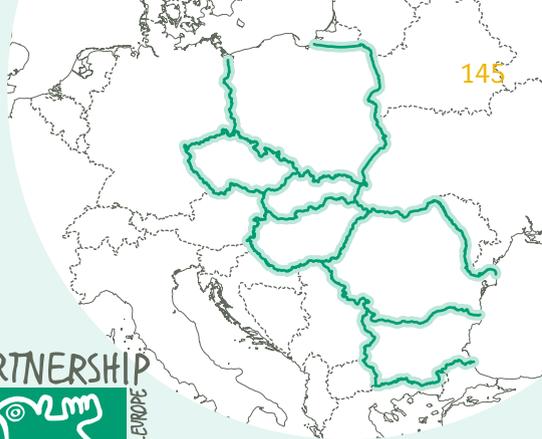
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The Environmental Partnership for Central Europe foundations



The Environmental Partnership for Central Europe is a consortium of six foundations in the **Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania** and from October 2003 **Bulgaria** that are focused on fostering community-based environmental action and citizen participation in Central Europe. Since their establishment in 1991, the Environmental Partnership foundations have invested over 26 million USD from more than 60 donors in grants and programs, over 14 million USD granted to more than 5,000 individual projects and have been a most significant private source of funding and technical assistance for community-based environmental initiatives in the region.

Partnership

The word “partnership” describes the role that the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe plays in building bridges of cooperation between people and organizations and across sectors to build civil societies and sustainable communities in Central Europe. Using a flexible mixture of small grants, technical assistance, networking and training activities and special programs, the Environmental Partnership foundations empower individuals, organizations, and communities to participate actively in environmental decision-making. At the same time, they initiate cooperation among the private, public and non-profit sectors for environmental problem solving as a basis for economic and social development.

Action

Over the past decade, the Environmental Partnership foundations have built a reputation among both domestic and international organizations for providing timely, flexible practical and non-bureaucratic financial and technical support for local environmental action at the local or community level. Their active approach to grant making, emphasis on small-scale assistance and guiding philosophy of partnership have served as models for other organizations, such as the Regional Environmental Centre and the Global Environmental Facility. The Environmental Partnership foundations work with a broad range of partners from the public and private sectors.

Results

Over more than a decade the Environmental Partnership foundations **have supported over 5,000 projects** which have enabled local leaders and community based NDOs to:

- * **protect over 160 endangered species of flora and fauna**
- * **plant more than 1,000,000 trees**
- * **insulate more than 1,000 homes, schools, and other public buildings**
- * **create over 5,000 km of cycling paths and nature trails**
- * **employ 5,000 people (FT, PT, for the space of a year)**
- * **mobilize and involve over 1,000,000 volunteers**

The Environmental Partnership continues to mobilise financial and technical support for practical action for sustainable development at the local or grassroots level. You can find out more on www.epce-consortium.org.

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Model projects for environmental sustainability in Central Europe (2001–2003)

A partnership project of the
Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU),
The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF-US)
and the Environmental Partnership for Central Europe (EPCE)



Rural economies in the four Central European countries of Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have largely experienced stagnation as wide-ranging market and democratic reforms have been introduced over the past decade. Some communities have nonetheless succeeded in demonstrating that locally-initiated environmental projects can generate new economic opportunity, address social problems and conserve heritage resources. But relevant experience with grassroots environmental projects is unrecorded and scattered across Central Europe.

The two-year 'Rural Livelihoods' project sought to bring together practical experience from successful local sustainable development projects in 12 rural micro-regions from Central Europe and 6 micro-regions from the German Neue Bundeslander. The participating micro-regions include: the Central White Carpathians, Frýdlandt and Slovácko (Czech Republic), the Lower Ipoly Valley, Boronka and Zselic (Hungary), the Kraków-Jura Bochnia, Central Pomerania around Debrzno and Babia Gora (Poland), Babia Hora, South Sitno and Ramža (Slovakia) and Lenzen, Ostritz, Reinstaedt, Retzow, Schoneiche and Zempow (Germany).

Model projects were identified and supported in four thematic areas: **1. sustainable agriculture**, such as maintaining local fruit varieties through food processing and marketing; **2. sustainable tourism**, such as engaging local people in heritage interpretation, trail maintenance and providing accommodation; **3. energy saving**, such as using rural schools as demonstration sites for learning about cost-saving solutions; **4. renewable energy**, such as bio-fuels for transportation and heating.

Community leaders from each of the micro-regions identified model projects, learned from the experience of others and provided expertise, inspiration and support to one another through seminars, study tours, exchanges and other types of events. In a period of just over two years:

- **160** rural communities benefited directly from the program;
- **513** people were involved in program delivery, with a further **1158** involved in technical assistance and exchanges;
- **159** small grants were awarded to support model projects with a total value of **822,805 €**. Grants averaged **5,174 €**.
- **361** partners were involved directly, including businesses, community groups, educational institutions, local government and national government agencies;
- **144** workshops and seminars were organized;
- **44** study trips and exchanges took place;
- **56** international meetings and events;
- **31** jobs were generated as a direct result of the program.

Core financial support for Rural Livelihoods was provided through a grant award of **409,000 €** from the **Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU)**, which enabled the **German Marshall Fund of the United States** and the **Environmental Partnership for Central Europe** generate an additional **1,100,000 €** giving the total project investment a value of **1,500,000 €**.

In coming years, the Rural Livelihoods network will help ensure European Union rural reforms focus also on the new opportunities for rural sustainability offered by local initiatives in Central Europe.