

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL REVITALIZATION OF RURAL LOCALITIES - AN ESSENTIAL CHALLENGE OF THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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### Abstract

The Central and Eastern European countries have been in transition for almost three decades from the centralized economy to a free market economy. This period has produced profound, positive and negative transformations in all aspects of socio-economic and cultural life in these countries.

In this context, the EU Agropuzzle 3 and Beekeeping projects have set out to identify in the partner countries of these projects (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania) business ideas, implemented or under implementation, which can be taken as successful examples for the socio-economic and cultural revitalization of localities and rural communities. In this regard, the paper presents examples of vegetal and animal production farms and agricultural processing enterprises as economic support of localities and rural communities, as well as agro-tourism and entertainment units with economic effects but also for valorisation local, historical and cultural traditions.

Emphasis is placed on the essential role of local government and educational institutions in the formation of the entrepreneurial spirit of the rural population in order to develop new business ideas.

**Key words:** business ideas, rural development, agriculture production, agritourism, economic efficiency

Encouraging the development of rural entrepreneurship can help increase productivity in rural areas and, on this basis, increase the living standards of rural residents.

Petrick and Weingarten stated in 2004 that the European model of agriculture can be understood as an attempt to strike a balance between efficiency and agricultural structures that are sufficiently profitable, the achievement of certain standards concerning product quality and the environment, the incorporation of agriculture into rural society, and simple and transparent administrative policy.

Sarris, Savastano and Tritten begin with an investigation into the assumption that the productivity of farm sizes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is reversed, as suggested by empirical activity in different developing countries (Berry, Cline, 1979). Based on the data presented, they test the inverse relationship between farm size and production per hectare for some CEE countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic). The authors are still analyzing whether there are credit market imperfections and whether they operate in a differentiated way between farms of different sizes. Empirical results support the hypothesis that there are indeed financial constraints among farmers in CEE countries and that these

constraints appear to work more closely for smaller farmers. Another finding is that capital and labor prices are related to the size of the farm in a way that suggests a form of polarization. During the transition, poverty has become a serious problem for many people in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in rural areas. In particular, former state agricultural workers were disadvantaged during the transition, transforming into one of the major losers of market reforms (Milczarek, 2002).

In this context, the EU Agropuzzle 3 and Beekeeping projects have set out to identify in the partner countries of these projects (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania) business ideas, implemented or under implementation, which can be taken as examples for the socio-economic and cultural revitalization of localities and rural communities.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Agropuzzle 3 and Beekeeping projects are Erasmus Plus (KA2) projects, which aimed at developing, updating and completing the specific skills and training profile for sustainable agriculture and agribusiness for participating students and teachers in order to promote the transfer of knowledge to all actors involved in

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agricultural production and development of rural communities.

The projects runs between 2016 and 2019 and has been coordinated by the Masaryk Technical School in Opava and Natura Opava (Czech Republic), as partners, the Rural Development Association - RUDE and the Azores Sustainable Development Association (Portugal); USAMV Bucharest - Faculty of Agriculture (Romania); Agricultural Chamber of Opole (Poland); "Angel Kanchev" University of Ruse (Bulgaria), Rural Development Association of the Pyrenees (Spain); The Secondary Trade School of Agriculture & Services on the country in Žilina (Slovakia).

These projects prepare relevant conditions and encourages individuals in the field of agribusiness and beekeeping farming. Also, targets the exchange of experiences as well as the increase of practical self-confidence, promotion of professional development and growth of the participants who will work together on issues such as farming, support of rural environments, agro-business in selected small family farms, their stories and background. It is expected to identify examples of good practice for all participating countries as serve as source of inspiration for people in different regions, as well as local or regional communities of seven partner organizations.

The spectre of partners is stacked in such way that the organizations mutually discuss and inspire each other; there are representatives of educational institutions (e.g. theoretical organizations) as well as representatives of professional organizations (e.g. those from open practice area). This project can perfectly gather the interdisciplinary knowledge and experience of the participants to the profit of the partner organizations and their entire local communities.

An 2015-2018, a team of students and professors of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, were the beneficiaries of education and training courses within the framework of visits to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. During these mobility was highlighted contribution of small farmers and family farms to food security, rural development, development of new jobs and management of natural resources and also an opportunity to encourage research and to support protection measures cultural heritage and the environment and maintaining biodiversity (Toader, Roman, 2016).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

**Current status.** Agricultural production provides us with our daily bread. It is really necessary to appreciate everyone who nowadays deals with real work that feeds all of us. It is really necessary to teach the next generation to

follow those principles. The next generation should be given the opportunity to learn about new trends and innovations from other EU countries so that the young people can compare these aspects and use the experience as inspiration for their own work. Another goal is about linking the know-how of partners from the EU countries, the professional diversity and specificity of individual countries, exchange of experience, possibility to compare the level of supporting the agriculture and farming, working conditions and marketing strategy.

According to FAO data, for the period 1990-2016, global agricultural output in households of all categories (agricultural enterprises, peasant farms and households) increased for all studied countries (Figure 1).

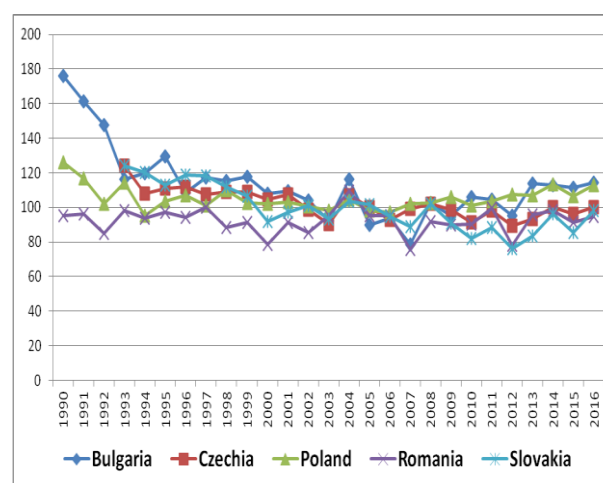


Figure 1 Agricultural Production Index 1990-2016 (FAO statistis, 2018)

The number of persons working in agriculture and the labor force in rural areas are shown in Table 1. It can be seen that in Slovakia, for the year 2014, there were registered 82.6 thousand persons, which accounted for 58.6% as the labor force in agriculture, and in Romania over 2.4 million people were registered, accounting for 53.9%.

Table 1  
Number of people working in agriculture and labor force in rural areas in 2014 (FAO statistis, 2018)

Countries	Employment in agriculture, 1000 persons	Labour force participation rate, rural areas (%)
Bulgaria	208.9	45.0
Czech Republic	136.7	59.1
Poland	1819.5	55.8
Romania	2441.9	53.9
Slovakia	82.6	58.6

**Experience in Bulgaria. Buffalo farm - village Tserovets.**

The project mobility start by visiting the local regional buffalo farm



in the nearby village Tserovets. The owner of the farm -Galina Stoyanova Peinova breeds - 30 buffalo of the breed "Bulgarian mura". Buffalo have primarily been bred for milk production; secondary product is buffalo meat or also sales of breeding bodies. Mrs. Peinova sales the milk for processing to cheese and yogurt to the local dairy. Also, the farm has a contract with a dairy. By the time of sale the milk is collected in a 400 liter milk bath. It is bussiness family, and work 3 persons in this farm.

On other objective was *Beekeeper "Plamen Minev"-Brestovica*. The farm was created by the great grandfather the beekeeper in the early 20th century. Each generation has increased the number of bee families to reach the current 650 bee families. In



2017, a modern manufactured was set up to make primary processing and storage of honey and pollen. The bee families are located in 3 beeches in the

land of the village of Brestovitsa. Bee honey, wax and pollen are produced in the beekeeping farm. The farm is of a family type and benefits only to one hired worker. The beekeeping farm is certified for organic production of Lakon. The output is realized through companies that buy organic honey at wholesale.

**Experience in Czech Republic. Mini-brewery "U Komárků".**

An important point of visit in Czech Republic was mini-brewery "U Komárků". This company produces brew beer using traditional non-pasteurized method; it means beer retains all the vitamins B as well as other healthy substances. The beer produced is being sold by its own restaurant, along with other traditional foods. This unit has been baking specialties of own kitchen since 2001, using a special oven (on beech wood only); this oven is called Golem. This is the unique design of the three-chamber oven fitted with two



separate outlets into the chimney. The system is protected by the Czech Patent Office as a utility model. It was not easy to build the oven. It was very difficult to find a oven man who could be able to meet these requirements to make the oven fully functional. It has found such a man in Slovakia. It is interesting that the whole project of the oven is drawn up on the wall already built; the oven man let only his feelings to lead him. And he was very skilled - as we found out later. He comes from the third generation of professional oven men.

*Beekeeping farms Lukáš Matela*. This is a organic beekeeper who organizes summer camps of Langstroth beekeeping, sells homemade honey and produces other supplementary honey products as mead or honey wine. Together with his father take care of 100 bee colonies. To control varroa uses only oxalic acid. Lukáš Matela has been publishing articles about beekeeping in the Czech beekeeping magazine "Modern Beekeeper".



*Beekeeping Educational Complex in Chlebovice*. The complex includ a beekeeping museum, educational garden of beekeeping plants, educational apiary and apiary shop. Visitors have the opportunity to learn not only in beekeeping but also in history and the environment. Group tours also use video projections about bee life, bee lectures, apiculture and bee products, demonstration of candle production and honey. The complex organize for all those interested an education program of apiculture: *Beekeeping in theory and practice, learning how to connect humans with nature, competitions and games, stays*. For children is organised the courses *Introductory in beekeeping, durring of summer*. Children can be housed in



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the center during the educational program. The center receives community money and works on a voluntary basis.

**Experience in Poland.** *Family farm Martin Luks.* The farm of Martin Luks has 27 ha in which he cultivate in organic farming different crops: spelt, rye, buckwheat, rape, beans and vegetables such as carrot, onion, cabbage, garlic, roots, radish, etc. Also, he has around 45 families of bees in conventional system. It is a family business managed by Martin Luks and his wife. The two children are not directly involved in agriculture activities. They are students and maybe they'll join the work in farm. The farmers have graduated the agricultural school and the daughter is a PhD student in Biology. For organic production receive 10% like subsidy from local administration for certification of products. For crops are used only seeds from own production. To develop the apiculture activity the farmer use own bees family. By the moment he is not involved in organic association farmers but intend in the future. The vegetables and crops are exported to Czech Republic, Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands directly to customers. The honey is selling only for local market. The farm is not connected directly with agritourism and restaurants activities. The farmer use the old varieties of crops for organic productions because is not picky about soil and climate conditions and resistant at pest and disease. Also, he cultivate meliferous crops such as facelia, rape and buckwheat for bees family. For health of bees the farmer use only non-toxic smog. The high quality of honey is proved by the certificate of quality given by a special laboratory.



*Agriculture Chamber of Opole and Secondary*

*Agriculture School in Komorno.*

The Agriculture Chamber of Opole province is a self-government unit of the agricultural local authority acting for the problem solving and is representing businesses of entities which are united in this chamber. The chamber is acting for



the farming, influences the forming of agricultural policies and participates in the environmental protection, the culture, the sightseeing and reserving the cultural heritage of rural areas. Activities of the chamber are connected with large-scale support to the agricultural environment by coordinating joint actions in the area of the farming, with supporting initiatives and creating the image of a modern farmer, and also supporting the agricultural education in the province. In this sense, the Chamber has a good colaboration with the Secondary Agriculture School from Komorno, for education of farmers and also for organise vocational training course to young people to want become the farmer. Others activities of this institution are: supervising the operations for the agricultural market; taking action to improve the quality of crops and agricultural production; developing cooperation with foreign organizations of agricultural producers; to cooperate with the public service in the field of environmental protection, national health and national cultural heritage; consultation of the activities of agricultural farms and organizations associated with the agricultural sector, including agricultural schools.

**Experience in Romania.** *Beekeeping Research and Development Institute in Tulcea.*

The institute is an economic research and production

organization in the apiculture field belonging to the Romanian Beekeepers Association.



Romanian Beekeepers Association (ACAR) is a professional organization of beekeepers, nongovernmental, autonomous and apolitical organization founded in 1958 by Professor's Veceslav Harnaj and his colaborators. The Romanian Beekeepers Association is the largest national association, its network covering the entire country. Romanian Beekeepers Association has branches and shops and economic units in each of Romanian counties "APICOLA", being located in the major cities of Romania.

The Institute organize specialized courses for beginners and professional beekeepers, also carrying out extension activities, provide modern technology as well as technical assistance in beekeeping.

*Happy vegetables Farm.* The farm was founded in



2007 and holds 6 ha in the county of Târtășești, Dâmbovița County. It is certified by Ecocert's inspection and certification body.

The farm produces various vegetables, herbs, ingredients for salads, jams, juices, syrups, teas and spices, produced by traditional methods, medicinal plants, seedlings and seeds.

The family is working on the farm and 5-6 seasonal workers in the commune. The harvested products are sold the same day, keeping their freshness. The farm sells its products at farm gate, on the internet, on the market, fairs and exhibitions. Orders are made on the Internet or by phone, or there is the possibility to even collect the products directly from the garden.

*Rawboost Smart Food Srl.* The unit is a family-owned company with organic products, located in Târgoviște, Dâmbovița County.



It was established in 2006 and is certified by the Certrom inspection and certification body. The company has nutritional supplements, detoxification products, vegetal proteins in its portfolio, creating its own recipes for a healthy lifestyle. These products are sold online or found on the shelves of some shops or supermarkets. The turnover for the year 2016 was over 270 thousand lei. Owners aim to restructure the lifestyle of their living habits by adapting local natural ingredients to the latest scientific findings on nutrition.

*Merry Berry Organic Farm.* Located in Mija village, I.L. Caragiale, Dâmbovița County, the MerryBerry farm has entered the conversion period to organic farming in 2017. It is certified by the Certrom inspection and certification body. It currently owns 100 ha of blueberries, which make this farm the largest plantation in Romania. Until 2019, they want to increase their surface by cultivating another 100 ha. The farm was set up by accessing European funds, both for the implementation of the irrigation system, but also for the establishment of the plantation. Three young horticulture engineers work on the farm, and seasonal workers come from the villages adjacent to the farm. As a perspective, the farm wants to set up a plantation



of about 50 ha with raspberries and also build a fruit storage space.

*Rasnov City Hall.* The development strategy of the Rasnov City Hall is focused on improving the lives of its inhabitants: modernizing and expanding the communication ways, providing the best infrastructure and, last but not least, promoting the town at national and international level. For this, City Hall considers it a duty and the highlight of some extremely important values for the image of a community and not only. Also, the City Hall promote true history, multiculturalism of places, but also finding ways to respect the tourist's right to fun. Thus, tourism becomes an investment area that the City Hall places in the highest priority area. Even in the vicinity of a commercial myth, Dracula, Râșnov wants to offer its citizens something else. A unique story where romantic legends with knights and princesses are reconstituted in the medieval fortress, the music of history heard in the churches of the city, "clean air, quiet, good food", as read on the back of a postcard sent from Râșnov 1925.

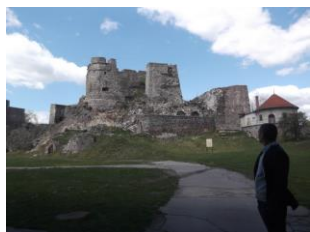
Inspired by the old emblem of the town Râșnov-Rosenau, it wants to become



the "Roza of national tourism". Also, the City Hall development projects with internal and external financing include: improving the urban environment and preserving, protecting and sustainable valorisation of cultural heritage, preserving and protecting, promoting and developing the natural and cultural heritage; increasing the contribution of the Rasnov Citadel to the economic development of Rasnov and Brasov in general by attracting an increased number of visitors with an annual rate of 7%; capitalizing on Rasnov Citadel by asserting and presenting historical and cultural significance, using specific cultural marketing strategies and tools. The objectives resulted from this visit: the importance of decision-makers in the development and promotion of existing resources and local traditions, permanent concern for initiating new business ideas for small entrepreneurs, as well as a permanent connection with the rural community and the civil society in the area; encouraging the development of local entrepreneurship that can help increase productivity and, on this basis, increase the

standard of living of the inhabitants of the visited areas; capitalizing on existing opportunities in the area that can increase profits for economic activities.

**Experience in Slovakia.** *Levice – history and nowadays.* Levice is located in eastern part of Danubian Lowland with a population of 35000 and an area of 6100 ha. The first written evidence of the city existence dates from 1156. Ladislav Bielik is one of the most famous personalities from Levice through his photos taken during the Warsaw Pact invasion in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The historic center was restored using EU funding. European funds are used for reconstruction of the historical center, to create an industrial park area and restored many educational and cultural buildings. For the next years EU funding will go in infrastructure. The Levice district, part of the Nitra region, and it also administers the largest agro area in the country. Around 5% of the population works in agriculture.



## CONCLUSIONS

The Central and Eastern European countries have been in transition for almost three decades from a centralized economy to a free market economy, and this process has produced profound transformations, positive and negative, in all aspects of socio-economic and cultural life of these countries.

In this context, the “Agropuzzle 3” and “Beekeeping” EU projects have set out to identify in the partner countries of these projects (Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania) business ideas, implemented or under implementation, which can be taken as successful examples for the socio-economic and cultural revitalization of localities and rural communities.

In this regard, the paper presents examples of vegetal and animal production farms, and enterprises for processing the agricultural products, as well as agrotourism units with economic effects, but also designed to exploit the historical and cultural traditions at zonal and local level.

Emphasis is placed on the essential role of local government and educational institutions in the formation of the entrepreneurial spirit of the rural population in order to develop new business ideas.

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