

# NGOs' contribution to the implementation of sustainable tourism in Southern Transylvania, Romania

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## ABSTRACT

The present research investigates the contribution of NGOs to the implementation of sustainable tourism in Romania. We argue that in Romania's post-communist rural context, NGOs and their networking activities are crucial to mobilizing community cooperation and participation in rural development projects. The study focuses on the activity of one NGO successfully implementing community-based tourism in Southern Transylvania and reveals the range of non-economic benefits provided, such as community empowerment and capacity building (skills, partnerships, networks, participatory processes), which are expected to enable community self-governance over the long term. The paper identifies the strengths of the NGO's development strategy and considers its potential for broader implementation.

**Key words:** sustainable tourism, community-based tourism (CBT), Saxon heritage, NGOs, networking, community empowerment, capacity building, community participation, Southern Transylvania, Romania.

## I. Conceptual framework

In recent decades, sustainable tourism has emerged as the dominant paradigm in tourism development.

As defined by UNWTO, sustainable tourism is "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". As such, sustainable tourism development should "meet the needs of present tourists and host regions, while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future" (UNWTO 2018).

Tourism sustainability principles refer to the triple bottom line (TBL) framework of economic, environmental and social sustainability; a suitable balance between these three dimensions guarantees long-term sustainability (Stoddard et al 2012).

Sustainable tourism development strategies emphasize the importance of community-based, or collaborative, tourism planning, development and control, so that priority is given to the developmental needs and interests of local communities (Butler 1999, Wearing and al 2005). "Sustainable tourism should start with the needs, concerns and welfare of rural communities" (Strezelecka et al 2017) and should result in direct socio-economic benefits for host communities

(Sharpley 2000).

Implementation of community-based tourism (CBT) requires a multi-stakeholder approach, based on the consensus, participation and collaboration of 3 interdependent decision-making groups: the business sector, local administration and residents, in the planning and management of the local tourism product, for shared benefits (Selin 1999, Jamal, Getz 1995, Graci 2013, Waligo et al 2013) and it involves networking among various stakeholders at different levels.

Many rural communities however, face limitations in the implementation of community-based tourism, arising from the citizens' lack of experience, entrepreneurial skills, knowhow, or their unfamiliarity with participatory decision-making processes. This is the case with the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, such as Romania, with limited experience of democratic, participatory decision-making, where "community participation is constrained by the legacy of top-down collectivized organizations" (Hall 2000) and the culture of mistrust, political disinterest, lack of participation and skepticism towards cooperative projects still lingers (Jafari 2008, Mikulcak et al 2013).

This is where organizations such as NGOs are called to play a vital role in building consensus, identifying common goals and providing a community development vision, mobilizing communities and promoting partnerships and cooperation for successful implementation of development

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projects.

Relying on extensive local and external cooperation networks “NGOs have emerged in the last decade as one of the main advocates and implementers of sustainable tourism/ecotourism” (Wearing et al 2005). They are able to bridge the gaps between various institutional levels, to mediate public-private sector interactions, to initiate cross-sectoral partnerships, to mobilize stakeholders and implement participatory approaches for sustainable tourism projects (Jamal, Getz 1995, Graci 2013). In the post-communist context of Eastern Europe, NGOs provide expertise, guidance, training and successfully lobby for much needed financial support (Jordan et al 2016).

## II. Aims of present research

Rural tourism based on traditional rural landscapes and cultural heritage has been identified as a major growth area in Romania and farm-based tourism, as an element of agrarian pluri-activity, is expected to help raise incomes, stabilize populations and sustain local traditions (Hall 2000). Experts estimate that rural tourism has the potential of becoming the main driving force of rural socio-economic restructuring and it appears to be the only realistic economic opportunity for some rural communities (Jordan et al 2016); furthermore, as a diversification strategy used to achieve independence from subsistence agriculture, rural tourism is expected to contribute to the revitalization of the rural periphery (M Strezelecka et al 2017).

The present research, based on a relevant case study, aims to demonstrate the crucial contribution of NGOs to the implementation of sustainable tourism in Romania. We argue that especially in Romania’s post-communist rural context, the involvement of NGOs and their networking activities is vital in assisting communities overcome various limitations and in mobilizing community cooperation and participation in development projects such as rural tourism implementation.

In post-communist Romania there are a number of NGOs implementing sustainable tourism. The major ones, active at a national scale, are The Romanian Association of Ecotourism (AER), the main organization promoting ecotourism in Romania and The National Association of Rural and Eco- and Cultural Tourism (ANTREC) promoting rural tourism and being instrumental in the creation of the rural guesthouse network (Roberts, Simpson 1999). Such NGOs provide the wider framework and guidelines of

sustainable tourism.

The present study however, focuses on the activity of one local NGO directly implementing community-based tourism compatible with environmental conservation in the rural communities of Southern Transylvania.

The study aims to analyze the NGO’s integrated development strategy and the synergy of its activities. It focuses on the range of non-economic benefits provided by NGOs, mainly community empowerment, and “capacity building for synergistic collective action” (Hall 2000) (building skills, partnerships, networks, participatory processes), which help improve the communities’ socio-economic environment and allow wider community participation in tourism planning and management and enhance the capacity for self-governance over the long term.

The study investigates the NGO’s networking activities both within the community (“bonding”) and outside of the community (“bridging”) and clarifies the vital role such networks play in assisting communities accomplish their development goals.

Lastly, amid controversy regarding the contested role of NGOs in the implementation of sustainable tourism, the present study aims to identify the main factors explaining the success of the strategy, and to explore the potential for implementation in other rural communities.

## III. Research Methodology

This is an empirical study, based on the qualitative research method, combining field survey (participant observation, interviews) with data from secondary sources.

In the preliminary stage we consulted secondary sources, such as research on sustainable tourism and on NGOs activities for the implementation of community tourism. Regarding the chosen area, we collected national, regional and local statistics, and consulted local NGOs’ websites and relevant information available in the national and international media.

The field survey was carried out in August-September 2014. Data regarding the local context and tourism trends were collected using the participant observation method. First, we visited the entire area of Saxon villages, participated in local events, used local tourist facilities (local guesthouse, shops, restaurants) and talked with locals involved in the tourism industry and with tourists. We were thus able to assess the area’s tourism potential (the natural and cultural

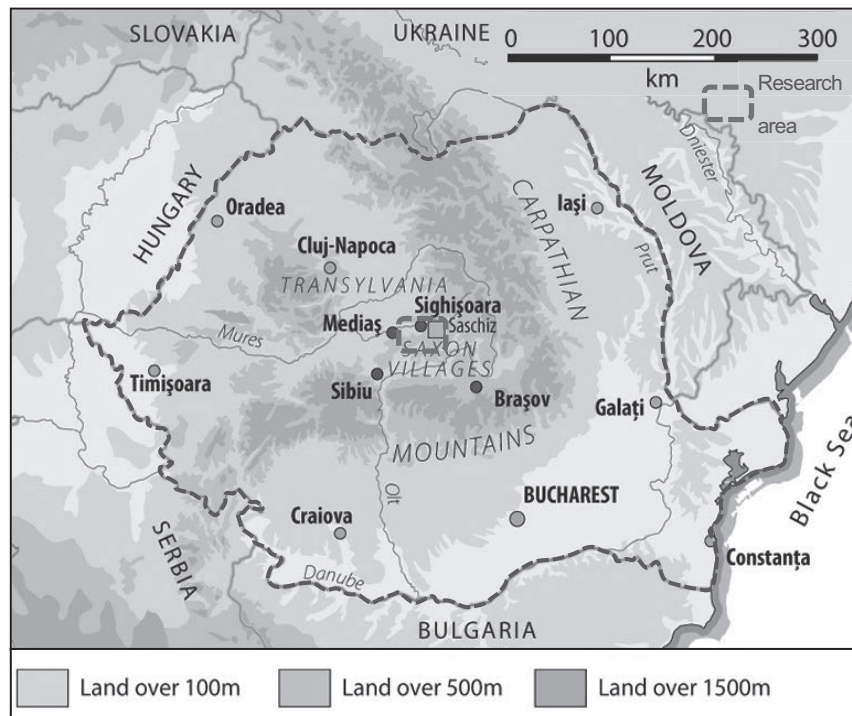


Fig. 1: Romania, Transylvania and location of research area

(Source: ADEPT Foundation, modified by authors)

<https://fundatia-adept.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Map-Tarnava-mare-Romania.png>

tourist resources), tourist flows and to identify the main types of tourism practiced and the typology of visitors.

The main set of data were collected during the survey and semi-structured interviews with NGO leaders and staff and other key informants such as the mayors, Local Action Group (GAL) staff, guesthouse managers, members of the Tourism Association, entrepreneurs/local business owners, farmers, members of the local women's association, other local citizens. During the post-survey stage, additional data were requested from key informants and updated information available on the web (SNS, Tripadvisor) were collected to further clarify some aspects. Data processing and analysis resulted in a model of the NGO's networking pattern and synergetic activities, demonstrating the vital contribution such organizations play in the implementation of sustainable tourism and in the long-term socio-economic sustainability of local communities.

#### IV. Case study

##### 4.1 Southern Transylvania context

Southern Transylvania, more specifically the Tarnava Mare area is located in central Romania, approximately 300 km north from Bucharest, with easy access on the major European Highway E60 and the Railway 300 (both direct

links to Western Europe); the closest cities are Brasov, Sibiu, Medias and Sighisoara, a World Heritage site and well-known international tourism destination (see Figure 1).

Tarnava Mare area is a hilly plateau (300-600 m) spanning 85,000 ha. It is an area of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural traditions, inhabited in the past mainly by the Saxons (a population of German ethnicity settled in the area in the 12-13th centuries) and Romanian and Hungarian minorities, organized in traditional, self-sufficient rural communities (Fundatia ADEPT Transilvania).

Over the centuries, these communities practicing extensive mixed farming and traditional forestry, have created original landscapes, where forests and cultivated fields alternate with grassland ecosystems rich in biodiversity.

At the end of WW2, major changes occurred following the transition to communism. Agriculture was restructured under the cooperative farming system, and most farmers had to commute to the city for factory jobs while continuing small-scale part-time farming. The massive exodus of the Saxons, which started at the end of WW2, continued especially during the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in population decline and major changes of the ethnic structure, with the inflow of Romanian and Roma (Gypsy) population.

Following the collapse of the communist system in 1989,



the farming sector has been reorganized, and after the land reform, small-scale family farms have been revived.

Nowadays, the area is home to 24 traditional farming communities with approx. 5000 families (~27,000 people) (ADEPT website), administratively organized in 8 rural communes\*<sup>1</sup>. Mixed subsistence farming remains the backbone of the local economy, with most households dependent on small-scale, traditional (semi)subsistence crop- and livestock farming. Population aging and decline, low farming incomes and the lack of non-farming jobs, combined with deficient rural infrastructure and poor living standards are some of the common challenges faced by these communities.

In recent decades, there is widespread understanding that the continued management and conservation of traditional landscapes in the area depends to a large extent upon the socio-economic vitality of local communities. (Fundatia ADEPT 2014).

Since the early 2000s the region has been the focus of integrated community development projects implemented by local NGOs with EU financial support within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The CAP provides subsidies for sustainable farming, socio-economic diversification of rural communities (creation of small and medium enterprises SMEs in various sectors such as food processing, crafts, rural tourism), for human resources training (within the Leader program), as well as for infrastructure improvement (GAL Dealurile Tarnavelor website).

In this context, diversification of economic activities in non-farming sectors, especially rural tourism, capitalizing on local tourism resources, has been promoted for its potential



Fig. 2: Traditional rural landscape in Southern Transylvania (Source: ADEPT Foundation <https://fundatia-adept.org/ro/peisajele-cu-inalta-valoare-naturala/>)

to create alternative jobs, raise local incomes and improve rural living standards.

The Tarnava Mare area offers a diversity of tourism assets. The area's traditional rural landscapes, where patchworks of forests alternate with grasslands with a high density of rare flowering species, considered to be some of Europe's last surviving High Nature Value (HNV) farmed landscapes (similar to the Japanese Satoyama), are preserved since 2007 under EU's Natura 2000 designation (Fundatia ADEPT 2014) (see Figure 2). Meanwhile, the cultural Saxon heritage such as the fortified churches (among which 7 are designated UNESCO heritage sites since 1993, respectively 1999), traditional Saxon houses, the historical settlement pattern on the one hand and the rich rural traditions on the other, are the object of various conservation and revival projects implemented by local and international NGOs (Iorio, Corsale 2014 b) (see Figures 3, 4).

In spite of such potential, implementation of rural tourism has proved difficult, due to various local limitations. One of the main obstacles is the lack of skilled workforce, which remains one of the major complaints of local entrepreneurs.



Fig. 3: Typical Saxon village in Southern Transylvania: Saschiz (UNESCO heritage site since 1999)



Fig. 4: Saxon architectural heritage in Southern Transylvania: fortified churches (Source: <http://romaniatourism.com/saxon-heritage.html>)

This is explained by a combination of local factors such as the migration of young, educated people to the city or abroad on the one hand, and the low levels of education resulting in the lack of entrepreneurial skills, knowhow and experience on the other. The situation is compounded by the lack of capital and of networks within and outside the community, and deficient infrastructure (water, sewage, garbage disposal; education and health care facilities, public transportation, internet networks etc.).

#### 4.2 Foundation ADEPT Transylvania

The present study focuses on Foundation ADEPT Transylvania (ADEPT = Agriculture Development and Environmental Protection in Transylvania), an environmental NGO founded in 2004 with the initial mission of conservation of the area's high biodiversity semi-natural grasslands and traditional landscapes. As it became very soon obvious that biodiversity conservation depends on the continuation of traditional farming in the area, the NGO put forth a coherent, integrated strategy of sustainable rural development of local communities, "linking landscape conservation with incomes for local communities" (ADEPT website) and subsidized under various schemes within the framework of CAP.

The Foundation has a staff of 12 (ADEPT interview 2014), many of them locals, familiar with the area and committed to their mission over the long-term. Furthermore, they are an interdisciplinary team, covering various fields of expertise, from biology/ecology to tourism, farming, forestry, marketing and branding etc. The ADEPT Foundation implements local and regional pilot projects, the results of which have had a broader impact, used as inputs to improve national and EU level rural strategies.

ADEPT has been able to secure financing for projects from various sources: EU CAP subsidies (main source), sponsorships of trusts and charities and since 2007, a stable corporate sponsor (Orange Romania, the biggest broadband internet service provider in Romania). Their operational strategy relies on networking - "**bridging**" (Jamal, Getz 1995, Iorio, Corsale 2014 a, Graci 2013) with a wide range of international organizations, to share experiences, knowhow and to secure external financial and logistic support. The Foundation enjoys the continuing patronage of Charles, Prince of Wales, which brings increased attention and wider exposure in the international media.

On the other hand, networking at the local level - "**bonding**"

(Jamal, Getz 1995, Iorio, Corsale 2014 a), the foundation has been able to initiate partnerships between the public and private sector, entrepreneurs and citizens, to put the basis of fundamental institutions and associations which encourage wider community participation and contribute to a better business environment.

In the initial stages of ADEPT's activity, the focus has been on conservation projects, with research on local biodiversity, and suitable conservation measures. Support for traditional farming activities became a priority due to the direct link with biodiversity conservation. On the one hand, the foundation offers direct assistance to local farmers (advisory/consulting services to apply for funding under the agri-environmental schemes of the CAP). On the other hand, lobbying at national and European level, ADEPT was able to secure additional CAP subsidies for small farmers, which was a major victory and helped gain the trust of local farmers.

Over the past decade there has been a gradual shift in strategy, with more projects promoting diversification of economic activities into non-farming sectors compatible with biodiversity conservation (pilot projects in traditional food processing (see Fig. 10), crafts etc.).

Another major achievement has been the development of community-based rural tourism, capitalizing on the Saxon heritage of the region. Community-based tourism is guaranteed to bring direct benefits to local communities as it remains under local control; furthermore, it is compatible with the conservation of local heritage (natural environment, landscapes, built heritage, other cultural traditions).

The Foundation has been involved in planning and implementing tourism activities as follows:

1. Consulting with the communities to assess local needs and aspirations and to build consensus regarding a shared development vision, making sure that community needs remain central. The vision combines: 1. socio-economic diversification for better jobs, incomes and living standards, and for the socio-economic vitality of communities, 2. conservation of local heritage.
2. Setting goals, objectives: sustainable/community-based tourism was agreed upon as a major option of development, as it is compatible with conservation of local heritage and revenues are guaranteed to stay in the community.
3. Assessing natural and cultural tourism resources/potential and available human resources.
4. Adopting the **Tourism Strategy of the Sighisoara-**



**Tarnava Mare Natura 2000 site** (2016) which promotes the whole area as a single tourist destination and encourages partnerships among the 8 communities involved.

5. Lobbying, networking and fund raising.

6. Identifying suitable types of tourism, compatible with biodiversity conservation: rural tourism, heritage tourism, active tourism (cycling tourism, eco-tourism), food tourism; create a clear image of the area as a sustainable tourism destination.

7. Creating the institutional framework for cooperation: the Local Action Group (GAL), the Tarnava Mare Tourism Association, local Women's Association.

8. Promoting partnerships among various stakeholders: central government, local authorities, GAL, communities, private businesses, other NGOs active in the area.

9. Implementing projects for tourism infrastructure such as:  
a. setting up the Tourist Information Center (which acts as de facto DMO coordinating tourism activity in the whole area) (see Fig. 5);  
b. creating the long-distance walking and mountain bike trails network (>100 km) linking the 8 villages/communities (an awarded project) (see Fig. 6);  
c. setting up the tourism website [www.discovertamavamare.com](http://www.discovertamavamare.com), a one-stop solution for tourist information, booking etc.

10. Directly supporting entrepreneurs in tourism: a. assistance to apply for CAP subsidies; b. training programs: guesthouse management, food management, certified nature guides (40 young people), traditional crafts etc.; c. support with marketing, promotion, contacts/networking.

11. Marketing and PR activities: a. branding of the area as a sustainable tourism destination; b. original Tarnava Mare brand: an area of unspoiled nature and rural traditions, appealing to Western visitors; c. international networking: participation in national /international tourism fairs, contracts with foreign tour operators; d. PR in national and international media: TV programmes, documentaries; high-profile visits (Prince Charles); e. using SNS to promote the destination.

12. Preservation/ revival of local traditions: reviving local festivals (Haferland traditional Saxon culture festival (see Fig. 7), local fairs).

13. Organizing events: marathon & cycling competitions, races (see Fig. 6); Slow Food events: farmers' markets.

14. Implementing visitor surveys, to identify the tourist profiles, their interests/expectations, unmet needs; using the results as feedback to improve tourism products and target

marketing and branding.

15. Monitoring visitor numbers and behavior and implementing a visitor management strategy to avoid overcrowding and degradation of tourism resources.

The NGO's strategy has proved successful to some extent, and the result over the years has been a gradual increase in the number of local businesses offering various tourism services (guesthouses, restaurants, tours etc) (see Fig. 8, 9).



Fig. 5: Tourist Information Center in Saschiz

Photo by the authors (2014.9.6)



Fig. 6: Tourism infrastructure: cycling trails (Source: <http://www.discovertamavamare.org/top-activities/cycling/>)



Fig. 7: Saxon Traditional culture festival

(Source: <http://povestidecalatorie.ro/saptamana-haferland-cel-mai-mare-eveniment-dedicat-sasilor-din-romania/>)

Working in close association with other NGOs active in the

area (MET Mihai Eminescu Trust etc.), and with the help of some high-profile public figures (Prince of Wales), they have been instrumental in publicizing Transylvania as a sustainable destination, thus improving the region's image. As a result, Transylvania was chosen by Lonely Planet as the top region to visit in 2016 (Lonely Planet), based on visitor reviews.

With the area becoming better known, a continuous stream of foreign visitors mainly from Western and Central Europe, come to experience the “medieval atmosphere”, “the travel back in time to a rural Europe long disappeared from the West” (TripAdvisor); among them, Saxon families originally from the area periodically come to visit their ancestors' lands; in recent years there are more domestic visitors. The village of Viscri, for example, which has one of the best preserved fortified churches (UNESCO heritage) and where the Prince of Wales owns a summer house, has seen a rapid increase in the number of visitors, from approx. 400 in 2000, to more than 34,000 in 2017 (Iorio, Corsale 2014 a, MET oral communication).

Based on the area's various natural and cultural tourism resources, the tourism offer is diverse (Sasaki, Takatori 2016). Rural guesthouses offer traditional hospitality, where visitors enjoy local traditional lifestyles; locally-produced food is a big attraction. Visitors can experience various crafts, take cooking classes, enjoy horse riding, try their hand at milking the cows, make cheese, collect honey or make traditional alcohol, help with the fruit harvest, or make traditional jams and preserves. The Slow Food movement is promoted in the area and there are seasonal fairs offering traditional food products. (see Fig. 9)

Eco-tourism and active tourism are other attractive offers: hiking or cycling in the hills, botanical and entomological tours with qualified guides; participation in events like the marathon and bicycle races which attract competitors from all over the world. Visitors enjoy accommodation at local guesthouses, local food and genuine contact with local people.

Heritage tourism is increasingly popular with Romanian visitors on tour to the major UNESCO sites and other cultural landmarks of the region. Reviving local festivals like Haferland, the festival of Saxon traditional culture has helped attract Saxon families in search of their roots (“nostalgic” tourism).

Despite best local efforts to promote sustainable tourism in the area, major challenges persist. Paradoxically, one of the problems is the easy access by motorcar and the relative

proximity to urban destinations in the area, such as Sighisoara, a UNESCO heritage site, which offer various types of accommodation and attractive programs.

As a result, a large proportion of tourism activity is transit tourism, with visitors arriving on organized bus tours or by car, for very brief visits, usually a few hours to half-day. Most visitors stop at the Tourist Information Center, visit the UNESCO fortified churches and might stop for a meal, but they do not spend much time or money in the area. Fewer visitors come for longer stays, mainly foreigners, either as independent travelers or on arranged small-scale tours (Sasaki, Takatori 2015).

This remains a major challenge, so that ADEPT Foundation, local authorities and the Tourism Association are exploring means to attract more visitors and encourage them to spend more time (and money) in the region. Diversification of the tourism offer, as well as improved branding and marketing of the destination both nationally and abroad are some of the solutions suggested.



Fig. 8: Guesthouse in Saschiz in a refurbished traditional Saxon house (Source:

<http://www.discovertamavamare.org/staying/bed-breakfast/pension-cartref/>)



Fig. 9: Locally produced traditional food offered by the guesthouse (Photo by the authors, 2014.9.4)



## V. Discussion and conclusions

In recent years, the role of NGOs in the implementation of community-based tourism projects has been contested. From developing countries there is research reporting NGOs failures, due to their lack of expertise, failure to raise needed financial support, or the failure to communicate with authorities or with the local citizens and gain cooperation for the projects (Finnetti 2001, Segrado, Farmer 2006); another demerit mentioned is the excessive dependence of some communities on NGOs' activities and their incapacity to self-govern (Butcher 2005).

Foundation ADEPT has managed to avoid all these traps. It has developed organically, and has seen a gradual evolution/expansion from the initial biodiversity conservation focus towards a comprehensive vision of integrated development, centered on local communities' needs and aspirations.

Its success can be credited to the following factors:

- continuous dialogue with local community; putting the community's needs and aspirations at the center of any development project
- knowledge of local realities, as a locally-anchored organization (with a majority of local staff) and an interdisciplinary team with expertise in relevant fields
- resilience and long-term commitment
- leadership and long-term vision
- ability to act as interface between various institutional levels
- mutual respect and good cooperation with local authorities
- ability to gain local trust and respect and to mobilize local community cooperation
- networking: encourage community bonding, resulting in cooperation and positive synergies for the projects
- ability to develop wide networks of external support (bridging) to share expertise, knowhow, funding
- complementarity of activities in various fields (farming, tourism, conservation), and resulting positive synergies

Over time, ADEPT's efforts have been rewarded with multiple EU awards: for best communication with farmers (2012, 2013), for most benefits to communities in a protected area (2014), and the European Cultural Tourism Network (ECTN) Award, (2017, 2018) for the project "Transylvania Mountain Bike Trails to revitalize the Târnavă Mare cultural landscape".

The Foundation has had a relevant contribution in various other economic sectors. Promoting sustainable farming

within the EU's agri-environmental and NATURA 2000 schemes has been linked with conservation of local natural heritage (biodiversity, natural landscapes) representing attractive tourism resources. ADEPT has been also instrumental in reviving local cultural traditions (food, traditional crafts, occupations), as well as traditional community events, all potential tourism resources. It has been protecting local products under the local brand and it has established quality standards and a local certification system to guarantee geographical origin (see Fig. 10).

The authors argue however that it is in the area of human resources and community networking that the Foundation's activity has been most valuable, providing a range of non-economic benefits such as capacity building and community empowerment.

With CAP funding, ADEPT has been providing human resources (re)training programs, offering local people new skills, abilities and competencies which help stimulate entrepreneurship and innovation.

Dialogue and communication, networking within the community (bonding) has been demonstrated to enhance community dialogue, help build consensus, instill community spirit, strengthen community cohesion, cultivate local pride and local identity.

ADEPT's community education efforts have helped raise awareness regarding local heritage and the need for preservation of traditional rural landscapes, Saxon



Fig. 10: Traditional local food products and branding (Source: ADEPT Foundation

<http://www.discovertamavamare.org/products/tarnava-mare/>)



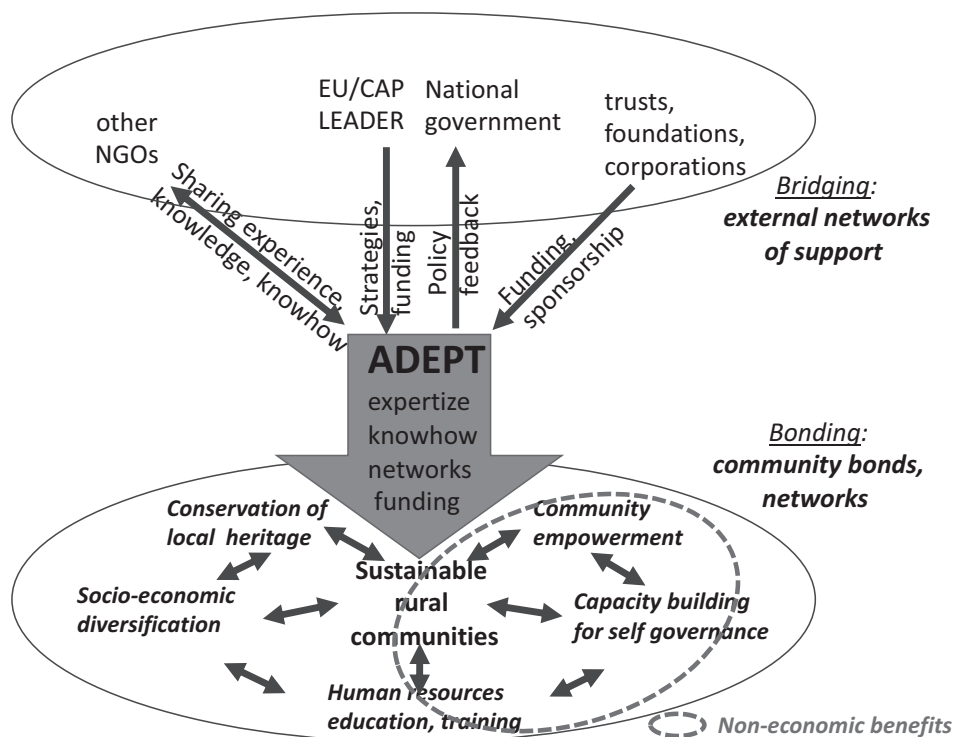


Fig. 11: Adept Foundation: model of networking pattern and integrated rural development (Sasaki, Takatori 2015)

architectural heritage, authentic rural traditions.

Thus, ADEPT has been able to harness the community's willingness to cooperate in development projects, and enhance the community's capacity for self-governance in the long term.

One of the immediate results was that ADEPT's presence and activity is seen as a guarantee of a healthy/stable local business environment and a guarantee of support for local communities and entrepreneurs. This has helped attract a steady flow of, on the one hand, local youth returning to the area after university studies or after working in the city, and on the other, attract re-locating entrepreneurs, many of them highly qualified, with work experience in the city or abroad. With ADEPT support, and usually with CAP financing, they start new innovative businesses, in tourism (guesthouses) or related sectors (food processing, crafts etc.) (Sasaki, Takatori 2016). This is a virtuous cycle, with successful entrepreneurs representing positive role models for the community and being emulated by other entrepreneurs (Sasaki, Takatori 2015).

A survey of local citizens' perception of ADEPT's activities shows appreciation for the increased opportunities of alternative incomes it provides, but also for the increased community bonding and cooperation generated by such projects (Hartel et al 2014).

This local case study is relevant in that it demonstrates that NGOs' contributions to rural development extend far beyond assisting communities to accomplish their short-term/immediate development goals. NGOs provide non-economic benefits which are as important in terms of human and community development (see Fig. 11). Capacity building and community empowerment represent vital components which enhance communities' abilities for self-governance and enable them to secure a sustainable future over the long term.

Considering the potential for wider implementation of this model, it is obvious that insofar as the success of the operations depends on the long-term commitment of a dedicated team of experts, the possibilities are quite limited. However, ADEPT share their experience and knowhow with other like-minded NGOs and offer training sessions for rural development experts, so it might be expected that in the long run their efforts will bear fruit.

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- \*<sup>1</sup> Rural communes are administrative units grouping 1 to up to 15 villages, with total population up to 15,000 inhabitants.