



Stronger



Prosperous



Resilient

The 'Whole Village model' revitalises rural areas in Transylvania, Romania



SUMMARY

The Whole Village Concept aims to revitalise and restore the cultural and natural heritage of Transylvanian rural areas. It addresses social and economic needs, making villages attractive for both locals and newcomers. The process involves obtaining local authority support, evaluating cultural heritage, and engaging the community to set priorities, engage residents, finding financial resources, selecting project leaders and teams, providing training, supporting local entrepreneurs, implementing sustainable village development activities and continuous readaptation for improvement. The initiative has restored 700 historic structures, planted three million trees, created 100 permanent jobs, and offered 140 seasonal opportunities, all while fostering community spirit and sustainable development.



CONTEXT

In 1990, numerous Transylvanian villages witnessed significant emigration of Romanian Saxons, leaving less than 10% of them in the region. Romania's rural areas face several challenges, such as insufficient project development and implementation capacity, minimal community participation, depopulation, an aging demographic, high unemployment and poverty rates, and migration. The historical legacy of the communist era has made the local Romanian Saxon communities sceptical toward community-led initiatives, making the implementation of the Whole Village concept more challenging. To solve this, the NGO Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET) takes advantage of cultural and natural heritage to encourage tourism as a means of income for rural families.



OBJECTIVES

The "Whole Village" concept aims to:

- > The restoration, conservation, and revitalisation of **cultural heritage**.
- > The involvement, consolidation, and **empowerment** of local communities.
- > The development of the **local economy** through cultural and sustainable tourism.

Themes: Housing, sports, culture and leisure, social inclusion, entrepreneurship, social economy, tourism and heritage. **Rural Revitalisation.**

Country: Romania

Organisation(s): Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET), (non-for-profit organisation).

Start & end date: 2000 - present

Budget: 13,000,000 €

Funding sources: EU Culture 2000 programme grants; EEA Grants, NGO Fund, Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Program, US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, Active Citizens Fund; MET London and Horizon Foundation, National funds from the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry for Youth and the Ministry for Environment.

Website:

- <https://www.mihaieminescutrust.ro/en/>
- <https://sea4neb.eu/local-experiences/the-whole-village-concept/>

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

MET initially targeted the village of Viscri, where they developed the Whole Village concept. By raising awareness among the local communities of the potential of the existing heritage as the ground for dialogue between different ethnic groups and as an asset for sustainable development, they promoted cultural tourism and preserved local heritage, leading to the pilot project self-sufficiency. Similar initiatives have been carried out in the village of Rachis and by 2023, MET has **expanded to nine other rural communities** in Transylvania, positively impacting more than 6,500 people.

Today, MET focuses on restoring and preserving cultural, natural, and historical heritage, supporting small rural businesses and social entrepreneurship, and developing sustainable tourism, exemplified by Experience Transylvania (ET), a social enterprise managing heritage houses and guesthouses in Transylvania. The approach adopts participatory methodologies and community dialogues with the local authorities and local actors to identify priorities, adapted to changing needs and challenges, diversifying the financial resources via national and international grants. Educational workshops and summer schools support the local youth with international and intergenerational transfers of know-how.



RESULTS

MET achieved this through the **restoration of 700 historical structures and the planting of three million trees**, reinvigorating the landscape. They empowered residents by offering training in various skills, resulting in the creation of 100 jobs within MET projects and 140 seasonal opportunities during the peak tourist seasons. Furthermore, the initiative inspired 20 villagers to establish their own guesthouses, offering a warm welcome to tourists while preserving the distinct local culture. MET extended support to artisans as well, particularly weavers, assisting them in crafting and selling traditional carpets and embroideries that highlight the region's rich heritage. Involving rural students, a remarkable 2.2 million trees were planted during a reforestation campaign. MET's thematic summer camps, initiated in 2012, have provided 200 children with unforgettable experiences in rural settings. Additionally, 75 children were granted the chance to participate in an architecture initiation course, broadening their perspective and sparking an appreciation for design.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The MET has achieved remarkable feats by employing **strategic thinking for rural development** in Romania's Transylvania region. This approach involves meticulous planning and execution of projects in collaboration with the community, ensuring initiatives are aligned with local needs and aspirations. A significant contributor to their success is their steadfast dedication to conserving the cultural and natural heritage of Transylvania's villages. They've invigorated community spirit through capacity building, empowerment, and the transfer of knowledge across generations. By promoting traditional practices and bolstering local crafts and techniques, they safeguard identity and authenticity, create economic prospects, and enhance the well-being of local families. An innovative element of their approach is the integration of tangible and intangible cultural heritage with natural heritage, yielding a diverse and appealing cultural and eco-tourism portfolio, as exemplified by the Viscristown pilot project. MET has addressed challenges related to demographic shifts, ethnic diversity, and the emigration of the Saxon population through fostering dialogue, coexistence, and collaboration among varied communities.



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