

Transylvanian Herb Garden

Social integration of disadvantaged people in rural areas through sustainable collection and processing of medicinal and aromatic plants

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- **Scale of activity:** regional
- **Actor/s:** NGO, local communities, volunteers, etc.
- **State of activity:** started in 2015, finishing in 2017
- **Keywords:** medicinal and aromatic plants, disadvantaged people, social integration, traditional knowledge, small scale business



Summary

Transylvanian Herb Garden is a project aiming at the "Social integration of disadvantaged people in rural areas through sustainable collection and processing of medicinal and aromatic plants"

Started in 2015 this project is a good example of how the work related to the collection, processing and using herbs can contribute to sustainable rural development. Integrating social, environmental and cultural (traditional knowledge) aspects. Main activities cover trainings and knowledge transfer mainly on a local level.

The project is supported by a grant from Switzerland through the Swiss contribution to the enlarged European Union.

Why we think this is an important step?

Wild collection is still an important business in Romania for export and specialized industries. Big amounts of wild collected plants and fruits are sold on the informal market to traders who export these products. The unsustainable plant collection leads to a decline of a key income for vulnerable groups like the Roma ethnic minority, women and the elderly. **Experience and knowledge about collection and identification of plants and their use over centuries were passed down from generation to generation. It is important to save this traditional knowledge** because: „Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.” (UNESCO, Convention on Intangible Heritage, 2003)

Goal of the project

The project is focussing on **social integration of disadvantaged** people and on revaluation of biodiversity and the traditional knowledge of the target region related to the local aromatic and medicinal herb varieties and species. In this way the target groups of the project are disadvantaged people from the rural area of the Central Region: unemployed, Roma people, women, small scale farmers with low income, disable young people, etc. The women, who benefit from the present project are coming from the rural areas and during generations preserved the knowledge about rare local herb varieties and species, about the cultural and ethnographical aspect of these plants, about identification and classification, breeding, collection and harvesting of wild and cultivate plants. This knowledge was collected and used for promoting the products developed in the competence centres. The new cost effective and environment friendly small scale processing methods were taught for the multipliers. Through these activities additional income possibilities for families interested in herb breeding and processing are relieved.



Background and activities

The specific objective is achieved by three core steps:

The first steps are focussing on establishing networks of communities and NGOs to facilitate social integration. Positive change in the rural area can't be achieved without the active participation of the local community members.

The second steps of the project are focusing on the transfer of expertise and knowledge related to collection, processing and use of local varieties and species of aromatic and medicinal plant. The 2 **competence centres** established in the project are the heart of the project activities and are functioning as a training and expertise centre where knowledge and experience can be acquired by the visitors or by the participants at different workshops. The **herb garden** serves for learning practical skills about herbs. In order to share the experiences in the field of processing and use of medicinal plants, there will be organised yearly **Open days** at the competence centres. In this way each output is built up like a chain, helping and strengthening each other.

The third steps are focussing on encouraging and promoting local economic activities and sustainable development in order to offer social integration of the disadvantaged people from the rural area.

During the project period we work together with 25 communities coming from the two subregions of Transylvania.

In Odorheiu Secuiesc and Cluj Napoca we built up local volunteer groups. The aim of these groups is to explore the local wild medicinal plants. In these two developing regions we established 2 competence centres where the members of volunteer groups will have the possibility to learn about the cultivation, wild crafting and processing of medicinal plants.

Besides improving the knowledge regarding gathering and processing medicinal plants we offered each participating community access to information regarding extra income opportunities within the domain of processing and marketing the products.

Source and contact

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