

COLLECTION OF  
EXAMPLES OF SOCIAL INNOVATION  
*in mountain areas*



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## INTRODUCTION



**SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas)** is a four-year project (2016-2020) funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme. It aims to advance understanding of social innovation and innovative governance in agriculture, forestry and rural development, and how it can be boosted, in marginalised rural areas across Europe and around the Mediterranean, including non-EU countries.

### WHAT IS SOCIAL INNOVATION?

For the SIMRA consortium, social innovation refers to “the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors”. Social innovation aims to increase and introduce new solutions to challenges faced by rural areas, especially those considered as marginalised.



### WHAT IS A MARGINALISED RURAL AREA?

Within SIMRA, rural areas are considered marginalised because:

- of their physical constraints (e.g. mountainous, arid)
- of their limited access to infrastructure (limited access to road transport networks, electricity and/or to telecommunications, including the Internet).
- or they have marginalised populations (i.e. societal marginality) being:
  - o people with (very) low incomes
  - o high proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion
  - o high levels of infant mortality
  - o high proportion of early leavers from education and training



## WHY A BROCHURE OF GOOD EXAMPLES?

This brochure aims at showcasing the diversity of social innovations in marginalised rural areas of Europe and the Mediterranean regions. These examples are extracted from the SIMRA database, available on SIMRA's website.

The examples selected meet the following criteria:

- i) Evidence of reconfiguration of social practices in response to societal challenges;
- ii) Active involvement of civil society or grassroots organisations;
- iii) Novelty or reconfiguration taking place in new geographical settings or in relation to previously disengaged social groups;
- iv) Improves societal wellbeing through social, environmental or economic aims.

## WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL INNOVATION IN MOUNTAIN AREAS?

The specificity of mountains is recognised both by EU policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy and the Regional Policy; and by global agreements such as the Sustainable Development Goals and UNESCO designations. Mountains cover 26.7% of SIMRA's study area. They are important sources of energy, water and biological and cultural diversity, and characterised by their altitude, terrain, roughness, slopes, low population density and difficulties of access, making them marginalised rural areas.

This fourth collection of examples of social innovation published by the SIMRA project\* focuses on how communities capitalise on the natural and social assets in mountainous areas in terms of community life, living environment, and dynamic approaches to governance.

\*Find the first three collections of examples on SIMRA's website:  
<http://www.simra-h2020.eu>

# LAMO: NEW IDEAS FOR MARGINALISED MOUNTAIN AREAS (ITALY)



## WHAT IS LAMO ABOUT?

LAMO brought together 24 university students from different disciplines (engineering, philosophy, nutritionists, economics, international studies, etc.) and local communities to co-design innovative proposals for the development of two marginalised mountain areas in Trentino: Vederne in the north-east (Primiero valley) and Boniprati in the south-west (Giudicarie valley).

Throughout the project, stakeholders and local residents from both territories met with the students in a systematic way, at least once a day for two hours over a week. Together, they assessed the strengths, weaknesses, potential and limitations of the territories. As an output, the students provided proposals for development, based upon their academic knowledge, personal background and experiences, and existing best practices. Inhabitants collaborated with the municipalities in welcoming and hosting the students with the provision of meals, whilst the municipality provided accommodation. Such informal conditions are an integral part of the LAMO project, facilitating dialogue between local people and students, and aiding the efficient collection of data by the students.

## HOW DOES LAMO CONTRIBUTE TO RELAUNCHING MARGINALISED MOUNTAIN TERRITORIES?

During a residential week (5 days), students were divided into six groups: 3 groups of 4 students per territory. Using the “Charrette” participatory method, each group

engaged with local stakeholders (e.g. municipalities, local associations and actors of economic activities) and inhabitants; and visited the marginalised mountain areas. They researched suitable best practices of development using the internet and from their own knowledge and experience. At the end of the week, each group presented their proposal for the area to the local communities.

Proposals aim to offer new visions for marginalised mountain territories and innovative projects for their relaunch. Two projects were recognised by awards for their innovation and are now part of the planning of the municipalities. One of these projects is the “Floating Innovation” in Boniprati. Students have proposed the introduction of complementary activities to provide leisure services to selected groups of beneficiaries (disabled and nature tourists), whilst also enhancing the potential of local natural capital. Activities planned are electric wheelchairs for disabled people, setting-up trails and snow paths, and suspending curtains between trees for temporary accommodation and immersion in nature.

### WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF LAMO?

LAMO has been a new experience of bottom-up design for two marginalised mountain areas and for Trentino. It has had positive social and cultural impacts on involved actors. Administrators have gained experience of a new approach to designing proposals, which is bottom up, affordable, values the potential of the territory and of young people, and is able to take into account the opinions and needs of inhabitants. As the students are not living in the mountain areas, the proposals are submitted without personal prejudice. This is a great advantage to make proposals easily acceptable by administrators.

Students have experienced how theoretical studies and personal background can be useful in solving practical problems. Stakeholders and residents have found that enhancing human capital can lead to innovation. This is especially important in marginalised mountain areas, which are characterised by their low number of inhabitants and thus a limited human capital resource. They have also highlighted the value of the university to the types of topics discussed, which can be perceived as distant from the needs of marginalised areas.

🔗 Find more information on LAMO’s website  
[www.provincia.tn.it/LAMO\\_laboratorio\\_montagna](http://www.provincia.tn.it/LAMO_laboratorio_montagna)



# IMPROVING THE GOVERNANCE OF LEBANESE FORESTS (LEBANON)



## HOW DOES THIS INITIATIVE HELP INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF LEBANESE FORESTS?

A Stakeholder's Governance Committee has been implemented in the Bental Nature Reserve (BNR) located in Mount Lebanon, one of the oldest nature reserves in Lebanon. Local authorities, with the support of external experts and external funding, implemented a participatory approach to engage stakeholders in the management of the forest and its resources, as well as in the decision-making process. The Committee, a comprehensive governance structure, was proposed to the communities local to the BNR, highlighting the importance of involving all direct and indirect beneficiaries with a shared interest (i.e. forest users, foresters, local inhabitants, researchers, environmental organisations, etc.) in the decision-making processes. This will be essential for strengthening social cohesion and community development.



## HOW DOES PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IMPROVE THE SUSTAINABILITY OF FOREST GOVERNANCE?

The sustainability challenges faced within the BNR forest relate to the lack of information from policy-makers or researchers to beneficiaries, concerning forest goods and services.

The proposed governance model has supported the development of two working groups of importance to the development of the BNR. The two main stakeholder group targeted by the project are women and young people, for whom technical, managerial and capacity-building support were essential to their empowerment. They were engaged in the design, planning and implementation of activities aiming to raise awareness of forest protection measures, the challenges of forest sustainability and support activities and the coordination of the BNR governance committee.

Sustainability indicators (management, financial and socio-economic indicators) have been implemented relating to activities which are designed to meet the Committee's objectives and aspirations and those of the local communities.

## WHERE IS THE SOCIAL INNOVATION IN THIS INITIATIVE?

The social innovation is in the improvement of the existing governance structure of forests through the use of a participatory approach for their management, which is being tested at present. Community members, mainly women and young people, have been engaged in the activities of the reserve and in seeking funding for the development of their income-generating initiative for the transformation of the forest products. Young people were trained on how to design, plan, prepare and implement activities. The engagement of the communities in the management of resources will support the regulatory measures of the relevant Government Ministry and thus ensure the success of the management practices being implemented. The current innovation is an important tool in improving the management of forest goods and services and will eventually enhance the funding of the sector whilst protecting the forest from risks to its sustainability.

The engagement of beneficiaries in the decision-making process will contribute to the implementation of decisions at the local level.

▀ Find more information by reading the report of the FAO "*Mediterranean Forests: Towards a better recognition of the economic and social value of goods and services through participative governance*" available on <https://planbleu.org> ([here](#))

# HACK MY TOWN (ITALY)



## WHAT DOES “HACK MY TOWN” MEAN?

Hack My Town was a competition organised in December 2013 amongst teams of university students who were challenged to provide solutions for "smart" services<sup>1</sup> in the city of Glorenza. Glorenza, which possesses a strong community identity like many other Alpine villages and is the smallest city of South Tirol, was chosen for verifying the application of the concept of a Smart City in a mountainous village.

The name “Hack My Town” explicitly recalls “hackathon” experiences, which are an intensive creative design method. Usually it deals with computer coding, where people come together in one place, with no set programme or timescale, to solve problems, not necessarily involving technologies.

## HOW WAS “HACK MY TOWN” ORGANISED?

The idea originated in Alpine universities. They invited university students and local stakeholders from Glorenza to participate in the educational experience. Five universities (Basilicata, Bozen-Bolzano, Consorzio Roma Ricerche, Genova, Turin Polytechnic) accepted the invitation and sent teams of students. Amongst local stakeholders, the Vice-Mayor, the spokesperson of a local environmental association, and a manager of a summer camping site also participated.

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<sup>1</sup>“Smart” refers here to services which are enhanced by means of digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and the better use of local assets and knowledge

Before the hackathon, these local people spent several hours with the students, illustrating the location, its history, current issues, and their perspectives on the future. The hackathon took place between 10:30 am on a Saturday morning and 09:00 am the next day. Solutions were evaluated by two juries (one student and “adult” made up of academics, local stakeholders and the Vice-Mayor). Then, the winning solutions were examined by the local council.

The Municipality of Glorenza was enthusiastic about the event, and about how students creatively approached the challenge, paying attention to the needs of the inhabitants and the identity of the community. Students highlighted the value of having someone who is empathetic to listen to the needs of others. A meeting with the Municipality was planned after the hackathon to verify the implementation of the 2 winning projects. This shows the will of the municipality to engage in a more democratic form of governance. Working with the municipal administration, local stakeholders and associations was the key to the success of the event.

### WHAT WERE THE IDEAS PUT FORWARD BY THE STUDENTS?

Three student teams agreed to their solutions being made public.



- The team from Bozen-Bolzano (winner picked by the Student Jury) focused on the “identity” of Glorenza. They designed a plan for local branding of this town, which is unique within the area with its medieval walls, and heritage passed down through generations. They designed a plan for local branding.
- The team from Genova wanted to solve the problem of apple monoculture. By using new technologies and connected systems, the students proved that it was possible to estimate the timing of the harvest and to help farmers to improve their management of part-time jobs.
- The team from Turin (winners of the Adult Jury) used the symbolic arcades of the city in a physical and digital strategy to boost the identity of Glorenza. The physical arcades, currently undervalued, could become a service space, with screens displaying information and attracting investors. A strategy using digital arcades was identified as a means of reaching out to neighbour communities, enabling people to relate to the area, a source of information for tourists, and providing new opportunities for the community to take on projects of common interest.

▀ Find more information on the website of the event: <http://hackmytown.unibz.it/>, or read a scientific paper on the educational process of Hack My Town [here](#)

## TEAM KARWENDEL (AUSTRIA)



Photo credit: H. Sonntag

### WHAT IS TEAM KARWENDEL ABOUT?

TEAM KARWENDEL is the volunteer platform of the largest natural park in Austria, for people willing to spend their free time engaging with nature, in the Karwendel Alpine Park. Volunteers contribute to the protection of the region and of nature itself by dedicating themselves to alpine farming and habitat management, fence repairs and combatting the encroachment of invasive species. Manual activities offer a variety of everyday working life experiences, whilst also providing an understanding of agriculture and nature conservation, and an emotional relationship to the cultural landscape.

### WHAT IS THE WIN-WIN FOR VOLUNTEERS AND THE NATURAL PARK?

The platform is effective and free of charge for volunteers as financial support for its operation comes from the Natural Park authority, the Tyrolean Nature Conservation Fund and the Raiffeisen Club. Participants are provided with board and lodging, which sometimes means sleeping in the hay! They are responsible for travel to the Park and

have the benefits of enjoying the outdoors while participating in the conservation of an environment they appreciate.

The benefits for the Natural Park Authority are reducing the maintenance costs of the Park and achieving an important part of its mission of communication and raising awareness about nature conservation. The platform engages people from cities in the conservation work and creates a bridge between town and country, enabling experience and appreciation of the work of farmers and environmentalists.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF THIS INITIATIVE?

Increasingly, people become aware of the beauty of the landscape, the challenges to maintain a cultural landscape, experience nature, and gain from the balance between city life and contact with nature. The volunteers recognise that common objectives and teamwork are good experiences, and the sponsors increase their awareness about the values of the cultural landscape for their activities.

- Find more information on Team Karwendel: [www.karwendel.org/team/](http://www.karwendel.org/team/)





## ECONOMOUNTAIN (PORTUGAL)



Photo credit: European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

### WHAT WAS THE MOTIVATION FOR THE ECONOMOUNTAIN INITIATIVE?

Vila Pouca de Aguiar is a county located north of the Douro Valley, in the north of Portugal. In this region, like in many other mountainous areas, land abandonment has led to an increased risk of forest fires. Generally, land abandonment results in landscapes that are more homogeneous, and an accumulation of dry matter in forests and rangelands. This increases the risk of fire, especially under the Mediterranean climate with a prolonged dry and hot summer season which is naturally favourable to wildfires. Forest fires are problematic from the point of view of security, loss of value of forest products and loss of ecosystem services. The EconoMountain initiative aims to create new economic activities and use resources in ways to reduce forest fuel and control forest fires.

### WHAT IS THE INITIATIVE ABOUT?

The innovation is a new technique of targeted grazing using goats for clearing mountain pastures, which acts as fuel control in case of a fire. The intensity, period and timing of grazing are carefully controlled. Goats are well adapted to targeted grazing due to their agility and flexible behaviour. They can access most places, adapt



to most weather conditions, and be led to graze in small plots. Moreover, they contribute to revitalising abandoned land through pastoral activity, provide environmental benefits and reduce costs by 50% compared to mechanical techniques of clearing wood. The usual pattern is that the farmers intensively graze their livestock in the areas of the fire breaks, as defined by the forest services, thereby reducing vegetation fuel loads. In exchange for this service, they receive monetary or in-kind remuneration.

The social innovation lies in the type of management of the initiative which includes forest owners, managers of communal land, shepherds, local authorities and a private biodiversity fund. The project's "kitchen workshops" provide it with an information and communication component. These aim to change the habits of consumption towards one of greater responsibility, valuing the most sustainable mountain forest products (mushrooms, honey, etc.) and exploring niche markets.

### WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF THE INITIATIVE?

The initiative has achieved efficient and cost-effective management of forest fuel, protecting the ecosystem against fire. This has increased the value of forest resources and the competitiveness of the territory, reducing investment risks and bringing in new investors and new products (e.g. resin, mushrooms). The provision of ecosystem services has also increased, which is beneficial for tourism and the generation of local wealth.

The initiative has implemented a new system of land management, redefining the use of animals in the landscape and increasing the area and purpose of targeted grazing. This has led to creating more jobs for shepherds and raising the awareness of the community about the benefits of resource and landscape management. Achieving social recognition of the value of ecosystem services was a very important outcome for this initiative.

Finally, the kitchen workshops increase the proximity between the consumer and markets / producers while raising awareness about sustainable consumption and the evolution of eating habits.

▀ Find more information on Economountain: <http://aguiarfloresta.org>

# TERRAVIVA: ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION OF TERRACED LANDSCAPES (ITALY)



Photo credit: Marco Tessaro

## WHAT DOES TERRAVIVA DO?

Since 2017, TERRAVIVA has tackled the widespread problem of the fragmentation of properties. It focuses on the terraced slopes of the Municipality of Borgomezzavalle, in the Antrona Valley in northern Italy, an area once cultivated by the local population but neglected since the early 1960s. Today, many of the landowners have emigrated from the valley, the terraced slopes remain abandoned, and, in many cases, people are not aware of the localization of their properties.

## HOW DOES TERRAVIVA ACHIEVE A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP?

TERRAVIVA is a not-for-profit association of landowners which is using an innovative form of partnership with local public authorities in order to:

- Bring together small, abandoned and fragmented properties and make them available for farmers and other stakeholders;
- Directly engage civil society in taking good care of the territory, fostering a collective approach which relies on recognition of mutual rights and duties;
- Promote a sharing economy initiative, to give new life to abandoned terraces.

The TERRAVIVA association makes the land available at no cost to farmers in need of arable land. It transfers lots of land to local farmers, who are not requested to pay rent. Instead, they are required to comply with principles of agroecology and, by cultivating neglected land, help restore biodiversity and the landscape whilst restoring the value of fragmented properties. The first lots of land have been transferred to two local farmers via a public call for access to land.

The TERRAVIVA project is investigating the environmental benefits deriving from the restoration of terraced landscapes and promotes a programme of monitoring based upon ex-ante (abandonment) and ex-post (cultivation phase) evaluation. It uses a participatory approach using public-private partnerships. In this way, citizens and landowners feel that the local authorities are deeply engaged in the initiative rather than being external observers or promoters. This leads to a widely perceived legitimacy of the process. Some participants also consider the landowner’s association as a “way of return” to their valley. The association restores an ancient spirit of community which is part of the local heritage.

### **HOW DID TERRAVIVA BECOME AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER LANDOWNERS?**

The Association has extended beyond the Municipality of Borgomezzavalle and involved other landowners throughout the valley. The experience launched by TERRAVIVA is attracting the interest of a growing number of residents and public officers and administrators. The partners are pursuing the development of the initiative, especially in the topics of social farming and sustainable tourism/agri-tourism.

The Association has had beneficial impacts on the local economy by the cultivation of the land made available. Farmers have increased their yields and incomes, local environmentally sustainable products have been promoted, and the Association has become part of a network which brings together consumers, producers, landowners.

Find more information on TERRAVIVA’s website:  
<http://terraviva.scienzeaturalivco.org/>

# MOUNTAIN THERAPY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES (ITALY)



Photo credit: Associazione Montagnaterapia

## WHAT IS MOUNTAIN THERAPY?

The term "Mountain therapy" was developed in 1999 in Italy, following a conference presentation on a specific methodology which focused on mountains. The aim of "Mountain Therapy" is to bring the benefits of mountains to people disadvantaged through physical, mental, economic and/or family conditions. The following year, a Working Group on Mountain therapy was developed with staff from the public health service sector and members of the Italian Alpine Club. Since then the Working Group has developed interdisciplinary groups operating in mountain areas across Italy, on a voluntary basis, on a range of different issues of physical and mental health.

In 2009, the Group officially created the Italian Associazione Montagnaterapia ONLUS ('Mountain Therapy Association') that developed the methodological approach of mountain therapy, through the activities of health promotion as well as prevention and rehabilitation, with children and adults.



## HOW IS MOUNTAIN THERAPY A SOLUTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES?

The association carries out many different programmes and projects with therapeutic-rehabilitative and/or socio-educational-recreational characteristics. These aim at promoting health, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of individuals with different problems, pathologies or disabilities. Activities are carried out by the association in coordination with the National Health Service, the Italian Alpine Club, or other associations dedicated to people with disabilities.

The projects and activities taking place in mountains are designed for the development and the well-being of the individuals. The initiative assumes that for rounded development, people need knowledge and experience of care and protection of their environment.



Photo credit : Associazione Montagnaterapia

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS INITIATIVE?

The Associazione Montagnaterapia's initiative has improved access to, and benefits from, the mountains for people with physical or mental health issues. Moreover, it has increased the awareness of health providers that living experiences outside the hospital is of benefit to patients with disabilities.

The Association has shown that a strong motivation exists to work together on a regular basis between the public and private sectors which also facilitates interdisciplinary exchanges and learning.

▀ Find more information and all the network contact on the Associazione Montagnaterapia's website: [www.amionlus.it/](http://www.amionlus.it/)



## AKTIVNO V ŠOLO - SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY FOR CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL (SLOVENIA)



Photo credit: Luka Vidic

### WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE “AKTIVNO V ŠOLO” PROGRAMME?

In Slovenia, as in many other countries, children are often brought to school by car or bus, even if the distance they have to travel is relatively short and the journey done by walking or cycling. Since 2015, the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Slovenia has promoted physical activity as a means of getting to and from school.

Getting to school with “pešbus” (walking bus) and “bicivlak” (bike train) is organised by the engagement of a network of municipalities, primary schools, parents and children. Active travel to school is important for physical and mental health, autonomy and social development of the children as well as beneficial for wider educational reasons.

### WHAT IS AN ACTIVE WAY TO GET TO SCHOOL?

Since 2015, the programme has been managed by the Institute for Spatial Policies (IPoP), in collaboration with partner organisations, and since 2017 the management





has included the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) Slovenia, and Focus - Association for Sustainable Development. The organisations implement activities that aim to promote approaches to sustainable travel to school which can be adopted in urban and rural areas. In the 1<sup>st</sup> phase (2015 to 2016), three schools were identified as pilot cases and more than 80 children were involved in testing the way of getting to school with pešbus or bicivlak. In these pilot cases, children were collected at “bus” stops by adults who accompanied them to the school entrance. The parents and teachers assigned to the programme by the school authorities drafted a route map of the stops with an exact timetable according to the number, age and geographical distribution of the children participating.

In subsequent years the programme was developed with the support of the Ministries of Health and of Environment and Spatial Planning. The activities are expanding rapidly. In spring 2018, children from 23 schools around Slovenia were participating in pešbus or bicivlak. Recently, the programme has been oriented in three ways: 1) educating school co-ordinators and spreading the network of participating schools; 2) promoting independent, active travel to school with older school children; and, 3) collaborative planning of safe school routes.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THE PEŠBUS AND BICIVLAK?

Each day, children are physically active, which is good for their health and wellbeing. They are more relaxed when they arrive at school and more focused in class. Children develop social skills, independence, a sense of responsibility, awareness of personal abilities, get acquainted with traffic rules, and learn to be self-reliant in traffic. They also develop healthy mobility habits and are sensitised to sustainable mobility and an environmentally friendly lifestyle.

Parents share responsibility for the daily routine with other parents and, or school staff. In school areas, the number of car journeys is reduced, and the level of emissions is lowered. Teachers can incorporate the practice of getting to school into the school curricula, improving the teaching of sustainable lifestyles and development. An indirect benefit may be the regeneration of school neighbourhoods, villages and urban areas in terms of traffic infrastructure, such as sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, cycling lanes, and improved safety and comfort.

▀ Find more information on the “Aktivno v šolo” website: [www.aktivnovsolo.si](http://www.aktivnovsolo.si)

## ARTEL 13: VOLUNTEERS TO THE RESCUE OF ISOLATED VILLAGES IN THE RHODOPE MOUNTAINS (BULGARIA)



Photo credit: Artel 13

### WHY WAS ARTEL 13 NEEDED IN KISELCHOVO?

This initiative consists of bringing social life back to Kiselchovo, a small isolated village in the Rhodope Mountains, close to the border with Greece, which has only 12 residents. Residents suffer from the lack of basic social services (such as medical care), no local shops for daily needs and, most importantly, complete social isolation due to the difficulties of access in this mountainous area. The village of Kiselchovo has developed into a tourist destination due to the Artel 13 Association and the work of dozens of volunteers on restoration and local activities.



## HOW DID ARTEL 13 MANAGE TO TURN THE SITUATION AROUND IN KISELCHOVO?

"Artel 13" is a Bulgarian not-for-profit association which started its project of reviving Kiselchovo by opening an arts and crafts centre in the heart of the Rhodope mountains. Through the help of the volunteers of the Times Heroes Bulgaria platform, several old houses were renovated and converted into guest houses. A new touristic destination has developed around the village of Kiselchovo with facilities that include hiking trails, horse tours, and visitor accommodation. The association launched an arts programme which includes a series of thematic workshops devoted to topics such as local crafts, traditional local meals and music, which has already attracted a lot of visitors to the area.

The programme of workshops organised by Association Artel 13 has increased from 2 in 2014 to more than 14 in 2017. The range of topics now includes creative writing and illustrating fairy tales, production traditions, introductions to local culture and knowledge about Rhodope cuisine, traditional medicine based on the use of herbs, and the production of felt from wool.

## HOW DOES ARTEL 13 COMBINE A REVIVAL OF TRADITIONS AND SOCIAL INNOVATION?

Artel 13 helps local people to become involved in rural tourism activities and profit from it. The association has attracted new inhabitants to the village, with 3 Bulgarian and 1 Russian family returning thus far. Some of these families have moved from large cities, preferring to stay in the village. The combination of rural lifestyle and urban skills (e.g. technological) transforms some traditions into innovations.

The kitchen workshops, in particular, have increased the connections between the consumers, and markets and producers, whilst also raising awareness about sustainable consumption and the evolution of culinary traditions.

▀ Find more information on Artel 13's website: [www.artel13.com/](http://www.artel13.com/)

# A CO-OPERATIVE DRIVING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PËRMET (ALBANIA)



Photo credit: Visit Permet

## UNDISCOVERED TREASURES OF PËRMET

Situated in the heart of a valley and surrounded by mountains, Përmet boasts natural attractions such as the National Park Bredhi i Hotovës-Dangëlli and the hot springs of the Langarica Valley. There are numerous cultural assets including Përmet, the ‘City of Roses’, churches and monasteries of the Byzantine period, and archaeological remains of the Ottoman Empire. The area has attractions of interest to Christians, Muslims and, in particular, to Bektashi who have pilgrimage sites in the villages of Ali Postivan and Frashëri. The valley is famous for its high-quality agricultural and traditional products including grapes, cherries, herbs and medicines, wine, cheeses, meats, honey and gliko (compote). Despite these many assets, in the early part of the 21st Century the Përmet district was one of the least developed areas in Albania, with a lack of skills and knowledge in the promotion of tourism.

## WHAT IS THE PRO PËRMET CONSORTIUM?

The Pro Përmet Consortium is a voluntary association for people involved in the sectors of regional products, or hospitality and service. It is dedicated to the goal of developing sustainable tourism in the Përmet district. Members are collaborating to promote the territory and its products, develop tourism and tourism infrastructure, and protect the environment. The Consortium provides its members with the tools to

develop and increase their own capacity, and to promote their products as a united group instead of relying upon outside help or working alone. It also encourages them to share their best practices and improve the quality of their services and marketing of products. Through the Pro Përmet website and its Facebook page, the area is promoted as a destination for good food and outdoor experiences.

### HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS THE PRO PËRMET MODEL BEEN?

Pro Përmet products have increased in popularity as has the market demand. All Consortium members have increased their profits and their number of employees. In 2009, before the project started, the total net profits from all 15 consortium members was 13,302,080 Lek (approximately €95,000). By 2012, profits had increased by 15% to 15,302,680 Lek (approximately €109,000). Over the same period, employment in consortium members increased by 44%. Over the past few years, members of Pro Përmet and the entire economy of the district have benefited as more tourists visit the area and stay for longer.

▀ Find more information about Përmet on the Website: [www.visitpermet.org/](http://www.visitpermet.org/)



## S4RE: SKILLS FOR RURAL EMPLOYMENT (KOSOVO)



### WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE SKILLS FOR RURAL EMPLOYMENT PROJECT (S4RE) IN KOSOVO?

S4RE aims to reduce poverty in the rural areas of the Sharr Mountains of Kosovo through an integrated approach to developing vocational skills and the local economy. It is increasing the employability and income generation of vulnerable people, in particular young people, women and minorities. It targets areas and people that are not sufficiently serviced by the formal Vocational Education Training system. The project intervenes in the provision of skills development for young people in the Sharr mountains, in south and south-east Kosovo.



The project started in 2013 and is implemented by Helvetas and local partners, funded by donations from the Medicor Foundation and Helvetas amounting to 2.8 million CHF over two phases between 2013 and 2018.

### WHAT SKILLS ARE NEEDED TO FIND A RURAL JOB?

The project comprises three key types of intervention: 1) opportunity groups targeting young unemployed men and women; 2) within company, on-the-job training which targets existing employees to boost the competitiveness of businesses; and, 3)



strengthening rural, small-scale producers in four supply chains (non-timber forest products, berries and fruit, dairy livestock, and honey). Inspired by the learning group methodology, S4RE has developed the opportunity group approach, based on practical training, tailored to regional needs. The approach encourages young people to come together in peer groups to share, learn and apply newly acquired technical, entrepreneurial and life skills.

An example of a successful result is Hit Flores, a company specializing in selling plants and other non-timber products from the Sharr Mountains. It trained its staff to identify, classify, clean, process and package wild mushrooms, which helped increase the quality of products and subsequently online sales of this product.

After completion of their apprenticeship, some people are hired by the businesses that the provided on-the-job training. Having seen the positive impact of the in-house, informal training on business performance, some of the companies participating are taking it forward at their own expense.

### HOW SUCCESSFUL IS S4RE?

Since 2013, the project has supported 7 000 beneficiaries comprising unemployed young people, women, minorities, rural households as producers in supply chains or employees of local businesses, and training providers. Local and national institutions such as employment agencies, and local youth action councils and groups have taken forward the project approach to training to provide assistance to young job seekers on a sustainable basis. The social innovation is in the approach taken, which has income and employment opportunities at its centre, and is now taken further to a skills development programme. The approach stimulates the participation of all actors and enables them to find their place based on their capacities, resources and interests.

- Find more information on the website: <http://helvetas-ks.org/s4re/>



Photo credit: S4RE Kosovo

## DEL MONTE DE TABUYO MUSHROOMS (SPAIN)



Photo credit: Del Monte de Tabuyo

### HAVE YOU TASTED THE DEL MONTE DE TABUYO MUSHROOMS?

Del Monte de Tabuyo is a small co-operative, created by five women in 2004. It is transforming mushroom production for use in their own restaurant, and sales in local shops and online (i.e. direct selling to consumers). The company has two main activities: manufacturing and packaging delicacies for selling; and running a restaurant. The co-operative is based in Tabuyo del Monte, in the foothills of Mount Teleno, the highest peak of the León Mountains (2,188m).

### HOW IS THIS FOOD SUPPLY MODEL SUCCESSFUL?

The company expanded from their original specialisation in mushrooms to a diversified range of fruit and vegetables that suit the needs of their restaurant and the local shops. The different food products sold by this company are either cultivated or harvested, from local land. The products are handmade, producing high quality preserves and dishes. The five women who created the company sow, grow, harvest and cook all the products. Thus, they control their products from the moment they are sown until they are packaged or served on the plate.

Customers can taste the local products in the restaurant "Comedor del Monte" (the "Mountain dining room"). The restaurant provides both set and themed menus (hunting menu, mycological menu, seasonal vegetables cuisine, etc.), depending on

the season and personal taste. The menu is inspired by traditional local recipes. This enables the Del Monte de Tabuyo company to guarantee the freshness and flavour of their dishes. The production process is fuelled by a renewable energy source, and uses products collected directly from the surrounding mountains or from farms that using traditional cultivation techniques and organic farming.

Other activities have expanded around the restaurant such as guided tours for mushroom-picking, mycology classes with the co-operative during the autumn and spring seasons or visiting the mycology museum. The company has developed around a specific product, mushrooms, which they have successfully branded and promoted.

### WHAT IS PARTICULARLY INNOVATIVE ABOUT THIS COMPANY?

The social innovation lies within the commitment of these five women to their territory. They were motivated to create their business by the *Águeda Mujer Rural* association (“Avant-guard rural women”), which provides training and support for rural women in the area. These five entrepreneurs believe that the social economy and co-operation are keys for the prosperity of the territory and its people. In order for their business to thrive and prosper, the Monte del Tabuyo company is a member of different networks and projects. Examples of such networks are the “Lions Union of Co-operatives and *Co-operactives*” which promotes the social economy, the European network of Natura 2000 areas for the conservation and preservation of natural habitats, and an association of women cooks from Castilla y Leon. The aim is to highlight the work of women entrepreneurs, as well as to share knowledge about the sustainable exploitation of local products and dissemination of cultural heritage.

Economic growth linked to the multitude of companies, co-operatives and other initiatives set up by women in rural areas favours the creation of employment. This encourages settlement of population in an environment that, without new and innovative projects, would be progressively depopulated in favour of the larger population centres.

Find more information about the Del Monte de Tabuyo website: [www.delmontedetabuyo.com](http://www.delmontedetabuyo.com)



# DO YOU HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL INNOVATION TO SHARE WITH US?



Do you have examples of social innovation in a marginalised rural area in Europe or Mediterranean countries?

Click [here](https://uhi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/simra_en) to submit your example!  
 (also available in French)  
[https://uhi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/simra\\_en](https://uhi.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/simra_en)

If validated, find it on our SIMRA database  
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