

## PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN WESTERN STARA PLANINA

Since its founding in 2014, the Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity (STEP) has been working with different stakeholders in Western Stara Planina (WSP) learning area (LA) in Bulgaria. STEP has implemented several projects for sustainable management and use of HNV grasslands in WSP. Together with its local partners, STEP has formed a partnership group of farmers, local authorities, NGOs, advisors, members of the community, and other existing initiatives. This established a discussion platform where the opinions of different stakeholder' groups can be shared and explained. STEP is convinced that pragmatic and mutually beneficial solutions can only be achieved with the participation of all members of the community and that finding the key to good decisions requires time and efforts of many different layers of society.

The HNV-Link participatory process in WSP was a natural continuation of the relations and the trust gained between the organisation, its partners, and the local stakeholders. STEP engaged local actors throughout the project implementation through activities of interviews and bilateral stakeholder meetings with public administration, farmers and farmer representatives. STEP's experience in multi-actor work assured that the concerns, aspirations and perspectives of the actors were given a prominent role in all these events.

The process started by identification of the key stakeholder groups from the HNV farming perspective, and assessment of groups' motivations, expectations, and potential contributions to the project objectives and activities. The first round of face-to-face meetings in the framework of HNV-Link project was carried out in October 2016, when the project team identified and visited key stakeholders and explained the project objectives and activities. The team used these meetings as an opportunity to increase awareness on the importance of HNV farming for the community as a whole.

STEP's next action was a questionnaire to survey stakeholders' expectations. The questionnaire and some additional questions were sent in advance to those stakeholders that had helped in organising the meetings and establishing new contacts in the LA. Further to this, STEP carried out 48 interviews in WSP LA in February 2017. In addition to the questionnaires and interviews, the meetings helped to identify the main challenges faced by HNV farming and the whole LA and outlined how the past explains current development. They provided opportunity to learn from the local initiatives and the good and bad practices. They were also essential to gathering data and HNV farming innovations for WP1 and WP2. STEP experts actively participated in the meetings of the two Local Action Groups in WSP learning area where HNV-Link project was presented and discussed.



Kotenovtzi village, 24.02.2017 LAG meeting in Georgi Damianovo



Berkovitza, 24.02.2017



The LA innovation workshop gathered 35 representatives of the local and regional agricultural offices, advisory services, municipal authorities, NGOs, farmers' associations, farmers, food processors, and others. Together, they discussed the long-term vision for the conservation and development of high nature value farming in the learning area, articulated as "agricultural modernization taking into account natural and cultural heritage in the region", that is a precondition for an integrated socio-economic development and nature conservation of the area.



Jelezna village, 16.02.2017



Chiprovtsi, 16.02.2017



LA innovation seminar 02.06.2017



Godech municipal fest, 21.07.2017

European Rural Parliament Market of initiatives,  
Vernhorst, 20.10.2017

The WSP LA vision and the project activities were presented at the Godech municipal fest (21.07.2017) and the European Rural Parliament gathering in Vernhorst, the Netherlands (20.10.2017).

The partnership created between STEP and a NGO local stakeholder, "Local initiative for Varshets," resulted in the new project proposal "HNV farming innovations in Stara planina". The project was submitted for funding in the framework of Interreg-IPA CBC Bulgaria-Serbia Programme with the project's Serbian partner, the association "Natura Balkanika". The main objective of the proposal is to enlarge the HNV-Link network with partners and innovations from the Serbian part of Stara Planina and other HNV innovations from the Bulgarian part of Western Stara Planina. If successful, the project will build on the experience and knowledge of the HNV-Link project and will work for securing the future of HNVf systems in Stara Planina on both sides of the border.



**Table 1: List of participatory events in LA Sítio de Monfurado, Portugal (up to April 2018)**

Activity	No of Participants	Date
Bilateral meetings with stakeholders	10	Oct 2016
Interviews and meetings with local stakeholders	50	Feb 2017
LAG meeting in Georgi Damianovo	20	Feb 2017
Local workshop on innovations	40	June 2017
Godech municipal fest	40	Jul 2017
ERP Market of Initiatives	30	Oct 2017

**Links****Baseline assessment process**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rJSTvX-eoY&t=8s>

**Report from the innovation seminar**

<http://www.hnvlink.eu/download/BulgariaInnovationseminarfinalreport.pdf>

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