

NEW FORMS OF GOVERNANCE - OPPORTUNITIES FOR REGIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

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SUMMARY

The paper focuses on some research findings of the Bulgarian team in the frame of the on-going international project entitled “Farming transitions: Pathways towards regional sustainability of agriculture in Europe” (FarmPath), financed by the 7th Framework Programme of the EC. The paper deals with emergent transition derived from two innovative initiatives (novelties) that define "a new form of governance", i.e. development of rural tourism and traditional food production on the territory of the municipality of Elena. It explores how emergent transition reconfigurates local actor groups and societal domains in new forms of governance (restructuring, renegotiating etc.) establishes them in the community, which factors support or hinder the emergence and development of these novelties. Finally the paper draw the sustainability dimensions that the two initiatives may lead up to the Elena region (economic, social, environmental).

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Introduction

The paper focuses on some case study research findings of the Bulgarian team in the frame of the on-going international project entitled FarmPath, financed by the 7th Framework Programme of the EC⁴. The paper deals with emergent transition derived from two initiatives (novelties) that define “a new form of governance”, i.e. development of rural tourism and traditional agriculture and local food production on the territory of the municipality of Elena. Elena case study focuses on building new facilities for rural tourism, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, recovery of the traditional agriculture; marketing and certification of local agricultural products innovative regional governance and planning - all these aiming at social and economic prosperity and development of the region. The paper explores how these initiatives reconfigure local actors and societal domains in new forms of governance (interacting, networking, restructuring, renegotiating etc.) that leads to emergent transition in the community, which factors support or hinder the latter, whether the transition leads to sustainability of the region.

1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the paper adheres to the Conceptual and Analytical frameworks of the FarmPath project, i.e. it is based on the intersection of three main concepts - transition theory, multifunctional agriculture and, sustainable regional development. The transition studies are based on the **multi-level** (sociotechnical landscape, regime and niche level) and **multi actor perspective** that emphasis on the radical novelty (initiative) that emerge at **niche** (micro level), carried by “small networks of dedicated actors” (Geels and Schot 2007: 400), and transforms the **dominant regime**. The regime operates at meso/regional level and includes technological developments, infrastructure, techno-scientific knowledge, societal groups and networks, rules and regulations, markets etc. The regime is a “powerful constellation” and “represents the mainstream, conservatism and convention” (de Haan 2010: 28) and is characterised by “cognitive routines, shared beliefs, capabilities and competencies, lifestyles and user practices, favourable institutional arrangements and regulations, and legally binding contracts” (Darnhofer 2011: 5). In FarmPath the regime is defined as a societal function it fulfils and thus it is not only related only to the existing farming regime but is broadly defined as agro-food regime (Darnhofer 2011: 22). It is also assumed that within the regime several **sub-regimes** might be distinguished (e.g. production, processing,

⁴ The research project “Farming transitions: Pathways towards regional sustainability of agriculture in Europe” FP7 KBBE 2010-4, Contract No. 265394 (www.farmpath.eu).

consumption, marketing etc.) which might shape various configurations (interaction, interdependence, constrain, influence etc.).

Sociotechnical landscape (macro level) forms an exogenous environment (macro-economic and demographic trends, macro-political developments, climate changes, societal values, consumers' patterns etc.) and normally cannot influences directly on niche and regime actors as changes at the landscape level usually take place decades (Geels and Schot 2007).

Project conceptual frameworks combines the previous approaches defining **sustainable rural development** through changes in the farming /activities (as pluriactivity, diversification and multifunctionality) with the transition studies where the transition process is central and is driven by the niche(s) and its novelty.

The main objective of the FarmPath project, respectively, the presented case study is to explore emergent transition as ***interaction*** between the niche and regime but not the niche itself. From the perspective of the transition theory the niche is itself a novelty and is related to the evolution of the dominant regime to a new state, and is viewed in a medium to long-term time span. Thus it is expected to observe enmeshed various stakeholders/actors acting and interacting thought different production systems, entering into relations with institutions, regulations, negotiations, social norms, values, consents etc. All theses are considered as non-linear connected, dynamic, interpenetrated and co-evolved at all levels. We explore the “New Forms of Governance” (NFG) initiative in the focus of its interaction (in space and time span) within the dominant regime and sub-regimes (Darnhofer 2011: 3, 13). Interrelations and anchoring (technological, social, and institutional) that emerge between niche-regime-subregimes are also in the research focus of this case study.

In the paper we will not focus especially on the impact of the macro-level designations of the socio-technical landscape that influences (directly or indirectly) the regime and transition to innovation. We will consider the NFG initiative as multi-actor novelty that may induce changes towards regionally sustainable agricultural regime and rural development, provoke new governance approaches and policy measures.

2 Method

The research work in FarmPath project was organized in formation of a few clusters, each of them grouping case-studies in three countries with similar initiatives. The cluster “New Forms of Governance” deals with new forms of governance in rural areas and their role in transitions towards regional sustainability and draws on experience of rural initiatives in Greece, the Czech Republic and Elena case study in Bulgaria. The case studies capture the functions of newly-established initiative and network of actors who share a common view and interest in

the promotion and development of the region with regard to specific principles of sustainability and employ different forms of capitals (social, natural, economic).

The FarmPath project uses mostly qualitative sociological methods of data collection. In Elena case study **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with representatives of various stakeholders: hotel-keepers, bee-keepers, farmers, local and regional authorities, entrepreneurs and other key informants.

3 Local context

3.1 Socio-Economic Characteristic, Economy and Quality of Life

Municipality of Elena (LAU 1 level) is located in the central north part of the Bulgaria. It consists of the town of Elena and 123 villages. The total territory of the municipality is 671,389 sq. km. from which 57% are forests and 29% arable land. It is a semi-mountainous region ranging from 100m to 1500m.

The municipality is classified as rural and 17 villages in the municipality are designated as “mountain disadvantaged areas” according to the classification under the Bulgarian rural development program 2007 – 2013.

The total population in Elena municipality is around 9 500 people⁵ more than half of which lives in the municipal center – Elena. Compared with the previous population census in 2001, there is a decrease of 17%. The population density is very low - 16 inhabitants/sq.km.

In the municipality of Elena the settlements are grouped around the central town - Elena. In Elena are mainly located institutions, providing services for the population – schools, health care centres, banks, etc. Therefore the condition of infrastructure network affects the quality of life in the area and in particular settlements, standing at a large distance from administrative centre.

In most of the settlements there is well-developed electricity and water supply network but they are outdated and they are not functioning properly. Also the municipality has well developed road network. But there are no motorways and first class roads and the category of existing roads is low.

The leading economic sector is sector of services (round 60% of the gross added value) - more than 70% of the enterprises are operating in the trade, services and tourism, 6% are in the agriculture and around 6% in industry⁶.

More than 20 years ago there were relatively big industrial enterprises which after the transition to market economy do not work at their full capacity, the equipment is old and

⁵ Data from the 2011 Population Census.

⁶ Data from Municipal Development Plan of the Municipality of Elena 2007–2013 (official document)

amortized, and most of them are closed. Nowadays new small and medium enterprises - mostly private - restored the traditional business and currently operate successfully in the field of timber and clothing industry, wood-processing, tailor enterprises, restaurants, processing of forest fruits and herbs but also in services (hotels and restaurants, tourism facilities etc.).

The tourism and tourist services offered in Elena area at that time may refer to forms of mass, conventional type of tourism. Formal state policy directed the tourist and sports societies and inputs, and networks (Balkantourist state company and Cooptourist company were the main actors in the tourism sector). Trained instructors and schools for beginners in skiing and tour guides activities were part of the sector.

Regarding agricultural production, more than 20 years ago the only production unit in the municipality is so called Agro-Industrial Complex (AIC). The main part of the agricultural activities both in the crop production and in animal husbandry is carried out within the AIC. There was a considerable amount of the territory under the plum trees, strawberries and partially raspberries. The municipality had a relatively small part of the cereals and oilseeds productions compared to the other municipalities in the district. 3000 ha cultivated land was under the grain crops. The bee-keeping was developed to a certain extend. Animal breeding was also developed – around 24000 sheep and 2000 cattle were raised.

3.2 Municipality governance and institutional arrangements

The municipality governance combines the efforts of the public authorities and local actors. It is governed by mayor, deputy mayor and secretary and has two departments: "General Administration" and "Specialized Administration".

The municipality administration in cooperation with local NGO's and Local Tourism Council (LTC) as well as experts, is developing strategic documents for community development and different socio-economic sectors. Some of the actors are actively involved in the process of sustainable tourism development by sharing best practices for the integration of cultural and natural heritage.

The functioning of the municipal administrations is regulated by the regional development policy. The municipality development plan for the period 2007 – 2013 set priorities and measures to be funded under the Regional Development Operational Programme and the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP). Additionally, the municipality has developed "Strategic programme for economic development of the municipality" and "Strategy for regional policy for cultural heritage preservation and management" as well as together with municipality of Zlataritsa initiated the establishment of Local Action Group (LAG) under the Leader programme.

There are more than 20 projects funded by national and European programme which initiated and implemented by the municipality⁷. Almost half of them are social projects focused on integration of disadvantaged groups as well as children and old people. There are five projects on promoting civil participation in various forms – forums, referendums, etc. There are also five projects on developing tourism – ecotourism and cultural tourism. The infrastructure projects are five and are related to water supply, waste management, improving road conditions and improving playing grounds for children.

After 2000, the Tourist Society “Chumerna” and the Sports Society “Chumerna” are the main stakeholders, partners and key actors in the municipality of Elena in the process of setting up and development of the integrate product of rural tourist services and local food production. Also they involve local people to participate in this process as voluntaries.

The higher layer of governance structures is the district – Veliko Tarnovo. This is the level where most ministries and national agencies have their regional offices. The interactions between the municipal administration and the district offices of the national bodies are not always well coordinated. Smooth collaboration is very often more a result of personal attitudes and motivations than an established mechanism.

3.3 Tourism and Agriculture

Elena municipality is situated in the semi-mountainous and mountainous area. Its landscape is dominated by forests and pastures while the arable land is found in small-scale parcels throughout the entire municipality. There are protected areas in the territory of the municipality (two natural reserves, the protected natural sites "Elephant" and "Waterfall") which offer favourable condition for tourism and recreation.

The municipality is rich with a lot of artefacts of the cultural-historical heritage: architecture and construction, folklore and crafts (homespun tailoring, furriery, weaving etc.) of which the most preserved crafts are mostly wood carvings and pottery. The landscape, a few natural sights of the Elena Balkan - part of the Balkan range - are potential resource for development of tourism.

Within the municipality lots of facilities for sport and tourism were built and reconstructed: ski facilities, ski-lift, terrains for climbing, many routes and eco-paths, two outdoor pools and one indoor, sport stadium with professional equipment etc., renovated hotels, newly built family hotels.

Farm structure in the municipality is determined by the terrain and natural conditions. Vast majority of the farm holdings in Elena region are holdings of medium and small farmers - there is only one agricultural cooperative and a few larger land leasers.

At the moment the livestock breeding is concentrated in small farms specialised in pig-

⁷ <http://www.elena.bg/project/index.htm> - (in Bulgarian language) Accessed on 31 May 2012

breeding, sheep and goat-breeding and beef-breeding. In the municipality there are only two larger farms with herds of about 100 cows each and 3-4 large sheep farms (more than 100 sheep).

The crop production is carried out mainly by the cooperative (one cooperative in the village Konstantinovo) and 2-3 leaseholders who cultivate 20-30 to 50ha and another one with 100ha. Local people produce agricultural products for own consumption on their fields and own gardens. Some of them sell part of their products and operate as semi-subsistence farms, mainly in vegetable and meat production, bee-keeping etc.

Some of the guest houses also produce vegetables and other home-grown products but it is only for their visitors and own needs.

3.4 Environment and Land Management

Due to the long-term land abandonment much of the available agriculture land has gradually overgrown by natural vegetation. Expert estimations report that more than 3000 ha have been converted to forests. Many of the abandoned arable fields close to villages were used as pastures for grazing animals. Small scale patches of vegetable gardens and mown meadows formed mosaic landscape around some of the villages.

The municipal development plans⁸ report forest cover of almost 36 000 ha and agriculture land of around 28 000 ha, of which arable land is 19 000 ha.

Many of the farming areas in the municipality can be considered as High Nature Value grasslands – these are flower-rich meadows, extensive pastures with very low grazing density and small scale mosaic cropping around villages. It is very important as a provider of non-agricultural/non-market goods: attractive landscapes, recreation spaces, cultural heritage, biological diversity, tourist amenities, etc. In this regard it is an important part for development and advancement of the integrated product “rural tourism and local food production” as a basis of the transition process within the initiative “new form of governance” At the same time, in the last five years due to the implementation of the Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) there is an increase of the cultivated land:

“For example, in 2009/2010 in municipality of Elena there were cultivated approximately 83 ha under wheat, 22 ha under maize and no area under sunflower. In 2011/2012 the area under crop production (wheat and oilseeds) has increased, as some of the uncultivated land was ploughed – which is not so rapid in the municipality of Elena as it is in other district areas due to the geography and spatial characteristics of the territory. Furthermore, this change is mainly in favour of field crops (grain,

⁸ Municipal Development Plan of the Municipality of Elena 2007–2013 (official document)

oilseeds, and technical cultures - intensive production system) due to the volume of subsidies”⁹.

There is a tendency for reconstruction and increase of areas planted with permanent crops - plums, cherries, raspberry, currant, aronia and strawberries. Recently the interest in cultivation and collection of wild herbs (balm (*Melissa officinalis*), lavender, spearmint and forest fruits) and mushrooms is growing, mainly for export.

The territorial management can be grouped in the three main categories:

- ✓ Unrestricted regime – usual rule of law applies, including the good agriculture and environmental conditions for agricultural land supported by any of the CAP schemes;

- ✓ Regime under biodiversity protection – depending on the protected area category, there are different management regimes. In nature reserves, no economic activity is allowed; the only exception is controlled tourism paths. In protected sites as well as in Natura 2000 sites, economic activities are allowed meeting certain restrictions defined in the designation orders. In the municipality there are two nature reserves, three protected sites and a couple of natural monuments covering an area of 550 ha. Additionally, approximately one fourth of the territory is covered by a Natura 2000 zone “Tvurdishki Balkan”.

- ✓ Regime under water sanitary protection – there are two management regimes depending on the distance from the dam. In sanitary zone I (up to 1000m) all economic activities are forbidden, including the change of permanent land use. In sanitary zone II (a buffer of 1809ha around zone I) it is not allowed to locate livestock and pig farms; to apply liquid manure or establish campings or other vacation facilities. The dam “Yovkovtsi” situated in western part of the municipality is a water sanitary protection zone covering an area of 22 300 ha.

4 The initiative: New form of Governance

The case study consists of two sub initiatives that define a “new form of governance”, i.e. development of rural and agritourism and traditional agriculture and food production on the territory of the municipality. The new form of governance is established on the basis of the idea to integrate the two sub-regimes - tourism and agriculture in order to attain integrity, interaction and support between them. The main aim is to achieve a synergy effect resulting in the sustainable development of the whole municipality as an economic region and territory.

Rural and agri-tourism

The municipality has more than 100 years tradition in organized tourism. In 1901 the local Tourist Society “Chumerna” was established. Some years later in 1908 the Sports Society

⁹ Interview with the representative of the Regional Agricultural Advisory Service, Veliko Tarnovo

“Chumerna” was found. Later on it started the building of the relevant sport equipments with the participation of the local people. There were built mountain hostels, playgrounds, tourist itineraries. Despite all the natural resources, rich traditions and heritage, after the Second World War up to 1990 Elena as a tourist destination is not part of the "pathways of Balkantourist" and it is "episodic and non-promoted (non-propaganda)" destination. The establishment of the NGO "Local Tourism Council" in 1997 is seen as a new beginning for the development of alternative forms of tourism in the municipality.

The initiative (novelty) was launched in 2000. The tourism product of Elena municipality is a complex package composed by the rich cultural and historical heritage, monuments and crafts, nature and its phenomena, entertainments attract tourists depending on their interests.

Up to 2000, in Elena there was only one hotel. 12 years later, there are 98 registered guest houses, small hotels/family hotels, rooms; bungalows (see Table 1).

Table 1. Accommodation establishments and tourist visits in the municipality of Elena

Year	Accommodation establishments ¹	Tourists ²	Number of the visitors of the museums ³	
			Bulgarians	Foreigners
2005	46	1545	9148	151
2006	51	3416	-	-
2007	60	5490	8970	279
2009	69	-	10685	229
2011	81	7814	11086	286
June, 2012	98	n/a	-	-

¹ All accommodations establishments – guest houses, small hotels/family hotels, rooms; bungalows

² Data from the hotels’ registers for the visitors and nights spent (statistics made by the municipality authorities)

³ Data from Local Complex of Museums

Source: Municipality expert “Trade and Tourism”

“Currently, only 25% of the all accommodation establishments are situated in Elena. The rest of them are located in the other 124 settlements – almost in every settlement there is at least one registered place for accommodation. It is a good trend showing revitalization and preservation of the region – lot of the old houses are renewed and adapted for tourists’ accommodation¹⁰”.

After 2000 was build new and was reconstructed the old facilities for sport and tourism: ski facilities, ski-lift, terrains for climbing, routes and eco-paths, two outdoor pools and one indoor, sport stadium with professional equipment, artificial rock climbing wall, 8 polygons for sports orienteering, equestrian facilities etc.; renovated houses as hotels, new build family hotels. Currently, the tourist Society “Chumerna” marks and maintains 9 hiking trails in the

¹⁰ Source: interview with the Municipality expert “Trade and Tourism”.

municipality. Nearby Yovkovtsi dam is also used as a resource for rural tourism. Around it people make camps, fish, play sports and practice, others recreational activities.

Hunting tourism has developed rapidly within the initiative, although it is a target (specific) one and cannot be assigned to a classical type of rural tourism. The territory of Elena is rich with game and two forestry holdings manage the hunting.

Crafts are well integrated into tourist package of Elena. Since two years representatives of the craftsmen have attended along with other stakeholders the tourist exhibitions.

Traditional agriculture and local food production

In the studied (semi-)mountainous area traditionally the agriculture regime has been well presented by extensive perennial and cereals production, animal breeding and food processing.

The industrialization and the collectivization of the land and stock breeding during the socialist time were powerful factors for the leaving of the residents of the small mountain villages and transmigration to Elena and to the larger cities to seek better employment and education for their children. At present, the number of the livestock has been significantly reduced and the livestock breeding is concentrated entirely in private farms which sell their products, mainly cow's milk, in the dairy of Elena town.

The agricultural cooperation “Agrokoop Chumerna”, Elena was the successor of the AIC after the political changes. The small owners` agricultural land was hired and sunflower was grown in cooperation with Dobrudja Agricultural Institute, specialized in the selection and development of the production technology for wheat and sunflower. The processed sunflower seeds were exported to France by the Institute. But in 2002, the license for this variety of sunflower and its production technology is sold. Currently, it is produced in France and Bulgaria is its importer¹¹. Thus, an opportunity to continue the implementation of the selection and production technology is missed. Moreover the cooperation stopped its activity few years later and the prevalent part of the land is uncultivated.

At present, there is only one cooperative in one of the villages in the municipality which grows sunflower, produces select seeds, buys up and process herbs and forest fruits.

The favourable climatic and agricultural conditions, ecological cleanliness, traditions offer an opportunity to refund and extend the land covered with perennial plants such as raspberry, aronia, strawberry, black currants. From the formerly existing perennial plants nowadays there are about 250 ha of plum trees, 15 ha – apple trees and about 9 ha of vineyards – most of them ill-kept and in need of renovation.

In the recent years increases the farmers` interests in starting fruit-growing, but in fact their interest is directed mainly towards the nuts (walnuts and hazelnuts) – the production costs are relatively low as well as many farmers benefit from the RDP measures under the most

¹¹ Source: interview with the former chairman of the agricultural cooperative.

preferred measures: 112 Setting up of young farmers and 141 Supporting Semi-Subsistence Farms Undergoing Restructuring.

In addition to the agricultural production, local people start producing local food such as different kind of honey, wine, cheese, meat dishes and the most famous “Elenski but” which is a local certified ham.

Main changes occurred in the agriculture profile are as follows:

- ✓ reconstruction and increase of areas planted with permanent crops - plums, cherries, raspberry, currant, aronia, strawberries;
- ✓ livestock breeding is carried out in small farms - pig-breeding, sheep and goat-breeding, and beef-breeding; breeding and preservation of local breed sheep;
- ✓ starting organic bee-keeping;
- ✓ cultivation and collection of wild herbs and mushrooms
- ✓ vegetable-growing – traditional sector in the past, now starts again.

Elena traditional food specialties are: "Elenski but" prepared thanks to specific climate of Elena area; fillet Elena; Elena plum brandy; organic Balkan honey; aronia wine; milk and dairy products from the region; herbs (common balm, stevia etc.). Traditional food production in the municipality aims to application of the local certification scheme in order to popularize local amenities and promote Elena as a best place for rural tourism. The promoters (producers and local authorities) are close up to protect the brand "Elenski but".

For already 12-years of its beginning the initiative has made a significant progress but it is still difficult to be described as initiative that achieved its goal – creation of the comprehensive and integrated product of rural tourism and traditional agriculture. The integration between the two sub-regimes is still on-going process:

“One of the reasons is the lack of communication, commitment and established network of the actors (farmers and hotel-keepers). Another reason is still a weak popularity, some restrictions and bureaucratic requirements for implementation of already prescribed by the Bulgarian legislation direct sales of livestock products. One of the criteria to register a retail shop is the most limited one for producers to market their products directly to the tourist establishments outside of their own farm. Also it is not possible local authorities to take decisions and to encourage farmers and hotel-keepers as it is in Italy, for example. Anyhow, the hoteliers show a huge interest in selling local products, because it is known that production in the Elena region is environmental friendly¹²”.

¹² Source: interview with the Municipality expert “Trade and Tourism”.

5 The interactions between the niche and regime

The field work revealed that the initiative is already recognizable by the regime but there is still not integration even interaction between both of them. Moreover the regime (region) directly did not support the initiative with information nor technically or methodologically. The only connection is just between some of the regimes' sections with the niche connected in some way – e.g. LTC is in direct contacts with the LTC in Veliko Tarnovo district center. Also LTC participates regularly in the tourist expos "Cultural Tourism - Veliko Tarnovo".

At the societal level (national landscape level) the interactions are realized by the mediation of the regime through the impact that such niches have on the assessment and adoption of the national priorities of the state policy in tourism. Also some of the niche's actions support the process of the legal framework updating for the tourism sector in the country as a whole. One of them is the niche's contribution in the already prepared draft of the new Tourism Law, which reflects the new realities and includes many new elements, connected namely with the expansion of the alternative types of tourism in the country.

However, there are some good practices of interaction between the niche and the regime. The initiative changed the vision for the two sub-regimes, which play a key role for the whole agro-regime in the region, putting them in an interrelation. The awareness, the development and the progress of the initiative "rural tourism in the municipality of Elena" on the basis of the mobilization and engaging all local resources – environment, nature, tourist (show) places, culture, history, environmental friendly local products etc. – is a best practice that ensure implementation and successful achievement of the RDP aim (regime's) for rural sustainable development. It shows the pathway of the preservation of these territories through the diversification of the economic activities and their integration with agriculture.

The initiative presents an effective way to shorten the paths between tourism agents and tourists through exploring and using new and modern communication tools and instruments for advertisement and offering small, short-time, flexible, targeted and diverse tourist packages with services specific for rural tourism. Thus it has a positive impact on the competitiveness in the region as encourages changes in the tourism development profile of the area, represented mainly by the historical and cultural tourism services in and around the city of Veliko Tarnovo (some modules of the rural tourism product are incorporated in the Regional program for tourism development as a diversification and supplement of the current tourist product).

Unlike the regional level, on the municipality level the interaction between the two sub regimes is more visible as well as their support to the initiative success, but at that moment they operate rather parallel and separately than interconnected.

The initiative altered the technical aspects of the regime with the increased interest in the tourism amenities of the municipality of Elena and its surroundings which reflects in the

growth of the visitors' number (mainly for the weekend and up to 7 days stay). This trend shows that the initiative is popular and well-advertised; it is mainstreamed into the regime due to its natural and cultural heritage and capacity and thanks to the local ecological products, delicacies and tradition food. Also there is a continuous process of expanding and diversifying of tourist services and attractions offered with a view to create an image of the brand "tourism in Elena" as a standard for best tourist product. In this regard the joint participation of the local authorities, LTC and all stakeholders in lot of expos and exhibitions is a very strong element. Moreover the last participation of the local representatives on such forum is related to the win a prize for the best performance.

Elena as a tourist destination is more and more known among the foreign tourists. Some of them have already purchased properties (houses) in the villages not only in the municipality but also in Veliko Tarnovo region.

The initiative led to change in the way of administration - the sites for food and entertainment, and accommodation establishments are registered in the municipality under the legislation of the Tourism Act and the regulations thereto, including regulations on the municipality level.

The analysis shows that there are just some examples of anchoring of the initiative into the regime's actor networks, especially in tourist networks (national, regional or international.) Local Tourism Council is a partner of other similar local tourist councils, for example with this one in Veliko Tarnovo. Also there is a well-established contact with the Ministry of economy, energy and tourism in the form of consultations, exchange of information, feedbacks. But the initiative actors operate mostly individually only on a local basis, which limits their possibilities to access information, to increase their capacity, to identify and follow changes in the customer preferences and needs, etc.

In this respect it was important to examine how institutional changes impact on the initiative. Since 2000, all institutional changes at the municipality aimed at the accomplishment of the idea for establishing of the new form of governance, including local strategies, local plans for municipality development, strategy for tourism development, setting up LAG, etc. Part of this process is the establishment of the appropriate structures to support the initiative - the most important of which are Municipal Expert Commission for categorization and Tourism Advisory Board.

The Local Tourism Council was founded to operate as NGO but its main goal is to present local authorities and institutions on the regional and national level and since then it works very closely with local authorities:

"The whole energy – ours and municipality's is precisely directed towards development this kind of tourism and in the deepest sense to change the policy of the municipality¹³".

¹³ Interview with the chairman of the LTC.

The municipality government, encouraged by the successful launch of the initiative, endeavours to facilitate the institutional arrangements that would promote the development of the local tourism in every way (regarding rules, procedures for registration of facilities for tourism, encouragement of local people to start business in tourism, provide local actors with information, subsidize activities related to promotion of local tourism product, etc.). In all aspects these activities make actors more confident and committed to the initiative and its direction and future success.

6 The emergent transition

The most visible marks of the emergent transition could be distinguished as:

6.1 Strengthening and expanding the activities related to rural tourism

The main emergent transition characteristics are: continuous growth of the number of the accommodation establishments and tourist accommodation facilities, the number of the tourists both Bulgarians and foreigners, the number of the visits in the museums, diversification of the facilities and entertainments for rural tourism development within the municipality etc. It is observed a big variety of the accommodation establishments. According to the municipality expert in “Trade and tourism”, officially registered places consist of hotels, guest houses, separated rooms, family hotels, small hotels, bungalows etc. *“There is no settlement without at least one accommodation establishment and the municipality consists of 124 settlements”*.

The development of the integrated product of local tourism is accompanied with the new tourist attractions – mountain biking, rock climbing, rope trolley, swimming pools, zoos, horseback riding, visiting a farm (though sporadic), eco-paths, visits to apiaries, various games such as paint ball, tennis, hunting etc.

6.2 Improved interaction between local authorities and actors involved in the initiative

It resulted in the local policy orientation and prioritization of tourism sector in local economy and institutional arrangements developed for promoting rural tourism; common initiatives/actions in advertising Elena municipality as tourist destination etc.

6.3 Reinforced multifunctionality of agriculture

✓ Growing interest by farmers and new entrants to start business in tourist services offering (especially running guest houses). There is an increase of the farmers who started to offer tourist services (accommodation, food and entertainments). Agricultural activities are shifted to the best agricultural practices which promote a multifunctional role of the sector. But it could not be claimed that farmers shift from being commodity producers to being service providers. The core group founded the LTC started contacts with farmers to attract them to join the initiative, but they found some difficulties: fragmented land, lack of farmers' experience and knowledge, mentality of the „small narrow-minded region” ("s/he are going to profit and I to serve her/him - the Bulgarian does not like such things") etc.

✓ Increase of the cultivated land and traditional agricultural production (perennials, vegetables etc.) and encouragement of the agricultural producers to diversify their activities as cultivation of the herbs (common balm, lavender, peppermint, stevia, etc.) and in initiation of organic bee-keeping and organic aronia selection and growing and aronia wine producing.

✓ Modern processing technologies are implemented, a new enterprise in collecting and packaged herbs and mushrooms was build up for cultivation of variety of (wild) herbs and species.

6.4 Strengthen links and social networking

Consumer preferences and their changes force strengthening the interaction between producers, processors and consumers patterns. The increase in consumer demands and needs leads to diversify and enrich the tourist product and its transformation into an integrated tourist product with the label “Elena” – like: accommodation ⇒ local food ⇒ entertainment ⇒ exploratory activities, ⇒ tourism and recreation.

7 Sustainability assessment

The Buttel states that “sustainability is not so much and end-point as it is a process; the notion of sustainability remind us that there will always be new ways the agro-food systems can be rendered more ecologically sound, more economically viable and more socially just” (Buttel, F., 2006). Following him, the overview of the initiative addressed does not consider sustainability as a point in time towards which is mapping and making a strict quantitative assessment but rather is assessing it as an ongoing interactive process balancing qualitatively the three dimensions – economic, social and environmental.

7.1 Economic sustainability dimension

✓ The largest number of registered companies in the municipality is in the tourism and service sector.

✓ In the last five years one can note an increase in the number of the agricultural producers.

✓ There is a significant increase in the number of tourists in the municipality; as well as in the number of registered tourism companies and facilities

✓ There is a reduction in the number of all livestock animals, including pigs. In the future it may have a negative impact on the production of the most well-known product Elenski but ham.

✓ In the last 3-4 years, there is a trend of utilizing abandoned land but mostly with cereal and technical crops – not too typical for the region.

✓ At the moment this is driven by the CAP subsidies.

✓ From this perspective, the process is again in transition due to the introduction of the CAP subsidies and the farmers' adaptation to the type of support offered followed by the next reforms in the CAP support expected from 2014 onwards.

✓ On-going process of the implementation of the alternative tourism (rural, eco etc.) and integrating local food products and specific nature values in tourism offers and packages.

7.2 Social sustainability dimension

✓ Overall, the municipality is characterized by decreasing and aging of population, which is the usual trend in rural municipalities in the country;

✓ At the same time, there are indications of young people returning to the area and starting their own business after having spent some years working abroad.

✓ New entrants – Bulgarian and foreigners who buy old houses in the villages.

✓ There is an identified need for more specialized training in the field of rural and ecotourism tourism as well as in environmentally friendly farming practices.

✓ The few trainings in farming are carried out only recently with the implementation of measure 111 under the NRDP but these focus on topics mostly related to the needs of implementation of measure 112 Young farmers and measure 141 Semi-subsistence farmers as well as measure 214 Agri-environment.

✓ Neither of these are enough for ensuring an integrated development between tourism and farming in the area.

✓ There is no recorded planned interaction or collaboration between farmers and tourism providers in the area. We consider this a weak point given their mutual dependency in terms

of customers-consumers; landscape creation-maintenance by farmers and use-satisfaction by tourists.

- ✓ Municipal authorities are reported as collaborative and supportive to both farmers and tourism providers.

7.3 Environmental sustainability dimension

- ✓ Nature-rich area both in terms of high conservation value forests and high nature value farmland although no assessment have been made; it is as it is - mostly taken for granted.

- ✓ There are no water, soil or air pollution problems.

- ✓ Local people and businesses make use of the nature values and environment: promoting their farming products as coming ecologically clean area; beautiful landscape for tourism, etc. and rely on continued existence.

- ✓ Around a fourth of the municipality falls within Natura 2000 area but local people and administration seem to ignore it; it can be due to the fact that it is a part of “Tvurdishki Balkan” SPA, which may be considered as diverting the marketing focus from Elena Balkan.

Local authorities, local actors/stakeholders have put sustainable development of tourism as a priority for the local economy. From the above mentioned evidences of the research fieldwork it is apparent, that the development of this initiative has been achieved significant progress in the institutional, organizational, infrastructure, information and socio-economical aspects. Although the promotion of the local tourism and attracted tourists from the country and abroad, still it could not be claimed that the initiative ensures sustainability features; there are several weaknesses that hinder this already has occurred. The development of rural and ecotourism is dynamic product that does not tolerate inaction - requires continuous efforts and innovation.

The following features can be drawn as deficits of sustainability:

- ✓ Insufficient and not integrated management of natural, cultural, infrastructural and human resources at the municipal level.

- ✓ A lack of an integral product of rural and eco tourism.

- ✓ There is no real and strong relationship between the two sectors - tourism and agriculture.

- ✓ Weak and individual marketing of the destination.

- ✓ Lack or poor quality control of the services.

- ✓ Low interest and collaboration among all stakeholders (hoteliers, private business, farmers, cultural and museum staff, service sector).

- ✓ No funding of common activities.

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