

# Action Research in sustainable rural development

## Case Study Project Apuseni, Romania

### Abstract

Sustainable Development and management of natural resources only works if there is a common view of the future within the local society. To gain this common view, it is necessary to involve stakeholder, who are able and willing to make decisions towards an effective and efficient use or conservation. Therefore one of the most important objectives of the Project Apuseni was to get into an exchange of scientific view and knowledge of the people living in the area. With various methods of information, participation and cooperation the objectives and issues of the trans disciplinary approach has been put successfully into practice. Within 3 years it has been possible to involve stakeholder in discussions, workshops and practical experience like building up agro-tourism by organizing an association, who set up an information centre and developed attractive offers for tourists. On a political level the project offered workshops and discussion. Participative Action Research have been applied successfully according to the experience of an other Sister-Project in Hohenlohe in the South of Germany. The Romanian people appreciated the trans disciplinary approach, which had to be adopted to various aspects of the regional society and social norms. With three posters this approach is documented by first giving an overview of the Methodology, secondly describing a workshop on marketing of milk products and thirdly giving some examples of the participative action process on the third poster.

### Background

The following Figure gives a brief overview of the theories within the learning process of an action research cycle. The systems engineering approach provides the basis of the action research cycle as a problem solving technique. Starting from the analysis of the situation or problem, practitioners and scientists working in collaboration, plan various solutions, implement the best solution and evaluate the outcome. All steps in the cycle should be clearly documented to allow the cycle to begin again if the solution is found to be unsatisfactory. From a behavioral perspective the people are of central interest. It is therefore necessary to start with the analysis of the problem by looking at the personal image of the stakeholders referring to their past behavior, as it is important to assess whether or not the planned actions will match the peoples competencies, convictions, values and objective. The more the norms, and controlling beliefs required for the implementation match personal perceptions, the more likely is the adoption of a new behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TpB) provides a theoretical framework for the stakeholder analysis as well as it leads to an approved method of predicting human behavior.

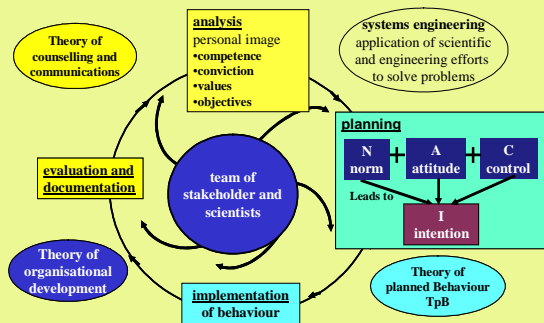


Abb. 1 Social-Psychological Aspects of Project Management  
Sources: Cohen, Fink, Gaddon, Willis 1996; Susman and Evered, 1978; Ajzen I 2001, Rogers C 1985.

### Methoden

The stakeholder analysis reflects attitude and influence as the criteria for deciding the stakeholders involvement in the action process. The attitude of the various stakeholders are assumed to be of importance to the subjective norm of individual behavior. The stakeholder analysis leads to an effective and efficient participation process with a precise distinction between informing, participating and cooperating with the stakeholder.

Theory of planned behavior (TpB)		Norms + Attitude + Control			results in	Intention
Stakeholder Analysis	1. stakeholder e.g. local authorities farmers NGO's government SME's citizens women politicians	2. attitude ++ strongly in favour + weakly in favour o indifferent or undecided - weakly opposed -- strongly opposed	3. influence h high m medium l low			4. How to involve? e.g. inform press, poster, other media participate discussion, focus groups, consultations, interviews, a.o. co-operate working together for some time, implement solutions, evaluate outcome

Abb. 2 Stakeholder-Analysis in the context of the Theory of Planned Behavior [TpB]  
Sources: Richard Beckard in Dick (2001), Selle (1995), Ajzen (2001)

The participation analysis as part of the AR-process covers four procedures, which can be executed either together with, or independently of the stakeholders.

1. The first step of the procedure is the listing of all those (persons and groups), who are affected by the change, or are able to affect the change.
2. The next step is to determine the attitude of the listed stakeholder. The attitude is evaluated in five levels from positive to negative.
3. Thirdly is the evaluation of the influence of the stakeholders classified from high to low.
4. As a last step, various possible forms of participation are discussed.

In order to represent the certainty of the estimation of attitude and influence, the degree of the certainty of the estimation should be part of the analysis with the distinction being between fully confident (///), an informed guess (//) and a wild guess (/). The certainty shows where there is a need for more information on various stakeholder's attitude or influence.

### Distinctions of the Participation Process

The following instruments and methods have been used to involve stakeholder in the project:

#### Information

- public relations
- start up event
- leaflets
- introduction campaign
- private conversation
- presentations/ discussions
- placard at the pub, in the church, etc.
- final public event

#### Participation

- interviews with residents and experts
- activating questionnaire
- planning for real – building a model
- technical advice to private households
- workgroups and workshops

#### Kooperation

A Steering group called "Communal Forum" was invented to gain an organisational frame to the exchange and discussion between Scientists and local Authorities. The forum contributes to the project as

- a Link between local and regional key-person and organisations working on rural development,
- support and advise with the lead-projects,
- and gaining ownership to the regional development process



Picture 1: Workshop at the school house



Picture 2: Planning for Real with school children

### Leading Projects (LPs) and Case Studies

enable a close cooperation between scientists and local people. The small projects are used to validate approaches in the manner of an project management cycle.

Following questions have been used to choose the leading projects, which were taken to action.

- Which importance has the idea of the LP to sustainable development?
- Will the TP be working after the project apuseni has finished?
- Is there quick success to be expected?
- Can the LP be realised within the project period and with the resources we have?

Based on the answers to these questions, the LP's were chosen by the staff members and brought into discussion with the steering comity and additional workshops with the stakeholder. The following Project were expected to contribute to sustainable development and seemed to be feasible:

- new income through developing agro-tourism
- animal-husbandry and building stables
- grassland management
- plant production
- medicine plants
- forestry
- water supply and waste management

**Village-Association** as a platform to build up Tourism and Marketing.

**Scientific Forums** to exchange knowledge between German and Romanian Scientists.



Picture 3: Călineasa – questionnaire at a fair



Picture 4: Information after mass on Sunday