



SMART VILLAGE STRATEGY OF REMETEA (ROMANIA)



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I. FOREWORD

1.1 Local, regional, and national context

Located in the mountainous area of the Giurgiu Basin in Harghita county, Romania, Remetea is one of the largest villages in the region.

The village is lying at the foot of the Giurgiu volcanic mountains, at an average altitude of 750 metres above sea level. According to the 2011 census, the population is 6,171, the large majority being ethnic Hungarians of Roman Catholic confession. The total surface area of the village is 10,774 hectares, of which the village itself covers 1,145 hectares. Remetea and the villages around it typically have long cold winters and short summers. The average annual temperature is between 5.1 and 5.5 degrees Celsius.

The river Mureş, which enters Remetea from the south, describing large curves that divide the village in two, is the largest river locally. On the right-hand bank of the Mureş is the Nagyret bog, a 300-hectare area of eutrophic peat bog, in which rare species of plants have survived from the ice age. In 1980, four hectares of this land were declared to be a nature reserve. In this part of the bog, the peat is more than 3.5 metres in depth.

The administrative management of the village is assured by the local council as a deliberative authority, constituted by 15 local counsellors (including the deputy mayor) as an executive authority, respecting the legislation regarding public administration in Romania. The village of Remetea has its own legal personality under public law, with own patrimony and full legal capacity. The specialist structure of the municipality (mayor's office) is an organisation with a restricted size, which carries out the decisions of the local council and the dispositions of the mayor, as well as deals with the current needs of the local community. Besides the specialized commissions (social, cultural, health, legal and economics) and subordinated institutions (health centre, touristic centre, community centres, social centre, nursery) the village hall tries to respond to all the community needs.

1.2 Key characteristics of the village

Remetea is a settlement of several hundred years of history, with strong traditions and eloquent cultural characteristics. One of the biggest assets of the village is the natural mineral water springs and supplies. We hope to revive the 'bath culture' of the region by opening a wellness and bath centre, while using resources efficiently.

The traditional economy is based on agriculture, forestry, and handicrafts. The community has entrepreneurial spirit, including service providers, a chocolate and sweets factory, and an office furniture enterprise. In this context, the priority is to identify and eliminate factors that limit the pursue of new business opportunities.

The leadership and management of Remetea is stable, makes use of cooperative management techniques and builds up local knowledgebase, besides the subordinated institutions (health centre, touristic centre, community centres, social centre, nursery) tries to respond to all the community needs.

1.3 What is ‘smart’ for Remetea?

Our „smart village” concept will address the emergent needs we have identified in our community, by the following actions:

- Responding to youth out-migration: extending employment opportunities for both young and aging population by promoting distant work/online work; diversifying the labour market by encouraging starting up ICT companies; promoting digital marketing; organizing volunteering and charity online; using online platforms for intergenerational knowledge transfer.
- Diversifying educational opportunities: Enabling online education (blended learning and e-learning) for children, young people, and adults; creating an education platform for schools; Opening non-formal online learning opportunities for adults (digital parenting, active parenting, digital competence development); after-school type educational programs, focusing on ICT skills (basic skills, coding, media literacy, digital citizenship)
- Improving health services and prevention: Creating a presentation platform with useful health information, scheduling, preliminary information regarding medical services and consultations; organization of healthy lifestyle digital campaigns.
- Environment: monitoring the condition of the soil and plants; collection of specific data using sensors; consumer education; creation of an application in the field of water and wastewater services and consumption.
- Making public services more efficient by developing online public service; launching “RemeteApp”; digitization of administration, keeping registers, genealogy, etc.; Providing reliable, authentic information to the inhabitants; broadcasting live events; opinion polls using mobile applications; promoting public engagement.

II. WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM VISION FOR REMETEA?

Our village has been facing complex challenges and dynamic transformations that urges the implementation of a new, integrated, digital management system that facilitates interaction with all the local actors of our community’s everyday life. Our motivation is to learn and adopt an integrative development approach, including economic development, health, innovation, and



education. In the present context of the crises (Covid-19) we have experienced the increased importance of online services and digitalization.

There are four main categories of initiatives whose realization has a special importance in village development:

1. **Infrastructure:** Building a natural gas distribution network in the villages of Remetea and Sineu, Harghita county.

The objective of the project is to build a natural gas distribution network located in the villages of Remetea and Sineu, with a total length of approx. 60 km, which covers all communal and county streets and roads in the village belonging to the public domain.

The general object of the investment is the development and modernization of the rural area, with direct implications upon local investments, upon industry, tourism and upon the wellbeing of local people. The aim is to create a sustainable investment that will be integrated into the existing infrastructure and correlated to future investments.

The project will pursue the concept of „smart gas distribution network”, which involves that the investment includes as a feature the increase of gas network flexibility, especially using IT technologies.

2. **Civil constructions:** Building a swimming pool of educational purpose

The swimming pool with educational and training purpose will be developed and equipped according to a standardized project plan, through the program of the National Investment Campaign CNI S.A. The pool is addressed primarily to the didactic use by schools and other educational establishments from Remetea village. The proposed investment aims to facilitate free access to the pool for children and young people to practice swimming and other water sports, and after the official school program in can be used by people interested in swimming as a leisure and health maintenance activity, the pool having a capacity of 65 persons maximum.

The destination of the construction is a swimming pool, so water sports being its main function, with a built area of 840 sqm and a developed area of 1391 sqm. Its surfaces will be designed according to the European and national norms in force for pools used for educational purposes.

The investment is in an advantageous positioning near the centre of the village. The investment will have a positive impact, creating an unprecedented opportunity to develop swimming sports activities by the various local beneficiaries. At the same time, the existence of the swimming pool makes it possible to highly diversify the physical activities within the school education and extra-

curricular programs and will contribute to the health and general well-being of the local inhabitants.

3. **Tourism:** Spa Centre, Remetea village

In Remetea there is a mineral water source with high yield of water, certified for its healing properties, all exploitation right owned by the village. The community would like to exploit it for touristic purposes; therefore, a feasibility study has already been made. The study gave birth to a new tourism concept for this region, which takes into consideration the new tendencies in tourism worldwide. The goal is to replace the mass-tourism with the „luxury of simplicity”, where sustainability becomes a main aspect, „Soft” or „Human-scale” Tourism being preferred instead of mass tourism. The main objectives are to put the least possible weight on the natural environment, enjoying nature in its „untouched” shape, requesting the visitors to know and adapt themselves to the culture of the visited place.

Following these principles, the idea is to build guesthouses around the spring, arranged like a mini-village in the style of the local built heritage, perfectly fitted into the landscape. According to this concept the water will be used for healing or wellness “individually in each guesthouse, not in a large, common spa building.

The concept includes and interactive presentation of the local and regional cultural heritage and natural values, involving the local community in providing these services, for instance by interactive presentations of the local gastronomy.

In this way we would like to establish a touristic practice that avoids the negative effects of mass tourism, that offers a recreation full of authentic experience, in the spirit of a simple yet high quality lifestyle. This concept is adapted to the large-scale changes in our lifestyle that are expected to be valid globally after the pandemics.

4. **Education:** Upper-secondary education in Remetea

The aim of the project is to establish a four-year upper-secondary theoretical school (high school) in the village for young people aged 14-18, where not only locals, but children from all over the country and the larger region could apply. The institution will first aim for double accreditation, i.e. it will be accredited to give both Romanian and Hungarian high school diplomas (baccalaureate), the next aim being to join an international school network and provide an internationally recognized high school diploma.

This will contribute to the pedagogical-methodological renewal of education in the region. The establishment of the school also means a new investment in infrastructure, i.e. the construction of

a modern school complex that attracts teachers and students from the larger region. The new school will serve as a boarding school with proper dormitories and will house more than 200 teenagers. It will operate with 27 teachers and almost the same number of support staff who create the conditions for optimal pedagogical work during its full operation. At the heart of school concept there is the individual child, and the background pedagogical principles lie in our belief that each child has different endowments, motivations and values. Thus, the basic mission of the school is to focus on the self-paced, optimal development of every students, supported by a growing amount of reformed pedagogical-educational theories and practices worldwide.

III. INTERVENTION LOGIC

3.1 Challenges

Remetea has some economic and social disadvantages, just as most rural mountain areas have. As a “cul-de-sac” village, the access to the village and the traffic infrastructure needs improvements. Remetea is not located in the catchment area of any big cities, the region is short of big industries and major private investments, most of the jobs in the region are part of the low payment category. Once a prosperous industry of the region, the milk powder factory has been closed and timber industry also diminished. Tourism is less developed in the village, investment in tourism industry is exceptionally low. Another specificity is that most of the local population speaks Hungarian as a mother tongue, a minority language in Romania, so besides the foreign language competences of the inhabitants, Romanian language competences also need improvement.

The main challenges in engaging local community in village development are:

- a) **Lack of once organic connection between generations** – older family members used to pass their competences and knowledge to the younger generations, but due to the big societal changes (mobility of young generations, digitalization) this organic link does not exist any more, and intergenerational learning has to be facilitated in new, yet unexplored methods.
- b) **Volunteering and mutual help** has long traditions but these traditions “faded away” with the new, individualized society, so solidarity needs to be “re-invented”.
- c) **Communication channels** are changing quickly, so the local public services and local business need support to adapt new communication and marketing methods.
- d) While children spend lots of time on the internet, their active digital skills are not developed, so they cannot make use of the online learning opportunities, **students need support to become conscious digital citizens.**

- e) **Communication between school and parents** is sometimes difficult as parents are very busy – digital communication should be developed for this purpose.
- f) The idea of “sustainability” and environment protection is still not enough understood and adopted by the local people.
- g) **The digital information services of the Village Hall** are not developed enough, and citizens do not have enough digital competence – these two areas need to be developed at once.

3.2 Assets

a) **Community**

Remetea is one of the “biggest” villages in the region with a population of 6171 inhabitants. It is a community of several hundred years of history, a settlement with strong traditions and eloquent cultural characteristics. Local people attend community centres and programmes organised by local NGOs, the Church or youth groups. There is a strong community formed around the local schools (located in several buildings with educational purpose), 687 children aged 2 to 15 go to the local educational institutions. Children aged 16 and above commute to a neighbouring town or move to boarding schools. There are 65 teachers of various levels and subjects involved in public education. The school has a strong connection to other community groups as well, playing a key role in the scientific, cultural and charity events of the village. The local school puts a special focus on the development of the creativity of the children, which could be a good basis for future innovation in the village. Besides various anniversaries and cultural events where the local people take part in great number, occasionally scientific, informative and educative events are also organised. Among the regular events we can mention the “Ladies’ Hour” and “Conscious Parents’ Evening”. We also run an activity club for young people with disabilities, where two specialists coordinate their training and development.

b) **Economic activities**

The traditional (and still relevant) economy of the village was based on agriculture, forestry, and handicrafts. New businesses are mostly based on these traditional economic activities: The milk powder (and baby formula) factory and the chocolate factory make use of locally produced milk; the office furniture factory continues – a renewed form – the traditional woodcraft. Services are also playing a growing part of the local economy, public services also play an important role in employment. The agricultural cooperative plays an important economical role, and it has good development potential. Also based on traditional skills in handicrafts and woodwork, the village

has numerous small building companies, that are characterized by a high level of mobility, providing construction services in all parts of the country and in Europe as well.

c) **Local values**

Remetea is liveable town indeed, with a high sense of community and shared cultural values. Traditional dance and music clubs, celebrations of historical events are part of the everyday life of the village. The community is conscious of the heritage values and takes good care of their buildings and street images.

One important asset is the Health Centre of the village with the family physician's cabinet, the dental clinic, the ambulance and firefighter station and the pharmacy. Local people can also get appointment to health specialists who regularly come from the neighbouring town to make consultations.

d) **Environment**

One of the biggest assets of the village is the natural mineral water springs and supplies. In a recent project over 22 mineral water springs have been identified. Mineral water once was used for traditional cure, we hope to revive the "bath culture" of the region by opening a wellness and bath centre. The village has its own, internal water supply.

Recently lots of investments have been made in the water and sewage system, the efficient use of resources being one of the main goals. Besides these investments we have also started planning a solar energy park.

"Mlastina Mare" ("The Big Swampland") is a protected natural habitat, its reconstruction and long-term protection has been recently implemented within a Phare Project.

The Mures River, one of the biggest rivers of the country has its spring approx. 30 kms from the village, the riverbank is also rich in flora and fauna.

e) **Governance:**

The leadership and management of Remetea village is characterized by stability, making use of cooperative management techniques and building up local knowledge-base. Successful projects have already been implemented in teamwork and efficient use of local resources, therefore (we excel in accessing European funds even on national level. Remetea has proven an innovative spirit and has initiated successful projects that are recognized not only locally, but also regionally.

The basic living conditions are ensured for all the inhabitants of the village through the existence of basic infrastructure, social services, and public health services, supported by private entities and

NGOs as well. Even if less urbanized, the village provides a favourable environment for an active community full of vitality.

3.3 Objectives

After identifying the key challenges that Remetea is facing we can focus on how to exploit them into something that can bring added value to the community. The main areas identified for which we propose specific objectives, activities and results are:

1. Community and local identity
2. E-governance and accessible local services
3. Living standards and environmental issues
4. Digital education and SMART students
5. Limited entrepreneurial activity and lack of market access:

Six **Specific Objectives (SOs)** have been defined for the Smart Village Strategy as described below.

SO 1: Preserving the local identity by creating a digital collection about the history of the local community

SO 2: Development of smart local governance (e-governance) based on easy communication and interaction with citizens

SO 3: Improving living standards by implementing projects that have an impact on the quality of life that meet the needs of the population

SO 4: Improving the local educational system modernization and digitization of teaching activity

SO 5: Supporting economy and agri-food sector

SO 6: Intelligent public safety.

3.4 Smart solutions: actions, outputs, and results

Specific Objectives	Activities	Outputs	Results
SO1: Preserving the local identity by creating a digital collection about the history of the local community	A1. Identification, collection and preservation of data and information related to the past and history of the community, descriptions, photographs, newspaper articles, etc.	An accessible digital archive and platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Getting to know, understand and develop the local identity
	A2. Transposition the material into an accessible digital platform		
	A3. Organizing commemorative and educational meetings dedicated to various categories of people (children, the elderly, etc.)	Regular educational meetings with local people	
SO2: Development of smart local governance (e-governance) based on easy communication and interaction with citizens	A1. Development of free wireless internet access by arranging wi-fi hotspots in frequented public spaces (public and educational institutions)	Public internet access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing administrative bureaucracy Increasing transparency and efficiency of local authorities Reducing administrative costs
	A2. Updating the existing website, presenting all public administration services, with the possibility of accessing links of standard forms, as well as completing them	A website / application with current information and accessible forms (RemeteAPP)	
	A3. Implementation of solutions: online payment for local taxes and duties, or fines; online submission of documents and requests; issuing documents in digital form (with electronic signature)	Special application that reduces the time to process requests and increases taxpayers' satisfaction with the local public authority	
	A4. Implementation of a system through which the locals can notice in real time the problems in the locality	Creating a <i>Civic Alert Platform</i> Efficiency in problem solving	
SO3: Improving living standards by implementing projects that have an impact on the quality of life that	A1. Development of an Intelligent water-sewerage system	Using an innovative operational management model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing local infrastructure Improving living standards
	A2. Modernization of the public lighting system by introducing technological methods to increase energy efficiency and reduce electricity consumption	Improving infrastructure and basic services	



Specific Objectives	Activities	Outputs	Results
meet the needs of the population	A3. Establishing a smart natural gas distribution network	Improved flexibility for the gas networks, especially using ICT technologies.	
	A4 Promoting the use of green energy by setting up solar systems in public institution buildings	Switching to a digital, intelligent and energy efficient administration	
SO4: Improving the local educational system through modernization and digitization of teaching activity	A1. Equipping local schools with IT equipment and educational software through the project <i>Rehabilitation and equipping of the educational infrastructure of Fráter György General School in Remetea , Harghita county, financed by the program POR/ 2017/10 / 10.1.b / 7regions, Priority Axis Improvement of the educational infrastructure</i>	IT equipment (e.g. interactive boards, wi-fi coverage, audio / video conferencing solution, laptops, tablets, computers, etc.) and educational software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversification of the educational offer and improvement of the didactic activity, which implicitly will lead to the diminution of the discrepancy between the students from the rural and the urban areas
	Development of digital skills within the school by organizing training with the target group: teachers, students, possibly parents for the use of digital tools	Training for capacity building and developing digital skills among children, parents, and teachers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning to an online educational system
	Facilitating and developing the transition to an online educational system	Acquiring digital skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An educational system adapted to current trends (online / digital school)
SO5: Supporting the local economy and agri-food sector	Arrangement and operation of the Agri - food market (endowment and application of a sustainable intelligent management)	Facilitating the development of creative, innovative, and high value-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfying the increased demand for quality agri-



Specific Objectives	Activities	Outputs	Results
		added businesses (local business environment)	food local and regional products
		Supporting organic food production and an organized short supply chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase productivity and marketing of local products
SO6: Intelligent public safety	Developing the existing video camera surveillance system	Safe and intelligent environment for local people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring public order, security and safety of citizens



IV. EXISTING STRATEGIES

Remetea village is in the process of elaborating of a new local development strategy for the coming programming period. The new local development strategy will include the SMART objectives we set up in this strategy as well.

The existing Development Strategy of Remetea identifies nine development priorities for the period 2014-2020, based throughout analysis of needs and resources.

1. Renovation of public areas, road networks: Improving the road network and extending it outside the village to improve production, land use and services. Taking care of the street image/ street view: preserving the heritage houses and gates.
2. Four new services in the centre by massive infrastructure development: a new building for the agricultural market, a sports and recreation centre, an ice rink and building a community activity centre.
3. Tourism: development of the two areas with touristic potential in the village (Eszenyő, mineral water spring), including a visitor centre, a study house, an adventure park and bicycle trails.
4. Mureş cycle path: building a promenade by the river Mureş, which could be connected to the Mureş International Bicycle Route.
5. Food industry cluster: Establishing cooperation between food businesses is identified as a priority. The site of the former milk powder factory would be suitable for establishing new food industry.
6. Basic Service Development: Extending the village caretaker/ rural facilitator service, expanding the number of users of the water and sewage water network.
7. Energy efficiency and the use of renewable energies: sustainability awareness education in schools, public counselling for local people. The energy-efficient planning of new municipal investments, the establishment of a biomass-based energy production unit and the installation of a biogas reactor for the water treatment plant are of paramount importance.
8. Human capital, entrepreneurial culture: setting up a regional training centre, regular business and entrepreneurship facilitation programs, setting up an association of local businesses.
9. Development of the health and social sector: setting up an authorized medical diagnosis laboratory, launching regular medical service at school, developing a social housing/renting system.

The strategy is linked to wider micro-regional, regional or national programmes and strategies. The main regional strategic development directions of Harghita County are: facilitating economic growth, development of public administration and increasing living conditions, our strategy is linked to these goals.

The priorities of the Regional Operational Program are reflected our strategy too:

- improving institutional capacity and making administration more efficient.
- improving the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises and agriculture
- we also organize trainings for entrepreneurs within an adult training framework.
- promoting sustainable transport and closing capacity gaps in key network infrastructures.
- promoting employment and worker mobility.
- investing in education, skills, and lifelong learning.

V. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The local community is engaged in developing local village strategies and projects by collaborating with the main stakeholders like:

- ✓ **Village Hall of Remetea** - public services for the citizens;
- ✓ **Fráter György General School** – educational services for primary and local secondary level (classes from 1st to the 8th grade);
- ✓ **Health Centre** – public health services (cabinets for family physicians, dental practices, pharmacy, ambulance and fire station);
- ✓ **REDISZA SA** – Public services for water supply and sewage, and;
- ✓ **NGOs active in various areas** – activities in the service of the local population.

For example, the elaboration of the 2014-2020 strategy for the development of the village has been the fruit of the close cooperation between the local public administration and the local inhabitants, and it is based on a need's analysis developed in close collaboration with professional organisations and institutions.

Various projects are implemented and managed by the internal project management team of the Village Hall, making continued use of competences, experience and knowledge accumulated in previous projects.

Regarding the development of the village several local organisations play a crucial role: the “Compossessorate” (community forest and pasture managing organisation), local associations with various activities in the field of sport, youthwork, culture, social issues, agriculture and forestry.