



Grassroots Rally Cry

Encouraging Local Participation in Romania



Awareness-raising events, like this demonstration against the proposed gold mine in Rosia Montana, help to balance the public's and government's knowledge on important issues.

BACKGROUND

Due to frequent changes in environmental legislation and the regular reorganisation of public institutions, civil servants have difficulty responding to the needs of the public regarding its legal privileges. For its part, the public does not know how to take advantage of the generous provisions of the legal framework, including those enshrined in the Aarhus Convention and the Law of Public Information.

OBJECTIVES

The project organisers aimed to:

- help find solutions, together with NGOs, to constraints that bind local administrations in the ongoing process of decentralisation;
- increase public participation in local decision-making processes, and thereby encourage people to more fully exercise the democratic provisions of the Aarhus Convention;



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- train local civil servants (including those from environmental protection agencies) to better understand the nature and implications of the Aarhus Convention and the servants' legal duties regarding public access to information;
- organise events to be coordinated by local NGOs and officials in two counties (Alba and Galati) to improve understanding and communication among local institutions, and between local institutions and the public;
- help build contacts and stimulate cooperation between local authorities and local NGOs;
- develop participatory practices in local decision making according to the Aarhus Convention; and
- present the results to members of parliament, senior government officials and representatives of the media.

METHODOLOGY

To achieve its aims, organisers:

- identified, selected and involved representatives from local authorities and NGOs;
- publicised the project activities;
- organised two workshops on Local Administration and Aarhus Convention, and
- advised on the implementation of two public participation exercises involving local concerns, both of which were selected during the training sessions.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Two events were organised around topics identified as important by the local groups. In Alba Iulia, the issue was public participation in the development of the Rosia Montana gold mining project. In Galati, it was public participation in a local environmental action plan.

The results of the workshops were publicised through press conferences and articles.

An opinion poll was conducted in Alba Iulia and in Alba County. Its results were announced during a workshop and at a press conference in Alba Iulia.

A public participation process was organised in Galati. In addition, an opinion poll was organised in the city of Galati and Galati County.

The public was informed and involved when local authorities drew up environmental plans, programmes and policies (i.e. the public was consulted at an early stage in the decision-making process).

Citizens developed a better understanding of their legal rights and they exercised them in regard to concerns about local developments and environmental issues.

A booklet expressing the project's experiences was published. The booklet was presented during a Bucharest workshop for decision makers in the government, Parliament and the media.

FOLLOW-UP

Coverage of this project in the media will continue. The lessons of the project will be disseminated as examples of good practice. Other projects concerning the Aarhus Convention and public participation will be developed by the project partners.

