

# **Balkan Bytes: Environmental NGOs and Electronic Networking in South Eastern Europe**

## **Workplan of StrawberryNet Romania for 2004**

### **Introduction**

This workplan was developed under the framework of the project aiming to support co-operation and electronic networking in the countries of South Eastern Europe (SEE), for StrawberryNet Romania.

The workplan is the follow-up of the REReP 2.3 project and is based on the results of the business plan development process during the Mission Driven Business Planning workshop organized in Rome, February 25-28, 2004.

Strawberrynet will focus on the following 5 priority Action Areas in 2004:

- On-line publishing services and web content development and maintenance;
- Building information communities;
- Improving sustainability;
- Development of intersectorial communication;
- Synchronising networking activities at national and regional level.

The workplan relies on these 5 Action Areas and all activities are developed under these categories. Also in developing the workplan was taken in consideration the new co-operation activities with the following 8 NGOs which received equipment to increase their information management capacity:

- Milvus Group
- Ecotop
- CsTTE
- Apathy Istvan Association
- Potaissa Foundation
- Ecological Society Maramures
- CSE Amonit
- OG Accent

### **Target Group**

Our activity is targeted to serve NGOs, especially but not exclusively environmental organizations.

We consider to serve other organizations as well, which are in line with our mission and values like funders, state institutions, active citizens.

## **Target Group Profile**

These NGOs represent various fields of activity and geographical regions of the country. Also they are in different levels of development. Taking into account their level of activities and communication needs, we divided this potential userbase into three categories:

- small (budget: less than 2500 EUR/year),
- medium (2500 - 10000 EUR/year) and
- developed (more than 10000 EUR) NGOs.

The developed organizations can afford certain level of connectivity, which is more consistent with their needs as the organization develops.

The interviewed NGOs consider electronic networks as an effective way to disseminate information. Considering the amount of information and available resources they have, they are willing to invest up to two-four days per month to provide input into the network. Currently the Romanian environmental NGOs use the Internet primarily to search for general information for their work (80%), co-operation with other NGOs (66%) and Web publishing (49%). On-line campaigning, lobbying, on-line fundraising and other, more advanced applications of electronic information networks are still to be developed. Fifteen percent of the interviewed NGOs mentioned planning to use networks for marketing their organisation and exchanging environmental information on regular basis. All interviewed NGOs expressed their availability to put public information on the Web, such as general information (80%), articles (70%), case studies (66%) and news on regular basis (52%).

Besides existing our userbase the NGOs are using some services we also offer, mostly from free providers, like yahoo, geocities, etc. We would like to serve these NGOs because our services are more targeted, customised and appropriate for NGOs. We believe that using our services these organisations can fulfill their mission better.

## **Target Group Needs**

We research the market needs using surveys, following our partners' needs, feed-backs and orders received from users.

NGOs need content development and Web publishing (21%) possibilities. This figure suggests that Romanian NGOs have already recognised that technical problems are not the main bottleneck in NGO communication. Instead, most of all NGOs need to improve their on-line communication culture as well as their technical skills.

Our survey has revealed a general lack in human resources. Therefore NGOs call for simple, automated Web publishing tools to publish their information in a cost effective and timely manner. The project should help developing and sharing such tools in the NGO community. A large number of the interviewed NGO representatives demands the creation of a virtual NGO community for the topic they are interested in, to be able to find quickly background information for their work.

The majority of NGOs cannot afford buying software for their work. Since there is a high level of computer software piracy in Romania, the use of legal software is more and more strictly enforced. As a result, NGOs will be forced to download trial or demo versions of programmes they need for their daily operation, not being able afford purchasing a full licensed software product. There is need to train NGOs to use free software like Open Office and Linux.

Also there is a emerging need for campaigning support – several campaigns were started and NGOs were not effective in managing the campaigns because of specific communication problems.

E-mail became critical in the daily work of our users. However the increased amount of spam (unwanted mail) and computer viruses are creating time efficiency and even financial problems (for dial-up users e-mail download cost are 5-50 times bigger). Some of the beneficiaries changed their e-mail address due to these problems.

## **Products and Services**

We are offering the following products and services:

- Dynamic web publishing using ActionApps
- Mailing lists
- NGO Database
- Informational communities
- Campaigning tools
- Technical support
- NGO portal
- Training
- Free/Open source software support

We are planning to develop new services that will cover new demands described above.

## **Activities**

### **Action Area I:**

#### **On-line publishing services and web content development and maintenance**

##### **Summary**

The activities under this action area consist in offering to NGOs dynamic web publishing services using APC ActionApplications, which make the web publishing as easy as filling in online forms. The current web portal [www.ngo.ro](http://www.ngo.ro) and other NGO web pages are developed and maintained in a collaborative way using this application.

##### **Justification**

Environmental NGOs hold a very important amount of information interesting for NGOs, authorities or general public but they didn't know how to organise and publish this information.

Romanian NGOs have such limited financial and human resources that the only cost effective and timely publishing medium is the Internet. Several organisations have made an effort to embrace the Internet for publishing, however due to limited human resources and insufficient technical skills the typical result has been static web pages, with large sections “under construction”, not updated on a regular basis. We can see that these organisations have something to say, but they don't have the means to do it. With the advent of APC's easy-to-use Action Applications, we can build the capacity of Romanian NGOs to publish important content online, thereby making information relating to more accessible to Romanian citizens, enabling them to take a more active role in community development.

Making the ActionApps available at the national level in Romania will enhance information sharing in Romanian civil society, and thereby increase informed public participation in decision-making and community development, and greater environmental awareness.

##### **Description**

Activities will focus this year to further develop the web portal:

- to upgrade APC ActionApps;
- to improve the information management and design;
- to develop of a site to support NGO campaigns with interactive tools;
- to develop a projects' database;
- to involve the above mentioned NGOs in the publishing process;
- to facilitate the publishing process in order to improve collaboration, the number and the quality of the information published;

##### **NGOs involved**

- StrawberryNet associate members (ACT Nemira, UNESCO Pro Natura, CET Cluj)
- above mentioned partner NGOs

### Summary Timetable:

ACTIVITY/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>I.1.</b> Upgrading Action Apps software on the StrawberryNet server;		■										
<b>I.2.</b> Improve information management and design;		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>I.3.</b> Develop campaign site	■	■	■	■	■	■	■					
<b>I.4.</b> Develop project database						■	■					
<b>I.5.</b> Involving partner NGOs;		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	
<b>I.6.</b> Facilitation of publishing process;				■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

### Expected results

- Action Applications tool upgraded on the SBN servers and services available as a Romanian product for Romanian environmental NGOs;
- more online Romanian content, in Romanian, from, and about environment and environmental NGOs;
- at least 10 active content providers committed to regularly using the Action Apps to publish their information;
- more advanced and more attractive information structure and design of the portal.

## **Action Area II: Building information communities**

### **Summary**

The activities under this action area are referring to identifying different groups of organisations, which have similar interest in order to train and assist them to build information communities. That means to make these organisations to use the Internet strategically for sharing information, effective communication and promoting in exterior their information and messages. The activities will be connected with using Action Apps.

### **Justification**

In Romania there are many environmental groups of NGOs which have similar interest and work in many cases together in order to accomplish their goals.

In their work together these NGOs usually share information, elaborate common documents or promote messages to other stakeholders or public.

Also it was underlined that NGOs representatives don't have the required technical skills for publishing information on a web site. Therefore there is no so much experience in structuring the information on a web site based on a clear taxonomy.

In this context resulted that user friendly tools are needed for web publishing and also support for building their information communities based on Internet (web pages, mailing lists...). These kind of activities will increase the networking among environmental NGOs and also will generate content on the web.

Several information communities were initiated during the previous projects on public participation, sustainable agriculture, nature conservation, POPs, Black Sea. These initiatives should be facilitated and needs technical support in order to become a sustainable, living on-line community. Also there are other topics to cover with new partners.

### **Description**

The activities under this action area will consist in:

- Meetings with the working groups on different environmental issues. The staff from StrawberryNet will meet the group's representatives on their place without organising expensive meetings. In these meetings NGO representative s will be trained and also will be developed workplans with each group in order to build information communities based on Internet.
- Dissemination of the brochure: "4 steps to build an information community";
- Working with these groups to develop/facilitate the web sites for their domains of interest;
- Integrating these thematic pages with the [www.ngo.ro](http://www.ngo.ro) portal and participant NGOs website;
- Attracting new groups for developing new information communities;
- Technical support for development and maintenance of the thematic web pages.

**NGOs involved**

- StrawberryNet associate members (ACT Nemira, UNESCO Pro Natura, CET Cluj)
- working groups on different issues

**Summary Timetable:**

These activities are ongoing.

**Expected results**

- the thematic pages will be more interactive and dynamic;
- new content uploaded;
- at least 2 new websites developed in collaboration with the working groups and NGOs;
- the brochure for promoting information communities disseminated among NGOs.

## **Action Area III:**

### **Improving outreach and sustainability**

#### **Summary**

The activities under this action area are focusing on outreach and making the network more sustainable. We will produce outreach materials, participate to events and making on-site visits in order to communicate better our services, values and principles towards our target group. These activities will also help organisations to understand the importance of using the Internet strategically for sharing information, effective communication and promoting their information and messages. The target group will be motivated to support the network and its services. The on-site outreach will be amplified by the activity of our e-rider, the Peace Corps volunteer Amber Schulz. The main strategy of this action area was designed during the Mission Driven Business Planning workshop organised in Rome.

#### **Justification**

During previous phases of the NGO networking program we developed new services and ICT tools for information sharing and collaboration. However these services are not well known yet on a large scale. The purpose of this action area is to make the services of SBNet more accessible, more sustainable and explain how these services are able to benefit NGOs in Romania.

There is also necessary to explain why our network is best fit the NGOs needs. By articulating our unique selling points on outreach materials, on-site demonstrations and conferences our beneficiaries will realise the unique value of the network, will understand how it works and how can be sustained on the long run.

Until now service development and deployment was done mainly on project base, funded through grants from funding organisations. As funding organisations are moving away, there is crucial to develop support directly from users. User support will also help us to develop more demand driven services. Those NGOs who are working with us already on a more advanced level acknowledged the utility and value of our services and started to support it.



## **Description**

The activities under this action area will consist in:

- Developing the following outreach materials:
  1. Base Packet for brand building:
    - 1.1. Leaflet about our services and us, emphasising the unique selling points and main services;
    - 1.2. Banner (supported by local sponsor: Chemoprint);
    - 1.3. Stickers;
    - 1.4. T-shirts;
    - 1.5. Poster;
    - 1.6. Calendar;
    - 1.7. Generic CD cover template;
    - 1.8. Demo CD including free software;
    - 1.9. Website.
  2. Raising awareness on ActionApps + web hosting
    - 2.1. Leaflet with list of specific services;
    - 2.2. Demo site;
    - 2.3. References, examples, manual.
  3. About campaign tools:
    - 3.1. Leaflet (covered by the Environmental Partnership Foundation);
    - 3.2. Generic site (partly covered by the Environmental Partnership Foundation).
  4. Promoting information communities:
    - 4.1. Brochure (already available);
    - 4.2. Poster;
    - 4.3. Examples/good practices – webpage.
- Participation to NGO fairs, conferences;
- on-site visits;
- Dissemination of printed materials;
- Announcements on mailing lists;
- Integrating the marketing materials into the [www.ngo.ro](http://www.ngo.ro) portal and [www.sbnet.ro](http://www.sbnet.ro) website.

## **NGOs involved**

- StrawberryNet associate members (ACT Nemira, UNESCO Pro Natura, CET Cluj)
- Peace Corps volunteer Amber Schulz
- partner NGOs, consultants

### Summary Timetable:

ACTIVITY/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
I.1. Developing printed outreach materials												
I.2. Developing outreach materials for the web												
I.3. Participation to events, on-site visits, dissemination of materials												
I.4. On-line announcements												

### Expected results

- the thematic pages will be more interactive and dynamic;
- new content uploaded;
- at least 2 new websites developed in collaboration with the working groups and NGOs;
- the brochure for promoting information communities disseminated among NGOs.

## **Action Area IV:**

### **Development of intersectorial communication**

#### **Summary**

These activities will build a common platform between NGOs' and authorities' initiatives regarding communication on environmental issues.

#### **Justification**

Nowadays the collaboration between Romanian environmental authority and NGOs regarding communication on environmental issues is very weak.

Also from Start up meeting resulted that the NGO informational communities should be open to build bridges with other sectors.

Furthermore in the light of Aarhus Convention authorities have to make progress in assuring the public access to environmental information and public participation including also electronic means.

#### **Description**

- Development of the web site [www.natura2000.ro](http://www.natura2000.ro) in collaboration with Romanian Natura 2000 NGOs Coalition as a platform of communication and cooperation between environmental NGOs and state institutions in the field of the Natura 2000 Network implementation in Romania.
- Development of the web site <http://biodivforum.ngo.ro> as a mechanism of public consultations and participation on biodiversity issues that will function as a NGOs node in connection with the official Clearing house mechanism on Biodiversity developed by the Ministry of Environment and Water Management under the [www.biodiversity.ro](http://www.biodiversity.ro)

#### **4.3.1. NGOs involved**

-Associate members of StrawberryNet

#### **Summary Timetable:**

ACTIVITY/Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>I.1.</b> Developing the web-site <a href="http://www.natura2000.ro">www.natura2000.ro</a>												
<b>I.2.</b> Developing the web-site <a href="http://biodivforum.ngo.ro">biodivforum.ngo.ro</a>												
<b>I.3.</b> Meetings with the Ministry of Environment												

#### **Expected results**

- 1 meeting/2 months with Ministry of Environment representatives regarding the development of these two web sites
- [www.natura2000.ro](http://www.natura2000.ro) developed as a platform of communication and cooperation between NGOs

and authorities on Natura 2000 issues;

- biodivforum.ngo.ro developed as a mechanism of public consultations and participation on biodiversity issues that will function as a NGOs node in connection with the official Clearing house mechanism on Biodiversity developed by the Ministry of Environment and Water Management ([www.biodiversity.ro](http://www.biodiversity.ro)).

## **Action Area V: Synchronising networking activities at national, regional and international level.**

### **Summary**

This action area is focused on developing a co-operative approach among NGOs involved in information and communication service providing activities on environmental issues. NGOs' initiatives will be followed and meetings held in order to raise the effectiveness of these activities by avoiding parallelisms, offering mutual support, sharing tools and resources, training and know-how transfer.

### **Justification**

The problems to be solved are many and complex, availability of resources and expertise limited, therefore there is a need for extensive co-operation between those NGOs capable to deliver information and communication services for the NGO community. In this way the NGOs' initiatives will be complementary to each other and the effectiveness of the projects carried out by those NGOs will be increased.

The regional co-operation will help NGOs to overcome similar problems and identify ways to increase regional co-operation among environmental NGOs from the SEE region by facilitating the information flow on regional level.

International co-operation is needed to integrate local initiatives in global trends of environmental networking. Know-how transfer, skill and resource sharing is also very important among NGOs providing ICT services. The dynamics of the ICT sector is requiring continuously the identification of new resources to be adapted and integrated in order to assure the capability of NGOs to make their voices heard properly.

### **Description**

- Organising meetings and on-site visits among NGOs involved in NGO ICT projects;
- On-line discussions;
- Creating discussion lists, links as needed;
- Exchange of information periodically about beginning, ongoing and finalised activities;
- Logistical support of partner NGOs involved in project implementation;
- Developing APC ActionApps and FTP co-ordination support tools;
- Developing SEE regional information exchange mechanism using the content pooling feature of ActionApps, in co-operation with Bluelink Bulgaria;
- Participation to APC meetings and projects;
- Maintaining/developing links with the APC community;
- Participation to regional and international environmental networking projects.

**NGOs involved**

- Associate members of StrawberryNet

**Summary Timetable:**

Activities are ongoing, correlated with demands and with NGO events in the country, in the SEE region and international.

**Expected results**

- Well co-ordinated, more effective activities;
- Well informed partners, good relationships;
- Required tools and logistics available;
- Improved SEE regional information exchange;
- New SEE country networks taking advantage of ActionApps for environmental networking;
- Improved international participation.