

Environmental NGOs Electronic Networking in South Eastern Europe StrawberryNet (Romania): Final Report

StrawberryNet activities were developed according to a work plan based on the results of a business-plan development process during the Mission-Driven Business Planning workshop in Rome that took place on February 25-28, 2004.

We developed activities under the five following priority action areas:

- Online publishing services, and web content development and maintenance
- Building information communities
- Improving sustainability
- Development of inter-sectoral communication
- Synchronising networking activities at national and regional levels

During the project, the StrawberryNet Foundation has developed and supported the creation of information services in partnership with other organizations, such as:

- news services;
- an environmental legislation database;
- an NGO database, modified to comply to the new 1% funding system;
- mailing lists (environment, Natura 2000, water protection, GMOs, sustainable transport, agriculture, rural development, etc.);
- communication tools for campaign support;
- websites on special topics: (GMOs, Natura 2000, rural development, Green Agenda, citizens' guide for solving environmental problems, etc.);
- the ngo.ro portal, with interactive sections (events, resources, publications, etc.);
- direct support/consultancy for solving communication problems between and within NGOs;
- training activities; and
- publishing information materials.

All these services were offered using advanced open-source technologies based on the following principles:

- they do not require advanced technical skills for the user;
- they are inexpensive;
- they are within a structured framework;
- online Romanian-language formats are easy to use;
- know-how is transferred to users; and
- there are possibilities for automatic updates.

The project enabled us to provide technical support for NGOs at nominal costs (or even for free) in our spare time. Because it can be expensive to employ an IT specialist, this represents an extra value that makes us different from others in this field.

Service statistics and usage-related data

Space used on server: 1,600 MB

Overall monthly traffic: between 5-7 GB

Web data from February 2005 for all sites and services:

Monthly web traffic	Unique visitors	Visited pages	Downloaded files	Total visits
3,178 MB	24,910	60,933	177,470	230,590

Sub-domains	Mailing lists	FTP accounts	E-mail accounts	E-mail forwarders
72	30	46	33	47

Relevant data regarding the level of usage of the automatic publication system:

Database entries (actual record index): 22,465

Databases: 180

Articles in the legislation database: 484

Organisations registered in the database: 770

News in Romanian (including archive): 670

Subscribers on the media mailing list: 267

A general part of the ngo.ro portal is registered on www.traffic.ro (currently ranked No. 22 in the NGO section, with 498 unique visitors 2,423 hits per week. What follows is a list of activities carried out.

Action Area I

Online publishing services and web content development and maintenance

Activities were focused to develop the web portal www.ngo.ro and other web sites associated with the portal:

- APC ActionApps upgrading

This conducted in June to make new services available (site module, updated alerts and reader management module, upgraded content pooling, more user-friendly menus). ActionApps is being developed continually. In October 2004 a StrawberryNet representative attended the APC Workshop in Cape Town, South Africa, at which the plan for further development of ActionApps was discussed. A new upgrade is scheduled for December in order to provide better multi-lingual support (using the MLX module) and to upgrade the links module.

- Improved information management and design

Website structure was improved, to some degree, by acting on feedback from both editors and users. Also, as a consequence of National NGO Forum resolutions, we began planning with other Romanian NGOs (both civic and social) to enlarge the www.ngo.ro topic range in order to improve sustainability.

StrawberryNet brought on a new editor to increase the accuracy of published information.

- Interactive tools for supporting NGO campaigns

This was carried out in June 2004. Discussions were initiated within the APC framework in order to develop more campaign-oriented facilities of ActionApps, which will take place under the APC ActionKit Project. Also, intensive campaign information management support activity was performed on Rosia Montana and GMO-related topics. StrawberryNet facilitated access for NGO Alburnus Maior to benefit APC's legal expertise regarding the lawsuit started by the RMGC company. (RMGC wishes to block public opinion both in court and by forbidding published materials on the www.rosiamontana.org website.) Alburnus Maior also received support from APC to mirror the aforementioned threatened website. We recently published on the campaign website a Greenpeace press release and high resolution photos covering its demonstration against the opening of the Rosia Montana gold mine, which took part in the front of the government building and was ended by police intervention. (<http://campanii.ngo.ro/rosiamontana>)

- Project database development

The NGO database has been developed further into a valuable source of information for NGOs and other stakeholders. StrawberryNet Peace Corps volunteer Amber Schulz made some important contributions to this effort. We have to finish the interactive updating facility of the projects+ngo database in order to ensure consistent password management and user-friendly updating.

- Involving all NGOs in the publishing process

The eight NGOs to whom the REC has granted computers have increased their news and publishing contributions on www.ngo.ro.

- Facilitating the publishing process in order to improve collaboration, and raise the quality and quantity of published information

StrawberryNet has welcomed a new staff editor. She is Ildiko Knop, a journalism student at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj. We have received positive feedback about her involvement in our content management activity. She has also been in charge of facilitating other NGO representatives (11 current content providers) interested in publish on www.ngo.ro.

Action Area II

Building information communities

The activities in this area comprise the following.

- *Meetings with working groups on different environmental issues*

StrawberryNet staff participated in 13 meetings with four groups of NGOs dealing with environmental issues, such as: Natura 2000, environmental management,

protection of birds, GMOs and biosafety. Discussions took place concerning opportunities for developing information communities and topic-related web content. ActionApps gave presentations about how to best develop information communities.

- Brochure dissemination: Four steps toward building an information community

More than 1,000 copies of this brochure were distributed during visits to NGO offices and different NGO events (fairs, forums, conferences, workshops).

- *Working with these groups to develop/facilitate the web sites for their domains of interest;*

Two new informational communities were developed during this period for Natura 2000 and environmental management in Romania: a coalition of 33 NGOs dealing with Natura 2000 issues, and a five-NGO partnership active in the field of environmental management.

The web sites developed are:

www.natura2000.ro/coalitiaONG

www.ecomanagement.ngo.ro

Also, 65-subscriber mailing list was created for Natura 2000, which has led to active discussions about the implementation of Natura 2000 in Romania.

- Integrating thematic pages with the www.ngo.ro portal and participant NGO websites

Both new websites developed are integrated with www.ngo.ro.

- Attracting new groups for developing new information communities

Two new groups have started to develop information communities.

- Support for development and maintenance of thematic web pages

We provided support for the development of six information communities.

Action Area III

Improving outreach and sustainability

The activities developed under this action area consisted of the following.

- Developing the following outreach materials:

1. Base packet for brand building (consisting of)

- leaflet about us, our services and unique selling points;
 - banner (supported by local sponsor, Chemoprint);
 - stickers;
 - T-shirts;
 - poster;
 - calendar;
 - generic CD cover template;
 - demo CD, including free software; and
 - website.
2. Raising awareness about ActionApps + web hosting, via:
- leaflet with list of specific services;
 - demo site; and
 - references, examples, manual.
3. Campaign tools:
- leaflet (covered by the Environmental Partnership Foundation); and
 - generic site (partly covered by the Environmental Partnership Foundation).
4. Promoting information communities:
- brochure;
 - poster;
 - examples/good practices.
- Participation in NGO fairs, conferences
 - On-site visits
 - Announcements on mailing lists
 - Support for development and maintenance of thematic web pages.

One particular highlight was our participation in the International Fair in Rimini, Italy. We also developed a multimedia presentation for this event, which is under further development and will be used as our main promotional material.

Action Area IV

Development of inter-sectoral communication

The following achievements were recorded under this action area:

- Monthly meetings were organised with representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Water Management.
- The www.natura2000.ro website was developed in collaboration with the Romanian Natura 2000 NGO Coalition as a platform for communication and cooperation between environmental NGOs and state institutions toward Natura 2000 Network implementation in Romania.
- There are advanced discussions to develop a joint web portal (MEWM and Romanian NGOs dealing with GMOs).

Action Area V

Synchronising networking activities at national, regional and international levels

We realised the following activities:

- organised meetings and on-site visits among NGOs involved in NGO ICT projects;
- online discussions;
- creation of discussion lists, and links as needed;
- periodic exchanges of information regarding starting, ongoing and finalised activities;
- logistical support for partner NGOs involved in project implementation;
- help to other SEE country networks for installation and use ActionApps for environmental networking;
- participation in APC meetings and projects (most importantly, ActionApps Camp in South Africa);
- maintenance/development of links with the APC community (participating regularly in APC online meetings);
- participation in regional and international environmental networking projects (an important contribution to the APC ActionKit project, which will help enhancing our campaign management initiative).