



# CARPATHIAN FOUNDATION

SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN THE CARPATHIAN EUROREGION

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*project profiles*



Grant Applicant:

*Local Government of Tarcál*

Title of Project:

*Fő út 61. 3915 Tarcál, Hungary*

Name of Project Team:

*"To Europe by Means of the Tokaj-Hegyalja Wine"*

Amount of Grant:

*Municipality of Tarcál*

Project Duration:

*\$50.000*

Names of Project Leaders:

*July 1997 – June 31, 2000*

*Sándor Pataky, Mayor of Tarcál*

*Dr Mihály Pulinka, town clerk*

Other organizations playing a leading part:

*Zemplén Federation of Settlements, Tokaj-Hegyalja*

*Federation, Vine-Growing Community of Tokaj-*

*Hegyalja, 25 other listed organizations*

# [Hungary 'THE TOKAJ - HEGYALJA WINE ROUTE']

Due to the excellent climatic conditions, wine has been produced in the Tokaj region from ancient times. Because of the adverse economic conditions in the second half of this century, there was a danger that old traditions would be lost, and the wine would lose its distinctive reputation for being a quality wine. In order to reverse this process the Municipality of Tarczal, together with NGOs and other local governments in the Tokaj region, has commenced a campaign to develop the centuries' old tradition and skills of Tokaj-Hegyalja viticulture to very high standards.

## *The Micro – Region*

In the Tokaj-Hegyalja region several factors have created excellent conditions for viticulture - the special soils based on volcanic rocks, the southern slopes and the ideal microclimate due to the proximity of two rivers. The unique wines of Tokaj have been famous for centuries. Louis XIV of France called the Tokaj Aszu 'the wine of kings, the king of wines'. There are at present 27 settlements in Hegyalja. Two of the former settlements are now in Slovakia and there was a strong traditional trade connection with Kosice, Slovakia and Krakow, Poland.

The small town of Tarczal is historically one of the most important towns in the Tokaj region. Its wines are excellent and have always figured among the best in the entire Tokaj appellation. Many of the vineyards of Tarczal belonged to aristocratic families such as the Rakoczis. After centuries of successful winemaking, Tarczal and the whole region suffered a catastrophic disaster. The phylloxera pest starting in 1885 destroyed some 75 % of the Tokaj vineyards. This great setback was followed by a slow period of reconstruction. Vineyards suffered much damage in the Second World War. Forced collectivization afterwards led to further failure. Winemaking

practically disappeared from peasant farming, cellars lost their value, became dilapidated, and the traditional wine culture seemed to vanish completely. Fortunately some recovery has been seen since the eighties.

## *The Challenge*

Some 85,000 people live in the whole Hegyalja area, and after the three main towns, come those of middle rank including Tarczal with 3,400 inhabitants. By the end of the eighties it became clear that viticulture and winemaking in Hegyalja had entered into a cul de sac. Although there was a volume production of grapes, even the pre-conditions for the traditional family based enterprises were disappearing. Then the eastern market also ceased to exist.

The capital resources of private producers, cellar co-operatives, and vine-growing communities, that emerged as a result of the privatization process, are extremely limited. Foreign investors have entered the region, and have implemented major investment programs. Although it is true that these represent only 10% of the vineyard area, through their marketing activities, they represent a considerable percentage in wine sales, and by the introduction of new technologies (reductive wines) as opposed to traditional wine-making procedures they are squeezing traditional wines from the markets.



Local communities instead of using an innovative approach have become apathetic, and due to a deficiency of production and marketing information, have accepted their fate. They have been unable to mobilize their inherent human resources, and were avoided by the new investors. As a result there is a high rate of unemployment, and a failure of the drive needed to produce high quality traditional wines.

## *The Vision*

The people living in Hegyalja possess immense inherent human resources. Every element of viticulture is still alive in them. Old professions and crafts have not been forgotten, and the famous hospitality of the region has not been lost. The project covers the whole Hegyalja region, and is intended to help the 14,000 small-scale producers. Having good market is a vital interest and that cannot be gained without marketing and capital.

The aim of the project is to revive the self-esteem of the local people. Local knowledge should be refreshed and updated by specialists, and training. New actions were required in order to implement the project objectives. Of these, the most important were the following:

- Creating the conditions for education and training the human infrastructure
- Building up of conditions for tourism and wine-tourism
- Establishing the route of a Wine Tour in the wine region, together with a complex tourist program and information network
- Strengthening local values, and heritage preservation
- Improving the efficiency of sales promotion and marketing activities
- The Wine Road was to be linked to these activities in order to revive the former markets for Tokaj wine.

## *The Plan in Action*

Sandor Pataky, the Mayor of Tarcál, and the town clerk, Dr. Mihály Pulinka have formed a project team at the Tarcál municipality, which has drawn into cooperation the Zemplén Federation of Settlements, the Tokaj-Hegyalja Federation and the Vine-growing Community Board of Tokaj-Hegyalja.

This project team is working to a specific plan, which includes:

1. Quality wine – to find the people who know the traditional technology well, and involve them in the vine-dresser training, and to survey the stock of cellars and barrels suitable for traditional wine-making.
2. Preservation of local culture – to learn and make known the local cultural traditions: folk customs, dances, and music; and to provide for their preservation. To research old crafts (smith, wheel maker, glass blower); describe their professional skills, and restore their practical application if possible
3. Market-access for small producers – introduce a Tokaj-Hegyalja product package: wine, accommodation, and tourism to attract guests. To develop and regularly hold wine shows, competitions, and the historical Wine Road.
4. Civilized consumption of wine – to spread the traditional habits of wine consumption linked to local gastronomic specialities.

The Wine Route is to be the window-front for these new actions. The traditional wine route went from Tokaj to Slovakia and Poland. It is not just a wine-tasting trip. It is to be the mobile introduction to a Hegyalja product package. There will be a focus on publicizing the circumstances of producing different types of Tokaj wine, and characteristic Hegyalja dishes will accompany wine tasting. Cultural events such as music and dancing would be part of the celebrations.

## *Impact and Results*

A full range of events was held including TV items, wine shows, Tarcál Days, the Zemplén Art Festival, and Mini-Wine Routes.

### Regional Achievements

- ✦ Borut – Wine Road – first organized in two counties and ten cities,

promoting Tokaj wine and celebrating many aspects of the Tokaj regional culture

- ✦ Discussions commenced on the possible extension of the Wine Road to Romania
- ✦ Tokaj-Hegyalja Wine Route Association founded in 1997. It is planning a regional strategy and introducing new standards, and arranging for new tourist brochures
- ✦ Creation of the Zemplén Association of Settlements

### Local Achievements

- ✦ Creation of the Andrassy Kuria Ltd. in 1997 to produce wine based on the knowledge of local people
- ✦ Training for vine-dressers in Tarcál
- ✦ Opening of a handicraft workshop: pottery, sewing, weaving can be learnt and the products sold to tourists
- ✦ Several new investors in Tarcál partly because of the friendly policy of the municipality
- ✦ Reconstruction of local synagogue; plans for a recreational park and an open air theatre
- ✦ Successful protest against a waste battery disposal factory
- ✦ Repeated annual Tarcál Days

## *The Future*

The nature of the project is such that many of the activities are on-going and will not cease after three years. The production of traditional Tokaj wine, the recovery of local culture and history, and the marketing of small-scale production are all long-term tasks. The new Wine Route is the beginning.