

Travelogue from Romania

I returned to Romania in December 2010, five years after my previous visit when I served as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer (JOCV). Romania is an eastern European country located on the west bank of the Black Sea and enjoys an annual rainfall of approximately 600 mm and its fertile black soil yields wheat, corn and sun flowers which are planted on a large scale. In the Carpathian Mountains which dominate the center of the country, fruit orchards are grown and livestock husbandry is practiced. 30 % of the total domestic employment is generated by the agriculture sector and overall the country has relatively good natural and socioeconomic conditions for farming.

On the other hand, if one looks at the GDP in Romania, the agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors only account for less than 10%. It is a very low figure compared to the high percentage of farming population. This is because of the fact that 95 % of the farming population are subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers who only sell their surplus products when it is available. My duty as a JOCV was to support the organization of agriculture cooperative bringing the small scale farmers to work together.

There were always many farmers participating when seminars on forming cooperative development were held, indicating a high level of interest among the farmers. However, they were not necessarily active when it came to the actual establishment of cooperative. Under the communist system, lands were confiscated by the State and people had the image of the old collective farming system when hearing about cooperative.

During my work, I decided to go and help the work of farmers - one farm per day. Although it was a slow business requiring diligence, for me, it was like "killing four birds with one stone." I could learn about different aspects of local farming and see farmers' lifestyles first hand. At the same time I could explain about cooperative while working together in the field, building trusting relationships. One thing I always looked forward to was the lunch which was provided to me as the reward for my labor. Meals and home-made wine at individual farms were absolutely delicious. Regrettably, it did not get to the stage of actually forming cooperative during my term but I believe I was able to lay the groundwork for my successors by establishing a foundation of trust with the farmers.

Romania in those days was full of high expectations prior to joining the European Union. The country subsequently achieved its long-term desire of becoming an EU member and on my return I was looking forward

to seeing how Romania had changed.

The transformation in the capital, Bucharest, was stunning. Many luxury cars zoomed around the city and the formerly graffiti infested metro walls were beautifully painted in white. The sight of young people with smart phones seemed to reflect the glory of the EU membership. Contrastingly, the village where I had lived was exactly as it had been, as if time had stopped there. Comparing the nostalgic pastoral scene and the totally transformed city, I had mixed feelings about the realities in the transitional period of the political system.

Former counterpart welcomed me with the same smile as before. According to him, although cooperative was formed since my departure, there has been little practical activity. After joining the EU, support from Japan was terminated and his cooperative was forced to make a major adjustment to its course. However, he continues to work for the cooperative without losing his passion, which made me feel proud again about the fact that I could work with him. I sincerely hope that his tireless efforts will bear fruits.

While I was able to forge deep friendships through working with the farmers, I was faced with the difficulty of supporting establishment of cooperative. I felt that it was critical to attain clear achievements within the limited time available, and to clarify the path for achieving the objectives. I joined AAI January 2011 and am involved in the training program at JICA Tsukuba. I am looking forward to it while at the same time feeling slightly nervous about dealing with the participants who have been selected from different countries. As I did in Romania, I hope to build new friendships at Tsukuba. (Sawada Feb. 2011)



The white winter in Romania was as beautiful as before. The fir tree in front of the church was decorated and the Christmas preparation was progressing.



Reuniting with my counterpart, drinking hot wine with cinnamon. His friendly smile was the same as ever.