

SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING RURAL DURABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON RURAL AREAS

Paul LUCIAN ¹

Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania

Abstract:

During the last few years, economic growth has doubled the ecologic impact on the planet, and placed additional pressure on the environment. A rapid growth was recorded, which lead to a deficit of natural resources for both current and future generations.

The conducted research revealed that the priorities of rural development are the same for all three time spans, i.e. pre-accession, adhesion and integration, and continue to this present day.

Managerial objectives of durable rural development lead to the strong economic growth and a degradation of the surrounding environment, by strengthening the efficiency of economic activities. The durability of resource allocation, usage and production processes by reducing resource degradation and improving waste management lead to a rethinking of durable development objectives.

The development of agro-tourism and ecologic within the Romanian rural space are processes which consider the needs and requirements of current and future local rural communities, through: financial benefits for livestock farmers who emphasize on quality above everything else; the generation of new employment opportunities for inhabitants of rural areas; the reduction of the impact on the natural and cultural heritage of those specific regions; the support of popular traditions and of traditional products.

Key words: Rural space, mountain tourism, organic farming, sustainable rural development, development priorities

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¹ Faculty of Economics / Department " Management, Marketing ,Business Administration", paul.lucian@ulbsibiu.ro

1. Introduction

Rural development is one of the most complex contemporary problems of rural areas today as the rural population holds a large share of the total population of the globe and is involved in European and global economy.

At an E.U. level, 60% of the population lives in rural areas which occupy 90% of the territory; agriculture uses 50% of available land, consumes 30% of water resources and 20% of fuel resources.

Within the Romanian agriculture, there are 31.6% of workplaces in rural areas, 6 times more than the average across the E.U. Agriculture's contribution to GDP is 7% in the E.U. and is of just 3% in terms of labor productivity as compared to E.U. averages.

Also, Romanian rural areas account for 87% of the total area, while the urban area occupies 13% of the total area. Rural development involves a balance between conservation requirements of the rural area from an economic, ecologic, social and cultural perspective and is today facing a permanent tendency of modernization and urbanization.

We do not try to follow a classification of rural areas at an European or national level; this is difficult because of natural handicaps of certain areas, either due to lack of human and natural resources.

Promoting Sustainable Rural Development causes a reassessment of the relationship between man and nature, advocates for solidarity between generations as the only viable option for homogenous, balanced and long-term development of the areas where most people live.

For the 2014-2020 period, rural area development is supported by improving coordination between the funds of the Joint Strategic Center (CSC), due to existing disparities, taking into account their specific needs.

2. State Of Knowledge Of The Problem

The Rural Development Policy, pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), currently puts emphasis on all aspects of rural life, to align the requirements of global support towards "the eradication of poverty and hunger". Development for the three pre-accession, accession and integration

periods, is based on the priorities of Romania and its convergence towards the European countryside.

European priorities of rural development were treated in parallel with changes made to the programming principles and policies for all support and intervention funds and instruments.

During 2007 - 2013, Romania absorbed 4.9 billion Euros from European funds for agriculture, i.e. half of European allocated amount. Although uptake has been good in relation to other Operational Programs, the results are poor, and rural areas still face new challenges. Statistics show that agriculture is one of the most important sources of income for the majority of the world's population, produces most foods, uses half of the total available land area, offers most jobs, goods and services. The modernization of agriculture by introducing advanced technologies through the use of large amounts of chemicals led to the production of large quantities of products, yet there were negative effects on the environment, especially on the soil.

The EU has no specific legislation protecting the soil, ergo soil problems are addressed through specific measures regarding water, waste, chemicals, industrial pollution, nature protection.

Traditional features of Romanian rural areas are their disparities in terms of development, and better said in all aspects of development, the quality of physical and social infrastructure, human resources performance and the quality of life.

Farms in Romania are seen as subsistence or semi-subsistence farms because of low productivity and the non-integrated market. Although Romanian farmers receive support in the through FEADR funds, they have limited access to credit, since many rural properties are not registered in the Land Register. Official statistics show that over one million farmers are working in their own households, without remuneration, because they lack the opportunity to make money from another source, i.e. most of them do not have a job. In this context, the unemployment rate in rural areas is of 5.1%, much lower than in other sectors. Agriculture workers have a low level of education, lack vocational and / or technical college education in general. Between 2012-2013, gross enrollment ratio in primary and lower secondary was 85% in rural and 97% in urban areas. Also, just 40% of graduates of secondary schools reach tertiary education in these areas. In these conditions, lack of

entrepreneurship in rural areas is based on preparing young people for agricultural activities.

Romanian rural areas are experiencing high levels of poverty among farmers because incomes are low; they generally do not contribute to the pension system, they have social assistance benefits, as shown in the 2015 Country Report for Romania. Most farmers are located at the subsistence level; the rural population seldom benefits from kindergartens, although 45% of rural children are aged 0-4 years. Access to health services is low because of the lack of doctors in rural areas.

It can be concluded from the analyses that from a development standpoint, rural areas record a significant gap, not only when compared to urban areas, but also to other rural areas in other member states. Rural development is even more affected by climate change.

3. Material And Method

The method used in this paper is a comparative analysis performed both at a Member State level and at a national level. The research is supported by European and national investigation documents. The European Commission draws up annual country reports, make assessments, warnings and generally monitors programs and financial instruments for the implementation of the Rural Development Policy.

For their part, the documents issued at European level about rural development are taken into account by the national legislation in the form of the National Reform Plan, National Program for Rural Development, or the National Strategy of Rural Development, for example the alignment with the objectives of the “Europe 2020” strategy.

A thorough study of the documents issued for a longer period of time is conducted by the Ministry of Rural Development is the key element of the entire project. In particular, we analyzed the objectives of the CAP and Rural Development Policy objectives at European level and taken nationwide.

A first observation upon studying the documents, also confirmed by practice, refers to disparities within the development of Romanian rural areas as compared to rural areas of other Member States. In this paper, we never intended to analyze disparities between villages and cities, and we did not

grade natural handicaps, but rather the ways in which development can eliminate these disparities for a better living standard of the rural population.

In this respect, we noticed that priorities become the priorities contained in the programs and strategies, and are funded afterwards. The literature abounds with material on sustainable development and financing strategies for environmental protection. A first finding would be the contribution of economic activities in rural areas over the natural resources and the bio diversity of those particular areas.

Statistics taken from NIS's Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2010-2014 show that agriculture is not in a satisfactory condition and a large part of the rural population has no income for a decent living, and that the situation may worsen. Interventions for improving the living standards of the rural population are set at European level and are supported through programs and common provisions from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD - FEADR), which, together with other funds in the Common Strategic Code will streamline implementation and improve the development of the rural space in general.

The current program is based on complementary interventions, a novelty for nationwide rural development.

4. Results And Discussions

The main European documents focus on policy for all rural communities within the rural development pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy on these issues to ensure a decent living of people in rural areas through:

- promoting the role of farmers and farming communities in natural resource management and natural landscapes through direct financial support to farmers,

- diversification and the integration of agro-forestry and agriculture based on the potential that natural resources and local knowledge and traditional practices, creating new opportunities and sources of income for the rural population and reduce pressure on agricultural land.

- the harmonious development of rural areas and rural settlements by planning, organizing and managing space, to offer a multifunctional role of the areas and rural settlements, meaning an economic, social, ecological and

cultural-spiritual role, while maintaining a natural environment conducive to recreation and attractive for tourism, achieving decent living conditions and acceptable standards of living for all rural communities. We infer that measures provided at European level are based on rural development, i.e. to strike a balance between maintaining the countryside in an economic, environmental, social and cultural manner, while at the same time increasing the number of the employed population in productive service activities, including cultural, tourism and habitat preservation activities. In the long run, sustainable rural development's goal is to ensure development and social stability and economic programs based on the protection and conservation of the environment and its landscape, while at the same time maintaining soil fertility, providing a healthy habitat and biodiversity as well as the preservation of traditions and of the cultural heritage. These issues must be retained considering that in Europe, global warming is more pronounced than in the rest of the world, and is expected to increase to 5.5 degrees Celsius at the end of the XXI century.

Southern Europe experienced extreme drought during the twentieth century, and today low rainfall only amounts up to 20%. This contributed to environmental degradation and human activities such as irrigation, regulated water courses, land use change and urbanization. Aware of the seriousness of environmental degradation, Europeans have provided investment projects that are based on strategies for creating multifunctional and sustainable rural areas. The EU stressed several times that there is a paramount need to reduce degradation of biodiversity and ecosystems, foreseeing strategic measures to the horizon of 2050. Environmental Strategies show that biodiversity and ecosystem services must be protected, valued and restored for their value but also for their outstanding contribution to human well being and economic prosperity. Europe has pledged to halt biodiversity decline by 2000 because 60% of services provided by ecosystems degraded human society, affecting the production of timber, the water supply and protection against natural hazards. Also, the balance must be restored between the size of the rural area and the share of employed workers in productive service activities, including cultural, tourism and habitat activities.

Comparing development policies, e.g. the Regional Development Policy and the Rural Development Policy infer interrelationships between the urban and rural, between village and city. Urban development directly and

immediately affects all forms of rural development, primarily due to migration from village to town and not vice versa, and shape the aging population of the village. Another aspect which emerged from the comparative analysis reveals that the Regional Development Policy is integrated into the European space through common interests than the Rural Development Policy which defends national interests and must defend them further to ensure prosperity for the rural population.

From researched materials, it is clear that the E.U. is in a continuous process of expanding its economic space and its skills, but was less concerned about the new opportunities for development of rural areas, predominantly rural areas in Romania's case. At the same time, the E.U. has made the following three directions its priorities for rural development:

The competitiveness of agriculture, environmental protection and diversification of the rural economy. These priorities are valid for the entire Romanian territory and overlap Regional Development Priorities.

These directions of development at the national level are based on interventions made via supported programs.

The first direction of rural development, i.e. agriculture competitiveness, depends on the essential possibility of integration of agricultural trade, value-added processing, and the diversification of specific products and ancillary products with high ecological value; ergo, an increase in competitiveness due to high-end technologies.

The competitiveness of products and services depends on natural and human resources, the specific conditions of the countryside, the traditions, the infrastructure and existing market outlets.

The three periods, pre-accession, accession and integration have targeted a competitive agriculture, the management of climate changes and therefore the conservation and environmental protection of the resources of soil and water and the biodiversity of the environment; and as a third dimension, diversification, i.e. developing and strengthening the rural economy. These listed objectives have a clear continuity for the three stages of the integration process.

In the paper entitled, "E.U. Territorial Agenda 2020 - towards a smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, composed of various regions", the E.U.'s goal is described as tackling biodiversity loss related to the vulnerability of

natural, cultural and landscape changed which lead to rural areas losing their territorial identities.

The landscape is defined as an area whose characteristic is the result of action and interaction of natural and human factors.

Rural-mountainous areas are recognized by outstanding beauty and landscape diversity. Extremely varied countryside, agricultural and forestry potential, specific architecture rural and traditional life are factors that favor the development of sustainable tourism and agro-tourism. Mountain tourism and agro-tourism are forms of tourism that rely on natural heritage, ethnography, folklore, architectural and gastronomic elements. To achieve sustainable rural development, interventions through the prism of national priorities are related to keeping traditions, specificity and it is imperative that development does not to endanger the natural environment.

Investments in tourism through domestic agro-food consumption and offerings have the function of an economic revival of the peasant household.

The fact that most food consumed in agro-tourism activity comes from own production on the one hand contributes to the profitability of tourism, services are high quality, and prices are lower than in other forms of tourism. Besides these advantages, expanding rural tourism has an educational component which contributes to bolstering the knowledge and cultural traditions of the region, its landscapes and historical values of the rural area. For rural communities, agriculture is one of the most important sources of income for most people around the globe. Sustainable rural development, a system of organic agriculture, which provides a production system which is both ecological and sustainable...

Organic farming began to develop in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe and the USA. The interest for ecological agriculture was motivated by the desire to reduce risks which occurred considering human health, due to genetic engineering or the draining of the soil's resources, the low quality of food products and the poverty of rural communities.

Ecological agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science for the benefit of the surrounding environment, and establish an equitable relationship between man and nature.

The main objectives of ecological agriculture are: to avoid all pollution forms, both of products and of the environment; to maintain natural soil fertility by ensuring long term, sustainable harvesting; ensuring a decent

standard of living for farmers; producing foods in sufficient amounts and with a high quality in order to maintain the health of consumers.

The current CAP does not place enough accent on supporting producers of ecological products, and on trade with such products. At a national level, the measures proposed through the PNDR, as part of the FEADR / EAFDR during 2014 – 2020, specify within the ‘Measures for environment and climate’ chapter, ecological agriculture is mentioned, for which the financial allocation is of 8.4% of FEADR. Ecological agriculture should be a priority for the entire Romanian rural space.

Also, within the National Program for Rural Development (PNDR), measures have been included in order to support the establishment of agro-tourism pensions, for example, through the ‘Support for the establishment of non-agricultural businesses in rural areas’, where up to 50.000 Euros and more can be allocated for these investment projects.

A newer element for the Rural Development Policy during 2014 – 2020 is the correlation with this policy with other European Development Policies. All these strategies are aligned with the Europe 2020 strategy, which calls for a stronger integration between E.U. policies and financing instruments. These objectives are included into the Common Strategic Framework (CSF). The purpose of the CSF is the efficiency and synergy of policies at a European level. The following The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); The European Agriculture and Rural Development Fund (EARDF); The European Social Fund (ESF); the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the Fishing Fund (FEPAM). The alignment of all these programs to the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy means they will likely be achieved. We believe that in order to achieve these objectives, including the eradication of poverty, national objectives should prevail. There are several interferences between the ERDF and EARDF programs, at a national and European level.

Both regional and rural development consider development possibilities. The regions through the Regional Operational Program are characterized by different priorities from one region to the other, but also through disparities from city to village. Urban development centers grow as a result of neighboring rural areas, through the exodus of the population from villages to cities. Rural villages are characterized through the same disparities within the PNDR across the entire country. In the case of a multi-fund

approach, and considering complementary objectives, the same space can be at the same time, under the impact of several programs and several Management Authorities, with positive effects in the absorption of European funds.

5. Conclusions

Several projects have been implemented across the E.U. which have as a basis the new framework and strategies for durable and multifunctional rural development.

The Rural Development Program, through the diversification of agricultural production, specifically the diversification of ecological agriculture, but also through the diversification of non-agricultural activities such as durable tourism contributes to the development of the rural economy.

Multi-fund scheduling contributes to the balanced and sustainable development of rural areas. Due to new challenges, needs and expectations with which the rural population confronts itself, even more interventions are required throughout 2014 – 2020.

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