



The EU Common Policies for Rural Development as Applied to the Romanian Rural Space

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The common policy for development appears like a synthesis, a new perspective, of all the aspects that need integration and adaptation, after a process of grouping together so many countries, with such different stages of development and economic and social realities. All the financial help comes to ease the transition towards a new common political and economic system.

During the pre-accession period, the rural development meets new approaches; people trying to accommodate with the new system of financial help and the kind of changes they are supposed to make. Romania, as a state, should be able to establish its own national rural development plan, and its own strategy of work. And this is exactly what has been done. It is an opportunity for our rural space to develop and to become a desirable place to live in. The European policy for rural development is a very complex one due to the fact that most of the European space is represented by the rural. Furthermore the people living here represent the majority and need as much support as they can get in order to their living standards.

The Romanian strategy for rural development was supported by the financial pre-accession funds, especially Sapard¹, funds that covered a large area of actions and were meant for solving the most stringent necessities. Even though the coordinators of these programmes commonly agreed that this financial programme was a success, we still have a long way to go so as to reach a flowing management of these actions. People in the rural community still don't the necessary information in order to know how to handle these funds, how to make a project, or how to become the beneficiaries of their own work. What is important here is that we need to get used to this kind of help and policy, because, after the accession to the European Union, we should know how to spend the large quantity of money that is given for the period 2007-2013 so that the living standards and the agricultural productivity would gradually grow. So, the absorption of the money given in the pre-accession period is a sign of starting to diminish the real economic gaps that are very present between us, as a nation, and the other European countries.

The particular objectives of rural development can be included in the general regional policy, which is one of the most important European policies. The main purposes they stress upon are: competitiveness, modernization, alternative economic activities, quality of services, and preservation of the environment. Therefore, we develop the idea of a multifunctional rural, not necessarily of a productive one. If we look upon the functions of our rural, we may find them easy to convert into sustainability directions. To revitalize the rural space, we need to have an economic, social and ecological sustainability, expressed through systems of alimentary and forestry production. We find it compulsory to create a balance between the rural space and agriculture as an in-going activity that develops as a support for the community, as a consumption space, and that depends, at the same time, on the rural space as a territory delivering raw materials for production. Hence, there appears the need for specific policies and strategies for complex, multidirectional development.

Usually the common policies should represent the national interest, even within a global or a continental one, because of the specificity of each of the territories involved in this process, which comes with its own issues, as well.

¹ Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Every territorial unit has its own way of development and evolution. In the case of Romania, we have to start from the reality of having an excessively large number of small farms on small allotments, inhabited and worked by too many people belonging to the aged active population stratum. One of the axes of implementation of these policies implies the financial support for the price of the raw materials, which gives the opportunity to improve technology and to increase qualitative productivity, through direct payments.

Nowadays reality materializes in the few resources that we dispose of: the natural resources, a large territory reserved for agricultural practices, an aged and untrained active population, lack of modern technology, and systems of irrigation. All these drag us either into the impossibility of creating and producing quality products at higher standards, or into the situation of not being able to deal in an efficient manner with the European open market. It is obvious that we are rather late in our tentative of entering the food market, thus having no chance to resist in front of the big food-chain producers, so present leading actors there.

The right way to approach the rural development policy would be to start from the deepest necessities, making our administration organs aware of the need of acting on a vertical decentralized scale, from bottom to top. Any attempt to build something new on a shaky foundation, even theoretically speaking, usually gives way for not quite qualitatively high standard finite products. In this perspective, the first thing the common policy should act upon is finding a way to correlate the evolution of the population to the greater background extent of the evolution of infrastructure. In terms of their development, both of them find themselves, more or less, in a relation of dependency one upon the other. Deciding to start an analysis upon the community issue, we must highlight the importance of some investments in education, professional training, and change of profession during lifetime programmes.

A binding progress in the research field, with the intent of innovation may end up in a set of new policies regarding health and quality of the population. Both the initiative and its innovative meaning are strongly related to the level of education of the people. Living in modern times, working with modern technology, brings everything to efficiency. This means a constant moving forward, and definitely a sustainable development in a global context.

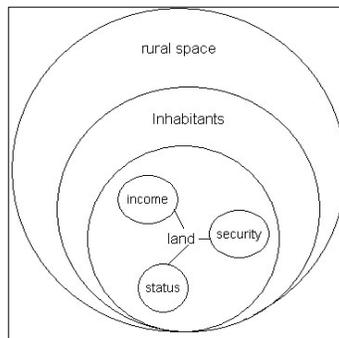


Figure 1. The inclusion model of the rural units.

If we take into discussion the other half of the foundation, the infrastructure, we can assert that there are still many things, equally important for this subject, to be debated upon. Even if we reach the maximum level of development in each and every of the factors concerning the first stage of the foundation, meaning, high educated and trained people, specialized professional background, and a functional administrative system, without a matching infrastructure we are doomed to failure in the evolutionary aspect. Therefore the investments in infrastructure have to be spread in all directions, meaning the transportation system, the environment, telecommunications and energetic systems. The evolution of technology, resulting in industrial advancement, makes it necessary for the active working population to deal with the actual and factual poorly built infrastructure, since it maintains its position of binder between technology, production, and progress. An effective producing system needs the same effectiveness for the transportation of the merchandize towards the outlet market points, thus needing high quality roads. The same goes for the communication systems, the water a gas supply networks, the energetic systems and the informatics support for technology. A poor road, water and gas supply, technical support, and communicational system make it a difficult and bumpy road for the display of the high qualitative products towards the consumer. And we have in mind here not only the relationship involving the transportation of goods and materials from the producer of finite goods towards the consumer, but also, the transportation involvement in the relationship between the row material provider and the finite goods producer. A two side issue arises here. On one hand, we deal with the modernizing of the old and the common. On the other hand, we are concerned with the preservation of the old and the traditional. This is related to our attitude towards the people living in the rural space, who perceive development as a change in everything, ranging from shift in attitudes, in perception, in the economic and social environment

that does not necessarily bring benefits, to the construction of a new mentality as a whole. For them the concept of rural means all that which is specific to both life and family; that identity that the land they owe gives them, identity that provides the basis for sustaining the family group. Therefore, the central link that defines the Romanian rural space from the perspective of the inhabitants is reduced to the simple formula of dependency between land, income, status and security. The land is the single unit that binds the three coordinates that build both identity and mentality, thus providing a concentric model for the image of the rural space. This concentric model, picturing a gradual inclusion of small units, people and land, into a larger one, reveals the strong connection between the two components of the rural space. There is a special interdependency that must be understood and clarified before applying the above measures for development. People act like an engine activated by the land that individualizes the main features of the space in which they live and evolve. People see farming as their own way of life, as the engine that empowers their sense of property and statute of ownership. The land is particularly important for them, it is the basis on which the rural family appears and the rural economy is formed. After establishing this status, we could analyse the relations and their results. As we can see from the figure, the status of property results in three extensions: income, security and ownership (status). People practice all kinds of agriculture activities that provide them income. They depend on their land for production. The land gives them a certain sense of security. To be a private owner means a lot to the present farmer, having in mind the past decades, period characterized by collectivization and sense of communal, non-individual property. The minimum security and productivity they obtain might be enough for the nowadays old and poor population inhabiting our villages, still focusing on agriculture, and difficultly adaptable to alternative activities resulting in alternative incomes. It is rather a strange conjuncture that Romania has to face, a situation in which the funds for development exist but there is an imperative need for them to be constructively absorbed. Yet, this does not happen, because we do not have the necessary mentality and opening towards the new. Today's common policies for rural development stress upon the modern and modernization due to the reality in the territory, reality that reveals a serious backwardness of the rural in comparison with the urban. In fact these policies aim is to change, and here the verb to change implies to replace the old, the common and the traditional with the new. Traditionalism is seen as a non-fact, meaning a non-improvement, a non-modernization, or a non-development, and the question that arises here is whether rural development means the exemption of traditionalism or not. Our rural is mainly characterized by a strong addiction to the urban in what the concept of dynamics is concerned. Often, because of its remoteness, low accessibility, strong traditionalism in socio-economic and cultural systems, it had to become a consumer of the products provided by the specific urban spaces polarizing them. The enclosure of the rural into a region induces a direct dependency or even a parallelism between the common policies for development, be it rural, agricultural, or regional. Therefore, regional development means solving the issues of the peripheral regions or areas, giving space to the major problems of the rural embodied in low productivity and remoteness. The most important start point for building a coherent rural development policy should be translated by a thorough analysis of the functions prevailing in the rural space. These functions keep changing under the influence of different socio-economic and political conditions and also under the action of other types of policies. A shift must be produced in the position held by the rural, that of a provider of raw materials and food for the producer, the urban. We have to consider that the aspect of ensuring the necessary domestic food supply is not so important. The real challenge is to succeed in consuming the food stock that rural produced. Besides, rural development does not necessarily mean agricultural development, but it rather implies a complex strategy that involves human resources, raw materials and social and economic condition. Rural development has become the second main pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy, insisting on the human component (workforce, level of employment, education, culture and traditions, new professional qualifications). The European Union's rural space represents more than 85% of the territory while 50% of its population is an active agricultural force. We must study the position of agriculture within economic development.

After a long period of modifications, undergone by the Common Agricultural Policy, the finality of its objectives came to have the present complex, almost perfect form. Therefore we can synthesize the present formulation of the above mentioned objectives:

- the growth in the offer for agricultural products, the increase in efficiency, the diversifying of technology and of the production aspects, resulted into a linear development of production (the transition from subsistence type of economy translated in the syntax of “only for myself” to a welfare-state economy);
- insuring a stabilized income system, fair to farmers, that supposes a decent level of life for the agro-producers;
- stabilizing agricultural markets by creating a stock system and purchasing at fixed prices (building up of a good management of resources and reserves, in order not to face the situation of importing goods at exceeding prices);
- reasonable prices for the consumers (a fair balance between production and prices);
- assuring the safety, improving the quality of alimentary products for the customers, aligned to the communitarian standards.

In this context, the Common Agricultural Policy acts independently within each and every state, in agreement with the particular type of agriculture, and the existent situation of every region, having in mind the fact that here agriculture is a unit strongly connected to all the other elements of economy. The Common Agricultural Policy in Romania provides some advantages in what the protection of the environment is concerned and it complies with the standards of livestock breeding. Its application consists in reliable subventions for farmers and special programmes for poor rural areas resulting in economic growth. The Common Agricultural Policy functions using a series of guiding principles such as: a unique market, (within European Union agricultural products are purchased without restrictions), communitarian preference (the traditional EU products are preferred), financial solidarity among member states - therefore communal measures are financed by a common budget (each of the member states must contribute to the communal budget in order to help the other candidates comply with the costs requirements of this policy). On its way to accession to the European Union, Romania, like other candidate countries, has to make important efforts to adopt the measures of the *Acquis Communitaire*. Everything must be done in agreement and partnership with the European Union, implicitly with the new candidate countries and the already member states, by respecting the established regulations and benefiting of certain financial help, nearly all of it being non returnable funds. The Common Agricultural Policy, the most significant reform of the EU, having as a major target the agricultural and rural development, helps the country that gains the membership to quickly shape up into a flowing evolution and development. All the new member states should make a good use of the advantages provided by this policy and perceive it as an opportunity towards a better planning of the sustainable agriculture. It is not advisable to exactly copy the western principles of agricultural production improvement. The way to be followed is to merely adapt our nowadays situation with its functions, specific needs and realities, intrinsic to our separate identity, to the above described model and regulations.

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