



Regional Development and Local Mentalities

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Introduction

Regional development in the Romanian rural space cannot be taken into consideration only in relation to projects and their costs. Its implementation as a sustainable development also implies reactions of the social actors-communities and leaders-to this problem. These reactions can be named attitudes, aspirations, mental, concepts on development, and real or virtual sustainers of development.

In our intervention we are trying to reveal, mainly the mentality of the local leaders related to development. Before proceeding to such a qualitative analysis we must show some differences of nuance and depth in the Romanian rural space connected to local mentalities, in the hypostasis of the collective social actor: the community.

The Effects of Historical Tradition

Although Romanian rural communities have recently undergone the impact of the industrial society, in their mentalities we can track down, as differentiations, the historical realities from the 19th century. In cultural attitudes, in life-style, in the individual, in the individual and collective relation to action. So we can find "subjugate" mentalities and "free" mentalities, the first ones being identified in the rural communities, which were parts of the feudal economies, and the free mentalities can be tracked down in those rural communities, which had activated in a free peasant economy.

So in the Bărăgan Plain recently they identified a differentiation among the villages of the "mosneni" (free peasants) and the villages of the boyars (the feudal dominions).

In Transylvania at the level of the cultural mentalities we could find conflict situations among the former "nemes" villages (the free villages) and the villages of the serfs (villages of the feudal dominions). In 1998 we could also see the strong mentality of the free peasants (razesi) in the geographical space of Vrancea.

Rural communities from that mountainous area were at that time in conflict with the official owner of the forest enclosures. Communities, led by their local leaders asked for the restitution of their property over the forests in the old principle of common use, where each community had its own mountain, and it was owned by the local community and not by the state.

Collectivized and Not-Collectivized Villages

For almost half of a century, from 1949 until 1990, Romanian rural communities have gradually (from 1964 onwards in a radical way) undergone the path from an economy based on peasant-farming to a collectivist-type economy, dominated by the absence of private property and as a result- the lack of ideological and economical control of rural communities.

From the perspective we are interested in, that of the mentalities, we must specify that at this moment we can still feel differences at the level of mentalities among the communities that have experienced kolhozisation and those which have not experienced kolhozisation.

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In 1997 and 1998 I have studied with my students from the sociological department two communities from the Western Carpathians. In 1997 we have studied the commune of Călățele, with its adjacent villages: Călățele, Finciu, Văleni, Călata, all communities have undergone the experience of kolhozisation. In 1998 I have studied a neighboring administrative unit-the commune of Râsca, which includes the villages of Cristeşti, Dealu Mare, Lapusteşti and Marcesti. These communities have not experienced kolhozisation. In the perspective of our analysis we must underline the fact that in the community of Călățele a lack of solidarity of the local leaders (mayor, headmaster priest) was maintained, this was generated by the separation of the school from the church and of local town hall from both, imposed by the communist regime in the collectivized villages. This phenomenon of de-solidarisation of the above-mentioned local leaders can be found in all of the former-kolhosed rural communities, at least in all of the villages I could make direct observations in this direction. In the community of Râsca, which has not undergone the experience of kolhozisation, I have found a stronger solidarity of the local leaders (mayor, headmaster priest). As a result of the solidarity of the local leaders important elements of the society of information was implemented: digital phone, with more than 100 users, a fax, which includes the village in the national and international phone-system. In Călățele there is no such endowment, even the town hall's phone, connected to the county network was very difficult to use. The people from the community of Râsca have managed to contribute 50 % to the development by their own contribution and 50 % of the contribution came from the state. The local leaders' solidarity activated the villagers in their contribution.

Local Development and the Mentality of the Leaders

Not only the above-presented example, but other ones which have seen along other field-studies confirm that the development of the rural communities has real determinations in the mentality of the leaders, a mentality which cannot be entirely overlapped only on the differentiation between the kolhosed and non-kolhosed villages, but on the way of thinking of these leaders of the social action in the spirit of development.

In order to reveal this mentality of the leaders, we have addressed the next question to a number of 15 mayors from villages chosen accidentally: "Who must support the development of your community?"

Out of the 15 answers, 10 invoked the county authorities, the state and the government, and the other five answers invoked the European Community, the PHARE Project. We reproduce an answer from the first category: "The superior forums should support us with some financing programs, as at the level of the village there are no persons who could draw out financing and development projects". And a response from the second category: "The county forums, the Government and the European Union and non-governmental organizations should support us".

We face here on one hand on ethnocentric mentality, dominant (66 %) and one which as a trend of accepting European values (34 %), which is in minority. The ethnocentric mentality, as well as the pro-European is projected in a larger phenomenon, that of the structure of mentalities in rural communities, which can be revealed depending on the generation of the villagers, which actually exist in the Romanian villages.

Romanian rural communities are populated by three generations: the generation of the peasants, the generation of the collectivists and the generation of the farmers.

The first generation includes the aged population between 70 and 80 years, who have declared themselves in our inquests as "ploughman".

Some of them are analphabets and practice agriculture with ploughs and animals for traction. Among them I have met people who own cattle, animals for traction, who can plough around 0,5 hectares per day. The generation of the "ploughmen" is disappearing, but still is a reality in Romanian rural communities. The generation of the collectivist peasants is the generation, which has between 45-70 years, all of them pensioners of the former kolkhozes (or becoming such pensioners), with pensions of few hundreds of thousands of leis. Some of them still own tractors, have horses and cows in their property, but their mentality regarding the agriculture and development is at the same level as that of those who call themselves

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“ploughmen”. There is another generation of the people situated between 18 and 45 years, that of the farmers, many of these people have experienced unemployment and came back to the rural as owners of the land, trying to implement their urban mentality in the cultivation of the land. But not all of those who are in the generation of the farmers are really farmers. There are communities where we could not identify even one farmer, and where I have found such farmers, their number equals that of the old ploughmen. In an ideal model of rural generations, the ploughmen have between 3-10 %, the farmers have between 1-10 %, and the generations of the former collectivist farmers represent 80 %, if not more, even 90 % in the communities where there are no farmers.