



ORIGINAL PAPER

Sustainability of Rural Development in Romania: Priorities, Trends, Objectives

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Abstract:

Sustainable development has been imposed by the need to solve the multiple global problems of humanity, through a rational consumption of resources, by avoiding pollution and profound imbalances in ecosystems that coexist on a global scale. Consequently, the process of sustainable development aims at both social and ecological economic activity. Given that agriculture is an important economic subsystem of the national economy, the sustainable development of rural areas and agriculture has become an essential component of the sustainable development of the national economy. Through its content, rural development expresses a three-dimensional relationship of economic, social and ecological nature. The article analyzes the development opportunities, financing opportunities, administrative changes and development possibilities of non-agricultural activities in rural areas in Romania, in order to achieve the sustainable development objectives assumed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Keywords: *rural development; sustainable growth; agriculture; climatic change; rural space.*

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Introduction

For rural areas, the accelerated changes has brought not only new challenges but also the affirmation of behaviors favorable to the existence and progress of the rural community.

In some directions, rural development is proving to be the way to achieve inevitable changes, achieved in an economically, rationally environmentally responsible and socially equitable way. The village communities act successfully in the use of the local values and abilities they have, simultaneously with the adoption of the new rules regarding the development of modern technique and technology at local level. Changes in agriculture have stimulated rural communities to better organize themselves locally. Community development allows local residents to pay increasing attention to infrastructure expansion.

In this general context, the preoccupations of scientists and specialists from different fields of human activity, civic organizations, including international economic and social bodies, in order to prevent the degradation of rural space, to affirm the role of rural communities in the process of economic and social development and cultural in rural areas. In more and more countries of the contemporary world, especially in the economically consolidated ones, sustainable development strategies also include essential objectives regarding the sustainable development of the countryside.

The problem of rural development, as a result of the high share of the rural population and of the areas owned in the rural space, of the special role and place that belongs to the social life, has acquired not only a national dimension but also an international one. The special development of the rural space is a very topical problem, of great complexity and difficulty, aiming at achieving a balance between the requirement of preserving and conserving the existing material and spiritual values and the tendency to modernize the rural space.

The component of sustainable economic development, the special development of rural areas can be analyzed based on studies conducted in recent decades (Pirvu G., 2011: 46), which refers to a series of contradictory processes and phenomena of the contemporary world, the most obvious and significant being:

- accentuated polarization of the economic development process, materialized in the existence of some very rich areas and others very poor;
- the deterioration of the natural environment as a result of the unprecedented aggressiveness and the uncontrolled expansion of the industry, of the intensification and growth over tolerable economic limits of the agri-food industry, of the transport infrastructure, etc .;
- uncontrolled rampant urbanization of some areas and regions;
- elimination of traditional values and their replacement with industrialized ones, standardized;
- amplification of negative economic and social phenomena such as unemployment, underemployment, migration, etc ..

These phenomena and processes have negative effects on the development and quality of rural life, which requires the achievement of sustainable rural development against the background of sustainable development of the entire national economic system, in direct connection with Romania's integration into the EU. Through its content, rural development expresses the set of actions designed to improve the quality of life in rural areas, based on sustainable economic growth, on maintaining the natural landscape. A major problem for Romania is the development of the rural world, a

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concept of vital importance for the future evolution of the Romanian state (Bădescu, et al. 2009).

Rural development is currently a priority in the program of economic and social development in the short, medium and long term (Mihailescu, 2005). Taking into account the complexity of such an approach and the particular situation of rural Romania, the emphasis in developing and capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the European context rests with the public administration, by accessing funds specific to the common agricultural policy and other financial instruments of European Union policies, especially the structural funds within the regional policies. Public administration reform ensures a managerial-institutional transformation process in rural areas as well.

The package of reforms for the administration, materialized in the normative acts that regulate the functioning of the local public administration, must produce effects diminishing the dysfunctions regarding the management of services and human and financial resources, of the acquisitions, of the communication and the approach to the citizen. Institutions such as the Central Unit for Public Administration Reform (role in coordinating and modernizing the public administration reform process), the General Directorate for Administrative Capacity Development (specialized structure with a role in managing and implementing the Operational Program for Administrative Capacity Development), the Directorate for Fiscal Policies and Local Budgeting (specialized structure with a role in ensuring the application of local fiscal and budgetary policies), the National Institute of Administration (with the role of ensuring continuous training in public administration and developing the strategy of continuous training of civil servants), National Agency of Civil Servants (With a role in the implementation of the strategy and in the application of the Government Program in the field of management of public functions and civil servants) contributes to ensuring the integrative decision-making system in rural development, in general, and in the reorganization of the regions. it is development, especially (Dinulescu S.M, 2020).

The major problem for the Romanian rural community is implicitly related to identifying different funding opportunities, finding sources of co-financing, developing a portfolio of projects suitable for development options, which means developing a sustainable development strategy aimed at human resource development and promotion of public-private partnerships on areas of common interest associated with neighboring territorial administrations.

Economic, Social and Ecological Aspects of the Sustainable Development of the Rural Area

The rural development process is designed to take place against the background of sustainable and complex development of agriculture, agriculture and rural space being interdependent sides specific to the rural community, by respecting some principles specified and inscribed in the European Charter of Rural Space:

- the European rural area is a valuable landscape of life and work, the fruit of a long history and whose safeguarding is a living concern for society;
- the existing threats make it indispensable to define a policy in favor of the rural space, within a global economic and social policy involving the two sides, rural development and agricultural development;
- the principles of sustainable development are recommended to be reflected in all policies applicable to rural areas, and these policies to be integrated;

- a rural development program should as far as possible start from concrete, regional data, encourage local initiatives and be based on an internal development on the following coordinates: to place man with his problems at the center of concepts and decisions, to ensure the identity of the community, to preserve and promote the cultural and historical particularities of the rural space; to encourage the diversification of relations between rural populations and the rest of society.

In accordance with these principles, the objectives of sustainable rural development have been established, the realization of which is considered to raise the degree of economic and social development of the rural space and to cultivate the traditions and customs specific to the village communities. Among these objectives we should mention:

- increasing the competitiveness of rural areas, in order to maximize their contribution to enhancing economic and social progress;
- ensuring opportunities in favor of the rural population, in order to raise its standard of living to the urban level;
- conservation and protection of the environment;
- maintaining the population in rural areas by eliminating the population exodus to urban centers;
- increasing the income alternatives of family households.

Along with these general objectives, sustainable rural development is also based on a number of principles that were highlighted in the Cork Declaration (Ireland 1996) (Alexandri C., et al., 2003: 663-664).

Economically, sustainable development means that any specific activity carried out in rural areas is carried out in conditions of efficiency. Agriculture itself, a defining activity of the rural area, must be approached in accordance with the needs of future development, in close connection with the protection of the natural environment. In this respect, it is considered that the elements regarding the construction of a sustainable agriculture are (Beli N. et al., 1995):

- the formation of a competitive agriculture that will ensure the creation of an economic surplus necessary for the accumulations destined for its own development and that will have a positive contribution to the achievement of the general balance;
- the insertion of agriculture in the whole natural economic system and its functioning on the principles of the competitive market economy;
- the development of an ecological agriculture that would produce clean agri-food goods and that would not be posted either as an agent or as a victim of pollution;
- developing agricultural activities to ensure the incomes of agricultural producers, increasing the quality of life of farmers and the entire population in rural communities.

The reform in the economic field must have as objective the development of the territorial infrastructure, simultaneously with the one at national level, the establishment of units in public / private partnership providing services for commercialization of agricultural products, including for export, and combating pollution, by carrying out land improvement and water retention works in basins, by regularizing running water courses and by planting trees and sowing meadows (Mărginean, 2005, p. 69). Decisive and differentiated public intervention in favor of farmers with small agricultural land properties in order to be successful must ensure the free execution of mechanical agricultural works, for the households of elderly farmers with properties of 1-2 ha of agricultural land. At the same time, the subsidies on products of the farmers entering the

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market must be consistent, and the concentration of agricultural holdings, which is necessary, must not affect the farmer and must not lead to his new plunder.

The reform must take into account, at the same time, the ways of using resources, including through public borrowing (Mărginean, 2005, p. 69). Recent developments in the European system of financing through the common agricultural policy (CAP) confirm the orientation towards financing development programs in rural areas and increasing the complementarity of financing of agriculture and rural space with financing through regional policy.

Another sector that needs revitalization is the marketing of agricultural products. Even if the products of the Romanian peasants can prove to be competitive on the market, this sector needs a series of support measures to recover the agricultural production through the market: the modification of the laws of the markets; use of guaranteed minimum prices for basic agricultural products (wheat, milk, meat); supporting the development of agricultural and wood products markets; expanding the wholesale market network; development of the sector for the provision of forest services and products, other than wood; encouraging public-private partnership for the purchase of agricultural products.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the knowledge and application of sanitary and phytosanitary quality standards and regulations by farmers are vital from at least two points of view. On the one hand, compliance with these legal provisions is a condition for access to support mechanisms by the European Union: the principle of conditionality or "cross-compliance", ie linking payments to respect for the environment, food security and animal welfare, and maintaining agricultural land in good condition (Ursu, 2005, p. 58). On the other hand, non - compliance by producers leads to the impossibility of marketing agricultural products on the European market. Although there has been an accelerated transposition of the quality, sanitary and phytosanitary acquis in recent years, this problem still raises issues for farmers and processors.

Socially, development is conceived as a support that ensures normal living conditions for rural communities.

The social reform aims to size the school network on multiple criteria and children attend primary school in the village, as well as alternative systems that include transportation, housing, spending coverage, etc., substantial assistance to specialists working in the environment who want to stay in the locality, organizing centers, resources for the development of local development projects and their management, providing material support in the form of scholarships for students in rural areas to attend schools with an agricultural profile, expanding the training system initial and continuing vocational training for rural adults, the provision of subsidized places in higher education for students from poor farming families, the considerable increase in the level of allowances for rural children for periods including schooling, and the increase in the amount of pensions or those from the former CAPs are substantial arguments for the sustainable development of the Romanian village. A locality has real chances to improve the living conditions of its inhabitants if the combined actions of the population and the authorities aim at developing the territorial network of social assistance services, at the same time with a new resettlement, upon request, of the inhabitants of isolated hamlets in suitable locations aid in the reconstruction of households.

The phenomenon of reverse migration compared to the communist period, from urban to rural, specifically for periods of crisis, has severely affected Romania. This

phenomenon took place in villages and counties with the lowest standard of living, contributing to underdevelopment and poverty in these counties. Already poor, they received an excess of labor in the conditions of a very low demand. A gratifying fact recorded in 2011 is that the total labor force entered in agriculture was in decline in Romania by -6.7% (Eurostat, 2012, p. 74).

One of the consequences of the migration phenomenon is the large share of farmers in the total employment rate and the large number of elderly farmers, a problem aggravated by the level of education of the rural population, because only one person per thousand inhabitants in rural areas has higher education which does not allow the redistribution of labor to other sectors. Romanian agriculture, with over 4 million households and over 3 million active people, cannot provide the necessary food for the entire Romanian population, compared to the EU, where 7.8 million farmers produce food for 350 million inhabitants and a significant surplus for export (Radu, Neamțu, 2011, pp. 151-156). This situation is a strong obstacle to Romania's integration. Our country is currently the European state with the largest number of farmers, about 37% of the total active population. Romanian farmers represent almost 40% of the existing farmers in the European Union, where the share of the population active in agriculture, out of the total activity, is only 5.3%. Illustrative is also the fact that two thirds of the Romanian rural population is 50 years old and almost a third of it is over 60 years old (Eurostat, 2012). The situation of the rural population is exacerbated by the crisis in the pension and social insurance system. In order to overcome the crisis in the pension system for farmers and to fight against the poverty of the rural population, Romania must implement a viable system of early retirement of farmers (Popescu, 2004: 11). This is another challenge for the future governments of Romania, given that all attempts to reform the social security system have failed.

The variation of rural occupation is marked within the historical regions by tradition and the heterogeneous aspect of the region (population-relief). The share of the non-agricultural population, in the total employed population in rural areas, is higher the more the mountainous relief is present and the more the reference area has a longer urbanization and the share of employees in the employed population. The predominant occupation in agriculture is characteristic of isolated villages located far from small towns. Residents living in developed villages, with good roads and in households with commuters in the city have higher incomes, obtaining them mainly from non-agricultural rural occupation. The high level of inflation and the difficulties in obtaining low-cost loans have contributed and still contribute to the underdevelopment of the private agricultural and non-agricultural sector in rural communities. Food and beverage boutiques are, in fact, largely the private non-agricultural sector of the Romanian village.

Ecologically, sustainable development is achieved in accordance with economic and social development, environmental protection being the foundation of the balance between economic and ecological. First of all, rural development depends on the practice of sustainable agriculture in order to maintain an optimal relationship between the quantity, quality and structure of food production and the conservation of environmental quality.

Environmental quality and biodiversity are under pressure from the perspective of natural process and economic activities. There is an urgent need to improve environmental conditions and to promote sustainable practices in agriculture and the economy in general. High natural value land (HNV) with an area of about 16% of total agricultural and forestry land is an important factor for biodiversity.

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Increasing the forested area is a priority need, contributing to the process of adapting to climate change and reducing GHG emissions. It is estimated that significant areas of agricultural land are affected by various soil degradation phenomena, being suitable for afforestation. There is a strong link between the need to promote biodiversity and afforestation and the need for training and advice at the local level to promote good practices in agriculture and forestry on landscape and ecosystem management. These concepts are relatively new in Romania, but there is potential for these ideas to be consolidated in the culture of farmers and foresters.

The need for sustainability of businesses, jobs, communities and ecosystems also requires better protection of water and soil resources and integrated management systems. Priority support should be given to specialized training and counseling aimed, especially in high-risk areas, at achieving water quality standards and protecting soil resources as a way of adapting to climate change (MADR, Romania's Rural Development Strategy 2014- 2020).

Particular attention should be paid to local public administration opportunities for EAFRD funding, as it is the tool best suited to the development needs of rural communities. It ensures a unitary and coherent context of European support for local development strategies. EAFRD funding aims to increase the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector by promoting knowledge and improving human capital (training and information, innovative practices, promoting early retirement and establishing young farmers in rural areas, consulting services, etc.), restructuring and development physical capital (modernization of agricultural holdings, increasing the economic value of forests, agricultural products, infrastructure development and revitalizing the productive potential destroyed by natural disasters), as well as transitional measures, specific to the new Member States (supporting the establishment of producer groups, advisory services and consulting, of semi-subsistence farms) (Pirvu G, 2011: 52).

Following the quality of life in rural areas, it can be seen that it becomes necessary to diversify the rural economy and improve the environment in rural areas through measures aimed at sustainable use of agricultural and forestry land through compensatory payments for natural handicaps, agri-environment actions, afforestation premiums, "Natura 2000" payments, by diversifying non-agricultural activities and encouraging tourist activities.

Conclusions

Specialists (Bold I. et al, 2003: 801; Pirvu G. et al, 2009: 5-6; Pirvu G., Gruescu R., 2009: 7) address sustainable rural development in terms of socio-economic, regional economy and of the intersectoral economy. The first concerns the behavior of social groups that live and carry out activities in rural areas, produce income and use rural services; the second identifies the geographical, demographic and economic variables that characterize rural areas, paying attention to the role of rural areas at macro-economic and social level.

The third bases its research object on input-output tables and aims to identify and measure the type and intensity of connections between agriculture, related industries and the rest of the national economy.

Sustainable rural development is considered the main strategic document whose use ensures the attenuation of economic and social discrepancies that occur between regions and areas of a country, between urban and rural space, discrepancies created by

the different degree of endowment with natural resources, real capital human financial. Consequently, the objectives of regional rural development aim at: access to resources, balanced distribution of the benefits of development seen in terms of material, individual, access to service and social security; efficient management of available resources, etc.

The development of basic services for the rural economy and population, the renovation and development of villages, the conservation and improvement of rural heritage (historical, cultural), the development of micro-enterprises are also important measures for the quality of life of the rural citizen. According to the possible portfolio of projects, the action regarding the elaboration of local development strategies must be considered, including the development of public-private partnerships, the design and implementation of strategies with the financing of cooperation programs.

The public administration has the responsibility to get involved as a partner for support and coordination through counseling, dissemination and information actions (Avram, 2007:72). The investments for the modernization of the agricultural and forestry infrastructure, those for the renovation of the villages, the conservation and improvement of the rural heritage belong, together with the implementation of the reform, more and more in proportion, to the local public administration. This, by accessing European funds, but also by attracting the central administration in carrying out projects for the construction or modernization of agricultural roads, irrigation and drying systems to ensure water and electricity sources, land protection works against floods, gas supply networks, sewerage and water treatment systems, renovation of buildings with cultural, historical and architectural value, environmental improvement, etc.

The regional policy of the European Union constituted in a set of instruments and procedures facilitates the development of the localities from the Romanian rural environment.

In the period 2007-2013, Romania had the opportunity to access 13 billion euros through the common agricultural policy and 19 billion euros through the regional policy. The management of financing through the Structural and Cohesion Funds (ERDF, ESF, CF) allowed the development of operational programs such as Human Resources Development Operational Program, Increasing Economic Competitiveness Operational Program, Transport Operational Program, Environment Operational Program, Administrative Capacity Development Operational Program, Regional Operational Program and Technical Assistance Operational Program. The rural public administration also plays an important role through support actions (information, partnership) in obtaining complementary funding. Improving social infrastructures (health, education, social services), as well as supporting the development of the regional and local business environment allow sustainable development by capitalizing on natural resources, including by promoting tourism and increasing the quality of services. Local authorities are considering increasing energy efficiency and security of supply in the context of combating climate change.

To this end, the expansion and modernization of water systems, the development of integrated waste management systems and the rehabilitation of contaminated sites are not only measures for nature protection, but also support for increasing the economic competitiveness of the rural environment. Correlation of the Human Resources Development Operational Program with the Development of Administrative Capacity Operational Program also allow solving the individual and

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collective needs and opportunities of the inhabitants of the Romanian rural environment. Attracting funds and projects that enhance the effectiveness of development strategies is a priority of rural development in the context of territorial organization and institutional reform.

European funds accessed in the period 2014-2020 can be involved in achieving a profound reform of local public administration, in attracting substantial investments in infrastructure and sustainable development in rural areas. At the same time, these funds would allow the increase of social expenditures, taking into account the use of resources for the development of the country, including through public borrowing.

Social policies for the rural environment must focus on welfare criteria “focusing on the poor or at high risk of poverty or social exclusion” (Sandu, 2005, p. 72). In order to restructure social policies and develop the rural environment, it is necessary to know the social groups that ensure the internal dynamics of the villages.

In the vision of the local authorities is also the non-agricultural rural population which includes all the people who have as main source of income the non-agricultural activities and work in the rural environment. The non-agricultural rural economy still has small dimensions and limited diversity. There is a need for an incentive for its development, a public debate and a consistent social and economic study to form the basis of economic policies in rural areas (Dinulescu S.M., 2020: 133-137). At the same time, the reform must take into account the restructuring of inefficient state units, as well as the relaunch of agricultural enterprises in the direction of the market economy. The existence of urban-industrial decline has increased unemployment and rural poverty. At present, the population employed in rural areas has as object of activity agriculture. Seasonality (autumn-winter) affects the occupational segment in rural areas.

The structure of the Romanian economy is still anachronistic compared to the developed countries of the European Union. The decrease of incomes and purchasing power of the rural inhabitants represents the negative consequence of the transformation of the social structure in Romania, of the restriction of the economic activities, of the pioneering in the field of tourism and of the modern agricultural farms.

In the vision of the European Union, as well as of the Romanian rulers, the European funds represent a chance for the rural communities, in general, and for the disadvantaged ones, in particular.

The Regional Operational Program 2014-2020 highlights the direction of local authorities' efforts for the economic and social regeneration of rural communities, for a responsibility in local initiatives to implement strategies, which measures the effectiveness of real local autonomy.

The reform of the Romanian public administration continues to ensure a process of transformation of the rural localities, fact marked by the normative acts that have already brought structural and organizational changes in the management of the resources of the Romanian village communities.

Rural communities received in 2007-2013 and in 2014-2020 substantial amounts to support their development strategies, rural specific programs can be correlated with funding programs through regional policy, environmental policy, enterprise policy, policy in the field of education, health policy, etc. Within the financial perspectives 2014-2020 of the European Union, rural communities benefit from the opportunity to be co-financed both by the funds specific to the Common Agricultural Policy and by financial instruments of other Community policies, especially the structural funds within the regional policy.

In conclusion, we can say that economic development and territorial cohesion cannot be achieved without a viable agriculture, a reform process in all sectors, which are closely linked, and without a mobilization of all segments of civil society, not just government. Agricultural development and modernization of villages is an ongoing, very complex process, which must be accompanied by measures targeting primarily the sensitive sectors.

Accepting the doctrine of sustainable development of rural communities is not a possible voluntary option among many others, but is the only responsible and efficient way to design long-term economic and social development, in accordance with national interest, international cooperation requirements and objective trends. the process of globalization of the world economy.

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