

DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY

Surname and first name:

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Faculty:

SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

Field of doctoral research:

SOCIOLOGY

Doctoral thesis title:

"RURAL PATRIMONY" AND EUROPEAN POLICIES. STUDY ON THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE NORTH-WESTERN REGION

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Keywords

rural development, community, resources, local initiatives, rural web, endogeneity, sustainability, institutional arrangements, governance of markets, novelty production, social capital, neo-endogenous rural development, Common Agricultural Policy, SAPARD Programme, North-Western Region, partnership, inter-community association, development strategies, representations.

Chapter 1 Rural development - concept and theoretical models

The first chapter of our thesis explains three major theoretical models which vertebrate the approaches on rural development: the *exogenous*, *endogenous* and *neo-endogenous* models. The order in which they have been enumerated reflects their temporal succession within the theoretical discourse on the issue of development.

The exogenous rural development represents the classical and dominant form of post-war rural development, coagulated around the industrialization process as a development engine. The principles of this model are based on scale and concentration economies, where the main function of the rural areas is to supply the expanding cities with food products. The urban centers constitute the growth poles responsible for the economic development of rural areas. In other words, the main forces of development come from outside the rural areas (Ward *et al*, 2005; Galdeano-Gómez, Aznar-Sánchez and Pérez-Mesa, 2011). The exogenous development implies investments meant to continuously intensify and industrialize agriculture. In an initial phase the exogenous model proposes as solutions to increase the revenues of agricultural enterprises and encourage labor force and capital through the modernization of agricultural production and of rural services. In the second phase, the rural development concentrated on attracting new types of services through promotion of tourism, relocation of factories in the rural area, etc. Towards the end of the 70s, following a saturation of internal markets, the exceeding of the ecological limits and a diminishing capacity to absorb the surplus of rural population within the urban sector, the exogenous model started to decline (Lowe *et al*, 1995; Ward *et al*, 2005).

The endogenous rural development constitutes a reaction or an opposition to modernization, a "bottom-up" type of action opposing the Fordist, modernist, "top-down" exogenous approach (Bassand *et al*, 1986 *apud* Vanclay, 2011). The main purpose of this perspective is the improvement of the local economical and social situation through the mobilization of internal resources. The definitive elements of the endogenous development are: the initiation and control of the development process at the level of local community (Galdeano-Gómez, Aznar-Sánchez and Pérez-Mesa, 2011); maintaining benefits at local level; respecting local values, (Slee 1994); producing specific local goods and services; the existence of original combinations of social relations, markets and technologies capable to transform local characteristics into resources (Bowler 1999). Van der Pleog and Long (1994) emphasize the

necessary equilibrium between internal and external elements, formulating the following definition: "The patterns of the endogenous development are mainly based – but not exclusively – on *local resources* available, such as: potential of local ecology, labor force, knowledge and connection between production and consumption". This definition, consider Lowe *et al* (1995), constitutes on the one hand a progress since it advances an empirical and relational concept of endogenous development, allowing the development processes to be compared according to their relative exogeneity/endogeneity. On the other hand the authors insist on the necessity to distinguish between the local and external *control* of the development processes, considering the local production and consumption circuits against the extra-local ones and taking into consideration individuals or groups as an object of development; following this reasoning they suggest as a solution the institutional focus on creating connections between the local and extra-local actors and on the nature of these relations (*ibid.*). The social values on which the endogenous rural development is based defines development as a social concept, rather than in terms of economical growth (Brugger, 1986 *apud* Vanclay, 2011).

Ray (2001) advances the concept of *neo-endogenous* (rural) *development*, where the extra-local factors are identified and taken into account as essential elements, without underappreciating the potential of local areas to outline the future. The idea of *neo-endogenous* (rural) development implies the following: the *endogenous* (or *participative*) *dimension*, which refers to a "bottom-up" type of trajectory, characterized by the focus on resource identification development mechanism identification at local level; the "*neo*" element, which identifies the roles of different manifestations of the *extra-local* – the actors of the national or European political-administrative system or from the level of other places. From the policies perspective the *neo-endogenous* development is based on the idea that socio-economical welfare can be attained by redirecting interventions from individual sectors towards local/regional territories. This is an alternative solution to the intervention practices of central authorities which approach the sectors of economic and social life in an isolated way or applying standard measures, without taking into consideration the culture or the location. In this way, the local areas can assume the responsibility of their own socio-economic development, Ray (2006).

As for the originality of this new perspective Vanclay (2011) relates it rather to the new concept that names it, considering that in the case of the exogenous-endogenous dichotomy the two dimensions have not been designed to exclude each other. Thus the popularity of the neo-

endogenous development model is due on the one hand to the need to constitute an integrated approach and on the other hand to the erroneous supposition that endogenous rural development implies necessarily the exclusion of extra-local factors.

An example of an integrated and (neo-)endogenous approach of the rural development is the *LEADER programme*, proposed by the European Union. It includes both a "top-down" type of approach through the fact that it constitutes an initiative of the European Union, and a "bottom-up" type of approach, as the planning and implementation of decisions happen at local level. (Subchapters 1.1. *Preliminary considerations*; 1.2. *Exogenous rural development*; 1.3. *Endogenous rural development*; 1.4. *Mixed approaches of rural development*).

Chapter 2 Towards a new theoretical frame for the understanding of rural development – ETUDE Project

Chapter 2 extends the concept of *rural development* through the articulation of a model whose theoretical dimensions – *endogeneity, novelty production, sustainability, social capital, institutional arrangements, governance of markets* – are defined in terms of a *rural web*.

The *rural web conceptual model* was conceived in response to the European Commission call requesting through the 6th Framework Programme proposals for the "analysis of the conceptual aspects of integrated sustainable rural development" (European Commission, 2005). The model was developed within the ETUDE project (**E**nlarging **T**heoretical **U**nderstanding of **R**ural **D**evelopment), initiated by a network of research and higher education institutions including the following: The Institute for Rural Development Research (IfLS, Germany); The University of Perugia, The Department of Economics and Food (Italy); Cardiff University, The School of City and Regional Planning (United Kingdom); MTT Economic Research (Finland); Baltic Studies Centre (Latvia); Wageningen University, The Rural Sociology Group (Holland) (Subchapter 2.1. *The project*).

The ETUDE project puts forward the development of an integrated conceptual frame that leaves behind the mono-disciplinary and sectorial and integrates a series of new elements which emerge theoretically with the aim of: (1) acquiring a better understanding of the dynamics, scope and of the regional economic impact of the rural development processes, at the same time reflecting the heterogeneity of rural areas and activities; (2) evaluating the differential impact of

the new rural configurations in terms of management of territories, competitiveness of rural economies and quality of life in the rural areas; (3) exploring the interfaces between different rural development trajectories and governance structures and rural policies (<http://www.rso.wur.nl/UK/ETUDE/>) (Subchapter 2.2. *Background and objectives*).

Van der Ploeg *et al* (2008) starts from the idea that the *web* modelling the regional rural societies and economies is multilayered. There is an *empirical* model which articulates the interrelations, interactions, confrontations and reciprocities existing between actors, resources, activities (social, economical, political or cultural), sectors and spaces. The more numerous the interactions, connections, confrontations and combinations, the bigger the density of the web. *Theoretically*, the web coagulates as an intersection of several dimensions which emphasize its particularities. Although these dimensions can be distinguished at least theoretically they cannot be separated as they intercorelate.

The six theoretical dimensions of the network can be synthetically defined as follows:

(1) *endogeneity* refers to the extent to which a local and regional economy is based on the available local *resources* (material resources, social resources, local values). This notion regards the equilibrium between endogenous and exogenous resources and the *control* of this equilibrium and of the destination and use of the produced goods (Oostindie *et al.*, 2008);

(2) *novelty production* regards the capacity (at regional level) to continuously improve the production processes, products, cooperation models etc. The novelties offer practices, artifacts, knowledge and/or combinations (of resources, technological procedures, various domains of knowledge) which allow specific configurations (a production process, a network, integration of two different activities, etc.) to work better (Oostindie and van Broekhuizen, 2008);

(3) *sustainability* refers to the mobilization of new resources and their combination with the existing ones in order to ensure ecological durability and the emergence of new and strong economical configurations; "the new resources combinations also allow the creation of new multifunctional enterprises and of networks of connections between the rural and the urban areas" (van der Ploeg *et al.* 2002 *apud* Sonnino *et al* 2008).

(4) *social capital*, understood in the context of rural development constitutes the ability to act collectively, a mode of action through cooperation integrated in the ability of individuals, groups, organizations, institutions to engage in webs, to use social relations towards a common objective and/or benefit (Tisenkopfs, Lace and Mierina, 2008).

(5) *institutional arrangements*, in the sense given by the theorists of the rural web, consist of both formal juridical regulations, and of informal social norms structuring social interactions (Knickel *et al*, 2008).

(6) *governance of markets* designates the institutional capacity to control and consolidate the existing markets and to build new markets: the organization of acquisition networks, distribution of total value acquired (both at actors and at territorial level), of potential benefits acquired through collective action, etc. (Vihinen and Kröger, 2008).

As an analytical instrument, the *web* constitutes a means for assessing the effectiveness and comprehensivity of actors's actions in the process of constituting the trajectories of rural development; it allows the exploration of the empirical characteristics of specific areas, of regional situations overall and of the development of initiatives and processes within this frame (van der Ploeg *et al*, 2008).

Chapter 3 The Common Agricultural Policy today

Chapter 3 describes the reference frame for the rural development processes at European level: The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union, as an ensemble of laws and practices adopted by EU in order to offer a unitary, common direction for agriculture.

The role of the CAP is to trace a series of directions of action towards ensuring a durable agricultural sector and the enhancement of its competitiveness materializes through efforts of reaching the following operational objectives: assurance of quality and food security; environmental protection and assurance of animal welfare; sustaining the cultivators within the European Union in order to be competitive; assurance of the continuity of rural communities and enhancing their dynamic and durability. We underline the importance of the elements which determine the existence of a functional and durable agricultural sector: management of issues related to climatic and environmental conditions and adaptation of cultivators to the new market situations. The assurance of a functional agricultural sector implies the existence of viable rural areas where the economic development constitutes the main support (Subchapters 3.1. *General features of CAP* and 3.2. *Role of CAP*).

Adopting the Common Agricultural Policy as a safety policy is justified in the context of the persistence at global level of phenomena and processes which can alter the agricultural

activity (natural hazards, the increasing volatility of markets), but also by the necessity to deliver public goods and to ensure a durable rural environment (Subchapter 3.3. *Premises of adopting a common agricultural policy*).

The support offered by the European Union through CAP to all the member states responds to these needs, while offering the premises for an economic and social cohesion, which reflects the diversity of economical, ecological and cultural needs. The underlying principles for the communitary approach of the agricultural policy target the assurance of equitable conditions for cultivators and the setting of trans-national objectives in order to allow a common action, given the necessity to solve some transborder issues (Subchapter 3.4. *Added value of EU*).

The effecting of the support implies adopting a set of instruments designed to comply with different aspects of the policy objectives: common norms which are meant to assure equitable conditions for the agricultural production at European level; basic direct payments in order to reinforce the agricultural activity given its exposure to the difficulties generated by the volatility of markets; safety mechanisms which guarantee an intervention in crisis situations; measures oriented towards specific needs which take into consideration the diversity of the rural areas (and needs) (Subchapter 3.5 *Consequences of the policy*).

In order to sustain these intervention measures, the European Union allocates a financial subsidy for the Common Agricultural Policy of approximately 40% of its total budget. The CAP Budget is established annually by the EU Council and the European Parliament; the annual budgets are integrated in a financial framework of six years. The current financial framework (2007-2013) stipulates the financing of agricultural expenses through two funds of the EU general budget: the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF), which finances the direct payments to cultivators and the regulatory measures of agricultural markets, as well as interventions and export refundings, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which sustain the rural development programs of the member states (Subchapter 3.6. *CAP Financing: budget - costs, revenues, expenses*).

Given the fact that the Common Agricultural Policy is predominantly oriented towards market and competitiveness, it has undergone a series of transformations meant to respond to the demands and expectations of the society, as well as to the emerging economical conditions. The latest reform took place in 2003; "decoupling" of the support connecting single payments with

the standards of eco-conditionality; "modulation" and introduction of a mechanism of financial discipline are the main items of novelty added (Subchapter 3.7. *CAP Reform*).

Chapter 4 The Common Agricultural Policy after 2013

The deadline for the new reform of the Common Agricultural policy is 2013. Its accomplishment aims at tracing new directions which will respond to the objectives of the European Union's *Europe 2020* strategy. Prior to establishing the guiding lines for the policies of this strategic sector, the Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission launched in 2010 an online public debate (on the website of DG Agriculture) regarding the future of CAP and structured around four general topics: motivations for the necessity of a common policy, reasons for its reform; putting forward new instruments and the expectations of people towards agriculture. The debate addressed to the wide public, involved parties (cultivators organizations and professional organisms, environment protection associations, consumers, groups concerned with animal welfare, other non-governmental organizations involved) and to reflection groups, research institutes etc.

The over 5700 contributions reflecting the opinions of the responders were synthesized in a report on which the European Commission based its communication "The CAP towards 2020". It underlined: the main challenges and major problems regarding the EU Policy for agriculture and rural areas, as well as the possible political orientations and options for a more durable, balanced, oriented simplified, efficient and responsible common agricultural policy.

The challenges identified regard problems related to: food security; environment and climatic changes; territorial equilibrium. By offering solutions to these challenges CAP can contribute to the *Europe 2020* strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. In this context, the proposals of the European Commission for CAP focuses on the following objectives: dependable food production; durable management of natural resources and adoption of new climatic policies; balanced territorial development. (Subchapters 4.1 *Public debate regarding the post 2013 CAP*; 4.2. *The CAP towards 2020*).

The accomplishment of the future agricultural common policy objectives implies also adopting new instruments or upgrading the existing instruments which proved their utility within

the actual policy (direct payments, market management related instruments, rural development policy instruments).

As for the CAP global agriculture, the proposals of the Commission correspond to those of the majority of respondents who participated in the public debate and they recommend to maintain the current structure based on two pillars, on the one hand the first pillar includes subsidies for cultivators and the latter remains the support instrument serving community objectives. (Subchapter 4.3. *Instruments*)

The evolution of the public debate coagulates three possible general directions of policy as such: *Option 1*, which is suggesting a continuation of the current CAP, but which also involves adjustments of certain chapters (for example the problem of equity of direct payments in the member states); *Option 2*, which recommends a major policy revision in order to assure its sustainability and obtain an equilibrium among its various objectives, among cultivators and among member states; *Option 3*, which suggests a more ample reform of CAP, based on a series of climatic change and environment-related objectives and on the gradual elimination of revenue subsidies and of most of the market measures (Subchapter 4.4. *General policy options*).

Romania's stand on the future CAP directions is presented in a *Memo* drafted by the Romanian Government. The document stipulates a series of recommendations regarding the main instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy. As for the direct payments, Romania backs the idea of their equitable distribution among the member states and the elimination of the existing discrepancies, as well as that of backing agriculture at smaller scale, for the active farmers; putting a cap on direct payments for the larger farms is not approved by the Romanian state. As for the market measures, Romania is for maintaining the actual instruments of intervention which are acting as a safety net and encourages the creation of new instruments which would allow the maintaining of the EU agriculture at a competitive level compared to third parties. Concerning the rural development policy, Romania considers that it should be maintained within CAP, and as far as Pillar 2 is concerned, a consistent budget level should be maintained. As for the creation of measure sets which should respond to the needs of specific areas or groups, the Romanian state supports the adopting of measures meeting the problems that are affecting the Romanian rural space: depopulation, abandonment of agricultural terrains, etc. (Subchapter 4.5. *Romania's position on the CAP after 2013*).

Chapter 5 EU rural development policy

The EU rural development policy established through *Agenda 2000*, constitutes the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy. It was conceived as a framework which would allow reforms of market segments in order to promote a competitive and multifunctional agricultural sector and to maintain the alternative sources of income in the rural areas to adopt the agri-environmental measures. The guiding principles for this policy were the decentralization of responsibilities and programming flexibility, based on a set of measures applied in conformity with the specific needs of the member states. The aim of the rural development policy was to integrate various types of financial assistance granted by EU, which helps assuring a balanced development throughout all the European rural areas. The main features of this type of development are the increasing of competitiveness of the agricultural and forest sectors, the preservation of the environment and of the European cultural heritage and the increasing of life quality in the rural areas and the diversification of economic activities (Subchapter 5.1. *General elements*).

The implementation of the rural development policies objectives for the programming period 2000-2006 was executed using a set of financial instruments which are applied differently for different countries, periods or measures: The European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), the Temporary Rural Development Instrument (TRDI) and the Special Pre-Accession Assistance for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD). The current programming period (2007-2013) uses two instruments: the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), financing the policy within EU-27 and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), through its component dedicated to rural development (IPARD) for the candidate countries (Subchapter 5.2. *EU financing instruments during 2000-2013*).

The SAPARD programme during 2000-2006 was created in order to support financially the development of agriculture and rural areas in the candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe so that, at the moment of integration, they would be prepared to participate in the Common Agricultural Policy and to adapt to the working modalities of European structures. To ensure the implementation of this operative programme the Romanian Government elaborated the National Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (NPARD) and established the SAPARD Agency responsible for the technical and financial implementation of the programme.

The Agency is subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and was organized at central and regional level by establishing eight regional offices corresponding to the eight regions of development of the country. The programme became operative with the accreditation of its first measures in July 2002. The Romanian authorities supported the adopting of 11 measures under four priority axes: *Priority axis 1* – ”Improving the access to markets and the competitiveness of agricultural products”; *Priority axis 2* – ”Improving the rural development and agricultural infrastructures”; *Priority axis 3* – ”Rural development economy”; *Priority axis 4* – ”Development of human resources” (Subchapter 5.3. *European politics of rural development during 2000-2006*).

During the following period (2007-2013), the support for rural development was granted through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which brings a considerable simplification compared to the previous period. In this case also the implementation becomes viable as strategic national plans are adopted. The major objectives of development established in this frame correspond to axes which are allocated sets of measures. The measures under *Axis 1* aim at modernizing production and improving the quality of products; the measures under *Axis 2* aim at ensuring the delivery of environment services and land management; *Axis 3* aims at supporting ”rural life” (*living countryside*) and maintaining and improving the social and economic structure, especially in the isolated rural areas; the *Leader Axis* is meant to encourage the implementation of integrated strategies through partnerships built on local bases called Local Action Groups. Out of the total of 46 measures, in Romania have been implemented (Subchapter 5.4. *European policy of rural development during 2007-2013*).

Chapter 6 European programmes of rural development in the North-Western Region.

Chapter 6 offers an overview of the implementation of the European policy for rural development for one of the eight regions of development in Romania, the North-Western Region. Within this frame we analyze the dynamics of the SAPARD funds by describing the way in which European funds have been absorbed. We chose to analyze the finances corresponding to the pre-accession because once the financial exercise ended we could access complete information regarding the implementation of the programme.

The data regarding the SAPARD implementation in the North-Western Region was obtained from the Regional Paying Centre for Rural Development and Fishery Satu Mare (RPCRDF), an agency which is authorized to mediate the granting of the financial support offered by the European Union for the agriculture and rural development sector.

The set of data was transposed in descriptive graphics (column diagrams, radial diagrams and diagram maps) which describe the distribution of projects and investments in the context of the specific measures for each county of the Region, taking into consideration the number of projects/ contracts and the values of the non-refundable subsidy. We will briefly go through a few general observations emerging from the analysis of the data:

At the level of the North-Western Region, throughout the entire period of financing were submitted and contracted projects for 6 out of 11 measures adopted at national level. The Region contracted 16% of the total number of investments (projects) achieved in the entire country.

Depending on the number of contracts per measures, the financial subsidy granted through the SAPARD programme presents itself as such: almost half of the contracts aim at investments in *agricultural enterprises*; a fourth of the contracted projects imply the *development and diversification of economic activities which would generate multiple activities and alternative revenues*; as far as the number of approved requests is concerned the actions implying the *treatment and marketing of agricultural and fishery products* and *the development and improvement of the rural infrastructure* are equally rated; as for the *improvement of quality structures, veterinary and phytosanitary control, food and consumers security* the projects constitute under 1% from the total of contracts. Due to the specific of each measure, the value of payments effected for each of them is not directly proportional to the number of the contracted projects. Thus, the largest sums were paid for *development and improvement of rural infrastructure*, approximatively a third of the total value; around a fourth of the total allocated sums were destined for the *treatment and marketing of agricultural and fishery products* and *the development and investments in agricultural enterprises*; as for the *improvement of quality structures, veterinary and phytosanitary control, food and consumers protection*, the number of projects is directly proportional to the value of the financial subsidy.

In the North-Western Region, the largest number of projects was contracted in Bihor county, followed at considerable distance by Cluj county. The smallest number of projects was registered in the counties of Bistrița-Năsăud and Sălaj. Regarding the value of the non-refundable subsidy, the largest amount of payments was allocated to the counties of Bihor and Cluj (in approximatively equal amounts), and the smallest to Sălaj county (Subchapter 6.1. *Dynamics of SAPARD funds*).

Chapter 7 Representations on rural development

Chapter 7 contains the results of a qualitative study whose *objectives* are: (1) capturing the local dimensions of rural development and (2) identification of modalities through which the local administrations (as autonomous institutions or as members in association structures) contribute to its realization. The filter used in order to shape the image of the local development is constituted by the *representations of the local leaders on development*. The underlying research issues for this project are: *What is rural development?; What is the role of the local leaders in this process?; How is the local development agenda established and which are its dimensions?; Which are the factors that influence the local initiatives of development?; Is association the “winning ticket” of the rural development?*

The local practices of the rural development are studied in the Someș-Sud Micro-region, an inter-community association consisting of seven parishes: Bîrsău, Crucișor, Culciu, Homoroade, Păulești, Pomi and Valea Vinului, within the space of Satu Mare county. For each of these there is: a *general presentation* which offers for each case information on the population, economic activities, geographical conditions, infrastructure etc., and an *image of the rural development elements, as they are perceived by its main actors – the local leaders (mayors and deputy mayors)*. In our research, we use the *semi-structured interview* as an associated technique to *qualitative documentation*.

The analysis of the information obtained through interviews shapes the overall image of the rural development at the level of Someș-Sud Micro-region and answers our research questions. Therefore :

(1) *What is rural development?*

For the local leaders rural development means *attracting European funds*, which represents the prerequisite of the main dimension of development: *development of infrastructure*. It also constitutes the basic condition for *attracting investors*, the second dimension of development. Nevertheless, in some cases the idea of development starts from the *valorification of the local resources* through agriculture, development of tourism (the third dimension of development). Overall, the key to understanding rural development is subsumed to the *economical development*.

(2) *What is the role of the local leaders in this process?*

Due to the fact that most of the projects of development in the Someş-Sud Microregion belong to the local administrations, the local leaders play a fundamental role in reaching the objective of development. They establish and apply the development trajectories at the level of parishes, but they influence the individual initiatives of the community members, especially regarding the accessing of European funding (through information on the opening of financing lines, logistics support, etc.).

(3) *How is the local development agenda established and which are its dimensions?*

Each local administration traced a series of objectives regarding the development of each parish. As for strategies we will mention the two types of identification: there are (1) strategies with a role of *programmatic documents* or *instruments of planification*; generally they are elaborated by qualified people and explore exhaustively the dimensions of development, proposing for each a set of directions of action; the strategies are included in a well defined temporal framework often coinciding with the financing periods of the European Union and implicitly of the national programmes; (2) the strategies as *simple schemes of ideas of action* of the development agents; all these are not drafted in documents per se, but they constitute the perceptions of the local leaders on a desirable development; in this case the development targets a few definite directions and is oriented towards the immediate needs of the community. The differences between the desirable directions – effective actions (personal strategies) and the strategies elaborated as planning documents by extra-local actors (the strategies suggested by the consulting firms) indicate that the strategies of development of the local leaders and strategic documents are not always convergent, a situation for which they assume responsibility. Though the *strategy* – as document per se – is considered by the majority of local representatives a *means*

of planning activities which facilitates obtaining finances from external sources; it constitutes a helpful instrument in the phase of accessing funding.

Regarding the *modalities of establishing the directions of action*, the opinions are split: a part of the local leaders state that the development trajectories are established exclusively by the local administration leadership (mayor and deputy mayor), based on their own evaluation of the situation, without the feedback of population; others claim the necessity to take into consideration the local needs expressed by the locals, analyzed by authorities and then implemented (in some cases the proposals of citizens are explicitly formulated); in other situations the directions of action are not established according to needs, but according to the disponibility of the financing lines, valorizing the emerging opportunities. Some local representatives believe that despite the existence of development ideas, a well defined strategy is lacking, as this strategy should concentrate on the local realities and anticipate and build a set of viable actions.

Most of the projects developed at local level target the development of the infrastructure.

(4) Which are the factors that influence the local initiatives of development?

Achieving the development objectives is considered by the local leaders to be strongly related to the financial capacity of the local budget and to *accessing the extra-local financing sources* – governmental and especially European. The only financing sources which are considered to be viable are the European funds. An important role in the process of development through projects is played by the *access to information* regarding the financing opportunities (the existence, the availability of types of financing lines). Overall both the local authorities and the locals are well informed in this matter. Another factor contributing to the success of the local actors initiatives is the *support offered by various entities* during the phases of the accessing process or implementation of projects. The support requested by the *local administrations* refers to: information on the possibilities of development, accessing projects, implementation and management of projects, elaboration of development strategies.

Not all initiatives of the local administrations for obtaining financial support materialized. The sectors for which financing was requested coincide for all the parishes of the microregion; nevertheless the success rate and/or the fields where financing was obtained vary from one parish to another. The local leaders identify a set of factors which cause difficulties to the materialization of the initiatives of local authorities; most often these are: the difficulty to access

certain projects deemed necessary (situation caused by: rigidity of legislation; too short periods between information on opening certain lines of financing and the deadline for submitting documentation; the lack of support from the competent local authorities regarding consultancy; lack of personnel specialized in project management); the modalities of granting financing (financing of projects depending on political criteria and not on the needs of communities); the reduced capacity of the local administrations to manage the implementation of projects (lack of specialized personnel; insufficiency of funds in the local budget which would support certain activities); the faulty management of European funds at national level and faulty management of the problems of rural areas (the existence of development directions which do not meet the major problems of rural areas; modification of the conditions that must be fulfilled by the applicants from one session to another – throughout the development of the same programme; the high level of bureaucracy; the conditions imposed by the EU which are unfavourable given the lack of possibilities of support at local level). To all these one can add: the massive diminution of funds allocated from the state budget; the dependence of the local budget on the allocations from the state budget; a disadvantageous geographical location from the point of view of fructifying economic activities; the precarious economic relations with the county seat; the poor valorification and management of the territory resources; the fragmentation of properties in small parts, the poor management of terrain by the locals; the lack of terrains owned by the local administration etc.

(5) Is association the “winning ticket” of the rural development?

The partnership takes many forms at the level of the micro-region. The main expressions of cooperation between the local administrations are the *micro-regional associations*, the *associations of inter-community development*.

The inter-community, as a form of association, constitutes an important instrument for solving the problems with which the local public administrations are dealing. At the level of the Someș-Sud Micro-region there are two such partnerships aiming to develop the utilities infrastructure. Most of the local leaders welcome this type of partnership. The association coagulated around the refuse management is considered to be necessary as it appears to be the only solution of centralized management following the measures of shutting down the landfill sites. In this respect the initiative of association appeared more like an external constraint. Although it opens to other opportunities (the creation of legal conditions for the accomplishment

of the salubrity services), the local representatives consider that the partnership also causes difficulties because of the difficult cooperation between the local administrations.

Under the name of *micro-regional association* – a form of inter-community association – there are two such entities at the level of the observed parishes, which aim at supporting the development of the localities that make up the micro-regions and the representation of their interests. Th opinions on the association of parishes with other purposes than the achievement of the infrastructure projects are divergent: a part of the local representatives considers that they bring benefits, while others considers it is useless because the projects are inefficient (e.g. the project for cross-border cooperation, the project for the development of the administrative capacity).