

# INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT – THE CONCEPT, CURRENT FEATURES AND METHODS OF IMPLEMENTATION

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***Abstract:** The article revolves around inquiries concerning identification of solutions to help rural communities recover, especially deep rural communities, suffering from several dysfunctions, which most frequently have a defining impact on low living standards. One can nowadays notice a switch in European Union policy from sectoral, non-integrated policy, to territorial policy, which allows for the implementation of strategies promoting integrated rural development. This approach has the added benefit of a complex, many-sided approach to rural areas, involving the inventorying of all of its parts, in order to identify those that can support development of viable activities that at the same time comply with sustainable development guidelines.*

***Key words:** integrated rural development, features, methods of implementation*

***JEL classification:** O13, O18, P25, Q01*

## 1. Introduction and methodology

Internationally, rural development is one of the most intensely debated topics, numerous definitions have been suggested in the long run, and several plans for the concept's operation have been advanced, with the goal of solving the existing drawbacks of rural areas and improving the living standards of the local populations.

Historically, rural development has been approached in a non-integrated manner, e.g. sectoral policies, such as CAP (Common Agricultural Policy), have been implemented to tackle the agricultural dimension, while other dimensions may have been completely ignored, such as the environment (Callanan Sarah, Cuddy M., Léime Ní Áine, 2003, p.140).

Currently in the UE, a policy discourse has emerged which envisages a fundamental shift in support policies for rural areas from a sectoral approach (essentially agriculture) to one that is territorial (Shortall S., Shucksmith M., 2001, p.122) enabling the integration of social, cultural, economic and environmental concerns (Scott M., 2002, p.1013) and implement strategies that promote “integrated rural development”, which emphasizes the interconnections between various facets of rural economy (Gore T., Powell R., Wells P., 2006, p.30).

The methodology used on this work consisted in analyzing the available material on rural development in general and integrated rural development in particular, starting from the time when the latter concept first emerged, and through to the present time. Both official documents and the results of investigations by various specialists were analyzed. Later, the various meanings of this approach to rural areas and the means to implement them were also examined.

## 2. Meanings of the concept of integrated rural development

### 2.1. Early approaches

The evolution of this concept since the time of its emergence and through to the present has seen numerous approaches, depending on the continent or the country where it was being implemented, but also the degree of economic and social development.

Initially, countless debates involved groups of experts during several FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) events; their results were reviewed during the FAO/SIDA/DSE interregional conference on integrated rural development, held in Berlin in 1977; the conclusion was reached that this concept offers a complete framework for a well-balanced and sustained development, which incenses the population to active participation, and targets improved social fairness (Bold I., Buciuman E., Drăghici Manea, 2003). Numerous studies were also released, analyzing both the concept per se and its practical results (for instance Mosher, 1972; Ruttan, 1975; Livingstone, 1979; Cohen, 1979 & 1980; Belshaw, 1977, quoted in Binns A. J., Funnell C. D., 1983, p. 57), as well as its efficiency in fighting poverty in rural areas (Leupolt, 1977; Aziz, 1978; Lea, 1980; Macdonald, 1981; Chambers, 1983; Lea and Chaudhuri, 1983; Conyers et al., 1988, quoted in Unwin T., 1997; Livingstone 1979, Zoomers and Geurten 1991, quoted in Zoomers Annelies, 2006, p.5).

### 2.2. Integrated rural development as mentioned in official European documents

The European Union has been preoccupied with implementing a rural development policy ever since its inception. The desire to maintain and stabilise the population in peripheral areas led in 1981 to the approval of a series of *Integrated Development Programmes*, covering the various economic sectors. These programmes were concentrated on the Western Isles of Scotland, the department of Lozere in France and Disadvantaged Area in Belgium (Delgado Ma del Mar, Ramos E., 2002, p.5).

In 1988, the document “The Future of Rural Countryside” defined the legal framework for the introduction of Community Initiatives (Delgado Ma del Mar, Ramos E., 2002); as far as rural areas are concerned, the most important initiative was LEADER (*liens entre actions de developpement de l'economie rurale*). LEADER encouraged and continues to encourage rural regions to try to explore new means to become or remain competitive, to capitalize on their assets to the utmost and overcome any obstacles they might face (Abordarea LEADER: un ghid elementar, p.4).

The fundamental guidelines of the EU's rural development policy were summarized in 1996, in the **Cork Declaration**; the Declaration listed 10 points, the second referring to an integrated approach to rural development.

**The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) (1999)**, agreed at the Informal Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, contains a key message concerning the demand for integrated strategies (Faludi Andreas, 2009, p.16), mentioning that the program-based system of the structural funds offers the opportunity to design integrated development plans, which allow for better valorization of opportunities generated by spatial development policy (ESDP, 1999).

Later, a political agreement was concluded on the **Agenda 2000**; the Agenda introduces – as a central section of the second CAP pillar - a new Rural Development Regulation (number 1257/99), which included measures (article 33), targeted at promoting integrated rural development throughout the Community (Thompson K.J., Psaltopoulos D., 2004, p.41). At the same time, that document suggested a multi-functional approach to agriculture and integrated treatment of the problems affecting rural areas (Delgado Ma del Mar, Ramos E., 2002, p. 11).

### **2.3. Expressions of integrated rural development**

In addition to the official approach, as illustrated in European documents, there is a multitude of definitions from various organizations / researchers, some of them briefly summarized as follows.

Integrated rural development is seen as a process to organize the economic, social, environment and cultural resources of rural economies in such a way as to generate and sustain in the long run those communities' viability (Fitzpatrick T., Smith S., 2002, p. 4). A similar point of view is found in other studies (Almas, 1998, quoted in Tisenkopfs T., 1999; Kearney et al., 1994, quoted in Scott M., 2002; Gore T., Powell R., Wells P., 2006).

Interest in territorial rural development partly reflects an acknowledgement of the fact that rural areas vary in terms of their potential and needs, and that central institutions cannot be aware of the best thing to do, and on the other hand it reflects the fact that the more emphasis is placed on a local approach, the more energetic is the active contribution of the local population to the process of development (Moseley, 1997 in Scott M., 2002). Adopting the guidelines of integrated rural development in the evolution of rural spaces does not exclusively mean accepting a local vision and ruling out a global approach, because things are not limited to a competition between people in charge with strategic tasks (on a downward hierarchy) and those in charge with conveying local needs and interests (on an upward hierarchy), but rather trying to find a state of balance (Fitzpatrick T., Smith S., 2002).

Integrated rural development is an ongoing process involving outside intervention and local aspirations; aiming to attain the betterment of groups of people living in rural areas and to sustain and improve rural values; through the redistribution of central resources, reducing comparative disadvantages for competition and finding new ways to reinforce and utilise rural resources. It is integrated in the sense that – as opposed to central development - it is controlled and managed locally; but – opposed to local development – besides local resources it also leans on the professional and financial support of the centre (Nemes G., 2005, p.24).

In time, integrated rural development underwent an expansion of its content, and it is currently defined as a complex, multi-dimensional approach to rural areas, which are viewed as a system comprising several autonomous subsystems, tightly bound by coordination and interdependence ties.

### **3. Means of implementing integrated rural development**

In time, the various studies and projects launched resulted in a definition of the phases to follow when implementing the guidelines of integrated rural development, to be highlighted as follows. Moseley (1996, p. 19) considers that the essential elements of integrated rural development are:

- focus on a defined and coherent area;
- respect and build upon local distinctiveness;
- treat social, economic, cultural, and environmental issues in an integrated way;
- develop on partnership of relevant agencies working to shared objectives;
- set individual projects and initiatives within the context of an agreed strategy;
- fully involve local people in both fashioning and delivering the programme.

A similar stance is found in the handbook jointly published in 2000 by the Carpathian Foundation and ECOVAST (European Council for the village and small town - an organization with consultative status with the Council of Europe and the European Commission): *Integrated rural community development: training manual*, a manual whose purposes are promotion and assistance in training people involved in

rural development in Central and Eastern Europe ([http://www.ngorural.org/lib/rural\\_dev.pdf](http://www.ngorural.org/lib/rural_dev.pdf)).

According to this, there are some **key elements of integrated rural strategy**: strengthen and diversify the economy of rural regions; sustain farming throughout rural Europe; develop forestry as a multi-purpose activity; encourage manufacturing, craft and service industries, on a local base; make good use of telecommunications; promote sustainable rural tourism; ensure good housing, while respecting local traditions; maintain and strengthen local services; look after the heritage of wildlife, culture and landscape; strengthen the partnership between government, local authorities and the rural people.

Practically, by enforcing the guidelines of integrated rural development one takes into account all the resources of that rural region, without emphasizing any particular branch, but on assessing the whole and the compatibility of the various components to act as vectors able to induce development. The connection between the components is highly important as well; it will be established in such a way so that activities will not be necessarily be developed independently, but with a view supporting other activities, creating a dense, gradually-crystallizing network in the long run.

This type of measure would initially need a diagnosis of the rural area, in order to exactly identify which are the local and visible elements that can be developed. A selection should then be made among them, of those that can support the development of well-balanced operations, in the wake of a cost-benefits analysis. In this case options may vary, depending on the financial resources available, as one could select activities that tend to involve a change in management, by using limited resources but with immediate benefits, or activities that involve much higher costs, but which can be accounted for by later achievements.

In the former situation, an example might be that of an area where the locals are involved in handicraft trades, as they carry on ancestral customs. Adequate management ought to be able to identify a retail market, which would allow them to earn an income and at the same time encourage the preservation of those crafts.

In the latter situation, one could include large-scale plans, involving the use of sizeable resources, and likely to be grounded in a viable activity, easier to develop and which would gradually support the emergence of other activities as well. Such an instance would be capitalization of resources compatible with touristic use, in a rural area with farmland or handicraft industry potential, which in time would lead to the creation of an integrated network that could support the development of the entire region. One could thus use a set of projects to support the creation of accommodation and food catering establishments, which would simultaneously stimulate the development of agriculture and the improvement of infrastructure, the development of cottage industries, the development of social services and village infrastructure, among others.

Thus the rural area, utilising its resources and finding its segment of the market can become independent, keep its population and sustain its values for the future (Nemes G., 2005, p.42).

The benefits of implementing the guidelines of integrated rural development include: strengthening local community and instilling the spirit of social solidarity; inventorying all available resources and identifying those compatible with unfolding of viable activities; the establishment of a partnership between the local community and local authorities; the opportunity for the participation of the entire local community; revalorization of the rural space; promoting and preserving local traditions and culture; getting all participants in a certain region involved.

At the same time, enforcement of the guidelines pertaining to that concept would

mean a profound change in the mindset, as it needs making all local participants aware they are an integrated part of a system, working as part of a chain and that the proper course of other activities depends on the way they act. In this context, it is very important – when a project is launched – to have all forces involved aware of the stakes and use their skills and competences to the utmost in order to achieve the goal wanted.

The drawbacks might be related to the high costs, in situations where measures incompatible with local specific features are implemented, or management is faulty, which might endanger the course of the entire program.

## Conclusions

Integrated rural development is a complex concept, it involves identifying all types of activities that can be developed function of the local resources available, and choosing the most viable of them. The final goal of all these policies is to raise the living standards and improve the quality of the residents' lives, but in such a way as to exploit natural resources within their capabilities, making sure that the environment's critical systems and processes are preserved in an optimal condition.

At the same time, one of the basic guidelines of integrated rural development is that of inducing certain elements of development, with the system then developing on its own and possibly even lead to the development of neighbouring regions.

One can conclude that implementing the guidelines of integrated rural development might be the best solution to help rural areas recover, especially deep rural areas, allowing for the implementation of those activities that are viable and sustainable for the local community.

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