

S U M M A R Y

of the doctorat thesis entitled:

RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME MEASURES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNISATION OF RURAL AREAS

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Romania is distinguished by its geographical diversity, comprising varied landscapes and settlements, including urban and rural areas. Rural tradition and cultural heritage are well preserved in many traditional villages with wooden houses and old churches, especially in mountainous and more remote regions. These rural areas maintain their traditional way of life, focused on agriculture, animal husbandry and other rural activities, reflecting customs deeply rooted in the past.

However, recent changes, such as accelerated urbanisation and modernisation of areas, have brought a new dynamic to the Romanian landscape. This blend of tradition and modernity contributes to the cultural and geographical diversity of the country.

Rural development in Romania is a key concern, given the significant number of people living in rural areas. Various initiatives have been implemented to improve the quality of life and ensure sustainability in these areas.

The main areas of intervention concern agriculture and the agri-food sector, where the aim is to modernise infrastructure and promote sustainable practices. Education and vocational training occupy an important place, with a focus on programmes tailored to the needs of rural communities and skills development for economic diversification.

Infrastructure and public services are a priority, including the extension and modernisation of the transport network, access to health and education services, and the development of communication services. In a context where Romania has been called the "Breadbasket of Europe" due to its significant agricultural production,

diversification of economic activities in rural areas becomes crucial for sustainable development, helping to reduce dependence on agriculture, generate new jobs and strengthen economic and social sustainability.

In the context that our country relies on agriculture as the main, and often the only, activity in rural areas, the novelty of the present PhD thesis lies in the broad analysis of the measures and policies that have underpinned rural development, the study of past research directions and the identification of future research directions in rural development, and the multi-pronged approach to rural development by engaging and harmonising all the factors involved.

Being such a complex area, rural development has been, is and will be a major topic on the agenda that underpins the creation of long-term development strategies of all countries. As mentioned in this PhD thesis, at the heart of rural development is rural space, a concept that is difficult to define because of its many different meanings in so many areas. In order to understand the dimension of rurality, the simplest, but at the same time complex, definition should be mentioned: "Rurality is considered as the space outside the urban territory".

With economic and social development, in many countries the rural has grown at a much slower pace than the urban. Thus, the rural has become the target of many organisations that have begun to invest time, energy and financial resources to mitigate these differences. All of these measures have focused on improving the quality of life of rural dwellers, access to education and health services, improving utility and road access infrastructure, reducing social and demographic isolation, and last but not least, reducing dependence on agriculture through diversification of activities.

Compared to most European countries, Romania has seen huge differences when it comes to the quality of rural life. The decline in rural quality has been accentuated by over-dependence on agriculture and strict control over resources during the communist period, factors which have led to a decline in the quality of life in rural areas. Access to health services, education and other facilities has been limited.

Romania's accession to the European Union (EU) has had a significant impact on the country as a whole, including rural development. Accession to the EU has brought with it access to European funds for regional and rural development. Through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Structural Funds, Romania has benefited from substantial financial resources for the modernisation and development of the agricultural and rural sector. EU funds have been used to improve rural infrastructure, including upgrading roads, extending utility networks and increasing access to essential services. Another positive aspect of EU accession has been the adoption of European standards in the agricultural sector, which has led to the modernisation and improved quality of Romanian agricultural products. This has increased competitiveness on the European market. European programmes have also been geared towards supporting

rural communities through projects aimed at improving social, educational and health services in rural areas.

Chapter I, entitled **"RURAL DEVELOPMENT - COMPLEXITY, CORE AND IMPROVEMENT MEASURES"**, explores key aspects of developments and approaches in rural development. The first part of this chapter examines the diversity of definitions and perspectives on rurality and rurality. The criteria that delimit a territory as rural are also presented, highlighting the complexity of this concept. The next point touched upon in this chapter focuses on the importance of the village in the context of rural development. It explores the role of local communities and their contribution to shaping the core of rural development, highlighting the close links between rural identity and local progress.

Finally, the sub-chapter "The Use of European Funds in the Development of Rural Areas" focuses on the impact and ways of using European funds in stimulating rural development. This sub-chapter is an overview of the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) which is a key instrument in promoting growth and modernisation in rural areas. The allocation of European funds, through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and the implementation of NDPDR measures have a significant impact in several areas. These include direct support for farmers, financing rural development projects, economic diversification, promoting environmental sustainability, improving social services and infrastructure. The LEADER approach encourages the involvement of local communities in defining their priorities, strengthening social cohesion and facilitating the transition to a sustainable rural economy. The NRDP contributes to economic growth, improved quality of life and environmental protection in rural areas, supporting harmonious and equitable development throughout the country.

This chapter provides an introduction to the complexities of rural development, revealing different perspectives on the countryside, the vital importance of the village in the development process and the impact of EU funds on promoting growth and sustainability in rural areas.

Chapter II entitled **"BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT"** presents a bibliometric analysis of the concept of rural development, using a specific methodology. In the introduction to this chapter, the importance of the bibliometric approach for understanding the evolution and deepening of the concept of rural development is highlighted. The steps of the analysis are detailed to provide transparency on how the bibliometric study was conducted.

The analysis and interpretation of the results include general indicators on the evolution of publications, providing an overview of trends in the field. The following sub-chapters examine the context of rural development by period, with separate analyses for the periods 1990-2000, 2001-2011 and 2012-2022.

In the sub-chapter devoted to analysing the co-occurrence of keywords and clusters, semantic connections between terms are explored, highlighting cluster structures that may reveal specific sub-domains or themes in rural development.

Overall, this chapter provides a detailed overview of the existing scientific literature on rural development and identifies key developments and trends in the field through bibliometric analysis.

Chapter III, "**ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME MEASURES**", examines in detail the measures implemented in national rural development programmes in three distinct periods: 2007-2013, 2014-2020 and the transition period 2021-2022. Each period is analysed in detail, starting with an overview of the corresponding National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) and continuing with an assessment of the main sub-measures and the status of contracted projects.

In the 2007-2013 period, the structure and performance of the 2007-2013 RDP is examined, including details of key sub-measures and the status of contracted projects.

It then looks at the second programming period, 2014-2020, presenting general aspects of the NRDP for this period and assessing the implementation of sub-measures and the status of contracted projects.

The transition period, between 2021 and 2022, is specifically analysed, highlighting changes and developments during this period.

An important aspect is to address the relationship between the rurality index and the value of projects per county. The determination of the migration index and the rurality index is explored in detail, followed by an assessment of the correlation between the rurality index and the contracted value of projects. This analysis brings to the fore the interaction between the rurality characteristics of the regions and the scale of investments implemented through the NRDP.

Through this chapter, a comprehensive overview of the implementation of NRDP measures in Romania over the three periods analysed is constructed.

Chapter IV is entitled "**CASE STUDY ON RURAL TOURISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT FROM A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE**" and focuses on the main element of rural development: the local. The first part of the chapter presents the study area in detail, providing information about the Doftana Valley, including geographical, cultural and economic aspects relevant to the area's tourism potential. Information is provided on the structure and content of the questionnaire, explaining how it was implemented to obtain the necessary data. The questionnaire was administered to a population of 380 inhabitants, with 360 questionnaires validated and duly completed, a sufficient number to ensure representativeness and extrapolation of the results to the entire population of the municipality.

Also in this chapter the respondent profile is analysed, including significant demographic data. Subsequent sub-chapters report on the perception of locals

regarding the impact of tourism, the current state of tourism in the area and the willingness of residents to contribute to the development of local tourism.

Through the detailed and structured approach of this case study, Chapter IV provides a broad overview of how the local community in the Doftana Valley perceives and contributes to the development of rural tourism.

In Chapter V, "**GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**" , general conclusions and recommendations are presented in relation to the original contributions of the paper.

The local community, the inhabitants of Valea Doftanei commune, play a particularly important role in the development of the area, because only through their active involvement it is possible to implement measures through which rural tourism can develop offering conditions for a sustainable increase in the quality of life of the locals.

Thus, the PhD thesis, through the studies, analyses and research carried out, puts into whole all the key elements of rural development by carefully studying the rural area, by understanding the trends of approaching rural development in the field of scientific research, by analysing the measures implemented during the two programming periods and the transition period Romania has gone through since joining the EU and by consulting the most important development drivers. This PhD thesis identifies new approaches and perspectives on measures to redress the current situation of the Romanian rural areas and to improve the differences with the urban firstly, and secondly with the European rural areas.