

SUMMARY

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

MULTIFUND APPROACH IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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In the current context, characterized by economic and social challenges in rural areas, it is essential that policies are adapted to the specific needs of local communities and use available resources in an integrated and sustainable way.

The aim of the thesis is to determine to what extent the multifund approach is a better solution for increasing the quality of life of rural communities and for strengthening the administrative capacities of the LAG. The research highlights the importance of implementing a multi-fund approach and collaboration between different funds to support sustainable rural development.

The thesis is structured in two main parts (bibliographic study and own research), having 9 chapters, 6 sub-chapters and 8 sub-sub-chapters. It also includes an extensive bibliography, a series of appendices, as well as the list of abbreviations used in the text.

In the first part, a bibliographic study is carried out, which includes economic theories and a systematic review of the literature in the general field of rural development policies in the European Union and in particular for LEADER initiative.

Chapter 1 of the paper is entitled "Economic theories and the definition of rurality" and discusses the complexity of the concept of rurality, emphasizing the existing controversies in various research disciplines, requiring a clear and coherent definition of rurality for the development of effective rural development policies. A brief presentation of the economic theories that were the basis of the construction of policies in the field of rural development and how they evolved was made. This provides a theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of rurality and the various policy approaches adopted at European level.

Chapter 2 of the thesis, entitled "Rural development policies in the European Union", analyzes the evolution of rural development policies in the context of the European Union and their impact on rural areas. It emphasizes the importance of integrative approaches and diversification of funding sources to meet the specific needs

of rural communities. The chapter is structured in two main subchapters: the evolution of rural development policies and a systematic review of the literature in the field. In the analysis, it is highlighted that rural development policies have adapted over time to respond to economic and social challenges in rural areas, with recent approaches focusing on diversifying economic activities and supporting local initiatives, which has led to a better integration of communities in decision-making processes.

The literature review suggests that, despite the success of the LEADER initiative, there are challenges related to coordination between funds and policies, as well as the administrative capacity of LAGs. It also highlights the need for further studies to assess the long-term impact of these policies on rural development.

This chapter concludes by underlining the importance of a detailed analysis of the existing literature, which is crucial for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of rural development policies and the effectiveness of the approaches applied under the LEADER initiative.

The second part focuses on the original research, including research methodology, analysis of data from official sources and questionnaires. The purpose of the research is to identify the optimal ways of attracting funding through Local Action Groups and their impact on local communities.

The specific objectives include the comparative analysis of the programming periods of the LEADER program in Romania, the analysis of the strategies of LAGs in the use of funding from multiple funds, the presentation of case studies and the analysis of the impact of LEADER funding in Romania.

The research methods included are both direct, through questionnaires and case studies, and indirect, through the analysis of data from official sources, such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Agency for Financing Rural Investments. Considering the complexity of the studied phenomenon, a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative methods is used.

Research indicates that the multi-fund approach can improve the quality of life in rural areas, but challenges are also identified, such as increased administrative effort and difficulties in managing different types of funding.

Chapter 4 of the thesis focuses on the analysis of the impact of LEADER funding in Romania. The study examines the territorial distribution of LEADER contracts, highlighting inequalities in the allocation of funds between different regions. It also discusses LEADER's contribution to rural development, with an emphasis on the types of projects implemented and their beneficiaries. The analysis shows that most of the contracts are concentrated in the more developed regions, and a large part of the projects benefited from private contributions, which suggests a more active involvement of the communities in the use of the funds.

Chapter 5 of the paper presents the positive and negative effects of multiple funding from the perspective of LAGs. This chapter analyzes how LAGs have been able to access and implement funds from various sources to meet the needs of local

communities. Among the issues discussed are: the importance of diversifying funding sources for the sustainable development of rural communities, the challenges faced by LAGs, including excessive bureaucracy and administrative difficulties in managing multiple types of funds, the positive effects observed in communities that have managed to attract multiple financings, which led to the improvement of infrastructure and social services, as well as to the increase of the quality of life.

The thesis includes in chapter 6 relevant case studies to highlight the European and Romanian experience. In this chapter, it is analyzed how different member states of the EU use multiple funds to support local development. The three selected case studies are discussed, each representing a Member State that has implemented the multi-fund approach, Greece, Sweden and Poland. A second category of case studies focuses on LAGs in Romania and analyzes the contribution of LAGs in attracting and managing additional funds, highlighting both the positive results and the challenges encountered in the implementation process.

Chapter 7 of the paper, entitled "Impact of LEADER financing in Romania", analyzes the financial and social effects of the LEADER program on rural communities in Romania. It examines how LEADER funds influenced demographic, economic and social indicators, as well as the specific impact of different types of projects and beneficiaries. The impact of LEADER funding is evaluated by comparing localities according to the amounts allocated and their efficiency in attracting the population and economic development. There is a correlation between the amount per capita absorbed from the LEADER program and the increase in the number of people settled in the respective territories. The contribution of non-agricultural projects to the development of tourism is also discussed.

Chapter 8 of the paper focuses on the public policy proposal for the implementation of a multi-fund approach to CLLD, with the aim of creating a functional framework to respond to societal needs. This proposal underlines the need for a legislative system to support the multi-fund approach, given the history and experience of the LEADER programmes. It mentions the existing problems in the management of funds and suggests the digitization of administrative procedures to reduce red tape. It is also proposed to form a Multifund Coordination Committee to ensure coherence between the various European funds.

One of the key conclusions of the thesis is that the multi-fund approach, which involves the simultaneous use of several sources of financing for rural development projects, can significantly improve the quality of life in rural communities. This suggests that policies should encourage LAGs to collaborate and integrate funds from various sources, such as EAFRD, ESF and other structural funds, to maximize the impact of implemented projects.

In conclusion, the thesis proposes recommendations for improving the legislative framework, digitizing administrative processes and better coordination between

European funds, emphasizing the importance of integration and cooperation between different types of financing for sustainable rural development.