

## **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – BETWEEN PIONEERING AND STANDARDIZATION**

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*Abstract: This article reviews the main approaches concerning local development strategies in Romania, after December 1989. Generally, the process of drafting a comprehensive development of a community is still under the sign of the pioneering, although there are several initiatives to impose a standard in the field. With reference to the Brasov county, is presented the general development of documents that govern the development of local communities.*

*Keywords:* community, local development strategies, community development

### **Planning of local development in post-communist Romania**

In the first years after 1989, there has been a tendency to elude the importance of local development planning, because of excessive information about the "results" of hypercentralization planning (and increasingly far from reality, as the end of the communist age approached) within public space communication. In addition, since during the communism, the various development plans of human communities were developed almost exclusively 'top down', the perception of planning as a tool for exercising control by the party-state persisted.

With the European integration approaching, this picture gradually began to fade as the existence of regional, county or sector planning documents, was a condition imposed in the accession negotiations. Thus were defined the eight development regions followed by the creation of a common vision of the development of the counties that make up these regions, in the form of general or sectoral strategies. The fact that it was not just about an intellectual exercise, it began to be visible through the European funds, starting from the pre-accession

(under PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD), by which the projects which were part of a development strategy have been favored by the evaluation methodology.

The trend is more visible in all European funds available in the post-accession phase (structural funds), where the classification of a project proposed for funding under a development strategy explicitly is present as a distinct criterion in the assessment scales. With the emergence of this factor (external, derived from the approach of European financial grant support), the development of local development strategies began to be felt increasingly more like a necessity in local communities.

Along with this trend, there was a gradual "rehabilitation" of the approach to strategic planning of the development, now seen as an important component of the democratic exercise in any local community. This (re) discovery of the planning tools for community development was made possible thanks to the work of some of the international institutions (like the World Bank, The United Nations Development Programme - UNDP etc.) and some international non-governmental organizations, acting at the national or local level. However, the drawing up of such local development strategies was facilitated by the adoption of the legislation on decisional transparency, involving proceedings of public consultation concerning all documents relating to the common interest of local communities.

The most significant initiative to support the development strategies has been the one initiated by UNDP, by means of the document Agenda 21 at local level (adopted by the UN in 1992 at the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro). In Romania, the implementation of Agenda 21 had the following phases:

a) Pilot phase (2000-2003) that included nine cities (Baia Mare, Galati, Giurgiu, Iasi, Miercurea Ciuc, Oradea, Ploiesti, Ramnicu Valcea and Targu Mures) and included the following activities:

- Creation of advisory and technical / of local expertise structures;
- Developing a sustainable development strategy and a local action plan;
- Identifying and developing prior projects;
- Supporting the implementation of prior projects by UNDP.

b) Extended phase (2003-2004), which involved similar activities to those of the first phase in 13 cities: Arad, Campina, Medias, Sibiu, Sighisoara, Pitesti, Targu Jiu, Slatina, Targoviste, Vatra Dornei, Falticeni, Bolintin Vale and Zimnicea;

c) The final phase (2005-2006) where the methodology previously developed was also applied within larger cities or in the case of two counties, but also in smaller communities: municipalities in Brasov, Bistrita, Borsec, Constanta, Medgidia and Gura Humorului and also in Brasov and Mures county.

### **Local development strategies in the post-accession period**

For practical reasons (getting a higher score in the projects financed by structural funds) or due to the initiatives of local authorities, after January 1st, 2007 (the day when Romania joined the European Union), the number of development strategies elaborated in local communities increased significantly. Because they were developed with different methodologies and by different categories of specialists (economists, sociologists, environmental specialists, etc.), they have a heterogeneous appearance and varied content.

Thus, the local development strategies elaborated in different regions of Romania that can be investigated on the Internet vary between declarations of good intentions and enunciation of general objectives of development to large detailed documents concerning the projects that need to be developed. In Brasov county, an attempt to standardize their content was made by the Agency for Sustainable Development of Brasov as a "practical guide to developing local strategies for sustainable development."

In the first year after the, it was a financing scheme exclusively for elaborating local development strategies, within the Operational Programme "Administrative Capacity Development" (Domain 1.1: Improving decision-making at political-administrative level, local development strategies). Its purpose is to standardize the process of community development planning, in order to achieve the complementary nature of local initiatives.

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