

THE IMPACT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES ON ECONOMIC GROWTH IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: Rural development in Romania is an essential component of the country's overall development. The practical contribution of the work in the studied field was a comparative analysis of the socio-economic development strategy of Cășeiu commune from 2009-2015 with that of 2014-2020. The research method consisted in the analysis of the quantification indicators regarding demography and labor force. Infrastructure was also analyzed and the branches of the Cășeiu commune local economy (agriculture, industry, commerce, tourism) were identified being potential poles of development for the commune.

After indicators interpretation it can be stated that the local development strategies confirm the implementation of most projects, increasing the development level of the commune.

Keywords: rural development, strategy, analysis, rural communities, economic growth

The role of rural development policy in the European Union is to help rural areas face various economic, social and environmental challenges. The development of rural communities can be described as a process where the community is actively involved into mobilising every initiative for the valuation of own resources for the social and economic benefit of the community. (Vincze, 2000)

The development of the rural economy by the contribution of the commune councils in the NW development region of Romania should result in competitive and sustainable economies in the rural areas. The investment projects conducted should ensure during their operation the actual accomplishment of targets, including own funds for the commune councils. (Armanca L, 2016)

The aim of this research is to identify the main evolving trends and difficulties in the rural development of the area, the impact of implementing EU funded projects on the community, the economic growth and development perspectives of Cluj department's commune of Cășeiu.

The role of the Cășeiu commune strategy is to create "a better world". This place intends to offer its citizens a good life, with an environment appropriate for training, work and leisure.

(The rural development strategy of Cășeiu commune 2014-2020)

Material and method

The methods used are mainly quantity-wise – document analysis and secondary quantity data assessment, SWOT analysis and case study. We have used assessments related to surface, population, number of households, population dynamics, tourist objectives, investment projects and other elements enabling us to make detailed analyses on the level of rural development in the area.

There is documentary evidence of the commune of Cășeiu from the year 1261 as being formed of 10 villages dating from different periods: Coplean 1348, Gârbău Dejului 1315,

Guga 1590, Leurda 1909, Urișor 1405, Custura, Sălătruc, Rugășești, Comorita 1325. The commune is located 63 km away from Cluj and 2 km from Dej. The area measures 8328 ha out of which 524 ha within the built-up area and 7834 ha outside the built-up area.

Results and discussion

Local authorities have started a series of large projects meant to dramatically change people's lives, bringing them a plus of comfort and create them new development opportunities. Following the enforcement of socio-economic strategy 2009-2015, the following projects were implemented in Cășeu:

| Nr. crt. | Project title | Project value (lei) | Funding program (European funds / local budget / etc) |
|----------|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Repair, renovation of Cășeu Town Hall | 155.000 | Local budget |
| 2 | Arrangement sports locker rooms | 134.000 | Local budget |
| 3 | Establishment of tourist information center | 565.000 | European funds, Local budget |
| 4 | Refurbishing of Cășeu Cultural House | 50.000 | Local budget |
| 5 | Refurbishing of the human dispensary of Cășeu commune | 10.000 | Local budget |
| 6 | Drinking water pumping station for raising pressure. -Rugășești | 65.000 | Local budget |
| 7 | Extension of drinking water distribution in Cășeu | 19.000 | Local budget |
| 8 | Modernising of public lighting system in Cășeu commune | 164.000 | Local budget |
| 9 | Channeling of Cășeu commune | 2.300.000 | Local budget, County Council |
| 10 | Rebuild Road DC 5 Salatruc -Leurda | 950.000 | Local budget, County Council |
| 11 | Repair of communal road Valea Gugii, Urișor, Coplean, Custura | 49.198 | Local budget, County Council |
| 12 | Improvement of the management system within the City Hall | 170.959 | European funds |
| 13 | Car purchase | 50.000 | Local budget |
| 14 | Setting up sports ground instead. Cășeu | 180.000 | Local budget, County Council |
| 15 | Introducing water in Rugășești | 1.300.000 | Local budget, County Council |
| 16 | Refurbishing of Kindergarten Cășeu | 89.187 | Local budget, County Council |

Source: (Town Hall of Cășeu - Investment List 2015)

After analysing the 2014-2020 strategy it was noted that a series of objectives was proposed and among these the following are ongoing:

- Fencing the football field at Rugășești;
- Pedestrian bridge in Guga;

- Asphalting the walking paths in Căşeu commune;
- Modernising the agricultural infrastructure of Căşeu commune, building an agricultural road that would facilitate the access of agricultural equipment;
- Modernising the road infrastructure of Căşeu commune, consisting of road asphaltting and building drains in Urişor and 2 km in Căşeu.

Following the analysis of criteria and indicators identified in the development strategies of Căşeu commune, it will be followed whether the proposed objectives help with the commune development.

Social criterion – Health subcriterion

Refurbishing wing B of the village dispensary – the main purpose of this objective is of offering fair health care services to as many of the commune inhabitants as possible without them having to go to town.

Social criterion – Education subcriterion

Labour market integration of persons with disabilities— a project named “*INCLUSIVE*”, being co-funded from the European Social Fund through the Human Resource Development Operational Programme 2007-2013, *Investing in people*. This project has come to help the inhabitants of Căşeu commune by developing trade worker training courses. The courses were attended by the local women, and 17 families with more than three children benefitted from counselling from the experts of this programme. This programme has also included two workshops - social-educational integration of vulnerable groups and perceived employability of vulnerable groups.

The number of schools’ units (primary and secondary education) is an important indicator that illustrates the level of education in Romanian rural area. (Mincu, 2011)

Rehabilitation of the school and kindergarten of Rugăşeşti and Căşeu – this project was more than necessary, as pupils at this school did not benefit from the conditions required to attend classes. The school had an unfit pit latrine toilet, the water was not chemically suitable for drinking, there was no contract with a sanitation service, the furniture was deteriorated, lighting was not sufficient. The priorities of this project were to solve the aforementioned issues.

An artificial turf field – the project has been conceived for the commune’s sports fans, the turf being 36 metre long and 18.5 metre wide, with night lighting and a 60-seat stand for those wishing to watch live football matches. 6 parking spaces were arranged near the football field. The parking was made afterwards as it was noticed that the football field also attracted young people from outside the commune, and lately the young men of Căşeu have commune created their own football team and participate in championships developed on the commune football field. This project has been accomplished from the local budget of Căşeu registry office. Thanks to the football field children of the commune lead a much more active and healthier life.

Dressing rooms for the field were created from the local village hall funds, being an urgent project for the village youth. Participation in a fairly large number in sports events required a dressing room for storing the sports equipment, and also a lavatory.

Technical supply of homes

- Water supply Subcriterion

Drinking water supply is a world indicator of the degree of civilisation and the quality of life. A key target of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 7, which aims to ensure environmental sustainability, is “to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015”. This water supply target underpins several other MDGs, including those relating to poverty (MDG1), education (MDG2), and gender equality (MDG3). (Hunter et al., 2010). Supplying water to the village of Rugăşeşti was a project completed in 2013, the lack of water being a problem that people

of Rugăşeşti struggled with for a long time, as during summer fountains and springs dried out and people had no water. Bringing water to the village led to a fair agricultural growth. Many of the village inhabitants have greenhouses for growing vegetables that they sell at the market of Dej municipality.

Water pumping station for rising water pressure in Rugăşeşti – this project came to follow the water supply project as the water pressure was much too low and during rainless summers water came with no pressure for some of the inhabitants.

At the end of 2012 sewage works for Urişor were completed, this project being extremely important as it leads to better living conditions of the inhabitants and also a higher degree of comfort, so that in the event of unfavourable weather conditions people no longer risk being flooded. This can also attract various investors.

Household sewage and water cleaning station in the commune of Căşeiu also improves the living conditions of the inhabitants, lowering the risk of disease caused by water contamination.

- Access to means of transport Subcriterion

Asphalting the Sălătruc – Leurda road and repairs to the commune roads and the streets of Urişor, Coplean, Guga, Custura would make an easier and safer access of the inhabitants towards Cluj and Baia Mare, which are situated at equal distance from Căşeiu - 60 Km. The project also contributes to reducing travel time, to increasing traffic safety. Road reconstruction will encourage tourism growth in the area as this rehabilitation facilitates access to tourist attractions in the area. Before road rehabilitation people's access to health services was restricted by the transport services as it was hard for doctors to reach patients needing urgent medical attention.

- Electricity supply Subcriterion

By modernising the public lighting in Căşeiu commune 700 bulbs were replaced on the commune posts and a hundred more lamps were brought to cover lightless areas, thus increasing the inhabitants' safety on the commune streets. Lamps are of latest technology thus light is more powerful and the energy consumption is 40 % lower.

Economic criterion – Tourist Potential Subcriterion

Building the Tourist Information Centre of Rugăşeşti – the project was co-funded by the European Social Fund by Capacity Development Operational Programme, the project amounting to approximately 500,000 lei. Two workplaces were thus created, one of tourism agent and one of tourist guide. Căşeiu commune has very many tourist attractions including the Haller Castle of Coplean, the *Samum* Roman Castrum, the wooden Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic church, as well as a diverse relief with beautiful landscapes. Thanks to this tourist information centre the historical monuments of the commune can be better promoted, local customs and traditions drawing tourists to the area, and money spent on them being a source of income for the commune. Tourism development has a major role in attracting potential investors but also a support for the development of business environment, thus creating workplaces.

The Centre's employees have started promoting the commune via institutions other tourist centres in the country collaborate with but also via the tourist information centre of Cluj-Napoca, by participating in several national and international fairs. They started to organise handicraft social gatherings with the Cluj Popular School of Arts and the Dej Museum. For the inhabitants of the commune and not only weaving courses were held, at the end of the course the participants being awarded a master craftsman's diploma.

Students at the primary and middle school of Rugăşeşti participated in the summer of 2016 in weaving courses, and became increasingly more expert in the art of weaving. All these courses are meant to preserve the tradition and culture in the area.

Refurbishing the community centre of Căşeiu – the project has been executed from local government funds. Exterior refurbishment works for the community centre were: changing the building roof, insulating windows and insulating the building on the outside, the purpose of this project being to increase and diversify the cultural activities in the commune, to preserve and promote folk traditions. Dance parties are organised in the community centre on holidays, attended by the commune’s inhabitants. In the premises of the community centre the following activities are developed: dinners for various occasions (funerals, weddings, baptisms), Christmas celebrations, coral concert etc.

Administrative criterion – Public administration development

Repairs and refurbishment of wing B of Căşeiu registry office – the project was started as the building was old and crowded and given that lately very many young people of the commune started celebrating their engagements at the registry office and because of the too crowded space the inhabitants could not enjoy the events, the registry office representatives declared they would focus all the public services towards the citizens of the commune.

Improving the management system in the commune of Căşeiu – this project is co-funded from the European Social Fund through the Priority Axis 2: *Capacity development to improve the service performance of local administration* Operational Programme “Improving the quality and efficiency of public services, with the emphasis put on decentralisation”. This project is meant to introduce and maintain management systems such as quality management ISO 9001-2008, environmental management system ISO 14001-2005 and occupational safety and health OHSAS 18001, developed over 11 months. The main purpose of this project is to increase the quality and efficiency of the commune’s public services, ensuring enough economic and social development to meet population needs. At the same time as the implementation of these standards, the registry office personnel have participated in professional training courses for the financial audit of the project in order to support the inhabitants of the commune of Căşeiu in case they wanted to obtain information on such standards, or if they wanted to open their own business they could obtain the required information from the qualified personnel of Căşeiu.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the two strategies a continuity of strategic objectives was noted, being relevant for the needs and problems of the inhabitants of the commune of Căşeiu. Furthermore, it was noted that a part of the projects proposed were achieved with the hope of attracting potential investors. The commune of Căşeiu faces issues specific to a small community but it is wished for its development and attracting young people in the commune. From the analysis of the 2009-2015 Strategy, weak tourism and culture, and infrastructure problems were noted; however, a part of them have been solved, resulting in better accessibility to the commune.

With supply of water provided to Căşeiu, Coplean, Urişor, Rugăşeşti, soil workability has increased from 40% in the year 2009 up to a current 90%, this also tanks to the APIA subsidies. Both strategies are very well proposed as there is a continuity of objectives and both are focused on the needs of inhabitants. As recommendations, we mention agritourism development, establishing agritourism boarding houses, granting support to the young people in the commune for the starting of agricultural business.

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