



# Forests are Contributing to a New Sustainable Rural Development Policy

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## ABSTRACT

Forests and other forested areas represent over 40% of the land of the EU, varying widely from one region to the next. Forests are multifunctional, having economic, social and environmental uses. Forests provide great advantages to the society, regarding health, recreation and tourism. They contribute to rural development and offer about 3 million jobs. A sustainable management of the forests means using the forests and the forested areas in a way and in a rhythm allowing to maintain their biological diversity, productivity, capacity of regeneration, vitality and capacity to accomplish, now and in the future, useful ecological, economic and social functions on the local, national and world level, without damaging other ecosystems.

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## 1. Introduction

"The loss of the forest means not just losing a treasure, but losing the very source from which richness springs [...]. The permanent and general interest should be seen by the cultivated people and the leading class. The latter is responsible of the future of the country, of the constancy of the people on its land, carefully preserved. This is why the forest issue is not a technical, speciality problem but a national problem" (1935).

For a sustainable rural development, it is beneficial to organize an interdisciplinary research programmer using ICT, from which the foresters cannot be missing.

Yet, the forest itself is dealt with by forestry as a considerably complex cybernetic system. This truth is acknowledged not just by specialists, but also by the Romanian school of ecology. We shall cite only the illustrious biologist, academician Emil Pop (1973), according to whom: "The forest is the most complex and the strongest ecosystem in the terrestrial system [...]; it is, first of all, a collective being, the most impressive of all, kindled by a life of its own, crystallized from a million individual lives, as diverse as possible - merged in a harmonious physical being and a unitary spirit, which impresses in a overwhelming and unique way the human spirit".

Forest issues are situated on a lower level even in the alpine rural area where the forest occupies a prevailing place.

This unjust positioning of the forest problems has been noticed as well in the past by the great forester Marin Drăcea (1940), according to whom "we are indebted to understand one thing: that the reforms ignoring this reality, namely the forest, have been and will be gloomy both for the land and for the nation".

Professor Victor Giurgiu used to say: "As a forester, I am deeply concerned that the forests will be put in the hands of the communes or of some natural persons devoid of the necessary forest conscience; they will be illegally cut down, destroyed to the disadvantage of the future generation and of the country. History has proven this truth."

One of the essential principles of a sustainable forest management is this: forests should yield revenues annually in the long run and should continually exert protective functions, because the owners' and the society's demands are annual and permanent. Discontinuities in this concern can deeply affect the quality of life and the stability of the population in the rural area.

The rural world is no longer the agricultural world of yore; the attractiveness of the cities seems to have settled in without needing the wagon of modernity. Generally, the migratory trend has changed especially with the coming of the young population. The agricultural world is now a desired residential area, an increasingly wanted tourist destination and is becoming an area of initiatives and different policies highlighting its leading position in environmental issues.

The rural zones continue to remain very diverse in their organization and dynamics. While some rural areas took advantage of the new development techniques, others, less favored in point of resources or adaptation capacity, complain of isolation and a worrying delay and prove that the promises of diversity include the traps of disparity.

To conclude, the rural future is a concern that is no longer just national, and a preoccupation where one can find elements of answer in the initiatives of other partners. In general, the multiple rural areas of Romania make use, nowadays, of specific and voluntary actions. State authorities and local collectivities have a determining role in the development of the rural areas.

### **1. Effects on the management and conservation of localized resources**

In matters of agriculture, the development policies have contributed rather to the reinforcement of the existing orientations and structures than to the promotion of diversification. The dominant productions have been strengthened; the analysis of the EU material improvement policy offers an emblematic illustration in this sense. Yet, the structuring of local networks and the promotion of strongly typical products largely improves the outcome of this agricultural side of the rural development policies. Yet, it is a fact that the means dedicated to rural development remain modest compared to the means provided as aid revenue.

In environmental matters, the evaluation highlights a modest outcome of the actions undertaken. Although the policies are implemented along with their new institutions, their new partnership practices, their new intervention territories, however, their impact remains poor. In matters of agriculture and environment, in spite of a high cost of the measures, the water quality has not yet recorded a significant improvement. Finally, in matters of tourist policy, the most tangible effects concern the improvement of the quantity and quality of the boarding units. The elaboration of complete tourist products and structuring products is often more problematic. Moreover, the small boarding facilities and the social tourism seem to have been left without any help.

The rural territories are therefore extremely diverse, and the challenges they are going through, which can be major, express this variety of situations. First of all, they are dealing with the stakes related to the competition between functions. Such is the case of the “countryside-like city areas”, where the competition between the residential and the productive, especially agricultural areas, can be extremely intense. Then, there are challenges related to the specialization of their functions. “The most fragile countryside areas” suffer because they have no other alternative to their declining productive function. Finally, there are also challenges related to the balance to be found in the future between the different functions. The rural areas in transition, constituting an important part of the rural territories, still have to find the ways of a development bringing them close to the “new countryside”, attractive and multifunctional. The variety of stakes, reflecting the variety of the rural territories requires a mobilization of all the public actors. The intervention of the State, translating a concern for national fairness and solidarity, needs to be joined by an intervention of the local collectivities able to assume this diversity of situations, as close to the rural actors as possible. Far from constituting frozen images, the images of rural Romania are meant to evolve. The rural territories are neither closed into a unique development scheme, nor promised or condemned to remain forever in a given class. It is this conviction that guides the public action.

## **2. Elements of a sustainable rural development strategy**

### *1. Diminution of the rural fault*

The economic, social fault (and which moreover is not without environmental effects) of about a third of the rural areas is not acceptable. For several decennia, the renewed efforts of the State, of the EU and of the local collectivities have kept the phenomenon under control without managing, however, to reverse the trend, in general terms.

Even the most dynamic rural area can be threatened by the risk of exhaustion, after all, of the competitiveness factors relying on the labor force. For the moment, the loss of productiveness that could lead to a lesser qualification of the labor force or that determined by the technological fault are more than compensated by particular skills and know-how (not recognized and not paid as such), and the quality of the work relations. Yet, finally, the comparative advantage constituted by the labor force can become problematic due to the disappearance of the social conditions that used to favor its appearance. In this stage, the weaker qualification level, actually related to the poorer density of the professional training apparatus, risks to fully

expose its ability to create inconveniences. Actually, the absence of an ample access to the New Information and Communications Technologies can become a major weakness.

A voluntaristic strategy meant to fill the rural gaps requires two things: defining specific objectives, according to the territories concerned, on the one hand, and defining, in this framework, the priorities of action of the different public actors, on the other hand. **The most fragile countryside** needs a privileged attention from the State, without excluding, certainly, the mobilization of the other traditional partners. **Maintaining the agriculture** there is a primary priority. It constitutes sometimes (especially in the areas that are mainly agricultural) the only activity. Maintaining it is therefore the guarantee of the perenniality and often of the reversibility of the use of territories. A multifunctional agriculture, profitably yielding high-quality products and paid for its trading functions (local and environmental maintenance and administration) really finds its place there. **Modernization or even industrial conversion** constitutes a second goal. Often largely inhabited by workers, the declining countryside has been affected by the crises of different artisan professions (skin and wood processing, shoe making, textiles, metallurgical crafts). The innovating initiatives (very small high-tech enterprises) or the modernization of the enterprises in the sectors based on local traditional resources are illustrative in this sense. The third goal concerns the reinforcement of the small towns and rural quarters that fill the national territory, especially in the most fragile countryside. These places have often lost a part of their role of agricultural market, and even their role in industrial production (to the benefit of the city areas or countryside with low-cost labor force), and so they have to find a specific function in point of services, especially in the framework of a rural economy with tertiary claims.

**The definition of priority objectives for the most fragile countryside has to be accompanied by a great vigilance of the State about the evolution of the other territories.**

At the same time we need to avoid the phenomena of contamination and anticipate certain “reversal” tendencies. The new countryside may become just as well victims of their attractiveness (and consequently live a flow of newcomers preceding the activities, accentuating the precarity and unemployment issues), and also victims of their relative fragility. In this way, the Common Agricultural Policy reform could affect the “countryside in transition”, situated on a large area of the national territory. Agriculture could be encouraged to diversify and the relatively diffuse agro-alimentary complex should be consolidated. In the fine management of agriculture, the local collectivities also have an essential role to play. The diminution of the rural fault is answering the urgent demand of reducing the territorial inequalities. Thus, it has to put into motion equalizing levers for resources among the local collectivities. These payments need to rely on renewed criteria, better fitting the specific problems of the rural territories; they no longer have to be only the responsibility of the State, but need to be exerted horizontally, among regions and within every region. Today, consumers appeals at many sources of information, and the value of the integrated marketing communication has increased considerably. When considering the factors that contribute to the process of integrated marketing communication is very important to take into account the context in which this process occurs. (Oancea, 2005)

#### *2. Betting on a controlled residential economy*

The residential economy is an essential development lever, as long as no domination of the rural area by the urban area is encouraged. The strategy consists, for the rural territories, in endowing them with means able to make their territories attractive. The residential economy is to be built especially around the landscape and service quality control. The leisure economy, which should be encouraged more than it is now, also represents a usable resource for the areas neighboring the cities.

#### *3. Rethinking the city-village relations and truly coordinating their policies*

Any sustainable rural development strategy requires a simultaneous effort in the domain of sustainable arrangement for the cities; namely a re densification strategy, and more sustainable transport means and networks. The endeavor to regulate the residential function of the “countryside-like city areas” is a goal both for the future and for the present, due to the importance of this issue. The contradictions between receiving the population and maintaining a productive function have already been mentioned.

The agricultural patrimony has partially become an urban patrimony. Today, 40% of the land used in agriculture is situated in the per urban and urban areas. At the same time, the specialized agriculture is ten times more present in the urban areas.

#### *4. Permitting agricultural and industrial development*

##### **a) Accompanying the agricultural mutations**

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, as it was engaged, will lead the agriculture towards continuing its mutations. The perspectives of diminution of the support for export and more openness of the

markets to international competition, compensated in part by aid revenues, are at the heart of the debates. Under these circumstances, the natural tendency seems to privilege a productive agriculture, guided more by the downstream sector and inserted in a globalized economy. This agriculture may be qualified as “productive and precise”, because its technological level allows it to offer products perfectly answering the qualitative demands (certification) and quantitative demands of the food industries and of the great distribution and also because it provides a technical answer to the environmental concerns (precision). Yet this form of agriculture alone is not satisfactory. Its development necessarily leads to a geographic concentration of the production, and thus to a problem for a great number of areas left unattended.

At the same time, beside this productive and precise agriculture, the State needs to maintain the development of other forms of agriculture as well. One of them is the production of high-quality foods, based on home-made products and related skills. This “agriculture based on home-made products” relies on official quality signs (certifications). Another form of agriculture integrates service activities. It relies on real “rural enterprises”, complementary and varied as activities. They can be found especially where the classical production function is harder to achieve (fragile countryside, countryside-like city areas), and yet the need of a territorial management is essential also where services can be developed, especially in relation to the residential and recreational function of these rural areas. We are dealing with an agriculture based on territories. The search for an intelligent coexistence of these different forms of agriculture requires the pursuit of several objectives.

It is necessary to assure the perennial existence of the agriculture based on home-made products. Its resilience depends on the international recognition, and especially in WTO, of the notions related to the geographic origin. The State has an important role to play in this debate and negotiation. The great agricultural production zones need to try to integrate in their competitiveness poles advantages guaranteeing their international position (connections with the research and innovation; connection with the logistics sectors etc.).

#### **b) Supporting a diversified economy**

In point of agriculture and other activities, the productive function entrusted to the rural areas remains essential. From this perspective, forestry, whose development potential is important (especially in the alpine regions), but also tourism, are activities relying on rural resources that could be profitably used. Yet, efforts should also be made at the interface between different productions. While it is necessary to encourage the development of agriculture, forestry and tourism, it is also necessary to encourage the synergies between these sectors, promising essential gains in terms of development.

#### *5. Anticipating the environmental changes*

The rural development strategies need to anticipate the changes that could affect the rural areas in the domain of agriculture. In the long run, the evolution of the climate could considerably change the great ecological balances; the multiplication of exceptional phenomena (droughts, exceptional storms) requires a reflection on the best prevention means (search of resilient production systems), and also protection and mending means (creation/maintaining of forests). In the average term, the increasing environmental demand shall be translated by an increased demand of services (commercial and non-commercial services), but also controls regarding the main providers of these services, holders of rural areas. The demand of nature and access to protected areas – whose surface cannot grow – might generate growing conflicts between the owners of areas and the people desiring access. These two territorial stakes, of different sizes, need to be anticipated and considered in the development strategies. The issue of taking into account the non-commercial functions and that of considering the supplementary cost related to a multifunctional management are clearly topical. In forestry, territorial maps, today at the stage of experiment, concern this very goal.

#### *6. Promoting territorial logic*

The development of the rural areas needs to rely on all the forms of solidarity and proximity. Geographic proximity (putting production means and employees in common) can be used to achieve projects, network proximity (technological platforms, virtual or not) can serve to bring together ideas and stimulate innovation, and finally institutional proximity can improve the dynamics of a project and make it benefit of collective support. The organization of these “proximities” needs to be encouraged as part of the projects based on territories.

### 3. Conclusions

The countryside in Romania is diverse, yet the bases of this diversity are about to change. The various forms of agriculture once defining large areas now prove less determining. This is happening, first of all, because the evolution of this activity, without wiping out the regional specificities, sometimes attenuated the differences between them. Then, this change is happening because the role played by agriculture and food-related activities in the past in the economy and in the rural jobs is diminishing, although it continues to remain important. The industrial economy and especially the tertiary economy are developing gradually as the residential function of the rural area is being confirmed. All of a sudden, the analyst stands in front of a complex landscape. Certain old faults still exist and continue to play a role, while new ones appear and others are fading out.

The ecological reconstruction of the degraded forests and of the deteriorated rural agricultural area represents the most important component of the ecological reconstruction of the country, with beneficial economic, social and spiritual consequences. Especially in the rural area, the results obtained so far are insignificant.

Finally, though no longer on the first place, the agricultural sector remains strong and constitutes an advantage for the rural areas. Yet, its evolution, though marked in the average term by the new agricultural policy, can also present faults. Some recent crises (sanitary crises such as the bovine spongiform encephalopathy or climate crises) have shown, if it was still necessary, the sustainable incidents and stigmata they could trigger in the territories and in the agricultural activity. The public action is also part of a renewed landscape. For several decennia, the place of the State is no longer exclusive, because numerous actors are operating.

For a sustainable development, it would be useful to organize an interdisciplinary research program using ICT, in which foresters surely need to participate.

A new sustainable rural development policy consequently supposes a strong will relying in part on the strong support of the State for the most underprivileged rural areas in terms of habitat, accessibility, economic development and services for the populations. It also relies on the joined action of the local collectivities, in the spirit of the decentralization laws, to accompany these new stakes and allow the rural area to fully use its advantages. The rural world is one of Romania's chances in Europe in the horizon 2020; therefore, let us take advantage of it.

To conclude, we shall cite, from the greatest Romanian agronomist, the academician Gheorghe Ionescu-Șișești, a phrase that could become a true landmark for *a policy related to the Romanian agriculture and forest*: "We are convinced today that the ruin of the forests would mean the ruin of agriculture and the ruin of agriculture would mean the ruin of civilization" (1955).

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