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Strategic goals and priorities of sustainable agriculture and rural development in region of Upper Danube Region¹

Abstract: According to the Draft Spatial Plan of Republic of Serbia (2010): spatial integration and functional connection of regional units, that are necessary for achieving of greater territorial cohesion within Republic, as well as for development capacities strengthening and greater competitiveness of its constituent parts, leads to the identification process of development zones. One of them is the Danube belt, wider area functionally directed to, or linked with Danube River, which also includes zone along the Sava River. Compact space, linked with west towards Hungary, Croatia, Slovakia, Austria and Germany, and east towards Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Moldova, is a key development axis for spatial integration of Republic of Serbia with Europe.

Economy, transport, tourism, cultural cooperation and other forms of population connection along this development axis, will be supported by projects related to Corridor 7, or common development strategy based on interstate cooperation of Danube countries and regions. Except underlined, important place will have also protection projects and cooperation within process of natural resources preservation between Serbia and Croatia in the area of Upper Danube region.

Unequivocally orientation of Republic of Serbia for European integrations requires different definition of role and importance of agriculture, food-industry and rural development, comparing to previous documents and practice. Hence the need for creation of clearly conceived frame like a document – Strategy, as adequate answer on key questions for further development of agriculture and rural areas in the zone of Upper Danube region (Sombor city and municipalities of Apatin and Bač)². In possi-

1 Paper is a part of research project III 46006 - Sustainable agriculture and rural development in the function of strategic goals achievement within Danube region, financed by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia, project period 2011-2014.

2 a) Standing conference of towns and municipalities and the program of environmental protection in Serbian cities and municipalities (2004-2006) provided consulting support to realization of all activities during the establishment of the Strategy of local sustainable development of the Sombor Municipality (now city) 2007-2015.

b) Consulting, research and technical support in realization of all activities during the establishment of the Strategy of sustainable development of the Apatin Municipality, 2009-2019, provided Regional agency for small and medium enterprises, Alma Mons doo Novi Sad and Institute of agricultural economics Belgrade.

ble extent, policy of this development should be adjusted to the Common Agricultural Policy of EU, whose focus is more and more on development of rural areas.

By development strategy, as long-term development document, relating the contemporary scientific achievements, are determined strategic goals and priorities of sustainable agriculture and rural development in the zone of Upper Danube region. That was accomplished by fundamental perceiving of existing natural and created potentials, available human resources, previous development directions, present and predictable problems, detail analysis and estimation of environment impacts. According the above mentioned, the most favorable, realistically achievable options of future development are suggested, bringing down the focus on place and role of agriculture in sustainable development of rural areas.

Strategic goals and priorities of sustainable agricultural and rural development in the zone of Upper Danube region, presented in this paper work, are mostly global and they just represent view on vision. They are actually answer on question „what we want to achieve?” considering available resources.

Keywords: strategic goals and priorities, sustainable agriculture, rural development, Upper Danube region, Republic of Serbia.

Introduction

Development of *the Strategy for the area of the EU Danube region*, for whose creation the European Commission received mandate on June 2009, and that should be adopted in early 2011, will allow establishment of a third large transnational region in Europe (beside the Mediterranean and the Baltic region), for which in the period 2014-2020 special development fund will be defined. The priorities of cooperation in the Danube region are transport, environment and economic development.

Republic of Serbia Government Act "***The position of the Republic of Serbia for the participation in the development of a comprehensive EU strategy for the Danube region***" (March 2010), stipulates:

- within the *Environment protection section* - priority areas are: *Environment protection and sustainable use of natural resources in the basin of the Danube*, relating to strategic activities for development of the national parks and other protected areas potential and water quality improvement in the Danube River Basin;
- within the *Socio-economic development section* - priority areas are: *Economic development and strengthening of regional cooperation and partnerships in the region of Danube Basin*, relating to strategic activities for stimulation of the rural economy diversification and improvement of the local economy by strengthening the facilities of local communities and development of tourism (rural, agro, eco), development of local crafts and agricultural production promotion in the Danube Basin region.

c) Consulting, research and technical support in realization of all activities during the establishment of the Strategy of socio-economic development of the Bac Municipality, 2009-2014, provided Regional agency for small and medium enterprises, Alma Mons doo Novi Sad and Institute of agricultural economics Belgrade.

Model of sustainable agriculture and rural development that favors agricultural resources, biodiversity and climate is a priority of all acts passed in recent years concerning a new model of development based on the concept of the social, economic and environmental sustainability. In terms of the nature-geographic, resource and socio-economic developmental characteristics, *Strategic objectives and priorities for sustainable agriculture and rural development in the area of the Upper Danube region*, concern with the modalities of development of the sustainable agriculture and rural development, which will provide an optimal contribution to sustainable development of the Upper Danube, within following strategic acts:

- Local sustainable development strategy of the Sombor Municipality (nowadays City) 2007-2015;
- Sustainable development strategy of the Apatin Municipality, 2009-2019;
- Strategy for socio-economic development of the Bač Municipality, 2009-2014.

Successful management of the above-mentioned strategic documents development required from the very beginning high political sensitivity and skill of reaching commonly acceptable solutions especially when a number of interested parties had different and often opposing views on key aspects of the strategy development. Therefore, in the development of the strategies for sustainable development, principle of conformity of the strategic priorities with already adopted strategies at the national level was cherished. In the very process of strategic documents drafting a participatory approach which implied the participation of all relevant stakeholders from the territory of the municipalities Sombor (nowadays City), Apatin and Bač was applied.

Based on the principles of transparency and openness, operating procedures and working groups, whose main role is defined through the decrees and rules of procedure, were adopted. In accordance with the above, certain working bodies were defined:

During the establishment of Sustainable Development Strategies of the Sombor Municipality (nowadays City) and Apatin Municipality:

- Partner Forum;
- Strategy development team;
- Coordination team;
- Thematic working groups.

During the establishment of sustainable development strategies of the Bač Municipality:

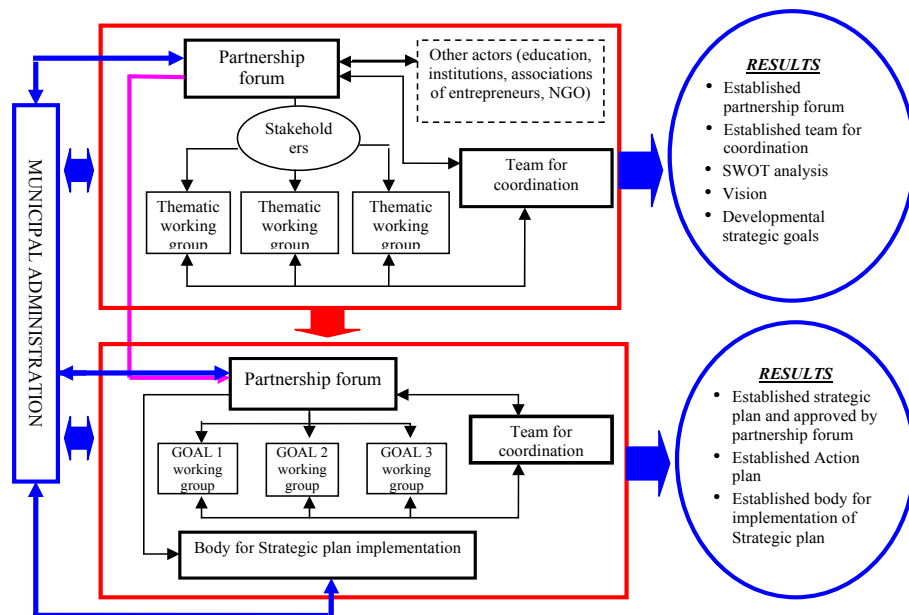
- Partnership;
- Local action group;
- Thematic working groups.

Complete coordination of the formed body required both vertical and horizontal approach, and effectiveness and efficiency of the set system was included in the communication plan.

By combining strategic approaches and practical solutions, Strategies represent an instrument that allows a conduct of systematic, integrated and sustainable development policies in the local community.

It is important to point that the abovementioned Strategies of local sustainable development are "living" documents, subject to change, critical consideration in accordance with the needs, circumstances and other factors (both positive and negative) that occur in the realization of the projected aims and objectives.

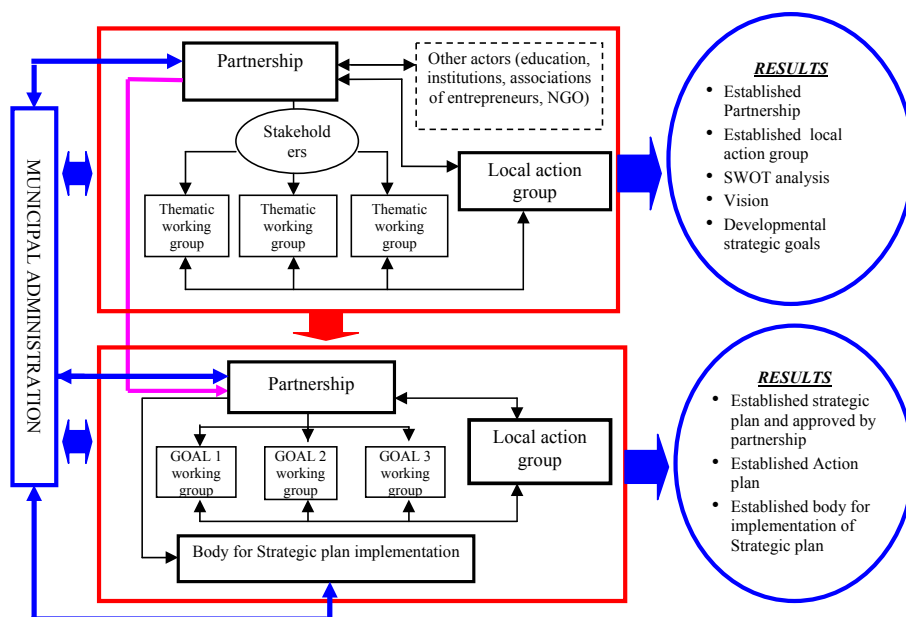
Picture 1 is schematic presentation of establishment process of the Strategy of sustainable development of Sombor municipality (now city) and Apatin municipality.³ Picture 2 is schematic presentation of establishment process of the Strategy of sustainable development of Bač municipality⁴.



Picture 1 – Process of strategic planning - organization

³ Strategy of sustainable development of Apatin municipality, 2009-2019. Regional agency for small and medium enterprises, Alma Mons doo Novi Sad and Institute of agricultural economics Belgrade, Belgrade, 2009.

⁴ Strategy of sustainable development of Bač municipality, 2009-2014. Regional agency for small and medium enterprises, Alma Mons doo Novi Sad and Institute of agricultural economics Belgrade, Belgrade, 2009.



Picture 2 – Process of strategic planning - organization

Within establishment of strategic plans for local administration development, forming of bodies of local action groups (LAG) represents part of methodological approach of local economic development (LER) that enables transparency of decision making process during the selection of development priorities.

Methodological approach (World Bank methodology or methodology for establishment of the *Strategy for local community sustainable development* within Exchange 2 programme of the EU) requires formation of development bodies, and accent is on common (coherent) work of local governments and organizations from public and private sectors. In accordance with methodological approach of strategic plans creation, local action group represents local partnership of representatives of city (municipal) government, NGO representatives and representatives of business associations.

Process of sustainable development strategy establishment

Process of *Strategy of local sustainable development of Municipality Sombor* (nowadays City) developing, as well as *Strategy of sustainable development of Municipality Apatin*, was based on plan of activities of program *Exchange 2*, which represents a platform for creation of general methodology of sustainable development of local communities. Main principles used in modeling of the Strategy of sustainable development of mentioned municipalities were:

- *Bottom-up principle* - strategies were managed and developed by local administration and stakeholders. Experts provided consulting role, training of municipal coordinators, as well as professional and technical support during the document establishment.

- *Principle of participation and transparency* – Strategy creation processes were open for public through participation of civil and business sector representatives and municipal administration in bodies established for strategy development. Furthermore, public was constantly informed via municipal website, radio, media and press.
- *Principles of equality* – during the work group meetings decisions were made and work handled in jointly manner, regardless to religious or political beliefs, no matter whether the participants were businessmen, agriculturists, clergy, scholars, NGO representatives, etc.
- *Principle of sustainability* – key principle applied during municipality vision, goals and priorities setting, was principle of sustainable development. Municipality Sombor, as well as Municipality Apatin, will strive to use all of their resources in a manner that will best suit the needs and interests of citizens, and taking care of environment improvement.
- *Principle of balance of potentials, needs, ideas, resources and capacities* – development strategy of municipalities Sombor and Apatin reflects actual needs of municipalities and their citizens, as well as realistic assessment of resources, comparative advantages, financial potentials and capacities.

Process of *Strategy of socio-economic development of Bač municipality* developing is in accordance with stances of World Bank. Focus is on participative local development planning, and defining of local development domain in comprehensive way, putting on same level spatial, economic, demographic, social and environmental dimension. Accordingly, main principles that have guided the establishment of Strategy for sustainable socio-economic development of Bač municipality are:

- *Principle of consensus and interdependence* - This indicates consensus reached by serious negotiations, not a general democratic system of majority voting. Consensus of participants, during the Strategy establishment, has been held by interactive participation on workshops as well through expression of own interests of all actors, with respect the needs for compromise in different circumstances. This also meant construction of common vision, and identification of strategic goals and measures.
- *Principle of equality* - Nobody is the owner of partnership, as no organization dominated within the partnership. Partnership members are equally involved in the everyday activities and process of decision-making. During the capacity building of each partnership segment, it is important to enable mutual interaction of all stakeholders based on this principle.
- *Principle of diversity* - often are emphasized difficulties connected with quality of partnership work, as it involves different interest groups, or stakeholders. When it is claimed that the problems incurred during the facing of various (often-opposed) interest groups reduce partnership action. However, within complexity of developmental problems that municipalities met, it was important to ensure platform that will take into account wide range of possible views and experiences, in order to define causes of certain problems and possible solutions (partners usually differ in level of knowledge, orientation, goals, experience, approach to specific problems, etc.).

- *Principle of responsibility* - proposals that were determined during the partnership meetings (as well as meetings of working groups) are strategically grounded, rational and financially justified. In other words, there were clear criteria and procedures that guided the process of strategic priorities and measures determination, and which will be again in focus in the process of programs/projects selection.
- *Principle of transparency and openness* – creation of Strategy of socio-economic development of Bač municipality was public, as well as adopted decisions that are by their nature public too. Through this principle, municipality continually and timely informed all citizens, but also wider public about all stages within the process of strategic document establishment (through Internet, media, etc.). In this way, all stakeholders were fully and truly informed.

Methodology

In accordance with the defined principles, the strategic document development methodology consisted of several phases:

- *Activities plan development* – it consisted of activities related to kick-off meetings with municipality president, heads of administration/departments and other high officials, to whom the main Strategy development plan was presented. Based on available resources for Strategy creation (human capital, facilities, etc.), municipalities proposed people that will constitute *Strategy development team (or LAG)*, whose responsibility was to precisely plan all activities, define duties, and adjust *communication plan* along with consultants on strategy development.⁵
- Based on available resources for Strategy establishment, municipalities formed *Strategy development team (or LAG)*. Team proposed and based on that work body *Partnership forum (Partnership)* was defined, whose main role was decision-making and managing on all strategic development priorities proposed by *Coordination team (LAG)* and members of *Thematic work groups*.
- *City/Municipality profiling* implied organization of the meetings administered by experts for Strategy development, as well as education/workshops for city/municipality representatives (*Strategy development team, or LAG*) whose main function was introduction to the model and approach to city/municipality profile development (situation analysis). Data layout for city/municipality profile creation was related to choice of indicators by which insight in current state of city/municipality by certain segments was possible, and later these indicators were used to measure performance results in the Strategy implementation phase. *Local community (city/Municipality) analysis phase* identified and grouped all necessary elements, problems and potentials of city/municipality, used to determine strategic priorities of the city/municipality future development. Analysis involved

⁵ In case of Sombor and Apatin, after defining kick-off activities Coordination team members were proposed and Agreement of cooperation was signed, as well as the plan of activities between program Exchange 2 and city/municipality.

both quantitative and qualitative data processing approach, and participation of stakeholders in identifying, analysis and ranking of problems was of utmost importance. Following data collection and condition analysis, SWOT analysis was performed (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), that defined strategic priorities of sustainable development.

- *Participatory process* – in development of strategic documents of utmost importance is that all stakeholders conjointly participate in defining of main priorities of city/municipality development. Logic and advantage of participatory planning is based on direct involvement in the very process, through all the phases of Strategy development, from common challenges in identification, to development of common solutions. Activities of participatory process included also establishment of *Partnership forum (Partnership)*, which represented key body for discussion and information exchange among all social, economic and institutional stakeholders from the territory of municipalities Sombor, Apatin i Bač, concerning the defining and implementation of policies and activities of sustainable development. The role of *Partnership forum (Partnership)*, considered organization and defining of *Thematic workgroups*, whose members are representatives of city/municipal agencies, business sector, government and non-government organizations, and other relevant institutions from the territory of municipality (nowadays City) Sombor and municipality Apatin. *Thematic workgroups* worked on constitution and identification of vision, common goals and possibilities for problem solving, and in accordance with goals and policies of sustainability they proposed activities that should be included in Strategy of sustainable development of city/municipality. Members of Thematic workgroups were administered by *Coordination team (LAG)* whose members were allocated (as coordinators) in established workgroups. By participatory process, in this phase of creation of Strategy of sustainable development, the vision, strategic goals and measures of municipality (nowadays City) Sombor, municipality Apatin and municipality Bač were established, i.e. programs/projects that would carry out harmonized goals of city/municipality development in following period were proposed.
- *Adopting Strategy of sustainable development* consisted of an array of planned activities that were meant to include and activate broader public, or in other words constantly informing public on activities related to process of strategic document development. In accordance with pre-set communication plan, the strategic document draft was presented to the public through planned promotional activities (panel discussion organization, presentation of strategic priorities in local communities of city/municipality, presentation of strategy draft on the city/municipality website, constant information through local media on Strategy development activities, etc.) whose main characteristic was more transparent approach to opinions and suggestion on possible amendments to the document. Time frame for this process (*public debates*) was one month. After that process, the city/municipal assembly adopted the Strategy of sustainable local development.

- Successful *Strategy implementation* implies strong political will and support. Also, implementation plan implies budget, human, institutional and procedural component required for Strategy implementation.
- *Action plan*, defined within strategic document, included hierarchy of tasks, responsible parties, realistic time frame, human resources and financial needs, sources of funding, expected impacts and results, measures and systems for evaluation of each project. During the implementation, each project will be constantly monitored to ensure achieving of established goals and desired results.
- Team of people is responsible for managing the process of strategy implementation. Practice is to establish an *office or agency for local economic development* (public-private partnership, or non-profit organization). Advantages of establishing an office are that it directly monitors Strategy implementation process, and it may affect other municipal activities and decisions as well, as it may develop direct cooperation with private sector and other organizations, etc.
- *Monitoring* represents a constant process of strategy monitoring and/or implementation of projects according to the schedule and used inputs, infrastructure and services of project user. It identifies in due course current or potential good results or issues, in order to ease up timely adjustment of project operations. Monitoring assumes planned project per se, measures progress, has focus on completion and is perpetually present.
- *Evaluation* is necessary in order to make periodic Strategy implementation assessment, and manner it was conducted in, therefore this phase includes answers to following questions:
 - What has been achieved?
 - How was it implemented?
 - Lessons learned and how to benefit from them during creation of new projects?
- *Evaluation process* overlaps monitoring process which refers to project or implementation program. It implies systemic approach to periodic implementation quality assessment, and programs are by internal control being monitored through reports, that are gathered on various bases (e.g. data gathered on weekly, monthly or quarterly basis).

In designing of monitoring and evaluation system, it is necessary to incorporate a few indicator types, as there are:

- *Goal indicators* that measure Strategy or project progress according to the same goals;
- *Output indicators* that measure progress according to the given output;
- *Input indicators* that measure financial payment, human resources and staff time.

Indicators that measure Strategy establishment progress, have to be:

- *smart* - specificity, measurability, achievability, importance, time limited;
- *justified* - valid from the aspect of key participants in process of monitoring and evaluation, or stakeholders, and they have to measure what is set for measuring;

- *reliable* - conclusions formed according to indicators must be the same if they are measured by different persons;
- *type sensitive* - indicators must be disaggregated by type;
- *sensitive* - enough to measure important changes in situations that are monitored;
- *cost-effective* - Information should be valid according to time and money that was necessary for data collection;
- *well-timed* - should be able to collect and analyze all data relatively quickly;
- *in accordance with local ability/resources* - should not be too complex and difficult for the partners in the project;
- *built on the stability* - indicators should be determined according existing local data about activities or should come through experience from the indicators used in other projects (of course, where is possible).

Development priorities and objectives

Precondition for achievement of strategic goal of *Upper Danube region* is realization of general and specific goals, as well as realization of measures and projects, which are given for each of three specially marked *development priorities (directions of development)*. Defined development priorities essentially determine way of strategic objective realization, or they are instruments of strategic objective of the city/municipality:

1. **Development priority: *Improved and continuous social development;***
2. **Development priority: *Competitive and sustainable economic development;***
3. **Development priority: *Preservation, protection and promotion of environment quality.***

As the **three general goals** of the territory of Upper Danube region, which are related to the defined development priorities, considered as general development framework and instrument for realization of higher goal (Strategic objective), are selected:

1. **General objective** (general objective of I development of priority): *Polycentric development of social sector as generator of overall Region prosperity;*
2. **General objective** (general objective of II development priority): *The continuous and sustainable economic growth based on developed institutions and entrepreneurial infrastructure, simulative local environment for investment, particularly for new and foreign investments, implementation of new technologies, better employment and entrepreneurship development;*
3. **General objective** (general objective III development priority): *Sustainable management of natural resources and protection and improving of environment quality through rational usage of existing natural potentials, strengthening of the energetic competitiveness, application of new technologies and strengthening of institutional and infrastructure capacities.*

Realization of each general objective considers definition and accomplishment of sub-objectives (**specific objectives**). Specific objectives are priorities that lead to achievement of higher goal (general and strategic objective) and

vision realization. By specific objectives is determined how is implemented general, or strategic objective, and they are instruments of higher goals that solve certain problem, or part of problem. In addition, accent is on definition of specific objectives that can be implemented (in relation to needed resources, time) and give optimal effects in development process and achievement of higher goals, with predictable results (ratio: *input-output*).

For vision, strategic goal and three general objectives realization (for all development priorities of Upper Danube region), next **specific objectives** are identified:

- *Support to human capital development* (I development priority);
- *Improvement of infrastructural capacities in public sector* (I development priority);
- *Strengthening of institutional cooperation and institutional capacities in public sector* (I development priority);
- *Affirmation of social and cultural identity* (I development priority);
- *Continuous build, reconstruction and modernization of physical infrastructure* (II development priority);
- *Development of competitive and export-oriented industry, service sector and SME sector* (II development priority);
- *Development of intensive and competitive agricultural production within wider concept of complete rural development* (II development priority);
- *Development and constant improvement of tourism* (II development priority);
- *Protection and improvement of natural resources* (III development priority);
- *Development of infrastructure in field of environment protection* (III development priority);
- *Strengthening of institutional capacities in field of environment protection* (III development priority).

For defining of each specific objective, **real measures** are identified. They have to be taken in order to achieve development priorities in specified time-frame. They are instruments for resources usage, and in technical meaning represent connection between strategic and operational work in development achievement. Measures provide time and financial measurability of objectives.

Development of intensive and competitive agricultural production within wider concept of complete rural development (III Specific objective, II development priority)

Significant support (source) of economic development in the Upper Danube region is definitely agricultural sector, with strong institutional capacities and preserved and developed agricultural infrastructure. Accomplishment of second specific objective is in direct function of vision and general objective of development priority realization - *Competitive and sustainable economic development*.

According to EU rural development policy, Upper Danube region its rural development has to base on:

- Creating of greater competitiveness of primary agriculture (properties enlargement, intensive appliance of agro-technical investments, higher investments in mechanization, quality standards, sale and marketing);
- Establishing conditions for additional employment of rural population (especially women, young, members of husbandries with small properties, etc.);
- Permanent improvement of living conditions in village;
- Special emphasis on agricultural land protection, environment preservation, etc.

Measures of Specific objective

Measure 1 - Protection and preservation of agricultural land

According the *Law of agricultural land*, local communities have obligation to reinvest all means obtained from public agricultural land renting into agriculture through investment in protection, maintenance and agricultural land preservation and agricultural infrastructure development. Measures include projects of commasation, melioration, anti-erosion measures, etc.

Measure 2 - Educational and consulting support to agriculturalists

This measure is especially important for agrarian sector competitiveness building, and it's specially useful in cases when agriculturalist are not organized through association, cooperative, etc. It is crucial that local communities keep strong connections with agricultural extension service in Novi Sad, faculty of agriculture, Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management of Republic of Serbia, Secretariat of agriculture, forestry and water management of Vojvodina province, as well as number of relevant institutions. Through good cooperation of local communities with these institutions and constant educational and experimental activities, needed knowledge and skills can be available to farmers, so basic directions in further agriculture development planning can be provided.

Measure 3 - Support to establishment and development of farmers association, as well as support to inter-regional and international networking of producers

Considering high farmers' disorganization and big problems, especially in phase of products realization, it is extremely important role of local communities in the processes of farmers' cooperation encouraging, through the forms of cooperatives, clusters, associations, etc. Local communities support in establishing of inter-regional cooperation of agricultural producers (cooperatives, agricultural enterprises, association farmers, etc.) is highly useful

Measure 4 - Direct support to agriculturalists for building of agricultural production competitiveness

Although this measure is not under jurisdiction of local communities, by attracting of donor funds or/and establishment of agrarian budget, local commu-

nity could provide support for building of higher competitiveness for investment and development-oriented farms, especially in fruit, vegetable, organic and livestock breeding production. Support of higher competitiveness creation considers financial incentives to enlargement, intensification and modernization of agricultural production, as well as improvement of marketing, product quality, products realization, processing of agricultural products, etc.

Measure 5 - Support to promotion and agricultural products marketing

Given that current problems in Serbian agriculture are product marketing, insufficient investment in packaging, distribution and promotion, special attention of Upper Danube region should be devoted to these problems. Beside promotion of local products on fairs and support in establishing of certain agricultural product brand (by which local communities in Upper Danube region are recognizable), also very important is greater demand of city/municipality authorities on more strict control and monitoring of republic inspection regarding agricultural products repurchase flows.

Measure 6 - Support organic production and processing establishment

At the beginning of 2008 Secretariat for economy of the Vojvodina province, Agency Alma Mons doo Novi Sad and company *Slovan Progres* doo signed a cooperation protocol for realization of project of "Centre for organic production development" establishment. Its' aim had to be spreading of awareness about the necessity of healthy food consumption, improvement of organic food production and establishment of sustainable agriculture system. Center should include experts from the field of science, representatives of institutions which are dealing with food testing, food producers and government representatives, that all together by systematic interconnection and education, could achieve benefit and provide to local products safe way to the EU market. Everything stopped just on plans and good ideas. In next period is needed better support of state and public institutions, as well as their stronger cooperation with private sector within the affirmation of all proposed activities of this Centre.

Measure 7 - Strengthening of rural population activities diversification process and improvement of life conditions in rural areas

Measure considers at first place respect of the concept of rural development by the model of EU countries. Rural development includes not only intensification of primary agricultural production, but number of projects directed to environment protection, better life conditions in village, generation of new opportunities for employment, especially young and women, or members of husbandries with small estate, etc. Within this measure is needed affirmation of LIDER approach, which is primarily related on methodology of rural development projects nomination for financing from EU funds. LEADER instrument in implementation of rural development policy basically means „forcing“ independent determination of integral programs of local communities sustainable rural development, with common action of local community authorities and all local stakeholders (by the *bottom-up* principle).

Measure 8 - Strengthening of institutional infrastructure capacities and promotion of inter-institutional cooperation

Measure considers efficient work of city/municipal departments/agencies for rural development /agriculture and special emphasis have to be on intensification of inter-institutional cooperation. In domain of inter-institutional cooperation, one of the projects should be strengthening of the initiatives of local communities within relevant institutions (Republic geodetic institute) for registration of change of public land usage that is leased. Institutional support considers also promotion of LIDER approach to rural development, in other words organizing of professional trainings for local authorities and LAG (local action group), toward nomination for rural development projects financed from EU funds.

Starting from the basic assumptions and aspirations of the process of strategic planning, proposed goals and priorities of sustainable agriculture and rural development within the zone of the Upper Danube region are based on detailed examination of local, material and intangible resources, needs and potentials, by the basic elements that create system of territory, in complete complexity of its economic, social, environmental and institutional components. Based on that was performed evaluation of the existing social capital needed for initiation of desirable and elimination or mitigation of negative processes and trends, in order to establish a partnership between local stakeholders for the identification, reconciliation, optimization and implementation of all activities that will ensure in long-term period increase of overall life quality in the zone of the Upper Danube region.

Order of mentioned developmental goals and strategic priorities realization will depend, at first, from real measures which should ensure their temporal and financial measurability. Accordingly, significant influence will have:

- estimated value of investments;
- possibility to secure necessary amount of financial assets (from the sources that are currently, or in the coming years will be available to potential investors);
- well organization and order of certain phases execution within the investment projects duration.

How the territory as a system is in constant process of evolution, not only influenced by endogenous factors and the developmental process, but also due to variable and unpredictable factors of environment, in achieving of mentioned trends of future integral rural development of the Upper Danube region have to predict real need for interventions, in terms of a possible redirection of programs, projects and other activities determined by this strategic document. Because of that has to bear in mind that strategic planning is a continuous process.

Conclusions

Strategy of local communities' sustainable development represents one long lasting, comprehensive and synergetic process that affects all life aspects on all levels. Concept of sustainable development considers economic growth, but that one which will secure greater participation of clean technologies and innovation of whole society, poverty reduction, better resources usage, promotion of health conditions and life quality, reduction of pollution level and preservation of biodiversity. For long lasting, and also sustainable development, resources and possibilities have to be distributed in such way that all residents can enjoy basic safety standards, human rights and social privileges.

Strategy of sustainable development of local communities in the region of Upper Danube includes few priorities. One of them is *competitiveness and sustainable economy development*. In function of vision and general goal accomplishment of mentioned development priority, specific goals have been defined, with special reference to sustainable agriculture and rural development.

Agriculture and rural development on the territory of local communities of Upper Danube zone, as well as in whole Republic, is in process of intensive changes. It was started from changes in comprehension of essential role of agriculture for development of one country, to comprehension of necessity for institutional changes, as like in Sombor city and Apatin and Bač municipalities, as in whole Serbia too.

Strategy of sustainable development establishment of selected local communities should compensate the lack of suitable strategic development documents for the territory of Upper Danube. Thereby it was necessary to harmonize needs of agrarian policy of selected local communities with Republic agrarian policy, as it could make further long-lasting and sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas possible, and their harmonization with requirements of international integration processes, before all Serbian accession to WTO, realization of SAA and EU admission.

In practice and legislation, exist many of unsolved problems that affect sustainable agriculture and rural development, as on level of local communities in the zone of Upper Danube, as on level of entire Serbia. Local communities (city Sombor, municipality Bač and municipality Apatin) can and has to offer reliable models for development of sustainable agriculture within their rural areas.

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