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TERRITORIAL APPROACH TO REGIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Dejan Janković^{1}*

Summary

The paper reviews some of the key principles of a territorial approach to rural development and particular aspects of regional rural development. Some features of the EU Leader initiative were analysed as examples of the approach, and the social context and factors which may affect the application of these features in regional rural development were identified. The paper concludes by emphasising the need for different rural policies and preconditions for implementing the territorial approach. Moreover, available resources of rural areas were emphasised as well as the need for perceiving rural areas as (valuable) resources (not as issues), particularly in the context of Serbian rural development processes.

Key words: *regional rural development, territorial policies for rural development, LEADER initiative*

JEL: *Y800*

Introduction

Developed countries of the European Union – which have had a relatively stable agricultural policy – have gradually overcome productivism and exclusive sectoral support to rural areas in favour of the need for differentiated territorial policies in rural development. Strongly market-oriented agriculture has (in terms of food overproduction) caused a drastic reduction in the number of farmers in the total world population, the issue of their unemployment, and environmental pollution, which is a side-effect of industrialized agriculture. The perception that rurality is “no longer the monopoly of farmers” (van der Ploeg *et al.* 2000:393), “declining of agricultural dominance” (Murdoch *et al.* 2003: 60), and “decline of agricultural hegemony

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in many rural areas” (Marsden 1998: 108; Goodwin 1998:7) raise the issue of rural area heterogeneity in terms of the relationship between agriculture and the need for regionally sensitive and differentiated rural policy.

Centralized sectoral policies, mainly under the auspices of Ministries of Agriculture, are slowly giving way to numerous stakeholders in and out of rural areas such as environmental activists, regional development centres, regional authorities, local governments, various kinds of NGOs, and etc. Consequently, “other policy relations have emerged in rural areas” (Murdoch *et al.*, 2003: 60) due to the fact that these actors can now use different funding opportunities and thus “gain a greater role in the design and implementation of development schemes”. Therefore, “spatial and policy differentiation appear to reinforce one another within rural areas as particular policy structures interact with given socio-spatial formations” (*ibid.* p. 61). According to some authors (Marsden 1999: 503), new circumstances in rural areas reveal the need for a “new political and social economy of rural space” based on the reconsideration of some of the basic principles of “rural social science” (*ibid.*).

Under new conditions of policy making in regional rural development, it is of great importance to adapt (transform) current institutions, establish new institutions, and strengthen their overall capacity, accountability and efficiency. Adequate “institutional architecture” enables the successful social interaction of local population in order to achieve their own development interests, which are coordinated with “external” institutions and actors. Success appears as an effective articulation, promotion and then – eventually – (social) action in favour of achieving the collective interest of the specific territory – region. This (social) action, therefore, should be in line with the potentials for development which ought to be effectively realized whether economic, socio-cultural or environmental, as “environmental management has an obvious territorial dimension” (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2007: 18).

In the paper, we will present some relevant characteristics of a territorial approach to rural development and underline the importance of regional development as well as the connection between regional and rural development. We will also analyse some experiences of the LEADER initiative (French acronym, standing for ‘*Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale*’, meaning ‘Links between the rural economy and development actions’). This initiative represents an interesting stimulus to processes in the local (rural) economies all over the EU and has caused a lot of positive effects on the development of EU rural areas. We assume that such experiences are valuable for Serbia and in the final part of the paper we will emphasise the importance of placing territorial rural development on the agenda of the Serbian development policy. We conclude with the factors which may influence the local/regional governance in Serbia and countries which may have a similar national development context.

Territorial Approach to (Regional) Rural Development

The issue of regional rural development is clearly connected with the territory, which may not be defined by administrative boundaries so much as by functions, a relatively homogeneous and integrated economy, and socio-cultural identity, which form its competitive advantage over other areas or regions. In the social theory which deals with the issue of regional development, there is a frequently used concept of *territorial competitiveness*, which, in addition to the economic meaning “*the ability to withstand market competition*”, means providing environmental, social and cultural sustainability of a given area. Some approaches to this issue (Leader 1999: 5) discuss four dimensions of territorial competitiveness: “social competitiveness” or the ability of participants to act effectively together on the basis of shared project concepts encouraged by cooperation between the various institutional levels; “environmental competitiveness” or the ability of participants to make the most of their environment by making it a “distinctive” element of their area while ensuring that their natural resources and heritage are preserved and revitalised; “economic competitiveness” or the ability of participants to create and retain the maximum added value in areas by strengthening the links between sectors and turning their combined resources into assets for enhancing the value and distinctiveness of their local products and services; “positioning in the global context” or the ability of participants to find an area’s role in relation to other areas and the outside world in general, in such a way as to develop their territorial plan to the fullest and ensure its viability within the global context.

In addition to the mentioned dimensions, some authors also add and emphasize the political and institutional dimension (Rauch *et al.* 2001) as well as cultural dimension of regional rural development (Murdoch *et al.* 2003). Ray (Ray 2006: 17) speaks of “culture economies”, the idea which comes from three sources: the changing nature of post-industrial consumer capitalism, the trajectory of rural development policy in the EU, and the growth of regionalism as a European and global phenomenon. This approach identifies culture as the basis of a territorial identity with a number of markers such as different languages and dialects, foods, folklore, crafts, historical heritage and the natural (specific) environment. Thus, a territory, in terms of production, refers to the nurturing and (or) construction of territorial identities which are valorised through a variety of products and services offered to users of rural areas and “consumers”. The “commoditization” of rurality, or the “commoditized” rurality, stands for both tangible and intangible conceptualization of rurality, and it certainly has constructivist bases and consequences (like branding in general). The question is, however, whether these structures marginalize problems which exist in rural areas (poverty, deprivation, and the like).²

Sociologically, “territorial competitiveness” should not be perceived from a purely economic viewpoint as a tool for increasing the competitiveness of a region in global (market) terms. It should be perceived as a framework wherein the social actions and decision making of “local” population occur. Those actions and decisions should be based on the directions of their will and aspirations as well as regional spatial proximity. Regional spatial proximity

² Regarding that, see Hillyard 2007: 60-62, especially study of Cloke *et al.* 1994, to which the author points.

should be regarded as “the experiential and structural base for the development of awareness and responsibility”, “the competence for social action and management”, the possibility of intra- and inter-regional cooperation and exchange of experiences (not strengthening the autarky and (or) protectionism), and the way to minimize the effects of the impact of global markets, and the like (see, Müller 1998: 185-189).

Rural development is a broader framework of regional development because it includes a number of sectoral approaches alongside a regional approach, as well as local level approaches. The term rural development may mean both planned government “intervention” and positive social change, which has more or less spontaneously occurred during the historical development of rural areas usually influenced by the modernization, industrialization and urbanization of society. Some authors would disagree with “spontaneous” change and would emphasize “designed change... that is deliberately induced, not naturally evolving” (Moseley 2003: 4). The need for intervention, in terms of rural (development) policy, stems from the necessity of reducing poverty and social inequality of rural population, and also from the need for a decrease in development disparities of the whole territory of a certain global society. Although the *reduction in rural poverty* is often the foundation of the definition of rural and regional rural development (Rauch *et al.* 2001; similar de Janvry and Sadoulet 2005), some authors (especially Rauch *et al.* 2001) argue that it should be the *basic goal of rural development*, both in developing and in developed countries (de Janvry *et al.* in 2002, according to Bogdanov 2007: 37). They explicitly emphasize regional rural development as essentially oriented towards people with the aim of reducing mass rural poverty, which can be achieved by the optimal development of (previously mentioned) territorial dimensions, within a smaller or larger territory. Although we could accept the systematization of the three main conceptual approaches in strategies of rural development: sectoral, territorial and human (oriented to the rural population), the sociological perception of this issue still requires the conclusion that in the territorial approach, which is oriented to the potentials, *i.e.* the competitiveness of a particular area, it is basically an approach which targets the widely perceived *ability of actors / population* in certain rural areas to identify and utilize resources (along with social institutions and organizations), and overcome the limitations of the territory in which they live and work with their collective action. In that sense, reducing mass rural poverty might be expected as a consequence of regional development.

The importance of “local” rural development was announced in the late 1980s, in the document of the European Commission - *the Future of Rural Society*, which emphasized the need for external support (rural development policy) to endogenous potentials of rural areas. Within the European Union policy, the endogenous potentials and local-territorial concept of rural development have represented a step forward in understanding that agricultural policy - which dominated rural policy together with the other usually separate and often uncoordinated sectoral measures - did not give the same results in various rural areas in terms of reducing poverty and inequality. Thus, a key issue of considering the reasons why some planned social change and projects did not contribute to the development of certain areas has emerged. In a sociological sense, one could say that the complexity of rural development has been perceived, first of all at the level of planning and understanding of rural development, *as a process*. This complexity revealed issues

such as social networks, interactions, power relations among actors and institutions, participation, local resources, knowledge/skills and capital which rural areas *have* in different amounts and *use* in different manners for their development. In the sense of a territorial approach, these and other questions have emphasized understandings that rural regions are socio-economic units which have their own structures and actors (institutions, formal and informal social groups, potentials and constraints for development) who use available resources in different manners.

In that sense, region as planning and development category (not only political and administrative), should provide a place for: systematic development of the network of settlements, appropriate economic and spatial redistribution of economic capacities, subsidiary distribution of power and authority, support of local-regional initiatives, and responsibility for certain development activities. Although there are regions of different sizes (as well as local government/municipalities of various sizes), region is always considered as the optimal framework for integrated and sustainable socio-economic, demographic, cultural and environmental development of a specific territory, and the “best compromise” between fragmented local initiatives and “distant” global national plans of development. Regional position provides optimal position for the potential *synergistic effect* of local development initiatives, along with development support provided by the system of global (national) measures. It implies the constructive networking on the level of internally perceived common interests, needs and opportunities for development, linking of mutual initiatives and social actions, and using (or constructing) social capital for the achievement of sustainable socio-economic and environmental development in line with desired development goals.

Territorial Approach to Rural Development: the Example of the EU LEADER Initiative

The optimal utilisation and operational development of potentials in a specific rural area depend on a range of elements which represent the components of each of the previously mentioned dimensions. These components operationalize general dimensions of the regional rural development and can be used for more specific analysis of these dimensions. A good example of this policy is the EU LEADER initiative, which has represented an interesting “laboratory for rural development” for almost two decades. The initiative has a lot more symbolic and ideological importance than financial, which is rather minor in comparison with other measures of rural policy. This initiative was launched in 1991 comprising 3 stages: LEADER I (up to 1994 as a pilot program), LEADER II (1994-1999), LEADER+ (2000-2006). Although LEADER emphasizes the “bottom up” and territorial principle of an endogenous (participative) approach to socio-economic development of rural communities, it might be said that this approach “is not everywhere entirely novel, because a number of countries can point to historical and contemporary examples of its introduction” (Ray, 2000).

LEADER is now an integral part of EU rural development policy, along with other similar funds like SAPARD (IPARD), PHARE, ISPA or the national programs similar to LEADER which

are focused on rural development in local rural communities (*POMO and POMO+* Finland; *PRODER* Spain; CTE France ; *REGIONEN AKTIV* Germany, etc.). All these programs in the EU and member states, target mainly the involvement of local (regional) “capital” and local stakeholders in developing long-term potential of their areas, implementation of self-designed strategies, preservation of natural and cultural resources, village renewal, improving the economic environment (new jobs) and organizational capability of local communities. In this sense, “*co-operation on several levels*” is a key component of such concepts. As a specific method for providing support to rural development, the LEADER approach is in the CAP (2007-2013) perceived as one of the four axes which will be co-financed by the European Fund for Rural Development. While the first three axes are “vertical” (1. competitiveness, 2. environment and the countryside, 3. economic diversification and the quality of life), LEADER, as a horizontal measure, is based on the following eight principles: *local features* (these features are represented by local groups and local development strategies and include: 1. area-based approach, 2. bottom-up approach, 3. local group (partnership approach), 4. innovation, 5. multi-sectoral integration), *trans-local features* (these features emerge from interactions between local groups and their respective strategies including 6. networking and 7. trans-national cooperation), and *vertical features* (these features are represented and implemented by the programming authority and provide the governance framework in which the local groups carry out their activities including 8. decentralized management and financing (EU Commission 2003: 14)).

The positive experience of the first two LEADER initiatives led to continued funding in the form of LEADER+ measures for the period 2007-2013, during which LEADER will evolve from a pilot initiative to the fourth axis of rural development in the EU CAP. According to some opinions, LEADER was an “effective initiative” which also “contributed to the sustainability of development processes at local levels” and LEADER II measures have led to the “creation of safeguard of 100,000 permanent jobs” in European rural areas and over 1,000 LAG (Local Action Groups) across Europe, which are connected and share experiences of their development projects (European Commission 2003: 22-24; Shucksmith *et al.* 2005: 110).

However, since LEADER and similar measures across EU actually represent “*exogenous initiation of local activism and dynamics*”, it is important to avoid the danger of mixing cause and effect. Estimating the impact of LEADER, Shucksmith *et al.* (Shucksmith *et al.* 2005: 110) claim the following:

“LEADER is an instrument to stimulate processes in the local economy rather than to promote investments”. According to these authors, successful implementation of multi-sectoral integration is the effect of certain preconditions and external influences such as: favourable institutional and administrative context (“institutional thickness”), successful and diversified local economy, vital, dynamic and representative partnerships and strategic orientation of the local action plans, rather than the effect of LEADER activities. LEADER activities have contributed to the sustainability of development processes at local levels and they have proved to be “adaptable to different socio-economic and governance contexts and applicable to small-scaled area-based activities in rural areas”; they induced the

responsibility of local partnerships and raised the awareness of strengthening strategy and cooperation within the regions, etc. (*ibid.* 108-110).

However, LEADER activities encounter numerous problems and obstacles such as the obstructive influence of interest groups, the issue of partnership quality in local action groups, administrative problems in project implementation, a relatively low participation of women in local action groups, and the problem of institutional underdevelopment, which can be an obstacle to successful development efforts.

Processes within LEADER local partnerships and their consequences have been widely researched and the results indicate many specifics which are conditioned with socio-economic, historical and political contexts present in different countries during the researches (see, Moseley (ed) 2003; Bruckmeier 2000; Buller 2000; Osti 2000; Esparcia 2000; Thuesen 2009; Furmankiewitz *et al.* 2009; Kovach 2000). Many LAGs were seen as a “tactical response to funding opportunities” (Moseley (ed) 2003: 155) and local authorities played a major part in creating appropriate partnerships... but “in many areas, key individuals – with energy, good contacts and a talent for making things happen - also played key roles (*ibid.*; also, see Osti 2000).

Many LAGs, as local partnerships, have in fact been strongly influenced by official regional and other governmental structures as in Germany (see Bruckmeier 2000), France (see Buller 2000), Spain (see Esparcia 2000), and especially Poland (Furmankiewitz *et al.* 2009) and Hungary (Kovach 2000). Strong influence of traditional elites on the LAGs was often the case in many of the mentioned countries.

Also, good historical background in regional development (in the case of Germany, see Bruckmeier 2000) and rural areas that already have had strong historical and cultural identity (in the case of France, see Buller 2000), made the LEADER initiative more effective in the realization of development goals. The Italian examples show that areas which have already had “traditional solidarity”, “aggregative capacity” and strong social capital, together with key individuals (charismatic people in key positions), have been more effective in the development of areas.

The LEADER approach, which could serve as a paradigm of the territorial principle in rural development, identifies the following basic components of four dimensions of territorial competitiveness (environmental, economic, social competitiveness and positioning in the global context): human resources, physical resources, image/perception of the area, markets and external relations, activities and business firms, governance and financial resources, know-how and skills, culture and identity (Leader 1999: 22, 23). Each of these components can, in a certain way, contribute to the territorial capital and competitiveness, and they are more or less linked with some of the mentioned dimensions of territorial competitiveness (see, Leader 1999). It is, however, clear that their separation (see, *ibid.*) is rather analytical by nature due to correlations with the main (corresponding) dimensions, although possibilities of multiple correlations are often the case.

The Need for Territorial Rural Development Policies in Serbia

The situation in rural areas in Serbia, which account for 85% of the territory and 55% of the population (with the density of 63 inhabitants/km²), is very difficult according to many relevant indicators. There are many problems in rural areas and it is hard to break the vicious circle of underdevelopment and poverty, especially with the lack of relevant policies and deagrarianization, a process which has always had its economic, social, demographic, cultural, political, and other aspects. The lack of competitiveness of the Serbian agriculture, crowding out of “the agribusiness market arena” by agrarian population, undeveloped rural economy and many underdeveloped rural areas further complicate the picture of the current and future development and survival of Serbian villages. Poverty rates of rural areas in Serbia are twice as high as the ones in urban areas (see Veselinović, Mičić, Miletić, 2012). The employment rate in agriculture is among the highest in comparison with the EU (about 23%) and reflects a pervasive importance of agriculture in the national economy and a low level of diversification of economic activities in Serbian rural areas, which results in a lack of employment opportunities (MPŠV Republike Srbije, 2009: 6)

For decades, the issue of depopulation of rural areas has been one of the central issues associated with rural areas in Europe and Serbia. This complex issue entails many “hot spots” such as youth migration, unemployment in rural areas, urban concentration, and the like. The situation in Serbian rural areas is further complicated regarding high percentage of unemployment at the national level, social position and unemployment of young people, long-term social crisis and bad economic situation (see Antevski, Petrović, Vesić, 2012).

The concept of *governance*, as an example of evolution in theory and practice of rural development, is primarily applied in developed countries depending on the achieved economic, democratic (political) and institutional level of development. In countries with lower levels of overall development (as in Serbia), the discourse on governance is rather reserved for the (near or distant) future. In underdeveloped and developing countries (like Serbia), the essential discussion, in theory and often a lot less in the development practice³, is actually on the level of transition from the sectoral to multi-sectoral policy measures, and from the centralized management to eventual local co-ordination of (multi) sectoral measures.

The analysis of the development of rural policy and theoretical approaches to policy discourse and social sciences of developed countries in this paper aims to be useful for Serbia:

- to indicate possible different solutions and good practice in rural development, which could be applied in Serbia (on the basis of principles and possible structural and institutional similarities, as well as modifications of useful experience);

3 Attempts to deal with optimal regional (rural) development are in fact between an analytical use of the governance concept and normative claims of how to steer regional development in the best manner (Böcher 2008: 377), because the analytical discussion of what is really happening in regional politics often includes normative perspective of how regional policy could be effectively and efficiently shaped.

- to *point out the advantages of the concept of regional development*, which must be incorporated into the strategy of rural development *having in mind huge regional disparities affecting the socio-economic and political context of Serbia*. The benefits of regional development must be used along with (multi)sectoral measures of rural and agricultural development, and should not be endangered by politicization in everyday disputes of political “elites” in Serbia;
- by emphasizing these questions one indicates *the need for their scientific analysis* in order to investigate the possible prerequisites for application of similar principles in rural development;
- to gradually *reconstruct the issue of rurality in Serbia, as a priority and need for overcoming the rural-urban dichotomy which implicitly includes the perspective of the traditional-modern paradigm (rurality referring to residual traditionalism which should be surpassed)*. This reconstruction might lead to rurality which is more attractive and valuable for the society in general, and makes better use of its own (rural) resources.

Conclusions: Conditions for Regional Rural Development Policies in Serbia

By means of new approaches to rural development policies at local and regional levels, the theory of rural development in developed EU countries not only transcends the issue of sectoral and (or) multi-sectoral measures, the issue of territoriality and the role of local communities in rural development, but it strongly emphasizes the new concept of horizontal and vertical integration within the local community, its formal and informal institutions and structures, and integration with external regional, national and other factors, as well as institutions and structures. Very often these ideas are summarized in the concept of local/regional governance. To what extent such integrations are really possible depends on many factors (which always have to be considered in Serbia and countries with similar problems in the national development context) such as:

- the willingness and capacity of a society for a kind of (democratic) decentralization (global/national context);
- the development of national economy, social and political context, the level of general (under)development as a macro framework of the development processes;
- the inherited institutional architecture and the historical, political and cultural (local-regional) context, the existence of mezzo-level administrative structures (for example, development of regional institutions), readiness (knowledge) and (institutional) ability of local (self-)government to effectively perform its functions (the existence of all necessary elements to constitute *governance* in theory);
- the motivation and existence of real options (permanently “open” channels of communication) for the true (democratic) participation of the rural population, *i.e.*, the willingness of local governments (elected political leaders and (or) traditional elites) to assume the (political) accountability for decentralized management and coordination of complex interactions with many relevant actors and institutions for the general sake,

and not their own narrow political interests and calculations;

- the strength of local and regional economies to fund development programs and projects which are relatively independent of financial transactions from the national (global) level (sustainability in terms of degradation of dependency syndrome from the government, investment of their own efforts to reduce poverty and boost socio-economic vitality of local communities in partnership with many other economic actors - businesses, other local governments, various funds and projects of cooperation and how etc);
- the sustainability of development processes independent of changing local, regional and (or) national political structures, as well as long-term and strategic approach to planning (regional) rural development.

The regional perspective of rural development could promote the awareness and need for different forms and types of rural-urban links and qualitatively different integrations, and thus the development of rural areas in Serbia. At the moment, it is very hard to discuss the implications of regional rural development policies in Serbia due to the fact that Serbia is (still) a strongly centralised and politicized society with almost non-existent effects of regional development policies and strategies, and modest effects of local and regional initiatives. We consider that efforts should be made in order to empower local governments (municipalities) in Serbia and crucial steps forward in development might be enabled by effective local governance and integration of their (development) initiatives into regional development actions. This is important due to the fact that the development of many municipalities and regions in Serbia depends on historical, socio-economic and cultural characteristics, and that the level of regional disparities among municipalities (and the regions) in Serbia is very high. In that sense, we consider that the future progress in regional (rural) development might be identified and monitored primarily on that level. However, it is utterly important that this development occurs in accordance with heterogeneous characteristics and resources of different municipalities and regions (local people, culture, food, history, landscapes, nature and biodiversity, alternative types of energy...), which centralized policies mostly fail to recognise and use in an appropriate manner. Also, regional (rural) development must represent simultaneous infrastructural, economic, social and political integration (inclusion) of rural areas, their population and economy into global society. In that sense, it is crucial to deal with the reconstruction of rurality which could consequently lead to perception of rural as more attractive, more valuable for society in general, and making better use of existing rural resources.

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TERITORIJALNI PRISTUP U REGIONALNOM RURALNOM RAZVOJU

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Rezime

U radu se daje prikaz nekih od osnovnih principa teritorijalnog pristupa u regionalnom ruralnom razvoju. Kao primer ovog pristupa analizirane su pojedine osobine LIDER inicijative i, u tom kontekstu, identifikovani su socijalni kontekst i faktori koji mogu da imaju uticaja na primenu ovih osobina u regionalnom ruralnom razvoju. U radu se zaključuje o potrebi za diferenciranim ruralnim politikama i preduslovima za implementaciju teritorijalnog pristupa u ruralnom razvoju, kao i u vezi sa postojećim resursima ruralnih područja i potrebi percepcije ruralnih područja kao (vrednog) resursa (a ne kao problema), naročito u kontekstu procesa ruralnog razvoja u Srbiji.

Ključne reči: regionalni ruralni razvoj, teritorijalne politike ruralnog razvoja, LIDER inicijativa

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