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The promotion of the regional convergence – the modernization of the scientific potential in the field of rural development

Abstract: *A scientific approach referring to the research network development with the following objectives:*

- *improvement of the degree of integration/involvement of the research-development-innovation (RDI) units in Romania with concerns in the field of rural development into the European research programs on this theme;*
- *the transfer of knowledge resulting from the European scientific community, specialized in the rural development problems, to the scientific community in Romania;*
- *the knowledge transfer will aim at the development, in cooperation with the European partners, of some common projects under the future EU Framework Program 7.*

Keywords: *rural player, institutional player, rational option*

The project „The promotion of the regional convergence – the modernization of the scientific potential in the field of rural development” proposes:

- improvement of the degree of integration/involvement of the CDI units in Romania with concerns in the field of rural development in the European research programmes regarding this theme;
- the transfer of knowledge resulted from the European scientific community, specialized in the problems of the rural development towards the scientific community in Romania;
- the knowledge transfer will have as a goal the elaboration, in cooperation with the European partners, of some common projects to the future Framework Programme 7 of the EU.

Project argumentation:

A. We have a rural player with the following socio-economics characteristics:

- The rural population in Romania decreased by about 900 thousand people in the period 1990–2006, reaching 44.8% of total population; 47.2% of the total

population lives in predominantly rural regions, while 42.7% in significantly rural regions. The *rural demographic ageing* process has a negative influence, as on hand it implies the economic impossibility to buy land, and on the other hand, the psychological barrier to sell land; it involves a retained attitude in relation to the banks, to financial bureaucracy and low information levels; it also involves the formulation of short-time projects rather than medium or long-term projects.

- The low educational level (general and specialized education) is strongly reflected in the structures of rural employed population. The people who graduated primary or secondary school account for 56% of the total population employed in rural areas; this adds to a precarious training of people in farming activities.
- The rural occupational structures tend towards “*mono*” activity. The World Bank studies consider that about 80% of the investigated rural population is employed in farming activities, which means low and unreliable incomes in Romania’s conditions. *The underemployment*, as an intense phenomenon in rural areas, negatively impacts the living standard and inhibits any type of behaviour favourable to land market; the “underemployment rate” is high among the young population (15–24 years), which represents a most serious phenomenon. The high share of the “*people employed on a part-time basis*” in the rural areas (88.0%), most frequent in the case of women (55%), adversely impacts the rural household income, resulting in the “subsistence strategy” option.
- The empirical studies identified a convergence type generated by the community participatory forms, as a social phenomenon with a diverse manifestation in the rural areas. The main element that can trigger the rural participatory phenomenon is information: “The nutrients for the individuals involved in participatory programs can be conceived as information referring to plans, policies, directions or ideas, etc... if Kauffman’s study is a reasonable guide, it can be stated that “information equity” for all the players is not an optimum framework for participation. It can be rather stated that the “information inequity” is a precondition for the implementation of certain adequate participatory programs (Randell, M., 2002: 147–148). The social convergence area is defined by the nature and quality of information required by the rural players. The analysis of sociologic case collections makes it possible to evaluate the social impact of knowledge and information dissemination at the social player level:
 - change of attitude and behaviour from communication to adoption of technologies,
 - modification of social community values.

The knowledge and information dissemination model has four distinct stages in the rural community case:

- *knowledge/information-* the farmer is subject to an information campaign on the existence of a certain innovation and gets familiar with the way in which this operates;

- *persuasion* – the farmer is building up favourable/unfavourable attitude with regard to innovation;
- *decision* – the farmer participates to actions that force him to make a decision regarding innovation adoption or rejection;
- *confirmation* – the farmer looks for reconfirmation of decisions made with regard to innovation (classical model conceived by Rogers and Shoemaker).

The essential conditions of the information dissemination process are in a logical order: precursory elements referring to local cultural models, to innovation needs, to information-seeking behaviours, the information dissemination process and the consequences/effects or impact. The process *per se* is a learning process, as a result of information, and implies the change of attitude and of the production-related, social behaviour. The knowledge, information, persuasion and implementation are phenomena taking place in this order, even though it is not obligatory that all these are present. The stage of consequences or impact is always investigated on a separate basis, in order to understand the evolution following the acquisition of new knowledge, that will be applied or not, in other words the innovation will be used or abandoned. This model admits the hypothesis that the first informed people may not be always the opinion leaders, those with the largest persuasion area in rural communities. The hypothesis can be completed with the following: owing to the specificity of rural communities, the persuasion and information type under the form of written materials should be completed with practical examples, with demonstration plots that under this rationale represent the material continuation of the information process. We should also take into consideration the sociologic finding according to which the less intense social relations are most frequent among the people who are “one step ahead the society”, and not among the people “lagging behind the society”.

During the information stage, the characteristics of those people are important who are promoting “the new idea” which transmits the innovation; in the acquired information materialization stage, the social characteristics of those people are mostly important who began to adopt the innovation.

The knowledge and information dissemination impact meant:

- emergence of farms with new activities – snails and silk worms production: “...I began the sericulture activity following the brochures... it would be a good idea to present more economic calculations...” (farmer, Buzau county, survey conducted in 2005);
- development of crop and livestock commercial farms: “I began to buy cattle, I started from 5 and now I have 45, from what I read about sheep I started to buy sheep, I have 250 now... yet I have not seen any leaflet on electric fences or about water feeders in the field or pasture” (farmer, Bistrita-Nasaud county, 2005 survey);
- the formal, institutional behaviours were multiplied;
- the information needs were multiplied and diversified: „*Information helped me to get a credit from the bank.*” (farmer, Ilfov county, 2005 survey).

The information process is not a segmented process, it rather develops depending on the rural community characteristics, on the innovation adoption specificity. The farmers consider that in order to be relevant and true, the information should take place in certain conditions:

1. Information dissemination should take into consideration the agricultural specificity of the zone: “*We want zone-specific leaflets*” (farmer, Calarasi county, survey conducted in 2005), “*I would like leaflets on mountain grazing and pasture maintenance*” (farmer, Covasna county, 2005 survey);
2. Dissemination through modern methods “*film strips, people must also see things, reading is not enough*” (farmer, Mures county, 2005 survey); “*use of the Internet*” (farmer, Ilfov county, 2005 survey);
3. Conjugated dissemination – the same information type should be disseminated through several channels.

The analyses by sociologic collections reveal a strong impact of the information process; a change in attitude and behaviour became manifest, as the information beneficiaries became more exigent, began to ask for information multiplication or other information types, to modify their technological or organizational practices.

The knowledge and information process should take place depending on the following requirements:

- True identification of the farmers’ information needs, finding out those information that are truly necessary. It is quite obvious that the information type is that derived from the „top-bottom development” model where the information contents and format are designed by factors outside the rural community. The alternative use of modernization and development models is necessary. Under the participatory development pattern the information should be asked for and not merely delivered, regardless of farmers’ requirements / expectations.
- Defining the target group not as a social aggregate, but rather as a sociologic entity defined by certain characteristics. As the information is addressed to farmers, and not to a “generic farmers” it should be conceived, designed, edited and transmitted only in conformity with certain beneficiaries’ characteristics.
- A multiple information should take place, so as to ensure a visible impact.

B. We have an institutional player with the following characteristics:

- Formal,
- Many institutions – confusion of roles, resulting in institutional disorder,
- In an early empowerment stage, as the formal structure is suffocated by the informal structure.

The ***local power*** is still the prisoner of party political options, and it is dominated by the influence of certain groups of economic interests; on the other

hand, a typical transition phenomenon is represented by the “public involvement discordance” syndrome, which appears in the local power involvement in the approach to public problems. The main effects of the “public involvement discordance” syndrome are the following: delay in the establishment of the new ownership forms, maintaining the community vulnerability, diminution of leaders credibility (mayor, association head, priest) and of the institutional authority, diminution of institutional cohesion, fragmentation of local administration activities (Şandor, D., 1999:679–680). The case studies (carried out in the last four years) revealed the impossibility of authorities to help, to reorient the rural players in establishing their own institutions by which they can help themselves; these authorities are not able to manage endogenous development programs. It should be mentioned that these statements are based only on case studies conducted mainly in the “rural poverty bags”, in communes located in the development regions South and South-East. The non-involvement of decision-makers resulted in an increase of “individualism” and a “social lethargy” of the entire rural community. The cohesion, community solidarity forms, in the absence of a catalyst, of a social coagulation pole, tend to get annihilated and be replaced by an “egocentrism” which is incompatible with the community modernization norms, yet specific to a traditional rural society.

There are two dimensions circumscribing concrete rural development and modernization patterns: the central and local power system and the non-governmental organizations. The central power should provide incentives for actions at all levels and political support for their achievement. This can be achieved in the conditions where complex and functional relations are in place between the government, public agencies and communities based upon an efficient information system that should ensure an optimum information flow and to stimulate the development actions, to provide information on the economic multiplication possibilities, to increase aspirations and stimulate the demand. In the absence of an administrative entity that should operate only for the benefit of the rural areas, the rural problem institutionalization is dissipated into sequential and sub-sequential objectives. The modernization and rural development requirements are dissipated, being absorbed by multiple forms of governmental action, the strategies are fragmented depending on the ministerial competence area, which determines a weakening of objectives and their reaching below the level of expectations. In parallel with this process, the diminution of trust in the government’s activity takes place. In general, the trust/lack of trust level is determined by the satisfaction level, which in its turn depends on the educational level, the income level and the orientation toward power: those people are more satisfied with government’s activity which have a lower educational level, lower incomes but more useful relations, power – oriented and with positive appreciation of their living standard.

C. The contact between the two – *rural player and institutional player* – results in “*selective deafness*” because:

- The rural actor is under the “pressure” of certain economic, financial problems and has an “appetite for information”.
- The institutional player filters the information, knowledge and economic support in relation to:
 - The statistical data, non differentiated by local particularities,
 - Political pressures,
 - Bureaucratic pressures from the part of EU.

In this case, the correct response is based on the *rational option theory*:

- ***Institutional type of judgment,***
- ***Designing a co-operation based network.***

Network of this project trying:

- ***To think:*** through the complex interdependency of multiple direct or indirect exchanges of ideas, values, experience, competence; exchanges between the IAE partners, the Institute from Iasi and the Research Center from the Academy of Economic Sciences.
- ***To build up:*** collection of data, studies, style of thinking as a collective product of partners
- ***To survive:***
 - ***From the social point of view*** through the institutionalization of relations with the European networks, e.g. ERDN.
 - ***From the institutional economy point of view*** through the institutional information management.

A successful approach would mean:

- For the partners – an opportunity for intellectual identity,
- For the rural players – support to empowerment,
- For the institutional players – an alternative, a functional pattern in which the “selective deafness” can be attenuated.

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