

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF RURAL AREA BY THE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION - CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract**

*The analysis of the rural communities is presented in terms of evolution of the social, historical, economic, organizational and cultural components. Over the time, these evolutions made rural development a growing political concern aimed to restore the connections between agriculture and nature, to maintain and to keep a clean environment to promote the population stabilization in these areas, with complex implications on the overall state of the rural communities. The analysis of these areas allowed the identification of the development stage and of the resources needed to ensure sustainable development. Based on these considerations, the case study in Borcea commune, Calarasi county, focuses on the evolution during the last 20 years, due to the influence of the economic, social and political factors, as well as on new directions for sustainable rural development. Quantitative on site research was achieved based on a semi-standardized questionnaire, applied face to face, at the respondents home and by interviewing the administrative responsibilities factors, namely: local councilors; local main stakeholders (doctors, teachers, priests, representatives of culture, education, social care, police institutions); companies. Based on this data, analysis was made on areas of interest, being used in elaborating the strategy for economic and social development, at local level, with the participation of the members of the respective community, in order to establish a strategic orientation that integrates in the Development Strategy at regional level.*

*Key words:* community, economic and social development, rural area, strategy

### **INTRODUCTION**

Romania rural development strategy for the next years is part of the reform and development that EU proposes for Europe strategy 2020 [3].

Following the lines of this ambitious strategy, NRDP aims to meet the overall objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy related to food security, sustainable management of natural resources and balanced territorial development and the specific objectives of the rural development. Thus, addressing in a strategic manner all the six priorities of rural development NRDP aims to support in a sustainable and intelligent manner the economic and social development of the rural areas in Romania [1, 5].

Considering the results obtained following the interpretation of the questionnaires SWOT analysis was made, for each area of interest regarding the proposed study, based on which action directions were identified for business development; human resource development;

local public administration development and social services development [8, 10].

In the case study on the perception of the community members on the social and economic development in Borcea commune, the starting point in the elaboration of the development strategy was the analysis of the current social, economic and institutional situation and the evolution of these aspects over the past 20 years [7].

This commune benefited and benefits at present by favorable conditions for the economic development and increase the living standards of the population due to the following factors: the existence of some diversified natural resources (climate and fertile soils favorable to agriculture: fishery resources, forestry); high degree of accessible road (DN 3B Călărași-Fetești near Soarelui Highway); highly skilled and highly adaptable workforce; relatively diversified socio-economic profile; high degree of accessibility to other transport systems; various social, cultural, educational services, etc [6].

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the analysis of social and economic development of Borcea commune, Călărași county, 3 specific research methods were used: dynamic, deductive and quantitative economic analysis; SWOT analysis; economic survey or participative research that involve collecting information from the territory using as research techniques “the questionnaire” and “the interview”.

We analyzed the documents provided by the town hall, the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development in order to achieve the diagnostic analysis of the commune, which included: data about the commune location about its physical and geographical features; statistics and censuses carried out at local level in the fields: demography, employment, economic sector, education and culture, environment protection; specific statistics on environment and agriculture, made by the Institute for Life Quality Research under the project “Pollution control in agriculture”; General Urban Plan (GUP).

The quantitative on site research was made during November-December 2015, based on semi-standardized questionnaire, applied face to face, to the respondents domicile.

The research recorded the opinions and attitudes of the population in Borcea commune, Călărași County, regarding: assessment of living standard, local public services; trust in institutions and citizen participation; perception of change and development potential of the area; prioritization of the development actions of the commune; involvement in implementing rural development programs in the community.

The questionnaire comprising 11 questions was applied to a total of 93 respondents in the commune. The sample was selected with a statistic sampling step based on electoral lists and on the Agricultural Registry from the local council in order to provide a representative sample in terms of age groups and income. [11].

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Borcea commune is situated in the South-East part of the Romanian Plain, in South Baragan

Plain, on the left bank of Borcea Branch. It was created following the administrative and territorial re-organization of Romania in 1968 [2].

Borcea commune centre is situated on the left bank of the Danube branch: Borcea branch. The commune is located 14 km from Fetesti town and 37 km from Calarasi municipality; it has a total surface of 39,422 ha of which inside land: 585 ha and outside land: 38,837 ha, of which, arable land 130,499 ha (Table 1.).

Table 1. Land structure of Borcea commune, on use categories, in 2014

No crt.	Category	Surface (ha)	Percent(%)
1	Arable land	30,499	77.10%
2	Forests	3,204	8%
3	Roads	455	1.85%
4	Constructions	128	0,3%
5	Degraded lands	325	0.5%
6	Water and ponds	3,607	9.13%
7	Pasture	1,204	3.12%

Source: Fiche of Borcea locality

In Borcea commune, over 200 companies are registered, which have as activity object trade of food and non-food products to the population, 32 agricultural companies, of which three are former IAS which operates more than 8,000 ha of arable land [2].

Besides all these companies there are in the commune: a travel agency S.C. BORCEA S.A. dating from 1991 and it has 45 subordinate employees; a small textile factory, in the Cultural Hall in Pietroiu village, leased for 10 years with 35 women employees; a bread factory where 20 people work; a beauty salon with 3 employees; bakery; 2 slaughterhouses; can factory; 3 units of cereal processing (oil factories, bakeries).

In the locality there are at present 60 shops and 14 service providing units.

According to the census made in 2011, Borcea commune population is of 7,986 inhabitants, decreasing compared to the previous census in 2002, when there were 9,694 inhabitants. From the present population (8,777 inhabitants) most citizens are Romanian orthodox (Table 2 ).

The lands of great quality and crops are the main resources of Borcea commune, the most common crops being wheat, maize, potatoes,

oilseeds and vegetables. Vast crops of sunflower and rapeseed enable the development of beekeeping [7].

Table 2. Ethnical structure of Borcea commune

Total population	UM	Total	Men	Women
Borcea commune	Nr %	8777 100	4257 49,3%	4520 50,7%
Romanian	Nr %	8555 97,47%	4237 49,82%	4318 50,18%
Lipoven	Nr %	33 0,37%	13 0,11%	20 0,26%
Hungarian	Nr %	13 0,15%	9 0,09%	4 0,06%
Rroma	Nr %	170 2,01%	86 1,15%	90 0,86%

Source: Fiche of Borcea locality

The commune has infrastructure in order to provide educational services to the population. (Table 3).

Table 3. Educational infrastructure, in 2015, in Borcea commune

Education units	Teachers	Pupils
Kindergarten no. 1	4	70
Kindergarten no. 2	3	69
Kindergarten no. 3	4	38
Kindergarten with extended program	2	25
School No. 1	26	380
School No. 2	21	350
School No. 3	15	200
Technological High School No.1	13	105
School of Arts and Crafts No.2	6	36

Source: Own calculation.

Water supply is made by a centralized system. The sewerage network does not exist, but it is submitted a sewerage project under the Environment Funds which has as objective to create a treatment plant and 35 km of sewerage. The project meets the needed score but the funding is pending.

At present, the medical services are provided by two individual medical offices, two pharmacies, an analysis laboratory and a veterinary unit. [8].

The structure of the interviewed population depending on the school level graduated is as follows: 11.68% of total respondents graduated secondary education; 31.48% of the total are graduates of vocational and foremen

school; those who completed only primary education 9.20%; 25.76% are high school graduates and 15% of the population completed or are in the process of completing the high level of long duration; the percent of the population who did not graduate from any school is of 6.88%.

Many tourists visit the locality, especially for hunting and fishing opportunities, but also for the opportunities provided for relaxing, walks on the water or in the surrounding forests.

In Borcea commune two parks are created, according to the European standards by the necessary utilities and facilities; sports grounds with synthetic carpet and adjustable night installation; pensions; Beach which is to be arranged; camping spaces nearby forest; restaurants with traditional food; disco, bars and terraces [9].

Starting from the social aspects of the commune, one of the questions addressed to the respondents was referring to the assessment of the living conditions (Figure 1), where respondents appreciated that 41% are not too satisfied; 26% quite satisfied; 18% dissatisfied; 15% very satisfied.

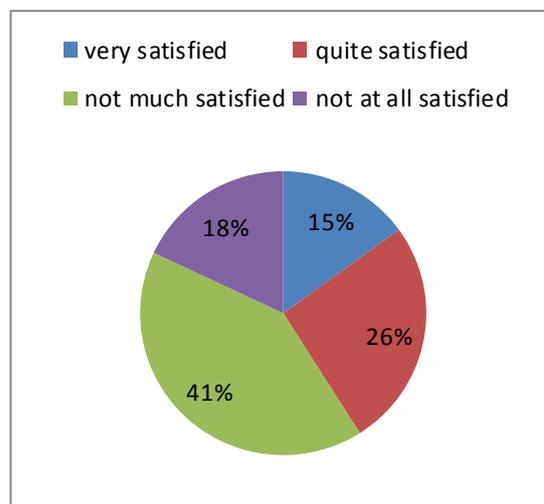


Fig. 1. Appreciation of the living standard

From the survey carried out it resulted that the inhabitants of Borcea commune are totally dissatisfied that they do not have sewerage and that some roads in the commune have not been rehabilitated yet.

Another question referred to the migration of the young people to find a job. At this question (Figure 2), a percent of 42%

responded that they leave the country, 39% leave for town and 12% stay in the commune.

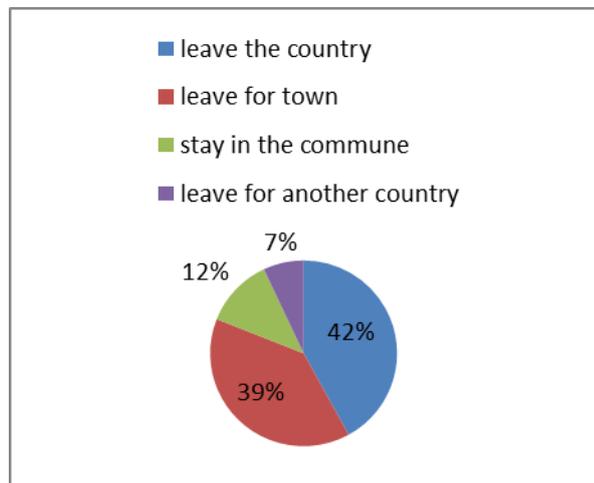


Fig. 2. Orientation of young people to profession

From the total of respondents in Borcea commune, even they live in the rural area, 35% of the respondents do not have land anymore, 25% decided it is more profitable to lease the land and only 13% are owners and they work their land (Figure 3).

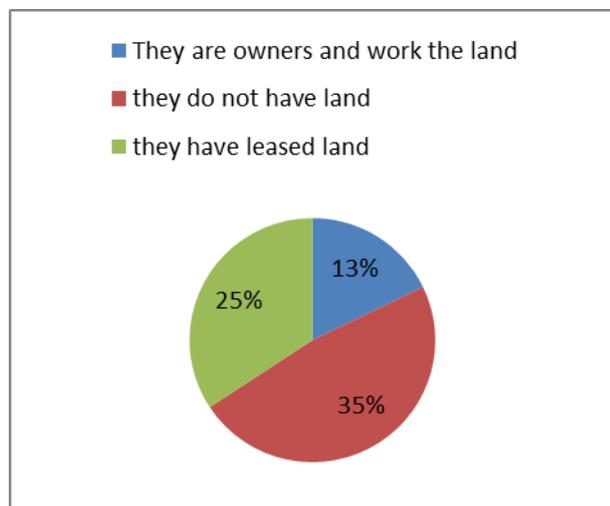


Fig. 3. Respondents vision on land use

Referring to the development priorities of the commune, 22% of the respondents believe that water and sewerage should be prioritized in the future projects of the local council, creating jobs and connecting to the gas network with an equal percent of the respondents, 20% (Fig. 3).

When asked, however, whether and how they would contribute to the implementation of projects that contribute to solve the problems

that they consider priority, 44% of the respondents are willing to contribute with work to achieve a community project, 24% would participate with work and money and 15% would support with money such a project (Fig. 4).

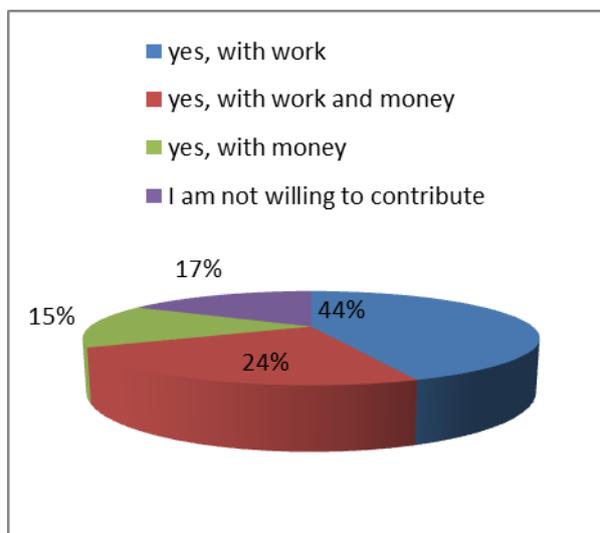


Fig. 4. Way to support the priority projects of the commune

The vision of the citizens of Borcea commune is in the spirit of developing the area from economic and social point of view, through a better use of local resources, attracting investments and investors, creating/rehabilitating the infrastructure of urban type and valuing the geographical position, with full respect for environment.

Both the Local Development Strategy, and the institutional mechanisms involved in the implementation process must take into account the interests of the community, which were expressed by the survey.

## CONCLUSIONS

After questioning 93 persons in Borcea commune and following the discussions with the community leaders, the following suggestions of the inhabitants result:

**Regarding the agriculture:** creation of some livestock farms by accessing European funds; attracting investors to the area; better organized exploitation of the fisheries potential of the area; achievement of ecologic agricultural products; support the young

farmers in developing activities and services in agriculture; creation of some associations of the agricultural producers; creation of some processing units of agricultural products; achievement of some investments for green energy production, the area having wind and solar potential.

**Local services:** Accessing government programs to encourage local initiatives; Development and diversification of social services provided, based on identified needs and available resources; Use of financial resources available under EU programs; Civil society development.

The orientation of the companies existing in the commune towards diversification of products and services; Involving the local authorities in solving the social problems of the community; Informing the citizens about the legislation on environment rules; The establishment of micro-units for processing resources and non-agricultural products existing in the commune; Creating jobs for active population existing in the commune; Changing the citizens mentality towards retraining; Increasing the training level of the population through the implementation of the program “The Second Chance” in the rural area, too.

**Sustainable tourist development:** Establishment of some agrotourist pensions with a focus on developing the equestrian tourism under Measure 313, Priority Axis 5, Arrangement of tourist activities; Organization and promotion of activities in sportive fishery sector.

Such a strategy would meet the main problems of Borcea commune, namely poor development of communication infrastructure and in particular the technical infrastructure, and also it would provide opportunities for access to the potential investors in the area and conditions necessary for carrying out the economic activities.

But the infrastructure does not resolve yet the depopulation problem and the lack of jobs. A solution in this regard is found in attracting investors in sectors such as ecologic agriculture, with a focus on vegetable growing and cattle breeding.

A sustainable development of the local

economy implicitly contributes to the community mobilization. Any attempt to mobilize the population fails in the absence of support, and this cannot be achieved but in a situation of economic stability.

Attracting investors through fiscal measures could be a viable solution for workforce employment and in terms of increasing the number of specialized jobs. But addressing such a strategy is risky, considering the poor state of the infrastructure. Poorly developed infrastructure is constituted as inhibiting factor for any type of activity, regardless other benefits provided to the potential investors [4].

A multilateral approach for the commune development is to achieve some investments both in infrastructure and in improving the local economy and the level of community mobilization. This strategy is ideal for the development of a commune, but some priorities must be set up depending on the commune particularities and its diagnosis.

Encouraging the economic initiatives closely follows to improve the infrastructure regarding the overall development of the commune. As local development direction, the development of the milling sector, bakery and food industry and vegetable processing, milk processing and use of animal products and farms development of young cattle breeding and fattening, are taken into consideration.

As development strategy of the local economy it is necessary to encourage the ecologic agriculture, the vegetable growing, fruit growing, processing the obtained products.

The rural area is seriously deprived by the infrastructure and institutions that facilitate social participation. Social exclusion in the European definition, means also lack of access to communication and information systems, linking individuals and between individuals and the community. In this respect topics such as banking integration (and access to credits), investments, insurances, media, telephony, cultural institutions should be addressed. In the Romanian rural area, the banking and financial infrastructure as cultural infrastructure (theaters, museums, cinema) are under-developed, the degree of

monetary integration is very low and the use of insurance instruments is also deficient. Businesses in the rural area are generally perceived by the banking system as high-risk customers and accordingly they are confronted with additional demands for guarantees and higher financial costs for loans. Also, there is a tendency to reduce the activity of the banking sector in the rural area due to low profitability [4].

A unilateral development of the commune does not offer conditions for economic stability, therefore investments are absolutely necessary both as regards agricultural activities and also to encourage initiatives in the agro-tourism sector. The priority projects will be those to increase the comfort level of the population, precisely the improvement of the transport infrastructure and technical infrastructure.

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