

IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ACCESSING ON ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The objective of the paper is to evaluate the impact of accessing the European funds on the economic and social development of Călărași county. The present analysis aims to highlight the particular aspects regarding the report between the degree of involvement in the process of accessing the European funds and the impact of this approach on the economic and social development of Călărași county. Starting from the premise that in the current programming period 2014-2020 Romania established through the Partnership Agreement assumed with the European Union, the Specific Objectives, the Priorities and the Financing Measures and related to the development needs of the communities in the county, all related to the Specific Objectives, Priorities and financing measures adopted, Călărași County Council drafted its project portfolio and priorities in accessing the European funds for the above-mentioned period. Following the evaluation of the project portfolio of Călărași County Council, it is worth noting that the institution understood that a community can develop itself much more efficiently and quickly by accessing non-reimbursable European funds, than in the absence of them. Călărași County Council put its imprint, through its projects, implemented or under implementation, on the promotion of the cultural and natural heritage and the development of the tourism infrastructure.

Key words: development, European financing, project management, objectives, strategy

INTRODUCTION

In its actions regarding the development of the county, Călărași County Council created the framework needed to encourage the local initiatives, taking into account all the communities of the county and focusing mainly on the areas that are facing the most difficulties, in order to ensure the necessary support to each community in part [3].

Through the implementation of its projects, Călărași County Council has always sought to improve the potential of all areas of the county through sustainable and balanced development, through major investments in infrastructure, in creating a solid business sector, in education, social and cultural activities, including through its involvement in job creation [9].

In its efforts, Călărași County Council aimed to encourage the continuation of the economic and social development process throughout the county and in particular to act to increase the economic and social level of the rural

communities by providing the necessary conditions for this process [10].

The regional, national and global changes and challenges that marked and influenced the development of the county from the point of view of its future progress were not omitted. In order to prevent these situations, very clear objectives and strategic directions of action were defined, which came in order to ensure the development of the county, based on a realistic investment and on protecting its identity [5].

One of the elements considered critical of the strategic planning process that led to the establishment of Călărași County Council vision was to identify opportunities to orientate the institution in the development process and on which it must direct its efforts to reach its objectives [4].

The first step, in this direction, after identifying the defining characteristics of the county, the opportunities and challenges that it has to face, was to identify the elements needed to argue and formulate the vision for the development of the county, which will lead, when

establishing the vision and implicitly, of Călărași county strategy [11].

In its forecasts, Călărași County Council, appreciated that by 2020, it can become a county with a sustainable local economy, with an emphasis on innovation, tradition and capitalization of resources, tempting for potential investors, based on an ultramodern infrastructure and a developed partnership and entrepreneurship sector [7].

In the process of attracting non-reimbursable European funds, Călărași County Council has identified those objectives that address a full area of development needs, so that their actions lead to the achievement of the targets proposed in the County Development Plan [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The objectives followed in the process of data collection were as follows: defining the vision of Călărași County Council in the process of accessing the European or national funding; the difficulties encountered and the impact on the development of the county due to the process of accessing the European or national funding; reducing the influence of risk factors on the whole community; imposing measures designed to bring added value to the projects implemented or under implementation.

In order to demonstrate the proposed objectives, the data collection activity was carried out at Călărași County Council, a public authority of county interest, which carries out activities in the field of local public administration, and which shows a special concern regarding the improvement of the living conditions of the inhabitants of the county.

After completing the data collection activity, we identified the impact of accessing the European funds on the economic and social development of the county.

For this purpose, the analysis of the current situation was used as methods, in consultation with the representatives of the institution, involved in the process of accessing the European or national funding, as well as collecting data, both meant to bring enough information to achieve the objective of the paper.

We oriented, in the data collecting process, on the programming documents related to the period 2014-2020, and implicitly, the financing programmes, the priorities and measures dedicated to the implementation of the project ideas of Călărași County Council.

The investigation methods used in the analysis process, are divided into two categories [8]: theoretical methods - consisting of studying specialized materials in the field of public administration, financing programmes from the European or national funds; practical methods - applicative - consisting of data collecting, a process that proved to be particularly important in identifying the projects and funding programmes of Călărași County Council and their impact on the economic and social development of Călărași County.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In Călărași County Development Plan, elaborated for the programming period 2014-2020, the priorities and intervention fields were identified at the level of Călărași county, in conjunction with the strategic objectives and development priorities foreseen at European level in 2020 Europe Strategy for the reference period [6].

From the information presented in Figure 1., it resulted that a special emphasis was given to the Regional Operational Programme 2014-2020 (27% of the implemented projects), through which problems related to road, health and social infrastructure were solved. In addition, following this initiative, the institution sought national funding sources (PNDL, CNI, ANL, Ministry of Tourism, representing, in total, 40% of the implemented projects).

Analyzing the situation, it is further remarked that Călărași County Council concerns were also aimed to improve the institution ability to provide transparent services, by carrying out an institutional level analysis through which vulnerabilities were identified and corrected, as well as by improving the employees' knowledge and skills, local elected officials/authorities in this area.

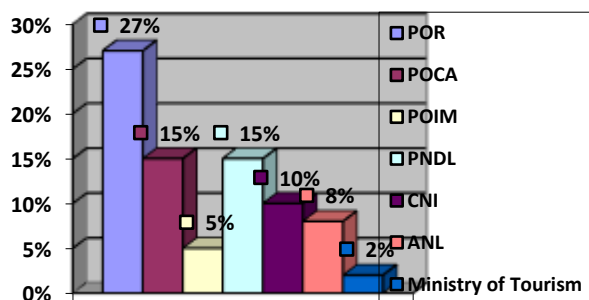


Fig. 1. Financing programmes by which funds were accessed by Călărași County Council in the period 2014-2019

Source: Own design based on [3].

Another concern of Călărași County Council aimed at the integrated solid waste management system in Călărași County by creating a selective waste collection platform in Ciocănești commune through the Large Infrastructure Operational Programme (POIM 15% of the implemented projects). The project continues, in the second phase and in the current programming period [2].

We present, below, the situation of the projects implemented or under implementation of Călărași County Council, from the point of view of the funds accessed on each Operational Programme, in the current programming period (Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

Table 1. Funds POIM 2014-2020 attracted by Calarași County Council

	European Funds - POIM 2014-2020	Project value
1.	Integrated solid waste management system in Călărași county POIM Phase II	119,364,319 lei VAT excluded

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

The analysis highlighted the fact that, Călărași County Council accessed, during 2016 - 2019, European funds in value of 533,922,384.62 lei. The value of the national funds accessed by the institution amounted 372,449,011.19 lei.

The value of the financing contracts signed by Călărași County Council, both as a partnership leader and as a partner in different projects, was 146,594,426.70 lei, approximately 31,868,353.63 €. If we refer only to the year 2018, from the point of view of the value of the financing contracts signed by Călărași County Council, we find that it amounts to a value of

255,219,865.57 lei, approximately 55,482,579.50 €, which represents a qualitative leap on accessing the European funds by the institution.

Călărași County Council focused its efforts on creating partnerships and identifying financing sources, in order to improve accessibility in the cross-border area, both by building a bridge over the Danube between Călărași and Silistra, as well as by making its connections, as well as on the creation of a suitable port infrastructure on the Danube, in order to take over the transit of goods from the rail and road transport networks.

Another priority of the county administration for the period 2014-2020 is represented by the facilitation of the quick and safe access to all the areas and localities of Călărași county, in order to increase the labor mobility and to expand the business sector.

In the period 2014-2020 the ring road was rehabilitated under the National Local Development Plan (P.N.D.L.) [4]. Corroborating the information, during the period under evaluation, the total length of the county roads rehabilitated or modernized was 92.79 Km. In parallel, Călărași County Council supported the administrative-territorial units in the county to submit projects through the National Local Development Development, a programme of national interest, which emphasized the road, sanitary, social, educational and connection infrastructure to the water network/canal.

Analyzing the situation from the point of view of the achieved objectives and referring to the total length of the roads on which road markings and signs were initially planned, to be achieved this was 650 km, of which only 122 km were achieved up to date, only one road junction being traffic lighted in Călărași municipality of which 25 provided in the county.

Another notable objective of Călărași County Council was the modernization of the railway transport infrastructure by creating the intermodal transport premises.

It was assumed that it is needed to rehabilitate the railways that cross the county, as well as those that connect the most important railway node in the area, Ciulnița and Călărași

municipality. It was desired to ensure the facilitation of access of persons and goods, from the rail system, to the naval system, by establishing a railway route to the Danube in

Călărași municipality, as well as by the rehabilitation of the railway linking Oltenița municipality to Bucharest.

Table 2. Funds POR 2014-2020 attracted by Calarasi County Council

	European funds - POR 2014-2020	Project value
1	Modernization and rehabilitation of county roads DJ 402 and DJ 302 under ROP 2014-2020, priority axis 6, Investment priority 6.1	128,868,255.92 lei
2	Modernization of county roads DJ 201B , DJ 305 route –ROP priority axis 6, investment axis 6.1 Open call for West Region and South Muntenia	133,987,301.49 lei 29,837,947 €
3	Modernization and rehabilitation of county road DJ 306 under ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 6, investment priority 6.1 – SUERD	53,815,805.32 lei, 11,699,088 €
4	Electical power rehabilitation Cinema within Călărași County Culture and Creation Center ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment priority 3.1	2,530,107.67 lei
5	Electrical power rehabilitation of Ciocănești Care and Assistance Center ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment priority 3.1	6,259,750.55 lei
6	Electrical power rehabilitation of Section of catching and dermatological diseases within Călărași County Emergency Hospital ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment priority 3.1	2,519,257.27 lei
7	Electrical power rehabilitation of Călărași Maternal Center ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment priority 3.1	2,156,082.44 lei
8	Electrical power rehabilitation of Center of Community Services for Severely Disabled Children Călărași POR 2014-2020, Axa prioritară 3, prioritatea de investiții 3.1	3,555,607.83 lei
9	Electrical power rehabilitation of Emergency Reception Center "Sfânta Maria" Călărași, ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment priority 3.1	3,586,336.39 lei
10	Increase of energy efficiency of „Dr. Pompei Samaritan” Călărași County Emergency Hospital ,ROP 2014-2020, Priority axis 3, investment axis 3.1 SUERD	10,000,000 lei
11	Electrical power rehabilitation of Nicolae Bălcescu Technological High School, Oltenița municipality, ROP – Axis 3.1 SUERD	3,122,045 lei
12	Electrical power rehabilitation of Spiru Haret Secondary School, Oltenița municipality, ROP – Axis 3.1 SUERD	3,354,810 lei
13	Electrical power rehabilitation of Normal Schedule Kindergarten no. 5, Oltenița municipality, POR – Axis 3.1 SUERD	2,551,114 lei
14	Electrical power rehabilitation of Ștefan Vodă Secondary School, Ștefan Vodă commune, ROP – Axis 3.1 SUERD	3,178,269 lei
15	Electrical power rehabilitation , Călărași County Gendarmes Inspectorate , ROP – Axis 3.1 SUERD	3,975,609 lei

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

Table 3. Funds INTERREG VA Ro-Bg 2014-2020 attracted by Calarasi County Council

	European funds - INTERREG VA Ro-Bg 2014-2020	Project value
1	Risk management and protection against floods in Călărași and Polski Trambesh cross border regions	Project total budget: 3,853,515.63 € Călărași County Council– Budget: 2,794,779.66 € (12,855,986.44 lei)
2	Improving the navigability safety on the Danube in Călărași - Silistra cross-border region	6,000,000 €
3	Development of joint tourist products and rehabilitaton of cultural heritage, project aiming the investment objective restoration of Demetriad House	Budget: 851,590.29 € Călărași County Council- Budget: 648,402.25 €
4	Improvement of risk management and partnership in Călărași - Dobrich cross border region, project aiming the modernization of joint dispatcher I.S.U - S.A.J	Călărași County Council - Budget: 313,302.81 € (1,441,192.26 lei)
5	Efficient management of emergency situations in Călărași - Veliko Tarnovo cross border region, project aiming equipment purchase for ISU Calarasi and for Calarasi Gendarmes Inspectorate	Călărași County Council - Budget: 364,024.14 € (1,674,511.04 lei)

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

Table 4. Funds POCA 2014-2020 attracted by Calarași County Council

	European funds - POCA 2014-2020	Project value
1	PRO: Performance and quality in the organizational management of Călărași County Council	494,880 lei
2	Improving the capacity of local public administration to provide services based on the principles of ethics, transparency and integrity	397,889 lei
3	Strategic planning and administrative simplification for a sustainable development of Călărași County	3,650,604.65 lei

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

Table 5. National funds attracted by Calarași County Council

	National funds	Project value
	National Local Development Plan (PNDL)	
1	Modernization of DJ 211D route Ștefan Vodă –L =24,752 km	42,082,824 lei
2	Modernization of DJ 411 Chirnoși – Radovanu – Crivăț Length : 18,09 km	24,189,953.40 lei
3	Modernization, rehabilitation of DJ 403 Length: 38,80 km	59,357,184.26 lei
4	Modernization and rehabilitation of DJ 401C and DJ 412 Length: 38,80 km	31,751,043.10 lei
5	Modernization and rehabilitation of DJ 310	46,597,744.30 lei
	National Agency for Dwellings (ANL)	
6	Service house no 1 bis, Nicolae Titulescu boulevard, Călărași municipality	5,493,112.88 lei VAT excluded
7	Dwellings for young, destined to rent to doctors, Călărași county	3,055,398.33 lei
8	Extention of B building commercial spaces PT+ works execution	1,474,925.70 lei VAT excluded
	National Company of Investments (CNI)	
9	Rehabilitation of Călărași Administrative Palace	57,347,080.75 lei, VAT excluded
10	Construction of new building of Călărași County Emergency Hospital	97,803,699.72 lei VAT excluded
11	Rehabilitation, modernization, equipment of basement of building C of „Dr. Pompei Samarian” Călărași County Emergency Hospital	1,336,210 lei
	The Ministry of Tourism	
12	Tourist development of Borcea branch-Călărași – Leisure port	99,699,688.64 lei
13	Creation of Multifunctional center in the tourist area of Călărași municipality	1,892,457.60 lei
	The Ministry of Culture	
14	Access 10 for Centenary	67,377.15 lei

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

Table 6. Private funds attracted by Calarași County Council

	Private funds - SERA Foundation	Project value
1	Creation of Center for disabled children	245,410 lei

Source: Own data of Călărași County Council [3].

Another important objective of Călărași County Council was the modernization of the naval transport infrastructure. In order to support this measure, it was sought to identify financing solutions, including by creating partnerships or attracting investors to develop industrial and commercial ports in Călărași and Oltenița municipalities, which can support the economic development of the county along the Danube river [1].

The transport infrastructure has always been a priority for Călărași County Council, on

ensuring the mobility of the labor force from the rural to the urban area.

For this category, Călărași County Council has taken steps to create bicycle paths to serve all areas of the town, by implementing the project “Promoting eco-tourism in the area of the Danube in Călărași by cycling and using non-motorized fishing boats for environment conservation”.

Through this project, the mapping and signaling of four cycling routes were organized, the cycling competition was organized, set up as an eco-tourism event, the

fishing route was established on the Danube by consulting the relevant actors and the web portal was created for the promotion of the project and the tourist area. In addition, 10 bicycles and 5 rowing boats were purchased, which were and can be made available to the tourists interested in exploring Borcea branch area, and 5 persons, from the beneficiary employees, were trained as tour guides.

Another important objective of Călărași County Council was the improvement of the critical technical-urban infrastructure for the county: public utility networks by increasing the quality of life of the inhabitants of the county. At the level of the communes in the county there have been multiple interventions aimed at modernizing and extending the public utilities.

Another important step in the actions taken by Călărași County Council for the economic and social development of the county, was the construction, modernization and equipment of the cultural infrastructure, by creating an environment favorable to the cultural development of all the communities in Călărași. Thus, the work was continued at Călărași County Library, which will provide modern reading spaces, attractive for all age categories, that meet the standards of information and communication technology development, at an alarming rate of growth, in an information society.

During the development process, Călărași County Council did not neglect the development of the tourism infrastructure, whose purpose was to attract the investments of the private sector to the tourist area, by creating an adequate infrastructure for the development of this segment.

The offer of the accommodation structures of Călărași county is undersized to its potential, meaning that, apart from Călărași town, Oltenița town and the North-West area of the county that hold a few hotels, the tourist reception capacity is lacking in the county territory.

Călărași County Council has also directed its efforts towards the development of sports and recreational infrastructure. In this regard, Ion Comșa Stadium in Călărași was modernized and allocated significant financial resources,

together with Călărași Town Hall, in order to obtain sports performances in the football area. A particularly important emphasis was placed on providing modern health services, by improving the medical services offered to the patients, by employing doctors on deficient specialties, on equipping and rehabilitations.

Also, Călărași County Council expresses concern regarding the improvement of the educational infrastructure for all the localities of the county and the increase of the quality of the educational services, supporting the territorial administrative units to solve their problems.

A special emphasis was given to the implementation of a modern waste management system, with an emphasis on selective collection and reuse of waste for increasing the energy potential.

In order to develop the environment of cross-border cooperation, Călărași County Council implemented, in partnership with the local public administration in Bulgaria, a project regarding the construction of a Business Center on the Romanian shore of the Danube.

The purpose of the collaboration was to improve the relational framework with the partners from the cross-border area by developing the business sector and promoting the domestic products and services across the border. This collaboration brought multiple benefits to both communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Like any perfect public administration, the activity of Călărași County Council can be improved throughout. A weak point of the County Council, identified in the Development Plan of Călărași County for the period 2014-2020, is the transport infrastructure that remained on the same lines, not offering the ability to provide easy access to all the inhabitants.

In addition, in Călărași municipality, the transport lines served by the operator were established from the former steel plant - the largest employer 20 years ago, crossing the town from West to East, to the second major developed area, the one of the cellulose and

paper plant, respectively the prefabricated factory.

At present, these companies significantly reduced their number of employees, finding new jobs created in the North and South - Saint Gobain, Aldis. In these conditions, seeing the increasing mobility of the labor force from the rural to the urban area, it is needed to identify new routes of public transport. Another weak point is the insufficient unuse of the opportunity to develop the local communities by adapting them to the needs of the tourist consumption market, by capitalizing and promoting the natural and cultural heritage, as a form of tourist attraction, starting from the diversification of the tourism forms and capitalizing the tourism potential of the county. This step, in parallel, requires the development and diversification of the tourism products, while increasing the quality of services. Local public authorities have made massive investments, in recent years, regarding the accessibility, as well as infrastructure of public utilities and services.

Although in recent years, Călărași county has undergone an important development regarding accessibility, as well as the infrastructure of public utilities and services, the county remains deficient on port infrastructure, connectivity infrastructure with Bulgaria over the Danube, waste and wastewater collection infrastructure. In order to eliminate these weaknesses, the institution directed its efforts towards attracting European funds through investment programmes for these areas

However, the county remains deficient regarding the port infrastructure, connectivity infrastructure with Bulgaria over the Danube, wastewater and waste collection infrastructure. In order to solve these deficiencies, Călărași County Council must focus its efforts through sustained investment programmes in these areas.

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