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**Administrative Capacity Development for the Modernisation of Rural
Communities in Romania**

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Abstract: The local public administration is one of the key social actors in the sustainable development and transformation of the community, assuming its constant adaptation to new conditions at the economic, political and social level. The present paper aims to analysis the connections between the development of administrative capacity and modernization of local communities in Romania. Assumptions main research are the need to develop the administrative capacity to support the modernization of local communities and the mutual influence between this two processes. It also takes into consideration to use the analyses for improving administrative capacity made by international bodies like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the European Commission. This paper aims to contribute to the development of literature in the field considering the specificity of the modernization process in rural communities in Central and Eastern Europe, which is based on the transformation of public administration and connecting it to the needs of citizens. The target group of readers is represented by researchers, who have the opportunity to develop new mechanisms for the improvement of the administrative capacity but also by practitioners in the field who can implement new development strategies for the local public administration. Quantitative and qualitative tools will be used for the theoretical and practical examination of the way in which Romania can develop by contributing to the general welfare of the citizens. The originality of the paper is the rationale, description and operationalize a framework of reference for highlighting the impact of modernization on local administrative capacity development. To this we add an empirical analysis conducted for a local community in Romania.

Keywords: social change; rural development; smart communities

1. Introduction

Administrative capacity development has a long history in the development aid of third world countries, it built on previous concepts starting from institutional building of the 1950s and it begins to take a macro- reform perspective in the late 1980s -1990s.

The challenges of globalization, increased mobility of people, technology, societal, demographic and climate change, are more than ever a fundamental impact on the role of the public sector and governments. These changes coupled with the importance of administrative capacity increasing require for strong and stable authorities / institutions, which are at the same time agile and flexible, and open to change. The public sector has always been under pressure to develop public services and to deliver citizen-centric service.

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Science, technology and innovative behavior constitute transformation forces for the public administration in the modernization of rural communities. The Europe 2020 Strategy aims to boost smart development by supporting sustainable investments in innovation.

At EU level, the prerequisites for the modernization of public administration and successful reform are often dealt with a great importance the concept of “administrative capacity building”.

The present paper is divided into several parts, the first part refers to the regulatory framework and the importance of administrative capacity development, the next one treats the challenges with the public administration are facing in the modernization of rural communities and in the last part there is made an empirical analysis on a local community in Romania, Ciugud village, Alba County.

2. Legal Framework and the Importance of Administrative Capacity Development in the Modernization of Rural Communities.

Although, there were noted improvements in the public administration building, it still reflects a conservative organizational culture focused on more the formal side of administration activity. The concern towards the real impact of its results on society is low, where we can add the insufficient involvement from different partners such as academia, business, relevant social partners and civil society.

Despite the pre-accession funds and later support of the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity Development, professionalization of public administration, such as the efficiency of public expenses remain important objectives for public administration in Romania.

The public administration building strategy for 2014-2020 aims to establish the general framework for public administration reform, which is accompanied by an action plan that includes both short-term goals, time horizon targeting 2016, deadline by which Romania must make changes in public administration field and also, long-term strategic objectives, which will target the 2020 time horizon, correlated time with enrolling of the Operational Programme Administrative Capacity.

Previously Romania's accession to the European Union, considerable efforts have been made to increase reforms in various fields, the public administration being in the center of this process, benefiting from significant investments designed to increase its own capacity.

The government adopted two successive strategy regarding public administration reform: the public administration reform accelerate strategy during 2001-2003 and 2004-2006, which led to the implementation of reforms regarding the public policy, decentralization and civil service.

Both of National Strategic Development of Romania and National Reform Programme took the main role to support the financial programme processes in the absence of related public administration strategy which to achieve administrative capacity development to formulate public policies and which to manage service delivery during the period 2007-2013.

During the period 2007-2013 there were 40 sectorial strategies, where we add different documents without to include in the legal framework.

To achieving the objectives from the Europe 2020 strategy, the public administration plays a fundamental role in the implementation of policies and actions which create the framework for achieving them. The approval of Regional Committee regarding the elimination of innovation disparities (2013 / C 218/03) draws attention to the need for the public sector building, and in

particular, public authorities building in promoting innovation and extending the perspective on the role that it should play in reducing disparities and increasing the accessibility and quality of services.

Through the Partnership for Open Government and National Action Plan for the period 2012-2014, the Government was committed to promote the efficient use of resources and new technologies, to improve government act and dialogue with citizens.

Increasing the efficiency of public administration activities depends on using on a large scale of information technology, both in relation with citizens / users of services and also with other public institutions.

The current structure of administrative territorial organization of Romania exists since 1968, restricting the unitary territory development and improving its potential, with consequences for national economic development.

Thus, the developing and implementing sustainable local and territorial policies is difficult because of limited administrative capacity of local authorities and either because of the lack the regional administrative level.

For modernization of local communities it is necessary to increase the quality of decision making at local public administration level, to meet the needs of local communities by introducing either the extending use of fundamental instruments for decision (decisions of deliberative and executive authorities, programs, projects, strategies) at local level: impact analysis, cost-benefit analysis. Also models of good practice are necessary for public administration, to know other levers and ways of governance in achieving the mission.

A special importance should be given to clarifying the roles and responsibilities associated with each category of staff from the public authorities and institutions, assessing their activities and finding appropriate solutions to boost the quality of work performed.

The public administration need a flexible organizational structure and internal processes to adapt to new situations.

Using the quality management, best practices and innovation are tools and practices that help to modernization of the public authorities which will bring positive effects on citizen satisfaction and modernization of rural communities on long-term.

By establishing of mechanisms for benchmarking, bench doing and bench-learning in the public administration we can compare the obtaining performances in achieving of activities, in the provision of public services, encouraging to make partnerships to identify and implement common solutions regarding the problems which they face and in finding the ways for modernization of the communities.

3. Challenges of Government on Modernizing Rural Communities

According to the Partnership Agreement proposed by Romania for the programming period 2014-2020, among the main objectives of the program it can be found the need of structural reforms for smart, sustainable growth and social and economic inclusive.

Romania continues to face enormous challenges in terms of development, the overall level of economic activity in Romania remain weak due to the considerable decrease of employment in agriculture, decrease entrepreneurial culture businesses in all regions except Bucharest-IIfov.

In Romania, there are big differences in skills, education, access to health, opportunity, these intensifying at territorial level, with pronounced variations between regions and between urban and rural areas.

In the main, poverty affects rural areas, small towns and isolated communities which they have insufficient access to services, communities that lack basic public services, such as education, culture, medical and social services. In these areas, the poverty is associated with the lack of modernization.

In the context of fiscal austerity, the public authorities services in Romania are limited to the citizen as against those citizens from the most EU countries but the big problem is inequity quality and accessibility of services to which citizens are entitled. Residents of rural areas are particularly disadvantaged because of the lack in digital skills and extension of e-services. Significant differences of capacity at local public administration level have blocked the equal absorption support for improving the administrative frame to mobilize resources and attract investments.

A problem at the public authorities' level is partial fulfillment of tasks arising from the implementation of the open administration principles. For an important change of local communities it is essential to strengthen the role that civil society, academia and other relevant social partners which should play in a modern state, to contribute consistently to the analysis, formulation of alternative policies, to support the public authorities' activities and work for the benefit of citizens. By creating various tools and mechanisms is desirable to building the capacity of these structures to promote reform measures for local level.

Among the challenges which public administration are facing it can be found the issue of well-trained human resources because it is expensive compared with the budget provided for that. In the absence of well-trained human resources, the responsiveness of public administration is diminished. Financial and human resource constraints from the local public authorities level makes it difficult to execute some basic functions for proper functioning of their specialized structure.

To meet the ambitions of economic growth reflected in the overall objective of the Partnership, Romania approach five major challenges for development: competitiveness, people and society, infrastructure, resources, administration and governance. However, the inward actions of Romania will contribute to achieving the Europe 2020 strategy.

Information and communications technology (ICT) is important for countries in process of developing because it creates new patterns of interaction, business and service delivery. By expanding access to ICTs and encouraging its use, the European Union aims to stimulate sustainable economic growth, improve service delivery and promote good governance and social responsibility.

Digital Agenda for Europe, an initiative of the Europe 2020 Strategy highlights the importance of ICT infrastructure as a means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of governance in the context of the challenges regarding the administration and governance.

Overall, the population has fairly low skills in digital area where disadvantaged groups have fewer digital skills, which are completely insufficient to constitute an effective means of inclusion and participation.

Accord with international efforts, such as those of the United Nations Organization, the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the National Strategy for promoting social responsibility during the period 2011-2016 has developed a framework to define the concept of social responsibility, recognizing that poverty reduction is a matter of ethics and responsibility.

A significant problem that must be resolved to promote social inclusion and local economic development is the infrastructure. In rural areas, local roads have a key role in providing access to national communication routes, and therefore to the main economic, social and cultural centers.

Although, the basic infrastructure in rural areas has been supported in recent years through both national funds and by EU funds, it is still underdeveloped, limiting economic growth and employment of the workforce, and affects negatively the quality of life of rural population.

Sustainable social and economic development of rural areas depends on improving rural infrastructure and basic services available. In the future, rural areas need to be placed in a competitive position for investment, while providing adequate living standards of local people in the community and adequate social services.

The negative effects are reflected in the low mobility of the workforce and therefore in the absence of exploitation, but also in the economy, by reducing access to services, high costs, however hindering competitiveness and efficient operation of industrial sector and agriculture.

Administrative capacity development is essential to develop and implement political reforms and to improve the absorption of European funds. Efforts made by the Romanian authorities to reform and modernize various aspects of public administration have been recognized in the analysis made by international bodies, including the World Bank.

The insufficient administrative and financial capacity at the center and local public administration level for the needs of diverse beneficiaries, such as the provision of public services of high quality is caused by the transfer of powers in the decentralization process (in education, health, records population, basic public services) which was conducted without a proper assessment of the capacity of local authorities.

Because of unclear decentralization, decentralized public services provided by local authorities have been underfunded in most cases, access was limited to public services both because of technical problems (low interconnection of information systems), and because of socio-economic factors.

The Operational Programme Administrative Capacity plays a special role in satisfying public administration reform for the period 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 which were taken into account various interventions.

Through the Spatial Development Strategy of Romania, developed for a time horizon of 20 years, it aims to: ensure balanced and sustainable development, increasing competitiveness in areas of development and capacity. Also, the National Strategy for Regional Development emphasizes the role of regions in promoting growth at national level. Each region has its own economic and development potential which can contribute to national economic growth.

The territory of Romania is predominantly rural (almost 90% of the area belongs to the administrative units rural), thus that financed interventions by the rural development program should ensure acceleration of restructuring and modernization of rural areas for integrated development of economically and sustainable rural areas.

Romania has the largest part of the EU population living in rural areas where the risk of extreme poverty is four times higher in rural areas compared urban areas. Romania's rural development strategy for the coming years is part of the reform and development of the EU and it proposes the Europe 2020 strategy.

Another reference document is the “National strategic framework for sustainable development of the agrifood sector and the countryside during 2014-2020-2030” which aims to establish sustainable development goals of the Romanian agri-food system and rural areas for economic recovery Romania.

4. Analysis Ciugug Commune, Alba County

As administrative unit, Ciugud is a village, with a population of almost 3000 inhabitants and is composed of six villages. It is located at a distance of about 10 km from the Alba Iulia city. Ciugud village absorbed European funds, money that contributed to community development, income representing the proceeds of the City Hall for almost a century. Apart from the investments that were made through local public administration, local citizens were involved and used their entrepreneurial spirit in opening a local business. This village is an example of how to use various measures of integrated rural development program.

Three thousand people benefit from many services, such as, sewer, water and gas, paved roads, bike trail, paved sidewalks, energy independence, children's park, free internet, well-developed industrial area, modern schools.

Also, tourism has gained importance with the opening of pensions due to infrastructure. City Hall has implemented projects on the modernization of farm roads, the road system.

Through the site of Ciugud City Hall, the citizen can access electronic services, consulting their debts and their payment, ensure transparency of decision-making acts and inform citizens about various events. To modernize community was encouraged entrepreneurship, a significant number of companies having activity in areas such as trade, light industry, services, catering, agriculture, forestry and fisheries. City Hall developed documents such as General Urban Plan, City Planning, Spatial Development Strategy and Development Strategy commune.

Ciugud joined the Convention of Mayors for local renewable energy for sustainable development. The Convention of Mayors is a type of movement that mobilizes local and regional actors around EU and achieving the objectives outlined by the European institutions as an important model of multilevel governance.

As local development priorities of the commune are: developing local infrastructure, local government modernization, development and diversification of economic activities in rural areas.

5. Conclusion

From the analysis of Ciucug village, we can draw some conclusions, that to reduce disparities persist between rural and urban areas and to create decent living conditions for the rural population is necessary to continue the renovation of villages and rural infrastructure development. To improve the living conditions have taken measures to increase the involvement of community economic and quality of basic services. At the same time, collaboration with the locals might empower them and could give rise to local action initiatives based on civic engagement and ownership of the common objectives.

Local development strategies for the medium and long term is an essential element of sustainable development in terms of sustainability of investment projects and their correlation with the national strategy.

The administrative territorial units should be encouraged to identify and exploit alternative sources of generating their own income or alternative ways of cutting budget expenditures through grant projects, different mechanisms of collaboration / partnership, calling volunteering, sponsorships etc. Also, models of good practice are needed in public administration, to know other levers and ways of governance in achieving the mission.

Financial autonomy of local authorities is a prerequisite for the provision of quality public services locally to meet the needs of citizens in their geographical area of jurisdiction. But this requires a unified approach, targeting both the legislative framework and the way in which resources are managed.

Develop the skills required of public administration modernization of rural communities is a concern at European and national level as it is the role of facilitator of socio-economic development of which depends on the evolution of Romania and the position it will take to other stakeholders globally.

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