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## Project management competencies for regional development in Romania: analysis from “Working with People” model

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### Abstract

This paper shows the skills and competences (technical, behavioural and contextual) affecting regional and rural development in Romania. The methodology used is based on the model of Working with People (WWP), which integrates elements of social learning and planning and Project management international models, which integrate competences that have an influence on regional development. WWP model is the result of experience in rural development planning from the research group GESPLAN at the Technical University of Madrid in several European contexts and emerging countries.

The results show that the main skills and competences for regional development in Rumania are focused on three components: technical-entrepreneurial, social-ethical and political-contextual. Experience lessons in the first years of the Romanian National Rural Development Network (NRDN) demonstrate the right project management approach for Regional Development, exceeding the “technical” approach of the management and emphasizing the behaviour of individuals and the contexts where they work. This new way of thinking opens up new fields of research in regional development projects planning, evaluation and management. These three dimensions are necessary for effective management and implementation of projects and programs under conditions of regional development.

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## 1. Introduction

The first models of regional development planning, presented between the decades of 1950 and 1960 promoted the technique as the solution to all problems. In these models the infallible instrument for regional development was the blue print project, based on engineering, scientific rationality, top-down approaches (Bond and Hulme, 1999), the dominance of the quantitative and a top-down planning. This "technical" approach causes a clear urban-rural dichotomy, resulting in numerous conflicts with settlements in rural areas (Chisholm, 1962), land use planning (Clark, 1982), society division (Moore, 1984). In Europe, this technical approach is reflected in national policies for regional development planning with a strong orientation towards production.

Given the failure of these regional development models, new values and trends emerged in developed societies (Cazorla et al, 2013). Since the early 90s various authors refer to the emergence of *postmodernism*, especially in relation to cultural and ideological changes in rural areas (Cloke, 1993; Halfacree, 1993; Murdoch & Pratt, 1993; Philo, 1993). In this new phase, which reflects the lack of novelty of the industrial capitalist society, society becomes "old" (Cazorla et al, 2013). Other of the values that are consolidated in post modernity, and provide a novel approach to development, is the territorial approach to planning (Friedmann & Weaver, 1981).

As it is remarked in a recent literature by (Cazorla et al, 2013), After several modifications of this instrument in 1985 and 1988, this new territorial orientation of regional development was confirmed as the main route to social inclusion and to counteract the undesirable effects of previous guidance, based on eminently functional criteria

In the absence of effective measures for rural development in the European Union (EU), new strategies arose based on the concept of "endogenous development" (Musto, 1985; Garofoli, 1992; Cazorla, et al, 2005). But endogenous development requires the creation of new local organizational structures (Bryden & Scott, 1990) to achieve local control over the development process. Within this context, in 1990 the European Initiative LEADER was created (EU, 1990) as a new experimental approach to regional and rural development. The specifics of the initiative have been described in numerous investigations (Moseley, 1995; De los Ríos-Carmenado et al, 2011), adding new elements to the regional development. Thus, the LEADER initiative has reached a level of maturity as a model for rural development (Cazorla et al., 2005), so that the learning activity of such initiative in the EU is applied in the broader context of rural development planning.

Romania as a New Member State of EU benefits 12.3 billion euros concerning the National Programme for Rural Development for 2007-2013. The axes and the priorities of rural development during 2007-2013 are: Priority AXIS 1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, (sectorial measures); Priority AXIS 2: Land management, (mixed measures); Priority AXIS 3: Diversification of rural economy and the quality of life in rural areas, (territorial measures); Priority AXIS 4 (LEADER): building local capacity, promoting private-public partnership, promoting cooperation and innovation; improving local governance.

As to project management, the Romanian National Rural Development Network (NRDN) is a very complex social project that aims to rural development. The NRDN general objective is to implement a new rural development management approach based on social learning to enhance the implementation of the National Rural Development Program. The NRDN has to enlist the energy of all actors in the rural development process, and to promote an effective flow of information, exchange of ideas and good practices, and sustains cooperation organizations and institutions which are involved in rural development (NRDN, 2012).

Working with People (WPP) is a concept which synthesizes the evolution of the 'modern project'. It proposes a new project management approach for regional development in post-modernity in rural areas (Cazorla and De los Ríos 2013). Key to the WPP conceptual framework is 'planning as social learning' and a 'new postmodern sensibility' (Cazorla et al. 2005, De los Ríos et al. 2011, Cazorla et al. 2013). The name Working With People was chosen to convey the need to overcome the traditional technical-economic vision of project management for regional development, and the need to focus on individuals' behaviour and the context.

As (Cazorla et al 2013) argues, within the WPP model project management approach for regional development results from the balance between three dimensions of competences: technical, behavioural and contextual. The aim of this management approach for regional development is to achieve a balanced role of actors and an empowerment in the four areas of a social relationship system: political, public, private and social. In its application in the framework of rural development project, the WPP model builds on the following principles and values: a) respect

for and primacy of the people, b) guarantee social well-being and sustainable development, c) bottom-up and multidisciplinary approach, d) Endogenous and integrated approach.(Cazorla et al 2013).

Building on these principles, the WWP model proposes to redefine regional development along three main components: technical-entrepreneurial,ethical-social and political-contextual.The threementioned components interacting through social learning processes. These three components include the four fields of a social-relationship system as defined by Friedmann (1992): political field, public administration field, private and entrepreneurial field, and finally the civil society field. The apparent simplicity of WWP involves a large social complexity (De los Ríos et al, 2013a) given the richness of the relationships and lessons that occur between the three components of the model (Cazorla et al, 2013).

Given the framework described above, the aim of this paper is to identify which skills and competences, according to the WWP dimensions, are acknowledged by the Experts of the NRDN as key competences for the rural development actors in Romania.

## 2. Materials and methods

The results of this research are based on a methodology that incorporates two main information sources: collection and review of secondary data on the concept described above and empirical information obtained from the experience lessons in the first years of the Romanian National Rural Development Network (NRDN), implemented in accordance with the planning model "Working with People". This concept has been applied in recent years in several experiences in project management for regional development.(Cazorla and De los Rios 2001; Cazorla et al, 2005; Cazorla et al., 2010; Cazorla and De los Rios, 2012; De los Ríos et al, 2011).

Between the activities implemented by NSU to spur the NRDN, the main methods of applying the model «Working with People» and for the social learning processes are: the «Thematic Working Groups» the «Experts Working Groups»and the «LEADER Working Group».For gathering and systematization of specialized information and experience on the skills that a promoter of rural development in Romania should have used two participatory tools that are complementary: empowerment assessment and focus group (Krueger, 1998).

During the period March and July 2012, six focus groups were conducted with a total participation of 20 stakeholders at each. The participants of the focus group were: public authorities, universities and research institutes, local action groups, professional associations, socioeconomic organizations, actors from agriculture, forestry and agribusiness and other relevant institutions and organizations active in rural areas. Because of their relevance for the study all LAGs at the Romania regions and all members of the Thematic Working Group were invited to participate (De los Ríos et al, 2013b).

The goal of the FG was to address stakeholders' assessment on the ability to apply knowledge and skills as well as personal attributes that a promoter of rural development should have. The FG has been designed in accordance with international standards and considering the elements of competences for professional projects managers described by IPMA (IPMA, 2010).

To prepare and then analyze the data was used a participatory model (Krueger, 1998):

- (a) sequencing questions to enable those present to understand the purpose of research and to express opinions,
- (b) note taking by an assistant moderator,
- (c) each new theme has been highlighted,
- (d)evaluating each highlighted ideas on independent expertise of each member, using a qualitative scale; (e) debriefing between the assistant moderator and moderator and
- (f) exchange of ideas, the conclusions in the study team members.

The themes answer fit into clusters (Krueger, 1998), according to the dimensions of the model WWP–Technical-entrepreneurial, Ethical - social, and Political-contextual (Cazorla and De los Ríos, 2012).Clustering helps to order the diverse themes offered by the participants, as is the overlapping of different participants' contributions (Miles & Huberman, (1994).The many examples provided by experts are one of the benefits of teamwork, using focus group method. Opinions' confidentiality is assured for all the participants at all FG. The board approved the conclusions and each expert gave his consent form.

### 3. Results and discussion

Competence indicates sufficiency of knowledge and skills, and where relevant, personal attributes that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations (IPMA, 2010). When assessing the knowledge, skills and attributes that an actor of rural development should have, Experts of the NRDR identify 22 different elements of competence. Priority is given to behavioral competences that have more than 50 per cent of the importance regarding both, the number of issues (13) and the weight of the assessment (51%). On the contrary, the weight of technical competences is much smaller (14%) and includes only 3 elements. Contextual competences are in the middle deserving 35 per cent of the relevance and including 6 elements. Table 1 presents the results of the assessment of skills for the different contexts (Political administration, Public administration, Private Field and entrepreneurial and non-economic Civil Society field) according to the model WWP for Romania.

Table 1: The competence assessment process

Competence Element	Share Assessment	Component dimension
Team work	12,5	Ethical-Social
Negotiation	11,2	Ethical-Social
Leadership	6,7	Ethical-Social
Communication	6,3	Ethical-Social
Efficiency	3,8	Ethical-Social
Creativity	2	Ethical-Social
Values appreciation	2	Ethical-Social
Consultation	1,6	Ethical-Social
Ethics	1,6	Ethical-Social
Reliability	1,6	Ethical-Social
Openness	1,1	Ethical-Social
Efficacy	0,4	Ethical-Social
Engagement and motivation	0,2	Ethical-Social
Finance	8,3	Political-Contextual
Program/projects implementation	7,1	Political-Contextual
Legal	6	Political-Contextual
Program orientation	5,4	Political-Contextual
Permanent organization	5,4	Political-Contextual
Systems, products and technologies	2,7	Political-Contextual
Information and documentation	5,8	Technical-entrepreneurial
Resources	5,4	Technical-entrepreneurial
Interested parties	3,1	Technical-entrepreneurial

#### 3.1. Behavioral competencies for regional development

As a general component of human behavior, the ethical and social component covers a whole range of the attitudes and values of people in the action of managing a project for Regional Development. The dimension of social complexity began to be addressed in project management —science, engineering and technology were combined with society, economy and culture — emphasized the importance of this social complexity (Koerner and

Klein, 2008; Yongkui and Yujie, 2009) and show that projects fail due to factors related to people rather than technical aspects. The social values of the agents and actors involved in development constitute a complex factor that affects project management (Crawford, 2006; De los Ríos et al 2013). In rural development projects, this social dimension is basic and its neglect has been demonstrated in numerous researches (Chambers, 1997; Cazorla and De los Ríos, 2012) to be the main cause of project failure. This dimension of complexity is related to the ethical-social WWP component, including attitudes, behaviors and values of people that relate to each other to promote, manage or direct projects (Cazorla et al, 2013).

This dimension is therefore the basis of the social system surrounding the development project and lays the "foundations" for the people come to work together, with commitment, confidence and personal freedom. In this dimension, behavioral skills are integrated with ethics and values as the most suitable elements to overcome potential moral conflicts in relation to the parties involved in the project (IPMA, 2010). The new project management tendencies point towards an acceleration and important changes in the ways of learning, towards processes based on action – learning by doing– as well as competence-based learning (De los Ríos et al. 2010) in the training of values and abilities. This approach to rural development enables us to consider questions of how knowledge can be better connected to action. In WWP – in the same way as the European rural development LEADER initiative – the innovation is essentially defined as a process (Cazorla et al, 2013), and is mainly obtained from the local knowledge, which is as appropriate for the action as the knowledge obtained from the professionals and the external input.

In the same way, by accepting and encouraging ‘intangible’ investments, this project management approach helps to reinforce the social, cultural and environmental sectors, and to promote a new understanding of rural development, which has as main aim to know and observe the realities. This is done based on a respect towards the others (Cazorla et al. 2001), on the appreciation of their values, on the ability to understand their point of view. These aspects are also a path for a new understanding of prosperity.

Regarding this component two elements focused on improving training of human resources are identified as the most relevant skills by the Experts during the participatory process: *team work* (12.5%) and *negotiation* (11.2%). An important aspect of the Local Action Group’s social capital is the interaction with the group’s partners and members, and the need for creativity and leadership (Roxana, 2013).

The work of the LAGs is rural development on the basis of a WWP cooperation model, which is at the same time old and something quite new. People are working together for the common wellbeing. Successful teamwork requires that everyone plays honestly according to the agreed rules. The contribution of different players is valuable, and there is a positive atmosphere in a team that supports everyone’s development and promotes equality between players. Good team plays honestly according to the agreed rules, appreciates contribution of different players, and the atmosphere in the team is good and supports equality and the development of all team members. Teammates are respected and encouraged. Information flows freely and is freely accessible.

The good team knows how it has played previously – all its victories and defeats – and has learned its lessons. Team members know their current status and striking power and are familiar with the environment in which they play. The team has a large number of supporters who appreciate what the team does and what it has achieved. Power and responsibility are distributed within the team flexibly, depending on the situation and the skills of the players in question. Teams as a whole, assumes responsibility for defeats and give positive and constructive feedback. New players are recruited and players develop their skills actively being able to encourage their team members to keep improving their performance. A good team monitors and evaluates its development on a regular basis.

### 3.2. Technical competencies for regional development

**Technical-entrepreneurial component** integrates the key elements to achieve, providing the WWP project as investment unit and technical tool capable of generating a flow of goods and services and respond some objective, according quality standards (Cazorla and De los Ríos, 2012).

The technological innovation –from the fundamental technical competence – has dominated debates concerning rural development. WWP conceives technical-entrepreneurial project as a process of social learning that includes new human relations, new management, administration and negotiation systems, new forms of learning, new ways

of structuring and sharing information and knowledge among all social agents that bring innovation (Cazorla et al, 2013).

Of relevance in this context is the technological innovation process occurring within economic districts characterized by a territorial network of relationship between economic actors. The technological project management complexity dimension has prevailed for years, starting from the scientific rationality of the modern project leading to the first models of regional development planning (Bond and Hulme, 1999).

However, in comparison with behavioral and contextual competencies, much less importance is given to technical competences by the Experts participating in the workshops. This finding comes to verify the evolution of the rural planning approaches, shifting from technological based models to other more territorial and inclusive models that need other skills, besides the technical ones, to be implemented. *Information and documentation, resources and interested parties* are the three elements mentioned within this group. The latter is related with the social well-being dimension of the WWP model that states that the efforts made must be directed to satisfy the needs of the rural population.

### 3.3. Contextual competencies for regional development

**Political-contextual component** provides the territorial project with key elements to meet with the context the project is inserted. This area covers the ability of project to make relations with political organizations and with the different public-administrations (Cazorla and De los Ríos, 2012). Right project management approach for regional development needs **organizational complexity** as of the differentiation and interdependence between the operational elements of the organization (Williams, 1999).

In rural development projects, different structures and partnerships emerge, which are organized as operational elements for territorial cooperation of agents and local institutions (Cazorla and De los Ríos, 2012; De los Ríos et al, 2011). These new structures —as the so-called Leader Local Action Groups— are the operating platform to address the bottom-up approach, facilitating the management of projects from the bottom upwards, allowing local stakeholders to engage in a participatory manner and taking into account the reality of each territory.

Experts participating in the participatory process acknowledge that *project and program orientation* is essential to achieve an endogenous and integrated approach through multi - sectorial interventions, what is a general principle of the WWP model. *Funding and legislation* deserve special attention and Experts give a share of 16 per cent to these two elements when assessing the importance of the knowledge and skills desirable for a rural development promoter. The *knowledge of systems, products and technologies* is other contextual element mentioned by the Experts. The thematic initiatives launched by the Romanian network include the establishment of eight Thematic Working Groups (TWG). The subjects for those groups were agreed in a workshop held on February 2012, during the second meeting of the National Steering Committee (NRDN, 2012). The choice of the subjects to be discussed in the TWG shows that workshop participants are aware of the relevance of contextual competences to promote development. Particularly, funding and legislation were the topics most widely supported in the brainstorming process performed for the constitution of the thematic working groups. This is consistent with assessment of the Experts on the most valued elements of competence for rural development managers.

## 4. Conclusions

In line with the principles set up within the WWP framework and the different dimensions of the project management competences the following aspects need to be considered for regional development in Rumania. According to the Experts of the NRDN there are 22 main competences desirable for those who are devoted to rural development in Romania. Six of them, of which four are behavioral competences – team work, negotiation, leadership and communication – and two are contextual competences – finance and program and projects implementation, have as much importance as the remaining 16.

There is no question about the properness of technical competences for project managers of rural development. The less attention that the Experts pay to the technical dimension shouldn't be interpreted as a lack of acknowledgment regarding its importance. Rather, the interpretation is that this aspect is already solved: rural agents

in Romania have widely proven their achievement in technical competences as they have successfully designed a number of projects from a technical point of view.

By focusing on the other two dimensions – ethical-social and political-contextual – the Experts claim that these aspects have been, and continue being, widely neglected. The results of the participatory process show that the non-technical dimension of rural development projects are a main concern for the Experts. This corroborates the idea that the failure of projects is often due to factors related to people and their limitations to deal with the constraints of their environment as it has been demonstrated in numerous researches.

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