

# THE PERIPHERAL RURAL. REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF ROMANIA

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## Abstract

Peripheral communities, especially those located in the remote rural areas of the counties, often face difficulties in integrating strategic perspectives. The article analyzes communes in the identified countryside, with different environments but also constraints that slow down their development on certain components. The efforts identified and already customized in the peripheral communes in the countryside of the North-West region of Romania by implementing the development strategies they benefit from can be a predictor for exploiting the development opportunities, so necessary today. The results collected following a qualitative methodology, based on a secondary analysis of data from the Development Strategies of the Communes in the analyzed area, as well as based on the outline of an own indicator revealed that the differences with the intermediate or peri-rural they look at community strategies and vision, which helps them align with a certain level of development.

**Keywords:** development strategies, Northwest Region of Romania, rural periphery, strategic profile.

## 1. Introduction

In the administration's concern today, special attention is paid to the rural area - it operates in environments with strategic opportunities and constraints that slow down their development on certain components, which is restricted to local public policies: local decision makers are limited to accessing sources financing and development or to deal with the phenomenon of migration to the opportunities offered by the urban environment. From a preliminary analysis, it can be seen that in the European Union there is a particular concern about the problem of rural space, especially since the '80s. Rural areas are linked to values such as nature protection and conservation of cultural values, healthy environmental experience and the human dimension belonging to a community, tourism and leisure spaces.

The concern to understand the role of the rural space remains active, and the most exhaustive way is to operationalize, through the definitions in the specialized literature of the concept of community. In the definition of community, the classical distinction remains the one initiated by Ferdinand Tönnies (1944) between community (*gemeinschaft*) and society (*gesellschaft*). The community, in its assumption, is a social system in which relationships are personal, informal, traditional and based on feelings (village, block, neighborhood, small town, etc.). Society is a system in which relationships are impersonal, utilitarian, formal, rational, based on trade, politics, etc. In another paper, William and

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Loureide Biddle (1965) stated that by talking about community we mean a "representation of the feelings that citizens living in a certain area share in common."

From this statement it is clear that the boundaries defined by public, private or non-governmental organizations, as they are known to be clearly delimited, in communities are not strictly defined. The existence of a community is accompanied and determined by the feeling of belonging to that community. In this perspective, "community development" can be defined as a social process through which individuals in a community better control and adapt to the specific aspects of a constantly changing world. Creating a community does not only mean spatial proximity or, more generally, only the similarity of status. Völker, Flap, Lindenberg (2007, p. 101) describe four major conditions that make possible, facilitate and motivate the emergence of a community:

- Existence of opportunities and / or meeting places (the opportunity for people to meet, get to know each other, socialize);
- People's motivation to invest in group relationships (the degree to which people are motivated to create a community differs depending on economic and social status, education, lifestyle characteristics);
- Relational alternatives or the achievement of individual goals (community emergence is more likely in the case of small numbers or lack of contacts or relationships outside the neighborhood, which causes individuals to develop local relationships), and
- Interdependence (dependence of individuals on others, sharing the use of common goods, generates more and more community participation, at least as long as the benefits outweigh the complications that may occur).

As can be seen, the objectives are the most comprehensive, covering a variety of interventions. For this reason we can say that the practice of local development through community development appears today as an indirect necessity in the practice of public administration. Community development - sometimes divided into community planning, community organization and real development, generally follows the usual practice of intervention in any vital area of a community: education, health, social assistance. Therefore, an important part of the paper will refer to the evaluation process for the communities analyzed. The practice of community development can also be described as a process of solving problems with clear and necessary steps to achieve a desired goal to prevent or improve community problems. It is clear that we have a multidisciplinary approach to the concept, with particularities in rural and urban communities around the world.

## **2. The context of small and medium communities**

The transition to modernity and deeper aspects from the perspective of local development through the capacity of communities also appear in Romania. Community development actions have been around since ancient times. Since the 1990s, based on a massive transfer of codified international experience in facilitation models and community practice management institutions, Romania has begun to invest more concern. The channels from which such institutional models come are mainly those of actors very active in the field of international development such as donors, foundations or agencies. (Sandu, 2011, p. 4).

Currently, we find that community studies involve sociological and anthropological surveys in a context of local development. The new paradigm through which local development is designed foresees the existence of complex and multidimensional processes, which are at the interference of the planning and implementation stages of the plans and the

observance of certain principles that provide a solid basis for the respective community. The participation of the inhabitants of a commune in the realization of the social-cultural endowments, of the technical-urban endowments, is also influenced by the situation in the territory, which the different members of the commune have in relation to the respective objectives; those who will benefit directly, to a lesser extent, from the new objectives will be less interested in participating. "The more a local development project can provide equal benefits for a given population group, the less likely it is that the participation of the members of that group will be less differentiated." (Sandu, 2011).

Before outlining an operational approach for integrating strategic concepts into community analysis, it is important to understand the strategic planning process from a multidisciplinary approach. Chandler (1994, p. 331) states that "Strategy is the determination of the organization's long-term goals and objectives, the adoption of determined policies and the allocation of resources to achieve these goals." This definition indicates, in practice, the major issues that the strategic process must address: Do you want to move forward? By what parameters can the objectives of the organization be met? What human and financial resources should be involved?

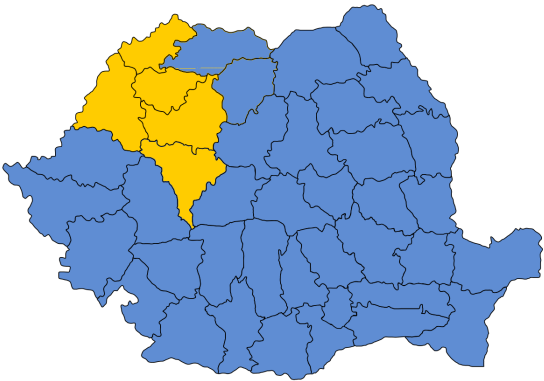
To a significant extent, today a predominantly rural Romania predominates. 93.7% of the Romanian territory is rural territory; Today, approximately 44% of Romanians live in rural areas, 40% of those who work are employed in activities located in rural areas, the participation of agriculture in the constitution of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP below) being only 13.4%, at the level of 2002, 12.6% at the level of 2006 and 4.35% at the level of 2019 (although at the level of 1990 it was 21.2%). (Report to WorldBank). The deepest influences were suffered by the rural world during the communist period and in the short period after 1989. The pressure for the rural environment to be examined in a wide audience in the public debate is increasingly evident. From the analysis of the data we can deduce with certainty that all the processes generated in this interval led to a sustainable feature of the general economic profile that affects not only the rural world, but the whole society. It is about the emergence of the dual economy (Bowring, 1986, p. 43). This is the feature of underdeveloped countries, of the peripheries of the world economic system. The rural reform of the last 20 years has contributed to the complete systematization of a challenge acquired through this reform itself. In a study (Bădescu, 2005), which reports one of the problems encountered by the reforms, the authors state that the reform, instead of organizing the reality of the peasant economy, stimulated those categories of properties that had been asserted before 1989. Ownership of peasant labor (the patrimony of the Agricultural Production Cooperatives) contributed to the disorganization of that reality. The legal-doctrinal apparatus of this reform was well codified in Law 15/1990 but also in Law no. 58/1991.

First of all, of course, we must mention here the considerable social problems of peasant families, directly affected by this. Job loss and income source, difficulties in professional reorientation, but also increased tensions in families belong to this conflict area. Through various measures, the state seeks to provide social support to these issues, especially through vocational reorientation programs. But the abandonment of many peasant households also has important effects on the life and structure of the peripheral rural area in particular. The aging and emigration of the population, the disappearance of the necessary supply devices (shops, craft workshops) and the reduction of basic public infrastructure (school, railway, post office) are phenomena that can be observed in many villages (Rosener, 2003, p. 219).

### **3. The characteristics of the communes located at the border of the rural counties of the North-West Region**

In the first stage it is essential to mention the communes that will be the object of the analysis. Thus, the communes are geographically grouped at the edges of four counties: Bihor, Cluj, Alba, Sălaj and Satu-Mare, representative for the peripheral countryside of the North-West Region. Based on the recommendations received, 14 communes chosen according to the criterion of approaching the border of the four counties were sampled. At the same time, two communities from the intermediate rural area (two from different counties) were chosen to make comparisons. The sampling communes are presented in the following table.

**Table 1. Communes analyzed.**

County	Sampled commune	
<b>Cluj</b>	Beliș	
	Negreni	
	Mărișel	
	Vultureni – rural intermediar	
<b>Bihor</b>	Borod	
	Bulz	
<b>Sălaj</b>	Sâg	
	Plopiș	
	Șamșud	
	Chieșd	
	Bobota	
	Meseșenii de Jos – rural intermediar	
<b>Satu Mare</b>	Bogdand	
<b>Alba</b>	Albac	

#### 4. Methodology

##### 4.1. Research questions

Each commune has a specific strategic profile, very important to build and understand in the strategic planning process. This profile includes strategic issues, possible elements of competitive advantage, key strategic factors and strategic solutions. Differences between communities are important and sensitive, and therefore structuring the strategic profile is essential from the perspective of effective strategic planning. Using a qualitative tool through the analysis of official documents, a unitary approach could be outlined. The three main research questions are directly related to the objective of the paper:

**Table 2. Research questions used.**

1. What types of communities appear as a result of strategic planning processes in communes in a peripheral area?
2. What are the existing differences and similarities of the communities identified with the rural and intermediate environment?

3. What is the perspective of the communities addressed in the strategic planning process, what were the conclusions and what recommendations can be initiated?

From the three questions, several research secondary questions arise:

**Table 3. Secondary questions used.**

1. What are the possible competitive and comparative advantages?
2. What is the level of local government in the light of the preliminary analysis and the conclusions drawn?
3. Is the “reconstruction” of peripheral communities an effort for horizontal adaptation (shaping participatory strategies)?

#### 4.2. Strategic issues

The strategic problems, as they were analyzed and interpreted in accordance with the paradigm used in strategic planning, have certain correlations with most of the communes analyzed in our area. Some interpretations of them will be presented, as described in Chapter 3.5. Strategic profile from the analysis of the Local Development Strategies 2014-2020.

**Table 4: Content of development strategies on strategic issues.**

Quality of life	Infrastructure	Cooperation / Social capital	Local economy	Social assistance
<b>Bobota commune, Sălaj county</b>				
<p><i>Low quality of life indicators</i></p> <p>It is due to poor infrastructure, combined with a lack of adequate local services and the possibility to socialize and spend free time, leading to an acceleration of labor migration, especially of young and qualified older people.</p>	<p><i>Poor public water supply and sewerage infrastructure</i></p> <p>Practically, the non-existence and lack of a natural gas network drastically reduces the possibility of industrial developments.</p>	<p><i>Lack of community cooperation</i></p> <p>Despite the existence of non-governmental organizations, folk groups or sports teams, a climate of mistrust and lower social capital is maintained, as well as reduced cooperation at the commune level.</p>	<p><i>Insufficiently developed local economy</i></p> <p>The local economy is not able to retain or attract a significant amount of work. The depopulation of the commune is due to both negative demographic growth and labor migration. The local economy is less limited to the strategic profile of the commune.</p>	<p><i>Integration of marginalized ethnic communities</i></p> <p>Social exclusion and crime are also strategic issues. If not treated properly and in time, they can influence the long-term economic and social development of the commune.</p>

<b>Chieșd commune, Sălaj county</b>				
-	<i>The road infrastructure has important problems, especially the poor condition of the county access roads in the commune.</i>	<i>Lack of ability to write projects from local grants</i>  Weak consolidation of specific associative structures (NGOs, associations) to form such skills negatively influences local development, but also the level of social empowerment and social capital.	<i>Strong contraction of the local economy</i>  The decline of the mining industry in the 1990s and, in particular, the closure of mining in the commune. The number of people thinking about the possibility of leaving the commune is very high (70% of the total answers to the questionnaire applied to the population in the preliminary analysis) and shows the real dangers mentioned above.	<i>Low awareness of the advantage of connecting the local cultural phenomenon to the local development process,</i>  The integration of local culture and traditions with the phenomenon of economic, commercial and territorial marketing remains a challenge in the peripheral countryside.
<b>Meseșeni de Jos commune, Sălaj county - intermediate rural</b>				
<i>Poor quality of indicators directly related to quality of life</i>	-	<i>Weak consolidation of specific associative structures (NGOs, associations)</i>	<i>Economic attractiveness without sustainable development</i>	<i>The departure of young people from the commune to areas with greater potential</i>
<b>Plopiș commune, Sălaj county</b>				
-	<i>Road infrastructure has important problems, especially the poor condition of</i>	<i>Poor awareness of the advantage of connecting the local cultural phenomenon to the local</i>	<i>Low level of economic attractiveness</i>	<i>Population migration is an issue that the community needs to pay attention to.</i>

	the roads that connect the commune with the major road network.	<i>development process</i>  An important factor that by integrating local culture and traditions with the phenomenon of economic, commercial and territorial marketing would bring local and regional potential.		8.67% of the population is really thinking about the possibility of relocation. 72.13% would migrate to find a job.
<b>Şamşud commune, Sălaj county</b>				
-	<i>Road infrastructure has major problems especially in terms of connectivity with the adjacent rural environment.</i>	<i>The relationship of the community with the local administration</i>	<i>The local economy characterized by the lack of economic activities at a significant level in the commune</i>	<i>Youth migration due to the lack of economic activities able to offer them local opportunities for professional and personal development</i>

**Source:** Adaptation of the authors.

The communes from Sălaj County, at the level of perceiving the strategic problems, have identified in a coherent and uniform way problems that are encountered in the analyzed geographical area. In comparison, it seems that quality of life indicators are more visible in the communes on the outskirts of counties - such as Sâg, Plopiş, Chieşd. However, infrastructure problems are present in every commune. Social services - especially where we have more nationalities seem to be the biggest problems. Again, the young population is rapidly migrating to the functionalities of cities - such as Meseşeni de Jos, the commune closest to the county seat.

**Table 5:** Content of development strategies on strategic issues.

<b>Quality of life</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Cooperation / Social capital</b>	<b>Local economy</b>	<b>Social assistance</b>
<b>Bulz commune, Bihor county</b>				
<i>Low quality of life indicators</i>	-	<i>Lack of cooperation</i>  Communication with	<i>Insufficiently developed local economy</i>	<i>Youth migration</i>  due to the lack of

The lack of adequate local services and the opportunity to socialize and spend free time lead to an acceleration of labor migration, especially of young and qualified older people.		the county public authorities is quite difficult.		economic activities able to offer them local opportunities for professional and personal development.
<b>Borod commune, Bihor county</b>				
<i>Lack of capacity to generate public services - education, health</i>  Due to the functionalities of the city, the commune has problems in integrating the minimum services at an acceptable level.	-	<i>The reduced capacity of the mayor's office to manage current problems due to a low degree of financial autonomy</i>	<i>Strong contraction of the local economy</i>	<i>Low awareness of the advantage of connecting the local cultural phenomenon to the local development process</i>

**Source:** Adaptation of the authors.

The communes on the outskirts of Bihor County have, in general, approximately the same strategic problems, all the more so as there is a rather synthetic difference between the two communes. We have common strategic problems, such as: lack of local collaboration, weak capacity of public administration, local economy with gaps in representation. However, the comparison is visible in detail from the perspective of governance indicators. It is not enough to realize how these strategic issues are perceived only on the basis of sociological inquiry.

**Table 6: Content of development strategies on strategic issues.**

<b>Quality of life</b>	<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Cooperation / Social capital</b>	<b>Local economy</b>	<b>Social assistance</b>
<b>Beliş commune, Cluj county</b>				
<i>Low quality of life indicators</i>	<i>Lack of utilities drinking water</i>	<i>The sustainable development of tourism is due to the</i>	<i>Insufficiently developed local economy, especially</i>	<i>Youth migration, the existence of conflicting relations</i>



59% of all respondents said that the direction in which the community is heading it is not a good one, only 4% saying the opposite.	network, sewerage, poor infrastructure, these problems amount to 83% of the total answers received.	<i>lack of a common and coherent vision.</i>	<i>on the collaboration side</i>	<i>between the locals as well as the impossibility of practicing agriculture</i>  The locals practice a type of subsistence agriculture.
<b>Negreni commune, Cluj county</b>				
<i>Lack of capacity to generate public services - education, health</i>  Due to the functionalities of the nearest town - Huedin, the commune has problems in integrating the minimum services at an acceptable level	<i>Public water supply infrastructure and especially sewerage and lack of a natural gas network</i>  The possibility of industrial / economic developments of the commune is drastically reduced	<i>Local cooperation</i>  Weak consolidation of specific associative structures (NGOs, associations, groups)	<i>Local branding. Poor sustainable local economy</i>  The commune does not yet have a local brand to promote its own products, despite the very important advantage conferred by the notoriety of the traditional fair.	<i>Low awareness of the advantage of connecting the local cultural phenomenon to the local development process.</i>

**Source: Adaptation of the authors.**

The problems in the case of the group of communes from Cluj county are very obvious, defining an interesting profile, namely the lack of a brand, because they are the most advantaged by the position in a mountainous area - Belis, with specific activities - Negreni (summer and autumn fairs the Negreni). However, the communes focus on recurring issues related to infrastructure, good governance, collaboration and the underdeveloped local economy.

#### **4.3. Key strategic factors.**

The key strategic factors are those things that the organization or business unit, respectively the community must obtain correctly and which are important for success. Stakeholders - public or private, even non-governmental organizations use these criteria to evaluate them. Graham Kenny (2001, pp. 3-10) proposes a predictable model for formulating key strategic factors, the methodology being correlated with the success of identification. The key strategic factors in the analysis of our communes will give us an idea of how the planning effort is focused on key areas, which could ensure a

multidimensional development. We analyzed according to the development strategies the chapter entitled Key strategic factors, and the comparative results are the following:

Table 7: Comparative approach on key strategic factors.

Key strategic factors identified	Commune / Communes analyzed	Frequency of key strategic factors
Community tourism	Plopiș, Șamșud, Bulz, Beliș, Albac	5
Community cooperation	Meseșenii de Jos, Plopiș, Bulz, Negreni	4
Life quality	Bobota, Șamșud, Negreni	3
Diversified economic development	Bobota, Șamșud, Beliș	3
Social inclusion	Bobota, Albac	2
Development and use of competitive advantages in the local economy	Chieșd, Albac	2
Education and entrepreneurship	Poplar, Bulz	2
Integration and capitalization of human resources at community level	Chieșd	1
Administrative capacity	Chieșd	1
Connecting with the county seat city	Meseșenii de Jos	1
Agriculture and local product development	Meseșenii de Jos	1
Traditional local fair	Negreni	1

Source: Local Development Strategies 2014-2020.

Community tourism is the category with the highest frequency, but we need to understand exactly how it is customised through its functionalities: development of community tourism focused on traditional lifestyles, expression of local cultural and community values and specific ethno-cultural. Defining specific tourism products, based on the integration of traditions, cultural phenomenon and ethnic diversity, certification of local products and construction of local brands. This category of factors occurs with the highest frequency, so we could customise the factors for the specific geographical-peripheral area.

Education and entrepreneurship are other dimensions that we can analyse in conjunction with these rural communities. Supporting local education at both initial and adult education levels and guiding this process must be done in line with local values and long-term development directions. Cultivating entrepreneurship and initiatives through cooperation between members of the community is an unexplored analysis factor in the context of the analysed communes. The education of the school population in the villages belonging to Bulz and Plopiș communes has, for example, a specific character, the Slovak population identifies there and the existence of a day center for children meets their need for education even in the peripheral rural areas of the counties.

#### ***4.4. Identification of comparative and competitive advantages***

Competitive advantage theory (Porter, 1985) helps to understand how to create advantageous economic situations by developing and exploiting local competitive advantage, not only comparatively, which should then be included in development plans. The competitive advantage of a territory is determined by the strength of groups and combinations of economic activities (conglomerated) – geographical concentrations of interconnected companies, suppliers and institutions, whose resources, knowledge and skills give them a key position and even supremacy in the field of activity. On the other hand, the comparative advantage of a territory is determined by factors that are generally difficult to influence or change: location, land, natural resources, workforce and local population. An analysis of competitive advantages is important in the idea that the clear direction is outlined and you can see a similarity between rural communes placed at the border of Cluj, Sălaj and Bihor counties.

	<b>Comparative advantages</b>	<b>Competitive advantages</b>
<b>Negreni</b>	Favourable geographical location	The Negreni Fair, with a tradition developed over time
	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	Advantageous connectivity
		The possibility to develop a tourism that stimulates economic development and integrates local culture.
<b>Bobota</b>	Favourable geographical location	The possibility to develop a cultural-historical tourism centre capable of stimulating local economic development
	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	
	Advantageous connectivity	
<b>Chieşd</b>	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	Local experience in stimulating economic development and integrating local products
	Young population and good health perceived subjectively	Good infrastructure
	Coal reserves and high probability of thermal water existence, the existence of mineral water springs.	
<b>Meseşenii de Jos</b> - <b>Rural intermediar</b>	Advantageous connectivity	Possibility of connecting with the county residence city
	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	Increasing quality of life
	Young population and good health perceived subjectively	Strong development of local identity
<b>Plopiş</b>	Landscape and climate for agriculture and	Community participation – the commune is

	rural tourism	able to provide an increased index of community development
	Sufficient water resources in a relatively poor area	The role of local administration as facilitator to focus community efforts on convergence with strategic objectives
	Shared with only three villages, easy to manage from the point of view of utilities.	Activity of the Information Centre for the Promotion of Community Tourism and to ensure a coordination activity for local tourism development
<b>Șamșud</b>	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	Very strong cultural advantage
	Favourable geographical location	Human resource with important knowledge in the field of wine-growing activities
<b>Bulz</b>	Community cooperation and entrepreneurship	Community cooperation and entrepreneurship
	Landscape and climate for agriculture and rural tourism	Advantageous connectivity
	Favourable geographical location	

**Source:** Adaptation according to the development strategies of the 2014-2020 communes.

As the analysis illustrates, most municipalities have consistently defined their comparative and competitive advantages. Municipalities in the common geographical area of Sălaj have particular advantages related to the field of strengths: local traditions and customs, local products, community tourism. They are also shared with significant proportions of ethnic but also multi-faith minorities. Bulz commune in Bihor has the strategic advantage of community cooperation in the field of entrepreneurship, which makes it perceived as sustainable. The most obvious connectivity as a comparative factor seems to be the communes Șamșud, Chieșd, Bobota and Negreni – they have connectivity with important European roads but also with the national network. As described in the previous subchapter of key strategic factors, it seems that cultural tourism occupies the most important weight in representing competitive advantages, which is clear if the communes want to focus their attention.

#### ***4.5. Local governance – comparative indicators***

This section is of interest to the local government, the indicator contributing to the generation of the principles of good governance, as well as the optimal conditions for its development. Local public authorities are able to manage local businesses based on their own budget and local regulations, based on the principles of local autonomy and decentralisation. In addition, local authorities have the means to encourage active citizenship and private sector development. Only in this way can strategic options be initiated coherently. Knowledge of the quality of local governance in the economic, social and political context plays an important role in decision-making for potential external economic promoters. At the same time, it is an important tool for identifying strong areas for community development in strategic planning. The focus on good

governance in realising community development makes community analysis more interesting and has the potential to provide relevant data for understanding community mechanisms, even for the proposed context. (Hintea., 2018, p. 21). The indicators of good governance are quantitative and qualitative, following 3 dimensions and 11 indicators, and the results were comparatively relevant. In order to answer the question of the level of local governance for the peripheral municipalities analysed, the instrument has been adapted as follows:

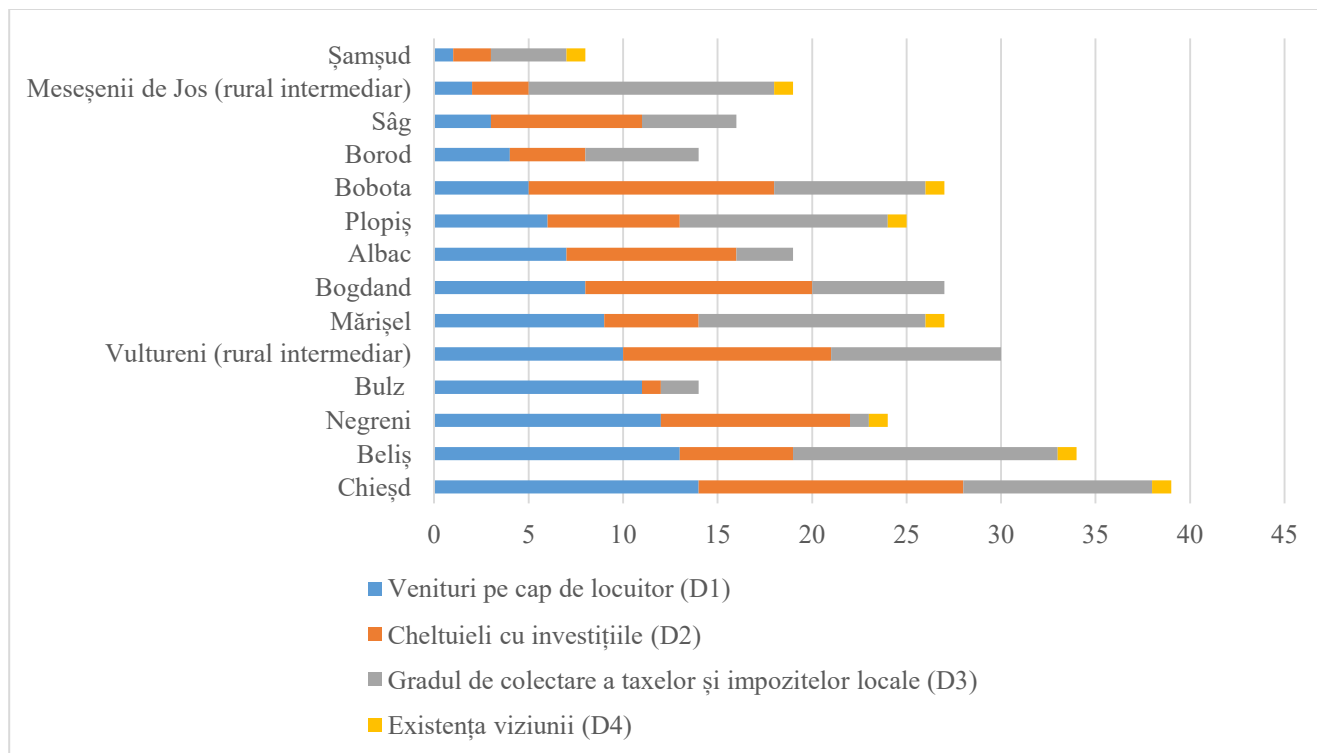
**Incomes of local government per capita. (Dimension 1).** The existing data for the policy department were used for this indicator of the Ministry of Local Public Administration and Local Regional Development for the reference year 2018, the formula for calculating variables has been transformed and normalised. Using known maximum and minimum values, we ranked the values, the highest score being 14 and the lowest 1.

**Capital expenditure per capita. (Dimension 2).** The data for these indicators were taken from the fiscal policies of the Ministry of Local Public Administration and Regional Development for the reference year 2018. As with the previous indicator, the values were normalised and ordered downwards, with a maximum score of 14 and a minimum of 1.

—**The collection of local taxes and taxes. (Dimension 3).** The existing data for the policy department were used for this indicator of the Ministry of Local Public Administration and Local Regional Development for the reference year 2018. The best collection rate was marked with 14 and the lowest 1.

**The existence of vision (Dimension 4).** For this indicator, information has been retrieved from the joint sites and existing development strategies. The binary response to “Yes” or “No” has been changed to “0” or “1”. For example: Is there a vision statement? No = 0 and Yes = 1.

The maximum score that can be achieved on this dimension is  $43 = 14 (D1) + 14 (D2) + 14 (D3) + 1 (D4)$ . Then, after the systematisation and summary of the scores obtained, we have an image of the indicator from the perspective of the local government, on three levels. However, to highlight the limits of this indicator, not all variables can be summarised in the same way, leading to a slight distortion. In addition to the current analysis, only the year 2018 is considered, leading to a cross-sectional analysis, and not necessarily longitudinal. The results are as follows:



**Figure 1:** Assessing good local governance in terms of efficiency.

**Source:** Personal data processing.

In the field of efficiency of local administration, noteworthy differences can be observed: on the one hand we have a general score, on all 14 communes analysed (peripheral rural, marginal rural). The highest score is held by the commune of Chieșd (Salaj County), followed by Beliș commune (Cluj county). They are placed over the middle countryside. They behave effectively, which gives them a considerable advantage. Then there is the commune Vultureni, which represents the intermediate rural environment of Cluj County. Bobota commune is located over other communes in Sălaj County. From the intermediate rural environment, Meseșenii de Jos commune in Sălaj County has problems of scoring in terms of efficiency. Șamșud commune has the lowest score, on all dimensions, except for the existence of vision statement in the strategy. From Bihor County, the level is similar between Bulz and Borod, in Bulz being more highlighted the investment expenses, and in Borod the higher degree of collection. Both communes have problems in determining their vision, and this is also due to the lack of a strategy. Although the indicator would very well indicate the administrative capacity of the communes, it may be quite synthetic, but in a comparative way, it is important and reveals essential data.

From data systematisation, we can group 3 levels of efficiency of local administration in the marginal rural of analysed counties. The commune in the intermediate rural environment, such as Vultureni commune in Cluj County, registered a fairly high score, which confirms, once again, the existence of an increased level of administrative efficiency. If we refer to the mid-level communes, these are the communes of Sălaj County, which are located over the middle rural area – Meseșenii de Jos, for example. The communes in Bihor County are the most inefficient in terms of local governance, like Șamșud in Sălaj County. There, the administration may be ineffective from the perspective of the 4 indicators analysed. The vision statement in this dimension is underestimated, so the commune of Șamșud has a statement of vision, which would

raise the indicator far above certain commons, but due to the lack of a methodology to assess the vision this could not be achieved.

## **5. Conclusions**

Overall, the results of the study are good and comparable to those obtained in previous similar studies in other municipalities or cities. First, the main objective has been achieved, as an overview of development prospects has been obtained – on the one hand from the study of quantitative and qualitative data, then an image of good governance at local level in the identified area and the results that can be used in multiple approaches.

The study is relevant both internally – Community and external – stakeholders. As external stakeholders may be interested in consulting indicators on good local governance, local taxation, development strategies, quality of life perspective. Also, local authorities could benefit from our results, because they represent an objective assessment of the most important neighboring communities, but which share the same geographical area – the county limit, hard to reach, with limited perspectives of vision and development. It is quite difficult to customise a certain context for each rural community in the peripheral area of the counties; what we can conclude is primarily related to the final outcome. For most communities we have at hand development strategies, analysed qualitatively and quantitatively, with substantial effort, both financial and human. Strategic choices help us, but are they really timely and available to local decision makers? What about the entrepreneurial environment?

The peculiarity of marginal communes in Sălaj County is a unitary one – there is a linearity in really treating the problems. Another aspect to be highlighted is social equity and social inclusion underdeveloped in most municipalities; it is imperative that each community establish a policy that involves integrating disadvantaged groups into the normal parameters of quality of life. We can see a slight increase in the quality of governance for communes in the geographical mountain area of Cluj county. Their focus on financial stability and efficiency often pushes municipalities to act in an egalitarian and unfair manner, without taking into account the factors related to the specificities of the community. This creates major cleavages that can be observed by any Community research. What is important for these municipalities is to find an action plan that enhances the development policies of Community tourism, because it has been the most frequent strategic factor in most peripheral communes.

The discretion of local decision-makers remains a sensitive subject. An important aspect is that these communes have a certain reluctance to the usefulness of strategies. Thus, the degree of dependence on a coherent and correct strategy is quite low, which is why economic and political factors are stronger for efficiency.

In the part of the recommendations, several policy options and directions could be identified, which are key to the perspective. The policy options take into account what is really relevant – the size of the vision put into practice. These policy options for each commune print a future orientation character, as they are the result of strategic planning in the identified communes, a strategic process that usually benefits local government, which would mean that we have ‘privileged’ communities that have concentrated their efforts to identify problems and solutions. There are many communes in the middle of the counties – in the middle countryside that do not benefit from strategic planning, which greatly diminishes their prospects. They are also common in the peri-urban rural, which does not have a clear direction. The effort to outline the perspectives of the local government in the communes, which must play an important role in facilitating and

not trading the development prospects will be increasing, especially for the communes in the marginal rural of North-West counties. Therefore, following the response to research questions, we find a longitudinal approach to the strategic planning process, the “reconstruction” of communities and the rethinking of strategic directions can be resolved through a participatory approach, as highlighted in the efforts made. Predictors could be relevant in the idea of outlining some realities and perspectives of the peripheral rural environment, which brings added value to the study of rural community management, with all the limitations that exist and will always make strategic planning processes more substantial.

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