

Ionela NEȚA

*Institute of Agricultural Economics, Romanian Academy
neta4oana@yahoo.com*

Rural Development Networks in Romania

Abstract

The rural development network is meant to build up sustainable partnerships between the academic/university nuclei and the rural players, to develop and refine the instruments used in the investigation and dissemination of good practices. An efficient rural development network also aims at getting the people more aware of the rural area problems and opportunities.

Keywords: rural development network, network of excellence

JEL Classification: Q01, Z13

The excellence/research network is an instrument created to strengthen and consolidate the scientific excellence in specific research areas by the integration of a critical mass of resources and the necessary scientific expertise so as to make out of the European scientific research the driving force at world level in the respective field.

This expertise will be built under the form of a network that defines its common activity program, meant to produce first a sustainable integration of the research capacities of the members of the network, and at the same time, to produce new knowledge in the field. Thus, the excellence network is an instrument for the consolidation of excellence through the diminution of the European research fragmentation; it is considered that its main result is the sustainable structuring and modelling of the research activity modality in the declared area of the network. At the same time, by the investment made in the consortia with excellence teams, it is expected that the network will produce new knowledge, though this is not its main goal. It is important that these networks should not be transformed into "closed clubs" and be concerned only with the development of excellence inside the network. As a result, each network will have the mission to disseminate the excellence beyond the consortium borders.

A "Common Activity Program" should include the following components:

- A set of *integrating activities*, targeting the modelling and consolidation of the modality in which the different partners will

develop research activities under the network. This will certainly involve a coordinated planning of the modality, in which the consortium members will develop their own research activities, so as to increase the complementarity of specializations and to contribute to the development of mutual specializations. The mutual specializations imply a development of the positive and strong parts of the research activities, and the diminution of "weaknesses" in the research process. The integrating activities can also include the pooling of certain specific research resources (research premises, instruments and/or technological platforms), the common administration of the knowledge portfolio of the consortium members, mobilities and mutual visits of the specialists, the re-allocation of specialists, and the improvement of the electronic communication networks so as to ensure an interactive work of the teams involved in the project;

- A set of **research activities**, subordinated to the goal for which the network has been created, i.e. the development of new research instruments and the creation of new research platforms of common interest and use, or the generation of new knowledge to bridge up the gaps in the common knowledge portfolio;
- A set of activities dedicated **to the dissemination of excellence**, the most important aspect of a common program of activity being the development of a common program for training the researchers and the other key persons within the consortium, as maintaining the excellence position at EU level mainly depends on the existence of a team of researchers with special scientific performances. Other activities dedicated to the dissemination can include actions for increasing the awareness level of the large public and their understanding the role and beneficial effects of science and technology, as well as knowledge transfer to research teams outside the network. All the activities in this program must benefit from a coherent managerial framework, taking into consideration the fact that the activities can and must support each other for reaching the proposed goal.

The network of active organizations in community development – RuralNet

The RuralNet network is a network of active non-governmental organizations in community development. The bases of this network were established in 2002, when the need for information, knowledge and experience exchange encouraged the organization of a first meeting with organizations dedicated to community development in Romania. After this other meetings followed, which had their own importance in shaping the role that this network could have in the civil society. In this respect, the bases of a cooperation were established, namely priority directions of action, principles and values – all these

being included into a partnership agreement, signed by about 20 organizations.

The RuralNet Mission is to ensure the increase in the quality of services provided by the active organizations in the field of community development in Romania and the best use of their competences and resources.

The RuralNet goal is to develop and maintain the collaboration framework for the active organizations in the field of community development in Romania.

The RuralNet members are organizations dedicated to community development, or which develop at least one community development project in Romania and are part of the **Network of active organizations in community development – RuralNet**. *The RuralNet Members are:*

1. The Center for Rural Assistance
2. The Romanian Community Development Association
3. The Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family
4. The Resources Center CREST
5. The Regional Community Development Association
6. The Ecology and Tourism Club "Albamont"
7. The Free Youth Organization
8. The Community Foundation
9. Albin Foundation
10. The Romanian Social Development Fund
11. The Community Development Partnership
12. Education 2000+ Center
13. Outward Bound
14. Ecotop Foundation
15. The Sustainable Development Association "The Live Fire"
16. CIVITAS Foundation for Civil Society
17. The Council of Non-Governmental Active Organizations in Social Services
18. The Romanian Counselling and Support Association
19. The Center of Ethno-Cultural Diversity Resources
20. The Center of Resources for the Romani Communities
21. The Mediation and Community Security Center
22. The Foundation for Education and Local Development Agapis
23. Ecotopia Romania Association

The RuralNet Members have based their activity on the same main principles, and their work targets the same fundamental values: community involvement, respect of traditions, diversity and local specificity, respect for the environment, and improvement of the living conditions in the communities in Romania; yet they can use different instruments to implement their principles.

By the Cooperation Agreement, the RuralNet members commit themselves to an intense long-term **cooperation**, which should ensure a

greater complementarity and coherence of their community development activities in Romania and South-East Europe.

The RuralNet Members agreed to cooperate in the following areas:

- **Promoting the concept** of community development and **good practices** in Community development
- **Lobby and advocacy activities** for the communities where they are acting and for the RuralNet Members (i.e. actions for the official recognition of the specific community development professions, the improvement of the legal framework for the communities and the community development organizations);
- **Vocational training** in community development of the RuralNet network members;
- **Exchange of relevant information**, with regard to the programs, activities, events, existing or potential financial resources in the fields in which the RuralNet Members are interested; relevant information with regard to other social actors with expertise in similar fields;
- **Development and implementation of programs** based on the complementarity principle, by providing technical assistance and training, when needed;
- **The dissemination and promotion of relevant information on the RuralNet**, in the brochures, information bulletins, web pages, study visits of the RuralNet Members.

The RuralNet Coordination Committee consists of the **Rural Assistance Center (CAR)**, the **Romanian Community Development Association (ARDC)**, the **Romanian Counselling and Support Association (ARCS)**.

The Rural Assistance Center is a non-governmental organization, based in Timisoara, established in the year 2000 by the Open Society Foundation Romania, which activates in the rural development field. Its mission is to create and consolidate the local capacity for sustainable development in the rural communities. Its **values** are the following: social equity and justice, participation, sustainability, intervention responsibility, transparency and pro-activity. *The main interest fields are the following: community development and institutional development in the rural areas.*

CAR activities are guided by the principle of key actors' involvement in projects through local, regional, national and international partnerships.

CAR is a member in two important networks of the civil society in Romania: **SON** (Soros Open Network) and **RuralNet** (a network of active organizations in community development. In 2003 **CAR** started to collaborate with the European network **PREPARE** (Pre-accession European Rural Partnership), and in 2004 it joined the **PASOS** network (Policy Association for an Open Society)

CAR activities include:

- o Community services:
- o Information
- o Technical assistance (community facilitation, training and consultancy)
- o Financial assistance to initiative groups
- o Development of studies, research works and strategies
- o Development of specialized publications
- o Development of public policies

CAR beneficiaries:

- o Formal and informal associative structures (local associations, local initiative groups)
- o Institutions (the town hall, the village club, the school) in the rural area;
- o Business environment in the rural areas;

CAR Partners:

- o Rural communities
- o Governmental institutions
- o NGOs
- o Universities
- o Commercial companies
- o Mass media

Throughout its activity, CAR implemented more than 57 projects in 217 communities, having 713 beneficiaries with the support of over 65 funding bodies, 50 partners, and 110 sponsors and donators.

The RuralNet network development represented a project implemented in the period **2004-2006** by the Rural Assistance Center under partnership with member organizations in the RuralNet network - **The Romanian Community Development Association, the Community Development Association SZEKE, the Romanian Counselling and Support Association, the Civitas Foundation for the Civic Society, Outward Bound Romania, Agapis Association, Center of Romani Communities Resources, the Ethno-Cultural Diversity Center.**

The project objectives:

- o Encouraging the exchange of knowledge, practices and expertise among the network members and increasing the networking capacity of the network.
- o The dissemination of good practices, experiences and results of the network members as well as the development of activities inside the network both at national level and with institutions/international organizations involved in community development.
- o The increase of visibility and recognition of RuralNet at national and international level, with the goal of becoming an important player in the process of developing policies that target the development of the communities in Romania.

The project comprised 4 types of main activities:

1. training sessions
2. workshops
3. development of common projects
4. other (biannual meetings, coordination, monitoring, dissemination activities)

The funding body for the project was Charles Stewart Mott Foundation – 50,000 USD.

The Romanian Community Development Association (ARDC),
Focșani, Vrancea

ARDC mission is to contribute to building up a strong civil society, working with poor and less developed communities in Eastern Europe, such that they rely upon their own strengths and enjoy self-determination and collective welfare. ARDC accomplishes its mission working directly with such communities or supporting organizations and institutions that are working with them, also by developing the work of the facilitator in the zone.

ARDC is the first non-governmental organization in community development in Romania, which started its activity in January 1999 as a network of community facilitators of different professions (sociologists, ethnologists, social assistants, teachers, psychologists, economists, and engineers), located in the poor counties of Romania, trained in community development and having work experience directly inside the communities.

For ARDC a developed community first means a strong community, active, united and persevering, which has the capacity to identify, analyze and solve its own problems, without any intervention from outside. And this becomes a reality when the people (the citizens, the individuals) get self-confident, while gaining confidence in the other people, too; the people feel capable of intervention and cooperation in solving up the local problems; the people assume their responsibility for the destiny of the communities they are living in, they enjoy collective welfare and are proud of the community they are living in.

ARDC goals are the following:

- o Change of attitude and supply of knowledge to the communities with which we are working and to other organizations
- o Promoting the values of the community development and of our model to the communities and organizations we come into contact
- o Promoting the alternative represented by the non-governmental organizations as partner of the initiatives of the central and local public authorities.

The Romanian Counselling and Support Association is based in Drobeta Turnu Severin, having the mission to support the individuals and groups in the process of personal development and for the integration into the community.

EC Regulation no. 1698/2005, art. 68, stipulates that each EU Member State has the obligation to establish a **National Rural Network**, which should put together the organizations and administrations involved in rural development. As a result, Romania, as a New Member State of the European Union, is making efforts in order to set up this national network. **The National Rural Development Network (RNDR)** represents an opportunity for a better integration of the activities in the field of agriculture, forestry, socio-economic milieu, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, as well as for a better adaptation to the dynamics/territorial contexts.

The national rural development network is defined as a network consisting of representatives of the local/central public authorities involved in rural development, institutions, NGOs, which are involved in local development, Local Action Groups and beneficiaries of the programs, or involved in reaching the goals stipulated in the rural development measures.

This multi-national partnership between civil societies organizations has the objective to consolidate the civil society in the rural area and to promote intra and transnational cooperation in this field. In this context, the National Rural Development Program (NRDP) will bring actors from different sectors on the stage and will have a very important role, as it contributes to communication improvement among the participants to the rural economy. The National Rural Development Network will contribute to building up active partnerships between the public, private and non-governmental sectors, putting together representatives of the local/central public authorities involved in rural development, local collectivities, interested NGOs (professional associations, foundations), etc. A successful rural development will greatly depend on these partnerships.

That is why the rural development network will have to be established and managed in an open, dynamic and accessible way for those interested and involved in the rural development fields.

The existence of this network of public and private organizations (NGOs) that are active in the community development, some with expertise in the development of community development projects or programs, can represent the starting point in the foundation of a rural development network, which will develop in time and in which different deep changes will be produced, from different directions, with regard to the range of subjects, participants, undertaken actions.

References

1. www.maap.ro
2. www.ruralnet.ro
3. www.ruralnet.org.uk