

PERSPECTIVES FOR PROMOTING LOCAL POLICIES OF DEVELOPMENT OF MONTANE ECOLOGIC AGRICULTURE IN THE UPPER BASIN OF THE SOMEȘUL MARE RIVER

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Abstract: Comprising a number of 10 political-administrative units, the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River has a sustenance agriculture, while industrial activities had either “vanished”, or significantly reduced their activity. Therefore, the only viable alternative to boost the social and economic life of the human habitats in the region remains rural tourism, with its variant – agro-ecotourism, together with a montane ecological agriculture. Field investigations revealed the existence of some local authorities ready to support the project of implementation of montane ecological agriculture in the communities they represent.

Key words: local authorities, local communities, sustainable rural development, ecologic agro-tourism, European funds

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INTRODUCTION

The agriculture sector in post-1989 Romania was subject to numerous political, economical and social debates, generated by the need for some historical reparations regarding the reestablishment of the rapport between man and the property taken from him in the communist period (Benedek, 2003).

A special case in the communist period was that of the mountain areas, that were kept out from collectivization due to morphologic-geographical characteristics. The agricultural land

(arable land and hay meadows) from these areas remained in the private possession of the former owner, while the forests and mountain pastures were confiscated by the communist state.

In order to keep their land, the owners had to deliver to the state a substantial part of their production, either at no charge or, later, after 1965, as an obligatory contract with the state, which paid the land workers underpriced. For example, in the year 1980 the state paid the peasants one quarter of what the pork meat cost in the grocery.

After 1989, local communities from the non-collectivized mountain areas bordering the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River (extended to the present area of 46.399 hectares in 2000), resp. 10 administrative units (9 communes and one town), claimed the forests and mountain pastures, regaining them gradually between 1994 and 2000.

The new regulations, apparently favourable for the small farmers from the mountain area surrounding the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River, didn't improved, as expected, the condition of local agriculture, because they weren't supported by legislative measures that should have stimulated the development of both a montane ecologic agriculture and an ecologic agro-tourism, as requirements for a reliable sustainable development (Zaman, 2006).

The small households hoped for a more generous market for their products, but food safety regulations and quality standards imposed to the farmers after Romania's entrance in the EU in 2007 effected a dramatic regression of the agriculture in this geographic area.

The small farmers from the settlements around the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River resized their households, and the production is momentarily intended for subsistence.

If the montane agriculture from this area would be supported, it could provide the national market and the EU-states with remarkable quantities of lamb, mutton, beef, poultry meat, organic milk products, organic potatoes, organic fruits and some pot herb.

If in 1988 this region provided to the Arabic world from the Middle East over 50,000 lambs and almost 16,000 sheep, the capabilities of rearing these unpretentious animals can grow significantly, some field studies and inquiries estimating a potential of over 100,000 lambs and circa 50,000 sheep for export.

The stopping of mining, the regress of forestry, and the decrease of the agro-pastoral activities, imposed by the new orientations regarding the protection of biodiversity in the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River, caused the poverty-stricken town halls to give up some rural development projects. The rural development is on a turning point. There are high hopes for laws and regulations that will support the montane ecologic agriculture and the ecologic agro-tourism, as sole alternatives for a sustainable rural development in the peripheral geographic space of the Rodnei Mountains National Park.

THE PRESENT LOCAL AGRICULTURE

As geographic-economically category, *the land use structure* is widely influenced by natural conditions (relief, soil, rainfall, topoclimate), but it adapted to the evolution of human communities in their relation with the exterior.

The three main categories:

- Agricultural terrain;
- Forest area;
- Unused land or with other uses;

Suffered changes as a result of intensifying anthropization processes, of changing pedological, phytological, and climatic conditions, but also because of last decades land planning and melioration.

Analysing the land use structure in the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River, we can see that almost half of the region (49.62 %) is covered with forests, mainly in the Rodnei Mountains area (Șanț, Rodna, Maieru, Sângeorz-Băi), agricultural land represents 42.44 %, and the rest of approx. 8 % having other uses (roads, railroads, streets, buildings, mountain ridges, rocks, etc.).

The agricultural land (45590 ha) consists mainly of pastures and hay meadows (40506 ha, representing 88.8 %), the arable land occupies 10.8 %, and the rest is used for orchards, vineyards, and tree nurseries (0.33 %).

Concluding, the main feature of the region's land use is the broad expanse of forests, pastures, and hay meadows (~88 % of the total area), which, according to the integrated land planning, suffer substantial qualitative changes: reforestation with high genetic value species of high productivity, amelioration of natural meadows' floristic composition, fertilizations, and extension of hay meadows (Coldea, 1990).

Table 1. Land use structure (2008)
(Source: the Agricultural Reports of the town halls)

Settlement	Land use categories (ha)					Total
	Arable	Pastures and hay meadows	Orchards and vineyards	Forests	Other areas	
Sângeorz-Băi	856	6431	81	6344	970	17682
Maieru	688	3923	16	7447	830	12904
Rodna	373	9198	18	5790	1991	22415
Șanț	227	8430	4	10675	1568	20904
Ilva Mică	408	1801	9	2162	462	5250
Ilva Mare	462	2762	1	4405	698	8328
Lunca Ilvei	670	2462	10	5197	782	9121
Măgura Ilvei	550	1191	4	926	301	2972
Poiana Ilvei	231	910	2	520	119	1752
Leșu	467	3398	7	4410	728	9010
Total	4932	40506	152	53278	8500	107368
	4.6 %	37.7 %	0.14 %	49.62 %	7.9 %	100 %

Arable land occupies a small part of the region (4.6 %), in water meadows, on terraces of the main rivers, alluvial fans, mild hillsides, and on gentle mountain slopes with proper exposure, sustaining cultures adapted to lower temperatures and shorter growing periods.

On the south oriented "hill-front", up to an altitude of 600 m, there are orchards consisting mainly of plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, cherry tree, and sour cherry. Because of the rough terrain, animals are used for agricultural labour instead of mechanized work. The agglomeration of population in depressions or at the foot of mountains effected an obvious change in the agricultural landscape; e.g., deforestations in the vicinity of mountain areas caused a mosaic-like culture structure, primarily because of climate and soil conditions (Mureșianu, 1997).

Regarding land ownership structure, the agricultural land belongs (and belonged even before the year 1989) to individual landholders, due to the fact that the region was not collectivized. One may say that agriculture in the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River had, even in the former most centralized economy, some capitalist features, being an "oasis" of private land property in the surrounding socialist "ocean".

The crop structure was long time dominated by maize, but in recent years, potato took the lead (37.2 % of the arable land, compared to the 35.6 % of the maize), its growing being stimulated by the convenient exchanges made by local producers with the big cereal growers from the Oltenian Plain and Banat region (Mureșianu, 1997).

In all settlements, the surface of cultivated areas decreased in recent years, caused by the abandonment of barley, oat, hemp, and potato cultures from higher areas and from outside the village, or because of wild animals constantly destroying the crops, or as a cause of laziness and inefficiency.

Fruit tree growing occupies small areas in house gardens; larger orchards are owned by bigger landholders and are located in the vicinity of villages. The optimal growing areas are some foothills, the terraces of the Someșul Mare and Ilva rivers, gentle, sunny slopes not affected by temperature inversions (0.14 % of all agricultural land).

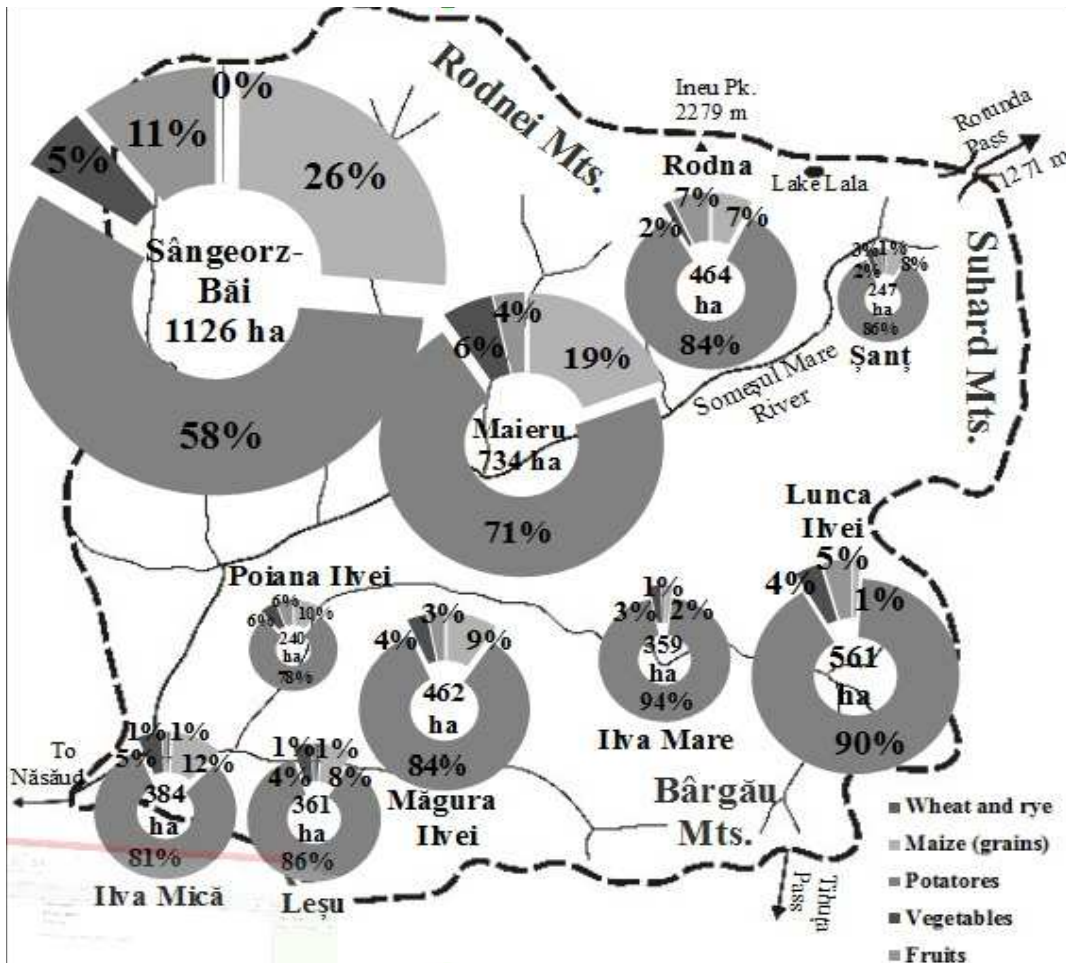


Figure 1. Production structure of the main cultures
(Source: Mureșianu et. al, 2010, p. 206)

With 40,506 hectares of pastures and meadows and only 4,932 hectares of arable land (approx. 4.6 % of the studied area), the prevalence of the *stock breeding* sector is obvious, and counted in 2008 a total of 11,334 cattle, 9,415 swine, 36,155 sheep and 91,199 poultry.

The montane pasturing represents an occupation specific for a certain way of life of the autochthonous “someșan” and “ilvan” Romanians and a fundamental traditional activity which deciphers the very permanence of the locals in a space stricken by both history and nature. Despite harsh climate (cold rain shower, persistent fog, early – sometimes august – hail and snowfall often catching the herds on the mountain off guard), the locals continued to practice pastoralism, an occupation attested by 14th and 15th century documents as being an inseparable part of the live of the villages from these ancient lands (Morariu, 1937). Probative for the existence of this activity is the ongoing presence of the toponym *nedei* (a flat place on the mountain where homonymous festivities were held on certain occasions by herders), frequently occurring in the southern Rodnei Mts. and adopted by the geographic literature.

The regional particularity is given by the existence of mountains for summer grazing, with folds (e.g. Ciungi, Curățel, Crăciunel, Cișa, Lazi, Paltin, Putredu, Zănoaga) and mountains for hay meadows (Fântânele, Capul Beneșului, Culmea Lazului).

The beekeeping is one of the old activities of the locals, and this is proved by the persistency of characteristic toponyms, such as Dealul Stupini, and by historical documents. Thus

there is mentioned that during the Tatar invasion in the year 1717 there were 458 beehives destroyed in Rodna (Păiuș, 2003).

More recent, between 1995 and 2000, during winter, there were “initiation courses” for beekeeping organised in Sângeorz-Băi, with a good participation from people from the Someș and Ilva valleys, and, beginning with 2001, the Beekeeper Association County Branch reorganised itself after the model of the Sângeorz Apiculturist Club.

OVERVIEW ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE AGRICULTURE FROM THE UPPER BASIN OF THE SOMEȘUL MARE RIVER

Two decades ago, the systematic management of rural space stopped to factually depend on decisions taken at national and county level, being transferred, naturally, to local communities.

Nowadays, however, decisional autonomy is not accompanied by a legislation favourable to local development based on own financial resources, because a large part of this funds is directed to the centralized state budget.

Given this reality, the ten administrative entities from the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River (nine communes and one town) reached a point of some imperative questions: what shall be done in order to link traditional rural households to the present day realities? How can subsistence agriculture be left behind and what opportunities come in useful to agriculture by extending the Rodnei Mountains National Park (RMNP) until its boundaries will reach the local’s properties? As expected, the first institutions trying to get an answer were town halls.

Initially, over a decade ago, when the EU started to direct large PHARE and SAPARD pre-adhesion fund to Eastern Europe, with EU candidate nations, local authorities (town halls) from the ten administrative entities of the Someș upper basin showed a real interest in supporting entrepreneurs to access them.

The mountain, with its harsh natural environment, determined most austere activities in the region: mining, stock breeding, forest work, and building material exploitation (Rey, 1985). Mining came to an end by the year 2006, wood exploitation and primary processing experienced a remarkable development until the start of the financial crisis in 2008, and stock breeding is endangered by milk and meat products imported from other EU countries.

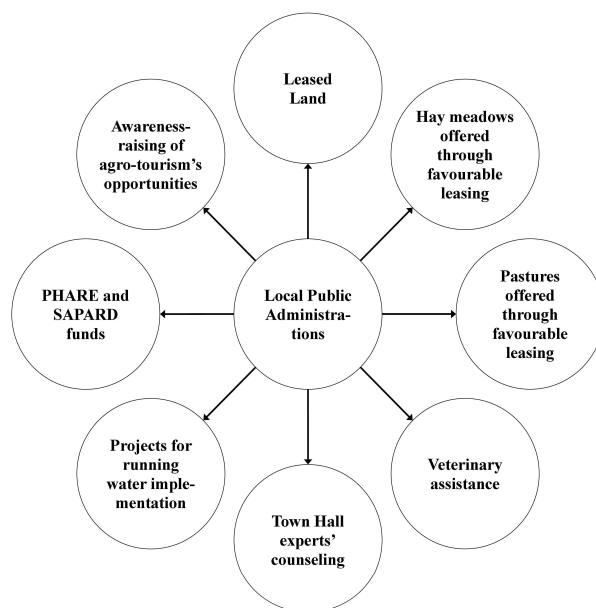


Figure 2. Ways to support local agriculture by Town Halls

To this moment, town halls in the region supported local agriculture through following initiatives (figure 2):

- Town hall experts' counselling;
- Land leasing for installing agricultural products processing facilities (esp. milk);
- Hay meadows offered through favourable leasing;
- Pastures offered through favourable leasing;
- Veterinary assistance;
- Projects for running water implementation;
- Support for accessing PHARE and SAPARD funds (town halls from Șanț, Rodna, Maieru, Sângeorz-Băi, Leșu, Ilva Mare and Lunca Ilvei supported 12 entrepreneurs to access funds in order to re-finance 12 milk processing businesses);
- Expert awareness-raising of agro-tourism opportunities.

In the timeframe 1990-2005 positive results occurred, especially in the dairy cow growing sector, intensely stimulated by PHARE and SAPARD projects implementation, fact that became visible through the 18 milk processing businesses operating in 2005.

An interesting correlation can be made between the retreats of former state employees (esp. from the mining sector) to their own households, the increasing number of cows, the rising of milk production, the multiplication of private milk processing operators, and the increasing number of employees in this particular sector (figure 3).

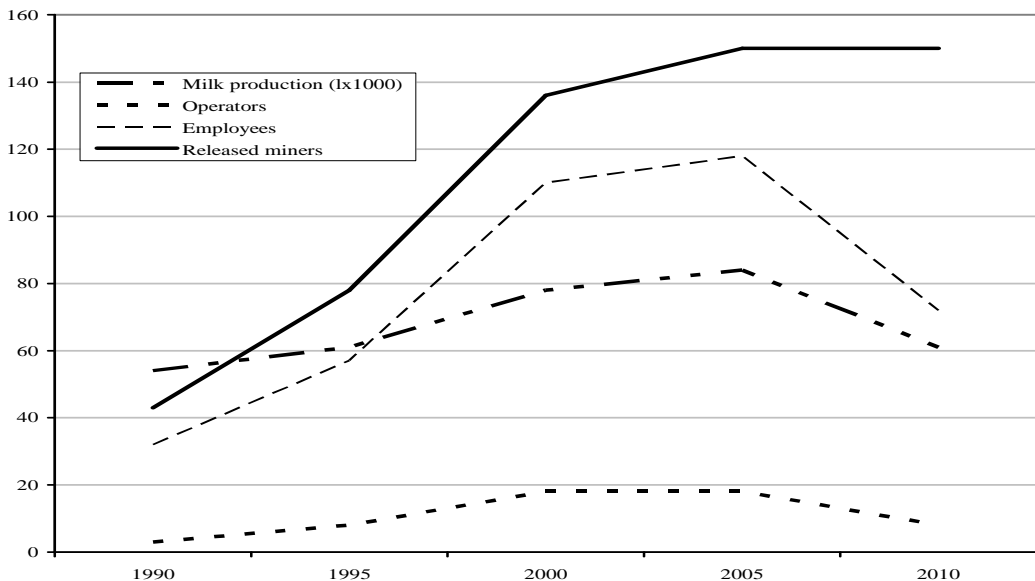


Figure 3. Correlation between the retreats of former state employees to their own households (mainly released miners), the increase of dairy cow number and milk production, of private milk processing operators, and of employees number

Figure 3 reveals the remarkable positive evolution of three of the indicators until 2005, when, in the pre-adhesion period, Romania had to meet very high standards, especially in the milk processing sector. This generated an obvious regress of all the elements of the correlation. Regarding miners, the evolution curve on the chart represents the cumulative number of mine workers released from the mining sector in the year of reference, and it reveals a remarkable match to the one representing the evolution of employees in the milk processing sector. At this point we want to add that many of these miners were not actually released, but voluntarily left their jobs when the mining company intended job cuts, encouraged by compensatory payments offered by

the state, and by the support from town halls in accessing PHARE and SAPARD funds (which helped them to start small businesses in the sector of dairy cow breeding or the milk processing industry). Another cause for miners quitting their jobs was also the ulterior motive that the mining activity will eventually be terminated in the near future.

Between 2005 and 2010, a great number of milk processing operators vanished (12 out of 18), and, consequently, the number of dairy cows, the milk production and employees' number decreased (Fig. 3).

At the end of the year 2008, after two years from EU adhesion, local authorities' reports, based on production amount, revealed that agriculture was still a subsistence one, with the exception of the livestock breeding sector, where the six remaining milk processing operators have an exceeding production.

This correlation shows us, among others, that the period of maximum development of the dairy cow breeding sector, milk production sector, and milk processing operators coincides with the years in which town halls offered farmers intensive support in accessing PHARE and SAPARD funds.

The foundation PIAA (Payment and Intervention in Agriculture Agency) dramatically changed the situation. Beginning with 2007, PIAA manages European funds for the implementation of supporting measures, financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF). Subvention are granted as direct payments per hectare, managed by the Integrated Management and Control System (IACS / IMCS), following market measures for commercial structures implementation according to Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

As for the administrative entities in the studied area, the local PIAA centres have a poor collaboration with local public administrations (town halls), and local farmers are losing important funds that could help them develop their homesteads and direct them to montane ecological production, producing "Park"-labelled goods.

Between 2007 and 2010, local communities lost over 20 million € because town halls did not supported the farmers in setting a fair solution regarding cadastral plans. The inaccuracy of these plans, as well as the differences between late years' photomaps and cadastral documents frustrated farmers of substantial European funds.

A beneficial, productive relationship between county and local PIAA offices and town halls should base on the following elements:

- Town halls, in collaboration with PIAA, have to offer all information required by farmers regarding local ecological, montane agriculture investment opportunities;
- Supporting the farmers to clear their properties' cadastral situation;
- Identifying national and export markets for "Park"-labelled eco-products;
- Elaboration and implementation of procedures regarding the application of the ecological agricultural products intervention system;
- Warranting financial counselling for past payments;
- Assistance, through own specialists, of financial operations regarding the management of allocated funds.

It is our belief that all these actions will transform local public administrations in dynamic and productive actors on the market of montane ecological agriculture development, as sole alternative for the sustainable development of the Romanian village from the upper basin of the Someşul Mare River.

LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE TRADITIONALISM OF FARMERS

Our research was made in two steps – interviews with representatives of the ten municipality administrations and with landowners.

The first interview guide included, among other items, following questions:

1. Which steps should the agriculture in the region undertake in order to bring more prosperity to the population and the settlements?

2. What chances do you grant to an ecological montane agriculture?
3. What means do you have at your disposal to sustain an ecological montane agriculture?
4. How long will it take, in your opinion, for this region to become a supplier of “Park”-labelled bio-products on national and European markets?

At the same time, in order to compare the perception of our two groups, we questioned a total of 128 farmers (93 male, 35 female) which answered to questions such as:

1. To which extent does the town-hall support your agricultural activities?
2. What do you know about ecological agricultural products?
3. Would you participate to some agro-ecological projects and, implicitly, to place your land to their disposal?
4. If you answered affirmative to the previous question, what conditions would you set?

From the answers of town-hall representatives, we were able to extract several important conclusions:

- To the first question, all representatives underlined the need to voluntarily merge the highly fragmented properties, as a condition for higher yields that would have real market chances and the possibility to overcome the present stage of traditional subsistence agriculture;

- The answers to the second question were something more diversified – even if all town-hall representatives believe in such an alternative, the evolution speed is perceived differently (from 10 years by the mayor of Rodna, to 20 years by the mayors of Șanț, Maieru, Lunca Ilvei, Poiana Ilvei, Sângeorz-Băi, Măgura Ilvei and even 50 years by the mayors of Ilva Mică, Ilva Mare, Leșu Ilvei);

- Regarding the actual means to sustain an ecological montane agriculture, the town-hall representatives believe that they can develop, through agriculture officials and council members, an awareness-raising activity (Rodna, Sângeorz-Băi, Maieru, Măgura Ilvei, Lunca Ilvei), support, by own financial means, special courses for farmers (Rodna, Sângeorz-Băi, Maieru, Măgura Ilvei, Lunca Ilvei, Ilva Mare), while other municipalities (Șanț, Ilva Mică, Poiana Ilvei, Leșu Ilvei) appreciate that they can place at the disposal of this project their agricultural lots and can help to solution the cadastral problem, wherever it is necessary;

- For the occurrence of “Park”-labelled bio-products, the answers are linked to those for the second question, the town-hall representatives underlining, however, that it is hard to predict the evolution of national and international markets regarding bio-products.

The second set of questions, addressed to farmers, tried to register the perception of individuals possessing parcels of various sizes (small, under 1 hectare; medium, between 1 and 3 hectares; large, over 3 hectares), as follows:

- To the question regarding municipality support for agricultural activities, most of the respondents accused a minor participation of town-halls in the development of local agriculture (69 respondents), a number of 32 respondents declared themselves contended, while the rest (27) offered evasive, inconclusive answers;

- The answers to the question regarding ecological agricultural products can be grouped in two categories: favourable ones, proving a reasonable knowledge about bio-products (71 respondents), from which only 7 over 50 years old, and the unfavourable ones, revealing either a total lack of information regarding bio-products (30 respondents, all over 50 years of age), or a limited knowledge on the problem (27 respondents, all of which older than 50 years);

- The answers to the third and fourth questions are more diverse, matching the strong bond to property of the respondents and the individual’s mentality regarding the radical change of a traditional way of life. Here, too, the positive answers regarding the project were offered by the younger population (from which over 40 persons worked abroad, also, where they lived different experiences), as follows: from the 64 respondents under 50 years of age, 44 saluted such a project and would unconditionally offer their land for its implementation (only requesting that the local administration should solve the problem of storage for bio-products and of markets); 12 respondents from this age category are prepared to participate to such a project, but they have

doubts about land merging; 8 respondents have serious concerns about both the project and the property problem. From among the farmers exceeding 50 years of age, following three categories of answers returned: 7 respondents were favourable to the project and wish to participate with their land, 18 would participate only after the legal status of the attached land will be resolved, while 39 respondents believe that the present traditional form of agriculture shall be preserved, even if it doesn't produce a significant income.

Considering the answers, we were able to group the landowner respondents in two age categories – under and over 50 years; those over 50 years old are more conservative, while the younger show a more positive attitude regarding the implementation of a montane ecologic agriculture.

If we analyse the answers from the two categories of questionnaires, we'll discover a significant contrast between the willingness and availability of town hall representatives for the modernization of agriculture in the studied area and the reticence, basing on a harmful traditionalism, of almost half of the responding farmers. But this contrast also reveals the bright side of the reality, with municipalities having forward-looking mayors, eager to modernize the villages they were elected to lead, along with public servants willing to renew the settlements they work for, but also a significant number of young farmers prepared to participate unconditionally to projects trying to link the local traditional agriculture to a modern montane agro-ecology.

The discussions with representatives of town halls, the farmers and those of stockbreeders and sheep farmers, with employees from PIAA, with veterinaries, etc, helped us to sketch an overview of the present state of local agriculture, and, moreover, of the potential of each administration to sustain the transition from the obsolete traditional agriculture to the montane ecological agriculture. Linking all the aspects observed with the (higher or lower) potential of local public administrations to create storage facilities and to find markets for "Park"-labelled agricultural products, the image comes into sharper relief.

The analysis of information led us to a synthesizing formula, through which we will try, basing on the amount of favourability, to highlight the potential of local public administrations and of local communities to promote the project of deployment montane ecological agriculture in the region:

$$Plpa \& lc = \sum_{k=1}^N x_k \quad (1)$$

where Plpa&lc = total potential of local public administrations and local communities;

N = number of settlements = 10

x_k = each settlement's potential, where x ranges from 1 to 10

The rating system for each local public administration and local community on a 1 to 10 scale is based on a specific series of favourability elements, such as: the open mind of local public administration and the active involvement in the modernization of infrastructure, generally, and of agriculture, in particular = 3 points; awareness-raising activities for new opportunities = 2 p.; cooperation with = PIAA = 2p.; perception and attitude of local communities regarding the project = 3p.

Once the numeric expressions characteristic for all local public administrations and local communities from the region are calculated, we will obtain, by summarising, their level of readiness for applying to such a project. The elements reveal the following hierarchy (figure 4):

1. Rodna – 9 points
2. Lunca Ilvei – 8 p.
3. Maieru – 7p.
4. Măgura Ilvei – 7 p.
5. Ilva Mare – 6 p.

6. Leșu Ilvei – 6p.
7. Șanț – 6p.
8. Sângeorz-Băi – 5 p.
9. Ilva Mare – 5 p.
10. Poiana Ilvei – 5 p.

The total potential of local public administrations and local communities summed 64 points out of 100 possible points.

Knowing the structure ranking for local public administrations and local communities allows us to point out the settlement which may become a pilot centre for the implementation of any projects for the development of a modern agro-eco-montanology.

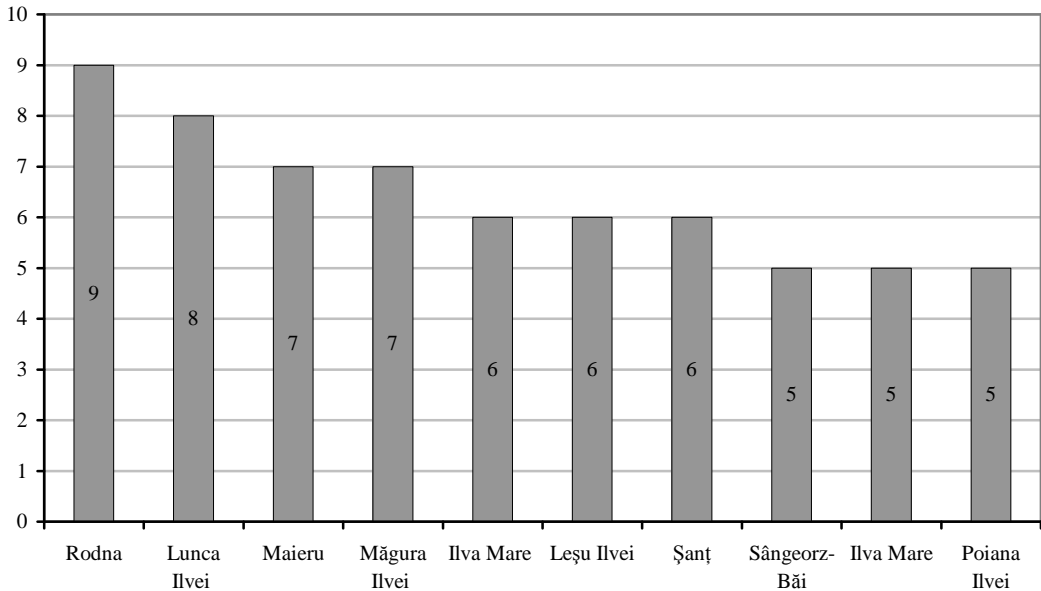


Figure 4. The score earned by each of the 10 administrative units for their potential to implement the project of development of a montane eco-agriculture

If we try to analyse the results, we see that Rodna, which was always the most emancipated settlement from the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River, meets the conditions to become a pilot centre for the development of montane ecological agriculture, a role that might also be played in the region by Lunca Ilvei (with a very active municipality and the most developed agro-tourism in the region). Maieru and Măgura Ilvei gained a reasonable score, mainly thanks to young and dynamic mayors, very active in the collaboration with the population, but also in the attraction of European funds for developing some agriculture modernisation projects (the municipality of Măgura Ilvei, for example, will start this year a project to build three very modern mountain sheep farms).

At Ilva Mare, Leșu Ilvei and Șanț, the municipalities are active and involved, but modernization projects meet an important resistance from the farmers. In the spa-city of Sângeorz-Băi, the modernization of spa therapy gets most of the interest, at Ilva Mică, houses are highly scattered on hillsides, with land tenures gravitating around them and with a highly contented population with the present conditions, and Poiana Ilvei is a commune founded only in 2003, where most of the population wants to remain sole landowners.

Trying to realise a SWOT analysis for Rodna, as a potential pilot centre, we can point out the following:

SWOT-analysis on Rodna's condition as possible pilot centre for the implementation of a montane ecologic agriculture in the region

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An active and dynamic mayoralty, with numerous graduate specialists and a mayor (formerly the commune's veterinary) with a good knowledge of the people and the local realities. - The presence of a local PIAA centre, functioning in a town hall building and financially supported by the local public administration, employing two local agricultural engineers, very familiar with the region's conditions. - The presence in Rodna of the Rodnei Mountains National Park Administration (RMNPA), having rapid and real means to counsel farmers on "Park"-labelled bio-products. - A remarkable geo-demographical potential, with approx. 4200 locals ($\approx 65\%$) employed in agriculture on their own lots.

Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The harsh soil and climate conditions, with frequent temperature and pluvial fluctuations. - Approx. 25 % of arable land has remarkable relief energy (high declination). - From the over 2100 pensioners, more than 1000 work their land, and most of them are contented with their present earnings – their annuity and their subsistence agricultural products. - The traditionalism of farmers over 50 years of age. - The suspicion of older farmers regarding the lending of their land for the realisation of the project. - The shortage of reasonable access ways to some of the properties.

Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The modernization of most access ways to the properties, using local and European funds. - The presence of over 150 temporary housings ("field houses", shelters) on hay meadows and some arable land, that can be utilized for both husbandry and bio-product cultivation. - The experts from the town halls, the local PIAA centre (counting three agricultural engineers) and from the RMNPA, which can counsel farmers in the field of montane ecological agriculture. - The adequate transportation infrastructure. - The lack of alternatives, on local level, for hundreds of young locals without another workplace.

Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weather conditions in the mountains, that can compromise, in some years, the ecological production - The unpredictable course of specific markets - The wastage of products that have not been collected and distributed in time - The abandonment of the project by some doubtful farmers - The ongoing fragmentation of estates through inheritance - The competition of producers from traditional regions (mostly external) - The changes in the local administration due to local elections, whereby mayors hostile to the project were coming into office - The instability of legal milieu

CONCLUSIONS

The ten administrative entities from the upper basin of the Someşul Mare River experienced after 1990 a harsh period, pointed by the downfall of traditional industrial activities, such as mining, forest exploitation and primary wood processing, quarry construction material mining, etc., which determined a lot of released workers from those sectors to return to their traditional homesteads.

If by the year 2005 local public administrations supported farmers in accessing PHARE and SAPARD funds, after Romania's entrance in the EU and the take-over of rural development funds by PIAA, town halls vanished from the local agriculture supporting environment.

Synthetic, region-specific indicators reveal a local agriculture trapped in obsolete traditionalism.

In this environment, town halls must intervene, with on-hand authority and means, in the support of farmers, in order to overcome the step of subsistence and to reach a montane ecological local agriculture, with "Park"-labelled products.

The investigation among both, the ten local public administrations, and the farmers or other representatives of local communities, revealed the existence of a significant contrast between the good intentions of municipality representatives and the harmful traditionalism of many farmers.

Likewise, there is a remarkable human potential, represented by thousands of young farmers (under 50 years of age), willing to practice a montane ecological agriculture, with the condition that local public administrations will support them in building warehouses for bio-products and in identifying markets.

The evaluation of the region's administrative units' potential helped us to identify a possible pilot centre for the implementation of montane ecological agriculture, namely Rodna, a fact also revealed by our SWOT-analysis.

In order to link the local subsistence agriculture to the specific of montane ecologic agriculture, town halls from the upper basin of the Someșul Mare River have to effectively and active collaborate with the farmers and the local PIAA centres, this being the only way to ensure a sustainable development for the region's settlements.

It is imperative to abandon the declamation of circumstantial slogans and to pass over to definite actions and projects, beneficial and productive for the local public administrations and especially for the local communities they are representing.

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