

INTERDEPENDENCE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL ECONOMY LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN SERBIA¹

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Abstract

The work includes the analysis of different opinions and views on rural development and rural economy, both at the general level, and the level of Serbia. The first part of the paper, which analyzes the rural development at the community level, refers to the neglect of rural areas, and emphasizes the importance of the formation of local action groups (LAGs). Also mentioned are two conditions that Serbia needs to fulfill in order to improve the situation in the economy and society, which has a direct impact on rural community development. The second part of the paper highlights the importance of diversification of the rural economy of local communities in Serbia with respect to the diversity of local communities. Analysis of the structure of employment of rural labor force by sectors in Serbia (October 2013) indicates that only agriculture employs 21.8% of the population.

Key words: *rural economy, diversification, local action group, local communities*

Introduction

The concept of rural development can be found in economic theory and practice in recent decades. The methodological and analytical framework for scientific study and implementation of rural development can be reduced in several dimensions: regional (spatial), social and economic. There are several valid definitions of rural areas: according to the OECD typology, applied by the EU and EUROSTAT. The European Union

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applies OECD definition of rural. The purpose of rural development is the construction of an appropriate economic capacity of rural areas in order to improve the quality of residents life.

The most important mechanism for the implementation of LEADER at the local level is what is called Local Action Group (LAG). LAG is composed of representatives of different social, economic and political sectors that exist in the community, and their work is overseen by a Board (*Bogdanov, N., 2007*). The rural areas of Serbia swept the depopulation and aging. The decrease in the demographic vitality of rural areas is affected by emigration, especially of younger women (*Executive Summary first national report on social inclusion and poverty reduction in the Republic of Serbia - the role of local Government, 2011*).

The rural economy is territorially completed complex of economic activity in a particular area. In Serbia, this area includes 86% of the territory, and their lives more than half of the population. It should be borne in mind that the rural areas in our country are many times neglected. For example, the rural economy achieves almost 30% lower GDP per capita than the national average and is based on the significant role of the primary sector, especially agriculture (*Stojanović, Ognjanov, 2012*).

According to *Labour Force Survey* and author's calculations the dominant part of the rural labor force in Serbia is involved in agriculture, which puts Serbia among leading agrarian European countries. In addition to agriculture (21.8%), rural workforce is engaged in food processing industries (17%), wholesale and retail trade (12.1%), education (6.6%) and health and social care (5.70%).

Categorization of rural local communities in Serbia

The concept of rural development can be found in economic theory and economic practice in recent decades. Rural Development was created as a response to problems related to *intra* and *inter* regional disparities in economic development and serve as a (suitable) complex analysis of the development potential of rural areas. The methodological and analytical framework for scientific study and implementation of rural development can be reduced in several dimensions: regional (spatial), social and economic. All three aspects of rural development are conceptually and fundamentally very complex, and hence the definition of universal

development model and policy, which would be acceptable for the majority of regions or countries, is impossible.

There are several definitions of rural that might be applied:

1. *according to the OECD typology;*
2. *definition of rural applied by EU;*
3. *EUROSTAT approach to defining rural regions .*

According to the *OECD* typology rural regions are divided into three groups:

1. *regions where over 50 % of the population lives in rural communities - mostly rural regions;*
2. *regions in which 15 to 50 % of the population lives in rural communities - significantly rural regions and transition regions;*
3. *regions where less than 15 % of the population lives in rural communities - mostly urban regions.*

According to the definition of rural which applies *EU* rural areas are divided into:

1. *integrated rural areas* - areas with the highest employment in the secondary and tertiary sector , the growing population and a potential danger to the environment , social and cultural heritage;
2. *transitional rural areas* - areas relatively distant from urban centers with different mixtures of primary and secondary sectors;
3. *distant (remote) rural areas* - areas with low population density , highly dependent on agriculture , isolated due to geographical characteristics which provide only the most essential services.

EUROSTAT approach to defining rural regions is based on the degree of urbanization:

1. *Densely populated area* - the group of municipalities, each of which has a population density and total population greater than 50,000;
2. *Medium populated areas* - the group of municipalities, each of which has a population density greater than 500 inhabitants / km more than 100 inhabitants / km (which is not part of a densely populated area). The total population of the zone must be at least 50,000, or sea border with densely populated zone;
3. *Sparsely populated areas* - the group of municipalities that are placed even in densely populated areas or in the middle.

The European Union applies OECD definition of rural. The rural development strategies are theoretically formulated as three conceptual approaches:

1. *Strategies focused on particular sectors (sectorial approach)* - the basic principles related to economies of scale (productivity) and concentration of resources. Development concepts that period pushed the expansion of the urban economy, the rural sector was a "supplier" of food and raw materials. The objectives of rural development policies were modernization and specialization of agriculture, and promotion of the mobility of agricultural labor and capital;
2. *strategies focused on the rural environment (physical access)* - rural development policy is based on the spatial approach is justified by the heterogeneity of the area and its potential links between the metropolis and the provinces, unwanted consequences of economic growth and changes in certain areas . A key principle of these models is the reliance on local development potential and their innovative parts - local structures and community members;
3. *Strategies focused on people* - scholars generally agree that the concept of rural development based on human potential are not suitable, due to the high mobility of the educated and well-qualified workforce.

According to *Spalević A. (2009)* the potentials and limitations are defined (from an economic point of observation) for the development of rural areas in Serbia. *Potentials* from the economic point of observation are:

1. Reserves of labor in agriculture as well as working potential in other sectors;
2. Proximity to markets (in the village with a relatively small distance from urban settlements).

Constraints from the economic point of observation are:

1. Human resources (unfavorable age and educational structure and lack of motivation);
2. Physical capital and finance (underdeveloped economic structure, market structure and credit system);
3. Lack of market institutions;
4. Political environment (lack of political will and conflicts).

Priority users, aims and objectives of the rural development policy.
American experts believe that *the priority beneficiaries of rural*

development policy must be residents of poor rural areas, where it is estimated that one third equity position of the population has a low priority. Policy priority users in European theoretic are seen as farmers. It is obvious that both the low priority given to nature lovers and future generations in rural areas. Among American specialists *priority objectives of rural development are focused* on high quality of life for rural communities and the full employment of the rural population. The importance of preserving the rural environment and biodiversity has to be noted. In Europe, the heterogeneity of response is much larger - equal importance are the high quality of the rural environment and the lives of rural communities. In addition to these two goals high conservation of the rural landscape was also ranked (Bogdanov, 2007).

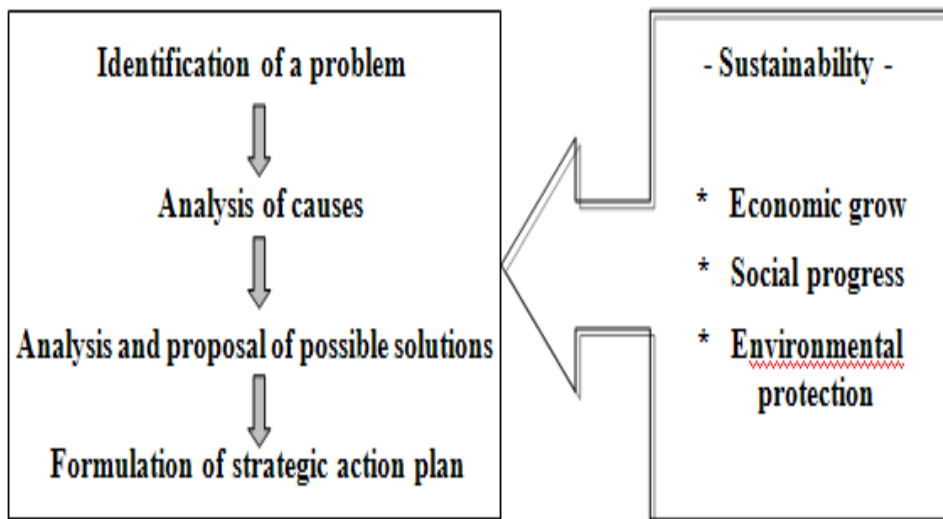
According to Bogdanov, N. (2007), every program will contain LEADER axis to finance and implement:

1. *Strategy LAG (Local Action Group) for local development , which are built on one or more of the three thematic axes;*
2. *operating costs of the LAG;*
3. *cooperation projects between LAGs;*
4. *experimental and pilot approaches;*
5. *capacity building and support necessary for the preparation of local development strategies.*

An effective method to implement the main objectives of pre-defined axes 1, 2 and 3 is the *LEADER approach (bottom-up)* use, through the *local development strategies* that must be innovative, integrated and participatory. This is undoubtedly approach for sustainable local economic development, and the main concept behind is that development strategies are more effective and more successful if they are made and implemented at the local level by local actors, accompanied by a clear and transparent procedures, supported by relevant public administration and with the necessary technical assistance for the transfer of good practice. The difference between the Leader and the other, more traditional rural policy, it states that the "how" to act, rather than the "what" to do ³. The main result of this attitude is to create a starting point for formulating an action plan (*Figure 1*) which will be, of course, strategically oriented, simultaneously taking into account the categories of sustainable development, namely *economic growth, social progress and environmental protection*.

³ Available at http://www.seerural.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/05_LIDER-PRISTUP.pdf

Figure 1. *The stages in the formulation of a strategic-oriented action plan, taking into account the sustainable development category*



Source: Sarić, R., Grujić, B., Roljević, S. (2011): „Rural development as the backbone of sustainable local economic development“, *Thematic Proceedings “Rural development policies from the EU enlargement perspective”*, Institute of Agricultural Economics Belgrade, Serbia, p. 69.

Local action groups. The most important mechanism for the implementation of LEADER at the local level is what is so called Local Action Group (LAG). LAG is composed of representatives of different social, economic and political sectors that exist in the community. According to *COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1698/2005*, LEADER program management at the local level, by local action groups, is characterized by several elements:

1. *each LAG must define their own geographic area , which covers the region with between 5,000 to 150,000 inhabitants , which is in charge;*
2. *LAGs operate to a pre -approved strategic plan appointed for the area. These multi - sector plans must be developed locally, and then submitted for approval to the institution at the national level;*
3. *LAGs are then responsible for the implementation of these plans over the LEADER program.*

Work LAG overseen by a Board composed must be expressed in a partnership of community, government and the private sector (ie., must be composed of representatives from the local and business communities,

local authorities, social partners, government agencies, etc.). LAGs in different countries are involved into different organizational forms – with limited liability in Ireland, as a non-profit consortium of Italy, as municipal associations and national parks in France, as well as cooperatives, associations and joint stock companies in other parts of Europe.

Strategic measures for rural development in Serbia. According to *Spalević A. (2009)*, the main aspects in the development of rural Serbia are:

1. *integral development;*
2. *cooperative enterprise;*
3. *models of agro -rural economy.*

Method of polycentric economic development is suitable for the realization of the policy of integrated rural development. This secondary development centers in rural areas should have: a minimum of labor to organize activities, utilities, cooperatives, and so on. For the further development of agriculture training of family farms and their better organization to participate in the competition is essential. In order to strengthen the economic power of rural areas some requirements needs to be met: *Competitive economy in the organized system of settlements and centers; Comasation; The role of government (Spalević, 2009).*

Competitive economy in the organized system of settlements and centers. The concept of rural development is based on the principle of the multifunctional development. By this a combined agricultural and other activities are covered. The realization of this concept is based on linking villages in the settlement system and communication with the centers of a higher order. This connection involves the formation of secondary centers at the municipal and village community centers. The community center of the village covers the catchment area from 3,000 to 10,000 residents. Small villages under 300 people should not keep from closing unless at strategic locations, or in areas with specific natural resources.

Comasation. The private sector of agriculture is typical for the petty possession - to 5 ha. Such a farm in Serbia represents approximately 80%. The average size of holdings used is 3.59 ha of arable land, which represents a major obstacle in the application of modern technology and machinery. Besides, the problem of small parcels, followed by increase of fallow and arable land for stick-in-the-mud uneconomic production. For the above plots it is impossible to build the necessary drainage systems. Such households do not have a real chance in agriculture, so it is

necessary to enlarge of either rapidly reorient activities in the non-agricultural sector.

The role of government is reduced to help in terms of funding and in the form of subsidies and loan approval for raising social standards and public utilities in the country and improvement of infrastructure, investment in human resources, the development of half/processing facilities in the villages, and so on (Spalević, 2009).

The rural areas of Serbia swept the depopulation and aging. The decrease in the demographic vitality of rural areas is affected and emigration, especially of the younger female population, further worsens the imbalance between male and female population in the country. Given the lack of a clear definition of rural areas in the official statistics, it is more difficult to adopt precise assess to the situation happening in the rural areas and with the rural population. Population in rural areas is poor and the overall growth of poverty during the crisis is the result of deterioration in the living standards of the population outside urban centers. The disadvantaged are especially households where agriculture is the only source of income.

Underdevelopment of municipal infrastructure and services sector adversely affects the quality of life of the rural population and encourage permanent migration. In the rural areas are less accessible health and education services, the share of people without health insurance is twice that of the total population, the small number of households paid pension and disability insurance, a very low number and proportion of social assistance and social protection services. There is a distinct gap in access to information - telecommunication technologies. Population in rural areas has poor access to key markets - goods, information and financial capital. The financial market is not structured according to the needs of farms and specificities of agriculture and farmers' awareness of the lowest among the farms of southeastern Serbia.

Support for rural development financed by the agricultural budget is focused on the growth of competitiveness of the agricultural sector, improving rural infrastructure and diversification of the income holdings. In the previous period (2008-2010) the various programs of the Government and donor funds are the most supported programs for water supply, development of local infrastructure and the development of rural tourism (*Executive Summary first national report on social inclusion and poverty reduction in the Republic of Serbia - the role of local Government, 2011*).

Serbia to the 2020th. Until 2013 Serbia decreased total imports, exports, gross domestic product (GDP), which creates the basic structural problems of Serbian economy and society. In order to improve the situation in the economy and society, it is crucial meeting two conditions (*Serbia 2020, 2010*):

1. *Institutional Reforms (Serbia to become a stable country);*
2. *Construction of infrastructure and defining the spatial development of Serbia (creating the preconditions for sustainable economic growth and development).*

Institutional reforms should define the framework and content of the basic institutional and regulatory changes that will lead to raising the responsibility of public officials. This includes harmonization of legislation with European principles and values. Upon completion of the *construction of infrastructure and defining the spatial development* provides the foundation for faster growth and development of the 2020th year. Designed multi-stage production of the entire work.

Diversification of the rural economy of local communities in Serbia

The rural economy is territorially completed complex of economic activity in a particular area. Subject of Rural Development treats territorial entities with a coherent economic and social structure. In Serbia, this area includes 86% of the territory, covered by more than a half of the population. It should be borne in mind that the rural areas in our country were neglected for many times. For example, the rural economy achieves almost 30% lower GDP per capita than the national average and is based on the significant role of the primary sector, especially agriculture (*Stojanović, Ognjanov, 2012*). When analyzing the diversification of the rural economy in Serbia, it is necessary to bear in mind the diversity of local communities Serbia (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *General characteristic of the rural areas in Serbia economies*

Economy characteristics	Rural area	Features of agriculture
High agricultural productivity and integrated economy	Vojvodina and northern parts of central Serbia around the rivers Sava and Danube	High productivity, better the structure of agricultural holdings, the vertical connection to the processing facilities
Male urban economy with agriculture, which depends on labor	These areas are located along rivers, on the main roads in central Serbia, and/or around urban centers	Agricultural production is intensive and market-oriented, while the environment is threatened in some areas due to the existence of outdated industries
Economy based on natural resources	The mountainous regions in the southeastern part of Serbia	Extensive agriculture, light industry, dependence on natural resources

Source: *Rural Development in the Republic of Serbia*, <http://www.exchange.org.rs/>

According to *National Rural Development Programme from 2011 to 2013*, The economic structure of rural areas in Serbia reflects the development of primary sector of the local communities, especially agriculture, which is still based on exploitation of natural resources. At least diversified income has households in Vojvodina, with 61% of farm income coming from agricultural products sales, of which 70% is made up of grain. The greatest degree of diversification among agricultural households has incomes in Western Serbia, with a significant income in the diversified farming and cattle breeding (Cvejić S., Babović M., Petrović M., Bogdanov N., Vuković O., 2010).

Nevertheless, the newly adopted strategic documents *Serbia 2020* predicts new solutions starting from the point of view that the rural areas are distinguished by unique economic and social characteristics specifically reflecting the existence of certain traditional activities.

The extent to which the strategy of *Serbia 2020* will be applicable in the rural sector of the economy is determined by the adopted priorities for rural development (*National Rural Development Program 2011–2013, 2010*).

Programming increase the development potential of rural areas, inter alia, for the first time based on an integral view of potential food processing and marketing. The vision for the food industry is based on the target consumer orientation, standardization and innovation. In particular, it was pointed out that we should encourage the development of small and medium-sized enterprises that produce and market products with protected designation of origin and products with protected geographical indications, as well as products based on traditional recipes. In addition to this vision defined the *vision for agriculture* and *vision for rural Serbia*. *Vision for Agriculture* refers to the production of the concept of dynamic development and builds a competitive family agriculture and agribusiness. Thus understood agriculture should be integrated with the wider food processing industry and be able to contribute to sustainable development through protection of environmental and few natural resources. *The vision for rural Serbia* aims to create a demographically balanced picture of rural regions to the same level as urban areas and thus contribute to income growth. According to Stojanović, Ognjanov (2012) programmed measures should contribute to the implementation of the following strategic objectives:

1. *Sustainable improvement of agricultural and food sector through investments in enhancing competitiveness;*

2. *To develop standards of food safety , veterinary and phytosanitary standards, environmental standards and other ones in accordance with the legal framework of the EU (EU Acquis Communautaire);*
3. *Sustainable development of the rural economy and rural areas - even encouraging expansion of agricultural activities in the countryside. From all the above it can be concluded that the standardization and increase of the production of traditional food on the territory of Serbia is clearly indicated as important strategic directions for the development of agro - rural economy in the future.*

Factors that influence the diversification of the rural economy.

Factors that influences the diversifications of the rural economy are numerous and very complex, so there are a large number of their divisions. *Bogdanov, N. (2007)* means that the most general separation factors influencing the distribution of labor households in *internal* (starting from the household/entrepreneurs) and those more general level, *external* (resulting from the local environment - the village/region). The main factors influencing the diversification activities of *households/entrepreneurs/individuals* are:

1. *Motivation* - commitment of individuals or households to diversify activities;
2. *Higher initial capital* - the loans may encourage specialization in more productive activities;
3. *Access to the market* - this factor does not include just the market for the product, but also the availability of factors such as transport, infrastructure and telecommunications, information sources and so on;
4. *Human resources* - better indicators of human capital (age, skills, education) provides a broad set of labor and entrepreneurial options for individuals and households;
5. *Gender equality* - the marginalization of women could be due to their reduced economic opportunities; is sensitive to the position of young people migrate to urban centers seasonally or permanently;
6. *Social capital* - the presence of adequate social resources, the network also increases possibilities for individuals and businesses.

The main factors influencing the diversification of activities at the *local/regional level* are:

1. *Increased proportion of out -farm activities (growth of the service sector, the processing of the product, etc.);*

2. *Increased diversification of sources of farm income (employment growth, the reduction of hidden unemployment, production diversification including new products, product specialization and increasing the standard and quality of products, etc.);*
3. *Changes in the distribution of income generated by diversification (increase in demand, investments, savings).*

All these factors lead to a higher or lower income inequality among community members, depending on the ability of individuals and households to engage in these processes. Apart from these, there are *factors that are particularly relevant* and important in relation to the previously mentioned:

1. *Local physical and natural resources* - the way in which productive resources used affect local economic growth;
2. *The quality of local government* - local government knows about specific rural resources and is more efficient in the operationalization of the program that it created itself;
3. *Local physical and communal infrastructure* - including a network of roads, telephone lines, social services and so on;
4. *strength of connections with the city* - the strength of this relationship is reflected in the supply of inputs, consumer goods, income population employed in urban centers or income from the sale of products in the city;
5. *Trade and transport* - an important indicator of the level of development of the local economy. Some authors believe that the development of productive chains and production partnership has long-term nature;
6. *social capital* - deciding on important aspects that determine the overall economic growth must be designed at the local level (including cooperatives and producer associations).

The dominant part of the rural labor force in Serbia work is in agriculture, which puts Serbia in most agrarian European countries. The current structure of employment is the result of insufficiently diversified economic structure. The economic structure of rural areas is still largely dependent on agriculture and food industry. The following is a tabular view (*Table 2*) of employment structure of rural labor force by sectors in Serbia as of October 2013.

Table 2. *Structure of employed persons by sections of activities in the Republic of Serbia, October 2013*

Section of Activities	October 2013	Structure of employed persons (%)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	522,084	21,8
Mining and quarrying	23,065	1,0
Manufacturing	399,654	16,7
Electricity and gas supply	37,206	1,6
Water supply; waste management	36,866	1,5
Construction	126,620	5,3
Retail and wholesale trade; repair of motor vehicles	288,606	12,1
Transportation and storage	130,882	5,5
Accommodation and food service activities	61,973	2,6
Information and communication	50,140	2,1
Financial and insurance activities	44,566	1,9
Real estate activities	2,028	0,1
Professional, scientific and technical activities	63,185	2,6
Administrative and support service activities	49,175	2,1
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	132,950	5,6
Education	156,867	6,6
Human health and social work	136,455	5,7
Art, entertainment and recreation	44,823	1,9
Other service activities	45,177	1,9
Goods and services producing activities of households for own use	41,003	1,7
Activities of extraterritorial organizations and bodies	680	-
Total	2,394,004	100,00

Source: *Labour Force Survey, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, October 2013, Belgrade*

Apart from agriculture (21.8%), rural workforce is engaged in manufacturing (17%), wholesale and retail trade (12.1%), education (6.6%) and human health and social work (5.70%). Sections in which the share of rural employment is also higher than 5% are public administration and defence (5.6%), transport and storage (5,5%) and construction (5.3%). Insufficient development of public services and the services sector in rural areas are the reason for the small number of jobs in these industries, and their low representation in the total employment expected.

Economic growth in Serbia to 2020th. There are a large variety of options to stimulate economic growth in Serbia in the future. According

to the document *Serbia 2020 (2010)* some of the options would be (*Serbia 2020, 2010*):

- *regulatory reform, which will reduce administrative pressure on the economy;*
- *establishment of a new industrial policy which will encourage exports, to save resources and increase energy efficacy;*
- *definition of strategic sectors that need to be carriers of economic growth and exports.*

As one of the strategic sectors that should be the bearer of economic development is agricultural production. This primarily refers to the yield increase in agricultural production using modern technology, which would establish a leading position in this sector in the regional market. Taking into account the global market, Serbia needs to work on standardizing and increasing the agricultural production of the final products, with special emphasis on traditional products and products with protected geographic origin. These products can easily find its place in the global food market. This type of production can only create value-added producers in rural and underdeveloped areas, with the possibility of the development of cooperative systems association.

Conclusion

Based on the research it can be concluded that there are many ways that Serbia can improve the situation of rural communities. Some of them will be enumerated:

- *Economic Recovery and Development of Serbia is based on a strong private sector;*
- *Privacy reliance on agriculture and the rural economy should be a permanent commitment of our country and as such is based on decentralization and balanced economic development;*
- *the realization of the concept of the rural economy, it is necessary to include direct and mixed farming households;*
- *emphasis should be placed on ensuring the conditions for diversification of activities of the local population;*
- *it is necessary to establish good cooperation between state and local governments.*

In general, more efficient and more successful implementation of local development strategy involves strategic planning in the sense that it is

necessary to know the developmental problems that exist in the environment, and the goals to be achieved in order to overcome these problems and improve the environment.

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