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Installation of young farmers in the context of rural development in Romania: Implementation of action from the WWP approach

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INSTALLATION OF YOUNG FARMERS IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA: IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION FROM THE WWP APPROACH

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Summary

In the rural development context, the term “Working With People (WWP)” means a professional practice developed in cooperation that seeks to connect knowledge (expert and experienced) with actions by a common project. This professional practice includes the technical value of the production –goods and services generated– and incorporates the development of the actors who take part into the participatory activities. This communication illustrates the application from the USR (Support Unit of the National Network for Rural Development of Romania) of the WWP approach to the planning of measures addressed to “Setting up of young farmers” included in the National Rural Development Programme of Romania. Instruments used and results from the participatory activities, with planners, managers and direct beneficiaries, carried on by the USR are described. The results show the principal problems identified in Romania and the proposed improvements at the level of LAG, the USR and the Ministry of Agriculture. Participatory processes based on WWP approach allow the actors to be more than simple information providers, by involving them actively in the search of proposals of improvement. The integration of expert and experienced knowledge enables them to manage the implementation of the proposed solutions.

Keywords. *Working With People, young farmers, rural development,*

INTRODUCTION

The agriculture reform carried out after 1991 caused the transformation of the agricultural property structure in Romania [18, 19, 20]. Agricultural and forestry land owned by the state was “re-transferred” to private owners [22, 8]. The result was an unbalanced agricultural system [15]: on one hand a large number of small holdings running a semi-subsistence system [8]; and on the other hand, a small number of large farms [22, 21].

Nowadays, these disadvantages have been intensified in rural areas by an unfavourable age structure [16]. Data from the last complete European Farm Structure Survey (FSS) show that in 2007 the farm holders aged 65 years or over were 44.2% in Romania, while in the EU they were 34.1%. Besides farm holders under 35 years old were 4.5% in Romania, while in the EU they were 17.3% [23]. Young farmers benefit from assistance schemes offered by the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Current National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) of Romanian cludes the measure 112 “Setting up of young farmers”.

From the USR (Support Unit of the National Network for Rural Development of Romania) the WWP approach has been applied to reach the setting up of young farmers in rural Romania. WWP is “the professional team practice that seeks to connect knowledge and action by a common project, which besides the technical value of production-of goods and services- mainly incorporates the value of people who get involved, participate and are developed through the actions developed within the context of the project” [5]. Through WWP we got information about the effect of the measure 112 and identified the problems and the proposed improvements at the level of LAG, the USR and the Ministry of Agriculture in relation to setting up of young farmers in Romania.

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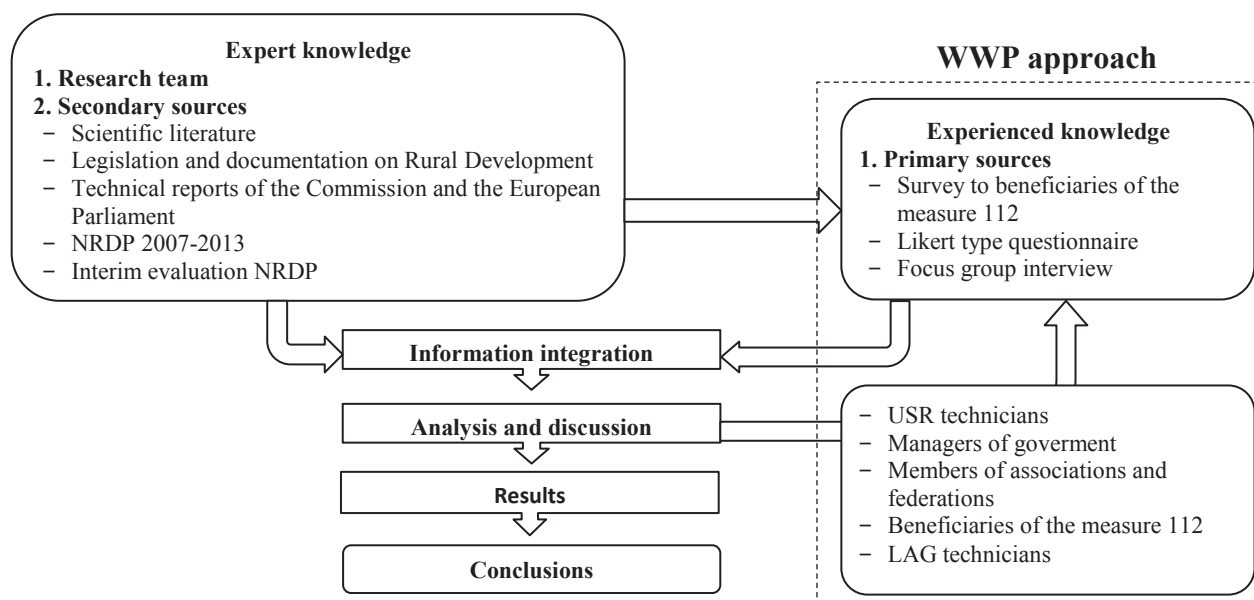
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MATERIAL AND METHODS

The methodology used on the research follows WWP approach [4, 5], integrates expert knowledge, from the research team, and experienced knowledge from the different actors implicated in the context of NRDP of Romania 2007-2013 about setting up of young people measure, based on the following diagram:



We used secondary information sources to review current situation, problems and potential solutions about setting up of young farmers topic in the European Union and Romania. The sources include scientific literature, European legislation and documentation on Rural Development, technical reports of the Commission and the European Parliament, National Rural Development Programme of Romania 2007-2013, and interim evaluation of National Rural Development Programme.

In order to collect information from primary information sources we used three different tools combining quantitative and qualitative methods.

1) The quantitative study is based on a survey to beneficiaries of the measure 112 conducted in 2010 over the interim evaluation of NRDP 2007-2013. The survey was designed with a confidence level of 95% and an error of 5%, a total of 132 interviews over a total of 2784 beneficiaries. The goal was to learn from the experience the effects of the NRDP measure 112 “setting up of young farmers” in rural areas from 2007 to 2009 along the implementation of the NRDP.

Quantitative data were collected from a participative process during the third workshop of the ad-hoc seminar “Development in rural areas and business opportunities by young farmers and entrepreneurs oriented to non-agricultural activities” in Alba-Iulia on June 15, 2012. The workshop was conducted by experts from the USR and the Technical University of Madrid (UPM) and carried on a Likert type questionnaire and a focus group interview. Participants include experts from different groups: USR technicians, managers of government and members of associations and federations of farmers, Local Action Groups (LAG) technicians, and beneficiaries of the measure 112.

2) 19 participants were asked to use a 5-point Likert type questionnaire. They rated problems (10 items) and solutions (9 items), identified in the bibliography review at European level as most important in Romania about setting up young people. Responses to the questions were measured on Likert scale: 1 = “very unimportant”; 5 = “very important”.

3) A focus group interview [17, 14] was carried out. The aim was to identify and assess the main problems for setting up of young farmers in Romania. 22 experts were divided in two groups,

each one was composed by a representative number of experts from each organization in order to increase the different points of view and enrich the discussion. Experts addressed four research questions about weaknesses and solutions related to professional skills of young people in rural areas. In addition to discussions for each question, the experts wrote on a form their opinions. Finally, the ideas proposed by the group were assessed for further discussion.

The application of WWP approach has been shown to be a useful methodology to improve policies and programs in rural development contexts. It has been applied in the EU [5] and in South American countries [4]. WWP approach shows the need to overcome the technical vision of the development programs, focusing on the behaviour of individuals and the context in which they work [12]. WWP is intended to improve human behaviour of the actors involved. Therefore, WWP project requires that planners, in addition to certain technical and contextual skills, have a special sensitivity to social [3] and sound ethical principles [11].

Following [4] the WWP approach may be summarized around four components: ethical-social, technical-entrepreneurial, political-contextual and social learning. i) The ethical-social component is aimed at improving the level of behaviours, attitudes and values of people who interact to promote, manage and direct their own development project. Try to improve moral behaviour of the people involved in a project in order that actors from public and private areas work together, with commitment, trust and personal freedom. The incorporation of ethics means that project developed under WWP approach is not "neutral", but is based on an ideal of service and is guided by values.

ii) The technical-entrepreneurial component integrates the elements to provide projects as investment unit and technical tools able to generate goods and services, to meet strategic objectives and business, in accordance with requirements and quality standards. The WWP approach adopts a "business function" -as mobilizing human, economical, public, private resources- leading to the arrangement and negotiation between various actors and involves a commitment to assume and manage risk. WWP approach serves not only to achieve "tangible" benefits, but to care about the "intangible" benefits in the form of expansion of knowledge, and social and cultural aspects.

iii) Political-contextual component provides the WWP approach the elements to meet with the rural development context. This area covers the ability of planners to make relations with political organizations and with the different public-administrations. The configuration of WWP approach must ensure that organizational change processes and structural processes are generated to allow adaptation to the priorities of involved people, also working with actors from the political and public administration fields. WWP organization has, therefore, an instrumental character, to serve the population, and it is flexible and changing according to the learning and the new information generated.

iv) Finally social learning component provides to the WWP approach an integrating component to ensure space and social learning processes [9, 1] among the different components, which lead to learn from the real agents of change. The social learning process runs with the main assumption that all effective learning comes from the experience of reality change. The process emphasizes on improving the linkage of knowledge, endogenous and exogenous, and practice planning. It mobilizes public and private resources in innovative solutions to the challenging problems of rural projects. In order to the population affected by the project actively participates in planning, with their own behaviours, attitudes and values -ethical-social component- to promote, manage and direct it.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Impact of the measure 112 in Romania

The results of the survey to beneficiaries of the measure 112 presented in Table 1 show that half of those polled set as a new farmer (57.7%). Half of them, were already established in rural areas, before applying for measure 112, but NRDP funds help them to stay at the rural areas

(51.5%), and 28.5% were established as new rural inhabitants. Besides holdings have become more productive (73.3%) and the majority are optimistic about the future, they think that current farm activity will be profitable in the future (84.6%).

Table 1. Effects of the NRDP measure 112 “setting up of young farmers”

Funding through NRDP measures has helped to	%
I set as a new farmer, because I was not	57.7
I continue my farming activity, but I have improved it	90.8
To initiate a complementary farming or forestry activity	10.8
Total change of my activity	15.4
Have you established in rural areas using NRDP funding?	%
Yes	28.5
No	20
I was already established, but NRDP funds helped me to remain	51.5
Do you think your current farm activity will be profitable in the future?	%
Yes	84.6
No	10
Ns / nc	5.4
Do you think your farm is now more productive than before to receive NRDP funds? What percentage?	%
Yes	73.8
No	11.5
Ns / nc	14.3
Estimated Average % increase in productivity	27

Perceptions of problems and solutions about setting up of young people

Perceptions of the importance of problems and solutions identified in the bibliography about setting up of young people are showed in Table 2.

Table 2. Importance of the problems and solutions identified in the bibliography review at European level more important in Romania

PROBLEMS	N	Mean	S.d
Difficult to take possession of land and high cost to start in farming	17	4.48	0.87
National legislation on succession	17	4.04	0.78
Difficulty to access to credit	16	3.93	1.00
Poor representation of young people in associations and cooperatives	17	3.78	0.86
Insufficient and inadequate professional training	17	3.76	1.14
Lack of basic infrastructure and social services	17	3.50	1.06
Unemployment and poor access opportunities in the labour market	17	3.38	1.07
Depopulation and loss of identity and traditions in rural areas	17	3.15	1.11
Lack of activities for young women	17	2.33	1.67
Negative image of farming way of live	17	1.93	1.45
SOLUTIONS	N	Mean	S.d
Facilitate holding transfer and reduce succession bureaucracy	19	4.63	0.67
Develop training programs tailored to the real needs	19	4.37	0.84
Encouraging the participation of young farmers in associations	18	4.21	0.75
Promoting information and communication technologies	19	4.18	1.00
Facilitate access to information about policies, programs and agriculture measures in EU	19	4.16	0.87
Increase the involvement of young people in their community development processes, including participatory decision-making	19	4.14	0.93
Promote entrepreneurship for economic diversification	19	4.03	0.96
Improving infrastructure and basic social services	19	4.03	0.96
Facilitate hiring of support services during periods in which farmers are unable to carry on the farm activity	18	3.86	1.16

Means were calculated based on a scale of 1 = very unimportant 2 = unimportant; 3 = medium; 4 = important; and 5 = very important

Most important problems are related to access to land: difficulty to take possession of land and high cost to start in farming (mean = 4.48, s.d. = 0.95); legislation on succession (mean = 4.04, s.d. = 0.78); and difficulty to access to credit (mean = 3.93, s.d. = 1). The sale of holdings is made difficult by a market that is still emerging, has high transaction costs, and fragmentation of land [22]. The following problems are the poor representation of young people in associations and

cooperatives (mean = 3.78, s.d. = 0.86) and insufficient and inadequate professional training (mean = 3.76, s.d. = 1.14). A study on the impact of training activities conducted by Foundation for the Promotion of Agriculture and Regional Economy (FAER) and Land witchcraft Agriculture Mezoögazdaság (LAM) Foundation in Romania. The professional training, consulting services and exposure visits are necessary to meet the challenges of rural areas [16].

As in the case of the perceptions of the problems, the most important solution according to participants was: facilitate holding transfer and reduce succession bureaucracy (mean = 4.63, s.d. = 0.67). Second solution is developing training programs tailored to the real needs (mean = 4.37, s.d. = 0.84). Studies in rural areas show that individuals with more education have more participatory behaviours and attitudes of leadership in social, economic and cultural fields [13, 10]. This solution was followed by encouraging the participation of young farmers in associations (mean = 4.21, s.d. = 0.75). Fourth is to promote information and communication technologies (mean = 4.18, s.d. 1); and fifth is to facilitate access to information about policies, programs and agriculture measures in EU (mean = 4.16, s.d. = 0.87). Information is an essential tool in the development process in rural areas. The lack of meaningful information and clear and concrete proposals has become a major obstacle to decision making [7].

Solutions proposed at different administrative level to Romania

Problems indicated by experts who participated in the focus group, match the problems identified in the literature review at European level, but the order changes. First stands the lack of suitable professional training, followed by the poor living conditions and the lack of perspective in relation to a decent lifestyle in the rural areas. Third problem is the lack of information on legislation and rural development programs appropriate to the target groups, fourth, the lack of social infrastructure in rural communities, and fifth the lack of youth participation in decision-making.

First solution proposed at LAG level is to identify and promote training opportunities, although in principle the objectives of the LAG are not the organization of training activities in agricultural issues. Secondly is to provide suitable information on legislation and NRDP measures to target groups. And thirdly is to promote collaboration and team work between the LAGs.

Solutions proposed at USR level in collaboration with the National Rural Development Network (NRDN) of Romania focus on providing information on legislation, Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) programs, guidance for applying to NRDP measures, best practices, etc. to potential beneficiaries, and to support, organize, identify and promote professional training opportunities for target groups (young farmers associations, etc.).

The MARD level solutions are much more varied, ranging from reducing bureaucracy and facilitate the procedures to request access to NRDP measures, promote legislation favourable to young people, or create professional training institutions specializing in agriculture in collaboration with the ministry of education.

CONCLUSSIONS

This paper has examined the application of WWP approach from USR to diagnose problems and suggest solutions to improve the setting up of young farmers in Romania. The WWP process allows the principal actors to be involved in promoting rural development and setting up of young people and to take part in the decision making process.

Success of WWP approach requires "social sensitivity" from planners and "stock assessment" to understand different perspectives and to be receptive to opinions, value judgments and ethical standards. Including key actors in participative processes to diagnose their problems provides specific data about the territory.

The implementation of the proposed solutions structured around the four components of WWP approach -ethical-social, technical-entrepreneurial, political-contextual and social learning-

will help rural communities to improve the establishment of young farmers, and to create improvement of innovation processes and development, while respecting their own culture, values and beliefs.

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