

Social Innovation and Rural Development: Experiences from Romania and Republic of Moldova

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Abstract: Social innovation is a multifaceted concept with major implications for different sectors - public, private and civil society, different fields - economic, social, educational, health, environment, different spaces - urban and rural. It involves several social actors and it is encouraged by various tools. It is seen as a paradigm with sustainable results in the communities involved. In the urban environment, progress is visible and easy to replicate, but in the rural environment the challenges of implementing specific solutions for social innovation are multiple. The paper aims to analyse rural development projects that include specific aspects of social innovation in their methodology, in order to highlight the results obtained and the impact at the level of communities in the North-East Region of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. To achieve this goal, we resorted to a step-by-step approach. In the first stage, we identified the projects financed through the programs with non-reimbursable financing, which had as objectives the development of the rural space and included components of social innovation. Through a cluster analysis, in the second stage we grouped the projects according to the main characteristics - size, field, results. In the final stage, through a case study specific approach, we illustrated the examples of good practice representative for both regions considered - the North-East Region of Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The materials used in the analysis were secondary sources - reports of funding programs, project documentation and case study articles. The conclusions of the paper highlight the results that are difficult to replicate for most of the analysed projects and a low sustainability of the projects in many situations. Extensive partnerships and applicants' experience are key to the long-term success of social innovation projects.

Keywords: social innovation, rural development, innovative projects.