

# Facets of Development: Evolutions and Challenges\*

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IOAN HOSU

## Socio-Economic Frameworks

**I**N THE public space, the periods of social and economic crisis entail debates that reflect how communities are organized in order to overcome extreme situations. Development projects represent strategic approaches generated by communities by which it is aimed to create or increase the community's capacity (human, institutional, economic, financial, infrastructure etc.) to produce positive changes: welfare, poverty elimination, local development, respect for human dignity.<sup>1</sup> Social sciences and social scientists have to provide solutions to the social, economic and political problems the individuals and local communities face. Sociology and the development issues strongly overlap, thus we could say that the subject matter of sociology overlaps the demarches and concerns communities manifest in relation to the aspects of their operation. Over the course of time the concepts concerning development have suffered the most diverse influences: ideological, economic, political or cultural. The historic, cultural-ideological evolutions or those concerning science and technology have provided new directions in the field of the *science of development*. From any direction would these influences show, we can certainly say that the purpose of these efforts is to increase the standards of living or, in our case, to get out of poverty. Although this is a desirable goal, to which all social actors subscribe (groups, institutions, organizations etc.), it is quite difficult to be put it in practice, as there are many obstacles in the implementation, sustainable and equitable maintenance of the development processes.

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## Academic Perspectives

**T**HE ACADEMIC interest for the development of human communities is very high and this is demonstrated by the considerable scientific outputs in the field of sociology: every tenth article published in the *Romanian Sociology* review approaches aspects relating to local communities, whether rural or urban.<sup>2</sup> Other social and human sciences manifest an equally high interest, bringing consistent and significant contributions in the field of local communities' development and competitiveness,<sup>3</sup> the study of the participation and social capital processes,<sup>4</sup> design, planning and regional development,<sup>5</sup> spatial planning.<sup>6</sup> The list of social sciences which systematically study the development issue and which have notable contributions in the field of development reveal that development structures have multiple components (individual, group, community, regional) to which many types of resources are added (human, material, social, spatial, cultural-identity etc.) suffering multiple perspectives and levels of analysis.<sup>7</sup> This complex and dynamic space, as is the one of development, becomes an extremely challenging one for any researcher of social and human sciences.

The increase in the scientific outputs in the field of development takes place in a historical context dominated by processes of democratic transition and by the efforts of transforming the economy in a market economy; it is the time when there is a need to modernize the Romanian society in accordance with the Community and institutional spaces in the developed countries. We notice that the body of theorists and practitioners has high expectations, the evidence of these expectations being represented by the rapidity with which the practices, techniques and models present in the efforts of planned change are developed or assimilated.

The high interest for development has led to strengthening and diversifying research methodologies in the field of local-community or regional-spatial development programs and projects. Empowering research methodologies, qualitative or quantitative, was generated and then imposed by two factors: high quality standards and more effective interventions. The maximization of the intervention effects, cost minimization, the protection of human dignity, durability and sustainability (environmental protection) are just some of the most important dimensions covered by the Social Impact Assessment (SIA).<sup>8</sup> The assessment methodologies have come into the current practice of development together with the programs that have received funds from certain institutions, agencies and organizations specialized in supporting global development initiatives: World Bank, OECD, The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development etc. The existence of these measurement and evaluation instruments is abiding in the efforts of elaboration and implementation of development programs and projects. The evaluation and methods of data collection and scientific analysis aim to measure relevant aspects of development - education, social exclusion or cohesion, social capital, social protection, the cost of social services etc.

Another important dimension for the academic evolution of the *science of development* is represented by the institutionalization of the educational offer, both for bachelor and especially for master programs, community development being one of the specializations present in every big university center in Romania. The management of these programs is in most cases done within the sociology, social work or public administration departments. In the case of master programs, we find a high degree of interdisciplinary where theoretical approaches are combined with themes that are mainly practical or case studies.

## **Perspectives of the Private Profit Sector and of the Private Non-Profit (NGO) Sector**

**I**N THE last decade we have noticed a new behavior among companies, Romanian or multinational corporations which operate in Romania, a more pronounced orientation towards developing community relationships and programs, particularly under the umbrella of the social corporate responsibility concept. These programs are designed for interventions in the community spaces in situations of risk or, on the contrary, these programs come to reward excellence (educational practices and models) or sociability (social capital, cooperation, trust, social networks oriented towards cooperation etc.).

The views expressed by two organizational entities (NGOs and companies) show high responsiveness for what is a high degree of adaptation and openness to innovative development practices. The interventions of the profit and non-profit sectors through projects and programs are aimed at creating a favorable democratic functioning, namely a functional market economy. Both entities are extremely dynamic, flexible and well connected to Western societies in which the market and democracy function; Romanian companies and also NGOs have positively exploited (in terms of learning) the interactions with similar entities in the Western world.

In the 1990s M. Cernea raised awareness on the role people and communities have in development processes: “The centrality of people in projects is addressed to those who currently design projects - primarily, to the development of technical and economic planners programs - it becomes tantamount to asking for reversal in the conventional approach to making project.”<sup>99</sup> The effect of his statements was the reconsideration of the role of social and human sciences (especially sociology and anthropology) in designing and implementing development programs. The assistance/development programs of the World Bank or of the various international agencies have made pioneering as they adopted participatory methods (participation, social capital, social networks). These practices were initially central concepts for development theorists, being rapidly assimilated into the development practice. After two decades, the researchers and practitioners concerned with development restate the

need to revitalize participatory forms based on information and real and effective consultation, participation representing the key to development again: „The challenge for the twenty-first century is to remake Participation: reframing the interactions among communities, professionals and institutions into a truly ‘participatory space.’”<sup>10</sup> The sociological studies conducted by Romanian researchers point out the centrality of participatory phenomena in the Romanian public space, emphasizing the necessity of a systematic study of participatory processes, giving evidence of the fact that in the Romanian society we are witnessing devaluations of the social capital (low level of trust, decrease in the stock of social relationships, lack of sociability etc.).<sup>11</sup>

Nongovernmental organizations, through the activities they undertook after the fall of the communist regime, have highly contributed to the preservation and development of the social capital at community level. There are many examples of good practices or innovative models that succeeded to combine standardized planning and implementation techniques with elements of reflection or with the knowledge stock in the community<sup>12</sup>: “Culturally and geographically situated knowledge (often referred to as ‘local knowledge’, ‘indigenous knowledge’, ‘community-based knowledge’ etc.) have become increasingly visible in development studies over the last three decades.”<sup>13</sup> The changes of attitude in relation to local communities have reshaped the scenery of development policies at micro-social level and have imposed new institutional actors in the scenery of community development. In this case we talk about nongovernmental organizations and we especially make reference to the Transylvania-Banat area. These regions have a special historical evolution when it comes to the re-building of local communities (in the field of cultural-identity development) with nongovernmental organizations as key stakeholders.<sup>14</sup>

## Future Challenges, Transformations

**I**N THE transition period we recorded a series of strategic errors that represent the result of the lack of policies or of the poor expertise in sustainable development even in activity sectors that were perceived as having high growth potential (tourism, agriculture). Investments in people and communities, new formulas of community economy (see the social economy or the social entrepreneurship) may be sources of collective welfare: “Economic and social effects lead to a cohesive economy, promoting solidarity networks at family, community and regional level, decreasing the welfare dependency, developing the community spirit and adopting civic participatory democracy at local, regional and European level.”<sup>15</sup> At European level, the above mentioned aspects are directions of action accounted within strategies that are aimed at increasing cohesion, homogeneity and balance.

Along with the elements of strategic decision regarding development, the quality of intervention is one of the issues the Romanian public institutions face when

it comes to the design and implementation of development. Some authors identify the cause of these deficiencies at the level of managerial decision-making and of the leadership in the public institutions in Romania.<sup>16</sup> Originally created in the corporate environments and subsequently adopted in the public institutions too, the evaluation and control systems in the field of total quality management (TQM), show the concern of reforming leaders in the public system for how public policies are implemented. Evaluation systems come to fill the existing gap in organizational environments with reference to performance measurement and evaluation at individual, managerial / institutional level.<sup>17</sup> TQM practices significantly contribute to the development efforts of local communities; these principles, procedures and tools will enable an adequate monitoring and a further improvement in the public administration's demarche to support the communities it manages.

The recent public discourse of development practitioners brings up the re-evaluation of the relationship between "*first-order*" factors, where we find concepts such as the economic neoliberalism of the economic-financial field, and the so-called "*second-order*" factors. These *second-order* factors tend to fill increasingly important positions in the design of urban, regional development strategies, with elements, notions and concepts like: socio-cultural factors, identity, social networks, participation, community and communicative relations etc.<sup>18</sup>

Strengthening the position occupied by socio-anthropological research methodologies has directly led to improvement in the relationship between those who design the development policies and the beneficiaries of these policies. The diversification of the data collection methods and techniques and choosing alternative routes have determined an increase in the participation of community members in planning, decision-making processes, respectively in the implementation of community development plans.

## Instead of conclusions

**T**HE ACADEMIA, the business environment or the civil society representatives (nongovernmental organizations, churches, community based organizations, grass-root organizations, civic activists and opinion leaders) have been demonstrating in all these 20 years since the fall of communism, that the incapacity of institutional actors to identify viable ways to generate viable and equitable development is on the list of the major problems of the Romanian society.

The present approach reveals two directions: (i) a direction in which the science of development could take root, found innovative solutions<sup>19</sup> and responsiveness (academia, NGOs, and a small part of the business sector); despite this opening, the actions of these agents of change fail to produce the expected socio-economic effects; (ii) a second direction which is represented by public institutions; we still

speak of a low commitment in this case; the performance of this sector is still far from the expectations of the Romanian public opinion or from those of the EU institutional partners.

This article has presented arguments for a better understanding of the field of community development, of the need to strengthen the theoretical approaches, but also of the activities undertaken by practitioners. Solving the issues the communities/Romanian society (economic, social, environmental, cultural, etc.) face requires a better understanding of the processes and structure of human communities, the study and adoption of working methodologies or models of community development adapted to local needs and to very particular contexts.



### Notes

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9. M. Cernea, “Using Knowledge from Social Science in Development Projects,” *World Bank Discussion Paper – 114* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 1991).
10. R. Eversole, “Remaking participation: challenges for community development practice,” *Community Development Journal* 47 (1) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29-41.
11. Sandu, 69 -76.
12. See the models implemented by nongovernmental organizations in Transylvania and Banat. It is a model that was originally introduced in the community development scenery through the programs of the World Bank – the community facilitator. The original model was adapted to local / regional realities and then transformed in a local promoter for a subsequent new position to appear, the one of local development agent. The active and representative NGOs for the social innovations mentioned are: The Civitas Foundation, Cluj-Napoca, respectively The Center for Rural Assistance, Timișoara.
13. Eversole, 33.

14. For details on the emergence and role of nongovernmental regional cultural associations with a cultural specific in Transylvania, see Vol. II, Chapter II: *Politica, cultura, biserica și economia la românii din Transilvania în timpul dualismului*, authors: D. Suci, S. Iarcoșan, I. Bolovan, M. Păcurariu, E. Cosma, A. Drăgoescu, T. Ionescu, H. Colan, in Anton Drăgoescu (ed.), *Istoria României. Transilvania*, (Cluj-Napoca: The “George Barițiu” Foundation, 1997).
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### **Abstract**

#### **Facets of Development: Evolutions and Challenges**

The issue of socio-economic development represents the central concerns for any community, whether urban or rural. The theoretical approach or the empirical models of development place the development issue in very different contexts, which, at first glance, discourage by their variety and multiplicity. Regardless of the historical period, the type of community, the problems to be overcome, the development issue maintains the same bench marks or principles around which the theorists’ and practitioners’ approaches revolve. Thus, we talk about theoretical concepts and action plans that express a desire for social change manifested in a community. The methodological frameworks, the theoretical concepts, the designed and implemented development models represent some of the elements that describe the vitality of social sciences in relation to the development issue.

### **Keywords**

development, values, social relations, community resources, community.

