

THE EUROPEAN FUNDS ABSORPTION FOR TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS OF RURAL SPACE IN MOLDOVA

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Abstract. The purpose of this article is to analyze the current situation of the European funds absorption for transport infrastructure development and improvement of rural settlements in Moldova before and after Romania's accession to the European Union. In 2000-2006, the improving accessibility and mobility of the rural population was made through pre-accession instrument SAPARD and for the programming period 2007-2013, investment projects are financed by the EAFRD. Road infrastructure is one of the essential problems of the rural space in Moldova, because the lack of transit in rural settlements which induce a feeling of isolation for locals, thus having implications at the level for social and demographic indicators. Development and modernization of transport infrastructure is essential for communal roads because they are the main link with the outside, both in economic and socio cultural perspective.

Keywords: *transport infrastructure, European funds, rural space, communal roads.*

1. Introduction

The Romania's accession to the European Union has determined, among other essential changes, implementation of the *Common Agricultural Policy* (CAP), including the assimilation of a new funding mechanism of budget funds of agriculture and rural development. These funds consist in the financial contributions of the member countries which are redistributed according to a very complex regulatory framework to those EU states or regions which are lagging behind as the level of socio-economic development.

According by additionality principle, co-financing this financial assistance is from the state budget in accordance with the requirements set out in documents signed or agreed with the Government of Romania and the European Commission. This financial assistance is intended to supplement and not replace national effort. (Stoica, 2010)

Regarding the *Special Programme for Agriculture and Regional Development*, the main priorities were those to contribute to the implementation *the Community acquis* regarding *Common Agricultural Policy* and solve specific problems for the sustainable adaptation of the agricultural sector and rural areas of the candidate countries. Since 2007, with the Romania's accession to the European Union, the objectives of this program were taken of fund complementary its, (Oprea, 2007) *European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development*. This structurally fund is different from that pre-accession by the fact that the responsibility for its management is 100% Romanian authorities.

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In this approach, the geographic area of research is represented the Romanian part of the historical region of Moldavia, a region situated in the Eastern Carpathians, known in the literature as *The Western Moldova*. The varied topography of this area favored the development of human settlements in ancient times and geographical position, on the axis European trade routes, made as the region to be constantly evolving demographic and economic.

Moldova is known for its serious economic problems accumulated for a long time, and the rehabilitation and development of the local road network has been and is a priority of economic policy in this area (Muntele, 2004), because roads contribute to increased regional accessibility and local. The access a locality at the most important roads has become an aspect to consider, which implies placing a greater emphasis on development as road networks, because the quality of transport services is considered to be a major factor in the quality of people's lives.

Since the main purpose of transport infrastructure is to enable spatial interaction, ie the mobility of people, goods, information and energy needed social activities, cultural and economic, in recent years, more and more, Moldavian localities have applied for the European Union funds, however the level of development of communal roads still have trouble (Muntele, 2010).

2. Methodology and variables used

Regarding methodology, we refer to the registration in the database and mapping the beneficiaries' financial programs SAPARD and EAFRD in Romania. Thus, for success was consulted website *Paying Agency for Rural Development and Fisheries*. This website has provided the necessary information to create a database, database which was then processed by calculating the spatial distribution coefficients. We opted to transforming the absolute values in percentage values by dividing the number of projects each measure at population variable, because is considered that the absorption of these funds has a strong impact on the lives of rural communities in Moldova.

3. Analysis and results

According to the *Paying Agency for Rural Development and Fishing*, the SAPARD beneficiaries could get up to 2 million Euro grants and for public utility projects do not generate profit, SPARD program covered by Measure 2.1. *Development and improvement of rural infrastructure*, the full amount of those investments. In contrast, the funds allocated for the Measure 3.2.2. *Village renewal and development, improving basic services for the economy and rural population and enhancement of the rural heritage* through EAFRD are 1.54 billion. of which the Romanian Government contribution is 20%, while of the European Union is 80%.

The main hypothesis of this approach, refers to the extent to which the investment on the expansion and modernization of transport infrastructure have contributed to improving the quality of life of rural population in Moldova.

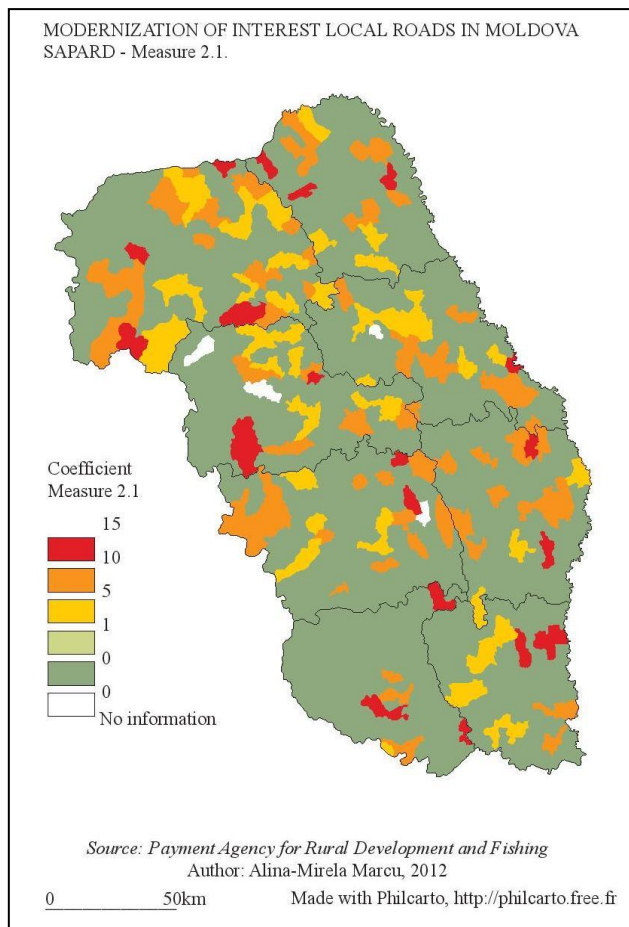


Figure 1 : Territorial distribution of SAPARD beneficiaries

Analyzed locally, the absorption of SAPARD pre-accession instrument in the region studied reveals the existence of major territorial disparities, can be explained both by the influence of natural factors and by anthropogenic factors.

As you can see, the mountain area represented by Bistrița Mountains, Ceahlău Mountains and Vrancea Mountains indicates a low degree of implementation of EU-funded projects, but not the same can be said about localities in Dragomirna Plateau: Bălcauți, Calafindești, Grămești, Mușenița, Zamostea or the localities in Bârlad Plateau: Boțești, Bunești-Averești, Miclești, Pungești, Solești, Ștefan cel Mare, that by attracting European financial support, have increased their access to various opportunities traffic and development. In that situation are rural settlements in Moldavian Subcarpathian: Girov Petricani, Răucești, Războieni, Țibucani who wanted to ensure an increase in the accessibility and quality of services to meet the mobility needs of residents. In the southern half of the region, the differences in absorption show asymmetry towards the central axis of the Siret River, eastern sector benefiting from the presence of large villages, while in the Vrancea sector large number of small localities have a reduced absorption of European funds to regional level.

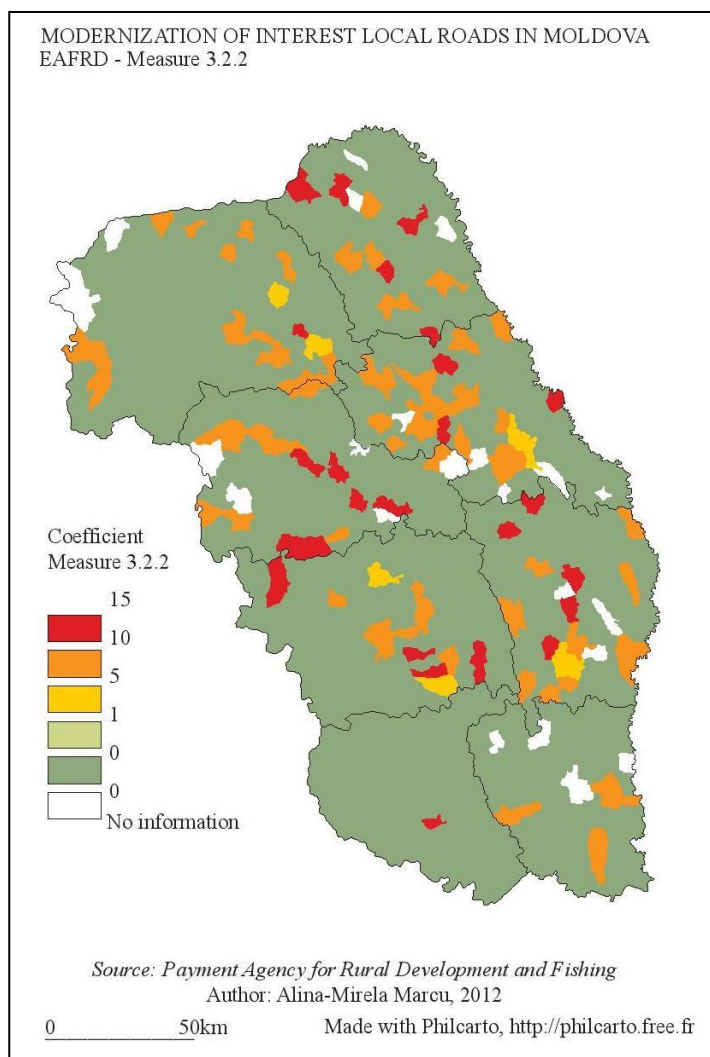


Figure 2: Territorial distribution of EAFRD beneficiaries

For the programming period 2007-2013, accessing EAFRD program is extremely important. At the level of the physical and geographical units, you can see a low absorption of European funds in Suceava County, in the North-West Obcinilor Bucovinei and in mountain area of Neamț County, counties with the largest expansion of mountain areas. In contrast to these, in Iași County the investment projects have been implemented much better in the contact area of the three natural units Moldavian Plain, Suceava Plateau and Central Moldavian Plateau, specifically in the Saddle Ruginoasa - Strunga in localities Heleşteni and Strunga, also in Vaslui County, on Bârlad Plateau territory and localities as Deleni, Laza, Muntenii de Jos, Oșești, Rebricea were beneficiaries of the fund. However, in the northern part of Moldavian Plain some small villages do not have any connection, only about joint centers or larger villages nearby is the country road. As can be seen, the southern part of the historical province of Moldova draws our attention by poor road modernization of local roads and in Vrancea County, Cârligele locality is the only beneficiary of funds for the development and improvement of transport infrastructure.

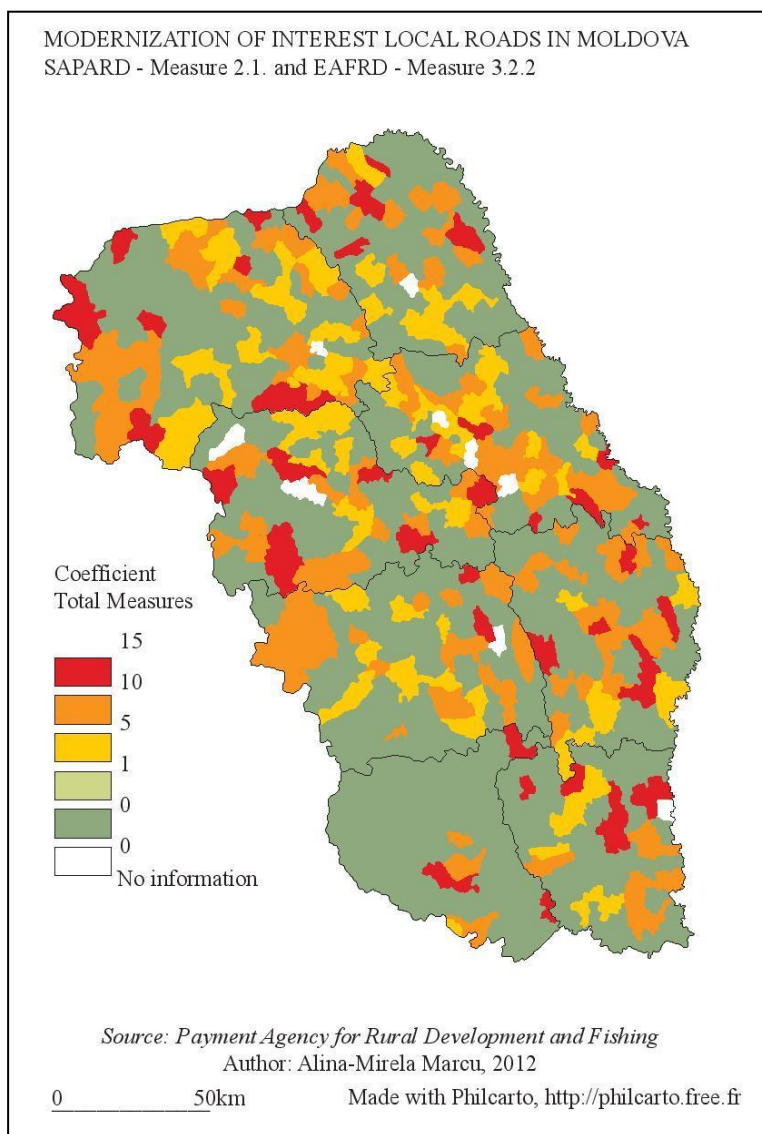


Figure 3: Territorial distribution of SAPARD beneficiaries and EAFRD beneficiaries

The figure no. 3 shows that most of the rural territory of Moldova is served by modern communication means. Stands out maintenance in good condition a rural villages along the main valleys of Suceava Plateau, Subcarpathian area and tentacular form, along passageways, settlements around major cities. Inside Moldavian Plain, modern road infrastructure ensure a contact between cities and rural settlements, especially in the longitudinal connection. The cross connection are poorly ensure, except European road E583, Iași - Pașcani. The localities: Avrămeni, Dobârceni, Gorbănești, Stăuceni, Sulița, located in northern Jijia Plain defines a large territory in which rural settlements do not have connection possibilities with surrounding towns. It can be said that, this part of Moldavia is a place with problems in the development of urban centers. Regarding the degree of modernization of local roads, Suceava Plateau emerges between subunits of the Moldavian Plateau, having a relatively high percentage of roads upgraded. Degree of modernization is superior in to the

northwest and west because the facilities of tourism infrastructure were priority. In Tutova Hills, the main axes of communication are located on Bârlad and Siret Valleys. Within this geographical units are few roads of local importance, modernized with the two European programs in localities: Băcani, Costești, Ivești, Puiești, Pogana and Tutova. In the north, the other cross roads are not modernized so that ties rural with the cities of Bârlad and Siret Valleys are difficult to achieve.

Vrancea Depression by its geographical position has been and continues to be a relatively isolated area, located side by modern roads of movement. The only connection to the piedmont area and plain area is county road Focșani-Vidra-Lepșa. Most of the roads in Moldavian Subcarpathians have a low degree of modernization and the transport of persons or goods is difficult.

Conclusions

Regional analysis of European funds absorption in the period 2002-2009 suggests that this rural area are still at an early relatively early formation of absorption capacity, a crucial role returning persons involved in the management of structural instruments. As you can see, across the region, the length of roads modernized is extremely low, and transport infrastructure is inadequate. Counties having the highest modernized roads are Suceava and Iași, in opposite is situated Vrancea county. The situation of roads is burdened both by lack of funds, poor quality work and climate conditions with winters rich in precipitation and low temperatures leading to rapid destruction of roads.

Given that road infrastructure is the foundation on which build businesses, we conclude that investments in modernization of regional and local roads are a priority to address imbalances and stimulate sustainable development of the region. After those presented is considered that the implementation of both measures has made as the Moldova rural space to be a place with much better place to live compared to the situation in which there would be no financial support from the European Community.

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