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## Abstract

The Romanian rural space represents a cardinal component of the overall evolution of the Romanian economy. The real dimension of the need to restructure the agriculture and rural development in our country is given by three rural resources: the useful agricultural area (14,8 million of hectares), agricultural labor powers (3.5 million) and total area of the rural space (90% of the country's area).

If to the above features we add the fact that our country has adhered quite recently to the European Union, it is obvious that the whole rural assembly should become an economic and social dynamic, performing and modern system in a short while.

With this expectation, Romania must adopt rural policies including elements of speeding up the compliance process, especially in regulating the right of property and its guarantee, but also in improving the infrastructure and education on this specific segment.

But, in setting out the rural and agricultural policies, the starting point should be the fact that agriculture is not only an economic sector producing merchandise and profit, but also a life style and the rural space is not only a production space but, at the same time, a cultural and social space with complex implications on the overall state of a nation.

Under these circumstances, the actual paper achieves in its first stage a synthesis of the literature data referring to the development of the rural space, having in view theories, issues, interdependencies and compulsions. The study being performed points out the particularities and functions of the rural space, focusing on the concept of rural development and elements representing the resources and factors of this development.

The paper was conceived as a whole, although it is systemized on eight chapters strictly shaped out. The doctorate thesis comprises 286 pages, out of which 80 pages of literature study, 196 pages of own contribution (the material and working methods, analyses concluded, results and conclusions), 10 pages of references including 86 figures, 48 tables and 179 bibliographic references.

The doctorate thesis entitled **“Studies regarding the development strategies of the rural space of Iasi County”** has as main objectives:

- Completion of a bibliographic research regarding the actual stages of the rural space development and elements representing the resources and factors of this development;
  - Completion of a research on the programs and strategies of rural development for the main European countries;
  - Establishment of the method or methods of analysis of the Iasi County rural space;
  - Completion of the proper analysis of the Iasi County rural space regarded as a whole and particularization by a case study of a certain micro-region of development belonging to Iasi County;
  - Proposal of a development strategy for the micro-region being studied as well as the rural space at the Iasi County level;
  - General conclusions.
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The programs and strategies of rural development for the main European countries have been also studied, pointing out the fields of action, conditions of application and financing as well as the results (pluses and minuses) obtained for each of them. The 2 most important programs of financial assistance for regional and rural development being completed in Romania between 2001 and 2006 have been also included in the conducted study, namely the Rural Actions Preparing Program (SPP) and Romanian Fund of Rural Development (FRDS).

A chapter dedicated to the **analysis methodology and material** followed the section of analysis of the literature data. It was considered as opportune to establish a coherent methodology of studying the rural space, respectively the definition of the specific terminology and certain indicators quantifying the state, characteristics and social and economic potential. The most synthetic indicators have been established able to quantify the rural development at the same time with the social cohesion, social potential, and economic potential and rural diversification potential.

**Three methods of specific research** have been used to studying the realities of the rural space of the Iasi County:

1. **Dynamic economic, deductive and quantitative analysis;**
2. **SWOT analysis;**
3. **Economic enquiry or participating researches involving collecting information from the territory, using the “questionnaire” and “interview” as research techniques.**

**The second part of the thesis, dedicated to the own contribution, includes the whole quantity of data of economic, social or other nature collected at the level of Iasi county, within 2001 and 2006, synthesized,** analyzed using the research methodology specific to the three types of analysis specified above, but also the elaboration, on this basis, of a strategy of rural development of the county complying in the best way with the reality of this space but also being in concordance with the documents of regional and national development for the coming years.

**The diagnosis analysis** of the rural development in Iasi County was conducted following several stages, such as:

- definition of the rural territory of the Iasi county (where a structural pattern of rural space is created);
  - analysis of the Iasi county resources (analysis of the natural resources, human resources, infrastructure condition);
  - Global analysis of the statistic indicators of the Iasi County including the analysis of indicators for the demographic environment, analysis of indicators for the economic environment, habitat and localities technical equipment, tourism activity. Also, an objective assessment of the poverty degree at the level of the Iasi county communes was completed within section.
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**The Iasi county territory** is located in the North-eastern part of Romania and central eastern part of Moldavia, being crossed through its central part by the 27<sup>0</sup>18' east meridian and North latitude 47<sup>0</sup>22' parallel. Within the Iasi county boundaries (5475,58 sq. km – 2,3% of the country area), there are 4 urban centers (Iași, Pașcani, Hârlău and Târgu Frumos) and 85 communes with 420 villages. The total population is 816.910 inhabitants, from this point of view, Iasi county being placed on the second rank, after Prahova County (874.349 inhabitants). 435231 inhabitants lived and worked in 2004 in the rural area of the Iasi County, representing 53% of the county's population.

Approaching a classification after the prevailing relief in the Iasi County, we could characterize the types of rural settlements and specific activities as follows:

➤ **the plain zone** – characterized by compact villages, with economic functions of cereal and vegetable agricultural profile;

➤ **Hill and hillock agricultural zone** - characterized by spread out villages, on both sides of the roads, with gardens, orchards and vineyards among groups of homes. As economic function, the stress is on fruit growing, viticulture and animal breeding. At the same time, the presence of more complex economic activities is noticed, such as those in connection with the primary or advanced wood processing and food industry.

The richness of the soil is given by the existence of over 380 thousand of hectares of land (land patrimony), out of which there is 70% of agricultural land, 18% forests and other land with forestry vegetation and waters and ponds representing 12,6 thousand of hectares. From the whole **agricultural area**, the arable land (67%), followed by grassland and hay fields (28%) holds the largest weight. The total cultivated area, as far as year 2005 was considered, was 256,6 thousand of hectares and the culture distributions were (in thou of hectares): straw cereals (48,4), corn (110,1), bean vegetables (2,2), technical plants (40,9), potatoes (9,4), vegetable total (12), fodder plants (27,7).

**The animal-breeding sector** is also represented in Iasi County. The total number of animals reported at the end of 2005 and their distribution is as follows: cattle (117 thou head), swine (118 thou head), sheep (324 thou heads), and poultry (2752 thou heads).

**The new tractors and agricultural machine fleet** has increased as a consequence of the procurements completed within the reference period, but the actual endowment level is not able to provide the completion of the mechanical works within the optimal periods of time stated by the technologies of culture. The structural deficiency generated by the lack of equipment is amplified by its moral and physical weariness. The total number as well as their distribution (at the beginning of 2006) is agricultural tractors (3164 pcs.), tractor ploughs (2620 pcs), mechanical seeders (1280 pcs), and self-motion combines (482 pcs).

At the level of Iasi County, a 54% increase of the total road length is noticed as far as county and commune roads of light layer roads are concerned. This increase, which is due to the implementation of the projects financed through the Sapard Program, leads to a better accessibility of the rural space and increase of the life standard in the beneficiary communes and villages. As far as the railways are concerned, 295 Km of railroads is in operation within the Iasi County, the total density being as much as 53,9 on 1000 square meters.

The communes located in Iasi County are classified as **communes of high capacity of population renewal**, where the birth rate is over 14,0‰ (representing approximately 25% of whole communes existing at national level), this areas being well

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known as a persistent traditional high natality model due to which the young population in the zone still keeps up at high figures. The average mortality rate in Iasi County was, within the reference period, of 9,9‰. The indicator is inferior to the national average - 12‰ and approximately equal to the EU average of 10,0‰. This fact indicates a younger population, in Iasi County.

As far as **the natural gas volume and network** being distributed until 2006, 19 localities (out of which 4 towns) were connected to the network. At the end of 2004, the simple total length of the natural gas distribution pipes was 607,1 Km, by means of which a volume of 70184 cubic meters of natural gas is distributed only for household consumption. Comparing with the values registered at the level of 1990, a significant increase is noticed. As for the thermal energy in Iasi County, it was distributed in 4 towns and three communes in 2004. It is considered that this indicator does not show a good quality of life in the rural areas of Iasi County.

The total number of **localities provided with potable water supply networks** was by the end of 2004 as much as 41, out of which 4 were the municipalities and towns of the county. The simple total length of the potable water supply network was of 1122 Km. the presented data indicates a relatively poor technical endowment of the localities and homes with direct influence over the life standard of the population. Quick actions should be taken in this field for the rehabilitation of the existing water supply network and promotion of feasible projects so that the technical endowment level could be regarded as satisfactory within the next 5 years.

**The global SWOT analysis** performed at the Iasi county level indicates the following **strengths** – existence of the European road E85 crossing the zone on North to South direction and Iasi airport; zone with positive natural population growth; existence of three universities having the scientific research, invention, technological innovation in agriculture, rural development, environmental protection, human resources development as basic concerns; existence of cultural centers, monasteries, historical monuments of national and international importance (UNESCO patrimony); possibility of developing commercial exchanges due to the localization of the county on the eastern border of the EU.

**Weaknesses** – poverty high rate, 51% of the occupied population (agriculture) produces only 21% of the regional GDP; low level of the modernized road infrastructure; potable water supply network, sewage systems and natural gas network are insufficiently developed (quality and quantity wise) as compared to the area and population of the county; insufficient capacity of treating the waste waters in cleansing stations and insufficient waste disposal yards; low rate of the use of the operating accommodation facilities compared to the existing tourism potential; low degree of the population being occupied in services; high weight of the population concentrated in the rural area (59.23%); high rate of unemployment in region;

**Opportunities** – foreseen reduction of the inflation and implicit decrease of the credit cost; encouraging of new forms of tourism and capitalization of the historical heritage; possibility of developing the business environment as the result of building industrial parks; existence of raw materials: construction materials and wood (see natural resources) able to attract investors; possibility for the airport to sustain the business environment and become departing point for the zone tourist routes; possibility that the existing social services infrastructure, after being modernized and rehabilitated, would serve as spaces for the development of integrated services intended for the disadvantaged categories.

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**Risks** – lack of cohesion for the measures of local social and economic development; poor competitiveness of the related companies in the county compared to those from the other member states of the EU; continuing the exodus of “grey material” towards other regions and abroad; continuous increase of the population pauperization degree; existence of zones liable to natural disasters (ground slides, flood).

The following stage in the study being conducted was **the participating research for three communes of the Iasi County**, selected so that they would be representative for the fore urban, intermediate and disadvantaged rural spaces. For each of such community a case study was conducted having as starting point, a social enquiry based on questionnaire. This participating research had as purpose to put into evidence two issues namely: on one hand **the implication of the population and degree of social cohesion at commune level and, on the other hand, identification of the development needs at the commune level by means of the population.**

Interviewing was used as work technique, which is recognized standard method for gathering specific data. In this purpose, a special questionnaire has been prepared for this study, applied to a representative sample at the level of each community being studied. The results can be synthesized as follows:

### **Case study 1 – Miroslava community**

➤ The average age of the population is 40-60 years and its most part comes from relatively small families, of 3-4 members each.

➤ The majority of the commune population is not aware of the importance of the social cohesion and voluntary implication of all inhabitants in the activities of the community

➤ The commune authorities that could decisively influence the community members in this matter are the mayor and the priest although at the declaration level the most subjects seemed to be open to certain collective voluntary activities, most of them declare that they don't want to be involved in an action group at the commune level. This proves once more that although the Miroslava community, located in the fore-urban area of the Iasi city, it is a commune with a good degree of development and good growing potential, at the population level there is no social cohesion factors in operation.

➤ The water supply network connecting the villages of the commune is the first activity supposed to start up to improve the technical endowment of the commune, followed by the natural gas network and sewage system. In order to improve the social life, it is assumed that modernization of the commune health units as well as the development and improvement of the media and information services. This point of view reveals the influence that the nearby urban exerts on the community members.

➤ Two measures are regarded as being able to capitalize the cultural and spiritual traditions and promote the image of the commune, namely the promotion of the church and organization of certain events during the commune's holiday.

➤ A large part of the commune's population wishes to get non-reimbursable funds in order to start up their own business, but most of them have no clear information on the possibility of accessing the EU funds. As for the initiative of accessing non-reimbursable funds intended for the commune development, most of them believe that this should be the mayor's and local council's task.

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➤ And last, the population of the commune is aware that projects financed or co-financed by EU funds are completed or under development in the commune and they admit the influence of such projects on the growth of the general standard life.

Using the same work methodology, **2 more case studies have been completed for the communities of Popesti and Dagata, considered as being representative communes for the rural intermediate space and disfavored rural space of Iasi County, respectively.** The conclusions of the two case studies are presented in the following.

All steps completed in the diagnosis analysis of the rural space of the Iasi county have allowed to **elaborate a strategy of rural development at the county level** for the period between 2007 and 2013 as well as certain strategic directions and objectives for the development of the three types of rural space: fore-urban, intermediate and disadvantaged.

Within the fore-urban rural space, the main issues to be resolved are the reduction and prevention of the environmental pollution, development and modernization of the technical infrastructure and rehabilitation and development of the social infrastructure. (Table 46).

**Table 46**

**Directions, objectives and measures for the development of the fore-urban space of the Iasi County**

<b>Strategic direction</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Reduction and prevention of the environmental protection	Awareness of the issues and education regarding the environmental protection	Increase of the population knowledge level concerning the environmental protection
	Protection and improvement of the quality of the natural environment	Water resources protection
Correct sizing and cleansing of the waste waters		
Correct storing of the dejection		
Optimal use of the natural resources in agriculture, requiring the agricultural production zoning and correct designing of the agricultural ecosystems within the zones		
Replacement of the synthetic chemical substances used in agriculture with natural products		
Using the integrated fight against diseases and pests.		
Prevention of soil erosion by: deforestation of degraded surfaces, execution of the soil working along the level curves		

		<p>Preservation of the genetic resources (cultivated plant species and domestic animals) but also the population against the micro organisms controlled by the human being on economic purposes.</p> <p>Storing of waste in specially arranged places</p> <p>Collection of the re-usable materials by reducing the scrap</p> <p>Preservation of the natural resources of the biosphere for future generations by developing the responsibility</p>
Development and modernization of the road transport infrastructure	Connection to the regional and national transportation	<p>Rehabilitation of the commune and village roads to actual standards.</p> <p>Construction of ditches and gutters for the rain water draining</p> <p>Construction of side walks</p> <p>Elimination of the swamping phenomenon from the DN 28 road area</p> <p>Completion of the belt road for the municipality of Iasi</p>
Rehabilitation of the educational, social and health	Improvement of the training conditions, increase of the health degree of the population	<p>Rehabilitation and development of the health infrastructure</p> <p>Rehabilitation of the education infrastructure</p> <p>Rehabilitation of the social infrastructure</p>
Rural rehabilitation of the metropolitan area of Iasi city	Attraction of investors, attraction of tourists and increase of the life standard of the inhabitants of this zone	<p>Rehabilitation of the historical sites, patrimony preservation, Public lightening network</p> <p>Rehabilitation of the nearby lake and creation of entertainment facilities</p>

### **Development of the intermediate rural space of Iasi County**

In the intermediate rural space, the main basis of the economic development is the agriculture modernisation (table 47).

**Table 47**

**Directions, objectives and measures for the development of the intermediate rural space of the Iasi County**

<b>Strategic direction</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Agriculture modernization	Population advising concerning the agricultural issues	Revival of the agriculture consultancy centers
	Increase of the agricultural production	Concentration of the surfaces
		Diversification of the cultivated species
		Endowment with performance machines and equipment
		Use of biologic material with high production capability
		Keeping the links of the culture technologies
		Intensification in achieving the agricultural production
		Attraction of specialists in rural area
	Increase of the economic efficiency in agriculture	Integration of the agricultural exploitations
		Association of small producers from agriculture for co-operation in the marketing of the achieved products
		Increase of direct investments
		Increase of the number of modules of optimal exploitation by association of agricultural and animal farms
		Increase of the production and specific processing capacities in the ecological agriculture
Increase of the number of new companies involved in activities exporting primary and processed ecological agricultural products		
Rehabilitation and development of the educational, social and health infrastructure	Improvement of the training conditions, increase of the population health degree	Rehabilitation and development of the health infrastructure
		Rehabilitation and development of the educational infrastructure
		Rehabilitation and development of the social infrastructure

**Development of the peripheral, marginal or disfavored rural space of Iasi County**

– the economic revival of this zone is based on the diversification of the rural economy by investments in non-agricultural activities (handicrafts, agro-tourism, and small industry etc – table 48).



**Table 48**

**Directions, objectives and measures for the development of the disfavored rural space of the Iasi County**

<b>Strategic direction</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Diversification of the economic activities	Development of the services and refreshment of the traditional activities and crafts	Increase of the number of units producing products or cultural goods specific to the region
	Development of the forestry	Making efficient the forestry potential aiming to reduce poverty
		Increase of investments for the woods protection and preservation
		Reduction of the illegal activities
		Rational exploitation of the forests
		Afforestation of degraded lands
		Sustainable management of the existing forests
	Development of the agro-tourism	Capitalization of the agricultural tourism potential
		Diversification of the agro-tourist offer
		Development of the trans-frontier co-operation concerning the agro-tourism
		Integration of the local tourism offer within the international and national circuit by editing promotion materials (tourist maps, guides)
		Organization of ethnographic fairs for promoting the local traditions and habits
		Creation of centers for the trade of the handicraft objects for tourists and visitors
Agriculture modernization	Population advising	Revival of the agricultural consultancy centers
	Efficiency increase in agriculture	Association of small producers in the agricultural field
Rehabilitation of the educational, social and health infrastructure	Improvement of the training conditions, increase of the population health degree	Rehabilitation and development of the health infrastructure
		Rehabilitation and development of the educational infrastructure
		Rehabilitation and development of the social infrastructure

The application of these strategies in an organized manner and continuously can lead within a period of 5 years to a development in the rural area that could be quantified by welfare and elimination of the disparities existing now at the level of Iasi county.

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A part of the results presented in the doctorate thesis have been presented at domestic and international scientific events, published or on the way of being published in related magazines and volumes.

Within 2001 and 2006, a part of the themes of the actual paper was the subject matter of **8 scientific papers** and certain CNCSIS research contracts

**The own contributions** that can be noticed following the analysis of the doctorate thesis “**Studies concerning the development strategies of the rural space of Iasi County**” are as follows:

➤ Study of the 2 most important programs of financial assistance developed in Romania for regional and rural development within 2001 and 2006, namely the Rural Actions Preparing Program (SPP) and Romanian Fund of Rural Development (FRDS).

➤ Use of a **combined methodology of rural space analysis** combining the facilities and advantages specific to economic analysis, SWOT analysis or participating research.

➤ **Gathering, synthesizing and computer processing of economic, social data** or of other type, collected at the Iasi County level between 2001 and 2006. Needed to conduct the rural space study of the Iasi County;

➤ Definition and **delimitation of the fore-urban, intermediate and disfavored area at the Iasi County level;**

➤ Completion of a **dynamic economic analysis, deductive and quantitative** for the entire Iasi County rural space;

➤ completion of the **global SWOT analysis for the Iasi County rural space** as well as a SWOT analysis for each of the relevant elements of this space, namely: **infrastructure, environment, rural development and agriculture modernization, human resources and social services, development of the rural tourism;**

➤ analysis of the attracted economic resources (inputs) by the most important EU program intended for rural development, the SAPARD Program and the impact of the implementation of the projects of infrastructure and agricultural exploits investments on the rural development;

➤ conception and elaboration of a questionnaire in order to get information directly from source (population of the communes being studied) in two directions: concerning the implication of the population and social cohesion at the level of the studied communities; to identify the communes needs of development;

➤ **completion of a participative research** (social enquiry at the level of **three representative communities as for the development level** for the Iasi County rural space) and computerized statistic processing of the data gathered in territory, by means of the SPSS Statistics program;

➤ **Issue of a strategy of rural development for the county** that would correspond in the best way to the realities of that space, but being in concordance with the documents related to the national and regional development within the next years. The strategy for the rural space at the Iasi County level was also completed with **the strategic directions for three micro-regions of the county** development which have been considered as representative for the rural fore-urban, intermediate and disfavored space respectively, as resulted from the three case studies conducted by participative research.

The own contributions detailed in the actual doctorate thesis demonstrate that all objectives proposed at the beginning of the preparation by doctorate have been completed.

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