

INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

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REVIEW

Abstract

The economic development of the rural environment has become a central concern at European level, due to its role in maintaining the ecological balance, preserving the cultural heritage and providing food resources (Popescu, 2020). Local Action Groups (LAGs), through the participatory approach promoted by the LEADER programme, have become an essential mechanism for sustainable local development (European Commission, 2020). The aim of this research is to provide a clear and up-to-date overview of how rural development can be supported through local initiatives and effective access to finance.

Keywords: rural development, local development strategy, impact, local action group.

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INTRODUCTION

The economic development of the rural environment is a constant concern at European and national level, given its importance for agricultural production, maintaining the ecological balance and preserving the cultural heritage (Popescu, 2020). The rural environment in many countries plays a key role in ensuring food resources and raw materials needed by industry, but it also faces significant challenges such as population migration to urban areas, poor infrastructure and lack of economic opportunities.

In the European Union, rural development policy has evolved significantly in recent decades, with a focus on diversifying the rural economy and supporting local entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as LEADER and the National Rural Development Programme (NDRP) provide opportunities to improve quality of life and reduce regional disparities (European Commission, 2020).

Local Action Groups (LAGs) have proven to be an effective mechanism for stimulating territorial development, applying the participatory approach and supporting community initiatives through access to finance and know-how (Benedek & Moldovan, 2015). Rural economic activities are a fundamental element in the sustainable development of local communities. These activities not only contribute to economic growth, but also influence social cohesion, environmental protection and the quality of life of the

inhabitants. Local action groups (LAGs) were created to support rural development by mobilising local resources and involving the community in the decision-making process. This thesis aims to evaluate the impact of economic activities in rural areas, focusing on LAG strategies and how they contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities.

In recent decades, interest in rural development has increased, particularly within the European Union, which has implemented dedicated policies to help rural communities. According to a European Commission report (2020), it is essential to address the economic, social and environmental challenges facing rural areas through rural development (COJAN, 2022). The LAG strategies serve as a crucial mechanism in this direction, with the role of uniting the various interests of the community and encouraging local initiatives.

Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of the LAG on economic and social development. For example, a study by Badescu and collaborators (2021) highlighted that LAGs help increase income and generate jobs in rural areas, supporting small businesses and local initiatives (Dragoi and Dumitrescu, 2024). Moreover, the research conducted by Ionescu (2022) highlights the relevance of community involvement in development, showing that citizen participation in local decisions leads to more favorable results and greater satisfaction from them (Teodorescu et al., 2022). However, the challenges continue to exist. A report by the Ministry of Agriculture (2023) indicates that many LAGs are having

difficulty raising funds and maintaining community participation in the long term. These issues highlight the importance of a detailed assessment of the impact of economic activities and LAG strategies to identify sustainable and feasible solutions.

The rural economic environment is described by the totality of the economic activities that are carried out in rural areas, focusing on agriculture, forestry, the exploitation of natural resources and, increasingly, agrotourism and traditional crafts (Otiman, 2006). It plays a crucial role in maintaining territorial balance and food sustainability, but often faces economic vulnerabilities, underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to modern markets and services.

Agriculture is a fundamental element of the rural economy, having a predominant position in Romania, representing about 25% of the workforce and contributing 4-5% to gross domestic product, despite a relatively low yield (INS, 2022).

Challenges of the rural economy

The rural economy in Romania faces a series of structural, social and institutional challenges that restrict the possibilities of sustainable and competitive development of rural regions.

One of the key challenges is the excessive fragmentation of agricultural holdings. According to Eurostat statistics, more than 90% of Romanian farms have an area of less than 5 hectares, which makes it difficult to mechanize, access European funds and integrate into modern value chains (Eurostat, 2021). This agrarian configuration leads to low efficiency and lower competitiveness compared to other EU member countries (Popescu, 2013).

Another major challenge is the migration of young workers to cities or abroad. This phenomenon generates a demographic imbalance, with an ageing rural population and an acute shortage of qualified personnel in the field of agriculture, services and local entrepreneurship (Sandu, 2011). Direct consequences include stagnation of economic initiatives and difficulties in adopting modern technologies.

Economic diversification in rural areas is a strategic priority for European and national policies. Rural development programmes (e.g., NRDP) stimulate investment in infrastructure, support for non-agricultural enterprises and vocational training. However, the process of

absorbing European funds is often hampered by bureaucracy, lack of information and poor administrative capacity of certain rural communities (Mateoc-Sirb, 2010).

In recent years, agrotourism and the green economy have emerged as promising segments, contributing to the sustainable development of villages by capitalizing on local resources, traditions and natural landscapes (Sima, 2015). At the same time, digitalisation and internet infrastructure are becoming increasingly relevant in facilitating access to markets and stimulating entrepreneurship in rural areas.

The rural environment is distinguished by a predominantly agricultural economic structure with low economic diversity, dependence on agriculture and associated industries, limited access to modern infrastructure and reduced employment opportunities (Mihai, 2017). Significant discrepancies also arise between rural regions, depending on the degree of accessibility, the available natural resources and the level of development of social and economic infrastructure.

The rural economy is also affected by farm fragmentation, which restricts the competitiveness and investment capacity of farmers. In addition, many rural areas depend significantly on European and national subsidies, which may limit private initiative and innovation in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors (Dumitru & Vasile, 2020).

Agriculture continues to be an essential element in the rural economy, accounting in Romania for about 25% of the workforce and having a 4-5% contribution to GDP, even if yields are relatively low (INS, 2022).

Another major obstacle is the low level of entrepreneurial and digital education in rural communities. In the absence of fundamental knowledge in management, marketing or the use of technology, people in rural areas face difficulties in initiating and developing sustainable businesses (Mihalache & Cazacu, 2019).

The main challenges faced by the rural economic environment include:

- migration of young workers, which diminishes the capacity for innovation and economic development;

- the lack of economic diversification, with most activities concentrated in agriculture, making the economy exposed to market fluctuations and adverse climatic conditions;

- limited to financing, rural entrepreneurs having difficulties obtaining bank loans and European funds;

- structural shortcomings, including poor quality roads, low high-speed internet access and insufficient public services;

- low level of entrepreneurial education, which limits the ability of local people to develop and manage sustainable businesses (Stoian & Marin, 2019).

Definition of rural development

Rural development is a complex and multidimensional concept that involves improving living and working conditions in other rural areas, by capitalizing on local resources, economic diversification, environmental protection and increasing social cohesion (Oțiman, 2006). Unlike the simple update of the agricultural sector, rural development involves integrated interventions targeting the economy, infrastructure, education, public services and cultural heritage.

As stated by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), rural development comprises „the total process of economic, social and institutional changes designed to improve the standard of living of the rural population” (FAO, 2017). Therefore, it is not just about increasing agricultural production, but also about generating jobs outside agriculture, reducing poverty and promoting social inclusion.

Within the framework of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), rural development is the second pillar of the CAP, with the objective of bridging the gap between rural and urban areas by supporting investment in infrastructure, innovation, youth and sustainable development (European Commission, 2020).

A key element is the participatory approach – sustainable rural development involves engaging local communities in decision-making and endogenous resource use (Stefanescu, 2014). Thus, the transition is made from a vision „from top to bottom” to one „from bottom to top”, which emphasizes the local initiative and the share capital.

The impact of economic activities on rural communities

Rural economic activities have a notable influence on job creation. According to a study carried out by Badescu and his collaborators (2021), LAGs had a significant role in creating

more than 1,500 jobs in the rural regions of Romania (Dragoi & Dumitrescu, 2024). These jobs are vital to keep young people in the community and to reduce migration to urban areas. For example, support programmes for small businesses, such as craft workshops or organic farms, have been crucial in attracting young entrepreneurs who aspire to develop their own businesses in their communities.

Economic activities in rural areas play an important role in increasing the income of the inhabitants, an essential element for improving the standard of living. Research shows that initiatives supported by LAGs have generated considerable revenue growth for small farmers and local entrepreneurs. For example, a case analysis carried out in Suceava County revealed that farmers who participated in the LAG programs reported an increase in incomes of up to 30% as a result of diversification of agricultural activities and access to local markets (Dragoi & Dumitrescu, 2024).

This increase in income not only improves the quality of life, but also contributes to the economic development of communities by increasing local consumption.

Role of local action groups

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are an essential component of the LEADER approach (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Rural Economy), promoted by the European Union to stimulate rural development from the bottom up. LAGs are public-private partnerships made up of representatives of local authorities, civil society, business environment and farmers, who develop and implement local development strategies (European Commission, 2020).

The main role of LAGs is to identify the specific needs of the territories they represent and to support projects tailored to these needs. Through this territorial and participatory approach, LAGs contribute to revitalising rural economies, encouraging entrepreneurship, preserving cultural and natural heritage, and promoting social cohesion (Stefanescu, 2014).

A major advantage of LAGs is the decision-making autonomy: they select the projects they finance based on their own strategy, financed under the National Rural Development Programme (NRDP). This decentralization allows a more efficient allocation of resources and stimulates local innovation (Mateoc-Sirb, 2010).

In Romania, LAGs had a significant impact in the period 2007–2023, contributing to the

diversification of economic activities, job creation and improvement of local infrastructure (AFIR, 2022). However, their effectiveness varies depending on administrative capacity, community involvement and cooperation between partners (Marin, 2018).

In the long term, strengthening LAGs is essential to promote sustainable and balanced rural development, as they facilitate citizen participation in decision-making and enhance local potential.

The role of European funds in boosting the rural economy

European funds are one of the most essential tools by which the European Union facilitates economic, social and territorial cohesion between member states. Within the framework of rural development, they contribute to reducing disparities between regions and stimulating modernisation as well as diversification of the rural economy (Benedek, 2014).

Rural development is one of the two fundamental pillars of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Since 2007–2013 and extended in 2014–2020, rural development has benefited from support through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which aims not only at agriculture, but also at infrastructure, public services and the local non-agricultural economy (European Commission, 2020).

According to Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013, European funds for rural development have the following main objectives: improving competitiveness in the agricultural sector; ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and combating climate change; balanced development of rural economies and communities (EU, 2013). These objectives are embodied in 6 priorities of rural development (P1–P6), of which P6 („promoting social inclusion and reducing poverty”) has a direct effect on local rural economies (Marquardt et al., 2012).

Research indicates that investments made through European funds facilitate: creating jobs in agriculture and related sectors; diversification of economic activities (for example: agritourism, services, processing); improving rural population income and limiting migration (Espancia, 2014); development of essential infrastructure such as roads,

water/sewage networks and social centres (Nedelcu et al., 2015).

In addition, through mechanisms such as LEADER and Local Action Groups (GAL), a participatory approach („bottom-up”) involving local communities in the decision-making process on resource use (Hoffmann, 2018) is encouraged.

Although the contribution of European funds is considerable, the literature also identifies difficulties in implementation: excessive bureaucracy and late payment processing (Falkowski, 2013); limited administrative capacity in certain LAGs (Rodriguez et al., 2019); harmony between local needs and defined strategic objectives (Olar & Jitea, 2020).

FUNDING PROGRAMMES AND LOCAL ACTION GROUPS

In the context of rural development in Europe, non-reimbursement financing schemes have become essential tools for mitigating territorial disparities and supporting local communities in their efforts to modernise, diversify and social cohesion.

This assets aims to highlight the theoretical framework of rural financing mechanisms in the European Union, focusing on the interaction between European funds and local actors, as well as on the importance of LAGs in the process of economic development of local communities.

The LEADER programme 2014-2020

LEADER is an approach initiated by the European Union to stimulate local development in rural regions. It fosters a "bottom-up" approach where local communities identify and implement solutions to their particular problems. In Romania, between 2014 and 2020, according to AFIR, LEADER was put into practice through Measure 19 of the NRDP 2014-2020.

This measure has the following purposes:

1. Supporting the economic and social progress of rural areas
2. Diminishing disparities between urban and rural areas
3. Promoting social inclusion and innovation at local level
4. Strengthening the capacity of local communities to develop and implement development strategies.

Measure 19 was organised into four sub-measures:

1. Sub-measure 19.1 Preparatory support for the formulation of local development strategies

2. Sub-measure 19.2: Support for the conduct of actions under the local development strategy

3. Sub-measure 19.3: Preparation and conduct of cooperation activities of LAGs

4. Sub-measure 19.4: Support for operating expenses and animation activities of LAGs

The total amount allocated to Measure 19 during this period was 636 million euro. (<https://www.afir.ro/finantare/leader/>)

During 2014–2020, Romania had 239 active LAGs, which benefited from a total budget exceeding 563 million euro (Olar & Jitea, 2020)

Table 1

Distribution of LAGs by region

REGION	NUMBER OF LAG'S
North-east	34
South-east	32
South	36
South-west	29
West	22
North-west	31
Center	30
Bucharest-Ilfov	5

The national rural development programme 2014-2020

NRDP 2014-2020 was the main instrument through which Romania accessed European and national funds for rural development. The programme was approved by the European Commission in May 2015 and managed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development through the Agency for Rural Investment Funding.

According to the report published by MADR, 9.363 billion euros were allocated for this program, of which 8.015 billion euros came from European funds, namely the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, and 1.347 billion euros represents the national contribution. (<https://www.madr.ro/pndr-2014-2020/implementare-pndr-2014-2020/documente-aprobate>)

During the implementation, Romania initiated 10 sessions for submitting projects.

The strategic objectives of this program were:

1. Increasing the competitiveness of agriculture, which aimed to modernize farms, support young farmers and develop agricultural infrastructure.

2. Sustainable management of natural resources and addressing climate change, with the aim of promoting organic agriculture, implementing agri-environment and climate measures, also afforestation and creating forest curtains.

3. Economic and social development of rural regions, by improving rural infrastructure, diversifying the local economy and promoting rural tourism and essential services (<https://www.madr.ro/pndr-2014-2020/implementare-pndr-2014-2020/documente-aprobate>).

As results, 71,178 projects with a total public value of 9.71 billion euros were submitted. The projects selected for funding were 45,465, with a public value of 5.39 billion euros, and the number of contracted projects was 42,674, with a total public value of 5.13 billion euros.

The Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the most significant and long-lasting policies of the European Union, established in 1962, with the aim of ensuring food security, stability in agricultural markets and an adequate standard of living for farmers. The CAP was based on Article 39 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and subsequently revised several times to adapt to new economic, social and environmental challenges (European Commission, 2020).

The fundamental objectives of the CAP are listed below:

- improving productivity in the agricultural sector;
- guaranteeing a fair standard of living for the agricultural community;
- stabilisation of agricultural markets;
- ensuring access to food;
- offering affordable products to consumers (Benedek, 2014).

Since its establishment, the CAP has undergone a number of fundamental reforms:

MacSharry Reform (1992): introduced direct grants and reduced market interventions;

Reform of Fischler (2003): encouraged „decoupling” production subsidies and implementation of the principle of „conditionality”;

Period 2007–2013: emphasis was placed on rural development and environmental protection;

Period 2014–2020: included measures of „greening” (greening), redistributive payments, support for young farmers and strengthening the LEADER programme (Marquardt et al., 2012);

CAP 2023–2027: provides guidelines for results and performance-based financing, with increased flexibility for member countries and a focus on the green and digital transition (European Commission, 2020).

The Common Agricultural Policy is organised on two main pillars, which operate simultaneously and complement each other:

Pillar I – Income support and market measures

It is financed exclusively from the budget of the European Union, through the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF). Its main objective is to maintain the stability of the income of agricultural producers and the balance on the agricultural market in Europe (European Commission, 2020).

Pillar II – Rural development

It is financed through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which benefits from national co-financing. It follows:

- investments in farm modernisation and rural infrastructure; (resistance for young farmers and non-agricultural entrepreneurs);

- agrienvironment and climate;

The objective of this pillar is to increase competitiveness and sustainability in rural areas, ensuring a balanced and sustainable development.

The Common Agricultural Policy has become a strategic tool in boosting the rural economy, not only by supporting the agricultural sector, but also by: infrastructure modernisation; support of essential services; the fight against poverty and social exclusion; (Esparcia, 2014).

The CAP represents a European policy of major budgetary importance, allocating around 30–40% of the total budget of the European Union in recent periods (European Commission, 2020).

The National Strategic Plan 2023-2027 is Romania's strategy for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy in the period 2023-2027. Its aim is to direct European funds to develop agriculture, increase farmers' competitiveness and support rural areas. It has been approved by the European Commission and will apply until 2027.

The total budget of PS 2023-2027 is about 15.8 billion euros.

Funding comes from two European funds: The European Agricultural Guarantee Fund which results in direct payments and sectoral interventions and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development which is represented by rural development policies. The plan includes 89 types of interventions to support farmers and rural development.

According to the list made by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for the programming period 2023-2027 in Romania, 246 local action groups are authorized. (https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/Axa_LEADER/2014-2020/2024/Listacu-Grupurile-de-Ac%C8%9Biune-Local%C4%83-2023-2027-selectate-de-MADR-si-datele-de-contact-ale-acestora.pdf).

The Local Development Strategy (LAS) is the main mechanism by which a Local Action Group (LAG) organises, coordinates and evaluates its interventions in its geographical area. SDL is a comprehensive document, created by the local community, aimed at identifying the specific needs of the rural region and formulating tailor-made measures to promote economic, social and environmental development (European Commission, 2020).

The approach of SDL is based on the concept „bottom-up” (bottom-up), characteristic of the LEADER program, through which local actors become initiators and decision makers in the development process (Esparcia, 2014). This instrument not only directs local financial allocations, but also sets out the eligibility criteria of LAGs to apply for European funds in the context of the Common Agricultural Policy.

According to the Guidelines of the Managing Authority for NRDP and European regulations (EU, 2013), a Local Development Strategy must include the following fundamental components:

1. Diagnostic analysis of the territory: this includes demographic, economic and social data; SWOT analysis of the area, as well as the identification of local resources and problems.

2. The strategic vision and objectives of the LDS, which set out the general development guidelines, formulating specific, measurable and achievable objectives.

3. Action priorities and focus areas are defined in accordance with the 6 European priorities for rural development (P1–P6) and the integration of local needs in the EAFRD

theme (e.g., young farmers, economic diversification, rural tourism, etc.).

4. The financial plan presents the budgetary allocation by measures and types of projects, as well as the estimation of output and impact indicators.

5. Project selection and evaluation procedures involve score matrices, eligibility criteria, and transparency and public participation mechanisms.

6. Animation and monitoring measures carrying out activities of promotion, information and consultation; mechanisms for tracking progress and adjusting the strategy.

SDL goes beyond a simple action plan, having diverse roles within the LEADER mechanism:

Function orientation – sets the general direction for local development;

Selection function – guides the choice of projects that will receive funding;

Mobilization function – involves the community in formulating and assuming objectives;

Assessment function – allows advance monitoring and quantification of impact (Olar and Jitea, 2020).

A crucial aspect that the literature analyzes is the level of coherence between the real needs of the community and the priorities set in the LDS. The investigations carried out in Romania (Marquardt et al., 2012; Olar & Jitea, 2020) highlight that in many cases the strategies have been influenced by formal models or lack of expertise, rather than by an authentic examination of territorial needs.

Thus, in order for SDL to become an effective tool, it is necessary:

1. active involvement of local citizens and actors;
2. collection of up-to-date and relevant data;
3. clear correlation between objectives, resources and expected impact.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This article is a narrative review of the literature, aimed at synthesizing and analyzing existing research. This approach was chosen to provide an integrative perspective on theoretical concepts, explanatory mechanisms and current research directions.

Bibliographic search was conducted in the following electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science and Google Academic.

Keyword combinations were used such as: Rural development, local action groups, financing of local action groups.

The period under consideration is from 2014-2025. Information was also used at national level, which was taken from the web pages of the institutions (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Agency for Rural Investment Financing and National Institute of Statistics) most relevant articles were selected following the documentation analysis for the elaboration of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To substantiate the work „Assessment of the impact of rural economic activities by analyzing the strategy of local action groups”, a bibliographic search was conducted in Google Scholar, Web of Science and Scopus using the following keywords: „rural development”, „local development strategy” and „local action group”. These concepts have been selected because they directly capture the thematic area of research, namely the relationship between the development of rural space, the strategic tools of local planning and the role of Local Action Groups in the economic dynamization of the territories.

To assess the level of interest of the scientific community in the concept of Local Action Group (GAL), a bibliometric analysis was conducted using the Web of Science database. The search was carried out using the keyword „local action group” (respectively its equivalent in the international literature – Local Action Group), a term associated with the implementation of rural development programs within the LEADER programme initiative in the European agricultural policy.

According to the database query results, there are 14,042 scientific articles that address this topic globally. The high volume of publications demonstrates that researchers are highly interested in the study of local governance mechanisms, participatory rural development, and the implementation of territorial policies.

According to the geographical distribution analysis of the publications, just 104 articles are written by Romanian authors or contain case studies and empirical analyses conducted in Romania. Compared to the total number of identified publications, the contribution of Romanian research represents about 0.74% of the total scientific literature in the analyzed database. This relatively small

percentage indicates a modest presence of Romanian research in the international literature on Local Action Groups.

This situation can be explained by several factors. The LAG system was initially implemented in Romania late, as a result of the country's integration into the European Union in 2007 and the adoption of rural development instruments under the Common Agricultural Policy. The studies conducted at the national level are often published in local journals or institutional reports, which are not always indexed in international databases.

Rural development, which is a common term used in studies on socio-economic dynamics of rural space, agricultural policies, and regional development strategies, was another key word sought.

The search results show the existence of 79,904 internationally published scientific articles on rural development. The high number of publications reflects the constant interest of researchers in analyzing rural transformations, identifying tools to stimulate the local economy and assessing the impact of public policies on rural communities.

According to the analysis of the results, Romanian research contributes by having 1,261 articles written by Romanian authors or including case studies and empirical analysis related to Romania. Compared to the total number of identified publications, Romania's contribution represents about 1.58% of the total scientific literature indexed on this topic in the analyzed database. The presence of Romanian research in rural development is growing, although it is still relatively small compared to international literature.

Interest in this topic is closely linked to the evolution of European policies dedicated to rural areas, particularly within the Common Agricultural Policy, which includes specific support instruments for the modernisation of agriculture, the diversification of the rural economy and the improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. Romania's accession to the European Union has led to an increase in research on rural development, with the implementation of programs dedicated to territorial development.

The obtained results indicate that the literature associated with the concept of rural development is the broadest, as the notion is broad and interdisciplinary, being addressed in economics, sociology, geography, public administration and European policies. Instead,

the expression local development strategy generates a smaller number of results, as it refers to a more specific instrument of planning and territorial intervention. The term local action group leads, in turn, to a more niche literature, focused mainly on the implementation of the LEADER approach, local governance, cooperation between actors and the impact of projects funded in rural areas.

From the perspective of the origin of the authors, we can see the existence of two major categories of contributions. The first category is represented by Romanian authors, who mainly deal with the rural development issues in Romania, the implementation of the LEADER programme, the functioning of the Local Action Groups, the use of European funds and the effects of local interventions on rural entrepreneurship, employment, infrastructure and social inclusion.

The study found that local action groups have various funding sources that they can channel into rural development projects. Local development strategies act as promoters of innovative projects. The paper includes a review of the main funding sources available to LAGs, with a focus on relevant measures from the NRDP (National Rural Development Program) and CAP SP (Strategic Plan under the Common Agricultural Policy).

Local Action Groups are highlighted in the literature as a means to stimulate integrated territorial development, strengthen public-private partnerships, and promote local economic initiatives. The LAG is a crucial tool for implementing the bottom-up approach in European cohesion and rural development policies, where local communities are actively involved in defining development strategies.

To conclude, the bibliometric analysis conducted on data from the Web of Science highlights that there is a significant amount of research dedicated to Local Action Groups worldwide, but Romania is not making a significant contribution. This aspect indicates the existence of a significant potential for the development of academic research in this field, especially through empirical studies on the impact of the LAG on the socio-economic development of rural communities in Romania. The extensive research on rural development at a global level is reflected in the many publications available. Although Romania's contribution is relatively modest in relation to international literature, the number of studies identified indicates a growing interest in

analyzing socio-economic transformations in the Romanian rural environment and assessing

the impact of European policies on it.

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of academic works on Local Action Group activities shows that rural development is a complicated and pertinent field that calls for more study.

Moreover, the experts writings show that, this subject is important and researchable from several socioeconomic and spatial angles as the effects of these policies in rural areas may be evaluated.

The subject chose is therefore essential for the academic world and for discovering means of reaching sustainable development in rural areas.

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