

# THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CBIS IN THE FIELD OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ROMANIA

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## **Abstract:**

*Community-based organizations can mobilize citizens to adoption behaviors to ensure the transition to a sustainable economy. This paper evaluates social and economic impacts of community based initiatives in Romania, in two different domains: transport and waste. The sample for this paper includes two community-initiatives, one from the transport domain and the other one from the waste domain. It was analyzed 12 interviews five interviews with members and one interview with a stakeholder for each of the two initiatives, which was conducted during January -May 2015.*

**Key words:** sustainability, social effects, economic impacts, community based initiatives

**JEL classification:** Q01

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

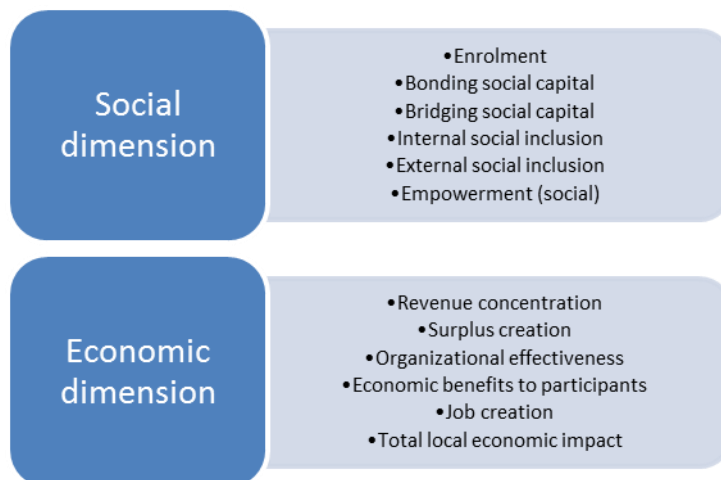
The community based initiative (CBI) concept is an integrated bottom-up socioeconomic development concept, which is based on full community involvement supported through intersectoral collaboration (Ardakani, 2008). There are many community-based initiatives involved in various fields: education, health, justice, socio-economic and other areas of interest. These initiatives exist in the form of associations funded or important projects aimed at eradicating poverty or other issues of public interest. Ideas program is based on: voluntary, private, faith-based alternative, public service programs, community partnerships, community-based social services or community programs for education. Cheng et al (2011) examined the role of learning in changing forest governance by community-based forestry initiatives in the USA.

The effects of the activities run by community-based organizations are the center of attention of many researchers, especially in developed countries. The key activity that will insure accountability of these initiatives is the evaluation, which provides information and analyses about all facets of complex community-based initiatives, from needs assessments to outcomes. (Edelman, 2000).

To ensure social responsibility and improving the lives of local communities, there is a growing demand to assess the effectiveness of community initiatives. Drawing on a general analysis of the concepts of accountability, effectiveness, and causality, Schweigert (2006) examined each meaning of effectiveness, in the light of its implications for evaluation design and to determine which kind of effectiveness is important considering organizational values and aims.

There has been a huge effort to develop reliable indicators of activity and achievements that are understandable to a wide range of audiences, identify important features of the activity, and generate high quality data accessible (Friedman, 2005).

Celata and Sanna (2014) made a list of specific indicators, classified according to four dimensions (social, economic, politic and tehnological). Figure 1 shows the indicators that describe the social and economic dimension.



**Figure no. 1. Indicators for social and economic dimensions**

Source: Celata and Sanna (2014)

Auspos & Kubisch (2004) consider that the most important elements for impact evaluation of comprehensive community-based efforts are as follows:

- providing sufficient time to see results;
- engaging the community in monitoring and analysis of results;
- improving the collection and use of data;
- developing a theory of change, clear and detailed enough to name the causal links between actions and expected results;
- comparing the results with the planned intervention.

Middlemiss (2008) show that there is limited understanding of the contextual conditions that are favorable for these activities, the types of people who might be affected and stages of adoption by individuals of sustainable behaviors. Kaplan and Garrett (2004) examines the benefits and challenges of using logic models to help build consensus and foster collaboration within a community coalition and facilitate internal and external communication.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

The sample for this paper includes two community-initiatives, one from the transport domain and the other one from the waste domain. In this paper, we analyzed 12 interviews, five interviews with members and one interview with a stakeholder for each of the two initiatives, conducted during January -May 2015.

The transport initiative has activities in the field of civic education and involvement. The main services that individuals receive from the initiative are: organizing events for cycling (both urban areas and mountain areas); watchdog, lobby, protest and advocacy activities; educational events. A lot of people benefits indirectly from their actions, by promoting bicycle usage they offer a more sustainable urban landscape.

The main objective of the waste initiative is to implement public policies regarding the environmental protection. The most important services that individuals receive from this initiative are: campaigns to collect plastic waste in various mountain tourist areas and campaigns for decorative objects from waste recycled. One of the main goals of the association is to increase the public participation for reducing environmental impact. The association gets in contact with local community needs and its desires directly at each of the events made and indirectly through local media or even on the Facebook page of the association.

### **3. EVALUATION OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES**

As most CBIs in Romania, the initiatives investigated were initiated with the hope to improve the social responsibility in various fields and with the goal to implement the changes that the members wanted to see in the society. Almost all interviewed members have declared that they wanted to get involved in groups or organizations, with the aim to improve the society.

The initiatives analyzed claim to have a real contribution to social change but could do more if they receive support from authorities but the members of initiatives do not believe in radical changes to trigger sustainability. Sustainability must be gained in time as there is a whole process that results in sustainability. Most people surveyed said they want the change to occur slowly, with predictable results, so that the community to get used easy to the changes occurred. These initiatives quickly became known in the local community through the activities undertaken to produce social change. Many respondents expressed the view that there are very few people who push for change in society. The population is caught in its own problem to survive: work, family and everyday life long handle so no time left available to determine social change. In addition, many believe there is no chance to succeed in achieving social change. Most people of the communities consider that it is a waste of time to try to change mentalities because there are several local initiatives that have an opportunistic attitude to achieve goals that are tangible and easily measured to obtain funds. Some respondents have suggested that there are personal interests that often lie behind social responsibility campaigns. The population is often suspicious when exhibiting social responsibility because sometimes these campaigns are used when it desired distraction from other issues of public interest.

The social change must be done in small steps, slowly, with minor adjustments in the environment in which it operates. Environmental conservation attitude is reflected in the attitude towards the way of producing social change which might intervene to a sustainable society. Implementation of a policy for a sustainable society should be made gradually taking into consideration all the effects which might occur. Sometimes the transition to sustainability is hindered by the community itself, people from local communities have different views on the concept of greening. Many are reluctant to actions aimed at environmental protection. People are skeptical about the success of actions to protect the environment. The lack of adequate infrastructure and ecological culture in local communities are the main impediments in development initiatives. Environmental education is considered insignificantly for most members of the community.

The members of the waste initiative want that the main contribution they might bring would be public awareness about environmental issues. The actions of the both initiatives aimed to determine social and economic changes in society. First is the need of making people aware of environmental issues to intervene behavior change but the contribution to social change initiative is limited by insufficient knowledge of the public on the concepts of ecology or sustainable development.

The effects of some actions of the waste initiatives reduced the workload in the case of companies from different fields which do not respect the environment. This led to job losses by some of the local population, causing dissatisfaction against the initiative among people from the community.

The members of initiatives investigated want that the effects of their actions to propagate throughout society, so changing mentalities will support the creation of a sustainable economy. The results of the efforts made by the transport initiative are building bicycle lanes. The effects occur which can enjoy a whole society. A small group of the population, cyclists can use travel lanes without them being life threatening. At the same time, no more cars are uncomfortable by the presence of cyclists on the streets.

Transmitting the feeling of closeness to nature is one of the priorities stated by members. The confidence that generations to come will enjoy nature and will have no place to raise children, motivates some respondents to continue to engage in such activities. One of the effects which are intended to produce waste initiative members through their actions should be stopping deforestation that led to the triggering of landslides in some areas. These landslides occurred mainly where the population not affords to carry out tests on the land where their homes raised, or where the population could not take measures to ensure against landslides. Stop cutting trees for the construction of buildings in parks is another effect that should help improve the lives of the local population.

There are certain categories of people who cannot move from the village to enjoy nature than in local parks. Widening roads or highway construction can produce negative effects but knowing and anticipating these effects may lead to their removal. People should be informed to take appropriate decisions overall interest of society.

Regarding the achievements made, 15 protected areas have been saved, about 100 organizations was helped to comply with the legislative requirements in order to activate in this area and in some area, have been developed bike routes. Some respondents stated that the membership initiative offers opportunities for personal and professional development through participation in various public campaigns. An active involvement in projects initiative offers the opportunity to gain experience, money and recognition.

Most respondents appreciated that in society there are only very few people who push for social change in a radical way. The issues of general interest are presented to the public through the distribution of messages on social networks, conferences, or through the work of scientific researchers. The transport initiative promotes the protection of the environment, organizing several events dedicate to reducing the pollution in urban areas. They have created the first Touristic guide for the region Muntele Mare, the first ciclo-touristic map of Romania, the first ciclo-touristic map of the Cluj area, the first serious Guide for setting-up NGO's. This initiative contributed to the elaboration of several draft laws (in the field of environment and cycling).

Members of waste initiative had collaborated with the other initiatives on joint projects of public awareness, a forestation, ecological activities, and exchange of information, financial support and consultations. The need for effectiveness and legal requirements to work are factors that constrain the ability to cause social change. Disclaimer genuinely by authorities of responsibility for environmental protection had the effect of decreasing enthusiasm of volunteers involved in the initiatives. The feeling that they are fighting with windmills, caused the abandonment by some members of the shares of voluntarism. Lack of transparency of actions taken by authorities and bureaucracy hinder the activity of initiatives that could have a major impact in society.

## CONCLUSION

Both initiatives have a real contribution to social and economic change. They managed to produce changes in the population's attitude towards the environment. The activities undertaken have resulted in increasing the number of those who use bicycles. The people are starting to realize the importance of spending time in nature. Many families choose to go on trips or expeditions for knowledge.

It is supported by most respondents that sometimes they need to move from a peaceful approach to one of direct confrontation with the authorities. This shift is achieved when having

exhausted all peaceful forms of determining the change. The lack of reaction by the authorities is the factor that triggers the need for direct confrontation.

The lack of environmental education in the community and a superficial involvement of the authorities in implementing the measures that need to be taken has resulted in a diminishing impact on society. The difficulty of initiatives to attract volunteers to be actively involved has reduced ability to cause the desired changes in society. The existence of unfavorable laws volunteering activity or lack of clear legislation in environmental protection represents other factors that have hindered development initiatives.

Transition to a sustainable economy envisioned by the two initiatives should not take place dramatically, but must be done in stages. Dealing directly with the political and administrative system is not a viable solution for most respondents. To produce the desired change needed to be undertaken a series of actions in the long term. Then the effects will be profound and lasting. Sporadic and small-scale actions may cause some temporary improvements only.

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