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▶ **To cite this version:**

Dan Coriolan Simedru. Alba County: the role of the mountain region within social cohesion strategy. International Conference of Territorial Intelligence, Sep 2006, Alba Iulia, Romania. pp.5. halshs-01003202

**HAL Id: halshs-01003202**
**https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01003202**

Submitted on 10 Jun 2014

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# ALBA COUNTY: THE ROLE OF THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL COHESION STRATEGY

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**Summary:** The paper aims to present (1). the planning policy for Apuseni region in Alba County in line with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Recommendation Rec (2002) 1 and (2). the community instruments, specifically ERDF, to be used in line with the ROP issued by Romanian Ministry of Integration.

**Keywords**: planning policy, preservation, promotion and development, mountain area

# Region, Identity and Sustainable Development

# Alba County: The role of the mountain regions within the social cohesion strategy

## INTRODUCTION

***Setting the scene:***

Around two thirds of the Alba County are covered by mountains. An integrated planning policy for the particular regions should include socio-economic measures, protection and management measures and the last but not the least local culture and tradition. Within the territorial strategy, elaborate by the County these days, the balance between promotion, development, and protection of the natural environment become crucial.

Elected and appointed officials are in the process of learning the new policies to mobilize population and economic actors towards conservation and the best use of the endogenous resources in order to diversify the economic base. The rehabilitation of the basic infrastructure is a strategic choice for increasing the attractiveness of the mountain settlements for all groups of people.

***What are the options?***

The specific condition of the mountain areas consider attention to the coordination of the sectoral policies such as:

1. Promote the diversification of SMEs sector and encouragement of craftsman;

2. Strengthen the marketing of the agricultural and forestry products;

3. Support the tourism activities, protecting the environment;

4. Protect the specific landscape, air, water, and soil quality;

5. Preserve flora and the wild life and their habitat;

6. Promote the identity and the cultural diversity of the mountain population.

***Structure of the paper:***

The paper contains three chapters. The first one depict the main features of the Alba County organised on natural characteristics, settlements network and basic infrastructure in order to be able to evaluate the present situation and the competitive factors of the county. The chapter two encompasses the integrated policy options for the Apuseni mountain areas as part of spatial development, including measures of economic and social development, the protection and management of natural resources. The chapter three present the financial instruments for policy implementation using the opportunity of Structural Funds, during the period 2007-2013, in order to achieve the territorial cohesion of the Alba County.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCE ALBA COUNTY

The Apuseni region is characterised by its wealth of natural resources, including water resources, agricultural potential, historical and cultural heritage, value for quality of life and for economic and leisure activities not only for the local but also for other populations. However, the region is also characterised by difficult living and production conditions for farming activities due to the geomorphological and climatic condition.

Around two thirds of the Alba County are covered by mountains. In percentage this is representing 52%, the rest of the land being hills, 26%, and plain, 22% of the total county surface. A glance on the Alba relief identifies in the north-west of the county the Mountains of Trascau, Mare, Bihorului, Gaina and Metaliferi, and the Sebes Mountains in the south of the county. The highest pick is about

2059m high, Surianu, located in the Surianu Mountains.
From spatial point of view, a procentage of 75.5% of the total settlements[1] is historicaly developed within the Apuseni mountains, and covers 48.1% out of the total county area. As far as the accesibility and mobility is concern, for 45% of these vilages there is no railway connection, and most of the county roads are deteriorated.

Public utilities, drinking water, sweredge are scarce. About 70% of the mountain settelmens has poor drinking water pipeline network, and only 5% have sweredge sistem including waste water. The waste management sistem is lacking or is not performant in more than 50% of villages.

Regarding the economic features, the Apuseni region is lagging behind in comparison with the eastern part of the Alba county. The capacity of economic agents involved in production and services is week. The labour force is perceived as a problem by 40% of the mayors of villages. There is a little support for SMEs development at the local level.

The development, competitiveness and innovation in the Apuseni area are supported by a balanced settlements network, attractive natural environment, significant agricultural industry, and a high education support consolidated by university and NGOs network. However, there are spatial disparities, weaknesses of the primary and tertiary sectors, and environment damages caused by mining activities.

## CHAPTER 2: PLANNING POLICY FOR MOUNTAIN AREAS IN ALBA COUNTY

On 30 January 2002, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted the Recommendation Rec (2002) 1 to Member States on the Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent.

This is a policy framework document which takes into account the relevant activities of the Council of Europe and its bodies, and in particular the work of its Parliamentary Assembly and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in the field of continental spatial development policy and which could contribute to strengthening the European integration process by means of transfrontier, inter-regional and transnational co-operation.

The document is a base for a coherent strategy for the integrated and regionally balanced development of Europe, while based on the principles of subsidiarity and reciprocity, strengthens competitiveness, co-operation and solidarity among local and regional authorities across borders, thereby making a contribution to democratic stability in Europe.

Spatial development policy should give special and suitable consideration to the preservation, promotion and development of mountain regions. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe pay great attention to mountain regions in the context of the social cohesion strategy.

The Salzburg Convention of 1991 on the Protection of the Alps and the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy contain important principles for spatial development policies in mountain regions which represent an exceptional potential for Europe and fulfil numerous ecological, economic, social, cultural and agricultural functions.

An integrated policy for mountain regions should be a part of any spatial development policy, which should include measures of economic and social development, the protection and management of natural resources and the respecting of local traditions and cultures, taking into consideration environment condition such as altitude, topography and climate.

It should also consider the fact that the environmental conditions of the mountain regions represent not only a constraint, but also an opportunity for the populations living there and that it is necessary to tune the economic and social development and the protection of the environment.

Spatial development policy as a co-ordinating activity should draw the attention of various sectoral policies to the special conditions of mountain regions. These include:

- economic policies, which should promote diversification and multiple job-holding,

[1] This represents a number of 474 villages.

crafts and SMEs as well as co-operation between small enterprises;

- Agriculture and forestry where marketing activities should be strengthened and development policy based on quality products. Agricultural and forestry initiatives contributing to the protection and management of the environment should be supported. The protection, development and sustainable use of forests should be encouraged;

- initiatives contributing to the development of quality tourism, respectful of the natural, economic, social and cultural environments of mountain regions should be fostered and supported;

- the provision of public services, with no discrimination against mountain regions as compared with the rest of the territory;

- the promotion of rail transport, in particular for international and interregional traffic;

- the protection and sustainable management of land, water, air and landscapes, the conservation of fauna and flora and their habitats, and their rehabilitation where necessary;

- the maintenance and promotion of the identity of mountain populations and the diversity and richness of their cultural heritage.

## CHAPTER 3: REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAM FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Council of Europe by the heads of state and government of the Member States of the Council of Europe at their Second Summit on 10 and 11 October 1997, has to be accompanied by sustainable spatial development policies that bring the social as well as the economic requirements to be met by the territory into line with its ecological and cultural functions.

Europe's social cohesion is strengthened by transnational co-operation within large European regions. Because there is insufficient public finance available to cover society's needs, particularly for technical and social infrastructure, and their associated services, public and private investment will be required to make a greater contribution in the coming years to achieving the objectives of regional development.

In line with the EU integration a several financial instruments are available for Romania during the period 2007-2013. These instruments are organised under specific objectives and operational programs. The most significant program for Romania is The Regional Operational Program (ROP).

The aim of the ROP is to accelerate economic growth of the lagging behind regions. The objective can be achieved only through a strong coordination with the actions foreseen within the other operational programmes. The ROP will give priority to the regions that are lagging behind, using regional and local resources and encompasses four thematic priority axes, as follows:

**Priority Axis 1: Improvement of regional and local public infrastructure**

*Objective:* This priority axis envisages the improvement of basic infrastructure in the field of transport, education and social infrastructure, with the aim to increase the attractiveness and accessibility of the regions and to stimulate their socio-economic development. The main key areas of intervention identified within the transport and social infrastructure are the following:

- The rehabilitation/modernization of the county and local road network;

- The rehabilitation/modernization/development of the health services, social and public safety infrastructure;

- The rehabilitation/modernization/development of the education infrastructure

For the Apuseni Mountain region, eligible projects for the Priority Axis 1 can contribute for increasing accessibility in the region, with great deal for business location. The development of health and educational infrastructure may help the people to get better life condition and access to information and knowledge.

**Priority Axis 2: Strengthening of the regional and local business environment**

*Objective:* To increase the local and regional economies contribution to the creation of gross domestic product, by supporting those economies which became less competitive on the market economy, and by creating the functional economic structures, in order to sustain the most efficient use of the regions endogenous potential – natural resources, raw materials, human resources – and to stimulate the regional economies. The key areas of intervention are:

- Development of business support structures specific to each Region;
- Supporting local entrepreneurial initiatives

For the Apuseni Mountain region, eligible projects for the Priority Axis 2 can contribute for the SMEs network in the tertiary sector and by envisage the County Council role in building the partnership with the administrative units in supporting the local economic initiatives.

**Priority Axis 3: Development of regional and local tourism**

*Objective:* To create supplementary income sources at regional/ local level and to create new jobs, through the development of historical, natural and cultural assets in all regions, and within the regions in the more isolated areas, with tourist potential that could contribute to their economic development and reducing the isolation. The key areas of intervention are:

- Restoration and development of cultural and historical heritage
- Development of natural tourist resources in the context of sustainable development
- Improving the quality of tourist services related to accommodation and recreation facilities.

For the Apuseni Mountain region, eligible projects for the Priority Axis 3 can contribute for the development of eco-tourism within the region based on the natural and cultural heritage and supported by agricultural sector.

**Priority Axis 4: Sustainable urban development**