

The good collaboration between social entrepreneurship and rural areas – innovative approaches for community development and implementation

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Abstract. In the current study on the topic "The good collaboration between social entrepreneurship and rural areas - innovative approaches for community development and implementation", we will follow the path of social organizations that have successfully introduced people from socially vulnerable groups into agronomy and the production of agricultural products, training them how to be farmers and increasing competitiveness and entrepreneurial spirit among them. The isolation of the so-called "marginalized groups" of society is not in the service of the Bulgarian economy, and the fertility of our lands, which we are proud of in front of the whole world, has today turned into a wasteland. We will study the development opportunities and the results achieved by the organizations, introducing the Roma population, people with mental retardation or motor deficits in the production of agricultural products, improving their knowledge, creating good development opportunities in the depopulated agricultural areas. Projects such as the social enterprise "Bee" in the village of Hayredin, Vratsa region, which have successfully involved unemployed persons from minority groups in the production of honey and bee products, teaching them how to be beekeepers and providing them with beehives, are among the examples of successful social an entrepreneurial project that improved the quality of life of people from vulnerable groups in depopulated regions. Good examples are among us, and they deserve their special attention.

1 Introduction

Land has always played a major role in the formation of communities. It has been the cause of pride and wars. Bulgaria is not far behind, and a lot of blood has been shed for our Motherland. We are blessed with fertile soils, favourable climate, waters and four seasons which enable the production of numerous agricultural products. If in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century there was hard work in the village, today only the memories of the glorious past that flourished there remain. Thus, gradually the prosperity of the Bulgarian villages is

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replaced by the depopulation of the regions, at the expense of the centralization of the population in the big cities. According to NSI data, as of 31.12.2022, 73.6% of the population lives in cities, and only 26.4% live in villages. [1]

On the one hand, people still live in desolate regions who need work, income, education, a normal life, which unfortunately is hard to find in many places. In crowded cities, on the other hand, there is no place for everyone, especially those who suffer from physical or mental deficits and who live unnoticed by us because they are not competitive in the labor market. Is there then an opportunity for the two problems of rural depopulation and people in need of social support to come together, creating a solution that will benefit both parties?

Agrarian communities that tried to cope with their social problems were created hundreds of years ago. In Old England, as early as 1649, the English reformer Gerrard Winstanley created an organization united by a group of men called "True Levellers", later called "Diggers" by both supporters and opponents. Their activity was connected with the taking over of waste and uncultivable lands, which the "Diggers" began to cultivate and gradually settled, creating small, egalitarian rural communities. United by their religion, the Winstanley created something more – the idea of equality and joint responsibility. One person, one vote, equal workforce, equal profit, balanced social and commercial need. [2] Thus Gerrard Winstanley laid the foundations of the first cooperative movements in Europe and social farming, where everyone works for the common good.

To this day, social entrepreneurship has developed many times, depending on the needs of society. Over the last century, city life has become a leading desire of society, leading to massive urbanization of population and arable land. Rural areas became depopulated, and the production of pure agricultural products was replaced by fast moving goods and products full of obscure ingredients and poor quality. After all this, we can highlight 3 main problems facing agriculture and society:

- Depopulation of rural areas;
- Deserted agricultural lands;
- Social inequality and unemployment.

However, Bulgaria is not the only country with these problems. It is precisely for this reason that the European Commission launched the Common Agricultural Policy: 2023-27.

2 The common agricultural policy: 2023-27/

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-27 supporting Rural development through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, investing 95.5 billion euros for the period 2021-27. Rural development programs are implemented by EU member states through projects that can be drawn up on a regional or national basis. Each of the Rural Development Programs (RDP) must work on the development of at least four of the six Priority Areas and Focus Areas (FA), which are:

Priority 1: Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas:

- FA 1: Fostering innovation, cooperation and the development of the knowledge base in rural areas;
- FA 2: Strengthening the links between agriculture, food production and forestry and research and innovation;
- FA 3: Fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors.

Priority 2: Enhancing the viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture, and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable forest management:

- FA 1: Improving the economic performance of all farms and facilitating farm restructuring and modernization;

- FA 2: Facilitating the entry of adequately skilled farmers into the agricultural sector and generational renewal.

Priority 3: Promoting food chain organisation, animal welfare and risk management in agriculture;

- FA 1: Improving competitiveness of primary producers by better integrating them into the agri-food chain;
- FA 2: Supporting farm risk prevention and management.

Priority 4: Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift toward a low-carbon and climate resilient economy in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors;

- FA 1: Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity.
- FA 2: Improving water management.
- FA 3: Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management.

Priority 5: Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry;

- FA 1: Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture.
- FA 2: Increasing efficiency in energy use by agriculture and food processing.
- FA 3: Facilitating the supply and use of renewable energy.
- FA 4: Reducing greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture;
- FA 5: Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agriculture and forestry.

Priority 6: Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas;

- FA 1: Facilitating diversification, creation and development of small enterprises, as well as job creation;
- FA 2: Fostering local development in rural areas;
- FA 3: Enhancing the accessibility, use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT) in rural areas; [3]

Priority Area 6 is one that enables many organizations to engage in the fight against social inequalities, to help improve and improve the quality of life, by creating training and entrepreneurial programs for youth and adults wishing to engage in agriculture, as well as social farms integrating people from marginalized groups, persons with addictions, mental or physical deficiencies.

2.1 Social sustainability in the CAP strategic plans

The Common Agricultural Policy 2023-27 works for the development of mainly 3 strategies related to the social sustainability of agricultural areas:

- Attracting young farmers who will develop business in the field of agronomy;
- To promote the recruitment of new labor, gender equality, including the introduction of more women in agrarian business, social inclusion and local development of rural areas, through the implementation of the circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry;
- Improving food production throughout the Union, producing quality, nutritious and safe food, produced in a sustainable way, producing as little waste as possible, animal welfare and combating antimicrobial resistance.

Point 2 of the CAP is when European strategies and policies could collaborate with social enterprises across Europe, creating social farms that provide jobs, knowledge and protection to people in need from vulnerable groups and will increase the number of people in rural areas. Between 2014 and 2019 alone, the population in rural areas decreased by 0.8 million. However, this does not apply to all of Europe. In some member states we have a 0.2% increase in the number of rural population, while in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal and Romania it has decreased by exactly that amount. OECD

study? It proves that rural areas located around large cities tend to grow in population, while other areas become depopulated and desolate. [4]

On the other hand, rural areas are home to 137 million people across Europe, which forms 30% of the population. The long-term vision of the CAP includes precisely combating the depopulation of the regions, improving services such as health, education, social support, employment opportunities, gender equality and social inclusion. [5]

2.2. LEADER

LEADER is a local development method that has been used for more than 30 years and aims to engage local actors and communities in the development of rural areas. Provides support related to planning, designing, creating strategies, making decisions related to the resources that are needed to realize the goals. It brings together the public, private and community sectors to work together for the development of rural areas and communities.

The term LEADER itself represents the French abbreviation "Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale", which means "Links between the rural economy and development actions". [6]

In the 2014-2020 programming period, the LEADER method has been extended under the broader term Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) to three additional EU Funds:

- the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF),
- the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and
- the European Social Fund (ESF).

Table 1 shows the development of the LEADER program since its inception, the growth of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the public budget provided [7].

Table1. Evolution of the LEADER

Name	Period	Program type	Nr. of LAG's	Total public budget (EU + national)	Nr. of member states
LEADER 1	1991-1993	Community Initiative	217 LAGs in lagging rural areas	1,2 bio. EUR	EU12
LEADER 2	1994-1999	Community Initiative implemented through 102 national/regional Operational Programs	906 LAGs in lagging rural areas	5,4 bio. EUR	EU15
LEADER +	2000-2006	Community Initiative, implemented through 73 national/regional Operational Programs	1153 LAGs in all rural areas	5,1 bio. EUR	EU15+10
LEADER Axis	2007-2013	Obligatory RDP/Axis 4 measure (5% resp. 2,5% for new member states)	2402 LAGs in all rural areas	8,9 bio. EUR	EU 25+2
LEADER/ CLLD	2014-2020	Obligatory RDP Measure 19 (5%)	~ 2600 LAGs22 in all rural areas	9,8 bio. EUR	EU27+1

LEADER is implemented within the national and regional frameworks for rural development of the EU Member States, co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The social economy and social enterprises often use principles, many of which are very close to characteristics of the LEADER method. [8]

The seven LEADER principles:

- Public-private partnership,
- Territorial approach based on sub-regional areas,
- Integrated local development strategy,
- Bottom-up management,
- Cooperation,
- Networking,
- Innovation.

LEADER's methods match very well with the principles of social economy and social entrepreneurship, skilfully combining to provide the best support to social entrepreneurs. Interest in the LEADER approach is growing as it perfectly combines with the ideas of social farming, rural community development and Smart Villages, which capture interest and focus even more attention on rural communities and development opportunities. [9]

3 Social farming and innovation – green care and farming care

The example of The Diggers from 1649 is one of the first types of social farming in Europe, which has been gaining more and more popularity in recent years. European countries are beginning to pay attention to social farms that practice solidarity, social inclusion and rehabilitation of people from vulnerable groups, helping them find work by training them in agronomy and agriculture. Social farming, also known as "green care" and "farming care", is increasingly proving its benefits, which are related to both social, ecological and business aspects. The point of social farming is not just to produce agricultural products that are then offered on the market, but to produce with the help of people who need support, rehabilitation and social integration to fit into society or to return to the labor market, acquiring work skills and knowledge. These could be people from marginalized communities, with a low level of education, emigrants, people with a certain degree of disability, people with mental disorders or those being treated for addictions (gambling, drug addiction, alcoholism).

The meaning in social farming is much deeper and significant, and the need for policies, financial support and training programs at European and national level is necessary. Social and health institutions are also looking for "alternatives" to standard treatments, knowing that nature soothes and has a positive effect on a person's physical and mental state. On the other hand, social farming represents a new opportunity for farmers to perform alternative services, expanding the scope of their activities and their role in society. Integration between agricultural practices and social services can also enable new sources of income for farmers, while sharpening the image of agriculture in society and favouring the development of new social relations [10].

- Social farming could have a positive impact on the development of rural areas, by attracting young people, investments, institutions and professionals who could work with people with special needs;

- Social farming could improve and strengthen relations in rural communities, by involving minority or isolated social groups in agriculture;

- Social farming enables farmers to expand and diversify their services by integrating agricultural practices into social services, which could bring additional income for them;

- Social farming can be a generator of social innovation, where collective learning, bottom-up approaches and practices rooted in local experience could generate new approaches and policies leading to radical change in societal groups at regional, national and European level. Their role is essential and related to informing the public about social

problems, opportunities for integration, increasing knowledge related to agriculture, attracting investments, uniting business and non-governmental organizations, changing laws and state institutions related to work with vulnerable groups.

4 Good examples in Bulgaria

The term "Social farming" is still not so well represented in the scientific literature, and practice shows that few farms and projects that can be called "social". However, there are several good examples with which we can boast that in Bulgaria there is also an opportunity for collaboration between persons in need of support and agriculture. If in Europe, alternative methods of treatment and implementation of people from closed communities, through work in nature, are already proven useful, in Bulgaria we are still a little behind. Fortunately, however, we have a lot to brag about.

4.1 Social enterprise "Bee"

Social enterprise "Bee" belonging to the association "New Path" has been operating since 2008 and is located on the territory of Hayredin village, Vratsa district - the village with the highest unemployment in the entire district. The aims of the Bee Project are to create career opportunities and promote employment for Roma in the community by training them to be beekeepers and providing them with hives to raise bees and produce honey. New Path Association has proven to be a stable non-governmental organization promoting the development of the impoverished region, helping people from minority groups to start their own businesses and work on an equal footing with others from the local community. [11]

Social enterprise "Bee" is developed through the support of the "Open Society" Institute - Sofia, whose goal is to support non-governmental organizations and municipalities that wish to apply for financing from the EU structural funds and other programs that help the integration of Roma in local communities. They also work on projects funded by the Operational Program "Human Resources Development" together with the "Local Initiative Group Mizia and Kozloduy" and the Foundation for the Economic Development of Small Enterprises, Hungary, thanks to which they have gained experience from Hungarian social organizations with a similar mission and have proven to the local residents that their idea has a potential that is developed and working in other countries. Those who perform best during the trainings and prove their motivation are given hives and mentoring help to set up their own bee farms, while others are employed in the social enterprise. "New Path" Association supports the newly created bee organizations, and their goal is to develop as well-prepared businesses, creating jobs for other persons from minority groups. In addition to all the programs and organizations listed above, "New Path" also works with the "Land - source of income" Foundation, which supports the financing of entrepreneurs who cannot get bank loans for the realization of their ideas, because they cannot offer guarantees. Association "New Path" offered financial support to 7 people from the municipality of Vratsa who received a BGN 2,000 loan from the "Land - Source of Income" Foundation, and on average the amount they have to return increases by 6-7%. [12]

4.2 „Land - source of income” Foundation

The "Land - Source of Income" Foundation was created as an idea in 1997, and the "S.E.G.A" Foundation - Sofia, the Institute for Market Research - Sofia and an expert start improving the project. The purpose of "Land - a source of income" is to support landless Roma families

to become the owner of the land and receive permanent income from it. The activity of the program takes place in the Plovdiv region.

Since its inception, the progress of the program has gone through several phases of development, which are divided in the following order:

4.2.1 Pilot Lighthouse (1997-1999)

Several micro-loans were made in the form of donations, which were then to be returned to the Regional Development Fund. 75 families from the villages of Borets and Chalakovi received access to working capital. In the second year of the Pilot Program, the return on funds in the village of Chalakovi reached 62%, as groups of Roma families with permanent knowledge of agriculture were formed, but in the village of Borets only 14%, which necessitated the termination of the project there.

4.2.2 First stage "Development of the main structures" (2000-2003)

In 2000, the company "Land" was established, formed by 7 partners from the village of Chakarovi. The main goal is the purchase of agricultural land for landless Roma families, which are financed with microcredits. For the purchase of land, families must participate with a 20% co-payment, an annual interest rate of 6% and a repayment term of the agricultural loan – 5 years. In the same year, an Agricultural Information Center was established, which aims to inform families wishing to become farmers. 1000 Roma families from 16 settlements took part in the process. The agricultural information center has also received the support of the municipalities and town halls in the region. "Development of the main structures" continues with the unification of several specialized technical schools in Perushtitza, Kuklen and Sadovo, which are united in 9 student initiatives. 250 young people participated, who were introduced to viticulture, floriculture, beekeeping, rabbit and pigeon keeping, and had the opportunity to visit the farms on site, gaining experience and knowledge directly from the farmers. Many contacts were also established with businesses and municipalities, which were also involved in the problem of unemployment of Roma families.

4.2.3 Second stage "Institutional separation" (2003-2007)

In 2003, the Foundation "Land - a source of income" was registered in Gad Plovdiv as a legal entity with a non-profit purpose for carrying out socially useful activities. The activity is consulting, training and providing access to resources, as well as the development of the Agricultural Information Center and the newly formed company "Land and Income" EOOD.

- Third stage "European funds as a tool for program development" - two projects are implemented:

- "Ensuring access to professional education and training for Roma families engaged in agricultural activity", financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and OP "Development of Human Resources";

- SUNRISE - "Increasing the motivation and skills of teachers and trainers in a knowledge-based society"

4.2.4 Fourth stage "Dissemination of experience" (2011-2013)

During this stage, the Project "Integration of Roma communities through economic initiatives" continues, which is implemented in partnership and with the financial support of

the "America for Bulgaria" foundation. The main goal here is again to support Roma families to create income and employment. [13]

4.3 The "Wonderful Garden"

The "Wonderful Garden" project is implemented by the "St. Nicholas the Wonderworker" Foundation, Dobrich, whose mission is to give a dignified and independent life to persons placed under prohibitions and persons with mental difficulties. The goals of the Foundation are:

- protection of the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities;
- building sustainable systems for social and health protection;
- upholding the right to a dignified and independent life of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families;
- improving the conditions for the inclusion and full participation of persons with intellectual disabilities in all areas of social life;
- construction and development of social services in the community for persons with intellectual disabilities and their families;
- support for the full participation of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the preparation, monitoring and control of national, regional and local policies aimed at persons with disabilities;
- raising the awareness of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families about the possibilities to assert their rights themselves;
- formation of positive public attitudes.

From 2004 until now, the Foundation can boast of huge successes, one of which is that it became the first organization in the whole of Eastern Europe that managed to remove the prohibitions of two girls - a precedent in the history of the Judicial System.

The successes of the organization are many, but the "Wonderful Garden" project is one of the good examples of social farming in Bulgaria, which successfully implements in agriculture and the production of vegetables and persons with mental retardation, treated for addictions and placed under interdiction, who remain unwanted from other employers.

The "Wonderful Garden" opened its doors in 2017, starting with charitable funds in the amount of BGN 4,500, and in 2018 they already work with 30 young people. In addition to imparting a craft to the individuals employed in the organization, they provide them with the knowledge they need for the labor market and work discipline. Initially, they started with the cultivation of flower seedlings, which they placed on the roofs of the social institutions - Protected housing and Day center for adults with disability

Gradually, the idea gained popularity and at the end of 2018 they won an award for the best business plan and the UniCredit Bulbank award for social entrepreneurship in the amount of BGN 12,000.

The luck of the "Wonderful Garden" smiled when the municipality of Dobrich donated 4 decare of land for them to manage for free within 10 years, until they realized that the land was a former landfill. Regardless of the bad surprise they encounter, with the help of businesses and volunteers, the donated terrain is improved, becoming a working field for 10 girls with intellectual disabilities. The working months for them were October, November, February and March, and they also received a salary earned on a project for the Bulgarian Women's Fund. A total of 22 persons, 9 of them with intellectual disabilities, and the rest with physical deficits, were gradually employed under the programs of the Employment Agency over a period of 24 months.

The idea of the "Wonderful Garden" received attention not only from Bulgarian organizations, but also from many foreign ones, who helped financially in its construction,

materially, by donating machines, drip irrigation systems, work clothes, etc. They also received support from 50 American volunteers who helped improve the terrain all summer.

The "Wonderful Garden" also enjoys the attention of many schools and kindergartens, which are their frequent guests and to whom they can pass on the knowledge of agriculture to even the smallest [14].

5 Conclusion

We live in a world where equality is still a utopia. Humans are social beings, but they suffer from their social problems. Some of them we create ourselves, but others we were born with without asking for them. This does not mean that we should resign ourselves and leave everything to chance. Sometimes the state does not have the strength, knowledge and resources to fight social inequality alone, so social entrepreneurship comes to the rescue. With the good collaboration between the state, NGOs, business and the support of European programs, good projects are obtained that bring positive results. However, this cannot happen if we do not unite as a community and the institutions do not start working together. The examples of social enterprise "Bee", The "Wonderful Garden", "Land - a source of income" Foundation should be just a drop in the sea of good examples with good social impact. But if they do not have the support of the state and business, many of these projects will remain just an idea in the head of some enterprising person who did not find the strength and means to develop it, or they will sink quickly, without even being able to prove the importance and apply their skills to change for a better future.

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