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Development opportunities for the isolated communities

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Abstract

Together with Romania's membership in EU came an on fashion group of concepts – social economy, cohesion, sustainable/enduring development, isolated community etc. – we seemed eager to put to work, except many of them were hardly familiar to us, neither to the scientific level nor to the empiric one. And so, my approach is both a clarifying attempt, an endeavour to adjust some of these concepts to our reality, and an exercise of putting them into practice.

The key concept the entire article revolves is that of isolated community, presented in regard with the principle of sustainable development – a direction on hand to fallow due to its ethic generosity but as well because of the large European funds intended to support social and economic cohesion, solidarity, inclusion and community's specific identity.

Keywords: community; social issues; minority; sustainable/enduring development; vulnerability; isolated community; chance and equality.

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Introduction[1]

In the context of climate changes, economic challenges, social pressure, media often presents crises episodes faced by human beings communities: lack of food and water, an impossibility to travel or communicate, lack of qualified human resources, refuse to be medically assisted … What do all these aspects have in common? And when we use the term "community"[2] (Plano, Riggs, Robin, 1993) to what exactly do we refer: a social group (how large?), bounded by common values (Tönnies,[3] in: *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences,* 2007-173), delimited by a geographical area?, an administrative area?, so what is, in fact, a *community*? And starting from this point, to what we refer when mentioning *isolated community*.

Well, we can singularly use the term "isolated", but there are some others to be considered: "exclusion", "marginalisation" (Neamtu, 2003: 511-522), "seclusion", "alienation", and even "localism" (as in opposition to "globalization"). But, in the case of the vulnerability – and isolation - of a community its specificity often implies social relations dissipation or even breach for individuals/families/social groups (Cojocaru, 2005, pp. 22-42). It can manifest as a geographical/residential partial or complete separation, as well as socially - lack of communication, interaction, cooperation, involvement (Zamfir, Vlasceanu, 1993) - or both. So, mainly we can speak about a deficient functioning of the social networks, but not always caused by the same factors, yet conducting to similar effects.

While *marginalisation* is an effect of a poor functioning of the social system – and so caused by a *hexogen factor* – meaning that individuals or groups are driven

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[1] This analysis represents a start point for a series of applications in social work field, concerning the standardization of practical activities in social work. These applications are realized through a project founded by European Union, precisely The Operational Sector Programme for the Human Resources Development widely financed from The European Social Fund, which gives the opportunity of funding activities from the occupational area. Without being a paradox, yet not circumscribing into the natural area, a partnership between 3 Romanian universities ("George Bacovia" University of Bacau, University of North from Baia Mare and Braila Centre of Studies from "Constantin Brancoveanu" University) lead to the initiation of a project now in an development stage. The partners are implementing the project called "European Qualifications and Standardization within the Social Work Field – Acronym Eur-As" (PERSEUS: POSDRU/18/1.2/G/11966).

[2] Community *A social group with the feeling of a common identity, a consciences, and interests. Generally, the members of a community live in a certain geographical area, relate to a common institutional machinery, use a volume of social transactions big enough to create the consciences of common interests. The communities vary in size and complexity, from the rural environment to urban centers, from massive groups politically integrated to political or security international communities.*

[3] The author made the fundamental distinction between Gesellschaft – society and Gemeinschaft – community, as a natural homogenous organism, where prevails members' common interest and solidarity.

to social isolation, periphery, against their will, by other groups, being placed in a demeaning position in regard with the others; *seclusion* involves the decision of separating from the others – an *endogenous factor*, from different reasons: ethnical, political, psychological, religious etc. and having as a result the auto-marginalisation. Because of the similitude of the effects, we are tempted to say that isolation is produced by a mix of the two factors, due to the behaviour adopted by the members of the isolated community and its neighbours. So, it would not be inappropriate to speak about *alienation* in these conditions, since we find connections related to the snow ball effect of the individual subject's estrangement from its community, society, or world.

The phenomena happens when the subject (individual, groups) lacks the power to negotiate and fight for rights, usually either due to an inferior economical, educational, professional status, being labelled as the so-called *underclass; or because their behaviour is perceived as deviant and is highly disapproved and incriminated by the large majority. There are many examples here: the 60' Hippy Current, the Homosexuals, Gypsies, and Mormons etc. Getting away/apart is the main reaction, sometimes thought as a winning strategy derived from the hope of "being left alone" – since they are not worthy (behaviour grafted on a fatalist attitude), as it is the case of beggars, elder people, women in certain cultures etc.*

Tipologies

Different reasons and motivations, as mentioned, determine different types of isolated communities.

Peculiar social practices isolated communities

According to a 2009 report of the European Fundamental Rights Agency, the discrimination perception of the Romani/gypsies community of Romania is lower than that of the other EU countries covered by the report. The perceived discrimination levels given by the report are: Czech Republic 64%: Hungary 62%: Poland 59%: Greece 55%: Slovakia 41%: Bulgaria 26%: Romania 25%. Based on this report, Romanian newspapers have stated that the Romani/gypsies minority in Romania is the 'least discriminated Romani minority in Eastern Europe. However, the same report suggested that the favourable responses from Bulgaria and, to a lesser extent, Romania be regarded with caution, as the low levels of reported discrimination might be a result of the high levels of segregation between roma/gypsies and non-roma. Spatial segregation is high amongst the roma; (that is, they are living in areas predominantly populated by other roma/gypsy): highest in Bulgaria (72%), Romania (66%), Slovakia (65%) and Greece (63%). The implications of this should be borne in mind when looking at the results, as higher

levels of spatial segregation imply that roma respondents are cut-off from mainstream society, which, on the one hand implies that they experience high levels of discrimination, but, on the other hand, may serve to shelter them from discriminatory treatment as contact with the majority population is limited. For example, on September 27, 2003, a very high meditated case surprised the 12-year-old girl case, daughter of the King of roma/gypsies, who was forced to marry a 15-year-old boy. Since both were below Romania's legal age of marriage (set at 16), no official marriage ceremony was performed. The girl fled from the wedding, but her father brought her back and she was forcibly married in respect with the gypsies' marriage customs. Particularly controversial was the fact that the groom showed the wedding guests a bloodied bed sheet to prove that the marriage had been consummated; in Romania, the age of consent is 15 years old, so sexual contact with the 12-year-old girl was illegal under Romanian law. A friend of her said "She told me it was the worst thing that ever happened to her. The European Parliament rapporteur for Romania at that time said that it was a rape and the child must be given over to foster care. It is worth mentioning that her father said that he believes, also, that there shouldn't be marriages between romani children anymore, but he argued that hundred years old traditions cannot be changed over night. When it comes to geographically isolation the situation tends to present as it fallows.

Geographically isolated communities and relocation phenomena

There are many rural settlements where electrification (Fara, Finta:2002) is a problem yet to be solved, such as the isolated Hamlets in the Apuseni Mountains, the Cerna Valley, or the Danube Delta. In spite of the fact that these isolated villages have been included in the national electrification program, the difficult conditions imposed by the accomplishment of the work and the long distances between them and the national grid have not permitted their electrification. The electrification of these settlements has not been possible till this date due to the fact that the individual units are very remote, widely spread over large areas, access to the homes is difficult and only on foot or on horseback.

E.G., Marasu Community (administratively represented as a small village residence) is positioned in Braila County at 60 km distance of Braila City and is composed of 5 villages: village residence Marasu, Tacau, Bandoiu, Magureni and Plopi. Villages' centres are localized in the very proximity of the dam that holds the right bank of Valciu Danube Branch. The connection between the villages is established with difficulty either on the dam or a dirt road. The village is part of Braila's Big Isle, laying on a territory between 212A Road that cuts the Isle across and Danube River – Valciu Branch. Braiala's Big Isle is situated on the South-East part of Romania on Danube's lower streem, between Giurgeni – Vadu Oii and Danube's 2 branches: Old and New Danube that reunite at Braila. The isle

lays on a surface of approximately 76.687 ha and was formed through successive alluvial deposits; up to the moment of being dammed, most of it was frequently flooded, due to its plain shape, the underground waters close to surface, numerous lakes and pools. The negative landscape forms were most of the year covered in water. Once it has been dammed, the isle was set into a draining branches network that should collect the excessive waters and overflows them into Danube River, with the help of pumping stations. It is not always the case. The most important aspect manifests each spring and autumn, when Danube's level rises and the level of the phreatic waters grows and floods the villages, the water getting out of the ground and the population cannot fight against the phenomenon in any way. Marasu's population is about 3486 inhabitants: Marasu – 1100 residents, Bandoiu – 481 residents, Plopi – 346 residents, Tacau – 877 residents and Magureni – 682 residents. The main occupations are agriculture, farming and fishing. The natural heritage of these villages is very favorable to farming – as a main economic function, the soil has a very complex structure that provides a high and diverse productivity of cereals, technical plants and numerous species of domestic and savage animals. 29 estate farms develop on this perimeter their activity, yet, there are no agricultural commercial associations. When it comes to industry, only a private corn meal supports the sector. Since the available job offers is highly reduced, a lot of families are the beneficiaries of social help in regard with the Law 416/2001. Their total number rises to 176. Within the administrative residence village there are both a human and a veterinary medical office that are satisfactory equipped. The main issues remaining periodical flooding, no matter the season and the very poor state of the roads, most of the year, impracticable. The road makes the connection to the ferry, but it takes more then 5 ours to reach this destination, further, the only connection to Braila is insured by a single bus per day. Marasu has no potable water and swage system, while the educational system is quite large: 3 houses of culture, 5 kindergartens, 5 schools that gather 500 pupils and 30 teachers. 4 of these schools have been rehabilitated and modernized.

Climacterically isolated communities for a temporary period of time

"Over the past weekend, 12,862 people were evacuated in northern Romania, and 3,000 people are still trapped or isolated by the waters in 15 remote villages." (http://www.act-intl.org). The north and north-eastern parts of Romania were severely hit during July 25-27, 2008 by storms and torrential rains (80-140 liters/square meter), causing massive flooding over vast areas. The major rivers (Prut, Tisa, Suceava, Moldova and the great Siret) surged to their highest levels in more than a century, bursting their banks in many areas including the historical regions of Maramures and Bukovina situated on the border with Ukraine. The hardest hit regions with the highest number of evacuees and flooded villages are the counties of Suceava and Botosani. In total, 174 localities in seven counties (Maramures,

Bistrita, Suceava, Botosani, Iasi, Bacau, Neamt) have been affected. In these areas, 9,260 households are flooded, 2,217 homes seriously are damaged, and 6,299 fresh water wells are contaminated. Other damages include the flooding of 20,000 hectares of farmland and the destruction of 5 km of national main roads, 66 km of county roads, 507 km of village roads, 45 km of dykes and embankments, and 162 important bridges and overpasses. Massive landslides have occurred in two locations in Suceava County and more are expected in the Carpathian mountain regions.

Ethnically isolated communities

Romanian case: "Different ethnical sources accumulated over the centuries. Some of them turned into fluid combinations between the maintenance of a conscience-tradition of a distinct ethnical origin, combined with the integration in the larger Romanian community. Isolation, especially at the village or area level maintained a higher ethnical identification."(Zamfir, 2003). The commonly accepted name for the ethnic group is *Boyash (in English)*, however in contemporary Bulgaria the terms *Ludari* and *Rudari* are in common use, while in Romania both terms are present in some form: *Rudari* and *Băeși*. For the same ethnic group in Hungary and Croatia the terms *Beyash* and *Boyash* are now officially used. The ethnonym *Banyash* in Serbia is known only among the group settled in Baèka region, living along the river Danube, near the border with Croatia and Hungary. This term is only sporadically understood, and not used among some other Banyash groups in the Serbian Banat region, e.g. the village of Uljma. They are also known by many appellations based on trades; in addition to Rudari/Ludari (possibly from Bulgarian "rudar", "miner") they are known as *Kopanari* ("cradle-makers"), *Koritari* ("trough-makers"), *Lingurara* ("spoon-makers") and *Ursara* or *Mechkara* ("bear-trainers"). The Boyash community in certain parts of Croatia have their own internal justice system. This system deals with interpersonal conflicts that arise at the village level. In many senses the system enforces the social norms and expectations of the culture but has little authority at the inter-village relational level. Larger villages (300 people or more) - have a village chief, called a *Predsjednik*, who is assisted by a group of elders. A plaintiff or person pursuing justice appeals to the Predsjednik of the village for assistance or a judgment over an issue or conflict. A *Globa*, or court, is called and the elders of the village interview the parties and other witnesses. A judgment is arrived at and is communicated to both the plaintiff and the defendant. The judgment is final and binding. The judgment usually involves the payment of money by the defendant to the plaintiff in the event of a verdict in the plaintiff's favour and then in the villages of North Western Croatia the purchase of several cases of beer, to be paid for by the defendant, is then ordered for distribution to the whole village. The majority of *Banyash Roma* in Serbia today live in mixed communities with different South Slav groups along the rivers: Danube, Sava, Tisa and Morava, but

they can also be found in some villages cohabiting with the Romanian language speaking Vlachs. The estimated figure of Banyash settlements (also obtained during recent fieldwork) in central Serbia is about 140, plus 30 in Banat and 7 in Backa region (the province of Vojvodina). However, the approximate dimensions of the Banyash population cannot be estimated (it is impossible to determine their exact number, not even with the help of most recent extensive demographic study about Roma in Serbia).

Religiously isolated communities

*An interesting case is provided by the Romanian media from the years 2000. At M*aguri Racatau lives a strange isolated community, a sect once part of the Pentecostal cult, while the rupture produced in 1984. The sect gathers children, women elders over 70 years old and its leader is Ion V., the third of a family of 11 children. Due to this sectarian ideology those who are not part of it do not exist and are completely ignored. Though the subject was one of interest for the media over the past years, only when the "wife" of one of the leader could not stand anymore the daily beatings, the authorities decided to intervene. Eight children out of 12 were finally taken from that place and considered to be saved from an isolationist way of life. The Community of Vidreni, overcalled as the *Strange of Good*, isolated of any other life model, is reunited around one leader – who is one of the very few with upper education. Specific to this sect is the very fact that its members do not communicate with anybody and great no one, and do not accommodate anybody in their homes. For them, the contact with a nonbeliever is considered as devil's work. About TV, radio or any electrical device is useless to mention. Even more, due to their incommunicado, it is hard to precisely describe their beliefs. This clan do not declare its children, who are born at home in quite difficult conditions; usually all sect's members being treated in improper medical conditions. Cases of children's death presented as a cause of medical deprivation. Even more, the clan allows marriages only between their own members so situations of consanguinity are more and more often. Authorities do not relive marriage certificates due to this cause. There are also other conduits that brake legal norms and the majority's customs. Though it is not of large dimensions, the sect gathers presently 50 members and however put, presents a symptom that should be envisaged. Sects like this are not a unique case in the world – famous cases being well mediated. But the main issue remains the tension between the protection of both the rights of religious expression and the other fundamental ones. It seems that the fundamental religious right can also be perverted in forms of a community generating social problems even for its own members. Another example, this time a socially accepted one is represented by the Lipovean's minority. Over the centuries, the Lipoveans and their ancestors went by the name of *staroobreadtsi*, and their religious cult was called *staroobreadcestvo*, in French: *Vieille Foi*, in English: the *Old Faith*, in Romanian: *believers in the old rite*. All

that time, the term "believers in the old rite" was associated varied epithets such as *rascolnic, schismatic, sectants*. This Orthodox Lipovean (of Pravoslavnic type) population in Ardeal was labelled schismatic by the Catholics and the Protestants.

Costs and effects

As we mentioned already, though factors and motivations might be different, usually effects are very similar. The isolated communities are usually composed of economically deployed people, unemployed, ethnical heavily discriminated minorities, persons with disabilities, mentally challenged, delinquents, misfits (Radulescu, 1993). Further more, the socio-economic status of the isolated communities does not improve; on the contrary, its members deepen in poverty, since (auto-)marginalisation narrows the possibilities to brake free: no more connections to information, knowledge, education, support programs etc.

In a world of globalization, a*nother aspect to be considered would be that of interconnections between people, groups, communities, organizations; it is highly improbable for a community to be completely isolated, since it is part of an eco-system. Marginalisation effects reflect not only on isolated community's members, but also on its neighbours (no matter if they are structured from a social, economic or administrative point of view). As a first conclusion, an isolated community phenomenon regards not only its members but equally the entire socio-economic system (being it a county, a region, a state or a public or private sector). In their book (*Brinkerhoff, White, *1988),* Brinkerhoff and White stressed upon the *negative costs of poverty* in regard with a bundle of aspects: the pressure over the protection system, the instability of the safety system, the destabilisation threat, the loss of valuable genetic material etc. Beyond the cultural diversity, there are present a serious of human general behaviour and mental constants; one of these being the need for contact with the kinds, explained by Hill (1987) in regard with 4 fundamental reasons: *social comparison*, *positive stimulation*, *emotional support* and *seeking for attention*. To these 4 reasons we should also add the *social proximity factor*. To a larger scale, the isolated community can no longer benefit from establishing contacts with new people in order to adjust their reactions to new or challenging situation; exhausted its educational potential and doesn't have the possibility to get support on crises situations; the contribution to humanity's values and its appreciation is restricted – all this carved on a deficient *propinquity* leading to *cognitive dissonance* and finally to alienation. Heider, a pioneer of *unity relationships* researches, also indicated that higher benefits and lower costs are involved when proximity, neighbourly resources (human and material) are used.

The psychosocial disequilibrium is generated by two categories of morbio-genetical factors that interact through "negative models" which are automatically

accepted and imitated due to the mechanisms of collective psychical contagion, becoming types of behaviour, communication and inter-human relationships:

- community/endogenous factors: tensioned interpersonal relationships; intra-community conflicts; a frequency raise of antisocial conducts of delinquently-aggressive type – manifested as violence; a considerable limitation of the behavioural freedom.

- extra-community/exogenous factors: social changes; socio-demographical and economical factors, cultural and moral changes; axiological crises; professional changes, unemployment; lifestyle, behavioural models, thinking patterns profound and quick changes; income disparities; mass-media pressures; a crisis of cultural, moral, religious and traditional values; natural calamities and so on.

Their effects are either of a *structural* type – a decrease of group's cohesion; of a *dynamic* type – an increase of social pressure; or of a *relational* type – having as departure point the state of alienation.

The endogenous aggressive conducts (of an antisocial type) manifest in the behaviour of the community group either as suicidal aggressiveness or as homicidal hetero-aggressiveness, like:

- *toxically-manias* – a defection from the combat with life;

- *community isolation syndrome* – connected with the incapacity to adjust to a new socio-cultural model; first, present as a defence mechanisms, persisting then as a pathological form of suicidal isolation;

- *anomic-delirium syndrome* – as a result of social, cultural, moral and religious values marks or social normative model; a perfect moment for the appearance of social myths and false idols, collective hysteria, projections of danger and conspiracy, religious or other nature fanaticism, minorities wrongfulness;

- *sinisterness syndrome* – manifest as collective panic, behaviour disorder, adjusting difficulties.

Socio-pathies – psychosocial unbalance of an exogenous type – are behavioural deviances with an aberrant character, highly anti-social and manifest in three main directions:

- *adjustment disorders* – consisting in instability, emotional disturbance, rejection attitudes of system's values, a low or absent level of aspirations, unpredictable moods changes;

- *behaviour disorders* – consisting in the lack of a positive motivation, random actions, tension and conflict in the interpersonal relationships, elopement and drifting, vindictive actions, as a result of the high suggestibility and the lack of responsibility, expressed through violent conducts like sadism, suicidal, homicidal, theft etc.

Socio-depressions are caused by the prolonged exposure to exogenous factors, consisting in:

- *psychic exhaustion*, and having as a result a collective discouragement state and the give up of projects, being specific to developed or under-development societies and manifested as defeatist attitude, a decrease of aspirations' level, a decrease of labour quantity and quality, lack of interest.

- *collective neuroses* – are groups' adjustment difficulties to quick changes of society's evolution; caused by a disruption between needs and aspiration on one side and the real offer on the other hand. It determines a decrease of self-esteem, a loss for the intrinsic value of the individual, and finally for the very meaning of life. It also burdens the community group, creating conflicts, refusal and vindictive collective attitudes.

- *deployment of liberty syndrome* – shows in socio-political crisis situations, like: revolutions, wars, deportation, captivity, and manifests as psycho disorders of reactive type: claustrophobia feelings, panic and insecurity states, terror feelings, lack of communication and cultural exchanges, estrangement, anxiety, insomnia, nightmares, confusion episodes etc.

- *psycho or somatic disorders* – caused by isolation together with poor living conditions (pauperism, improper nutrition, climate change), manifested as anorexia, bulimia, endocrinal or sexual disorders, dystrophy, TBC, cardio and neuronal disorders etc.

- *syndrome of community estrangement* – is triggered by the isolation from the ethno-cultural origin community; the group has to face the competition between the two cultural models, and manifest as fear of communication conduction to isolation.

Conclusions

As we mentioned from the very beginning, the concept of community, from a classical sociological perspective, implies a highly cohesive social group, based on shared values, interests, norms, and habits, being more or less consciously embraced – the picture of what once used to be the (old) rural communities. In this case, is community's identity endangered by novelty (like globalisation factors) or the proximity relations might actually be its strong point.

Though some would be tempted to hastily answer "no", we first should explain that a community (even isolated or not at a certain point) developed its social fabric also from stereotypes and myths (e.g. *Myth of Stranger*). For example, the Central-Eastern Europe, as Joanna Nowicki explains in the Chapter *Familiar/ Estranged* (Delsol, Maslowski, Nowicki, 2002, p. 469) seems to be haunted by the spectre of loosing its identity/"soul" to European Union; a concern in regard

with social, minority, linguistic identity, and still relaying on stereotypes like: the German invader, the dangerous Russian, the second hand people (Romanians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians) perceived as outsiders, poor, drifters, immigrants. Even more, the European Union – an aspiration oasis, is perceived more as the West – a referential value, then a familiar community.

The identity dilemma – a devil's disciple position, was meant for the sake of a transparent demonstration in order to uphold the hypothesis that E.U.'s actions do not attempt to different communities identity, but actually support it. Even more, that key concept – *sustainable development*, mentioned at the very beginning of the article, represents a global and European powerful tool for the development of social cohesion, inclusion and fight against marginalisation.

Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations. The term was used by the Brundtland Commission[4] which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that „meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainable development ties together concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity. The field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into four constituent parts: environmental, economic, and socio-political sustainability and cultural diversity.

In Romanian, the concept is described by two equivalent terms enduring/durable (*dezvoltare durabila*) and sustainable (*dezvoltare sustenabila*) that have emerged as synonymous borrowings from different linguistic sources.

Sustainable development has become a political objective of the European Union since the Maastricht Treaty of 1997. In 2001, at Goteborg, the European Council adopted the Sustainable Development Strategy of the European Union; an external dimension was added to it at the Barcelona Council in 2002. As a result of that process, the EU Council adopted, on 9 June 2006, the renewed Sustainable Development Strategy for the enlarged EU space. The document reflects a cohesive and coherent strategic vision with the general objective to develop further actions enabling the European Union to achieve continuous improvement of the quality of life for the present and future generations by creating *sustainable communities* that are capable to manage and use resources efficiently

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[4] The Brundtland Commission, formally the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), known by the name of its Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland, was convened by the United Nations in 1983. The commission was created to address growing concern "about the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and the consequences of that deterioration for economic and social development." In establishing the commission, the UN General Assembly recognized that environmental problems were global in nature and determined that it was in the common interest of all nations to establish policies for sustainable development.

and to realize the potential of the economy for social and ecological innovation in order to provide prosperity, a better environment and social cohesion. In order for the present article to achieve comprehensiveness, we mention there are five different dimensions of social cohesion[5]: *material conditions*, *passive relationships*, *active relationships*, *inclusion and equality:*

> - Material conditions are fundamental to social cohesion, particularly employment, income, health, education and housing. Relations between and within communities suffer when people lack work and endure hardship, debt, anxiety, low self-esteem, ill-health, poor skills and bad living conditions. These basic necessities of life are the foundations of a strong social fabric and important indicators of social progress.
> - The second basic tenet of cohesion is social order, safety and freedom from fear, or "passive social relationships". Tolerance and respect for other people, along with peace and security, are hallmarks of a stable and harmonious urban society.
> - The third dimension refers to the positive interactions, exchanges and networks between individuals and communities, or "active social relationships". Such contacts and connections are potential resources for places since they offer people and organizations mutual support, information, trust and credit of various kinds.
> - The fourth dimension is about the extent of social inclusion or integration of people into the mainstream institutions of civil society. It also includes people's sense of belonging to a city and the strength of shared experiences, identities and values between those from different backgrounds.
> - Lastly, social equality refers to the level of fairness or disparity in access to opportunities or material circumstances, such as income, health or quality of life, or in future life chances.

The European Union and its Member States have the responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy by involving all institutional components at national and EU levels. The importance of close collaboration towards the goals of sustainable development with the civil society, business, social partners, *local communities and citizens* is also underlined.

The activities of the European Union in the sphere of social protection and inclusion are regulated by the decisions of the European Council of March 2006 that established new objectives and operational approaches to encourage cooperation among Member States using the open method of coordination. The Communication of the European Commission on Social Services of General Interest set benchmarks for the responsibilities of government agencies and support organisations in charge of social affairs. The Member States also have precise obli-

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[5] According to the government-commissioned, State of the English Cities thematic reports.

gations under the European Pact for Youth and the European Pact for Gender Equality.

Specific provisions that are relevant for social inclusion are present in practically all national strategies and sectorial programmes. The Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resource Development 2007-2013, which was approved in October 2007, contains a distinct chapter on social inclusion. The programmes that provide financing for social initiatives cover the entire population of Romania but are primarily directed toward reducing the risk of poverty, promoting access to social services for certain underprivileged groups and improving the access to, and participation in the labour market for vulnerable groups. The target groups include the Roma population, persons with disabilities, young people leaving the child-protection state system, women, families with more than 2 children, single-parent households, children at risk, convicts and former offenders, people dependent on alcohol and drugs, the homeless, victims of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS carriers, persons affected by professional diseases, refugees and asylum seekers. Minors left behind by migrant workers are a recent addition to these categories; the typical profile for the group are minors left in the care of elderly relatives or other family members (recent surveys estimate that this is the case of between 1/5 and 1/3 of all families in some rural areas).

The main envisaged areas of intervention are:
  - The development of *social economy*[6] by actively involving all relevant stakeholders (public institutions, business or professional associations, labour unions, etc.) and by encouraging the social action of non-governmental organisations and groups of the civil society (social cooperatives, self-help associations, foundations, charities and voluntary services, etc.). Such actions will support the development of strong local communities, will provide useful services to the people, will encourage citizens' activism and will help the emergence of new businesses resulting in further employment opportunities for vulnerable groups, while promoting social cohesion and solidarity.
  - Improved access to, and participation in the labour market for vulnerable groups through measures that are additional to those provided to the general population, in particular through targeted, personalized approaches, in-

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[6] Social Economy Organizations are social and economic active actors in all the sectors characterized mainly by specific entrepreneurial purpose and shape. Social Economy includes organizations like cooperatives, mutual enterprises, associations and foundations. These enterprises are highly active in domains like social protection, social services, health, banking, insurance, agricultural production, proximity services, training and education, culture, sports and recreational activities." (SE definition – Permanent European Conference of Cooperatives, Mutuality, Associations and Foundations is the only comity from Europe that regroups and exercise authority over the main categories of Social Economy's actors.)

cluding awareness initiatives for the problems facing the ethnic roma population.

    - Promoting gender equality on the labour market by facilitating women's access to traditionally male occupations, to leadership positions and involvement in politics by deterring gender stereotypes, combating human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace, by creating an inclusive labour market, securing work schedules adapted to women (work from home, flexible schedules, etc.), including retraining for alternative occupations of persons employed in industries at risk of relocation (textiles, garment industries).

The adoption of the *Romanian National Sustainable Development Strategy* (http://strategia.ncsd.ro) marks the beginning of a long-term process leading, in successive stages, to the establishment of a new development model in accordance with the worldwide strategic guidelines that were agreed in the framework of the United Nations and with the directives of the European Union. This process should not be limited to a one-off publicity campaign (Iliescu, 2006, pp. 99-124). It should involve the active participation of all relevant actors: central and local authorities, political parties, business and professional associations, social partners, the educational and research systems, the civil society and the mass media.

Extrapolating from Ionescu's (2004, p.164) model of social development of rural communities, we wonder about the social finality and impact of sustainable development on isolated communities.

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