

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC SHIFTS IN THE 2023-2027 CAP STRATEGIC PLAN ON NON-AGRICULTURAL DIVERSIFICATION AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: A CASE STUDY OF BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA

Claudiu Gabriel BONACIU*
Horia Laurențiu CARTIȘ**

Abstract. During previous programming periods (2007-2013, 2014-2020), through Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and funding via the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Union aimed to establish a strategic framework for diversifying the rural economy by stimulating non-agricultural activities. However, the new rural development policy outlined in the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plan places the funding of non-agricultural activities under the responsibility of Local Action Groups (LAGs). This study aims to analyze the contribution of non-agricultural activities to the labor market dynamics in rural areas, comparatively examining the effects of shifting strategic orientations in rural development policy and underfunding on economic activities in rural space.

The research focuses on the administrative-territorial units of Așeu, Vadu Crișului, Șuncuiuș, Bulz and Bratca (Bihor County). The first three localities are members of the Local Action Group Association Zona Aleșd – Valea Crișului Repede, and the last two are part of the Poarta Transilvaniei Local Action Group Association. The research is completed with a case study extended to three individual companies (SKIPAS, Casa Bucătarului, Carpathia) with an analysis of the strategic changes introduced by the CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027, followed by an analysis of the main institutions of the Romanian state that directly or indirectly implement properties with European or national funding in the Romanian rural area.

The theoretical and empirical foundation of this endeavor is based on processing data from official statistics (European, national, and local), government documents, as well as a rigorous analysis of specialized literature, including doctoral theses and relevant scientific articles.

Keywords: rural development, social inclusion, tourism, Romania, Bihor, CAP 2023-2027, Strategic Plan, non-institutional integrated.

1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Rural areas in Romania face structural vulnerabilities, derived from geographical isolation and restrictive economic dynamics, factors that severely limit access to sustainable occupational opportunities. However, the resilience of the private ecosystem

* Innovation Manager, manager in rural development projects and coordinator of public policies in tourism development, at the Bihor Destination Management Agency. PhD in the field of International Relations and European Studies, Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. E-mail: gabibonaciu@gmail.com.

** Economist, PhD in Geography, University of Oradea. He currently serves as an Associate Lecturer at the Faculty of Geography, Tourism, and Sport, University of Oradea. E-mail horiacartis@gmail.com.

and the synergy between local actors are key drivers of social inclusion, the benchmark for assessing the success of cohesion policies being the job creation rate.

Within the European Union, through Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the aim was to establish a strategic framework aimed at diversifying the rural economy by mobilizing the resources of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). This mechanism aimed to reduce dependence on the primary sector by directly financing non-agricultural activities, considered essential for the modernization of the Romanian village. The development of these sectors (tourism, crafts, services) is not only an economic alternative, but a necessity for local entrepreneurs, providing solutions for the exodus of the workforce and demographic aging. However, the performance of these tools has often been influenced by the lack of a unified long-term strategic vision and fragmented planning. Although the concept of non-agricultural rural development is aligned with the requirements of the current market, its heterogeneous implementation has produced variable results in the process of social inclusion, with the risk that punctual investments will not turn into long-term sustainable interventions, in the absence of a correlation between the specific needs of the communities and the European funding directions.

The research objective of this study is to analyze the impact of institutional and financial architecture changes operated through the NSP 2023-2027 on non-agricultural diversification and social inclusion in rural areas. The research aims to identify the limits of the current rural governance model, characterized by inter-ministerial fragmentation, and to substantiate the need for an integrated coordination structure at government level.

The research hypotheses from which we start this analysis are:

H1. The current architecture of financing non-agricultural activities, by transferring responsibility to Local Action Groups (LAGs), has led to a decrease in absorption capacity and a decrease in the rate of job creation in rural areas.

H2. The fragmentation of responsibilities between multiple ministries, in the absence of an integrating body, prevents the capitalization of synergies between sectoral investments (e.g. industrial parks and related rural businesses), leads to a dissipation of the impact of European funds.

The research questions pursued during the documentation and analysis process are:

Q1. Do the changes in the financial and institutional architecture introduced by the PNS 2023-2027 affect the development of non-agricultural activities and social inclusion in rural areas?

Q2. To what extent does the institutional fragmentation of rural development policies in Romania undermine the efficiency of non-agricultural investments and what integrated governance mechanisms could remedy this dysfunction?

The research was based on a mixed methodological approach, which integrated literature review, comparative analysis of quantitative data, qualitative analysis and statistical analysis of available information. For the collection and presentation of the results, the case study, observation, as well as the graphical representation of the data through tables and figures were used.

The expected results take into account the fact that the development of non-agricultural activities in the rural area under analysis contributes directly and indirectly to the creation of jobs, providing a process of social inclusion in the medium and long term, and without an integrated support, of the financing of activities not related to

agriculture, based on specific legislation, the phenomenon of abandonment of small businesses intensifies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Between 2000 and 2027, the private ecosystem in Europe's rural areas benefited from more than 70 billion euros in funding from European Union cohesion policy funds (European Commission, Cohesion Data 2000–2006, 2007–2013, 2014–2020, 2023–2027). These investments have contributed to a moderate increase in the number of jobs in rural areas (AGRIDATA, 2026). At the same time, through the four programming periods of the Common Agricultural Policy, between 2000 and 2026, more than 20 billion euros were allocated to support non-agricultural economic activities in rural areas (European Commission, 2025). Together with other European financial instruments, these interventions have supported the strengthening of social inclusion and the diversification of the rural economy.

The attention of research on social inclusion in rural areas is found in analyses that evoke the importance of this phenomenon, emphasizing the role played by local actors through participation, but also public policies. The success of European programmes should not only be measured by the number of participants or beneficiaries, but also by their ability to reduce social barriers and facilitate equal access to opportunities. From this perspective, rural development needs to be looked at in a broader context than just participation in projects. In practice, however, authorities and decision-makers tend to consider that people who do not participate in local projects are automatically socially excluded. The researcher demonstrates that this approach is too simplistic and can lead to erroneous interpretations of the realities in rural areas. (Shortall, 2008: 450–457).

Recent work demonstrates that the current challenges of Europe's rural environment are multidimensional and can no longer be addressed exclusively through the instruments of the Common Agricultural Policy. Digitalisation, reducing territorial disparities, developing public services and combating social exclusion must be integrated into a coherent territorial approach, adapted to the needs of each rural community (Salemink, Townsend and Chapman, 2025; Benner, Tripl, & Hassink, 2024). In this context, European rural development policies are called upon to combine economic investments with measures aimed at social inclusion, innovation and strengthening the resilience of local communities.

In addition, international cooperation can see the strengthening of the capacity of local administrations in the process of responding to the needs of communities, by facilitating access to financing, education, employment and exchanges of good practices (Brie, Mărcuț and Polgár, 2022).

The results of another study conducted between 2007 and 2022 show that although most countries have made progress in reducing rural poverty, the differences from the European Union average remain significant. Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania consistently rank among the countries with the highest levels of risk of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. As for Romania, the authors point out that it has the highest values of rural poverty and social exclusion among the new member states of the European Union (Memo, Pieńkowski, 2025: 51). In contrast, Poland is highlighted as a positive example, being the only country analyzed that has consistently reduced the indicators of poverty and social exclusion in both urban and rural areas over the entire period analyzed (Memo, Pieńkowski, 2025: 59). The study explains this

situation by limited access to education and public services, reduced employment opportunities and the persistence of structural imbalances in rural development. The authors believe that reducing these disparities requires sustained investment in education, infrastructure and public services, as well as integrated policies aimed at developing human capital and diversifying the rural economy (Memo, Pieńkowski, 2025: 61-63).

According to a recently published article, social inclusion in the Romanian rural area is one of the responsibilities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR), an institution with responsibilities in the development and implementation of rural development policies. The authors highlight the fact that the analyzed programmatic documents treat social inclusion as a priority objective and present the way in which it was integrated into the three programs financed by European funds (Bonaciu and Brie, 2026: 159). Although all programmes contributed to the development of rural entrepreneurship and the promotion of social inclusion, the results were different, with the highest impact being recorded under SAPARD and PNDR 2014–2020, especially in the fields of tourism, services and productive activities (Bonaciu and Brie, 2026: 160), but as highlighted in this study the lowest impact on social inclusion is recorded in the current programming period of the PNS-CAP 2023-2027.

According to the European Commission, about 45% of Romania's population lives in rural areas, and 87% of the country's surface is classified as a rural area, of which 57% represents agricultural land and 30% forests (EC, 2023). In other words, less than half of the population on almost nine-tenths of the territory — an imbalance that, precisely because it is so severe, should be at the heart of any coherent public policy. On the other hand, it is not in the full mandate of any ministry.

Since 2000, Romania has benefited from three consecutive cycles of European funding for agriculture and rural areas, followed by the new strategic format of the CAP, which is still being implemented. The historian speaks for itself: from 1.3 billion euros in SAPARD (2000-2006) to 15.8 billion euros in the 2023-2027 NSP — eleven times more money — but with an increasingly agricultural orientation and an increasingly smaller presence of the non-agricultural component (Chereji, Maerescu, Țuțui, Chereji jr. and Chiurciu, 2023).

Budgetary figures confirm this where the data are comparable: in SAPARD (2000-2006), Measure 3.4 dedicated to non-agricultural received 13.2% of the allocation; in the PNDR 2007-2013, Axis 3 — diversification and quality of life — received 24.7% of the budget, a historical peak of the allocation for the non-agricultural component. In the PNDR 2014-2020 (9.3 billion euros) and in the PNS 2023-2027 (15.8 billion euros), the public records on the exact share of non-agricultural interventions are more fragmented, but the architecture of the two cycles is clearly lacking a dedicated axis equivalent to Axis 3 of the PNDR 2007-2013 or PNDR 2014-2020 sub-measures: non-agricultural funding appears today dispersed in interventions placed under the responsibility of the community, of Local Action Groups (DR-36), with budgets clearly lower than direct payments, eco-schemes or irrigation (MADR, 2000, 2022).

The NSP 2023-2027, approved by Decision C (2026) 884 of the European Commission on 18 February 2026, after five successive amendments, is essentially an agricultural strategy. 25% of the EAGF is blocked for eco-schemes, 41.32% of the EAFRD for environmental and climate commitments and irrigation, 15% of direct payments for redistributive support. The new implementation model through the PNS-CAP gives states greater autonomy, without this flexibility automatically leading to more ambitious policies. At the level of France, the NSP prioritises the competitiveness of farms, but shows a relative

status quo in terms of climate and environmental ambitions, and the comparison with the strategic plans of Germany and Spain highlights the existence of different national options in using the flexibility offered by the new CAP (Bureau, 2024: 10–14). In the case of Spain, support for non-agricultural activities is not concentrated in a homogeneous national intervention, but is dispersed between regional interventions and LEADER. This architecture allows for territorial adaptation, but makes it more difficult to benchmark the national financial effort aimed at diversifying the rural economy (EC, 2023; Massot, 2022).

The financial weight given to non-agricultural diversification is visibly lower although the PNS-CAP for Romania 2023-2027 states that: „Investments in non-agricultural activities in rural areas lead to the development of the rural economy and the encouragement of entrepreneurship and by promoting the prioritization of investments in digitalization and innovation, the reduction of disparities at the level of rural enterprises compared to urban ones will be ensured” (PNS-CAP 2023-2027, 2022: 1067). The analysis of the implementation of the PNS CAP 2023–2027 highlights an interest of the beneficiaries which, for open rural development interventions, exceeds the available financial resources, indicating a gap between the investment needs of the rural environment and the financing capacity of the programmed interventions (Pascar, Copăcian, Baliban and Chereji, 2025: 803).

In the current programming period, Local Action Groups (LAGs), funded by the LEADER approach, have lower financial resources than in previous cycles. Also, new interventions, such as DR-36 – Local development placed under community responsibility (PNS-PAC, 2022: 959-967), have a relatively modest financial allocation compared to direct payments and eco-schemes. From the perspective of social inclusion, the DR-36 intervention retains the LEADER philosophy of involving communities in decision-making, but the focus falls on the local governance mechanism rather than on measurable social results. The NSP mentions contributions to the indicators on social inclusion and local development, but does not set clear quantitative targets for poverty reduction, integration of vulnerable groups or increased employment in rural communities. Although the intervention of DR-29 – Investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities is designed to meet the needs of entrepreneurs in rural areas, its applicability has so far remained limited (PNS-CAP, 2022: 914-918). In Romania, the NSP started with 150 million euros for DR-29, explicitly intended for the creation and development of non-agricultural activities. Subsequently, the documents of the 2024 Monitoring Committee record a total allocation of only 20 million euros, in the context of a discussion on the reduction/elimination of the intervention. This means a nominal reduction of approximately 86.7% compared to the initial allocation of 150 million euro (MADR, 2024: 11). At the time of the elaboration of this study, the call for projects had not yet been launched, which prevented accessing funding and assessing the real impact of this intervention, as well as carrying out a punctual analysis.

Another critical aspect is the fragmentation of support instruments. In previous programming cycles, non-agricultural activities benefited from dedicated measures and separate calls, which facilitated access to finance for rural entrepreneurs. In the current NSP, local development through LEADER coexists with other interventions, and the effectiveness of this complementarity depends on the timing of calls and the administrative capacity of the LAGs. In practice, delays in implementation can diminish the economic multiplier effect that the LEADER approach had in previous periods (Crunțeanu, Comșa, Fîntîneru, 2024).

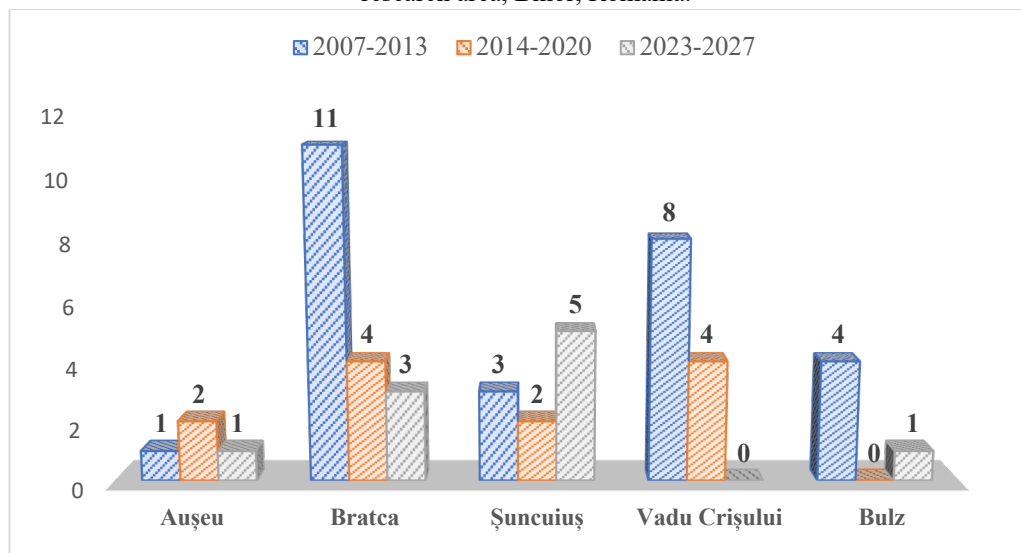
At Member State level, the approach to financing non-agricultural activities has been different. While Romania *formally retains a distinct national intervention* for non-agricultural investments, but with a relatively low financial allocation, the Spanish model distributes support for the diversification of the rural economy between regional interventions and LEADER. This decentralisation allows funding to be adapted to territorial needs and the integration of objectives relating to entrepreneurship, social inclusion, employment and depopulation, but reduces transparency on the total amount allocated exclusively to non-agricultural activities (Annex 1).

Starting from these gaps identified in the literature, the present study aims to analyze how the changes in financial and institutional architecture introduced by the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027 influence the development of non-agricultural activities and the dynamics of the labor market in rural areas, using Bihor County as a case study.

3. EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE ON NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES. CASE STUDY – BIHOR COUNTY.

The data of the research carried out on the territory of the Aleșd Zona – Valea Crișului Repede LAG and the Poarta Transilvania LAG suggest that the current institutional architecture of financing through the LAG has reduced the efficiency of interventions dedicated to non-agricultural activities.

Figure 1. Distribution of project funding for non-agricultural activities 2007-2027, in the research area, Bihor, Romania.



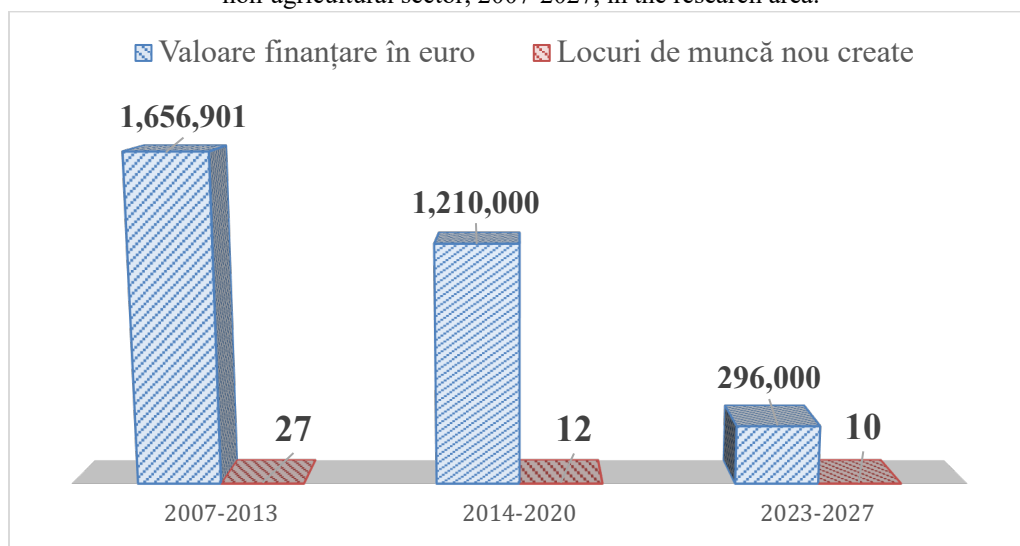
Source: authors' processing based on data collected from MADR(2026)

Figure 1. indicates that in the 5 communes, between 2007 and 2013, 27 non-agricultural projects were implemented; in 2014-2020, 12 projects, none in Bulz; through PNS 2023-2027, only 10 projects — and none in Vadu Crișului, although the demand from entrepreneurs was high. According to the programmatic documents of the two LAGs, at the level of the two territories, the funding applications submitted (PNS 2023-2027) exceeded the allocated ceilings by 51.11% and 47%, respectively (LAG-AFIR, 2026).

There is also a significant decrease in the number of projects funded in the current programming period, 62.96% lower than in the 2007-2013 period and 16.67% lower than in 2014-2020. Through the Aleșd Area LAG, 6 projects for non-agricultural activities were financed in the 3 communes, each worth 36,000 euros, and 4 projects were financed through the Poarta Transilvaniei LAG, each worth 20,000 euros. In the four programming periods in the research area, 49 non-agricultural businesses were financed through the measures (3.4, 313, 6.2 and 6.4, respectively Leader - Business Startup for Women and Youth). The projects selected for financing were direct investments in the field of tourism and consisted of the construction of accommodation units (22 agro-pensions, 17 pensions or rooms for rent, 3 campsites, a local gastronomic point) and the development of leisure activities (6) in the field of tourism.

Regarding the financial absorption and the newly created jobs in the research area, we find, by comparing the quantitative data recorded in the three programming periods analyzed, a gradual decrease in the amounts invested in non-agricultural activities.

Figure 2. Comparison between the value of funding and the number of new jobs created in the non-agricultural sector, 2007-2027, in the research area.



Source: authors' processing based on data collected from MADR (2026)

Figure 2. indicates that in the current programming period the value of funded projects has decreased compared to previous programming periods by approx. 100%, which also led to a decrease in the number of new jobs created, by about 62%. These data quantitatively support the H1 hypothesis of the present study.

3.1. Data analysis

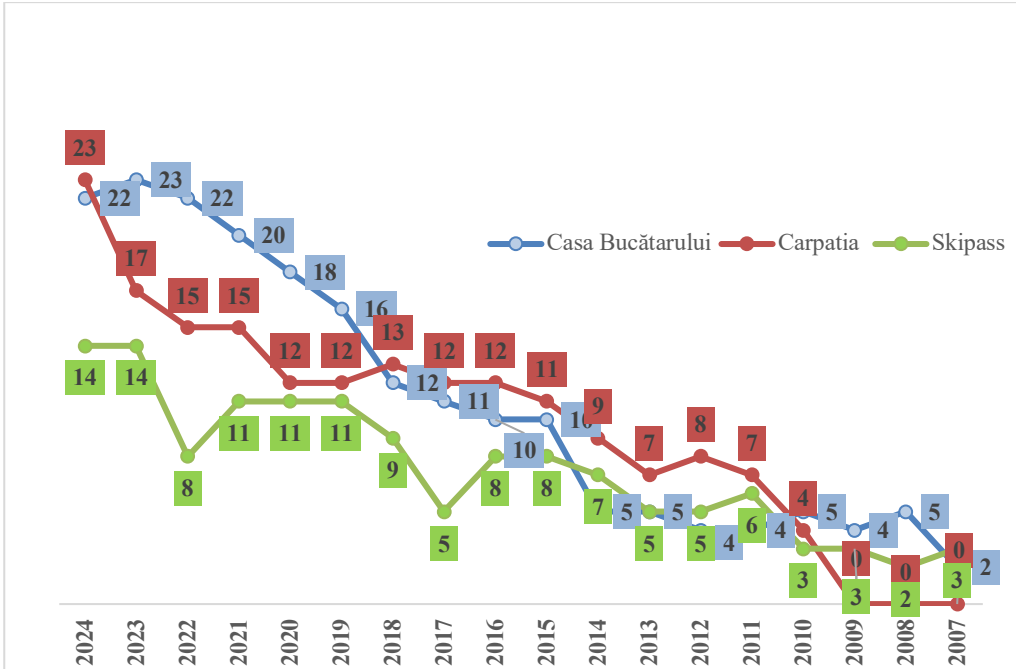
The present study aims to test the degree of generalization of the research conclusions by extending the analysis to three non-agricultural companies located in two communes in the researched area **Casa Bucătarului** (SC Padaflora SRL, Șuncuiș) and **Carpathia** (SC JAQY & ALY TOUR, Bulz) and one outside the **Skipass** research area (SC SKIPASS SRL, Nucet, Vârtop), all pensions built and modernized with European funds, in similar or different financing cycles, with a clear trajectory of job growth. The analysis of the evolution of the number of employees in these companies —

presented in Figure 3 of the field research — shows, in all three cases, a marked increase in employment over the horizon 2007-2024, to an extent that far exceeds what a linear extrapolation of the demographic and economic trend of the municipalities to which it belongs would have predicted.

For the Casa Bucătarului, the article already provides a detailed benchmark : 2 employees in 2007, 5 in 2008, 10 in 2015, 22 in 2024 — an eleven-fold increase. The other two companies confirm, through the graph presented in the field research, the same general trajectory of employment growth.

It is important to emphasize that these three companies, although located in different tourist areas, represent precisely a case study that goes beyond the initial area, but which confirms that in another area, apart from the in-depth one, there is the same result: the financed non-agricultural has led to the emergence of jobs in the rural area. The effect of investments made in non-agricultural activities, the construction of pensions and the establishment of leisure activities, is reflected in the dynamics of tourist arrivals between 2006 and 2026, who consumed tourist services in the researched area.

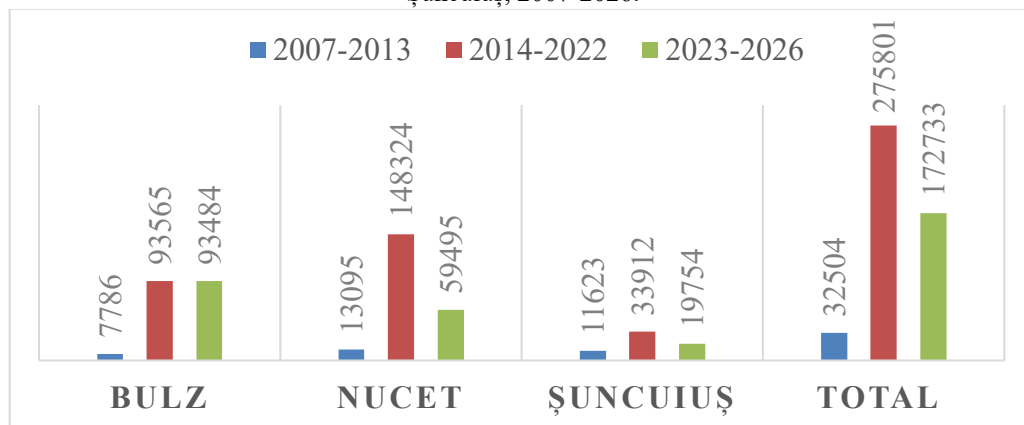
Figure 3. Evolution of jobs created with the help of non-agricultural activities at 3 commercial companies in Bihor county, 2007-2024.



Source: authors' processing based on data published online by TopFirme (2026)

The quantitative data in Figure 4 indicate that due to investments in non-agricultural activities, the number of tourist arrivals increased significantly between the periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2022 and decreased dramatically in the period 2023-2026. Thus, it can be seen that in Nucet, Vârtop village where the Skipas pension is located, the largest increase in the number of overnight stays is recorded between 2014 and 2022, compared to the period 2007-2013.

Figure 4. Evolution of the number of arrivals in accommodation units in Bulz, Nucet and Șuncuiș, 2007-2026.



Source: authors' processing based on data published by INS (2026)

The same growth trend for the same periods is recorded in Bulz and Șuncuiș. In the current programming period, the most significant decreases, compared to the other two periods, are recorded in Nucet and Șuncuiș. As for the statistical data for Bulz commune, we note that the number of overnight stays in this programming period, compared to the previous period, is almost equal, with the possibility of increase given that the data analyzed for all localities include reports until June 2026.

3.2. Institutional fragmentation: four ministries, no integrator

An additional element that needs reflection, which this study formulates, is the absence of an integrated vision of the rural area, which also influences the impact of non-agricultural investments. At least four ministries pour money into rural areas, but each on its own legislation, indicators and definition of rural areas.

The results presented so far explain the effects of non-agricultural investment on the rural economy, but do not fully explain the causes of the performance differences observed between programming periods. In order to understand these differences, it is necessary to extend the analysis beyond the financial dimension, to the institutional framework in which rural development policies are developed and implemented. The case studies presented converge in demonstrating that non-agricultural investments create jobs and stimulate the development of rural communities. However, they also highlight the existence of a structural limitation: the institutional fragmentation of public policies that have effects on rural areas.

The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration (MDLPA) finances water-canal, county and local roads and, through regional agencies (including North-West RDA), infrastructure such as the four Smart Specialization Parks (PSI) in Bihor — in Marghita, Aleșd, Beiuș and Ștei — financed 60% of European funds through the North-West Regional Program 2021-2027 and 40% of the budget of the Bihor County Council, with a combined contractual value of over 62 of millions of lei, the execution stage in October 2025: Aleșd 98%, Marghita 95%, Beiuș 62%, Ștei completed (CJ Bihor, 2025). Each park is located in a small town on the immediate border of the rural area, with utilities, inland roads and access prepared for private companies to invest — generating a horizontal spillover effect, in the rural fabric (catering, suppliers, maintenance, logistics, etc.).

The Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure finances the construction of national roads and railways, including the 9.6 billion euro Transport Programme 2021-2027 (MTI, 2026).

The Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests finances water-sewerage, afforestation and waste management at the commune level, including over 500 projects through the PNRR (MMAF, 2023).

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR) finances the PNS-CAP.

Each ministry operates on its own legal basis, with its own indicators, its own budget lines and its own — or absent — definition of rural space. What illustrates the case of the PSIs in Bihor is a synergy that has not yet been fully exploited: the MDLPA has financed the parks, while the small non-agricultural companies that the parks need around them (catering, suppliers, maintenance, logistics, in neighboring communes) do not benefit from a dedicated funding channel through the CAP to develop. If the NSP as well as the local development strategies (LEADER, LAG) had been better financed on a non-agricultural basis and correlated with the MDLPA, these companies could have been directly supported through Pillar 2 of the CAP, contributing to accelerating the emergence of non-agricultural jobs in rural areas.

No one in the Romanian public administration can, therefore, regard the rural space as a unique object. There is no framework law for rural development, there is no inter-ministerial body that brings these flows together, harmonizes indicators and proposes integrated directions. The European money that reaches the countryside is real, but because it comes through disconnected channels, it cannot be evaluated, adjusted or planned as a whole.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The data presented converge in support of both hypotheses formulated in the present study. H1 — according to which the underfunding and placement of non-agricultural funding under the management of the LAG causes a decrease in jobs in rural areas — is supported by quantitative data from field research: financial absorption decreased by 100% in the 2023-2027 NSP compared to the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 NRDP, and the number of newly created jobs decreased by approximately 62%. It is also convergent with the assessment made in the research carried out on the territory of the two LAGs, according to which the current institutional architecture of LAG funding has reduced the effectiveness of interventions dedicated to non-agricultural activities.

H2. The fragmentation of responsibilities between multiple ministries, in the absence of an integrating body, prevents the capitalization of synergies between sectoral investments, leads to a dissipation of the impact of European funds is supported by the results of the analysis through which institutional fragmentation was demonstrated.

From the data presented, it follows that continuously and dedicatedly financed non-agricultural activities produce clear, measurable, sustainable spillover effects, while the fragmentation of the current architecture, by placing the funding under the management of the LAG and by dispersing it between four ministries without an integrator, diminishes these effects.

The results also raise a question that goes beyond the framework of agricultural policy itself: in the absence of an integrated vision of rural areas, sectoral investments collide with each other without enhancing each other. The case of the PSIs in Bihor, financed by

the regional program, and of the small non-agricultural companies around them, financed (or not financed) by the PNS-CAP, illustrates exactly this dissipation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The generation of employment opportunities in non-agricultural sectors is a fundamental pillar for the resilience and structural transformation of the rural environment, constituting a strategic alternative to traditional farms. This economic diversification facilitates the strengthening of financial stability and social inclusion, directly contributing to the alleviation of poverty and to the process of modernisation of local communities in previous programme periods. The DR-36 intervention (PNS PAC 2023-2027) preserves the fundamental principles of participatory local development and provides continuity to the LEADER approach in Romania. However, the decrease in its financial weight within the PNS - CAP, the delays in implementation and the lack of measurable social indicators have reduced its impact on the social inclusion and economic development of rural communities in the researched area.

In the three programming periods in the research area, 49 non-agricultural businesses were funded. The projects selected for financing were direct investments in the field of tourism and consisted of the construction of accommodation units and the development of leisure activities in the field of tourism.

The investments implemented in the study area have generated a significant multiplier effect on the rural economy, contributing to the creation of new jobs and to strengthening the revenues of local budgets. Economic diversification, through the development of the accommodation segment (pensions) and leisure infrastructure, stimulated the interdependence of non-agricultural sectors and favored the increase of tourist flows in the Crișul Repede Gorge. The impact of these investments is reflected in the upward dynamics of the arrivals indicator between 2007 and 2026, the flow of tourists generating positive externalities through the consumption of complementary services, which supported the viability of local entrepreneurship.

The economic and social effects of the non-agricultural, active activities in the research area reflect the fact that these investments have been beneficial for entrepreneurs but also for locals. The data collected, between December 2023 and March 2024, with the help of the semi-structured interview applied to 40 inhabitants, 10 from each locality, indicate that non-agricultural investments represent a benefit for the inhabitants of the local communities under analysis (Bonaciu, 2025: 364-373). Investments in non-agricultural activities, such as accommodation units, have produced a horizontal economic development effect in the rural economy of Bihor County. Thanks to them, other local non-agricultural businesses have also developed, both in the field of tourism, but also in other fields, which have contributed to: the emergence of new jobs and the increase of income for entrepreneurs in rural areas.

The institutional solution. The data presented show that, currently, the PNS 2023-2027 does not constitute a strategy for the Romanian rural area — because the rural area is not, in the public administration of Romania, a recognized object of policy. Non-agricultural activities that employ rural Romanians and contribute to the socio-economic dynamics of villages currently benefit from a level of funding below their potential — reflecting institutional fragmentation rather than a lack of political will.

The remedy already exists, in another field. Romania has, since 2017, a Department for Sustainable Development (DDD) within the Prime Minister's Chancellery, which coordinates, at the level of all ministries, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 17

Sustainable Development Goals. DDD has demonstrated that an integrative structure at the center of government can gather data and indicators from multiple sectors and turn them into a coherent picture.

The same principle can be applied to rural areas. What is required is the creation, development and establishment of a **Department for the Development of Rural Areas (DDSR)**, within the Prime Minister's Chancellery, with three concrete tasks:

Single legal framework. Develop a **framework law** that would officially define rural space at the level of the entire public administration — a single, operational, legally established definition to replace the current fragmented definitions, different from one ministry to another.

Interministerial coordination. Coordination, at the level of all the ministries involved (MADR, MDLPA, MIPE, MT, MMAP, MF), of indicators, budget lines and evaluations of investments with an impact on the rural area — by creating an **Interministerial Council for the Development of Rural Areas**, with quarterly meetings.

Integrated annual reporting. Producing, every year, an **Integrated Report on the State of the Romanian Rural Area** — a public document, presented to the Government and Parliament, which captures for the first time, in a coherent picture, the real size of the investments, their results and the implementation gaps.

Anticipated benefits. Such a department would allow:

- (I) harmonisation of definitions and indicators between ministries,
- (II) identifying synergies that have not yet been exploited — as is the case of the PSIs in Bihor, not connected to non-agricultural financing through the NSP,
- (III) assessment of the opportunity costs generated by the current fragmentation, and
- (IV) proposing budgetary and legislative corrections on the basis of a uniform record.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The present study has some limitations. Firstly, the data on the three budget cycles are not entirely comparable: for the PNDR 2014-2020 and PNS 2023-2027, the public records on the exact share of non-agricultural interventions are more fragmented than for SAPARD and PNDR 2007-2013. Secondly, the analysis is based on the empirical data collected from the research carried out on the territory of 5 communes from two neighboring LAGs (LAG Zona Aleșd – Valea Crișului Repede, LAG Poarta Transilvaniei) and on qualitative data on three companies from Bihor. Extending the study to other LAGs and counties, on a wider sample of non-agricultural firms, would allow for a more robust testing of both hypotheses.

Future research directions include: (i) a quantitative analysis of the impact of the NSP 2023-2027 on non-agricultural employment at national level; (ii) a comparative study of how other Member States have defined and integrated the non-agricultural component into their strategic plans; (iii) an assessment of the opportunity costs generated by the current institutional fragmentation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bonaciu, C. Gabriel, (2025), in *European instruments and mechanisms for rural development*, Cluj-Napoca, Babeş-Bolyai University, 364-373.
- Bonaciu, C. Gabriel and Brie, Mircea, (2026), *Social inclusion and european rural development policy: the case of non agricultural tourism activities in rural Bihor county*, in *Analele Universităţii din Oradea, Seria Relaţii Internaţionale şi Studii Europene*, TOM XVIII, p. 157-173. <https://doi.org/10.58603/MWQM4459>, accessed 29.07.2026.
- Brie, Mircea; Mărcuţ, Mirela and Polgár, István, (2022), *Developing international cooperation capabilities to boost local development and social responsibility. Case study: Bihor County*, in **Civil Szemle**, vol. XIX, nr. 4, Budapesta, p. 133-151.
- Bureau, J. Christophe, (2024), *Le plan stratégique français : ses principales caractéristiques et son positionnement par rapport aux défis et enjeux définis à l'échelle européenne*, in *Innovations Agronomiques*, 90, 4–15, [10.17180/ciag-2024-vol90-art02](https://doi.org/10.17180/ciag-2024-vol90-art02), accessed 11.08.2026.
- Chereji, A. Ioana; Maerescu, C. Maria; Țuțui, Daniela, Chereji, Ioan jr. and Chiurciu, I. Adriana, (2023), *Rural Development from Policy to Politics. National Strategic Plans and Their Potential Impact on Social Structural Transformations. Comparative Overview. Case Study Romania Between the European and National Context*, in *Annals of the University of Oradea, Fascicle: Ecotoxicology, Animal Science and Food Science and Technology*, https://protmed.uoradea.ro/nou/images/Publicatii/Ecotox/2023B/Agroturism/04._Chereji_A.pdf, accessed 28.07.2026
- Crunțeanu, M. Elena; Comșa, Mircea și Fintineru, Gina, (2024), *The Impact of LEADER Funding in Romania*, *Sustainability*, 16(4), 1503. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16041503>, accessed 31.07.2026.
- Massot, A. Martí, (2022), *Hacia una gobernanza marco y multinivel de la Política Agrícola Común post 2023: un análisis institucionalista*, *Economía Agraria y Recursos Naturales*, 22(2), 5–29, <https://doi.org/10.7201/earn.2022.02.01>, accessed 11.08.2026.
- Memo, Umutcan and Pieńkowski, Dariusz, (2025), *Poverty and Social Exclusion: Key Challenges for Sustainable Rural Development in the New European Union Member States between 2007 and 2022*, *Comparative Economic Research*, 28(2), 45–64, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1508-2008.28.12>, site accessed 06.08.2026.
- Pascar, F. Andrada; Copăcian, V. Petru; Baliban, Andreea and Chereji, A. Ioana, (2025), *Implementation Stage of the Main Rural Development Interventions Funded by the EAFRD under the CAP Strategic Plan 2023–2027, Romania*, în *Lucrări Științifice, Seria I, Management Agricol*, Vol. XXVII (3), p. 799-803, <https://lsma.ro/index.php/lsma/article/download/2924/pdf?>, accessed 25.07.2026
- Salemink, Koen; Townsend, Leanne and Chapman, Polly, (2025), *The remapping of rural digitalisation: A just-rural narrative review*, *Journal of Rural Studies*, Volume 113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103499>, accessed 28.07.2026.
- Shortall, Sally, (2008), *Are rural development programmes socially inclusive? Social inclusion, civic engagement, participation, and social capital: Exploring the*

differences, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 24(4), p. 450–457. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2008.01.001>, accessed 04.08.2026.

Web-sites and official documents

- AFIR, (2022), Selection Report 2022, <https://www.afir.ro/rapoarte/rapoarte-feadr/selectie/>, accessed 14.07.2026.
- AFIR, 2026, <https://www.afir.ro/finantare/leader/#>, site accessed on 03.08. 2026.
- Bihor County Council, (2025), *Bihor County Council Project Portfolio -PRNV 2021-2027*, <https://www.cjbihor.ro/portofoliu-de-proiecte-al-consiliului-judetean-bihor/programul-regional-nord-vest-2021-2027-prnv/>, accessed 25.07.2026.
- European Commission, (2023), *Spain's CAP Strategic Plan*, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/cap-my-country/cap-strategic-plans/spain_en, accessed 09.08.2026.
- European Commission, (2026), *Result indicators*, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2014-2020/2014-2020-EAFRD-allocation-by-focus-area-EU-planne/6q2m-arif>, <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/2007-2013-Finances/2007-2013-Rural-Development-EAFRD-payments-by-meas/ncmu-938z>, accessed 14.07.2026.
- INS, (2026), National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online, Tourism, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table>, accessed 31.07.2026.
- MADR, (2010), *Ex-post evaluation regarding the implementation of the SAPARD Program in Romania in the period 2000-2008*, Bucharest, <https://madr.ro/sapard.html>, accessed 18.07.2026.
- MADR, (2011), *Final report on the ex-post evaluation of the SAPARD Programme in Romania in the period 2000-2008*, Bucharest, pp. 75-151.
- MADR, (2015), PNDR Annual Progress Report 2015, <https://madr.ro/pndr-2007-2013/raport-anual-pndr.html>, accessed 15.07.2026.
- MADR, (2015), PNDR 2007-2013, Bucharest, p. 349, <https://madr.ro/pndr-2007-2013/programul-national-pentru-dezvoltare-rurala-2007-2013.html>, accessed 17.07. 2026.
- MADR, (2017), *Ex-post Evaluation of the National Rural Development Program 2007-2013, Annex 10. Detailed Efficacy Analysis*, Bucharest, pp. 5-7, <https://madr.ro/pndr-2007-2013/studiul-final-privind-evaluarea-ex-post-2007-2013.html>, accessed 17.07.2026.
- MADR, (2017), *Ex-post Evaluation of the National Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, Annex 12 – List of Common and Additional Achievement Indicators*, Bucharest, p. 6-7, <https://madr.ro/pndr-2007-2013/studiul-final-privind-evaluarea-ex-post-2007-2013.html>, accessed 10.03.2026.
- MADR, (2022), *CAP plan 2023-2027 for Romania*, https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/2022/PNS_2023-2027-versiunea_1.2-21.11.2022.pdf, accessed 28.07.2026.
- MADR, (2024), CM PS PAC Decision no. 9/2024, https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/comitet-monitorizare/comitet_2024/Decizie-CM-PS-PAC-nr.-9-din-2024.pdf, accessed 30.07.2026
- MADR, (2025), *PNDR 2024 Annual Progress Report*, Bucharest, p. 42.
- MEDAT, (2026), *List of tourist reception structures with accommodation functions*, Bucharest, <https://se.situr.gov.ro/OpenData/OpenDataMain>, accessed 20.07.2026.
- MMAP, 2023, *Water Management*, <https://pnrr.mmap.ro/managementul-apei/>, <https://pnrr.mmap.ro/managementul-deseurilor/>, accessed 27.07.2026.

- MTI, (2026), Transport Programme 2021-2027, <https://fonduri.mt.ro/transparenta/anunturi/programul-transport-2021-2027>, accessed 31.07.2026.
- POARTA TRANSILVANIEI LAG Association, (2026), Selection Report, <https://gal.afir.ro/GalApel/VizualizareApelSelectie?idApelSelectie=ce9f9445-18bb-4996-99b4-ecf2fd9725f4&nrPagina=1>, accessed 28.07.2026.
- TopFirme, (2026), Baza de date, <https://www.topfirme.com/afacere/padaflora-s-r-l-/2wy05gi50j/>, <https://www.topfirme.com/afacere/skipass-srl/2ky7tikh2h/>, <https://www.topfirme.com/afacere/jaqy-andamp-aly-tour-srl/3pto77ew2p/>, accessed 18.07.2026.
- ZONA ALESD-VALEA CRISULUI REPEDE LAG Association, (2026) Selection report, <https://gal.afir.ro/GalApel/VizualizareApelSelectie?idApelSelectie=cdbab280-cc1b-4062-acc8-a817a4f0bb74&nrPagina=1>, accessed 28.07.2026.