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TM 3. Environmental Management, Impact and Risk Assessment

3.1. Environmental management and integrated management practicies in rural areas

Environmental management and integrated management practicies in rural areas

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In recent years, ensuring the premises of sustainable development in the rural areas is of major importance, as a series of specific regulations and strategies in this field have been developed, both at the European Union and at the national level. In the following, some aspects regarding the correlation between socio-economic problems specific to the rural areas and environmental problems are presented; aspects regarding the sustainable development of rural areas, as well as a series of aspects regarding the implementation of the environmental management system.

At the level of the European Union, there is a long-term vision for the development of rural areas, because they represent an essential part of the Union's identity and economic potential. This long-term vision for the rural areas of the EU was adopted at the national level by the Decision of the Chamber of Deputies no. 92 of December 21, 2021.

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, declared that the “Rural areas are the fabric of our society and the heartbeat of our economy. They are a core part of our identity and our economic potential. We will cherish and preserve our rural areas and invest in their future”.

In order to be able to ensure the sustainable development of rural areas, we must identify socio-economic and environmental problems in order to establish the steps to be followed.

The relationships that appear between general problems and environmental problems are very complex. Here is an example of how a general problem can generate multiple environmental problems, creating a vicious circle from which it is difficult to get out. Such connections or correlations can be imagined for almost all general problems as well as for environmental problems.

The main influencing factors of environmental quality deterioration in rural areas, such as intensive agriculture, population explosion and increased consumption and production lead to increased environmental pollution, reduced environmental absorption capacity and decreased natural resources, irreversibly damaging the local and global environment.

To get out of this vicious circle of the relationships that appear between general and environmental problems, first of all, political will is needed (because we are discussing problems at a global level) to change the concepts through which we are aware and approach these complex problems. The first steps in this direction have been taken, the concept of sustainable development being already well known.

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Sustainable development must necessarily be based on three directions: ensuring social equity, economic prosperity and ensuring a sustainable environment. According to the constitutional provisions, the state, through specialized central and local public authorities, must ensure the citizens of rural areas the right to a healthy environment.

At the European Union level, several objectives have been established for the sustainable development of rural areas. The first objective refers to the stimulation of competitiveness in agriculture and forestry, the second objective refers to ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, combating climate change and adapting to it and the third objective refers to achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities, including the job creation and maintenance.

Environmental management is a generic term that describes the complex process of approaching environmental problems, respectively their identification, impact and risk assessment, identifying of programs to support sustainable development, their implementation and evaluation, requiring interdisciplinary collaboration and most of the time coordination from the point of view of strategies at local, regional, national and international level.

The concept of integrated environmental management appeared as a result of the need for a comprehensive approach to strategies, the degree of development and environmental aspects, with the objective of the approaching in a global context of the relations of companies or public institutions with the environment, resulting in the reduction of the negative effects of human activities on the environment.

Environmental management systems appeared as a necessity for the structured and systematic integration of environmental protection issues in the general management of the organization. The standards regarding the environmental management system are of major importance, the other standards having the role of tools for evaluating the performance of organizations, respectively for evaluating the performance of products.

An organization's reasons for implementing an environmental management system are strategic, managerial, economic and legal. Other advantages of the implementation of an environmental management system are the reduction of risks and negative impacts on the

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environment, savings of raw materials through their complete processing, reduced energy consumption, fewer audits from clients, control authorities, etc.

The environmental management system can be integrated at the level of the organization, depending on its field of activity, with other management systems, such as quality management system, health and safety management system, energy management system and the social responsibility management system. In the case of central and local public authorities, the internal managerial control system of public institutions can be integrated with the quality management system, the environmental management system as well as with other types of management systems.

In the following**,** two case studies will be presented.

The first case study presents the activity of the Apavital SA Company and how it contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas. Apavital SA is a regional operator for the public water supply and sewerage service in Iasi and Neamt counties. At the level of the commercial company, several management systems are implemented, such as quality management system, environmental management system, health and safety management system, energy management system, information security management system and the social responsibility management system.

Apavital SA provides water supply and sewerage services for approximately 500,000 inhabitants and over 3,600 economic agents, managing 80 operating areas in Iasi and Neamt counties. The degree of connection of the rural population to the water supply system differs from one to another locality depending on several factors, for example localities with a higher degree of economic development show a higher degree of population connection to the drinking water supply system.

Within the company, a regional Project for the development of the water and wastewater infrastructure in Iasi County is being developed during this period. As part of this investment project, infrastructure works for drinking water supply, collection and treatment of wastewater will be carried out in 29 urban agglomerations (representing 113 localities divided into 41 administrative territorial units) from Iasi County. The implementation of this project will lead to increasing the

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efficiency of the drinking water distribution system and the wastewater treatment system in safe conditions regarding the health of the population and environmental protection.

The second case study refers to the establishment of the sustainable local development strategy of the commune of Belcesti for the period 2019-2024. The sustainable development strategy of the commune was established after identifying and evaluating the needs and development potential of the area.

According to the constitutional provisions, the state, through specialized central and local public authorities, must ensure the right to a healthy environment for citizens in rural areas.

Five local development objectives were established, correlated with the municipality's sustainable development strategy, respectively:

- Establishing a favorable environment for economic and agricultural development
- Rehabilitation, modernization of education, health and social infrastructure
- Development of tourist potential
- Ensuring the protection and quality of the environment in order to increase the standard of living of the inhabitants
- Increasing the capacity of the local public administration to implement the administrative reform and the integration of the commune into the regional whole

In order to achieve the five objectives established in the Strategic Plan, a series of priority projects were established for Belcesti commune, for which expected sources of funding were identified and deadlines for the completion of the respective projects were established. The achievement of the proposed objectives is closely dependent on the sources of non-reimbursable financing that can be attracted, because the local budget does not have the capacity to support the achievement of all the proposed objectives.

The sustainable development strategy of Belcesti commune is evaluated annually through monitoring reports. In order to follow the effectiveness of the objectives established in the Strategic Plan, a permanent monitoring and evaluation of the results of the undertaken activities is needed. Depending on the results of the evaluation and monitoring and in accordance with the legislative changes, the Strategic Plan can be revised periodically so that it meets the needs of the sustainable development of the Belcesti commune.

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In conclusion, in order to be able to ensure the sustainable development of rural areas, socio-economic and environmental problems must be identified in order to establish the steps that must be followed because the relationships that appear between the general problems of the development of rural communities and environmental problems are very complex.

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