

DISTRIBUTION OF PROJECTS FINANCED BY MEANS OF THE NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN CLUJ-NAPOCA METROPOLITAN AREA

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ABSTRACT. *Distribution of Projects Financed by Means of the National Rural Development Programs in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area.* The measures and sub-measures included in the National Rural Development Programs of 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 have also been accessed by the 19 communes of the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area. The present paper focuses on the most significant measures and sub-measures of these programs, in relation to their main purpose (supporting the modernization of agriculture, encouraging the diversification of the rural economy and improving the standard and quality of life in rural areas) and the distribution of contracted projects (and submitted projects - where the case) in this area, an area developing under the socio-economic influence of the nearby city. While for some communes the influence of the city is quite visible, some other communes still preserve accentuated rural features, and these different trajectories are also mirrored in the types of submitted or contracted projects from such communes, in the context of these development programs.

Keywords: *rural development, Cluj-Napoca, metropolitan area, projects, National Rural Development Program.*

1. Introduction

The National Rural Development Programs (NRDP) aimed at supporting different sectors of rural economies, while also targeting the improvement of the general standard of life of rural communities. Several measures comprised in

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these programs were meant to support the development and modernization of agriculture, by providing opportunities to individual farmers/farms (semi-subsistence farms, small-scale farms or young farmers) as well as to the larger production units or groups of producers. The aim of these measures was to increase the value of agricultural products, by upgrading the production, processing and marketing, thus bringing higher income to rural communities. In addition, several measures targeted the development and modernization of public infrastructures (which could in their turn act as supporting or restrictive factors for the development of entrepreneurship projects) by supporting the local authorities' initiatives, as well as the rehabilitation of cultural heritage (by individuals, associations, NGOs or local authorities). The programs also included measures targeting the development of non-agricultural businesses (by individuals and enterprises) from rural areas, by supporting the increased production of various merchandise or the expansion of different services - among which tourism held an important place.

Some of these measures have been previously analyzed by several authors, in studies focusing on the national situation (Bíró, 2015; Rusu, 2018) or in specific areas; Tănasă *et al.* (2018) focused on the North Eastern Development Region, while Munteanu and Drăgan (2020a, 2020b) focused on the Apuseni Mountains.

2. Materials and methods

In the present analysis, we addressed 15 measures targeting agriculture, four measures targeting other types of businesses and three measures targeting public infrastructures. First, our study focused on the spatial distribution of projects targeting agriculture implemented in the context of measures 112, 121, 123, 125, 141, 142 of the 2007-2013 NRDP and sub-measures 4.1, 4.1a, 4.2, 4.3, 6.1, 6.3, 9.1, 16.4 and 16.4a of the 2014-2020 NRDP. The beneficiaries of these measures were farmers, enterprises, associations, groups of producers, as well as local authorities. We also analyzed the territorial distribution of projects from non-agricultural sectors (including the ones addressing the standard of living in rural areas) that have been submitted in the context of measures 312, 313, 322 of the 2007-2013 NRDP and sub-measures 6.2, 6.4, 7.2 and 7.6 of the 2014-2020 NRDP.

We consulted various public documents, the general documentation of each National Rural Development Program and the specific guides and charts of each measure and sub-measure. The data used for the analysis of beneficiaries of the specific measures were retrieved from the official site of the implementing authority - the Agency for Financing Rural Investments.

For the 2007-2013 NRDP, projects have been selected by location of the implemented project (of the activity) and not in terms of the residence of the beneficiary. For the analyzed area, this criterion had complex implications because many projects implemented in the analyzed communes were actually submitted by persons living in Cluj-Napoca, as well as other neighboring cities (mainly Turda or Gherla), or even other areas (including other counties). However, this aspect was only relevant to the 2007-2013 program, because one requirement of the following program was for the beneficiary to reside in the same administrative-territorial unit as the location of the proposed project. We must also mention that for the 2014-2020 program, used data is still only intermediate, due to the continuation of some projects at the time of writing this paper. Data was successively imported into GIS software in order to provide a clear visual upon the spatial distribution and clustering of projects in the analyzed area.

Following the model of previous studies (Munteanu and Drăgan, 2020a, 2020b) we analyzed the measures of the two programs side by side, grouped by their aim, strategic objective or beneficiaries and by their relation: compatibility or continuity.

We did not analyze the measures included on the LEADER axis (we only referred to them briefly, where the case) because several analyzed communes are part of Local Action Groups (LAG) alongside other communes, outside the metropolitan area: Apahida, Bontida, Borşa, Jucu and Vultureni are part of the Someş Transilvan LAG, alongside nine other communes from Cluj and Sălaj counties; Aiton, Feleacu, Ciurila, Petreştii de Jos and Tureni are part of the Lider LAG alongside other four communes; Căianu and Cojocna are part of the Câmpia Transilvaniei LAG together with 12 other communes, Gilău is included in the Napoca Porolissum LAG with other 12 communes and Huedin town, while Baci, Floreşti, Gârbău, Sânpaul and Săvădisla are part of the Someş-Nadăş LAG.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Study Area

Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area covers an area of 1.603 km² and includes 19 communes with their 107 composing villages (alongside the city). From a spatial and functional point of view, there are two rings of communes that can be differentiated: the first one, made up by the communes located closest to Cluj-Napoca - Floreşti, Baci, Chinteni, Apahida, Feleacu and Ciurila, and the outer ring composed by the communes Gilău, Gârbău, Sânpaul, Vultureni,

Borșa, Bonțida, Jucu, Căianu, Cojocna, Aiton, Tureni, Petreștii de Jos and Săvădisla. However, if one considers the development of the analyzed communes, one may include Ciurila in the second ring, and Gilău and Jucu in the first ring, due to the main E-W direction of development of housing, economy, infrastructures etc (a differentiation that is used in the Integrated Urban Development Strategy of Cluj-Napoca, for the 2014-2020 period).

Although located near the city of Cluj-Napoca, some of the analyzed communes still maintain pronounced rural features. Agriculture is still present on extended surfaces of the area, with a total of 109,916 hectares (National Institute of Statistics), and to some extent, mostly in the marginal parts of the metropolitan area, faces the same struggles as the Romanian agricultural sector, in general.

The favorability for agriculture in the analyzed area is evident especially in the Someșul Mic floodplain, where both the soil quality and the terrain slope offer the most suitable conditions, and in the second ring of the metropolitan area, where agricultural areas still cover extended surfaces. Matter of fact, the second ring is described in the Development Strategy of the Metropolitan Area (2015) as a “support space, focused on agriculture and leisure activities” in which “the continuous support of entrepreneurship in agriculture and food industry, as well as services for the diversification of the local, rural economy is necessary”, especially since the development level of such communes is not always very elevated. While in the communes of the first ring and some of the second ring, the economic and social development can be significant (Apahida, Baci, Chinteni, Feleacu, Florești or Gilău), in the second ring there are many communes with a much lower level of socio-economic development (Aiton, Borșa, Căianu, Cojocna, Petreștii de Jos or Vultureni).

The communes in the second ring of the metropolitan area have large percentages of their surfaces registered as agricultural areas: 90.47% in Borșa, 88.91% in Cojocna (the analyzed commune with the widest agricultural areas, of 12,326 hectares), 83.43% in Aiton, 80.24% in Petreștii de Jos etc. Moreover, arable lands are very extended in some of the analyzed communes, representing more than half of the total area of Borșa and Cojocna (58.66% respectively, 53.06%), 49.45% in Căianu, 44.86% in Aiton, and 41% in Bonțida, Chinteni and Ciurila.

Besides, according to the General Agricultural Census of 2010, the numbers of agricultural holdings in the area are rather high (considering the area's location near Cluj-Napoca), representing 23% of the agricultural holdings in the county (still, a rather proportional value, since we analyzed 19 of the 75 communes of the county). There are some communes that stand out, for instance, Apahida, the commune with the highest number of agricultural holdings in Cluj County, 2440, or Baci, with 1893 agricultural holdings. Ten communes in the

metropolitan area have between 1000 and 1600 agricultural holdings while the other seven communes have between 200 and 990 agricultural holdings. Out of the 22,371 agricultural holdings in the area, 55.7% have utilized agricultural areas and livestock, 43.7% only have utilized agricultural areas, while 0.6% only have livestock.

3.2. Measures targeting agriculture

Although dependency upon agriculture is not as strong in the analyzed area as in other rural areas of the county, and the number of semi-subsistence farms is rather low and concentrated in the second ring of the metropolitan area (e.g., Borșa, Bontida, Săvădisla, Vultureni), much can still be improved in this sector. A substantial support for small farms and larger enterprises from this sector could come from those measures of the National Rural Development Programs targeting the development of agriculture and forestry, through several types of investments, analyzed as follows:

- Investments for the modernization of agricultural holdings were targeted by Measure 121 “Modernization of agricultural holdings” of the 2007-2013 NRDP and sub-measures 4.1 “Support for investments in agricultural holdings” and 4.1a “Support for investments in fruit-growing holdings” of the 2014-2020 NRDP. While having some differences in terms of the eligibility criteria of submitted projects (including a given minimum economic dimension of the farms), all measures implied the co-financing of the investments.

There were 12 contracted projects in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area on Measure 121, in seven communes (most of the communes having one implemented project, and Apahida and Cojocna having three respectively, four projects) and four projects on Sub-measure 4.1 (in Bontida, Ciurila, Feleacu and Săvădisla). There was only one contracted project on Sub-measure 4.1a, in Apahida, a commune that still holds relevant orchard areas, 220 ha, being surpasses in the area only by Baci, with 511 ha and Cojocna, with 267 ha.

- Investments for the increase of products’ value and the effective promotion of the merchandise were targeted by Measure 123 “Increasing the added value of agricultural and forestry products” of the 2007-2013 NRDP and Sub-measure 4.2 “Investments for processing/ marketing of agricultural products” of the 2014-2020 NRDP. Potential beneficiaries of these measures were larger holdings or producers’ groups, which could receive substantial financial support for the implementation of eligible projects. There were only two contracted projects on Measure 123 in the area, in Apahida and Bontida, and three contracted projects on Sub-measure 4.2 in Apahida, Bontida and Căianu.

- Investments for the installation of young farmers as heads of agricultural holdings were targeted by Measure 112 of the 2007-2013 NRDP and Sub-measure 6.1 of the 2014-2020 NRDP. These two measures were very similar in terms of requirements and minimum economic dimension of the holding while having differences regarding the granted financial support (a higher support being provided by Sub-measure 6.1).

There were 72 beneficiaries of Measure 112 in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, located in almost all the analyzed communes - with the exception of Gârbău. Cojocna was the commune to concentrate the largest number of beneficiaries (11 implemented projects), followed by Apahida and Căianu (seven projects, each), Borșa and Săvădisla (six projects each), Chinteni, Ciurila, Gilău (five projects each) and Petreștii de Jos (four projects). The rest of the communes had one or two implemented projects on this measure.

However, we can note an increased number of beneficiaries for Sub-measure 6.1, with 124 projects contracted in 18 of the communes of the area. Aiton was the only commune where no project has been contracted on this sub-measure, and moreover, where no project has even been submitted. One explanation can be provided by the aging population of the commune, where the 65+ age group represents the largest percent of the population, 36.2%, and where the 15-29 age group holds the lowest percentage among the communes of Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, 11.5%. Another factor that can contribute to the situation is represented by the very extended agricultural areas in the commune leased by agribusiness enterprises.

At the other end, the communes with the highest numbers of contracted projects were Sânpaul (22), Apahida (17), Săvădisla (15) and Cojocna (13). Nine projects were contracted in Borșa and Bontida, seven projects in Căianu and Chinteni, while the other communes had between one and five projects each. The contracting degree was rather high, since there have been 168 projects submitted by 2021 in total, on this sub-measure.

- Investments for the development of semi-subsistence farms and small agricultural holdings were represented by Measure 141 "Supporting semi-subsistence agricultural holdings" of the 2007-2013 NRDP and Sub-measure 6.3 "Business start-up aid for development of small farms" of the 2014-2020 NRDP. While targeting different beneficiaries (different farms in terms of their economic dimensions), one may note how the second measure came as a follow-up to the previous measure, of the 2007-2013 program.

These measures registered more projects in comparison to the ones regarding young farmers in the study area, with higher figures for Measure 141 than for Sub-measure 6.3. There were 240 contracted projects in the area on Measure 141, in all the analyzed communes. The highest numbers of beneficiaries

were listed in Săvădisla (40), Gilău (32) and Căianu (25). Five other communes had more than 10 beneficiaries: Bonțida (19), Cojocna (17), Baci (16), Apahida (13) and Florești (12), while the rest of the communes had between two and nine projects.

In the following development program, there were 47 contracted projects and 78 submitted projects (in total) on Sub-measure 6.3 by 2021. Of course, the number of projects per commune is also lower, with a maximum of eight contracted projects in Căianu, followed by five projects in Sânpaul and Jucu, while the other communes had between two and four projects. Ciurila, Feleacu, Florești, Tureni and Vultureni did not have any contracted projects (while the first four communes mentioned did not have any submitted projects either).

Among the last two sets of measures, dedicated to small farms, Measure 141 had the highest number of beneficiaries, the average in the area being of 12.63 projects/ commune, being followed by Sub-Measure 6.1, with 6.52 projects/commune, Measure 112 with 3.78 projects/commune and Sub-measure 6.3 with 2.47 projects/commune. Of course, the situation is much nuanced between the analyzed communes. In four communes there were more than 40 projects: Săvădisla (64), Căianu (47), Gilău and Cojocna (44 each) while in other four communes there were more than 20 projects: Apahida (40), Sânpaul (34), Bonțida (33) and Baci (26). At the other end, the communes with the lowest number of projects were Aiton and Feleacu, with five respectively, six projects on all measures. The explanations rest in the extended leased areas and the aging population of Aiton, while for Feleacu, on the other hand, the explanations may reside in the reduction of agricultural areas in recent years and the increasing share of population that has found other means of making an income, the average number of employed persons having substantially risen from 283 in 2015 to 506 in 2019. However, we have to mention that among the communes of Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, only Florești, Baci, Apahida, Feleacu and Chinteni have a share of the active population that works in a different administrative unit of over 60% of the total active population (Benedek, 2019). From the same source, one may also note that the Suburban Area of Cluj-Napoca does not fully overlap the Metropolitan Area: Sânpaul, Vultureni and Borșa are excluded due to the low number of commuters, while Petreștii de Jos is included in the Turda Suburban Area.

However, the closeness of the city does have an impact upon the area, the communes' economy slowly distancing itself from agriculture, and thus the interest for agricultural projects also decreases. We can note this by analyzing the figures in the metropolitan area in comparison to the ones at the county level. In the case of measures supporting young farmers, the average of projects/commune is much lower in the studied area than in Cluj County.

While for Measure 112, the average in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area is 3.78 projects/commune and in the county 4.36 projects/commune, for Sub-measure 6.1 the difference is higher: 6.52 projects/commune in the metropolitan area and 8.10 projects/commune in the entire county. A similar situation can be remarked for other measures regarding agriculture as well: 12.63 projects/commune on Measure 141 in the metropolitan area vs. 29.5 projects/commune in the county (as a sign of the reduced dependency upon semi-subsistence agriculture in the analyzed area) and 2.47 projects/commune in the metropolitan area vs. 6.57 projects/commune in the county on Sub-measure 6.3.

- Investments for the support of producers' groups were directed through Measure 142 "Establishment of producers' groups" of the 2007-2013 NRDP and Sub-measure 9.1 "Establishment of producers' groups in the agricultural sector" of the 2014-2020 NRDP. There was only one contracted project on Measure 142, implemented in Apahida by "Someș Arieș Cooperativa Agricolă", while on Sub-measure 9.1, there was one project submitted by the "Cooperativa Agricolă Lunca Someșului Mic" group. Often times seen as an example of best practices, the group was founded in Apahida and Jucu, and has 13 members - farmers with agricultural holdings between 0.58 and 30 ha.

We must also mention Sub-measures 16.4 and 16.4a of the 2014-2020 NRDP "Support for the horizontal and vertical cooperation among the interested actors in the supply chain in the agricultural and fruit-growing sectors". Although these measures did not strictly refer to the producers' groups, they did imply the cooperation of several stakeholders, farmers, sellers (e.g., restaurants, tourist establishments), local administrations, NGOs etc. Besides, the main objective of these sub-measures was very much in line with the previous ones, and referred to the adaptation of production and products to the market. There were 11 contracted projects in the area on these two Sub-measures, that targeted local natural products, their distribution through short supply chains and local markets. Five projects were contracted in Apahida, two projects were implemented in Gilău and Chinteni, and one project in Petreștii de Jos and Cojocna. The projects were submitted by self-employed persons, small enterprises, local authorities (in the case of Petreștii de Jos) as well as the Napoca Porolissum LAG. Besides, there were 21 more projects submitted that were still in evaluation at the time of writing the present paper, seven in Apahida, four in Florești and three in Gilău. Also, Borșa, Căianu, Cojocna, Feleacu, Jucu, Sânpaul and Săvădisla each had one project.

- Investments in agricultural and forestry infrastructures were facilitated by Measure 125 "Improving and developing the infrastructure related to the development and adaptation of agriculture and forestry" of the

2007-2013 NRDP and Sub-measure 4.3 “Investments for the development, modernization or adaptation of agricultural and forestry infrastructure” of the 2014-2020 NRDP. These measures supported projects regarding agricultural or forest roads, that could have been contracted by local authorities, associations, or the forest administration. Such infrastructures could have had an impact on the development of other projects in the area as well.

All the projects that were submitted in the area regarded agricultural roads. However, their number was not very high, there were eight contracted projects on Measure 125 (in Apahida, Borșa, Cojocna, Florești, Gilău, Petreștii de Jos and Sânpaul) and one contracted project on Sub-measure 4.3 in Baciuc. There were also some projects submitted from Apahida, Borșa, Tureni and Vultureni on this sub-measure but they have not been contracted.

3.3. Measures targeting the diversification of the rural economy and the quality of life

- Investments for the diversification of economic activities in the rural areas were supported by four measures: measures 312 “Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises” and 313 “Encouraging of tourism activities” of the 2007-2013 NRDP, and sub-measures 6.2 “Support for the creation of non-agricultural activities in rural areas” and 6.4 “Investment in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities” of the 2014-2020 NRDP. These measures targeted various activities such as tourism, handicrafts, medical or veterinarian services etc., and the beneficiaries could be self-employed persons or small enterprises. The amount of the financial support was very different among the four measures, and so was the covered percentage of eligible expenses.

There were 45 contracted projects on Measure 312, distributed in 12 of the 19 communes of the metropolitan area. Almost half of these projects were implemented in Florești, while the other communes had between one and five projects. The high number of contracted projects in Florești is not surprising given the accelerated demographic increase in recent years - in less than 20 years, the population of the commune has increased by 625.32%.

Measure 313, on the other hand, recorded less projects in the study area: 35 projects in 13 communes, with a maximum in Florești (eight projects), followed by Feleacu (seven projects). The rest of the communes with contracted projects had between one and four such financed investments. Gilău commune only had two beneficiaries of this measure regarding tourism, which is a rather surprising fact, considering its location in the Apuseni Mountains, its important natural potential and high number of tourism establishments. Most of the

projects were submitted by entrepreneurs or enterprises, and only four projects were submitted by local authorities, for the establishment of Tourist information and promotion centers (Bonțida, Chinteni, Petreștii de Jos and Tureni).

In the following development program, Sub-measure 6.2 generated slightly more interest. The number of projects in the area was thus quite high, 98 projects - on average 5.15 projects/commune. Again, the disparities were obvious, as there were 32 contracted projects in Florești, 15 in Apahida, 14 in Baci, while the other communes had less than five projects. As in other cases, the only commune in the area where no projects are listed is Aiton. We can notice the concentration of projects in the communes of the first ring of the metropolitan area. In fact, the numbers are quite high even compared to other tourist areas of Cluj County, like the Apuseni Mountains, where the maximum numbers of projects occurred in Beliș (15 projects) and Călățele (12 projects).

The number of submitted projects (that have not been contracted or are still in evaluation) was also rather high, 352 projects submitted by 2021. The maximum number of submissions was recorded in Florești (90), followed by Săvădisla (44) and Apahida (42). Relevant numbers of submitted projects were also recorded in Baci (29) and Gilău (26), the rest of the communes having between 3 and 16 submitted projects; the lowest numbers of proposals came from Gârbău, Aiton and Tureni (3-5 projects). However, the total number of submitted projects (contracted, under evaluation, and not selected projects) is quite impressive – 450 projects.

The situation is very different, however, for Sub-measure 6.4 on which there were only 31 contracted projects in 11 communes, by 2021. Yet again, the highest number of projects was registered in Florești (eight projects) followed by Apahida and Baci (five projects each). The number of submitted projects was higher, 102 projects, out of which more than half were submitted from four communes: Florești (29), Apahida (16), Gilău (14) and Baci (12). In Aiton, Borșa, Petreștii de Jos and Sânpaul no project has been submitted; one explanation might reside in the very high share of the elderly population of these communes e.g., 36.2% in Aiton, 27.8% in Borșa.

In what regards the total number of projects contracted on measures destined to increase the diversification of the rural economy, the results can only be intermediate at this point. However, on the four analyzed measures and sub-measures (312, 313, 6.2 and 6.4), a total of 209 projects has been contracted in Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area. Most communes of the area had between four and nine beneficiaries. Some communes of the first ring of the metropolitan area did however stand out due to the high numbers of contracted projects: Florești (68), Apahida (24) and Baci (22). These are also the communes

with the younger population of the area, in Florești, the 30-44 years age group representing 34.4% of the total population (while the 65+years representing 6.5%), in Apahida the same group representing 27.7% and in Baci 28.5%. At the other end, the communes with the lowest numbers of contracted projects (one or two projects) were Borșa, Sânpaul, Vultureni, Aiton and Gârbău, communes with an elderly population and a higher degree of ruralism.

The spatial distribution of projects indicates a contrasting situation between the communes in the first ring of Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, where the average of contracted projects was 23.66 projects/commune, and those in the second ring where the average was much lower, 5.15 projects/commune. However, these discrepancies between the two rings are somewhat attenuated when analyzing the situation of submitted projects. Still, there are some communes that stand out, in contrast: the communes with high numbers of projects, indeed located in the first ring - Florești, Baci, Apahida and Gilău, and the communes with very low figures, indeed located in the second ring: Aiton, Borșa and Sânpaul.

Referring to the manner in which the influence of the city can be perceived in the case of measures targeting agriculture (the lower average in the metropolitan area in comparison to the county average), one may note a completely opposed statistic for these other measures. In the context of the 2007-2013 NRDP, for Measure 312, the average in the metropolitan area was 2.36 projects/commune and in the county 1.06 projects/commune, while for Measure 313, it was 1.84 in the metropolitan area vs 1.25 in the county. A similar rate was maintained in the following NRDP, when for Sub-measure 6.2 there were 5.15 projects/commune in the study area and 3.25 projects/commune in the county, while for Sub-measure 6.4 there were 1.63 projects/commune in the study area and 0.92 projects/commune in Cluj County.

When comparing the number and distribution of projects contracted on these last four measures and the main measures regarding the development of agriculture (in terms of numbers of beneficiaries: Measure 141, Sub-measure 6.1, Measure 112 and Sub-measure 6.3) we note that in most of the analyzed communes the higher numbers of projects refer to the agricultural sector (Figure 1). In fact, Florești and Feleacu are the only communes where the number of projects targeting the diversification of the rural economy are higher than the projects from the agricultural sector.

In what regards the economic sectors of the projects contracted on Sub-measure 6.2, one may notice the pronounced heterogeneity of the sectors. There were however some sectors that did stand out: tourism (with more than 20 projects for the construction or upgrade of accommodation establishments), textile industry and tailor shops (13 projects) and crafts and arts (12 projects).

Projects were also contracted in other fields like photography, software development, beauty salons, constructions etc. Meanwhile, on Measure 6.4 most investments were accessed for auto shops and tourist establishments.

However, in 2021 tourism was definitely not a priority, as there were only two projects submitted on Sub-measure 6.2 and one on Sub-measure 6.4 concerning the development of camping sites or bungalows. Most submitted projects were from sectors such as: woodcraft, furniture production, various crafts, health services, outdoor relaxation services (horse-riding centers, ATV renting shops) etc. However, the decrease in interest for tourism projects came after the 2020 tourism crisis generated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

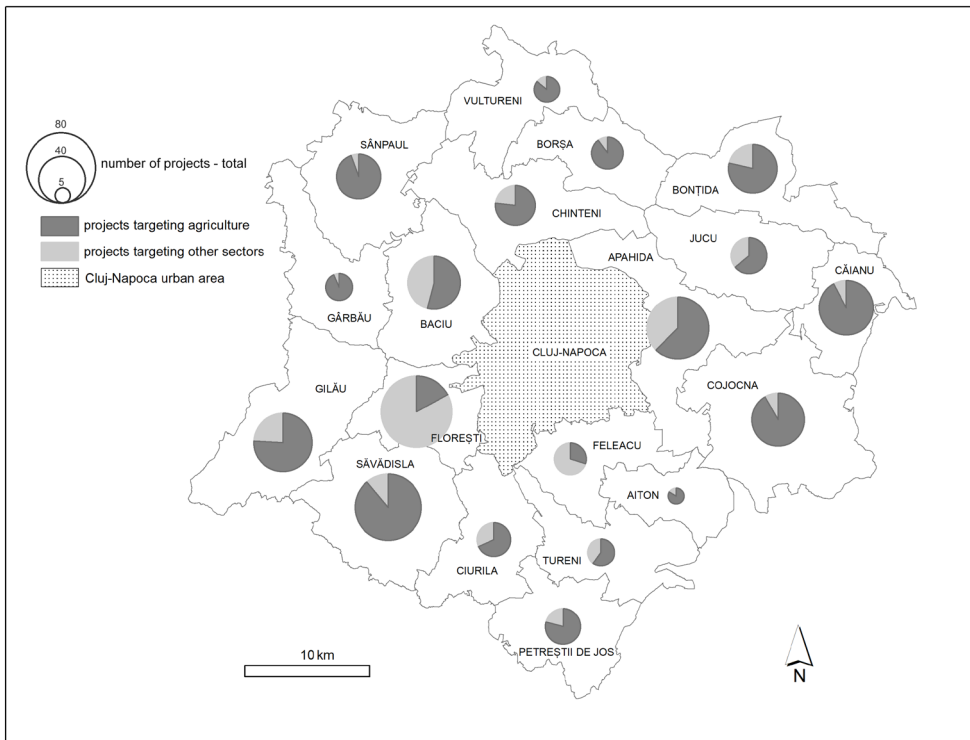


Fig. 1. Distribution of projects contracted on the main measures targeting agriculture (M. 112, M. 141, S.M. 6.1, S.M. 6.3) and the diversification of economic activities (M. 312, M.313, S.M. 6.2, S.M. 6.4) in the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, 2007-2021
Data source: own calculations based on data retrieved from AFIR)

- Investments for increasing the quality of life in rural areas were covered by Measure 322 "Village renewal and development, improvement of basic services for the economy and rural population and upgrading the rural heritage" of the 2007-2013 NRDP and sub-measures 7.2 "Investments in the creation and upgrade of small-scale infrastructure" and 7.6 "Investments related to cultural heritage protection" of the 2014-2020 NRDP. These measures included several directions of action, from the development of key infrastructure and services (including local roads, access to education or the water supply network), to the protection of heritage buildings.

At the time of implementation of the 2007-2013 program, not all the communes of the metropolitan area had a proper drinking water network, in fact, only 51 villages out of 107 even had one. Issues were being signaled in many communes like Aiton, Borșa, Cojocna, Ciurila, Gârbău or Vultureni. Still, there were only 11 contracted projects on Measure 322 in the study area. Two projects were contracted by the administration of Ciurila and one project in each of the communes: Apahida, Bonțida, Borșa, Chinteni, Cojocna, Florești, Gilău, Sânpaul and Tureni. The situation persisted in the context of the second development program, when again, not many projects have been contracted by the local authorities. There were, however, 16 contracted projects in 12 communes (Apahida, Bonțida, Gilău and Jucu had two projects each, while the other eight communes had one project each). Of the 16 projects, two were referring the water supply issues (in Jucu and Săvădisla), while five projects were dedicated to the construction of kindergartens (in Apahida, Bonțida, Florești, Gilău and Sânpaul) and the nine other projects addressed the road network improvement. Among the seven communes that did not have any contracted projects, there were five cases however, in which local authorities did not submit any project: Aiton, Borșa, Chinteni, Gârbău and Vultureni.

In what regards Sub-measure 7.6, referring the cultural heritage, this measure could have represented an opportunity for the analyzed area, which comprises more than 300 historical monuments, among which 119 A class monuments, many of them in need of restorations or renovations. Still, even though the number of monuments in need of rehabilitation is very high in the area, there were only seven contracted projects on Sub-measure 7.6, in Apahida, Bonțida, Cojocna, Petreștii de Jos, Săvădisla, Sânpaul and Vultureni. However, the projects submitted by local authorities were targeted at the modernization of the cultural community centers of the communes. There was only one project, submitted by the Orthodox Parish of Cojocna, that involved the rehabilitation of a monument, namely the wooden church in the village.

4. Conclusions

When drawing the line and analyzing the spatial distribution of all the contracted projects in the study area, on all the analyzed measures and sub-measures, one may note serious discrepancies among the 19 communes of the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area. On the one hand, there are the communes with rather high total numbers of contracted projects: Florești (85), Apahida (80), Săvădisla (76) and Gilău (64), followed by some communes with 40-60 projects: Cojocna (56), Căianu (54), Baci (50), Bonțida (49) and Sânpaul (42). The rest of the communes in the analyzed area have between 15 and 33 projects, with the exception of Aiton, the commune with the lowest number of contracted projects, seven projects, and most of them in the agriculture sector.

Although throughout the paper we could identify some disparities among the two rings of the metropolitan area, we can also remark some exceptions that clearly indicate that the mere inclusion in one ring or another is not an accurate predictive factor for the type or sum of initiatives in that commune. For example, the commune Feleacu has a rather modest number of projects, in spite of being included in the first ring of the metropolitan area, while a reversed situation can be observed for Săvădisla, Cojocna or Căianu, belonging to the second ring and having a high number of beneficiaries.

In terms of the type and sector of the lucrative activity, we have also noticed that the inclusion in one ring or another is clearly not decisive. For example, in Apahida, a commune in the first ring, more than half of the contracted projects involve investments in agriculture (47 out of 80 projects). Likewise, in Baci, 27 projects out of the total of 50 are in the agricultural sector. It is only Florești commune that has more than three quarters of the contracted projects oriented toward the diversification of the economy (70 out of 85), but of course, this commune has had a very particular development in recent years.

Our research provides an insight upon the directions of development that are considered by the local population, by the local stakeholders, while also underlining some factors that can impact such initiatives and the ongoing development of the study area.

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