



21-22 November 2024

THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN FUNDS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN TIMIȘ COUNTY

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Abstract:

The present study investigates the role of European funds in promoting the sustainable development of rural areas in western Romania, with a focus on economic, social and environmental effects. In the context of significant disparities between rural and urban environments, European funds are an essential mechanism for economic revitalization and increasing the quality of life in rural communities in this region. In addition, the study highlights good practices and proposes solutions to maximize positive long-term impact, thus contributing to sustainable rural development. The research results are relevant for decision-makers, specialists and direct beneficiaries, providing a solid basis for the formulation of future strategies in the use of European funds for rural development in Romania. The study also explores the impact of European funds on the development of local collaborative networks, including partnerships between NGOs, local authorities and the business environment, which have facilitated project implementation and increased community cohesion. Another important aspect addressed is the contribution of the funds to the promotion of social entrepreneurship and circular economy initiatives, which not only support economic development but also ecological responsibility.

• Introduction

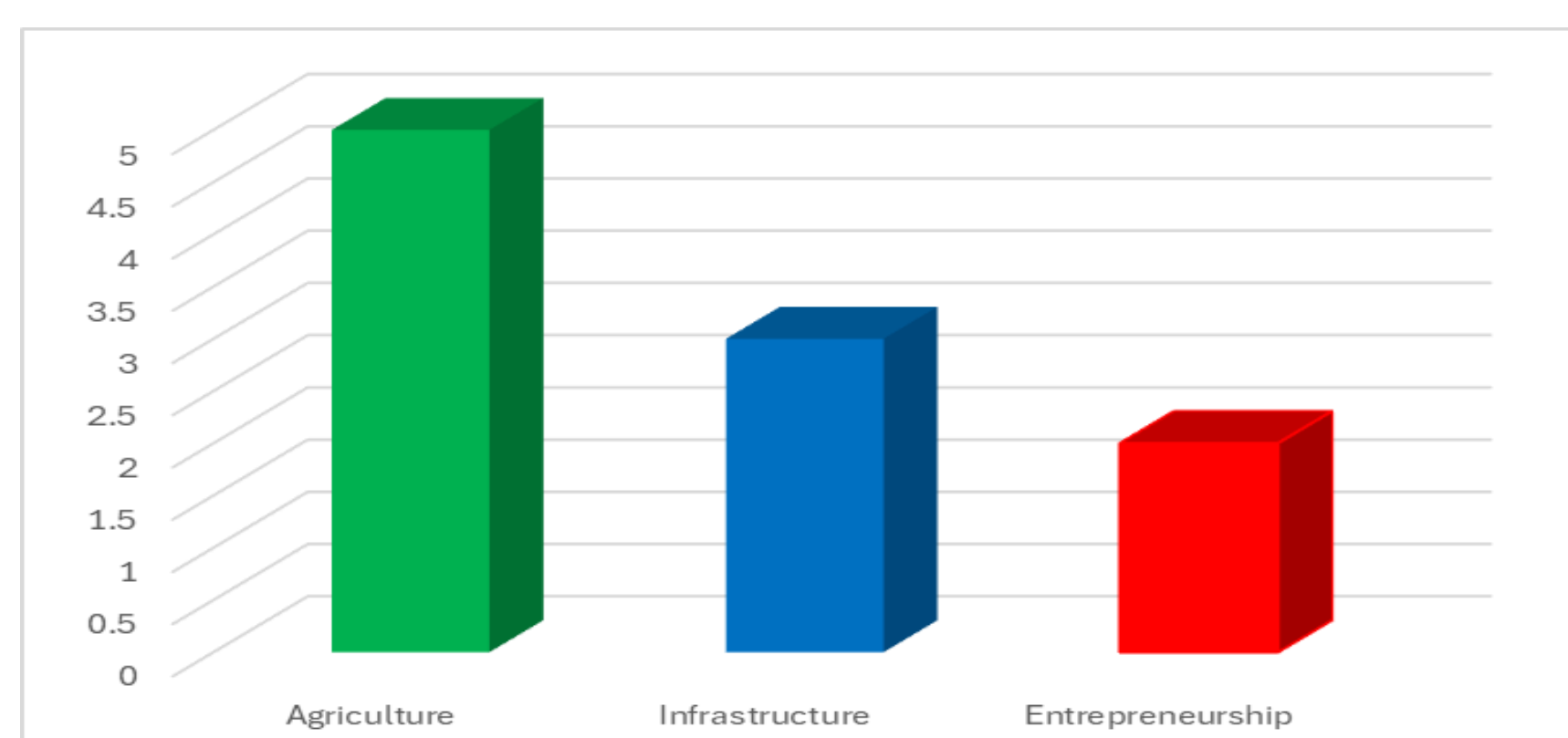
Sustainable rural development represents an essential objective in the context of European integration processes, with the potential to reduce economic and social disparities between rural and urban areas. Our main contribution lies in offering an integrated perspective on the results of European funds, including identifiable best practices and challenges faced by local beneficiaries. This paper will demonstrate that European funds not only facilitate economic development but also create opportunities for innovative partnerships between various community actors.

• Material and method

For this study, we adopted a mixed approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to obtain a detailed overview of the impact of European funds in rural areas of Timiș County, specifically focusing on the Lunca Pogănișului area. This integrated methodology allows us not only to evaluate numerical data but also to understand the social and economic context in which these funds are implemented, thus providing a holistic view of the subject..

• Results and discussions

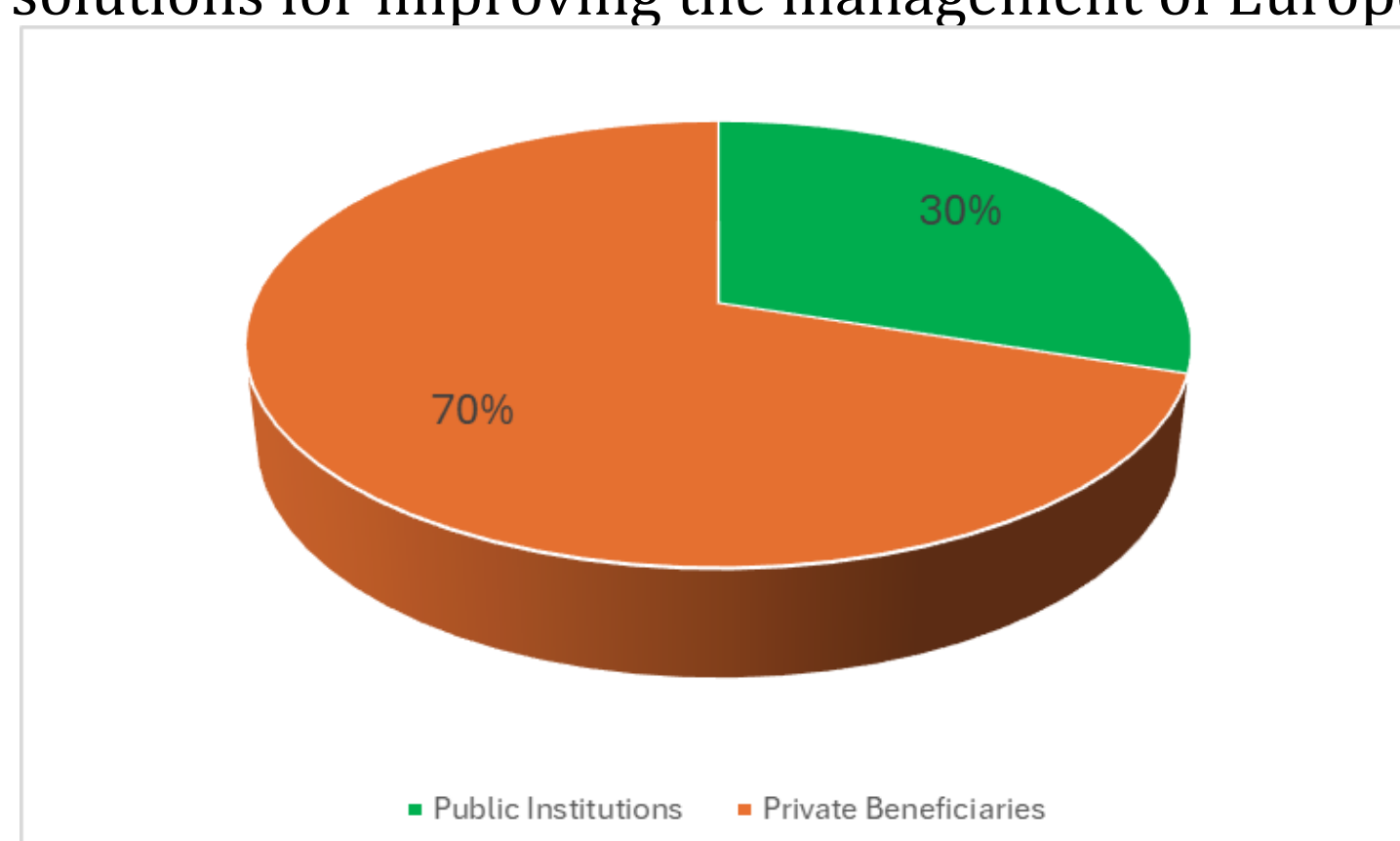
To complement the quantitative analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries of European funds. These beneficiaries included representatives of local authorities, entrepreneurs, and community members who were directly involved in the funded projects.



Types of funded projects

The interviews were designed to explore the perspectives and individual experiences of respondents, with questions focusing on:

- ☐ Evaluating the impact of funds on the local economy and quality of life.
- ☐ Identifying challenges encountered in the project implementation process.
- ☐ Suggestions and solutions for improving the management of European funds.



Distribution of beneficiaries

The implementation of European funds in the Lunca Pogănișului area had the following economic effects: 50% of the funded projects were for agriculture, contributing to the development of this sector; 20% supported entrepreneurship. The funds accessed by public institutions (30%) were dedicated to infrastructure without directly generating economic opportunities. All three public institutions accessed funds for infrastructure projects, such as roads and utility networks; however, the long-term effects remain limited.

Projects and economic impact

Indicator	Reported Results	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Job creation	Temporary and indirect employment	20%
Infrastructure improvement	Roads and utility networks	100% (public institutions)
Increase in agricultural income	Private agricultural beneficiaries	71%

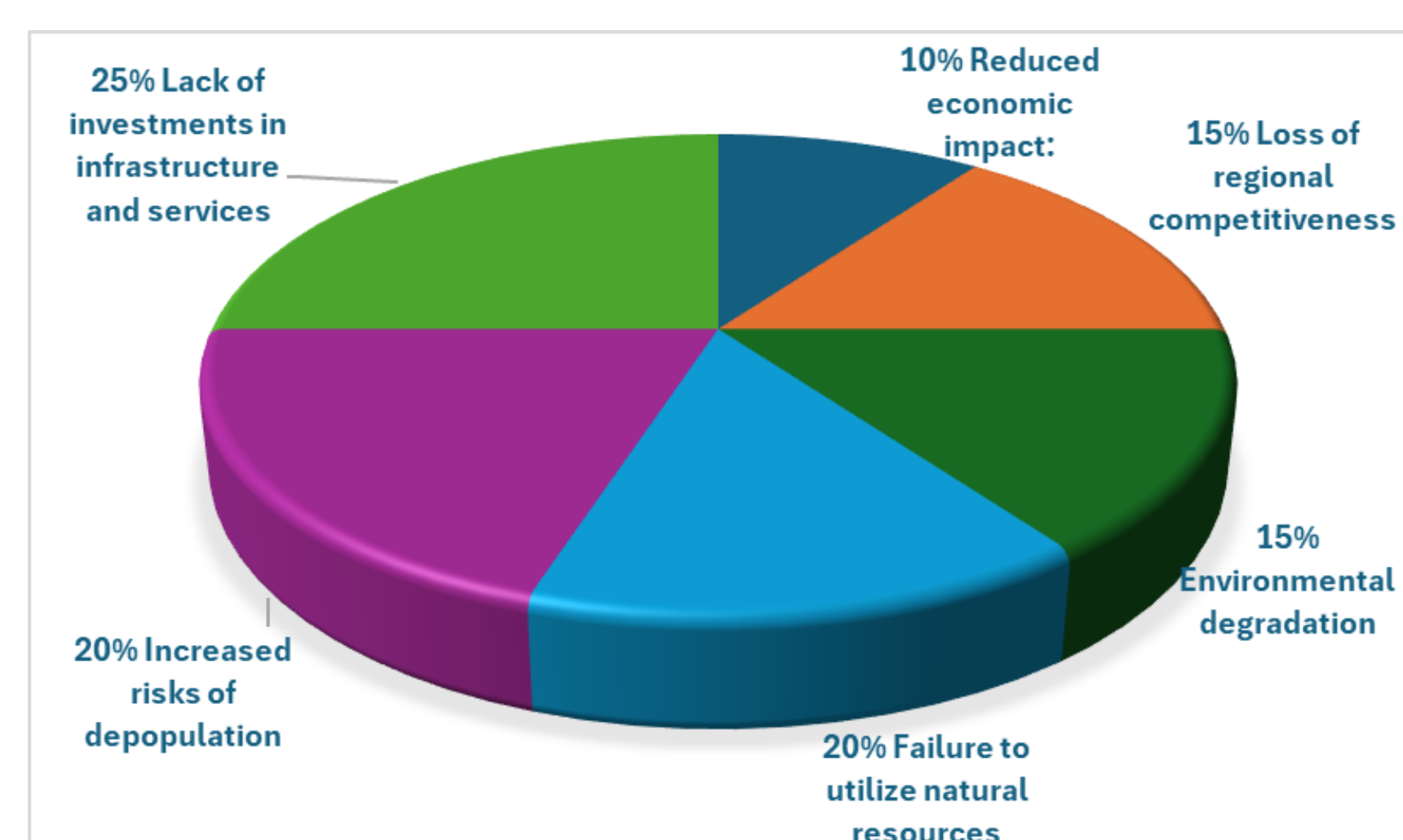
The beneficiaries reported a limited impact on community involvement and job creation. Entrepreneurship supported through European funds (2 projects) created minimal local opportunities, without a significant impact on social cohesion. 60% of respondents perceived an improvement in their quality of life.

Distribution of Projects by Type and Beneficiary

- 50% of funded projects are in agriculture**, suggesting increased interest from private beneficiaries in developing this sector.
- Infrastructure prioritized by public institutions.** Funds accessed by authorities were exclusively for infrastructure, highlighting the need for local development.
- Entrepreneurship as a secondary area.** While significant, fewer funds were allocated for entrepreneurship, indicating untapped potential.

Lunca Pogănișului has significant agricultural, tourism, and ecological potential. Without sustainable projects, these resources risk remaining unused, leading to stagnation in economic development and missed opportunities for innovation in agriculture and eco-tourism.

Without investments in development projects, the local economy may remain stagnant, with a low level of diversification and limited opportunities for economic growth.



The impact of not accessing sustainable projects in Lunca Pogănișului

To complement the quantitative analysis, we conducted semi-structured interviews with beneficiaries of European funds. These beneficiaries included representatives of local authorities, entrepreneurs, and community members who were directly involved in the funded projects.

•Conclusions

The study on the impact of European funds on sustainable development in the rural area of Lunca Pogănișului highlighted the potential of these resources to address essential issues in isolated rural communities. However, the results show that this potential is not fully exploited. Although significant progress has been made in certain areas, such as infrastructure and agricultural support, the overall impact remains fragmented and insufficient to stimulate truly sustainable transformation.