

# COMMUNITY OF PREDEAL A DIAGNOSIS OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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**Abstract:** *The objective of the article is to carry through a description of the social problems experienced by the community of the town of Predeal. The data forwarded herewith and the developing research will contribute to outlining a strategy of community development.*

**Key words:** *community, community development, social problems.*

## 1. Introduction:

As the majority of the Romanian communities of our days, the community of Predeal presents acute necessities of development. The census of the population from Predeal carried out during the summer of the year 2006, as well as the opinion poll about the inhabitants' perceptions with respect to the social problems of the town, carried out during the same period, unveiled many of the problems that the inhabitants of this area are confronted to and, implicitly, part of their solutions and the possible directions of development. An important aspect as regards the success of identifying and implementing a strategy of development is that the Townhall of Predeal has already been endeavoring to outline this strategy, and it may be a collaborator of great help in realizing and implementing this strategy.

## 2. Theoretical Aspects: Community, Community Development, Social Problems

### 2.1. Community

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1972) defines community as a „population living within the legally set

limits of a town”. There is further specified that the term is very rarely used so as to describe a regular metropolitan area, a commercial area or an entity defined by other functions than the political ones. The issue of determining the borders of a community is unsolvable (except by the arbitrary means) as it is acknowledged by the fact that decisions taken *externally* may have a significant impact upon the allotment of the values and upon important private or public decisions *within* the community. The main preoccupation outlined in the literature with respect to the community power consists in outlining and sharing these values and decisions.

Encyclopedia Universalis specifies the fact that the word community raises issues that have not been solved yet. It identifies two types of non-operational definitions: general definitions, among which there is C.M. Arensberg's definition, for whom „communities stand for structural units of organization and cultural and social transmission”. A second definition of this type, inspired by the works of G.A. Hillery, who in 1955 gathered 94 definitions of the community from the Anglo-Saxon literature, takes into account all types of possible communities: „a community is a collectivity

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whose members are connected through a strong feeling of participation". In the category of the particular definitions, we find the definitions of rural communities.

The Encyclopedia of Social Development (2007) defines community as „an enduring social formation, gathering a relatively small number of individuals, with a similar cultural background and social statuses, who inhabit a little extended surface and among whom there are well defined and persistent relations of cooperation, there succeeding thereby the exercise of an efficient social control on the level of the respective group”.

Dumitru Sandu (2005) states the fact that it (community) „designates a human grouping characterized through an increased probability of their members' value unit. Operationally speaking, the community is acknowledged through at least one of the following three attributes: its members' cultural similarity; intense interaction among the members of the group; status similarity among the members of the group (occupation, education, age, localization etc.)”.

## 2.2. Community Development

Within Romania, there have been increasingly experienced schemes of community or regional social intervention, based on ideas of partnership, local participation, social capital mobilization etc, pre-eminently taken over from the practice and supported by international institutions and organizations pertaining to the European Union, to the World Bank etc.

Cătălin Zamfir (2006) asserts that the paradigm of local community development has focused on identifying the specific manner of supporting local communities in developing auto-management processes destined for solving their problems, especially for leaving the „backwardness” behind. The preoccupation towards community development has pre-eminently

come out within severely and chronically underdeveloped countries wherein the frailty of the economic system offers for the majority of the communities a deficit of opportunities towards integrating within the global development process. The essential tools of these strategies are creating a community cohesion and crystallizing the cooperation capacity; the concept of social capital standing for the central point of this strategy.

Dumitru Sandu (2005) appreciates that community development refers to voluntary changes in, through and for community. „In other words, there is about a family of changes in the social (not individual) plan for whom there are specified the place, the manner of achievement and the purpose. All these four elements – motivation, space, manner of achievement and purpose – are called for by the change so as to fulfill the requirement of fitting within the community type”.

The same author considers that the main agents of community development are local public administrations and NGO-s, which interact in this sense, to this purpose (in terms of cooperation, competition, or reciprocal control). There is likewise of importance the participative dimension, related to stirring up the community members. As regards the number of group members who should participate so that the action might fit within the community type, Sandu states it is of no relevance, this is a matter of involving a part of the group voluntarily or co-interestedly for the community benefit. He achieves a simple classification of the motivations stirring up to common interest, depending on co-interest and volunteering, into four types of situations: des-interested / altruist, through co-interest, in group and forced participation.

The targets of community interventions may be summarized this way (Sandu 2005):

- reducing poverty;
- manufacturing public wares;

- changing institutions;
- changing mentalities.

Local or community participation refers to the process of committing the members of a local community in actions aiming at satisfying requirements of a local, pre-eminently local and public character or in-group. In other words, local participation is the participation to community actions, which means to actions wherein „the main actors and beneficiaries are the local residents, the purposes are these residents’ interests and the action is rather public than private” (Kaufman, Wilkinson, 1967, *apud* Sandu).

### 2.3. Social Problems

Cătălin Zamfir (2006) appreciates that the starting point for social change consists in identifying social problems. In specialized literature, the social problem is defined in the following terms: a factor, a process, a social or natural state that negatively affects societal functioning and human condition. However, social problems are not only negative states, but also positive ones. „Development opportunities arising may be likewise deemed a social problem: identifying the modalities for turning it to good account is a development opportunity”.

Likewise, Sorin M. Rădulescu (1996) claims that the meaning of a social problem does not come out clear or obvious for everyone, especially for the laymen. From this outlook, what some deem a noxious or undesirable condition, others will assess as beneficial for society. This way, the notion of social problem entails a series of controversies as regards its desirable or undesirable character, its functional or dysfunctional character. Therefore, in defining or evaluating social problems, an answer must be offered to the following questions: a. Who defines the respective social problem? b. Which are the criteria resorted to in bringing forth this definition?

Sorin M. Rădulescu (1996) asserts that the sociological study upon social problems is the most frequent, oldest and commonplace area of interest for sociologists. Defining social problems entails a series of common elements, the author enumerating a few definitions of social problems, which are considered of significance:

- from the conceptual standpoint, social problem is a term depending on a context, which is used to designate any noxious (harmful) condition to society, or any injustice (illegality) entailing causes, definitions, consequences and possible social solutions;
- a condition is defined by numerous persons as a deviation from the observed norms;
- an aspect of society bringing about the population’s concern which calls for social change;
- a condition that captivates public attention, engenders preoccupations and controversies and may lead in certain cases to taking action.
- a considerable discrepancy between the standards (norms) of a society and its real achievements;
- an obstacle that breaks out upon desired action or understanding, or a perceived difficulty, which is not quickly solved or controlled through normal procedures; an interruption of the smooth or conventional going of things.

Cătălin Zamfir (2006) identifies the possible level where a problem may come out: potential, latent, manifest and central:

- ◆ The potential level of a social problem is characterized by the following: „it possesses all characteristics of a social problem, however it is not formulated by the collectivity as such. It is not present on the level of collective consciousness as a social problem; under certain conditions it may be undertaken in awareness as a problem”.
- ◆ The latent level of the social problem: „it is considered by the collectivity as a

problem, however it is associated with a passive attitude: resignation, frustration, anxiety”.

- ◆ The manifest level: „the social problem, considered by the collectivity as such, is associated with an active attitude: the will to set out to action”.
- ◆ The centrality level of a social problem: „a state of manifest social problem which is deemed of priority so as to mobilize attention and to canalize available resources”.

Sorin M. Rădulescu (1996) identifies the stages completed by natural history of social problems:

- stage of awareness;
- stage of official reactions towards solving the respective problem;
- stage of reactions towards the official answer;
- stage of reform (of alternative policy development).

*Types of social problems:*

Cătălin Zamfir (2006) identifies the following types of social problems:

- development deficit;
- groups/societies/zones in crisis/difficulty (families with many children, mining areas, etc);
- natural/social conditions which adversely affect collectivities/human condition (natural catastrophes, diseases);
- individual, collective behaviors that adversely affect the other persons (criminality, violence);
- poor functioning of several institutions (corruption, inefficiency);
- deficit of individual and collective capabilities of action (low education level, low social capital);
- deficit of the capacities possessed by the institutions responsible to take action;
- deficit of the behavior/state of society in relation to significant matters;
- emergence of opportunities for development (EU integration etc.)

Sorin M. Rădulescu (1996) makes a brief classification enabling the differentiation of the following types of social problems according to their importance:

- problems menacing the society members' economic wellness (for instance, unemployment, poverty, social inequality);
- problems affecting social order and the exigencies of social conformism, endangering the values protected by law (violence, criminality, juvenile delinquency);
- problems prejudicing the physical and ecological environment (negative impact of the urbanization, industrialization, pollution problems etc.);
- problems menacing the physical, psychic and social wellness of human collectivity (over-population or danger to the demographic equilibrium, diseases of wide social spreading);
- problems effecting in the individuals' discrimination (inequality in position, sex, age, religion, or ethical origin);
- global social problems with worldwide impact (zonal conflicts, wars, state terrorism, mafia networks etc.)

Solving these problems is inevitably included within the process of social development. It lays at the basis of social development, but it also constitutes the starting point and central element. Society may ignore its problems, progressively entering into crisis, may adopt solutions with negative effects, may oscillate between approaching a solution and overlooking it, or may adopt efficient solutions. Traditional approach is characterized through a pre-eminently spontaneous process of reacting to challenges, while current late-day approach, oriented towards social development, is characterized through changing social problem solving into a development target, associated with strategies / plans / programs of collective action (Rădulescu, 1996).

*Sources for becoming aware of social problem importance*

Sorin M. Rădulescu (1996) claims there is no official procedure, of unanimous acknowledgement, for identifying or solving a social problem; and for identifying the priorities as regards its clearing up. The main sources through whose intermediary a social problem acquires public recognition are the following:

- ◆ literature;
- ◆ mass-media;
- ◆ protest movements and demonstrations;
- ◆ social conflicts;
- ◆ some accidents, natural catastrophes or dramatic events;
- ◆ opinion polls;
- ◆ sociologic studies.

*Methods for analyzing social problems*

Zamfir (2006) is sensible of the fact that the methodology for the research upon social problems must be multi-leveled:

1. Diagnosis of potential/pending problem, wherein several analysis levels are included:

- ◆ problem identification;
- ◆ problem magnitude determination;
- ◆ decisive factors of social problem dynamics.

2. Diagnosis of becoming aware of social problems.

3. Analysis upon the activity undertaken by community to deal with social problems:

- ◆ drawing up a list with activities / solutions practiced by collectivity;
- ◆ assessing the efficacy / efficiency of previously practiced solutions.

4. Identifying new solutions for complying with social problems.

### 3. Geographical Placement of Predeal Town. Access

Predeal, town also known as climacteric resort, is placed at the partition line between the basins of Prahova and Timiș, within the pass bearing the same name. It is the Romanian town situated at the highest

altitude (1097 m). Predeal resort is at a distance of 142 km from Bucharest, on DN1, at 25 km from Sinaia and at 25 km from Brașov. The town-resort Predeal stretches on a surface of 58.4 Km<sup>2</sup> (total internal territory in 2000: 930 ha). *Stable population*: 5000 persons (1.07.2006), 2100 families.

Access:

- Airport. Accessible air stations: Otopeni, Băneasa București (140 Km); Tg. Mures (150 Km); Sibiu (130 Km).
- Railway: The access to the station is ensured through connecting roads on trajectories with a maximal length of 10 Km. There are railway stations in Predeal, Timișul de Sus and Timișul de Jos.
- Town-resort Predeal is placed on E-60-DN1. European and national roads: E60-DN1; County roads: DJ102P.

### 4. Brief Description of Social Problems Undergone by Predeal

For a few years, **the central social problem** in the town of Predeal has been housing. The problem placement on central position has been brought about by the following:

- approximately 200 families were evacuated from claimed nationalized houses. Effects: these families left the town, moving to relatives etc. in other localities, their children leaving the school effectiveness much reduced etc.
- a few years ago, the Town-hall of Predeal initiated a program granting lands to those interested in building. This approach failed for two reasons: a law was promulgated no longer permitting and supporting this process, and the second reason was brought about by the fact that several persons who had been granted the land, instead of building a home, sold the terrain and the issue of a personal abode has not changed.
- the Town-hall initiated a strategy for solving this problem: it built an ANL

block of flats, some other blocks of social dwellings being on their way to be built; in 2006 a project was launched offering terrains for free use to youths aged beneath 35 years old, according to the law 15 / 2003.

Among **manifest social problems** there may be mentioned:

- the inhabitants' desire to have access in their neighboring area to different repairing workshops (shoemaker's, clockmaker's), tailor's, as well as to other shops besides the food stores.
- the provision of the polyclinic, as well as the setting up of a center for medical analyses, for diagnoses (for any medical analysis, for any graph, the patients are sent to Braşov).

These problems have grown manifest following some steps taken by the Retired Persons' Association from Predeal in solving some of the local social problems.

Among **latent social problems** within the town of Predeal there may be enumerated: the lack of canalization in the areas Timişul de Sus, Timişul de Jos, Dâmbul Morii, Malul Ursului and partially in Predeal.

There likewise exists within collective consciousness, a category of poorly defined problems, in a latent state, but bringing about small inter-personal conflicts:

- the issue of workplaces: part of the inhabitants from Predeal are discontent with the fact that they are deprived of workplaces, because of the invasion of cheap labor force from Valea Prahovei (Azuga, Buşteni, Sinaia, Poiana Țapului, Comarnic, Cămpina). On the other hand, some Town-hall representatives accuse the natives to be pretentious about workplaces, even lazy.
- the problem of the inhabitants from Bucuresti: part of the flats within blocks (even half of them) and the houses throughout Predeal have owners from Bucureşti, who are made responsible for the town squalor.

Other problems existing within collective consciousness:

- insufficient development of tourism;
- school: diminution in the pupils' number, the teachers' high fluctuation.
- absence of the possibilities for spare time facilities by the inhabitants;
- the issue of cleanliness and environment protection;
- negative perception upon local public administration etc.

*Data ensuing from the last census of the population from Predeal:*

- 60,5% among the respondents live within their owned dwellings, and 14,1% within State-rented dwellings.
- 5% among the respondents are going to permanently move to Predeal in the following 5 years.
- At the question „During the last 5 years, as regards the tourism in Predeal...”: 38,1% among the respondents declared „it has remained unchanged”, 26,9% declared „things have gone to a better direction” and 23,6% declared „things have gone wrong”.
- As regards the perception upon the number of tourists coming to Predeal: „marked up a diminution” - 45,8%; „stayed the same” - 23,0%; „marked up a rise” - 16,1%.

#### **SWOT Analysis**

**External Factors:** Opportunities, Threats

**Internal Factors:** Strengths, Weaknesses

#### **External Factors**

#### **Opportunities**

- ◆ Privileges geographical placement, with high tourist potential
- ◆ Direct access, through tourist paths, and forest roads, to the mountains of Piatra Mare, Postăvarul, Bucegi
- ◆ Externally financed programs
- ◆ Attraction for a high number of tourists
- ◆ Rise in the number of holidays houses, boarding houses and hotels
- ◆ Development in skiing opportunities and facilities

- ◆ Neighboring town (25 km) to the city of Braşov

#### **Threats**

- ◆ Invasion of labor force from Valea Prahovei and Braşov
- ◆ Lack of interest in some programs of community financial back-up out of lack of familiarization with some aspects regarding the criteria for their selection and implementation
- ◆ Tourist competitiveness with the resorts on Valea Prahovei
- ◆ The responsibility transfer towards local administration without providing the corresponding financial resources
- ◆ Impact of the tourists' presence, periodical, seasonal, upon environment

#### **Internal Factors**

##### **Strengths**

- ◆ Placement in the core of the country, within mountain relief, with high tourist potential
- ◆ BCR Subsidiary, BRD, SNCFR training center
- ◆ Beneficiary of externally-financed programs for infrastructure, in the social (dwellings) field, environment protection
- ◆ Neuroses Sanatoriums on Valea Râşnoavei, Valea Timişului
- ◆ Improvement of the skiing facilities during the last years
- ◆ Developed tourist infrastructure
- ◆ Presence of a Branch of the University of Bucharest, the Faculty of Informatics and Management Accounting

#### **Weaknesses**

- ◆ Diminution in the inhabitants' number, especially because of the housing problem (evacuated from nationalized houses)
- ◆ Negative natural growth
- ◆ Diminution in the children's number and implicitly diminution in the pupils' number from high-school classes (danger of its turning into secondary school)
- ◆ Utility networks not covering all areas of the town
- ◆ Cultural life inexistence
- ◆ Tourist utilities not used to the best of their capacities
- ◆ Insufficiently qualified staff for ensuring quality tourist services
- ◆ Poor highway maintenance
- ◆ Absence of an ecologic garbage ramp
- ◆ Insufficient parking places
- ◆ Deficient communication among local decision-making factors
- ◆ Insufficient playgrounds for children, as well as sports terrains
- ◆ Degraded amusement areas (parks, sports terrains etc.)
- ◆ Lack of a department in charge with implementing and developing the strategy
- ◆ Inadequate marketplace
- ◆ Part of the population shopping the supermarkets of Braşov
- ◆ Inexistence of a laboratory for medical analyses
- ◆ Inexistence of products (footwear, clothing, household wares, etc) and services (diverse repairs, etc) necessary for the inhabitants

<b><u>Inhabitants' level of satisfaction:</u></b>	
<b>Not at all satisfied:</b>	<b>Very content:</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> place:</b> spare time possibilities-41,7%	<b>1<sup>st</sup> place:</b> streets' lighting-26,8%
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> place:</b> personal financial situation-36,2%	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> place:</b> their appointment-24,5%
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> place:</b> arrangement of commercial spaces- 34,0%	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> place:</b> personal dwelling-24,1%
<b>4<sup>th</sup> place:</b> condition of streets-32,8%	<b>4<sup>th</sup> place:</b> health-24,1%
<b>5<sup>th</sup> place:</b> locality cleanliness and maintenance-26,1%	<b>5<sup>th</sup> place:</b> citizens' safety-18,9%

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