

**"LUCIAN BLAGA" UNIVERSITY of SIBIU  
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING,  
THE FIELD OF ENGINEERING AND MANAGEMENT**

## **SUMMARY**

**CONTRIBUTIONS ON THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF THE  
EUROPEAN PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED IN THE CENTER  
REGION, PROPOSALS FOR EFFICIENCY AND  
OPTIMIZATION OF THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT**

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## KEYWORDS

Projects management, regional development, sustainable development, development strategy, structural funds, operational program, impact, impact assessment

## INTRODUCTION

**The topicality and the importance of the approached problem.** The project management science and practice have recently recorded on global level a spectacular evolution and it has an ascending trend development, with a particular impact over all organizations types, imposing new concepts in project terms growth. The base is to lay emphasis on elaboration and implementation of the realistic and coherent strategies, on planification and organization, aspects meant to bring noticeably improvements at the community level. This trend is ever more prominent in the European Union where, under the impact of the integration requirements, the projects management tends to become the main form of existence in the economic environment.

The globalization, commercial connections enhancement, economic crises, exchange rate fluctuation, oil prices decrease and its effect over world state economy, labor migration,

technological progress – all these entail a reset of the existing approaches toward economic processes and systems organization.

Project management started its journey and professionalization less than a century ago, as a necessity to identify innovative solutions for strategic, military, economic, social problems. Also, nowadays economic development can not be regarded without applying new and modern approaches and visions, but to ensure the economic success you need to create a challenging environment for novelty and innovation.<sup>1</sup>

The project management universality by applying its techniques, methods, processes and outlines in various fields, led to the necessity to create conceptual and methodological frame and practical instrument, in order to guide the professionals working on projects and to allow management study for a better streamlining.

All this time, project management specialization had a constant evolution and led to a specific vocabulary, well known by the area specialists and constantly updated. Projects theoretical and empirical framework represent a „*living instrument*”, what determines an invariable consolidation and improvement of the practice. Projects are uniquely defined, but the idea of shaping generic deployment frameworks is present in the world of researchers and practitioners.

Considering the short period of time in which these objectives took shape, the project management research advanced very fast, reaching a maturity stage, especially in business environment. In many cases, the practice input the theoretic base for the project management and not the other way round. There were specific tools, applied for a longer time in projects from various fields (constructions, IT, communication, etc) (example Gantt chart, Critical Path method, The program evaluation and review technique - PERT) which were the basis for a further determination of the framework of knowledge and even for the science derived from the general management specialization.

Projects analyze in business field, non-reimbursable funding projects and their role in economic and social nation development represents a current and ongoing concern. The information concerning the role and the impact of the european projects developed in the business sector are insufficient, except some programmes that have been supported by the Government or other foreign partners. The lack of relevant information or insufficient data related to monitoring terms, company's development procedure following the funding it benefited from, long term funding influence, the impact on the community where it was implemented, all these led to a necessity to emphasize these results in order to identify the funding real support and its impact.

The example of the countries with a large experience in Project management field shows that, gradual, the projects will be developed increasingly in business, considering the advantages of working using these. European countries which hold more experience than our country, which joined much more earlier European Nation, applies successfully the efficient instruments for Project Management and especially for European funding Management projects, which is the subject of this research. All these bring added value using a rigorous

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<sup>1</sup> Popa A. Particularități ale managementului strategic al dezvoltării regionale. În: Analele științifice ale Universității de Stat „Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu”, vol. 4. Cahul, 2008. p. 162-166.

implementation framework, effectiveness and efficacy that can be assessed, and the results become comparable in terms of project uniqueness.

This thesis took shape following the political and economical fluctuations, which had social and cultural consequences after UE Romanian accession. This accession, long-expected, in a much bigger and superiorly developed region, took into account benefits as structural funds in order to accomplish the convergence objective that our country didn't benefit from at the expected, or at least desired, capacity.

Another concern, not less current, it is also the restricted involvement of the inland researchers in the analysis and adaptation to the specifics of the national economy of the knowledge framework PM regarding European projects field. It is found that the number of the inland scientific works concerning the study of the methodological framework of the project management implementation and the tracking of the impact of the projects in which this management system operated in the financing projects is modest.

In practice, projects with foreign investment and valuable financial support appeal most of it to the services of foreign specialists, certified for the project implementation part, even if the costs are higher. Only in the last 10 years in Romania, "Project Management" courses have been introduced in higher education institutions, most of them only in the second cycle (within the master's program) and lately at universities with "Faculties of European study" which have introduced specializations such as "Project Cycle Management".

Each of the two periods of the financial years 2007 - 2013 that ended, although not finalized with high performance in the absorption of the budgets allocated through the European funds, and 2014-2020, have the role of contributing to the increase of the experience in this field from the part of the two parts involved (the authorities managing the programs and the applicants benefiting from them).

The 6 years cycle of the 2007-2013 period, plus two years of post-implementation, had provided the opportunity to improve skills starting from the strategic document elaboration phase, from the organization of the administrative structures that managed the projects to the improvement of management skills which is reflected in the contribution to accessing and absorbing European, as well as their impact on the communities where the investment was made.

At the end of each programmatic period, in Romania it was only a well-known one, it is more than relevant to carry out a diagnostic analysis of the positive and negative aspects that led to the obtained results. Such an analysis has the role of contributing and making significant improvements to the impact of projects, better absorption and improvement of the results our country needs to achieve in the future programmatic periods from 2014-2020, which is already under implementation.

The emphasis and importance of project management as a managerial system option is developing in more and more sectors, Software, Industry and Business (Entrepreneurship). Project management is on an upward trend due to its proven necessity in the context of sustainable development and existing funding, whether it be with European money, money from the Romanian Government, money from Crowdfunding, money received from "*business angels*" or own investments.

This area has become a necessity lately, there is a elaborated and applied debate about a project society, given the constant use of projects and programs that carry out

individual processes with varying degrees of complexity. The need for automated mechanisms and work tools for project management are more than relevant so they are applicable starting from central or local public institutions, local public authorities, and up to the private environment.

In trying to analyze the 5 years post-accession period and the money situation at Romania's disposal, with astonishment we have found that examples of large-scale projects with European funding that have changed the course of the country's development can be identified with difficulty.

A big problem in Romania was, and we still believe it is even now, the institutional inability to propose, initiate and manage large infrastructure development projects, integrated projects with a national impact. Our country appears to have been unable to demonstrate the implementation of a short, medium and long-term development plan that would harmonize national, regional priorities with the major policy convergence objectives in the European Union.

Considering that there was no concrete decentralization policy, based on the needs of each development region of Romania, our institutional management model has proven its limits ineffective. European funds have only increased unnecessarily the state apparatus, a structure constituted of teams of under-qualified people who have failed to streamline implementation processes and obtain result indicators with impact on the regions where they have been implemented. These deficiencies have led to financial mechanisms that have blocked payments to beneficiaries due to the government's refusal to advance payments from the national budget, with their recovery from the Commission as general reimbursements. These facts proved to be uninspired and no one explains how these things will change from this perspective in the new financial exercise. The contracting rate in the first quarter of 2017 is close to 3%, and the main program that was contracted was the NPRD 2014-2020.

Instead of investing in prevention and in project management training, in order to avoid obvious irregularities due to the interpretative legal framework, our country has developed an abusive control mechanism, the purpose of which is to reclaim large sums of money, any price, from projects that have already been implemented. We believe that they have been realized in such a way that there is as much cash as possible in the state budget up to the receipt of new sums of money reimbursed by the European Commission.

As a result, one year before the end of the 2007-2013 financial year, Romania was in a very bad situation regarding the absorption of European funds compared to all Member States. This aspect has decisively influenced the quality of the projects because, in order to increase the absorption percentage, projects, which did not have a decisive impact on the community or the target group for which they were developed, have been contracted.

There have been constant discussions in the public space about incapacity, lack of results, failure, corruption in the management of structural funds, but no one has identified, in a structured way, the causes of this situation. What were the reasons why Romania was not able to recover from the European Commission money already spent from the "pockets" of the beneficiaries or from the state budget.

We have come up with the most frequent criticisms of Structural Funds management and to the absorption process during the period 2007-2013, and we have exposed three categories of major causes for the inability to absorb European funds:

**A. Problems regarding the initial conception of Operational Programs**

**B. Faulty management at Managing Authorities level:**

**C. Strategic budget planning issues at national level:**

Only a year before the start of a new 2014-2020 financial year, Romania had to complete and solve major problems regarding the old programming. They provided concrete support for the outlook for the budget for the 2014-2020 financial year. Instead of focusing on drafting guidelines and working procedures for the 2014-2020 period, the main activities were to solve problems and artificially increase the absorption rate.

Analyzing in detail all these critical aspects that negatively influence the achievement of the project indicators, the achievement of their objectives and results, as well as the successful implementation, I consider an opportunity and a need at the same time to penetrate the quality management niche, to highlight the impact of the projects on the community where they were implemented, the analysis of the main indicators, the manner and modalities of implementing the structural funds.

Problems related to the structure and functioning of the consultancy market in project implementation:

The Romanian management consulting market is a atomized one without a dominant player or dominant group of players. For customer offers - it is a market with great potential for the first, and is, from the perspective of customers, a market where services can be obtained at reasonable prices.

Analyzing this market I have noticed that Romanian companies are on this market, starting from 0 and reaching 100-150 consultants, successfully concurring with the local subsidiaries of multinational consultants; also, the consulting departments of some of the Big Four (PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, Ernst & Young (EY), KPMG) audit firms are trying to penetrate the market for consultancy projects to attract EU funding, a traditional market dominated by small and medium-sized local players.

Currently, there are no dominant brands on the Romanian market and customers do not have an attachment for a consulting brand. Today, due to the reluctance and uncertainty in the European funds market, and because the availability of customers to pay extra for "a name" has reduced, it is a good time for domestic firms to bite the market slices of international players present in Romania, in the conditions in which they will be able to offer similar consulting and training products.

As we can see, the Romanian consultancy market and small, medium and large players are made up of: Micro-enterprises, Small and medium-sized enterprises, Large enterprises, Local public authorities, State and private universities, NGOs, specialized department on consulting in implementing projects from EU funds as well as other organizations that, in partnership or on their own, can write, implement projects and benefit from the money allocated from the Structural Funds.

On the other hand, from experience, I noticed that most consulting firms pay special attention to the elaboration and writing phase of the project, propose very complex technical solutions, even erudite under certain conditions and very difficult to achieve impact indicators, but they put too little price on implementation and a quality system for its implementation.

It certainly can be said that quantity was more important than quality, we witnessed a project marathon, where many applicants developed projects only to win the quantified quantity chapter, without these projects having a consistent impact on communities where it was implemented.

This results in a very small number of consultants or applicants who develop their own project and who consciously prepare a logical implementation framework matrix, a realistic Gantt chart, to see if the activities that have been successful in the evaluation can be charged from the budget allocated. They must have sufficient human and material resources to ensure effective project management.

The key to the success of an efficient and quality management is the knowledge of the importance of project management, how effective management is achieved, what are the immediate benefits and long-term benefits.

Implementation procedures differ depending on the type of project, but the management principles are the same regardless of the fact that we have to deal with projects with a given theme where the management team knows from the beginning the objectives, activities, results and indicators of projects or projects with open theme in which each applicant, on the basis of the applicant's guide and according to his needs, designs his project idea and the implementation is carried out based on the planning of the project, designed by the management team itself.

This doctoral thesis has emerged as a result of political and economic changes with social and cultural consequences that emerged as a result of Romania's accession to the European Union. This accession process has attracted a number of advantages that our country could benefit from, as a result of integration into a larger and higher developed region, such as the structural instruments made available to Romania to achieve the objective of economic and social convergence.

At the end of each period, a particular importance is to accomplish a diagnostic analysis of the positive and negative aspects that led to the results obtained. This analysis has the role of contributing to the improvement of the results that Romania could achieve in the future in this field.

The 2007-2013 funding period has been the most economically challenging in recent decades as a result of the major economic and social impact of the crisis. Since 2008, many Member States have experienced a significant economic downturn, accompanied by a dramatic rise in the unemployment rate. Major fiscal and budget constraints did not allow national governments to offset the decline in economic activity, with long-term increases in public spending and investment. On the contrary, public investment has suffered the largest decreases in recent decades, over 50% in some Member States, and more than one third in other crisis-hit Member States, such as Portugal, Cyprus or Greece. This is how the economic environment was presented during the period of implementation of the programs financed by the ERDF during the period 2007-2013. Therefore, the ERDF and the other European Cohesion Fund (European Social Fund and Cohesion Fund) were, in fact, the only stable source of public investment, becoming by far the main instrument of public investment in Member States and less developed regions.

Through the ERDF, about 200 billion euro was invested over the period 2007-2013, particularly in areas such as transport, energy, research, development and innovation, ICT,

SMEs, but also to support small and medium-sized enterprises. These funds have essentially contributed to maintaining investment and capital spending in such a difficult economic period, which is an essential condition for economic recovery and the creation of conditions for sustained economic growth of Member States and regions.

Through the scientific research activity within this thesis, we analyzed the impact of the projects on the communities where they were implemented, the use of the indicators resulted from the projects that contribute to the efficiency of the project management, the solutions for the improvement of the quality management in the implementation of the structural funds, the proposals on solutions to improve the content of Operational Programs, proposals on improving the quality of project management, all based on case studies on projects that have been finalized.

The arguments presented, as well as those presented in the research, denote the importance and the actuality of the subject, especially in the context of the start of the second financial exercise of the financing programs for the period 2014-2020, with emphasis being placed on the efficiency of the Project Management, elaboration, practice and evaluation of the implementation methodology at the level of the applicants for funding.

**The main target** of the PhD thesis "*Contributions regarding the evaluation of the impact of the European projects implemented in the Center Region, proposals for streamline and optimization of the project management*" represent proposing solutions for improving the project management and creating a **software application**, specific to the management of the european projects. The research aims presenting the theoretical concepts, identifying the impact evaluation methods and carrying out a research on the impact of projects in order to identify and highlight good practices. Alos, the purpose is to formulate specific proposals to improve project management, respectively to improve the impact of projects on the performance of beneficiaries implementing them but also on the realization, efficiency, development and implementation of regional strategies and policies. They will support and increase the degree of maturity in project management of the beneficiary who will be much more prepared for the 2014-2020 funding period, so that the absorption of European funds will be much higher.

**The purpose** of the thesis is to raise awareness among stakeholders, mainly non-reimbursable fund applicants, physical and legal entities on the development and implementation of projects that meet the needs of sustainable development, to implement a series of relevant and important changes and have a major impact on the progress of the community.

The thesis aimed at identifying the main difficulties and deficiencies encountered by the beneficiaries of projects financed by European funds but also by the Authorities that managed these projects due to the negative influence of certain categories of factors and at the same time proposing constructive regulation and improvement solutions.

*The specific objectives* of the research are:

- Presentation of the basic theoretical concepts in sustainable development, sustainable development indicators, the use of impact assessments, basic concepts of project management, including the different approaches that already exist in the literature in order to achieve a complex and complete theoretical framework;

- Presentation of the specific concepts of European policies: the region, sustainable development and regional development, the European Regional Development Policy, a part of the structural funds of the European Union, the Regional Operational Program and the Sectoral Operational Program Increase of Economic Competitiveness;
- Presentation of the theoretical aspects and the evaluation methodology for the impact of European funded projects on the community where they have been implemented, with a focus on the impact assessment of EU-funded ROPs and SOPE projects;
- Analyzing the rate of absorption of European funds in Romania since 2007 until now, factors influencing the absorption rate and the main problems that led to the inadequate management of the projects with European financing;
- Accomplishing an empirical study on the impact of EU-funded projects on the development of the central region, with practical examples of implemented projects including: presenting project managers' opinions, analyzing the effects produced by project implementation, identifying the methods used to analyze these effects, identifying the main management issues in this type of projects, the proposal of solutions for solving the most frequent problems, the identification of the modalities and the proposals to improve the impact of the projects, taking into account the opinions of the specialists in the field.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, they are used as bibliographic and information sources:

- specialized books published in the country and abroad by internationally recognized authors in project management and project management with European funding;
- Articles published in international databases and published journals;
- publications of some institutions in the country: the Romanian Government, the European Institute of Romania, the Implementing Bodies that manage these types of projects;
- National and international strategies carried out by different institutions at the level of economic, local and regional structures; (*Europe 2020 Strategy, National Competitiveness Strategy, Regional Development Strategy - Center Region*, etc)
- Publications of International Institutions: *European Commission, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Network of Impact Assessments - NONIE, European Central Bank, World Bank*, etc.;
- Data transmitted to the Unic Management Information System (SMIS) by the 7 Managing Authorities within the ministries managing Structural and Cohesion Funds.

### **Thesis structure**

The elaborated research is structured in eight chapters, covering the subject studied both theoretically, methodologically and practically. The structure of "*Contributions regarding the evaluation of the impact of the European projects implemented in the Center Region*,"

*proposals for streamline and optimization of the project management"* thesis is thus presented:

### **Chapter 1. Sustainable Development as a Development Strategy of the European Union,**

Includes the presentation of the existing approaches in the literature regarding the concept of sustainable development, its role for the development of the communities in Romania and the priority sectors of development. For a better understanding of the concepts, this chapter presents the indicators of sustainable development, the importance of regional development strategies, regional development indicators, the implication of this concept in community development, the role of strategies in investments and the need to link them to existing funding programs.

The set of sustainable development indicators for Romania is structured on the objectives of the National Sustainable Development Strategy, with three-tier hierarchy: **level 1** - main indicators (basic); **level 2** - complementary indicators, usable for monitoring and reviewing sustainable development programs; **level 3** - progress indicators of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania, covering the policy package it generates, including those not included in the EU Strategy.

**The main regional development** indicators to be pursued and presented as the results of this research are: economic development, competitiveness, lifelong learning, poverty and social exclusion, aging society, public health, climate change and energy, production and consumption patterns, ecological efficiency, natural resources management, transport.

### **Chapter 2 The knowledge degree of urban reality - the basis of the process of developing sustainable development policies.**

It addresses specific themes of European policies: territorial cohesion, European context on development and territorial cohesion, practical aspects of the practical reality of the practical case analyzed as well as the link between them, the strategic framework of the city community analyzed in the case study, the role of the projects with European financing in the implementation of the development strategy.

We have highlighted that it is very important before designing a set of policies for the sustainable development of any community, to know the urban reality and the real, existing parameters from which to go for each strategic domain: *public administration, total revenues, the industrial sector, agriculture, forestry, tourism, health, education, the business and economic environment, etc.*

### **Chapter 3. Presentation of the European Union Programs in Romania in 2007-2013 and European Funds absorption for ROP and SOPE programs.**

links the financing opportunities for project through the European Union programs in Romania in the period 2007-2013, with specific on POR and POSCCE programs and their situation at the level of the Center Development Region. I also analyzed the degree of absorption of the two programs in the analyzed region. In order to benefit from EU funds, projects should contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the operational programs established at national level according to the development needs identified locally and

regionally, so I analyzed what were the main factors influencing the performance structural instruments at program level. I considered it necessary to present in this chapter the specific elements of the ROP and SOPE projects financed by the European Union in the financial year 2007 -2013, in order to better definition of the concept.

**Chapter 4 Factors that have influenced the performance of structural instruments.**

Describes and lists the performance indicators used in selecting and approving investment projects. I also tried to highlight the main problems and factors identified during the period 2007-2013, which had negative contributions to the impact of the projects implemented in the Center Development Region and to develop proposals for their improvement.

In the table below, we have presented the identified problems, following the presenting structure:

<b>General problems, classified according to their internal factors to which they relate</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The reduced administrative capacity of all institutions implementing the Structural Funds;</li> <li>b) Reduced administrative capacity of beneficiaries;</li> </ul>
<b>General problems, classified according to the internal factors to which they relate and which have influenced the operating mechanisms</b>
<b>Specific problems of the Priority Axes under the two SOP IEC and POR programs, in which we analyzed specific case studies</b>
<b>Specific problems, classified by external factors to which they relate</b>

Table no. 1 - The identified problems that have affected structural instruments

**Chapter 5. Usefulness of Impact Assessments in the Post-Implementation of EU-funded Projects**

We highlighted the need for rigorous evaluation of project impact assessment, we present the difference between monitoring and evaluating the impact of projects, presenting the main challenges and constraints appear in the development of the impact assessment, the benefits of a rigorous assessment, the need to assess the impact of EU funded projects and the usefulness of the information obtained from the impact assessment of the projects. The role of this impact assessment was to improve the outcomes of future projects and to increase the impact of implemented projects on the community.

**Chapter 6. Methodology for assessing the impact of EU-funded projects**

An analysis of project evaluation modalities is carried out, impact assessment analyzes deliberated and unintended effects in the medium and long term. We believe that a rigorous analysis of the impact and the factors that directly contributed to it, is best suited to verifying that the project's objectives are being achieved and whether the desired effects are created. I have presented in this chapter the project impact assessment methodology, namely the steps to be taken in the impact assessment, the description of the main quantitative and qualitative impact assessment methods and the description of other methods frequently used in the evaluation of projects.

## Chapter 7. Feasibility and Impact of EU-funded projects through POR and SOPE programs over the period 2007-2014 on the sustainable development of the Cugir City Community, Alba County.

It approaches the studied practical cases, the feasibility and the impact of the projects implemented and taken as studies case in the present research. The impact analysis of case studies has also attracted a number of recommendations and solutions to improve it and improve project management, a relevant impact factor.

The chapter ends with the presentation of the need to use these tools and project results in the development of the Cugir City Development Strategy for 2014-2020 and the control of the proposed activities according to the time schedule. Following the analysis of the two case studies we also proposed a good practice guide for the effective implementation of projects and their impact on the community.

At the community level in Cugir, based on the questionnaire and with the help of the respondents, the main development projects implemented within the Regional Operational Program of Cugir City Hall on the local community were analyzed.

The main effects of the project on the modernization of seven streets in Cugir and the village of Vinerea, I brought to the attention of the respondents who analyzed their importance for the community. These were the most relevant effects we considered and which we introduced in the questionnaire:

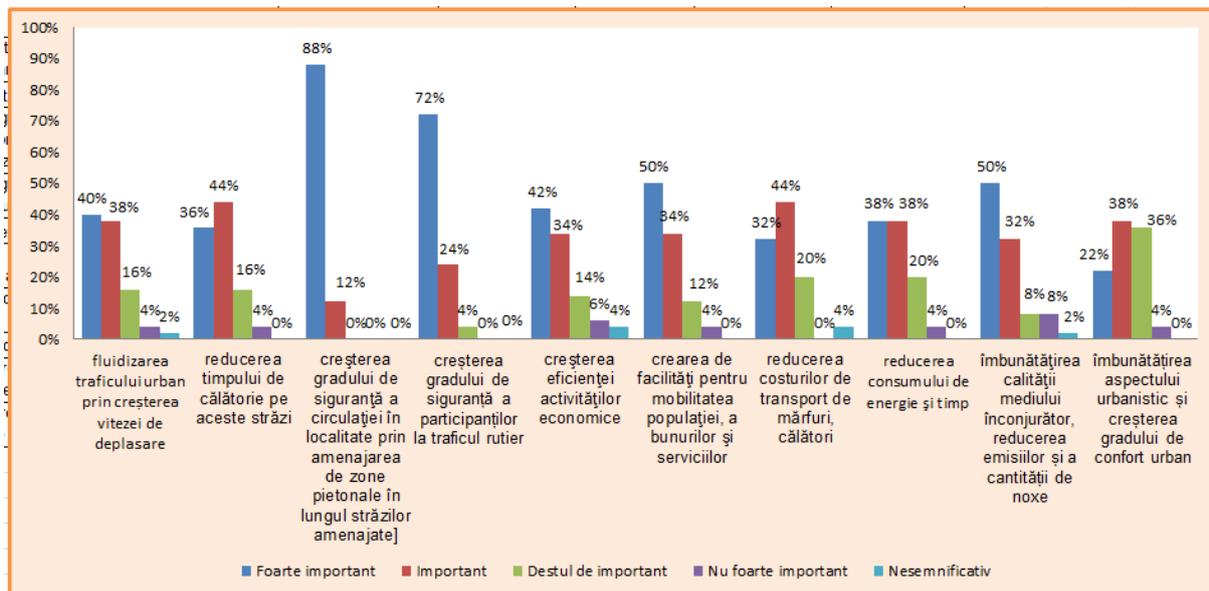


Chart no. 1 The effects generated by the project "Rehabilitation and modernization of the street network" in the town of Cugir, Alba County

52.3% of respondents say that the project "Rehabilitation and Upgrading of the Street Network" in Cugir City, Alba County, will be effective in the first three years after implementation, 18.2% say the project is producing effects in the first five years, 2.3% in the first seven years after implementation, 25% of respondents say the project generates effects more than 10 years after implementation. Based on this statistics, we emphasize the need to improve and expand the effects of projects funded by non-reimbursable funds, especially

infrastructure investments, to catch up with European countries and achieve European development goals.

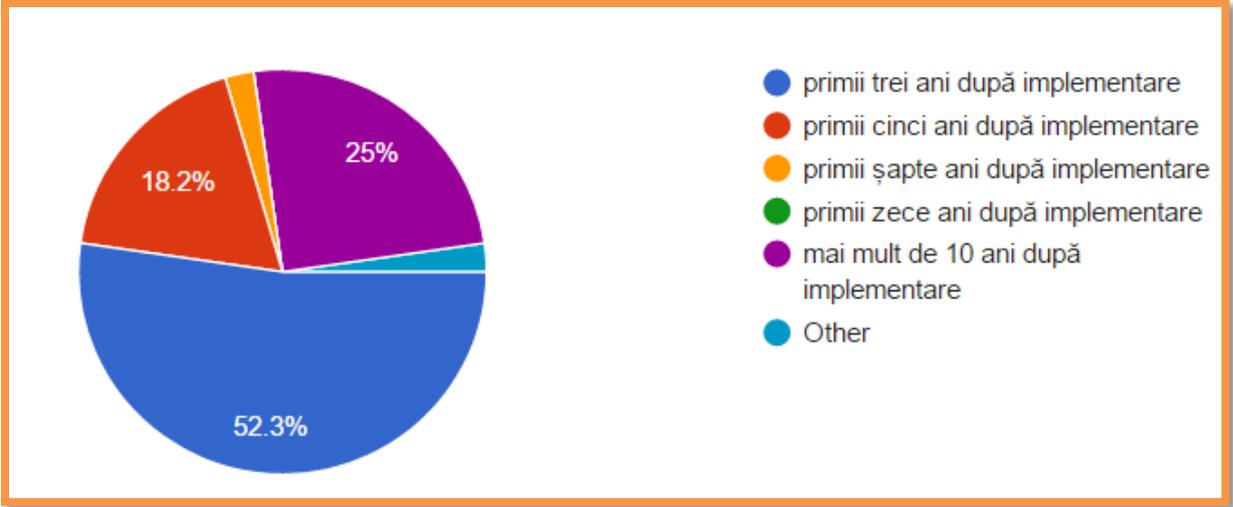


Chart no. 2 The period during which the project "Rehabilitation and modernization of the street network in Cugir City, Alba County" is taking effect.

Based on this statistic, we emphasize the need to improve and extend the effects of projects funded by non-reimbursable funds, especially investment in tourism, to continue financing them from their own sources for the notoriety gained over time. There is also a need to identify other country-specific folk traditions that are funded through various programs that, in addition to promoting the area, will keep national values for a long time and international promotion of local brands that can attract investors of all types.

According to the answers received in the questionnaire, about 93.5% of the analyzed projects generate positive economic effects on Cugir city, 88.2% produce social effects and 57.4% produce positive effects on the environment.

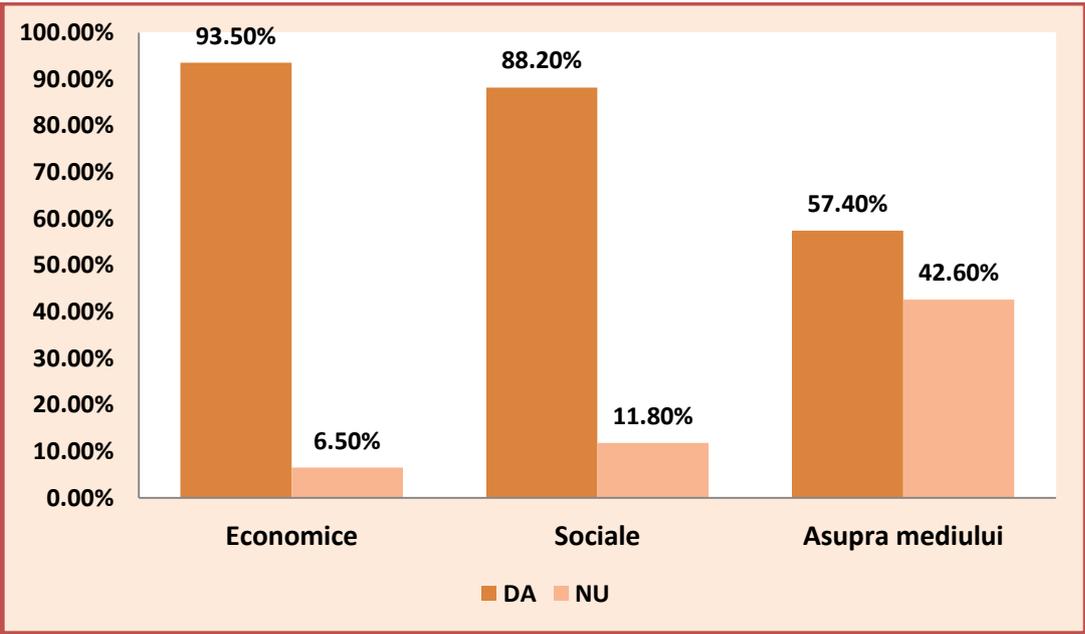


Chart no. 3 The effects of the projects implemented and analyzed

Within the projects implemented through POSCCE and ROP, were analyzed the responses of the persons involved in the project, either those responsible from companies or members of the management team. In total, there were 22 people who responded to this questionnaire and characterized the effects of the projects as:

<b>Positive effects of implemented projects</b>		<b>%</b>
<b>Economic</b>	Developing societies	21,20
	Increase resource efficiency;	16,60
	Increasing productivity and implicitly turnover;	23,80
	Increase customer portfolio;	12,40
	Increase product range;	6,50
	Supporting the business environment towards a competitive one;	10,30
	Improve and increase freight and passenger traffic,	6,60
	Increasing the number of tourists and developing this sector	1,20
	Increase in medical service revenues to the local budget;	3,40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Social</b>	Increasing community-based jobs;	47,25
	Increasing accessibility to improved health services;	8,30
	Improving the health of the population;	20,90
	Positive effects on people in disadvantaged categories;	18,45
	Increasing the safety of the population in traffic;	5,10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	
<b>On the Environment</b>	Efficiency of energy consumption;	8,10
	Use of alternative energy sources in production	32,60
	Reducing carbon emissions and reducing pollution;	55,80
	Conservation of biodiversity and anthropic potential;	1,25
	Collection of medical waste;	1
	Selective collection and increase of recycled waste	1,25
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Chart no. 4 The main effects of the projects implemented through ROP and POSCCE

For a pertinent and consistent assessment of the impact on the Cugir community, the effects of the projects should be analyzed according to the three categories.

	The effects of the generated projects:	Situations where effects have been analyzed or are being analyzed
<b>Economic</b>	93,50 %	72,72 %
<b>Social</b>	88,20 %	45,45 %
<b>Environment</b>	57,40 %	54,54 %

Chart no. 5 Generated effects vs. analyzed effects

In order to identify the most frequent problems that have arisen during the elaboration and implementation of the projects financed on ROP and POSCCE at the level of the Cugir community, we present the assertions that have received a qualifying 1 Total agreement - 5 Total disagreement.

	Acord total	Acord	Indecis	Dezacord	Dezacord total
Has the duration between the submission of the application for funding to the intermediary body and the approval of the project proposal for funding been complied with?	9,09 %	9,09 %	9,09 %	9,09 %	63,63 %
Is the duration between the approval of the project proposal for funding and the signing of the grant agreement appropriate to the project requirements	13,63%	18,18%	54,54%	9,09 %	4,54 %
The level of information requested and the level of bureaucracy in the preparation phase of the application for funding is low	4,54 %	4,54 %	18,18%	27,27 %	45,45 %
For project submission sessions with deadlines, the project submission period provides sufficient time for applicants to prepare the funding dossier.	4,54 %	18,18%	4,54 %	31,81 %	40,90 %
Consider the length of the evaluation period for the application for funding	0%	27,27 %	18,18%	4,54 %	50 %
The support provided by the help desk of the Intermediate Body and the AM ROP for the elaboration of the financing application was adequate	27,27 %	27,27 %	27,27 %	13,63%	4,54 %

The level of bureaucracy in the project implementation phase was appropriate	13,63%	4,54 %	54,54%	13,63%	13,63%
Payments related to refund requests have been made on time.	13,63%	13,63%	45,45 %	13,63%	13,63%
The economic conjuncture during the implementation did not have major consequences on the project.	27,27%	9,09 %	63,63 %	0%	0%
There were no difficulties in supporting the project from its own sources until the reimbursement was received	45,45 %	45,45 %	9,09 %	0%	0%
The effectiveness of the management process led to the Schedule of planned activities, without modification	13,63%	40,90 %	36,36%	9,09 %	0%
Changing the rules on implementation conditions during the project had negative effects on the project.	0 %	36,36%	40,90 %	13,63%	9,09 %
Did the objectives and interventions of the community / community development program in the town of Cugir respond to the needs development program?	72,72%	27,27 %	0%	0%	0%
Supporting technical assistance for project management is sufficient	13,63%	13,63%	13,63%	13,63%	13,63%

Table no. 2 Questionnaire answers

It is very important at the level of the projects presented in the case studies that the indicators established and proposed in the projects can be monitored in the longer term, so that they can follow the profitability and impact of these programs on the communities where they were implemented. Indicators predicted in the case study analyzed for the POSCCE program, are very important to follow:

INDICATORS	Value at beginning of implementation [figures]	Estimated value at the end of the implementation period	Estimated value at the end of the holding period of the required investment (5 years)
<b>Achievement</b>			
Tangible / intangible acquired by the project (number)	0	69 (pcs)	69 (pcs)
Production area upgraded / built through the project (sqm)	0	7.800( sqm)	7.800 (sqm)
<b>Achievement</b>			
Increase of the turnover compared to the last financial year (%)	40 mil RON	175,72(%)	184,68(%)
Number of jobs created	0	190	196
The number of jobs maintained	390	390	390
Increase the export (%)	0	39(%)	46(%)

Chart no. 7 Economic performance indicators

Improvements can be made to equipment and systems, by partial or total replacement, or by upgrading them from the point of view of management and control of operation in optimal parameters. Thus, as a result of the investments and calculations, a centralized table of the energy savings resulted from the implementation of all proposed measures emerged.

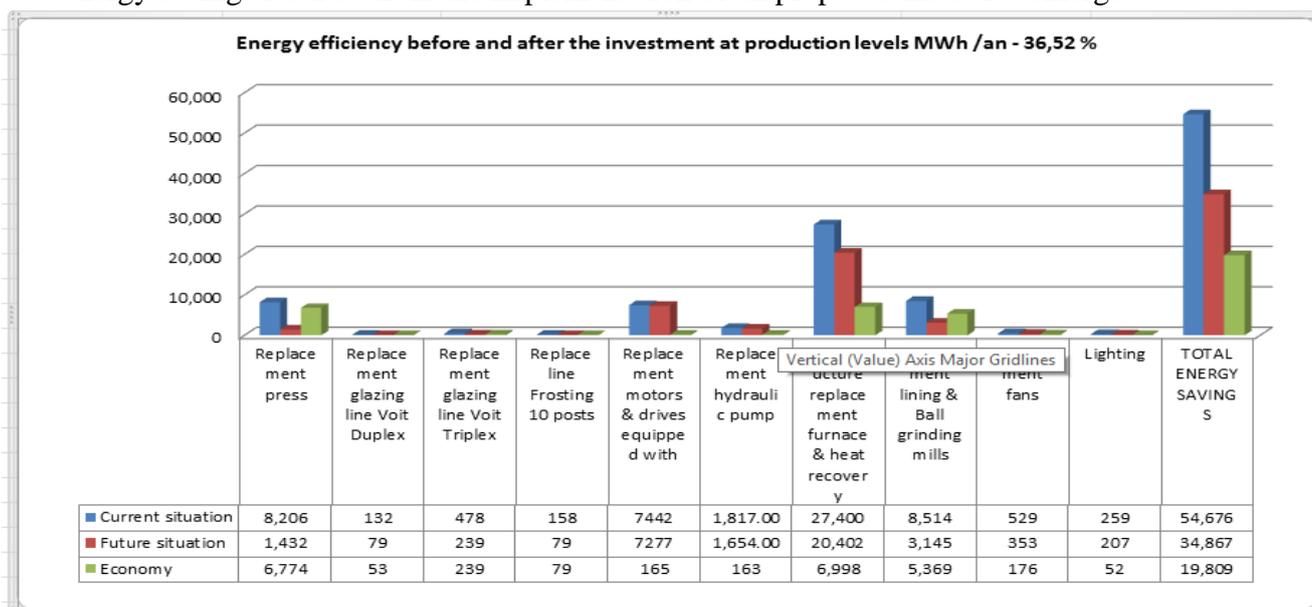


Chart no. 8 Energy efficiency ante and post investment at post-investment production levels Mwh / year

The implementation of the investment, respectively the implementation of measures to improve energy efficiency in the manufacturing process, does not cause the increase in consumption of other resources downstream from the place of application of the measures. A reduction in the energy consumption of about 11,939.91 MWh / year was achieved by the implementation of the project, which represents a saving of 29.89% from the total initial consumption.

It is very important to monitor whether, on the long term, these parameters are close to the values proposed in the feasibility studies carried out, if they respect the financial forecasts made and the cost-effectiveness at the enterprise level in the short, medium and long term. These values can not be pursued without a complex mechanism that would oblige or cause the beneficiary to be aware about the importance of reporting these types of indicators constantly, including after the end of the project's durability period.

## **Chapter 8 Improving Project Management using a Software/Online Application**

In this chapter, a practical solution, an automatism, a tool for project management specific to non-reimbursable funds has been proposed, it is a software solution (application-program) for real and efficient management of the projects with European financing. We tried through this program interfaces, presented as a "print screen", to explain the utility and the necessity of such software in a more and more automated and high-tech era. We have explained the role, the objectives as well as the advantages or disadvantages of this software application.

Regarding the project management software for non-reimbursable projects management, we identified a number of problems to which it responds, problems that once resolved could improve the quality of project implementation and successful implementation of all established project indicators. The main issues that can be solved are:

- The need to track the implementation of the project in real time
- Time efficiency for implementing the project
- Automating the reporting process
- Reporting correct implementation situations
- Transparency towards the institutions managing the projects
- Exceeding the bureaucratization of the beneficiary at the level of project management financed by European funds



Main Panel

In this menu, which is part of the Main Panel, the Project Title and Project Code will be entered. It is a menu where you can add a second project with its or more codes, depending on how many projects it has won and implemented. There are companies that request funding for several programs and have two projects at the same time, or within a few months or 1-2 years. Also, the majority of Local Public Authorities (City Halls, County Councils) have multiple projects across multiple domains, and then it is good to differentiate between them.

So, when the company manager or project manager can choose and see what the situation is at each project in real time, depending on the implementation period of each.

Moreover, the monitoring officer can enter this application from his office without moving to the project beneficiary's headquarters and always watch the implementation stage without ever going on the ground to follow the situation there. This Project Officer will have access only to the project he is in charge with and whose delegated monitoring officer from the AM or IB is.

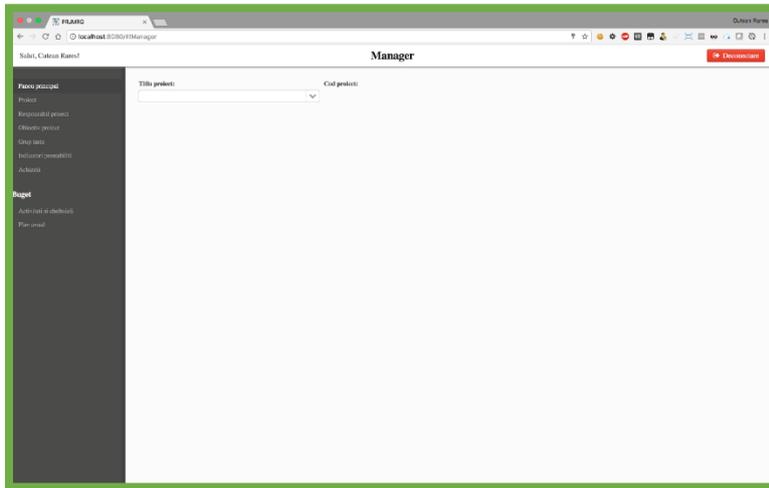


Fig Nr. 1 *Main Panel*

Within the Main Panel menu, there is the possibility that any person in the project management team members can enter the goals they have to fulfill as his job descriptions. The menu has a section that contains:

**Objective 1** - specifying the objective to be met by any member of the project implementation team. **Target** - which is the numerical or percentage value of this goal, so that it can be constantly monitored, monthly, at what value.

**Value** - the value of the indicator will be added until the moment you fulfill the application so that you can get a chart of the actual situation of each task over a certain amount of time. **Observations** - will be mentioned comments on the situation of each objective, why can not be met, where there is a problem, what kind of problem it is, so that the manager can see it, and at the meeting to discuss directly the solving of the problem and not to approach the nature of this problem. We believe that it is important for each team member to pursue the project objectives, to record the percentage or value of the objective achieved so that it does not reach the last months of the implementation period and the targets are not achieved or at least at an advanced stage completion. Also, from this information can be drawn graphs with monthly activities so as to observe the effectiveness of each member of the monthly management team, so that they can optimize and maximize the results.

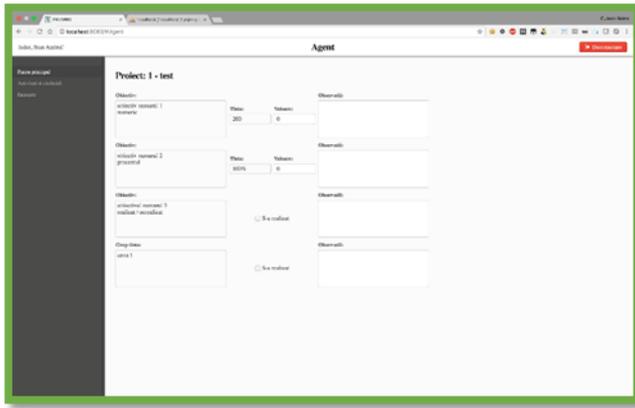


Fig Nr. 2 *Main Panel (1)*

Also within this menu, "Main Panel", there is the the option of creating a graphic that the project manager can activate to see at any time a comparison at the project level. It can ask the application to show the situation at each indicator level compared to the target to be met. This graphic can be highlighted in procurement, the target group of the project, and specific project indicators, etc. It is of great help so that we can track the monthly situation, quarterly or annually, so that conclusions can be drawn on the effectiveness of the project implementation team throughout the project and identifying the main disturbing factors that slow down the implementation or the non-realization of the indicators in certain time periods.

Until now, on the implementation side, there were only assumptions about the project implementation stage, I mean the monitoring officer came to the field and checked the work done, the stage of the indicators, the acquisitions, the target group achieved and proposed a percentage execution at the project level, on each indicator, without using a mathematical formula and completing them in a standardized manual report form, see Figure no. 3. Now, with this project management software / program we will be able to automate these results, which will represent the correct numerical and percentage of the project implementation stage.

This graphic may also be generated by the delegated monitoring officer from the Managing Authority / Intermediate Body or any monitoring officer according to the institution managing the funding program. This program, designed to automate the entire project management process, will support both the implementation team to streamline the entire project management process, and at the same time those who manage these funds and have the correct results regarding the implementation level at any stage of the project.

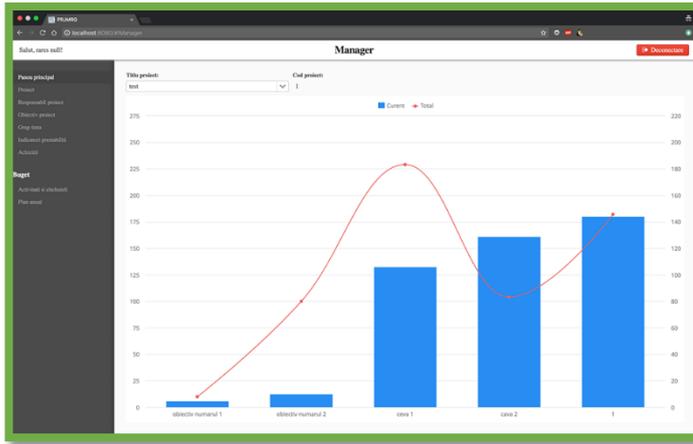


Fig Nr. 3 Main Panel - Grafic

VI. Stadiul activităților prevăzute în contract <sup>3</sup>				
Activitatea din contract	Graficul execuției conform calendarului activităților	Stadiul activităților la data de raportare (Realizate, în curs de execuție (%), neefectuate)	Stadiul implementării (în avans / în termen / întârziată)	Explicații și soluții propuse în vederea reducerii întârzierilor (dacă este necesar)
<b>ACTIVITATEA 1 – Organizarea tehnică și logistică aferentă proiectului</b>	Luna 1			
1.1. Stabilirea spațiului de lucru	Luna 1	Realizate	In termen	
1.2. Întrunirea echipei de proiect, trasarea atribuțiilor și sarcinilor de lucru în cadrul proiectului, stabilirea perioadelor de raportare.	Luna 1	Realizate	In termen	
<b>ACTIVITATEA 2 - Campania de promovare a proiectului, a rezultatelor atinse și a finanțatorilor, de informare a comunității locale și de publicitate</b>	Luna 2-Luna 36			
2.1. Întocmirea documentațiilor pentru achiziția serviciilor de	Luna 2	Realizate	In termen	

MDRT			
PO XVI Procedura de monitorizare	Doc	POI XVIAMGRP	
Emitent: AM POR / DMP	Ediția	2	
	Revizuire	1	
	Data	Marie 2012	
5.1. Întocmirea documentațiilor pentru achiziția serviciilor de realizare a paginii web	Luna 2	Realizate	In termen
5.2. Derularea procesului de achiziție pentru selectarea firmei care se va ocupa de realizarea paginii web	Luna 2	Realizate	In termen
5.3. Încheierea contractului de achiziție servicii	Luna 3	Realizate	In termen
5.4. Realizarea și testarea paginii web a evenimentului	Luna 3-6	Realizate	In termen
<b>ACTIVITATEA 6 – Rambursarea cheltuielilor efectuate</b>	Luna 10 și 12.2012 Luna 22 și 24.2013 Luna 34 și 36.2014		
6.1. Întocmirea cererilor de rambursare a cheltuielilor efectuate	Luna 10.2012 Luna 22.2013 Luna 34.2014	Realizate	In termen
6.2. Rambursarea cheltuielilor efectuate.	Luna 12.2012 Luna 24.2013 Luna 36.2014	In curs de execuție (66%)	In termen

Img Nr. 3 Typical template Beneficiary progress report

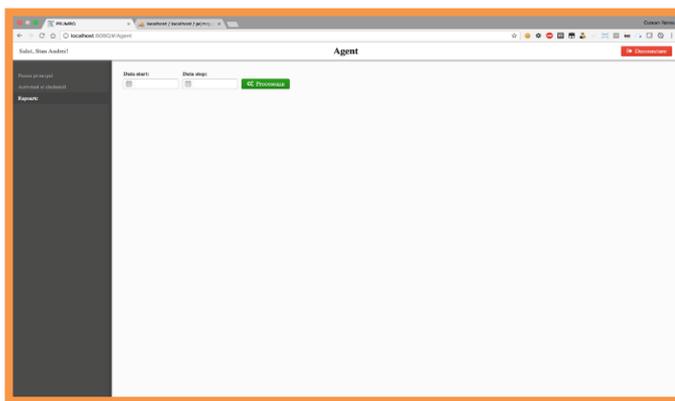


Figura Nr. 4 Reporting period

As it can be seen in the figure above, which has two sections with calendar dates, any member of the implementation team can choose a reporting period. In this way, he can generate a graphical report about the activity carried out during the chosen period. These reports are required to justify the work of each member of the implementation team and report to the project manager on the performance of the tasks.

### Project

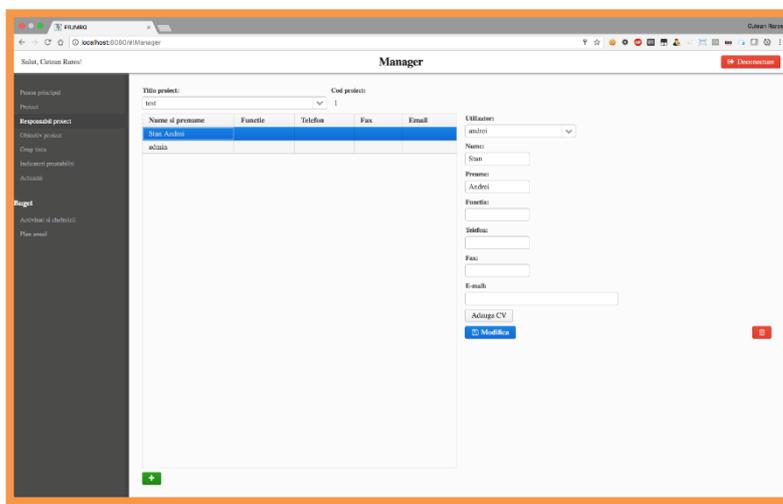
This menu has several sections as follows:



stage of the proposed works or acquisitions. In this way, the project management activity can be streamlined, meetings are convened only when certain implementation problems are identified, based on the information provided by each member of the management team. Meetings may also be convened when the manager is not satisfied with the results displayed in the application that refer to the good implementation of the funding project.

Each member of the implementation team must constantly, on a daily basis, according to the nature of the project, complete all the activities they carry out within the project, according to the job description. The main data to be provided for each member of the project management team is: "Name and Surname", "Job", "Phone", "Fax", "Email", "Curriculum Vitae".

This "Project Manager" menu also includes a user section, depending on who is using the application, so any member of the implementation team will be able to change the user automatically and perform their tasks in the application according to the job description.



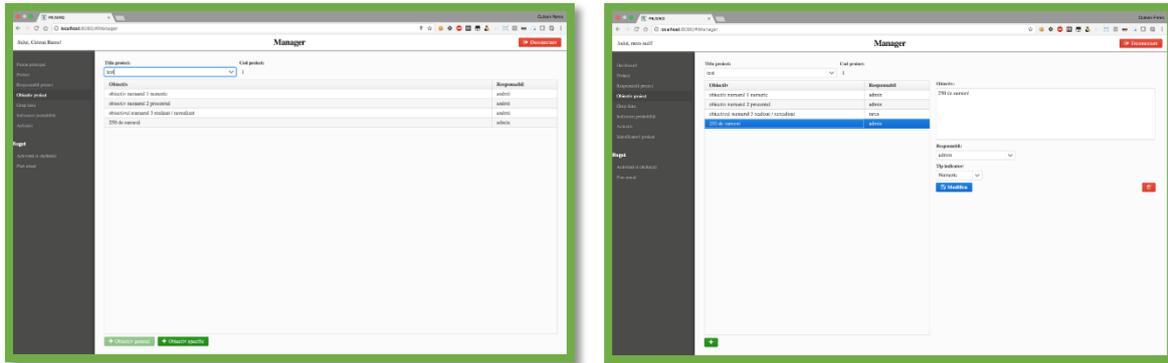
Figură Nr. 7 *Project manager*

### Target group

Within this "Target Group" menu from the project implementation management software, the target group for each project will be mentioned. There are many projects that have target groups to manage, and in most cases these target groups were managed using classical programs (excel, word, etc.). I considered it opportune for the application the introduction of this part which caused problems to many projects. Many of the projects that had a target group did not reach their 100% indicators because they did not manage the situation properly, losing information about the target group and not having a responsible to carry out this task.

This menu includes: "Target group" section - where will be introduced which is the target group according to the contracted financing project. The "Responsible" section - where will be a person responsible for implementing the proposed target group within the project. It is very important that there is always a designated person within the project implementation team who can be monitored by the project manager if the target group task has been carried

out or not or at what level it is achieved. The *"Indicator type"* section - refers to the target group for the project, whether numeric or percentage. It aims to highlight the situation on each type of target group when presenting reports on indicators and target group type.



Figură Nr.19 *Project goal*

### **Predictive indicators**

Any project with European funding, regardless of its nature, has a number of predefined indicators that it proposes with the elaboration of the investment plan and which it assumes when the financing contract is signed. Regardless of their nature, these indicators are decisive in implementing the project and in receiving the entire amount of money to fund it.

During the programmatic period 2014-2020 on certain funding programs, if you did not meet these indicators, a debit note was issued with the recovery of the amount of money allotted to the project.

From the mistakes learned during the implementation period of the projects we considered it appropriate in this application to develop a menu for the monitoring of the project indicators, indicators to be observed and monitored throughout the project implementation and follow-up period (durability).

This menu includes the following sections:

- "Indicator name" - what kind of indicator we have in the project (increase of turnover, reduction of energy consumption, street x that needs to be modernized, increase of the number of cars on the rehabilitated road, etc.);
- "Unit of measurement" - the type of unit of measure (eg km, mp, kw, units, units, etc.);
- "Reference value" - Indicate what is the value of the indicator to be complied with and is specifically set out in the project;
- "Reference Year" - indicate the year until this indicator has to be achieved and met so that there is no problem with the correct implementation of the project.
- "Current value" - indicate the value at different stages of the project implementation so that it is possible to keep track of how much of the predefined indicator has been achieved by the time X. Example: if we have a building hall 40 square meters in a year, then we need to track and complete monthly the approximate surface area so that if only a small part of the project is executed in the 6th month of the project, steps must be taken to complete in time of this indicator. These indicators are directly correlated with the timing of the activities, so if an indicator is to be completed in just a few months of the project implementation period, this term is respected for an effective project management.

- "Target value" - indicate the target value proposed by the project manager, this value may be the same as the reference value or be larger, so that the project's results are even better.
- "Development Region" - it will mention the development region on which this indicator impacts;
- "Development Regions" - if one of the indicators has an impact on several regions of development, this will be mentioned in this section.
- "Responsible" - the person responsible for the preparation of this project indicator should be mentioned so that there is a responsible person for doing so.

If these sections are duly completed by the Project Management Team members then, at any time during the implementation period, what is the degree of achievement of the project indicators, how many of them have been achieved and how many have yet to be completed. These indicators will also be tracked during the project's sustainability period so there is no problem as to how to change them

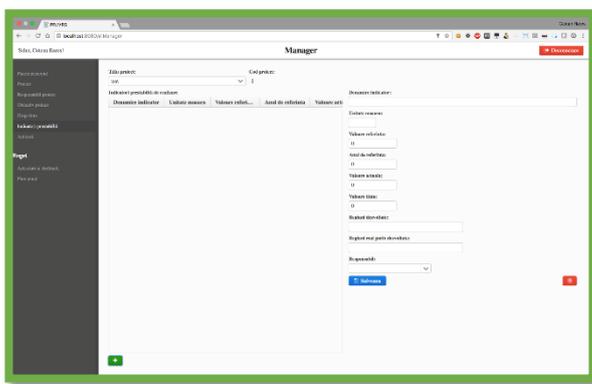


Figura Nr. 10 **Predictive indicators**

### Acquisitions

It contains: "*Title*" - it will mention the type of procurement that will be made under the project; "*Description*" - describe the type of acquisition made in the project that is to be implemented, the services or the goods purchased, by case. "*CPV*" - the CPV code specific to each type of acquisition under the legislation will be mentioned. "*Contract type*" - the type of procurement contract (eg: services, works, equipment, machinery, etc.); "*Value of the contract*" - which is the value of the purchase contract following the procurement procedure; "*Currency*" - the type of currency in which the purchase is made under the procurement contract; "*Procedure type*" - the type of the procurement procedure, if it is a direct purchase or a competitive procedure; "*Data of the procedure publication*" - the date on which the procedure was published on public procurement specific websites or the date on which the direct procurement procedure was initiated; "*Data of the result evaluation publication*" - the date of publication of the result of the eviction of the procurement procedure and the designation of the winner, the date of the minutes of the awarding of the winning bid of the procurement contract. "*Signature date*" - the date of signature Purchase Agreement, "*Transmission Date*" - Date of submission of additional information or clarification on published acquisitions; "*Acquisition value according to the project*" - the amount of the

purchase under the project and the financing contract will be stated. We need to mention this value to see if savings are being made in relation to public procurement carried out within the project and what is their value. "*Responsible*" - mention the person within the implementation team who will handle the specific acquisition dossier, in most cases being the financial officer. "*Start date*" - the date when the procedures for the public procurement began. "*Stop date*" - the date when the public procurement was completed, the date when the signing of the financing contract with the winning bidder was signed. It is necessary to enter these calendar data in order to observe whether the schedule of activities is complied according to the project and the Gantt chart. "*Add PDF*" - add the purchase agreement signed by both parties, the project applicant and the winning bidder. We added this section due to the need for maximum transparency and for the monitoring officer to be able to download this contract whenever they need information on the actual purchases. Also in this PDF file, the entire procurement procedure will be uploaded, so if control is needed from the institutions managing the funding programs, they will not come on the ground and block the project implementation activity, control being carried out based on the documentation uploaded to this program.

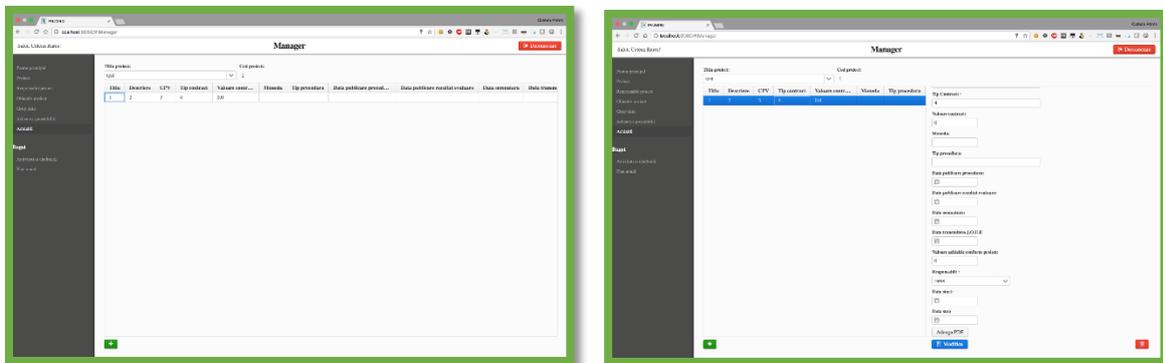


Fig Nr. 11 Acquisitions

### Project indicators

In addition to the predefined indicator menu, we chose to go into the depth of the types of indicators that are very important for an appropriate approach to project management, but also to achieve tangible results once the project implementation is completed. So I created this menu that contains the following sections:

- Result indicators: "*Indicator name*", "*Unit of measure*", "*Reference value*", "*Reference year*", "*Target value*", "*Responsible*"
- Achievement Indicators: "*Indicator name*", "*Unit of measure*", "*Target value*", "*Of which women*", "*Of which men*", "*Responsible*"

Considering the whole set of indicators to be followed, I have considered the possibility of introducing these indicators so that they are recorded once they have been achieved, and moreover, there is clear and structured evidence so that it is easy to monitorize. A good thing is that the project manager, implementation team members, and project monitoring officer can constantly see what the percentage and number of indicators are, so that they can provide clear timeframes for finalizing implementation project.

Another aspect is related to the type of monitored indicator. It can be seen what the number of women or men benefiting from the project implementation is, which greatly helps to produce statistics at national level on the impact of certain specific projects for the population.

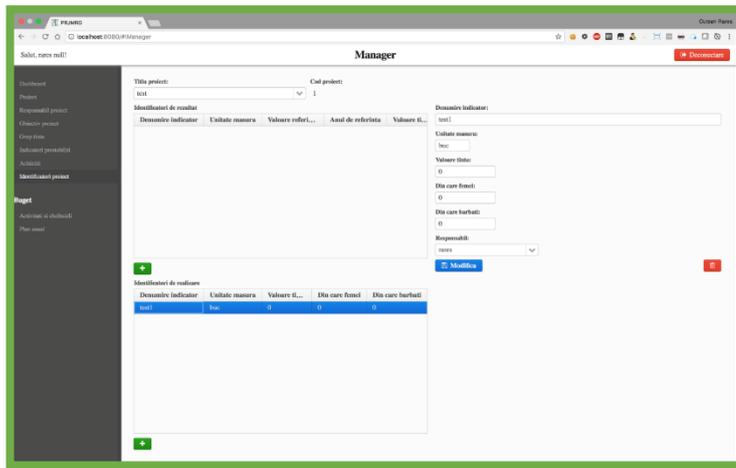


Figura Nr. 12 Project indicators

## Budget

The budget of the project is very important and needs to be managed properly. At the end of the project implementation period, it must be in line with the project budget allocated for each activity, identify the same amounts or lower, meaning that an economy has been achieved in the procurement process.

## Activities and expenses

This menu contains the following sections: "*Activities / Expenses*" - introduced on each section according to the activity graph, each activity proposed in the GANTT diagram, both activities and sub-activities. Also, the expenses incurred in that activity will be mentioned; "*Expenditure description*" - it will indicate on each activity and sub-activity what type of expenditure is being carried out; "*Acquisition*" - the type of acquisition at the level of each activity and sub-activity will be mentioned, eg purchase of construction services, procurement of construction services that are part of the same activity.

This information can also be downloaded from the application purchase as long as the purchase has been split into lots; "*Unit of Measure*" - the unit of measure specific to each type of acquisition within the activities and sub-activities will be noted; "*Amount*" - Specify the value or number of units purchased within each activity or sub-activity so that we can generate at any time a comparison between how much was purchased and how many items had to be purchased under the finance contract; "*Unit Price*" - will state the unit value of each purchased product or service; it can also be imported from the purchase menu; "*Total Value*" - the total value of the products or services for each activity or sub-activity purchased under the

project, it can also be imported from the purchase menu; "VAT amount" - will mention the VAT amount of products or services per activity or subactivity purchased under the project, it can also be imported from the purchase menu.

Within this menu, you can also generate graphs that can present your budget implementation status and purchases over a time schedule, so you can see calendaristically if the GANTT diagram proposed for project implementation is respected.

Both the project manager and each member of the implementation team will complete these sections considering their responsibilities for each section.

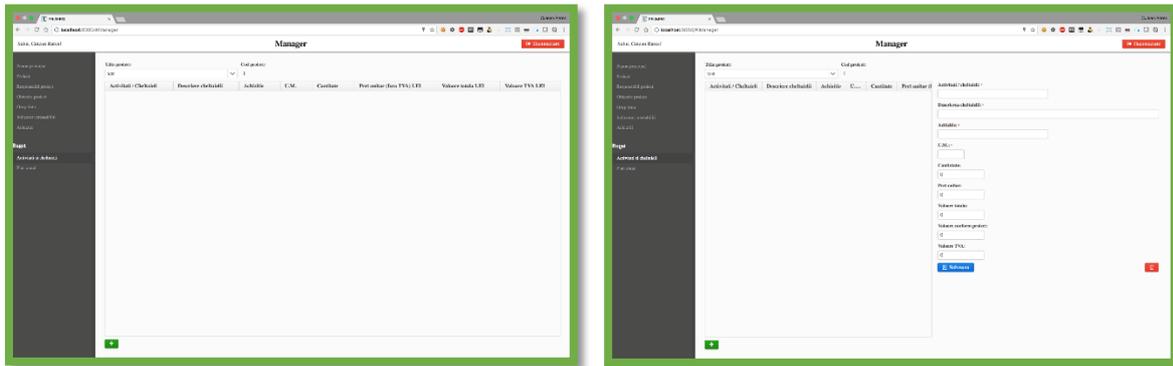


Figure Nr. 13 Activities and expenses

### Annual plan

The "Annual Plan" menu has a particular importance for the monitoring and sustainability part of the implemented project.

This menu contains the following sections: "Year" - it is predefined but can also be added, "Expenses" - it will mention the expenditures of the corresponding year according to the Balance Sheet submitted to the financial administration; "Revenues" - the revenues from the corresponding year according to the Balance Sheet submitted to the financial administration; "Turnover" - the Business Number of the corresponding year according to the Balance Sheet submitted to the financial administration; "Number of employees" - the number of the corresponding year according to the Balance Sheet submitted to the financial administration. This information will be of real help regarding monitoring period in which the project manager has the obligation to complete these indicators, which can be taken from the financial statements submitted after the completion of a full fiscal year. On the other hand, a comparison can be made by generating graphs to compare the results proposed in the financial forecasts prepared during the project design and concrete results in the balance sheet so as to see how realistic the financial forecasts were and on the basis of these comparisons draw up a series of formulas that bring the two steps as close as possible to the result.

The screenshot shows a web application titled 'Manager'. It features a sidebar menu on the left with options like 'Home', 'Project', 'Reports', 'Users', 'Settings', and 'Help'. The main content area displays a table for 'Titlu proiecte' (Project Titles) and 'Cost proiecte' (Project Costs). The table has columns for 'An' (Year), 'Cheltuieli' (Expenditures), 'Cota de achiziție' (Acquisition Rate), 'Venituri' (Revenues), and 'Nivelul de angajare' (Engagement Level). The data for the years 2017 to 2023 is as follows:

An	Cheltuieli	Cota de achiziție	Venituri	Nivelul de angajare
2017	1.000	2.500	3.000	10
2018	0	0	0	0
2019	0	0	0	0
2020	0	0	0	0
2021	0	0	0	0
2022	0	0	0	0
2023	0	0	0	0

Figure Nr. 14 *Annual plan*

### Monitoring

During the monitoring period, the beneficiary is obliged to submit quarterly reports on the status of the project. It is not allowed during the monitoring period to modify downwardly the project indicators made according to the grant application or the project. To be consistent with the legislative and program requirements, we created a menu in this application called "*Monitoring*". This section sends notifications to the project manager to submit the half-year progress report to the institution that manages the project. This report can be generated directly from the application and sent to the project monitoring officer or to the secretariat of the funding program that has been implemented.

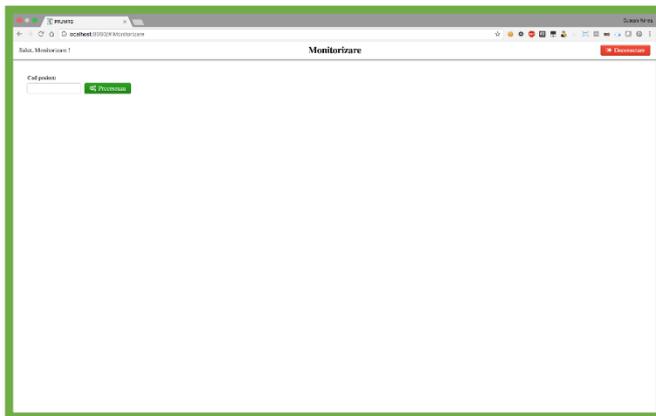


Figure Nr. 15 *Monitoring*

## **Chapter 9. Conclusions and Personal Contributions**

Presents the final conclusions on the theoretical and experimental research, my own recommendations and contributions, the limits of the research, as well as the future directions of the research carried out, as well as the applicability of the proposed software in the research.

By this thesis, we aim to propose a new approach to project management from a theoretical perspective but transformed into a practical application for integrated project and project management within a unic IT platform. This suggested solution is intended to be the equivalent of an **Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system** to ensure the identification of

good practices, real solutions, and efficiency in improving the management of European funded projects.

The conclusions of this paper regarding the problems encountered in the management and implementation of projects funded for the period 2007-2013, the proposals for improvement, the problem-solving solutions and the application for the management of the projects with European funding, will find their applicability in the financial year 2014-2020, which already started.

Applicants and beneficiaries will need to show more availability, professionalism and more efficiency in the management of non-reimbursable funds.

The relevance of this research results both from the timeliness and importance of the issues addressed, the major role that European funds have, but also from the need to complete the current theoretical and practical part with automated specific tools (*software for project management*).

The thesis proposes and wishes to make important contributions to the current state of knowledge in the field, significantly completing the issues related to the impact of European projects and resolving the main issues directly affecting the impact. It responds to a pressing need of the Romanian society, demonstrating its inability to handle the financial resources (funds) made available by the European Union in the financial year 2007 - 2013, and continues to demonstrate this inability in the middle of 2014-2020 .

**The scientific problem solved.** Within the research, components of the project implementation methodology were determined. This fact has led to the improvement and consolidation of the theoretical and applied base of the chosen research field, with the final goal to make the project management more efficient in the beneficiary enterprises but also among the beneficiaries of the Local Public Authorities, who can take the models of good practice in the private field.

Although project management is no longer a relatively new field, but still very topical, it will have to be viewed differently from the perspective of a classic mechanism to attract funding sources for the achievement of strategic objectives. It will have to be a way of institutional development, a new way of strategic thinking, a simpler and more automated mechanism of action that can increase organizational performance, regardless of the entity, and will have a significant impact on the decisive development sustainability of the community in which it operates. Institutions and organizations should adopt these automated tools, such as project management software created and proposed in this research, to reach a different level of organization and implementation, in order to respond to current trends of change and innovation and ultimately to achieve the foreseen strategic objectives.

**The theoretical significance** of this research consists in the contributions made to the presentation of the main problems that have had a major influence on the impact of the projects implemented in the Center Region, problems identified also at the national level. Also, the possible improvement solutions for the evolution, professionalisation and standardization of MPs were considered, which will allow to remedy the existing deficiencies and synthesis of the defining elements of a generic methodological framework, elucidating its particularities in the project development and implementation with non-repayable financing.

**Applicative value** is reflected in the proposed measures for streamlining the project implementation framework, the "*good practice guide*" for project management, "*the project*

*management software application*" developed to create automation and a mechanism to streamline project implementation, which will demonstrate its applicability in the 2014-2020 programming period. These tools are designed to reduce waste of resources, reduce the risks of not implementing correctly and in time the project, to consolidate the structures and assess the success of projects, the impact that they also had and the performance of project management. We intend these to serve as a source for the development and adoption of regulatory and standardization rules at national level and also at the level of beneficiaries, regardless of the size of the projects implemented and the type of beneficiary (public or private).

**The implementation of the scientific results** is determined by the implementation and recognition of scientific and practical value. Research recommendations and conclusions, good practice guide, and software application for project management with non-reimbursable funding can be used by public and private beneficiaries, project implementing organizations, including economic operators, public authorities, international and intergovernmental organizations.

The financial year 2007 - 2013 was not adequately approached either technically or in terms of resource preparation. Unfortunately, as mentioned during this research, the results and impact of the implemented projects was under-expected, which is not desirable in the 2014-2020 financial exercise. At present, these financial resources allocated through the European funds have a major contribution and represent an important driver of economic growth for the development of all sectors, with related fields, as defined in the National Competitiveness Strategy 2014-2020. Thus, the imperative of improving and increasing the rate of absorption of European funds is emerging, this being a solid argument for **necessity in developing this thesis**.

Regarding **the methodology of research**, the thesis starts with a research from secondary sources that combines a set of methods and techniques adapted to the objectives. The first part of the paper contains a bibliographic study made by scientific documentation and goes through several stages. These are: information on sources, data collection, study of sources from which documentation were made, in-depth assessment and study, identification of the main relevant information that is in line with the objective of knowledge of the studied field. Another stage of scientific documentation was the use of sources, which involved the preparation and use of documentary information for the actual research. The main documenting method was the content analysis, adding the comparative method used to highlight the characteristics of the concepts and notions analyzed, adding the quantitative and qualitative research tools.

Analyzing the ultimate goal of this research, we agree that qualitative research complements quantitative research, which is why we conduct a combination of the two types of scientific research in this study, for a complete analysis of how to improve and streamline project management and increase the impact of EU funded projects.

The scientific documentation is combined with direct documentation and has been constituted in the analysis of practical reality providing information on the field in which the research topic is integrated. The analysis and interpretation of the two types of research, qualitative and quantitative, which characterize the practice of the field studied, outlined the idea underlying the construction of the thesis.

Documentation is an imperative stage for research, it is also important for knowing the scientific experience in the area under investigation, it also required documenting the subject, and secondary research based on electronic sources (*databases available on specialized websites, web sites of intermediary bodies, managing authorities, European Commission, etc.*). In the first chapters of this research, documentation using secondary sources is mainly represented by a bibliographic study mainly made of books, studies and research in the field, reports of the institutions, continuing with accessing topical information to deal with this topic on different web portals and proper websites. In the second part of the research we have interpreted and presented the results gathered from the quantitative and qualitative research on the impact of the projects and the management practice of the European projects in the Center Development Region.

### **The research tools used**

The research tools used in this study are as follows:

- a questionnaire focusing on the regional development impact of projects receiving EU grants;
- a questionnaire focused on identifying the most frequent problems that determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of projects funded by the European Union;
- the semi-structured interview.

This scientific approach was intended to draw attention over the link between sustainable development, project management and the impact of EU-funded projects on the communities where it is being implemented, and also on the power of innovation that this concept holds. Analyzing the case studies under this research, the beneficiaries of which were Local Public Authorities and private legal entities, it should be underlined the contribution that this project management **software application** can make to the management of European-funded projects, over successful completion and their impact on the sustainable development of communities.

The institutions training in the field of projects must not have an approach to attracting European funds, but to attract those types of funding that will bring progress for the beneficiaries and to visibly support the beneficiary community. The application of such software that can significantly improve the management and implementation of the projects aims at developing automatism and tools that reduce the excessive percent of bureaucracy, presenting in real time the situation at the level of the implementation of the project, which can follow the project indicators during the period monitoring that can help management authorities to discover the most impactful projects and create new funding lines based on real and measurable results, not just based on undocumented assumptions and predictions.

The current state of research in project management field with European funding has raised an increased interest from a growing number of theoreticians and researchers, who have a common goal, namely achieving a maturity in projects management of non-reimbursable funds, contributing to the development communities in which we live and work.

In line with the Europe 2020 strategy, one of the main priorities is "*smart growth: developing a economy based on knowledge and innovation*", a priority that can only be

achieved through such mechanisms and development concepts that streamline working processes across the field. The approach of the scientific research in this thesis has taken into account the Europe 2020 Strategy, as well as the main objectives proposed by the European Commission for the European Union's evolution. The objective of allocating 3% of EU GDP for research-development investments is crucial for an *"Innovation Union"* in order to improve framework conditions and access to research and innovation funding, to guarantee the possibility of transforming innovative ideas into products and services that create growth, jobs, optimize processes and make our work easier.

Every manager wants to choose the course of his work that will be the best in achieving his company's goal and the success of the project he is implementing. Judging the effectiveness of various possible decisions, certain criteria must be used to measure the performance of the project's work and outcome. As the problems of the real world become extremely complicated, it is necessary to make an abstraction and a simplification of reality in a working model, which I have taken into account for beneficiaries of projects with European funding.

If at the beginning of the financial year 2007 - 2013, the management of projects with non-reimbursable financing developed in the classic version, and the discussion about a special information system for project management was a great act of courage, now this is perfectly achievable and is more than a necessity. It is well known that organizations that have started using the modern technologies in the field of project management, have increased their efficiency by 80% compared to traditional systems, thanks to a better record of time, allocation of resources, management of changes along the way, canceling the possibility of suspending a project in the implementation phase. Moreover, the modern information systems for the management of projects with non-reimbursable financing are supplemented by the knowledge-based tools from the field of artificial intelligence.

The application for implementation and management of European-funded projects proposed by this research will function as an ERP system that will meet ISO standards, tracking and verifying the project implementation process, based on procurement planning and project activities. Management and implementation project can be tracked in real-time on any PC, on tablets, smartphones and at the same time, it can also be accessed by using these devices. This Project Management, Implementation, and Sustainability Project Management Program is dedicated to all applicants for funding from various industries and environments, and contains all the necessary facilities for managing, planning and tracking the achievement of SMART objectives, activities, project indicators and an instantly accurate reporting of the values of the indicators and the stage of project implementation.

In the programmatic exercise 2007-2013, the implementation of a project with European funding was done by a management team using classical tools, so it was normal to have some shortcomings in the implementation and finalization with the maximum yield of a project. Most of the members of the management team had other tasks in addition to those of the funded project, so some of the information was lost, no longer found, it was not known what percentage of the project was implemented, how much remains, etc. All of this was identified

after a thorough research by the project manager or other responsible persons, demonstrating that there was a deficiency in the time of project implementation and the achievement of established indicators.

The need for such an application started from the successful implementation of projects in the Center Development Region, Alba County, Alba Iulia, by a private company, a large enterprise with approximately 700 employees. One of the investments made by this company was the development of an ERP software to streamline and optimize production, but also to track it in real time. This investment has decisively supported the increase of production, its efficiency, the real time tracking of the production process and of the product units at each stage of the technological process.

In order for the financial years 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 to become more profitable for Romania, and the field of projects with non-repayable financing to be seen as a fund meant to bring progress, not just the attraction of European funds or money is important, but also the realisation of adequate spending strategies is needed. It is the responsibility of each community, every city, development area, country to link all investment objects and development directions into an appropriate policy, that will speed up the process of modernization within a strategy that gives a new horizon and another prospect of capitalizing on European funds.

In most communities, a situation occurs where local actors assimilate to the concept of regional development the access to European funds, as an opportunity to access the financing within a certain relational institutional framework, and in most cases if a Local Public Authority opts for a funding program, whatever it is, it will have to comply with the funding rules of the financier and not the other way round, as normal. The 2007-13 financial exercise should have been a very good case study for poor money management but also for allocating it to various areas that did not add value to the community where they were being implemented.

It is important to understand this problem at the macro level and to take into account the indicators of the projects implemented and finalized during the period 2007 - 2013 as a starting point for the development of communities, cities, development areas, national strategies on domains, etc. We considered it appropriate to present a case study from a small community of the Center regional development area, a city in Alba County, a study by which we exposed the syncope of the Institutions that managed the grants and syncope of the project beneficiaries, City Hall, which did not properly manage a funded project and had a negative impact on the beneficiary's budget, even if the investment was made. Unfortunately, the mistakes made by both the beneficiary and the institutions managing the European money led to the failure to meet a consistent number of project indicators, and more so, they were not tracked in order to realistically establish their impact on communities where the project was implemented.

A real situation of the impact of indicators at decentralized level for the projects implemented during 2007 - 2013 could have helped to develop objective, specific financing lines, tailored to the needs of the communities in the 2014-2020 financial year. Financing lines would have

been created depending on the needs of the communities, and the development strategies for 2014-2020 should have been drawn up taking into account the impact of project indicators in the previous period.

## CONCLUSIONS

Project management represents a specialized management area and a modern working method with an important role in ensuring competitive advantage in the current economic environment.

This scientific thesis was intended to highlight the link between development and project management, the innovation power of this concept in order to bring long-term benefits, taking into account the context in which the projects are implemented, in order to meet the development needs of the organizations that implement them, and last but not least, to solve problems.

Regarding the relationship between projects and programs, projects may be independent or included in a program. In this research we focused our attention on the projects included in the Operational Programs existing in Romania during the period 2007 - 2013, with particular emphasis on the Regional Operational Program, the Sectoral Operational Program Increase of Economic Competitiveness and their specific fields. We started from the idea that each project receiving a European grant has a very high defined role and must make its contribution, in one way or another, to the achievement of the objectives of the programs, but also to the achievement of the objectives set by the European policies. In other words, any project proposed for financing any of the programs, is a defining element in the development and improvement of living conditions or services in Romania.

Achieving a maturity in project management contributes to the development of the ability to face the dynamism and complexity of the environment in which we live and work. Under these circumstances, EU-funded projects can contribute to the development of a region through the positive effects on organizations and society. The long-term effects produced intentionally or unintentionally by projects represent in fact its impact.

This paper aims to undertake an in-depth analysis with measurable results within a community that has benefited from projects in several areas, and to track the impact of the projects implemented on its development, which are needed to check whether they produce the effects, if they adequately contribute to the achievement of the objectives of European programs and policies and if the community feels a major improvement in everyday life.

The knowledges gained through impact assessments are useful to European funding recipients, but also to institutions responsible for implementing European programs and projects (Intermediate Bodies, Managing Authorities, Government of Romania and the

European Commission) in order to constantly improve certain theoretical/practical aspects and which have a direct influence on the community where they apply.

Considering the projects analyzed by us through qualitative and quantitative methods over the impact of EU funded projects on the development of Cugir City in Alba County, the method and Cost - Benefit Analysis was used as an assessment. Qualitative impact assessment methods have been used in private beneficiary cases to provide a clearer image of the effects of projects. Specific quantitative methods specific to impact assessment are less well known among those involved in project management who participated in the experimental study.

Accessing European funds triggers a lengthy process, and the effects are also long-term. The preparation of institutions in the field of projects should not be regarded as having the purpose of attracting European funds but of attracting any kind of fund designed to bring progress. In order for the next 2014-2020 period to become more profitable for our country, an important contribution is the realisation of an adequate spending money strategy. It is the responsibility of each country to link all investments directions into an appropriate policy that will speed up the modernization process through a strategy that provides a new horizon and another perspective of capitalizing on European funds.

The research has a particular importance, especially now, when we are facing a new stage of development at European level (2014-2020), a period when impact assessment results may be useful in preparing new programs. A rigorous impact assessment takes into account the context in which the project is being implemented, external factors that can influence the results. Improving the impact of projects can be achieved first and foremost through efficient and effective management.

Following the identification of the main problems faced by the projects during the period 2007-2013, the low absorption rate, the problems identified at the level of the applicant and the management team, we considered that such an online software application dedicated to the management of projects with European funding is imperative to streamline project management.

Thus, if the IT application developed in this research will be implemented by potential future grant beneficiaries, the whole project implementation process could be considerably improved by providing real-time data to both the applicant and the project management authorities .

## PROPOSALS

- Awareness of the financing and implicit development potential of European funds at institutional and national level, a condition for Romania's modernization and progress;
- A better coordination of the activities at the level of the managing authorities leading to the reduction of the bureaucracy in the realisation of the specific reports of the implementation period of the project;

- Revise and simplify procurement procedures, create clearer, more transparent and unitary guides and instructions, that leave no room for interpretation, a way to eliminate subjectivity and reduce the number of mistakes in making acquisitions;
- Promotion of collaboration and partnership relations between intermediary bodies and beneficiaries of financing that will contribute to diminishing the number of delays in the evaluation of submitted projects, checking the procurement activities and making payments;
- Keep in line with the timetable for calls for project applications launching, to enable the mobilization of human and material resources of the beneficiaries for the preparation and projects submission;
- Promote transparency and periodic information of all persons involved in the implementation on the project status and the main changes that have been made to reduce the communication problems between the members of the project team;
- Blending of the labor legislation with the specifics of the projects implementation through the possibility of introducing civil contracts for all the experts involved, for the purpose of their incharging even after the finalization of the projects;
- The efficiency of helpdesk actions by increasing the relevance of the information provided by officials - avoiding copy-paste answers from the applicants' guides and focusing on providing clear and consistent answers to the problems faced by the beneficiaries;
- Enhance the ability to verify projects and reimbursement requests by transferring verification tasks to entities that are already empowered and qualified to carry out these activities, especially the auditor and the accounting expert;
- Avoiding unilateral changes of the contractual conditions, including financial ones, from the Managing Authorities applicable for the projects already under implementation. Such changes have negative effects on project implementation (execution of the chart of activities, ability to honor payment obligations, achievement of project objectives), but also in absorption capacity of funds;
- Increase the capacity of programming, implementation and monitoring of the managing authorities through efficient use of funds for technical assistance (selection of bodies / companies with portfolios and certified results in support of authorities managing European funds). The focus should be on key absorption activities (project evaluation, contracting, verification of pre-financing / reimbursement requests, monitoring);
- Unification of the way of problems approaching by the Regional Intermediate Bodies. There are many situations where, for the same issue, IBs are transmitting different requests/responses, which creates confusion among beneficiaries. It is necessary to create a common implementation methodology and a common knowledge/information/response database to the beneficiaries.

This scientific approach has developed new research perspectives by highlighting the importance of ongoing management of non-reimbursable projects as a science and profession, which allows identifying existing opportunities and ensuring a high level of development in a society that strives for developing a true culture of projects. Thus, any support, effort,

automation in improving the procedures for the implementation of projects with non-repayable financing is welcome and needs to be analyzed in order to ascertain the impact and the benefit it can bring to the level of sustainable development of the community where it is implemented.

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