

## SUCCESS FACTORS AND OBSTACLES IN IMPLEMENTING INTERCOMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Nicoleta LAȘAN

<sup>1</sup>University of Oradea, Doctoral School in Economic Sciences, Oradea, Romania

<sup>2</sup>"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Arad, Romania

[nicoclau2000@yahoo.com](mailto:nicoclau2000@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** *The present paper aims to determine the success factors and obstacles in implementing intercommunity development projects through associations of public authorities. Intercommunity cooperation institutionalizes the cooperation between two or more local public authorities, allowing them to jointly administer certain important services, and in recent years this type of cooperation has been on an upward trend in Europe as well as in Romania. The study is empirical and the research is quantitative, the results reflecting the responses to a questionnaire applied to public authorities members of an intercommunity development association. The first part of the study focuses on literature review, most relevant researches in the field being presented as well as the differences between the existing studies and the present one. The study continues with the analysis of the main success factors and barriers in implementing intercommunity development projects based on the results obtained from the questionnaire applied. The results of the questionnaire were interpreted using the Excel analysis tool. In the end, the main conclusions are drawn, as well as possible future research directions that can complement the present study. The results of the research are useful for improving intercommunity development projects on all levels: preparation, management, communication, implementation, results and final beneficiaries, and to overcome obstacles that have been identified.*

**Keywords:** *project management; success factors; obstacles; intercommunity development projects.*

**JEL Classification:** *R58.*

### 1. Introduction

Intercommunity cooperation institutionalizes the cooperation between two or more local public authorities, allowing them to jointly administer certain important services. In recent years, it has been observed that this type of cooperation is on an upward trend both at the European level and at the level of Romania, the motivations that lead public authorities to cooperate being related to administrative and financial factors. Due to the limited financial autonomy and the lack of administrative capacity, many administrative-territorial units are unable to satisfy the needs of citizens at optimal costs, and one of the most convenient solutions is the association structures. However, intercommunity cooperation offers public authorities a solution to create economies of scale and at the same time allows preserving local autonomy (Allers and van Ommeren, 2016).

Depending on the purpose and objectives established, cooperation can take many forms: from informal networks that have the strict role of facilitating the exchange of information, to extremely well-structured and institutionalized cooperations. Despite the obstacles that prevent cooperation between public authorities, and which most often relate to the lack of trust, the lack of financial resources and the fear of losing autonomy, intercommunity cooperation offers numerous benefits: from better services/products for citizens and facilitating access to grants, to eliminating the risk of duplication of efforts and promote a

culture of cooperation and consultation between public authorities (Council of Europe, 2008).

The role of this research is to determine the success factors and obstacles in the implementation of projects through intercommunity development associations, and the research question was formulated as follows: What are the success factors and obstacles in implementing intercommunity development projects through associations?

To answer the research question, a study was conducted on the implementation of intercommunity development projects through an intercommunity association based in Satu Mare County, Romania. The research focused on the analysis of success factors and obstacles starting from three projects implemented through the Association. A questionnaire was developed, focusing on the one hand on the success factors and on the other hand on the obstacles, and applied to the members of the Association. The research methodology was quantitative, the developed questionnaire being applied to a number of 22 members of the association, administrative-territorial units from Satu Mare County.

## **2. Literature review**

Intercommunity development projects are public project implemented by associations formed out of public authorities. According to Wirick (2009), public projects are those projects that are implemented, administered or supervised by one or more public institutions, while Gasik (2006) prefers a more comprehensive definition according to which public projects are projects implemented for the benefit of the public.

In the context of this paper, we will consider intercommunity development projects as public projects implemented through intercommunity development associations. Intercommunity development projects are much more complex compared to public projects, due to the number of public authorities involved and the delegation of implementation to an external public law body. Despite this complexity, intercommunity development projects can bring about individual and collective outcomes that local communities would not have been able to achieve acting alone. More than that, the numerous partners mean different experiences, knowledge, resources that each involved community can bring as a contribution to the success of a project.

Research on success factors in the implementation of intercommunity development projects reveals that aspects such as formal and informal governance are of crucial importance. While formal governance refers to the specific framework and procedures used in implementing intercommunity projects, informal governance concerns trust. The creation of a coordination structure in the form of intercommunity development associations ensures that the interests of all parties involved are taken into account when writing and implementing projects, but also a greater degree of involvement from the participants (Kujala et al., 2020). Such a coordination structure ensures that each of the parties involved will know what is expected of them and what their role is, provided there is good communication between the coordination structure and the parties involved.

The importance of the management structure for intercommunity development projects is also confirmed by a study carried out in 2017 on collaboration in the field of waste management, according to which the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the projects proved to have an essential role in the case of all the projects analyzed, regardless of the size of the public authorities involved. Other important elements are considered to be the involvement of representatives of the parties involved in project management and the existence of professional managers (Soukopová and Vaceková, 2017).

In a similar analysis regarding the success factors in the implementation of public projects, it is shown that these are: project management actions (communication systems, planning, appropriate organizational structures, quality measurement, etc.), project procedures

(procurement methods and strategies), the human factor (experience, involvement, etc.), project factors (type, size, nature and complexity of the project), and external factors (social, economic, legal, political, physical and technological) (Chan et al., 2004).

In a study carried out in 2021 on the success factors and barriers in the implementation of intermunicipal cooperation projects for the development of social infrastructure, in the absence of the existence of a coordination structure such as the intercommunity development association, Eikeland and Maeland concluded that the success factors and barriers can be grouped into the following categories: end users, employees, management, results, organization and collaboration (Eikeland and Maeland, 2021). Some of these categories will also be used in this case study, adding an element that makes the implementation of intercommunity development projects even more complex, namely the existence of an intercommunity development association responsible for preparing and implementing projects that target several administrative units.

Regarding the barriers in the implementation of intercommunity development projects, an analysis carried out in 2019 regarding the barriers in the implementation of integrated projects, reveals the fact that there are many such obstacles, which can be classified into 3 large groups, as follows: capital factors (financial barriers); organizational factors (managerial barriers), contractual barriers, educational barriers, communication barriers and technological barriers, environmental or external factors (cultural, legal and political) (Kahvandi et. al, 2019).

Other elements that could affect the success of a project is the neglect of partners by the coordination structure, in this case the intercommunity development association. The coordination structure must be careful in achieving a good balance between the freedom granted to the parties involved and their control/coordination. Time pressure can also be a barrier to project implementation, as most intercommunity development projects are implemented within a limited period of time. We should also not omit factors such as communication and cooperation, which can crucially affect the implementation of such a project.

### **3. Success factors and obstacles in implementing intercommunity development projects**

In order to determine the main success factors and obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects through associative structures, a questionnaire containing a number of 41 questions was developed. The questions were grouped according to the main categories of success factors/obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects, namely: project preparation (with questions focusing on drafting/preparing the project), project management (with questions focusing on project management), communication (focusing on communication between the management team from the Association and the managers from the partners), project implementation (questions regarding the project implementation phase), project results (referring to the results obtained as a result of project implementation), and final beneficiaries/target group (looking at the relationship and benefits of the project to the target group).

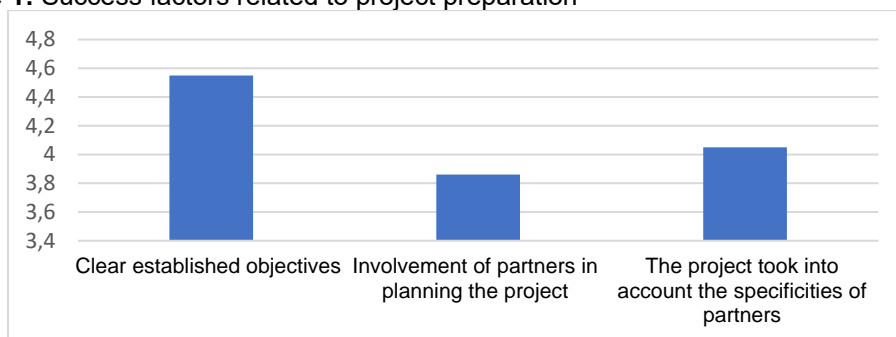
The questionnaire was applied online to a sample of 22 representatives of the members an intercommunity association based in Satu Mare County. The results of the questionnaire were interpreted using the Excel analysis tool. Respondents were asked to check answers from 1 to 5, where 1 meant that they did not agree at all with that statement and 5 that they strongly agreed with that statement. In what follows, we will analyze the answers on the main categories of success factors considered.

With regard to the project preparation phase, questions were asked regarding the project development phase, which is considered essential for the success of any project. The results of the questionnaire show that the clear establishment of the project's objectives is

considered one of the success factors, along with the particularities of each partner involved in the project.

The lowest median score was obtained for the question regarding the involvement of partners in project planning. This results implies that it is not considered as an important factor as the other two factors related to the preparation of the project, probably also due to the fact that the partners expect the Association to prepare the project, without the direct involvement of the partners, but taking into account the particularities of each one.

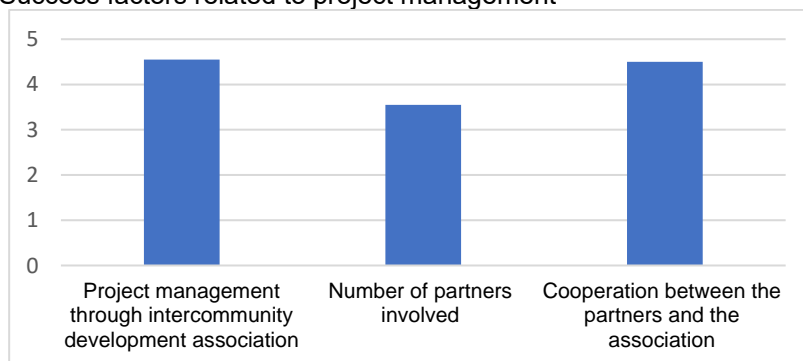
**Figure 1:** Success factors related to project preparation



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The second category of success factors concerned the project management in general. Figure 2 shows that the best scores were obtained for the questions that concerned the management of the project through the intercommunity development association and the cooperation between the management team and the member partners, while the number of co-opted partners did not receive an equally good score, with the result that this aspect is not considered to be as important as the other two in terms of project management.

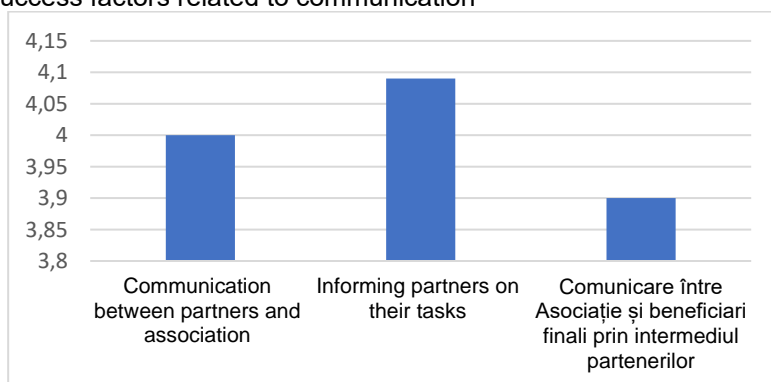
**Figure 2:** Success factors related to project management



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The third category of success factors taken into account were those related to the communication between the Association's team and the partners as well as the final beneficiaries. All success factors in the implementation of intercommunity development projects related to communication achieved very good and very close scores. The partners appreciated that for the successful implementation of intercommunity development projects, good communication is needed between the management team of the Association and the partners involved, informing the partners about their responsibilities in the implementation of the projects, but also communication between the Association and final beneficiaries/target group through partners.

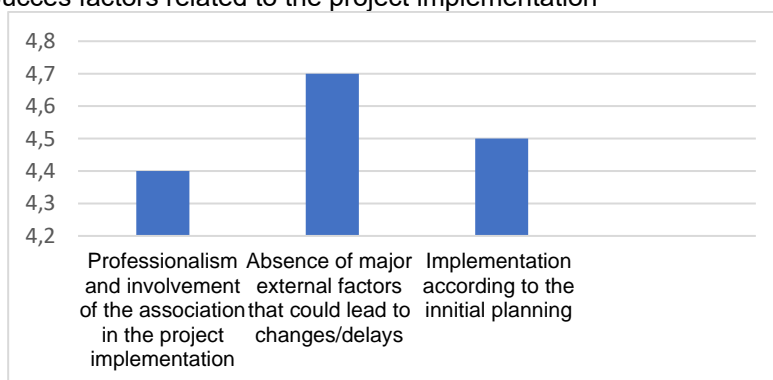
**Figure 3:** Success factors related to communication



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The fourth category of success factors concerned the implementation phase of the project. The respondents appreciated that the professionalism and involvement of the association team, and the absence of external factors that cause changes/delays during the implementation period are major contributors to the success of intercommunity development projects, while the implementation of the project according to the initial planning in terms of resources and time obtained a slightly lower score in compared to the first two factors.

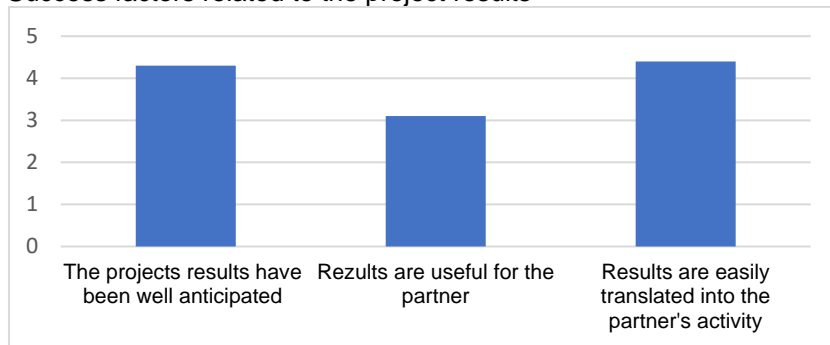
**Figure 4:** Success factors related to the project implementation



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The penultimate category of success factors concerned the results of the project. It is interesting to note that although the majority of respondents consider that one of the success factors of intercommunity development projects is the correspondence between the results obtained as a result of project implementation and those anticipated, and that it is important that these results are useful for the partner, a much lower score was obtained for the question that concerned the transposition of the project results at the level of the administrative unit.

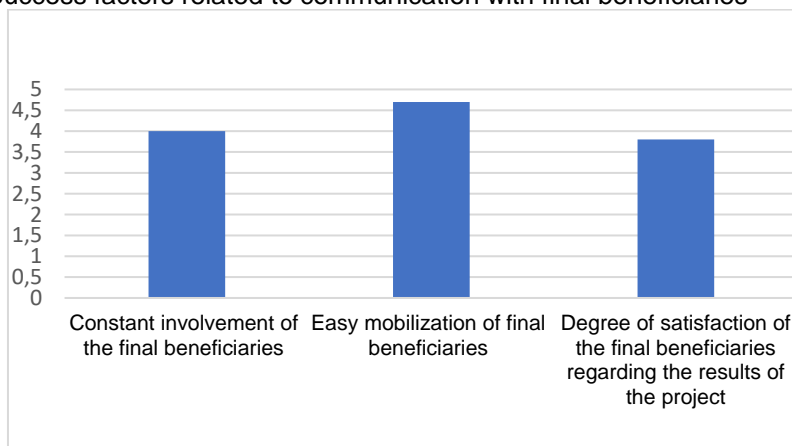
**Figure 5:** Success factors related to the project results



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The last category of success factors considered the communication with the final beneficiaries and their perception of the project. The respondents appreciated that the success of a project largely depends on the ease with which the target group is mobilized to participate in the project activities, while the constant information of the target group about the activities and their degree of satisfaction is not so important in the implementation of intercommunity development projects.

**Figure 6:** Success factors related to communication with final beneficiaries



Source: Own processing of the questionnaire results.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the most common obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects are considered to be:

- the lack of clarity in establishing the objectives of the project during the drafting period;
- not taking into account the particularities of each partner in the project preparation stage;
- the high number of partners targeted by the intercommunity development project, a fact that made the implementation of the project difficult;
- failure to inform the employees from the partners about their responsibilities;
- reluctance shown by the employees of the partners during the implementation of the project;
- transposition of the project results into the partner's activity;
- the occurrence of changes/delays in project implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic;

- difficult mobilization of the target group/final beneficiaries to participate in the project activities, the latter being probably one of the biggest shortcomings/obstacles in the implementation of inter-community development projects.

The highest scores were obtained for the obstacles focusing on: the number of partners targeted by the project; the reluctance shown by the employees of the partners during the implementation of the project, the changes/delays caused by the COVID 19 pandemic and the difficult mobilization of the target group/final beneficiaries to participate in the activities of the intercommunity development project.

#### 4. Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to determine what are the success factors and obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects through intercommunity development associations.

The results of the research seem to confirm that the success of projects is no longer measured strictly in terms of compliance with the budget, time period and indicators (Albert et al., 2017), but rather success is a combination of these hard factors and factors related to the implementation of the project, results obtained but also effects on the target group or the final beneficiaries.

The research revealed that from the perspective of the members of the associative structures, the success factors in the implementation of intercommunity development projects are found in all the 6 listed categories equally, but of greater importance are: establishing clear project objectives, project management through the structures associations, the collaboration between the association team and partners, informing the partners about their responsibilities, transposing the project results into the partners' activity, but also obtaining project results according to the initial planning.

The results of the questionnaire revealed that the most common obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects are considered to be: the lack of clarity in establishing the project objectives during the drafting period, the failure to take into account the particularities of each partner in the project preparation stage, the large number of partners targeted by the intercommunity development project, which made it difficult to implement the project, reluctance shown by the partners' employees during the implementation of the project, the transposition of the project's results into the partner's activity, the occurrence of changes/delays in the project implementation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the difficult mobilization of the target group/final beneficiaries to participate in the project activities, the latter being probably one of the biggest shortcomings/obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects.

It must be recognized, however, that although the research is useful, it is limited compared to the vast field on which it focuses. This research only considered the perception of members of one association regarding the success factors and obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects, and due to this limitation, the quantitative research could be expanded in the future to study the perception of members of other associative structures. Moreover, the qualitative research carried out in this study should also be complemented with a qualitative view that would allow respondents to add to the equation other success factors or obstacles that may have been omitted in this research. Despite these shortcomings and limitations of the research carried out, the obtained results have practical utility. First of all, the perception of success factors in the implementation of intercommunity development projects through collaborative structures was identified, studies of this kind being limited in number. Secondly, the study identified the main obstacles in the implementation of this type of projects. The identification of success factors and obstacles in the implementation of intercommunity development projects allows an improvement of this type of projects on all levels: preparation, management, communication, implementation, results and final beneficiaries.

## References

1. Albert, M., Balve, P., Spang, K. (2017). "Evaluation of project success: A structured literature review", *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, No. 10(4), pp. 796–821.
2. Allers, M, van Ommeren, B. (2016). "Intermunicipal cooperation, municipal amalgamation and the price of credit", *Local Government Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 5, pp. 717–738.
3. Chan, et al. (2004). *Determining Critical Success Factors of Project Management Practice: A conceptual Framework*,. [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/variables-for-project-Success-Source-Chan-et-al-2004\\_fig1\\_275537604](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/variables-for-project-Success-Source-Chan-et-al-2004_fig1_275537604).
4. Council of Europe (2008). *Good practices in intermunicipal co-operation in Europe*. Strassbourg.
5. Eikeland, M., Maeland M.B. (2021). *Success factors of implementing collaborative public sector projects*, University Agder.
6. Gasik, S. (2016). "Are public projects different than projects in other sectors? preliminary results of empirical research", *Procedia Computer Science*, No. 100, pp. 399–406.
7. Kahvandi, Z., Saghatforoush, E., Mahoud, M., Preece, C. (2019). "Analysis of the Barriers to the Implementation of Integrated Project Delivery (IPD): A Meta-Synthesis Approach", *Journal of Engineering, Project, and Production Management*, Vol. 9, pp. 2-11.
8. Kujala, J., Aaltonen, K., Gotcheva, N., Lahdenperä, P. (2020). "Dimensions of governance in interorganizational project networks", *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 625-651.
9. Soukopová, J., Vaceková, G. (2017). "Internal Factors of Intermunicipal Cooperation: What matters most and why?", *Local Government Studies*, No. 44, pp. 105-126.
10. Wirick, D. (2009). *Public-Sector Project Management: Meeting the Challenges and Achieving Results*. John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, USA.