

# Public Policy Implementation for Rural Development

Subjects: [Development Studies](#)

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Rural development is a problem of social and economic nature, which is required to be addressed in a manner taking into account its complexity. This development is related to planning and policy actions which central problem is (Ackoff 1977) how to make the proposed planning solutions accepted and implemented effectively. In rural context, this means to deal with a set of stakeholders with different education levels, purposes and influences, and with a set of standards which is lower than that of urban or national development.

rural development

public policy

social improvement

inclusive growth

policy relationship

hierarchical representation

## 1. Introduction

Rural development problems have a social and cultural profile ([Maiorano et al. 2022](#)), where it is required to know and understand the historical relationships and mediation that outline dominant groups often exacerbating poverty in the most rural and isolated sectors of society ([Zamarreño-Aramendia et al. 2021](#)). Development, in a social and collective meaning, can be defined as "movement upward of the entire social system" (Myrdal 1974) that implies a gain of competences (Ackoff, 1989). In other words, researchers can define rural development as the collective improvement of rural communities in a multiple criteria environment (wealth, health, competencies, infrastructure, social cohesion, etc.) that implies a social advancement, a gain of competencies and a better condition of life for the community, with the resources this community has or acquires. Development is made by locals for locals, so public policies and politics support the local development but it needs to be initiated and carried out by the interested stakeholders. Those stakeholders are in general: (1) local inhabitants (farmers, local entrepreneurs and workers, and their families, including young and old non-active people), (2) local authorities, (3) local companies, (3) local associations and, as supporting stakeholders, (4) policy makers at regional and national level and external stakeholders such as (5) NGOs, (6) national companies or (7) academic actors, among others. The role of policy makers is crucial since it has an important impact on the acceptability and implementation of development actions (Ackoff 1977).

The different policy actions of the rural development can be of various nature ([Pangratie et al. 2020](#)), mainly related to relationships between stakeholders or networks ([Murdoch 2000](#)), information and communication technologies ([Naldi et al. 2015](#); [Salemink et al. 2017](#)), infrastructure development ([Barrios 2008](#); [Liu et al. 2022](#)), capability

development ([Naldi et al. 2015](#); [Torre et al. 2023](#)), public policy making ([De Janvry et al. 2002](#)) or financial issues ([Padmanabhan 1988](#)), among others. Those actions are at different maturity levels and relate directly to the conditions of life of rural farmers, the main population of those areas ([Brauer and Dymitrow 2014](#)). The discussion raised by ([Maître 2022](#)) even has to do with the relationship between rural poverty and hierarchical relationships within poor farming families. The author raises a relationship even with access to financing and problematizes access to microfinancing as an unsuccessful strategy so that these families can access the necessary resources to develop their productive activities. The foregoing raises the hypothesis that rural development must be imperatively linked to the regional and national development plans from governments. Some works formulate the need to formulate a public policy for rural development, mainly in developing countries where those areas represent a major potential in fruits, vegetable and livestock production, on which the main cities within the country depend ([Drescher 2002](#)). To answer that need, an Integral Rural Development Public Policy needs to be formulated based on the efforts of various institutions and the rural community of the area under study, with a planning horizon of 10 to 20 years ([Belshaw 1977](#); [Popper 1993](#)). In the development of public policies, an interactive planning and problem-solving approach will add more robustness to the solutions proposed, since they will deal more suitably with the real needs of the different stakeholders ([Ackoff 1977](#)). The bases of interactive planning and the interests of structuring needs and problems can be seen in ([Ackoff 1997](#)). This approach has numerous applications in the so-called social systems ([Jackson 1982](#)), including that of agricultural development ([Jiménez 1992](#)), mainly from a cooperative, economic perspective ([Rojas Palacios et al. 2022](#)). [Ashley and Maxwell \(2001\)](#) propose a vision of rethinking agricultural development proposing a set of indicators and strategies, as well as an analysis method based in narratives. The impacts of technologies and their opportunities in rural policy making are examined in ([Salemink et al. 2017](#)) via a systematic literature review. [Abreu and Mesias \(2020\)](#) propose a framework to assess rural development with a set of unified indicators, completing the works of ([Belshaw 1977](#); [Popper 1993](#); [Ashley and Maxwell 2001](#)). Sustainability in agriculture and livestock is also an important issue to consider in rural development, mainly the implications of sustainable practices in rural development ([Auliah et al. 2022](#)). Last but not least, ([Castro-Arce and Vanclay 2020](#)) introduce the notion of social innovation and propose a framework to support rural development on a community perspective, and ([Ogujiuba and Mngometulu 2022](#)) develop the notion of social investment and study their influences in rural development, which is not always positive.

## 2. The Vectors of Rural Development

Studies on rural development are numerous to point out the need of a suitable policy proposal and deployment to ensure the efficient development of rural regions ([De Janvry et al. 2002](#)). Those policies are developed following two main complementary and connected visions: that of inclusive growth and that of social improvement.

Since reducing inequality has become a major concern of development policies ([Ali and Son 2007](#)), the first notion that appears to be directly related to the development of rural policies is that of **inclusive growth**, which can be defined as an *“economic growth that is distributed fairly across society and creates opportunities for all, as well as its potential ability to reduce the widened income gap that exists between high- and low-skilled jobs”* ([Heshmati et al. 2019](#)). Inclusive growth needs, then, the deployment of financial and economic policies that reduce socio-

economic inequalities and at the same time increase productivity ([Thomas and Hedrick-Wong 2019](#)), and aim to reduce barriers to inclusion through access to financial support and knowledge. To that end, the different policies and actions can be categorized in basic inputs (those that are crucial to reducing inequalities), enabling inputs (those that enable basic inputs and contribute to a fair increase of productivity) and complementary inputs (those that support basic and enabling inputs to make inclusive growth continuous, accepted, and sustainable). Those inputs can be of a purely financial nature ([Reddy 2010](#)), of a socio-economic nature, mainly related to labor ([Kvist 2020](#)), or of a resource access nature ([Ghanem 2014](#)). Recent developments in inclusive growth are seen in ([Thomas and Hedrick-Wong 2019](#); [Heshmati et al. 2019](#)).

But as Ackoff (2004) states, development and growth are two different notions. While growth focuses on wealth increasing, and can be explained by a matter of number and size, development is a matter of improvement, which is compulsorily related to the acquisition of competencies. For that reason, the other notion related to development policies is that of **social improvement**, which remains more heterogeneous since there are various slight variants of its signification ([Weiss 2000](#)), however, it is also an important vision of rural development policy. In this vision, financial inclusion and economic growth is not a goal itself but a part of a more complex system (which can be considered as a social system in the sense of [Gharajedaghi and Ackoff 1984](#)). A social system is seen as a system in which parts can decide (i.e., are purposeful, since they are made by human beings or groups of humans) and the whole is also purposeful ([Ackoff and Emery 2005](#); [Ulrich and Probst 2012](#)), so the social improvement of a community (seen as a social system) needs to take into account the individual development of each of its parts (and their decision implications) as well as the group decision and improvement issues. Improvement is a primal goal of policy making ([Sweet 2011](#)) and can be of different nature. Social improvement englobes, then, all categories of improvement that allow to improve globally a social system, mainly a community, towards policies and programs ([Beyer 1969](#)). Thus, social improvement implies individual improvement of families ([Massie 1849](#)). According to ([Collins and Swann 2003](#)) social improvement is a collective action that reflects a positive change on communities. This social improvement is then related to individual issues, like personal health ([Beyer 1969](#)) or education ([Reimers 2013](#)), to family issues, like the family's nutrition or wealth ([Maldonado and Moya 2013](#)), and community issues, related to the evolution of the social system that individuals, families, economic, and political stakeholders create around a common territory ([Lawson 1993](#)). However, both growth and competences are needed for rural development, since wealth and competencies are necessary for making evolving rural areas towards a more sustainable future (Balanovska et al., 2018).

In both visions, the development of local populations passes through a series of levers and vectors ([McCann 2002](#)), which are the conditions and needs for which a community can pursue an inclusive and social development. Various authors deal with those elements that drive development and influence policy making, showing that their natures and relationships are different and can be categorized ([Terluin and Roza 2010](#); [Hălbac-Cotoară-Zamfir et al. 2019](#)). Those levers and vectors are not policies but elements that compose them, that can enable or push the development when they are present or limit it when not. Different works in literature studied those levers and vectors in different ways, and most of them agree on the following categories:

- Individual financial levers, like the access to financial resources, subsidies, specific loans, banking strategies and other financing possibilities for individual to develop rural activities ([Reddy 2010](#); [Tabares et al. 2022](#)).
- Family socio-economic improvement, i.e., other economic actions to increase the individual and familial wealth, like employment creation, support to family income or economic improvement of familial units ([Briones 2013](#); [Kvist 2020](#)).
- Individual health and nutrition ([World Health Organization 1961](#)), like food assistance programs, increasing of individual health follow-up or giving basic and enabling health conditions to individuals and families ([Lawson 1993](#); [Gonzalez-Feliu et al. 2018](#)).
- Education and training ([Maldonado-Mariscal and Alijew 2023](#)), in terms of access to basic education at both the elementary/high school ([Lawson 1993](#)) and university level ([Umpleby and Shandruk 2013](#)), as well as of specific education and training programs for local rural populations ([Collett and Gale 2009](#)).
- Community enabling and social cohesion ([Shucksmith and Chapman 1998](#)), which aim to develop the community and increase the links between their members ([Hart et al. 2014](#)).
- Cultural issues ([McCann 2002](#)), aiming at maintaining and developing the culture specificities of rural communities.
- Agricultural resource improvement, i.e., increasing access to fields, water, crops and other land and water resources necessary for agriculture.
- Political drivers ([Giessen 2010](#)), i.e., policy and political actions and levers that support the development of a territory, such as relationships between local and national politics, the development of laws, or collaborative policy-making forums, among others.
- Other issues not included above, like coordination among stakeholders ([Reina-Usuga et al. 2012](#)), communication ([Meyer 2003](#)) or participation issues ([Oakley and Marsden 1984](#)), among others.

Most works see three main sets of conditions for both individual (or familial) and regional development. The first is health and nutrition ([World Health Organization 1961](#)), since malnutrition, sickness, and lack of sleep, among others, have a negative impact on concentration and generally on individual effectiveness ([Boliko 2019](#)), so they condition the predisposal of each individual to social improvement ([Maldonado and Moya 2013](#)). The second is that of wealth ([Ratner 2019](#)), since the economic capabilities of individuals have a strong influence on their capacities of improvement ([Bebbington 1999](#)). Some authors give a particular importance to economic and financial capabilities, which are the basis of inclusive growth ([Thomas and Hedrick-Wong 2019](#); [Ghanem 2014](#)) and one of the reasons behind the most accepted development policies, i.e., subsidies, employment creation, support to trade, etc. Third, the improvement of individual (family) capabilities, through education and training ([Lawson 1993](#)) or through entrepreneurship capabilities ([Tabares et al. 2022](#)) are required to have an improvement that lasts throughout the

timeline, and is seen as one of the main conditions of social improvement ([Bebbington 1999](#)). Those three categories of conditions (or drivers) are related: health is crucial to ensure that individuals contribute to work (then earn money) and study or train (so to education); at the same time, without wealth, health and nutrition can be compromised and, without public support, so can education; finally, education is generally required to increase wealth via a more qualified workforce. From these reasons, researchers can consider that financial levers (1), socio-economic improvement (2), individual health and nutrition (3), and education and training (4) are the basic inputs that need to be considered in policy making, and at the same time can be seen as enabling inputs. For that reason, ([Maldonado and Moya 2013](#); [Gonzalez-Feliu et al. 2018](#)) define a set of policy actions for rural improvement, which can be completed from works cited above to include the consideration of the four sets of levers and vectors researchers have discussed, leading to the following categories of initiatives for social improvement:

- Primary economic improvement, aiming at increasing the financial and socio-economic capabilities of individuals and families.
- Cost reduction to increase nutrition and health accessibility, in order to improve individual and family health conditions and improve their socio-economic conditions.
- Food access initiatives, as well as health access initiatives, giving the possibility to families of improving their health and nutrition by directly providing part of their needs instead of economic support.
- Education, training, and monitoring programs or education access initiatives, to improve individuals' competencies. These could be completed by work access initiatives that would both improve competencies and wealth.
- Promotion and development of self-production for food autonomy, which is aimed mainly to support health and nutrition but can have an impact on competencies and socio-economic improvement.

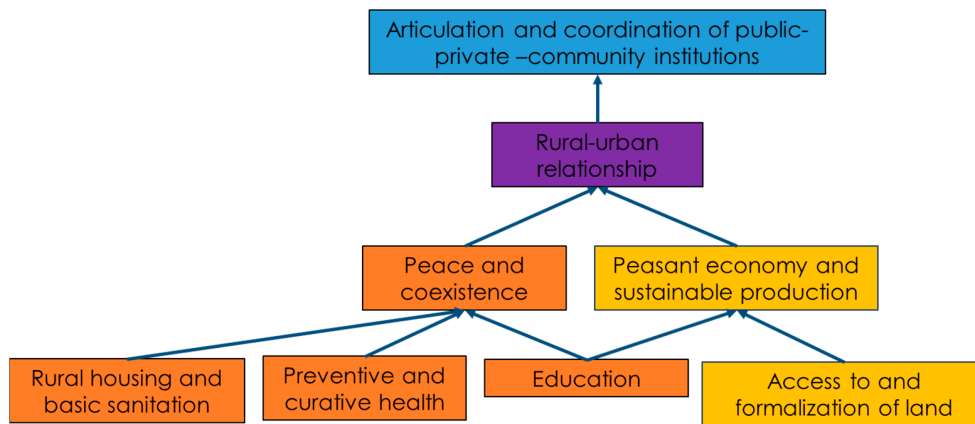
Finally, it is important to recall that policies are made of different elements of which those drivers can be part, but remain composite elements. The acceptability and the prioritization of those policies is in general made by decision makers (policy makers) on the basis of their needs, as well as their political willingness and commitment, but cannot be perceived in the same way by the inhabitants of rural areas (mainly farmers), who are not always aware of the complexity of the policy process and the relationships between drivers. Therefore, it is important to include both policy makers and rural inhabitants in the decision-making process of rural development policies, and consider both their mutual priorities and their basic needs and requirements, as well as the relationships between the defined and prioritized policies.

### **3. Public Policy Actions in Rural Development: A Typology**

Public policies for rural development can be of different nature and, as seen above, are related to various drivers and levers. According to various authors (refs.) those policies can be grouped into 5 well-defined categories:

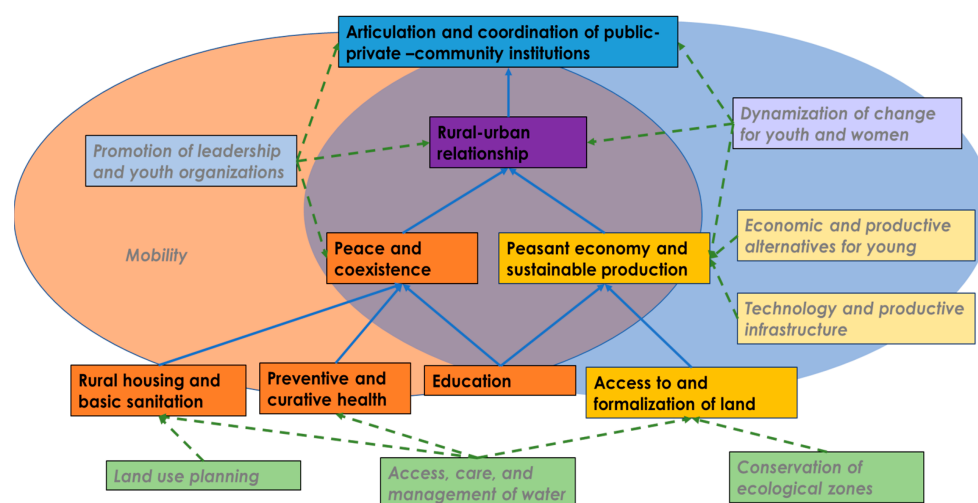
- Economic policies are those that bring wealth and improve the economic conditions of rural populations. They are mainly related to the access and formalization to land and/or real estate accession, employment creation and improvement, access to financial instruments, productivity improvement and technological evolutions, among others.
- Environmental policies are those related to the access to resources. If access to land (seen as access to property in the context of real estate actions) is considered an economic policy, the access to crops and agricultural resources, water and the promotion of biodiversity and fertility of land are considered environmental. It is important to note that not all environmental policies are incompatible with economic ones, and sometimes there are strong synergies between them.
- Social policies, related to the improvement of communities as a society and their individual and collective competencies. Researchers find in this category education, health, mobility, peace and cohabitation issues.
- Cultural policies differ from social ones in the fact that they promote the characteristics and identity of the rural areas. They are more related to the construction and defense of a common construct (called culture) that is evolutive, goes beyond traditions, and defines a rural community. Researchers find in this category policies like demographic dynamics, identity issues, the relationships between rural and urban areas or those between communities, or the promotion of languages or cultural heritages, among others.
- Political and participation policies allow the community and its individuals to propose, participate and communicate with decision makers. They are the basis of public-private cooperation and are mainly related to consensus searching, communication and participation in the decision making processes.

Given those policies, it is seen that not all are at the same level, and not all have the same impact or the same priority. Essential policies are those that are required to start a development process, without which this development is not possible. Enabling policies are those that support essential policies and act as "levers" of development, increasing the speed in which some actions will be implemented. Finally, complementary policies are those which are not essential but once the essential actions are carried out, can give higher values to the development actions. A first analysis of the relationships between those policies is seen in Peña Orozco et al. (2024), showing that complementary policy actions are not important, but shows that some policies are needed before others to ensure a continuous and robust rural development. Moreover, the assessment proposed by the authors (based on a Colombian case, then validated with a set of experts from Colombia and the Mediterranean area) confirms that some actions lead to others, so policy strategic guidelines would be hierarchized. **Figure 1** shows the hierarchy of essential policy strategic lines, as agreed by the eight experts of the two regions:



**Figure 1.** Example of hierarchization of eight essential policy actions for rural development in a Colombian area (Peña Orozco et al. 2024).

It is observed that housing and basic sanitation, health issues, education, and access to land (and its formalization) are the basis of the essential actions lines of the policy. They are required to develop others and lead to peace and coexistence (housing, health, and education) and to peasant economy (education and access to land). In other words, education is essential to develop other policies, and without minimum living and health conditions it is difficult to develop coexistence policies. Then, to develop peasant economy, access to land is mandatory, as well as education. Then, those two issues (peace and coexistence, and peasant economy and sustainable production) are required to develop policies improving urban–rural relationships (since productivity needs to be efficient and a minimum of coexistence is required to ensure good relationship conditions). Then, the last strategic line in this hierarchy is the articulation and coordination among institutions. This is not a classification of importance or priority, but a complementary vision that shows how the development of one strategic or action line can lead to the development of others that are essential in the public policy. This hierarchy has been seen to be similar in both Colombia and the Mediterranean area, showing that the basic needs of peasants are similar and then the framework is transferrable.



**Figure 2.** Inclusion of enabling policy actions in the hierarchization to the previous case.



This hierarchy is then complemented with enabling strategic lines. Enabling actions are not a requirement for the policy but support their development and their acceleration. Researchers observe that three environmental strategic lines will enable the basis of essential action lines, mainly related to the good disposal of resources and their environmental quality that guarantees farming efficiency and can support an improvement of life conditions. Although the sensibility to water and ecology was higher in the Mediterranean area (for climate and cultural reasons), researchers observe that those issues are also present in Colombia (although a higher importance is given to technology and peace because of its historical context). The two economic enabling strategic lines (productive alternatives for young and technological and productive infrastructure) enable the peasant economy. Technology and productive infrastructure are seen in both contexts as the main economic policy strategy to pursue, and corresponds to the needs formulated by the various experts and institutions. Then, the promotion of leadership and youth organizations, and the dynamization of change for youth and women, enable the four non-basic essential strategic lines (i.e., those in the three higher levels in the hierarchy), showing the big importance of youth and equity to sustainably develop a rural territory. Finally, two strategic lines are transversal and enable a wide set of both essential and enabling policies: mobility, which has been appointed as enabling but has a strong support in individual and collective development, and spaces for participation, which has a strong impact on cooperation, communication, and economic development, including the relationships between cities and rural areas.

Last but not least, it is important to question the role of social capital in this development strategy ([Robison and Schmid 1994](#); [Saikouk and Badraoui 2014](#)) since development is first of all a matter of learning and competencies. Indeed, social capital is essential in a company's development ([Häuberer 2011](#)) and sustains also the resilient development of territories, being a major asset in rural development ([Auliah et al. 2022](#)). To develop social capital, different actions can be carried out ([Dubos 2017](#)) from which the development of individual and collective capabilities is crucial. Education is one of the main essential policy actions, without which most of the developments will not be efficient. This has been seen as a main issue in Colombia and in the Mediterranean area, with two main categories of educational actions: the first is the basic education, for children and youth, to guarantee high school education standards and increase the number of university inscriptions in those areas; the second is a more professional, applied education, aimed at training farmers into farming, production, logistics, and management needs that will have a direct impact on their productivity. To those, sustainable production and more generally responsible and sustainable management will be needed to have a consistent and resilient development ([Irwin et al. 2023](#)). This issue joins also the high importance of developing competencies (and leadership) among young and women, as shown in **Figure 2**. Indeed, this figure illustrates how a joint development of inclusive policies allows the improvement of social development, first for individuals (and families) and then for their respective communities.

## 4. Implementing Public Policy Actions in Rural Development

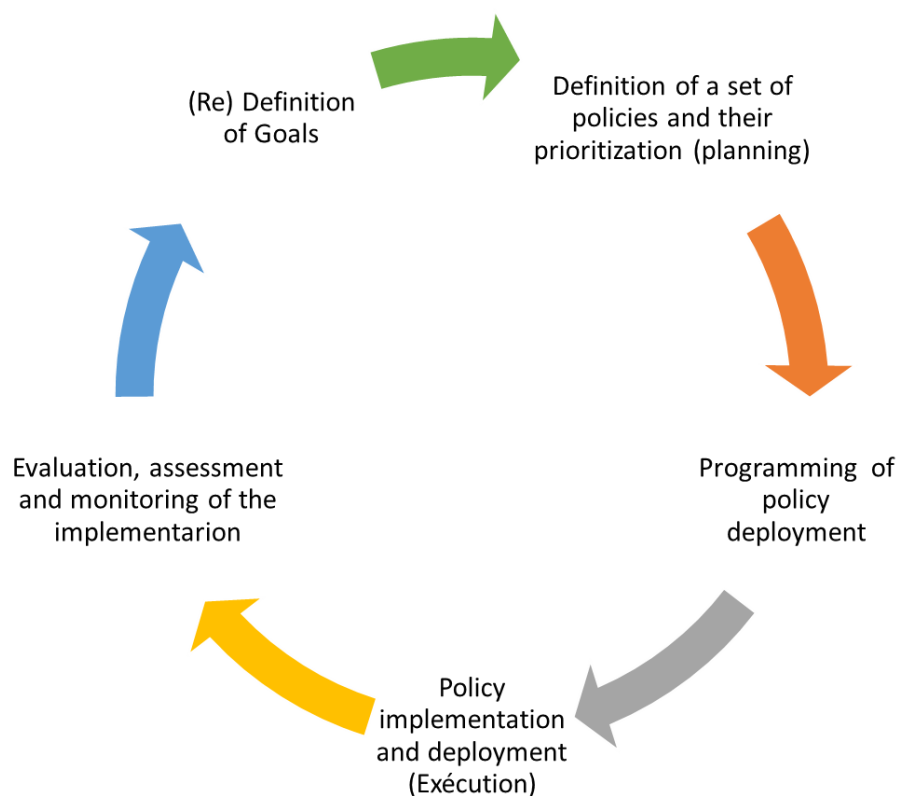
The proposed typology and hierarchization of public policy strategic lines and actions has a direct impact on its deployment and implementation. Indeed, if those policies are related and there are some hierarchies, their implementation needs to consider them, and their deployment cannot be linear but is more related to that of a



project where the beginning of each task depends on its precedence constraint verification (Schwindt and Zimmerman 2015). This leads researchers to the notion of planning, since implementing a set of policies depends on how this implementation has been prepared and planned in advance. Planning can be defined as a process to assess the futurability of present decisions (Drucker 1959), or, in other words, the design of a suitable future (Ackoff 1970). It is needed to anticipate decision making to anticipate a future state that depends on a set of interdependent decisions (known as decision system), and when that future cannot arrive alone, without the deployment of various actions. Bringing planning to public policy in rural development, the process can be decomposed in the following stages, as an extension of the ProACT way of thinking (Keeney 1999, Raiffa 2007) but also in the planning vision of Ackoff (1970) and :

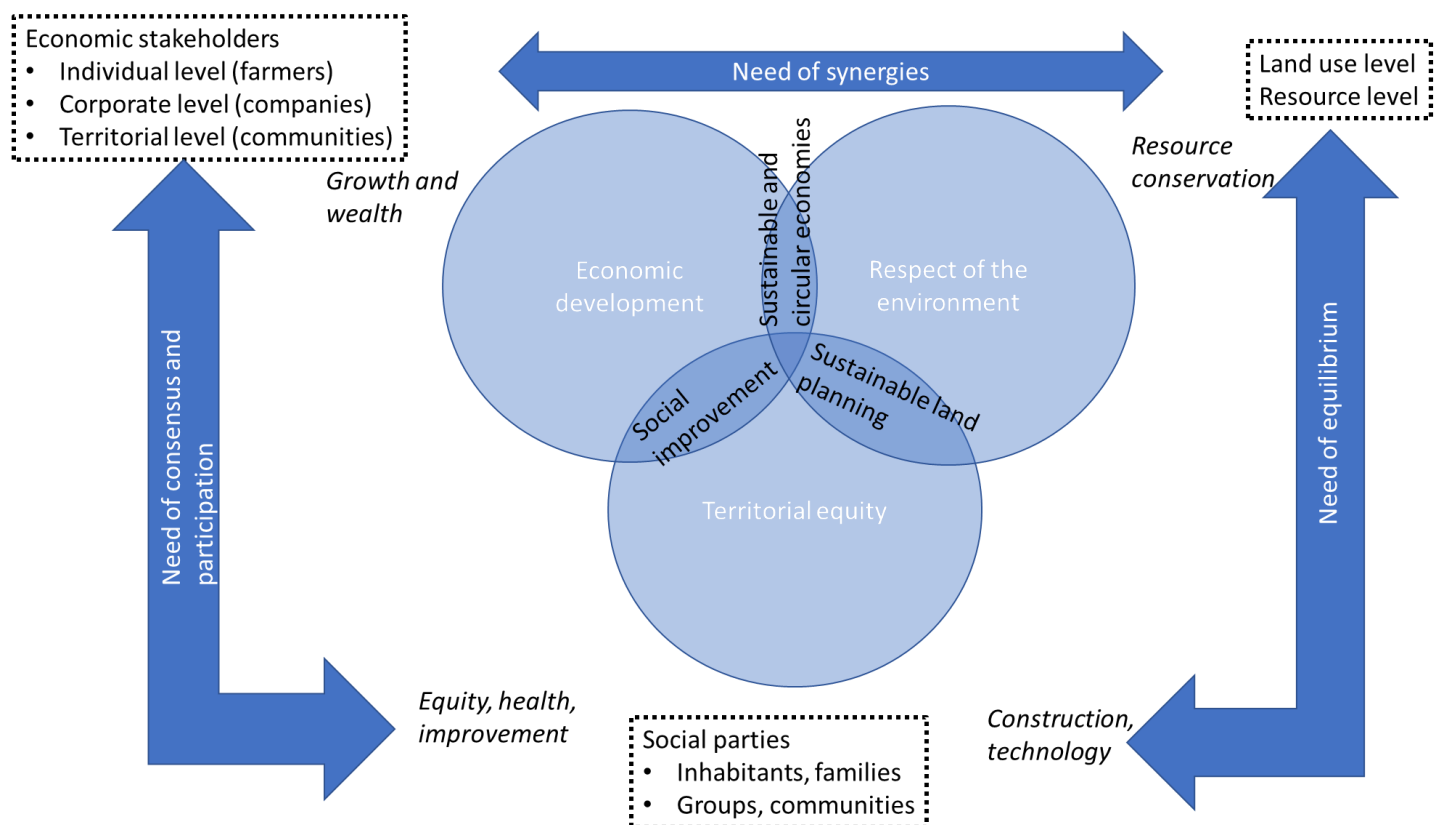
- First, the main **Problems** are defined, mainly via a characterization or a general diagnosis. In the case of rural development, this means to identify the main weaknesses and lacks of the current state of a given rural territory.
- Second, **Objectives** (or goals) are set, if possible collectively. This is crucial to then propose the most suitable set of policies.
- Third, the different possible policies are examined and grouped into possible sets of actions or **Alternatives**, and their impacts in the development of the given rural territory assessed (i.e. their **Consequences** are evaluated).
- Fourth, **Tradeoffs** and agreements are made among stakeholders to select the most suitable set of policies to implement.
- Fifth, a deployment plan is defined and responsibilities and milestones set.
- Sixth and finally, the policy deployment is followed-up and its efficiency and degree of deployment evaluated using suitable tools and methods

In implementing policy actions for territorial development, researchers can define three crucial phases which impact the effective deployment of project, action or plan (Ackoff 1970): (1) the diagnosis phase, which will lead to the understanding of the decision problem and then to the proposal of the right way of action to deal with this problem (Gonzalez-Feliu and Gatica 2022); (2) the programming phase in which the deployment of chosen solution (i.e. the set of public policies to implement) is organized; and (3) the evaluation of the good implementation, which takes part in the execution or deployment phase.



**Figure 3.** The policy planning and implementation cycle (own elaboration from considerations given above).

Implementing rural development policies, as a territorial action, needs to take into account the components of territorial development (Gonzalez-Feliu and Cedillo Campos 2017, Torricelli 2018), and in a logic of sustainable development (Masson and Petiot 2012, Vargas et al. 2021), the three spheres of sustainable development, as well as the involved stakeholders with their purposes and their interactions (see **Figure 4**):



**Figure 4.** Interaction issues between logistics and territorial planning.

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