

PUBLIC GOVERNANCE DIRECTORATE

Research Agenda

Designing the operational logic and key organisational constructs of the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development in Romania

This report presents an implementation approach designed to address Romania's sustainable development challenges through informed research, policy analysis, and strategic recommendations. It outlines key areas of focus that align with Romania's national priorities and the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Research Agenda

ROMANIA'S CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Executive summary

The CExDD is envisioned as a central hub for Romania's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiatives, bridging government agencies and international stakeholders. Its establishment reflects Romania's dedication to harmonising its sustainable development strategies with global best practices and standards. The Centre integrates its five functions – Data Centre, Scientific Research, Networks & Partnerships, Strategic Policy Development, and Communication & Knowledge – seamlessly into the national sustainable development framework.

Strategic Objectives and Phased Implementation: The CExDD aims to fortify policy coherence, enhance data-driven governance, and boost multi-sectoral collaboration. Its strategy revolves around long-term investment in capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and innovative research, with the objective of transitioning Romania towards an inclusive, resilient, and modern economy.

Drawing from extensive literature reviews and stakeholder insights, this report recommends priorities and activities that resonate with Romania's unique development needs. These include fostering data-driven governance, enhancing research capabilities, strengthening networks and partnerships, and promoting innovative and strategic solutions. By embracing an adaptive and dynamic approach, the CExDD is set to integrate Romania's sustainable development efforts into a cohesive, forward-looking system.

Multifaceted Functionalities Data Centre: Establishing a robust system for data collection and analytics to support informed decision-making and SDG tracking.

- Scientific Research: Collaborating with academic institutions to shape evidence-based policy-making.
- Networks & Partnerships: Building national and international alliances to foster shared sustainable development goals.
- Strategic Policy Development: Advancing innovative policy solutions and strategic thinking to address sustainability challenges.
- Communication & Knowledge: Promoting public awareness and engagement in sustainable development.

Expected Impact: These functions are expected to catalyse policy coherence, enhance public sector efficiency, and ensure active public participation in the sustainable development process.

- Policy Coherence and Collaboration: The CExDD will ensure policy integration, aligning Romania's strategies with global SDG targets. Its operations aim to improve inter-ministerial collaboration and enhance public sector efficiency, crucial for effective sustainable development.
- Capacity Building and Public Engagement: Specialised training and public engagement initiatives will focus on promoting sustainable practices and improving stakeholder participation in the sustainable development process.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: The Centre will implement robust mechanisms to track progress and assess the impact of SDG strategies, ensuring transparency and accountability.

Societal Benefits and Global Alignment: The CExDD's initiatives are set to significantly enhance public administration efficiency, support inclusive economic recovery, and align with European economic objectives. The Centre not only addresses Romania's specific developmental challenges – such as urban-rural disparities and energy transition – but also aligns its strategies with global sustainability frameworks and best practices.

Program Delivery and Phases: The Centre's plan unfolds in two phases: setting up foundational structures and scaling initiatives for broader impact.

- Phase One: Initial two years will focus on establishing the foundation, including setting up the program and gaining approvals.
- Phase Two: Subsequent three years will reflect agreed work plans with focal ministries, including the flexible deployment of strategic funds.

Stakeholder-Driven Priorities: The Centre's priorities, shaped by stakeholder insights, address key developmental challenges including urban-rural disparities, energy transition, infrastructure improvement, human capital development, and institutional capacity strengthening.

Adaptable and Evolving Strategies: The recommendations for CExDD are crafted to complement existing frameworks while filling critical gaps and aligning with global best practices, showcasing adaptability and responsiveness to emerging challenges in Romania's sustainable development journey.

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1 Introduction and context

1.1. Context and situational analysis

Romania, a country with a complex socio-economic fabric, stands at a crossroads of potential and challenge. Despite significant strides in economic growth, with GDP per capita more than doubling in recent decades, it faces the highest poverty rate in the European Union. The journey towards prosperity has been marred by stark rural-urban disparities, leaving a considerable segment of the population economically vulnerable. The challenges are multifaceted, ranging from transitioning to a sustainable energy system to enhancing human capital and institutional resilience. The following sections present a situation analysis and strategic focus in five key areas.

"In the domain of sustainable development, you cannot think just about your country. We must think about the connections and relationships for Romania."
INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

1. Economic Growth and EU Convergence:

- *Situation Analysis:* Romania's economic narrative is characterised by a dual reality. While urban areas exhibit dynamism and integration with the EU economy, rural regions remain mired in poverty and isolation. This divide manifests in the highest poverty rate across the EU, coupled with significant income inequalities.
- *Strategic Focus:* Policies need to be recalibrated to bridge these disparities. Emphasis should be on rural development, poverty alleviation, and harnessing the potential of neglected sectors. The focus should also extend to strengthening governance frameworks to improve public service delivery and ensure effective EU fund utilisation.

2. Energy Transition and Decarbonisation:

- *Situation Analysis:* Over 70% dependency on fossil fuels highlights Romania's urgent need to shift towards a low-carbon economy. This transition, critical for meeting the 2050 net-zero emissions target, requires substantial investments across electricity, buildings, and transport sectors.
- *Strategic Focus:* Developing comprehensive strategies for energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, and phased reduction of fossil fuels is crucial. The approach should integrate technological advancements, policy reforms, and public-private partnerships.

3. Transport and Water Infrastructure:

- *Situation Analysis:* Romania grapples with underdeveloped transport infrastructure, posing a significant barrier to economic growth. Simultaneously, water management has emerged as a critical issue, with climate change exacerbating droughts and floods.

- *Strategic Focus:* Investments in sustainable transport solutions and robust water management policies are imperative. Enhancing infrastructure resilience to climate change should be a priority, coupled with innovative financing models and technology integration.
4. Human Capital and Skills Development:
- *Situation Analysis:* The country's future growth hinges on its ability to improve human capital. Current educational systems and vocational training programs inadequately prepare the workforce for the evolving demands of a sustainable economy.
 - *Strategic Focus:* Developing comprehensive educational and training programs with a focus on sustainable practices and digital skills is essential. Addressing skills gaps, particularly in the green economy, and fostering lifelong learning must be central to these initiatives.
5. Institutional Weaknesses and Policy Implementation:
- *Situation Analysis:* Institutional inefficiencies, characterised by low administrative capacity and political volatility, have hindered Romania's development. This impacts the nation's ability to leverage EU funds effectively and deliver sustainable development.
 - *Strategic Focus:* Strengthening institutional capacity and enhancing public sector management are critical. Efforts should be directed towards building robust mechanisms for policy implementation and ensuring transparency and accountability in governance.

"It's unbelievable that in Romania today there is not a place to put ideas, new ideas, strong ideas, into practice."
 INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

1.1.1. Political Economy Analysis

In the evolving landscape of Romania's sustainable development efforts, a nuanced political economy analysis reveals both challenges and opportunities that shape the nation's trajectory toward achieving the SDGs. The Centre stands at the forefront of this journey, positioned to catalyse transformative change through strategic initiatives and evidence-based policies.

1.1.2. Challenges in Policy Implementation

One of the paramount challenges Romania faces is the intricate maze of policy implementation, marred by institutional silos and a lack of cohesive cross-government coordination. This fragmentation is further intensified by political instability, which has historically led to a cycle of inefficiencies and delayed reforms. The OECD's Comparative Stocktake report highlights the necessity for integrated policy planning and budgeting to support SDG implementation. It underscores the need for Romania to cultivate robust institutional mechanisms, akin to its establishment of the Department for Sustainable Development and the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development. These structures illustrate Romania's commitment to institutionalising sustainable development, but they also emphasise the need for further integration and coherence in policy execution.

"The centre needs to focus on the way policies are coordinated."
 INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

1.1.3. Engagement with Stakeholders

Another significant area is stakeholder engagement. In a landscape where sustainable growth is imperative, Romania must pivot towards a more inclusive, participatory approach in policy-making. Engaging businesses, civil society, and local governments is not just beneficial but crucial for bridging gaps between policy formulation and ground-level implementation. The literature review from the OECD report sheds light on the importance of collaborative management approaches, emphasising the need for a multi-level governance approach that amplifies local ownership and adaptability in sustainable development initiatives.

1.1.4. Role of CExDD

In this context, the CExDD is not just a participant but a potential catalyst in Romania's sustainable development narrative. The Centre is poised to play a pivotal role in enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration and driving a stakeholder-centric approach to policy formulation and execution, by:

- *Facilitating Cross-Sector Collaboration:* The Centre can act as a hub, fostering dialogue and partnerships between government agencies, private sectors, civil society, and international bodies. By promoting an integrated approach, CExDD can help break down institutional barriers and create a more cohesive framework for sustainable development.
- *Advocacy and Capacity Building:* Another critical role for the Centre is in advocacy and capacity building. Leveraging insights from global best practices and previous initiatives within Romania, the CExDD can advocate for policies that are both innovative and grounded in practicality. It could focus on areas like digital transformation, climate change adaptation, and fostering inclusive economic growth.
- *Expertise in Policy and Governance:* Drawing on the lessons learned from other countries and its own research, CExDD could offer specialised knowledge and advice in sustainable development policy and governance. This would involve not only formulating strategies but also providing the necessary tools and frameworks to ensure their effective implementation.

"The Centre of Excellence will be an amazing mechanism, not only to coordinate but also to build capabilities to walk the talk."

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

The journey towards sustainable development is a complex and multi-faceted one, requiring a nuanced understanding of the political economy and a strategic approach to overcome inherent challenges. Romania, through the CExDD, has the opportunity to forge a path characterised by integrated policy planning, inclusive stakeholder engagement, and innovative governance models. By embracing these principles and learning from both its experiences and global best practices, Romania can make significant strides towards realising its sustainable development aspirations

1.2. CExDD's role in addressing identified challenges

- *Promoting Sustainable Economic Growth:* The CExDD's role in fostering sustainable economic growth focuses on bridging the urban-rural divide and enhancing economic activities that support environmental and social sustainability. The Centre's hybrid governance structure ensures that research and activities are inclusive and appropriately impact rural areas, thereby reducing

disparities and poverty. This aligns with the broader vision of achieving EU convergence through sustainable means.

- Objective: To support Romania in continuing its economic growth while addressing the disparities between urban and rural areas.
- Actions: Implement policies and initiatives that foster sustainable economic activities, support rural development, and reduce poverty.
- *Energy Transition and Electrification:* In the realm of energy transition and decarbonisation, the CExDD is set to play a critical role in assisting Romania's shift to a sustainable energy system. This involves developing awareness and strategies for energy efficiency and adopting renewable energy. The Centre's actions in this area are crucial for Romania to meet its commitments under the EU Green Deal and transition towards a greener economy.
 - Objective: Assist Romania in transitioning to a sustainable energy system and in electrifying its economy.
 - Actions: Facilitate the development and implementation of strategies for energy efficiency, renewable energy adoption, and phasing out of fossil fuels.
- *Enhancing Transport and Water Infrastructure:* Improving Romania's transport and water infrastructure is another focal area for the CExDD. The Centre's objective is to support the development of sustainable transport solutions and effective water management policies. This initiative is aligned with Romania's National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, focusing on building resilient infrastructure and promoting sustainable industrialisation.
 - Objective: Improve Romania's transport infrastructure and manage water resources effectively.
 - Actions: Support the development of sustainable transport solutions and robust water management policies.
- *Human Capital Development:* In the field of human capital and skills development, the CExDD endeavours to strengthen the workforce's capabilities to meet the demands of a sustainable economy. This involves developing educational and training programs that emphasise sustainable practices and green skills, addressing the gap in human capital necessary for Romania's sustainable development.
 - Objective: Strengthen Romania's workforce capabilities to meet the demands of a sustainable economy.
 - Actions: Develop educational and training programs focused on sustainable practices and green skills.
- *Strengthening Institutions and Policy Implementation:* The final challenge involves strengthening Romania's institutional capacity and policy implementation efficiency. The CExDD aims to provide expertise and support for institutional reform, improve public sector management, and ensure the effective use of EU funds. This ties in with the OECD's emphasis on institutional mechanisms and multi-level governance for efficient sustainable development strategies.
 - Objective: Enhance Romania's institutional capacity for effective policy implementation.
 - Actions: Offer expertise and support for institutional reform, improve public sector management, and ensure effective use of EU funds.
- *Promoting Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCSD):* Romania's sustainable development journey is intricately tied to its ability to create and implement policies that are harmoniously aligned across various sectors, ensuring that economic, social, and environmental goals are not just met, but are also interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The challenge, however, lies in overcoming the compartmentalisation of government policy-making processes. The Centre will lead an integrated policy-making approach, ensuring that all governmental policies across different sectors are not only aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals but also work

in synergy to amplify the overall impact. This involves a transition from siloed to a holistic policy framework, where economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability are seen as interconnected pillars of development.

- Objective: Ensure that Romania's policies across different sectors are aligned with sustainable development goals.
- Actions: Assist in the development of an integrated policy framework that addresses economic, social, and environmental dimensions cohesively.

This analysis underscores the complex tapestry of challenges and opportunities that Romania faces in its pursuit of sustainable development. The CExDD's role in this context is to provide targeted, nuanced strategies that address the specificities of Romania's development landscape. By focusing on bridging economic disparities, enhancing energy transition, improving infrastructure, developing human capital, and strengthening institutional capacity, Romania can embark on a path towards inclusive and sustainable growth. Collaboration with diverse stakeholders and learning from past experiences will be key in shaping a prosperous future for Romania.

2 Literature review

This research should be read together with the Comparative Stocktake Report and Design Report, steering the Centre towards an impactful research agenda and robust capacity building.

The core objective of this report is to **define clear priorities, delineate essential activities, and suggest cutting-edge methods and techniques**. These elements coalesce to form a blueprint that empowers the Centre to make informed decisions, strategically channel its resources, and leverage the latest innovations in the realm of sustainable development.

Together, these documents weave a comprehensive tapestry for guiding the CExDD. This report places a spotlight on priorities and practicalities for implementation including research agenda. It ensures these efforts are not only in sync with the Centre's foundational purpose and structure but are also enlightened by the forefront of sustainable development practices.

"We need more expertise, we need more studies, we need more analysis."

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

As the world progresses towards the 2030 deadline for the United Nations' SDGs, nations are intensifying their efforts to balance economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equality. Romania, in this global endeavour, stands out with its commitment to sustainable development, particularly through initiatives like the CExDD.

Global Best Practices in Sustainable Development

The **United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** offers a pivotal framework for global efforts in this domain. Established in 2015, the agenda outlines 17 SDGs aimed at eradicating poverty, improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth—all while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests (United Nations, 2015). This comprehensive approach serves as a guideline for countries, including Romania, striving to incorporate these global goals into their national agendas.

In Europe, the **European Union (EU)** has been a key proponent of sustainable development. Eurostat's 2021 report provides an insightful overview of the EU's progress, particularly highlighting advancements in poverty reduction and clean energy usage. These achievements are part of the broader European Green Deal, initiated by the European Commission in 2019, aiming for a climate-neutral continent by 2050 (European Commission, 2019; Eurostat, 2021). This deal, ambitious in its scope, sets a precedent for member states like Romania, offering a sustainable model for economic prosperity.

Romania's Commitment to Sustainable Development

Romania has articulated its dedication to sustainable development through its National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030. Adopted in 2018, this strategy outlines the nation's roadmap to achieve the SDGs, emphasising inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societal development (Romanian Government, 2018).

Additionally, Romania's alignment with the European Green Deal signals its commitment to a sustainable and green future, integrating European ambitions with national goals (European Commission, 2019).

Institutional Frameworks and Governance

The OECD highlights the critical role of integrating policy planning and budgeting in supporting SDG implementation. Romania's establishment of the Department for Sustainable Development in 2017 under the Prime Minister's office and the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development exemplifies this integration, showcasing a commitment to institutionalising sustainable development efforts (OECD, 2020; Government of Romania, 2017).

Furthermore, the concept of multi-level governance enhances the effectiveness of these strategies. Research by Faguet (2014) and Hooghe & Marks (2003) points to the benefits of decentralisation and multi-level governance, including improved adaptability and coordination among government levels. These insights are crucial for Romania, particularly in ensuring efficient and comprehensive implementation of its sustainable development initiatives.

Collaborative management approaches are also pivotal. Studies by Margerum & Whittall (2004) and Treib et al. (2007) underscore the importance of stakeholder engagement, cooperation, and network-building in sustainable development. These principles are integral to Romania's approach, fostering broader participation and consensus-building in its sustainability initiatives.

Innovative Operating Models and Capacity Building

The **Finnish** Environment Institute (SYKE) illustrates an effective 'hub and spoke' operating model, promoting knowledge sharing and coordination (Finnish Environment Institute, n.d.). Additionally, Galbraith's (1971) discussion on matrix organisation designs highlights the value of cross-functional collaboration and flexibility—approaches that could greatly benefit Romania's sustainable development strategy.

Capacity building is another cornerstone for successful SDG implementation. The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) through its Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) demonstrates how targeted capacity building can foster innovation and skill development in specific sectors (European Institute of Innovation and Technology, n.d.). Romania can draw lessons from these models to enhance the capabilities of its institutions and workforce.

Lessons from International Examples

South Korea and **Sweden** present instructive case studies. South Korea's green growth policies showcase a successful blend of environmental sustainability and economic development (KDI School of Public Policy and Management, 2019; Kim & Chung, 2016; Lee, 2018; Yoon & Lee, 2015). Sweden, known for its comprehensive approach to sustainable development, provides insights into integrated policy-making and community engagement (Government Offices of Sweden, 2016; Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2020; City of Malmö, 2018).

This literature review elucidates the multifaceted nature of sustainable development. It underscores the importance of a coordinated approach, robust institutional mechanisms, multi-level governance, stakeholder engagement, innovative operating models, and continuous capacity building. Romania, in its journey towards sustainable development through initiatives like the CExDD, can draw valuable lessons from global practices and adapt them to its unique context. This adaptation will not only enhance the country's efforts in achieving the SDGs but also contribute significantly to the global pursuit of a sustainable future.

3 Recommendations

Drawing on the information gathered in chapters 1-3, this chapter presents a set of recommendations for the CExDD's (i) priorities; (ii) key activities; (iii) governance and management; and (iv) innovation methods and techniques.

3.1. Priorities

To align the Centre with Romania's specific context, stakeholder perspectives, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation priorities, the recommended priorities for CExDD need to reflect a balance of the scope of the CExDD, Romania's development needs, and the insights gathered from various stakeholders.

- *Data-Driven Policy Making and Governance:* Aligns with the need for robust data collection and analytics for informed decision-making.
 - Objective: Enhance government capability to make informed decisions based on accurate, timely, and comprehensive data.
 - Actions: Implement and advance data governance models, predictive analytics, and regular SDG progress reporting.
- *Fostering Research and Scientific Analysis:* Addresses the gap in research-informed policy-making, as highlighted by stakeholders' emphasis on the need for more studies and analysis.
 - Objective: Establish Romania as a centre for research-driven, scientific policy-making to address complex sustainability issues.
 - Actions: Develop interdisciplinary research initiatives, policy impact studies, and global research alliances.
- *Enhancing Networks and Collaborative Partnerships:* Meets the expressed need for greater collaboration and coherence among various stakeholders in sustainable development.
 - Objective: Position Romania as a leader in sustainable development through effective national and international partnerships.
 - Actions: Facilitate regular multi-sector dialogues, contribute to global sustainable development policies, and develop mechanisms for resource and information sharing.
- *Innovative Strategy Development and Scenario Planning:* Responds to the call for innovative and strategic thinking in sustainable development policies.
 - Objective: Promote Romania as a forward-thinking nation in crafting and executing resilient strategies for sustainable development.
 - Actions: Establish scenario planning and policy innovation labs, and foster public-private partnerships for sustainable solutions.
- *Effective Communication and Knowledge Dissemination:* Aligns with the need for increased public engagement and education in sustainable development, as emphasised by stakeholders.
 - Objective: Transform Romania into a model of public engagement and education in sustainable development.

- Actions: Develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy, conduct public workshops, and create digital platforms for knowledge sharing.

The CExDD's priorities directly address Romania's specific developmental challenges and opportunities. These include bridging urban-rural disparities, transitioning to sustainable energy, and enhancing human capital and institutional resilience. The Centre's focus on data, research, collaboration, innovation, and communication ensures a holistic approach to these challenges, offering both immediate and long-term benefits.

The CExDD's functions are strategically aligned with the National Action Plan for Implementing the National Sustainable Development Strategy Romania 2030. By focusing on data governance, scientific research, collaborative networks, strategic thinking, and effective communication, the Centre supports the comprehensive and integrated approach required for successful SDG implementation.

Stakeholder insights have played a crucial role in shaping the Centre's priorities. The focus on research, innovation, and data-driven policy making resonates with the stakeholders' call for more expertise and analysis. The emphasis on collaborative networks and partnerships addresses the need for a unified approach and coherence in sustainable development efforts. Lastly, the priority of effective communication and knowledge dissemination aligns with the need for public engagement and education in sustainability.

The recommended priorities for the CExDD are crafted to ensure that the Centre not only complements Romania's existing sustainable development framework but also fills critical gaps identified by stakeholders and aligns with global best practices in SDG implementation. These priorities are designed to be dynamic, allowing for adaptation and evolution in response to emerging challenges and opportunities in Romania's sustainable development journey.

3.2. Key activities

A guide for sustainability aimed for public authorities, local public authorities to better understand what sustainable development is."

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

The Centre marks a significant evolution in Romania's approach to sustainable development, building on existing initiatives and international partnerships. This evolution reflects Romania's alignment with global sustainable development standards and its commitment to innovation and collaboration in public administration.

CExDD will be implemented as a unified program partnering with key Romanian ministries, focusing on policy domains that drive inclusive and resilient growth. The Centre's approach involves close collaboration with governmental bodies, academia, private sectors, and international organisations. This will facilitate a comprehensive and integrated approach to sustainable development challenges.

Considering the complexity of sustainable development and the need for policy and institutional change, CExDD's approach will include:

- *Research and Analysis Support:* Deliver and support research to inform policy development, monitor institutional performance, and assess impact.
- *Knowledge Sharing and Problem-Solving Assistance:* Facilitate the sharing of practices and knowledge and assist with problem-solving by providing access to various sources of expertise.

- *Policy Development and Implementation Support:* Assist with convening, consultation, socialisation, and communication activities related to policy development and implementation, including stakeholder engagement in these processes.
- *Linkages to Other Initiatives:* Connect with other relevant initiatives and programmes to ensure coherence and maximise the impact of sustainable development efforts in Romania.

The CExDD delivers a suite of services and activities designed to advance the nation's journey towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Centre operates as a catalyst for sustainable growth, innovation, and strategic planning, positioning Romania as a leader in sustainable development.

3.2.1. Services and Value Delivered by the CExDD's Five Functions

1. Data-Driven Decision Support:

The CExDD provides robust data collection and analytics, enhancing the government's capability to make informed decisions. This service is crucial for aligning national policies with global sustainability targets and for monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

2. Research and Scientific Analysis:

The Centre establishes Romania as a hub for research-driven, scientific policymaking. It undertakes interdisciplinary research initiatives and policy impact studies, providing evidence-based insights for complex sustainability issues.

3. Networks and Collaborative Partnerships:

By fostering national and international collaborations, the CExDD enhances Romania's profile in the global sustainable development arena. It facilitates multi-sector dialogues and contributes to global sustainable development policies, creating a unified approach towards sustainability goals.

4. Innovative Strategy Development:

The CExDD promotes Romania as a forward-thinking nation in sustainable development. It establishes scenario planning and policy innovation labs, encouraging the adoption of resilient strategies and innovative solutions to sustainability challenges.

5. Communication and Knowledge Dissemination:

Transforming public engagement in sustainable development, the Centre develops comprehensive communication strategies. It conducts public workshops and creates digital platforms for knowledge sharing, increasing awareness and education about sustainability.

CExDD will operate in two phases. The first phase will focus on making strategic investments, setting up the program, and establishing agreements with partner ministries, regional governments and research institutions. The second phase will scale up successful initiatives from the first phase.

3.2.2. Phase 1: Initial Setup and Strategic Engagement

Duration: Approximately 12 months

Key Workstreams

- Establishment of CExDD's Management Structures and Systems:
 - Setting up the data centre infrastructure.
 - Implementing data management systems and developing a code of ethics for data usage.
 - Establishing the governance model for data integrity and security.
- Development of Research and Policy Frameworks:
 - Forming an interdisciplinary research committee to identify key sustainability challenges.

- Initiating partnerships with academic institutions and launching cross-sectoral research projects.
- Developing an impact assessment framework to gauge the effectiveness of policy interventions.
- **Strengthening Networks and Partnerships:**
 - Organising quarterly multi-stakeholder meetings to foster dialogue on sustainability.
 - Establishing international alliances for sustainable development.
 - Starting a community outreach program for local stakeholder engagement in sustainability discussions.
- **Innovative Policy Development and Scenario Planning:**
 - Creating an internal think tank unit within the CExDD for scenario planning and wargaming.
 - Launching a policy innovation lab to experiment with novel sustainability solutions.
 - Publishing a white paper on Romania's prospective sustainable development challenges.
- **Communication Strategy and Public Engagement:**
 - Developing an integrated communication strategy that aligns with other functions of the CExDD.
 - Organising public workshops on sustainable development.
 - Creating a digital portal for disseminating research and policy updates.

Timeline and Specific Activities

- **First 3 Months:**
 - Infrastructure setup for the Data Centre.
 - Initial meetings of the interdisciplinary research committee.
 - Preliminary stakeholder engagement and international partnership outreach.
- **Months 6-8:**
 - Implementation of data governance practices and predictive analysis models.
 - Development and launch of initial research projects.
 - First round of multi-stakeholder and community engagement meetings.
- **Months 9-12:**
 - Evaluation and refinement of data management systems.
 - Progress assessment of ongoing research projects.
 - Scaling up of communication strategies with the creation of digital platforms and enhanced public workshops.

3.2.3. Phase 2: Scaling and Deepening of Initiatives

Duration: Post-approval phase, extending over several years

Expansion of Activities

- Scaling up data collection and analysis capabilities to cover wider areas of sustainable development.
- Deepening research partnerships and increasing the scope of policy impact studies.
- Expanding international collaborations and resource pooling mechanisms.

- Further development of scenario planning and strategic thinking initiatives.
- Enhancing communication strategies to reach a broader audience and foster greater public engagement.

Strategic Focus Areas

- **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Strengthening the government's capability to make informed decisions based on robust data analytics.
- **Policy Innovation and Research Excellence:** Positioning Romania as a leader in research-informed policy-making for sustainable development.
- **Collaborative Leadership in Sustainability:** Driving sustainable development through national and international collaborations and partnerships.
- **Fostering Innovation and Strategic Solutions:** Encouraging innovative approaches to tackle sustainability challenges through strategic thinking and policy labs.
- **Enhancing Public Awareness and Participation:** Building a well-informed citizenry engaged in sustainable development initiatives.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regular assessments of the impact of initiatives and activities; continuous refinement of strategies based on feedback and emerging trends; and transparent reporting on progress and challenges in achieving sustainable development goals.

These early activities for the CExDD in Romania will set a strong foundation for the Centre's long-term vision, creating a robust framework for sustainable development aligned with national priorities and global sustainability goals. Please see Annex 1 for the full logic of each function.

3.3. Governance and management

The governance structures and management roles are designed to ensure the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development operates effectively, with clear strategic direction, operational excellence, and robust stakeholder engagement, positioning it as a leader in Romania's journey towards sustainable development

3.3.1. Board of Directors

The Board of Directors forms the apex of the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development (CExDD)'s governance structure, providing strategic oversight and high-level decision-making.

Role and Responsibilities:

- *Strategic Leadership:* They are charged with setting the overall strategic direction of the CExDD, ensuring it aligns with both national priorities and global sustainable development goals.
- *Governance Oversight:* The Board monitors the Centre's adherence to governance standards, assessing risks and opportunities, and ensuring ethical integrity in all operations.
- *Initiative Approval and Guidance:* Key projects and initiatives are subject to the Board's scrutiny and approval, ensuring they are consistent with the Centre's mission and strategic objectives.
- *International Representation:* Emphasising a global perspective, the Board includes an international representative, enhancing the Centre's credibility and fostering cross-border collaborations.

Reporting and Communication:

- The Board maintains transparent communication with various stakeholders, including government bodies, funding partners, and the global sustainable community, reporting on the Centre's progress, challenges, and strategic developments.

“An international advisor on the board will give Romania not only important visibility, but also trust.”

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- Acting as the operational heart of the CExDD, the Board of Directors will steer the effective translation of the strategic vision into tangible actions and outcomes.
 - Operational Strategy: Craft and oversee the Centre's operational strategy, aligning it with the broader goals set by the Board.
 - Policy Implementation: Plays a critical role in integrating policies and directives into the Centre's diverse functions.
 - Support and Coordination: Aligning the Centre's activities with strategic goals and coordinates between different directorates to ensure operational cohesion.

“It is this group that can steer and coordinate the mixture of different strategies, action plans, and inter-institutional frameworks to put in place and to make them functional.”

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3.3.2. The Scientific Council

The Scientific Council within the Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development (CExDD) is designed as a dynamic and adaptive body that will drive the scientific and research-oriented aspects of Romania's sustainable development goals. The Council, with its broad mandate and strategic focus, will play a pivotal role in ensuring that the CExDD remains at the forefront of research and scientific innovation, contributing significantly to Romania's sustainable development initiatives.

The Scientific Council will have a set of criteria to guide the selection of research and activities, focusing on alignment with program outcomes, government strategies, collaboration opportunities, SDG outcomes, and evidence-based interventions.

Criteria for Research and Activity Selection:

- *Alignment with Strategic Outcomes:* Ensuring research contributes directly to the CExDD's and Romania's broader sustainable development goals.
- *Consistency with Government Strategies:* Research activities must resonate with national policies and sustainable development resolutions.
- *Collaborative Potential:* Projects should promote partnerships across government agencies, academia, and the private sector.
- *Evidence-Based Approach:* Initiatives must be grounded in scientific evidence and best practices.
- *Risk Management:* Mitigating risks of strategic drift by focusing on well-defined, impactful research areas.

- *Resource Optimisation:* Ensuring efficient use of funds, avoiding overlap with other programs, and maximising the impact of each project.

The Scientific Council will operate within the administrative and legal context of Romania, ensuring compliance with national policies and regulations. It will work closely with various ministries, fostering a culture of collaboration and strategic coherence. The Council's structure and approach will be adaptable, capable of evolving with shifting priorities and new sustainability challenges.

To ensure the Council's effectiveness and strategic focus, a set of guiding principles will be established:

- *Strategic Alignment:* Research and activities must align with CExDD's long-term goals and Romania's sustainable development framework.
- *Adaptive and Responsive:* The Council must be capable of quickly adapting to new sustainability challenges and global trends.
- *Interdisciplinary Focus:* Encouraging research that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries, fostering innovation and comprehensive solutions.
- *Stakeholder Engagement:* The council must be representative of all of Romania's regions and their interests and actively engage a wide range of stakeholders, including government bodies, academic institutions, and the private sector, to ensure a holistic approach to sustainable development.
- *Transparent and Accountable:* Maintaining transparency in decision-making and being accountable for the outcomes and impacts of funded research.

Considering Romania's legal and administrative context, the CExDD will navigate the complexities of inter-ministerial coordination and focus on fostering strategic leadership and cohesion. The program's structure and approach will be adaptable to accommodate evolving priorities and ensure effective implementation of sustainable development strategies.

"It is necessary to develop common projects that are specifically designed to bringing the regions together."
INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

3.3.3. General Director

The General Director serves as the chief executive of the CExDD, overseeing its overall functionality and ensuring the integration of various components into a cohesive unit.

"It will be quite the challenge, to find a common view from the political level and make it real, implementing it into government strategies and plans"
INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

- *Leadership:* Provides overarching leadership and strategic direction, ensuring alignment with the Board's vision.
- *Operational Management:* Manages high-level operations, acting as the primary representative of the Centre.

- *Reporting*: Regularly reports to the Board on progress, challenges, and opportunities, ensuring accountability and transparency.

3.3.4. Scientific Director

As the focal point for the Centre's research and scientific endeavours, the Scientific Director leads the development of data-driven arguments and scientific insights.

"We need more expertise, we need more studies, we need more analysis."

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

- *Research Oversight*: Manages scientific projects, overseeing data analysis and research methodologies.
- *Policy Integration*: Ensures that research outputs are seamlessly integrated into policy development.
- *Supporting the Scientific Council*: Collaborates closely with the Scientific Council to identify and prioritise key research areas.
- *Communication Strategy*: Develops and manages strategies for stakeholder engagement and knowledge dissemination.
- *Collaborative Projects Management*: Oversees collaborative projects, enhancing the Centre's outreach and impact.
- *Synergy Creation*: Works to create and maintain synergies between the Centre and its myriad of partners.

"The centre should collect, connect and distribute the best ideas, tools and practices for sustainability."

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

3.3.5. Administration Director

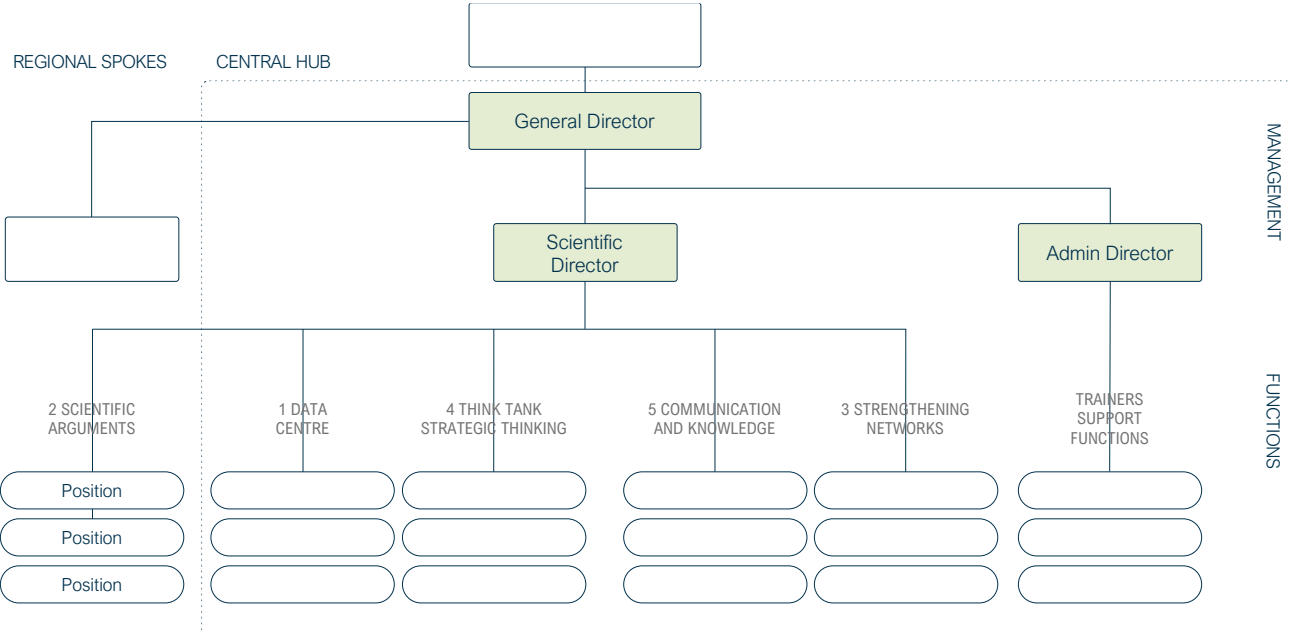
The Administration Director is responsible for the smooth operation of the Centre's administrative functions.

"We find it extremely important that capacity and expertise is built in the public sector and private sector because otherwise, they cannot speak the same language"

INTERVIEWEE FROM THE PROJECT

- *Operational Support*: Manages administrative staff and resources, ensuring efficient service delivery.
- *Process Optimisation*: Implements processes to support the functional efficiency of the Centre.
- *Staff Development*: Oversees staff development, ensuring the administrative team is equipped to support the Centre's diverse needs.

Figure 3.1. Proposed organisational chart for the CExDD.

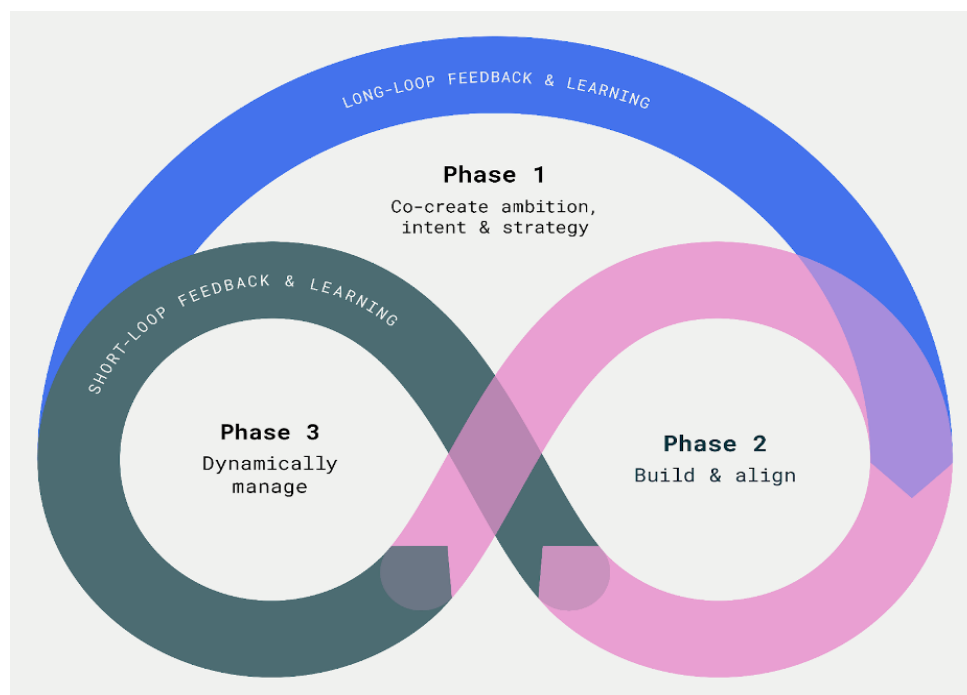


Source: Author's own elaboration

3.4. Innovation methods and techniques

The Centre can greatly benefit from the OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI)'s approach to innovation portfolio management. This method, refined for the international development sector, offers a structured and strategic way to manage innovation activities, ensuring they align with the Centre's goals and the complex environment in which it operates.

Figure 3.2. A phased approach to innovation portfolio set-up, implementation and management with short- and long-loop reflection, learning and adaptation at its heart



Source: Author's own elaboration

Understanding Innovation Portfolio Management: Embracing innovation portfolio management involves systematically managing and prioritising innovation activities. This approach helps in assessing the social return of investment across an entire portfolio, crucial for CExDD's success in sustainable development initiatives.

Innovation in International Development Context: CExDD, like other development organisations, operates in a dynamic environment. It must balance diverse stakeholder needs, including local partners and international organisations. Portfolio management will aid in balancing risks and rewards, enabling CExDD to evaluate its social return on investment across its innovation activities.

Customising Portfolio Management: The CExDD should establish its portfolio using both base and custom criteria, reflecting its unique mission and operational context. This approach allows for strategic discussions and leads to a tailored portfolio suited to the Centre's specific needs in sustainable development.

Key Portfolio Criteria: The CExDD's portfolio criteria should include funding volume, scaling stages (from ideation to sustainable scale), and custom criteria tailored to its strategic objectives. This structure aids in evaluating and prioritising innovations based on their potential impact and alignment with the Centre's goals.

Engaging Stakeholders in Portfolio Management: Assembling a core team of decision-makers and stakeholders is vital. This group will oversee the portfolio management process, ensuring that innovations align with CExDD's strategic intentions and scaling stages.

Strategic Portfolio Analysis: The CExDD should regularly analyse its portfolio, assessing where funding is allocated against scaling stages. This analysis provides strategic insights into how well the portfolio aligns with the Centre's objectives and the balance of its innovation activities.

Adaptive Portfolio Management: Portfolio management is dynamic, requiring regular reviews and adjustments. CExDD should adapt its portfolio in response to changing circumstances and emerging opportunities, ensuring that it remains aligned with its strategic aims and maximises social impact.

Capacity Building and Culture Change: Emphasising capacity building and culture change within CExDD is crucial for successful portfolio management. This includes fostering a culture that supports innovation, enhancing staff capacity in managing portfolios, and ensuring leadership support for innovation strategies.

Mechanisms for Portfolio Management: CExDD should develop mechanisms, such as incentives, resource allocation strategies, and governance models, to support portfolio management. These mechanisms will ensure that the portfolio management approach is effectively integrated into the Centre's operations.

Iterative Process and Continuous Learning: Finally, CExDD should view portfolio management as an iterative process, incorporating continuous learning and adaptation. This approach allows the Centre to evolve its strategies and practices in response to new insights and changing developmental needs.

4 The Road Ahead

This report captures the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that Romania faces on its path to achieving the SDGs, highlighting the instrumental role of the CExDD in navigating and addressing these complexities.

The CExDD's establishment symbolises Romania's commitment to integrating and elevating its sustainable development efforts to align with global standards. The Centre stands as a beacon of innovation, collaboration, and strategic foresight, harmoniously merging the five core functions—Data Centre, Generation of Scientific Arguments, Networks & Partnerships, Think Tank & Strategy, and Communication & Knowledge—with the national and global sustainability agenda.

Key findings from this report underscore the urgent need for a unified approach to SDG implementation, emphasising the importance of data-driven policy-making, research and scientific analysis, enhanced networks and partnerships, innovative strategy development, and effective communication and knowledge dissemination. These elements are not only crucial for Romania's sustainable development but also resonate with the global pursuit of a balanced and inclusive future.

The CExDD's role in fostering sustainable economic growth, energy transition, infrastructure development, human capital enhancement, institutional strengthening, and policy coherence significantly contributes to bridging urban-rural disparities, promoting clean energy, and bolstering institutional resilience. Its dynamic functionalities and phased implementation approach, underpinned by stakeholder insights and global best practices, position the Centre to fill critical gaps and adapt to evolving challenges and opportunities in Romania's sustainable development landscape.

In conclusion, the CExDD exemplifies a strategic move towards a cohesive, forward-looking framework for sustainable development in Romania. It marks a new era of cooperation, innovation, and strategic thinking, poised to make Romania a global leader in sustainable development. The Centre's comprehensive approach, undergirded by robust research, collaborative networks, and innovative methodologies, sets a strong foundation for a resilient and sustainable future, not just for Romania but as a model for the global community.

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