

S U M M A R Y

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

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Vocational training in agriculture and rural development is an essential tool for the transformation and modernisation of the agricultural sector, ensuring the economic, social and ecological progress of rural communities. This supports economic growth and food security and contributes to protecting the environment and improving the quality of life for rural residents.

Equally, the vocational training of farmers is vital for the progress of rural communities. It contributes to increasing productivity and efficiency by adopting modern techniques and advanced technologies, facilitating local economic development by creating new business opportunities and jobs. It also ensures food security through the sustainable production of high-quality food and contributes to environmental conservation through ecological agricultural practices. Vocational training improves the quality of life of rural residents and helps them adapt to climate change, ensuring the resilience and sustainability of agriculture.

The degree of novelty offered by this doctoral thesis is given by the analysis of a topic less studied in the research of other theses, namely the analysis of the role that professional training can have on the development of agriculture and rural space. At the same time, this paper, through the case study carried out in the South Muntenia region, highlights the importance of the concept of lifelong learning, with positive effects on the way agriculture is practised, making it more efficient and adaptable to contemporary challenges. This not only improves productivity and sustainability but also contributes to economic development and improves the quality of life of rural communities.

Vocational training in agriculture can bring a significant degree of innovation in various aspects of agricultural practices and rural management: advanced technologies, precision agriculture, sustainable techniques, soil and biodiversity conservation, modern marketing strategies, diversification of agricultural activities, adaptation to climate change, natural resource management such as water conservation techniques, crop rotation to improve soil fertility.

The overall objective of the PhD thesis is to highlight the importance of vocational training for rural residents, revolutionising agricultural practices and farm management. Through this scientific approach, we aimed to emphasize the role of professional training for the development of agriculture, for the sustainable use of all existing resources at the rural area level, through which to offer the inhabitants ways and solutions for their efficient management..

To fulfil this objective, a series of **secondary objectives** of the research were established, which derive from the main objective:

- presentation of the concept of professional training and the legal framework for its implementation;
- presentation of the role of education in rural development;
- presentation of the support offered through the PNDR of professional training measures developed for rural areas and agriculture;
- presentation of the impact of professional training measures in Romania following the application of the PNDR, POSDRU AND POCU programs;
- the socio-economic analysis of the South Muntenia Region that provided the premises for the implementation of the pilot program of professional training carried out in this region;
- carrying out a field survey addressed to several 500 farmers from the South Muntenia Region to identify the professional training needs of rural farmers.

Establishing the general objective and the secondary ones, within the case study carried out, allowed us to collect a large number of data from the studied area, based on which, we had the opportunity to formulate a series of conclusions and proposals for awareness of the importance of vocational training in the agricultural field.

Chapter 1, entitled "**PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF ADULTS. LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**" addresses the complexity and importance of vocational training in the context of rural and agricultural development in Romania, reflecting the evolution of this field and its long-term impact on economic and social sustainability. In the first section, the concept of vocational training for adults is discussed, emphasizing the need for continuous development of skills to adapt to changes in the work environment. The literature, including the work of Knowles and Jarvis, emphasizes the importance of learning and applying knowledge in all professional settings.

The evolution of vocational training is explored from the apprenticeship system of antiquity to the institutionalization of technical and vocational education in the 20th century, highlighting the impact of technological and economic changes. The next section focuses on vocational training in the European Union and in Romania, describing the legislative and strategic framework governing this area, including the importance of adapting to the demands of the labor market and promoting professional mobility. Analysis of relevant legislation, such as Government Ordinance No. 129/2000, the National Education Law and the Labor Code, highlights the mechanisms through which Romania aims to ensure equal and non-discriminatory access to professional training and to promote the development of skills recognized on the labor market. The role of the National Qualifications Authority and the impact of European policies on vocational training in Romania are also discussed.

The chapter explores in detail the specific training and advisory needs in the agricultural sector, highlighting the importance of adapting to new technologies, sustainable practices and risk management. The presentation of the initiatives from the National Strategic Plan for the modernization of the agricultural sector through digital technology marks an important step towards the effective integration of consulting and professional training services.

Through the broad discussion of current developments, legislation and strategies in the field of vocational training, the chapter emphasizes the essential role of continuing education in promoting sustainable economic and social development, with a focus on adapting to labor market dynamics and global challenges. Investment in vocational training is a strategic priority for the development of the professional skills needed in a modern and competitive economy.

Chapter 2, entitled "***THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING MEASURES IN ROMANIA FOLLOWING THE APPLICATION OF THE PNDR, POSDRU AND POCU PROGRAMS***" addresses the impact of vocational training measures in Romania, in the context of the application of PNDR, POSDRU and POCU. This section provides a broad perspective on the efforts to modernize and adapt to European standards through these programs funded by the European Union, highlighting the achievements, challenges and impact on the Romanian economy and society.

PNDR is presented as a cornerstone in Romania's rural development strategy. Since its inception, PNDR has been focused on improving rural infrastructure, modernizing the agricultural sector and promoting sustainable practices. PNDR 2007-2013 and PNDR 2014-2020 are mentioned as successive stages of this program, each with its specifics, but aimed at improving living conditions in rural areas and increasing the competitiveness of the agricultural sector. The program offered the possibility of initiating and developing sectors that would provide new jobs, improve rural incomes and adapt to EU standards. However, it encountered challenges such as administrative complexity and difficulty absorbing funds.

POSDRU is aimed at developing human capital and improving competitiveness by aligning education and professional training with the needs of the labor market. The program placed a special emphasis on social inclusion, seeking to improve access to education and employment for vulnerable groups. Results include increasing school enrollment and upgrading educational infrastructure, although they have faced challenges related to resource management and impact assessment.

POCU focuses on improving human capital and reducing economic and social disparities through investments in certain areas (education, vocational training), with direct results on employment and social inclusion. The main axes of the POCU are presented as initiatives to support young people, improve access to the labor market for all categories of people, social inclusion and combat poverty, but also improve the education and skills of residents with positive effects on local development. POCU is described as having a significant impact on the socio-economic development of Romania, contributing to the modernization and diversification of the rural economy, and improving the skills of the inhabitants.

The chapter details how these EU-funded programs have contributed to rural development, vocational training and adaptation to the modern economy in Romania, marking significant progress in modernizing infrastructure, improving education and vocational training, and supporting social inclusion. However, the challenges encountered are also highlighted, such as administrative complexity and the need to improve the sustainability and efficiency of the programs.

Chapter 3, entitled "***SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THE SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION***" engages in a rigorous elucidation of the defining socio-economic characteristics of the South Muntenia region, emphasizing the geographic, demographic, and economic specificities, as well as those related to tourism. Through meticulous investigation of

geography, biodiversity and human settlement structure, the academic discourse progresses to a detailed analysis of population dynamics, culminating in an exhaustive analysis of the economic structure of the region, which includes entrepreneurship, the agricultural sector, rural development and tourism.

Initially, a descriptive picture of South Muntenia is outlined, emphasizing the strategic importance of the geographical positioning, the diversity of ecosystems and the morphology of human settlements. The specificity of the region is marked by a rich ecological variety, which hosts characteristic species of flora and fauna, in a climate favourable to the development of a wide range of human activities. The structure of human settlements reflects a dynamic evolutionary trajectory between rural and urban environments, indicating relevant particularities of the urbanization process.

The next section deepens the analysis of population evolution and dynamics within South Muntenia, offering an analytical perspective on demographic transformations and their impact on the social and economic structure. A careful examination of numerical population variations and prevailing demographic trends is carried out, highlighting their implications for regional planning and development.

In the third section, the discourse turns to the economic foundation of the region, with a focus on macroeconomic indicators, entrepreneurial initiatives, and the agricultural and tourism sectors. Analysis of economic indicators, such as Gross Domestic Product and labor productivity, illustrate the economic significance of the region in a national context. Details on entrepreneurship, agriculture and rural development expose a diverse economic structure, highlighting the role of infrastructure, the distribution of agricultural land and the specific characteristics of the area related to agricultural production. The tourism potential of the region is also explored, highlighting the natural and cultural capacity as engines of economic expansion.

In chapter 4, entitled "***CASE STUDY REGARDING THE APPLICATION OF THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING MEASURE IN THE SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION***" we carried out an analysis of the current knowledge, skills and competencies of farmers in the South Muntenia Region to identify their training needs. To analyze how agricultural vocational training can bring added value to agricultural holdings, for the growth of the rural economy, 500 people were interviewed who came from a wide variety of agricultural farms of different physical dimensions, with different activity profiles.

The questionnaire was structured in two parts: the first part provided a series of information about those who participated in the survey: geographical location at the level of the analyzed region, age group, gender of the respondent, level of education, the basic profile of the farm and the size of the farm.

In the second part of the questionnaire, it was desired to obtain information regarding the participation or not of farmers in professional training courses, the courses completed or specifying the reasons why they did not participate in professional training courses, as well as the intention to participate in the future to training courses, the reasons and criteria for choosing a training course, but also the inconveniences encountered in choosing a training course, the duration of a course and last but not least, the future intentions of the interviewed farmers regarding accessing some measures from PNS in the future programming period (2023-2027).

The 500 respondents were invited to answer 25 questions in the questionnaire without specifying their personal identification data. In this way, objective answers could be received, which would present a clear picture of the need for professional training for the benefit of the development of agricultural holdings and implicitly of rural communities.

In chapter 5, "**GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**", the conclusions of the paper were presented, as well as a series of recommendations formulated for the organization of an effective and successful professional training course for the rural community.

Through this doctoral thesis, through the studies and research carried out, we wanted to highlight the fact that vocational training can essentially contribute to the development of the Romanian rural space, because by developing the knowledge and practical skills of farmers, particularly important ideas and solutions can be obtained for the modernization of agriculture, for the better change of rural communities, supports the establishment of young farmers, encourages entrepreneurship and creates jobs in emerging sectors of the rural economy, with positive effects on the revitalization and sustainable progress of rural communities.