

SUMMARY

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Sustainable rural development is a topic of interest for a wide group of specialists with interdisciplinary skills and concerned with the modernization of rural settlements while preserving their identity. Numerous studies published in prestigious journals address different research topics incident to the development of rural areas, as is the research topic addressed by me in this doctoral thesis. The approach focuses on the strategic approach to sustainable rural development as a means of making rural development management more efficient.

The current socio-economic context creates a favorable framework for studying the problematics of the sustainable development of rural areas for several reasons: the socio-economic reality of rural areas, the wealth of resources and their potential for sustainable development, traditions and ethno-cultural identity, the interest shown at the level of power of the European Union and implicitly of the member countries for sustainable rural development, the active involvement of the community in the process of elaborating, adopting and implementing the best solutions for the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources.

Rural development has a strategic character, it is characterized by complexity and global importance, a fact that leads me to identify relevant solutions for the integration of the major fields of activity carried out in the countryside, but also their development, respectively their diversification under the conditions of preserving identity. In order to fulfill this requirement, we proceeded to adopt the strategic approach to the issue of sustainable rural development because it is based on intelligent, respectively creative thinking within which through the development of strategies, future changes are predicted and realized.

Doctoral thesis entitled "Strategic management of sustainable rural development" presents at the beginning numerous information derived from the successive diagnosis of statistical data and specialized publications that contribute to highlighting in a relevant way the state of knowledge of the issue of sustainable rural development and the researched area, supplemented with own opinions. The present thesis combines in a balanced manner the elements of certified theoretical foundation with results and own opinions, respectively conclusions of the applied research carried out. The doctoral thesis is structured in two parts, one of theoretical foundation and the other of application. Both add up to 6 chapters whose defining elements are:

Chapter I, entitled "The current stage of sustainable rural development" highlights numerous elements of the theoretical foundation of the concepts of sustainable development, respectively of sustainable rural development. The European Union has an important role in this endeavor through the numerous initiatives for the implementation of the concept of sustainable development: obtaining by the year 2050 the status of a neutral region regarding the carbon footprint; the adoption of the Green Deal policy and implicitly the orientation towards well-being. It is also noted that sustainable development is mediated by the adoption of information and communication technology that has the role of optimizing and streamlining the use of resources, namely the creation of intelligent networks compatible with the Internet of Things (IoT) for their dynamic and sustainable management. Sustainable development is a basic component of European policy, it is present in strategic documents, respectively treaties of the European Union and is carried out on the basis of the three pillars, emphasizing that the environment represents the basis, the economic the instrument, and the social the target of sustainable rural development. Sustainable development is a basic component of European policy, it is present in strategic documents, respectively treaties of the European Union, such as "Agenda 2030" with the 17 objectives of sustainable development (SDG), initially adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, for which he created his own vision. At the same time, the role of environmental diagnosis is emphasized for identifying problems and developing relevant solutions for sustainable development.

The second chapter entitled "The methodological framework for research on the strategic management of sustainable rural development" emphasizes the complexity and actuality of the sustainable rural development process, which calls for the choice of a research methodology that uses quantitative and qualitative methods capable of capturing the territorial specificity and takes into account the dynamics of the processes that characterize the current economic-social context. Sustainable rural development is linked to the rural economy through the available resources, so attention is focused on their sustainable exploitation, for which research is needed in the field of management, by adopting strategic thinking. The methods included in the case study methodology subscribe to the strategic approach to the process of sustainable rural development and bring added value by focusing on characteristics, territorial specificity, respectively on

the sustainable capitalization of available endogenous resources, and the creation of a favorable framework for increasing the capacity for innovation and adoption of emerging technologies. The premises for the development of development options are created by knowing the current state and the future evolution of the community. The development of strategic objectives, the strategies to achieve them and their implementation takes place within a process called strategic management process. In order to develop and choose the most relevant strategic options, a strategic diagnosis is needed in advance.

The purpose of the research is to sustainably exploit the endogenous resources available at the level of the Territorial Administrative Unit (UAT) Vaideeni, Vâlcea county in order to diversify the economy and achieve sustainable development by developing relevant options and/or strategic projects in this regard.

The general objectives of the research are: the strategic approach in the management of sustainable rural development as an effective way of research, the realization of the strategic diagnosis of the countryside in Vâlcea county and Vaideeni commune in order to identify the elements of territorial specificity, the elaboration of strategic options for sustainable rural development, the realization of the project strategic for sustainable rural development of Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county.

The research methodology is subscribed to the established purpose and objectives and allows performing analyzes at the territorial level using various methods belonging to strategic management. Concretely, quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the research methodology, such as: secondary analysis of specialized literature, identification of critical factors and successful initiatives, application of PESTEL and SWOT analysis models. To ensure continuity, we proceeded to perform the SOR analysis (consolidated by focus-group meetings) and create the problem tree and the objective tree.

The third chapter "Diagnostic analysis of the sustainable development of rural space in Vâlcea county", highlights that the process of sustainable development at the level of the "South West Oltenia Region" is guided by the "Regional Development Plan (PDR) of the South-Oltenia Region, 2021-2027". At the level of the Region, there is natural capital, favorable to agriculture, but also to other economic sectors that await a capitalization commensurate with it, which is possible by improving the use of water resources, by implementing new technologies for irrigation, adapting farms/households to the requirements of the "Common Agricultural Policy 2021-2027" and the new Green Deal development strategies, the sustainable utilization of landscape resources for sustainable tourism, the sustainable utilization of endogenous resources available to achieve: profitable agro-food production, the sustainability of natural resources, adaptation to climate change, and a development of the territory balanced. In order to capture the specificity of rural settlements in Vâlcea County, the diagnosis consisted in evaluating the criteria that define an area according to the PESTEL model (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal). The results obtained following

the application of the diagnosis of the rural area using the PESTEL model led to the selection of relevant diagnostic sub-criteria for the approach regarding the development of the rural area of the county, highlighting at the same time the impact on the future strategy.

Chapter four entitled "Research on the strategic management of sustainable rural development. Case study: montana area, Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county", highlights the complex character of the theme and the particularities of the process of diagnosis and elaboration of strategic options for the sustainable development of Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county. It is located in the northwest of Vâlcea county, at the base of the Căpățâna mountains. The materialization of the research took place in stages according to the research methodology and led to the following results:

The analysis of the political criterion highlights the existence of a legislative framework dedicated to the sustainable development of the rural area highlighted at the level of the European Union through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) carried out on the basis of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. Currently the 2023-2027 PAC is based on the specific legal framework and the set of detailed specifications in the PAC strategic plans (PS) approved by the European Commission. PS PACs make an appreciable contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the European Green Deal, the farm to fork strategy and the biodiversity strategy (European Green Deal, Farm to Fork Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy). For the period 2023-2027, the implementation of the PAC in Romania is carried out through the National Strategic Plan (PNS) which contains measures for the development of the sustainable rural economy. The Local Development Strategy (SDL) ensures the implementation of rural development measures according to the PAC through the PNS at the Vaideeni UAT level, Vâlcea county.

The analysis of the economic criterion attests agriculture as the main activity in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county, as well as the development of tourism - Vaideeni commune is a tourist resort. The utilization of endogenous resources available in Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county is generally carried out at the household level through subsistence agriculture. There is also an appreciable number of enterprises carrying out activities in the following fields: agriculture, hunting and services (5), forestry (9), food industry (7), wholesale trade (2), retail trade (11), beverage manufacturing (1), wood processing (1), manufacture of chemical substances and products or rubber (1). The workforce numbers around 310 employees. Local producers in the categories of vegetables, fruits, jams and jams, bee products, dairy products, natural juices are promoted in a special section on its website. Also 13 local producers registered in the National Register of Mountain Products.

The analysis of the social criterion leads to highlighting the phenomenon of depopulation as in most mountainous areas in Romania, with the mention that it reaches a minimum in the year 2022 from where it starts to register a slight increase as can be seen in figure 3. This state can also be put on the effects of the implementation of policies, programs and projects included in the local development strategy. The road

infrastructure of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county is good, the geographical location at micro-regional, county and regional level ensures connectivity with county and national roads. The public utility infrastructure is well represented by the water supply network. All households, institutions and economic agents are connected to the electricity distribution network. There is no methane gas supply network, thermal energy is provided with stoves and/or individual thermal plants. Waste management is done locally. In UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county, the health infrastructure includes two family medical practices and two pharmacies. Education in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county is provided by Luca Solomon Secondary School (Vaideeni village), it has 14 classes, 2 laboratories, an IT office, library and sports field. Each of the neighboring villages has a primary school as follows: Primary School in Atârnatu with 3 classes, Primary School in Izvoru Roșu with 3 classes, 1 computer lab, 1 laboratory and library, Primary School in Marița with 2 classes.

The analysis of the technological criterion highlights the ability of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county to assimilate sustainable technologies and concerns for increasing the population's access to information and professional training, increasing innovation capacity and increasing research and development expenses. Also, the location near the town of Horezu creates the conditions for an appreciable level of spending on innovation and the number of enterprises, especially in the field of rural tourism. There is an appreciable number of entrepreneurs who have innovated in products, technological processes, organizational and marketing methods.

The analysis of the natural criterion highlights a predominantly mountainous area, little anthropically modified with small localities where the density of the stable population is low. Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county is located at the foot of the Căpățâna mountains. Climatic is an area under the influence of two major structures: the hill and the mountain. It presents a rich diversity of flora and fauna represented by beech forests, beech with softwoods, softwood forests (spruce, rarely fir and pine even yew). Juniper, rose hip, raspberry, blueberry, juniper and herbaceous vegetation (mosses, lichens), as well as bluebells, rock gorse, mountain lily, bear's grape cornflower (vulnerable species) can be identified next to it. The fauna is rich and diverse, represented by birds (nightingales, warblers, titmouses, etc.) and carnivorous animals (fox, wolf, marten, wild boar, deer, squirrel, deer, Carpathian lynx, black goats, brown bear). The meadows present a qualitative floristic composition that has a positive effect on the quality of the mountain products - element of identity and development of these areas (SDL, Vaideeni).

The analysis of the legislative criteria attests to the existence of specific laws and regulations for the sustainable development of mountain areas. Public research and executive institutions specialized in rural development, non-governmental organizations in the field and the numerous studies, pilot projects, normative acts and specialists are elements that contribute to the realization of a legislative framework suitable for the sustainable development of rural mountain areas and provide specialists

for the application of EU Resolutions /EC regarding the concept of "mountain product", "protected origin" (PDO) and "protected geographical indication" (PGI), etc.

The strategic diagnosis carried out according to the PESTEL model identified the characterization elements of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county. They are presented centrally in relation to the analysis criteria, highlighting the relevant sub-criteria. The characterization elements were used in the process of assessing the relevance of each sub-criterion selected for the purpose of the research.

The PESTEL diagnosis was completed with the results of the empirical research carried out to evaluate the existing administrative capacity in Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county, including the existing possibilities to create and maintain an adequate framework to ensure a sustainable rural development. The cumulative results validated the hypotheses and created the premises for the identification of needs, potential and available means for the process of sustainable rural development.

The fifth chapter entitled "Strategic project regarding the sustainable rural development of Vaideeni municipality, Vâlcea county" highlights a number of 23 sub-domains at the level of the four major fields of activity (economic, social, infrastructure and environment) in which the local needs were identified from the perspective of the existing potential and the means available for their realization. The use of the SWOT analysis model consisted in the matrix arrangement of external and internal factors in the form of four quadrants, from the combination of which strategic options can be easily identified. In order to emphasize the specific elements of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county in relation to the sustainable development of the rural economy, we continued the research with the assessment of the relevance of the opportunities and threats on the strong and weak points (SOR analysis), for which we organized a focus group meeting at which 7 people participated, representing key local factors and specialists concerned with the sustainable development of the rural economy.

The problems of the sustainable development of the rural economy in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county are identified with the help of SWOT analysis, but the causal relationships are decisive for the development of relevant solutions and implicitly of strategic options, for which we chose to use the problem tree method motivated by the use frequent in the process of strategic planning.

After identifying the problems and causal relationships, solutions (strategic measures) were developed to replace the problems in the problem-tree, obtaining the objective-tree. In the tree of objectives, the strategic options identified with the help of SOR analysis are highlighted, which proves that "different methods of analysis and well done achieve similar results" (Iagăru, 2016).

The information acquired and the results obtained from the implementation of the methodology used led to the outline of two strategic directions, the first to create a framework favorable to the sustainable development of the rural economy and the second to elaborate specific strategic options in this regard, including the realization of the strategic project.