

STRATEGIC APPROACH – IMPERATIVE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

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Abstract: Strategic approach of the rural development is a necessity arising from the fact that the evolution of human society has caused structural and functional changes affecting the elements that characterize the authentic rural area and give individuality and specificity to it. It is noted the need to produce a change in the countryside able to strike a balance between the need to preserve and promote rural tradition and natural tendency to modernize rural life. The purpose of the research is to develop a set of policy options that lead to rural development, to improvement of the quality of life for all community members without increasing the use of natural resources more than the endurance limits of the earth. The results are based on strategic analysis of the countryside in Sibiu Depression and are relevant to the elaboration of strategic development options that take into account its specificity.

Key words: activities, attitude, development, economics, rural, strategy.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary society - knowledge based society - presents as a defining characteristic the change in the general sense, all areas of human activity that directly affects economic activity of both organizations and of those responsible for creating and implementing a sustainable development mechanism, in any community. Change becomes a solution for business due to frequent reorganization and continuous adaptation to cope with changes in their products and in their action to seize the opportunities manifested at a time and to counteract threats. This means that organizations and managers should adopt one model of effective thinking, the strategic model that is based on intelligent thinking i.e. creative thinking (Brătianu, 2000). Stakeholders (parliament, government, the city, the community, the individual) should develop and implement mechanisms for sustainable development and must adopt rural development policies, establish strategies that take into account local diagnosis, i.e. real assessment of economic and social life of the individual and of the community, government programs and policy guidelines (Mitrache 2000). Management adopted by both companies and nonprofit organizations or factors responsible able to operate on the basis of strategic thinking is a strategic management. It contributes to the foundation and implementation of plans and programs designed to achieve the overall objectives of the organization (Nicolescu, 2001). Located in obvious correlation with the overall strategy of the firm, strategic management refers to the process by which managers set the direction of long-term evolution of the organization, establish specific performance goals, develop strategies to ensure the attainment of these objectives - taking into account various national circumstances and external - and undertake the execution of the decisions and actions chosen (Constantinescu at. Al, 2000). Strategic approach to rural development is a necessity arising from the fact that the evolution of human society has caused structural and functional changes affecting the elements that characterize the authentic rural environment and give individuality and specificity to it (Iagăru, 2012). It is noted the need to produce a change in the countryside able to strike a balance between the need to preserve and promote the rural tradition of economic, environmental and social environments, with the natural tendency of modernization of rural life (Nistreanu at. Al., 2009). The purpose of the research is to develop a set of policy options that lead to rural development and to improve the quality of life for all community members without

increasing the use of natural resources over the endurance limits of the earth (Mateoc-Serbs and Ungureanu, 2010, p 46). For this it was organized a field research on strategic assessment of the countryside in Sibiu Depression. The rural area investigated is located in central Romania, namely in the southwestern hills of Transylvania Basin and the northern Carpathians, respectively Cindrelului Mountains and Lotrului mountains in the north whose altitude is between 380 and 602 m (Sandu, 1998). Strategic approach involves a comprehensive and coherent set of steps and procedures that must be followed in a particular sequence (Rue and Holland, 1986): situation analysis, examining perspectives, establishing future strategic alternatives and compares them, strategy implementation, evaluation and control of the strategy. A new trend towards a healthier life-style, renewed attention towards environmental issues and increased attention to quality, only to name a few. Research tends to point these issues out when it comes to peoples' attitude towards choosing a holiday spot. Nowadays tourists, known as "the new tourists", pay more and more attention to the rewards yielded by holidays, especially uniqueness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Most schools of methodology insist that the study of a particular socio-economic reality should "use in parallel and complementary quantitative and qualitative methods to achieve extra knowledge (Kerekes at. Al., 2010)." Methods and techniques of strategic management are used by responsible factors of rural development to have an overview and to identify critical factors with impacting on the rural areas (David, 2009). Strategic approach to rural development begins with the statistical study and of literature in the field (reports, strategies, studies, monographs) and continues to direct research in order to collect data on problems uncovered by information in official documents. The information obtained is grouped into categories by analyzing the macroeconomic factors with the help of the PESTEL method (political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors) and represents an important step in creating a new strategy since it fixates the frame in which it operates and in which decisions will be taken (Garrett at. Al., 2009). The resulting information is used in the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) to highlight strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Ilieș 2008). To highlight new problems and increase the quality of information it was proceeded to organizing a semi-structured interview with key local stakeholders and structured interviews to collect data regarding successful initiatives.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Research methodology has allowed to obtain relevant information in accordance with the objectives of the research and led to the identification of problems of development of rural areas in order to integrate main activities in the rural environment in the context of environmental protection. Situation Analysis of the rural development is managed in terms of policies through the Common Agricultural Policy which provides overall strategic framework and promotes the idea of adapting it to local specificity.

Economic diagnosis performed in the countryside of Sibiu Depression has highlighted a number of specific issues. This leads to the conclusion that economic activities are less diversified; its economic life is still dominated by agriculture. Focused on meeting domestic demand, the agriculture benefits from important and diversified natural potential, but is still at the beginning of a long and difficult process of modernization and restructuring process, meant to lead to efficiency and better exploitation of natural resources.

Rural non-agricultural activities conducted in Sibiu Depression have recorded a considerable amount and belong to different domains. Food is an important traditional branch of manufacturing industry and illustrates a high percentage among the processing units (30% of total manufacturing units) and a slight increase (32 units in 2010, compared to 27 units in 2007). Other businesses in the manufacturing industry represented in Sibiu Depression rural area are part of the categories: wood, products of wood and cork, except furniture (23 specialized units); manufacture of articles of straw and plaiting materials (14 specialized units); clothing and specialized in the manufacture of other non-metallic mineral products (12 specialized units). Metallic construction and metal products, except machinery and equipment in rural areas of Sibiu Depression are represented by 45 enterprises specialized in this type of activity. Construction is one of the most developed activities in rural areas of Sibiu Depression, the number of companies specialized in this type of activity is of 127 units which means 11.6 % of total enterprises from the rural areas investigated. Trade is the largest economic activity in rural areas of Sibiu Depression, and the share of this kind of enterprises reaches 26.75% from all the enterprises situated in rural areas. Transport recorded a positive development from 49 companies in 2007 to 76 companies in 2010 but is does not stand up to the current requirements. The tourism sector in rural areas of Sibiu Depression recorded in 2010, compared to 2007, an increase both in the number of units specialized in such activities (from 64 companies in 2007 to 77 companies in 2010) as well as the annual business, but not yet effective and sustainable in natural resource that are available. Communications specialized in information and communications haven't succeeded in an appropriate development, but the prerequisites to achieve this in the near future exist. Services in the banking sector and give an improved security in the rural area investigated in 2010. Companies specializing in rural real estate transactions highlight the existence of a lively activity. Legal and accounting services, administrative centralized management and management consulting, as well as architectural and engineering can be found in half of the rural areas analyzed. Administrative services and support services, education, health and social assistance, arts, entertainment and recreation and other types of services are more limited and unevenly distributed.

Analysis of the social environment in the Sibiu Depression shows a share of inhabitants living in a rural area of Sibiu Depression of 16.01% (2010) of the total population. This illustrates an unbalanced distribution of population by the two areas within the basin influenced by the inclusion of Sibiu. Natural growth shows a positive value of 2.2 ‰ (2009) well above the average of the same indicator for the period from 1992 to 2009 (0.26 ‰), which indicates the existence of a favorable environment for development of the area investigated.

Analysis of the technology in the rural area of Sibiu Depression shows a relatively high level of both expenditure on innovation and the number of enterprises.

Analysis of the rural environment in Sibiu Depression shows that rural development must meet rural environmental protection performance. This approach is supported by the existence of a legal and institutional framework implemented by the Regional Environmental Protection Agency Sibiu, whose status is "decentralized public service with responsibilities in environmental protection.

Legislative environment analysis reveals regulation by a variety of environmental laws, human health and quality of life which implement EU directives on environmental health level, labor law, public health and fiscal domain.

The information gathered led to the SWOT analysis, a method commonly used to identify strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats that an organization

or territorial units have (Vincze et al., 2009). A first variation of SWOT analysis was then obtained, that included a significant number of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats which led to the organization of focus group meetings with local responsibility makers and professionals with the aim of discussing relevant opportunities and threats, each of the strengths and weaknesses found taken separately and analyzed in terms of sustainable development and economic diversification of agricultural and nonagricultural environments. The results have enabled a brief SWOT analysis (Table 2) whose interpretation shows that natural resources are the most important factor especially for tourism development, rural, agricultural, food industry and related industries. To capitalize them, an important role have technologies in information and communication and physical infrastructure.

Table 1

Brief SWOT Analysis

	Strengths		Weaknesses
PT 1	The existence of favorable natural resources for sustainable tourism and rural tourism.	PS 1	Low level of knowledge on attracting development funds.
PT 2	Natural resources for sustainable farming.	PS 2	Poor educational infrastructure.
PT 3	Industrial parks in the rural areas of Sura Mica and Selimbar	PS 3	Fewer jobs for young people with higher education.
PT 4	Important forest resources.	PS 4	Sustainable development strategies still not adapted to local conditions.
PT 5	Brands recognized nationally and internationally.	PS 5	Decreased acreage and number of animals.
	Opportunities		Threats
O 1	Opportunity to access national and European development funds for tourism and agrotourism.	A 1	Lack of action to support businesses in rural areas
O 2.	Opportunity to access national and European development funds for agriculture and food industry.	A 2.	Reduced capacity of key local stakeholders to create partnerships for European funds and implementing projects
O 3	Possibility of accessing funds for development of non-agricultural sector.	A 3	Low interest of farmers for association.
O 4	Possibility of accessing funds for development of physical infrastructure	A 4	Reduced companies activity due to the economic crisis
O 5	Possibility of accessing funds for development of agricultural services	A 5	Lack of policies and strategies to promote and support their products in rural areas

The results are relevant for development in the implementation of policy options that lead to sustainable development of rural areas:

Promoting rural development by attracting investment in physical infrastructure and information and communication technology. Attracting investment in physical infrastructure, information and communication technology that helps to increase the attractiveness of rural areas, the efficient use of resources and environmental protection.

Improving educational infrastructure for knowledge, and develop entrepreneurial skills. Education is one of the essential elements of rural development that needs to be sustained and envisage the development of entrepreneurial skills, knowledge of the principles of sustainable development and the need for economic diversification.

Promote actions to support businesses in rural areas. It is the policy option that provides the basis to solve rural problems of state institutions in order to cooperation with enterprises and educational institutions; support products and / or services on the market, stimulating the adoption of sustainable development principles; support start-ups.

CONCLUSIONS

Adoption of policy options geared to promoting information and consulting services, namely cooperation between entrepreneurs, public authorities and universities is directly related to the development of economic activities in the rural areas investigated. Socio-economic analysis conducted in the rural areas studied showed a relative increase of economic activities, especially in those in which the tourism and agro tourism are main activities, but the construction, trade, food industry not so much.

Encouraging entrepreneurship is dependent on the availability of educational infrastructure and actions taken in order to support entrepreneurs.

Identify existing problems in rural areas studied and proposing policy measures to solve them in the direction of capitalizing territorial specificity, are central to sustainable development of economic activities.

Development and promotion of public services in rural areas should be one of the major concerns for key local stakeholders towards people in rural areas.

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