

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Nicolae CONCIOIU

University of Craiova, Romania

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7162-4332>

Email: chimicalconi@yahoo.com

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Abstract:

The present work consists in the strategic evaluation of the rural space and the elaboration of strategic options for sustainable rural development by involving the members of the rural community. The aim is to harmonize the development requirements of the community and environmental protection according to the European Union 2020 development strategy (European Green Deal). The research methodology adopted is the case study whose complexity required the use of qualitative and quantitative research methods to highlight the specific elements of the rural space in the Guşoeni Territorial Administrative Unit and the adoption of strategic measures for the sustainable development of the rural economy. The methodology consisted in the strategic diagnosis of UAT Guşoeni with the help of the PESTEL and SWOT strategic analysis models. The continuity of the SWOT analysis was ensured by creating the problem tree to highlight the obstacles and the objective tree to highlight the solutions regarding the sustainable development of the rural economy.

Keywords: sustainable development, strategic diagnosis, rural economy, strategic options, rural space

1. Introduction

The studies are carried out at the territory of the Guşoeni Territorial Administrative Unit (UAT) located in the southern extremity of Vâlcea county, respectively the eastern extremity of Oltenia and approximately in the southern central area of Romania located at 44°2' north latitude and 24°10' east longitude (Concioiu and Iagăru, 2020). The area of Guşoeni commune is 3688 ha (inventory on the occasion of the application of Law no. 165/2013 and confirmed by OCPI Vâlcea), of which 1931 ha is agricultural land and 1935 ha is land with forest vegetation and other destinations (Annual Report, 2021 Guşoeni Town Hall).

2. Literature Review

The development of a territory/zone/area aims at the exploitation in superior conditions of the endogenous resources that give it specificity and constitute the continuous space of development. Communities are responsible for how they manage to preserve their territorial specificity and develop it to obtain cultural, social and economic competitive advantages. Endogenous resources are the basis

of the territorial specificity of an area and underpin its development (Zaman et al., 2014).

The issue of the sustainable development of a territory is current and complex, occupying a special place in economic, social or geographical practice (Iagăru et al., 2016).

3. Research objectives

The purpose of the research is to develop in order to implement some strategic options for sustainable rural development in Gușoeni commune, Vâlcea county. At the base of the development of strategic options is the concern of researchers to promote environmentally friendly technologies. To achieve the goal, six specific strategic objectives were established:

- Diagnosis of the environment to capture elements of specificity and dynamic connection to sustainable development policies and programs.
- Identification of endogenous resources with potential for sustainable development/utilization available in the environment of Gușoeni commune.
- Supporting and supporting the sustainable development of the community by developing an educational system oriented towards the use, access, creation and promotion of knowledge to accelerate the adoption by the local economy of the principles of sustainability and the promotion of environmentally friendly technologies.
- Ensuring an integrated sustainable development and improving the quality of life for the diversification of economic activities, the development of services and the creation of facilities for the maintenance of young people with higher training.
- Increasing the population's income by involving household members in multiple activities specific to the rural area.
- Development of actions specific to the marketing of rural products/services.

3.1 Methodology of research

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to diagnose the potential for sustainable development of the rural economy in UAT Gușoeni because they lead to "obtaining more knowledge" (Kerekes et al. 2010, p. 33), respectively to "forming an overall picture and the identification of critical factors with an impact on the countryside" (David, 2009). Specifically, the case study methodology was adopted, which consisted in the application of the following methods: secondary analysis of statistical data and relevant literature (reports, strategies, studies, monographs), PESTEL analysis, respectively SWOT analysis followed by the problem tree and the objective tree. The PESTEL diagnosis model because it represents a process of deep analysis of the components that directly or indirectly influence the sustainable development of the community in the researched rural area (Garrette et al., 2009). It analyzes both the strengths and weaknesses, respectively the opportunities and threats of the studied area, and in order to develop directions for achieving a sustainable rural economy, it trains all stakeholders (entrepreneurs, farmers, members of local authorities, members of non-governmental community organizations, employees in the rural social infrastructure, retirees and young people, managers from the industry and services sector, researchers, etc.) (Kerekes Kinga, 2010). The continuity of the SWOT analysis was obtained by using the problem tree that highlights the major problems faced by the community members and ordering them according to the causal relationships. A better

approach to the process of identifying solutions to solve the reported problems and building an objective tree, with a particular structure based on the principle that for each problem there are several solutions, is obtained. The next step in the development strategy development process is the clear formulation of the objectives, their ranking and the development of strategic options regarding the sustainable development of the rural economy. The implementation of the research methodology is presented in figure 1.

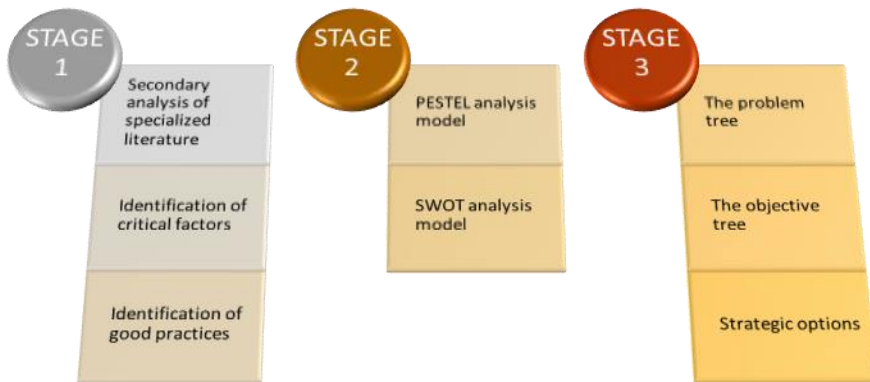


Figure 1. Implementation of the research methodology

Source: Adapted from Nistorescu at Iagăru 2012

3.2 Research question

Based on theories and studies from national and international specialized literature, as well as statistics and personal observations, the following hypotheses

Does the dynamic investigation by the factors of local responsibility of the components of the environment to identify existing trends and foreshadow future processes and phenomena increase the degree of knowledge and allow the development of relevant strategic options and supporting elements for the development of sustainable development policies at the local level?

The evaluation of endogenous resources and their potential for sustainable exploitation in the context given by the environment leads to the identification of economic opportunities that can be exploited profitably by focusing on the principles of sustainable development, innovation, information and communication technology?

Does the encouragement and support of entrepreneurship in the direction of integrated sustainable development at the local level ensure the diversification of economic activities and create conditions for maintaining young people with higher education within the community?

4. Results and discussion

This study contains elements of specificity resulting from the application of the case study methodology based on the diagnosis of the area related to UAT Gușoieni with the aim of identifying relevant strategic options for the sustainable development of the rural economy. The use of the PESTEL strategic analysis model for the diagnosis of the rural space related to UAT Gușoieni proved relevant for obtaining a realistic image and highlighting the territorial specificity, basic elements of the adaptation of the economic environment to the frequent changes in the environment. In order to complete the information regarding the socio-economic characteristics of the studied area, we applied the SWOT analysis mainly due to its character as a premise function in the preparation of development strategies. The aggregated information from the two strategic analysis methods is presented synthetically in table 1, which highlights the most relevant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for achieving a sustainable rural economy at the Gușoieni UAT level (Table 1). In order to ensure the continuity of the SWOT analysis, we used the problem tree method, which allowed highlighting the obstacles to the sustainable rural economy and ordering them according to the causal relationships (fig 2). Thus, a simplification of the process of identifying solutions for the reported problems and the construction of an objective tree (fig. 3) was achieved according to the principle that for each problem there are several solutions (Nistorescu and Iagăru, 2012).

Table 1. SWOT analysis of sustainable rural development in UAT Gușoieni, Vâlcea county

Strengths		Weaknesses	
1	Diverse underground resources (oil and natural gas)	1	Poor knowledge of fundraising
2	High tourist potential favorable to forms of tourism: monastic, uval (vineyard), agrotourism	2	Lack of a collector for agricultural products
3	High agricultural potential with favorability for organic farming	3	Aging population
4	Adequate physical infrastructure (roads, sewage, natural gas, dispensary)	4	Failure to attract young people with higher
5	Adequate ICT infrastructure	5	Irrelevant rural economy development strategies
Opportunities		Threats	
1	Sources of financing agricultural activities	1	Increased migration especially among young people
2	Sources of financing for non-agricultural activities	2	Vulnerability to climate change (extreme weather events)
3	Promotion of public-private partnership	3	Alteration of cultural heritage and traditions
4	Promotion of entrepreneurship	4	Lack of measures to protect genetic resources
5	Good quality of natural resources	5	Shy actions to promote and support local products/services

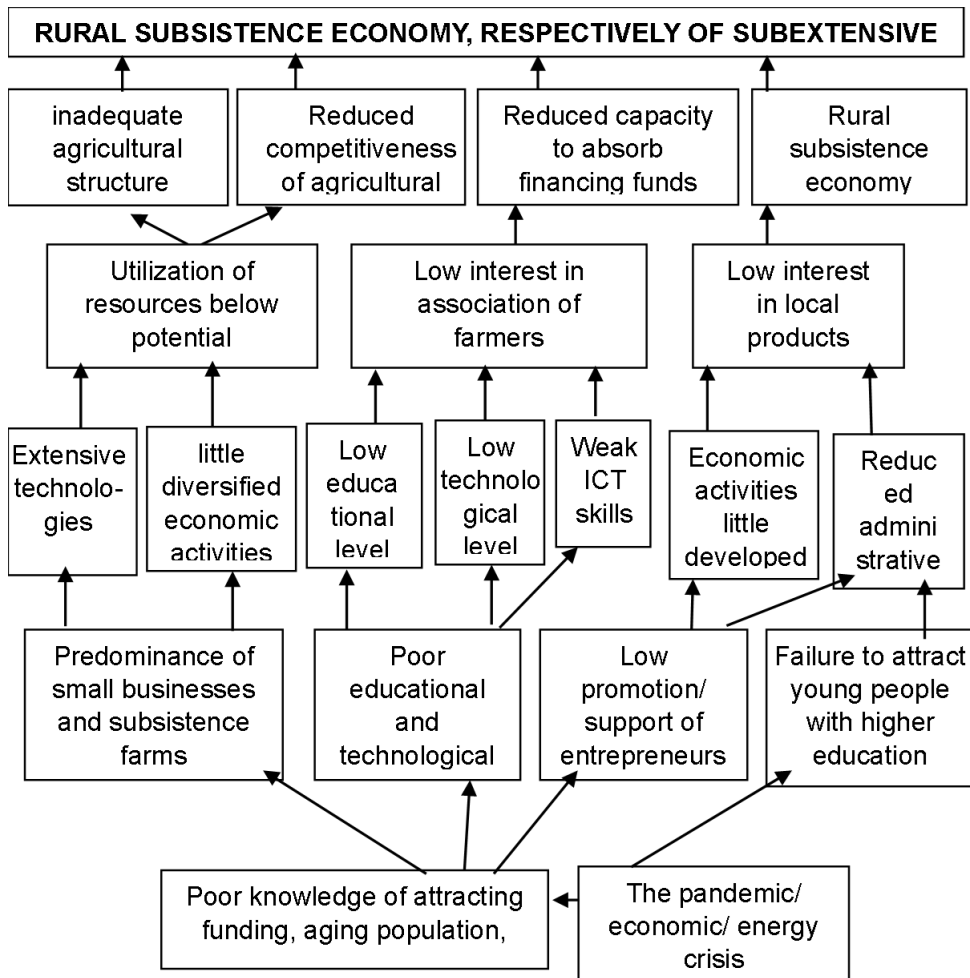


Figure 2. The problem three

Source: Own results

The information obtained is conclusive for the promotion of the following strategic options for the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources and implicitly the development of the sustainable rural economy:

A. Strategic options that create a favorable framework for the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources and implicitly sustainable rural development:

- Promotion of public-private partnership as a means of financing potentially profitable infrastructure projects in operation;
- Promotion of entrepreneurship both in terms of the educational side and the informational side, respectively consulting on sources of financing and methods of access;
- Promoting the permanent improvement of the physical and ICT infrastructure;

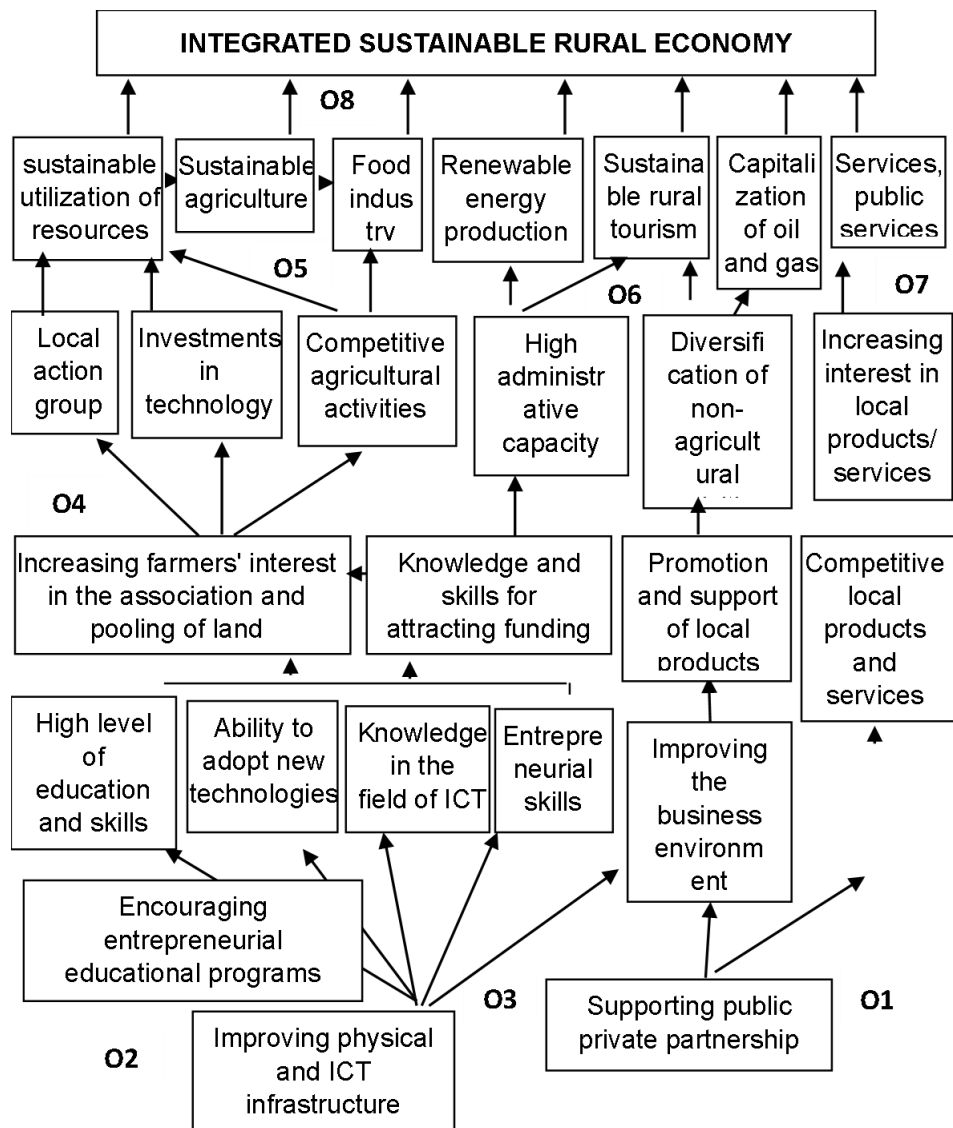


Figure 3. The Objective three

Source: Own results

B. Strategic options specific to the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources and implicitly sustainable rural development:

- Implementation and development of activities that sustainably capitalize on the renewable biological resources of the soil mainly through vineyards and fruit orchards, but also through agricultural crops of interest to the community;
- Implementation and development of activities that sustainably capitalize on endogenous resources through monastic, rural and agrotourism;

- Development and promotion of activities that sustainably capitalize on tradition and culture;
- Development, promotion and superior valorization of local products/services;

5. Conclusions

The development of strategic options for the sustainable development of the rural area is based on the use of strategic analysis models recommended by the specialized literature capable of highlighting in a relevant manner the territorial specificities of the researched area.

The case study of the research is the strategic evaluation of the rural space in the town of Gușoieni with a view to the sustainable rural development of the community. The major objective of the research is the design of strategic options for the sustainable development of the rural area, which lead to a better adaptation and improvement of the rural development policies, regarding the re/invigoration of economic activities and the increase of the degree of employment in the rural area.

The superior utilization of the endogenous resources of the rural space in the Gușoieni commune is based on a diagnosis at the level of its component elements.

Supporting the public-private partnership leads to the improvement of the business environment and its adoption of sustainability techniques with an impact on the development of non-agricultural activities and increasing interest in local products/services.

The improvement of the physical and ICT infrastructure, respectively the encouragement of entrepreneurial educational programs leads to a high level of education and skills, the ability to adopt new technologies, knowledge in the field of ICT and entrepreneurial skills, which increases the interest of farmers in the association and implicitly the development of sustainable agricultural activities .

It also leads to the accumulation of knowledge and skills for attracting financing funds, which leads to the increase of the administrative capacity to promote the production of renewable energy and the diversification of non-agricultural activities.

In this way, the prerequisites for obtaining a sustainable integrated rural economy are created.

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