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RE-EVALUATION OF THE POTENTIAL OF SOUTH MUNTENIA REGION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

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Abstract
The integrated sustainable development strategy of South Muntenia Region presented within the work, constitutes a projection for the very immediate period, respectively year 2015, of the rural area development in a balanced manner and it is to be proposed to the authorities involved at regional level The South Muntenia Regional Development Board (1) and a county level (The County Councils) (2) in the implementation of the development policies. The strategy aims a wide range of economic, social and environment issues of the communities that are relevant in order to define the objectives needed to obtain the sustainable development and the increase of the economic and social cohesion in the region. Following the analysis of the funding programs for the rural area development projects, with social and economic impact, we found out that for South Muntenia Region, the rural development strategy must contain measures and indicators of the development at an integrated level, relating to the following constitutive elements : the area infrastructure development strategy, the strategy for SMEs development in South Muntenia Region, the strategy for environment protection in South Muntenia Region; the strategy and programs for the increase of nutritional level (qualitative and quantitative) of the rural population in South Muntenia Region.

Key words: *strategy, analysis, program, rural, development*

INTRODUCTION

South Muntenia Region, with a surface of 34,453 swuare kilometers, representing 14.45 % of Romania surface, is situated in the South-South-East part of it, bordering to the North with the Center Region, to the East with South-East Region, to the South with Bulgaria, the limit being given by the natural border – The Danube River and to the West with South-West Region.

The presence in the South of the region of the Danube River gives it the possibility to have communications with the 8 river countries, and by means of the Danube –Black Sea channel to reach to the Black Sea and thus to have access to Constanta Harbour – the main maritime gate of the country.

The existence in the center of the region but not being part of it of the country capital, Bucureşti, component part of Bucureşti-Ilfov Region, constitutes by the existing institutional and social infrastructure and by Otopeni international airport, a real advantage.

Not being and administrative structure, South Muntenia Region is formed by 7 counties (Argeş, Călăraşi, Dămboviţa, Ialomiţa, Giurgiu, Prahova and Teleorman), 15 municipalities, 28 towns şi 481 communes with 1552 villages.

The Region relief characterised by variety and amphitheater arrangement contains three major forms of relief : mountains 9.5 %, hill 19.8%, field and meadow 70.7%.

If for the 4 counties in the South (Ialomiţa, Călăraşi, Giurgiu, Teleorman) the characteristic form of relief is the field the others 3 counties in the North (Argeş, Dâmboviţa, Prahova) contain both the field and the hills and mountains.

The hidrographic network quite rich is dominated by the Danube River in which the manin rivers of the region flow (Olt, Arges, Dâmboviţa, Ialomiţa and Prahova). This is completed by a series of natural and anthropic lakes with complex use [4].

The climate taken as a whole is moderate temperate-continental, with annual average temperatures between 10 ^{0}-12 ^{0} C in the South part and 2 ^{0}-6 ^{0} C in the North part and with an

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athmospehre precipitations regime characterised by the following annual average quantities: 504 mm-600 mm in the fiedl area and 1000 mm-1300 mm in the mountanins area.

Their variety of the forms fo relief and the geological complexity make the natural resources of the region to be quite diverified.

The mountains and hill area concentrates the natural resources of the subsoil (petroleum, natural gas, coal, radioactive and metal ores, salt, calcareous marls, sulphur, gypsum accumulations and mineral springs) important for the chemical, energetic and constructions materials industriy.

Besides the subsoil resources, of a remarkable importance and with direct influences in the development of some economic sectors there are the soil resources.

The share of the arable surface in the agricultural surface being of 80.6 %, that allows to practice the agriculture to a large scale.

The region posesses rich and water important resources (3.4% of the region surface), that, by using them in different sectors, have a remarkable role in the economic development of the region.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Starting from the identification of the most important strategic directions and priorities, we used SWOT analysis in the context of the re-evaluation of the potential of South Muntenia Region, as basic instrument in the elaboration of the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of the region.

In SWOT analysis we used the socio-economic comparative research data, of re-evaluation of the region potential, as well information provided by the experts within South Muntenia Regional Development Agency, APIA (Agency for payment and Intervention in Agriculture) and MADR that supported the elaboration of this paper, to which the results provided by the questionnaire added, they having the aim to identify some specific issues with influences on the local economic performances and strategic directions of rural development in the region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the con conclusions of the socio-economic analysis and SWOT analysis, on the comparative advantages of the regions, on its strengths and opportunities, the strategy, by its structure and contents, aims the balanced and economic development of the region, together with the development of its capacity to adapt and to respond to the main key economic changes [2].

The background and development process of the strategy is based on taking into consideration of the following specific and important aspects of the region:

- The existence of some areas characterised by and adequate environment, that contributes to its attractiveness for the residents and tourists and to its competitiveness considering the business location;
- The nature and the varied character of the region that need specific measures and activities;
- The existence of some polycentric settlements, including important increase poles that provide good conditions for the productive investments concentration;
- That fact that a significant percent of the population lives in small towns, communes and villages, characterised by a modest development and that needs interventions that aim to support the economic development and diversification;
- The predominant agricultural character of the south area and the problems generated by this aspect;
- The inadequate road networks for the public and goods transport.

Starting from the identification of the most important strategic directions and priorities, we used SWOT analysis in the context of the re-evaluation of the potential of South Muntenia Region, as basic instrument in the elaboration of the Integrated Sustainable Development Strategy of the region.

SWOT Analysis – the rural area in South Muntenia Region

Strengths:

Natural conditions favourable for the economic development
High percent of the non agricultural activities in the North of the region
Long time traditions in all agriculture sectors
Existence of some agro tourism structures under development
Non polluting life environment
Rich cultural and historical patrimony
Original historical and cultural traditions
High level of electrification of the households
Qualified work force

Weaknesses:

Inadequate technical conditions of the commune roads network
Low level of development of the social infrastructure, of services and public utilities
Low number of SMEs
Lack of employment opportunities
Low percent of non agricultural activities in the South of the region
Lack of specialised labour force in non agricultural sectors
Low level of education and living conditions
Low productivity and profitability
Low financial power of the rural population

Opportunities:

Revitalization of the rural communities
Development of SME sector in the rural area l
Facilities for the agricultural activities
Development of agro tourism, preservation of the historical and cultural traditions
Investments for the environment protection Increase of the ecological products volume
Increase of the non agricultural activities
Diversification of the non agricultural activities
Increase of the population incomes in the rural area
Existence of the financial Structural Instruments for the development of the rural area

Threats:

Under-estimation of the rural area in the region development
Lack of capital to support the investments
Insufficient use of the existent potential
Slow development of the rural economy
Increase of the disparities between the rural communities
Migration of the young persons to the urban areas
Intensification of the disparities between the rural communities and their excessive depopulation

The re-evaluation of the socio-economic potential of South Muntenia Region is highlighted by the aspects presented in the *strengths and weaknesses*. The elements regarding the

weaknesses and threats, indicating the restrictions that the strategic development directions and objectives in the analysed sectors will be corrected by the implementation of some measures and activities under the form of implementation/achievement indicators, result and impact [1].

Based on the re-evaluated socio-economic characteristics of the region, including the relevant discrepancies and disparities within the region and the questionnaire, we made the SWOT analyses that led to the elaboration of the component elements of the integrates sustainable development strategy of the region, of the medium and long term systemic framework, that includes the rural development.

The strategy aim is to obtain the positive economic and social effects for the benefit of the entire region, presenting in an integrated approach the strategic directions, the objectives and activities needed to accomplish them. For long term, the main strategic aim for the development of South Muntenia Region is: „to increase the region capacity for the sustainable and balanced economic and social development of the region, that lead to the decrease of the disparities and increase of the social and economic cohesion, the increase of welfare and living standards of the inhabitants in the region"

The integrated sustainable development strategy of the region aims itself to achieve the development plan, by accomplishing 3 global strategic objectives, developed on vertical and 5 horizontal (transversal) objectives interdependent, that will be applied to all individual priorities and measures, that will ensure the revitalization and competitiveness of the region. In the future phases for the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Regional Development, the horizontal objectives will be taken into consideration, totally by an integrated approach..

The strategic development objectives that reflect the correlation of the social, economic, and environment forecasting of the region, are included in a strategic development such as:

Objective 1 – Development of the region competitiveness and attractiveness

Objective 2 – Development of competitiveness and innovative capacity of the business sector in the region

Objective 3 – Sustainable economic, social and cultural development of the communities in the rural area and it aims the development of an attractive and prosper rural area, by an integrated and balanced approach as regards the development of the communities and of the rural economy, favouring its positive contribution to the regional prosperity. This wish for the rural area development can be obtained by: the development of a diversified, competitive and powerful rural economy in agriculture, by the modernisation of the production and processing systems; providing alternative sources of incomes for the farmers; improve the local networks of transport and TIC; improve the services infrastructure; improve the access of the rural communities to the education, training, employment and counselling services; preservation of the natural and cultural heritage of the rural communities; promotion of the rural development using the local work force, materials, methods and traditional crafts.

Horizontal objectives – Environment protection; Equal opportunities; Innovation; Information Society and Human Resources Development.

The main aim of the strategy is to support the regional infrastructure strategy that represents one of the factors needed to increase the region competitiveness. In order to reduce the regional disparities, the infrastructure issues must be solved, that limit the accessibility, the business development and the employment level. In the wide context of the development strategy of the area infrastructure, the specific objectives of the strategy are: the improvement of the road access within the region, by the modernization of the commune and county roads, including the increase of the territorial density; orienting the investments to less developed areas; increase the life quality especially in the areas with social and economic problems by connecting them to the regional and national infrastructure; elimination of the problems generated by the traffic conditions at the community level; elimination of the factors that restrict the development potential of the region; cease the migration of the active population from the rural communities.

These objectives will be achieved by : the modernisation of the transport infrastructure in order to facilitate the access to the national roads network, jobs, social opportunities, markets

also in the areas with development potential of SMEs; the modernisation of the communication and information infrastructure concomitantly with establishing a performing services system in the information sector; improve the quality of the environment, social, cultural and pleasure infrastructure in order to increase the level of attractiveness of the region.

He measures to achieve the development strategy of the area infrastructure, elaborated within the paper, aim the improve of the development strategy of the regional infrastructure, with impact on the rural area development.

An important measure for our study is *Measure 3.2. Development of the non agricultural rural economy and stimulation of its competitiveness*

Objectives: increase of the rural areas contribution to the regional economy; extension of the range of the economic activities that are developed; contribution to the creation of alternative sources of incomes; facilitation of the access to services for the farmers; contribution to the increase of the production rentability and agricultural companies services; increase of the alternative incomes and of the emplozment opportunities for the young persons and women in the rural area; support the projects initiated by the young persons and by the women for the activities developed in the rural area; support the activities specific to the rural tourism, forest tourism and eco-tourism.

Indicative activities: the promotion of the alternative specific products based on the superior use of the local resources; suport provided for the development of the activites of the rural area; development of the craftsmen industries; improve the performing production activites; investments for aquaculture; investments for sericulture; investments for beekeeping; investments for mashrooms harvesting and processing .

Covering area: South Muntenia Region

Impact: the increase of the population incomes in the rural area; increase of the number of jobs for the rural population; reduce the number of unemployed persons; increase the added value for the activities in the rural area [3].

CONCLUSIONS

The complex development of the rural area is an objective of national importance considering the conditions provided by the access to the European Union, situation that determined the intensification of the theoretical and practical concern in this sector. Many of the traditional approaches are not adequate anymore to the market economy and especially, to the rural area, being needed new requirements. This requires a modern approach, taking into consideration that the rural area possesses a high variety of local resources that can be used highly based on the sustainability, in order to develop the rural area.

For the achievement of the Convergence objectives six Sector Operational Programs and one Regional Operational Program were elaborated covering the period of the current budget exercise of the European Union (2007-2013) in the priority sectors: transports, environment, economic competitiveness increase, regions development, human resources development, administrative capacity development, technical assistance.

The rural area possesses the potential in order to increase the live quality of the entire society, by the existence of a healthy and secure environment, with a high level of social integrity and security, contributing this way to the social and economic cohesion.

The rural settlements that provide the needed infrastructure, the pleasure facilities and adequate spaces, constitute necessarily the premises for the development if multiple sectors. The protection of the cultural heritage by the restoration of the cultural buildings, of the monuments or creating museums, allow cultural and social activities, contribute to preserve and improve the areas identity, to increase their attractiveness level and not least encourage the tourism.

In many rural areas, the previous development of the specific agro-systems contributed to a much richer biodiversity than the present one on the old arid lands.

The agriculture contributed also to the decrease of the air quality, to the soil pollution, surface and deep waters pollution, as well of different lands. The production of food, the processing of the raw materials do not comply always with the environment and many times are in conflict with the society wish to protect the environment.

The rural area will transform itself in order to respond to the demand for an attractive pleasure and living area.

The rural area provides an important potential for the pleasure activities, but this must be maintained and sometimes improved. On the other hand, the rural area preservation for its beauty, historical and cultural importance is not comparable with the economic development. On the contrary, such protection can support the development – by tourism – of other investments as well. But the natural patrimony needs a careful management, adapted to the local conditions. Usually, this management develops closely related to the agriculture, because the workers in agriculture have a central role in the management of the rural areas.

The actions that will be taken will relate to the global investments, aiming to maintain the traditional image of the villages, the local architecture and the rural heritage, at the same time the measures being perfectly compatible with the objectives of the local development. These integrated actions can aim the renovation of the traditional elements of the houses, the protection and maintenance of the traditional elements of the rural heritage, such as water mills, wind mills, bridges, as well preserving the customs and the rural traditional life.

The sustainability must be always taken into consideration in the sense that the tourism development must be planned carefully, so that to exist a balance between the economic, social and environment impact [3].

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