

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN VAIDEENI COMMUNITY, VALCEA COUNTY, ROMANIA

Achim Daniel BĂLUȚĂ, Valentin-Dumitru-Ioan IVAN, Rareș IAGĂRU

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, 59 Marasti, District 1, 11464, Bucharest, Romania, Phone/Fax: 00 40 744 6474 10; E-mails: dani.baluta78@gmail.com, valisadu71@gmail.com, raresiagaru@gmail.com

Corresponding author: raresiagaru@gmail.com

Abstract

The sustainable management of endogenous resources is a complex and current theme of global interest that promotes a territorial diagnosis model to highlight the specificity of the studied area and develop relevant strategic options for the development of the rural economy. The actuality of the research has a counterpart in the requirement of the development of the rural economy by the achievement of the modernization criteria and the preservation of the natural and anthropic heritage, and the complexity is highlighted by the orientation towards innovation in the sense of the adoption and implementation of technologies with low impact on the environment. Specifically, the research aims at the strategic diagnosis of Vaideeni commune in order to identify the endogenous resources and developing relevant strategies for their sustainable exploitation. Vaideeni commune is located in Vâlcea county and represents a remarkable area recently declared a tourist resort of local interest, rich in traditions and customs preserved unaltered. For the strategic diagnosis, the PESTEL model was used, the usefulness of which is recognized, because it allows highlighting the particular aspects of the studied community. The results of the PESTEL model allow the adoption of relevant measures to correct the rural economy and improve its resistance to the increasingly frequent changes occurring in the environment. Next, the SWOT analysis was used, doubled by the realization of a focus group with key local factors and specialists, concerned with the development of the rural economy. The general conclusion derived from the results obtained when applying the PESTEL and SWOT analysis models highlights that the sustainable development of the rural economy is closely related to the territorial specificity and is supported by the community that gives life to and maintains the territory that belongs to it.

Key words: diagnosis, economy, resources, rural, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The issue of rural development in Romania has as a benchmark the accession to the European Union (January 1, 2007) and is focused on the development and implementation of relevant measures to adapt the rural economy to the territorial specificity and integration into the internal market of the European Union through the adoption of the Agricultural Policy Commons [23]. In this context, the sustainable development of the countryside is considered a process characterized by complexity and actuality oriented towards the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources and the active involvement of the community in the elaboration, implementation, and adoption of relevant strategies for the superior exploitation of its potential. The justification

for such an approach is underlined by the wealth and diversity of resources, respectively by the need for their sustainable exploitation in the context of awareness of the limited nature of resources and the ever-increasing demand for food in the conditions of environmental protection and climate change. The choice of this research topic is motivated by the interest that the European Union gives to rural areas and the inclusion in the Common Agricultural Policy of numerous levers of development that Romania adopts for implementation through the National Strategic Program. At the same time, the numerous situations of irrational capitalization of resources require the promotion of such research themes [14, 15]. The central element of the choice of this theme is given by the identification of the most effective means of integration of the developed activities and

implicitly by stimulating their diversification in favor of the non-agricultural ones, respectively by encouraging the performance in the agricultural domain [19]. The specialized literature highlights numerous factors with relevant influence on sustainable rural development. They are of an internal and external nature with the mention that recently the role of internal factors is emphasized. The present research is subordinated to the new concept of territorial development which states that economic development is mainly determined by endogenous factors [24, 25], and investments in human capital, innovation, and knowledge are relevant supporters. The endogenous forces involved in this process are represented by factors of local responsibility and various resources - natural, human, material, economic, social, cultural, and spiritual [29]. At the same time, the research takes into account the fact that any territory has a number of characteristics that give it individuality, specificity, and authenticity that must be developed and exploited sustainably, in order to keep them unaltered [13].

The work aims to sustainably capitalize on the endogenous resources available at the territorial level, for the achievement of which the following objectives were established: the strategic diagnosis of Vaideeni commune with reference to the endogenous resources and how to capitalize on them; the choice of the case study as a research methodology and the inclusion of relevant methods of strategic analysis; the development of relevant strategic options for the sustainable exploitation of endogenous resources. The research was carried out in the Vaideeni Territorial Administrative Unit (UAT), located at the foot of the Căpățanii Mountains in the northwest of Vâlcea county with geographic coordinates: 45°10'02" N 23°56'17" E. It has an area of 15,759 ha, of which approximately 10,000 ha are covered with forests [18].

Local responsibility factors and community members show concern for the long-term capitalization of available endogenous resources by carrying out agricultural and non-agricultural activities with concern for the diversification of the latter through relevant entrepreneurial combinations. For a greater

applicability of the phenomenon, encouraging measures are needed in the form of relevant strategies, and this paper provides a model for their elaboration, a model that can be replicated for other areas.



Map 1. Location Vaideeni commune

Source: Map carta Vaideeni, <https://mapcarta.com/13673614>, Accessed 22.05.2024.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In The research methodology adopted is the case study because it involves the in-depth study of the rural economy, in the natural setting of the Vaideeni commune, from several perspectives [12]. The case study is a method of holistic analysis applied to complex situations and provides a complete illustration of the analyzed phenomenon "integrated into a real way of life and complete with numerous information from various sources (interviews, questionnaires, testimonies, evidence, documents, direct observation, participant observation)" [28]. Specifically, within the research methodology, quantitative and qualitative methods were used "different but complementary" [17], such as: secondary analysis of specialized literature, identification of critical factors and successful initiatives, application of models of PESTEL (political, economic, social, technological, natural, legislative) and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis. To ensure continuity, we proceeded to carry out the SOR analysis (consolidated by focus-group meetings) and create the problem

tree and the objective tree to highlight the problems, and the causal relationships and develop solutions to solve them to develop the rural economy sustainably. The application of the mentioned methods was carried out successively according to the structure shown in Figure 1.

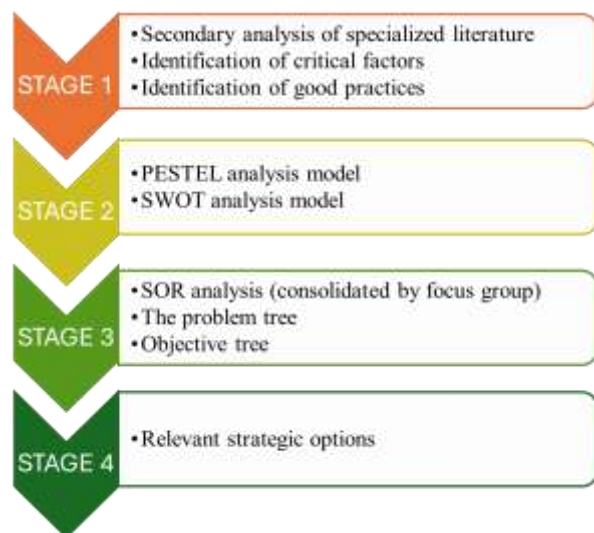


Fig. 1. Schematic structure of the research
Source: Own conception.

From the schematic structure of the research, its development in four stages is highlighted. In stage 1, we proceeded to collect data and information following the purpose of the research using the questionnaire applied at the territorial administrative unit (UAT) level, the secondary analysis of the statistical data and the relevant literature, respectively the observation for the qualitative improvement of the information. The obtained results outlined a realistic picture that also highlights critical factors and good practices. The second stage consisted of carrying out the strategic diagnosis of Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county with the help of PESTEL and SWOT models [7,16].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The materialization of the research consisted of accessing, using, creating, and promoting knowledge, respectively in the realistic highlighting of the level of sustainable development of the community in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county as it results from the detail presented:

I. The study stage of statistical data and specialized literature regarding the development of Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county highlights an increased interest of specialists for the endogenous potential, respectively the positive results recorded at the level of the 3 pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and ecological). It is also noteworthy the orientation towards the development and diversification of economic activities (non-agricultural), emphasizing the role of agriculture, especially sheep farming, for the development of the community [1, 9, 10, 2]. It was also highlighted that the development of viable solutions for sustainable development is in the attention of specialists, but the expected progress has not yet been achieved.

II. The strategic diagnosis stage using the PESTEL model highlights a series of factors with an impact on this sustainable development, grouped according to the following criteria:

The analysis of the political criterion is centered on 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) based on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The purpose of the CAP is to support farmers and guarantee Europe's food security. PAC has evolved with economic development and adapted to the demands and needs expressed over time by consumers. 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 [3]. PS CAPs are intended to make a major contribution to meeting 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) [20, 4, 5, 6]. Thus PAC fulfills multiple functions in society: food production, rural community development, and promotion of sustainable agriculture. 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 a 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 [26].

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 development of agricultural activities is primarily based on the existing natural resources that mainly favor animal husbandry represented by 2,992 ha of pastures and 1,739 ha of hayfields that provide most of the fodder necessary for raising about 22,000 sheep, 2,820 cattle, 2,100 pigs, and 700 goats. On the 320 ha of arable land, corn, potatoes, and vegetables are mainly grown. Fruit growing occupies about 640 ha where the predominant species are apple and plum. The forest and other forest vegetation is also a renewable resource well represented by the approximately 9,600 ha exploited through various forestry activities [8, 22]. 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 (SDL, Vaideeni. Local producers in the categories of vegetables, fruits, jams and jams, bee products, dairy products, and natural juices are promoted in a special section on its website. Also, 13 local producers registered in the National Register of Mountain Products use the mention of mountain product quality, which certifies the mountain origin of the raw materials and feed, the positive influence of their quality on the raw materials of animal origin, and the processing of agri-food products in the mountain area (in our case in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county). Tourist

activity at Vaideeni UAT, Vâlcea county is registered on an increasing trend by the tourist resort status, a fact also demonstrated by the tourists visiting the area whose number of arrivals reached a maximum in 2019 (1019 tourists), decreased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (617 in 2020) and continued to grow until it reached the number of 748 in 2023 to which 336 arrivals in apartments and rooms are added [21, 27]. At the same time, the positive evolution of the accommodation capacity in tourist structures from 40 places in 2019 to 58 in 2023 (agritourism pensions) is also noted, to which 52 places are added in apartments and rooms for rent [22].

The analysis of the social criterion leads to the highlighting of the phenomenon of depopulation in most mountainous areas in Romania, with the mention that it reaches a minimum in 2022 from where it starts to register a slight increase as can be seen in Figure 2.

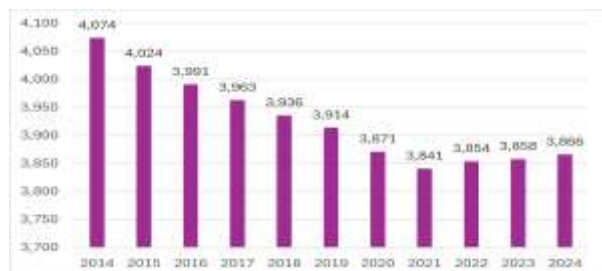


Fig. 2. Population evolution in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county

Source: NIS data Tempo online, 2024, own processing.

This state can also be on the effects of the implementation of policies, programs, and projects included in the local development strategy. The population density is 24 inhabitants/km². The road infrastructure of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea County is good, and the geographical location at the micro-regional, county, and regional levels ensures connectivity with county and national roads. The density of road transport infrastructure corresponds to the current level of development and prospects, its quality requires improvement. The infrastructure of public utilities is well represented by a water supply network with a length of 18,796 m a sewage network with a total length of collecting channels of 3,091 km and a total

length of pipelines of 2,463 km. There is also a treatment plant with an installed capacity of 23.58 mc/h and 6.55 l/s and an operating capacity of 4.7 mc/h and 1.3 l/s [8]. 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 Vaideeni UAT, Vâlcea County, the health infrastructure includes two family medical practices and two pharmacies. Social problems are solved with the help of a community nurse and two social workers from the Mayor's specialized apparatus. Education in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county is provided by Luca Solomon Secondary School (Vaideeni village), it has 14 classes, 2 laboratories, an IT office, a library, and a 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 number of enrolled children is decreasing and hovers around 380, they are guided by 35 teachers. To these are added 4 kindergartens (about 100 children) and 7 educators.

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 main objective of the innovation was to improve the quality of the products, the orientation towards the mention of mountain product quality, and later towards the expansion of the range of products and services. The local administration has numerous projects aimed at innovation and

sustainability, as follows: "Purchase of aggregates for snow removal and sanitation in Vaideeni commune, Vâlcea county", through which the purchase of an aggregate for sanitation and snow removal was achieved; DiVA-HUB Digital Innovation HUB Vaideeni an acre project brings together research-development-innovation and tourism; Development of a ski area in the Ursu-Ursuletu holiday village, Vaideeni Commune, Vâlcea County; Development of a ski area in the Transcapatanii Ski - Bear resort, Vaideeni Commune, Vâlcea County; Development of leisure infrastructure in Voineasa tourist resort-Vâlcea County-Adventure Park - Partnership with County Council.

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, in the north of the Horezu subcarpathian depression and on the upper Luncavațului valley. The geographical coordinates place Vaideeni commune at the intersection of the parallels of 45°10'30" north latitude with the meridian 23°55'30" east longitude. The village of residence is at an altitude of 567 m, the village of Recea at 650 m, and the village of Cerna at 610 m, resulting in an average altitude of 610 m. Climatically, it is on the border between the hill climate II and the specific mountain climate, climate type III. It presents a rich diversity of flora and fauna represented by beech forests, beech with softwoods, and 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 - an element of identity and development of these areas [26]. 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, the 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 the EU/EC Resolutions regarding the concept of "mountain product "

product with Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), etc. This gives a great chance to the mountain economy if the contained government policies are implemented in an integrated manner.

The relevance of the criteria/sub-criteria of the PESTEL model, for the sustainable development of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county:

The strategic diagnosis carried out according to the PESTEL model identified the characterization elements of UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county. They are presented centrally about the analysis criteria, highlighting the relevant sub-criteria. (Table 1).

Table 1. Results (criteria and sub-criteria) of using the PESTEL model

POLITICS	ECONOMIC
Adequate legislative framework represented at the level of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU of Common Agricultural Policy, European Green Deal, Farm to Farm Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy. • Romania by National Strategic Plan (PNS) • UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county of Local Development Strategy (SDL). SDL promotes coherent policies, appropriate social policies, and a friendly business environment	The rural economy is structured by branches Agriculture is the main branch Rural tourism is an economic branch under development Business environment favorable to the development of small businesses and their orientation towards the production of products with the mention of mountain product quality The labor force in a slightly increasing trend
SOCIAL	TECHNOLOGICAL
The depopulation characteristic of mountain areas is stabilized at the level of 2022 for UAT Vaideeni The social policies implemented numerically register the population on a slightly increasing trend (2023,2024) The road infrastructure is eco-friendly and ensures connectivity with national roads Public utility infrastructure is well represented. There is a nurse and 2 social workers Education is well-represented	UAT Vaideeni has the capacity for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assimilation of sustainable technologies • Increasing the population's access to information and professional training • Increasing innovation capacity and spending on research and development There are many projects that aim for innovation and sustainability
NATURAL	LEGISLATIVE
Predominantly mountainous area with little human modification Small towns located at an average altitude of 600 m Rich diversity of flora and fauna The meadows have a qualitative composition that positively affects the quality of mountain products.	Laws and regulations for the development of hilly and mountainous rural areas (PAC, PNS, Mountain Law) normative acts and specialists for the application of EU/EC Resolutions regarding the concept of "mountain product" product with protected

Source: Own information resulting from the PESTEL diagnosis.

The characterization elements were used in the process of assessing the relevance of each sub-criterion selected for the research (Table 2). It was possible to identify 24 sub-categories whose relevance for the research was assessed by organizing a focus group to which local responsibility factors and specialists in the field were invited and participated.

They were asked to appreciate on a scale with 5 levels from 1 to 5 points where 1 represents the very insignificant appreciation and 5 the very significant appreciation, the importance of each sub-criterion for the achievement of the project's purpose. Appreciating the relevance of the criteria and sub-criteria of the PESTEL model for the relevance to the fulfillment of the purpose of the research

determined a better orientation of the process of sustainable rural development. responsible factors and stakeholders in the

Table .2. The relevance of the criteria and sub-criteria of the PESTEL model

Diagnostic criteria	Sub-criteria	Impact on future strategy				
		1	2	3	4	5
POLITICS	The corresponding legislative framework at the EU level (CAP)					
	The corresponding legislative framework at the national level (PNS)					
	Appropriate legislative framework at the local level (SDL)					
	Policies to support and encourage local products					
ECONOMIC	Dominance of agricultural activities and small farms					
	Rural tourism is an economic branch under development					
	A business environment favourable to the development of small businesses oriented towards the production of products with the mention of mountain product quality					
	The labor force in a slightly increasing trend					
SOCIAL	The depopulation characteristic of mountain areas is stabilized at the level of 2022					
	Social policies appropriate to population enrollment in a slightly increasing trend (2023,2024)					
	The road infrastructure is eco-friendly					
	Adequate educational system					
TECHNOLOGICAL	Ability to assimilate sustainable technologies					
	Population access to information and professional training					
	Increasing innovation capacity and spending on research and development					
	Implementation of projects aimed at innovation and sustainability					
NATURAL	Predominantly mountainous area with little human modification					
	Small towns located at an average altitude of 600 m					
	Rich diversity of flora and fauna					
	Meadows with a qualitative composition that has a positive effect on the quality of mountain products					
LEGISLATIVE	Laws and regulations for the development of hilly and mountainous rural areas (PAC, PNS, Mountain Law)					
	Environmental protection laws and regulations:					
	normative acts for the application of the EU/EC Resolutions regarding the concept of "mountain product"					
	normative acts for the application of EU/EC Resolutions on products with protected designation of origin (PDO) and protected geographical indication (PGI)					

Source: Own information resulting from the PESTEL diagnosis.

III. Results obtained from the implementation of SWOT and SOR models

The matrix arrangement of the elements specific to the studied area in the form of the four quadrants (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) led to the easy capture of the most advantageous combinations and the identification of strategic options relevant to the purpose of the research. (Table 3). The specific elements were identified through the analysis of the criteria describing the analyzed territorial life framework (PESTEL) and selected within the

semi-structured interviews addressed to the responsible factors and stakeholders.

The numerous elements of specificity required the continuation of the research by assessing the relevance of the opportunities and threats on the strong and weak points (SOR analysis) to rank them and take into account the most relevant ones for the research. For this, we organized a focus group meeting attended by 7 people, representing key local factors and specialists concerned with the sustainable development of the rural economy. Some of them also participated in the preliminary

phase of the research as interviewees, and are representatives of some institutions with concerns in the field, such as local councils,

town halls, APIA, GAL, entrepreneurs, and universities.

Table 3 SWOT matrix

STRONG POINTS		WEAKNESSES	
1	Outstanding natural resources and potential for sustainable development	1	Geographic isolation
2	Ancient traditions well preserved	2	Aging population
3	Attachment to the commune, traditions, and values	3	Unexploited tourist potential
4	Local authorities involved in community life	4	Deficient health system
5	Adequate road infrastructure	5	Lack of public transport in UAT
6	Adequate educational infrastructure	6	Lack of online education (infrastructure and human)
7	Development of traditional local economic activities	7	Poor promotion in the virtual environment
8	Obtaining and promoting local products with the mention of mountain product quality	8	Lack of support measures for the development of the local business environment
9	Annual plan rich in cultural events	9	Lack of digitization at the level of local government
10	The ability to work in partnership (GAL Microregion Horezu)	10	Low capacity of local administration to attract external financing sources
11	the development of joint projects within the LAG	11	Poor development of services
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
1	Laws and regulations for the development of rural areas (PAC, PNS, etc)	1	The COVID-19 pandemic crisis
2	Financing period 2021-2027 beneficial to the rural economy	2	The effects of the war in Ukraine
3	Tourist resort status	3	Reduced access to vocational training
4	The possibility of accessing funds for digitization in local public administration	4	Dominance of agricultural activities and small farms
5	Policies to support and encourage local products	5	The predisposition towards an exaggerated consumption of resources
6	The possibility of attracting labor force from outside the locality through telework	6	Low funds for educational and social infrastructure and heritage rehabilitation
7	Increasing attractiveness for local products	7	Promotion and support strategies for local products not adapted to the requirements
8	Increased capacity to assimilate sustainable technologies	8	Increased competition and costs in small holdings as a result of the CAP
9	Business environment favorable to the development of small businesses	9	Weak bargaining power of agricultural producers (low price for products and unmotivated activity)
10	normative acts for the application of EU/EC Resolutions: • regarding the concept of "mountain product"	10	The example of parents (who work abroad) does not motivate young people to continue their studies
11	• regarding products with protected designation of origin (PDO) and • protected geographical indication (PGI)	11	Lack of policies and strategies to attract young people

Source: Own information resulting from the diagnosis.

They noted in the SOR tables (on a scale from 0 – not important to 3 – very important) the relevance of the opportunities and threats on the strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of the project's purpose (Table 4).

The obtained results reveal the most important elements of specificity. These are presented in matrix form in a succinct SWOT matrix (Table 5) whose analysis easily determines rural development measures.

Table 4. SOR analysis

SP/ W	OPPORTUNITIES											THREATS											Total
	O ₁	O ₂	O ₃	O ₄	O ₅	O ₆	O ₇	O ₈	O ₉	O ₁₀	O ₁₁	A ₁	A ₂	A ₃	A ₄	A ₅	A ₆	A ₇	A ₈	A ₉	A ₁₀	A ₁₁	
SP ₁	18	21	18	20	16	15	20	18	19	21	20	18	19	20	16	18	12	18	16	17	16	18	394
SP ₂	18	20	16	18	18	16	19	18	19	20	18	18	20	19	15	16	14	16	17	16	16	15	382
SP ₃	16	18	15	16	15	16	15	16	17	17	15	19	19	18	16	16	15	14	15	14	15	16	353
SP ₄	15	16	16	15	14	15	15	17	17	16	16	17	16	16	14	15	15	12	14	14	15	16	336
SP ₅	16	15	15	16	15	15	14	16	16	17	14	16	18	17	15	14	16	14	15	13	16	15	338
SP ₆	17	16	14	15	17	16	15	14	13	14	15	14	17	15	17	16	15	14	16	14	15	17	336
SP ₇	19	20	18	19	20	19	21	18	20	19	20	18	19	19	17	21	21	20	18	17	19	19	419
SP ₈	19	21	19	18	19	20	18	19	21	18	19	18	18	19	20	20	17	18	20	19	17	20	417
SP ₉	16	17	16	15	16	15	14	17	17	18	15	16	14	16	16	17	17	19	19	15	15	16	356
SP ₁₀	18	20	19	18	19	18	19	17	20	19	18	17	17	19	19	20	17	16	18	18	19	17	402
SP ₁₁	19	20	21	18	20	21	18	19	20	17	21	19	19	20	20	21	17	18	18	17	20	18	421
W ₁	19	20	18	20	17	15	18	18	19	18	20	17	17	18	17	16	14	18	16	16	17	17	385
W ₂	18	19	18	17	17	18	19	19	18	21	18	19	19	20	16	16	15	17	18	17	16	15	390
W ₃	19	17	21	18	19	15	19	20	19	20	19	18	18	19	17	17	16	16	17	18	18	17	397
W ₄	15	14	15	16	16	17	17	12	15	15	17	18	18	16	17	13	15	14	16	13	15	14	338
W ₅	14	15	15	14	14	15	14	16	16	15	16	17	17	18	16	16	15	15	13	13	14	16	334
W ₆	15	15	13	12	12	15	15	16	14	14	12	12	15	16	14	12	15	16	13	13	15	14	308
W ₇	14	13	13	12	12	16	15	15	12	12	14	13	13	16	14	10	15	21	16	15	13	17	311
W ₈	15	16	19	19	21	20	20	21	19	19	20	18	16	17	19	15	20	18	18	17	19	20	406
W ₉	16	15	20	17	19	19	17	20	19	19	19	17	17	18	19	19	19	18	19	19	20	19	404
W ₁₀	17	19	20	15	18	19	20	15	20	19	18	15	18	18	21	19	20	18	18	19	17	19	402
W ₁₁	20	20	21	19	20	20	15	15	18	19	21	17	17	19	20	20	20	19	20	18	18	19	415
TOTAL	373	387	380	367	374	375	377	376	388	387	385	371	381	393	375	367	360	371	370	352	363	374	

Source: Own results obtained from focus group meetings.

Table 5. Summary SWOT matrix

STRONG POINTS		WEAKNESSES	
1	Outstanding natural resources and potential for sustainable development (agriculture, tourism, food industry)	1	Aging population
2	Ancient traditions well preserved	2	Unexploited tourist potential
3	Development of traditional local economic activities	3	Lack of support measures for the development of the local business environment
4	Obtaining and promoting local products with the mention of mountain product quality	4	Lack of digitization at the level of local government, education or health
5	The ability to work in partnership (GAL Microregion Horezu)	5	Low capacity of local administration to attract external financing sources
6	Development of joint projects within the LAG	6	Poor development of services (commercial, banking, etc.)
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
1	Financing period 2021-2027 beneficial to the rural economy	1	The consequences of the war in Ukraine
2	Tourist resort status	2	Reduced access to vocational training
3	Increasing the attractiveness of local products	3	Dominance of agricultural activities and small farms
4	Business environment favorable to the development of small businesses oriented towards the production of products with the mention of mountain product quality	4	Promotion and support strategies for local products not adapted to the requirements
5	normative acts and specialists for the application of EU/EC Resolutions:	5	The negative influence of the CAP on small holdings by increasing competition and costs
6	• regarding the concept of "mountain product"	6	Lack of attractive policies and strategies for young people

Source: Own results.

The results obtained from the application of the case study methodology and the included analysis models allow the easy identification of problems and create the prerequisites for identifying the causes of their occurrence. This is done using the problem tree method. To develop the solutions to solve them, we proceeded to use the objective tree method.

Results obtained from the application of problem tree and objective tree methods
 The frequent use of the problem tree in the process of strategic planning justifies our option for it in the identification of causal relationships of rural development problems in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county (Fig. 3).

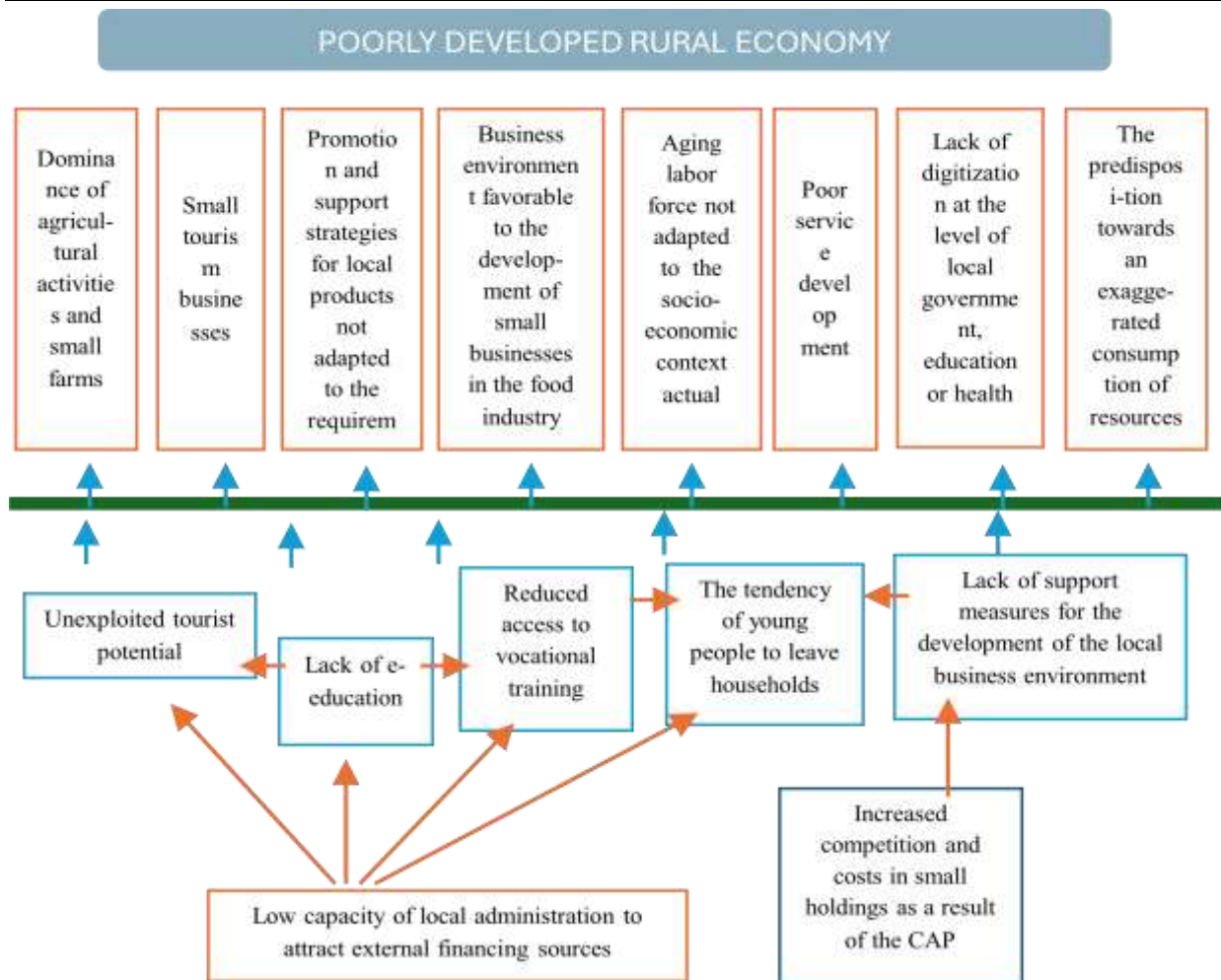


Fig. 3. The problem tree of the sustainable development of the rural economy in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county
 Source: own processing.

After identifying the problems and causal relationships, solutions (strategic measures) were developed to replace the problems in the problem tree, obtaining the objective tree (Fig. 4.) with the mention that a problem is solved by several solutions, and one solution can solve several problems.

In the tree of objectives, the strategic options identified with the help of SOR analysis are highlighted, which proves that two different analysis methods (SOR and the problem/objective tree), but correctly carried out, lead to similar results [11, 14].

The integration of the results obtained within the methods used leads to the development of relevant strategic options for the orientation of the rural economy toward sustainable development. They are grouped into two strategic directions, the first for the development of strategic options aimed at preparing the framework necessary for the

implementation of sustainable development and the second for the development and implementation of strategic options specific to the achievement of sustainable development.

The first strategic direction highlights the following strategic options:

- Developing the capacity of the local administration to work in partnership (with the Horezu Microregion LAG and other entities);
- Promotion of online education to achieve partnerships and knowledge in the field of accessing funding sources
- Promoting rural entrepreneurship for sustainable exploitation of natural resources and traditions
- Creating a business environment favorable to the development of SMEs and the realization of "mountain product"

Within the second strategic direction, the following strategic options were developed:

- Effective capitalization of the post-2020 financing framework favorable for the rural economy;
- Development of joint projects within the LAG
- Effective utilization of the EU/EC Resolutions regarding the concepts of

- mountain products, products with protected designation of origin (PDO), and products with protected geographical indication (PGI);
- Diversification of social assistance services
- Increasing the quality of life
- Increasing attractiveness for qualified young people

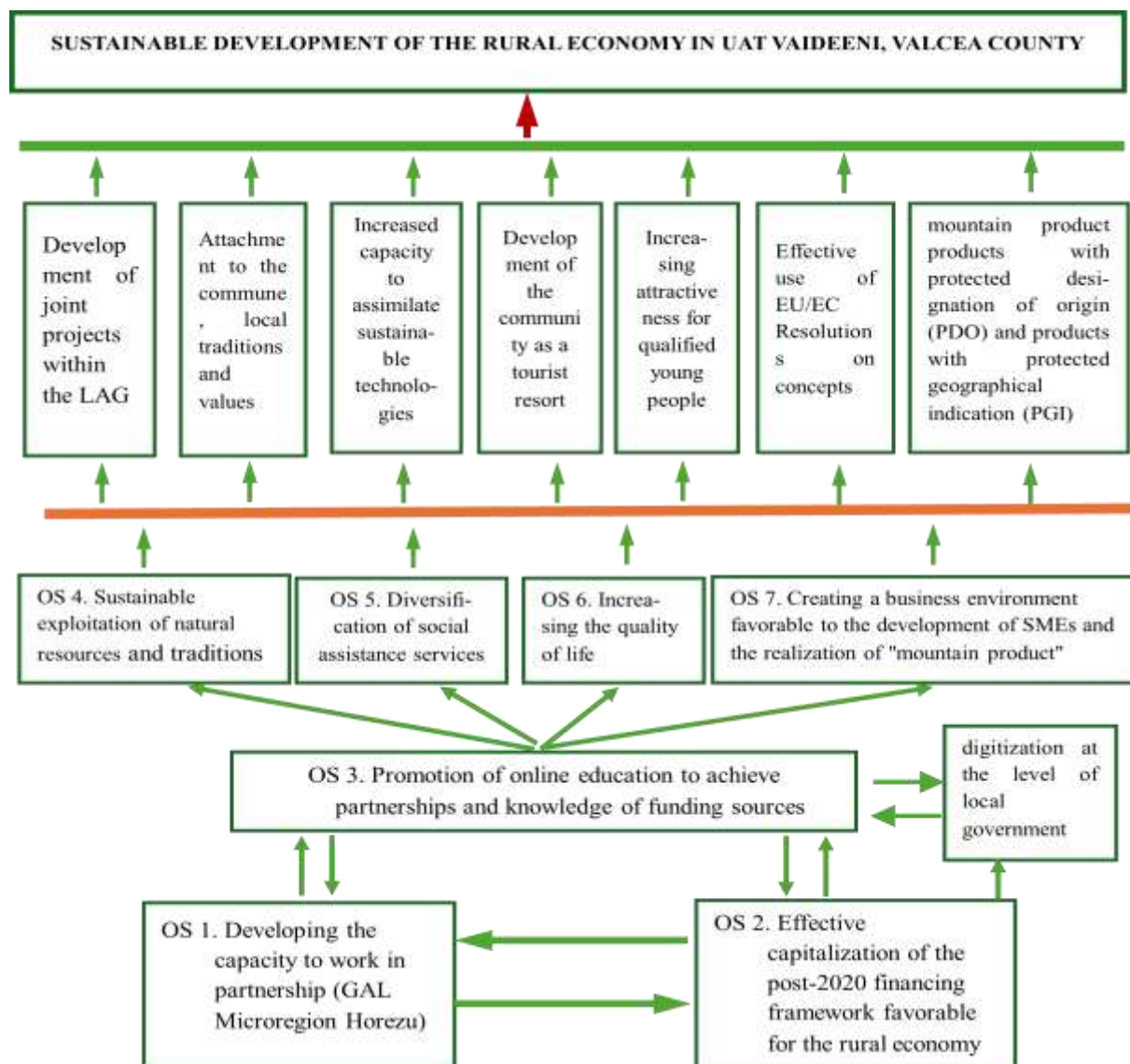


Fig. 4. The objective tree of the sustainable development of the rural economy in UAT Vaideeni, Vâlcea county
 Source: own processing.

CONCLUSIONS

The research topic is subscribed to the global concerns in which each country, depending on the experience gained in the community space and the economic and social context, carries out specific activities to develop objectives, strategies, and measures for the sustainable development of the rural economy.

The use of the case study methodology in researching the sustainable development of the rural economy is justified by the positive results obtained in numerous studies and by the ability to integrate quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively to adapt to the research topic. The research identifies the specific elements of the studied area, highlights the problems of sustainable development elaborates solutions

to overcome them, and frames the rural economy on a trend favorable to the desired achievement according to figures 3 and 4. The research is completed with the elaboration of strategic options for the sustainable development of the rural economy in the UAT Vaideeni, grouped in two strategic directions for preparing the framework necessary for the implementation of sustainable development and for the elaboration and implementation of strategic options specific to achieving this objective. The results and discussions highlight the need to continue research in this direction for the evaluation of endogenous resources and the identification of elements specific to the intensity and dynamics of changes in the environment for the elaboration, adoption/adaptation of strategies for the sustainable development of the rural economy.

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