

**THE SWOT ANALYSIS IN THE GEOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH,
WITH APPLICABILITY IN THE STUDY
OF THE HUMAN SETTLEMENTS FROM MOLDOVA VALLEY -
(BAIA-DRAGUSENI SECTOR)**

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Resumé: L'analyse SWOT est une méthode efficace, utilisée dans le cas des planifications stratégiques pour l'identification des potentiels, des priorités et pour créer une vision commune de réalisation de la stratégie de développement d'une zone. En fait l'analyse SWOT doit répondre à la question „où sommes-nous”, cela impliquant l'analyse du milieu interne et externe spécifique. La valeur de l'analyse SWOT consiste dans le fait qu'elle est une méthode intuitive d'organisation d'une grande quantité d'informations et de données et de leur large applicabilité et c'est une technique par laquelle on peut identifier les points forts et les points faibles et on peut examiner les opportunités et les difficultés d'un projet, d'une action ou d'une situation réelle. Elle est extrêmement utile pour les études géographiques aussi, surtout pour celles qui s'occupent de l'analyse socio économique, de l'environnement, de la population, de la planification du développement du territoire et des études géographiques complexes. L'analyse SWOT c'est, enfin, l'identification des atouts, des déficiences (déterminées par le milieu interne), des opportunités et des menaces (déterminés par des facteurs externes : sociaux, technologiques, économiques, écologiques et politiques). Dans le cas concret d'une étude de développement durable d'une zone rurale située au contact entre le Plateau et les Sous Carpates de la Moldavie, nous avons appliqué l'analyse SWOT pour connaître l'état du milieu naturel et des conditions nécessaires pour le développement cette zone où l'agriculture est la principale activité économique. Dans l'analyse SWOT on a introduit des éléments provenus du remaniement des données statistiques, des études sur le vif, l'interprétation des données cueillies à l'intermédiaire de questions adressées aux habitants et aux représentants de l'autorité locale, l'analyse des cartes topographiques et des images locales prises par satellite, ainsi que des observations personnelles.

The SWOT analysis (or TSOP, in Romanian) is an efficient method, used in the case of strategy planning, to identify the potentials, the priorities and to create a common vision for the accomplishment of the development strategy. In fact,

SWOT analysis must offer the answer to the question: where are we?, this involving the analysis of the internal environment and the general and specific external environment. SWOT analysis is one of the analytical instruments, most frequent taught in the business learning system.

SWOT comes from English and represents the acronym of the words: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

SWOT analysis represents an audit method of the organization and its environment, being considered the first step of the strategical planning. The method helps the specialists to focus on the relevant aspects; once identified, these change into marketing objectives. It can be used together with other audit and analysis methods, such as PEST analysis and Porter model.

Even though the origins of SWOT analysis are quite unclear, the American economist Ken Andrews is regarded, in general, as being the pioneer of SWOT analysis. In 1971 he was one of the first strategy theoreticians who defined formally the concept of strategical concordance between the resources and the potential of a company and the external environment. He stated that this methodology is a healthy approach to determine a recess strategy, the best way for a company to use its strong points to exploit the opportunities, but also the most efficient way to protect its strong and weak points, against various external threats.

The SWOT analysis value consists of an intuitive method of organizing a great quantity of information and data. One of its great advantages is its wide applicability. The SWOT analysis is, in fact, a technique through which the strong and weak points can be identified and the opportunities and threats of a project, action or state of fact can be examined and can be used as element of realization of the result (survey). That is why it is also extremely useful in the geographical studies, especially in those which refer to the analysis of the socio-economical, environmental factors, population, territory development planning, and in the case of the drawing up of complex geographical studies.

The SWOT analysis means, in fact, the identification of the trumps, deficiencies, (determined by the internal environment), opportunities and threats (determined by external factors such as: social, technological, economical, ecological and political).

The SWOT analysis can be approached from many perspectives:⁶

a) a strategical perspective, because it allows the identification of the strategies which, on its own includes: the vision (future orientations, strategies, etc.), motivation (acknowledgement, political attitude, social and cultural values), objectives (social security, improvement of local conditions);

⁶ *SWOT Analysis*. Bremen Regional Information Society Endeavour, June 1998

b) a qualitative prospective, as it describes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and it is used for the identification of the proper strategies for the regional development;

c) a quantitative prospective, as main effort to standardize this method, since it includes quantitative information which refers to the technical frame (kind of property, prices, quality, etc.), social, legal and regional premises (data protection, elementary regional data, cooperation, etc.).

All these ways of action can be finally made up as a possible project (this stage does not represent the initiation of the project, but only its source). A project can also take shape as a result of one's desire to fulfill his/her objectives (what he/she wants to make).

The inherent simplicity of the SWOT analysis hides through a great complexity. The main task for the analyst who is supposed to make such an analysis is to gather and to interpret the great data quantity about the most important environmental forces and then to decide how to proceed, as a response to them.

For the moment, the SWOT analysis is less used in the geographical research, but in the context of the systemic thinking application, this proves its wide applicability.

In the concrete situation of a study for sustainable development regarding a rural area situated in the contact zone between the Moldavian Plateau and the Sub-Carpathians, we applied the SWOT analysis for the natural environment state and for the area development, in which the agriculture represents the basic economic activity. In the SWOT analysis there have been introduced elements resulted from the processing of the statistical data, field study, data interpretation, collected by applying questionnaires addressed to the inhabitants and local authority representatives, study of different topographical maps and satellite pictures of the area and also personal observations.

The SWOT analysis obtained this way represents the departure point for the drawing up of a concrete plan of measures for:

- the valorization of the trumps and the increase of their number;
- the approach of the weak points with a view to change them into strong points;
- the discovery of different modalities, in order to benefit by the opportunities;
- the avoidance or reduction of threats.

All these measures represent the basis for the elaboration of a new viable strategy for a long lasting area development, which should be achieved by local public authorities, in order to make it viable, in the context of the alignment to the European standards.

1. Environment

1.1. Strengths

- generally reduced levels of water, air and soil pollution;
- the maintenance of the biodiversity through the existence of various types of natural vegetation and fauna;
 - the presence of some Sub Carpathians forestry surfaces in the analyzed area, on Pleșu summit, having a great ecological value;
 - large bio-active surfaces within the area;
 - the existence, in great quantity, of potable water resources having a good quality;
 - a reduced percentage of surface waters with inferior quality, less than the national average;
 - great weights of natural forests and hay surfaces from the total landed surfaces;
 - the existence of some protection plantations against landslides on some hill-slopes;
 - natural environment suitable for rest and leisure activities;
 - the prevalence, in the area, of small villages, which have a less negative impact on the natural environment;
 - the percentage of population with access to the water supplies system in continuous growth due to the implementation of the SAPARD programme in the area;
 - the existence of large drained, dammed and sewed surfaces which limitate the floods effects;
 - the restriction of the great polluters activity upstream the Moldova river;
 - the acquisition, by some great polluters, of modern equipments for the filtration of the emissions of environmental dangerous substances;
 - the lack of powerful industrial organizations (institutions) which could generate pollution in the proximity of the area;
 - the presence of the depression plank of Moldova Valley which allows the rapid flows of air masses;
 - the use, on a large scale, of natural fertilizers;
 - various agricultural harvests;
 - the reduced use of pesticides, insecticides and chemical fertilizers;
 - the setting up of Moldova river permanent surveillance service;
 - the elaboration of the National legislation regarding environment protection;
 - the setting up of an ecological firm.

1.2. Weaknesses

- the lack of protected areas on the area administrative territory;
- constant atmosphere pollution, along the E 85 route, with some exceeding regarding the maximum values of the indexes for monitoring of the environmental factors;
 - the pollution of the surface waters, as a result of uncontrolled garbage pouring made by the population, economic agents, accidents, as well as because of the lack of the sewerage system in the villages from the area;
 - the high density of population in the analyzed area (97,3 inhabitants per square km), fact that implies a great pression over the natural environment;
 - the lack of specialists in the field of environment protection in the area, and the weak implication of local public authorities in this matter;
 - the disrespect for the legislation in the field of environment protection regarding the storage of the house waste products or in the industrial ones;
 - the lack of stations for the treatment of the residual waters on of ecological platforms to store the waste products;
 - the phenomenon of soil erosion (about 20 % from the agricultural surface)
 - uncontrolled deforestation, especially in the area of the Sub-Carpathian forests;
 - the natural resources are not exploited properly, especially the gravels from the Moldova river valley;
 - the lack of some "Local Action Plans for Environment Protection" at the level of zone town halls;
 - the insufficient education and information of the population in the field of the environment protection;
 - the lack of non-governmental organizations to protect the area environment and the weak activity of those at Suceava department level.

1.3. Opportunities

- the drawing up of some "Local Action Plans for Environment Protection" and other plans for sustainable development for the communities from the analyzed area;
- the collaboration between the area communities for the realization of common investigations in the field of the infra-structure and environment protection;
- the access of Communitarian pre-adheretion funds (as SAPARD fund) to set up cleaning services, station of house-hold water filtration, water pipe-lines and sewerage and the management of waste products;
- the possibility to access some external financing sources regarding the realization and development of the environment infra-structure;

- the construction of protection dams and the realization of hydro-technical works to limitate the negative effects of the floods;
- the growing local authorities' interest towards environment protection;
- the realization of studies in the field environment protection in the frame of the area's town halls and in other fields;
- the setting up of protected areas in the zone;
- the unrolling of popularization and ecological education programmes for the population, especially school pupils;
- the unrolling of collection campaigns for recyclable materials in the area, with the help of schools;
- the realization of some cleaning/hygiene works of the former spaces for waste deposit;
- possibilities of tourism activities in Moldova meadows;
- the practice, on large surfaces, of ecological agriculture, through external financing;
- the introduction of the methane gas system network, in most of the villages of the area, which will contribute to the decrease of the quantity of noxas released in the atmosphere by burning the wood, and, implicit, the quantity of wooden mass exploited as fire wood.

1.4. Threats

- the existence of some zones predisposed to natural disasters (landslides, floods);
- insufficient funds for environment protection;
- the disappearance of some species of plants because of the lack of some special programmes of protection;
- the continuation of uncontrolled deforestations in the area with effects on the air and water pollution, and soil erosion;
- the continuous uncontrolled exploitation, without any impact studies, of some large amounts of rubble and sand materials from the Moldova valley;
- the water pollution with sawdust from the garters present in the area or upstream Moldova river;
- the area presents a great risk of floods and landslides on both its sides;
- the continuation of uncontrolled storages of household/industrial waste products in forbidden places because of the lack of local authorities' implication in solving these matters;
- the continuation of the degradation of the hydro-technical works against floods, because of the lack of financial funds or of local authorities' slight implication;

- the increase of the area's pollution degree as a result of the growing traffic and deforestation.

2. RURAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Strengths

- an agricultural field suitable to a relatively large palette of agricultural crops;
- a great percentage (76,6 %) of agricultural fields from the landed properties and of the ploughing fields (53,8 %) from the total of agricultural fields;
- numerous population, with high density - 97,3 inhabitants / square km;
- over national average birth rate;
- positive migration balance in the area;
- the growth of population in the villages situated on the flat terrain nearby the Moldova river (1992-2002);
- the presence of the E 85 route (almost 30 km through the area), and of some departmental routes;
- a dense network of roads (65 km/100 sq. km), continually improving;
- a relatively high percentage of asphalted roads (45 % from total);
- the existence of the necessary equipments for road maintenance in town halls' possession;
- the rapid development of constructions and utilities sector;
- the improvement of commercial services by the setting up of numerous shops;
- the unrolling of 7 SAPARD programmes (rural roads modernization);
- the setting up of 3 farm for selected cattle through the SAPARD programme;
- numerous cattle live stock, continually improving;
- the existence of milk collecting centers in the area;
- developed forestry sector in the area;
- recently modernized communication structure;
- the conservation of some traditional occupations;
- the diversification of the production and service sector;
- large sums of currency getting into the local communities from abroad workers;
- the rapid change of mentalities under the influence of local working force gone to work abroad;
- the improvement of qualifications/poli-qualifications of abroad working force;
- the improvement of population's car stocks;
- rich resources of good-quality water and construction material abundance;
- the existence of the Vadu Moldovei hospital and of medical units;
- the improvement of the population' home appliances.

2.2. Weaknesses

- deficient quantitative and qualitative transport structure as well as weak community utilities and services;
- rural tourism less developed;
- reduced possibilities of employment in other professional fields, other than the agricultural sector;
 - a reduced agricultural car stock, physically and morally old and out of date agricultural technologies;
 - a great range of agricultural fields crumbling;
 - a great range of old agricultural workers;
 - a great range of abroad leavings;
 - the closing of factories from the nearby towns and the loss of jobs for the local people;
- severe under population of the small villages from the area;
- insufficient number of high-educated specialists;
- insufficient development in the service sector;
- the lack of railway roads in the area;
- high rate of officially unemployment in the region;
- the continuous "brain migration";
- the lack of cohesion of social and economical development measures at a central level;
- small number of modern agricultural farms;
- insufficient preoccupation to access non-repayable funds;
- relatively low range of European funds absorption;
- insufficient budget to be invested in great infrastructure projects;
- weak applicants' ability to work and implement EU financed projects;
- high level of state-assisted population;
- out of date mentalities at a big range of population;
- different economical and social development between villages;
- lack of economical vision in some villages.

2.3. Opportunities

- the growth of the volume of community funds allocated to the less developed Romanian Development area, after the 1st of January 2007;
- the start of structural EU funds unrolling after adhesion;
- the unrolling, at the Suceava department level, of the biggest infrastructure project, with external financing;
- the drawing attraction of external financing through other international projects, also for the individuals;

- the offer of facilities for farm associations;
- the growth of agricultural production through technology changings;
- the setting up of a greater number of modern agricultural farms;
- the contribution of currency from those working abroad;
- rapid experience and knowledge transfer from those returned from work abroad;
- rapid improvement of agricultural machines and equipments stocks;
- the increase of the life-level through the endowment with utilities of the villages;
- the decrease of the pressure over the forests by replacing the fire wood with methane gas;
- the development of the tourism in the area, especially the transitory one, but also agro-touristical;
- the modernization of the local schools, through governmental programmes;
- the setting up of modern storehouses for agricultural products and the development of agricultural products market;
- the diversification and development of economical activities, especially services;
- the "lohn" activity development;
- rapid changing of mentalities of the population gone to work abroad;
- large promotion of PPP-s in utilities development;
- great request for modernization and extension of the transport (especially roads) infra-structure.

2.4. Threats

- the possibility that some agricultural products (meat, milk, vegetables) could not meet the quality conditions according to EU standards;
- the remaining abroad of those gone to work there;
- the continuation of the de-population of some villages in the area;
- the growth of population age, by the leaving of young generation, economically active;
- the growth of the percentage of social-assisted population;
- the leaving of the specialists from the education system, wealth-care and public administration;
- high value of agricultural density (127 inhabitants/100 ha agricultural field);
- the growth of prices for agricultural works and phyto-sanitary products;
- the decrease of the prices for agricultural products;
- the development of bureaucracy and corruption at a local and national level;
- permanently changing legislation;

- insufficient development and modernization of the education and health infrastructure;
- the unfortunate geographical position of the area in the North-eastern part of the country;
- the insufficient collaboration between the public local/departmental administrations for the promotion of some projects of regional interest;
- the lack or the insufficiency of some realistic projects of local, departmental or regional development;
- the decrease of life-level for the population from the area;
- high level of corruption and political clientship;
- the existence of an unprofessional regional development strategy;
- the negligence of NE development region by the central authorities.

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