

## SUMMARY

The present thesis is an analytical study of the mountain area "Dorna Country" in Suceava county, with great perspective and great potential for economic development, that are insufficiently exploited.

The first part of the thesis, consisting of two chapters, establishes the theoretical foundation and the general context of the study. The first chapter outlines the concept of rural development in general, followed by a general overview of the rural development in Romania, with examples of rural development and rural development trends in our country. The concept of "smart village" and community development in the Romanian countryside is also presented through the description of the role of the European Community in the development of the rural environment. Furthermore in the first chapter, some aspects related to social innovations are presented, with definitions and presentation of their general aspects and their role in the context of the rural growth of the Dorna Country through the LEADER program. The second chapter delves into the concept of rural development focusing on research in Romania and the European Union, presenting models of rural development in both Romania and the European Community.

The first chapter of the thesis, **CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT**, elaborates on the conceptual theory of rural development as a complex process, that requires a balanced and integrated approach, focusing on the specific needs of each community and ensuring the benefits of development are equitably distributed among all community members, as a complex and multifaceted process of improving the quality of life in rural areas, including social, cultural, economic and environmental aspects. The chapter highlights how rural development is essential to address the specific challenges rural communities face, including geographic isolation, limited access to services and resources, and vulnerability to economic and climate change. The importance of all the factors involved in the phenomenon of rural development, the dynamics and the causality determining the imbalances that block or slow down the rural development are also highlighted. In Romania, this involves a series of opportunities and challenges specific to its socio-economic and geographical context. Although there is significant progress, rural development in Romania continues to face difficulties, including fragmentation of agricultural land, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to services and youth migration. The integrated and sustainable approach, together with the

efficient use of available resources and funds, are essential to ensure equitable and sustainable rural development in Romania

The second chapter of the thesis, STATE OF RESEARCH ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, focuses on Rural Development in the European Union (EU) and in Romania, as an essential component of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), with a role in improving the competitiveness of agriculture, sustainable management of natural and climate resources, as well as the balanced economic and social development of rural areas. The CAP is based on two main pillars: direct payments to farmers and rural development measures implementing the European Union's objectives: improving the competitiveness of the agricultural sector through modernisation, innovation and knowledge transfer, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action to combat climate change, efficient water management, conservation of biodiversity and development of renewable energies, economic and social development in rural areas through increased employment, support for entrepreneurship and improved infrastructure and access to basic services.

The chapter highlights the importance of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), that supports rural development programs designed at national or regional level in accordance with EU priorities, covering, but not limited to, a wide range of actions, such as: support for investments in farms to modernize and increase energy efficiency, training and innovation programs for farmers and rural enterprises, environmental protection measures, including agri-environment-climate and ecological agriculture, support for LEADER local development, to encourage bottom-up approaches up for rural development, involving local communities in decision-making. Research on rural development in the European Union is extensive and diversified, reflecting the complexity and diversity of rural areas in the different Member States. This research is often supported by European funds, including the Horizon Europe (previously Horizon 2020) research and innovation, as well as other initiatives.

The role of the research is to contribute to EU policy-making by providing data and analysis that help guide investment and develop effective strategies to address the opportunities and challenges specific to rural areas in Europe. They support the exchange of best practices and innovations between different regions and Member States, thus promoting a more coherent and sustainable rural development throughout the European Union. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as the EU's main policy for rural development, provides financial support for agriculture, rural development and environmental management in rural areas, focusing on objectives such as improving agricultural productivity,

protecting the environment, managing natural resources and promoting economic diversity in rural areas.

The Rural Development Program (RDP), implemented by EU member states to promote rural development at national level, provides funding and support for a variety of initiatives and projects aimed at economic diversity, infrastructure improvement, environmental protection, promotion of rural tourism, community development and more. The LEADER program is based on a decentralized and participatory approach, in which Local Action Groups (LAGs) are involved in identifying and implementing rural development projects. This program promotes economic diversity, development of human resources, preservation of cultural and natural heritage and improvement of the quality of life in rural areas. Also in this chapter, the Euromontana initiative is presented, as an EU initiative that focuses on the development of mountain areas in Europe. Euromontana promotes the sustainable development of mountain communities, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, economic diversity and the cooperation between mountain regions. Also, there are project models presented, as examples of good practices, both from Romania and the European space.

The second part of the thesis, consisting of our own contributions, comprises two chapters. The third chapter presents the research method and the information base that led to the results of the study, while the fourth chapter presents the study on strategies for stimulating economic growth and improving the quality of life in the Dorna Country, ending with a customised, adaptable development model particular to the Dorna Country.

Therefore, the third chapter, RESEARCH METHOD AND INFORMATION BASE, addresses the practical aspects that determine the result of the study to project the development model of the Dorna Country. The chapter presents first the research methods adaptable to the research carried out, then an economic-social analysis of Dorna Country for the phenomenological diagnosis from the economic and social point of view of the area, the presentation of statistical data by highlighting the evolution over time of the determinants, namely the geography, demography, health and education in the Dorna Country.

We used direct observation to verify and complement other sources of information such as documents. This gave us support to reach a more complete and reliable view of the studied area. It is a valuable research method that provides researchers with authentic insight and a deeper understanding of the studied phenomena in their natural environment. In order to obtain quantitative data in the studies carried out, we applied the research method based on the

questionnaires. It is a technique often used in social, marketing, psychological and many other fields to collect data from a large number of people in a relatively efficient and economical way. We used this method to conduct quantitative studies carried out in the area of Dorna Country, based on standardized questions addressed to the population of this territory, in order to obtain information about attitudes, behavior, preferences, opinions and other variables.

Chapter four, **STUDY ON STRATEGIES TO STIMULATE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE DORNA COUNTRY** highlights the results of studies, analyzes and researches concerning the social, economic and cultural potential of the rural area of Dorna Country (Dornelor Basin) in Suceava county, for a sustainable development and the identification and proposal of new opportunities for economic development of the rural area of Dorna Country with extended applicability.

The chapter presents a series of macro-level analyzes of the area of Dorna Country, respectively the Gross Domestic Product, the analysis of the social structure and the cultural model, the analysis of the technical infrastructure, respectively of the transport, communications and public service infrastructure. The analysis of the Dorna Country social capital, innovative capacity, sustainable development and the SWOT analysis of the Dorna Country is then presented. Also, the LEADER approach (the LEADER Program) is analyzed, considered as a method of supporting local identity, used to build and develop "cultural economies" through sales of "local" products on national and international markets, which then contribute to a deepening of identity in the local area. The LEADER program is a development program that aims to strengthen the image of rural areas through an "identity policy". In Dorna Country, a series of investments were made through the Local Action Group "Bazinul Dornelor", which are still functional today and generating new jobs.

The chapter draws to an end with the proposal of a local development model, for an integrated and efficient development of the rural territory of Dorna Country with an emphasis on the fields of agriculture, industry and tourism, simultaneously with the creation of new job opportunities and implicit solutions for increasing the quality of life and an increased rate of maintaining young people in the rural communities of the Dorna Country.

The identification of the development model is founded on the questionnaire-based study applied in the localities of the Dorna Country, on bibliographic materials related to the specificity of the component localities and on updated information and statistical data, processed statistical information and data obtained from qualified institutions such as: the National Institute of

Statistics, the National Office of Trade Register, the Payments and Intervention Agency for Agriculture, the National Agency of the Mountain Area, the Local Action Group "Bazinul Dornelor", the Town Halls of the component territorial administrative units.

Considering the agricultural specifics of the Dorna Country, based in particular on animal husbandry, a project that can ensure income for the population, economic sustainability and development of the area could be the establishment of a short supply chain with agricultural products processed in a common processing unit.

The project can have a positive impact for all residents of the TAUs belonging to "Dorna Country", both from a social point of view by creating new jobs, and economically, by providing a secure income for the cooperating members. Such a project can be established through the contribution of the members who are part of the newly established economic unit, but also through non-reimbursable funds, accessing financing lines granted by the National Strategic Plan 2023-2027, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture through the Agency for the Financing of Rural Investments.

Through this project, a modern unit for the collection, processing, storage and marketing of dairy products will be built, which will constitute a pillar of the development of the dairy industry in the Dorna Country, Suceava county. Thus, a unit for the production, processing and marketing of dairy products will be built to increase the efficiency of cooperation between agricultural producers, members of the associative form, through the joint use of the newly established infrastructure. The investment will contribute to the creation of new processing units for local agricultural products and the promotion of integrated food chains, actions that will have a direct effect, contributing to the creation of job opportunities, therefore promoting employment.

The proposal of this development model could contribute to support and stimulate the protection of the product, by applying the mechanisms used in the EU; increasing the consumption of domestic food products at the expense of imported products; the increase in the number of farmers raising animals (dairy cattle) in the impact area of the project, that will provide the raw material needed for this dairy processing factory; the development of the dairy processing activity in order to obtain products such as: fresh cheese, fermented cheese, cottage cheese, processed cheese, butter and cream for consumption, fresh products (yoghurt, kefir, buttermilk).

At retail market level, the project will be successful due to the fact that the Romanians' preferences towards domestic milk and dairy is increasing. Also, at national level, the demand for milk and dairy products has grown, as well as the

consumption forecast at the level recorded in other European Union countries. The project will contribute to the development of the local and regional milk and dairy market, while meeting the demands of the modern consumer lifestyle, which is key to market competitiveness.

Bringing this investment in would fill an existing gap on the local, regional and even national market, namely the need for dairy products and cheeses (of domestic production) obtained in optimal conditions that ensure, quantitatively and qualitatively, the optimal intake of necessary nutrients. Family farms in Dorna Country are a factor that contributes essentially to food security, and the diversity of products that have acquired the right to use the optional quality term "mountain product" ensures the food requirements for consumers already accustomed and dependent on their taste.

The TAU components of the Dorna Country are similar as forms of socio-economic manifestation, from a gastronomic point of view, the differences being mainly their geographical position and local traditions.

In conclusion, the results of the study show the significant potential of the Dorna Country for socio-economic development through the active participation of its inhabitants. To ensure success and effective results, it is essential to collaborate and involve local decision-makers, to take initiative in order to support economic operators and residents, with the potential to add value to the community in which they live, for the economic development and the well-being of the population.

The paper ends with a chapter of conclusions in which the results of the study are synthesized and possible recommendations and directions for future studies are specified to analyze the evolution of the development phenomenon in the mountainous area of the Dorna Country, in order to achieve the intended goal.