

PROJECT MANAGEMENT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEHEDINTI COUNTY

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Abstract

Local sustainable development is a new concept that aims at enhancing and diversifying economic activities, at enhancing investments in the private sector, at contributing to the decrease of the unemployment rate and, last but not least, at the improvement of the living conditions. Local sustainable development management through projects presupposes the sustainable development of a new conceptual, legislative, and institutional framework that ensures a distinct approach of sustainable development. Local sustainable development policy is an ensemble of measures planned and promoted by the authorities of local and central public administration in partnership with different factors (private, public, volunteer) aiming at ensuring dynamic and sustainable economic growth by efficiently valorising local potential in order to improve living conditions. The main domains aimed at by local progress policies are the sustainable development of enterprises, the labour market, investments, and the transfer of technology, the sustainable development of the SMEs sector, the improvement of infrastructure, the quality of the environment, the rural sustainable development, health, education, training, and culture

Key words: sustainable development, project, management

INTRODUCTION

An effective project management for the sustainable development of the local communities in the Mehedinți County should rely on existing realities, exploit any kind of advantage the county benefits of overall, and create sustainable development opportunities that solve stringent issues the communities are facing nowadays. Sustainable development designates the totality of forms and methods of socio-economic sustainable development whose goal is first of all to ensure a balance between these socio-economic systems and the elements of natural capital. Starting from this premise, we have chosen to approach this complex phenomenon by briefly presenting the socio-economic profile of the Mehedinți County in order to establish defining major coordinates that allow the design of the main directions of sustainable development and justify the necessity and opportunity of all investments for sustainable development of the communities in the county. The goal of the paper is to approach the concept of sustainable development of the local communities in the Mehedinți County through a performing management defined by the initiation, founding, and implementing of investment projects that correspond to the strategic priorities at local, regional and national levels. Project management for the sustainable

development of the communities in the county is analysed from the perspective of the opportunities of accessing non-reimbursable European financing available through functional Operational Programmes in Romania under the European Union objectives of convergence and cooperation. The discipline and strictness in using resources from public institutions – Mehedinți County Council and Local Councils – lead to an increasingly effective management promoted within programmes that allow reaching county strategic goals. Our scientific approach relies on the theoretical-methodological approach of management, in general, and of project management, in particular, and on its application in real economy in the Mehedinți County. The motivation of this approach lies in the integration of our country into the European Union in January 2007, a historical moment that needed a new approach, more complete and more unitary of regional sustainable development in Romania, capable of keeping up with the new international challenges in the context of European Union recommendations, according to its integrated vision of sustainable development and of the requirements of territorial cohesion.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Starting from the premise that sustainable development of the Mehedinți County is a process that depends on its regional and national context, we have approached the analysis and presentation of county priorities of sustainable development starting from regional and national imperatives. To get a general view of sustainable development of the communities of the Mehedinți County, we have reviewed the main socio-economic indices and made an analysis of these indices until 2013. Since any sustainable development strategy, programme or project relies (as a necessity and as an opportunity) on a detailed analytic study of the realities, issues, and advantages characteristic to a county, we have identified, using a SWOT analysis, the strong points (the geo-strategic position of the county, its population – urban concentration above the national mean, positive natural gain, flexible labour force with high training levels, diversified transportation means of national and international importance, consistent tourism potential, etc.) and weak points (precarious basic infrastructure, particularly in the rural area, insufficient and ineffective exploitation of the agricultural and tourism potential, etc.) of the county from a socio-economic point of view, while examining the sustainable development opportunities (European funding, sustainable development of maritime and fluvial transport, implementation of PPP, etc.) and also the main threats to an effective exploitation of the strong points (economic crisis, increase of unemployment rate, etc.), remediation of weak points and use of

opportunities. Achieving the goals through strategic sustainable development planning is possible through the initiation and implementing of projects that meet priorities at county level. Since European non-reimbursable funds have been an essential support of sustainable development and, at present, on the background of world economic crisis, they represent a maximum interest pillar for the support and continuation of the evolution process at social and economic levels, we present both the portfolio of the projects of the Mehedinți County Council financed through pre-adhesion funds (Sapard, Ispa, and Phare) and projects financed from structural and cohesion funds for the current programmes (2007-2013). In the context of the current economic crisis it is increasingly obvious that project management for the sustainable development of local communities relies on European funding as a safe financial source for the support of the process of implementation of sustainable development strategies at national, regional, county, or local levels. The projects presented within this approach are the incontestable proof in this respect. The results of finalised projects or of the projects being implemented will affect positively the quality of the life in the communities of the county, thus contributing to the sustainable development of certain sectors considered a priority: tourism, transport infrastructure, water infrastructure, waste water, integrated waste management, social work infrastructure, etc. All these projects, different due to their specificity, cooperate within a general plan, through the results they involve both short- and long-term, to the increase of the living standards of the population.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Current priorities of the European Union are related to these aspects of integrating local actions from the perspective of territorial cohesion and, particularly, of sustainable local development. The county of Mehedinți has a valuable potential in agriculture, in industry, tourism, transports, and trade, being advantaged by its strategic position. The county of Mehedinți is located in south-west Romania and covers 4,900 km². The Danube, one of the largest rivers in Europe, flows 192 km along the southern border of the county. The historical vestiges from Drobeta-Turnu Severin are the proof of the importance of the area during the centuries. Archaeological digging proof there used to be human settlements in the area ever since the Palaeolithic (the vestiges of a settlement from the Palaeolithic have been brought to light and are still being studied at Schela Cladovei). The first cemeteries and proofs of stable cultivation activities on the European continent were found in this area. The county of Mehedinți has a population of 330,000 inhabitants and a population density of 67.8 inhabitants/km². Any project is a system of extremely complex actions starting with the idea

embodying an issue and finishing with the statement of objectives, implementation activities and effective budgetary planning aiming at solving the issue and getting results that develop the communities sustainably. Starting from these considerations, the scientific approach focused on the approach of theoretical grounds, of the features and typology of management, with accent on the relationship between programmes and projects, implementing modalities in accordance with the priorities of sustainable development such as stated at national, regional, county, and local levels.

While debating the issue of local sustainable development in the context of the policies promoted at European Union level, we started by presenting the integration of Romania into the European Union in the context of the process of integration of East European countries. Romania's belonging to the European Union is an extremely important reality for all that is sustainable development of the communities. National, regional and county strategies are stated depending on European imperatives and financial support from the European Union is fundamental in this context. Particular attention should be paid to the administrative-territorial organisation during the current period as a main features of successful project management for the sustainable development of the communities, with focus on the relationship between local, regional and central administrations and on the competences they have in the process of sustainable development. Decentralisation, as a priority of the economic and social progress has been one of the points debated in this chapter, with focus on the typology of decentralisation processes in the European Union member states. In current conditions, when Romanian economy still has to face rather serious structural issues corroborated with the world economic crisis, it is but natural to consider as extremely important the financial support from the European Union as a safe and imperiously necessary source of financing for Romania, necessary to develop the Romania State on the whole and fill in the significant gap between Romania and other European States. Thus, absorption of Community funds has become a phenomenon that seems to govern any approach of strategic sustainable development planning at national, regional, county and local levels, and local sustainable development project management with non-reimbursable funding becomes essential. As for the local sustainable development project management, it has all the imperatives established through the National Strategic Reference Framework 2007-2013 for Romania's sustainable development, in general, and of regions and counties, in particular, through the absorption of structural funds from operational programmes under the Community objectives of convergence and cooperation. These priorities are the sustainable development of basic infrastructure at European standards,

the long-term increase of economic competitiveness, the sustainable development and more effective use of human capital in Romania, the consolidation of effective administration, and the promotion of balanced territorial sustainable development. Structural Community Funds are the main instruments of the European Union destined to promote socio-economic cohesion and solidarity. Structural Funds are an important complement of national policies: they are a true effective contribution to the achievement of the three strategic goals promoted by the policy of Economic and Social Cohesion at European level: convergence or the reduction of the sustainable development gaps between regions (the States can ask for financing for the regions whose GDP/capita is below 75% of the European mean); regional competitiveness and employment (Romania is not yet eligible from this point of view); European territorial cooperation (a theme goal that supports the adaptation and modernisation of education policies and systems, the training and employment of labour force). The management of structural funds and the achievement of the National Plan for Sustainable development through the implementation of Operational Programmes are a new route map for all the actors involved. European financing is a main factor that influences positively the sustainable development of the communities of a county, and the success of absorption largely depends on the quality of local sustainable development management through projects by both local public authorities and private environment or Non-Governmental Organisations. This type of management is relatively recent in the practice of local public institutions and their capacity and expertise take shape gradually while strongly challenged. It is unanimously accepted that pre-adhesion funds such as Phare, Ispa and Sapard represented a first essential step in accumulating expertise in the management of European financing, but structural and cohesion funds presuppose a much more complex management since they finance projects that need to meet objectives and indices established through Operational Programmes.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the most useful conclusions that can be drawn from the presentation of the projects aiming at developing the county sustainably is that it is not enough to involve local authorities in the support investments to increase the inhabitants' life quality. Private management should be a partner on this road full of challenges, economic and social sustainable development at European standards. Local sustainable development wholly depends on the quality of the investment projects, on good management and on the profitability for private and local investors. Thus, the key principles to follow in the sustainable development of a financing scenario for local

community sustainable development are: Intelligent financing of towns and regions through the improvement of budgetary relations with higher administration levels; Encouraging the private sector to involve actively in the financing of investment sustainable development at local level; Financing aiming at developing the metropolitan area by dividing costs and advantages; Exploiting the advantages of economic increase at local level; Developing public-private partnerships; Approaching a new vision in public management at local level aiming at easing financing; Encouraging entrepreneurship in the public and private sectors at local level; Encouraging the private sector to invest on the market to produce long-term results in local economy; Emphasising project quality in local investments and not financing offers; Training competent employees in local and higher administrations.

Local public authorities should remain open to all initiatives in the field and be, at the same time, the motor of attraction to the private environment and the key factor in identifying and using all financing opportunities. The concept of integrated management supposes a series of concentrated actions at the level of the entire county and not separate actions. The desideratum of this new concept is unique tariffs available for the population of the county and the improvement of life quality and environmental conditions. Sustainable development of a county cannot be performing in a polluted environment.

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