THE GROUNDING OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Cristina DIONISIE

1“Petre Andrei” University of Iași

Abstract

The paper reveals some issues that may be taken into account when grounding the regional strategy for development starting with the negative results from the post-socialist period. The study is a speech for the use at regional level of the triple bottom line principle in the management process. Formulating the strategic objectives, be they general or specific, observing the 3 aspects of the triple bottom line may contribute to surpass some managers’ vision who are only interested in making short-term profit. The study has to take into consideration the real problems that have appeared in the grounding of the regional strategy. Neglecting the social and ecological efficiency has become a real problem with respect to maintaining a positive image of the Romanian integration process and in fulfilling the obligations assumed that refer to the social and life standards. One of the objectives of this paper is also to analyse the regional discrepancy and to offer some criteria and strategic marks for the grounding of the regional strategy.

Key words: regional strategy for development, triple bottom line, strategic marks for the grounding of the regional strategy, sustainable development.

Starting from the study of the regional development strategies and of the negative outcomes recorded during the post-socialist period, which resulted from their implementation, the paper intends to warn about the necessity of taking into account certain aspects that might contribute to the correction of the recorded malfunctions: 1) the essential landmarks that must be taken into account when grounding the regional and territorial development strategies; 2) the use of the scientific methodological tools when grounding the strategies for the regional tourist development; 3) the involvement in the business environment of the main regional actors for the validation of the development priorities; 4) stimulating the citizens to get involved in the working out of the regional development strategies.

The analysis of the results of the strategies designed for the regional tourist development reveals a series of negative trends: a) the aggravation of the economic interregional gaps (the disparity index of the GDP/inhabitant in comparison to the national average =100, varying between 0.678 in the North-east region and 2.008 in Bucharest in 2006); the increase of the structural gaps (thus the North east region is centred on agriculture- with a contribution of 15% of the regional GDP in comparison with Bucharest where the agricultural sector holds more than 60%; c) the increase of the gaps concerning the net income level. Except for Bucharest – where wages are more above the national average, the gap between the average net income in the most developed region (the South-West region) against the one with the minimum level (the North-East region) in 2006, was 1.10; d) the aggravation of the gaps regarding employment, both as a whole, and on sectors or activity branches. The North-East Region holds 15.1% of the whole employment percentage, holding at the same time the highest employment rate in agriculture- 42.7%, followed by services 33.6% (18.8% commercial services and 14.9% social services) industrial and civil engineering sectors with 23.6%; The region around Bucharest is the only region of the country where the service sector, which on a national level hold 39.1% of the total, generates the most important jobs, reaching 64.0% (44.2% commercial services and 19.8% social services) of the whole employment percentage in the region. The industrial and the civil engineering sectors hold 31.5% while the agriculture holds 4.5%; e) the increase of the discrepancies with respect to unemployment. The regions with the highest unemployment rate were the North-East (in 2004) and the South- West (in 2003, 2005 and 2006), the lowest rate being recorded in the region of Bucharest for the period 2003-2006.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The paper has used the descriptive analysis, the SWOT analysis, empirical and scientific documentation methods. The descriptive analysis has used the following as data source for the exemplified outcomes: The National Prognosis Commission, The National Statistics Institute. The
The strengths mainly refer to:
- being aware of the experience in the field of regional planning in Romania and other European countries;
- the existence of some specialists and of the possibility to co-opt them from different environments: academic, administrative, private business environment, etc.
- being aware of the perception the citizens, the experts and the representatives of the different entities have with respect to the process of working out the regional development strategy;
- identifying the information needed for the working out of the regional development strategy;
- the chance that all the main actors involved in the process use all the information technologies;
- the existence of some studies that deal with the models of indicators used in other countries with respect to the sustainable development.

The weaknesses are:
- not using the triple bottom line principle when grounding the regional strategies;
- the incomplete or efficient statement of the objectives and of the strategic options without taking into account neither the triple bottom line nor the available resources;
- the lack of prioritizing with respect to regional development;
- not using the methodological tools, the knowledge and the good practices in the field;
- the inconsistency of the data and of the materials available as sources of information;
- limited capacity of managing the data bases at the level of the local public administration authorities;
- the lack of transparency;
- the lack of some landmarks and criteria clearly defined on a national level on which the regional decision-makers might rely when grounding their own strategies;
- the lack of social cohesion and solidarity.

The opportunities refer to:
- the need and the social pressure exercised upon the regional authorities to prepare their own development strategies;
- the need of a regional information base that might be accessed interactively in the process of consultation and achievement of the regional development strategy;
- the interest of the authorities to access important European funds;
- re-awakening the interest towards the objectives set at Rio de Janeiro, Lisbon, etc.
- the need of permanent information on the means of achievement and implementation of the regional development strategies;
• increased requirements due to the media or 
online study of some issues of interest for the 
regional development;
• the need of a virtual interaction environment on 
a regional level, and sharing the experience 
specific for the processes of grounding the 
regional development strategies

The threats mainly refer to:
• The difficulty to attract, different partners in the 
process of strategic planning: citizens, 
universities, people belonging to the business 
environment, because of the preponderant 
interest of the groups in relation to the of the 
regional communities;
• Social conflicts also generated by the current 
context of the economic crisis;
• the lack of social consensus;

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Following the analysis of the various 
regional strategies we have noticed that the 
fundamental landmarks to be taken into account 
when grounding the strategies for regional tourist 
development are:

1. Assimilating the triple bottom line 
principle as fundamental principle in grounding 
and implementing the regional strategies for 
tourism. One should state the general and derived 
strategic objectives, since observing the three 
bottom lines might help to overcome the mindset 
some managers have with respect to making only 
short-term profit. Neglecting the social and 
ecological efficiency is detrimental to the image 
which is favourable to the integration and runs 
counter to the obligations assumed, which refer to 
the observance of the minimum social and ecologic 
standards and requirements when trading tourist 
services.

2. Adjusting the investments on the 
capitalization of the regional identity. Each region 
has its own identity proved by its history, traditions 
and culture. This traditional, cultural and economic 
mark should be highly valued. For example 
although the North-East region holds an important 
cultural-religious and human potential, it has not 
been turned to enough good value yet.

3. Using the research and knowledge 
potential provided by the public and private 
academic environment. The process of grounding 
the regional development strategies might be 
accelerated efficiently and substantially by the 
involvement of the academic environment. The 
city of Iași - a university and cultural center by 
tradition, provides a rich educational and research 
offer both in notorious public Universities and in 
the private environment, which is characterized by 
an accentuated dynamics of the offer.

4. Co-opting and turning to good value the 
innovative human factor. It would be necessary to 
find the innovative ways to stimulate the 
involvement of the highest number of people who 
have formal or latent interests in the process of 
analysis, prioritizing, decision-making and 
implementation of the regional development 
strategy.

5. The use of the democratic principles and 
the harmonization of the various points of view 
used in the grounding and drawing up of the 
regional development strategies. The data of the 
questionnaire prove that, although there is interest 
for the involvement in the process of achievement 
of the regional development strategy, its grounding 
did not have an extensive participatory framework, 
since the transitory interests of the political class 
and clientele prevailed. This is why, it is necessary 
to take into account all the points of view and to 
expand the partnership to achieve the regional 
development strategy. It would be desirable to use 
a generic model of partnership that might allow the 
integration of the existent knowledge potential that 
the various social actors and the citizens may 
apply. To conceive such a model one might use the 
tools of the software engineering (archetypes used 
in object modelling).

6. The connection, within the process of 
strategic grounding, to the criteria used by the 
economies of the developed countries. If we take a 
look at the sustainable development models used 
by the European developed countries, we notice 
that many of them have a very accurate 
methodology for the drawing up of the regional 
development strategies. For example, Great Britain 
shows constant interest in achieving a model of 
indicators of regional development, the system 
with 68 indicators grouped on four dimensions, as 
a matrix, being published in 2007. Therefore, what 
should be done in our country is to identify and test 
certain variants of indicators that might match to 
an integrated vision upon the development of one 
region and ensure sustainable development; the 
drawing up of a forecast model of the alternatives 
(pessimistic, average, optimistic) for the regional 
social-economic development on the grounds of 
the integration of the tendencies measured 
according to the identified indicators. At the same 
time, creating a virtual portal connected to the 
international knowledge bases, managed by the 
public administration might turn into an efficient 
integration way of the models and knowledge 
coming from different countries.

The requirements and the criteria needed for 
sustainable development must be applied when 
grounding the regional development. Sustainable 
development is a desideratum that may be reached
at in different ways, using one or several models, each with its own action tools. Within the chosen model, the taking into account and the use of the triple bottom line principle should be found in the statement of the objectives and of the strategic options. The statement of these options must have in view the need of continuity in the strategic action at a regional level as well as the need to adopt some fundamental strategic options, according to the regional specificity. As far as the main long-term general objectives are concerned, they should aim at:

a) The design of a competitive structure of the regional economy based on services and innovations;

b) The connection of the region to the flows of international merchandise, tourists, investments, information and cultural values;

c) The increase of the investments in the human and social capital of the region, with a view to ensuring the innovative capital as a support for the sustainable development;

d) The increase of the efficiency of the rural economy, preserving at the same time the quality of the environment of the extremely rich folk assets of the regions.

e) Turning the urban centres into culture poles- by the capitalization of the specific cultural potential or regional and trans-regional attraction- by the development of a favourable business environment.

Three sets of important options should be taken into account when grounding the regional development strategies and outlining a development model of the Region:

1. Horizontal options: the focus upon the economic increase and the orientation towards the working out of the social and environment problems. The economic increase should be the essential criterion in directing the investments. It is desirable that priority investments be the ones that sustain the development of the regional business infrastructure, while the investments in human resources must be oriented towards the qualifying of the manpower;

2. Territorial options: adopting a polycentric territorial development model. The polycentric development, as regional strategic option refers to sustaining the development around a network of development poles, which means: identifying the influence poles, which will act as development poles also for the neighbouring areas; directing the resources with priority towards the development poles, first of all towards the competitive branches and toward those that support the population. Thus we also have in view the development of those activities that enable the development of the connection rural-urban, so that the areas might mutually support each other in the development process.

3. Sectorial options: the orientation towards the functional specialization in the most competitive branches and which creates strategic advantages. The identification of the priority development sectors should start from the requirement of creating comparative advantages to the region in comparison with other regions and from the needs of the private sector, which controls most of the sectors in the regional economy. Identifying the priority sectors at a regional level must be achieved by consulting and involving both the partners in the region, and the citizens. The priority sectors should be evaluated then according to a rigorous methodology which should take into account the following criteria: the importance of the sector for the regional development; the competitive potential, the innovative potential; the potential of attracting the development into the regional economy.

CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions that have come out following our research on the grounding of the development strategies are:

Our country did not use an accurate system set on strong criteria, principles and landmarks for the strategic grounding;

In our country we cannot talk about cooperation between the academic environment, the public sector and the socio-economic environment with respect to the grounding of the sustainable regional development strategy;

The scientific methodological tools are not used in the strategic grounding;

The human factor is still neglected, and especially the intellectual capital that generates knowledge an innovation and that might have been attracted into this process;

As far as the system of indicators used in characterizing the regional development is concerned, we cannot talk about either integrating the indicators (economic-social-personal environment) or keeping up with the cycles that correspond to the socio-economic processes.

The lack of transparency imposes the creation of a regional knowledge base permanently updated with the results of the research in the field, administered by the public authorities responsible with the achievement of the regional development that should be accessed by all the social actors.
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