

The Valorization of Local Products in Arid Zones: Diagnosis of a Small Business Producing Date Jam

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Abstract:

The goal of our research is to try to understand the realities of small agro-food businesses in arid zones, namely through a small business in Messaad in the Wilaya of Djelfa, that specializes in the production and commercialization of date jam. It also aims to increase the value of local agricultural products as an important lever of local economic by embedding itself in a sustainable strategy. The methodological approach used is the three E's: enterprise, entrepreneur, and environment, which necessitates the use of a few tools available in the field of entrepreneurship, namely :The entrepreneur profile and entrepreneurial spirit ;The small business (forces and weaknesses ;The environment opportunities and threats. The observation allowed us to confirm that entrepreneurship encouragement and support are the keystone for promoting local products in these regions.

Keywords: valorization- local produce- small business- arid zones- date jam

Jel Classification Codes : L26; Q12;Q15;Q18;Q20

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I- Introduction:

As is the case for the agro-food sector in market economy countries, the weight of small businesses in Algeria is growing, both in terms of number, turnover, workforce and even export rate. But "the world of small business is largely a mystery" according to Julien and Marchesnay,(1992)¹, who's "management is an enigma" according to Meier and Pacitto, (2007)², and whose "we must get out of ignorance" according to Marchesnay, (2003)³.

In the absence of a clear strategy adopted by the agri-food industry to increase the value of so-called "terroir" products, this leads us to give interest to this type of small business. In this case, from a nascent branch that is not well known, this finding has been realized and it is interested in a company that has specialized in the manufacture of a local product: Date jam, downstream from Phoenicultural sector, where more than 50% of production is estimated at 700 thousand tons (Touzi 2015)⁴ currently 1 million tons is unvalued.

The company is located in an arid, steppe region, but offers a fertile micro-climate to arboreal gardens, a potential that also remains to be exploited and exploited, given the absence of local entrepreneurship.

Indeed, concerning the phoenicultural regions where packing units are set up, Benziouche, (2012)⁵, there was almost no production of finished products derived from dates. The only known and locally produced derivatives are dates (Ghars), and the pitted date manufactured by some packers or small scale artisanal. While it is possible to inventory more than 30 derivatives, such as jam, juice, fruit bars with fragments of dates that are produced and marketed on a large scale in some phoenicultural countries, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are well advanced in this area of date valorization (production, marketing and consumption)

On the other hand, the discordance between the conditioning capacity and the production in the phoenicultural regions generates transfers of large quantities to the units installed elsewhere either in the rest of the regions, or in the north of the country or in the semiarid regions. These transfers involve significant transport costs and increase the cost of packaging which calls into question the competitiveness of the product.

The challenge for our agricultural economy, is to integrate in a logic of sustainability, and to value all our existing potential from the rational and rational use of available resources, and the valorization of these large quantities of dates (figure 1)

This directs our study to draw a better knowledge of the economic performance of a small company, which takes the initiative of investment in the field of transformation, of valorization of dates generally marginalized even in its regions of production. Our company is located in Messaad, (wilaya of Djelfa), whose object of study is part of the understanding of this initiative with the risks incurred on all levels.

The objective is also the knowledge of the strategy and the behavior of this company as well as their economic performances and finally the knowledge of their assets, opportunities and threats.

Our problem, which we seek to treat, is the following:

What is the experience of small agro-food companies that value local products in arid zones, are they a lever for sustainable agriculture?

What is the economic performance of this small company by using date valorization?

What are the assets, opportunities and constraints of this small company following the use of this activity outside production areas?

What is the socio-economic impact of the company's activity on the date's sector in Algeria and on the development of the Messad region?

Thus, to answer this question, we are led to formulate four hypotheses; the first highlights the relationship that can exist between the characteristics of the entrepreneur and the opportunities of the environment; an interaction that seems relevant to the existence and survival of the company. The second hypothesis considers that the company that values a local product; this is an important specific asset in sustainable agricultural development. Tan disk the third hypothesis is that which assumes that the company achieves significant economic performance in this new agro-food business, although the constraints of technical mastery and supply disruptions in date to be transformed are present. However, the last hypothesis considers that the socio-economic impacts on the dates and also on the development of the arid zones will be fruitful (especially on the employability in the region and the outlet of dates with low market value) with the generation of this experience in other regions and on this type of processed products.

II– Methods and Materials:

In order to treat our problematic, namely the diagnosis of the trinomial: entrepreneur - company - environment and the verification of the research hypotheses formulated, we are based primarily on agricultural statistical data, and on recent bibliographical resources dealing with this topic. . Secondly, on the free observation on the ground within this company, and the semi-directed interview, in a process that requires a certain voluntary attention directed by the objective of our work to collect the necessary information on them. stakeholder behavior, namely the creator of the enterprise, the counter-master, the subdivisionary of agriculture and the head of quality control. Surveys of actors with research links are carried out using the questionnaire containing direct questions with the subject; by addressing the dimensions related to the die, the elements of the SWOT matrix) and the performance dimensions according to an observation grid adapted from that developed by M. Marchesnay in 1993.

As for the profile of the entrepreneur, we used the grid proposed by G. Pendelieu, (1997)⁶ and the classification of Boutillier and Uzunidis (2002)⁷, which is based on the nature of the social capital that the entrepreneur mobilizes. to start a business its mode of articulation with the economic system and the economic policy measures that favor the emergence of entrepreneurs with the aim of innovating and / or creating jobs and incomes.

III- Results and discussion :

According to (Torres, 1999)⁸ the small enterprise, and despite a very strong heterogeneity around the world, it is possible to say that its logic of existence is between "small is beautiful" and "small is difficult", and which characterizes according to (Folliard, 2010)⁹ by the following traits:

- The responsibility, and the risk are concentrated on one man
- Small businesses do not have big means, but they do what they want (flexibility).
- The information system is without formalization.
- The strategy is intuitive and not very formalized.

Drawing on the experiences of some countries, and the key role that SMEs play in the economic development process. The Algerian state has taken through a number of economic reforms a series of support measures and supports the promotion of SMEs in terms of creation and development.

Thus, the law of orientation on the development of the SME promulgated in June 2017, which modifies and completes the law of 2001, aims at encouraging the emergence of the SMEs, the improvement of their competitiveness and their capacity of as well as the improvement of the national integration rate and the promotion of outsourcing. As a result, several SMEs have been created, the statistics available show that the total number of this type of enterprise is close to 1060289 SMEs all together (Table 1). The government's action plan aims to create one (1) million new SMEs during the 2015-2019 five-year period.

The number of employees of all these created companies exceeds the number of 2601958 hired in all categories of economic activities. Nevertheless, the share of the agricultural sector in the total number of SME legal entities remains paltry and does not exceed 6,476 units or 1.08% of the estimated total of 595,810 SMEs.

However, analysis of data from the Ministry of Industry and Mines shows that only 9% of these private SMEs (legal entities) are located in the south of the country until June 2017. With a small part are order agriculture. While 69% are located in the north of the country and 22% in the highland regions, which means the uneven distribution between region and between sectors of activity. This is undoubtedly due to the reluctance of young people to the agricultural sector, which they see as painful and risky. But also because of bureaucratic and religious constraints (Table 3).

Algerian SMEs have a widespread sociological characteristic, that of being family businesses, which therefore has a very close proximity aspect, and they have legal statuses that largely privilege the personal company, the EURL (the one-person company with responsibility limited), and to a lesser extent, limited liability company (Chellil and Ayad, 2009)¹⁰.

Their management remains subject to a family model: the sole or principal proprietor, surrounded by staff recruited from the family, manages himself and concentrates in his hands almost all the decision-making power, responsibilities and prerogatives. The control of modern management methods is still insufficient and the use of external advice and expertise is only very rarely carried out. (Melbouci, 2005)¹¹.

III-I entrepreneurial diagnosis: between potentialities offered and scarcity of an entrepreneurial spirit.

The company was created as part of the government's encouragement to start up small businesses in order to cope with the rising unemployment crisis, especially during the difficult times of the 1990-2000 decade. And in the context of a new agricultural policy which is part of a logic of sustainability, and which envisaged both the encouragement of strategic sectors, and the consideration of the valorization of local products;

The period prior to 2008, local products were marginalized, despite the assets available to the country in terms of ecosystems and biodiversity varied (A very wide range of local products), and local know-how and ancestral heritage very rich. And since 2008 when the policy of agricultural and rural renewal was promulgated by law 08-16 of 03 August 2008 on agricultural orientation which concerns two main axes:

- Protection and enhancement of natural resources,

- Preservation and enhancement of rural tangible and intangible heritage, we are witnessing efforts that are in full swing to promote local products including phoenicolous products.

The region of Messaad is a former partially exploited palm grove, which is located at the crossroads that leads to Zibanes, Ghardaïa, and Touggourt, which are areas with a strong potential for date products.

The company is small, of local commercial scale, located in an arid region, which stretches east to the south of a palm grove, and which offers in particular agricultural potential, and arboreal: (2500 ha fruit trees).

While the basis of this transformation activity is the phoeniculture which offers in our country a strong potential to valorize.

The valorization of dates, like many agricultural products in Algeria, is still below the objectives expected since independence, although the colossal actions and programs implemented by the State, particularly in the new agricultural development programs from the year 2000.

The company tries to make a large contribution to the valorization of dates, particularly cultivars with low market value; most of which are in the process of regression or disappearance. Indeed, several studies (Remini, 2006)¹² illustrate in recent years the blatant erosion of biodiversity in some Algerian palm groves.

His choice was oriented towards a product that is part of these agro-food products ancestrally transformed in the home and which were part of an essentially artisanal activity, and therefore always of "proximity" or "domestic" (Ferrier, 2000)¹³. It is about the jam of dates, the fruits of the palm tree, since the date, according to its consistency, its aroma and its sugar level, is preferentially intended for this or that use (as fresh fruit of table, as suitable dry fruit for transport or for processing into local products (date jam, for example) (Touzi, 2015)¹⁴

The agri-food processing sector is quite new in the region, and the marketing of a local product resulting from processing has been seen as a local challenge, even though the products processed and crafted at the home, are present in the consumer's plate.

The company is ahead, a challenge of proximity by valuing a new product on the market, to say that the activity is in the start-up phase. If we allow ourselves to use the notion of leader at this level, and for this couple: Jam of dates-market, which is characterized by the local approach, we can say that indeed, the company is leader on its market; Whatever: ENAJUC (the national company of juices and preserves), public producer number 1, with its subsidiary N'gaouss seemed to be the holder of the big part.

According to our summary (figure4), it was found that the institutional context seems theoretically favorable to the development of the activity (the support mechanisms for young promoters, the incentive policy for the valorization of local products ...), in a region that does offer a significant supply of raw materials; fruits and vegetables, with a view to expanding the processing activity. Also the observation allowed us to say that the entrepreneur is from now on precursor, on the one hand in the launching of an individual entrepreneurial spirit in a poor environment in the matter, by creating this small unit of transformation, and on the other hand by marketing a little known product, hence a spirit of innovation well present.

III-II Strengths & weakness

The reputation of the product is now the major asset of this organization, which is very appreciated, and has an organoleptic quality consistent with the characteristics indicated in the technical sheet prepared by the contractor and filed with quality services; hence a zero sanitary risk, and a consistent and safe quality of hygienic and sanitary life.

On the other hand, what we have noticed as weaknesses is above all the effect of sociological proximity which is not favorable enough (the leader comes from a different region than the place of the company). , which prevents the development of a dense relational tissue), and from a financial point of view, we note the low financial profitability, the low cash rate, and the lack of a culture of accounting registration.

Also we noticed the fluctuation of the price of the raw material: the dates, due to the disorganization of the market and the disruption of the production too related to the climatic hazards, the cultural management, and the biological alternation (Benzouche, 2014¹⁵, Benzouche and Chehat, 2010¹⁶, Benzouche and Cheriet, 2012)¹⁷, which affects the price of the product.

Thus, in this very delicate phase in the life of the company, the entrepreneur is faced with the fact that he lacks both the financial means, and secondly the low motivation that begins to gain ground in his mind, either he gives the project to his collaborator, or he tries to diversify the portfolio of activity, and expand, seizing the opportunity of the agricultural development plan by making fruit juice

III-III Constraints and Threats

The low demand and seasonal consumption of these valued byproducts of dates on the Algerian market are a real constraint; Given the low purchasing power of consumers on the one hand and the eating habits that favor the consumption of fresh products, especially dates, on the other hand.

Our work at the level of this company and like the other date packaging units (Benzouche, 2014)¹⁸, shows that the technical mastery, the know-how, and the desire to expand in the activity remains low . As a result, there is no specialist in conditioning or cold, and none has benefited from the results of research or training institutions in the field, which has a negative impact on the economic performance of these companies.

Unlike the other units involved in date packaging and established in the phoenicultural regions, the unit located in Messad allocates all of its production for the local market, which limits its operation to a period of 4 to 5 months maximum during the year following the rupture of supply on the one hand, and the cessation of activity during the summer on the other hand.

III-IV Impacts on the sector and the region

The palm grove of Guettara (Messad daïra) which spreads over a productive area of 100 ha, is a niche phoenicole well present, while the region of Messad meanwhile, offers significant potential arboreal: in Khatala, Dhayet Tolba , Chebat Henni; Gahra; Selmana, Mgueded, and Mlaga, all these localities can contribute to the improvement of the living conditions and the local development of this region by the creation of the small entities of transformation and conditioning like this small company, thus allowing the survival of a population increasingly confronted with the marginalization and scarcity of workstations. In addition, a reduction in poverty following hiring offered.

After a few years of installation, this small company in Messad has largely succeeded in achieving its goal; The results recorded speak for themselves and demonstrate the efficiency of this policy.

As an example, it can be mentioned that the area planted with fruit trees greatly exceeds that recorded since the country's independence. Several jobs created in this region, and irrigated agricultural area has doubled. The face of agriculture in this region is particularly changed. The agricultural development plan has allowed farmers, including tree growers and growers to take into account their palm groves and improve the technical route through the aid granted and encouragement in terms of financial and extension and perfectionnement (the PRCHAT program).

III-V the company's performance: dimensions and criteria.

Based on our diagnosis of the experience of the company studied, we have been able to record the set of criteria, which further define our objective, namely the components of the company's performance, its sustainability, its efficiency, the value of its human resources and its legitimacy in its environment, and the table above develops the content of these criteria.

III-VI Contractor Profile Identification

Starting from the aspect of a proximity management evoked by Torres (2002), which according to him the entrepreneur is close to his employees without hierarchical or social distance, and who exercises a centralized or personalized authority. We can confirm what characterizes this management, namely:

- The absence of functional decomposition.
- Strong versatility at the creator.
- A strong interweaving between the decisions made by the contractor.
- A simplified information and coordination system, based on oral communication.
- An implicit strategy in the short term: intuition-decision-action.
- A proximity capital essentially relational.
- A local clientele.

So following the observations and the small interviews, we can trace some traits of this entrepreneur, and his profile.

a) Share capital of the entrepreneur

This capital, which includes financial capital, knowledge capital and relationship capital, appears to have a low financial capital, and its investment depends on state support for business creators under the scheme. ANSEJ and FNRDA (the national fund for agricultural regulation and development).

Regarding his knowledge capital it seems the entrepreneur values a university degree, and significant professional experience; whereas his capital relations and weak, whatever he knew to profit from this old knowledge to start his business.

b) Mode of articulation with the economic system

This kind of entrepreneurship is witnessing the importance of institutional support, and the result of the state's economic policy in this transition phase in favor of entrepreneurship and business creation, in order to fit into the sustainability of development of these regions.

Despite the spirit of innovation and the desire to undertake felt in his speech, he can be qualified as a local entrepreneur where he could not engage in his project that by very limited equity and that the proximity aspect is very present in the experience of the company.

c) Economic policy measures

This policy is implemented by a set of aids and support through special funds created by the State to enable young graduates, to create their own jobs, to encourage employability and by limiting the exodus of youth.

d) The age of the entrepreneur

The entrepreneur is 40 years old, the age of full maturity and activity and also full experience required.

e) The genre

The bearer of the idea of undertaking in our case is the reflection of the social context, it is a man witness of the domination of the masculine gender on the business world.

f) The main mobiles

We can mention the following: his desire to undertake, his passion to promote a local product, and seizing the opportunity of aid granted.

g) Level of study

The entrepreneur has a graduate level, he is technical training.

h) The previous occupation

For a few years after he finished his studies, the entrepreneur joined the civil service for a short time before joining a public company, but that did not last long because of the dissolution of the companies local.

i) The qualities of the leader

We can cite, from what we have seen, that what marks the qualities of the leader are, above all, perseverance and attachment to the project.

j) His speech

It adopts a clear speech, whether with actors outside the company or inside the company, but sometimes it lacks the strength to convince, for lack of a proper financial commitment.

k) Contemplated investment.

The financial capital of the entrepreneur consists mainly of aid granted by two schemes, a lightened credit from the National Agency for Youth Employment, and financial support granted under the Agricultural Development Fund.

For the moment, it lacks the funds to think about it, but that does not prevent it from wanting to look for other sources of financing, such as co-financing, or to file a supplementary support file again.

III-IIV the local environment and its characteristics:

The main deficiency inherent in the entrepreneur, can above all be related to his insufficiencies in management, also on the human level, he becomes an entrepreneur for the first time in his life, in a circle accustomed to the public company and to the public entrepreneur, so what characterizes the local environment is the absence of a local entrepreneurial heritage, but also the existence of constraints related to the economic and social development of the region which are also important and many. They are physical, demographic and economic. Although the region contains significant potential and diversified resources (physical, natural, ..) whose enhancement would certainly promote its economic and social development, and can mark the launch of a private entrepreneurship.

Regarding the distant environment, we can see, the careful integration of the local population in the various systems of the state, the high rate of unemployment, and the lack of organization of the raw material market.

IV- Conclusion:

Starting from the parameters of agricultural sustainability, namely among others, the valorization of the agro-food potential available, our work is part of the understanding of the reality of a small company promoting a local product: the jam of dates .

According to our study, and in reading of what has been obtained, it has been found that the company confirms the proximity approach, as being "a centralized, low-specialized organization, equipped with internal information systems and externally and favoring intuitive and unformalized strategies "(Torres 2002); is that it is still in a fragile and sensitive phase in terms of marketing and image building, something that may be detrimental to its maintenance and development in the neighboring markets.

Considered as a new player (lack of an entrepreneurial culture of transformation and packaging), the company finds it difficult to adapt to it, given the lack of a policy of agricultural cooperation, the lack of structures support and management, which prevents producers from organizing themselves and creating processing units,

As for the creator of the company, he is surrounded by a local environment not yet adapted to this kind of entrepreneurship, this project leader, from academia is characterized by a spirit of innovation, and a desire undertaking. He has just manufactured and marketed a new product where he created his own job and put others to work, despite his low commitment to investing in equity.

Nevertheless, this kind of entrepreneurship can contribute to the valorization of dates with low market value, and improve the living conditions of the local population, thus allowing sustainable local development.

In conclusion, despite the state effort on agricultural development, we can see the absence of a clear vision among the various local actors in order to promote the agro-food potential, and that the entrepreneurial spirit of a the side and the policy of encouragement and support of this nascent entrepreneurship on the other hand, can constitute the keystone to promote local products and to be part of a logic of agricultural sustainability.

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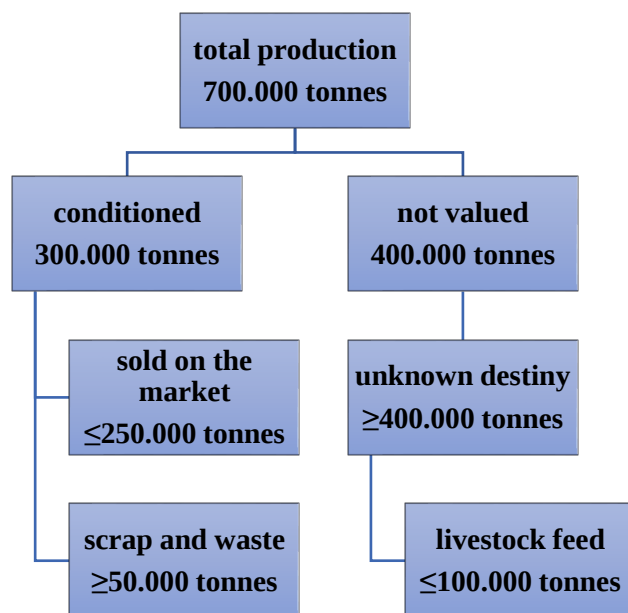
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Appendix:

Figure1: the date potential in Algeria



Source: Ulrich, *valorization des dates non comestibles en Algérie*.2013

Figure 2 : The 3 E approach

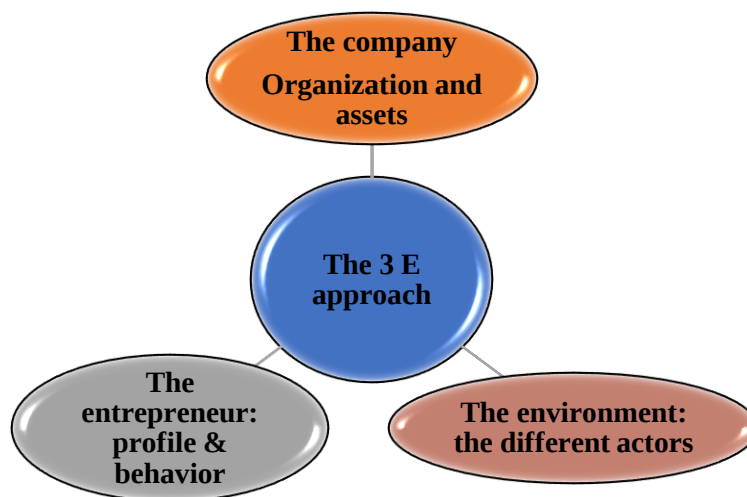


Table 1: Key figures on SMEs in Algeria until June 30, 2017

Total population of SMEs (all statuses combined)	1 060 289
SMEs created in the first half of 2017	9941
Cessation of activities (Private SMEs)	4166

Private SMEs (legal entities)		595810
Private SMEs (Individuals)		464 215
Public SMEs (legal persons)		264
Jobs (Agents)		2 601 958
Density of SMEs (Number of SMEs per 1000 inhabitants)	All statuses legal confused / Average international	23/45
	Moral people Private / Medium international	17/45

Source: SME Statistical Newsletter No. 31, Ministry of Industry and Mines of Algeria

Table 2: Distribution of SMEs (legal persons) by business sector

Activity area	Private SMEs	Public SMEs	Total	Part (%)
Agriculture	6392	84	6 476	1,09
Hydrocarbons, Energy, Mines and related services	2843	3	2 846	0,48
BTPH	177727	23	177 750	29,82
Manufacturing industries	92804	84	92888	15,58
Services	316044	70	316114	53,03
Total General	595810	264	596 074	100

Source: SME Statistical Newsletter No. 31, Ministry of Industry and Mines of Algeria

Table 3: Concentration of private SMEs (legal entities) by region

Region	Number of SMEs S1 / 2017	Concentration rate (%)
North	415 242	69
Highlands	129 767	22
South	50 801	9
Total General	595810	100

Source: SME Statistical Newsletter No. 31, Ministry of Industry and Mines of Algeria

Figure 4: Investigation of the case study

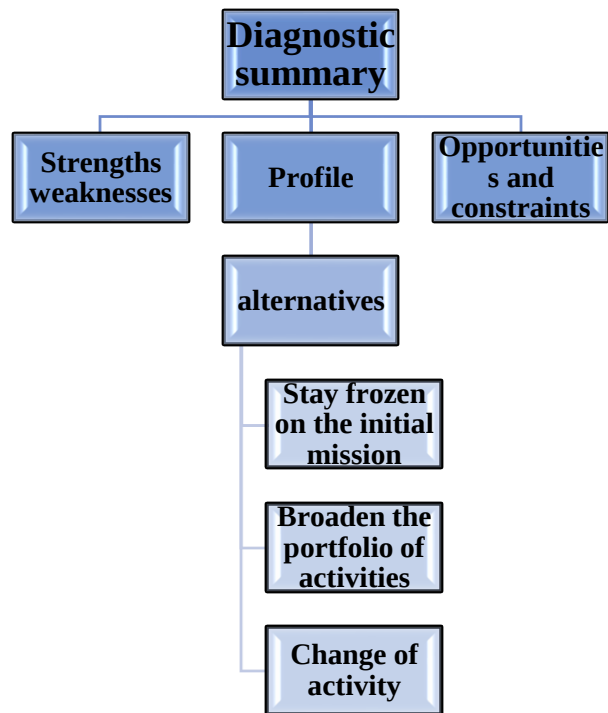


Figure5: The main SWOT elements of the company

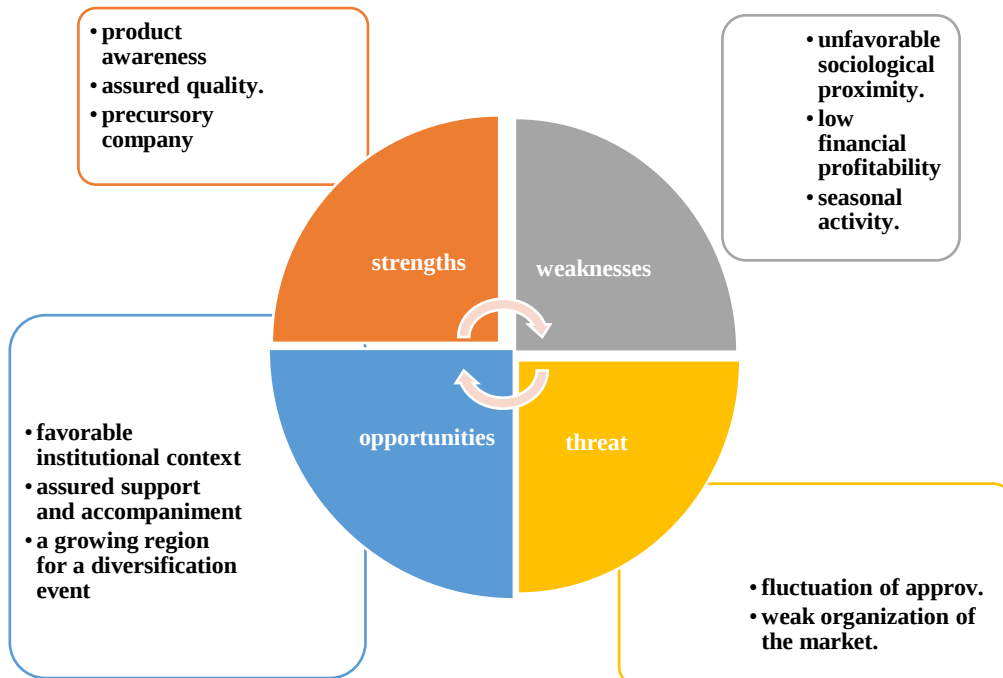


Table5: Business Performance Criteria. According to our finding

1. Sustainability of the organization - Quality of the product: good according to the official controls carried out periodically, which gives the idea of certain confidence of the company in itself so that it continues to manufacture the product. - Financial profitability: difficult to count, seems weak, not encouraging enough, this can be explained by the fact that the company is not very experienced. - Competitiveness: at this level of the market, and in the absence of similar products, we can not talk about the degree of competitiveness.
2. Efficiency and economy - Resource saving: The idea of locating in a place close to the phoenicultural regions gives the idea of seeking efficiency, and the use of these latter seems relatively economic, variable charges and fixed charges at the same time.
3. Values of human resources - Mobilization of employees: women employees are less demanding and more mobilized, young girls recently out of school life. - Work climate: healthy overall, based on mutual respect. - Employee performance: good, one turnover per satisfactory employee. Employee development: the lack of a training plan or other.
4. Legitimacy of the organization with external groups - Donor satisfaction: in this case, we are talking about public money, offered by the state in the form of investment support, not often enough controlled, but it seems that the company holds trust by the ANSEJ agency, and also from the subdivision of agriculture, which oversees local agricultural development projects. - Customer satisfaction: according to our findings with local customers, customers seem satisfied. - Community satisfaction: each actor in the community has his or her own vision for the company's mission, in general an attitude of satisfaction that prevails, but without this attitude being accompanied by encouragement from the local authorities.

Source: according to our finding

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