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**“LUCIAN BLAGA” UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU  
FACULTY OF ECONOMICS**

***Study on growing organizational competitiveness and  
customer satisfaction through efficient management of  
logistics activities***

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## **RESUME**

In the current economic context, it is of utmost importance to identify the sources that generate a competitive advantage which can in turns be exploited by the business organizations for formulating and implementing optimal strategies in order to impose on the market competition.

The management of logistics activities can be an extremely important source for an organization to generate potential competitive advantage. Logistics, itself, is today an integrative element for a big part of the functions of a business organization and based on the activities from this area serious concerns in improving the global results of an organization can be identified.

We can note that logistics, following the definition from 1991 of the National Council for Logistics Management, is an activity which is clearly within the managerial field. Thus, logistics is: „a process for planning, implementing and control of both the flow and the efficient and effective storing of goods, services and information related to these, from the point of origin to the point of consumption with the purpose of sustaining the requirements of the client.” Based on this, we can argue that this managerial perspective must be taken into consideration, which has as grounds the entire decision-making process, starting with the planning phase and ending with the controlling phase, under efficient conditions and as a main element that can grant an organization particular capabilities related to managerial performance which can be extremely benefic if turned into preformant competencies.

Starting from these premises we must state that the present paper focuses on one crucial element from the management of the business organizations that of identifying the most appropriate ways to increase both competitiveness and customer's satisfaction. In the context of an economy based on knowledge and innovation, one asset in the competition from different markets is the design and implementation of a performing management of logistics activities which can provide serious resources for cutting costs or for increasing the customer's level of satisfaction.

The present paper, centered on the analysis of suppliers of integrated logistics activities and on the beneficiaries of the logistics activities on the industrial market in Romania, aims to outline an integrated logistics model by which the supply companies of these services can adapt their activities to the national particularities of the clients and their extremely varied organizational culture.

The main objectives of the present research are:

- (1) Identifying a certain set of indicators for evaluating the performance of a logistics system adapted to the particularities of the Romanian market.



- (2) Designing a logistics model for the Romanian clients by analyzing the level of serving through:
- Evaluating the most important factors regarding customer's level of satisfaction;
  - Evaluating the most important aspects regarding the communication/collaboration in business;
  - Evaluating the relationship between client-supplier of integrated logistics services;
  - Evaluating the important aspects of label/brand in business.
- (3) Motivation that can lead to accepting a supplier of integrated logistics services by a potential client, through:
- Determining the level of satisfaction within the subjects in relation to the current logistics supplier;
  - Determining the main qualities sought by a potential client when trying to find an adequate logistics supplier;
  - Studying and analyzing the main characteristics of potential clients.
- (4) Possibility to develop certain extension strategies and adaptation of the logistics model to different contexts and organizational culture, by:
- Identifying the socio-economic particularities of the business environment;
  - Aspects regarding the local infrastructure (roads, borders, warehouses)

Currently, **the importance and role of logistics** are increasing, as a result of at least three considerations.

- First, the distribution is a first-hand element in serving clients, in meeting their increasing requirements. Moreover, an efficient logistics is the winning element for attracting and keeping clients. The prestigious companies know that they can attract and keep more clients only if the distribution meets their standards.
- Second, logistics is an important element of costs within the activity of every company. The costs for logistics activities are increasing and, under these circumstances, companies must intensify their attention on performing an efficient logistics in order to complete the efficiency of the physical distribution system so that it can noticeably reduce costs while having positive implications both for the company and its clients. Currently, **there still are serious limitations in this field**, by using rather little modern

decision-making instruments for coordinating the transport activities, for storing and for an efficient handling of the goods.

- Evolution in the area of information technology influences fundamentally the logistics activity by improving the physical distribution of goods. In this respect, using the computer as much as possible, the electronic system for scanning the uniform bar codes of the products at the sales point, recording via satellite, electronic exchange of data and electronic transfer of funds, have allowed companies to create advanced systems for processing the order, for controlling the stocks and for planning and streamlining transport and transport routes.

From the point of view of the management of this type of activity, we are currently facing two major challenges:

- Effecting an **integrated logistics** or an **integrated logistics system**. Both terms take into consideration *the movement of the goods through a chain of sequential links for added value, which assure that the product (service) reaches its right destination at the right moment and in the requested form and quantity;*
- **Implementing a strategic logistics**, by using logistic competencies and alliances from the whole distribution channel, for **obtaining a competitive advantage**. In fact, this type of logistics aims to build crossorganisational alliances, an alliance that would allow the mixing of assets and performance of a company (trusts, consortium, group of companies etc.) with the services offered by other logistics operators.

Over the last years, the management of logistics activities is outlined in paradoxical aspects. On one side, its impact on the global strategies of a business is clear, but, at the same time, due to a series of factors of both internal and external nature, the complexity of this type of management has increased extremely. These evolutions have led to an outsourcing of the logistics activities, especially the external logistics, to 3PL type of suppliers (Third Party Logistic). Nowadays, these 3PL suppliers have an important role in the performance of the supply chain and see their clients as strategic partners that can identify solutions for optimizing the supply chain and that can bring sustainable competitive advantage.

The management of logistics activities becomes more complex and much more difficult when the life cycle of the products is shorter, consumer's behavior has become more sophisticated and their demands extremely diverse so that meeting their requirements is now a vital element. Also, the business environment, on most markets in the world, is extremely dynamic and unpredictable. Thus, a major transformation occurred in the way of thinking and managing a production chain, the production companies can no longer push their products into the flow until they reach the final

consumer, but going from the premises of identifying consumer's needs, now, the consumer pulls the wanted products from the flow, products that must reach him when he desires. Therefore, the final price and the quality of the products are not sufficient argued on this type of market, speed and flexibility of the logistics chain becoming an element of major importance. In order to obtain a growing flexibility and to achieve a superior answering speed, the transfer relationship from different links of this production and sales chains must be redesigned, awarding greater importance to the way the information flows, how it is analyzed and also the decision-making process in real time. The performance of a logistics chain must constantly be analyzed in order to identify problems and to quickly answer to the minimal costs and standards imposed by the client. These aspects assure the survival of a business and of all involved factors.

Today, integrated logistics suppliers (3PL) are in a continuous transformation regarding the way they conceive their operations strategies adding new types of services to their portfolio which are in most cases adapted to the requirements and needs of their clients. Thus, as mentioned before, these integrated logistics suppliers are perceived as strategic partners which, by collaborating with the client, can streamline the supply and sales chain, can reduce the time for a cycle and can assure fast solutions to client's request.

On the other hand, we now assist to a revolution of knowledge which is just now starting. The optimal management of the knowledge which flows or is developed within an organization, as well as the knowledge that derives from outside can make a selection of the necessary information and maybe, through a creative organizational culture, to transform these competencies in performing capabilities, so important for the development of an organization. The effects of this revolution can equal the industrial revolution, because a well fundamental management of knowledge can be considered the engine that assures the transformation of an organization and its rapid adaptation to change, similar to the way the steam engine meant moving from an old and primitive production system to a much more performing one. It can be said, quoting Alvin Topfler, that this revolution of knowledge is „*the third wave*” on mankind's general development scale, both from social as also economic perspective. The implications of this revolution of knowledge are multiple and have deep repercussions in all organizations<sup>1</sup>.

Essentially, it can be considered that *the revolution of knowledge represents a fundamental change from the economy based mainly on physical resources to the*

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<sup>1</sup> Miricescu D. – *Time Management – the essence of performance in an organization*, „Lucian Blaga” University Publishing, Sibiu, 2008

*economy based mainly on knowledge*<sup>2</sup>. The core of this revolution is the determinant role that knowledge has within the modern economy. The last years distinguish a special dynamic of the business environment with major implications on the organizations and with an emphasis moved towards an obvious growth of economic importance, in order to make full use of the competitive advantage, of the technological processes and technologies, of information, human resources and not least, of the capabilities and competencies of an organization. All these are factors linked structurally to knowledge and their exploitation. As noted by Ovidiu Nicolescu, all these factors approached individually show extremely valuable elements with big pragmatic implications but the common ground is knowledge, each of them taking the form of individualizing and operationalizing methods.

Thus, it can be said that, in view of the theory based on knowledge, the company can be perceived as a market structure based on the knowledge resource, its main activities focusing on their production and integration in order to obtain sustainable economic performance<sup>3</sup>.

There are four important aspects which are in general subject to logistics: transport, controlling the stock, storing and serving clients. A performing management of these four aspects can assure, at the end, the competitive advantage of an organization, which can in turn result in: an advantage regarding cost reduction, in general, or obtaining lower response time to client's request.

Serving clients is an extremely important element and must be a component part of the organizational strategy, so a decision-maker factor which falls into the duties of top management. Besides costs, it is also an important indicator for evaluating the performance of a logistics system. The policies for serving clients must be performed starting from the main idea that a main purpose of logistics is to respect the promise regarding the delivery, specified in the declaration of intent, both by the internal customers as also by the external ones. This ability to deliver with consistency and at the initially set standards is, in many cases, the key element in attracting and maintaining clients. Serving the clients to competitive standards is performed through a perfect combination of the following elements: quick answers to client's requirements, active presence in client's area and a fast delivery based on elements of mutual trust<sup>4</sup>.

All these mentioned points lead to the conclusion that logistics activity represent nowadays a defining element for achieving a sustainable competitive

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<sup>2</sup> Jones A.B. – *Knowledge Capitalism – Business, Work and Learning in the New Economy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

<sup>3</sup> Nicolescu O, and others. – *New Approaches in Management and the Economy of an Organisation*, Vol I, *General Management of an organization*, Economica Publishing, Bucharest, 2004 (pp.43)

<sup>4</sup> McGinnis M. A., Cancro J. P. – *Logistics Basics for Purchasing and Supply Professionals*

advantage and the management of these activities becomes an essential link in its approach. The identified key problems take into consideration serving clients according to its requirements and necessities, sometimes, through differentiating elements and thus exceeding its expectations. The answering speed, consistency in honoring the promises, the level of trust and flexibility are some defining aspects that can distinguish a business organization from another similar to it.

For this reason, we intend to assess the way in which these aspects are produced on the Romanian market, but with extrapolation upon Central and Eastern Europe. The market typology from this area where there are a lot of problems related to the stability of the business environment, infrastructure, legislation, can deliver special and specific shades about the way logistics activities can be organized and managed. On the other hand, this market has an increasing market dynamic, being situated from a geographical point of view, at the junction of important tracks for the economic development of the next years. For this reason, we mention an attractive market where the economic development opens new perspectives and opportunities for tempting growth. All these aspects have led to the accomplishment of the present paper, in order to present all specific elements from this area and to bring clarification and pertinent proposals *regarding the increase in organizational competitiveness and client satisfaction through an efficient management of logistics activities.*

We outline the fact that the elements presented in the following research are in key with the main research directions on national and international level, which gives it a special relevance and a perspective of immediate applicability in practice. Thus, we mention that the present research substitutes, according to the documentation from the National Plan for Research, Development and Innovation PNII, issued by UEFISCDI and by the National Council for Development and Innovation:

- Research field – Social Science and Humanities (SH)
- Sub-area – Individuals, institutions and markets: economics, finance and management (SH1)
- Research area – Organization studies, strategy (SH1\_7)

From the point of view of the expertise, this research is set out as followed:

- Topic 9 – Socio-economic and humanities research
- Research direction 9.1 – New techniques in management, marketing and entrepreneurial development for organizational competitiveness
- Research topic 9.1.5 – Strategies for establishing and exploitation of company's competitive advantage.

As a structure, the research is divided into three main parts, which take into consideration the term logistics in general and particular aspects of the Romanian market and connected markets, all viewed, as presented later, from the point of view of the collaboration of the PhD. Candidate with the „Lucian Blaga” University from

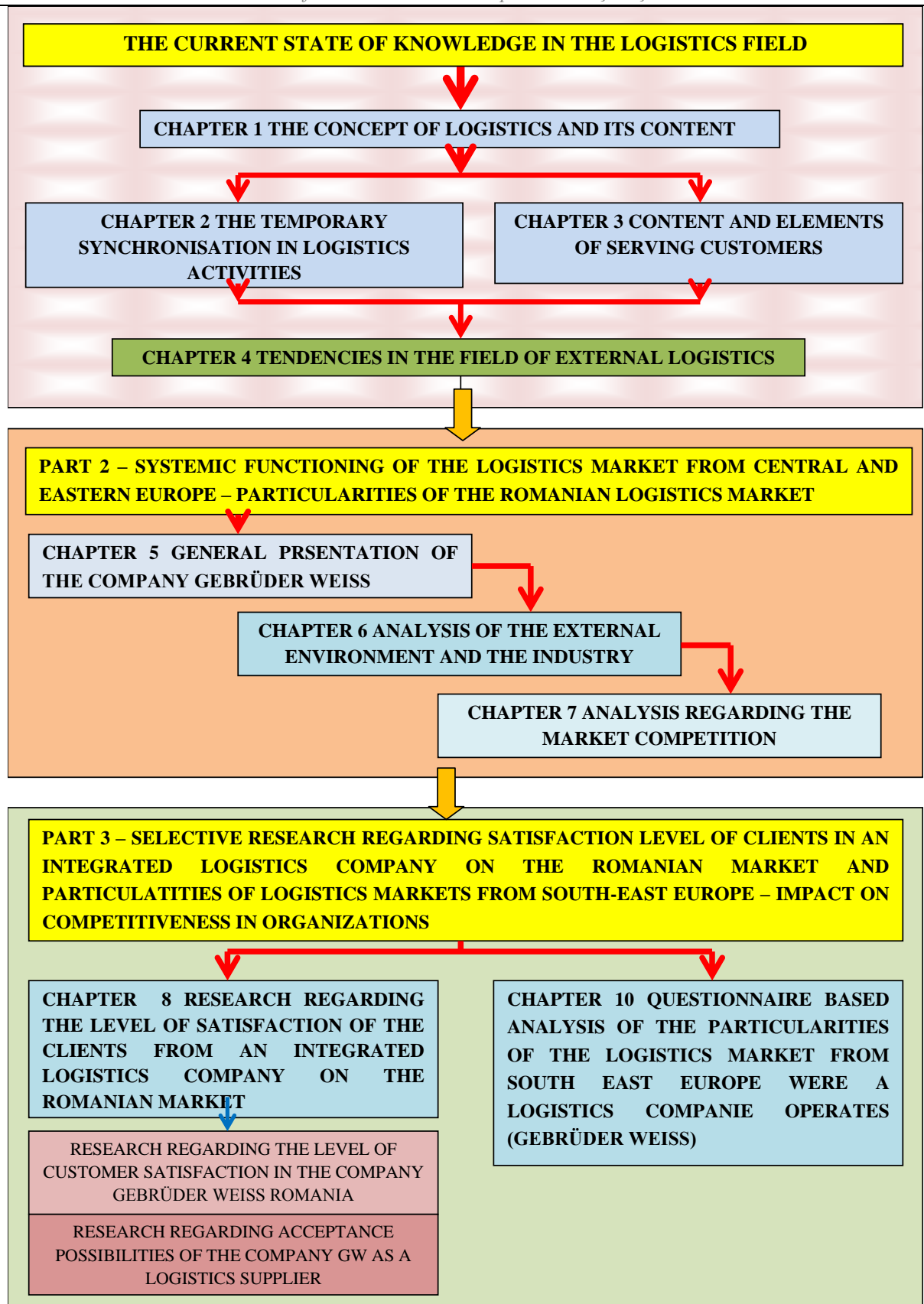
Sibiu and with the company Gebrüder Weiss Romania, where he also has an important management position.

Thus, THE FIRST PART of the research deals with the main aspects regarding the CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE LOGISTICS FIELD. Here, over four chapters, there are presented *the general elements regarding the term logistics* and the main aspects which cluster this activity in the management field having a great impact on costs, quality and delivery period, as essential triad within today's competitive environment.

The second chapter discusses *the temporal synchronization*, regarded as a revolving plate for identifying certain operation strategies which can produce a competitive advantage. All these are presented from the perspective of competition based on time, which becomes an essential side in organizing and managing global supply and delivery chains. An optimal management of activities on time and the performance of having reduced delivery terms, increase customer's satisfaction, sometimes also in favor of the delivery price.

In a logical continuation, the third chapter deals with *the concept of serving clients* which gains in consistency through reaction speed, consistency, flexibility and creating the feeling of trust and partnership between supplier, client and supplier of integrated logistics services. It is outlined here, the importance of achieving a level of serving at the standards required by the clients, or, which can even anticipate certain requirements that clients have not express, hence an essential added value is created through logistics activities, leading to obtaining an important competitive advantage for all the players involved along the supply chain.

Therefore, almost natural, the fourth chapter of the research is integrated into the logical flow, demonstrating the importance of a partnership with a company that can offer integrated logistics services. On the ladder of *the evolution of the logistics term* it has been strongly outlined, the 3PL model, which supposes the existence of partners which offer logistics services with high added value based on a collaboration in different areas connected not only through the physical transfer of materials but also on the information flow, which is of utmost importance. This partnership develops over a larger period of time and the partner from the logistics field becomes a strategic partner.



THE SECOND PART, consists of important analyzing elements regarding SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONING OF THE LOGISTICS MARKET FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE focusing on the PARTICULARITIES OF THE

LOGISTICS MARKET FROM ROMANIA. This part of the research contains a relevant analysis of the logistics market from this part of Europe, having an extremely growing potential and a strategic importance in the general development of the European economy. Here, there are three chapters which built a conclusive image of the market from this area.

Hence, one of the chapters, chapter five, contains an *interesting case study of a company that operates on the European market for a long period* and which has entered the Romanian market several years ago, *Gebrüder Weiss*. The case study is interesting, from our perspective, also because it presents a development model of this type of business in this area, a model that can be considered an accurate framework for rethinking a business in the logistics field and on the Romanian market.

Chapter six makes further steps in the analysis of the local market by also presenting an *analysis of the external general environment* with all its important components: politico-legal component, economic component, and socio-cultural component, technological, demographical and international component. Highlighting these aspects define in a more concrete way, the typology of the business environment from Romania and the necessity to adopt a business to the local conditions. It must be also mentioned that for an integrated logistics service supplier, the challenges of the Romanian business environment are extremely high and target an underdeveloped infrastructure, complicated aspects regarding legislation and also some elements of socio-cultural nature. It is also worth mentioning the challenges of positive nature which aim political stability, coherence of governmental politics and development opportunities from the area, which are also connected to the possibilities of extending towards the near and far East.

The seventh chapter descends to the analysis of the external specific environment, narrowing the analysis to a more restricted field of competition by *analyzing the competition on the logistics market from Romania*. It is a wide chapter which absorbs statistical information and tries to establish the most important players from this market by doing a ranking related to turnover, profitability, level of investments, number of employees, volume of handled goods and many other aspects. It must be also mentioned that the chosen criteria, so the ranking on this market are very different, which shows that we are facing an environment with an increase competitiveness and with players which position themselves differently, according to the identified and performing capabilities and competencies.

For the moment, there is neither in Romania nor in other parts of the world, a model of integrated logistics services by which the supply companies of these services can adapt their activities to the national particularities of the clients and to their extremely varies organizational culture.



The last part, THE THIRD PART, is dedicated exclusively to the research, aiming a SELECTIVE RESEARCH REGARDING CLIENT'S LEVEL OF SATISFACTION OF AN INTEGRATED LOGISTICS COMPANY ON THE ROMANIAN MARKET AND THE PARTICULARITIES OF THE LOGISTICS MARKETS FROM SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE – THE IMPACT ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF AN ORGANISATION. As the title also mentions, this part is focusing on three research directions, according to the objectives of the paper. All this is analyzed based on the responses from three questionnaire surveys, having as a target sample clients of companies which offer integrated logistics services or the managers of logistics companies which perform their activity in different locations from Eastern Europe.

The first research takes into consideration *an analysis of client's level of satisfaction of a logistics company* that is Gebrüder Weiss, in order to identify, at the end, important aspects which outline serving clients on the Romanian logistics market.

The second research addresses the problem from a different perspective trying to identify which are *the motivations that would lead to accepting an integrated logistics service supplier by a potential client*. The goal is to determine how to enter and withstand on a market with increased competition.

Both research are integrated in chapter eight and followed by a consistent chapter for conclusions, chapter nine.

The last research, included in chapter ten, takes into consideration, *an identification of the particularities of logistics markets from South-Eastern Europe*, starting from the idea that each country has important and particular aspects which must be considered, including here elements regarding infrastructure, politico-legal frame, and weather problems and also aspects of psycho-social nature. Therefore, it is important to adapt the business to these aspects and it's interesting to establish the different sides in approach related to the level of logistics serving.

All these three parts compose, logically, the image of a whole. Starting from the open literature for the current stage in the field, highlighting new tendencies in the field, going through two extremely ongoing topics, the ones related to the level of logistics serving and the ones related to the quickly responding the client, it then reaches the clear outline of the performing frame of a business in the Eastern Europe area and finalizing with the three complex research from then third part where we also draw pertinent conclusions on the working assumptions launched in the theoretical part from the beginning.

There also needs to be mentioned that currently, the logistics service supplier companies are based on own experiences without having the possibility to take advantage of the results of a scientific research on this topic. Therefore, our intention is address this situation and to make a model which can represent an efficient means of

work and also a support in the decision-making process for the logistics service supplier companies.

The present paper was drafted through a strong collaboration with two major organizations which have an involvement in this field or which have as a main activity the logistics activity, one organization from the academics field, that is the „Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu and the team from the department of Industrial Engineering and Management and the company Gebrüder Weiss Romania. Without this close collaboration, the studies could not have been effected and many of the specific aspects could have been neglected.

The collaboration with the „Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu emerged in the research activity, starting from the identification of potential indicators for evaluating the performance of the logistics system, going to discussions regarding the way to conceive a performing logistics model for the Romanian market and also the identification of means for the exploitation of this model together with elements that can represent important poles in developing sustainable strategies that have as a ground the management of logistics activities.

The collaboration with the company Gebrüder Weiss Romania SRL was mainly concerning the know-how in the logistics field, based on a long experience also in the field of intercultural experience and by taking into consideration that the company Gebrüder Weiss Holding AG is active on three continents (Europe, Asia and America) in 25 countries and having 156 locations. Thus, also the partnership with Gebrüder Weiss Romania SRL played an important role in the process of identifying the indicators for evaluating the performance of the logistics system and establishing certain strategies for extending and adapting the logistics model to different contexts and organizational cultures.

Certainly, without being modest, the author has a relevant experience in this type of managerial activities, being one of the essential pawn that developed the business of a company that offers integrated logistics services (Gebrüder Weiss Holding AG) on the East European market and also in outposts in Asia.

We hope that the present research is interesting both as a theoretical approach but more from a practical perspective. The material could represent an interesting working method for the managers of logistics companies. Part of the conclusions of these researches were presented by the author as scientific papers in important publications from Romania or in the proceedings from certain specialty conferences. Part of the studies regarding customer satisfaction has already been put to disposal to the company Gebrüder Weiss and are used within the managerial process to improve the activity, to identify performing competencies and for formulating certain sustainable strategies for development that can assure a competitive advantage.

Of course, there is already a part of the materials which have been transmitted to the University partner, which is the „Lucian Blaga” University from Sibiu, so that it can be disseminated among the interested lecturers and students, especially for the purpose of being used as case studies or example for good practice in bachelor or master courses.

At the end of the paper, a first element that needs to be outlined is the fact that logistics activities represent in today's economy, an essential element in identifying sources for a competitive advantage. Especially for the companies that operate in the production field where they are links in an extremely long production chain, the management of the supply chain is a revolving plate both for optimal managing the relationship with the business partners – suppliers and clients, as also for identifying the optimal solution for reducing costs. It is certain that, the ones who manage to reduce the delivery time and also manage well the other aspects concerning the quality of the delivery and the operation costs, have an important asset in the competition on the global market. The competition based on time stated by Stalk in the '80 of the last century is still dominant on many markets in the world, therefore organizations must identify solutions against this.

We highlighted these elements in the introduction part of the research, emphasizing the necessity to identify creative solutions for increasing the answering speed, under the most advantageous economic conditions. As resulted from the research based on questionnaire addressed to certain clients of companies that offer integrated logistics services, the answering speed and flexibility are some of the most intense needs of the business partners. The pressure of short deadlines, the large group of companies that apply the concept Just-in-Time (JIT) and the new production philosophies based on the Toyota Production System (TPS), of Kaizen, Lean Manufacturing or Quick Response Manufacturing type, force a total rethinking of the policies and strategies from the logistics field, bringing this function to the main focus of the ones who's target is to find coherent and sustainable business strategies. The production batch is decreasing, the diversity in production is increasing, the stocks along the logistics chain have become minimal, and hence, flexibility in supply and a quick response to customer's orders have become essential.

Many of the logistics activities have been outsourced in order to reduce costs and the relationship with specialized companies has become more and more special. These business organizations that initially aimed only transport activities, trucking, have embraced many serving elements, so that they can increase the level of serving. Thereby, there have been put to disposal, special warehouses, intermodal terminals, terminals for cross-docking, management of transport information, optimizing the transport routes and premium services of express type. All these have led to the development of a long term partnership, mentioned also inside the paper, with strong

influence on the main indicators for economic performance. Thus, the terms 3PL and 4PL appeared, aiming a partnership of strategic nature and consolidating the supply chain by increasing certain strong groups that together obtain important competitive advantage. We here also mention the different studies in this field which present the current state in this important area, so in the following, we will also mention the conclusions of a study effected annually concerning the partnership between 3PL supplier and their main clients.

„The *2016 20th Annual Third Party Logistics Study* shows continued collaborative and positive relationships between shippers and third-party logistics providers, which have been developing since the study began 20 years ago. This year’s survey suggests 3PLs and their customers are becoming more proficient at what they do, individually as well as together, which is improving the quality of their relationships. Both parties—93% of 3PL users and 94% of 3PL providers—reported that their relationships are successful and that their work is yielding positive results<sup>5</sup>.”

„The *2016 3PL Study* showed that 70% of those who use logistics services (shippers) and 85% of 3PL providers said the use of 3PL services has contributed to overall logistics cost reductions, and 83% of shippers and 94% of 3PL providers said the use of 3PLs has contributed to improved customer service. Moreover, the majority of both groups—75% of shippers and 88% of 3PL providers—said 3PLs offer new and innovative ways to improve logistics effectiveness<sup>6</sup>.

Some tendencies, mentioned also at the end of the first part in the present research, highlights more intense, the necessity of an extremely rapid dynamic in adapting to the new requirements of the market and transforming the 3PL model in a 4PL model. The key characteristics of a 4PL organization, as mentioned and listed in chapter 4, are:

- Hybrid Organization – formed by more different entities
- Typically established as a partnership or a long term contract.
- Aligning the purpose of partners and clients through allocation of the profit.
- Is responsible for management and operation of the whole offer chain
- Continuous flow of information between partners and the 4PL organization
- Potential income generator

This type of 4PL logistics supplier is, from this perspective, a strategic partner which is different from the tactical partnership encountered in 3PL operators. A 4PL supplier is, mainly, an integrator of the supply chain and the set of competencies and abilities required in this case are unique. Thus, 4PL logistics leads to the

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<sup>5</sup> 2016 Third-Party Logistics Study - The State of Logistics Outsourcing, *Results and Findings of the 20th Annual Study*

<sup>6</sup> 2016 Third-Party Logistics Study - The State of Logistics Outsourcing, *Results and Findings of the 20th Annual Study*

accomplishment of an alliance of the best service suppliers and assures an efficient management of costs and durability of the supply chain.

The management of logistics activities can represent an extremely important source for an organization, to generate potential competitive advantage. Logistics, itself, represents today an integrating element for many parts of the functions of a business organization and, based on the activities from this area, there can be identified serious reserves for improving the global results of the organization.

The second part of the paper approached a detailed analysis of the business environment in Romania and the main particularities of the Romanian logistics market presented within different statistical data, prove certain important tendencies.

Chapter five is a general presentation and an analysis of a more strategic approach of an important player from the integrated logistics market in Romania. Gebrüder Weiss Romania is one of the players ranked in the first five companies on the market and represents an example of good practice for the development of a Western company on the Romanian market which has developed its local business by building a logistics system from scratch in Romania, compared to another player from the same market which entered the market by acquiring the most important national company from the transport and other logistics services field. Thereby, we consider that the present study represents also an example of good practice in the field, proving certain development modalities on this extremely interesting market. The services offered by the company are very diverse and it has a significant client's portfolio. There are four fundamental values which govern the activity of this company: independency, sustainability, commitment and excellence in service. From a financial perspective, as presented in the chapter, the company is continuously developing. Except the year 2009, the turnover is on an ascendant trend.

From an operational perspective, the company has already implemented hubs that cover the most important areas in the country. So, the main location is in Bucharest and the other locations are in Arad, Oradea, Cluj, Sibiu, Craiova, Bacău and Constanța. The cross-docking terminal from Sibiu is a key point in this network, taking also the entries from the Western part in the country and also realizing all the distribution and division of goods that comes from Bucharest and needs to reach the Central and Nord-Eastern region.

The sixth chapter focuses on the analysis of the external Romanian environment approaching all its components, the politico-legal component, the economic component, the socio-cultural component, the technological and international component. For each of these components we mentioned the particularities and influences manifested on the companies which operate in the logistics field. We can sum up these influences by a short revision:

- Romania has a good position from point of view of the economy and location being an access gate between Europe and Asia, this representing a major opportunity;
- Romania has the least developed road infrastructure from Europe in view of the coverage. It also has a low level of safety and connection to the other EU states;
- The workforce is qualified and has reduced costs;
- The potential of developing a cargo logistics platform on the airports from the identified key areas in order to build intermodal terminal with possibilities of also connecting them to the rail network (Bucharest, Timișoara, Constanța);
- The interest rate is higher than in most of the other EU states and the exchange rate are fairly stable;
- Population's current income is relatively stable and is still situated at a lower level, far from the average of the European Union;
- The unemployment rate is relatively stable and is situated at a level that is not a big problem for the people that search for a job, and at the same time still offers sufficient workforce for the organizations that are looking to hire;
- The retail market in Romania has huge potential being a market with approximately 20 Million consumers and an important growing potential.

As also mentioned in the content of the paper, the Romanian business environment has still many controversies, having many opportunities but also many dangers. The biggest problem alleged by the logistics operators refers to the delicate road and rail infrastructure which leads to an increase in exploitation costs per loading unit and to average operation time. These problems can also lead to risks of accidents, delays due to blockage, reduced transit speed and high operating tax (tax for the road, tax for matriculation, assurance, etc.)

Another major problem is generated by the changing legislation that can lead to other operation problems.

The opportunities are generated by the extremely favorable geographical position, at the junction between West and Far East. The migration of many businesses towards the Eastern part of Europe and the Middle East opens new development perspectives. The retail market in Romania registers significant growth which means that all the support activity of the major shopping centers is in a continuous development. Another important opportunity is also due to the low costs in workforce and its high competence. And, because the information flow is very important for this

industry, we must mention that the development in informatical infrastructure is among the best in Europe, the internet speed is one of the best which enormously help the optimal transfer and management of the information.

From the end of the second part of the thesis we can have a detailed image of the logistics market in Romania. A first important aspect of this logistics market is outlined by the fact that there are many layers of different dimensions and activities on the market. In general, the landscape is dominated by many transport, trucking companies but which add in their title or activity field, the logistics. Therefore, it is hard to differentiate how many and which of the many companies from the market truly deal with logistics and offer integrated logistics services so that they can be called 3PL type suppliers.

A documented analysis, as the one presented in chapter seven, proves that the Romanian market is dominated by some important players, sadly, most of them being companies with foreign capital or branch offices of Western companies in Romania. The positive aspect of this picture is that it proves the attractiveness of the Romania market and the existent opportunities for development in the area. Among the ones that currently dominate the Romanian market, we mention, Schenker Romtrans, Gefco Romania, Gebruder Weiss Romania, all of these companies offering 3PL integrated logistics services.

It is also important to mention that the 4PL services are absent from the Romanian market, which still seems to be at the beginning and still has problems of legislative and economic matter and especially an infrastructure still too little prepared for the logistics explosion from the last period.

Some conclusions are worth mentioning and outlined in the following, presenting here only the most significant elements from the detailed analysis effected in chapter seven. They are:

- The highest turnover was effected in 2012 by Schenker Romtrans of 81.7 Million €, with a difference of 7.2 Million € compared to 2011, followed by Gefco Romania with approximately half of the value of the first ranked, 42 Million €;
- Regarding the productivity per employee, the companies Gefco Romania, Trans International Spedition, Gopet Romania and All Cargo Express excel with values of over 400.000 € per employee in a calendar year;
- Schenker Romtrans is also in this category on first place having a profit in 2012 of 3.5 Million €, with 2.3 Million € more than in 2011. T is followed by Karl Heinz Dietrich with 2.8 Million €, which registered a decrease of 267 thousand € compared to 2011 and by Gefco Romania with a profit of

1,9 Million € in year 2012, declining with over 1 Million € compared to 2011;

- Schenker Romtrans has the largest market share of 7, 1% with a total turnover of 81.7 Million Euro. The next in the ranking is, TTS, which deals with sea transport, having a turnover of over 68 Million Euro, covering a market share of 5, 8%.
- In the category of own assets, Schenker Romtrans is ranked first with 68 Million €, followed by Karl Heinz Dietrich with 53 Million €, on the 3rd place is Gebrüder Weiss with approximately 23 Million € registered assets in 2012;
- The most stable logistics supplier, from the point of view of profitability, in the period 2009-2012, is Karl Heinz Dietrich International Exped, followed by Gefco Romania and All Cargi Express.

We can conclude that the third part contains a wide *selective research regarding customer's satisfaction level of an integrated logistics company on the Romanian market and the particularities of the logistics markets from South Eastern Europe – the impact on the competitiveness of the organizations*. The entire scientific step from this research area is focusing on three research directions which respond to the objectives of the thesis. Three surveys are analyzed, all based on a questionnaire and having as a target sample the clients of certain logistics companies which offer integrated logistics services or the managers of some logistics companies that perform their activity in different locations from Eastern Europe. As we already mentioned in the introduction, the collaboration with Gebrüder Weiss and the high involvement of the author in coordinating the activities of this company in Eastern Europe has determined us to focus greatly on this company's clients and on the experiences that the company's managers have in this area. But, from own experience as also from the discussions with other managers involved in logistics activity, the results of the analysis can be extrapolated, without any difficulty, to the mainstream of this area and many of the signaled problems are in fact problems which confirm the working hypothesis extracted from the open literature.

The first research takes into consideration an *analysis of customer's level of satisfaction of a logistics company* that is Gebrüder Weiss, in order to identify at the end, important aspects that outline serving clients on the Romanian logistics market.

The objectives of the research, mentioned at paragraph 8.2.4. aim to:

- evaluate the most important factors regarding customer's level of satisfaction;



- evaluate the most important aspects regarding the communication/collaboration in business;
- evaluate the relationship between client-supplier of integrated logistics services;
- evaluate the important aspects of brand in business (when choosing a partner for the logistics part).

The main conclusions of this analysis, detailed in chapter 8, refers to the following important aspects:

- The main sources of information used by clients are Internet and T.V.;
- The services they contacted are connected to road transport (72%), followed by sea transport and a few clients contacted services concerning integrated logistics solutions, only (9%), out of these, the majority aimed the internal transport of goods (67%) and the rest (33%) searched for elements regarding the transfer of goods on international relations.
- The level of satisfaction is relatively high, 61% of the respondents stating that past experiences related to the logistics company have been satisfactory, and 29% stated complete satisfaction regarding this relationship;
- The most appreciated element connected to the logistics serving part is the *competence*, followed than by *seriousness* and *trust*;
- The main notions associated to the studied company have been: *promptness*, *adaptability* and *quality*;
- The main arguments for choosing this collaboration have been: the quality – price ratio (40%) and experience (21%);
- Maybe, slightly contradictory with some of the mentioned conclusions is that there also are elements of dissatisfaction, connected firstly to a flawed communication, to the way some complaints are solved, and the occurred mistakes in the delivery activity.

One of the most important questions was that of asking the questioned subjects to evaluate, from a personal perspective, which are the elements that lead to a high serving level. The received answers are firm and prove that one of the main elements is the time for delivering the order (89%), followed by solving on time the occurred problems (78%) and consistency in offering the services (61%). *This aspect checks one of the hypothesis, the one related to the high importance of optimal managing the activities on time in order to obtain reduced answering time.*

Other important elements, from client's perspective, for a high level of serving are: adapting to client's needs (86%), optimal ratio between qualities – price (77%), professional training of staff (73%).

The second research approaches the problem from a different perspective trying to identify which are the *motivations that would lead to accepting an integrated logistics supplier by a potential client*, trying, thus, to determine which are the means to enter and maintain on a market with high competition.

The main objectives of the present research are:

- Determining the level of satisfaction among the subjects in relation to the current logistics supplier;
- Determining the main qualities searched by a potential client when trying to find a satisfactory logistics supplier;
- Study and analysis of the main characteristics of potential clients.

Again, it is highlighted that a majority of respondents (91%) consider that *the time for honoring the order is very important*. On the next position (55% of the subjects) are the opinions according to which, a very important aspect of a logistics supplier is *the consistency in delivery*, and 50% consider that it is very important that the client has *all the information regarding processing the order in real time*. 74% of the respondents consider that a collaboration between client and logistician is very important in solving potential problems, whereas 49% of the subjects award great importance to the price of the logistics services.

Regarding the aspect of choosing a new logistics supplier, 53% of the respondents consider that the brand of the company would be an important aspect that could help them in their choice, and 38% of the subjects consider that the working way of the sales agents is an important aspect when choosing a particular logistics supplier.

We outline again the fact that, also the present research proved that for the majority of the clients, the main element of satisfaction is that the logistics supplier can offer a lower time for honoring the order, and, also to offer information in real time regarding the status of the order and a low price for the offered services. More so, they consider that in case of unexpected problems, the logistics supplier must be 100% cooperative in order to solve these problems in short time and with maximal efficiency.

The last research, from chapter ten, is based more on the characteristic elements of the socio-cultural environment and the politico-legal component and tries to identify *the particularities of the logistics market from South-Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, Georgia and Turkey)*. The main hypothesis is that each country has important particular aspects that need to be taken into consideration in a business, more so, in case of a business from the logistics field.

There are some common elements among the analyzed countries in view of the elements that help to create a high level of logistics serving. Again, the speed of honoring an order is the most important element brought by the managers from he

analyzed countries. Consistency in honoring the order is considered to be another important element, emphasized by the management from Bucharest.

For four of the questioned managers, that is, the ones from Bulgaria, Turkey, Macedonia and Romania, the most important element that influences the activity of a business and, which acts from the general external environment, is the economic component. For the Georgian manager, the most important component seems to be the politico-legal one. When trying to singularize the elements of the general external environment, again the economic component was chosen, that is the inflation (Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia). Another element with increase relevance is the constraint of political matter (Georgia, Turkey, Macedonia, and Romania).

Three of the analyzed countries seem to have high competition on the market for integrated logistics services (Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania), and two of these (Bulgaria and Romania) have as a main competitor in the field of logistics services the company DB Schenker

An analysis of the services that clients look for, offers us a relatively balanced breakdown. Mainly, if we analyze Romania, almost all services are covered uniformly (road, rail, sea, air transport and storing), but less the consultancy service. The office from Macedonia does not offer services for rail transport and consultancy. The office from Turkey also covers 3 services, but less the part for storing and consultancy. The branch office from Georgia didn't have orders form consultancy and the representatives from Bulgaria do not offer rail transport services.

From the point of view of the infrastructure none of the interviewed person consider that the analyzed countries have premises for stating that this aspect is developed at a satisfactory level. It is appreciated that the infrastructure, especially the road infrastructure, is average developed in countries like Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia and underdeveloped in countries like Romania or Macedonia. This acknowledgement leads to the idea that due to this factor, the response time is reduced and the operation costs are increased, which annuls in many cases the efforts of companies to perform on a market.

In order to support the initially set objectives, we can say that the main factors regarding the level of satisfaction on the Eastern Europe markets are similar to the ones on every market from the supply chain. These elements are:

- The speed for honoring an order
- Consistency in honoring the order contracted initially
- Flexibility and adapting to client's request
- A balanced ratio between price – quality
- Open communication, by supplying clear information regarding the stage for honoring an order;

- Rapid solutions to problems;
- Reduced operating costs.

## PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH POTENTIAL DIRECTIONS

We can point that we have some interesting personal contribution inside this whole paper. Some of them can be highlighted in a small resume:

- in the theoretical part we done a general analyses *regarding the term logistics* and the main aspects which cluster this activity in the management field having a great impact on costs, quality and delivery period, as essential triad within today's competitive environment
- *we put a great importance on the temporal synchronization in logistics activities*, and we prove that this is a revolving plate for identifying certain strategies which can produce a competitive advantage in the logistic market, in general, and in the domestic logistic market especially, and this was verified by the results of the questioners research about the logistic service level in Romania
- we give a great importance of achieving a level of serving at the standards required by the clients, as a way for realizing the competitive advantage on the logistics market
- the thesis contains, in the second part, a detailed analyses of the logistic market from Romania, that contains a lot of interesting cross comparative analyses between the most important player on this market (turnover, number of employees, assets). The seventh chapter absorbs statistical information and tries to establish the most important players from this market by doing a ranking related to turnover, profitability, level of investments, number of employees, volume of handled goods and many other aspects. It must be also mentioned that the chosen criteria, so the ranking on this market are very different, which shows that we are facing an environment with increase competitiveness and with players which position themselves differently, according to the identified and performing capabilities and competencies.
- The most important original work is grouped in the third part of the thesis were are presented three questionnaire surveys, having as a target, clients of companies which offer integrated logistics services or the managers from logistics companies which perform their activity in different locations from Eastern Europe. This research takes into consideration *an analysis of client's level of satisfaction of a logistics company, the motivations that would lead to accepting an integrated logistics service supplier by a*

*potential client, and an identification of the particularities of logistics markets from South-Eastern Europe.*

A first proposal regarding a performing logistics model refers to developing real partnerships between the involved companies – clients, logistics operators, suppliers, governmental institutions – and realizing sustainable collaboration strategies by identifying the performing competencies of each actor from this chain, in order to generate a competitive advantage that could satisfy all components of this „strategic alliance”.

Thus, we propose at least two important directions, argued also by other specialists in this field:

- Realizing an **integrated logistics**, of an **integrated logistics system** by *moving the goods through a chain of consecutive links of added value by exploitation of the performing capabilities and competencies of each organization from this chain, that can assure that the product (service) reaches the right place, at the right time and in the requested shape and quantity;*
- **Implementing a strategic logistics**, by using competence and logistic alliances from the distribution channel, for **obtaining a competitive advantage**.

The research directions are multiple and the perspectives for development and later deepening remain open. Implementing certain logistics elements of the 4PL in practice is a challenge, especially as detected within the research, the consultancy part is not too good developed in the analyzed area.

It is necessary to thank our collaborators from the „Lucian Blaga” University in Sibiu for their involvement in the present research and for the way certain knowledge and competencies have been transferred from the academically field into the business environment. Together with these specialists we succeeded to draft the final form of the questionnaires and to effect a relevant statistical analysis from which we were able to outline the positive elements but also the areas that require improvement regarding the logistics market from Romania and from the whole Eastern Europe region. Without this close collaboration, we could have not effected these studies and many of the found specific aspects could have been neglected.

The collaboration with the company Gebrüder Weiss Romania SRL was mainly linked to its know-how in the logistics field based on a long experience, also from intercultural perspective, and considering that Gebrüder Weiss Holding AG is active on three continents (Europe, Asia and America) in 25 countries and having 156 locations. Gebrüder Weiss Romania SRL supported this research by making the connection to the main clients and transmitting a large part of the questionnaires to the identified target group.

We hope that the present research effort is interesting and useful both for the theoretical approach but more so, in practice. The presented material could represent an interesting working instrument for the managers of logistics companies. As initially mentioned, a part of the conclusions have been presented, by the author, as scientific papers in important publications from Romania or in the proceedings of specialty conferences. Part of the studies regarding customer's satisfaction have already been put to the disposal of Gebrüder Weiss, being now used in the managerial process for identifying the performing competencies and for formulating sustainable strategies for future development which can assure the competitive advantage.

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