

Abstract: To achieve sustainable development of rural areas, European and other countries' local community organizations develop thematic villages (TVs). Thematic villages are social ecosystems of thematic objects in rural areas where their actors create thematic experiences for residents and visitors. This research aims to identify a critical factor, and the managerial decisions applied to its management, which determine the sustainable development of the TV and rural area. The Structured grounded theory was formed, which reveals the critical factor – the weighted involvement of TV actors and explains what managerial decisions need to be made and how they act. Proper and timely implementation of engagement strategies ensures a critical mass of weighted involvement of TV actors. The more weighted TV actors are involved, the better they understand the issues that need to be solved to harmonize dimensions of rural area sustainable development.

Keywords: Thematic Village; Structured Grounded Theory; Sustainable Rural Development; Weighted Involvement, Decision-making theory

Santrauka: Siekiant darnaus kaimiškų vietovių vystymo, Europos ir kitų šalių vietos bendruomenių organizacijos vysto teminius kaimus (TK). Teminiai kaimai yra socialinės teminių objektų ekosistemos kaimiškose vietovėse, kur jų veikėjai kuria temines patirtis gyventojams ir lankytojams. Šiuo tyrimu siekiama nustatyti kritinį veiksnį ir jo valdymui taikomus vadybinius sprendimus, lemiančius TK ir kaimiškos vietovės darnų vystymąsi. Buvo suformuota Struktūruota grindžiamoji teorija, kuri atskleidė kritinį veiksnį – pasvertą TK veikėjų įsitraukimą į teminio kaimo veiklas ir paaiškina, kokius vadybinius sprendimus pasverto įsitraukimo išlaikymui reikia priimti ir kaip jie veikia. Tinkamas ir savalaikis įtraukimo strategijų įgyvendinimas užtikrina kritinę pasvertai įsitraukusių TK veikėjų masę. Kuo daugiau TK veikėjų yra pasvertai įsitraukę, tuo geriau jie supranta problemas, kurias reikia spręsti siekiant suderinti kaimo vietovių darnaus vystymosi dimensijas.

Raktiniai žodžiai: Teminis kaimas; Struktūrinė grindžiamoji teorija; Darnus kaimiškų vietovių vystymasis; Pasvertas įsitraukimas, Sprendimų priėmimo teorija

Highlights

- Thematic village definition
- Weighted involvement of thematic village actors is the critical factor
- Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities has been developed
- Targeted and timely application of involvement strategies can help
- Opportunities for sustainable development of thematic villages and rural areas

1. Introduction

Thematic villages (TVs) are innovative ecosystems of thematic objects for the sustainable development of rural areas, where the potential of a rural area is revealed through a targeted thematic concept. In these specially designed thematic objects – parks, farmsteads or community areas – TV actors create thematic experiences not only for visitors but also for the inhabitants of the countryside. Theming is implemented through targeted thematic programs, thematic services and goods, thoughtfully designed thematic environments, thematic narratives, etc. The theming draws on the resources (culture, heritage, nature, infrastructure, food) available or attracted to the rural area. TVs can be considered as one of the community empowerment programs because they are developed by creative, entrepreneurial, collaborative and innovative community organizations to seek sustainable development of rural areas

(Cristina, 2020). TVs can also be seen as a driver of economic development in rural areas as they provide additional income opportunities not only for the actors and members of the TVs and community organisations, but also for the surrounding rural population (Putri & Pawestri, 2018; Lopez-Sanz et al., 2021; Suliyati & Yuliati, 2021; Imaniah et al., 2023; Subiyakto et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024). TVs also provide the conditions for the social development of rural areas by enabling their inhabitants to interact, socialise, and carry out activities and projects to reduce social exclusion (Suliyati & Yuliati, 2021; Bernacka et al., 2023; Subiyakto et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024). They also promote cultural and environmental development, through the promotion of culture and events in rural areas and the improvement of the environment and the creation of identity (Adamowicz & Zwolinńska-Ligaj, et al., 2020; Prasetyo et al., 2020; Yuliastuti et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024). According to the above-mentioned researchers, a balanced economic, cultural, environmental and social development of a rural area, oriented not only towards the needs of the generation of the present, but also towards the needs of future generations, are the dimensions of sustainable development that the implementation of the TV concept promotes. Incorporating the dimensions of sustainability into the TV concept ensures the creation of wealth in rural areas. TV is a themed object – a farmhouse, park, museum, nature trail or other space in a rural area. Thematic villages are usually created and developed by local communities. Thematic villages are characterised by a unique thematic environment, thematic programming, education and other activities aimed at creating thematic experiences. The development of a TV draws on local or attracted cultural, heritage, natural, infrastructural and knowledge resources, integrating them to develop and market a unified package of local products, services and experiences, not only for visitors but also for the local population, based on a selected unique theme (Kloczko-Gajewska, 2013; Idziak et al., 2015; Vilkė et al., 2019; Stojanova et al., 2021; Bernacka et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024). The economic, social, environmental and cultural development of the TV, and by extension of the countryside, is not possible without the involvement of the actors of TVs, whether they are members of community-based organizations or simply residents of the countryside (Idziak et al., 2015; Vilkė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2019; Ulva et al., 2020; Sodik et al., 2021; Mazzetti, et al., 2022; Imaniah et al., 2023; Yuliastuti et al., 2023; Bernacka et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024; Johnston et al., 2024). It is therefore important to identify the critical factor that determines the development of a TV and how it should be managed in order to ensure sustainable development not only of the TV but also of the rural area in which it is located. The wealth of research on TVs in Europe and around the world shows that the development of TVs is an important phenomenon not only in the scientific but also in the practical sphere. There is a unanimous scientific consensus on the positive impact of TVs on the sustainable development of rural areas and the importance of local community involvement in TV activities. However, there is still a lack of definition as to what is the critical factor for the development of a TV and rural area and how it should be managed. To fill this gap, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the critical factor that determines the sustainable development of a TV and the rural area in which it is located.
2. To identify the managerial decisions that should be used to manage critical factor of a TV and rural area sustainable development.
3. To explain the operation and management of the identified management solutions to ensure sustainable TV and rural development.

As a result of the research, a new theory, the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities, has been developed. This theory is relevant not only in the Lithuanian context but also in the European (Poland, Austria, Latvia, Czechia, etc.) and other countries of the world. Such assumptions can be made because the Corbin and Strauss (2015) Structured Grounded Theory methodology used for the research states that if aspects identified in the study exist in the phenomenon being studied, they also exist in other homogeneous phenomena, in this case in Thematic Villages of other countries. The extensive analysis of Thematic Villages in the international scientific space and the identification of their homogeneous features (need for community involvement, need for leadership, thematic aspects, impact on sustainable development) confirms the applicability of our research results in other territorial contexts. The theory can also be applied not only to TVs, but also to other projects developed by

community organisations, community businesses and other initiatives. This confirms the correlation of the theory created in the research results with Decision-making theories (Simon's Bounded Rationality Theory (1955); Kahneman's and Tversky Perspective Theory (1979); Thaler's (2016) Behavioral Theory; Loewenstein and Chater Nudge Theory (2017); Hertwig, and Pleskac, and Pachur's (2019) Uncertainty Management theory) and demonstrates its theoretical robustness. However, until now, there has been a lack of empirical research revealing specific involvement mechanisms in the context of TVs and how these mechanisms interact with contextual circumstances. This research can not only confirm the applicability of existing decision-making theories in the context of TV but also enrich these theories with new empirical understanding about weighted involvement, which can be beneficial for theorists and practitioners in other fields as well. Understanding the mechanism of the Weighted involvement theory and being able to apply the proposed managerial decisions for the involvement of TV actors, TV activities can enable the successful development of TV and the sustainable development of rural areas, not only in Lithuania but also in other countries in Europe and the world.

2. Theoretical background

A review of the concepts and characteristics of TV found in scientific literature suggests that the main driver of TV development is an active, cooperative and involved community – a community organization or a rural population. Community involvement is a dynamic relational process that facilitates communication, interaction, participation and exchange between the organization and the community to achieve a range of social and organizational outcomes. Social involvement is the process by which community members can access information, interact and involve with each other and organizations. There are differences between two types of community involvement – episodic and relational. Episodic community involvement – community activities that are carried out for a short period of time without creating any permanent relationship with the community organisation. Relational community engagement is the ongoing implementation of activities within a community organisation, where the organisation takes the initiative to build a reciprocal relationship with the organisation and to achieve mutual benefits (Johnston et al., 2018). The meaning of community involvement in various initiatives depends on social, political, cultural, technological and economic factors (Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019; Susanti et al., 2020). Also, it should be highlighted that community participation in various community empowerment programs should involve the local population, which leads to the creation of a local economy and can improve the standard of living of communities (Cristina, 2020). Community participation in various programs implies a redistribution of power that allows poor communities, currently excluded from the political and economic sphere, to be included in the future, so that they can influence decisions and lead to meaningful socio-economic reforms that allow them to share equitably in the benefits of their localities (Niswaty et al., 2020; Dawuni et al., 2021). Community involvement also determines the resilience of the community itself and the area in which it is located in the face of emergencies and disasters (Johnston et al., 2024). On the other hand, communities' participation in various programs is influenced by demographic, social, economic and biophysical variables (Danano, 2020). Meanwhile, Mazzetti et al. (2022) describe involvement as positive organizational participation driven by intrinsic motivation, personal satisfaction and harmonious passion, resulting in benefits at both individuals (job satisfaction, well-being) and organizational levels. It is important to mention that involvement is an individual's activity of mentally and emotionally cultivating his or her initiative and creativity to achieve group goals and maintain group conditions (Prasetyo et al., 2020). Thus, researchers who have carried out studies in the context of rural community organizations stress that the involvement of the population and various stakeholders is a key factor for the success of various rural community's empowerment programs. TVs can be considered as one of the community empowerment programs because they are developed by creative, entrepreneurial, collaborative and innovative community organizations to seek sustainable development of rural areas (Cristina, 2020).

Research by other researchers in the context of TVs shows that the involvement of stakeholders such as local community organizations, residents and TV's actors in the development of TVs is a crucial factor in their development. TVs are viable when residents and local communities are involved in the management and theming of rural change (Idziak et al., 2015). This is in line with the success factors for TV development

which basement is a strong collaborative group, a strong leader and good contacts with other stakeholders (Kloczko-Gajewska, 2013). It is also important that the members of the communities involved in the development of the TV should be actively involved in the activities, know the goal they are seeking, and cooperate with each other. Also, successful development of TV requires not only a distinctive theme but also the active involvement of the actors involved in the TV, a strong leader and ideas. It is important to point out that the attractiveness of TV for visitors is created by the unique exposure of the theme, the best solutions of which come from the collaboration between TV actors, villagers and specialized organizations (Vilkė & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2019). Involving community members in the development of TVs provides opportunities to develop entrepreneurship and reduce unemployment in rural areas. However, this requires inclusive communication from local authorities and others interested in the development of the TV (Imaniah, 2023). In addition to highlighting rural economic and cultural activities and making the theme attractive to visitors, the involvement of rural residents and the support of the state are crucial, as well as encouraging and guiding the initiatives of the rural population in the right direction (Ulva et al., 2020). The authors place particular emphasis on the potential for the development of TVs created from the initiatives of rural residents, with the support of local authorities. Also, community participation and rural culture, potential in the form of traditions and local wisdom, can be the basis of TV development, providing opportunities for economic growth. Community involvement has a positive impact on the planning, managing, and developing TV activities and promotes the development of a creative economy in rural areas. The development of TV requires community leaders to act as promoters, organizers, and mentors who support and encourage innovation for the development of the rural area and its community (Hazin et al., 2024). Local communities' active participation in planning, implementing, and managing TV projects is key because they develop thematic products and services, local culture, environment, and infrastructure. TV management by local communities are tourism objects and creates opportunities for sustainable rural development outcomes. Community involvement in TV development stimulates sustainable economic growth and reduces economic inequality between regions (Sodik et al., 2021).

In addition, previous research in the context of TVs underlines the importance of TV development for the sustainable development of rural areas. It is important to emphasize that TVs are not only intended for visitors but also for the rural population. The theming can help to solve local problems, organize the local community, increase the self-esteem of residents, and provide them with opportunities for a more interesting life (Reindrawati, 2023). All these have a positive impact on the sustainable development of a rural area and contributes to identity building. The researchers stress the importance of the involvement of the rural population in the selection and implementation of the TV theme and the importance of the support of professional consultants and the state (Yulastuti et al., 2023). The other researchers conducted a study and found that creating an attraction, a TV, requires community creativity and community participation to keep a themed rural tourism destination alive and sustainable. In terms of community participation in the development of the TV, the study identified two forms of participation, i.e., participation in implementation and participation in benefits. Participation in implementation – the involvement of the community in the creation and development of the TV. And participation in the benefits – the involvement of the community in the activities of the TV – the final products (events, education, entertainment) (Tobiasz-Lis et al., 2019). Community participation brings many benefits to the efficiency of a tourism site (which is by its nature a TV), but there are many challenges to community involvement, such as operational (lack of access to information, lack of effective decision-making structures, lack of discussion platforms, lack of knowledge), structural (lack of access to planning experts, weak community development, budget, education) and cultural (community consciousness, mistrust, power differentials, unequal distribution of costs and benefits, and conflict of interest) aspects that hinder community participation (Desnamita et al., 2019).

The results of the study on the conditions needed for the development of TV confirmed the importance of effective communication and community involvement for the empowerment of entrepreneurship in TVs (Imaniah et al., 2023). The authors also emphasize the vital role of social norms in shaping communication interactions in TVs and in sustaining the desired atmosphere of empowerment and community development. The results of this study revealed that the identities, roles, and relationships of

the participants play a crucial role in empowerment communication in TVs. Furthermore, the study highlights that collaboration between a range of stakeholders with different backgrounds, such as businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies, has been crucial in supporting entrepreneurial empowerment through a variety of events and activities that directly involve the community. Also, the success of a TV development depends crucially on the involvement and personal qualities of its leaders and TV actors (Bernacka et al., 2023). The researchers identified the qualities that are particularly likely to be found in the management of TV, namely non-conformism, social identity and self-efficacy. These are the critical personal factors identified by the researchers as determining the level of involvement of women leaders in the development of TV. Also, a flow chart was developed for the implementation of a community empowerment program tailored to ensure farmers' involvement in TV (Prasetyo & Firdauzi, 2023). It was found that the involvement of farmers, or in other cases, TV actors, is a prerequisite for the successful development of TV. TV programs and values aligned with TV actors, the economic conditions for involvement, and the appropriate infrastructure can increase their involvement, which are critical factors for sustaining TV programs in the future.

The existence of TVs improves the quality of life of the rural community, enables them to manage their environment, improves the social relations of the inhabitants, and enhances social ties through the existence of a TV in the village. TVs are a form of impetus for sustainable settlements (Yuliati et al., 2019). The role of the community in the creation of a TV is crucial and its involvement must be continuously motivated and supported. Community involvement is also essential for the adjustment, integration, unification, maintenance, improvement, and protection of TVs and access to public facilities and infrastructure services. Traditions and habits, social interaction, the quality of the living environment, the role of government, and the economy are all factors that influence the existence and development of a TV. Other researchers investigated the criteria for community empowerment in TVs and found that some of the key principles of TV development are: the principles of autonomy and creativity, which means that the development potential of a TV must be based on the autonomy, initiative, and creativity of the local community; the principle of human resources and development means that TV must be able to involve and develop existing human resources to be more creative and autonomous (Subiyakto et al., 2023). These authors thus link the development of TV to the potential of the TV actors involved in TV. As it can be seen from the research on TVs discussed above, the phenomenon of TV is of particular importance for the sustainable development of rural areas and has been analysed quite extensively in the scientific field. Researchers have highlighted the importance of the involvement of community organizations, TV actors, and residents in the development of TVs. However, the managerial decisions that can be used to ensure the development of a TV have not yet been explored.

To fill this research gap, this study aims to identify the critical factor that determines the development of a TV and the rural area in which it is located, and the managerial decisions that should be used to achieve it. To this end, a new Structured grounded theory was developed in this study, which revealed that the critical factor in the development of TV is the **weighted involvement of TV actors in TV activities**. The Structured grounded theory also helps to identify and understand the mechanism of the weighted involvement, to understand how it works, and what contextual and causal relationships and engagement strategies enable TV actors to be weighted involved in TV activities. Identifying this critical factor, understanding it and making recommendations for its management will enable TV actors to successfully develop TV and achieve sustainable rural development.

Given the nature of the created Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities and its connections to the decision-making process, it can be assumed that it could be linked to various decision-making theories. Connections with popular decision-making theories would not only demonstrate the scientific validity of the created theory but would also help to better understand how TV actors make decisions about involvement in TV activities. Specifically, Simon's (1955) bounded rationality theory explains that people cannot make fully rational decisions due to limited cognitive capabilities and information constraints, which applies to TV participants who lack complete information about future opportunities and risks when deciding on their involvement. Furthermore, Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory complements this understanding by revealing how people evaluate potential losses and benefits asymmetrically, with TV actors likely prioritizing the minimization of potential losses

(time, energy, resources) over maximizing potential benefits. Additionally, Thaler's (2016) behavioural economics expands these insights by emphasizing how social, emotional, and psychological factors influence economic decisions, suggesting that TV participants rely not only on economic calculations but also on community ties, identity issues, and self-realization aspects. Moreover, Loewenstein and Chater's (2017) "nudge" theory demonstrates how decisions can be subtly influenced through "choice architecture," similar to how strategies used by TV leaders (training, support, leading by example) can encourage actors to get involved and remain involved. Finally, Hertwig, Pleskac, and Pachur's (2019) uncertainty management theory explains how people make decisions under uncertain conditions, reflecting how TV participants must constantly adapt and review their decisions about involvement by comparing their expectations with actual situations. The mentioned decision-making theories offer a theoretical foundation that can help conceptually understand how TV actors make decisions about involvement in TV activities and how these decisions can be influenced.

3. Materials and Methods

The review of the scientific literature on TV found a limited number of theories that shed light on the phenomenon of TV development critical factor for sustainable rural development. The purpose of Structured grounded theory is to provide a simplified but correct picture of a complex reality, like a map. Moreover, the Structured grounded theory approach is appropriate when the literature does not provide sufficient theories to cover the aspects or areas of the phenomenon under study, when there is a lack of evidence to support it, or because of the phenomena that are taking place, since reality is dynamic, constantly shaped by diversity, subjective experience and innovation (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). To find out what and how the critical factor of TV development must be managed to achieve sustainable rural development, it is necessary to identify who makes what managerial decisions, why and how they are made, which contextual conditions determine the choices made, what results are generated by the choices made and what hinders or facilitates the attainment of these results. For this purpose, a research version of Corbin and Strauss, 2015 Structured Grounded Theory was chosen. In this study, the researcher sought to uncover the critical factor of the phenomenon under study, i.e., the development of TV for rural sustainability, and the associated managerial decisions that involve contextual and causal conditions, intervening conditions that change them, the relationships between them, and the consequences – the outcomes.

The logic diagram of the research methodology is presented in Figure 1. The first stage was to analyse the literature on TV studies and to select and justify the research method, to define the methodological requirements and the sampling method.

In the second stage of the study, the research sample was defined (3 TVs with official TV status, 1 TV without official status and 1 TV that is no longer in operation). Then, the research data method was selected and justified – semi-structured narrative interviews and the choice of research instruments – interview calendars. The first 2 stages of the research were conducted in early 2020, communicating directly with respondents by visiting TVs, examining them, and experiencing their atmosphere.

The empirical study was conducted in 2021–2022 years, in five TVs in Lithuania: The Antalieptė Foot-bridge village, The Vajasiškis Antecedent village, The Cijonai Bird village, The Pelėdnagai Owl village and The Dargužiai Cheese Capital village. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted.

The first interviewed respondents were representatives of the Vajasiškis TV "Village of Ancestors": the leader, 2 active participants, and the elder. Vajasiškis is inhabited exclusively by the silver community, presenting ancient Lithuanian folk customs, where through inclusive theming, visitors feel as if they are visiting their grandmother.

The second data collection stage was conducted with the leader of the Antalieptė TV, 2 active participants, and the elder. This TV is called "Village of Footbridges" because it has many footbridges and offers participation in a theatrical educational program "Ancient Lithuanian beliefs, gods, goddesses, mythological creatures" – a journey through footbridges and forest, during which mythological creatures are encountered.

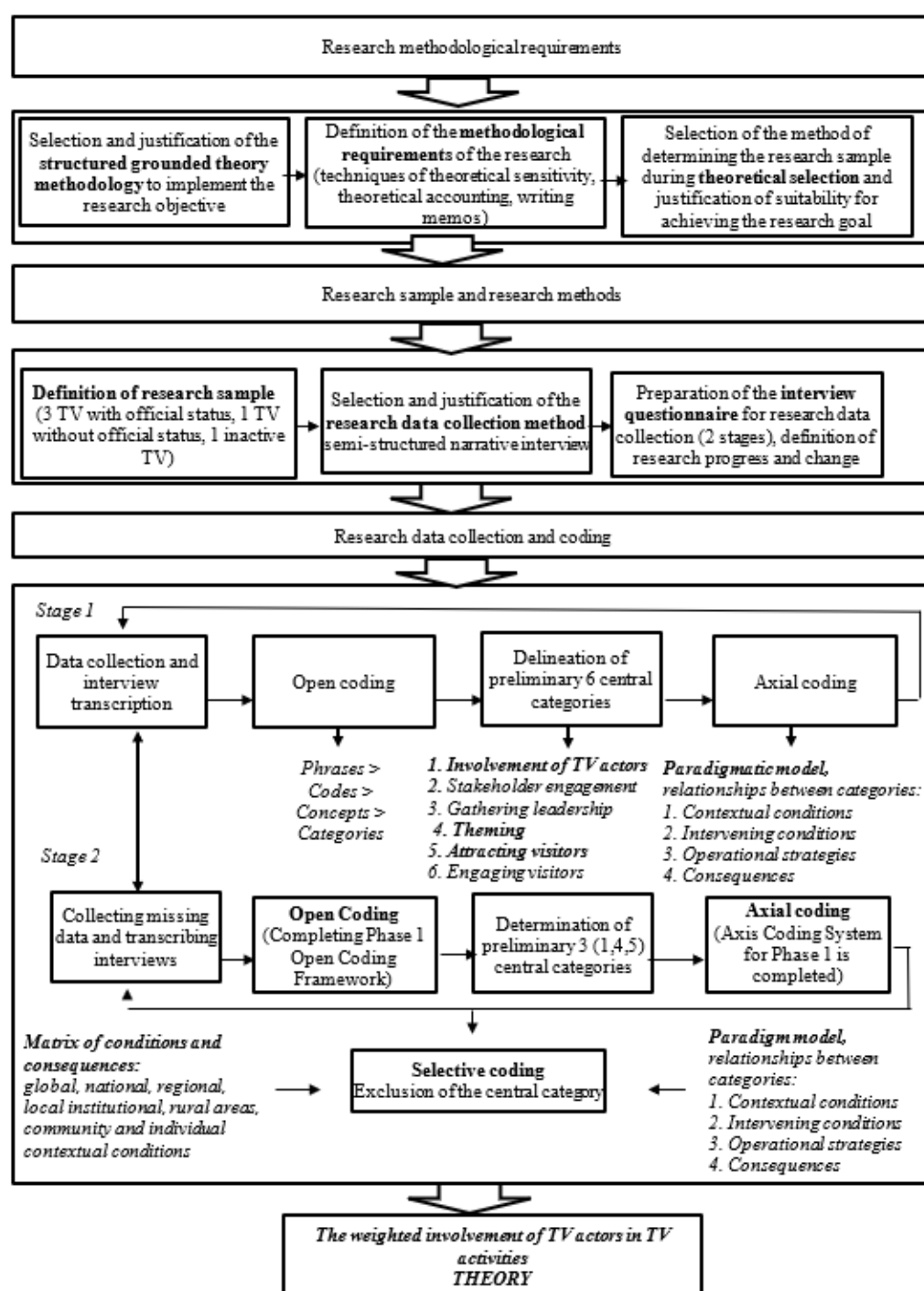


Fig 1. Logical scheme of research design. Source: authors

Interviews with representatives of the next two TVs took place in early 2021 remotely due to quarantine restrictions. Remote communication platforms were used. Discussions were held with the leader and 2 activists from Pelėdangiai village, which presents the owl theme (owl-related stories, educational activities, food), and with the leader of Dargužiai village, themed as the "Cheese Capital" (presenting the cheese-making process, offering cheese tastings).

As quarantine restrictions eased in late 2021, a visit was made to Cijonai, to the Bird TV, which reveals the bird theme, offering opportunities to observe various birds, prepare and taste bird-related dishes, and participate in various educational activities. In this TV, interview was established with 2 leading actors of the thematic village.

The study selected 5 TVs with official TV status, acquired through the creation of TVs in the Lithuania-Latvia 2010–2012 project "Thematic Villages." Respondents were selected using the convenience sampling principle – those most connected to thematic villages (leaders, activists, and supporting elders).

Respondents were interviewed in semi-structured narrative interviews. With respondents' consent, all interviews were recorded and lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours. Open-ended, pre-prepared questions of two types were asked to the respondents: 1. *Questions revealing the critical factor in TV development and related managerial decisions*: Who established the TV? How did the TV creation process unfold? Who participates in the TV activities now? How are the TV activities currently conducted? What resources are needed for the TV? How do you reveal the TV theme to guests?

2. *Questions revealing the impact of TV on rural area development*: What was your rural area like before the establishment of the TV? What is your rural area like now in your eyes? What is your rural area like now in others' eyes? What could your rural area be like in the future?

During interviews, pre-prepared questions were asked, and modified when necessary, allowing interviewees to speak as much as they wished. This follows Corbin and Strauss, 2015 Structured Grounded Theory methodology, according to which all objects discussed by the interviewee exist, and even information not obtained through questions can be useful for understanding the researched phenomenon.

The statements of the interviewees quoted in the article are anonymised (e.g., R1, R2, R3...) to maintain confidentiality. The research sample was determined by the method of theoretical sampling, which is characteristic of the Structured grounded theory methodology. Under this method, data are collected for theory development until repetition occurs and all categories are saturated. Thus, when data began to repeat and no new categories were being obtained, the research was terminated. The logic diagram of the research methodology is presented in Figure 1. In the third stage, the collection and coding of the interviews data was carried out. Qualitative research software MAXQDA was used to code the text of the semi-structured interviews, to write the memos, and to determine the relationships between the codes, categories, and concepts. Data coding processes were performed in strict compliance with the version of the Corbin & Strauss (2015) Structured grounded theory. The open coding method, where the text of the interviews was broken down into codes, aimed at developing as many codes as possible, grouping them into concepts and categories. In the stage of axial coding, a coding paradigm was used to identify categories that reveal critical factors of TV development (phenomena). Phenomena-impacting contextual, causal, and intervening conditions were determined, including engagement strategies applied by actors and leaders of the TVs and aimed at the management of the phenomena and the consequences arising from the interaction of such conditions and strategies. In the selective coding stage, the theory of the research phenomenon was developed, a core category – a critical factor determining TV development – was identified and its links to other categories and subcategories were established.

In the fourth and final stage, the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities was developed. To clarify the mechanism of the weighted involvement of the actors in the TVs, the metaphor of scales was used to reveal the contextual and causal relationships between the identified concepts. It should be noted that the fourth and third stages of the study were carried out in parallel, as it was necessary to go back to the field and reanalyse the data in order to refine the theory that was being built with the missing concepts.

The following limitations were imposed on the research:

- Sample specificity – the study involved leaders, active actors of 5 officially recognized TVs, and several representatives of interested institutions, therefore the results do not reflect the broader opinion of the rural population, which could be the subject of further research.
- The research focuses on individual decision-making processes and involvement cycles of TV actors; it does not include analysis of collective community decisions and involvement cycles, which could be an area for future research.
- Although the Structured Grounded Theory methodology (Corbin and Strauss, 2015) suggests that research results can be applied to other homogeneous cultural, territorial, and organizational environments, empirical validation of the theory in other cultural contexts could still be conducted.

Part of the research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when some interviews were conducted remotely, without experiencing the atmosphere of several TVs, which could have affected the quality of data collection.

4. Results

Based on the data from the study, its coding, researcher's memos, literature review, and discussion with the results of other studies, a Structured grounded theory is built around the central category of the weighted involvement of TV actors in TV activities. Weighted involvement is sustained and conscious participation in an organization's activities, supported by a combination of personal, community, or organizational involvement levers.

To underline the uniqueness of the involvement of TV actors in TV activities and the validity of their expectations and personal approach, the researcher called the critical factor of TV development for sustainable rural development "Weighted Involvement". Involvement in TV activities is weighted because TV actors are weighing up – assessing how much they have to give to the TV and how much they will get back from it. If the ratio of work, effort and return is satisfactory to the actors of the TV, they are involved in the activities of the TV in a weighted way and through their involvement they promote the sustainable development of the rural area in which TV is located. If it is not satisfactory, the TV actor withdraws from TV activities.

The diagram below (Figure 2) shows the components of managerial decisions for weighted involvement of TV actors in TV activities: the critical point of consideration (1a), the involvement levers that determine it (1b) and the reference and current situation combinations of involvement levers (1c and 1d), the contextual conditions (2), the intervening conditions (3), the engagement strategies used to cope with intervening conditions (4) the phases of the inclusive involvement in TV activities cycle (5), and the outcomes – consequences – of TV actors' weighed involvement in TV activities (6).

The following is a discussion of the components of the scale's metaphor in Figure 2, using the categories identified by the researcher, their explanations, and quotes from the interviews of the research participants.

The Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities is developed and illustrated in Figure 2 using the metaphor of scales, as it operates cyclically on the principle of balance scales. The balance scale compares the weight of the object to be weighed with a reference weight on the other side of the scale using a horizontal lever. As with the weighing of objects using a balanced scale, TV actors reach a decision point at a certain phase of the life cycle of involvement in TV, a critical point in the decision-making process of whether to remain involved in or withdraw from TV activities – the critical point of consideration.

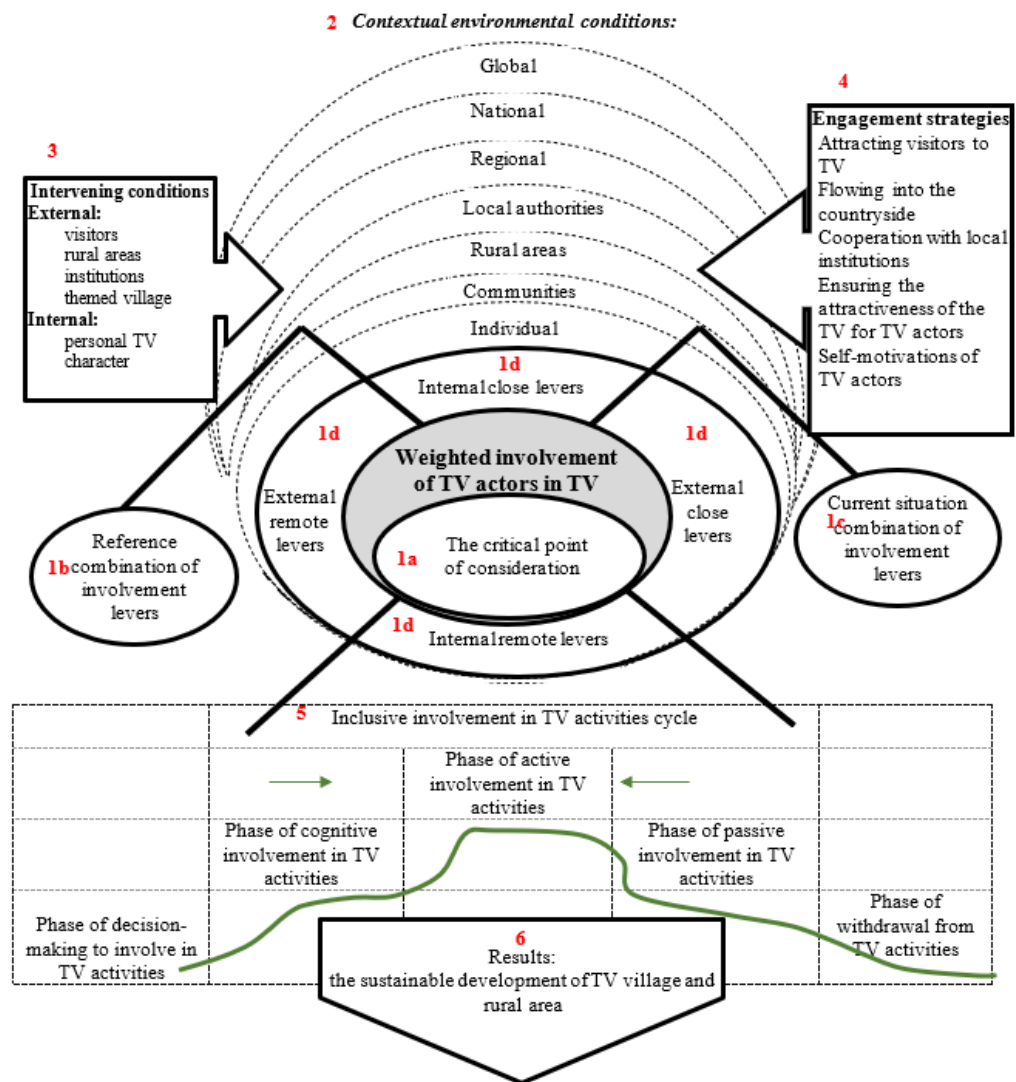


Fig 2. The Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities to achieve sustainable development of the rural area: scale metaphor. Source: author

4.1 Critical point of consideration and levers

A **critical point of consideration** (No. 1a, Fig. 2) is a situation where a TV actor has to decide whether to stay involved in TV activities. A critical point of consideration occurs when the contextual environmental conditions for the TV actor's involvement in the TV activities are affected by intervening conditions.

At the critical point of consideration, the TV actor weighs – and compares a **reference combination of involvement levels** (No. 1b, Fig. 2), which is composed of personal expectations for the contextual environmental conditions, with the **current situation combination of involvement levels** (No. 1c, Fig. 2), which is composed of the TV actor's perceived conditions of the contextual environment.

Internal and external close levers (No. 1d, Fig. 2) represent the TV actor's personal expectations of the contextual environment conditions – the reference combination of involvement levers. **Internal and external remote levers** (No. 1d, Fig. 2) represent TV actor's perceived contextual environment conditions – the current situation combination of involvement levers. At the critical point of consideration, TV actors weigh the reference combination of involvement levers from the position of his/her own expectations with the current situation combination of levers from the position of his/her personal perception.

4.2 Contextual environmental conditions

The **contextual environmental conditions** (No. 2, Fig. 2) reveal the context of the TV actors' involvement in TV activities, which influences the development of the TV and the possibility of weighted involvement. The contextual environmental conditions are components from which TV actors form reference and current situation combinations of involvement levers. Contextual environmental conditions consist of these categories:

- **In the global** context, one of the categories that have a positive impact on the development of TVs is **People's Values**: not only those developing their own TV, but also TV actors who have visited foreign TVs and adopted good practices from them, realise that visitors come to TVs with the expectation of thematic experiences "R1: *Now people don't want to go to those museums anymore, just to see. But here they come, they get attractions in this village, they want to touch, try, taste everything.*".
- One of the categories of **the national** context is the **lack of support from the state for the TV**, which negatively affects the possibilities of the involvement of the TV actors in the activities of the TV "R3: *We donate our half a day, we got those 10 euro. And then we couldn't take those 10 euros without taxes <...> and we pay personal income tax on it as an employee and on it as a secondary position... for you, it's 10 euros minus 2–3 euros.*".
- One of the categories that reveals **the regional context** and negatively affects the development of TV is the **unsupportive attitude of district municipalities towards TVs**. According to the respondents, TVs are often seen by district municipalities as their own businesses and are therefore rarely given the support they need "R11: *But they put a lot of emphasis on the fact that we are not a state-owned business, but a family business. It's your own business, you make what you make, it's your business or something.*".
- **The local institutional context** can have a positive impact on the development of TV, as shown by **the concept of elderly support for TV**. The local elderly are physically and emotionally closer than the municipality, which makes it more aware of the needs of the actors of the TVs "R12: *We get on well with the commune. The elder is fine. But not yet with the mayor.*".
- **The context of the rural area**, such as social and demographic situation, sometimes harms the development potential of the TV, as shown in the category **Lifestyle and values of the population**. Lack of empowerment, lack of entrepreneurial skills, employment on their own farms and fatigue from daily chores lead to a lack of demand for involvement in TV's activities "R13: *People are tired of taking any initiative. They don't understand why they are doing it, meaning. Nobody even wants to think about business at all.*".
- **The context of communities** creates positive conditions for the development of TV, as revealed by the concept of **Community activism**. The establishment and development of TV is often conditioned by an active community organisation "R10: *It all started with the establishment of a community. When the community was established, they were involved in the project activities, and it was then proposed to them to choose such a theme for the thematic villages.*".
- **The individual context** has a strong influence on the involvement of the TV actors in the TV activities, as revealed by the concept of **TV actors' expectations**. The respondents identified simply wanting to be involved in TV activities as one of the most important individual conditions for TV actors' involvement. Those rural people who understand the essence of TV and the opportunities it offers and want to take advantage of them are the ones who are involved in TV in a balanced way "R5: *But the people who come are those who understand. And those who don't want to, don't come.*".

The contextual environmental conditions and their concepts discussed above reveal the current situation's combination of involvement levers. They are perceived differently by each of the TV actors. Perception is influenced by the level of knowledge and attitudes of the TV actor. This perception does not necessarily correspond to the real situation. TV actors also have their own expectations of those contextual conditions – reference combination of involvement levers, which depends on their personal capabilities and characteristics. Thus, at the critical point of consideration, TV actors compare their

perception with their expectations to these contextual environmental conditions – weight internal and external remote levers with internal and external close levers. It would be relatively easy for the TV actors to decide about involvement in the TV activities if the contextual conditions were stable and not constantly changed, positively or negatively, by intervening conditions.

4.3 Intervening conditions

The contextual environmental conditions give rise to contingencies – **Intervening conditions** – that create problems or opportunities and affect, positively or negatively, the chances of the TV actors' involvement in TV activities. The intervening conditions (No. 3, Fig. 2) positively or negatively affect the contextual environmental conditions, which change the combination of the TV actor reference and current situation combinations of involvement levers. The clash of contextual environmental and intervening conditions leads to the need for the TV actor to consider whether to stay involved in TV activities – **the critical point of consideration**.

The results of the coding exercise revealed that the intervening conditions for the involvement of TV actors in TV activities can be categorized according to their origin into internal and external intervening conditions:

The internal intervening conditions for a TV actor's involvement in TV activities include the TV actor's **personal conditions** – stemming from his/her own personality, his/her personal environment (family, friends), attitudes, and the decisions made. The study identified various internal conditions that interfere with a TV actor's involvement in TV activities, one of which negatively influences the development of TV, is the **limited personal earning potential for the TV actors** "R6: *maybe, maybe, maybe. maybe the other person would have preferred to have some earnings more. Here we don't get any earnings practically.*".

The external intervening conditions for a TV actor's involvement in TV activities are all conditions that are independent of the TV actor himself or his home environment. These include:

- **External intervening conditions arising from visitors to the TV** – changes in the needs, opportunities, desires, attitudes of visitors to the TV influence the demand for and nature of the TV, and thus influence the opportunities for involvement of TV actors. For example, **engaging visitors in the topic** is challenging because different types of visitors react differently to TV activities, so TV actors need to be able to adapt to the types of visitors and still involve them in the TV activities "R11: *Very interesting, I don't know if it's by nationality or not.*".
- **External intervening conditions arising from institutions** – arising from changes in national, regional and international legislation and requirements for local authorities' relations with the TV. For example, **insufficient support from local authorities and municipalities**. Quote from the interview participant reveal the attitude of district municipalities towards the development of TV: R5: *„No, the eldership [local authority] doesn't. Not this thing. They only boast that there is such a village in the eldership. That people come, that it attracts people."* Local authorities do not always understand the impact of TV on the sustainable development of rural areas. As a result, TV actors face bureaucratic, financial, infrastructural, environmental management, attracting residents and visitors and other challenges.
- **External intervening conditions from the rural area** – the activity, community spirit and the opinions and attitudes of the inhabitants of the rural area in which the TV is located can influence the involvement of the TV actors in the TV activities. A very important concept of involvement is the **acceptability of the TV to the inhabitants of the rural area**. For example, the imposition of a thematic identity reduces the possibility of the population's involvement in TV activities and the development of TV: "R13: *Even the title seems to say that you can make TV something, pottery... no, no, nobody sticks, nobody wants to*". For these reasons, some villagers may find the theming to be forced on them may not want to be identified with a particular theme and may not want to get involved in TV activities.
- **External intervening conditions arising from the TV** – arising from the nature of the TV as a thematic object, the interactions between the TV leader and the actors. Such problems or opportunities arise

within the TV as an organisation. **Unshared leadership** complicates the development of TV. The constant turnover and scarcity of actors in the TV make the work of the TV leader more difficult and makes him/her responsible for all the activities of the TV. The perception of TV actors that everything depends on one person adds uncertainty and makes it difficult to engage with the TV in a measured way. All the work of organising TV activities is concentrated in one hand "R4: *The big responsibility is still with the chairperson of our community today. She gets a call and then she asks – will you be able to, or how.*".

Internal and external intervening conditions change contextual environmental conditions and TV actor's current situation and reference combinations of involvement levers. When these changes occur, the TV actor has to evaluate them, weigh them up and decide whether to stay involved in the TV activities. Sometimes these changes are not important for the TV actors, but sometimes they may lead to a withdrawal from the TV activities. This can hinder the sustainable development of not only the TV but also the rural area. To prevent TV actors from withdrawing from TV activities, engagement strategies can be applied.

4.4 Engagement strategies

If, at the critical point of consideration, **the engagement strategies** (No. 4, Fig. 2) are applied and triggered, influencing the combinations of the weights of the TV actor's involvement in the TV activities, the TV actor remains involved and moves to the higher phase of **the inclusive involvement in TV activities cycle** (No. 5, Fig. 2). If the engagement strategies are not adapted or do not work, the TV actor's involvement becomes more passive, moves to a lower phase of the weighted involvement cycle, or withdraws completely.

The engagement strategies are defined in the Structured grounded methodology as strategies that actors use (or do not use when they could) to manage, cope with or respond to a phenomenon. These are the reactions and responses of people and groups of people to events and problematic situations that happen in their lives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The following internal and external engagement strategies for TV actor's involvement to TV activities were identified in the research:

Internal engagement strategies are the personal strategies of the TV actor, a way of thinking for themselves, where the positive and negative values – levers – of involvement in the TV are weighed up and a decision is made to stay involved or to disengage. These strategies come from the TV actor's initiative.

- One of **the engagement strategies of self-motivation** of TV actors to involve in TV is the **search for self-fulfillment**, manifested in the **willingness to share their experience** "R9: *I want to share what I know.*"; to **leave a legacy for the next generations** "R1: *And also to teach the young people, well, anyway, how we brought something from our parents and grandparents so that they can take something from us.*"; to **be proud of our rural location** "R6: *It's nice to know that people will come to us and will say, "Oh, I've been to Antaliepte. It's nice. In general, well, it's a small village, it's a really small village, but it's so nice.*"

External engagement strategies are strategies for involving TV actors that are adapted by the TV leader, other TV actors and stakeholders. These strategies do not come from the TV actor's own initiative but from the environment. External engagement strategies include but are not limited to the following:

- **The use of visitor attraction engagement strategies** in TVs enables them to cope with external intervening conditions arising from visitors, for example, the use of the **living-themed museum strategy**, which enables TV actors to know how to involve visitors in the implementation of the TV program, through **thematic activities with visitors** "R14: *so we smell smoke, we beat eggs ourselves, we bake ourselves, we...* In a word, children and adults are very much involved in the process." Also, the activities of the TV actors are greatly facilitated by a well-thought-out strategy for involving visitors through the **thematic experience package**, i.e., the presentation of the thematic experience package to visitors. This strategy is implemented through **thematic goods** "R18: *one time, I know it didn't work*

out there... and some people need those cheeses and others need them... and there are not enough of them."; **enjoying themed food** "R1: well, yes. Hare, hare. What does a hare like – cabbage? Cabbage day...", **the thematic program** "R3: you know, we have a ceremony at the stone, a sacrifice... it's very exciting."

- The use of **cooperation engagement strategies with local authorities** offers the possibility to deal with external intervening conditions from different institutions that hurt the contextual environment of local authorities. For example, the use of **strategies for concessional cooperation between local authorities and TVs** provides opportunities to involve local authorities in TV activities and to secure their support and supervision. TV actors, given the lack of formal obligations on local authorities to assist TVs, **are also satisfied with the limited involvement of local authorities**: "R4: well, no, they don't influence. They don't interfere with us. They don't forbid us, they allow us, they help us when we need it. That's all right here. But there's no such malicious stick in the wheel."
- The implementation of the **engagement strategy to promote communion between the TV actors and the inhabitants of the rural area** shows to the inhabitants that by cooperating with the TVs they will have more opportunities to create their own well-being, to communicate, to implement various ideas and to meet their needs. The use of strategies to **organise joint leisure activities with the rural population** is one of the priority ways to involve the population in the activities of the TV and to enable it to develop "R5: We still do some educational activities together to learn... there was a time to make candles out of wax before Christmas." and events "R8: Well, they only come to the annual celebrations that we organise."
- The use of a **rural-appropriate theming engagement strategy** enables TVs to be integrated into rural life and to have their support. In this case, it is also easier to retain and attract new TV actors who have been involved in a balanced way. The strategy of **linking the theme to the resources of the rural area** is very important, as it enables the specificity of the rural area to be revealed, the sustainable use of existing resources to be made and the implementation of an acceptable theme to be carried out. "R1: You know, this is our village here, we don't have anything... but we do have old people... and so the idea of making a village of old people came up."
- **The engagement strategy of making the TV attractive to TV actors** provides the conditions and motivation to maintain the involvement of existing TV actors and to attract new ones. For example, the strategy of **matching TV working time with other TV actors activities** enables the retention of the valued TV actors by enabling them to carry out their compulsory daily activities and to have free time: "R16: We are also matching, because there are still chores to do for people... it's not like we are all in trouble here.", to combine TV activities with other leisure activities of the TV actors: "R1: There are ladies who sing in the choir, we are matching them."
- **Mobilizing leadership engagement strategies** are used to cope with the problems caused by the intervening conditions of non-shared leadership, which harm the involvement of TV actors in TV activities. For example, in **the engagement strategy of dividing the responsibilities of the TV actors according to their abilities**, the TV leader tries to divide the responsibilities of the activities according to the abilities, interests, and abilities of the TV actors. "R5: you know what they say... you need to be everything and a plumber and a sweeper and everything you need to be... if you want to have something like that happen. You know, we don't have specialties here, we all have, you know, what can we do?"

These or other engagement strategies can be applied by the TV actors to themselves and to other TV actors and can also be applied by the leader of the TV to himself or other TV actors, or even by other stakeholders. Timely and appropriate application of engagement strategies can increase the chances of keeping involved TV actors at the same level of inclusive involvement in TV activities cycle or even increase their level of involvement.

4.5 The action of the Inclusive Involvement Cycle

The critical points of consideration arise each time the intervening conditions change the conditions of the contextual environment and the TV actor's expectations and perceptions of them. This happens in each phase of the inclusive involvement in TV activities cycle as long as the TV actor is involved in the TV activities.

As long as there is a critical number of TV actors in the TV who have been involved and have reached **the phase of active involvement in the inclusive involvement to TV activities cycle**, the TV is developing. In the active involvement phase, the TV actor actively carries out the activities of the TV, fulfills his/her role and responsibilities, effectively combines the activities with everyday life, sees the specifics of the TV from the inside, and devotes a great deal of time, and energy to the TV. The phases of decision to involve, cognitive involvement, passive involvement, and withdrawal from TV activities do not guarantee the full commitment of the TV actors to the development of the TV and do not create significant added value for it. This is also confirmed by the research participant's observation about the behaviour of actively and passively involved thematic village actors: *"R12: There is nothing from them. They work, but not like we do. Still, when you are involved yourself, you can tell all kinds of nonsense about the same turtle. But a person hired for a short time will just hand out a ticket and say – go there and that's it. And that's not enough for people. That communication. So that's the hardest thing, to find a person who would like animals this way and could tell about them."* When the critical factor of TV development is well managed by the TV actors and the leader, **the results of a weighted involvement in TV activities** (No. 6, Fig. 2) are achieved – sustainable development not only of the village where the TV is located, but also of the whole rural area, which is felt by the TV actors and the inhabitants of the village and the rural area in different intensities, depending on the intensity of involvement.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the empirical study revealed a critical factor in the development of TVs – a central category around which a Structured grounded theory is built – and the managerial decisions related to it. The critical factor of TV development for sustainable rural development was identified as the Weighted involvement of TV actors in TV activities. The involvement of TV actors in TV activities is weighted, as TV actors only become or remain involved in TV activities when they consider that the involvement meets certain expectations and that the conditions of involvement are in line with their capacities and qualities.

As discussed in the Literature Review section, previous research in the context of thematic villages emphasized the importance of community engagement and participation (Prasetyo et al., 2020; Cristina, 2020; Wondirad & Ewnetu, 2019; Idziak et al., 2015; Vilke & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2019; Imaniah, 2023; Sodik et al., 2021). The results of our research not only confirm these previous findings but also extend them by identifying a specific engagement mechanism – weighted involvement, and detailing its operating principles and management possibilities. It is important to note that our identified "weighted involvement" complements Johnston et al.'s (2018) concepts of episodic and relational community involvement, revealing how episodic and relational involvement can be transformed into sustainable participation practice.

The metaphor of scales was applied to visualize and explain the theory of the critical factor of TV development in achieving sustainable rural development. Using the metaphor of scales, it was revealed that when the intervening conditions (problems and opportunities) change the contextual environment of weighted involvement in TV activities, the actors in TV reach a decision-making need – the critical consideration point – to decide whether to stay or retreat from involvement in TV activities. At the critical consideration point, the TV actors weigh – as if on a scale – a reference combination of weights, which is composed of personal expectations for the conditions of the contextual environment of the weighted involvement, against a combination of weights of the current situation, which is composed of the TV actor's perceived contextual environment conditions of the weighted involvement. If, at the critical point of the consideration, the engagement strategies are applied and triggered, the TV actor remains involved and moves into a higher phase of the inclusive involvement cycle. If the engagement strategies are not

adapted or do not work, the TV actor's involvement becomes more passive, moves to a lower phase of the inclusive involvement to the TV activities cycle, or withdraws.

The highest phase of involvement of TV actors in TV activities is the active involvement phase, where TV actors themselves apply personal engagement strategies – initiating and implementing TV improvement and development, which motivates them and others to be involved in TV activities. This is a stable, long-lasting phase. It has been found that the selection and implementation of the right managerial solutions ensures that a critical mass of TV actors are involved in TV activities, and that their involvement in TV activities leads to a certain outcome – the sustainable development of the rural area.

The results of the empirical study could be explained by a range of Decision-making theories, from the classical to the most recent.

These results correlate with Simon's (1955) theory of bounded rationality, which states that people make decisions in a partially irrational manner due to lack of object knowledge, information, and time. In thematic villages, actors facing a critical point of consideration make decisions based on their expectations, possibilities, and their perceived contextual conditions, which are not necessarily perceived rationally. They, like in the Theory of bounded rationality use the limited information available to them to decide whether or not to be involved in TV activities. This is in line with Simon's statement that decision-makers are looking for a satisfactory solution rather than an optimal one. Within the context of the Weighted Involvement Theory, this means that instead of seeking an optimal decision, TV actors reach a satisfactory solution by comparing their reference combination of levers (their expectations) with the current situation's combination of levers (perceived conditions).

Kahneman and Tversky's Perspective theory (1979) adds to the inter-interpretation of the research results. Perspective theory suggests that people are biased in their decision-making, influenced by emotions, and tend to avoid potential losses rather than seek potential gains. This is reflected in the TV actor's engagement strategies identified in the study, through which the TV actors seek personal satisfaction and self-realization but avoid time and money losses by trying to combine TV activities with other activities. This perfectly explains why in the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities, external and internal proximate and distant levers are dynamically weighed according to how TV actors subjectively assess potential losses and gains in the engagement process. These results also correlate with the participation form, where Tobiasz-Lis et al. (2019) identified two types of participation: participation in implementation and participation in benefits. Our research expands these concepts by revealing the internal dynamics of these forms of participation and their interactions with each other.

Behavioural economics, as developed by Thaler (2016), defines the impact of people's psychology on their individual and economic decisions. His insights into the importance of social preferences and context in decision-making correlate with the study's identification of the levers of reference combination of involvement levers, which consists of personal expectations, opportunities, and perceived context, on which TV actors make decisions to be involved in TV activities. TV actors, according to Behavioural economists, make irrational decisions based on emotions, expectations, their own perception of the context and previous experiences, not only on the current situation combination of involvement levers.

The results of the study can also be supported by Loewenstein and Chater's (2017) Putting nudges in perspective theory, through the influence of the environmental architecture (decision-making is determined by contextual conditions and their changes), the importance of social context (decisions are made according to the socio-local context, in which the TV actor operates), nudges (decisions can be influenced through nudges – engagement strategies), the choice architecture (which is driven by leadership strategy and sharing of responsibilities), and the motivation dimension (which unpacks the weight of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in decision making). In this context, the engagement strategies used by TV leaders (training, support, leading by example) act as such "nudges" that help TV actors decide to involve and remain involved in TV activities. These insights are directly related to our concept of engagement strategies in the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities,

where leaders apply internal and external engagement strategies to influence the decision of TV actors at the critical point of decision.

Hertwig, Pleskac and Pachur's (2019) theory of uncertainty management correlates with the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities presented in this paper. Uncertainty management theory explains why TV actors have to continuously reevaluate their choice to involve in TV activities. This is because they operate in a constantly changing contextual environment and their involvement depends on their ability to adapt to these changes and make appropriate decisions. According to Uncertainty theory, people make decisions using simple heuristics based on environmental conditions and available resources. This relates to the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities, in which actors in TV make decisions based on their perceived contextual environment and expectations and opportunities. The 'adaptive toolbox', referred to in Uncertainty management theory, explains the engagement strategies used by actors in TV, where decision-maker's decisions can be influenced by certain prior tools. TV actors face constant uncertainty about future activities, outcomes, and benefits, so they must constantly adapt and review their decisions about involvement – constantly weighing current and expected involvement levers. In the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities, this corresponds to the concept of an inclusive engagement cycle, in which TV actors move between different phases of engagement in TV activities – from the decision to involve to active involvement or withdrawal – depending on changes in interventional conditions.

This result agrees with the work proposed by Mazzetti G., et.al (2022), who investigates the role of individual variables and situational factors regarding engagement and workaholism simultaneously. They investigated the fact that engagement is a positive form of organizational involvement, whose core components are strong feelings of enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride. Engagement is driven by intrinsic motivation, based on personal gratification and satisfaction from the job itself, it involves freely choosing to invest time in work and reflects a harmonious passion for activities. At the individual level, engagement gives a high level of job satisfaction, better social functioning, higher life satisfaction and improved general health and well-being. At the organizational level, engaged members create opportunities for its development.

In addition, the results of the paper correlate with Johnston, K. A., Taylor, M., & Ryan, B. (2024) on the importance of community engagement in building resilience in rural areas. The results of both studies revealed that contextual conditions that influence engagement decisions are crucial for engagement in community activities. Engagement decisions can be influenced through the dimensions of leadership, empowerment and agency, which are consistent with the phenomenon of engagement strategies and create the conditions for sustained engagement. Our research findings on the weighted involvement of TV actors are also related to the studies on community involvement in TV activities discussed in the Literature Review section (Idziak et al., 2015; Vilkè & Gedminaitė-Raudonė, 2019; Ulva et al., 2020; Sodik et al., 2021; Imaniah et al., 2023; Yuliastuti et al., 2023; Bernacka et al., 2023; Hazin et al., 2024). These studies emphasized the importance of community involvement for the development of TVs, while our research revealed how this involvement works through the weighted involvement mechanism and how it can be managed using various engagement strategies.

In summary, the results of the study not only confirm existing decision-making theories, but also extend their applicability to the specific context of TVs, by showing how TV actors make weighted involvement decisions in TV activities. The results of the study reveal which **managerial approaches** can influence the decisions of TV actors. The decision-making-consideration mechanism that emerges from the study complements classical decision-making theories by showing how individual and collective decisions and applied engagement strategies intertwine to achieve the common goal of sustainable development of TVs and the rural areas in which they live. The results of this study show that decision making theories can be successfully applied in the context of TVs. Moreover, the fact that the Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities developed in the study correlates with other decision theories makes it possible to apply it in other organizational contexts. It can work in a variety of contexts, especially those where people are involved in organisations for reasons other than financial motives. In such cases, weighted involvement decisions need to be made based on expectations and opportunities, without rational

decision-making levers, such as the need for a living income. The Theory of Weighted Involvement in Thematic Village Activities is also relevant in various countries in Europe and elsewhere where sustainable rural development is being pursued through the creation of TVs or other community projects. This is confirmed by the nature of the Structured Grounded Theory methodology, which states that if research results exist in one studied phenomenon, they will also exist in other homogeneous phenomena. The homogeneity of thematic villages in Lithuania, Europe, and other countries worldwide is confirmed by the results of scientific literature analysis, revealing the common features of thematic villages (community involvement, theme uniqueness, positive impact on sustainable rural development, etc.). This demonstrates the breadth of applicability of the study results in a contextual and geo-regional perspective. They are relevant not only for actors involved in TV or other community-based initiatives and projects but also for policymakers, designers of rural sustainable development strategies and other stakeholders interested in sustainable rural development.

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