

The rural space and the human factor

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ABSTRACT

Given the growing importance of sustainable management of resources, as including human resources, in recent years is trying increasingly to growing importance is given to rural. Without taking into account the human factor, can generate problems like loss of social welfare. The purpose of this article is to make an analysis of the importance of the human factor in achieving the expected results due to the promotion and use of green economy, as well as a overview of the characteristics of the human factor in rural. The importance of the human factor is given by the need to take decisions that must have an impact on various aspects of rural.

Keywords: *rural, green economy, Romania, the importance of human factor, Human Development*

INTRODUCTION

Romania has a very important developing potential, which is not being used to its true capacity. With a surface of 238.000 square kilometres and a population of over 20 million inhabitants, Romania represents 6% of the total surface of the European Union and 4% of its total population. According to information published by INS, in comparison to data gathered in 2002, the population of Romania dropped in 2011 by 1.5 million inhabitants, meaning 7.2% of the total population. The factors that determined this decrease are mainly the negative natural increase (approximately 25%), as well as the external migration (approximately 75%).

In order to accelerate an economic growth and to assure a convergence of incomes with the ones in EU, investments and competitiveness should be improved in Romania. After recording an important decline, around the late 90's, the romanian economy has resumed its growth starting with the year 2000, recording an annual growth rate of 5%.

In Romania, the share of the rural population reflects an incidence bigger than that of other countries in EU. As so, from a point of view of territorial distribution, rurality is more obvious in Romania. In comparison to urban settlements, rural settlements are less populated and on a smaller scale.

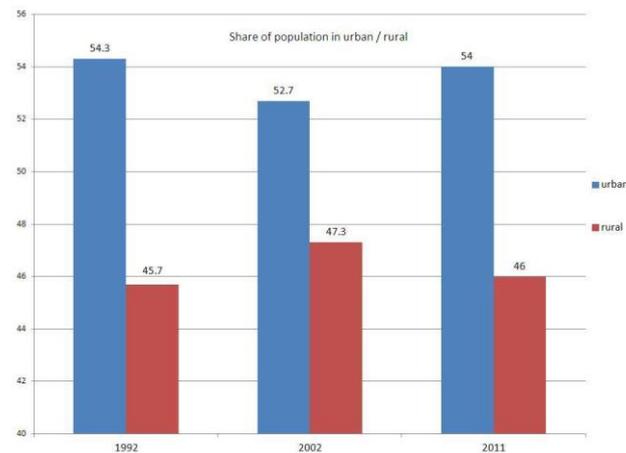
The involvement of these rural communities to the economic growth is very little. From the point of view of population density, there are significant differences, with the rural population being distributed unevenly. The most populated rural areas are the ones in the north-east of the country, where the birth rate is high, but also in the southern regions, due to the industrialization from the communist period. Also, there are big disparities, determined mostly by topography on a regional and county level.

We can consider, however, that the high share of rural areas within the national territory represents an advantage. As so, one can find craftsmen in the rural area, ready to both conduct traditional rural activities, and to offer domestic products.

RURAL AND POPULATION STRUCTURE

The rural areas have a substantial growth potential and a vital social role. Thus, the rural areas in Romania cover approximately 87% of the territory, including 46% of the population, that is 9.26 million inhabitants.

Figure 1: Share of population in urban / rural



On a sectoral level, a growth can be seen, from 2007 to 2012, of the ecologic production sector, but also a potential to continue extend and develop this production area. There is an interest to increase the production of high quality traditional food. Lately, one can observe the tendency to use origin designations, certified and registered at a national level, for the products that were created.

The need to standardize the processing units has led to the growth in numbers of the upgraded processing units. As a consequence, the number of investors from the urban area that possess significant resources has also grown. They make investments in the agro-food sector and apply innovative practices and technologies.

A traditional industry has developed in the past few years: wood processing.

However, according to the data published by INS, the aging index of the population has increased from 48.4 in 1992, to 79.8 in 2002, and to 101.8 in 2011¹.

Also, the demographic dependency report of the elderly has increased from 16.6 in 1992, to 20.6 in 2002, and to 23.7 in 2011².

In the rural area, after processing the statistical data regarding the level of education of the inhabitants older than 20 years, the informations can be synthesized in the table 1 and graphic 2.

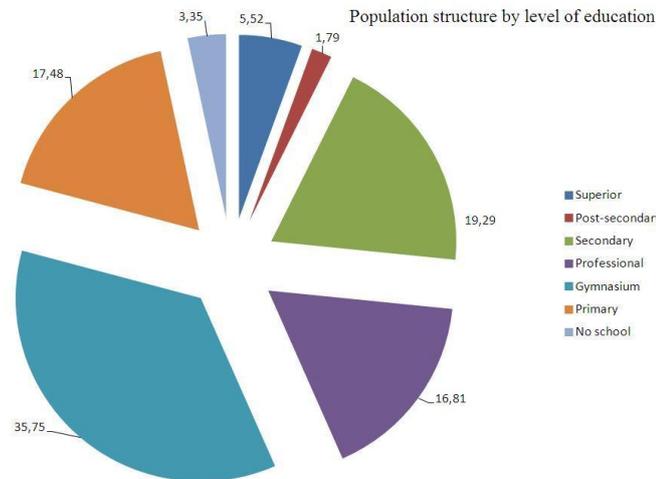
¹ the index of population aging represents the number of elderly persons (65 years and older) in relation to 100 young persons (under 15 years)

² the demographic dependency raport of elderly people is given by the number of elderly persons (65 years and older) in relation to 100 persons of working age (15-64 years)

Table 1. Level of education

Census	TOTAL	Superior	Post-secondary	Secondary	Without graduating high-school				
					Total	Out of which:			
						Professional	Gymnasium	Primary	No school
2011	7.055.242 (35 % of Romania's total population)	5.52	1.79	19.29	73.40	16.81	35.75	17.48	3.35

Figure 2: Population structure by level of education



Ten million and eight hundred thousand people live in the urban area, representing 54% of the total of settled population. The counties with the highest percentage of stable inhabitants that live in the urban area are: Hunedoara (75,0%), Braşov (72,3%), Constanta (68,8%), Cluj (66,3%), Sibiu (66,2%), Braila (62,5%) and Timiş (61,8%).

In 11 counties around the country, the rural area includes over two thirds of the settled population of the county. This group contains the following counties: Dâmboviţa (71,1%), Giurgiu (70,8%), Teleorman (67,6%), Neamţ (64,0%), Vrancea (63,8%), Călăraşi (63,8%), Bistriţa-Năşăud (63,3%), Buzau (61,4%), Vaslui (61,3%), Olt (60,9%) and Sălaj (60,7%).

The closest difference between the proportions of the settled population living in the two areas has been recorded in three counties: Mureş, Bihor and Prahova (50.2%, 49.2% and 49.1% of the settled population of these counties lives in the urban area).

The decrease in numbers of the population compared to the year 2002 is more emphasized in the rural environment (9.65 compared to a decrease of 5% in the urban environment).

On the 20th of October 2011, on a national level, children (0-14 years old) represent a proportion of 15.9% of the settled population, the young population (15-24 years) represent 12.3%, the adults (25-64 years) form the majority (55.7%), and the population older than 64 years old represent 16.1% of the total population. The population age 85 and older represent 1.3% of the total.

The age group 25-64 years represent the labor resources of a country and a prerequisite of economic development of the counties. Not by accident, the counties with the highest economic potential have higher proportions of this age group in the settled population. This

includes Bucharest (61,1%), Ilfov (58,3%), Constanta (58,2%), Brasov (57,9%), Timis (57,4%), but also Arges (57,5%), Tulcea (57,1%) and Satu-Mare (56,7%). Proportions lower than the national value of this age group have been recorded in Calarasi (52,8%) and Giurgiu (52,6%) as well.

If on a national level, one out of six persons (16,1%) that are part of the settle population are age 65 or older, in Teleorman this age group represent approximately a quarter of the settled population. In counties Buzau and Giurgiu the age group of 65 years and older represent 20% of the total, and in Vrancea, Neamt, Braila, Olt, Valcea, and Calarasi it represents 18% of the total of settled population. The lowest proportion of the age group has been recorded in Ilfov (12,9%), as well as in Satu-Mare (13,3%) and in Timis (13,5%).

The demographic situation of Romania in 2008 reflected a historical-demographic process of deterioration unfolded during the second half of the 20th century.

The effect of the pro-natalist policies from the second half of the '60s and from the '80s has been the demographic decline shown even in the final decade of the last century.

LIFE EXPECTANCY

If between 2004 and 2006 the average life expectancy in Romania was 72,2 years, with sensitive differences between the male population and the female population (68,7 years for men, and 72,5 years for women), in 2011, Romania was situated amongst the countries with the lowest average life expectancy: 70,1 years for men, and 77,5 years for women).

It has to be mentioned that at a EU-27 level, between 2004 and 2006, the average life expectancy was situated around 75 years for men and higher than 80 years for women, and in 2011, the average life expectancy increased for both categories: 77,4 years for men and 83,2 years for women.

These information regarding the average life expectancy are included in the centralizing table below:

Table 2. Life expectancy

	Women		Men	
	Romania	EU	Romania	EU
2004-2006	75,5	80	68,7	75
2011	77,5	83,2	70,1	77,4

As a conclusion to the information regarding the population of Romania, in general, and the rural environment, in particular, we can say that the average life expectancy has increased, and the temporary migration for work abroad has decreased the pressure on the necessary resources to cover the essential economic and social needs of the population, and it has also led to a decrease of unemployment.

At the same time, there are aspects less pleasant. Those are: the lower birth rate; the change in demographic behavior of young couples which choose to have less children (preferably one), born at a higher age of the mother; the massive decrease of birth rate at mothers with a high level of education and average level of living; the increase of the elderly/adults dependency raport; the massive migration (especially the external one, but internal as well) from the less developed areas (rural environment, small towns, etc.) has led to imbalances and even depopulations in territorial profile when it hasn't been compensated by natality; the aging of the population of Romania, with strong negative effects on the evolutions of future labor resources.

During the last years, it has been found that older people have gradually replaced the younger population in the rural area. At the beginning of the '90s, the people that migrated to the urban areas came from all the age groups. This tendency has modified after 1996, when young people started leaving the rural areas, and older people started migrating to these areas.

Thus, the rural area has become more and more attractive to the population older than 35 years, and especially to people in the 45-54 age group who are, usually, more vulnerable on the urban area labor market, and who are heading towards rural areas, where they begin to conduct the subsistence activity.

For some people, however, living in a rural area is preferable to living in a crowded urban environment. The young population migrate to the urban areas searching for better work places and a more attractive life style.

For rural areas, migrating to another country has bigger economic and social implications than migrating from the urban area to the rural one. As so, important financial flows are occurring in the rural economy, as a consequence of the consistent amount of money sent in the country by the people working abroad.

This money not only lead to attitude change regarding the migration abroad, but also prepare the way for the modernization and the development of the rural space. A good amount of these sums of money are being invested into buying housing and land, as well as into the attempt to increase the qualitative level of life in the rural area, and to ensure a protection in case of potential financial problems. Those that have worked abroad (especially young people) begin to develop entrepreneurship, being willing to start a commercial agricultural, or non-agricultural, activity.

Despite the advantages, we should mention that there are disadvantages, represented by the social costs, as well. More and more children remain in the care of relatives in the country and more and more families are being separated.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMAN FACTOR IN INCREASE SOCIAL WELFARE

From the point of view of the level of preparation, if one talks about the preuniversity education, one can mention the following beneficial aspects: the increase of the mandatory duration of education to 10 years, the reorganization and diversification of the formation ways specific to the professional and technical education; the increased degree of participation in preuniversity education and the degree of continuation of studies after the end of the mandatory period; the existence of affirmative educational policies for roma population, which leads to an increase in access opportunities to preuniversity education; the existence of a legislation for education that gives national minorities the opportunity to learn their mother tongue in school and to receive education in their mother tongue, the adoption of the National Law of Education.

Actions to continue implementing a coherent and functional system to ensure the quality in preuniversity education are necessary, as well as the adoption and implementation of the National Qualifications Framework.

Prerequisites were created at the higher education level for: the structuring of the higher education system in 3 study cycles compatible at an European level, according to the „Bologna Process” concept; the expansion of the network of higher education institutions, both public and private; the consolidation of the autonomy of universities, sustained by the introduction of a system that ensures the quality of the evaluation, both external and internal; the insurance of transparent qualifications, of transferability and comparability to the ones created at an European level, by introducing the diploma supplement.

Some of the aspects identified at a national level have a correspondent at European level. Thus, taking into consideration the 2020 Europe Strategy, we notice that three aspects are closely related to each other: the intelligent development, durable and inclusive³. As such, the main challenges of Europe: the aging of population, the insufficient level of qualification of the work force, the necessity to increase the degree of innovation, the relationship between economic growth and environment degradation, as well as energy safety, should be treated through an integrated approach⁴.

If we consider that the economy that leads to the improvement of the human welfare and of the social equity, as well as to the reduction of environmental risks and ecological deficits, represents „*the green economy*”, then we can state that green economy is based on three strategies: the reductions of the carbon emissions, the improvement of the energetic efficiency and resources, and the prevention of biodiversity and ecosystem services⁵ loss.

The expression „green economy” first appeared during an Earth Summit held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992, and it is seen as an alternative to sustainable development.

Even though there is a formal conceptualization, there are no delimitations settled regarding a precise definition, on how to measure the degree of ecologization from an economy, on how to identify the role of the states, the financing method, on how to discover which would be the sectors most affected and which would be the beneficiaries, and last, but not least, on how to evaluate the influence of the transition to green economy on the day-to-day life of the citizens⁶.

The transition towards a green economy should be made on both a national, and a global level, through cooperation and coordination, and all the strategies used for a green economy should be catalyzed and sustained by public and private investments, as well as political reforms and legislation changes⁷.

CONCLUSION

The desire to have a „green economy” is strong. By promoting sustainable development and the eradication of poverty, such a transformation depends on two big changes: the way in which our economy is structured and the acknowledgment that the environment represents the basis of our goods and that it should be managed as a source of economic growth, prosperity and wellbeing.

In this context of changing comparative advantages, one inescapable conclusion is that not all rural areas have the same conditions for attempting a development process based on the exploitation of its amenities. Low population density, which is characteristic of these areas, complicates economic diversification. The demographic profile and the characteristics of the social fabric, mainly of tagnant rural areas or those that lose population are different: there is a vulnerability to external social ties, lack of local opportunities, low expectations of social mobility or increased interactions. Distance from urban centers can also turn into a disadvantage through increased information and transportation costs⁸.

When we talk about human resource development, we need to consider transforming their prospects.

³ European Commission (2010), Europe 2020 - A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels

⁴ 2020 - Rolul politicii regionale în viitorul Europei – Panorama Inforegio nr. 39

⁵ UNEP, 2011, Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication, www.unep.org/greeneconomy

⁶ Donald Sawyer, Green economy and/or sustainable development?, *Politica Ambiental*, Nr. 8, iunie 2011

⁷ TEEB, The economics of ecosystems and biodiversity: mainstreaming the economics of nature: a synthesis of the approach, conclusions and recommendations of TEEB, 2011, www.teebweb.org

⁸ *Politica Ambiental - Green economy: challenges and opportunities*, N° 8 · June 2011

Three of their common drivers: their proactive developmental states, their capacity to tap into global markets and their focus on social policy innovation⁹.

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