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THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF ROMANIAN RURAL AREAS

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, most European countries have faced demographic phenomena, having as main characteristic birth rate decrease and ageing of population. Depending on the existing socio-economic conditions, these phenomena were different across countries: Romania was not an exception to those trends in Europe. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the key features of rural demographic structures and their evolution. Based on the proposed objective, the analysis was conducted on three levels with related questions: i) rural demographic structures and dynamics – is sustainable rural development possible in the context of continuing deterioration of human capital?; ii) spatial disparities – which are the specific demographic characteristics at different territorial levels?; iii) proposals – which are the ways for improving the rural population's situation?. The analysis of the statistical data revealed the following characteristics: i) the rural population has been constantly decreasing, a process that started with the Revolution of 1989; ii) the rural population growth rate has had increasingly large negative values since 1992 – a process with a strong territorial footprint; iii) the rural population has experienced a strong aging process; iv) the main drivers of population decline are the negative natural increase and migration; iv) at local level, there is a process of population concentration in highly and newly urbanized areas; in parallel, there is a depopulation of the rural areas, particularly of the peripheral ones.

Key words: rural population, rural area, demographic transition, Romania.

JEL Classification: J11, R11.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, most European countries have been facing disturbing demographic phenomena, having as main characteristic a decrease in birth rate and population aging. Depending on the existing socio-economic conditions, these phenomena were different across countries. Romania was not an exception to the European tendencies: an obvious trend of population decline, caused by changes in the three components of population dynamics – natality, mortality and emigration. Knowing the demographic phenomena and processes is very important, both at national level and by residence area, so as to identify the processes with positive or negative impact on the economic and social development.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

In order to analyze the changing demographic profile of the Romanian rural areas, the demographic transition theory formulated by Warren Thompson (1929) and Frank Notestein (1954) was taken into consideration (INSSE, 2012). The demographic transition is a process by which the populations move from a demographic pattern with high death rate and birth rate levels to a modern demographic pattern in which these two phenomena are declining. The demographic transition explains the evolution of the population depending on a number of social, economic, legal, educational, health, psychological and cultural factors.

The demographic transition is a topic of interest for our country, too. In Romania, the demographic transition has particular features, as each country has its own experience. According to Trebici, Romania entered the demographic transition later than the Western European countries, the difference being due to a delayed economic, social and political development as opposed to the Western European countries (Trebici, 1996). Thus, Trebici emphasizes the interrelationships between demographic variables (“demographic transition”) and socio-economic variables (“growth”, “development”). Even though not all the intimate aspects of the demographic process were identified, the specialists’ reflections on the demographic transition became a theory of population trends evolution in unity with economic “development” (Trebici, 1991, p. 302).

Through the evolution of the main demographic indicators, after 1990, also including the segment of the rural population, Romania has got in line with the demographic trends in Western European countries described as the theory of the second demographic transition in literature (Crenshaw, Oakey and Christenson, 1999; Muresan, 2007, Caldwell, 2008). Thus, on one hand, the birth and fertility rates have significantly declined; on the other hand divorces, age at first marriage and age at first birth as well as the number of children born out of marriage have increased. The high economic and social costs of transition were intensely felt by the rural population (Sandu, 1999; Zamfir, 2004; Heller, 2000; Horvath, 2008).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

To reach the main objective of this work, which aimed to highlight the main rural demographic structures and trends, a documentary survey on the subject matter was carried out and the statistical data from the National Institute of Statistics were analyzed. The data was processed by Excel and the graphical presentation at local level was performed using ArcView software.

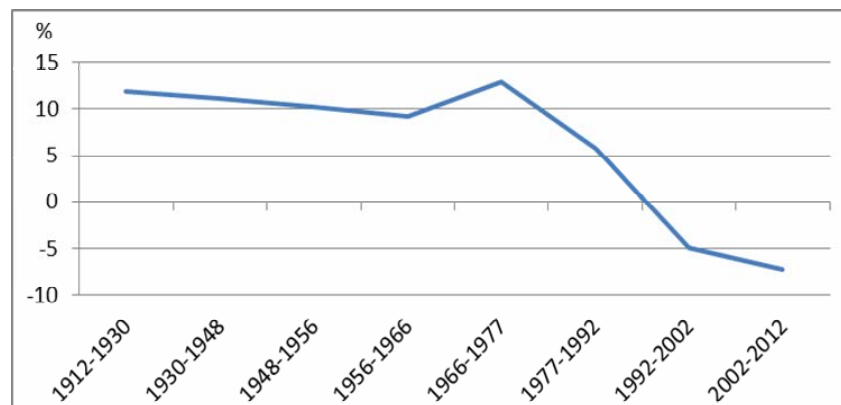
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The demographic characteristics of the Romanian rural areas can only be understood in the context of national demographic transition and socio-economic development.

4.1. DYNAMICS OF RURAL POPULATION

According to the statistics from population censuses, it appears that there are two trends in the evolution of the Romanian population, namely: i) a first period with a corresponding increasing trend prevailing in the last century, which was composed of several stages whose tendencies were determined by important historical events; ii) a second period with constant downward trend that began immediately after the Revolution of 1989.

In the period 1912-1966, the overall population growth rate decreased from 12% to 9% (Figure 1). The causes behind this development were the high death rate during the two world wars, epidemics and drought in different times, declining birth rates and population migration abroad. Changing the political system after the World War II was the first step in changing the demographic policy in Romania. The Communist Party in power in that time intervened by a pronatalist law that caused over 12% increase in the growth rate of population in the period 1966-1977. Later on, however, although the pronatalist policy continued, the growth rate continuously experienced a sharp decline, down to 5.8% in 1992.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 1. The growth rate of the Romanian population in the last century.

The second period, which followed the anti-communist Revolution of 1989, was characterized by a pronounced and continuing population decreasing trend. This trend was primarily influenced by the repealing of the law prohibiting abortions (in the early 1990s). Another important reason was the open borders, which allowed Romanians to migrate to Europe for work. Negative values of growth rate are evidence of this decrease (-5% in 1992-2002 and -7% in 2002-2012).

In the year 2012, the rural population totaled 9.618 million people, accounting for 45% of total population (Table 1).

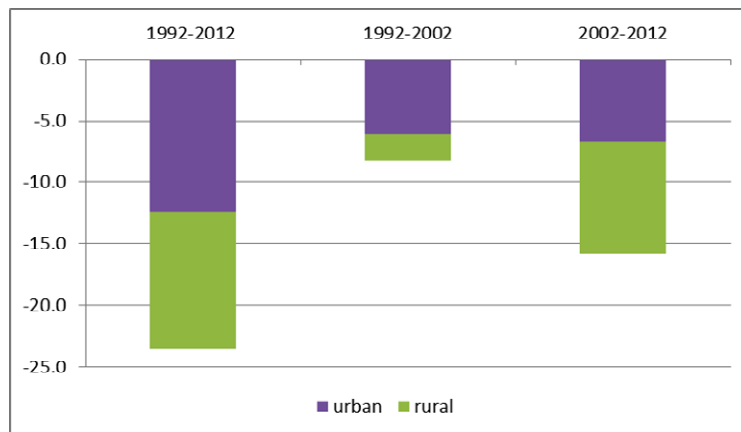
Table 1
Rural population characteristics

	1966	1977	1992	2002	2012
Population (thou. persons)	11,797	12,164	10,418	10,245	9,618
Population dynamics (1977 / 100 %)		100.0	85.6	84.2	79.1
Rural population, % of total	61.8	56.4	45.7	47.3	45.0
Elderly rural population aged 60 and over (%)	12.2	16.4	22.1	24.3	23.8

Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

The rural population decline began long before 1989 and coincided with a broad migratory flow from rural to urban areas as a result of promoting socialist industrialization policy. The intensity of this migratory flow decreased in the years following the communist regime change, being gradually replaced by external migration, which intensified after 2000.

The evolution of the rural population in Romania in the last two decades was characterized by a steady downward trend in the number of people (0.8 million inhabitants in the period 1992-2012) which was, however, lower than that of the urban population (1.5 million inhabitants). But there was a difference between the first and the second decade. While urban areas decreased steadily but slowly (-6.1% and -6.7%), the rural areas experienced a radical intensification of the process (-2.1% and -9.1%) during the economic crisis of recent years (Figure 2).

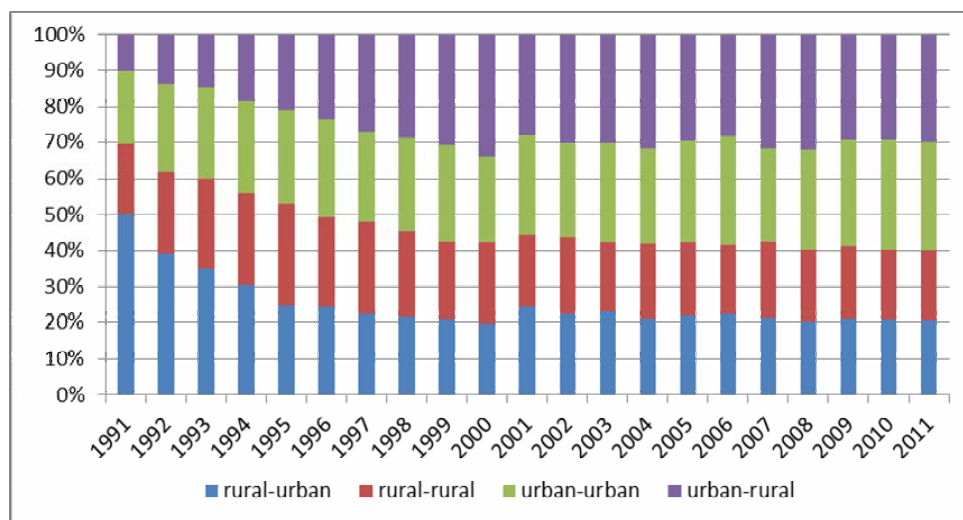


Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 2. Population growth rate by residence area in the last two decades (%).

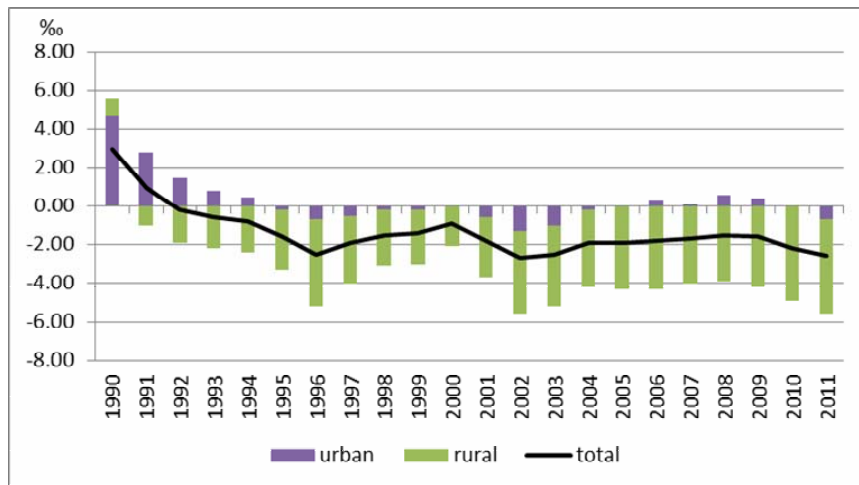
After 1989, due to the significant political, legal and economic changes, the characteristics of the migratory flow in Romania changed. The internal migration flows have increased since 1990, much of the rural population migrating to urban areas due to the removal of restrictions on settling in big cities. Most inhabitants of the neighbouring rural settlements and those already living in these cities without domicile bought homes and “legally moved” into them. In the years after 1990, this migration flow diminished. Around the year 1996, when many industrial enterprises went bankrupt, leading to the emergence and increase of unemployment, the migration flows from urban to rural areas were intensified. Thus, many of the newly unemployed solved up their financial problems by returning to their rural households or to those belonging to their relatives. As it can be seen in Figure 3, migration from rural to urban areas decreased from 50% in 1991 to 20% in 2011, while migration in the opposite direction, from urban to rural areas, increased from 10% to 30 %, later on lingering around this value.

The migration was not the only thing that contributed to a sharp decline of the population. A key role was also played by the natural population change. The evolution of the decreasing birth rates and increasing death rates resulted in increasingly lower values of natural balance, even negative in the last two decades (Figure 4). The most affected in this process were the rural areas, which did not have positive values after 1991.



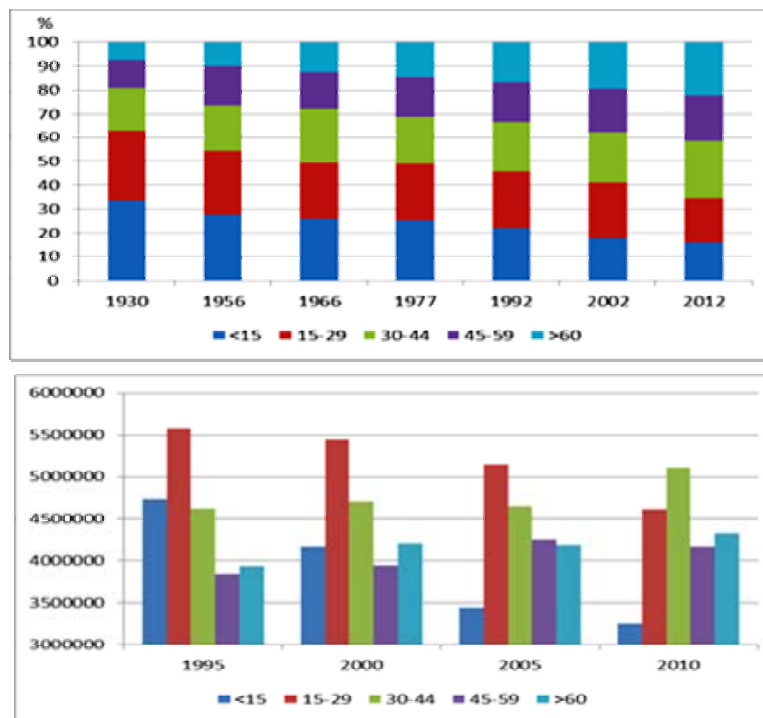
Source: Suditu (coord.), 2012.

Figure 3. Migration flows structure.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 4. Evolution of natural increase rate.

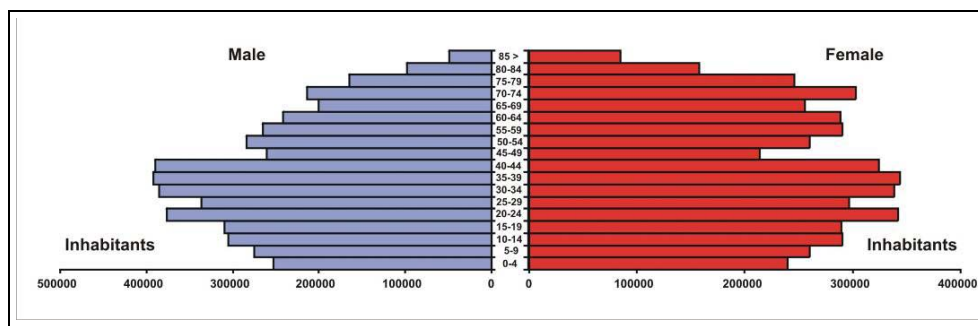


Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 5. Age structure at national level.

The main result of this demographic behavior that characterized the Romanian population, especially the rural one, is its growing demographic aging. This trend turns from the analysis of the evolution of age groups shown in Figure 5. It can be noted that there was a sliding of age groups which worsened the demographic situation. From Table 1 it can be noticed that the rural population 60 years and over has a very high share (23.8%) in total population.

The rural population aging, gradually manifested since the second half of the twentieth century, became much stronger after 1992. In fact, this process of transition from a traditional pattern of population reproduction, characterized by high birth and death rates, to a modern pattern, with low birth rates and moderate death rates can be noticed at present. Thus, the age pyramid has a narrower base and a bolder top, because of the declining birth rate and increasing average lifespan (Figure 6).



Source: Nancu, Guran-Nica, Persu, 2010.

Figure 6. Age pyramid – rural population in 2010.

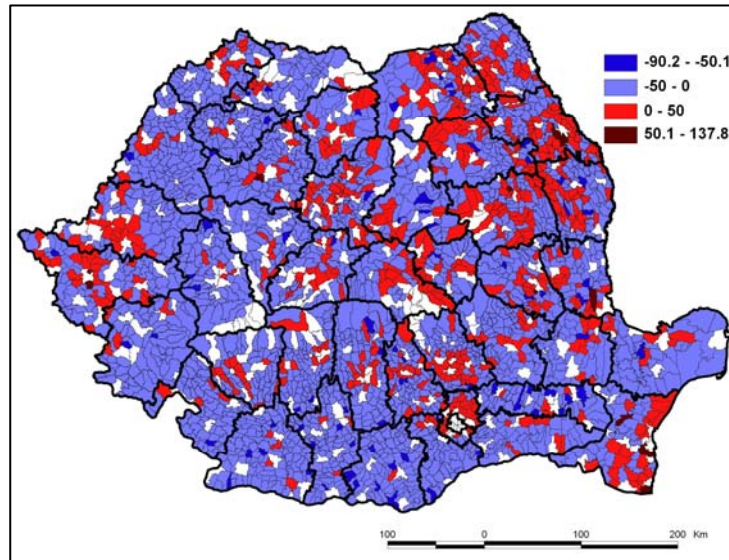
4.2. TERRITORIAL DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Negative trends of Romanian rural population can be found in most municipalities. At local level, in terms of population growth rate, it has a diverse mosaic structure (Figure 7).

The growth rate of the population experiences large variations. Negative values are found in areas characterized by: i) low accessibility and low economic development level (the Danube Delta, the Apuseni Mountains, the Southern Carpathians, Banat Mountains, Mehedinti Plateau, etc.); deep ruralism (Western Romanian Plain and Moldova Plateau); iii) strong industrial decline (Petrosani Depression, etc.). Areas with a higher concentration of population are found in the peri-urban areas and territories with not so strong economic decline (e.g. Bucharest-Ploiesti-Brasov Corridor).

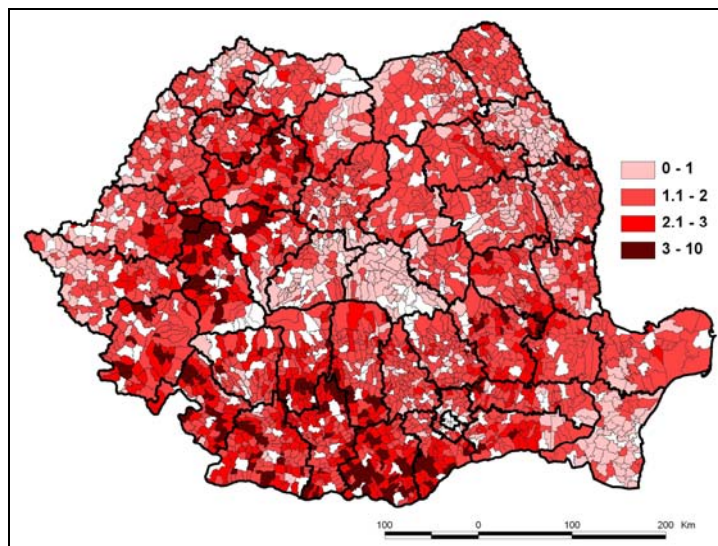
There are strong spatial disparities of the rural population aging index (Figure 8). The territorial analysis highlights areas where the elderly population can exceed one third of the total population. Among them, the settlements from Somes Plateau, Apuseni Mountains, Mures Corridor, Mehedinti Mountains and Plateau,

Buzau Subcarpathians, Romanian Plain and Getici Subcarpathians stand out. In the areas from Dobrogea, the central and western part of the country, rural aging is less intense.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 7. Rural population growth rate (%) in the period 1990-2012.



Source: National Institute of Statistics, Romania.

Figure 8. Ageing index – rural population in 2012.

5. CONCLUSIONS

From the demographic point of view, the following rural population profile can be noticed in the period after 1989:

- i) downward trend of the rural population, which is an obvious trend in all censuses conducted after 1989;
- ii) downward trend from rural to urban migration flow;
- iii) negative trend of the natural growth rate of the population since 1991;
- iv) increasing trend of population aging index;
- v) diminution of the population in most rural municipalities, through the internal and external migration flows;
- vi) population concentration process in highly and newly urbanized areas together with the depopulation of the peripheral areas.

The trends signalled out in the paper conducted to direct economic and social implications. In this context, the main development priorities could be:

- i) developing specific policies to reduce rural population decline and balance its distribution in the territory;
- ii) adapting the rural services to population's needs, depending on its structure;
- iii) development of policies to support people in need in the areas where population aging is a strong phenomenon;
- iv) strengthening the network of small cities, with role in fixing the populations from the area of influence (specialized infrastructure – education, cultural, health, etc.).

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