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RURAL LABOUR FORCE AND MULTIFUNCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE TERRITORY¹

ABSTRACT

The assumption of the multifunctional character of the rural area implies the multiplication of roles that this territory has in the society. The new roles (ecologic, socio-cultural, etc.) are assumed as far as the rural society perceives their importance, as well as the benefits generated by this new vision and it is able to fructify the new opportunities (new occupations, funding sources) that it might benefit from by assuming the new roles. The initial assumption was that the driving force of the change of vision is the human capital. Its characteristics, from the demographic aspect, to the educational and occupational characteristics and ending up with the perception characteristics with regard to the rural community future, can represent constraints or catalysts in assuming the multifunctional character of rural areas.

Key words: rural multifunctionality, human capital, territorial disparities.

JEL Classification: O18, O15, J21, J24.

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Agricultural Fund for Rural development (EAFRD) has as objective under Axis III (“Quality of life in the rural areas and rural economy diversification”) *Multifunctional development of rural area by supporting the non-agricultural economic activities on the agricultural holding and, in general, of the economic activities in the rural area* aiming at:

- increasing the additional incomes of subsistence and semi-subsistence farms from non-agricultural activities;
- creating jobs in the countryside;
- best use of local potential;
- limit the depopulation of rural areas;
- create services for the rural population;
- best use of renewable energy production potential;

¹ The present study is part of an empirical study conducted in the period 2007–2008 focusing on the occupational diversification opportunities in the rural areas. A series of procedures, instruments and techniques were used in order to reveal the phenomena and processes taking place in the rural area. The investigation units were the commune and the rural household. For a most accurate evaluation of the current situation in the communes and rural households, the data were collected in different contexts and areas.

- rural tourism development;
- promoting entrepreneurship.

All these will remain only “desiderata” in rural Romania if they are not backed up by the human capital *through which and for which* they will be put into practice. *The starting point of this study is that the driving force of this change of vision is the human capital itself.* Its characteristics, starting from the demographic aspects and going through the educational and occupational aspects and ending up by the psychological/perception aspects with regard to the future of rural community can turn into catalysts or constraints in assuming the multifunctional character of the rural area.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is structured into two complementary parts:

I. The first part attempts to reveal the occupational and professional disparities that characterize the rural area in each of the four macro-regions from Romania. The evolution of the main indicators that describe the occupational and professional structures reveals the adoption of multifunctional development patterns at macro regional level and the potential of adopting such a development path from the perspective of the main characteristics of labour market.

II. The second part includes a study on the agro-regional disparities of the labour force characteristics; these disparities have an influence upon the assuming of the multifunctional development patterns. The scientific approach of the second segment is based on the hypothesis that the location in a given geographical area (mountain, hill, plain) exercises a greater influence upon assuming the multifunctionality of the rural area compared to the macro-territorial vision.

I. Macro-regional occupational and professional disparities

The objective of the first part is to reveal the macro-regional disparities in assuming the multifunctional character of rural areas, mainly focusing upon the evolution in time of the human capital characteristics associated to the extent to which the rural area has followed the multifunctional development path. The analysis was based upon the secondary statistical data provided by the National Institute for Statistics and the set of indicators that have been used reveal the *evolution of rural occupational structures in the years 2002 and 2007* as main resultant of assuming multifunctionality in rural development. The changes that were produced at the level of occupational structures in these five years bear a double imprint: that of the inherent demo-social characteristics of rural population, on one hand, and of the institutional efforts to lead the rural area on an European trajectory, on the other hand. The main indicators on which the analysis is based are the following:

- *The activity rate* (calculated as share of the active population in total population) – reflects the size of labour recruitment pool at territorial level. In the multifunctional development context, the activity rate is an indicator referring to the labour potential; its evolution in time measures the degree in which the macro-region is confronted with the risk of losing the available local labour force on medium and long term.

- *The degree of economic activities diversification*, by multiplying the income sources, contributes to the diminution of risks resulting from the agricultural activity, as only occupation of the household members – eliminates the seasonality of incomes, attenuates the shocks generated by the natural phenomena with negative impacts upon the agricultural production, etc. Statistically revealed by the evolution of occupational structures, the diversification level of economic activities reflects the speed at which the rural areas are going forward on the multifunctional development path.

- *The professional structures* are the reflection of the economic diversification level and reveal the adoption of the values of a modern economy in the relations on the labour market – when these relations are based on contractual economy – or of a traditional economy when the labour relations are based upon family labour. The temporal mobility between the professional structures can be also an expression of multifunctional development as long as the movement goes from the occupational status associated to low and/or unstable incomes (unpaid family worker, farmer) to the occupational status generating higher incomes (employee, employer).

II. Agro-regional disparities in assuming the multifunctional development patterns

As rural area multifunctionality development is put into practice by the support to non-agricultural economic activities (AXIS III - EAFRD), we consider that the diversity of potentially exploitable resources also becomes a stimulating factor in rural economy diversification. This is the objective motivation why in the present study we opted for revealing the existing disparities between the communes located in the three important geographic areas (mountain, hill, plain). The purpose of this geographic approach is to investigate the following:

- to what extent the human capital is able to potentiate the multifunctional development of the rural areas benefiting from a higher diversity of natural resources (hilly or mountainous zones) or

- can the human capital, by its characteristics, determine the multifunctional development of rural plain areas even though these are the “depositors” of less diversified natural resources?

The data on which the analysis was based were collected during the questionnaire-based sociological surveys applied to representative samples of

households extracted from the total rural households of the communes belonging to each agro-region (mountain, hill, plain).

Out of the multiple dimensions describing the characteristics of human resources, we selected from the field survey those results with the greatest impact upon the assuming and internalization behaviour of the rural area multifunctionality:

- *Average age of the population in the sample* – this represents an important predictor of the opening towards the occupational diversification of the rural communities, as it is well known that a younger population is more open to innovation, has a greater occupational mobility and is more open to professional retraining.

- *The share of households with dependent children* – reflecting the demographic regeneration potential, and by this, the continuity opportunity at the level of household / community.

- *The population ageing index* – calculated as a ratio of the number of persons aged over 60 to the number of persons aged 0 – 14 years, reflecting the demographic regeneration potential at community level. The values larger than one of this index generate significant risk of population number decrease, which is equivalent to a contraction of demand on the local markets of commodities and services, making the respective regions less attractive for investments.

- *Average number of schooling years* – reflects the educational level of the population from the investigated communes; a higher level of this indicator reveals a greater opportunity of the community to attract new investments, as the labour force available at community level has a higher training level, which confers it higher adaptability and facilitates the possibility to get professionally retrained and reoriented.

- *Employment rate of the population of working age* calculated as a ratio of the employed population to the population of working age (15-64 years) – reveals to what extent the population of working age is involved in economic activities generating welfare at household level and consequently at community level. A low value of the indicator is a clear signal of *the need to implement new investments* that should create jobs at local level.

- *Occupational structure* – revealed by the share of the main economic activities – agriculture, agro-processing industry, industry – constructions and services – in the total employed population at sample level – indicates the level of local economic activities diversification. This indicator (partially) reveals the extent to which the rural communities are or are not on the path of multifunctional development. Thus, a high share of labour employed in the primary sector of the economy can be associated to a poor internalization of the multifunctional development principles. As far as the importance of employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors increases in local rural economy, it is easier to assume the multifunctional character of rural areas, as the communities are already on the multifunctional development path.

- *Labour renewal index* – calculated as ratio of the population aged 15–29 years to the population aged 30–44 years. By comparing the number of young labour force, at the beginning of their active life, to the number of adult labour force, this index highlights the evolution trajectory of the labour force volume available in the future. A ratio larger than one reveals the opportunity of young labour growth on the local market, which favours the attraction of investments in alternative economic activities. When this ratio tends to zero, there is a higher risk of labour force contraction at community level.

- *Share of households with members who left the locality for work* – reflects the occupational mobility of rural household members. The occupational mobility is a good predictor of economic activity diversification and mainly of multiplication of income sources on the household. A high occupational mobility signals out a larger openness for understanding and accepting new ideas and practices in the professional life. At the same time, it means the courage to face the challenges of a new environment – even of the business environment – external to the original environment whose operation rules are well known. The occupational mobility ensures the premises of enlarging the technical horizon and the methodological apparatus with which people operate in the rural area, by importing new working techniques and methods from the destination points of the occupational migration.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Macroregional occupational and professional disparities

The active population²

The rural active population decreased in relative terms in the ten inter-census years, as a direct consequence of the demographic ageing that characterizes this residence area, in general, and of the young population migration to the urban area or to foreign countries. This process has mainly affected the rural areas of the macro-region one where the share of active population decreased by 3.5 %. Moderate decreases of the active population importance in total population were also noticed in the macro-regions two and four in the period 2002-2007. Besides the two above-mentioned explanations, in this case the phenomenon is caused by the existence of a strong migration flow generated by old people and/or beneficiaries of early retirement scheme coming back to their native localities with inactive person status.

The lowest activity rate is found in the rural area of the macro-region one that is subject to the stronger demographic ageing process; the highest value of this indicator corresponds to the macro-region four due to the presence of a significant

² Active population – employed or unemployed population aged 14 and over.

volume of population of working age. In the period 2002 – 2007, the rural population's activity rate followed a slightly decreasing trend, with different intensities from one macro-region to another. The previously mentioned trend is determined by the decrease of the active population volume. If we add here the diminution in number of the population outside the active life – mainly the share of young people under 15 years old in total population³ following the dramatic decline of the birth rate, we can state that the Romanian rural area will be soon confronted with the “desertification” risk⁴ with regard to the population of working age.

Table 1

Regional activity rates of the rural population

	Activity rate of rural population*		%
	2002 ¹	2007 ²	
Romania	47.8	46.4	
Macro-region 1	44.8	41.3	
Macro-region 2	49.3	47.8	
Macro-region 3	46.6	48.2	
Macro-region 4	50.3	48.3	

* activity rate –percentage ratio of active rural population to total rural population

Source: calculations based on data from:

¹) NIS (2003) – Household Labour Force Survey (AMIGO) in the year 2002;

²) NIS (2008) – Labour Force in Romania. Employment and Unemployment in the year 2007.

From the perspective of assuming a multifunctional development pattern, the current activity rate and mainly its trend provide a series of information on the *potential participation to the economic activities of the population in each macro-region, which influences the attractiveness of each macro-region for the location of new economic objectives.*

According to this criterion, the four macro-regions of Romania can be grouped into three categories:

- Macro-regions with *low and strongly decreasing potential of the active population supply (macro-region 1)* that is confronted with a severe “desertification” risk with regard to its active population, as the lowest birth rates are also found here. *The rural area of this macro-region becomes risky for the location of new investments due to the potential labour deficit on long term.*

- Macro-regions with *medium potential of available labour and labour potential under moderate decline (macro-regions two and four)*. In these rural areas, the macro-regional activity rate was down by 1.5% and 2% respectively in the

³ Share of the population under 15 years old in total rural population was down from 19.4% in 2002 to 17.6% in 2007

⁴ Demographic desertification – demographic phenomenon that means the significant diminution that can result in the disappearance of a category of population or of the entire population in a given area.

period 2002–2007. The fact that the active population represents almost half of the total rural population of macro-regions and in the last five years the population structure experienced relative stagnation as regards the participation to the economic activity can be considered a strength. This state of things offers the perspective of long-term maintaining the equilibrium between the population of working age on one hand, and the population from the base and the top of the age pyramid, on the other hand. From the perspective of assuming the multifunctional character of the rural area, this temporal continuity in the activity rate is equivalent to an increased opportunity to adopt the alternative activities on the basis of an increased labour supply on the local market, which makes *the respective region attractive for the location of new economic objectives*.

- Macroregions with *medium and increasing available labour potential (macro-region three)* at the level of which the rural population structure is improved by the participation to the economic activity, as the region rural areas seem to have become attractive for the stabilization of new active population contingents. From the perspective of assuming the rural area multifunctionality, the positive evolution of the macro-regional activity rate and its getting close to half of the total population result in increased opportunities for adopting alternative activities on the basis of an increasing labour supply on the local market, which makes *the region attractive for the location of new economic objectives*.

Evolution of macro-regional occupational structures

There are significant disparities between Romania's rural localities with regard to the employed population structure. There are communes where industry or the tertiary sector are absent, while the farming sector accounts for 80–100% of total employment. A lower value added per labour unit is expected in these areas, which yields lower incomes.

The diversification of economic activities, by the multiplication of income sources that it implies, contributes to the diminution of risks resulting from the agricultural activity, as only occupation of the household members, to the elimination of income seasonality, it attenuates the shocks generated by the natural phenomena with negative effects upon agricultural production, etc. Unfortunately, the share of the employed population in the secondary and tertiary sectors is still low: 38.7% in 2007; yet in the recent period a diminution of agricultural employment in rural areas could be noticed, which will have a positive impact upon the material situation on the rural households and will lead to the rural social structure improvement in the future. The economic reform and the structural adjustment processes brought about changes in the economic structures and functionality of rural communities.

The structure of the employed population is determined by two main factors:

- A large part of the rural population is confronted with limited employment options and has to work in activities with low productivity in order to ensure a minimum living for survival.

- The precarious technological endowment in agriculture requires a higher volume of manual labour and determines the rural population to carry out low productivity activities generating modest incomes.

In the territory, the evolution of the structure of employed population by activity branches and sectors, is in concordance with the economic-social development level: the macro-regions where there are more counties with low and very low economic development level (macroregions two and four) have an employment structure characterized by a high share of the population employed in agriculture and low share of the population employed in services. The zones with high economic-social development indices (macroregions one and three) have an employment structure where the services and industry have higher shares in the rural occupational structure.

Table 2

Evolution of the employed population structure in the rural area by activity sectors

Macroregions	% in total sectors and total regions					
	Agriculture		Industry and constructions		Services	
	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²
Romania	68.3	61.3	16.0	19.9	15.7	18.8
Macroregion 1	58.2	49.5	22.4	28.1	19.4	22.4
Macroregion 2	76.0	72.4	11.4	13.4	12.7	14.1
Macroregion 3	61.9	50.7	20.6	24.1	17.5	25.2
Macroregion 4	70.3	64.9	15.4	18.6	14.3	16.5

Source: ¹NIS (2003) Household Labour Force Survey (AMIGO) in the year 2002;

²NIS (2008) Labour Force in Romania. Employment and Unemployment in the year 2007.

The macroregional analysis by the rural occupational structure provides a series of indications on the *multifunctional development pattern adoption* in the rural areas, reflected by the labour force attraction into the non-agricultural activities. According to this criterion, the four macroregions of Romania can be grouped into two categories:

- *Macroregions where the primary sector prevails in the occupational structure* (macroregions two and four) where two-thirds of the employed population is working in the farming sector. The high agricultural employment level is a consequence of the lack of occupational opportunities in the other economic sectors at regional level, the job supply being low not only in agriculture but also in the urban areas that could attract available rural labour. Although agricultural employment importance is decreasing at macroregional level, the development rate of non-agricultural sectors capable to extract the under-employed labour in agriculture is low (the share of the population employed in the secondary and tertiary sectors in total employed population averagely increased by 1% each year in the macroregion four and by 0.72% in the macro-region two). In other words,

the regional occupational structure suffers from relative conservatism, slowly evolving from the traditional agrarian pattern to the multifunctional development pattern. The management of human resources slowly improves, the efficient use of the available labour being still deficient.

• *Macroregions with balanced employment* (macroregions one and three) with equal shares of people with agricultural and non-agricultural employment. In the period 2002–2007, the extraction rate of labour from the primary to the secondary and tertiary sector followed a constant trend, the share of the population employed in agriculture decreasing by 1.74% and 2.24% respectively per year. The rural area of the two macroregions evolving from the traditional agrarian patterns seem to *have adopted the multifunctional development pattern, the occupational structure evolving from the traditional agrarian pattern to a balanced diversified pattern.* The steady rate by which the employed population is transferred from agriculture to the non-agricultural sectors enables us to state that the regional management of human resources begins to improve, which leads to a *better utilization of the available labour force.*

Evolution of rural professional structures

The concentration of rural activities in the primary sector is associated to a specific socio-professional structure. While over 90% of the persons employed in the urban areas are wage earners, the self-employed or unpaid family workers prevail in the rural areas (these represented 63.3% of the rural employed population in the year 2007). Overall, those occupational status forms that are characteristic to the traditional agrarian economy, where the household members carry out the agricultural works on the rural household, dominate the structure of the employed population in rural Romania. Most self-employed workers and unpaid family workers are working in the agricultural sector. The main problem related to this professional structure is the fact that the persons with this professional status are self-excluded from the social protection system either by contributing with modest amounts (the self-employed) or by not contributing at all to the social security schemes (unpaid family workers). Although a diminution trend in the importance of the low occupational status structures is manifested (self-employed, unpaid workers), the rate of this process is slow, their cumulated share declining by only 0.7% on the average per year in the period 2002–2007.

In the predominantly agricultural macro-regions (two and four), the self-employed and the unpaid family workers account for about 70% of the employed population. There is a direct correlation between the two phenomena (Chircă C. and Teșliuc E. 1999, p.14). Thus, in the rural areas from the latter macro-regions, the socio-professional structure is either rigid, either their evolution to the modernization has a slow rate, the shares of employees being reduced and/or have low growth rates in the period 2002–2007.

The macro-regions that have already adopted the multifunctional development pattern (one and three) have a special situation from the professional structure perspective, which is much closer to urbanity by the high and increasing shares of employees (wage-earners) in total employed population.

The macroregional analysis in relation to the rural professional structure provides a series of indices referring to the rural populations' adopting the *contractual economy patterns in the work relations* as a relative reflection of potential available labour so as to get involved in the formal agreements on the labour market.

Thus, the higher the share of unpaid family workers in the professional structure, the higher *the availability of increasing occupational mobility* and the higher the opportunities to find labour force for the new economic objectives. At the same time, a low share of employees requires immediate corrective interventions in order to stimulate the local business environment to create jobs, so that the dependence upon the agriculture with low and unreliable incomes diminishes.

Table 3

Structure of employed population in the rural area by professional status, by statistical macro-regions

	Employees		Employers		Self-employed		Unpaid family workers		Members of agricultural association or cooperative	
	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²	2002 ¹	2007 ²
Romania	32.0	35.9	0.7	0.7	37.8	37.0	29.0	26.3	0.5	Na
Macroregion 1	39.9	47.1	1.1	1.1	33.9	31.4	25.0	20.3	0.1	Na
Macroregion 2	25.1	25.1	0.7	0.6	40.1	41.7	33.3	32.5	0.8	Na
Macroregion 3	37.8	45.0	0.9	0.8	36.4	36.6	24.8	17.6	0.2	Na
Macroregion 4	30.5	33.8	0.6	0.7	39.5	34.7	29.3	30.8	0.1	Na

n.a. – non-applicable

Source: ¹) NIS (2003) Agricultural labour force survey (AMIGO) in the year 2002, AMIGO, 2002;

²) NIS (2008) Labour Force in Romania. Employment and Unemployment in the year 2007.

According to this criterion, the four macroregions of Romania can be grouped into three categories:

- *Macroregions with weakly formalized professional structures and with conservation tendencies* (macroregion two) for which the share of employees was maintained at 25.1% in the period 2002–2007. In the same period, the share of employers declined, which reveals that the business development initiatives in these areas are subject to significant economic risks resulting in bankruptcy and furthermore, at rural area level there is an obvious trend of non-assuming the risks involved by new business initiation. Although the macroregion is characterized by significant available labour that can be mobilized from the rural household to off-farm employment, support measures for business development are required, so as to develop the multifunctional development model.

• *Macroregions with weakly formalized professional structures, yet with improvement tendencies* (macroregion four) for which the share of employees increased from 30.5% to 33.8% in the period 2002–2007. This macroregion also has significant available labour force, which can be attracted into economic activities on the basis of contractual relations on the labour market, the share of unpaid family workers representing 30.8% of total employed population in the year 2007. The tolerance to assuming the risk of new business initiation is higher in the rural population from this macroregion, the share of employers increasing from 0.6% to 0.7% in the investigated period.

• *Macroregions with medium formalized professional structures and accelerating trends of relations formalization on the labour market* (macroregions one and three) for which the share of employees increased by 7.2% in the period 2002–2007, representing almost half of the employed population by the end of the period. This evolution can be explained by the economic growth acceleration due to larger investment flows attracted into these areas, which led to an additional demand of paid labour, in the rural areas inclusively⁵. This accelerated increasing mobility is thus the direct result of adopting the multifunctional development pattern that led to the improvement of the living standard for the rural people, by their becoming no longer dependent on agriculture that yields low incomes. There is still available labour in these regions that can be integrated into contractual relations on the labour market, yet the size of this available labour is lower.

3.2. Agro-regional disparities in assuming the multifunctional development patterns

The comparative analysis of the human capital characteristics in the territory reveals the existence of significant disparities between the rural localities from Romania, located in the three geographical areas. Thus, the premises of rural area multifunctionality assumption are also different. Thus, the *populations in the plain areas* feature the highest demographic ageing, are less educated and have the lowest demographic regeneration opportunities. The communes from this geographic area are subject to the highest depopulation risk, and strong intervention is needed to attract and set up the young people in this area. Although the occupation level of the population of working age has the highest value, the occupational structure in the plain communes is dominated by the primary sector, the tertiary sector being represented by the people employed in the public services (local administration, retail, education, health) and not in productive services. The occupational mobility is quite limited, revealing a more conservative attitude. The tendency to non-assuming the risk is obvious by the fact that only 5.8% of households declared that

⁵ Tudor, M. & Balint, B. (2006) *Off-farm Employment and Agricultural Sales: Evidence from Romania*, Post-Communist Economies, Vol. 18, No. 2, June 2006, pp. 246.

they intend to develop a non-agricultural business, as they did not manage to identify the economic niches (the type of business) in which they could be successful by such an approach. As a result, the rural area transformation into a functional area in the plain zones requires concerted measures for the change of rural population's mentality and attitude in particular.

At the level of communes from the hill and mountain zones, the premises for assuming the rural area multifunctionality by the population seem to be more favourable compared to the population from the plain zone. Benefiting from a better educated human capital (the average number of schooling years corresponds to graduating an arts and crafts school that provides a solid base of technical specialty knowledge), these communes are already on the path of multifunctional development, the importance of the primary sector in labour employment being much lower. In these areas it is necessary to stimulate and encourage private initiative development as more than 40% of the population of working age has no occupation. The lack of job supply at local level, accompanied by the increased occupational mobility, can result in the risk of depopulation in these areas, as the labour force would prefer to migrate, also definitively, in search for better living and working conditions. This risk is high in the case of the communes from the hills, where about one quarter of households have members who left the locality to find a job. As the intention to invest in non-agricultural business appears only in 5.6% of the households from the hilly region, we can estimate that those involved in the occupational migration will not find sufficient jobs at local level in the future as well, which can determine them to definitively migrate from these communes.

Table 4

The characteristics of the human capital as premises for assuming the rural area multifunctionality at agro-regional level

Main characteristics of the human capital	Geographic area		
	Plain	Hill	Mountain
Average age (years)	41.25	39.73	38.91
% of households with dependent children under 15 years	34.00	41.00	39.33
Population ageing index (%)	1.67	1.34	1.12
Average number of schooling years	8.24	9.08	9.12
Employment level of population of working age	62.54	59.26	53.43
Occupational structure			
– primary sector (%)	34.89	16.14	13.32
– secondary sector (%)	30.22	41.00	42.37
– tertiary sector (%)	34.89	42.86	44.31
Labour renewal index	0.77	0.81	1.08
% of households with members who left the locality for work	15.60	23.50	18.00
% of households intending to develop a non-agricultural business	5.8	5.6	7.0

Source: own processing of data collected during the field survey conducted by IAE in 2007.

The most favourable premises for assuming the rural area multifunctionality are found in the case of communes from the mountain areas. Multifunctionality is not a new concept in the case of these communes; owing to the diversity of the available natural resources (pastures, forests, landscape) these communes have already adopted a multifunctional development pattern. Benefiting from a younger population and renewable and better-educated labour force, these communes have real opportunities to fructify the benefits that multifunctionality is currently promoting. This is proved by the fact that 7% of households intend to develop a non-agricultural business in the near future.

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