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ASPECTS REGARDING THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA DEVELOPMENT AFTER THE ACCESSION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

ABSTRACT

Romania became a member state of the European Union on January 1, 2007, and this involved compliance with the EU norms and standards, as well as the need to include certain national priorities subscribed to the national needs, given the significant economic development deficit compared to the Western and Central European countries. The Romanian rural residents, perhaps even more than those in urban areas, have put much hope in the European integration, especially after the “Agriculture and Rural Development” chapter was intensely debated in the pre-accession period. However, after seven years, the Romanian rural areas seem as developed or underdeveloped. The national agricultural policies were often inconsistent, the European funds have been poor, and rural development can be seen only here and there on the large farms or under the form of small and timid initiatives. *This research aims* to present the results of a rural area diagnosis conducted in the period 2007 - 2013, given a series of economic and social indicators, which reflect the development level of the Romanian countryside. *The main source of information* is the National Institute of Statistics of Romania for the data to be processed, and the national and international literature for the fundamental research. *As research methods*, we used bibliographic syntheses, statistical and mathematical processing and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative phenomena. The development / underdevelopment of the Romanian rural area after joining the European Union will be presented in the 2007-2013 timeframe, taking into account indicators such as: rural area and its distribution by agricultural and non-agricultural utilization categories; rural population in terms of structure, employment, educational level, life expectancy and so on; revenues and expenditures of the rural population; GDP / capita.

Key words: rural development, Romanian rural areas, EU integration.

JEL Classification: Q01, Q18, Q56, O13, O21, O44.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses an issue extensively discussed in national and international scientific circles, and yet, insufficiently known - that of **rural areas** and their complexity. Currently, the Romanian rural area should be approached on at least three integrated levels, namely: economic, social and environmental. The Romanian rural development should be reconsidered in view of the three basic pillars for the modern civilization: economic, social (including education and

culture) and environment. One will have to accept the fact that agriculture cannot be considered competitive and development cannot be sustainable unless all factors are taken into account, i.e. technical, economic, environmental and social. Including the environmental component with the same power with the economic and social pillars, this should represent the driving engine of growth and not an obstacle to reaching a living standard comparable to the developed countries of Western Europe.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

In a general sense, *the Romanian rural area* is an area with a wide variety of physical characteristics (in terms of relief, soil and subsoil, infrastructure, etc.), economic characteristics (population, living standard, resources, production, efficiency, etc.), social characteristics (inclusion, cohesion, health status, level of education, poverty, etc.) and environmental characteristics (pollution degree, water, air and soil quality, etc.) (Chiritescu, 2013).

Caught in an economy system with deep structural changes, the rural communities are the space of Romanian institutional uncertainties, risks and social crisis. The adaptation responses of these communities to a system under full evolution are found in the empirically manifested functional emergence, in different spatial and economic contexts. Especially in the transition period in Romania, while amplifying the phenomenon of underdevelopment of rural communities, there was a process of widening disparities at local and regional level. The economic and social gaps are, on one hand, the result of their different endowment in natural and human resources; on the other hand, they result from the specific economic, social, demographic and cultural evolution directions (Gavrilescu, Florian, 2007).

The rural world is a very large and complex reality, being addressed in its various aspects by many research institutions and by numerous researchers. The terminology used to describe the countryside is extremely rich, but *sustainable rural development* remains a challenge and a priority at national and European level. In the developed countries, the economic development strategies in rural areas aimed at reshaping rural economies in the context of agricultural restructuring and economic and social changes associated with it. This change first requires a bottom-up development strategy, involving local resources and rural communities. As a result, partnerships and collective participation are now the watchwords in the rural development discourse. The current rural development philosophy highlights the importance of all the local stakeholders' participation in this long-lasting process with implications at all levels (economic, environmental, social, etc.). This approach has brought some positive changes in the process of sustainable rural development, with a focus on rural communities (Chiritescu, 2013).

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The basic research conducted for the preparation of this article had as main documentation source the national and international specialized literature and previous studies and research on this theme. The applied research primarily focused on the official statistical data processing for the timeframe 2007-2013, taking into account indicators such as: rural area and its distribution by use of agricultural and non-agricultural land; rural population in terms of structure, employment, level of education, life expectancy and so on; revenue and expenditure of the rural population; GDP/capita.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Romanian rural area importance could not and cannot be challenged by anyone, given the fact that it represents over 87% of the country, where about 50% of the country's population is living. Furthermore, more than 56% of the 27 European Union member states live in rural areas, which cover 91% of the European territory. This makes the *rural development policy* an area of vital importance. Animal husbandry and forestry remain of utmost importance for the land use and natural resource management in the rural areas of the European Union, at the same time representing a platform for the economic diversification in the rural communities. Therefore, strengthening the rural development has become a priority for the EU, which already has an active rural development policy, which is a must in reaching the valuable goals for the rural areas and for those who live and work there (MARD, NRDP, 2008; European Commission, 2005, 2006).

The results following the processing of several statistical indicators reflected a fluctuating evolution of the economic and social situation of the Romanian rural area, with an underdevelopment tendency. In the period 1990-2000, a series of bad decisions were taken at government level, which had multiple effects on agriculture in general, generating losses reflected in the decrease of the contribution of agriculture to GDP.

Analyzing *the evolution of the farmland indicator*, we can notice a diminution of its share in total land area on the average, by 0.07% per year. The distribution of land resources by categories of use remained relatively uniform, arable land prevailing with over 64% of the agricultural area. As regards the agricultural land ownership, private ownership prevails (67.31% in 2007 and 68.63% in 2013) (Table 1).

Table 1
Evolution of agricultural area

Land resources	U.M.	Reference years						
		2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total	ha	23839071	23839071	23839071	23839071	23839071	23839071	23839071
Agricultural	ha	14709299	14702279	14684963	14634436	14621427	14615057	14611883
	%	61.70	61.67	61.60	61.39	61.33	61.31	61.29
Arable	ha	9423255	9415135	9422529	9404008	9379489	9392262	9389254
	%	64.06	64.04	64.16	64.26	64.15	64.26	64.26

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, www.insse.ro.

The importance for Romania's rural areas can be highlighted by looking at how to maintain the numerical stability of the *rural population* over the last 80 years, although its share in total population declined steadily (from 78.6 % in 1930 to 45.1% in 2013 – Table 2). The year 1985 is worth mentioning, when Romania had an equal share (50%) of rural and urban population. After 1985, the evolution of the rural population's share was very low and uniform, with variations ranging from -0.9% to +0.7% (Table 2).

Table 2
Romanian population by residence areas

Year	Number of inhabitants			%	
	Total	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
1930	14,280,728	3,051,253	11,229,476	21.4	78.6
1948	15,872,624	3,713,139	12,159,485	23.4	76.6
1956	17,489,450	5,474,264	12,015,186	31.3	68.7
1960	18,403,414	5,912,011	12,491,403	32.1	67.9
1965	19,027,367	6,417,124	12,610,243	33.7	66.3
1970	20,252,541	7,464,811	12,787,730	36.9	63.1
1975	21,245,103	8,339,229	12,905,874	39.3	60.7
1980	22,201,387	10,171,618	12,029,769	45.8	54.2
1985	22,724,836	11,370,092	11,354,744	50.0	50.0
1989	23,151,564	12,311,803	10,839,761	53.2	46.8
1990	23,206,720	12,608,844	10,597,876	54.3	45.7
1995	22,680,951	12,457,195	10,223,756	54.9	45.1
2000	22,435,205	12,244,598	10,190,607	54.6	45.4
2007	21,537,563	11,877,659	9,659,904	55.1	44.9
2008	21,504,442	11,835,328	9,669,114	55.0	45.0
2009	21,469,959	11,823,516	9,646,443	55.1	44.9
2010	21,462,186	11,818,670	9,643,516	55.1	44.9
2011	21,413,815	11,778,195	9,635,620	55.0	45.0
2012	21,355,849	11,737,460	9,618,389	55.0	45.0
2013	21,305,097	11,681,500	9,623,597	54.9	45.1

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the NIS, Romania, www.insse.ro.

As regards *the distribution of the rural population* (Table 3), a diminution in the number of active and employed population was noticed throughout the years, which is comparable to that at national level. It is perhaps surprisingly that the

unemployment rate, although increased from one year to another, had values below the national level (6.4% in 2007 and 7.3% in 2013).

Table 3
Distribution of rural population

Distribution of population	U.M.	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Active population	th persons	4500	4473	4449	4427	4305	4411	4425
Inactive population	th persons	5188	5219	5239	5246	5357	5243	5218
Employed population	th persons	4281	4268	4211	4208	4066	4185	4189
Unemployed	th persons	219	205	238	219	239	226	236
Activity rate (15-64 years)	%	65.1	64.5	64.6	64.4	62.6	64.2	64.4
Employment rate (15-64 years)	%	61.5	61.2	60.7	60.9	58.8	60.7	60.7
Unemployment rate	%	4.9	4.6	5.4	5.0	5.5	5.1	5.3

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the NIS, Romania, www.insse.ro.

Educational infrastructure in the rural areas (Table 4) is poor at all levels, being almost absent in secondary and higher education. The number of schools has declined at all levels, not always justified by the decreasing number of children / young population, and the decisions have often been taken only out of economic reasons.

Table 4
Education units in the rural areas

Levels of education	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<i>Total – national</i>	8230	8221	8244	7588	7204	7069
<i>Total – rural</i>	3754	3748	3793	3420	3200	3189
Rural – %	45,61	45,60	46,01	45,07	44,42	45,11
Preschool education	210	206	208	130	102	91
Pre-university	3543	3541	3584	3289	3097	3097
Primary education	17	18	18	29	33	39
Secondary education	3268	3261	3180	2946	2775	2783
High school	169	170	310	313	286	271
Vocational education	89	92	76	1	1	2
Post high school education	:	:	:	:	2	2
Higher education	1	1	1	1	1	1

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the NIS, Romania, www.insse.ro.

We can also find discrepancies to the detriment of rural areas if we take into consideration *the population's incomes and expenditures*. In general, the average income per capita is lower in the rural areas compared to the urban areas, both in Romania and in most EU member states. A similar situation to the detriment of rural areas can be noticed in terms of total household incomes.

The main category of incomes, both at individual and at household level in Romania, is represented by the gross income from wages and other earnings, exceeding 50% of total revenues (Table 5). *The revenues from agricultural activities* are extremely low (3.7%), while a high share of incomes (over 20%) comes from social security benefits (social benefits, allowances, allocations, etc.).

The share of total consumption expenditures on households in Romania is the following: agri-food products and soft drinks = 40.9%; alcoholic beverages and tobacco = 7.1%; clothing and footwear = 6.0%; housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels = 15.8%; furniture, household equipment and maintenance = 4.6%; health = 4.5%; transport = 5.8%; communication = 5.1%; recreation and culture = 4.4%; education = 0.9%; hotels, cafes and restaurants = 1.3%; various goods and services = 3.6%. (www.insse.ro)

According to the National Institute of Statistics, the minimum monthly food basket of a Romanian person would be composed of the following foodstuffs: 28.9 kg bread, 2.5 kg pork, beef 1 kg, 2.5 kg chicken, 2 kg cheese, 3.5 kg potatoes, beans 2.1 kg, 1.6 kg carrots, onions 2.5 kg, 6 liters of milk, 3.5 kg apples and 13 eggs. (www.insse.ro)

The Gross Domestic Product (Table 6) generally increased, yet the problems emerged from the economic growth levels, diminution of the population's purchasing power, GDP/capita diminution, etc. Based on GDP, the economic growth can be measured by calculating an index under the form: $IGDP = \text{GDP current year} / \text{GDP previous year} \times 100$. In the year 2009, Romania had the lowest GDP/capita, adjusted with the purchasing power in the EU, i.e. \$ 11,869, while Bulgaria had \$ 11,883 (according to the newspaper Romania Libera, www.romanialibera.ro).

Table 5
Distribution of incomes and expenditures

Income and expenses	Average monthly gross salary (RON/employee)		Total monthly household incomes (RON/person)	Total cash incomes (%), out of which:				
	Total Economy	Agricultural sector		Gross and assimilated wages	Incomes from agriculture	Incomes from non-agricultural activities	Incomes from social security benefits	Incomes from property
Incomes	1,845	1,350	797.26	50.9	2.5	2.8	24.2	0.2
Expenses	Total monthly expenses per household (RON/person)	Household category						
		Employees	Farmers	Unemployed	Retired people			
Total (RON/person)	647.44	790.72	477.71	451.87	644.55			
Food and beverages (%)	21.7	20.9	17.3	26.9	23.2			
Non-food commodities (%)	22.4	22.0	18.3	21.8	24.0			
Services (%)	16.9	19.1	8.4	21.5	16.4			
Investments (%)	1.8	1.0	2.2	0.2	1.3			
Production (%)	1.7	0.5	5.0	0.1	2.6			
Taxes and fees (%)	13.3	23.7	1.9	10.0	6.0			

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the NIS, Romania, www.insse.ro.

Table 6
GDP evolution

Gross Domestic Product (in current prices)	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
GDP value (million RON)	416006.8	514700	501139.4	523693.3	557348.2	586749.9	628581.3
GDP index	-	123.72	97.36	104,50	106.43	105.27	107.12

Source: own processing based on the data provided by the NIS, Romania, www.insse.ro.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian rural development should be reconsidered having in view the three main pillars of the contemporary civilization: economic, social (including education and culture) and environment. One must accept the fact that agriculture cannot be considered competitive and development cannot be sustainable unless all the factors are taken into account, i.e. technical, economic, environmental and social factors. Including the environmental component with the same power with the economic and social pillars, this should represent the driving engine of growth and not an obstacle to reaching a living standard comparable to the developed countries of Western Europe.

Many experts and researchers (Chiritescu, 2013; Otiman, 2011; OECD, 2006; Nemes G., 2005; and others) suggest that *a new model of rural development* is necessary, which will have to be followed by a change of paradigm in the economic development.

The new rural development paradigm will have to be based on the integrated rural development concept, taking into account all the values in the rural areas and the different modalities to reconfigure and exploit them as resources for sustainable rural development. At the beginning of the third millennium, in rural Romania, the population and labour mobility, education and research, the rational use of resources, the modernization of agriculture and rural communities, the cultural heritage and environment protection, as well as a more efficient administration, etc. should become permanent subject in focus for all local actors (authorities, residents, businesses, NGOs, associations).

After 24 years of transition to democracy in Romania and 7 years after joining the European Union, the Romanian rural communities seem to be in a continuous transition in terms of sustainable economic development. Integrating the economic, social and environmental sectors in the sustainable development program and policies of the Romanian rural communities can represent a consistent and apparently complete development model; yet what seems simple when presented in theory (methodology) is quite difficult to apply in practice. The years that have passed since the collapse of communism meant for the Romanian rural

areas in general and the Romanian agriculture, in particular, a time of radical change, with more or less positive effects. In all these years, there have been a permanent need to identify new strategic directions based on agricultural and rural development policies as well as to design sustainable rural development strategies. (Chiritescu, 2013)

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper has been financially supported within the project entitled “*Horizon 2020 – Doctoral and Postdoctoral Studies: Promoting the National Interest through Excellence, Competitiveness and Responsibility in the Field of Romanian Fundamental and Applied Scientific Research*”, contract number POSDRU/159/1.5/S/140106. This project is co-financed by the European Social Fund through the Sectoral Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007-2013. **Investing in people!**

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