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RURAL LIBRARIES, EVOLUTIONS AND DYNAMICS IN REGIONAL PROFILE

ABSTRACT

The sustainable development perspective of the rural society imposes, undoubtedly, the condition of the presence of a minimum stock of knowledge available for the local human capital from the perspective of personal improvement of knowledge and mental and spiritual abilities, but also of the motivation to increase the communication and cooperation capacity at community level. For this purpose, we shall try to analyze the public cultural supply across regions and the dynamics of the demand for information of the consumers of written culture, the meeting of self-training needs in the Romanian rural area in the last quarter of the century, and to see whether the premises of social sustainability necessity and sufficiency are met.

Key words: sustainable development, human capital, social sustainability.

JEL Classification: O15,O18, P46.

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking about the evolution and structural changes produced at social and educational level after 1989, one cannot ignore the role of libraries in the educational process of the population. The major structural changes generated by the permanent adaptation to the national and international economy rigours, corroborated with the technological development, have had a negative effect on the education system provided by means of libraries. The effect of such modifications has also materialized into the diminution of the socialization level provided by libraries. For the young generation, the access to information sources via internet or books in digital format have narrowed the social interaction, while the isolation tendency and the lack of real communication have had a negative effect on overall development. In the context of these considerations, the current approach intends to make a diagnosis of changes produced in the cultural offer of the period 1990–2016.

2. STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Seen in the context of the contribution to personal training, the problem of changes in the structure of the cultural offer represented by libraries has been the subject of numerous debates on library role over time, on the one hand, and on the explosion of alternative information sources offered on the market, on the other hand. At least recently, young people seem to have lost interest in books under physical form, as these prefer to use modern means, like books under digital format. Without minimizing the importance of technology in the educational activity and in the social life, the library should be seen as a space dedicated to social cohesion, transformed into a meeting place for people, as well as in a necessary center for community development. In this context, experts consider that the public library has a particular social role in the community, and the services provided by this focus on fulfilling this role (Erich, 2015).

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Starting from the above-mentioned considerations, in order to capture the main changes produced in the public cultural offer, the present approach is based on the public information related to the period 1990–2016 (limits modified in accordance with data availability), provided through the national system of statistics, i.e. the database of the National Institute of Statistics – Tempo-Online. Presented mainly under table form, the primary data were processed using consecrated statistical methods of comparison and structural type.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Throughout the period 1990–2016, the total number of libraries declined significantly by 41%, with significant oscillations across regions. As against the national average, it is worth noting that the number of libraries had a divergent trend, this increasing by 18.1% in the region Bucharest-Ilfov, while the region West lies at the opposite pole, with a decline in the number of libraries that exceeded the national average by 13 % (Table 1).

This involution can be also noticed, yet to a lower extent, in relation to the number of communal libraries. Thus, while in the year 1990 the total number of libraries was 2620, in the year 2017 there were only 2007 libraries. It is interesting that in the region Bucharest–Ilfov, the number of communal libraries increased from only 2 in 1990 to 11 in the year 2016, quite an opposite situation compared to all the other regions, where the diminution percentage ranged from –9.1% (region

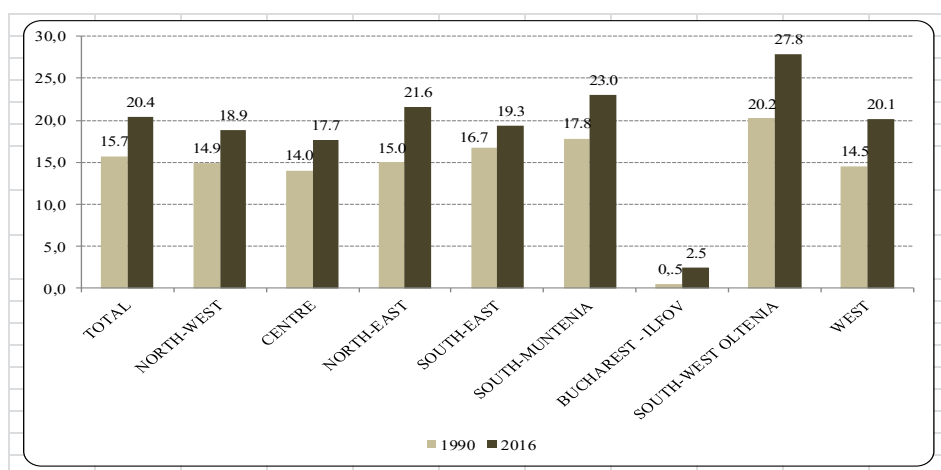
North-East) to –36.3% (region West). Under the background of the decline in number of all categories of libraries, the share of communal libraries increased by about 5% in the year 2016, i.e. from 15.7% (1990) to 20.4% (2016) (Fig. 1).

Table 1

Evolution of the number of libraries at national level, by regions, in the period 1990–2016

	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)
Total	16665	9832	–41.0
North-West	2563	1432	–44.1
Centre	2351	1229	–47.7
North-East	3092	1949	–37.0
South-East	1938	1184	–38.9
South-Muntenia	2685	1634	–39.1
Bucharest – Ilfov	376	444	18.1
South-West Oltenia	1900	1150	–39.5
West	1760	810	–54.0

Source: Tempo-Online database, NIS, 2018.



Source: Calculations based on Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of communal libraries in total libraries (in percentage) in the period 1990–2016 (%)

Yet the decrease in the number of libraries did not result in a drastic decrease of the available book fund. Thus, the number of books increased by 6.2 % nationwide, due to the specific weight of the region Bucharest–Ilfov, as well as of the region South-West Oltenia, where the number of books significantly increased. Unlike the total book fund, the book fund of communal libraries experienced an overall decrease by 21.4%, which was a noticeable trend in all regions, except for the region Bucharest–Ilfov (Table 2).

Table 2

Evolution of the number of books in libraries, per total and in communal libraries,
in the period 1990–2016

	Total books in libraries			Total books in communal libraries		
	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)
Total	154851955	164475096	6.2	23043245	18101212	-21.4
North-West	27424886	22994158	-16.2	3543226	2508070	-29.2
Centre	19998479	19416894	-2.9	3206979	2151375	-32.9
North-East	28619048	26244350	-8.3	4780707	4166158	-12.9
South-East	15825420	15183281	-4.1	2636553	2012546	-23.7
South-Muntenia	17304669	17151296	-0.9	3717888	3440028	-7.5
Bucharest – Ilfov	16696931	36107397	116.3	24274	70842	191.8
South-West Oltenia	13479434	13891224	3.1	3026773	2505474	-17.2
West	15503088	13486496	-13.0	2106845	1246719	-40.8

Source: Calculations based on Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

The alternatives to traditional libraries resulted in the dramatic decrease of the number of readers both per total libraries and at the level of communal libraries. Thus, overall, the number of active readers diminished from -30% (Bucharest–Ilfov region) to -50.8% (Vest region), entailing a total decline of 41.5%.

The number of active readers in the communal libraries decreased by 25%, by 16.5 % under the national average; this trend was mainly attenuated by the regions Bucharest–Ilfov and South-West Oltenia. It is worth noting that the number of active readers in communal libraries in the region Bucharest–Ilfov significantly increased in 2016 compared to 1990, i.e. more than 4 times (Table 3).

Table 3

Evolution of the number of active readers in libraries, per total and in communal libraries, in the period 1990–2016

	Total readers in libraries			Total readers in communal libraries		
	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)
Total	5871325	3432770	-41.5	743615	557689	-25.0
North-West	842680	460141	-45.4	101920	59228	-41.9
Centre	754335	411896	-45.4	87527	42272	-51.7
North-East	1039415	636949	-38.7	160540	138161	-13.9
South-East	738125	391071	-47.0	87499	61333	-29.9

Table 3 (continued)

South-Muntenia	798790	491778	-38.4	143725	124545	-13.3
Bucharest-Ilfov	454799	318274	-30.0	622	3188	412.5
South-West Oltenia	659557	435232	-34.0	95581	100228	4.9
West	583624	287429	-50.8	66201	28734	-56.6

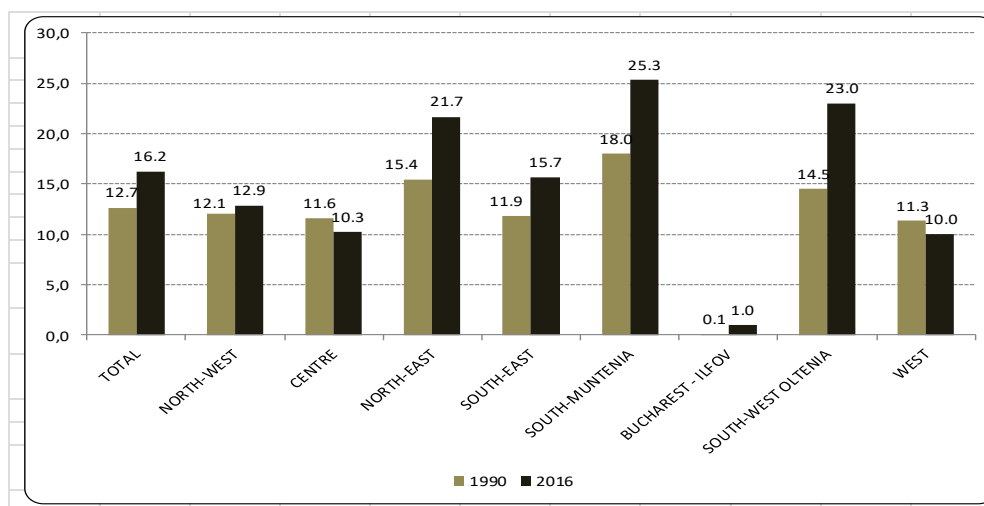
Source: Calculations based on Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

The number of readers from communal libraries followed an upward trend as share in total number of readers, both per total and in six out of the eight development regions. Thus, in the following regions the increase in share of the number of readers in the rural area in total was above the national average of 3.6%: South-West Oltenia (+8.5%), South-Muntenia (+7.3%) and North-East (6.2%).

An explanation for this phenomenon lies in the fact that these regions encompass a group of counties where the poor counties have quite a high share. Thus, the region North-East is known as the poorest region from Romania.

In the region South-Muntenia, 4 out of the 7 counties are located in the plain area, with counties characterized by the existence of only one relief unit (the plain) and mainly oriented towards mono-activities, mainly in the farming sector.

Even though the investments in expanding the technological infrastructure have an upward trend in these areas as well, the high poverty level which adds to the deterioration of demographic indicators and in certain cases to the reluctance to novelty have attenuated the decline of the educational offer and demand represented in this context by the number of libraries and readers (Fig. 2).



Source: Calculations on the basis of Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

Figure 2. Evolution of the share of readers in communal libraries in total readers in libraries at national level, in the period 1990–2016 (%)

The involutions of the number of readers also impacted the number of books released from libraries to readers. Thus, throughout the period 1990–2016, the total number of books released from libraries decreased by about 37 %, while at the level of communal libraries the decline was almost double compared to the national average. The same trend, noticed in the number of active readers, has been also noticed in the case of books released to readers from communal libraries: the number of books released from communal libraries increased in the regions with poor rural areas (e.g. North-East, South-Muntenia, South-West Oltenia).

As in the other cases, the exception to the rule is the region Bucharest–Ilfov, where the number of books released from communal libraries increased by 165.8% in 2016 as compared to 1990 (Table 4).

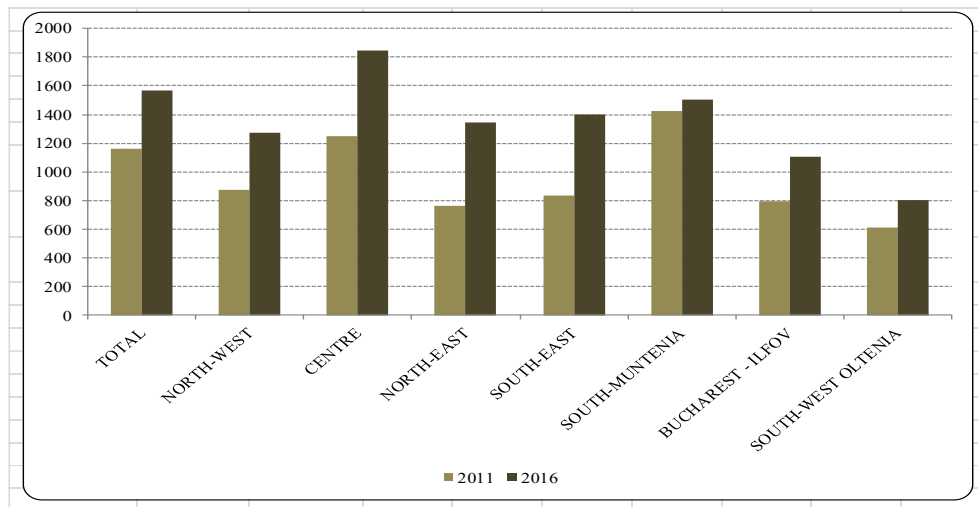
Table 4

Evolution of the number of books released from libraries, communal libraries inclusively, in the period 1990–2016 (number)

	Total			Communal		
	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)	1990	2016	2016/1990 (%)
Total	60629275	38239554	-36.9	5709587	820761	-85.6
North-West	8836222	5876791	-33.5	677921	531305	-21.6
Centre	7257403	4224654	-41.8	710217	289456	-59.2
North-East	12189807	8446829	-30.7	1388725	1578297	13.7
South-East	7314956	4244133	-42.0	709662	640667	-9.7
South-Muntenia	7387967	5011002	-32.2	1014023	1074967	6.0
Bucharest – Ilfov	5594571	3626272	-35.2	5583	14838	165.8
South-West Oltenia	5674802	3897839	-31.3	675543	831107	23.0
West	6373547	2912034	-54.3	527913	166057	-68.5

Source: Calculations on the basis of Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

As regards the library staff, we must specify that the public information covers only the period 2011–2016, which is characterized by the increase of the number of library employees from 1163 persons (2011) to 1569 persons (2016), i.e. by about 35%, a noticeable trend in all regions, with oscillations across regions ranging from +5.3% (Bucharest–Ilfov) to +75.7% (South-East region) (Fig 3).



Source: Calculations on the basis of Tempo-Online data, NIS, 2018.

Figure 3. Evolution of library staff in the period 2011–2016 (no.)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The current structure of libraries from Romania does not qualify them, without proper support from authorities, to cope with the challenges in this field. According to expert Regneală, the contemporary public library has to provide readers with updated cultural and information documents, in different formats, organized in such a way so as to facilitate a fast access to them.

In this context, libraries must be connected to the national and international information networks, have professional staff and computerized programs complying with international standards.

State intervention will need to support the creation of an efficient library network that guarantees the best basic information services for the rural population, intervention motivated in fact by the library mission, comparable to that of the educational system.

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