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THE GEO-DEMOGRAPHIC DIMENSION OF ROMANIAN RURAL SPACE

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ABSTRACT. Knowing, researching into and developing the rural space are activities of utmost importance for a country, both by the dimension of the rural space, expressed by the surface as such, and by the dimension of the demographic component (of the rural population). Referring to Romanian rural space, this is dominant, representing almost 94% of Romania's total surface (93.7%). In what concerns the demographic component (population), as it is known, this confers a particular dynamics to the rural space, generating a series of quantitative and qualitative aspects. At present the share of the rural population reaches 47% out of the total of Romania's population. Generally speaking, we can assert that the village and generally the Romanian village remains further on the main propeller of life. Thus the share of the rural population, besides the whole range of socio-demographic indicators, which can outline the degree of stability or instability of the rural space, as well as other basic indicators, such as the share of the rural population occupied in productive activities, socio-cultural services, tourism activities, etc., enhance the importance of the rural life from one country or another, reason for which the development of the rural space remains a problem of a national and international level. Consequently, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has raised the issue of the rural space at the level of European and Community policy.

KEY WORDS: Romania, rural space, rural population, dynamics of population, demographic structures.

INTRODUCTION

The development of the rural space for the nowadays society represents a priority issue, particularly in the conditions in which we assist at a pronounced pressure and expansion at the same time, of the urban over the rural, but also to forced industrialization which is made most of the times, to the detriment of

the rural space (Otiman, 1997). In these conditions, on the background of the tendency of modernization of the rural life, one must find those opportunities that are best suited in view of conserving the rural space, both in an economic, socio-cultural as well as ecologic field. In this context, an important role is played by the demographic component (the rural population), as a dynamic element, with multiple aspects, both quantitative and qualitative (Szymańska, Biegańska, Gil, 2009). This component is the one determining the intensifying or diminishing of certain evolutions, and also of the modelling or structuring the rural space. The rural population can be thus analysed through its number and evolution, respectively of the birth rate and mortality indices, etc., of the structures and last but not least, of its mobility.

THE DIMENSION OF ROMANIAN RURAL SPACE

In the administrative organization of Romania's territory, the experience of the historical past was used and there were taken into account the actual and future requirements of the country's development (Bold, Buciuman, Drăghici, 2003). In its present form, the administrative-territorial organization of Romania dates back to the year 1968 and comprises the following administrative units: the district, town and the commune. The communes are made of one or more villages and small villages.

The most recent changes in the administrative-territorial organization of Romania took place in 2007, in which the territory of Romania comprised 42 districts, Bucharest included, 320 towns and municipalities, 2,856 communes with 12,955 villages. At the level of the 42 districts, inclusively Bucharest, there were organized in 8 regions of development, representing the framework of implementation and evaluation of regional development policies.

According to the European Union standards regarding the Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units (NUTS), Romania's 8 regions of development fall within NUTS 2, the level NUTS 3 is materialized by means of the 42 districts, to which one can add the municipality of Bucharest, while the level NUTS 4, i.e., the one corresponding to the micro-regions was not, as yet, organized at the level of Romania. The level NUTS 5 corresponds with the 320 municipalities and towns, respectively the 2,856 communes with 12,955 villages (Fig. 1).

The 12,955 villages are concentrated on a surface of approximately 223.3 thousand km², which represents around 93.7% of Romania's surface, resulting that the Romanian rural space is predominant. On this territory a number of 9,659,904 inhabitants lived at the end of 2007, representing 44.9% of the total population, while the urban population represented 55.1%. Relating the rural space surface to



Fig. 1. Romania. Map of territorial administrative organization
 Explanation: A – region development border, B – county border, C – commune border
 Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data from ESRI Romania (<http://www.esriro.ro/>), <http://earth.unibuc.ro>

the 9,659,904 inhabitants in the rural environment, there results a density of the rural population of 43.3 inhabitants/km², i.e., less than half of the average value of Romania's density (90.3 inhabitants/km²).

Table 1. The distribution of the population on the two environments (urban-rural) at the level of some former communist states, nowadays EU members (2007)

Country	A	B	C
Bulgaria	7.6	71	29
The Czech Republic	10.4	74	26
Poland	38.1	61	39
Romania	21.5	55	45
Slovakia	5.4	56	44
Hungary	10.0	66	34

Explanation: A – total population (in million); B – percentage of urban population (%); C – percentage of rural population (%)

Source: World Population Data Sheet 2008

Compared with some East-European former communist states, at present EU members, only Romania and Slovakia have a rural population the share of which exceeds 40% (Table 1 and Fig. 2).

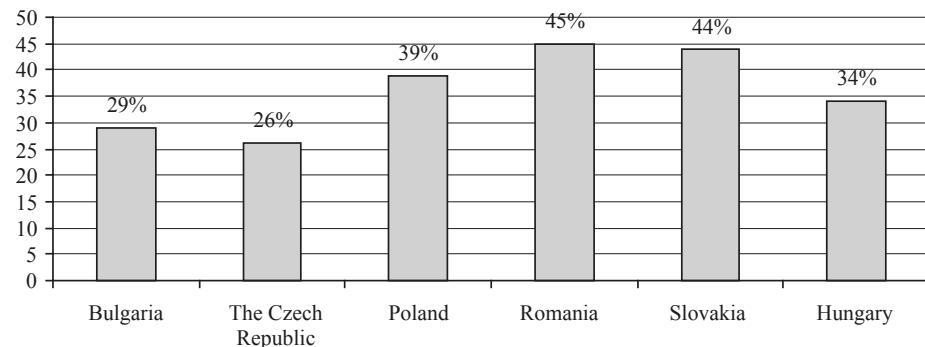


Fig. 2. The share of rural population at the level of some former communist states, nowadays members of the European Union (2007)

Source: World Population Data Sheet 2008

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL POPULATION

The population, i.e., the dynamic component, plays a particularly important role in the economic, social, and political life of the rural space (Surd, 2002). Grounding the options of rural politics cannot be made without a good knowledge of the various aspects concerning the population dynamics, or its structures. Following the evolution of the Romanian rural population over an interval of approximately eight decades, i.e., since the interwar years until nowadays, one can notice that for more than five decades, its share was superior to that of the urban population. During the interwar years, the rural population was almost synonymous with the peasantry, i.e., the agricultural population, wherefrom there results a clear differentiation between a town and a village.

All along this period of time, (1930–2007), the rural population registered a continuous decrease from 11,229,476 inhabitants in 1930 to 9,659,904 inhabitants in 2007, thus the rural has lost—in this interval—1,569,572 inhabitants, i.e., a decrease rate of -14%. The decrease of the rural population is marked by two distinct moments (periods), i.e., the period of domination of the communist regime (1950–1989) and the second one, the one that marks its collapse and the settling in of a new democratic regime (beginning with 1990).

All along this domination time of the communist regime in Romania there took place a genuine rural exodus, i.e., the massive shift of the rural population

towards towns, this representing the main labour force in view of sustaining the industrialization policy of the country, concomitantly with the development and accentuating the urbanization process.

In this period of time, the rural space has lost over 1.3 million inhabitants, the rate of decrease of -11%, a situation which is also reflected on the share of the rural population in the total of the population, this being reduced from 76.6% in 1948 to 46.8% in 1989, but dominant until the level of the year 1985, when there occurs the balance of the two types of populations, rural, respectively urban (Fig. 3).

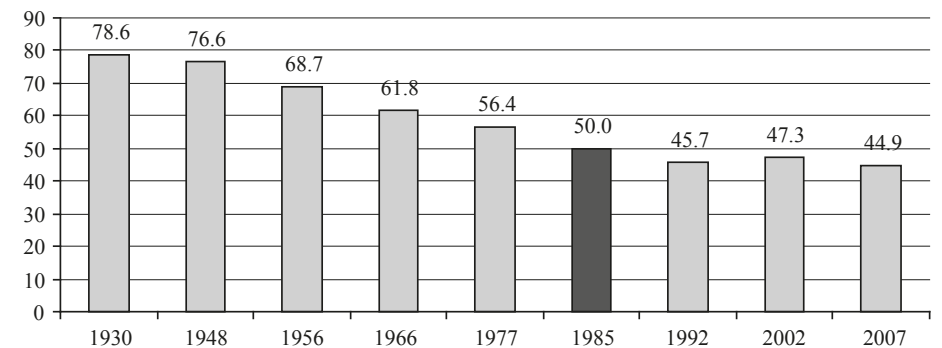


Fig. 3. Evolution of the rural population share at the level of Romania (1930–2007)

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2008, Institutul National de Statistică și Studii Economice, Bucureşti

Beginning with the year 1986 the relationships change in favour of the urban population, the share of which reached over 55% at present. Nevertheless, the share of the rural population in Romania’s total population still remains pretty high, comparative with the average of the EU member states (30%). The second period of time, after 1990, which marks the settling in of the democracy in Romania, corresponds also to a diminishing of the rural population with almost one million inhabitants (937,972), the rate of decrease of -8.85%.

The main causes that have lead to this diminishing of the rural population was the natural negative balance in the rural environment (natural deficit), and also the intensifying of migration from the rural towards the urban. This was possible due to the new legislative regulations in the political-social system in Romania, of after the 1990s, which also ensures the free movement of persons. Within this period of time, we assist, however, to a slight increase of the rural population, its share slightly increasing from 45.7% in 1992 to 47.3% in 2002, after which it declines again. The causes of this slight increase are due to the

decline of the urban economy, which was to have as a result the lack of work places and housing while the costs of the urban life were to increase continuously. This situation has determined more and more persons able to work to migrate from towns to villages. The increasing degree of the demographic aging of the Romanian population determines (triggers) important changes in the evolution of the birth rate and death rate.

Between the 1990s–2008 the birth rate index has dropped from 14.3‰, to 10.4‰, while the death rate index increased from 13.4‰, to 14.3‰, the maximum value being registered in 1995, (the latter) one being 15.4‰ (Fig. 4).

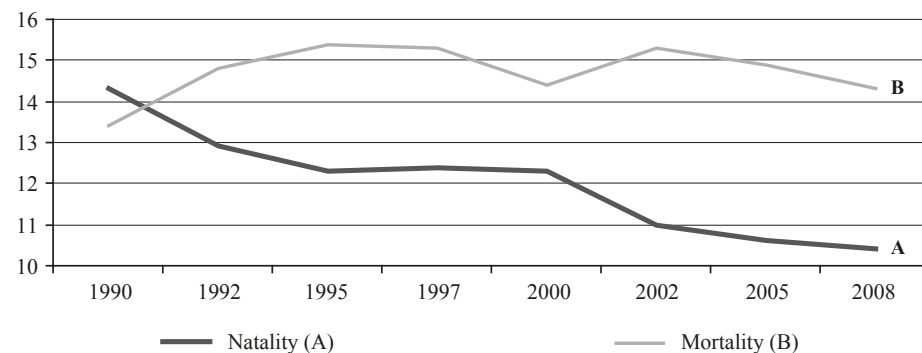


Fig. 4. The natural movement of the rural population (1990–2008)

Explanation: A – natality; B – mortality

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 1990–2008, Institutul National de Statistică și Studii Economice, București

Analysing the balance of the two demographic indicators, one can observe that only in 1990 we assist at a positive natural balance, this being of 0.9‰, after which the balance becomes negative, the value of the natural deficit registered in 2008 being -3.9‰. This negative natural balance, generated by the higher values of the death rate index, comparative with that of the birth rate one, reflects both the tendency of demographic ageing, and the increase of the degree of morbidity of the rural population. The internal migration, placed upon the changes of places and housings between town and village or *vice versa*, outlines the fact that until the 1990s the migration from village to town (rural-urban) was somewhat superior to the direction urban-rural and this in the conditions in which the communist regime was rather restrictive. After the 1990s there occurred a massive migration from the rural areas towards the urban ones, so that the number of the rural population who had migrated to the towns had reached impressive figures. In 1990 alone, there have migrated to towns around 616,000 persons from the rural area.

This large scale depopulation of villages to the detriment of towns represented a direct consequence of abolishing the legislation concerning the closed character of some municipalities and towns. The ones most exposed to this phenomenon were the youth, for whom the town represented a better paid work place and a life style that was completely different from the one in the rural environment.

The emigration rate of the rural population was highly superior to the urban one, so that the migrating rest of the rural population has maintained itself at a negative level (-5.2‰ in 1992) until 1995, when on the background of the accentuated restructuring of the industrial sector in the urban environment, of the diminishing of the work places and also the continuous increase of the family spending, the sense of migration got inversed, so that numerous persons able to work return to their ex-residencies in the rural areas, thus accentuating the phenomenon known as re-migration. In this sense, the migrating rested at the level of the Romanian rural space shall register positive values, reaching 5.4‰ in 2008 (Fig. 5). This means that the rural space has become more and more attractive for the population in towns, especially for the adult persons (the age group 45–54), who are, as a rule, more vulnerable on the labour market in the urban environment, for most town-people, living in the rural environment is preferred to the crowded and polluted urban life.

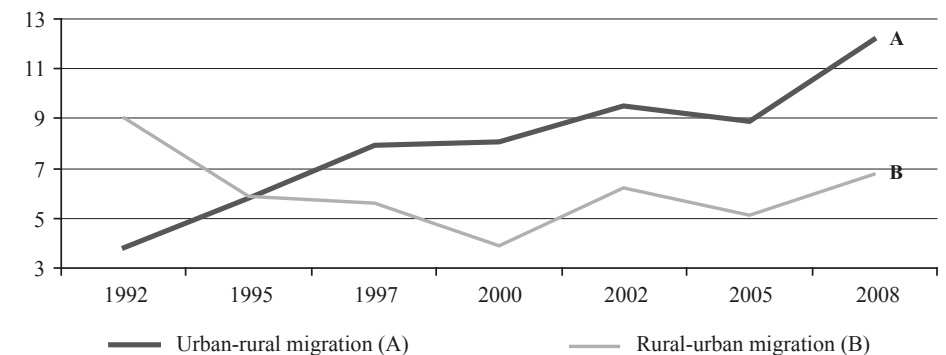


Fig. 5. The remaining rural-urban and urban-rural migration (1992–2008)

Explanation: A – urban-rural migration, B – rural-urban migration

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 1992–2008, Institutul National de Statistică și Studii Economice, București

In spite of all this the urban-rural migration remains insufficient in order to compensate for the decline of the rural population.

The external migration has major economic and social implications at the level of the rural space. Although there is no official data referring to the number

of the people left abroad from Romanian rural environment, it must be mentioned the fact that the most of the people opt for temporary employment only. The most numerous are men, while women in the rural area incline towards a temporary external migration at younger ages (18–29 years old).

The sums of money sent into the country by the ones working abroad create important financial fluxes in rural economy. This money contributes to the modernization and development of the rural space. The most important part of these sums of money is invested in real estate transactions (the building and modernizing of houses, land, etc.). Through this, it is aimed at the raising of the qualitative level of life in the village and ensuring a means of financial protection. In spite of all this, the migration abroad attracts people with its inherent social problems. In this sense, most of the times separation of the family members occur, while the children remain either in their grandparents' care, or of other relatives in the country, a situation which is negatively reflected upon their level of education and behaviour in the society.

The structure presented on the age groups of the Romanian rural population emphasizes the phenomenon of demographic ageing. This tendency is manifested on the one hand by the reducing of the young population, respectively from the age group 0–19 years old and by the increasing of the old age population share (65 years old and over), on the background of a natural negative balance (low birth rate and death rate on the increase), but also of the phenomenon of outflow of the population, especially of the young ones.

Compared to the year 1990, the share of the young population has been reduced from 33.3%, to 25.4% in 2000, reaching the percentage of 24.2% in 2008, out of the total of the rural population, while the share of the aged population has increased from 13.9% in 1990 to 16.8% in 2000 and to 18.7% in 2008. As a matter of fact, out of the approximately 45% dependent persons at the level of Romania, almost 2/3 live in the rural area. This situation can be outlined with the help of the general index of demographic dependency, i.e., the ratio of the young and old age population to 100 adult persons. The value of this indicator, at the level of Romanian rural space for the year 2008 was 75.3%, which means that 100 adult persons support 75.3 young and old age persons as compared to only 42% in the urban environment. Also, one must mention the fact that the majority of the old age people, aged 80 and over are encountered in the rural environment, the percentage of which reaches 58.3%, compared to 41.7% in the urban environment. The degree of the demographic ageing of the rural population can also be represented and made visible by the *horn glass (sand glass)* form of the age pyramid, unlike the urban environment, where its basis gets narrow, determining the reducing of the young contingent (Fig. 6).

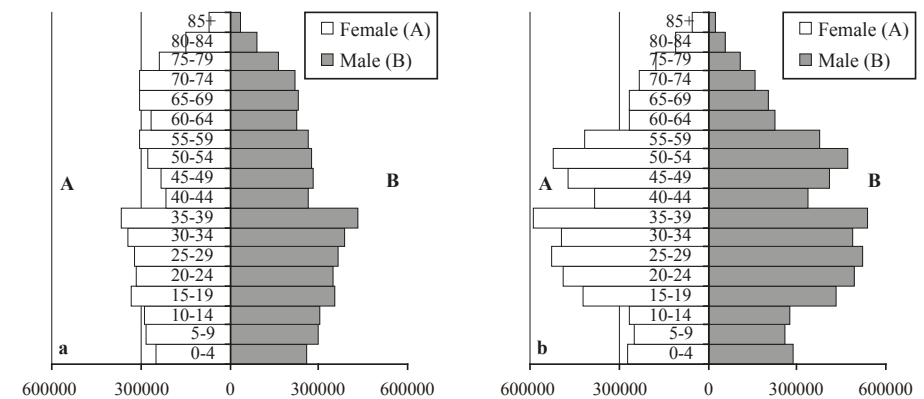


Fig. 6. Representation of the population over age groups through the pyramid of ages: a. in the rural area; b. in the urban area

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 2008, Institutul National de Statistică și Studii Economice, București

The demographic ageing of the rural population also rises a series of socio-economic problems. The social problems consist in resolving the food needs, health and social protection of the rural population, the economic ones emphasize the effect of the ageing of the population upon the production, consumption, of the investments but also upon labour productivity (Guran-Nica, Rusu, 2004).

The demographic evolution of almost two decades, as well as the economic restructuring at national level has left a strong imprint also upon the labour force. A country's population and economy do not evolve independently of one another. The work force in the rural environment represents thus a determinant role within the circular flux of the rural economy, being an important consumer of goods and services, but at the same time an indispensable factor of production. The economic activities carried out in the rural environment are less diversified, comparative with the urban environment, while the economic life of the Romanian village is dominated by predominantly agricultural activities (Popescu, 2002).

After the 1990s, during the transition period of time at the national level there could be observed a clear tendency of diminishing the degree of the work force absorption. Despite all this, the participation of the rural population to various economic activities specific to the rural space has registered a certain improvement. Thus the rate of economic activity has increased by 2.1% in 2000, as compared to 1996, and the rate of the workforce absorption has also registered an increase of 2.9% in the same interval.

The following interval 2000–2007 outlines a rather pronounced decrease, both of the rate of activity with almost –7%, and of the rate of labour force absorption, respectively with –8.3% (Fig. 7). This decrease can be incurred upon the restructuring of the economy, respectively of the diminishing of the work places available and last but not least, due to the temporary migration for work abroad. In this respect the population able to work has substantially diminished in the rural area.

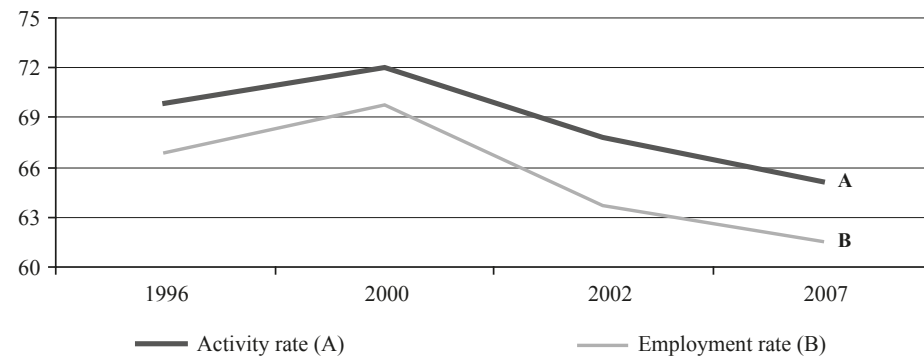


Fig. 7. Evolution of the activity rates and of labour force situation in the rural area (1996–2007)

Explanation: A – activity rate, B – employment rate

Source: The Statistical Yearbook of Romania, 1996–2007, Institutul National de Statistică și Studii Economice, Bucureşti

Out of the total of 9,659,904 persons belonging to the rural environment in the year 2007, the persons considered active, registered a share of 46.4%, while the inactive population reached the percentage of 53.6%. According to the International Labour Office (ILO), out of the 46.4% active population in the rural area, 44.2% represent the population absorption in various economic branches, while 2.2% were unemployed.

The rate of unemployment has registered an obvious decrease in the rural environment from 6.4% in 2000 to 4.9% in 2007, this being much lower than in the urban environment (7.7% in 2007). However, the rate of unemployment cannot be reflected in a genuine way in the rural environment as the priority activity – the agriculture, through its seasonal character requires at the same time non-qualified labour force, the activity of which can be temporary. For Romanian rural space, the agriculture is the most important branch, thus concentrating, the highest number of persons absorbed this field: 2.75 million persons in 2007.

Following the structure of the population over the three important sectors of the national economy, one can notice that at the level of the year 2007, the share of the population absorbed agricultural field (therein being included as well the persons carrying out fishery, hunting and forestry activities), was pretty big, reaching the value of 29.5% (industry – 31.4%, services – 39.1%), which is against the requirements of the contemporary economic-social progress.

One of the main causes of this situation could be the reforming of the lowland, which by the reconstituting of the property right has lead to the appearance of the petty land owner and to the economic recession, which through massive dismissals has determined a migration of the recurrent persons from the industrialized urban to the rural agricultural. In spite of all the efforts of modernizing the agriculture, of the production and service activities, the rural population remains largely aged and without too many perspectives. As an alternative source for revigorating Romanian rural space, in view of obtaining incomes, but also for placing the labour force, one could mention the practising of rural tourism and of agro-tourism.

CONCLUSIONS

For Romania the rural space has a particular significance, since here there are preserved and conserved the traditional spiritual, cultural values of our nation. That is why the uncontrolled interventions upon the rural space can deteriorate these values. In this sense, a particular importance in the redressing of the rural space incurs on the human resource. Thus, there is of utmost need that in elaborating the strategies of development of the rural space to be paid a maximum attention to the human factor with all its aspects of manifestation. Undoubtedly the demographic dimension, through its various aspects, represents the dynamic and active component in the long run, in what concerns the dynamic resources of the society.

In certain states the indicators of the rural population dynamics, reach alarming values, so that some villages can be threatened with disappearance. For all this, Romanian rural space cannot be defined only by those villages that display figures of their decreased, but by those villages preserving their birth rate higher over the towns. The Romanian contemporary village remains to date the main life generator.

Although the urbanization phenomenon registers a rapid acceleration lately, whilst the reducing of the population taken in the primary sector is more and more obvious, however, the importance of the rural space is not diminished, but on the contrary, it is more and more closely researched into, researched and subject to a complex process of development.

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