

ASPECTS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN ROUMANIAN RURAL SPACE**TABITA HURMUZACHE, IANCU TIBERIU, ANDREA FEHER, MIROSLAV RAICOV**

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ABSTRACT

The quality of life, is today an area of interest for the specialists of economic and political sciences. The interest in this field is given by the importance that is given to the human factor within the society. Thus, the evolution of the main indicators characterizing the quality of life is an important tool for monitoring the economic and social phenomena that occur within the society, providing an overview regarding the welfare of society.

An important role in increasing the quality of life in rural area has the renovation and development of villages. In this respect a special attention should be paid to the modernization and expansion of basic rural infrastructure, resulting in the development of economic, social and cultural and even creating jobs, increasing employment degree of the population, thus increasing the revenue.

Improved quality of life of Romanian inhabitants of the villages, determine, in equal measure, the economic development of rural areas. This, by the effects it produces causes increased income of the population, increased consumption of goods and services, resulting in a high satisfaction of demand, increase food security measures and therefore the quality of life.

Development of entrepreneurship spirit of residents from rural area, increased accessibility degree to basic services and better capitalization of resources and traditional products are other measures which have as effect the improvement the standard of living of the rural population.

Keywords: quality of life, living standard, rural space

INTRODUCTION

Common Agricultural Policy with its two pillars - agriculture and rural development - is a policy of strategic importance to the European Union contributing to food security, environmental protection and territorial balance (FEHER, 2013).

The economic development is largely reflected not only within the development degree of the society but especially by creating some living conditions to be better as possible to satisfy under the best conditions the community needs.

The concept of life quality is often confused with the concept of living standard. Even if these concepts are often confused between them, there are some small differences. The quality of life is defined as a global expression of all conditions and activities that compose life: natural environment, habitat, work, family life, leisure, education, health, social life participation, economic and social services, social environment, while the concept of living standard is referring to issues related to: lifestyle, social position, culture, values and aspirations of community members, highlighted by indicators such as: the level and trend of incomes, people consumption, health conditions, housing conditions, education and access to culture and art.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The preparation of this work is based on extensive documentation in the field, books, reports and national statistics and is based on the study of indicators aimed at quality of life and standard of living in Romanian rural space.

RESULTS

The concept of life quality has a wider scope than the living standard, including also the quality of the environment, demographic issues, working and leisure conditions, housing conditions, health, training and level of education and culture, level and structure of income, level structure of consumption etc.

Being a combination of factors, of economic, social and environmental nature, the analysis of life quality should be performed on its components:

- ❖ in terms of *environment*, the analysis of life quality aims: protecting biodiversity, protection and rational use of resources;
- ❖ *economically*, the following issues are considered: meeting in good conditions and a high level of individual needs, practicing some clean production technologies, exploring social utility of production;
- ❖ in *social* terms, it aims at establishing the equality between individuals, providing the means for self-satisfaction and keeping the quality of living conditions.

Currently, it pays particular attention to the rural space and its economic development. Thus, addressing the issue of life quality in rural areas is a current problem, which lies in the importance of rural space in the economic and social life of each community.

The importance of rural space is highlighted by its functions: economical, social and environmental. Thus, its role can be fulfilled only if it is characterized by an attractive living environment equipped with modern infrastructure, with a diversified economic activity, with a viable agriculture and forestry, with numerous non-agricultural activities and a landscape clean and tidy.

Even though the rural area is an area devoted to agriculture and forestry, rural space development concerns especially the introduction and development of some non-agricultural economic activities. In *Figure 1*, we present the structure of rural economy by the main economic activities.

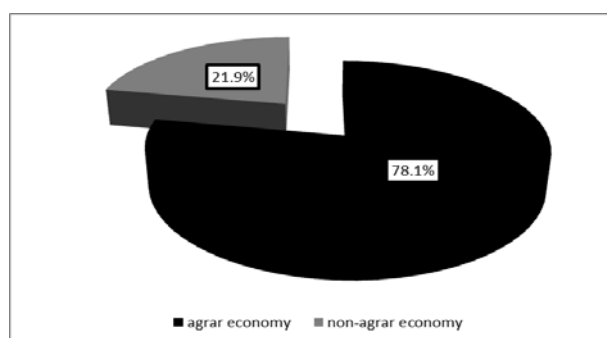


Figure 1. The structure of rural economy

The rural economy is a predominantly agrarian economy, it occupies a share of 78.1%, the remaining of 21.9 % being occupied by the non- agricultural economy (industry and services). At European Union level the situation is different, the largest share is represented by non- agricultural economy, 59.7% and 40.3% by agrarian economy. The large discrepancies between the structure of Romanian rural economy and of the

community one are due to a much lower share of services (non-agricultural) in rural areas and, in particular, to the rural tourism which in Romania practically has a very small contribution to the rural economy (OTIMAN, MATEOC, MĂNESCU, 2013).

The sustainable development of rural communities results in improving the life quality of inhabitants both economically and socially as well as for the environment. The economic development involves the increase of total income, of average income per capita, the increase of employment and therefore reducing the unemployment rate, reducing gender disparities, reducing rural-urban disparities and a less polluting environment. Nationally, rural areas represent 87.1% of country territory. The analysis of territory structure, according to methodology of OECD on rurality indicates that a share of 59.8 % represents rural space 39.4 % intermediate space and 0.8 % urban space (MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT).

The administrative-territorial organization of Romanian rural area indicates the existence of a total number of **2,860 communes**, comprising several villages, with a total of **12,956 villages**. There are also met a number of **341 localities that have rural characteristics called even villages**, being in urban composition only administratively. There are also 67 localities with populations under 10,000 people with rank of city and **33 communes, whose population exceeds the number of 10,000 inhabitants, and have not a city status, being considered rural areas**.

With regard to the population which is concentrated in rural areas, this is around 8.98 million inhabitants, meaning 47.2%. By comparison with the European Union, Romania's population is characterized by a certain degree of rurality more pronounced. In relation to Eurostat data from 2012, **45.5% of the population is in rural areas, 43.9 % in intermediate regions and 10.6 % in urban areas** (MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT).

An important indicator of the living level is the number of inhabitants per square kilometer. According to presented data, at national level the average is 91 inhab/sq km. There are, however, some regions, which exceeds the national average. For example, the North East Region where there is the highest level, 100.8 inhab/sq km, without taking into consideration Bucharest Region, but also regions where the values are lower, like South-East Region, 60.0/ sq km, with the lowest level of this indicator.

The average density of population in rural areas has remained relatively constant over the years, being 45.1 inhabitants/sq km). The analysis of this indicator at territorial level shows that over 80% of rural localities have a density close to the threshold used by the European Union to identify rural areas. There are great disparities, especially due to the influence of regional and county relief.

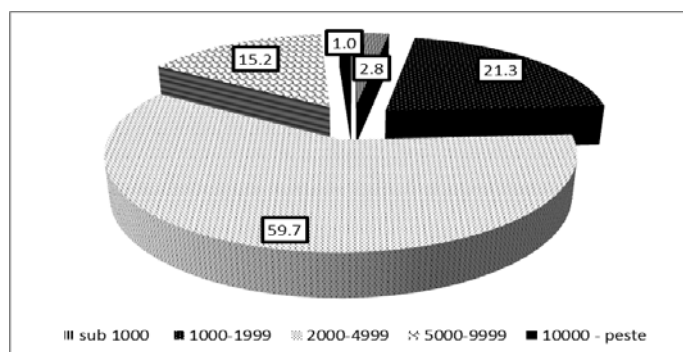


Figure 2. Grouping of communes by number of inhabitants

The average population of a commune is of 3,780 inhabitants, but there are a variety of communes in Romania in terms of population sizes. The villages have a large diversity in

terms of number of inhabitants. The size of villages varies from those that have only a few inhabitants, to the villages with a population of over 7,000-9,000 inhabitants. Still, the villages with few inhabitants are predominant, the average number of inhabitants of a village being around 800.

The main factors contributing to the socio –demographic evolution in rural areas are: **birth rate, mortality rate and migration.**

In general, there is a strong direct correlation between mortality rate and degree of demographic aging.

Table 1. The significance of demographic disparities rural - urban, 2011

INDICATORS (per 1000 inhabitants)	Rural	Urban	Difference rural - urban
Birth rate	9.8	10.0	-0.2
Mortality rate	14.7	10.0	4.7
Natural increase	-4.9	-	-4.9
Marriages	4.2	6.4	-2.2
Divorces	1.09	1.88	-0.79

Source: Romanian statistical yearbook, 2011

A third component of population trends is the movement, migration expressed by the indicator of **average migration rate** which is "the balance" of residence changes within the confines of a commune, meaning the difference between the number of those establishing their residence in the village and those who have left with the residence from the village.

The fluctuations in the population trends are a consequence of migration, particularly of young people able to work, toward urban areas in the search of better jobs and of a more attractive lifestyle.

Remaining in the rural area of a part greatest possible of young population category would be a decisive factor for rural revitalization, economic diversification, for restoring demographic imbalances, especially in areas with agricultural deficiencies.

Returning of young people to rural space has very favorable implications for the development of productive activity, their entrepreneurial spirit being easily to train and guide primarily towards non-agricultural activities which must be established and developed in the rural communities. In these circumstances, it would take place an increase of life quality, it would limit migration and alleviate social problems, including reducing unemployment in rural areas. It would also increase the employment degree of women which typically adapt more easily to non-agricultural activities.

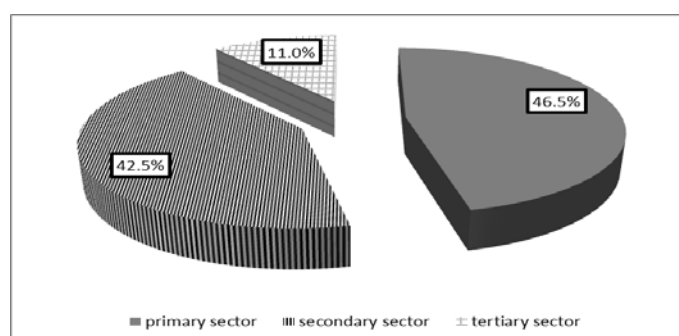


Figure 4. GVA structure by economic sectors

Romanian rural area is the main repository of the vast majority of economic resources: raw materials, agricultural resources, forestry, tourism and spas. Agriculture, along with forestry and forest exploitation have an important contribution to the GDP, while the employment in these industries represents over one third of the total population occupied of the country.

A correct layout of the structure of rural economy on activity sectors can be obtained from the analysis of gross value added by main component sectors (*Figure 4*). Thus, it can be seen that the highest share is held by tertiary sector, 46.5 %, followed by the secondary sector, 42.4 % and primary sector 11.0 % (EUROSTAT).

In terms of SMEs density per 1,000 inhabitants, there is noticed a higher concentration of them in urban areas compared to rural areas, *Figure 5*.

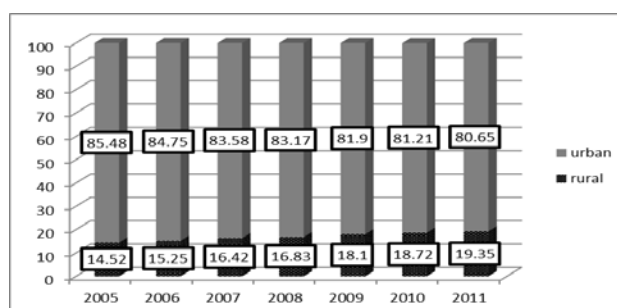


Figure 5. Evolution of SMEs by area of residence

In the period under review there can be seen an increase in the number of SMEs in rural areas, from 63,741 to 85,497 SMEs. However, they are still a pretty reduced share, below 20 % of the total SMEs existing nationally.

The structure of employed population in Romania nationally in 2011, was 30.4 % of the total employed population and it was concentrated in the primary sector, 28.8 % in the secondary sector and 40.7% in the tertiary sector. At EU-27 level, the employed population distribution by economy sectors is as follows: 5.2% of the employed population was recorded in the primary sector, 22.6% in secondary one and 70.2% in the tertiary sector.

In rural areas, the employment is concentrated mainly in agricultural sector, 29.1% in the year 2011. Regarding the professional status of rural population employed in agriculture, 52.9% are self-employed, 41.6% are family members engaged in an activity unpaid, 5.2 % are employed and 0.1% are employers.

The small number of workers employed in agriculture, of only 5.2% of total employed population is an issue with which is facing Romanian agriculture, as the qualification level of smallholders is extremely low and labor productivity, together with the results of production process are relatively low.

Due to single occupation of population from rural space in agricultural activities on their own, **the unemployment rate in rural areas** is lower than the urban population. The highest values in terms of **unemployment rate in rural areas** are registered in the Central Region (3.5%) and Southeast (2.9%) and lower values in the North - East (0.6%) and South West (1.0%). The share of women who are unemployed is much lower than men because even women's employment rate is lower.

Life quality is greatly reflected in family income level and the income incumbent on every member of the family. In the following table we present the average earning by economic activity.

If we analyze the data according to *Table 2* we find that the average level of nominal earning in activities such as agriculture, fisheries and fish breeding, hotels and restaurants, the earning is well below the national economy average.

Table 2. Net nominal average monthly earning by activities of national economy, lei / employee

Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1024	Transport, storage and communications	1557
Industry	1388	Financial intermediation	3200
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning	2671	Real estate activities and other services	1182
Manufacturing	1237	Public administration and defense	1968
Mining and quarrying	2435	Education	1380
Constructions	1125	Health and social assistance	1226
Trade	1166	Other activities of the national economy	824
Hotels and restaurants	786	Total	1391

Source: Romanian statistical yearbook, 2011

However, in activities such as public administration and defense, mining and quarrying, electric and thermal energy, gas and water, the earning well exceeds the average recorded for entire economy.

The analysis of life quality in developing countries and in a country like Romania, it is advisable to carry out, according to the experience gained in the field related to the evaluation and analysis of poverty, to the disparities existing within the society, taking into account the low level of revenues compared to the needs, but without neglecting the interdependence between the quality of life and the characteristics of natural, economic and political environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Romania needs to modernize and reform its policies to be able to preserve own values. Modernization is essential to be able to continue to increase the level of prosperity, social cohesion, environmental protection and quality of life.

The current state is not really an option. Through economic growth and a labor force employed in productive areas there can be achieved results that meet the expectations that the European Union has from our country. Through concerted action in areas that have a major impact on quality of life, there can progress in European integration of Romania.

The development and jobs are key points on a truly European agenda. The indicators of life quality can be red flags for drawing attention to social problems, as well as for those which may have negative consequences in a medium and long term. Selection of used indicators is also important for establishing social goals or to assess the effects of policies in the view of improving the life quality of population.

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