

POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE DOBROGEAN COUNTRYSIDE

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Abstract: *In the Romanian countryside, especially the communities that are at a significant distance from the nearest city, they struggle day by day to survive, the main concern of the families living in these areas being that of finding resources for the next day. This continuous struggle to find resources narrows their perspective on life, they are not interested in other areas such as education, culture, politics. In Romania, approximately 43% of the country's population lives in the countryside, a particularly important percentage. Also, in Romania there is also a marked inequality between the rural and the urban environment, the villages in Romania remain far behind in terms of modernization, and many of them face significant category. These shortages are related to poor infrastructure, poor education, lack of sewage, lack of jobs. The passage of time aggravates the things that have accentuated the problems due to the fact that there is no involvement of the authorities, social policies, educational policies. The optimal functioning of a democratic society, namely its stability and efficiency depend on the existence and active affirmation of the community and citizens.*

Keywords: countryside, social politics, political culture, rural population, social assistance

1. Introduction

At the administrative level, Dobrogea consists of two counties, Constanța and Tulcea respectively. The administrative-territorial organization of Tulcea county includes four cities, namely Babadag, Isaccea, Măcin as well as Sulina. In the same county there are 46 communes and 133 villages (cjtulcea.ro). As for Constanța county, we have 12 cities, 59 municipalities and 189 villages (insse.ro). Using statistical data from 2021 of the Constanța County Statistics Directorate, the rural population represents 32.1% of the total population. (insse.ro) The population of Tulcea County according to the INS on July 1, 2018 was 238,542 inhabitants, of which approximately 50.8% represent the rural population (insse.ro). The entire rural area of Dobrogea is made up of 105 municipalities totaling 322 villages. We can say about the rural area of Dobrogea that it is one of contrasts, being able to classify the rural communities as follows:

Rural communities close to cities. These communities are the ones that "take advantage" of the proximity of the cities and based on this aspect they enjoy development in multiple fields such as economy, education, entrepreneurship, etc. The cities have a great influence on these communes or villages and the inhabitants of the rural environment in their immediate vicinity borrow from the behaviour of the urban inhabitants, being rural inhabitants only in theory. These residents will be educated like those in the urban environment, they will send their children to urban schools, they will find work more easily, they will be more connected with reality in the sense that access to information is easier, their quality of life being superior to the other inhabitants of rural environments but who are at greater distances from urban centers. Once the citizens' basic needs are met (job, financial resources, infrastructure) they will have the desire to get involved in other life activities such as volunteering, politics, recreational activities, etc. Among the main rural communities that enjoy proximity to urban centers we mention: Valu lui Traian, Cumpăna, Limanu, Lumina, Lazu.

Rural communities based tourism industry.

These communities are the ones that, despite not necessarily being close to the city, enjoy an efficient development based mainly on the natural resources of the area. This category includes those villages that are on the Black Sea coast, those that are in the Danube Delta or those that enjoy a spectacular landscape due to the relief. In addition to these aspects, when we talk about Dobrogea, it is very important to bring up the multitude of ethnicities present in the area, which makes the region an ethnic mosaic, as it has been called by several authors. These ethnic areas are famous for the preservation of traditions, for different shows but also for the specific cuisine that makes tourism in those areas develop. As for the local administration in the Dobrogean countryside, there are 59 town halls in Constanța County and of these, 11 are led by female mayors: Adamclisi, Bărăganu, Cumpăna, Gârliciu, Grădina, Ion Corvin, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Oltina, Peștera, Saraiu, Fair. (cjc.ro) As for Tulcea county, out of the 46 town halls, only 3 are run by women Valea Teilor, Valea Nucarilor and Maliuc (ziuaconstanta.ro) It is interesting to bring up this aspect also due to the fact that the rural environment is recognized for the conservative, traditional mentality in which men are the ones who lead in politics, while women are the ones who take care of the household chores and raising children. This aspect is worth analyzing to see if this choice of women at the head of the town halls is based on the awareness of the fact by the citizens, that women can also have a position in the administration like men or if their choice is based on a poor offer in what looks at the candidates. We notice that we currently have 14 women at the head of the town halls in the rural area compared to the urban area which only has men elected as mayor. Another aspect worth noting is that despite the fact that Dobrogea is recognized for the multitude of ethnic minorities living in the region, this does not apply at the level of local administration. Out of the total of 105 town halls in the Dobrogean countryside, only one commune has a mayor elected out of those among the ethnic minorities, namely Slava Cercheză from Tulcea County, whose mayor is Ivan Ignat, who is part of the Lipoveni Russian Community in Romania. This being the mayor of the commune for over 30 years, being one of the longest serving mayors in the local public administration. Otherwise, most of the rural town halls have mayors from the classic PSD-PNL parties or independents. Thus, we can observe a major difference between the rural communities in Dobrogea and those in the areas inhabited by Hungarians, in Transylvania.

Aging and demographic decline

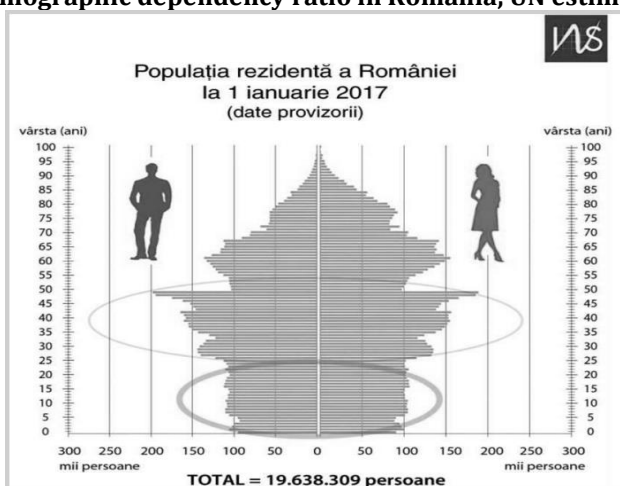
Old age has always been the concern of many scientists, writers and philosophers. This stage is a normal, natural one that we all go through at some point. A successful and peaceful old age is closely related to a balanced life. In order to maintain adequate health, a vigorous body and implicitly a long life, one needs a proper diet, physical exercises, moderation in everything and regular intellectual activity. Sociologists and demographers operationalize the concept of "demographic aging" in the increasing share of the elderly population (65 years and over) in the total population (Rotariu, 2017:56). Demographic aging should not be confused with biological aging or psychological aging, which refers to the aging of the human body, accompanied or not by the degradation of mental processes and functions (thinking, memory, attention, concentration, resistance to stress, etc.), as a result of advancing in age of a person or group of people. Demographic aging refers to the change in the age structure of the population in favor of older ages (65 years and over – „third age”) as a share in the total population, to the detriment of young ages, as a firm and long-lasting trend. Current statistics show that the rate of population aging is increasing alarmingly. People today are hungry for information to help them make their lives better and live longer. It would be desirable for old age to be a period without diseases, without risks, with good physical functioning and a high quality of life. In

states with a high standard of living, the average life expectancy for men is 70 years for women, 75 years. For many of the elderly, old age comes with physical and mental changes that influence the rhythm, complexity and dynamics of life. The professional and social experience of the elderly can play a very important role in this period, if it is taken into account as a resource both for themselves and for the family or community. The most „aged” populations in the world are those of countries such as Japan (over 20% elderly), USA, Russia, Italy, Germany. Europe is considered to be the oldest continent.

The social and economic consequences of demographic aging

The problem of aging has become very important and widely addressed in several fields of activity. The general conclusions are that in elderly people there is a decrease in the acuity of the sense organs, motor performances are reduced, and emotional mobility is altered. The result is that the elderly become less active, less interested (the sphere of interest in acquiring knowledge being very reduced), more fearful, more anxious, cold towards those around them, their character traits are accentuated most of the time in a negative sense (thrifty people become stingy, nervous people become suspicious). There is also a change towards themselves: mistrust, dissatisfaction, bad mood, frequent worries for minor reasons set in. As the scope of interest narrows. We must say, however, that these changes appear varied, differently, depending on the genetic background but also on the training and attention they have paid to themselves throughout their lives professional training, balanced life. (Răşcanu, 1997:156-157). Old age is accompanied by profound changes in the body, in the sense of its general wear and against the background of frequent and various diseases. This situation, often accompanied by the lack of adequate income or family support and help, is the main cause of the social problems encountered by the elderly. As we can see in the statistics, life expectancy has increased significantly (Rotariu, Dumănescu and Hărăguş, 2016:45). Theorists say that old age should be seen as a period of psychological development. In support of this statement we should talk about the fact that the elderly must adapt to the decline of physical strength and health, must prepare mentally to face retirement and, last but not least, adapt to the narrowing of the family field (children marry and move away, partner dies). Contemporary society looks at old age from a positive and a negative perspective: the positive one - in which old age is linked to wisdom accumulated over time, life experience as well as a different approach to life in general; the negative one - which refers to the fact that old age is often an age of suspicion, mistrust of others, inflexibility and exaggerated criticism. Aging is a complicated process that brings with it a series of changes that only the attentive and sensitive can notice and accept. The needs of the elderly do not differ much from those of adults or children, but in the case of the elderly these needs can be accentuated depending on his ability or inability to meet some of them can become more urgent with the passage of time. Old age often means helplessness and loneliness, and the elderly feel overwhelmed by these challenges of age.

Figure 1: The demographic dependency ratio in Romania, UN estimates (1950-2060)



Health status indicators

The average length of life expresses, in a certain way, the state of health of the population. In the last five years, at the level of Constanța county, the longest life expectancy was recorded in 2017, for men the average life expectancy was 72.28 years and for women 79.24 years. From the point of view of public systems, a high life expectancy means less public consumption for medical care and lower social assistance expenses. A low or declining life expectancy requires the adaptation of public health and social protection measures to be able to respond to needs, knowing that chronic conditions and physical/psychological disability are more common among the elderly. The increased number of elderly people and their low incomes show that these people are less able to access medical or sociomedical services appropriate to age-specific pathology. At the national level, an intensification of health problems and chronic diseases can be observed, along with advancing age (Eurostat, hlth_silc_04).

Regarding the poly-pathology faced by the elderly, in the first place among the ailments they suffer from are: tumors, diseases of the digestive system, cardiovascular diseases, followed by endocrine diseases and those of the osteoarticular system, and in the lower places are neurological diseases and dementias.

Compared to the rest of the population, the elderly are more exposed to the risk of poverty (in their case, poverty can mean either a lack of income/insufficient income, or reduced material resources, or difficult access to social, medical, housing, transport services). The risk of social exclusion is increasingly high among the elderly and, implicitly, has effects on the electoral behavior of the elderly. Also, the risk of social exclusion in old age is higher among women, especially among the very old and/or widowed. The prevention and reduction of poverty and social exclusion largely depend on the actions and reforms adopted. At the national level, the concept of social inclusion includes measures and actions from various fields (social protection, employment, housing, education, health, mobility, security, justice, culture, communication-information) aimed at combating social exclusion. Romania is faced, like most European countries, with an aging population, against the background of the reduction of birth rates and the accentuation of the migratory phenomenon. The largest part of the elderly population at the national level is represented by women, respectively by people living in rural areas. The higher share of the elderly female population is due to the higher mortality rate of

the male population, mortality that manifests itself even more as age increases. against the background of the reduction of birth rates and the accentuation of the migratory phenomenon.

The level of education determines the increase or decrease of the individual's vulnerability to poverty, the relative poverty rate being higher among the elderly, the lower the level of education. In this context, there are effects in terms of electoral behaviour by the fact that political participation in the public space is reduced due to the fact that there is no interest on the part of the elderly who do not feel the effects of the vote they gave to the elected officials at the local, regional or central level. The electoral behaviour of the elderly is influenced by the decisions of politicians and the perceptible results at the political and administrative level.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in the case of the present research is based on the quantitative method, on the questionnaire technique. The questionnaire proves to be an extremely frequently used technique, the population starting to be more and more familiar with this type of research method. Thus, the questionnaire represents a technique and, correspondingly, an investigative tool that consists of a set of logically and psychologically ordered written questions, which, through administration by the investigation operator, determines answers from the people questioned to be recorded in the written. Through the questionnaire, information can be obtained regarding the attitudes, knowledge, motivation and interests, dispositions and inclinations of the people who are part of the research population.

The objective of the present research is to identify the level of political culture in the target population, subsequently being able to make connections between the political culture of the citizens of rural Dobrogean and their electoral behaviour, starting from the hypothesis that a low level of political culture negatively influences the electoral behaviour of citizens.

The research tool

A research on the political culture of the population is one that must take into account a multitude of aspects, especially in the conditions where the contrasts are extremely accentuated at the national level: highly developed areas and very poor areas. In this sense, we proposed that the present research relate to a narrower space, namely the Dobrogean rural environment, its analysis relating to the political culture of the analyzed space. Such a study is more than useful considering that studies on Dobrogea from this perspective are extremely limited, being completely absent in the countryside. In the course of this research, we will try to see to what extent the political culture, representing the dependent variable in the present case, is determined by the independent variables such as: poor quality education, poverty,

Research population and sampling scheme

In the present case, the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 1000 individuals with the right to vote, who have their domicile in the rural areas of Constanța and Tulcea counties. The localities where the questionnaires were applied are: Albești, 2 Mai, Vama Veche, Limanu, Hagieni, Cogealac, Deleni, Ion Corvin, Negureni, Gârliciu, Crucea, Ciocârlia de Sus, Mihail Kogălniceanu, Stupina, Mireasa, Siriu, Mihai Viteazu, Topraisar, Baia, Greci, Jurilovca, Enisala, Luncavița, Casimcea, Piatra, Izvoarele, Slava Casian, Slava Rusă, Murighiol, Frecăței. We chose for the application of the questionnaires both well-developed rural communities located near the cities and isolated, poor villages/communes located at a considerable distance from the nearest urban center.

Questionnaire content

The questionnaire includes, in the first part, general data of the respondents such as age, sex, education, locality or belonging to a certain ethnic community. General data is followed

by 17 closed questions. Closed questions are those that can only be answered in the pre-set options, there being both questions with dichotomous answers and questions with a choice answer. Compared to open questions, closed questions have some advantages, namely: they considerably reduce the effort required to give answers, they allow respondents to consider some answer options that they would not otherwise have thought of, they are much more easily accepted by respondents, and so on. On the other hand, they also have disadvantages such as the fact that they can suggest to the respondents the normal answer option, they allow random answers to be formulated, they require a great effort of drafting and pretesting to establish all possible answer variants. The questions of the questionnaire that we applied had as an answer scheme 2, 3 or 4 predictable answers but followed by the answer "another or others" in case the desired answer is not in the scheme proposed by us, thus giving the opportunity to all respondents to be able to answer (Popescu and Motoi, 2022: 270).

The difficulties encountered

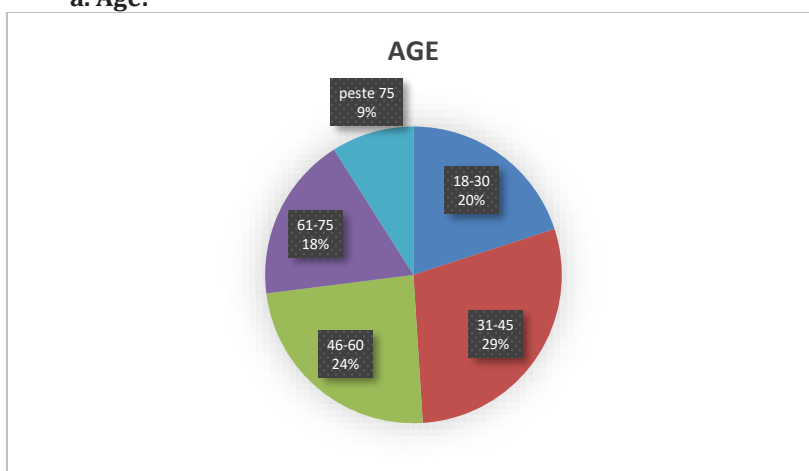
Considering the fact that the entire research was carried out in the rural environment, the main obstacle was traveling to the field to carry out the questionnaires and the reluctance of people to answer. At first glance, I can say that citizens are afraid to answer a stranger's questions, especially when those questions contain aspects related to politics, which made it difficult and delayed the realization of the predetermined sample. This reluctance that the majority of citizens have is caused by the negative perception among the general political population, institutions, authorities, etc.

Data presentation, analysis and interpretation (graphical component)

Interpretation of general data

In the first part of the questionnaire, there were questions regarding the general data of the person questioned, such as gender, age, level of education, locality or belonging to a certain ethnic community. Thus, from the total of 1000 questionnaires, for the interpretation of the general data we have the following graphs:

a. Age:

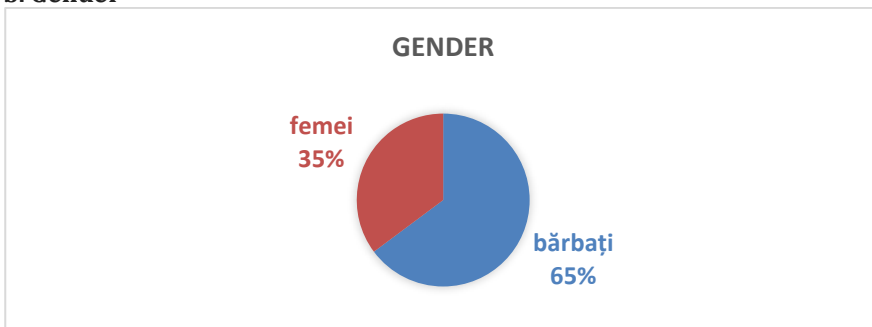


The most numerous respondents were those aged between 31 and 45, followed by those aged between 46-60, followed by the categories of those aged between 18-30, 61-75, and at the opposite pole being those aged over 75 years.

Interaction with the latter was the most difficult due to the health problems these citizens have. The fact that they could not write or that they have difficulty hearing made the questioning process difficult. Also, this category is also an extremely reluctant one, this being

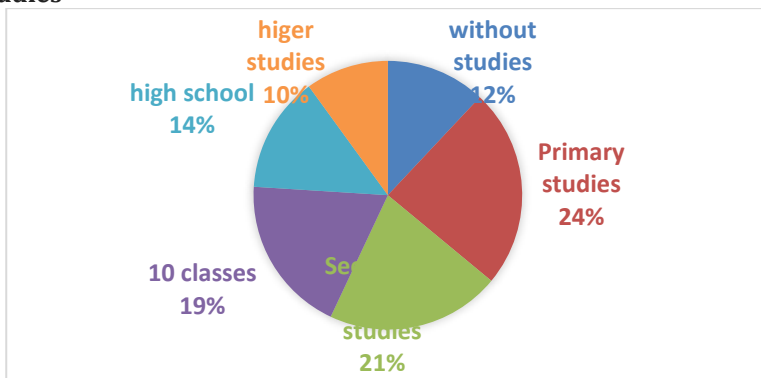
caused by their fear of not paying extra tax, not of not fining them, they hardly understand the objective of the present research. At the opposite pole, in terms of age, those with whom the interaction was easiest was the category of young people between the ages of 18 and 30. This one, it is the category of those who are connected to various sources of information, are present on various social networking sites, are willing in the vast majority to "help" through the answers provided, without considering this as negative. As for the rest of the categories, 31-45, 46-60, respectively 61-75, here things are a little different in the sense that other elements intervene that make them reticent or not, such as gender, studies, or locality but we will analyze these aspects later.

b. Gender



In terms of gender, despite the fact that we tried to maintain equality, men were the ones who were either more willing to answer or more. Thus, 648 respondents were men, and the rest, respectively 352, were women. Considering the fact that I applied the questionnaires physically, walking in the field and I applied most of them in the public domain and less in households, I noticed that the male gender is much more present in the public domain (streets) than the female gender. I met the women either in front of the gate or in households, except for those I found at their workplace. If we refer to the differences between the sexes at the level of rural communities, we can affirm the fact that the female sex represents a vulnerable category and this is due to many factors. (Spătaru, 2016:5)

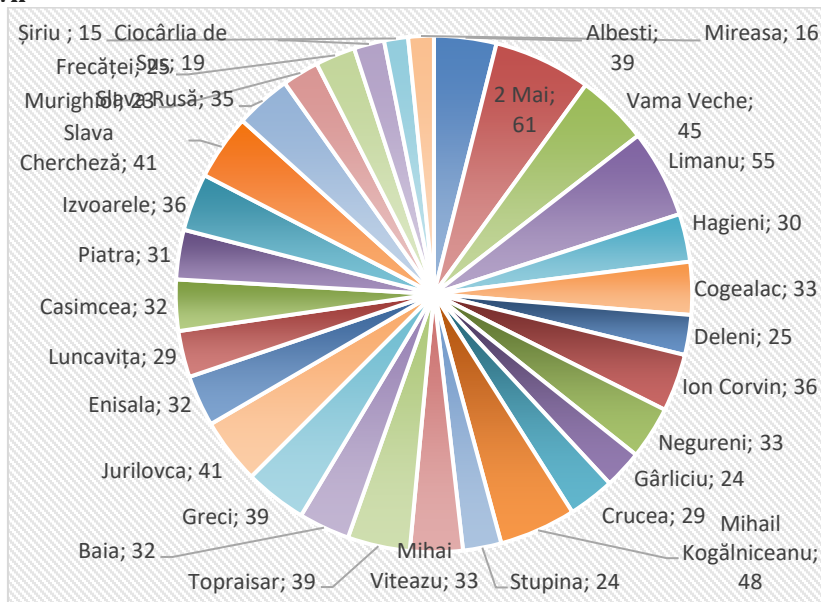
c. Studies



Regarding the education level, according to their answers, almost half of the respondents (45%) have 4 or 8 classes (primary or secondary education). On the other hand, those who have higher education or are following a form of higher education represent a percentage of approximately 10% of the total (98 respondents). In this category we mainly identify young people between the ages of 18 and 30 and who live in those rural communities in close proximity to urban centers. Thus, we can affirm the fact that proximity to a city

positively influences citizens from an education perspective, access to higher education being easier, opportunities being more numerous, compared to those who live in isolated rural communities or located at a considerable distance from the nearest city.

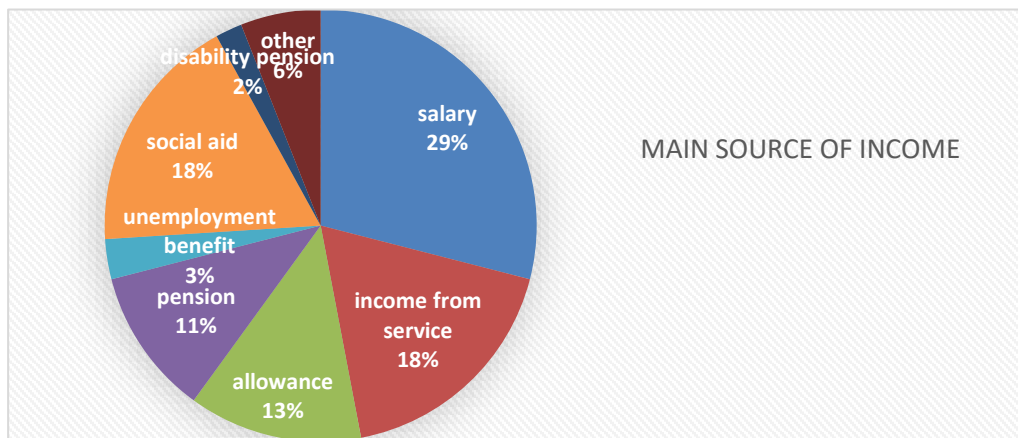
d. The town



As I explained in the methodology, the questionnaire was applied to a sample of 1000 people, citizens with the right to vote from 30 rural communities in the Dobrogea region. The number performed for each locality was influenced by a number of factors such as population density, the day on which the survey was applied, the reluctance or receptivity of citizens, etc. However, I tried to keep some equality taking into account the demographic characteristics of the targeted community.

Thus, most questionnaires were applied in the localities of Limanu, Vama Veche and 2 Mai, Slava Chercheză, Jurilovca or Mihail Kogălniceanu. Also, there are small localities with a low population density and where it was extremely difficult to apply even a few questionnaires, these villages being Șiriu, Mireasa or Ciocârlia de Sus.

e. Main source of income



In terms of the main source of household income, almost half (47%) said that salary and income from the provision of services by the day is their financial base. Here, an extremely interesting thing seemed to me is that considering that the two sources represent their financial base, they are at opposite poles, in the sense that we have on one side those who stated that the income salaries represent the main source of income, the majority of them being in more economically developed rural communities such as Limanu, Vama Veche, Mihail Kogălniceanu, and on the other hand, those whose main source of income are those amounts from "day work" are those individuals living in poor rural communities with difficult access to jobs or quality education. Social assistance (18%) still remains extremely important in rural communities, especially marginalized ones characterized by chronic poverty, as it is extremely difficult for them to survive without it. A number of approximately 130 people stated that the children's allowance is the main source of income, and a number of 110 stated that the pension is the financial basis of the household in which they live. Other sources of basic income for citizens are unemployment allowance, disability pension, social aid, income from own activities (own grocery stores, car services, etc.), income from agriculture, the latter being in the category "others", without it being extremely difficult for them to survive without it.

Conclusion

This is the reality of the villages in Dobrogea, and this greatly accentuates the rural/urban divide that already exists at the national level, the contrast being an extremely significant one. Consumption poverty, i.e. poverty estimated according to households' consumption, is much more extensive in the rural environment, compared to the urban environment. If consumption in cities is extended to a multitude of areas, in the rural environment, the main consumption is reduced to those mandatory necessary products (food, medicines, vices). If they are at a significant distance from urban centers or if there is no tourism in the area, rural communities are prone to poverty. This category represents the most significant part of the Romanian rural environment, where most rural communities are dominated by poverty, school dropout, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, lack of jobs, poor infrastructure, etc. Consumption poverty is only one of many types of poverty. The consumption deficit is only the "entrance ticket to the door of poverty". Beyond the entrance, however, poverty expands and, with time, takes control of all spheres of life. Falling into poverty is a process in which consumption poverty is only the initial phase. ([revistadesociologie.ro](#)) Unfortunately, more and more households face this problem, becoming over time a chronic one that spreads continuously. According to the study „Atlas of Marginalized Rural Areas and Local Human Development in Romania”, developed by the World Bank and published in 2016, in Dobrogea we have the following rural communities with a high degree of marginalization and poverty: Adamclisi, Castelu, Ciobanu, Crucea, Dobromir, Lipnița, Mihai Viteazu, Mircea Vodă, Ostrov, Pantelimon, Rasova, Topraisar, Horia (CT), Cuza Vodă, Baia, Ciucurova, Daeni, Horia (TL), Izvoarele, Jurilovca, Murighiol, Slava Cercheză, Topolog. The degree of marginalization was defined as „the percentage of the population in a commune, exposed to disadvantaged conditions in terms of human capital development, employability or housing” ([adrse.ro](#)).

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