

# RESILIENCE RESOURCES OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN ROMANIA

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**Abstract.** The current sociological analysis concerns the resilience of the rural population in Romania, this being the seventh country in Europe according to the number of inhabitants and it has a predominantly rural population until 1985. In 1859 (birth year of the modern Romanian state), the rural population was of 3.2 million pers. (82.8%) and the urban population was of 665.000 pers. (17.2%). The rural population registered a *boom* of more than 12 million persons in 1948. Currently, it counts over 9 mil. inhabitants and it represents 46.2% of the Romanian population. Along history, it was confronted with numerous traumatizing situations and events, such as: poverty, famine, epidemic diseases, strong repression during strikes, world wars, the transition from capitalism to communism and backwards, from monarchy to republic, the expropriation of agricultural land etc. Despite the menacing events of several global and national changes, the rural population managed to find resilience resources every time (biological, economical, cultural and moral), in order to adapt itself to the encountered difficulties and to return to normality, ensuring the reproduction of rural communities. It's main current vulnerability is natural decline, stated in 79% of the country's rural localities and we consider that the most important way to overcome it is sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *collective resilience, population dynamic, social modernization, sustainable development, rural investments, population migration, natality/mortality rate, life quality*

## 1. Introduction

In a previous article, we presented comprehensively our theoretical contributions to the debate of the resilience concept and we revealed the subjective sources of the moral and psychological revival of the inhabitants in the urban environment, when they find themselves under the influence of traumatizing factors. We also highlighted the expression types and forms of resilience and we analysed three of its' major approach perspectives: the psychological, sociological and biological perspective, starting from the hypothesis, that man has a bio-psycho-social structure and his reset concerns all of these three dimensions, in a unitary way.

If psychologists are concerned with the individual's resilience and his subjective resources, sociologists, in return, study the collective or community resilience or at group or society level (Otovescu et al, 2015: 32-37).

In the present article, we intended to make an analysis of the rural population in Romania, because, although having registered the hardest strokes during its existence, this succeeded, still, not only to adapt to modern changes and preserve itself, but also to remain at high levels for 126 years (1859-1985) and to regain part of its historical deficit of sustainable development.

Modernization has been, in Europe, a historical process of social renewal on multiple levels, generated by the political and economic ascension of the bourgeois-class. The capitalist society brought constitutional order and the separation of powers in the state (parliament, government, justice), market economy and series production (by applying the machinery technique), the electrification of villages and cities, the asphaltting of roads and the railway network, the settlement of schools and hospitals, of banks, the grounding of national culture on individual creations or values etc. Capitalists and workers were the main social agents of the renewing changes. In Romania, they emerged and developed more difficultly, as Romania was tributary to the old feudal relations (landowners and peasants).

Romania's capitalist evolution and, implicitly, modernization process was carried out mainly in the cities, where ca. 20% of the country's population lived, while, in the rural environment, it was weak and sporadic, although 80% of the inhabitants lived here. Although, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, certain capitalist renewals were signalled in rural economy, such as the acquisition of some agricultural machinery and the establishment of popular banks that granted loans to the land owners, the dominant social relations were still those between the land owners and the villagers. This fact explains the historical delay of the villages from the modernization perspective and, at present, it reclaims the necessity of their sustainable development.

To be underlined that Romania entered the competition of capitalist modernization from the position of a predominantly rural and traditionalist society, the inhabitants of which performed occupations specific for economic agriculture, this being seasonal and depending on nature's moods, attributes that were characteristic until the 1965-1970's.

It had a mainly rural population and an eminently agricultural economy, based on the production of cereals and the peasants' physical labour. Certain statistics inform us that, in 1920, Romania had 15.541.000 inhabitants, 12.088.000 of whom lived in the rural environment (78%) and 3.453.000 in the cities (22%). Out of the total of active population, of 9.076.000 persons, the great majority activated in the rural space – 7.102.000 pers. (78%) (Axenciuc, 1996: 21).

During the interwar period, Romania made a title of glory out of the fact that it was considered Europe's „grain peer”, although the economy continued to be unilateral - that is nearly exclusively agricultural and deficient under the aspect of mechanization. The priority interests were those of the big rural property, animal traction and the physical force of the majority social class- the peasants- being used for their satisfaction. Only after the 1970s, it was appreciated, at political level, that Romania gained enough progress on the industrialization and urbanization line, as to be able to be considered an industrial-agricultural country, a society similar to those under development.

Thus, a historical and organic problem of the Romanian society, at all times, was „the rural problem”, this being linked to the destiny of the village people and of the evolution of the property regime over the land. In its essence, the rural problem was both an economic and agricultural one (the lack of agricultural property for the majority of peasants) and a social one, in a broad sense, linked to the first one (poverty, illiteracy, alcoholism, epidemic diseases and so on).

Until 1962, the rural economy was dominated, as we underlined, by the feudal production relations that had been maintained for a very long time, becoming a brake in the way of capitalist modernization. As opposed to the land-owners, the peasants were the main productive class of the society, they lived badly and difficultly, being deprived of agricultural property, for its biggest part, fact that determined it to rebel several times, culminating with the 1907 rebellion. After the agricultural reforms in 1864, 1921 and 1945 that had a reparatory role, but did not bring a radical change with regard to the life conditions of the whole villagers, the socialist cooperativisation process followed (1949-1962). This came as a big stroke for the villagers, as a unitary social class that decreased numerically, through the migration to the city of numerous inhabitants of the villages, become workers overnight (after their property right over the land and agricultural machinery was taken away from them, also depriving this class of the economic support of its reproduction).

The massive migration of the village population towards the cities, as a life-saving strategy, was definitive until 1989 and led to the de-population of villages and the abandoning of agricultural occupations, usually leaving behind only the elder generations, unable to work. The migration abroad, after 1990, for a better-paid job and a higher living standard, accentuated the work force deficit in the national agriculture and economy, generating, in the present, a labour force crisis on the labour market in Romania, obliged to import from Asian markets.

Sociological analyses underline that around 5 mil. Romanians had to leave abroad, after 1990, the majority of them due to the economic constraints. They reached over 30 countries on the European continent, especially in Italy, Spain, Germany and Great Britain, where their number exceeds 2.5 mil. pers. The Romanian Diaspora also exists in North America (USA, Canada), in Latin America (large communities of Romanians in Argentina and Brazil), in Africa and the Middle East (Israel), in Australia and New Zealand etc. (Otovescu, 2017: 25-42). Despite of the external migration, the amount of the rural population in Romania exceeds 9 mil. pers. and has a rather consistent proportion within the total population of the country (over 46%), fact that proves its high resilience potential. This means more than the entire population of several countries, such as Bulgaria (7.1 mil.), Serbia (7.02), Denmark (5.75) and Norway (5.26) and almost the population of other countries, such as Hungary (9.8), Greece (10.77), the Czech Republic (10.58) and Sweden (10.0).

The former Romanian peasants re-adapted to the market economy, becoming the farmers of today, whose number is the largest in all 28 member states of the EU. Eurostat registers prove that, out of the 10.3 mil. farms registered in EU, a number of 3.4. mil. are in Romania (33%), followed by Poland (1.4 mil. - 13.6%) and Italy (1.01 mil. -9.8%).

## 2. The theoretical and methodological framework

### 2.1. *The concepts of collective resilience and sustainable development*

From the sociological perspective, resilience can be understood as „the capacity of resisting and recovery, revitalization, rebirth of some groups/communities/societies, after the destabilizing or traumatizing action of certain natural and social factors, radical and explosive changes that concern the life of a human collectivity on the whole. In consequence, when sociology deals with the problems of the collective resilience, the solutions are appropriate at collective level” (Otovescu et al, 2015: 34).

Currently, „durable” or „sustainable” development makes the object of some national public policies, but under conceptual aspect it has been outlined within the context of some international theoretical debates, related to the exploitation of the natural environment to the benefit of the current generations, but without hampering the needs and expectations of the future generations.

The sustainable development concept has been acquired from the field of political debates, in the theoretical register of social sciences and undergoing multiple approaches, of historical, sociological, economic nature etc., being appreciated as a complex concept, due to its multidimensional character. Thus, it can be defined through an ecological, social, economic, technological, cultural, moral dimension, a dimension of scientific research and innovation, of international cooperation and so on.

The idea of sustainable dimension appeared, initially, as a rational and responsible response, of controlled protection of human life (current and future) from the practice of anarchic economic development, at any costs, so-called free. The latter used even the high-risk, polluting technologies in order to gain profit, without anticipating the possibility of some natural disasters, with a big impact on the life quality of the future generations.

Essentially, sustainable development is a documented answer, scientifically based, to the need of protection and conserving the natural environment against the threats of industrial civilisation (as a pollution source), to the need for change of a society or of some fields of it, relating to certain value parameters, of searching a viable solution for a major problem (poverty, unemployment etc.), of correlating several large-scale actions and organizing several actions in order to achieve a major goal, of community interest (at local, county/department, regional, national level, in the case of a country).

The great merit of the sustainable development theory is the unitary approach of the relations between man, society and nature, on a short, medium and long term, as well as advancing some adequate therapies, according to the stated dysfunctions.

Sustainable development is a concrete solution to different types of collective trauma and crises (ecological, of natural resources and so on), but also a viable alternative for balancing society and nature, younger and older generations, developed and under-developed states, the right to a clean environment and the right to use plastic products etc. The base pre-requisite is that humanity has a commune future that all people must respect and protect, because they live on the same planet. As the phrase also points out, the „durable/sustainable development” is a social process, initiated in order to satisfy human needs of long duration, being generated by certain pressing

community needs. For these reasons, it must be managed by public authority institutions, able to ensure the carrying-out and control of the process up to the final stage. Usually, the respective authorities possess the necessary means, advantages in order to mobilise financial, and human resources, to carry out substantial activities on a long term and to ensure their management, with considerable efforts.

Sustainable development involves a commitment and an inter-institutional responsibility, being assimilated as a cardinal value within UN's and EU's strategic directives and the programmes of some national bodies (at the level of the communes, cities, main cities, counties, regions). If we think only about the European funds for the construction of major objectives, such as highway networks and water supply networks etc., we get the image of what institutional support and managing a large community interest project mean.

Handling the sustainable development concept through the perspective of four dimensions that we consider essential – ecological, social, economic and technological – allows us a unitary, but also differentiated approach of the analysed problematic.

The sustainable development topic appeared in the register of social-political sciences in Romania within the context of analysing the problem of the petrol crisis in 1973 and of the appearing of some reports of the members of The Club of Rome such as: Aurelio Peccei, *The Limits to Growth*, 1972; Mikhail Mesarovic, Eduard Pestel, *Mankind at the Turning Point*, 1975 and others, works that were also translated into Romanian.

## *2.2. Sustainable development as a revitalization factor of the rural communities*

The new theoretical-philosophical perspective, opened by the promotion of sustainable development as a global humanity value, was actively supported through an institutionalized network that organized and extended itself consequently, at world level and from which corresponding ramifications emerged, at national level. As examples of important institutional events supporting this philosophy of sustainable development, we underline the following:

- UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, 1972;
- World Commission on Environment and Development led by G. Brundtland and established by the General Assembly of the UN in 1983;
- Vienna Convention, 1985, on the depletion of the protecting ozone layer of our planet;
- the Brundtland Report, entitled „Our Common Future”, 1986, issued after the nuclear catastrophe in Chernobyl (1985), which pledged for a development strategy that would not imperil the ecological balance;
- Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, 1992, in which 170 state leaders took part, where the Agenda 21 was adopted as an action programme allowing each local administration in the world to establish the directions of its sustainable development, on a medium and long term;
- World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002 and others. (Otovescu, 2017).

The fact that UN has a Department for Sustainable Development, as well as the EU, proves the primordial attention granted to the new strategic sustainable development

orientation of all world countries. The priority action directions inscribed on Agenda 21, concern: fighting poverty and social exclusion, protection the natural environment and production of sustainable goods and services. At a world political level, sustainable development was seen as a factor for building a new society, with a superior life quality and as a mean for reducing cleavages between poor and rich countries.

At national level, like in Romania, for example, the National Centre for Sustainable Development was established, which began the implementation in our country of the UN Programme for Sustainable Development (PNUD). The Local Agenda 21 was carried out during 2000-2003, in nine pilot-cities in our country and Government Decision, in more than 40 main cities, later extended the programme during 2003-2007.

After Romania's accession to the European Union, in 2007, local development strategies for communes and cities in Romania were elaborated, as a preliminary condition for accessing European funds for local development. In addition, since January 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, the Ministry for regional Development and Public Administration was established, as a management authority under the command of the Romanian Government. Since the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2017, it has been reorganized, under the name: Ministry of Regional Development, Public Administration and European Funds, having, as a main objective, the coordination of European structural and investment funds, during the period 2014-2020, of the regional development, territorial cooperation and cohesion, transnational and interregional cooperation and landscape planning programmes. For the implementation of the regional development programmes, Romania was split in eight regions, each of them having a Regional Development Agency- as a sustainable development vector, of an economy that would respond to global competitiveness, by creating regional systems of advanced knowledge and innovation.

Another important national rural development institution, placed under the command of the Government, born in Romania ever since 1883, is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR). It ensures the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of policies and strategies in the fields of agriculture, forestry and rural development, modernization of activities and the efficient use of the allocated funds.

It has a number of 15 agencies and other institutional structures under its command, among which the National Rural Development Network. At territorial level, MADR is represented by the Directorates for Agriculture and Rural Development that exist in each county. The General Directorate for Rural Development is a management authority for the National Rural Development Programme - NRDP, developed under the motto: „Romanian villages have a future!”

The National Rural Development Programme was developed in several stages, through the SAPARD (2000-2006), NRDP1 (2007-2013) and NRDP2 (2014-2020) projects. Within this programme, „national strategic orientations for the sustainable development of the disadvantaged mountain area (2014-2020)” were set out. There also exists a programme for „integrated investments in the territory of the Danube Delta” and others.

The main objective of this work is the investigation of the major changes that occurred in the Romanian rural environment from a demographic and economic point

of view, during the period 1859-2018 (159 years), based on some indicators considered as relevant. In addition, some significant benchmarks of sustainable development and of the resilience of rural communities in our country were set out. The examination of the demographic decline and of sustainable development was especially supported by historical analysis, by the statistic method and by the case study (in Dolj County).

In the elaboration of the study, we started from two general hypotheses:

Hyp. 1: The Romanian society knew a permanent demographic growth until 1989, after which it entered a state of decline, the risk of a massive de-population existing especially in the rural environment;

Hyp. 2: The biggest need for sustainable development in Romania is in the rural environment, where we meet also currently localities with dirt roads, no water supply and sewerage networks or where certain villages live the stress and drama of their physical disappearance from history.

### **3. Discussions**

#### *3.1. The rural space development – a historical challenge for the modernization of Romania*

In its entire history, the rural space was and remained for Romania one of the most important and difficult social-economic challenges. This, for several reasons:

a) Here lived and worked, depending on nature, more than 80% of the country's population that built-up, at the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most numerous social class – the villagers;

b) The modernization of the agricultural economy, firstly through the mechanization of works and the improvement of the living standards (electrical network, water supply and sewerage network, asphaltting of roads etc.) still remained a major aspiration during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because they involved massive and long term investments;

c) Illiteracy was a mass phenomenon and diseases caused large damage, especially amongst children – the number of those deceased under the age of 1 per 1.000 living births being amongst the highest in Europe: 175,6, in 1930 and 198,8 in 1947 (for a population of ca 15 mil. inhabitants). In 2017, the infantile mortality rate was, in Romania, of 6,6 deceased under 1 year per 1.000 living births being higher in the rural environment (8,4 per thousand) than in the urban environment (5,2 per thousand).

#### *3.2. The dynamics of the rural and urban population. Comparative evolutions.*

In the country's demographic history, Romania's population increased permanently until 1989 and since 1990, it started to decrease year after year, until the present time. As for the rural population, this has always been more numerous than the urban population, situation that existed until 1985, when it became equal to the urban one, after which it entered a continuously descending trend. This fact is proved

by the following statistical data, processed and correlated by us (Axenciuc, 1996: 20-21).

**Table no. 1:** Historical evolution of the relation between the rural and urban population in Romania (1859-2018)

No.	Reference years	Total population	Rural population		Urban population	
			Number	%	Number	%
1.	1859	3.865.000	3.200.000	82,8	665.000	17,2
2.	1906	6.584.000	5.351.000	81,3	1.233.000	18,7
3.	1920	15.541.000	12.088.000	77,8	3.453.000	22,2
4.	25 <sup>th</sup> of January 1948	15.872.624	12.159.485	76,6	3.713.139	23,4
5.	1 <sup>st</sup> of July 1985	22.724.836	11.354.744	50,0	11.370.092	50,0
6.	1 <sup>st</sup> of July 1989	23.151.564	10.839.761	46,8	12.311.803	53,2
7.	1 <sup>st</sup> of July 2016	19.706.529	9.120.865	46,3	10.585.664	53,7
8.	1 <sup>st</sup> of January 2018	19.530.631	9.027.161	46,2	10.503.470	53,8

If in the Union year of Moldavia with Wallachia (24<sup>th</sup> of January 1859), the population of the newly established modern state lived in the villages in a percentage of ca. 83%, after nearly 5 decades, in 1906, the relation between rural and urban was still the same (81,3% - 18,7%). Even later, after almost half of century, at the beginnings of communism in Romania (1948), the Romanian society was defined by the predominance of the village population, this representing 76.6% of the entire population of the country. Barely through the 1985 census, it was signalled that the village population had decreased to half of the total population, becoming equal to that of the cities.

Since 1989 until the present, the relation between the percentage of rural and urban population reversed, meaning that the rural population decreased and the cities became demographically oversized, having ca. 54% of the resident population in Romania, at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018. The last Population and Housing Census reveals that, on December 30, 2022, Romania had 19,053,815 inhabitants, about 1.1 million less than in 2011. At the same time, there was also a slight recovery in the share of the rural population (of to 46.2% in 2018 to 47.8% in 2022). Out of 42 counties, 39 experienced losses in the number of inhabitants and only 3 had an obvious increase in population: Ilfov, Bistrița-Năsăud and Suceava.

Statistic calculation show us that, during the last 3 decades, the resident population of our country knew a general decrease. For instance, at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018, we were 3.620.933 less than in 1989, the most of people belonging to localities in the rural environment. If we take into account that the demographic prognoses of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics anticipate a perpetuation trend, over the next 3-4 decades, of the population decline, estimating that, in 2060, our country will reach 15.3 mil.



inhabitants, nearly equal to the population in 1919 (15.495.000 pers.) or that in 1948, at the beginning of the communist age (15.872.624 pers.), then the need for adopting measures inspired through firm and urgent public policies for the solving of the two previously underlined problems: Romania's rapid demographic decline and the disappearance of some rural localities.

Amongst the causes of the population decrease, there are: a higher mortality rate than the natality rate at the level of the whole country (negative natural growth), but also in the rural environment, where it is sensibly higher than in the urban environment, as it can be noticed from the table below; the massive migration for work and a better life in other countries of ca. 5 mil. Romanians. Only in the 2007-2017 decade, after Romania's accession to the EU (1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007), 2 mil. young people, aged below 40, left out country. The National Institute of Statistics reveals that only in 2008 there were 302.796 temporary immigrants from Romania, but also after 8 years, in 2016, their number remained high – 207.578 pers. Suggestive for explaining the population decline in Romania are also the statistical data in the next table (Axenciuc, 1996 p. 51).

**Table no. 2:** Dynamics of the natality and mortality rate in Romania

Years	Residence environment	Natality		Deceased		Immigrants		Total population	
		No. of living births	Per thousand inhabitants	No.	Per thousand inhabitants	Definitive	Temporary	No.	%
1990	Urban	156.950	12,9	99.331	8,2	96.929	- Year 2008: 302.796	12.311.803	53,2
	Rural	157.796	14,3	147.755	13,4			10.839.761	46,8
<b>Total / average</b>		<b>314.746</b>	<b>13,6</b>	<b>247.086</b>	<b>10,6</b>			<b>23.151.564 (1<sup>st</sup> of July 1989)</b>	
2017	Urban	113.042	9,0	124.299	9,9	23.156	242.193	12.523.597	56,3
	Rural	92.793	9,6	137.446	14,2			9.707.246	43,7
<b>Total / average</b>		<b>205.835</b>	<b>9,3</b>	<b>261.745</b>	<b>11,8</b>			<b>22.230.843</b>	

In the year 2017, a low natality rate, of 9.3 per thousand was registered - the EU average being of 10.1 per thousand, while the mortality rate was of 11.8 per thousand, our country being ranked on the 8<sup>th</sup> place in EU-28, according to the data offered by IndexMundi.

Sociological research state that 4 out of 10 Romanians that left were aged under 35 years; that the average age of the Romanian immigrants was of 28.8 years in 2002 and of 33.3 years in 2012; that Romanians formed the largest foreign community in Italy and that their number exceeded 1 mil. not only in Italy, but also in Spain and the

USA (Otovescu, 2016: 128). The majority of Romanian immigrants were high school and professional schools graduates and, in the last years, the share of young Romanians studying abroad also increased. Thus, our youth is contributing not only economically, but also to the increase of natality in other countries that adopted them, to the detriment of the biological reproduction of the population in Romania.

### *3.3. Left villages and agonizing villages*

The amplitude of the flows of Romanian immigrants after 1990, that some specialists compare, referring to their volume and intensity, to the flows of refugees from Syria, torn by civil war, obliges us to acknowledge the gravity of the difficulties faced by the citizen, who had to search for living solutions in other countries, as well as the incapacity of the government to manage the challenges of the transition period from communism to capitalism in an appropriate way, when poverty risk has spread over 40% of the population of our country. If the citizen solved their own problems, through internal migration and migration abroad, the government and the local authorities must instead solve the problems of the country and of the local communities.

The cities always offered more living opportunities than the villages, the populations' internal migration from the rural to the urban environment being encouraged. The youth in remote villages, particularly, left their houses and families, leaving only older generations behind. As the inhabitants physically disappeared, numerous villages became empty, as the surroundings, with unprocessed gardens and agricultural lands, which offer a desolating image. According to some estimations, there are ca. „128 completely abandoned villages” and others in agony, „perhaps even 200 small villages that have under 10 inhabitants” (Otovescu, 2016). Other times inhabited by hundreds or perhaps thousands of people, who gave life to the places and energy to the traditions or collective events, now „[only] houses, churches and graves are left behind” (Bogdan, 2018).

In the current administrative organization, on the territory of the 41 counties of the country, there are 12.951 villages, 2.854 communes 320 cities and 103 main cities (Tudor, 2019). The natural decline of the population in Romania and, particularly, the accentuated depopulation process in the rural environment, caused by aging (high age average - over 60 years) and the decrease of natality, by (internal/external) migration, is an irreversible phenomenon, fully expanding at national scale, being signalled in 33 counties, namely in 2.532 villages and cities, according to the calculations of prof. Vasile Ghețău, based on the data supplied by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania (Vasile, 2019). We underline that the 2.532 localities undergoing demographic decline represent ca. 80% of the total of rural and urban localities in Romania. In our county, Dolj, for instance, at the 2011 census it was stated that 7 of the 376 villages of this county no longer had any inhabitants and 46 villages (12% of the total number) had less than 100 inhabitants each. In 30 of these lived less than 25 persons. (Regional Directorate of Statistics Dolj, 2019, 12). If the actual rhythm of population loss of the Romanian villages should be continued, the estimations lead us to the idea that, in 2 or 3 decades „perhaps at least 300-400 rural settlements shall be erased from the map” (Bogdan, 2018).

A recent analysis on the meaning and dimensions of the movement of resident population in Romania was carried out by a renowned specialist, prof. Vasile Ghețău, who warns on the fact that the population decreased in 80% of the total of 3.181 localities of the country- in 79% of the rural and 82% of the urban localities, at it can be stated from the table below (Ghețău, 2019).

**Table no. 3:** Distribution of the localities according to the dynamics of the number of resident population in 2017

Localities	Number of localities	Number of localities in which:			Proportion of the localities in which the population decreased - %
		The population increased	The population was stationary	The population decreased*	
<b>Communes</b>	2861	566	26	2269	79
<b>Cities and main cities</b>	320	57	0	263	82
<b>All localities</b>	<b>3181</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2532</b>	<b>80</b>

It results that the resident population in Romania increased only in 623 localities (representing 19.58% of the total of 3.181 localities in the country), of which 57 are urban and 566 are rural; it was stationary in 26 localities (0.82% from the total of localities in the country), all being rural and it decreased in 2.532 localities (79.60% of the total, 263 of which are urban and 2.269 rural). Thus, the rural population benefits from more resilience resources than the urban one, as it knew increases in 20% of the country's communes (the urban population increased in 17.81 of the cities).

The amplitude, complexity and rapidity of the depopulation phenomenon do not allow the local authorities in our country to control its manifestations, but they also do not have appropriate responses and programmes of intelligent or pragmatic measures, as we encounter in other countries.

The village Palaios Panteleimonas in Greece, for instance, was revitalised after the physical disappearance of some villagers and after being abandoned by its last inhabitants, by being transformed into a touristic village, currently being visited daily by thousands of tourists.

An attractive measure also was taken by the town hall of Sambuca in Sicily that, in order to repopulate the locality, offered houses for sale at the price of 1 Euro, under the condition that the future owners would spend 15.000 Euros to restore them.

We consider that sustainable development was for Romania of the last 7 decades (44 years of communism and 28 years of capitalism) the main national salvation solution. It remained also for the future, especially because now we have the chance to access non-reimbursable funds from the European Union. Even if the current development rhythm, in certain fields, is discouraging. For example, during the last 100

years, only 805 km of highway were built in our country, while Hungary had reached 1.500 km of highway in 2015, Austria over 1.700 km and Spain had over 16.200 km at the beginning of 2015. In order to ironize the indifference of the public authorities and stimulate their interest, a citizen from Suceava built on his own, in March 2019, one meter of highway and other citizen planted flowers in the holes in the streets where they lived.

### *3.4. Life quality of the rural population*

The most problems of the current Romanian society appear as being related to the life of some rural communities that the previous governments could not solve. Numerous villages, other times vivid and prosperous, became, over time, suppliers of under-development, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, demographic decline, through the progressive depopulation of some rural cores - because of the sudden decrease of natality, of the inhabitants' accentuated aging and the youth's exodus towards the cities or migration in other countries. Thus, in the last 70 years, the rural population decreased by 25.76%: from 12.159.485 inhabitants in January 1948, to 10.839.761 pers. In July 1989 and currently, at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018, it reached 9.027.161 pers., situation that confirms, once again, the first hypothesis of our article.

In addition, at national level, the resident population diminished with 0.6%, being, at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018, 113.719 pers. lower than at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2017. At the beginning of 2019, it has been estimated that Romania would lose ca. 247 daily, fact that would place the country on the line of a demographic disaster.

Relative to the remote past, many things have changed now in our country, as we notice obvious signs of progress and technical civilization in the rural environment, but numerous villages continue to face the same problems that the inhabitants had during the previous centuries and other risk, furthermore, to disappear from the geographical map of Romania. In a traditional sense, sustainable development refers to the penetration of the elements of modern civilization into the rural world and the elevation the inhabitants' living standard, through the establishment of schools and medical units, through the asphaltting of streets and roads, through the mechanization of agricultural works, electrification of dwellings etc. In the current meaning of this term, frequently used in the language of the public administration, sustainable development concerns, particularly, the quality of the natural environment, water, air and soil conservation and the non-polluting waste management.

A revealing image of the resilience potential of the rural population results from the analysis of its life quality, through the perspective of some indicators presented below (at national and European level):

- The amount of the total average household income, registered in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of 2018, points out the fact that, in the rural environment, the incomes are lower (3.598.84 RON) compared to those in the urban environment (5.120.25 RON), also being inferior to the national average (4.454.10 RON). We mention that the gross minimum wage in Romania placed our country on the second last place in EU-28, maintaining this position even after its substantial growth since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2019, when it reached 2.080 RON or 271 Euros (2.350 RON for those with higher education). The highest minimum wages in the EU are in Luxemburg (2.000 Euros), Ireland (1.614)

and the Netherlands (1.578) and the lowest are in Bulgaria (202 Euros), Romania (271) and Hungary (283) (Ilie, 2018). The minimum wage average in the EU is of 872 Euros (15 countries are below this threshold, the other 13 being above this average value) and the medium wage average in the 28 countries is of 1.644 Euros (14 countries being below the average and 14 above).

- The relative poverty rate was in Romania of the year 2016 of 25.3%, being fuelled particularly by the precarious situation of the rural population. This rate brought our country on the 1<sup>st</sup> place in EU -28, where the average of poverty risk was of 17.3%. Romania was followed by Bulgaria, with a rate of 22.9%. In the year 2017, the poverty risk decreased to 23.6%, according to the data of the NIS. The information collected through a recent opinion poll, in January 2019 reveals that, at the beginning of this year, 25% of the Romanians considered themselves „poor”, that 30% are „worried” about the lack of money, about the uncertainty of the next day, about the low level of salaries and pensions and 12% are worried about their own health status. Only 1% assessed themselves as being „rich” and one third of the Romanians considered that a personal monthly income of ca. 2.000 RON would bring them financial peace.

- The inactive population in the rural environment increased continuously: from 4.32 million in the year 2000 to 4.76 mil. in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of 2018 (4, 2019). Technically, unemployment was higher in the country than in the city. If we take into account our county, we notice that the unemployment rate was, at the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2017, higher in the rural environment, „affecting 20.574 pers, namely 84.5% of the 24.353 unemployed persons in Dolj county, while, in the urban environment, 3.779 persons were registered, namely 15.5% of the total of unemployed persons. Women represented 46.4% of the total of unemployed persons in the urban environment and 39.1% of the total of unemployed persons in the rural environment” (325).

The agricultural economy offers limited work places for the villagers, but many of them sold even their lands, because of poverty or the incapacity to exploit them. Most often, these were acquired by foreign buyers that gained property over more than 40% of the total of Romania’s agricultural land. The former owners find themselves in the impossibility of having a sure and permanent living source, the social phenomenon of rural poverty and dependence of the villagers on the support provided by the Romanian state being thus amplified;

- School education and sanitary protection in the rural environment suffer because of the same problem of under-financing that is encountered also at national level. Moreover, the rural education is affected by the decrease of natality, by the dissolving of several schools and consolidation of others, measures taken during the period of the economic crisis during 2008-2012. Romania has 7.047 school units, most of them being unacknowledged. From the total of schools, 3.140 function in the rural environment and about 1.460 (46.5%) of these do not have a toilet with water and sanitary containers within the premises of the education spaces. The current government committed itself to modernize the toilets in schools, to ensure water sewerage and the installation of septic tanks;

- The utilities system, necessary for a civilized living of the rural population, presents numerous deficits in the entire country. At the level of the year 2018, it was estimated that half of the Romanians neither have a toilet in the house or access to permanent potable water supply; that, in the villages, the sewerage network is almost

missing and in the city only 87.7% of the inhabitants benefit from sewerage, although a EU Directive „obliges our country to connect all localities to the sewerage system until the end of this year” (ObservatorTV, 2018). Also waste collection and landfilling management in the villages present multiple flaws that affect the ecological or natural environment;

- The state of the public roads is an old and difficult problem not only for the rural environment, but also for the population of the entire country, ca. 35% of roads being without asphalt, fact that ranks us on the last place in EU-28. According to the NIS data, acquired by Libertatea and processed by us, Romania is crossed, at the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2017, by 86.099 km. of public roads, of which:

- only 763 km. were highways (4.3% of the total of public roads);
- 10.088 km. were dirt roads (11.71%) – of which 13 km. were from the national roads category, 1.858 km. from the county roads category and 8.217 km. from the communal roads category;
- 20.037 km. were stone roads (23.27%);
- 55.211 km. were modernized and asphalted roads (64.12%), but they did not lack holes and bumps. Certainly, the majority of dirt roads are in the rural environment, but they are also not missing in the urban environment, particularly in the new neighbourhoods or at the outskirts of some cities. Only in the capital of Romania, Bucharest, more than 200 dirt streets have recently been inventoried;

- The health protection of the rural population is deficient and often supposes only emergency medical services. In the rural environment, there are a small number of medical units and medical doctors, of pharmacies, but also a chronic under-financing and chaotic reforms in the system that accentuated the cleavages between medical conditions in the country and in the cities. For example, during the financial crisis in 2011, a number of 111 sanitary units were joined in Romania and other 67 hospital units were dismantled, out of a total number of 128 hospitals. From the NIS data it results that, in 2016, we had a network of 60.000 medical units spread across the entire country (under public and private regime), but the most of them, 49.000 (81.7%), were concentrated in the urban environment and only 11.000 (18,3%) operated in the rural environment, the number of doctors being, implicitly, lower. The gap between the two social environments is enormous on the medical field, taking into account that, in 2016, over 9 mil. pers. lived in villages (46.3% of Romania's population), while more than 10.5 mil. pers. (53.7%) lived in the cities. Statistics show that: in the cities there are 6.700 family medicine units and in the villages there are 4.600 family medicine units; in the urban environment operate 10.400 specialized medical units and their number is 27.2 smaller in the villages, with only 381 units; per 10.000 inhabitants in the rural environment there were only 9,8 units. In the cities, there are hospitals with 122.000 beds, while in the rural environment there are hospitals with only 10.000 bed. In the year 2016, Romania had 570 hospitals that granted medical assistance for a number of 4.2 mil. hospitalized patients. (Otovescu, 2011). They represent ca. 28% of the 15 mil. persons that permanently live in the country, according to our appreciation;

- The social protection of the citizen in the rural communities is normally achieved through specialized services of the local mayor's offices. Moreover, the church and different non-governmental organisations are involved in solving some individual

and family needs, but in the villages in a smaller rate than in the cities. Certain researches unveil that the governmental organisations assumed, especially, the role of „formers of social services” in the rural environment (Andrioni, 2009: 19), that there is a need regarding their specialization at local, regional and national level (Andrioni, 2018). In series of the rural life problems, some deficits regarding the inhabitants’ food consumption (Goian et al, 2010), the child’s education and protection within the family are signalled and so on (Andrioni, 2009);

- Life expectancy at birth, in the Romania of the year 2018, which is a synthetic indicator of people’s life quality, was amongst the lowest in the European countries, with an average of 75.2 years, while in Europe the average was of 81 years. To be remembered that, under this indicator, Romania is ranked on the 72<sup>nd</sup> place in the world ranking. Regularly, life expectancy in the Eastern European countries is lower than in Western and Northern states. According to genders, the life expectancy of Romanian women is higher (79 years) than that of Romanian men (71.6 years), but lower than the European women’s one – where the average is of 82 years, for women and 75 years, for men. Furthermore, the life expectancy of the rural population in Romania is lower than the one in the cities, the mortality rate being even higher in the village world – 14.2 deaths per thousand inhabitants, in 2017, in comparison with the urban environment, where the mortality rate was of 9.9 per thousand inhabitants. Technically, the number of deceases in the villages was, in 2017, for example, with 13.386 pers. higher than in the cities (26. Institutul Național de Statistică, 2018: 13).

- The perception and assessment of their own health status. In the year 2016, half of Romanians assessed their own health status as being „good” and „very good” (51%), the EU average being of 69%; the other 35% considered it „acceptable” (the EU average - 24%) and 14% appreciated it as „bad and very bad” (the EU average being of 7%).

The statistical data above reflect the size of the cleavages between life standards in the country and in the cities, but also the multiple needs of sustainable development of the rural environment in Romania, validating the second hypothesis of our study.

#### **4. Who saves the Romanian village and the sustainable development?**

##### *4.1. The rural investments as main community resilience resources*

The salvation of the rural environment is expected, first, to come from European funds and governmental policies, from the budgets of the public county administrations and of the communal mayor’s offices. Besides these, different community institutions, cultural and educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and associations could play a role.

The emancipation of the Romanian village was an imperative requirement for all governments that administered the country in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but remarkable results were obtained only after the 1960s (electrification of rural localities, construction of schools, kindergartens and medical units, road infrastructure, mechanized agricultural economy etc.). The philosophy of the current Romanian government has cohesion as a

central value and promotes it both at national level (in order to balance the discrepancies between villages and cities) and in the context of the European relations.

Recently, during the last General Assembly of the Association of Communes in Romania (Bucharest, the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 2019), the current Prime Minister proved to be aware of the specific needs of rural communities and mentioned the fact that the draft of the state budget Law for 2019 helps us to have a sustainable economic growth. Thus, more money was allocated for the county councils, in order to „pull the Romanian village out of the mud”. Moreover, it was pointed out that the chances to „pull the country out of the muds” were offered by the two programmes – NLDP I and NLDP II, as ca. 70% of their financing was directed towards the communes, so that the Romanian village would be modernized through specific projects, not demagogical declarations. Other investment sources were the Regional Operational programme 2014-2020 (ROP) and the National Rural Development Plan 2014-2020. We underline that the number of financing applications submitted at the administrative-territorial units totally reached 778 (in amount of more than 780 mil. Euros), of which 357 or 45.9% (ca. 399 mil. Euros) are at the level of the communes.

From the National Budget for 2018, 1.893 objectives for the development of the public infrastructure in the communes in Romania were contracted, in worth of 1.6 billion Euros. These funds were mostly allocated for the water and sewerage infrastructure (315 contracts in amount of 439 mil. Euros), the road infrastructure (506 contracts - 528 mil. Euros), the school and preschool infrastructure (320 contracts – 118 mil. Euros), the cultural infrastructure and the cultural patrimony (667 contracts– 212 billion Euros). Assuming its general objective, to have the main amenities in every village, the current government of Romania set up the Development and Investment Fund. NLDP I and NLDP II and ROP shall be continued and the financial resources allocated through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development , with the purpose of „raising the Romanian village at the European level, where we shall have all amenities”. In the Prime Minister’s vision, we must put an accent on cohesion not only at European level, but also at national level – „cohesion between village and city, cohesion between the more developed and less developed areas”. Firstly, the South - Eastern area of Romania is considered. Amongst the governmental priority objectives, in the current phase, there are the following: no unacknowledged schools until 2020, in Romania, due to the lack of sanitary amenities; „no mud on the streets of our villages and communes”; jobs in the rural environment, in order to prevent the youth from migrating towards the urban areas etc.

At present, the investment objectives and directions shall be continued, but with considerably larger financial resources than in the last years. Thus, there are now a total number of 12.681 investment objectives, of which 10.387 or ca. 82% are financed in the rural environment (in total amount of 34.25 billion RON). From those allocated for villages, we mention:

- 2.689 water supply and sewerage systems;
- 1.776 education units, of which 880 are day care units and kindergartens;
- 3.948 roads, bridges and small bridges

After Romania’s accession to the European Union, important steps were made on the line of modernization of the rural environment. Thus, for instance, during the period 2008 - 2018, in Dolj county were made out investments for water supply in 68



rural and urban settlements (from the total of 84 administrative - territorial units that, in 2008, did not have a water supply network) and for the construction of some sewerage systems in 59 localities (from a total of 105 territorial - administrative units that in 2008 had no sewerage network). Other investments concern ecological protection, performing road infrastructure works and wastewater treatment and recovery, waste landfilling in a single, county landfill, production of electrical power from renewable sources (solar, wind, water).

To be noted that the investments in the agriculture and rural development of our country benefitted from European funds, in 2017 and 2018, in amount of ca. 7.553 billion Euros. Almost 900.000 agricultural landowners received subventions, the total worth of which reached 2.75 billion Euros. The reconstruction and extension of the irrigation system allowed the setting into operation of 86 centres that ensure water for 1.980.000 ha. The development of a system against hail and for precipitation control in Muntenia, Transylvania and Moldova is planned, as well as the mapping of all agricultural lands by the state etc.

#### *4.2. The political agenda and the specific needs of the citizen*

The compatibility between the political agenda of the leaders and the needs or expectations of the citizen is essential for the progress of a society. The first often present their global achievements and the image of a land under progress, while the citizen take into account their specific life problems. If we refer to the current leaders in Romania, they frequently point out: raises of salaries and pensions that were real in the last years and improved the life of more than 10 mil. Romanians; the national economic growth in a larger percentage compared to other EU economies, as this was of 7% in 2017, 4,1% in 2018, estimated to be of 5.5%, in 2019 etc. According to the views of the population, whose specific needs refer to asphalted roads and highways, gas, water and sewerage networks and others, the image of those at the power is associated with unfulfilled promises, with inertia and lack of interest.

For a longer time, the political Romania has been blocked in plans and expectations of the population. Thus, for instance, the Casino in Constanta is almost totally ruined and no salvation solution for this former pearl of the Romanian seaside has been outlined. Moreover, the Radio House in Bucharest, a grandiose, but unfinished construction of the Ceausescu era, degraded continuously, under the carelessness of all governments up to the present time, who, in nearly 30 years, did not succeed to recover it. In the Capital, the works for the subway line of only 7 km between the University and Drumul Taberei started in 2011 and it was considered that it would be ready in 3 years, but still has not been finished after 8 years (March 2019). The works for the subway line between „Henri Coandă” International Airport and the Northern train station had not begun in March 2019, although in 2020 football games from the European Football Championship were scheduled to take place here. Romania could become a national construction field if it only concentrated on building highways. Nevertheless, the political-administrative management is deficient and weak, if we think about the fact that, in 28 years (1990-2018) only ca. 676 km could be built!

The society needs dwellings for young people, but these could be only partially covered until the present!

It needs hospitals, but only one was built in the entire country, in 28 years - the Municipal Hospital in Craiova!

It needs a modern and rapid road network, especially between the three historical provinces (Moldova, Transylvania and Wallachia), because this ensures communication, national unity and cohesion, but the measures taken have been for many years under planning!

It needs water and sewerage networks in villages, ecological landfills and waste recycling units, bathrooms inside the homes of the citizen in the rural environment, but the planned investments are weak, insufficient or blocked on the bureaucratic channels!

## **5. Conclusions and proposals**

Romania's population decreased in 80% of the rural and urban localities and, if this trend is continued, our country will reach ca. 10 mil. inhabitants and this will lead to the disappearance of several villages, with difficultly foreseeable consequences in the social, economic and cultural field. Certainly, there are also other countries with a population higher or lower than the one forecasted for Romania; still, not the number is important, but how well the human and natural resources are organized and administered, how much is achieved on the economic field, so that the population would reach a high living standard.

Romanians are dynamic and enthusiast people, capable of rapid mobilisation, qualities that help them overcome certain historical difficulties and historical cleavages compared to other countries. In order for Romania to become a prosperous capitalist society, it needs a biological, moral and spiritual regeneration of our country. First of all, the severe demographic decline must be stopped, by increasing natality on a long term, based on substantial financial incentives (for example: 250 Euros monthly for the first child, 300 for the second and 450 for the third, until the age of 16 years, when it has the right of work). The life quality improvement leads to a decrease of the mortality rate, but also to the stability of population that is no longer tempted to migrate abroad. The moral reconstruction of the society can be achieved through education, work and the internalisation of humanist values.

A special attention must be given to the repopulation of some villages and the improvement of life in the rural environment, through: granting free land to those who want to build dwellings; stoning and asphaltting of communal roads; construction of the water supply and sewerage network for citizen, but also for the irrigation of agricultural lands; setting-up agricultural machinery parks in each commune that the citizen shall be able to rent for use, as it happens in Israel; setting-up medical units with permanent service in each commune; endowment of the locality with specialists for agriculture (agronomists) and stockbreeding (veterinary doctors); setting-up banking units that would facilitate business in the rural environment; construction of day care units, kindergartens and modern school spaces, for the education of young people and of day centres for elder people etc.

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