

ROUMANIAN RURAL SPACE CHARACTERIZATION FROM WESTERN REGION

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ABSTRACT

The rural space represents the relationship that is established between man and nature, interdependency relations establishing between social actions and the natural environment where these actions occur, as well as the essence of material and spiritual civilization that emerge and evolve on a certain territory. Thus, the rural space includes many areas, communities, natural landscapes, farmlands, forests, habitats and traditional cultures, being actually the place where most resources of national economy are concentrated. Romanian rural area faces with many weaknesses. The main problems specific for rural areas are low economic development, aging, migration towards urban areas, poorly developed infrastructure and low population density. The rural space has some distinct features which are transferred within the individuality, specificity and authenticity, compared to other areas. The Western Region is one of the eight regions of development established nationally on October 28, 1998. This region consists of four counties: Arad, Caras-Severin, Hunedoara and Timis.

Keywords: rural space, Western Region, rural development

INTRODUCTION

Rural area represent the occupied territory mostly by forests, crops and green spaces, and is based on a predominantly agricultural society.

The expansion of urban areas, the development of communication ways, setting some non-agricultural activities, introducing some techniques and technologies have led at charging the rural space with new elements and new relationships, enriching it qualitatively and quantitatively. (MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT, 2013))

To reduce these problems it is necessary to develop and implement some development strategies, taking as starting point the needs identified in the territory. An important role have local communities, which must proceed to a dynamic development, supported by a local rural development strategy drawn up in accordance with the national strategy for rural development.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The authors of the research methods used to collect data from various sources and Reference section of territory, their processing, analysis, interpretation and drawing conclusions.

The objectives of this study are:

- evaluation of actually stage which characterizes rural area at regional and national level and identifies key issues;
- analysis of the main economic indicators that characterize the rural western region;
- creation some development strategies of rural area which eliminates existent problems from the studied area;

RESULTS

Rural area as defined according to Recommendation no. 1296/1996 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the European Charter of Rural Areas as being "an interior area, including villages and small towns, where most of the lands are used for: agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fisheries; the economic and cultural activities of the inhabitants of these areas (crafts, industry, services, etc.); arrangements for non-urban areas for leisure and amusement (or nature reserves); other uses (excluding those for housing)".

Many times the rural space is defined as opposed to urban one, more exactly *"the space characterized by a population and density relatively low and by a predominance of agricultural activity"*. (MATEOC-SÎRB, MĂNESCU, 2012)

The Western Development Region is part of the Danube- Cris- Mures- Tisa Euroregion, which includes the four counties of the region, three Hungarian counties and the autonomous region of Vojvodina, Serbia.

From the administrative point of view, within the Western Development Region, in the year 2011 there were 12 cities, 30 towns and 281 villages, of which belonged a number of 1,327 villages.

In the Western Region, 37.2% of total population is concentrated in rural areas. If we make an analogy with the existent situation at national level, where the value of the population living in rural areas is 45.1%, we can state that in the rural space of Western Region a fewer number of people are concentrated.

The analysis by component counties of the region, indicates differences in terms of the value of this indicator. Thus, in Arad and Caras- Severin counties, the share of the population living in rural areas, in total population approaches as value of the national average, 45 % and 44% , while in Timis and Hunedoara counties, the recorded values are: 38.7 % and 23.3%. The low rural population from rural areas in Hunedoara county is due to the fact that this county is the second county, by urbanization degree, after Bucharest - Ilfof.

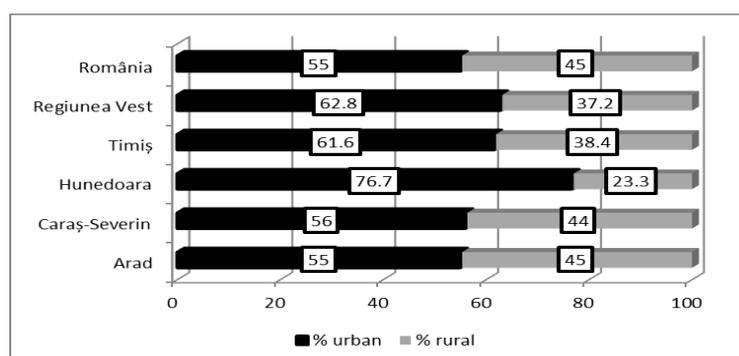


Figure 1. Population structure by area of residence

Source: Romanian statistical yearbook, 2012

The size of localities, in terms of population, in rural areas is usually low, 93.5% of them having a number of inhabitants below than 5,000. The remaining of 6.5% localities with over 5,000 inhabitants are found in Timis (13) and Arad (6) counties, within the latter one there is actually met and largest commune from the region, namely Vladimirescu commune with more than 10,000 inhabitants.

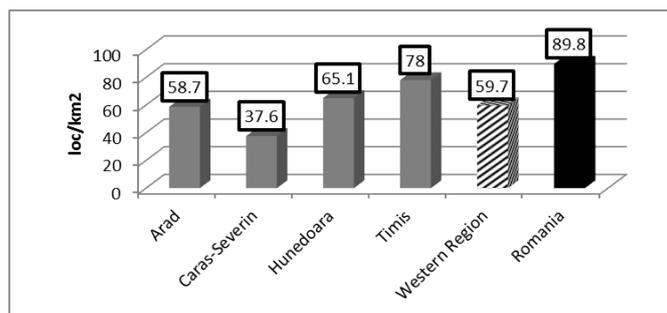


Figure 2. Population Density

Source: Regional Plan for Development, West Region, 2014-2020

In terms of population density (*Figure 2*), it can be seen that the region average, 59.7 inhab/sq km, is below the national average, 89.8 inhab/sq km. At counties level there are situations when it exceeds the average of region, namely Timis county (78 inhab/sq km) and Hunedoara (65.1 inhab/sq km) and there are counties where population density is below the region average, in Caras-Severin county (37.6 inhabitants/sq km) and Arad county (58.7 inhab/sq km).

Life expectancy at the West Region level was in 2011 of 73.06 years, lower than the national average of 73.47 years. The difference is recorder by gender and area of residence. Life expectancy among women being higher by 7 years, exceeding both the regional and national average. In rural areas, the average lifetime (72.57 years) is lower compared to urban areas (73.34 years) due to poorer living conditions and lack of medical services in some areas.

A feature of the rural population is demographic aging and the structure imbalances by aging groups. This makes that the reduction of the population in rural areas to be an issue much debated in these regions. In many cases, the decline of population exceeded the normal limits of the demographic system, creating thus imbalances.

The predominance of older people and a high mortality rate will result in an effect of 10% reduction, naturally, of the aging populatio and at rejuvenating the rural population. Thereby, the populations in coming years will be a young one, but much less numerous.

Agriculture. The Western Region has a significant agricultural potential, being on the fifth place in terms of total agricultural land distribution, by development region, *Figure 3*.

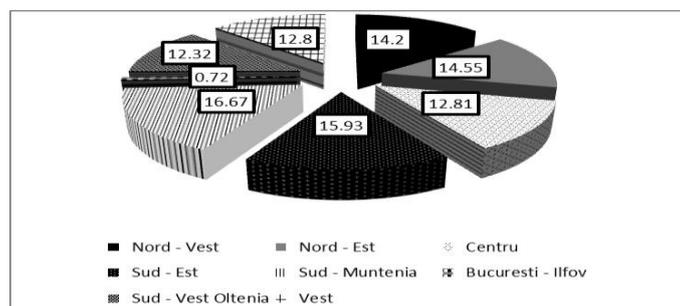


Figure 3. The structure of agricultural surface by development regions

Source: Romanian statistical yearbook, 2012

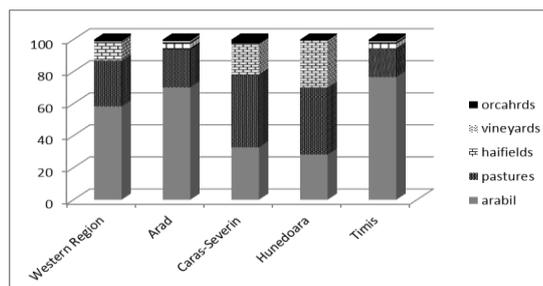


Figure 4. Structure of agricultural surfaces by counties

Source: Regional Plan for Development, West Region, 2014-2020

In the Western Region, the agricultural surface varies from county to county (*Figure 4*). Timis County holds the largest share, 37.1% , in terms of agricultural surface distribution by counties.

The structure of agricultural surface by counties is different. If in the region the arable land is predominant, 58.27%, there are counties which exceed this average: Timis county (76.59%) and Arad county (70.17%), but there are also counties where the percentage of arable surface in total agricultural surface is more reduced: Hunedoara county (28.21%) and Caras –Severin county (32.66%).

The pastures and hayfields in the region have a total of 39.94%. In Caras -Severin and Hunedoara counties these two categories have significant shares, above the average of region: 64.44% and 70.74%. This situation is due to relief, mostly mountainous. The other two categories of agricultural land use, vineyards and orchards, represent low shares, a similar situation to the regional level 1.79% and national level 2.79%.

In the West Region, there is a number of 271,891 farms of which 98.4% are individual agricultural holdings and 1.6% agricultural holdings with legal personality. These exploit an agricultural area of 774,304.02 hectares, or 44.72% of the agricultural surface of the region. Agricultural holdings with legal personality exploit 55.26 % of the total agricultural surface.

The average agricultural surface per agricultural holding is 6.32, a low value compared to the EU average, which is about 19 ha/farm.

In what regards the analysis of agricultural holdings by way of use, *Figure 5* shows that 71.1% are mixed agricultural exploitations, 25.3% are plant agricultural exploitations and 3.6% are agricultural exploitations of livestock profile.

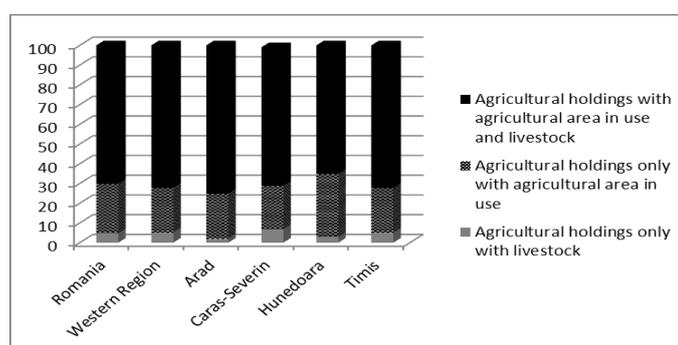


Figure 5. Agricultural exploitation structure by way of use

Source: Regional Plan for Development, West Region, 2014-2020

By comparison with holdings profile nationally, there can state that regionally is meeting a higher share of farms with mixed profile and of those with livestock profile and a lower value of farms with vegetable profile.

The analysis of the region's level by counties shows that Arad county is characterized by a higher share (both at regional and national level) of mixed agricultural exploitations. Caras- Severin county is characterized by an excess of regional and national values in terms of the share held by livestock farms and Hunedoara county by overcoming the same values concerning the farms with vegetable profile.

Farms performance is mainly determined by the quality of used production factors. Land is the main factor of production in agriculture. Lately, a growing emphasis should be given to land improvements. (FEHER, 2009)

Regarding the irrigated area, the Western Region holds only 0.55% of the total irrigated area at national level. Of the total area of the region, equipped for irrigation, 49,533 ha, only 2.65% owns the needed infrastructure for irrigations. The situation is different by counties. In first place is Arad county with 55.5% of total irrigated area in the Western Region (27,483 ha), followed by Timis county with 27.5% (13,646 ha) and Hunedoara county with 17% (8,404 ha).

In 2011 the Western Region has held 142,896 ha equipped for soil erosion control aiming at preparation for agricultural activities, at counties level, the largest agricultural equipped areas being held by Caras- Severin county (32.9%), Timis county (27, 8%), Hunedoara county (23.4%) and Arad county (15.9%).

Population employed in agriculture. A country with developed economy is characterized by the predominance of the tertiary sector both in terms of sector share in GDP forming, as well in terms of employed population structure.

Thus, a trend at EU member countries level is of reduction for the population employed in primary sector and leveraging the workforce surplus in the secondary and tertiary sector. This fact is due to engagement in the primary sector of a workforce with high productivity, benefiting thus from an agricultural with a high degree of mechanization, which replaces labor force. (IANCU, 2007)

The employed population in Romanian agriculture, 17.3% is situated at the highest level from the European Union, although lately declines of this were recorded. The main reasons behind the decline in the share of employment in agriculture are:

- ❖ withdrawal from agricultural activity of elderly people;
- ❖ relatively low incomes obtained within this activity, these are not attractive to rural youth, and they are directing towards other activities;
- ❖ the investments performed in rural areas, still reduced, are not able to absorb the younger workforce.

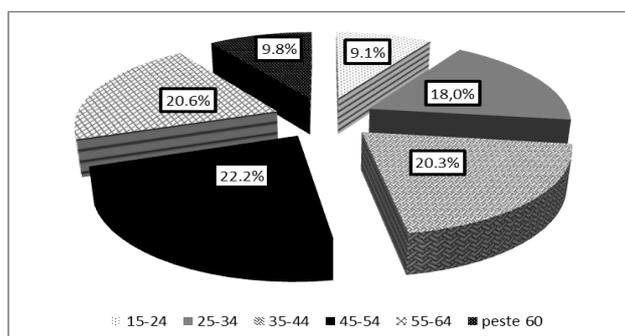


Figure 6. The structure of employed population in agriculture by age groups in the Western Region in 2011

Source: Regional Development Plan, 2014-2020, Western Region

The structure of the employed population in agriculture by age groups shows that young population represents a very small percentage, of 27.1%.

Tourism is an economic activity, a tool to support local and regional development, of economic activity restructuring, particularly in disadvantaged and rural areas.

West Region is a region with great tourism potential, given by a rich and diverse natural picture, a rich hydrographic network, a substantial forestry and wildlife foundation, a wonderful natural landscape and numerous anthropic attraction elements (churches, monasteries, citadels, museums, etc.).

Tourist accommodation in rural areas within the Western Region, rural tourist boardings and agrotouristic hold a share of 16.6% of the housing units number concentrated in this area. The majority of these can be found in Caras –Severin county.

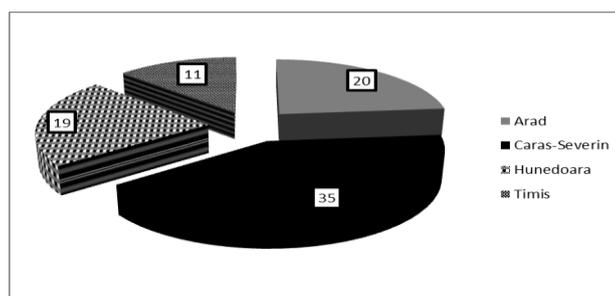


Figure 8. Distribution of agrotouristic boardings by the counties of Western Region, number

Source: Regional Development Plan, 2014-2020, Western Region

The Western Region has a particularly tourism potential, determined primarily by the diversified topography. The natural landscape is preserved mainly in rural settlements, including a number of specific economic activities.

The existing tourism resources in the region can cause practicing of some forms of tourism highly varied, of which within the rural space the most important are: Balneoclimateric tourism, cultural- historical one, viticulture and winemaking, agrotourism, rural tourism, ecotourism, hunting and fishing tourism and mountain tourism.

Rural tourism has grown in recent years due to the increase of urbanization degree. To this factor also contribute the fact that the main tourist attractions points and of heritage are in rural areas. A special form of rural tourism is **agrotourism**, which blends very well the agricultural activity with the touristic one. The tourism potential which underpins the development of touristic activities like rural or agro-tourism tourism, are represented by the households from rural space, but also by monastic spaces and hunting lodges. Thus, the residents of rural areas provide for tourists their own home or spaces specifically designed for tourism, offering them the opportunity to taste their traditional products and to actively participate to farm life (fruit picking, milking cows, etc.). This form of tourism is common met in mountainous areas where the local population combines very good the agricultural activities (forestry and wood processing, harvesting and processing of berries, as well the small industry or crafts) with the touristic ones .

Ecotourism is actually the most valuable manifestation of sustainable tourism. This form of tourism is aimed primarily to environmental conservation and focuses on the education of tourists in what regards protection and conservation of environment.

Ecotourism can be a viable alternative towards economic development for communities with few income-generating activities. Moreover, the ecotourism can increase the level of education and awareness of tourists, turning them into enthusiastic supporters of preserving the natural and cultural environment.

This form of tourism can be practiced in parks and natural reserves on the region territory: Mures Floodplain Natural Park, Retezat National Park, National Park Cheile Nerei-Beusnita Domogled - Cerna Valley Nation Parck and Satchinez Reserve etc.

Today, following agrotourism and ecotourism, a special attention is given to the ***viticulture and winemaking tourism***, the tourists being interested in educational travels, instead of passive ones. Thus, an organized visit in a detailed manner in one vineyard offers to visitors the possibility to learn the technological process of wine production as well of vine cultivation. On the other hand, tourists have the opportunity to become familiar with a wide variety of landscapes without giving up to comfortable accommodation conditions and not least, to discover traditional food and customs of the visited areas.

Hunting and sport fishing tourism: The Western Region has a rich heritage of hunting and fishing. The hunting tradition represents a vigorous part of Romanian material and spiritual culture. The existence of a major river networks makes possible the development of fishing tourism. We must mention as well the existent trout ponds in the region.

Featuring a rich touristic potential, the rural space of Western Region has the opportunity to develop non-agricultural activities, which will contribute greatly to increase the economic development degree and to improve the live standard of rural communities.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the analysis undertaken a further development of Wester Region is desired, so that it becomes a competitive region, both nationally and at EU level.

The economic development of the region aims in particular towards to a dynamic and diversified economy, the use of some highly qualified human resources and oriented towards specific activities of tertiary sector, an efficient agriculture, well equipped in technical terms and the enhancement of all available economic resources.

The development and diversification of economic activities in the region through innovation, attraction of investments and promotion of a competitive business environment are important factors that determine the economic growth and diversification of the region.

Increasing the number of jobs and of employment degree, reducing the unemployment rate and increasing the incomes for rural area residents will lead at increasing the standard of living and at improving the quality of life for the inhabitants of these areas.

Paying a particular attention to natural landscape, improving and preserving the environmental factors to ensure sustainable rural development and promoting of rural tourism, agrotourism and ecotourism will also contribute at increasing rural prosperity of rural space in the region.

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