

## A STUDY ON LIFE QUALITY IN THE RURAL AREA

Mateoc-Sîrb<sup>1</sup> Nicoleta, T. Mateoc<sup>1</sup>, Victoria Șeulean<sup>2</sup>,  
Doina Darvași<sup>2</sup>, Camelia Mănescu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitatea de Științe Agricole și Medicină Veterinară a Banatului Timișoara,  
Calea Aradului, nr. 119, mateocnicol@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Universitatea de Vest Timișoara, Blvd. V. Pârvan, nr. 4, 300223

**Key words:** rural infrastructure, unsatisfactory service, low income, implications, access to education, poverty, inequality

**Abstract:** Though in the developed economies there is a trend to remove differences between rural and urban from the points of view of accommodation, infrastructure development, and ensuring services necessary for the population, which has resulted in a loss of significance of the traditional perception of the rural area as underdeveloped area, in Romania there is still a major discrepancy between rural and urban which is not beneficial for the Romanian rural area.

Starting from these premises, we think that an analysis of the life quality in the Romanian rural area is opportune, taking into account that in the 12,946 villages of present Romania live over 45% (about 9.7 million inhabitants) of Romania's population in conditions unbelievable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and for the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium when science and technology are very advanced worldwide in all the fields of activity; this is also the time in which globalisation as a phenomenon resulted in economic integration both regionally and worldwide as a result of the large-scale promotion of information technologies (e.g. the Internet), of the removal of artificial barriers from the circulation of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and people.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to capture a most exact situation of life quality, i.e. of life conditions in the rural area, we have structured the main aspects aiming at the studied issue, in three important parts:

- infrastructure and services in the rural area;
- economic growth and income as factors of development;
- rural population and access to education.

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

As working material, we have used information and statistical data published in different works or specialised books, and as working method we have used observation, analysis, selection, comparison, and statistical processing.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 1. Infrastructure and services in the rural area

Romania is facing at present a major discrepancy between the rural and urban areas from the point of view of the social and physical infrastructure. We analyse below a few indicators considered important to ensure life quality in the rural area.

In the rural area, the most important access ways are the roads, but the present road network covers only 60% of the needs of the rural population and, moreover, over 25% of the communes cannot use their roads when it rains (World Bank Study, 2004).

In Romania, of the total public roads, 80% are county roads and communal roads. According to the Statistic Year Book for 2006, only 10.6% of these roads have been modernised, of which 30.7% have been asphalted.

In 2005, public roads in Romania covered 79,904 km; through the SAPARD Programme, they have developed and modernised only 2,058 km, which represents very little of the necessary infrastructure.

As for the **drinking water supply**, only 33% of the rural population has access to the public water network; when speaking of the **warm water network**, the situation is even more critical. About 70% of the rural households use wells to get their necessary amounts of water.

The **public sewage network** assist only 10% of the total rural population, determining a major risk of polluting the water table, particularly where the sewage network has not been developed together with the water supply networks.

**Thermal energy** is very little used in the rural area: only 0.5% of the total thermal energy is distributed in the rural area, compared to the urban area where the percentage reaches 58%.

Rural infrastructure in the field of communications is very poor from all the points of view: there are 138 Internet users per 1000 inhabitants and 92 computers per 1000 inhabitants.

Population's access to **medical services** is hindered by the deficit transport services, and the quality of medical services is hindered by the very old or even absent medical equipment, by the low number of doctors, and by the professional skill level of the medical staff. In most communes, there are only basic medical services. In order to benefit from specialised services, inhabitants of rural areas have to go to town.

## 2. Economic growth and income as factors of development

Development, as a complex factor, is, economically, the capacity of a national economy of generating and supporting annual growth through the prism of macro-economic indicators. Economic development is often seen as a continuous growth Gross Domestic Product phenomenon per both economy on the whole and inhabitant.

This approach does not, unfortunately, solve such particular issues as **poverty**, **unemployment**, and **uneven income distribution**. These issues, if left unsolved, expand and aggravate.

These phenomena are still present in Romania.

**Poverty rate** in Romania increased from 4% in 1989 to 20% in 1993 reaching in 2000 the highest level ever – 35.9% of the country's population.

Between 2000 and 2006, as a result of economic growth (the Gross Domestic Product increased with 5-6% yearly), poverty rate diminished with 13.8%, i.e. there were still 3 million people in absolute poverty in 2006.

Rural areas are marked by vulnerability since incomes are based mainly on income from subsistence agriculture, which means that in years unfavourable for agriculture poverty rate can increase considerably.

**Income inequality** has had an evolution in strict opposition to poverty rate. Income inequality decreased during periods of economic regression and started to increase with economic growth, so that the gap between the poorest and the richest has been larger and larger particularly after 2000.

Compared to other European nations, income inequality in Romania has had among the highest values in the European Union.

As for the **unemployment rate** in Romania, it has had an ascending trend after 2000 (Table 1).

**Table 1**

Unemployment rate evolution in Romania (2001-2006)						
Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Unemployment rate (%)	8.8	8.4	7.4	6.3	5.9	5.2

Source: Romania's Statistic Yearbook

The number of unemployed people in the rural area represents 33% of the total number of unemployed people in Romania, with 'masked unemployment' as a basic phenomenon.

Per age groups, the highest unemployment rate was at the level of young rural population, with ages between 15 and 24 years (13.9%).

The precarious situation of the incomes from the rural area pleads in favour of the necessity for developing a diversified rural economy, with emphasis on the developing potential in the non-agricultural sector as a sustainable source for the living conditions of the communities in the rural area and for the development of rural economy.

In rural areas, the average income per capita is about 95€, while in the urban area it reaches 135€. At the level of rural households, the income comes particularly from agricultural production, ensuring 43.4% of the total income. The average of the income from non-agricultural activities at the level of households was in 2005 about 12€ per month, i.e. 4.1% of the net income.

**At present, rural economy is characterised by a low degree of diversification and by a dependence on agricultural activities that determines the maintenance of low income levels.**

### 3. Rural population and access to education

The issue of labour occupancy is directly linked to that of ensuring incomes and to the issue of life quality at individual and social levels.

In rural areas, because of the low density of population (45.1 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>), there is low interest in investors.

A proper infrastructure and quality services could contribute to the development of jobs and better living conditions for the rural population.

The banking sector is not interested in financing rural business since they are perceived as risky; this is why there is a trend for the banking sector to diminish its activity in the rural area because of the low profitability rate. This aggravates the financial situation of economic agents in the rural area and, as a consequence, they hinder rural economic development.

The diversification of rural economy also depends on the **level of education, knowledge and professional skills**. Though infrastructure is an important element in the social and economic development of the rural area, professional training and primary education are the main instruments of good development through the conversion of the agricultural labour force into non-agricultural labour force.

The number of educational institutions in the rural area decreased as a result of restructuring the educational system and of the lack of trained teachers.

Though rural population represents 45.1% of the total Romanian population, the degree of participation in the rural area in the academic year 2005-2006 was 31.5% of the total population enrolled in education.

In the rural area, over 30% of the population aged 15 has not graduated from school or only graduated from primary school.

In 2007, only **24.54%** of the students in the rural area **managed to attend high school courses**.

The share of students in the rural area attending high school decreases from one year to another, which is rather worrying.

The share of rural population with a high level of education represents 1.8% of the total population ages over 15 as a consequence of low incomes.

There is a direct relation between the educational level and poverty; this is why stability of incomes in a family has considerable impacts on the participation to the educational acts.

Children from families with low incomes are twice more exposed to school abandonment, compared to children from families with a stable income source.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The present situation of roads, running water, and sewage network affects considerably the life quality of the rural population and is an impediment in the development of economic activities in rural areas.

2. The access of rural population to basic education and to health services is hindered by the transportation services and by the lack of incomes.

3. Deficit infrastructure results in a low interest in investments and hinders the development of rural economy.

4. The banking sector is not interested in financing rural business.

5. The low level of instruction and education is reflected by the quality of labour force in the rural area, a restrictive factor for the perspectives of diversification of economic activities.

6. Population occupancy rate in the rural area from the total active population in the rural area is as follows: 64.2% in the primary sector, **18.7% in the secondary sector**, and 17.1% in the tertiary sector.

7. The precarious situation of incomes in the rural area pleads for the necessity of developing a diversified rural economy.

8. The general objectives of the national strategy for rural development over the period 2007-2013 are:

- increasing the economic dynamics of rural areas in Romania, including sustainable development of the agricultural and forestry sectors;
- preserving and improving the environment;
- increasing social and life quality dynamics in the rural areas.

These objectives correlate with the EC Regulation No. 1698/2005 as well as with the strategic directions of development of the EEC.

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