

## ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

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### Abstract

*Rural areas are an important component of the overall evolution of the Romanian economy. The main three resources that require the agricultural restructure and rural development in our country are: the utilized agricultural area (14.8 million of hectares), the rural population (which represents around 9.24 million people, which means 46% of the population) and rural area surface (which holds 87.1% of the country surface). Therefore, the paper represents a study on rural development given the existing resources and factors, which highlights the features and functions of the rural area, insisting on these elements. At the end of the paper, there were highlighted the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the Romanian rural area, using the SWOT analysis method.*

**Key words:** agriculture, natural resources, poverty

### INTRODUCTION

Rural area in Romania consists of the administrative area of 2,861 communes comprising 12,957 villages. [4]

The rural area surface sums up 207,522 km<sup>2</sup>, respectively 87.1% of the country surface. The rural population is currently about 9.24 million people (46% of the population). [5] The number of the rural households is 3,311 thousand (45% of the total number of the households in the country) and of housing is 3,888 thousand (46.8% of the total number of the housing in the country). [8]

The majority of the economic resources existing in our country, such as the industrial raw materials, the agricultural and forest resources, tourism and spa, are found even in the rural areas.

The main activities in the rural areas (agriculture, forestry and logging), are still holding a high share in the gross domestic product, compared with the developed countries in the EU. Employment in these industries represents over 1/3 of the entire employed population of the country. [3]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to analysis and diagnosis the Romanian rural area, were used as research method: the multi-criteria analysis (an analysis based on the statistical indicators system) and the SWOT analysis.

In the rural area diagnosis by analyzing the system of statistical indicators in Romania, the authors, first used the seven criteria for analysis, and after this, summarized the important issues found in the research, using the SWOT analysis method.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In the rural area there are valuable items of *potential land* (agricultural land with superior production qualities, allowing crop diversification and the achieving of some major productions; forest land, reservations and natural monuments, areas with landscaping values in particular) *human potential* (large workforce, partially qualified in the non-agricultural activities, youth reserves which ensures its regeneration) and

*heritage* (historical, cultural, architectural and ethnographic). [1]

Despite these potentially valuable items, the large disturbances which have occurred in the rural areas in the recent decades, affected all the components of the economic and the social life, have changed economic relations, system of values, individual behavior and fundamentals of life in the rural communities. Under these circumstances, the rural area experienced a regressive process.

In the following, rural area is analyzed through multi-criteria analysis, such as: physical-geographical, demographic, economic, housing, technical equipment, social and ecological criteria. [9]

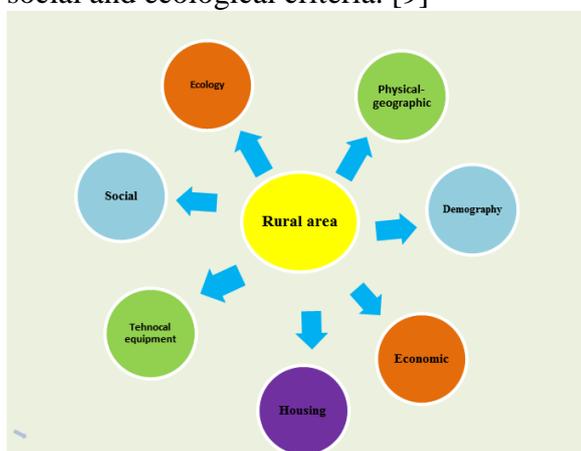


Fig. 1. Criteria for the analysis of the rural area

Regarding the **physical-geographical** aspect, the major risk factors for the rural area are floods, landslides, high seismicity, low rainfall, and reduced water sources. Although these risks are common in the rural area, only about 1/5 of the country surface is exposed to more difficult situations in this respect.

With reference to the **demographic** aspects in the rural area, it was registered a tendency of decreasing population and increasing demographic imbalances (the share of the elderly population continues to grow, which leads to a very high overall mortality).

**Economically** speaking, there is a limited diversification of economic activities, because the most rural localities have an economy based exclusively on agriculture, and where the non-agricultural activities are mainly industrial activities related to the exploitation of natural resources. Because of the contraction of the industrial activities and

construction of the cities, the job offers decreased in the rural area, which concluded to a lack of attractiveness for the youth to remain in the rural areas. [2]

The practiced agriculture is underperforming, where predominates small agricultural exploitations, without the adequate equipment, which can provide only the family subsistence.

**The rural housing criteria** is characterized by poor housing conditions for approx. 38% of the population, where the lack of equipment with plumbing inside the house was recorded in 84% of the households, which represents a high proportion of residential buildings made of materials unsustainable and an aging housing fund, with approx. 75% housing have more than 30 years. [7]

Regarding the **technical equipment** in the rural area, there is a poor state of roads (the majority of the roads are not upgraded and more than 61% of the rural population has no access to the major road and rail network). The water supply is inadequate (52 % of the population [6] are not benefiting from the public water supply system, and where the facilities exist, the amount of water supplied is usually insufficient).

With regard to the **social infrastructure and to the related services** in rural areas, the number of doctors is insufficient, (the number of people per one doctor is three times higher than in urban area). The education network is poorly diversified, the quality of the buildings is inadequate and the specialized equipment is poor, the infant mortality is high, as a direct result of the scarce living standards and health care.

On the quality of the **environment** degradation of soils predominates in the rural areas, due mainly to the human actions, thus almost 50% of the total communes are affected by powerful degradation of the soil and 37% of the communes are touched by moderate degradation of the soils. [10] Regarding the forest degradation, this is mainly a cause of uncontrolled logging, pollution and pests.

These phenomena and the processes are manifested differently in the territory, in

relation to the natural setting, the historical development and the relations with the urban industrial centers.

Following the analysis of the natural, human, economic and socio-cultural resources, the authors of the paper conducted a SWOT analysis of the Romanian rural area.

Table 1. The strengths of Romania's rural areas

<b>STRENGTHS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The natural resources are generally in good state of preservation;</li> <li>▪ Romania's landforms are: mountains, hills, plains;</li> <li>▪ Biodiversity valuable;</li> <li>▪ Variety of the traditional landscapes;</li> <li>▪ Rich hydrographic network;</li> <li>▪ High percentage of the population living in rural areas (45%);</li> <li>▪ Significant agricultural and forest area (61.3%, respectively 28.3% of the country) and favorable pedo-climatic conditions for the crop diversification;</li> <li>▪ Growing number of farms and new processing units and upgraded, brought up to European standards by the RDP 2007-2013;</li> <li>▪ Positive dynamics of the organic farming in Romania and the existence of a variety of quality traditional products and foods, nationally certified and high value products given by the area of origin;</li> <li>▪ Large share of agricultural and forest lands generating eco-systems services characterized by a great biological diversity;</li> <li>▪ Rich rural heritage (large natural, material and immaterial cultural heritage);</li> <li>▪ Keeping the traditions and the customs alive;</li> <li>▪ Overall low level of greenhouse gas emissions in agriculture.</li> </ul>

As presented in Table 1, the strengths of Romania's rural areas emphasizes its potential regarding the natural resources, the variety of relief forms and traditional landscapes, the richness in hydrographical net and the biodiversity all over.

Also, regarding the social aspect, Romania is a peculiar case of the EU-28 as about 45 % of its population is living in the rural areas, where agriculture represent the main income source.

Also, the large variety of soil and climate conditions is favorable for a large range of crops. Organic farming is a niche for Romanian agriculture to produce bioproducts.

The rich cultural heritage and preserved traditions are another feature of Romania's landscape and of high attraction for tourists.

Table 2. The weaknesses of Romania's rural areas

<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Average annual rainfall is unevenly distributed and varies;</li> <li>▪ Negative natural increase and migration of young people from rural areas;</li> <li>▪ Low levels of the education and of the further training in agriculture and forestry caused by reduced number of schools (high schools) with agricultural profile;</li> <li>▪ Underdeveloped entrepreneurial culture, there is a reduced number of rural SMEs;</li> <li>▪ High percentage of elderly farmers;</li> <li>▪ The large number of small farms, the excessive fragmentation and the small average size of agricultural and forestry lands;</li> <li>▪ Low level of association between the farmers;</li> <li>▪ Low level of the productivity in the agriculture and food industry;</li> <li>▪ Reduction of the livestock and of the quantity of organic fertilizer used;</li> <li>▪ Mostly cereals agricultural production structure;</li> <li>▪ Technical equipment is scarce and of poor quality for the agricultural, forestry and food industries;</li> <li>▪ Rural basic infrastructure underdeveloped and limited access to social services, health and culture;</li> <li>▪ Maintaining a high percentage of exported unprocessed products;</li> <li>▪ Limited and nonfunctional irrigation infrastructure;</li> <li>▪ Significant areas of agricultural exploitations and forest are affected by the adverse weather conditions (deficiency or excess water) which lead to the land erosion and landslides;</li> <li>▪ Low standard of living and high poverty rate;</li> <li>▪ Low level of development of the tourism activities and agritourism.</li> </ul>

However, despite the strengths, the rural areas of Romania have also weaknesses among which the most important are: the migration of the young people to cities and other countries looking for better paid jobs, the aging of the population and the low training level, the low living standard, the huge number of small farms and a reduced number of associative forms, the low productivity due to the low endowment, the underdeveloped infrastructure, the lack of irrigation systems, the limited access to various services ( health,

education, banking, transport, etc. as mentioned in Table 2.

Table 3. The opportunities of Romania's rural areas

OPPORTUNITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The existence of the National Programme for Rural Development 2014 -2020;</li> <li>▪ Favorable natural conditions for the development of the agritourism, hunting, fishing and activities which generates alternative income;</li> <li>▪ Infrastructure development (roads, potable water supply and sanitation) may generate the emergence of investors;</li> <li>▪ Access to the basic training programs and lifelong learning, for entrepreneurship development;</li> <li>▪ European Union support regarding risk management instruments and tools in agriculture (crop insurance, animals and plants insurance, setting up mutual funds, income stabilization);</li> <li>▪ Financial support through community funds for the development of the seals local network and short food chains;</li> <li>▪ The importance of the mountain areas for the production of quality food is increasing due to the effects of climate changes and to the increased population growth, globally;</li> <li>▪ Preservation and promotion of the local resources (agriculture, forestry, cultural heritage, natural heritage);</li> <li>▪ Capitalization of a range of renewable energy sources from agriculture and forestry (crop residues, energy crops, wood);</li> <li>▪ The absorption capacity of the common market for the agri-food products niche;</li> <li>▪ Local brands promotion.</li> </ul>

Table 4. The threats of Romania's rural areas

THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negative effects of the climate changes give rise to disruptive natural phenomena that can cause disasters such as: drought, floods, landslides, tornadoes, fires;</li> <li>▪ Migration of the youth from rural areas and the elder remaining population may lead in time to the depopulation of the villages (especially in the mountain areas);</li> <li>▪ Trends of intensification in agriculture, especially in the areas with agricultural potential, which implies increasing inputs;</li> <li>▪ External producers competition;</li> <li>▪ Decrease of the consumers purchasing power;</li> <li>▪ Urban and abroad migration (there is a risk that this trend will be accentuated);</li> <li>▪ The alteration and the loss of the heritage and rural traditions;</li> <li>▪ Extending the economical-financial crisis;</li> <li>▪ Negative trend in the occupied areas with orchards.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSIONS

The rural economy has different characteristics depending on the regions, on the demographic and social features and the economic specifics. This distinction is especially visible regarding the poverty in the Romanian rural areas, reflecting a low living standard and a lack of alternative income sources.

In the national economy, *agriculture* is one of the main branches that can contribute to the relaunching of the economic growth in Romania, especially because of its role, which cannot be retrieved by any other economic activity, since the demand of food is essential and permanent for the human existence, on the one hand, and on the other hand, agriculture provides raw materials, necessary for the revival of the many other industries, such as agrifood, textile, chemical, pharmaceutical, cosmetics, handicrafts, etc.

The rural economy is poorly diversified [6] and still dependent on the agricultural activities, which leads to low-income for the rural entrepreneurs.

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