

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS AT COUNTY LEVEL. CASE STUDY: ILFOV COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

The present study approaches the problem of the socioeconomic developments at county level over a ten-year interval starting with the year when Romania acceded to the European Union, and tries to highlight the main structural changes within areas such as demography, economic activities and social infrastructure within Ilfov County, which is one of the most dynamic territorial units of Romania as it capitalises its excellent position and is a polarising centre for workforce as well as for economic activities. The analysis uses statistical data from official sources, both national and European, which have been processed with classical statistical methods. The results suggest a strong dynamics of the main parameters that are relevant to demography and to economic activities, as well as a steady development of the social infrastructure.

Key words: demography, social infrastructure, economic activity

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic evaluation of territorial units at various levels of aggregation (national, regional, countywide) is an approach that stays abreast of time, at academic level as well as at government level, supported by the necessity of identifying the trends and changes occurring in each territorial unit, the effectiveness of the funding programs and strategies, and, moreover, of framing development strategies adjusted to each territorial unit [5]. The socioeconomic analysis is a basic tool in drafting customised development strategies and an important step towards identifying distinctive features that define the development potential of each territorial unit [1].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study analyses of official statistical data on demography, workforce, economic activities and social infrastructure. The source of the data is the Tempo Online database of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics [10] and the Eurostat database,

respectively [3]. The data was processed using classical statistical methods.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ilfov County lies in the south-east of Romania and has an area of 1,583 km², being Romania's smallest county and part of the Buharest-Ilfov development region, one which stands out through a high economic and social diversity [8]. To the east it borders the counties of Călărași and Ialomița, Giurgiu County to the south, Dâmbovița County to the west and Prahova County to the north [2] (Fig. 1).



Fig.1. The map of Ilfov County
Source: www.observatordeilfov.ro/harta-politica-a-ilfovului

The demographic profile of Ilfov County is marked by its position, as it practically surrounds the Municipality of Bucharest.

During the last decade there has been an increase in population of more than 40% (Table 1).

Table 1. The demographic evolution in the interval 2007-2017 (number of inhabitants)

Year	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Total	294,233	312,089	334,412	358,151	383,512	415,594
Male	143,060	151,688	162,569	174,222	186,548	201,765
Female	151,173	160,401	171,843	183,929	196,964	213,829

Source: Tempo-Online, NIS, 2018.

Concerning the gender structure, the population volume has an advance of approximately 3 percentage points in favour of the female population, which is found along the whole interval analysed. The age structure was marked by a strong increasing

trend of more than 44% in the young population, 0-19 years old, and of more than 45% in the older population between 20 and 64 years old. At the same time, the older population, aged 65 or more, has had a weaker increase, of around 20% (Table 2).

Table 2. The population age groups evolution 2007-2017 (%)

Year/Group	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
0-19	20.9	20.0	20.0	20.4	20.8	21.4
20-64	64.2	65.7	66.5	66.7	66.3	65.9
65 and more	14.9	14.3	13.5	12.9	12.9	12.7

Source: processing data from Tempo-Online, INS.

The demographic process in this county describes an aging population, with more than 12.7% made up of persons aged 65 years or more. However, this age group also had a decreasing trend during the interval 2007-

2017, from 14.9% to 12.7%, very close to the threshold of 12% considered to be the beginning of an aging process. This can lead, in the future, to multiple effects on society.[9]

Table 3. The demographic dependency ratio*, 2007-2017

Year	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Demographic dependency ratio	55.8	52.2	50.4	49.8	50.8	51.7

*0-19+ 65 and over/20-64x100

Source: own calculations using Tempo-Online data

Ilfov County experienced a process of demographic rejuvenation/regeneration, with a dependency ratio diminished from 55.8% in 2007 to 51.7% in 2017 (Table 3). The Pearl index ranges between 20.9% (2007) and 21.4% (2017), marking the contribution of the young population to the process of demographic recovery. The volume of each age group increased during the analysed interval, out of which the most substantial was the population aged between 20 and 64 years. A similar evolution can be found for the active civilian population, which had an ascending trend during the interval analysed (Fig.2).

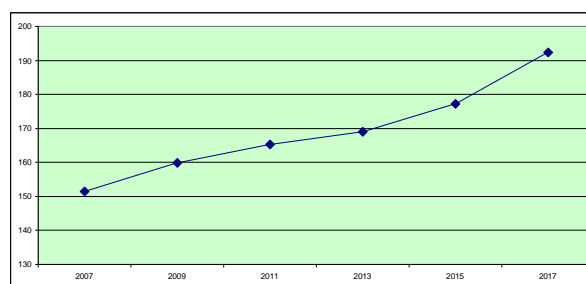


Fig. 2. Active civilian population, 2007-2017

Source: processing data from Tempo-Online, INS

After a short interval marked by variations (2008-2012), the active population had a new increasing trend and reached the value of 192.3 persons in 2017, which is roughly 27% higher than at the beginning of the interval. This value is very close to that of the

employed population, which was 191.1 thousand persons in 2017 (Fig. 3).

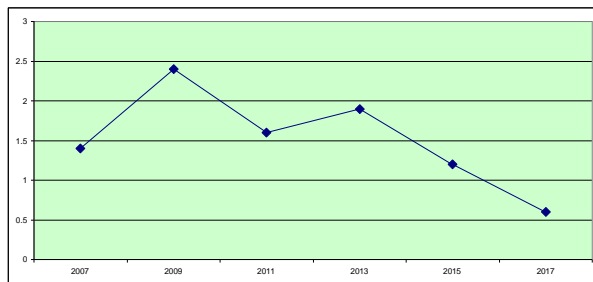


Fig. 3. Unemployment rate, %, 2007-2017

Source: processing data from Tempo-Online, INS

Given this evolution of the employed population it is not surprising at all to find out that the unemployment rate in Ilfov County had, on the whole, a descending trend between 2007 and 2017.

However, this process included variations, with two intervals when this population was higher than in the previous years (2009-2011 and 2012-2013), but the descending trend resumed in 2014 reaching the value of 0.6% at the end of the analysed interval, which is the lowest value during of the interval.

As expected, the positive evolution of the parametres describing population and workforce during 2007-2013 also marked the economic activity of Ilfov County. One of the parameters that are most useful in estimating the overall performance of a geographic area is the Gross Product (GP) both total and per capita. This is a primary measure of the economic performance (at various levels of territorial aggregation) and represents the total value of the final goods and services output during a year. GP per capita is an important measure of the standard of living. In order to make comparisons at national level, the GP per capita is calculated depending on the inhabitants' place of residence, a fact required by the national legislation (The Pearl index is computed as a ratio between the population aged 19 or less and the total population).

The Gross Product of Ilfov County had an overall increasing trend during the interval 2007-2015, from 3,089 billion euros (in current prices) in 2007 to 4.296 billion euros in 2015, which means an increase of around 39% (Fig. 4). The path was, however, not a linear one along the whole interval but

marked by successive short spans of increase and of decrease, especially between 2008 and 2010, at a time which, in addition, was the start of the global economic and financial crisis that also had a strong impact on the Romanian economy. Towards the end of the interval, the local economy of the county recovered its initial momentum, with a Gross Product reaching 4.3 billion euros, the highest peak of the analysed interval.

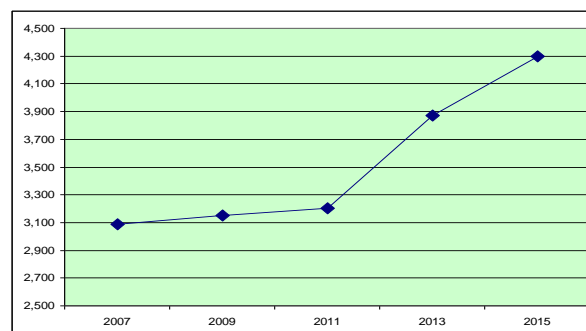


Fig. 4. GP, millions of euro, current prices, Ilfov County, 2007-2017

Source: own processing after Eurostat

Regarding the GP per capita in Ilfov County during the analysed interval, its evolution was similar to that of the nominal value GP, although at a slower growth rate, against a background of a substantially growing population during the same time interval (Fig. 5).

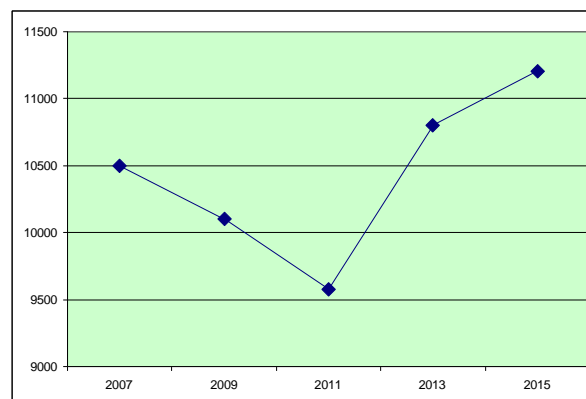


Fig. 5. GP/inhabitant, euros, current prices, Ilfov County, 2007-2017

Source: own processing after Eurostat and Tempo-Online, INS.

This evolution of the GP/capita should, however, be approached in relation to the national results too. From this perspective, the values recorded in Ilfov County were

considerably higher than the national average. In 2015, for instance, GP/capita was 11,202, euros in Ilfov, compared to the national average of 7,202 euro — i.e. 55.5% higher.

However, if one looks back towards the early part of the analysed interval one will find differences that are even bigger, such as in 2008, when the GP per capita in Ilfov County was more than 95% higher than the national average, and in 2012, when it was more than 90% higher than the national average. At this point in time, together with the Bucharest Municipality, the GP/capita was well above national level [7]. The late part of the interval is, however, marked by a smaller gap between these values and a faster growth of the Gross National Product, which was still under the value of the Gross Product of Ilfov County.

The demographic and economic growth of Ilfov County between 2007 and 2017 was supported, among other things, by the development of the social and urbanistic infrastructure, including the habitation infrastructure, as well as the educational and health infrastructure (Fig. 6).

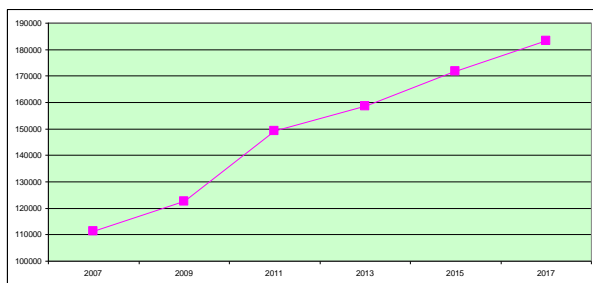


Fig. 6. Dwellings existing at the end of the year, 2007-2017

Source: own processing after Tempo-Online, INS.

Ilfov County has become a polarising area both for internal migration, from the historical regions to the Capital, as well as for many inhabitants of Bucharest in search of better habitation, far from the crowded city, which has led to a fast development in the real estate sector. In fact, the construction sector is one of the main employers of labour force in this region.[6] The habitation infrastructure of the county developed at a very quick pace between 2007 and 2017, at the same time with a higher demand for new dwellings. This process led to an improvement in the quality of housing concerning the ratio habitable area

per inhabitant, which, between 2007 and 2017 grew from 20,0 m² to 29 m², a growth of around 45%. This rapid development in the real estate sector led also to several problems at technical and urbanistic level many housing complexes were built either outside the area covered by drinking water supply networks, as well as of sewage networks, or they were not yet connected to them because of the bureaucratic procedure and the lack of the financial resources needed by the local authorities. Moreover, the access roads leading to some of the newly-built residential areas had not been transferred to the public domain while the owners/developers were made responsible for doing it. This process led to serious problems regarding the road access, as long as many of these roads are not modernised and are not easily accessible, especially in inclement weather. The public road network of Ilfov County lagged also behind the rapid developments of the interval 2007-2017. Its total length decreased from 810 km in 2007 to 784 km in 2017 (Fig. 7).

But even more worrying is the lack of financing for the road network maintenance programme, especially towards the end of the analysed interval.

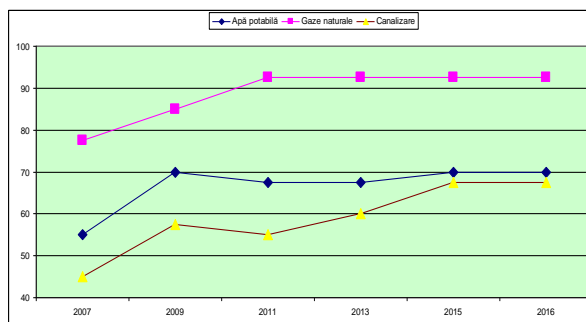


Fig. 7. The share of the localities connected to utilities networks, % of the total number of localities, 2007-2016

Source: own processing after Tempo-Online, INS.

The share of the modernised roads in the total number of roads was nearly 60% in 2007 and grew subsequently up to 86.3% in 2016. The lack of financial resources became obvious after this year, as this share went down fast to 49.1% at the end of 2017. This highlights an important opportunity of turning to EU funds for the development of infrastructure as a

way of supporting the accessibility and mobility across the region.[4]

Concerning the public networks of supplying drinking water, natural gas and sewage, one may remark an increase of the share of the connected localities, during the interval 2007-2017. However, the investment programmes need to be accelerated, especially for the networks of drinking water and sewage. The expansion programmes came to an obvious standstill in 2015. The demographic expansion of 2007-2017 lead to a development in the educational infrastructure of Ilfov County, particularly that of the young pre-school population. Kindergartens had the most dynamic evolution, from 23 units in 2007 to 53 units in 2017. This process of adjusting the structure of the school units took into account the growth of the pre-school population during the analysed interval, with more than 48%. The educational infrastructure expanded at the secondary school level too, both in secondary schools and in trade schools, where there were 14 units in 2007 and 18 units in 2017. This was enabled by the process of reforming the educational system, which lead to re-organising several school units, either by aggregating or by a status change, which also occurred within the primary and middle education units, whose number diminished from 67 in 2007 to 63 in 2017.

In the area of higher education, no changes occurred in the school units, and there still is only one higher education unit in Ilfov County. Besides the educational infrastructure, the sanitary infrastructure is another highly important part in evaluating the quality of life and indicates the population's accessibility to medical services. During the analysed interval, the sanitary infrastructure of Ilfov County has developed, especially concerning the units that offer specialised medical services. Their number rose constantly along the interval, from 104 units in 2007 to 276 units in 2017. In addition to them, a strong development occurred in the case of dental surgeries (from 88 to 191), family doctor's surgeries, pharmacies, analysis laboratories and other medical units.

Moreover, the number of hospitals has remarkably increased (from 7 in 2007 to 9 in 2017). The only medical units which were redimensioned during the analysed interval were the pharmaceutical stores and the general practitioners' surgeries.

CONCLUSIONS

During the interval 2007-2017, Ilfov County was marked by a strong process of socioeconomic development, besides the expansion at demographic level and of economic activities. Its polarising nature in relation to the population looking for new a new workplace and for better housing conditions, is obvious and caused important structural evolutions.

The rapid development of the real estate sector and of the economic activities brought about the development of the technical-urbanistic and social infrastructure, but also generated several problems at these levels, especially in the road infrastructure.

This accelerated rate of development outran the possibilities that local institutions have in expanding/modernising the utility networks, which slowed down development and aggravated the current problems of the infrastructure.

Although the private sector undertook the initiative of simultaneously developing the social infrastructure, especially the education and health areas, this is not a long-term solution.

Local budgets must be adjusted to the new coordinates of the economic and social activities and secure the funds required by the programmes of expanding/modernising the technical-urbanistic infrastructure, in order to support both the inhabitants' quality of life and the attractiveness of developing economic activities in a durable and sustainable way.

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