

DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS IN ROMANIA POINTING OUT THE PROBLEMS OF THE RURAL POPULATION

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Abstract

The concept of sustainability or sustainable development has become, especially in recent decades, one without we cannot establish and build a paradigm that meets the necessary and viable elements for a functional society of the future. There is a rich literature on sustainability, but we aim to analyze and bring to light a holistic transdisciplinary perspective useful into learning about a certain part of social reality: quality of life in rural areas of Romania, from the perspective of sustainable development. The main goal of the research we undertake is an analysis of the aspects considered to be relevant and effective in terms of subjective and objective indicators essential into describing a very important phenomenon and social, economic, cultural, spiritual process: quality of life. We capture both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the key concepts: quality of life, sustainable development, rural environment and we analyze them. We bring into light the concept of sustainable development and its social, economic, cultural and spiritual implications as it is mentioned in Brundtland report. The methodology is based on several complementary working tools. We mainly use, significant and recent INNS and Eurostat statistics on topic, and also integrate a series of indicators - subjective and objective - relevant to clarify the aspects brought in the research. The results of our current study reveal the way sustainable development impact demographic aspects in Romanian rural areas.

Key words: sustainable development, quality of life, rural environment, marginalization, social exclusion

INTRODUCTION

In academic and political circles around the world there is a substantial concern about sustainable development and how it can be applied with the concrete beneficial result and effects visible into society.

Why has this concept become so popular and widespread in all areas of social and scientific life? We believe that, among other things, is due to the great responsibility that the very essence of this concept bears:

Lets act today in ways that not ruin and exhaust the resources that we and the next generations will use [3]. This is one of the most important idea of the Brundtland report. It is an act of great responsibility. This make us wonder ourselves: Is it that people are now behaving irresponsibly? Unfortunately, the answer is **yes**.

The history of at least the last four or five decades fully demonstrated it. There is no hierarchy of the things or actions that have led to, for example, global warming, but it is

surely an act of moral responsibly to act in regard to find solutions, locally and globally.

In this context, the purpose of the research is to bring into the light the impact of sustainable development over the demographic aspects in Romanian rural areas and to reveal the impact over quality of life. Due to ever changing dynamics of society and its domains we are offering not final perspectives but benchmarks of improving the researches regarding the impact of sustainable development in Romanian rural areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology we use is based on several complementary working tools.

We mainly use, significant and recent National Institute of Statistics and Eurostat statistics on topic, and we also integrate a series of indicators - subjective and objective - relevant to clarify the aspects brought in the research.

We documented articles [1],[5], official reports [3] [9] [10][17][18], conferences [13], book reviews [8] a wide variety of bibliography from different fields of activity: agriculture, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, statistics, education, specialized literature in specialized magazines.

This gives substance from the perspective of the transdisciplinary approach that we announced that we use as an exhaustive working and researching method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

There is no scale of the importance or insignificance or of the factors that contributed to the decline of the environment, soils, land, air, water, or economic crisis, the decline of human relations, alienation, social alienation that it takes place all over the world - despite huge advances, scientific discoveries and technologies. All these factors, whether they acted more or less, contributed to what we call today in generic terms as the *global ecological crisis*.

The humankind, *the Man*, in the way he understood and let himself led by his mind to find solutions to various problems, is the main responsible.

Therefore, the problem is both individual and collective. Of course, our goal is not to find culprits. It is an unproductive, inefficient and a time-energy consuming action.

One of our goals is to find feasible solutions, algorithms which properly applied, to lead to a sustainable coexistence. If would wanted to elucidate or expedite this situation quickly, we would answer that it is in human nature to do so. There will always be in us the reminiscences of that primitive man who runs for his own survival driven to fulfill his basic needs. Sometimes at any price, no matter how high. *The other* is always to blame. Whether this *other* is fictive or real, he remains the main motivator, who, most of the time, deepened in a sleep of selfishness and pure rationality, whispers to him or even leads him unconsciously to eliminate *thy neighbor*.

In psychology, this innate tendency of a human being to eliminate his fellow man has been called Cainism or Cain Syndrome.

In social and economic terms we define this trend by *competition for resources* (by resources we understand all kinds of resources, from material, financial to intellectual, cultural, spiritual).

On the microsocial and individual level, we can relate this competition to the desire of some human beings to accumulate as much material goods or as much praise as possible.

From a macrosocial point of view, this competition takes place at the level of nations by disputing the "assets" a nation may have.

Wherever it takes place, this competition for resources affects us all. It is felt and seen in our way of behaving. In the context of our analysis, "behaving" does not refer to and is not a superficial and transient aspect, but derives from learned models, from thought patterns, attitudinal and action patterns always repeated, which, like algorithms running in a computer, composes - in the case of humans - a life program, and even transforms and functions as an autopilot. It's what we call *mentality*.

There is nothing wrong when these algorithms run in a program that finds its operability and utility and leads to beneficial solutions and added value. The human body is in itself an extraordinarily complex program that works largely on the basis of algorithms. One is the childhood "*7 years old home education*" through which our parents implemented the rules of good behavior: for example, it is good to "say hello", "not to lie", "be good" and so forth.

This mechanism of conditioning brings us many benefits, and when we repeatedly forget to use it, in different contexts, the system as a whole is disturbed, and we can even say that it "gets infected". Then, sooner or later, depending on the environment in which it takes place and the conditions accessed, it can turn into a disease that affects and alters the body, either in part or as a whole.

Therefore, health is affected and as a consequence, this is reflected in the quality of life as a whole, whether we speak at the individual level, microsocial or at the level of

a nation, macrosocial. So, one of the questions we ask is: How do we change the consumer's behavior when a virus, or an alteration takes place inside and outside the system? In specialized literature the concept of *Health of the whole common living* - developed by the prof. Constantin Popescu and prof. Alexandru Taşnadi from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies [11] - represents Value - as a criterion of appreciation of its viability materializing in the following requirements: Human health; Environmental health; Health of the organizations; Community health; Health of institutions (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The organic component of our common living whole
Source: [11].

We extend the perspective by adding an complementary approach which include questions about *what determines the quality of life?* What indicators can provide a better understanding of this complex and mostly subjective process of what quality life is. An answer to this question would be [4]:

- a. The degree to which human being's own hopes and ambitions are realized in daily life.
- b. People's perception in regard to own position in life, in the cultural and axiological context in which they live and in relation to their own goals, aspirations, standards and concerns.
- c. Assessing one's own health, in relation to an ideal model.
- d. Things that are considered important in people's lives.

We discuss these potential answers and others in relation to the SDG goals (Fig. 2) and SSI – (Sustainable Society Index) (Fig. 3) and try to explain to what extent and how impact over the rural quality of life in Romania in the

conditions of *the age of sustainable development*.

Trying to capture what interests us in this case we will not be able to ignore what is happening at urban level or at European and global level. The comparative analysis of the different elements and indicators will give us the extent to which we can create transition solutions, or lasting solutions to the topic. In terms of sustainable development, an important desideratum refers to the *care and respect* we must look for and lead in our actions so as to manage rationally, and responsibly all the resources: human, environmental, community or society, in part and as Humanity as a whole.

The objectives established in 1987 by the Brundtland report "*Our Common Future*" [3] were subsequently reformulated, at the following summits. The summit held in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) established Agenda XXI - for sustainable development, then, in 2002, summit in Johannesburg (South Africa) added new objectives adapted to the new economic and cultural realities, so that in 2012 at the United Nation summit, New York - to be set the **2030 Agenda**, that added new objectives to the existing ones organized in two categories: Human and NonHuman Resources.

The 2030 Agenda includes 17 main objectives organized on two key coordinates [14]:

8 Human Resources

"No poverty 2. Zero Hunger 3. Good health and wellbeing 4. Quality education 5. Gender equality 6. Clean water and sanitation 7. Affordable and clean energy 8. Decent work and economic growth.

9 NonHuman Resources

9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure 10. Reduced Inequalities 11. Sustainable Cities and communities 12. Responsible consumption and production 13. Climate action 14. Life below water 15. Life on land 16. Peace, Justice and strong institutions. 17. Partnerships for the goals".



Fig. 2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Source: Wikimedia commons images [16].

In the context of globalization and European integration, an important desideratum - responsible and rational management of resources - is strongly reflected in the concerns of politicians, officials and academics. **Agenda 2030** - includes both the major problems facing humanity and recommendations on how these problems can be addressed in relation to certain indicators.

SSI Structure		
Dimension	Category	Indicator
Human Wellbeing (HUW)	Basic Needs	Sufficient Food
		Sufficient Drinking Water
		Safe Sanitation
	Personal Development & Health	Education
		Healthy Life
		Gender Equality
	Well-balanced Society	Income Distribution
		Population Growth
		Good Governance
Environmental Wellbeing (ENW)	Natural Resources	Biodiversity
		Renewable Water Resources
		Consumption
	Climate & Energy	Energy Use
		Energy Savings
		Greenhouse Gases
Economic Wellbeing (ECW)	Transition	Organic Farming
		Genuine Savings
	Economy	GDP
		Employment
		Public Debt

Fig. 3. Sustainable Society Index SSI

Source: [15].

According to **Sustainable Society Index (SSI)** [15], a sustainable society can be analyzed through the following structure: 3 main dimensions of well-being: **a)** Social dimension: Human well-being **b)** Ecological dimension: Environmental wellbeing and **c)** an Economic dimension: Economic well-being, seven categories of areas of action and 21 indicators (to which have been added 3

more in a new category- Healthy environment).

We undertake the analysis around the key concepts: sustainable development, rural environment, quality of life. The issue of sustainable development is of great interest As explained in the Brundtland report the term sustainable development define a process that involves self-sustaining development over time, being essentially a long-term development. Sustainable development is also a process that perpetuates itself and thus becomes sustainable through the equitable distribution of resources - health, education, culture, gender equality, accountability and participation in political life - and through good and responsible administration and a lucrative management system, both in the current generation and especially in future generations. All these elements emphasize once again that the vision of sustainable development must be a long-term one.

The concept of sustainable development is closely linked and interdependent with the environment. We cannot address or talk of sustainable development in the presence of a development that neglects and overlooks to ensure the optimal conditions for the protection of the environment.

The quality of the environment depends on the level of development of the society, the communities, but also on the degree of their resilience. "Sustainable development is inseparable from the quality of life and is conditioned by the harmonization of the three requirements: economic prosperity, which is based on income obtained from productive activities in order to meet people's needs; the stability of social and cultural systems, which ensure the labor force necessary for the economic, social and cultural field; the stability of natural systems, which are the basis of life and have the role of procuring natural resources and goods" [12].

In Romania, the implementation of macro and micro indicators of sustainable development described in the **2030 Agenda** is a real concern in a political, economic, social context and an issue that involves all dimensions of society's development. Going through the stages of achieving the

desideratum is relatively difficult. Since the last decades of the last century, the dynamics of macro and microsocial relations have changed due to political and economic infrastructure. Romania's accession and acceptance in 2007 in the European Union brought with it a new energy that generated fundamental, structural but also unpredictable changes, in terms of property structure, money allocation, migration from village to city and political decisions.

The difficulties of implementing the economic desideratum required by the EU, as well as those of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, resulted mainly from the manifestation of the economic consumption model specific to the Romanian society as well as from a pronounced lack of direction and political and economic consistency, that led to a state of confusion and general anomy in all areas of activity.

True sustainable development presupposes first of all a qualitative leap in terms of the essential perception of the concept of development itself and the promotion of development as an absolute and unconditional goal, by and for all the nations of the world. How? By assuming a culture of sustainable development, by practicing an optimistic and inclusive mentality at all levels.

The segment subject of our research, namely the quality of life in rural areas from the perspective of sustainable development, is rich in data so we made a selection and use those we considered to be more representative so that, at the end of our research to gain a new perspective, clearer on the analyzed realities, which allows us to advance solutions also recommendations for other studies and perspectives.

The first item on the **2030 Agenda** is about ending chronic poverty. A society without poverty presupposes unitary economic development and an equitable distribution of resources. This balance can be achieved taking into account a number of factors, both objective, economic, material, and subjective, socio-psychological.

According to World Bank statistics: "Romania has one of the highest poverty rates in the European Union. The share of Romanians at

risk of poverty after social transfers increased from 22.9% in 2012 to 25.4% in 2015. However, the share of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion decreased from 43.2% in 2012 at 37.4% in 2015" [18].

According to local statistics (2011 Population Census) rural areas in Romania are organized into 2.861 communes (administrative units) including 12.373 villages containing 46.547 census sectors in villages, of which 5.3 percent are very small (less than 50 inhabitants), while about 1 percent are large (with 500 inhabitants or more) [10].

The number of census sectors per village varies considerably depending on the size of the population, from at least one sector per village to a maximum of 41 sectors in two villages.

Closely related to poverty and as a consequence of this it is *marginalization and social exclusion*, then practically all the other aspects described as human objectives of the 2030 Agenda: ending hunger, health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and health services, clean and available energy for all, decent jobs and growth.

Usually, the phenomenon of marginalization and social exclusion is associated either with the Roma population communities or with the small number of inhabitants in a community. However, these are not the most significant aspects.

Specialized studies show that Roma communities predominate in villages near cities (0.5 to 10 kilometers) while non-Roma communities predominate in isolated villages, ie more than 32 kilometers away from the nearest city.

In fact, less than 10% of Roma communities live in remote villages.

In Romania, a village is considered close to the city when the distance from it is up to 10 kilometers, between 10 and 32 kilometers is a moderate distance, and a commune, a village located over 32 kilometers from the city is considered remote.

In rural areas, the location of the village in the commune, the level of infrastructure development, easy access to everything that means public services, public transport, local

institutions, church, school, hospital, police, etc. are significant elements that generally signal the degree of marginalization and of spatial exclusion.

The lack of infrastructure development is directly observable by the lack of modern roads, usually these being land, the lack of local water network, communications.

Depending on these factors, the territorial administrative units (TAUs) are divided into three groups: “developed” communes, “medium-developed” communes and “poor” communes.

According to statistics made by the World Bank, using the estimated relative poverty rates, in 2019, in Romania there were 992 marginalized rural communities (35% of all communes in the country). In 535 of these communes, with a total number of 427,046 inhabitants, the poverty level is above average and severe.

At the country level, 38% of the rural population is in poverty, the most exposed categories being children, the elderly, people with disabilities and the Roma population. The poorest areas in Romania are the northeast 33% and the southeast 30%.

On a larger scale, comparatively, at the level of the European Union, according to Eurostat, in 2016, 23.5% of the EU population, ie 118.0 million people lived in households at risk of poverty and social exclusion, due to lack of material resources or low-level, low-wage work paid, by people of working age who have worked only 20% of their potential in the last 12 months [6].

Material deprivation refers to that aspect of poverty in which the person cannot cover unexpected expenses or cannot afford to have a meat-based meal, or certain goods such as a telephone or car.

In Romania, mortality rates are much higher compared to those of most EU Member States, with large gaps in the average life expectancy of males and females, respectively, in Romania and other European countries. Mortality rates are substantially higher in rural areas compared to urban areas. Between 2005-2018 infant mortality registered a continuous decreasing trend, being higher in certain periods (2013), the

level of the rate is still very high, - 6.4 deaths under 1 year of age per 1,000 live births. In 2018, the issue remains a priority in public health policies. Between 2008-2019, the natural growth was permanently negative. (Table 1).

Table 1. Resident population, by age/gender at January 1st, 2008 and 2019*

Age Year	Total 2008/2019	Male 2008/2019	Female 2008/2019
Total	100	100	100
0-4	5.1/5.1	5.4/5.3	4.9/4.8
5-9	5.2/5.1	5.5/5.4	5.0/4.9
10-14	6.0/5.5	6.3/5.7	5.7/5.2
15-19	6.3/5.4	6.6/5.6	6.0/6.1
20-24	7.2/5.2	7.6/5.4	6.8/5.0
25-29	7.0/5.8	7.3/6.1	6.7/5.4
30-34	8.0/7.0	8.3/7.4	7.6/6.6
35-39	7.0/7.1	7.3/7.4	6.8/6.7
40-44	7.8/8.0	8.1/8.4	7.4/7.7
45-49	6.1/7.7	6.2/8.2	5.9/7.4
50-54	6.7/7.0	6.8/7.3	6.7/6.7
55-59	6.4/5.7	6.3/5.8	6.5/5.7
60-64	5.8/6.8	5.5/6.6	6.1/7.2
65-69	4.6/6.2	4.2/5.6	5.1/6.8
70-74	4.4/4.3	3.7/3.7	5.0/4.8
75-79	3.4/3.4	2.7/2.7	4.0/4.0
80-84	1.9/2.7	1.5/2.0	2.4/2.4
85 +	1.1/2.0	0.7/1.4	1.4/2.6

Source: NIS, 2021 [10].

Note: No. data available for 2020.

Also, the phenomenon of population aging is acute. The phenomena that contributed to the increase of the aging rate being mainly: the decrease of the birth rate and the increase of the international migration (Table 2).

In Romania, as a result of the low birth rate and the emigration of the young population, the share of age groups has decreased to 30 years. Other affected groups are 20-24 years (2.8 percentage points), respectively 25-29 years (1.7 percentage points).

According to NIS statistics, [9] on January 1, 2019, the average age of the female and male population in Romania increased, compared to the same date of previous years. The average age of the female population is 3.2 years older than the average age of the male population.

The rural population is older, with an average age of 42.2 years, 0.2 years older than the urban population (42.0 years). Reflecting even

only on these analyzed aspects: number of ATUs, marginalization, birth rate, mortality, natural increase - and we can better understand some of the causes that determine the level of poverty in Romania to be very high. In terms of sustainable development, the aging trend of the population has a profound impact that is reflected in all areas of activity: economic, social, education, cultural, as well as on all future generations.

Table 2. Demographic aging index (DAI) and Demographic dependency ratio (DDR), at January 1st 2010-2019*

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
DAI	102.1	101.8	101.8	103.8	106.3
DDR	46.1	47.0	47.0	47.0	47.2
Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
DAI	109.3	112.1	114.4	116.3	118.8
DDR	48.2	49.0	50.0	51.1	51.9

Source: NIS, 2021 [9].

Notes: No data available for 2020.

Indicators are calculated at 100 adults/100 children

Compared to other UE states, in Romania, the risk of poverty and social exclusion due to poverty, in 2019 was 31.2 lower than the data reported in previous years: 41.9 in 2013/ 40.3 in 2014 / 37.4 in 2015 / 38.8 in 2016 / 35.7 in 2017 / 32.5 in 2018. Eurostat statistics show that in 2020, the level decreased to 30.4. (Fig.4).

Romania has, along with Bulgaria, one of the highest rates of risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union.

From the perspective of sustainable development, in the analysis of the social inclusion ratio, three correlative dimensions are usually taken into account: material deprivation from the economic point of view of the household, material deprivation from the point of view of owning durable goods and material deprivation with reference to the quality of living conditions and which overall influence the quality of life.

Globally, one of three Romanians is at risk of poverty.

"In general, the groups subject to social exclusion are those of Roma citizens. Due to the COVID19 pandemics, the situation worsened for the vulnerable and disadvantaged categories, so that 35.8% of the

3.7 million children in Romania are at even higher risk of poverty and social exclusion. 400,000 children do not go to school, and over 50,000 children are separated from their families, largely due to poverty, the departure of their parents to other countries for a better life, but also violence and family abandonment" (Eurostat) [7].

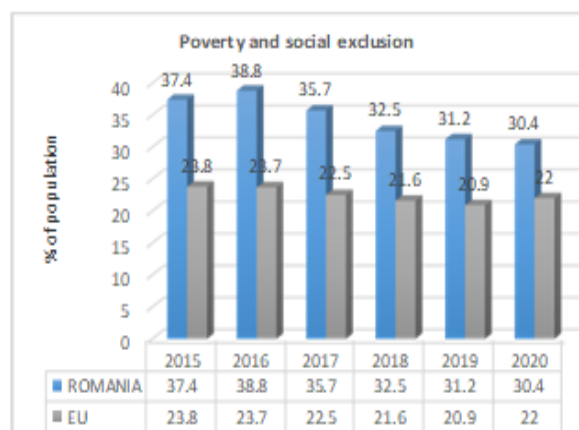


Fig. 4. People at risk of poverty and social exclusion Source: [17].

The 2011 census highlights the fact that, from the perspective of demographic developments, and by reference to the two main indicators: the resident population and the population by domicile, in 2019, Romania's population - by domicile - was 22.17 million people, decreasing compared to 2018 with 43,000 people.

According to the same provisional data provided by INS, in 2019, the resident population was 19.4 million inhabitants, down by 1.6 million people. The female population is larger (51.2%) than the male. At the regional level, population density is more concentrated in important economic centers, Bucharest 9.6% and Iasi 4.3%, at the opposite pole being Sălaj, Tulcea and Covasna with 1.1% and 1%.

The level of poverty is closely linked to the level of income of citizens on the one hand, but also to the lack of strategies at country level to reduce social disparities and promote social inclusion, equity and quality in education through spending on education, by increasing GDP and the implementation of social programs that supports the gradual improvement of education in the rural areas.

In relation to quality of life, **HDI** - the human development index includes indicators: **ALE** average life expectancy, **EI** Education index (expressed by school employment rate) and **GDP/capita** - Gross Domestic Product per capita [2].

$$HDI = \frac{ALE + EI + GDP/capita}{3}$$

Although citizens incomes increased in 2018, due to the increase in pensions and salaries, this did not contribute to the reduction of inequalities, the share of the low-income segment increased, being among the lowest in the European Union.

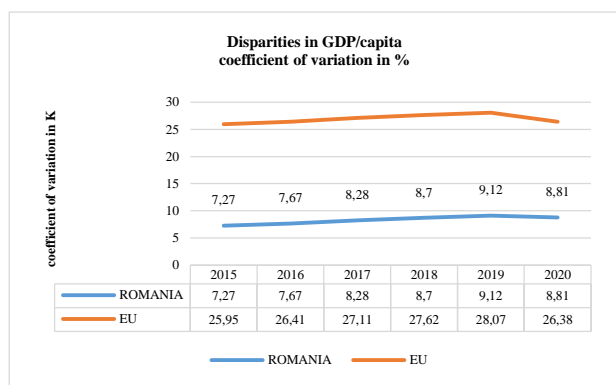


Fig. 5. Disparities in GDP per capita between Romania and EU, 2015-2020
Source: [17].

The gap between GDP/capita in Romania and the EU is obviously high (Fig. 5). Also, the difference between urban and rural are significant, both at national level and compared to the European average (Fig. 6).

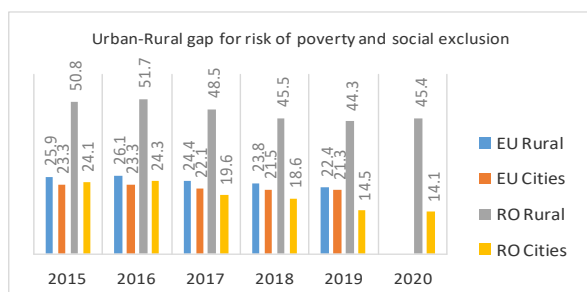


Fig. 6. Urban-rural gap for risk of poverty and social exclusion.
Source: [18].

Surprisingly, despite the discrepancies due to the level of poverty, between the countries of the European Union with poor living

conditions (damp walls, lack of foundation, windows, etc.), in 2020 Romania is next to countries such as Austria, with a rate of 9.4% of the total population, Cyprus being the first on the list, severely affected by 31.3% and Finland, the least affected, being the last with 4.1%.

This shows us to a large extent the importance that Romanian citizens attach to the creation of a certain relatively high climate of life, and a lifestyle from which to foresee a certain level of well-being, often in contrast with the level of income or social status

This has a direct and negative impact on the efforts to implement the vision specific to sustainable development.

In Fig. 7 it is shown the relative median at risk of poverty gap between Romania and the EU in the period 2015-2020.

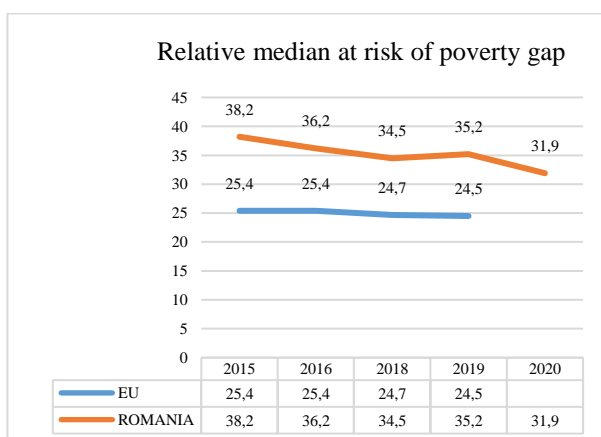


Fig. 7. Relative median at risk of poverty gap in Romania compared to the EU (No available data for EU 2020)
Source: [18].

CONCLUSIONS

The lack of social policies to facilitate solidarity and cohesion of communities are serious barriers that make it difficult to reduce social inequalities, end poverty, access to quality education, therefore a decent standard of living and living standards, which contribute to increasing the quality of life as a whole, both in urban and rural areas.

On the Eurostat map of the 17 indicators of sustainable development, certain dimensions are better positioned, however, the gaps regarding the situation in Romania determine an overall picture very diverse.

Each of the 17 main objective and subsequent objectives offer an overall portrait to a better understanding of the impact of sustainable development in Romania. In regard to this diverse and really unique picture of Romanian realities we pose a related and legitimate question: Why - after more than a decade of implementation in Romania most of the objectives are so low on the Eurostat map? Also, what are the capabilities we need to strengthen in order to obtain more visible and sustainable results that ultimately would led to a better quality of life - both in urban and rural areas, locally and globally?



Fig. 8. SGD Scores Romania overall
Source: [7].

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