

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

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Abstract: *The rural area from Romania represents a cardinal component of the overall evolution of the Romanian economy. The rural area can be analyzed from the perspective of the administrative, geographical, economic, agricultural dimension. The rural area dominates the Romanian economy both as a geographical area and as a share of the population it comprises, therefore Romania enjoys an important development potential, but insufficiently exploited.*

Key words: *rural area, characteristics, Romanian rural area*

INTRODUCTION

Rural area represents a geographical reality whose perception is based on information obtained from the surrounding reality, information that refers to the forms of habitat, land use, production and specific life in certain territories.

From an operational point of view, the rural area is delimited compared to other categories of areas on administrative criteria; so it is a priority area that exists only in our conception, representing an operational category.

The boundaries of the rural area are arbitrary and dynamic in time, changing depending on the polarization potential of rural localities or the potential for influence of urban localities. The rural area usually extends at the expense of the intact natural terrestrial area, the composite area and less rarely at the expense of the urban area (the urban area usually extends at the expense of the intact rural or natural area).

Within the rural area it can be included a series of subspaces that enter or not within the administrative limit of the rural locality, most often drawn subjectively (limit determined in historical context): the space of the rural settlement with all economic and social activities, the afferent agricultural space, forest space, space occupied by transport routes, space occupied by watercourses and lakes, space occupied by urban infrastructure. Also, the rural area can be analyzed from the perspective of the administrative, geographical, economic, agricultural dimension.

The rural area from Romania represents a cardinal component of the overall evolution of the Romanian economy. Three rural resources give the true dimension of the need to restructure agriculture and rural development from our country: the useful agricultural area, the agricultural labor force and the total area of the rural area (90% of the country's area). The need for the countryside to be perceived as a multi-structural entity is obvious, and in order to ensure its multi-functionality, there is a need to become a modern, efficient and dynamic economic and social system. We must start from the fact that agriculture is not only an economic branch producing goods and profits, but also a way of life, and rural area is not only a space of production, but is at the same time a social and cultural area, with complex implications for the overall state of a nation [3, 7].

Rural area can be defined both structurally and functionally. The organization of the rural territory is particularly differentiated. To this contributes, first of all, the respective level of development, the socio-economic profile as well as the geographical conditions (especially the relief and the hydrographic ones).

The overall image of the rural area is reflected in the radiography of its dimensions, which are a synthetic expression of the unity between the diversity of people's social actions and the support on which they take place, the natural environment, viewed in its integrity:

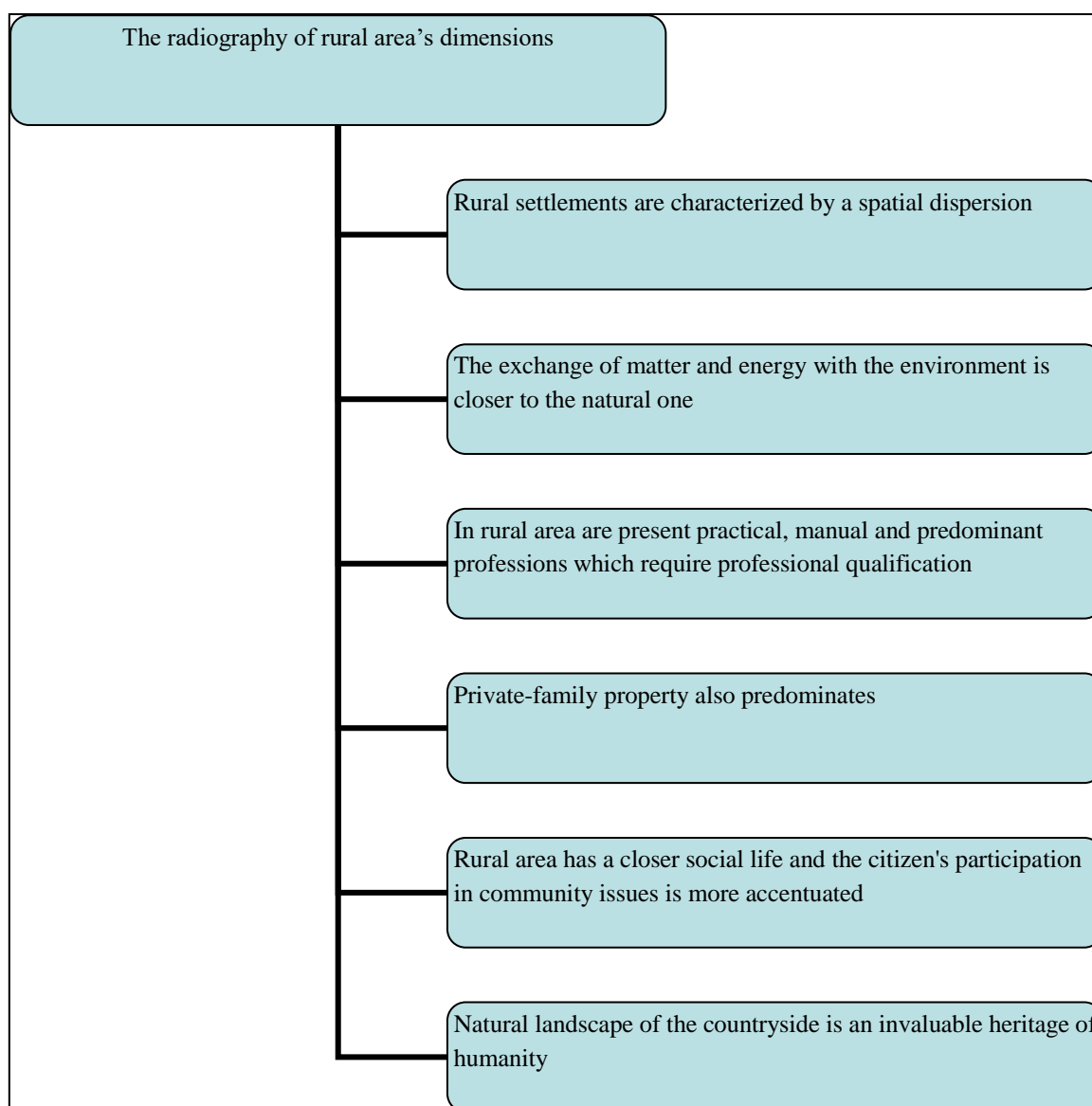


Figure 1. The radiography of rural area's dimensions

- Rural settlements are characterized by a spatial dispersion of economic activities, especially agro-systems.

- In rural settlements the exchange of matter and energy with the environment is closer to the natural one. In rural areas, agriculture usually dominates. Forestry, woodworking and crafts dominate the mountain area. Also in the mountainous, coastal and delta areas, the activities of agrotourism, hunting and fishing predominate.

- In rural area are present practical, manual and predominant professions which require professional qualification. It is a characteristic of the rural population to work simultaneously in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors.

- In rural area, private-family property also predominates. The division of private property and the development of a sense of ownership have positive consequences on the entrepreneurial spirit of rural people.

- The rural area has a closer social life and the citizen's participation in community issues is more accentuated.

- The natural landscape of the countryside is an invaluable heritage of humanity. The aerated landscape, through its flora and fauna, is incomparably healthier for people.

Quiet, peaceful, climate, fresh air, soothing landscape, social calm, cannot be quantified to measure rural habitat.

- The rural way of life, traditions and customs, together form the popular-local or regional culture. Social and cultural life is a valuable heritage of humanity, an element that together with the economy and ecology give the true size and value of rural area.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the paper was to identify the characteristics of the rural area, taking into account several opinions of specialists in the field. In order to achieve the proposed desideratum, we went through several stages: identifying the main studies in the field, highlighting some opinions and drawing some conclusions.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The rural environment represents the totality of the areas outside the cities and inhabited in our country by the population generically called “peasants”, as an antonym for the urban population of “townspeople”. In Romania, the rural area represents about 90% of the country's surface and the share of inhabitants from rural areas - among the highest in Europe - amounts to 47.3% from the total population [2, 14, 16].

The most ruralized counties (excluding Ilfov County) are Dambovita, with 69.96% of the population living in rural areas, followed by Giurgiu, with 69.15%, Teleorman (66.73%), Suceava (66.38%) Bistrita-Nasaud (63.88%), etc. At the opposite pole are the most heavily urbanized Counties: Hunedoara with only 23.04% rural population, Brasov (25.45%), Constanta (29.10%), Sibiu (33.46%), Cluj (33.80 %), Braila (34.68%), Timis (39.27%), etc.

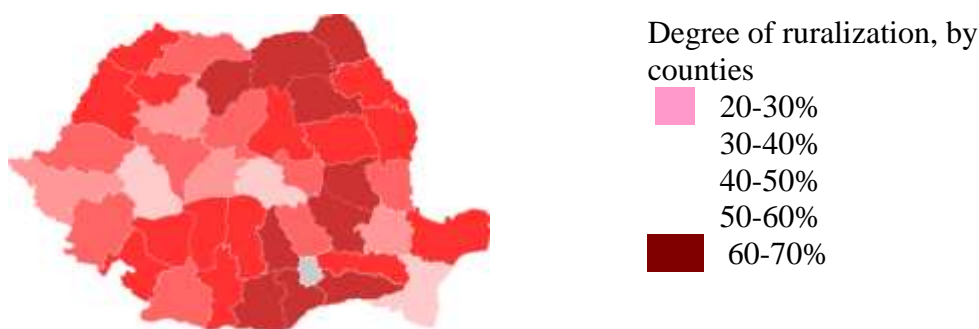


Figure 2. Rural area: ruralization degree in Romania, by Counties

The main form of settlement in rural areas is the village. Settlements smaller than villages, with only a few dozen of houses, are named hamlets. One or more villages may form a commune. Romania has approximately 12,951 villages organized in 2,854 communes, 3.8 million dwellings.

In the plain regions, large villages predominate, with about 2,000-3,000 inhabitants, in which the houses are compactly grouped. In the hilly regions, the villages have a population of 500-1,500 inhabitants, with houses lined up along valleys or roads, or slightly scattered due to vineyards and orchards that stretch among the houses. This is the most common type of village in the country. In the mountainous regions, the villages are small (300-500 inhabitants), with houses generally much more distant from each other, and in the intermountain depressions the villages are larger, with more crowded houses.

The characteristics of the Romanian rural space would be the following:

- agriculture, as an economic activity, predominates in most of the Romanian rural area. Exceptions to this rule are the mountainous areas in which forestry has developed, to

which is added a currently still small area in which the activities specific to ecotourism are more and more obvious: agrotourism, rural tourism, forest tourism, religious, ethnic tourism, cultural etc.;

- in the rural area the primary production sectors predominate. Services are still underrepresented. The most common professions in rural areas are those that require poly qualification. Usually people employed in sectors, other than agriculture, however, participate in agricultural activities in their own household;

- the predominant form of ownership is the private one. The most common form of exploitation is the private-family peasant farm. The public or the private state property has a weak representation, only the lands occupied by the communication networks or those with special destinations;

- private-family farms of peasant type have small dimensions, their average oscillating around 2.7-2.8 ha. They are endowed with the necessary work technique, they do not have the financial resources necessary to practice somewhat advanced technologies. Through the unitary yields achieved, the current private-family peasant farms fall into the category of subsistence ones, meaning they produce for their own consumption and not for the market [4, 5];

- the number of animals on peasant farms is also very low. The farm has 1-3 cattle, 2-3 pigs, several birds and sheep. Livestock partially satisfy their own consumption, and some livestock products are offered to the market;

- from an administrative point of view, the rural localities occupy small areas, and the population density is low;

- the rural area is characterized by the superior quality of the environment. Polluting activities were present until 1989, being generated mainly by the violation of environmental protection rules promoted by large combined breeding and exploitation of animals, as well as the sometimes abusive use of high doses of chemical fertilizers, especially nitrogen;

- the rural area, as a result of the nuances of conservatism promoted, better preserves the customs, traditions and popular culture. All this gives the true dimension of the rural area. This characterizes life in rural areas and gives dimension to the phrase "life in the country";

- the relative isolation of the rural environment imposes the continuity of the agri-food production processes, starting with the production of vegetal and animal raw materials and ending with the finished agri-food products destined directly for consumption.

Any attempt to highlight all the rural characteristics, which can synthesize and highlight the whole rural picture, complex, universal, valid and complete, will not be enough. The rural area has a number of characteristics that give it individuality, specificity and authenticity compared to the urban area.

Bernard Kayser [8, 9, 10, 11] believes that the rural must be conceived as a space in which a society is built and continues to be built. In the opinion of the sociologist quoted above, the rural area has the following characteristics:

- a relatively low density of inhabitants and constructions that give preponderance to the landscape, with its load and vegetal peculiarities;
- an economic use whose configuration is agro-forestry-pastoral;
- a way of life materialized for the inhabitants by belonging to the same community of limited size and by specific relationships in space;
- a specific identity and representation, strongly connoted by peasant culture.

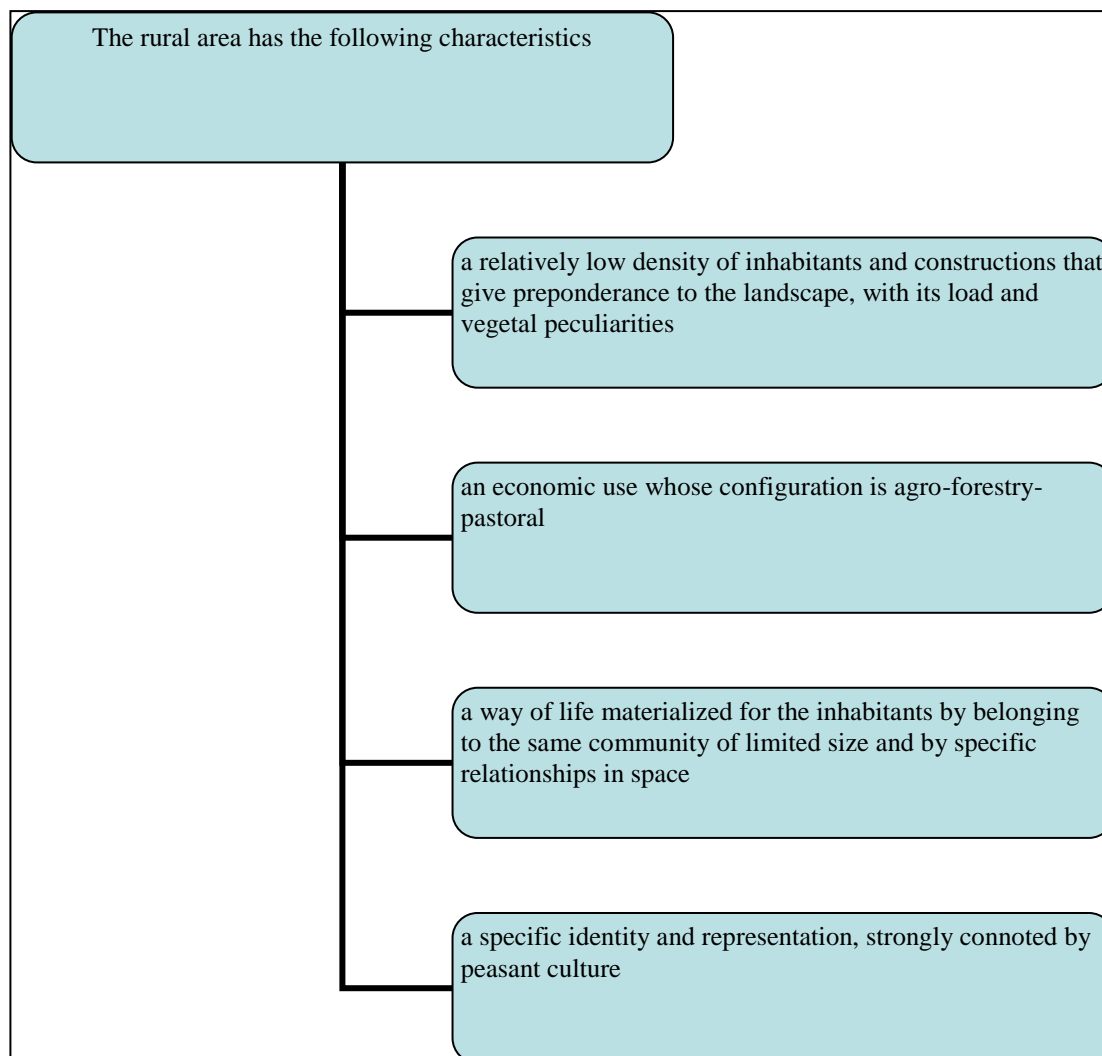


Figure 3. Characteristics of rural area

According to the American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin, the characteristics of the rural area are the following [12, 13, 15,]:

1. The rural population, for the most part, has agricultural, pastoral and gathering occupations, those living in urban areas fall into services, trade, industry and a wide variety of other actions and professions;

2. Because agricultural and pastoral activities require a relatively large territory, the population density in rural areas is relatively low. Non-agricultural activities flourish then and where the population density becomes high (factories, factories, offices);

3. Modern methods of communication and transport have not eliminated the fundamental importance of distance as a factor in all aspects of interaction and social cohesion, so the agrarian and pastoral way of life necessarily means that the inhabitants of the rural community will be few in number (over a certain number becomes a city), but there is no limit to the number of people who can live in a city;

4. Nature is close to the rural people, and the townspeople live in an environment built by them. The peasants spend their free time exposed to the vicissitudes of nature (cold, heat, etc.), and the townspeople spend most of their time in the environment built by them. Many of these are successes of the technique that remove the extremes of the natural environment;

5. Because the rural community is small, the population is not differentiated; it is relatively homogeneous in its social features such as ethnicity, language, religion, politics,

philosophy, economic conception, while among millions of citizens there is a great diversity and heterogeneity of the population.

From another point of view, the general characteristics of the rural area derive from those of the geographical area, but it also has particular characteristics:

- the basis of organization and classification of the rural area is represented by the geographical area through its component primary subspaces (atmospheric, hydrosphere, lithospheric, biotic space) and less the other subspaces categories of lower rank (for example urban area);

- the basic function of the rural area is the reproduction of the agricultural raw material (food for consume), to which it is subordinated from a structural and functional point of view;

- the rural area presents a distinct landscape aspect represented by the domination of the spaces occupied by agricultural crops, forest spaces, alternating with hearths of rural localities that have specific features (size, shape, content, structure, particular texture), poor predominance of main transport routes and communication, the social aspect of the population, which in general is distinctly inscribed in the landscape through behavior, speech, attire, degree of training, etc.;

- the rural area is characterized by distinct states that derive from the structure of the space (the relations between the geographical objects from the rural area) and the intensity of its relations with the urban area in different stages of determined geographical and historical time. Thus, two main categories of rural conditions can be distinguished:

- of balance, which can be achieved both by evolution and by involution, depending on the volume of substance exchanges, energy and information between urban and rural area;

- of instability, especially social instability (ecological instability, economic instability, etc.) maintained by the nature and intensity of relations with the urban environment. Economic instability is caused by social rather than natural factors. The instability of the environment is lower due to the low intensity of human intervention on it (compared to that of urban area), which lately tends to increase, to amplify, determined by the decrease of living differences between urban and rural standards (asphalting roads and diversification of territorial infrastructures, increasing the occupancy density of construction hearths);

- rural area presents a specific way of life, detached, expressive by the one from the urban area, subordinated more to the cyclicity and the natural laws;

- the structural mobility of the rural area is dictated by exogenous and endogenous forces with capacities of differentiated action as intensity and duration;

- the “elasticity” of the rural area consists in its capacity to respond flexibly to the internal and external requests. The shock states of the urban (the entropy produced by it) are attenuated by their partial or total absorption by the rural space, as the same shocks of the rural area (for example the phenomenon of emigration) are perceived and absorbed by the urban area;

- rural area is a space for the multiplication of food, energy, labor and spiritual resources, which are absolutely necessary for the development of the urban area;

- rural area constitutes the reserve space for the extension of the urban area;

- rural area is the space for conservation, regeneration and preservation of landscapes for tourist, cultural and spiritual needs;

- rural area is constituted as a space for locating some economic activities belonging to the secondary and tertiary sector, specific to the urban (for example tourist activities, industrial branches with strategic destination, production of perishable goods);

- rural area is constituted by its demographic potential and the weak presence of the economic units, as the main market for the sale of the urban industrial production;
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- the rural area is a strong stimulator of the development of urban services as a result of a high demand, determined by its demographic potential (banking services, health care, higher education, etc.);
- through its demographic potential and territorial expansion, the rural area influences the meaning of events and the structure of the political scale at zonal, regional and national level;
- through physical qualities, degree of equipment, demographic potential and experience, the rural area is an important factor in maintaining and strengthening the defense capacity.

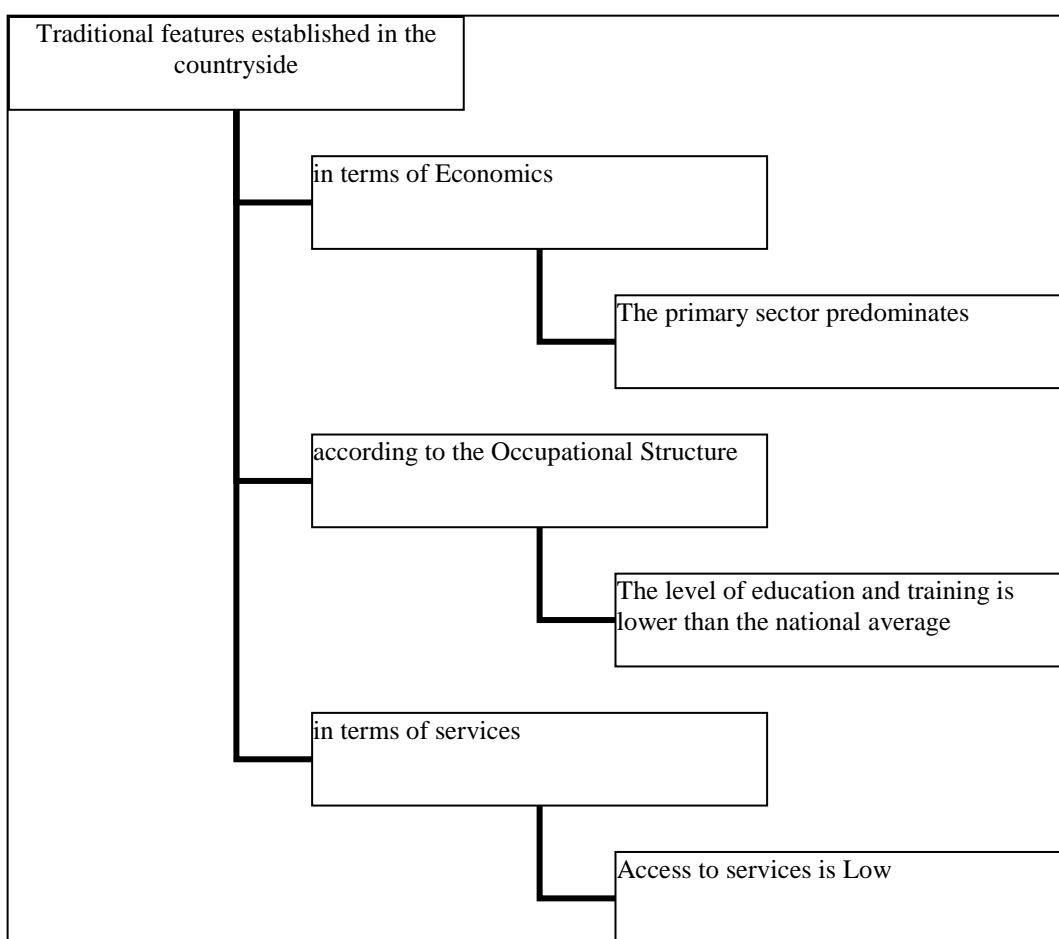


Figure 4. Traditional features set in the countryside

Graeme Hugo pointed out some of the widely accepted traditional features established in the countryside [1, 6, 7].

In its evolution, the rural area showed two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, rural area has been dominated by conservative trends in the economic, ecological and social environment. On the other hand, in the same evolutionary process, the liberal tendency to modernize rural life manifested itself.

The decision-makers must create the framework in which the balance between the conservation tendency of the traditional values of the rural area and the one of its modernization can be ensured.

Furthermore, the Romanian rural area will certainly follow the path of structural and functional changes due to the emergence and development of non-agricultural activities, among which services will have the largest share.

CONCLUSIONS

The rural area dominates the Romanian economy both as a geographical area and as a share of the population it comprises, therefore Romania enjoys an important development potential, but insufficiently exploited. The rural economy presents significant differences depending on the regions, on the specific demographic, social and economic features. This differentiation is visible especially in terms of poverty in the Romanian rural area, reflected in a low standard of living of the population and in the lack of alternative sources of income.

From an administrative point of view, the Romanian rural area, the object of the present study, represents 89% from the total surface of the country, extending on an area of 212700 km². This is where 91% of the country's agricultural area is concentrated, with the population of the villages owning 80% of the total agricultural land. The Romanian rural environment belongs to: 44.8% from the country's population (9.7 million inhabitants, of which 2.4 million are aged 60 and over), 47% of the number of houses and 46% of the living area. From the administrative point of view, it consists of 2854 communes, totaling in their turn 12951 villages; the average demographic size of a commune is 3800 inhabitants, and of a village of 780 inhabitants.

From a demographic point of view, the population is viewed in terms of its quantitative evolution (birth rate, mortality, natural increase), structure (by age, profession, sex, level of education, etc.) and spatially (territorial distribution), urban and rural, migration and geographical mobility, etc. After 1995, there is an obvious increase in population in rural area at the same time as stopping the exodus to the cities. As such, in these conditions the favorable premise of employment resources from the rural area is created, which will have a positive effect on increasing the quality of life in rural areas.

Characteristic of the rural environment is the low population density, its average level being 10 times lower than in the urban environment. The lowest density is registered in the communes from the perimeter of the Carpathian chain as well as in the Dobrogea area. The least populated are the counties of Caras-Severin and Tulcea.

The labor resources in the rural area bear the imprint of the specifics of the rural economy dominated by the primary sector (agriculture and forestry). The rural population is mainly engaged in agriculture, participating in agricultural activities with the status of self-employed and unpaid family worker in the proportion of 93.25% given that the level of education is lower than in urban areas.

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Economically speaking, the agricultural activity represents and will represent the central axis of the rural area. In Romania, agriculture holds the first place in the total population employed in the economy, manifesting a slight tendency to decrease it. Compared to some EU countries, its value is much higher, which is a weak point in the process of integrating our agriculture into EU agricultural structures. This dominant position of agriculture in the national economy has deep roots in the history of economic and social development of Romania which is reflected in the low degree of economic development and its efficiency.

Supporting the development of rural area will be achieved through tools that will integrate the environmental component, especially in the case of disadvantaged areas, which, most often overlap with areas of high natural value. At the same time, agri-environmental measures will benefit from increased budgetary means, achieved through high co-financing rates, especially in terms of services that require additional effort from farmers (organic farming, conservation of semi-natural habitats), as well as measures that attract significant yield losses (arrangement of buffer strips along watercourses). However, the simultaneous implementation, in the same region, of several programs and measures, on behalf of different policies, may lead to a lack of coherence at Community level.

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