

STUDY ON THE DEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN ALBA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract: This paper highlights the dynamics of the rural population at the level of Alba County, Center region, Romania. It is the county that occupies 18.3% of the territory of the Center region, and the county with the most villages in the region. The rural area of Alba County occupies approximately 83% of the territory of the Center region with residence for 40% of its inhabitants. The peculiarity of Alba County is the concentration of 75.5% of the total rural settlements in the county in the Apuseni Mountains (several 474 villages), on an area representing 48.1% of the total area of the county. The purpose of the paper is to emphasize the rural localities that can be attractive for the population in Alba County to stop the phenomenon of very aggressive migration in rural areas.

Key words: rural area, population, Center region, Alba County

INTRODUCTION

Of the total area of Romania, 207,522 square km, that is 87.08% is represented by the rural area [6]. The Central Region, one of the regions of Romania, consists of 6 counties as follows: Alba, Brasov, Covasna, Harghita, Mures and Sibiu. Alba County is in the central-western part of Romania, in the contact area of the Transylvanian Plateau with the Apuseni Mountains and the Southern Carpathians. It is the county that occupies 18.3% of the territory of the Center region, and the county with the most villages [14].

Regarding the rural area, it occupies approximately 83% of the territory of the region and provides residence for 40% of the inhabitants of the Central Region. Based on the criterion of administrative-territorial division, the weights of urban and rural spaces at the county level are expressed in the table below. At the level of the Center Region, the county with the largest area of the urban area is Brașov (22.3%), and the largest areas of rural space, over 85%, are in the counties of Mureș, Covasna and Harghita [15].



Figure 1. Map of the Center region

Source: Final, In-Depth Assessment Report Center Region, Romania [11]

The Alba County, located in the central part of the country and to the west of the Central Region, is in the contact zone of the Transylvania Plateau with the Apuseni Mountains and the Meridional Carpathians. It is surrounded by the following counties: Cluj (in the north), Mures and Sibiu (in the east), Vâlcea (in the south) and Hunedoara,

Arad and Bihor (in the west) [9]. It is the county that occupies 18.3% of the territory of the Center region, and the county with the most villages. Alba County has an area of 6,242 km², which represents 2.6% of Romania's area, being the 16th largest county in the country.

Alba County is recognized at the level of the region, but also at the level of the entire country and thanks to the Areas with approved ski slopes in Alba County are Arieseni-Vârtope and Șureanu. Even though the resident population is low in this area. During the winter sports season, these areas are full of tourists, which is very important for the development of tourism, respectively for increasing the income of the resident population.

For Alba county, the rural environment means culture, history, nature, man, life, future. The prosperity of the village of Alba means an obligation that falls to the present, to ensure the continuity of local values, and the essential element of the rural space in Alba county is man, the one who creates, the one who inherits, the one who protects [10].

The purpose of the paper is to emphasize the rural localities that can be attractive for the population in Alba County in order to stop the phenomenon of very aggressive migration in rural areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this paper we have analysed the bibliographical sources related to the topic, namely other official documents such as the Development Strategy of the Center Region, Alba County and some rural localities in Alba County in order to highlight opportunities for village revitalization.

At the same time, we also conducted a statistical analysis using data related to the Population Census at the end of 2021, respectively data available from the Tempo Online database for.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The location of Alba county within the Central Development Region means that it has and can establish direct links with all other development regions. Thus, by being close to the most important cities in the Center and West of the country, by direct or rail route, economic links can be established, which will lead to the development and resolution of disparities between rural and urban localities.



Figure 2. Map of Alba County

Source: Map of Alba County [12]

At the level of the Center region, the number of communes is 357 with a total of 1,788 villages. Alba County is the county with the most villages, a number of 656 villages located in the 67 communes belonging to the county.

Table 1.

Territorial organization of Alba County, Center region

| | Cities and towns | of which municipalities | Common no | No. Villages |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Center Region | 57 | 20 | 357 | 1788 |
| white | 11 | 4 | 67 | 656 |
| % White of the total Region | 19.3 | 20.0 | 18.8 | 36.7 |

Source: Processing according to the Regional Development Plan of the Center Region 2021-2027 [15]

Regarding the rural area of Alba County, it occupies approximately 83% of the territory of the Center region with residence for 40% of its inhabitants. In terms of surface area and weight in the Central Region, Alba County is in 3rd place, the first in the medium-sized category of counties, after Mureș and Harghita counties, which are in the large category.

Situated in an area with a diverse geographic environment, Alba county can enjoy many forms of tourism, taking into account the main destination, such as: mountain resort tourism, spa tourism, circuit tourism, urban tourism and rural tourism [8].

The mountain area, predominantly rural, occupies over 50% of the county's territory, which makes the two forms of tourism - mountain tourism and rural tourism constitute the basic tourist offer at the county level [4]. In the context of sustainable rural development, tourism has long been considered as one of the ways to achieve a more equitable distribution of income, mitigating economic disparities between rural and urban regions [5].

Regarding the population, according to the last census, it is observed that 57.93% of the resident population in Alba County live in the urban area, and 42.07% in the rural area. Of the total population in the urban area, the highest concentration lives in the municipality of Alba Iulia, respectively 19.63% of the total population.

Table 2.

Resident Population by Domicile, Alba County on December 1, 2021

| COUNTY OF USUAL RESIDENCE MUNICIPALITY, CITY, COMMUNITY | No. | % |
|---|----------------|--------|
| ALBA | 318,788 | 100.00 |
| ALBA IULIA MUNICIPALITY | 62,588 | 19.63 |
| AIUD MUNICIPALITY | 20,418 | 6.40 |
| BLAJ MUNICIPALITY | 17,607 | 5.52 |
| SEBEȘ MUNICIPALITY | 26,213 | 8.22 |
| ABRUD CITY | 4,164 | 1.31 |
| CITY OF BAIA DE ARIES | 2,979 | 0.93 |
| CAMPENI CITY | 6,433 | 2.02 |
| CUGIR CITY | 19,287 | 6.05 |
| TOWN OF OCNA MUREȘ | 12,317 | 3.86 |
| TOWN TEIUȘ | 6,102 | 1.91 |
| ZLATNA CITY | 6,569 | 2.06 |
| Totally urban | 184,677 | 57.93 |
| Rural | 134,111 | 42.07 |

Source: own processing after Final results: Demographic characteristics, Population Census 2021 [13]

The peculiarity of Alba County is the concentration of 75.5% of the total rural settlements in the county in the Apuseni Mountains (several 474 villages), on an area representing 48.1% of the total area of the county.

It is observed (table 3) that the rural population is experiencing a demographic decline, being continuously decreasing and aging, both at the national level and at the Alba County level. In the period analysed based on the 3 censuses 2002, 2011 and 2021, it can be observed that we witnessed a gradual decrease of the rural population. Thus, at the level of the whole country, in the year 2021 we have a decrease in the rural population by approximately 1,131,181 inhabitants compared to the year 2001. The decrease in the number of the rural population at the national level also registered a decrease compared to the year 2011, but this time by 148,131 inhabitants.

Table 3.
Population at the 2002, 2011 and 2021 Censuses in rural areas in Romania and Alba County

| Residence environment | The population for the census of: | | | 2021-2002 | 2021-2011 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | March 18 2002 | October 20 2011 | December 1st 2021 | | |
| THE COUNTY | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| A | | | | | |
| ROMANIA | 21,680,974 | 20,121,641 | 19,053,815 | -2,627,159 | -1,067,826 |
| Alba | 382,747 | 342,376 | 325,941 | -56,806 | -16,435 |
| RURAL | 10,245,894 | 9,262,851 | 9,114,713 | -1,131,181 | 148,138 |

Source: Own processing from the Population Census, 2021 [13]

An important factor for the configuration of the Romanian village and implicitly of the one in Alba County is the migration of the population which has important consequences in the development of the county. A phenomenon that has gained momentum - population migration, especially from the village-city direction, is determined by the diversification of communication routes, the increase in employment opportunities due to industrialization, a developed social life.

Table 4.
The resident population in rural areas in Alba county, 2021

| Commune, Alba county Census, 2021 | No. | % of the total |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| ALBAC | 1,821 | 1.36 |
| ALMASU MARE | 1,024 | 0.76 |
| Arieseni | 1,444 | 1.08 |
| AVRAM IANCU | 1,256 | 0.94 |
| BERGHIN | 1,651 | 1.23 |
| BISTRA | 4,285 | 3.20 |
| BLANDIANA | 756 | 0.56 |
| GRAIN PUMP | 2,144 | 1.60 |
| horn | 1,241 | 0.93 |
| SHOE | 1,779 | 1.33 |
| CENADE | 958 | 0.71 |
| rug | 1,488 | 1.11 |
| SKY-BREAKERS | 207 | 0.15 |
| THE CITY OF BALTA | 2,753 | 2.05 |
| CHIUGUD | 3,180 | 2.37 |
| CIURULEASA | 1,063 | 0.79 |
| CHRISTMAS DOWN | 1,917 | 1.43 |
| jack | 1,797 | 1.34 |
| CUT | 1,045 | 0.78 |
| DAIA ROMANIA | 3,009 | 2.24 |
| Doştat | 938 | 0.70 |
| FAREWELL | 1,301 | 0.97 |
| LOWER BOILER | 4,253 | 3.17 |
| GĂRBOVA | 1,805 | 1.35 |
| THE TOP FENCE | 1,396 | 1.04 |

| | | |
|-------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| THE HOPPER | 1,077 | 0.80 |
| hore | 1,766 | 1.32 |
| IGHIU | 6,378 | 4.76 |
| ENTREPRENEURS | 440 | 0.33 |
| YIDVES | 5,002 | 3.73 |
| orchards | 993 | 0.74 |
| THE NEW SHOVEL | 2,334 | 1.74 |
| THE MEADOW OF MUREȚU | 2,286 | 1.70 |
| Lüps | 2,691 | 2.01 |
| Metes | 2,477 | 1.85 |
| ling | 3,075 | 2.29 |
| MIRĂSLĂU | 1,739 | 1.30 |
| MOGOȘ | 635 | 0.47 |
| Noșlac | 1,604 | 1.20 |
| roundabout way | 470 | 0.35 |
| OHABA | 522 | 0.39 |
| PIANO | 3,259 | 2.43 |
| THE FORD CLEARANCE | 921 | 0.69 |
| slope | 451 | 0.34 |
| Poșaga | 814 | 0.61 |
| SHAVE | 1,119 | 0.83 |
| Ramet | 418 | 0.31 |
| Ramet | 942 | 0.70 |
| DRY TOMATO | 1,368 | 1.02 |
| MONTANA TOMATO | 2,358 | 1.76 |
| THE WILLOW | 1,249 | 0.93 |
| SALISTEA | 2,095 | 1.56 |
| Sancel | 2,231 | 1.66 |
| SANTIMBRU | 2,899 | 2.16 |
| SASSIORI | 5,786 | 4.31 |
| THE STAIRCASE | 1,371 | 1.02 |
| Șibot | 2,003 | 1.49 |
| SOHODOL | 1,527 | 1.14 |
| Sona | 3,737 | 2.79 |
| Șpring | 2,260 | 1.69 |
| Stremț | 2,285 | 1.70 |
| Șugag | 2,584 | 1.93 |
| UNIFICATION | 4,295 | 3.20 |
| VAUDE TO THE DEAD | 1,175 | 0.88 |
| LONG VALLEY | 2,863 | 2.13 |
| OTTER | 1,346 | 1.00 |
| I CAME FROM DOWN | 4,755 | 3.55 |
| Rural | 134,111 | 100.00 |

Source: Own processing after Population Census, 2021 [13]

Of the 67 communes in Alba County, it can be observed that the largest population is found in the locality of Ighiu, followed by Săsciori, Bistra, Jidvei, Gârda de Jos, Union (table 4).

The smallest population is found in the mountain areas of the county as follows: Ceru-Bacainți with only 207 inhabitants, this being the smallest population in the rural area, followed by Ocoliș, Ponor, Mogoș.

An important factor for the configuration of the Romanian village and implicitly of the one in Alba County is the migration of the population which has important consequences in the development of the county. The phenomenon has gained momentum - population migration, especially from the village-city direction, is determined by the diversification of communication routes, the increase in employment opportunities due to industrialization, a developed social life.

The biggest threat to the area is depopulation, the distant attitude of business towards culture and the arts, the low level of awareness of environmental issues and the risks of global warming. On top of this, the area is facing a strong economic decline due to the closure of large industrial units in the area [7].

The population of the rural area of Alba County is characterized by a relatively homogeneous ethnic structure, according to the 2021 census data, with Romanians exceeding 74% of the total population. Although we are in an area predominantly occupied by Romanians, ethnic minorities have contributed to the culture and socio-economic life of the county [10].

The weak points of the county, and the weak point that refers to the topic of this diploma project is the demographic and workforce situation as follows:

- The decrease in the population and the increase in the aging of the rural population;
- External and internal migration of the active rural population, including their families;
- Low and unattractive job offers in rural areas;

Starting from these realities of the rural space, it is necessary to identify the opportunities that we can capitalize on for a better organization, respectively a harmonization of all the resources in the rural space.

It is very important that at the county level the attractive rural settlements from the point of view of historical, cultural and ecumenical heritage are known: in Alba county there are two rural localities with objectives included in the UNESCO heritage: Călnic Citadel and Căpâlna Citadel.

An important support for the revitalization of the rural space, in the present case of Alba County, is given by the financing of rural development through Pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy. Romania has benefited from this support since the period of pre-accession to the European Union and continued to benefit from important non-refundable funds through the financial years related to the periods 2007-2013, 2014-2020, respectively the support from NextGeneration EU - the transition to the new CAP, respectively the current period of programming 2023-2027. Romania benefits from a support of 5.87 billion euros through pillar II of the Common Agricultural Policy, non-reimbursable European funds for making investments to European standards, efficient and profitable [1].

In order to keep the population in the locality or to attract from other areas, an important role is also the creation of appropriate living conditions [3].

A better rural area is an area where not only the environment is protected and the infrastructure is developed, but an area where we have a healthy and demographically balanced population. For that purpose the generational change in the rural area is not just a strictly academic debate but rather a critical aspect if we still want a future for us and our children [2].

Other opportunities for rural development in Alba County:

- In support of the inhabitants of the rural area, the Bank lending systems intended for businesses in the rural area also come;
- Relocation of industrial activities from urban to rural areas;
 - Construction of highways and high-speed railways - future European corridors, road and rail transport;
 - Development of alternative energies, renewable materials and waste recycling;
 - The development of local brands, certified organic agricultural and food products;
 - Association of producers and public-private partnerships beneficial for joint economic and rural development projects;

➤ Growing trend of practicing agrotourism, mountain, ecological and cultural tourism;

All these can support the development of the rural area, especially the maintenance of the population in the rural area as the main engine of rural development.

CONCLUSIONS

The population in the countryside has undergone significant changes in recent years. Even though we witnessed a migration from urban to rural during the pandemic and post-pandemic, there are rural areas that are depopulated, and here I am not strictly referring to mountain villages where the population density was not high anyway.

An important factor for the configuration of the Romanian villages and, implicitly, of the villages in Alba County is the migration of the population, which has important consequences for the development of the county.

Of the 67 communes in Alba County, it can be observed that the largest population is found in the town of Ighiu, followed by Săsciori, Bistra, Jidvei, Gîrda de Jos, Unirea. The smallest population is found in the mountain areas of the county as follows: Ceru-Bacainți with only 207 inhabitants, this being the smallest population in the rural area, followed by Ocoliș, Ponor, Mogos.

The vision for the development of the rural areas of Alba County is to improve the standard of living, basic infrastructure and services, diversification of economic activities, a high standard of living by making better use of the resources offered by the natural and cultural heritage, while ensuring the preservation and protection of the cultural-historical and ecological heritage.

Rural financing is perhaps the most important aspect of rural development. Thus, an attractive rural space for the new generations will bring a reduction in the differences between urban and rural areas.

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