

ANALYSIS OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL AGRI-FOOD POTENTIAL

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Abstract

In Romania, agriculture is the most vulnerable part of the economy, as about 30% of the country's population works in this sector. What minimizes the overall performance of the agricultural sector are subsistence farms, so that labor and land are used below their economic potential. The lack of competitiveness is generated by the excess of the agricultural labor force, to which is added the lack of capital and the inadequate training of the farmers. This results in an imbalance in the ratio between very low incomes and activities. The paper is based on statistical research on the degree of rural development of the commune under analysis, the diagnosis of the mentioned rural area, the SWOT analysis of the commune and the 2030 vision from the point of view of rural development. Regarding rural development, the policy focuses on three key points: environment, agri-food economy, extended rural economy. For this reason, the seven criteria of rural development representative for the diagnosis of the rural area were taken into account, according to which the Banca commune, Vaslui county was included in a specific category from the rural development point of view. The SWOT analysis of the rural area complements the highlighted characteristics and makes possible an overview, summary, of the agri-food potential, development opportunities and combating the existing problems. Finally, the 2030 vision captures the need to implement an agri-food strategy in order to develop economically, ecologically, territorially, socially in order to ensure agri-food safety and security.

Key words: performance, vulnerability, competitiveness, agri-food safety

Food security is interpreted as a relevant concern in terms of access to food, from the individual to the global level. The 1994 UNDP report on the development of individuals promotes issues related to the development of the concept of human security, including component issues related to food security. "Food security, at the individual, domestic, national, regional and global levels [is achieved] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences in a active and healthy living" (Summitul mondial al alimentației, 1996).

Starting from the statement that "security is a key component in defining the national agricultural model" it is stated that "the evolution of the agricultural sector and agricultural production, in general, must be limited to the requirements imposed by this dimension" (Istudor *et al.*, 2019).

Simultaneously with the advanced progress of the vast industrial countries, is a worldwide expansion and exploration of the gap between various countries and regions. The widening of the process of information globalization, of scientific, financial, economic and technical to improve

technology and economic management has also deepened the gap between regions and different countries. In terms of economic growth and its specific challenges facing rural areas, the sustainability of future years and jobs can be mentioned. However, they bring realistic opportunities such as rural recreation, livelihoods and jobs, tourism, and aim to accumulate valuable landscapes and natural resources. As a result of the existence of new global challenges - with long-term effect - there is a concept of structural transformation, which requires the development of a strategic vision and the implementation of relevant actions by the competent authorities.

"Globally, food demand is projected to increase by 70% by 2050, due to the growing population and rising incomes. Developing countries will contribute the most to this trend, with their demand for food doubling in the coming years" (FAO, 2009). One of the most important socio-economic challenges of Europe in the next fifty years is considered to be an aging population, and it is expected that unlike the evolution of world population, the European population will age and stagnate.

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It is estimated that by 2050, the population of the European Union will increase by 5% compared to the level of 2008, and will reach about 515 million. One of the countries subject to and affected by this trend will be Romania, so it is expected that the country's population will decrease to 18 million, which is a decrease in population by 10% compared to 2011. It is found that this is one of the most massive declines of the EU population, decline, surpassed only by Bulgaria (-22.5%), Lithuania (-19%) and Latvia (-22.5%). Romania's rural population has the largest share in the EU countries and represents 44.9% of the total population. There are significant geographical differences in terms of population density, so that most communes with less than 50 inhabitants / km² are grouped in the West of the country, compared to the East and South where predominant are rural localities with a population density of 50 - 100 inhabitants / km². In Romania, the process of "deruralization" is slow and materializes in different rates of minimizing the rural population depending on regional characteristics. The rural demographic strategy envisages decisive measures and actions to stop the negative demographic phenomena, the structural rebalancing of the population and especially of the age structure and the increase of the life expectancy in good living conditions. The strategic orientations related to the demographic requirements of the rural area are focused on improving the conditions in the rural environment.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

As mentioned in the literature, the rural area is witnessing the phenomenon of depopulation, estimating that in the future, the urban environment will prevail. As the main reasons for the existence of this phenomenon, can be taken into account, the comfort offered by the urban environment and the need of laborours.

Rural development is a complex subject, and agriculture has an essential role to play, so that an integration of the labor force into agricultural activities and a stability of the population is required by maintaining the youth in the rural area.

In order to establish the current situation of the rural area from the rural point of view, agricultural and sustainable development and its agri-food potential, Banca commune, from Vaslui County, was analyzed.

The objectives of the research are:

- carrying out the diagnosis of the mentioned rural space;
- SWOT analysis of Banca commune, Vaslui county;

- the 2030 vision from the point of view of rural development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Diagnosis of rural area in Banca commune, Vaslui county

Vaslui County, an area that includes the commune under study - Banca commune - was included in the predominant area with favorable factors for development. Therefore, the main objectives of policies regarding these areas are:

- promoting economic diversity;
- demand for small and medium-sized enterprises with an agricultural, commercial, artisanal, service and commercial profile;
- the efficient capitalization of the natural resources with special attention on the creation of its own conditions for the development of the recreation and tourism activities;
- development of transport, communications, energy and hydro-publishing infrastructure
- transforming agriculture into a diversified and efficient one;
- development of human potential;
- improving living conditions and social infrastructure;
- involving the local population in the process of developing these areas"(*The Green Card of the Romanian rural space*, p.20). In this way, seven criteria were obtained, for which an appropriate score was awarded, so that the commune could obtain a maximum of 100 points (*table 1*):

Table 1

Criteria characteristic of the diagnosis of the Romanian rural space

Nr.	Criteria	Score
1.	Physical-geographical criterion	8 points
2.	Demographic criterion	30 points
3.	Economic criterion	30 points
4.	Housing criterion	10 points
5.	The criterion of technical equipment of the localities	10 points
6.	Social criterion	9 points
7.	Ecological criterion	4 points

In the table is observed that, these points sum up the values of the component indicators characteristic of each criterion; each indicator reflects a social phenomenon with a greater or lesser significance for the characterization of the rural space.

The physical-geographical factors are determined in the economic and social example of the communes, so that the indicator has a weight of 8%.

The main forms of relief represent the first sub-criterion, as it is found the presence of general features of the hills, the appearance of plateau and

valleys, accompanied by terraces developed with slight geomorphological processes, especially landslides.

Another relevant indicator for the physical-geographical criterion is represented by natural risk factors, through landslides. This indicator is relevant for assessing the difficulties related to the exploitation of buildable or agricultural land. Banca commune does not show significant landslides. Also, low rainfall falls into the category of natural risk factors, due to the influence they have on economic activity, by exposing agricultural activities to the danger of drought. In the analyzed location, it is found that the precipitation regime is generally normal.

An essential factor in the diagnostic analysis of a territorial area is represented by its demographic characteristics, as it expresses synthetically and expressively the level of economic and social development and the conditions of the population's living environment (*table 2*):

Table 2

Appreciation of demographic resources	
Calculated intervals	Assessment of demographic resources
10,4-18,0	Large communes and high capacity for demographic renewal
2,7-10,3	Common with average demographic characteristics
(5,0)-2,6	Medium and small size common; poor demographic renewal capacity

According to the results obtained, Banca commune is in the range of 10.4-18.0, which can be considered a large commune with a high capacity for demographic renewal.

The economic criterion is broadly characterized by agriculture, industry, trade and services, so it is relevant to analyze the situation of economic development based on sub-criteria and indicators.

The agricultural structure of Banca commune includes crops of corn, wheat but also sunflower. At the same time, vegetable and fruit farms are developed and, developing, both for self-consumption and for the free market of nearby cities.

The housing criterion largely refers to the endowment of the dwelling with minimum conditions, from the living area and the construction of new dwellings, to the existence of the appliances necessary for decent living conditions. According to the obtained data, the quality of housing in Banca commune is average, but developing.

The criterion of technical equipment of the house refers in particular to the supply of running water, electricity, natural gas and technical comfort through equipment necessary for a decent home. In

the commune there is water supply in each village, so that each house has such a facility, which can be used for various household purposes.

The social criterion

Relevant for the characterization of this criterion are: the occupational status of the locals, the level of education, the material condition, the educational units, the medical assistance, the cultural life and the access to the transport routes.

Banca commune has only primary education units, so that the locals can benefit from the other types of education, such as vocational and high school, in Bârlad municipality (commuter), respectively state higher education in Iași county.

The ecological criterion

In general, the rural area is defined by a good ecological profile, requiring only zonal interventions, so the share given to the ecological criterion is 4%, compared to the other criteria. The indicators that characterize this criterion are air, water, soil and forests.

By calculating the synthetic index, the following categories of areas are obtained, from the point of view of rural development (*table 3*):

- 1.3-29.0: area where restrictive factors for development predominate;
- 29.1-43.0: area with average development conditions;
- 43.1-71.0: area where favorable development factors predominate.

Table 3

The result of the synthetic index according to the criteria for the development of the rural space

Criteria	Score
1.Physical-geographical criterion	6,5 points
2.Demographic criterion	15,5 points
3.Economic criterion	10 points
4.Housing criterion	3 points
5.The criterion of technical equipment of the localities	4,5 points
6.Social criterion	2,5 points
7.Ecological criterion	2,5 points
TOTAL	44,5

Considering the results obtained and the score of the synthetic index for Banca commune, Vaslui county, it is found that it falls in an area where favorable development factors predominate. This is due to the involvement of the local and regional community and existing actions to improve living conditions, as well as the economic situation of the inhabitants.

SWOT analysis of the rural space-Banca Commune

The use of SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) of the rural area aims to identify development priorities, optimal planning of actions and directions in which it is necessary to act to address existing threats.

According to the research carried out, the results can be summarized as follows:

STRENGTHS (S)

- High agricultural potential;
- Ecological agriculture in development;
- High share of the rural population;
- Existence of direct investments;
- Fertile lands and favorable environment;
- Existence of labor force;
- Attracting young people to productive agricultural activities for the market in the coming years.

WEAKNESSES (W)

- Impossibility to modernize technologies due to high costs;
- Deficient salary system;
- Lack of involvement for scientific research, for financial reasons;
- Uncultivated land;
- Rural population with low employment rate.

OPPORTUNITIES (O)

- The existence of the possibility to develop some actions of transformation and distribution in the rural area;
- Political and economic issues regarding migration can encourage young people to return to the country to develop small businesses;
- Maximizing the equipment in the rural area with European type infrastructure;
- Political and public knowledge of the importance of agriculture, as a factor of internal security and promotion of Romanian agri-food products.

THREATS (T)

- Increasing costs in agriculture for fuels, chemical treatments and fertilizer products;
- Increasing the degree of neutralization for the labor force in rural areas;
- European procedural and administrative restrictions;
- The monopoly policy of some companies (cereals, vegetables) trade, which occupy considerable market segments.

For the future, one of the main functions of the rural area in Romania is represented by the space expansion of the habitat and the increase of its quality and last but not least, the relevant reserve for increasing the quality agricultural production (Turtoi C., Toma C., 2006).

Among the main directions of action set out in the strategy are:

- The need to increase farmers' incomes (stimulating associative, cooperative forms);
- Vocational training of farmers (supporting investments and agricultural activities);

- Maintaining young people in rural areas, as a reaction to the increase in migration and the tendency to reduce the birth rate in recent times, is an important goal;

- Diversification of economic activities and increasing their competitiveness, through professional training and support for business development in the area;

- The need for sustainable management of forest resources, taking into account the proportion of current forested areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Practicing sustainable agriculture is a difficult and complex process, but it is evolving slowly due to the difficulties and obstacles already highlighted. The continued practice of intensive agriculture, which is based on industrialization and chemicalization, is not a solution for sustainable economic development, so sustainable agriculture seems to be a viable alternative to intensive agriculture. Its essential role is to promote "environmentally friendly" technologies and systems, which also takes into account the needs of future generations. For Romania, sustainable development could be ensured through several options, including the competitiveness variant, which is significant for promoting sustainable development, in the sense that it takes into account the true resources currently available to Romania and the way in which they use at a rational pace. Under current conditions of ensuring sustainable development for the rural economy, there is continued support for significant efforts to promote sustainable agriculture, aiming at issues such as: rural economic development, environmental protection, ensuring alternative incomes and the level of high life of farmers and including ensuring the existence of future generations.

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