

A Demographic Exploration of Associative Entities in the Local Action Group

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Abstract

Demographic exploration within sustainable local development is pivotal for understanding associative entities in a specific region. This study delves into Romania's demographic views, with a focal point on Local Action Groups (LAGs) in Central Dobrogea. Associative entities encompass political parties, non-governmental associations, agricultural cooperatives, and LAGs, serving as catalysts for positive change, policy influence, and community resilience. This research analyzes 177 respondents' data using SPSS, finding no significant associations between age/gender and participation in associative entities. The work emphasizes the potential influence of demographic characteristics, particularly age and gender, on individuals' perceptions, priorities, and participation in these entities. Age shapes perceptions of socio-economic issues, while gender influences perspectives within the context of sustainable local development. Consequently, this study provides insights into the demographic dynamics of associative entity participation, highlighting their enduring relevance in shaping a more sustainable and resilient local community.

Key words: sustainable local development, demographic exploration, associative entities, local action group, Romania

J.E.L. classification: F64, H00, Q50

1. Introduction

Demographic exploration, particularly within the context of sustainable local development, plays an essential role in understanding the dynamics of associative entities in a given region. This study delves into the demographic landscape of Romania, examining the participation of individuals in various associative entities, with a specific focus on Local Action Groups (LAGs) from Central Dobrogea.

LAGs have emerged as significant actors in fostering sustainable local development within rural areas of Romania. These non-profit organizations consist of representatives from the local community and form public-private partnerships that encompass various stakeholders from the socio-economic sector within the respective region (Ilie *et al*, 2021, p.370).

Associative entities, which encompass political parties, non-governmental associations, agricultural cooperatives, and local action groups, represent key components of civic engagement and community involvement. These entities serve as catalysts for driving positive change, influencing policy decisions, and promoting resilience within local communities (Hübel (Anghel), Stan and Tasențe, 2023a, p.44). Understanding the demographic composition of individuals

engaging with these entities is fundamental for devising strategies that can effectively contribute to sustainable local development.

This study is guided by the belief that demographic characteristics, such as age and gender, hold the potential to influence individuals' perceptions, priorities, and participation in associative entities. For instance, Hübel (Anghel), Stan and Tasește (2023a, p.45) examined how respondents' age influences their perceptions of socio-economic issues in the context of sustainable local development. Similarly, the role of gender in shaping perceptions of socio-economic issues within the realm of sustainable local development has been assessed (Hübel (Anghel), Stan and Tasește, 2023b, p.78). Furthermore, Kostas and Roumeliotou (2009, p.230) explored the predictors of social trust in local communities, highlighting the intricate interplay between demographic and socioeconomic factors.

This research aims to analyse data from various demographic groups in order to provide insights that can inform policies and initiatives aimed at bolstering sustainable local development in Romania.

2. Literature review

In the field of sustainable local development, investigating demographic dynamics and the role of associative entities is important. This literature analysis focuses on the context of local development and explores the complex relationships between demographic, economic, social, and environmental factors and the associative structures within local communities.

In the context of sustainable local development, the exploration of demographic dynamics and the role played by associative entities within the Local Action Groups (LAGs) emerges as a focal point of scholarly investigation. Domingues and Monteiro (2023, p.196) propose a methodological framework for evaluating local development, emphasizing the importance of robust assessment methods, a notion that aligns with the aim of our research to explore demographic factors within associative entities' participation, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive evaluation of local development.

Draçi and Laska (2023, p.194) delve into the role of the community and public services in decision-making for local development. Their work underscores the significance of community involvement, a theme that resonates with our exploration of associative entities' participation, which often involves community collaboration in Romania. More, Strandberg *et al* (2021, p.1) explore the outcomes of mixed deliberation on a municipal merger, emphasizing social trust and political efficacy. Forde (2020, p.16) offers insights into facilitating rural communities' enterprise opportunities through participatory processes, a concept aligned with the collaborative nature of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in sustainable local development. This highlights the relevance of studying LAGs within the broader context of rural development.

The studies by Hübel (Anghel) and Condrea (2023a; 2023b) and Hübel (Anghel), Stan and Tasește (2023c; 2023d) delve into various aspects of perception, age, and sustainable development. Their research findings contribute to how demographic factors, such as age, can influence perceptions related to sustainable development issues.

Marsden, Lamine and Schneider (2020, p.2) present a research agenda for global rural development. Miller *et al* (2023, p.31) offer recommendations for future research agendas, including those related to rural policies and Nagy and Filip (2022, p.107) emphasize the importance of establishing partnerships for rural development, aligning with the collaborative nature of LAGs and their potential impact on sustainable local development. These recommendations can guide in uncovering insights relevant to sustainable local development through the lens of associative entities. Brașoveanu's works (2013; 2023) explore environmental protection, legislation, and legal institutions in promoting sustainable development, providing valuable context for the role of associative entities in sustainable local development.

Examining the role of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in rural economic development yields valuable insights that can contribute to a comprehensive exploration of LAGs. A thorough understanding of their impact on economic development is essential for evaluating their effectiveness. So, Rus (2019, 2020) explores tax evasion and local public finances, highlighting financial aspects relevant to sustainable local development and the potential role of associative

entities in addressing fiscal matters. In this regard, Munteanu (2021) investigates corporate governance's impact on financial reporting and Staic, Uliu and Vladu (2022, p.622) analyze the influence of financing on sustainable local development. Herciu et al. (2023, p.306) propose an innovative approach to sustainability and Aivaz (2021, p.18) examines correlations between infrastructure, and financial indicators, offering insights into factors influencing sustainable development. More, Grigorescu *et al* (2023, p.2) contribute to understanding of competency in sustainable development, which can inform our exploration of the knowledge and expertise required for effective participation in associative entities.

This literature review demonstrates the multidimensional nature of the research topic and provides a foundation for the exploration of demographic factors within associative entities in the context of sustainable local development in Romania. It underscores the relevance of understanding the dynamics and impacts of such entities, particularly Local Action Groups (LAGs), on local development and community engagement.

3. Research methodology

The purpose of this research was to conduct a demographic exploration of participation in associative entities, specifically Local Action Groups (LAGs), within the context of sustainable local development in the Dobrogea Centru region of Romania. The objectives of the research were to analyze the demographic characteristics (age and gender) of respondents in relation to their involvement in LAGs, assess their current and past participation, and gather insights through open-ended questions regarding the reasons behind their involvement or non-involvement.

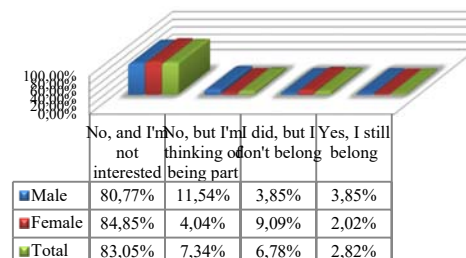
To achieve these objectives, a questionnaire was employed as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire consisted of a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative data from a total of 177 respondents residing in the Dobrogea Centru region of Romania. The data collected through the questionnaire were then subjected to exploratory data analysis using the statistical software SPSS. This analysis aimed to identify patterns, correlations, and associations between demographic factors (age and gender) and participation in LAGs.

4. Findings

In the context of sustainable local development in Romania, this demographic exploration provides valuable insights into the patterns of participation in different associative entities.

The data (Figure no. 1) reveals that a significant majority, 80.77% of males and 84.85% of females, show no interest in joining political parties, highlighting a widespread disinterest in political participation across genders. Only a minority, 11.54% of males and 4.04% of females, are considering joining a political party, indicating a tentative openness but with a notable gender disparity. Past membership is reported by 3.85% of males and 9.09% of females, suggesting a slightly higher disengagement rate among females post-membership. Current active participation is minimal for both genders, with 3.85% of males and 2.02% of females actively involved, underscoring an overall trend of limited engagement in political party structures. The data collectively paints a picture of widespread disengagement from political party involvement, nuanced by gender-specific trends in historical and potential future engagement.

Figure no. 1. Political party affiliation within associative structures

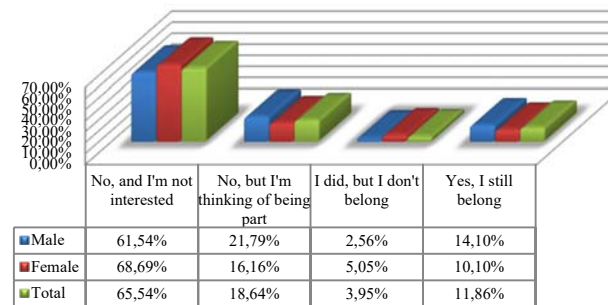


Source: Authors' work

The Chi-Square test results, with a Pearson value of 5.712 (df=3, p=0.126), Likelihood Ratio of 5.827 (df=3, p=0.120), and a Linear-by-Linear Association of 0.052 (df=1, p=0.819), on 177 valid cases, suggest no statistically significant association or linear trend between demographic factors and participation in Local Action Groups. The p-values exceed the conventional significance level (0.05), indicating that the observed associations are likely due to chance rather than a meaningful relationship.

The data (Figure no. 2) indicates gender-specific engagement with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A majority of both males (61.54%) and females (68.69%) express no interest in NGO involvement, suggesting a prevalent disinterest across genders. A notable portion, 21.79% of males and 16.16% of females, are considering NGO participation, indicating potential future engagement. Past membership is relatively low for both genders, with 2.56% of males and 5.05% of females having been involved but no longer active, suggesting a moderate rate of disengagement post-membership. Current active participation is moderate, with 14.10% of males and 10.10% of females involved, pointing to a relatively higher engagement among males. In summary, the data reflects a general trend of disinterest in NGO involvement, with nuanced gender differences in contemplation, past involvement, and current engagement.

Figure no. 2. Engagement in non-governmental associative structures

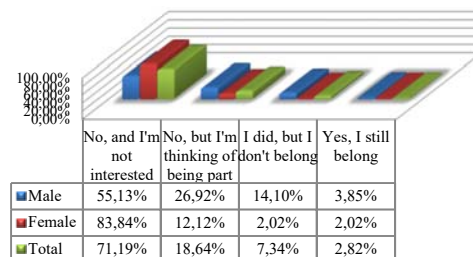


Source: Authors' work

The statistical output suggests an analysis of the association between demographic factors and participation in associative entities within a Local Action Group, using a Chi-Square test. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 2.354 (df=3, p=0.502), Likelihood Ratio of 2.374 (df=3, p=0.498), and Linear-by-Linear Association of 0.678 (df=1, p=0.410), all computed on 177 valid cases, do not indicate a statistically significant association. The p-values are well above the standard threshold of 0.05, suggesting that any observed differences in participation across demographic groups are likely due to chance rather than a meaningful or systematic association.

The data (Figure no. 3) presents the level of engagement with agricultural cooperatives, categorized by gender. A majority of males (55.13%) and a significantly larger majority of females (83.84%) express no interest in joining agricultural cooperatives, indicating a pronounced gender disparity in disinterest, particularly among females.

Figure no. 3. Involvement in agricultural cooperative structures



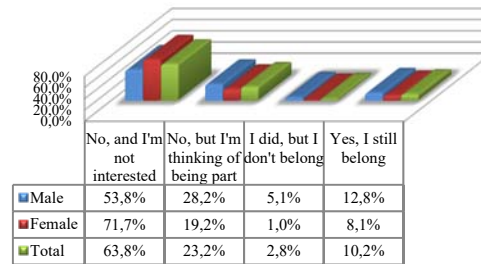
Source: Authors' work

Males appear more open to the possibility of joining, with 26.92% considering participation, compared to 12.12% of females. Previous involvement is reported by 14.10% of males and a much lower 2.02% of females, suggesting a higher historical engagement among males. Current active participation is minimal for both genders, with 3.85% of males and 2.02% of females involved, indicating a low level of current engagement across genders. In summary, the data reflects a general trend of disinterest in agricultural cooperative involvement, with notable gender differences.

The statistical data indicates a strong and statistically significant association between demographic variables and involvement in agricultural cooperatives within a Local Action Group. The Pearson Chi-Square value of 19.365 (df=3, p<0.001), Likelihood Ratio of 19.970 (df=3, p<0.001), and Linear-by-Linear Association of 15.311 (df=1, p<0.001), calculated from 177 valid cases, demonstrate that the relationship between demographic factors and participation in agricultural cooperatives is highly unlikely to be due to chance. This implies a significant, systematic connection between the demographic profiles of the respondents and their engagement with agricultural cooperatives.

The data (Figure no. 4) outlines gender-specific involvement in Local Action Groups (LAGs). A majority of males (53.8%) and a significantly larger majority of females (71.7%) indicate no interest in LAG participation, revealing a pronounced gender disparity in disinterest, particularly among females. Males are more open to the possibility of joining, with 28.2% considering participation compared to 19.2% of females. Prior involvement is relatively low for both genders, reported by 5.1% of males and a much lower 1.0% of females, indicating a higher historical engagement among males. Current active participation is moderate, with 12.8% of males and 8.1% of females involved, suggesting a relatively higher engagement among males. Overall, the data reflects a general trend of disinterest in LAG involvement, with significant gender differences.

Figure no. 4. Participation in Local Action Groups (LAGs) from an associative standpoint



Source: Authors' work

The Chi-Square test results, with a Pearson value of 7.295 (df=3, p=0.063) and a Likelihood Ratio of 7.399 (df=3, p=0.060), suggest a marginal association between demographic factors and participation in Local Action Groups (LAGs) on 177 cases. However, the Linear-by-Linear Association shows a statistically significant trend with a value of 4.731 (df=1, p=0.030), indicating a notable linear relationship between demographics and LAG involvement, despite the overall association not reaching conventional significance levels.

The data by Figure no. 5 presents the level of engagement in political parties across different age groups. There's a universal lack of interest among the youngest (16-24) and the oldest (over 65) age groups, with 100% not interested in political party participation. The 25-34, 35-44, and 45-54 age groups show a majority disinterest as well, with figures of 81.08%, 83.02%, and 80.00% respectively. However, these age groups also show a small percentage considering joining (ranging from 5.41% to 10.00%) and a minority with past (ranging from 6.00% to 10.81%) and current membership (ranging from 2.70% to 4.00%). The 55-65 age group, while still showing a majority disinterest (77.78%), has the highest percentage of current members (11.11%). Overall, the data reflects a general trend of disinterest in political party involvement across age groups, with a slight uptick in engagement among the 55-65 age group.

Figure no. 5. Patterns of political party affiliation across age groups

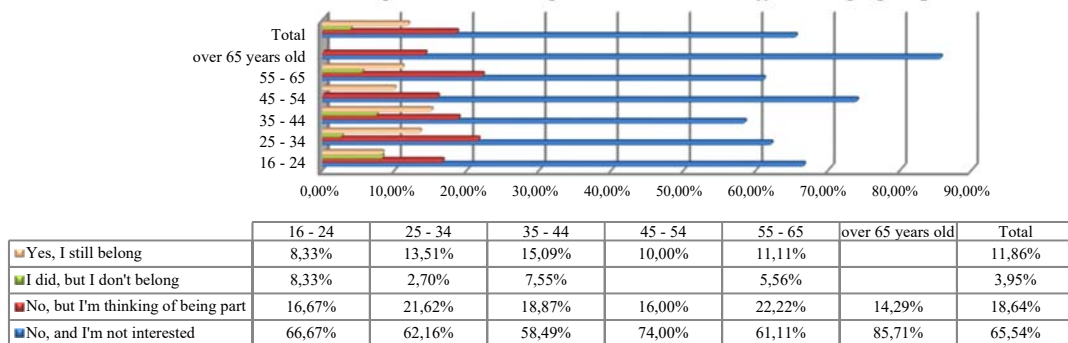


Source: Authors' work

The Pearson Chi-Square value is 12.210 (df=15, p=0.663), and the Likelihood Ratio is 14.798 (df=15, p=0.466), both suggesting no statistically significant association between age groups and political party involvement among the 177 cases. The p-values, well above the conventional 0.05 threshold, imply that any observed differences in political party participation across age groups are likely due to chance rather than a meaningful or systematic relationship. The Linear-by-Linear Association value of 0.541 (df=1, p=0.462) further supports the lack of a significant linear trend or association between age and political party involvement. In summary, the data indicates no significant association or trend between age demographics and participation in political parties within the Local Action Group.

The data by Figure no. 6 reflects engagement with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across different age groups. The majority across all age groups show a lack of interest in NGO involvement, with percentages ranging from 58.49% in the 35-44 age group to 85.71% in the over 65 age group. Interest in considering joining an NGO is relatively higher among the younger age groups, with 16.67% in the 16-24 age group and 21.62% in the 25-34 age group, and it decreases with age. Past membership in NGOs is relatively low across all age groups, peaking at 8.33% in the 16-24 age group. Current active membership in NGOs shows a slight increase in middle age groups, particularly in the 35-44 age group (15.09%) and the 55-65 age group (11.11%). In general, the data indicates a trend of disinterest in NGO involvement across all age groups, with a slight tendency for higher contemplation and participation in the middle age groups.

Figure no. 6. Engagement in non-governmental organizations across different age groups

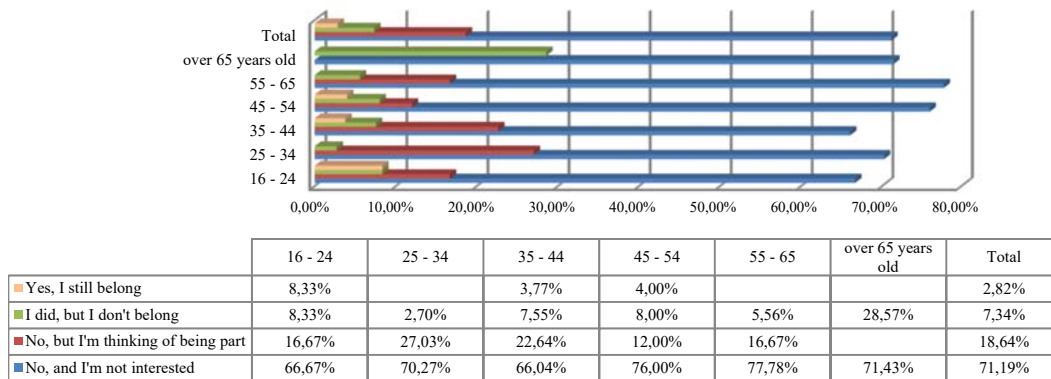


Source: Authors' work

The statistical analysis reveals that there is no statistically significant relationship between different age groups and their involvement in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This is indicated by the high p-values for both the Pearson Chi-Square (p=0.898) and the Likelihood Ratio (p=0.745) tests. The Linear-by-Linear Association test also does not show a significant linear trend in the data (p=0.281). These results are based on a total of 177 valid cases.

Figure no. 7 shows the data analysis regarding participation in agricultural cooperatives among different age groups. It can be seen that individuals aged 16 to 24, approximately 66.67% have not shown interest in or are not currently part of agricultural cooperatives. 16.67% are considering joining, 8.33% have been members but are no longer, and 8.33% are currently active members. In the age group of 25 to 34, the majority, which is 70.27%, have not expressed interest or are not currently involved in agricultural cooperatives. 27.03% are considering joining, and 2.70% have been members in the past. Among individuals aged 35 to 44, approximately 66.04% are not interested or not part of agricultural cooperatives, while 22.64% are considering joining, 7.55% have been previous members, and 3.77% are current members. For the age group of 45 to 54, the majority, which is 76.00%, are not interested or not part of agricultural cooperatives. 12.00% are considering joining, 8.00% have been members in the past, and 4.00% are current members. In the age group of 55 to 65, the majority, 77.78%, are not interested or not part of agricultural cooperatives, 16.67% are considering joining, and 5.56% have been previous members. Among respondents over 65 years old, 71.43% are not interested or not part of agricultural cooperatives, while 28.57% are currently active members.

Figure no. 7. Agricultural cooperative membership distribution across age demographics



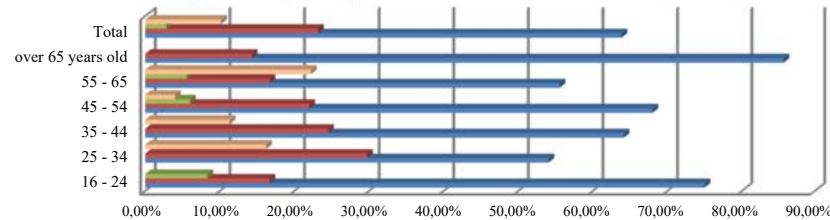
Source: Authors' work

The statistical analysis conducted on the data related to participation in agricultural cooperatives theme did not yield significant results. The Pearson Chi-Square test resulted in a p-value of 0.535, the Likelihood Ratio test had a p-value of 0.456, and the Linear-by-Linear Association test had a p-value of 0.789. These p-values are all above the commonly accepted significance level of 0.05, indicating that there is no strong statistical evidence to support a relationship between age groups and participation in agricultural cooperatives among the respondents. Therefore, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, suggesting that age is not a significant factor in determining participation in agricultural cooperatives in this study.

The data by Figure no. 8 reveals varying levels of engagement in Local Action Groups (GAL) across different age groups. Among the younger age group (16-24), 75.00% show no interest in GAL participation, which could be attributed to a lack of awareness or other priorities in their age range. Meanwhile, 16.67% are contemplating joining, suggesting a potential interest in community involvement. Additionally, 8.33% have been members in the past, indicating some level of engagement, and an equal 8.33% are current members, showcasing active youth participation. In the 25-34 age category, 54.05% are disinterested, possibly due to career and family commitments, while 29.73% are considering involvement, indicating a more open attitude towards community participation. Another 16.22% have previously been part of GAL, suggesting that some may have had positive experiences in the past. Moving to the 35-44 age group, 64.15% are not inclined towards GAL participation, which could be linked to increased family and work responsibilities. However, 24.53% are considering it, possibly due to a growing awareness of community issues. Additionally, 11.32% have been former members, indicating a history of involvement, and 3.77% are currently active members, highlighting ongoing commitment. For individuals aged 45-54, 68.00% exhibit no interest in GAL, possibly as a result of career stability and family obligations. Nonetheless, 22.00% are considering, indicating potential for increased

participation. Moreover, 6.00% have been past members, showcasing a history of engagement, and 4.00% are presently involved, reflecting current dedication. In the 55-65 age bracket, 55.56% are uninterested, which might be linked to retirement and reduced community involvement at this stage. However, 16.67% are contemplating, suggesting a willingness to re-engage, and 5.56% have previous GAL experience, indicating a prior interest in community activities. Among those over 65, 85.71% are not interested, potentially due to retirement and reduced mobility. However, 14.29% are still active members, demonstrating that some seniors remain engaged in community associations. These findings indicate diverse levels of engagement in GAL across age groups, influenced by factors such as life stage, awareness, and past experiences.

Figure no. 8. Local Action Group (LAG) participation trends across various age categories



	16 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 65	over 65 years old	Total
Yes, I still belong		16,22%	11,32%	4,00%	22,22%		10,17%
I did, but I don't belong	8,33%			6,00%	5,56%		2,82%
No, but I'm thinking of being part	16,67%	29,73%	24,53%	22,00%	16,67%	14,29%	23,16%
No, and I'm not interested	75,00%	54,05%	64,15%	68,00%	55,56%	85,71%	63,84%

Source: Authors' work

The statistical analysis conducted on the data related to participation in Local Action Groups (GAL) reveals the following results: Pearson Chi-Square Test: The Pearson Chi-Square statistic is 17,252a with 15 degrees of freedom, yielding an asymptotic significance of 0.304 ($p > 0.05$). This result suggests that there is no statistically significant association between individuals' participation in GAL and their demographic characteristics. Likelihood Ratio Test: The Likelihood Ratio statistic is 20.646 with 15 degrees of freedom, resulting in an asymptotic significance of 0.149 ($p > 0.05$). Similar to the Pearson Chi-Square test, this indicates a lack of statistically significant association between GAL participation and demographic variables. Linear-by-Linear Association: The Linear-by-Linear Association statistic is 0.078 with 1 degree of freedom, and the asymptotic significance is 0.780 ($p > 0.05$). This test also supports the conclusion that there is no significant linear association between GAL participation and demographic factors. In summary, the statistical tests conducted on the data do not provide evidence of a significant association between individuals' participation in GAL and their demographic characteristics. The p-values for all three tests are greater than the commonly used significance level of 0.05, indicating that any observed differences in participation are not statistically significant.

In the comprehensive demographic exploration conducted within the scope of the study various types of associative entities, including political parties, non-governmental associations, agricultural cooperatives, and local action groups, were examined in the context of age and gender demographics in Romania. The statistical analyses, encompassing Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, and Linear-by-Linear Association tests, consistently indicated a lack of significant associations between demographic variables (age and gender) and participation in these associative entities. This implies that the inclination to engage with these entities, important for advancing sustainable local development, remains relatively consistent across different demographic groups in Romania.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study conducted a comprehensive demographic exploration within the context of sustainable local development, focusing on the participation of individuals in various associative entities, including political parties, non-governmental associations, agricultural cooperatives, and local action groups in Romania. The aim was to understand how demographic factors, such as age and gender, influence individuals' engagement with these entities, which are essential for fostering sustainable local development.

The findings of this research suggest that there is a consistent level of participation in these associative entities across different demographic groups in Romania. The statistical analyses, including Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, and Linear-by-Linear Association tests, indicated a lack of significant associations between demographic variables and participation in these entities. This implies that individuals of various ages and genders exhibit a similar inclination to engage with these organizations, highlighting the universality of their importance in advancing sustainable local development.

The role of associative entities in promoting sustainable local development in Romania cannot be understated. These organizations serve as crucial vehicles for civic engagement, community involvement, and driving positive change. While demographic factors may influence perceptions and priorities, they do not significantly affect the propensity to participate in these entities. Therefore, policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing sustainable local development should consider the broad and consistent appeal of these associative entities to individuals across demographic spectra.

In essence, this study contributes valuable insights into the demographic dynamics of associative entity participation in the context of sustainable local development in Romania. It underscores the enduring relevance and accessibility of these entities, irrespective of demographic characteristics, in shaping the path towards a more sustainable and resilient local community.

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