



Disparity Analysis in the Vințu de Jos Commune

Simona BRANIȘTE¹, Veronica NICOARĂ²

¹*Regional Development Agency, Alba Iulia, Romania*

²*Orthodox Theological Seminary „Simeon Ștefan”, Alba Iulia, Romania*



Introduction

The project “Disparity Analysis in the Vințu de Jos Commune” intends to be a relevant study on the aspects of differentiated development within the villages as compared to that of the commune. The originality of the project resides in the work methodology, the solutions suggested for the diminishing of the disparities in the commune, and the concern for the future directions of research. The objective of the project is the analysis of the present situation of geo-demographic changes in the commune over the past 15 years, taking into consideration the socio-demographic, economic indicators and the identification of the factors involved in the analysis of the regional disparities.

The Vințu de Jos commune is situated in Alba County, in the depression corridor of Alba Iulia – Turda. This corridor represents a unit of a relatively accentuated complexity and it has a highly favourable geographic potential. This was the reason why the corridor has been a subject to socio-economic development since ancient times. Its Southern part is divided by the Orăștie Corridor that advances from South towards North, up to Vințu de Jos. The Western boundary is partly constituted of the Munceii Vințului, and further on by the Eastern Trascău Mountains.

The Vințu de Jos commune has 18 localities, only the communal centre being situated on the Mureș Valley, in the South-East. The Mureș River divides the commune in two distinct parts, each one having a different geography and development: the administrative centre – where all the facilities and services are located, and the rest of the villages – situated on the hills called Munceii Vințului, to the North-West of the commune. The top of these hills descends from an altitude of 900-1000 m down to 400 m, at the contact with the Mureș Valley.

The mountain area of the commune is not suitable for human settlement, especially in the areas of high altitude, steep slopes and narrow valleys. The Vințu de Jos commune represents the typical structure of a spread out mountain settlement, not so common in this part of the county.

The commune centre is a compact settlement, characteristic for the settlements located in the valleys where the greatest part of the population is concentrated: 62% (2002). Only 1/3 of the population lives in the 17 villages located at the basis of the high hills or on their top. The least populated locality is Mătăcina with only 9 inhabitants, and the most populated one is Valea Vințului, having 511 inhabitants.

Objectives

The drawing up of maps that would reveal specific information like: the administrative and territory layout of the commune, the evolution of the population between the two censuses, the evolution of the young population under the age of 14, in 2002 as compared to 1992.

To establish a set of development measures in order to reduce the disparities between the isolated villages and the commune centre.

The identification of spatial development measures for the commune, based on an analysis of the territory.

The analysis of the present situation concerns the changes that have taken place over the years in the structure of the population of the commune.

To identify the factors that generate the socio-demographic and economic disparities in the territory of the commune.

To analyse of the available statistical data, in order to observe the important geo-demographical tendencies.

Hypotheses

The commune will function as a supplier of workforce for the labour market in the towns of Alba Iulia and Sebeș.

The small number of inhabitants born after 1989 will have a reduced demographic influence in the next generations.

Due to the fact that there is a good accessibility to the commune from the better developed towns of the county, the population will stabilize and increase in number.

The disparities between the villages on the Mureș Valley, especially between the communal centre and the villages on the Vințului Hills will become more accentuated in the future, and as a consequence, their depopulation will become a probable danger.

The commune will become more accessible through the modernization of the infrastructure and of the communication means, thus leading to a more balanced development of the territory.

Methodology

The statistical data has been processed in Microsoft Excel programme, and graphs and diagrams have been drawn up, as well.

Maps have been drawn up using GIS (Geographical Informational Systems) technology, based on the information supplied by the Alba County Statistics Department. A GIS (Geographical Informational Systems), or in Romanian SIG (Sistem Informatic Geografic), is an informational system which is used to capture, store, integrate, manipulate, analyze and visualize data with spatial characteristics. We can summarize this definition in the following way: geographical data (with a spatial distribution), programming systems (software that incorporates procedures of analysis and of specific management), and a processing system (hardware).

The analysis of the maps and of the statistical data has been carried out using the deductive method of statistical correlation.

The method of the observation in the field intends to result in a comparative analysis of the socio-economic situation of the localities of the commune.

Demographic structure data presentation

Over the last years we can observe a tendency of growth, of stabilization of the population as it is returning to rural areas, a process explained by the good quality circulation means and connections, and the reduced distances to the urban centres of Alba Iulia and Sebeș (12 km, and 8 km).

Due to its location, the commune is attractive to those inhabitants from urban areas that would rather live in an unpolluted environment which can however provide quasi-urban public services and equipment (social overheads). Within Alba County, the commune of Vințu de Jos is among the few ones to register a growth in population number, in its case by 1,2%¹.

¹ Source: DJS Alba, "Analysis of the census of the population in the year 2002". Between the last two censuses conducted, only 13 of the 76 towns and communes of the county have registered a growth in population number, the remaining 63 having a significant decrease, the phenomenon being more accentuated in mountain areas. A significant growth was registered only in the following communes: Doștat (+5,3%), Cricău (+4,4%), Ciugud (+3,1%), Sântimbru (3,0%).

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Between the last two censuses the population number has increased from 5.232 (1992) to 5.295 inhabitants (2002), a demographic situation favourable to the socio-economic development.

The evolution of the population within the commune is different, the population of the settlements on the Vințului Hills has decreased between the two censuses.

If in 1992 the average population number for a village belonging to the commune Vințu de Jos was of 130 inhabitants (the communal centre has not been included in the estimation), in 2002 the average population was of 118 inhabitants. This shows that the desired place for residence is the communal centre, which is easier to get access to. At the locality level we can observe a decrease in population, however, in a differentiated way. On the whole, the commune Vințu has registered a slight increase by 1,2%, the administrative centre +8,2% and the village Vurpăr +7,3%. The other 16 villages have registered a decrease in population, the greatest being registered in the villages of Mătăcina, Laz, Hațegana, Stăuini and Ciocașu. Significant reductions of population have been registered in the villages already scarcely populated – under 50 persons in 1992 (Laz, Hațegana, Mătăcina, Poienița). Generally, the decrease of population in the villages can be correlated with the distance from the communal centre, and respectively, from the nearest town. Eight of the villages of the commune situated at a distance greater than 6 km have lost more than 20% of the population registered in 1992.

The issues involved in the analysis of the demographic structure of the Vințu de Jos commune are complex, therefore for this study both the socio-demographic and economic aspects have been taken into consideration.

Looking at the map that presents the evolution of the population between the two censuses we can observe the diminishing of the population in the settlements located farther from the centre, and to which access is difficult and the urban equipment is minimal. The descent of the population is not a recent phenomenon, but over the last years the process has become more accentuated. The population of the Laz, Mătăcina, Hațegana and Poienița villages has been reduced almost to a half, by migrating towards the villages on the Mureșului Valley. The villages in which the population has registered a small decrease, or has even shown an increase, are located very close to the road and railroad connections toward the towns of Alba Iulia and Sebeș, also close to the commercial, administrative, medical centres, and to the local industrial units – small factories from the processing industry. The demographic growth in some villages was due to the migration of population from the nearby urban centres or from the remote villages.

The map with the ratio of the young population under 14 years of age in 2002 as compared to 1992 shows that the diminishing of the young population has been more accentuated in the remote villages (between 100-50%). The young people leaving these villages were probably at the age of fertility, looking for employment, or in search of better conditions for education. Exception from the general tendency was made by the villages on the hills: Gura Cuțului where the young population increased by 50%, and Dealu Ferului where the number of young people has doubled (+120%).

Regarding the structure of the population, divided into groups of age, we must mention that as compared to the ratio of the age groups within rural areas, the population of the commune is younger, with 20,4% old persons, as compared to 26% old persons in the county.

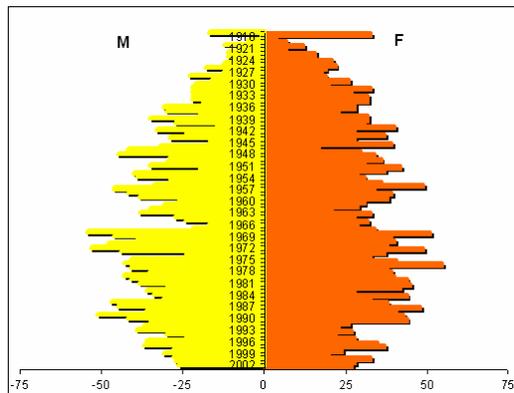


Figure 1. The pyramid of age groups in Vințu de Jos Commune.

Due to its accessibility from the most developed towns of the county, the population of the commune will stabilize and increase in number. The structure in age groups will change in the next period of time following the urban pattern; there will be a slower process of ageing, as compared to the demographic phenomena taking place in rural areas. The pyramid of age groups on years gives us a clear image of the population of the commune at the last census.

The population practicing agriculture² has been analyzed from a socio-economic point of view, this being the most important economic activity in the commune. We can observe disparities in the range of activities of the villages of the commune, due to the fact that the geography of the area is favourable for practicing agriculture, and also due to its degree of accessibility.

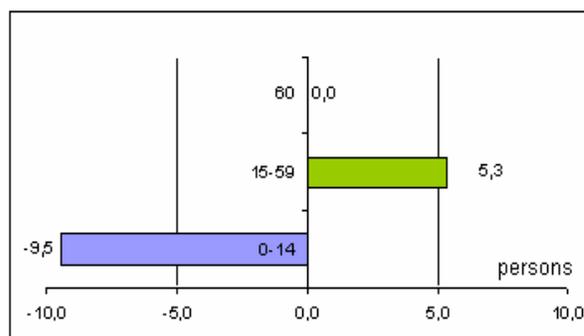


Figure 2. Evolution of the age groups in Vințu de Jos Commune in 2002 by 1992.

The population in the small localities (10 of the 18) across the Mureș River is practicing agriculture in a 75-100%. Generally it's a subsistence type of agriculture, carried out on small plots of land. The villages less involved in agriculture 21-74% are the following: Valea Vințului, Pârâul lui Mihai, Valea Goblii and Vințu de Jos.

The analysis of the distribution of the population employed in the processing industry in the area in the year 2002, complementary to the analysis of the population involved in agriculture, shows that the villages where the labour force for the local industry and for the industry in the nearest towns are the villages with good transportation connections with the centre: Valea Vințului, Vurpăr, Câmpu Goblii, Valea Goblii, Valea Vințului and Vințu de Jos.

Data interpretation

In the future, the reduced number of people born after 1990, with a modern reproductive behaviour, characterized by a greater tendency towards migration in the context of a free circulation of the people, will have a smaller demographic contribution as compared to the former generations. The enhancement of the migration will bring population with urban demographic behaviour, characterized by a low fertility rate.

The population of the commune will stabilize and will increase in number due to the accessibility from the most developed towns of the county.

The structure in age groups will change over the next period of time, following the urban pattern; it will present a slower ageing process as compared to the demographic phenomena in the rural areas.

Conclusions

Over the past few years we can observe a tendency for growth and stabilization of the population due to the return to the rural areas, made possible by the good transportation connections and the reduced distances to the urban centres of Alba Iulia and Sebeș (12 km, and 8 km respectively). Due to its location, the commune is attractive to those urban inhabitants looking for a life in an unpolluted environment which has however quasi-urban public services and equipment (social overheads).

In Alba County, the Vințu de Jos commune is one of the few communes to have registered an increase in population, which has been of 1,2%.

The variety of the land and the spreading out of the settlements determine distinctive levels of socio-economic development: on one side of the Mureș River we find the administrative centre, where all the public services and social overheads are concentrated, and on the other hand we have the rest of the villages located on the hills called Muncii Vințului, North-West of the commune.

Now, the commune is and will continue to be a supplier of work force for the labour market of the towns Alba Iulia and Sebeș, the economic links with these towns being strong and having been established as a tradition.

² The share of the active population practicing activities in agriculture.

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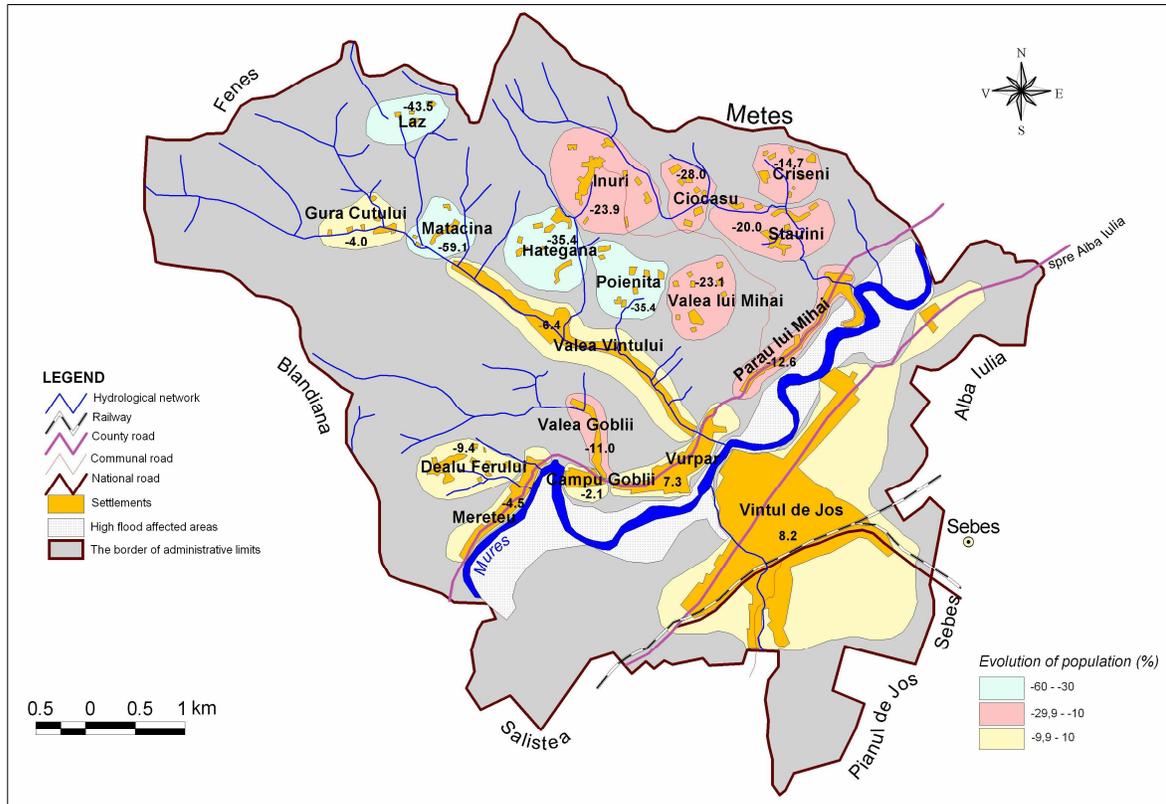


Figure 3. Evolution of population between 1992 and 2002.

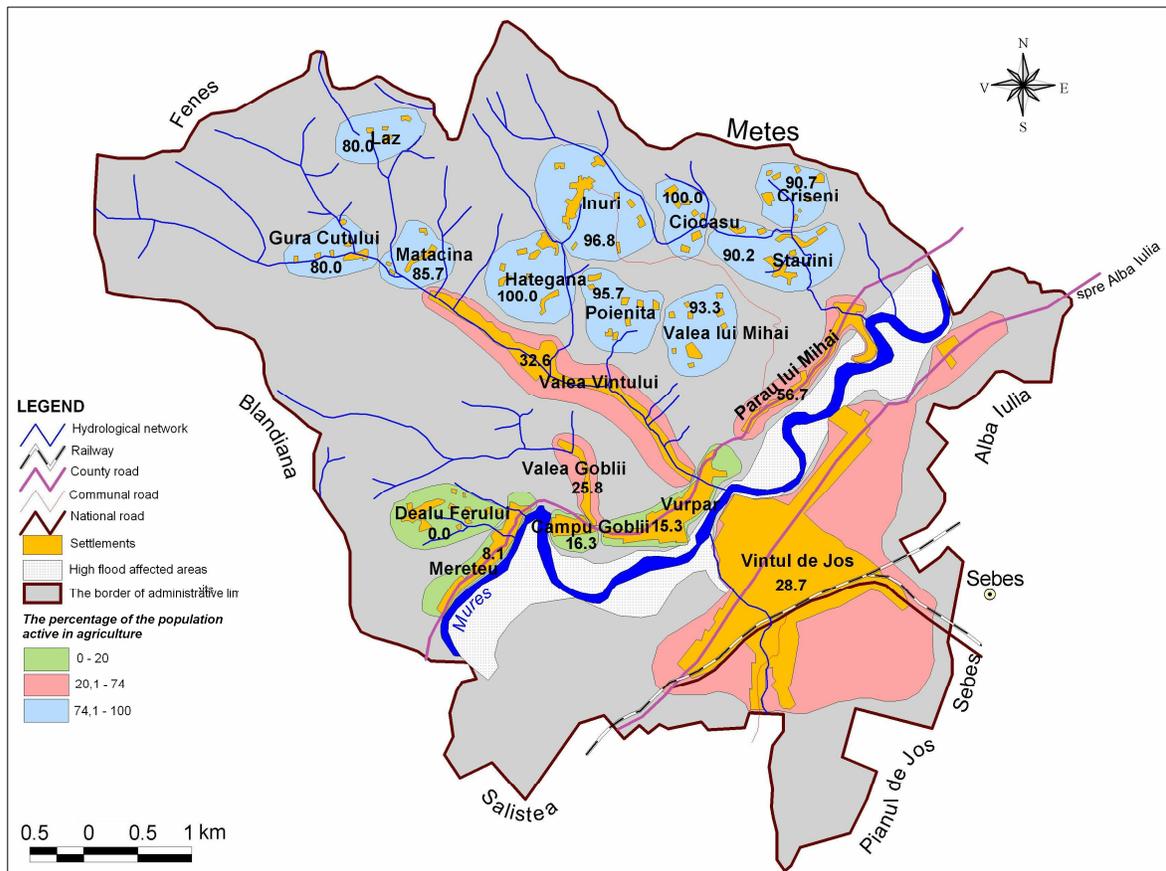


Figure 4. The percentage of the population active in agriculture.

Between 1992 and 2002 no significant changes took place in the structure on age groups: the ratio of the young population of 0-19 years was reduced from 29% to 25%, the ration of the adult population increased from 57% to ~60%, and the ratio of the older population increased with only 0,9% (from 14 to ~15%). In the future, the reduced number of people born after 1990, with a modern reproductive behaviour, characterized by a greater tendency towards migration in the context of a free circulation of the people, will have a smaller demographic contribution as compared to the former generations. The enhancement of the migration will bring population with urban demographic behaviour, characterized by a low fertility rate. The population of the Vințu de Jos commune will become affected by the following demographic phenomena: a lower birth rate, and as a consequence, a natural drawback (deficiency). These will also have an impact on the socio-economic situation. The localities of the Vințu commune, which is located in the area of influence of the biggest town in the county, are paradoxically characterized by very different degrees of development and by disparities that tend to become more accentuated along with time: demographic, economic and social disparities. Solving the access problems to the villages of the commune will lead to the stabilization of the population, the tightening of the commercial and informational links between them and the communal centre. This will have a positive impact on the inhabitants of the commune. For the future, just as the demographic situation in other European countries shows, the chances for demographic rehabilitation through an increase of births are small, the trend being to continuously reduce the number of children that a family decides to have. In the case of the Vințul de Jos commune the revitalization of the population will take place by an intake of young migrants from the urban areas. The process of stabilization and increase of the population will continue in the future, as well, due to the accessibility from the Alba Iulia and Sebeș municipalities, and due to an increasing attraction of the urban dwellers for the semi-urban areas with a bigger offer of space.

Three areas with distinctive levels and potential of development have been identified, using the method of field observation, and the analysis of statistical and map data. Thus, the most developed area is the communal centre, where we find concentrated all the administrative, educational, sanitary facilities, the economic units and the services. The second developed area is comprised of the villages on Vințului Valley, which have easy access to the communal centre but are however dependent from a developmental point of view on the administrative centre. And the third area of development is comprised of the villages on the Vințului Hills, which are isolated and cut off from the infrastructure and the basic social overheads.

Future lines of research

The position of the Vințul de Jos commune in the future Alba Iulia – Sebeș urban development area.

The elaboration of a new study that would focus on the following:

- the integrated development of the three localities, taking into consideration the socio-economic trends and the balanced spatial development tendencies;
- the stimulation of the development through the modernization of the infrastructure;
- the diminishing of disparities and the tendency for territorial homogenization;
- a balanced development, guided from an economic and territorial point of view;

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