

Spatial Determinations in Rural Functional Typologies Differentiations in the Western Area of Botoșani County, Romania

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ABSTRACT

Rural communities that are located along borders usually benefit from more favourable development conditions (forests, agriculture, etc.), which, at least theoretically, should lead to above-average growth villages in such areas. Statistically however, the analysis of the economic activities in 11 communes of Botoșani County located in the border area with Suceava County reveals significant discrepancies between communes located near a communication route and the ones located far from it. This situation determines the presence of some territorial functional peripheries, whose particularities we intend to discover herein. The natural environment dominated by mountains in the western part of Suceava County and plateau in the remaining area determined that the settlements from the contact area benefit from the trade between the two complementary areas. In addition, the hydrographical network of the area had a significant role, the most important settlements in the region being located at small distances from either side of the Siret River.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is seen as a dynamic equilibrium state of the rural system, in which each physical, social or economic component brings its own contribution by stable, predictable and monitorable developments.

In this case, the essential role in development falls on both the human resources involved in the economic and social life of local communities and the ecological values and the cultural landscape shaped by the relationship between man - nature - society, aiming at the ability of the rural areas to keep meeting their functions in society [1], [2].

The socio-economic changes are the first forms of evolutionary transformation of rural settlements. They involve changes of physiognomy and community functionality, mutations in lifestyle and its quality, the diversification of occupations and the increasing

number of people employed in non-agricultural activities [3], [4].

Whatever the direction from which it is viewed, sustainable rural development addresses many aspects of this equilibrium, such as agriculture, rural industries or tourism, with their specific forms.

According to Green and Hardill (2003), both "rural" and "urban" areas have similar issues regarding employment, and differences between different rural areas tend to be higher than those between rural and urban areas [5]. Hence, Jazepcikas et al. (2009) state that existing peculiarities in peripheral rural areas should be considered in the analysis of labour in a particular area [6].

Even if the Romanian rural system has a high level of heterogeneity, and differences between population groups and levels of village or region development are important [7], its general condition describes, for the most part, a model characterized by

dependence on the traditional agricultural activities, poor development of secondary and tertiary sectors, poor infrastructure and low population living standards [8].

It is in this category that Botoşani County's rural system integrates. We analysed an area formed by 11 communes located in the western part of this county, in a functional peripheral area.

2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Rural areas have been associated to a functional structure of communities, anchored mainly in the agricultural activities. The European specialized literature unanimously asserts that the rural economy is made up of all economic activities that take place in rural areas [10], [11]. Boussard, J. M. (1992) defines the rural economy as a branch of economics that is particularly interested in agriculture, the rural society and the agri-food sector, but also includes the agri-food industries economy and non-agricultural activities [12].

In Romania, the evolution rate of destructuring the agricultural economy (allotments, fragmentation of holdings, and dynamics of employment in agriculture) was marked, among other things, by a dynamics of the non-agricultural activities in rural areas today, often rooted in a quasi-urban polarization or even to the urban areas themselves. The study aims to highlight the functional bipolarity in the studied rural area.

In the last decades, geographical, economic and sociological studies have focused on identifying the areas with potential and/or occupational multiplication restrictions [13] and comparative studies of rural areas in different parts of Europe were developed, methods of implementing rural development policies or poverty reduction strategies and the improvement of the structural balance [14], [15].

This study structures information about a functional peripheral area of a geographically and administratively defined rural area and manages two spheres of interest: the economic activity in 11 communes along with the agricultural and non-agricultural employment of the population. The main data sources are provided by the National Institute of Statistics (Statistical Yearbook of Botoşani County, 2013 edition and the Statistical records of communes - 2011) [17], [18].

The analysis particularly focused on the employment of the total population, with special attention, where the situation allowed, on entrepreneurial characteristics in the communes of Tudora, Vorona, Corni, Vlădeni, Vârfu Câmpului, Văculeşti, Şendriceni, Mihăileni, Dersca, Hilişeu – Horia and Pomârla.

An analysis of the current development level of these communes and a forecasting of their evolution

involves the exploration of the existing economic coordinates together with the identification of the characteristics of the residential population. In this case, we equally discuss about the types of activities that are performed in communes as well as about the level of involvement of the rural population in such activities, visible through the statistical indicator *employed population* in different activities of the national economy and, moreover, about the local and extra-local employment.

Even if, after 1990, the number of population included in this category significantly decreased, there is still a high percentage of the population residing in rural areas and working in urban centres. At the local level, the percentage of this category of people is much higher in peri-urban communes, which are strongly connected economically and socially with developed towns or polarizing rural centres [19]. Moreover, in these cases, the economic life revolves around the city activities, the development level of communes and the particularities of the economic activities carried out locally being significantly determined by the city in the vicinity. Thus, the commune-city relationship is highlighted as a major development factor, whether we talk about the rural people's access to jobs in urban centres, or about the residential development of peri-urban communes through the city-commune migration, and whether we refer to the expansion of non-agricultural activities in communes.

The development potential of the 11 communes of the Botoşani County has been analysed using two types of information and analysis. First, the current regional documents were studied, *namely the North - East Regional Development Plan 2014 - 2020*, which is currently being developed by the NE Regional Development Agency (the version from November 2013) [20], and *Economic Monograph of Botoşani County*, elaborated by the County Prefecture in October 2012 [21]. The overall obtained picture was supplemented with statistical data and field conclusions on the economic life of the communes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The natural environment dominated by mountains in the west part of Suceava county and plateau in the remaining area determined that the settlements from the plateau - plain contact area benefit from the trade between the two complementary areas. In addition, the hydrographical network and accessibility of the area had a significant role, the most important settlements from the region being located at small distances from either side of the Siret corridor.

The economic development potential of Botoşani rural area depends undoubtedly on two things: firstly, on the typology of the entire region, which individualizes the few places with a polarization

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role (urban or rural) of Botoșani county and the neighbouring county (Suceava) and secondly, on the available resources for exploitation, be them natural or human.



Fig. 1. Localisation of the rural area under analysis.

In terms of human resources, the structure of the active population on the three main activity sectors highlighted (primary, secondary and tertiary), for the rural areas of the entire county, diagonally on the period after 1990, the following [17]:

- in 1992, for the vast majority of communes in Botoșani county, we note a significant percentage of working population in the primary sector, which indicates a clear dominance of the agricultural function of the county. This was determined partly due to the productive potential of the land and partly due to a lack of substantial competition from other functions.

- in 2002, the active population structure undergoes a more pronounced shift towards a higher percentage of agricultural activities. This is registered in both rural and urban areas, a minor exception being noted only in the capital city of the county and in Dorohoi city, in which the tertiary sector amounted to maximum 50%. But other cities had abnormally large shares of population employed in the primary sector, which, at that time, probably constituted the only refuge of the active population in the absence of appropriate functional diversification and lack of perspective.

- in 2011, the census suggests minimal changes in the activity fields and employment of the population in rural areas. A statistical analysis of the rural areas in the 10 communes should be done in this case, taking into account the overall socioeconomic conditions in which the data has been collected, because

the impact of the economic crisis has manifested itself both in employment and in the diversity of occupations.

In the following table, we present the differences between the employed rural populations in the three sectors, at the last census, in a commune [18].

In 2011, the structure of the employed population in the three major activity sectors (primary, secondary and tertiary) shows percentages of over 50% of the population employed in the primary sector, with two exceptions: Vorona (37.7%) and Vlădeni (39.5%) which register 50.7% and 51.9% of the employed population in the tertiary sector for reasons that we shall explain below.

These two communes are also the only ones that register values below the county average of 47.8% in terms of employment in the primary sector.

This means that the focus on the capitalization degree of the primary resources and their transformation in different activities is still very strong and imprints on the rural development of the analysed area a highly endogenous nature, in which agriculture, forest development and sometimes aquaculture is the basis of the rural economy for generations and it is crucial to the rural economy of the localities within the territorial functional peripheral area.

Despite the fact that Botoșani County is highly dependent on the primary sector, a number of companies with diverse activities are located in the analysed rural areas.

In the secondary sector, a more diversified structure is identified [18]: in Vorona (11.5%) due to civil and special construction activities, Vârfu Câmpului (13.6%) with population employed in constructions and clothing industry, Șendriceni (13.4%) due to constructions and Mihăileni with 14.7% due to construction activities, woodworking and clothing manufacturing, which functioned even during the economic crisis.

It is basically about a group of activities which are aimed to go beyond survival and generate a multifunctional agriculture, regional products and agritourism. On different degrees of development, they determine occupations which have close links with agriculture and natural resources, but seek a stronger connection with the external consumer. The source and continuity of these activities is given by the dynamism and opportunities offered by the contact area and especially by the proximity of Botoșani municipality and the diverse and intensely developed rural area of Suceava. This potentiality for development given by the proximity of Suceava, a tourism area of first rank, also determined concern for tourism, an economic activity in which Botoșani County aims to enrol as a regional pillar, yet far from having the neighbouring county's resources.

Tourism-related activities in the area are less developed, despite the availability of some important

tourism resources. In fact, two well-documented sources of information, namely the RDP 2007-2013, and NSP - Section VIII Tourism, make different categorizations of the analysed communes. Thus, according to RDP, the communes of Dersca, Mihăileni,

Tudora, Vârfu Câmpului and Vorona register an average tourism development [22], whilst according to NSP, the communes of Dersca, Tudora, Vârfu Câmpului and Vorona have a high tourism potential and a high concentration of natural and built resources [20].

Table 1. The economic structure of the rural population in 2011 (at communal level).

Commune	The employed population	Primary sector		Secondary sector		Tertiary sector	
		(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
Tudora	2882	1886	65.4	231	8.01	765	26.5
Vorona	3232	1219	37.7	373	11.5	1640	50.7
Corni	3291	2186	66.6	341	10.3	758	23.0
Vlădeni	2414	954	39.5	207	8.6	1253	51.9
Vârfu Câmpului	1979	1401	70.7	271	13.6	307	15.5
Văculești	842	653	77.5	54	6.4	135	16
Șendriceni	2059	1167	56.6	277	13.4	615	29.8
Mihăileni	1084	721	66.5	160	14.7	203	18.7
Dersca	1688	1249	73.9	194	11.4	245	14.5
Hilișeu – Horia	1566	870	55.5	101	6.4	595	37.9
Pomârla	1457	1126	77.2	105	7.2	226	15.5

Source: Statistical records of commune (2011), The Romanian National Institute of Statistics.

Table 2. Tourism development potential of the communes under analysis.

Commune	Natural resources (score)	Anthropogenic resources (score)	Tourist resources (score)	Technical infrastructure (score)	Tourism development potential (score)
Tudora	12.5	8	20.5	5	25.5
Vorona	8.5	8	16.50	5	21.5
Corni	4	7	11	5	16
Vlădeni	4.5	0	4.5	12.5	17
Vârfu Câmpului	7	8	15	7.5	22.5
Văculești	8	0	8	12.5	20.5
Șendriceni	6	0	6	10	16
Mihăileni	4.5	6	10.5	10	20.5
Dersca	8.5	6	14.5	7.5	22
Hilișeu – Horia	8	0	8	5	13
Pomârla	8.5	0	8.5	10	18.5

Source: National Master Plan, Section VI – Tourist Areas (2010), The Romanian National Institute of Research - Development in Tourism, Bucharest.

What is important for the analysis of the tourism phenomenon is that although it is located in a peripheral area, the study area is marked by significant mobility linked to the border interface position, the existence of traditional transport routes, which were developed due to economic trade with areas outside the county (i.e. Suceava county) and also to the cultural and economic attractiveness exerted by the Botoșani - Suceava urban system.

In fact, in the western area there about 80% of the county's tourism resources are found and also 3 of the 6 largest concentration axes of tourism resources in the county, linked, of course, to the presence of important roads [23]:

- Botoșani – Mihai Eminescu – Dorohoi (National Road 29B);

- Botoșani - Vorona - Tudor - Dolhasca (SV) (County Road 208C);

- Mihai Eminescu – Bucecea – Vârfu Câmpului – Siret (National Road 29C).

This mobility, difficult to place between tourism, migration for work or simple transit, foreshadows increased opportunities to boost tourism activities in the western part of Botoșani county and suggests that it is possible to be developed and a combination of community tourism, rural tourism and cultural tourism might be effective, as the most suited form for the existing natural and anthropogenic potential, the most interesting way to develop the area in accordance with the environmental and cultural protection activities.

The analysis of tourism development potential highlights three situations for the 11 communes located in the western part of the county:

1). *Low concentration of natural and anthropogenic tourism resources* for the communes of Hilișeu-Horia, Șendriceni, Vlădeni and Corni.

2). *Medium to high concentration of tourism development potential*, namely the presence of tourism resources with good technical infrastructure for the

communes of Tudora, Vorona, Vf. Cămpului, Văculești and Mihăileni.

3). *Communes with good technical infrastructure* but lack in anthropogenic resources: Pomârla and Vlădeni.

Development based on non-agricultural activities of the considered rural areas strongly depends on a number of structural and regional factors. Among the most important structural factors are the ones regarding the transport infrastructure, the locally available public utilities and demographic size, and among the regional factors, of utmost importance is the development level of the area, the economic power of regional urban centres and existing economic networks [16]. In many cases, insufficient public infrastructure hinders the development trend of non-agricultural activities in the communes. From this point of view, the supporting measures for the development of the non-agricultural sector should focus mainly on ensuring an optimal level of rural infrastructure, the role of the local government in this endeavour being very important. Financial barriers are, in most cases, very difficult to overcome, given that only a small part of the communes can afford to invest in large infrastructure projects based on their own funds [19]. In this situation, the only viable ways to secure the financing of such projects are the sum allocations from the state budget or European funds to modernize the rural infrastructure (the main source in this respect, is measure 322 of RDP "Village renewal and development, improvement of basic services for the rural economy and population and improvement of rural heritage", between 2007-2013, over 1.5 billion being allotted for this purpose).

From this point of view, for the developed communes, economically and socially connected with the neighbouring cities, dependency on agricultural activities seems to be overcome, many of them already registering diversified economic activities and the trend for the next period is acceleration of these processes.

For the localities where agricultural activities dominate, however, like those in Botoșani, the dependency on traditional agriculture can only be overcome by developing activities in the food industries and agritourism [23], [21], [22]. If food industry units can operate and work due to the local agricultural potential, the same cannot be said about tourism and especially about agritourism, whose development requires more than political will and pride; it needs the improvement of the existing tourism potential and adequate infrastructure.

Continuing the classification of activities which form the rural economy of the analysed communes, we have identified a third group, in which the functional links with agriculture are still present, but become weaker. It is the existence of non-agricultural activities, such as food processing and energy production. Finally one last type of identified activities benefits only of the

location in the rural area, with no functional connection to agriculture, such as some industrial and services sectors and tourism, performed without exploiting rural qualities (such as Cornișa Leisure Park). By analysing these statistics, it can be seen, as elsewhere in rural areas, that the most dynamic area of activity is, in this case also, trade. This can be explained if we mention that every village has usually at least one grocery store, and also mixed profile units (food-non-food), fewer in number. To these we can add weekly, monthly and yearly fairs, within which important activities, as well as trading activities take place. Fairs which are organised in rural areas are intended, in general, for the trading of animals, grains and other foods.

Basically, in most villages (with a few exceptions in cases of profound rural areas), the commercial phenomenon is present in the form of business units and fairs. In the analysed communes, between 2% and 3.9% of the total employed population works in the small shops.

4. CONCLUSION

Botoșani County has always been a county of contrasts: remarkable human potential which does not have a sustained economic potential supported by insufficient and poor infrastructure. After an economic centralism evident before 1989, in which some economic activities were simply implanted in the county, without tradition or at least clear premises for development, a transition period followed, in which all activities induced by force disappeared (manufacturing of technical rubber products, screws etc.). Lack of national economic and legislative consistency also influenced the traditional activities with an important raw material base in the county, which disappeared or have greatly reduced production (textiles, glassware and porcelain production, food - sugar, etc.).

Therefore, the economic coordinates of Botoșani rural area are determined by its strong dependency to agricultural activities and the large number of people employed in this sector. In this way, the economic activities of the 11 communes can hardly overcome the dependence on traditional agricultural practices. Although located in the proximity of two cities, which permanently attract new residents, it is relatively difficult to talk about a developed rural area in the case of the 11 communes, and about an economic life that is not dominated by agricultural activities. The evolutions from the last two decades of the communes under analysis showed that their modernization is done slowly, as far as the poverty mentality and the effects of local and regional policies make their presence felt in the world of villages and are correctly assimilated, because the current way of organization of agricultural activities can be considered a major barrier of the rural economic development potential.

The study of the authors pointed out that the development of the analysed rural areas depends largely on the availability of natural resources and the conditions for the growth and conservation of these resources, of local culture and traditions, availability of a skilled workforce, state of infrastructure and access to markets.

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