



Social Vulnerability of Rural Areas. Case Study Land Resources

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Rural areas also feature a high social vulnerability level which is materialized into the ways of managing and use of the multiple resources these benefit from. Land resources are a significant example in this respect, as the set of social, sociologic and demographic factors can inhibit or foster the land management process and may particularly induce a certain type of land use which is not specific to a modern rural economy.

Impact of social factors

The social dialogue in the rural communities transformed the rural population into a “manoeuvre mass” and not into a “partner” that can understand what privatization and restructuring mean; “quite confused about the near future they become more and more dependent upon the post-communist statute and remain increasingly dependent upon the paternalist offers” (Şandru, D., 1999: 677).

To this is added “*the collective memory*” influencing the concrete/real land ownership, use and operation types. The World Bank study made in the spring of the year 2001 reveals that those “who do not agree on people’s having the right to land transactions” account for 3,8%, whereas those “who do not agree at all on people’s having the right to land transactions” account for 3,3%. These are the deviations experienced by the rural communities, in the absence of concrete programs and projects, that should provide the necessary restructuring for their modernization; they rebuild interwar patterns, reactivating obsolete practices and appealing to traditional customs. The average size of land into ownership declined to 1,7 ha, while the share of households having less than 1 ha into ownership increased to 21,8%; this phenomenon is also a result of the traditional inheritance patterns operating in the rural areas. “Land” as central value in a traditional society, low value attached to associations as organizational forms (similarities with the “former agricultural production co-operatives” which are also due to maintaining the leaders who practise the same management forms, corruption included) have had a strong impact upon land ownership, land use and operation.

The rural household contracted not only economically but also socially, focusing upon its own internal relations and appealing to traditional forms, resulted in its operation as an autarchic entity. The rural institutional frailty, materialized into the lack of institutions, of organized markets, hinders the reallocation of community resources, with a negative impact upon performance at a micro and macroeconomic level (Dăianu, D., 1999: 2). In this respect, the following worth mentioning as characteristics of rural development through the amplification of institutional emancipation:

- there is a basic legal and institutional network necessary to rural economy operation as a market economy, but not all components operate as normal parameters;
- the institutional change is more difficult in the rural communities due to the current strong inequalities;
- the institutional change did not benefit from a clear outlook on the transition process management;

- the institutional pattern and the whole set of laws with direct or indirect incidence in the rural communities are characterized by functional overlapping, confusion and persistence of traditional elements.

These are accompanied by the population's lack of trust in the central power entities, which generated civil society apathy, with a tendency to divide and weaken the emerging small community networks (National Human Development Report, Romania, 2001-2002).

The following "steps" are necessary in the rationale of land issue institutionalization, namely:

- land strategy interpretation;
- establishment of an emergency regime necessary for solving up ownership right formalization;
- understanding by the rural population of the whole range of land strategy options and population information in this respect;
- institutional support to land issue-related behaviour (both manifest and latent behaviour).

The institutions involved in the management of land issues are quite fragmented; they monitor the land issue on a sequential rather than complementary basis, while their social efficiency is quite low at community level and at individual level in particular. The institutional operation modality is rather inhibiting, as it does not stimulate a rational behaviour in relation to land issue. The rich legislation framework on land is not materialized into a coherent institutional scheme that can result in its full implementation at rural community level.

The community impact upon the rural attitudes and behaviour is increasingly low; on one hand the *local power* is still the prisoner of certain party policy options, being dominated by the influence of certain economic stakeholders; on the other hand a typical phenomenon in the transition period is represented by the lack of agreement ("public involvement discordance" syndrome) that appears in the involvement of local power in addressing the public issues. The main effects of the steady manifestation of the public involvement discordance syndrome are the following: delay in setting up the new ownership structures, emergence and maintenance of community vulnerability, diminution of trust in leaders (mayor, chief of association, priest) and of institutional authority, institutional cohesion diminution, fragmentation of local administration activities. The case studies (made in the last 4 years) revealed the impossibility of authorities to re-orient the rural players in building up their own institutions by which they can help themselves; these cannot manage endogenous development programs. I mention that my statements are based only on case studies made mainly in the communes located in "rural poverty areas" from the South and South-East development regions. For example, in the study made in Tărtășești commune, the attitude of the local bodies involved in issues concerning air and soil pollution, education or health, resulted in the creation of a "fissure" between the local power and the population. The non-involvement of the decision-makers led to an increase of "individualism" and a "social lethargy" at the whole rural community level. The community cohesion, solidarity forms, in the absence of a catalyst, of a social coagulation pole, tend to become null and are replaced by an "egocentrism" which is incompatible with the community modernization norms, however specific to a traditional rural society.

Impact of demographic factors

The demographic changes, the current phenomena experienced by the rural areas and the accentuation/aggravation of the negative processes have a strong impact upon rural communities.

In the first place, it is the *rural demographic ageing* that has a negative influence, as it implies the economic impossibility to buy land, on one hand; on the other hand, this represents a psychological barrier to selling land; it implies a reserved attitude as regards banks, financial bureaucracy and low information behaviours; it implies the formulation of short-term projects rather than medium or longer-term projects.

Women's participation to rural activities (both inside and outside the household) has quite a high share. At a household level, in the last 3 decades women became increasingly involved in the decision-making process at a rural household holding level (and this not only in

the rural families); this process is not strongly supported by an educational emancipation in rural women; sex-based educational discrepancies/disparities persist in the rural area.

The *low educational background*, both general and specialized education, is strongly reflected in the rural employed population structures. The persons who graduated a primary or secondary school account for 56% of total employed population in rural areas; this adds to a precarious training that can hardly allow the employed persons to have the “profession” of a farmer. This deteriorated side of human resources is quite inhibiting for a modern behaviour, it is an obstacle to farm development expectations and projects, to land property increase included.

The rural occupational structures tend to become “*mono-occupational*”; a World Bank survey considers that 80% of the investigated population is employed in farming, which means, in Romania’s conditions, low and unsafe incomes. In this context, farmers have low possibilities to obtain incomes that could allow them to buy land.

Under-employment, which is a large-scale phenomenon in the rural area, negatively impacts the living standard, inhibiting any type of behaviour favourable to land market; in rural areas, in 1998, the number of under-employed persons was 4 times higher as compared to urban areas; a more serious phenomenon is the high “under-employment rate” of the young population (15-24 years).

The high share of “*part-time employed persons*” in rural areas (88.0%), more significant in women (55,0%), has a negative influence upon the rural household incomes and results in the option for a “subsistence strategy”.

The demographic phenomena with a strong impact upon the living standard, i.e. demographic ageing and lower educational background, are concentrated in lower-sized rural localities.

In a survey effectuated in 1999 by the General Directorate for Statistics and the World Bank, a hypothesis was tested according to which a lower living standard in households could be associated to a lower education level; at the same time, the living standard in a certain locality can be associated to the size of the locality; it is likely that the areas with population decline, decreasing birth rates and increasing death and migration rates are in this situation due to a decline in the living standard (Chircă, C. and Teşliuc, E., p.1999: 10). This hypothesis was confirmed.

The migration flows, their structure in particular, may have a strong impact upon land market behaviour. Under the conditions in which the “rural - urban balance” is positive (+4,2), it can be presumed that the return to the rural area will represent an economic pressure and a change in the traditional behaviour and expectations.

Influence of socio-demographic factors upon behaviour in relation to land issue

The investigation of behaviour in relation to the land issue, as the main type of rural behaviour, allows the exemplification of modalities by which the socio-demographic factors become determining factors for the rural communities.

In this respect, one can speak about a system of relations between the demographic characteristics and those specific to land ownership, land use and land management. In support to this statement, we used the results of a case study put over in the period of July-September 2001 in the Tărtăşeşti commune, Dâmbovița County, South Development Region.

The effects of the demographic changes upon the association structures. From the socio-economic point of view, the Tărtăşeşti commune is located in a rural poverty area; besides being located in a poor area – GDP/capita was 5.329 \$ in 1998, as compared to 4.522 \$ in the North-East region to 11.731 \$ in the Bucharest region – it is also located in a poverty area surrounding the great urban centers (at 30 km from Bucharest).

The demographic structure experienced changes, however at a low rate, which are specific to the rural area in the last decades: population declined from 5.247 (1992) to 5.226 inhabitants (2000); this decline followed an oscillating trend, i.e. 5.247 inhabitants (1992), 5.007 inhabitants (1997) and 5.226 inhabitants (2000), being determined by its own demographic processes: birth rate, death rate and migration rate; the structure by genders features “demographic normality”: 51,2% men and 48,8% women; the structure by age groups reveals the ageing phenomenon.

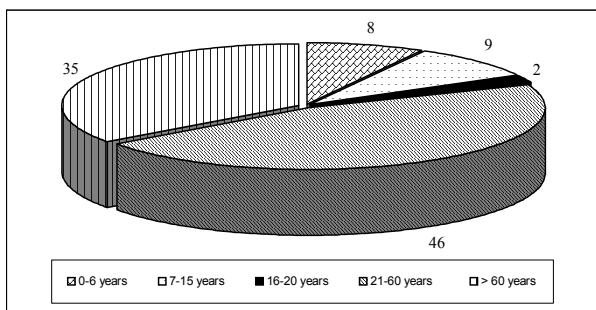


Figure 1. Structure of rural population by age groups.

The demographic indicators reveal the characteristics of a traumatized rural population – 3,8‰ birth rate and 11,6‰ death rate; the rural family concentration process is very strong: the average number of families/rural household is of 1,1.

This demographic characteristic, together with the social characteristics, determines a certain type of association behaviour; the association structures generally feature stability: most of them are part of the formal associations since their establishment (67,0% of the association members have been members since the association establishment year); the average age of the association members is of 68 years; 46,0% of the association members come from a nucleus family (only husband+wife) or incomplete families (widower), i.e. old families that do not benefit from any support.

The demo-economic characteristics of those who are members of association are the following:

- low educational level – 31,0% graduated primary school and only 31,0% graduated 8 grades; 15,0% are illiterate;
- a high share of pensioners, mainly of social security pensioners – out of total members, 54,0% are social security pensioners and 31,0% are pensioners of the former co-operative farms;
- occupational continuity – 31,0% of respondents had farming as their main occupation before 1990, as well.

The association structures and mainly their defective operation can be explained on the basis of these demographic characteristics, ultimately determined by the demographic potential of the investigated commune.

Land owners and lessces' behaviours. The problems generated by land ownership, use and management are also of a demo-economic nature.

The land ownership right restitution was completed in the investigated commune; the agricultural area that had to be restituted, i.e. 3.726 ha, was effectively restituted to former owners, whereas the ownership titles were issued in totality; it is worth mentioning that out of total 2.789 owners, 10,7% do not live in the Tărtășești commune.

The land operation types are the following:

a) *Private operation* – prevails in the investigated commune; the structure of land owners, resulting from the investigated sample, is characterized by:

- *old age* – average age: 61,5 years;
- *low educational level*: 7,0% had no school, 46,0% graduated primary or secondary school and only 5,0% graduated a post high-school education form. It is worth mentioning the low share of those with specialized studies (only 2,0% graduated agricultural high-school) and the high share (25,0%) of those who graduated a vocational school, mainly with an industrial profile;
- *confused occupational characteristics* – 45,0% of land owners are farmer pensioners (of the former co-operative farms) and 11,0% are working in agriculture or in agro-processing units at present; 18,0% are social security pensioners, while the remaining persons are employed in the sector of services, trade, industry and constructions. There is certainly an occupational continuity certified by the fact that prior to 1989, 31,0% were employed in agriculture and agro-food industry, while almost the same percentage, i.e. 26,0% were employed in industry and constructions.

b) *Land lease* – per total community, 206 persons leased out land, out of which 49,0% women and 51,0% men; the average age of lessces is 46,5 years. The data were obtained from the local council according to the existing official data. At the investigated sample level, the following aspects were found:

- “leasing out land” is more significant than “leasing in land”; about 1,18 ha were leased out on the average; the average age of those who “leased out land” is 70 years; the educational structure is the following:
 - ✓ primary school – 36,0%;
 - ✓ secondary school – 18,0%;
 - ✓ vocational school – 36,0%;
 - ✓ other (high-school, post high-school) – 10,0%.
- the demo-economic structure of those who “leased in land” is the following:
 - ✓ average age – 41,8 years;
 - ✓ educational structure: 25,0% secondary school; 38,0% vocational school; 37,0% post high-school;
 - ✓ occupational structure: 37,5% work in the trade sector, in services and in industry;
 - ✓ 62,5% work in agriculture;

About 1,6 hectares “were leased in” on an average.

The land resources and mainly the access to land and land use are influenced by various socio-demographic factors; the impact is significant by its amplitude and its depth, generating explicit, diffuse behaviour that may induce certain characteristics to the rural economy. The social vulnerability of rural communities is a predictive factor for the technical and economic dimension of the rural economy and mainly on the micro-economic parameters.

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