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# The Geodemographical Role of the Republic of Moldavia Rural Space

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The rural localities have an important role in the geo-demographical evolution of the geographical space. This fact is determined by the following particularities:

- the rural locality is the oldest type of human settlements with an evolution of over 10 thousand years determined by the evolution of humanity from the nomad way of living to the sedentary one. This progressive evolution has had as economic basis some events and important transformations in the life of the population, such as: the taming, the cultivation of cereals, the keeping of products etc. After V. Surd: "At the historical scale of time, the village is formed as the first form of habitat of the human community [1, p.12]. The apparition of the localities in the Rumanian space took place later, ancient traces of the Habasesti (Iaşi) localities and of the ones from the Danube Basin dating 3 thousand years before Christ [2];
- in the network of human settlements, rural localities have the dominant place, which, in conformity with different sources of literature, count 12-20 mln [3, p.106]. For example, only India counts over 560 thousand of rural localities, Turkey almost 35 thousand [4, p.10], Rusia-177 thousand, Ukraine – 30 thousand, Leetonia – 76 thousand [5, p. 218-266], Romania – 2,5 thousand [1, p.214-215], the Moldavian Republic – 1,6 thousand;
- over three billion people live in the rural space, which, for the year 2000 represented around 50% of the population of Earth. A progressive reduction in the quantum of evolution of the rural population is unregistered in the total of Earth's population. This way, in 1900 the rural population was 86% of the total population of Earth, in 1950 – 71%, in 2000 – around 50%. According to the demographical prognostics, in 2020 the rural spaces will be inhabited by only 37-38% of the total global population [6, p.192]. The differences in the territorial repartition focus on the balance of the rural population on the continents, geographical areas or countries, taking into account the territorial resources, the environmental factors and the socio-economic degree of development. This way, the biggest concentrations of rural population are located in Asia (around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the global rural population), especially in China, India and the Indochina Peninsula; Africa (12% of the total rural population, with the biggest rural populations in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Sudan etc.. Europe, North America, South America, Central America and Australia have a very reduced rural population (below 10% of the global rural population), but the smallest numbers belong to Great Britain, Belgium, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, U.S.A etc [6, p.195];
- a great difference between the rural localities according to the number of the people inhabiting it, their physiognomy and functions is registered. The main geographical, demographical and socio-economical classification indicator is the number of people living in rural spaces. According to this, discrepancy between the rural regions is even bigger, starting from 10 inhabitants (for the rural localities of North America), for example in Leetonia 87% of the rural localities have only 5-10 inhabitants, and arriving up to 20-30 thousand people in China or Japan.

The Moldavian Republic, as well as Romania, is different from the coterminous states by the presence of the big (2-3 thousand people) and very big (over 3 thousand people) rural localities.

In average, a Romanian commune has 4 thousand people, one in the Republic of Moldavia, 3,5 thousand people. The rural localities served as a base for the urban networks of localities. As a result of some territorial, administrative, economical and social transformations, the rural localities became urban localities.

At the same time, one must say that, during its historical development, the village transformed itself slower in comparison with the city. Even if the village becomes a city, it still keeps its specific features, expressed in the way of living, acting, people's occupations and their ancient customs, for a long time.

The Republic of Moldavia represents an exception among the European community through its big number of rural population. The political and socio-economic transformations during the economic transition had a negative impact on the evolution of rural population. During more decades (1960-1990) the number of the rural population decreased progressively. This was due to the intensity of the population's migration as well as to the territorial and administrative frequent transformations. Just in the period 1960-1980, 25 big villages became towns, having a population of almost 200 thousand people, mostly centres such as Criuleni, Cimişlia, Glodeni, Nisporeni, Sângerei and others.

The evolution of the rural population during the period between the two world wars was characterized by periods of increase and also periods of regression of the number of the population (table1).

Table 1. The evolution of the rural population in the Republic of Moldavia.

Year	Total population (thousands of people)	Number of the rural population		The evolution of the numbers	
		thousands of people	in % from the total	years	thousands of people
1950	2290,4	1902,6	83	1950-1959	+395,0
1960	2967,7	2297,6	77	1960-1969	+41,2
1970	3568,9	2438,8	68	1970-1979	-7,1
1980	3968,2	2331,7	60	1980-1989	-39,4
1990	4366,3	2292,3	53	1990-1996	-178,6
1997	3657,3	2113,7	58	1997-1999	-0,6
2000	3649,5	2114,3	59	2000-2004	-37,1
2005	3386,0	2077,2	61		

leaving out the departments from the left side of Nistre River.

Source: „Численность, состав и движения населения МССР”, Кишинев, 1983, p.17.

„The yearly statistics of the Republic of Moldavia”, Chişinău, 2005, p.36.

Analyzing the data from table 1, one may say that between 1950-1969 the rural population increased with 436,2 thousand people, while between 1970-2004 it decreased with 262,8 thousand. The most important reduction of numbers was registered between 1990-1997 (-178,6 thousand people). Even the intensity of the rural population in this period of time was high when because of the great natural progress the rural population was little reduced. During the studied period of time the proportion of the rural population within the total of the country's population also changed. This indicator increased quite enough until the beginning of the economical transition. If in 1950 the rural population was 83% of the total population, in 1990 it reduced to 53% due to the increasing of the urban localities and also to the increasing of the urban population as a consequence of the rural population migration and of the natural progress.

The demographical transition essentially changed the evolution of the situation in the rural space. Starting with the 90's one could observe a slow increase in the number of the rural population as a consequence of the administrative and territorial transformations (between 1994-1995 some urban localities were transformed in rural localities), of the territorial dismembering of the state (in the departments from the left side of the Nistre there were big towns such as Tiraspol, Bender, Râbnîţa with a big number of urban population), of the stopping of the rural population migration to cities (as a consequence of the destruction of the military complex and of the essential reduction of work places).

As a result of this evolution, between 1990-2005 the number of the rural population increased from 53% to 61%. Nowadays, the Republic of Moldavia is known to be the country with the highest number of rural population among the European states, being on the last place after Albania (59%).

The numerical evolution of the population of the Republic of Moldavia is influenced by the natural progress and by the migration of the population. Along more decades the increasing and the structure of the rural population was determined by the birth rate (table 2).

Table 2. The evolution of the birth rate in the Republic of Moldavia.

Year	Total of the new born Thousands	Birth rate (for 1000 people)	Rural space			
			New born thousands	Birth rate (for 1000 people)	in % comparing with 1950	in % comparing with the total
1950	91,1	38,9	79,2	40,8	100	86,9
1960	87,9	29,3	72,8	31,6	91,9	82,9
1970	69,8	19,4	48,5	19,8	61,2	69,5
1980	79,6	19,8	48,4	20,4	61,1	60,8
1990	77,1	17,7	42,5	18,5	53,7	55,1
1997	45,6	11,9	30,0	14,2	37,9	65,8
2000	36,9	10,1	24,2	11,4	30,5	65,6
2004	38,3	10,6	24,2	11,5	30,5	63,2

excluding the departments from the left side of the Nistre River.

Sursa: „Численность, состав и движения населения МССР”, Кишинев, 1978, p.42-43.

„ The yearly statistics of the Republic of Moldavia ", Chişinău, 2005, p.46.

The analysis of the dates from table 2 permits us to drop some very important conclusions about the role of the rural space in presenting the demographical situation of the state, such as:

- a) The number of the new born coming from the rural space has a dominant place within the total number of births. During the years 1950-2004 their number oscillated between 86,9 and 63,2%. At the same time with the decrease of the births there has the total balance has also been reduced. This way, the total number of new born of the Republic decreased from 91,1 thousand in 1950 to 38,3 thousand in 2004, 2,4 times as respect to the year 1950, and the birth rate from 38,9‰ to 10‰. At the same time the number of the new born in the rural space decreased from 79,2 thousand to 24,2 thousand 3,3 times comparing with 1950 while the birth rate decreased from 40,8 to 11,5‰, 4 times comparing with 1950. The conclusion is that the reduction of the new born in the rural area was bigger than the total number of the Republic. This fact is explained by:
  - the decreasing of the number of the population living in the rural space at the same time with the increasing of the indicators in the urban space;
  - the reduction of the birth rate in the rural space as a consequence of the evolution of the family planning concept and also due to the ageing of the rural population;
  - the political and administrative transformations as a result of the separation of the departments (“raioane”) from the left side of the Nistre, fact that can be observed from the decrease of the total number of the new born during 1990-1997;
- b) An essential reduction of the new born in rural localities. This way, their number in the Moldavian localities was of 30,5% as compared to 1950. at the same time one can see a reduction of this indicator during 1990-1997 from 53,7 to 37,9% or with 15,8 points %, as a result of the separation of the eastern departments.

It is very important that the rural birth rate constituted 60% of the total number of born children during all our research. This indicator transformed itself slower than other demographical indicators. If the number of the born children from the rural space decreased during our researches 3,3 times as compared to 1950, after that, the rate of the born children from the rural space comparing to the total number of births, decreased from 86,9% in 1950 to 63,2% in 2004 or, better said, with 23,7%. So we may drop the conclusion that the total number of the born children in the Republic was determined by the birth rate of the rural space. This way the birth rate of the rural population is the main factor in the formation of the demographical situation in the Republic of Moldavia.

During the analyzed period (1950-2004) there have been essential changes in the evolution of the mortality of the rural population (table 3).

Table 3. The Evolution of mortality and the natural increase of the population in the rural space.

Year	Total number of the deceased, thousands	Rate of mortality (for 1000 inhabitants)	Mortality in the rural space			The natural increase (spor natural) in the rural space		
			Thousands inhabitants	in ‰	in % as compared to 1950	Thousands inhabitants	in ‰	in % as compared to 1950
1950	46,4	11,2	22,4	11,6	100	56,8	29,2	100
1960	19,3	6,4	15,3	6,6	67,8	57,5	25,0	101,2
1970	26,6	7,4	19,0	7,8	84,8	29,5	12,0	51,9
1980	40,5	10,1	27,6	11,6	123,2	20,9	8,8	36,8
1990	42,4	9,7	27,2	11,9	121,4	15,3	6,6	26,9
1997	42,9	11,8	28,7	13,6	128,1	1,3	0,6	2,2
2000	41,2	11,3	29,0	13,2	129,4	-3,7	-1,8	-6,5
2004	41,6	11,6	28,4	13,4	126,7	-4,1	-1,9	-7,2

<sup>\*</sup> not including the departments from the left side of the Nistre River.

Source: „Численность, состав и движения населения МССР”, Кишинев, 1978, p.42-43.

„The yearly statistics of the Republic of Moldavia”, Chişinău, 2005, p.46-47.

As a result of the statistic analysis of the evolution of the rural population's mortality, two periods are presented:

- 1950-1970, when the mortality decreases from 22,4 thousand to 19,0 thousand persons (with a minimal value of 15,5 thousand in 1960), and the mortality rate decreased from 11,6 to 7,8‰ or, better said, about 1,5 times (the minimal value was of 6,6 deceased for 1000 inhabitants in 1960);
- 1970-2004, when the number of the deceased and, also the rate of the rural population's mortality increased from 19,0 thousand to 28,4 thousand persons or with 88%, and the rate of mortality increased from 7,8 to 13,4 deceased per 1.000 inhabitants (1,7 times).

So, the number of the demises and the rate of mortality surpassed the indicators for 1950. At the same time, one may see that the rate of the mortality of the rural population surpasses the general mortality rate of the Republic of Moldavia with 26,4%, and the mortality rate of the urban population with 50,1%.

In the last ten years the number of demises increased among the pensioners but also among the working population. For the period from 0-15 the rate of mortality stayed almost unchanged. Between the main causes of the demises in the villages we can mention: circulation apparatus diseases, liver tumours.

The mortality caused by accidents, crimes, intoxications or tumours among young people, reduced the demographical potential and the working forces of the rural space. As a consequence of the evolution of the birth and mortality rates, the natural progress (table 3) was essentially changed.

During 1950-1990 it has been high enough, but with evident tendencies of diminution. So, the natural balance decreased from 56,8 thousand in 1950 to 15,3 thousand in 1990 (3,7 times), and the natural progressing rate decreased from 29,2 to 6,6‰ (4,4 times).

During 1990-2004 we can conventionally delimitate two periods of natural progress in the rural space, such as:

- 1990-1998, when the natural progress had values between 6,6 and 0‰;
- 1999-2004, when the natural progress values became negative, oscillating between 1,2-1,9‰ (minimal value of minus 2,7‰ has been registered in 2003).

In the Republic of Moldavia the infant mortality has a firm decreasing tendency, having as a result 12,0 demises per 1.000 of the children born in 2004 (table 4).

The present situation is far from the developed countries level (under 7‰), having important reduction reserves, especially on exogenous mortality.

Between the causes of infant mortality there are: the circumstances of the prenatal period (25,7% from the total), breathing problems (22%), congenital anomalies (19%), congestions (18%) [7, p.44].

The increase of the mortality index has conditioned the decrease of the living average. In the rural environment it is of 66 years, two years shorter than in towns. The men from the villages live less than the women, about 62 and 70 years.

Table 4. The evolution of infant mortality in the Republic of Moldavia.

Year	The total number of Infant mortality	General rate of infant mortality (per 1000 born children)	Rural space		
			Infant mortality	Rate of infant mortality (per 1000 born children)	In % as compared to 1950
1950	11006	120,0	9817	123,0	100
1960	4297	48,0	3643	49,3	37
1970	1611	23,0	1174	24,3	12
1980	2789	35,0	1871	38,4	19
1990	1482	19,0	890	20,6	9
1997	901	19,8	640	21,3	7
2000	681	18,3	434	17,8	4
2004	464	12,2	297	12,3	3

Not including the departments from the left side of the Nistre River.

Source: „Численность, состав и движения населения МССР”, Кишинев, 1983, p.40-41.

„ The yearly statistics of the Republic of Moldavia ”, Chişinău, 2005, p.46.

During the last years we observed a tendency to the reduction of the number of marriages and the increase of the number of divorces in the rural space, fact that negatively influences the reproductive function of the family. If in 1990 there were 8,5 marriages per 1.000 inhabitants, in 2004 there were only 6,6. This fact is due to the socio-economic crisis, to the reduction of the young having the marriage age, to the increase of the marriage average time etc.

This situation of crisis influences the family increasing the tension between the spouses driving them to taking divorce initiative. The rate of divorces increased in the rural environment from 0,5 in 1990 to 1,8‰ in 2004. This rate is smaller than that of the urban space, while the increasing rhythm is faster in rural spaces than that in the urban ones.

The age and gender structure have a big influence upon the evolution of rural population. The rural environment, as well as the urban one are characterized by an evident disproportion within the gender structure of the population as a result of the human losses during the second war, of the longevity of the female population, and lately, because of the emigration phenomenon. In conformity with the census of the year 1959 the female population accounted for 53,6% of the rural population. The following years register a slow disparity between women and men. In 2004 the female population percentage was 52.5% of the total.

If the changes were relatively little for the gender structure, in exchange they were profound for the age structure of the rural population. It is more evident that the 0-15 group of age is decreasing. If this group formed 29,4 % of the total number of rural population, in 2004 it decreased to 23,7%. At the same time the number of the population that reached the retirement age increased (57 years old for females and 62 years old for males), from 18,3% in 1998 to 15,7% in 2004.

The increase in the number of the working population and the decrease of the number of those who reached the retirement age are explained by the legislation transformations regarding the age of retirement established in 1998.

*De facto* the number of the population over 60 years of age from the total of the population had slow increasing tendencies between the years 1991-2004. The index shows a percentage of 12,5% in 1991, of 13,4% in 1998 and of 13,8% in 2004. The increasing rhythms for the over 60 years old will be intensified in the next years (2009-2010), when the generations born in the 1949-1959's, a great number of the total present population, will reach this age.

One can observe a discordance regarding the evolution of the rural population: first, for a long period of time the rural population decreased as a result of migration, second, an increase in the natural progress was registered. This way the number of the rural population was slowly decreasing while the reduction of the number as a result of migration was balanced by the natural progress. Only after the 90's, when the natural progress of the rural population became close to zero or negative, it was more reflected in the decrease of the rural population (example, The 1990-1996's) (table 5).

The analysis of the data from the table 5 shows us that during the studied period of time, the population from the rural environment decreased with over 1,3 millions inhabitants as a result of migration, and that, at the same time, the natural progress has compensated this decrease with a value of over 1,5 millions inhabitants. The relatively small indicators of

migration and natural progress during the years 1997-2004 recall our attention. A positive natural progress was always characteristic for rural localities, but, starting with 1999 it became negative, a situation determined by the increase of mortality and decrease of the birth rate. The negative values of the migration progress are lately determined by the essential increase of the illegal migration of the population from the rural space.

Table 5. The evolution of the total, natural and migration progress in the rural environment.

Years	Total progress Thousands inhabitants	At the same time	
		Natural progress (thousands)	Migration progress (thousands)
1950-1959	395,0	530,2	-135,2
1960-1969	41,2	426,5	-385,3
1970-1979	-7,1	268,9	-276,0
1980-1989	-39,4	220,1	-259,5
1990-1996	-178,1	91,5	-270,1
1997-1999	-0,6	-0,8	-1,4
2000-2004	-37,1	-22,4	-59,5

Source: „Численность, состав и движения населения МССР”, Кишинев, 1983, p.40-41.  
„The yearly statistics of the Republic of Moldavia”, Chişinău, 2005, p.46.

One of the geo-demographical problems of the rural space from many states of the world consists in the depopulation of the rural localities. Society started to face this phenomenon from the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, while the Republic of Moldavia started to face this problem only at the end of this century. During the after-war period, the Moldavian village was characterized by development, enlargement and numerical increase. Many villages from the period between the 1959-1989 census increased numerically 1,5-3 times.

The actual territory of the Republic of Moldavia is characterized by a relatively dense network of rural settlements (in average 100 km<sup>2</sup> for 5 rural settlements) [8, p.58], fact that demonstrates the favourable natural conditions for living and economic activity.

In 2005 the rural settlements network was formed of about 1.613 villages in which there lived 2.077,2 thousand inhabitants, or 61% from the total of the population. In the rural system, according to the number of the inhabitants, big and very big localities predominate (table 6).

Table 6. The evolution of the number of rural settlements (after the population census data)

	1959				1989			
	The number of the localities	% of the total number of rural settlements	The number of inhabitants (thousands)	% of the total number of rural population	Number of rural settlements	% of the total number of rural settlements	The number of inhabitants (thousands)	% of the total number of rural population
Total	1989	100	2210,0	100	1580	100	2315,0	100
below100 inhabitants	207	14,0	10	0,5	113	7,1	5,5	0,2
101-200	173	8,6	27,0	1,3	115	7,3	17,0	0,7
201-500	328	11,4	112,0	5,1	237	15,0	82,0	3,5
501-1000	379	19,0	274,0	12,4	322	20,4	241,0	10,4
1001-2000	418	21,0	602,0	27,3	401	25,4	576,0	24,9
2001-3000	192	9,6	467,0	21,2	188	12,0	456,0	19,7
3001-5000	118	5,9	437,0	20,0	140	8,9	517,0	22,4
peste 5000	44	2,2	282,0	12,1	64	3,9	421,0	18,2

Source: The totals of the unifying census of the population from R.S.S.M. 1989. vol. I., Chişinău 1990, p.20.

As you can see from table 6, the number of small localities essentially decreased in 30 years (up to 200 inhabitants) from 380 inhabitants in 1959 to 228 in 1989 or 43%, while the number of the population decreased from 37,0 thousand to 22,5 thousand or 39%. In the villages with a population between 500 and 3.000 inhabitants there were little transformations while those with over 3000 inhabitants increased from 44 to 64 and the populations from 282 to 421 thousand inhabitants (1,4 times). This way in the rural settlements with a population from 1.000 to 5.000 were concentrated 67% of the inhabitants in 1989, while in the small rural localities with a population of below 500 inhabitants lived only 4,4% of the population. Along three decades the number of the population living in big rural spaces (with over 5000 inhabitants) increased. If in 1959 only 12,1% of the rural population were concentrated in such localities, in 1989 the index arrived to 18,2%. Usually this kind of localities is considered a

communal centre. Most of the branches of the social infrastructure have been dislocated there. Because of the lack of information referring to the population's migration from the rural space it is quite difficult to establish the evolution of the number of the population in these localities. The researches, between 2000 and 2002, within the INTAS project have demonstrated the fact that the number of rural population that has been studied has decreased a lot. In many villages 25-30% of the population is abroad, 2/3 belongs to the economically active population. This fact proves depopulation of the rural space [9, p.150]. Now the population of the rural localities is divided in two big groups: the population below 18-19 years old (children and young people) and the population of over 50 years old (the third age population). The population of average age (20-35), the most active from an economical point of view and also the most reproductive category from a demographical point of view is practically missing from the Moldavian villages. As a conclusion we may say that in the geo-demographical situation of the rural localities there are some outgoing negative situations: the decrease of the number of the population, the quality of life is getting worse, migration and demographical ageing is intensified, the unemployment rate is continuously increasing etc.

In order to ameliorate this critical situation of the geo-demographical development processes it is necessary that the government directs the social politics to solving the existing problems. This will contribute at the normal functioning of the family and it will optimize the increase in the number of the population. Secondly, we can mention the fact that during the after war period, the rural population has been the generator of evolution of the country's population. Unfortunately, starting with the 90's the population from the rural areas loses its reproductive capacity.

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