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# Analysis of Population Structure in the Someșană Plain

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## ABSTRACT

The Someșană Plain is situated in the central northern part of the Transylvanian Plain. Its individuality, from a geo-demographic point of view, is the result of a long evolution of its communities under the definite influence of physical, geographical, social and historical factors. The analysis of the population structured on age groups was done progressively during the population censuses in 1910, 1966, 1992 and 2002. In 1910, the young population accounted for 49.3% of the total population. The share of adult population was slightly more reduced than that of the young population (43.2%) while the old population (of 60 and over 60) accounted for 7.4% of the total population in the Someșană Plain. Until 1966 it can be said that the population in the Someșană Plain was young, the share of the population under 20 being of 49.3% in 1910 and 37% in 1966. After 1966, there were significant changes as far as the share of old population was concerned at the population censuses in 1992 and 2002, when the population of 65 and over 65 exceeded 18% of the total population, these values placing the population in the Someșană Plain.

## 1. GENERAL PROBLEMS

The Someșană Plain, situated in the central northern part of the Transylvanian plain, covers the whole sector crossed by the tributaries of the Someșul Mic river (Zăpodie, Murătoiu, Gădălin, Fizeș și Bandău) and the Someșul Mare river (Meleş and Șieu through its tributary Dipșa). Within the Someșană Plain, there are four natural subdivisions, with certain specificities reflected in the spatial distribution of the geo-demographic characteristics, as well as in the specificity of the settlements and of economy.

*The Cojocna-Sic hills*, situated between the the Zăpodie valley and the Fizeșul valley, cover a larger territory (568.3 sq km) where salt formations are found as well as sinuous valleys and the following lakes: Știucii on Săcălaia, Suatu and Aruncuta on Gădalin-slopes affected by ravines, and landslides.

In this subdivision, covering 568.3 sq km (31% of the surface of the whole sector) there are 36 settlements (26.2% of the total number of settlements) of different sizes.

*The Ungurașului hills*, (393.1 sq km) situated in the north-west part of the sector, starting from the Fizeșul valley to the Meleşului valley, between the confluence angles of the Someș rivers, are the high area of the Plain, where forests alternate with grasslands, orchards and cultivable lands.

*The Lechinței hills*, (340.1 sq km), cover the north-east of the Someșană Plain between the Meleşului valley and the Șieu Dipșa passage reaching south to the interfluves between the Someșul Mare and the Mureș river. It is the subdivision with the smallest surface and the smallest number of settlements (27).

*The Fizeșului Plain*, situated between the Cojocna Sic and Ungurașului hills (to the west and north), The Lechinței hills (to the east) and the interfluves Someș-Mureș (to the south), covers the middle part of the Someșană Plain.

There are large plateaus and gentle slopes, with less forest and more arable land. It is the sector with the most numerous settlements (44 localities representing 31% of the total number of settlements in the Someșană Plain).

## 2. GEOGRAPHICAL PREMISES IN POPULATION EVOLUTION

The geographic conditions specific to the region had an important role in the geographical distribution of the population and settlements in the area

### 2.1. Physical-geographical premises

The geographic conditions specific to the region had an important role in the geographical distribution of the population and settlements in the area. The relatively high uniform relief and the energy reduced by the relief as well as the relatively large valleys with relatively extended terraces facilitated a fast economic development and consequently favored early settlement. In the Someșană Plain the cuesta type relief is predominant due to the distribution of arable lands: cereals alternating with vine on cuesta fronts. The distribution of the valleys and their accessibility influenced the overall outlook of the settlements. Besides the monoclin relief, which is characteristic for this region, there are frequent landslides and extensive floodplains not depending on river flow.

The quality of the phreatic waters is inadequate from the viewpoint of mineralogy, hardness of water, bacteriological and biological properties and affects the quality of life in this Plain. The quantity and quality of the water resources in the Someșană Plain influenced the settlement and the development of rural habitats and determined the training and maintenance of natural lakes.

The natural resources also influence the settlements in the Someșană Plain from the economic point of view. The most significant resources are the methane gas and the salt. Salt mining has stopped since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century yet it greatly marked the economic development of Cojocna and Sic, which are now two of the large rural settlements with a complex economic development. The methane gas is now the only natural resource and is exploited in the domes in Mociu, Puini, Țaga, Buza and Strugureni.

### 2.2. Social and historical premises

A series of social and historical factors have shaped the specificities of the population and settlements in time. The remains discovered in Fizeșul Gherlii and Dipșa show that this region has been inhabited since the early Iron Age (7<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC). During the Roman rule in Dacia the salt resources were greatly exploited in Sic and Cojocna, which lead to an early development of these settlements. The first foreign population that influenced the local one was that of the Celts (before the formation of the Dacian state), followed by the Slaves (after emperor Aurelius'

withdrawal in 271), the Hungarians, who settled in the main valleys, and the Germans who were colonized by the Hungarian kings in order guard their borders and greatly exploit the conquered territories.

The social-economic development of the Plain was marked by its outlying, given the distribution of the localities in peripheral administrative and territorial units as compared to the local coordinating centres. Thus, ever since the appearance of the first administrative and territorial organizational forms – the royal counties – in the 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> century, there have been three such sectors in the Someșană Plain: Solnocul Dinlăuntru, in the north, Dăbâca in the center and Cluj in the south. This distribution has slightly changed. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, between the World Wars, The Someșană Plain covered the peripheral area of four counties: Cluj, Mureș, Someș and Năsăud and at present it covers the counties of Cluj and Bistrița-Năsăud. Its outlying character is also marked by the towns, polarizing centres situated outside the Plain in outlying corridors, which determined the migration of the population and resources predominantly towards them.

In the modern and contemporary period the evolution of the geo-demographic elements presents a series of features that place the Someșană Plain in the general phenomenon that characterizes Romania yet they set themselves out through the intensity and special orientation they had.

## 3. POPULATION

Starting from these physical-geographical and social-historical premises, the geo-demographic characteristics of the Someșană Plain exemplified in various statistics recordings show a series of specificities.

### 3.1. The numerical evolution of the population

The numerical evolution of the population in the Someșană Plain was determined by the action of the natural dynamics components as well as the territorial mobility of the population over the period under analysis. In 1850 the number of the population in the Someșană Plain was of 74,612 inhabitants. Under the circumstances of an increased natural growth, the population reached a number of 99,905 inhabitants in 1910. Between 1910 and 1930, it grew only slightly given the moderate natural growth (increased birth and death rates, 38.1‰ and 26.8‰ respectively) as well as the insignificant migration rate (-11.5‰). The population continued to grow due to the increased natural growth until 1966 when it reached its highest point. After 1966, despite a steady natural growth, the industrial development of the urban centres in the adjacent corridors caused a significant migratory flow towards

towns which resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of population. After 1990 there was a change in the migratory flow from towns to the country and for the first time in the demographic history of the Plain, a

positive migration rate was registered (0.7 ‰ in 2002). In 2002, the number of population in the Someșană Plain was smaller than in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by 3.4%.

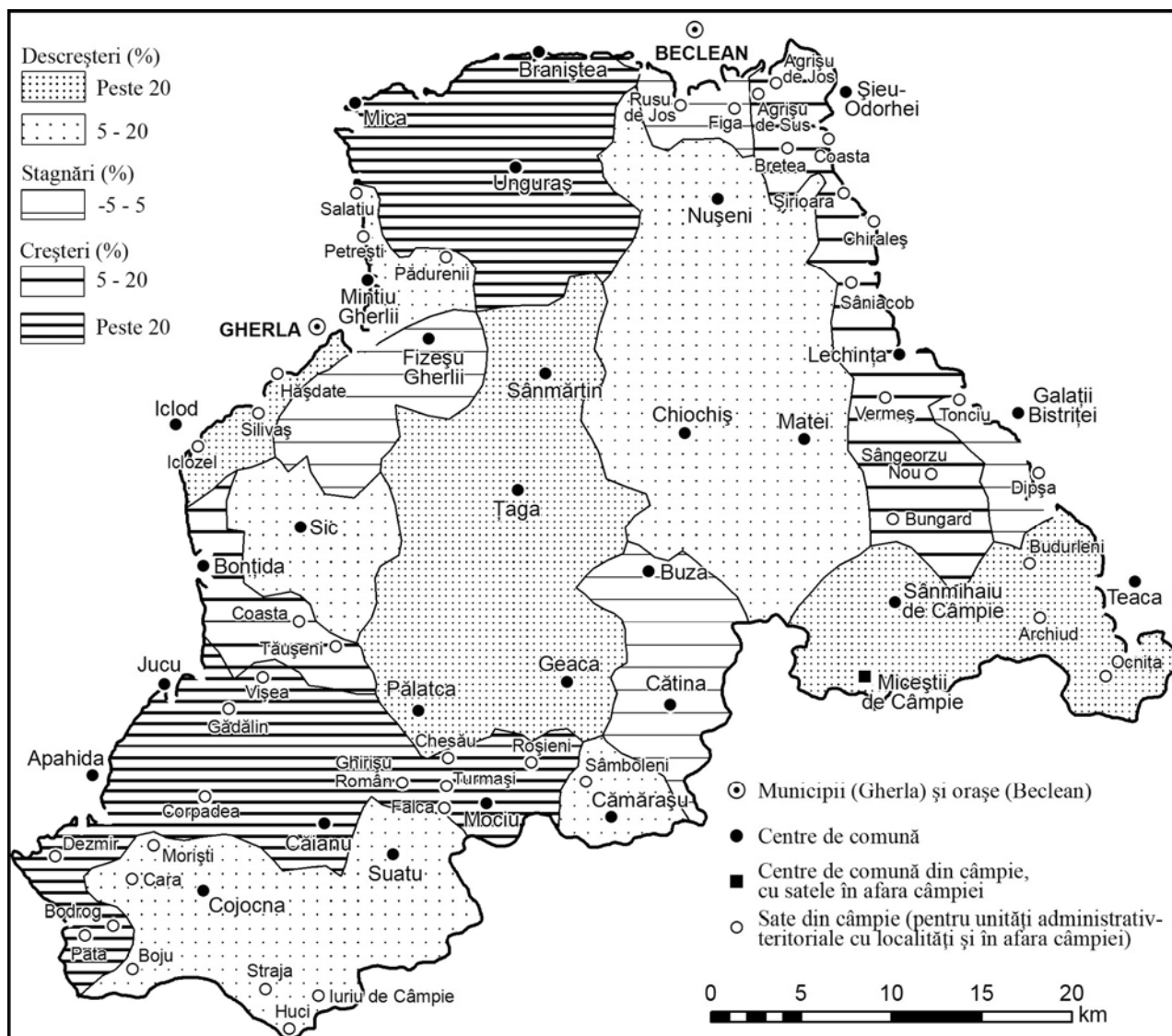


Fig. 1. The Someșană Plain. The numerical evolution of the population between 1850 and 2002.

The most significant decrease was registered in the commune of Țaga, where no less than 1323 inhabitants were lost (from 3,485 inhabitants in 1850 to 2,162 inhabitants registered in 2002).

A “steady” population – reduced variations in the number of population of up to 10% - is to be found in the localities which are part of Beclean as well as in the communes of Galații Bistriței, Buza, Cămărașu, Cătina, Fizeșul Gherlii, Suatu and Mintiu Gherlii.

More significant increase in the number of inhabitants was registered in the communes situated in the corridor areas: Șieu Odorhei, Branîștea, Apahida, Bonțida, Jucu, Mica, Unguraș, etc. The most significant population increase (of 1,113 inhabitants) was registered in the commune of Mica during the period

under analysis. The general density of the population in the Someșană Plain rose from 40.5 inhabitants/sq km in 1850 (fig. 3) to 60.2 inhabitants/ sq km in 1960 only to register 39.2 inhabitants/sq km in 2002 as a result of population decrease by 3,008 inhabitants. With these values, the Someșană Plain is positioned under the average of 50 inhabitants/sq km registered in the Transylvanian Plain.

At territorial level, in 2002 values close to the average density were registered in the Someșană Plain in the communes of Lechința, Teaca, Căianu and Cămărașu. Reduced values of population density were registered in the central part of the sector in Teaca, Geaca (characterized by a reduced population density throughout the period under analysis), Pălata and

Sânmărtin. The lowest density value was registered in Șieu-Odorhei commune (22.1 inhabitants/sq km), on Lechința hills. Significant values of population density (fig. 2) were registered in the communes situated near the outlying corridor areas: Bonțida, Mica, Sic, Apahida, Iclod (near Someșul Mic corridor), Branîștea (near Someșul Mare corridor), situation caused by the development of certain non agricultural activities, especially in the communes. The most significant value of population density was registered in the commune of Branîștea (99.4 inhabitants/sq km), administrative and

territorial unit characterized by the highest values of population density during the whole period under analysis.

The physiological density, analyzed at the population censuses in 1966, 1992 and 2002 show differences in accordance with the increase in the number of inhabitants.

In 1966, when the number of population in the Someșană Plain reached its peak, the value of the physiological density was of 0.64 inhabitants /100 hectares.

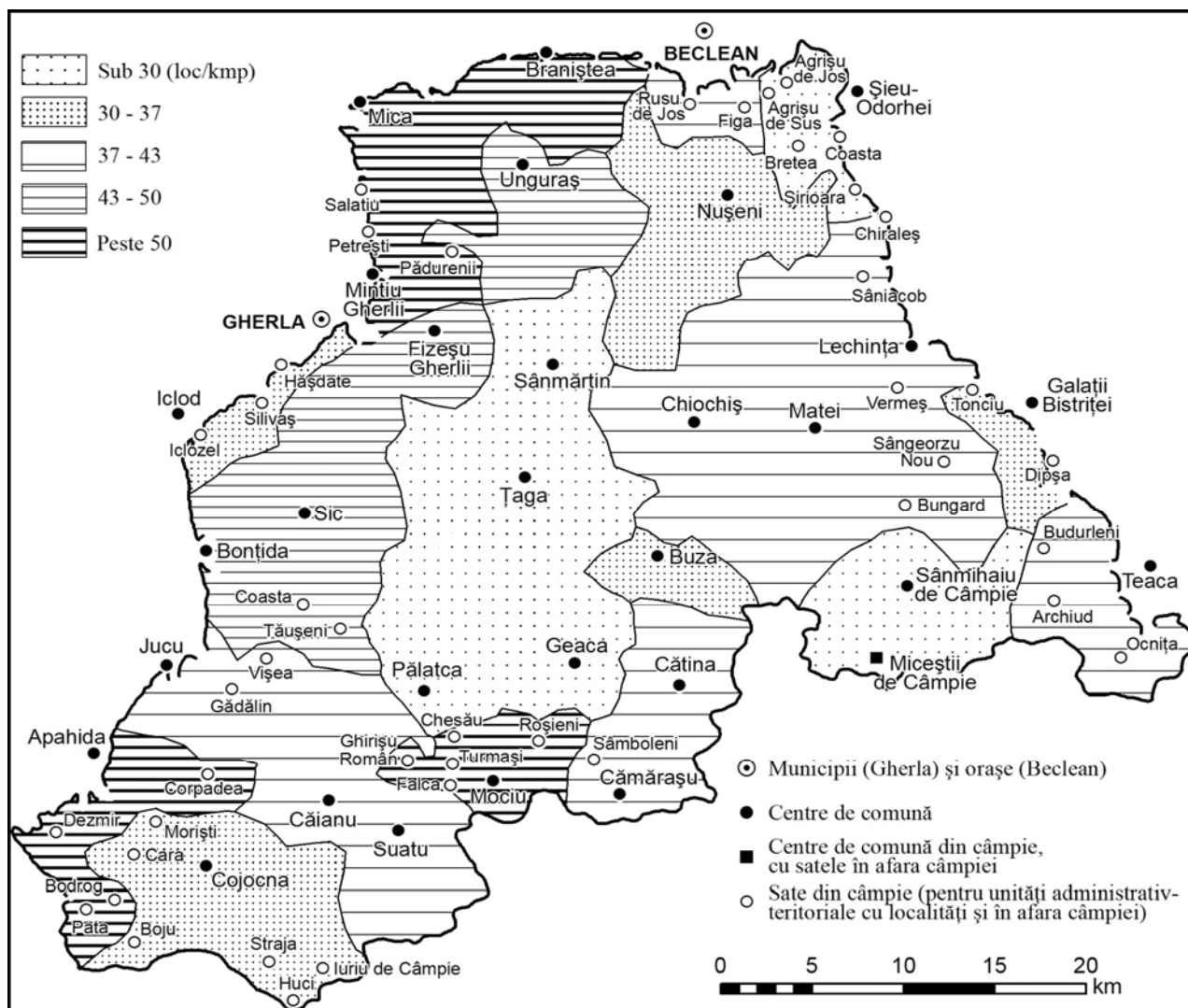


Fig. 2. The Someșană Plain. Population density in 2002.

The same indicator had the value of 0.45 inhabitants/hectare in 1992 and only of 0.42 inhabitants/hectare in 2002, much lower in comparison with the national average (1.46 inhabitants/hectare). This shows reduced manpower for cultivation, maintenance and agricultural potential. A comparative study of the indicator values in 1966 and 2002 outlines three specific situations. The most obvious phenomenon consists of the reduction in the demographic pressure over the arable land. This was

registered in 21 of the 32 administrative territorial units in the Plain: Branîștea, Sânmărtin, Sic, Matei, Căianu, Cămărașu, Mica, Unguraș etc., according to the evolution in the number of inhabitants.

There are three situations when the values of physiological density are approximately equal in the years under analysis.

Rises were registered in the outlying communes of Lechința, Apahida, Iclod, Jucu, Mintiu Gherlii, where there was a demographic import.

### 3.2. Dynamics of the population

In the dynamics of the population in the Someșană Plain the natural growth and the migration rate had different values according to the social and historical circumstances (fig. 3). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the natural growth was high (11.3‰) due to the high birth rates (38.1‰) and death rates (26.8‰). The highest values of the natural growth were registered in the south-west part of the sector in the following communes: Apahida, 17‰, Cojocna, 16.3‰, Căianu, 17.1‰, Pălatca, 16‰ and the lowest in the Lechința hills in the communes: Galații Bistriței, Lechința, Șieu-Odorhei, Teaca, characterized by a reduced birth rate (under 35‰). The natural growth began to descend after 1910 so that at the beginning of 1977 there were administrative territorial units where the negative growth rate was negative because of a

reduced birth rate (between 13-18 ‰) and a high death rate (over 11‰): the communes of Geaca (1.0‰), Țaga (4.0‰), Sanmartin (2.6‰), Șieu Odorhei (3.7‰) form a region of low natural growth in the middle of the Someșană Plain.

In 1992, at the Someșană Plain level, the natural growth was of -5.9‰. This can be explained by the abrogation of the 770/1966 decree, immediately after the fall of the communist regime, which led to an increase in the number of abortions comparable with those of the years 1960-1966. The great migration of the young population from the villages of the Someșană Plain towards the cities in the adjacent units, during the whole period of industrialization, resulted in a modification of the structure on group age, a significant decrease in the number of the young population from 37% in 1966 to 26.4% in 1992 as well as a growth in the number of old population, from 12.4% to 18.9%.

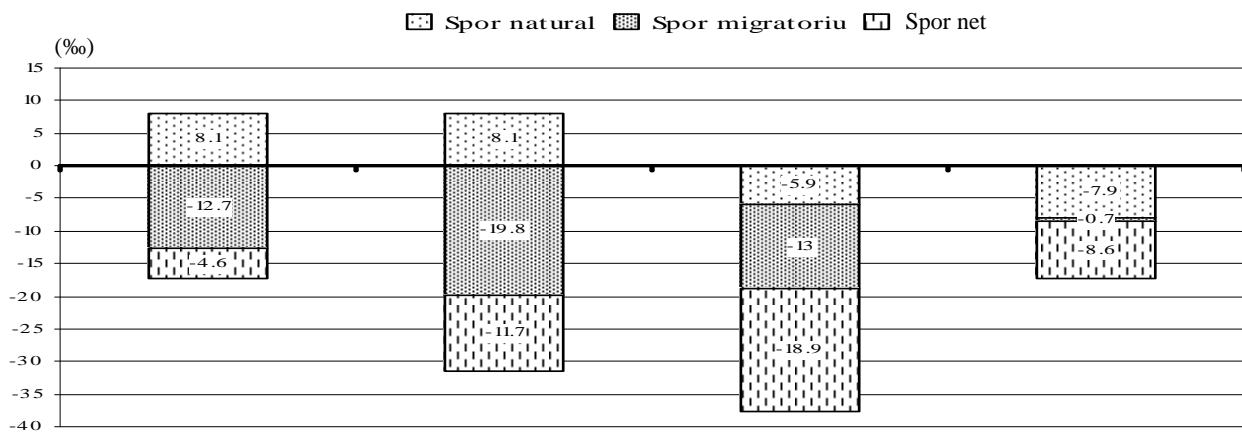


Fig. 3. The Someșană Plain. The net population growth in 1966, 1977, 1992 and 2002.

The period between 1992 and 2002 is characterized by a greater reduction in the natural growth given the decrease in birth rates of up to 10.2‰ and a significant increase in death rates (18.1‰).

The reduced value of the natural growth is partly caused by the massive migrations of the population from the Someșană Plain and by the demographic behaviour of the population. In 2002, the average natural growth was of -7.9‰. As compared to the medium value, there are units where the natural growth is positive: Iclod, Lechința and the suburbs of Beclean.

The positive values can be due to an increase in the birth rates in the commune of Iclod as well as to a reduction in the death rates in the commune of Lechința and the suburbs of Beclean. The lowest values of the natural growth are registered in the central areas, the communes of Nușeni (-19.3‰), Sânmărtin (-21.9‰), Pălatca (-15.5‰), values explained by significant general death rates, given the significant number of old population (over 25%).

The Someșană Plain was characterized over the whole period by a significant loss of population. If at

the beginning of the century the value of the migration rate was of -11.5‰, it continued to decrease until 1977, when the migration rate was minimum (19.8‰). Later, the deficit of population caused by migration from the Plain began to decrease -13‰ in 1992 and 0.7‰ in 2002.

Throughout the period under analysis, the lowest values of the migration rate were registered in the Fizeșului Plain, subdivision which had the population deficit in 2002. This phenomenon depends on the general economic context marked by industrial reorganization which led to less jobs and even the closing of some factories. The tertiary industries, although it extended after 1989, could absorb only a small part of the manpower from factories.

The urban - rural migration intensified especially after 1995. Thus, for the first time after 1968, the town of Bistrița registered a negative migration rate (-2.5‰), this tendency increasing in 1966 and 1997 (-4.6‰). Over this period, the communes under the influence of Bistrița, Lechința, Teaca, Galații Bistriței registered positive migration rates. Also, the town of Gherla is characterized, beginning with 1992 by a

negative migration rate (-0.5%), while the nearby communes, Fizeșul Gherlii, Mintiul Gherlii, Sic, are characterized by a positive migration rate.

**3.3. Geodemographic structure**

Here, the population is grouped into subpopulations based on several criteria: gender, age group, religious affiliation, ethnicity, industry, level of education.

The qualitative analysis of the Someșană Plain population together with quantitative elements, reveal specific features of this region.

**3.3.1. The gender structure of the population**

The male population was predominant until 1966 when, given the aging of the population and World War II, the female population was of 50.9%. After 1966, as a result of government intervention in the demographic evolution, there was a slight increase in the male population, of majority, at the population census in 1992. In 2002, the structuring of the population on sexes is relatively balanced, slightly dominated by the female population. At the population census in 1850, the women represented 48.6% of the whole population.

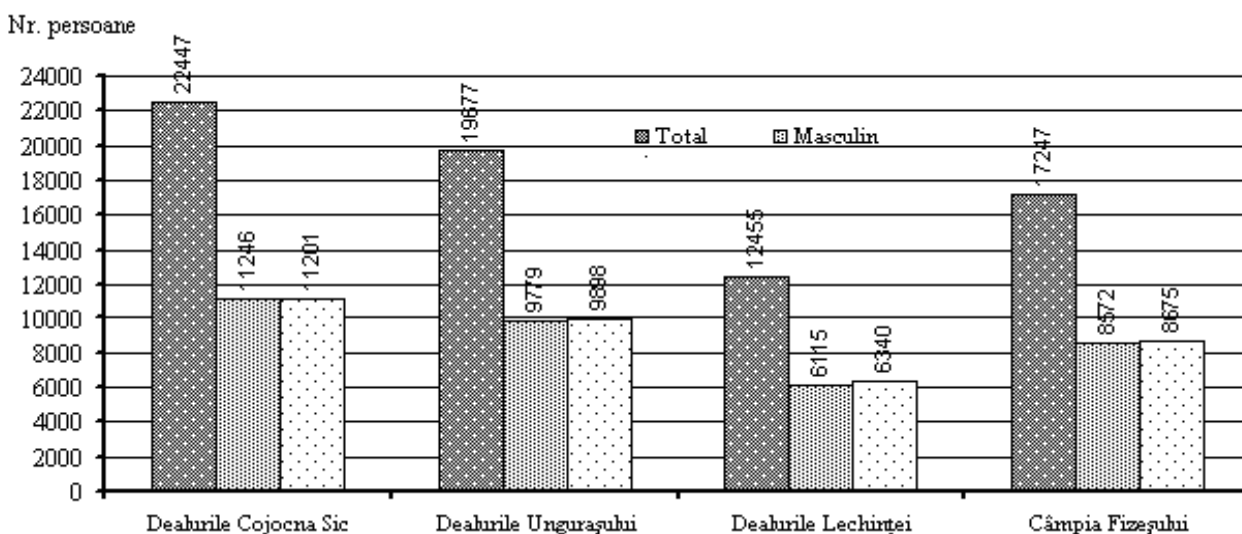


Fig. 4. The Someșană Plain. Population structure by gender, in the subunits, in 2002.

Population structure by gender presents different aspects in the subunits (fig. 4). Thus, the population is predominantly male, in Lechinței Hills, in Ungurașului Hills and Fizeșului Plain, the most significant disparities of the male population being recorded in Ungurașului Hills (51.7%). In Cojocna-Sic Hills a relatively balanced structure can be seen (fig. 4).

**3.3.2. The age groups structure of the population**

The analysis of the population structuring on age groups was done progressively during the population censuses in 1910, 1966, 1992 and 2002. In 1910, the young population accounted for 49.3% of the total population. The share of adult population was slightly more reduced than that of the young population (43.2%) while the old population (of 60 and over 60) accounted for 7.4% of the total population in the Someșană Plain. Until 1966 it can be said that the population in the Someșană Plain was young, the share of the population under 20 being of 49.3% in 1910 and 37% in 1966. After 1966, there were significant changes as far as the share of old population was concerned at

the population censuses in 1992 and 2002, when the population of 65 and over 65 exceeded 18% of the total population, these values placing the population in the Someșană Plain.

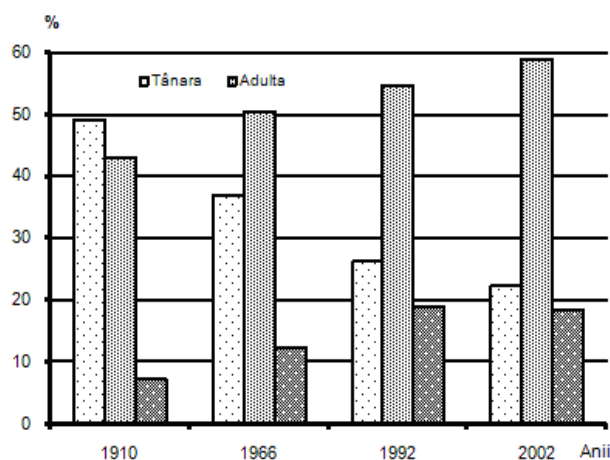


Fig. 5. The evolution of the population structure by age groups in the 1910, 1966, 1992 and 2002 censuses.

Depending on the share of elderly population group (fig. 5), the following situations can be distinguished:



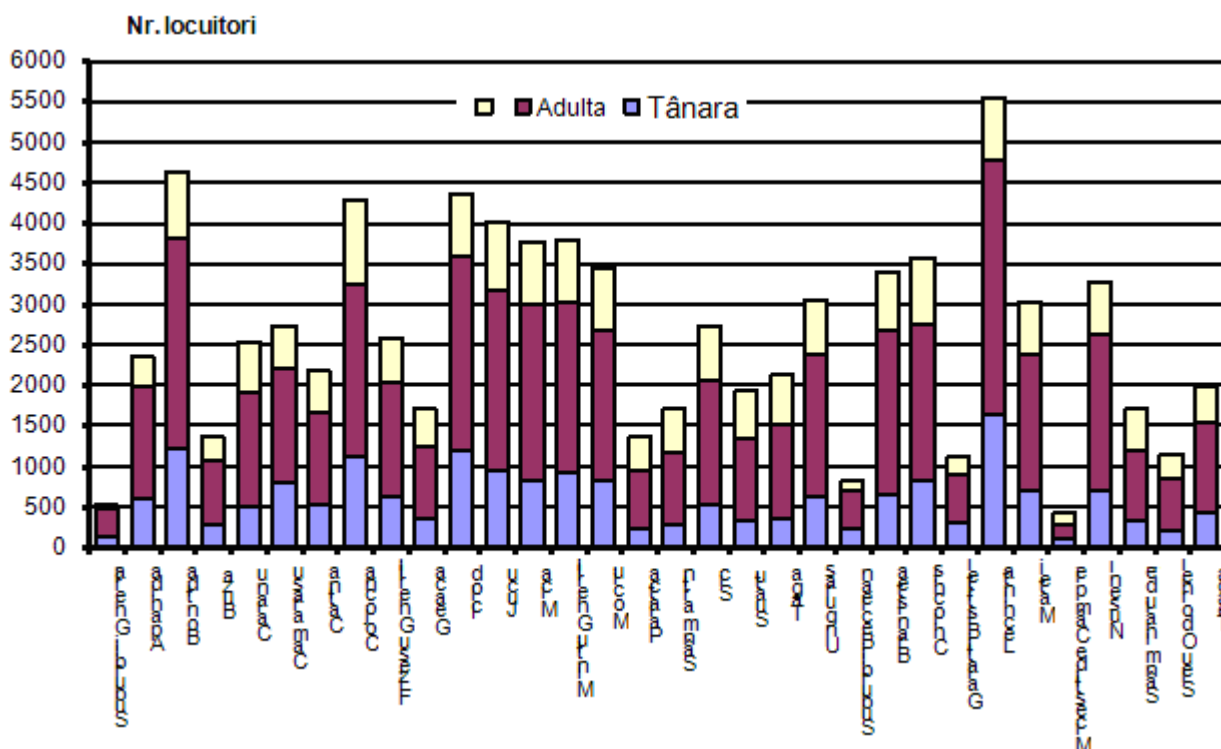


Fig. 6. The Someșană Plain. Population structure, by age groups at the community level in 2002.

- communities/villages with a high aging level where this age group has more than 25% share. These communities are located in the central compartment of the plain: Geaca, Pălatca, Sânmărtin, Suatu, Țaga and in the south east one: Miceștii de Câmpie, Sânmihaiu de Câmpie, Șieu Odorhei;

- communities with a minimum aging level (16-24.9%), category that accounts for the most administrative units of the Someșană Plain (21 communities, representing 66% of the total);

- communities with a reduced aging level-below 16% the share elderly population, category which accounts only the communities of Lechința, Apahida and the suburbs of the city of Gherla.

### 3.3.3. The professional structure

The social and economic structure of the population shows the degree of population participation in the economic activities.

In 1966, 66.5% of the 101 057 inhabitants registered in the Someșană Plain were active. The decrease in the number of the economically active inhabitants was more severe between 1966 and 1922, when there were significant reductions in the number of population all over the settlements of the Someșană Plain.

At the 2002 population census, under the well-known circumstances of geodemographic evolution in the Someșană Plain, the share of the active population dropped to 37.4%.

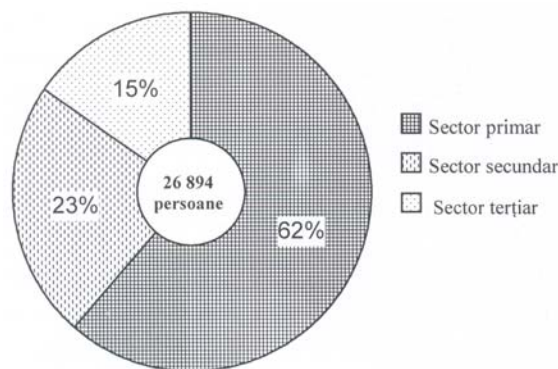


Fig. 7. The structure of active population employed in main economic sectors in Someșană Plain in 2002.

Agriculture is the specificity of the area. This explains the exclusively rural character of the Someșană Plain, the “plain” denomination referring to its agricultural function and not to its relief, which is hilly. The social and economic development of the localities in the Someșană Plain, oriented towards the basic sector, can be explained by the specificities of its relief, the drinking and industrial water deficit, the difficulty of organizing and maintaining certain intensively used.

The general rate of the educational level is of 88.6%, higher than the national average rate (84.6%). The study of population, according to the educational characteristics presented in the data of the 2002 population census, shows that the most numerous category (37.8%) is represented by the secondary school graduates.

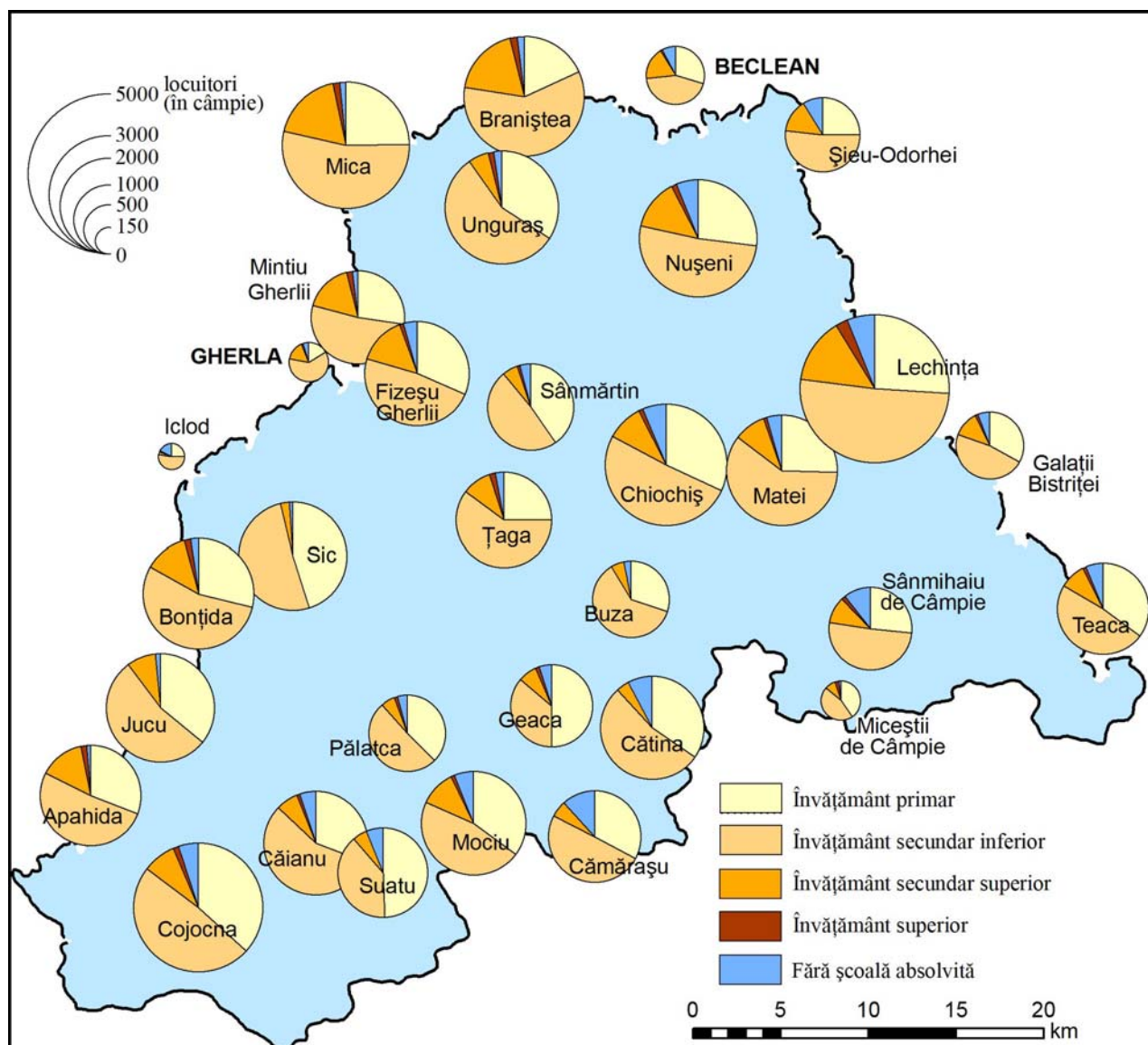


Fig. 8. The Someșană Plain. The population structure of 10 years and over by school level completed in 2002.

The rate of the education level, ( $P^p = P^p * 100 / P_{10\text{years and over}}$  where  $P^p$  represents the number of people with a certain level of training) indicates that the largest category (37.8%) is represented by secondary school graduates.

Graduates of this form of education are in proportion of 50.4% female and 49.6% male population. Compared to the average in all communes in Romania (34.1%) in the 2002 census, the share of this category is much higher in Someșană Plain (table 47). The highest value (39.6%) was in Fizeșului Plain and the lowest one (36%) in Cojocna-Sic Hills.

### 3.3.4. The ethnic structure

The Someșană Plain has a relatively diverse ethnic structure, which is explained in terms of historical social factors that favoured the penetration of

foreign populations who settled in this territory, with a majority Romanian population

Romanian population in 2002 had a majority share in 117 settlements (83%). The Hungarian population was characterized by a slight relative increase in the period 1966-2002 from 26.1% to 26.5%. Of the 141 settlements in Someșană Plain, only in 16 localities with Romanian population there was not a high percentage of the Hungarian population while 22 were had a majority Hungarian population. The gypsies are the only one who have seen a significant increase in the period analyzed.

In 1966 they counted 2,443 people, and at the census of 2002 the number was almost double, 4,862 people, representing 6.3% of the total number of inhabitants of Someșană Plain. This population growth was not only a better identification of those concerned, but also due to their demographic vitality. One can



highlight the localities where the percentage of the gypsies is exceeding 20%: Lechința (20.3%), Moruț 22% and even 25% in Vermeș (Lechința), Fizeșu Gherlii 25%, Cojocna 31.9%. The large number of gypsies in the

village of Moruț, Vermeș, Dipșa and Lechința is due to the German population who migrated from these villages and to the high flow of gypsies who settled there.

Table 1. The ethnic structure of the population in Someșană Plain registered at four censuses between 1910-2002.

Year	Total population	Romanians		Hungarians		Germans		Gypsies		Other ethnicities	
		no.	(%)	no.	(%)	no.	(%)	no.	(%)	no.	(%)
1910	99,905	61,142	61.2	31,070	31.1	5,295	5.3	0	0	2,398	2.4
1966	111,057	79,426	71.5	28,986	26.1	84	0.1	2,443	2.2	92	0.08
1992	77,509	52,861	68.2	21,005	27.1	78	0.1	3,410	4.4	23	0.03
2002	71,862	48,123	67.1	19,042	26.5	71	0.1	4,862	6.3	36	0.05

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followers, representing 28.5%. Significant losses were recorded among the Orthodox religion followers, who, in 2002, had with 2785 less followers than the previous census. Other religions, which registered a decrease in the number of believers were reformed religion, with less significant losses (only -0.6%) and Unitarian religion (-14.4%).

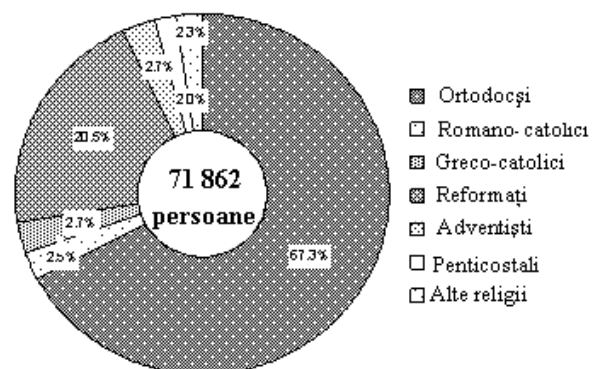


Fig. 9. The Someșană Plain Religious structure of population 2002 census.

### 3.3.5. The confessional structure of population

The religious structure is more diverse than the national. The Someșană Plain is a region where in the past millennium, according to social and historical factors influence, there were significant changes in the confessional structure. To the Orthodox religion specific to the indigenous Romanian population, was added the Catholic religion of the conquering Hungarian population and of those colonized over the centuries.

From the 1992 census, the Romanian society has undergone profound economic and social transformation, with direct influence on the number and structure of the religious population. Firstly there was a decrease in the number of inhabitants in Someșană Plain and this is reflected in reducing the number of followers of most religions. The most significant decrease was registered in the Greek Catholic population which from 1992 to 2002 lost 774

Decrease in the number of followers, in these confessions, can be attributed partly due to the passage of part of the population in the neo-cults, whose share increased by 46% during 1992-2002, accounting for 5.1% of the total population of Plain (from 3.2% in 1992). The greatest increase of 108% was registered among Pentecostal Christians confession followed by the Adventist population (25.4%) and 8.8% in the Baptist population. The three religions registered in 2002 an extra number of 1,156 followers from the previous census.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The Someșană Plain, situated in the central northern part of the Transylvanian Plain, covers the whole sector crossed by the tributaries of the Someșul Mic river (Zăpodie, Murătoiu, Gădălin, Fizeș and Bandău) and the Someșul Mare river (Meleș and Șieu through its tributary Dipșa). Its individuality, from a

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Agriculture is the specificity of the area. This explains the exclusively rural character of the Someșană Plain, the "plain" denomination referring to its agricultural function and not to its relief, which is hilly.

The social and economic development of the localities in the Someșană Plain, oriented towards the basic sector, can be explained by the specificities of its relief, the drinking and industrial water deficit, the

difficulty of organizing and maintaining certain intensively used

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