



Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism

Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning

Journal homepage: <http://jssp.reviste.ubbcluj.ro>



# Rural Space of Harghita County. The Ethnic Structure of the Population

Elena DĂNILĂ<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, Bucharest, ROMANIA

E-mail: [danila\\_elena@yahoo.com](mailto:danila_elena@yahoo.com)

**Keywords:** *Harghita County, ethnic structure, ethnic assimilation, majority, minority*

## ABSTRACT

The Hungarian population is concentrated in the upper ponds of the Mureş river and the Olt river, in the Eastern Carpathians and the Eastern border of the Intracarpethian Transylvanian Plateau. This zone is situated 200 km far off Hungary and separated from its territory by Apuseni Mountains, whose population is almost 100% Romanian. Harghita County is composed of 67 localities, with a population of 304.969 inhabitants. A big amount of the Hungarian population which inhabits Romania is concentrated in Harghita County, which is part of the Central Development Region. The Region holds a percentage of 29,9 % of Hungarian population, while the county itself holds 85% of this population. The Romanian people represents 14% of the county population and it is concentrated in 9 administrative-territorial units, out of which 7 are communes. In these 7 communes the amount of Romanian population is over 70%. These are located in the North of the county, except for the Voşlăbeni commune, which is located in the center of the area inhabited by Szekelys. There are other villages preponderantly inhabited by Romanians, like Livezi and Făgetel, which are not part of the 7 communes with Romanian population in majority. According to the historian Ioan I. Russu, the Romanian population from the territory inhabited by Szekelys today, was assimilated in the Middle Ages. This process is treated in several studies and it is presumed that the Romanian people represented at first the majority in some parts of the territory inhabited by Szekelys, but a great amount of it was "szekelysed". The paper focuses on the study of the ethnical structure and its evolution in the rural space of Harghita County, emphasizing the characteristics of the rural settlements according to the ethnical majorities and their distribution in the territory.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the demographic processes and phenomena is necessary the recourse to history. Thus, various factors including macro social long-term processes should be considered. The evolution of ethnic structure is based on factors such as territorial discontinuities, emigration, assimilation, ethnic enclavisation, urbanization and the demographic regime specific to each ethnic group.

This article is the result of an attempt to interpret statistical and demographic data since 1930 and ending with 2011, the understanding of current events not being possible without knowing their genesis and evolution. Relevant for the demographic study of

Harghita County is the assimilation issue, respectively the Magyarization and Szeklerization of Romanians from the former Székely Seats.

Compared with the situation of urban communities, from the structural point of view, mono-ethnic rural communities have a much slower movement. In case of mixed ethnic communities, population increases are based on distinct factors. For Romanian population relevant is the high natural growth rate and for Hungarian population decisive is the assimilation of other ethnic population. Population growth resulting from migratory growth comes from counties in its immediate vicinity, which can be demonstrated at local level, by preponderance, in the heart of Székely of the of Hungarian communities and

as you get towards the borders of the county, the areas inhabited by the Romanians are greater in number.

The criteria that can determine the ethnicity in Transylvania are the language, the religion and the anthroponomy. Of these three features, in many cases, in Harghita County, only the name remained relevant to the complex processes of loss of ethnic identity that took place in this area.

Two groups having different cultures and lifestyles, groups that have retained its identity, can be found in this space. The cohabitation in the county is rather conflictive, mentalities of the two ethnic groups being different.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to prepare this paper, I used the method of bibliographical research, consulting population and housing census data from 1930, 1992, 2002 and the provisional results of 2011 Census. The information was later processed so as to be relevant for my own research.

An important source of information, in order to understand the correct processes and phenomena in the studied area, is the paper *Structuri etnice si confesionale in judetele Covasna si Harghita* (Ethnic and Religious Structures in Covasna and Harghita Counties), by Phd. Ion Lăcătușu.

Other consulted document was "Territorial Planning of Harghita County Plan", 2010.

For mapping the ethnic composition of Harghita County population we used ArcGIS 9 software, processing information from 1:100,000 topographic maps since 1997.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. General characteristics

Harghita County is located in the center of the country and is largely centered on the mountainous area of the central group of Eastern Carpathians, having as dominance the natural corridor of Giurgeu Ciuc Basin, whose influence goes beyond the limits of the area [1].

The county has a surface of 6649 km<sup>2</sup>, representing 2.8% of the national territory.

The landscape is quite varied, predominantly mountainous, the mountain areas occupying 60% of the territory.

Because of its location, the territory of the county is crossed by important communication routes linking Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia, converging towards the urban and industrial concentration of Brasov city.

This geographical position has made the South-Eastern Transylvania to always represent an area

of demographic and cultural overlaps and confluences. Administrative-territorial units of the county have evolved both quantitatively and numerically. The most important changes have been achieved by moving some of them in the upper ranks of cities and towns. Also, the number of administrative-territorial units has increased lately, by setting up new communes [1].

Currently, the county includes 67 territorial administrative units, which have 294 localities. Of these, 28 belong to cities and towns and 236 are villages, components of communes.

The presence of high altitude relief in the county determines a certain spread of settlements in the territory, mainly in lowland and plateau areas. The population density of villages is of 3.5/100 km<sup>2</sup>, the average at country level being of 5.6/100 km<sup>2</sup>. This low density is due to the large extent of the villages in the mountain areas.

The geographical position of the county plays an important role in history, being situated at the crossroads linking South-Eastern Transylvania to Moldova and Wallachia, through the passes of Eastern Carpathians.

For understanding the evolution and formation of the concentration of ethnic Hungarian population in the county, different aspects such as the geographical and climatic conditions and historical context that followed the establishment of Székelys in the Carpathians [2] passes should be considered.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in Eastern Transylvania Székelys were settled. Throughout the feudal period, the administrative and territorial organization of Székelys was a specific one - Székely Seats, enjoying local autonomy.

### 3.2. The structure of population

Harghita and Covasna are the only counties in Romania where Hungarian ethnicity constitutes the numerical majority of population.

According to provisional results of 2011 Census of Population the total population in Harghita county is of 304,969 persons, out of which 40,431 are of Romanians (13.25%), and 258,615 are Hungarian ethnics (84.80%). Hungarian population in the two counties represents one third of the total number of Hungarians in Romania. Ethno-demographic situation of Harghita county is not represented by the image of a compact Hungarian ethnic block, given that there are a significant number of people ascending double identity, or controversial belonging groups (Roma), etc.

#### 3.2.1. Majority-minority report

Harghita County has a distinct ethnic structure, in which the minority represents the numerical majority and the majority is in fact minority.

Before the Unification of December 1, 1918, Romanians were considered minority, and the Hungarian majority belonged to the national state, according to the specific practices of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

After Unification, the roles have changed, the Romanians gaining the majority statute.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, after the Vienna Dictate, after the disposal of Northern Transylvania things have changed again.

The two communities of Harghita County, Romanian and Hungarian, have the common characteristics of the nationalities they belong to, but present also specific features, based on the reversed dominance report between majority and minority, according to the ethnic composition of the county.

Another noteworthy feature of the presented area is the existence in parallel of the two communities that do not communicate to each other.

Basically, the numerical majority of Hungarians of the county manifest segregationist tendencies, trying to eliminate everything that is Romanian characteristic, situation that in other areas cannot be found.

There is a constant battle for supremacy, which is based on the numerous historical events that

left their mark on the area. The population of ethnic Hungarians of Harghita County holds the political monopole, winning the leading positions continuously, thus having a dominant status, while the Romanians are situated on the opposite side, facing institutional discrimination often.

### 3.2.2. Demographic dimensions of Romanian communities

During 1850-1992 the Romanian population increased especially in urban areas, mainly in the county seat, Miercurea Ciuc, and in Romanian localities from the border of the county.

Besides the urban localities, population increases were recorded in mono-ethnic villages in the basins of Toplița - Bilbor, Corbu, Tulgheș, Subcetate Gălăuțaș, and Livezi, Săcel, Vidacut and Voșlăbeni villages.

The assimilation process of the Romanians from "Székely" is emphasized by the drastic decrease of their number in most localities of the county.

According to the Census of Population in 18.03.2002, over 60% of Harghita County localities have Romanian communities with a population less than 100 inhabitants.

Table 1. Evolution of ethnic Romanian population between 1930-2011.

Year	Total number of Romanians in the county	(%)
1930	24,996	100.00
1992	48,948	195.82
2002	45,870	183.50
2011	40,431	161.74

Source: 1930, 1992, 2002 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing

Table 2. Evolution of Hungarian population during 1930-2011, in Romania and Harghita County.

Year	Total number of Hungarians in Romania	Total number of Hungarians in Harghita County	(%)
1930	1,423,459	216,615	15.21
1992	1,624,959	295,104	18.16
2002	1,431,807	276,038	19.28
2011	1,237,746	258,615	20.89

Source: 1930, 1992, 2002 Census of Population and provisional results of 2011 Census

Table 3. Evolution of Roma population during 1930-2011.

Year	Total number of Roma people in Harghita County	(%)
1930	2702	100.00
1992	3827	141.63
2002	3835	141.93
2011	5422	200.66

Source: 1930, 1992, 2002 and 2011 Census of Population

The coexistence of Romanians and Hungarians in Harghita county has negative effects on the first, in terms of loss of national identity by giving up to

language and traditions, this being the most common situation in ethnically mixed localities. Assimilation is manifested by loss of national identity, in this case the

Romanians taking over the Hungarian ethnic characteristics, adopting the language spoken by them, lifestyle, culture. In general, the Romanians preserve their religious affiliation, whose rituals they still practice. In the early stages of assimilation, the bilingualism process, often present in a multiethnic environment is manifested.

At the origin of assimilation process there are many factors, through which poverty, difficult situation the Orthodox Church was passing through, Romanians lack of will to maintain their identity and origin of mixed ethnic families. It is known that Szeklerization was achieved by actions on the Church and School. Romanians were many times forced to move from one ethnicity to another, because of the situation in which they were at that time. The problem intensified by the lack of Romanian priests, teachers, or even the Romanian schools. Thus, wanting to continue their life in their environment, they felt forced, because not receiving enough support from outside, because they were numerically in minority, to learn Hungarian (linguistic assimilation is one of the stages of Magyarization) and then to change their religious confession. Switching from one religion to another (religious assimilation) was done in a longer time. There are known a lot of cases when the population declared Hungarian ethnicity, knew the language but belonged to the Orthodox confession. As regards the situation presented, Magyarisation faced obstacles in areas where parishes with Romanian priests were present.

In the villages from the heart of Székely, where the Romanian communities were small, the assimilation occurred naturally. Assimilation is hastened also by the cohabitation in ethnically mixed localities, 40% of Romanians in Harghita county being in this situation.

Szeklerization process occurred over centuries, slowly, both in a peaceful and natural way, but also by force, in periods of constraints.

Magyarisation is a long process of cultural, linguistic and religious assimilation.

The phenomenon of ethnic assimilation by Magyarization affected equally the other ethnic minorities such as Gypsies, Jews, Armenians and Germans.

### **3.2.3. Demographic dimensions of Székely communities**

At present, the names "Szekler", "Szekely Land", "Székely" means region where citizens of the Hungarian ethnic group live, characterized by certain particularities of language, costumes, traditions, customs, etc. [2].

Hungarians in Harghita County have common features with Hungarians in Hungary, especially in

terms of culture, language, traditions and values, but presents distinct characteristics, arising from the condition of "majority minority". Over time, the Hungarians in "Szeklerland" came to live in insular settlements, away from the central ethnic block, being separated from it by areas inhabited by Romanian ethnic population. They have difficulties coping and accepting the position of minority, position which they occupied beginning with the December 1, 1918 Unification.

Hungarian interests must harmonize with those of the Romanians in the area, taking into account that they are placed in the center of the country, being surrounded on all sides by the Romanians.

In Harghita County, the population of Hungarian ethnicity represents 84.8% of the population. To note is that this ethnic group, reported to the whole country, represents only 20.89% (in 2011), which contradicts the concept that the entire population of Hungarian ethnicity is concentrated in Transylvania, these inhabitants, plus the ones in Covasna County, occupying only the Carpathian area. Thus it represents approximately 30% of Hungarians in Romania, the rest being scattered in the Transylvanian Basin, near the border with Hungary, and about 10% are located in Bucharest.

From 1930 to 2011, the population of Hungarian ethnicity in the country experienced a decrease, with a peak in 1992 of 1,624,959 inhabitants, while their percentage in Harghita County compared to the number in the whole country has increased from 15, 21% in 1930 to 20.89% in 2011.

### **3.2.4. Demographic dimensions of Roma communities**

Roma population represents the component with the highest birth rate which can influence the percentages of the two ethnic groups, Romanian and Hungarian, in the overall population, noticing a lot of cases in which they said they were either Romanian or more often, Hungarians, being assimilated by them.

With the exception of some mono-ethnic gypsies communities of Romanian language, most gypsy population, at least linguistically, was integrated almost entirely by ethnic Hungarian population [2], 138. In 2011, the Roma population was of 5422 inhabitants, representing 1.77% from the total population of the county, of which 3208, nearly 60%, lived in rural areas.

Roma population fluctuations are based, in addition to their high birth rate, to the way the census is conducted, which most often consists of the individual statement. It is not surprising that from 1930 to 2011, in the census data, the Roma population had doubled in number, they declaring themselves when Romanian, when Hungarians, when Gypsies.

Table 4. The population of Harghita County from 1930 to 2011, the main nationalities.

Year	Total	Romanians	Hungarians	Roma	Germans	Others
1930	250,194	24,996	216,615	2,702	1,024	4,857
1992	348,335	48,948	295,104	3,827	199	257
2002	326,222	45,870	276,038	3,855	140	319
2011	304,969	40,431	258,615	5,422	72	429
Absoulte growth 2011/1930	54,775	15,435	42,000	2720	-952	-4,428
Relative Growth 2011/1930	1.21 times	1.61 times	1.19 times	2.00 times	0.07 times	0.08 times

Source: processed after Lacatusu I., 2008; 2011 Census of Population.

Table 5. The change in the ratio of Romanian and Hungarian population between 1930 and 2011, by county total and by area (%).

Type of population	1930 Census		2011 Census	
	Romanians	Hungarians	Romanians	Hungarians
Total population	24.996	216.615	40.431	258.615
Rural population	17.517	180.991	16.391	156.579
Urban population	7.479	35.624	24.040	102.036

Source: 1930 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

Table 6. The change in the ratio of Romanian and Hungarian population in the communes from Harghita County, between 1930 and 2011.

Name	1930		2011		Name	1930		2011	
	RO	HU	RO	HU		RO	HU	RO	HU
Atid	0.34	97.93	0.44	92.46	Mihăileni	13.97	85.73	19.64	79.9
Avrămești	0.63	97.89	0.78	87.04	Mugeni	2.41	95.48	0.66	98.37
Bilbor	84.37	11.13	99.5	0.49	Ocland	6.46	90.32	1.11	98.4
Brădești	0.34	99.30	1.15	98.63	Păuleni-Ciuc	0.15	99.73	1.64	98.29
Căpâlnița	0.14	99.25	0.34	95.65	Plăieșii de Jos	15.40	83.5	6.30	91.93
Ciuc Sângeorgiu	6.26	93.28	0.44	98.23	Praid	1.63	93.43	0.88	96.06
Ciumani	1.48	97.85	0.29	99.67	Remetea	0.98	97.98	0.9	98.94
Cârța	1.32	98.23	0.33	99.66	Săcel	31.06	63.90	19.75	61.47
Corbu	65.75	29.09	86.89	8.71	Sărmaș	67.5	24.20	81.46	18.16
Corund	0.13	97.69	0.33	96.73	Secuieni	1.46	89.71	2.8	74.48
Dănești	1.06	97.89	0.69	99.04	Siculeni	3.53	95.21	5.49	94.46
Dealul	0.19	98.79	0.48	99.3	Sâncrăieni	2.02	97.06	1.27	93.72
Ditrău	1.6	95.03	1.00	98.86	Sândominic	3.44	94.83	0.41	97.93
Dârjiu	0.27	99.61	1.46	92.78	Sânmartin	4.08	93.49	1.12	98.83
Felicești	0.08	97.31	0.94	98.39	Sânsimion	1.61	94.94	1.19	98.48
Frumoasa	17.48	79.72	2.39	95.84	Subcetate	91.59	5.833	91.7	4.670
Gălăuțuș	52.1	30.79	77.66	20.75	Suseni	0.95	98.41	1.26	96.34
Joseni	5.87	93.09	0.82	98.17	Simonești	0.21	98.14	0.88	97.77
Lazărea	0.96	96.42	1.41	97.23	Tulgheș	37.34	54.39	70.84	28.84
Lueta	0.83	97.15	0.23	99.76	Tușnad	2.42	95.94	1.46	92.72
Lunca de Jos	6.11	86.57	0.77	99.20	Ulieș	1.12	96.9	1.46	93.54
Lunca de Sus	2.27	97.11	1.09	98.78	Vârșag	0.28	99.71	0.25	99.74
Lupeni	0.18	97.87	0.4	96.33	Voșlăbeni	72.97	23.15	58.66	40.13
Mărtiniș	1.06	96.35	1.28	98.42	Zetea	0.31	97.15	0.41	98.31
Merești	20.66	76.59	0.45	99.17					

Source: 1930 Census of Population, Provisional data of 2011 Census of Population

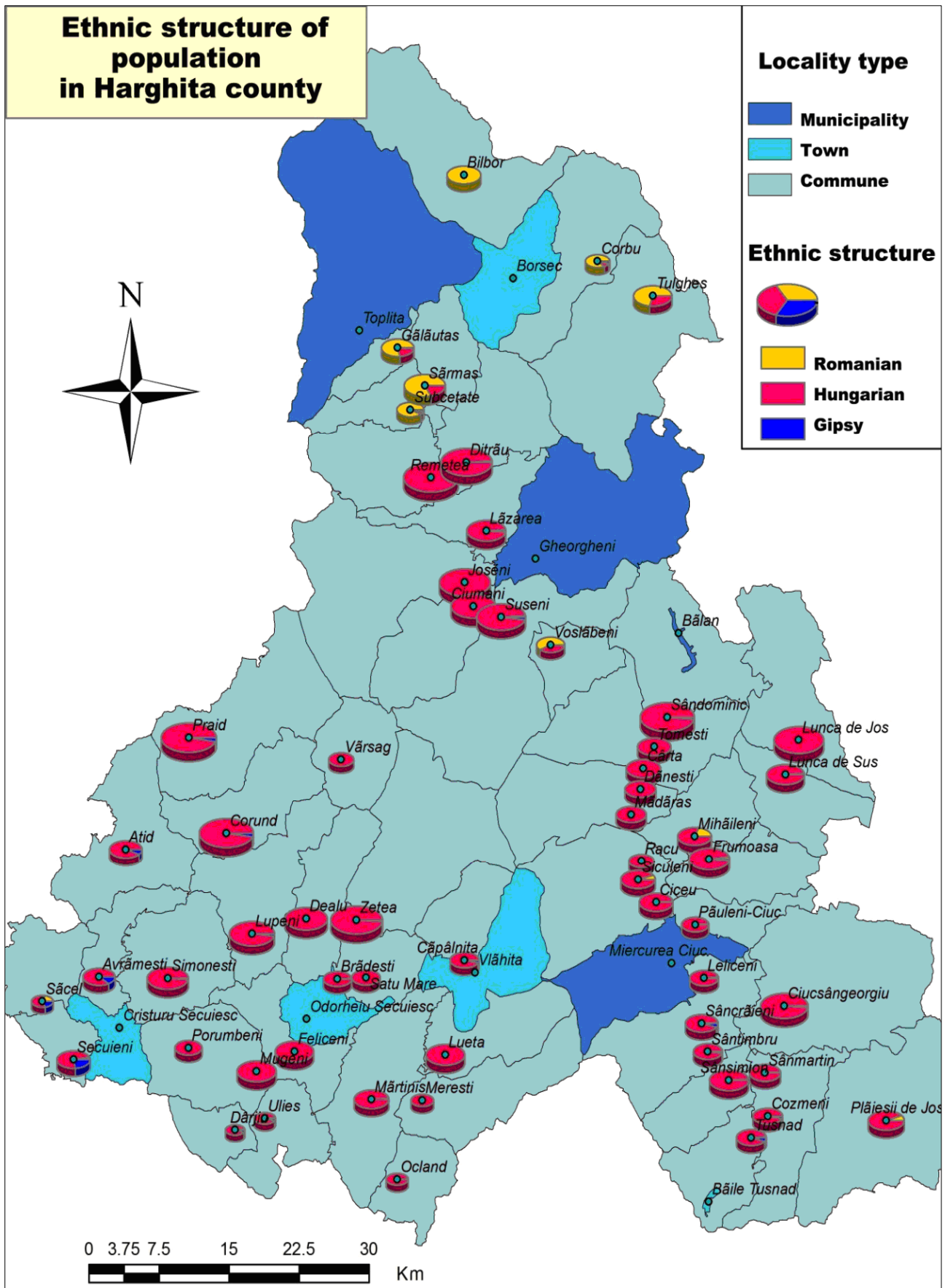


Fig. 1. Ethnic structure of Harghita County 2011.

According to provisional results of 2011 Census, the Roma population at the level of the country was of 619,007 inhabitants, of which 0.87% was living in Harghita County.

### 3.2.5. Evolution of the ethnic structure of localities

Between 1930 and 2011, Harghita county population increased by 1.21 times, from a population of 250,194 in 1930 to a population of 304,969 inhabitants in 2011. Throughout the county, Romanians number

increased 1.61 times, the Hungarians number 1.19 times, and a relatively significant increase registered the Roma population, which has doubled.

What is noticeable in the evolution of population and ethnic structure between 1930 and 2011 is the fact that from the absolute growth of county population, of 54,775 inhabitants, 48.49% is represented by the contribution made by the population of Hungarian ethnicity.

Another aspect is the decrease in Harghita County of people belonging to other ethnic groups, from 2.35% in 1930 to 0.16% in 2011.

Table 7. 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

	Year	Permanent population total		Romanians		Hungarian	
		No. of people	Relative growth	No. of people	Relative growth	No. of people	Relative growth
Total population	2011	304,969	0.93	40,431	0.87	258,615	0.92
	2002	326,222	1	46,225	1	278,483	1
Cities and towns	2011	128,597	0.89	24,040	0.84	102,036	0.88
	2002	144,083	1	28,302	1	115,186	1
Communes	2011	176,372	0.96	16,391	0.91	156,579	0.95
	2002	182,139	1	17,923	1	163,295	1

Source: Provisional data of 2011 Census of Population

Table 8. Population structure of Harghita County, by area (urban and rural) and by the main ethnic groups, according to 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

	Total	Romanians		Hungarians		Roma	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
County total	304,969	40,431	13.25	258,615	84.8	5,422	1.77
Cities and towns	128,597	24,040	18.69	102,036	79.34	2,214	1.72
Communes	176,372	16,391	9.29	156,579	88.77	3,208	1.81

Source: Provisional data of 2011 Census of Population and Housing

During 1930-2011, a great increase in urban than in rural ethnic Romanian population areas can be observed. Romanians decreased numerically in rural areas during the last 81 years with 1126 inhabitants, while in urban areas they tripled.

Detailing the situation at the level of existing rural administrative units, for Romanians and Hungarians, the following values can be obtained:

For a clearer analysis, from the communes in Table no. 6 were considered only the communes that existed in 1930, to facilitate comparison with the situation in 2011. Following the correlation between the evolution of the total population of Harghita county localities and their ethnic structure in the period 1930-2011, the localities can be divided into mono-ethnic villages and ethnically mixed.

Among the localities where ethnic Romanian population is the most significant, Bilbor ranks the first, recording a percentage of 99.5% ethnic Romanian population in 2011, during the last 81 years, from 1930 Census winning 15.31% (up from 84.37%), Subcetate

(91.7% in 2011), Corbu, with a percentage of 86.89% Romanians, registered an increase of 21.14%, Gălăuțaș (77.66%), Sărmaș (81.46%), Tulgheș (70.84%) and Voșlăbeni which unlike other communes mentioned, recorded a decrease of ethnic Romanian population from 72.97% in 1930 to 58.66% in 2011, which is also due to its positioning in the center of the county.

During 1930-2011, major decreases in the number of Romanians were recorded in the following localities: Ciuc Sângeorgiu, from 6.26% in 1930 to 0.44% in 2011, Frumoasa, from 17.48% to 2.39%, Merești (20.66% - 0.45%), Ocland (6.46% - 1.11%), Săcel (31.06% - 19.75%), Voșlăbeni, which although it has a majority population, has lost 14.31 percent.

Among the mono-ethnic Hungarian villages there are few which have less than 20 Romanians. These are Atid (11 Romanians), Avrămești, Căpâlnița (7), Cârța (9), Ciumani, Cozmeni, Dănești, Dârjiu, Dealu Lueta, Lupeni Merești (6), Ocland, Ulieș, Vârșag (4).

During the mentioned period, in many rural localities in Harghita County, the Romanian element

had lost in the favor of the Hungarian one, by the loss of ethnic identity. For a better understanding of these aspects, I created a map of ethnic structure of Harghita County, based on provisional results of 2011 Census of Population.

### 3.3. The situation of 2011 Census of Population and Housing

According to provisional results of 2011 Census, the permanent population of Harghita County is of 304,969 inhabitants, with 21,253 inhabitants less than in the recordings of 2002 Census. Population decrease is due to the same causes. Harghita County population represents 1.60% of the total population of the country.

Harghita County population structure, by ethnicity, in 2011 Census, is as follows: number of people who declared themselves Romanian was 40,431, representing 13.25% from the population of the county, the number of people who declared themselves ethnic Hungarian was 258,615, representing 84.8% from the population of the county, and that of people who declared themselves belonging to other ethnic group amounts 5,923, respectively 1.94% of the total population of the county.

Compared to the situation of 2002 Census, the percentage of main ethnic groups in population structure remained relatively constant, being noticeable only the increase of Roma population from 1.18% in 2002 to 1.77% in 2011 at county level.

The percentage of Romanians remained higher in urban areas, and the percentage of Hungarians in rural areas.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In Harghita County, only urban localities experienced significant increases. Specific to Harghita County is the ethnic achievement made in some localities with Romanian majority, by the ethnic Hungarian population.

The most vulnerable to assimilation were Romanian communities with a percentage below 10% of the population. It can be noted, however, the difference between the number of localities where Romanians virtually disappeared and the ones where their number has reduced substantially.

Birth rate should not be necessarily associated with the ethnic majority of a county, but rather with a regional demographic model, which is the result of the geographical environment, the socio-economic, cultural and religious situation,

In the analyzed area, the phenomenon of ethnic assimilation by Magyarization, equally included Romanians but also Gypsies, Hebrews, Armenians, Germans. It resulted in major ethnic losses for these

ethnic groups, losses which have contributed over time to maintain a Hungarian majority the area, perceived as a "strong Hungarian block".

From this research results that over history the Romanians adopted a specific way of survival, behavior allowing them to coexist with the Hungarian local majority, behavior characterized by knowledge of Hungarian language, maintaining good relations with local government institutions and personalities, the assertion of Romanian identity in a moderate manner, certain compromises, precisely for a good existence in parallel.

Vulnerability to the Magyarization is based on the impossibility to maintain the identity in the conditions of insular communities in a sea of Hungarians.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My gratitude goes first to PhD Vasile S. Cucu, who inspired my desire for knowledge and the need for individual research.

Information provided in order to complete this work, to understand the problems in the studied area and the support provided have been my guides in developing the article.

Also, I want to thank on this way to my colleague Ionuț ANGHELE, which suggested to me the possibility of developing the studied topic and helped me in the realization of certain elements. This work was financed through the contract POSDRU/86/1.2/S/57462, strategic PROJECT „Educația și formarea profesională în sprijinul creșterii economice și dezvoltării societății bazate pe cunoaștere”, “Calitate în învățământul superior”, cofinanced by The European Social Fund, through the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013.

The intellectual property of the results obtained by the scholars belongs to the University of Bucharest.

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