

Full Length Research Paper

The socio-economic dimension of rural development for the North-East Region of Romania

Beciu Silviu*, Popa Oana, Nistor Stefania and Olteanu Victor

University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Bucharest, street Marasti, no 59, Bucharest CP 011464, Romania.

Accepted 22 July, 2011

This paper is aimed at the approach of social and economic dimension of rural development at the level of the North-Eastern Romanian Region, in order to identify the main problems and perspectives of the region, offering suitable solutions for the implementation and improvement of the actual development strategy of the region. The methodology used SWOT analysis, in order to highlight the actual dimension and perspective of sustainable development for this region. Besides calculating the conventional GNP and income as the primary indicators of economic progress, the methodology used an adapted regional Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW) developed by economist Herman Daly and theologian John Cobb (1994), and a new version made by the United Nations Development Programme (2010). The methodology also used the results of a research project developed in all the six counties of the region, which provided this paper scientific support. The research results indicated development of agrotourism and non-agricultural activities as the main solutions for socio-economical problems of the region. One of the identified developing solutions was the infrastructure improvement of the region, with direct effect on increasing investments in the rural areas and the development of economical activities, based on rich cultural heritage of the region.

Key words: North East Region, Romania, rural development.

INTRODUCTION

The Northeast Region is the most important part of Romania, in terms of number of inhabitants in rural areas (22.3% of total rural Romanian population in 2008) (Table 1). It is also the Romanian region with one of the lowest GDP per capita. This research is trying to explain what are the causes that determine this situation, and what can be the solution for a better future development in the rural areas in the North East Region of Development. The rural development and planning problem is one of the most complex themes of the contemporary world, because in essence, it means achieving a balance between economic, environmental and socio-cultural conservation of countryside of the country on the one

hand, and trend of modernization of rural life, on the other hand (Otiman, 2010). Romania ranks last or next to last place on many indicators on the population's living conditions and rural areas lies heavy on unfavourable balance in its case (Alber, 2004). Analysis of the social dimension considers people as base of rural development (Zahiu, 2010). As Kebir (2008) said, the cultural resources constitute an increasingly significant economic issue for regional communities of all types (rural, urban, metropolitan, etc.) as they become major components of value production.

For Romania, the rural areas, both in size and structure as well as regarding its function have a special importance. Romanian rural space size as measured by the share of rural population is an element of reference in defining the role of this territory in all national territory (Bold, 2004). Romanian rural area comprises 93.7% of Romania's surface and in this space resides about half of

*Corresponding author. E-mail: beciu_silviu@yahoo.com. Tel: (004) 0723.165.907.

Table 1. Distribution of the Romanian population by region in 2008.

No.	Region	Total peoples	Male	Women	Total Urban	Total Rural	Male	Women	Peoples/km ²
1.	Total	21504442	10477611	11026831	11835328	9669114	4819099	4850015	90.2
2.	North Vest	2722063	1326914	1395149	1450982	1271081	631641	639440	79.7
3.	Centre	2523510	1235448	1288062	1500085	1023425	512931	510494	74.0
4.	North - East	3823492	1892604	1930888	1663685	2159807	1084616	1075191	103.8
5.	South – East	2819565	1381110	1438455	1553115	1266450	634826	631624	78.8
6.	South -Muntenia	3284525	1602014	1682511	1359191	1925334	950881	974453	95.3
7.	Bucharest –Ilfov	2248026	1055792	1192234	2072828	175198	85392	89806	1234.5
8.	South - West Oltenia	2262274	1108175	1154099	1075425	1186849	589013	597836	77.4
9.	West	1925377	930333	995044	1215422	709955	349812	360143	60.1

Source: INSSE, Romania 2010.

Table 2. The regional operational program for Romania, 2007-2013, financial and technical information (Euro).

No	Activities	The European union contribution	National public contribution	Total public contribution
1.	Support to sustainable development of urban growth poles	1 117 806 529	273 365 256	1 391 171 785
2.	Improvement of regional and local transport infrastructure	758 355 021	118 355 985	876 711 006
3.	Improvement of social infrastructure	558 903 260	98 629 992	657 533 252
4.	Strengthening the regional and local business environment	633 423 700	76 471 117	709 894 817
5.	Sustainable development and promotion of tourism	558 903 264	57 862 924	616 766 188
6.	Technical Assistance	98 629 988	32 876 662	131 506 650
7.	Total	3 726 021 762	657 561 936	4 383 583 698

Source: The European Commission, Regional Operational Program CCI no: 2007RO161PO001, Decision number: C/2007/3470. Final approval date: 2007-07-12.

the population. Dona (2010) said “the lack of a realistic vision of the future of the Romanian village, of the new occupations and qualifications required in the process of diversification of activities - to establish a multifunctional rural development is becoming more acute”. The Romanian village is no longer able to thrive only through nature’s gifts, the complex capitalization of currently stored wealth, of the scientific achievements in producing new material goods, as well as spiritual and cultural values adjusted to the changes that take place at global and regional levels, should constitute a strategy aiming at consolidating a prosperous future of the Romanian rural community. Hera (2006).

Adaptation strategies specific to rural communities in Romania, and implicitly in the North East region of development, were empirically grounded on a traditional natural and economic potential, promoting endogenous opportunities with social visibility (Gavrilescu, 2007).

Appropriate programs and investments can accelerate a region’s economic development but geographical location, administrative status of a village, which have great influence on the development, cannot be changed

(Lupu, 2007). The roles and positions of a region and its actors are constantly changing, providing opportunities for new future paths; a region must be sensitive to those changes. Therefore, one cannot overstress the comprehension of the changing techno-economic paradigm. It is also important to learn from the past, compare what has been done in other regions, and try to do some benchmarking (Harmaakorpi, 2006). One important issue in the Northeast Region is rural sustainable development and promotion of agro-tourism which is part of the 5th priority axis in the “Regional Operational Program” approved by The European Commission for Romania for the period 2007 to 2013 whose overall objective consists in supporting the economic, social, territorially balanced and sustainable development of the Romanian regions (Table 2).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main preliminary materials used for the socio-economical analysis of the Romanian North East Region of Development were the statistic database provided by the Romanian National Institute

Table 3. North-east development region – Areas, population, cities, communes and villages.

No.	Counties Names	Total Area (km ²)	Population	Number of cities	Number of communes	Number of villages
1.	Bacau	6.621	721.411	5	85	491
2.	Botosani	4.986	456.765	5	71	333
3.	Iasi	5.476	824.083	2	93	418
4.	Neamt	5.896	567.908	3	78	344
5.	Suceava	8.553	705.730	11	97	379
6.	Vaslui	5.318	456.686	2	81	449
7.	Total	36.850	3.732.583	46	506	2414

Source: INSSE, Romania 2010 (dates from 2008).

of Statistics and The Regional Development Plan 2007 to 2013 for the North East. Elaboration of SWOT analyses are based on field research documentation in the region as part of a national research project conducted by the authors of this paper.¹ The SWOT analysis are structuring the collected data in order to show strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks assumed by sustainable rural development in the North-East area of Romania and are offering the development solutions for the region, starting from the objectives of the region's rural development strategy.

The methodology is using diagnostic analysis of sustainable rural development social and economic aspects in the region of development, in order to identify existing resources and how they are recovered now. The collection of data, information and formulation of ideas, assumptions and conclusions are done through questionnaires and interviews adapted to this specific region. The assessment of rural development trends for the North East Region of Development is made using the new generation indicators of economic progress developed by the United Nations Development Programme: Human Development Index (HDI); and by economist Herman Daly and theologian John Cobb: Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (ISEW).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Romanian North-East region of development is the largest region of Romania, with an area of 36,850 km² (15.46% of the total territory). It has external borders with Ukraine and Moldova. In its composition are six counties: Bacau, Botosani, Neamt, Iasi, Suceava and Vaslui (Table 3). The economy of the North East Region was supported in the past by forced industrialization in the 1960s and 1970 (primarily petrochemical industry, furniture industry, construction materials and machine building). Our days, the North East is the most underdeveloped region of Romania - the GDP per capita being below national average (Table 4). The North East Region is characterized by a high level of poverty, employee monthly wages being also under national average (Figure 1). The poorest areas within the region are the southern part of IASI county, south-eastern part of Neamt county, eastern part of Bacau county, Botosani and Vaslui

counties. The North - East region of Romania has the lowest number of small and medium sized enterprises per 1,000 inhabitants (14.7 SMEs/1000 inhabitants, in 2007 comparative with national average - 26 SMEs/1000 inhabitants) (Figure 2).

The poor infrastructure, the low level of investments in the rural areas, had restricted the development of new activities in the region. In the present, agriculture is the main occupation in the rural areas, over 75% of peoples being employed in agriculture. Sustainable rural development can be achieved only in the context of achieving real economic growth in rural areas. Specific features characterizing the agriculture makes this branch of the economy to record the highest level of subsidies from the state, which had developed in recent years a complex intervention system, adapted to that prevailing in European Union countries. Of the more than 100 indicators of sustainable development identified by the European Union's statistical office, EUROSTAT, eleven are regarded as the most representative and enlightening in characterizing the degree of development at national or regional level.

The range of indicators that can be calculated to indicate the sustainable development for the North East Region of Development, are unfortunately limited, since non-existent of sufficiently expressive statistical series highlighting evolutionary trends. At the European level are calculated: growth rate of real GDP per capita, as indicator for socio-economic development of a region; resource productivity, as indicator of sustainable consumption and production; population at risk of poverty or exclusion for the social inclusion issues; employment rate of older workers, relevant for demographic changes; healthy life years and life expectancy at birth, by gender as image of public health; greenhouse gas emissions and share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption, to reveal the climate change and trends in energy consumption; energy consumption of transport relative to GDP, calculated as the ratio between the energy consumption of all types of transport (road, rail, inland navigation and aviation, including commercial,

¹ This work was supported by CNCIS-UEFISCSU, project no 114/28.07.2010PN II-RU TE_63/2010

Table 4. GDP evolution between 2000 and 2007.

No	Region	Year 2000	Year 2005	Year 2006	Year 2007
1a	Total GDP (Millions lei in current prices)	80985	288955	344651	416007
b	GDP per capita	3609.7	13362.8	15967.6	19315.4
2.	North West Region				
a	Total GDP	9449	34323	40806	50724
b	GDP per capita	3322.3	12538.6	14946.6	18610.5
3.	Centre Region				
a	Total GDP	9854	33143	40291	49417
b	GDP per capita	3729.3	13097.6	15920.2	19579.5
4.	North East Region				
a	Total GDP	9593	33266	38430	45990
b	GDP per capita	2508.9	8907.6	10295.8	12340.9
5.	South – East Region				
a	Total GDP	9427	32852	38509	44273
b	GDP per capita	3212.5	11541.7	13569.8	15641.8
6.	South – Muntenia Region				
a	Total GDP	9902	36855	44301	52014
b	GDP per capita	2857.4	11068.5	13374.6	15757.8
7.	Bucharest – Ilfov Region				
a	Total GDP	17869	65307	77711	95798
b	GDP per capita	7821.3	29572.6	35012.1	43037.3
8.	South - West Oltenia Region				
a	Total GDP	7183	23921	28589	34420
b	GDP per capita	2993.0	10371.1	12463.2	15097.3
9.	West Region				
a	Total GDP	7600	29081	35789	42996
b	GDP per capita	3723.4	15064.7	18570.1	22341.9

Source: Selected dates from INSSE, Romania 2010.

individual and public transport, with the exception of maritime and pipeline transport) and GDP, as indicator of sustainable development; fish catches taken from stocks outside safe biological limits, as indicator of natural resources; and also common bird index, as indicator of the population abundance and the diversity of a selection of common bird species associated with specific habitats; official development assistance as share of gross national income, as indicator of global partnership.

The rural environment in the North-East region is characterized by a modest level of income achieved by the active population, which can ensure, in most cases, only the minimum subsistence conditions. This requires

analysis of the particularities of the region in the N-E Romanian region of development, from the economic point of view (Table 5), in order to find alternative activities (handicrafts, agro-tourism, and non - agricultural activities) that can bring additional income for the rural residents. Agro-tourism activities are supported by the main attractions in the Northeast Region such Carpathian Mountains covered with alpine forest and rich in flora and fauna, famous painted monasteries from the fifteenth and sixteenth century protected by UNESCO, salt mines and spas that has therapeutic use, national parks and natural reservations, fishing lakes and other local tourist attraction. For the evaluation of socio-economic dimension of

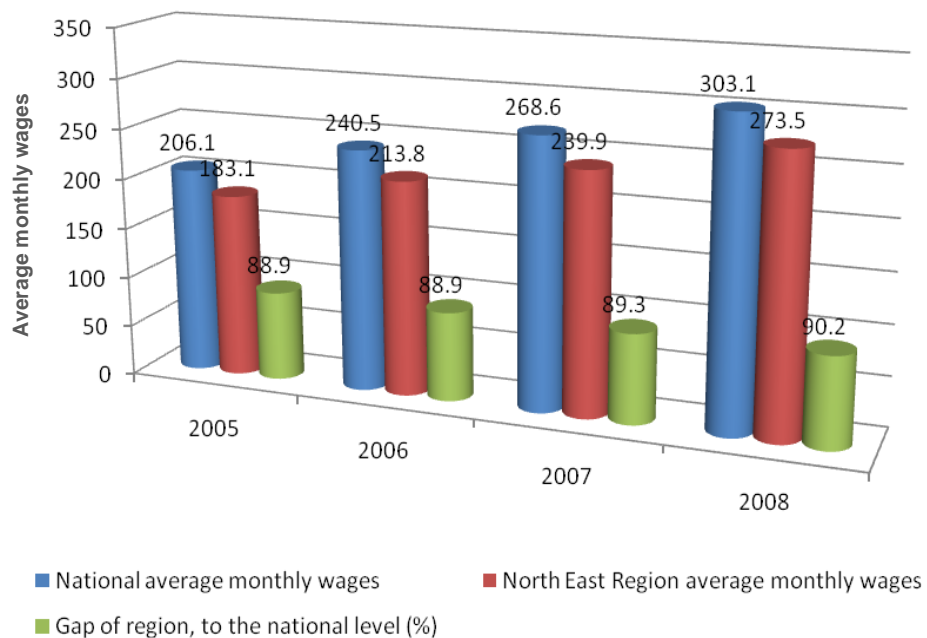


Figure 1. Average monthly wages, region gape (comparative with national level) (euro). Source: National Prognosis Commission 2008.

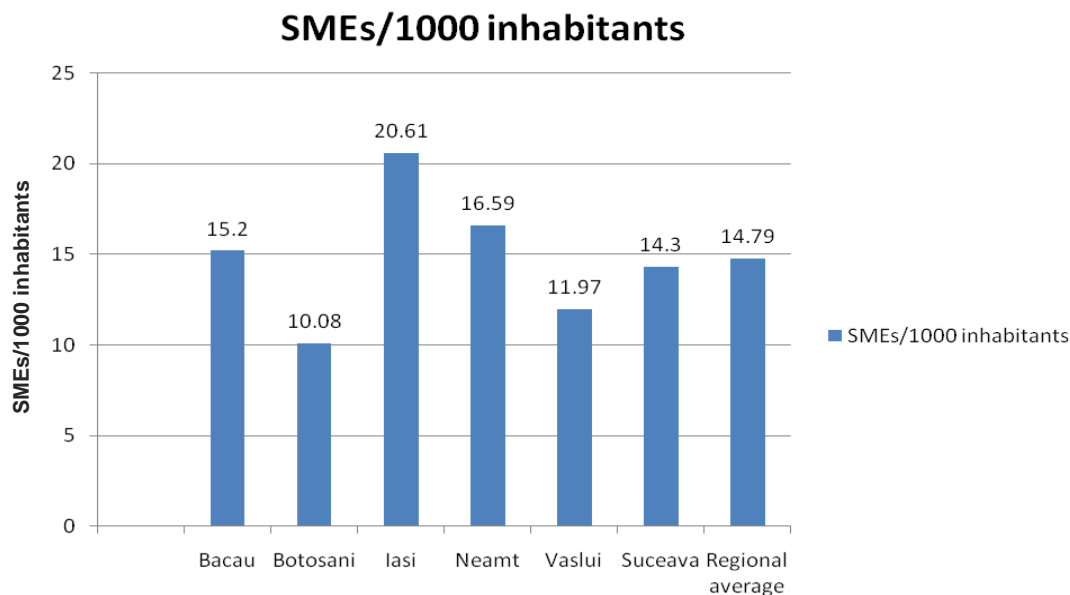


Figure 2. SMEs/1000 inhabitants in the North East region. Source: White book of SMEs -2007.

the Romanian North East Region of development in the rural areas was used the new method of calculation, for The Human Development Index, measured on a scale of 0 to 1, which is taking in account starting with 2010 the aggregate of three indicators: Life expectancy at birth (LEI = a long and healthy life); Education Index (EI =

access to knowledge - mean years of schooling and Expected years of schooling) and Income Index (II = a decent standard of living: GNI per capita -PPP US\$).

These indicators were taken as regional averages and even they do not deal directly with inequalities in wealth distribution, by including longevity and education they do

Table 5. Evolution of the main socio-economic indicators for the North East Regions, 2005-2008.

S/N	Socio-economic indicators	2005	2006	2007	2008
1	GDP growth in real terms	2.2	5.6	6.6	6.4
2	GDP per capita –euro	2517	2998	3407	3826
3	Evolution of employment rates	-0.6	-0.5	-0.3	0.0
4	Evolution of average number of workers	+0.6	+1.2	+2.2	+3.2
5	ILO unemployed rates %	6.8	5.9	5.8	5.7
6	Net average monthly wage in real terms	22.3	13.7	12.3	13.4

Source National Prognosis Commission, 2010.

reflect indirectly the distribution of resources in the region. A high average life expectancy, for example, indicates broad access to health care and adequate supplies of food and safe drinking water. For the component of the HDI, individual indices were computed according to the adapted formulas for region of development. The first step was to create sub indices for each dimension, so minimum and maximum values were set in order to transform the indicators into indices between 0 and 1: for life expectancy: (min=20, max=83.2), (maxim observed in Japan, year 2010); for mean year of schooling: (min=0, max =13.2) (maxim observed in USA, year 2000), for expected year of schooling: (min=0, max=20.6) (maxim observed in Australia, year 2000), gross national income (GNI) per capita: (min=163, max=108.211) (minim observed in Zimbabwe, year 2008, maxim observed in United Arabs Emirates, year 1980).

1) Life Expectancy Index (LEI) = $\frac{LE - 20}{83.2 - 20}$, where LE = Life expectancy at birth. The life expectancy at birth in the rural areas of the North East region is 73.14 years, so: Life Expectancy Index (LEI) for the North East Region Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\frac{73.14 - 20}{83.2 - 20} = 0.84$.

2) Education Index (EI) = $\frac{\sqrt{MYSI * EYSI} - 0}{0.951 - 0}$, where MYSI

= $\frac{MYS - 0}{13.2 - 0}$; EYSI = $\frac{EYS - 0}{20.6 - 0}$; MYS = Mean years of schooling (years that a 25 year old person or older has spent in schools), EYS = Expected years of schooling (years that a 5 year old child will spend with his education in his whole life), MYSI for the North East Region

Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\frac{10.5}{13.2} = 0.79$; EYSI for the North East Region Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\frac{14.6}{20.6} = 0.71$; Education Index (EI) for the North East

Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\frac{14.6}{20.6} = 0.71$; Education Index (EI) for the North East

Region Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\frac{\sqrt{0.79 * 0.71} - 0}{0.951 - 0} = 0.78$.

3) Income Index = $\frac{\ln(\text{GRIpc}) - \ln(163)}{\ln(108,211) - \ln(163)}$, where GRI

pc = Gross regional income at purchasing power parity per capita in the rural areas. Income Index for the North East Region Romania (rural areas, year 2010) =

$\frac{\ln(12.340) - \ln(163)}{\ln(108.211) - \ln(163)} = 0.66$, where GRI pc for the

North East Region of Romania = 12.340 (estimated value for 2010).

Finally, the HDI is the geometric mean of the previous three normalized indices: $\text{HDI} = \sqrt[3]{\text{LEI} * \text{EI} * \text{II}}$, so: HDI for the North East Region of Romania (rural areas, year 2010) = $\sqrt[3]{0.84 * 0.78 * 0.66} = 0.756$. The calculated HDI value for the North East Region of Romania is situated below HDI value for Romania in 2010 (0.767), which confirm the poor development in the rural areas of this region, relative with the national average and the implementation necessity of new rural development measures. SWOT analyses reveal the next aspects regarding non-agricultural economic activities and rural tourism in the region:

Strengths: Besides agriculture, the main economic activity, there are a lot of other non-agricultural economic activities taking place in rural areas, even if not very extensive; The existence of traditional crafts and activities such as beekeeping, sericulture, woodworking, wool and leather processing, processing of horns and bones, pottery. Rural areas in the region have a rich tourist, cultural and spiritual potential.

Weaknesses: Low level of rural population training; poor structure of tourism marketing policy (advertising and organization); the number of handicraft and decorative

Table 6. Regional operational program for Romania, implementation level, October 2010 (millions lei).

S/N	Region	Allocated value (ERDF + State Budget)	Number of projects/ application		Rejected projects		Funded projects		Degree of use, depending on the size of funds required by the projects submitted*
			Number	Requested Budget	Number	Requested Budget	Number	Requested Budget	
1	North East, from which:	2915.4	1150	5029.1	317	574.9	176	2020.8	152.8%
2	- Cultural heritage	161.0	27	349.6	3	10.8	10	148.9	210.5
3	- Recreational activities and tourist accommodation	161.2	39	348.0	13	71.8	17	146.8	171.4%
4	- Tourism promotion	104.9	94	69.4	19	14.3	5	4.2	52.6%
5	South East	2366.9	956	3338.0	237	621.5	106	977.2	114.8%
6	South	2542.0	899	4465.5	166	1008.0	80	1192.3	136.0%
7	South West	2502.7	823	4041.6	218	742.3	109	1255.4	131.8%
8	West	1846.8	703	4043.8	158	788.2	90	754.3	176.3%
9	North West	2159.7	1132	3948.9	325	883.6	110	1032.2	141.9%
10	Centre	1947.2	1077	4322.3	456	1436.8	125	928.2	148.2%
11	Bucharest – Ilfov	1582.7	563	2874.9	177	676.8	47	312.6	138.9%
12	TOTAL	17863.4	7303	32064.0	2054	6732.1	843	8472.9	141.8%

* Degree of use is the amount requested for the ongoing assessment projects and contracts, related to the value of financial allocations. Source: Monitoring Committee for the Regional Operational Program, Romania, 2010.

activities is falling; the state does not sufficiently support the development of fisheries and aquaculture. It is not yet properly harmonized legislative framework for non-agricultural economic activities and rural tourism; there are delays and poor management in privatisation of lake's surfaces.

Opportunities: Most part of villages from the North East region has a cultural and spiritual tourism potential for domestic and foreign tourists. The increasing number of NGOs that contribute to the development of rural areas and promoting rural tourism through: training courses and seminars, training in the supply of tourist services.

The potential for diversification of rural economy, that has to be supported by legislation, preferential credit systems and developing of specific promotional actions. Promoting investments to develop and diversify economic activities such as agricultural services, handicrafts, apiculture, sericulture, aquaculture and agro-tourism, which have the potential to increase employment of rural labour.

Threats: The decline in purchasing power for domestic tourists. In Romania, foreigners ignore the rural tourism potential. The number of tourists is increasing, in the conditions of inadequate infrastructure.

Developing agro-tourism is part of the priority axis No. 5 - Sustainable development and tourism promotion, of the Regional Operational Programme for the period 2007 to 2013. So far in this area were funded 32 projects for the North Eastern Region, of which 10 were allocated to cultural heritage, 17 for recreational activities and tourist accommodation and other 5 for tourism promotion, the total allocated budget being 427 millions lei from 2.915,4 millions representing the total amount for 2007 to 2013 period (Table 6). Analysis of the social dimension was made starting from people who live in the rural areas, the base of rural development. Even if the North East region is not confronted with a high level of

Table 7. The labour market evolution in the North East Region – the rural areas.

No.	Labour market	Measure unit	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	Evolution 2008/2000
1	Economically active population in rural areas	Thousand persons	1345	1073	1024	1065	1046	77.77
2	Employment in rural areas, of which:	Thousand persons	1306	1041	996	1043	1025	78.48
3	a) Workers in agriculture	%	80.8	75.1	75.9	76.4	75.6	93.56
4	b) Workers in industry and construction	%	9.1	11.9	11.6	11.0	12.1	93.56
5	c) Services	%	10.1	13	12.5	12.6	12.3	121.78
6	ILO unemployed	Thousand persons	39	32	28	22	21	53.85
7	Activity rates in rural areas	%	80.5	71.6	68.2	70.1	68.4	84.97
8	Employment rates in rural areas	%	77.7	69.2	66.1	68.4	66.8	85.97
9	ILO unemployment rate	%	2.9	3.0	2.8	2.1	2.0	68.97

Source: INSSE, Romania 2010 (selection dates from 2008).

Table 8. The evolution of population structure in the North East Region.

No.	Population	Measure unit	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	Evolution 2008/2000
1	Total population	Thousand persons	3823	3734	3732	3726	3719	97.28
2	Total population in rural areas	Thousand persons	2159	2114	2103	2108	2110	97.73
3	Population by age							
4	Population with age between 0 and 14 years	Thousand persons	803	685	676	668	662	82.44
5	Population with age between 15 and 59 years	Thousand persons	2327	2363	2369	2371	2369	101.80
6	Population with age over 60 years	Thousand persons	692	685	686	687	687	99.28

Source: INSSE, Romania 2010 (selection dates from 2008).

rural exodus at global level of population, this problem appear unfortunately for the category of young peoples, rural areas suffering a replacing process of younger generation with aged people. It also noted a significant reduction in the number of people actively employed in rural areas in 2008 compared to 2000 (Table 7). If the rural space from a particular region (as there is in fact in the N-E region) suffers a massive migration of young people to the city or a large number of farmers have over 60 years is very difficult to realize in short-term a strong growth.

So, for the stabilization of population in the rural areas, it must be seen as a problem which can find answers in measures of attracting the young age category for rural activities that can assure them a decent level of life. In the North East Region, the percent of rural population in the total population of the region has increased from 56.4% in 2000 to 56.7% in 2008 (Table 8). Evolution of the share of population between the two residence (urban-rural), highlights the trends recorded in the region: an increasing trend in the share of rural population by 2003 (from 55.87% in 1998 to 59.23% in 2003) explained mainly as a result of the migration that took place towards the countryside, a result of industrial restructuring in this period followed by a slight decrease in 2004 (56.42%)

mostly due to the fact that in 2003, a relatively high number of municipalities have been declared cities, especially in Suceava County, and then a new increasing trend until 2008 (56.7%). In the same period of time, the percent of peoples with age between 0 and 14 years had decreased from 21 to 17% and the percent of people with age over 60 years had increased from 18 to 18.4% (Table 9).

The social solutions must involve a diagnosis on the level of education in the rural population from the region, their cultural identity and social structure. The cultural resources of a region of development constitute an increasingly significant economic issue for regional communities of all types (rural, urban, metropolitan, etc.) as they become major components of value production. SWOT analyses reveal the next aspects regarding culture level of the region:

Strengths: Existence of strong traditions and a good experience about the cultural life of villages. There are networks of cultural institutions in the villages with a great tradition, such libraries, art or cultural centres, and significant number of teachers, which can assume cultural and voluntary activities in these institutions. The teachers and village priests are traditionally the main

Table 9. The evolution of population structure in the North East Region.

No.	Population	Measure unit	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	Evolution 2008/2000
1.	Total population	Thousand persons	3823	3734	3732	3726	3719	97.28
2.	Total population in rural areas	Thousand persons	2159	2114	2103	2108	2110	97.73
3.	Population by age							
4.	Population with age between 0 and 14 years	Thousand persons	803	685	676	668	662	82.44
5.	Population with age between 15 and 59 years	Thousand persons	2327	2363	2369	2371	2369	101.80
6.	Population with age over 60 years	Thousand persons	692	685	686	687	687	99.28

Source: INSSE, Romania 2010 (selection dates from 2008).

promoters of cultural life in the villages, allowing the organization of high-level activities. The good tradition in researching cultural rural life (studies of folklore, handicrafts, housing and port) provides the necessary conditions to support the villages with specialists able to revive cultural activities. The villages have access to common sources of information as cable or satellite television, Internet, newspapers, local and national radio channels.

Weaknesses: Decreasing number of schools and libraries. It is decreasing number of teachers with high level of education. Lack of funds for supporting cultural and art activities, no new books buying, lack of paid jobs to sustain cultural activities. Buildings depreciation affects cultural activities.

Opportunities: Providing funds necessary to support the cultural life in villages and rural areas from the European Union programs. The cultural centres can be used for specific Romanian village activities and there is a high interest for the traditions and cultural activities.

Risks: Changing destination for cultural activities building and taking over for use in the commercial activities. Cultural pollution by the urban elements that are imported in the villages has the effect of reduced motivation for some traditional cultural activities, choirs and assemblies presenting authentic performances being replaced by improvised bands that practice cultural kitsch. It might manifest a migration of young generation in other places that have an advanced cultural life.

Recovery and enhancement of quality human capital must be an essential condition for the successfully development of the North-Eastern Region. Human resources development and their required infrastructure will have direct benefit to the rural population in the region and is a fundamental prerequisite for progress in areas of social and economic rural planning and implicitly on rural sustainable development. The sustainable rural development in the North East can be achieved by

measures to boost rural tourism and services in the rural areas. This must include measures to rehabilitate the rural areas, improving the infrastructure, supporting of private initiative in the creation and development of agro-hostels, development of potential fishing, hunting ethnographic or environmental areas.

There are also required measures of qualification and retraining of the workforce according to local agricultural activities, providing training for staff included in the service sector, development of training programs and career guidance for the young and unemployed, investments for development of the manufacturing process. The main findings can be enumerated as follows:

Socio-economic disparities between Romania's development regions were significant and it required in identifying and implementing the best solutions to overcome existing difficulties. The Romanian North-East Region of Development, although it is the largest of the eight development regions of Romania was one of the poorest regions, both in Romania and the European Union. In this region, measures were necessary in order to identify and to access additional sources of funding, for the achievement of infrastructure projects, especially in rural areas; for sustainable development, by increasing use of alternative energy sources, assuring environmental protection; for promotion of Romanian traditional products and for a better quality of education, health and social services in rural areas.

In the conditions of a major economic gap recorded between urban and rural areas, it was even more important to take advantage of any existing development opportunities identified in the rural areas of this region. Development of agro-tourism in the North Eastern Region, one of the sustainable development solutions of the rural areas, could be made in conditions of a real support at the regional level for promoting such activities in the rural areas. Accessing structural funds was found as the optimum solution in financial terms that could be used especially for large investment objectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The results are part of the Project “research on actual size evaluation and the perspective of sustainable rural development through the elaboration of SWOT analysis, as a method of strategic planning for the North-East Region of Romania”, under a financial scheme supported by the Romanian National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education: CNCSIS-UEFISCSU (Grant no 114/28.07.2010). The project team consists of the following, Project manager: Beciu Silviu; Team members: Popa Oana, Nistor Stefania, and Alecu Iulian. Victor Olteanu is voluntarily assuring the web page of the project and has contributed to the article as scientific researcher and a Ph.D student (POS - DRU/88/1.5/S/52614).

REFERENCES

- Alber J (2004). Perception of living conditions in an Enlarged Europe, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working conditions, Luxembourg.
- Bold I (2004). Two centuries of agrarian economy, portraits and meanings, Mirton, Timisoara.
- Dona I (2010). The balances and disruptions of the rural communities. Sustainable socio-economical strategies for development (in Romanian), Ceres, Bucharest.
- Gavrilescu D (2007). Romanian rural economy (in Romanian), Terra, Iasi.
- Harmaakorpi V (2006). Regional Development Platform Method (RDPM) as a tool for regional innovation policy. Eur. Plan. Stud., 14: 1085-1104.
- Hera C (2006). Rural world: today and tomorrow. Romanian Academy Publishing, Bucharest; Herman D (1994). For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, Environment, and a Sustainable Future Human Development Report (2010). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
- Kebir L (2008). Cultural Resources and Regional Development. Eur. Plan. Stud., 16: 1189-1205
- Lupu A (2007). Introduction throw the agrarian economy and rural policy (in Romanian), Ex Ponto, Timisoara; Otiman P I (2006). Sustainable Rural Development of Romania in the context of European integration. Rural world, today and tomorrow: 253-258, Romanian Academy Publishing.
- The European Commission, Regional Operational Program (2007), CCI no: 2007RO161PO001, Decision number: C/2007/3470. Final approval date: 2007-07-12.
- Zahiu L (2010). Agriculture in Romania (in Romanian). Ceres, Bucharest.