Migration Movements in the Romanian Rural Space (1990-2008)

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Abstract: Human migration is one of the main phenomena that profoundly influenced the Romanian society and especially the rural areas, causing different advantages and disadvantages. This paper is the result of an analysis concerning the characteristics and evolutionary trends of the migratory movements, trying to reveal their causes. The research work was carried out at the local level (commune) and also at regional and national levels, aiming to discover the migration behaviour changes that took place in the last 20 years and their geographical distribution. All this information is a good scientific basis for future studies concerning the causes and the impact of the migrations on the rural Romanian communities.

Key words: migration, rural space, out-migrants, in-migrants, Romania.

1 Theoretical background

Migration is a “total” social phenomenon that offers important information concerning the opportunities and the problems the Romanian society had along the entire history, and will have in future too. In present, in the context of the globalization process, and the existence of the rapid, easy communication and traveling systems, free circulation conditions and the propensity to migration, this complex phenomenon affects almost the entire planet [1]. We have information about migrations since very old times, but the most intense and largest movements took place in the XX-th century, developing continuously until present. This situation has important and diverse economic, demographic, social and cultural implications. Therefore, many specialists in social sciences consider it an important “engine” for the changes happening in the society, having impact on the social structure and evolution both in the areas loosing those gaining population [2].

In Romania, in the past two decades, the population movement has been a most active process, having a strong impact on the society and the economy. However, in order to understand the mechanisms triggered by this, we need to reflect back upon the previous era, namely the second half of the XXth century. The migration was then generated by major political, social and economic events that Romania had faced, such as the Second World War, the famine that followed it, the deportations by the communist regime, the farmers forced to organize into farming cooperatives and the rapid industrialization of the cities in the decades seven and eight etc. All these shaped specific migratory behaviours. In this respect, Romania matches perfectly the European post-war model, most exactly the East-Continental one.

One of the outstanding works in the specific literature, Geography of Romania, highlights the importance of the communist politics, for having contributed to increasing the territorial mobility of the population. “The magnitude and orientation of migrations were determined by the industrialization and urbanization pace, by the differences in intensity of social and economic developments and the prevailing economic profile” [3, p. 69]. The main feature of the then movements was given by the final relocation of the rural population (mainly young people at working age – 20-29) to the urban areas, mostly from Eastern and South-Eastern areas to Western ones, more exactly from regions like Moldova, Muntenia and Oltenia to Banat, Crișana and other economically developed territories such as the large urban centres or the mining regions. In addition, the gross migration rate showed a generally declining trend, from over 20‰ in 1955 to only 10‰ in 1989, as a result of the access being restricted to large cities [2].

After 1989, given the significant political, legal and economic changes, the features of migration in Romania suffered rather important changes. Over these past 20 years, with the transition from a centralized to the market economy, the entire socio-economic system was transformed by the implementation of structural reforms. Alongside the privatization and restructuring of industrial companies, we need to mention the reform in agriculture meaning the restitution of farming land to former owners [4]. These actions triggered important social changes, in both urban and rural space. In the
latter, as a result of the deep fragmentation of farming land and less jobs provided by the industry, most households were engaged in a subsistence economy, determining a sharp decline of the living standard.

However, it is worth mentioning that the declining economy was a feature mainly of the first decade in the interval under review, as the year 2000 saw a revival of the economy, followed by a strong growth as of 2004 (fig. 1).

The difficult economic situation of the rural environment compared to the urban one is not new for Romania. The entire post-Bwar period has been economically difficult, despite attempts by communist regime to improve it, somehow, through erratic industrial investments. This impacted on all types of demographic behaviour. The consequence was the reduced natural balance and the intensified exodus towards the cities, which led to a constant decline of the inhabitant number and increasing ageing population, features which persisted and even grew more important, in some instances, after 1989 (table 1).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the rural population

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<tr>
<td>Population (thousand persons)</td>
<td>11,797</td>
<td>12,164</td>
<td>10,418</td>
<td>10,245</td>
<td>9,670</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population dynamics (1977=100 %)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>84.2</td>
<td>79.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural population as % of national population</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>56.4</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elderly rural population aged 60 and over (%)</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
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Under the circumstances, the migration „boomed” in 1990, with part of the rural population relocating to urban areas, first of all because the restrictions imposed by the previous era were removed (fig. 2 and 3). However, the intensity of this phenomenon went down in the following years, when a shift in the prevailing direction was observed, reflected in the positive migration balance of the rural areas after 1997 (fig. 3). Hence, “the urban-rural component becomes, maybe for the first time in the modern-day history of Romania, the main direction for migration” [2, p. 16].

The causes for this change are many, with the literature in the field focused on how the economic restructuring impacted on the urban population. “Lost jobs or uncertain jobs, the increasing cost of living in a city, the difficulties faced by young married couples in finding a house (the famous “blocks of flats” – cheap and low-comfort apartments – one thing of many that the communist regime was so proud about, stopped being built after 1989, and were replaced by individual housing, a privilege of those advantaged by the new economic order), as well as the lack of professional prospects for the young people, all these have led to a re-orientation towards the rural environment” [2, p. 16]. All the more since the land law was passed (1991) and many became owners of farming plots of land that, adding to houses owned or inherited from their parents formed an economic basis of the respective families. Another
reason why some urban inhabitants came living in the rural areas was the desire to improve the quality of life, with people being attracted by both tangible benefits (beautiful landscape) and intangible advantages (secure and friendly environment) [5], [6]. Therefore, we can conclude that there is an increasing attractiveness in the rural way of living, in parallel with mutations in the rural capital accumulations, in other words a shift from the farming-oriented use of devalued land to a tertiary use which revalues rural resources [7].

2 Spatial characteristics of the migration movements in the Romanian rural space

In order to understand the characteristics of migration in the Romanian rural areas and, most of all, the spatial dimension of this phenomenon over the past 20 years, we resorted to the analysis of some specific demographic indicators. These are the gross and net migration rates and the migration growth rate. The three indicators show how this phenomenon has evolved over time and its main features during the interval under review.

The first indicator, the gross migration rate, provides important information about all migration movements, with a highlight on the areas where the population has been, and still is, very mobile (fig. 4). The result is a chart that, if analyzed, would reveal regions in Romania where migration is stronger, compared to other territories with a more “static” population. The causes of such disparities are many and various. It can be a combination of drivers, formed of both rejection and attraction factors. Still, one fact is clear, and that is the persistence nowadays of some old migration patterns. Thus, in Eastern Romania, regions such as Moldova and Dobrogea remain spaces with a very mobile population, numerous rural localities showing a very high gross migration rate (over 700‰). The same values are common to many communities in counties like Timişoara, Braşov, Cluj, Dolj and counties of Eastern Muntenia, too. At the opposite, we find the ones in the mountains, as well as many rural localities in the South, Centre and North-West.

The precise explanation for the causes of this phenomenon cannot be given but by analyzing how the second indicator – the net migration rate – behaves spatially (fig. 5). We could say that there may be an “overlapping” of the two images, but we need to observe that, in the second case, the evolution of the migration balance is visible. This new perspective highlights the areas with significant population losses over the period, as well as the attractive regions. One will notice that the Eastern region of the country, Moldova, but the South too, Muntenia and Oltenia, remain – like in the second half of the XXth century – spaces which “provide”
population. These are, obviously, the rural communities less developed. The economic difficulties sharpened during the transition period and were not solved even in the years when the Romanian economy appeared to recover (2004-2008), a fact that is confirmed, in our case, by the significant rural population losses in some of the counties which are highly developed (Cluj, Prahova, Argeș).

Attractive rural areas are, as expected, the ones with “tradition” (Banat and South Transylvania) but also the metropolitan areas of large urban centres (București, Constanța, Brașov, Cluj, Iași, etc.). The economic development is still the main driver, and it is given by the proximity of industrial centres or the geographical positioning within regions with mainly industrial and services functionalities.

The analysis of the migration growth rate is a sum or combination of all pieces of information obtained from the first two indicators. However, the result is discouraging in the fact that communities with a negative growth outnumber the others, all the more since the attached values are more significant.

3 Conclusions

Over the past 20 years, the Romanian rural environment had to put up with various economic, legal and social events, which profoundly affected it. The nationwide changes influenced this environment, unfortunately in a negative way. We still cannot talk about any rural revival, but rather of a slow fadeout as a result of losing or giving up resources.

Population is one of these resources which, with the persisting subsistence economy and the lack of prospects of improvement, would rather migrate to either urban or high potential rural areas or, unfortunately, to other European states viewed as economic “paradises”. One hope for Romanian villages is that most people working abroad send their revenues back home, thus contributing to local and regional development otherwise much slower if depending only on domestic resources.

Despite the fact that, for the time period under analysis, we can say that the general feature of the rural environment is an important demographic loss on most of the national territory, there are spaces with attraction potential too, and they may be the reviving centres of the Romanian rural regions. These are the areas where the sub-urbanization, counter-urbanization, and gentrification (less present in rural) take place. This is evidence of the increasing interest and desire of the individuals, mainly urban inhabitants, to rediscover and benefit of all resources and traditions provided by an environment which did not lose its authenticity, in a world where identity is gradually annulled by globalization.

Fig. 5. Net migration rate (%) (1990-2008)
Fig. 6. Modern rural landscape

References:

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