

# The Influence of the Rural Sustainable Development on the Life Quality

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Joining the European Union has led in rural areas, major changes, knowing that a special dynamic. The many challenges imposed by certain European standards have created new development opportunities but also brought with it new problems that residents and authorities were able to manage them more or less effective depending on managerial competence, resistance to change residents and their other external factors such as bureaucracy in state institutions, lack of continuity in decisions with the change of party in power or the lack of adequate financial support from the state for starting rural development projects. Over these overlap and rural specific problems: lack of jobs, migration of active population, low income, lack of modern means of production in agriculture, and of course we must not forget the training level lower than in urban areas. The issue of sustainable development rural areas is one of the most complex contemporary issues because it requires a balance between the requirement of preservation of rural economic, environmental, social and cultural of the country, on the one hand, and the trend of modernization of rural life on the other side.

## **Keywords:**

Sustainable development, rural quality of life, community citizen, education, quality of life indicators

## **1. Introduction**

*The life quality* is an evaluative concept, being the result of reporting living conditions and activities that compose the human life, to the human needs, values and aspirations. It refers both to the global evaluation of life (how good, satisfactory is the life that different people, social groups, collectivities have) and to evaluation of various conditions or spheres of life: environment, labour (working life), interpersonal relationships and family life.

In this context we appreciated that is needed a defining of the concept of rural space and rural development. Thus, Robert Badouin, during its course of «Rural Economy», defines the rural space as opposed to urban space, designating by this concept "...areas characterized by a population of a relatively low density and by predominance of agricultural activities. The rural space, contrary to urban space, does not involve strong concentration of people. Agglomerations are limited to the village size or *burg* ..." (Badouin, 1971).

The objective of the present study is to describe aspects of the rural development in the Iron Gates area. Following the post-revolutionary changes and regulations imposed by the European Union, the rural world experiences a series of changes. In this demarche I intend to identify the socio-economic changes that have occurred in this space and that influenced the life quality of those living in this interesting and scenic area.

## 2. The life quality and rural development in the iron gates area

The Danube region has an economic growth potential insufficiently exploited. Being declared as part of Pan-European Transport Corridor VII of EU, Danube is an important waterway, which connects, through the Rhine-Main-Danube canal, between Constanta seaport, the industrial centres of Western Europe and the seaport of Rotterdam. Danube basin includes countries and regions that could benefit in the future of the direct access to Black Sea and the importance of connecting the EU with Transcaucasia and Central Asia area has been accepted by the European Commission through the new regional cooperation initiative of the EU entitled „Black Sea Synergy”.

The Danube region is a diverse area in terms of cultural and social, in the Western area of region, namely Germany and Austria, increases in population are recorded (due to the phenomenon of immigration), and in the east part (regions of Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary) population is in decline, registering migration trends to other regions of the same country or emigration.

Regarding Romania, in the analysed area decreases in the population are recorded, especially in rural areas and small towns mainly due to the phenomenon of migration to the cities, especially to Bucharest or to other states. Excepting Bucharest (with 8088 inhabitants/square km) the **regional density** ranges from 179 inhabitants/square km in Ilfov county to 139 inhabitants/square km in Galati county, 39 inhabitants/square km in Caras-Severin county and 30 inhabitants/square km in Tulcea county.

The structure by age groups is characterized by demographic aging of population, due mainly to the birth rate decrease, determining the absolute and relative decreasing of the number of young population (0-14 years) and increasing the number of older people (60 and over). The Danube region is characterized by its linguistic and cultural diversity, due to historical influence and confluence, by the variety of the cultural patrimony objectives given that the Danube is the largest river that runs through the EU and the second largest river in Europe after Volga, with a length of 2857 km.

Regarding the economic development, the Danube region is characterized by major disparities, both between states and between regions inside states. Less developed regions predominate in the new member states, where there are more pronounced and regional disparities, much of the underdeveloped areas being concentrated along the Danube. This underdevelopment is correlated with unemployment and, also, with the prevalence of the rural activities and with the inability to attract direct foreign investments.

## 3. Materials and Methods

### 3.1. Qualitative analysis of the rural development in *Iron Gates* area

#### STUDY 1 General aspects: social, cultural and economic

Thus, our objectives in this research refers to:

1. *Outlining an image of the village world from the Iron Gates area in the post-accession period;*
2. *Identifying the main evolutions and difficulties in the rural development in that area*
3. *The development prospects of the village from the Iron Gates area*

For the achievement of the proposed objectives, I have chosen a sample composed of 4 communes: Eselnita, Dubova, Svinita and Gogosu, all from Mehedinti county, known being the fact that Iron Gates area belongs to it.

The method that I used was a qualitative - semi-structured interview and participatory observation.

The interview, one for each commune, has 4 distinct parts: general aspects of the commune, rural development, community and prospects of development. These were attended by authorities of the 4 communes selected, namely the mayor or vice mayor, duration of the interviews being approximately 45 minutes, the period of September 2012.

From the answers of the interviewees the followings can be drawn:

In the last 4 years the authorities have launched a series of large-scale projects aimed at changing people's lives, trying to bring them more comfort and to create new development opportunities such as the process of evacuation waste water through the sewage system, power drinking water, modernizing the drinking water treatment plant, situation in which they faced:

- ✚ resistance to changing of those from rural space - resistance often justified in terms of costs associated (branching involving initial and ongoing permanent costs);
- ✚ bureaucracy faced by authorities in developing investment projects;

- other specific problems of the autochthonous space: the habit to receive and pay attention, Romanian mentality, benefiting municipalities by the stakeholders who have representatives of the same „political colour” with those of the government;

Figure 2.1. Map of Mehedinți county



Another series of problems remarked were the lack of employment, insufficient funds for social support and especially the problem of the Roma communities, a category largely social assisted, not infrequently with inappropriate behaviour.

Despite these impediments due to implementation of the strategy for the Danube Region, in conjunction with other actions at riparian member states level, benefiting from the grant programs, the region will become dynamic, competitive, in which the transnational, cross-border and interregional cooperation will lead to the limitation of social and economic disparities.

In this way the Danube will become from a natural barrier, an element that favours the sustainable development and cohesion. Also, conditions will be created for the environment rehabilitation, protection and conservation, leading ultimately to ensure the sustainable use of the natural resources.

In conclusion, we can affirm that, although there are still many problems of economic and social, the perspective is one optimistic, affirming that the rural development is in full process, and by the contribution of the social actors (town hall, school, local businesses, church etc.), Romanian village will provide the adequate framework of qualitative human development in the context of the sustainable rural development.

## STUDY 2 Life quality in the Iron Gates area

For more accurate conclusions on the quality of people's life in the area analysed, we will resort to important economic and social indicators and will analyse how they have had modifying as a result of implementation of European funded projects. The central objective of the study is to outline a more complete image of the quality of life perceived in this area.

The hypotheses which we started were:

1. *The quality of life varies depending on the social category that the individual belongs to;*
2. *Implementation of European funded projects influences the life quality of the people in rural areas studied.*

The research approach aimed at the quality of life in these areas, the influence that the European structural funds have had on the people's lives. The methods were - survey by questionnaire and secondary analysis of quantitative data. The sample was of 150 persons to whom was applied a questionnaire with 40 questions aiming indicators of quality of life and the way they have changed as a result of implementation of European funded projects. Of these, 6 questions aimed at socio-demographic data of respondents (gender, age, occupation, education, monthly household income and the number of its members). For sampling, the method of the step was used (step 3), targeting people over 18, residing in one of four selected communes.

## 2.2. The quantitative analysis of the rural development in the area of Iron Gates

We consider necessary the corroboration of the qualitative data obtained by interview and observation with quantitative data which will bring more clarity and objectivity to this approach. The central objective of this study is to identify the level of rural development in the rural space of the **Iron Gates**.

For the present research we will focus on the analysis of the factors influencing the quality of life in the rural space of Mehedinti county. We will use mostly quantitative methods - document analysis and secondary analysis of quantitative data and SWOT analysis. We have chosen these methods in order to create a more complete image of this area and to outline with elements as more as illustrative of how we can intervene in improving factors conditions in the Danube area.

**Mehedinti** is a county from Oltenia and Banat regions, in the South West of Romania. The county residence is Drobeta-Turnu Severin. It has an area of 493,289 ha (2.1% of the country area). Mehedinti county **soil** is characterized by a great diversity, from the brown acid soils and litho soils in the northern and northwest of the county, to typical and cambic chernozems in the south and south-west part of the county.

The brown and reddish-brown soils occupy the largest part of the county constituting an enabling environment for cultivating vines of noble varieties to produce superior wines. The agricultural area and its structure: 59.47% of the total area of 493,289 ha of the county, respectively 293,338 ha are destined to the agricultural sector. Of the total agricultural area, the private sector had 272,635 hectares, meaning 92.94%.

Following the analysis of the factors influencing the quality of life in the countryside in Mehedinti county, namely:

- **the number of inhabitants** on July 01 reveals that, in 2013 Mehedinti county had a population of 260,388 and compared to the same period of 2009 is a decrease of 32,529 persons;
- **the structure of population by gender** indicates that out of a total of **260,388 persons** on July 01, 2013, the women in Mehedinti are 50.73% (132 098 persons). Of these, 53.29% live in rural areas;
- **the life expectancy** indicator through which it analyses the development degree reached by a society, shows us that the birth rate in Mehedinti county was maintained at a relatively low level for the period 2009-2013, the birth rate being maintained in the level of 8-10 births per 1,000 inhabitants, slightly higher in the **rural areas than the urban**;
- **the county's total school population** experienced a negative trend, a phenomenon that manifested while the decreasing in the total population of the county. During the school years 2009/2010-2013/2014, a decreasing by 12.7% was registered in the total population covered by a form of education;
- **the health infrastructure**: the county health system, similarly to the other counties in Romania, has a number of common problems related mainly to: system underfunding and staff shortages caused by the migration of highly skilled health professionals in other countries. Therefore it decreased the number of beds in the health units in the county during the period analysed, from 1655 in 2009, to 1445 in 2013.
- **drinking water supply**: statistics show that the population served by public water supply system was in 2013 of 138,538 people, representing only 53% of the total number of inhabitants of the county;

- **the sewage networks:** the waste water collecting in 2013 was achieved in the 5 cities and municipalities and in 15 communes in the county through 280.8 km of pipelines. The evolution of figures show the increasing of the communes city halls interest to this domain, in 2009-2013, the number of localities with public sewage networks being increasing;
- **the land quality,** the pressure factors affecting in highest percentages the soil quality, were: frequent drought, wind erosion and landslides, compaction due to inadequate works, small and very small reserve of humus in the soil, ensuring low phosphorus, potassium and nitrogen. In the year 2013 there were not registered accidental pollution of soil or major environmental accidents.

The SWOT analysis revealed the followings:

**Table 2.2. SWOT analysis**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Varied relief composed of mountains, plateaus and plains</li> <li>☐ Temperate continental climate with Mediterranean influences, characterized by warm summers and mild winters, favourable for the development of agriculture, tourism</li> <li>☐ The presence of the Danube river in the county territory</li> <li>☐ Soil characterized by a great diversity, propitious for the development of viticulture, fruit growing</li> <li>☐ Varied natural resources</li> <li>☐ Balanced gender structure of the population</li> <li>☐ Slight increase of the young population share (0-14 years) in total population,</li> <li>☐ Life expectancy increasing, both on average and gender</li> <li>☐ Mortality rate in rural areas in decline</li> <li>☐ Low total infant mortality rate in 2013, compared to 2009-2012</li> <li>☐ Positive balance of the internal migration determined by the change of domicile, in rural areas</li> <li>☐ Relatively developed social infrastructure at county level</li> <li>☐ Human resources qualified in the social domain</li> <li>☐ Increasing the percentage of preschool population in 2013-2014</li> <li>☐ Degree of over 70% enrolment in education, especially for the students aged 3 to 14 years</li> <li>☐ Growing interest in the development of the sewerage networks in the localities of the county</li> <li>☐ Increased concerns for association at community level for providing services to population</li> <li>☐ Environmental legislation harmonized with EU legislation</li> <li>☐ Permanent monitoring of the air quality through the monitoring station which provides online data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Number of people decreasing, both in urban and in rural areas</li> <li>☐ Density of population in declining</li> <li>☐ The occurrence of a slow but constant process of demographic aging with negative implications for economy and society</li> <li>☐ Low birth rate</li> <li>☐ Increased mortality rate, especially in rural areas</li> <li>☐ Negative balance of the internal migration determined by changing the domicile, in urban area</li> <li>☐ High degree of poverty at the county level</li> <li>☐ Large number of beneficiaries of social support (the largest in the region)</li> <li>☐ Total school population with negative dynamics, manifested while decreasing of the total population of the county</li> <li>☐ Insufficient health infrastructure</li> <li>☐ High abandonment rate, especially for vocational and post-secondary school education</li> <li>☐ The number of hospitals in the county is the lowest in the region</li> <li>☐ Increasing the share of social assisted persons and thus of the budget effort for their support</li> <li>☐ The quality of life level in Mehedinți county is modest</li> <li>☐ Population served by the public water supply system in 2013 represented only 53% of the total number of inhabitants of the county</li> <li>☐ Low quality of housing in the county, compared to the national level</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ The large number of inhabitants in rural areas increases the possibilities of developing business, of implementing local development programs, that to increase the attractiveness of the rural areas,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Increasing the degree of dependency (the ratio between older people and active people), caused by the process of population aging</li> <li>☐ Maintaining a low birth rate will increase the</li> </ul>



preventing thus from the increasing of the urban-rural demographic imbalance ☐ Promoting the measures of advising and support for the young families ☐ The existence of financial support measures for the future mothers, that can positively influence the birth rate ☐ Developing the public-private partnerships for the development of social and health sectors ☐ Existence of the community development associations (CDA) for joint accessing of the community development projects ☐ Increasing the interest of local authorities for the promotion of partnerships for environmental protection ☐ Existence of large number of protected areas and natural parks	process of county population aging ☐ Severe negative effects generated by the temporary international migration ☐ Social insecurity; ☐ Changing of demographic behaviour of the married couples ☐ Difficulties in the financial support for the environmental infrastructure projects, especially by the small and medium communities ☐ Low concerns for the selective waste collection in rural communities ☐ Low degree of population concern for the biodiversity conservation ☐ Failure to properly inform the public about practicing the ecological tourism can lead to the loss of natural resources
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### III. Results and Discussions

#### Results obtained

It can observe some improvement of the living conditions, even the salary level remains low so that the motivation on the work results is minor. We can see that the European funds contributed to raising the quality standards in education and health, facilitated the headrace of drinking water, generated new sources of revenue and developed the infrastructure in the rural areas. Regarding the impact on those who have direct accessed these funds, we can affirm that their income increased, generating new opportunities, whose results will be visible in the future.

#### Recommendations on measures for the sustainable development in the area of Iron Gates:

Mehedinti county aims to become a county whose sustainable development will permanent take account of the European principles: intelligent, sustainable and inclusion favourable growth, by the valorisation of the existing economic potential, aiming at:

- ☐ ensuring the balance between socio-economic systems and the natural potential with particular emphasis on tourism potential valorisation, based on unpolluted and traditional resources; development of the eco-tourism based on local resources;
- ☐ the existence of a highly qualified workforce, for that is ensured a sufficient number of jobs;
- ☐ increasing the county competitiveness, by valorisation of the existing economic sectors, respecting the sustainable development principles;
- ☐ the enhancement of the natural, cultural and historical patrimony, so complex and particular in this region;
- ☐ permanent improvement of the people life quality and ensuring their equal access to higher quality public utilities and services;
- ☐ social policies to reduce the number of persons in risk of poverty and social exclusion;
- ☐ expansion and development of the health services in communes and localities of the county;
- ☐ development of a competitive and performance agriculture;
- ☐ active involvement of the institutions for the economic and social balanced development of the county, with permanent consultation of the communities, social partners and business environment in the decision-making process.

From the analysis made it appears that the vision of development for the future period responds to the changes taking place in present in the territorial, economic and social dynamics of the county.

The development vision generates priority domains, activities and responsibilities differentiated for the urban and rural areas.

In case that the urban areas will be more concerned with their own social and economic patrimony valorisation and with enhancing of the competitive advantages gained in 2007-2013, the rural areas will continue the process of increasing the quality of life, aimed at combating the demographic decline, attracting new investors and achieving a competitive and performance agriculture.

## Conclusions

☐ Now it is vital to put the scientific knowledge achievements in the service of human and social life and not in the service of death by pollution, wars, global poverty etc. The transition in the XXI century means the passing to the practical responsibility era for using the scientific knowledge from the perspective and in the support of the increasing and development of the life quality (Popescu *et al*, 2009);

☐ The real economy must serve by its results, as well as through the mechanisms it uses, to the human and environment health, as generations of living that coexist and succeed inevitable in the evolution of our microcosm.

☐ Since the evolution of the whole common living takes place in conditions of uncertainty, it arises the question to protect the human health, the other components that this is interrelated, meaning the families health, the environmental health, the health of the organizations and the health of the institutions.

☐ We are aware that the aggregation of different indicators, linked directly or indirectly to the rural quality of life is a complex, difficult and sometimes contradictory process, but so aware we are that, in terms of the health of the all common living, we must find those relationships and those indicators with which to build a functional whole that to give the possibility of a proper evaluation, but also to help in remedying some factors of influence, determinants for the quality of life;

☐ The quality of life could be defined as the ensemble of the states that support the interior harmony based on homeostasis, which provides the individual with the energy necessary to enjoy life;

☐ The quality of human life must be interpreted from the perspective of the imperatives of life that Adler spoke about, as lived life, work and love (Adler, 1996);

☐ The quality of life from the perspective of the life lived in community is defined by the ensemble of the conditions of the human being perceived as being in accordance with its biology exigencies;

☐ For the people's health, the development of the human medicine and of an entire sector of health services, is for the period that we are, a vital requirement. In the economy of the human society, people produce those things that the nature cannot provide them for free and that they need to be satisfied. Inside these things, the health services are integrated, those that prevent the people illness and/or take of people out of the crisis, when the disharmony occurs between the body homeostasis and the environment.

☐ From the perspective of the labour imperative, the quality of life expresses those exigencies of the employment of the human being as a vocation and not as career or job.

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