

DIAGNOSTIC ANALYSIS OF THE AGRICULTURAL POPULATION OF THE DOLJ COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract. *The paper presents in brief a diagnostic analysis of the agricultural population of the Dolj County, Romania, identifying the needs of this population with a view to local socio-economic development in accordance with EU goals: balanced regional development and improved general living conditions.*

Key words: *diagnostic analysis, population, agriculture, rural*

INTRODUCTION

Located in south-west Romania, the Dolj County lies between 40,000' and 44,030' north latitude and 22,000' and 23,000' east longitude; the River Jiu crosses it from north to south.

The Dolj County covers 7,414 km²; its neighbours are the counties of Gorj and Valcea to the north, the Old County to the east, the Mehedinți County to the west, and the River Danube to the south (border with Bulgaria).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To achieve the diagnostic analysis of the agricultural population of the Dolj County, we had in view the present state of the county agriculture (mainly vegetal and animal productions), the demographics of the county's population and, within the rural population, rural development, rural potential, and social factors.

To do so, we used statistics from both local and national sources (National Institute of Statistics, The Strategy of Socio-economic Development of the Dolj County for the Period 2007-2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Agriculture

The Dolj County over 3.1% of the total area of the country and 3.9% of the total agricultural land of the country.

Agriculture supplies most jobs and accounts for most of the GDP of the county. The agricultural area measures 590,000 ha, of which 302,000 ha are irrigated and 47,000 are private property. The fact that 40% of the agricultural land is represented by chernozem speaks for itself about the huge opportunities of practicing agriculture in the Dolj County.

Productions of the year 2009 showed that almost 2/3 of the agricultural production of the county were vegetal production.

To valorise the county's agricultural production, there are numerous processing companies such as bread making, milk processing, edible oil processing, sugar manufacturing, brewery, meat processing, vegetable processing, as well as alcoholic drinks manufacturing.

The equipment and the production areas together with the skilled labour force are extremely important in the promotion of high-quality products for both domestic and foreign markets.

The number of companies active in the county's agriculture, forestry and fishery was 637. Most of them (545) belong to agriculture, 70 belong to forestry (the forested area of the county covers 81,500 ha, of which 11,500 ha are privately owned), and only 22 in the fishery sector.

Almost half of the agricultural companies cultivate crops, 17% grow animals, and 4% cultivate crops and grow animals (mixed farms).

Promoting traditional products can be extremely beneficial for the rural economy, particularly in areas that are less favoured or far from urban centres due to the increase of the incomes of agricultural producers and to the settlement of the rural population in the area.

At county level, there were 15 ecological operators on the list of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, most of which were agricultural producers, a processor, and an apiculturist.

There was no trader, exporter, or importer of ecological produce.

Description of the Profile of the Agricultural Population

Socio-economic changes that have changed the rural area in the last two decades have had different effects on the different categories of population and on rural localities.

Population

The population of the Dolj County is 715,989, after a decrease of about 8%.

The evolution of the population pyramid per age groups in the last six years points out a constant demographic ageing (more visible in rural areas), with a decrease of the share of young people (age group 0-14) (from 16.89% to 14.77%) and a parallel increase of the adult population (age group 15-59) (from 61.08% to 63.43%).

The data most relevant for the evolution of the demographic indices starting with 1990 and pointing out the main cause of the decrease of the population for the same period concern the birth rate value, 3.9% less (from 12.6% to 9.1%), a rate below the national mean (10.2%).

On the other hand, the global mortality rate increased with 1.6% (from 12.3% to 13.9%) and, starting with 1990, it has usually been 2% above the national mean.

Rural Population

The analysis of the demographics for the Dolj County starting with 1990 shows that is facing a steady depopulation of the rural areas: the urban population was above the rural population starting with 1994, when the share of the two categories of population changed for the first time in favour of the urban population (50.02%). Moreover, starting with 1990, the rural areas of the Dolj County lost 57,288 inhabitants (-14.7%), and the share of the rural population decreased from 50.19% in 1990 to 46.20% in 2006 (-3.99%).

Comparing national level data with regional level data during the above-mentioned period, we can see that the depopulation of the rural areas of the Dolj County is more visible than the depopulation of the rural areas at national level: the share of the rural population of the Dolj County decreased with 2.66%, while at national level it decreased with 1.5% (from 46.6% to 45.1%) and it was almost stable at regional level (about 50.9%).

In addition, between 1990 and 2005, the rural areas at national level lost 8.05% of their population (of 853,924 people), while the rural areas of the Dolj County lost, during the same period, 14.02% of the population. However, a slight increase of the rural population of

the Dolj County (+0.7% between 1990 and 2005) suggests that the depopulation of the rural areas is not the indirect effect of a process of urbanisation within the county but, most likely, the effect of an ageing population or of a population migrating outside the county. In fact, the data concerning the migratory population flows suggest that this phenomenon, accounting for 0.2% people changing residence or domicile, is not likely to determine the decrease of the population. In any case, the balance of the people coming/leaving (thus changing their residence) is negative for the rural areas and positive, on the whole, for the urban areas, while the balance of the people coming/leaving (thus changing their domicile) is negative for the urban areas and negative for the rural areas.

Unfortunately, the real incidence of the non-recorded migratory movement cannot be estimated at this point.

Rural Development

A balanced development of the Dolj County is not yet possible because of a complex of factors that include demographic trends, degree of development of business, structure of employment rate, state of education and health infrastructure, level of accessibility, and environment quality. All these factors act differently in rural and urban areas and affect deeply the living standards and the level of human development in the rural areas.

As for demographic trends, the rural areas face a steady ageing of the population and a steady depopulation trend.

Only 12.82% of the economic active units are in the rural area; they represent 13% of the microenterprises and only 5% of the total large enterprises of the Dolj County.

Rural areas are still very much dependent on the agricultural system which is characterised, on one hand, by a large number of individual agricultural exploitations with no legal personality (99.5% of the total land areas) that cultivate mainly for self-consumption and, on the other hand, by a relatively small number of units with legal personality (about 0.5% of the total land areas) that use 40% of the lands and produce for the market. We should also take into account the fact that the low unemployment rate hides, in fact, an under employment in subsistence agriculture.

Health services in the rural area lack the proper infrastructure, which directs people to urban areas.

Territorial cohesion in the Dolj County is also affected by the limited accessibility of the rural areas because of the lack of proper transport infrastructure: only 6.99% of the county and communal roads are modernised; public roads at county level lacks density (29.6 km/km², compared to the 35.8 km/km² at regional level, and 33.5 km/km² at national level); and a small density of the railway network (30.5 km/1000 km², compared to the 34.4 km/1000 km² at regional level and 45.9 km/1000 km² at national level).

The living standard in the rural areas and the health state of the rural population are also low because of the environmental infrastructure. Though it is being modernised and extended (particularly as far as the drinking water is concerned), there are no water plants for the treatment of used waters and no systems for the collection of wastes in the rural area.

Moreover, there are a few industrial waste dumps that do not meet European Union standards and that will be closed.

In this context, rural development should be promoted through a series of integrated interventions with an impact on all aspects of socio-economic development that aim at increasing attractiveness of and living standards in the rural area through diversified economic

activities, improved accessibility, and proper infrastructure, together with environmental protection and proper valorisation of existing natural resources.

Rural Potential

The rural potential of the Dolj County relies on both the richness of the existing natural and cultural resources and on the variety of available economic activities within the county, including agriculture, traditional activities (crafts), and non-agricultural activities (tourism). The premise for the valorisation of this potential is the improvement of the infrastructure, the development of human resources, and the promotion of social inclusion and, in general, the development of the necessary conditions for the diversification of rural economy and for the improvement of life quality.

Agricultural activities on which relies the rural economy of the Dolj County have an important potential for the development of the rural area if:

- The productivity of agricultural production is improved through the promotion of cooperation between the small agricultural producers and of the unifying of subsistence agricultural exploitations;
- Local agricultural produce are valorised and promoted;
- Agricultural mechanisation is improved;
- The irrigation system is modernised and extended;
- Agricultural produce are integrated in a formal already existing agro-alimentary circuit in full swing in the Dolj County.

As for the rural traditional culture and folk traditions in the Dolj County, they are best visible in the folk festivals that preserve the folk traditions of the different areas and represent a major cultural resource of all Romania's rural areas.

Moreover, among traditional craftsman activities, we should mention the workshops that produce the famous Oltenia carpets made in Bechet that are worked manually (on a weaving loom), observing the traditional patterns inherited from our ancestors, with temperamental colours, with geometrical or floral patterns that reflect the tradition and spirit of the historical region of Oltenia.

Besides folk traditions, we should also mention the cultural and religious heritage represented by the numerous architectural monuments, including monasteries and churches located in the rural area (for details, see the passage dedicated to "Culture").

On the other hand, the richness of natural resources – such as the Danube River, the protected areas, and the thermal waters from Gighera – represents, with proper management, a relevant potential for the development of niche tourism (ecotourism, spa tourism, fishing tourism, etc.).

To promote the development of rural communities at European standards, they have established the Association of Mayoralties from Southern Oltenia (AMHSO) (2005) and the Association of Mayoralties from Northern Dolj (AMHND) (2006).

Are members of the AMHSO 17 Mayoralties from the Dolj County: Mayoralty Giurgița, Mayoralty Cerăt, Mayoralty Barca, Mayoralty Goicea, Mayoralty Carna, Mayoralty Bistreț, Mayoralty Măceșu de Sus, Mayoralty Măceșu de Jos, Mayoralty Catane, Mayoralty Gighera, Mayoralty Gangiova, Mayoralty Valea Stanciului, Mayoralty Drănic, Mayoralty Urzicuța, Mayoralty Afumați, Mayoralty Siliștea Crucii, and Mayoralty Lipovu.

Are members of the AMHND 11 Mayoralties from the Dolj County: Mayoralty Goești, Mayoralty Șimnicu de Sus, Mayoralty Melinești, Mayoralty Fărcaș, Mayoralty Tâlpaș,

Mayorality Almăj, Mayorality Brădești, Mayorality Filiași, Mayorality Murgăși, Mayorality Mischii, and Mayorality Bulzești.

Both associations aim at organising activities related to rural development, social and public services, socio-economic activities, enhancement of free initiative through technical assistance centres for the EU-financed programmes, cultural-artistic activities, ethnographic and folklore activities, development and diversification of objectives through the financing of counselling and legal representation centres for the defence of fundamental human rights, environmental protection through nature-conservation activities, and sports activities.

Social Assistance

The population of the Dolj County faces numerous issues of social nature that are also at national level: family abandonment, precarious living conditions of the elderly, high rate of juvenile delinquency, Roma issue (low literacy level, difficulty of getting employed, victims of discrimination), domestic violence, “street children”, alcohol and/or drug addiction, etc.

Important segments of the population risk, because of a complex of diverse economic and social factors, to be marginalised and chronically limited from the point of view of the opportunities supplied by the society.

All this results in a socially and economically vulnerable population with high risk of social marginalisation, particularly in certain segments of the population such as people with disabilities, young people aged 18 and having left social protection centres, old people, single females that are victims of domestic violence of sexual exploitation, families at conflict or in extreme poverty, addicted people and, in general, the Roma population.

They have established, in the Dolj County, in accordance with the Government’s Decision no. 134/434 from 2004 and of the Decision of the Dolj County Council, the General Office for Social Assistance and Child’s Protection through the unification of the County Office for Social Assistance and of the County Office for Child’s Protection.

There is also, subordinated to the County Council, a Commission for Child’s Protection, a Medical Expertise Commission for Adult People with Disabilities, as well as 28 placement centres.

The County Strategy in the field of Social Assistance aims at developing the existing system of social assistance through the development of new social services in the Dolj County.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis shows the following:

- a low productivity of the agricultural sector;
 - a high incidence of small and very small farms;
 - a low diversification of the agricultural production;
 - a continuous depopulation of rural areas and environmental deterioration;
 - a deterioration of life quality and an increase of poverty rate particularly in rural areas;
 - an abandonment of marginal properties;
 - An insufficient use of European funds for agriculture and rural development.
- Taking into account these aspects, the directions of action should be:
- diversifying and encouraging rural economy through governmental and/or European Union financing;
 - diversifying population’s incomes in rural areas through non-agricultural activities that can improve living conditions;

- developing a relationship between tourism, agriculture, and natural resources with positive effects in the area;
- improving the agro-alimentary and agro-industrial sectors through proper interventions;
- improving the irrigation system;
- producing ecological produce.

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