

- Thesis Summary -

***Research on sustainable rural development in the Valley of Râșca  
(Suceava County)***

**INTRODUCTION**

The doctoral dissertation entitled *Research on sustainable rural development in the Valley of Râșca (Suceava County)* represents a detailed analysis of the Romanian village in terms of the new sustainable development perspectives opened by the accession to the European Community area.

The objectives of this research were the following:

- characterization, from a systemic perspective, of all the physico-geographical components of the area, highlighting the relationships and interactions that occur at this level;
- socio - economic analysis and its evolution over the past 40 years, using statistical data and calculating a condition index ;
- assessment the level of living of the people by highlighting the living conditions and access to public services;
- characterization of the environment factors in terms of quality and specifying how they are influenced by local community and how they influence the local human life;
- identify how local authorities are concerned with the sustainable development of the area and the effectiveness of policies adopted by them;
- highlight how the residents of the study area perceive the surrounding reality and realize the importance of natural resources and environment for the development of the study area;
- observe how European policies for sustainable development brought improvements in other rural areas and identify advantages and disadvantages of implementing such a policy in the Romanian rural area.

In the eight chapters, which is structured the thesis, were achieve the proposed objectives, through a logical and successive exposure of information and by using a methodology of research, in line with the topic.

## **I. CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMING**

In an attempt to define the terms "rural" and "rural development" there have been various interpretations, due to the fact that these concepts have evolved in recent decades, with different meanings depending on the matter.

Rural development provides for actions that lead to improved quality of life for the population living in rural areas and protect the natural and cultural environment in line with the specifics of the area (Man & Mateoc-Sârb, 2007, p. 40). Rural development does not involve making changes in rural area's specifics; this is aimed at getting a balance through which a rural area is capable of performing in a sustainable manner his functions in the society.

In an attempt to understand the way in which events are developing in Romanian rural area, this study proposes a detailed analysis of a small territory. This is represented by Râșca Valley, an area well defined geographically and characterized by a space essentially rural.

This scientific approach is based on a specific research methodology, which includes various materials and methods used to achieve the objectives initially set.

## **II. ANALYSIS OF THE NATURAL COMPONENTS IN THE VALLEY OF RÂȘCA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

The studied area, although is a relatively small area, has a geographical location characterized by the combination of two different relief units. Represents an area of contact between the sectors of the Carpathian area (Stânișoarei Mountains), Subcarpathians pleated structure in the West and North-West and tabular structure of the Moldavian Plateau from the East and Northeast. The geographical location of the basin determines a number of physical-geographical effects caused by geological substrate, relief position, waters, climate, soils and vegetation.

The physical and geographical position of the study area also influences the social component and the economy. The Râșca basin has been since ancient times a favorable space for habitation because it favors the habitation through stable land and natural resources necessary for the development of human settlements (especially the resources represented by the water reserves, forests, and less the soil).

## **III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT VIEWED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

### ***a. Evolution of the rural settlements in the Valley of Râșca***

Râșca basin is known as a old housing area given the fact that it is located in an area that has a favorable natural environment and natural resources to support the

development of human communities. According to geomorphological conditions residents have sought favorable areas for housing, so that the rural settlements have been developed on the rivers terraces, with low slope or flat land. One element of the natural environment, which decisively influenced the structure of rural settlements and their territorial evolution, is the forest, whose limit was removed in time, leaving space for the villages.

**b. *Demographic aspects***

The number of population in the research area has a continued growth, as can be seen from the analysis of the statistics of the last 140 years. Râșca basin enjoys with important forest resources and their exploitation has led to the population maintenance in this area. However, the migration phenomenon has been manifested, in terms of both internal and external migration. A large part of the rural active population has been attracted to the mirage of industrialized cities or, after 1990; people have emigrated to States with better standards of life and civilization, who offered economic benefits.

In terms of population dynamics, the Valley of Râșca is characterized by a negative natural growth, caused by the aging population and the continued decline of the birth rate.

A peculiarity of the studied area is the ethnic composition of the population, a large number of inhabitants belong to the Orthodox Church of the Old-Calendar, a cult that is not officially recognized by the Romanian state.

The analysis of the occupational structure of the population shows that in this moment the active population may be able to support economically the inactive population over 65 years old, therefore Râșca basin presents sufficient resources for labor.

The Valley of Râșca, an essentially rural area, had and still has an active majority population in the primary sector of activity.

**c. *Agriculture***

In the Valley of Râșca agriculture occupies an important place, more than half of the population is engaged in this sector, but agriculture is practiced on the small areas of land, in order to obtain certain products for personal consumption of the inhabitants. The agricultural area is not very large due to the fact that a part of the territory is occupied by forests, or has constraints related with the relief: elevation, slope and the climate influences the type of crops and the use of certain varieties of plants. Soils are poorly fertile and productive, so that the farmers use large amounts of manure.

Livestock farming is a sector of agriculture well represented in the area, natural conditions helping to increase areas occupied by pastures and meadows. Livestock development is due to such forage base which provides the necessary quantities of food.

#### **d. *The forest industry***

Râșca Valley is an area known for forest resources which occupies 78% (18,000 hectares) of the total area of the basin.

Exploitation and woodworking has been and continues to be the most productive economic activity in the area, this is why a large number of commercial companies existing in the area have the objective of activity sawing wood. Although the area has important forest resources, their use is still done in a primary form.

#### **3.5. *Tourism***

In the study area exist an unorganized tourism, the time spent by tourists in the area being relatively short, limited only to the end of the week (weekend tourism), because there isn't any well-developed accommodation infrastructure and are not available offers for tourists. The main types of tourism are the tourism for rest and recreation and cultural or religious tourism, the area being visited because its beautiful places and the landscape created by the forest, as well as for local cultural objectives.

#### **3.6. *Transportation network and means of transport***

Currently the access in the Valley of Râșca is performed exclusively through road transport, so that the network of roads is constructed according to the spatial distribution of settlements, by the configuration of hydrographic network and by the particularities of the relief.

As regards the modernization of roads, there was noted an improvement in their quality over time, but the share of asphalt roads still remains low (14%).

#### **3.7. *The housing stock***

Regarding the housing dynamics is observed that this has evolved positively in recent years. Comparing data from the censuses of 1992 and 2002 with those available in the year 2010 can be seen that both the number of households and housing quality has changed. It is noted that in the last 20 years have grown the comfort indicators, the new houses have more room and are more spacious.

In 2002 the houses of villages Bogdănești and Râșca presented a very weak level of equipment-less than 10%. In the last ten years the number of modernized housing has grown, about 30% of them having the necessary facilities in 2011.

#### **3.8. *Health Services***

In the study area medical services are weakly developed. Reported to the total population, the number of doctors is very small, at the level of 2010 to a physician returned 2625 patients in Râșca village and 3997 patients in Bogdanești village. In these circumstances medical personnel may not cover the needs of people, which is why the villagers have appealed to health services from urban areas.

### **3.9. Education**

In the last 40 years the total number of students enrolled in local schools has decreased significantly, which is why two schools were closed.

The majority of residents are satisfied with the quality of the education in the local schools. Faced with learning conditions in educational establishments, teachers declare that schools are poorly equipped and furnished, being require investments for their modernization.

### **3.10. Culture and ethnography**

Over time, a remarkable influence on the local cultural life had Râșca monastery, and now it continues to be involved in various socio-educational activities.

Currently, the poor cultural offer and the lack of conditions for perform cultural and sportive activities are issues through which one can observe the level of development of the two municipalities, but at the same time denotes the passive and indifferent attitude of the local authorities and of the inhabitants towards these issues.

### **3.11. *Proposals for the sustainable development of socio-economic component of the rural areas from Râșca Valley***

Benefiting by the advantages that bring the forest resources of the researched area, more and more entrepreneurs could invest in the technologies of industrialization of wood, as is wood briquetting.

Another area of activity on which it should to insist more is the manufacture of furniture, considering the fact that the raw material is easily accessible, so like price as proximity. Wood carving is a tradition in the area, which is why it should be encouraged and promoted.

The agricultural sector can bring significant revenue to the local economy as long as the investments in this area will be productive activities such as livestock farming and use of animal products.

From the tourist point of view it can make some investments that highlight the natural potential of the region.

## **IV. DEVELOPMENT STAGE OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPONENT IN THE VALLEY OF RÂȘCA**

The evolution in time of the socio-economic dimension that characterizes the Râșca basin was evidenced by a proposed methodology within the Interamerican Institute of Cooperation for Agriculture from Costa Rica, by Sergio Sepúlveda. The methodology allows the calculation of an index for each dimension of sustainable development, for a certain period of time.

To obtain the index of sustainable development of socio-economic component of the Râșca basin, have been analyzed a number of variables that fall into four different themes: demography, economics, education and medical services.

The index results for socio-economic development in the basin Râșca, identifies a trend decline of the local system. Thus, if in 1977 the index value of 0.70, characterizes a period of stability, after 1990, the calculated values show that the system becomes unstable, in 2010 reaching a critical stage.

## **V. QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS IN RÂȘCA VALLEY**

The evolution of human society also meant the diversification of human activities which, by their intensity, affects the quality of the air, water and soil.

Charcoal production in rudimentary conditions in the villages of Buda and Slătioara, burning crop residues on fields and more recently incineration of waste produced in households and auto traffic, are sources of air pollution that have been identified in the area studied.

The mismanagement of wastes, in the village of Bogdănești and in the village of Râșca, but also the low level of ecological education of the population has led to the pollution of the Râșca river with all kinds of waste.

Quality of water and soil is influenced also by the storage in the bed of the rivers or directly on the soil of different types of waste generated from human activities, producing chemical and also aesthetics pollution.

## **VI. SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE VALLEY OF RÂȘCA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

The capacity of local authorities in the municipalities of Bogdănești and Râșca to satisfy the development needs of the territory has been highlighted by a number of issues such as: the number of public servants of the public Town Hall, their age and their level of education and the specialization, the available budget, the cooperation with local community members and local economic actors, the cooperation with local administrations of the neighboring communes as well as with other organizations and institutions of the central public administration.

An example that demonstrates how the local governments in the area are outweighed by the problems is the waste management. The uncontrolled waste is a serious problem in the area studied and unfortunately is not limited only to the area inhabited. During field observations, it was found waste deposited in the riverbeds in the vicinity of human settlements and in remote areas, at hundreds of feet on the forest roads.

## **VII. SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE VALLEY OF RÂȘCA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RESIDENTS**

The survey conducted on a random sample of 250 people, represented by the inhabitants of the communes Râșca and Bogdănești, was aimed at highlighting the perspective which the locals have regarding the development of the area in which they live.

The answers given by the inhabitants surveyed reveals that they knew about the natural resources of the area, as well as their importance in the process of rural development. The population of the area is aware of the fact that environmental degradation is more pronounced today than 20 years ago, as a result of human intervention in a reckless manner.

Is appreciated the interest of locals to take part in the decision making process of public policies or to participate in activities undertaken for the purpose of the community. It is observed that, although set in a rural area, the population is well informed and responsive enough to the proposals coming from the outside, this represents an asset for the development of the area.

## **VIII. LEADER PROGRAM'S CONTRIBUTION IN THE PROCESS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY: ENTRESIERRAS COMMUNITY, SPAIN**

LEADER program is a method by which European policies have intended to mobilize and promote the development of rural areas. To identify the results of the program LEADER in the Entresierras Community was intended the vision of subjects interviewed on the manner in which has developed over the last 20 years this territory, but also other rural areas in the vicinity.

It was considered that European policies for rural development contributed specifically to the modernization of villages by creating technical infrastructures, improvement of communication and social services. Rural tourism development has resulted in increasing the number of guest houses, which improved the quality of housing by providing housing with appropriate utilities.

The economic environment has been developed thanks to the support of the small investor, but also to support initiatives of association of economic agents. To solve the problem of the low number of inhabitants and the aging population has developed programs whose objectives have been to attract people, especially young families in rural areas by providing certain benefits (housing, employment and productive land area).

A drawback of the LEADER program was that there were a number of unprofitable investments, for example, were built some structures which are not exploited in any way due to the fact that they were made in the absence of feasibility studies. There have been instances in which it had invested large sums of money without well defined purposes, which has led to the loss of confidence in the effectiveness of the LEADER program.

In agriculture failed to maintain the farms and the subsidies for non-production made that large tracts of land to be abandoned.

The desire to develop rural areas with tourism potential has inflated construction of pensions which are functional only during the summer or on weekends. Closing these houses on large periods of time makes some villages seem downright deserted, that is precisely why were called "ghost villages" by the subjects surveyed. The use of multiple housing for touristic purposes has generated a crisis of the premises to rent or to buy, because they are found in low numbers and have very high prices.

A problem frequently encountered in the administration of local action groups is their politicization, which negatively influenced the decision-making process.

These aspects, both positive and negative with regard to the implementation of the program LEADER at the Spanish rural space demonstrates just how much influence the peculiarities of a territory the sustainable development process. After 20 years of European funding, in which took numerous projects of development, the Community Entresieras does not recorded certain progress, but it has to be considered that it has gone from the start with a disability: the continuous reduction in the number of inhabitants.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research thesis was focused on the analysis of components that underlie the process of sustainable development, specifically on the knowledge of the characteristics of the natural environment and the quality of environmental factors, highlighting aspects of the economic, social and cultural area examined and last but not least on highlighting the level of involvement of local authorities and civil society in the process of development.

- As regards the analyze of natural environment, it was intended to highlight issues that concern to rural development prospects in Râșca basin.
- The analysis of the socio-economic environment in rural areas contained in Râșca Valley surprised some problematic issues faced by the local population and which adversely affect sustainable development in the territory.
- The lack of jobs in rural areas has contributed to keeping agriculture as the main sector of activity for local people.
- In addition to agriculture, an important role in the local economy it holds the forest industry.
- The local education system is affected by the decrease in number of students, which led to the closure of the schools considered inoperative.



- The health system is not satisfactory for the local population, which is why locals prefer urban health services.
- At the cultural level a great importance shows the preservation of local traditions that confer an identity to this territory.
- The values obtained for the development index of the socio-economic component demonstrate that the system is currently in a critical stage of development.
- The main problems concerning the quality of environmental factors are those relating to soil and water pollution due to discharges of wastewater untreated or uncontrolled waste deposits.
- The involvement of local authorities in the rural development is not sufficient at present and the effectiveness of the activities is often affected by the financial problems and the level of training of public servants.
- The opinion of the inhabitants of the area, expressed means of questionnaires completed in the communes of Râșca and Bogdănești, demonstrates that the local population is not foreign to the problems faced by rural areas.
- The analysis of rural spanish areas demonstrates that development policies proposed by the European Union may have positive implications, but at the same time may cause various problems at the local level. For this reason it is necessary that development policies should be adjusted to the characteristics and specificities of each rural area in part.
- The rural space of the Râșca Valley is a dynamic environment, with future perspectives in terms of raising the standard of living, improving the living conditions and the quality of the environment. Sustainable development is feasible if will be implemented and promoted the natural resources, the socio-economic and cultural capital that characterize the rural area.

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