

SUMMARY

of PhD thesis “Research on Rural Development for the Improvement of Rural Population’s Quality of Life in the Syrian Arab Republic and in Romania,
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This PhD thesis aims, through a thorough comparative analysis between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Romania of rural development, to point out theoretical and practical issues related to increasing the quality of life of the rural population in general, and particularly in the two states mentioned above.

The global objectives of sustainable economic growth employment, poverty reduction, and equitable development, cannot be achieved unless a direct approach at rural level. Rural development is a special and distinctive branch of development. The development concept has evolved continually, initially being understood in terms of economic growth, later as a process of modernization, or world structural change. In the 1990s the international community renews the focus on poverty reduction and started to adopt a more holistic approach of development. The best known expression of current development concerns can be found in the Millennium Development Goals which, although formulated in 2000, set targets for achieving change over 25 years from 1990 to 2015. The goals and targets aimed at reducing extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

Rural development has emerged as a distinctive field of research and policy in the 80s, following the introduction of the development planning strategy by the World Bank and UN agencies. Given that the livelihoods of the majority of the rural population depend, either directly or indirectly, on the **agricultural sector**, agriculture is an obvious sector in which to concentrate efforts to promote growth. Currently, 60% of the world’s population ensures its existence directly from the practice of agriculture. Agriculture's role is crucial in solving the food problem, being a branch that provides raw material for

more than half of the industries: food industry - 90%, light industry - 70%, chemical industry - 20%. Promoting agricultural development has always been a central element of rural development policy. However, rural development is not just about increasing agriculture, and even if the agricultural sector is very important, it is not sufficient in itself to ensure economic growth in rural areas. Other sectors or dimensions come into play in the growth process in rural areas such as health, education and economic activities outside the agricultural sector. Rural development is multi-sectoral and includes a variety of different economic and social sectors, representing the process of improving quality of life and economic well-being of the population in rural areas.

The thesis contains 273 pages, 132 tables, 266 reference titles and is structured in five main chapters, detailed in subchapters, sections and subsections. Each chapter ends with a subchapter dedicated to presenting preliminary conclusions.

First Chapter “General Issues on Economic Development and Rural Development” presents introductory and general considerations regarding the concepts of economic development and rural development.

The first part of this Chapter outlines the main elements of the world economy’s development. It highlights the globalization of the world economy, occurred mainly after the Second World War and which experienced a spectacular development especially after the ‘80s, together with the globalization of financial markets.

Globalization seems to be desirable because it offers: a certain degree of individual freedom that no state can provide it; free competition on a global scale that accelerates innovation; release of entrepreneurial and creative talent; best allocation of resources, which produce wealth at an unprecedented level. Yet globalization also has a negative side, which consists mainly of exclusion or marginalization of the small, those disadvantaged by fate. Specialised literature highlights that the marginalization of poor countries is no longer a threat, but a reality, that if it will persist, will increasingly deepen the gap between rich and poor. Africa's share in world exports is decreasing since the '70s, as well as its foreign direct investment. Nor do Latin American countries record spectacular growth, according to some assessments, their share in world gross product increased insignificantly.

The same first part of this Chapter presents as well the main international organizations that play an important role in economic development by coordinating various aspects of the international economy and by committing to redistribute the benefits of global human development. In this context a separate subsection deals with national and global gaps in economic development, given that developing countries face great inequality in income distribution.

Inequality in income distribution is correlated with the absolute poverty which affects much of the population in these countries. Inequality in income distribution is revealed as well by the share that the poorest fifth of the population has in total revenues compared to the richest fifths share from the same total income. For rich countries, this ratio is on average 5 to 1. For the poorest countries, it touches levels above 30 to 1. The gap between the income of the richest one-fifth and one-fifth of the world's poorest was 30 to 1 in 1960 to 60-1 in 1990 and 74-1 in 1997. In addition, the World Bank report emphasizes that at the beginning of the third millennium, the world will increase the number of those who live at a dollar a day to 1.5 billion, comparing to 1.2 billion in 1997.

The second part of the First Chapter presents aspects of sustainable development in connection to the environmental development and rural development addressing the concept under three aspects: temporal, fairness and regarding the environment. Finally, the third subchapter outlines the main programs to reduce disparities in economic development and growth of living standards, highlighting actions initiated globally and regionally. It highlighted in particular the Millennium Development Goals and European Union policies in both rural development and in connection to development cooperation.

The Second Chapter, “Indicators, Methods and Studies on Rural Development and Quality of Life in the Rural Areas”, includes six subchapters and analyzes the rural development and quality of life in rural areas through the rural development indicators and different methods of calculation. The first part of this chapter, section 1 and 2, focuses on rural development indicators and standard of living indicators. An important aspect in this regard is the analysis of poverty, seen as a lack of resources to provide a decent standard of living. The interest of learning to measure poverty derives from the conviction that poverty is not only a consequence but also an unfavorable factor of economic growth. Fundamental concepts are defined and analyzed, such as poverty line, poverty depth index, relative poverty and absolute poverty, median deficit, Gini coefficient.

The third subchapter of this chapter deals with the living standards indicators used by international organizations - interactive method of aggregation index - 11 criteria (OECD) and the Human Development Index.

In four and five subsections indicators of living standards used in Syria and in Romania will be presented. In Syria the methodology for measuring the poverty line (threshold) starts from the specific household poverty line (threshold). The procedures for estimating specific poverty thresholds households are based on stages. Romania, as an EU member, uses as indicators of living standards the European Programme of Action for Combating Poverty indicators and those developed as a result of the Lisbon Strategy (2000).

The sixth's section of Chapter Two focuses on the state of research on rural development and the quality of life in rural areas, which are grouped into studies on the role of agriculture in the economy and socio-economic conditions of the peasantry, studies on living standards in rural areas in Syria, on living standards in rural areas in Romania, relevant to both countries.

The Third Chapter „Analysis on Rural Development in Order to Improve the Quality of Life of Peasants in the Syrian Arab Republic", is structured in six sections, making an analysis of the current status of rural development in the Syrian Arab republic. The chapter starts with a description of the natural and socio-economic conditions of Syria: territorial location, demographics, education, culture and traditions, economic development. Syria is a country with an average economic strength, based on agriculture, oil, industry and tourism. As since 2000 Syria has made important efforts to sign international trade treaties, the thesis analyzes the foreign investments in Syria during the period 2000 to 2013, imports and exports, as well as public aid for development. It was noted that these had an upward trend until 2008, but at the level of 2013, values almost halved due to the armed conflict that broke out in 2011. The total loss suffered by the Syrian economy in the three years of conflict (2011-2013) is over 140 billion dollars of which \$ 69.1 billion (49.4%) represents the value of money supply loss. The proportion remaining 50.6%, totaling \$ 70.67 billion is due to sharp fall in GDP and to the large difference between estimated and actual levels.

The second part of Chapter Three analyzes the main demographic indicators (natural growth, longevity, life expectancy at birth, migration trends of population and its density), indicators measuring access to education and culture, and indicators of urban amenities (total number of students and teachers in rural schools, road network, purchasing power, the number of municipal libraries, health services as the number of pharmacies, family medical services, dentists, etc.). Active total population is about 7,271,000 people (2012), of which 1.39 million working in agriculture. The rural population is located in 2013 at 9857000 people showing increases during 2005-2013. Syria's life expectancy is located around 74.5 years, with the highest value from the studied arab countries, and situating over the world level.

Subchapter three includes the analysis of indicators on the rural economy: land development, agricultural development facilities (car park and agricultural tractors, the amount of fertilizer used and the structure of irrigated land), developments in production value. Syria has an agricultural area occupying a share of 76% of the Syrian territory, 18.515 million ha of which cultivated land occupies a share of 32.6%, or 6,045,000 ha. 1638.8 ha of this land receive irrigation. Agricultural total production was calculated at \$ 7759.9 million, of which \$ 4986 million from vegetal production and \$ 2766.9 million from animal production.

The fourth part of Chapter Three presents the analysis of living standards indicators in Syria. In this context, the thesis looks at the gross domestic product as the main factor in knowing the results of the labor force use. GDP recorded annual growth nationally, increasing gradually. Compared to 2000, in 2005 there is an increase of +70.4%. The year 2010 recorded values of 216.9% higher compared to 2000 and 85.9% higher compared to 2005. The GDP of Syria fell in 2013 to 41% of GDP in 2010. If not the armed conflict, based on estimates that were made, GDP in 2013 would have reached 122% of GDP in 2010. Thus GDP loss for the Syrian economy is estimated to 2042 billion Syrian pounds in constant prices of 2000. And in the current prices, GDP total loss equals 70.9 billion. The labor force is structured mainly between 20 and 35 years in both rural and urban areas, gender differences indicate predisposition to hire men at younger ages than women. Unemployment is a serious problem when it comes to standard of living, so that it reaches a worrying percentage of 11.4% in 2012 and previous data reflect consecutive increases, so that the unemployment percentage is expected to be increasing.

Further on follows an analysis of employment indicators and of complex indicators on living standards in Syria (overall size of total expenditure per household, by country level, governorates and by area of residence, the size of food and non-food expenditure, by country level, governorates and by area of residence, poverty rate in Syria and some neighbouring countries). If the rural spending at country level is at an average of 27336 Syr/household, with an average variation of 12,5%, the situation is different within the governorates; the highest level of expenditures are registered in Tartous 31885 £Syr/household, of which 57,6% non-food, and the rest of 42,4 % for food. A high value of these expenditures is noticed in Dara governorate as well, with a distribution of 16435 syrian pounds per household for non-food expenditures (51.7%), and 15384 Syr / household (4.3%) for food; in contrast, Edleb governorate, has an aggregate total expenditure of 22692 rural Syr / household, of which 52.7% are food and 47.3% for non-food. In terms of inequalities in expenses distribution, in 2009 the distribution of monthly expenses per household at the national level, the Gini coefficient's value was 0.265 , 0.248 in urban area and 0.209 in rural area, showing that inequalities are higher in urban than in rural areas. The share of the poor in Syria is 35,2 (in 2006 – last data available), and the share of the population living below poverty line is 35,2 %, with a share of 36,9% for the rural area and 30,8% for urban areas – in 2007 last published data).

Finally, the Human Development Index (HDI) is analyzed, indicating that Syria was located for the period 1980-2013 at an average level of human development until the impact of the armed conflict. Reports on the conflict in Syria emphasize the economic gap, both social and economic development being in a period of extraordinary regress, but the damage to this development is immeasurable

(increased maternal mortality, occurrence of diseases that have long disappeared from Syria, lack of medicines, insecurity roads).

Based on this analysis, the last two sections of Chapter Three include proposals on rural development in order to improve the quality of life of peasants in the Syrian Arab Republic and preliminary conclusions on the issues under analysis.

Chapter Four „Rural Development Analysis for Improving the Quality of Life of Rural Population in Romania”, performs an analysis of the Romanian rural development. The Chapter is divided into eight chapters with sections and subsections. Subchapter one presents the socio-economic conditions in Romania: territorial location, climate, topography, population, education, culture, traditions, economic development, tourism. The second section deals with the rural development in Romania. Rural areas have substantial growth potential and have a vital social role. The rural population is not evenly distributed. There are significant differences in terms of population density across Romania. As far as employment concerns, labour force reserves are decreasing in Romania, and qualitative changes occur in their structure both in terms of age and of education. Education and training opportunities are still low in rural areas, although the level of education of the rural population has improved, but at a slow pace.

In the third section an analysis on the rural economy indicators is made. Agriculture plays an important role in the structure of the national economy both through participation in the gross domestic product, as well as a direct source of jobs. The evolution of farmland, agricultural equipment, evolution of production value are issues on which the analysis revealed the development of agricultural production. The fourth section presents the standard of living and quality of life in Romanian rural areas. To this end we analyzed the indicators of income and expenditure, the national median income assessment method of living standards and development of severe and absolute poverty rates.

In Romania, poverty has two main aspects. First, the incidence of poverty by residence: in urban areas this differs from the rural area. Secondly, there are regional differences in poverty at the level of the 8 regions, which have heterogeneous development indicators. If in 1989 the number of poor in Romania was estimated at about one million people, in 1998, nearly eight million people, or 34% of the total population were poor, of which more than two million people could be considered as extremely poor (their consumption was below the threshold of 40% of the average monthly consumption per adult equivalent).

During 2000-2012, GDP per capita in Romania increased from 1662 USD / capita in 2000 to 5706 USD / capita in 2012. In 2012, the worldwide GDP per capita was 7779 USD, 29090 USD at EU level, of 10732 USD in Hungary. Romania is ahead of Bulgaria where GDP / capita was 7198 USD.

During this period, annual GDP growth rate in Romania was 14.5%, reaching the highest level compared to France (5.12%), Hungary (8.86%) and Poland (9.18%). For 2010-2012, a study analyzing the population below the poverty line, ranks Romania on the last place with a share of 22.2% in 2010 and 22.6% in 2011.

The fifth section analyzes the social and economic protection in Romania, with the main direct financial aid and the sixth section performs a multidimensional analysis of indicators on the standard of living and quality of life. A first finding is that there are differences between the degree of poverty in the developing regions, both between rural and urban areas and inside the area of residence. Thus the poverty in rural areas ranges from 8% in the North East region and 20% in the Western Region, while in urban areas it reaches 28.0% in the North West region and 48% in the North East.

Finally, the seventh and eighth sections include proposals on rural development in order to improve the quality of life of peasants in Romania and preliminary conclusions on the analyzed issues.

The final part of the thesis is the Fifth Chapter "General Conclusions" which presents findings of the research, highlighting the most important aspects related to the role that economic development in general and rural development in particular have on increasing the quality of life of the peasantry the two states.