

S U M M A R Y

of the doctoral thesis entitled:

RESEARCH ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN RURAL AREAS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

PhD-student: **DOBRE R. Lucica**

Scientific coordinator: **Professor, PhD MOCUȚA Dorina Nicoleta**

**KEYWORDS: quality of life, sustainable development,
rural areas, transdisciplinarity**

In the paper entitled „*Research on the quality of life in rural areas from the perspective of sustainable development*” I proposed for analysis a research topic of maximum interest, namely that of the quality of life in the rural environment, in the context of sustainable development

The concepts of quality of life and sustainable development are both current and used, constituting important research topics in economic fields, and socio-human ones.

A major priority on almost all European and world development agendas and programs, an extremely important element in the huge gear of global development - sustainable development is intended to be the solution to the planetary crisis in terms of: climate change, the inefficient rationalization of natural resources as well as the transition to a balanced society in terms of resource consumption, oriented towards achieving and maintaining quality-based living standards.

The present research approach is notable for the fact that we analyze the two concepts, namely that of quality of life and that of sustainable development, in rural areas from North-Eastern Romania, counties: Vaslui, Iași, Suceava, Bacău, Neamț, Botoșani.

The research is innovative because it brings information regarding the rural areas of North-East Romania, to the perception that rural individuals have on the rural quality of life, and on sustainable development.

I have noticed that this segment, of the quality of life analysis in the rural area is poorly addressed by the specialized literature, the topic being insufficiently addressed especially in the context of sustainability. That’s why I considered it opportune to analyze the quality of life in the rural areas, based on mainly socio-economic indicators, the

research being carried out over a 10-year period, a necessary situation, intended to shed light on the de facto state of the rural quality of life, in the context of sustainable development. At the same time, the present paper „**Research on the quality of life in the rural environment from the perspective of sustainable development**” was carried out without omitting the world context, with the challenges that are in full swing, with particular reference to structural changes.

The scientific approach focuses on hypotheses such as:

- The North-Eastern area of Romania is a „challenging” one in terms of quality of life and sustainable development;
- Objective indicators and subjective indicators may influence the rural quality of life in the rural areas;
- Migration (internal-external) affects the rural quality of life in rural areas;
- Natural growth significantly influences sustainable development, respectively the quality of life in rural areas;
- Regional disparities affect the quality of life;
- Education level and the quality of educational services influence the quality of life in rural areas;
- Poor sustainable investments in the North-East of Romania impacts rural quality of life;
- Accessing the European funds for sustainable development is a basic pillar for increasing the rural quality of life;
- Excessive bureaucracy is a demotivating factor on accessing non-reimbursable funds.
- Restoring trust in the main political institutions is a determining indicator for increasing the rural quality of life;
- Promoting, strengthening the strengths of North-East region could lead to increase the rural quality of life;
- The implementation of Smart Village - Smart Schools projects could lead to increase the rural quality of life.

The purpose of the thesis is to capture and analyze the evolution of the quality of life in rural areas, from the perspective of sustainable development, in the Macroregion II, North-East of Romania, the following counties: Bacău, Botoșani, Suceava, Neamț, Iași, Vaslui.

As a main objective, we proposed an extensive research on the concrete effects determined by the quality of life, within sustainable development, in rural environment, Macroregion II, over a period of 10 years, respectively 2013-2023.

As a specific secondary objectives, and to achieve the main objective, we carried out two research approaches, namely: at the theoretical level, we undertook the main concepts of the thesis analysis, detailed within the first part of research approach, and at the practical-applicative level, a research survey based on a questionnaire.

The questionnaire, applied to a sample of 180 rural respondents, from the counties of Iași, Suceava, Neamț, Bacău, Botoșani, Vaslui, includes 35 closed and semi-open questions. Based on it, we tried to capture the current state, and the level of progress recorded on achieving the objectives of sustainable development, in North-Eastern of Romania, mainly the rural areas.

The analyzed approach started from the mentioned premises, which after a thorough theoretical foundation helped clarifying the main concepts of sustainable development and quality of life in the rural areas.

The documentation and research activity was carried out between 2019-2023, by consulting exhaustive databases, statistical data of the National Institute of Statistics (NIS), national, international studies, Eurostat statistics, which provided us with an informational framework corresponding to the research efforts.

The thesis bibliography includes 117 titles, scientific papers, articles, specialized references by significant authors for the research field.

The paper contains two parts containing structured in five chapters. On part I, over the course of two chapters, I analyzed the current state of knowledge in the field, and part II of the thesis, which consists of three chapters, constitutes the research part, the own contributions related to the analyzed subject, namely the quality of life in rural areas from sustainable development perspective.

In first part, „Bibliographic study”, I have carried out a point-by-point analysis of recent and scientific contributions on global sustainable development, with an emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goals. In this sense, I made a point-by-point examination of the most important summits on sustainable development topic, starting with the 1972 Stockholm, then 1987, respectively the Brundtland Report. We synthesized the most relevant ideas of the following summits held every 10 years, the last most important being in 2015, in New York.

I also made a brief reference to other moments related to the objectives set on the agenda of the last summit, respectively, other congresses, meetings, debates, which took place at the European or global level, considering the dynamics of the events, which required a quick resolution.

In first chapter entitled „**The current state of knowledge regarding quality of life research from the perspective of sustainable development**” I analyzed the main concepts I referred to inside the thesis, namely: the concept of quality of life, sustainable development, transdisciplinarity, rural space, as well as agrarian space, rurality, rural space structure, and its functions.

According to World Health Organization definition, the concept of quality of life refers to the level of health achieved by a person to ensure a physical, mental, social well-being to be able to perform daily tasks for himself, but also to become productive and useful to society, thus showing that health is a basic indicator in defining the dimensions of quality of life, even more important than financial well-being.

We must admit that a single definition cannot incorporate the multitude of factors with which the quality of life concept is interdependent, hence the growing interest of communities in it.

The sustainable development concept through the implementation of sustainable tools, must lead to a sustainable society, with an optimal quality of life, to ensure a sustainable future for current, but especially future, generations. In this sense, investments in research are those to be put over challenges of today's world, climate change, adaptation of the human factor, gradual replacement of the human workforce with technical means, all of which stimulate the human ability to measure intelligent, durable and sustainable change of humanity as a whole.

The concept of transdisciplinarity creates the bridge between science and tradition. Is the meeting between the different levels of reality (horizontal and vertical), studying the isomorphisms between different domain of knowledge, from here deriving the complexity of the transdisciplinary approach.

In the second chapter entitled „Sustainable development objectives”, we reviewed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with the 230 specified indicators, as well as their targets. In this sense, there are objections, counterarguments and disagreements regarding the high number of objectives, which through the subsets of objectives they create, lead to difficulty of the process and put distance to achieving of the main objectives.

We also considered it of interest to integrate into the paper a complementary perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals, namely the Sustainable Society Index - SSI, developed on 8 fields of action and 21 indicators. Also here, taking into account the European context, i integrate a SSI analyse of Romania on 3 large categories of dimensions:

1. Social dimension: Human well-being
2. Ecological dimension: Environmental well-being
3. Economic dimension: Economic well-being

The implementation of these objectives aims for the change to be achieved simultaneously, macrosocial and microsocial, within full use resources of the biosystem and transposing concretely and pragmatically all the wishes that are the basis of sustainable development.

Regarding the own research, it is found in the second part, in which I clearly defined the purpose of the work, concentrate on the principal objectives established at the beginning of the paper. For this, were considered relevant methods: questionnaire, SWOT analysis, statistical reports and observation, statistical indices and indicators.

Second part, „Own research” has three chapters, mentioning „The purpose and objectives of the research” in which i clearly stated the purpose, principal and the secondary objectives of the research.

In chapter III entitled „**Socio-economic analysis of the North-East region 2014-2022**”, we carried out the research of the North-East region, on each component county: Neamț, Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Suceava, Vaslui using a series of socio-economic indicators - economic, environmental, health, education, relevant for highlighting rural quality of life. We also used the SWOT analysis to highlight strengths, opportunities, but also weaknesses, while also identifying vulnerabilities, and all this in order to find solutions and opportunities for social, economic, demographic and environmental growth.

We have concluded that for rural sustainable development, a new medium and long term strategic vision is needed, which with the help of adequate management can bring economic, social and cultural prosperity to the North East area.

In chapter IV entitled „**Research on the quality of life in the North-East development region**”, I integrated the detailed analysis of the questionnaire-based survey.

The questionnaire aim is gathering information about objective and subjective circumstances of rural quality of life, North-East region, Macroregion 2, from sustainable development objective and perspective.

The questionnaire includes 35 questions, closed and semi-open, applied to a stratified sample of 180 respondents from the rural environment, permanently settled in the North-Eastern Romania, Neamț, Bacău, Botoșani, Iași, Suceava, Vaslui counties, being structured on eight segments, based on the following indicators: Quality of education and education services; Quality of net/monthly income; The human quality of work; Quality of employment/Occupational status; Unemployment/Employed labor force; Migration for work; Social vulnerabilities; The perceived tension of the rich versus the poor; Discrimination; Social marginalization/exclusion; Governance quality and functioning of democracy in Romania; Confidence in political institutions; Quality of the natural environment; Society direction; Quality of the housing environment: of homes, of the residence environment; Health quality and services; Perception on society quality in which they live; Quality of the human environment/ Altruist-assistance; Quality of life and social relationships; People's level of satisfaction regarding personal life: family life, the quality of relationships established between family members and with community members; World quality and the perception of the future.

Chosen indicators for analysis try to cover and reproduce a picture as accurate as possible, at the regional level, while provides a trending image of regions development.

Mainly, analysis focuses on the aspects, qualitative and quantitative, stated, in direct relation with the specificity of the North-East rural area of Romania - a picturesque area, culturally, ethnically diverse and rich from many points of view, but which, simultaneous confronting many problems, despite regional development potential, above the average of other development regions.

The summative evaluations of data correlation the indicators used in the analysis, allowed to conclude on the situation of rural quality of life, North-East of Romania from sustainable development perspective.

For each question, I analyzed the answers, considering that questionnaire application, carried out in the year 2023, between April and June, i.e. the post-pandemic period, a situation that significantly changed the respondents' perception on quality of life. It is wellknown that Macroregion II, North-Eastern region, Bacău, Iași, Neamț, Botoșani, Suceava, Vaslui counties, is not among the most prosperous at the national level, a fact that also emerges from the results of the study.

For a more complete analysis, I selected and used National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Eurostat, European Strategic Plans for sustainable development, the National Rural Development Program (PNDR) statistic data, also official agrarian policy documents, scientific works, studies and specialized articles that facilitate the deepening of the researched field and which concomitant, to answer the questions asked in the questionnaire.

Chapter V entitled „**General conclusions and recommendations**”, is structured on two sub-chapters: General conclusions and Recommendations.

The general conclusions are those that emerge during the work in an attempt to clarify sustainable development concept within quality of life concept with the intention of giving meaning, in a new holistic perspective to the overall picture of our research. All this considering the changes taken place during three decades since the Revolution of December 1989, which have brought with them periods of social disorientation, economic and political fluctuation.

The impact and effects of the pandemic crisis and post-pandemic period, which practically structurally changed everything that was achieved not only in agriculture, but in all sectors of activity, should not be forgotten.

Also here, I summarized the main ideas of scientific approach, on rural quality of life research, from sustainable development perspective in North-Eastern Romania.

Thus, Northeast region remains a region with multiple challenges, especially those created by poor living standard, inconsistent economic "incentives" to revive rural quality of life. Village's desertification - not only in North-Eastern Romania- represent a deepening problem.

A sustainable model to relaunch an area like the North-East region consists of a clear, realistic economic reform that generates economic growth by creating new jobs and engaging the labor market, especially the young generation.

Following the entire research approach, in the last subchapter, we considered it necessary to integrate a series of recommendations adaptable to the new conditions enforced by the reality.

In addition to efforts to increase and encourage development projects, it should be considered facilitating access to financing and funds, improving cooperation between

different decision-makers, increasing the role of local and regional authorities, a rural governance harmonized with the general norms of society, enforced by areas developing needs to facilitate maximization of economic potentials through adapted regulations.

Also, implementating specific tools and mechanisms to facilitate the degree of understanding of new communication and information technologies (NTCI) among the rural population, encouraging entrepreneurship, investments.

In this sense, connected to paper subject, we proposed integration of three project models oriented towards creating opportunities aiming to increase rural quality of life, namely: Circular Economy Model, Smart Villages, Smart School.

The implementation of the concept of „Smart School” in North-Eastern rural, in close connection to „Circular economy” and „Smart Villages” models can represent an important step in creating a favorable climate for both rural learners, but also an element of stability for those who want to return home from migration environments. This would, in the long term, have multiple benefits on revitalizing the rural environment, repopulating it and implicitly increasing life quality.

Presented data results from valuable and precise documentation scientific tools, National Institute of Statistics (NIS), Quality of Life Research Institute (QLRI) statistics, official data from Eurostat, the Worldbank, the National Rural Development Program, as well as numerous articles and specialized papers to support us in our documentation and scientific research efforts.

„Our common future” perspective should be built in awareness that change could be fulfilled on microsocial level, with each individual, as well as macrosocial, within communities, appealing on entire diversity of ecosystems resources, aiming to ensure a safe and just future, to increase rural life quality from sustainable development perspective.