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EDUCATION – A DETERMINING FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANIAN RURAL AREA

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the essential role of education in the process of developing the Romanian rural area, highlighting the direct link between the population's level of education and local socio-economic performance. Using a methodology based on the analysis of statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) and the qualitative evaluation of educational and economic indicators, the research demonstrated the existence of a positive correlation between education and development. The results show that rural areas with a higher share of population holding secondary and higher education degrees register lower unemployment rates, higher incomes, and greater economic diversification. The conclusion emphasizes that investments in education, school infrastructure, and vocational training represent essential conditions for the sustainable development of the Romanian village.

• Introduction

- Education is one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable development, playing an essential role in the formation of human capital and in reducing the economic and social gaps between urban and rural areas. In the current context of Romania, marked by economic transformations, migration and the demographic decline of villages, investments in education are becoming a sine qua non condition for the revitalization of rural communities.
- In rural Romania, access to education is often limited by factors such as long distances to educational institutions, poor infrastructure, low material resources of families and the lack of qualified teaching staff. These barriers contribute to maintaining a low level of educational capital and, implicitly, a slow pace of local development.
- This paper aims to analyze the role of education in the development of the Romanian rural environment, by identifying the correlations between the level of education of the population and the socio-economic indicators of rural localities.

• Material and method

- The research was conducted based on a mixed methodology, combining statistical analysis of quantitative data with qualitative interpretation of the results.
- The data sources included data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INS) – Population and Housing Census 2021, the TEMPO-Online database (indicators on education, employment and income) and reports of the Ministry of Education and Regional Development Plans.
- The indicators used are school enrollment rate (primary, middle, high school), the share of the population with higher education in the total active population, the unemployment rate, local GDP or average income per capita and the level of educational infrastructure (modernized schools, digital laboratories, internet access).

• Results and discussions

- Analysis of statistical data highlights the existence of a strong correlation between educational level and the degree of local economic development.

- The resident population of Romania, who has completed a level of education (aged 2 years and over) is 17,812,662 people, of which 52.4% are from urban areas and 47.6% from rural areas.

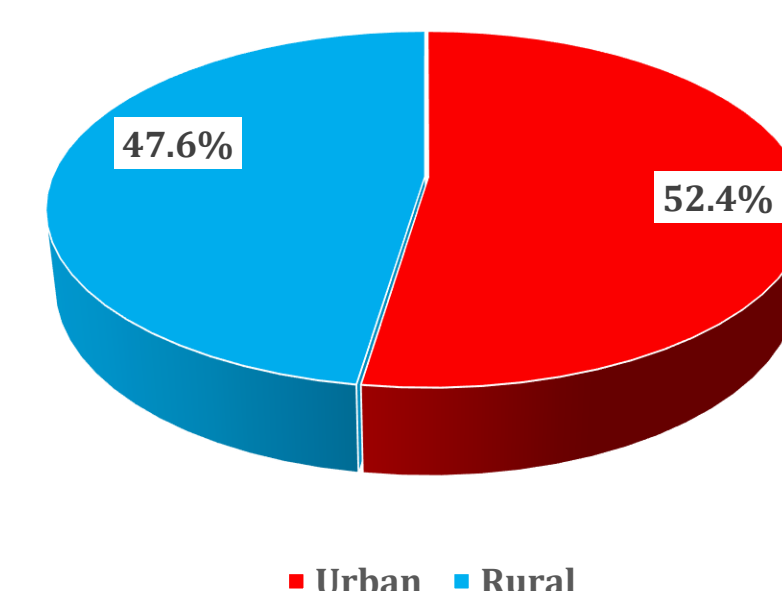


Figure 1 Structure of the resident population of Romania, who has completed a level of education, (aged 2 years and over) by areas of residence

- The population with higher education represents 16.3% at the national level, in the Romanian rural area it is approximately 3.1% of the total population, compared to 13.2% in the urban area

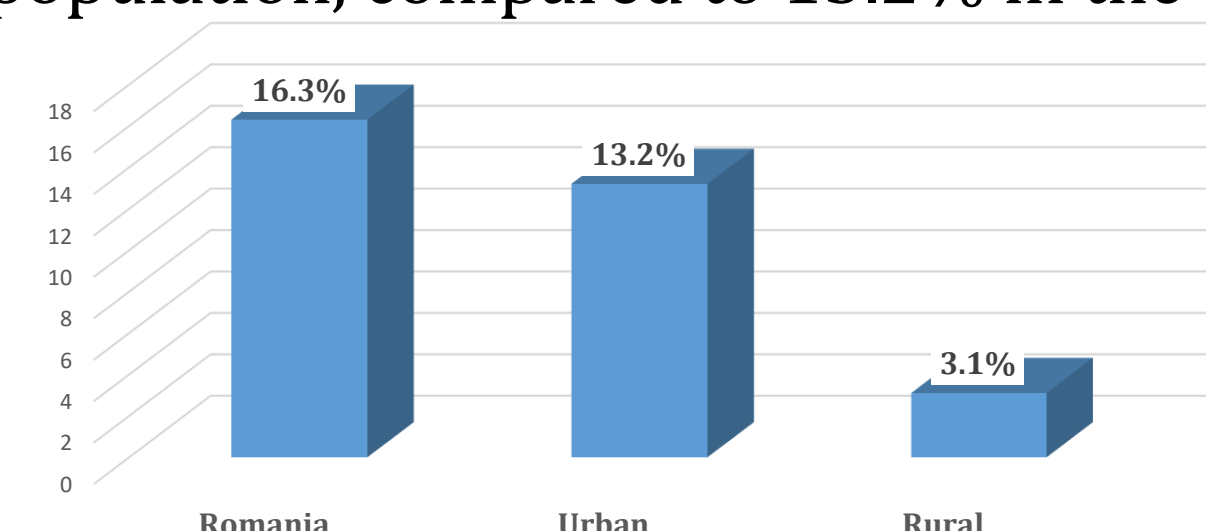


Figure 2 Share of population with higher education in total population

- The unemployment rate is inversely proportional to the level of education: localities with a high share of high school or college graduates have an unemployment rate below 4%, compared to over 10% in areas with high school dropout rates.
- Access to digital education has improved significantly in the post-pandemic period, but major discrepancies persist, only 63% of rural schools have functional IT laboratories, compared to 95% in urban areas.

Conclusions

Thus, research shows that a high educational level is associated with higher incomes, diversification of economic activities (services, rural tourism, microenterprises) and reduced youth migration.

The involvement of the community and local authorities in supporting education (public-private partnerships, "School after School" programs, local scholarships) has proven to be a key factor in success. In the communes where projects financed through the PNDR – Submeasure 7.2 or 7.4 – were carried out, a visible increase in the school participation rate was observed.

Education is a strategic vector for the development of the Romanian rural environment, both by forming human capital and by stimulating social and economic cohesion. Increasing the level of education favors innovation, entrepreneurship and civic involvement, contributing to sustainable local development.