UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES ”KING MIHAI I” FROM TIMISOARA
”YOUNG PEOPLE AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH IN APPLIED LIFE SCIENCES”

05-06 November 2026



MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY RURAL ENVIRONMENT

Maria Alice Bălan
“Santa Cecilia” Conservatory of Music, Rome, Italy

Abstract: *This paper examines the current state of music education in rural communities, where access to specialised teachers, instruments and cultural institutions remains significantly limited compared to urban areas. The study analyses the role of the school, the local church choir, the cultural centre and traditional ensembles as the main vectors of musical learning in villages today. Particular attention is given to the generational gap between oral transmission of folk repertoire and formal music instruction, as well as to the opportunities offered by digital tools and community-based projects. Based on a review of the literature and of recent educational initiatives, the paper argues that sustainable rural music education depends on cooperation between schools, local authorities and cultural organisations, and proposes several directions for reducing the urban–rural gap in access to music.*

• Introduction

Music education is part of every child’s general education and of the cultural life of the community. In villages, musical learning has always combined the school with informal settings: the church, the family, local celebrations and community ensembles.

Romania remains one of the most rural EU countries: on 1 January 2024, 9.65 million of its 21.83 million inhabitants (about 44%) lived in rural areas. Only 22.2% of Romanian adults attended a cultural activity in 2022, the second-lowest rate in the EU after Bulgaria.

Aim: to describe music education in the rural environment, identify its barriers and resources, and propose directions for development.

• Material and method

Review of the literature and of recent educational initiatives (2016–2026), as a qualitative documentary analysis:

- official statistics: INS population data and the Eurostat EU-SILC 2022 cultural participation module
- Romanian studies: 19 interviews with teacher trainers and practitioners; survey of 1,151 primary teachers
- Erasmus+ NEMT study (Romania, Latvia, Sweden), incl. 237 Romanian pupils, 28.27% rural
- international literature on community music programmes

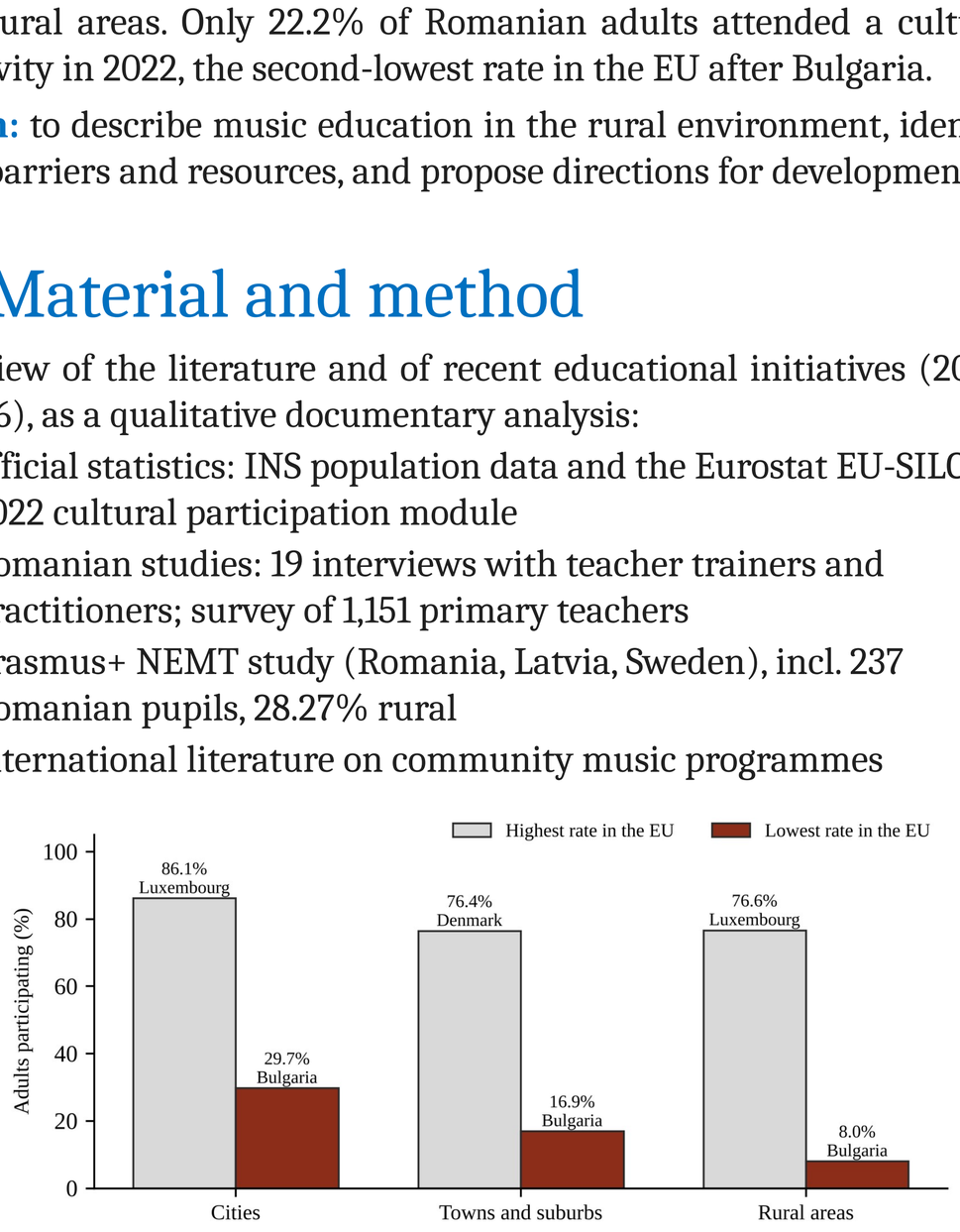


Fig. 1. Highest and lowest cultural participation rates in the EU by degree of urbanisation, 2022 (source: Eurostat, 2026)

• Results and discussions

Time and infrastructure. Music has two hours per week in grades 0–2 and only one hour in grades 3–8. Of 237 surveyed pupils, 94.10% have music lessons in classrooms not equipped for music (Fig. 2).

Teacher preparation. Music methodology often takes one semester of initial training; rural teachers more often report shortages of materials and gaps in their own musical competence.

Partnerships. Links between schools and local music communities are short-term and teacher-dependent.

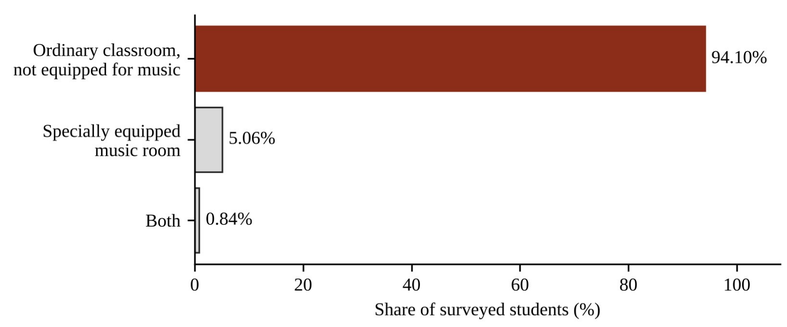


Fig. 2. Where music lessons take place, Romanian lower-secondary pupils (n = 237) (source: Erasmus+ NEMT, 2026)

Resources. Church choirs, cultural centres, folk ensembles, brass bands and oral tradition remain available; group music-making brings psychosocial benefits, especially for disadvantaged children.

Oral and formal learning. Oral transmission of folk repertoire between generations and formal school instruction rarely meet; digital tools and community-based projects can help bridge this gap.

• Conclusions

Reducing the urban–rural gap requires lasting cooperation between schools, local authorities and cultural organisations. Proposed directions:

- basic instruments and digital tools shared by school networks
- practical in-service training and mentoring for teachers
- formal partnerships with choirs, cultural centres and bands
- concerts and workshops by music students in villages
- local repertoire and regional choral tradition in lessons

Acknowledgement: The author thanks the organising committee of the symposium for the opportunity to present this research, and the “Santa Cecilia” Conservatory of Music, Rome, for supporting her academic activity.