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Sustainability of Local and Rural Development: Challenges of Extremely Deprived Communities

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Abstract. *Sustainability of Local and Rural Development brings about various and numerous types of challenges. The population demographic trend, together with isolation and poorly accessible locations, problems with infrastructure and economic status and safety of residents depict a local need and potential alike for integrated intervention. The challenge of extremely deprived communities characterized by a sum of marginalization factors determines collaborative actions directed to enhancing the situation of those deprived and lowering the impact on larger communities. To do so, ex-ante analyses on the ground are needed to have a stronger understanding of local social issue. Present study objective was to measure the indicators of marginalization for a small community in rural area of Romania, Mures County, so that local authority and other public and private actors to have data available to further design adapted social, educational and occupational services. Data shown that the small community has a very high degree of marginalization, with extremely high rates of unemployment and a critical housing situation, and interventions are needed on long-term basis to reduce the risk of poverty and exclusion.*

Keywords: deprived communities, challenges, marginalization, rural development, sustainability.

Introduction

The importance of local and rural development and its sustainability becomes more evident in the context of a society faced with demographic and structural social and economic challenges, such as aging population, rural-urban residence shift, poor continuous-education levels and poverty triggered by unemployment and low-income level per household member, housing and health conditions and other factors.

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According to the 2021 census in Romania, the population aged 65 and over registered an increase of around 20%, as compared to the last census (2011), while the active population counts for 8.185,0 thousand persons (7.689,0 k employed persons & 496,1k unemployed persons) and inactive population counts for 10.868,8 thousand persons (39,5% retired & socially assisted persons / guaranteed minimum income scheme; and 32,0% are persons involved in any kind of education form / pupils and students). (National Institute of Statistics, 2022)

As many other countries of Europe, data shows that Romania faces a depopulation trend coupled with a trend of population migration to smaller localities. In this sense, 2021 census data shows that population decreased in county municipalities in favor of localities found in their proximity.

The determinants of depopulation and of residence shift are various and widely discussed in literature. There are two sides of the same reality. In rural areas, there is a situation where the stability of the young population in terms of securing income and livelihood prospects is hindered by inequalities in access to social or educational services, which are not as readily available as in urban areas. Additionally, the lack of investment in infrastructure and industrial facilities further compounds the issue by limiting job opportunities. On the other hand, there is the urban area that becomes crowded, full of stress-producing factors and loosing connection to natural and to traditional, reason for which it loses terrain for people concerned with a healthy and educational environment for their children and with increasing the quality of life. As such, studies show that "investments in industry, services and job creation seem to be the most effective to convince people to relocate to rural areas" (Almeida, 2018).

Poor access to services of general interest, lack of jobs, isolation and poor investments in infrastructure also contribute to financial and material deprivation. In fact, according to studies, in countries with low-income levels, "the impact of factors such as social class, education, labor market experience, family size and marital disruption is significantly more powerful" (Whelan & Maître, 2012), especially when it comes to less favored socio-economic groups.

Moreover, in recent years important factors have been added with a critical impact on the population demographic trend, but also on its economic status and safety. The prominent ones are the Covid-19 pandemic period, the war in Ukraine with its many human and economic loses, and the energy crisis – challenges the population and governing actors had to face and cope with in the last few years.

In this context, in order to properly design and implement initiatives directed to the most deprived or marginalized communities, data should be at first collected on real grounds based on reliable sociological methods and, according to findings, address specific needs.

Results and impact measurement for such initiatives is an extremely difficult endeavor, because there should be drawn a point of reference (initial stage) compared to which the impact should be measured together with negative / positive factors contributing to the result. This is why, a more realistic and framework-related approach should be adopted. In this sense, a two-step analysis can be considered, first to determine the facts characterizing the situation present before providing the support and secondly to establish the results and impact of the actions or services implemented.

Considering the abovementioned, the interest of the present research is to measure, by means of a limited set of indicators, the degree of marginalization for a small community in Mures County. These findings can help local community and government to define specific social, educational and occupational services for potential beneficiaries.

Literature review

Preconditions - challenges

The literature review highlighted that no matter the initiatives to be put in place for rural areas revitalization, be it public, private or public-private partnership or be it directed to sustainable use of resources or sustainable general services provision from another perspective – most European countries face the same challenges related to local and rural environment, namely "depopulation, low fertility rates, and aging populations" (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2020), "shrinking populations, ageing, and uncertain economic futures" (Tent, et al., 2021), all of these imposing deficiencies in the provision of services of general interest. Services of general interest are defined as the ones that the public authorities of the Member States should provide as an obligation. Yet, these may also be subjected to public-private partnership (i.e. social services, educational services, etc.).

Among culprits for poor provision of services of general interest in rural areas, there can be listed factors like greater distances, lower populations, which in turn bring lower numbers of users while this negatively impacts the financial viability. (Tent, et al., 2021)

Even though rural populations decrease in number, increase in age; also they still remain remote and sometimes isolated. On the other hand, goals for sustainable change focus on dealing with accessibility, proximity, affordability, and quality, so as to secure life quality. As such, challenges also derive (as can be predicted) from the costs of provision of services, which in turn call for innovative concepts, but also for an "integrated and comprehensive process that involves economic development". (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2020)

According to literature, for the maintenance of services in rural areas, various solutions have been presented like redesign of accessibility by means of digitalization or transportation, restructure or resize of infrastructure such as the case of health services/health centers, redefinition of coordination for coproduction like the case of shared platforms, open universities. (Tent, et al., 2021)

Considering these solutions, other researchers also pointed out that "rural areas risk being left even further behind and marginalized during the next stage of technological innovation, since technologies are framed within an urban and neo-liberal approach to development" (Wang, Luo, Zhang, & Furuya, 2022) One of the negative constraints in this sense seems to be for example digital illiteracy and inadequate infrastructure which refrain them from being connected and access the services they need.

Faced with different challenges, the local communities and local governments are yet more and more aware of the importance of improving the living and working conditions of citizens and also work on improving the awareness on goals and initiatives that bring local prosperity. The principle of "leave no one behind" included in *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* at the *United Nations World Summit in September 2015* (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2020) turned to be a leading perspective, as communities understand that there could be no partial progress, but a common one.

Initiatives - challenges

The goals and objectives of initiatives and projects vary as much as the complex facets of local and rural development, together with the resources that can be attracted or dragged into the process. Thus, from working on disparities and gaps to working on smart villages, there's a wide range of alternatives, each of these dealing with more or less the same stakeholders but at a different level.

Europe 2020 strategy (2010) is regarded as the beginning of the smart village movement, as this indicated three inter-related priorities: smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth leading to greater rural development. (Wang, Luo, Zhang, & Furuya, 2022) According to the same authors review based on existing studies, "smart village research topics can be generally classified into eight dimensions: society, resources, infrastructure, the economy, governance, technology, services, and others (e.g., challenges, objectives, and conditions)", while "culture plays an important role and should not be dismissed".

Making a comparison, the analysis on disparities and disadvantaged communities should also take into consideration dimensions like the aforementioned. In fact, the 17 sustainable development goals set up in the *2030 Agenda* represent a commitment to eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development by 2030 worldwide, leaving no one at a disadvantage. (Balaban, Župljanin, & Nešović, 2019)

In terms of challenges related to initiatives, researchers pointed out (a) the need for a more inclusive governance at the local level that should be based on interactive relations between political authorities and civil society actors, (b) a strong engagement of communities, and (c) the need to resolve disputes between regional and local authorities. On the other hand, concerns were related to "inclusiveness, newcomer retention, gender equality, and work–family balance as cornerstones for the success of the rural strategy", while the break with traditional practices, lack of knowledge about the sustainable development goals and interlinking between goals were also considered important. (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2020)

Moreover, the initial analysis that should guide "the design of a sustainable development plan and its projects" should be based on a "solid understanding of local social issues", namely the "people potentially affected by the project, including the «communities of place» and «communities of interest»". (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2016)

Outputs and impacts - challenges

In terms of challenges related to measuring outputs and impacts when it comes to social affairs, there should be noted that metrics mean a set of indicators that should be able to measure concepts that matter. For example, *2030 Agenda* targets (2.A) "investment in rural infrastructure", (1.1.1) "rural population below the international poverty line", (4.5.1) "parity indices for all education metrics in the countryside", (9.1.1.) "proportion of rural population living within 2 km of an all-season road". (Diaz-Sarachaga, 2020).

Nevertheless, "impacts are perceived and experienced by local communities living in the area of the intervention", reason for which, in all stages of a "policy, plan, program, and project" (before, during, and after the design; before, during, and after the implementation/ construction/ operation, and at / after the completion), these "need to be predicted, assessed, mitigated, monitored, managed, and understood in their local social context". (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2016).

In a broader view, the challenges present both as pre-conditions in rural areas, and as factors important for setting goals and for implementing projects are not only numerous and various in kind, but also complex and difficult to be addressed. Yet, classifying them by nature (i.e., demographic, geographic, societal, economic, etc.), involving stakeholders which gives them the sense of belonging and identity, and also designing all stages from the concept to completion based on local context, not to mention a proper implementation, will provide the possibility of a successful intervention.

Marginalization – a broader perspective

Marginalization is a complex phenomenon that affects individuals and communities across the globe. This can take different forms from social to economic exclusion and people that experience it are facing precarious conditions, poverty and inadequate access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and housing.

Based on data collected and analyzed and based on the social, economic, and politic context, European Commission decided along years new development strategies to overcome the problems and needs the citizens face.

The *Lisbon strategy* (2001-2010) ambition was "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council, 2000).

Europe 2020 (2011-2020) came as a response to 2008 crisis and its three core priorities were: (1) smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation, (2) sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy, and (3) inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion. This last priority focused on employment, continuous education aimed at acquiring / developing new skills and fighting poverty. (European Commission, Europe 2020, 2010)

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* was launched after the UN Summit held in New York in 2015 and it is even more ambitious and sets as scope for the UN leaders: "We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources" (UN General Assembly, 2015)

In order to fight poverty and marginalization, these had to be at first subjected to measurement. The main indicator to monitor Europe 2020 and Europe 2030 is AROPE defined by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, as people "at risk of poverty or social exclusion". The indicator "corresponds to the sum of persons who are either at risk of poverty, or severely materially and socially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity. People are included only once even if they are in more than one of the situations mentioned above." (Eurostat, AROPE, 2021). The three components of AROPE headline indicator are: severe material and social deprivation rate (SMSD), at risk of poverty rate and low work intensity indicator. Targets for Europe 2030 – The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan – are as follows: (1) at least 78% of the population aged 20 to 64 should be in employment by 2030; (2) at least 60% of all adults should participate in training every year; and (3) the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion should be reduced by at least 15 million, out of them, at least 5 million should be children. (Eurostat, EU 2030, 2021)

According to Eurostat, approximately 22.5% of the EU population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion. This means over 113 million people in the EU. In Romania, the degree of marginalization is even higher than the EU average. The Report "Poverty Watch 2020-Romania" produced by the European Anti-Poverty Network Romania (EAPN RO) – RENASIS shows that in 2017 to 2019, approximately 23.5% of the total resident population was at risk of poverty, which means that about 4.5 million people. Moreover, in 2020, Romania had the second highest level of income inequality in the EU – the richest 20% of the population earned almost 8 times more than the poorest quintile. The same study shows that the "risk of poverty decreased in cities

but remained relatively constant in rural areas, almost five times higher compared to cities." (RENASIS, 2020)

The European Semester – Country Report 2022 shows that the poverty rate in rural areas is almost twice as high as in urban areas and it remains relatively high and stable as compared to the EU rate (38.9% vs. 18.7% in the EU). In fact, Romania has one of the highest shares of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (35.8% in 2020 vs an EU average of 21.6%). Most deprived groups are undeclared workers, the self-employed in agriculture, Roma, persons with disabilities, older people and the homeless. (European Commission, European Semester - 2022 Country Report - Romania, 2022)

In conclusion, the degree of marginalization in the European Union and Romania is a complex issue that requires urgent action. To tackle the issue of marginalization in rural areas, the Romanian government needs to implement policies that promote economic growth, improve access to basic services, and address discrimination and social exclusion.

Methodology

The present study refers to a small rural community in Mures county and the intention was to conduct a sociological research that would include all households which were appreciated to be around 54-55 dwellings. The access to funds directed to reduce the risk of poverty by means of providing social, educational and occupational services is facilitated by an ex-ante analysis, so the study can provide the local government reliable information to decide and design such initiatives for the marginalized community.

In the scope of this research, data was collected directly by consortium partners, but also obtained from public institutions which systematically and periodically collect data at county or national level. Important to mention is the fact that all partners involved systematically collect various categories of data depending on their interest and profile, meaning: demographic data, economic data, data with a social character, data related to social incentives / benefits, educational data (education degree / school enrollment rates), etc.

The research team used methods both for qualitative and for quantitative data collection, namely: (a) a sociological survey among marginalized community residents that took place in two steps – a questionnaire applied for each of the households identified in the community and a questionnaire (individual data sheets) applied for each of the household members identified by means of the first interview; (b) interviews with key actors at local level related to topics like education, housing, health, occupation.

The dimensions investigated by the research team were: demographic, socio-professional and economic status, education, occupation (entrepreneurship included), health status and health services, social services, housing and living conditions, juridic status of identity and property papers, as well as major problems and needs perceived by community members.

The situation of the disadvantaged community is well known not only in the area, but also at national level, which is why it was selected for this research. The study is intended to investigate further the degree of marginalization and how deep is the problematic of its members economic, social, educational, occupational and health situation, so that to properly design and calibrate the specific services.

The interviews with key local actors filled-in the gap of information by providing sensitive insights regarding the problems the community members face and the problems faced by larger community and by various institutions in relation to this very deprived community.

The two instruments for data collection were designed to cover the objective of the research, and they included four types of questions: (a) factual items – referring to respondents' behavior or the behavior of household members; (b) opinion items – reflecting attitudes; (c) identification items – socio-demographic type of data; (d) knowledge items – reflecting respondents' knowledge or information about their own community and household members.

The household questionnaire includes 69 questions and the questionnaire for household members was specific for age categories – one for adults with 30 questions and one for children with 21 questions. In the household questionnaire, there were also introduced filter questions in the sense that there are households that do not include children or do not include active persons (either occupied or not occupied). Questions in all instruments included open answer, closed answer or mixed alternatives. Also considering the educational level of respondents, when designing the instruments, but also for their application, the research team considered language accessibility and clarity, as well as avoiding negations, and securing as much as possible objectivity and neutrality, so that not to influence the respondents in their answer.

The instruments were first pilot tested so that the team to find out which are the questions that could generate issues – lack of responses, too many responses or open answer needed for other options; questions that would need additional explanations, time needed for application, etc.

The study was designed and tested during April-June 2021, household questionnaires were conducted during July-September 2021, household members questionnaires were filled-in during October-November 2021, while interviews with key local actors were held in January-February 2022. The quantitative data collected was filled in a data-base, and then codified and analyzed with IBM SPSS statistics software.

The objective of the present study was to determine the degree of marginalization for the small rural community. The indicators used were the ones presented in literature, namely human capital, employment and housing quality, with thresholds established in *The Atlas of Rural Marginalized Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania* (Teşliuc, Grigoraş, & Stănculescu, 2016). Findings are presented bellow.

Results and discussions

At first, some characteristics and history of the small community should be subjected to discussion, as the results to be further presented will be better understood in the scenery of the events.

The members of this community come - at least a great part of them - from another community which was dissolved due to the same type of aggregation and organization. They had improvised dwellings (made of cardboard, plywood, glass sheets, bricks) on a land found in the property of a city. The community was known for very high level of criminality, offenses and begging, not to mention the problems with misery and diseases generated by conditions. The city hall decided to build a district of social houses on the land they occupied and, as such, needed to release the land occupied by these residents without property acts. Once their dwellings were destroyed they searched for a new place to settle, found it nearby – in a village close to the area they used to live – on the banks of a river. Unfortunately, from the very clean and beautiful area it used to be, now, the area is full of garbage (as they collect and bring here whatever they think it would be useful), insecure – because the new residents tend to become violent either because they are under the influence of alcohol or other substances, or because of bad habits and common violent behavior. To this, other problems arose like thefts on public or private property and epidemics – in the small community, but also in the larger community spread by children – few

of them – who go to school or kindergarten. Now, their dwellings are built on a private property in the sense that the land is owned by a person who lives abroad and who has no interest in doing something with the land in the near future. The water of the river is also polluted by animal and human dejections and waste.

In this context, some years passed during of which the local authority tried to find legal solutions, social and economical solutions to solve the problem of the new residents. One fact is sure – they are here to stay and – even if they would be driven out from the area, they would find another area and will do the same. As can be easily understood, any type of intervention would need financial resources which are not available for the village administration (the matter involves building around 55 houses) and, moreover, even if such resources would be available the larger community expressed already a very strong disapproval to any investments. They see it as depriving the ones entitled for help from their community and, instead, encouraging the behavior of the newcomers.

On the other hand, the local authority is perfectly aware of the fact that only building social houses to the community members – which would be difficult from many perspectives (land available, land property, financial resources) – will not solve the situation, because the residents destroy and sale whatever could be monetized in one way or another. As such, much more should be invested in social, educational and occupational services. Opportunities in this sense have been found through the Operational Program for Human Capital 2014-2020, call for projects POCU/827/5/2 – under the Community Led Rural Development mechanism.

One of the partnering NGOs had done empirical research for their own activities in the area and, according to data, in the area there are 54-55 dwellings, reason for which it was decided to conduct a sociological research on the entire community, so that to better know how many inhabitants are to be found there and which are the type of problems they face.

During the study, the team conducted interviews in 48 households. Yet, some explanations are needed here in the sense that – according to what they declared – there are situations in which 2 or 3 dwellings constitute the same household (they administer together), while other times one dwelling constitutes 2 separate households (they administer separately). This is due to their pattern of behavior related to internal difficult relations – once they fight / quarrel on some topics, they separate. Sometimes children are to be found in one family for a few months and then in another family for other 2-3 months, either because parents are abroad for work (they generally go for seasonal agriculture works if they go for work), or because parents who most of the times are minor (children with children) separate and stay with their own parents (mothers). In any case, legally, children are registered on the name of their grannies.

One other fact to be pointed out is that residents of two households / dwellings were not interviewed because they were not in the community at the time of research, while for two other households the questionnaire was not followed by individual data sheets because the adult members were not cooperant (either under alcohol influence or violent).

Considering the categories of data needed to be collected according to the three classes of indicators with 6 sub-indicators (*see Table 1*), important to mention here is that gathering of certain data – such as the level of studies graduated by residents, persons affected by chronic diseases, disabilities or other conditions limiting their daily activities – was only performed with the individual data sheets and not with the household questionnaire. As individual data sheets could not be collected for two households (see above), a small deviation occurred when calculating the proportion of persons falling in that category.

The focus of the present study is to show the degree of deprivation for the disadvantaged community, so data was analyzed only for some of the questions included in the household questionnaire and in the individual data sheets. The questions for which answers were needed were related to: (1) the proportion of persons aged 15-64 who graduated maximum secondary school (8th grade); (2) the proportion of persons affected by chronic diseases, disabilities or other conditions limiting their daily activities – no matter the age; (3) the proportion of children and young (0-17 years old) in total population; (4) the proportion of persons aged 16-64 who is not formally employed nor enrolled in any kind of education; (5) the proportion of overcrowded dwellings (< 15.33m^2 per person); (6) housing insecurity, namely the proportion of households that do not own the dwelling.

In order to calculate the first indicator, data was needed for persons aged 15-64 out of the total number of persons, as well as persons aged 15-64 who graduated maximum secondary school. According to data in the individual data sheets, persons aged 15-64 are 138 (110 adult and 28 children), while persons aged 15-64 who graduated maximum secondary school are 129 (106 adult and 23 children). As such, the proportion of persons in the community aged 15-64 who graduated maximum secondary school is 93.5%. The percent is not only alarming because it represents the great majority of the household members, but also because most of them do not have graduated secondary school, but mostly primary school – if any.

To further highlight the very low level of education for the community members, which greatly impacts the other deprivation factors, the research team investigated how many of the community members aged 15-64 have graduated primary school. As can be seen bellow – *Fig. 1*, the results are quite similar, namely 82.6% declared they only graduated primary school.

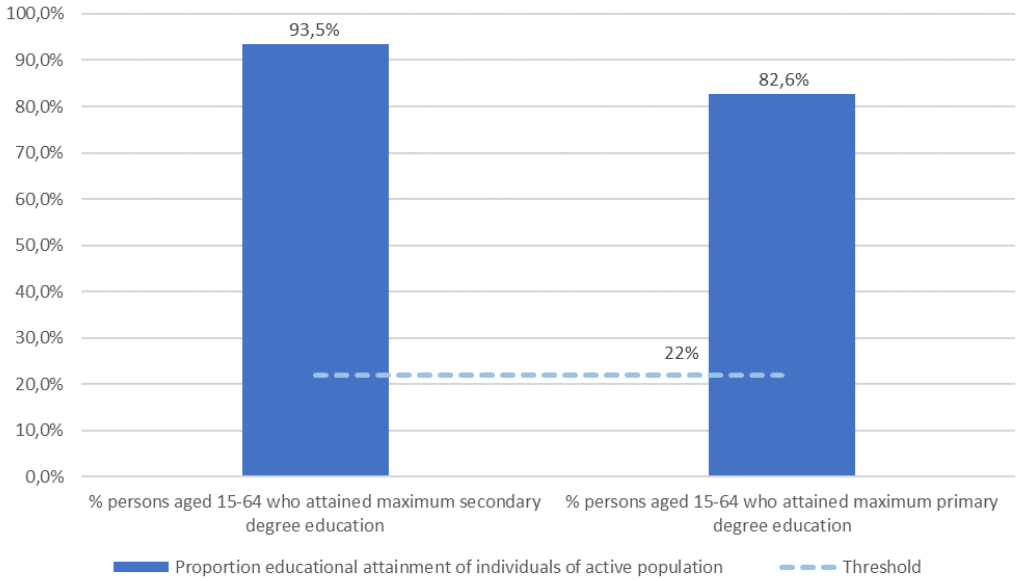


Figure 1. Proportion educational attainment of individuals of active population

Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

It is useless to mention how important education is in relation to employment, to the health status – due to not knowing and not applying norms aimed at protecting individuals / the community from pathogenic agents and the spread of different diseases – as well as the so-called perpetuation from one generation to the other of the low education level, because children not

having a model in their parents and relatives and not being supported to continute studying will soon abandon this path and follow another that is much easier, but less rewarding.

Moreover, it would be of great interest to try and recover at least the younger generations in terms of education, because otherwise – once ageing – it will be harder for them to be integrated to formal school and graduate at least secondary school, which will provide them the possibility to also enroll for vocational training – their chance to employment.

Regarding the second indicator, the proportion of persons affected by chronic diseases, disabilities or other conditions limiting their daily activities, this is more or less close to the threshold mentioned in *The Atlas of Rural Marginalized Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania*, namely it counts of 8.4% as compared to 8% (reference value – see *Table 1*). In the calculation of the proportion, various data was considered as shown in *Fig. 2. Proportion of persons affected by diseases / disabilities per category.*

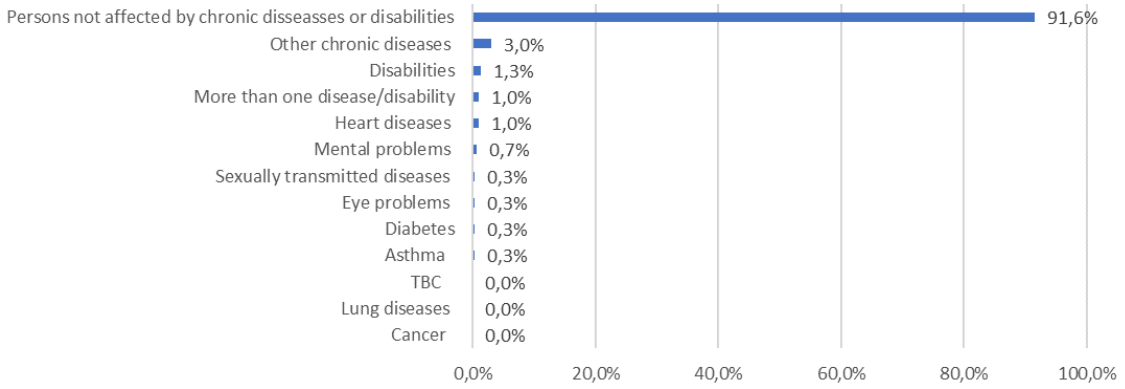


Figure 2 Proportion of persons affected by diseases / disabilities per category

Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

One important aspect is yet to be discussed here: even though the percent is close to the threshold, the data collected not necessarily reflects the reality on the gound. This is due to the fact that the low level of income and low level of education hinders them from – on one hand – understanding the gravity of some health problems and the impact these could have and – on the other hand – from searching answers and solutions to those problems – this means going to the specialist doctor to get a diagnostic and treatment. In other words, the community members most of the times go to the emergency reception units in hospitals when they do not have any other choice – occasion with which diseases are detected and then treated. As such, many other patients with chronic diseases and other health problems are maybe not detected / treated properly.

As for the third indicator, according to data collected by means of the questionnaire, the total number of residents is 298 persons. Out of the total number of residents, around 58% are children (persons under 18 years old). Yet, as mentioned before, many of the children have children so this type of allocation can be sometimes misleading. On the other hand, when we refer to one of the indicators of marginalization (see below sub-indicator no. 3), household members aged 0-17 in total population is 50.7%, which is still a very high percent as compared to the reference value (20.5%).

Considering the high percent of children and young in total population, but also the impact of low level of education discussed above for the active / employable population (aged 15-64), the research team also wanted to investigate what is the situation in this group (members

aged 0-17) when it comes to being enrolled in any kind of formal education and the results are shown in *Fig. 3*.

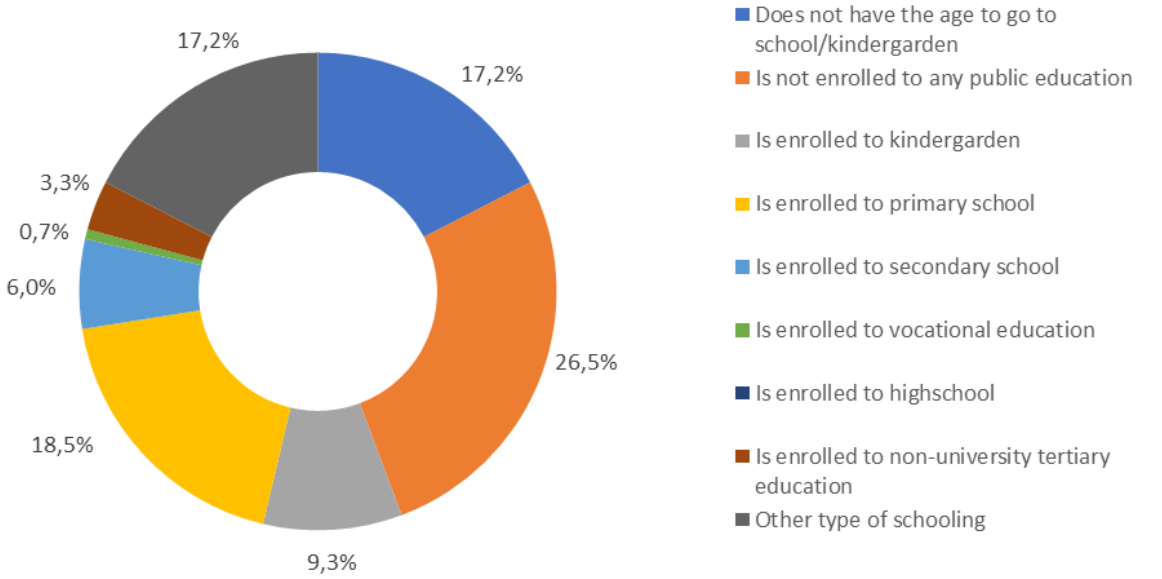


Figure 3. Distribution of children and young (0-17) in total population by educational level
Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

As data shows, except the 17.2% who do not have the age to go to kindergarden / school, ca. 27.8% are enrolled to kindergarden and primary school, but just 10% continue studying further to secondary, vocational and tertiary education.

Unfortunately, 26.5% are not enrolled to any formal, public education, while 17.2% go to other type of schooling – and this means the educational services provided as part of social services by locally active NGOs.

The problem is that the 26.5% of the children and young not being enrolled to any kind of education are in fact the ones that did not graduate few years in a row – due to lack of attendance and poor results - and do not have the age to be still enrolled for the next school year needed. As they are not supported for minimum education at home and do not have other responsibilities, they also discourage the younger children to further study and this tends to become a vicious circle hard to break through without external intervention.

Coming back to the calculation of indicators for marginalization, in order to determine the proportion of persons aged 16-64 who are not formally working nor enrolled in any kind of education, data was needed related to the proportion of persons aged 16-64 in total population and then how many of these persons declared that were not formally employed or studying. Data showed that 92.4% of people falls in this category, which was a point of discussion in terms of means of subsistence. Information about the source of income is partially drawn from categories of active but not occupied persons shown in *Fig.4.* below, to which pensions of retired persons and allocation for children also added.

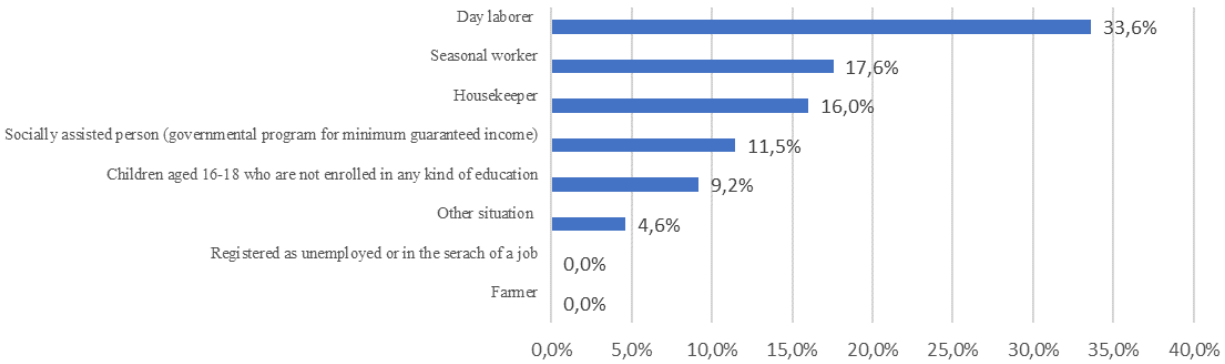


Figure 4. Proportion of persons aged 16-64 unemployed or not enrolled in education per category
Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

As pointed out above, the reasonable question arisen for the reasearch team was what could be the source and the level of income for the household members. According to what community members declared, the most important sources of income are – in the order of importance - child allowance, day labour, minimum guaranteed income (governmental squeme), begging and work abroad (see *Fig. 5* bellow).

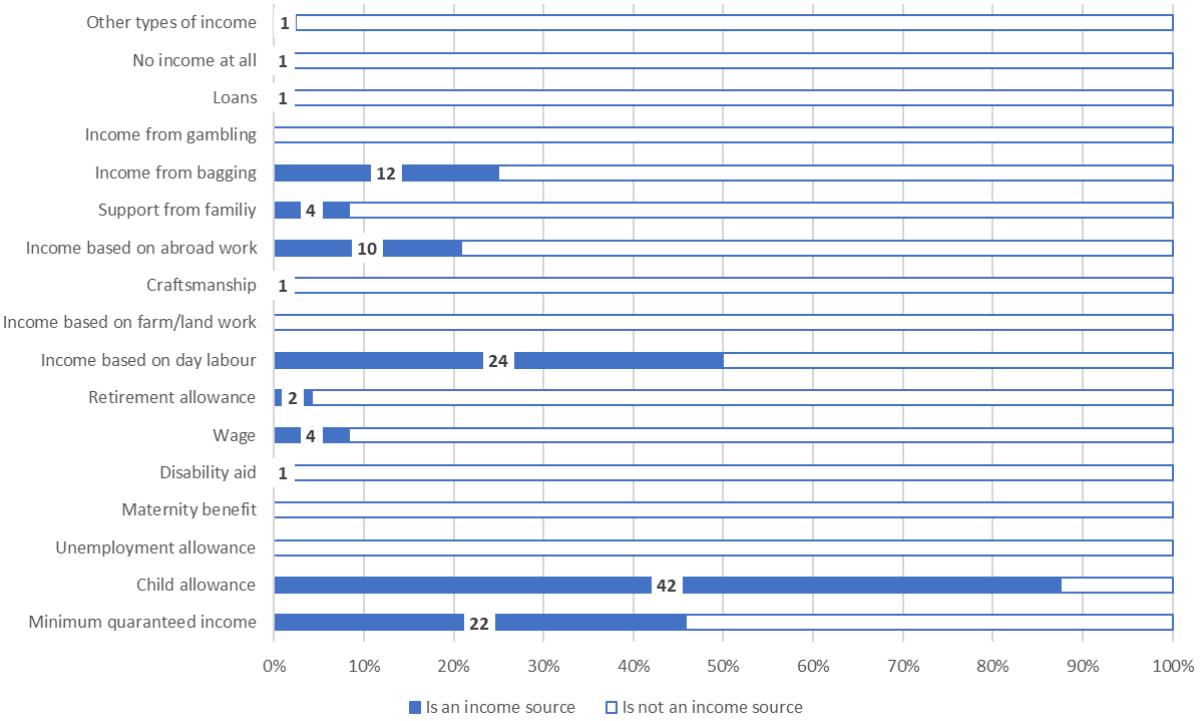


Figure 5. Income source of households
Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

Regarding the level of income, ca 40% of the households make a living out of 501-1000 lei (national Romanian currency), and ca 27% said they earn 1001-1500 lei (see *Fig. 6* bellow). In other words, about 67% of the households make their living with no more than 1500 lei, which is more like a miracle considering the number of household members (details in *Fig. 8* bellow).

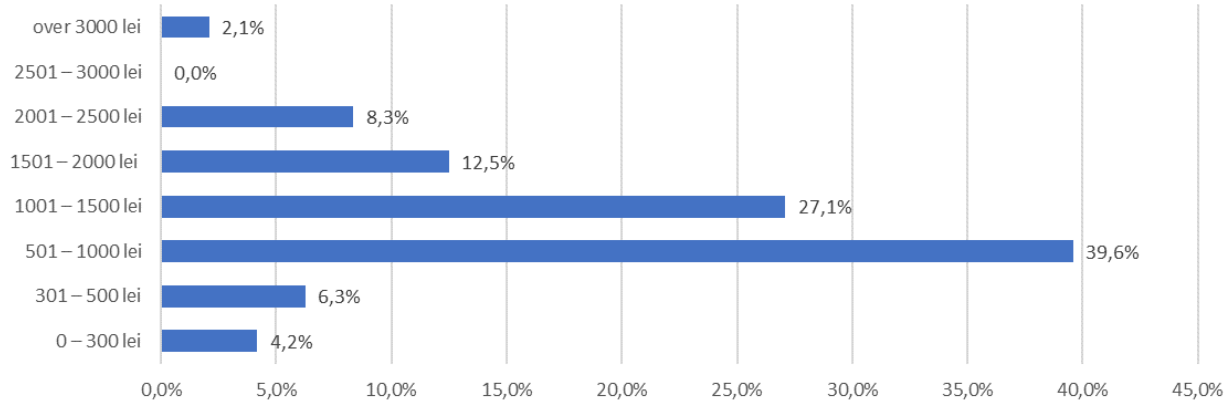


Figure 6. Level of income per household

Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

Taken as a basis for discussion and argument in favour of community members involvement to find a solution for their own situation, the research team included in the questionnaire one more item related to *what would be the minimum level of income the household needs to make a living*. Results shown that 35,4% declared they need 1500-2500 lei (national currency), while ca 27% declared they need 2500-3500 lei (see *Fig. 7* bellow). Making a parallel with percents above mentioned, it seems the community members do not have high expectations and are quite realistic about the prospectives they could have.

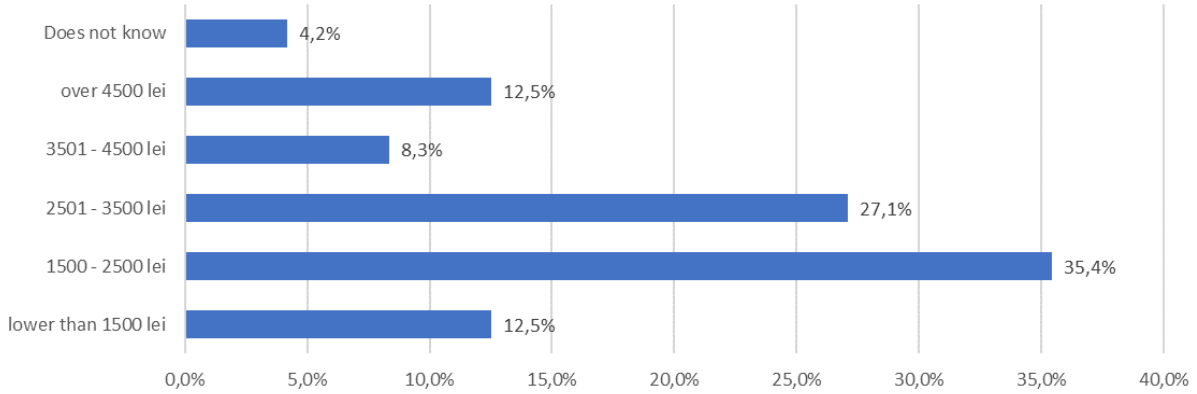


Figure 7. Minimum level of income declared to be needed per household

Source: Authors' own research results/contribution

The last two indicators refer to housing, namely how crowded and how secure from the ownership point of view are the dwellings the residents live in. From the first point of view, no discussion was needed – both from the interviewers' point of view (persons present on the site), and from dates declared by household residents, no household in the community offers not the comfort but the luxury of 15m^2 per resident. Regarding the property, just for one of the households the residents declared they have property documents – fact demonstrated by the fact that the electricity supply contract for this house assures the electricity for most of the dwellings in the community. This means that the proportion of households that do not have property documents for their house is 97.9%.

Coming back to the indicator related to the overcrowded dwellings, the research team wanted to see what was the housing distribution, namely how many residents live in each house and how many houses have more than two residents. As can be seen in *Fig. 8* bellow, except 4 houses (3 with 2 residents and 1 with 1 resident), all the households number more than 5 residents, while their great majority is formed of no more than two rooms.

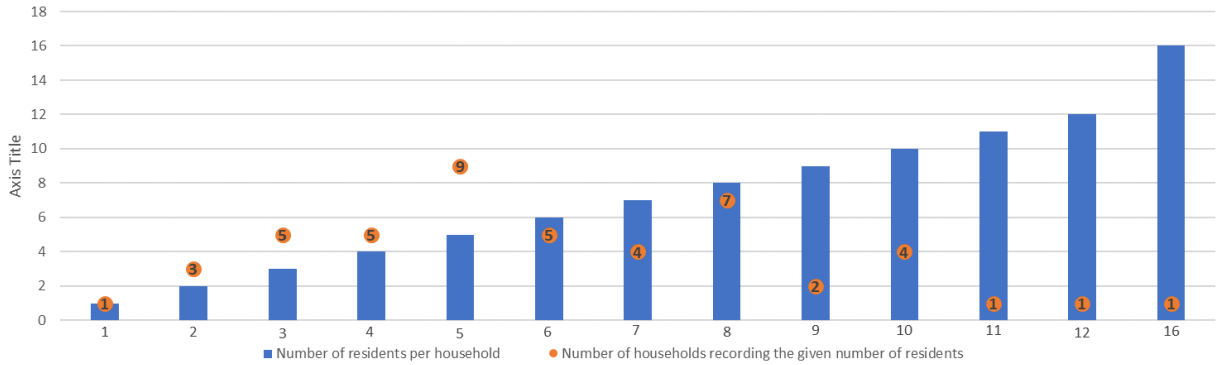


Figure 8. Number of residents vs. number of households recoding the given number of residents
Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

Considering all the aspects related to the proportion of children and young, the level of education, the level of employment, the proportion of persons affected by diseases and disabilities and also the housing conditions show a very high degree of deprivation.

To offer an overview of the findings, we include a centralization of data related to each of the indicators of marginalization in *Table 1*.

Table 1 Indicators of Marginalization

Criteria / Dimension	Key indicators	Threshold Minimum* Value (reference value)		Study results
		Urban area / Romania	Rural area / Romania	
Human Capital	(1) the proportion of persons aged 15-64 who graduated maximum secondary school (8th grade);	22.1%	59.3%	93.5%
	(2) the proportion of persons affected by chronic diseases, disabilities or other conditions limiting their daily activities – no matter the age;	8.0%	-	8.4%
	(3) the proportion of children and young (0-17 years old) in total population;	20.5%	-	50.7%
Employment	(4) the proportion of persons aged 16-64 who is not formally employed nor enrolled in any kind of education;	22.2%	72.1%	92.4%
Housing	(5) the proportion of overcrowded dwellings (< 15.33m2 per person);	54.7%	26.1%	100%
	(6) housing insecurity, namely the proportion of dwellings for which residents do not have property documents.	12.3%	87.9%	97.9%

*Thresholds in The Atlas of Rural Marginalized Areas and of Local Human Development in Romania
Source: Authors' own research results/contribution.

As unlikely as it may seem, this small community formed of 298 persons face such deprivation rates that the comparison to the threshold minimum values / reference values is simply inadequate. Additionally, if we globally consider dates for the larger community (the

village or commune) – which still show a high rate of marginalization – it will not be possible to eradicate poverty or predict a sustainable development without having targeted long-term interventions. The lack of research on the ground related to the phenomenon and its amplitude, about the roots and causes, characteristics of potential beneficiaries, followed by focused interventions, actions will neither help larger communities in the struggle to a sustainable development (on each side of social, economic, environmental, cultural life), nor help the smaller most deprived communities like the one studied in present research, which lacks not only the capacity and the resources, but also any perspective related to what shall be their future in the area or elsewhere.

Conclusion

The objective of the present research was to have a solid understanding of the local social issues so as the local authority and its partners would have sufficient data to properly design interventions related to social, educational and occupational services. As can be easily understood, resources are scarce and decision on what should be first supported or financed need to be based on objective analyses and on identified priorities.

According to findings of the study briefly presented above, the small community shows a very high degree of marginalization, with extremely high rates of unemployment and a critical housing situation. Residents are severely materially and socially deprived and community characteristics are passed on from one generation to another which makes the effort to address these problems a very complex and difficult one.

The sociological research also covered components regarding types of services to be provided – social services, educational services and occupational services – and this present study will be extended with a study related to the specific needs of such services and how these should be tailored to best meet the needs and thus be accessed by future beneficiaries. One example in this sense is the fact that continuing education for adults is very difficult to achieve as they stopped going to school in their first educational years. This means on one hand that they have lost the minimum knowledge acquired and, on the other hand, age conditions do not allow them to enroll in formal educational system now, at the same time preventing them from attending qualification courses.

Except providing important data about the population studied, the research was also conducted to a better understanding of the inter-sectoral approach needed. Advances should be made possible in all directions in order to bring changes for the better. To improve the living conditions and population prospects, more stakeholders need to be involved and also a strong engagement of the community – both the small one and the larger one – which seems to be no easy path in the present context. Also, short-term interventions would not probably bring the objectives set, as the issues have so complex causes and so deeply rooted that it will take generations to correct attitude and behavior more than the level of income.

The principle of inclusiveness and the idea of growing together and find a way to local prosperity and sustainability were the ones that governed the actions. Yet, there is a strong need to increase the intensity and to assure the continuity of interventions directed to such very deprived communities in order to succeed in setting a course of positive evolution.

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