

AVOIDING FAILURE IN THE URBAN-RURAL RELATIONSHIP, WITH ROMANIAN SOCIETAL CONNOTATIONS

Romulus GRUIA¹, Liviu GACEU²

Abstract. *Contemporary society has been undergoing major upheavals in recent decades, especially in terms of demographic dynamics in the urban-rural and rural-urban directions. Scenarios and solutions are far from being validated, so that general analyses and consequences at local level become more than timely. This includes the direction of national rural development as a component of the international and global integration process. Elements of the rural, continuously shrinking area and demography are addressed, but which has the potential to become an important necessity and not a derisory annex of the urban. The paper seeks to highlight a number of possibilities, principles and measures to support the increased attractiveness of the Romanian countryside and, by extension, its contribution to the development of agri-food and Responsible Tourism, with a view to 2050.*

Keywords: demography, development, rural, societal, urban

DOI <https://doi.org/10.56082/annalsarsciagr.2022.1.16>

1. Introduction

For the first time in the history of mankind, more people live in cities than in rural areas. The best example is Europe, which is one of the most urbanised continents. Here around 75% of the population lives in urban areas. Moreover, short-term forecasts suggest that the proportion will soon reach 80% [13]. Gradually the whole Earth will become virtually Planet of the Townspeople.

As a result, the relationship between urban and rural is changing as demand for land in and around cities becomes acute. As a consequence, urban sprawl is reshaping the landscape and in many ways affecting people's quality of life and the environment more than ever before. Urban planning and management are therefore high on the public agenda, with transport and housing being crucial challenges. In this context the urban-rural relationship highlights that urban development directly influences rural structure and functionality through a number of external factors such as demographic change, the need for mobility, globalisation and climate change.

¹Prof. PhD, Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania, Corresponding member of the Academy of the Romanian Scientists (e-mail: romulus.gruia@gmail.com).

²Prof. PhD., Eng., Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania, Associate Member of the Academy of the Romanian Scientists (gaceul@unitbv.ro)

The study is based on the hypothesis that, starting from the idea that Romanian societal development is directly linked to socio-economic elements, georesources, demographic evolution and cultural specificity, and taking into account this complexity, the relationship between urban and rural is in fact unbalanced, which requires a harmonization of theoretical and practical nature. In this sense, the aim of the paper is to make a principle analysis contributing to the establishment of theoretical, practical and information strategy elements for the sustainable and optimized development of the "urban - rural" relationship at the societal level, with applicability to the specific Romanian society. The focused objective of the paper is to develop the necessary concept for a harmonized strategy on the future development of the urban-rural relationship in our country and to avoid a failure in the development of the Romanian countryside.

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on a demographic diagnosis with a focus on the socio-economic aspects of the Romanian rural environment and on a series of multi-criteria analyses, comparisons and statistical processing. The principles, techniques and regulations specific to sustainable development are considered.

3. Results and Discussions

The Data processing for finding solutions to achieve the proposed objectives is done by analyzing the flows of the urban-rural relationship directed on three dimensions: - analysis of demographic dynamics in the world and in Romania, with emphasis on the population in rural areas; - analysis of economic dynamics specific to the urban and rural environment; - establishment of principles in future strategies necessary to avoid failure in the development of the urban-rural relationship in Romanian society (Fig.1).

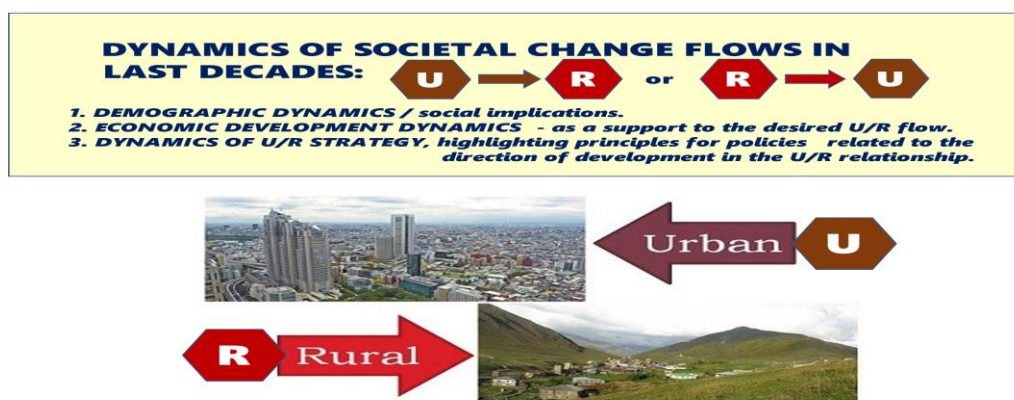


Fig. 1. Two-way relationship between urban and rural development

3.1. Analysis of demographic dynamics

Today, 54% of the world's total population - 7.046 billion people - live in cities, more than 5.2 times the number who lived in urban areas 60 years ago, according to the United Nations (UN). Estimates predict that the number of people living in cities will increase by a further 2.5 billion by 2050, the UN says in the revised edition of the World Urbanisation Report [10, 11], as shown in Figure 2 [14].

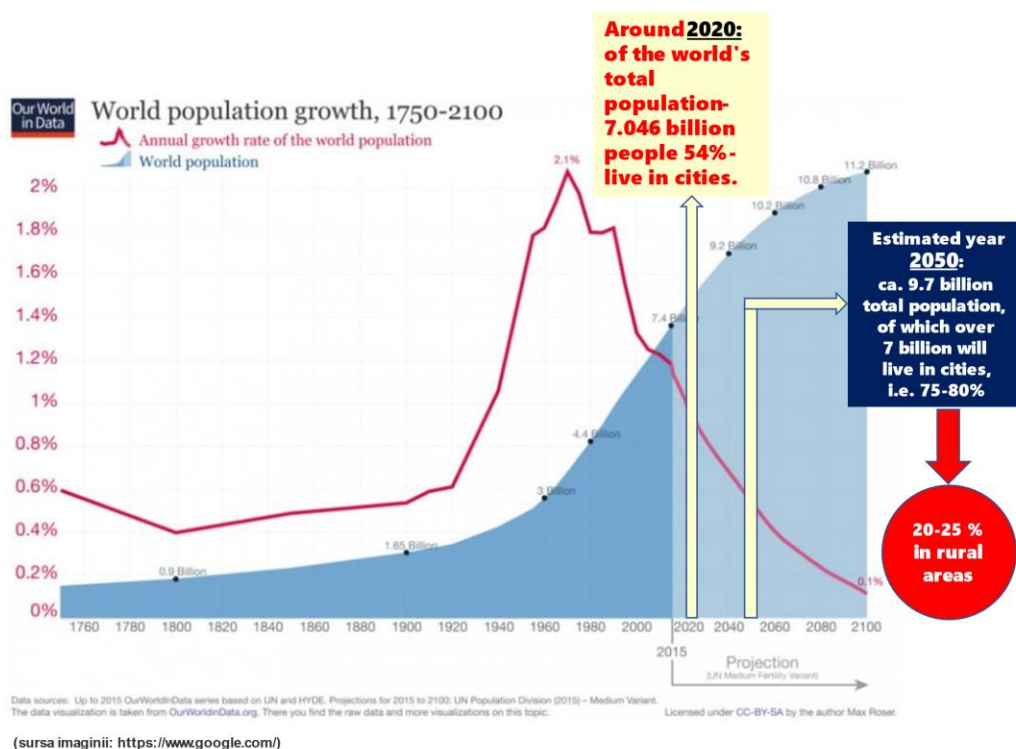


Fig. 2. Population dynamics in the world

Factors influencing population dynamics are life expectancy, fertility rates, urbanisation and migration. It is clear that the countryside is shrinking (Figure 3), but at the same time it is becoming increasingly important from a socio-economic perspective on the basis of its profile, which will be sought by more and more people living in urban agglomerations [3].

In Europe, it is estimated that some countries will lose even more than 15% of their population by 2050, and Romania is one of them [5, 6], with the urban-rural ratio illustrated in Figure 3.

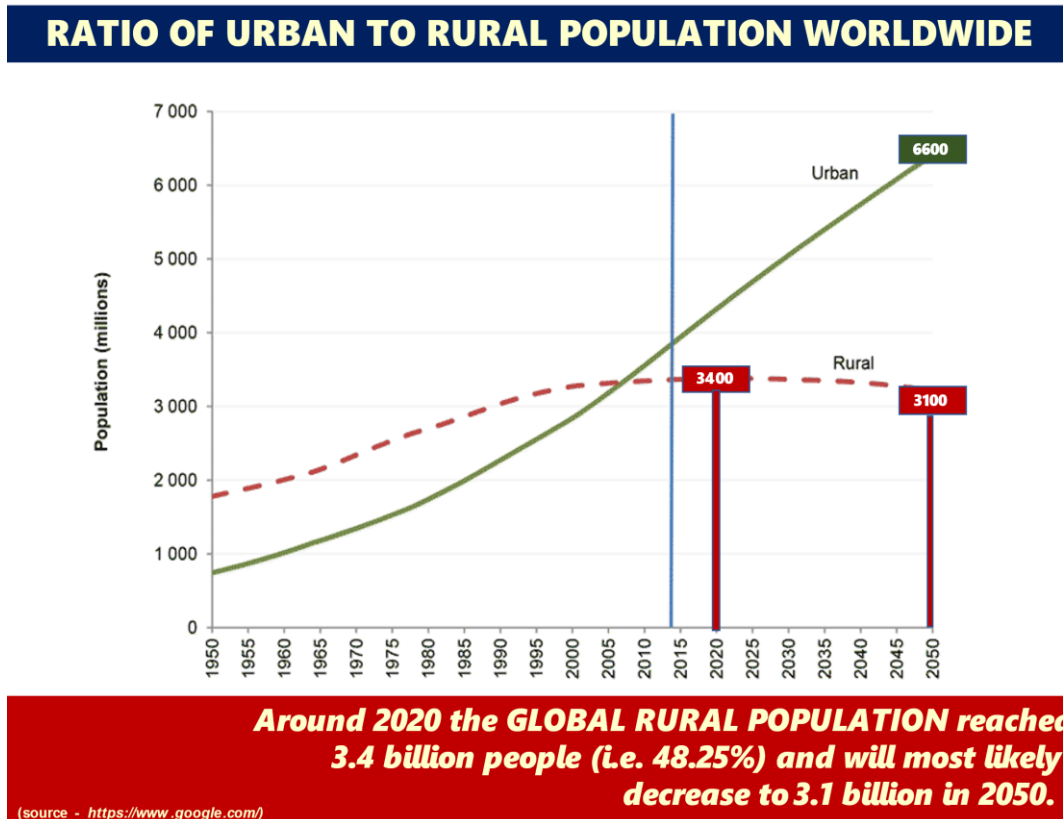


Fig. 3. Declining rural population

Romania is certainly part of this global trend, but it is appropriate to see the nuances of its evolution within this general trend in order to avoid certain errors recorded in other countries.

The Romanian population decline can be analysed from various points of view [2, 8, 6]. Basically, we can refer to **active decline**, which is considered to be that generated or maintained mainly by external migration, but usually combined with **demographic decline**, i.e. that inherited and caused by the age group structure and natural population decline. In general, and for our country in particular, a distinction is also made between active decline caused by *internal rural-urban* (or *intra-regional*) migration and *external migration* (between European countries or intercontinental). Unfortunately, the exaggerated emigration in Romania over the last three decades illustrates the lamentable failure of the policy and governance applied, which has NOT provided sufficient

economic and social opportunities at national level, but also at the level of the urban-rural relationship.

From the data published by the National Institute of Statistics [5,6] we can see that the population (by residence) was 22.089 million people on 1 January 2021 (down 0.5% from the previous year), of which the population by residence in urban areas was 12.442 million people and 9.647 million in rural areas, i.e. 43.67% (Fig. 4).

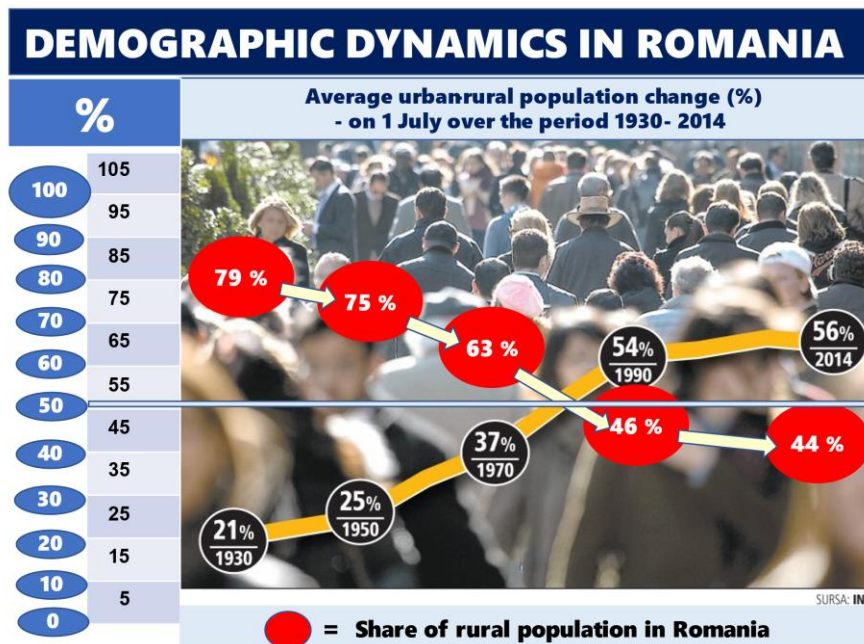


Fig. 4. Evolution of the Romanian urban and rural population over the last 100 years

In the urban-rural relationship it can be seen that in recent decades the Romanian economy has been increasingly divided into two distinct parts, defined by the residential criterion, respectively: a growing *urban Romania*, with a strong liberal component, which expects from the state opportunities rather than support, and a conservative *rural Romania*, with older people (usually over 60-65 years old), as well as people below the poverty line, who need help, not only for household development, but especially for survival [1, 7]. The young rural population has emigrated en masse, both to urban areas and especially to EU countries.

Within this pattern it is noticeable that the support of progress is provided by the URBAN ENVIRONMENT which largely influences our technological, educational, intellectual and cultural achievements and innovations, and lately a greater adaptation to societal demands can be observed.

On the other hand the existing model of urban-rural relationship has many shortcomings, so the current trend in urban development is moving towards REDUCED URBAN DENSITY approaches. This is because 'urban' leads to increased consumption of energy, resources, transport and land, increasing greenhouse gas emissions and air and noise pollution to levels that often exceed recommended (and legal) human safety limits.

There are also, in our view, shortcomings at the individual level: - overall consumption, energy use, water use and waste production, differentiated taxes and charges are all increasingly common and growing in many urban dwellings.

3.2. Analysis of economic dynamics specific to the urban-rural relationship

Rural decline is an inevitable process, generated by the perpetual transition of human society, generally with net positive benefits, from one societal model to another (Fig. 5), but it is essential how this transition is made in order to avoid a partial or even total failure, not only economic, but also cultural.

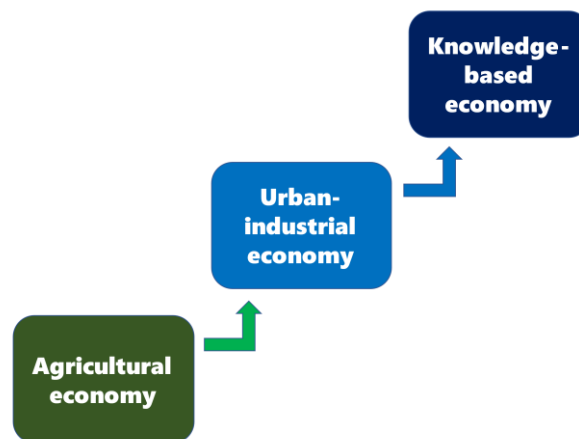


Fig. 5. Socio-demographic transition based on economic typology

In order to avoid the failure of the unbalanced relationship between urban and rural, at least two basic aspects can be considered: (a) The elaboration of harmonized development strategies between an integrated and subsidized rural economy, by an urban economy, beneficiary of the new ecological and organic quality products; (b) Societal development based on public policies supporting the process of definitive settlement in rural areas directly linked to the rural citizen's **purchasing power**.

As the expansion of urban areas has occurred mainly on former agricultural land, it has resulted in the loss of important ecosystem services [3], such as: food production; flood protection; biological diversity.

The principled rebalancing of the urban-rural model is about rethinking the position of 'the rural' [12]. Thus we can anticipate that the rural environment has the potential to be a significant quality of life priority for Romania. In this context, a first step is to REDEFINE RURALITY in the sense that, as already suggested, it must be realised that a "quantitatively" reduced rural area becomes a "qualitatively" valuable area by increasing its socio-economic and info-cultural importance, in the context of the needs and desires of townspeople. Three directions are essential in the sense of what has been said: - physical and mental reinvigoration of the body during holidays (*health*); - reconnecting with environment, with landscapes, flora and fauna (*Nature*); - reconnecting younger generations with the "ancestral original", reoriented and repositioned in the specific urban environment (*education*).

The next step is to IMPLEMENT INTELLIGENT PUBLIC POLICIES. Therefore, action must be taken to "polish the diamond" represented by the rural space and spirit in order to avoid the failure of other countries to transform the rural into a smaller urban, with the loss of the specific natural landscape, the customs and traditions of the authentic village, and in some cases, the traditional economic attractiveness. To AVOID THE FAILURE OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE URBAN-RURAL RELATIONSHIP we analyse both the regional decline [4,12] which can be assessed by 8 significant dimensions (Fig.6).

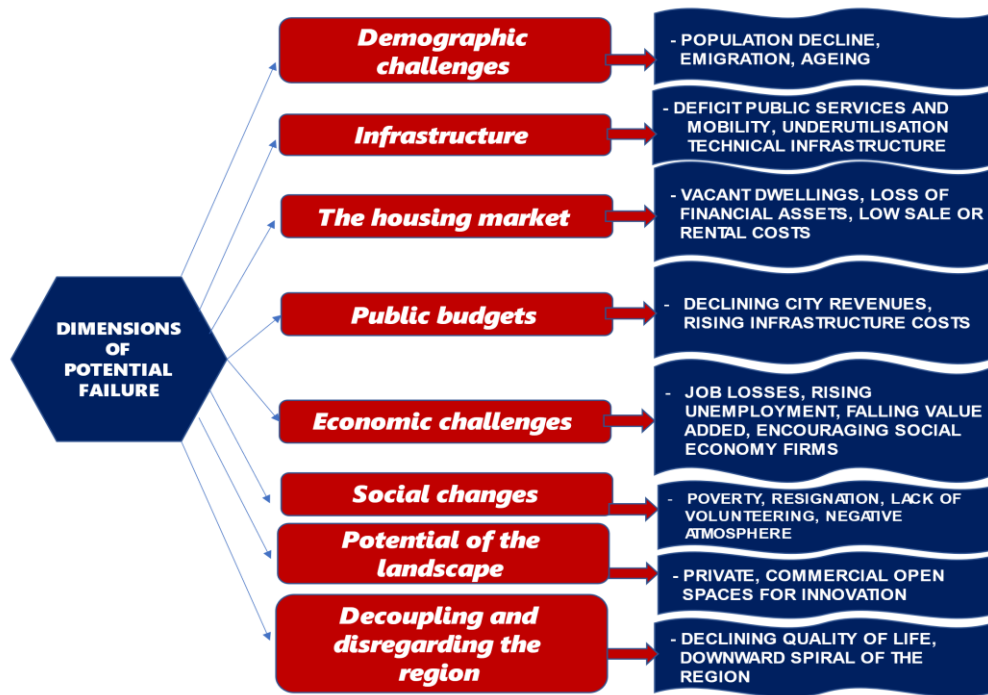


Fig. 6. Benchmarks for avoiding urban-rural failure at regional level

However, Romania is a special case where rural depopulation is not taking place in favour of internal urbanisation, but of international migration. Four categories of complex decline are usually identified [1] (these can coexist and interact in the same region) depending on the causes (Fig. 7).

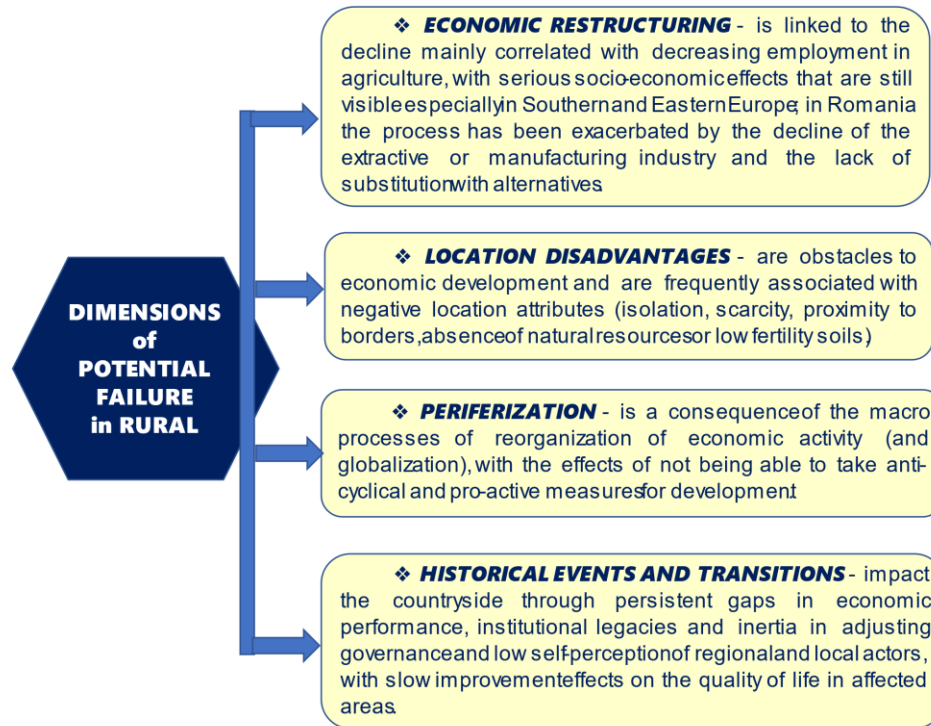


Fig. 7. Benchmarks for avoiding urban-rural failure at local level, including rural

The socio-demographic and economic diagnosis highlights not only the complexity of the urban-rural relationship as a development of human society, but especially the factors that need to be adapted and harmonized in order to avoid a failed transition.

3.3. Analysis of the establishment of principles to avoid the failure of the urban-rural relationship

We have in mind two contradictory elements that can generate various disharmonies, namely: on the one hand the number of people in rural areas is decreasing, and on the other hand the fact that rural areas occupy 87% of the national territory [9]. Also, analyzing the specific aspects of rural decline, we note that the Romanian rural environment is characterized by a strong social and economic heterogeneity between the different areas of the country, which is also reflected in the demographic evolution.

Therefore, rural localities located in peri-urban or tourist areas show positive demographic trends, mainly due to urban-rural migration. In comparison, isolated settlements, or those more than 30 km from various urban centres, show negative demographic trends, even with deserted areas (villages).

The evolution of the rural population follows the socio-economic evolution of rural communities, which has a decisive influence on migration. We refer to a number of aspects such as the level of development achieved by localities, infrastructure and public services, distance to larger urban centres, all of which are basically indicative of the living conditions that a given rural locality entails.

The disharmonies of societal development in the urban-rural spectrum have led to changes in the rural population over the last two decades. They are evidenced by the negative evolution of the main demographic indicators, which has generated a pronounced demographic imbalance manifested by an ageing population, falling birth rates and fertility, rising mortality rates, but also by the explosion of external migration, with the main negative effect being the depopulation of rural areas, especially those in fragile areas (upland, wetland and deepwater areas).

Without drastic economic and social policy corrections, the National Institute of Statistics estimates, as a plausible variant, that the evolution of the Romanian resident population in rural areas will be 6,141,500 inhabitants by 2060, representing a decrease of 2,930,700 people or 32.3% between 2017 and 2060 [6].

Rural demographic decline as a failure of the urban-rural relationship is the result of the combined action of several factors. These include: - dependence on subsistence farming/ - low incomes of farmers and workers in agriculture (compared to other sectors)/ - lack of opportunities for small business development/ - low level of development of basic infrastructure and public services / - poor quality of connective infrastructure (which can limit commuting)/ - location of villages in areas affected by natural constraints, characterized by low land productivity, especially in mountainous areas, etc.

The very serious effect is the abandonment of agricultural activities in favour of other types of activity in urban areas, with soil and biological degradation of the land, a situation that is difficult to remedy in the future.

It is becoming timely to develop societal strategies for urban-rural relations based on scientific knowledge and objective and ethical principles. In this respect, the complexity of future strategies for the development of the urban-rural relationship should refer to an integrated structure of strategic elements, which should contain at least four complementary strategic components: - the conceptual component; - the operational component; - the architectural and landscape component; - the political-administrative component based on appropriate public policies.

Public policies for the development of a *balanced and bioharmonised urban-rural relationship* will only be economically efficient and systemically effective

if they give human and other species a chance to live (especially in rural areas we talk about biological harmonisation, i.e. bioharmonisation). This is based on existing expert studies, backed up by hundreds of studies and researches little used in decision-making approaches (!). In principle, it becomes absolutely necessary that SCIENCE is present in the political decision so as to avoid the failure of the urban-rural relationship through the following aspects of the **bioharmonisation process** [6]: (a) Correlation and harmonization between natural resources and geo-political market requirements; (b) Correlation between industry (urban) and agriculture (rural); (c) Correlation between quantity-oriented intensive-industrial and quality-oriented semi-intensive and organic agriculture; (d) Correlation between economic elements and finance; (e) Correlation and avoidance of urban and rural cultural disharmony.

Conclusions

(1) The DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS in Romania is of great proportions, noting that our country is among the EU countries with the greatest decline in urban areas, while it is forecast that a quarter of Romania's rural population will shrink by 2050 (!).

(2) THE PROBLEM OF RURAL SHRINK is a complex one, which goes beyond the phenomena of depopulation and migration, so that national rural development programmes must explicitly take into account the demographic challenges, including the causes of shrinkage and the disadvantages of location, of elements of peripheralisation, as well as the solution based on the principles of bioharmonisation of the urban-rural relationship based on scientific directions for action.

(3) A FOCUSED RESPONSE on economic restructuring and the importance of rural areas for the implementation of the new European Ecological Pact in Romania is needed, in particular with regard to a just transition by supporting the bioeconomy, initiatives in the direction of the circular economy and the development of sustainable agri-zootechnical production and diversified and high-quality processing of food resources.

(4) In order to avoid urban-rural failure, the DEVELOPMENT OF INTELLIGENT PUBLIC POLICIES and the process of drawing up regional and local *strategies on rural contraction* must be balanced, bioharmonised and substantially strengthened at local level, where it becomes mandatory to empower all actors (both regional and local) with the development and implementation of such policies, especially in the maximum use of European funds.

REFERENCES

- [1] ESPON, European Shrinking Rural Areas Challenges, Actions and Perspectives for Territorial Governance (ESCAPE), <https://www.espon.eu/escape>, Accessed on March, 2022 (2020).
- [2] Gruia,R., Bioarmonism, from Theory to Practice to a future Ideology (In Romanian), Clarion Publishing House, Brasov, pp.27-36, 201-206 (2019).
- [3] Gruia,R., Gaceu,L., Rural Development Sustained by Agri-rural Tourism and the Novelty of the Romanian Village, Annals of the Academy of Romanian Scientists, Series on Agriculture, Silviculture and Veterinary Medicine Sciences, ISSN Online 2344-2085, Vol. 10 Number 1/2021 , 33-40 (2021).
- [4] Küpper, P. et al. Regionale Schrumpfung gestalten, https://literatur.thuenen.de/digbib_extern/dn052553.pdf, Accessed on 30 December 2020 (2013).
- [5] National Institute of Statistics, Projection of Romania's population by residence on 2060 horizon,https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/proiectarea_populatiei_pe_medii_de_rezidenta_la_orizontul_anului_2060.pdf, Accessed on 30 December 2020 (2019).
- [6] National Institute of Statistics, Social statistics, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/>, Accessed on 30 December 2020 (2020).
- [7] Romania's Government, Romania's territorial development strategy: Policentric Romania 2035. (10) Rural areas in decline · MDLPA-DPS. (2017).
- [8] Romania's Government, National Startegic Plan 2021-2027, https://www.madr.ro/docs/dezvoltare-rurala/PAC_dupa_2020/2020/DRAFT-Analiza-SWO-T-Plan-National-Strategic-2021-2027.pdf, Accessed on 30 December 2020. (2020).
- [9] Romania's Parliament, Law 351/2001 concerning the approval of Plan for national territory management - Section IV- Localities network, <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/29780>, Accessed on 15 March 2022 (2001).
- [10] United Nations, World Population Prospects 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/>, Accessed on 30 December 2020 (2019).
- [11] United Nations, Population, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/population/>, Accessed on 30 December 2020 (2020)
- [12] *** - <https://www.espon.eu/escape>.
- [13] *** - <https://www.eea.europa.eu/ro/themes/urban/about-the-urban-environment>, Accessed on March, 2022.
- [14] *** - <https://www.google.com/>, Accessed on March, 2022.