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SWOT ANALYSIS OF UPPER PRUT EURO-REGION: FOCUS ON ROMANIAN SIDE

The paper provides a synthesis of outcomes of the social and economic analysis of the rural area in the “Upper Prut” Euro-region, Romanian side, and the research was done by the researchers of the Institute of Agricultural Economics from the Romanian Academy. The paper presents the SWOT analysis of the Romanian side of the “Upper Prut” Euro-region and identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the rural area. It was done based on the information about the agricultural policy in Romania in the last decades, rural development policy of Romania, analysis of the current level of socio-economic development in rural areas of Romanian-Ukrainian cross-border region (rural areas in the counties Suceava and Botosani), and data used were provided by the National Institute of Statistics from Romania. The conclusions of the analysis are useful to evaluate the present level of socio-economic development and design the future rural development policies.

Keywords: SWOT, Upper Prut Euro-region, Suceava, Botosani, Romania

Войцілас Д.-М. SWOT-АНАЛІЗ ЄВРО-РЕГІОНУ «ВЕРХНІЙ ПРУТ»: ФОКУС НА РУМУНСЬКІЙ СТОРОНІ

У праці міститься узагальнення підсумків соціально-економічного аналізу в сільській місцевості у Євро-регіоні "Верхній Прут", а саме тієї частини, яка знаходиться на Румунській стороні. Дослідження було проведено науковцями Інституту економіки сільського господарства Румунської академії. У статті представлений SWOT аналіз румунської сторони Євро-регіону "Верхній Прут", де визначено сильні і слабкі сторони, можливості та загрози в сільській місцевості. Це було зроблено на основі інформації про сільськогосподарську політику Румунії в останні десятиліття, політику розвитку сільських районів Румунії, аналіз поточного рівня соціально-економічного розвитку в сільських районах румунсько-українського транскордонного регіону (сільських районах у повітах Сучава і Ботошань), використувувани дані були надані

Національним інститутом статистики Румунії. Висновки аналізу, допомагають оцінити нинішній рівень соціально-економічного розвитку і розробки майбутніх стратегій розвитку сільських районів.

Ключові слова: SWOT, Верхній Прут Євро-область, Сучава, Ботошань, Румунія

1. Introduction

The cross-border cooperation between Romania and Ukraine has a long tradition. Under the present form, it was launched in 1997, when were created two euro-regions: "Upper Prut" and "Lower Danube". The paper is focus on "Upper Prut" Euro-region.

The Romanian part of the "Upper Prut" Euro-region consists of two counties, namely Suceava and Botosani. The county Suceava lies in the north-eastern part of Romania, borders with Ukraine in the north and neighbours upon the county Botosani in the east. It is the second largest county in Romania. The county Botosani is located at the north-eastern extremity of Romania (it is the northernmost county of Romania), borders on Ukraine in the north and the Republic of Moldova in the east. Together, both counties represent 5.7% of Romania's territory (TEMPO online database). From the administrative standpoint, both counties (NUT 3) belongs to the development region North-East (NUTS 2). According to the methodology used at EU level, the two counties are considered predominantly rural areas (it classifies the territorial units NUTS 3 into three groups: predominantly urban regions, intermediary and predominantly rural regions). In Romanian legislation, the rural area is considered the space into the administration of communes (NUT 5), while the urban area is under the administration of towns (NUT 4). Thus, the "Upper Prut" Euro-region has 169 communes, which in their turn consist of 712 villages. The main results of the paper are focusing on the socio-economic analysis of the rural area of the Romanian side of the Euro-region.

2. Methodology and data

The paper used data provided by the National Institute of Statistics from Romania. The socio-economic analysis is based on qualitative analysis of the available data from the rural area in the "Upper Prut" Euro-region. The analysis was done at NUT 3 level, counties Suceava and Botosani.

The results of the paper are a synthesis of outcomes of the socio-economic analysis done by the researchers of the Institute of Agricultural Economics from the Romanian Academy. The SWOT analysis identifies the opportunities of the region in the rural areas and the main threats of the future having in view the strengths and weaknesses analysed. There were used the main social and economic indicators recorded by national statistics. There were considered the following categories of indicators: population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transportation and technical infrastructure. For each category, a few main indicators were used and analysed.

The population and labour force were analysed having in view the next indicators: the total population, the density, the age structure, the mobility (domicile changes), the natality, birth rate, death rate, labour renewal, demographic ageing, number of employees, structure of employed population by main sectors.

The social and cultural dimensions were analysed having in view the next indicators: the number of schools, number of teaching staff, school population, healthcare units by categories, number of beds, healthcare staff, cultural objectives, historical and ethnographic heritage, number of artists and museums.

The agriculture and forestry were analysed having in view the next indicators: land structure, number, total land area and average land area by types of farms, farm production, yields, livestock structure and production, agricultural inputs structure and quantity, mechanization (tractors and agricultural equipment), forested areas.

For the other economic activities were analysed the next indicators: size structure of active enterprises, business environment structure, number of tourists, tourist accommodation structures, agro-tourism boarding houses, accommodation capacity (number of beds), movement of tourists.

The transportation and technical infrastructure were analysed having in view the next indicators: length of public roads, modernized communal roads, length of railways, modernized railways, sewerage network, natural gas supply network, drinking water supply network, thermal energy supply, communes connected to public utilities.

3. Results – SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The SWOT analysis of the Romanian side of the "Upper Prut" Euro-region was done after an in-depth analysis of the main social and economic indicators available at NUT 3 level, for the counties Suceava and Botoșani. The findings of the SWOT analysis are detailed in the next chapters.

3.1. Strengths

The strengths of the Romanian side of the Euro-region were identified after the analysis of the following categories of indicators: population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transportation and technical infrastructure.

Population and labour force. From the demographic point of view, the population has been relatively stable for the last quarter of the century. The area analysed is characterized by a higher concentration of population in its eastern part, and the average density is 88.66 inhabitants/km² (TEMPO online database), which is little higher than the national level (84.4 inhabitants/km²). There was a positive balance of migration flows to rural area. Nowadays, the region has preponderantly rural population (56%), which is a plus for labour force. At the same time, there is a significant share of employed rural population (65%) and a balanced age structure of rural active population.

Social and cultural dimensions. As regards the educational system, there were investigated the number of schools, the number of teaching staff and the school population. School network reorganization continued in

the last years, resulting in the amalgamation of many school units into new structures and the dissolution of those that did not comply with the operating requirements as independent units. In latest years efforts have been made to improve the endowment of education units with visual aids and computers and IT equipment, while trying to attract and stabilize the teaching staff in rural areas and ensure pupils' transport to / from the education units

As regards the healthcare system, together with the health insurance system, one can say that many units that activated in the public system were closed down and the number of private healthcare units began to rise. In the last years, the number of healthcare staff had an increasing evolution in most categories, the greatest being noticed in the case of doctors, the number of which increased from 258 in the year 2005, to 417 in 2013 (TEMPO online database). However, the number of doctors / inhabitants is much under the national average.

The region analysed has a significant cultural-historical and ethnographic heritage, represented by many cultural objectives consisting of churches, monasteries, museums, memorial houses, mansions, inns and monarch courts. The rural areas preserve the ancient customs, traditions, crafts and habits, materialized under the form of genuine folk art masterpieces – pottery, manually woven carpets, sheepskin coat making, weaving, folk and traditional instruments, masks, etc. The counties Botoşani and Suceava were and will continue to be two important cultural centres of Romania, the cultural life in these counties bearing the mark of important personalities (Mihai Eminescu, George Enescu, Nicolae Iorga, Ştefan Luchian, Ciprian Porumbescu, Nicolae Labiş and many others). History is preserved and promoted through the 40 existing museums, 25% of these being found in the rural area; annually, these attract almost 60% of the total number of tourists.

Agriculture and forestry. The region has significant land resources. It has a favourable agricultural land structure. Out of total agricultural land, arable land has the largest share (64.65%) (TEMPO online database). Pastures and hayfields represent other important land use categories, with a share close to the national average. Also, the region has significant forestry resources (37.82% of the total area of the region and 7.6% of the Romanian's forests; at national level, forests represent 27.25% of the total area). There were positive structural changes through land restitution to former owners and the (active) private property prevails (private market-oriented agricultural holdings emerged). Cereals represent the main crop, which adds to the high value-added crops: potatoes and vegetables (also oil crops and green fodders). At the same time, the livestock sector is more developed than the national average (specialized in bovines and sheep). Also, the mechanization was improved compared to 1990.

Other economic activities. The size structure of the active enterprises is favourable to the sustainable community development as the larger enterprises are well-represented in the primary and secondary sector. The business environment structure, by economic activity sectors in the region, is dominated by the active enterprises in the field of services rendered to the population as well as to the enterprises. The secondary

sector of the investigated economy of the region accounts for 23% of total business, above the national average of 20% (TEMPO online database). On the basis of these data, we consider that the economy of the investigated area has already surpassed the lower stage of development and followed an ascending trajectory in which the focus has been increasingly laid on capital. At the same time, there are rich natural and anthropic resources, with variety and diversity of objectives of national and international interest, with special landscape areas, with natural reserves and protected areas and diverse therapeutical factors. The agro-tourism boarding houses prevailed in the tourist accommodation structures in rural area of the region, followed by the tourist chalets. The number of beds in the tourism units continuously increased, so that in the year 2014, there were 2.5 times as many beds in the tourist accommodation units than in the year 2001. As regards the movement of tourists, in the year 2014 the number of tourist arrivals was 2.5 times as high compared to 2001, and the number of overnight stays doubled in the same period.

Transportation and technical infrastructure. The transport and technical infrastructure plays a main role in the development process of any territorial unit; it can represent an asset for the areas where this is developed or on the contrary, a constraint to a potential local investment process. Among strengths, we include the presence of TEN-T road network and TEN-T railway network. Also, we observe that the public road network increased by 32.6% in 2014 versus 1990 and the operating railway network enlarged by 2.4% in 2014 versus 1990 (TEMPO online database). As a consequence of the development of the economy, openness of the European trade and EU accession, the motor vehicles matriculations increased. On the other hand, we can mention that the sewerage networks increased, also the natural gas supply networks and the drinking water supply. Other important characteristic of the region is the presence of the airport Suceava, which is included in the plan of its transformation into an international airport (from national airport).

3.2. Weaknesses

The weaknesses of the Romanian side of the Euro-region were identified after the analysis of the following categories of indicators: population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transportation and technical infrastructure.

Population and labour force. The main demographic processes that characterize the rural population of the region are the following: demographic decline that has the tendency to get stronger, demographic ageing both of total population and of the labour force. At the same time, the rural population demographic ageing has grown stronger since the 2000s. Demographic ageing is accompanied by the elderly population feminization phenomenon (women represent 60% of the population aged over 65 years) (TEMPO online database). Therefore, the labour renewal experienced an accelerated decreasing trend. The labour market has experienced significant changes. One result of the closing down of the economically non-performing industrial units was that, the number of employees was practically down by half in

the early 2000s, compared to early transition. Due to the poor development of the private business environment, the number of salaried jobs was maintained at a low level. Unemployment incidence in the working-age population is higher in the rural area of the region, compared to the urban areas. The occupational structure of the population is dominated by the primary sector where 46.5% of the employed persons carry out their activity, while 34.1% are employed in the tertiary sector. Agriculture prevalence in the occupational structure is the direct result of the deficit of non-agricultural employment opportunities; this deficit maintains the regional population's dependence on agriculture, the consequence being the low level of economic and social welfare.

Social and cultural dimensions. The number of educational units from the primary and gymnasium cycle decreased at the level of investigated rural areas, from 270 in 2005 to 164 in 2013 (TEMPO online database). A similar process also took place in the case of the teaching staff. This decrease was based both on the reorganization of the schooling network, which led to the disappearance of many teaching jobs as a result of the dissolution of classes of pupils that effectively functioned, and on the increased difficulties in the operation of the educational process, mainly resulting from sub-financing the educational system. In parallel, the school population from the rural area of the region constantly decreased in this period. The school abandonment phenomenon also lays at the basis of this process, determined by the precarious economic situation of many families, lack of education and a deficient educational infrastructure. In parallel, the schoolchildren's performance has also fluctuated in latest years, with a general decreasing tendency.

Agriculture and forestry. Among weaknesses, we identified the presence of (semi-) subsistence household farms. Also, the vineyards and orchards are weakly represented, their share, 0.23% (Suceava) and 0.75% (Botosani), is much under the national average (TEMPO online database). The productivity of crops is low, as a result of relatively low use of modern inputs, carriers of technological progress and the structure of agricultural production is slightly imbalanced (crop production prevalence in total agricultural production). The livestock sector experienced decline after 1990. On the other hand, the degradation of the soil emerged as a result of inadequate utilization of fertilizers and was a diminishing trend in the utilization of phyto-sanitary products and decrease of treated areas and crops. The mechanization is weaker than the national average (one tractor per 93.48 hectares versus the national average of one tractor per 76.38 hectares or the European average of one tractor per 13 hectares). Other important aspect is that the traditional wood utilization was abandoned and the forestry exploitation focused on intensive logging. In this way the value added was lost for the local economies.

Other economic activities. The main weaknesses identified were the advanced degradation of many buildings that are historical monuments and the lack of financial resources for the renovation of historical buildings.

Transportation and technical infrastructure. There is a low modernization level of highways with the presence

of the electric lines of rail transport only in Suceava county. Due to the economic crisis, the matriculations of new motor vehicles decreased in number in the last years. On the other hand, there is a low coverage of localities/population with drinking water supply networks, sewerage systems and natural gas supply networks. The investments in extension of the sewerage networks were mainly in the urban area and less in the rural area. Also, the natural gas supply networks extended mainly in the urban area. At the same time, the quantity of the produced and distributed thermal energy diminished.

3.3. Opportunities

The opportunities of the Romanian side of the Euro-region were identified after the analysis of the following categories of indicators: population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transportation and technical infrastructure.

Population and labour force. Among the opportunities identified we mention the regional partnerships for the development of education, employment and social inclusion like NE Regional Consortium for Education and NE Territorial Pact for Occupation and Social Inclusion. Also, we can include the thematic objectives related to the Strategy Europe 2020 dedicated to human capital.

Social and cultural dimensions. There are many opportunities for the development of the region analysed. We mention the European structural funds dedicated to the improvement of educational and transport and technical infrastructure and to performance increase in education (or governmental programs), the European funds dedicated to regional development and human resource development in the healthcare system and the European funds and governmental programs (both structural funds and other sources) dedicated to culture and heritage conservation. Also, we include in this category the Cross-border cooperation (cultural partnerships with the neighbour countries) and the cultural exchange programs with other localities. The goals of the authorities should be the promotion of the ancient customs, traditions, crafts and habits (materialized into genuine folk art masterpieces – pottery, manually woven carpets, sheepskin coat making, weaving, folk and traditional instruments, masks, etc) and the externalization of the old ethnographic and folk traditions on the occasion of different fests, fairs and religious events.

Agriculture and forestry. The structural pattern of agricultural land offers significant development possibilities to the rural economy, by the diversified farming practice, with large possibilities of interaction of different economic activities. Then, the return to the tradition in livestock rising and the exploitation and high valorisation of the wood because of the rich forestry resources can be considered an opportunity. The growth of the agri-food products demand from the neighbourhood countries could be also a good opportunity to develop the agriculture and connected sectors. We can expect an increase of the trade (generally) between Romania, Ukraine and Moldova, with good chances for a positive balance of trade for Romania, by increasing trends of the exports.

Other economic activities. Investments in tourism are one of the most important opportunities. At the same

time, we can expect the increase of population's incomes and living standard on the basis of tourism activities, in relation to the natural and anthropic heritage. Tourists' mobility is increasing and this will facilitate the development of other activities, as well. Not the last, the diversification of the recreational activities can contribute to the development of the region.

Transportation and technical infrastructure. Among others, the European funds dedicated to TEN-T road network and the European funds dedicated to TEN-T railway network are the main sources for the modernisation of these ways of transport. The transformation of Suceava national/regional airport in an international airport for serving the entire euro-region is one of the opportunities of the investigated area. All these investments will increase of trade between Romania, Ukraine and Moldova.

3.4. Threats

The threats of the Romanian side of the Euro-region were identified after the analysis of the following categories of indicators: population and labour force, social and cultural dimensions, agriculture and forestry, other economic activities, transportation and technical infrastructure.

Population and labour force. The continuation of the natality decrease and the migration phenomenon can negatively influence the development of the region. As a consequence, the potential GDP decrease by the increase of redistributive pressure on the public budgets generated by the increase in number of elderly population, retired from the economic activity. At the same time, the innovation capacity decrease, hence risk of entrepreneurial initiative decrease in the rural area. Disguised unemployment maintenance in the rural area/agriculture and high unemployment maintenance in the urban area put pressure on the economic results of the region and on the national and local budgets.

Social and cultural dimensions. Among different threats, we mention: non-attracting the qualified staff in education, non putting an end to school abandonment, increase in number of children with parents who left abroad for work, non-improvement of the educational and technical infrastructure in the rural area. Also, the diminution of the individual and collective school performances is other aspect which can negatively influence the region. On the other hand, threats appear when the state budget allocated to education is lower than the needs/estimation and the state budget allocated to healthcare is insufficient. Non-attracting the specialty healthcare staff by adequate remuneration or non-attracting the European funds dedicated to culture, education and healthcare or non putting into value the ancient customs, traditions, crafts and habits of traditional rural households or deterioration of traditional folk architecture are other threats for the near future.

Agriculture and forestry. Polarized structure of agriculture, with a large number of small individual holdings together with a small number of farms with legal status that operate very large agricultural areas and the perpetuation of (semi-) subsistence farms are the main threats identified. At the same time, the maintenance of the imbalanced structure of agricultural production (crop production versus livestock production) and non-

utilization of agricultural inputs can negatively affect the region. Also, non-putting into value of the experience in livestock farming and the superior valorification of the wood.

Other economic activities. For this analysis we identified as main threats the following: non-putting into value of the natural and anthropic resources of the region from the tourism point of view and non-correlation between the natural potential and the developed infrastructure.

Transportation and technical infrastructure. There are many threats for the region but we want to highlight the next: non-utilisation of the European funds for TEN-T road and railway networks, non-correlation between the economic potential and the developed transport infrastructure, low maintenance capacity of modernized roads, low capacity of the population to bear the utilization and maintenance costs of existing infrastructure or economic crisis continuation.

4. Conclusions

At the end of the paper a few conclusions can be mentioned. The SWOT analysis of the "Upper Prut" Euro-region, Romanian side, highlights the strengths and opportunities of the rural area in the region and identifies the past and present weaknesses and the main threats for the future.

The main strengths of the region are: high population density, population relatively stable, a positive balance of migration flows to rural area. The region has preponderantly rural population, a significant share of employed rural population and a balanced age structure of rural active population. The educational system, healthcare system, together with the health insurance system is in a positive evolution. At the same time, the region analysed has a significant cultural-historical and ethnographic heritage. The region has significant land resources, with favourable arable land, pastures, hayfields and forests. Cereals represent the main crop, which adds to the high value-added crops like potatoes and vegetables (also oil crops and green fodders), plus the livestock sector, which is specialized in bovines and sheep. The tourism is well represented and has huge capacity of development. Also, we include the presence of TEN-T road network and TEN-T railway network and the airport Suceava.

Among weaknesses, we identified: demographic decline, demographic ageing, which is accompanied by the elderly population feminization phenomenon. The number of educational units in the investigated rural area decreased; also the teaching staff. In agriculture are still present the (semi-) subsistence household farms, the productivity is low and the livestock sector experienced decline. The traditional wood utilization was abandoned and the mechanization is weak.

There are many opportunities in the region and we would like to highlight the next: the European structural funds dedicated to regional development and Cross-border cooperation. The tourism, as one of the main economic activities, has huge potential, but also the agriculture and forestry.

The main threats identified for the region are the following: the continuation of the natality decrease and

СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНІ ПРОБЛЕМИ СУЧАСНОГО ПЕРІОДУ УКРАЇНИ

the migration phenomenon, slow improvements in educational and healthcare system, non putting into value of the experience in livestock farming and the superior valorification of the wood, non-putting into value of the natural and anthropic resources or non-utilisation of the European funds for TEN-T road and railway networks.

5. Acknowledgements

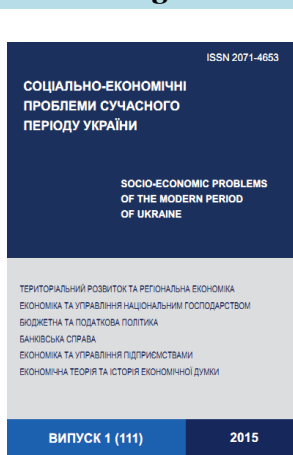
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Proceedings of the "SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS of the MODERN PERIOD of UKRAINE"



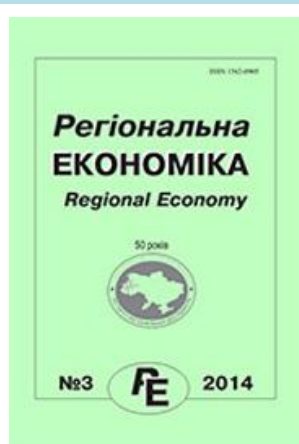
Proceedings of the "Socio-economic problems of the modern period of Ukraine" is a specialized scientific-practical edition based National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the Institute for regional studies of NAS of Ukraine.

The book highlights the results of studies of institutional and socio-economic problems of development of Ukraine at the macro, meso and micro levels, encouraging to published authors who carry out research work in various sectors of the economy.

The book "Socio-economic problems of the modern period of Ukraine" on the List of scientific professional publications of Ukraine in the field of economic Sciences.

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