IMPACT OF POPULATION'S EDUCATION LEVEL ON INCOMES AND LIFE QUALITY IN THE RURAL AREA. THE CASE STUDY

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Abstract:
Ensuring the highest life quality possible for the population has become the goal of social development. The authors of this paper present aspects of life quality in the inhabitants of the Romanian rural area, more precisely in north western Arad. To collect and analyse a large amount of information reflecting the real state of the respondents, they used the questionnaire method. Applying the questionnaire allowed the identification of several important aspects of life quality in the research area. The authors of the paper believe that the results of the questionnaire point out a low level of incomes, the lack of jobs reflected in a low level of employment, the lack of social protection, the need to increase the quality of education and, last but not least, the need for higher levels of education. This paper presents partial results of the processing of responses.

Keywords: life quality, incomes, education, study level, knowledge.

1. INTRODUCTION

Life quality is the research topic of many specialists in the field of sociology; it gained particular importance in Romania after 1990, when the Institute for Research of Life Quality was established under the aegis of the Romanian Academy.

Increasing life quality in rural area inhabitants supposes developing the rural area, and this should rely on a set of measures and principles as set in the European Chart of the Rural Area, a chart based on the principle according to which rural area should develop based on:
- Setting man in the centre of concepts and decisions;
- Protecting positive values, i.e. the traditional family, to favour the development of youth and their
- integration into the community;
- Strengthening the identity of the community and favouring the sense of responsibility,
- cooperation, and creativity;
- Promoting cultural and historical features;
- Encouraging economic and social diversification (Mateoc and Mǎnescu, 2012).

It is important to analyse life quality in rural inhabitants because Romanian rural communities cover about 90% of the country's area and represent **46.1% of the country's population (9,220,000 inhabitants in 2013)**. The average density of the population in rural areas has been relatively constant in the last years (about 45.0 inhabitants/km^2). Romania's population has a stronger level of rurality compared to other EU countries, where rural settlements are less populated; this is why we believe we need to pay more attention to the development of the villages, to the diversification of rural economy, and to the increase of life quality in rural inhabitants.

The development of rural communities can be described as a process in which the community is actively involved to mobilise all initiatives meant to valorise one's own resources for the social and economic benefit of the community (Vincze, 2000).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method we used was the questionnaire applied in three rural localities located north-west from the municipality of Arad, Romania. Applying the questionnaire allowed us to collect a large number of information and to identify some important aspects of life quality in the rural inhabitants in the area. The sample was sized depending on the number of inhabitants in each locality to ensure statistical relevance. The questionnaire consisted in questions divided into four chapters: Living conditions, Social environment, Professional life, and Personal life. In addition, there was also a chapter of Personal data to characterise demographically the studied sample (age, marital status, and sex, level of education, profession, and occupation).

We analysed the population of three localities where we applied the questionnaire to assess life quality in the rural area: 98 questionnaires in Peregu Mic, 103 questionnaires in Pecica, and 94 questionnaires in Vînǎtori 94.

The questionnaire consisted in simple or multiple response questions grouped per domains important for the personal and socio-professional life of the inhabitants. Primary data resulted from the responses were processed with a SPSS by applying the cross-tab, the Chi-square test and using proper graph representations.

The average age of the respondents was 44.53 years, with a minimum of 18 years and a maximum of 83 years, with a standard deviation of 15.75 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age of respondents

Specification	No of people	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Peregu Mic	98	19.00	82.00	41.98	15.69
Vânători	94	23.00	76.00	50.42	14.82
Pecica	102	18.00	83.00	41.56	15.29
Total	294	18.00	83.00	44.53	15.75

Source: Own research, 2015.

We can see that the population in Vânători has an average age of over 50, i.e. older than that of Pecica and Peregu Mic.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper presents partial results after processing questionnaire data. We present information related to the level of education, profession and occupation, and family income. All these aspects allow better understanding of rural realities, i.e. of living conditions in relation to the needs of each individual and then in relation to the needs of his/her community.

The authors of the study wish to point out the changes within the rural communities of Romania marked by the European perspective that enforces new standards and directions of development.

3.1. Education Level

Respondents in the research area have graduated mainly high schools (38.51%) and higher education (20.95%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Respondents' education level
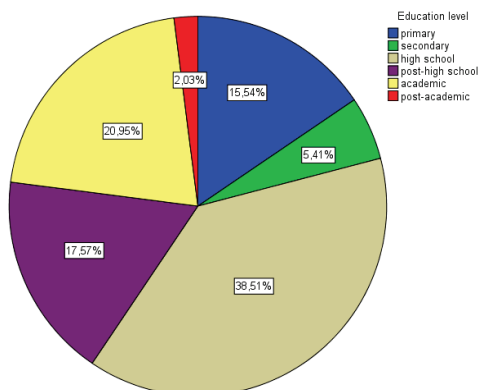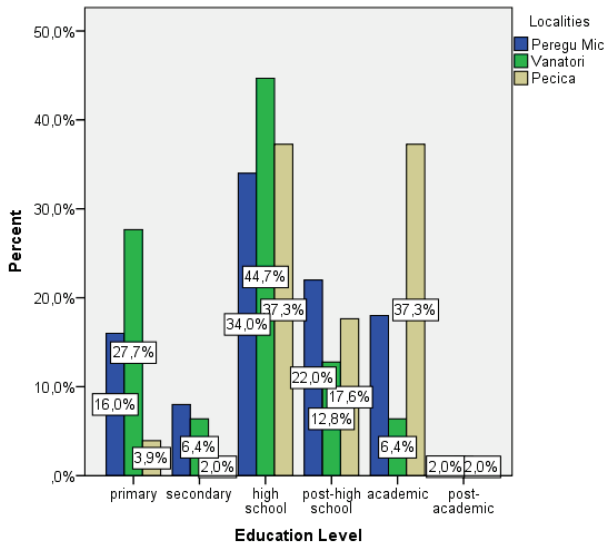

Source: Own research, 2015.

These data reflect a high level of education in the respondents in the research area (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents' education level per localities

Education level	UM	Peregu Mic	Vânători	Pecica	Mean of the localities
primary	%	16.00	27.70	3.90	15.50
secondary	%	8.00	6.40	2.00	5.40
high school	%	34.00	44.70	37.30	38.50
post-high school	%	22.00	12.80	17.60	17.60
academic	%	18.00	6.40	37.30	20.90
post-academic	%	2.00	2.10	2.00	2.00
TOTAL	No of people	100	94	102	296
	%	33.80	31.80	34.50	100.00

Source: Own research, 2015.

Figure 2: Education level of the respondents in the localities analysed
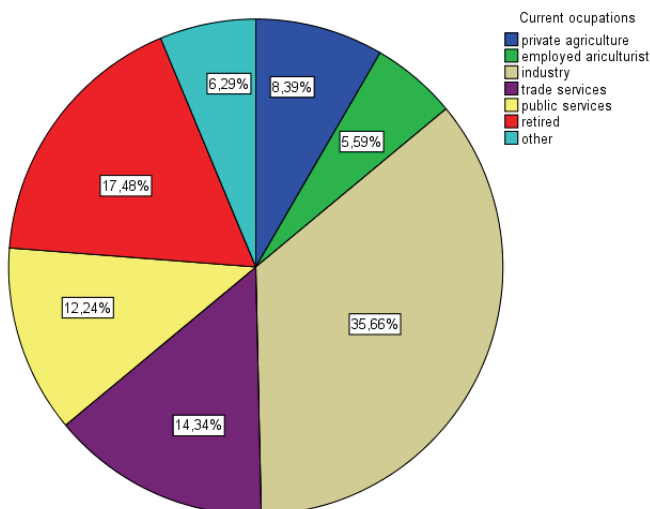
Source: Own research, 2015.

Data analysis per localities shows that the highest level of education is in Pecica (37.30% high school, 17.60 post-high school, and 37.30% higher education). At the opposite pole is Vânători, where there is the highest percentage of primary studies (27.70%), high school studies (44.70%) and the lowest percentage of higher education (6.4%).

3.2. Profession and Occupation

As for the professions of the respondents, data processing shows that they are rather diversified: from unskilled worker to technician, engineer, teacher, and doctor.

Data processing shows that over half of the respondents (62.24%) work in non-agricultural fields: 35.66% in industry and 26.58% in services. Retired people share 17.48% of the sample. This shows that the population in the research area is not aged. Private agriculture shares 8.39% of the respondents, and employed agriculturists share 5.59% as shown in Figure 3 below.

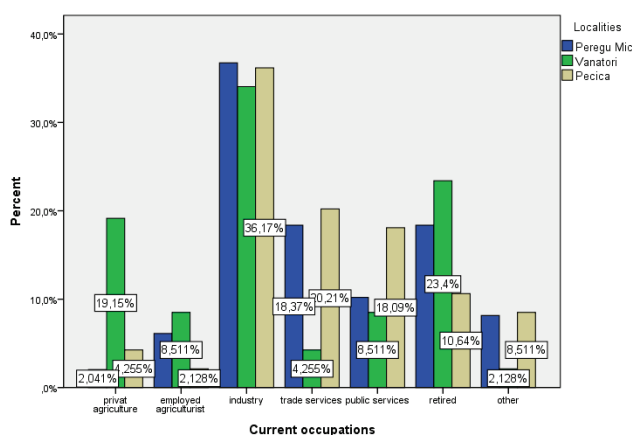**Figure 3:** Percentage of people employed per activities

Source: Own research, 2015.

Table 3: Current occupations of the people per localities

Specification		Locality			Total
		Peregu Mic	Vânători	Pecica	
private agriculture	%	2.00	19.10	4.30	8.40
employed agriculturist	%	6.10	8.50	2.10	5.60
industry	%	36.70	34.00	36.20	35.70
trade services	%	18.40	4.30	20.20	14.30
public services	%	10.20	8.50	18.10	12.20
retired	%	18.40	23.40	10.60	17.50
other	%	8.20	2.10	8.50	6.30
Total	No of people	98	94	94	286
	%	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Own research, 2015.

Figure 4: Percentage of people employed per activities and localities

Source: Own research, 2015.

Data analysis per localities (Table 3 and Figure 4) shows that Pecica has the largest number of people employed in industry (36.17%), followed by services (38.30%). People working in agriculture share the least percentage (4.25% in private agriculture and only 2.12% in employed agriculture).

Vânători has 36.73% of its population employed in industry, followed by 19.15% population employed in agriculture, i.e. much more than in the other two localities. To also note that Vânători has the largest number of retired people (23.40%), which points to a higher number of aged people.
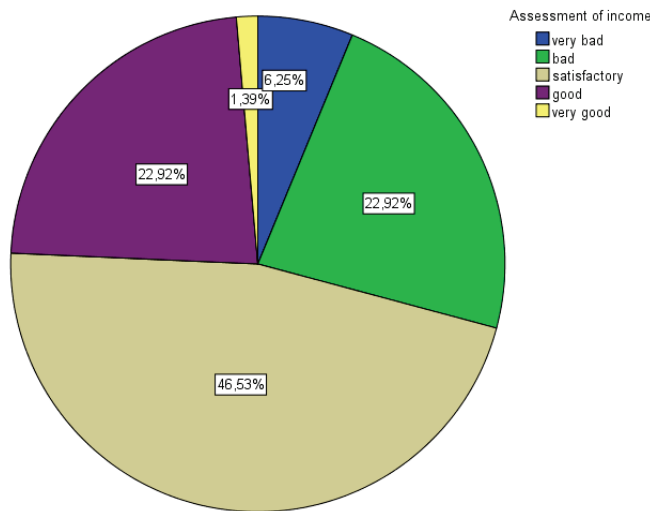
3.3. Incomes

Table 4: Assessment of incomes

Assessment of incomes	No of people	Percentage
very bad	18	6.3
bad	66	22.9
satisfactory	134	46.5
good	66	22.9
very good	4	1.4
Total	288	100.0

Source: Own research, 2015.

The respondents' assessment of the family incomes is over 46% good, 24.31% very good, and 29.15% bad and very bad.

**Figure 5:** Assessment of incomes

Source: Own research, 2015.

3.4. Incomes vs. needs

This indicator shows the degree of satisfaction of the respondents regarding their incomes and points out a high level of poverty of the population in the research area, particularly in marginal or disfavoured localities such as Vânători, where in 65.96% of the respondents the incomes cover the simple bare necessities of life and in 14.89% they do not (the respondents have to do with what they get). Likewise, 38.78% of the respondents in Peregu Mic and 23.53% of the respondents in Pecica claim their incomes do not cover the simple bare necessities of life: this shows that these people have another perception of life quality and their expectations are higher despite the fact that their incomes are higher than those of the people in Vânători are. In conclusion, each person has a different view of life quality and of standard of living: some are pleased with just little incomes, while others need more to claim that they are satisfied with their incomes.

Figure 6: Incomes vs. needs
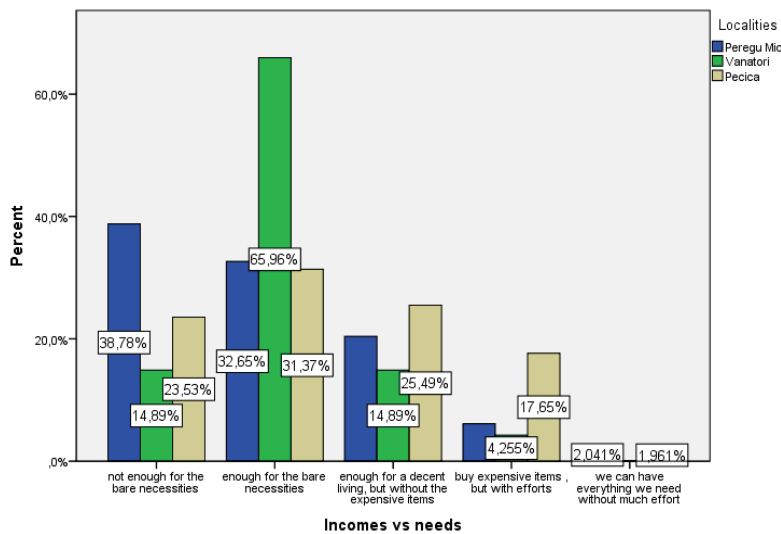
Source: Own research, 2015.

3.5. Incomes vs. Education Level

This is a synthetic indicator expressing the correlation between incomes and level of education.
Figure 7 below shows incomes of respondents depending on education level. Data point out the correlation between incomes and education level. We see that a low level of education (primary and secondary) results in low incomes of up to 800-1,000 RON (i.e. ~200 €) while high school, post-high school, academic and post-academic education result in incomes between 1,000 and 2,000 RON (between 200 and 500 €).
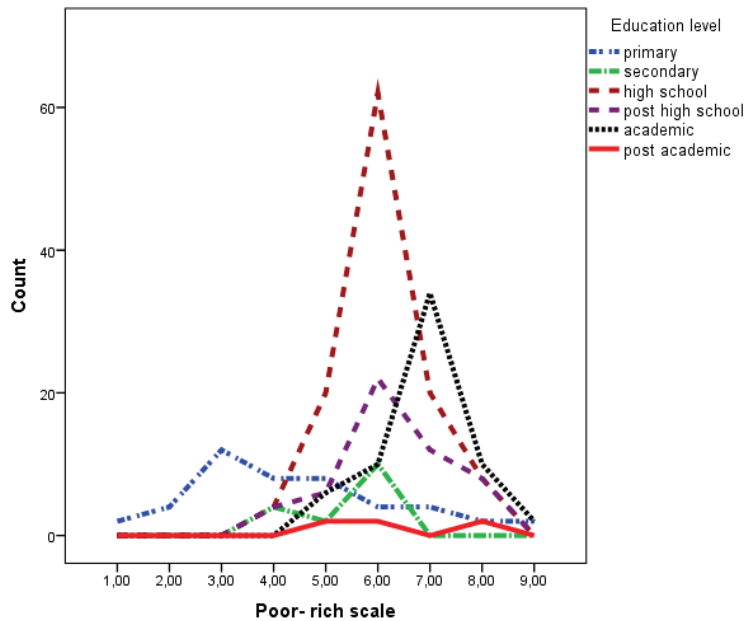
Figure 7: Incomes vs. Education level
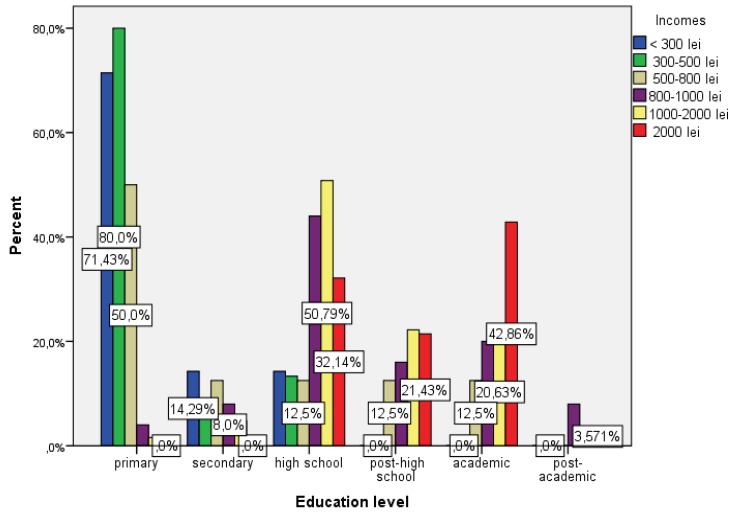
Source: Own research, 2015.

An increase of the incomes proportional to the level of education and to the level of training is also pointed out in Figure 8 representing the poor-rich scale depending on education level.

Figure 8: The poor-rich scale

Source: Own research, 2015.

Figure 8 shows that people that have graduated from high school or university range in the upper part of the poor-rich scale confirming that the education level influences directly higher incomes and, implicitly, a better standard of living and better life quality.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Romania's population has a stronger level of rurality than other EU countries: this is why we need proper policies that determine the development of the villages and the diversification of rural economy. Small towns in the Romanian rural area can become integrating poles, poles of economic growth for the neighbouring localities.

The maintenance of younger rural population in the rural area could be decisive for the revitalisation of the rural area, for economic diversification, for the levelling of geographical unbalances, particularly in areas with dysfunctionalities. Thus, the efficiency of the policy of rural development can reflect in the setting of this segment of population in the rural area in accordance with natural, economic and social opportunities of each area.

Each individual has a different perception of the standard of living and of life quality, determined by the level of education and training. Some are satisfied with little, some need more to declare themselves satisfied.

The education level influences directly higher incomes, better living standards, and better life quality.

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