

SUMMARY

Keywords: *rural economic zones, development, sustainability, poverty, factors*

Rural poverty represents one of the most complex socio-economic phenomena, with profound effects on social cohesion, quality of life, and development prospects. In the context of structural transformations in agriculture and demographic pressures, analyzing the causes and effects of poverty becomes essential for designing public policies adapted to the specificities of rural areas.

This PhD thesis addresses the relationship between poverty, well-being, and rural development through the lens of the concept of the rural economic area, understood as a functional unit that integrates rural territories with small urban centers, connected through value chains and proximity services. The main aim is to investigate the causes and effects of poverty in rural economic areas through an integrated approach that combines theoretical, bibliometric, and empirical analysis, with a particular focus on the polycentric area of Fălticeni–Pașcani–Târgu Neamț.

The objectives of the research include: clarifying the conceptual notions of rural economic area, poverty, and well-being; analyzing theories and explanatory models of rural development; identifying the structural, demographic, institutional, and infrastructural causes of poverty; and assessing its effects on human capital, social cohesion, and development trajectories. Moreover, the study discusses indicators used at the European level (e.g., AROP) and explores the role of urban proximity in order to develop territorial typologies and formulate differentiated public policy recommendations.

The research methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative tools: bibliographic and bibliometric review; field surveys for delineating urban influence areas; collection of statistical data from official sources (National Institute of Statistics, Eurostat); cluster analysis for grouping communes; SWOT analysis for strategic diagnosis; Pearson correlations and regression analyses for hypothesis testing; studies on the evolution of the top five socio-economic indicators; and multicriteria validation through the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), involving five experts from different domains. The results confirm the multifactorial nature of poverty, the decisive role of education and infrastructure, and the ambivalent effect of urban proximity, which can generate both opportunities for development and peripheral dependencies.

The thesis is structured into five chapters, following a logical progression from general to specific. The first chapter defines the conceptual boundaries of rural economic areas and discusses the main theoretical and empirical perspectives on rural development. The second chapter analyzes the causes and effects of poverty, its relationship with well-being, and the indicators used in international and national assessments. The third chapter defines the purpose, objectives, hypotheses, and expected results of the research, while detailing the methodology and information base, including the delimitation and socio-economic characteristics of the Fălticeni–

Pașcani–Târgu Neamț area. The fourth chapter presents the applied research results, including the profiling of communes, territorial typologies derived from cluster analysis, statistical results, and multicriteria validation through AHP. Finally, the fifth chapter synthesizes the main conclusions and outlines future research directions, with an emphasis on practical recommendations for policies adapted to rural economic areas.

The contributions of the thesis are both theoretical and practical. On the theoretical side, it elaborates a unified conceptual framework for analyzing poverty and well-being in rural contexts, integrating the urban–rural dimension. On the practical side, it substantiates differentiated public policy recommendations based on commune typologies and the structural determinants of poverty.

The novelty and originality of the research stem from integrating an extensive bibliometric and comparative analysis with a multiple case study applied to the North-East Development Region of Romania. This was achieved by adapting multicriteria methods at the local level and by testing hypotheses within the specific context of Romanian rural communes.