

## **THE ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY OF THE POPULATION AND THE CURRENT PROBLEMS WITHIN THE SUB-CARPATHIAN REGION BETWEEN THE OLT AND THE JIU RIVERS AT THE ENDING OF ALMOST TWO DECADES OF RESTRUCTURING**

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**ABSTRACT** – The transition period represents for the Sub-Carpathians between the Olt and the Jiu Rivers, relatively to areas with similar socio-economic problematic during the transition period (the south-western piedmont area and the Petroșani Depression), from a social point of view and by means of the impact of the changes in the support area, a period of “discreet or tacit convulsions” as regards the '60s and the '80s. The dynamic of the given region during the transition period reveals the facts that certain convulsions or restructurings do not necessarily have to possess explicit static or striking forms in the modification of the landscapes in order to allow the transparency of the problematic period these regions have crossed. The current paper presents certain aspects (the economic dependency, the demographic aging, the unemployment rate, the need of social protection, the illiteracy, etc.) characterizing the present situation of the demographic component with impact on the development as result of the crossing of this transition period. The aspects presented in the current paper are the result of the analysis of the statistical data regarding the discussed indicators and of a more ample field research carried out in order to assert the transformations suffered in the studied area during the transition period, from the perspective of social geography.

**Key words:** economic dependency, Getic Sub-Carpathians, economic restructuring

### **THE SUB-CARPATHIAN REGION BETWEEN THE OLT AND THE JIU RIVERS “IN TRANSITION”**

The Sub-Carpathian region between the Olt and the Jiu Rivers represents an area, which made no exception to the accelerated dynamic of the demographical increase, especially in the urban environments, in the second half of the last century. Although, by comparison, due to its second area-like feature as a result of the prioritization of the industrial development which flanked a target area (the thermo-energetic and mining area located in the Getic Piedmont) the region suffered a quite troubled dynamic not only in regards to the quantifiable aspects (volume of persons involved in the migration process, demographic and urban increase, etc.), but also in regards to less revealed aspects such as the transition from tradition to modern, accelerated by the importance of the industrial development, prior to the state of these areas, the decline of the pastoral activities, the upheaval of the life coordinates as were known in the years before 1989. The dynamic of the Sub-Carpathian region between the Olt and the Jiu Rivers during the transition period reveals the fact that certain convulsion or restructuring do not necessary have to posses explicit static or effective forms in the modification of the landscape (when it happens, more “the immerse part of the iceberg” has to be taken into account) in order for the problematic period which these areas have crossed, to be transparent. The relatively discreet evolution of this region during the reference period allows a detailed analysis of the true mechanisms which represented the base of the spatial structures (and social ones as well) indicated in the perimeter of a given section of the territory. From a social point of view and from the perspective of the impact that the level of modifications that have occurred in the support area (especially in the build-in space), the transition period represents for this region (and by comparison with other similar ones located towards the north – the Petroșani Depression and the south-western piedmont area, in regards to the socio – economic problems from the transition period) a period of “discreet or tacit convulsions”, in comparison with the period between the '60s and the '80s. In the transition period,

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the radicalization of all those aspects from the prior reference period were the target of all unification and equalization efforts, resulting the separation of the intrinsic social groups of “winners” and “losers” similar to the period 1947-1967.

### **THE ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND ITS IMPACT**

In the studied region, the impact of the economic restructuring was entirely reverberated, even though the area is not a first range mining region, the impact of an area was reverberated, cumulated with the most pronounced restructuring of the mining units, regardless of its dimensions. Temporarily, the moment coincided with the beginning of the massive restructuring processes of other units, starting with 1997. The overlapping or the spatial and temporal agglomeration of the industrial units submitted to restructuring represent an aspect that has to be taken into account, and which has contributed to the reduction of the economic, social and psychological impact of these measures if a national level planed staggering of the dismissals were to be made, not only regarding the industrial branches but also the areas, in order to generate the necessary respite of a more temporally regrouping. In the case of the studied area, between 1990 and 2006, a polarization towards the extremities of the demographic potential was acknowledged, represented by the spatial configuration of the natural increase in population, resulting a spatial belt-like or concentric circle-like elutriation of the natural increase, dictated by the proximity to the major urban center, better defined towards the east, gradually towards the town of Râmnicu Vâlcea and more abrupt towards the west, probably related with the perception regarding the potential of development and the opportunities of both towns. The areas of influence of the dwelling places are separated, the rural ridge coinciding with the county limit as well as with the two major areas of urban influence. This interface area possesses a demographic behavior different from the distance modeled ones, due to the presence in the south of the mining basins and probably to the traditional pastoral settlements characterized by stability, located in the northern part, the typical “block behavior” not being always present even though expected.

The mining basins, completed with the extractive activities of the concentrate hydrocarbons located southwards, manage to maintain the third in the binding polarization core of the demographic potential of the area, present at the beginning of the transition period but which has subsequently declined, a dynamic difference being present between the southern polarized center and the other two centers which possess an inverse, regressive dynamic in regards to the one characteristic of the urban centers, the demographic sustaining power being proportionally reduced with the extractive restructuring activities of the area.

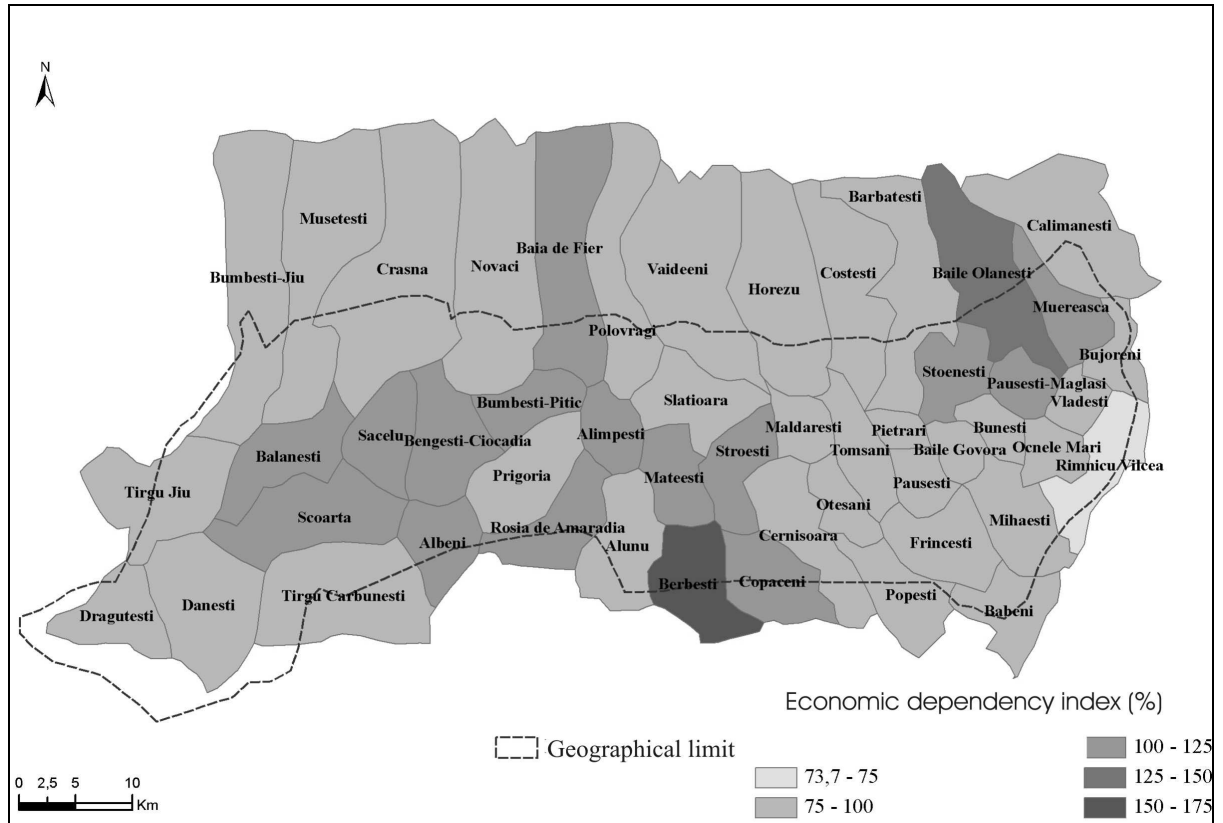
### **DEMOGRAPHIC AGING, UNEMPLOYMENT AND DEMOGRAPHIC DEPENDENCY**

A large part of the social problematic variance of certain spaces is explained by the configuration of certain peculiarities of the demographic consignment, particular in the case of this area, probably the most developed rural area within the entire south-western region, which was able to avoid the radicalization of the social phenomena, from this viewpoint, a more subtle and detailed analysis being more than required.

The evolution of the demographic aging process during the transition period and the spatial configuration at a locality scale at the beginning of the transition period reveals the fact that the high migration from the suburban belt towards the two county centers especially in the case of the part belonging to Vâlcea county, the values of this indicator in these areas registering a critical increase. Despite the intense migration rate of the retired population from the rural area, the population age structure and especially the high variation of the demographic aging coefficient within the Sub-Carpathian region, recorded by the town of Târgu Jiu during the analysed period, highlights an alarming tendency of aging as regards the town’s population, revealed especially by the low percentage, below 13.6%, of the population under 20 years old, much lower in comparison with the national threshold and a value of 9.3% of the population over 60 years old (value lower than the national threshold of 18.2%). This decrease in the young demographic segment is responsible for the increase of the demographic aging coefficient; in terms of urban habitation related economic costs and

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the lack of productive activities which have determined the retired population to retrieve towards the rural areas.



**Figure 1.** *The economic dependency rate in the communes and localities within the Sub-Carpathians between the Olt and the Jiu Rivers in 1992*  
(the definition of the indicator and the calculation formula according to Ilieş and Staşac, 2000)

The general evolutionary tendency which can be drawn in regards to the general variance of the demographic aging parameter during the transition period is that of spatial expansion by means of spatial contamination of the areas with much higher values (60-90 and 90-120, respectively), affecting especially the rural areas located in the “shading cone of the suburban area” and mostly those located on the main bind, which are also the most vulnerable to structural changes. The demographic aging parameter contributes to the explanation of the economic dependency variability, along with the unemployment rate, with the taxes perceived from the active population and with the percentage of the different levels of education of the population.

The configuration of the economic dependency rapport towards the beginning of the transition period (Figure 1) has high values in the rural areas with mixed agricultural and extractive functions and the associated areas of workforce gathering (up to 20 km) to which the north-eastern core is added, focused on the localities of Băile Olăneşti and Muereasca. This core is overlapped by the above-mentioned demographic aging core – located on one side in the shading cone (and the “dead angle” between the two main communication axes – lacking an important communication network) of the suburban area. The fact that the present areas are considered to possess the highest values of the economic dependency rapport as a result of the massive dismissals from the mining industry, which, combined with other factors would explain the high values of the rapport, denounces an ordinary phenomenon for the rural areas: one person is employed in the mining industry and taking into account the maximum income is considered sufficient to support the other family members, especially in the case when the households are able to produce different food

products or can sustain the family's subsistence. If the values of these parameters are to be analysed, we can conclude that they have almost double values in the reference period. After the restructuring of the extractive activities in this area, the number of members reverted to an employee is much higher. Therefore, the high values of economic dependency can be surprising in the case of the Băile Olănești resort and in the case of the neighboring rural area, which is entirely explained by high values of demographic aging parameter in the time being. This parameter had similar critical values in the case of the Bălănești-Săcelu-Dănești area, towards the western part.

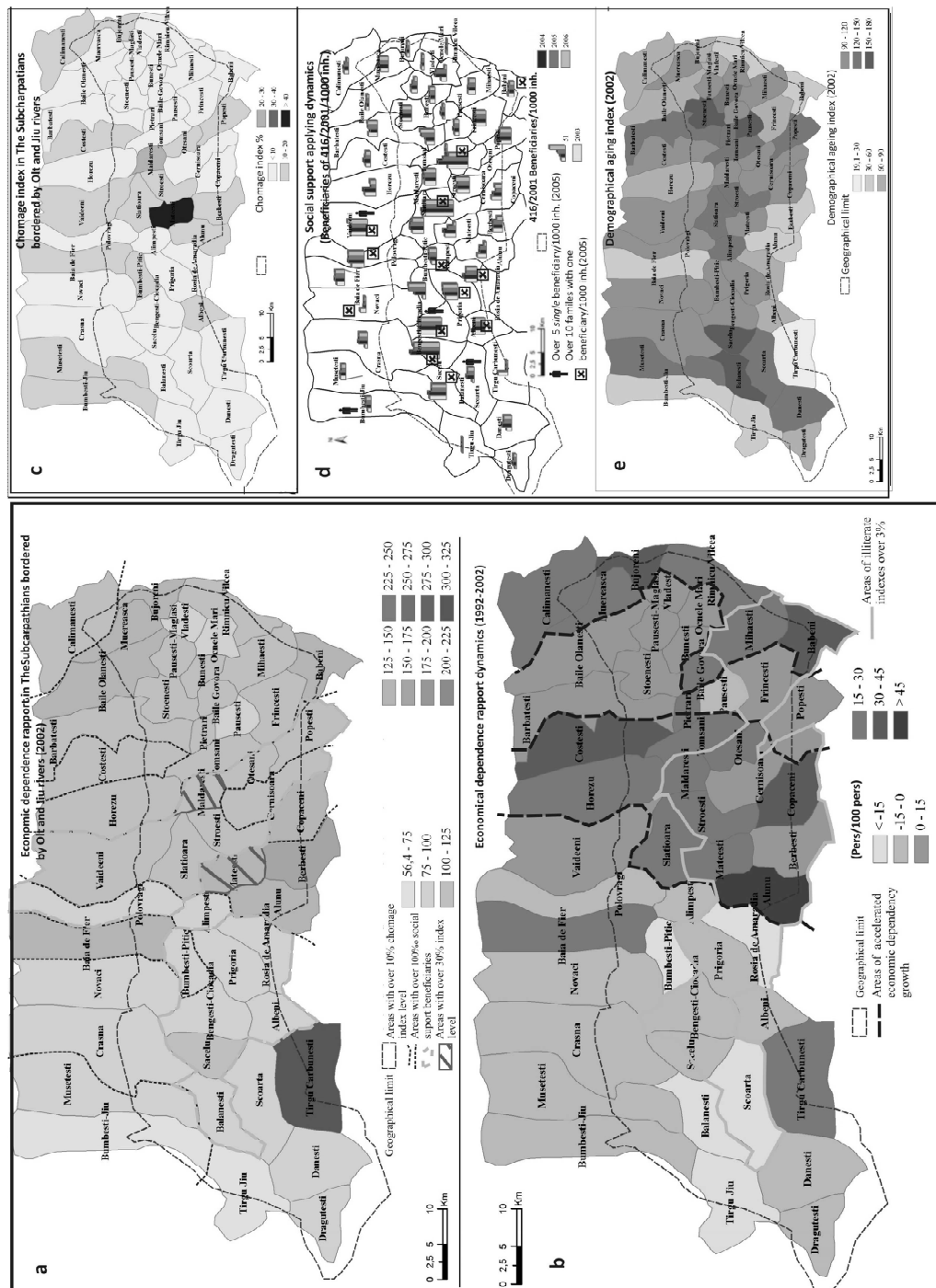
A general view regarding the modality wherein this indicator spatially occurred in 2002, reveals a concretization of the administrative boundary between the two counties, a value of 150 of the economic dependency value, the part situated in Vâlcea county outrunning on its entire surface the above mentioned value. Unlike the eastern part, the western one concentrates the positive and negative extremes possessing entirely low values if compared to the eastern part. The high values recorded in the case of the economic dependency rapport for the town of Târgu Cărbunești are explained by the lack of economic perspective, along with the collapse of the meager economic units that existed before 1989 and the decline in the economic activities from the secondary sector of the neighboring areas.

The areas from the Gorj County, which in 1992 recorded higher values, were those from the suburban rural areas and from the shading cone of the municipality as a probable result of the fact that one member (maximum two employees) of a given family with at least three members represented a common encountered and sufficient situation for subsistence. These areas have not change their situation regarding the dependency rapport (similar is the case of the north-eastern part, which presented higher values at the beginning of the period, without possessing a significant dynamic) unlike the adjacent localities which have reached the same status as a result of dismissals in industrial branches. The most intense growth of the dependency rapport, for the entire analysed period, was recorded in the area of mining exploitations from the central and southern part and in the area of ingathering the necessary work force. The spatial overlapping (Figure 2) among the areas with the most pronounced dynamic of the economic dependency and the areas with the most elevated values of illiteracy (over 3% of the entire population, also to be seen the percentage of the primary education levels) explains, in fact, why the intense spatial concentration of the demographic dependency phenomenon coincide not only with the areas affected by the economic restructuring, especially from the extractive branch, but also with the areas with a low human capital, incapable of reorienting towards other fields of activity or of finding a suitable place of employment.

It is also worth being mentioned that even though we usually correlate the high rates of illiteracy with the presence of the Roma communities, a group where the rate of education is much lower than in the case of the majority of the ethnical groups, in the present case, in the central – southern area of the border glided ridge, much more intense towards the part belonging to Vâlcea county, a region with communes more ruralized and to a greater extent disadvantaged as regards the main communication axis such as the triangle formed by the Mateești-Măldărăști-Cerțișoara localities can be recorded. This region overlaps the spatial configuration of the unemployment rate of over 10% (Figure 2). Thus, among the localities with higher occupational rates in the extractive industry or in collateral occupational fields, located at significant distances from the urban residential areas, not all the areas evolved to subcritical regions. Only those where the educational rate of the population is reduced, the given deficiency contributing to much higher unemployment rates and implicitly to an economic dependency.

Analysing the spatial distribution of unemployment among the population from the analysed region, the areas with the highest unemployment rate, affecting more than 1% of the entire active population, appears within the localities situated in the administrative limit (the ridge), in a closed space, throughout the entire transversal section of the area, including the areas with mining activities affected by restructurings, some rural localities such as Mateești (48%) and Măldărăști (35%) registering critical values. Additionally, the north-western areas (Bumbești-Mușetești) are added, areas affected by the restructuring of the mechanical plant, as well as the north-eastern area with a subcritical socio – demographic behavior ever since 1990.

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**Figure 2.** Present socio-economic aspects particular to the demographic consignment of the Sub-Carpathians between the Olt and the Jiu Rivers (the definition of the indicator and the calculation formula according to Ilieș and Stașac, 2000)

This area and the rural region represent the areas that outrun the county's average value, which in the years 2002 and 2006 was reduced to 10.8% and to 8.8%, respectively. A more detailed investigation of the unemployment rate in the area surrounding the Bumbești-Jiu center revealed the

fact that there is a irreconcilable discrepancy between the demand and offer of labour, being simultaneously recorded not only the unemployment of the active population, but also the systematically unoccupied jobs resulted after “job offer-type campaigns” due to the fact that these offers do not correspond or answer to any of the expectations of those in search of a job. In the case of this urban center, the most attractive option of reducing this crisis is considered the temporary migration for working abroad.

A region with critical values of the unemployment rate after the restructuring from the mining and the processing industries (1988-2003) was represented by the rural areas located in the surroundings of the town of Horezu, with an extent towards the Berbești-Alunu mining exploitation area, the attentive monitoring and the efforts carried out by the AJOFM managing to diminish the phenomenon in the last years. In the case of the risk groups and in the case of the unemployment of the sole provider of a family, the total percentage of those affected by unemployment varied, in December 2006, from 1.9% in the case of the town of Horezu to 11.1% in the case of the Păușești-Măglași localities.

### IN A NUT-SHELL

The studied area faithfully reproduces, to a smaller scale, a part of the transformations identifiable in other parts of the country or in other parts of the Romanian space.

The transition period outlined the “winners” and the “losers” of the “spatial competition” – polarizing and radicalizing disparities in the spatial configuration of almost any demographic or economic indicator contributing to territorial development and sustainability. The great winners (the greater ones appearing at a national level of analysis), after the uplifting of the migration barriers inside the urban spaces from the communist period, regarding firstly the young human capital and secondly the specialised one, the job offers (as well as those well paid) and the viable investments seem to be represented by the capital and by the urban centers representing the regional poles. At an intra-regional level, such as the analysed area, the winners (a relative status depending on the scale, the previous level being occupied by the losers in favor of the capital city and of the capital of the historical regions, at least) are represented by the urban centers with administrative functions (highlighting the role played by the rulers in the distribution of resources would have been a truism), the county residence towns becoming the “viable urban” in a territorial profile.

The “net losers”, unsustainable during the transition period, were represented by the small urban spaces (mono) industrialized – generated (sufficiently artificial) as a consequence of several initiatives such as “*The Action 7690*” having as a result the lack of means of sustainability after the disappearance of the main economic activity. Secondly, these spaces have lost, during the transition period, their highlighted dimensions – and even more – accumulating or concentrating the demographic “exits” from the social structure and the competitiveness for the survivor and the defrayment of the urban life costs, from the category of residence towns previously mentioned.

The third category of “losing” spaces after the transition period, but to a different extent and in a continuation (under no circumstances more intense) of the peculiar phenomenon of the industrialisation period and the forced industrialization, as well as in the favor of the urban area and of the regional and national town capitals, is represented by the rural spaces. In a study, rural spaces possess a peculiar dynamic inertia – always sluggish and more intense – due to the existence of the subsistence aspect of salvage situations or buffer-solutions as regards the harsh impact of economic restructuring within the transition period.

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