

UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY IN THE DANUBE DELTA SETTLEMENTS. TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES

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Différenciation territoriales du chômage et de la pauvreté dans les localités du Delta du Danube. La période de transition économique que traverse la Roumanie mais surtout la déclaration du Delta du Danube comme Réserve de la Biosphère ont conduit à des changements socioéconomiques qui ont obligé les communautés, la main d'œuvre et les économies locales à une adaptation aux conditions de l'environnement.

En général, la dynamique de la population chômeuse du delta a suivi l'évolution de l'économie locale: la cessation des contrats de concession, la restructuration des entreprises industrielles de Sulina et de Tulcea, le développement des activités touristiques. Le grand nombre de chômeurs est dû, pour la plupart, aux possibilités réduites de trouver un emploi. L'offre d'emplois est limitée puisque la plupart de la population passe sa vie dans le milieu rural. L'analyse des données statistiques concernant le chômage dans le delta du Danube, selon le recensement général de la population de 2002, indique un taux du chômage de 18,6%, beaucoup plus grand que la valeur de l'indicateur pour la même année, 11,7%, au niveau du pays. Le taux du chômage reste en étroite liaison avec l'évolution de la population chômeuse. L'enquête au terrain effectuée en plusieurs localités du delta du Danube y indique une situation beaucoup plus grave du chômage par rapport à celle suggérée par la statistique officielle. L'Agence départementale d'occupation de la main d'œuvre de Tulcea essaie de spécialiser une part des habitants du delta du Danube dans des activités liées au tourisme. Mais la plupart des gens préfèrent de ne pas faire appel à l'agence et de continuer de pratiquer un travail journalier. Dû aux restrictions introduites dans la pêche, activité traditionnelle de l'endroit, les pêcheurs devront se réorienter comme profession. En ce qui concerne la pauvreté, outre que le déficit de revenus, la population locale se confronte avec le déficit de quelques conditions essentielles de vie, comme suite de quelques accumulations négatives, à savoir: accumulation de dettes, déficit d'éducation, incapacité d'intégration dans le marché du travail. Les personnes âgées à une pension réduite, ainsi que les chômeurs et les personnes qui ne bénéficient d'aucun revenu et se trouvent dans une phase avancée de la pauvreté ont peu de chances à se redresser. Sans redressement, ces groupes risquent, à l'avenir, d'être marginalisés par la société dont ils font part.

The Unemployment Law No 1/1991 stipulated the protection of jobless people and their professional reintegration, an act which, after scores of years, acknowledges the existence of unemployed in Romania. Thus, protecting this category of people appeared to be imperiously necessary in the perspective of privatizing and restructuring the industrial enterprises, of personnel lay-offs and of part of the population returning to their places of origin. In keeping with legal provisions an unemployment assistance fund was to be created, beginning with January 1, 2004, through the contribution of 3% by enterprises and 1% by the employees.

Assistance benefits are limited to six months, nine months and one year for people temporarily out of work and youths who did not find a job after school graduation. The sum depends on the net income previously obtained by the beneficiary, seniority, category in the staffing chart and payment of contribution.

In 1992, assistance benefits were to be received also by people had failed to find a job within the time-period entitled one to receiving payment. The new benefits were no longer tied to one's earnings before dismissal, but to the minimum wage/economy, which means that it was lower than the unemployment benefits, but could be allocated over a longer period of time (up to 18 months).

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In 1997, as unemployment was growing, legal regulations offered additional facilities to small- and medium-size enterprises requesting low-interest credits to create new jobs, to set up or develop new co-operative units on condition that the people employed be maintained on the job for at least three years. These facilities had in view unemployment control and labour employment. Simultaneously, the period of state subventions (70%) for the graduates' net base-pay was extended from nine to twelve months.

It is now that the lay-off through collective redundancies was to be paid. In addition to unemployment benefits, people made redundant are entitled to compensations from public funds equivalent to 6-12 average wages/economy, in terms of seniority.

The first law on social protection and professional reintegration of the unemployed was re-published in 1994, completed by the Emergency Government Ordinance 47/1997, and repealed in 2002, when they passed a new law (76/2002) on the social security systems for jobless people and employment stimulation.

Unemployment in the Danube Delta is directly connected with evolutions in the local and county economy. As enterprises slowdown their activity or closed down, the number of redundancies and the rate of unemployment have been on the increase.

The economic transition and the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve status have entailed a number of social-economic changes, obliging local communities, the local workforce and the economy to adjust to the new conditions. The active rural population, particularly the female one, is out-of-work, or is looking for a work-place, a situation caused largely by little job opportunities since most people live in the country-side. For villagers, the majority of whom are fishermen who hold an industrial fishing licence, just as for the population at large, few jobs are on offer, e.g. only functionaries in state institutions, teachers and auxiliary staff in schools and kindergartens, many completing their revenues as day workers.

According to statistical data based on 2002 census figures, unemployment in the Danube Delta was of 18.6% by a higher than the national value (11.7%) registered that same year.

At county level, unemployment had a sinuous, generally down-sliding evolution (9.37% in December 2001 and 5.34% in April 2009), but with significant fluctuations in the Delta (a minimum of 2.17% in December 2005 and a maximum of 5.69% in December 2004). Generally, it appears that the evolution of unemployment rate was almost linear between the two temporal reference points (3.7% in 2001 and 3.3% in April 2009) (Fig. 1 a,b).

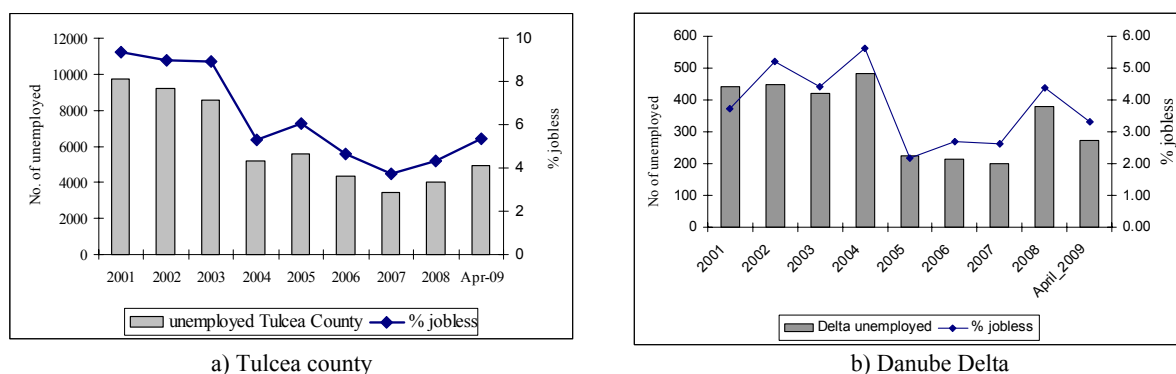


Fig. 1 – The number of unemployed and the unemployment rate.

The number of jobless people in the Delta was quite similar to that in Tulcea County, with significant decreases (by ca 50% in 2005, 2006, and 2007) and an increase in 2008. As a rule, the unemployed population dynamics in the Delta followed developments in the local economy: cancellation of leasing contracts, restructuring of industrial units in Sulina and Tulcea, and development of tourism.

Taking a look at the unemployment rate dynamics/settlement one finds it to correlate closely with the numerical evolution of the unemployed population (Fig. 2).

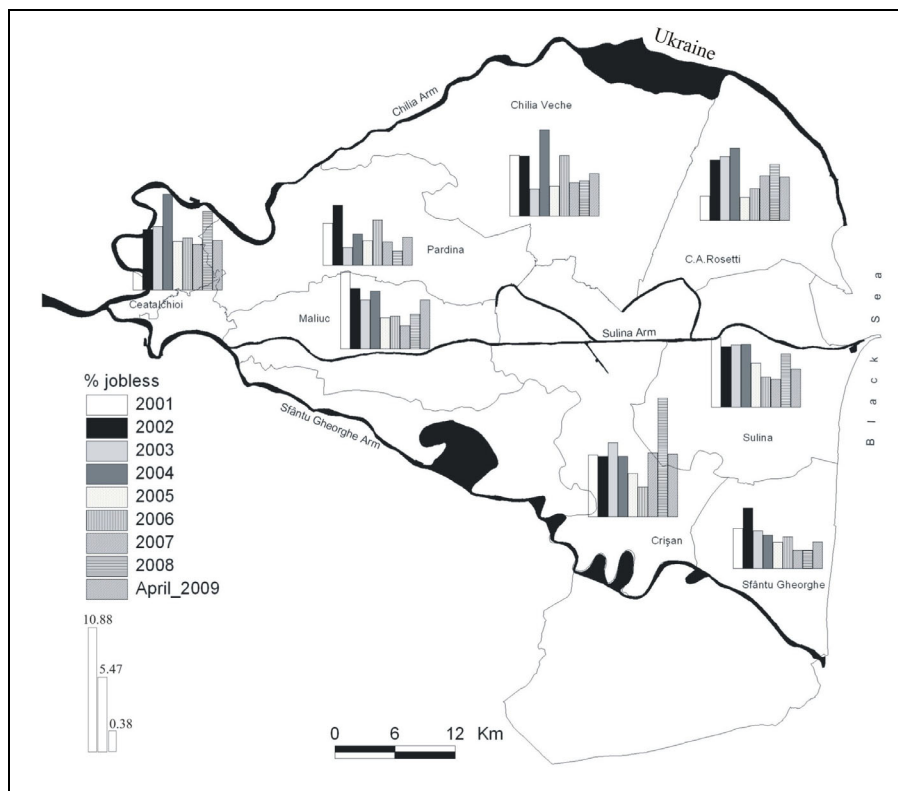


Fig. 2 – The rate of unemployment in the Danube Delta (Source: processed after TCLA).

Generally speaking, the number of jobless people in the Danube Delta showed ups and downs in terms of the economic and socio-political situation. Stimulating economic and social activities has a direct numerical impact on the jobless. After the 1990s, when unemployment was officially reported, there were more people, formerly industrial and construction workers who had no work place; on the other hand, the situation in exception making was be plan. Better in agriculture where unemployment values stood low (e.g. in Ceatalchioi and Pardina) (Fig. 3).

As repair and maintenance shipyards and some units of the food industry closed down, sectors which used to employ a large male and female workforce, the ranks of the unemployed increased, some were either looking for their first job, or trying to find another work-place. Relatively many jobless people were in Chilia Veche, where a number of farms had been dismantled; at Crișan, jobs were in short supply because of little local opportunities, on the one hand, and of the existence of a large young population aged 15–39 years, on the other. Besides, many general school-graduates remained at home because they had not the money to go on to high-schools elsewhere, while most of these who did finish higher grades returned to their native settlement but could not find a job there.

An altogether different picture offers Sfântu Gheorghe, a settlement where fishing, both in the Danube and at sea is an old traditional occupation, and a very active sector, so that few people were out-of-work. Also a large part of the female population found employment with the “Anonimul” Foundation, which ran a canteen for the poor, the tourist cottages of the vacation village, or at the fisheries station. At C.A. Rosetti, low unemployment was the result of elderly population (60–75 years old) a more numerous than the active one.

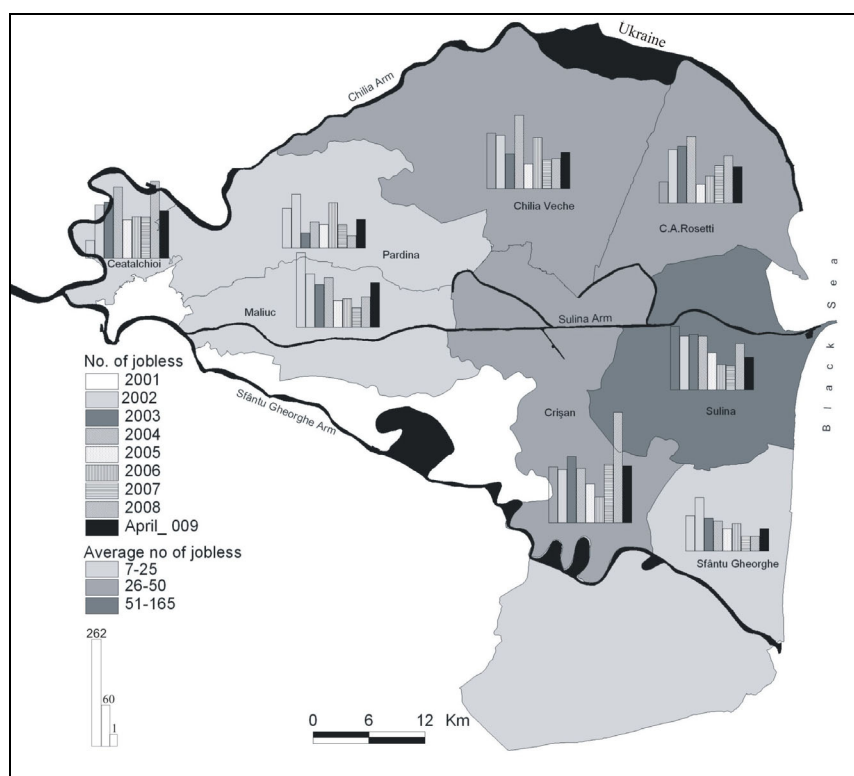


Fig. 3 – The numerical evolution of jobless people (Source: processed after TCLA).

Talking a look at the number of the unemployed/total population ratio, one finds a higher correlation between the overall Danube Delta inhabitants and the number of unemployed (0.7692) in 2002 than in 2008 (0.6313). The 2002 situation looks as follows: Sulina Town (215 unemployed), stood just above the correlation curve, while the localities of Chilia Veche (60), Crișan (34), and C.A. Rosetti (67) lay under the correlation curve, which means that the number of jobless people was in agreement with the hierarchical rank of these settlements in terms of overall population. The other localities stood above the curve (Maliuc – 25 unemployed, Sfântu Gheorghe – 17 and Ceatalchioi – 15 and Pardina – 16) and close to it, a position suggestive of a slightly higher unemployed population than hierarchical rank of these settlements in terms of overall population (Fig. 4a).

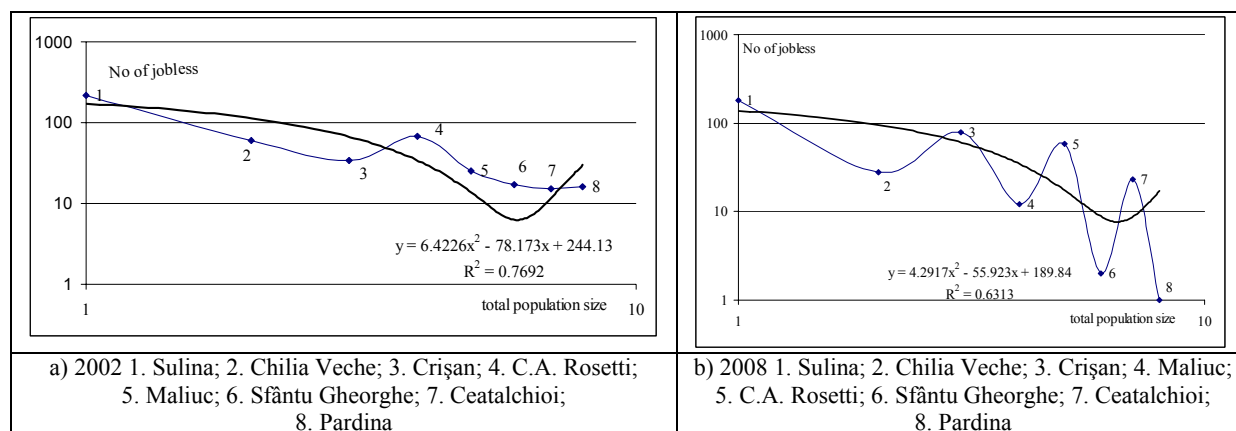


Fig. 4 – Total population/jobless people ratio.

In 2008, the situation was different, in that only two localities some close to the correlation curve (Sulina – 161 unemployed, and Crişan 70, both having had the same rank also in 2002); below the correlation curve and increasingly for from it stands Chilia Veche – 40 jobless people, Maliuc – 11, Sfântu Gheorghe – 2 and Pardina 1, which indicates fewer unemployed than their hierarchical rank in terms of total population: the position of this group of settlements is somehow different from that in 2002, when they stood above the correlation line: C.A. Rosetti – 57 people out of work and Ceatalchioii – 20, that is more unemployed population compared to their hierarchical rank (Fig. 4b).

The fact that a loose correlation between the total population and the unemployed population was registered simultaneously with a diminution of the officially reported unemployment figures in particularly important, it suggesting that unemployment population of the Delta settlements standing above the correlation curve was insignificant numerically compared to 2002 figures.

However, it should be remembered that this analysis relies on the official statistical data supplied by Tulcea Labour Employment Agency (TLEA), while field surveys revealed hidden unemployment disturbing the local job work. Yet despite a visible numerical decrease of the unemployed population through ageing, low participation in various forms of education, poor qualification or skills unrelated to job-market demand, etc. the unemployment rate indicates the alarming rise of jobless people in some of the Delta's settlements.

Evolutions in the structure of the unemployed population in terms of benefit recipients or non-recipients between 2002 and 2008 (Figs. 5, 6) show a significant increase in the population of the latter category in all of the Delta settlements, but more especially in Pardina, Ceatalchioii, C.A. Rosetti, and Maliuc, suggesting that unemployment has acquired a chronic character.

Field investigations conducted in many of these settlements have revealed a more dramatic situation than officially reported. To deal with this reality TLEA strives to train part of the Delta inhabitants to work in tourism, but most of them prefer to shun this chance and work by the day. Since fishing has been restricted, the villagers who traditionally have practiced it will have to turn the new professions.

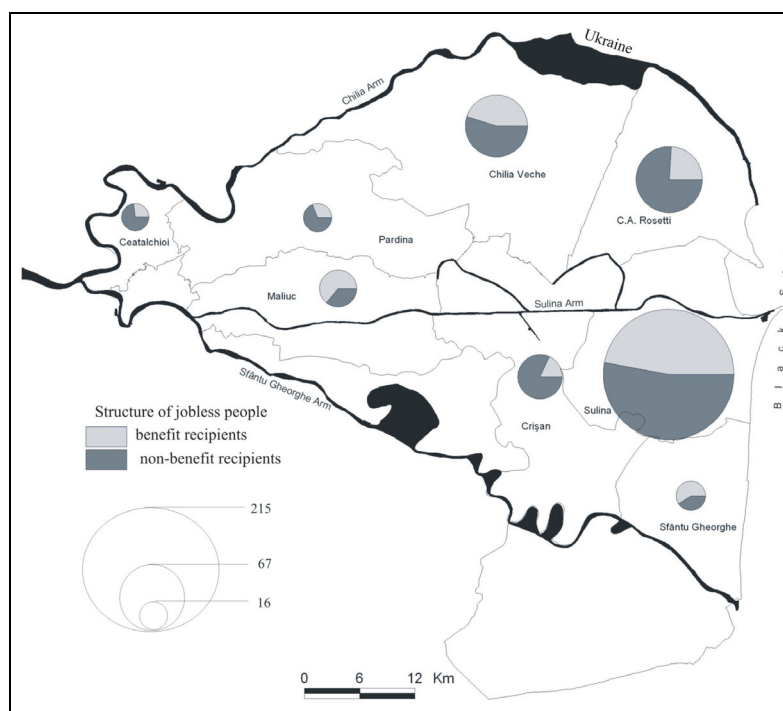


Fig. 5 – Number of benefit recipients and non-recipients in 2002.

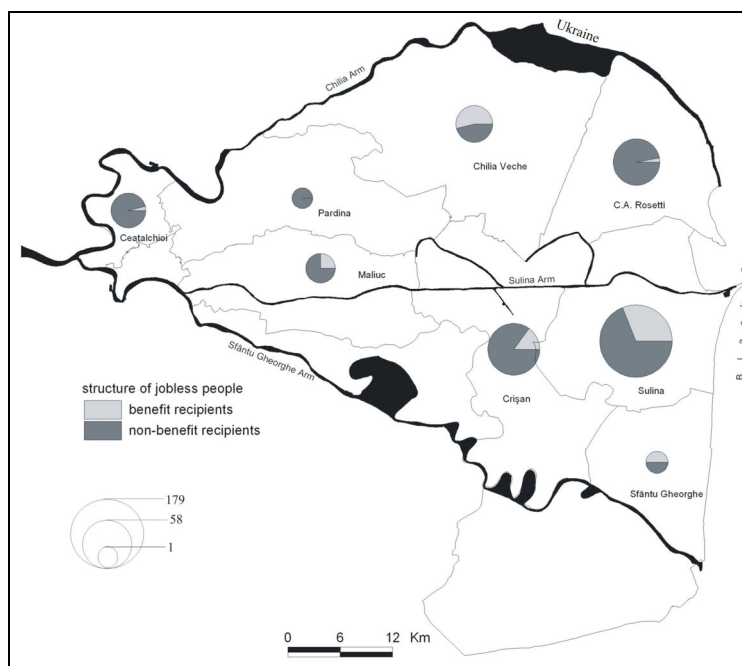


Fig. 6 – Number of benefit recipients and non-recipients in 2008.

By and large, it is clear that the shortage of jobs and of economic activities has a negative impact on the young workforce, in particular. Turning to farming is limited by land unfit for agriculture, while fishing and the number of fishermen decreases by the year. At the same time, for youths to get employment in neighboring towns is quite a problem because access is difficult, communication fares are high and the towns themselves are confronted with much unemployment and a precarious economic situation.

PROFESSIONAL RECONVERSION

As the Danube Delta has been renaturated and industrial fishing has been banned, actions have been undertaken to train fishermen (above 1,500 people) to discharge other types of activity, such as ecological tourism. Fishing is still allowed, but only for self-consumption, the surplus catch can be sold to tourist units. In order to make them turn to other occupations, the authorities have been considering the possibility to pay them compensation wages. However, most fishermen though jobless, refuse to attend the training courses offered by Tulcea County Labour Employment Agency, eventually losing the unemployed status and preferring to work illegally at various employers, or turn to poaching. For many, poaching is a source of higher income, although practicing it brings them permanently in conflict with the authorities. Appropriate training could stamp out this practice and entail the locals in tourism services, or encourage them to set up small handicraft shops for the manufacturing of reed or bulrush knit items.

TLEA-supplied data show that many inhabitants are not registered as unemployed, choosing instead to pursue subsistence farming, fishing or work illegally at various firms.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Looking at the role of this category of people in the past and at the present no major differences are apparent. Since fishing is exclusively a man's job, a woman's role in the household and in public is

perceived, both by herself and by others, as follows: “*women make the hard work...men are away most of the time, women being left with household chores*”: “*the husband comes home and says “here are the money, here is the fish, what is there to eat?”*” (45-year old housewife). Thus, relations between men and women are patterned on a fishing-related way of life: “*here, a man gets up at 3–4 in the morning and goes fishing, some go to the lake, others to the sea, one stays away for 3–4 days and then comes back home*” (45-year old fisherman). Therefore the woman is left alone to manage everything in the household, she knows best what should be done: “*you know, I was the manager: let us do some repair works in the kitchen, in the house, and he (the husband) would say no, it’s not necessary, but after I did what had to be done, his comment was: well done*” (68-year old housewife).

Women play an increasingly more important role, they are the ones who arrange and manage the household fit for tourist reception.

Reconsidering the socio-economic role of women is imperative in order to remove gender discrimination and marginalization of the female population which in many cases form the majority of the overall population. Acknowledging the role they play in the community creates a social and economic equilibrium, a climate of social cohesion. Yet, the extent to which the female population capable to work discharges various socio-economic activities falls short of its possibilities.

POVERTY

Poverty is a socio-cultural and psychological correlation that sets in after a lengthy period of shortage of resources; and reduces both the individual and the collective capacity for economic recovery. It affects people, families and groups of people whose material, cultural and social resources are so very limited that they are excluded from a minimum acceptable way of life in the member-state they belong to (EEC, 1985).

Extreme poverty means that financial resources are so severely missing that the individual’s living conditions are absolutely unacceptable for a civilised society, deeply affecting the dignity of the human being, causing fast-going and hardly reversible degradation of one’s normal capacities to function socially (Tompea, p. 519).

Community poverty means lack of public service or infrastructure within the respective community. A public service is said to exist if at least 80% of the population assert its availability.

The 1997 Report on Human Development defines poverty as the deprivation of all values possessed or embodied by a human being. According to the World Bank, a person is said to be poor if it has not access to a minimum set of goods needed for survival. The poverty threshold was established at 2\$/day/inhabitant, extreme poverty at 1\$/day/inhabitant.

The WHO (World Health Organization) Report considers poverty to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon which is dependent not only on one’s material situation, but also on one’s level of education, health, vulnerability and exposure to ecological and professional risk factors and on limited possibilities to make one’s needs known. Beginning with the 1990s, the poverty concept has been changing in that the individual income is no longer of primary importance, instead it is material welfare and human welfare as assessed by the Human Development Index.

In Romania, just like in the other East-European countries, the social and economic transition has entailed major changes for the population, poverty becoming more obvious as production fell and inequalities widened. A first wave of poverty occurred in the years 1991–1993, a second one came after 1997. The poverty rate soared from 22% in 1994 (*World Bank Report, 1997: Romania. Poverty and Social Policy*) to 41.2% in 1999 both in terms of percentages and severeness.

The poverty rate assessment indicators are: equivalent consumption/adult; demographic variables (size of household, age and sex structure); assets of the household members (educational level, occupation of the family head, number of employees, number of pensioners); data on the quality of the

residence (building materials, surface-area of the house, electricity, running water, sewerage system); characteristics of the residential area (size of settlement, socio-demographic traits) (Fig. 7).

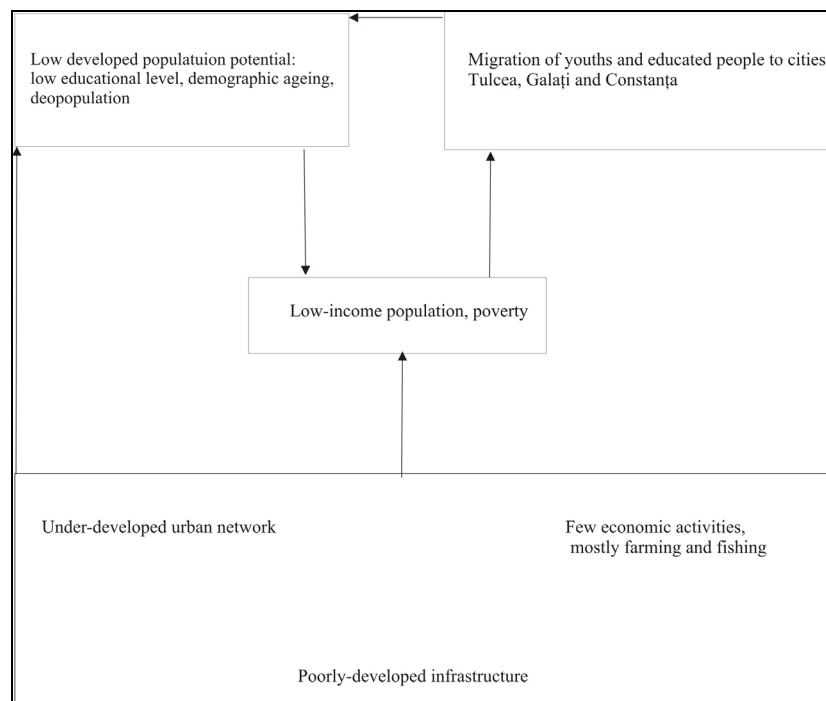


Fig. 7 – The poverty-population-economic activities-incomes relation
(Source: D. Sandu, 2000, slightly modified).

In addition to low incomes the Delta population is short of basic living conditions due to the accumulation of debts, lack of education and inability to integrate into the job market. In a state of advanced poverty and having little chances to recover are the elderly people living on a small pension, the unemployed and people without any income. Unless a solution is found, these groups are likely to be marginalized by the society they live in.

Most of the Delta inhabitants confess to being poor, very few families admitting to having a decent standard of living. The fact is that lots of people, especially women have no jobs, and moreover the population is ageing. There are actually two categories of poor people, those permanently faced with poverty, and those who, having lost their job, are temporarily in this situation. The first category includes people with disabilities, the elderly with very small pensions, without any prospects to ever obtain decent revenues, and families with many children.

The greatest part of the Delta poor perceive themselves as having been pushed into poverty by the economic transition and more recently to be the victims of leasing, whereby their “right” to benefit from fishing has been increasingly curtailed. Very few are optimistic that this crisis will soon come to an end. Poverty in this part of the country is associated with poor health and reduced life-span caused by heart diseases, improper diet, and unclean water; low incomes, little access to education, the absence of mass-media to voice people’s worries, or their viewpoints on the conservation of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve are also ingredients of a state of poverty.

The biggest problem in this respect is the failure of certain people to accede to the job market. Most of the poverty-stricken are children, youths and families with many children. The larger a family, the higher the risk of poverty, so lower life expectancy, and the likelihood for children to stay out of school (Pop, Voicu, 2000). A reduced level of education, makes it difficult for youngsters to find a

job, therefore their future living standard will be unsatisfactory. Most of the Delta youths cannot continue going to school beyond the primary grades, either because they fail to pass the exams, or their parents have not the means to sustain them in urban high-schools and pay housing and transport expenses. The families of old pensioners have a dramatic situation, the more so as ageing is associated with diseases and buying medicine bears heavily on their already low budget. Serious problems are facing also the one-parent family and the families of the unemployed who live on benefits from the state.

For the geographical dissemination of settlements and their welfare levels, basically of the poorest ones, see poverty map (Fig. 8). Dealing with their plight asks for investments.

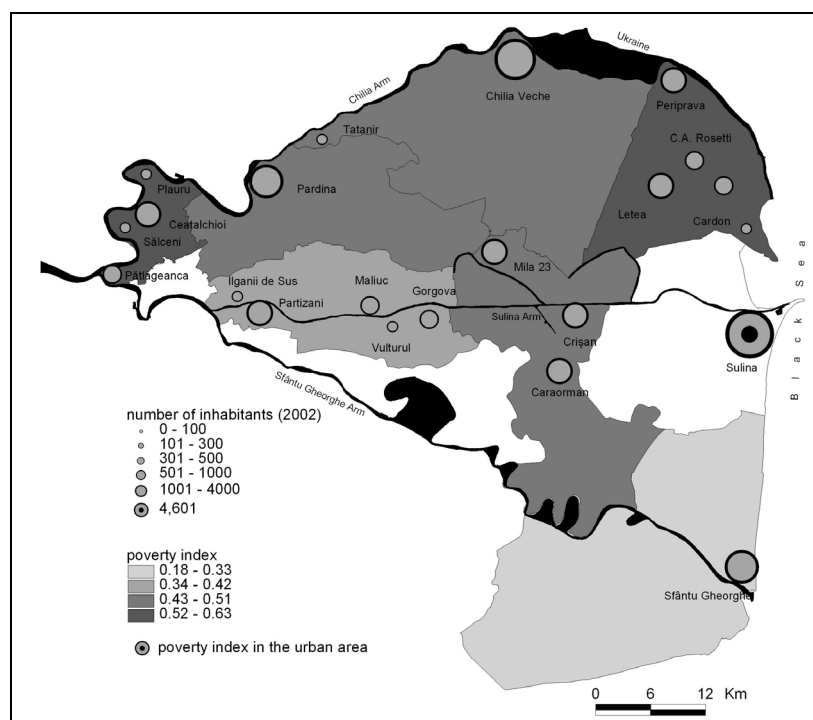


Fig. 8 – The poverty map (2004).

The population's incomes and implicitly its standard of living, of fishermen's families particular, began deteriorating after the 1990s, when Piscicola, a state-run enterprise (formed of several fishing units, forest brigades and collective farms) was divided into several private companies, a situation in which fishermen found themselves with void contracts and the loss of all former benefits stipulated therein; they had to choose between having a licensed physical person (LPP) status, or getting employment with one of the private firms. Formerly, as Piscicola employees they had enjoyed advantages, e.g. fishing-boats, equipment and tools, rest-leave and technological unemployment leave during the cold season when fishing came to a halt. However, their living standard would improve in-between the interval when Piscicola Company was dismantled and lease-holders appeared on the scene, as then they were free to fish without any imposition of quotas and sell the catch to the fisheries station that paid the best price. When the lease-holders came on the scene, fishermen had to choose between becoming their employees or maintain LPP status, work on their own and pay taxes to the state. The tax was set in terms of the estimated fish catch/year. From the moment the concessionaires began running their own contracts, the fishermen's situation would change. In most cases, they received a 50% lower price/kilogramme of fish, moreover, they had to buy the fishing tools themselves. In this way, their incomes and implicitly the living standard of their families would deteriorate significantly.

In the fishermen's view, leasing fishing resources benefited certain interest groups keen on making maximum profit, but instead of rehabilitating what had been destroyed over the 1992–2002 period and protect these resources, they embarked upon exploiting it in an irrational, uncontrolled manner.

Village women, in general, and in the Delta, in particular are one of the most vulnerable categories of population, having low incomes and few employment opportunities locally. Thus working on their own farm, or by the day in tourist boarding-houses during the summer season they do not benefit from social and health security provisions, having limited access to health-care education, contraceptive methods and information generally, which is a drawback to improving their social and economic condition.

VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT INDEX – DEVSAT

This index was conceived to identify poor villages in Romania with the help of several indicators, e.g. human capital, vital capital, dwelling conditions, the level of community, isolation (Fig. 9).

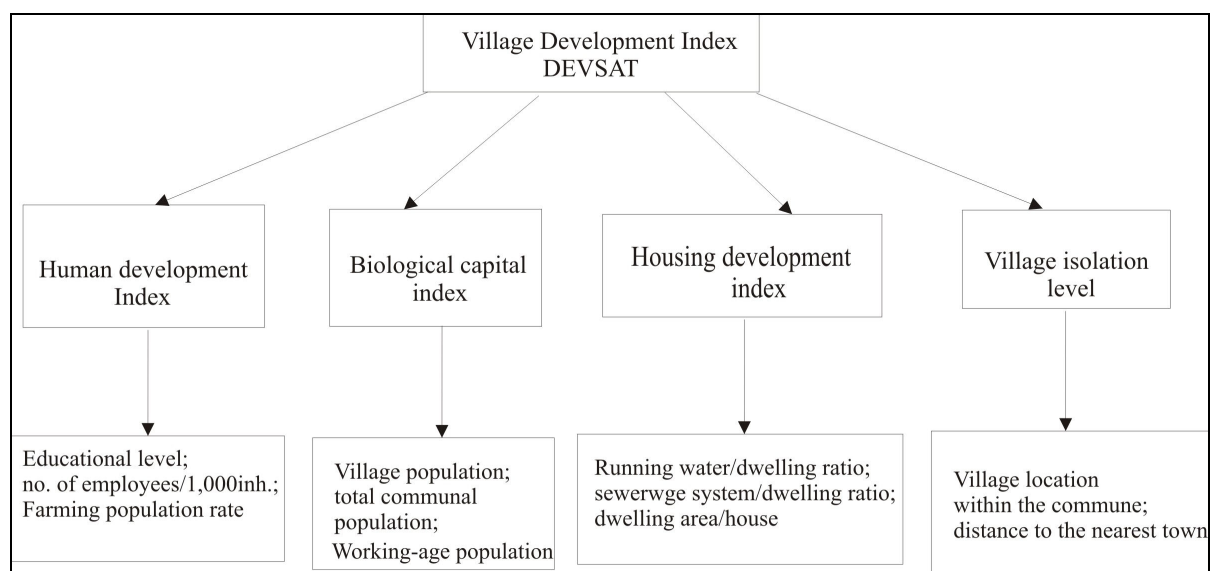


Fig. 9 – The Village Development Index. DEVSAT indicators (Source: D. Sandu, 2004).

The findings of this study have revealed a connection between the level of village isolation and its human and biological capital, in that the more isolated village location inside the commune and the greater its distance to town, the poorer and less numerous its population and the lower its educational level. At the same time, most people are working in agriculture, few of them are employed given that the working-age population group is small. House amenities are dependent on the level of education and incomes rather than on village isolation.

The results show the Danube Delta communes to be poor and lie at a great distance from county cities. Aggregating all the Danube Delta village indicators it appears that most villages (18) fall into the very poor category, two in the medium developed one – Ceatalchioi and Maliuc, and only a single village – Pardina in the poor category.

The summer of 2007, very dry and droughty, posed serious problems to the population. It came after a period devoid of precipitation since winter-time. The fires that broke out (unlike the local's

practice of burning the reed for hygienic purposes, controlled procedure) were hard to extinguish. Fortunately, the intervention of ecologists and of villagers succeeded in putting down fires close to the Caraorman Forest and settlement. However, a part of the strictly protected Erenciuc area and its older-tree reserve were destroyed by the flames. That same summer, works to remove the sand bars blocking water circulation in the Delta lakes and ponds, began first on the Sfântu Gheorghe Arm, in Dunavăț, Murighiol and Ceamurlia, which are areas of greater tourist interest. The economic development of settlements implies changing the mentality of people and of authorities alike. Hopefully, ecological reconstruction could be an additional income source beside agriculture which can satisfy only strictly individual needs.

What is essential for the Danube Delta population to exist is protection against high flood waters, the provision of the basic necessities available in the Delta and solutions to deal with isolation and communicate with the outside world.

Summing up we would say that the main problems facing the Danube Delta population are poverty, inadequate treatment of drinking water, water supply to settlements, poorly equipped dwelling-houses, deficient services and low-developed tourism.

FACILITIES FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS OR FOR PEOPLE WORKING IN THE LOCALITIES OF THE DANUBE DELTA BIOSPHERE RESERVE (ORDINANCE NO 27/13.08.1997)

Physical persons who have the domicile and actually reside in the localities listed under the Government Decisions No 323/1996 and 395/1996 benefit from a 50% reduction of local taxes for (Law No 27/1994 on taxes and dues).

The families who dwell in one of the settlements situated on the territory of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve benefit from 50% lower tariffs for electrical energy, natural gas, thermal power and drinking water supplied by the public network for household use, according to family quotas set by the local councils.

People are licenced to fish with own tools for family consumption without paying for the catch and in observance of regulations on fishing conditions and on permitted fishing periods /year.

Juristic persons investing in the areas benefit from deduction on the tax on profit for the costs involved by the respective investment, over a 5-year period from the start of the investment, and over a 10-year period for investors in Sulina Town.

The personnel of public institutions and of cult units appointed to posts that require higher or undergraduate specialist studies, and are situated in the localities of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, as well as people occupying eligible positions benefit from an up to 60% increase of base-pay for isolation. The increase for isolation benefiting the staff of cult units is calculated to the minimum gross base-pay in this country and is paid from the budget of the State Secretariat for the Cults. When establishing the domicile in the settlement one is to work in, he/she receives an installation allowance equivalent to two base-pays. The beneficiaries of an installation allowance, who subsequently tender their resignation or are dismissed for their faults before two years from installation, will return the allowance received, under legal previsions, calculated proportional to the period left until the end of the 2-year term.

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