

## THE MIGRATORY BEHAVIOUR OF THE POPULATION OF VRANCEA COUNTY – EXPRESSION OF THE WAY OF DEFINING RESIDENTIAL PERSONALITY IN RELATION TO THE ATTRACTIVENESS-REPULSIVENESS BINOMIAL

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**Abstract.** The investigation of the chrono-spatial features of the territorial mobility points out the exodynamic tendency of the population of Vrancea County, a feature which was fused during the dictatorial period by the cumulated action of the net preeminence of the rurality character of the demographic system, the mediocrity of the natural potential and the completely discretionary way of territory systematization practiced by the communist decision factors, features which aggravatingly acted upon the population migratory behaviour. Regardless of the period of time to which we refer, there are two conspicuous and invariable specificities: the marked incongruence between the two living environments and the inversion of the evolution directions on the occasion of the change of the political regime in 1989. Both derive from the way of defining residential personality in relation to the attractiveness / repulsiveness binomial, eminently manifested at the economic level, but also at the level of the mentality and individual and collective perception.

**Keywords:** *territorial mobility, rural exodus, return migration, economic discrepancy, living environments*

### 1. Introduction

The migratory behaviour of the population of Vrancea County, just like the one of the entire Romanian population, reveals obvious spatializing tendencies, territorial contrasts being accurately moulded on the relationship between the two residence environments, relationship enforced by the preservation or deepening of some economic and social development discrepancies, able to lead to substantial reconfigurations of the population territorial distribution.

The retrospective analysis of the migration balance of the population of Vrancea County in the period 1966-2009 outlines an evident temporal changeability and a very well expressed spatial variability by living environments, both of them being logical only in the context of their simultaneous approach against the background of the local, regional and national economic evolution.

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## 2. Dynamics by residential environments of the migratory balance

The study of the migration balance dynamics in the above mentioned lapse of time grounds the coordinates of the migratory behaviour of Vrancea population. At a first sight one can identify two distinct stages corresponding to divergent political regimes, the moment of the casting foreshadowing the reversal of the evolution tendencies (Figure 1).

The communist period opposes the *generally attractive image of the urban environment* to the *high degree of repulsiveness of the rural one*, the explanation for this dissonant dynamism having to be looked for in the economic development gaps between the two residence environments.

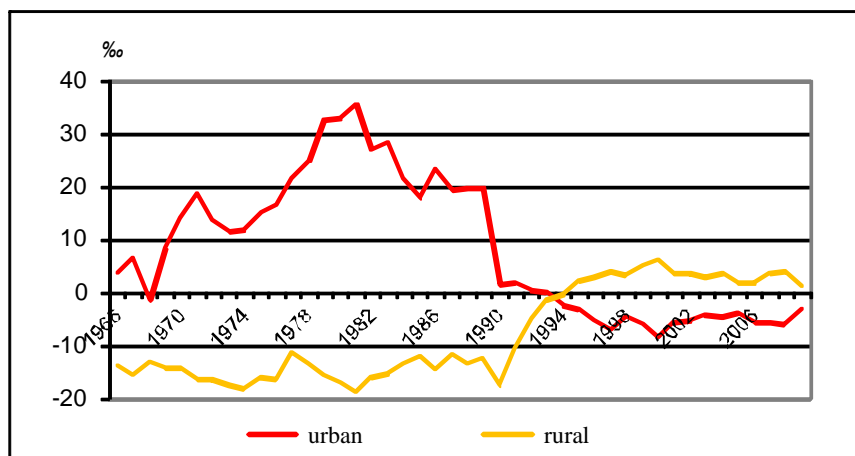


Figure 1: Dynamics by residence environments of the migration balance of the population of Vrancea County (1966-2009)

Integrand part of the Moldavian village, personalized by the same lack of attractiveness, Vrancea villages lack the advantage of a natural potential favourable to the diversification of the local economic profile through the insertion of some industrialization germs capable to polarize the local labour force resources and thus to intervene in the migration process. At the same, the allure of the rural environment curve is also due to the fact that in the past it was constantly neglected by the “dirigiste” policy of the former regime, which obviously deprived it of substantial sustainable investments in the local agricultural system. In this context, *during the socialist period, Vrancea villages experienced a constantly negative evolution, reflecting an undoubted tendency of chronicization of the migration deficit* at values of less than -11 ‰, even reaching a minimum of -18.8 ‰ in 1981, with a slight tendency of relaunching in the period 1982-1989 under the circumstances of the long term wearing out through exodus of the human potential, with extremely noxious consequences on the demographic vitality of the rural population.

By opposition, the evolution of Vrancea towns on the whole is much less dull, being generally described as passing from agony to ecstasy. The extremely modest rates of the migration increase at the beginning of the period (3.6 ‰ in 1966) are even followed by a discrete deficit in 1968 (-1.4 ‰), rapidly relaunched during the next three years, when the migratory balance rises to 18.5 ‰. *But the period of maximum increase overlaps the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> decade, the culminant point being reached in 1981(35.3 ‰), an evolution which*

accurately mirrors the tergiversation of the economic dynamics of the urban environment of Vrancea County by the communist regime.

### **3. Migration balance dynamics of the urban population**

The collective approach of towns has the disadvantage of levelling and even cancelling specific evolution individual trends. From this point of view in Vrancea County there are obvious discrepancies. Inherited from the previous period of time, they were deepened by the communist authorities through their preferential and dephased inclusion in the regional and national economic circuits by virtue of some rather doubtful development and systematization criteria, which rarely took into account the profitability of the economic activities and proximity of natural resources and access infrastructure. They were frequently dictated by pragmatic and populist interests derived from the necessity of offering an alternative to the rural population deprived of its former land properties in the context of the agriculture cooperativization or, many times, of imagining a “valve” for the feminine labour force in areas where industrial activities mainly involved the masculine segment of the population.

Figure 2 emphasizes the development gaps between the main Vrancea towns:

- important (nearly constant) growth of Focșani, whose dynamism can be explained through the rather recent industrial function overlapping the old and traditional role of administrative and commercial centre (with two climaxes – a secondary one in 1971 – 40.7 ‰ and a main one in 1981 – 46.6 ‰);
- initial completely devoid of attractiveness (illustrated by negative rates of -25.6 ‰ in 1968) of Adjud radically changes beginning with 1975, when the rates of this indicator become positive, reaching a maximum point in 1979 (38.7 ‰). This forced circumstantial attractiveness must be related to the effort of economic dynamization, firstly by providing the town with an industrial function (a cellulose and paper plant complex) in addition to the old traditional transportation one, and secondly by diversifying its industrial profile.
- moderate dynamism of Măreșești and Odobești which, in spite of certain economic stimulation efforts, experience a gap of almost a decade in familiarizing themselves again to the migratory decline (-8.3 ‰ in 1982 in the case of the latter urban centre, -5 ‰ in 1983 in the one of the former);
- late removal of the profound and long term repulsive character of Panciu, touched by economic reconfiguration stimuli only at the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> decade, bringing about a paroxysmal but incidental increase of up to 53.6 ‰, followed afterwards by a general regressive trend.

The collapse of the communist regime and the replacement of the dirigiste economic system with one typical of the market economy, set up the premises of a new context of causality between political, social, economic and, implicitly, demographic factors. The endless initiatives of industrial reconversion, ample urban industrial dismissals, the economic, social, demographic and, last but not least, psychological problems derived from the emergence of a new phenomenon – unemployment, the general erosion of the living standard in the Romanian town accumulately triggered the population's return to the rural environment in search of a new subsistence alternative, this process being favoured by the restoration of land properties to the former owners following the promulgation of the Land Fund Law in 1991.

Against this general background, starting with 1994 there took place an inversion of the dynamics by residence environments, Vrancea villages, despite their sideslippings characteristic to a many times agonizing agricultural system, recording a permanent migratory

increase (with values which, in certain stages, rose even up to 6.2‰ – in the year 2000), in obvious contrast to towns, where the rates of migration balance were constantly less than -5 ‰, decreasing to even -8.5 ‰ in 2002.

In the context of more flexible country borders and of being granted the right of free movement, emigration has become a fundamental component of the population's territorial mobility in this post socialist period, the steps forward taken by Romania towards the West having immediate repercussions on the dynamics of the external migration, whose main motivation remains the economic one.

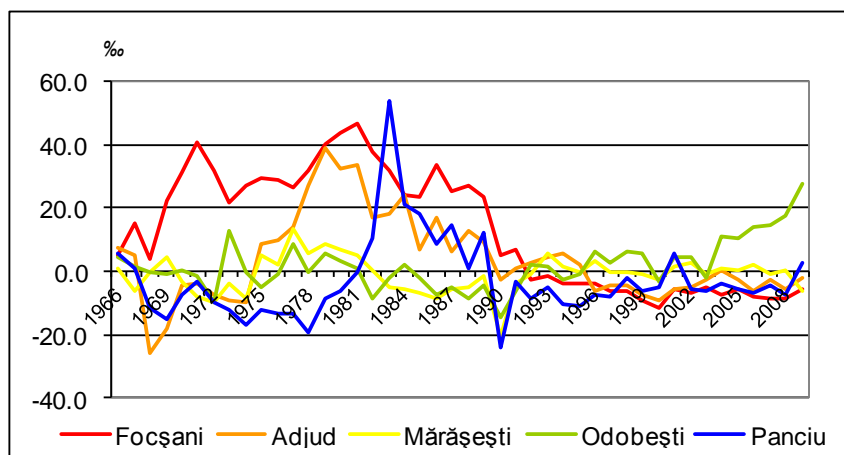


Figure 2: Migration balance dynamics of the population of the towns of Vrancea County (1966-2009)

#### 4. Typology of the migration balance dynamics

The typology of the migration balance dynamics structures Vrancea communes in relation to the specific way of summing up the two components of the migration movement (in-migration and out-migration) in 6 evolution patterns, enough well spatialised to be able to define migratory behaviours (Figure 3).

**Type 1** (9 communes – 14.1 % of the total number) is eminently *strongly exodynamic with recent balancing tendencies of the migratory deficit*. The initial strongly negative values (-12.7 ‰ in 1969) corroborated with the marked long term tendency of migratory decline, deepening up to a minimum of -33.1 ‰ in 1981, betrays *the conspicuously repulsive character of the afferent rural areas* (disadvantaged by an extremely limited natural potential). They accurately overlap Tutova Hills (Corbița, Boghești, Tănăsoaia - in this case the criterion of spatial isolation playing a negative part and explaining, to a certain extent, the precocious migration flows) and the south extremity of the plain region (an area whose repulsive image was accentuated by the agricultural collectivization process against the background of a minimum functional diversification, incapable of covering the active population excess). This evolution pattern also appears isolated in the Subcarpathian area, along Râmna basin. In this little offering rural environment, affected by the inherent disorder introduced by the land retrocessions initiated at the beginning of the 90's, the recent episodic relaunch of the migration balance appears as paradoxical.

**Type 2** (28.1 %) is *moderately exodynamic*, a character which it preserves throughout the whole lapse of time – starting from values of about -6 ‰, it follows a *slowly regressive*

*trend* until it reaches the maximum extent of rural abandonment in the year 1981 (-16.9‰), *stabilizing itself around -11 ‰, the post-communist period not substantially changing the ratio of forces between the volume of in-migration and that of out-migration, the migration balance oscillating around -6 ‰.* The temporizing of the rural exodus is a reflex on the demographic level of the relatively late de-enclavization of the south mountainous and Subcarpathian area, formerly less rallied to internal migration circuits due to its high degree of isolation.

Just like type 2, **type 3** (29 communes – 45.3 %) is *moderately exodynamic*, the difference between them being made by the recent coordinates of the population's migratory behaviour through *the extremely stable tendency of migration deficit relaunching*, the last decade distinguishing itself by means of its stabilization at values between 5 and 7 ‰. Very frequent on the territorial level, this type fully borders the piedmont area, where past out-migration was amortized to a certain extent by seasonal or temporary labour migrations to wine-growing regions, often leading to the permanentization of the population in the destination areas; the recent positive dynamics is the consequence of the linking up between two factors: the urban proximity on the one hand and the revitalization of the wine sector in the favourable context brought about by Romania's integration in the European structures on the other. From the piedmont area, this pattern irradiates in Siret Plain (covering the communes lying in the proximity of Focșani – Milcovul, Slobozia Ciorăști, Garoafa, Suraia, Vânători), as well as in the Subcarpathian area – the basins of Șușița (Soveja, Câmpuri, Răcoasa) and Putna (Valea Sării, Vidra). However, regardless of the physical geographical region they cover, the above mentioned areas overlap the largest general density values, thus reflecting the increased human pressure exercised on the local resources.

**Type 4** (3.1 %) definitely opposes two types of migratory behaviour, moulded on the two models of political and economic experience acquired: *a strongly and constantly exodynamic one* in the socialist epoch (the values of the migration deficit decreasing to -24.2 ‰ in 1979) and *a strongly endodynamic one* in the transition period, in both situations the spatial contiguity of Focșani (the capital city of the county) being incriminated (Câmpineanca and Golești communes).

**Type 5** (7.8 %) describes a *moderately exodynamic profile with episodic tendencies of migration flows polarization* – the discrete migration excess at the beginning of the analysed period (5.2 ‰ in 1966) suddenly leaves room to a moderate migration deficit (with values decreasing to up to -7.5 ‰ in certain years), the delay of the accumulation of masses of people through migration until the beginning of the 80's being due to the communist industrialization national policy, within which Vrancea towns did not seem to represent a priority. The regression of the migration increase in the last 5 years before the change of the political regime clearly foreshadows the return to negative values of the migration balance, installed at a low level even since 1988 (-1.9 ‰). The post-communist period can generally be divided in two stages: a first decade with slight fluctuations around the water-line and a second one in which the efforts of polarization of the population take the shape of a migration increase with extremely modest values (between 1 and 4 ‰).

The statistical data of such an evolution pattern personalizes the four small towns of Vrancea County (Adjud, Mărășești, Panciu and Odobești) which, despite the fact that benefited from a certain capital infusion, never managed to equalize the long-term polarization capacity of Focșani. However, this type also comprises a rural settlement – Gugești – a locally attractive centre, favoured by the insertion of some non-agricultural activities, as part of the effort of de-localization of the economic structures.

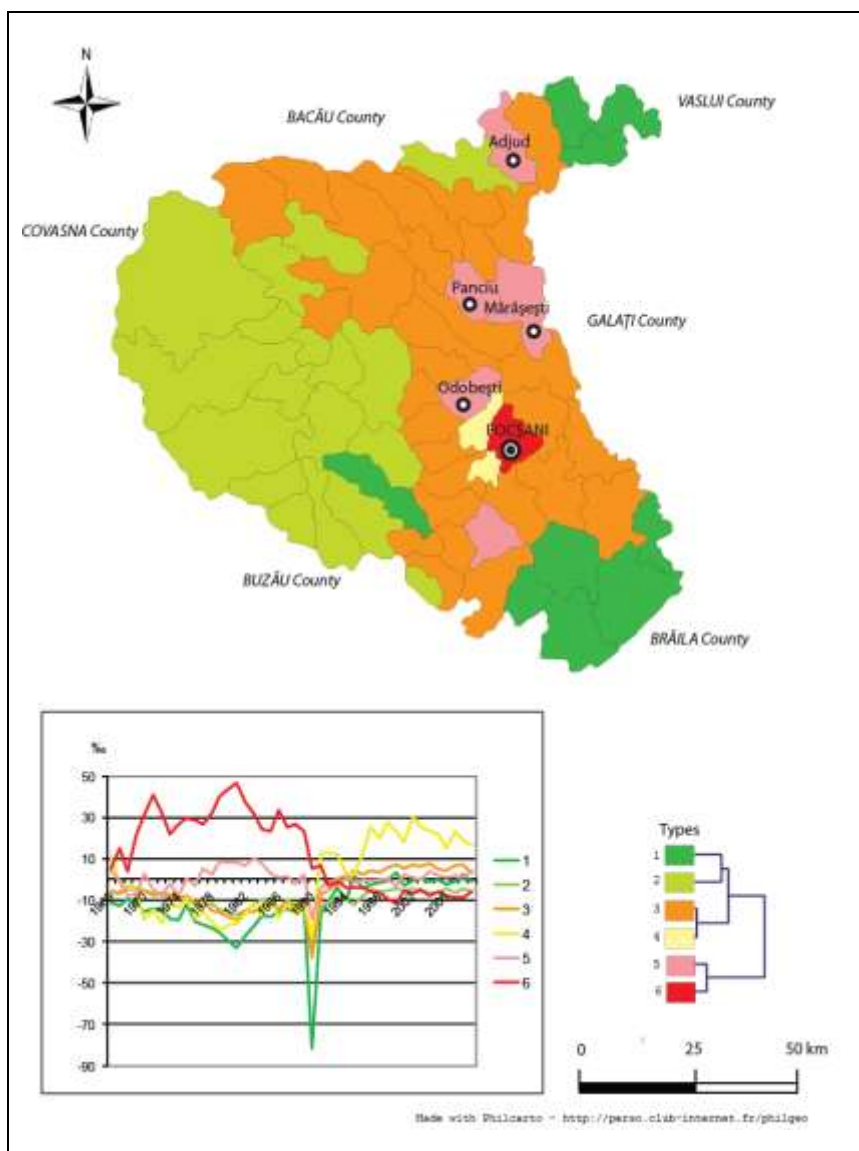


Figure 3: The typology of the dynamics of the migration balance of the population of Vrancea County (1966-2009)

The configuration of **type 6** (1.6 %) can be regarded as the image in the mirror of type 4 through the inversion of the behavioural models (*strongly endodynamic during the period of Soviet influence, moderately exodynamic in the post-communist epoch*), being typical of one single administrative unit: the capital city of the county. With an initial less potential induced by its administrative-commercial role, Focșani managed in a short time to mobilize significant contingents of rural population by virtue of the rapid rhythm of industrialization which had a hyperbolizing impact on migration flows. The effects of the economic sideslips derived from the change of the political regime were not late, the deficit emerging in 1992 (-2.9 ‰), with a subsequent intensification tendency (-11.7 ‰ in 2002) and a relative stabilization at values between -5 and -8 ‰ in most recent years.

## 5. The ratio between the migration balance of the population and its initial volume

The quantitative evaluation of the ratio between the migration balance of the population (from 1956 to 2009) and its initial volume illustrates the way in which territorial mobility acted upon the local human potential under specific circumstances of vitality or, on the contrary, of weakened demographic resistance (Figure 4):

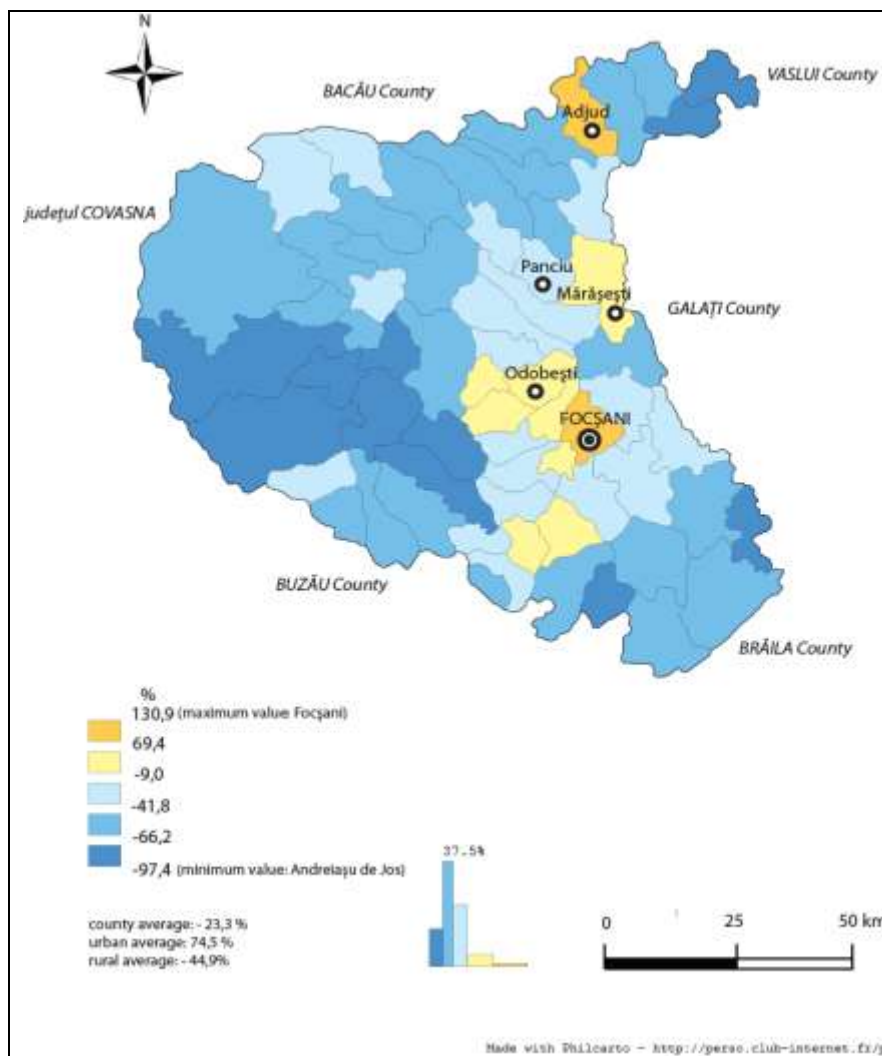


Figure 4: The ratio between the migration balance of the population of Vrancea County and its initial population in the period 1956-2009

- *the smallest values* belong to areas with a traditional, natalist (birth increasing) behaviour, the multiplication of the masses of people taking place primarily by means of the natural component of the general dynamics in the context of a constantly negative migration balance (as it is the case of the mountainous and Subcarpathian areas at the south of Putna, with values of this ratio decreasing to -97.4 % in the case of Andreiașu de Jos commune);

- *moderately negative values* (between -41.8 % and -9 %) characterize especially the piedmont area at the south of Zăbrăuți river, well known for its early birth rate decline superposed on a moderately exodynamic behaviour, relaunched after 1990 due to a volume of out-migration exceeded by that of in-migration;
- *moderately positive values* (rising up to 53 %) are typical of the centres with a moderate natural dynamism and a migratory behaviour oscillating between endo and exodynamism (Mărășești and Odobești towns, certain communes enjoying the advantage of a circumurban position – Câmpineanca, Vârteșcoiu, or playing the part of locally attractive poles – Gugești, Dumbrăveni);
- *the maximum value* of the ratio (130.9 %) singularizes Focșani municipality on the level of Vrancea County due to the overwhelming importance of the migration component of the general dynamics within the demographic increase process.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the migratory behaviour of the population of Vrancea County during the last half of the century discloses two invariable features: the net discordance between the two residence environments (urban-rural) and the transposition of the dynamics trends following the Revolution in 1989. The period of dirigiste economy is marked by the strongly repulsive image of Vrancea villages, bereft of both natural and economic resources able to attenuate the energy of the rural exodus and the evident plus of attractiveness characteristic to towns (assertion which requires completions in respect of the calibre differences between the capital city of the county and the towns in the second echelon). The substitution of the centralized planned economy practice with the one guided by competitive market economy principles resulted in the deepening of the negative image of the town, the solutions imagined involving a twofold manifestation: a return migration to the rural environment, on one hand, and a temporary labour migration abroad on the other.

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