The Socio-Demographic Changes in Romania: and Analysis from the Human Development Perspective

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Abstract

The social and demographic changes registered in recent years, at European and Romanian level, have produced some effects visible in various reference areas. By this paper, we propose to achieve an empirical analysis meant to emphasize the main socio-economic changes of the last 10 years and their influence on the human society development. Based on the inventory of statistical data referring to the socio-demographic dynamics and using a research methodology based on inductive reasoning, dynamic and dialectics analysis, we will obtain some results of research that indicate: the human development is in positive evolution, even the number of population is decreasing.

Key words: demographic, society, changes, resources, development, sustainability

1. Introduction

The socio-demographic changes are normal dynamic phenomena, insofar as we approach the concept of normality from the perspective of human society evolution and development by relating mainly to the time factor and to social norms. Nonetheless, the scientific literature in the field and the current socioeconomic reality show that in some directions of human society evolution, changes are significant and they exceed the patterns of an evolutionary rhythm specific to normality. Among the most visible such changes, we mention as follows: alarming population decrease at European level, ample migration phenomena, and a significant increase in hyperconsumerism in association with high consumption of resources resulting in a massive amount of waste, in higher pollution levels, etc. All of these changes are visible and important, but it is worth noting certain relevant regional differences. The aforementioned general-major changes, along with different and particularized ones are part of a complex circular circuit, where subsystems influence each other: the dynamic of socio-demographic changes influences research management methods, while research management methods adapt to socio-demographic changes. Hence, economic growth – illustrated most of the times by the GDP values, though GDP alone is not representative – determines an increased consumption of goods, a phenomenon correlated with changes in the attitude and

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mentality of the population regarding consumption and the direction of human development. This conjecture determines the emergence of new forms of approaching the issue of socio-demographic changes and multiple economic and social implications, such as high costs for waste management, technological adaptation, health issues of the population, adaptive socio-educational phenomena, innovations in managerial systems, etc.

Approached from the perspective of sustainability, the present paper aims at pointing out the main socio-demographic changes in the past 10 years in Romania and their possible consequences upon human development. We take into account that sustainable development - including as a desideratum of Europe 2020 Strategy – involves the optimal intertwining of economic, social, and ecological aspects. [7] Hence, a certain imbalance recorded in any of the components determines imbalances in the ensemble of a sustainable development. The research - empirical and predominantly quantitative – uses official data and reports and it includes a qualitative interpretative analysis. We use analysis indicators specific to the theme, and our base of reference is the Human Development Index (HDI), to which we add socio-demographic and economic indicators specific to the context analyzed. The qualitative component aims to identify the attitudinal, behavioural, and value aspects specific to connections and consequences regarding the socio-demographic changes and environmental factors.

2. The interdisciplinary approach to socio-demographic changes

The scientific literature regarding the socio-demographic aspects in the context of economic growth is very rich, complex, and sometimes controversial. Such endeavours have passed many times from specific analyses and researches to governmental reports, strategies, and policies. The authors interested in the vast and comprehensive field of socio-demographic changes often have to face veritable challenges of reality. [3, p. 2] The dynamic and permanence of socio-demographic changes are perceived as normal phenomena in the evolution and history of humanity. For centuries, the population structure has changed continuously, both quantitatively and qualitatively, at a slower or at a very intense pace, which determined implicit modifications in multiple other fields: economy, education, health, environment, politics, etc. All of these changes have marked human society and economic development plans, at the level of all countries. Furthermore, the environment – perceived as the main provider of resources necessary for ensuring human living – is a cause of all these changes and, at the same time, it bears their consequences through various forms of manifestation: adaptive reactions, quantitative and qualitative changes, rigidity, resilience, etc.

The main causes of socio-demographic changes – thus the reasons for which the population has recorded numerical and structural changes - are related to ensuring stability and security, in order to assure at least a decent living standard. People permanently seek job opportunities, try to obtain satisfying incomes and to avoid conflicts or they migrate involuntarily, (due to political, social changes or to environment conditions). A generally acknowledged certitude is that the reasons for socio-demographic changes are not only numerous but also complex. Some authors approach

the socio-demographic changes from the perspective of both the demographic explosion and the demographic implosion. [5, p. 100] Hence, the causes and effects of these changes have as common denominator the circular character and the mutual dependence. This is why we believe it is worth mentioning that the population changes its socio-demographic structure, always because of economic, political aspects, technological progress, resource management, etc. In their turn, these changes determine certain effects upon the economy, upon politics, technological innovation stimulation, the existence of resources, etc. This is a complex circular system, with accentuated dynamics, unfolding continuously. All of these aspects represent determining grounds for the attention and reaction of the academia and of the decision factors, mostly in the past 20-30 years, when the forms and consequences of socio-demographic changes have become more diverse, comprehensive, and obvious. In fact, sometimes they exceed the sphere of perception as phenomena categorized within the range of normality. Researchers, academicians, scientists, politicians, managers, entrepreneurs, etc have focused increasingly upon socio-demographic changes from the perspective of their consequences. We note that the interest for theoretical and practical studies concerns an interdisciplinary area. Sociologists analyze the socio-demographic changes, economists approach the issue from the standpoint of efficiency and cost of changes, psychologists analyze the attitude and behavioural causes and consequences, environmentalists are concerned by the effects upon the environment, etc. None of these fields of interest can produce results without being included within a single unit.

Concerning the topic of the present research, we have chosen to debate the influences of socio-demographic changes upon human development, while the doctrine we support is strongly anchored in the concept of sustainability. The topic is interesting for researchers all over the world, who have reported that changes in the environment determine socio-demographic changes and the other way around. [1, p. 2] Moreover, considering that the population is the core of the research interest, we extract from the scientific literature an essential element: demographic modifications have a vital impact upon human development, through the implications that it determines in the ensuring of resources necessary for a satisfying living standard and in the respecting of sustainable development principles. [6]

3. The socio-demographic changes in Romania and the Human Development Index

For the present paper, we have chosen the particular case of Romania, a country where the socio-demographic changes within the last 25 years have been major and accentuated and, at the same time, they have produced considerable effects in numerous directions. We refer here to the evolution of society as a whole, to economic growth, to social climate, to national policy from the perspective of international cooperation, to the mentality of the population, to research management methods, etc. The main causes of changes specific to the last 25 years are related to the major political reorientation of 1989, marked by the passage from a centralized economy to a market economy, which had immediate and profound effects upon Romanian society. Furthermore, these changes

have also entailed certain atypical consequences that have sometimes taken by surprise even decision factors, (in charge of the socioeconomic state of the country).

The aspects that determined and marked the intensity of socio-demographic changes in Romania are related to: the effects of globalization, the investment in human capital (especially for education and health), the professional approach to early education, the consideration of population health as a strategic element in human capital management, the approach to sustainability in the context of the attitude towards the environment, and to research management methods. Specifically, we believe that education is the basic solution to the weighting of issues such as a cause or consequence of major socio-demographic changes. Whereas the national education system produces high values, high-quality graduates choose to have a job abroad [8] – definitely or temporarily – thus to value in another context what they have acquired in the national learning and education system. To this aspect, we add the gradual decrease in educational act quality, considering that the last 15-20 years have been marked by quantitative growth to the detriment of quality (concerning the number of pupils and university students). Most national reports are interested in the quantitative aspect, which allows deviations from qualitative assessments.

One of the major changes that Romania has had to face in the last 10-15 years is the significant decrease in the number of inhabitants, after a sustained increasing trend up to 1989. Actually, Romania reached a demographic peak in 1989: a record number of 23,151,564 inhabitants. This was in fact a consequence of the ambitious policy implemented by the socialist system. In the period 1992 – 2005, the population of the country decreased by around 1 million persons. This trend was enabled mainly by low fertility rates (1.3 children/woman) and by migration abroad. The socioeconomic trepidation was perceived even more acutely because – immediately after the fall of the totalitarian regime – certain political consequences emerged, overlapping the socioeconomic ones: industrial collapse, increased unemployment rates, accentuated stress and worries of the population, uncertainties concerning the future, social drift, etc. Subsequently, the opening of borders, the international political changes, and the European Union accession produced other major effects within a very short time:

- massive, temporary, or definite migration towards other countries, in order to find a job;
- accentuated manifestation of high product consumption due to the rapid adaptation to the fast consumption rhythm specific to highly developed societies;
- educational transfer, mainly towards humanities, to the detriment of technical fields.

Official statistical reports [8] show that the major changes in fertility and birth rate are components of the demographic change process that is part of *the second demographic transition*. Hence, lower fertility is accompanied by changes in the attitude and behaviour towards marriage, cohabitation, divorce, existence of children out of wedlock, etc. Overall, the transition to the market economy also produced major changes in the living standards of persons fit for work, a phenomenon associated with an

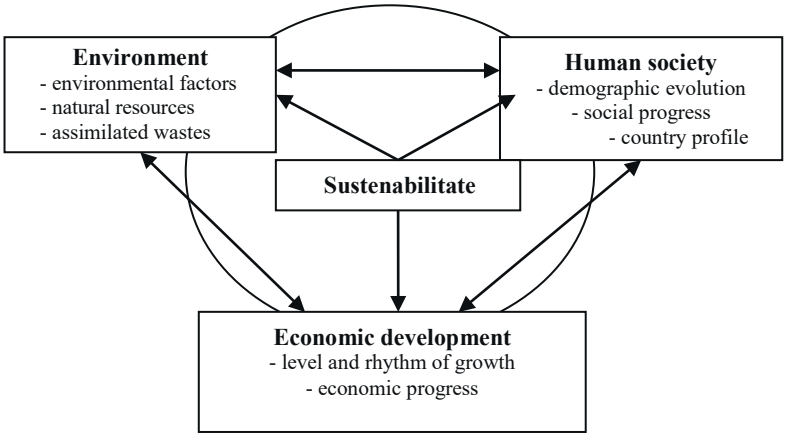
unpredictable evolution of labour market, to which public education reacted by providing services of a disputable quality sometimes. [4] Furthermore, the accentuated manifestation of the downsides of Romanian labour market has led to increased social consistency of the migration phenomenon. Currently, official records show that over 2 million Romanians work abroad, but the unofficial figures are not known (they are however estimated to around 5 million persons). Furthermore, there is no official record of the people who have left the country on a temporary basis or occasionally.

The socio-demographic transformations specific to the past 10-15 years have outlined a *socio-demographic profile* of Romania, reflected in the way the country population approached economic, social, and environmental issues.

In essence, changes have been noted in the occupational fields, in a trend towards hyper-consumerism, in a precarious eco-economic education, in a lack of interest for the environment, (due to ignorance regarding the importance of rational management of environmental factors or due to an inadequate approach to the principles of sustainability). It is also worth mentioning the focus on the management of the present, without taking into account the developmental need of the future generation. All of these aspects correlate directly with those referring to the rhythm of exploiting natural resources and to the management of environmental factors.

In this context, we also remind the role and manifestation of the complex circular system on the coordinates of which the socioeconomic and demographic evolution occur. Concretely, the environment with all embedded factors and resources represents the basic sources of economic development which, in its turn, determines the socio-demographic evolution, while the determined level of the socio-demographic evolution reflects upon the existence condition of the environment, from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. (Figure 1)

Figure 1. The complex circular system of the linkage environment - economy - society



Source: Personal design and realization, according to the schematization of sustainable development concept.

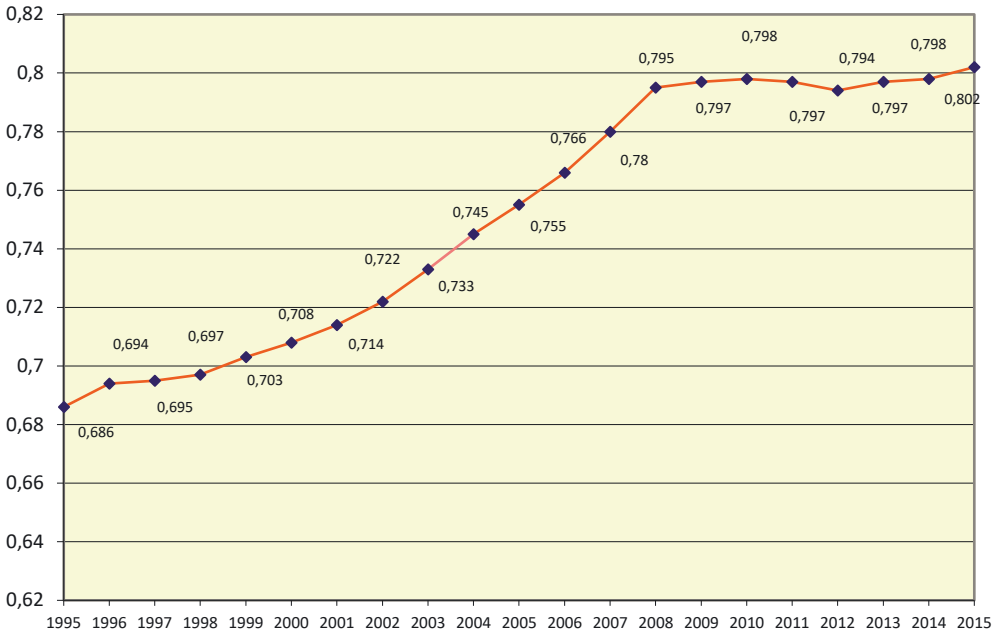
The perspective approached is strengthened by the adherence to the doctrine of sustainable development, in agreement to which the circularity mechanism functions as a complex process. In other words, the interdependencies between the three basic subsystems of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) have a direct impact on progress and human development.

The analysis of consequences determined by socio-demographic changes is a complex action, achievable through several approaching versions. For the present paper, we have chosen to use the analysis based on indicators, but considering there are so many of them, we have selected the most significant ones, in agreement with the scientific literature. Information sources are represented by statistical yearbooks, by the Eurostat database, and by specialized reports. The reference indicator is the Human Development Index (HDI). This is an essential aggregated indicator that measures progress, allowing us to assess the quality of life and the living standard, and it complies with the analysis of sustainability. [2, p.74] The United Nations Development Programme (PNUD) introduced HDI for the first time in the 1990s as an instrument for analyzing human progress and it indicates the progress of human capital of a country, along with economic implications. It comprises a set of relevant indicators for characterizing the economic and social evolution: gross domestic product per capita, life expectancy at birth, and the education index that includes enrolment rate and literacy rate.

The Human Development Index (HDI) enables the quantitative assessment of the strategic way in which a country can develop and mobilize the human capital. Furthermore, HDI reflects the achievements of a country through the human resources, on three basic dimensions: duration and quality of life from the standpoint of health, adequate education, and decent living standard. Concerning the last aspect, it is important to state that, for ensuring a decent living standard, several factors are involved, as follows: material welfare, population quality, and social system quality. HDI varies on a scale from 0 to 1; values close to 1 stand to indicate a very high level of human development.

Since 1995, Romania has also been included in reports for the hierarchy of human development. Hence, an evolution of general HDI for Romania is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. HDI evolution for Romania in 1995-2015 period



Source: United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Reports. Data: 1990-2015. *Human Development Index (HDI)*. http://hdr.undp.org/en/data

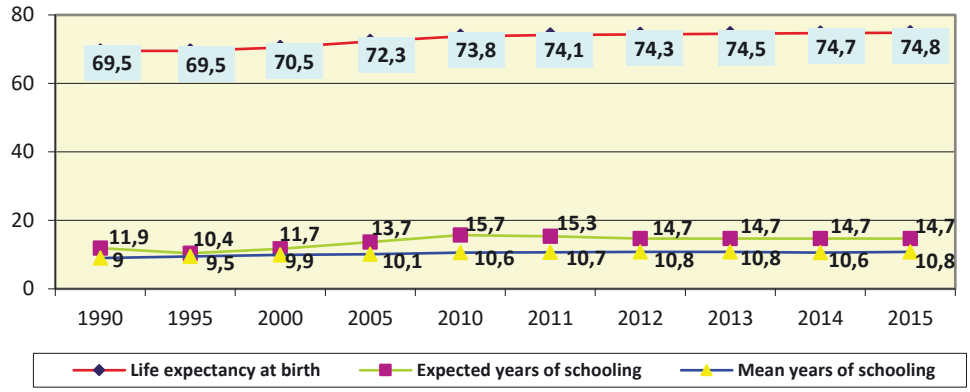
Figure 2 shows that, since 1999, HDI has increased at a fast pace until 2008, when the increasing rhythm became slower. A slight decrease was recorded in the period 2011-2013, most probably due to the effects of the economic crisis recorded in the previous years, and in 2015, HDI for Romania has exceeded the threshold of 0.8 (the interval 0.8-1 is specific to the very high level of development).

In the global hierarchy of HDI, Romania ranked the 50th in the year 2015, (the penultimate country in the category of countries with a very high level of development). The evolution is especially favourable, given that in 2006 it ranked the 64th out of 177 countries, meaning at an average development level.

In order to identify as accurately as possible the evolution of this aggregated indicator, we considered it useful to also analyze the indicators comprised within HDI, which may provide a clear image, from a demographic, social, educational, and economic progress perspective. Hence, we underpin that a favourable evolution in a unidirectional sense is not relevant in a broader context. This is also the case for the GDP (Gross domestic product) indicator; its singular analysis – that reflects only the value of economic growth – does not provide contextual information concerning the impact of economic growth on the development of society. Human progress is a conglomerate of effects from diverse but inter-relational and interdependent spheres of affiliation: background of existence, mentality, education, available resources, functional socioeconomic policies, external partnerships, etc.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the evolution of basic HDI indicators: socio-educational indicators (life expectancy at birth, expected years of schooling, and average of schooling years) in Figure 3 and the evolution of gross national income per capita in Figure 4.

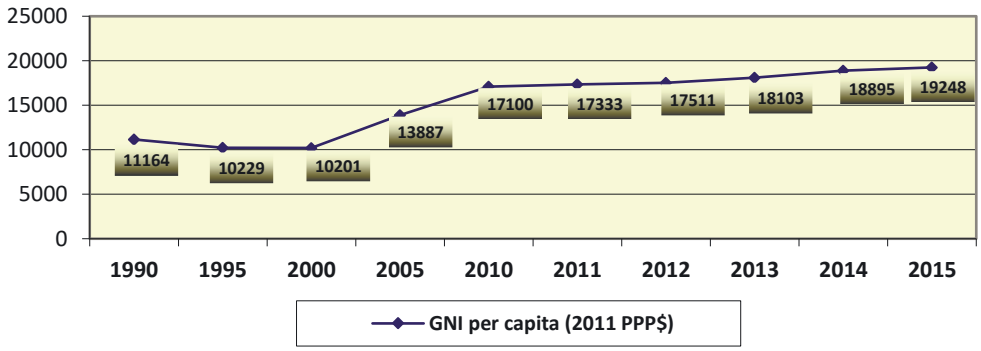
Figure 3. Dynamic of educational indicators of HDI - Romania (1990-2015)



Source: United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Reports. Data: 1990-2015. Human Development Index (HDI). http://hdr.undp.org/en/data

Figure no. 3 shows that for all three indicators within the HDI favourable evolutions were indicated. Life expectancy at birth has increased continuously in the aforementioned interval (1990-2015), in the 10 years chosen for analysis, and it was eventually 5 years higher per capita. In addition, (from 9 to 10.8 years) the average of schooling years has increased permanently, while the years of schooling/person have increased significantly from 11.9 years in 1990 to 15.7 years in 2010; after dropping to 14.7 years throughout 2012, this value has maintained constant thus far. We mention that these assessments are only quantitative; hence, the increase in schooling years does not also reflect implicitly an improvement in the quality of the educational environment.

Figure 4. Dynamic of GNI per capita for Romania (1990-2015)



Source: United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Reports. Data: 1990-2015. Human Development Index (HDI). http://hdr.undp.org/en/data

Figure 4 also shows that for the economic indicator Romania has had a favourable evolution. The values of gross national income per capita – calculated at the purchasing power parity (PPP) rate in $ for the year 2011 - have recorded an increasing trend; since 2010, the increase has been permanent except for the year 2012, when a slight decrease was registered. In the year 2015, Romania exceeded the threshold of $ 19,000 gross national income per capita.

Overall, according to the data observed and to the trend identified in the aforementioned figures, it is apparent that from the standpoint of economic growth, of progress in education, and of life expectancy at birth, the evolution is favourable for Romania. In other words, the living standard most likely has improved thanks to economic progress; investment in education has been possible in the same context, thus the general level of human development has registered a positive evolution in the last 15 years. The quantitative socio-demographic changes – mostly the reduction in the number of inhabitants - have not produced negative effects in the sphere of human progress and development.

4. Conclusions

The conclusive aspects show that, whereas the number of inhabitants has been decreasing (a phenomenon characterized by some authors as “dramatic”) the rhythm and level of consumption per capita have increased, which leads towards a generalized high-level consumption. Hyper-consumerism is maintained by certain socio-demographic factors: change in mentality due to the intercultural changes favoured by the migration phenomenon; reduced investments in the health and education of the population; precarious economic education; incapacity of assessing the complete lifespan of a product; strategic short-term orientation; lack of an overall view of over-consumerism; consumption encouragement maintained by specific sales mechanisms based on manipulating psychological techniques; and lack of interventions from State institutions and bodies. Romania is facing currently real challenges of sustainability and, according to the data analyzed, it has followed a favourable trend, considering that despite the sudden and major socio-demographic changes, it has managed to build a stronger economy and a more advanced society. Whereas some chapters - education quality, health investments, and promoting environmental values - still require consistent efforts, it is important to note that the impact of socio-demographic changes upon human development has not been negative thus far. We believe that the decreasing number of inhabitants is actually not unfavourable, from the perspective of preserving resources and ensuring a high life satisfaction level, while maintaining a favourable social balance of sustainable development. Nonetheless, taking into account that HDI and the associated indicators only illustrate the socioeconomic aspects and they ignore the environmental ones – included in the concept of sustainable development – it is important to identify the evolution pattern for environment-specific indicators, in the context of increased standard of living and quality of life, as well as of human development in general. We also note that in highly developed countries – ranking the first in the HDI hierarchy (Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, and the

Netherlands) – the very high value of HDI is associated with effective strategies and actions for preserving the environment and the natural resources. The outcomes are reflected in the reported environment indicators, including in studies concerning the attitude and behaviour of the population towards the environment. This represents the topic for a future research.

Among the limits identified for the research within the present paper, we enumerate as follows: lack of approaching environmental issues in the context of human development, (justified by the strict orientation of the research towards social, demographic, and economic aspects); use of a limited number of indicators in the analysis conducted; low focus on the downsides and advantages entailed by the socio-demographic changes, mostly on the ones related to economic and social welfare. We believe that the afore-stated limits actually represent a point of reference for future research.

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