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THE INSERTION OF HIGHLY DISADVANTAGED AREAS IN REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

Ioan IANOŞ
University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT), 4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: ianos50@yahoo.com

Daniel PEPTENATU
University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT), 4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: peptenatu@yahoo.fr

Radu-Daniel PINTILII
University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT), 4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: pinty_ro@yahoo.com

Daniela ZAMFIR
University of Bucharest – The Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Researches on Territorial Dynamics (CICADIT), 4-12, Regina Elisabeta, 030018, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: irdanniela@yahoo.com

Abstract: Discussing about the highly disadvantaged areas, the majority of authors analysed their internal characteristics and dynamics. We realised that in the very complex development process of this kind of areas it's very important to take into consideration the quality of the regional insertion environments. The territorial delineation of these areas has a referential point the regional framework, explaining why they are not comparable at the national or continental scale. To see the insertion compatibility in the regional environments of the highly disadvantaged areas, a detailed analysis it was occurred on the internal characteristics of each. Using the SWOT analysis, it where revealed for 16 areas the precarity of their internal environment, the demographic, economic, social and cultural problems these areas confront with. At the same time, the study shows a big variability of the external environments, which we retrieve in opportunities and threats more or less evident. This comparative analysis of two types of environments can be useful for a better appreciation of their quality in the implementation process of an appropriate treatment for each highly disadvantaged area.

Key words: underdevelopment, SWOT analysis, highly disadvantaged areas, quality of regional environments

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the studies related to contemporary territorial dynamics show as example the dominance of regional framework, and consequently the conclusions refer to the differences at macro-scale and the ways of decrease at this spatial level (Antonescu, 2001). Otherwise, it is well known that intraregional differences are more obvious than interregional differences; therefore the orientation of studies towards measuring the development process at meso- and micro-scale level

can be extremely useful (Bojnec, 2006). Highly disadvantaged areas are territorial entities which are worth a special attention, as they become real problems within territorial management if they are not assisted.

The present study extends other studies done along a decade, revealing the way the insertion of highly disadvantaged areas in regional environments takes place (Ianoş, 2001). As it was previously specified in a study (Ianoş et all, 2009), the individualization of highly disadvantaged areas represents a real challenge for the scientific community. The multitude of these areas implies, for a systematic analysis, the selection of the most representative areas, which can give some indications about their insertion in regional environments.

After their selection and after emphasizing their main characteristics, the characterization of internal and external environments followed, by means of a SWOT analysis. The internal environment was regarded both in terms of strong points, as well as in terms of weak points each selected area possesses. External environments have had in view both the opportunities and threats as regards the future development of these areas. In the insertion process, the two types of environments must be compatible, and this necessity is ensured by complementarily.

Moreover, a classification of these elements was done, depending on the potential role played, from the perspective of the integration of these highly disadvantaged areas in the regional assembly. The individualization of these classifications led to the prevalence of certain hierarchic types for the highly disadvantaged areas, in correlation to their geographic position, especially in terms of big relief units.

THE GENERAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THE SUBJECT OF HIGHLY DISADVANTAGED AREAS CAN BE GENERALIZED

There are very few studies which centre upon intraregional development, much less upon highly disadvantaged areas. These were defined as a concept with more than a decade ago, supposing the conformation to some distinct criteria (Ianoş, 2001). These were represented by:

- *Spatial contiguity of geographic areas*; the existence of at least 5 main elementary units (communes and towns), with direct neighbourhoods able to allow their territorial aggregation;

- *the average of the global indicator* should be situated 25 % under the level of the global indicator of disadvantaged area where it is enclosed, or over 75 % under the level of the development region;

- *the functional homogeneity* of the disadvantaged area;

- *the value* of at least one of the elementary indicators should be situated *close to or at the minimum level per country or at the macro-regional minimum level*;

- the existence of some *effective breaches* within the territorial development levels;

- *the negative territorial impact* upon all neighbouring areas.

Respecting these criteria supposes both quantitative analyses, as well as qualitative analyses, which must show that, indeed, the respective area detaches from the others by a very low development level, which is alarming, compared to the regional development level.

In the conditions of the revitalization of the poles and the growth centres' theories, as an instrument for the diminution of the process of depression of inequalities between the European Union's states (Salmon, 2008; Lopez-Rodriguez, 2008; Pocol, 2009; Ianoş, 2010a), it using at the level of the highly disadvantaged areas can be a way of treatment. For the present context, resulted from the fact that the big challenge is represented by the gaps between the western and eastern part of the EU, territorial development is much more important at macroscale level (Petrakos, 2008; Eposti, 2008; Szörfy, 2007). Actually, development at more reduced levels refers especially to national, regional, county or local policies (Bischoff and Giosan, 2004; Huber, 2006).

Social cohesion is a European scale challenge, but it must be imposed at local scale, too, with the same strength (Ianoş, 2010b). Besides, a tight cohesion at continental level cannot be done, if there is not accomplished a minimal condition, resulted from the elimination of contradictions regarding revenues at local and inter-local level. This is the reason why the

concentration of researches on the poorest areas can be one of the directions of passing from a utopian vision to a realistic one. Utopia results from a simple statistical calculation of averages. An increase of the GDP per inhabitant at regional level is obtained, if an economic growth in a few points is registered. The average determines development level to be generalised at a very large space, while, in practice, there are some large scale intra-regional discrepancies.

ANALYSIS METHODS

Regional insertion environments are extremely varied, and characteristics of natural, social, economic, built and cultural environments differentiate. The diversity of these sub-environments types explains, in a large measure, the number and intensity of sub-development at the level of intraregional areas (Heller and Ianoş, 2004). The analysis carried on at communal level exceeds the county administrative structures; therefore the appreciation of the development level of each highly disadvantaged area is more complete and realistic.

Field researches within such areas validate, all in all, the individualization of highly disadvantaged areas. Certain limits and the possibility to blank out some extended ones are to be refined. This cut-out is necessary for the process of consequently creating some discontinuities, with the purpose of selective development. However, exaggerated extension of such areas blocks their treatment process.

Field observations complete the general characterisation of highly disadvantaged areas and constitute arguments for re-discussing some of these areas' limits. Practically, travels to all development regions were done, but the detailed observations were done only regarding 16 highly disadvantaged areas. The geographic repartition of these areas was relatively balanced on regions, following the interception of some specific characteristics, too. From each development region there were selected two highly disadvantaged areas by region, excepting the regions North-West and South, from which there were selected three areas by region, having in view their diversity and space extension.

The SWOT analysis applied at the level of each highly disadvantaged area highlights, within strong points, the dominance of agricultural and (sometimes) forest resources and the volume of workpower, and within weak points, it highlights the exaggerated fragmentation of properties, pronounced depopulation and low qualification of workpower. External environments are extremely segregated, so that each region or, in some cases, several regions offer different possibilities. These belong to the structure of urban systems (monocentric, bicentric or polycentric), to accessibility to potential highways, to the existence of some explosive economic development centres and so on. Threats are also varied, referring to natural, political, social or economic-financial factors. It is obvious that such inventory-type analyses, specific to a SWOT analysis of classical type, are continued with matrix analyses, classifying strong and weak points in relation to their impact upon the development of each disadvantaged area.

The data used were synthesized from the last census, from some publications of the National Institute for Statistics, as well as from other statistical works. Most of the information was at the level of the years 2002, respectively 2005.

RESULTS AND COMMENTS

At national level, 40 highly disadvantaged areas were found, mostly situated in the southern part of the country. As it can be noticed, by the way of individualizing highly disadvantaged areas, there is no region which does not contain such areas (map 1). Obviously, their spatial extension mainly concentrates in big poor areas of the country, some of the poorest at the European Union's level.

The main characteristics of these highly disadvantaged areas are represented by the values registered by the population of over 65 years old's weight (P65), only primary school graduates (SCP), non-qualified workers (MN), the weight of population without running water (FAP), the rate of long duration unemployment (SM), infantile mortality (MI), the rate of population growth (RC), inhabitable surface per inhabitant (SL), the population working in agriculture (OA), the

weight of damaged buildings (CD), doctors per inhabitant (ML), the weight of population with secondary school and university education out of the total population of over 21 years old (EDS), pharmacies per 1000 inhabitants (FAR). The synthetical situation of the state of development for these areas comes out from the comparative analysis of the values registered by the indicators above mentioned, grouped on development regions (Table 1).

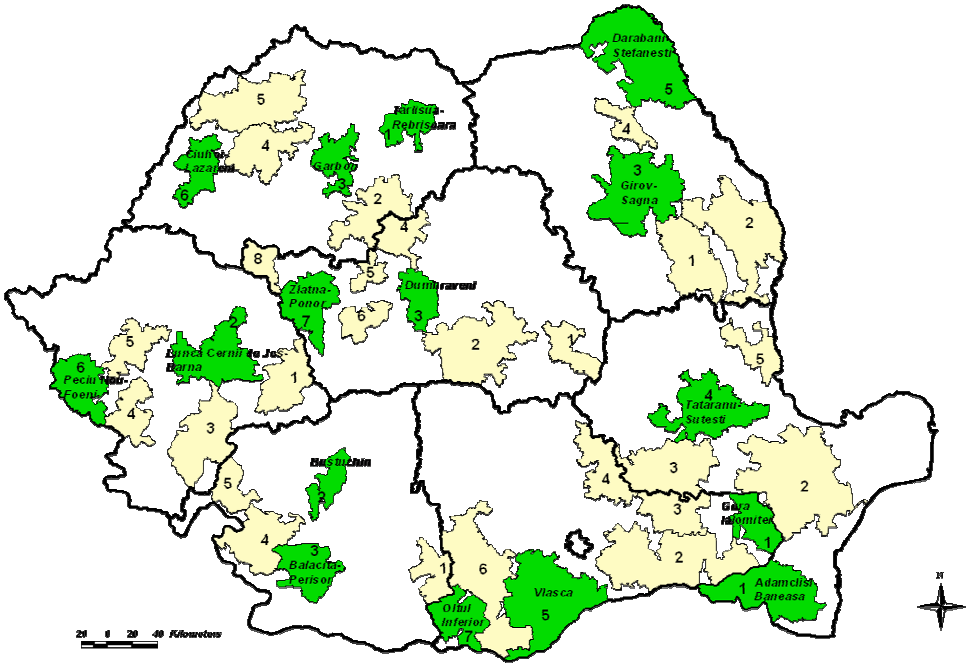

Figure 1. Territorial distribution of the highly disadvantaged areas in Romania

Table 1. Some characteristics of the selected highly disadvantaged areas, per development regions

Area	P65	SCP	MN	FAP	SM	MI	RC	SL	OA	CD	ML	EDS	FAR
North-East Region													
NE3	17.8	37.2	7.7	5.2	4.8	26.2	0.53	12.5	63.6	57.3	0.33	12.8	0.54
NE5	22.3	44.0	2.8	2.0	2.3	30.9	-0.5	12.5	84.7	76.1	0.5	12.0	0.28
South-East Region													
SE1	14.1	41.2	22.1	7.9	5.4	35.5	-1.6	12.9	67.1	75.5	0.3	12.5	0.47
SE4	26.1	39.0	10.1	1.0	4.1	22.3	-4.9	15.5	71.4	67.6	0.4	10.6	0.28
South Region													
S1	15.4	37.7	20.6	6.3	10.3	31.1	-4.2	12.6	49.5	68.6	0.39	12.7	0.0
S5	25.9	46.4	7.8	2.8	2.1	24.8	-13.6	14.3	66.9	74.4	0.31	14.5	0.52
S7	28.4	47.9	8.5	0.48	2.61	18.1	-13.8	14.1	73.3	80.2	0.17	13.6	0.36
South-West Region													
SW2	18.8	32.1	16.4	0.31	6.2	21.8	-6.5	14.4	41.9	0.77	0.42	19.1	0.0
SW3	29.3	44.0	5.9	0.25	1.6	26.6	-9.2	17.3	82.7	56.6	0.22	11.4	0.27
West Region													
W2	22.1	33.1	8.8	6.4	4.3	12.9	-18.2	17.7	62.7	3.4	0.29	15.8	0.29
W6	15.1	31.4	10.1	12.6	2.9	25.4	-4.72	17.1	62.5	77.3	0.66	16.9	1.15
North-West Region													
NW1	14.8	38.2	4.0	5.9	3.0	20.6	-13.1	13.7	84.0	0.23	0.29	8.7	0.23
NW3	28.8	38.4	8.7	3.1	2.6	25.4	-15.4	17.9	60.0	2.8	0.23	13.4	0.0
NW6	20.1	38.7	12.9	1.62	1.63	29.9	-11.2	16.1	42.8	74.3	0.48	14.2	0.26
Centre Region													
C3	13.9	33.6	17.0	6.1	5.2	24.4	-9.48	15.4	38.6	4.2	0.54	15.6	0.77
C7	22.2	32.5	8.78	3.33	3.6	19.1	-13.4	14.4	49.1	0.6	0.49	17.3	0.5

Even the rapid examining of this table leads to some conclusions, which could be extraposed to other highly disadvantaged areas from the same space. Therefore, it is noticed that the most aged spaces are those characterised by a high isolation degree, as well as by a specific demographic model. In each of the development regions there are areas with a high ageing degree, but also with a very low ageing degree, meaning that the influence of this indicator at the value of the global development coefficient is very low.

The very high countryside degree and the distance from the towns are explained by the relatively differentiated values of the weight of the graduates of primary school compared to the total of the population over 15 years old. The high values are usually correlated to the weight of the population of over 65 years old, except for the areas SE1 and C3.

The weight of non-qualified workers in the total of employees is an extremely controversial indicator, having in view the registered values. These values oscillate between 22.1 in the case of SE1 and 2.8 in the highly disadvantaged area NE5. As regards the values of the long term unemployment, these know the highest value in the area S1.

The infantile mortality was the factor which clearly detached these areas within the development regions, its values being extremely high, except for the area W2, S7 and C7, where it does not exceed 20.0 %. These are areas situated nearby some towns, or areas with special cultural models.

The degree of population growth registers differences of mark, within these areas being very obvious the depopulation registered between 1992 and 2002. On the whole, there is a relatively good correlation between the values of this indicator and the population over 65 years old. The only demographic growth in the mentioned interval is registered in the case of the highly disadvantaged area NE3, known as one of the areas in which natural increasing covers internal and external migrations. The highest value belongs to the area W2 (Lunca Cernii de Jos – Bârna), with the most isolated settlements and a strong migration of population in the years 1960-1980.

With small oscillations, weakly differentiated values are registered in the case of indicators regarding inhabitable surface per inhabitant and the weight of the people working in agriculture. In the case of the first indicator, disadvantaged areas from Banat and North-Western Transilvania and Oltenia impose, and in the case of the second indicator there are clearly emphasized three areas, randomly distributed: NE5, SW3 and NW1.

Compared to this general trend of distributing the values of several indicators, the apparition of some areas without pharmacies is surprising, although from the point of view of the number of inhabitants these are unexplainable. Out of the 16 selected areas, three of them lack such facilities which represent a minimal facility. It is true that none of these areas includes at least one small town or a rural locality with an obvious role of local polarization.

Following the field researches done, it resulted that indeed these areas constitute real problem-areas, and their studying must be continued, in order to individualize the concrete possibilities of treatment. In order to accomplish this, there were done estimations related to the existence of some territorial discontinuities at these levels, discontinuities which can be emphasized or diminished in relation to the objectives which can be established, in order to accelerate the development of these areas.

The application of SWOT analysis led to the individualising, for each of the highly disadvantaged areas, of the four categories of elements: strong points, weak points, opportunities and threats. The main objective was the building of 16 matrices-inventories of the main strong points, weak points, opportunities and threats. The number of individualised strong points varied from 11 within the area S1, to 24 within the area C7. Within weak points, with a frequency of 85 %, the low level of highly qualified workpower comes out. The diversity of these characteristics is expressed by the multitude of some restrictive or anthropic natural elements, with unforeseeable dynamics (for example, local extreme climatic phenomena, floods on very restricted basins, the high risk of some social or ethnic conflicts and so on). The most frequent opportunities are those regarding the favorability of general climatic conditions, geographic position and the existence of some circulation arteries. Among threats, the most frequent are earthquakes, floods generated by

the big hydrographic arteries, the exaggerated attractiveness of large cities in relation to young workpower, and the mirage of emigration and so on.

The detailed study for each selected area highlighted a dominance of weak points, which defined an internal environment with a pronounced precarity, depending on demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of each area. Moreover, the individualisation of each area started from criteria related to the contiguity of underdevelopment, the islands of development represented by some towns appearing as territory phenomena integrated in the respective assembly, but which modify the qualitative parameters of the internal environment.

The external environment, which constitutes the general framework of insertion of each highly disadvantaged area, has a big variability of characteristics, which we retrieve in opportunities and threats more or less evident.

Synthetically, the state of the internal and external environment quality on each of the thorough areas taken into account present themselves as it follows:

Table 2. The quality of internal and external environment on highly disadvantaged areas

Area	Internal environment	External environment
NE3	Diversified, precarious, but with degradation influenced by the town Roman	Connections on the Siret axis; frequent floods of the Siret; national urban poles difficult to access
NE5	Pronounced poverty, strong migration, degraded buildings, high infantile mortality, dominant agricultural activities	Reduced accessibility, national urban poles difficult to access, high peripheral degree
SE1	Reduced internal connections, dominance of agricultural activities, very high infantile mortality, degraded inhabitable fund	The development of Constanța as national pole, of European importance, access to the Danube, peripheral degree, abundant droughts
SE4	The dominance of agricultural activities, high ageing degree, difficult connections	The consolidation of the conurbation Galați-Braila, abundant droughts
S1	Favourable internal connections, water resources, diversity of economic activities, degraded inhabitable fund	Accessibility to the river Danube, to the Sun Highway and to the main railway; extreme climatic phenomena
S5	Pronounced rurality; the town Giurgiu could become a regional development pole, water resources, high degree of isolation for most of the settlements	Limited accessibility to the major infrastructure, Danube access, the existence of Bucharest at approximately 100 km.
S7	High ruralism degree; the town Turnu Măgurele as local polarization centre, industrial activities in pronounced decline	Limited access to the Danube, pronounced peripheral degree, extreme climatic phenomena, main railway.
SW2	Energetic resources, degraded relief with effects upon local economy, limited water resources	High isolation degree, fluctuations from the national energetic policy
SW3	The dominance of agricultural resources, high ageing degree, short/ unbalanced water resources	The existence of the town Craiova nearby, extreme climatic phenomena, pertinent agricultural policy
W2	Degraded local infrastructure, pronounced demographic decrease, forest and agricultural resources	Limited accessibility, the lack of a specific policy for mountainous areas, frequent floods on small rivers
W6	High agricultural resources, high infantile mortality, high degree of degradation of the inhabitable fund	Cross-border cooperation, accessibility to major infrastructures, surface earthquakes
NW1	Forest and agricultural resources, mine resources, young population, accentuated depopulation	High isolation, the lack of some policies for the protection of the mountainous area, extreme climatic phenomena
NW3	Limited agricultural resources, energetic resources, reduced internal connections, abrupt relief, high ageing	The increase of the influence of the town Cluj-Napoca, policies of agriculture revitalization, the Transilvania Highway
NW6	Geo-thermal and agricultural resources, modest major infrastructure, very high infantile mortality	The potential influence of the towns Oradea and Salonta, policies specific for non-conventional energies, potential of cross-border cooperation
C3	High energetic resources, abrupt relief, local floods, the role of polarizing centre of the town Dumbrăveni	The revitalization of the town Mediaş, the improvement of the major infrastructure which crosses Transilvania, new energetic policies.
C7	Mine and forest resources, accentuated depopulation, very modest infrastructure, local polarization centres, important agrotouristic potential	High isolation degree, the lack of some pertinent policies for the development of the mountainous space, extreme climatic phenomena, weak polarization of big cities

The characterisation of the two types of environments for each highly disadvantaged area created the possibility to appreciate their quality for the subsequent treatment, which could be implemented.

If the SWOT analysis usually stops at the phase of inventory of the main components, with a description of them, it was considered useful to pass to the next stage, respectively to the classification of strong and weak points, as definitive elements in establishing strategic objectives for the treatment of these areas. Their classifying was done depending on their importance in the process of elimination sub-development. In this respect, there were two clear paths: to determine the coefficients of correlation between the main strong and weak points or to apply a classical descriptive demarche, in which determination relationships are highlighted.

These classifications were done for each of the selected areas, taking into account the particularity of the internal environment and especially the elementary characteristics of them. Generally, the characteristics of physical and anthropic environment feel the strong influence of geographic conditions of each highly disadvantaged area. The very strong relationship between the local particularity of environment and the classification by importance of strong and weak points make difficult to present synthetically some convincing elements about these hierarchies.

There can be generally mentioned that, among the strong points which were identified in the highly disadvantaged areas situated in the mountainous spaces, there are to be mentioned, in the order of importance, the following elements: demographic potential, mineral resources, forest fund, touristic potential, animals' breeding, the population's level of qualification someway higher, water resources, population's hospitality, the incomes' level, the quality of the inhabitable fund, the continuity of the private property form. In a hilly space, highly disadvantaged areas are characterised by the following hierarchy of strong points: energetic resources, important demographic potential, partially specialised in extracting industry, agricultural resources, locally favourable to fruit-growing and wine culture, dense network of settlements. A highly disadvantaged area from the field usually presents the following hierarchy of strong points: diversified agricultural resources, animals' breeding, moderate demographic potential, large human settlements, local processing industry for agricultural and animal products, extracting industry (oil and natural gases).

As regards weak points, hierarchies vary depending on the main relief areas. Therefore, in the mountainous areas the hierarchy is as follows: reduced accessibility degree inside respective areas, the closing or diminution of activity within industrial enterprises, precarious condition of infrastructure, the multitude of small and scattered settlements, accentuated tendency of ageing, increasing migration rate, the absence of the centres for collecting animal products. Highly disadvantaged areas from the hilly spaces are characterised by the following hierarchy of weak points: soils' instability, massive depopulation, excessive degree of properties' fragmentation, very precarious condition of local infrastructure, the absence of some centres of collecting agricultural products, the inheritance of a degraded environment. In the field area, highly disadvantaged areas are characterised by the following deficiencies: high weight of agricultural surfaces which are not cultivated, intense depopulation, precarious local infrastructure, high ageing degree, weak organisation of agricultural markets, the absence of the centres of local preparation of agricultural products, local climatic phenomena with an impact upon development, the absence of water resources, especially in the dry season.

This description of the main hierarchies noticed following the SWOT analysis reveals the territorial difference and the intrinsic diversity of the problems these areas confront with. Their individualisation in the conditions of passing to tracking down the main internal disfunctionalities may lead to the fundamentation of some viable solutions of treatment of these "territorial poverty pockets" (Ianoş and Heller, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

Highly disadvantaged areas are the effects of a historical evolution of regional and local environments, being tightly connected to the isolation degree. The reduced accessibility was the main cause of the individualization of these real anomalies within the territorial distribution of

development. In the last period there can be noticed an increase of the impoverishment degree of these areas, along with the more accentuated depopulation (by internal and international migrations) and with their complete disregard within the regional territorial management.

Due to the fact that each highly disadvantaged area is individualized, taking into account the specific intervals of the distribution of the general development indicator, recorded at the level of each development region, these cannot be compared at national level. Nevertheless, elementary indicators show that the poorest regions (North-East and South) hold the less developed areas, at national level, if we regard them in terms of the real values registered by the respective indicators.

The process of these areas' territorial insertion is different, showing that highly disadvantaged areas from the developed regions have higher chances to rapidly integrate in a territorial assembly, without constituting a problem area. The elements presented in this study can constitute a model of interpreting the relationships between these areas and the regional environments in general.

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