RURAL ECONOMY IN BEIUŞ LAND: PERSPECTIVES AND RISKS

Claudiu FILIMON *
University of Oradea, Universităţii Street, no. 1, Oradea, Romania,
e-mail: filimonpunct@yahoo.fr

Luminiţa FILIMON
University of Oradea, Universităţii Street, no. 1, Oradea, Romania,
e-mail: palelumi@yahoo.com

Valentin NEMEŞ
University of Oradea, Universităţii Street, no. 1, Oradea, Romania,
e-mail: nemes_vali@yahoo.com

Abstract: Beiuş Land is a rural area by excellence, dominated by the small and medium size villages, with a shaped rural economy, at least until communism was enforced. The communist period was a turning point in the evolution of these localities through the disappearance of private land ownership and the implementation of large industrial units. Under these circumstances, the economy of the rural area was affected to the detriment of the industrial activities, the economic activities specific to this area thus becoming an annex of the industrial activities. The change of the political and social-economic regime after 1990 brought into discussion the economic identity of Beiuş area, as a result of the restructuring of the industrial sector. Thus, the rural localities were compelled to identify those component elements of the economic system to support the commercial agents in the market economy and to ensure a long term development, based on existing resources and to capitalize the local human potential. By taking all this into account, the study analyzes the present condition of the economy of Beiuş area, by highlighting the perspectives and risks of the traditional rural economy through its adaptation to the consecutive social-economic mutations. The performed analysis is leading to the conclusion that the sustainable capitalization of the economic elements specific to Beiuş Land, supported by an integrated territorial strategy of development, constitutes one of the most viable ways of economic development of the rural area.

Key words: rural economy, Beiuş Land, perspectives, risks

INTRODUCTION

The Beiuş rural area has not capitalized on many geographic studies on its economy, most of them focused on the physical component. For the communist period, we should mention the study performed by Rusu Viorica (1977), which depicts the economic system of Beiuş Land at its peak, at the end of the 70s. In recent years, the „re-discovery” of the „land” type areas as geographic regions specific to Romania has led to the study of this area from regional geography
perspective, being tackled elements of human geography or components of the rural economy of this area (Filimon, 2007, 2008; Filimon et al., 2010, 2011a; Filimon & Filimon, 2011).

Up to the middle of 20th century, the Beiuş rural area showed some elements of authenticity, one of them being its viable rural economy (Rusu, 1977, Ştefănescu, 2001). This allowed the secular evolution of Beiuş Land, following an economic pattern of „self-sufficiency”, where the goods were produced locally in the neighbouring villages, and in the fair of Beiuş the products were exchanged and commercialized between the villages. The rural settlements of Beiuş Land had a specific economic specialization, dependent on the local resources and present at the fairs in Beiuş and other neighbouring centres (Ştefănescu, 2001).

The communist regime had deeply modified the rural economy and the secular specialization of the Beiuş villages through collectivization and industrialization. In relation to the general industrial progress, the small local entrepreneurs (craftsmen) were competed by series products. Although the majority of the traditional crafts has been preserved up to present, the amount of the craftsmen has dramatically decreased, the local products mainly being handicrafts (Filimon et al., 2011a).

The mutations of the entire Romanian rural area after the fall of communism did not spare the Beiuş Land area, which was deeply affected in the first years after 1989, both economically and demographically. The most disturbing element was the significant economic drop of the towns located in the depression, with units mainly pertaining to the extractive industry or related to it (Filimon et al., 2011b). The rural area, which had provided labour and raw material for these units, was affected (figure 1).

![Figure 1. Beiuş Land. Rural economy from authenticity to loss of identity](image)

The lack of new economic perspectives, these mutations have triggered ambiguity and uncertainty, the rural area being at present in search of viable solutions which should ensure the future existence, and also a certain social-economic identity (Zamfir et al., 2009).

**OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

It could be considered that agriculture is one of the main economic activities in rural areas. This is no longer true, except for certain regions of Greece and Spain, as well as for central and eastern European countries like Poland and Romania (Downey, 2006). On a European scale, industrial employment is in decline, but some industries choose to establish themselves in rural areas for reasons of security, access to resources, the price of land and/or locational preferences of the leading staff. These industries may, however, remain dependent on transport, energy (e.g. high voltage electricity) and telecommunications networks. In most regions, the rural economy is highly diversified. As an example, in England, agriculture alone accounts for just 4% of the rural economy (Gallent et al., 2008).

Romania has got various particularities of the sustainable development in the farming sector, concerning poverty in the countryside, scarcity of productive technologies, practicing subsistence
agriculture, excessively cutting of the farm land estate. In the same time, there are also some advantages concerning the old traditions of Romanian rural economy, which are based on the ecological technologies and the high productive potential of the agricultural lands (Burja & Burja, 2008).

The intent of this study is the analysis of the economy of the rural area of Beiuş, through the sustainable capitalization of the specific economic elements. It aims at obtaining some answers to the questions regarding the durability of the economic identity of the rural area, by identifying the economic perspectives and risks in these localities. In order to achieve this goal, there were selected several relevant markers, where the data was had been provided. Dependent on the significant weight of agriculture, the first marker was the land stock and the agricultural land structure. The following markers apply to the human component and contain: labour, number of employees and their distribution on activity sectors. The third set of markers is analyzing the amount of commercial agents and their structure on activity sectors. These markers were analyzed at the commune level (no village data) by using the existing statistics up to 2011, given by the Bihor County Statistics Department.

Although the subsoil resources are an essential component of the economic system, they were not analyzed since they are not relevant to the rural economy, them defining other activity sectors specific to the rural urban.

**USED INDICATORS ANALYSIS**

**Land stock and the agricultural land structure**

Of the total surface of Beiuş Land, respectively 195 547 ha, the rural area covers 181 700 ha, respectively 92,9%, the rest being urban. At commune level, there are differences when it comes to the land stock, affected by the historical-political factors with a key role in the delimitation of the administrative area of each commune.

![Figure 2. Structure of the land stock (2011)](Source: Bihor County Statistics Department)
We consider that the most important are the land stock components (structures) which grant its quality. As regards the extent of the land stock, we observe a great diversity of the communes, with rates varying from a maximum of 34,646 ha in Budureasa, and a minimum of 2,440 ha in Pocola. The land stock structure highlights a balance between its two components, agriculture and forestry, which share equal areas in the rural space (figure 2).

*The agricultural stock* represents 47.4% (8,620 ha) of the total area, with higher rates in the communes to the right side of the depression (Răbagani, Pocola, Drăgănești, Buntești), and lower rates in the area in the vicinity of the mountains. The largest agricultural area is found in Drăgănești commune, 77%, opposed to the minimum of 22.4% in Pietroasa.

*The growing stock* is represented by the 87,172 ha of forest, respectively 47.9% of the total area of the communes. The highest weight is found in the communes closer to the mountainous area: Pietroasa, Budureasa, Criștoru de Jos, Finiș, Târcaia. Pietroasa commune holds most of the forest area in the depression, i.e. 15,175 ha, representing 73.8% of the administrative area. The smallest areas covered by forest belong to the communes of Pocola 4% and Răbagani 6%.

The flowery component of the growing stock, of economic importance, is characterized by the dominant deciduous trees, mainly beech, more than 70% (DSB, 2012), the rest being the conifers, especially spruce.

The agricultural land structure

Is important through the development of some economic activities. As one may notice, in the agricultural stock, with equal rates, is the arable land, (40.1%) and the grass land (46.3%), whilst the hay land covers 11,334 ha, respectively 13.1%. At the level of administrative territorial unit, the condition varies based on the geographic location within the relief units specific to Beiuș Land, with changes in the weight (figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Structure of the agricultural area (2011)
(Source: Bihor County Statistics Department)
The arable area covers 34,614 ha, 40.1% of the total agricultural stock, in six communes (Bunesti, Draghanești, Pocola, Pomezeu, Răbăgană, Uileacu de Beiuș). The highest percentage is found in Pocola commune, 72.9%, and the lowest is found in Budureasa, 9.1%.

The grass land covers 39,959 ha, 46.3%. At the level of communes, one should notice that in four of them, the percentage is higher than 55% (Budureasa, Pietroasa, Criștoru de Jos, Lunca).

The commune with the highest percentage of grass land is Budureasa (10,211 ha), representing 86.3% of the agricultural area. The smallest areas of grass land are found in Răbăgană, only 24.4% of the agricultural area.

The hay land in Beiuș rural area covers 11,334 ha, representing 13.1% of the agricultural area. In five communes it exceeds 20%: Criștoru de Jos, Câmpani, Cărcină, Rieni and Târcaia. The rest of the communes (4) have an average percentage, or even less (other 10). The extremes are represented by Criștoru de Jos with a maximum of 29.2% and Pocola, with the lowest grass land area, only 3.8%. The land stock of the rural area of Beiuș Land, balanced when it comes to forest and agricultural areas, is an important resource of the rural economy and, through a balanced economic capitalization, it can contribute to the sustainable development of the rural area. The agricultural area, lacking the soil quality (Ștefănescu, 2001), compensates with the large areas of grass and hay land which allows an ecological agriculture based on stock farming.

Labour, number of employees and their distribution on activity sectors

Labour, both through its quantity and quality component, is one of the markers which determines the economic development of an area. The amount of labour is directly influenced by the demographic dimension of the settlements and the degree of aging/rejuvenation of the population (Filimon & Filimon, 2011).

![Figure 4](image-url)  
**Figure 4.** Labour weight of the total population (2011)  
(Source: Bihor County Statistics Department)
For 2011, in the rural area of Beiuș Land, the working population is up to 35,302 persons, respectively 65.5% of the total rural population and 45.1% of the total population of Beiuș Land. In this regard, we can say for sure that the labour in Beiuș Land is consistent.

At territorial level, one should notice a balanced condition of the labour, in 17 communes being at an average rate (figure 4.). The maximum rate is recorded in Câmpani commune, where the working population is 70.4%, i.e. 1778 persons. Only in three communes, the working population shows a percentage lower than the average, Pomezeu, Răbăgană, and Şoimi, and the minimum rate is found in Pomezeu, only 58.3%. This situation is understandable through the increased degree of demographic aging (Filimon & Filimon, 2011).

As regards the economic development, an important role is played by the labour involved in a paid activity, which also supports the economy. In order to highlight this aspect, we analyzed the number and distribution of the employees on activity sectors in Beiuș Land.

According to the statistics of 2011, of the total working population in the rural area of Beiuș Land, the employed population represents 14.9%, i.e. 5393 persons. This rate, much more under the average recorded at country and county level and is around 20% of the active population, raises the question regarding the functionality and perspectives of the economic system of the rural area of Beiuș Land. Among the communes, there are big differences (figure 5) as regards the employed population, which are the result of the changes in the economic system of each commune.

The setting up or the dissolution of several economic units triggers fluctuations of the employed population rates. Furthermore, there are cases when not all the employees of a commune are active in the economic units of the respective commune. As regards the average recorded rate,
one can observe, that most communes follow this direction, with the exception of few ones. Thus, most of the employees are recorded in Rieni commune, 58.2%, followed by Drăganesti with 35.9%. The high rates of employees in the two communes is due to the presence on their territory, of several industrial platforms which absorb the local labour.

Six communes record low rates of employed population, under 10%. They are Budureasa, Cristioru de Jos, Lazuri de Beiuș, Remetea, Tarcaia and Uileacu de Beiuș which ranks last with only 6.1% employees. One possible explanation might be the existence of a larger segment of the active population in informal economy (Neef et al., 2007).

The structure of employed population in activity sectors reflects the territorial distribution of the economic units and their profile. The analysis of the employees’ distribution on activity sectors highlights a balance between the industrial and services sector. The two sectors, with 47.8% respectively 48.9%, are equally represented (figure 6). Although it is a rural area, the activities specific to the primary sector are only 3.3% of the total amount of employees. The low percentage is given by the fact that, for the time being, the activities in the primary sector are not regarded as profitable and it is the sector where the informal economy is well represented.

![Figure 6. Structure of employees on activity sectors (2011)](Source: Bihor County Statistics Department)

The industry employees are well represented in the two communes with industrial platforms (Rieni 88.3% and Drăganesti 69.3%), followed by other neighbouring communes or closer to the urban area (Bunesti, Lunca and Pocola), with over 35%. This category of employees is poorly represented in Cârpienet (0.7%), as a result of the lack of such activities within the commune.

The service employees are more in the communes of Lazuri de Beiuș (97%), Cristioru de Jos, Tarcaia and Uileacu de Beiuș, each with 96%. The opposite situation is found in Rieni, with
10%. We should also mention that this sector is dominated by public services (administration, education, health care), also trade and transport.

The agriculture employees, surprisingly few (179 persons), are only 3.3% of the total amount of employed population. This relatively low figure indicates that, for the time being, the primary sector is not a viable paid activity. The highest rates are found in the communes of Roșia and Remetea, with 13%, respectively 12%.

**Commercial agents and their structure on activity sectors**

These two indicators highlight the economic profile of the analyzed area. We should mention that, if before 1990 there had been well shaped profile of the commercial agents, as a result of the planned economic policy, after that there would be major changes in the functional profile of the commercial agents. The explanation is that the efforts made to find a profitable economic activity triggered consecutive changes of the activity profile.

The commercial agents in 2011 in the rural area of Beiuș Land are 957 (LFR, 2011). Each commune has an average of approximately 45 commercial agents, respectively 17.6 commercial agents to every 1,000 inhabitants, a rate close to the one recorded in the entire rural area of Romania, 20.3/1,000 inhabitants. Evidently, the amount of commercial agents in a commune is influenced by the number of villages belonging to it, by the amount of population, its economic past and geographical location. This explains the large number of commercial agents recorded in Drăganesti and Buntești (133, respectively 102), both having numerous villages and a very good central geographical location, in the depression hearth and a near-by industrial activity. The opposite is the commune of Cristioru de Jos, with only five villages and 19 commercial agents.

The functional profile of the commercial agents highlights all the drawbacks of the actual economic system in the rural area of Beiuș Land (figure 7).

![Figure 7. Functional profile of the commercial agents (2011)](Source: Bihor County Statistics Department)
Thus, of the total amount of commercial agents, most of them (832 representing 95.2%) are active in the services sector; mainly commerce. This situation is a general characteristic of the Romanian rural area, and not specific only to the area of Beiuș Land. The commercial activities meeting some basic human needs are the most accessible to the local commercial agents. These activities are completed by transport and other adjacent services (maintenance, repairings etc.).

The commercial agents active in the industrial sector, although less numerous (82, representing 8.6% of the total amount of commercial agents) give consistency to the economy of the rural area, by being the main suppliers of goods and having a large number of employees. Most commercial agents with industrial profile focus their activity on the production of commercial goods (food, refreshments, spirits etc.), wood processing and footwear and clothing industry. These are well represented in Lunca (11 units) Câmpani (10 units), Buntești (9 units), Pietroasa (8 units). We can draw the conclusion that these units have few employees, most of them being involved in wood processing.

The commercial units belonging to the primary sector are the fewest, 43, with a very small amount for a rural area, but explainable through the limited agricultural potential of the Beiuș Land area (Filimon, 2007). The most dominant are the commercial units based on berry and herb picking and the primary wood processing, favoured by the location in the mountainous area.

DEBATES AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the aforementioned markers presents a pretty clear image of the rural economy of Beiuș Land.

Ștefănescu, B. (2001, p. 46) states that „agriculture has been the main reason for living for the inhabitants of Beiuș Land”, considering that „the economic diversity...is nothing but the result of the poor results in agriculture” (Ștefănescu, 2001, p. 46).

Thus, the main occupational activity in the life of these inhabitants, from old times up to now, has been agriculture. On the whole, the Beiuș Land area is not exactly restrictive, but not so favourable to an efficient agriculture, due to the less fertile soil.

The inability of the Beiuș territorial system to support a viable agriculture was evident since the 18th century when, facing the demographic „boom”, agriculture was no longer able to support the inhabitants, the villagers turning to the process of specializing in handicrafts (Ștefănescu, 2001; Filimon, 2007).

The present economic system of Beiuș Land is still strongly unstable, with reversed hierarchy and in search of its own identity. The most eloquent example are the activities performed in the tertiary sector, specific to a well developed economy, in relation with the economic activities specific to a rural area, in general. Unfortunately, these tertiary activities are only side activities, with a reduced impact on labour and local economy, not being able to support the rural economy in this area.

The questions arising from this analysis are partly rhetorical and nostalgic over the past, others come with answers from the recent years' reality and with solutions for the near or far future. What are the perspectives of the rural economy in Beiuș Land area? Which economic activities can resuscitate the local economy? Here are two questions to which we try to give answers that should outline some coordinates for the surpassing of the present difficulties.

Where perspectives are concerned, we can firmly state that, if the decisional actors should responsibly implicate themselves (national authorities, local administrations and population as service-delivery orientated and beneficiary), the rural economy of Beiuș area can be rejuvenated. Although the natural fertility of Beiuș Land was not a favourable one, agriculture has been largely practised here, in spite of the low economy efficiency. Since the European Union encourages the ecological agriculture and sustainable development, we think that this is the undeveloped chance of this area (and other „land” type areas, where these activities are largely practised without their inhabitants' awareness of the real potential of their products on the European market). There is a need for a strategy in this respect, of an initiative to support the rural communities in the process of developing an ecological agriculture, other than the subsistence one. Nevertheless, one should notice some initiatives to support the local producers of vegetables and fruit (there already are
projects of this kind (MADR, 2012). Another initiative is represented by the programs of encouragement of the producer groups (DAB, 2012) which could contribute to the economic revival, especially with the high potential of the labour in the depression. The encouragement of the development of the traditional economic activities specific to the rural area of Beiuș Land is a viable perspective for the future. They can be doubled by activities in the service field, the tourist ones mainly, which can contribute to the diverse work offer and a better capitalization of the human potential, mainly the feminine one. The preparation of producer groups in the stock farming field could support the capitalization of the hay and grass land potential, as opposed to the increased number of commercial agents that practice the growing stock exploitation, not viable on a long term.

Moreover, by taking into account the history of the „land” type area, the preservation of the traditions, local customs and the manufacture of handicrafts, one should encourage their economic capitalization, as a major tourist attraction (mainly for foreign tourists). No doubt that the handicrafts industry can become a viable side field, and the products (hope chests, woven fabrics, earthenware etc.) can represent a landmark of the rural Beiuș Land area, components of its „land brand”. The land stock is the one that ensures the sustainability of such activities. When all these economic perspectives find a transposition in the territorial reality, we shall consider that the Beiuș rural area has taken a normal direction which should offer the possibility to define and perpetuate a sustainable economic identity.

Where the risks that threaten the economy are concerned, the highest ones are those related to the low degree of the existing natural and human potential capitalization, with a major impact on the entire rural economy.

As regards the land stock, there are several risks. One of them is the high pressure on the growing stock through the numerous units of wood exploitation. On the long term, it can trigger both environmental and social issues through the economic dependency on this activity type. Other risks are related to the low capitalization of the grass land which can lead towards the degradation of the grass land, thus, stock farming lacking an extremely valuable resource. The absence of maintenance works, due to the lack of capitalization, triggers the appearance of anthills, shrubs etc. The same mechanism is visible for the waste land, due the absence of the workers who had left for a better living in other European Union countries. This also triggers the breach in the bond between the human and his land.

Where labour is concerned, the highest risk is represented by the high discrepancy between the existing human potential and the employed population. This situation can trigger, by lacking viable local alternatives, a migration of labour towards more attractive geographical areas. The present global economic recession can also trigger the return of the working population, a situation that should be capitalized in the Beiuș Land area.

Another risk is the tendency to split the economic activities into three components, which is not viable on the long term, mainly through the increase of the commercial activities more than the need for such services. Without minimizing the importance of this sector, this split of the economic activities can trigger the abandonment of some traditional activities (stock farming and plant growing), which on the long term, are far more sustainable, both as an economic activity that capitalizes the local raw resources, and through the goods and the financial value. For that matter, the high weight of the commercial activities highlights the lack of viable solutions, of alternatives of sustainable economic development and the drawbacks of the enterprise in the rural area.

As a conclusion, analyzed through the rural economy, the present rural background of Beiuș Land is defined by a deep confusion, instability, a confused search of a viable economic identity which should ensure its inhabitants the perspective of a better life.

The situation is maintained by the major structural deficiencies, the lack of national policies to stimulate the rural economy and the tendency to disregard the primary sector as a viable economic alternative for the local population.

A significant element, not capitalized in the Beiuș Land area, is represented by the preservation of the customs and traditions, belonging to its „land” type area quality. The
tendencies to direct the European regional policies towards the territorial development based on local specific, we hope that will ensure, at national level, the capitalization of the identity of this area, together with the development of the local population enterprise.

Acknowledgments
This contribution represents results from the following research project PN II, TE_287, 75/2010

REFERENCES

Burja C., Burja V. (2008), Adapting the Romanian rural economy to the European agricultural policy from the perspective of sustainable development, MPRA Paper No. 7989.


Submitted: Revised: Accepted and published online
Octomber 01, 2012 November 02, 2012 November 22, 2012