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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, GENOM, CYBERSPACE AND SPACE – CONTEMPORARY THREATS TO THE SECURITY OF THE STATE AND NATIONS

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Abstract: Among many contemporary threats, which include threats in the military, economic or social sphere, issues related to threats in cyberspace, artificial intelligence (AI), genetic modifications of the human genome and threats related to with space exploration. This work, based on a qualitative analysis of the literature, aims to identify selected, often overlooked and not functioning in the common awareness of contemporary threats to state security. The analysis undertaken allows us to conclude that an important factor contributing to the increase in the level of threat to the security of the state and nation today are the contemporary "black swans" in the security sphere, the weakness of political leadership, unknown directions of AI development and changes in the human genome, threats related to the outer space exploration and threats in cyberspace.

Key words: artificial intelligence (AI), cybersecurity, cyberspace, genome, national security, outer space

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The beginning of the 16th century, the Amazon is inhabited by Indians. They run the primal economy in our understanding. They live according to nature. But they too, like every human society inhabiting the world, have their problems. Each of these communities' cares about their daily lives and ensuring the safety of themselves, family, clan, tribe. And the world of the Indians, despite knowing the secrets of the jungle, is full of dangers. The everyday, known and tamed, include deadly animals, attacks by neighboring tribes, river floods, hunger, diseases, injuries while hunting or death in childbirth. However, among the greatest threats are repeated attacks by the Incas. Newcomers from distant mountain valleys kill the defending inhabitants, kidnap others into slavery and

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force the rest to pay tribute. These are all very important issues for everyday security, and experienced chieftains claimed that they were even crucial. After all, these were and are the pillars of their tribal security - food (economics) and reducing the external threat (military). Beyond the perception of the Indians, maybe it was one of the Pano tribes living on the Ucayali, maybe the Guarani on Paraguay, or maybe the Pirahã from the Maici River, there was knowledge about Europe, Ch. Columbus, caravels, the causes of geographical discoveries and F. Pizzaro. Apart from a few shamans, they cared little about conquering the Inca Empire. They probably didn't even realize it at first. In this region, the circulation of information at that time left much to be desired. The Indians in the Amazon lived on with a little more security - the Incas stopped their invasions. Then there will be strange white people in dark costumes - it was the Jesuits who set up their reductions in Paraguay, and the Guarani Indians were slowly getting used to the new civilization. The level of security for a while (from the point of view of historical processes) stabilized again. The Jesuits disappeared as a result of decisions made in Europe that were incomprehensible to the Indians, and the Amazon was divided into a number of states and it was dangerous again.

Wars on the continent between new states fighting in different political constellations brought nothing but death, destruction and new frontiers to the Indians. The economic boom, incomprehensible to the Indians, only caused them problems. The boom for sugar cane, coffee, and later rubber resulted in the expansion of plantations and pushing the Indians further and further into the Amazon, where they encountered the original inhabitants with whom they had to fight for their lives. New, unknown diseases decimated the warriors, and some tribes simply died out.

Other Indians, living in the early 21st century areas that were allocated to them, for example, by the Brazilian government, still do not understand why the increase in subsidies for ecological fuels in the European Union causes them to take away their land and create new oil plantations. Or replacing the Amazon forests, which provide shelter, building material and food, for pastures for cattle exported by hacienders. Indians were forced to work, kidnapped, their defenders killed, and entrepreneurs motivated by the desire for profit grew in strength. The institutions appointed to defend the Indians did not work or acted too slowly to really protect them. Until finally the Indians understood the danger that threatened them and came out of the jungle. In this way, the so-called civilized world found out about them (Rogacin, 2014). But nothing has changed (Wallace, 2020). It was too late to counteract the impending danger.

The aim of the undertaken works and analysis of the literature is an attempt to indicate the importance and role of new threats in the contemporary system of national security and the state, although already described in the literature on the subject. It seems that we are not prepared for possible threats from outer space, cyberspace, AI development or changes in the human genome. In addition, the black swan phenomenon known from economics may become a key factor for new threats. Just like the covid epidemic, the decisions of state leaders, or the course of the war in Ukraine.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND STATE SECURITY

In the rich Polish literature on the subject, you can find a number of works more or less holistically (Korzeniowski, 2016; Kitler, 2011; 2019; 2020) addressing the issue of the definition of security (Stańczyk, 1996; 2011), its essence (Lutostański, 2017), the theoretical approach to the threat (Lubiewski and Dróżdż, 2020), its classifications, sources and types (Ciekanowski, 2010) and spatial profiles (Wendt, 2008). Equally numerous works indicate the importance of the country's economy and defense issues for ensuring its security. In addition to the issues fundamental to security already mentioned, the changing realities of life, techniques, scientific discoveries, changes in political constellations, the impact and changes in geopolitical location, new media, fake news show us new spheres from which we may encounter a threat (Bełza, 2011).

Along with the recurring role and importance, perhaps only in the political and propaganda version, we place more and more emphasis on the narrowed concept of security. Narrowed by adopting the concept of nations and functioning in the literature as national security (Bąk, 2010). As a layman, it is difficult to understand such a narrowing of the concept of security by adding the term "national" to it. What about states inhabited by nations with conflicting interests and no common sense of security, such as Israel; Rwanda, Turkey, or Russia, or those threatened by national minorities (Wendt, 2021), not to name too many. This may also result from the research paradigm that has not been fully developed (Bombała, 2017). Of course, they can be considered useful in the field of didactics, ordering or pragmatically assume that we have / should have the greatest influence on national security, but my understanding of national security includes, moreover, according to the literature on the subject, which is consistent with the formal logic, the entirety of contemporary threats to each country (Ciekanowski et al., 2016).

And now you can go back to the Amazon Indians for a moment. Maybe they knew, maybe they didn't, but they certainly weren't prepared for unknown threats. Another question is whether, if they knew, they would be able to defend themselves, take care of their safety, the safety of the tribe (nation). We in contemporary Poland, more broadly in Europe or in the world, research, track, protect, build walls, in a word, we try to counteract possible everyday or known threats, just like the Indians mentioned above. We pay relatively little attention to potential threats already present in the world. Present not only in literature, but increasingly threatening us in the real world.

Among the many contemporary threats, which are investigated by numerous state (nation?) institutions, it seems that researchers, and above all, the state, which in the current reality is responsible, well, let it sound grandiose, for the security of the nation, enjoy relatively little interest issues related to the threats brought by the threats present in cyberspace, artificial intelligence, genetic manipulation of the human genome and threats resulting from the broadly understood exploitation of space. Of course, I do not underestimate everyday threats, economic (Stańczyk, 2020), energy (Mrozowska et al., 2021), political (increasing role and importance of authoritarian systems), military, threats related to the interaction of the media and democracy (Adamowski and Jas, 2004), political and electoral systems (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020; Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020a; Borkowski et al., 2021; Wendt, 2021; Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2022) or the spread of new diseases. In a word, threats that are increasingly known to us, threats that we deal with better or worse, but still. The purpose of this part of the work, in accordance with its title, is to draw attention to potential threats, the real effects of which we have not yet encountered in everyday life. Just like the Amazon Indians, who met the conquistadors relatively late, but whose influence, despite the lack of it, threatened the lives or even annihilated many of the Indian tribes.

MATERIAL, METHODS AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

The empirical material for the work undertaken was collected on the basis of information from the mass media about potential contemporary threats. It also includes classic, existing and potential threats to the broadly understood security of the state and nation, known from the literature (Ciekanowski, 2010). The study uses case analysis methods and methods typical of security sciences (Sienkiewicz, 2010). According to the literature, most of the methods used in the social sciences and humanities can also be used in the analysis of state and national security (Mróz-Jagiełło and Wolanin, 2013; Czupryński et al., 2017). Similarly in the field of international security and space superpower as well as cyber security (Bógdał-Brzezińska and Gawrycki, 2003; Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020b). Qualitative content analysis was used to examine existing but also omitted content to show significant or unspoken (disregarded) risks. The work also uses the method of comparative analysis, confronting the effects of response to events defined as threats.

The most important of the limitations of the undertaken research is the problem of access to information crucial for state security and defining threats, which by definition belong to classified information resources. Another limitation is the wide range of topics, which is basically impossible to present the whole issue. An attempt to solve the latter problem is a general approach to the subject, the work is a pilot study, constituting an outline of the subject and an indication of the direction of future research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Threats related to cyberspace

Threats related to cyberspace are already well recognized and have a rich literature (Bógdał-Brzezińska and Gawrycki, 2003). They already concern our everyday life, although not all of us pay attention to it yet. Cyberattacks on bank accounts, enterprises or exchanges are already commonplace. The arms race in cyberspace is already underway, cyber battles and wars are being waged (Kozłowski, 2014; Boyte, 2017). Constant surveillance is underway, and G. Orwell's prophecies in China are slowly becoming a real reality. Despite the conducted research (Nikhita Reddy and Ugander Reddy, 2014; Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020c) and the implementation of preventive measures, the press / media more and more often report new hacker attacks (Bendovschi, 2015) on important institutions, and it is only a matter of time before computer programs are used to paralyze company, city or Internet network in a region or country. An equally important battlefield for maintaining security is the issue of shaping the geopolitical dimension and the impact of one state (formal, informal group) on another actor on the international scene (Bogdanoski and Petreski, 2013; Bógdał-Brzezińska and Wendt, 2020a; 2020b; Potulski et al., 2022).

A great challenge for modern security is universality, even dependence of the economy, state institutions, medical and educational structures, and finally ourselves, on the Internet (Abomhara and Køien, 2015). No wonder that cybersecurity is a fundamental issue, it can even be described as a pillar of the security of a modern state (Ciolan, 2015). However, the state of our current knowledge does not allow us to fully prepare for the potential threat. A useful translation in this and the following research is the concept of the black swan. Just like in economics, a black swan, an incidental event of great importance for the economy, which could not be predicted due to a very low level of probability of occurrence, affecting on a national and international scale, functions similarly in politics and in the sphere of state security.

Artificial intelligence

In 1942, I. Asimov, a famous science fiction writer, formulated three laws of robots, to which he added the law "0" after their criticism. Thus, they ultimately took the following form: (0) A robot may not harm humanity, or by inaction cause harm to humanity; (1) A robot may not harm a human or, by inaction, allow a human to be harmed; (2) A robot must obey the orders of a human unless they conflict with the First Law; (3) A robot must protect itself as long as it does not conflict with the First or Second Law. Almost eighty years have passed since the 1940s, and humanity has made significant progress in the construction of artificial intelligence (AI). So significant that even though a fully autonomous thinking machine (AI) has not yet been constructed, the world of film writers has created entire series or disaster movies with AI in the lead role from the "Terminator" series to the next parts of "The Matrix". This is not just a fantasy of film producers, nowadays ChatGTP allows you to receive answers to questions asked by a human from AI (Biswas, 2023; Else, 2023; Kalla and Smith, 2023). Answers not always explaining the issue we are asking about but based on information from the global Internet.

V.C. Müller (2014), the future security of work with AI was already considered by O.A. Person and W. Wesler (2017), and M. Brundage and his team (2018) worked on preventing the use of AI in a malicious (insecure) way. The key question in this approach is asked by L. Muehlhauser and N. Bostrom (2014), wondering, assuming that AI surpasses human intelligence, whether we are adequately prepared for the world we know so far from sci-fi movies. And finally, a problem directly related to the subject of security, raised in their work by M.C. Horowitz with the team (2018), the problem of relationships and the use of AI in security. The analysis carried out in the text on the examples of the United States, China, India and Russia leaves many questions about the state and advancement of our allies (USA) in terms of the possible use of AI to disrupt international relations. A separate reproach that raises concern and undoubtedly determines the level of security is the combination of AI with cybersecurity, which is suggestively argued by P.K. Donepudi (2015). Treating the above research and threats with due seriousness, but not necessarily taking into account the implications of the work of Hollywood screenwriters, it should be pointed out that although we have not created AI at the moment (or maybe we do not know it), we are able to defend ourselves against its actions, after its creation, it may be too late.

Modification of the human genome

It's not a dream anymore. Since the cloning of Dolly, the sheep, there has been a global race between superpowers for supremacy in research and genetic modification. From time to time, the media inform us about the potential benefits of working on genetically modified plants, which have already become commonplace. Although in a number of countries genetically modified corn or soybeans are still censored, the benefits of these modifications are already widely known. Vegetation - yes, animals, yes, but man? Yes, the human genome has been subject to modifications for many years. Medicine knows thousands of examples of research. Cures some diseases, gene therapy is commonly used in some types of cancer. These are positives. But the threats, although we do not know about them, are evident (Furtado, 2019). We have no knowledge of the results of human genotype studies in China, Malaysia or South Korea. They are probably significantly more advanced than research in the US, EU countries or the UK (Callaway, 2016). Embryo manipulation is common and probably more common than we think. Putting aside for the moment all ethical considerations (Rotschield, 2020) related to the creation of a "new, better" man, selection and genetic modifications lead to the creation of a new better "race", possibly the races of the future rulers of our planet.

Outer space - threats from space and space technologies

Like the threats already mentioned above, the cosmic ones have so far been underestimated, and have been widely discussed in the literature for several years (Pelton and Allahdadi, 2015). Outer space (Paikowsky, 2017) is not only the use of space technologies, but also potential problems (Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020d; Bógdał-Brzezińska and Wendt, 2021) and threats (Wendt and Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2022). In contrast to the "old" use of space (outer space) conducted by more or less responsible (national) states, the dynamic entry of private companies can and is largely free of any control. Goals, resources, means, tools, and above all, it is not subject to any control, which leads to many different risks (Manulis et al., 2021). And in this case, the new cybersecurity rules for the new space will not help (Falco, 2019; Wendt, 2022), private companies simply will not comply with them. And yet there is also a whole range of other, classically understood threats related to outer space. The problem of satellite and hypersonic weapons, cybersecurity of satellite systems. And so far we don't even have a working SDA - Space Domain Awareness System (Bielawski, 2019) (space domain awareness includes the study and monitoring of, among others, satellites orbiting the Earth), which is also in my opinion necessary to ensure security in any country, because at the international level, action is basically excluded (obvious lack of exchange of sensitive information between, for example, China and the USA).

CONCLUSION

No, not only the economy and military are the pillars of national security. In addition to these two pillars, there are many others. The world of international relations (Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2009; Horowitz, 2018), incomprehensible decisions of leaders (e.g. D. Trump of January 5, 2020 or V.V. Putin of February 24, 2022), incompetent governments, social unrest, division of society, possible war with Iran (anyone) that will disrupt oil prices and supplies, an earthquake coupled with a higher than expected tsunami at the site where a nuclear power plant has been built, and not to give any more examples - the unknown effect of the gentle movement of a butterfly's wings startled by protesters on the edge of jungle over Amazon Indians.

Are we prepared for the threat then? No, we're not and probably never will be. Security is affected by many factors, many of which are difficult or unpredictable, such as terrorist attacks (Wendt, 2019), and probably also impossible to imagine their existence. In security, as in economics, we are dealing with the phenomenon of a black swan. The trivial truth about generals, to stick to the military pillar, always prepared for the rules of wars that have already been fought, has been confirmed too often. It can be extended to security without much error. We are often well, and sometimes very well prepared for the threats we know. We bear the costs of surprise, the asymmetry of forces or resources, but as humanity and as a nation, we have managed to survive so far. This does not release us from the obligation to prepare for new, unknown and thus more dangerous challenges. And that they will come is basically only a matter of time.

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STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS ON POLITICAL CONFLICT AND TRUST IN AUTHORITIES TO DEVELOP ECOTOURISM IN CAMEROON

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Abstract : Ecotourism is often touted as an ideal model for community-based tourism, where the involvement and participation of locals forms the basis of the sector, bringing with it an amplitude of benefits to participants. The aim of this study was to examine stakeholder and community perceptions of conflict, corruption and a lack of trust as having negative impacts on the development ecotourism in Cameroon. The study employed a qualitative research approach, conducting in-depth interviews with stakeholder groups with knowledge of ecotourism in the country. Key findings reveal that barriers stemming from closed social networks, a lack of trust, and instances of conflict and corruption mar the ability of locals to effectively participate in the sector, rendering negative perceptions towards the sector. In many cases, the sector has come to be seen as one that breeds or encourages corrupt exclusionary practices, such as nepotism and the dominance of the private sector in what should be a public affair.

Key words: Conflict, trust, authorities, Ecotourism, Cameroon

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INTRODUCTION

The success of ecotourism at a local level is incumbent upon several factors, most of which relate to the presence of trust amongst all stakeholders, especially those in local communities and the government. The issue of trust, especially as an enabler to community participation, has become an area of focus in the literature on tourism development (Tichaawa et al., 2023; Hadinejad et al., 2019; Nunkoo and Gursoy, 2017; Moyo and Tichaawa, 2017; Mura and

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Tavakoli, 2014; Nunkoo and Smith, 2013; Ramkissoon and Nunkoo, 2012; Adler and Kwon, 2002), highlighting the importance of giving due consideration to this issue, especially in cases where ecotourism sectors are faced with hurdles to their development. The notion of trust is heavily reliant upon the notion of transparency, where all concerned stakeholders are privy to the goings on in the sector (Musavengane and Matikiti, 2015). A lack of transparency oftentimes undermines trust among stakeholders in the sector, ultimately leading to discord and miscommunications between them, and can stem from, lead to or be exacerbated by high levels of conflict and corruption in both the public and private sector spheres (Farrelly, 2011). We argue in this paper that, In Cameroon, where the ecotourism sector is still developing, the stakeholder and community perceptions of conflict and corruption, relating to trust, is important to consider. This is especially important given that the country has previously been ranked as one that is plagued by high levels of corruption and has experienced unprecedented levels of conflict in recent years (Mbatu, 2009; Alemagi and Kozak, 2010). Additionally, given the crucial space that the sector finds itself in post-COVID-19 pandemic, in the midst of the political crisis and trying to adapt to the climate crisis, it is essential that issues related to perceptions of trust, conflict and corruption are fully understood, so that they may be minimised as an inhibitor to the development and regeneration of the ecotourism sector to meet current sustainability imperatives. Consequently, in this paper, we investigate stakeholder and community perceptions of conflict, corruption and a lack of trust as having negative impacts on ecotourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict and corruption as negative impacts of (and on) ecotourism

Corruption in Cameroon's political systems has been cited as being an inherent problem in the country (Alemagi and Kozak, 2010). Understood to be "private gains from public goods which are linked to a public role" (Van der Geest, 1982, p. 2145), corruption is a problem that should be conceptualised considering various factors, including the state of economic development (in an underdeveloped economy), the nature of a country's political system, and the degree of socio-economic change in the communities. Furthermore, certain cultural or traditional practices might also have perpetuated a culture of corruption, such as that marked by traditional gift-giving (Van der Geest, 1982). Alemagi and Kozak (2010) note that corruption was an ordinary occurrence in Cameroon, with the spread of corruption undermining the democracy within the country (Kindzeka, 2019), and therefore preventing the widespread dissemination of benefits to the communities. Furthermore, as Alemagi and Kozak (2010, p. 558) state, "Cameroon's economy is weak. Most Cameroonian's earn low wages and work long tedious hours. Due to the high rate of unemployment, many citizens have been forced to engage in criminal activities and other unlawful practices." Thus, the abject state of poverty in which many Cameroonians found themselves living might have served to encourage (and perpetuate) the corrupt practices involved.

The recent years have posed a number of challenges to Cameroonians, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the separatist conflict in the country placing a further strain on already stressed individuals (Djoumessi, 2021; Ekah, 2019). These crises have also inhibited the continued development and growth of the ecotourism sector in the country, resulting in degrowth due to the inability of tourists to access the country due to lockdowns, or travel within the country stemming from safety and security concerns of the separatist conflict. Thus, these crises have targeted the core of the sector, having an unfortunate domino effect on all stakeholders involved, especially in terms of local communities who are at the heart of the ecotourism sector. Given that the country, like many is still recovering from the impacts of the pandemic and attempting to rebuild the sector in the face of ongoing geopolitical conflict, issues related to trust among stakeholders becomes a critical success factor.

The importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of a cohesive ecotourism sector

There are many studies (Forje et al., 2021; Harilal et al., 2022) that note the relationship between stakeholders' interest and involvement in the ecotourism sector, leading to their acceptance thereof. This is crucial for the development of ecotourism, especially regarding local communities as stakeholders. Ecotourism occurs within the immediate vicinity of locals, thus, attempting to develop ecotourism separate of local involvement and participation is inherently flawed. Local communities as a stakeholder group need to be incentivised to participate in the sector, which often leads to them being welcoming hosts for tourists (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2018). This is built upon the basis of equitable benefit sharing and recognition of locals as key stakeholders, that are central to the operation of the sector (Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2013). In instances where this is not done, locals have little to no reason to participate in the sector or tolerate any resultant disturbances to their daily lives. Additionally, attempting to develop ecotourism without the community as central role players can lead to fractured trust and low levels of interest in the sector.

The importance of trust for a sustainable and successful ecotourism sector

The concept of trust is one that emanates from the narrative of social capital (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014), and is essential for buy-in of all stakeholders for a successful sector. The concept of trust also works towards fostering goodwill between stakeholders, through the establishment of various social networks (Harilal et al., 2022; Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). Hence, in considering the importance of trust for the successful operation of the ecotourism sector, the establishment of equitable and fruitful relationships between the various stakeholders are essential. It is well documented that the contribution of locals in ecotourism is essential (Manwa et al., 2017), and this becomes more important in settings in global south contexts, where local contexts are nuanced with traditional community structures. This is particularly true in the Cameroonian context where traditional community structures and hierarchy are prominent (Cheka, 2008). This is a critical aspect for the success of the sector. The traditional community structure can serve to include or exclude locals, resulting in low levels of trust in the case of the latter (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2020). The buy-in, leading to involvement of locals is entrenched in trust, highlighting the importance of fostering this among all stakeholders (Situmorang, 2018). Furthermore, the existence of trust can also serve to draw on the goodwill of stakeholders (Harilal et al., 2022; Adler and Kwon, 2002), especially in periods where the sector is faced with various challenges. This is pertinent in the Cameroonian context, the long-standing geopolitical conflict has afflicted various regions, in addition to the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the climate crisis (Loveline, 2022; Djoumessi, 2021; Ekah, 2019).

Cameroon: A geopolitical overview

Inherited from its colonial legacy, the geopolitical situation in Cameroon is fractured by ongoing conflict between the two dominant groups of nationals, as previously mentioned, posing a challenge to (eco)tourism development in the country (Langoya and Long, 2016). Cameroon is divided geographically, politically and socially into two national groups, consisting of the French-speaking citizens (Francophone nationals) and the English-speaking citizens (Anglophone nationals). Geographically, the country is divided into nine provinces, with only two of the provinces being classified as Anglophone (Socpa, 2016). However, although housing the minority group in Cameroon, the two small provinces contribute significantly to the country itself, in the form of a significant amount of natural resources, in addition to the economic contributions emanating from the provinces (Ionova and Kouaheu, 2018). Socially, especially within the last five years, the tensions between francophone and anglophone nationals have reached crisis point, resulting in many regions becoming unsafe for travel due to the violence and protests (Browne, 2019; Kindzeka, 2019). Consequently, many of the ecotourism attractions in the region became inaccessible or unsafe. It is also important to note that the development of an ecotourism sector, which was flagged as a sector for strategic development in the country, with potential ecotourism hotspots located in both the anglophone and francophone provinces.

Although the tensions are not new to the social, political and geographic spheres in Cameroon, the evolution of the tensions have a definite impact on the overall tourism sector in the country, and not only on ecotourism. The sentiments have been echoed by Kimbu and Tichaawa (2018), in relation to the negative impact of the Anglophone crisis on the tourism sector in Cameroon, with the affected areas being less than desirable destinations for the tourists to frequent. The above, inevitably, has had a knock-on effect on other aspects of the local economy in such regions, with other tourism-related businesses also suffering as a result of the conflict (Entsuah, 2019). Therefore, the need to examine the stakeholder and community perceptions of conflict and corruption, as negative impacts from the development of ecotourism in the country, is necessary for its overall growth.

METHODS

A qualitative approach was employed in this study; utilising in-depth, face-to-face interviews with key ecotourism stakeholders from the Douala Edea National Park (DENP) and Mount Cameroon National Park (MCNP) regions in Cameroon. The national parks are located in different provinces in the country, with the DENP located in a primarily francophone region and the MCNP located in a primarily angophone region – both of which host ecotourism sectors (Tegha and Sendze, 2016; Angoni, 2015). The significance of the geographical location is that it introduces a dual context to the study, underpinned not only by the different geographical locations, but also by the afore mentioned geopolitical conflict.

Given the exploratory nature of this research, in-depth interviews were deemed the most appropriate method of data collection (Mason, 2017), allowing for extensive insights into the causes of perceptions of levels of trust, and of ecotourism being a vector of conflict and corruption to be gained. Key stakeholders, including community representatives, local community chiefs, non-governmental organisations, local tourism operators, government officials and representatives, were purposively chosen based on their vast and nuanced knowledge of ecotourism in Cameroon, and of the local contexts. Purposive sampling is frequently used in tourism research that adopts a qualitative design through the use of interviews, as it allows for specific informants to be selected based on their context specific knowledge and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The total number of interviews conducted amounted to 22, with each interview having been audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. This allowed for thematic, content analysis to be carried out, with the assistance of Atlas.Ti.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data revealed several themes and sub-themes related to stakeholder perceptions of conflict, corruption and trust as negative impacts of ecotourism in Cameroon, as detailed in Table 1 below. The results and discussion are presented as combined, under each broad theme. The sub-themes are highlighted in the discussion.

Table 1. Key themes from data analysis
(Data source: Authors based on feildwork)

Theme	**Sub-themes**
Ecotourism activities in Cameroon	- Non-delivery by government - Inside 'trading' – corruption and nepotism - Government and locals – inequitable benefit sharing
Limited involvement of stakeholders	- Limited involvement of locals - Disinterest of locals to participate in ecotourism - Role of government in fostering involvement of stakeholders - NGOs as trustworthy intermediaries - Crises as a barrier to involvement
Management of ecotourism	- Collaborative and participatory management - Equitable benefit sharing - Consideration of local contexts increasing trust

Ecotourism activities in Cameroon

The results regarding the community perceptions of conflict and corruption within the government, emanating from the negative impacts of ecotourism, revealed that participants believed ecotourism activities have resulted in corruption and nepotism between the authorities and local community members, as well as that ecotourism activities have resulted in conflict over benefit sharing between local government and community members. A local community chief from the region alluded to the corruption that is present, whereby funds generated from the sector are not circulated within the community, as well as to the lack of benefit sharing to locals.

"Since the creation of the park, all the money goes to this government treasury. We don't know how the money is shared. We don't share that money. The ministry will decide. So, the only benefit the community people are having is

the porters and the guard […] it seems as if they are dumping the money somewhere, we do not know."

Interestingly, an opposing view was aired by some informants, who disagreed that corruption and nepotism were outcomes of ecotourism. This is linked to and reflective of the geopolitical and social situation which characterizes the region – whereby informants' responses are tempered by their sense of loyalty to the (francophone) political party. For example, a government representative noted:

"There is no difference, all citizens have equal benefits and opportunities [from ecotourism]"

Contrary to the above stance, issues of conflict, corruption and nepotism were flagged by the key informants interviewed, with the ecotourism-related business opportunities being accessible only to those with 'connections', such as to the relatives of those in influential positions, or with business opportunities being contained within the existing structures. Moreover, the perceptions of corruption stemmed from the lack of transparency in relation to the funds generated from ecotourism-related activities, with the communities concerned not benefitting (much) from the funds, despite such tourism being community-centric (Manwa et al., 2017). The issues of corruption, conflict and nepotism relate to the broader issues of trust and the notion of social capital, where the social networks and structures present in these communities served to contain opportunities for those within the network, as opposed to disseminating such opportunities widely (Zhang et al., 2021).

For example, it was noted that although community members are eager to become involved in and participate in the sector, the closed networks pose as barriers to their entry into the sector. A local NGO representative from the region elaborated on this:

"The community is not very involved in eco-tourism because there is no organization there. They (the community) don't have any personal contact with these tourists. Tourists come, yes. But when these tourists come, it is after they have seen the authorities and private companies in town" (NGO).

Communities also face barriers to entry into the sector, stemming from issues of corruption, conflict and nepotism, as detailed by key stakeholders from the region:

"There are too many of these (private) tour organisations, it becomes like a family thing. I'm having my tour organisation, I call my brothers and sisters to take part […] There is a guy, who has one of the strongest tour organisations. He usually uses the other guys (from the French speaking provinces) … you see what I mean? So, it becomes like a family thing now" (local community representative).

"They also take people from outside, we don't know. Formerly, these things were done by residents, people from this mountain. Now they take people from Limbe, people who do not have any impacts on this park. They say we are all Cameroonians" (local community chief).

Barriers to entry have increased in the face of the geopolitical conflict that has seized regions of the country, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns, coupled with the negative effects of extreme weather events has only served to worsen these issues.

Limited involvement of stakeholders

In many cases, this has led to locals losing interest in becoming involved, residing themselves to the reality of their situation – that ecotourism in their locality is largely dominated by non-locals, who prevent local involvement by bringing in their relatives or people they know from other regions of the country to become involved. This was reiterated by a community representative from the region, who stated:

"They (the community) are not really involved; they are not interested" (Local community representative).

Again, this illustrates the closed social networks that exist in the region, and how this can ultimately lead to disinterest on the part of communities. Although aware of the potential benefits that being involved in the sector could result in, community perceptions of the sector have become clouded by the way in which the sector operates, which is supposed to be premised upon community participation and involvement (Moswete and Thapa, 2015). Characterised by closed networks and limited access and opportunities for locals to participate, the stagnation of the sector in Cameroon is unsurprising, as noted by an NGO.

"If the local are not involved in the ecotourism sector development, it will not be possible in such an area" (NGO).

Interestingly, interviews with government stakeholders revealed another perspective on this issue, with a government tourism official stating that if locals wanted to be involved, they would:

"We can't force people those interested will get themselves involved in ecotourism sector and those who are not interested will be left out" (Government official).

This points to the lack of awareness on the part of government on the effects of closed networks on opportunity and benefit sharing, related to widespread involvement and participation in the sector. Additionally, this also highlights the oversight of government on their role in encouraging local participation and ensuring that locals have opportunities to become involved in the sector. As drivers of the sectors growth and development, it is essential that government coordinates the roles of all stakeholders to ensure the sustainable and responsible development the sector. For example, it was noted that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an important role, as intermediaries between government and locals, and can advance an agenda of decentralised ecotourism development (Romero-Brito, 2016). Locals tend to have a greater level of trust in individuals who belong to an NGO and are therefore more likely to trust the information that is shared by them. Moreover, NGOs can also act as intermediaries who link people from different networks together, thereby creating opportunities for locals to have access to different people, organisations and resources to assist in their involvement and participation in the sector (Forje et al., 2021). This was iterated by an NGO that was interviewed, with the sentiments supported by a local community member.

"NGO are in the best position since they act like a neutral party, and they look at those who are best in need of what is needed in the ecotourism sector and its development" (NGO).

"NGOs can call for regular trainings to orientate the community and to assist them with startup capital" (Local community member).

Management of ecotourism

Reflecting on the foregoing discussion, issues of transparency, lack of access to knowledge and resources and networks all contribute to the low levels of trust that locals have in government actors, especially in regard to ecotourism development and their involvement or benefit sharing therein (Wu and Chen, 2018; Situmorang, 2018; Kimbu and Ngoasog, 2013). A proposed solution to this is a change in the management style of the sector, where a bottom-up, participatory management style is adopted to increase transparency, involvement, benefit sharing and ultimately trust amongst all actors (Park et al., 2015; Wishitemi et al., 2015). In doing so, many of the factors that have led to distrust of government could be addressed, with the decentralisation of power that this approach would institute also being beneficial to ensure that those admitted into the sector are not only through closed network connections of family and friends, as previously noted. This was echoed by a community representative, who stated *"If you increase collaboration you have to be transparent" (Community representative).*

Essentially, this approach would enable beneficial local economic development, as a favourable outcome of ecotourism development in the area. This is premised on the notion that locals are central to a successful ecotourism sector, and accounts for the nuanced governance structures in communities, whereby traditional community chiefs are recognised as an authority, thereby becoming central role players in the operation and management of a successful ecotourism sector (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2020; Wu and Chen, 2018). An NGO reiterated this sentiment, stating:

"If the locals are not involved in the ecotourism sector development will not be possible in such an area" (NGO).

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to investigate stakeholder and community perceptions on conflict, corruption and trust in government as as having a negative impact on the development of ecotourism. Although ecotourism has been earmarked as a sector to trigger strategic growth (Kimbu and Ngoasong, 2013), this study found that its development has been hampered by ineffective management strategies, a lack of appropriate infrastructure and relatively low levels of involvement (by locals) in the sector. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the political crisis and changing climatic factors have placed further stresses on an already constrained sector (Harilal et al., 2022; Loveline, 2022; Ekah, 2019). In terms of the lack of involvement and the ineffective management strategies, the corrupt practices of those involved, as well as the non-inclusive management practices currently employed, serve to alienate local participation in the sector, as well as encourage negative perceptions of the sector as previous studies equally highlighted (Harilal and Tichaawa, 2018; Situmorang, 2018). It appears that perceptions vary across (Anglophone and Francophone) regions and stakeholders with different political/governmental affinities, illustrating the geopolitical and social nuance that exists.

Unfortunately, as the ecotourism sector is characterised by high levels of private sector involvement and dominance, the perceptions (and attitudes) of respondents and key stakeholders have accordingly become negative, viewing the sector as one that revolves around closed networks, thus encouraging corrupt practices such as nepotism, money laundering, the misappropriation of funds and the alienation and exclusion of people from ecotourism activities in their localities. This is despite locals having knowledge on the potential benefits that the sector (if appropriately managed) and their meaningful involvement can result in. Consequently, many have distanced themselves from the sector, leading to perceptions of disinterest by governmental stakeholders.

From a broader perspective, issues of conflict and corruption are not isolated only to the ecotourism sector but is rather a broader and multifaceted problem that affects many countries in sub-Saharan Africa at different levels and in different ways (Mbatu, 2009). Specific to the case of ecotourism, conflict and corruption seem to be exacerbated by a lack of trust, which is worsened by the top-down management of the sector. Unfortunately, the lack of dedicated ecotourism policy in the country worsens this situation, not being able to mandate a participatory management system (Harilal et al., 2022), which could aid in the cultivation of a culture of transparency among all stakeholders involved, and ultimately begin to foster trust (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014; Farrelly, 2011). Given the scant research that has been conducted specifically on ecotourism, trust, conflict, crisis and corruption in Cameroon, this paper contributes modestly to literature, by presenting an overview into the current situation in Cameroon, vis-à-vis stakeholder and community perceptions on conflict, corruption and a lack of trust as negative impacts of ecotourism.

It is recommended that further research be conducted on this specifically, and at a broader scale, with a view to enhance the sustainable re-development and regeneration of the ecotourism sector. It is important that these types of studies are undertaken, as the development of the ecotourism sector is heavily dependent on the meaningful involvement and participation of locals. Any hurdle to this involvement – such as negative perceptions (and the causes thereof) must be understood and resolved.

Aknowlegments

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FACTORS INFLUENCING LOCALS' PERSPECTIVES ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CAMEROON

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Abstract: Tourism development is linked to community-based transformation and growth, impacting the residents' livelihoods. The study aimed to comprehensively understand locals' perspectives on tourism development. The study mainly focused on identifying the factors that influence these perspectives and assessing their implications for sustainable tourism planning and management, using Yaoundé in Cameroon as a case study. Employing a quantitative survey research design, the study collected data from 385 locals using non-probability convenience sampling. Key findings revealed that positive perceptions of tourism development are linked to benefits. As residents benefit economically and socially from tourism, they desire increased tourist arrivals and see tourism as having positive impacts. A gap between training and participation in conservancy was identified, suggesting a major implication of the need to incorporate local voices in tourism planning and policies for more sustainable and inclusive growth of the tourism industry. By exposing factors that influence locals' perspectives and assessing the implications for sustainable tourism management and planning, the study contributes to the literature and provides valuable insights to inform decision-making in the tourism industry.

Key words: Cameroon, community participation, impacts, local community, local perspectives, tourism development, sustainable tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as a multifaceted industry, has the potential to influence economies, societies, and environments on local, national, and international scales (Pekerşen & Kaplan, 2023). The benefits of tourism are undeniable as it contributes to the economy, job creation, culture, and biodiversity preservation and promotes socialization (Ramkissoon, 2020). Moreover, technology has made travel more accessible through social media, websites, and applications (Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021), with affordable services like Airbnb, budget airlines, Uber, and Google Translate enabling tourists to travel extensively. The popularity of domestic tourism has increased, with more recent literature showing a spike in studies related to domestic tourism (Adinolfi et al., 2021; Chamboko-Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2023; Mzobe et al., 2022). Many African countries have developed local economic development strategies to promote different forms of tourism and have earmarked the tourism sector as a critical industry to enable strategic growth (Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020).

Globally, policymakers are increasingly promoting tourism development strategies that prioritize the involvement of local communities (Gohori & vander Merwe, 2022). This approach aims to ensure that the needs and perspectives of people living in a specific area are considered when making decisions about economic, social, and environmental development. However, community participation still needs to be improved despite a call for stakeholder collaboration in tourism (Gohori & vander Merwe, 2022; Shereni & Saarinen, 2021). While there are some success stories of the symbiotic relationship between tourism development in local communities, Reindrawati (2023); Adebayo and Butcher (2021) have noted challenges such as lack of training, missed opportunities, power inequalities, and limited participation.

Literature evidence from recent studies alludes that tourism has many benefits, yet there is limited local involvement in the tourism sector (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020; Nyikana & Tichaawa, 2020). Scholars call for strengthening interrelationships at the local operational level for sustainable tourism development (Acha Anyi, 2023; Frederick & Nguh, 2020). Other scholars focused on residents' perceptions of quality of life-related to the impacts of tourism (Nange & Ozturen, 2022) and maintain that residents' support for tourism development directly influences residents' overall quality of life. Despite some studies examining the impact of tourism development, a gap still exists in the literature. Few researchers have focused entirely on understanding local perspectives on tourism development. Yaoundé's unique position in Cameroon's socio-political structure, combined with its urban-rural dichotomy, presents an intriguing context to explore the local perspectives and their underlying influencing factors on tourism development. The underrepresentation of the locals residing in the tourism hub contributes to a significant research gap with potential implications for sustainable tourism planning and management. The study aims to close this gap. To achieve this, the study objectives are to identify the factors that influence local perspectives on tourism development and to explore the potential implications of local perspectives on sustainable tourism planning and management.

Understanding locals' perspectives on tourism development is crucial to the success of any tourism strategy. Given the increasing recognition of sustainable tourism as a vital lever for economic development, exploring these perspectives provides critical insights into how tourism policies and practices can be shaped to align with the needs and aspirations of local communities. The study contributes to the literature on locals' perspectives in the tourism context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, the development of tourism has become increasingly important. Tourism has been widely recognized to significantly impact the local economy and residents' social and economic lives (Truong et al., 2020). The study aims to understand the perspectives of locals in Yaoundé regarding tourism development, necessitating it to ground its footing in the stakeholder and social exchange theories. The stakeholder theory proposes a balanced approach that considers the interests of all stakeholders, challenging the traditional view that an organization's primary responsibility is to maximize wealth (Al-Badarneh et al., 2019). Thus, the study considers the interests of the locals. Social exchange theory suggests that residents are more likely to have a positive attitude towards tourism activities if they perceive economic gains in their community or personal benefits (Pham et al., 2019). This approach can also be applied to social interaction and intangible benefits (Wang. Y & Pfister, 2008).

Tourism development relies heavily on locals. They are important determinants contributing to tourist satisfaction at a destination (Pekerşen & Kaplan, 2023). The impact of tourism development on the local community has been the subject of extensive research (Harilal et al., 2021). As tourism develops, locals become more aware of its economic benefits (Beritelli et al., 2013). However, they also critically observe the impacts on nature and culture, particularly the changes in the local community's identity. Research has shown that the local community's attitude towards tourism impacts tourism's direction and development (Khan et al., 2021). If local communities positively perceive the impacts of tourism, they will have a positive attitude toward tourism development and the presence of tourists. On the other hand, if they negatively perceive the impacts of tourism, they are likely to oppose any tourism development in the community (Frleta, 2022). As local community participation and support for tourism development effectively contribute to achieving tourism's long-term success, the local's perceptions toward tourism are needed more in tourism planning and policies.

Factors influencing local perspectives on tourism development

Residents' support for tourism is not unconditional and can be influenced by several factors. Tourists are attracted to communities where tourism is developing (Pekerşen & Kaplan, 2023), encouraging the locals to take pride in their culture. Tourism can facilitate an understanding of cultural identity and support preserving and reviving traditional arts, culture, and crafts (Tapfuma et al., 2023). The cultural heritage embodied in the traditional arts and crafts reflects the culture and traditions of the locals (Yang et al., 2018). Moreover, tourism development can lead to more recreational and entertainment facilities within the community, which can enhance the quality of life for the residents (Ramkissoon, 2020; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

Tourism, one of the fastest-growing industries, benefits the local communities economically, specifically job creation (Shereni & Saarinen, 2021), and economic diversity, which can result in less reliance on traditional economic sectors like agriculture (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020) and thus acts as a poverty reduction tool for the locals. Other benefits include empowering the local communities (Adebayo & Butcher, 2021; Tichaawa & Moyo, 2019), increased investments, and business activities such as deepened marketing and linkages (Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015). Sustainable tourism is regarded as a cleaner industry, with fewer pollution challenges than other industries such as mining and manufacturing. As a result, the destinations and communities have a relatively clean physical appeal (Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015).

The negative impacts of tourism often go hand in hand with the positive impacts. Concerns have been raised regarding the negative impacts of tourism development on local communities (Beritelli et al., 2013). For example, as communities are in the growth stage of the tourism area development life cycle, they experience using the transport capacity to excess, which can lead to environmental damage and traffic congestion problems. Literature underscores additional problems associated with tourism growth, such as crowdedness in public areas, cultural degradation, and social ills such as prostitution, gambling, excess consumption of alcohol, and drug abuse (Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2015; Tichaawa & Moyo, 2019). Further challenges communities experience are uneven distribution of economic benefits (Ristiawan & Tiberghien, 2021) and changes in the value system of families and family relationships (Douli & Slimani, 2016). Tourism development can increase the cost of living for local residents (Hu et al., 2022).

Taking into consideration the factors that affect communities' perceptions of tourism development, researchers (Ciro & Toska, 2020; Ristiawan & Tiberghien, 2021; Shereni & Saarinen, 2021) argued that it is crucial to develop systems that attend to and balance the needs of the locals with socio-economic and environmental considerations, with the failure to do so potentially results in lack of support from the locals. Conversely, with the growth of tourism, African locals have begun to reassess its multi-dimensional impacts on their communities, resulting in a shift in their perspectives (Pekerşen & Kaplan, 2023; Reindrawati, 2023).

Community participation in tourism

Community participation in tourism development refers to the degree of residents' participation during the crucial tourism development stages (Hu et al., 2022). Participation could include engaging in various activities such as decision-making, policy implementation, management, daily administration of activities, and marketing (Chabwe et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021; Mpotaringa & Hattingh, 2019). The success of tourism development relies on local communities' support and participation (Adebayo & Butcher, 2021). In their study, Halim et al. (2022), echoing the same sentiments, indicate that residents' support for tourism is influenced by their participation and perceived impacts. Residents' participation is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, residents better understand how the community can adjust to changes brought about by tourism. Secondly, residents are the ones who are most affected by tourism development, so their input is valuable. Lastly, residents are an integral part of the tourism product, and their knowledge and involvement can help to enhance the overall visitor experience (Gohori & vander Merwe, 2022).

According to Nange and Ozturen (2022), locals can be financially empowered through meaningful involvement and participation in community-based tourism. In their study, Mpotaringa and Hattingh (2019) made recommendations using the example of the WegRy/Drive Out Bull Run motorsport event, in which the authors call out for locals to grab the opportunities that arise from the event. Despite tourism development creating new employment opportunities, research indicates that conflicts within the community result in uneven participation opportunities for the locals (Ristiawan & Tiberghien, 2021). For example, the economic benefits of tourism may not always be distributed equitably among locals.

The study context

Cameroon's local geopolitical context dates back to the country's colonial era and is influenced by its historical division between anglophone and francophone nationals (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020). Cameroon was colonized by three imperial powers, Germany, France, and Britain, at different times and was placed under the League of Nations in 1920. After World War I, Cameroon was divided between France and Britain when France gained control of the larger Eastern part of Cameroon, which covers about four-fifths of the country (Kimbu, 2010). Meanwhile, Britain gained control of the smaller Western part of the country, which covers about one-fifth of the country. This division gave rise to the political and cultural division of Cameroon between Francophone and Anglophone regions (Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013). However, the political ruling party of Cameroon is still embedded in Francophone ethos, resulting in a skewed ongoing conflict of power (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020). Hence, locals' perceptions of tourism-related government initiatives vary across the geopolitical landscape.

Cameroon's ethnic diversity, with an ethnic fractionalization score exceeding the sub-Saharan African average, provides a unique opportunity for tourism development (Frederick & Nguh, 2020). Often called "Africa in miniature" because of its immense natural beauty and cultural diversity, developing a strong tourism industry in Cameroon can positively impact local communities and contribute to broader sustainable development goals (Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020). Despite tourism being a minor industry compared to agriculture and manufacturing, Cameroon tourism displays rapid growth (Siyabulela, 2019). Located in the central region of Cameroon, Yaoundé is the administrative capital and the second largest city in Cameroon (World Population Review, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

The study follows the interpretive paradigm. The researcher aimed to comprehend the world from the participants' subjective experiences, views, and opinions (Okamoto, 2021). Data were collected from locals in Yaoundé, Cameroon. The study used a quantitative survey design to collect data. Quantitative research design allows for examining the relationship between variables, which can be analyzed using statistical procedures. The questionnaire used in the study was developed based on an extensive literature review. The questionnaire was split into three sections: the profile of the respondents, their perception of tourism impact, and the locals' involvement in conservancy. The questionnaire contained mainly closed-ended questions. Dichotomous or categorical questions were used for the questions aimed at understanding the locals' perceptions.

Trained community fieldworkers were utilized to administer the questionnaires in their respective communities. Field workers explained the study's aim and objectives and assured respondents that their information was for research purposes only. Using Raosoft (2023) as the sample calculator for a population of more than one million, using a 5% margin error and with a 95% confidence level, 384 suffice as a sample size. Using a non-probability convenience sampling approach, based on the respondents' availability and willingness to participate in the study, the research compiled the views and opinions of 385 local residents. A total of 420 questionnaires were distributed, 392 questionnaires were returned, which resulted in a response rate of 93%, and 385 questionnaires were validated for analysis. The valid response rate was 91.7%. The questionnaire was shared with tourism experts for their expert views to ensure validity. Before the full-scale study, the questionnaire was pilot-tested to identify design and format issues (Mpotaringa & Hattingh, 2019). Descriptive statistics were performed on the data. The study used cross-tabulations to create contingency tables for categorical variables for analysis. By conducting the analysis, the Chi-Square test for independence was used for statistical analysis to determine if there is a significant relationship between the categorical variables.

RESULTS

The study sought to explore locals' perspectives regarding tourism development, elucidating influencing factors and exploring the potential implications these perspectives could have on sustainable tourism planning and management. To understand the characteristics of the locals, it is imperative to profile them. Table 1 below provides a profile of the respondents.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics (n=385)
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Variables	Key findings	n	%
Age	18-30	261	67.8
	31-45	84	21.7
	46-60	40	10.5
Gender	Female	178	46.2
	Male	207	53.8
Highest level of education	Primary	30	7.9

	Secondary	196	50.9
	Tertiary	118	30.7
	Other	41	10.5
Household monthly income (total in CFA)	0 -25000	147	38.1
	25001-50000	129	33.6
	50001-100000	51	13.3
	100001-300000	41	10.6
	300001-500000	10	2.7
	More than 5000000	7	1.7
Length of residency in the village (in years)	0-10	204	52,9
	11-20	130	33.7
	21-30	45	11.8
	31-40	3	0.8
	Above 40	3	0.8

As shown in Table 1, 67.8% of the respondents were aged between 18 and 30. Most respondents were male (53.8%), while 50.9% had secondary education as the highest level of education. Most respondents, 71.7%, earn 50,000 CFA (less than $100 US) and below. It can also be seen that most of the respondents (52.9%) have stayed in the community for ten years or below.

Locals' perspectives and observations on tourism

Table 2 shows factors that influence locals' perspectives on tourism development, including tourist presence, desired changes in numbers, positive and negative impacts, and tourism businesses in the community.

Results show that 45.7% of the respondents have seen tourists and indicated the absence of tourism businesses in the community. More than half of the respondents (54.3%) indicated that they have not seen any tourists in the community, nor are there any tourism businesses in the area. In exploring the locals's opinions on whether tourist numbers should change, the study findings illustrate that those who believe tourist numbers should increase (81%) are in communities with tourism businesses. In comparison, only 3.8% of those in communities with tourism businesses prefer the number of tourists to remain the same. Conversely, those who think tourist numbers should decrease (35.3%) are in communities without tourism businesses. Most respondents who believe that tourism has positive impacts have tourism businesses in their community (96.4%) compared to those who believe that tourism has no positive impacts (3.6%). This confirms the relationship between positive perceptions of tourism and the presence of tourism-related businesses. Regarding perceived negative tourism impacts, the findings reveal that 45.2% of the respondents perceiving negative impacts of tourism have tourism businesses in their community compared to those perceiving no negative impacts (54.8%). This suggests a weaker association between negative perceptions of tourism and local business presence.

Table 2. Factors influencing locals' perspectives on tourism development (n=385)
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Items	Tourism businesses in the community				
		No		Yes	
		n	%	n	%
The presence of tourists in the community	Yes	176	45.7	14	3.6
	No	209	54.3	371	96.4
Desired change in tourist numbers	Increase	181	47.1	312	81.0
	Decrease	136	35.3	58	15.2
	Remain the same	68	17.6	15	3.8
Perceived positive tourism impacts	No	165	42.9	14	3.6
	Yes	220	57.1	371	96.4
Perceived negative tourism impacts	No	275	71.4	211	54.8
	Yes	100	28.6	174	45.2

A chi-squared test was performed (Table 3) to determine the correlations between the presence of tourism businesses in the community versus tourists' presence, desired change in tourist numbers, and positive and negative tourism impacts. The study could not establish a significant correlation between the presence of tourism businesses in the local community and negative tourism impacts, confirming the weaker associates highlighted in Table 2.

Regarding the locals' observations and perceptions concerning tourism, findings are shown in Table 4. Table 4 distinguishes respondents who have seen tourists in their community and those who have not, indicating the community's stance on desired changes in tourist numbers. Of the community members who have seen tourists in the community, 75.5% think that tourist numbers should increase, while 16% believe that tourist numbers should decrease. Most respondents who perceive positive tourism impacts have seen tourists (88.8%) compared to those who have not (11.2%), while those who perceive negative tourism impacts and have seen tourists are 60.6%. These findings highlight a relatively even distribution of responses among those who have seen tourists and those who have not, suggesting that negative perceptions of tourism are not strongly tied to whether tourists are seen.

Table 3. Analytical statistics on the connection between tourism businesses, tourist presence, desired changes, and tourism impact.
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Interpretation
Tourists' presence	32.300	1	<0.001	Significant correlation between the presence of tourism businesses and tourists' presence in the local community
Desired change in tourists' numbers	14.119	2	<0.001	Significant correlation between the presence of tourism businesses and the desired changes in tourist' numbers in the local community
Perceived positive tourism impacts.	29.327	1	<0.001	Significant correlation between the presence of tourism businesses and positive tourism impacts
Perceived negative tourism impacts.	2.852	1	0.091	There is no correlation between the presence of tourism businesses and negative tourism impacts

Table 4. Locals' observations and perceptions of tourism (n=385)
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Items		The presence of tourists in the community			
		No		Yes	
		n	%	n	%
Desired change in tourist numbers	Increase	171	44.4	290	75.5
	Decrease	192	50.0	62	16.0
	Remain the same	22	5.6	33	8.5
Perceived positive tourism impacts.	No	142	36.8	43	11.2
	Yes	243	63.2	242	88.8
Perceived negative tourism impacts.	No	223	57.9	233	60.6
	Yes	162	42.1	152	39.4

A chi-squared test was performed (Table 5) to analyse locals' preferences and tourism impacts. Similar to the findings in Table 4, the study could not establish a significant correlation between the presence of tourists in the local community and negative tourism impacts.

Table 5. Analytical statistics for locals' preferences and tourism impacts
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Interpretation
Desired change in tourists' numbers	10.404	2	0.006	Significant correlation between the presence of tourists and the desired change in tourist' numbers
Perceived positive tourism impacts	8.023	1	0.005	Significant correlation between the presence of tourists and positive tourism impacts
Perceived negative tourism impacts	0.49	1	0.825	No correlation between the presence of tourists and negative tourism impacts

Community engagement and participation

Regarding locals' engagement and participation in the conservancy, the results are shown in Table 6. Most respondents (88.7%) have not participated in tourism decision-making and have yet to receive any tourism-related training, while 72.7% have received training and participated in tourism decision-making. Reflecting on locals' opinions on community involvement in tourism planning, most respondents (86.3%) indicated that local people should have a say on what kind of tourism and how tourism should be developed in their local community. Most respondents (81.8%) indicated the presence of a conservancy in their local area and having received tourism-related training. Regarding participation in the conservancy, more than half (55.8%) have not received any tourism-related training. Nevertheless, they participate in decision-making in comparison to 25% who participate in decision-making but have not received any tourism-related training.

Table 6. Community engagement and conservancy participation (n=385)
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Items	Received tourism-related training				
		No		Yes	
		n	%	n	%
Participation in tourism decision-making	No	341	88.7	105	27.3
	Yes	44	11.3	280	72.7
Should local people have a say on what kind of tourism / and how tourism should be developed in your community?	No	53	13.7	64	16.7
	Yes	332	86.3	321	83.3
Conservancy in the local area	No	237	61.6	70	18.2
	Yes	148	38.4	315	81.8
Conservancy participation	Decision-making	92	55.8	41	25.0
	Policy implementation	19	11.6	21	12.5
	Management of activities	23	14.0	61	37.5
	Daily administration of activities	30	18.6	41	25.0

The study found a correlation between tourism-related training received versus participation in tourism decision-making and having a conservancy in the local area (Table 7).

Table 7. Analytical statistics on tourism training and decision-making participation.
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Interpretation
Participation in tourism decision-making	26.516	1	<0.001	Significant correlation between tourism-related training received and participation in tourism decision-making.
Should local people have a say on what kind of tourism / and how tourism should be developed in your community?	0.077	1	0.781	There is no correlation between tourism-related training received and whether locals should have a say on what kind of tourism /and how tourism should be developed in their community
Conservancy in the local area	7.632	1	0.006	Significant correlation between tourism-related training received and having a conservancy in the local area
Conservancy participation	3.521	3	0.318	There is no correlation between tourism-related training received and participating in the conservancy.

Economic assessment of tourism

An understanding of the main economic and livelihood activity in any community is crucial for tourism development. Respondents were asked to state the main economic activity in their community and further specify their source of living. The findings are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Economic and livelihood activity
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Economic activity		Distribution
Main economic activity in the community		
Agriculture		n=340; 88.2%
Business including tourism		n=42; 10.9%
Teaching		n=3; 0.9%
Individual source of living		
Agriculture	Farming	n=286; 84%
	Fish farming	n=3; 0.8%
	Livestock rearing	n=48; 14.3%
	Palm wine topper	n=3; 0.8%
Business including tourism	Arts and craft	n=11; 26.2%
	Buying and selling of food	n=5; 11.9%
	Decor	n=3; 7.1%

	Hairdresser	n=2; 4.8%
	Seamstress	n=3; 7.1%
	Shopkeeper	n=16; 38.1%
	Other	n=2; 4.8%
Teaching	Primary school	n=2; 66.7%
	Tertiary	n=1; 33.3%

Despite respondents bemoaning about inflation, unemployment, and income inequality, results (Table 8) show that agriculture (88.2%) was the primary source of income, where most respondents indicated that they were into farming (84%) and livestock rearing (14.32%). A total of 10.9% were into business, including tourism, with 26.2% of those respondents into selling arts and crafts.

Table 9. Economic aspects of tourism (n=385)
(Data source: Authors based on fieldwork)

Items	**Tourism businesses in the community**				
		No		**Yes**	
		n	**%**	**n**	**%**
Personal tourism-related income received	No	350	90.9	313	81.2
	Yes	35	9.1	72	18.8
Household tourism-related income received	No	350	90.9	286	74.4
	Yes	35	9.1	99	25.6

Findings (Table 9) show the absence of tourism businesses in the community, which corresponds with many respondents' indicating not having received any tourism-related income in either a personal capacity (90.9%) or as a household (90.9%). Encouragingly, for those with tourism businesses in the community, most respondents (81.2%) have received personal tourism-related income, and 74.4% have received household tourism-related income.

DISCUSSIONS

The study aimed to comprehensively understand local residents' perspectives on tourism development, using Yaoundé in Cameroon as a case study. The study focused on identifying the factors influencing these perspectives and assessing their implications for sustainable tourism planning and management. Locals, the everyday users of the space tourism development targets, provide invaluable insights into the local community's desires and expectations regarding tourism development. The study findings have revealed that locals who have witnessed tourists in their community have different perspectives than those who have not, influencing their attitudes toward tourism development. The findings in Tables 2 and 4 show that tourism in the community is at a development stage based on Butler's tourist area life cycle (Butler, 1980). At this stage, findings show that the residents desire to increase the number of tourists visiting the community, are happy to benefit from tourism and have a positive attitude toward it.

The study (Table 3) also showed a significant positive association between the presence of tourism businesses in the community and the presence of tourists, desired change in tourist numbers, and positive tourism impacts in the community. The findings could be backed up by the fact that tourists tend to visit to buy souvenirs when tourism-related businesses like selling arts and crafts in the community exist. This is further supported by the findings, which showed that despite agriculture being the primary source of income, residents have received tourism-related income in areas with tourism businesses. As the residents benefit economically and socially, they desire the tourist arrivals to increase and view tourism as providing positive impacts. The study reaffirms the notions posited by the social exchange theory and the stakeholder theory that benefits derived from tourism can be perceived as crucial social exchange factors and the importance of residents' perception of the impacts on tourism development (Ramkissoon, 2020).

In support of the current study findings, Pekerşen and Kaplan (2023) posit that local communities in contact with the tourism sector support tourism development and perceive its effects positively. Scholars (Halim et al., 2022; Tichaawa & Moyo, 2019) have found different sentiments concerning the impacts of tourism development. Although the study revealed that some community members perceiving negative impacts of tourism have tourism businesses in their community, the study found no association between the presence of tourism businesses and negative tourism impacts. These findings suggest that no direct linear relationship exists between the presence of tourism businesses in the community and the negative tourism impacts, possibly due to various factors at play, such as tourists' behavior, infrastructure development, and local policies. Similarly, Pekerşen & Kaplan (2023) could not establish a correlation between personal benefits from tourism development and adverse environmental effects and socio-cultural effects of tourism development.

The study distinguishes respondents who have received tourism-related training. This distinction is important because it can affect residents' knowledge and awareness about tourism, potentially influencing their perspectives. Furthermore, a conservancy in the community affects local perspectives on tourism development and environmental awareness. Unsurprisingly, the results (Table 6) show a high percentage of respondents who have not participated in tourism decision-making when they have not received any tourism-related training. A possible reason could be the lack of knowledge and awareness about tourism. Conversely, those who have received tourism-related training mainly participate in tourism decision-making. These trained people also prefer that local people's opinions be considered in tourism development. These findings concur with Mindzeng (2018), who maintains that capacity-building and empowerment promote community participation.

Of concern is the findings that most tourism-trained individuals do not participate in conservancy efforts. This aligns with a study by Shereni and Saarinen (2021), who state that communities living around protected areas have insufficient involvement in making decisions and fail to devolve authority to locals. Previous studies have also highlighted additional challenges, such as lack of training and power inequalities contributing to limited participation (Rastegar et al., 2021). The tendency of the government to retain authority in decision-making and the marginalization of the local communities, especially women in the management of conservancies, are common challenges in tourism development within communities (Gohori & vander Merwe, 2022). The study emphasizes the importance of implementing policies that tackle communities' challenges in supporting and developing tourism within their areas.

PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For tourism stakeholders, the findings provide insight into the implications of the direct exposure of local residents to tourism activities and their influence on the perception of tourism development. Governments can establish programs that expose locals to tourists and tourism projects where they can see the benefits of tourism development. In communities where residents are more concerned about socio-economic benefits, support should be given to the local tourism business. This is because local communities who positively perceive the impacts of tourism tend to support tourism development.

The study showed that the presence of tourism businesses and tourists in the community does not significantly predict negative tourism impacts. From a tourism stakeholder point of view, locals are also concerned about and benefit from tourism development; hence, they are also responsible for tourism development. This might imply the need for policy interventions that effectively target other factors to mitigate the negative impacts and encourage residents' participation in the conservancy and other tourism-related issues such as decision-making.

However, when preparing tourism policies and plans, it is crucial to ensure the cooperation and involvement of the local community. Policymakers can create more sustainable and equitable development outcomes by engaging with communities and encouraging participation. Stakeholders, researchers, and communities must collaborate and develop sustainable solutions that are locally relevant. To achieve this, participatory methods are necessary to promote cooperation and inclusivity. Both the private and government sectors can implement more training programs to create more tourism awareness and promote participation.

CONCLUSION

The study provided an exploration of the local perspectives on tourism development. The findings indicate that the presence of tourism businesses and tourists in the community is associated with the community's desire for change in tourist numbers and perceived positive and negative tourism impacts. Furthermore, the study highlighted the implications of tourism-related training on community participation. Challenges such as lack of participation in tourism-related decision-making and conservancy were common among residents without tourism-related training. To achieve the study aim, the study objectives were to identify the factors that influence local perspectives on tourism development and to explore the potential implications of local perspectives on sustainable tourism planning and management. Although agriculture was shown as the dominant source of income in the study area, those with tourism businesses in the community have received high tourism-related income either as individuals or within the household, highlighting the positive economic impact of tourism. The study has its limitations. The study only used surveys with locals in Yaoundé since the research aimed to capture the locals' experiences, opinions, and behaviors. Future studies could use more areas and use mixed methods research design by incorporating interviews with community leaders such as chiefs, representatives of the community leadership forums, and conservancy managers to get in-depth perspectives from different points of view within different contexts.

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THE PLUM BRANDY FROM OAŞ LAND SYMBOL OF IDENTITY AND OF LOCAL SPECIFICITY

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Abstract: The plum brandy from Oaș Land is an identitary, specific element, deeply rooted into geographical romanian realities. With its origins long lost in past time, the craft and art of obtaining the plum brandy are nowadays in danger to be lost against the background of socio-economic changes specific to globalization. In this context, the purpose of the present study is to highlight and briefly describe a traditional occupation (plum tree cultivation and obtaining plum brandy) that has endured and survived over time. The obtained

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results highlighted the main aspects regarding the culture of plums and the craft of obtaining traditional style plum brandy, in Gherța Mică Commune, Romania.

Key words: plum brandy, fruit trees, plums, draff, local plum brandy distilleries, Oaş Land, Gherța Mică

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INTRODUCTION

Romanian popular culture with its specific features of authenticity and originality is spread throughout the Romanian space. Each ethnographic area is distinguished by a series of specific ethnographic phenomena, marked by a great variety and diversity of forms, which bear the imprint of the zonal or local specificity, thus contributing to the strengthening of the element of identity (Ilieș et al., 2014; Stașac and Herman, 2014; Caciora et al., 2019). This is the case of ”Oaş Land”, a Romanian ethnographic area with ancient traditions and customs preserved from ancestors, with a whole range of popular culture values specific to both material and spiritual life, completing the unity of civilization and culture of the Romanian people (Herman and Wendt, 2011; Herman, 2012, Ile et al., 2022; Ilieș, 2006; Mușlea, 2004).

Traditional occupations are represented by all the economic and social activities that have defined a certain community over time, being passed down from one generation to another. Among these, special attention was paid to animal breeding and plant culture. Within the plant culture, the plum tree culture stood out, which in turn had special implications in the way of organizing space and time, in the development of the craft of obtaining plum brandy, the development of the trade with plum brandy. Therefore, this plum tree culture played a significant role in defining the cultural identity of the inhabitants Oaș Land, by sustainably capitalizing on the specific environment of Oaş Land. However, in the context of social and economic changes, plum tree culture and other related activities are facing a series of challenges, which require novel solutions to survive and integrate in a constantly changing environment.

The plum brandy or booze is an alcoholic beverage specific to areas specialized in the culture of fruit trees, especially plum trees. Although considered a national beverage, it is manufactured in many other countries under different namings, ”Pálinka” in Hungary, ”Slivovika” or ”Rakia” in Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia (Pomohaci et al., 2002).

„The booze is a traditional Romanian alcoholic drink obtained exclusively through the alcoholic fermentation and distillation of plums (various varieties), whole or crushed, or the juice obtained from plums, with or without pits” [Gov. Order 368, 2008, art. 3, alin 1]

In Romania, the best-known fruit-growing areas where plum brandz is produced are Turț, Pitesti, Văleni, Muscel, Pâtârlagele, Bistrița, Zalău, Horezu a.s.o.

The first documentary mentions about the production of alcohol in the Romanian space dates back to 1332 in Transylvania (Godea 2005, p. 10), while the first mentions about Turț, in Satu Mare County, was attested from 1570 (Pomohaci et al., 2002, p. 7 citing Cioltean, 1998).

Since ancient times, the geographical location has imposed favoritism and restrictions on the communities that developed at the foot of the Oaş Mountains. Thus, over time, migratory populations have avoided these less fertile and hard-to-access spaces, thus facilitating the development of highly original local communities. Among the elements of identity specific to the study area are the popular port, the music, the dance, the speech and last but not least the activities and occupations specific to the place, inherited and transmitted from generation to generation (Herman and Wendt, 2011; Herman and Gherman, 2017; Herman and Benchiș, 2016).

Currently, against the background of globalization, many of the identity elements specific to local communities are in danger of disappearing (Herman et al., 2016; Herman and Grama, 2018). This process is a natural one, being a result of adapting to the progress made by the current society, defined by global values, less connected to the specifics and local physical and geographical conditions.

In this context, the present study aims to highlight an element of local identity that not only managed to overcome the challenges induced by the phenomenon of globalization, but also adapted to the new conditions, becoming an image and symbol for the Oaș Land community.

Given that the culture of fruit trees, especially plums, is an ancient activity in the Oaș Land, as in the whole of Romania, a superior, sustainable exploitation of it is required. Thus, in addition to the consumption of fruits in various forms (fresh, dried, smoked, compote etc.) and obtaining alcohol following their fermentation and distillation, a reorientation, a capitalization through tourism is required.

Tourism is an activity specific to today's society (Caciora et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2020, 2023; Boc et al., 2022) which can evolve into a sustainable and superior form of capitalizing on plum tree culture and activities related to it. The ability of tourism to capitalize on the entire spectrum related to plum tree culture is derived from the unique and original elements given by: the landscapes with blooming plum trees in April; the richness and variety of the fruits reaching maturity in the month of August; the associative, family-type activities imposed by the fruit harvest in August and September; the processing of fruits in order to obtain the plum brandy in the months of October – November. From those presented, it is noted the existence of a continuous activity, throughout the whole year, activity that can be a factor of tourism animation. Among all these activities, the most spectacular in terms of novelty, mystery and good cheer seems to be the last stage, namely obtaining the plum brandy following a special craft that takes place in specially designed spaces called "Pălincii" which are the local plum brandy distilleries.

The local plum brandy distillery is an identity spatial presence in Țara Oașului, next to the church, mushroom shape dance area, household, school, a.s.o. Unlike the northern part of the Oaș Land (Cămârzana - Negrești-Oaș - Racșa), where the local plum brandy manufactories are smaller in size, in the western part, in the Turț - Gherța-Mică – Călinești - Oaș Depression Basin, they are large, serving the entire community. This aspect is explained on a historical scale, by the different socio-economic conditions between the two parts of Oaş

Land. Therefore, this economic gap is very visible at the spatial level nowadays and is reflected by the size of the houses and the grandeur of the popular port. It is no coincidence that it is said that in Negreşti-Oaş, the exact time is given for the entire Oaş Land. From here all economic, social and spiritual customs, traditions, novelties and trends spread throughout the Oaş Depression.

DATA AND METHODS

Study Area

Gherța Mică commune is located in the southern part of Satu Mare county, on the eastern part of Oaș Land, in the homonymous depression, being crossed from north to south by the Valea Uliței stream, a right tributary of Tur River. From an orographic point of view, this space is a depression area flanked to the northeast by the Palna Hill, to the west by the Pusta-Heighi and Corni Hills, and to the south-east by the Turului Plain, a subunit of the Someșului Plain. From an administrative point of view, it borders the following territorial-administrative units: Turț (to the north), Cămârzana and Târșolt (to the east), Călinești Oaș and Livada (to the south) and Turulung (to the west) (Figure 1)

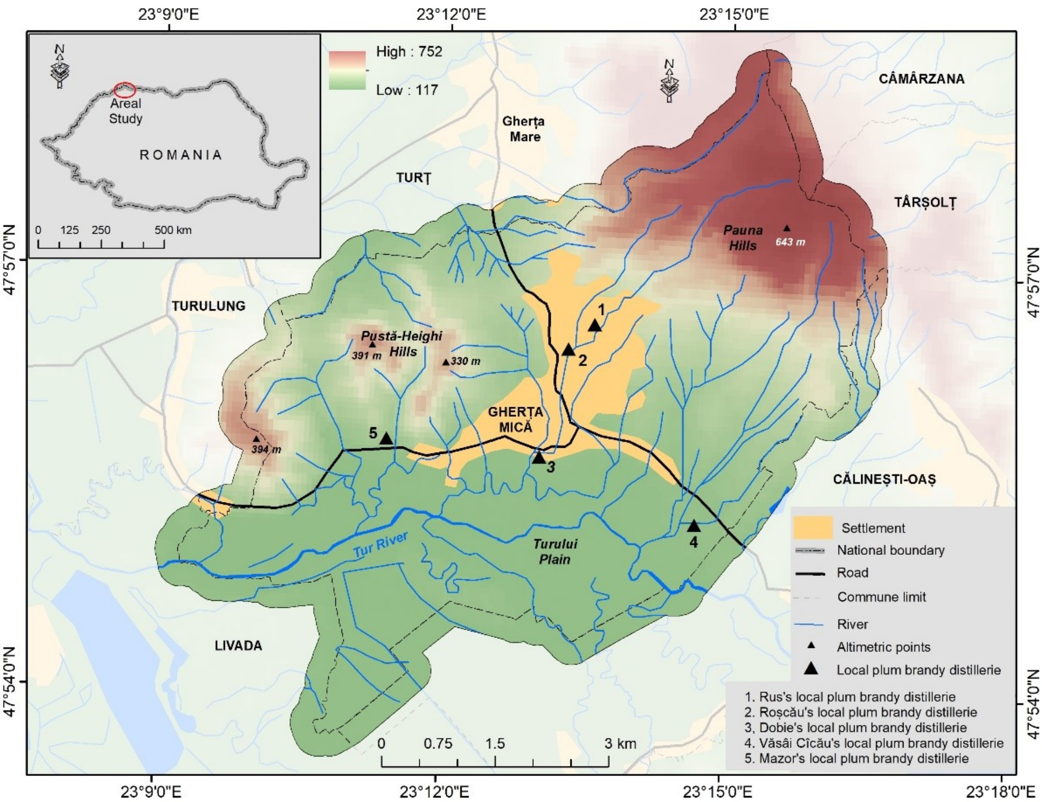

Figure 1. Areal study

Like any activity specific to the rural environment, the inhabitants of the Gherța Mică commune have always been concerned with various occupations within agricultural activities, but fruit growing and animal husbandry occupy a special place. The total area of the commune is 3885 hectares of which: arable

(1166 ha), pastures (1117 ha), vineyards and orchards (205 ha), forests (1102 ha), unproductive (22 ha), rivers, lakes, ponds (81 ha) and roads (192 ha). Gherța Mică has a population of 3,881 inhabitants, the majority being Romanians, totaling a percentage of 98.11%, alongside whom also live Roma (1.38%) and Hungarians (0.51%). From an administrative point of view Gherța Mică commune no longer has other villages belonging to it.

Data analysis

The present study represents the results of the research undertaken by documenting some books and articles from the specialized literature, to which the field interventions are added. The present study used the method of direct observation, the interview method (consulting the main actors involved, the owner of the local plum brandy distillery, the local population) and bibliographic documentation. This paper tries to capture, highlight and describe one of the most representative and much appreciated and loved (by some) local crafts specific to Oaș Land, namely the production of the plum brandy (booze), insisting on a case study, represented by Gherța Mică commune. After a preliminary description of the role and importance of the plum brandy in the life of the inhabitants of Oaș Land, the paper focus on the main steps taken until obtaining the finish product, starting with the planting of the fruit trees and here we referred in particular to the plum trees plantations, which offer the best quality of the plum brandy, then continuing with the stage of picking, fermentation and after that the transport and actual making of the plum brandy in the so-called ”palincarii” (the local plum brandy distilleries). Here the main focus is oriented towards the process through which the draff (fermented plums) goes, until it reaches a liquid that is only good to be drink (the famous plum brandy). The software used for mapping the prospected objectives and drawing up figure 1 was ArcGis 10.6.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The physical and geographical conditions of the Gherța Mică commune are influencing factors represented by the bio-pedo-climatic favorability and restrictions imposed on this area, which led to the imposition of basic activities, namely animal breeding, plant-based agriculture and fruit growing. Within this last agricultural activity, special attention was paid to the plum tree culture.

The cultivation of plum trees in Gherța Mică has a long tradition, plums being appreciated for their fruits, which are used in various ways, from fresh consumption to the production of dried plums, jams and plum brandy. The supreme and the most sustainable form of capitalizing the harvests is the plum brandy, the "visiting card of the Oaș Land inhabitants". Wherever they travel around the world, the famous plum liqueur can often be found in the luggage of the Oaș Land inhabitant, which can often "open" new horizons, strengthen friendships and directly or indirectly lead to the promotion of this product across borders.

Since ancient times, the craft of producing natural plum brandy has been a major concern for the people of Gherța Mică, who have constantly perfected their production techniques in order to obtain a product of the best quality. The pride and vanity of putting on the table and honoring those who step on the threshold of their homes, with a plum brandy of the best quality, naturally matured in oak barrels with mulberry tree staves, which also gives it a slightly yellowish color, has started over time and a competition among inhabitants of Oaş Land. The competition has an ongoing character, aiming at the selection of: plum varieties; of saplings; of the way of planting and care; the picking and selection of the fruits, the storage vessels of the draff; choosing the best local plum brandy distilleries with the best boilers to get the best plum brandy.

Plum tree cultivation

A popular saying says that "he who does not plant a tree, does not dig a well, does not build a house, does not start a family and does not have a child" is not considered an accomplished person.

In this spirit, fruit growing is the basic occupational in Gherța Mică, where plum trees predominate, along with apples, pears and walnuts. Why do plum tree orchards predominate? It is a question that finds its answer very easily and quickly when you enter the house of an inhabitant from Gherța Mică. No sooner have you entered the house than they sit you down at the table and quickly fill you up with a glass of plum brandy and something to eat, such as a plate of bacon, sheep's or cow's cheese, onions and sausage. You can't walk out of the house without been greeted by the host.

Until it reaches the finished product, the plum brandy involves several stages, a long and arduous process, which starts with the planting of the trees (plums), their maintenance, picking, storage and then its production (distillation) of the plum brandy.

The planting of fruit trees (plums, in our case) usually takes place after a preliminary preparation of the soil, fertilizing it with manure from animal farms, especially in autumn at the end of October or spring at the end of March and the beginning of April, respecting the standard spacing of four meters per row and five meters between rows for easier maintenance.

The picking of plums was usually done by a group, made up of family members and relatives, one by one, until the plums from everyone present were picked up.

The preparation for the picking of plums (fruits) was and is still being done since the summer. The wooden tubs (who still own them) are taken outside to the street or in the yard and turned upside down, then they are filled with water to swell so that the juice from the plums does not flow when they start to ferment. The hoops are also checked and tightened (beated) so that they do not fall, and the unsuitable ones are replaced with new ones, as well as the damaged staves.

At first, the plums were stored in large pits dug in the ground and buried, lined with yellow clay to prevent from seeping into the ground, later in wooden tubs, and nowadays in plastic barrels, of course protected from the sun's rays and of rains.

However, the craftsmen claim that for storing plums, the best are oak barrels, which lend extremely subtle aromas to plum brandy, and for preservation and aging, it must be left for at least five years in mulberry barrels, from which it lends a yellowish color.

The quality of the plum brandy also depends on the quality of the plums (Figure 2). The most famous areas for the cultivation of plum trees or fruit trees in Gherța Mică are: Dumbrava, Cioncășele, Susanii, Merii Popii areas.

Figure 2. Aspects of plum trees cultivation

The process of obtaining the plum brandy has its secret depending on the area, ethnographic region, etc. and has been passed down from generation to generation until today.

In a first stage, after the plums have been picked and stored, their fermentation is expected, usually between two to six weeks after picking, after which the resulting draff must be boiled, when the fermentation of the plums is at its maximum. From this moment the draff must be taken to the local plum brandy distilleries.

The local plum brandy distilleries

The local plum brandy distilleries is an identity spatial element in Oaş Land, alongside the church, mushroom shape dance area, household, school, etc. Unlike the northern part of the Oaș Land (Cămârzana-Negrești-Oaș - Racșa), where the local plum brandy distilleries are smaller in size, in the western part, in the Turț - Gherța-Mică - Călinești-Oaș Depression, they are large, serving the entire community. This aspect is explained on a historical scale, by the different socio-economic conditions between the two parts of Oaş Land. Therefore, this economic gap is very visible at the spatial level and at the present time and is reflected by the size of the houses and the grandeur of the popular port. It is no coincidence that it is said that in Negrești-Oaş, the exact time is given in the Oaş Land. From here, all economic, social and spiritual customs, traditions, novelties and trends spread throughout the depression.

As a related activity to fruit growing, the local plum brandy distilleries are the traditional distilleries made up of copper boilers (99% purity), large combustion chambers, coolers to which are added the large storage containers for the draff.

In Gherța Mică commune, over time there have been several local plum brandy distilleries, among which we mention: Bozga’s, Dobie’s, Mazor's, Roscă's, Rus's, Văsâi Cîcău's local plum brandy distilleries, which we will detail in the following. Continuing the tradition, these distilleries follow its course and purpose, being under the tutelage of his son Bura Marcel, who lovingly and responsibly carries on this craft that he inherited from his father and grandfather.

Bura Marcel's local plum brandy distillery operates in Gherța Mică and is open to all residents, but also to the residents of the surrounding communes who want to produce on their own and in the traditional way the famous plum brandy of which they are proud all over the world "Oaș Land plum brandy".

The local plum brandy distillery is over 100 years old; it was received as a dowry by Câcău Vasile from his father-in-law Ştrango Vasile, and Marcel Bura inherited it from his father Cîcău Vasile. Although at the beginning it operated on the Valea Uliței that runs through the center of the commune, it was relocated by Bura Marcel to the Main Street in the area of the fuel supply point, also owned by him.

Currently it works with three boilers, two for boiling the draff and obtaining ”vodka”, one of 400 l, the other of 350 l, and the third for the final distilation of the ”vodka” and obtain the plum brandy through the second boiling of 220 l (Figure 3).

The process of manufacturing the plum brandy involves the following operations: transporting and depositing the draff in the local plum brandy distillery building; wood supply; charging the two boilers with draff; sticking the lid to the boiler; collection of ”vodka”; collection of the plum brandy etc.

The transport and deposition of the draff is done in larger barrels, newer in those of plastic, located in the building of the local plum brandy distillery and can be done by the owner (the one who is going to make the plum brandy) or if not, for a fee by the owner of the plum brandy.

Figure 3. The interior of Bura Marcel's local plum brandy distillery

In addition to the quality of the plums, the wood used for the fire and, of course, the water specific to the place used in the process of boiling and finishing the plum brandy are also important in order to obtain a quality product. The woods used for distillering the plum brandy should be hard essence usually beech, sessile, ashtree, etc., which also make a lot of embers, maintaining the burning for a longer time, compared to softwood, for example.

The two boilers are then loaded with draff for the first distilation through a chute that leads from the basin to the boiler. Next, the boiler lid is glued with clay mixed with wheat flour so that it does not crack, as well as the tube that takes the steam to the cooler.

The draff is boiled for about two hours, two and a half hours until the alcohol vapors rise through the lid, pass through that tube, which at the bottom is suddenly cooled, in the so-called cooler, turning by condensation into a liquid, called ”vodka” or ”vudka”. Cooler water is pumped continuously from a well drilled at a depth of 100 meters.

The draff from the first boiler, is stirred automatically through a gear that does not allow the draff to be overburned, previously this process was done manually. At the beginning of the boiling of the draff, the ”vodka” that flows for the first time has a fairly high alcohol concentration, about 40-50%, so that in the middle of the boiling it decreases in strength by half (20-25%), and towards the end boils to reach somewhere around 10%. All the ”vodka” from the first boil is collected in a single container, where it adds up to a strength of 15-25%.

After each boiling of the draff, the cauldron is washed and cleaned so that it does not stick to the side walls and bottom, as this would lead to the smoking of the plum brandy.

The ”vodka” collected from the first boiling (which locally is called ”tistulaş”) will be introduced into the third cauldron, where a new boiling (redistillation or return) follows. A gentler fire will be needed, because a stronger fire could lead to the explosion (destruction) of the boiler. During this stage, stirring is no longer necessary because the liquid does not stick to the cauldron.

When the firstly disttiled liquid, called ”tistulas” boils it follows the same route described in the first phase of the distillation, a liquid with a very high alcohol content (around 80% or even more) will flow, which in the local term is called ”rasalău” or ”rasalit”, being taken separately and used by the locals for rubbing, in case of rheumatism. Toward the end of boiling, the disttiled liquid is more often checked to measure its alcohol content. Checking the alcohol content is done by throwing a glass of liquid on the hot lid of the boiler and setting it on fire with a match, and if it stops burning, the process stops because it no longer contains alcohol. These last drops of liquid are called ”coada” and have few uses, they can even be thrown away.

At the end, after collecting the liquid resulting from the second distilation, follows the preparation of the real plum brandy. As mentioned here, the quality of the plum brandy will depend on the quality of the local water, to which we must also add the skill of the one who prepares it (the ”heteș”). It is considered a quality plum brandy that preserves the aroma of the fruit (plum in our case), has a strength of about 52 degrees and forms those bubbles, which persist for as long as possible, when it is stirred in the bottle or poured into glasses.

The person responsible for the entire process, from the beginning to the end, of obtaining the plum brandy is called ”heteș”. When the owner loads his finished product - the plum brandy - into the barrels and goes home satisfied, not before paying his fee to the owner of the local plum brandy disttilery and to the ”heteș”.

In addition to all these stages of the distillation process, that moment is also a good opportunity to socialize, to troubleshoot some memories or adventures, some more difficult than others, and to prepare specific traditional dishes: potatoes on the embers, chicken in embers, bacon grilled on a stick over the fire and, of course, the tasting of the plum brandy just out of the cooler.

The path to perfecting the true plum brandy does not end at the local plum brandy manufactory. This is brought home and stored, ideally in oak (*Quercus cerris*), acacia, etc. barrels, which will give it that yellowish color over time, which also increases its appreciation.

The maturation period lasts about a year, after which it is removed from the barrel and drawn into bottles or demijohns with corks. Usually only in the second year does the plum brandy reach its full maturity. Then four markers can be established for quality: 1. taste and strength, 2. perfume, 3. aroma and fruitiness, 4. color and finesse (Godea I., 2005).

CONCLUSIONS

The plum brandy is a result of man's coexistence with nature, in a given geographical space and which imposed some favors and restrictions on him at the same time. It is used for own consumption, as well as for commercial purposes (sale or in the form of gifts, souvenirs).

The plum brandy was, it is and will always remain an artisanal product of infinite local, regional, provincial and national variety. It is a Romanian national asset (Godea I., 2005).

For the inhabitants of Gherța Mică, the plum brandy is somewhat of a local symbol, being present in everyone's life from birth to death, both in moments of joy and sadness. It is no coincidence that it can be considered as a local pride (a true local brand) that could be promoted both nationally and internationally. A strong alternative can also represent tourism, considering that it is a booming activity that has the ability to capitalize on new spaces, objects and geographical facts. As the plum tree culture and obtaining the plum brandy provide some action (animation) throughout the whole year and a commensurate souvenir we recommend tourism as an alternative measure in the preservation and continuation of these ancestral occupations. Thus, a better promotion of this traditional product could attract tourists to the area, with effects in the development and support of the local economy.

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DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: This comprehensive study delves into enhancing European Union demographic policies through three key recommendations. First, it advocates for a more integrated approach, addressing challenges like declining birth rates, aging populations, and migrant integration collectively. Second, it emphasizes the need for enhanced coordination between European Union and member states' demographic policies to foster a synergistic response. Lastly, the study recommends increased civil society engagement in policy development and implementation, promoting inclusivity, transparency, and community-driven solutions. These recommendations aim to fortify the European Union's demographic strategies, ensuring they align with societal needs and aspirations.

Key words: demographic policies, integrated approach, coordination, European Union, civil society engagement, inclusive governance

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the European Union has faced complex demographic challenges that have prompted a reevaluation of its demographic policies. This scientific article aims to explore and analyze the multifaceted landscape of demographic policies within the European Union. The introductory section begins by elucidating the concept of demographic policy, underscoring its significance in shaping the population dynamics of the European Union member states. Subsequently, an in-depth examination of the current demographic context within the European Union unfolds, shedding light on the prevailing trends that influence the formulation of strategic policies.

The European Union, as a collective entity, grapples with a dynamic demographic panorama characterized by aging populations, migration complexities, and diverse population trajectories among member states. The

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identification of these demographic nuances serves as a foundational understanding for the ensuing exploration of challenges faced by the European Union. These challenges encompass not only the implications of an aging population but also the intricate dynamics of migration, urbanization, and socio-economic disparities.

As the article delves deeper, specific demographic policies designed to address these challenges emerge as focal points of discussion. Policies aimed at boosting birth rates take center stage, exploring measures ranging from support for families to initiatives that reduce the financial burdens associated with raising children. Gender equality and family planning education are integral components, recognizing the interconnectedness of social and demographic dynamics. The demographic policies addressing active aging form another crucial aspect of the article. The emphasis here is on measures to encourage the economic participation of the elderly, enhance their health and well-being, and improve access to essential services and care.

Furthermore, the article examines the European Union's approach to the integration of migrants, underscoring the significance of promoting workforce mobility, social and economic integration, and combatting discrimination and xenophobia. The inclusion of these policies signifies the EU's commitment to navigating the challenges posed by diverse demographic compositions. This article not only evaluates the impact of the European Union's current demographic policies but also presents recommendations for their enhancement. These recommendations advocate for a more integrated approach that considers all demographic challenges collectively, emphasizes greater coordination between EU and member state policies, and calls for increased involvement of civil society in the formulation and implementation of demographic strategies. The subsequent sections will delve into these aspects in detail, offering insights into the intricacies of demographic policies within the European Union.

Defining the concept of demographic policy, as a concept, refers to the strategic approach taken by governments or organizations to manage and influence changes in population. These changes can span a wide range of aspects, including birth rates, death rates, migration, and aging. The primary objective of demographic policies is to address and navigate the challenges and issues that arise from these population changes. These challenges can have significant impacts on the social, economic, and political fabric of a society, and thus, require careful and strategic management. For instance, a country with a rapidly aging population may implement demographic policies aimed at promoting active aging, improving healthcare services for the elderly, and encouraging the economic participation of older adults. On the other hand, a country experiencing high levels of migration may focus its demographic policies on facilitating the social and economic integration of migrants, and combating discrimination. In essence, demographic policies serve as a roadmap guiding societies through the complex terrain of population changes. They are a critical tool for ensuring the sustainable and harmonious development of societies amidst shifting demographic landscapes.

The current demographic context of the European Union is a dynamic and evolving landscape. It is characterized by several key trends that are shaping the future of the region. One of the most significant trends is the declining birth rate across many European Union countries. This trend, coupled with increasing life expectancy, is leading to an aging population. The proportion of older adults in the population is increasing, while the proportion of younger people is decreasing. This demographic shift has profound implications for various aspects of society, including the economy, healthcare, and social security systems. Another important aspect of the EU's demographic context is migration. The European Union is a major destination for international migrants, and migration plays a significant role in shaping the region's demographic profile. Migration contributes to population growth, cultural diversity, and economic development. However, it also presents challenges in terms of social integration and cohesion. Furthermore, there are considerable regional variations within the European Union. Some regions are experiencing population growth, while others are facing population decline. These regional disparities are influenced by factors such as economic opportunities, quality of life, and social services. The European Union's demographic context is complex and multifaceted. It is shaped by a combination of demographic trends, migration patterns, and regional disparities. Understanding this context is crucial for developing effective demographic policies and strategies.

Identifying the main demographic challenges facing the European Union. The European Union is currently grappling with several key demographic challenges that are shaping its future. One of the most pressing challenges is the aging population. With declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy across many European Union countries, the proportion of older adults in the population is rising. This demographic shift poses significant challenges for social security systems, healthcare services, and the economy. As the working-age population shrinks, there is increased pressure on social security systems to support a larger elderly population. Additionally, healthcare services need to adapt to cater to the specific needs of an aging population. Another major challenge is the integration of migrants. The European Union is a major destination for international migrants, and their successful integration into society is crucial for social cohesion and economic development. However, this process can be complex and fraught with challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and discrimination. Furthermore, regional disparities within the European Union pose another demographic challenge. Some regions are experiencing population growth, often driven by migration, while others are facing population decline. These disparities can lead to imbalances in economic development, social services, and quality of life across different regions. Lastly, the declining birth rate is a cause for concern. A lower birth rate can lead to a decrease in the working-age population, which can have significant implications for the economy. It can also result in an imbalance in the age structure of the population, with a larger proportion of elderly people compared to younger people. These challenges require effective and strategic demographic policies.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a multi-faceted approach to comprehensively investigate and enhance European Union demographic policies. The methodology was designed to provide a nuanced understanding of existing policies, identify areas for improvement, and propose recommendations for a more effective demographic management strategy.

The study commenced with an extensive *literature review* encompassing academic publications, policy documents, and reports related to demographic challenges faced by the EU. This foundational step aimed to establish a robust theoretical framework, contextualizing the historical evolution of demographic policies.

A detailed *policy analysis* was then conducted to scrutinize the current demographic policies implemented by the European Union and its member states. This involved a systematic examination of policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and outcomes, with a focus on key challenges such as declining birth rates, aging populations, and migrant integration.

The study employed *scenario planning* techniques to project potential future demographic trends and challenges. This forward-looking analysis aimed to assess the adaptability and resilience of existing policies in addressing uncertainties that may arise in the coming decades. Finally, an *iterative analysis* approach was embraced, allowing continuous refinement of findings based on ongoing feedback, emerging trends, and dynamic policy landscapes. This iterative process ensured that the study remained responsive to the evolving nature of demographic challenges within the European Union.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review chapter of the article critically examines the intersection of *active ageing and demographic challenges* through an analysis of key articles. Andersen and Hatland (2014) underscore the urgency of addressing demographic challenges by reshaping welfare institutions, highlighting the need for proactive policy responses (Andersen and Hatland, 2014). The "Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences" edited by Binstock et al. (2011) contributes an extensive overview, delving into the intricate connections between aging and societal implications, forming a crucial foundation for understanding demographic complexities (Binstock et al., 2011). Bloom et al. (2011) offer a comprehensive examination of population aging, presenting facts, challenges, and responses within the European context, providing valuable insights into the demographic landscape (Bloom et al., 2011). Cini and Borragán's (2022) work on European Union politics broadens the discussion, emphasizing the political dynamics influencing demographic policy formulation (Cini and Borragán, 2022). Hantrais (1999) explores the socio-demographic changes and their policy impacts, enriching the understanding of the contextual factors shaping demographic policy decisions (Hantrais, 1999). Klemencic and Fried (2007) provide a specialized focus on the future of higher education amidst demographic challenges, establishing a link between demographic trends and educational institutions (Klemencic and Fried, 2007). Krook and True's (2012) rethinking of international norms adds a gender perspective to the discourse, emphasizing the global promotion of gender equality by the United Nations (Krook and True, 2012). Moody and Sasser (2020) contribute by exploring the concepts and controversies surrounding aging, providing insights into the broader context of demographic challenges (Moody and Sasser, 2020). Van Nimwegen and Van der Erf's (2010) geopolitical analysis situates Europe at the crossroads of demographic challenges and international migration, showcasing the global dimensions of demographic issues (van Nimwegen and Van der Erf, 2010). Walker and Maltby (2012) delve into the concept of active ageing as a strategic policy solution, offering proactive approaches to address demographic ageing in the European Union (Walker and Maltby, 2012). Windle et al.'s (2010) systematic review on the effectiveness of exercise in promoting mental well-being in older age complements the discourse by emphasizing the holistic dimensions of active ageing (Windle et al., 2010). Lastly, Zolotukhin et al. (2017) contribute a unique perspective by examining demographic and migration policy in a specific context, the mining region, and its impact on the ecological consciousness of the population (Zolotukhin et al., 2017). This literature review synthesizes these diverse perspectives, forming a comprehensive understanding of Active Ageing and Demographic Challenges within the European Union, and sets the stage for further research and policy development.

The literature review chapter of the article engages in a thorough exploration of the intersection between *urbanization and demographic change* by drawing insights from diverse scholarly works. Hauser and Seneca's (2022) examination of labor mobility in a monetary union adds a critical economic perspective to the discourse, shedding light on the intricate connections between urbanization, labor patterns, and demographic dynamics (Hauser and Seneca, 2022). The edited volume by Jetten, Haslam, and Alexander (2012) on "The Social Cure" complements the discourse by exploring the intersection of identity, health, and well-being in the context of urbanization, providing a social psychological perspective (Jetten et al., 2012). Montgomery et al. (2013) contribute significantly with their comprehensive work on "Cities Transformed," emphasizing the implications of demographic change in the developing world, providing a nuanced understanding of the urbanization process (Montgomery et al., 2013). Soldo and Manton's (1985) exploration of demographic challenges for socioeconomic planning enriches the discussion by underlining the importance of strategic planning in the face of urbanization and changing demographic structures (Soldo and Manton, 1985). Furthermore, van Nimwegen and Van der Erf's (2010) analysis of Europe at the crossroads, with a focus on demographic challenges and international migration, broadens the geographical scope, highlighting the global dimensions of urbanization and demographic transitions (van Nimwegen and Van der Erf, 2010). This synthesis of research contributes to a holistic understanding of Urbanization and Demographic Change within the European Union, setting the stage for informed policy decisions and future research endeavors.

The literature review section of the article critically examines the theme of a *comparative analysis of demographic policies* by synthesizing insights from various scholarly works. Hasselbalch's (2019) study on brain drain in European labor mobility navigates the delicate balance between solidarity and skills, providing a nuanced perspective on the challenges posed by demographic shifts (Hasselbalch, 2019). Kahanec's (2013) research delves into labor mobility in an enlarged European Union, contributing valuable insights into the economic aspects of demographic policies (Kahanec, 2013). The edited volume by Kahanec and Zimmermann (2016) further enriches the discussion by exploring the intersection of labor migration, EU enlargement, and the impact of the Great Recession, offering a comprehensive view of the multifaceted challenges faced by the European Union (Kahanec and Zimmermann, 2016). Pierrakos et al. (2014) provide a significant contribution through their comparative analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of demographic policies in EU countries during the years 2009-2010, offering a systematic examination of policy outcomes (Pierrakos et al., 2014). The work by Rašević et al. (2014) investigates strategies to motivate policymakers in addressing demographic challenges, shedding light on the practical implications of demographic policy decisions (Rašević et al., 2014). Additionally, Santa and Haj's (2020) exploration of the role of demographic policies in the internationalization of Romanian higher education adds an educational dimension to the discourse, highlighting the broader societal impacts of demographic policies (Santa and Haj, 2020). This comprehensive synthesis of research forms the basis for a nuanced understanding of the comparative analysis of demographic policies within the European Union, fostering informed policymaking and guiding future research endeavors.

The literature review chapter of the article engages in a rigorous analysis of *psychological perspectives and strategies* by weaving together insights from a wide range of academic literature. Aizer et al.'s (2016) study on the long-run impact of cash transfers to poor families provides an economic lens that intersects with psychological aspects, emphasizing the role of financial support in shaping demographic outcomes (Aizer et al., 2016). Anheier's (2013) work on civil society emphasizes the need for measurement and evaluation, shedding light on the societal structures influencing psychological perspectives within demographic policies (Anheier, 2013). Chen and Feeley's (2014) analysis of social support, social strain, loneliness, and well-being among older adults adds a psychological dimension to the discussion, highlighting the intricate relationship between social factors and demographic well-being (Chen and Feeley, 2014). Cramm et al.'s (2013) exploration of neighborhood social cohesion and social capital emphasizes the importance of community factors in shaping the well-being of older adults, providing insights into the psychological dimensions of demographic policies (Cramm et al., 2013). The work by Gottlieb and Bergen (2010) on social support concepts and measures contributes to the understanding of psychological resources within the demographic context (Gottlieb and Bergen, 2010). Additionally, Jetten et al.'s (2012) edited volume on "The Social Cure" delves into the intersection of identity, health, and well-being, offering psychological perspectives that inform demographic policy considerations (Jetten et al., 2012). Sharma et al.'s (2018) systematic review on community education and engagement in family planning further expands the discourse, highlighting the role of education and community engagement in shaping demographic attitudes and behaviors (Sharma et al., 2018). Sultan's (2018) examination of the effects of education, poverty, and resources on family planning in developing countries provides additional insights into the psychological determinants of demographic choices (Sultan, 2018). Tal and Kerret's (2020) exploration of positive psychology as a strategy for promoting sustainable population policies offers a forward-looking perspective on the psychological dimensions of demographic planning (Tal and Kerret, 2020). Finally, Windle et al.'s (2010) systematic review on the effectiveness of exercise in promoting mental well-being in older age underscores the importance of physical and mental health considerations within the broader demographic policy framework (Windle et al., 2010). This comprehensive synthesis of research on psychological perspectives and strategies contributes to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing demographic policies in the European Union.

The article's literature review meticulously dissects the realm of *international migration and integration*, meticulously synthesizing insights from a broad spectrum of academic contributions. Alonso-Carrera and Raurich's (2018) study on labor mobility, structural change, and economic growth provides a foundational understanding of the economic implications of international migration within the European Union, emphasizing the role of labor mobility in shaping demographic landscapes (Alonso-Carrera and Raurich, 2018). Åslund et al.'s (2015) research on childhood and family experiences underscores the significance of early life factors in the social integration of young migrants, enriching the discussion with insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by this demographic group (Åslund et al., 2015). Goodman's (2013) work on civic integration policies adds a policy-oriented perspective, categorizing and comparing integration requirements and shedding light on their implications for demographic policy formulation (Goodman, 2013). Greenwood's (2017) exploration of interest representation in the European Union contributes to the discourse by examining the role of various actors in shaping policies related to international migration and integration (Greenwood, 2017). Hasselbalch's (2019) framing of brain drain between solidarity and skills in European labor mobility provides a nuanced understanding of the social and economic aspects of migration (Hasselbalch, 2019). The edited volume by Heckmann and Schnapper (2016) contributes to the discourse by exploring the integration of immigrants in European societies, offering a nuanced understanding of national differences and trends of convergence (Heckmann and Schnapper, 2016). Nieswand's (2012) theorization of transnational migration introduces the concept of the status paradox, offering a theoretical lens to understand the complex nature of migrant experiences (Nieswand, 2012). Ouali and Jefferys (2015) critically examine workplace strategies of trade unions in the face of hard times, highlighting challenges in fostering anti-racist approaches within labor movements and their impact on migrant workers (Ouali and Jefferys, 2015). Strang and Ager's (2010) investigation into refugee integration identifies emerging trends and remaining agendas, providing critical perspectives on the multifaceted nature of integration efforts for diverse migrant groups (Strang and Ager, 2010). Taran and Gächter's (2015) examination of discrimination against migrant workers globally contributes a global perspective, shedding light on challenges and suggesting ways forward for more inclusive policies (Taran and Gächter, 2015). Valtonen's (2016) work on social work and migration adds a social perspective, emphasizing the role of social work in fostering successful integration processes (Valtonen, 2016). Wiesbrock's (2011) exploration of the integration of immigrants in Sweden proposes it as a potential model for the European Union, contributing a comparative perspective to the discourse on integration policies (Wiesbrock, 2011). This comprehensive synthesis of research on international migration and integration serves as a foundation for understanding the intricate dynamics and challenges associated with demographic policies in the context of the European Union.

The article's literature review is a comprehensive and insightful analysis of *social well-being and health*, drawing on a wide range of sources. Böcker and Meelen's (2017) study on sharing economy participation examines motivations related to people, planet, or profit, shedding light on the socio-economic aspects of sharing activities (Böcker and Meelen, 2017). Bølstad's (2015) analysis of public opinion dynamics within the core and periphery of European integration contributes to understanding the social sentiments influencing demographic policies (Bølstad, 2015). Caporali and Golini's (2010) work on births and fertility in interwar Italy provides historical context and perceptions surrounding demographic trends, contributing to the broader discussion on population dynamics (Caporali and Golini, 2010). Christoph's (2012) exploration of the mass media's role in migrant integration emphasizes the impact of media on social well-being, offering a perspective on how information dissemination influences societal cohesion (Christoph, 2012). Codagnone and Kluzer's (2011) research on ICT for the social and economic integration of migrants into Europe underscores the role of technology in shaping social well-being outcomes for migrant populations (Codagnone and Kluzer, 2011). Courtin and Knapp's (2017) scoping review on social isolation, loneliness, and health in old age provides a comprehensive overview of the interplay between social factors and health outcomes among the elderly, contributing to the understanding of aging populations (Courtin and Knapp, 2017). De Paola and Brunello's (2016) study delves into the role of education as a tool for the economic integration of migrants, exploring the broader societal implications of educational policies on migrant communities (De Paola and Brunello, 2016). Delnord, Blondel, and Zeitlin's (2015) research on disparities in preterm birth rates in European countries sheds light on health inequalities, emphasizing the importance of addressing demographic factors in maternal and child health policies (Delnord et al., 2015). Esping-Andersen and Billari's (2015) work on re-theorizing family demographics offers a theoretical framework for understanding the changing dynamics of family structures and their impact on population trends (Esping-Andersen and Billari, 2015). Hantrais (2017) explores social policy in the European Union, providing a contextual backdrop to the broader demographic policies and their implications for social well-being (Hantrais, 2017). Kutter and Trappmann's (2010) examination of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe adds a nuanced perspective on societal structures, influencing social well-being and health outcomes in the region (Kutter and Trappmann, 2010). Melchiorre et al.'s (2013) study on social support, socio-economic status, health, and abuse among older people in European countries offers insights into the intricate connections between social dynamics and health outcomes among the elderly (Melchiorre et al., 2013). Nandi's (2010) collection of essays on human development and public policy contributes to the understanding of the broader societal factors shaping public health policies and demographic strategies (Nandi, 2010). Nova's (2019) examination of authoritarian demographic policies in Hungary adds a critical perspective on the role of political ideologies in shaping demographic strategies, emphasizing the potential implications for social well-being and health (Nova, 2019). Nugent's (2017) work on the government and politics of the European Union provides a contextual framework for understanding the policy-making landscape that influences demographic strategies and their impact on social dynamics and health outcomes (Nugent, 2017). Oliver and Gidley's (2015) research on the integration of migrants in Europe offers valuable insights into the social well-being and health implications of migration policies within the European context (Oliver and Gidley, 2015). Sardak et al.'s (2018) analysis of current trends in global demographic processes provides a foundational understanding of the broader demographic landscape, setting the stage for discussions on policy implications (Sardak et al., 2018). Schneeweis's (2011) examination of educational institutions and their role in migrant integration contributes valuable insights into the social dynamics influencing the well-being and health of migrant populations (Schneeweis, 2011). Simon's (2019) work on the economics of population growth adds an economic perspective, shedding light on the interconnectedness between demographic policies, population dynamics, and overall well-being (Simon, 2019). Walker and Maltby's (2012) exploration of active ageing as a strategic policy solution in the European Union offers specific insights into addressing demographic challenges to enhance social well-being and health outcomes (Walker and Maltby, 2012). Wallace et al.'s (2020) collaborative effort on policy-making in the European Union provides a comprehensive overview of the policy landscape that shapes social and health-related strategies within the region (Wallace et al., 2020). Finally, Weening-Verbree et al.'s (2013) systematic review of implementation strategies in oral health care for older people in long-term care facilities provides a nuanced perspective on healthcare policies impacting the well-being of specific demographic groups (Weening-Verbree et al., 2013). This comprehensive literature review provides a nuanced understanding of the intersection between social well-being, health, and demographic policies in the European Union, encompassing diverse dimensions from economic participation to media influence and technological integration.

DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES TO INCREASE THE BIRTH RATE

The European Union is currently navigating a complex demographic landscape characterized by shifting population dynamics and challenges. As countries within the European Union face concerns related to aging populations and declining birth rates, a proactive and strategic approach is essential. This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the policies implemented by the European Union to address demographic challenges. The first part of this study focuses on a set of crucial measures devised to tackle the issue at its core.

The cornerstone of the European Union's efforts to bolster birth rates lies in the implementation of targeted measures to support families. In this context, the first subpart delves into the diverse strategies and incentives designed to provide families with the necessary support structures. These initiatives encompass financial incentives, accessible childcare facilities, and other supportive mechanisms aimed at easing the challenges faced by families in raising children.

Furthermore, recognizing the economic pressures that families often encounter, the European Union has also developed policies to alleviate the cost of living associated with family life. The second subpart examines these measures, encompassing economic strategies and social programs that seek to reduce financial burdens, thereby fostering an environment conducive to family planning and child-rearing.

Gender equality emerges as a pivotal aspect of the European Union 's approach to increasing birth rates. The third subpart explores the policies implemented to promote equal opportunities between men and women. By fostering an environment where both genders share responsibilities in both the workplace and domestic spheres, the EU aims to create a supportive atmosphere for family life and parenting.

The fourth subpart delves into the educational initiatives devised by the European Union to enhance family planning. Education plays a crucial role in empowering individuals and couples to make informed decisions about family planning. This section explores the educational strategies employed to provide comprehensive information and resources, contributing to responsible family planning practices.

This article's first part serves as a gateway to understanding the multifaceted initiatives undertaken by the European Union to stimulate population growth. By examining the specific policies addressing the increase in birth rates, we gain valuable insights into the EU's commitment to proactive demographic management and its endeavors to shape a sustainable and vibrant future for its member states.

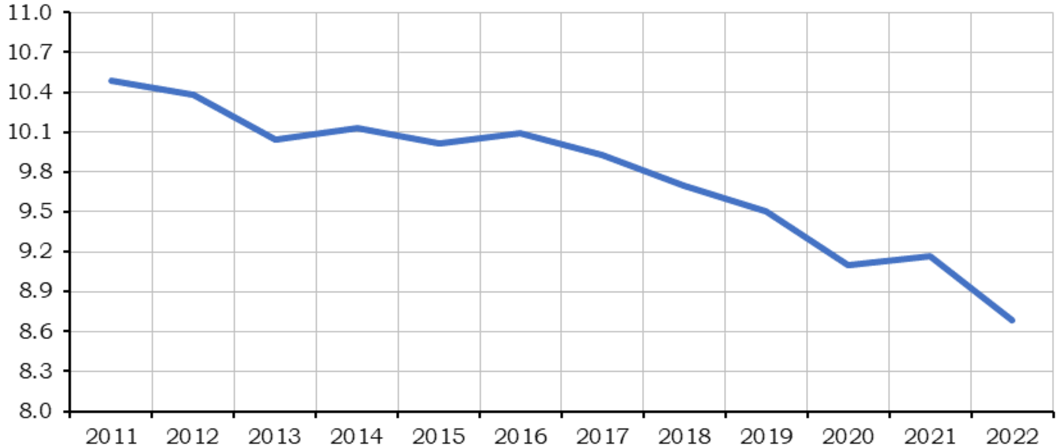

Figure 1. Crude birth rate in European Union in the period 2011-2022
(Data source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

Support Measures for Families

Family support measures are a crucial component of demographic policies, particularly in the context of the European Union where declining birth rates pose a significant challenge. Family support measures are designed to alleviate the financial, social, and emotional burdens that families often face. These measures can take various forms, including financial benefits, access to quality childcare, flexible work arrangements, and parental leave policies.

Financial benefits for families can include child allowances, tax benefits, and housing subsidies. These benefits aim to offset the costs of raising children and to make it financially feasible for families to have more children.

Access to quality childcare is another important family support measure. By providing affordable and high-quality childcare services, governments can help parents balance their work and family responsibilities. This not only supports the economic participation of parents, particularly women, but also contributes to child development.

Flexible work arrangements and parental leave policies are also essential for supporting families. Flexible work arrangements, such as part-time work, telecommuting, and flexible working hours, can help parents balance their work and family responsibilities. Parental leave policies, on the other hand, allow parents to take time off work to care for their children, particularly during the early years of a child's life.

Family support measures are a multifaceted approach to support families and address demographic challenges. By alleviating the burdens that families face, these measures can contribute to increasing birth rates, promoting gender equality, and supporting the well-being of families.

Economic Strategies and Social Programs

Reducing the cost of living for families is a critical aspect of demographic policy, particularly in the context of the European Union, where economic pressures can significantly impact family life.

The cost of living encompasses a wide range of expenses that families incur, including housing, food, healthcare, education, and childcare. High costs in these areas can place a significant financial burden on families, potentially influencing decisions about having children and impacting the overall quality of life.

Housing is often the largest expense for families. Policies aimed at reducing housing costs can include providing affordable housing options, offering housing subsidies, or implementing rent control measures. By making housing more affordable, these policies can alleviate financial stress on families and contribute to a higher standard of living.

Food, healthcare, and education are other significant expenses for families. Policies in these areas can include providing subsidies or free services. For instance, free school meals or subsidized healthcare can reduce the financial burden on families.

Childcare is another major expense, particularly for families with young children. The cost of childcare can be a significant barrier for parents wishing to return to work. Policies to reduce childcare costs can include providing affordable public childcare, offering childcare subsidies, or implementing policies that encourage employers to provide childcare solutions.

Reducing the cost of living for families involves a multifaceted approach that addresses the various expenses families face. By reducing these costs, demographic policies can support families, potentially influence decisions about having children, and contribute to a higher quality of life.

Promoting Equal Opportunities Between Men and Women

Promoting gender equality is a fundamental aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where it is enshrined as a core value. Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys. It implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.

In the realm of demographic policy, promoting gender equality often involves implementing measures to ensure equal opportunities in areas such as education, employment, and family life. For instance, policies may be put in place to promote equal access to education for girls and boys, to ensure equal pay and opportunities for advancement in the workplace, and to support a fair division of household and caregiving responsibilities between men and women.

Promoting gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also a necessary condition for sustainable development and economic growth. When women and men have equal opportunities to contribute to society, economies can grow more rapidly, and societies can become more inclusive and resilient.

However, achieving gender equality is a complex task that requires concerted efforts across multiple sectors and levels of society. It involves challenging deeply ingrained social norms and structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. It also requires the active participation of all members of society, including men and boys, in promoting gender equality.

Promoting gender equality is a critical aspect of demographic policy. It is a key strategy for addressing demographic challenges and fostering sustainable development.

Family Planning Education

Family planning education is a critical component of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union (EU), where it plays a significant role in managing population growth and promoting reproductive health. Family planning education involves providing individuals and couples with information, skills, and services to make informed decisions about when and how many children they wish to have. It encompasses a range of topics, including reproductive health, contraception, fertility, and the social and economic implications of having children.

The primary goal of family planning education is to empower individuals and couples to exercise their reproductive rights. This includes the right to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing, and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so. Family planning education can also play a crucial role in addressing demographic challenges. By enabling individuals and couples to plan their families, it can help manage population growth, reduce unplanned pregnancies, and improve maternal and child health.

Moreover, family planning education can contribute to gender equality. By empowering women with knowledge and resources, it can enhance their autonomy, improve their health, and expand their opportunities in life.

Family planning education is a vital aspect of demographic policy. It is a key strategy for promoting reproductive health, managing population growth, and fostering gender equality.

DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES FOR ACTIVE AGING

As the European Union confronts the challenges posed by an aging population, the second part of our scientific exploration delves into the nuanced realm of *demographic policies for active aging*. Building upon the foundation laid by the second part, which meticulously examined measures to encourage economic participation, promote health, and enhance access to services for senior citizens, this section focuses on the multifaceted strategies devised to further address the implications of an aging demographic.

The second part unravels a series of targeted policies aimed at fostering social engagement and continuous learning opportunities for senior citizens within the European Union. The importance of social inclusion for the well-being of the aging population is underscored by initiatives designed to mitigate social isolation, facilitate community involvement, and promote active participation in various societal spheres.

One significant subpart explores the policies aimed at creating a socially inclusive environment for the elderly. The European Union recognizes that social connections are pivotal to the overall well-being of senior citizens, and as such, has implemented measures to foster community engagement, intergenerational interaction, and cultural participation among the aging population.

Simultaneously, the article delves into the concept of lifelong learning as a cornerstone of active aging policies. The European Union has recognized the potential for continued personal and professional development among the elderly. This subpart scrutinizes policies designed to provide learning opportunities, skills training, and educational initiatives tailored to the unique needs and interests of the aging demographic.

Moreover, the exploration extends to policies addressing the digital divide among senior citizens. In an era dominated by technological advancements, ensuring that the elderly have access to and are proficient in using digital technologies is crucial. This section investigates the strategies employed by the EU to bridge the digital gap, fostering digital literacy and inclusion for older individuals.

The second part of this article unveils the intricate tapestry of policies within the EU geared toward enhancing social inclusion and promoting lifelong learning for the elderly. By delving into these initiatives, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the European Union's commitment to ensuring that the aging population remains actively engaged, connected, and equipped with the skills needed to navigate the evolving landscape of the 21st century.

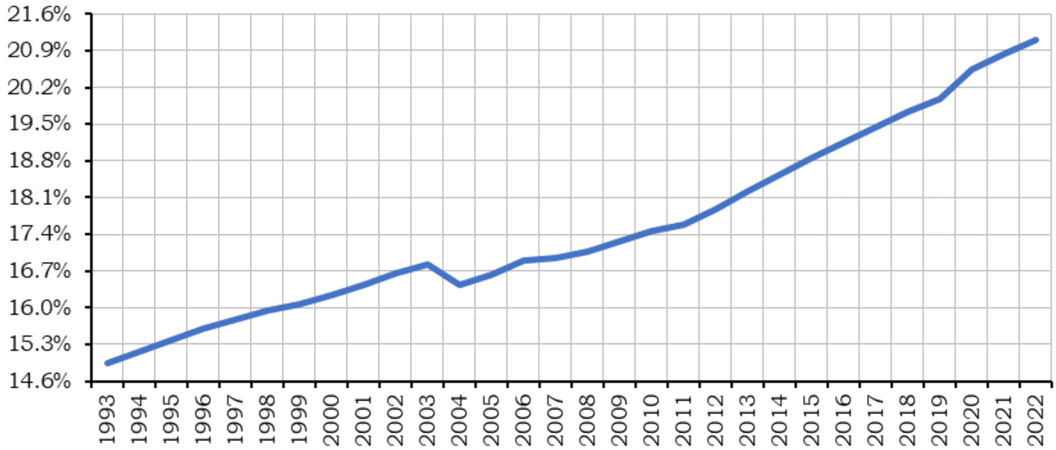

Figure 2. Proportion of population aged 65 years and more in European Union in the period 1993-2022
(Data source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

Measures to Encourage the Economic Participation of the Elderly

Encouraging the economic participation of older adults is a key aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where an aging population presents both challenges and opportunities. The economic participation of older adults refers to their involvement in the labor market, either through paid employment or self-employment. This participation can contribute to the economy, alleviate pressures on social security systems, and enhance the well-being of older adults themselves.

However, encouraging the economic participation of older adults is not without its challenges. Age discrimination, health issues, outdated skills, and inflexible work arrangements can all act as barriers to their participation. Therefore, measures to encourage their economic participation need to address these barriers. One such measure is the implementation of anti-discrimination laws. By protecting older adults from age discrimination in the workplace, these laws can help ensure that they have equal opportunities to participate in the labor market.

Another measure is the provision of lifelong learning opportunities. By helping older adults update their skills and acquire new ones, lifelong learning can enhance their employability and adaptability in a rapidly changing labor market.

Flexible work arrangements can also encourage the economic participation of older adults. By allowing older adults to work part-time, telecommute, or have flexible working hours, these arrangements can accommodate their needs and preferences, making it easier for them to remain in or re-enter the labor market.

Encouraging the economic participation of older adults involves a multifaceted approach that addresses the various barriers they face. By implementing these measures, demographic policies can harness the potential of an aging population, contributing to economic growth and social cohesion.

Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Older People

Promoting the health and well-being of older adults is a crucial aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where the population is rapidly aging.

Health and well-being in older age are multifaceted concepts that encompass physical health, mental health, and quality of life. They are influenced by a range of factors, including lifestyle, social connections, and access to healthcare services.

Promoting physical health in older age can involve measures such as preventive healthcare, regular health check-ups, and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Preventive healthcare can help detect and manage chronic diseases, which are prevalent in older age. Regular health check-ups can ensure early detection and treatment of health issues. Promoting healthy lifestyles, including balanced diet and regular physical activity, can help maintain physical health and prevent diseases.

Mental health is equally important for the well-being of older adults. Measures to promote mental health can include providing mental health services, promoting social connections, and addressing loneliness and isolation, which are common issues among older adults.

Quality of life in older age can be enhanced by ensuring access to social and recreational activities, promoting lifelong learning, and fostering social inclusion. These measures can contribute to the emotional well-being of older adults, enhance their sense of purpose, and improve their overall quality of life.

Promoting the health and well-being of older adults involves a comprehensive approach that addresses their physical health, mental health, and quality of life. By implementing these measures, demographic policies can contribute to the well-being of older adults, support their continued participation in society, and harness the potential of an aging population.

Improving Older People's Access to Social and Care Services

Improving access to social and care services for older adults is a vital aspect of demographic policy, especially within the context of the European Union, where the population is rapidly aging.

Social and care services play a crucial role in supporting the health and well-being of older adults. These services can include healthcare, social support, housing, and recreational activities. However, access to these services can often be a challenge for older adults due to factors such as cost, availability, and accessibility.

Improving access to healthcare services is a key aspect of this policy area. This can involve measures such as expanding healthcare coverage, reducing out-of-pocket costs, and ensuring the availability of healthcare services that cater to the specific needs of older adults.

Access to social support services is also important. These services can include counseling, support groups, and community programs that can help older adults maintain social connections and enhance their quality of life.

Housing is another critical area. Policies can be implemented to ensure the availability of affordable, accessible, and age-friendly housing options. This can help older adults live independently and safely in their communities.

Recreational activities are also important for the well-being of older adults. Policies can be put in place to ensure that older adults have access to recreational and cultural activities that can enhance their well-being and keep them engaged in their communities.

Improving access to social and care services for older adults involves a comprehensive approach that addresses the various needs of older adults. By implementing these measures, demographic policies can contribute to the health and well-being of older adults, support their continued participation in society, and harness the potential of an aging population.

DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES FOR THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANTS

In the ever-evolving demographic landscape of the European Union, the third part of our comprehensive scientific inquiry delves into the dynamic sphere of *demographic policies for migrant integration*. With the increasing complexity of migration patterns and the profound impact of diverse cultures within the European Union, this section examines the policies crafted to foster the seamless integration of migrants. The third part scrutinizes the multifaceted strategies aimed at promoting workforce mobility, facilitating social and economic integration, and combatting discrimination and xenophobia.

The first subpart scrutinizes the policies aimed at promoting the mobility of the labor force among migrants within the European Union. Acknowledging the valuable contributions migrants bring to the workforce, the European Union has strategically implemented measures to enhance labor market participation. This section explores initiatives such as skills recognition, vocational training, and employment assistance designed to create an environment conducive to the mobility and professional development of migrant workers. Furthermore, the article investigates policies aimed at facilitating the social and economic integration of migrants. Recognizing the importance of creating an inclusive and supportive societal framework, this subpart delves into initiatives that address language barriers, cultural adaptation, and access to essential services. By examining these policies, we gain insights into the European Union 's commitment to fostering a harmonious coexistence between migrant communities and the host societies.

A crucial aspect of the article explores the policies designed to combat discrimination and xenophobia. As migration continues to shape the socio-cultural fabric of the European Union, this subpart scrutinizes strategies to create an environment that actively counters discriminatory practices and prejudices. Initiatives promoting diversity, cultural awareness, and anti-discrimination measures are integral components of the EU's approach to nurturing an inclusive society.

The third part of this scientific exploration unravels the intricate web of policies within the European Union aimed at integrating migrants seamlessly into the economic, social, and cultural fabric of their host societies. By delving into these initiatives, we gain a nuanced understanding of the European Union 's commitment to cultivating a diverse and inclusive environment while actively combating discrimination and xenophobia in the pursuit of demographic harmony.

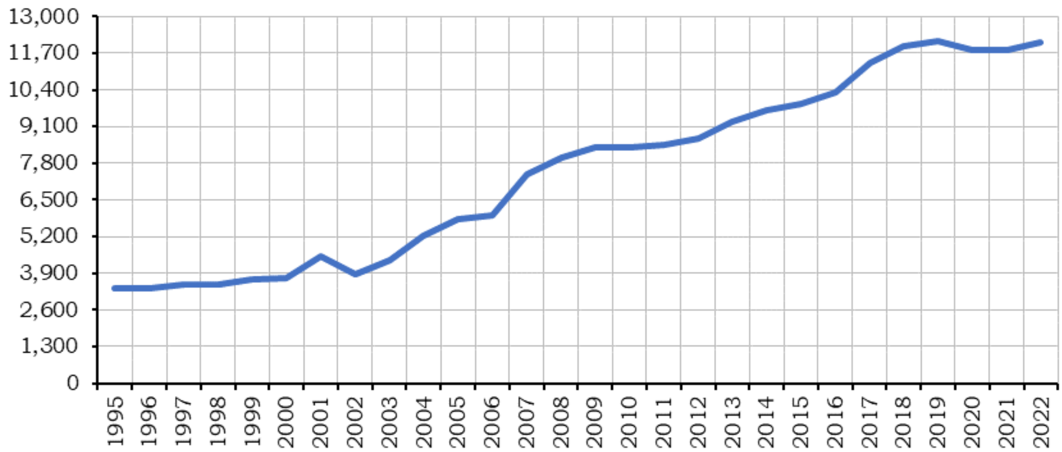

Figure 3. EU/EFTA born population of working age who usually resides in another EU/EFTA country (thousand persons) in European Union in the period 1993-2022
(Data source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat)

Promoting labor mobility

Promoting labor mobility is a key aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where it can play a significant role in addressing demographic challenges and fostering economic growth. Labor mobility refers to the ability of workers to move freely within a labor market, either geographically (between regions or countries) or between different sectors or occupations. High labor mobility can contribute to a more efficient allocation of resources, better matching of skills and jobs, and greater economic dynamism. In the context of the European Union, promoting labor mobility can help address regional disparities in employment and wage levels, mitigate the effects of local economic shocks, and contribute to economic convergence between member states. It can also help address demographic challenges, such as labor shortages in regions with aging populations, by enabling workers from regions with surplus labor to move to regions with labor shortages.

However, promoting labor mobility is not without its challenges. It requires policies to remove barriers to mobility, such as language barriers, recognition of qualifications, and access to information about job opportunities in other regions or countries. It also requires measures to support the integration of mobile workers and their families in their new communities, such as access to housing, education, and social services. Promoting labor mobility is a complex task that requires a comprehensive approach and concerted efforts at various levels of governance. By implementing measures to promote labor mobility, demographic policies can contribute to economic growth, social cohesion, and the sustainable development of the European Union.

Facilitating the Social and Economic Integration of Migrants

Facilitating the social and economic integration of migrants is a crucial aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where migration plays a significant role in shaping the demographic landscape.

Social and economic integration refers to the process by which migrants become part of their host society. This involves not only their participation in the labor market but also their inclusion in social, cultural, and political life.

Facilitating the economic integration of migrants can involve measures such as recognition of foreign qualifications, provision of language and vocational training, and anti-discrimination policies in the workplace. These measures can help migrants find employment that matches their skills and qualifications, thereby contributing to the economy of their host country.

Social integration, on the other hand, involves fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among migrants. This can be achieved through measures such as intercultural dialogue, inclusive education, and access to social services. These measures can help migrants build social connections, understand and navigate their new cultural environment, and access the support they need to settle in their new home.

However, facilitating the social and economic integration of migrants is not without its challenges. It requires concerted efforts at various levels of governance and the active involvement of both migrants and the host society. It also requires addressing issues such as discrimination, social exclusion, and disparities in access to opportunities and services.

Facilitating the social and economic integration of migrants is a complex but crucial task. By implementing measures to promote integration, demographic policies can harness the potential of migration, contribute to social cohesion, and foster sustainable development.

Combating Discrimination and Xenophobia

Combating discrimination and xenophobia is a critical aspect of demographic policy, particularly within the context of the European Union, where diversity and inclusion are fundamental values. Discrimination refers to unfair treatment based on certain characteristics such as race, nationality, or religion. Xenophobia, on the other hand, involves fear or hatred of foreigners or people from different cultures. Both discrimination and xenophobia can pose significant barriers to the social and economic integration of migrants, and can undermine social cohesion and harmony.

Combating discrimination and xenophobia involves a multi-faceted approach. Legal measures, such as anti-discrimination laws, can provide protection against discriminatory practices in various areas including employment, education, and housing. These laws can help ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background. Education and awareness-raising are also crucial in combating discrimination and xenophobia. This can involve promoting intercultural understanding, challenging stereotypes, and educating people about the rights and contributions of migrants. Schools, media, and public campaigns can play a significant role in this regard.

Support services, such as counseling and legal aid, can also be important in helping victims of discrimination and xenophobia. These services can provide assistance and support to those affected, and can help them seek justice.

Combating discrimination and xenophobia is a complex but crucial task. It requires concerted efforts at various levels of governance and the active involvement of all members of society.

By implementing measures to combat discrimination and xenophobia, demographic policies can contribute to social cohesion, diversity, and the sustainable development of the European Union.

EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Evaluating the impact of demographic policies in the European Union is a complex but crucial task. It involves assessing how these policies have influenced key demographic indicators, such as birth rates, death rates, migration rates, and the age structure of the population. It also involves examining how these policies have contributed to broader social and economic outcomes, such as social cohesion, economic growth, and sustainable development.

The impact of demographic policies can be evaluated through various methods. These can include statistical analysis of demographic data, economic modeling, and social research. These methods can provide insights into the effectiveness of demographic policies and their impacts on individuals, families, and societies.

However, evaluating the impact of demographic policies is not without its challenges. Demographic changes are influenced by a wide range of factors, including economic conditions, social norms, and individual choices. Therefore, isolating the impact of demographic policies can be difficult. Moreover, the impacts of demographic policies may take many years to become apparent, making it challenging to assess their short-term effects.

Despite these challenges, evaluating the impact of demographic policies is essential for informing policy decisions and ensuring that these policies are effective in addressing demographic challenges. The findings from these evaluations can provide valuable insights for policymakers, helping them to refine existing policies and develop new ones that are better suited to the evolving demographic landscape.

Evaluating the impact of demographic policies in the European Union is a complex but crucial task. It requires rigorous methods, a long-term perspective, and a deep understanding of the multifaceted nature of demographic changes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING EUROPEAN UNION DEMOGRAPHIC POLICIES

Integrated Approach to Addressing Demographic Challenges

To optimize the impact of European Union demographic policies, it is crucial to embrace a holistic and integrated approach that tackles the myriad challenges faced by the European Union. The adoption of such a comprehensive strategy is paramount in acknowledging the intricate interplay of demographic issues and capitalizing on the potential synergy that arises from addressing multiple facets of population dynamics simultaneously. First and foremost, an integrated approach recognizes that demographic challenges are interconnected. Issues such as aging populations, declining birth rates, migration patterns, and workforce dynamics are not isolated problems but are interdependent components of a complex system. By acknowledging these interconnections, the EU can develop policies that address the root causes of demographic challenges in a more nuanced and effective manner. A key advantage of an integrated strategy lies in its ability to capitalize on synergies. By simultaneously targeting various aspects of population dynamics, the European Union can create a more robust and complementary set of policies. For instance, policies aimed at supporting work-life balance may positively impact birth rates by alleviating the challenges faced by individuals in managing career and family responsibilities. Similarly, initiatives promoting educational opportunities and gender equality can contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce, positively impacting economic growth and innovation. Furthermore, an integrated approach allows for a more adaptive and responsive policy framework. Demographic trends are dynamic and influenced by a multitude of factors, including economic conditions, social norms, and technological advancements. A comprehensive strategy enables the EU to respond swiftly to changing circumstances and adjust policies accordingly. Flexibility is key in addressing the evolving nature of demographic challenges, and an integrated approach provides the necessary agility to navigate unforeseen developments. In addition, a holistic strategy fosters a sense of inclusivity by recognizing the diversity of challenges faced by different regions within the European Union. Demographic issues vary across member states, and tailoring policies to the specific needs of each region ensures that interventions are more effective and culturally sensitive. This approach not only promotes solidarity within the European Union but also enhances the overall coherence and efficiency of demographic policies. The adoption of a more integrated approach is indispensable for enhancing the effectiveness of European Union demographic policies. By recognizing the interconnected nature of demographic challenges and harnessing the potential synergy derived from simultaneously addressing various facets of population dynamics, the EU can develop a more robust, adaptive, and inclusive strategy that is better equipped to tackle the complexities of demographic change in the 21st century.

Comprehensive Demographic Strategy: The European Union should formulate a holistic demographic strategy that considers the interplay between declining birth rates, aging populations, and migrant integration. Rather than isolated initiatives, this strategy should incorporate a cohesive framework that recognizes the impact of each policy area on the others. By understanding the intricate relationships between these demographic challenges, the European Union can develop more nuanced and effective policies.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: Encourage collaboration and coordination among various sectors, including health, education, labor, and social services. A cross-sectoral approach ensures that demographic policies are not siloed but rather interconnected, fostering a more holistic response to the challenges. Collaborative efforts can lead to innovative solutions that address the root causes of demographic issues and create a synergistic impact on societal well-being.

Data-Driven Decision Making: Strengthen data collection and analysis mechanisms to enable evidence-based decision-making. A robust data infrastructure will provide policymakers with accurate and timely information on demographic trends, allowing for the continuous refinement and adaptation of policies. This data-driven approach ensures that policies are responsive to evolving demographic dynamics and remain effective over time.

Public Awareness and Engagement: Launch comprehensive public awareness campaigns to inform citizens about the importance of demographic challenges and the role they play in shaping policies. Engaging the public fosters a sense of collective responsibility and encourages support for demographic initiatives. Informed and engaged citizens are more likely to participate in and benefit from the policies designed to address demographic issues.

Flexibility in Policy Implementation: Recognize the dynamic nature of demographic challenges and build flexibility into policy frameworks. This adaptability allows for timely adjustments in response to emerging trends, unforeseen challenges, or shifts in societal needs. A flexible approach ensures that demographic policies remain relevant and responsive to the ever-changing European demographic landscape.

By adopting a more integrated approach to demographic policies, the European Union can strengthen its capacity to address the complex challenges of declining birth rates, aging populations, and migrant integration. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of a coordinated, cross-cutting strategy that aligns diverse policy areas toward a common goal of ensuring a sustainable and vibrant future for all member states.

Enhanced Coordination between European Union and Member States' Demographic Policies

To maximize the impact of demographic policies, it is imperative to establish a collaborative framework that promotes consistent communication and cooperation between the European Union and its member states. Developing such a structured framework is a critical recommendation aimed at fostering a cohesive and synergistic approach to demographic management across the European Union. The first key element of this framework involves facilitating regular communication channels. Establishing mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between European Union institutions and national governments ensures that information is shared promptly, allowing for a real-time exchange of ideas and insights. This open line of communication enables quick adaptation to emerging demographic challenges and facilitates the timely implementation of effective solutions. Moreover, the collaborative framework should encourage the exchange of information, experiences, and successful strategies. This exchange can take various forms, including conferences, workshops, and working groups dedicated to demographic issues. By providing platforms for sharing best practices, challenges, and lessons learned, the European Union and its member states can tap into the collective expertise of diverse regions and draw inspiration from successful policies implemented elsewhere. Creating a collaborative environment requires fostering a sense of shared responsibility. The framework should emphasize the interconnected nature of demographic challenges and highlight the mutual benefits derived from collective action. This shared responsibility fosters a spirit of cooperation, encouraging member states to actively contribute to the development and implementation of effective demographic policies. The collaborative framework should also incorporate mechanisms for joint decision-making. While recognizing the sovereignty of individual member states, establishing consensus on overarching goals and strategies is essential. This may involve the creation of advisory bodies or councils where representatives from both the EU and member states collaborate to set common objectives and standards for demographic management. In addition, the framework should be adaptable to evolving circumstances. Demographic challenges are dynamic and may change over time due to various factors, such as economic shifts, technological advancements, or global events. A flexible and responsive framework allows for the continuous reassessment of policies and the incorporation of new insights, ensuring that the collaborative approach remains relevant and effective in addressing the ever-changing landscape of demographic issues. The collaborative framework should be underpinned by a commitment to transparency and accountability. Clear reporting mechanisms and benchmarks should be established to track progress and assess the impact of demographic policies. This transparency fosters trust between the European Union and its member states, reinforcing the collaborative spirit and ensuring that all stakeholders are held accountable for their contributions to demographic management. Developing a structured framework that facilitates regular communication, collaboration, and information exchange between the European Union and its member states is crucial for optimizing the impact of demographic policies. This collaborative approach harnesses the collective expertise and experiences of both EU institutions and national governments, creating a synergistic environment that enhances the overall effectiveness of demographic management across the European Union.

Shared Best Practices and Knowledge Sharing: Facilitate platforms for member states to share best practices and successful initiatives in addressing demographic challenges. Establishing a repository of successful case studies and innovative approaches will enable countries to draw inspiration from each other, accelerating the adoption of effective policies and avoiding the duplication of efforts.

Policy Harmonization and Standardization: Work towards harmonizing key aspects of demographic policies across member states while respecting national diversity. Standardizing certain elements, such as data collection methodologies or key performance indicators, can simplify the evaluation of policies' effectiveness and promote a more cohesive response to shared demographic challenges.

Capacity-Building Initiatives: Implement capacity-building programs that enhance the capabilities of both European Union institutions and member states in the field of demographic management. This may involve training programs, workshops, and knowledge-sharing initiatives aimed at improving the understanding of demographic trends, policy evaluation methodologies, and the implementation of evidence-based strategies.

Mutual Support Mechanisms: Establish mechanisms for mutual support during demographic crises or significant demographic shifts. This can include coordinated responses to sudden population changes, joint initiatives to address specific challenges, and the provision of expertise and resources from the European Union to member states facing particularly acute demographic issues.

Regular Evaluation and Adjustment: Institute regular evaluations of the coordination mechanisms to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Feedback loops and continuous improvement processes should be established to adapt coordination efforts based on the evolving nature of demographic challenges and the changing needs of member states.

By fostering a more coordinated approach between the European Union and member states in the realm of demographic policies, the EU can harness the collective strength of its diverse nations. This recommendation emphasizes the importance of collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and harmonization to create a unified and robust response to the shared demographic challenges faced by the EU and its member states.

Increased Civil Society Engagement in the Development and Implementation of European Union Demographic Policies

Enhancing the impact of demographic policies within the European Union requires a strategic emphasis on fostering greater coordination between the European Union and its member states. This imperative stems from the recognition that demographic challenges are not confined by national borders and that a collaborative, unified effort is essential to address the complexities of population dynamics effectively. One key aspect of this recommendation involves aligning the efforts of the European Union and its member states. This alignment is crucial to ensure that there is a harmonized vision and set of objectives regarding demographic management. By establishing common goals, the EU and its member states can work towards shared outcomes, reducing redundancies, and maximizing the collective impact of their interventions. Furthermore, the exchange of best practices between member states and the European Union is pivotal in developing a comprehensive and informed approach to demographic policies. Different regions within the European Union may face unique challenges, and the diversity of experiences offers valuable insights. By facilitating the sharing of successful strategies, innovative solutions, and lessons learned, the European Union can create a knowledge-sharing network that empowers member states to adopt effective policies that align with their specific contexts. Coordinated efforts also contribute to resource optimization. Demographic challenges often require substantial investments in various sectors, such as healthcare, education, and social welfare. By coordinating resources and avoiding duplication of efforts, the European Union and its member states can maximize the efficiency of their spending, ensuring that funds are directed where they are most needed and can yield the greatest impact. Additionally, fostering greater coordination enhances the ability to implement uniform standards and benchmarks for monitoring demographic progress. By establishing common indicators and metrics, the European Union can assess the effectiveness of policies consistently across member states. This not only facilitates data-driven decision-making but also enables the identification of successful strategies that can be scaled up or replicated in different contexts. The collaborative approach also strengthens the European Union's role as a facilitator and coordinator, leveraging its influence to encourage member states to prioritize demographic challenges on their national agendas. This alignment of priorities is crucial for creating a unified front in tackling issues such as aging populations, declining birth rates, and migration patterns. Optimizing the impact of demographic policies in the European Union necessitates a critical emphasis on fostering greater coordination between the EU and its member states. This collaborative approach, marked by aligned efforts, shared best practices, and resource optimization, not only enhances the overall effectiveness of demographic management but also strengthens the unity and resilience of the European Union in the face of complex and interconnected challenges.

Establish Dialogue Platforms: Create structured and inclusive platforms for dialogue between EU institutions, member state governments, and civil society organizations. These platforms should encourage open discussions, allowing civil society representatives to share their insights, experiences, and concerns related to demographic challenges. This inclusive approach ensures that policies are informed by a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Consultative Processes in Policy Formulation: Incorporate civil society organizations into the early stages of policy formulation through consultative processes. Seeking input from organizations representing various societal interests ensures that policies are reflective of the diverse needs and aspirations of the population. This participatory approach contributes to the legitimacy and social acceptance of demographic policies.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Collaborate with civil society groups in designing and implementing public awareness campaigns on demographic challenges and policy initiatives. Civil society organizations often have direct connections with communities, making them valuable partners in disseminating information and fostering public understanding of the importance and implications of demographic policies.

Capacity Building for Civil Society: Invest in capacity-building programs for civil society organizations, enhancing their ability to engage meaningfully in demographic policy discussions. Providing resources, training, and access to relevant information empowers civil society to contribute more effectively to policy debates, ensuring that their involvement is informed and impactful.

Monitoring and Evaluation by Civil Society: Encourage civil society organizations to play an active role in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of demographic policies. Their independent assessments can serve as checks and balances, ensuring accountability, transparency, and the effectiveness of policies in meeting the intended goals.

Diverse Representation in Decision-Making Bodies: Advocate for increased representation of civil society representatives in relevant decision-making bodies related to demographic policies. This ensures that the voices of different societal groups are considered at the policy-making table, fostering a more democratic and inclusive governance structure.

Support for Grassroots Initiatives: Provide financial and logistical support to grassroots initiatives led by civil society organizations that address demographic challenges at the local level. Recognizing and supporting community-driven solutions enhances the effectiveness and relevance of policies, taking into account the unique needs of different communities.

By prioritizing the active engagement of civil society in the development and implementation of demographic policies, the European Union can tap into a wealth of diverse perspectives, local knowledge, and community-driven solutions. This recommendation underscores the importance of participatory governance in ensuring that demographic policies resonate with the values and aspirations of the broader population.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this comprehensive study has illuminated the multifaceted demographic policies implemented by the European Union to address pressing challenges related to birth rates, aging populations, and migrant integration. The first part of the study highlighted the European Union's proactive approach to increasing birth rates through targeted family support measures, economic strategies, gender equality initiatives, and educational programs. By alleviating financial burdens, enhancing childcare accessibility, and promoting equal opportunities, the European Union aims to create a supportive environment for family life and responsible family planning.

The second part delved into demographic policies for active aging, emphasizing the importance of social engagement, continuous learning, and digital inclusion for the elderly. The measures to encourage the economic participation of older adults, promote their health and well-being, and improve access to social and care services underscore the European Union's commitment to harnessing the potential of an aging population.

The third part explored demographic policies for migrant integration, focusing on promoting labor mobility, facilitating social and economic integration, and combating discrimination and xenophobia. By fostering an inclusive environment, recognizing the contributions of migrants, and implementing measures to address cultural barriers, the EU strives to create a harmonious coexistence between migrant communities and host societies.

In evaluating the impact of these demographic policies, it becomes evident that the EU's holistic approach addresses not only demographic challenges but also contributes to broader societal goals, including social cohesion, economic growth, and sustainable development. Rigorous evaluation methods are crucial to understanding the effectiveness of these policies, considering the complex interplay of factors influencing demographic changes. The findings from such evaluations will be invaluable for refining existing policies and shaping future strategies that align with the dynamic demographic landscape of the European Union. Overall, this study underscores the European Union's commitment to proactive demographic management, fostering a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable future for its member states.

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TOURISM AND TOURIST PERCEPTION IN ARIEȘENI COMMUNE, ROMANIA

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Abstract: The present work represents an analysis of tourism in Arieșeni commune, through the lens of existing tourist resources and accommodation infrastructure, to which is added the assessment of the perception of residents and tourists regarding what constitutes tourism in a tourist resort of local interest, Arieșeni. To capture the tourist phenomenon, bibliographic sources (both related to the resort and of a general nature) were used and consulted, supplemented by field trips to "validate" the bibliographic information obtained. The tourist's perception was obtained through the sociological survey method, based on the questionnaire. Tourism in Arieșeni commune is based on the existing tourist resources, especially the natural ones; even though human resources are equally significant but less exploited. The perception of the surveyed people on tourism in the resort is a positive one, but through the interpretation of the questionnaire, the aspects that could be improved are also identified.

Key words: tourist potential, tourist resources, tourist resort, Arieșeni

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INTRODUCTION

Given that today tourism has become an increasingly present topic, the present study aims to analyze how it manifests itself in a specific rural area in the Apuseni Mountains (Arieșeni commune), given the fact that each community rural has its own way of realizing its tourism brand, which is why each study is different, offering unique perspectives. Interesting to analyze are those premises on which the tourist activities that are currently taking place (tourist resources, tourist infrastructure) have been consolidated, as well as the way in which they are perceived by locals and tourists. Added to all this is the desire to find out if the results that emerge from the questionnaires correspond to the reality of the analyzed space. The commune of Arieșeni is located in the north-western extremity of Alba County, at the border between Bihor and Alba counties, at the

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foot of the Bihor Mountains, in the upper basin of the Aries river that springs from under the Vârtop pass (Figure 1). From an administrative point of view, the commune brings together 17 villages whose specific feature is given by the uneven distribution on the territory of the commune, influenced by the characteristics of the natural environment, being spread out, crossed by tributaries of the Aries basin. These villages are: Avrămești, Bubești, Casa de Piatră, Cobleș, Dealu Bajului, Fața Cristesei, Fața Lăpusului, Galbena, Hodobana, Izlaz, Pănțești, Pătrăhăițești, Poienița, Ravicești, Sturu, Ștei-Arieșeni and Vanvucești. Also, the commune is part of the "regional geographic system of Moților Land" (Cocean et al., 2013, p 103), which gives it an added tourist appeal, considering the unique characteristics of these "country" type territorial entities: "mentality, behavior, ethnographic, folklore aspects, speech pattern" etc. (Cocean et al., 2013, p. 106).

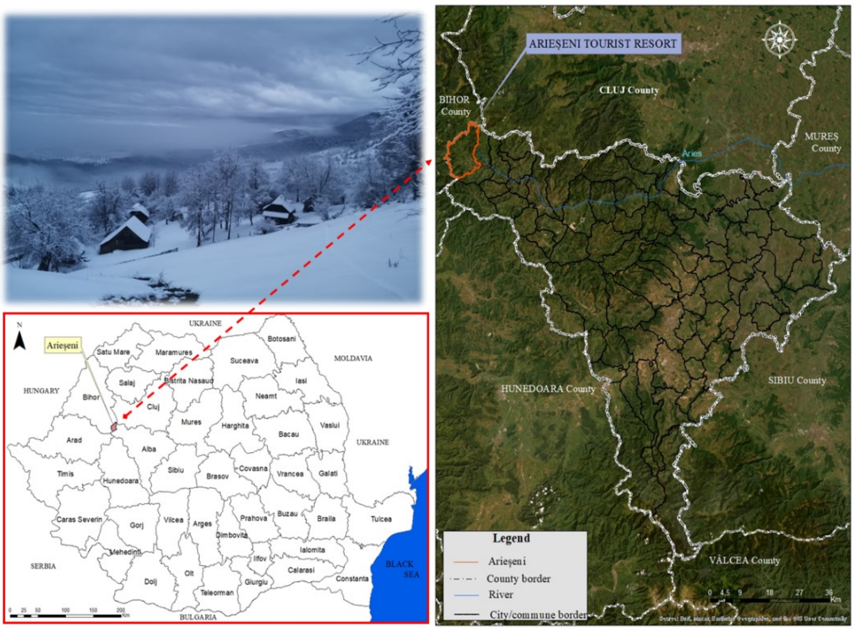

Figure 1. Geographical location of Arieșeni

The climate of the Arieșeni commune is typical of the mountains, generally humid and cold on the high peaks with gradual alternation towards the low regions. Climatic resort, the Arieșeni commune falls, from a bioclimatic point of view, in the medium and small mountains, which range from less than 700-800 m (in depressions and intramontane valleys) up to 2000 m. This bioclimate has a tonic character -stimulating, in the upper part, with relaxing shades in the lower part. It requires the neuro-vegetative, endocrine functions that coordinate the acclimatization of organisms to the changed environment (Gaceu and Teodoreanu, 2013). The tourist resort of national or local interest is that locality or part of a locality that has human and natural resources, highlighted in the Tourist Heritage Register and that cumulatively fulfills certain criteria provided in the annexes established by law (Decission 852/2008). Arieșeni commune (Alba County), was certified as a tourist resort of local interest, according to

Government Decision no. 329 of March 16, 2006. The existing natural and anthropic tourist resources at the commune level represent the basis for the development of tourist activities and for the development over time of accommodation units with a tourist function. Regarding the geographical studies that refer to the Apuseni Mountains, the Bihor Mountains or even the Moților Land, from which information was gathered about the area in which the Arieșeni commune is included, we recall the work of Bleahu and Bordea (1981) with data. on the relief of the Bihor Mountains; the work of Gaceu and Teodoreanu (2013) for climate information; Cocean and Filimon (2013) for the data relating to the Arieșeni commune as a component part of the "country" type entities; Petrea (2004) for aspects related to rural tourism in the Apuseni Mountains, etc. The studies that make direct reference to the Arieșeni commune are articles aimed at tourism aspects, for example: Herman (2022), Gozner (2015), Balintoni (2002), etc. The present study aims to expose in a simple and concise way the tourist potential of the Arieșeni commune and the way in which the locals and those who visit it perceive the tourist phenomenon at the level of this resort.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the realization of this work, both information from bibliographic sources regarding the Arieșeni tourist resort, as well as general data, were used and consulted. The tourist potential of a destination is the result of the spatial association of the tourist fund with the existing technical-material base (Cocean, 2000; Herman et al., 2012; Ilieș et al., 2013; Ielenicz and Comănescu, 2009; Hoang et al., 2018; Trukhachev, 2015; Dehoorne et al., 2019). Precisely for this reason, in order to be able to analyze the tourist phenomenon that manifests itself in the Arieșeni commune, a study is made both of the existing tourist fund (natural and anthropic tourist resources) and of the existing technical-material base, in this case, accommodation units, it is necessary with tourist function. The analysis of the tourist infrastructure in the Arieșeni commune assumed the use of information from the Ministry of Tourism. To capture an overview of the size of tourism at the resort level, in 2023, the main aspects targeted were the number of structures and accommodation places. Regarding the identification of natural and human resources, a field trip took place, after the analysis of existing data on them. Regarding the perception of local residents and tourists on tourism in the Arieșeni commune, the results were obtained through the sociological survey method based on the questionnaire (Bryman, 2012; Elhosiny et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2023), applied in April 2023. It was applied both to the residents of the Arieșeni commune (44% , 88 people) as well as tourists (56%, 112 people), aimed to obtain an overview of their opinion regarding the resources of the Arieșeni commune. Structurally, the questionnaire was composed of 10 questions, these aimed at: the extent to which the Arieșeni commune is considered a tourist resort; the number of days that offer leisure alternatives; comparing the degree of attractiveness of natural and anthropogenic tourism resources; the degree of knowledge of the existing tourist attractions at the level of the tourist resort; favorable season to visit the resort; the degree of knowledge of existing tourist routes and how they are organized; the opinion on the number of existing accommodation units with a tourist function as well as the quality of the services offered by them; the most suitable form of tourism for the Arieșeni commune and the opinion about how or not the Arieșeni commune is sufficiently exploited in relation to the tourist resources it has. Through the prism of the questionnaire, socio-demographic data of the people surveyed were also obtained, which can be used in the analysis of some tourist indices for this area. So, from a number of 200 people surveyed (44% locals, 56% tourists), in terms of age, 66% are between 16-25 years old, 12% are between 26-35%, 13% are age 36-45, 5% are 46-55 years old, 3% are 56-65 years old and 1% are over 65 years old. Of the total number of respondents, 39.5% are men (79 people), 60.5% are women (121 people) and regarding the level of education, the situation is as follows: 5% have primary education (10 people), 6% have secondary education (12 people), 51% have high school education (102 people), 40.5% have university education (81). persons) and 10.5% have postgraduate studies (21 persons). In terms of ethnicity, 96% are Romanian, 2% Hungarian, 1% Moldovan and 1% Slovak.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

"The Aries and its main tributaries form an important axis of polarization, the most clearly highlighted area being the Ariesului Mare valley. This area, the best defined in Apuseni, includes numerous well-individualized tourist areas, especially the tourist villages (Arieșeni) and a large number of tourist points" (Petrea, 2004, p. 127).

Natural tourism resources

Following the consultation of the existing bibliography at the level of the commune and following the trip in the field, a number of 13 natural tourist resources were identified (Table 1) of which only one of the tourist resources has the status of a tourist objective (appropriately). arranged for visiting): Vârtop Glacier Cave (Figure 2). Access to some tourist resources is facilitated by certain bridges or wooden railings - the route to Izbucul Tăuz or Vârciorogu Waterfall (Figure 5). Many of these natural tourism resources are more attractive without facilities to visit, offering a distinct aspect of wilderness, all being located in a special natural setting, most of the time surrounded by coniferous or mixed deciduous forests, with a course of water nearby.

Table 1. Natural tourist resources

	Name	Resource type	Village
1	Coiba Mare Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
2	Coiba Mică Cave	Hydrographic	Casa de Piatră
3	Glacier from Vârtop Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
4	Gura Apei Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
5	Hodobana Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
6	Huda Orbului Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
7	Huda Oilor Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
8	Șura Popii Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
9	Biserica Scoachii Cave	Orographic	Casa de Piatră
10	Pătrăhăițești Waterfall	Hydrographic	Pătrăhăițești
11	Vârciorogu Waterfall	Hydrographic	Vanvucești
12	Tăuzul Spring	Hydrographic	Casa de Piatră
13	Coliba Gheoabului Spring	Hydrographic	Casa de Piatră

It should also be mentioned that, on the list of natural tourist resources, there are also some superlatives of the Romanian karst: the largest portal of the cave (Coiba Mare Cave - 47 m high and 74 m wide) (Figure 3);[1] the most ramified cave (Hodobana Cave), the place where the oldest trace of Neanderthal man in Romania was found (Ghețarul de la Vârtop Cave).

Figure 2. Calcareous formations from Vârtop Glacier Cave

Figure 3. Coiba Mare cave portal

Figure 4. Vârciorogu waterfall

Figure 5. Tăuzul Spring

Anthropogenic tourism resources

The "endowment" of human tourism today is given by those elements that man built in the past, for purposes other than tourism, becoming over time, due to their attributes (age, uniqueness, function, size) real tourist attractions (Cocean, 2000). The rural area, the commune of Arieșeni presents an extremely rich anthropic tourist "endowment", in close connection with the community of

[1] https://www.arieseni.pro/9-arieseni-obiective-turistice/76-pestera-coiba-mare-arieseni

moti in this mountainous area. Its very membership within the territorial entities of the "country" type - Moților Land, demonstrates the existence of unique, special characteristics at the level of the commune. In the list of historical monuments, the commune of Arieșeni is included with the following objectives: the ensemble of the "Înălțarea Domnului" wooden church with: the "Înălțarea Domnului" wooden church (Figure 6) and the edict for the toca (Figure 7). [2]

Figure 6. The wooden church "Înălțarea Domnului"

Figure 7. The edict for the ”toaca”

Ethnographic tourism resources are significant for the inhabitants of Arieșeni commune: occupations and crafts; exploitation and processing of wood; woven to "război"; traditional clothes; folk songs; peasant architecture and technical installations: "the thatched roofs of Apuseni defy the abundance of wood through the durability of the roof itself" (Cocean, 2000, p 150).

Analysis of accommodation units

”The tourist infrastructure is a defining indicator in shaping and developing tourist destinations. The most representative structural elements of the tourist infrastructure are: reception structures with accommodation functions; ...” (Herman et al., 2020, p. 106). Accommodation structures represent an essential element, with roles and functions in the valorization of the tourist heritage, which are reflected in their ability to retain tourists in tourist destination areas (Herman and Tătar, 2015; Ilieș et al., 2013).

In Arieșeni, in 2023, the accommodation base was represented by a number of 68 tourist reception structures with the function of accommodation,

[2] *http://www.cultura.ro/lista-monumentelor-istorice*

distributed as follows: rooms and apartments for rent (56%, 38 units), tourist guesthouses (34%, 23 units), tourist villas (4%, 3 units), agritourism guesthouses (3%, 2 units) and tourist cabins (3%, 2 units).

The analysis of the comfort level of accommodation structures in Arieșeni, in 2023, highlighted the predominance of accommodation structures classified as 3 stars (49%, 33 units), followed by those with two stars (36%, 24 units) and 1 star (13%, 9 units). At the opposite pole were the accommodation structures classified as 4 stars (2%, 2 units).

In Arieșeni, in 2023, the accommodation base was represented by a number of 1,191 places, distributed as follows, by typological categories: rooms for rent (531 places, 45%), tourist guesthouses (439 places, 36%), tourist villas (135 places, 11%), tourist cabins (69 places, 6%) and agritourism guesthouses register the lowest percentage (2%), with 26 places.

In 2023, in the tourist resort, Arieșeni, a number of 8 tourist reception structures with a public catering function were registered, classified by typology, as follows: classic restaurants (5); fish restaurant (1), guesthouse restaurant (2). Regarding the comfort category, these units are classified as follows: 2 stars (3 units), 3 stars (4 units), 4 stars (1 unit). The analysis of the number of places shows that in these establishments there are 482 places, of which the most places are registered at the level of classic restaurants (358 places), followed by restaurants in guesthouses (64 places) and the fish restaurant (60 places).

Respondents' perception of the tourist potential of Arieșeni commune

The way in which the participants in the tourism phenomenon (locals, tourists) perceive tourism and how it manifests itself at the level of a tourist destination/resort is extremely important (Herman et al., 2021a,b; 2022; Ilies et al., 2023) to be able to create an overall picture in terms of the quality and good functioning of tourism on the one hand and how what the natural environment offers is or is not well exploited, on the other.

Analyzing the extent to which Arieșeni commune is considered a tourist destination, on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1-very little and 5-very high), it was found that, out of a number of 200 respondents, 113 (56, 5%) considered Arieșeni commune a tourist destination to a very large extent, 57 (28.5%) to a large extent, 23 (11.5%) medium, 4 (2%) to a small extent and 3 (1.5%) to a very small extent.

Regarding the alternatives for spending free time, which the commune offers, 7 people (4%) considered that there are alternatives for spending free time for 1-2 days; 59 people (29%) – a weekend; 68 people (34%) – one week; 65 people (33%) – more than a week and 1 person did not provide an answer to this question.

When asked about the degree of attractiveness of the existing tourist resources at the level of the resort (with the options: natural resources, human resources or both), the majority (115 people, 57.5%) considered that both categories of resources present a high level. degree. of attractiveness, 87 people (43.5%) considered that natural tourism resources are more attractive, and 7 people (3.5%) considered that anthropogenic tourism resources present a higher degree of attractiveness (Table 2).

Table 2. Natural tourist resources in the commune and its vicinity, according to the responses of the respondents

Tourist resources	Locals	Tourists	Total
The Rusty Pit	53	54	107
Vârciorogu Waterfall	65	50	115
Galbenei Keys	21	11	32
Pătrăhăițești Waterfall	24	10	34
Bihoru Peak	13	16	29
Patrahitesti Ethnographic Museum	10	5	15
The glacier from Vartop	8	4	12
Ski slopes-Vârtop	7	31	38
The glacier from Scarisoara	6	15	21
Coiba Mare Cave	5	2	7
Coiba Mică Cave	4	2	6
Tăuzul Spring	4	2	6
Piatra Grăitoare Peak	3	5	8
The wooden church "Înălțarea Domnului"	3	2	5
Poarta lui Ionele Cave	2	7	9
Ordâncușei Keys	1	3	4

As can be seen in the table above according to the responses of the people surveyed, the most famous tourist attractions in Arieșeni commune and its vicinity are: Groapa Rustinoasă, Vârciorog Waterfall, Pătrăhăițești Waterfall, Cheile Galbenei, Pătrăhăițești Museum, etc. The rather low values regarding the other touristic objectives in the table demonstrate their poor capitalization, given the fact that they are touristic resources (Coiba Mare Cave, Vârtop Glacier Cave, Izbucul Tăuz, etc.), which fulfill certain attributes special features (size, uniqueness, etc.) that give them a great degree of attractiveness, but apparently, a poor knowledge on the part of the visitors.

To find out whether or not the tourist resort, Arieșeni, is affected by seasonality, the respondents were asked about the most suitable season for visiting (with the options: spring, summer, autumn, winter, or all), so that, 91 people (33.7%) considered summer to be the most suitable season for visiting the commune; followed by winter, 81 people (30%); autumn, 71 people (26.3%), at the opposite pole are those who consider spring to be the most favorable season, 14 people (5.2%) and those who considered all seasons favorable for tourist activities, 13 people (4.8%). It is obvious that seasonality is fully manifested in Arieșeni commune, but the rather high values for the autumn season (26.3%) combined with the values recorded for spring (5.2) and those of all seasons (4.8%) create a possibility of changing the seasonality ratio in the future, through specific strategies to attract tourists and in the off-season.

When asked about the existence and good functioning/organization of tourist routes at the level of the municipality, 40% of the people surveyed (tourists and locals) considered that there are enough routes at the level of the municipality, being well organized at the level of the municipality. the opposite pole, with close values (37%) are those who consider that there are not enough tourist routes, well organized at the level of the tourist resort, and a significant percentage (23%) belongs to those who do not know the situation (Table 3).

Table 3. The degree of knowledge of tourist routes and their organization, at the level of Arieşeni commune (number of tourists and locals)

	Locals	Tourists	Total (number and percentage)	
Yes	22	58	80	40%
No	50	24	74	37%
Don't know	15	31	46	23%

Analyzing the contribution of locals and tourists to the total value of each answer, it can be seen from the table above that the answers of locals are different from those of tourists, to the greatest extent. Their interpretation can be cross-referenced to get an overall picture like this: tourists consider that the tourist routes are sufficient and well organized (58 people) and their answer can be analyzed in terms of the fact that they are the ones who actually travel. their . On the other hand, the fact that the locals consider, in a large number (50 people), that these routes are not sufficient can also be taken into account by those who deal with tourist routes at the commune level, due to the fact that, those who live in this resort know the territorial natural capital of this space much better than tourists, so they see more possibilities for capitalizing on this area, by setting up more tourist routes.

Accommodation units with a tourist function existing at the level of a tourist destination are a good indicator of the values recorded by the tourist flow in this area, i.e. the ratio between demand and supply. The respondents were questioned about the number of these accommodation units with a tourist function existing at the level of the commune. 143 people (71%) think they are enough, 21 people (11%) think they are too much, and on the opposite side, 13 people (6%) think they are too little, the remaining 23 people (12 %)) not being familiar with the situation of existing accommodation units.

Regarding the quality of the services offered by the tourist service providers in the Arieșeni commune, on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 is the worst and 5 is the best), the results are as follows: 77 people (38.5 %) consider the quality of services to be good, 62 people (31%) consider it very good, while 45 people (22.5%) support the fact that this quality of services is of an average level, 12 people (6 %) say she is weak and 4 people (2%) consider her the weakest (Figure 8).

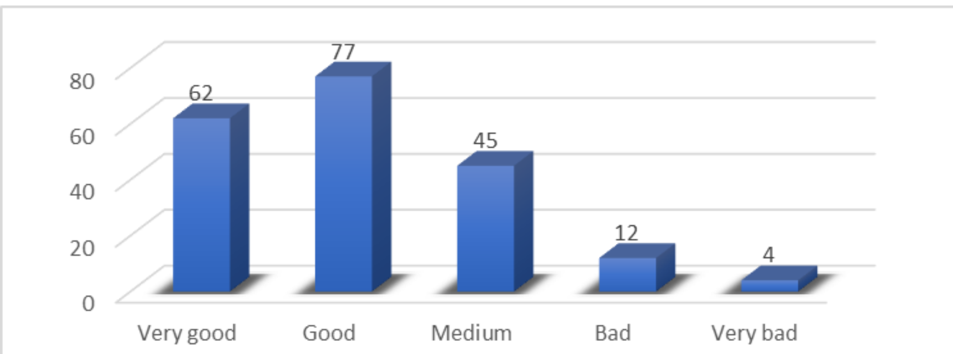

Figure 8. Quality of services offered by tourism service providers

Most of the people surveyed, 139 people (69.5%) believe that the Arieșeni tourist resort is not sufficiently capitalized, 33 people (16.5%) say that it is sufficiently capitalized and 29 people (14.5%) do not I know the situation.

CONCLUSIONS

In the tourist resort of local interest, Arieșeni, the natural tourist resources are the biggest generators of visitors, given the fact that the anthropic tourist resources (just as attractive), are less exploited, although they could represent special attractions for this area, complementing what the natural setting has generously provided this space. The analysis of the accommodation infrastructure shows that there is a large number of accommodation units, (if we take into account the fact that it is only a tourist resort of local interest), which offers good quality services, according to the responses of those surveyed. Although perceived as a tourist destination by those surveyed, the tourist resort of local interest, Arieșeni, is affected by seasonality, just like most tourist resorts in Romania, in the absence of economic recovery strategies through the prism of tourist activities. However, given the existing tourism resources, the future may show bright colors for what tourism activity means in this rural space.

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ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY AND HETEROGENEITY IN BIHOR COUNTY IN THE FIRST YEARS OF THE 3RD MILLENNIUM

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Abstract: The study of ethnic communities has aroused and continues to arouse the interest of specialists from various scientific disciplines, geographers, historians, sociologists, jurists, political scientists, etc. This study aims to highlight, from a geographical perspective, the evolution of ethnic communities, respectively the ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity in Bihor County in the first years of the 3rd millennium. For this purpose, the evolution of the communities of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks was analyzed in the censuses of 2002, 2011 and 2021 in order to be able to capture the changes occurring, from a numerical point of view, within these ethnic communities. The ethnic homogeneity index was also calculated, which highlights those areas where there is ethnic homogeneity and those with ethnic heterogeneity.

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Key words: ethnic communities, ethnic homogeneity, ethnic heterogeneity

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INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnic communities represents an essential component from the perspective of approaching the demographic structures present on the territory of the states. The research of these communities is an old concern, it has an interdisciplinary character, in their study bringing the contribution of geographers, historians, sociologists, jurists, etc. (Birnir, 2006; Dincă et al., 2012; Dogan, 1999; Dumitrescu and Manea, 2008). Concerns of this kind are quite old, but an explosion of them occurs with the beginning of the 20th century when the notions of ethnicity, ethnic and inter-ethnic relations are often encountered. The ethnic component becomes interesting both from the point of view of the specificity induced by the presence of ethnic communities within the territory, but also from the perspective of the political discourse, of the problems it generates (Csergo, 2007; Owsinski and Eberhardt, 2003).

The proposed study aims at the geographical specificity of an analysis of this kind, namely the way of evolution from a numerical point of view and the geographical distribution of the ethnic groups presents on the territory of Bihor County within the timeframe 2002-2021, as well as highlighting the degree of ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity. For Bihor County, the geographical literature aimed at the study of the ethnic component is well represented by older and new works belonging to geographers and historians, sociologists, etc.

Some reference works date from the end of the last century and have dealt with the issue of the ethnic component regarding the emergence and evolution of ethnic communities, inter-ethnic relations, electoral behavior within Bihor County, whether it is Hungarians, Slovaks, Roma, Jews, etc. Such materials were developed, either for the entire county or only for certain areas of the county by Bodocan, 2001; Deac et al., 2023a, b; Filimon, 2007, 2014; Filimon, 2012; Ilieș, 1994a, 1994b, 1996, 1998, 2018; Josan et al., 1994; Ropa, 2020; Stupariu 2020.

A reference work for Bihor County is Ethnicity, Confession and Electoral Behavior in Crișana and Maramureș (Ilieș, 1998) which deals with the emergence (colonization, migrations, settlements, purges, electoral behavior and inter-ethnic relations) of cohabiting minorities in these areas, including Bihor County, from the first available information until the end of the 20th century. Along with the mentioned literature, the real help for the proposed study is the statistical information regarding the ethnic communities provided by the three analyzed censuses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Areal study

Bihor County is in the northwestern part of the country, limited in the western part by the border with Hungary and from north to south by the counties of Satu Mare, Sălaj, Cluj, Alba and Arad. It occupies an area of 7,535 km², administratively it is made up of a number of 100 TAUs, respectively 10 cities: Oradea, the county seat municipality, followed by the municipalities of Salonta, Marghita, Beiuș and the cities of Aleșd, Nucet, Săcueni, Ștei, Valea lui Mihai and Vașcău. A number of 90 communes are added to these cities (Figure 1).

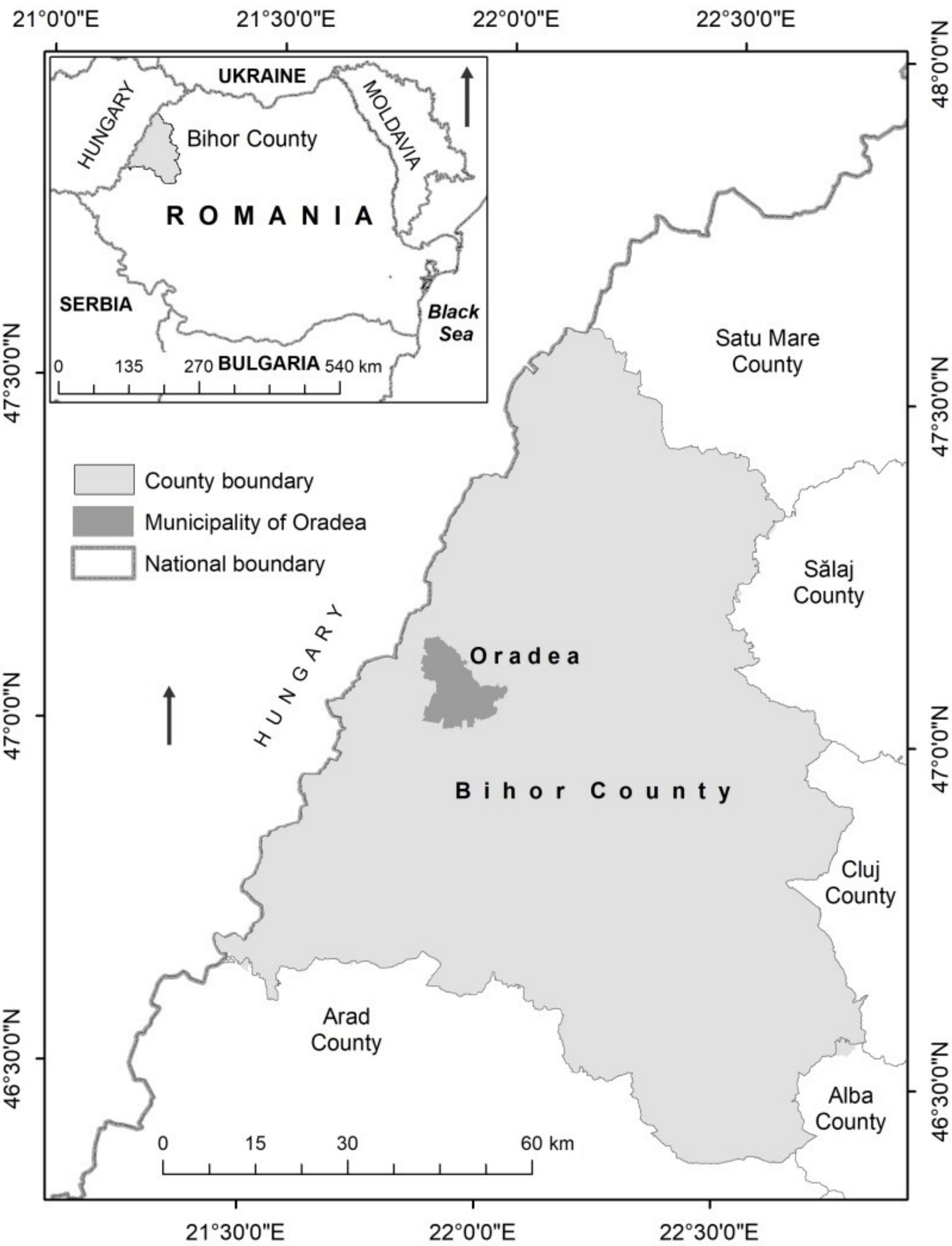

Figure 1. Geographical position of Bihor County

It should be mentioned that the current administrative component underwent changes in the period 2002-2011, respectively in 2003 when, through a referendum, a number of five communes appeared through administrative reorganization: Gepiu, Sânicolaul Român by separation from Cefa commune, Paleu from Cetariu, Roșiori from Diosig, Tămășeu from Biharea. Another moment is represented by the year 2002, when Săcuieni commune obtains the status of a city, and later in 2007, Toboliu commune emerges by separating from Girișu de Criș commune.

From a demographic point of view, the population of Bihor County recorded a numerical decrease in population from 2002, when it recorded 600,876 inhabitants, to 551,297 inhabitants in the 2021 census. This decrease in the number of inhabitants is also reflected in what concerns the current ethnic component.

Research methods

The analysis of the ethnic component of Bihor County, on TAU level, was carried out based on the statistical information provided by the 2002, 2011 and 2021 censuses (National Institute of Statistics). From the total of ethnicities present in the territory of the county, the communities of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks were analyzed because they are the most representative, respectively the total number of each community and the weight within both the county and the component TAUs. The rest of the ethnic minorities present, Italians, Germans, Ukrainians, etc. by their numbers are irrelevant for the present study.

To highlight the degree of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity, we used the ethnic homogeneity index (Vert, 2001) calculated according to the formula $Oet = 10 - \frac{\Sigma\mathrm{m\ xNm}}{pt}$, where:

Oet = the ethnic homogeneity index,

Σm = the number of people who make up the ethnic group

Nm = the number of ethnic groups

Pt = the total population

If the value obtained fell within the range of 7.51-10, it means ethnic homogeneity, the values between 5.1-7.70 define a relative homogeneity and the range 5.0-0 ethnic heterogeneity.

The values thus obtained, respectively the percentage values of the ethnicities at the three censuses and the ethnic homogeneity/heterogeneity index for each territorial unit were then represented cartographically using the ArcGis 10.6 software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Romanians, although they recorded a numerical decrease from 446,167 inhabitants in 2002 to 347,148 inhabitants in 2021, remained the majority population with a percentage of 63% of the total population of Bihor County. Percentagewise, the Romanian population decreased from 74.3% in the 2002 census to 63% in 2021, with the mention that the most significant reduction of the Romanian population characterizes the period 2002-2011 when the ethnic Romanian population decreases from 74.3% to 63.6%. This decrease is the result of the values of the components of the natural and migratory movement of the population, to which are also added socio-economic and political events (the extension of the transition period towards a market economy, industrial restructuring, unemployment, Romania's accession to the EU, etc.).

On TAU level, the most representative decreases were recorded, in the analyzed period, in five of them: Budureasa (-14%), Lăzăreni (-14%), Șoimi (-22%), Tinca (-12 %) and Tulca (-15%). The decrease in the ethnic Romanian population is compensated by the increase in the share of the ethnic Roma population within these communes. From the point of view of ethnic homogeneity, it should be mentioned that the Romanian population was and is homogeneous in a number of 52 TAUs out of 100 (Figure 2).

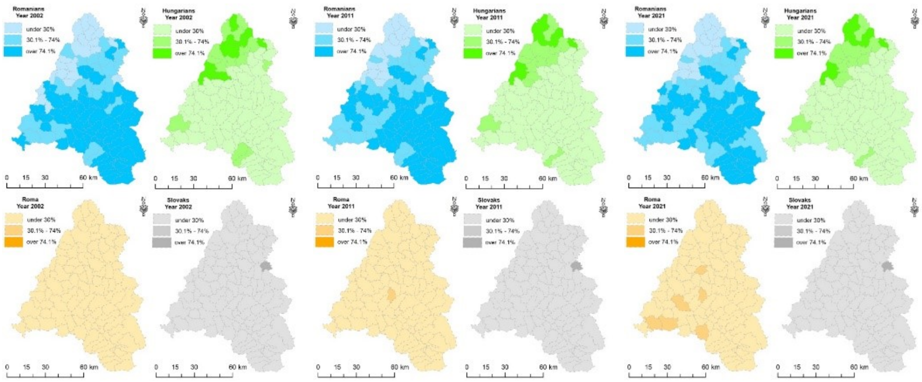

Figure 2. The share of ethnic groups in the 2002, 2011 and 2022 censuses

In a number of five communes: Buduslău, Cherechiu, Sălacea, Sălard and Șinteu, the ethnic Romanian population is poorly represented at less than 2%. At the level of cities, the Romanian population is a minority in a number of three cities: Săcueni (6%), Valea lui Mihai (11.6%) and Salonta (36.1%); in the other cities it represents the majority: in Oradea (67.5%), Marghita (50.5%) or is homogeneous in Beiuș (81.3%), Nucet (89.0%), Ștei (87.9%) and Vașcău (90.4%).

The Hungarians had a similar evolution to the Romanian population, decreasing numerically and percentagewise from 153,170 inhabitants (24%) in 2002, to 112,298 inhabitants (20.3%) at the 2021 census. Similar to Romanians and Hungarians, they recorded the most significant decrease in the interval 2002-2011, from 24% to 20.4% in 20011.

At the level of the county seat, namely the city of Oradea, the ethnic Hungarian population decreased from 23.1% in 2002 to 18.2% in 2021. Within the communes, the largest decreases are recorded in Cherechiu (-18%), Buduslău (-10 %), Tarcea (-7%).

On TAU level, Hungarians show ethnic homogeneity in the city of Valea lui Mihai (79.14%) and are the majority in the cities of Salonta (53%), Săcueni (62.2%), but are absent from the cities of Nucet and Vașcău.

Within the communes, a compact group of communes, cantoned in the north-western part of the county, is individualized, namely the communes: Biharea, Borș, Buduslău, Cherechiu, Sălacea, Șimian, Tămășeu and Viișoara, where Hungarians are homogeneous (Figure 2). More significant communities of Hungarian population are present in the city of Marghita (34.8%), the communes of Abrămuț (50%), Cetariu (61.8%), Curtuișeni (54.7%), Diosig (45.3%), Paleu (50.8%), Sâniob (60.6 %), Sălard (65.2%) Tarcea (65.5%), Tărcaia (52.4%).

It should be specified that in a significant number of TAUs, the Hungarian population is not present at all (Buntești, Căbești, Ceica, Curățele, Criștioru de Jos, Copăcel, Câmpani, Drăgești, Rieni, Roșia, Șoimi, Șinteu, Vârciorog,) or it boils down to the presence of several families (Abram, Avram Iancu, Boianu Mare, Cefa, Mădăras, Măgești, Popești, Toboliu, Tulca, etc.).

The Roma population, unlike Romanians and Hungarians, had a different evolution, in the sense that it registered a constant increase throughout the entire period, from 31,401 (5.2%) inhabitants in 2002 to 36,173 (6.6%) in 2021. And for this ethnic group, the period 2002-2011 represents the period in which the largest increase is recorded from 5.2% to 6%.

Even if reported at the level of Bihor County, the increase in the share of the Roma population within the total population is not spectacular, at the level of territorial administrative units, special situations appear. Thus, spectacular increases are recorded in municipalities such as Avram Iancu, Batăr, Ciumeghiu Curtuișeni, Drăgești Lăzăreni, where the Roma ethnic group recorded increases of 10% in the analyzed interval. The most significant increases are in Diosig commune with 14% and Șoimi commune with 18.4% in 2021 compared to 2002.

Within the cities, the most numerous Roma communities are in Săcueni 25% in 2021 compared to 15% in 2002 followed by Aleșd with 15.6% in 2021 compared to 9.6% in 2002. If in the case of the city of Aleșd the growth of the Roma population was linear throughout the period, in the case of the city of Săcueni the most significant increase occurred in the 2011-2021 timeframe from 15.2% to 25.1%. This increase can also be attributed to the city status being obtained in 2004, a fact that acted as a magnet for the Roma communities in the neighboring communes.

A situation that is somewhat difficult to explain is recorded in the city of Oradea, where the Roma ethnic group decreased from 1.2% in 2002 to 0.7% in 2021. A possible explanation would be the fact that part of the Roma population in the city declared themselves to be Romanian or Hungarian, knowing that this practice exists amongst them.

In parallel with these increases on territorial level, situations of decrease in the Roma population are also recorded. Such cases are found in the communes of Copăcel (-4%), Holod (-10%), Lugașu de Jos (-12.7%). Also within the county, a number of fourteen TAUs are registered where this ethnicity is missing: Ștei, Aștileu, Buntești, Căbești, Căpâlna, Câmpani, Curățele, Lazuri de Beiuș, Pocola, Sâniob, Sârbi, Tărcaia, Viișoara and Vârciorog (Figure 2).

The Slovak ethnic group decreased from 7369 inhabitants, i.e. 1.2% in 2002, to 4787 inhabitants (0.9%) in 2021. And in the case of this ethnic group, even if it is a decrease, it was a linear one, without there being a period in which the decrease recorded very high values.

In the analyzed period, it is worth noting that in some communes, even if it did not hold large shares, this ethnic group disappeared. This is the case of the communes Abram, Abrămuț, Balc, Olcea, Sârbi, Spinuș, Tăuteu, Țețchea, Viișoara. Currently, this ethnic group has more important communities in a number of ten TAUs. In only one TAU it shows the character of homogeneity, namely in Șinteu commune, where it has a percentage of 94.7% of the total population compared to 98.2% in 2002 (Figure 2).

More representative Slovak communities are present in the communes of Derna (16%), Popești (12.1%), Suplacu de Barcău (15.1%), Mădăras (6.2%), Lugașu de Jos (4.7%), Brusturi (3.5%), Aușeu (4.3%), Aștileu (3.8%).

Within the cities, this community is more important in the city of Aleșd, where it represents 6.2% of the total population and where this community did not register a decrease in the analyzed timeframe.

From an ethnic point of view, related to the degree of ethnic homogeneity or heterogeneity, following the analysis carried out, the ethnic map of Bihor County is presented as follows (Figure 3).

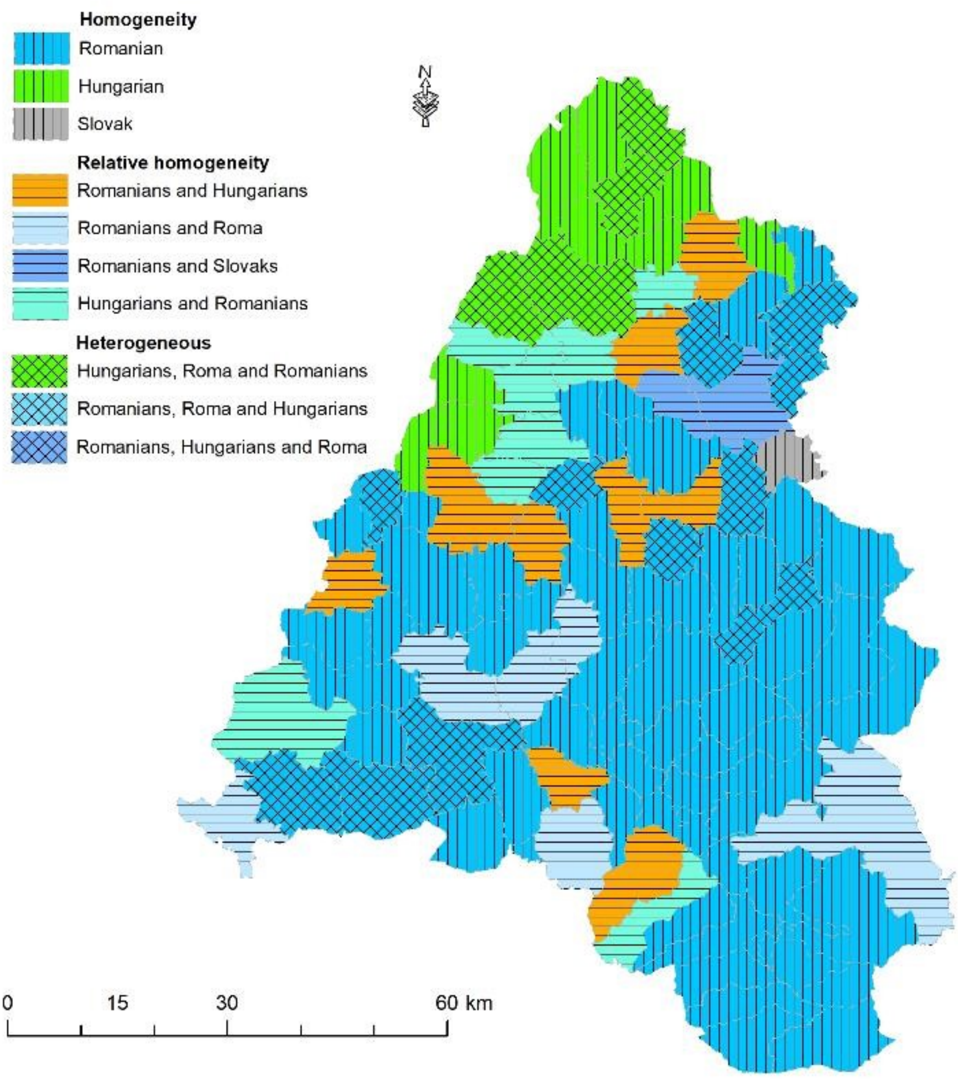

Figure 3. The degree of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity in Bihor County

Ethnic homogeneity (7.51-10) characterizes a number of 61 territorial entities, of which 51 TAUs are characterized by Romanian ethnic homogeneity, 9 TAUs show Hungarian ethnic homogeneity, and only one commune, respectively Şinteu, shows Slovak ethnic homogeneity (Figure 3).

The second category is represented by the one with a relative ethnic minority (5.1-7.50) (Figure 3), a number of 25 administrative units are included, within which there is a majority population doubled by one ethnicity or another with close values. And within them, four subtypes are individualized, respectively a number of 9 TAUs: Oradea, Marghita, Lugașu de Jos, Căpâlna, Finiș, Sânicolau Roman, Oșorhei, Tileagd show a relative Romanian-Hungarian homogeneity.

The second sub-type, relative Romano-Roma homogeneity, is characteristic in 6 communes: Drăgești, Husasău de Tinca, Lăzăreni, Budureasa, Avram Iancu and Șoimi.

The third subtype, relative Romanian-Slovak homogeneity, is found in only two communes in the county, namely Popești and Derna.

The last subtype, relative Hungarian-Romanian homogeneity, is present in a number of 8 territorial entities: Abrămuț, Cetariu, Paleu, Roșiori, Salonta, Sâniob, Sălard and Tărcaia.

Ethnic heterogeneity (5.0-0) is specific to a number of 14 territorial units, and just as in the case of relative homogeneity, several subtypes appear grafted onto a basic population to which larger communities belonging to at least two other ethnicities are added from those analyzed (Figure 3).

The first subtype is defined by ethnic heterogeneity grafted onto a Romanian population to which the Hungarian and Roma population is added. This situation is present in six communes: Girișu de Criș, Suplacu de Barcău, Tăuteu, Tinca, Țețchea, Vadu Crișului and the city of Aleșd.

The second subtype is based on the Hungarian population to which Roma and Romanians are added, it is found in a number of three communes: Curtuișeni, Diosig, Tarcea and the town of Săcueni.

The third subtype of ethnic heterogeneity is based on the Romanian population to which Roma and Hungarians are added. It is present in the communes of Balc, Batăr, Ciumeghiu and Ineu (Figure 3).

CONCLUSIONS

From a numerical point of view, the decrease in the population of Bihor County also left its mark on the ethnic component. The ethnicities most affected by this decrease are the Romanian, Hungarian and Slovak ethnicities. The only ethnic group that registered a slight demographic increase is the Roma ethnic group, otherwise it is natural because they are known for their higher birth rate.

The distribution in the territory from a spatial point of view does not show differences in the analyzed interval, each ethnic group keeping the traditional areas.

On county level, the majority character of the Romanian ethnic population is still maintained, to which are added larger communities of Hungarians, Roma and Slovaks, the other ethnicities being poorly represented. Moreover, the county, by the value of the ethnic homogeneity index (6.5), is included in the framework of relative homogeneity.

Territorially, an area appears, including the largest part of the county, which concentrates towns, communes with a homogeneous Romanian population, to which is added, in the northwest part, a strong Hungarian area, and in the eastern part of the county, at the border with the county of Sălaj, there is a large community of Slovaks.

The strong Romanian character of the county is confirmed by the degree of ethnic homogeneity present in a number of 51 TAUs, to which are added other 17 territorial unites with relative homogeneity grafted onto a majority Romanian population. In the case of the other ethnic groups, the ethnic homogeneity is present in nine for the Hungarians and one for the Slovaks.

The Roma ethnic group, although it has registered an increase, does not have ethnic homogeneity in any TAU, moreover it does not constitute the basis for relative homogeneity, being present as a component in the 14 units defined by ethnic heterogeneity.

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