

How should local authorities manage rural depopulation? The case of Romania's north-western rural areas

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Abstract: The phenomenon of rural depopulation in north-western Romania is a growing concern for local authorities, with significant long-term social, economic, and demographic consequences. These regions, despite their natural and cultural resources, are facing a steady decline in population, especially among younger generations who migrate to urban areas or abroad in search of better economic opportunities and improved quality of life. This paper situates the issue of rural depopulation within the purview of local governance, aligning directly with the objectives of the working group theme.

The study aims to explore and propose feasible, governance-oriented solutions that local authorities can implement to manage and reverse rural depopulation, fostering sustainable rural development. The research is grounded in policy analysis theory, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of social, economic, and demographic systems in addressing governance challenges.

The methodology involves a multi-dimensional analysis of each commune in the region, incorporating demographic indicators (e.g. population evolution, migration rates) and economic factors (e.g. total local income, financial autonomy). The methodology will be designed to analyze the socio-economic and demographic dynamics of the selected rural areas and to generate actionable policy recommendations for local authorities. The data will be sourced from national and regional statistical databases (e.g., Romania's National Institute of Statistics), administrative records, and other public datasets. The employment of statistical tools, including regression analysis, will facilitate the identification of patterns and correlations between economic performance, demographic trends, and governance efficiency. These quantitative data will be complemented by qualitative insights gathered through stakeholder interviews, including local officials, community leaders, and residents. The utilization of qualitative data is expected to facilitate the contextualization of quantitative findings, thereby offering insights into the manner in which local authorities perceive and address the issue of rural depopulation. This mixed-methods approach is a rigorous and comprehensive methodology that integrates statistical analysis with detailed qualitative insights. The utilization of multiple data sources and diverse perspectives will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of rural depopulation. Moreover, the emphasis on governance and policy ramifications will furnish practical instruments for local authorities to tackle the issue effectively.

The study's primary objective is to formulate a series of actionable policy recommendations for local authorities, with the aim of promoting rural revitalization. Additionally, the study calls for the enhancement of collaboration among local governments through the establishment of administrative partnerships, associations, and consortiums. Such governance frameworks will enable a more unified and effective response to rural depopulation, in alignment with the WG1 theme of strengthening local governance structures.

The study further posits that rural depopulation is indicative of systemic crises, underscoring the necessity for integrated and resilient governance strategies. By integrating policy analysis with practical solutions, this paper presents a comprehensive framework for local authorities to address the underlying causes of rural decline, as opposed to merely its symptoms, thereby fostering sustainable rural development in Romania's north-western regions.