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Specificity of Severe Material Deprivation among Rural Communities in the North-East Region of Romania

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Abstract

The paper offers a perspective on poverty related to basic, but also consumption deprivation of two rural communities in the North-East Region of Romania, while attempting at emphasizing the signals of extreme deprivation that may be representative for disadvantaged rural areas at regional level. In this respect, we conducted a questionnaire survey that was applied to the residents of these communities. The results showed that, within the severely material deprived members of such communities, a sub-grouping in terms of deprivation levels was still possible, offering the possibility of better identifying their specificity.

Keywords:

Severe material deprivation, rural communities, basic deprivation, consumption deprivation.

1. Introduction

The progress of any society could not be considered without taking into account the complex characteristics of the people involved in it. The

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sustainable approach considers economic development in relation with both the social dimension and the environmental condition. The education and health indicators of a society are hardly influenced by the level of poverty, which reflects an important aspect of all communities, even for the most developed ones. This has been the reason for the vast academic literature devoted to the analysis of this concept. Also true is that its profound reverberation on the quality of people's life renders it a permanent area of interest.

Eurofund [2] pays special attention to an extremely relevant aspect considered in our paper, emphasizing that, in spite of the signs that many Europeans are beginning to feel an improvement of financial hardship and a lower level of deprivation, there are still subgroups in the population not equally benefiting from the recovery trend. This observation is to be investigated in the present paper, by a thorough analysis of the concept of severe material deprivation as it is defined by official documents and statistics [7], measured in two rural communities of the North-East Region of Romania, in order to establish their level of deprivation comparatively with the regional and national rates, and to understand the specificity of the severely material deprived people. Consequently, the study, based on the direct approach, offers a perspective of the poverty related to basic, but also to consumption deprivation of these communities, emphasizing some obvious signals of extreme poverty that may be representative for disadvantaged rural areas at regional level.

2. Theoretical Approach on Expressing Poverty through Material Deprivation

The concept of poverty occupies a central position in the literature devoted to development [3], being applied in situations when people cannot “participate in the activities and [do not] have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong” [11].

According to the traditional approach, poverty has been measured only in relation with income's dimension, on assuming that it could capture fairly well whether people were able to attain certain minimum thresholds in a variety of dimensions - such as nutrition, clothing and housing [1]. However, Sen [10] explained it from a much complex point of view, considering it as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as low income. Taking into consideration that awareness regarding the limitations of analysing only the income for measuring poverty became more

widespread [13], attention has been focused on material deprivation measures, capable to offer information about the financial situation on the long term, rather than a snapshot measure of income [14].

The work of Townsend [11], [12] represents the basis for many studies of the field regarding material deprivation, which assumes “lack of necessities and activities commonly approved in the belonging community” [5]. To complete this perspective, deprivation is also defined as the “enforced lack of possessions, activities or amenities through lack of resources” [6]. This approach reveals the reflection of the income level upon the capacity of an individual to respond to personal necessities, which thus shows that the lack of resources may be materialized into lack of possessions, activities or amenities. But, because persons and households have different characteristics, including a different system of values and behaviours in similar situations, that provoke a very different manner of spending, the level of income is not always equivalent to the levels of deprivation. Layte et al. [6] mention “a substantial mismatch between income and deprivation measures”. In this way, it is suggested that the direct approach is more appropriate for revealing poverty than the indirect one, i.e. the level of income, once it considers especially “necessities and activities commonly approved in the belonging community” [5], such as, for example: rent payment, bills for utilities or loans; maintenance of an adequately hot home; affording some unforeseeable costs with personal economies; consuming meat or proteins once in two days; having a holiday once a year; possessing goods like a colour TV, a mobile phone, a car and a washing machine [7].

All these theoretical approaches, along with others, not mentioned in the present paper, reveal the complexity of the phenomenon of poverty and the necessity to analytically explore the problem on the ground (in our case represented by two rural communities). Based on the previews mentioned through the theoretical background, the authors propose an overview on poverty and on its measure through material deprivation for a particular area of Europe, namely for one of the poorest zones of Romania, the North-East Region.

3. Research Questions

The paper analyses the state of being registered in the rural space related to material deprivation as a specific measure of poverty, as well as other socio-economic characteristics that may contribute to its better understanding. In other words, the study uses the direct approach for

offering a perspective of the poverty related to basic, but also to consumption deprivation of two rural communities from the North-East Region of Romania, attempting at emphasizing some obvious signals of extreme deprivation in these communities that may be representative for disadvantaged rural areas at regional level. We opted to choose these communities (Rauseni Commune, Botosani County - 2,817 residents, and a disadvantaged area of Dancu Village, Holboca Commune, Iasi County - 1,458 residents) as their inhabitants seemed to be more deprived than the ones from other rural areas. Our argument was that, although the regional rates show high levels of deprivation, the situation is even much worse for some communities, which could express the material situation for a large part of the rural space in this region.

4. Research Methods

To obtain information about the two components of the direct approach (i.e. basic and consumption deprivation), we conducted a questionnaire survey applied to the residents of the communities. To this end, the indicators measuring the severe material deprivation that have been adopted since 2009 by EU were used. The concept refers to the persons from households that can be included in at least four from nine of the following categories [7]: (1) Persons that cannot afford to pay their rent, their bills at utilities or their loans; (2) Persons that cannot afford to maintain their home hot; (3) Persons that cannot afford some unforeseeable costs with their economies; (4) Persons that cannot afford to consume meat or proteins once in two days; (5) Persons that cannot afford to take an annual 1 week holidays away from their home; (6) Persons that do not have a color TV; (7) Persons that do not have a washing machine; (8) Persons that do not have a car; (9) Persons that do not have a mobile. Accordingly, the most frequently used threshold [7] is the one of 4+ (considered in the present paper), selecting and taking into analysis only the respondents that can be included in at least four from the nine categories of deprivation.

Consequently, the methodology explained by Whelan et al. [13], was applied it in our study for first determining the severe material deprivation rate among the respondents, then for identifying the ones to be preserved for analysis, for making their sub-grouping on considering three distinct severe material deprivation levels. More explicitly, given the set of 9 deprivation categories considered of equal weight, if a person's outcome exceeds the established threshold (4+) among these categories, then the individual is said to be severely material deprived. In this case, the

respondent is maintained into analysis for the following step. Three sub-groups were formed taking into consideration the severity of deprivation below the common threshold (4+), as follows: 1) low level of severe material deprivation group (with 4 or 5 categories); 2) medium level of severe material deprivation group (with 6 or 7 categories); 3) extremely severe material deprivation group (with 8 or 9 categories).

The survey questions were taken over from a series of papers that investigated the problem of deprivation and of its measuring [6], [13], [1], [5]. A pilot study with 265 residents from the two communities, as random samples, was run. The questionnaires also included a series of items referring to socio-economic aspects, habitation, community, health, etc., in order to deeply investigate the levels of deprivation in the analysed communities and the possible factors related to it.

According to Guio [5], the information related to deprivation can be presented by the usual breakdowns (age, gender, other socio-economic characteristics). In this way, we related, on one hand, the three groups of severe material deprivation, and, on the other hand, the gender (female and male), education level (primary, lower-secondary, secondary, tertiary), main source of income (wage, agriculture, social income, pension), family income perspective (extremely hard, very hard, hard, well) and the estimated necessary household income (<400 lei, meaning approximately <100 euro; 400-1,000 lei, meaning approximately 100-225 euro; >1,000 lei, meaning approximately >225 euro) variables. The Joint Correspondence Analysis [4], [8], [9] was used for describing the associations between them and for identifying the profiles of different severe material deprivation levels, completed with a descriptive approach within and across groups. Data was computed into SPSS.

5. Findings

5.1. Counting the severely material deprived respondents (4+) in the two analyzed rural communities

The rate of severe material deprivation shows the level of lacking different goods (a car, a washing machine, a TV, a mobile), but also of important activities or amenities (paying the rent, the bills at utilities or the loans, maintaining the home hot, taking a holiday, having some economies for unexpected costs) within a certain geographical area. In the study applied in the two communities of North-East Romania, out the total of 265 respondents, the obtained results after counting were: 49 respondents without deprivation (18.85%); 211 respondents severely material deprived

(4+): (81.15%); 5 respondents without responses related to deprivation components. Preserved into the analysis were the 211 respondents identified as being included in the group of severe material deprivation which formed a sub-grouping, as shown in the Methodology section. In this way, the results showed: 1) 56 respondents to be included in the low level of severe material deprivation group (with 4 or 5 categories) (26.54%); 2) 80 respondents in the medium level of severe material deprivation group (with 6 or 7 categories) (37.91%); 3) 75 respondents in the extremely severe material deprivation group (with 8 or 9 categories) (35.55%).

Considering the national and regional severe material deprivation rate, our results reveal a high difference between them and, in this way, high level of inequalities regarding the living standard of the people from these rural communities. Consequently, according to the statistics, the North-East Region's and the national rates of this indicator are the same, being equal to 23.8%. Comparatively with the rate obtained in the present analysis, which is equal to 81.15%, extremely material disadvantaged areas were identified in our study, such a high percentage offering the possibility to divide the severe material deprivation registered in these communities into three distinct groups, in order to, on one hand, better evidence the large lack of resources specific to these rural areas and, on the other, to investigate separately their basic and consumption levels of deprivation and to have a clearer perspective upon the other related socio-economic specificities that might be considered as possible determinants of their situation.

Analysis of the basic and consumption dimensions of severe material deprivation should necessarily consider that the categories of deprivation do not evidence only some observations related to the lack of certain goods, but also a specific standard of living and a capacity of response to household needs, appearing as potential determinants for the level of social inclusion of the individuals in the communities to which they belong. Therefore, discussing about the basic deprivation indicators means that (1) the first category refers to individuals' capacity of facing the current spendings specific to a household, while 61.61% of them cannot afford to pay them; (2) another category includes those affording to maintain the home hot, while 30.81% of the respondents fail to do this; (3) the third category refers to the capacity of facing some unforeseen costs with personal economies, the observation being made that 99.53% of the respondents cannot afford them precisely because they are not able to have economies; (4) the fourth category is related to food and to the capacity of individuals to consume meat or proteins once in two days in order to be healthy and even efficient in the personal activity, while 97.63% of them do not afford to have it; (5) the last category refers to an annual holiday and to the possibility to have it – here, no respondent gave a

positive response. In this way, we discuss about some aspects that could positively contribute to personal well-being and to the capacity of having self-respect and of being productive and creative, the conclusion being that the individuals of these communities are highly disadvantaged from this point of view. Also, as to consumption deprivation, the general levels are also high: 99.05% of the total number of severely material deprived respondents do not have a car; 79.62% do not have a washing machine; 33.65% of them do not have a TV; 36.97% do not have a mobile.

5.2. Identifying the profiles of severely material deprived groups

For identifying the profiles of different severe material deprivation levels (low level of severe material deprivation: 4-5 categories; medium level of severe material deprivation: 6-7 categories; high level of severe material deprivation: 8-9 categories), the Joint Correspondence Analysis is applied to describe the associations between the categories of gender, education level, main source of income, family income perspective and necessary income variables. The results obtained after processing the data into SPSS are shown in the following.

According to the Joint Correspondence Analysis, the maximum number of factorial axes is equal to the difference between the parameters taken into analysis and the variables numbers ($m-p=20-6$). The number of factorial axes interpreted corresponds to a value higher than ($1/6=0.16$).

Table 1. The specific values for the first two factorial axes

Dimension	Model Summary		
	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance Accounted For	
		Total (Eigenvalue)	Inertia
1	.576	1.923	.320
2	.430	1.558	.260
3	.330	1.379	.230
4	.313	1.352	.225
5	.167	1.162	.194
6	.132	1.123	.187
7	.107	1.098	.183
8	-.077	.940	.157
9	-.217	.847	.141
10	-.459	.723	.121
11	-.709	.629	.105
12	-.933	.563	.094
13	-3.601	.250	.042
14	-4.848	.198	.033

Total		13.744	2.291
Mean	-.022 ^a	.982	.164
a. Mean Cronbach's Alpha is based on the mean Eigenvalue.			

In the present analysis, the maximum number of factorial axes is equal to 14, but the results listed in Table 2 show that the first 5 factorial axes explain the highest differences between the observed groups. In order to obtain an easier to be interpreted graph, points' representation is made into a two factorial axes system. The graphical representation of the variables (in the system of the first two factorial axes) is illustrated by the above diagram (Fig. 1), which indicates the existence of some associations between the categories of variables considered.

The results of the Joint Correspondence Analysis suggest that, at the level of our sample, heterogeneity does exist, being related to the severe material deprivation groups and to different categories of the chosen variables. In other words, among the severely material deprived members of communities (4+) [7], a sub-grouping is still possible, while the step from a sub-group to other is materialized into lower or higher standards of living for the individuals, revealing inequalities that can be met even at such a deep level of disadvantaged people segmentation. In this way, we shall firstly refer to the category of severely material deprived persons (4+), while continuing to dig more and to extract different levels of disadvantage and conclusions regarding the profile of people included in the three established groups of deprivation.

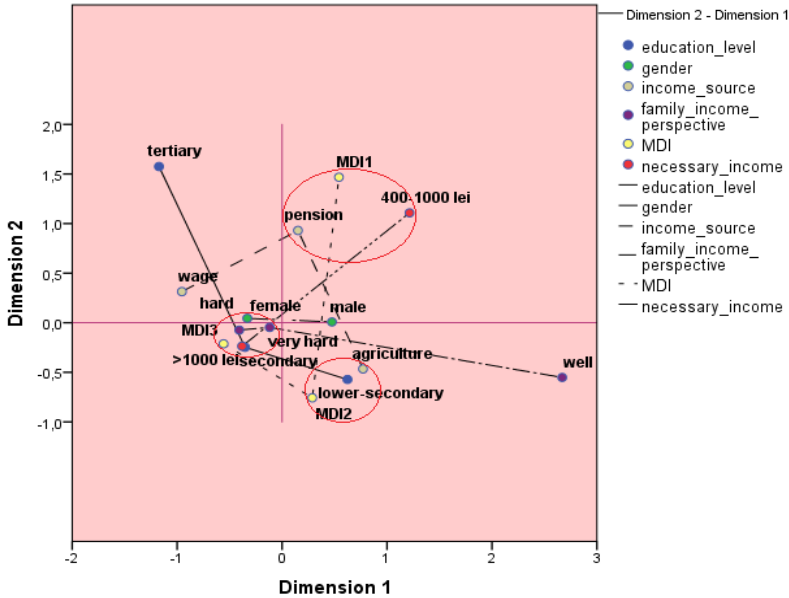


Figure 1. Representation of values on the first two factorial axes

In the investigated sample, a difference may be observed among the members of the analysed communities in terms of gender, education level, main source of income, family income perspective, and estimated necessary income. Consequently, on the basis of the corresponding point representation, we can define the following profiles:

1) **the profile of members with an extremely severe material deprivation** (8-9 categories): (1) gender: female, (2) educational level: secondary, (3) estimated necessary income for the household: more than 1,000 lei, (4) family income perspective: very hard and hard;

2) **the profile of members with a medium severe material deprivation** (6-7 categories): (1) educational level: lower-secondary, (2) main source of income: agriculture;

3) **the profile of members with a lower level of severe material deprivation** (4-5 categories): (1) main sources of income: pension, (5) estimated necessary income for the household: 400-1,000 lei.

In order to improve the image offered by the Joint Correspondence Analysis and to properly describe the main characteristics of each deprivation group, we completed it with a descriptive analysis.

(1) The profile of extremely severe material deprivation

The most affected individuals here under analysis are the ones that are not able to answer to all or to almost all categories of deprivation

measures (8-9 categories). Among them, 97.33% cannot afford to pay their rent, their bills at utilities or their loans; 53.33% cannot afford to maintain their home hot; 100% cannot afford some unforeseeable costs with their economies; 100% cannot afford to consume meat or proteins once in two days; 100% cannot afford to take annual 1 week holidays away from their home; 65.33% do not have a colour TV; 97.33% do not have a washing machine; 100% do not have a car; 74.67% do not have a mobile.

They are, generally, females (53.33%), especially with a secondary educational level (40%), with an estimated necessary income for their household higher than 1,000 lei (approximately 225 euro) and with the specification that it is hard and very hard to get through with the daily necessities imposed by their household (80%).

Accordingly, by completing the Joint Correspondence Analysis with the descriptive one, one can observe that the other 20% of the extremely severe material deprived persons assert that it is extremely difficult for them to outface to their necessities, none of them having adopted a positive position (choosing the category well of the perspective on family income variable). It is a pessimistic perspective upon reality, but, as revealed by their deprivation measure, it agrees with their standard of living. It is surprisingly to observe that the belonging to this group may be possible even in the situation in which the individual participates to the labour market (32%). Other mentioned sources of income are: agriculture (32%), social income (25.33%) and pensions (10.67%). Another aspect to be here emphasized is that the percentage of individuals with social income is lower than the one of those employed or working in agriculture. In other words, in the extremely severe material deprivation group, the socially assisted ones are less deprived than those employed or working in agriculture.

(2) The profile of medium severe material deprivation

The following level of severe material deprivation, the medium one, is characterized by the fact that 6 or 7 categories are not in tune with respondents' daily reality. In this way, 66.25% of them cannot afford to pay their rent, their bills at utilities or their loans; 31.25% cannot afford to maintain their home hot; 100% cannot afford some unforeseeable costs with their economies; 96.25% cannot afford to consume meat or proteins once in two days; 100% cannot afford to take annual 1 week holidays away from their home; 25% do not have a colour TV; 73.75% do not have a washing machine; 97.5% do not have a car; 27.5% do not have a mobile.

As revealed by the Joint Correspondence Analysis, the main characteristics of the severely material deprived individuals from this group are related to their educational level (lower-secondary) and main source of income (agriculture). Adding some other aspects, revealed through

descriptive analysis, we can complete the image of this group, observing that: (1) females are still more numerous than men (56.25%, 43.75%, respectively); (2) nearby agriculture as a main source of income (40%), wage (27.5%), social income (22.5%) and pension (10%) are other sources of the persons included in this group; (3) the lowest percentage for the educational level is of the respondents with tertiary education (only 3.75%); (4) it is the group in which people are the most optimistic as to their family income perspectives, stating that they are doing well (14.29%) in highest percentages, if taking into consideration the three severe material deprivation groups; (5) in most of the cases, people mentioned that they need more than 1,000 lei to satisfy their household needs (71.25%), but, also, there were cases in which the lowest level of necessary income – less than 400 lei (12.5%) - was mentioned.

(3) The profile of low severe material deprivation

The lowest level of severe material deprivation is the one with 4 or 5 categories. In this way, 7.14% of the subjects cannot afford to pay their rent, their bills at utilities or their loans; 0% cannot afford to maintain their home hot; 98.21% cannot afford some unforeseeable costs with their economies; 96.43% cannot afford to consume meat or proteins once in two days; 100% cannot afford to take annual 1 week holidays away from their home; 3.57% do not have a colour TV; 64.29% do not have a washing machine; 100% do not have a car; 0% do not have a mobile.

It is very interesting to observe that the Joint Correspondence Analysis showed that the profile of the lowest level of severely material deprived persons is specific to the retired ones, who, although having a low level of income (in most of the cases, between 400 and 1,000 lei), still have the benefit from a safe and stable income. Descriptive analysis completed the image, revealing that: (1) in such cases, males are more numerous than females (55.35%, 44.64%, respectively); (2) respondents have different sources of income (wage, agriculture, social income), nearby pension; (3) different levels of education, including the tertiary one, appear in highest percentages among the severely material deprived groups (17.86%); (4) it is the group that mentioned most frequently that the estimated necessary income for their household is between 400 and 1,000 lei (33.93%); (5) they also appreciate that life is extremely hard, in highest percentages between groups (46.43%).

5.3. Material upturn across the groups of severe material deprivation

After observing profiles' particularities of each group, we compared the levels of deprivation at each category, for emphasizing the components that make the difference among groups.

As shown in Figure 2, high differences in goods possessing may be observed between the categories of consumption deprivation, but also between the established groups, progress being evident from one group to another.

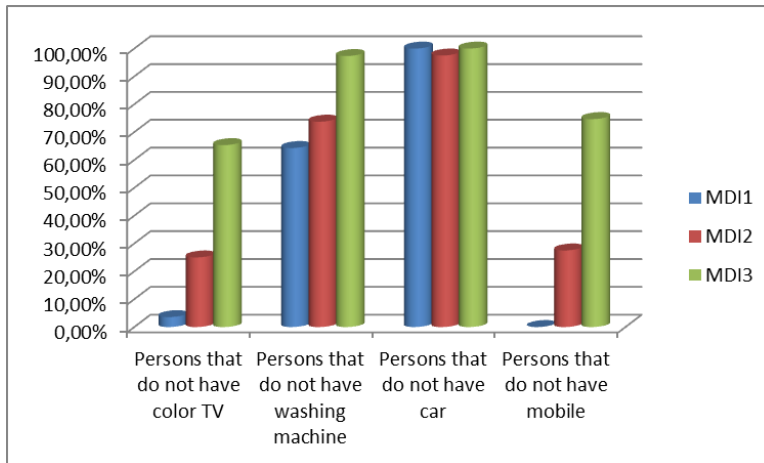


Figure 2. Comparison between the severe material deprivation groups in terms of consumption deprivation

Consequently, on one hand, it can be seen that the less detained goods are a washing machine (20.38% of the respondents of all three groups) and a car (only 1% of the respondents) and, on the other, different percentages of the same goods detaining are met among our groups of deprivation. The most important progress is met in the case of mobile phones (from 74.67% for the extremely deprived group to 0% in the lowest affected by deprivation group), of a washing machine (a 33.04% percentage difference between the first and the last group) and of a TV set (from 65.33% to 3.57%).

When discussing about basic deprivation goods, we detect two distinct situations that have to be separately analysed (Fig. 3). First, it is the case of the categories related to affording to pay the rent, the bills at utilities or the loans and to maintain home hot, that register progress across the severely material deprived groups. Accordingly, 97.33% of the extremely material disadvantaged people mentioned that they cannot afford to pay their rent, their bills or their loans, this percentage decreasing in the next

group with 31.08% and in the last group with 90.19%. In a similar way, 53.33% of the respondents from the most material affected group explained that they cannot afford to maintain their home hot, a percentage that decreases in the next stage to 31.25% and in the least affected group to 0%, respectively. The second situation is met in the categories related to affording some unforeseen costs with personal economies, to consume meat or proteins once in two days and to take a 1 week annual holidays away from their home, where almost no one is able to complete them.

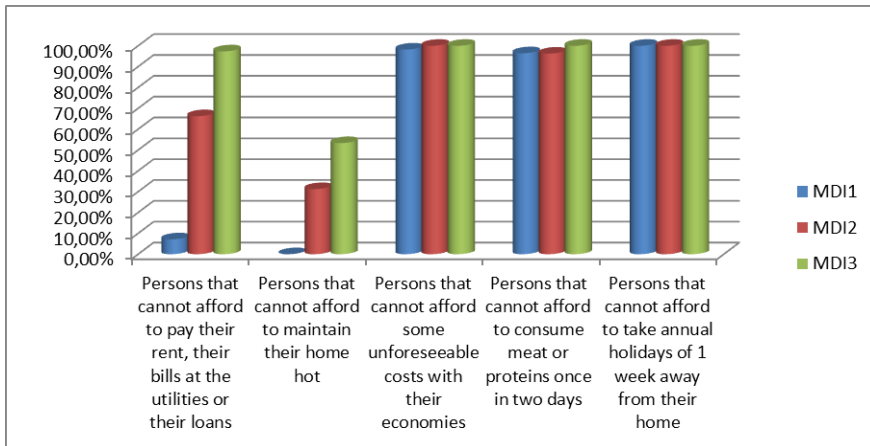


Figure 3. Comparison between the severe material deprivation groups in terms of basic deprivation

Summarizing, at general level, the less detained goods are the washing machine and the car and the less affording activities and amenities are related to unforeseeable costs, consuming meat or proteins once in two days and having a holiday once a year.

Across the groups, the most important differences are met in the case of the mobile phone, washing machine and TV possessions. Progress is not observed for the car detaining category, this good being a luxury that people included in the severely material deprived groups cannot afford. The dimensions related to the payment of rent, bills at utilities or loans and to maintaining home hot register progress across the deprived groups, in opposition with the lack of progress recorded for the other categories of basic deprivation.

6. Discussions

Analysis regarding poverty status of people from certain communities is not a facile issue. Our option for measuring it was oriented to material deprivation with its main categories because they seem to properly describe the people's standard of living, helping to better understand its different levels. Thus, for obtaining information about the two components of the direct approach (i.e. basic and consumption deprivation), the survey questions were taken over from a series of papers that investigated the problem of deprivation and of its measuring [6], [13], [1], [5]. Consequently, the methodology explained by Whelan et al. [13], was applied for first determining the severe material deprivation rate among the respondents, then for identifying the ones to be preserved for analysis, for making their sub-grouping and understanding their specificities. In this way, the comparison between the severe material deprivation rate of the communities analysed in this study and the one from the regional and national level is possible because the used methodology is the same.

In this perspective, the paper focuses on the direct approach, attempting at emphasizing some obvious signals of extreme deprivation that may be representative for disadvantaged rural areas at regional level. Because the study is made investigating two rural communities from the North-East Region of Romania, it represents an analysis of a limited rural space situation, offering no larger or even general perspectives. This may be seen as a limit of the study, but it still provides evidence revealing that deprivation registers high levels in some rural areas comparatively with the statistic data available at regional and national level. In this way, for further research, growing the number of investigated rural communities may be recommended especially for obtaining general findings regarding the North-East Region, but also regarding the general characteristics of the people that are included in the severe material deprived category.

7. Conclusions

The categories of material deprivation are illustrative of the living standard, helping to better understand its different levels. These deprivation indicators intercept financial stability and safety, the conditions of habitation, food and spare time that constitute important pillars for the quality of life dimension. Therefore, the reason for choosing the direct approach is that the level of income in a certain moment is not able to intercept the real standard of living for a person to be included in the

poverty category, or not because this is the perspective of a certain moment, while the accumulation of some possessions that contribute to a better standard of living is made over a longer period of time, on the basis of income's accumulation. Unfortunately, as one can observe, the members of the two disadvantaged rural communities show a deficit to all these categories, which is a distinct sign of poverty. Highly material disadvantaged areas were identified through our study, offering the possibility to divide the severe material deprivation recorded in the investigated communities into three distinct groups in order to, on one hand, better evidence the large lack of resources specific to these rural areas and, on the other, to investigate their levels of deprivation separately and to have a clearer perspective over the other related socio-economic specificities constituting possible determinants of their situation.

The question that naturally comes is related to the spreading of this deprivation state. Are these identified communities isolated cases or are they representative for the poorer rural areas of the North-East Region of Romania, or even at national level? How many communities are affected by this high deprivation level and, concretely, how many lives are stuck in the situation of not being capable to become agents in their own lives? Is it the individual aspect or community's/region's/country's lack of development determining the observed state-of-being in the investigated communities?

The results of the present study showed, for the analysed rural communities, that extremely severe material deprivation is mainly associated with women, with a low level of education attainment, with a negative perspective related to family income and with a higher estimated necessary income for their households than people can afford. Also, it was observed that the workers in agriculture are most frequently associated with a medium severe material deprivation, while the retired people are more related to the most advantaged group, the one with a low level of severe material deprivation. This paper represents only a static image of a limited rural space situation, offering no larger or even general perspectives. However, it provides evidence revealing that deprivation registers high levels in some rural areas comparatively with the statistic data available at regional and national level.

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