

QUALITY OF LIFE IN ROMANIA 1918–2018: AN OVERVIEW

IULIAN STĂNESCU

This paper aims to provide an overview of the quality of life in Romania during the hundred years since the country's unification in 1918. Three highly relevant domains for the quality of life are reviewed using secondary data analysis: (1) the living standard, with a focus on household income and consumption, (2) living conditions, especially urbanisation, housing and utilities, (3) perceived quality of life. Behaviour, factual, and opinion data was collected from a variety of sources: statistical and social surveys, census data, official statistics, archive documents, and academic research. The periodisation is based on the two major historical events that shaped Romanian history from 1918–2018: the Second World War and the December Revolution of 1989, resulting in four discrete blocks: the interwar years (1919–1939), the Second World War and first post-war years (1940–1947), the period of the communist regime (1948–1989), and the period following the Romanian Revolution of 1989.

***Keywords:** Romania; quality of life; living standard; living conditions; housing; urbanisation; interwar; Second World War; communism; transition; capitalism.*

This paper aims to provide an overview of the quality of life in Romania during the hundred years since the country's unification in 1918. Reviewing a century of history through the quality of life prism means, in essence, to see in which period the people enjoyed or not a better life and which are the key points in the modernisation of Romanian society. 1918–2018 was a century with a tortuous history, marked by two watershed events, the Second World War and the Revolution of December 1989. In their aftermath, Romania's economic, social, and political structure went through a fundamental change twice in less than half of century. Furthermore, this is the century during which the country experienced, in up to four generations, a crucial modernisation process, first through industrialisation and urbanisation, then by deindustrialisation.

When dealing with such a long period of time, the sheer complexity of the quality of life concept (Zamfir, 1984; Zamfir, 2005; Mărginean, 2005; Dumitru,

Adresa de contact a autorului: Iulian Stănescu, Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții al Academiei Române, Calea 13 Septembrie, nr. 13, sector 5, 050711, București, România, e-mail: stanescu.iccv@gmail.com.

2005; Mărginean, 2011) poses a real challenge. For instance, the operationalisation scheme developed by Mărginean (2005: 38–48; 2011: 20–23) features no less than 24 quality of life domains comprising 100 objective and subjective indicators. Obviously, an overview of the quality of life in Romania over so many domains exceeds the scope of this paper. Therefore, a choice needed to be made about the domains of social life with the highest relevance for the quality of life. We chose three such domains, which are to be reviewed using secondary analysis:

– *The living standard*, focused on household *income and consumption*: as this is the domain with the highest relevance for the economic dimension of living conditions, it features subthemes and indicators concerning: key processes and structural change in the social structure; land and farm ownership breakdown; the distribution and redistribution systems; income breakdown by type and real term dynamics for main types of income; consumption breakdown: food consumption, ownership of durable goods; household budget breakdown and income-expenses balance; poverty and material deprivation; social and economic inequality; free time and cultural consumption;

– *Living conditions: urbanisation and housing*: considering that urbanisation is a process associated with better living conditions throughout history, this domain comprises: population urban/rural breakdown; internal migration; housing availability and construction, housing quality and living conditions: breakdown of housing by building materials, utility and fixtures availability, overcrowding, etc.;

– *Perceived quality of life*: evaluations and attitudes of the public regarding life satisfaction, health satisfaction, changes in Romanian society, direction of the country; subjective wellbeing; the main source of data is the quality of life survey programme of the Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL), which began in 1990.

Other relevant domains for quality of life during 1918–2018, such as health and education, had to be left out due to paper size constraints.

Data availability is a major challenge when dealing with such a long period of time. The sources for the empirical data used in this paper include: behaviour, factual, and opinion data from surveys and census, official statistics, archive documents, and academic research. The method used is secondary data analysis. On the whole, data availability shows the level of concern and opening of the various political regimes and governments from 1918–2018, as well as the general level of development of Romania during this period. For instance, public opinion data is available only from post-1989 surveys. Last but not least, due to the fact that more information and data is available for the post-1989 period in comparison to the communist or interwar periods, there is an inherent difference in terms of length between the sections of the paper covering different historical periods or time blocks.

The periodisation used in this paper is based on the two above mentioned major historical events. Therefore, the process is straightforward, resulting in four discrete blocks (or periods) of time: (1) the interwar years (1919–1939), (2) the Second World War and first post-war years (1940–1947), (3) the period of the communist regime (1948–1989), and (4) the period following the Romanian

Revolution of 1989. For each of these periods, the analysis is structured according to the above mentioned three quality of life domains, based on data availability.

THE INTERWAR YEARS

The legacy of the Bucharest Sociological School, led by Dimitrie Gusti, provides a reasonably clear picture of the living standard during the interwar years, especially for the peasantry. The predominance of food poverty is probably the most important finding of the 1920s and 1930s village monographs. On this issue Gusti (1968: 490) noted that “the diet (...) is deficient through excessive corn intake, low animal, fresh produce intake (only 48% of households have dairy cattle), through lack of ability in cooking, and through totally lacking food hygiene”. A significant case of peasant food poverty is the one cited by Gusti (1968: 451) in his theoretical work on the problem of sociology: the weekly food intake in the summer of 1938 of a member of a family named Spulber from Nereju in Vrancea county. For brevity, we list only Wednesday: “breakfast: polenta [boiled cornmeal] with a pickled cucumber; lunch: nothing; afternoon snack: cold polenta with 5 apples; dinner: polenta with pickled cucumber”.

Using survey data from 60 villages from all the historical provinces of Romania, collected in 1938, Golopenția and Georgescu (1941/1999: 291) show that two thirds of peasant households registered a surplus in the household budget, and one third a deficit. Overall, peasant households were dependent on income from labour outside the household due to insufficient owned land in comparison with their needs.

On the living standard of the peasantry, Axenciuc (1999: 384–385) distinguishes three socio-economic categories, based on data from the 1930 census: (1) upper, (2) “middle”, and (3) mass majority of the peasantry. (1) The upper category comprises the “wealthy” households that farmed 10–50 hectares of agricultural land; some 250,000 households or 7% of total peasant households were in this category. (2) The “middle” households, which owned from 5 to 10 hectares “had an uncertain living, being threatened by drought years, the tax burden, with incomes at the limit of conserving their assets, prudent expenses and very modest consumption”. 560,000 households were in this category, equivalent of 17% of peasant households. These peasants farmed one fifth of the total agricultural land. (3) The third category included the mass majority of the peasantry, which farmed less than 5 hectares or nothing, around 2.5 million households in all. These peasants “had difficult problems to live and survive, (...) at the limit of biologic life, most of them always in need, (...) with no real perspective for change”. The “chiabur” (equivalent of Russian/Soviet kulaks) category covers some of the “middle” and “wealthy” peasant households and is defined by Țăra (2011: 132) as “land-owning peasants (...) between 10 and 100 hectares that used wage labour in addition to their own labour”.

The analysis of the Romanian bourgeoisie of Manoilescu (1942/2002) remains to this day the most outstanding work on this issue for Romania in the interwar years. According to Manoilescu (1942/2002: 119–132), the Romanian bourgeoisie included: major industrialists (around 3,000 individuals); major owners of trading companies (2,000); bankers (1,500); major landowners (10,000) – this category comprises owners of at least 100 hectares, the majority of whom were the former landed aristocracy that crossed into the bourgeoisie following the land reform act of 1921; the major landowners controlled 0.4% of farming units, but farmed over 27% of the agricultural land; engineers in the private sector (1,500); economists in the private sector (1,500); rentiers (property owners) from the abovementioned categories, afterwards retired (1,500). The consolidated total for the bourgeoisie is 22,500 individuals, equivalent of 0.11% of Romania's population at the end of the interwar years or 0.4% if one counts the typical 4 member household at the time. Around 44%, a large minority, of the bourgeoisie comes from the landowner class before the 1921 land reform act.

Alongside the bourgeoisie, Manoilescu introduces the “pseudo-bourgeoisie” category, which features individuals with non-manual work and higher education: civil servants (engineers, economists, and high ranking civil servants), university professors and secondary education teachers, lawyers, physicians, judges and prosecutors, army officers, journalists, writers, artists, others, as well as pensioners and rentiers from these categories. With some rounding up, Manoilescu reached a grand total of 125,000 pseudo-bourgeoisies. With family members included, it means less than 3% of the total population and around a fifth of the urban population. Closer to the reality of interwar social stratification is the comment by Schifirneț in the introduction to the 2002 edition of Manoilescu's book that the pseudo-bourgeoisies actually belong to the middle class, “which is nor bourgeoisie, nor proletariat, nor peasantry” and which also includes individuals with secondary education residing in urban areas.

One peculiarity of the population by ethnicity breakdown in interwar Romania was the fact that a large share of the bourgeoisie and the middle class or pseudo-bourgeoisie in Manoilescu's terms belonged to ethnic minorities. Manoilescu (1942/2002: 122–125) makes numerous references to “a high degree of allogeneic individuals” for almost all bourgeoisie and pseudo-bourgeoisie categories. For instance, estimates and totals for bankers and physicians show that one third were ethnic minority, according to 1940 data. The share of ethnic minorities bourgeoisie and pseudo-bourgeoisie varied by region and foreign capital ownership. Larionescu and Tănăsescu (1989: 337) show that, in 1935, over 60% of board members in the extractive (mostly oil) industry were not Romanian nationals. Moreover, in 21 cities in the provinces of Transylvania and Banat the share of industrialists of Hungarian, German, Jewish and other minority descent was almost 90%. This fact, in addition to overpopulation of rural areas, the Great Depression of 1929–1933 and declining economic living standards were the root causes of social tensions in the late interwar years that in politics led to growing support for the far right in the 1930s.

In the non-manual labour strata, the civil service was an important, but heterogeneous segment. Measnicov (1938: 23), citing budgetary records, gives a round total of 250,000 people. In the civil service one could find Manoilescu's pseudo-bourgeoisie or the middle class, as well as the large majority of the public administration clerical workers, but also teachers (65,800), the clergy (21,300), army officers and non-commissioned or warrant officers (43,400), police officers and Interior Ministry officials and clerks (21,100), auxiliary and support personnel, as well as local government clerical workers (45,000).

Manual and non-manual labour employees of for-profit entities, irrespective of ownership type, were a very heterogeneous category. 1.022 million employees were recorded at the 1930 census, out of which 590,000 in urban areas (Gusti, 1938: 54). Included in this total were employees in the public sector, but also employees in state owned enterprises, some 100,000 in total, half of which worked for the state owned railways. Experiencing proletarianization were also servants (300,000) and apprentices (95,000) that had incomes similar to employees. Somewhat closer to proletariat than the incomes and living standard of the middle class were the self-employed and the owners of small businesses (327,000) from urban areas. Usually, these people owned small workshops where they also laboured as tradesman.

The size of the industrial workers is somewhat difficult to establish. Axenciuc (1999: 298) puts forward an estimate of over 700,000 in 1938 for the total number of employees in manufacturing and transportation, most of which were workers. In his analysis of social stratification in interwar Romania, Țâra (2011: 164) places the industrial workers (the proletariat) around the half million mark. The education and/or training breakdown of employees in manufacturing and transportation was as problematic as it is revealing for the general development level of Romania in the interwar period: 16% illiterate, two thirds elementary school graduates, 5.5% vocational school graduates, 9.2% high school graduates, and just 1% university graduates (Axenciuc, 1999: 298).

The price and cost of living statistics data collected by the interwar Institute of Statistics is a good starting point concerning the living standard of the urban strata. Measnicov (1938: 25) cites the monthly expenses thresholds from the cost of living statistics for a households of "middle employees" comprising 5 individuals, out of which three children: for Bucharest (the capital city) – 10,500 lei, for large cities – 7,500–9,000 lei, for towns with lower cost of living – 5,500–6,000 lei. Measnicov also deals with the wage distribution of non-manual employees in the public sector, based on budgetary data. Almost 80% of them had monthly wages below 5,000 lei. Less than 5% of clerical workers had wages above 10,000 lei. As a result, it was common practice for non-manual workers to supplement their income from other sources, such as tutoring or teaching at private schools for teachers, property income (rents) or through petty corruption.

There is no data regarding wage distribution for manual workers, especially industrial workers. Axenciuc's work (1992: 542–545) on nominal wages in manufacturing and transportation points to lower wages for workers in comparison

with non-manual workers. What about the purchasing power of workers in the 1930s compared to 2016? A (quasi-) purchasing power index based on (1) nominal wage data of workers employed in the food processing, textiles, and metallurgical industry for 1934 from Axenciuc and for 2016 from official statistics (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017c: 102–107), on one hand, and (2) yearly average prices for three basic foodstuffs – eggs, milk, potatoes – from 1934 (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940: 632) and 2016 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b), on the other hand, reveals a purchasing power 1.5–1.8 times higher in 2016 compared to 1934. In other words, an average wage worker employed in processing, textiles, and metallurgical industry in 2016 could buy 1.5–1.8 times more eggs, milk or potatoes than his counterpart from the same industries in 1934. This means that most interwar workers faced a daily struggle to make ends meet. Most likely, some worker households supplemented their food intake from their allotment.

The living standard, especially in urban areas, was severely degraded by the Great Depression of 1929–1933 (Academia Română, 2003: 142–143). During that time, unemployment climbed to 300,000, equivalent of up to 10% of the urban population. After the economic recovery, unemployment decreased to just 27,000 in 1937. Besides unemployment, even more painful were the “sacrifice curbs” of January 1931, 1932 and 1933, as the austerity policies enacted at the request of foreign creditors were called. Each of the three successive rounds of “sacrifice curbs” meant cuts of 10–15% of wages, suspension of other wage rights and deferrals in the payment of wages and other social rights, such as pensions.

Pasti (2006: 36) notes that in interwar Romania “the market is still a secondary mechanism of distribution”. Most of those employed in agriculture – 78.2% of the total active population, according to the 1930 census (Manuilă and Georgescu, 1938: 155) – had a minor or no participation in market relations; their needs were met mainly through self-consumption (Golopenția and Georgescu, 1941/1999: 267), namely subsistence farming. The state’s part in resource distribution was through the incomes of public employees and through redistribution. Last but not least, corruption was an important part of the distribution system and a main trait of social and economic life in interwar Romania. References about corruption, especially about the relationship between leading capitalists and state elites, are often found in political memoirs. For instance, the memoirs of Constantin Argetoianu, cabinet minister in many interwar governments and briefly prime minister in the late 1930s, provide a short but vivid history behind the rise to fortune of Nicolae Malaxa, the largest industrialist in Romania by the end of the 1930s (Academia Română, 2003: 151–152). Archive documents from the 1940 commissions for wealth control of leading political figures (including King Carol II) and major industrialists, are a major source of factual data regarding high-level corruption (Axenciuc, 1999: 297). Corruption permeated all levels of society, leading to lower living standards, and the erosion of social cohesion and public morals. Overall, the distribution system in the interwar period is revealing for the pre-industrial level of development of Romanian economy and society.

Massive income inequality and social polarisation are main traits of the interwar period. The income tax data from 1938, cited by Georgescu (1992: 218), is revealing: 716 persons declared a yearly income above 1 million lei (7 of which above 10 million lei), 70,529 individuals has a yearly income above 100,000 lei, 304,400 taxpayers had an income of 20,000–40,000 lei. Adding to these categories the high income civil servants and “chiabur” peasant households (“middle” and “wealthy” peasants, equivalent of Russian/Soviet kulaks), Țâra (2011: 188) estimates that “a share of 3–4% of the country had a very high living standard”, while the rest of the employees “struggled to survive from one day to another”.

Social protests, especially workers’ strikers, were a consequence of social polarisation. Social strife intensified during difficult economic times – the post-war years 1918–1920 and the Great Depression years 1929–1933. According to Scurtu (Academia Română, 2003: 142), at least 50 workers died during the repression of the printing press workers strike of 1918, the general strike of 1920, the miners’ strike of 1929, the Prahova Valley oil workers and the Bucharest railway workers strike of 1933. These were the most important, but only a fraction, of the interwar strikes.

Living conditions: urbanisation, housing, utilities

A mainly peasant society, interwar Romania was in a pre-industrial development stage. During 1919–1939, higher natural growth of the rural population compared with the urban population led to slight growth of the former’s share in the total population. According to calculations made by Axenciuc (1996: 17), the share of the rural population actually increased by 4 percentage points from 77.8% to 81.8% (*Figure 1*). Despite some progress, the economic growth of the interwar period was insufficient to trigger an ample urbanisation process and thus change the ratio of urban-rural population.

This fact appears even more poignant if one looks at the real urbanisation level in cities and towns. According to data from the 1938 public health survey, cited by Scurtu (2001: 30), out of 176 cities and towns, 74 had no running water, 123 had no sewage system. The picture becomes more revealing if we consider the fact that one fifth of people employed in agriculture resided in urban areas (Georgescu, 1938: 50).

In 1938, 565 urban and rural localities, in which around one fourth (24.5%) of the population resided, were connected to the power grid. The number of households with electricity was almost 436,000 (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1940: 500, 506), equivalent of just 10.5% of the total number of households registered at the 1930 census (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1938–1940). There were more than 395,000 households with electricity in cities and towns, almost 45% of the urban population. Households used electricity almost exclusively for lighting (and much less for home appliances) due to the low purchasing power of the population (Axenciuc, 1999: 380).

Housing availability and quality were highly problematic in the interwar years (*Table no. 1*). The 1929 housing survey, conducted by the Labour Ministry, showed that out of the 3.08 million housing units in rural areas, some 29% had wood floors, while for the rest the floor was made of a mixture of earth and manure; over one fifth (21.6%) had a single room; the breakdown of the roof materials was: straw 13%, reed 15%, shingle 29%, slate 25%, and 19% tile (Academia Română, 2003: 159).

Table no. 1

Housing by building material of outside walls

	1929	1977	1992	2002	2011
Urban					
Reinforced concrete, prefab concrete, brick, stone or substitute	50.0	55.2	76.5	90.0	85.5
Wood (beams, logs)	20.0	4.7	2.3	2.1	2.1
Adobe and other similar materials	30.0	17.1	8.0	7.8	6.6
Other, no information					5.8
Rural					
Reinforced concrete, prefab concrete, brick, stone or substitute	30.5	33.4	39.7	41.0	43.6
Wood (beams, logs)	33.0	20.3	15.8	15.4	12.1
Adobe and other similar materials	36.0	46.3	43.3	43.6	36.9
Other, no information		0.0	1.2		7.4

Sources: Academia Română (2003: 159), Axenciuc (1999: 381), population and housing census of 1977 (Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1980–1981), 1992 (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1994–1995), 2002, (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2003b), 2011 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013b).

In urban areas, especially in the capital Bucharest and several other large cities, there was a housing crisis. A first effect was overcrowding of available housing. The number of people per building was 6.5 in urban areas, compared to 4.5 in rural areas, with a peak of almost 10 people per building in Bucharest. The second effect was the high price of housing and rent. During 1918–1938, there were 16,400 housing units built in Bucharest (Academia Română, 2003: 163), a city in expansion of 631,000 inhabitants and 158,000 households at the 1930 census (Manuilă and Georgescu, 1938: 138).

In the interwar period, the periphery neighbourhoods of the cities, especially Bucharest, featured slums, usually with improvised housing, no paved streets, no sewage, and water available only from public wells. Manuilă (1939) left a vivid description of the squalor, diseases and infections found in the Tei neighbourhood, at that time in the outskirts of Bucharest.

The 1941 census provides further data on the living conditions only in Bucharest (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1943: 360). By that time, the city's population of almost 1 million lived in 105,000 housing buildings comprising

266,000 housing units. One quarter of housing buildings were built using adobe, the rest by bricks or substitutes. Out of total housing units, 21.1% had water from public wells, the rest running water; just over half (53.4%) had electricity; 89% used wood for heating, the rest had central heating; wood was also used in the kitchen as fuel for cooking. Last but not least, 28% of households had radio sets (Axenciuc, 1999: 378–379).

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND FIRST POST-WAR YEARS

Of all the periods covered in this paper, the Second World War is the most difficult period for quality of life research due to precariousness of data sources, as well as incomplete and fragmented data series. Official statistics ceased to be published in 1941 because of wartime restrictions. Although data collection continued (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1945a: 2), publication of statistical yearbooks would resume only in 1957. The single source for official statistics is the “Statistical Communications” series of booklets, issued by the Central Statistics Institute during January 1945–September 1948. Other sources include: archive documents, such as transcripts of cabinet meetings, intelligence and Interior Ministry bulletins on social issues, and other archive documents; public documents from the period, i.e. laws and regulations, policy documents, articles from print media; other sources, including scholarly publications from the war years that feature some statistical data and memoirs. Of the available sources in print, the most important by far are the transcripts of cabinet meetings.

In the summer of 1940, Romania ceded Bessarabia, Northern Bukovina, and the Hertza region to the Soviet Union, Northern Transylvania to Hungary and Southern Dobruja, also called the Quadrilater, to Bulgaria. In the fall of 1940 Romania formerly joined the Axis. Romania entered the war by joining Nazi Germany in the invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. In the second phase of the war, Romania, joined the United Nations on August 23, 1944, and signed an armistice with the Allies on September 12/13, 1944. The participation in the war continued, this time against Nazi Germany until its unconditional surrender on May 7/8, 1944. The peace treaty between the victorious Allied powers and Romania was signed on February 10, 1947. Following the Second World War, Romania was in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union.

The Romanian Army lost 794,562 military personnel during the Second World War, of which 92,620 killed in action, 367,976 missing, and 323,956 wounded and sick (Academia Română, 2008: 373–374). The exact number of civilian casualties is unknown. However, the number of civilian casualties from the 1944 British and American air raids 1944 is known – 7,693 dead, of which 3,994 in the capital city of Bucharest (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1945d: 12), and 7,809 wounded (Axworthy et al., 1995: 314).

Romanian citizens of ethnic minorities were exposed to policies based on racism and a failure of political leadership during 1940–1947. Under the regime of

Marshal Ion Antonescu from 1940–1944, Jews – both Romanian citizens and from Soviet territories under military occupation – were victims of war crimes, deportations, and other atrocities. The total number of victims is estimated between 280,000 and 380,000. Some 25,000 Roma/Gypsies were also deported. In addition, racial and anti-Semitic laws first enacted by the regime of King Carol II were toughened (Wiesel et al., 2004: 388, 326). Businesses and property owned by Jews were “Romanianized”, resulting in “quick enrichment of capitalist elements”, Romanian and German (Constantinescu, 2000: 52). Following the August 23 coup, the German minority’s privileged status came to an end. Ethnic Germans suffered deportations, arrests, camp internment, forced labour, and property expropriation due to the 1945 land reform act (Academia Română, 2008: 742–760).

The war years are different to all other periods when it comes to living standards due to an obvious reason: the wartime organisation of the economy and society implies certain peculiarities. The first such peculiarity is a greater role of the state in the distribution system. Dirigisme was openly acknowledged and encouraged by political leaders (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2003: 23, 94). This is to be expected in a war economy and was practiced by all major participants in the Second World War. The precise ratio between state and market in the distribution system during the war remains to be established. Scurtu (2011) provides a general assessment that “the market had a decisive role in the cities”, but in villages “the peasant household continued to be closed, and expenses very low”.

The second peculiarity is that during wartime consumption becomes more relevant than income for living standards. As resources are redirected to support the war effort, scarcity of goods occurs. In this situation, the population’s supply is less achieved via the market, but rather through various forms of rationing. Therefore, the quantity and quality supply of food and essential goods, such as clothing and footwear, becomes critical.

The third peculiarity concerns the nonlinear growth of the economy during 1940–1947. Despite the lack of official statistics, the general trend of the economy, especially concerning living standards, is possible due to major contributions by Axenciuc (1992, 1996, 2012) and Alexandrescu (1986, 2008: 761–812). The economy registered ups and down, with a high watermark in 1943, due to a bumper harvest, and freefall during 1944–1946, caused by multiple causes: destruction by military operations and Allied air strikes in 1944, dispersion of enterprises and civil administration, armistice commitments, prolonged war effort, major transportation crisis, failure of the fall 1944 sowing campaign and a severe drought during 1945–1946, which led to catastrophic crop failure for two years in a row.

Employment and population income remained similar to the interwar years. The peasantry remained by far the main majority of the population: 75.6% of the population lived in rural areas and 71.6% of the population was employed mainly in agriculture (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1945a: 10). The income of the peasantry continued to be very low (Șandru, 1996: 410–426). Even after the March

1945 land reform, smallholdings continued to be the mainstay in the farming unit breakdown (Golopenția and Onică, 2002: 486).

In urban areas, the wage inequality continued the interwar patterns: between manual workers and technical and administrative employees (Axenciuc, 1992: 542–543), and between high public officials and the rest of public employees, as set by the civil servants pay act (1941b). According to cabinet transcripts, the relative position of workers seems to have improved to a certain extent during the war years, and the wage differences to have somewhat reduced. On wage differences in the public sector, the finance minister explained, “in September 1941, the maximum difference was 6 times over, and last year declined to 4.9” (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 393, 384). Despite such efforts, wage incomes were low due to high taxation to finance the war effort. Moreover, taxation was regressive. By August 1944, the net wage was only 29% of the gross wage for low paid employees and up to 45.8% for higher paid employees (Constantinescu, 2000: 78).

The motivation for the increased attention to the workers’ living standard was political, aimed at securing public order. In the Economic Council of Ministers meeting of August 6, 1943, Mihai Antonescu, vice president of the Council of Ministers, cited the urban areas of Ploiești (oilmen), Petroșani (miners), Grivița (rail workers), and the Autonomous Companies of Bucharest as “the areas in which the social factor, namely the communist tendency and the occurrence of disorder and usage of action are the most acute”. Mihai Antonescu went on to say that these “are hotbeds of agitation. We must understand that a continuous supply is a preventive way to insure public order. It must be done even with some sacrifice. You must do all that is possible concerning footwear and clothing. Please make all effort” (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 332).

The Antonescu regime intended to advance “work as a national duty for each Romanian” (Decret-Lege pentru organizarea muncii naționale, 1941a). Subsequently, the population was mobilised for public works. In addition, work was explicitly advanced as the sole legitimate source of income. To a certain degree, these measures anticipated post-war developments after 1947. The labour legislation became harsher, according to the needs of a war economy: the number of working hours increased, paid leave was suspended, some state owned and private enterprises were taken over by the military, “farming mobilisation” was introduced in rural areas to maximize agricultural output (Constantinescu, 2000: 54, 60–61, 72) and continued even after the regime change in August 1944 (Arhivele Statului din România, 1994: 116, 118–119; Ciucă, 2012: 39).

Income from wage, pension and other social benefits declined in real terms during the war period. High inflation, even hyperinflation from 1944, led to an explosive cost of living growth. Unfortunately, the only available data covers just the capital city, Bucharest (*Table no. 2*), where the cost of living was higher than the rest of the country (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 387), while the only data on real wages cover only public administration employees. According to the transcript of the Cabinet meeting of February 9, 1944, the wages of several public

employees categories were lower in real terms compared to 1940, and even lower by 35–75% compared to 1913 (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2007: 131–132).

Table no. 2

Cost of living and public administration employees' average real wage index in Bucharest (1940–1947)

1940 = 100	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	1946	1947
cost of living index	143	211	285	429	2,537	15,561	362,543*
public administration employees' average real wage index	106	94	96	87**			

Sources: author calculations based on statistical data in *Statistical Communications no.2* (1945b: 15), no. 19 (1948: 17), * December 1947; ** December 1944.

Since foodstuff and goods were, with some exceptions, free to trade on the market, speculation occurred. It manifested both before the coup of August 23, 1944, but also more intensely afterward (Arhivele Statului din România, 1996). Due to scarcity of goods, speculative behaviour was extensive. Mills, closed circuit shops, co-operatives, physicians, even priests were just some of the cases discussed in cabinet meetings (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 259–260, 269, 588, Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2007: 588).

Regardless of the ideological stance of the regimes in power, starting with 1941 the authorities tried to compensate the increase in prices and rarity of goods by two main methods: firstly, by introduction of closed circuit shops attached to factories or public offices, in which workers or public employees could buy food, goods, wood for heating at official prices that were lower than market prices, and secondly by rationing some basic foodstuff, such as bread, rice, sugar, etc., footwear and clothing.

The Antonescu regime tried to increase the living standards and fight inflation at the same time mainly by securing a better supply of goods through closed circuit shops and rationing, rather than nominal wages increase. Also for taming inflation, German army units stationed in Romania were forbidden to buy goods directly from the market (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 337–340). However, with all the efforts, inflation and speculation would be decisively mastered only by the 1947 monetary reform.

The structure of the consumption also followed the pattern from the interwar years, namely a very high degree of self-consumption for the peasantry, and a high level of food and clothing expenses in the household budget for the urban population; in Bucharest, rent was also high in the household budget. In addition to purchasing power, the level of consumption depended on the agricultural output and the performance of the supply system, mainly of transportation. In this issue, Mihai Antonescu, Vice President of the Council of Ministers, said in the Cabinet meeting of August 6, 1943, that “there are so many incoherences in our supply

system, that, if you do not permanently supervise the transportation and supply regime, (...) we risk blockage, because leaving to the private initiative the demand and supply of rail cars we risk, at a certain point, to have oversupply in some regions and insufficient supply in others” (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 336).

Besides food, insufficient supply of footwear and clothing was the other main hardship for the population during 1941–1947 (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 333, 337, 340). This problem was never solved due to three causes: lack of raw materials, insufficient transportation capacity, and the high share of military consumption, which, for instance, left only 20% of natural leather output for civilian consumption (Ciucă, 2012: 64).

Heating during the cold season was another issue. In the 1940s, the country required up to 600,000 railway cars of wood for heating per cold season. Once more, securing the transportation for this quantity was problematic. In search of a solution, one outcome was the introduction of natural gas in Bucharest (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2008: 487–497).

A prolonged and severe drought caused crop failure in 1942, 1945, and 1946 – a hardship that added to war difficulties. Cereal output, especially wheat and corn used for staple food, was catastrophically decreased by the drought (Axenciuc, 1996: 501, 517). In 1942, the situation was salvaged by food brought from occupied Soviet territory (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 131, 238, 251). The years 1946–1947 were marked by famine, especially in the East and Southeast of the country, which led to increased death and infant death rates, over and above those during the war years 1941–1945 (Institutul Central de Statistică, 1947: 7). Relief over the high point of the famine in 1947 came through large cereal imports from the West. A share of the National Bank of Romania official gold reserved had to be put aside as collateral to pay for the imports (Academia Română, 2008: 798).

Taking into account the consequences of the famine, and the human and economic losses of the war (Belli, 2001: 45–48), we regard the 1945–1947 years as the period with the lowest living standard for Romania’s population in the entire 1918–2018 century.

The war meant an increase in the need for social care, especially for the war invalids, orphans and widows. Monthly payment of child benefit was introduced, in the beginning paid for by employers. The Patronage Council for Social Work was established as a government body. It provided social services for families in need and other vulnerable groups, including meals for free or at token prices (Scurtu, 2011). After the coup of August 23, 1944, the organisation was renamed as the League for Social Work and subsequently dismantled.

Evaluations of the populations regarding the living standard and living conditions are found in memoirs and, especially, Interior Ministry and intelligence briefings regarding the social issues. Some memoirs, cited by Scurtu (2011), such as the ones by academicians David Prodan and Gheorghe Zane, students at the time of the war, reveal a rather favourable evaluation for the period before the summer

of 1944. Most likely, the favourable subjective appraisal of the 1940–1943 is based on the severe degradation in the living standard during 1944–1947. The intelligence bulletins on social issues reveal a full range of hardships and dissatisfaction by social categories: issues with the supply of foodstuff and goods, mainly clothing and footwear, especially for rationed items and in closed circuit shops; severe lack of food during 1946–1947; work conditions and delays of wage payments for workers, etc. (Scurtu, 2011; Arhivele Statului din România, 1996).

Although the Antonescu regime continued the public works programme from the interwar years, especially in Bucharest, the quality and quantity of housing continued to be a major social problem, especially for workers and the urban poor strata. After a visit to the *Rogiferul* factory in Bucharest, owned by the industrialist Nicolae Malaxa, Marshal Antonescu recalled during the Cabinet meeting of March 2, 1943 that he had seen “the most horrible exploitation of man, in the most horrible filth that one could imagine – they were shadows of humans that worked, not humans, exploitation of man through man and the distraction of man (...) People from the countryside came and settled in the most miserable conditions possible (...), candidates for typhus, tuberculosis, etc.” (Arhivele Naționale ale României, 2006: 133).

THE COMMUNIST REGIME

Following the Second World War, Romanian society experienced a series of structural changes in all areas, reaching a new form of organization after the socialist model developed in the Soviet Union under the leadership of Josef Stalin.

The research of the living standard during 1948–1989 raises special issues. Romanian sociology registers only 31 large scale empirical research projects during this interval (Zamfir and Filipescu, 2015: 101). Although almost all of these were published in books or journals, the great majority are village or industrial monographs, closely packed between 1957–1974, and less representative on a national level. As a result, the main sources for the 1948–1989 period are the three censuses of 1956, 1966, and 1977, as well as the statistical yearbook series.

Living standard: income and consumption

The periodisation put forward by Poenaru, Molnar and Csorvassi (2000) remains highly relevant for changes in the living standard. Accordingly, the over four decades of communist regime could be separated into three distinct periods: (1) post-war and recovery years up to the end of the 1950s, (2) economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s, (3) crisis period of the 1980s.

The first period comprises the post-war and recovery years after the Second World War. Although this period saw a sustained increase of incomes, one must take into consideration the low starting base, caused by a series of factors, such as

the freefall of the economy during 1945–1947 and the dominance of foreign capital in the control heights of the economy, with the Soviet Union taking over the former German participations under the guise of Soviet-Romanian concerns called Sovrom. The post-war and recovery period featured a chronic shortage of consumption goods, including food, which led to rationing for some basic foods and goods, even during the 1950s. The end of this period was in the late 1950s, but difficult to pinpoint.

According to the secular series of Axenciuc (2012: 40–41), Romanian GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (in constant 2000 US dollars) of 1950 is comparable to 1938. In addition, the social product index of 1951 is above the one of 1938 (Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1966: 103). The recovery period for the living standard was longer. Data series regarding yearly average consumption per inhabitant for main food products reveal that the 1938 level is not surpassed in 1950, but in 1960 (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1990: 129). Due to a gap in the data series between the beginning and the end of the decade, the point of overtaking the 1938 level is impossible to pinpoint. Most likely it is somewhere in the second part of the 1950s, but this remains to be identified in further archive research.

The second period covers the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s and it features sustained increase in the living standard, free universal access to key public services, especially health care and education, improved infrastructure, housing access, and better living conditions. All this meant “taking out of poverty the great mass of the population” (Poenaru et al., 2000: 450) and, in effect, Romania’s full entry in modernity from a quality of life point of view, due to the industrialisation process. In the 1970s, the economy started to reveal to show signs of weakness that at the end of decade began to manifest in the living standard. Gaston Marin (2000: 195–197), leading central planner from the 1950s to the mid-1960s, chairman of the state prices committee in the 1970s, shows that a general resetting of prices was necessary in 1974–1976. However, this would have led to a decline in the national income and, possibly, social problems. Based on these considerations, communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu ordered a resetting of the prices according to political objectives. In the 1970s, Romania was also severely hit by natural disasters: flooding in 1970–1971, 1975, and a catastrophic earthquake in 1977. Beginning in 1978, the economy experienced balance of payments and foreign debt problems that would decisively impact the living standard in the following decade (Stroe, 2000: 375–377).

The third period comprises the years 1982–1989, of prolonged economic and social crisis, marked by the effort to restore the balance of payments deficit and the policy decision to fully pay the foreign debt. These policies had deep negative consequences for the living standard, leading to a “pauperisation of the entire population” (Poenaru et al., 2000: 450–451), which featured severe cuts in the

supply of consumption goods, chronic shortage of foodstuffs – cues were notorious –, and, towards the end, even peacetime rationing.

The communist period stands out due to the profile of the distribution system. Political decision replaced the market (supply and demand) as the main distribution system. Incomes were set through decisions taken by the Communist Party leadership, carried out via the command economy (state owned enterprises, banks, cooperative system etc.), as well as via the government (redistribution via taxation, public services, wages in the public sector etc.). Although under a command, state run economy – through collectivisation of agriculture and nationalisation of the means of production –, the market was never fully eliminated from the distribution system and it remained as a secondary (sub)system. Market relations were present formally (legally) through tradesmen, free practitioners, and, especially, individual (non-collectivised) and collectivised peasants, but also informally through the black market, supplied even by theft from the socialist enterprises, co-operatives, and collective farms.

Poenaru, Molnar and Csorvassi (2000) identified a series of key traits or peculiarities of incomes during the communist period: (1) the growth of real incomes, although high, was inferior to the overall pace of economic growth; (2) earnings from work (wages, income from agriculture) had, by far, the main share in the breakdown by types of income; (3) over time, the share of income from social insurance and social benefits in total earnings increased, as the population aged; (4) there were some policy induced income gaps between social categories, favourable to workers and to the disadvantage of all other categories, mainly peasants and agriculture pensioners, secondary social insurance pensioners, as well as non-manual employees, including those with tertiary education, known in the communist period under the term technical, economic, and socio-administrative personnel; (5) wage and income differences were flattened overall, a process formally known as “social homogenization”.

The distribution system during the communist period faced the so-called “problem of material co-interest”, a distinctive feature of Soviet-type societies. According to economist and politician Alexandru Bârlădeanu, in charge of economic policy during 1955–1965, “the Achilles’ heel in the socialist economic system was the lack of material co-interest of economic agents (...). The problem of material co-interest was out there both in industry and agriculture. We were looking for those ways. The fact that we did not find them – we did not search for them, or maybe it was not even possible to find them – led to the collapse of the socialist system. Because an economy could not run with clerks” (Betea, 2008: 134–135).

Concerning the consumption part of the living standard, the structure of the household budget was, in large, the same during 1960–1989. Food and beverage expenses were over 50% of the household budget for employees, between 63–74% for peasants, and around 58–59% for social insurance pensioners (Comisia Națională

pentru Statistică, 1991: 125). In employee households, this was followed by clothing and footwear (16–18%), and housing and durable goods (15–19%). An important trend in the population consumption was the decrease of self-consumption, namely of consumption from the allotments of collectivised farmers, individual allotments of employees and pensioners, or individual peasants farms. The share of this category declines from almost 41% in 1950 to around one fifth in the early 1970s, a level maintained up to 1989 (Poenaru et al., 2000: 463). On the other hand, the share of consumption from retail commerce increased from 38% in 1950 to less than 60% in the 1980s. This change is the outcome of industrialisation and urbanisation, as wages and pensions became, by far, the main sources of income for the population, surpassing income from collective or individual agriculture and replacing subsistence farming.

Looking at the dynamics of consumption, the over four decades of the communist period could be broken down in two distinct sub-periods: (1) up to the end of the 1970s, and (2) the 1980s. The first, which dates from 1948/1950 to the emergence of the foreign debt crisis of the early 1980s, is the longest unbroken period of increase in the living standard in the entire 1918–2018 century. However, in the 1950s the population was still experiencing hardships and shortfalls in food and consumer goods consumption. The average yearly food intake per inhabitant in 1950 was lower to the one in 1938 for important foodstuffs: by one fifth for meat and eggs and by half for fruit. In fact, rationing continued during the 1950s for some key foodstuffs, such as bread, and meat. By 1960 the food intake saw marked improvement and the 1938 level was surpassed. In 1978–1981, the high point of consumption per inhabitant during the communist period, it was significantly higher, between 1.3 and 2.6 times, for all foodstuffs and consumer goods (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1990: 129).

The second period dates from the early 1980s to 1989. It is the longest unbroken period of unrelenting decline in the living standard during the entire 1918–2018 century. Despite an increase of real incomes by less than 6% between 1981–1989 (Poenaru et al., 2000: 453), the living standard saw a decline that remained strongly in the memory of contemporaries. The purchasing power declined for most of the population. Compared to official data, which showed an increase of 5.9% of the average real wage for the entire 1981–1989 period, calculations done by Ionete (1993: 24–27) – using data that could be published only after the fall of the communist regime – revealed, on the contrary, a decline by 5%. The decline of the purchasing power was also caused by “the significant increase of the monetary mass”, which in turn led to “high stress in insuring the volume of merchandise for the solvable demand by the population, as effect of forcing exports based on resources earmarked for the internal market” (Stroe, 2000: 341–388). In the day to day live, the population faced “a progressive increase in the scarcity of goods, including basic foodstuffs”, added to which there was “a quick decline in the quality of goods” (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1999: 37).

In aggregated terms, the shortfalls and scarcity of goods in the 1980s featured: a decrease by 12% of the household electricity consumption, including enforced temporary power cuts for households; heavy restriction of central heating for homes and workplaces starting with the winter of 1984/1985 (Poenaru et al., 2000: 467); hot water supply reduced to several hours a day for all cities with centralised heating systems; last but not least: cuts in the food intake.

Compared to 1980, the average daily calories intake per inhabitant saw a 10% cut (from 3,259 to 2,949) by 1985 (*Figure 4*). The average yearly meat intake per inhabitant saw a 20% cut. The decrease in the living standard is also revealed by the higher share of foodstuff expenditure in the household budget for all types of households of up to 6% for employees and pensioners households (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1990: 131). The period is marked by cues, (people waiting for foodstuffs to be supplied to shops), and, by the end of the 1980s, of the reoccurrence of rationing, but this time in peacetime. The sharp and prolonged decline in living standards was the cause of protests by industrial workers, despite the dictatorship. The first such mass movement was by Jiu Valley miners in 1977, followed by Brașov industrial workers in 1987.

The dynamic of the living standard during communism reveals two ambivalences. First, according to Pasti (2006: 85–87), is that the increasing material wellbeing of the population during the economic expansion period up to 1980 was twinned by giving up other components of a good life, such as fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as real access to political power. In our opinion, the second ambivalence is that although the people were the ones to carry on their shoulders, almost entirely, the burden and costs of modernising Romania by industrialisation, the same people did not reach a sustained period in their lifetime when they could enjoy the benefits of modernisation by having a content, good life. After three decades of growth, there was a decade of persistent decline in the living standard, especially at the level of basic needs: food, heating, light. As a result, the population of Romania ended the communist period on a weary, worn-out note.

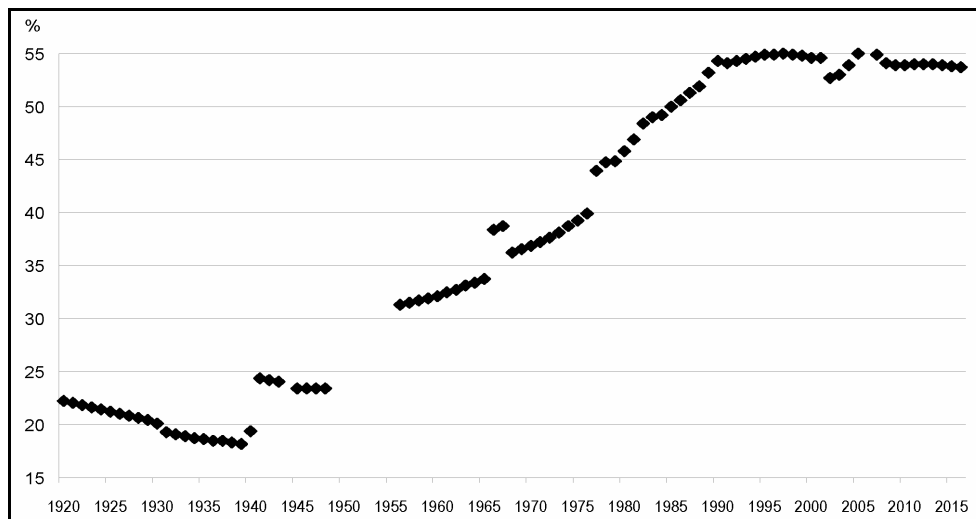
Living conditions: urbanisation, housing, utilities

Urbanisation is one of the main processes in the modernisation of Romanian society during 1948–1989. The share of the urban population increased from 23.4% at the 1948 census (the first census on the borders of Romania as decided at the 1946 Paris peace conference), to 31.3% at the 1956 census (Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1959–1961), and 43.6% at the 1977 census (Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1980–1981). Beginning with 1985, the urban population is in majority, reaching a share of 53.2% in 1989 (*Figure 1*). During 1948–1989, the yearly increase of the urban population was close to 210,000 individuals, from 3.7 to 12.3 million. However, urban population growth was not linear. Up to 1969, including

for the census, hundreds of suburban communes or other assimilated places were counted as urban areas (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1990: 49, 51). During the communist regime, the rural-urban migration was the main cause of the urbanisation process, driven by industrialisation (Rotariu et al., 2017: 90–91). Secondly, urban areas also increased by changing the administrative status from communes to towns. For instance, the number of towns and cities increased from 183 in 1965 to 260 in 1989.

Figure 1

Share of the urban population



Sources: Statistical Yearbook 1939 and 1940, 1966–2017, Statistical communications no. 5 (1945c: 3–5) for 1940–1943, Victor Axenciuc (1996: 21) for 1945–1947, Golopenția and Georgescu (1948: 12) for 1948.

Electrification is another key process through which Romanians' life entered modernity. For the quality of life, this meant the substantial decrease of time allotted to household duties, less hardships and more free time, especially for women. Compared to 10.5% of households connected to the power grid in 1938, the 1966 census showed that 83% of homes had electricity, a share increased to 85.3% in 1977. Housing and living conditions surveys of the National Statistics Commission in 1981 and 1990 revealed that 95.4% and, respectively, 98.7% of families had electricity, according to data cited by Vâlceanu (2000: 474).

The growth by about 46% of the total population between 1948 and 1989, but especially the size of the urbanisation process – the urban population increased by 3.3 times – meant an intense demand for housing, the quantity and quality of which was highly problematic in the interwar years. According to estimates by Vâlceanu

(2000: 468–469), Romania experienced a housing crisis in the 1950s, when the industrialisation process was taking off: between 1948–1956 urban population increased by some 150,000 people per year, but newly completed housing units were below 20,000 per year.

From 1951 to 1989, 5.5 million housing units were built in Romania, out of which 2.98 million by the state, state owned enterprises and co-operative and local organisations, and 2.54 million from the population's private funds (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1991: 524–525). The peak of housing building was in the 1970s, especially the second part of the decade: 42.5% of all housing built from public or socialist enterprises' funds during 1948–1989 were delivered in those years. According to Vâlceanu (2000: 471), between 1966–1989 “in urban areas the growth of housing exceeded population growth”.

From the quality of life viewpoint, there are two ambivalences in the social memory about housing and housing policy during the communist regime. On one hand, the sheer scale of housing construction and the easy access to housing for the population through token rent or purchase with very accessible loans. In fact, housing policy in Romania was similar to the one in the other socialist states in the Soviet camp, both in terms of policy design and volume of new housing per population size (Dan, 2006). On the other hand, there was the systematisation policy, especially its most sensitive aspect, the demolishing of housing, churches, monuments. The policy also included village “systematisation”, namely the abandonment of depopulated villages, resettlement, and new town-like blocks of flats and social infrastructure. According to data compiled by Dan (1999: 451), over 182,000 housing units were demolished between 1977 and 1987, out of which 98,000 in urban areas and 84,500 in rural areas.

The 1980s saw a quantitative decline in housing construction. The number of new housing units from public funds decreased year by year down to slightly below 55,000 in 1989, a level comparable with the early 1960s.

By 1989, the number of housing units exceeded the number of households by over half a million units, based on data from the housing fund balance, cited by Vâlceanu (2000: 472). As to the question whether the housing stock was sufficient or not in comparison with demand for housing, the answer is rather negative, especially if one considers the uneven housing demand between expanding urban and declining rural areas. Vâlceanu (2000) and Dan (2006) show that by 1989, despite all the efforts and the volume of new housing, and because of the 1980s austerity, Romania was placed among last in Europe both in terms of access to housing and housing living conditions, as measured by several indicators: average rooms per housing unit, living space per room, average number of rooms/housing units per person etc. In addition, overcrowding was still an issue. According to data from 1990 the housing and housing conditions survey by the National Statistics Commission, cited by Vâlceanu (2000: 473), 73.1% of families lived in housing units with two or three rooms.

Table no. 3

Main utilities and facilities of housing units

	1966	1977	1992	2002	2011
Running water, total	12.2	29.5	51.6	53.2	79.0
Water from the public network	12.0	28.8	48.7	48.7	58.4
Hot water	5.2	20.2	43.1	43.4	59.5
Sewage, total	12.2	29.5	50.7	51.1	68.5
From public network		25.6	44.3	44.6	48.8
Natural gas from public network	10.5	18.7	32.2	40.5	45.3
Bathroom		26.4	47.0	50.0	64.2
In the housing unit		24.4	46.3	49.1	62.4
Water closet (WC)		22.5	47.1	50.5	61.2
In the housing unit		21.6	45.0	47.3	59.4
Electricity	48.3	85.2	96.7	96.3	
Heating					
Own and central heating	15.8	20.4			45.7
Solid fuel ovens	69.1	71.8			46.3

Sources: population and dwelling census 1966 (Direcția Centrală de Statistică, 1969–1970), 1977, 1992, 2002, 2011.

Living conditions also include the housing comfort level, measurable through the access to utilities and availability of facilities. According to census and official statistics' survey data, Romania registered a remarkable progress during 1948–1989 (*Table no. 3*). However, according to data compiled by Vâlceanu (2000: 476), at the end of the 1980s Romania was at the level for these indicators achieved by Western developed states a decade earlier. Moreover, there were notable urban-rural differences: in urban areas, the share of housing connected to public water and sewage networks reached 81–87% at the 1992 census, in comparison to just 3–11% in rural areas.

AFTER THE ROMANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1989: TRANSITION AND THE NEW CAPITALISM

The three decades (1989–2018) from the Revolution of December 1989 and up to the 1918 Union centennial could be divided in two main periods: the transition and the new Romanian capitalism (Pasti, 1995; Zamfir, 2004; Pasti, 2006; Stănescu, 2014; Zamfir, 2015).

By and large, the transition process was completed by the mid-2000s. Ownership structure and relations, employment, incomes and living conditions form a different general picture during 2004–2006 compared to 1989–1990. Added to this is the functioning market economy qualification, issued by the European Commission in 2004, and the fulfilment of the twin major national political objectives of the transition: NATO membership (2004) and European Union accession (2007). The structural

features of a new capitalism, different from the interwar capitalism, emerged during the transition and gradually expanded and consolidated afterwards.

Living standard: income and consumption

Using as criteria the dynamics of population incomes and consumption with 1989 as base year, two distinct periods emerge. The first covers the transition period with its sharp decline in the living standard at the beginning and thereafter a recovery to the level of 1989–1990. From the quality of life point of view, the transition seems more like a continuation of the 1980s crisis than a solution to it. The recovery process was both long, about a decade and a half, and sinuous. During 2004–2006, the values of several key indicators were at last comparable to 1989–1990: average yearly meat intake per inhabitant – 2004; income per capita – 2006 (Zamfir et al., 2010: 12); real average wage earnings – 2007; real average pension – 2008 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2006, Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017a). The sinuous trait comes from the nonlinear dynamics of incomes and consumption, deeply eroded by the 1990–1992 and 1997–1999 recessions. The cumulative GDP decline during the two recessions was sharper than in each world war, according to economist Nicolae Belli (2001), who coined the phrase “transition more difficult than a war.”

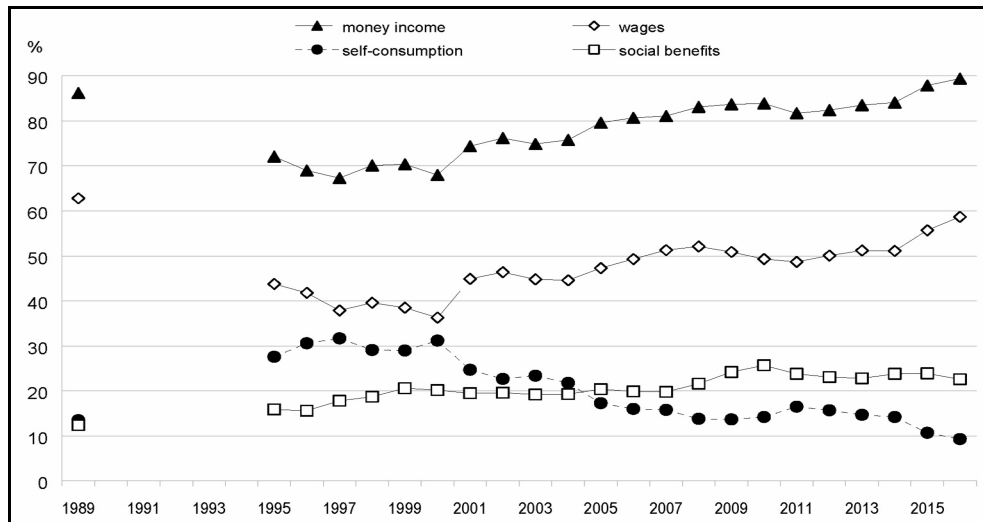
The second period, after the mid-2000s, covers the new capitalism. During this period, significant real income growth was interrupted by the 2009–2010 recession. The recovery to the real wage and pension levels before the recession took 6 years. In 2016, incomes, especially wages, again experienced a sustained growth period, similar to 2006–2008.

Structural changes in the transition period in the economy and ownership relations were matched by changes in the structure of population incomes. Compared with the communist period, the market replaced the state as the main distribution system. De-etatisation meant the (re)emergence of earnings from private property and capital – rents, interest, dividends, stock market gains etc. The 1994 Research Institute for Quality of Life survey (Stroie: 40) showed that, less than five years since the fall of communism, property and capital earnings covered 14% of the income of the richest 10% of the population. The overall effects of de-industrialisation and de-collectivisation processes of the transition are observable in the income breakdown by type (*Figure 2*). During the 1990s, the share of wage income decreased, while the share of pensions, social benefits, and self-consumption increased.

Besides changes in the distribution system, the defining feature of the transition was privatisation. According to Pasti (2006: 507), this process entailed “the transfer of the largest part of national wealth to the ownership of at most 1% of the population, in terms that could not be regulated and even less legitimised”. Changes in the living standard were determined not only by changes in the distribution system, observable in the income breakdown by type, but also through the transfer of the “people’s” wealth, inherited from the defunct socialist regime.

Figure 2

Income breakdown by type 1989–2016



Sources: Ilie (2006: 271), Romanian Statistical Yearbook (2003a–2017).

The choice of persons that benefited from the largest part of this wealth transfer, unique in the entire 1918–2018 period, was and remains a moral issue, a social justice issue or, in Pasti's terms, a legitimacy issue. Zamfir (2015: 37) points to the crux of the issue: “*privatisation* and [communist confiscated or nationalised] *property restitution* were the main source of a complex corruption system that swallowed the entire state”. Based on this reason, Zamfir (2015: 34) writes that “during transition, corruption is not a strictly individual deviant behaviour, but the main instrument for establishing the new rich class”.

Almost 30 years after the beginning of the privatisation process, data about wealth distribution in Romanian society is even more lacking than for income distribution. Due to this reason, a review of wealth – to see who owns what – at national level should be pursued, based on an individual asset declaration form and on the completion of the systematic registration in the national cadastre programme.

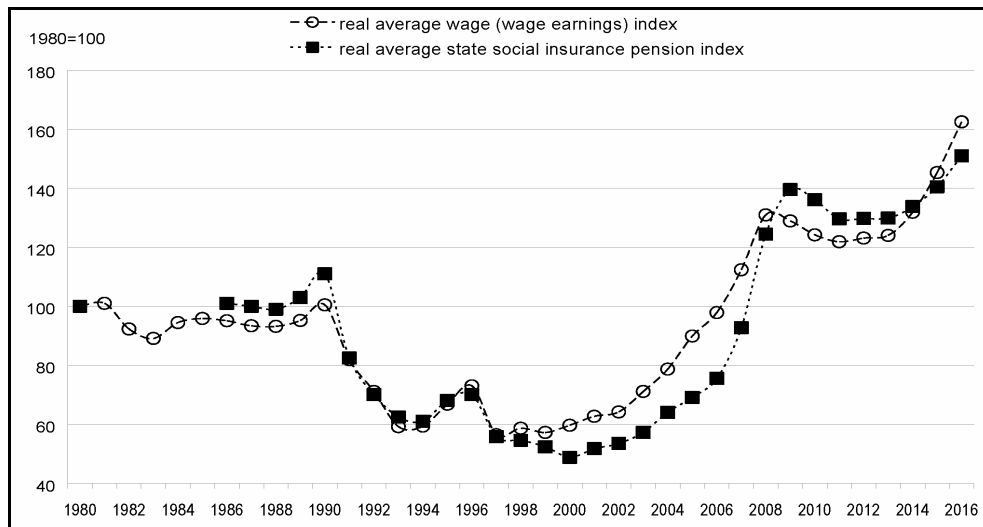
The dynamic of the two main types of income for the population, wages and social insurance pensions, reveal a sinuous trend after 1989 (Figure 3), heavily dependent on the two transition recessions (1990–1992, 1997–1999) and the one in the new capitalism period (2009–2010).

The decline of real wages and pensions from the transition period is a continuation, albeit even sharper, of their decline in the 1980s, the last decade of the communist period. The recovery to the 1990 level of the real average wage (or wage earnings) and the real average social insurance pension in the years 2007 (for wages) – 2008 (for pensions) marks, therefore, also the recovery to the 1980 level.

As observable from *Figure 3*, this was an unusual long – 27–28 years (1980–2007/2008) – crisis for incomes and, in broad terms, for the living standard, which adds up to more than a quarter of the entire century since the 1918 Union.

Figure 3

Indices of main types of income 1980–2016



Sources: author's calculations based on data from Romanian Statistical Yearbook 1990–2016, INS Tempo-Online database, and Ionete (1993: 25).

The living standard decline in the 1990s is more similar to the one in 1919–1924 and 1944–1947 as it featured reduced employment and hyperinflation. On the other hand, the erosion of purchasing power during the 2009–2010 was also based on the austerity policy to cut public sector pay by 25% in a manner very similar to the three successive “sacrifice curbs” (public wages cuts of 10–15% each year) during the Great Recession era of 1931–1933, but also the austerity policy to cut household consumption – and not nominal income – by 10–20% in the 1980s. In other words, the transition recessions, on one side, and the new capitalism recession, on the other side, had different paths to the decline of the living standard.

During the transition, the ratio between the average social insurance state pension (excluding collective farm pensions) and the average wage deteriorated from 45–49% in the last decade of the communist regime to the lower 40s and even below 40% (Zamfir, 2011: 50). In the late 2000s, the relative position of the pensions against wages started to improve; the ratio was between 51–56% during 2009–2015 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2013a, 2017a). Close to 2020, there are two outstanding pension issues: farmers' pensions and the so-called special pensions, in fact occupational pensions for former army, police and intelligence

services personnel, former judges and prosecutors, diplomats, MPs, parliamentary clerks, civil aeronautics personnel, justice auxiliary personnel, and court of auditors' personnel. Both involve income inequality and social justice issues.

The role of the state in regard to the living standard went through a fundamental change in the transition period. In the distribution system, the state (re)turned to a secondary position, behind the market. The redistribution system, which includes fiscal and social policies, adds to the role of the state in terms of outcome for the living standard. Redistribution shrunk through a string of policies: replacement of progressive taxation for individual income with a flat tax, first at 16%, further reduced to 10% starting with 2018; high taxation of labour in comparison with capital via high social contributions for wages, with a high of 57% in 2002 (Bercea, 2003: 396) and around 40% on a decreasing trend afterward, and low taxation for capital – 16% corporation tax since 2005, gradual decrease of dividend tax from 16% to 5%, no wealth tax, no capital earnings tax. On the social policy side, less redistribution is achieved through less public services for the general public, especially health care and education, and overall reduced social spending. “If developed countries invest over 30% of GDP in the sphere of social policies, Romania invests less than half of the [2000–2007] EU average: 16.4%, below all European countries that experienced the transition” (Zamfir et al., 2010: 8).

Changes in the consumption side of the living standard involve a different pattern in the breakdown of the household budget. The share of food expenditure increased up to 60% in the 1990s, following decrease in real wages. Official statistics data allows long-term analysis on several household types: employees, peasants, pensioners. For all these types of households, the share of food expenditure returns to a comparable level with 1980 in the mid-2000s (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1991: 125; Institutul Național de Statistică, 2007: 256). Starting in 2004–2006, the entry in the new capitalist period, the breakdown of the household budget experiences change: food expenditure began a long term decline, even with a slowdown during the 2009–2010 recession, reaching 44% in Q2 2017 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b).

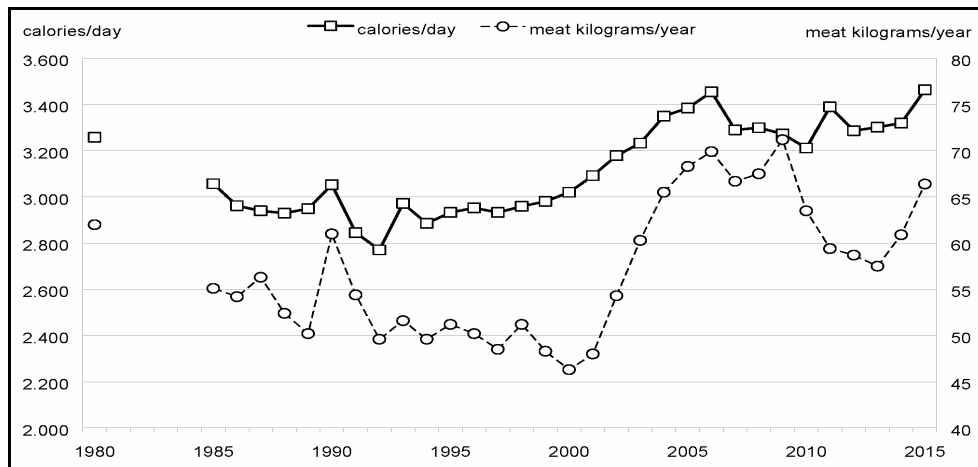
The average food consumption or intake of the population after 1990 (*Figure 4*), measured by daily calories and quantity of meat per year, adds to the general picture of an unusual long crisis, around a quarter of a century, in the living standard. The transition period seems more like a continuation than a break with the crisis of the 1980s. In terms of food intake, the crisis was left behind in 2004. Even if not that hard as the transition recessions, the 2009–2010 recession left a clear negative, half decade long mark on meat consumption.

Ownership of consumer durables experienced a positive change after 1989. The scarcity of goods from the end period of the communist regime was left behind. If in Soviet-type socialism the solvable demand of households exceeded consumer goods supply, during transition the consumer goods supply had difficulties in finding solvable household demand. The consumerist boom knows two major periods: the early 1990s and the mid-2000s, when retail loans became

widely available and with it the household consumption of durable goods – electronics, white goods, but also cars – took off. For instance, the number of cars per 100 households increased from 5.02 in 1989 (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1991: 124) to 30.5 in 2016, a year in which the share of households that own at least one car reached 37% (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b).

Figure 4

Food consumption 1980–2015



Sources: Statistical Yearbooks (1990–1991), (2003–2016).

Another consumption-led improvement in the living standard comes from the emergence of new technology, mainly about mass communication and digitalisation: mobile and fixed telephony, the Internet, computers, laptops, smartphones and other devices. In 2016, over two thirds of households owned a laptop or a PC (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b), while the number of mobile telephony connections exceeded the total number of inhabitants (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017a: 595).

The income-expenditure balance of the household budget saw a constant pressure. Despite the significant real term income growth during the new capitalism, a substantial part of households experience difficulties in keeping up with current expenses. The share of households that could not pay some bills in time actually increased during 2007–2016 from 24% to 34%, with a 38% high in 2014. Despite the lower share of food expenditure in the household budget, pressure arises from two main sources. The first one concerns new aspirations and old deprivations, part of the evolving side of the living standard. Some are accumulated consumption needs, unfulfilled during the quarter century living standard crisis of 1980–2004/2006, other needs come from the new technologies. The second source comes

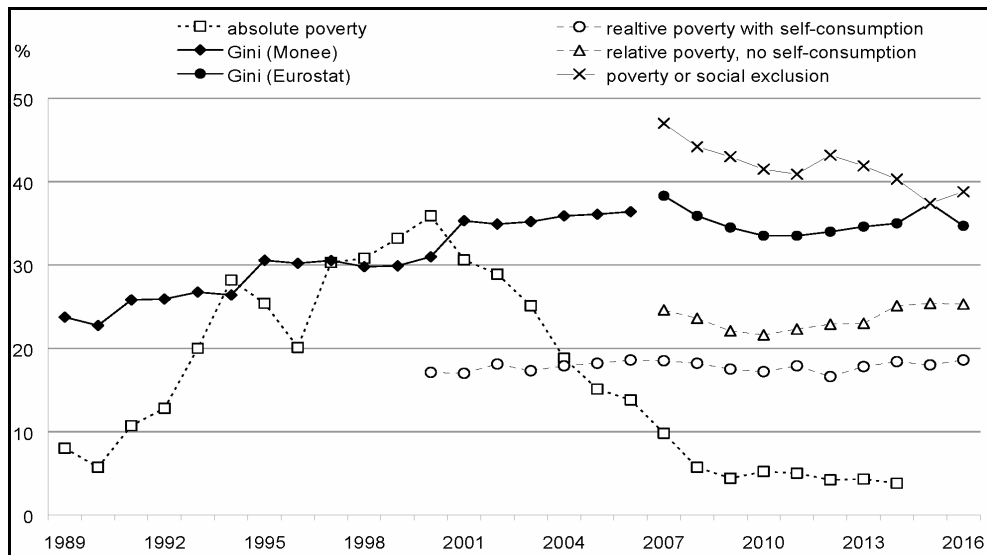
from the quantitative and qualitative decline in public goods and services, especially health care, education, and housing. The overall result is that even households that are better placed on the income scale, such as the more prosperous, tertiary educated, corporate or professional households, feel an expenditure pressure arising from: private kindergarten and school tuition fees, education related costs (tuitions, manuals, books, school supplies), to be paid regardless of a formally free public education service or not, health care costs (medicine, treatment, doctors, sample tests), car loan, home mortgage or loan etc. Although these kind of expenses are not yet fully included in the statistical household budget survey model of the National Institute of Statistics, increases in the share of expenses with non-food goods and services are observables in areas such as education, health, transport and communications (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b).

Free time, an important part of quality of life, experienced important changes during transition. Data from the RIQL quality of life diagnosis programme show that, during 1990–1999, only church attendance went up. All other free time activities saw a decline, either a more moderate decline in case of television or a massive decline for reading books, newspapers, magazines, theatre and concert attendance, going out for parties, meetings, sports, or weekend travel (Urse, 2005: 303–304). These changes came both from households unable to afford their costs, but also from a change of pattern in spending free time, continued in the 2010s with the gradual replacement of television by the Internet as the main medium of spending free time.

In the 1990s, Romanian society experienced a poverty shock caused by the freefall of the economy. Many structural changes in employment, distribution and redistribution systems, income and consumption, find their social equivalent in the profile of poverty. Also in this regard there is a marked difference between the transition and new capitalism periods. During transition, the defining trait of the living standard was, according to Zamfir (2004: 47), “the explosion of poverty, with quick increase in inequality in the background.” The main indicator for the transition period is absolute poverty (*Figure 5*), which for Zamfir (1995: 15) means “lack of minimum living conditions (foods, clothing, housing), necessary for simply surviving in the setting of a certain society. (...) In the long run, absolute poverty produces irreversible biological degradation. In the medium run, it produces a quick deterioration of minimum skills and opportunities for a person to take part in society”. The trend of the share of population below the absolute poverty threshold followed the overall trend of the economy, with one important caveat: the high point of absolute poverty (35.9%) was in 2000, the year when the economy began to recover after the second recession of the transition period. Therefore, the economic and social cycle are not fully overlapping or, in other words, the social sphere experiences a slower recovery following a crisis than the economic sphere.

Figure 5

Poverty and inequality 1989–2016



Sources: Eurostat (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) for Gini (disposable income per adult equivalent), poverty or social exclusion, relative poverty, no self-consumption; Transmonee (2016) for Gini (income per inhabitant); absolute poverty, World Bank methodology, in Zamfir et. al (2010: 28) for 1989–2004 and MMPS (2015: 6) for 2005–2014; relative poverty with self-consumption, in Zamfir et al. (2010: 32) for 2000–2008, MMPS (2010: 1), (2017: 1) for 2009–2016.

A complex phenomenon, poverty is not limited to being below a certain income threshold. It varies across social communities, both regionally and between urban and rural areas (Ministerul Muncii, 2017). The transition also featured the occurrence of extreme poverty, of poverty stricken and ghetto type areas (Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004). Among ethnic minorities, the risk of poverty was and remains higher for the Roma/Gypsies (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, Zamfir and Preda, 2002). Moreover, poverty was twinned with “severe social disruption processes, most of which impossible to measure: workforce degradation; families’ dissolution; increased crime, especially organised crime; the emergence of drugs; lower citizen security; increased violence, new forms such as blackmail, kidnapping, protection taxes, human trafficking, economic and sexual exploitation, up to and including children; the increase of the street children phenomenon; increased challenges in social integration of youths from poor environments, especially those exiting the social protection institutions; lower school enrolment and the professional skills of the active population” (Zamfir, 2004: 51). The impoverishment of the population also had marked social-political outcomes, in good part similar to the interwar years: social conflicts, strikes, changes of government, including by street protests, systematic change of governments (but not of presidents) following each election.

The resumption of economic growth following the end of the transition also meant getting out of absolute poverty for millions of Romanians. In this context, the absolute poverty threshold gradually lost its relevance. Since 2014 it has been dropped from official statistics, as the threshold value was only 69.72 EUR per month for a single person (Ministerul Muncii, 2015: 3).

The issue of living standard analysis using a threshold for decent living or subsistence minimum remains open. One alternative to the income thresholds approach, such as the absolute or relative poverty thresholds, is the normative method or the budget standards approach, developed and in use in Romania by RIQL since the early 1990 (Mihăilescu, 2014). Moreover, it is the same method employed by the Central Statistics Institute up to 1948. The ratio between incomes broken down by income types and household types by place of residence, on one hand, decent living and subsistence minimum, on the other hand, reveals the same issue of constant pressure on the household budget for large parts of the population during 1989–2016 (Mihăilescu, 2017: 75–102).

Regardless of the indicator in use – relative poverty, Gini coefficient or S80/S20 income quintile share ratio (Ministerul Muncii, 2017: 4) – an increase of income inequality and social polarisation is observable during the transition (*Figure 5*). The new capitalism saw no major decrease in income inequality; in certain aspects it even increased (Molnar, 2011; Precupețu, 2013; Dumitru, 2015). In fact, in 2016 Romania is in the unenviable position of being the EU member state with the highest level of income inequality, ranked last in relative poverty (Eurostat, 2017b) and second to last, after Bulgaria, in the poverty or social exclusion indicator (Eurostat, 2017c).

One of the key sources for the high level of social and economic inequality in Romania is the distribution of the economic gains as measured through the net national income, which is favourable for capital and unfavourable for labour. Compared to other European countries, including those highly developed and regional peers at a comparable development level, such as Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania features the most unbalanced distribution between capital and labour. In 2014, labour received less than 40% of the net national income, compared with around 60% in developed countries and 44–52% in the region (Georgescu, 2015a: 16). Moreover, this pattern of distribution explains why in Romania economic gains, measured by GDP growth, are not matched by a similar improvement in the living standard.

In our view, the disproportionate, unbalanced distribution in Romania between capital and labour has at its source both the distribution and redistribution systems, which are set by neoliberal public policy options, but also by “objective” factors, which stem from the structure of Romania’s economy, decisively marked by the deindustrialisation process that took place during the transition. For instance, according to the comparative analysis at European level of gross added value in the

economy by Georgescu (2015b: 14), low gross added value jobs predominate in the Romanian economy.

Evaluations and attitudes of the population regarding the quality of life and the living standard

Life satisfaction is, according to Dumitru (2005: 333), “the most important reference system when people evaluate quality of life.” Based on data from the RIQL quality of life survey programme (1990–2010), Romanians were rather dissatisfied with their day to day life during the transition period and rather satisfied in the new capitalism (Mărginean and Precupețu, 2011: 250). Family life and work are the main sources of satisfaction (Dumitru, 2005: 333), while earnings are the main source of dissatisfaction (Zamfir, 1995: 27).

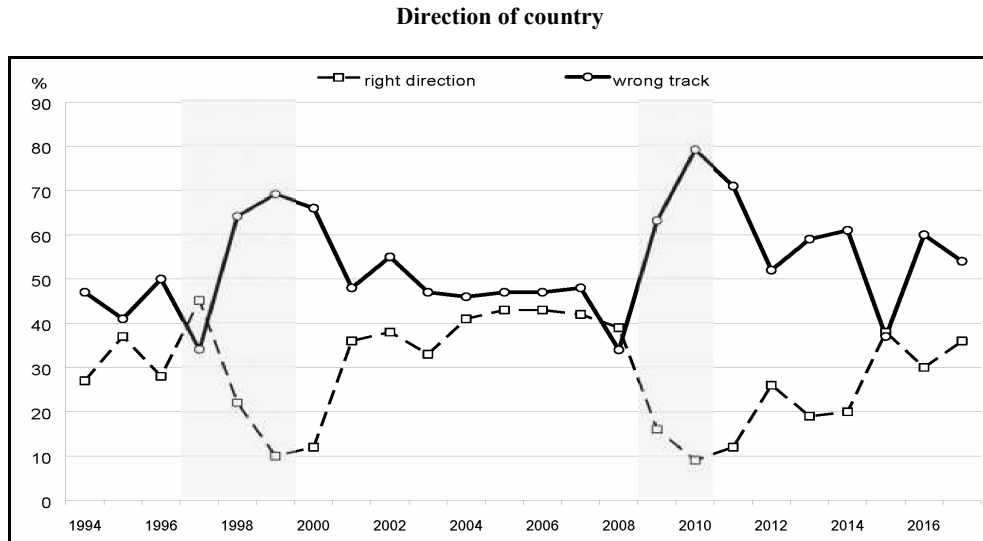
Appraisal of the personal health status is a key indicator for the perceived quality of life (Pop, 2010). Although evaluations during 1990–2010 are rather positive than negative, the social impact of transition is observable. The difference between positive and negative appraisals is lowest between 1997 and 1999, the timeframe of the second transition recession.

Subjective wellbeing data (evaluation of family income compared to needs) shows, according to Zamfir (2015: 18), that “the expected prosperity [of transition] was not achieved”, and that “the social cost [of transition] was high”. The share of the population that viewed income as not enough even for basic needs or only for basic needs declined very rarely under two thirds after 1993, according to RIQL (Mărginean and Precupețu, 2011: 249) and Soros Foundation (1995–2007) data. Moreover, the systematic high share of subjective poverty, even during times of economic boom and significant real term income growth, also points to the abovementioned constant pressure on the household budget.

The results of the transitions are negatively viewed by the majority of the public, with the exception of 1996, according to RIQL data (Mărginean and Precupețu, 2011: 237, 260). Zamfir (2015: 17) views the mainly negative evaluations of how the country is led as yet another way for the public to voice its negative opinion about the transition, its strategy and outcome. In our view, these evaluations, taken together with the ones about politics (Mărginean and Precupețu, 2010: 61–63), also reveal the disruptive nature of the transition process, which caused the deep inequalities in the distribution and redistribution of wealth and incomes and, therefore, an increase of the perceived social distance between those who rule and those who are ruled.

The direction of the country question brings together economic, social and political evaluations by the population, about the past, present and future. After 1994, these evaluations are persistently negative for the longest part of the time (*Figure 6*), heavily influenced by the impact of recessions (Fundăția Soros România, 1995–2007, Comisia Europeană, 2008–2017).

Figure 6



Sources: Soros Foundation Romania Public Barometer (1995–2007), European Commission Eurobarometer, (2004–2017).

Notes: recession are in grey; the difference up to 100% are non-answers.

Living conditions: urbanisation, housing, utilities

Deindustrialisation and the freefall of the economy during transition caused an end to the rural-urban migration that marked the urbanisation process during 1948–1989. Starting in 1991, internal migration in Romania has two main traits. First, “a relatively low rate of migration compared to the one in highly developed societies” (Sandu, 2009: 274); second, net migration from urban to rural areas. The increase of the rural population share is not a result of natural growth, negative from 1991 onwards (Mihalache, 2015: 199), but precisely because of migration from urban to rural areas. Driving this process, according to Sandu (2009: 275), is the freefall of the economy and the waves of poverty in the 1990s, observable in “the survival strategies for segments of the urban poor”.

Similar to the communist period, another source of relative growth for the urban population was the change by administrative means from communes to towns. The number of towns and cities increased from 260 to 320 during 1990–2015, the largest increase being in the 2003–2005 period. As a result, the share of the urban population resumed its increase, up to 54% at the 2011 census. Even allowing for the population aging in rural areas, as a result of declining birth and fertility rates, the share of the rural population resumed its growth after the 2011 census due to continuing migration from urban to rural areas (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2016). Poverty could not be the main cause due to income growth and the significant drop in absolute poverty rates, but the suburbanisation phenomenon

(Dumitrache et al., 2016), which in turn is based on the increase of the living standard, especially for the high income urban strata, in the final years of transition and in the new capitalism.

Suburbanisation could be traced both through the urban-rural breakdown of housing construction by private funding and especially through the regional breakdown of housing development. Over 61% of the 858,000 housing units build by private funding during 1990–2016 were in rural areas. Ilfov county, the hinterland of Bucharest, has placed first in the country in new housing in almost every year since 2003. Moreover, it is the only part of the country where the resident population actually increased from 1992 to 2016, and by no less than 63% (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b).

During the transition, the social outcome of the retreat of the state led to a housing crisis and a worsening of living conditions. After 1990, “the number of newly built housing units collapsed spectacularly”, notes Dan (2009: 104). It would be the mid-2000s, at the end of the transition and beginning of the new capitalism period, that housing construction would see a major increase, driven by private funding. In 2008, the number of new housing units reached 67,000 units (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b), higher than around 60,000 in 1989, but far from the 103,000 total in 1988 (Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, 1991: 524). The housing building boom from the mid to late-2000s was based on a housing and real estate credit bubble, which crashed in late 2008 triggered by the Great Recession (Voinea, 2009: 85).

Compared to the communist period, at the end of 2016 the main indicators for housing showed improvements across the board: housing units per 1,000 inhabitants (12%), living area per person (71%), number of rooms per person (35%), rooms per housing unit (21%), living space per housing unit (71%), etc. All these are the outcome of the 12% increase in the housing stock, but also of the over 15% decline of Romania’s resident population.

Better housing quality is one of the main components of the increase in quality of life after 1989. Put side by side to the transition, the new capitalism features improvements to building materials, including for outside walls. In comparison with 1929, the 2011 census data reveals an increase of the share of housing with walls of concrete, prefab, bricks, stone or substitutes from 50% to 85.5% in urban areas and from 30.5% to 44% in rural areas. In the same interval, the share of housing made by wood declined from 20% to just 2% in urban areas and from 33% to 12% in rural areas. Housing with walls made from adobe and other similar materials remained around the same share of 36–37% in rural areas (*Table no. 1*).

Major improvements in living conditions came from better access to utilities and housing facilities (*Table no. 3*). In 2016, almost 70% of all households had a bathroom and water closet (WC) inside home. In rural areas, the share of these facilities is 41% for bathroom and 38% for WC. In the age of global connectivity, over 68% of households were connected to the Internet at the end of 2016 (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2017b).

SOME CONCLUSIONS

In this section we will focus on some key trends of facts regarding quality of life in Romania during the 1918–2018 century.

In the interwar period, living standards were very low for the great majority of the population. Romanian society was deeply polarised and income inequality very high. Therefore, the image of thriving economy and society during the interwar period is nothing more than a myth.

The communist period is strongly ambivalent. It features both the longest unbroken period of increase in the living standard in the entire 1918–2018 century from 1948 to 1978/1982, but also the longest unbroken period of unrelenting decline in the living standard during the entire 1918–2018 century from the early 1980s to 1989. Therefore, the population of Romania ended the communist period on a weary, worn-out note. Another way of looking at the ambivalence of the communist period is that the people who carried on their shoulders, almost entirely, the burden and costs of modernising Romania by industrialisation, did not reach a sustained period in their lifetime when they could enjoy the benefits of modernisation by having a good life.

The transition period of the 1990s through the early 2000s was more of a continuation than a solution of the 1980s living standard crisis. Indeed, between 1980s to the late 2000s, Romania experienced a major secular economic and living standard crisis, which covers more than a quarter of the entire 1918–2018 century. It is an unusually long period of time, even in comparison with average length of economic recessions, with obvious long term effects in terms of social cohesion and inclusion. At the close of the 1918–2018 century, most of Romanians still bears the scars of the social cost of transition. Despite new technologies, evolving living standards, and significant real income growth, the new capitalism period features income inequality and deep polarisation reminiscent of the interwar period. Romania exited from the 2009–2010 recession is in the unenviable position of being the EU member state with one of the highest levels of income inequality.

The low point in terms of quality of life was undoubtedly during 1945–1947. While there were no less than four major recessions apart from wartime – 1929–1933 Great Depression, 1980s crisis, the two transition recessions of the 1990s, the 2009–2010 recession, 1945–1947 remains the only one which featured a famine. Overall, food poverty, up to the limit of preserving biological life, marked everyday life up from 1918 to the late 1950s, especially for the great majority of the peasantry that did not own enough land to feed themselves. Deep seated food insecurity remains a legacy of the 1945–1947 famine and the long living standard crisis of 1980–2014.

The decisive breakthrough for Romania's entry into modernity in terms of living standards and living conditions was achieved during the 1960s and 1970s: most of electrification and urbanisation took place at that time. Despite the industrialisation and urbanisation effort, it was only in 1985 before the urban

population became the majority. Housing access and quality in urban areas was highly problematic from 1918 up to the early 1970s. The massive building programme of the 1970 and early 1980s relieved most of the pressure, but a new housing crisis occurred in the 1990s, when housing construction all but collapsed. Housing access was improved in the 21st century, despite the mid-2000s real estate bubble, due to resumption of large volume housing construction, but also because of a 15% population decline. Access to utilities was achieved in the great majority of urban areas by the late 1980s, but at the price of virtual abandonment of rural areas. Good coverage of water and sewage systems at a national level was attained only in the late 2010s following the 2007 EU accession. It remains one of the top gains of EU membership.

REFERENCES

- (1941a) Decret-Lege pentru organizarea muncii naționale. Monitorul oficial nr. 41 din 18.02.1941.
- (1941b) Decret-Lege privind salarizarea funcționarilor publici. Monitorul oficial nr. 242 din 12.10.1941.
- Academia Română, *Istoria românilor*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2003.
- Academia Română, *Istoria românilor*, IX: România în anii 1940–1947, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2008.
- Alexandrescu, I., *Economia României în primii ani postbelici (1945–1947)*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986.
- Arhivele Naționale ale României, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, VII (mai–iulie 1942), București, 2003.
- Arhivele Naționale ale României, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, IX (februarie–decembrie 1943), București, 2006.
- Arhivele Naționale ale României, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, X (ianuarie–aprilie 1944), București, 2007.
- Arhivele Naționale ale României, *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri Guvernarea Ion Antonescu*, XI (mai–august 1944), București, 2008.
- Arhivele Statului din România, *România Viața politică în documente 1945*, București, 1994.
- Arhivele Statului din România, *România Viața politică în documente 1946*, București, 1996.
- Axenciuc, V., *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1859–1947*, I – Industria, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1992.
- Axenciuc, V., *Evoluția economică a României. Cercetări statistico-istorice 1859–1947*, II – Agricultura, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1996.
- Axenciuc, V., *Introducere în istoria economică a României. Epoca modernă*, București, Editura Fundației „România de mâine”, 1999.
- Axenciuc, V., *Produsul intern brut al României: 1862–2000: serii statistice seculare și argumente metodologice*, I, București, Editura Economică, 2012.
- Axworthy, M., Scafeș, C. & Crăciunoiu, C., *Third Axis Fourth Ally: Romanian Armed Forces in the European War 1941–1945*, London, Arms and Armour, 1995.
- Belli, N., *Tranziția mai grea decât un război*, București, Expert, 2001.
- Bercea, F., *Impozitele directe*, in Văcărel, I. (Ed.), *Finanțe publice*, IV ed. București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 2003, pp. 381–430.
- Betea, L., *Partea lor de adevăr*, București, Compania, 2008.
- Ciucă, M.-D., *Stenogramele ședințelor Consiliului de Miniștri. Guvernarea Constantin Sănătescu*, 2, București, Saeculum I.O., 2012.

- Comisia Europeană, *Eurobarometru*, 2004–2017, available online at <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>.
- Comisia Europeană, *Eurobarometru*, 2008–2017, available online at <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>.
- Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, *Anuarul Statistic al României 1990*, București, 1990.
- Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, *Anuarul Statistic al României 1991*, 1991.
- Comisia Națională pentru Statistică, *Recensământul populației și locuințelor din 7 ianuarie 1992*, I–IV, București, 1994–1995.
- Constantinescu, N. N., Economia României în perioada celui de al doilea război mondial, in Constantinescu, N. N. (Ed.), *Istoria economică a României*, București, Editura Economică, 2000, pp. 39–92.
- Dan, A. N., România și politica ei de locuire în contextul Europei de Est și al Uniunii Europene, in Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *Politici sociale în România: 1990–1998*, București, Editura Expert, 1999, pp. 149–181.
- Dan, A. N., *Politici de locuire: România încotro?: o analiză comparativă a României în contextul ECE și UE*, București, Editura Universității din București, 2006.
- Dan, A. N., Locuința și serviciile de locuire, in Preda, M. (Ed.), *Riscuri și inechități sociale în România*, București, Administrația Prezidențială, Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Riscurilor Sociale și Demografice, 2009, pp. 103–125.
- Direcția Centrală de Statistică, *Recensământul populației din 21 februarie 1956. Rezultate generale*, I–III, București, 1959–1961.
- Direcția Centrală de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al Republicii Socialiste România 1966*, București, 1966.
- Direcția Centrală de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și locuințelor din 15 martie 1966*, I–III, București, 1969–1970.
- Direcția Centrală de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și locuințelor din 6 ianuarie 1977*, I–III, București, 1980–1981.
- Dumitrache, L., Zamfir, D., Nae, M., Simion, G., Stoica, I.-V., *The Urban Nexus: Contradictions and Dilemmas of (Post)Communist (Sub)Urbanization in Romania*, in "Human Geographies-Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography", vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 39–58.
- Dumitru, M., Cercetarea calității vieții în România, in Mărginean, I., Bălașa, A. (Eds.), *Calitatea vieții în România*, II ed. București, Editura Expert, 2005, pp. 321–340.
- Eurostat, *Gini coefficient of equivalised disposable income – EU-SILC survey*, 2017a, available online at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tessi190>.
- Eurostat, *People at risk of poverty after social transfers*, 2017b, available online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=t2020_52.
- Eurostat, *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion*, 2017c, available online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=t2020_50.
- Fundația Soros România, *Barometrul de Opinie Publică*, București, 1995–2007.
- Gaston Marin, G., *În serviciul României lui Gheorghiu-Dej*, București, Evenimentul Românesc, 2000.
- Georgescu, D., Populația în viața economică a României, in Gusti, D. (Ed.), *Enciclopedia României*, București, 1938, pp. 41–63.
- Georgescu, F., *Capitalul în România anului 2015*. paper presented at the „Prelegere susținută la decernarea diplomei „Virgil Madgearu” cu medalie de aur, Academia de Studii Economice”, București, 30/05/2015, 2015a.
- Georgescu, F., *Growth, ageing and income distribution in Romania*. paper presented at the „IMF-World Bank Constituency Meeting”, Sofia, 30/05/2015, 2015b.
- Georgescu, V., *Istoria românilor. De la origini până în zilele noastre*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1992.
- Golopenția, A., Georgescu, D., *60 sate românești*, II, București, Editura Paideia, 1941/1999.
- Golopenția, A., Georgescu, D., *Populația Republicii Populare Române la 25 ianuarie 1948. Rezultatele provizorii ale recensământului*, București, Institutul Central de Statistică, 1948.

- Golopenția, A., Onică, P., Recensământul agricol din Republica Populară Română, in Golopenția, A., Golopenția, S. (Eds.), *Opere complete*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 2002, pp. 473–660.
- Gusti, D. (Ed.), *Enciclopedia României*, București, 1938.
- Gusti, D., *Opere, I Sociologia: sistemul de sociologie etică și politică*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 1968.
- Ilie, S., Distribuția veniturilor în perspectiva dezvoltării sociale, in Zamfir, C., Stoica, L. (Eds.), *O nouă provocare: dezvoltarea socială*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2006, pp. 251–275.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Recensământul general al populației României din 29 decembrie 1930*, I–VII; IX–X, București, 1938–1940.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Anuarul Statistic al României 1939 și 1940*, București, Imprimeria Națională, 1940.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Indicatorul localităților din România*, București, Imprimeria Institutului Statistic, 1943.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 1*, București, Imprimeria Institutului Statistic, 1945a.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 2*, București, Imprimeria Institutului Statistic, 1945b.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 5*, București, Imprimeria Institutului Statistic, 1945c.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 10*, București, Imprimeria Institutului Statistic, 1945d.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 18*, București, Imprimeria Națională, M.O., 1947.
- Institutul Central de Statistică, *Comunicări statistice nr. 19*, București, Imprimeria Națională, M.O., 1948.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2002*, București, 2003a.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și locuințelor din 18 martie 2002*, I–III, București, 2003b.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2005*, București, 2006.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2007*, București, 2007.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2012*, București, 2013a.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Recensământul populației și locuințelor din 20 octombrie 2011*, I–III, București, 2013b.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2015*, București, 2016.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Anuarul statistic al României 2016*, București, 2017a.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Baza de date Tempo-Online*, 2017b.
- Institutul Național de Statistică, *Buletin Statistic Lunar 12/2016*, București, 2017c.
- Ionete, C., *Criza de sistem a economiei de comandă și etapa sa explozivă*, București, Editura Expert, 1993.
- Larionescu, M., Tănăsescu, F., Structură și mobilitate socială în România interbelică. Tradiții sociologice, in Drăgan, I., Anastasiu, C. (Eds.), *Structura socială a României socialiste*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989, pp. 303–349.
- Manoilescu, M., *Rostul și destinul burgheziei românești*, București, Albatros, 1942/2002.
- Manuilă, S., Georgescu, D., Populația României, in Gusti, D. (Ed.), *Enciclopedia României*, București, 1938, pp. 133–161.
- Manuilă, V., *Pauperismul și criza familială într-un cartier marginal al Bucureștilor (Tei)*, in „Sociologie Românească”, vol. IV, no. 4–6, 1939, pp. 170–178.
- Mărginean, I., Semnificația cercetărilor de calitate vieții, in Mărginean, I., Bălașa, A. (Eds.), *Calitatea vieții în România*, București, Editura Expert, 2005, pp. 25–60.
- Mărginean, I., Conținutul paradigmei calității vieții, in Mărginean, I., Precupețu, I. (Eds.), *Paradigma calității vieții*, București, Editura Expert, 2011, pp. 15–38.
- Mărginean, I., Precupețu, I. (Eds.), *Calitatea vieții în România 2010*, București, Expert, 2010.

- Mărginean, I., Precupețu, I. (Eds.), *Paradigma calității vieții*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2011.
- Measnicov, I., *Situația funcționarilor de stat*, in „Sociologie Românească”, vol. III, no. 1–3, 1938, pp. 22–36.
- Mihalache, F., Dimensiuni ale diferențierii demografice în mediul rural după 1990, in Zamfir, C., Stănescu, I. (Eds.), *România la răscruce: opțiuni pentru viitor*, București, Pro Universitaria, 2015, pp. 196–209.
- Mihăilescu, A., *Minimul de trai: instrument în politicile sociale*, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2014.
- Mihăilescu, A., *Cosul de consum în România*, 2017, available online at <http://romaniasociala.ro/2017/11/04/cosul-de-consum-in-romania/>.
- Ministerul Muncii, Familiei și Protecției Sociale, *Setul național de indicatori de incluziune socială corespunzători anului 2009, 2010*, available online at www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala/755.
- Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Protecției Sociale și Persoanelor Vârstnice, *Setul național de indicatori de incluziune socială corespunzători anului 2014, 2015*, available online at www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala/755.
- Ministerul Muncii, Familiei, Protecției Sociale și Persoanelor Vârstnice, *Setul național de indicatori de incluziune socială corespunzători anului 2016, 2017*, available online at www.mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/2014-domenii/familie/politici-familiale-incluziune-si-asistenta-sociala/755.
- Pastî, V., *România în tranziție. Căderea în viitor*, București, Editura Nemira, 1995.
- Pastî, V., *Noul capitalism românesc*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2006.
- Poenaru, M., Molnar, M., Csorvassi, A., Vâlceanu, G., Veniturile și consumul populației. Problema locuințelor, in Constantinescu, N. N. (Ed.), *Istoria economică a României*, București, Editura Economică, 2000, pp. 449–476.
- Pop, C., *Starea de sănătate a populației în context european. O abordare din perspectiva calității vieții*, in "Calitatea Vieții", vol. 21, no. 3–4, 2010, pp. 274–305.
- Rotariu, T., Dumănescu, L., Hărăguș, M., *Demografia României în perioada postbelică (1948–2015)*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2017.
- Sandu, D. Migrația și consecințele sale, in Preda, M. (Ed.), *Riscuri și inechități sociale în România. București*, Administrația Prezidențială, Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Riscurilor Sociale și Demografice, 2009, pp. 266–286.
- Scurtu, I., *Viața cotidiană a românilor în perioada interbelică*, București, RAO, 2001.
- Scurtu, I., *Viața cotidiană sub controlul sever al regimului Antonescu*. 12.12, available online at www.ioanscurtu.ro/viata-cotidiana-sub-controlul-sever-al-regimului-antonescu/.
- Stănculescu, M. S., Berevoescu, I. (Eds.), *Sărac lipit, caut altă viață! Fenomenul sărăciei extreme și al zonelor sărace în România 2001*, București, Editura Nemira, 2004.
- Stănescu, I., *Puterea politică în România: de la comunism la noul capitalism*, București, Pro Universitaria, 2014.
- Stroe, G., Băncile, circulația monetară și creditul în perioada 1948–1989, in Constantinescu, N. N. (Ed.), *Istoria economică a României*, București, Editura Economică, 2000, pp. 341–388.
- Stroie, S., Veniturile Populației, in Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *Dimensiuni ale sărăciei 1994*, București, Editura Expert, 1994, pp. 31–52.
- Șandru, D., *Satul românesc între anii 1918 și 1944*, Iași, Casa de Presă și Editură Cronică, 1996.
- Transmonee, *Romania Country Data, 1989–2015*, 2016, available online at transmonee.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Romania.xlsx.
- Țăra, S., *Stratificare socială în România interbelică*, București, Universitatea București, 2011.
- Urse, L. Timpul liber și calitatea vieții, in Mărginean, I. (Ed.), *Calitatea vieții în România*, II ed. București, Expert, 2005, pp. 295–320.
- Voinea, L., *Sfârșitul economiei iluziei*, București, Publica, 2009.
- Wiesel, E., Frilling, T., Ioanid, R., Ionescu, M. E. (Eds.), *Raport final. Comisia Internațională pentru Studiarea Holocaustului în România*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2004.

- Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *Indicatori și surse de variație a calității vieții*, București, Editura Academiei, 1984.
- Zamfir, C., Sărăcia și pragurile sărăciei, in Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *Dimensiuni ale sărăciei 1994*, București, Expert, 1995, pp. 15–31.
- Zamfir, C., *O analiză critică a tranziției. Ce va fi "după"?*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2004.
- Zamfir, C., Evoluția tematicii calității vieții: o analiză sociologică, in Mărginean, I., Bălașa, A. (Eds.), *Calitatea vieții în România*, București, Editura Expert, 2005, pp. 11–24.
- Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *România: răspunsuri la criză*, București, ICCV, 2011.
- Zamfir, C., Spre o nouă teorie a tranziției, in Stănescu, I., Zamfir, C. (Eds.), *România la răscruce: opțiuni pentru viitor*, București, Pro Universitaria, 2015, pp. 15–44.
- Zamfir, C., Filipescu, I. (Eds.), *Sociologia românească 1900–2010: o istorie socială*, Cluj-Napoca, Eikon, 2015.
- Zamfir, C., Preda, M. (Eds.), *Romii în România*, București, Editura Expert, 2002.
- Zamfir, C., Stănescu, I., Ilie, S. (Eds.), *După 20 de ani: opțiuni pentru România*, București, ICCV, 2010.
- Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C. (Eds.), *Țigani între ignorare și îngrijorare*, București, Editura Alternative, 1993.
- Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C., Dinamica bunăstării în societatea românească socialistă: moștenirea din 1989, in Zamfir, C. (Ed.), *Politici sociale în România: 1990–1998*, București, Expert, 1999, pp. 35–41.

Articolul de față își propune să ofere o sinteză a evoluției calității vieții în România în secolul ce a trecut de la Marea Unire din 1918. Trei domenii ale vieții sociale înalt relevante pentru calitatea vieții au fost supuse unei analize secundare de date: (1) standardul de viață, cu accent pe veniturile și consumul populației, (2) condițiile de viață, îndeosebi procesul de urbanizare, locuirea și accesul la utilități, (3) calitatea percepută a vieții. Datele factuale, de comportament și de opinie au fost selectate dintr-o varietate de surse: recensăminte, anchete statistice și sociologice, date statistice oficiale, documente de arhivă și cercetări științifice. Periodizarea pe care o propunem are la bază cele două evenimente majore care au schimbat istoria României între 1918–2018, al Doilea Război Mondial și Revoluția din decembrie 1989, cu patru etape distincte: perioada interbelică (1919–1939), al Doilea Război Mondial și primii ani postbelici (1940–1947), regimul comunist (1948–1989) și perioada de după Revoluția din decembrie 1989.

Cuvinte-cheie: România; calitatea vieții; standard de viață; nivel de trai; condiții de viață; locuire, urbanizare; interbelic; al doilea război mondial; comunism; tranziție; capitalism.

Primit: 04.03.2018

Acceptat: 20.03.2018