

The present doctoral thesis investigates the phenomenon of poverty in contemporary Romania, starting from the premise that low wages and cheap labor are a fundamental cause of the persistence of this social problem. The study proposes an update on the perspectives regarding the social implications of poverty by combining the quantitative analysis of secondary data with a substantial qualitative component, thus providing a complex perspective on the multiple dimensions of the phenomenon.

On the conceptual level, this research operationalizes poverty as a social-cultural and psychological state resulting from a long-term lack of resources, which diminishes the individual and collective capacity for active social integration. This approach allows exploring the multiple facets of poverty beyond the economic dimension, including social, cultural and psychological aspects relevant to the Romanian context. The conceptual differentiation between 'deserving poor' and 'undeserving poor' has negative effects on tackling the problem of poverty.

The theoretical framework is developed by presenting the various typologies of poverty, the evolution of the discourse on poverty in the modern society and the relationship between this phenomenon and related problems such as social marginalization.

Poverty in Romania has manifested itself as a direct consequence of the post-1989 economic strategy, whereby keeping wages lower than in other countries in the region would have the effect of attracting foreign investment. This has resulted in high social costs, reflected in consistently higher poverty rates than in neighboring countries, significant external migration and low investment in education. Current demographic challenges, such as an ageing population and depopulation of rural areas, accentuate the structural vulnerability of the predominantly service-oriented Romanian economy.

Social marginalization, manifested differently in urban and rural areas, is an aggravating factor of poverty. In urban areas, the limited access to public services, despite their physical proximity, creates a paradox of marginalization, with an incidence ten times higher in small towns than in the capital. In rural areas, geographic isolation, poor infrastructure and poor access to public services exacerbate the effects of poverty, resulting in communities characterized by high birth rates, low educational attainment and dependence on the informal economy.

The research methodology combines the analysis of secondary quantitative data with qualitative research, by conducting fifteen semi-structured interviews with people affected by poverty in different regions of the country and a case study focusing on the intervention of an NGO in marginalized communities. This methodological triangulation facilitates a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, overcoming the inherent limitations of using exclusively quantitative data.

The analysis of socio-economic indicators reveals significant discrepancies between macroeconomic performance and the persistence of poverty at the micro-social level.

On education, the research emphasizes how the Romanian education system, marked by underfunding and structural inequalities, reproduces pre-existing social disparities, facilitating the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty. The NEET youth phenomenon and the issue of domestic violence are examined as social manifestations influenced by poverty, reflecting the complexity of interactions between economic, social and cultural factors.

The results of the qualitative research complement the statistical overview, providing insights into the difficulties faced by people affected by poverty and their perceptions of the causes and possible solutions to the problem.

The case study, carried out in partnership with ASSOC Baia Mare, illustrates the potential of external interventions in community development and poverty alleviation, highlighting the complementarity between the non-governmental sector and the public social welfare system.

Poverty is understood differently in contemporary society than in traditional society. In today's society, subject to an accelerated pace of change, influenced by information technology, globalization and consumerism, poverty also has an ethical dimension and can be seen from the perspective of respect for human rights.

The original contribution of the paper is to reconfigure the social picture of poverty in contemporary Romania by integrating theoretical perspectives, quantitative data analysis and qualitative research into a coherent vision of the causes, manifestations and possible solutions to this persistent phenomenon.