



Similarities and Differences in Europe's Rural Space

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The similarities and the differences of the rural element are the results of the actions of some concurrent natural and socio-historical factors. If the city does "level" people's natural states of mind, it brings them to a common denominator, villages, by their specific activities, by the way they manifest in space, habit, spirit and vestimentation, give birth to those traces of originality by which one can say that the national identity does reflect most likely in the specific of rural life, in all of its simplexes and complexity. On the other side, the basic economical role of rural space remains still the one concerning the agricultural production and culinary safety of general population.

In order to surprise the specific ways in which the economical life in the village goes on in some different European countries, the following questionnaire has been created:

Questionnaire

1. Give the definition of the rural space.
2. Give the definition of the rural settlement.
3. Which are the criteria for promoting a rural settlement in the category of towns and who (what organism) decides.
4. What is the biggest need of your country as for as the rural medium is concerned?
5. Which is the most serious negative aspect that affects the rural settlements?
6. How are integrated from an administrative point of the rural settlements in your country? Present the model of the administrative-territorial structure in your country.
7. Specify the number of the villages and towns in your country, the weight of the rural and urbane population.
8. Which is the average surface of the agricultural land belonging to a household (farm)?
9. Which are the concrete forms used by the state to sustain and stimulate the agriculture, farmers?
10. What is the weight (%) from the income of a person or a family allotted for food?
11. Which is the ratio between the income of a farmer and that of a worker from the urbane environment?
12. Which are the strongest motivations (in order of importance) for accepting the statute of a peasant (farmer)?
13. Which are the main parts of a rural household?
14. How would you appreciate the communication links between the villages and towns (roads, telephony, post etc.)?
 - very good
 - good
 - bad
15. Estimate what rate (%) from a household's (farm's) work is mechanized and what rate (%) represents the physical effort of the man and the animals.
16. Who represents the stable intellectual nucleus residing within the rural settlements?
17. What industrial activities are more frequent in the rural environment?
18. Who is a part of the leading staff of the villages and how are they chosen and paid?
19. In what manner the state encourages the local initiatives in the rural environment?

20. What percentage (%) from the local budget deriving from the taxes remains at the rural communities' disposal and how many (percent) enters in the centralized budget of the state?

Answers were given by representatives from seven European countries, as it follows: Frantz Greif-merited teacher at The Federal Institute of Agricultural Economics, Wien; Bronislaw Kortus merited teacher at The Jagiellowsky University in Kraków; Vesselin Boiadjean and Petar Stoianov-teachers at The "Ochrid Komanski" University in Sophia; Tatiana Tkatchenko - teacher at The Lomonovsky University in Moscow; Branka Tošić - from The "Jovan Cvijić" Institute of Geography in Beograd; and Surd Vasile - teacher at "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca.

Most the opinions concerning the definition of rural space converge into the one that it represents a peripheral space, with agricultural traditions, placed beyond the borders of the cities, its borders being often arbitrary and most of the times traced on administrative criteria.

Rural settlements are perceived like smaller localities, most population being evolved in primary activities. For Russia, rural localities represent "all inhabited settlements, excepting urban ones, working colonies and health resorts" (quoted from A. J. Alexeev's "Geography of Rural Settlements, 1989"). Urban settlements are those with over 3,000 inhabitants, with over 85% of the population in the second and third sector. In conclusion, these are neither villages, neither towns, but a spatio-economical and social product interposed between village and town. Russian cities are established on concrete quantitative criteria (over 12,000 people living there and over 85% of the active population involved in the second and third sector).

Basic criteria to define rural settlements are most likely the ones regarding the number of inhabitants and the rate of active population from the primary sector (in Yugoslavia, over 50%). The criteria, which define the rural settlement and the urban settlement, are flexible enough, in such a manner as the differences are hardly discernible (Belgium, Bulgaria). In Austria, future urban settlements should have a sum of political and administrative functions, which are associated with the historical and geographical traits. In Bulgaria, there is no precise legislation to define either village or city. Usually, the urban status for an existing rural settlement is decided by the government (in Belgium), by a presidential ordinance (in Bulgaria) and by a proclamation of the municipality (in Yugoslavia). In modern times, in The Russian Federation there is no clear quantitative criteria system to classify the transfer mechanisms from rural

settlements to urban ones. Things go the same way in Belgium and Bulgaria. In Romania, settlements that are to be promoted in the category of urbanism should satisfy a sum of quantitative and qualitative criteria (a certain population limit, the right combination of primary, secondary and tertiary functions, a certain techno-urbanistic level and a good communication potential). The transferring decision is taken by the government after analyzing the concrete situation. In Poland, this decision is taken by a committee, which takes into account the population rate, the prevalence of non-agricultural functions, and the history of the city and the opinion of local administrative councils.

Basic needs of rural space are radically different. In countries belonging to the ex-communist system, massive depopulation of villages, simultaneous with the lack of a modern regional development politics and excessive fragmentation of the land fund represent major impediments for a sudden change for the better and the modernization of rural life. In Austria and Belgium, countries with an advanced economy, the creation of labor vacancies in rural economy and the persistence of rural economies are associated with the general effort to accomplish a high level agricultural production and to preserve the natural space.

In Poland, immediate needs, excepting the ones regarding the fortification of funciary proprieties, were consisting in the lack of some efficient sewerage systems and of treatment of the polluted waters, the insufficiency of water supplying systems, the need of electrification of villages, of generalization of gas heating system and of modernization of rural roads. In Romania, the poor quality of rural roads is replaced with the immediate need of expanding the gas heating system, of recovering the rural environment (by affronting and by creating a class of qualified farmers and by making a legislation which to certify the actual funciary proprieties). A *Green Paper-The Politic of Regional Development* was created in Romania in 1997 and also a *Green Paper -Rural Development in Romania*, 1998.

The territorial expansion of Russia, which brings a large variety of natural resources and conditions as a base for the rural economical activities, is equally determining a difference of primal rural needs. The modernization of the built-in cadre, the realization of a minimal transporting and communicating infrastructure are associated with the need of adapting to some reforms in the rural economy, which are to conclusively satisfy the national food need.

The most negative aspects concerning rural settlements in Bulgaria, as it was mentioned before, are related to the lack of a modern regional politics

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phenomenon characterizes both Romania and Yugoslavia, while in Austria, the lack of restorations and latent conflicts between locals and newcomers are relevant negative signs. In Bulgaria, the "rural urbanism", commercial implants (supermarkets) near villages and matters concerning the vehicle traffic and parking slots are signaled as being the most expressive negative aspects. In Poland, as well as in Romania, the dispersion of rural settlements and the fragmentation of funciary proprieties are first order negative aspects. In Romania, villages with a population up to 500 inhabitants represent 81.9% of the villages, while the ones with over 2,000 people living there represent only 1.4%. 46.7% of the Polish villages have a population under 200 ppeople. In Romania, 51.3% of the rural settlements are under 500 inhabitants.

Russia appears to face a low level development of the rural services infrastructure, which is an older problem, and a newer problem concerning right legislative and administrative measures, combined with an keen financial and material crises.

The administrative organization of national environment reflects some traces of originality, which pull their origins in the socio-economical, historical and political context. For instance, Bulgaria is formed by 9 provinces, which have 278 districts each. Most districts have both villages and towns incorporated. There are some districts, which consist, only or only in towns.

Rural settlements in Yugoslavia are integrated in 210 municipalities (189 in Serbia and 21 in Montenegro). Each municipality has a different number of settlements (more or less than 100). In Serbia, municipalities are integrated in 30 districts (each district has a few municipalities). The Republic of Montenegro holds no districts.

Austria is composed by 9 "Lander" and 98 political regions (Politische Bezirche) which consists in 2300 "Gemenden" (10.000 cadastral units).

Administratively speaking, Belgium is a federal state, divided into 3 regions:

- Brussels-the capital;
- Valonia;
- Flandre.

Regions are divided in provinces (6 in Flandre and 4 in Valonia). Each province is divided in juridical cantons, which represent a certain number of communes. Since 1976, the ancient communes have fusioned, each regrouping a various number of the old villages.

Poland is divided into 49 municipalities and 2484 communes. From this year (1999), the territorial apportions with 12-17 principalities and almost 300 districts (poviats) will be applied. The number of

communes will remain the same (2484). In Romania, there are two levels of administrative-territorial administration: counties and communes.

So, at national level, there are 41 counties. Rural environment is an administratively organized in commune (2,685 communes). An average commune is formed by 4 to 5 villages (there are several communes with only one village, and there is a commune with 41 villages). One of the commune's villages, usually the one with the most favorable position and the best urbanistically quoted, has the role of communal center and administratively locates the commune. A county has on average 65 communes. In Romania there are 264 towns.

The territorial-administrative ranking in Russia has the following configuration:

- economical regions, which can be a republic, a province or a bigger town;
- the district, which stands like an autonom territory.

The inferior step of this ranking does not have a unique base. The base is practically missing in most of the territorial formations or is represented by various forms of rural administration.

In some of the counties was preserved the local councils system (seisovet) and in others was introduced a new administrative structure at rural administration level (The Peciora district, The Pskov region).

The number of villages and towns is well enough correlated both with the territory's size and with the general level of urbanization of the counties in charge. In Bulgaria, there are 238 towns and 5,098 villages (4,445 typical villages and 653 settlements having the village status):

- railway stations, refugees, hamlets, and monasteries.

The rural population rate is 32%. In Yugoslavia, there are 234 towns and 7,154 villages and rural people represent 48.8% of country's population. In Austria, there are estimated to be 5,000 villages and 15 so-called towns (Political Districts), and many other with the nomenclature of town (about 40 town with more than 10,000 people). Agrarians represent 45% of country's population. In Belgium are registered 5,589 urban and rural communes and the rural population rate is over 97%. According to the 1996 statistics, in Russia there are 1,087 towns, 2,022 urban localities and 24,307 rural administrations. Rural inhabitants represent 27% of the population.

In Romania there have been registered 13,089 variably sized villages having 1 to 10,000 people living in, one of the villages having no population at all so losing the status of settlement.

Rural population represents 45% of the Romanians and the majority of 55% dwells in towns.

Poland has a record number of rural settlements -42,686, and these people represent 36.8% of country's population. The big number of villages has a strong historical motivation. Otherwise, as it was mentioned above, 46.7% of Poland's villages have under 200 inhabitants.

The size of the agricultural terrain allocated to a rural husbandry is on average under 10ha in Bulgaria (2-3 ha), 3-4ha in Serbia, 2.47 ha in Romania and 6.7 ha in Poland.

The sizes of the Austrian and Belgian agricultural exploitations are sensibly close: 20 ha, respectively 20.5 ha.

In 1996, in Russia, the average size of funciary propriety of collective farm type was of 43 ha. The concrete formulas used by states in order to sustain the agriculture, and the farmers are various. So, Bulgaria dispose of a special found of THE MINISTRY FOR AGRICULTURE, FOREST AND AGRARIAN REFORM, which is utilized especially for acquiring agricultural machines, fertilizers and new technology. The state is the promoter of the Agrarian Reform.

In Yugoslavia the most conclusive intervention of state powers consists in taking decisions for growing the quality of the soil.

In Austria, the "ÖPUL PROJECT" stipulate the principles of adopting the actual economical support for the surface covering private agriculture.

Belgian farmers get help as well from the State as from the European Council (C.E.) especially for milking cows and sustaining cereal agriculture.

The Polish Government gives credit for acquiring mobile and immobile goods, and the church parallel with the support given to programs of development of agricultural infrastructure, gives subventions for agricultural suppliers. The involvement of some foreign foundations in modernizing the rural infrastructures is good enough.

In Russia, at a federal level there exists a direct and indirect agricultural production development sustaining system. The direct form of this system is given by a sum of programs, some of them with small regional character and have not enough founds. Indirect support is realized by customs system applied to agricultural import products and by giving credits.

In Romania the government has given concrete support in fertilizing the soil (chemical fertilizers at very low prices, in some cases for free).

Budgetary incomes allocated to alimentation are very much different. So, in Bulgaria, 50 % of the budget is spent for getting food, 4 % of it for alcohol and tobacco.

The situation concerning this matter was not known for all Yugoslavian territory (only for Serbia).

Different to Bulgaria, as a consequence of the persisting conflict situations and of the country's international isolation, almost entire budget is spent on food. The weight of these expenses is under 20 % in Austria, 15-16 % in Belgium, 30 % in Poland, 43 % in Russia, and 60 % in Romania. In general, farmer's agricultural incomes are inferior to the ones of workers in urban industry. In Bulgaria the rate of the urban income in comparison with the rural one is 56: 44 while in Belgium the rural income is 30 % inferior to those from other sectors. In Yugoslavia the rural incomes represent almost 70 % from the total other activities, while in Poland, farmer's monthly incomes are sensibly equal to worker's (340 zlots/month for farmers and 329 zlots/month for workers).

In Austria is difficult to estimate, but is given rapport of 1:1.3 between and workers income. In Russia the average monthly people's income is 9823 rubles (10608.8 rubles monthly, in urban activities and 7044.8 rubles in rural environment). In Romania, this rapport is almost 1:1.

The strongest motivation for accepting the farmer's status is manifesting in a diversified enough palettes. In Bulgaria the attachment to natal places and the lack of urban living sites are situated in the first place. In the country the majority of the population is adult and poor qualified and youngsters hope to obtain incomes from agriculture. In Austria the main reason is the agricultural propriety, while in Belgium the possession is situated on the first place, followed by the difficulty of integration in other sections. In Poland, as well as in Romania and Bulgaria, the terms of acceptance of the farmer status are constrictive ones which consisted as well in the lack of other working alternative as in the lack of living places in urban environment. In Russia, working liberty (independence) and agricultural production development facilities is on the first place. For Yugoslavia, no opinions were expressed in this sense.

No adequate answers were given to questions no. b, probably by misunderstanding. The main components of rural husbandry, in Romania are peasant's house, animal's refuge and storage facilities for agricultural production. In parallel, each husbandry has a vegetable garden and orchard and a courtyard. Economical autonomy of rural husbandry is on the major causes of lack of efficiency of rural working and lack of modernization of rural settlements.

Communications links between the rural and urban sites are appreciated to be good on average in Bulgaria, bad in the most parts of Yugoslavia and

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Romania, poor with big regional differences in Russia and excellent in Austria and Belgium. In Poland, the roads between villages and towns are appreciated to be good as well as postal services while phone links are bad.

The mechanization level of work in rural husbandry's bringing into the light opposite aspects.

In Bulgaria, physical work or the mechanical one is neither decisive. The level of mechanization is different from one art of culture to another. For instance in plane regions the cereal culture enjoys a high level of mechanization while the tobacco culture is almost entirely made by hands.

In Yugoslavia, 37 % of the husbandry's have tractors and only 0.5 % have aggregate working machines for harvesting cereals.

In Austria, farming is 95 % - 100 % mechanized with the exceptions of mountain zones where the mechanization level is between 89 % - 90 %.

Plants culture is 100 % mechanized in Belgium, while in the domain of raising animals come feeding and cleaning operations require some physical work.

In Poland, 90 % of the energy consumed in agricultural production is mechanical energy.

In Romania, once the comeback to the private property form were generalized some agricultural activities which does use on large-scale man's and animal's physical work power.

This consisted in: ploughing, maintaining some cultures harvesting corns and potatoes.

In the raising animal's domain, most of the working process requires physical power.

Although there exists an available tractor park for private production, the high prices discourage accepting mechanization by the usual farmers.

For Russia data from official sources are missing.

Intellectual stable nucleus in rural environment is formed everywhere by: teachers, priests, functionaries, doctors and officers. In Romania, the poor representation of intellectuality in rural environment gives some partial answers to immoral crises.

The most frequent industrial activity in rural environment are concerning repairing agricultural machines (Bulgaria) textile and timber industry (Austria), workmanship (Belgium), meat and construction industry (Poland), as well as small factories specialized in storing, keeping and manufacturing agricultural products (Russia).

The most frequent activities in Romania are in the domain of food production.

Usually, rural activities are leaded by a local council, which is also leaded by a village magistrate. These councils are chosen by a universal vote and they usually have the stable domicile in the village they rule. Financial support is realized given by the central funds of the villages. On the other side, in Poland they are paid from funds of the local councils and in Russia from district's budgets.

The local initiatives are encouraged in different ways by the government: from promises and demagogy to subventions, credits and low taxes.

The local budget weights, which remain to the rural collectivities, are different from country to country.

In Bulgaria and Poland, 10-20% of the local taxes is available to the local community. In Austria and Belgium, the budget resulted from local taxes is 100% available to local councils.

In Russia, the local rural administration disposes of an own budget. Taxes collected are 100% going to the budget and local financing is provided from the district's budget, according to the district's administration:

In Belgium, the state gives some different financial facilities to the communes:

- for roads infrastructure;
- incomes from the own patrimony are 100% available to the communes (wood-selling, selling living places);
- payments for services brought to the community;
- taxes for physical persons perceived by the federal state which are guide to the commune.

In Romania, 60% of local taxes are available to the commune. Parallel the state sustains financially the public functionaries in rural environment and yearly gives important sums from the central budget to sustain rural teaching and other vital activities.

Local initiatives financed by the population are numerous, as providing local drinkable water from local systems, introducing methane gas or recovering some rural roads network.