

METRIC AND EVOLUTIVE ASPECTS OF THE RURAL SPACE FROM ROMANIA AFTER THE 2nd WORLD WAR

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Abstract. The work-paper put in the light the main aspects with regarding rural population (number evolution, structure, social framework) and villages (size, administrative organization and the stages of evolution) in relation with the main political events occurred after the 2nd World War.

Key-words: rural of Romania, evolution, number of villages.

Romania has an area of 238,391 sq. km (km²) and a population of 21,680,974 (Recensământul populației și al locuitorilor, 18 martie 2002, vol. II, Institutul Național de Statistică, București).

The general density of population is 91.3 inhab./km², a value very close of the general density of Europe. By comparison, the general density of population of Austria is 95 inhab./km², Norway – 13 inhab./km², Sweden 20 inhab./km², United Kingdom 240 inhab./km² and Germany 230 inhab./km².

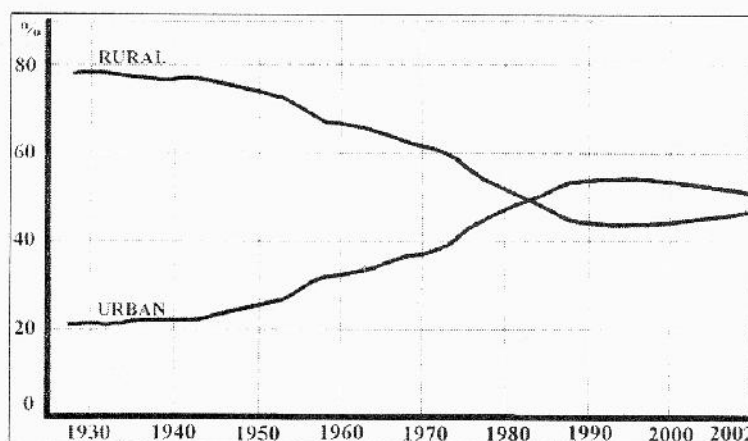


Fig. 1 – The evolution of the rural and urban population from 1930 to 2002 (Anuarul Statistic al Romaniei 2003).

Rural population of Romania systematically decreased after the 1st World War. In 1938, the pick year from an economic point of view, during the interwar period, the part of rural population of Romania was approximately 78%.

The most semnificative decreases of rural population were in the interval 1960 – 1990, in connection with industrial socialist development and general rural exodus. In 1985, the share of rural population was 50 % and in 1989 – 46 %, from this year remained stationary, until 1998.

After this year (1998), rural population registered a small increase, reaching 47, 25 % (2002), as a result of the general collapse of urban industry, which was accompanied of a very important number of remigrants from urban to rural areas.

Out of the total of 10, 261,445 inhabitants, representing rural population in 2002, the social category of peasants represented 35 %, peasants-workers – 47 %, intellectuals and clerks – 6.5 % and other categories, 11.5 %.

In a 50 years period, the Romanian agricultural population, over 65 years old, registered four structural changes.

Former individual peasants became after 1950 cooperatist peasants and then the majority of them workers in the urban industry. Today, some of them are state pensioners or cooperatist pensioners, as well as owners of agricultural and forestry lands.

At this age, they lack innovative management initiatives, as well as technical possibilities to practice a modern agriculture.

The survey done within this kind of rural communities from the pilot villages, included in the 1998 PHARE study, demonstrated that over 90 % from the present owners of land from the rural area don't want to develop and modernize their farms.

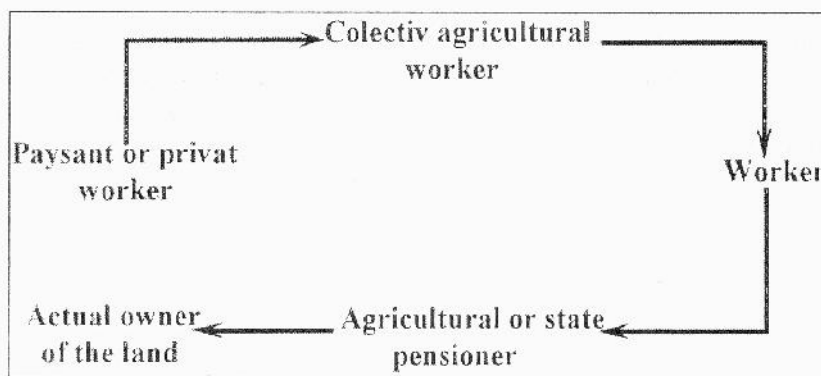


Fig. 2 –Occupational evolution of the peasants from those areas which were included in the cooperatist system (by Căndea Melinda et all, 2004).

Therefore, the agriculture is mainly one of subsistence, using animals and physical human workforce also, accompanied by significant agricultural areas abandoned.

From the administrative point of view, as a result of changes within the Law no. 2/1968 (Law no. 2 / 1968) is allowed to set up new communes and cities.

In 2004, in Romania there were 2,846 communes and 13,098 villages (the commune is the administrative form of organizing the rural space in Romania).

The average population of a commune is 3,750 inhabitants and per one village: 750 inhabitants.

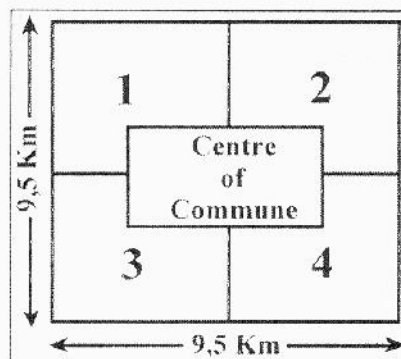


Fig. 3 – The model of rural commune by an administrative point of view (1,2,3,4 – satellite villages).

From an administrative point of view, almost 90 % of the Romanian territory belongs to the rural space (214,880 sq. km). The average area of a commune is 8000 ha.

The model of rural commune from Romania comprises five villages, that means 1 600 ha (area) for one village.

As compared to the average value, there are frequent deviations. Thus, Cornereva commune from Caraş-Severin County comprises 41 villages and approximately 1200 inhabitants that means 30 inhabit /village in average.

In the mountainous area of Arieş river (Apuseni Mountains), the communes with many villages are very common (Avram Iancu – 39 villages, Arieşeni, Gârda, Scărişoara, Vidra, over 20 villages).

On the other hand, there are many communes that comprise one village only, but with numerous inhabitants (frequently more than 2000).

The present legislative system from Romania encourages setting up of new communes and cities, as a result of political games. But many of them have not the minimum infrastructural and functional facilities.

Relatively recent classifications (Gr. Pop, I. Benedek, 1996) establish three categories of villages for Romania, according to the number of inhabitants:

- small villages (< 500 inhabitants);
- medium villages (501-1500 inhabitants);
- large villages (>1500 inhabitants).

In the first category we can highlight the subcategory of very small villages (< 100 inhabitants). In addition, we can distinguish a category with very large villages (> 4000 inhabitants).

A specific phenomenon for the interwar Romania is an important increase of the small and very small villages.

Thus, during 1966 – 1992 only, the number of the small and very small villages increased from 4997 to 6648 (24.7 %) (Gr. Pop, I. Benedek, 1996) a process that is still going on nowadays even for those areas in the proximity of main cities.

This process of massive depopulation of the villages, especially the small and very small ones, has its roots in the national demographic decrease of the birth rate after 1989 and massive emigration of the young population (in 1970 there were 427034 birth and, in 2002, 210 529, out of them 112 339 in the rural area (53.4 %).

More significant is the decrease of school population in the rural area.

This population registered a decrease in the majority of cases of 10 or even 20 times, many schools being closed.

As compared with 1966, over 100 villages disappeared by natural courses, the majority of them in the Central and Southern part of Romania Plain and Southern and Northern part of Moldavia.

Approximately 1 500 000 inhabitants (7 %) live in the 6448 small and very small villages registered in 1992 (Gr. Pop, I. Benedek – 1996).

Over 5 000 000 inhabitants (22 %) live in the large and very large villages, totaling 1866, (14.4%).

After the 2nd World War, the Romanian villages experienced six stages of evolution, each one with the negative impact on the development and modernization of the rural area.

The six stages are:

- stage of war compensations paid by Romania (1945-1956);
- stage of massive collectivization and state agriculture (1857-1962);
- stage of massive industrialization (1963-1984);
- stage of imposed external debts or “scientific feeding” of the population (1984-1989);
- stage of economic disintegration of a socialist type (1989 – 2000);
- the beginning of rural modernization (2000 – present);

Stage of war compensation paid by Romania to former Soviet Union (1945-1956)

This represented a huge burden for the entire country, but more heavy for the peasants.

The vigorous male work from the rural area that outlived the hardships of war had to continue their physical hard work in agriculture as they lacked technical facilities.

Using the plough driven by animals and physical work represented characteristics of the Romania rural life.

The crops and livestock production was low leveled.

The major part of the agricultural production was sent to the former Soviet Union.

The entire economy was controlled by soviet counselors supported by a powerful Russian army who stayed in Romania until 1958.

During this period a massive deportation of rich peasants (*chiaburi*) to Bărăgan (Eastern part of Romanian Plain) takes place and at the same time to the building of Danube - Black Sea Channel, conceived as an instrument of physical and moral destruction of thousands of people.

At the same time, the German population from Banat and Transylvania was deported in Siberia and Southern part of Ukraine, the reason being that they supported German troops at the beginning of the war.

Entire families were dislocated from their native places, divided and obliged to do hard labor. The majority of them never came back.

Stage of massive collectivization and state agriculture (1957-1962)

The process of collectivization started even from 1948, after the Soviet model.

The rich peasants (kulaks, *chiaburi*, in Romania language), in fact the elite of the peasants in that time, was in a short period of time decimated (deportation, wild prison, the children did not have access to high schools and universities).

In the first phase of this stage, the rural agricultural collectives were called Collective Agricultural Households (G.A.C).

At the same time, the so-called Stations for Tractors and Agricultural Machinery (S.M.T.), later called Station for Agricultural Mechanization (I.M.A.) supported collective agricultural with technical means, especially tractors.

The former royal lands, those belonging to the important owners of land and other categories of land were turned into State Agriculture Household (G.A.S), afterwards called State Agricultural Station (I.A.S).

In ten years time, the Communist State controlled almost the entire rural economy.

Several isolated mountainous rural areas were not included in the collectivization process, as the young population of these villages was drawn by urban industry.

Stage of massive industrialization (1963-1984)

This stage was characterized by huge investments in industrial development, especially in chemistry, steel industry and electricity and the setting up of a powerful social work class. This was the main pillar which supported the Communist system.

Consequently, there is a "demographic emptiness" of the rural, as a major part of the population emancipated towards the urban areas (*rural exodus*).

During the period 1960-1985, the rural space lost about 5 millions inhabitants.

The dream of any young person living in the rural areas was that of becoming a worker in the urban industry, to receive an apartment in a block of flats given by the state and being the owner of a car ("Dacia" Romanian car).

The "normality" of the Communist system consisted in owning a Romanian car, a state apartment and a holiday at the seaside (Black Sea).

Those who insisted more could get a passport to go on a trip (individually or in group) to visit the former Socialist countries, in Europe.

Visas were not given for former Yugoslavia, because this country facilitated the access (as a location) to Italy or Austria.

Stage of imposed external debts (1984-1989) also called "the scientific feeding of the population"

The process of industrialization was supported by the massive export of agricultural products, as well as by the huge external currency borrowed.

Consequently, supporting the energo-intensive and over-dimensioned industry, depending strongly on the external market, was done through massive export of food products to the population detriment.

The main food products (meat, milk, eggs, bread, and butter) were drastically reduced, being distributed on special coupons.

From the Communist Party policy point of view, this approach was done in order to ensure "scientific feeding of the population".

MDs and researchers were frequently on TV screen at rush hours explaining the "scientific rationale" of the new system of feeding the population.

The population was waiting many hours in rows, in front of the shops to buy meat, milk, etc. on coupons.

Another practice was the fictive reports of rich crops in mass media and in official statistics.

Stage of economic disintegration of a socialist type (1989-2000)

This stage started in December 1989 and it was marked by powerful social convulsions in rural areas, generated by the process of giving back the land to its rightful owners.

Massive destruction of the infrastructure of the former C.A.P., I.A.S., robberies and forgeries of documents related to ownership of the land, took place during this period.

Administrative buildings, stables for animals, irrigation systems, forest etc. were destroyed and divided piece by piece among the peasants.

There was a true national theft induced by the politicians at that time.

The arable land drastically reduced, as well as the number of livestock. At the same time, the currency is rapidly spent, especially by the political class (trips abroad, buying goods from the external market, etc.).

In the spring time of 1989, Nicolae Ceaușescu announced the entire payment of the external debts and the existence of a reserve of approximately 4 billions US dollars.

The political elite and the so-called "revolutionaries" established "legal bases" for taking by force some infrastructure and lands.

The rule of bribery and corruption was accentuated in the social relations.

The beginning of rural modernization (2000 - present)

This period is characterized by the setting up of the development of private farms on modern bases, both on cultivating the land and on animal livestock.

These farms started the competition for their agricultural products especially with the ones in European Union.

The rural keeps on being characterized by an extensive and traditional type of agriculture.

The rural in Romania is looking for a new balance which is to be accompanied by the disappearance of many villages in the following 10 – 15 years.

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