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## Foreword

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**“Rural Space and Local Development”**  
*“Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

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Distinguished guests and colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

As an organizer of this event I feel that it is my duty to thank you for your competent and diligent participation to the third edition of the international conference that has as a main goal to debate upon and clarify the “multiple and complex problems of the rural world”.

As mentioned before, this conference has two main purposes:

- the evaluation of the present stage of studying and knowing the rural space;
- the status and the directions of evolution of the Romanian village in a European context.

Mankind has been fascinated with the mirage of towns since early times, due to the constant wish for economic emancipation, increasing life comfort, safety and education.

But we do not have to forget that nowadays approximately 50% of the 6,3 billion inhabitants of Earth live in the rural area, situation which is quite the same for Romania as well.

At least from the point of view of the essential role of the rural space for insuring life support for the whole society, through providing the necessary food supply, we consider to be the right time to focus a special attention on the Romanian and overall universal rural space. If we were to add here other purposes for getting to know better the village universe everywhere, we should think at the ecological, spiritual, cultural and sentimental factors in order to get a more complex knowledge of the rural environment.

Time has come to rephrase the problem of half of a country from the point of view of the population number and of around 90% of the country from an administrative point of view, under the most diligent and strict terms.

Time has come to put into function all the connections and possibilities meant to strengthen and reinforce the Romanian rural space.

Without our proud villages, growing demographically and economically, the county will result to be poor, hungry and barren. We assist in the present moment to a process of depopularization in spite of the promises and offers of programs of revitalization of rural life. And obviously here arises the question: What do we do? Do we let everything be? Do we intervene sequentially? Do we turn villages into insalubrious non-functional tons or modernize the villages that we have? Do we promote a general politics focused on promoting and sustaining the rural development?

In the villages with many temporary immigrants there has been a lot of building going on lately. The local architectural background is almost completely destroyed being replaced by new styles foreign from our spirit and tradition. Each county should benefit of special services and architectural offers especially made for villages, and fitted to the local space. No project, no building authorization should be approved and/or released without respecting the local, zonal and/or regional architectural tradition.

The General Urban Plans emphasize the fact that in many places there is a chaotic spatial display of the precincts, not taking into account the elementary law of territorial threat,

that of land preservation. In exchange, they permit high costs for the endowment of the new households, spread from the relatively gathered precincts, with technical gear and utilities.

The Romanian rural space has, as most of the poorer countries, two main infrastructural weaknesses:

- poor quality roads;
- lack of current water and sewerage system.

The general opinion concerning the rebuilding of the two infrastructural categories above mentioned is unanimous: the Romanian villages would maintain and re-gain their prosperity.

In order to accomplish the two major administrative objectives considerable technical and financial efforts are necessary. Only to modernize the communal roads, connecting the villages with the administrative centers, are necessary about 32.500 km of road.

Where from do we get the money? The local budgets and the ones at a central level are too poor to support and sustain such a demeanor simultaneously. Another possibility would be accessing the funds coming from the EU through development programmes, such as SAPARD especially. The rural administration is still dealing with high costs that have to be allocated for the accomplishment of infrastructural projects. The counties, through their specialized personnel, should offer similar projects for free.

Another way of solving the problem would be to use the specialized academic research force that could provide such project types at lower costs and in record time. The "ultra-democratic" way of action of the localities seldom gave proof not to be the best one in what the costs are concerned, and thus giving way to conflicts of interest.

Last but not least there should be a higher usage of the employment and qualification of the local human, financial and technical resources. Unfortunately in the Romanian village there is a poor commitment towards collective welfare and comfort. The water drainage is never cleaned, there is a low interest in preserving the roads, even those in a precarious state, there is a poor interest in keeping self and individual hygiene, there is a lack of real intellectual models in the rural areas (practically all the people working in education, health care and religious endeavors are commuters).

We have a lack of cognitive commitment in what concerns the implementation of the public welfare from the point of view of the rural administration. And that is because we did not succeed to completely eliminate the so called centre-oriented spirit, based on waiting for orders and decisions to be made for us and instead of us, on a constant breaking off trying to solve insignificant problems, with no real purpose and no clear deadline for the major problems. Who would stop a village mayor to put his people to work? By constantly cleaning their own households, by protecting their own water resources, depositing the remnants in especially delimited and dedicated spaces, cleaning their own ditches in front of the house, and the road they use and constantly pass over every day with their tractors, trucks, cars or carts. In many villages there exists the necessary human and mechanical resource to put into function a good quality transportation infrastructure. But there is no one to access it, organize it and put it to run!

The mayors restrain themselves from taking "unpopular" decisions out of electoral considerations, thinking of the permanence of the office they have been given for at least 4 years.

Even the rural street signs are in peril because of the vandalism of those going against the law, and the lack of interest of the local authority.

The Romanian post December 1989 village has returned to the autarkical interwar agriculture, dominated by physical work both human and animal. There is an inexcusable delay in returning to a modern productive agriculture, able to insure the necessary internal market and to offer a diversified palette of high quality products ready for the external market as well. We have good examples to be followed in the near neighboring countries, that of the Czech Republic, but we tend not to copy them not even partially.

We go in slow steps towards environment preservation. But we still "accept" massive deforestation even in the perimeters under legal protection, the clearance of the seed productive and anti-erosion forests. There is no clear and organized planning of ecologic construction and reconstruction, neither at a national nor at a state level. We deal with a general disinterest from the part of the school, the church and the society in this respect. The societies that cannot, do not know how or will not build on the well-established basis of economic and socio-cultural tradition, that do not assimilate in a suitable form and rhythm the innovatory

aspects of everyday life production, instruction and local territorial administration processes, will not succeed in shaping themselves on the way of progress. They do not evolve, but, in the best case, they remain at the same repetitive models.

The social disorder is truly reflected in a certain spatial disorder. The potentially creative energies are engagingly spent in power disputes and interminable law suits meant to establish proprietorship, on a background of corruption, which is difficult to follow and even harder to eradicate.

The more and more numerous intervention on behalf of the EU are not enough punctuated and engaged for putting and end to the negative state of being the Romanian society and economy are dealing with.

Therefore we really need a simple, modern and efficient administrative system all over the country and especially in the rural areas.

These being said, I hereby declare open the proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference "**Rural Space and Local Development**", Cluj-Napoca – Turda – Micești.

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