



State of the Romanian Rural Area. Labourforce, Agricultural Land, Productivity, Management and Ways of Modernization

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A. Generalities

The rural population of Romania consists of 10,223,756 inhabitants (July 1, 1995) representing 45.1 % from the whole population (22,680,951).

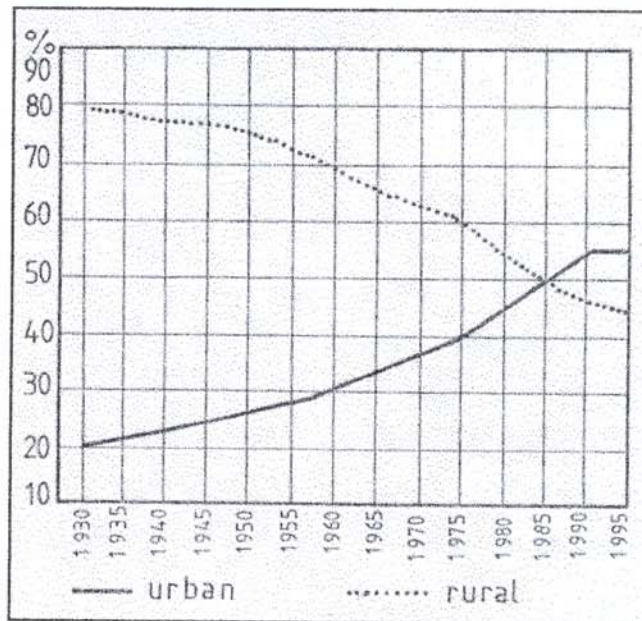


Figure 1. Population in urban and rural areas on July the 1st within 1930-1940 and 1946-1995 (after the Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 1996, p. 81).

The rural is administratively organized in 2,687 communes including 13,099 villages. A

commune has an average of 3,806 inhabitants and a village 780 inhabitants.

Table 1. Classification of communes by the number of population, July 1st, 1995*

Groups of communes by population	Number of communes		Population	
	Absolute data	Percentage of total	Absolute data	Percentage of total
< 100 inhabitants	44	1.6	31,992	0.3
1000 - 1999	385	14.3	619,871	6.1
2000 - 4999	1662	61.9	5,565,983	54.4
5000 - 9999	563	21.0	3,620,809	35.4
≥ 10 000	32	1.2	385,101	3.8

A commune has an average of 7487.8 ha of land while a village only 1637.9 ha. The average number of villages belonging to a commune is 4.87.

If differences in size between communes are relatively small (approximately 1:5), those between villages reach quite high values. There are villages with 1-2 inhabitants (Steierdorf, Caraş-Severin county) and villages with over 14,000 inhabitants (e.g. Dăbuleni, Dolj County).

There are also notable differences between the number of villages belonging to a commune. For instance, the Sic commune, Cluj County, consists of a single village while Cornereva commune, Caraş-Severin County, is composed of 41 villages. A great number of villages belonging to a commune is a rule for the central area of the Apuseni Mountains (Western Mountains).

As far as the ratio surface – geographical position, in Romania the following law is to be found: the communes in the mountainous area have greater surfaces than those in hilly and plain lands for the same number of inhabitants. This fact is induced by the different natural fertility of the soil. Taking into consideration the number of villages held by a commune and their demographic potential, the more villages a commune possesses, the lower its demographically potential is. Concerning the size it could be asserted that over 50 % (50.8 %) from the total number of villages in Romania are small (≤ 500 inhabitants). They are more frequent in Western Mountains, Getici Subcarpathians and Bârlad Plateau. Bigger villages (1500 – 4000 inhabitants) are often met in Oltenia Plain, Banat Plain, Suceava Plateau and in the southern part of Transylvania.

Administratively the rural area holds 90 % (214,551 km²) of the total surface of the national territory (238,391 km²).



Legende

1. Areas with big villages.
2. Areas with small villages.

Figure 2. Areas with a higher frequency of small and big villages.

B. Labour Force

The population involved in agriculture increased with 132,000 persons compared to that of 1990, this increase taking place on the background of a general lessening of the rural population with 374,120 persons. It is a new phenomenon, made obvious in the context of the urbane population's growing while the rural one, taken as a whole, records a numeric decline.

The growth of agricultural population is explained through the process of remigration which follows the relinquish or reduction of activity in urbane industries. In the context of a drastic reduction of unprofitable industries, including mining, it is expected that the population involved in agriculture should record certain increases, not spectacular though, during these years.

* by Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 1996.

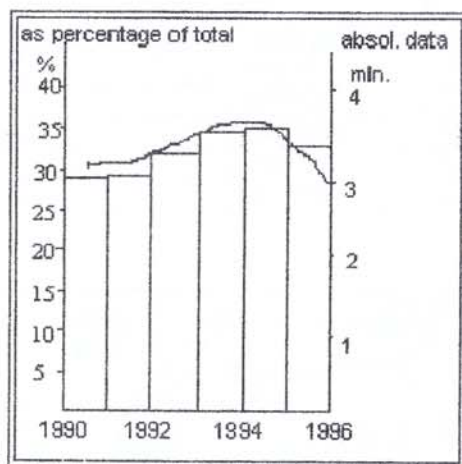


Figure 3. Employment (agriculture).

The model of Petroșani coalfield doesn't display a positive process. The lack of funds, reasonable degree of comfort, facilities for the education of children determined a lot of miners who have lost their jobs to quickly abandon their agricultural activities and to return, even as unemployed people, to their former apartments they left in Jiu Valley and to accuse the government of cheating them.

The comparison between sexes shows that women (50.3 %) represent more than 50 % of the rural population. From the total agricultural population of 3,187,000 persons, the women represent 47.8 % compared with the share of 43.8 % they represent for the whole national economy. The agricultural population divided into main age groups is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Repartition of agricultural population by main age groups

Age groups	Percentage
15-24	11.9
25-34	13.1
35-49	21.7
50-64	32.9
> 65	20.4

For 50-64 and over 65 age groups, the population involved in agriculture outnumbers considerably the values for these age groups at the level of the national economy (18.1 % respectively 6.8 %).

The female agricultural population is of 1,523,386 persons, distributed on the main age groups according to the data in table 3.

Table 3. The distribution of female population involved in agriculture by main age groups

Age groups	Percentage
15-24	5.0
25-34	6.0
35-49	11.1
50-64	16.2
> 65	9.5

The same phenomenon is ascertained in relation with the female population employed at a national level (9.5 % compared with 3.1 % for over 65 age group).

Life expectancy at birth in rural areas is of 68.46 years (64.7 years for men and 72.66 years for women) compared with 70.05 years at national

level (66.3 years for men and 73.95 years for women).

The unemployed workers represent 3.3% (95,610 persons) with a significant percentage for young active groups (in urbane areas the rate of unemployment is of 5.4%). The unemployed workers represent 3.3 % (95,610 persons) with a

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Table 4. The percentage of unemployed population in rural areas by main age groups

Age groups	Percentage
15-24	10.5
25-34	6.8
35-49	3.3
50-64	0.9
> 65	0

The rural population from the age group of 50-54 consist of 1,287,843 persons from which the women rate is 52.7 % (678,949).

The age group of 60-64 comprises 723,916 persons from which the women rate is 53 % (384,563). The rural population over 60 consists of 391,063 persons, representing 10.5 % from the total population of the country. It would be notable to show the number of rural households, which prosper economically, compared with the total number of rural households, but the data at the national level are absent. As a result of the analysis made locally within Cluj County resulted that only 20 % of the number of rural households offer work forces capable of ensuring a relative prosperity. The rest of them are dependent on the first category especially regarding the basically agricultural labors. This should be a first sign that indicates the "surplus" of labor force in rural areas.

The agricultural land is also divided into:
 - arable land – 9,337,100 ha (63.1 %)
 - pastures – 3,392,400 ha (22.9 %)
 - meadows – 1,497,700 ha (10.1 %)
 - vineyards and wine growing/viticulture nurseries – 292,400 ha (2.0 %)
 - orchards and fruit-growing nurseries – 277,600 ha (1.9 %).

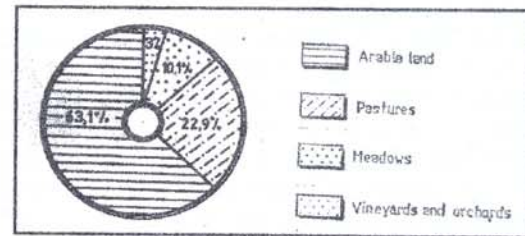


Figure 5. Agricultural area by use (end of the year, 1995).

C. The Ratio Territory-Rural Population

As mentioned before, the surface of Romania consists of 23,839,100 ha, divided into three main categories of land depending on the way it is used:

- agricultural land – 14,797,200 ha (62 %)
- woodland – 6,680,100 ha (28 %)
- other types of land 2,361,800 ha (10 %)

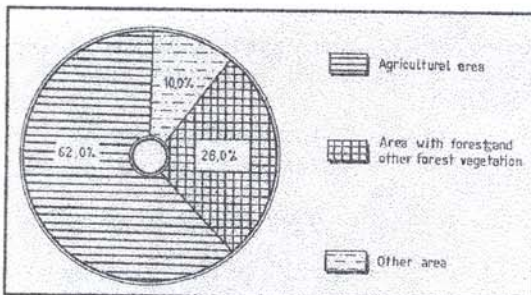


Figure 4. Total land area, by use (1995).

A rural settlement contains 633 ha of land on the whole, respectively 1,121 ha of agricultural land.

The average arable surface belonging to a rural settlement consists in 707 ha. An inhabitant of a rural area owns an average of the following land surfaces on categories (table 5).

A person who works in agriculture owns an average of 4.64 ha of agricultural land and 2.92 of arable land.

The agricultural surface per inhabitant at the national level (0.65 ha) is below the world average value (0.764 ha) while the arable surface per inhabitant (0.42 ha) outruns considerably the world average (0.27 ha), a fact that places Romania into a favorable light regarding its agricultural potential (more detailed studies have proved that those countries whose cultivated surface per inhabitant exceeds the world average (0.27 ha) are generally exporters of farm products – I. Puia, V. Soran, 1978).

Table 5. The average of land surfaces on categories for an inhabitant at national level and within rural environment

Category of land	ha/inhabitant at national level	ha/inhabitant in rural environment
Total surface	1.04	2.10
Agricultural land	0.65	1.44
Arable land	0.42	0.91

D. Land and Landowners

As a consequence of the law 18/1991 in Romania exist 6.2 million landowners. The medium size of a rural estate is of 1.11 ha (pastures are excluded as they are public property). The degree of division for land estates is extremely high, especially in hilly areas, arising from the compensatory effect of the natural fertility rate for the total agricultural land belonging to a rural settlement. A land estate has an average of 10-15 plots of land and as a result there are approximately 70 million plot units on the whole country. With such a high degree of agricultural land division it is impossible to practice a modern, efficient agriculture. The energy and time consumption deriving from the locomotion towards the agricultural land is often greater than the effort consumed in working the land. For a 2 ha agricultural land estate, divided into 10 plots, the average time of reaching the estate per person is 50 minutes, the equivalent of a 4 km walk. If a person walks to the estate five times yearly for each plot, the outcome is an expenditure of 41 hours 40 minutes time (41 h 40') per person, equivalent of 166.6 km in length.

The coerced time of the rural became excessive (1993, V. Surd).

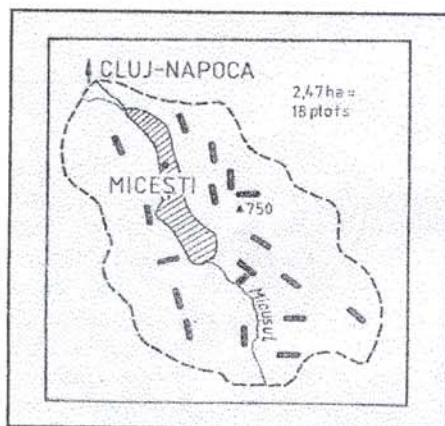


Figure 6. Dispersion pattern of Micești land estate – Cluj County.

The arable surface for a physical tractor is of 87 ha.

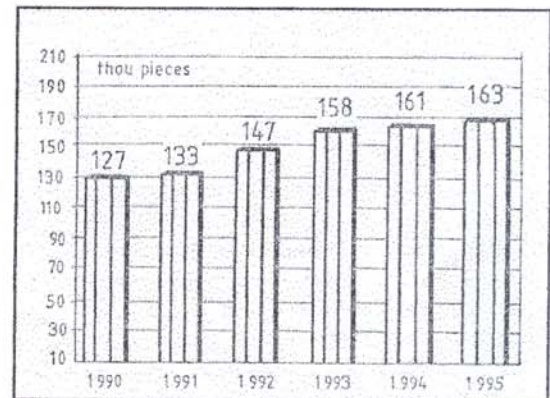


Figure 7. Physical agricultural tractors.

Although the number of private tractors in rural areas multiplied considerably, due to the high degree of land estate dispersion as well as to the upkeeping of an adequate outlook, these tractors aren't made full economic use of. Simultaneously, there was a return to the interwar agricultural practices with an increase in animal traction shown in the growing number of horses. More alarming is the fact that nursing cattle are used for traction and agricultural works with a negative impact upon production. This is added to the amplifying human physical effort.

The quantity of chemical fertilizers/ha of arable land decreased from 118 kg in 1990 to 50 kg in 1995. In the same way the quantity of natural fertilizers developed (2655 kg - 1995, 1865 kg - 1995).

There was a considerable deterioration of the ratio between vegetal production and animal production ($\frac{53\%}{47\%}$ in 1990 and 60.9 respectively 39.1 % in 1995) outlining a process of moving off from agriculture in countries with an advanced economy.

In the case of the vegetal production there were recorded notable outputs for cereals (17,173,500 tons in 1990, 19,882,200 tons in 1995) and vegetables. In other categories of crops, especially for technical plants, a considerable regress is recorded. This disorganization of state property and of the cooperative property together with the incapacity of linking the agricultural production profile with industrial manufacture profile, on the background of the strengthening of private property, led to a significant decrease in land surfaces cultivated with technical plants. The

average productions per hectare straighten out a bit (3 082 kg of wheat and 3 184 kg of maize) following the downward profile between 1992-1993. Nevertheless these values are below those in the countries with an advanced economical development.

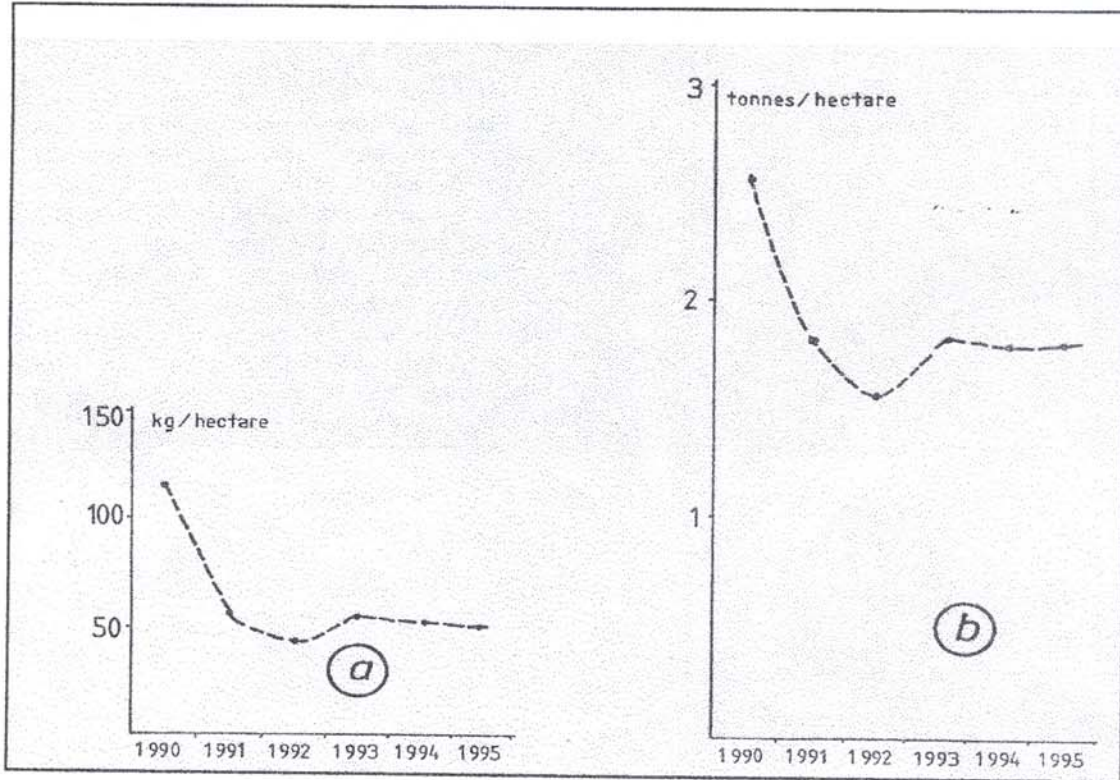


Figure 8. a, b, Chemical (a) and natural (b) fertilizers used per hectare.

Table 6. Average production per hectare

Years	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Wheat and rye	3,212	2,507	2,188	2,321	2,535	3,082
Maize grains	2,756	4,072	2,046	2,605	3,131	3,184

The fruit production decreased in all categories (670,000 tons per total) which represents less than half the volume of the production of 1990 (1,453,000 tons). The outstretched orchards belonging to the former C.A.P. and I.A.S were abandoned either as a result of people's incapacity to work them after the reallocation or as a result of their extensive

exploitation. In many villages they were cut down and used as firewood. The grape production, after a clear fluctuation (1,339,200 tons in 1993, 788,500 tons in 1994) came back to its volume of 1990 (954,000 tons). In this field as well, especially in the vineyards of southern Moldavia, there are practices of abandoning the crops and transforming them in arable lands, as a result of

the incapacity of the owners to find resources for maintenance costs. The relatively high prices maintained for native wines, their poor promotion on the international market, which results in the incapacity of absorption by the market, deepens the

crisis of vineyard and wine in Romania.

The most obvious regress was recorded in the zootechnical livestock field, the appreciable decrease of livestock being characteristic for every type of livestock except for horses.

Table 7. Livestock number (at the beginning of the year)

Years	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Cattle	6,291,000	5,381,000	4,355,000	3,683,000	3,597,000	3,481,000
Pigs	11,671,000	12,003,000	10,954,000	9,852,000	9,262,000	7,758,000
Sheep	15,435,000	14,062,000	13,879,000	12,079,000	11,499,000	10,897,000

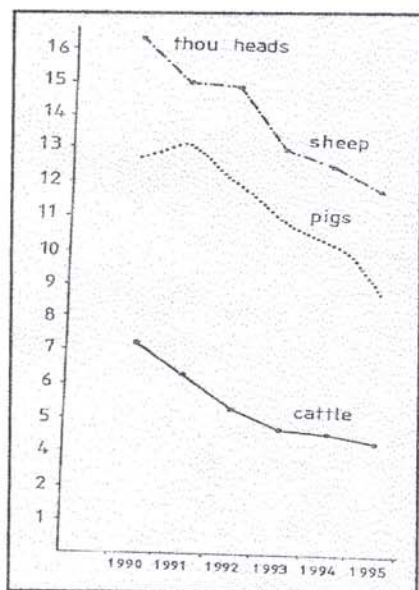


Figure 9. Evolution of livestock number.

Thus, the number of cattle was reduced to almost half (from the number of 6,291,000 in 1990 to 3,481,000 in 1995). The number of pigs, sheep and poultry decreased with 32 % and the number of the bee families diminished by almost half (1,201,000 – 1990, 696,000 in 1995). The horses were “rehabilitated” for tractions and agricultural works, their number increasing from 663,000 in 1990 to 806,000 in early 1996.

The production of meat decreased by 386,000 tons (2,232,000 tons in 1990, 1,846,000 tons in 1995) and the fish production is also 25,720 tons lower (63,497 tons in 1990, 37,769 tons in 1995).

The egg production is 2,510 millions pieces less (8,077 million pieces in 1990, 567 million pieces in 1995). Although the milk production recorded an absolute growth (44,229,000 hl - 1990, 50,775,000 hl - 1995) and a growth of milk per animal (2,063 liters - 1990,

2,951 liters - 1995), it can't satisfy the necessary quantity for internal consumption. The low buyer's price (one liter of milk is much cheaper than one liter of mineral water) does not encourage the production of rural households which are the main milk suppliers. The long distances up to the processing centres and the absence of a modernized road infrastructure force the small producers to accept low prices, milk being their only source of making money. In numerous situations, due to the circumstances mentioned before, milk is used for feeding pigs.

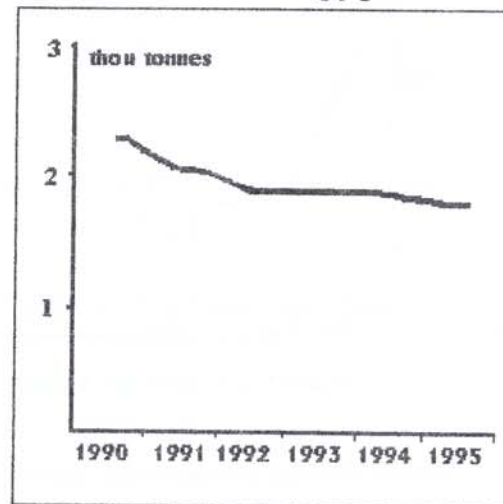


Figure 10. Evolution of meat production.

E. Prospects of Rural Management

A hall runs each commune, consisting of two types of clerks: eligible and permanent.

Mayors and deputy-mayors are elected every four years from the lists of candidates presented by political parties (independent candidatures are also accepted). Apart from these, there is the Local Council, elected according to law 69/1991 regarding local public

administration and Government Order No. 22/1997, regarding the modification of the above mentioned law. However, this order hasn't been passed by the parliament. The success in rural administration depends mainly on the mayor's and the local counselor's character and also on financial power. Although the Local Councils

enjoy a great autonomy in decision-making, being deliberative organs, their capacity of taking an efficient and benefic action for the rural community they represent is diminished by the reduced managerial capacities of those elected and by a very low financial potential.

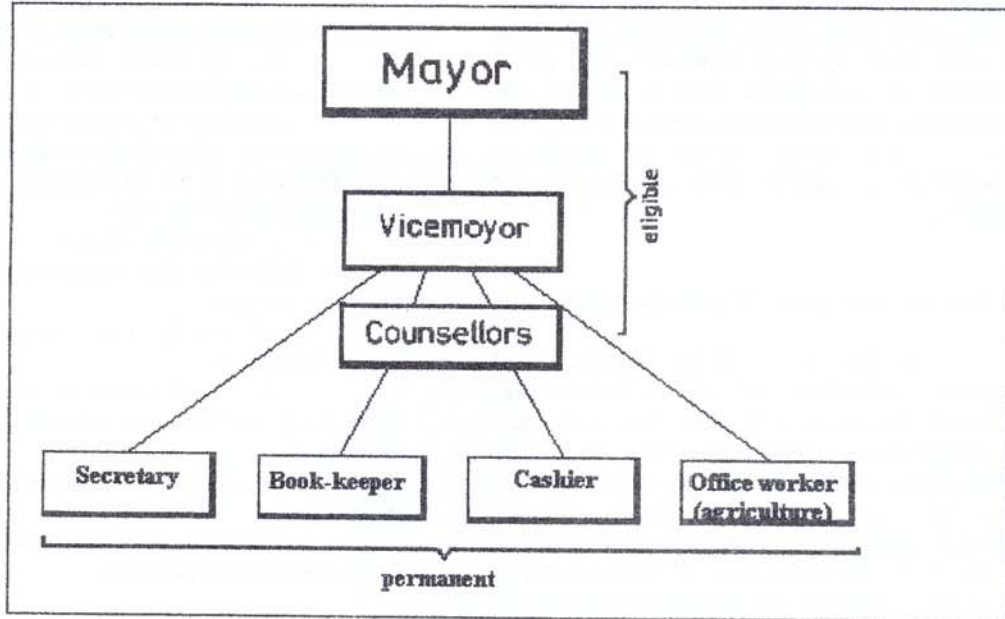


Figure 11. The personnel structure of a hall in rural area.

There are numerous situations when people choose to work as local counselors for financial reasons and for personal pride, the most "incisive" persons ending by being elected although they aren't good managers. The allocation of the local budget performed at the central level proved to be a serious obstacle in taking certain decisions concerning the rural population welfare.

Each commune has a veterinary surgeon and an agronomist who is paid by the County Agricultural Boards and is expected to be innovative in their fields.

As in the case of the other intellectuals that are working in rural areas (teachers, physicians) they are usually commuters. The extremely slow rhythm of reinforcing law 18/1991 regarding land ownership, a task that falls upon the shoulders of the agronomists, undermines their competence in the field. Therefore, in numerous cases, the halls renounce their services. The veterinary surgeon, a townsman, has his consulting room only in the centre of the commune. The emergencies in the nearby villages are usually solved empirically by the peasants or end up in the sacrificing of the sick animals. The situation of the

between the centres of the communes and the villages in the area, the poor quality of the country roads and lack or poor endowment with telephones, stress upon the state of isolation for numerous rural settlements even if some of them are in the proximity of towns or cities. The church is not particularly involved in solving some fundamental rural needs, except those strictly related to its domain (baptism, funerals, mass).

One of the major crises of the Romanian rural is induced by the absence of intellectuals with a permanent rural residence. The present managerial system is highly centralized and bureaucratic and the villages that are central communes are the only ones to take advantage of that, now, as before. The gap between "centre" and "periphery" is getting bigger. Disoriented rural communities are looking for some kind of order able to help them develop in a positive direction. Many of these communities "die out". The tendencies of enforcing bureaucratically the law 18/1991 regarding land allotment lead to frequent controversies, especially between neighbors. The accept once of the ownership right in the present form and content, made only in the office with numerous omissions and mistakes, without a

rigorous surveyreevaluation, means to sending to court large numbers of peasants in order to strengthen some territorial facts. In the present-day stage, the rural communities are unable to uphold the effort of a survey reevaluation to secure a fair possession. The racket with agricultural land is a common practice for the former and the present authorities in rural areas making a lasting progress of land estate merging impossible. The actual allotment of agricultural land is another key problem the rural Romanian society is facing. The state, as the formal owner by means of collectivization, should solve the problem of possession.

F. New Administrative - Territorial Order

The present state of the Romanian rural requires "correction" of the administrative-territorial division made in 1968. Thus there must be reestablished the communal centres, which were eliminated in 1968 and at the same time it must be promoted a new administrative-territorial link for the rural. That means promotion of a strengthening policy for a rural centre, more developed and able of taking over some vital urban functions such as law, learning and medical ones. In our opinion, this present administrative-territorial division of the rural is no longer good, and does not correspond to the rural need of modernizing. The decisions to reestablish the rural communities should be taken by the new communal centre as well as by the supracomunal centres concerned. There should be no limitative criteria. An organizational flexibility is more desirable than immutable patterns. The new spatial order would create the competition spirit, underline the local managerial and economic potentials and harmonize in a perceptible manner welfare with the effort made by each community. The most important social aspect is that of decision taking in the benefit of mutual interest and of the fusion of common interests. The rural world turned from the group interests, which had a general benefic influence, to strictly individual interests. An abnormal selfishness, leading towards the setting up of an economic autarchy in every household, found its place in rural areas. The consolidation of the mayors and local counselors' party positions, up to states of indifference, often take first position, in front of the major needs of the rural communities. The halls often work in an empirical manner inducing almost critical states. Orders are expected to come from higher authorities. The inactivity inherited from the former political system is clear. The poor quality of information

and its restriction in time due to isolation left a strong mark upon the rural system.

In conclusion we can list the following phenomena which mark profoundly the life of the Romanian rural communities:

- the considerable decrease of crops;
- a low level of productivity both in the vegetal sector and in the livestock sector;
- the diminished managerial capacity, doubled by a rigid administrative system;
- a tendency of amplifying physical effort for agricultural works which has disastrous effects upon the health of the rural population and upon the agricultural productivity;
- a sustained demographically aging process, doubled by the natural disintegration of numerous villages;
- extremely low communication potential (roads, telephones);
- the disintegration of social life for microgroup and the establishment of a "rural selfishness";
- the return to traditional agricultural practices;
- the massive market penetration of foreign agricultural products.

G. The Resources of Rural Development

The resources of rural development can be divided into two main categories: internal and external. Both the internal and external resources are parted into two groups: permanent and "accidental".

A modern agricultural development remains a major permanent desideratum. The merging of dispersed land estates should have to be accompanied by modern forms of production cooperation.

The handicraft industry remains a viable alternative of highlighting the creative and productive capacities of the population but will still be limited to those rural settlements where it is deeply rooted in by tradition, perseverance and innovating spirit (e.g. Corund, Vama, Izvorul Crişului).

The discovery of some subsoil resources or the utilization of those known already may constitute a major economic basis for a limited number of rural settlements. The case of the villages in the mining areas of the Eastern Carpathians and of the Western Carpathians is illustrative in this respect but the obsolete exploitation is not offering any chances of prosperity.

The process of urban-rural remigration started at the same time with the phenomena of disintegration and extinction of some town-based industrial plants, which could no longer face the exigencies imposed by the market economy. It is the case of those industrial branches that require energy and which have been kept running by the commuters or by underqualified workers. The rise in the price of city-life and the increasing maintenance costs for flats will continue to

encourage the process of remigration. In most of the cases it is a question of vigorous labor force, capable of adjustment and more responsive to innovating processes. As a result of this process, the advantage will be on the side of those villages located within a small or medium distance from the towns. Many of the rural households that have been abandoned or are about to be abandoned will be made to function again.

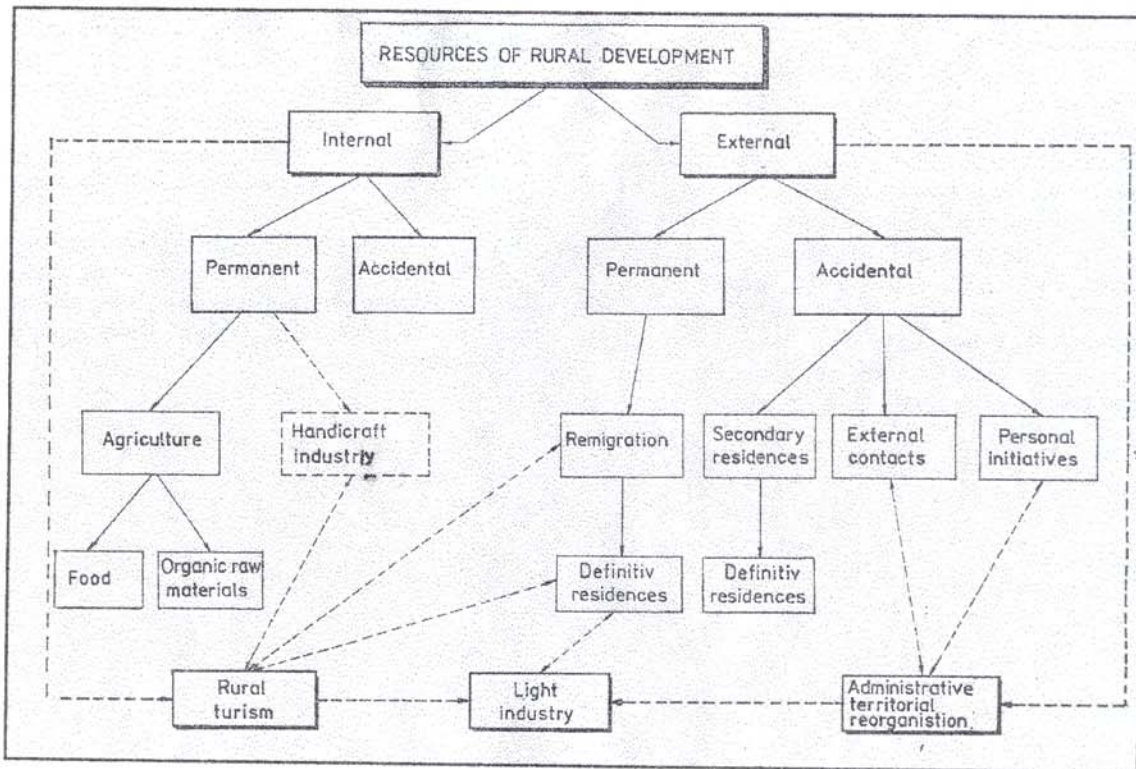


Figure 12. The resources of rural development.

The reconfirmation of a rural demographic behavior is expected and this will lead to an increasing birth rate in rural areas, together with a relative territorial stabilization of the labor force. Secondary residences became fashionable for a certain category of town population. These were mainly built in well-known tourist areas (seaside, Prahova Valley) or in recreational areas but they are not very frequent in villages situated near large towns although there accelerator in upholding the process of rural life modernization.

The external contacts of the rural microcommunities and of the rural macrocommunities are meant to shorten considerably the temporal distances between the world of the prosperous rural (of those countries

are many abandoned households in this area and the buying price is much lower. This is explained through the modest communication potential inducing a state of isolation. A plan for a territorial development strategy is needed and it could be done by promoting the rural and not by the uncontrollable spreading of large towns.

The permanent residences should solve first of all the problem of a lasting settling of intellectuals in villages. This may become an (with an advanced economy) and that of the perceptible decaying rural. The action started by a group of Western European countries under the name of "Romanian Villages Operation" played an important role in connecting the Romanian villages with the western world.

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Rural tourism may be selectively promoted in a limited number of villages that have already a certain experience in the field and can offer high standards of accommodation. The rural settlements in mountain or coast areas are favored because they can establish a permanent number of customers by means of a price competition. The light rural industry should be developed in a larger number of villages especially the primary processing of agricultural products. The lack of capital, initiative and experience are the main obstacles.

The administrative reorganization would stimulate the competition spirit but also the responsibility spirit and this could lead to the release of latent local energies that cannot fully and openly manifest themselves because of the rigid organizational administrative frame.

The desirable administrative-territorial reorganization of rural areas should avoid tendencies and practices of amplifying the bureaucratic phenomenon.

All these sources of promoting the Romanian rural cannot have a positive result

without an efficient involvement of the state in the process of national economic remolding.

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