



Analysis on the Disfunctionalities that Occurred Due to the Change of Property on the Agricultural Terrains in South-Western Romania

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Introduction

The problems of the Romanian village and those of the peasant economy are closely related to the characteristics of the current land law, to the ways of applying this law, to the bad functioning of a stock market of agricultural products that endangers the profitability of the village activities, to many and radical political changes (most often with totally opposed directions), to inertness in thinking and conscience, that all together lead to the perpetuation of some disfunctionalities, of some states of facts, of the time and place Romania occupies today, on the continent.

Some of the disfunctionalities, pointed out in the development of various activities in the Romanian villages, are related to the type of land property, to the reduced extension of the lands legally obtained, to the low productions and productivities, because of the old fashioned and insufficient techniques, to the slow start of some viable initiatives of association or constitution of profitable farms etc.

Trends in the Evolution of the Law Situation of the Land Fund

The major changes in the Romanian agriculture, after 1990, are due to the way in which the Law on Land Fund was conceived and then applied (18/1991). At a first analysis, this law was constituted as a repairing act of some serious past social errors.

By the law the right of the land property reconstitution was settled up to 10 hectares for each family. But because during the 45 years of communist government, thousands of families moved from one region to another, and mostly from east and south to south-west in Banat, the lands here became insufficient, and a great number of the natives or those that had come afterwards were put in possession of small lots. First, it was the idea of changing the ex-agricultural production cooperatives into associations with juridical status, and not into private family, agricultural exploitations. In Banat, a province with an important percentage in the agricultural economy of the country, such associations are very reduced (9,2 %) comparing to the country average of the (42,4 %) (Oțiman, 1994). At first, such agricultural associations were scarcely developed and they were grouped either around old structures, that had agricultural equipment, or around already constituted organizational structures (ex. state agricultural enterprises).

Juridically, this way of putting in possession was acceptable. Practically the result was an exaggerated division of the great lots. The division of the lots was done in a great hurry and without thinking, without taking into account the necessity of preventing or acting against some factors of

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degradation or limitation (the slope, the danger of slidings or of erosion, the predisposition to an excess of pluvial, phreatic or coast humidity).

Today, the number of lots is higher than in 1945 (over 7 millions lots) and their surfaces, very reduced. The small agricultural exploitations (under 2,7 ha country average) are, for now, practically impossible to be extended because of the introduction of the state's preemption right, by the Development and Rural Agencies, also coordinated by the state.

However, the situation in Banat is not so bad as in other Romanian provinces. If in Romania the most of the retroceded properties are less than 3 ha (average – 2,68 ha) in surface in Banat the surface of the reconsidered properties is about 3,35 ha, and that of a family's exploitations of about 11,0 ha (Oțiman, 2000) (table 1).

Table 1. The proportion and the size of the family farms in Banat and Romania.

Specificity	Medium surface	< 0,5	0,5-1	1-3	3-5	5-7	7-10	>10
		(ha)						
Banat	3,35 ha	1,40	21,40	22,8	22,77	5,93	13,82	2,08
Romania	2,64 ha	8,57	31,23	33,35	15,92	7,13	3,56	0,24

An essential cause of the shaping of the larger and stronger private agricultural exploitations in Banat is induced by the existence of a strict land evidence that was largely introduced under Habsburg rule and accurately continued up to the 1950's. This fact has determined a fast and accurate restoration of the majority of ex/land owners exactly on the old lots and has considerably reduced the litigations.

For the time being in Romania the idea of private family farm is far from being generalised. By the Law of Territorial Fund no 18/1991 this form is practically excluded and by later land acquiring there have been hardly created 1 to 3 farms with a surface of over 20 ha for each Banat comune. Law 1/2000 is facilitating these new manners of organisation and exploitation of the agricultural lands but it is only at its beginnings and it encounters lots of difficulties in application due to the previous system of land use arrangement that has already been shaped. Other laws to regulate the funciar market and bringing together the lots into compact farms with a proper manner of organisation and arrangement of lots are missing for the time being.

Social and Economic Disfunctionalities

For the beginnig the initiative of reconstruction of the property right was favourably received. In time, the Romaniaan peasant using small lots has begun to get poor fastly. By being given small lots (1,5 ha), lots owned by over 83 % of the Romanian farms, the governants and politicians have sentenced the Romanian peasants to a perpetous poverty because on such a lot a peasant family can only hardly and uncentainly survive.

Even though there were sustained associative forms (family, societies), in Banat these organisational forms are few in number due to the very strong spirit of property of the peasants. And though after 10 years of privations and personal restrictions, in Banat there were aquired tenth of tractors and agricultural machines and other tools for each dwelling. According to the total number or on number per person of tractors, agricultural machines and other tools necessary for the land to be worked, Banat is however by far on the first place in the country in what the technical endowment in the private sector is concerned, machines that are consuming their energy on small, unprofitable lots. The largest part however, of the machines are old and of a reduced capacity and the accompanying accessories minimal. This fact makes the Romanian agricultor to get a productivity 8 times lower than a European Union farmer.

The reduced surface of the farms in Romania is owing to a lack of the land market on one land due to the lack of property titles (in the Eastern and Southern Romania) and on the other hand due to the conditions typical to the transition epoque such as: the inexistence of the accumulation of capital in the rural areas towards making or extending the agricultural exploitations; the absence, of some enterprisers willing to start a bussiness in the agricultural

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domain; the lack of some steady obligations of the landowners for the state; the domination of some agricultural farms less than 1,3 ha in size to the limit of subsistence (Pană et al., 1994).

The lack of the price to lead to the establishing of some funciar property puts the possessor in the incapacity of processing the value of the funciar property, or computing its damping or making funds for the protection or improvement of the soil fertility, or assuring dividends to the landowners because the value of the used is not known etc.

Successful Privatisations in the Domain of Banat Agriculture

However, in the south-western part of Romania, land transactions are carried and the private, western like farms most of them owned by foreign landholders, stand out and extend more and more.

Like at the beginning of the century, the first ones who got involved in the reorganization of Romanian agriculture were the Italians and the Germans. They granted or bought plots of land especially near the western border of Romania (over 80 % of the contracted businesses). Starting with 1997, Italians from Milan but not only, acquired through several methods, tenth of thousands of hectares of land, some of them having high qualities (near Jimbolia and Lovrin), while others having poor quality or having restrictions regarding cultures (most of the lands are argillaceous, vertisols) Lands are exploited with the help of the latest technologies and several pedo-agrochemical classifications are being done regarding the land's quality (both at the beginning and during the land's exploitation), classifications that hadn't been done by Romanian agriculturists. There had been also done several drainings on lands where rain water stagnated; they were made loose through the scarification of argilloceous lands and with a very low porosity. There had been done a complex tilling of the superficial layer of the land with the help of some agricultural equipment of high capacity and cultivation of the land with profitable plants (especially sorts of wheat rich in gluten, soya beans or other technical plants).

Favoured by the chemical features of the soil, the wheat cultivated here was looked for and demanded at export even from the beginning of the century, being used for the fabrication of high quality flour paste ware. These lots owned today by Italian cultivators, are to be found near Beba Veche, Dudeștii Vechi, Cherestur, Valcani (on vertisols). To these lots we can add the properties already established at Orțișoara (on entiluvisols), Uivar (on vertisols), Secaș (on luvisols), Voiteni (on luvic chernozems), Gătaia (on vertisols) and so on (fig. 1).



Figure 1. The agricultural lands acquired by foreign investors in Banat.

Other lands from the Banat area were taken either by German investors like those from Giulvăz and Giera (on vertisols, chernozems, halomorphic sols), Biled (on chernozems), Teremia Mare (on cambic chernozems and psamosols), Jimbolia (on chernozems), Sat Chinez (on phaeozems) or by other persons interested like Poles who acquired lots at Uivar and Cenei (area with vertisols but also with chernozems).

In hilly areas, foreign investors didn't penetrate because of the low quality lands but also because of an inadequate infrastructure. There had been carried out a few reduced transactions at Secaș (by Italiani) with embankment activities for being about some fruit-growing and viticultural plantations at

Recas, with the granting of most of the viticultural farms by English investors.

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The Quantitative Evolution of Banat's Land Fund

Although the historical province of Banat extends on an area of almost 2 million hectares (table 2) only 64 % of it is used for agricultural practice and again of this 64 %, only 64 % has an arable use (772 249 ha). From the point of view of the useful agricultural area and arable area per inhabitant (1,06 and 0,68) Banat exceeds the given country level values at that is 0,65 and 0,41.

On a stable and unmodified background the quantitative evolution of the landuse categories was insignificant, with a slight tendency of lowening of the lands cultivated with orchards and vineyards in favour of grazing pastures and hay-fields.

In return there were obvious fluctuations regarding the extension of arable areas used in the process of agricultural production. If the use in the process of agricultural production years 1990-1993 are considered to be marked by searches and uncertainties regarding both the way of property and the land use, after 1995, the situation got partially stabilized so we can express some conclusions for the last 5 years of analysis. These conclusions are not encouraging concerning the use of arable land.

The main cultures take as much as 80 % of the agricultural area of Banat. The largest areas have been sown with wheat and maize (approximately 50 % of the arable area), with slight compensatory variations from one culture to another, as well as from one year to another (table 3).

Table 2. The situation of Banat's land fund in the last decade of the 20th century.

Nr. crt	Category of use	Area ha	% of the		
			Total area of Banat	The agricultural area of Banat	The area divided on categories of use
1	Land in crop	772 249	411,05	64,45	7,55
2	Pastures	268 750	14,28	22,43	8,96
3	Hay-fields	117 377	6,24	9,79	8,37
4	Orchards	32 596	1,73	2,72	10,19
5	Vineyards	7 292	0,39	0,61	2,60
6	Total agricultural land	1 198 264	6,69	100,00	7,93
7	Other utilities	683 073	36,31	-	7,47
8	Total	1 881 337	100 ,00	-	7,75

Table 3. Changes occurred in the structure of the arable areas in Banat by different cultures in the period 1991-2000.

Culture	Surface (ha)/years			
	1991	1995	1996	2000
Wheat and rye	169 944 22,0%	220 557 28,6%	198 351 25,7%	205 150 26,6%
Maize grains	196 231 25,4%	210 339 27,2%	210 371 27,2%	194 391 25,2%
Sunflower	33 968 4,4%	50 053 6,5%	65 168 8,4%	53 140 6,9%
Soya-bean	13 067 1,7%	4 563 0,6%	6 530 0,8%	6 351 0,8%
Sugar beet	13 199 1,7%	8 625 1,1%	8 925 1,2%	8 018 1,0%

Each year, the area occupied by traditional cultures in this part of the country has decreased: from 82,5 % in 1995, to 81,6 % in 1996 and to 78,9 % in 2000, and this tendency of growing smaller will go on due to an inefficient agricultural policy and which doesn't take into account protection actions or sustainment measures for people working in agriculture (bad technical utilities, very expensive tools and machines, cheap agricultural products, an inefficient

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organization in the process of taking over the agricultural products, the lack of a competitive market with a coherent structure etc).

Stable situation concerning the percentage of the covering of arable fields are meat at barley and barley cultures (aprox. 11%) oat (3,6 %), potatoes (1,9 %) and vegetables (1,9 %).

A type of culture growing larger is the sun-flower culture, that has increased by 1-2 % in 1996-2000, on the grounds of its multiple ways of evaluation. In return, the areas occupied by white-beat cultures and especially soya-bean have significantly decreased during the last years, a fact that triggered massive sugar or proteins imports. The last sugar (white-beat) culture hardly covered 0,8 % of the arable area.

A real tragedy affects the vineyards and orchards. The lack of work force, very high prices of the insectofungicides and especially the absence of a reliable and profitable market, causes a progressive narrowing of these areas. If in 1991, out of the total areas occupied by vineyards (7 292 ha), 74,7% was active (produced vine), after 1995 this percentage dropped down significantly to 67,5 % in 1995, to 65,8 % in 1996 and down to 44,3 % in 2000.

The same situation occurred with orchards to. Out of the total area reported as used for this purpose (32 596 ha), in 1991 only 62,8 % was productive, and in the period 1995-2000, the areas used exclusively for productive orchard dropped down to 60 %.

From these statistic, it's clear that Banat keeps a cereal agricultural structure, not favourable to tehncial plants or fruit tree and vine dependent areas. In fact, the cereal character of Banat agriculture inheritance of the comunist agrarian policy, is subscribing to the national tendency and the causes of their agricultural structure depend both on technical considents as well as on the mentality of the managers or of the specialists or even of the simple farmers, mentality that was strongly imprinted during the last 40 years.

Productions and Productivities

Inevitably, this structure and quantitative evolution of the funciar property is constaining the agricultural exploitation to inferiour performances some even poorer than the ones obtained on the properties obtained as a result of the Reform in 1945, or those obtained in postwar Romania (Lazar, 1944). With all performances revealed by statistics (Otiman, 1997) that places Romania on advanced positions in Europe (on 8th place in the total agricultural surface, 4th place on the extention of the arable surface/inhabitant, the 6th place on the total arable surface, the 5th place on the extention of the arable surface/inhabitant, the 2nd place as irigated surface, 1st place as useful agricultural surface equiped for irigation etc), however Romania's Land Fund is suffering a series of imperfections in organisation, technical equipment and effective exploitation problems that are reflected on the total productions and on the productivities at the surface unit and the investment done.

The economic advance this part of the country did was owing to some historical and geopolitical situations realised during colonisations with German, Hungarian, Franch or Italian population with the colonists being suported by the local autorities by getting a thorough knowledge of a professional culture at high standard, by getting a thorough knowledge of profesional culture at high standards (at that times), by having a performing agricultural inventory and by a large opening to the west that part of the inhabitants here benefited of. That is why in the statistics of the time (1925, 1935) (Statistical yearbook, 1938) this region was in the top of the land productivity or in the top of exports of agricultural products (Lazăr, 1944).

After 1990 the division of the large lots existing in the state and cooperatist agriculture, the division or spread of the existing agricultural inventory, the reduced number and old workers in private agriculture has had a strong negative impact in the agricultural practice in Banat. However, under those circumstances Banat maintained itself in the top of the transformations: lower lots fragmentations than in other parts of the country, higher percentage of family associations that possess economically profitable lots, superiour technical equipment comparing to other parts at the country (table 4). For example in Banat at the beginning of the XXI Century there was determinad the lowest agricultural surface/agricultural machine (/tractor – 79 ha, /sower / 209 ha, /combine / 1286 ha) and also here there was registered the highest percentage of technical endowment of the private agricultors.

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Table 4. The agricultural surface served by the main agricultural tools.

Specificity	Tractors/ha			Sowers/ha			Combines/ha		
	State	Private	S/P	State	Private	S/P	State	Private	S/P
	ha		%	ha		%	ha		%
Banat	79	81	98	214	209	102	400	1286	31
Romania	92	136	68	310	528	59	415	1572	26

Although it is known that Banat is generally regarded as a “promise land” due to its fertile soils, the real situation is quite different. Indeed over half of the surface of Torontal Plain between Timisoara and Sannicolau Mare and between Mures and Bega Rivers, about 175 000 ha are lands with a high fertility (class I and II), lands that have harvests comparable to those obtained in Western Europe countries (fig. 2). The remaining arable lands are suffering a series of limitations and restrictions (salinity or acidification, excess of humidity both phreatic and surface, volume variations, natural or anthropic compactness, surface and depth erosion, land slidings etc. - Ianos et al, 1997), that reduces the productivity of the land proportional by with the intensity and the extension of restriction.

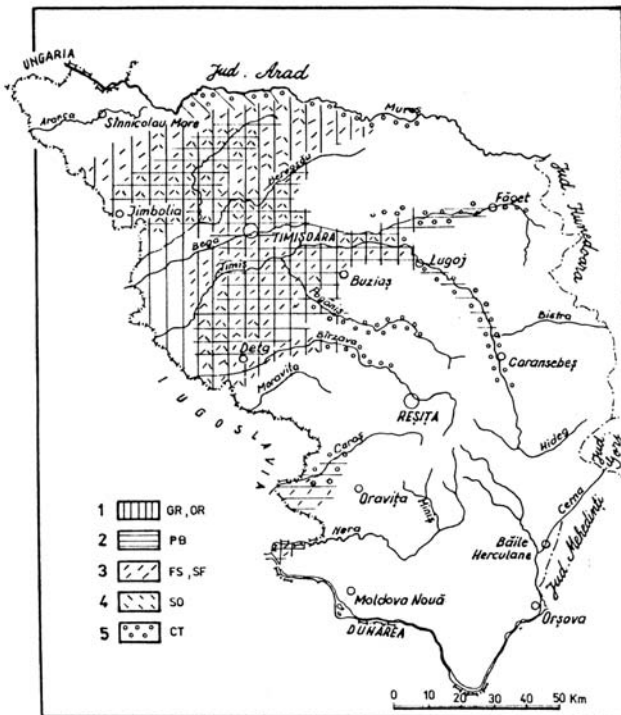


Figure 2. Favourability of the lands in Banat for different agricultural cultures.

Generally estimated, the quality of the arable land in Banat region expressed by natural bonitation, is 51 points (related to the agricultural area) or 63 points (related to the arable area). The value is low. The average quality does not justify the low productivity for the most of the cultivated plants.

The wheat's average productivity, a basic cereal in Banat region, as all over Romania, varies between 2200 and 3200 kg/ha (table 5) productivity lower than the country's average and incomparable with those obtained by the West European countries.

The causes are many and partly known: the lack of rational fertilizing, the technical and economical impossibility of application of a proper agrotechnique, the precarious technical equipment which does not allow the accomplishment of

cultivation at the perfect opportune moment, plus some other objective reasons determined by some climatic oscillations with calamity risks.

Table 5. The average productivity on hectare at the main culture plants in Banat Region.

Culture	Years	The average productivity (Kg/ha)			
		1991	1995	1996	2000
Wheat and rye		2 558	3 200	2 283	2 607
Grains maize		3 273	3 238	3 364	3 635
Sun-flower		1 002	1 268	1 210	8 04
Soya-bean		1 229	1 118	1 400	1 534
White-beet		21 923	18 540	24 114	23 062

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Conclusions

From a brief comparison of the results obtained in the vegetal agriculture sector from Banat to those from countries with a balanced developed agriculture there results the conclusion that we do not keep the pace with the epoque, the Romanian agricultural economy being over forty years behind.

For the rebuilding of the plants culture sector, the following measures are imposed: technical equipments according to quantity as well as quality; the replacement of the proper fertilization techniques with the superintensive fertilizations, actions of proper maintenance of the cultures, a permanent improvement of the biological potential of the soils, making the family farms profitable in size, labour force and the technical equipment, wich will lead to a maximum shortening of the time necessary for interventions.

For the profitability of the agricultural exploitations, actions of support for the local investors (in order to make profitable exploitations, on more extended areas) as well as for the the foreign investors (by land renting and by cultivating plants requested on the world markets) are necesarry.

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