



Some Considerations on Rural Household in the Giurgeu Basin

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Introduction

The intra-mountainous basin of Giurgeu - with a surface of 1620 km² and a population of 82 000 inhabitants – owing to its organization and forms, its functions and lifestyle of population – is a rural area par excellence.

The close ties between people and nature – formed and established throughout the centuries – give a more than plausible explanation to the somewhat different psychology that people here have, as compared to other regions, with more possibilities for “mobility”.

The local people are incompatible with the city. If they leave home, they either return, or, in case they stay, they choose a lifestyle similar to the one they have left.

The tight bondage between man and nature has a strong impact on the way settlements are built up and on how farming is organized, and explain the high values of local identity of dwellers in this area.

Rural Settlements in a Space-Time Context

To better understand problems regarding rural farming we believe it is necessary to clarify certain aspects connected to rural settlement in general. Human settlements are the dominant element in the dynamics of geographical area and they reflect the nature of the place, the lifestyle of the inhabitants, their interaction with nature.

The settlements from the Giurgeu Basin have been strongly influenced by the natural conditions; the surface of the basin was – and still is – a territory on which a forest – favoured civilization came into being. This is reflected in the buildings from the cores of the settlements.

In old times (up to the XIIIth century) the cores were situated at the contact point of the forest with the marsh, in the upper and middle regions of the brooks, affluents of the Mureş River.

Subsequently, migration of the cores took two directions: toward the slopes of the basin and the surrounding mountains, where, through clearing, places were obtained for settlement centers, cereal cultivation, meadows and pastures; and toward the axis of Mureş, because of the existence of low territories and the possibility for developing ways of communication.

Spatial distribution of settlements was and is influenced by a number of factors. Among them in the beginning at least, the natural factors had a decisive importance.

We want to emphasize the role of the relief, water, of the different microclimates, present on the slopes with different displays, and last but not least, as we have already mentioned, the role of the forest from an economic point of view.

Forester roads, once they came into being, have facilitated the appearance of temporary settlements (forester or pastoral), which, with time, have changed into permanent settlements.

Quantitative Distribution of Settlements

In the Giurgeu Basin area, there exist 48 settlements (46 rural ones and two towns), with a resulting density of 3,1 settlements per 100 km² - a value much more reduced than that on national level (5,5). If we also add to this the fact that many rural settlements are, from an administrative point of view, contained within larger rural settlements (the two practically merging), the average density is even lower. The existence of these small settlements, as well as their names, has survived only at the level of local folk tradition.

The areality coefficient value (the average surface belonging to a settlement) is 34 km² /settlement, a rather high value, considering the adverse physical and geographical conditions.

The distance between two settlements varies between 1–2 km and 10–12 km, the average being 7,1 km.

As regards settlements dispersion, we can distinguish three categories:

- settlements with a low dispersion coefficient (0,12 – 1,99), such as Ditrău, Joseni, Remetea, Ciumani, Borzont and Subcetate;
- settlements with an average dispersion coefficient (2 – 3.99), such as Suseni, Chileni, Voşlobeni, Gălăuţaş etc;
- settlements with a high dispersion coefficient (4 –5.99), such as the villages around Sărmaş and Topliţa.

As regards the building dispersion from the settlement core, we can distinguish:

- settlements with a very low dispersion coefficient, often located in the region of high lowland – owing to a tendency of increasing the density of houses in favor of lands for agriculture (under 0.4), such as Ditrău, Lăzarea, Borzont and Joseni;
- settlements with a low dispersion coefficient (1 – 2.99), such as Ciumani, Remetea, Subcetate, Voşlobeni etc;
- settlements with an average dispersion coefficient (3-4), at Valea Strâmbă, Suseni and Sărmaş;
- settlements a high dispersion coefficient (over 5), where the forms of relief and economic specificity (zootechny, silviculture), sometimes spectacularly increase building dispersion. This is the case with the settlements located in the far North of the basin.

Morphological Distribution of the Settlements

The geographical position of settlements explains from a causal point of view the choice for a settlement core. Depending on major aspects of relief, we can distinguish:

- settlements grouped at the high lowland contact with the eastern crystalline strip (Voşlobeni, Lăzarea, Valea Strâmbă etc.);
- settlements grouped at the contact point of the Belcina brook dejection cone with the major bed of the Mureş River (Joseni, Ciumani, Chileni);
- settlements located at the contact between the mountain foot accumulation and the dejections cone of the western bank of the Mureş river (Borzont, Ciutac);
- settlements with cores situated at contact point of high lowland with the fragmented plateaus from the North (Subcetate, Hodoşa, Sărmaş, Gălăuţaş).

As regards altitude, the geographical position of the settlements presents the following groupings:

- settlements below 800 m including the majority of permanent cores;
- settlements between 800 – 1 000 m such as Izvorul Mureşului, Ghiduţ, Fundoiaia, Jolotca, Nuţeni, etc. and a part of the settlement core of Valea Strâmbă, Tincani, Ditrău, Sărmaş;
- settlements situated above 1 000 m – Covacipeter and Țengheller.

Thus, the permanent settlements are grouped in the basin proper, they isolatedly penetrate

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its slopes, and, with rare exceptions, avoid the surrounding mountains. The maximum frequency of settlements cores are located between the altitudes of 700 – 800 m, the most commonly met altitude being around 700 – 750 m. We also witness a general lowering of the cores and of some isolated households, which are attracted to the lower parts of the basin by highways, railways and economic life.

The Rural Farming

As a first organized form of systematic administration of rural territory, rural farming represents a socio-economic system of production and primary consumption, specific from an organizational, structural and functional point of view, of a variable extension, usually articulated to cores of rural settlements. (V. Surd, 1992). Given the particular conditions and relative isolation of the basin, the psycho-sociological dimension of the household is greater, the effect being transmitted to the level of the whole community in the region. The result is a local and regional sense of identity with significant values.

In order to formulate some conclusions with regard to rural farming we have used official statistics and information gathered from a public inquiry, where heads of households were mainly involved.

Starting from the idea that the natural conditions of the basin do not favor – at least at first sight – the development of an agriculture with a diversified structure, we remark from the very beginning the following:

- the agriculture of the region has a deeply subsistential character;
- the community is to a great extent tradition-oriented;
- the phenomenon of overpopulating the rural medium, starting from last decade, is a verity, which has not changed the growth of economic achievements;
- the restricted degree of co-operation among landowners had significant negative effects in the planning and organizing of modern estates with high economic performances.

Basic Characteristics of Rural Farming

Owing to a structural and economical lack of organization of the rural area, started one decade earlier, at a micro-regional level rural farming has undergone significant changes, mostly reflected in a series of feature modifications.

Through a partial or total disorganization of some industrial enterprises from the two towns of the basin, a rather consistent migration process was generated, from these towns toward the rural settlements of the basin. The increase of the number of people per household had as a result the change of some indicators that are strongly connected to rural farming.

The agricultural density of population has an average value of 78 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface. Comparing this value to that of other regions, (even that of plane regions), it is obvious that we have to do with a pronounced overpopulation of the micro-region with rural population involved in agriculture.

There appear significant differences in comparison to the average value. Greater values are registered in the two towns (Gheorgheni, 177 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface; Toplița 80 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface). This also holds good for some villages (Gălăuțaș 110 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface; Ciumani 85 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface; Sărmaș 81 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface).

We should remark that the greatest part of the population in the two towns is involved in agricultural activities. Also, a great part of the population of Gălăuțaș village, who is involved in industrial activities, is also involved in agriculture. The lowest values of agricultural density are registered in the village of Joseni (42 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface), Voșlobeni (42 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface) and Suseni (43 inhabitants/km² of agricultural surface).

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The average value of density per km² of arable surface is four times greater than that of density value per km² of meadow and pasture surface. The area of meadows and pastures is much greater than that of arable surfaces (table 1).

Table 1. The Agricultural density of the population (inhabitants / km² of agricultural surface).

| Nr. | Town - Village | Nr. of inhabitants | Agricultural Surface (km ²) | Agricultural density | Arable sur-face (km ²) | Place/ arable (km ²) | Mea-dows pastures km ² | Place/ mea-dows |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|---|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Gheorgheni | 21129 | 119 | 177 | 13 | 1625 | 106 | 199 |
| 2 | Toplița | 16828 | 211 | 80 | 11 | 1530 | 200 | 84 |
| 3 | Ditrău | 6381 | 81 | 79 | 22 | 290 | 59 | 108 |
| 4 | Joseni | 6024 | 145 | 42 | 30 | 201 | 115 | 52 |
| 5 | Lăzarea | 3677 | 62 | 59 | 28 | 131 | 34 | 108 |
| 6 | Ciumani | 4692 | 55 | 85 | 14 | 335 | 41 | 115 |
| 7 | Suseni | 5329 | 124 | 43 | 26 | 205 | 98 | 55 |
| 8 | Voșlobeni | 2001 | 48 | 42 | 7 | 286 | 41 | 49 |
| 9 | Remetea | 6572 | 84 | 78 | 24 | 274 | 60 | 109 |
| 10 | Sărmaș | 4358 | 54 | 81 | 12 | 363 | 42 | 104 |
| 11 | Gălăuțaș | 2869 | 26 | 110 | 4 | 717 | 22 | 131 |
| 12 | Subcetate | 2258 | 40 | 57 | 12 | 188 | 28 | 81 |

The average value of agricultural surface per household is 4,0 ha/household. Joseni (6,54 ha/household), Suseni (5,84 ha/household), Subcetate, Voșlobeni, and Lăzarea are above this value, whereas Gheorgheni (1,64 ha/household) and Gălăuțaș (2,86 ha/household) are much below the average (table 2).

Table 2. Situation of agricultural surface per household.

| Nr. | Town/Village | Nr. of households | Agricultural surface (ha) | Agr.Surface/household |
|-----|--------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Gheorgheni | 7223 | 11827 | 1,64 |
| 2 | Toplița | 5472 | 21090 | 3,85 |
| 3 | Ditrău | 2352 | 8158 | 3,47 |
| 4 | Joseni | 2223 | 14534 | 6,54 |
| 5 | Lăzarea | 1460 | 6239 | 4,27 |
| 6 | Ciumani | 1777 | 5512 | 3,10 |
| 7 | Suseni | 2115 | 12352 | 5,84 |
| 8 | Voșlobeni | 1019 | 4772 | 4,68 |
| 9 | Remetea | 2628 | 8370 | 3,18 |
| 10 | Sărmaș | 1330 | 5360 | 4,03 |
| 11 | Gălăuțaș | 885 | 2537 | 2,86 |
| 12 | Subcetate | 805 | 4005 | 4,97 |

In the public inquiry we also had in view the situation of estates according to their size. On the average, the small rural estates are predominant, with an agricultural surface between 0,05 – 3,0 ha. They constitute almost 90 %. The predominance of such small estates is mostly characteristic to the town of Gheorgheni and to the village of Gălăuțaș, because their inhabitants are involved in non-agricultural activities. They practice agriculture as a secondary activity and own agricultural surfaces under 0,1 ha. Middle-sized estates can be found in a proportion of 7 %, while

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the large-sized estates (above 6 ha) only amount to 3 %.

As regards types of property, family estates are present in a proportion of 90 %, the rest being represented by private societies, small in number, and belonging either to the state or to the church.

To conclude: from the presented statistical data and that of the inquiry, the subsistence-oriented agricultural surface of the Giurgeu Basin becomes evident. The only viable possibility to pass to market production lies in the co-operation between family estates and settlements – which means a certain complementarity in the process of agricultural production.

Types of Rural Estates

In the bibliography a series of typologies can be found, all of them elaborated according to a number of criteria. In the present material we do not intend to exhaust the subject, for several reasons, one of them being the lack of indispensable data that could facilitate an as accurate as possible establishing of the main types of estates. We try, however, to outline some of the estate types, defined on the basis of the following criteria: the social category of the head of the family, the demographic dimension, the way the components spatially associate and the degree of equipment and amenities. (V. Surd, 1992)

According to the social category of the head of the family, the estates where the head of the family is a peasant are in a proportion of 48 %. They are followed by those estates, where the head of the family is a craftsman (19 %), a worker (16 %), an intellectual (9 %) or of some other category (8 %).

Obviously, these values differ from one settlement to another. In the case of the two towns and that of Gălăuțaș village, the estates where the head of the family is a worker are predominant (35 %). In the case of the villages of Joseni, Suseni and Lăzarea predominant are the estates with peasants as head of the family (over 50 %). In the case of Ciumani and Ditrău craftsmen-led estates overpass sensibly the average value per micro-region, because a great part of the population from these villages own joiner's workshops.

As regards demographical size, the majority of the Giurgeu Basin estates have 2–3 members, the regional average being approximately 2,8 persons/estate.

We should notice a certain polarization in the sense that there is a great number of small rural estates made up of 1-2, generally older people, as well as there is a large number of relatively large estates, with more than 4 people on them.

Small rural estates made up of 1 – 2 members are characteristic especially to the villages of Lăzarea and Voșlobeni, while those made up of 4 –5 members are representative for the villages of Joseni, Ditrău and Sărmaș, and for the town of Toplița.

As regards modalities of spatial association of the components, on a national level we can distinguish between two major types of estates (V. Surd, 1992): with monoblock components and with detached components.

Estates with monoblock components appear only sporadically in the region and are characteristic especially for the maximum-concentration zones of the cores of settlements such as Lăzarea, Ciumani, Joseni, etc. On a micro-regional level, their proportion does not overpass 10 % of the total number of estates. For the area of the basin the characteristic estates are those with detached components. Their proportion overpasses 70 % of the total number of estates. The extensive utilization of the space derives mostly from traditions, a strong specificity of the place being the deep communion with nature of the local people.

An estate with detached components has one or two buildings for dwelling. The main building is usually frontally exposed to face the street. The smaller building, usually in the yard is usually used as dwelling place for summer. Buildings designed for agriculture or for other purposes are placed in most of the cases at the back, and are made of a large building which has a shed for cows and sheep, a pigsty, a henhouse and a barn. It's not characteristic to have spaces for entertainment in the interior of the yard. Yards are usually exaggeratedly big. In many cases non-

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functional spaces occupy more than half of the surface. The subtype of estates with dispersed detached components is mainly present at the outskirts of settlements. In the case of derived forms of habitat, they are present on the slopes of the basin.

With some exceptions, the functionality and aesthetics of these estates leaves much to be desired, giving to the landscape an impression of disorder. They are equipped at a very low level and their economic performance is low as well.

In our attempt to establish basic types of estates according to the degree of equipment and amenities, we particularly insist on the dwelling place stock, but on the accessible and occasional facilities.

The situation of housing and dwelling-space valid for the year 2000 (table 3).

Table 3. The situation of housing and dwelling-space.

| Nr. | Town / Village | Nr. of Inhabitants | Nr. of apartments | Nr. of rooms | Dwelling Surface (m ²) | Report m ² / inhabitant |
|-----|----------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Gheorgheni | 21129 | 7578 | 16010 | 248179 | 11,7 |
| 2 | Toplița | 16828 | 5602 | 12031 | 175884 | 10,4 |
| 3 | Ditrău | 6381 | 2474 | 4976 | 82002 | 12,9 |
| 4 | Joseni | 6024 | 2246 | 4586 | 79276 | 13,2 |
| 5 | Lăzarea | 3677 | 1475 | 3060 | 49710 | 13,5 |
| 6 | Ciumani | 4692 | 1789 | 4340 | 73633 | 15,7 |
| 7 | Suseni | 5329 | 2126 | 4183 | 73345 | 13,8 |
| 8 | Voșlobeni | 2001 | 1027 | 2418 | 38609 | 19,3 |
| 9 | Remetea | 6572 | 2632 | 5812 | 87451 | 13,3 |
| 10 | Sărmaș | 4358 | 1497 | 3205 | 50955 | 11,7 |
| 11 | Gălăuțaș | 2869 | 886 | 1642 | 26624 | 9,3 |
| 12 | Subcetate | 2258 | 809 | 1925 | 32244 | 14,3 |
| | Total | 82118 | 30141 | 64188 | 1017912 | 12,4 |

From the analysis of the values presented in the table, it results that the average value of dwelling space/inhabitant overpasses the average on national level, which is 10,7 m²/inhabitant. This value is very high in Voșlobeni and Ciumani.

In the case of the village of Gălăuțaș, because of the great number of official residences, this value rests much below the regional average. With the exception of a few buildings erected within the last ten years, the great majority of older buildings is made of wood and covered with tiles. Heating is mostly done with wood. Because the basin does not have a gas station, the thermal energy stations in the two towns work on the basis of liquid fuel or wood.

As regards accessible and occasional facilities, there is a relatively good situation, almost half of the households having a bathroom. Every fifth household has an automobile or an auto utility. 70% of the households have a TV set. With the exception of mobile phone, every seventh household has a telephone. The number of PC's is on the increase. Many households from both towns and villages are connected to the cable-TV system.

On the average, approximately 40 % of the estates in the basin can be labeled as having a satisfactory level of facilities and acceptable amenities. 20-20 % belong to households with either low level of facilities and amenities or a good level of facilities and considerable amenities. 10-10 % is represented by the extremes, with the minimum or maximum levels of facilities and amenities.

To conclude, we should note the overwhelming predominance of traditional household on the whole surface of the Giurgeu basin.

In our opinion, the perpetual pauperization of traditional household is inevitable, owing to the ageing of that demographical segment which has kept this form of household alive.

On the other hand, the presence of modern households with good economic performances and a high level of facilities, their generalization, is made more difficult at present, by a diversity of

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factors. Suffice it to mention the perpetual pauperization of the greatest part of the population in the region. This is caused partly by the low level, of agricultural production and its weak diversification and partly because of the imminent collapse of sylvicultural economy and of woodwork, - two activities that have maintained the income of the population in the region at a satisfactory level, along the centuries.

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