



TRADITION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN THE RURAL AREAS OF ROMANIA. EXAMPLES FROM THE NORTH-EASTERN PART OF ROMANIA

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Abstract: *Still of the XIX century, in the modernization process of Romania, one thing of the great problems of the Romanian society has constituted the structure of the Romania society. The modern society is the town and bourgeoisie result. In Romania, on the contrary, the social reports them reunited and opposed on the landowners and peasants. Even if after 1900, after a period of urban relative development, approximately 80% of Romanian population lived in villages. Great rural predomination has strong marketed a large game of social-economic projects and the different interpretations of national past, the Romanian spirituality and destiny. The “Romanian model” past, present and even future has remaining of many points of view a predominant rural model. Northern-Eastern region of Romania, the poorest region of Romania and European Union, is characterising, and in present time, of an accentuating prevailing of a rural medium. Which is the underdevelopment image in the Romanian rural of the Northern-Eastern Region of the country? Which are the mechanisms which can dismantle this underdevelopment and which are the starting point which on this process to can base?*

Key words: *Nord-West of Romania, underdevelopment, rural*

1. RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ROMANIA

From the XIX century, in the process of modernization of Romania, one of the greatest problems of the Romanian society was its structure. The modern society is the result of the cities and the citizenship. In Romania, on the contrary, the social reports were

reuniting and opposing especially the land owners and the peasants. Even if, after 1900, after a period of relative development of the urban sector, almost 80% of the Romanian population was living in villages (in 1905, 91,9% of the Romanian population was living in villages). The massive rural predomination strongly marked, not only a large part of the social- economic projects, but also many interpretations of the national past, the Romanian spirituality, of the Romanian destiny. The past, present and future Romanian model is predominantly rural.

After 1945, the communism tried, undoubtedly, to urbanize the Romanian society. The brutality of its solutions forced the detaching from the rural past but with the price of the lack of balance of all the society structures and with the result of a false idea of modern society, very different from the 20th century modernity.

Immediately after 1990, directly or indirectly, the returning of the unemployed population to the rural environment was encouraged, but, the imperative of the modernization of Romania as a EU member, reclaims the growing of the urban population and the reducing of that from agriculture, knowing the fact that a modern agriculture is the one without peasants. The Romanians did not only inherit the great differences between the urban and the rural from the communism. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the major discrepancy between Bucharest and the rural areas from around was emblematic. The majority of the foreign travelers were shocked by the huge difference between the civilization and the opulence of „Little Paris” and the poorness and underdevelopment of the rural areas around the capital and not only. But the great state of poorness was found in the whole rural world and the peasants did not have land properties. The Great Peasant Uprising from 1907, which included from the Old Kingdom of North Moldova to Oltenia, was a consequence of the grave state of poorness of the Romanian rural world at the beginning of the 20th century.

Although the period between wars brought an improvement of the peasants' state, through the agro-reform in 1923, when a great part of the peasants' farms (1,4 millions) were appropriated, the predominance of the small peasant's lot (10 ha) and the lack of agriculture inventory resulted in a decreased productivity and in an accumulation of many debts of the little landowner (in 1930-1931, the value of the peasants' debts surpassed five times the value of the land) (Pasti, 1997). The lack of productivity of small farms was the reason why the communist systems imposed the collectivization of the agriculture. The collectivization of the Romanian agriculture between 1948 and 1962, though, did not have the expected results. The productivity remained low, in spite of the introduction of agricultural technology, and the remuneration of the cooperators symbolic. These were the causes of the large rural exodus which emptied the Romanian villages of the young generation, generation which headed for the industrialized big cities (Pasti, 1997). During the 80s, although the rural environment was hosting almost 50% of the Romanian population and 25% of the work force, every year, for collecting the crops there were gathered all pupils and a great part of the industrial employees. Here it is a concluding proof of the Romanian agricultural productivity from the communist period (Baker, 2014). Contrary to the state of the Romanian villages, the communist authorities tried a process of systematization, willing to merge them in order make the technical updating more profitable. The lack of professionalism and the brutality of the solutions proposed alerted the entire Europe, and at the insisted protesting of the numerous international institutions, the process was abandoned (Molnar, 2009).

2. THE MECHANISMS OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN RURAL ROMANIAN

The post-communist period found the Romanian rural with a population highly old, with poorly productive systems and with a great lack of infrastructure. The first preoccupation of the authorities after 1990, concerning the rural environment, was the reappropriation of the peasants and shutting down the agricultural cooperatives. Paradoxically, the under-development of the Romanian rural was highlighted by these actions (Molnar, 2005). When the lands were given back, the rural population reestablished quickly the traditional farm which used to be during the interwar period. That was a big step towards under-development and a typical example of privatization with negative consequences. Which were the mechanism which led to this effect?

- Firstly, the peasants were separated from the infrastructure and the technology of the past cooperatives. The irrigation systems, the equipment for the industrial growth of the animals and for industrializing the agricultural products were almost completely lost. The machines and utilities made for mechanizing the agriculture remained under the property of the state and the prices for using these became almost prohibited under the conditions that the state had a control of the material (Pasti, 1997).

- Secondly, the peasants were completely separated from the money. This lack of money in agriculture was immense. Although the government created preferential credits for agriculture, there were no visible results and the possibility, after 2007, of accessing the European funds was impossible, as the old population of the villages does not know how to do that or does not want to (Molnar, 2009).

- Thirdly, the peasants do not have any kind of independent trading system of the agricultural products. In the years with great climate, when the productions are higher, the peasants find it impossible to sell their products because the big buyers are not willing to spend more on the purchasing of smaller quantities from the bad-located small producers (Pasti, 1997).

The logical result of these factors is a social life particular to the Romanian village, so sung by the poets and the politicians, but not accurate for a modern society. The village community has practically no public life. The villagers are preoccupied with their own small farm and isolated in its interior. Moreover, the multitude and complexity of the problems of the Romanian village create a bad image not only for the Romanian investors but for the foreign ones too (Pasti, 1997).

3. EXAMPLES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS OF NORTH-EASTERN ROMANIA

For instance, the profound rural spaces from the north-east of Romania, the less developed places in the EU are very good for exemplifying. Botosani County (see Figure 1), where these places belong to, it was last on the list of places with the less raw income in 2016 in Romania (see Table 1).



Figure 1. The geographical position of Botosani County in Romania

Table 1. Comparative development indicators: Romania and Botoşani county

Indicators (2016)	Romania	Botosani County
GDP per inhabitant – 2016 (€)	9,162	4,910
Urbanization level	54.9	41.9
Number of inhabitants on 1 doctor	376	740
Infant deaths (‰)	15.0	20.2
Weight of population with tertiary education (%)	7.0	6.5
Internet access (% of total population) - 2011	35	24
Average net nominal monthly earnings (€)	440	420

Source: INS, 2016

The three villages from Botosani County studied are placed in three different areas (see Figure 2). The first one, Mihai Eminescu village (Ipotesti) is placed near Botosani city (10km) and it is the place where the national poet grew up. Until 1990, a great part of the population was commuting, working at the industrial companies in Botosani. As proven, during the communism, the peasant's farm had a higher living standard, only when it was used for obtaining outside incomes for a family which depends on the incomes made from working in industry. The richer villages near the cities, where not occupied by peasants, but by commuters, who used to complete their incomes with working in agriculture. The reduction of the industrial activity in Botosani had an impact especially on this category of peasants, who, in spite of the fact that they received their land back, live worse than they used to. Although the village has very nice landscapes and a memorial museum of Mihai Eminescu, which could add to the incomes of the villagers, the tourism is not developed, there being no lodging capacity. The possible clients would have to sleep 10 km away from the village, in Botosani. Apart from the reduced incomes, the explanation for the lack of interest of the villagers is the lack of any promoting, therefore a reduced number in the tourists. Moreover, there is no souvenir boutique and no tourist indications. The access road, for instance, to the forest where the poet used to play in his childhood, is not indicated in any way (see Table 2).

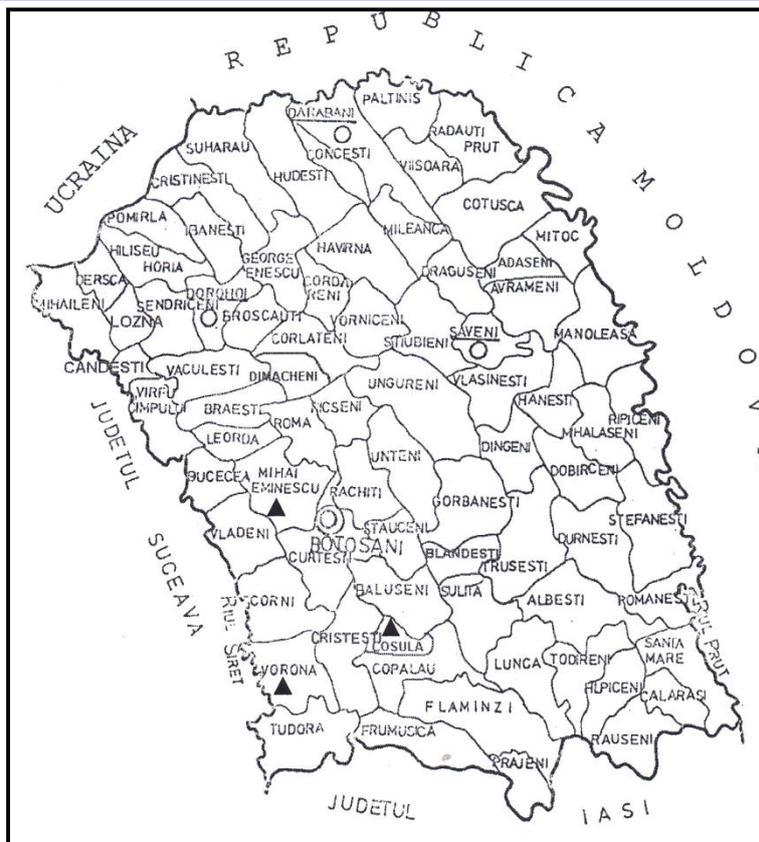


Figure 2. The locating rural villages studied

Table 2. Indicators of rural development in the studied communes (2016)

Indicators	Vorona	Ipotesti	Cosula
Population	7.492	6.005	3.670
Length of public roads (km)		72	46,5
- Modernized	26%	8%	-
- Mettaled	56%	28%	15%
- Earthen roads	21%	64%	85%
Houses		1.931	1121
- With electric energy	100%	96,3%	98,6%
Post office	2	1	1
Subscriber of telephone network	700	241	10
Subscriber of radio	2.712	1.577	800
Subscriber of TV	2.453	1.285	650
Family doctor	2	1	1

Source: Botosani County Council, 2016

The second, Cosula village is situated 20 km far from Botosani, has an important surface of forest and an important medieval architectural monument, a monastery built during the ruler Petru Rares (16th century). Cosula was a very poor village during the communism also, the primary cause being the reduced fertility of the soil and secondly, the historic heritage: it was the land of the monastery for a long time and a great part of its villagers were gypsies, who were deprived of any rights until the 19th century. A

traditional occupation is the manufacturing of the wood, one of the near villages having a title in this way, Padureni (The wood village). Most of its villagers live from what they get from their own small farm. The crops were never enough. The only product that can be used for trade is the garlic, which has very good conditions to grow. There are almost 1500 gypsies (41% of the population of the village) but they are integrated, although they are very poor (see Table 2).

The third, Vorona, is placed in the western side of the city, with great forests and the tourist place, the monastery of Vorona. The natural area and the presence of one of the most representative religious monuments of the area could be favorable to the development of the tourism. Its position on an important national road (Botosani-Falticeni) and the satisfactory traffic infrastructure offers good conditions for travelers. But here, again, there is the problem of the poor farms. Every year on the 9th of September, there is a great number of pilgrims but the only place to sleep is in the monastery area. Although there is a high demand of lodging places, especially during the religious holidays, the village has not been able to develop such places. The primary cause is the lack of money and implications of the authorities which could counsel the villagers how to benefit from the European funds. Unfortunately, the authority intentions for tourist development are only declarative, and the village development level having no possibilities. The foreign investors are not interested as there's a lack of the minimum of utilities (running water, gas) and of the infrastructure (see Table 2).

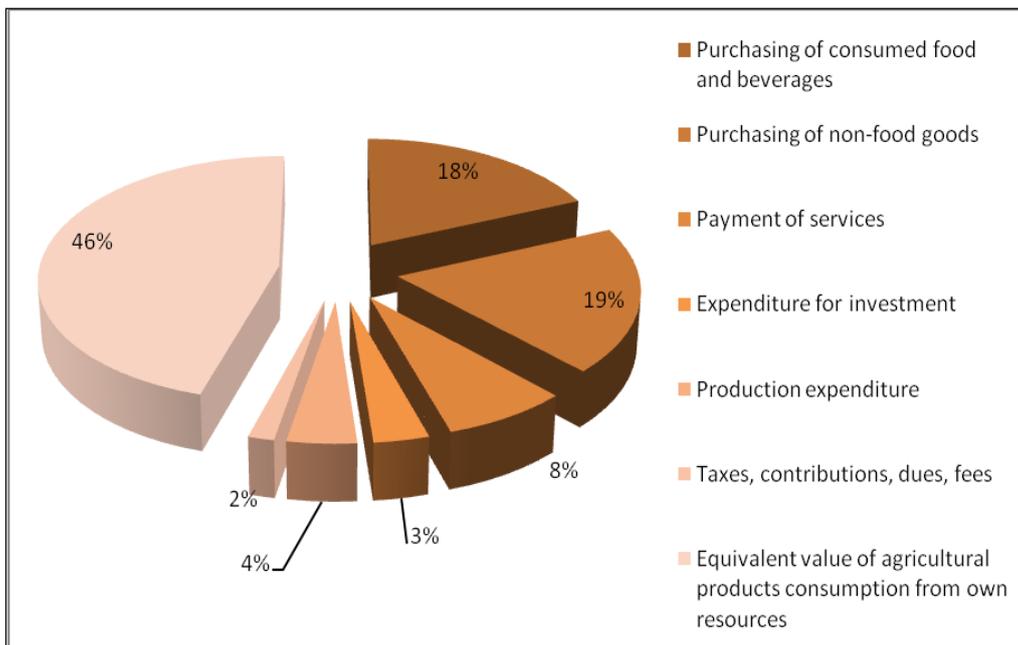


Figure 3. Total expenditure of rural household in NE Region (2016)

The image of the Romanian village, besides the rhetorical claim of being idyllic, the traditional confronts with the under-development. The peasant farm from the north-east of Romania that still display the traditional rural architecture from the beginning of the 20th century offer a bad look on what is intended to belong to a modern society. They still have those communist looks, being made of clay and straw, but offering a good resistance to water. If the traffic infrastructure has a main good road, the others are all country roads. In spite of the great number of population, the Romanian village has a very

small market, therefore the bank, commercial and cultural utilities being very rare (Figure 3). The market expansion from the urban area has not been seen yet in the rural one. According to a study, the average expense of a village family is 30 euros on inedible goods and only 10 for services (Pasti, 1996). Also, the study confirms that they consume their own home-made products. That is why the possibility of the movement of the rural population towards a non-agricultural activity is extremely reduced.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This picture of the rural under-development is fragmentary though. But it indicates two important conclusions. Firstly, it has to be shown that the rural under-development is generated from the returning to the small traditional Romanian farm, after the agro-reform in 1991. This generates poorness, patriarchal social relations and isolation towards urban. Secondly, the Romanian society is not ready for a rural modernization. The urban intellectual elite, who produces ideologies, continues to state that the Romanian village should remain traditional. This whole traditional thing means under-development. Normally, these ideologies are not pragmatic, do not foresee action programs in the rural, but try to legitimize the political representatives with origin in the interwar period.

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