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Transformation of the Rural Areas in Rumania: Directions and Dynamics

In connection with the World Congress of Rural Sociology, held in Bucharest, 1996, rural sociologists grouped at the Rumanian Academy of Sciences prepared two specialist studies¹. Both publications have certain features in common. Their authors and editors concentrated their attention on the fundamental problems of transformation of the rural areas and agriculture, at the time of change of the political system, and availed themselves of the latest statistical data and current empirical research findings. In view of those merits, the statement seems justified that the two mutually complementing volumes make a compendium of a systematized knowledge of the condition and development prospects of the rural areas and agriculture in Rumania.

The collective work: *Satul romanesc contemporan* is meant to depict a synthetic approach to the most essential problems of the Rumanian countryside of today. And, in turn, the second publication: *Coordonante economice si socio-demografice ale satului romanesc in tranzitie* handles matters of a more limited range. Hence the need to begin with a presentation of the publications mentioned above with items of a more general nature.

The starting point of the analyses comprised in the first of these books, making a collective work, is the rather broad assumption that there are two principal factors conclusive to the shape and directions of the transformations taking place in Rumanian rural areas and agriculture. The other factors, though essential as well, are of secondary importance. The first of those determinating factors is the initial condition of rural areas

¹ *Satul romanesc contemporan (Contemporary Rumanian Village)*, ed.: Fulea, M., Florian, V., Sarbu, A., Bucuresti 1996, Academiei Romane.

Fulea, M., *Coordonante economice si socio-demografice ale satului romanesc in tranzitie (The Coordinating Role of Economic and Socio-demographic Factors in Transformation of Rumanian Villages)*, Bucuresti 1996, Academiei Romane.

and agriculture in the period preceding the reform — the transition from collectivized to free-market agriculture.

The second factor is of a legal nature — the form, intentions and implementation of the Law No 18, of 1991, which mapped out the main directions of ownership changes in the Rumanian countryside at the time of transformation.

Chapter I deals with a diagnosis of the condition of the economy, based on actual statistical data. What is interesting from a political point of view, is the fact that the balance-sheet of rural and agricultural resources, presented in this chapter also covers the Republic of Moldavia (Republica Moldova).

Implementation of the reform, the legal basis of which is the above mentioned Law of 1991, encounters numerous difficulties which is not surprising. It is interesting, however, that the course of implementation of the reform is referred, by most of the authors, to the concepts of rural sociologists from Western countries (Cf. Placide Rambaud, Gilbert Durand, Jean-Louis Belliard, Werner Pevetz, Immanuel Wallerstein). The problem of adequacy of the western models of both transformation of rural areas and social development of rural communities in the post-communist countries is also discussed by rural sociologists in Poland.

A characteristic trait of the second of the two books mentioned above is the narrow range of problems handled by the author. Attention is focused, above all, on the economic, demographic, social and educational problems of rural communities at the time of radical structural transformation. As regards changes in the area of the economy which are liable to produce accelerative effects, in the social, demographic and educational sphere, it is imperative to stimulate individual farms due to securing parity of prices of agricultural products and those of the means of agricultural production, with prices of crude oil being of particular importance. A long-range strategy is needed regarding economic regulations of agricultural production ensuring not only its growth per hectare but also the improvement of the quality and widening the range of agricultural products.

What is necessary from the social point of view is 'offering a continued encouragement' (see p. 45) to individual farming which is more susceptible to innovations and showing greater flexibility than the state sector of agriculture, in the drive for modernization and adjustment to fluctuations on the market. It is also necessary to offer resistance to frustration appearing among farmers who have not, as yet, attained the expected results from the cultivation of the land regained due to the reform.

Structural changes connected with economic transformation have brought about essential demographic consequences in the Rumanian countryside. The data pertaining to these consequences derive from statistical

reports and materials, and also from the surveys carried out by the author in the years 1974–1994.

It appears that a notable number of people of advanced age and pensioners, 43.5% in 1992 (see Table 5, p. 93) have remained in the rural areas in Rumania. Employment in agriculture, both its private and state sector, shows a considerable rate of feminization: 58.7% (Table 6, p. 94). The average age of farmers employed in the three sectors is 40, whereas that of persons resident in the countryside and employed in non-agricultural lines — from 20 to 39.

An essential problem is the low rate of rural youth at universities and colleges of higher education. In the Engineering College of Bucharest only 10.6% of students at the Department of Mechanics (in 1993) came from the country and 89.4% from towns. The corresponding data for Medicine (Institute of Medicine, Bucharest) were 5.5% and 94.4%, respectively. In the total community of students of rural background, there was a distinct predominance of women.

The crucial period of transformation of the Rumanian countryside — the process consolidated recently due to the fact of power having shifted to the right — has created for scientists an extremely favourable situation from the cognitive, theoretical and methodological point of view. In the areas of the Rumanian rural sociology, the theoreticians' imagination had been stirred and solid field work taken up. Its first results were used by the authors of the books here discussed. Nevertheless, a full synthesis of the changes, reforms and modernization processes taking place at present is still a matter of the future because ownership structure in rural areas is still far from stable.