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RURAL DEVELOPMENT VERSUS TRADITIONALISM
AND SYNERGY VERSUS POVERTY
IN RURAL ROMANIA

Abstract

The objective of my study is to introduce the reader to a poor agrarian world in post-socialist Romania with its problems, linked by institutional change, decentralisation of power and cultural reshuffle. Several years have passed since 1989 and the economic problems in agriculture are in a continuous process of transition. Decollectivisation which began in 1990 and the law regarding the restitution of agricultural terrain found the people unprepared. They found themselves in front of a big new challenge: passing from a very centralised and harsh economic system to a market economy. Unfortunately, the mentality, the institutional frame and the structure of Romania's villages were unprepared for this change.

Nowadays, in the Romanian countryside many families live in stagnation and isolation, working on small farms and programmes of rural development are hard to implement there.

Keywords: rural Romania, rural development, poverty, traditionalism, negative synergy.

INTRODUCTION

In my article I present an extensive study carried out in three rural regions in three Romanian counties: Arad, Hunedoara and Gorj.

The two tendencies, the scattering of post-socialist State power and decentralisation, affect Central and East European regions in different ways. I present the problems of agriculture in these three regions and try to answer the following questions: why can the concepts of rural development not function there? Why have the strategies of development not been implemented?

Transition from centrally planned to pluralistic systems has to be considered as a particular and in some respect unusual process of institutional, economic and social change. It differs from region to region, from country to country, and even from county to county. In post-socialist Romania nowadays, most farmers are the owners of family holdings.

Currently, about 85% of agricultural land is privatised. The main form of privatisation in Romania – as in most of the acceding countries – was restitution. In this respect it is important to know that the land reform carried out after World War II restricted farm size per family to 5 ha. Therefore, restitution in post-socialist times gave rather small plots of land per family. In addition, where such limits did not apply it was originally ruled that no more than 10 ha were to be restituted per family. This constraint was addition; lack of financial resources was another implicit restriction in setting up farms during the restitution that would be sustainable in the long run. As a result privatisation led to an agricultural structure dominated by small-scale farms. To make things worse, plots are very fragmented.

Of a total of 3.9 million holdings in Romania 40% or 1.6 million of them cultivate less than 1 ha of land. This 40% of farms cultivate 6% of the total acreage (i.e. 10,525,000 ha). This leaves about 2.4 million farms, which operate on more than 1 ha. Altogether 2.7 million or two thirds of the farms are below 3 ha with a total combined acreage of slightly more than 20% of the total. The limit initially put on the size of land to be received by a family during restitution can be seen in the number of farms with a size above 10 ha. Though the category between 10 and 20 ha still has nearly 290,000 farms, in the categories above that there are only a few holdings; they number between 20 and 100. The exception to this is the category above 2,000 ha (255 farms), cultivating 11% of the agricultural area.

Most of these small units develop a subsistence production being decapitalised and not having an adequate material foundation. In 1991, through the law 18/1991, the ex-landowners received their former terrains. But, the ex-C.A.P.s (Agricultural Cooperatives of Production) were already destroyed (the agricultural machines were stolen or sold at very low prices, the system of irrigation was destroyed and buildings were demolished). Few people had agricultural machines and equipment to work the land intensively and at a high standard. The so-called "Agricultural Reform" (1991) in fact meant returning to primitive agricultural practice. Because of that, the only options for the peasants remained traditionalism (old habits) in both fields: agricultural work, local customs and norms. Since then, Romanian agriculture traversed a long and difficult way and the situation of some peasants seems unchanged since 1991.

In many agricultural regions peasants work in a traditional manner, with scarce resources and old technical equipment. Productivity is very low, the goods, which are obtained, are destined for family consumption and do not enter the national economic system. This is also the case of the regions that I have studied: villages

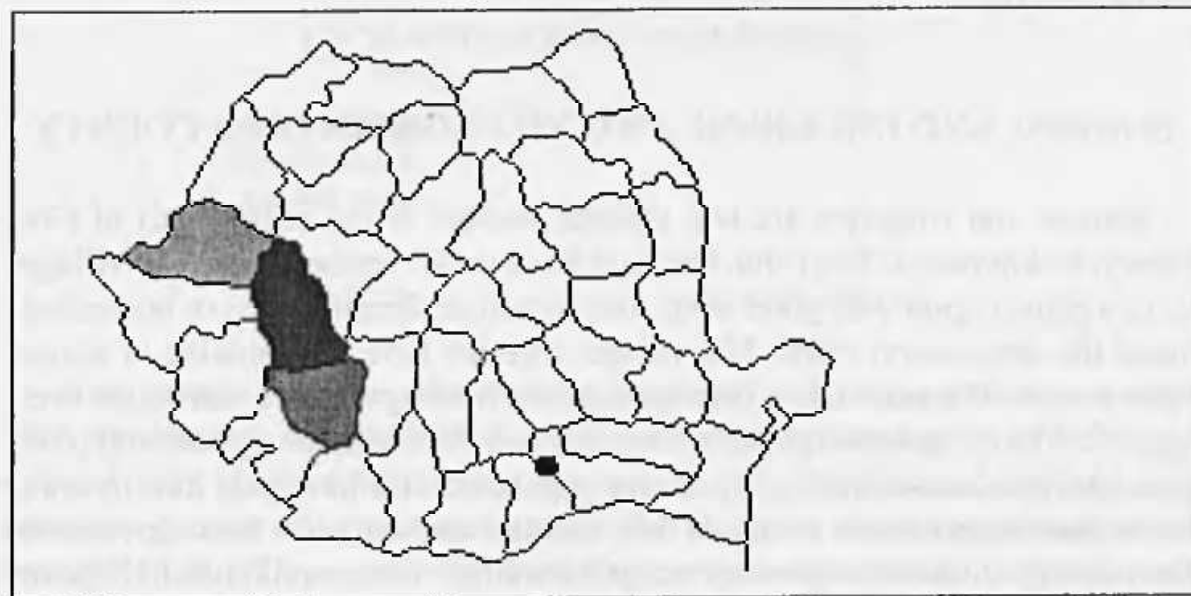
Pilu and Varsand in county Arad, Jiu Valley region in county Hunedoara and Budieni and Ungureni villages in county Gorj. Although, the relief, the climate and the culture of the people in these three regions are different, their problems regarding agriculture are similar:

- people work the land with rudimentary possibilities;
- agricultural production is very low and is destined for their own consumption;
- people do not trust the agricultural politics of the Romanian Government;
- people complain about the lack of preoccupation of the Government regarding their problem;
- they are suspicious of the local authorities;
- generally, they are poor and cannot develop a profitable business;
- they have no possibility of setting up a local association;
- the lack of specialists in the modern agricultural field.

In my study I take all these problems and the consequences into consideration. I also discuss the differences between these regions, not only the similarities.

Map 1

The counties which have been studied: Arad, Hunedoara and Gorj and their position on the map of Romania



It is important to underline that, because of the mentioned conditions, the concept of *rural development* can hardly be implemented in these regions. The concept of rural development is a multi-level, multi-actor and multifaceted process (Ploeg, 2000) and can be seen from multiple points of view:

- as a global interrelation between agriculture and society;

- as a new developmental model for the agricultural sector;
- implying major changes at the level of personal identities, strategies, and practices, interrelations and networks;
- implying changes at the level of policies and institutions.

In my case study I show, on the basis of some examples, from all the three studied regions, that these conditions are not fulfilled. I try to answer the following question: why these conditions cannot be touched in these three regions?

Another concept that I discuss is *synergy*.

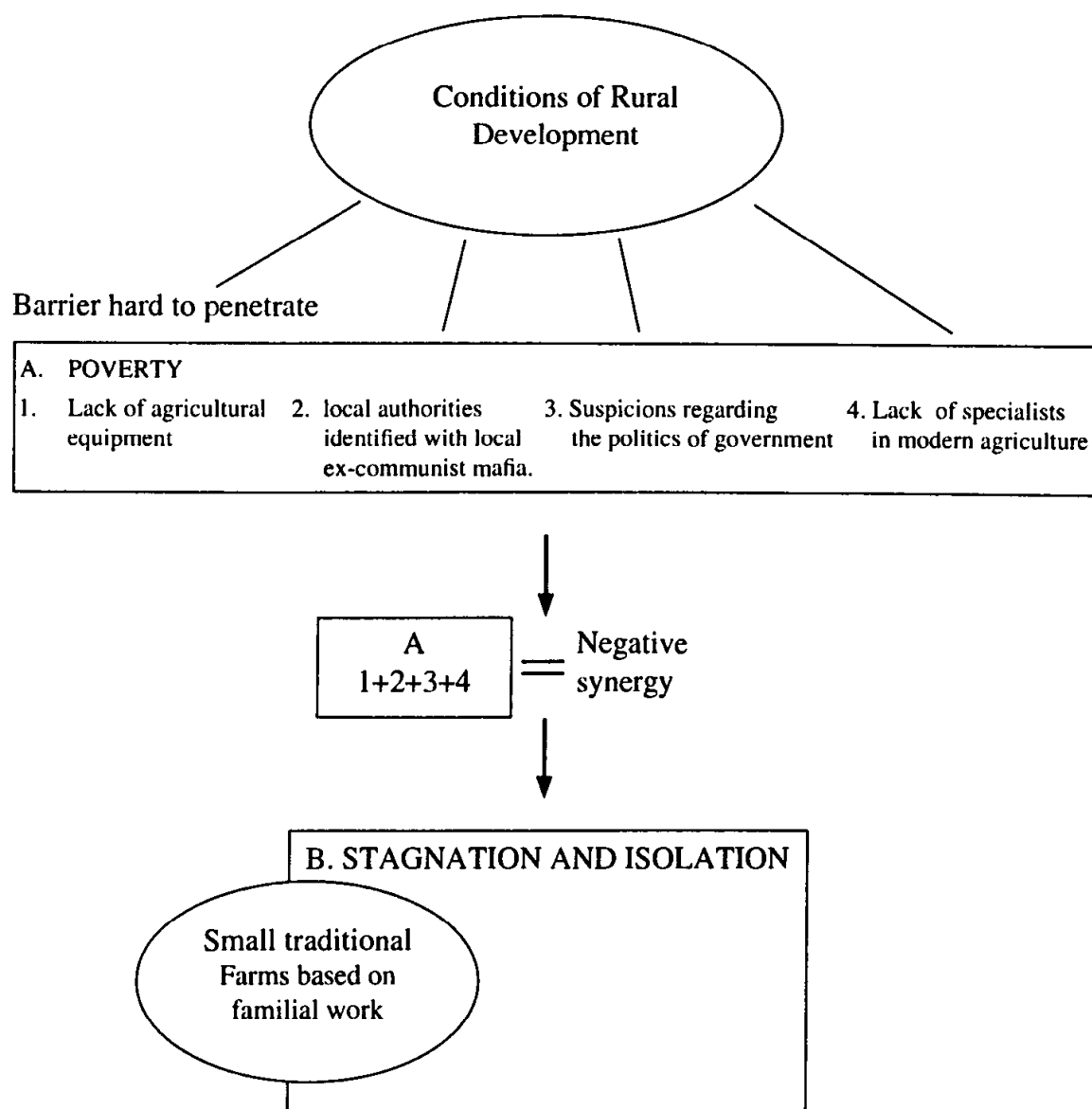
Synergy is defined as a linkage between two or more entities, whose joint efforts produce quantitatively higher effects than those produced by the efforts of the same entities (Brunori, Rossi, 2000).

In the regions where I have conducted my research, I observed a phenomenon that I characterised as “negative synergy.” There are some conditions in these regions, which altogether make almost impossible a regional development based on agriculture. These conditions are linked especially by the poverty of the people. In my study, I try to develop a theoretical framework, which explains how socio-economic conditions could sometimes stop rural development. I also try to explain how the conditions of harsh poverty create a phenomenon of “negative synergy”, a concept that can be defined as a sum of negative influences, which can make rural development almost impossible, even stopping potential improvements. (see fig. 1).

BUDIENI AND UNGURENI, TWO VILLAGES IN GORJ COUNTY

Budieni and Ungureni are two villages situated in the central part of Gorj county, 15 km east of Targu-Jiu, the main town in this region. These two villages lie in a plane region with good fields, rich in humus. Small forests or bushes surround the agricultural fields. The villages together have a population of almost 4000 people. The majority of these people live from agriculture, having an average of 2–3 ha of agricultural fields. They are very dependent on agricultural products. However, almost half of the active population also have paid jobs in town. Those families are much better off than families who only live from agriculture. The majority of these people, especially the younger ones, would like to improve their incomes by working in town, but they have not found jobs: “I would like to have a job in town. This would be easier for me. I could earn around 140 euro per month and my wife could do the agricultural work. If she couldn’t manage this work, I would pay somebody 30–40 euro per month to help her. Our situation would be better (M.N. a 28-year-old man).”

Figure 1



Many people in these villages have problems with earning enough money. They need money for agricultural work like ploughing, sowing etc.: “This agricultural work really devastates us, we have to pay approximately 160 euro to prepare a hectare of agricultural terrain. For us this is an enormous amount of money!” (A.R. a 55-year-old man from Ungureni). In Budieni and Ungureni only 5 people have tractors and agricultural machines. For these people agricultural work is a real business. All the peasants from these villages appeal to them to work their fields. This is a kind of oligopoly market. Therefore, services are bad and the peasants often complain that, their plots are not well ploughed.

To earn some money the peasants from here go to the market in Targu-Jiu to sell their agricultural products, especially eggs, poultry and vegetables. To do this, they have to wake up early in the morning to catch the first bus, which leaves

Ungureni at 6.00. After that, they load their goods on to the bus and go to town. The distance to Targu-Jiu is at least half an hour and the price of a return ticket is 1 euro. When they return in the evening, after selling their goods, some may have made a profit of between 3 and 10 euro, in the best of cases.

Another problem for the peasants is drought, which has been swooping upon this zone for many years. Unfortunately, Budieni and Ungureni have never had an irrigation system because the closest river is almost 40 km away. Some inhabitants understand that it is too expensive to build an irrigation system in their village: "I don't know if it would be profitable to build such an extensive system of irrigation and I don't know if such large expenses could be recovered by agricultural production. Additionally, here the land is fragmented, the majority of people have 2–3 ha of land. An association is needed for such an extensive project. But, please tell me who could put together the agricultural terrain? Eventually through a government decree, as in the time of Communism! (P.N. a 58-year-old man, an ex-engineer, currently a pensioner)."

In times of drought, peasants' crops decrease and sometimes they remain without food for their animals. Knowing this fact, some opportunist businessmen come to these villages and suggest that the peasants sell them their cattle. Not having fodder, the peasants sell the cattle at a very low price: "The businessmen who buy cattle come to the village and ask us to sell them our cattle. They offer us a ridiculous price. Two weeks ago, one of these men wanted to give me only 100 euro for a big ox. I didn't accept that and I walked with my ox to the cattle market, 17 km away, where I sold the ox for twice that price. (M.N. a 28-year-old man)."

Drought is not the only problem of the peasants, but so is the general access to water. There are no water pipes. People draw water from wells which are sometimes over 40 m in depth. During the drought, in order to keep their gardens alive, people have to sprinkle their vegetables at least once a day. That means that they sometimes have to draw one hundred or more pails (a pot of ten l of water) in a day. This is a really exhausting physical task! In fact, almost all the tasks in these villages require physical work. The gardens around the houses are worked with hoes and rakes; but not only the gardens. So as not to spend money on herbicides, the peasants even work their agricultural 2–3 ha terrains with hoes. This has to be done twice in a season for the maize culture and once for the vineyard.

In Communist times the situation was almost the same. An old woman who had worked in the C.A.P. system said: "It was hard then and it is hard now! Then, we had our fields in the C.A.P. and what the cooperative paid us was a mockery. Today we have the land but we don't have agricultural machines to work it. Due to the fact that we worked in the C.A.P. we have the lowest pensions. I only get 15 euro per month. Others have even smaller pensions. What can we do? We are still working in agriculture. We don't have another profession! At least to be better for our children! But they cannot find jobs anywhere. From this point of view it was

better in Ceausescu's times. If we could, we would dig him up and put him in his old place to lead the country. (M.C. a 68-year-old woman from Budieni)." To escape poverty some younger people leave these villages and go to work in Serbia or Hungary. The rest of the people accuse the Romanian government for their lack of preoccupation regarding their problem: "These guys really want to bury us. I don't know what they have to do for us, but I think that this situation is extremely desperate (M.C. a 68-year-old woman from Budieni)." Other more educated people found explanations for the situation in Romanian agriculture: "I think, the government made a grave mistake by returning the agricultural terrain to the people. They knew that our peasants have small plots of fields. They should have formally returned the fields to the people and the C.A.P. should have remained. The people destroyed the C.A.P. and now what are they doing? They work as in the Middle Ages! (P.N. a 58-year-old man, an ex-engineer, currently a pensioner)."

The C.A.P. has now disappeared. Only a ruin from the old C.A.P. still remains as evidence of the past. In other villages the people who led the C.A.P. usually shared the goods of the Cooperative. In these villages it wasn't the same. We can find this from a very interesting statement: "To be sincere, the people from here didn't have too many things to steal from the C.A.P. The agricultural machines were already old. The engineers left the villages and... the peasants took what they could, but I told you, not very valuable things... This was the end. Now, you still can see the ruin of the old C.A.P. (C.M. a 57-year-old man from Budieni)."

The end of the C.A.P. in 1990 meant the end of modern agriculture in these villages. Now, the people work the land in the manner I have already described: with hoe and rake, collecting maize by hand and carrying it with wagon and horses. The farms are very fragmented and on such fields intensive agriculture is impossible. Nevertheless, at least a good new can delight us: working the land in this old-fashioned manner it is very safe for pollution. Few people use fertilisers for their fields. They prefer to work the land with the hoe.

VARсанд AND PILU, TWO VILLAGES IN THE NORTH OF ARAD COUNTY

Varsand and Pilu are two villages situated in the Northwest of Arad county, on the border with Hungary, on the Crisul Alb River. They are plane villages and agricultural land is situated on both sides of the river. Here, conditions are excellent for irrigation. The lands are crossed by deep channels, which are always full of water and communicating with Cris River. In spite of these good conditions for irrigation, people wait for the mercy of God regarding rain, especially in recent years when they have been severely punished by heavy drought. The inhabitants

of these villages are mainly elderly people, who live from agriculture. Most of them have 3–4 ha of agricultural terrain, which is worked with rudimentary methods and technology. The soil is generally good but eroded because of wind, drought and mono-culture systems. Acidity of the soil is very high in some places.

Both villages together have an arable surface larger than 2000 ha, but only 70% of this is cultivated. Land abandonment has recently become a frequent practice. Elderly people are dying and only few of the younger people have the motivation to work in agriculture, which is seen as one of the most unattractive activities.

People usually have small farms based on family work, which is a very similar situation to the rest of the country.

They breed cattle, pigs, poultry and sheep and work their fields. Due to these diverse activities, farm production is very low and intensive agriculture could only be a dream. The peasants have worked in this manner for a long time and they culturally reject people who don't continue to do so. Most people are expected to have two or three pigs, two or three cows and a dozen chickens. Also, a good farmer must plant both maize and wheat. Farmers, who don't have all these, are not considered good agriculturists.

Collectivisation which took place here in the Communist period, was a long, harsh and painful process. De-collectivisation was similar, creating many social tensions.

The C.A.P.s in this region were very well organised and always made their quota. They also had more activities, having farms with animals, land with wheat, maize, barley, sunflowers and clover. In those times there existed a system of irrigation on a surface of over 10 ha, where vegetables grew. In other places they grew honeydew melon and watermelon. The terrains were fertilised and production was high. In spite of this, people were paid very little for their work. Like the peasants from Gorj county, they have small pensions, from 8 to 15 Euro per month. The elderly people from Varsand remember how their C.A.P. was often praised in the local press. Therefore, they cannot understand why they have the smallest pensions in Romania.

Nowadays, in post-communism, de-collectivisation has proved to be a source of discord. Immediately after the 1989 Revolution, the C.A.P. was destroyed. The people took whatever they considered to be their part for the work in the cooperative. They didn't even consider this illegal but compensation for their small salaries during the entire period of collectivism: "Everybody took whatever they could. Nobody thought about others. Some took irrigation pipes, others even took all the materials from the cooperative's buildings. The engineers were luckiest because they organised an auction and bought the cooperative's machinery at a very low price (H.D. a 62-year-old-man from Varsand)."

The "sharing" of the C.A.P. capital was only the beginning of the discord. An explosive situation was created by implementing the law 18/1991. As in other

parts of post-communist Romania, the county authorities established the leaders of "the land-sharing commissions". Being on good terms with these authorities, the mayor and the cooperative's engineers reached the head of these commissions. Interpreting the law in a favorable manner for themselves and their friends, the heads of these "land-sharing commissions" took the best agricultural plots. Knowing the situation of the plots very well, these engineers even began to work the fields of those people who did not have the possibility of working or claiming it. Thus, they soon became very rich, having agricultural machines and cheaply buying many plots from elderly people. Now, the majority of peasants depend on these people, to plough their land and liberate the certificates of the propriety for these lands. The ordinary peasants now complain regarding the activity of these commissions: "These people are really jackals, they are the head of the commissions and from 1991 until now they haven't managed to liberate for us, our certificate of propriety of the lands. They are not in a hurry, because they want to maintain our dependence on them in any problem (A.L. a 62-year-old man from Pilu)."

The law 18/1991 not only offered many possibilities of interpretation, but also was bad and created tensions through its essence. This law even offered agricultural plots to people who had never had land before. All people who had worked in the C.A.P. generally received land, especially engineers and managers of other cooperatives, as well as gypsies, who have never had agricultural fields, but who worked in these cooperatives: "I think the people who made this law were crazy! Why did they give plots to the gypsies? The gypsies have never had agricultural land and, of course, they sold these plots to other people (A.R. a 55-year-old man from Pilu)."

Another problem, which created tension in these villages, was the phenomenon of migration from towns back to the villages of the people who worked in industry. This began to be a common phenomenon after the collapse of many factories in Romanian heavy industry, especially after 1992. As Alina Mungiu-Pippidi observed in her book, *The sickle and the bulldozer*: the Romanian peasant has a psychology of limited resources and after the collapse of Communism, this manner of thinking became a national psychology. So, the Romanian peasant is very suspicious. He lives with the impression that resources are very low and anyone who works near him will exploit these resources and his quota will remain smaller than before. This idea is well sustained by our interviews: "why didn't these people remain in the town? They have left the village when here was hard and now they leave the towns because life became difficult there. They are like chameleons!" (N.M. a 60-year-old woman from Pilu).

In fact, a lot of people from Romanian rural areas have a hard life. Their farms are small and they live on subsistence agriculture. Their contribution to the national economy is almost null. Their benefit is obtained from hard physical work and is reduced to their own consumption. The poorest people live in

a system of natural economy. They consume only what they can produce and relations with the exterior are very limited. This is the situation in isolated villages like Budieni and Ungureni. In the villages situated on the national route, like Varsand and Pilu, the peasants try to sell their products to truck drivers who transit the country. This is the case of Varsand, which is a border village. Another strategy used by people from these two villages, especially by the youngest, is to run a small business in Hungary. In fact, they just buy some products from Romania and sell them in Hungary, or vice versa. In these conditions, agricultural activities became very unattractive, which was well observed by an old peasant from Varsand: "Working in agriculture is not an easy task and... the younger people are not accustomed to working in hard conditions. And, tell me the reason for working in agriculture? They go to sell cigarettes in Hungary every day. Selling cigarettes is an easy task, but working in agriculture requires hard physical tasks... In fact, they are smart guys; with this business they sometimes even earn 400 euro per month. I don't earn anything from agriculture (H.D. a 62-year-old man from Varsand)."

The chance for peasants in this region would be to create farming associations. But, the people are very suspicious regarding any form of cooperation. This suspicion was consolidated by some events which took place after the 1989 Revolution: "some people with trucks came to our village, telling us to sell them our agricultural goods, especially maize and wheat. They promised us that would come every year and that they would even set up a family association here. We were happy because our possibilities of transport are very limited... I gave them two tons of maize and I know a man who gave them twelve tons... These people gave us receipts for our goods and they never came back to give us money, as they had promised. When we went to the police with these receipts, they proved to be false (B.D. an 83-year-old from Varsand)."

In such conditions fear of any form of association and land abandonment in Varsand and Pilu became widespread. One chance for agriculture here seems to be the engineers who even work the abandoned land. It is really hard to say if it is a good or bad thing that the ex-communist opportunist elite benefits from the incoherence of a post-communist transition and laws. In any case, for agriculture this is good. For the ordinary peasant this is an immense injustice.

CAMPUL LUI NEAG AND DEALU BABII, TWO VILLAGES IN HUNEDOARA COUNTY

Campul lui Neag and Delul Babii are two villages situated in the south of Hunedoara county, in a mountain region, in the area called Jiu Valley. Jiu Valley region is famous and well known not only for its old inhabitants or its folkloric traditions and rural development. Jiu Valley is famous as an important industrial

area. In the middle of the 19th century coal exploitation began there. Since then, the natives of Jiu Valley had to live close to this activity and to adapt to these new conditions. In spite of the influences generated by working class culture, this community has not changed too much. Of course, they have been influenced by this mining culture but their community has kept the cultural core. This was possible because the community is very hermetic. The name of this community is *momarlani* and the peasants who form this community have a special sense of pride. They have populated the territory of Jiu Valley for hundreds of years. The main occupation of the *momarlani* people is agriculture, especially breeding sheep, cattle and pigs. The cultivation of plants is not so important, because agricultural land, the geography of the area and the climate cannot permit such an extensive activity. Few plants grow very well (maize, millet and potatoes), and they are cultivated by the *momarlani*. In summer and autumn they mow the grass for the animals, store and transport it. They have large pasturelands in the hills and mountains. Their houses are usually situated on the borders of industrial towns of the Jiu Valley. This fact permits them to carry out all these agricultural activities.

Campul lui Neag and Dealul Babii had the chance of being among 9% of the villages which were not touched by the syndrome of collectivism in the Communist period. There were some attempts to develop C.A.P. systems, but all of these were unsuccessful: "When I was just a boy, there was an attempt of the Romanian State to set up a C.A.P. (Agricultural Cooperative of Production). But it was unsuccessful. Finally the Communist elite understood that this commune farm couldn't be viable. The people didn't work very much for this farm. They were accustomed to working in the family and for the family, not for the State." (M.V. a 45-year-old man from Dealul Babii).

Although the peasants from Jiu Valley were not affected by collectivism, they suffered other influences exerted by the Communist regime in Romania. After 1948, many *momarlani* men were employed in the coal industry. This fact began to be visible especially in the diminution of the agricultural activities and of the agricultural production in the region: "In 1938, the year of maximal economic productivity in the inter-war period, Uricani and the surrounding villages (Campul lui Neag and Valea de Brazi) had over 10,000 sheep, over 2,000 cattle and almost 600 horses. After half a century this amount of animals has decreased considerably, being only 35% of this sum" (Fagas, 2000).

The industrialisation of this region drastically affected not only agricultural production but also the lifestyle of the people, gender relations and the folkloric traditions of the region had dramatic effects on the environment of Jiu Valley. Many areas were completely destroyed, and all these without economic profit. For example, Campul lui Neag had been a wonderful place, full of tradition, a really mythical space. Additionally, it is situated on the border of "Retezat National Parc". In spite of this, the leader of the Communist party decided to begin

a massive coal exploitation when the geological prospecting in Communist times, proved the presence of coal under this village. Soon after this discovery, vast coal exploitation started here. Firstly, the peasants were evacuated from their houses and the ground was prepared for the future carrier. Secondly, the Communist engineers tried to implement an innovation: they tried to extract the coal directly from the surface, but not in the normal way, with deep wells. The result was a big pit, one km in diameter. But, ironically the coal, which was found there was very poor in quality and quantity. The only result was ecological disaster. Even today, many people are working to repair these damages. The duration of this carrier was less than ten years. The reparations of the damages started in 1992 and have not yet finished. In addition, the ecosystem has been destroyed there and the real peasants from this region have become miners. Old traditions have almost disappeared. A succinct economic analysis shows us that the Romanian State lost millions there. Nowadays, the feeling of Campul lui Neag's native people regarding this project are baffling: "When the carrier began here, more than 40 houses were destroyed and the people living in them, expropriated. Some of them built other houses high up, in the mountains, not to be touched by Communism's projects again. Other people left the village and bought apartments in Uricani town. Most of them started working in the coal industry. The Communist regime was bad, because it destroyed the village, but I can say that it was also good, because it offered work for all the people (G.N. a 52-year-old *momarlan* man from Campul lui Neag)."

The peasants from Dealu Babii were rather lucky as regards the heavy industry projects. Their village is situated in high hills surrounding the Vulcan town. They are an insular community and the small dimensions of the village made it impractical for collectivism and its purposes. There was no coal mining there. However, the lifestyle of the people was also affected by Communist politics from Jiu Valley and especially due to the "cult of labour" which was ideologically implemented. In this context, all the *momarlani* men from Dealu Babii were determined to work in coal exploitation. This was also because of law 25 from 1950, which did not allow the head of the family not to have a hired job. Anyone who did not have a hired job was arrested. In spite of this, the *momarlani* people never left their old habits linked by tradition. The most important of these is agricultural work. Even in Communist times, the *momarlani* had their small private farms and they worked in agriculture. Unfortunately, nobody from the top of the Communist Party had thought of developing agriculture in this area. On the contrary, a high system of quota to the State was imposed for private agricultural workers. In such conditions, the *momarlani's* farms remained in their old form.

Nevertheless, good news came to Jiu Valley, concerning farming after 1997. That year the Romanian government began a series of projects regarding the de-industrialisation of that area. In this context, many people lost their jobs, others

renounced their jobs in factories and mines and began to resume working more intensively on their private farms. They still work in the old manner, keeping their old habits. This seems to be an impediment for the implementation of the concept of rural development. However, thinking of the experience of other regions rural tourism could be introduced. Nature, natural food produced by the *momarlani*, old tradition and folklore could attract foreign tourists. In this context the communities of *momarlani* from Jiu Valley could have an important role in the economic development of the region. Unfortunately, there are some impenetrable barriers for such projects. Firstly, the lack of infrastructure and secondly, the bureaucratic system. Additionally, the Jiu Valley region is still identified with industry and coal exploitation and few people are interested in making investments in this area. Some *momarlani* complain about the lack of preoccupation of the Romanian government regarding their problem: "In this region there are no services in the agricultural field. Last summer I wanted to buy five Holstein cows, but I couldn't. Here there are no possibilities for rural development because there are no services in this field. I have a lot of work on my farm. I really don't have time to go hundreds of km to buy these animals. It is a pity that the Government of Romania is not interested in developing agriculture in this region. In my opinion there are good possibilities for these activities. (P.N. a 45-year-old man from Maleia)."

The situation of Dealu Babii and Campul lui Neag in Jiu Valley region seems to be better than that of the villages suffering the consequences of collectivisation. Nevertheless, here agriculture could only be developed in one direction, i.e. sheep and cattle breeding. Rural tourism is another possibility, which can be taken into consideration. But, the traces of heavy industry make these projects almost impossible for the moment. Waiting for a good opportunity, the *momarlani* from Jiu Valley are still living in the realm of their old traditions as regards lifestyle and farming.

ARGUMENT FOR STUDYING THESE ROMANIAN REGIONS AND VILLAGES

I chose to study these three regions and villages, because they are different economically, geographically and culturally. They are different as regards the programmes which could be implemented here. Pilu and Varsand have excellent conditions for irrigation, but Budieni and Ungureni do not. These villages also had a different past regarding the collectivisation of agriculture. The villages in Jiu Valley have been among 9% of agricultural regions which could not be collectivised. In the villages in Arad county collectivisation was harder to implement than in Gorj county because of the people's opposition and their distrust regarding this process. These regions are also historically different. They belong to three Roma-

nian regions: Oltenia (villages in Gorj), Transylvania (villages in Jiu Valley) and Crisana (villages in Arad county).

Studying these three regions we can have a good comparative view of rural Romania. We can also have a better perspective of the institutional climate and see the relations between the particularities of some areas and this climate. In this manner, we can better observe how the influences from the political sphere could determine changes in the agricultural system. Analysing these three regions comparatively, we would better understand which programmes could be implemented in agriculture to help people living and working there. The relations between culture, historical traditions and geographical space could easily be grasped from such an extensive study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCLUSION

The picture of rural Romania, which results from such an extensive study, is not very encouraging. Agricultural land is the most fragmented in Europe.

Working on small plots and having little state support, the peasants are retreating into the family sphere, which is seen as a refuge against the enemy forces, which are surrounding them. These facts, together with the primitive conditions of working the land, make the participation of these peasants to the market economy of the State, almost nonexistent. The peasants in these villages only practice subsistence agriculture.

The largest majority of Romanian peasants live in very bad conditions, without running water, flush latrines, telephones, medical services or access to education and information. Only electricity is a widespread amenity in rural areas.

Nowadays, Romanian peasants see agriculture as a survival strategy rather than a business. Few of them see agriculture as a way of enrichment and making profit.

A factor, which determines this bad situation in Romanian agriculture, is the weakness of Romanian industry and the poverty among the town people, caused by unemployment and low salaries. Romanian peasants have to sell their products at low prices. Many factories have collapsed in market economy conditions after 1989. Due to unemployment and bad conditions in the urban sphere we can observe immigration from urban to rural areas. This is a survival strategy for some people.

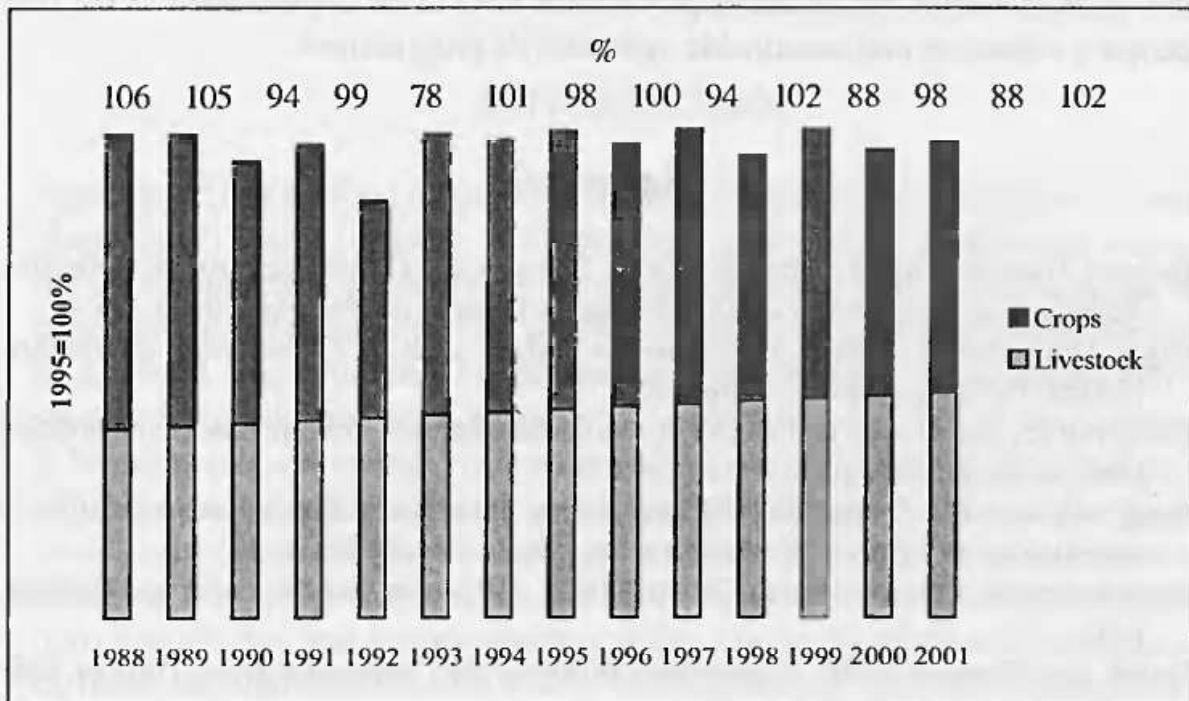
The harsh process of collectivisation which Romania experienced (Soulet, 1998), determined tensions between people and authorities but also among people. People's trust in the authorities and laws decreased considerably. Collectivisation in Romania transformed the Romanian peasants into a rural proletariat and "the plan of the systematisation of the villages", which began in 1961 had the objective to radically transform Romania's villages. A consequence of this fact was

the retreat of peasants into the realm of their families and small farms, in isolation and stagnation, leading to poverty.

The destruction of the C.A.P. systems can be seen as a consequence of the mistakes and oppression of those times. This fact together with the law 18/1991, has thrown Romanian agriculture back into the Middle Ages and led to the collapse of the entire infrastructure.

Figure 2

Development of agricultural production (1995=100%) and share of crop and livestock production (1988–2001)



Source: FAO and Eurostat.

Due to the lack of infrastructure in the agricultural system and especially due to poverty, land abandonment, erosion of the soil and losses of the crops became usual phenomena.

The most important conclusion of our study is that rural development is incompatible with poverty. Deep poverty, which can often be seen in rural areas, is transforming into a phenomenon that I called, negative synergy. This is, in fact, a difficult barrier to penetrate by some programmes or possible alternatives, which could appear in rural zones. Although we have to mention that, this is just the situation of the small family farms in the studied villages. The situation of larger farms in the rest of the country could be different but is not the subject of this study.

One of the economic solutions, which can be implemented in rural Romania is a law, which could convince the peasants to work in cooperatives or associations. Nowadays, it is almost a truism to say that intensive agriculture cannot be practiced on small plots. Rural tourism can be another solution, but only with good ecological education of the peasants, improvement in infrastructure and a better legal climate. Another possible solution for Romanian agriculture would be the granting of credits for Romanian peasants to buy agricultural machines and equipment. In the current conditions these credits have to be granted on a long-term basis and at a low rate of interest. In conditions of European Union enlargement, Romania's extensive agricultural land must enter this large, strong market. To fulfill this objective some important improvements have to be implemented in the law, people's education and sustainable agriculture's programmes.

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