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A PORTRAIT OF THE ROMANIAN COUNTRYSIDE

Modernisierung und Tradition: Das Rumänische Dorf 1918–1989
(Modernisation and tradition: the Romanian village 1918–1989),
by Andreas Sauer. Gardez! Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2003, pp. 140.

This book is an updated version of Andreas Sauer's degree thesis presented at the Department of History and Philosophy, Bern University in 1990. The author has been the Berner Zeitung correspondent in Italy and the Balkans since the mid-nineties. He is also known as a poet. This work outlines Romania's history from the inter-war period until the end of the Ceaucescu regime looking mainly from the point of view of the modernisation process contrasting with tradition.

The starting point is the author's statement that whoever observes Romanian history and looks deep into the 20th century, reaches the banal conclusion that the majority of the population belonged to the peasant stratum.

The book contains statistical data depicting among others such areas as changes in population numbers, the landownership structure, agricultural employment structure in the period under discussion. The author then presents the problems of political and economic changes in Romania as well as socio-cultural phenomena, utilising very interesting monographic rural research carried out by Dimitri Gusti – an outstanding Romanian academic, philosopher and sociologist and a student of Durkheim – and his school. The author illustrates tensions between tradition and modernity in the daily lives of the researched communities – e.g. a confrontation of traditional, magical medical practice and academic medical knowledge.

Characterising the post- 2nd World War period the author discusses the agricultural collectivisation, the resistance to this process and the highly controversial programme in the eighties of so-called rural systematisation which in fact represented a policy of ruining the countryside and discriminating ethnic minorities and the areas they lived in, provoking international protests.

Summing up the author concludes that the consequences of partial, irregular strategies of modernisation and their inevitable contradictions continue to provoke negative consequences with varying intensity and frequency.

Andreas Sauer's book is based on sound academic research combining theoretical ideas and empirical facts. It should be of interest not only to a narrow circle of experts dealing with Romanian issues but also a wider group of readers interested in the subject of south-eastern Europe.