

SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE IN ROMANIA AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL SPACE

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: In diesem Artikel werden die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten des ländlichen Raumes an Hand der Grundcharakteristika der Subsistenzlandwirtschaft untersucht. Der Schwerpunkt gilt dabei dem Agrarisationsprozeß der rumänischen Wirtschaft im Lauf des letzten Jahrzehnts. Es klingt paradox, dass innerhalb einer immer stärker globalisierten und dem tertiären Sektor zugewandten europäischen Wirtschaft bestimmte Regionen und Staaten, wie z.B. Rumänien, eine wachsende Landbevölkerung und eine steigenden Anzahl von in der Landwirtschaft tätigen Beschäftigten aufweisen, wobei beides zu den Kennzeichen einer Agrarisierung gehört. In der Realität erfüllt die Landwirtschaft aber die Rolle eines sozialen Puffers in einer Transformationsgesellschaft, die durch einen raschen Rückgang industrieller Tätigkeiten und städtisch-industrieller Agglomerationen gekennzeichnet ist. Unter diesen Bedingungen stellt sich die Frage nach den Möglichkeiten und Alternativen für die Entwicklung des ländlichen Raumes. Eine dieser Chancen sollte in der Modernisierung landwirtschaftlicher Produktionsstrukturen liegen. Andere Möglichkeiten bestehen in der Modernisierung der Infrastruktur, in der Entwicklung des ländlichen Tourismus, im Ausbau des Bildungssystems in Hinsicht auf das mangelnde kulturelle Potential und in der Förderung von Aktivitäten in Industrie und Dienstleistung.

ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to evaluate the main features of the subsistence agriculture in Romania. The main task is on the „agrarisation“ process of the romanian economy in the last decade. It is obviously paradoxal, that within a more and more globalised and tertialised european economy, some regions and countries, like Romania, are experiencing a growing rural population and a growing amount of active people in agriculture, which are also the main features of the „agrarisation“. In fact, the agriculture fullfils the role of a social buffer in a transforming society, dominated by the rush decline of industrial activities and urban-industrial agglomerations. Under this conditions we are seeking in this paper after development possibilities and alternatives for the rural space. One of them should be the modernisation of production structures in the agriculture. Other elements are concerning the infrastructure modernisation, the rural tourism, the education system connected to the problem of lacking cultural capital in the rural spaces and the development of industrial and service activities.

Introduction

The agricultural sector of the postrevolutionary Romania has been the subject of many economical, social and regional debates, more or less of a recent date. Most of the studies have emphasized the growing subsistence nature and character of this sector. One of the major causes of this particular situation has been the continuous shift between the Romanian economy sectors, the major trend being continuous „agrarisation“ of the economical life. The socio-economic conditions which fostered the „agrarisation“ process are connected to the transformation process of Romania from a socialist, planned-economy and one-party system to a democratic and market oriented system. Therefore the driving forces of the „agrarisation“ are: the decline of industry and the deindustrialisation of major urban-industrial centres. The loss of eastern-european markets and of the positive terms of trade with the former est-block countries and the massive urban-rural migration. According to this situation the number of agricultural households has grown steadily, the process being followed by an acute leveling process and pauperisation of rural population.

The land privatisation is in an advanced stage of completion but issuing of land ownership certificates remains a goal for the future policy. Also the land market is not fully functional and the establishment of market-oriented large-scale farming is far from being completed (CSÁKI, 2000). After the change of the political system in 1989, according to the Land Law from 1991, the system of regulations from Romanian agriculture has been changed or amended. The issuing of this law and its application has dominated the period between 1989-1998 and has been defined as the landowner compensation phase. The result has been no less than disastrous, conducting to an excessive fragmentation of the agricultural land-units, the average farm size reaching 1,9 hectares in 1997 (BENEDEK, 2000a). Some authors (MATHIJS, SWINNEN, 2000) have concluded that despite this situation an act of social equity has been done and this may conduct eventually to a positive effect (incentives for farmers, high political stability and social bondage). Despite the effort, the land-ownership restoration did not permit the establishment of large and productive farming units, and as we have mentioned, this had a negative outcome. However, since 1998 we are able to witness the second phase of the reshaping process to which the Romanian agriculture has been subjected (BENEDEK, 2000b), phase marked by the privatisation of state-owned farming facilities and the altering of ownership condition. For instance, the maximum of 10 hectares of agricultural land per owner has been set to a value of maximum 50 hectares, and from 1 hectare of forestland per owner to 10 hectares,

respectively. All these measures have been set according to the idea of a growing agricultural productivity, given the direct correlation between the level of land productivity and farm size. These measures have been supported by the issuing of new regulation as part of the SAPARD programme for Romania.

Methodology and goals of the study

The main scientific target of the study is not the description *de facto* of the present situation, which is quite well known, but a subcomponent analysis of the Romanian agrarian world in all its complexity on the basis of the socio-economical typology of the rural households. I will basically use my own typology elaborated on the basis of empirical evidences in the Bistria region (North-Eastern part of Transilvania) and the typology of households used by the official Romania statistics. Secondly I will try to emphasize the non-agricultural sectors that may be good alternatives for the reactivation of the rural space because the key to the agrarian problem may lie in the non-agricultural sectors: development of industry and services along the creation of more viable economical structures in agriculture. Therefore I will present some basic futures of the rural tourism as alternative income source of rural households.

Methodologically the present study has been based on the results of an empirical study on agriculture using the inquiry method in North-Eastern Transylvania, in 1998. The inquiry has been conducted on a sample of approximately 1000 households. The main hypothesis of the survey, with general extension to the specific Romanian situation were:

- the agriculture practiced in the rural space of the zone is subsistence oriented;
- the rural households are production units with low economical performances and low level of technical dotation;
- in condition where agriculture is the main occupation of the rural population, we assist to the overpopulation phenomena of the rural space;
- the agriculture remained the main economic activity in the rural space, although the changes in the structure of active population;
- there is a low level of association and collaboration between the farmers, as effect of the socialist cooperativisation;
- the rural population experiences poor living conditions;
- the spatial relation, of rural settlements to urban-regional centres, like Bistrița in our case, are structured mainly by their position in the social division of labour.

The results were added to those of a national-scale study on rural households involved in rural tourism activities in 2000 (200 households). Both studies were conducted by the author. The results of these two empirical studies were used along with present statistical data available by the National Statistical Office, for correlation purposes of the conclusions and validation of our observations.

Rural household typology

As mentioned before, in the methodological section of the study, the core of this research is based on a socio-economical typology of rural households, the empirical inquiry study being conducted in Bistrita region. The criterias to form the types of households are the following:

- I have been made a first grouping of households on the basis of the economic status of his members, excluding childrens. On this basis I have distinguished: a) households formed by inactive persons and b) households formed by active persons.
- The second grouping of rural households were undertaken on the basis of further economic and social status of the members: a) unemployed and retired in the first case, and b) farmers, actives in industry and services, and different mixtures between this status categories. In the case of mixed types, the household were added to one type or to the other on the basis of the economic status of the head of the household.

The main purpose is to correlate certain socio-economical characteristics of households with the agricultural profile of the region. In the first part of the correlation we focused on the sectorial segments of the labour market that were filled by rural households.

Table 1: Types of Households and Their Share of the Total Number of Households in the Bistrita Region

Nr. crt.	Type of household	Share of the type, %
1	Households with unemployed persons	2.0%
2	Households with retired persons	26.4%
3	Households with farmers	23.6%
4	Households with commuters	15.9%
5	Mixed households with commuters and farmers	18.4%
6	Mixed households with farmers and commuters	4.4%
7	Multiply mixed households	9.3%

Source: Benedek (2000)

In table 1 we can follow the typology of the rural households from Bistrita region. Knowing the variables that can be strongly correlated with these types, we are able to draw some conclusion regarding the weight of different households types at national level. It could lead to very important conclusions, because we have further details for each household type only at regional level.

Table 2: Basic Variables of Household Typology

Territorial Unit	Urbanization rate	Unemployment	Activity Rate	Actives in Agriculture
Bistrița region	60%	11.0%	46%	20.0%
Romania	55%	10.4%	40%	36.7%

Source: Anuarul Statistic al României (2000) and own studies

Given the relative small differences between the values of the first three variables, the last variable induces certain probable differences between the percentages of different household types from the two territorial units under consideration. Anyway, the trend of the differences from all variables is the same and it leads to the idea that at national level the percentage of retired persons households and farmers households is the biggest while the other types have smaller proportions, except the unemployed households, which given the fact that they have approximately the same values in Bistrita region as it does at national level, suffered almost no change. We can estimate that the proportion of active farmers and retired persons households, which account for approximately 50% of the total households in Bistrita region, can reach at national level values of approx. two thirds. The National Statistics Commission database comes in contradiction with these deductions, giving in 1999 a 3% (65) for retired persons households (DOBRESCU, 2000). Following this value are the active farmers households with a percentage of 16,8% meaning that at national level the process of "agrarisation" is more active than recorded in the inquiry study for Bistrita region. The phenomenon can be explained due to the higher level of development of the Bistrita region in comparison with the Southern and Eastern regions of Romania, well known as underdeveloped regions.

In the following, I will present the main characteristics of agriculture in the regional model. I have to notice, that the categorisation of the mechanisation level in low, medium and high follows the some thresholds revealed in the survey: 0-25%, 25-50%, more than 50% of agricultural labour process is mechanised. Also, for the land concentration level we have used following thresholds: under 5 ha agricultural land for the low concentration level and between 5 and 10 ha for the medium concentration level. The survey had identified only few households working more than 10 ha, an insignificant number of households for any type of the typology.

Table 3: Basic Characteristics of Agriculture for each Household Type in Bistrița Region

Nr. crt.	Type of households	Proportion of households with production for market, %	Mechanisation level	Land concentration level
1	Households with unemployed persons	30	Medium	Low
2	Households with retired persons	25	Low	Medium
3	Households with farmers	27	Medium	Low
4	Households with commuters	18.7	High	Low
5	Mixed households commuters/farmers	23.5	Low	Low
6	Mixed households farmers/commuters	33	High	Medium
7	Multiply mixed households	24.5	Low	Low

Source: Benedek (2000)

The data of survey clearly indicate the orientation of agriculture towards subsistence. Thus only a quarter (26 %) of the households sell agricultural products, so producing for the market. This low level, in comparison with the number of the employed in the agriculture, is explainable by several elements, between which the most important are: the deficient technical endowment, especially with mechanical tools, of the households, the generally small areas that the majority of the households possess, the reduced number of animals. Subsistence is the answer to the unfavorable market conditions for the farmers. At the same time, this is also the result of a reduced emergence of a contractor group in the primary sector, partly due to the absence of contractive culture and, on the other hand, due to the low level of information the households.

Table 3 shows that regarding the households formed by the head of the family as farmer and the rest of the family members as commuters working in the secondary and tertiary sectors (off-farm activities), are in most cases market-oriented, having relatively high levels of productivity and an average farm size between 5 and 10 hectares. The overall situation of these particular types of households on the labour market is rather good as their income is obtained following non-agricultural activities as well as through selling of agricultural products on the market. The inactive households with unemployed account for a large proportion of the market oriented households as well. The difference is that in this case the average cultivated surface is smaller and the agricultural input has medium values. In fact, this household type forms a transitory position towards the household with active individuals, because the position of unemployed is only active in the period of the social assistance, so the term is only of statistical nature, these individuals being in fact part of the active agricultural population. On the other hand it is necessary to stress out that the commuters household type despite the relative high income accounts for the lowest proportion on the general market. It means that this particular type of household consumes the greatest part of its agricultural products, also having probably the highest consuming rate of all household types.

But, in generally, each type of households bear a relative little amount of market oriented households and we are not able to identify a clearly market oriented type. In addition the average net wages are the lowest in the agriculture. Therefore, the development of non-agricultural employment and the support of the market oriented household types became a major importance. In table 4 we can follow the differences in the average net wages/month in agriculture and other economic sectors, the ratio being 1:3,6 between agriculture and the best played sector of finance and banking, fact with support the idea, that the key of the development of the rural space lies not in the agrarian sector.

Table 4: Average Net Nominal Monthly Salary Earnings, in 1998

Economic activity	Average monthly salary (lei)
Total economy	1 042 274
Agriculture	764 800
Forestry	964 280
Industry	1 094 757
Post, telecommunications	1 664 782
Financial, banking and insurance	2 763 051
Public administration	1 373 164
Education	1 051 738
Health, social assistance	850 351

Source: Anuarul Statistic al României (2000)

Anyhow, the average number of agricultural employees in 1998 was 250 407 (ANUARUL STATISTIC AL ROMÂNIEI, 2000), accounting for approximately 5% of the total number of employees in Romania. This means that a mere 7,6% of the total number of agricultural active population is employed. Consequently the agricultural income has modest values, no greater than the above-mentioned percentage.

Table 5: Structure of Income for the Main Households Categories, in 1998

Households	Total incomes	Salaries, bonuses, benefits	Own-account activity income	Trade of goods, buildings, lands	Provisions of social protection	Equivalent value of consumption of agricultural products from own resources
Employees	730 506	71,1%	1,1%	1,5%	5,6%	20,3%
Peasants	526 652	6,0%	6,3%	19,0%	8,1%	60,6%
Unemployed	414 063	21,6%	5,2%	7,4%	22,6%	43,2%
Retired persons	640 968	13,5%	1,3%	5,2%	38,3%	41,9%

Source: Anuarul Statistic al României (2000)

Table 6 offers information regarding income categories for each type of household. An interesting figure is the extremely low percentage of income from private agricultural activities. Even if we sum up the income from land trade, real estate and other goods, the proportion is not essentially altered, an exception being the households with active agricultural individuals, where the value reaches 25%. According to this figures the most vulnerable categories are the households with retired and unemployed persons, their income being formed almost exclusively of pensions and social assistance money provided by the state. This particular image is only partially true for the Bistrița region where a much more favourable situation exists for the households with unemployed. As we have already mentioned, this particular type of household is a transitory category towards the active household, the official state of unemployment cannot be always associated with social periphery.

But the development of the agriculture, particularly, and of the rural space, generally, does not depend only on economical issues, social and cultural questions are also important. Recent empirical studies (KNAPPE, BENEDEK, 1995, BENEDEK, 2000c) brought some light in this issue, emphasizing the essential role of the local individuals with high cultural level. The functioning of agricultural farming associations from Northern and North-Eastern Transylvania is linked with the activity of those particular individuals with formational background before 1989 such as: agricultural engineer (most cases), nomenclaturist, economist and in small proportions doctors or other free practice professions. Added to the situation is the role of the Protestant Church, which in some cases attracted foreign investments and thus participated in the process of local development. A typical case was recorded in a village from Cluj County where a farming association was functional until 1997 grouping almost all the village households. The association was dissolved in 1997 due to the emigration of the manager (German minority member, agronomist). It seems that the know-how capital regarding the market-oriented agriculture is quite limited in the rural areas, and therefore the presence and involvement of "key-actors" can be crucial.

The survey for Bistrița region has supplied other details, for instance, only three categories of households possess innovatory social groups (high skilled persons and entrepreneurs): those with farmers, with farmers and commuters, and the highest proportion, those with commuters. These types, due to the presence of innovating groups, are the most dynamic, flexible types, with a cultural capital above the regional average, having an important weight of the heads of the household belonging to the mature-young age group. The exception is the first group that has even with the presence of the above mentioned innovating group, characteristics which brings it nearer to the other types of households, those less flexible namely, having a low educational level, mature-old age of the heads of the household, a reduced, descending social and spatial mobility. It seems that the smaller weight of this innovating group (4,5 %) is the explanation of this situation. It may also be noticed the presence of a transition type, made up by households (a farmer as) the head of the household, the others employed in non-agricultural sectors, that has demographic, cultural and social characteristics similar to the less flexible types, but a high spatial mobility and a high degree of connection with the outside. This situation is due to the presence within this type of the heads of the household who last the social status they had before 1989, belonging to the secondary and tertiary sector (usually former commuters), but though the specific lifestyle of the commuting groups, they structured the social and spatial relationships on two levels, the urban and the rural one. By losing the commuter status, it took place a withdrawal from the urban level that seems to be only a formal one, the social and spatial relationships with the urban being put up on an informal level.

Table 6. The Basic Social Characteristics of the Rural Household Types

Nr. Cr.	Type of households	The demographic dimension of the household	The of the head of the household	Educational level of the head of household	Social mobil of the head of house	The weight of the innovating group %	Spatial mobility
1	Households with unemployed persons	Small (1-2 persons)	Average (40-60 years)	Average-low	Downwards	0	Reduced
2	Households with retired persons	Small (1-2 persons)	Advanced (> 60 years)	Low	Downwards	0	Reduced
3	Households with farmers	Big (4-6 persons)	Average (40-60 years)	Low	Downwards	4.5	Reduced
4	Households with commuters	Average (3-5 persons)	Young (20-40 years)	Average-high	Upwards	16.6	High
5	Mixed households commuters/farmers	Big (4-6 persons)	Young (20-40 years)	Average	Upwards	7.9	Average
6	Mixed households farmers/commuters	Big (5-7 persons)	Average (40-60 years)	Low-average	Downwards	0	High
7	Multiply mixed households	Average (3-5 persons)	Average (40-60 years)	Low	downwards	0	Reduced

Source: Benedek (2000)

It does not exclude the fact, that one of the main factors of the lack of social capital and of the rural underdevelopment may be the discrimination and marginalisation of the rural population through economic policy, especially in the communist period, when industrial and urban development has been regarded as motors of general societal development, neglecting and disfavours the agriculture. But it is also an undefeatable empirical evidence, that the general system of values and norms, the educational and cultural capital of the rather traditional than modernised rural population are crucial for the rural development.

In this context and taking into account the character of agricultural activities, highly subsidized in the EU, is essential to know if there is any possibility to implement and develop extra-agricultural economic activities. The target domain is quite vast, the natural potential creating opportunities for such activities as: forest exploitation and processing of wood, collecting and processing of wild fruits, exploitation of mineral resources, some industrial activities such as food and textile, rural tourism etc. In the present study we shall focus on the last aspect given the fact that is the only field for which we have empirical data despite serious regional changes especially in the textile industry (rural areas from western and north-western Romania with foreign capital), food industry (milk processing, meat products and beverages with spectacular examples in Bihor county) or forestry. The impact of such enterprises is in some cases essential for a diversified rural economy and for the income level of rural households.

Concerning the rural tourism activities we must underline that there is a large hiatus between the value and variety of the natural resources and the actual degree of capitalization of these resources in the respect of both tourist infrastructure (in most cases underdeveloped) and tourist circulation. Consequently the impact on the rural space is concentrated in relatively small rural areas (Maramures region, Bucovina, Apuseni Range, Brasov and Sibiu) while the majority of the rural settlements with high tourist potential and their tourist products remain highly unsought. According to a study made in 2000 (BENEDEK, DEZSI, 2001), on a representative population sample, we came to the conclusion that only 5000 rural households were involved in tourist activities, in all cases these activities being only a secondary source of income. Figure 1 shows that inactive individuals (retired persons or housewives) account for an important part of the total individuals involved in rural tourism activities. Thus it can be considered that this is an excellent way to improve income through non-agricultural activities using a section of the household members that possess a large amount of spare time.

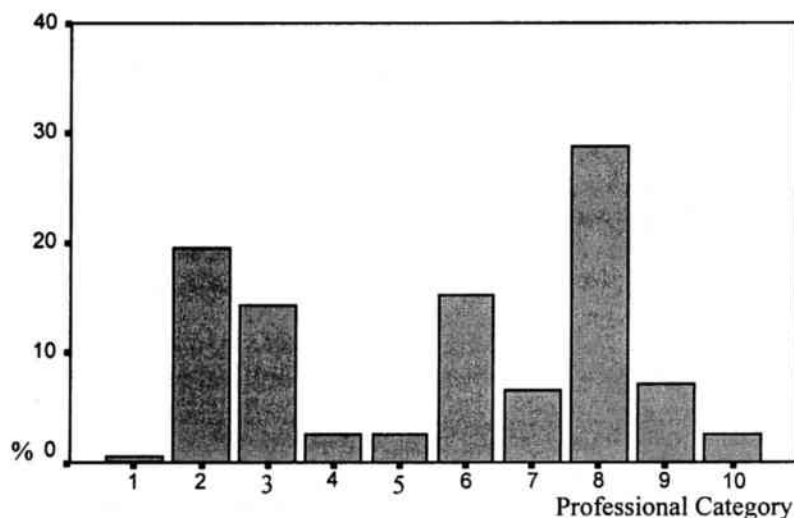


Fig. 1. Professional category of individuals involved in rural tourism
 1. no answer; 2. retired person; 3. housewife; 4. unemployed; 5. unqualified worker; 6. qualified worker;
 7. entrepreneur; 8. intellectual; 9. technician; 10. administrative worker.

Source: Benedek, Dezsi (2001)

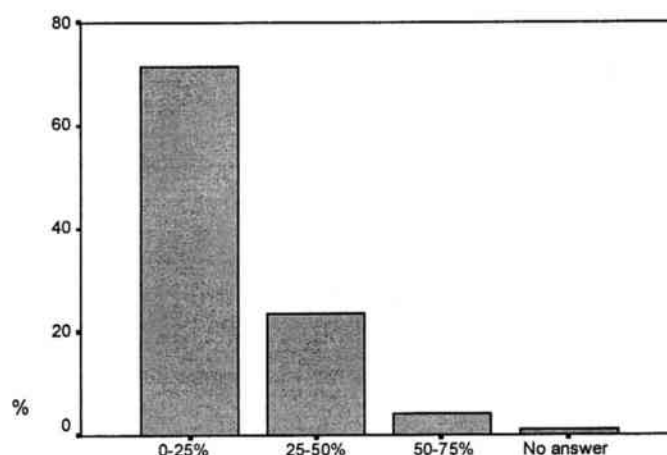


Fig. 2 Proportion of rural tourism activities in the total income structure
Source: Benedek, Dezsi (2001)

Also is worth mentioning the fact that the intellectual sequence of the rural population (teachers, ministers, doctors etc) has the highest proportion of involvement in tourist activities, this situation being in support of the idea that the highly educated individuals play an extremely important role in the rural areas.

In Figure 3 is illustrated the secondary role played by the tourist activities in the total budget of the rural households. However, in $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cases these activities are responsible for essentially improving rural households income. In conclusion, rural tourism is a realistic slution for rural development, but only on a low level, involving a relativ little number of settlements and households, concentrated mainly in the mountains. It is far to be a large scale sollution for the rural space, which needs more capital intensive strategies both in agriculture and industry.

Conclusions

The emergence and deepening of the subsistence character of the Romanian agriculture has to be set in the context of social and political changes that took place after 1989. The cause of this situation is mainly the restructuring process undergone by the socialist industry and mining that produced an excess of work force that was canalized towards agriculture, the services sector being not very well developed and concentrated in large urban settlements. The data of the field inquiry indicate an obvious process of agrarisation of the professional structure, as a consequence of the accelerated growth of the agricultural active population in the Bistrița region, from about 50 % at the 1992 census to 65 % at the 1997 inquiry. This growth took place on the account of the decreasing number of jobs in the industry and of the reducing intensity of the commuting phenomenon. Thus, the weight of the active population in the secondary field decreased in the last six years from 29 % to 14 %, while the services had a small growth, from 20 % to 21 %. The process is registered also on national level by an increase of active population number in agriculture from 28,9% in 1991 to 36% in 1998.

Another question, where further research is needed, is why the degree of association between peasants is so reduced in the analised region, especially, and in Romania, generally. In fact there should be made a distinction between the peasant's wish to associate in an institutionalized form and the wish to cooperate taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of each. The results of the survey indicate that 40 % of the region's farmsteads realizes a form of cooperation no matter what, especially in the process of production. The percentage is not impressive because of reasons, which are not exclusively related to the subjective-affective sphere of rejecting the cooperation. The motivation is more probably related to economic reasoning, which show that cooperation in the production domain may be extremely expensive. We are offering, of course, to ensuring the mechanization of some works, as the majority of the households don't have the necessary technical endowments for this. These shortages themselves should motivate the peasants to associate, which didn't happen but only at a limited scale, the reasons for this behavior being linked with the unpleasant memories related to the associations in the communist era, which the low cultural capital is of the rural space is added to. As we already stated, the hypothesis formulated in the beginning of the study might be valid in this context too, to which there should be added the general economic context, extremely unsafe for this kind of associations and the absence of support from the state.

Table 7: Number of rural localities with urban facilities, in 1998

Region	Total number of rural settlements	Drinking water supply	In %	Public Sewerage	In %	Natural gas	In %
Total	13084	2648	20,2	374	2,9	749	5,7
North-East	2445	278	11,4	72	2,9	33	1,3
South-East	1445	487	33,7	42	2,9	16	1,1
South	2030	405	20,0	53	2,6	86	4,2
South-West	2080	261	12,5	22	1,1	27	1,3
West	1335	224	16,8	37	2,8	42	3,1
North-West	1823	701	38,5	73	4,0	133	7,3
Center	1823	263	14,4	54	3,0	410	22,5
Bucharest	103	29	28,2	21	20,4	2	1,9

Source: Anuarul Statistic al României (2000)

In what the strategies of sectorial development are concerned, the rural space under study should concentrate on the development of services, breeding (with the adjacent processing industry) and fruit growing, the former in the context of economic activities diversification in the rural space, the latter two on the basis of the existing regional specialization, traditions and good natural conditions. The agriculture, in the present crisis conditions, when the state cannot interfere efficiently to support this sector, the hopes should be redirected towards the local horizon. In this context, the promotion of association farms in breeding and fruit growing at the same time with the development of the horizontal system of production through the food industry, represents, for the moment, the only viable alternative. We estimate that the process is bound to be a very difficult one, because according to table 7, most rural settlements lack the most basic infrastructure elements that are absolutely necessary in the process of rural development.

Basically the reconstruction of the rural space, as mentioned before, has to be based on two main strongholds: the emergence of large, market-oriented structures in agriculture and development of non-agricultural activities in the rural areas, respectively. These two processes have to start simultaneously according to the scarce capital and abundant labour conditions in Romania and in order to absorb the working force surplus due to the changes in other sectors of the economy. Due, we consider that the optimal size of farms should lie between 200 and 500 ha, depending on the geographical and market conditions, but however the actually existent medium size of 1,9 ha can not deliver the basis for rural development. Supporting this little and subsistence oriented structures may be a fatal error, taking into consideration the size of households, the scarce financial instruments of the state, the low level of entrepreneurial culture in the rural space and of the institutional framework needed for the implementation of a sector based development strategy.

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