

THE VILLAGE - THE MAIN COMPONENT OF THE EUROPEAN RURAL AREA*

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Abstract: *Europe, in general, has a strong rural tradition and the village has had and still has an important role in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the state. In particular, Eastern Europe, as well as the southern part of the European continent dominated by the agrarian economy, which is dependent on the instruments and mechanisms of European rural development policies, also shows the need for innovative interventions in this century. The role played by the agricultural sector in rural areas has changed considerably over the last five decades, and is reflected in a major shift towards multidimensional and multisectoral use of physical land and space in general. In order to understand the village as a complex social system with an integrative role of their various roles, we will conceptually analyze this social unit from the perspective of the rural community¹ based on the specialized literature.*

Keywords: village, rural area, rural community, Europe.

Before the First World War, studies deal primarily with the social system of the village considered a microcosm of society². After the Second World War, the interest of researchers is directed in particular to the social and economic aspects arising from the changes and in general on the problems of the transition to modern agriculture.

* Writing this paper was possible due to financial support provided by „Entrepreneurial Education and Professional Counseling for Social and Human Sciences PhD and Postdoctoral Researchers to ensure knowledge transfer” Project, co-financed from European Social Fund through Human Capital Programme (ATRIUM, POCU/380/6/13/123343).

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¹ The rural community can be seen as a social form that is constantly changing as people change their perceptions and definitions of reality. Along with other types of communities such as the community of knowledge, religion, craftsmen, local producers, tourist services, etc., the rural community is an integral part of the theory of community development.

² Ilie Bădescu, *History of Sociology. Contemporary Theories*, Bucharest, Eminescu Publishing House, 2002, p. 235.

„Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «George Barițiu» din Cluj-Napoca. Series Historica”, LIX, 2020, Supliment, 2, *Lucrările conferinței internaționale online „ROMANIA-ITALIA-EUROPA. Evoluții istorice - Dinamici culturale - Relații internaționale”, 16-18 septembrie 2020*, p. 501-508.

The concept "village" has a certain representation, which refers to the archaic, to a certain lifestyle, to a certain communion with nature and to a certain type of relationship between community members. The village at the moment is more than that.

Relationships that community members distribute to each other, the plurivalence of these social, spiritual realities finds its center of connection, today and in the past, within well-structured, organized, governed institutions, based on legal, moral and social norms³.

The concept of community appears in German Romanticism and means a global entity in which the ties between members are very close, a supra-individual entity that prevails over the individual⁴.

At the beginning of the last century, the sociologist Max Weber understands a rural community only in the sense of a rural society because the social constitution of rural communities is the most individual and most related to the historical development of all social communities⁵.

Singular definitions fulfill their role only in the context of a particular theory, because they explain only a certain part of reality⁶. The definition of community has emerged over time through the efforts of sociologists. The idea of local community consists primarily of people located in a relatively common space, are integrated into social institutions, experience religious experiences, create together and transmit common values to generations.

From Peter Burke's point of view, the term community is both useful and problematic because, like rural space, the concept of community is very difficult to offer a definition that includes all the specific elements, and a single definition would be incomplete.

He emphasizes that the community phenomenon is characteristic of traditional society, the community being a small group in which "everyone knows each other", called by Mendras⁷, a society of knowledge, but which does not share the view of its continuity over time⁸. The same point of view is shared by the Romanian sociologist George Em. Marica in a study on the definition of the village in which she finds that a

³ Dorina Onica, *A fi în „Gura Satului”*, „Studii și comunicări de etnologie”, nr. 33, 2019, p. 122-137, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/previewpdf?id=854579>, site accesat în data de 7 August 2020.

⁴ Bruna Zani, Augusto Palmonari, *Manual de psihologia comunității*, Iași, Edit. Polirom, 2003.

⁵ Paul Ghosh, *Max Weber on 'The Rural Community': A critical edition of the English text*, "History of European Ideas", 31, 2005, p. 327-366.

⁶ Adela Elena Popa, *Sat bogat, sat sarac. Comunitate, identitate, proprietate in ruralul romanesc*, Iași, Edit. Institutul European, 2010, p. 127.

⁷ Henri Mendras, *Elements de sociologie*, Paris, Edit. Armand Colin 1989, p. 132.

⁸ Peter Burke, *Istorie și teorie socială*, București, Edit. Humanitas, 1999.

small social formation, with a small number of people, such as the village, involves a certain type of social relations⁹, but which over time changes according to local realities, and members the community not to carry on the same system of values. The complexity of this situation is exemplified by the Romanian sociologist on the one hand by the fact that “the greater determination of the natural environment as well as the agricultural occupation largely explains certain features of the rural spirit such as: greater closeness to nature, more metaphysical conception, more pronounced spontaneous sociability”, and on the other hand the spiritual factors “determine in their turn the relation of the rural with nature”¹⁰.

The analysis of the term community generated different approaches. In this sense, starting from the classic concepts formulated by La Comte who speaks of the moral community, by Le Play who focuses on the empirical community¹¹, Tonnies¹² and Weber who see the community as typology, or the community approached as methodology by Durkheim and the molecular community proposed by Simmel, the Nisbet researcher starting from this concepts related to community, thus identifies five ways of analyzing and using the concept of community¹³.

After abandoning the global ambition of village monographs, ethnologists and sociologists have returned in recent years to the study of the village, placing it in a spatial context. Thus the village is analyzed as a rural area, with different components from country to country. Some economists wonder about the consequences of social and regional inequalities on the growth of an entire national economy, while others seek a fundamental starting point in the logic of the peasant economy. Political scientists, in turn, have acquired a taste for the study of power, decision-making mechanisms and influence in local communities, both urban and rural¹⁴.

⁹ In the opinion of the Romanian sociologist, the definition of the village must have a complex, synthetic character, appealing to a series of determining factors. Details in George Em. Marica, *Încercare dde definiție a satului*, in Idem, *Studii sociologice*, Center for Transylvanian Studies, Romanian Cultural Foundation, Cluj-Napoca, 1997, pp. 142-180.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

¹¹ The principle on which the community is based in Comte's vision is moral strength and affection. And for Le Play, the community is an empirical phenomenon from which the study of society must start.

¹² For Tonnies, the community implies stable and intimate relationships, understanding, mutual help, kinship, neighborhood. More details in Ferdinand Tönnies, in *Community and Society. Treatise on communism and socialism as empirical forms of culture*, Craiova, Beladi Publishing House, 2016, p. 63.

¹³ Robert Nisbet, 1967, apud Adela Elena Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁴ Jean-Louis Durand-Drouhin, Lili-Maria Szwegrub și Ioan Mihăilescu, *Rural Community Studies in Europe*, Oxford, Pergamon Press Ltd., 1981.

In this context, theoretical perspectives appear regarding the current approach of the community. Human ecology of American origin is interested in how social interaction is achieved in relation to space, environment and material resources so the community is seen as a human component subject to cycles of gradual evolution. From the perspective of functionalism, the community was approached as a system of social institutions based on common values.

The different evolution of economic phenomena in rural areas has changed over time its social structure. Rural society in the first phase of industrialization is marked by traditionalism, relatively high resistance to change, social immobility. The essential characteristic of that period was the rural exodus, a natural consequence of the development of the industry, the increase of the attraction capacity of the cities, the socio-cultural opening of the urban environment.

At present the permanent owner of the land is not a farmer, but a landlord; the temporary owner of the building, the tenant or tenant, is an entrepreneur, a capitalist like others in other economic branches, he wants to turn the results of multi-active activities¹⁵ into income. The differences between the villages in European countries lie in the vision that the rulers had after the Second World War. Once again, Europe is divided as a result of economic industrialization and social policies, which has created positive transformations in the west and gaps in the east and south of the continent in terms of the village as a social formation.

The analysis units, the western European and the southern and eastern European villages faced similar problems, the depopulation determined by the urban and industrial development. In Spain, for example, the process of urbanization and demographic concentration around industrial centers took place several decades behind the countries of northern and central Europe¹⁶. The gap itself, with the acceleration of industrial development, has made the absorption of the population from villages to cities gradually leave the villages without the social role based on the archaic family

¹⁵ When we talk about multi-active activities in the rural area, we refer to non-agricultural activities, tourism services, creative and leisure services or innovative ones.

¹⁶ Enrique Luque Baena, *Estudio antropológico social de un pueblo del sur*, Madrid, Edit. Tecnos, 1974, p. 251.

structure. These phenomena led to the disappearance of some Spanish villages¹⁷, as well as the transformation of the largest into industrial cities¹⁸.

In order to be able to implement its economic development policies, the Dutch government considers the village a component of the physical space for food production with a focus on the landscape offered by this industry. Only then are the values of nature, authenticity and quality added to this rural space¹⁹.

This approach is radically different from those developed by France and Switzerland²⁰ where both have a spatial approach that seeks to classify different types of space according to the localizing forces of economic activities, and agriculture is no longer sufficient to characterize depopulated rural areas. Unlike Switzerland and France, the Netherlands did not face the depopulation of part of their territory. Thus we note that the Dutch approach to the village is more of a landscape approach than an economic or even demographic approach²¹.

The Romanian village is European approached as a community, moreover closed to the material and cultural elements from outside, with a population subjected to complex historical and economic events has transformed at social and economic level over time.

¹⁷ Similar situations have been recorded in different regions of Italy. In an attempt to repopulate rural areas and combat the effects of urbanization and emigration, many Italian towns and villages have adopted a scheme to sell houses for \$ 1 (\$ 1.56), and other local governments offer sums of money to adults for it would attract you to mountain villages. More details in Dana Cazacu, *An unpopulated region in Italy offers 43,000 euros to people who move to abandoned villages there*, in „Impact”, 2019, <https://playtech.ro/stiri/o-regiune-nepopulata-din-italia-offers-43-000-of-euro-to-people-moving-in-abandoned-villages-from-there-44785>, site accessed on August 7, 2020 and in Florin Casota, *The beautiful village of Italy where you can buy a house for 1 euro*, in „Bussines Magazin”, 2018, <https://www.businessmagazin.ro/arta-si-societate/lifestyle/satul-superb-din-italia-unde-poti-cumpara-o-casa-cu-1-euro-photo-gallery-16964117>, site accessed on 12 August, 2020.

¹⁸ Between 1960 and 1970, ten provinces all located on the outskirts of Madrid recorded a population increase of over 20%: Alava, Madrid, Vizcaya, Barcelona, Guipuzcoa, Alicante, Las Palmas, Baleares, Valencia, Tenerife. In the same ten years, fourteen inland provinces lost more than 10% of their population: Toledo, Jaen, Ciudad Real, Lugo, Palencia, Avila, Caceres, Zamora, Segovia, Bajadoz, Guadalajara, Teruel, Cuenca, Soria. More details in Joan F. Mira Castera, in *Rural community studies in Spain*, 1981, apud *op. cit.*, Drouhin, pp. 306.

¹⁹ Cheryl de Boer et Hans Bressers, *The Netherlands country screening*, University of Twente, 2009, p. 149.

²⁰ Switzerland and France are moving from a geographical approach to an economic approach to the rural landscape. Villages with tourist potential can renew jobs in rural areas and can serve as a basis for attracting a population and thus creating new jobs.

²¹ Michel Blanc, *La ruralité: diversité des approches*, „Économie rurale”, nr. 242, 1997, p. 5-12. https://www.persee.fr/doc/ecoru_0013-0559_1997_num_242_1_4892. Site accesat în data de 06.08.2020.

In the last 70 years, the Romanian village analyzed on the principles of monographic methodology by the interdisciplinary teams coordinated by the sociologist Dimitrie Gusti²² still presents similar deficiencies to the interwar period.

The Romanian village does not show that it would act at community level as a space where individualism is replaced by actions to be carried out for the community. The communist period contributed to a denaturalization of the village through forced industrialization, the collectivization of rural society and involved through the extraction of young people from the villages. As a result, the villages remained mostly populated by elderly people who continued to transmit the values of the village to a fairly small number of young people, and over time this number of local young people decreased, leaving a gap in the community. The vast majority of young people came into contact with urban values²³, and when they returned to the village they brought with them those values to the local community, identifying less and less with the values of the community from which they emigrated. A contrary situation is the participation in seasonal agricultural work, when we can talk about a community reaction to the real, concrete needs of the villages. Workers employed in state-owned enterprises in urban areas requested rest leave to participate with their families in gathering crops from their own lands, or those of relatives²⁴, because the rural labor force was aging.

After 1990, the Romanian village registers a lack of the idea of community in the sense of classical theories or the results of sociological studies coordinated by Dimitrie Gusti, Henri H. Stahl, s.a. In the villages, typology does not matter in this context, there were different types of communities, made up of people specialized in a certain trade and who acted to solve common or particular problems within the community. Examples of this are when someone is building a new house or when a wedding is about to take place. In the first case the relatives and the local community actively participated, there were at least 2 or 3 people who had experience in building houses. In the second example, relatives, neighbors, and other members of the community worked together to organize the festivities.

At present, other types of communities have been developed, we mention the community of those who work abroad and who give advice to those in the village about the ways and advantages of emigration to a foreign country.

²² The monographic campaigns carried out by teams of specialists in several villages in Romania aimed at both the broad knowledge of the rural community and Gusti's intention to establish a sociology of the nation to support a future social reform.

²³ The urban values we are referring to are a job, a monthly salary, electricity, paved roads, sewerage, modern housing, etc.

²⁴ Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Etnogeneză și țuică*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing House, 2018, p. 31.

At the local level, specific communities were created in Romania, after 1990, but especially after 2007. These are the communities of animal breeders²⁵, who managed to work together, for the benefit of their own community when their rights or subsidies were violated by the local administration or private companies. At the level of 2007-2018 regarding the association with others, for the creation of community networks with a common purpose, it is a behavior that registers negative values in rural Romania²⁶.

The concrete needs of the Romanian village in the 21st century are closely related to the living conditions resulting from the economic activities they undertake.

Theoretically, the members of the village should be united, work together²⁷, emanate a thought of pragmatic community development that will solve the problems related to poverty, jobs not far from home, health care, schooling and living. agricultural or non-agricultural products. Studies on the Romanian village from the perspective of community collective action²⁸ show that the rural inhabitants rely mostly on institutions in solving community problems²⁹ and not on community associative forms with a common purpose. In contrast, in European countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, the local community culture is much more developed. Associations of different types, especially professional, agricultural, farmers'³⁰, non-

²⁵ Gabriel Bonaciu, *Crescători de animale, fără pășune*, 2015, <https://www.digi24.ro/regional/digi24-oradea/crescatori-de-animale-fara-pasune-384012>. Site accesat în data de 10 August 2020.

²⁶ Adela-Elena Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 149

²⁷ At the level of 2007, the work together with other people from the village to do something for the benefit of the community is low in the Romanian countryside. More details in Adela-Elena Popa, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp.146-161.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 153.

³⁰ Thousands of farmers took part in the November 2019 protest wave that took place in the capitals of France and Germany, blocking traffic in the two European capitals. They were dissatisfied with trade agreements that would disadvantage them, government reform that did not increase their revenues, regulations that would affect performance in the sector and criticism of agriculture on various issues, from pesticide use to welfare. animals. More details in Ramona Dascălu, *Farmers in street! WAVE OF PROTEST! Are there Romanian farmers ?*, Agointeligența, Bucharest, 2019, <https://agointel.ro/125662/fermierii-in-strada-val-de-proteste-urmeaza-fermierii-romani/>, site accessed on August 14, 2020.

agricultural, associations of tourism associations³¹ show a united thinking and act as a professional group against unfair competition.

CONCLUSIONS

The development of community thinking is for Romania a concept that will help the rural space to develop in the future on the foundations of the European Union principles. Even if the economic and rural development gaps between Eastern Europe and Western Continent persist, the models of community development and cooperation applied in the West should be addressed depending on the specifics of the rural area in Romania as well. Rural communities in Eastern Europe, in general, and in Romania in particular, can create professional associative forms through which to have representation in relation to local administrations but also to solve their community problems.

This last conclusion raises the question: Does the Romanian public administration, local or national, want these local communities to be strong and to be organized in professional associations?

A hypothetical answer would be: NO. I argue that the state is afraid of strong organizations, because it must respect their rights and solve their problems as a group and not individually.

And an optimistic answer would be Yes. Because a state with visionary public policies needs to know the real problems of the community, of the society!

³¹ For example, in France, professional associations of mountain guides together with state institutions protect the status of guides through actions in the field, succeeding in reaching justice with cases that violate the laws and endanger tourists. More details in *Two months of suspended prison required for the guide without a diploma*, 2018, https://www.ledauphine.com/haute-savoie/2018/12/21/deux-mois-de-prison-avec-sursis-requis-pour-le-guide-sans-diplome?fbclid=IwAR2anZVn9s_iITvS4EmSaspsX7R5tFZSqXGSrTQ4eQdCrD2gEO-7js0uIVw, site accessed on 14 August 2020.