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A UNIQUE POLICY OF URBANIZATION? THE RURAL SYSTEMATIZATION IN ROMANIA

Abstract: Rural Systematisierung ist als repräsentativ für die Brutalität des kommunistischen Regimes in Rumänien betrachtet. Dieser Artikel behauptet, dass eine solche Politik nicht einzigartig war und dass Rumänien war in der Tat eines der letzten kommunistischen Staaten, die sie implementiert. Diese Verspätung bezieht sich auf die Rolle die das Dorf hatte und hat in der Deutung der rumänischen Nationalidentität und die Einhaltung, im Namen der nationalen Unabhängigkeit, der Grundsätze des ursprünglichen Stalinismus von der Ceausescu Regime. Schließlich, bestimmten die Stagnation der Urbanisierungsrate und die Rückständigkeit der Landwirtschaft in den 80er Jahren die Systematisierungsumsetzung.

Key words: rural systematization, communist regime, agricultural policy, urbanization, village, urban centre, national identity, urban system, reform, culture, society, economy.

Introduction

Throughout this article I will approach the transformation of rural area during the last two decades of the communist period in Romania. I am dealing with a specific policy of urbanization applied by the communist regimes through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) starting with the sixties, in order to radically change the rural area and to reform the agricultural sector in the Eastern European state. This policy which I will define as “rural systematization” was a deliberate strategy of the communist regimes to transform certain selected settlements into small towns, which were to attract the population from the nearby smaller villages. The new towns, which I will describe in the next pages under the name of “agro-industrial complexes” were constructed according to centrally designed plans, and were suppose to act both as urban cities and regional industrial centres for the processing of agricultural raw products.

The CMEA was founded in 1949, as an economic organisation of the communist states as counterpart of the Organisation for European

Economic Co-operation which existed among the democratic countries in Western Europe. It was in fact a part of the Soviet strategy of avoiding the application of the Marshall Plan for the Eastern European states. Although it never reached the importance of European Economic Community in Western Europe, the CMEA attempted to coordinate the economic policy of the Eastern European States, including aspects such as industrialisation or the modernisation of agriculture.

The case of Romania is special among the Eastern European states since it rejected for a long period rural systematization, only to implement it during the final years of the regime. This is especially interesting as during the interwar period and the first two decades of the communist regime the Romanian policy toward agriculture was comparable with the one promoted by the rest of the South-eastern European states: agrarian reforms in 1921 and 1945, collectivization between 1949 and 1962. Yet, this situation changed during the eighth decade of the twentieth century, when the Romanian leadership chose to reject the agricultural policy promoted by the CMEA and to delay as much as possible the construction of agro-industrial centres.

Besides, another interesting aspect of the rural systematization in Romania is the bad reputation that it enjoyed among the Romanian intellectuals after 1989. Actually, what I will argue in the next pages is that it remained mostly in the stage of planning, rural systematization was (and still is) considered by the Romanian intellectuals as one of the most negative aspects of the communist regime. This is in my opinion representative for a certain ideological connection between the rural space and the Romanian identity, a connection which distorts the perception of the countryside and its short and long term development.

This paper will be organised in several sections which will approach different aspects relevant for the policy of rural systematization. The first one provides the reader a historical background of the rural area in Romania during the twentieth century. Here I argue that the villages represented an important landmark of the Romanian society mostly because of a development model that relayed heavily on agricultural exports during the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that this model became obsolete in the last century, it affected the structure of the rural area for the next several decades.

The second part describes the policy of rural systematization carried out, in various forms, by all the Eastern European states. Here I argue that

such a policy was not at all singular to Romania and that the leadership in Bucharest delayed it as much as possible.

The third part, entitled “Cultural Aspects of Rural Systematization in Romania”, deals with the actual perception of the Romanian intellectuals about this policy. The mostly negative perspective about the development of agro-industrial centres is in my opinion connected with the importance of the village and rural area for the Romanian national identity. I consider this an important factor in delaying the implementation of rural systematization by the communist regime from Bucharest, especially as nationalism became the dominant ideology during the seventies and the eighties.

The last part places the rural systematization into the wider context of urbanization in South Eastern Europe. The peculiarity of the urban development in this area, emphasising the importance of capital city and the centralist political model adopted by most of the countries during the nineteenth century, became incompatible with the massive social transformation that took place during the first two decades of the communist period. Therefore, the rural systematization represented an effort to adjust the urban structure to the new social one.

Historical Background

The Romanian landscape was dominated by villages which were, at the beginning of the twentieth century, inhabited by almost eighty percent of the Romanian population. Throughout the last century, the number of the inhabitants of the villages declined, although they continued to represent an important share of the total Romanian population. In 2002 the percent of rural population was still close to fifty percent. During the eighties, the average dimension of a village was of 880 inhabitants, with more than and 44.0 percent of them with under five hundred.¹ The dimension of the villages and their territorial density greatly varied at a regional level: the less populated were the counties located in the Eastern part of Walachia and in Dobrudja, regions which have been colonised after their integration to the Romanian kingdom during the nineteenth century.

There would be rather difficult to define the aspect of an average Romanian village, since during the twentieth century the regional differences in architecture remained notable. The modern state of Romania was formed in 1859, through the union of Moldavia and Wallachia, two

principalities which shared strong cultural, socio-economic and political similitude. After World War I, three other provinces were attached to it, namely Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia. The first two were previously parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy while Bessarabia had been ruled starting with 1812 by the Tsarist Empire.

The regional differences remained strong, and can be explained through historical and ethnical factors. The villages inhabited by Germans in Transylvania were grouped around the fortified church, since the Saxons had been colonised in the South Eastern parts of Transylvania starting with the middle of the twelfth century, and their task was to protect the frontiers of the Hungarian Kingdom. In the South Western part of Transylvania, known also as Banat, German Swabians colonists arrived during the eighteenth century, and their movement was regulated by the Habsburg Monarchy. Therefore, the villages they constructed had been designed according to systematic plans, and preserved an orderly aspect until nowadays. Nevertheless, most of the Romanian villages in the Old Kingdom and Bessarabia were not organised according to systematic plans.

The predominance of the villages as an essential part of the Romanian rural landscape was the result of a specific model of economic development. During the nineteenth century the Old Kingdom developed an economy based on the exports of grains toward the Western European industrialised states² and the local medieval elites seized the property over land and used the landless peasants as cheap labour force. This is especially easy to notice for the regions integrated to the Old Kingdom during the nineteenth century. As the colonisation was not regulated by the state, the first settlers were the temporary pastors, which were periodically moving with their flocks to the region. Initially the established small settlements inhabited by an extended family and used the untilled lands as pastures.³ They were settled into the villages later, when the density of population grew and the land was transformed from pasture into agricultural (cultivated) terrain.

This shows that the villages had an important political and economic function: that of providing labour force for the grate estates. Indeed, not only in Romania but in the whole Eastern part of Europe countryside was dominated by villages. The farms as economic centres for exploitation of land were a rare occurrence and, aside several model farms managed by the state, practically inexistent in Romania. The closest to farms were the estates mansions, which were located at a close distance to the villages. The villages represented therefore a good way of controlling landless

peasants, as shown by the fact that the local landowner was the one that approved their mayors even at the middle of nineteenth century.⁴

The ulterior evolution of the rural area preserved the village as an important peculiarity of the Romanian landscape. Due to the usage of peasants as cheap labour force, the living conditions in the villages constantly deteriorated during the nineteenth century. Romania continued to export important quantities of cereals on the Western European markets and the land owners preferred to pay less the peasants and cut the costs of production instead of investing into technology and raising the overall agricultural productivity.

The result was the so called "rural problem", with masses of landless peasants living in deep poverty. A series of peasants' revolts which culminated with the one in 1907, repressed with the price of several thousand victims⁵ opened the debate regarding an eventual distribution of land to the peasants. The beginning of the World War I postponed the problem. Until 1916, Romania kept a neutrality position but the politicians agreed that eventual land redistribution was to be carried at the end of the war. Romania joined the fight against the Central Powers in august 1916, a decision that proved disastrous on short term. In several months, enemy troops controlled more than half of country and the government and royal family, retreated in Moldavia, could only hope that the front, sustained by an army composed mostly of peasants, would hold. The Russian revolution (February 1917) was another reason to fear because of the possibility of revolutionary disorders among the Romanian troops.

The solution adopted in order to gain the support of the peasants was to distribute small plots of land of maximum five hectares to every household. Most of the land was expropriated from the estates and distributed to the peasants, and as a result the estates lost their economic function.

The extent to which the policy of keeping the peasants in the villages continued is difficult to asset, but the way in which the reform was enacted meant that the land was used mostly as subsistence mean and the development of the farms was delayed. The average distributed plot was in fact much smaller than the five hectares stipulated by the law: between 2.3 and 2.8 hectares.⁶ Such small plots didn't encourage the development of farms in the Romanian countryside and slowed the migration of the peasants toward the cities. This situation lasted for the whole interwar period, as in 1940 a Danish expert writing about the situation of cooperatives in Romanian agriculture, was stroke to discover

that the migration from villages and establishment in the middle of their lands, in farms, never really took place in Romania.⁷

The importance of the village as a peculiarity of Romanian landscape was further strengthened through a second agrarian reform that took place in 1945. It expropriated all private terrains exceeding fifty hectares and distributed them in even smaller plots to the peasants. The average surface of the distributed plots was of 1.3⁸ hectares and it was expected to be used mostly as subsistence mean by the peasants.

Nevertheless, the reform in 1945 brought noticeable structural changes in the Romanian agriculture, changes which represented the first step of a radical transformation of the social and economic structures existing in the villages. Unlike its forerunner, it didn't distributed all the land to the peasants, but preserved an important proportion which was transferred to the state and worked by state farms. Such enterprises began to slowly develop and gained an important impulse in 1949, after the remaining estates were transferred to the state. During the next several decades, this kind of farms gained importance in the Romanian agriculture. Their architecture resembled the one of the private farms in Western Europe, with several buildings and dependencies placed in the middle of the land they worked. They were managed by state representatives, using agricultural tools and a number of daily labourers recruited among the peasants from the nearby villages.

State farms managed only a small percent of the Romanian territory. Most of it was initially managed by private peasants and, after the collectivisation of agriculture (1949 – 1962), by collective farms (see table I). In theory the collective farms were enterprises in which the land was jointly owned by its members, who also appointed the administrative staff. Nevertheless, the local party structures played an important role in the appointment of the collective farms' managers, which meant that in practice the peasants had little control over their administration.

An important distinction, reflected even by the communist constitutions, was maintained between the state and collective property. The last communist constitution, published in 1965,⁹ mentioned socialist property as the basis of the Romanian economy (art. 5) and defined it as state property consisting in goods that belonged "to the whole people" or collective property for goods that belonged to the collective associations (art. 6).

In practice, the fact that the collective property was deemed inferior to the state one meant that the collective sector was subject to less investment

in technology and specialised staff. Actually, the collective farms had little to no access to technology, since the agricultural tools were managed by the Stations of Machines and Tractors which worked, against cost, the collective land. Therefore, they required the physical work of the peasants, and the villages remained a constant presence in Romanian landscape.

Table I: Repartition of the agricultural and arable land according to property forms in April 1962¹⁰

	Agricultural surface		Arable surface	
	Thousands of ha	%	Thousands of ha	%
Total agriculture	14,594	100	9,854	100
A. Agricultural state property of which:	4,364	29.9	1,781	18.1
State Farms	1,745	12.0	1,365	13.9
B. Collective Farms	8,862	60.7	7,524	76.4
C. Associations for working the land (in the mountainous areas)	415	2.8	149	1.5
D. Small households (in the mountainous area)	954	6.6	400	4.0

On the background of the rapid urbanization that took place during the fifties and the sixties the regime was less preoccupied by the villages and the rural landscape. It was supposed that the development of heavy industry would absorb the peasants and transform them into workers and townfolk. Nevertheless the rate of growth of urban population sharply declined after the first two decades (see table II), due to the economic crises that stroke Europe at the beginning of the seventies.

Table II: Growth of the urban population in Romania during the twentieth century¹¹

Year	Urban population (%)	Growth rate for the whole interval (%)	Yearly growth rate (%)
1912	18.3	-	-
1930	20.1	9.83	0.35
1941	24.4	21.39	1.94
1948	23.4	-4.1	-0.58
1956	31.3	33.76	4.22
1966	38.2	22.04	2.20
1977	43.6	14.13	1.3
1992	54.3	24.54	1.63
2002	52.27	-2.95	-0.29

The crisis was followed by attempts of reform undertaken by the leaders of Eastern European regimes, which tried to escape the trap of debts in which the area felt during the seventies and to preserve a certain standard of living for the population. Yet, Romania was a notable exception among the Eastern European states, as the leadership in Bucharest focused rather in paying the debts with the price of huge economic and social costs, instead of undertaking economic and social reforms.¹²

The crisis revealed another problem of the communist regimes. The policy of heavy industrialization promoted during the fifties and the sixties meant that the investments in agricultural technology were very low and the need for manual labour force remained relatively high. That led to an important contradiction in the development policy, between industrialization and the consequent urbanization officially promoted and the need for labour force in agriculture. The development of agro-industrial centres was an attempt to solve this contradiction, by developing the light industry specialised in processing agricultural products and keeping some of the labour force available for the agricultural sector.

The Policy of Rural Systematization

Nevertheless, while in other Eastern European states the idea of agro-industrial cooperation and industrialization of agriculture gained terrain the Romanian leadership chose a divergent path in their policy toward agriculture. The new policy of USSR and other Eastern European states promoted an increased vertical cooperation among farms specialised in processing/distribution of products and the ones supplying non-agricultural inputs and services for agriculture. The concentration of the agricultural population in settlements of urban type was initially proposed by the Soviet Union in the late sixties and was pushed intensively in Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria. In the Bulgarian case the number of official established agro-industrial complexes grew from 153 in 1974 to 161 in 1977 and 338 by 1979.¹³

In the case of Romania the principles of “sistemizare rurală (rural systematization)” were laid down during the National Conference of the Romanian Communist Party in 1967 but the first “complexe agro-industriale (agro-industrial complexes)” were built only after the earthquake in 1977. Even at that moment the progress was rather slow and the decision to accelerate the process was taken during the Party Plenum in June 1986.¹⁴ The connection between the development of agro-industrial complexes and the shortage of labour force in agriculture becomes obvious if one takes into account that in December 1981 the first restrictions regarding the residence were officially published¹⁵ and they were used until the end of the regime in order to obstruct the migration from the countryside to the cities.

The delay in implementing the systematization is explainable if one takes into account the tensioned relations between Romania and the CMEA and the overall deterioration of Soviet-Romanian relations during the sixties. The refuse of CMEA policies was undoubtedly also connected with the official nationalist ideology of the period, which relied heavily upon a glorification of peasant folklore and presented Nicolae Ceaușescu as someone deeply concerned with the peasants' problems.¹⁶

On the long run, Romania rejected specialization among the state members which would have reserved to her the status of agricultural producer¹⁷ and chose to force the industrial development. As a result, the living conditions in the villages deteriorated and, at the beginning of the eighties, the regime in Bucharest was confronted with shortage of labour force in agriculture. The decision to speed up the construction of agro-

industrial complexes in 1986 came as an attempt to stop the migration toward the cities by improving the living conditions in the villages and to modernize the production process. Yet, the projects of “rural urbanization” implied immense costs and in the case of Romania it was implemented at the worst moment, during a period of acute economic crisis. The block of flats erected in the villages lacked basic amenities, such as running water above the ground level¹⁸ and the program progressed rather slowly until it came to an end in December 1989.

The delay of urbanization affected the Romanian rural area way after the collapse of communist and it imprints the Romanian landscape until nowadays. With around 32 percent of the total population employed in the agricultural sector and around 45 percent of population still living in the rural area, Romania is one of the less urbanised states in the European Union. However, the problem of Romania is not only the proportion of rural population, but also the small number of cities which would accommodate the growing urban population in the near future. In 2002 for example, the number of Romanian localities administratively defined as cities or towns was of 265. The number of cities in Netherlands, the EU members with a population close to Romania (16 million in comparison 22), is almost double – 430. Meanwhile, the number of cities in Bulgaria, state with a comparable development level with the one of Romania, is of 249 at a population three times lower.

Cultural Aspects of Rural Systematization in Romania

The delay of the rural systematization by the Romanian communist leadership may be explained through its refusal to adjust the development strategy to the economic realities of the seventies. Nevertheless, in this part of the paper I will argue that this delay was also due the specific ideology of the Romanian regime, which was rejecting the CMEA policy in the name of national independence. I consider that traditionally the rural area was an important element in the construction of Romania’s national identity, an element which was incorporated by the communist regime in the nationalistic ideology displayed especially during the seventies and the eighties. Therefore, the reform of rural area was delayed also based on ideological or cultural reasons strongly connected to the Romanian traditionalism.

As a starting point of my analysis I propose the perspective which the Romanian intellectuals held about systematization. Their overwhelming majority describe the rural systematization and the development of agro-industrial centres are described in negative terms (see note 14 for example), emphasising its role in the destruction of national identity in Romania and the strong resistance showed by the peasants who refused to leave their villages. This perception is based on the work of the historian Dinu C. Giurescu, *Razing of Romania's Past*,¹⁹ published after his emigration in USA in 1988. In his work Giurescu severely criticised the policy of systematization, which, according to him, played an important role in the destruction of the cultural patrimony of Romania and the national identity of Romanians. Nevertheless, he made little distinction between the policies of urban and rural systematization. The first one meant the demolition of the historical centres of the cities and their reconstruction according to the regime's architectural plans. The second one meant the transformation of certain selected villages in small towns, which were to attract the rural population from the nearby villages.

Due to the international criticism of the Ceaușescu regime, the rural systematization became rapidly an expression of the communist dictatorship directed against the free will of the peasants. Without any attempts to compare it with the policies of the neighbouring countries, the rural systematization was regarded as a peculiarity of the Romanian Communism, despite the fact that even Giurescu writes rather about the regime's plans for it, without giving any data regarding the number of agro-industrial centres that were really built.²⁰

The approach of rural systematization in a comparative perspective and a thorough investigation of the sources contradict Giurescu. In fact, the number of localities administratively defined as "urban settlements", namely cities or towns, remained constant (189) between 1968 and 1982,²¹ and shows that the Romanian administration started to develop the agro-industrial centres after 1982. Meanwhile, voices among the Romanian architects tried to connect the policy of systematization to the dominant nationalistic ideology. The development of agro-industrial centres was considered a way of preserving the rural specific of the country, by providing nearby working places for the commuters from the villages.²²

Less it is known about the peasants' perception over systematization, since no systematic study of this problem was conducted. Ironically, the reason for this may be the fact that there are so little examples of systematised communes and hence the topic is difficult to approach.

Nevertheless, one book indirectly approached a case of systematization, namely the one of Scornicești village (later town), which was the place of birth of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last Romanian dictator.²³ It showed that the perception regarding the systematization was mostly positive among the villagers.²⁴ Yet, one should take into account that, because of its strong symbolic value, Scornicești is not the best case study to assert the experience of the people who were subject to systematization.

The perspective regarding the systematization proposed the Romanian intellectuals shows that the rural area is still a sensitive topic in the Romanian culture. This is an important factor in explaining the reluctance of Romanian communist regime to apply policies which would have radically changed the countryside. The overall perception of the peasants and villages in the Romanian culture is very important in this context, and a short overview of it may help to better understand the reasons for which the rural systematization was delayed by the communist regime.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rural area was considered a part of the country that Romania should be ashamed of and the image of the peasants was very negative among the urban strata.²⁵ The evolution of the term “prost” is representative for this perspective: the word was used during the eighteenth century to define the uneducated, lower class person and was transformed into a strong insult during the nineteenth and the twentieth century. The political attempts to transform the rural area were delayed, even when the social pressure to improve the peasants’ life was obvious. The peasant uprising in 1907 affected roughly the whole Romanian territory and was suppressed with the price of thousands of victims, but the agrarian reform was promulgated only ten years later, during World War I.

It was in fact the war that changed the perspective about the peasants. As most of the army consisted in peasants and the survival of the Romanian elites depended of it, two reforms were hastily promoted: the agrarian reforms which distributed land to the peasants and the electoral one, which granted the right to vote for the whole adult male population. With the strengthening of nationalism in interwar period, the peasants become the main symbol of Romanian nationalism. They had the advantage of being orthodox, Latin (although is arguable to which extent the average peasant of aware of his or her Latinity) and not corrupted by the foreign values. The most important Romanian fascist organisation, the Iron Guard, was especially active in the rural area, which was considered the most “românised” part of the society.²⁶ The village was therefore regarded as

the cradle of Romanian civilisation and the virtues of the peasants and rural life were praised in literature and arts.

This perception changed after the Second World War, with the instauration of the communist regime in 1947. The “new man” of the official ideology was the worker and the presence of Soviet troops in Romania until 1958 acted a good deterrent against the nationalism. Nevertheless, the regime in Bucharest promoted an autonomous policy toward the Soviet Union, and after the death of I. V. Stalin, attempted to distance itself of the Soviet model. The key event here was the retreat of the Soviet troops from Romania, in 1958, an event which allowed the regime in Bucharest to pursue a more autonomous policy and to reject the political reform undertaken in Soviet Union after the death of I.V. Stalin. Under these circumstances, the regime recovered both intellectuals and ideas from the interwar period.²⁷ Interesting to notice, among the intellectuals recovered by the regime were both Dinu Giurescu (the author of the work regarding the systematization in Romania) and his father, Constantin C. Giurescu, also historian. They were reintegrated during the second half of the fifties in the teaching and scientific activity, after being purged in 1950.

The return of the nationalism during the leadership of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989), was especially strong in Romania. Under these circumstances, the villages and the peasants regained their symbolic value,²⁸ reflected by ample festivals dedicated to Romanian rural tradition, such as “Cântarea României [The Singing of Romania]”, where different groups of amateur artists presented the traditional songs and dances from different regions all over Romania. Of course, these festivals were centred on the Romanian rural tradition, with little space for the ethnic minorities. This would explain not only the delays in the implementation of systematization but also the attempts to ideologically motivate it as an attempt to preserve the rural population.

One should not also underestimate the extent to which Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian leader during the eighties, was prone to the tendency to overestimate the importance of the village. Ceaușescu was an old school communist (or rather Stalinist), but this was not necessarily incompatible with a strong nationalism. His rural origin, as son of a ten children family from the small village of Scornești, is another factor that should be taken into consideration. Despite his open attachment to the communist ideology, Ceaușescu was deeply influenced by his rural origins. His attitude toward its family members, who occupied important positions in the state administration, is representative for the importance of

the family ties in the countryside. Despite his publically displayed atheism, he was the one to erect a church in his birth village, as a dedication to his mother who was a very religious person. It seems indeed that his publically professed attachment to the communist values was not at all incompatible with a traditionalist perspective regarding the importance of the village and peasants for Romania.

Rural Systematization as Part of a Wider Urban Development Model

Despite the initial rejection, the communist regime in Romania felt in line with the other Eastern European states and initiated the rural systematization during the eighties. This aspect is especially interesting since the reasons for which the rural systematization was finally adopted during the last decade of the communist regime are still unclear. By accepting the systematization, even in the last moment, the regime contradicted both its attitude toward the Soviet policy and the traditionalism emphasizing the role of the village for the Romanian national identity.

In order to provide an explanation for this peculiarity of rural systematization in Romania, I will place it into a wider context of urbanization in South Eastern Europe. From the theoretical point of view, there are two main categories of theories that attempt to explain the process of urbanization at a world scale: convergence and divergence theories.²⁹ In the first case urbanization is associated with a so called “natural” development of human society, being a universal feature of it, with stages that are more or less identifiable. The second category regards urbanization more as a result of regional developments and less as a general trend in the evolution of human societies. Therefore, there are no universal valid features in the development of cities or towns, but rather particular cases that should be individually approached.

In the case of this paper, I consider that the “convergence” theories would be more appropriated for my analysis, because of two distinct advantages they offer. In the first place, they allow a comparative perspective, which is very useful in placing developments of Romania into a wider, regional context. To a certain extent I already did this, when I argued that the Romanian case was peculiar in Eastern Europe because of the fact that the rural systematization started relatively late and hence

contradicted some authors that considered this policy as being particularly aggressively implemented in Romania.

Secondly, I consider the “convergence” theories more appropriated for the historical period I am dealing with. Indeed, one may accept that during the earlier historical periods the region of nowadays Romania was relatively isolated and enjoyed a particular development, but such an assertion is relatively difficult to prove for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Romanian principalities and later Romania were directly connected to the regional developments in Eastern Europe, in a first stage through the process of nation-building according to the Western European model and after the Second World War as a part of the Soviet zone of influence.

Regarded from this perspective one would expect that the political events which affected Romania and South Eastern Europe to be reflected by the social and economic developments, which would share common features in the whole area. In regarding the topic of this paper, one common trait of the urbanization in the South Eastern Europe was the development of the capital cities, as a part of the nation building process.³⁰ This makes sense if one takes into consideration several historical factors that supported such a development: the mostly rural, undifferentiated societies in South Eastern Europe, the centralism promoted by the newly formed states and the national pride that made them to focus on the capital city as an area which was representative for the nation as a whole and comparable to the cities in Western Europe. In the case of Romania for example, Bucharest may have been the “little Paris”, but the rest of the urban centres, especially in the Old Kingdom, remained of relatively low importance.

Under these circumstances, the urban centres (either cities or towns) hardly fulfilled the main function of the city as defined by Max Weber, namely the economic one, as a place of regular exchange of goods.³¹ In most cases the cities in South Eastern Europe acted rather as administrative than as economic centres. This is also reflected by the relative low degree of autonomy which the cities enjoyed in this area and their strong subordination to the central authorities. In the case of Romania, this was reflected by the importance of Bucharest as capital city in comparison with the other urban centres and steadily decline of Iași, (the capital of principality of Moldova before the Union in 1859) starting with the second half of the nineteenth century. This centralist tradition was further enforced during the communist period, when economy was

closely controlled by the state. Therefore, the cities functioned as places of distribution (rather than exchange) of goods since there existed not a real market in the economic sense. Furthermore, the communist regimes continued and strengthened the centralist policy of the interwar period, as they attempted to control as much as possible the societies they were ruling. That meant that even the developing of new urban centres or the expansion of the old ones was controlled, at least in theory, by the central authorities, according to the needs of a planned economy.

A useful concept to describe this kind of urban systems is the one of primacy, referring to regions in which one city, usually the capital city, clearly dominates the rest of the urban places.³² Important for this paper is the fact that primacy is specific to centralised political systems and is connected with the relatively small size of the country, the short length of its urban history and the low level of economic development.³³ Especially relevant from my point of view is the low level of economic development associated with the undifferentiated societies of South Eastern Europe which acted as a factor supporting the primacy of the capital city.

Nevertheless, after the first two decades of the communist regime the societies in Eastern Europe suffered a tremendous transformation. The industrial development and the subsequent high rates of urbanization deeply affected the social structure. Relatively fast the social structure became more complex, as the states of the area made a transition from mostly rural to mostly urban societies. This transformation was especially noticeable in the case of the less developed societies. In the case of Romania, the rate of growth was impressive during the first two decades of the communist regime, but was followed by stagnation and regress during the seventies and especially eighties. The reasons for this were, according to the political analyst Michael Shafir, the inability of Romanian leadership to adjust its policies to the social and economic changes following the first two decades of the regime:

Romania's economic problems in the late 70s and early 80s derived from the orthodox political-economic mentality of a leadership incapable of pursuing measures conducive to a <second> industrial revolution because the leadership had <overlearnt> the task of implementing the first economic breakthrough, the core of which rested in mobilizational tactics geared toward high growth rates.³⁴

Regarded from the perspective of urban systems, the industrialisation of the South Eastern European societies made the traditional urban systems characterised by the primacy of the capital city obsolete. The development of agro-industrial centres may be interpreted as an attempt to transform it in a rank sized system, with various layers of urban centres of different dimensions, more suitable for industrialised societies. This would explain why such a policy was undertaken to a certain degree by all the Eastern European communist states in an attempt to adjust their agricultural sectors to the new social realities.

The initial refusal of such a policy by the Romanian leadership was in concordance with its inability to adjust to the social transformation which was created by the regime itself. The hasty implementation of rural systematization during the eighties represented a late attempt to deal with the development problems resulting from the discrepancy between the existing urban system and the newly emerged social structure. It was unfortunately implemented too late and due to the haste to which the new agro-industrial centres were built, its results were at least questionable.

Conclusions

The policy of rural systematization was by no means peculiar to the Romanian communist regime, but was applied, in different forms and degrees in the whole Eastern Europe. In fact, it was Romania among all the communist states that delayed it as much as possible, until the last years of the communist regime. These findings contradict the mainstream of Romanian intellectuals, who emphasize the destructive effects of rural systematization in Romania, considering it a peculiarity of the brutal and oppressive Romanian communist regime. Arguably, the sad fame which this policy enjoyed is partially motivated by its hasty implementation in a period in which the regime had insufficient resources at its disposal.

The negative perception of rural systematization is in my opinion connected to the symbolic role of the village in the discourse regarding the Romanian national identity. Ironically, this role was an important factor for the late implementation of this policy during communism. Nevertheless, the attachment of the Romanian leadership under Nicolae Ceușescu to the traditionalist, Stalinist model of development, and their basic refusal of any Soviet policy in the name of national independence also played an important role in the initial rejection of rural systematization.

The development of agro-industrial centres during the eighties, after more than a decade of rejecting the CMEA policy, shows that there were pragmatic reasons for undertaking such a policy. The radical social transformation that the regime undertook during its first two decades was incompatible with the urban system existing in Romania. As a matter of fact the main factor that hindered a natural adjustment of the urban system to the new socio-economic structure was the central economic planning specific to communist regimes. Therefore, a state designed plan for the development of new urban centres was in the end necessary.

NOTES

- ¹ Giurescu, D. C., *Distrugerea trecutului României [The Razing of Romania's Past]*, Museion, București, 1994, p. 72.
- ² Rosseti, R., *Pentru ce s-au răsculat țărani [Why Did the Peasants Rebel]*, Atelierele Grafice Socec, București, 1908, p. 269; Chirot, D., *Schimbarea socială într-o societate periferică: formarea unei colonii balcanice [Social Changes in a Peripheral Society: the Creation of a Balkan Colony]*, Corint, București, 2002 [1976], traducere de Victor Rizescu, p. 170, Scraba, G. D., *Starea socială a săteanului: după ancheta privitoare anului 1905, îndeplinită cu ocazia Expozițiunii Generale Române din 1906 de către Secțiunea de Economie Socială [The Social State of the Villager: Following the Enquiry in the Year 1905, Accomplished with the Occasion of the General Romanian Exposition in 1906 by the Section of Social Economy]*, Institutul de Arte Grafice "Carol Gobl", București, 1907, pp. 21-25.
- ³ For example in the case of Brăila county, in Eastern Part of Wallachia, 67 percent of the county's inhabitants were immigrants from Transylvania or overpopulated regions in the Old Kingdom. Mihăilescu, G., "Note asupra populației și satelor din Câmpia Brăilei [Notes on the Population and Villages from Braila Plain]", in *Analele Brăilei [Annals of Braila]*, No. 2-3, 1932, p. 89.
- ⁴ Filliti, I. C., Gruia I.V., "Administrația locală a României [The Local Administration of Romania]" in Gusti, D./Orghidan, C./Vulcănescu, M./Leonte, V.(eds.): *Enciclopedia României [Encyclopaedia of Romania]*, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1938-1943, vol. I, p. 304.
- ⁵ The number of victims is debatable since the documents related to the military actions against peasants were destroyed at the end of the repression. I quote the expression "thousands of victims" as in Platon, G., "Relații agrare. Mișcări sociale [Agrarian Relations. Social Movements]", in *** *Istoria Românilor [The History of Romanians]*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2003, Vol. VII, Tomme 2, p. 101. The volumes were published by the Romanian Academy and represent the point of view of the mainstream Romanian historians.
- ⁶ Mesnicov, I., „Evoluția de după război a proprietății agricole [The Evolution of Post-War Agricultural Property]“, în Golopenția, A./Georgescu, Dr. D. C., *60 sate românești cercetate de echipele studențești în vara 1938 [60 Romanian Villages Researched by The Students' Teams in the Summer of 1938]*, Institutul Național de Științe Sociale al României, București, 1941, vol II, p. 11.
- ⁷ See the ample study of Gormsen, M., "Studiu critic asupra cooperăției românești [A Critical Study on the Romanian Cooperation]", in *Independența Economică [The Economic Independence]*, 3-4 (1940), pp. 33-195.

- ⁸ Calculated according to the data regarding the total number of total number of land granted villagers and the total land granted in January 1948 as published by Axenciuc, V, *Evoluția economică a României: cercetări statistico-istorice; 1859-1947 [The Economic Evolution of Romania: Statistical-Historical Researches; 1859-1947]*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2000, vol. II, p. 103.
- ⁹ The Romanian Constitution in 1965, at http://legislatie.resurse-pentru-democratie.org/const_1965.php (May 2012).
- ¹⁰ Balomiri, E./Bordeianu, C./Bordeianu, T., *Agricultura României: 1944-1964 [The Agriculture of Romania: 1944-1964]*, Editura Agro-Silvica, București, 1964, p. 53.
- ¹¹ Data taken from Alexandrescu, I./Bulei, I./Mamina, I./Scurtu, I.: *Enciclopedia de istorie a României [The Encyclopaedia of Romanian History]*, Editura Meronia, București, 2000, for the years 1912, 1930, 1941 and Romanian National Institute for Statistics, <http://www.insse.ro/RPL2002INS/vol1/tabele/t01.pdf> (2006), for the years 1948, 1956, 1966, 1977, 1992, 2002. The growth rates were calculated by me.
- ¹² Berend, I. T., *From the Soviet Block to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, p. 33.
- ¹³ Wädekin, K. E./Jacobs, E. M. (eds.), *Agrarian Policies in Communist Europe: A Critical Introduction*, Allanheld, Osmun & Co. Publishers Inc., Totowa New Jersey, 1982, pp. 240-243.
- ¹⁴ Berindei, M., "Distrugerea satelor românești în arhivele comitetului central [The Destruction of the Romanian villages in the Archives of Central Committee]", in 22, 30th of June 2009, at <http://www.revista22.ro/articol-6312.html> (April 2012).
- ¹⁵ Shafir, M, *Romania: Politics Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1985, p. 143.
- ¹⁶ Lovenduski, J./Wodall, J., *Politics and Society in Eastern Europe*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987, p. 147.
- ¹⁷ Retegan, M., *Război politic în blocul communist [Political War in the Communist Block]*, Rao, București, 2002, pp. 11-12.
- ¹⁸ Almond, M., *Decline Without Fall: Romania under Ceaușescu*, Alliance Publishers Ltd., London, 1988, p. 13.
- ¹⁹ Giurescu, D. C., *The Razing of Romania's Past: International Preservation Report*, U.S. Committee, International Council on Monuments and Sites, Distributed by the Preservation Press, Washington, D.C., 1989. The Romanian edition was published in 1994, under the title: Distrugerea trecutului României [*The Razing of Romania's Past*], Museion, București, 1994.
- ²⁰ *Ibidem* (Romanian edition), p. 13.

- 21 Oroveanu, M. T., *Organizarea administrativă și sistematizarea teritorului Republicii Socialiste România [The Administrative Organisation and the Systematization of the Territory of Socialist Republic of Romania]*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1986, pp. 313-314.
- 22 Nicului, C., „Punct de vedere în legătură cu dezvoltarea satului românesc în contextul sistematizării teritoriale [Point of View Regarding the Development of the Romanian Village in the Context of Territorial Systematization]”, in *Arhitectura [The Architecture]*, 3/1988, p. 45.
- 23 See Mungiu-Pippidi, A./Althabe, G., *Secera și buldozerul: Scornicești și Nușoara. Mecanisme de aservire a țăranului român [The Sickle and the Bulldozer: Scornicești and Nușoara. Mechanisms for Vassalage of the Romanian Peasant]*, Polirom, Iași, 2002.
- 24 *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30.
- 25 For the low status of the peasants in the Romanian society see short story “Proștii [The Fools]” (1910) of the writer Liviu Rebreanu in Rebreanu, L., *Nuvele [Short Stories]*, Editura Liviu Rebreanu, București, 2006, pp. 196-202 or Zeletin, Ș., *Din țara măgarilor: însemnări [From the Country of the Donkeys: Notes]*, Nemira, București, 2006 (1916).
- 26 Heinen, A., *Die Legion “Erzengel Michael” in Rumänien: Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation: ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, München, 1986, p. 387.
- 27 Fischer-Galați, S., *Eastern Europe and the Cold War: Perceptions and Perspectives*, East European Monographs, Boulder, New York, 1994, pp. 20-21.
- 28 Verdery, K., *Compromis și rezistență: cultura română sub Ceaușescu [National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania]*, Humanitas, București, 1994 [1991], traducere de Mona Antohi și Sorin Antohi, p. 179.
- 29 Abraham, D., „The Pattern of Urbanisation in Eastern European Countries”, in *Romanian Journal of Sociology*, January-December 1990, vol 1, Nos. 1-2, p. 51.
- 30 Förster, H., „Geographische Stadtforschung – ein Überblick”, in Bohn T. M./ Calic M., *Urbanisierung und Stadtentwicklung in Südosteuropa vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert*, Verlag Otto Sagner, München, Berlin, 2010, p. 160.
- 31 Weber, M., „The Nature of City”, in Meadows P./ Mizruchi E. H., *Urbanism, Urbanisation and Change: Comparative Perspective*, second edition, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Reading Massachusetts, Menlo Park, California, London, Amsterdam, Don Mills, Ontario, Sydney, 1976, p. 21.
- 32 Eisenstadt, S. N./ Sachar A., *Society, Culture and Urbanisation*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, Beverly Hills, London, New Delhi, 1987, p. 39.
- 33 *Ibidem*, p. 42.
- 34 Shafir, M, op. cit., p. 107.

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