

TERRITORIAL DISPARITIES AND VILLAGE DYNAMICS IN ROMANIA: POST-SOCIALIST TRAJECTORIES AND POST-ACCESSION CHALLENGES

PhD Ioan Ianos

*Interdisciplinary Centre for Advanced Research on Territorial Dynamics
University of Bucharest, Romania*

One of the poorest EU countries, Romania is the most rural, as well. From this fact, a simple question arises: does a correlation between both extreme characteristics exist? It is very difficult to give a negative answer. In any case, historically, Romania inherited huge territorial disparities at all the scales: national, regional, urban-rural, intra-urban etc. In the communist period the extensive industrialisation and cooperativisation of agriculture diminished regional disparities, but increased the rural-urban ones. These last discrepancies explained the huge “transfer” of rural inhabitants to urban centres, especially between 1970 and 1990. In this period, the share of urban population increased from 36.9 to 54.3%. Since the collapse of the totalitarian regime the territorial disparities have increased at the regional level. Bucharest has become the main attractor for population, foreign direct investments, accessibility etc. This hypertrophic trend is revealed by widening gap between the GDP in comparison with the least developed county (in 1995, Bucharest’s GDP exceeded Vaslui’s GDP 10.4 times, and in 2014 the difference was almost 27 times).

The main loser of the entire post-socialist period remains the Romanian village. The changes have had contradictory effects due to the different dynamics of three interrelated processes: deindustrialisation, new ruralisation and tertiarisation. The time lag between rapid deindustrialisation and a rather slow tertiarisation of the cities led to high unemployment. In this general framework, the land reforms (by dissolution of the former cooperatives in some successive phases, the villagers received their former land properties) played an important role in diminishing the negative effects of abrupt deindustrialisation. Over 1.2 million daily commuters lost their work place in urban industry and came back to agriculture. So, the first post-socialist decade represented a critical period for the Romanian villages, due to the fundamental restructuring of the economy, involving the changes of the traditional rural-urban relationships: rural-to-urban migration was replaced by urban-to-rural one (especially in the surroundings of the big cities).

After the accession to the NATO and the EU, the Romanian village has registered a further decline, especially in the less developed areas of the country, due to the new opportunities created by migration of workers to more developed countries in Western and Southern Europe. This massive rural emigration affected the majority of the villages, which have lost their demographic potential, while the flipside effects of remittances dramatically impacted their local identity. In the meantime the positive effects of European integration on the rural infrastructure and economy have become increasingly relevant.

An in-depth case study made in the village of Moroieni (Dambovita County) reflects the complexity of the process of self-organisation, the villages’ capacity to integrate the changes and to contribute to the knowledge production by a better valorisation of local perennial values.