

Romanian Agriculture during the Interwar Period and the Demographic Effects of Its Development

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*“A rich land,
poor equipment
and badly paid labour.”
(Mihail Manoilescu)*

THE UNION of 1918 brought major changes to the Romanian socio-economic climate, as the country’s population almost doubled (14.7 million inhabitants as compared to the 7.9 million registered in 1915 in the Old Kingdom)¹ and significant resources entered the country. “By the end of the second decade, Romania’s patrimony of human and material resources, including its production, transportation and exchange forces, was 2.2–2.5 times richer than in the pre-war Romanian state.”² Consequently, the Romanian economy entered a new phase, its development playing a crucial role in redefining the country’s demographic environment.

The structure of this paper rests on three interconnected pillars (an analysis of the agricultural sector, a comparative analysis of Romania’s agriculture and industry in the period under study and an examination of the internal migration caused by the development of both agriculture and industry). Our investi-

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gation begins with an in-depth analysis of the agricultural sector, which was subject to sweeping reforms and experienced major structural changes, followed by a comparison between its evolution and the progress registered in the industrial sector. In the last part of the paper, we shall focus on the findings of these examinations and tackle the concrete aspects of the rural/urban migration entailed by the aforementioned developments.

From a methodological point of view, our intention is to pursue a unitary and adequate direction of research. We have resorted especially to the qualitative method, which has proved extremely useful in our research. The main instrument of this method is analysis. Therefore, the approach of our paper tends to be analytical in nature, emphasizing the significance of the interpretations. We also used the comparative method when we wanted to offer an overall perspective on a particular issue. This method is essential for reaching breakthrough results, which is yet another aim of our study.

Agriculture and the Agrarian Reform

THE AGRARIAN reform was, without a doubt, the main driver of change for the Romanian agricultural sector during the interwar period. It was carried out by the Averescu Government in 1921 and saw the expropriation of 6,123,789 ha (arable land, pasture and woodland) out of the 9,242,930 ha belonging to the great landowners (with estates of over 100 ha), representing 66.1% of the total. Roughly about 1.4 million peasant families benefited from this expropriation. Consequently, the average plot of land pertaining to a peasant's farmstead came to measure 3.8 ha, smaller estates, of up to 10 ha, becoming prevalent and amounting to 73.7% of the total agrarian area.³

Although the agrarian reform was meant to favor the peasants, its effects were limited as it failed to solve some of their main problems. The reform was made without paying attention to all the elements required by an efficient agricultural system, such as specialized equipment, availability of credit, or special counseling on modern agricultural techniques. Hence, the marked decline in agricultural output. Nevertheless, the agrarian reform was a decisive step towards the democratization of the country, despite the drawbacks of the land distribution law and the deficiencies experienced by those granted ownership.⁴ Once such reforms had been carried out, deep changes occurred naturally in the social, political, economic and cultural life of the country.

The evolution of agriculture during the twenty years following the reform was not spectacular, and the agrarian issue remained hotly debated, stirring many disputes. On one hand, there was talk about the disadvantages of dividing up the

agrarian land, while, on the other hand, reasons were given for a new wave of expropriation. Two clear factors may be identified with respect to the development of agriculture during the interwar years, which go beyond such debates and controversies. The effects of the agrarian reform concluded in 1921, which involved the breaking-up of large agrarian estates into small peasant farmsteads, involved a decline of 20–30% in the average output per hectare for different crops.⁵ During the following period, the output improved, as in the entire period between 1921 and 1938 cases of increased average output per hectare were reported, from 8.56 q to 12.5 q for wheat and from 8.1 q to 13.6 q for corn, confirming the legitimacy of labeling Romania as an agrarian country and placing it first in Europe in terms of corn production and fourth in terms of wheat production.⁶ The liberal government, which had encouraged industry to the detriment of agriculture, had also imposed high stamp duties on certain agricultural products.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AGRARIAN STRUCTURE, 1930–1941

Farm size	Number of individual farmsteads		Difference registered between 1941 and 1930	% of the area of individual farmsteads		Difference registered between 1941 and 1930 (% of total)
	1930	1941		1930	1941	
under 1 ha	610,000	465,681	-144,319	1.6	1.9	0.3
1–3 ha	1,100,000	756,646	-343,354	11.1	14.2	3.1
3–5 ha	750,000	439,506	-310,494	15.3	16.7	1.4
5–10 ha	560,000	447,722	-112,278	20	30.1	10.1
10–20 ha	180,000	115,253	-64,747	12	14.6	2.6
20–50 ha	55,000	25,883	-29,117	7.8	6.9	-0.9
50–100 ha	12,800	4,378	-8,422	4.5	2.9	-1.6
over 100 ha	12,200	3,461	-8,739	27.7	12.7	-15

The data in the table above were determined with a view to outlining the evolution of the agrarian structure and were based on the Agrarian Census of 1930 and the General Census of 1941.⁷

The first thing we notice is the decrease in the number of individual farmsteads belonging to all categories, which was caused by the territorial losses of 1940, as the areas corresponding to these regions were not taken into account in 1941. What is worth mentioning is the drastic decline, during this period, of the overall weight of farms measuring over 100 ha in favor of those that had only up to 20 ha (there was a particular increase in the weight of farms measuring between 5 and 10 ha). This proves the continuation of the fragmentation process affecting agrarian properties, while the threat of a new expropriation determined many great landowners to divide up their properties, in the hope

of obtaining a better price than the one paid by the state for potential expropriations. However, this new land redistribution failed to occur, as political talks had faltered, in keeping with Marshal Antonescu's promise: on 22 April 1942, he had officially announced that those fighting on the Eastern front would be granted land ownership in Bukovina and Bessarabia, without affecting the ownership rights of the Romanians in those areas.

As observed above, estates of over 100 ha ceased to be dominant within the rural land structure subsequent to the agrarian reform. This also resulted in the great landowners losing their political power, as mainly evidenced by the disappearance of the Conservative Party from the Romanian political stage. Moreover, we notice that many of the great landowners who had additional capital due to the amounts they received for the expropriations turned their attention and capital towards other fields, such as banking, trade and industry, contributing mainly to the development of the latter.

Consequently, we may argue that deep changes took place with respect to the agrarian economic structure in the wake of the agrarian reform. The main socio-economic relations were altered: the one between the peasants and the great landowners, as well as that between the great landowners and society. This influenced the evolution of Romanian agriculture in the following two and a half decades, until the collectivization process was initiated by the communist regime in 1949.

In the context of a still unstable agrarian society, the economic crisis of 1929–1933 struck a hard blow to agriculture, and the state had to intervene by way of legal enactments in order to avoid large agrarian debts and to prevent the impending perspective of forced execution from creating a socially delicate situation in the rural environment. Thus, a series of measures meant to help agriculture were passed, starting with the 1929 measure introduced by the central authorities for the financing of cooperatives, which allowed the rescheduling of farm credits granted in the rural area. Afterwards, in December 1931, Parliament promulgated the law for the temporary cessation of forced executions (first until 15 February 1932, then extended until 1 May 1932); all investigations and executions involving rural assets were provided for in this law. Other legal measures meant to support Romanian agriculture and enable it to survive those economic and social hard times included the four laws for the conversion of agrarian debts, promulgated between 1932 and 1934. The need for such laws that helped reduce the farmers' debts was crucial, in light of the economic crisis which, in 1921, threatened to cancel the effects of the agrarian reform, as many plots of land risked to become subject to forced executions, their ownership thus transferred to the creditors. In April 1934, the law for the liquidation of agrarian and urban debts was passed. According to this law, the debtors

who benefited from converted credits were prohibited from transferring ownership over their lands until liquidating all contracted monetary obligations. Moreover, a new banking law was passed on 8 May 1934, prohibiting credit companies from owning immovable assets and forcing them to sell all real estate that had been obtained mainly by forcible execution. This put pressure on land prices, with many plots of land being put up for sale, and discouraged the banks from rapidly executing defaulting debtors, given the risk of not recovering defaulting amounts by selling estates.⁸

The table below is a synthesis of such legislative measures and their effects.

Legislative measure	Date	Effects
The decision of the central bodies to fund cooperatives so as to reschedule credits	1929	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuing agricultural activities as efficiently as possible • avoiding forced execution • avoiding some undesirable social situations in the rural area
The law for the temporary suspension of forcible executions	18 December 1931	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gaining time in the hope that the economic climate would improve • reducing the farmers' debts—countering the risk of cancelling the effects of the agrarian reform of 1921
The laws for the conversion of agrarian debts	1932–1934	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the protection of creditors
The law for liquidating urban and agrarian debts	7 April 1934	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discouraging banks with respect to the forced execution of farmers
The banking law	8 May 1934	

We may notice a technical difference between the larger properties—many of them remnants of the great estates—and those resulting from the division entailed by the agrarian reform. As expected, large agrarian properties, managed in the same way as an enterprise, constantly reported superior turnover and benefited from significant investments in the form of agricultural equipment, attentively studied production plans and enhanced work methods. Among these, the farms of Barbu Știrbey (also the administrator of the Crown Estate), Ion M. Gologan, Ion A. Antonescu, Eugen Procopie-Dumitrescu, I. Rizescu⁹ and others distinguished themselves, as their owners were individuals of agronomic vision and skill, fully deserving their place amongst the elite of Romanian agriculture.

As for the rest, farm work continued to be performed with the help of livestock. The numbers corresponding to 1935 indicated, as expected, a higher number of cattle being used for land work in areas of high agricultural use (Dobruja, the Danube Plain), as opposed to other areas. The overall situation, by geographic area, was the following:

BEASTS OF BURDEN/PEASANT HOUSEHOLD (% OF TOTAL)

	0 heads	1 head	2 heads	3-5 heads	over 5 heads	TOTAL
The Pruth and Siret Plains	25.4	13.4	51.2	9.2	0.8	100
The Eastern Carpathians	38.5	16.1	37.6	7.2	0.6	100
The Southern Carpathians	40.4	10.7	41.3	7	0.6	100
The Danube Plain	23.9	8.2	53.5	13.4	1	100
Dobruja	14.8	7.2	40.7	29.3	8	100
Bukovina	47.4	35.8	13.3	2.9	0.6	100
The Transylvanian Plateau	55.5	7.5	28.4	7.6	1	100
The Tisza Plain	46.8	5.4	37.1	9.3	1.4	100
Northern Transylvania	59.5	6.1	25.5	7.2	1.7	100

SOURCE: Gh. Popescu, *Dezvoltarea economică în profil teritorial a României 1900-1985* (Cluj-Napoca: Sincron, 1994), 118.

As for modern equipment, the situation of Romanian agriculture was far from ideal. The break-up of agrarian estates and the extremely limited capital owned by the peasants greatly influenced an agriculture which, lacking adequate methods and equipment, had stagnated throughout the entire interwar period.

THE TERRITORIAL ALLOCATION OF CERTAIN TYPES OF AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT IN 1935

	Farm size ha	Number of tractors units	Number of thrashers units	Land size/tractor ha	Land size/thrasher ha
The Pruth and Siret Plains	1,609,500	370	1,129	4,350	1,426
The Eastern Carpathians	389,200	139	295	2,800	1,319
The Southern Carpathians	1,043,750	334	1,025	3,125	1,017
The Danube Plain	2,702,000	965	3,184	2,800	847
Dobruja	1,239,500	335	416	3,700	2,980
Bukovina	327,600	84	339	3,900	966
The Transylvanian Plateau	1,282,500	675	2,663	1,900	482
The Tisza Plain	1,731,800	1,237	3,050	1,400	568
Northern Transylvania	388,500	185	534	2,100	728
TOTAL Romania	10,714,350	4,324	12,635	2,478	848

SOURCE: Popescu, 120.

Note: The data have been calculated as per the current territory of Romania.

The percentage of farms deprived even of beasts of burden, not to mention machinery and mechanized equipment, was large, reaching almost 40% of the total number of peasant households at national level.¹⁰ This important indicator regarding the development level of Romanian agriculture is reinforced by several observations made by the interwar economist Mihail Manoilescu, who noted on this subject: “A rich land, poor equipment and badly paid labor. Inordinate amounts of underpaid labor take the place of any technical progress and stand in the way of modernization, impeding the efforts to improve equipment.”¹¹

All of the above had direct repercussions on the quality and level of agricultural output. Thus, between 1932 and 1936, an annual average yield of 25,925 quintals was obtained for a cereal-sown area averaging 3,187 million hectares, meaning 7.94 q of cereal per hectare, a value clearly inferior to the one obtained in the developed European states (for instance, during the same period, Germany registered a production of 21q/ha).¹² The Romanian crop yield suffered even with respect to corn, which was the main Romanian agricultural product.

CORN CROP PRODUCTIVITY (1932–1936)

Country	kg/ha	Difference in % (Romania = 100%)
Canada	2,700	260
Germany	2,300	221
Italy	2,000	192
Czechoslovakia	1,830	176
Bulgaria	1,300	125
Romania	1,040	100

SOURCE: Păun, 171.

In this economy, life in the rural environment remained precarious, contributing to the migration of people from the villages to the urban areas. Such a migration came to define the interwar period in Romania from a demographic perspective. Moreover, we can speak of an oversized agrarian population, as foreign researchers who studied interwar Romanian agriculture ascertained that out of the 13,069,000 people doing agricultural work as per the 1930 data,¹³ a large percentage were surplus. The surplus numbers vary between 23.1% (according to George D. Jackson Jr.)¹⁴ and a staggering 51.4%, meaning 6,721,000 people (according to Wilbert E. Moore),¹⁵ with above average values in Bukovina and below average values in Transylvania and Bessarabia. Although the accuracy of either figure seems doubtful, the issue of the oversized agrarian population lingers, and the fact that it is difficult to quantify the exact surplus does

not invalidate in any way a situation that clearly influenced the economic and social reality of interwar Romania.

Nevertheless, the rural family continued to grow, and the average number of its members increased from 4.4, as per the 1930 census (the highest average was of 4.8 members in Dobruja, while the lowest was in Banat, where a family had 4 members on average), to 4.7 as per the data in 1941.

Coming back to the migration from the rural to the urban area, we must mention that it took place in the context where 72% of the country's population depended on agriculture,¹⁶ and its overwhelming majority lived in the rural areas. Also, as regards the discrepancy between the agrarian potential and the demographic numbers relevant to the agrarian population, which draws attention to the overpopulation issue mentioned above, migration seems to be a legitimate assumption.

Looking at the regions, we find that the geographical area with the largest population dependant on agriculture was the Old Kingdom, followed by Transylvania, Bessarabia and Bukovina. This hierarchy is not conclusive in itself due to area- and landscape-related disparities. Consequently, we will look at the density of agrarian population per square meter of farm land. The results indicate that the Old Kingdom and Transylvania were situated near the national average, while a clearly superior density was present in Bukovina, suggesting the latter as an especially likely source of migration from the rural area. As for Bessarabia, the density was below the national average. The regional data are centralized in the following table.

THE SITUATION OF THE AGRARIAN POPULATION PER REGION

Region	Population dependant on agriculture	Farmland (square km)	Density/square km
Bukovina	595,000	4,078	145.90
Transylvania	3,645,000	44,857	81.26
The Old Kingdom	6,363,000	79,685	79.85
Bessarabia	2,466,000	35,391	69.68
Romania	13,069,000	164,011	79.68

SOURCE: Șandru, 202.

The profoundly agrarian structure of the Romanian population during the interwar period was accentuated by the relation between the active rural population and the active urban population. Within a general population of 18,057,000 inhabitants in 1930, the rural population amounted to 14,406,000 people, which represented 79.8% of the entire country's population, leading to a ratio of 1 to 4 for the urban/rural population. This situation was even more disproportionate with respect to the active population, as only 21.7% of the total lived in towns.

This means that the active rural population exceeded the one in the urban area almost by a factor of 4 (the active rural population was of 8,252,000 people in 1930, as opposed to only 2,293,000 people in the active urban population).¹⁷

Moreover, statistics show that a very large part of the active rural population was involved in agriculture, while only 13.4% of the rural inhabitants drew their main income from other sources,¹⁸ like industry, trade, finance or public administration.

For a better picture of the Romanian population during the interwar period, it is necessary to relate the internal data to the European context and to compare them to the data corresponding to other states where agriculture represented one of the key branches of the economy. As detailed in the table below and as expected, such an analysis indicates that Romania had a surplus agrarian population far larger than other countries, confirming our opinion regarding the precariousness of the Romanian peasants' life, who were often forced to leave their homes in order to ensure the sustenance of their families.

THE SITUATION OF THE FARMING POPULATION IN EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

Country	Population dependant on agriculture	Population surplus	Population surplus (%)
Albania	800,000.00	622,000.00	77.8
Czechoslovakia	4,812,000.00	-226,000.00	-4.7
Estonia	419,000.00	2,000.00	0.5
Greece	2,829,000.00	1,424,000.00	50.3
Italy	17,953,000.00	4,859,000.00	27.1
Yugoslavia	10,629,000.00	6,532,000.00	61.5
Latvia	1,036,000.00	-113,000.00	-10.9
Lithuania	1,657,000.00	452,000.00	27.3
Poland	19,347,000.00	9,922,000.00	51.3
Portugal	2,954,000.00	1,386,000.00	46.9
Romania	13,069,000.00	6,721,000.00	51.4
Spain	11,864,000.00	1,417,000.00	11.9
Hungary	4,472,000.00	1,001,000.00	22.4

SOURCE: Şandru, 205.

As indicated by the table, Romania was included, together with Albania, Greece, Yugoslavia and Poland, in the category of states where the proportion of surplus agrarian population exceeded half of the agriculture-dependant population, indicating a worrisome lack of efficiency on the part of Romanian agriculture, as well as a pressing social issue.

Agriculture vs. Industry

IN INTERWAR Romania, the economic differences between industry and agriculture may have represented the main driving force behind the migration of the rural population towards the urban environment. This population was driven to migrate partly by the difficult living conditions in the rural area, and partly because it was attracted by the rapid expansion of industry in the urban area and the superior possibilities available there.

One reason is given by the results of the comparative analysis between the price index in agriculture and industry. The difference highlights the clear advantage between the spending capacity of industrial workers as opposed to farmers. This situation continued during the fourth decade, despite the state intervening in favor of agriculture through tax incentives or bonuses meant to stimulate the export of agricultural produce on the international market, where prices were continually decreasing. As such, Romanian agriculture was in a jam, since due to its low levels of mechanization, it encountered major difficulties in matching such prices.

The following table shows the differences between the spending capacity of agriculture and industry during the 1930s:

PRODUCTION PRICE INDEXES

Year	Agrarian	Industrial	Difference	%
1930	58.2	98	39.8	68.4
1931	50.8	86.6	35.8	70.5
1932	47.7	80.9	33.2	69.6
1933	44.9	81.3	36.4	81.1
1934	44.1	82.6	38.5	87.3
1935	48.1	90.2	42.1	87.5
1936	54	95.4	41.4	76.7
1937	64.6	101.8	37.2	57.6
1938	67.1	99.3	32.2	48.0
1939	72.7	112.5	39.8	54.7

SOURCE: Mihail Manoilescu, *Aspecte ale economiei românești* (Bucharest, 1939), 39.

The difficult rural life and the low spending capacity is also confirmed by the structure of expenditures, as households from the rural area spent between 60% and 75% of their income on feeding the family,¹⁹ while the percentage remaining for education and upkeep was extremely low. This structure of the expenses reduced investments in better tools for agricultural work to a bare minimum, and any attempts to raise efficiency and productivity for the purpose of

increasing income were often subject to failure due to the high degree of division of the agricultural land.

The analysis of the export structure shows an extremely high proportion of agrarian products; the export of livestock, animal products, cereals and by-products, vegetables, fruit and seeds amounted to 74.5% of the total, as recorded at the beginning of the interwar period. The level diminished due to the considerable growth in oil exports, but this did not influence the large quantities of exported agrarian products.

THE WEIGHT OF MAIN COMMODITIES WITHIN ROMANIAN EXPORTS (%)

	1913	1920	1929	1933	1935	1937
Livestock	0.43	0.19	0.68	2.85	5.66	4.24
Animal products	1.68	0.50	3.07	2.55	2.58	2.35
Cereals and by-products	66.86	67.20	30.92	23.02	19.61	32.24
Vegetables, flowers, seeds	5.09	6.60	3.43	4.91	6.61	5.53
Wood and by-products	3.54	5.72	16.16	7.18	8.70	8.96
Mineral fuels, oil and by-products	19.60	19.09	33.25	55.34	51.69	40.52
Iron and ironwork	0.59	0.15	0.18	0.28	0.11	0.11
Equipment, machinery and motors	0.06	0.00	0.08	0.11	0.02	0.01

SOURCE: Păun, 178.

The fact that agrarian products were mainly destined for export pressured the farmers' income a great deal, as their products needed to match the extremely competitive sale prices on the international market and comply with possible protectionist custom duties of the importing country, due to the fact that large quantities of such products could not be absorbed by the internal market. Romanian agriculture was profitable for just a few, as the mechanization level was low, the agricultural land had been broken up, and there were a lot of middlemen between producers and buyers. As such, most of the peasants were part of the agrarian surplus population, which meant they faced a very hard life.

On the other hand, the accelerated development of the industry represented a counterweight to the agricultural situation. However, even though the country started to make significant economic progress, thanks to foreign investment and domestic entrepreneurs, this did not change the prevalently agrarian character of the Romanian economy. It only introduced a vector of economic

development, which strongly influenced the Romanian social and demographic dynamics.²⁰

The metallurgical and extractive industrial sectors experienced significant growth. With respect to oil, “production grew from 968,000 tons in 1918 to 5,800,000 tons in 1930, placing Romania in the sixth place in the world. The metallurgical industry had an impressive growth, as the steel production increased from 38,000 tons in 1925 to 144,000 tons in 1928.”²¹

Consequently, the effects of industrialization were felt throughout the entire economy: transports improved, the railway network was modernized, and new employment opportunities appeared in the public service sector and state administration,²² this development inducing effects on internal migration.

The Materialization of the Rural/Urban Migration

THE DIFFICULT living conditions in the rural area, where agrarian overpopulation and the lack of agricultural productivity represented the main causes of a precarious existence, correlated with a positive evolution of industry and commerce, decisively left their mark on the internal migration patterns. These were also the conclusions of the economist Mihail Manoilescu, who emphasized the need for occupational change: “A large part of the peasant population must, at any cost, leave agriculture and find, either in villages or in towns, an occupation in the industry or the crafts.”²³

Migration towards the city intensified during the fourth decade and the population of large towns grew significantly, given the combination between the abovementioned factors and natural growth. For instance, during the interwar period, the population of Bucharest tripled, and the capital of Romania was third in the world as regards population dynamics, among the cities of over one million inhabitants. During this period, it registered an annual average growth of 4.3%, and was surpassed only by the great cities of Russia (the numbers show an average annual growth of 5.7% for Moscow and 5.1% for Leningrad).²⁴

Looking at the professional structure of Bucharest’s inhabitants,²⁵ we notice that the domains acting as magnets for the newcomers were trade, transport and the public institutions, as the capital offered them employment opportunities in such areas, which indirectly reflect the economic development of a country. Apart from such areas employing over 43% of the entire active population of Bucharest, the development of the textile and metallurgical industries was felt on the labor market, as they employed a large number of people. Also, we notice that the urban environment of the capital city offered extremely diverse

employment opportunities, 20% of the entire population operating in other domains than the main ones.

The table below presents in detail the professional structure of the active population of the capital city.

BUCHAREST, 1930

Total population	324.331	100%
Land exploitation	12.792	3.94
Oil and mining	2.697	0.83
Metallurgical industry	15.323	4.72
Wood industry	7.382	2.28
Constructions	11.580	3.57
Textile industry	30.753	9.48
Food industry	12.101	3.73
Chemical industry, paper, printing	11.621	3.58
Other industrial enterprises	2.341	0.72
Credit	13.811	4.26
Trade	46.212	14.25
Transport and communication	29.394	9.06
Public institutions	63.773	19.66
Others	55.637	17.15
Not declared	8.878	2.74

SOURCE: *Recensământul general*, 5: 50.

Focusing strictly on migration, we notice that in 1930, 48.6% of the urban inhabitants had not been born in the respective towns, while for Bucharest the percentage reached 59%. In 1941, the proportion of people living in Bucharest without having been born there was of 69%. Studies have shown that the proportion reached 71.1%, excluding the suburbs.²⁶ As employment in the industry could not justify such numbers, it is obvious that this exodus towards towns and towards the capital, in particular, was owed to other factors than the demand for industrial labor. Among them, the most important must have been the other employment opportunities, apart from the industry. A very significant role in this respect was occupied by public sector employment, as public institutions developed a lot during the interwar period. Statistical data come to support such a claim and the data from the 1930 census indicate that civil servants amounted to 21% of the total active population, excluding those working in agriculture.

Another relevant factor was the accelerated growth of the rural population, which increased demographic pressure, driving the people out of the villages, where resources, most of them agrarian, could not support this surplus. Between 1920 and 1939, the rural population grew quickly, reaching 4,392,378 people, 81.8% of the entire country's population (as opposed to 77.8% in 1920). By cal-

culating the annual average for natural growth, we find that 94% was provided by villages and only 6% by the urban area. Consequently, it is obvious that the number of inhabitants grew in the rural area per square kilometer of arable land, reaching 116.3 inhabitants per square kilometer in 1938.²⁷ The numbers clearly show that there was pressure upon living standards in the rural area, caused by the positive natural growth, which stimulated the migration towards the emerging towns.

We must also factor in the legislative flaws and the failure to enforce the enacted laws, which favored the construction of clandestine dwellings, which housed the population coming from villages in extremely precarious hygienic conditions. Such dwellings made out of wood, clay and straw, covered by thatched roofs or cardboard, could be built in only three days and usually took one week to complete, while the controls carried out by the city officials were scarce or inexistent. It appears that almost 20,000 dwellings of this type existed in Bucharest alone in 1938.²⁸

Last but not least, this migration was stimulated by the mirage of the urban environment, whose overly dynamic lifestyle offered means of recreation and possibilities of social contact clearly superior to those found in villages.

Conclusions

ALTHOUGH IT had a winding evolution, the Romanian economy developed speedily throughout the interwar period. This was supported by a number of economic and social changes, which were felt especially after the Union of 1918. Thus, the important natural resources of Transylvania (mainly coal and natural gas deposits), the industrial sectors of the new regions, and the larger market which appeared in aftermath of the union represented catalysts that proved to be essential for the economic evolution of Romania during the following decades.

Undoubtedly, the sector with the most important growth during the interwar period was the industry, influenced mostly by the availability of new resources and the strong support of the liberal government, which dominated the Romanian political stage. However, despite its industrial progress, Romania remained an agrarian country during the entire interwar period: according to the 1930 census, 13 million of the total 18 million Romanians lived off the land. This overwhelming number, representing more than 70% of the country's population, combined with the generally poor status of Romanian agriculture, caused social inequality during the entire interwar period, as the living standards of farmers were extremely low. The agrarian reform of 1921 was far from enough to revive

the agriculture, which had long been in deep crisis. The lack of systematically implemented coherent programs was quite manifest. Affected by the extreme fragmentation of the estates and by chronic funding incapacity, interwar agriculture relied on archaic farming tools and techniques. This impacted negatively and severely upon the output and the living standards of the agrarian population, too large for the revenue generated by its work.

In this economic and social climate and apart from the general European population growth trend, demographic changes were dominated by the migration from the rural to the urban environment. This migration was determined by two factors: a rejection factor, namely the incapacity of agriculture to ensure acceptable living standards, and an attraction factor, generated by the numerous work and leisure opportunities provided by the urban area, especially by the larger cities of the country: Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara, Iași or Constanța, where the labor market demand was complex and included opportunities in many areas, from the public administration to the industry, trade or credit institutions.



Notes

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Abstract

Romanian Agriculture during the Interwar Period and the Demographic Effects of Its Development

The interwar period was a time of major structural changes for the Romanian socio-economic environment, with new territories, resources and an almost doubled population being the main drivers of change. The aim of this paper is to carry out a pertinent analysis of the agricultural sector—the main economic activity of the country’s population, as 13 of the 18 million inhabitants were dependent on agriculture—and to compare its development with the more dynamic evolution of the industrial sector, a comparison that reveals most of the factors that led to internal migration away from the rural area.

Keywords

Romanian interwar economy, agricultural sector, demographic changes, internal migration