

THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF RURAL SPACE - A VITAL PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

*The purpose of our article is to contribute with a complementary analysis to different conceptual and practical perspectives in relation to the approach, estimation and concrete evaluation of the classification of agricultural land, in direct relation to the rural space, in Romania and in the EU. Along with the land use for agriculture we are also bring to attention other uses of land, including land required for human settlement. In the economic literature, according to their origin, goods are classified into: a) **free goods** – air, solar heat, natural light – whose consumption is unrestricted, being in themselves gifts of Nature, and consumed according to time and place and b) **economic goods** - either materials, or services, information - i.e. that type of goods, which, unlike free goods, have a limited character, being the result of an economic activity and a consumption of resources. In principle, natural resources are limitless, their consumption being free, unrestricted. However, under conditions of excessive exploitation, these natural resources become depletable, limited due to the exponential evolution of the "artificial" development in all economic fields, as well as a result of unsustainable (over)consumption. Among the goods - assets, of strategic importance, are the lands, both agricultural and non-agricultural. The paper has the purpose to analyze the concept of rural space, in Romania and the European Union. for this purpose the official statistical data and corresponding processing methods, also reports, the strategic European directives and recent researches and scientific articles were used. The results emphasized the importance of its integrated development and planning as a vital pillar of durable development and sustainability in direct connection with the agricultural land use. According to a report of the European Charter of Rural Areas "the rural area of Europe represents 85% of the total area, affecting - directly or indirectly - more than half of the European population". Romanian agriculture proved to be still of a low competitiveness compared to the other EU member states, as production factors are still being used below the optimal level. Therefore, rural areas are ecosystems where the progress in reducing poverty and increasing the quality of life is very slow.*

Key words: economic assets, rural management, rural sustainability, quality of life

INTRODUCTION

Going beyond the current meaning of the concept of "rural space", namely the one that focuses mainly on geographical positioning or economic reality, and taking into account the current "readjustments" of modernity, one of the first significance of the concept of "rural space" contains "the related agricultural land crops and animal husbandry and the non-agricultural land area affected for uses other than agriculture, respectively the habitat and human activity in the rural environment" [1]. Complementary to this meaning are added other attempts to clarify the concept, namely: "rural space includes the inland and coastal area, as well as villages and small towns,

where most of the land is used for agricultural and forestry purposes, and mountain areas are used for leisure, nature reserves, other residential or craft, cultural activities" [13].

In specialized literature the concept is defined in regard to own perspective of rural, meaning of each country: the actual model of agriculture, the housing density per km², rural population, the perception of heterogeneity of rural space, and the changes that took place in the communities due to the social dynamics.

We know the fact that urbanization and the accelerated pace of industrialization have contributed significantly to the distribution of the land - all land of any kind, regardless of destination, of ownership (public/private),

registered within the territorial administrative unit (UAT).

From the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [10] perspective there are two main hierarchical levels: **local** and **regional** with three subgroups:

- **predominantly rural**, more than 50% of population lives in rural areas
- **significantly rural** in which 15-50% of population lives in rural areas
- **predominantly urban**, with only 15% rural population.

Within the land fund, two main categories of land are distinguished:

- agricultural land** = represents the main object of work in agriculture
- non-agricultural lands** = represents the forest fund, non-productive lands, roads, yards, etc.

In this context, the purpose of the paper was to analyze different conceptual and practical perspectives in relation to the approach, estimation and concrete evaluation of the classification of agricultural land, in direct relation to the rural space, in Romania and in the EU.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In addition to quantitative methods and statistical-mathematical techniques, we consider various theoretical models from various scientific fields. Also NIS statistics [9], OECD [10], and Eurostat reports [5, 6, 7,], World Bank data [11, 14], as well as economic and sociological theories are the basis of analysis for the research we carry out and bring to light here.

In a global context, the functioning of society is mainly determined by the way in which social changes act at the level of the social structure and the social system.

The dynamics of the social reality present in Romania, but also anywhere in the world, presupposes equally both the knowledge and description of the components of the parts of the whole, as well as the understanding of the social reality itself, a reality that is always changing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

An invaluable asset and the main natural resource on which agriculture as human activity depends is the land.

From the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, it appears that in 2018, Romania's land fund was 238,398 km² (23,839,700 ha) total area, of which the total area of rural areas is 207,522 km² (20,752,200 ha), i.e. 87.1%.

As statistics show, at the European level, in terms of land, Romania ranks 9th among the 27 EU states, meaning. 5.33%. Although it has an important potential for development, it is insufficiently used, registering significant discrepancies between what exists in terms of the number of agricultural holdings and the agricultural land actually used in agriculture. Under this aspect, Romania occupies an "honorable" *first place* in terms of the ratio of agricultural holdings versus used agricultural area (Fig. 1).

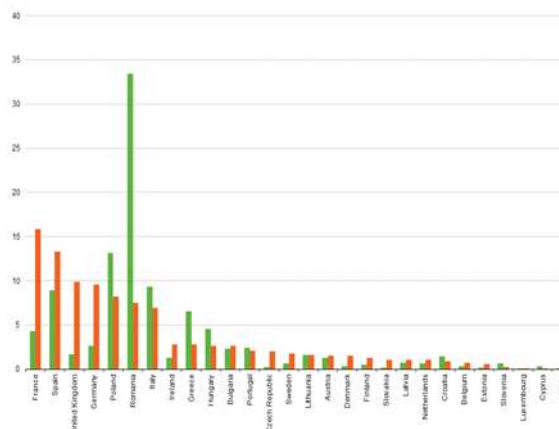


Fig. 1. Number of agricultural holdings vs Agricultural Area Used
 Source: Personal processing based on the data from Eurostat, 2013 [7].

As we pointed out in one of our previous article [2] „Natural land resources, although vast, actually have a low potential for use in the cultivation and agricultural production of major crops. This is mainly due to natural factors - agriculture being the economic sector with high economic risk due to the fact that it depends to a large extent on naturally unpredictable conditions. Political, economic and social factors, which are constantly changing, also contribute”, and we may add -

along with the massive urbanization that take place nowadays.

Earth's surface	29% Land 149 million km ²		71% Ocean 361 million km ²	
Land surface	71% Habitable land 106 Million km ²		10% Glaciars 5 Million km ²	19% Barren land 28 Million km ²
Habitable land	46% Agriculture 48 million km ²	38% Forest 40 million km ²	***	*
Agricultural land	77% Livestock meat and diary 37 million km ²	23% crops 11 million km ²		*
Global calorie supply	18% meat and diary	82% plant-based food		
Global protein supply	37% meat and diary	63% from plant-based food		

*1% Freshwater/ Lakes and rivers 1.5 million km²;

**15% Urban and build-up land 1.5 million km²;

***14% Shrub 17 m km²

Fig. 2. Global land use

Source: Personal processing based on the data from [11].

As many studies and statistics show, by 2050 the global population on Earth would grow from 7.5 billion to 11 billion, which imply that **food demand will increase by 70%**.

Globally, of the world's agricultural area of about 4.152 billion hectares, arable land is between 1.524-1.804 million hectares (Figure 2).

India, China, Russia, which own more than half of the cultivated area - 723.5 million hectares.

The distribution of land use (less/more land) at the global level in the last decade 2010-2020 is shown in Figure 3.

The countries with a stronger concentration of the population represent about three quarters of the world's population.

The question imposed is: *has agricultural land increased or decreased over the last decade?*

Currently humanity consumes an equivalent of 1.5 planets per year to provide all the resources need to ensure not only the global food production but also the quality of air, the biodiversity, quality of water etc.

In terms of usage of the land the Earth needs more than one and half year to regenerate, and

to continue to provide in sanate condition the resources we need to live.

The concept of sustainability addresses the very principle that we need to make use of our natural and artificial resources in such way that we, the current generation and the next generations after us, would be able live in terms of well-being, prosperity and resourceful environment, economically, socially, cultural.



Fig. 3. The world map less/more land in the last decade 2010-2020

Source: Personal processing based on the data from [8, 11].

Along with sustainability emerge the paradigm of *Traditional economy* versus the new paradigm of *Green Growth* which in short would point the aspects presented in Table 1.

The paradigm of **Green Growth** in agriculture would be reflected and would be measured by the progress of providing overall social well-being thorough services and sufficient goods in sustainable ways that are economically efficient, environmentally beneficial in long terms. „Ensuring global food production depends to a large extent on a rational, efficient and sustainable management of the land, and in general on everything involved in organizing and planning the economic system in which agriculture remains, not only in theory, an important field of economic activity and a primary sector of the economy" [2].

"Following the global trend and the shortcomings that endanger the existence and balance of the ecosystem itself, the aim is a reorientation of agricultural policies by implementing environmental policies that respect and protect the environment" [2].

Table 1. Traditional Economic vs. Green Growth Policy Paradigm

	Traditional Economic Paradigm	Green Growth Paradigm
Economic-environment links	Environmental protection as detracting from economic growth	Environmental protection as a driver of economic growth
Planning perspective	Short and medium-term perspective	Long-term perspective and planning
Policy perspective	Government policy interventions to correct market gaps and failures	Government interventions for structural changes and facilitating policy adjustment
Scope of environmental responsibility	Government agencies, private sector units responsible for environmental management	Corporate departments and wider society, government agencies
Environmental policy interventions	Modalities of consumption and production Improvements	New and innovative patterns of economic activity to reduce environmental pressures
Economic policy interventions	Environmental externalities Taxes and charges	Fiscal incentives to green innovation, active-ties, businesses jobs
Economic indicators	GDP/ Measuring the rate and level of economic and productivity growth	Qualitative aspects of growth or well-being including environmental quality
Environmental indicators	Measuring the resources use and output of pollutants	Measuring the connection between economic activity and output of environmental goods and services

Source: Personal processing based on the information from [12].

With a growing rate of human population of 78 million people per year, humanity is facing nowadays the greatest challenge and agriculture as the most strategic domain in supplying food would have *the duty* to provide. In this respect, adopting Green Growth practices, sustainable practices, would be not only possible but also mandatory.

It became clear that „*ORGANIC is not just a fancy word for NORMAL Food*”.

As we mentioned in a previous article The continuity of rurality worldwide, in the current conditions of modernity, over-technology and globalism, makes the evolution of all the conditions themselves,

whether geographical, climatic, social, political conditions, leading into a differentiation within the essence, in the core of the concept of rurality, and, in some areas, even at a decrease in the boundaries between rural and urban. Maintaining the ecological balance is a desire that is naturally part of the very essence of the concept of sustainable development [4].

Also, the ecological balance is ensured, by the very quality of human life, the well-being, by the "*health of the whole living being*" [3].

In terms of rural space, urbanization and population growth will directly be felt in the shortage of the available land in rural areas, which mean not only the decrease of agricultural activities but also the drastic decrease of rural population. For example, according to World Bank data [14] it's predicted that by 2050, Africa could lose 247 million acres of farm land. This also could mean an accelerated and exponential competition for the resources.

Between the traditional rural space and urban space the following characteristic: economical structure and occupational structure, would make a significant difference with long term effect on the stability of the living itself, the lifestyle, the behavior.

By definition, the rural lifestyle implies certain traditions, certain customs of regional and cultural patrimony.

In comparison with the urban lifestyle where the manifestation of life itself has a different tempo, in rural we see the authenticity of the a national ethos.

Life in the countryside would be diminish by the modernity of an invasive technology (Photo 1).

It is estimated that by 2050 almost 70% of global population would live in the cities of the future –*Biodiver Cities*.



Photo 1. Life in the countryside
 Source: Own design.

CONCLUSIONS

The current global demographic crisis is in itself a threat that has overwhelming effects along with others effect such as climate change, pollution, economic crises, increasing poverty, water availability, the dependency on technology, urbanization and less and less land for agriculture. These threats require a very detailed analysis not only in terms of land management but also at the level of quantifying the consequences of such changes without putting something sustainable in place.

In order to find solutions and make good decision together with consistent scientific methods, sustained efforts of governments and civil society are needed. In a society where land registration is not even half done, it shows not only the heavy level of bureaucracy, social anomie but also the mentality refractory to progress.

Agriculture is the only domain that can provide in practice, not in theory, the food Humanity need to survive, and to thrive.

As we mentioned in our article „Although it has a high potential in terms of pedo-climatic conditions, Romanian agriculture remains at a modest level of competitiveness, compared to the other EU member states, the use of production factors being below the optimal level. This leads to a poor integration of the labor force in the rural environment, as well as the migration of the population from the countryside to the more attractive urban areas in terms of earnings. As a result, rural areas are ecosystems where the progress in reducing poverty and increasing the quality of life is very slow” [3].

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