

## THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW PERI-URBAN PATTERN IN ROMANIA

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*The phenomenon we are going to refer to in this study is peri-urbanization in residential purposes in Romania today. In fact, the consequences of this process is a new peri-urban pattern which has, in its centre, social actors who are far from being the poorest people in the town; on the contrary, they belong to the high and the middle class. Most inhabitants of peri-urban territories enjoy the benefits of a double residence, since they have kept their old residence from the urban perimeter, driven by the need to be close enough to the work place, or because of the learning centres where their children study, or due to representative cultural landmarks, such as cinemas, theatres and so forth. The present article describes the sociological profile of nowadays peri-urban area.*

The phenomenon we are going to refer to emerged in the developed European countries as far as 30 years ago. By all accounts, this aspect is in direct reference to the settling of urban population representatives, their number increasing at fast rates, on territories whose traditional functional and organizational pattern was based on agricultural activities. This process stands out as a source of conflict between urbanity and countryside. Due to its social, political, economic and topographical nature, this conflict turns out to be the expression of agricultural marginalization, by the means of an almost total exclusion of this field from the management and planning strategies for the respective peri-urban territories (Cavailhes, J., Jolie, D., dir., 2006).

Peri-urbanization in residential purposes is living its heydays in nowadays' Romania. Due to this aspect, agricultural peri-urban areas located in the proximity of important Romanian cities seem to undergo a modified dynamic, led by the natural desire of people, who want to become owners of land plots located in territories where the costs for pieces of land are affordable, even to a **medium income** earning, not only to the rich or very rich citizens.

As far as the root of this phenomenon is concerned, one might state that the emergence of peri-urbanism in Romania was as a matter of fact the result of a double crisis: a rural and an urban one; both of them being in fact hypostasis of the deeply rooted dysfunction that came into being way before the 90s, at the same time with the rural depopulation phenomenon; the starting point is set in the

migration from rural areas to urban ones, as a result of massive industrialization, accompanied in its turn by an urbanization just as spectacular as the industrialization itself.

For the moment, both in the developed European countries, and in countries such as Romania, peri-urbanization means, in fact, dealing with a different type of urbanization.

One has to emphasize the first fundamental difference between the *old peri-urban pattern* and the one emerging nowadays:

– the *old pattern* used to assume that peri-urbanization was located rather on the outskirts of the city, or inside an urban marginality, being characterized by maximum and multilateral poverty, an area where ‘the losers’ living in the city used to flock;

– in return, *the new peri-urban pattern* has in its centre social actors who are far from being the poorest people in the town; but on the contrary, they belong to the high and the middle class (Caruso, G., Peeters, D., Cavailhes, J., Rounsevell, M., 2007).

Therefore, in the beginning of the XXIth century we were witnessing a *silent mutation*, several issues of interest arising out of it, from the social and sociologic point of view – namely new *ways of occupying rural territories*. The concern for issues regarding the occupancy of rural space has been drawing the public attention and the political one for decades, but in the last 15–20 years it has been experiencing an enhanced intensity. The theoretical frame of the issues regarding the emergence of new types of community would be the one of *geopolitical function for occupancy of the national territory by specific human communities*. Simultaneously with the orientation of political and scientific speeches towards the necessity of repopulating rural depopulated areas and also towards the fight against rural depopulation, there emerges a new type of human community, having a special relation with both rural and urban areas. (Jean, B., 1992).

When taking a closer look at the map of a big city, such as the Romanian Bucharest, the French Paris, or the Canadian Québec etc., the land registers and the ownership certificates would point out that a great number of inhabitants pay taxes directed not only towards the “big city” (the metropolis), but also towards “the small village” on whose territory they have recently settled their residence. In other words, “the big city” cannot legally and instantaneously engulf the surroundings of the space where those inhabitants have established their residence. National statistics count them in as rural population who migrated from the city towards a village, although, taking into consideration many other points of view – such as work places, education, cultural matters and so forth – this is a strictly urban population).

On top of that, most inhabitants of peri-urban territories enjoy the benefits of a double residence, since they have kept their old residence from the urban perimeter, driven by the need to be close enough to the work place, or because of

learning centres where their children study, or due to representative cultural landmarks, such as cinemas, theatres and so forth.

Also there are to be found many members of the ‘new socio-politic elites’ who enjoy the benefits of a third or even fourth residence, meant to be used when it comes to spending longer or shorter holidays – at the seaside, in the mountains, and not only in their own country, but also abroad.

This eclectic mixture of residential statuses possesses most surprising social consequences: regarding the collection of taxes, the fairness of electoral lists, the peri-urban and inter-urban means of transport and so forth. This is precisely why the problem of rural areas occupancy should undergo a thorough re-examination performed not only by the political group, but also by the sociological one.

*The shapes that are being put on by the occupancy of rural territories in the developed world* and even in less developed countries, such as Romania, have undergone radical changes during the last decades, and most probably they are going to be subjected to more modifications. For instance, the concept of “inhabited forest” (signifying ‘continuously inhabited’) was almost inexistent as far as 15–20 years ago, both as social fact and as notion used inside the sociological, politic or social discourse. About two decades ago, there was no mention about the existence of a significant social nucleus. And nowadays we’re witnessing the exercise of huge pressure upon forested territories, phenomenon ending only after the irretrievable occupancy of these areas (achieved by people who establish their permanent residence there). We hereby make mention of the fact that these territories have had, as of late, a purely economic-touristic role.

All these mutations require a thorough review of the political and sociological discourses. From the communities’ sociological point of view, not only in Romania, but in general, there’s to be found a total lack of research activities, not to mention the missing paradigms.

#### **THE SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF NOWADAYS PERI-URBAN AREA**

In order to define the sociological profiles of the main peri-urban population categories existing nowadays, one should consider a *first general classification of the inhabitants of these areas*:

1) *The first category – the majority* – that was formed in Romania during the last 15 years and in the last three decades in Europe, is made up mostly of persons who came from urban areas in order to reside in the countryside adjacent to the town;

2) *The second category* – the one of native inhabitants – is the one that alienated part of their territory in favour of the new comers, generally because of the lack of financial security.

In what the first category is concerned, there are three phenomena offering an explanation for the settling of families originating from urban areas at the

countryside's outskirts of big cities. These phenomena belong to the evolution of the whole European territory, regardless whether they took place earlier or later.

1. The birth and the strengthening of a *middle class social category*, after having amassed enough capital in order to become home-owner residents outside the metropolis.

2. *The increasingly refuse of the old social urban values* and the emerging of the collective consciousness regarding the natural life frame.

3. *The reaction of rejecting* the previous urban lifestyle, solved by buying lands belonging to the proximity rural areas, and building individual housing spaces on them; the rejection was directed especially towards the most common form of occupancy of apartment houses, in neighbourhoods with blocks of flats, with no parks or other type of green space around. For millions of people living in such areas, life events unfold in a routine characterized by the lack of privacy. However, in Romania this feeling of rejection was doubled by a refutation of the *communist inhabiting pattern* in the so called 'match-boxes' made out of concrete, with no aesthetics or functions whatsoever. The new inhabitants of the small flats migrated to the city from the countryside, in search of a better paid work place and of a better life.

4. *The large scale access to public means of interurban transportation and to personal vehicles* as well as the development of the road infrastructure facilitated the development of such behavioural patterns, hence making possible the daily journeys within the city, from the town to the residential area.

5. A series of *legislative measures favourable* to changing the permanent residence, that were not allowed in the past decades; besides, in communist countries owning a second house was not allowed, and the same applied when it came to multiple properties.

#### THE SOCIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES ORIGINATING FROM THE BIG CITIES ARE SUBSEQUENTLY MENTIONED:

- \* Generally speaking, these families **are younger and more numerous** in comparison to the ones from the departure or arrival communities, being made up of **four-five persons**, respectively husband and wife, their age varying (in the 20–40 age group), with two or three children. In other words, **single persons are almost non-existent** in this stage of the residential peri-urban perimeter, as the desire for 'taking roots' is rather being approved by families, not by single persons. The search for a house outside the alienated space of the city begins especially after having established and consolidated a family, due to the peace, calm, greeneries, freedom and beautiful landscapes.

- \* The second characteristic of these families is the individual ownership of their house and of the adjacent plot of land (its size varies, it can be smaller or larger). Despite the fact that individual houses are the norm, small detached houses have been built, or mini-blocks of flats – offered for rent to the newcomers by their business orientated owners, who did not hesitate to seize the opportunity and build housing in the peri-urban areas, in order to rent them later on.
- \* The members of these families are being counted in the national statistics as *active migrants*, because despite having changed their residential location, most of them did not give up the working place and/or their occupation. *The activity rate of peri-urban population*, that was originally urban, is greater than the local one. Thanks to public transport means and to road infrastructure, pendular mobility has turned into a rule, despite the higher costs involved: the increasing of transport time and of its costs (fuel and car maintenance), the need to buy a second family car and so forth. One has to emphasize the fact that all these tribulations have a negative effect on the environment, by altering it step by step, in a way that's beyond control.
- \* Finally, the forth sociologic characteristic of these families resides in the *urban culture* they have. By changing their residence, the new comers also bring with them their previous lifestyle, their shopping habits, their free-time activities or the ways of using public services and so on.

#### SOCIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL RURAL POPULATION

As mentioned above, peri-urbanisation has been carried on territories inhabited and cultivated by native populations. Some of these territories have been alienated – by means of selling them to urban families wanting to change their residence in a more natural and less polluted surrounding. The local inhabitants who continue to dwell there make up a *distinct social body*, separated from the 'social body' of the new comers, and receiving them as an alien layout. In other words, the old rural 'social body' does not identify itself with the new one, stemming from the urban area.

*The farmers or the peasants* make up the socio-occupational category standing as the representative category of the traditional 'social body'. But under the new conditions they become a minor marginal social strata, with an insignificant role when compared to the active population residing in these peri-urban areas.

For instance, according to a series of French national statistics, farmers represent no more than 5% of the total active population, although they occupy 52% of the national territory (Larchers, Gerard, 2007). Nowadays, Romanian

farmers do not face a similar situation. Their share from the total of active or working population is larger, when compared to other developed European countries (around 30%).

The general depiction of the nowadays socio-geographical structure of France, according to the author quoted above, looks like this:

- 8 millions inhabitants residing in the peri-urban area, this is equivalent to 15% of the whole population, and 22% of the surface,
- urban population occupies 7% of the territory and 60% of the whole population of France,
- rural population numbers 30 million persons, this is equivalent to 24% of the whole population and 70% of the surface.

*Defining the identity of the nowadays peri-urban population*

In order to define as precisely as possible this identity, one needs, first of all, to resort to the concept of “*free will*” in its acceptation as freedom to choose. From this point of view, nowadays there are two types of peri-urban population: one of them lives in the peri-urbanized area because of a *choice made by themselves*, while the other one resides here out of *obligation* or forced by circumstances.

In the equation drawn for defining the identity, except for the notion of ‘*free choice*’, one also has to insert the *concept of exclusion*. This way, there emerges another classification of the nowadays peri-urban population, divided into two other categories:

- a) *Those persons who managed to achieve their dream of benefiting from the advantages offered by both urban and rural patterns and*
- b) *Those who find themselves in situations that exclude them from these opportunities.*

Another classification of nowadays peri-urban territories, able to bring its contribution to a more precise definition of the identity of its inhabitants, has been published by Gerard Larcher in his work *Les avenir des espaces periurbains* (Larcher, G., 2007): *peri-urban residential areas* and *peri-urban areas in crisis*. In the peri-urban residential areas, social life and associative activities come into being and get developed almost exclusively in the interior of the newcomers’ communities, while the neighbourhood relations with the peri-urban crisis area are rather frail. This way it emerges a phenomenon of *socio-residential enclaves* reflected upon the newcomers. On the other hand, native inhabitants picture themselves as being excluded from this lifestyle – especially young people get to have this feeling – and this way they develop *aggressive behavioural patterns* (directed at cars, shops, or other goods symbolising the world that excludes them).

Identity becomes questionable both to the population located in the peri-urban area and to the residents of the crisis peri-urban zone. Finding a new identity seems to be as necessary for the inhabitants torn from their usual surroundings, the urban environment, and rooted in a rural area; the same applies to the old rural inhabitants, who feel like they’ve been excluded, so they try to find their roots and

traditions again, in a bid to revalue them and confer them a new value in the new given conditions.

This process of identity construction can turn out to be useful to inhabitants of both areas, including native peasants, able to put their knowledge to advantage within the new circumstances, such as agro-livestock activities, industrial artisanal production, rural tourism (hotels, motels, boarding houses) and so forth.

All in all, one might say that the nowadays peri-urban population is an extremely complex category in search for identity, as the present stand of peri-urban areas is at the crossroad of two different identities (urbanity and rurality). They are still behaving like 'moving boundaries', continually expanding their territories; if this extension is not properly administrated, it might end up by leading towards an uniform urban lifestyle, causing the loss of positive aspects belonging to the natural and unpolluted rural way of life.

#### THE COMING INTO BEING OF THE NEW PERI-URBAN PATTERN IN BIG ROMANIAN CITIES

The following paragraphs represent an attempt at decelerating the *main factors* that led to the proliferation of the field built on a rural-agricultural Romanian territory. At the same time, it is going to draw a comparison between the evolution of Romanian peri-urbanization and the one belonging to the European developed areas.

The nowadays peri-urban areas of cities such as Bucharest, Cluj, Brasov, Constanta and so forth emerged out of the request and possibilities of certain categories of people to live in a house situated in a residential area endowed with both rural and urban characteristics. At the same time, as we've previously mentioned, they benefit from the advantages offered by both environments: natural space, free of pollution, and the most modern technical-urbanistic facilities (streets, pipe canalization, central heating, running water and others).

While we're at this we might as well mention the fact that not only in our country, but also in other countries where this process unfolded, it has come to a serious lack of balance between the rural area and the surrounding environment (Dubost, Fr., 2003).

Despite the fact that a significant segment of the Romanian population got poorer after 1990, there were categories that thrived, and they managed to amass enough capital in order to trigger (as a releaser) the emergence of the new peri-urban Romanian pattern, namely a peri-urban area inhabited by people with a *large fortune* and an educational level above the average.

The new method of urbanizing by putting pressure on the agricultural areas is part of the strictly residential mobility category, sometimes taken only as a holiday destination, without being accompanied by the massive industrialization of the occupied territory, as it happened between the 60s and 70s. On the contrary, the

reason for creating this type of residential area is precisely the attempt to *shelter its inhabitants from the negative effects of industrial establishments*.

The areas standing out as the peri-urban territories of big cities are often to be found *along the important roads and highways of the country*. The rule shows that the new peri-urban pattern stretches out in a *circular way*, around big cities, getting its way into the traditional agricultural plots of land, usually to be found at 10-15 kilometres distance from the boundary of the city, and it also destroys it. This way, with each year passing, new residential zones emerged in the north and in the south, in the east and in the west of each important Romanian city, and in time they might become a distinct category of human communities, qualifying as distinctive areas because of their tendency to isolate themselves not only from the jumble and pollution characterising urban areas, but also from the traditional rural areas. By these means, the *social stratification* of the socio-occupational structures starts to manifest itself on the *residential level* too. But in socio-occupational strata permeability is not difficult to achieve, unlike in the case of residential peri-urban areas belonging to the new pattern. In this case, strata become almost impermeable: practically, these inhabited peri-urban areas turn into quasi isolated communities, and getting inside them seems unlikely, especially from the inferior strata. *The impermeably socio-residential strata are determined, in the first place, by the gap between extremely high incomes of the inhabitants of this area and the income earned by the other categories of population residing in the surroundings*.

According to an assessment, in the last couple of years, for the development of each peri-urban area, hundreds of hectares of plots of agricultural land have been rendered useless. And this is practically determined by the fact that these plots of land have had their destination changed. Implicitly, this triggered the alteration of the economical-geographical landscape of the country, because of replacing their agricultural destination with the 'building plot' one, and hundreds and hundreds of such pieces of land are being subjected to this treatment every year.

The development of the new peri-urban was achieved by the means of a specific process of migration from the urban to the rural, improving (at least from a formal point of view) the quality of the human capital belonging to the rural area. Despite the fact that statistics set out things this way, the reality shows that the new inhabitants of rural areas have their own villas, their own bank accounts, and also their high educational level, aspects which determine them not to take part to the life of the rural community where they have settled their residence. On the contrary, it occurs a phenomenon of 'residential enclavation', that determines not only an isolation from the village, as welcoming natural environment, but also from the alienated city, abandoned precisely because of the disagreements living in there involved.

From the point of view of the inhabiting and living facilities, the new peri-urban space's characteristics are closer to the urban one, in the detriment of the rural lifestyle. Practically, these new communities have no connection whatsoever with the rural lifestyle, except for their houses being situated in the middle of a

natural frame. To a certain degree, the emerging and development of the peri-urban areas located in the proximity of important cities, makes its contribution to the deterioration of the welcoming village pattern, at least when it comes to the dwindling category of agricultural used plot lands.

The starting point of the recent disintegration and restructuration of the Romanian's territory open space was determined by the urban pressure put on the rural-agricultural area. The nowadays peri-urbanization came into being as a result of a series of causes, the main ones being listed as it follows:

- a) *The proximity of important cities* – situated at about 10–15 kilometres from the urban boundary. Next to the proximity aspect, one also has to take into consideration the development of road infrastructure, connecting the municipality and the county it belongs to, and also connecting it to the counties in the neighbourhood. In this context one also has to mention the daily continuous pendular movement, from the new residence to the work place, situated most of the times in the middle of the urban area.
- b) *The management of real estate*. Many investigations were conducted by journalists and persons in charge of applying the law, in an attempt to put an end to speculations regarding land plots. This shows the bad management of Romanian authorities in charge of real estate. Hundreds of hectares conveniently located in such areas of interest have been taken into possession, using rather unorthodox methods, and then speculated in, for exorbitant prices (at the beginning a square meter was about 10-15 dollars / Euros, but as time went by it reached hundreds of Euros, or even more, for a square meter of land).
- c) *The defragmentation of land real estate*. The growing number of agricultural exploitations, their size dwindling sometimes, started in the '90s in Romania, laying against a background of suppression of the collective **CAP and IAS**-owned land, and also against the background of simultaneous or non-simultaneous retrocession of **land** to the rightful owners (basically by abiding to the already famous law 18; unfortunately, not even nowadays is the law being applied correctly). When the allotment process ended, a new defragmentation emerged, by redistributing the land to descents, in the process of succession. In most cases, these descents do not have their permanent residence situated in the rural area, so the idea of selling those plots of lands is more appealing to them in comparison to permanent inhabitants of the village. By selling their land to the new 'favourites of the era', the agricultural destination of those plots of land also undergoes changes, becoming a residential one, in most of the cases. One should also add that the prompt decision of selling the inherited or retrocessed land plots was primarily the result of the extreme poverty, increased towards pauperization, of most rural residents.

d) *The technical-urbanized process of converting and kitting out the territory.*

The already existing well-developed road infrastructure made its substantial contribution to the emerging and development of the new peri-urban areas in Romania, and so did the numerous shopping centres or in bulk arcades built at the outskirts of big cities. These regional development centres also made their contribution to the increase of adjacent land price, as they seemed to be appropriate for turning them into permanent residences for the increasing number of members belonging to high and middle social classes.

All in all, one might conclude by asserting that the *flexibility and the variability* of the action system characteristic to *public and private actors* lay at the basis of the new unsettled communities. Spontaneous habitats, another name by which new peri-urban residential areas go, become specific living manners, with no previous existence in the national geographical space. They get to be circumscribed to certain realities that allow, despite being under compulsion themselves, actions of occupying the land, almost transgressing the law. Another common characteristic of the new peri-urban areas is the almost complete disappearance of agriculture – even the vegetable gardens turned into a dwindling minority, as the ornamental function rules over the productive one, unlike the way things used to be in the traditional village (vegetable gardens are rarely to be found, even when it comes to personal use).

#### **THE PLACE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE PROJECTS OF CONVERTING PERI-URBAN TERRITORIES**

As it has been previously shown, in Romania, during the 90s, the occupying and extending of peri-urban areas within residential purposes turned into an unstoppable and difficult to control phenomenon. As a matter of fact, no administrative body and no institution holds exhaustive records, not to mention the lack of the skills needed in order to administrate these processes.

In order to find a remedy for these situations, the Romanian government should put into stage a whole battery of measures referring to territorial planning and regional development. The development and urbanism plans, at national or regional level, as well as laws aiming at protecting the plots of land used in agricultural purposes, from the pressure put on them by the urban invasion, are measures that were meant to be introduced in many European countries, by several governments, following one another. Countless cartographic files have been drawn and many airplane taken photos, joining a series of document analysis, in an attempt to use them as tools for solving the problems created by the urban pressure on agricultural plots of land. Unfortunately, the aims of all these projects could not be reached yet. There are numerous reasons that determined this semi-failure: the

incoherency between sectorial programs, the lack of permanent institutional landmarks to refer to (that might as well confer an operational character to all their decision), the refusal of certain local administrations to comply with these decisions, the relations between owners and lawyers or other people who are supposed to supervise the respect for the body of rules, who allow them and bring their contribution to transforming agricultural plots of land into building urbanized ones etc.

It takes an adjustment directed at the way of approaching the problems, in these respects:

1. switching the orientation - from the logical pattern of activities regarding the putting to work of agricultural plots of land – to the drawing of large scale development lasting projects, in order to develop an area rich in landscapist and patrimonial values;
2. setting up realistically operational tools;
3. the control and permanent surveillance performed by local and regional authorities;
4. the exclusive centring of social habitats outside agricultural plots of land;
5. the increase of public awareness regarding the crucial importance of agricultural plots of land.

Putting to work the agricultural plots of land belonging to the peri-urban area comes as an urgent necessity, otherwise these areas are also going to gradually turn into pure displays of urbanism, qualitative restrictions of life that are to be found in a city included... It takes a revival of the collective consciousness in what the part of agriculture is concerned, when it comes to maintaining the balance between city life and countryside life (“*ville-campagne*”) in an attempt to reduce the nowadays effects of mutilating the agricultural rural landscape. All in all, one has to conclude by saying that the evolution of the direction of peri-urbanism in Romania is not unique in Europe or worldwide. Many societies (in fact, most of them) have known similar evolutions, at least in what some sequences are concerned (*Moez Bouraoui, M. Si Saida Hammami, Melle, 2005*).

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