

Claudiu-Cătălin MUNTEANU

*Institute of Agricultural Economics, Romanian Academy, Bucharest
munteanu.katalyn@yahoo.com*

**BOOK REVIEW:
RURAL ROMANIA IN THE NEW CAPITALISM 1990–2020**

The book “**Rural Romania in the new capitalism 1990–2020**”, coordinated by Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache, offers a holistic perspective on the current state and evolution of villages in Romania. By combining a comprehensive sociological perspective on the Romanian village with an economic perspective on rural development, this book offers its readers an extensive view of rural Romania between 1990 and 2020.

After a brief introductory study signed by Iulian Stănescu about the main problems faced in the development of rural areas in Romania, the book offers its readers several studies grouped into six distinct sections about rural development and its associated issues.

The first section of the book opens with an exhaustive definition and analysis of the term “rural environment”, authored by Flavius Mihalache. Contrary to popular misconceptions, there is a clear scientific dichotomy between rural areas and urban areas. The main factors that differentiate these terms are demographic factors, such as the number and density of population, alongside socio-economic factors, such as the prevalence and importance of agricultural activities among economic activities. Mihaela Hărăguș and Ionuț Földes make an extensive analysis of the demographics in rural areas. The main demographic problems in rural areas highlighted by the authors are villager migration, coupled with the lack of economic perspectives. These two problems naturally lead to a vast depopulation of rural areas.

The second section encompasses studies that offer an exhaustive view of the economy of rural areas. Sergiu Țâra analyzes the agrarian structure of Romania. His study presents a list of agrarian reforms implemented in Romania after 1990 and documents its impact upon the development of rural areas in Romania. The author identifies a causal link between these reforms and the lack of performance in the Romanian agricultural sector. Mihaela Kruzslıcika, Cornelia Alboiu and Diana Drigă present an economic analysis for the period 1990–2018 regarding the dynamics of agricultural production, the degree of self-sufficiency and the general market context. This section concludes with a study that explores the key characteristics of farms in Romania, such as size, revenue and economic importance. This final study is signed by Cecilia Alexandri and Lorena Chițea.

The third section offers a compendious view about Romanian farmers. Mărioara Rusu analyzes the territorial disparities generated by CAP implementation in the period 2007–2014 and makes a forecast about the possible results of implementing PNDR 2014–2020. Dan Petre and Anca Popescu describe the features of Romanian farmers and characterize their distinctive nature. While CAP implementation helped Romanian farmers in terms of competitiveness, it also created a devised dual agricultural system composed of small subsistence farms and big “corporate like” farms.

The fourth section is centered on the quality of life and on social welfare issues in rural areas. Simona Ilie makes an introduction about employment, income generators and quality of life tendencies in rural areas. She concludes that although informal economy is widespread in rural areas, the unemployment rate has improved drastically over time, which offers optimistic perspectives about income and an improved quality of life. Ana Nițu offers further evidence about this trend by analyzing the level and structure of the total consumption expenditure, the total average daily consumption expressed in calories and the degree of endowment for rural households. Overall, authors identify good perspectives about reducing the gap between rural areas and urban areas. Horia Mihai analyzes the causes of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas. Migration, the fast aging of rural population and the lack of attractiveness for some rural areas are the main drivers of poverty. Alongside quality of life, living conditions are the main drivers that determine the standard of living in a society. Therefore, Iulian Stănescu explores in a separate study the consequences of poverty in rural areas by analyzing living conditions. Although living conditions in rural areas improved drastically in the period 1990–2020, living in the countryside still has significant drawbacks. According to the author, compared to the western standard of living, there are significant gaps in rural areas regarding infrastructure, internet speed, sewage usage and access to better heating sources such as gas. The final study of this section, authored by Ionuț-Marian Anghel, offers valuable insight regarding the quality of life, living conditions and socio-economic status for the Roma population living in rural areas.

The fourth section focuses on education as a pillar of social development in rural areas and as a social status fail-safe. Flavius Mihalache analyzes education and the educational process in rural areas. The author advocates for a comprehensive approach regarding education to tackle the lack of vision regarding the educational process in rural areas. This approach is needed to reduce the rate of early school dropout and to increase the chances of children in rural areas to access higher education. Maria Livia Ștefănescu analyzes Romanians’ perceptions on the accessibility of educational services in a longitudinal study for 1990–2010 that compares urban areas with rural areas. Results show that for rural areas, the accessibility of educational studies is lower compared to urban areas, thus rural population manifests a lower degree of satisfaction and harvests negative perceptions about the educational process.

The fifth section concentrates on the healthcare system and on the access to healthcare services in rural areas. Cristina Tomescu analyzes the factors that influence the health state of Romanians living in rural areas and correlates their life expectancy and cause of death to healthcare accessibility in rural areas. In a complementary study, Maria Livia Ștefănescu analyzes the perceptions of the rural population about healthcare services in rural areas. Results reveal a rather pessimistic bleak future about the accessibility and progress of healthcare services in rural areas.

The final section focuses on the social structure of Romania's rural areas and how some social processes develop and evolve at the level of rural communities. Mihai Dumitru creates an extensive social stratification tableau for rural communities in Romania. According to his study, rural communities are highly divided due to economic inequalities deeply rooted in the Romanian society. Cultural values, access to education, public policies and unemployment are important factors that determine social stratification in rural Romania. In a pioneer study about social deviance and criminality, Dan Banciu and Lucian Rotaru reveal the dysfunctional nature of the social fabric that comprises rural areas in Romania. By employing a longitudinal approach from 1989 to 2000 regarding violent crimes, statutory rape and homicides, the authors reveal an alarming upward trend for criminality in rural areas. Last, but not least, Laurențiu Tănase tackles the issue of religion and religious beliefs in rural areas. Results reveal that religious authority and participation into religious practice are highly correlated with age and are transmitted towards the younger generation as the only beacon of light for the authentic orthodox religious belief.

Overall, this book contains 22 scientific studies realized by a collective of 24 researchers that offer a unique multidisciplinary approach towards the reality of rural areas in Romania.