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Rural poverty in Romania and the need for diversification: Carpathian studies

DAVID TURNOCK

Introduction

Poverty is a very serious problem in Romania, as it is in the other transition states in South Eastern Europe, as a result of economic restructuring and a decrease in salaried employment. It is assessed by the Commission for Poverty Alleviation and Promotion of Social Inclusion (www.caspis.ro) in terms of spending power related to an 'alimentary baseline' along with non-food items and services added. But poverty does not correlate simply with unemployment because millions of country people are tied to small restitution holdings sustaining very low incomes that can easily fall below the poverty line (CARTWRIGHT 2001). Some small individual farms survived under communism while private plots were an important part of the cooperative system (Photos 1 and 2). But 'minifundia' in Romanian agriculture has greatly increased because spontaneous privatisation after 1989 meant that legislators in 1991 "had no option but to issue a land law that sanctioned the earlier spontaneous repossession" and dissolve cooperatives 'de jure' (CHIRCA & TEŞLIUC 1999, p. 37). Hence 'by design' the restitution created a rural class of elderly landowners because most of the heirs who inherited their parents' former land were now urban dwellers, for the rural population declined from 12.16mln (76.6 %) in 1948 to 10.60 mln (45.7 %) in 1990 and 10.26 (47.3 %) in 2002. "Young and middle-aged rural households who depend on land for their living and who will have to make up the core of the future farmer population lost out in the distribution of land in the wake of de-collectivisation" (Ibid p.38). Moreover, a ban on land transactions after the revolution effectively blocked access to land for younger farmers for almost seven years: so, "with a sticky land sales market and insecure land leasing arrangements it is very difficult to match the surplus land they [the principal restitution beneficiaries] own and the surplus labour of the younger farmers" (i bidem p. 33) other than through land



Photo 1: Traditional practices for cereal harvesting maintained in the 1970s in the village of Gornovița (Mehedinți Plateau)
Photo: TURNOCK 1980

associations which are most common in lowland areas specialising in arable farming. Although land leasing became legal in 1994 the leaseholder still lacked adequate security and informal

sharecropping arrangements remained popular. Most farmers struggled with insufficient land and livestock as well as inadequate equipment. There were 4.26 mln individual farms in 2000 with



Photo 2: Maize cultivation on private farms and gardens at Câmpuri (Vrancea) in 1990
Photo: TURNOCK 1990



Photo 3: Opportunities arise for commerce through privatised shops in former cooperative premises – illustrated here at Nistorești (Vrancea) – and through new kiosks and cafes.
Photo: TURNOCK 1987

an average area of 2.36 ha. Meanwhile markets for agricultural commodities were depressed before 1997 by fixed prices for meat, milk and wheat that eliminated competition from commodity and storage markets. And smaller producers still face difficulties because from 2001 only ‘commercial’ farms could benefit from government agricultural support.

Country people who used to commute to work in the towns often find

themselves effectively excluded from the salaried labour market and “pushed into less onerous activities in farming, non-agricultural self-employment or unemployment” (TEȘLIUC et al. 2003, p. 137). Formal employment in rural areas accounts for only 26 % of working people, compared with 90 % in urban areas. 39 % of working people in rural areas are self-employed – overwhelmingly in agriculture through some are active

in commerce (Photo 3) – and 34 % are unpaid family workers (METE et al. 2003 p. 2). Not surprisingly, a third of rural income comes from informal earnings – overwhelmingly from small-scale agriculture, land leasing and agricultural seasonal work (for example by itinerant teams of landless labourers who are paid in kind) – compared with less than 20 % in urban areas. Thus CHIRCA and TEȘLIUC (1999, p. 30) assert that “those who work as sole entrepreneurs in the rural area are cursed to be poor”: farming is not generally seen as a source of prosperity or a real source of economic growth. The situation remains critical despite positive economic growth since 2000. In 2002 42.4 % of the rural population were poor compared with 17.6 % for the urban sector: i.e. 68 % of the nation’s poor lived in rural areas. And whereas the overall rate declined significantly from 35.9 % in 2000 to 28.9 % in 2002, the urban areas tended to gain from growth while the rural poor were largely excluded. Indeed the labour shakeout from SOEs continues so that “people are still moving towards occupational categories with increasing poverty” – especially agriculture (GATTI 2003, p. 73). Moreover while there is social provision for poor people, through unemployment benefit, ‘minimum income guarantee’ and heating allowances (in addition to pensions and

Area	Zone	1986			1998 - 2000			2002		1992
		Total	A	B	Total	A	B	Total	C	D
Apuseni	Urban	13.579	+8.1	+7.2	15.209	+4.5	-5.1	14.275	+5.1	4.757
	Rural	41.867	+2.8	-16.3	35.003	-2.3	-8.4	34.968	-16.5	11.222
	Total	55.446	+4.1	-10.5	502.232	-1.5	-7.5	49.243	-11.2	15.979
Buzău	Urban	11.900	-6.9	-4.6	12.626	-2.1	*	11.631	-2.3	4.096
	Rural	101.494	+1.3	-7.2	94.259	-3.9	-1.5	93.686	-7.7	33.840
	Total	113.394	+1.8	-6.9	106.885	-3.7	-1.3	105.317	-7.1	37.936
Harghita	Urban	20.526	+10.9	-0.2	19.878	-4.5	-2.0	18.744	-8.7	6.403
	Rural	30.984	+7.7	-4.3	30.278	-2.3	-1.6	29.208	-5.7	10.090
	Total	51.510	+9.0	-2.7	50.156	-3.1	-1.7	47.952	-6.9	16.493
Maramureș	Urban	64.896	+13.5	-4.7	59.711	+2.4	-7.5	57.218	-11.8	16.481
	Rural	108.214	+12.0	-8.2	101.314	+2.5	-9.0	97.043	-10.3	28.511
	Total	173.110	+12.6	-6.9	161.025	+2.4	-8.4	154.261	-10.9	44.992
Reșița	Urban	157.209	+2.6	-5.7	138.012	-0.8	-2.8	122.962	-21.8	46.467
	Rural	30.159	-4.9	-8.1	24.419	-9.3	-1.3	24.585	-18.5	8.247
	Total	187.368	+1.4	-6.1	162.431	-2.1	-2.5	147.547	-21.3	44.992
Retezat	Urban	165.682	+10.4	+6.8	173.909	+1.2	-12.6	157.660	-19.9	10.573
	Rural	39.931	-4.2	-1.5	33.145	-8.7	+3.4	31.996	-19.9	10.573
	Total	205.613	+7.6	+5.2	207.054	-0.4	-10.1	189.656	-7.8	67.386
Vâlcea	Urban	26.922	+7.9	+2.8	28.687	+0.5	-1.7	26.881	-0.2	8.747
	Rural	50.578	+6.3	-8.8	44.072	-1.7	-1.3	43.848	-13.3	16.259
	Total	77.500	+6.8	-4.7	72.759	-1.0	-1.5	70.729	-8.7	25.006
Total	Urban	460.714	+7.9	*	448.032	+0.3	-6.9	409.371	-11.1	143.764

Tab. 1: Carpathian study areas: Population
Source: National Commission for Statistics (commune files)
A Natural increase per thousand
B Net migration per thousand
C Percentage change 1986 - 2002
* less than 0.1

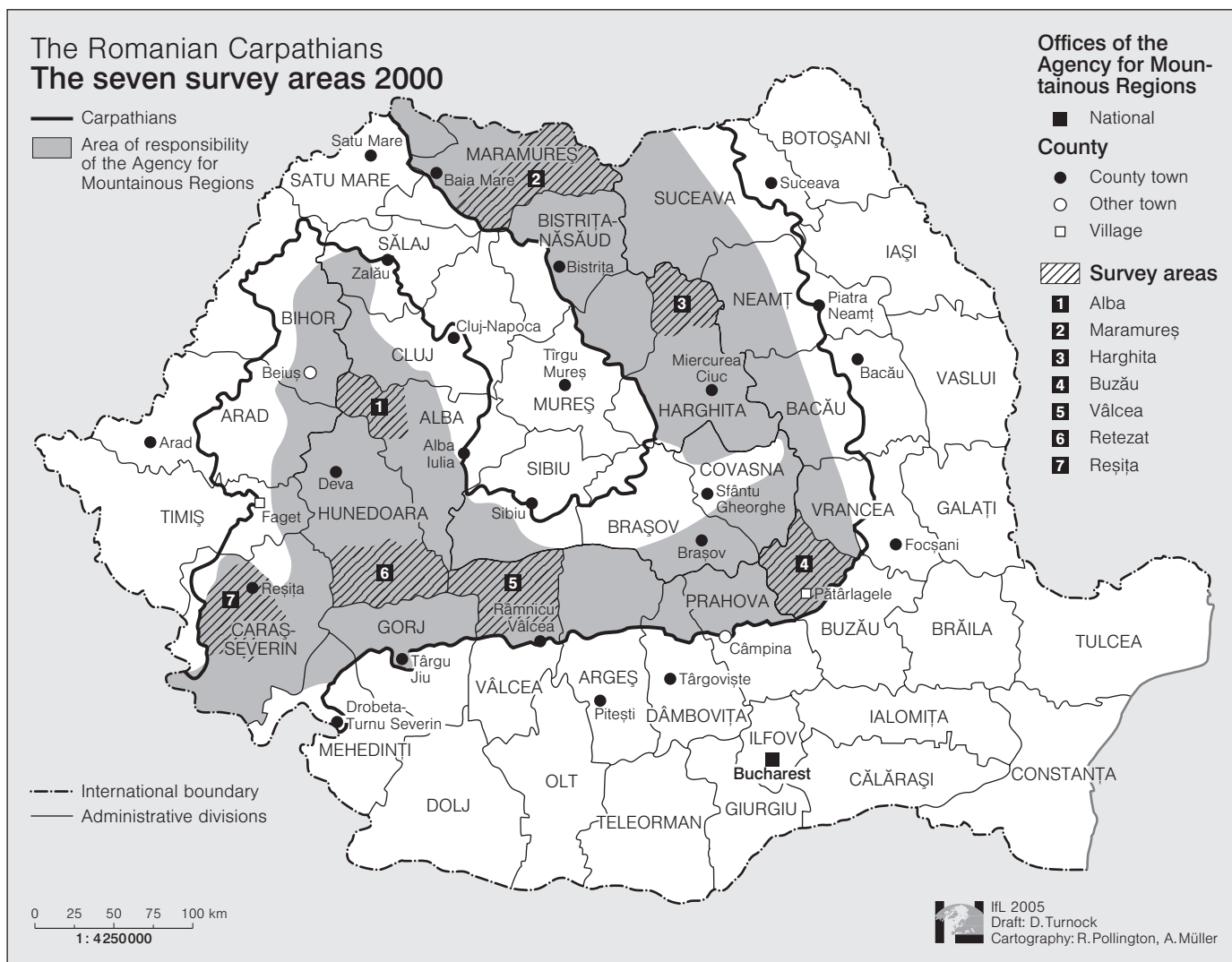


Fig. 1: The seven survey areas 2002 in the Romanian Carpathians
 Source: Administrative maps

family allowances for everybody) rural people do not always get their fair share. Rural poverty is more evenly spread among the regions than the total headcount, but the North East has more than its 'fair share' with a ratio of 1.17 times the total rural population share, followed by the South East (1.12) and the Centre (1.01). The other regions are below parity but by small margins: South West (0.95), West (0.92), South (0.90), North West (0.89) and Bucharest-Ilfov (0.88). The unfavourable position of the North East arises from the fact that rural employment is overwhelmingly agricultural with 84.0 % in Botoşani and 80.2 % in Vaslui compared with the national average of 69.0 % (SANDU 2003).

The role of small farms: studies from the Romanian Carpathians

The status of agriculture is ambivalent. It is fundamental to the lives of Romanians who depend very heavily on home-produced food and almost all rural people

(and many urban dwellers) undertake agricultural work at some time during the year in vegetable gardens if not in the fields: 69 % of the rural employed work in agriculture (compared with only 6 % of the urban) but few people see it as a route to prosperity. 51.3 % of those working in agriculture are occupied on their own small farms while another 42.0 % are unpaid family members; leaving 0.5 % as cooperative workers and just 6.2 % (0.22 mln) as employers or employees on the larger holdings. Yet it might be supposed that poverty would indicate extremely high levels of intensification on small farms to generate the surpluses that would generate higher incomes. This is a matter that is examined with reference to seven Carpathian areas during the 1990s (Figure 1) using the 'fişe': a statistical file compiled annually at the town and commune level by the National Commission for Statistics.

The studies were made in areas where the author and his colleagues had field-

work experience and local contacts; first and foremost the Buzău Subcarpathians with a population of 113.4th in 1986 (a baseline for end of the communist era) and entirely rural apart from the small town of Nehoiu (12.2th). Four other areas were selected as being prominently rural apart from small towns and tourist centres: the upper Arieş valley in the Apuseni Mountains (55.4th) including the small towns of Abrud and Cămpeni (13.6th); Maramureş in the north (173.7th) including the towns of Borşa, Târgu Lăpuş and Vişeu de Sus (64.7th); Vâlcea in the south (77.5th) including the towns of Băile Olăneşti, Brezoi, Călimăneşti and Horezu (26.9th); and Harghita in eastern Transylvania (51.5th) including the towns of Borsec and Topliţa (20.5th). The other two areas are urban-industrial cores in the West Region with a modest rural population in the surrounding areas: Reşiţa with 187.4th people, including 154.2th in the city of Reşiţa and the smaller towns of Anina, Bocşa and Oraviţa; and Re-

		Land Units#		Salaries		Stock Units*		Admin.Units			
		Total	Arable	A	B	A	B	I	II	III	Total
Apusenie	Urban	3.290	2.238	10.270	6.142	6.301	3.975	2	0	0	2
	Rural	12.519	6.332	4.498	2.829	40.142	25.022	2	8	5	15
	Total	15.809	8.570	14.768	8.971	46.443	28.997	4	8	5	17
Buzău	Urban	2.139	1.448	5.699	4.135	6.106	3.499	1	0	0	1
	Rural	45.147	33.438	16.541	8.744	74.861	50.807	2	13	12	27
	Total	47.286	34.886	22.240	12.879	80.967	54.306	3	13	12	28
Harghita	Urban	4.628	1.655	9.697	6.997	6.126	2.211	2	0	0	2
	Rural	16.330	8.475	6.492	2.804	31.847	13.994	1	8	0	9
	Total	20.958	10.130	19.189	8.901	37.973	16.205	3	8	0	11
Maramureş	Urban	11.349	6.247	23.274	13.268	24.863	16.453	3	0	0	3
	Rural	39.654	13.139	7.655	8.099	66.590	49.026	6	15	0	21
	Total	51.003	29.386	30.929	21.367	91.453	65.479	9	15	0	24
Reşiţa	Urban	10.531	8.414	76.228	49.527	53.764	15.042	4	0	0	4
	Rural	40.521	34.006	4.733	1.919	29.612	18.935	4	7	4	15
	Total	51.052	42.420	80.961	51.446	83.376	33.977	8	7	4	19
Retezat	Urban	11.635	3.976	81.466	51.293	20.382	12.281	7	0	0	7
	Rural	34.562	23.099	8.835	3.609	54.180	24.998	3	10	0	13
	Total	46.197	26.175	91.301	54.902	74.562	37.279	1	10	0	20
Vâlcea	Urban	5.061	4.687	13.213	5.830	12.703	6.516	4	0	0	4
	Rural	22.998	14.807	5.888	3.392	44.877	29.370	3	6	6	15
	Total	29.059	19.494	19.101	9.222	575.580	35.886	7	6	6	19
Total	Urban	48.633	28.665	209.577	137.192	130.245	59.977	23	0	0	23
	Rural	211.731	133.296	54.642	31.396	342.109	212.152	21	67	27	115
	Total	260.364	161.961	264.219	168.588	472.354	272.129	44	67	27	138

Tab. 2: Carpathian study areas: Land units, stock units and salaries

Source: National Commission for Statistics (commune files)

A: 1986 - 1990; B: 1998 - 2000; C: 1986

#Each hectare of arable is 1.0 (2.0 for vegetable gardens and 8.0 for vineyards) while hay meadows are reckoned at 0.3 and pasture at 0.1.

*Animals are combined into a single category by reckoning 0.84 per cow; 0.20 per pig; 0.14 per sheep and 0.04 per head of poultry (based on meat production).

tezat with 205.6th, including 165.7th in Haţeg and a cluster of towns in the Jiu Valley coalfield (Petroşani and the outlying towns of Aninoasa, Lupeni, Petrila, Uricani and Vulcan). The total population for the seven areas was 863.9th in 1986: 403.2th was rural and 460.7th urban. Statistics were collected for a to-

tal of 138 units (115 communes and 23 towns) to monitor trends in population, employment and agricultural activity, particularly with regard to livestock that have an important subsistence value and also constitute the main export product. The towns were relevant to the exercise because they included extensive agri-

cultural areas and in the case of Bocşa included an intensive poultry farm established in the communist period. The results are summarised in tables dealing with population (*Table 1*) and agriculture and salaries (*Table 2*). These provide the overall picture for each area while *Figures 2 - 3* deal with the natural increase and migration for individual towns and communes for 1986 and 1998 - 2000. Figures have also been calculated for 1990 - 1992, 1993 - 1995 and 1996 - 1997 but are not referred to in detail here because they do not disturb the overall trend.

Population is clearly declining, especially the manufacturing and mining towns of Reşiţa and Retezat which suffered badly through industrial restructuring (*Photo 4*). Taking the seven areas together there was a steady fall from 863.9th in 1986 to 810.5th in 1998 - 2000 and 764.7th for the 2002 census – an overall decline of 11.5 % (with almost exact similarity between the urban sector (-11.4 %) and the rural (-11.7 %). However the figures vary widely between areas, with the heaviest decline in Reşiţa (-21.3 %), followed by Apuseni (-11.2 %), Maramureş (-10.9 %), Vâlcea (-8.7 %), Retezat (-7.8 %), Buzău (-7.1 %) and Harghita (-6.9 %) but while the rural decline was heavier than the urban in Apuseni (the only region where the



Photo 4: The principal colliery at Anina in the Reşiţa area that has seen a steep decline of employment in mining and heavy industry.

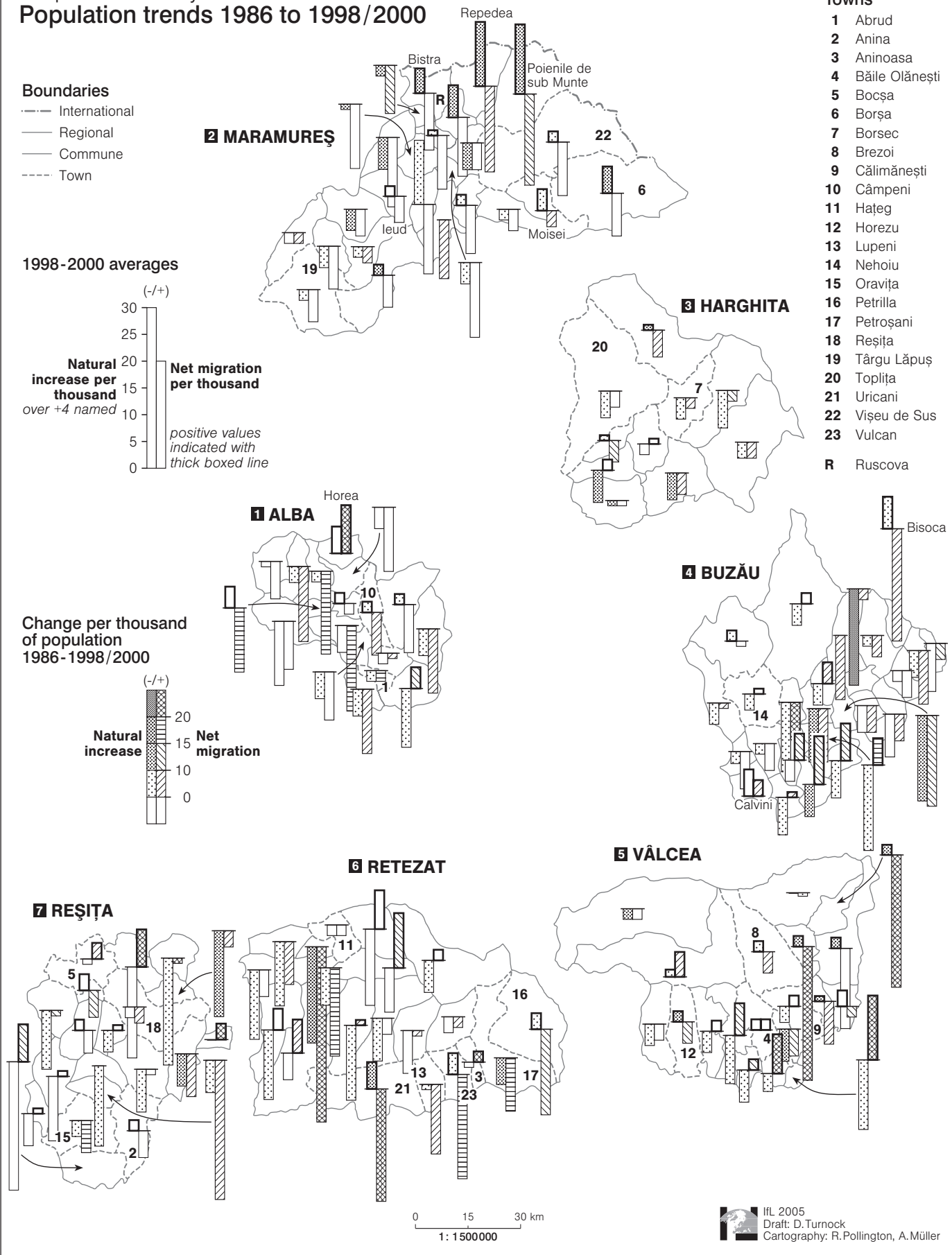
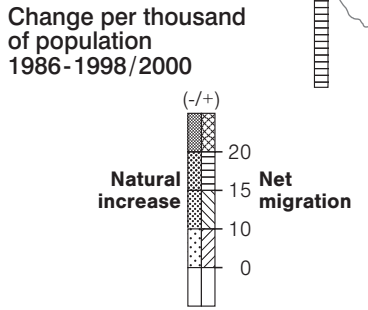
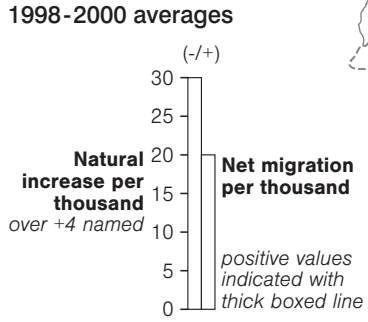
Photo: TURNOCK 1987

Carpathian survey area
Population trends 1986 to 1998/2000

- Towns**
- 1 Abrud
 - 2 Anina
 - 3 Aninoasa
 - 4 Băile Olănești
 - 5 Bocșa
 - 6 Borșa
 - 7 Borsec
 - 8 Brezoi
 - 9 Călimănești
 - 10 Câmpeni
 - 11 Hațeg
 - 12 Horezu
 - 13 Lupeni
 - 14 Nehoiu
 - 15 Oravița
 - 16 Petrilla
 - 17 Petroșani
 - 18 Reșița
 - 19 Târgu Lăpuș
 - 20 Toplița
 - 21 Uricani
 - 22 Vișeu de Sus
 - 23 Vulcan
- R** Ruscova

Boundaries

- - - International
- Regional
- Commune
- - - - Town



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Fig. 2: Population trends in the Carpathian survey area 1986 to 1998/2000
Source: National Commission for Statistics (commune files)

Carpathian survey area
Livestock 1998 to 2000

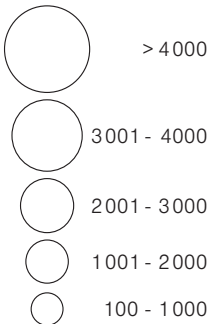
Commune classification



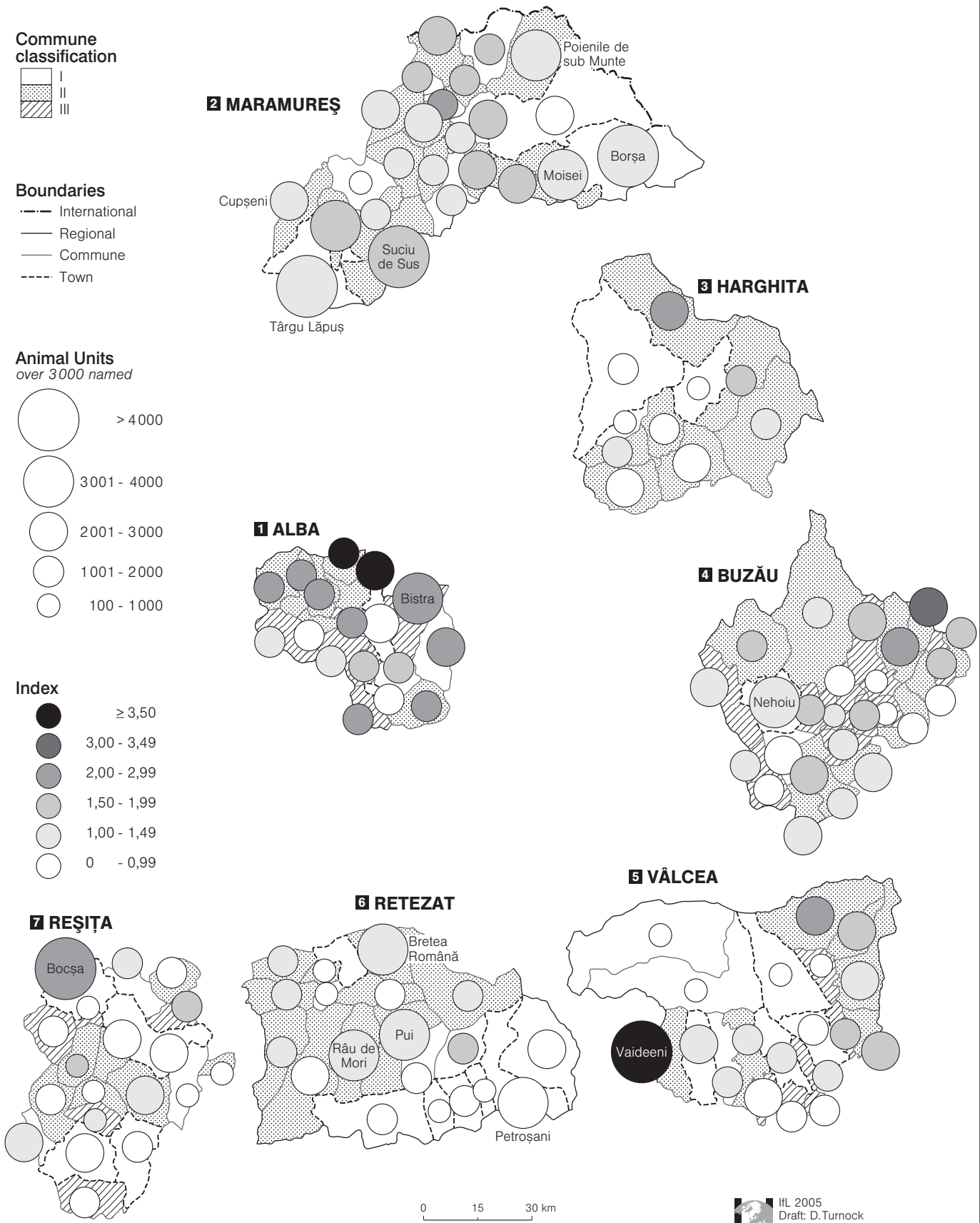
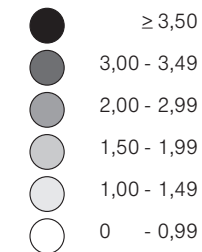
Boundaries



Animal Units
over 3000 named



Index



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Fig. 3: Livestock in the Carpathian survey area 1998 to 2000
Source: National Commission for Statistics (commune files)

urban population has actually grown), Buzău, Retezat and Vâlcea the reverse was the case in Harghita, Maramureş and Reşiţa. However it seems that the departures were somewhat selective on a gender basis with the female share of the population rising progressively from 49.9 % of the total in 1986 to 51.4 % in 2002. This applies most strongly in urban areas where the progressive shift was from 49.4 to 52.5 % while the rural trend was in the opposite direction from 50.4 to 50.0 (the latter figure stable since the mid-1990s). This would arise from the return of the single men from the towns to the rural areas as a result of redundancy, with subsequent out-migration by both males and family units. Under communism a significant number of people of working age (particularly men) worked away from home: they were not 'present' when population figures were calculated but still deemed to be 'domiciled': hence the latter was usually higher than the former in rural areas but lower in urban areas. However the difference has declined from 103.7 to 100.9 % in rural areas and in the other direction from 97.9 to 98.3 % in urban areas (100.6 to 99.5 % overall). Thus there appears to little further scope for return migration to rural areas.

Moreover the capacity of rural areas to reproduce is being further eroded by the ageing process. All the rural districts are in a state of natural decrease with an overall transformation from +4.4 per thousand in 1986 to -2.2 in 1998 - 2000, when Maramureş alone retained a positive figure of +2.4 against the opposite extreme – for Reşiţa (-9.30) and Retezat (-8.70) – where local industry and mining has attracted the young to the towns over a long period. However most areas still included some communes with natural increase in 1998 - 2000: Bistra +1.48 and Horea +4.48 in Apuseni; Bisoca +5.75, Calvini +4.50 and Siriu +1.20 in Buzău; Bilbor +0.34 and Gălăuţaş +0.68 in Harghita; Dognecea +1.11 in Reşiţa, and six communes in Vâlcea with increases of +0.13 - 2.15. But Maramureş was most remarkable with natural decrease in 12 communes overturned by the increases in nine others that ranged up to high rates of +5.63 for Ruscova, +6.18 for Bistra, +11.79 for Ieud and 12.92 for the Ukrainian commune of Poienile de sub Munte (Figure 2). Meanwhile the urban areas retain a small natural increase (+0.3) after the more substantial margin of +7.9 in 1986. Overall birth rates have fallen

Region	LU/HH	AU/LU		AU/HH		AU/LU-HH	
		I	II	I	II	I	II
Apuseni	1.12	3.21	2.00	3.57	2.23	3.38	2.11
Buzău	1.33	1.66	1.13	2.21	1.50	1.90	1.29
Harghita	1.62	1.95	0.86	3.16	1.39	2.41	1.06
Maramureş	1.39	1.68	1.24	2.34	1.72	1.95	1.44
Reşiţa	4.91	0.73	0.47	3.59	2.30	1.21	1.03
Retezat	3.27	1.57	0.72	5.12	2.36	2.40	0.92
Vâlcea	1.41	1.95	1.28	2.76	1.81	2.29	1.50
ALL RURAL	1.78	1.62	1.00	2.88	1.79	2.07	1.28
ALL URBAN	0.34	2.67	1.23	0.91	0.42	1.35	0.62

Tab. 3: Carpathian study areas: Ratios based on land, livestock and households

Source: Calculated from National Commission for Statistics (commune files)

AU: Animal Units HH: Households LU: Land Units

I 1986; II 1998 - 2000 average

while death rates have remained stable but the rural areas have a slowly rising death rate. Meanwhile migration rates from the rural areas were high in 1986 (-7.9) and went even higher during 1990 - 1992 when many earlier moves were officialised after the revolution before subsidising to -3.4 in 1998 - 2000 (reflecting an advanced ageing situation, though not so much in Apuseni and Maramureş with higher rates of -8.4 and -9.0 respectively (Figure 3). By contrast the balanced situation for the towns in 1986 has been converted into high outflow (-6.9) during 1998-2000 with a particular high figure for Retezat (-12.6) due to restructuring in the Jiu Valley coalfield, which produced net in-migration for the rural component of that area (Figure 3).

Migration from urban areas is course driven by the decline in salaries, while rural areas have small farms to act as social security. In 1986 - 1990 salaries were almost identical with households but there were only 0.6 jobs per household in 1998 - 2000. The fall has been steeper in rural areas (43.5 %) than urban areas (34.5 %) so the rate of 0.95 jobs per urban household (down from 1.45 in 1986 - 1990) is better both absolutely and relatively than 0.26 per rural household (down from 0.46 in 1986 - 1990). However there are wide variations, especially in rural areas. All the towns and 21 of the communes have more than 0.33 salaried jobs per household (Group I): indeed Berca (Buzău) still has more jobs than households, implying a daily inward flow of commuters. But there are 27 communes with 0.33 - 0.10 jobs per household (Group II), while the other 67 have fewer than 0.1: I.e. less than one job per ten households (Group III). However, there is no correlation between natural increase and salaries: four of the communes retaining natural increase during 1998 - 2000 are in Category III – Bistra

(Apuseni), Calvini (Buzău) and Racoviţa and Stoenesti (Vâlcea) – and 16 are in Category II and only two (Gălăuţaş and Malaia) are in Category I. Evidently any slight advantage a particular commune possesses over local salaries is insufficient to influence the age structure after a generation of communism which bred a presumption that the talented youth would leave home. No doubt today most young people in the growth communes are working away from home (and increasingly abroad).

Agriculture. The focus is on the livestock sector where stocking has fallen steadily from 1986 level by 42.4 % to the 1998 - 2000 level of 272.1 thousand animal units. A much greater decline is evident in urban areas (down to 46.0 % of 1986 compared with 62.0 % for the rural sphere) that accounted for 22.0 % of the total stock in 1998 - 2000 compared with 27.5 % in 1986. But this is largely due to the near collapse of the former state poultry farm at Bocşa (Reşiţa), for this area's stock accounted for 41.2 % of the total urban stock in the urban areas in 1986 but only 25.1% in 1998 - 2000 after a decline of 72.0 %. Overall, the decline has been progressive apart from a slight recovery in 1996 - 1997 in Apuseni and Vâlcea (which was not been sustained) and a slight turnaround in Reşiţa for 1998 - 2000. For further analysis the stocking levels have been related (a) to land capability measures for 1986 - 1990 and (b) to households recorded in the 1992 census, using the three salary groups. This exercise reveals, significantly, that fewer salaries do not result in more animals being reared. Group III households averaged 1.64 animal units during 1998 - 2000 and while this was higher than the 1.44 for Group I it was lower than the 1.95 for Group II (although Group III households made slightly better use of their land with 1.08 animal units per land unit compared

with 1.02 for Group II and 0.86 for Group III). So it seems clear that while agriculture has a fundamental importance for family subsistence and the provision of small amounts of cash through livestock sales (and some casual marketing of manufactured products like plum brandy) it is not a serious contender for intensification even when labour is available. It would however require questionnaire surveys to establish the alternative ways in which 'surplus' family labour is used, including work outside the commune (often abroad or on the Romanian black market). But other research (DUMITRU et al. 2004) reveals that people who earn money abroad invest in their housing and consumer durables rather than local agriculture or business in general.

Meanwhile the livestock statistics reveal interesting variations between the seven regions with respect to the data for 1986 and 1998 - 2000, with the Apuseni and Retezat marking the extremes, because when the two indexes are combined the Apuseni emerges with 2.11 animal units per household/land capability unit compared with 0.92 for Retezat (Table 3). In the Apuseni there is relatively little land (1.12 units per household) but stocking is intensive with 2.23 animal units per household and 2.00 per land unit in 1998 - 2000 (although down from 2.21 and 3.21 respectively in 1986). Fodder is the key and the decline since communism arises in part through the loss of fodder deliveries that were made by the state through production plans. Now the communities are self-sufficient and they have to balance the labour of mowing the meadows and managing stock on unenclosed grazings against the market prices for livestock. At the other extreme is Retezat with 3.27 land units per household, offering a good fodder supply that attracts a high stocking rate of 2.36 animal units per household but without a high level of intensification: only 0.72 per land unit (down from 5.12 and 1.57 respectively in 1986). Reșița (with a combined index of 1.03) is similar with 4.91 land units per household sustaining 2.36 units per household but only 0.47 per land unit (down from 3.59 and 0.73 respectively in 1986). Significantly Reșița and Retezat are the highly industrialised areas where a commuting population has not been too heavily dependent on subsistence farming in the recent past, while the Apuseni is heavily rural with many small isolated commu-

nities. The largely Hungarian population of Harghita (combined index 1.06) comes close to the Retezat-Reșița model with a particularly sharp decline in activity with stocking levels that were above the average (per household and per land unit) in 1986 but below it in 1998 - 2000, while Maramureș (1.44) and Vâlcea (1.50) incline towards the Apuseni model with land per household that is below the average - 1.39 and 1.41 units respectively - but intensively used, although the stocking levels per household are no better than average. Finally Buzău is not well-endowed with land (1.33 units per household) but it is stocked at a level only slightly above the average which means that the activity per household is low. Of course not all relevant factors can be taken into account such as the accessibility of some of the land (difficult in much of Retezat where national park restrictions are also in force) and the problems of labour for haymaking in elderly households. Nevertheless traditions vary and some regions demonstrate a greater commitment to making the fullest use of the fodder and grazing potential. The exercise is not undertaken for the urban areas since many households are not agriculturally active. Not surprisingly the overall stocking level per urban household was low in 1998 - 2000 at 0.42 compared with 1.79 for the rural counterpart (down from 0.91 and 2.88 respectively in 1986) but the figures are higher per land unit: 1.23 compared with 1.00 for 1998 - 2000 with an even greater difference in 1986: 2.67 compared with 1.62 (largely due to the special case of the former Bocșa state farm).

Escaping from poverty

This is a major issue concerning both social policies to relieve stress and economic programmes to increase employment; issues which the author has elaborated elsewhere (TURNOCK 2004, 2005). Salaries are essential. "Rural residents in the highest expenditure quintiles tend to have a higher share of wages in total income than those in the lower quintiles" (METE et al. 2003, p. v), pointing to the importance of salaried work - essentially non-agricultural - as the most effective escape route from poverty. Farmers should transfer to non-agricultural employment where their marginal productivity is zero or near-zero but this requires a more efficient land market and easy access to new employments. Currently

younger people are finding their own solutions through migration. While the rural areas have human capital that has accumulated through experience and family values rooted in the land, the departure of the young has long been accepted: indeed there is much parental encouragement even though it poses "a threat to the development of the community" over the long term (POPOV & LUBIENIECH 2001, p. 79) because young people are seen as carriers of progressive values, while the mentality of older people involves "attitudes based on dependency on the state to support agricultural prices [which] are not seen as conducive to market-oriented thinking" (i bidem p. xi). But migration from the countryside to the town - so pronounced under communism - went into reverse by the late 1990s when migration within the rural and urban spheres balanced the exchanges between them (ROTARIU & MEZEI 1999). This is confirmed by the national demographic profile that shows the natural decrease of population in rural areas balanced by in-migration whereas in the early and middle 1990s it was exaggerated by net out-migration. But the domestic picture is balanced by a powerful flow from rural areas to foreign countries, both temporarily and permanently (GRIGORAȘ 2001). It started with the emigration of Germans, freed from the obligation to pay the education tax that the communists imposed as a condition for their departure before the revolution - and provoked significant domestic movement as the Roma moved into much of the empty property. But the outflow continues through the lead set by the more enterprising Romanian families or certain religious denominations, as the young found various ways of gaining employment abroad (though they were often forced to use illegal means in the early days when visas were needed to enter Schengen space). This is by no means a purely rural phenomenon but the towns generally offer more non-agricultural work opportunities.

Rural Policies are needed to break "the vicious circle of subsistence farming" (CHIRCA & TEȘLIUC 1999, p. 42) and help agriculture as a whole to secure stronger market-orientation and more value-added through food processing which is burdened by obsolete technology and surplus capacity. Increased farm productivity on small farms also depends on reduced fragmentation, improved agricultural extension, better marketing, an

improved environment for land transactions and the enforcement of business contracts (METE et al. 2003, p. v) that can all make for a more efficient business. Despite low labour costs only parts of the agricultural sector are presently competitive – wheat and sunflowers, and possibly maize and pork – in contrast to beef, chicken, milk products and sugar beet which suffered from imports. However the scope for greater efficiency and high yields in lowland areas is being demonstrated by European agribusiness backed by modern refrigerated transport. Genagricola (part of the Italian Generali Group) has purchased 20,000 ha in the Timișoara area and intends to buy several thousand hectares for vineyards in Caraș-Severin.

Biomart of Portugal will produce ecological fuel from 150,000 ha of rape in a new refinery planned for Lehliu Gara while Spanish interests are active in Banat in sunflowers and the oil extraction business, although agriculture still accounts for only a small proportion of total foreign direct investment FDI (GURAN-NICĂ 2002). There are also many well-organised Romanian farms as in the case of Curtici near Arad, a highly mechanised formal association where 2,500 owners have contributed a total of some 5,000 ha. Mention may also be made of the ‘grain barons’ in the southeast while the Racova organisation in Moldavia demonstrates the logic of combining arable and dairy farms with bakeries and milk processing.

A National Plan for Agriculture & Rural Development (NPARD) brings together the ministries concerned with rural development, while multidisciplinary research on rural problems – triggered by the PHARE-sponsored Rural Development Project (Guvernul României, Comisia Europeană 1997) – gave rise to a plan for an integrated and dynamic rural economy, based on agricultural development, along with the consolidation of holdings; better living conditions and infrastructure; village modernisation sensitive to conservation; reversal of demographic decline with skills training and stimulation of business; and environmental protection through reafforestation, water management and more sustainable agriculture (Government of Romania, Ministry of Agriculture 1999). Farming has been aided externally by the Agriculture Sector Adjustment Loan – one of a series of World Bank Pro-

grammatic Adjustment Loans to support accelerated reform – and even more substantially through the EU’s 2002 - 2006 Special Accession Programme for Agriculture & Rural Development (SAPARD), based on the work of an inter-ministerial committee (Guvernul României 2000). During 2003 grants were made in support of co-funded projects in Category One which seeks improved processing and marketing: involving new buildings; treatment and recycling; use of by-products; and monitoring and control systems. Funds are being allocated to milk and dairy products (25 %); meat, meat products and eggs (23 %); vegetables, fruit and potatoes (17 %); cereals (13 %); wine (9 %); fish (6 %); sugar (4 %) and oilseeds (3 %). However much of the funding in this category has gone to urban-based enterprises: in the period from August 2002 to September 2005 this involved 45.1 % of a total of 255 projects and 44.7 % of the total project value of 341.35 mln Euros. Meanwhile there has been much funding under Category Two which covers rural infrastructure – roads, water and sewerage (further referred to below) – extending earlier funding under the Romanian Social Development Fund (RSDF) for small infrastructure projects in poor villages and the work undertaken by the Ministry of Public Works during 1997 - 2000 (DROGEANU 2000). Finally, in 2004 support began for Category Three involving the modernisation of agricultural holdings through machinery and irrigation; rehabilitation of orchards and vineyards; improvement of buildings and greenhouses; and acquisition of pedigree stock.

Structural Change. All this will help to consolidate ‘commercial’ farms (which alone qualify for state assistance under legislation of 2001) and improve the quality of production in a manner commensurate with environmental protection. But it is doubtful how far agriculture can provide a permanent solution to rural poverty, and greater diversification of employment is needed. Indeed a model based on 20 - 40 ha family farms with capital-intensive production technologies could mean potential unemployment for 2.5 mln people over 5 - 10 years. DUMITRU et al (2004) therefore argue that 2.0 mln people should be taken out of agriculture. This will reduce the share of the active population to 15 % – close to the 13.4 % that is the average for accession states in the last

round of EU enlargement. One million would come from pensioners (who could be relieved of the struggle of farmwork by higher pensions in return for the release of land) and another million from job changes which might be generated over a period through SAPARD (an estimated 52,000 new jobs), other rural programmes of land improvement financed by IBRD and the growth of agricultural SMEs (currently way below EU levels). This constitutes a huge challenge not least through the retraining that will be needed; not to mention other barriers including a lack of capital and information, plus a lack of transparency in local government and trust in public institutions. POPOV & LUBIENIECHI (2001, p. v) have therefore recommended commune development plans aided by business development support and more organisations – women’s groups and business/farming clubs to help with marketing and training; also ‘partnerships among groups of communes with common problems where these can be addressed more effectively at a larger scale than the individual commune’. In short, there has to be a rediscovery of identity and all areas need encouragement to help themselves. National programmes for the development of SMEs will need reinforcement by private projects e.g. during 1999 - 2002 the Centre for Economic Development (a member of the Soros Open Network) successfully implemented micro-credits granted in 36 rural areas in Călărași, Dâmbovița, Iași and Prahova – part of a total portfolio of 1,800 such credits worth \$0.9 mln altogether. Emphasis is placed on agriculture (procurement of seeds, fertilisers and fuel) but also handcraft workshops and services including rural tourism.

In some areas (particularly mountain regions with scope for agrotourism) there could be a valid alternative through pluriactivity which is now appreciated as “a consciously constructed nexus that allows on the one hand the continuation of farming and on the other hand makes for the reproduction of other economic activities that would be impossible if they had to be grounded on stable and full-time employment relations” (VAN der PLOEG & De ROOIJ 2000, p. 46). There is scope for ecofarming (for farms large enough to be registered) given demand in the EU and also potential for rural tourism (given the country’s biodiversity resources and a good range of lo-

cally-produced food); while 2.5 mln ha of degraded land – with a further 7.0 mln ha susceptible to erosion – provides opportunities in afforestation. Indeed, it is thought likely that in the EU member states pluriactivity will become more important, making heterogeneity intrinsic to rurality. It may therefore be a mistake to regard the agricultural sectors of ECE inevitably as “the new hinterlands of Western European agribusiness” (i bidim p. 52) and one approach to the poverty problem may involve rural diversification and sustainable development. The Ministry of Agriculture provides help through some 540 advice centres which supply information on harvesting prospects and marketing; help plans for farm modernisation and the extension of pluriactivity into local industry and food processing; and provide limited credit to meet the costs of ploughing, seeds, chemicals and machinery. There are good prospects for ecofarming through local associations like the one started at Cânduști (Dâmbovița) in 2001: It has 300 members across the county’s fruit-growing region (and beyond) and links with Voinești research station and the national association of fruit growers as well as local agricultural advisors (MIHAI 2001). A strong family farm ethos combined with better marketing opportunities may well open the way for viable family farm enterprises as opposed to subsistence farms constrained by a poor marketing system.

Infrastructure: The problem of community poverty

All forms of business have to come to terms with the inadequacies of rural services evident in most areas away from the urban fringes. Rural problems are thus partly a matter of communal poverty – or social vulnerability (GURAN-NICĂ & ROZNOVIETCHI 2002) – arising from inadequate infrastructure (education, health, housing, water and sewage, roads and transport) although it correlates rather poorly with consumption poverty (SANDU et al. 2000). There are vast differences between individual villages since poverty shows a bias towards small isolated settlements (more than 32 kms from the nearest towns) of which there are some 1,300 in Romania with a population of 260,000 (STĂNCULESCU et al. 2004). Infant mortality is higher in small villages with low human capital and remote from commune centres. And piped water is particularly limited in such vil-



Photo 5: Dispersed settlement in the commune of Soveja (Vrancea) where earth roads and trackways negotiate heavily-eroded hillsides

Photo: TURNOCK 1985

lages – with implications for their sanitary condition, including the handling of milk in good conditions of food security. By contrast, large villages tend to have three times more salaries per unit of population than small villages – often remote from commune centres due to poor infrastructure (Photo 5) – and they have also seen an improvement in business and services since 1989, based on “a renaissance of individual initiative” (VON HIRSCHHAUSEN 1998, p. 261). When the situation was generalised on a commune basis by the RSDF with a prime focus on distance, mountain communes were

more disadvantaged than their lowland counterparts. But the situation was reversed over housing quality since dwellings built of ‘chirpici’ (mud applied to wooden trelliswork, a system common in the lowlands) tend to correlate with poor hygiene and high infant mortality, especially when the number of rooms is small. Hence, it is necessary to calculate indexes using several criteria including household consumption, migration and fertility indicators and accessibility as indicators of population, employment and community education stock. Methodologies by CHIRCA and TEȘLIUC (1999,



Photo 6: The small resort of Trei Ape in Brebu Nou commune (Reșița) where an artificial storage delivers additional water to the Bârzava hydropower system.

Photo: TURNOCK 1992

pp. 133 - 142) and LĂZĂROIU et al. (1999) highlight the problems in small villages in the North East.

Regional Development. Special measures are also being taken in some problem regions. Early in the transition period the Carpathians were singled out because of the physical limitations on agriculture and the lack of investment during the communist era in areas that had, in some cases for logistical reasons, escaped collectivisation but without the capacity to expand on the basis of private enterprise. At the same time there were rural specialists close to the first post-communist (Salvation Front) government familiar with the West European mountainology agenda concerned with family farm modernisation and pluriactivity. Prominent here was the veterinary specialist R.REY who had published books in the communist period (e.g. 1979) commending a more flexible approach to rural development. A big improvement in distribution was called for, including better links with the food processors and a stronger technical base for an ecologically sustainable agriculture. Assistance was initially provided in 1991 – for all but the fringe areas of the Carpathians – by a Commission (later Agency) for Mountainous Regions. The Commission also contributed to a drive over agrotourism because – associated with

craft industries – it was seen as a way of boosting pluriactivity (PETREA & PETREA 2000). Complementing a West European initiative – Opérations Villages Roumains (OVR) – that organised a network of pilot projects in 1993, the Commission promoted model agrotourist farms, leading in 1994 to the formation of a national non-governmental organisation for rural and ecological tourism (ANTREC). At this stage PHARE supported pilot projects by both ANTREC and OVR and the two networks have continued to flourish while the government has granted fiscal concessions for agrotourist farms (ATFs). Such initiatives were comparatively rare under communism when foreigners were not allowed to stay in private houses, although the hydro-power development of the Bârzava above Reșița paved the way for several small rural tourist centres (*Photo 6*), but now there are some 5,000 ATFs (a tenth with email facilities) that offer some scope for enhanced local services and handicrafts (*Photo 7*).

The Apuseni Mountains were also assisted when an infrastructure study by the Planning Ministry during 1993 - 1994 was developed into a Special Assistance & Development Programme launched in 1996 in the aftermath of serious flooding the previous year that called for emergency work to repair the infrastructure (ABRUDAN & TURNOCK 1999). But it has also been possible to provide fiscal concessions for the woodworkers of the Arieș Valley who traditionally marketed their wares in the adjacent lowlands with customary rights to station their carts on common grazings. To encourage settlement there are free allocations of timber for house building for incoming professionals (doctors, priests and teachers) and for young married couples already living in the area. There is also international assistance for agriculture (IANOȘ 1999) and tourism is beginning to make a significant contribution although the infrastructure is still poor (with a somewhat 'inflated' star classification for hotels) and visitors stay for only relatively short periods. Meanwhile in 1996, with a general election approaching, the government attempted to steer resources to certain lowland counties like Giurgiu and Vaslui that were heavily dependent on agricultural work. This initiative was taken over by a broader approach through the Ministry of Agriculture to identify 'less-favoured areas' (LFAs) along the

lines of a study of 'high poverty' zones referred to by PUWAK (1992, pp. 39 - 40). Another study by NADEJDE (1999), based at Urbanproiect, identified 'underdeveloped' areas using 17 criteria arranged into the four categories of geography, demography, economy and social issues. However, this work has not yet produced any formal scheme of support with fiscal or other incentives and the only existing LFA programme relates to mining areas with heavy unemployment, although many rural communes also benefit from the investment incentives and special programmes (IANOȘ 2000).

The Central Place System. More rural enterprise is arguably dependent on a more cohesive central place hierarchy. Many rural settlements have a history of centrality with respect to markets and other services for the surrounding districts. In this way it would be possible to envisage growth extending through a hierarchy of settlements and development axes "enhancing competition among localities for strengthening the abilities to make use of local potential" (VRABETE & POPSE 1999, p. 263), backed by a better-qualified workforce, community participation, institutional capacities (NGOs helping to forge public-private partnerships) and sustainable development: including the development of local images grounded in history and culture for rural tourism, where currently much growth concerns the building of second homes by urban dwellers e.g. Valișoara in Alba, Rânca in Gorj and Tulnici in Vrancea. However it will not be easy for enterprise to penetrate outlying rural districts. Although VON HIRSCHHAUSEN (1998, p. 264) remarks on the contrast between 'ultra-individualist' communes in the Carpathian zone – grading through different levels of association to 'neo-collectives' and informal family associations in the lowlands – there are strong informal community support structures in mountain communities which also have "a tradition of independent farms and a long history of operating independent businesses [and so] are better able to develop business plans and initiate new business activity" (POPOV & LUBIENIECHI 2001, p. ix). With few NGOs in the least-developed rural areas and poor leadership after decades of communism with its urbanising-centralising ethos, it may be down to the small towns and the most dynamic rural centres to draw the surrounding communes into district-level associa-

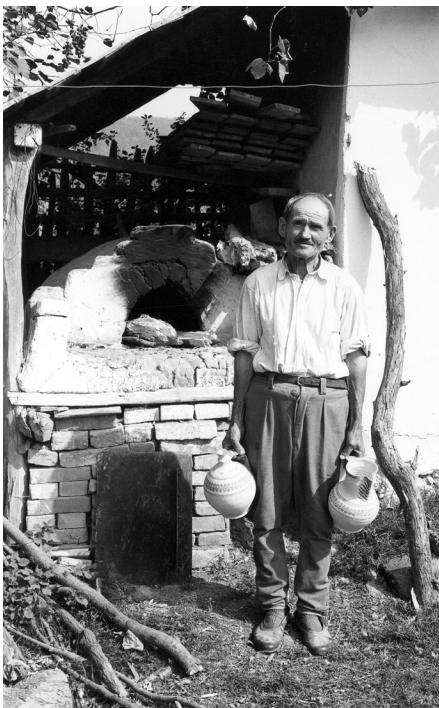


Photo 7: Rural tourism offers some hope for the survival of rural handicrafts e.g. ceramics in Șișești (Mehedinți).
Photo: TURNOCK 1978

tions. Such a scale of local government is traditional in Romania through the 'plasă' though it has been marginalised since the communist 'raioane' were abolished in 1968. There is still much scope for the promotion of the best-placed rural centres to urban status.

Conclusion

Solving the poverty problem requires a package of measures that involve all branches of government. Social assistance has improved with unemployment benefit, minimum income guarantee and heating allowances, as well as family allowances for the population as a whole. But a long term solution requires job creation through sustained economic growth, with regional development programmes in the areas of highest unemployment. The rural areas present a particularly acute dilemma because while the elderly beneficiaries of restitution may settle for their subsistence holdings after the 'neo-serfdom' of the communist collective the structure cannot generate wealth without which there is no basis for diversification. The case studies indicate a consensus over the lack of any basis for viability in small subsistence holdings and the need for a mechanism whereby 'commercial' family farms can emerge. This then requires parallel action to create a better business environment that in turn depends on an overhaul of the infrastructure and enhanced 'capacity' for local governance through elected councils, NGOs and stakeholders along with further fiscal decentralisation. The European agenda may well offer a way forward – offering the prospect of membership in 2007 – but it has yet to engage the rural population through more formalised community involvement in the competition for resources.

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