



ORIGINAL PAPER

# Communism and Condominium: Cultural Determinants and Development Policies in Romanian Traditional Villages

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to clarify why in the Romanian history, the communist state has proved to be the most unsuited and incompatible institution with the mechanism of the Culture of Commune to Diffuse Tradition (*Cultura Obștei de Tradiție Difuză*), specific to the Romanian agrarian communities; furthermore, the article investigates why the communist state and the free rural communities were in structural and functional contradiction, impossible to be removed both theoretical and practically. Furthermore, the article argues that despite the fact that the city has benefited for more than 150 years of privileged and full attention of the Romanian public opinion, housing the capitalist-economic activities of the Romanian free market and those of the political and administrative centralized state in inner or along, it remained an unarticulated social creature, ground and disturbed in the inner, an environment devoid of identity during this entire period.

**Keywords:** *communism, condominium, devălmaș property, freedom, traditional Romanian village*

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### Introduction

A significant percentage of Romanians have lived and still live in villages. According to the latest data of the INS, nine million Romanian (about 40% of the population) still lived in rural areas in 2011, although 81 years ago before the date of this record more than 80% of them had been living in rural areas. Despite modernization projects, transformations and historical evolution, the village remained through its durable and resilient nature, the most characteristic way of inhabiting for the Romanians. This statement is especially true since it is based on the observation of the fact that its younger relative, the Romanian city, failed, despite the passage of time, to overcome its initial condition of hybrid, unstructured and incoherent socio-cultural organizational form, a condition which was still present at the middle of the nineteenth century, once with the beginning of modernization in Romania. This ingrate situation of the Romanian city, which affected our rural life, is, as noted by H. H. Stahl referring to the village in 1938, a paradoxical one (Stahl, 1938: 70).

Despite the fact that the city has benefited for more than 150 years of privileged and full attention of the Romanian public opinion, housing the capitalist-economic activities of the Romanian free market and those of the political and administrative centralized state in inner or along, it remained an unarticulated social creature, ground and disturbed in the inner, an environment devoid of identity during this entire period. Although the causes of this adherent history of the Romanian city to civilization are numerous, in this article we will have to remember only one of them, which we consider to be most relevant to our study: the building of the Romanian modern city against the dates of the rural and autochthonous environment, the burial of an urban culture based on ignorance or collective repression of the culture's mechanisms of Romanian villages, domestic political will to overcome and removal of Romanesque history of the latter. Indeed, infiltration and installation from the nineteenth century in the Romanian collective mentality of prejudice and opposition regarding structural and functional split between the city and the culture of the village was one of the most harmful collective conceptions specific to the period of Romania's still unfinished modernization.

Today, however, the historical realities reveal the new damaging limits of this prejudice even in our case. Formed as a result of misunderstanding of the mass industrialization process, a process that generated important mutations in agricultural activities of the peasantry, but together with this, also an inner tension in its traditional culture, where agriculture played millenary role as basic economic activities, bias in question is firstly based on the economic abstract impression of the association reaching the identification of villages with agriculture as opposed to city with industry (Raubaud, 1971: 511). We are talking about a collective feeling that has prevented the Romans to observe industrial potential of villages but also the agricultural dominant of the Romanian cities. Second impression that fueled this fatal to prejudice rooted in the political ideal of the first generation of politicians who assumed Romania's modernization: the belief in the omnipotence of the state. Opportunity for urban culture and the idea of progress for them, the powerful state had the decisive role to urbanize in force and at all costs the Romanian villages in their conception. It was so induced the feeling of a background opposition between the state and the Romanian village.

In their opinion, the Romanian city was built on the political process of dismantling the traditional life of the village, process undertaken using state institution which – as it was found out – because of their superficial organization did not influence, through their work, the mentality's deep layers of specific rural Romanian communities,

from whose rows most of our townspeople came. The third impression that stays at the root of prejudice of the opposition between villages' culture and the one of the cities is related to misunderstanding the connection and continuity between the life of villages and the one of towns, upon which we can consider the first as the base for formation and evolution of the second. It is a misunderstanding that alters the way in which the urbanization process was represented to Romanians, namely in a simplistic and distorted way, as a socio-cultural process through which the city, through a mechanical action exerted from outside required its own culture based on the one of the village, and not vice versa, as an internal process of transformation and modernization, through which the village itself created or acquired and integrated new goods and values in its life, selected from among those whom the culture was able to recognize and assimilate. Indeed, in all processes of urbanization, not the city, but the village plays the active factor, the central factor. Urbanization, as process of modernization of Romania depends, therefore, firstly, on the resorts and resources of the villages' culture, and not as it is believed, on those of towns. In this context, any project of modernization of Romania is related in principle and must be linked to a more thorough knowledge of the culture of villages, without which the built on or linked to it life of the city is meaningless and lacks durability.

Unfortunately, excluding the few notable exceptions offered by members of the Romanian Social Institute, scientific knowing of the Romanian village, although admitted by the Romanian intelligentsia as a national debt since the late nineteenth century, has remained ever since a simple desideratum. The reasons are relatively simple: the scientific research of Romanian village was hijacked on every occasion from its real purpose, being subordinated to political objectives and interests of Romanian intellectuals. First issue of the villages was put under political image as "agrarian question". Iorga's writings, of Radu Rosetti, Gheorghe Panu, C. Dobrogeanu Gherea, S. Zeletin or of the representatives of the "Junimea" and "semanatorist" movements are proof of this. Then it was imagined as "problem of the national Romanian destiny". Redrafted after the construction of Great Romania in 1918, the problem of the Romanian village became a favorite hobby of representatives of indigenous nationalist movements. After 1945 the peasant problem was again put under discussion. This time it was formulated in the language of Marxist ideology of class struggle, as problem of scientific materialism, from where was removed only after 50 years of communist regime. Today, Romanian intelligentsia is bound to raise again the issue of scientific knowing the Romanian villages. It is required by the responsibility towards the modernization of Romania but also by and historical circumstances favorable to scientific research, circumstances arising on the background of gradual democratization and loss of politicization in the Romanian public life.

### **Historical Aspects and General Considerations on the Romanian "devalmaş" village**

Scientifically knowing Romanian villages is not a simple problem to solve. Its solution involves a long series of theoretical difficulties from those in the methodology to practical ones. First is known that any scientific research cannot be conducted in the absence of identifying and assuming a problem that it seeks to solve, the problem through which the theoretical research acquires the practical character. There is to know that any scientific research depends on the existence of a prior general theoretical concepts from which it starts, a design issue determined both in the working hypotheses stage, in the choice of research methodology, and especially in stage of practical use of the methodology for testing working hypotheses. Recognizing the specific needs of scientific

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research, we seek to determine in this article the core cultural structures of the Romanian village, structures that, despite various historical statutes which has undergone, have been preserved in time, ensuring a certain level of freedom to the peasant life.

So what characterizes the Romanian village? First of all, the fact that its existence is spread over a period of time. For this reason any current scientific research on this must take place in the inner of a social-historical investigation: post-socialist Romanian village today cannot be understood, for example, only with reference to the old traditional Romanian village whose structural elements keep them still, messy and dysfunctional. These elements are the more important for us to identify as long as starting with them we discover, what we believe to be, the sources of unconscious resistance of the Romanian society to the historical process of modernization, a process only possible to the extent that these cultural elements are recognized as the base of the Romanian's daily life mechanisms.

The fact that the Romanian village has an existence stretched over more than a thousand years, shows that the nature of Romanian peasant is unitary, homogeneous, with unique features in European social history. Unity, uniformity and strength of the peasantry are not its natural virtues. Their emerge and sustainability depended on the proper functioning of the rural culture of origin. We speak about a culture built and maintained not around specific activity of individuals but around the village community's collective activity, a fundamental institution, deeply rooted in the collective mentality of villagers, one of which binds the possibilities of social memory to their oral invoice. From the unity and homogeneity of peasant mentality provided by the culture of traditional broadcast congregation (Stahl, 1983: 250), derives the strong character and endurance of Roman peasantry to historical changes. Subconsciously, tied to each other through an organic network of functional connections, not one that allows them to act effectively only through collective action of the community, Romanian farmers develop a stubborn enmity towards any attempt to rape them by a force foreign to the community. "On a citizen one can exercise terror and compel him to do what you want. One can change his consciousness and in this way, all the gestures that he has under the supervision of this consciousness. But the shaking of an individual consciousness is not enough to break the collective conscience of the community, for that one is not controlled by individual, but something deeper and more mysterious" (Stahl, 1983: 80). Communist political regime watched continuously over 50 years the obedience and the change in force of the Roman peasantry. However, denying them landownership, weak consciousness of belonging to the local culture, long rehabilitation process to which it was subjected to during this time did not allow them to achieve their objective. On the contrary: today, we find not only that the peasantry remained unchanged in substance, but also that, in equal amount, the failed communist project provoked and made chronic a severe reaction among its people, manifested as a mixture of skepticism, pessimism and docility under which that, in the absence of its links with the congregation and the earth, actually hides a stubborn and resistant to change without precedent. Romanian peasantry is primarily a purely indigenous population who organized pastoral and agricultural production processes in communitarian - agrarian formations. Because of this we can say about Romanian villages that they cannot be considered at all the product of the establishment processes of earlier tribal formations, nor that of acculturation processes, a process of crossing these social - agrarian communities from a culture to another. Their appearance is explained rather as a result of indigenous communities of reaching a stage of cultural development, which enables them, respecting certain gnosiological level, but also a set of geographical,

biological, historical and mental structural frameworks capable of creating and organizing their specific spiritual, economic, legal and administrative activities. It is a stage of cultural development in which their spiritual constitutive production, but also the legal and administrative one, is developed around agriculture. We refer to an itinerant agriculture, agriculture whose technique did not allow continuous cultivation of land, but only two or three years of it, after it had been deforested and after the end-of-life, abandoned to regain fertility. In this situation, work was conducted on common land, forests, pastures, fields, joint property in possession of another individual, and on the individual properties used permanently (house, yard, garden), all under the supervision of local collective bodies (Stahl, 1980: 171).

Although historical documents do not help us determine the precise historical moment when the Romanian agricultural community was formed, we can determine with certainty upon their entering in dissolution. Starting from here, namely the nineteenth century, the century of decline for the last privately-owned-property villages, and descending the ladder to the previous centuries of history, these documents prove their existence also during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the century when the first Romanian state formations were constituted. However, there are sufficient historical aspects which make us believe that the genesis of Romanian agricultural communities took place earlier than the thirteenth century: "In other words, unable to date chronologically the stage of social development in which these rural community formations could have their genesis, we push their time until times when in truth, only then, they could derive from the prehistoric primitive communism" (Stahl, 1980: 172).

The age of the Romanian common-property villages, quite remarkable when compared with other European agricultural communities has, in our opinion, primarily to do with the Romanian peasantry's character. Contrary to the specific trait of agrarian populations everywhere, Romanian peasantry was not an amorphous mass and inertia of farmers (Stahl, 1980: 171). On the contrary, it was characterized by inner division, warrior capacities and its organization as confederation. First we learn about it from "The diploma from Tihani" (1055), from documents dating from 1108 to 1109 mentioned in the "Codex diplomaticus Hungariae Ecclesiasticus needle civilis" of Fejer, etc, but especially from "The diploma of the Ioanit knights" (1247), the most representative document which sends to the period of pre-constituting the Romanian states through direct references which it makes to those "majores terrae" judicial captains, princely and royal, representing the interests of agricultural Romanian communities towards the Hungarian and Tartar states. We refer to a military professionalized social class, which through processes of labor division functionally separates itself from the great mass of Romanian farmers and builds-up the first Romanian political forms of co-federal organization of Romanian agrarian communities: "In this regard we believe that those majores terrae, those chieftains of the country, about which the Ioanits Diploma speaks, were heads of village confederations with princely and princely character. In this status of native aristocracy, blanket warriors, nobles in the band, they could have in the villages they were part of, the rights to subsidies that persist even before the foundation of the reign and that could continue after the kingdom was founded" (Stahl, 1980: 184). Once with military specialization, released from the cares and responsibilities incumbent the agricultural landowners, and without owning any *emines dominium*, which first appeared with the establishment of the rule (Arion, 1938: 28), these native warlords are not involved in any way in the production processes of agrarian communities. However, their economic base is not, as believed, secured by exploiting the peasant agrarian communities, whether we speak of a feudal

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exploitation or a tribute one. The economic basis of this warrior aristocracy is in fact represented by the stipends provided by agrarian communities in exchange for protection services benefiting from it. Military professionalization of this aristocracy, favored by the warrior virtues of the peasantry coming from, did not lead to a weakening of the heroic mood among members of the Romanian agricultural communities; on the contrary, it has remained until late peasants with military purposes, who participated significantly, along centuries, to the big army of the Romanian countries.

The age of the Romanian agrarian communities of judicial or princely type lets itself explained, in the third row, by their character as confederation. Conserved until the late nineteenth century, the organization as confederation of the privately-owned-property villages, mentioned for example by Dimitrie Cantemir a century earlier with reference to the famous peasant republics of Campulung Vrancea and Tigheciului (Cantemir, 1973: 224-226), although underwent many changes over time remained one of the fundamental structures of the free Romanian villages. Organized by countries (country Olt, Bârsa country Maramureș, Oaș, Vrancea, România Câmpulung, etc.) meaning under the form of village confederations or detours, the Romanian villages have kept their autonomy from the central state and ruled and worked late separated from it. In their capacity as “quasi-state organizations, relatively independent, as opposed to the Lord” (Stahl, 1998: 11) they are older than Romanian *cnezate* and *voievodate*.

How did it happen that although the warrior nobility who founded the old medieval state came from the ranks of local Romanian peasantry, the state institution promoted by it did not really managed to impose agrarian life in our communities? How to explain this secular parallelism between the life of the Romanian village and the one of the princely state? The answer to these questions is bound to noticing that if the Romanian political aristocracy was largely domestic in nature (Djuvara, 2011), the structure of the Romanian medieval state was an exogenous one. Indeed, for us, the impermeability of the peasant communities against the political- administrative intrusion of the Romanian feudal state is due to the absence of any communication between the internal mechanism of the culture of a community of disseminate tradition, specific characteristic of the Romanian common property villages and of the medieval state's values. Created by the invading populations, especially of the Cuman one, the first type of civil organization of the Romanians was taken over and used by the autochthon aristocracy in its working related relations offered to the agrarian communities of origin, immediately after warding off the nomadic conquerors. Over time, however, this foreign age-based structure with tribal role and then feudal, superimposed to the peasant indigenous culture led to a change, even to an alteration of the relations between the nobility and the community of peasants, that based on relationships supported by military services, as they were at first, turned into relations of direct economic exploitation of the peasantry starting with the eighteenth century. The degradation of the relations between the political class and the peasant community has increased over time, leading to a chronic rupture and separation between them, one that not only did not stop with the modernization of the Romanian state in the mid-nineteenth century, but which reached paroxysmal cotes with the instauration of the communist regime since the mid-twentieth century.

Prior to clarifying why the communist state in the history of the Romanian proved to be the most foreign institution and the hardest to adapt to the mechanisms of the culture of a community of disseminate tradition specific to our agrarian communities and why does a radical contradiction exists between the communist state and the peasant

community, we have to make a more concrete image about what actually common property Romanian village (“sat devalmaş”) means.

**Structural and typological considerations of the Romanian *devălmaş* village**

As previously said, the Romanian villages have done not just the subject of social history research but also that of direct surveys on land. Field surveys were to find them in an advanced stage of dissolution, and consider them to be, rightly, a continuation of the old local peasant common property communities. How should we represent ourselves, however, these ancient peasant communities considered to be the origin of the late Romanian villages?

First of all, as a socio-cultural product emerged from a process of territorialization of a native population, a process thought to be the final stage of dissolution of tribal congregation, in which it was organized before. Indeed, the condominium (common property) Romanian village should not be seen neither as a social unit of tribal aspect, nor as historical achievement of a founding hero, but as a social creature appeared in the bosom of the existing socio-cultural life. Autonomous territorial social formation, the common property village was imposed in Romanian history through usual character and technical solutions with specific economic character, as an organic and mandatory framework for life that will work beyond the will of peasants, nobility or the one of the Romanian wheel of state. Framed in which Alexander A. Tschuprow called *Feldgemeinschaft*, “all households, owner of a territory, which are linked between themselves by such relations so that” all “has the power to mix, according to precise rules, in the economic and legal rights of every household in particularly” (Tschuprow, 1902), the common land village distinguish itself from the south Slavs’ “*zadrugas*”, a purely family formation, or from any other form of coexistence of private farms, which were isolated from the capitalist nature, “is nothing but the clotting together of households in one congregation or pack” (Stahl, 1944: 321), meaning into an “aggregate” with administrative role able to interfere in the economic and legal life of every household.

Arisen from the processes of territorialisation and dissolution of the community tribal village, the common land village was above all «a democratic egalitarian communal village, vaguely colored gerontological and with a homogeneous population, composed exclusively of natives, forming one “pack” closed to the nonnatives, using the body of the estate in “absolute condominium” through “local dominions” and exceptionally, through “the amount of fathoms”, based on a natural economy, dominated by “using” the land through direct labor, in primitive techniques of deforestation and permanent grubbing» (Stahl, 1998: 13) or to use another definition extracted from the works of H. H. Stahl, “is a form of social life, the flesh of the estate of a closed biological group, often linked by kinship of pack, living in family households, associated in one congregation, which through its decisions taken by its general assemblies, has the right to interfere in the privacy of each household, according to the judicial rules, according to the congregation’s psychological mechanism based on diffuse traditions” (Stahl, 1944: 328).

However, its historical evolution generated by the development of its own technical capacities (Trandafir, 2011: 66) but also by the intervention in its center of the political mechanisms for operating the noble class, made it a village with a rural community in which farmers ended up by having significant differences in wealth and by cleaving so in bands and multiple social categories, compiling their various public rights (ownership, freedom, equality, responsibility, etc) not on the principle of affiliation to native population, but on the basis of written contracts in frames of economy exchange

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and work techniques which allow both privately land use and continuation of their exploiting.

Common property villages, whose cultural structures were compromised by the impact of exploiting mechanisms of feudal, capitalist or communist origin, ended up breaking up with the tradition of the Romanian villages and significantly distinguishing themselves from the previous.

In conclusion, following this historic process occurred “clăcășești” villages, Romanized, subservient villages owned by the state, boyars or monasteries. For a long time, alongside these subservient villages continued to be free peasant communities (such as “moșnenești” and “răzășești”: “Moșnean is, in Wallachia, a generic name given to the descendent of a “moș”, which once mastered the entire border and designates the owner who remains in the condominium, unlike the word nobleman, word to designate the one who individualizes and decides upon the estate. Furthermore, in Moldova, to the word “mosnean” word corresponds with the same meaning, the word “razes”, from whose linguistic family is the word “razoras” , that you meet for example in “Ypsilanti’s Store”, with the meaning that arises from this disposition when you want someone to sell the thing still, to have the duty to let first relatives know that they will to be part of that estate with him or “razorasi” (Fotino, 1940: 333-334), historical representations of archaic common property Romanian villages, necessarily constituted before the century of founding the local powers.

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