

necessary for preserving the individual and collective identity based on religious criteria that add to this complex image of constructed identity linked to migration.

The *Epilogue* is the ultimate proof that the book, grounded in a solid methodology and statistical approach based on desk data and field research in which the author collected a variety of opinions, definitions, and explanations from the perspective of the Romanian and Roma migrants, succeeded to capture minutely the complex differences between two rural communities impacted by migration. It proves beyond doubt that in spite of these differences there is a shared characteristic of a rich and intense history of migration on which important commonalities emerge about migration practices and resources for migration. The findings might be extended, as the discourses and narratives might be found also in other communities, either rural or urban, as the sense-making process is the same, from the decision to migrate to the one to return, and regarding the experiences related to skills, contact with other work and life cultures, and interactions, while the reasons are a complex mixture of individual options and structural economic reasons.

Migration as a phenomenon is linked to the individual and collective identity which is constructed and shaped by the new experiences gained by migrants and stayers alike, who tend to merge past, present and future in explaining the new identities that are shaped by migration which is perceived as a phenomenon of deep impact on the way individuals relate to their social environment.

The book provides for an insightful and rich reference for scholars, policy-makers, and the general public interested in how migration impacts on each individual and the society as a whole at national level, as it is one of the ‘open wounds’ of the Romanian society.

Cornelia Dumitru

**IULIAN STĂNESCU, FLAVIUS MIHALACHE (eds.)
„România rurală în noul capitalism”: 1990–2020”,
Editura Pro Universitaria, București, 2022, 375 p.**

România rurală în noul capitalism [Rural Romania under the new capitalism], edited by Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache, is a collection of studies that address the multiple transformations affecting Romania’s rural areas in the three decades after the fall of communism. The “new capitalism” of contemporary Romania designates a new stage in the country’s social and economic development and is set in contrast with the old capitalism of the interwar period. The volume is divided into four sections that analyse different aspects of rural life, such as demography and legal status of rural municipalities, rural economy, quality of life, and social processes.

Keywords: Rural studies; Rural economy; Quality of life in rural areas; Social processes in rural life.

“România rurală în noul capitalism [Rural Romania under the new capitalism]”, edited by Iulian Stănescu and Flavius Mihalache, is a collection of studies that address the multiple transformations affecting Romania’s rural areas in the three decades after the fall of communism. The

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volume is intended to fill a gap in Romanian rural studies, as these have received limited attention in recent years, although almost half of the country's population live in rural areas.

The editors, both researchers within the Research Institute for Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy, have gathered for the purpose of this volume 22 scientific studies authored by sociologists, demographers, economists, anthropologists, political scientists and experts in communication, from various Romanian universities and research institutes of the Romanian Academy.

The multi-disciplinary volume is opened by an introductory study signed by the first co-editor, that synthesizes most findings of the subsequent studies and stresses the critical issues in today's rural Romania. The term *new capitalism*, included in the book's title, was chosen to designate the current stage of Romania's economic and political development, that started in the second half of the 30 years period, after the *transition* period, which in turn began immediately after 1989 and lasted until around 2004–2008. The *new capitalism* of contemporary Romania is conceptualized in contrast to the "old capitalism" of the interwar period. After clarifying the concepts, the reader is offered an integrative analysis of a panoply of critical issues in the rural area, addressed separately in the subsequent chapters of the volume, such as depopulation, poverty and income inequality, poor agricultural production, transformations in employment structure and standard of living, poor health and education services in rural communities. In its final section, the introductory study envisages the need for a territorial and administrative reform in Romania that should take into consideration the increased heterogeneity of Romanian rural areas. Some insights for how to conduct such a process envisage the necessity to reform the local public funding, the cooperation between rural communes and the introduction of sub-urban communes, the inclusion of communes located in the immediate vicinity of cities in their urban territories or their transformation into towns, and the merging of several rural municipalities.

The other 21 studies of the volume are grouped into four sections, as we learn from the introductory note, since they are not highlighted specifically in the table of contents. The first section opens with a study authored by the second co-editor, that concisely presents the definition and legal status of rural municipalities in Romania and discusses critically the legislative changes occurred since 2001 that allowed for the proliferation of new and smaller communes, without considering necessarily the needs for local development. While more than half of the rural municipalities have now less than 3000 inhabitants and are vulnerable to the risk of population loss due to ageing and migration, other communes located in the peri-urban areas experienced a rapid growth of their population, economy and infrastructure. Still, their legal status remains the same.

The demographic dynamics of rural areas is presented in the second study, authored by Mihaela Hărăguș and Ionuț Földes, both researchers at Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Based on official statistical data, the study stresses the deepening tendency of the natural decline of the population in rural areas, due to low fertility rates and migration. It also stresses the heterogeneity of rural areas with respect to population growth and proposes a four-type classification of rural municipalities, which takes into consideration their belonging to functional urban areas and the presence within them of marginalized communities.

The second section of the book focuses on the economic development in rural Romania. After highlighting the fragmentation and the subsequent inefficiency of the new agrarian structure introduced after 1989 (study authored by Sergiu Țăra), the dynamics of the resulting agrarian economy are analysed in three distinct studies, all authored by researchers from the Institute of Agricultural Economics of the Romanian Academy. In the first of them, Mihaela Kruzslıcika, Cornelia Alboiu and Diana Drigă analyse the evolution of the supply chains for grains, vegetables and animal products between 1990 and 2018. They consider various economic indicators, such as production, consumption, local supply, trade balance, but also factors such as market fluctuations, EU accession, farm size, environmental factors etc., which influenced the three sectors. Besides the grains production sector, which saw a certain revival especially after 2007, the other agri-food sectors remain underdeveloped. Each section of the chapter is concluded with specific policy recommendations for improvements.

The impact of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on the economy of Romanian farms is examined in the chapter signed by Cecilia Alexandri and Lorena Florentina Chișea. Based on

data about the physical and the economic dimensions of the farms, as well as the employment structure, production and other synthetic indicators (returns, subsidies, gross added value, consumption, etc.), their study shows that the value of animal products decreased systematically after 2007 whereas the total value of agricultural products remains volatile. Although the value of subsidies for agricultural production increased five times during 2007-2016, this was not followed by an equal increase in agricultural production. Subsidies granted according to farming land (and not agricultural production) had a strong impact on the dimensions of the farms, bigger farms being advantaged compared to medium and small size farming and encouraged the process of land grabbing, through different means, by Romanian and foreign owners. While acknowledging that access to subsidies produced improvements in the farming sector, the study calls for a better distribution of CAP funds in order to tackle poverty and developmental gaps in rural areas.

The national implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy is analysed in the chapter "Introducing the Rural Development Policy of the European Union in Romania - mission, priorities, territorial disparities", signed by Marioara Rusu. The study examines comparatively the absorption of EU funds within different Romanian regions and counties in the programming period 2007-2013 and evaluates succinctly the National Plan for Rural Development (PNDR) for 2014-2020. It points to the territorial disparities in the absorption of European Funds and critically addresses the question of adequacy of the CAP to the needs and peculiarities of Romanian rural areas.

From a different methodological perspective, the last chapter of the section about the rural economy offers a qualitative analysis of the subjective views of farmers and other stakeholders about Romanian agriculture and its problems. The image of "one country with two agricultures" is dominant among the 75 participants to the study conducted by Dan Petre and Anca Popescu. They point out to the enormous gap between the 'big agriculture' of large businesses, highly profitable, dominated by international players, using high technology and connected to international trends, and the 'small agriculture' of small and medium-sized businesses, that face difficulties to adapt to the requirements of a modern and efficient agriculture.

The kernel of the volume is organised around its third section, which focuses on the quality of life of people inhabiting rural areas in Romania. The authors of the ten chapters of the section are all researchers within the Research Institute for Quality of Life of the Romanian Academy. Simona Ilie authors two studies of this section, which address two important components of the standard of living: employment and income in rural areas. After discussing the influence of social, economic and political factors on employment in rural areas (privatization, deindustrialization, migration, EU adhesion), the study analyses the profile of rural employment by level of employment, age groups, education, branches and type of work (salaried vs non-salaried). Comparisons to urban employment show that in rural areas employment had different dynamics, related particularly to the fact that agriculture remains the dominant economic sector. The ups and downs of rural employment are synthesized at the end of the chapter. The study "Incomes and living standard in rural households" starts with a thorough discussion of income policies applied over the last 30 years targeting the rural population. It then analyses longitudinal data about income and budget structures of rural households and points out to the urban-rural disparities regarding the risk of poverty and inequality. Although rural incomes increased and diversified, along with the economic development of the last two decades, an important part of the rural population still relies on social security, the in-kind value of consumption from the household's own resources and other irregular revenues in order to subsist.

The standard of living in rural Romania is also the focus of the next study, authored by Ana Nițu. Besides incomes and sources of revenue, her analysis considers consumption and expenditures in rural households. The study concludes that the standard of living in rural areas improved constantly over the last 30 years, due to the increase in incomes and paid work. Consumption of food and long-term (durable) goods is comparable for rural and urban households, but there are still differences that need to be overcome in order to align the standard of living in rural and urban areas.

A rather pessimistic view of the rural-urban cleavage comes out from the study on poverty and social exclusion by Horia Mihai. The data analysed here portray the inhabitants of rural areas in the category of "losers of transition". Although material deprivation was reduced after the '90s, relative poverty and income inequality are still dominant in rural areas and need to be tackled by broad public

policies that develop other economic sectors besides agriculture and empower the rural population to overcome the limits of the current labour market.

The living conditions and the access to local public utilities of the rural population are analysed in a second study authored by Iulian Stănescu, one of the editors of the volume. Based on official statistical data and the analysis of national development policies targeting rural areas, the study acknowledges the general improvement of rural living conditions over the last 30 years, due to better housing and facilities and the growing access to public utilities (water, gas, sewerage, electricity, and internet). However, the author stresses particular phenomena that need to be considered when evaluating the general rural living conditions, such as the sub-urbanization of rural areas situated in the proximity of cities and the increased heterogeneity of rural communities.

The socio-economic situation of the Roma minority in rural areas is the focus of the study signed by Ionuț Anghel. Using census data and secondary data analysis, this study underlines important gaps between the Roma and the other ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians) inhabiting rural areas with respect to education, employment, housing and standard of living. Although access to medium education has increased and illiteracy has been reduced, the Roma rural population still face structural socio-economic barriers that impede its access to further education and development. School segregation and lack of employment opportunities as well as poor housing conditions, overcrowding and lack of infrastructure in areas inhabited by Roma are all factors that concur in the continuously deteriorating living standard of Roma.

The final part in the quality of life section of the volume focuses on education and health care services in rural areas. Each of the topics is approached through two distinct studies, employing objective and subjective data. The study signed by Flavius Mihalache analyses some effects of the various and often incoherent reforms of the Romanian education system on rural schooling, such as the reduction of school units and the decrease in number of schoolchildren (related also to the demographic changes in the rural population), decentralization of decision-making and poor financing. Data about the academic results of schoolchildren in rural areas is missing; it could have completed the picture of the difficulties faced by the rural educational system. The study authored by Cristina Tomescu compares data about health indicators and access to health services in urban and rural areas. It marks the differences regarding life expectancy and mortality by cause of disease between the rural and urban population and stresses the poor health infrastructure of rural areas, as well as the poor coverage of anti COVID-19 vaccination during the pandemic. The subjective views about access to desired education forms and the quality of health care services in rural areas are discussed in two different chapters authored by Maria Livia Ștefănescu, based on data collected throughout an extensive research programme conducted by the Research Institute for Quality of Life between 1990 and 2010.

The last section of the volume is miscellanea, addressing other important social processes occurring in rural Romania, such as social stratification (study authored by Mihai Dumitru), deviance and criminality (Dan Banciu and Lucian Rotariu), urbanization of the rural and sub-urbanization of regional urban centres (Cătălin Berescu) and religiosity (Laurențiu Tănase).

Among the shortcomings of the volume, we note the absence of any reference to the more subjective features of the quality of life, such as life-style or subjective wellbeing. References to the political participation of the rural population are also missing. Overall, the volume outlines most of the transformations faced by rural communities in the 30 years of capitalism and democracy in Romania, assessing the improvements made in the quality of life of the rural population, but also acknowledging the vicissitudes of public policies affecting rural life and economy. It offers valuable and rich information to anyone interested in deepening one's knowledge about rural Romania.

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