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CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES OF THE RURAL SPACE

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Summary: *This paper is a bibliographic study of the rural space concept, from its establishment and until now. In this respect, the following works from the dedicated literature have been studied: scientific works, doctoral dissertations, case studies, books and websites dedicated to this topic. The used method was the bibliographic research and the synthesis of conceptual approaches in own manner. The conclusions that may be drawn from the performed research reveal certain concept dynamics in time, as the functions and services of the rural space were better understood, leading to the conceptual development of the rural space. Also, the approach of the development of the rural-urban dichotomy has outlined the rural space concept more clearly.*

Key words: *concept, dichotomy, rural space.*

INTRODUCTION

The term “rural”, in the conception of the majority, defines the “country”, the peasants and generally, all non-urban territories and activities [11]. Although, from the economic point of view, the agriculture and forestry hold a significant position, the meaning of the word “rural” is larger than agricultural or forestry, containing also other activities, such as: rural specific industry; handicraft, the productive services related to the agricultural production and the unproductive services related to the rural population [8]. In a synthesis definition, the adjective *rural* is used in order to define everything that relates to the life in the countryside, located outside the urban areas [4]. The term *rural* is often used in opposition with the term *urban*, which names everything related to the city [6]. This general definition often creates confusion between the term rural and the term agricultural, which does not meet reality.

The rural space is not a material and uniform space. The uniformity may be regarded under two aspects: the first one is related to the land – topography, subsoil, soil and microclimate; the second one pertains to demography – density, polarization from small communities to big urban areas. Usually, the term *rural* describes an ensemble that is different from the urban one and, at the same time, conventionally delimited by statistic and administrative units [10].

The criteria for defining the urban or rural nature of a collectivity or of a space may be resumed to three features: economic, sociologic and geographic [4].

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This paper is a bibliographic study, a review of the rural development concept, starting with the shaping of the term and until nowadays, as the study passes through most of the variation periods of the concept, the increasingly better understanding of the functions and services generated by the rural space and by the development thereof, approaching at the same time the dichotomic analysis of the rural-urban space.

The method used for this work was based upon the bibliographic research, which is essential for understanding the concept’s history. 39 bibliographic titles were researched for this study, consisting in: scientific works, doctoral dissertations, case studies, dedicated books and websites.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The term *rural* comprises all activities performed outside the urban environment and includes three essential components: the administrative communities formed of rather few members having mutual relationships; the acute dispensation of the population and of the collective services; the particular economic role of agriculture and forestry [9].

A more complete definition of the rural space occurs by taking into account the following types of criteria: morphologic (number of inhabitants, density, environment type), structural and functional (types of activities and relationships).

From this definition of the rural space, at least the following elements are outlined: the rural space is characterized by a weak population density; the human establishment forms are villages and communes, which are characterized by the individuality and discontinuance of the built space; the productive activity is predominantly agriculture and forestry, however it does not exclude the processing industry and the rural trade; the relationships between individuals are mainly based upon the mutual acquaintance in all matters; the environment is much less polluted than in the urban areas etc.

The final form of the definition of rural space is found in the Recommendation No. 1296/1996 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe related to the European Carta of the rural space, in the following version: the phrasing (term/notion) "*the rural space comprises an inner or coast area that includes villages and small towns, where most of the land is used for: a. agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and fishing; b. the economic and cultural activities of the inhabitants of such areas (handicraft, industry, services etc.); c. the organization of non-urban areas for leisure and entertainment (or natural reservations); d. other use purposes (except for dwelling purposes)*" [38], [39].

Usually, the term *rural* characterizes an ensemble that is different from the urban one and at the same time conventionally delimited by statistic and administrative units.

For instance, in the US, depending on the percentage of the agricultural population, the categories *agricultural rural* and *non-agricultural rural* might be distinguished, while in France, the strict delimitation of the industrial and urban development areas has allowed the shaping of the rural space as a territory where the agricultural production is dominant, and the elements of nature are in a closer state to the original one [22].

In Belgium, the rural space is considered to define a certain kind of landscape, *landschaft*, which is a territory cultivated by humans [4].

In Russia, the rural areas are considered the ones where the main functions are represented by agriculture, forestry, fishing and the industrial activities for primary processing such branches.

In other countries (UK, USA, Brazil), the definition is given depending on the preponderant occupation of the majority of the active population [4].

The analysis of the dynamics of the development of the rural space is not simple at all. The references to rural, the conceptions, the scientific theories, all of it may be influenced by the political and ideological context drawing the interpretation of the city/village relation.

Retrospectively looking, in 1955 Maurice Halbwachs defines the antagonism according to which [13] "there are rich and poor people in the villages, there are class differences.

The preoccupation to maintain their level, and even to climb on the social ladder, mostly explains their condition. But they also have, in addition, the feeling of being a peasant before the city inhabitants".

The historiographer Labrousse [13] sees in the superiority from the city the contact civilization, the speed, the power, which is opposed to the "temper" of the rural. The discrepancies of nature permanently showing us the inelasticity of the rural civilization and the elasticity of the urban civilization, the stability, the relation, the fixed nature, the prudence in the case of the rural and the active movement of the elites, a risk only in the case of the urban.

Various authors have been influenced by the dichotomic evolution of the rural space.

In a publication from 1963 F. Tönnies speaks about the community and the countrymen association characterized by the lack of knowledge, psychic and social immobility, cultural homogeneity.

The labour of the geographers at the time was influenced by the idea of the dichotomic evolution and the “urban domination” almost advances as a postulate [18].

The pupils of Pierre George: R. Dugrand, M. Rochefort, Y. Babonau, B. Kayser, present in their thesis as a certainty the classification of the urban as [13] “a form of exploiting of the villages”. The big European cities, seen as a whole, have the power of a real dominator. But this does not force us to consider the relationship with the secondary centres, where the rural means are the image of a radical unavoidable opposition”.

At the same time, we might follow up the intelligent analysis of Nicole Mathieu, who explains that [13] “starting with the 60’s and as the city growth has come to know an acceleration without precedent, a period of increase of the jobs, consumption and life standards begins, and an analysis model becomes dominant: the urbanization of the villages”.

We finally meet the contradictory relationship previously mentioned: a space discontinuance between the cities and the villages no longer exists and the integration is predominant – the assimilation by the cultural distribution of the urban products and traditions. The rural exodus is certain, but secondary compared to the modernization process that homogenizes space [2]. The development of the concept of rural space continuum starts from here.

In 1974, Raymond Ledrut dedicates its seminary in Toulouse to the study of new forms of spatial structures [13]: “the division of space along the city-village cleavage is not essential” he claimed. Ten years later, Georges Day states that [13] “it is obvious that the old sharing between the city and village is changing under our very own eyes...between the city and the village the merger accelerates”.

“We start from the hypothesis”, wrote Henri Lefebvre [12] that the urbanization supplements society. The traditional groups characteristic for the country life are transformed, wider units absorb or convert them. The urban fabric proliferates, spreads, corrodes the remains of the country life. In this conception, a highway, a supermarket located in a field are a part of the urban fabric.”

Henri Mendras (1959) wrote [16]: “City inhabitants and countrymen form in certain matters a single society, they participate to civilization in the same time. The city inhabitants and the countrymen form in certain matters a single society, they participate to civilization in the same time. Ultimately, all statistics prove, on the contrary, differences of intensity and not of contrasts”.

The continuum theory has rather old roots. It is expressed to the Council of Europe by G. Moss in 1980 [13]: “The terms rural and urban assign the manners of using the land and we are eventually defined by them; hence, the terms apply to both land and people. Together, they form what is considered nowadays a continuum system, a rural-urban continuum with no distinction between them that purports different levels of the social and economic activity. In the rural exodus continuum, the ecologic processes and the natural resources are equally predominant and intensified”.

In order to tone it more, J. C. Chamboredon, in his contribution to the “History of Urban France”, oscillates between two theses, but manages to formulate finely and toned a theory that might be summarized under the following ideas [14]:

1. the transformation of exchanges between the world of the rural and the urban and their social and economic integration leads to a redefinition of the city – village opposition;
2. the labor division between the two worlds is growing, from the social and cultural point of view, and it never appeared clearer or more excessive, the rural – urban dichotomy, consists more precisely in the two poles of an axis along which a position continuum is developed;
3. these positions are characterized in the future by individuals and not by social systems, micro societies or cultures;
4. the countrymen society becomes a secondary social stage, complementary to the urban scene, a double affiliation, the multi-loyalty characterized by such individuals;

5. however, by its cultural and symbolist function, the countrymen society generates a rejuvenation of its own identity, accentuated by the territorial affiliation.

N. Mathieu had a corollary, namely that [13] “the death of the rural is identified as a fulfilled past”. He also said that the rural environment today is affirmed as a new identity and specificity, becoming again a perpetual oscillation between continuum and dichotomy”.

Currently, a concept and mentality change is required regarding the rural dynamics, correlated with the local and regional autonomy and with the subsidiarity principle.

The new conception about the rural specifies the fact that the rural space in Europe represents a precious landscape, the fruit of a long history, whose salvation is a constant preoccupation of society. The rural space may fulfil its supply, relaxation and balance functions, desired more and more by society only if it remains an attractive life environment, endowed with a good infrastructure, a viable agriculture and forestry, local conditions favorable to non-agricultural economic activities, an intact environment with a clean landscape [20].

CONCLUSIONS

✓ The rural space is characterized by a weak density of the population; the human establishment forms are the villages and communes, characterized by the individuality and discontinuance of the built space; the productive activity is predominantly agriculture and forestry, however it does not exclude the processing industry and the rural trade; the relationships between individuals are mainly based upon the mutual acquaintance in all matters; the environment is much less polluted than in the urban areas etc.

✓ The village-city dichotomy comprises the transformation of the exchanges between the rural and urban world and their social and economic integration leads to the redefinition of the village-city opposition; the labor distribution between the two worlds grows, from the social and cultural point of view. The rural-urban dichotomy consists, more precisely, in the two poles of an axis along which a position continuum is developed; such positions are characterized in the future by individuals and not by social systems, micro societies or cultures; the countrymen society becomes a secondary social stage, complementary to the urban stage, a double affiliation, the multi-loyalty characterized by such individuals; however, by its cultural and symbolist function, the countrymen society generates a rejuvenation of its own identity, accentuated by the territorial affiliation.

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