

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGRARIAN REFORM OF 1921 IN THE FORMER “COPOU” UNIT OF THE COUNTY OF IAȘI - NEW FINDINGS

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Abstract

In inter-war Romania, the agrarian reform of 1918-1921 was a topic of research and prioritized debate. A reference event in the modern history of the country, the issue still is, at present, and most likely also in the long term, a topic of historical-economic research of considerable importance.

On studying the historical-economic literature available, it can be noted that there is still no extensive research which aims at analyzing in depth the 1921 agrarian reform, especially its implications or overall consequences at the level of the entire Iași County. There are a few papers focused on the overall development of the agrarian economy of the interwar period in which various aspects are presented in detail, backed by relevant arguments regarding the implementation endeavors at the level of Iași County.

The present paper tackles the reform at the level of the rural settlements in the inter-war administrative-territorial unit - the “plasa” Copou, including the possible differences that might emerge in comparison to other similar “plase” in the county of Iași, in terms of appropriations and leases, the expropriations of the large agricultural holdings, the various abuses committed during the implementation procedures, the colonization steps a.s.o. – all of which resulted from the agricultural reform triggered by the law decreed in 1921 – based on the available archived files with their unavoidable qualitative and quantitative limitations.

Key words: agricultural sciences, economic history, historiography, interdisciplinarity, rural economy

JEL Classification: N00, N30, N50, Q01

I. INTRODUCTION

Upon reviewing the field literature dedicated to this topic it is not difficult to notice that the agrarian reform of 1921 in Romania has up to date been tackled in a large number of economics, sociological legal and political studies. The fact that this reform was recorded as one of the most important changes in the structure and legal status of landed properties has been widely accepted, including by most foreign authors. Prior to the implementation of this reform there had been three main categories of small agricultural holdings: the small; the insufficient in comparison to the actual needs, while lessees had owned no land at all. The extensive national and international literature on this topic shows that the land reform and its many and varied consequences and implications represented a crucial turning point in the historical evolution of Romanian agriculture, rural areas and the national economy on the whole. The different opinions and approaches have contributed to the in-depth research and understanding of this endeavor.

II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

From a historical perspective, the agrarian reforms have represented substantial changes in the legal status of the landed fund resulting in considerable landownership changes. These changes of a structural nature had a considerable impact not only on the ways of cultivating the land included in the economic sector, but also on the means of exploitation of the soil and subsoil resources and the socio-economic activities involved. In this respect it can be noted that the surface of land, its uses and the socio-economic activities have played a fundamental role in laying the foundations of any state. Archived documents and the literature provide evidence concerning the major role of land as the main factor of production over time and an indispensable condition of the development of any state. It is also well-known that the very existence and proper functioning of any nation has always relied on a series of prerequisites including the different types of rent, taxes, fees or royalties charged on the various existing categories of land, soil and subsoil resources. The efficiency of the institutions in any state is inextricably linked to an optimal level of income based on these levies, depending on the state's ability to provide a minimum quota of incomes, tax rates or royalties preferably without resorting to external loans.

The influence exerted by international bodies and institutions on such economic categories as well as the particular historical contexts should also be taken into account in all of the Romanian provinces. Examples of external interference were the documented instances of “land appropriation” which affected mainly the economically challenged rural dwellers, against the background unfavorable of the socio-economic inequalities

and economic imbalances – mainly as a result of local features such as the availability of capital and its accessibility and size.

The agricultural reform of 1918-1921 has been approached mainly by researchers from the field of Economic History. Given the current need of objective quantitative evaluations to complement the qualitative-descriptive arguments and interpretations and the importance of primary historical sources, the importance of the surviving archival records should not be underestimated, because only a fraction of the archival records have been studied. With historical sources consistency should be observed.

Thus, on reviewing the contents of primary historical sources it will be noted that as a rule archived files and documents contain mostly descriptive data and information rather than statistical records. The archives of the Iași Branch of the National Archives of Romania are no exception: the archival inventories testify to this state of affairs, which does not necessarily represent a drawback. Qualitative data often provides readers with relevant insights, a fundamental prerequisite in the process of conducting quantitative research. In other words, qualitative data essentially complements the quantitative. If archival records are studied exhaustively whether they are stored at county or central level researchers are likely to gain a more in-depth assessment of the actual situation which will often differ to a large extent from the professed goals and optimistic statements made by the then representatives of state authorities.

As an argument of the informative potential of the primary sources that have not been exhaustively or effectively processed by researchers, in the current context of differences of opinion regarding whether or not the 1921 agrarian reform is still of any interest, it must be noted that throughout the country, the 1939 land ownership structures represented the de facto basis for the redistribution of the land fund after the Second World War, and more importantly, after 1989. It emerges that the consequences and effects of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” have been perpetuated almost a century later.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the county of Iași, as in the “Copou” unit (*“Plasa Copou”*), several bodies were supposed to be involved in the process of land appropriation. According to the provisions of art. 104 these were: *“The Local Committee”*, *“The Commons Committee”* as well as *“The Local County Committee for Land Appropriation”*. Upon reviewing their involvement at the time, the law clearly stated that their mission was to put those provisions into practice. For instance, according to the 1921 agrarian law, “Local Committees” were supposed to comprise several responsible individuals such as the mayor, the priest, the teacher, four designated individuals as well as a freely elected person to act as the secretary of that body. The main task of these local committees in every rural settlement was to draw up documents – usually tables, listing the villagers legally entitled to benefit from the process of land appropriation (Garoflid, 1921, p. 52).

The second legal body that was supposed to act in the matter, “The Commons Committee”, was to comprise several members: a Commons` Justice – to act as Chairman; a regional agronomist – to serve on behalf of the “Casa Centrală a Împroprietării Sătenilor” (*“Headquarters of the Agency for the Landed Properties of Villagers”*), the governmental authority responsible for supervising peasant appropriation; the “plasă” administrator (*Romanian interwar middle level administrative unit*); two individuals designated to represent the peasants` interests besides another one appointed by the Ministry of War. The main task of the “The Commons Committee” was to judiciously analyze whether or not the documents provided by local committees complied with the regulations and the provisions of the 1921 Agrarian Law. If there was any evidence of incongruity the body was not just fully entitled but also expected to apply the provisions of the law so as to mitigate the dispute.

“The Local County for Land Appropriation” was the third body responsible to act alongside the other two in order to put into effect the stipulations of the “Decree Law” of 1918 and the “Reform Act of 1921”. Such committees were to include a justice appointed by the president of the courthouse, an agricultural advisor and an agricultural engineer. The justice also presided over the committee’s meetings to review and mitigate all potential complaints/appeals filed by peasants. The main task of the “Local County” was to compile clear and accurate data concerning lawful ownership, regardless of the number of initial requests of land allotment; in other words, it had the final word in any claims or appeals at county level with a view to unblocking the allotment process on the whole.

From the point of view of the judicial organization of the County of Iași during the inter-war period, the archival documents as well as several historical studies indicate the following bodies: *“One Court of Appeal located in Iași, having 2 divisions and 18 magistrates, whose jurisdiction encompasses the courthouses located in Bacău, Botoșani, Baia, Fălciu, Iași, Neamț, Roman și Vaslui. A Public Prosecutor’s Office assisting the Court of Appeal – 1 Prosecutor General and 1 Prosecutor. One Courthouse in Iași – 4 divisions, 32 magistrates, 1 chief prosecutor and 5 prosecutors. 9 county/district courts located in Iași (2 urban and a mixed one), Tg. Frumos, Podul Iloaiei, Sculeni, Șipotete, Țigănași și Voinești, employing 20 magistrates. A labor court in Iași employing/consisting of 2 judges”* (Gusti, (Ed.), 1938, p. 244)

Most expropriated landed properties were to be broken down and subdivided into smaller size agricultural plots ranging from 5 to 7 hectares. The artisans of the reform and its regulators had had several aims in mind when deciding on these figures. While the plots spanning around 5 hectares were to be allotted to all of the small peasant households that had previously owned no landed properties at all, those reaching 7 hectares were to be set aside for potential colonists. When assessing the reasoning behind the “Decree Law” of 1918 and the “Agrarian Law” of 1921 one has to take into account to a greater extent the end results of the enforcement of art. 98, which stated that rural inhabitants were to be provided not only with land for agricultural purposes but also with plots for residential-housing needs. More exactly, art. 98 stated that peasants meeting the criteria had the opportunity to benefit from 1000-3000 sq. m. plots of land. Local or regional practices on the matter were usually decisive in finally determining the exact size of these particular plots. Needless to say, such provisions also heavily depended on land availability and the geographical profile of the rural settlements in the various regions.

To put things into perspective, our research concerning the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) has shown that by 1938, 22,988 individuals (*heads of families*) had benefited from the provisions of the agrarian law at the level of the former inter-war Iași County. The total number of peasants allotted comprised the villagers that had had their forms filled in and were clear of any claims or appeals as well as the “colonists” or “settlers”.

In the allotment (*recapitulation*) tables of 1927 in the County of Iași, the number of small peasant households that were deemed to have completed all their legal forms clear of any claims or appeals totaled 18,579 individuals, of which 12,836, listed in “Table 1” (“*Tabela I*”) (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 8), were appropriated with a total area of 48,437.95 hectares; 34 had been approved by the “Agrarian Committee” and appropriated with a total area of 148 hectares, and 5,709 individuals, deemed to have met the criteria in “Table II” (“*Tabela II*”) (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 9), were appropriated with a total area of 16,439.64 hectares. Another 1,163 individuals who owned small agricultural holdings (listed in the “I-VI” and “VII-IX” subcategories) were described as “lessees fully entitled to land appropriation” (367 in the former “Cârligătura” administrative unit, 449 in the “Codru” unit and 347 in the “Copou” unit (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 13; f. 32). The column titled „justificarea suprafeței repartizate” (“*breakdown of area dedicated to allotment*”) mentions another 46 „reangajați militari” (“*former military*”), who were allotted 307 hectares at county level.

By having a thorough look at the data recorded by the personnel/staff of “Consilieratul Agricol Iași” (“*Iași County Agricultural Service*”), one simply has to add up the lower end values of two columns so as to see that a number of 19,742 requests for allotment had been filed under the label – “soluționate” (“*solved*”) or “satisfăcute” (“*satisfied*”) so as to use the interwar era term (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 13; f. 32; f. 49; f. 68; f. 85; f. 103; f. 122; f. 139; f. 156; f. 175; f. 189; f. 203; f. 221; f. 238; f. 252). Upon considering the figures of the “Tabelul I” (“*Table I – e column*”) one can see that the “global” (“*total*”) landed area that underwent changes in the process of allotment totaled 48,437.95 hectares. Thus, 12,386 local beneficiaries at that point apparently were deemed to have gained ownership status of those landed areas. The same table indicates further (*g and h columns*) that another 5,709 locals had benefited from the process appropriation. Thus one has to reconsider the total number of peasants endowed and further add up the numbers so as to come up with the final result – 18,579 individuals that managed by means of small size-agricultural holdings around 65,025 hectares at the level of all the administrative units comprising the former interwar County of Iași (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 8).

Another relevant category from the statistical viewpoint was that of the individuals that had their filed requests eventually rejected by state authorities: in the five units of the County of Iași, 326 requests from the subcategories I-IV and another 1,019 from the subcategories VII-IX were “rejected by the Agricultural Service in accordance with the regulations”. Last but not least, a further 5,236 individuals from the subcategories I-XI were “listed but not granted” because there was not enough available land. The number of requests that were not granted totaled 6,581. Recordings archived mostly during the 1919-1939 period and in some cases even after are a clear proof of this, given that they provide the early versions of the statistical situations detailed at the level of all the villages and communes. A simple side by side comparison was and still is so very often one of the easiest ways of determining overall how many peasants were later on erased from them, despite being initially listed in various official documents as entitled beneficiaries. In short, this indicates that due to various reasons they did not in the end reap the benefits of land appropriation. By making a more in-depth investigation on this particular issue one can determine that the high frequency of such cases may be attributable to various reasons (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 13; f. 32).

According to primary historical sources, in 1927 the total aggregated area granted for appropriation in the units making up the County of Iași was 3,193.41 hectares (508.30 hectares in the “Cârligătura” unit, 169.80 hectares in the “Codru” unit, 1,002 hectares in the “Copou” unit, 724 hectares in the “Bahlui” unit, 788 hectares in the “Turia” unit). It can be noted that the administrative unit with the largest expropriated area was the one in the northern part of the county – “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 8). Archive documents provide information concerning details of general and global purposes, according to the provisions of the “Decree-Law” of 1918 and those of the Land Reform Act of 1921. Out of the total of 3,139.41 hectares of “reserves” 1,002 hectares were, following the distribution made by the “Agricultural Service” (“*Serviciul*

Agricol”), registered in the “Copou” unit: (“*Agricultural schools of all degrees*” - 56 hectares; “*Agricultural holdings*” - ; “*Areas reserved to various buildings*” - ; “*Agricultural model plots*” – 75 hectares: “*Plots designated for the use of the County Agricultural Council and Regional Agricultural Administrative Units*” – 35 hectares; “*Garden plots managed by the Headquarters of the Agri-coop Agency for the Appropriation of Peasants*” – 81.5 hectares; “*Ministry of Public Instruction (except primary schools)*” – 45 hectares; “*Ministry of Cults, Metropolitan churches, Bishoprics, etc. (properties of local churches not taken into account)*” – 100 hectares; “*Ministry of war (for general purposes)*” – 60 hectares; “*Ministry of Communications - Road Cantons*” – 30.5 hectares; “*State Undersecretariat for the Railways, Cantons, Stations, etc.*” – 35 hectares; “*The Ministry of Public Health for hospitals, infirmaries*” – 3 hectares; “*Rural primary schools*” – 156.5 hectares; “*Churches in rural areas*” – 35 hectares; “*Cemeteries*” – 7 hectares; “*Burial plots for animals*” – 2 hectares; “*Fields for practicing sports*” - 37,5 hectares; “*Agricultural access roads*” – 165 hectares; “*Plots for the Livestock Service*” - ; “*Ministry of Industry*” – ; “*Ponds with reed*” - 16 hectares; “*Ministry of Justice*” - ; “*Areas reserved for stock markets*” - ; “*Beeharvesting plots*” - ; “*Sites designated for rural fairs*” - ; “*Carol Foundation*” - ; “*Bush-covered areas*” - (A.N.R. Iași, 1927, f. 18; f.11-12). While in the year 1928 the total areas designated as reserves in the entire “Kingdom of Romania” amounted to 395,442 hectares, in 1930 the total was of only 353,781 hectares (Frunzănescu, 1939, p. 112; Șandru, 1975, 163; Dobos, 2017, p. 39; Dobos, 2018, p. 130).

On assessing the development of the implementation of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” in the “Copou Agricultural Region”, (“*Regiunea Agricolă Copou*”) archival units prove once more to be an indispensable instrument of research. Thus, by the 31st of December 1933, according to a series of documents, out of 43 large agricultural holdings/estates that had already been expropriated, 13,795.01 hectares represented the area that had been definitely expropriated in accordance with the law, while 4,682 represented the total number of peasants that had filed requests for allotment in the same period. Concerning the procedures of land expropriation and implicitly redistribution one can note that out of the total number of allottees, 3,289 individuals were locals as opposed to another 289 peasants that had been registered as “appropriated settlers” whose legal forms were deemed to have been completed, representing only 4.69% out of the total of 4,682 (A.N.R. Iași, 3/1934, f. 74).

In the former “Copou” unit (“*plasa Copou*”) a significant feature in this context was the fact that the percentage of the individuals who failed to be allotted land was 27.67%, higher than those in the rest of the county. The records fail to provide detailed information concerning the areas especially provisioned for the “settlers” (“*colonists*”), however they show that the total area granted to the 3,289 rural households was 8,816.26 hectares. The average allotment was thus 2.68 hectares per household, which shows the discrepancies between the real situation and the stipulations set out in the “*Instructions of the Decree-Law no. 3697 and 5697 of 1918*” and those of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” specifying that colonists were entitled to landed properties spanning at least 7 hectares.

From the point of view of possession, the records further show that there were no more leased out properties by agricultural authorities to any local small sized farmers be they “*îndreptățiți la demersurile de înzestrare sau coloniști*” (“*entitled to appropriation or for settling purposes*”). A second important concern of most inhabitants of rural areas was that of the access to grazing grounds during the whole interwar period. In this respect, the data recorded indicates a total of 3,460.60 hectares that had been expropriated in accordance with the provisions of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” with the aim of redistributing them to the various villages and communes so as to ensure that these had proper grazing ground areas to sustain livestock at hand (A.N.R. Iași, 3/1934, f. 74).

Given objective criteria such as the number of dwellings per hectare as well as the high natural increase of the population registered in the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) one can better understand why local authorities had set aside a fairly large land area with the aim of ensuring that local authorities had at their disposal the necessary means of creating new settlements. The “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) was thus no exception compared to other neighboring units, records showing precisely that out of the total expropriated area 301 hectares and 9,100 sq. m. were provisioned especially with the aim of creating future “new rural settlements” – as shown by the multiple registers archived by the “County Agricultural Service” (“*Serviciul Agricol*”). A further 35 hectares were reserved for the “special cases of appropriations”. Approximately, 651 hectares were set aside as “reserves for the institutions” while 96 hectares and 6,840 sq. m. were deemed to be “unsuitable for agricultural purposes and land occupied by roads” (A.N.R. Iași, 1934, f. 74)

Last but not least, when considering the reconstitution and the evaluation of the effects of the vast 1921 agrarian reform, one must not focus only on the land fund destined for the appropriation of peasants but also on the land that was let out to small sized agricultural holdings under lease agreements. Given the overall complexity and vast effort towards ensuring a long-term successful reform process it should not come as a surprise that a fairly large area of about 310 hectares was managed under lease agreements at the level of all villages and communes that made up the “Copou Region” (“*Regiunea Agricolă Copou*”) at the time. The significant number of lessees was to a large extent the result of an ever-growing need of access to crop land

attributable not only to local inhabitants but to natives from neighboring regions and counties. This complex problem was further aggravated by other factors. The general situation of the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) was no different to any significant extent from that of its neighboring units and counties in Moldavia or from that of the then “Kingdom of Romania”.

Thus, one has to keep in mind that areas suitable for agricultural purposes were insufficient in comparison to the needs of the already quite large number of local inhabitants and allottees. Undoubtedly, the high rates of natural increase only made matters worse. Secondly, the very specific geographical features of the region located in the north-east of the former County of Iași had major implications - predominantly hilly with relatively extended wooded areas. Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that a mere 18 hectares was the remaining available land fund left in the administration of the “Casa Centrală a Împroprietăririi Sătenilor” (“*Headquarters of the Agency for the Landed Properties of Villagers*”) for “settling purposes” out of a total of only 20, designated for appropriation procedures in the event that such written requests were to be filed by peasants.

According to the centralized data issued by the Ministry of Agriculture and State Domains - “*Agrarian Reform Department*”, one can determine quite well the overall level of progress in the implementation of the reform achieved at various stages in time. For instance, following the instructions of “*Order no. 262238*” of the 9th of December 1933, the central authorities were informed that despite the general local shortage of available crop land, 27 “colonists” (“*settlers*”) had arrived from the neighboring counties for appropriation purposes. In this respect, one example indicative of the slow pace of procedures is that by 1933, out of 36 large agricultural holdings/estates expropriated according to the instructions and regulations stipulated by the “*Agrarian Reform Act of 1921*” and subsequent laws on the matter, six former properties had still not been measured by the cadastre personnel. This also helps one to better understand why by the same year quite a large number of peasants - 1,345 – were unfortunately still unable to claim their rights despite meeting all the legal criteria required. The slow progress of plotting work registered by many cadastre units was a widespread occurrence throughout the interwar period (A.N.R. Iași, 1934, f. 73).

In assessing the agricultural situation entailed by the procedures of the agrarian reform in the former “Copou Region” (“*Regiunea Agricolă Copou*”) as well as that of the whole interwar County of Iași, the particular importance of a series of documents dated the 15th of August 1938 emerges. One of these was “*Order no. 2363/938*”, issued by the “*Iași County Agricultural Service*” (“*Serviciul Agricol al Județului Iași*”), which played an important part overseeing the implementation of operations. The document mentioned the need of conducting a statistical survey and implicitly gathering new data and information on the overall progress by means of making use of a series of fairly detailed yet concise standardized questionnaires, besides instructing the officials in all of the regional administrative units on how to make the most of the statistical instrument that had been delivered to them, mainly by providing thorough explanations on how to make sure that questionnaires were accurately filled in. By means of centralizing the available data at unit level, regional administrators were thus tasked with delivering a descriptive summary of their ongoing situation that was to be later delivered to the central and county authorities (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 5-19).

Upon considering the valuable quantitative and qualitative information provided by the archived questionnaire dated the “7th of August” filled in by the administrator of the “*Copou Agricultural Region*” at the time one can note that 36 estates had been expropriated, totaling around 13,197.90 hectares. With respect to point b) of the first question asked, in regard to the total number of former large agricultural holdings that had been measured, distributed and plotted the answer provided was 23. To put things into perspective on the basis of this figure one can compute fairly easy that in percentage terms this meant 63.88% out of all deposed estates in the former “Copou Region” (“*Regiunea Agricolă Copou*”). Concerning the status of the remainder of 13 large farms that had not yet been divided, the questionnaire records that cadastre employees still had to execute plotting work on no less than 1,521.55 hectares.

Nevertheless, on reviewing the statistical indicator represented by the number of divided expropriated properties on the whole, it must be noted that it exceeded that of those not yet measured and divided (29 totaling an area of 6,544 hectares and 59,9 ares). In percentage terms 80.55% of all expropriated properties had completed all the necessary cadastre works required. In order to furnish a clear assessment of the situation, the questionnaire featured the nominal roll of the deposed properties that had a pending status for cadastre employees: „*7 estates still have to be measured – 30 hectares of communal plots in Bogdănești, 15 hectares of communal plots in Copou, 11 hectares of communal plots in Miroslava, 15 hectares of communal plots in Rediu Mitropoliei, 60 hectares worth of ground lease in Galata, 1121 hectares and 46 ares comprising the agricultural holding of the City of Iași - pending cadastre measurement. In total 7 estates covering an area of 1252 hectares 4600 sq.m. The communal grazing grounds of Aroneanu, Copou, Rediu Mitropoliei, Rediu Tătar, Holboca and Uricani still need to have their boundaries settled*” (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 14).

Concerning question number five featured in the same questionnaire (“*Dacă s’au făcut întocmit debite pentru toți? Pentru câți da, pentru câți nu?*”) aimed at determining precisely whether or not the peasants had been listed as paying for their newly acquired properties at the level of the “*Copou Agricultural Region*”

(“Regiunea Agricolă Copou”) - as it was called at the time - nominal archive records show that by the 7th of August 1938 the financial situation was as follows: *“11749 hectares and 8629 sq.m. are under payment procedures at this point, due to the fact that they had been distributed for appropriation purposes. According to our statistics a number 3407 peasants are registered as active payers for their newly acquired properties. However, another 28 locals managing an area of 49 hectares as well as a series of 400 dwellers of the suburbs of the city of Iași will be appropriated on area of covering 1071 hectares and 4600 sq.m. Last but not least, 28 peasants that benefit from long term lease agreements on the 60 hectare “Galata” estate are also paying off their debt for their plots”* (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 14).

In order to determine the percentage of peasants that had not been classified as “undergoing payment procedures” the archival records provide the necessary data to assess the situation. Thus, about 12.31% out of 3,475 listed individuals had not had their forms completed in the “Copou” unit (“Plasa Copou”) at the time, as required by the provisions and regulations of the agrarian laws. This percentage meant that there were 428 requests for appropriation filed by various persons living on the outskirts of the town Iași, as well as 28 individuals that had solicited approval from local authorities to manage plots located in the “Galata” commune by means of long-term leases.

Concerning the request of the “Iași County Agricultural Service” (“*Serviciului Agricol Județean Iași*”) focused on assessing the overall development of the actions entailed by the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921”, the then administrator of the “Copou” unit considered that several issues still needed to be addressed so as to consider that all actual field operations had been fully completed:

“First of all cadastre works are still ongoing (...) – secondly, concerning the situation of all deposed properties it should be noted that our statistics and documents are in need of revisions that have to be executed by our staff accompanied by a representative of the Cadastre - estate by estate, on site as well as the paperwork.

With respect to the available plots that are still part of reserves we consider that they are all to be sold to peasants that have still not managed to be appropriated with any plots.

“The measurement forms of “Via Dabija” with an area of 7 hectares and 1891 sq.m. have still not been completed being the possession of the “Jewish Hospital”.

The plotting work and other cadastre operations that were executed on the “Cucuteni” estate – formerly the property of the “Rural House” – have to be made public. According to our figures allottees have been granted ownership of an area covering 146 hectares and 5800 sq.m. located in the commune of Bogdănești” (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 14).

Given the provisions of articles 77-91 (“*Chapter X – The Order of Preference for the Appropriation*”) as well as those of articles 114-119 (“*Chapter XV – On Settling*”) of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” the local authorities of the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) considered that they knew of “*only one settlement centre for the accommodation of new settlers – Orsoaea, in the Lețcani commune, covering in part the former Epureni-Isovoare estate. In all a total number of 109 peasants have been settled, 103 of them natives of the Măcărești commune – Iași County. The other 6 on the appropriation list are from Bucovina. In this respect we can also find that the “settlers have been granted an area totaling 342 hectares, with all legal forms deemed to have been completed. More exactly, 70 individuals out of the 109 already have buy-sell agreements/land sale and purchase contracts, while the remaining 39 are waiting for their contracts to be drafted up”* (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 9).

A comparison with the data recorded in 1927 that mentioned 455 “settlers” (“colonists”) in the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”) shows that there are important differences from the year 1938 – 109 individuals. The main explanation for this has to do with the frequent changes of the administrative-territorial organization of the region that overlapped and implicitly interfered with the measuring, dividing and plotting activities carried out by the “Cadastre Department” (“*VI Cadastre Inspectorate*”). For instance, after having had completed the expropriation of the former “Epureni” estate/agricultural holding, the authorities in charge distributed the resulting plots – covering 1,454 hectares - to at least four rural settlements (“*Epureni*”, “*Rediu-Tătar*”, “*Vânători*” and “*Copou*”), according to the stipulations set out in the “*Instructions of the Decree-Law no. 3697 and 5697 of 1918*” (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 111). Thus, one can see that data comparison is a very difficult process due to the frequent alterations that have made in the structure and boundaries of the hamlets, villages and rural communes of the “Copou” unit (“*Plasa Copou*”). It should be noted that all archival records are a testimony to the fact that most of the hamlets and villages comprising the administrative unit suffered a lot of changes in terms of appendance. Consequently, the process of reconstitution of the rural communes in the interwar period has to take into account the fact that the statistics may be difficult to interpret.

On assessing the size of plots that were provisioned to be distributed to “settlers” or “colonists”, it can be noted that on average it only amounted to ~3.13 hectares, according to data available for 1938. The figure shows, that on the whole, the authorities` endeavors in applying art. 85`s provisions of the “Agrarian Law of 1921”, that villagers listed in this particular category had to be appropriated with plots ranging from 7 to 25 hectares, were far from successful. In this respect, our investigations have determined that the main reason behind this what can be deemed only relative success was the shortage of available land for this purpose. In support of this, the

administrator of the “Copou” region firmly assured the then “Iași County Agricultural Service” that across the region there were absolutely no more available land areas for the purpose (A.N.R. Iași, 1938, f. 14).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Upon conducting field research, it emerges that several interwar era archival funds, of which the most important are the “Iași County Prefecture” (*“Prefectura Județului Iași”*), “Iași County Agricultural Advisory Board” (*“Consilieratul Agricol al Județului Iași”*) and the “Iași Agricultural Service” (*“Serviciul Agricol al Județului Iași”*), which have survived the vicissitudes of time. Currently they are available for study purposes for individuals and researchers with an interest in the effects of the 1921 agrarian reform on the whole or at a regional level – in this paper, the “Copou” unit. A brief overview of the archival units shows that the sheer volume of the documents does not allow extensive research. In any case, the historical records contain valuable data and information that underline the most important features of the topic addressed. Thus, one can see numerous irregularities - frauds and abuses - have been reported during the implementation of the provisions of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” – starting with the expropriations through to the appropriation stages - almost during the entire interwar period. Of particular importance are two archival units that store all of the documents on the numerous cases of abuses reported by individuals entitled to allotment. On the whole our investigations have determined that no less than 1000 worth of pages (complaints, memos, provisions, experts’ reports, instructions, petitions, minutes, official reports and collective reports) were drawn up indicating the deficiencies and unlawful actions of land redistribution carried out in various rural settlements.

The archival records clearly show that it was especially during the appropriation procedures that most irregularities were filed and reported. The extensive number of complaints registered by local and county authorities during 1919-1939 stand as solid proof that the phenomena had been nearly a constant feature of the implementation stage. The authorities were not only well aware of the large number of irregularities that plagued the reform but, in many cases, they were themselves involved, violating the provisions of the law. This situation could be explained by the influence that the former owners of large agricultural holdings had over the state authorities and their strong motivation in protecting their interests.

The facts stored by the primary historical sources are also backed by many articles published in the newspapers of time. An abundant series of headlines pointed out the misdeeds of civil servants and clerks. They were thus blamed especially for not properly drafting up the lists of rightful allottees and thus hindering the development and positive effects that the agrarian reform of 1921 was supposed to have on the rural population and the entire economy. At least some of the central authorities responsible with the monitoring of the implementation process to some government officials and members of parliament acknowledged time and again the fact that action needed to be taken against some of their very subordinates.

The implementation and effects of the provisions of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” at the level of the former “Copou” unit have not been a topic of research for Romanian even less for foreigners. A few studies on its socio-economic effects at the level of the whole former interwar era county of Iași should only be viewed as an exception. Our investigations have aimed to determine to some extent the effects, development and implications that the reform had within the rural economy of the “Copou” region located in the north-eastern part of the former Iași County by researching the archived statistical data and information on the allottees, lessees and deposed owners of estates while attempting to relate at least in part to what had happened in other neighboring units at time.

Like in the other neighboring regions, the situation of the “Copou” unit was marked overall by the extensive restructuring process of landed properties during 1919-1939, resulting in a relatively constant breaking down of large agricultural holdings into ever smaller plots. Despite the fact that central authorities had claimed at some point in the year 1926 that the implementation of the reform had supposedly been finished, archival data and information on the “Copou” interwar unit undoubtedly proves the contrary. Thus, many figures are indicative of the many delays in the actual field operations. Some sources clearly highlight that as late as 1939 there were still many problems that needed to be addressed.

Given the complexity and overwhelming number of historical documents on the topic, a careful further inquiry into the matter with a view to obtaining more results of a quantitative nature is obvious. However, apart from the fact that the extensive quantitative information recorded in archival units requires a lot of effort and processing time, it should be noted that there are several shortcomings that hinder potential research endeavors. The statistics are difficult to compile and interpret because they lack a much-needed feature that is homogeneity. Particularly, given the fact the administrative-territorial law underwent no less than 11 consistent revisions during the interwar era, the statistical data on hamlets, villages and rural communes proves to be extremely complicated. Individuals studying the effects of the “Agrarian Reform Act of 1921” on rural settlements have a hard time in following the numerous changes of their boundaries. Many rural settlements were subject to appendage time and again. Of particular importance when studying the “Copou” unit is the fact that as a result of

the administrative reform of 1926 it comprised another 13 formerly neighboring rural settlements that prior to 1918 had been part of the Russian Empire. Thus, its area registered a significant increase.

Strong arguments of a qualitative and historical nature take precedence over statistical analysis, given that econometric and quantitative methods are basically inapplicable outside of a well-defined theoretical framework. A review of the primary historical sources has been carried out, resulting in the use of some of the extremely large number of relevant sources, interpretative-descriptive methods, in order to obtain some in-depth knowledge of the topic addressed. The case study is a difficult endeavor even at the level of a constituent region of a particular county like that of the interwar county of Iași. The general situation of the “Copou” unit was no different to a significant extent from that of its neighboring units and counties in Moldavia or from that of the then Kingdom of Romania.

V. REFERENCES

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