

ON THE NEED FOR INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY IN RESEARCH ON THE RURAL SPACE

Sebastian DOBOȘ

Romanian Academy, Iasi Branch, 700481, Romania
sebastian_d_dobos@yahoo.com

Abstract

An analysis of the present situation of rural areas in general, and of the Romanian ones in particular, represents an endeavour which cannot be undertaken in the absence of a historical analysis of the development of the rural environment, given the fact that the rural space has never been a static entity but a dynamic one, in constant confrontation with the urban environment. Given the strategic importance of agriculture as an economic activity, at present and throughout the history of human society, the study of its dynamics is of particular interest to researchers and specialists in the academic field, as the analyses and retrospective studies contribute to the elaboration of future strategies, despite the fact that the usefulness of such scientific studies is not generally acknowledged.

As an interdisciplinary field, the history of agriculture is closely connected to other sciences, e.g. agricultural economics, political economy, rural economy, forestry, archeology, ethnography, sociology and statistics. In spite of some considerable shortcomings, the available research on the economic history, the history of statistics and historical sociology of the Romanian rural space provides a general assessment of both advantages and drawbacks, for example as a result of the agrarian reforms and following the strategies and measures adopted by authorities with a view to improve the living standards of the inhabitants. Moreover, irrespective of any inherent deficiencies and/or limitations, the general assessment is bound to be an important source of information for future researchers, authorities or indeed anyone interested.

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

JEL Classification: *N01, Q01*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Romania, a mainly rural state entity - a fact which has been time and again confirmed even by the accounts of those travellers who ventured to this part of Europe, the rural environment has always been of great importance. The eminently rural character of the dwellers living in the Carpathian – Danube - Black Sea area is attested for example by the first census of the Romanian United Principalities (1859-1860), which was conducted by Dionisie Pop Marțian. The census data shows that approximately 90% of the total population resided in rural areas, with circa 71% of the households relying on agriculture as their means of livelihood (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 16).

Romania's inter-war rural population structure can be noted by consulting the data from the 1930 national population census, according to which about 79.8 percent of the total number of inhabitants resided in rural areas. The same 1930 census details a density of dwellers of 48.9 per square kilometer (in comparison to 61.2% - which represents the mean of villages and cities). Also 79.2% of the households, 78.2% of the buildings, and 55.2% of the total number of enterprises in Romania at that time were to be found in rural areas (Șandru, 1980, p. 43). It is also worth noting that between 1919 and 1939 the importance of the rural environment and the distinct features of the agri-based economy are eloquently evidenced by the fact that more or less $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total population produced approximately 50% of the overall gross output, depending on the specific seasonal fluctuations caused by a series of internal and external distinct factors (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 42). Although during the communist regime (1945-1989) there was a gradual drop in the total number of inhabitants in the rural areas, so that by 1989 the numbers of the rural population was about 10.8 million of the total number of citizens (<http://businessday.ro> (cf. datelor INS)). The urban population outnumbered the rural one only in 1985 (Axenciuc, 2012, p. 68).

Present-day Romania continues to be rural to a great extent - comprising about 93.7% of its territory, 47% of the total population and about 40% of its employed workforce, even though according to data available for the year 2008 (Rusu, Florian, et. al., 2011) the agricultural sector represented 6.46% of the GDP (www.insse.ro). The primary sector is mainly represented by a large number of small agricultural holdings, as

well as by a small number of commercially active farms, a type of enterprise which is growing in numbers. The small agricultural holdings practice an archaic, noncompetitive form of agriculture, whilst the cultivated areas are continually shrinking as a result of the inhabitants' diminishing purchasing power and the lack of a real and effective agricultural market.

II. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the present situation of rural areas in general, and of the Romanian ones in particular, represents an endeavour which cannot be undertaken in the absence of a historical analysis of the development of the rural environment, given the fact that the rural space has never been a static entity but a dynamic one, in constant confrontation with the urban environment. Two main elements have to be considered: the geography (topography, soil, subsoil, climate etc.) and the demography (density, polarization, evolution pattern etc.). The present situation of the rural areas, of the Romanian ones in particular, is the result of a series of internal historical social, economical, political and legal factors, as well as of external factors – both objective and subjective, which resulted in a marked development gap, which was estimated, at the time of Romania's independence, at roughly 200-300 years in comparison to the Western countries' level of development at the time (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 36).

This state of facts is documented in the historical statistical literature and the history of the Romanian economy, and also by simply comparing the appearance of the Romanian rural areas to that of rural areas in Western Europe or even in other parts of the world. It can be noted that the "Law of the Establishment of Urban and Rural Communes" was adopted only in 1864. Subsequently, "in the period following the national censuses, the authorized statistical entities determined yearly, by processing the data provided by the legal status authorities, the population movement, with a higher or lower degree of accuracy" (Şandru, 1980, p. 5). Another telling example which illustrates the little interest for the Romanian rural areas, particularly in the interwar period, as well as the above-mentioned development gap, is the following quotation: "the relative nature of statistical data has always been acknowledged, even by the head of the Central Institute of Statistics, dr. Sabin Manuilă, who stated that after the First World War, Romanian statistics were only at the beginning, due to the unreliability of data sources. Romanian statistics – according to Sabin Manuilă – has always been neglected, a situation which has led the scientists, state officials and even the employees of the statistical apparatus, as well as public, to make use of the available and processed data according to various interests or subjective views, thus misusing them" (Şandru, 1980, p. 6-7).

Current Romanian social and economic discrepancies, which show distinct characteristics at the level of the regions of development as established on January 1 2007, as well as at the level of the administrative units, are not new, having shown continuity through time in varying forms specific to the historical regions of Moldavia, Transylvania, Dobrudja etc. Such social and economic differences have had a considerable impact on the rural population of the Carpathian-Danubian-Black Sea area, in the context of the general difficult historical situation determined by frequent infectious diseases outbreaks, foreign invasions and occupations, military conflicts, enforced agri-food produce requisitions as forms of taxation etc.

A statistical analysis of the complex problems affecting the Romanian rural environment at the beginning of the 21st century, based on criteria such as geography, demographics, economy, infrastructure, dwelling stock etc., will indicate that these problems are not specific to the current level of development, but are in fact recurrent problems, a constant from the historical point of view (www.eadr.ro). Upon considering the rural demographic problems, such as high birth rates, very high perinatal mortality rates, agrarian overpopulation, depopulation in specific areas, or the problems affecting the landed fund, for example the excessive parcelling of the agricultural lands, the large number of extremely small private agricultural holdings etc., and indeed the problems related to the discrepancies between earnings in rural vs. urban areas etc. (Rusu, Florian, et. al., 2011, p. 3-5), as well as those affecting the outdated and insufficient agricultural implements and machinery, one will not fail to note that the same problems are discussed in most of the studies of authors who have examined them in the communist, inter-war and pre-WWI period, the socio-economic phenomena showing distinct historical characteristics.

The commune, the basic unit of the rural economy, is a distinct territorial-administrative unit with multiple economic, social, cultural, infrastructure-related functions. Most authors in this field of study, this territorial-administrative unit relies heavily on agriculture, the agri-food sector, forestry, services, institutions and public infrastructure, the natural habitat etc. The establishment and evolution of society includes the successive emerging of the rural and urban environments, of villages and towns, closely related to the agricultural and industrial revolutions; this implies the need for a two-pronged approach to the origins and evolution of human settlements and various social environments. Thus, a historical analysis would require, on the one hand, a consideration of the independent emergence and evolution of villages as distinct types of human "societies" with an inward-oriented development without external influences, and, on the other, an account of the rural - urban interactions (Brânzan, 2006, p. 2).

Amongst the very first scientific approaches to the complex set of problems specific to the rural environment and its place in the overall development of society are those developed by the sociological school of Bucharest, which include Henri H. Stahl's theory of the "joint ownership communities" ("comunități devălmașe"); Virgil Madgearu's ideas regarding the "peasant households" based on individual families cultivating their lands or involved in other specific occupations; Henri Mendras's views on "rural societies" (Mendras, 1971) and Max Weber's distinctions between "family-owned households" and "domestic economies" (www.sociologyguide.com). In chronological order, followed the contributions to the study of the rural environment by Ion Ionescu de la Brad, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's rural-agrarian theory of "nonserfdom" ("neiobăgia"), a number of studies by members of the "Social Institute of Banat-Crișana", in the framework of Dimitrie Gusti's sociological school, as well as Traian Herseni's studies of the origins and features of the village as a particular human settlement and of rural culture in general. Further foreign authors' works that are relevant to the issue are Henri Lefebvre's theory of "urbanized society" ("societatea urbanizată") which acknowledges the gradual takeover of the rural environment by the urban one, as well as Placide Rimbaud's optimistic model of the "modernized rural space" ("ruralul modernizat").

In contrast to other European countries, in Romania "the agrarian issue" has constantly been a key one throughout history, as a result of the fact that agriculture has traditionally been the main sector of the economy, employing the largest part of the available workforce and providing for the largest part of the population. At the beginning of the 20th century too, the agrarian issue, as it was frequently known, represented a central social and political focus on which rested both economic progress and the improvement of the peasants' condition. At the end of the First World War the agricultural sector was beset with so many problems that cereals had to be imported in order to cover the internal demand. In order to pave the way to a more intensive agriculture, the problem of the agrarian reform and that of the modernization of agriculture needed to be addressed. Consequently, agrarian economists, sociologists as well as responsible Romanian politicians, including V. Madgearu, C. Garoflid, C. Stere, N. Cornățeanu, D. Gusti, H. H. Stahl and especially Ion I. C. Brătianu all laid the theoretical, doctrinal and legal foundations of the reform put into practice after 1918, one which required a tremendous amount of preparation from all points of view. The laws of the agrarian reform of 1921 represented an unprecedented legal, economic, social and technical act in both the Romanian and European law of the 20th century, in terms of its extent and legal and socio-economical implications (Șandru, 1975).

In the course of time, as a result of the development of the material and spiritual output of society, economics became an autonomous field of study with distinct contributions to knowledge. The subsequent deepening of the process of labour division and the emergence of the various sectors of material production have created the necessity of subdividing economics into fields and subfields, with specific areas of focus and interests. As a result, *Rural Economics* emerged as a distinct field of study, at first in the developed countries of the time, with its particular areas of interest including the economic phenomena in agriculture, both at a macroeconomic level – the analysis of the rural economy as a whole, and at the microeconomic level – the study of the evolution of individual agricultural holdings (Ștefan, 2001). Given the stringent need of strengthening the state's intervention in the development of the agricultural sector without affecting the economical autonomy of individual agricultural entrepreneurs, the establishment of *rural economics* as a distinct object of study is thus fully justified (Tănase, Florescu, 2007, p. 5). From a historical point of view, The German School of Agricultural Economics emerges as the first to have operated a distinction between the two perspectives of analysis of the rural economy, by naming the first "Agrarian politics" ("politica agrară") and the second "The economics of rural households" ("economia gospodăriei țărănești"). It can be noted that the latter would be eventually known in the United States of America as "the Management of Agricultural Holdings" (Tănase, Florescu, 2007, p. 6)

By and large, the Romanian School of Rural Economics followed a similar path in its evolution, despite the fact that its beginnings were affected by the difficult historical context, with the result that its establishment was gradual. In this context, an important event was the 1827 initiative of the "Epitropia Școlilor din Moldova" (the Church Council of Moldavian Schools), at scientist Gheorghe Asachi's suggestion, of founding a gymnasium as a schooling institution which included a course in agrarian and political economics ("economia pământescă și politicăescă") (Adăniloie, 1999, p. 8). Two other significant events were the setting up in 1834 of an agronomy section within the Society of Physicians and Biologists of Iași ("Societatea de medici și naturaliști din Iași") to benefit those interested in gaining specific knowledge and new methods of cultivating the land ("lucrarea pământului"), and the publication in the same year of the book „Școala rurală și dumesnică sau învățătura pentru lucrarea de câmp și de acasă” ("The rural and domestic school, or teachings for land cultivation and household work"), by M. Drăghici (Adăniloie, 1999, p. 267). A further development in the history of the Romanian School of Rural Economics was the setting up by Ion Ionescu de la Brad, appointed in 1834 teacher at the Academia Mihaileană in Iași, of the syllabus of the Course in Agriculture, which included "Rural Economics" as a distinct subject dealing mainly with key concepts such as the landed fund, the labour force, finances as well as the related legal issues. In 1843, as a result of the drawing up of a new set of regulations for

the public schools in Moldavia, the former course in agriculture was renamed “Course in Rural Economics” (Adăniloae, 1999, p. 15).

Subsequently, in 1903, Simion P. Radianu named his elaborate scientific treatise “Rural Economics”, despite the fact that it dealt mainly with the macroeconomic phenomena of agriculture. Gheorghe Ionescu Şişeşti, the first Romanian disciple of the German School of Agrarian Economics, strove to apply the concepts and principles of this school in Romania, given the fact that, as he suggested, “at present our agriculture is undergoing a series of deep transformations, affecting both its methods and structure. Such alterations, which from more than one point of view, have occurred much too late while having often been misguided by state policies, as is shown by the contents of the book, must be given most careful attention. They must be managed in the larger framework of the role and importance of agriculture in the wider economic organism. Only in this way can the types and limits of state interventions and individual interests related to the strengthening of agriculture made clear and stated accordingly” (Ionescu-Şişeşti, 1995, p. 5). The book in question was “Politica agrară cu privire specială la România” (“Agrarian Policy, with Special Reference to Romania”), a large part of which treats the problem of agricultural holdings extensively. In the same vein, the publication in 1929 of “Rural Economics” by N.O. Popovici-Lupa, another disciple of the German School of Agrarian Economics, is according to some reputed authors in the field also an important moment.

Victor Slăvescu’s general course in „National Economics”, the equivalent at that time of contemporary Political Economy, included a chapter on “Agrarian Economics”, which dealt with the main economic issues of agriculture, viewed as an integral part of the economy. The particular structuring of the contents of this course has led some present-day authors to consider that Slăvescu, a respected author and member of the *Academy of Higher Commercial and Industrial Studies*, viewed production factors as the object of study of agrarian economics, while agrarian politics was mainly concerned with the role of the state to intervene, by means of levers, in the ample process of the development of agriculture (Adăniloae, 1999, pp. 8-10). Despite the views of the French School of Agrarian Economics, which does not consider Agrarian Policy as a constituent part of the Agricultural Sciences, time has shown that there is a real need for thorough knowledge of all agricultural disciplines, given the interdependencies between production relations and factors, besides the biological ones, such as agricultural biology, amelioration of agricultural plants and others. It is interesting to note that most agrarian economists in Romania, for instance Ion Ionescu de la Brad, P.S. Aurelian, Petre Maior, S.P. Radianu, N.O. Popovici-Lupa and Gheorghe Ionescu-Şişeşti were trained as agronomists, notable exceptions being Victor Slăvescu and Virgil Madgearu (Tănase, Florescu, 2007, p. 8).

In an evolutionary perspective, the concept of *agrarian economics/ rural economics* has undergone frequent redefinitions and reviews in accordance with the specific characteristics of each historical context, under the influence of economic, political and social factors. This dynamic nature of agrarian economics makes for the need consider its various determinants: *natural and socio-economic factors, the stages of historical evolution* (legal and economical), which account for the current state and allow making predictions of future developments; *the farming systems*, as determined by natural, economic and social conditions and *the relations between agriculture and the branches of economic activity located upstream or downstream*, in the process of organizing and capitalizing the agricultural production. Agrarian policy, on the other hand, is based on the study and research of three fields: *the economic doctrines centred on the role of the state in the development of an agrarian national economy* (interventionism or state guidance); *the intervention methods of the state in the development of agriculture*, which will also account for their causes and results; and *institutions created by the state with the aim of guiding and encouraging the development of agriculture*.

At this stage, an important conclusion refers to the specific national features of agrarian economies and policies, determined by the different factors that operate across states, in various historical periods. Agrarian Policy finds itself related to several other sciences and fields of study, its closest tie being to Political Economy, so that Agrarian Policy can be defined simply as the economic policy in the sphere of agriculture, including the peculiarities of agriculture as a sector of material production, which are also bound to influence the steps taken by the state to ensure an adequate agrarian policy, which will benefit the national economy at large. In this context, it is important to note the link between agrarian policies and the management of agricultural holdings. Theoretical Agrarian Policy focuses on agriculture as a branch of the national economy, while the Management of Agricultural Holdings centers on the farm as the basic unit of agriculture. From the viewpoint of the methods of management of the process of agricultural production, Agrarian Policy focuses on guidance and stimulation; in contrast, Agricultural Holding Management focuses on administrative and direct management issues.

A *systematic research* requires approaching rural economy from the perspective of economic systems, as grounded in the “input-output” analysis. Such an approach presupposes the rethinking of the available methodological instruments for analysis, diagnose and action planning, in the sense that all of the elements comprising the system are to be taken into account, as well as the interrelations between the system and the environment (natural, socio-economic, legal etc.), besides the system’s reaction to an external variable, the “system input”, in the actual rural space. Systematic research is always an interdisciplinary endeavour, making

use of mathematical modelling, statistical calculus, sociological and historical analyses etc., which is bound to provide the scientific support for the policies of development of the rural space (Ștefan, 2001, p. 11).

Despite the general advances in scientific knowledge and in the various fields of science, there is even at present a general inadequate approach to the problems of the rural economy and the rural space on the whole, a situation which is reflected in the relatively small number of studies on these topics, in the general context of the decreasing interest in this field of study. Agriculture represented a major theme of scientific research during the controversial communist regime, right until 1989, however its appeal has diminished considerably following the regime's demise. At the same time, on considering the available literature, it will be noted that while some of the important problems specific to the national rural space have benefited from detailed accounts in a number of scientific works, on the whole the Romanian rural space has not yet been studied in a comprehensive manner. An example in point is the lack of monographs, treatises, syntheses and other similar types of works meant to account for all the qualitative and quantitative features of the rural space issues. Thorough scientific knowledge is the result of both qualitative and quantitative analyses of rural socio-economic phenomena, which are now absolutely necessary, all the more so since historically, the rural environment has often been a topic of interest mostly for historians, sociologists, archaeologists and anthropologists only to a lesser extent for economists.

An important quantitative method of research is the *time series analysis* used in historical research. The model of time series can be applied to any sources of information that present diachronic time series data, such as those of economic history, which include statistics on trade and navigation. Similarly, references in demographic history include valuable data for time analyses of the population. In the studies of population, there are three types of time series analyses based on age, period and cohort. The effects of age are most visible in the process of aging. In the cycle of life, the effect related to time period is the one marking all of the cohorts in a given historical period, whilst the cohort effect refers to a unique relation at the level of the whole cohort in a relation to a given historical event. The elimination of the three types of effects in a diachronic series is the aim of time series analyses (Gavrilă, 2009, p. 31). Concrete examples are provided by demographic history and political history. Historical studies of climate include time series analyses of series of data of air temperatures and assessments of the impact of climate changes on crops (Gavrilă, 2009, p. 33).

In economic history, time series analyses have been used particularly in the last decades, mainly for purposes of comparisons at the international level, such as industrialization, economic growth and unemployment rates. The analysis of statistical time series involves the reconstruction and study of the dynamics of either one or more variables in time, employing methods of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Drawing the graphs of time series provides researchers with the possibility of visualizing clearly the chronology of the increases and/or decreases of variables, as well as seasonally fluctuations and long-term trends. These graphs aided by additional calculations yield rates of growth and acceleration or decline rates.

In most cases, the analysis of time series requires the calculation and use of statistical indices (Murgescu, 2009, p. 91). This process requires the conversion of different of the initial measurement units into percentages. Thus, indices allow comparisons between different variables-parameters, even though the initial measurement units different. Time series analysis and indices allow historians to study the way in which dynamics of a variable in time can be correlated to that of another variable or group of variables. One can analyze for example the way in which the variation of prices in time is related to that of the salaries, or assess to which extent the indices of rebellions are related to the level of unemployment, or to other alterations of the living standards (Gavrilă, 2009, p. 33). The techniques of statistical association for the identification, isolation and measurement of the extent of association between two or more variables, irrespective of their being a time series or not, are often used in social and historical studies. Statistical methods of correlation and regression provide mathematical evidence of the existence and corresponding degree of intensity of a possible link between two or more variables. Researchers resorting to statistics to support their various hypotheses or theories ought to make careful use of this kind of information, and check it against further references or indeed by applying additional methods. Adapting statistical methods to historical purposes and interpretations is aimed at gathering and disseminating information. In many cases however the quantitative component substitute for qualitative accounts which resist quantification.

There is currently an abundance of research methods available to scientists in studies of historiography, both qualitative – ethnography, cartography, linguistics, stratigraphy, etc., and quantitative – descriptive statistics, statistical inference, time series analysis, causal research, statistical sampling, mathematical modelling, etc. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance that the research methods chosen lead to objective accounts, based on careful analyses of the different types of information sources. Scientific research methods, of course, lie at the very basis of the research process, whilst scientific research represents the essence of knowledge, in general and is the motor of change in society, in particular.

Any studies of historiography, both the existing and potential ones, necessary for a better understanding of the rural space, imply a series of major and minor inherent objectives. One important difficulty is that the sources of information are inconsistent, incompletely preserved, ambiguous or unclear. In other cases the information available contains varying units of measurement, a situation which requires additional conversions.

Further problems are related to conflicting information as found in the available sources, forcing researchers to rely on or to resort to mere estimations of data series, calculations and/or information which cannot be easily or even at all verified. Such difficulties and similar ones have often led to discouragement of researchers attempting to study the rural space.

In spite of these shortcomings, the available research on the economic history, the history of statistics and historical sociology of the Romanian rural space provides a general assessment of both advantages and drawbacks, for example as a result of the agrarian reforms and following the strategies and measures adopted by authorities with a view to improve the living standards of the national rural areas. Moreover, irrespective of any inherent deficiencies and/or limitations, the general assessment is bound to be an important source of information for future researchers, authorities or indeed anyone interested. The available literature (primary, secondary, tertiary) in libraries and archives also makes for the effective elimination of potential reiterations of the former errors, aleatory or systematic, of past generations.

Of note in this context is *Agrarian History* – the discipline studying the evolution in time and space of agriculture, forestry, agrarian institutions, relations and ideologies of the rural environment from a socio-economical, technical, cultural and political perspective. In contrast, the History of agriculture is that branch of Agrarian History that only examines the agricultural production process (Lup, 2006, p. 18). In order to approach the role and place of agrarian history in the sphere of historical sciences it is necessary to understand the concept of agrarian history. Thus, one of the first recorded definitions is attributed to J. Beckmann in 1775, who deemed the “history of agriculture to be the history of agricultural production, comprising both the accumulated experience and scientific” (Lup, 2006, p. 18). This definition is considered to be narrow due to the fact that the term “agriculture” has gained a broader meaning in time, covering the production, distribution, consumption and the environment. In 1982, Eugen Mewes proposed the notion of “agrarian retrology” – the science which deals with the study of humankind’s accumulated agrarian experience as related to both current and potential concerns (Lup, 2006, p. 19). It should be noted in this context that Agrarian Policy and Agrarian History, as interdisciplinary fields of study, in elaborating and adopting adequate measures, frequently resort to data provided by the economic history of agriculture, the geographical history of agriculture (both of which are often deemed to be interdisciplinary economic subjects, alongside econometrics, economic sociology, economic cybernetics and also ecology), by agricultural accounting, agricultural statistics, the financial and economic analysis of agricultural holdings, rural sociology and others.

The objectives of agrarian retrology are the following: a) the theory of agrarian history, sources, terminology and methodology; b) the evolution of land uses and soil amelioration; c) the evolution of production profiles (vegetal, animal or mixed); d) marketing and distribution of the agricultural products; e) the problem of human nutrition – quantity and structure; f) efficiency in agriculture; g) forms of ownership and types of agricultural holdings; h) agricultural policy – the role of decision-making factors; i) the role of education; j) the role of forested areas in maintaining the natural equilibrium (Lup, 2006, p. 18).

Since Agrarian History does not deal only with the history of agriculture as a production process, but also with rural entities, agrarian institutions, theoretical frameworks, etc, there are noteworthy important academic and research institutions to which this sub-discipline of History is of interest: *The Institute of Agricultural History at the University of Reading* (Great Britain); *The Danish Society for the Study of the History of Agriculture in Copenhagen* (Denmark); *The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences)* – Chair for the History and Sociology of Agriculture (Switzerland); *The Netherlands Agricultural Historical Institute (NAHI) – University of Groningen*; *The German Museum of Agriculture (Stuttgart University) in Hohenheim*; *The School of Agronomy (“Instituto Superior de Agronomia”)* – *University of Lisbon* (Portugal) among others.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Given the strategic importance of agriculture as an economic activity, at present and throughout the history of human society, the study of its dynamics is of particular interest to researchers and specialists in the academic field, as the analyses and retrospective studies contribute to the elaboration of future strategies. At a global scale, agrarian problems are closely related to those of the rural environment, in general, engaging the interest of specialists, researchers, decision-making factors etc. In spite of the fact that in the developed countries only a small number of individuals are involved in agricultural activities, while economic issues take center stage, there is a large number of countries worldwide with a predominantly rural population, where agriculture and the rural environment are a major issue for state authorities and decision making factors. According to statistics, at a global scale agriculture continues to be the main occupation for approximately 50% of the active population.

The relevance and applications of historiographic studies in agrarian/rural economics derive from history as science with multiple connections to society. As has been shown, completely objective and thoroughly researched historiographic studies of agriculture and the rural space in general and of the Romanian one in

particular can go a long way towards finding viable solutions to the current and prospective challenges of agriculture. A historically-informed economic outlook on the current urban and rural phenomena, for example by determining, by means of synthesis indicators, of retrospective dynamics and the continuation through the centuries of long or short-time economic developments and shifts will provide the proper perspective for the analysis and scientific construal of the evolutionary trends of rural spaces. Such a shift is necessary because given the general disinterest, not many rural economy studies have recourse to historiography, which at present, is often ignored by researchers who have failed to persuade the scientific community of its importance.

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