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BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ NAPOCA
PH.D. SCHOOL - HISTORY, CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

**THE ECONOMIC CONSTRUCTION OF
ROMANIA. THE AGRARIAN REFORM OF 1921
IN THE FORMER COUNTY OF TÂRNAVA
- PH.D. THESIS SUMMARY -**

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2016

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KEYWORDS

agrarian issue, agrarian crisis, land reform, expropriation, leasing, latifundia, absentee, optants, yokes, economic construction.

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INTRODUCTION

The First World War, in which the main combatants were the peasants, prompted the Parliament and King Ferdinand to ‘**the agrarian issue**’, the most important problem to solve after the end of the hostilities. In this context, similar to other areas of the country and the former Târnava Mică county- Dumbrăveni, **the land scarcity, exacerbated by the effects of this war, has influenced the way in which the land reform was implemented and applied.**

Having economic, social and political connotations over the economic construction of the country, **this extremely paradigmatic topic was allotted large spaces in the Romanian historiography.** Ever since the period preceding the first major world conflict, especially after the revolt of 1907, continuing with the interwar period, marked and reinterpreted during the communist regime, as well as in the post-December period, **the issue of the Agrarian problem enjoyed great attention,** being materialized in many studies and scientific papers.

The current importance of the past events, constructed and represented using historical instruments, is confirmed by the subject of this thesis, too, which focuses on one of the most important problems that the Romanian economy has faced and is still facing. Thus, **the issue of the land, with its huge connotations and implications,** the circumstances in which the largest land reform was implemented, and its effects on the economic construction of settlements in the geographic area defined as an object of research, the

historical region which they are part of , as well as the Great Romania, **has strong current vibes.**

In the context of these general issues, in the elaborated thesis, **I coherently and constructively structured the research results**, highlighting **unprecedented elements** in the issue of the Agrarian problem that **add value to the scientific knowledge of the historical reality.**

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In fact, the carried out research is a follow-up of the previous approaches by **deepening the constructive analysis of the Agrarian issue**, especially the particularities of the implementation of the Agrarian Reform of 1921, in the former Târnava Mica County, Dumbrăveni place. In this way, from a historical perspective, I thoroughly analyzed every locality in the researched place and I made some comparisons between the practices found within them and those identified in other regions of the country. Furthermore, based on the ideas identified in the literature and archival sources, **I have found by means of the instruments provided by the applied methodology the effects of the most radical reforms in the economic development of Romania and the analyzed area.** Thus, I analyzed documents relating to landowners, property, leasing, expropriation, appeals, litigation, land allotment and livery in each of the localities of Dumbrăveni.

BRIEF CONTENT

The scientific approach that we conducted on the go in-depth research on studying the Agrarian issues, especially the Reformation in 1921 in the geographic area of the former Târnava Mică County – Dumbrăveni place, where the multidisciplinary approaches **have interposed in history**, some specific elements of other segments, **such as the economic ones**, have brought us these results, step by step. Thus, **we tried to emphasize the importance and the necessity of the scientific knowledge of the specific peculiarities to the analysis of the most radical transfer of ownership up to the communism** for the multiple effects, generated in that period, but also in shaping the perspectives of the future economic development.

In the first stage of the scientific research, from the **cognitive** point of view, we approached the established or proposed valences for the concepts operating in the studied area, from the 'reform' one to the 'radical land reform' one. Through **the semantic oppositions** we have brought some required clarification **to eliminate the risk of some inadequate interpretations and perceptions**. Thus, we defined the concept of **Agrarian Reform** from the historical point of view.

To get **a clear picture** of the context in which the facts and the historical events were analyzed, we conducted **a comprehensive analysis of the period preceding** the adoption and implementation of the land reform where we conducted **a comprehensive picture of the Romanian society** from the Organic Regulations to the outbreak of the Second World War.

The analyzed data and information proves that, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, **though the old-fashioned serfdom system has been removed, agriculture faced serious economic and social problems**. The overtime accumulated tensions, due to the lack or insufficiency of land, due to taxation or other debt which encumbered estates and other factors with a negative impact on the economic development and living standards of the population, **culminated by the echo of the uprisings of the time**. Essentially, these things emphasized the fact that the land issue did not only not improve, it radicalized during the First World War.

To shape the premises which made possible the realization of the Agrarian Reform of 1921, which succeeded to bring about for the first time a profound change in the structure of land ownership by removing the old-fashioned landowning system, in **Chapter 1 entitled 'ROMANIA after the GREAT UNION – The political, economic, social, cultural in the national and European context'** we have illustrated the European and the national context of the early twentieth century.

In the international situation created at the end of World War I, when the national issues were radicalized, beginning with the eighteenth century, with the spread of the Enlightenment ideas, which reached a moment of climax in the nineteenth century, when Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece gained independence, while Italy, Germany and Romania were merged, led to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, German, Ottoman and Tsarist kingdoms and as of many other dynasties. Thus, they ensured the necessary conditions **to substantiate the national states of modern Europe**, impacting **changes in the configuration of the state of Europe and the implementation of large and radical social, economic and cultural reforms** on which they based their further development.

Under the given circumstances, based on the study of a rich scientific literature, identified for the chosen topic, we first raised in a mimic image the impact that World War I had on the configuration of the states in Europe and nationally, then we defined the general transformations that led to the construction of Great Romania. On the basis of the identified and contextual factors, **we found and described in a constructive manner, the premises that foreshadowed the necessity and the utility of a major Agrarian Reform accomplishment**, at European level and in Romania.

After building an overview of the events and circumstances that impacted on the land issue, as a natural and coherent follow-up of the conducted research, in **Chapter 2**, entitled **‘The Agrarian issue in the economic and social Romanian and European context, before the enactment of the Land Reform of 1921’** based on the ideas found in literature, the publications and normative acts issued in that period, **we detail in terms of the specific analyzed issue, their characteristics in each of the historical regions**. In the above mentioned context, in order to highlight the particularities of the regions, we have provided a comparative "Agrarian issue" in the Old Kingdom, Bucovina, Bessarabia and Transylvania. Under the given circumstances, I presented, analyzed and outlined the main visions shaped by the personalities and authorities of the time, to address the poverty situation in which the vast majority of the rural population found itself. We also approached the solutions considered relevant to strengthen the Romanian national state and for the country's economic construction and development in relation to the issues of the period.

As a result of the existing concerns to identify reliable solutions in the context determined by the presented events, in the actions of the authorities, registers the legalization of the largest Agrarian Reform. From this aspect, the research carried out in **Chapter 3** entitled **‘Visions for solving the agrarian issue and the legislative connotations of the Agrarian Reform’**, we have first outlined and highlighted the most important opinions of political leaders, personalities of the Romanian culture, government and specialists in economics, identified in the literature and publications from the early twentieth century, the agrarian problem solving with effects in the agricultural development, as the most important branch of the Romanian economy in that period. Translating these visions into practice could be done only by creating the specific regulatory framework for achieving the most massive transfer of ownership at national and European level which sought social, economic and political objectives. Then I focused the research on highlighting the legislative connotations of this act of justice, with a strong economic and social character, in which I

outlined the symmetries and asymmetries of legislation that has been regulated by the reform of 1921 in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș on one hand and in Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea and Moldova on the other. In this context, I underscored the importance of achieving the legal Romanian national state, enshrined in the Constitution of 1923, which provides the authority to govern the country.

The Legislation of the Agrarian Reform has created a general legislative framework, necessary for tackling the field, but this was not sufficient to ensure proper enforcement of these provisions. Starting from this goal, for achieving proper objectives sought by the research carried out in **Chapter 4**, entitled suggestively "**Valences of the implementation of the Agrarian Reform of 1921 in the former Târnava Mică County –Dumbrăveni place**" after the overview of the former Târnava Mică County, which included the localities belonging to Dumbrăveni place and specifically the more detailed description of this administrative structure, through a case study, we highlighted the particularities specific to the actions implementing the analyzed reform. Thus, through a constructive methodology, **we described comparatively, step by step, how effective that provided in settlements in the geographical area** which is the subject of the research, **the forced leasing, expropriation, transfer of ownership or land reform and putting in possession** of the entitled, emphasizing **the symmetries and asymmetries** in relation to the practices in the other historical regions or nationally, identified in the scientific literature.

Although this act was based on the principles governing social equity, in fact, the transposing of the provisions related to the actions mentioned above **was conducted poorly and with delay**. These deficiencies, with a negative effect on how the specific operations referring to the transfer of ownership were performed, especially the putting in possession of those entitled, have been caused by some **more or less objective endogenous and exogenous factors**. These include the acute shortage of arable land specific to the hilly area that was located geographically in the former Târnava Mică County - Dumbrăveni and the numerous disputes in the courts, through which the expropriated tried either the exempt or the circumvention of law enforcement or delaying its implementation. Also, **the identified practices highlighted that on one hand there was an element attesting the existence of tensions generated and fueled by the competing interests in the various categories of owners**, while, on the other hand, they were emanating from the **area's ethnic mosaic**.

As it was in the region which it was part of or elsewhere in the country, the implementation of the Agrarian Reform in the former Târnava-Mică County - Dumbrăveni place, was done

in a long period of time, being a complex and difficult to apply process. Since 1922 and until 1924 the **highest volume of the work and operations** necessary for the transfer of ownership and livery was achieved in most localities of the place. **Completing the reform** in most of the analyzed localities was done later that year, with the exception of Cund village. Thus, **in 26 of the 34 municipalities of the place**, which represents **76.47% of the total, the reform was completed by 1930** in **7 localities**, namely **20.58% later** that year and in a locality, representing 2.94% it was not applied. Of the municipalities in which specific works of the Agrarian Reform were completed after 1930 we could mention Boiu where the transactions have been completed in 1932, in Domald, Nadeş and Țigmandru in 1933 in Măgheruș in 1934, Dumbrăveni in 1939, the last village being Pipea, where the livery was only realized in 1940.

The shortcomings of the legal normative framework led as it was natural to **different practices**, which usually **have been favoring large landowners or Saxon communities**, who owning the financial resources have interfered in some cases, resorting to corruption in delaying the enforcement of the reform in the analyzed place. Realizing **the risk of losing the privileged positions** they obtained after their settlement in Transylvania, the Saxons had opposed themselves by all their economical means to the settlement of other ethnic groups in the villages inhabited by them. In fact these issues **have confirmed the theories of opposition to the changes and preservation of the language, religion and culture of ethnic minority groups** that have excessive conservation trends.

The poor implementation of the Agrarian Reform in Dumbrăveni **was repeatedly noted by the reports of the governmental authorities** of that time. Moreover, the weak and subjective implementation of the operations of expropriation and land reform, **generated a state of discontent**, accumulated tensions among peasants, culminating in some straining circumstances in even true **rebellion against the authorities or the church**.

Delaying the Agrarian Reform, marked by a number of uncertainties, **has temporarily led to the forced leasing and to provisory landowning**, which resulted in **the poor exploitation of the agricultural land, subject to expropriation**. Such shown problems were passed on **agricultural production which in many of the analyzed localities was below pre-war levels**, with a negative impact on the economic development of the analyzed area. Therefore, contrary to expectations or the expected social impact, **the reform has not had the expected economic and social impact** on the living standards of

the rural population. However, due to the inherent limits and subjective factors detailed in this paper, **the reform can be said to have partially achieved its goals.**

As shown, after the expropriation, almost in every locality of Dumbrăveni occurred more **re-divisions and redistributions** of the expropriated land that was the subject of entry into possession of those entitled. Due to **the shortage of land**, the fields for homes and culture had **dimensions well below the limit prescribed by the law** for the area in the research. The extremely small pieces of land, the poor quality, territorially dispersed or in remote localities, which came as a result of the transfer of property in the possession of those entitled, mostly Romanian peasants and the deemed unfair manner in some cases of the redistribution of land ownership caused great dissatisfaction among them.

A global picture resulting from the conducted research, which covered both the entire period that benefited from the reform and the results achieved in each of the 33 localities of the place, show that the **total agricultural area of 85 047 hectares**, as effect of the land reform made the object of expropriation and effective land reform, **an area of 9394 acres and 471 stânjeni²**, which represents **11.04%** of the agricultural area of the place.

According to the data shown in various stages of implementation of the Agrarian Reform, it can apparently be said that the Romanians would have been favored by the effects of the Agrarian Reform as they had the largest share, i.e. **63.65% of temporarily or permanently landowners**. But precisely through this, **the two hypotheses were confirmed**: on one hand that the Romanians were the majority population of the analyzed place, and on the other hand the faster or dynamic land allotment emphasize the higher poverty of the Romanians than that of the ethnic Germans and Hungarians. Consequently, **the effects capture in fact, the priorities stated by the laws of the land reform and implicit the social and the economic character** on which they were founded.

If we relate to the land areas that have been assigned to various categories of entitled land reform or purposes, the largest share of **72% was destined to meet the needs of public interest**. Thus, **30%** was allocated for schools, churches, cultural institutions, municipalities, roads, gendarmerie posts, livestock and other such destinations, **27%** for creating or completion of communal pastures and **15%** for the formation of communal forests. Compared to them, the entitled people received only two categories of the batches type, only **28%** of the expropriated land.

Other elements that have generated a number of complaints were those related to **the mechanism of pricing / yokes and the payment method in the analyzed place**. As with the forced leasing, **prices ranged from one locality to another**, depending on the

category of the localities where they were located and compared with that which they belonged to. Both the forced leasing price and the one related to **expropriation was affected by the devaluation of the national currency**, the transition to the euro, as well as the factors inherent to the mechanisms to raise political capital through populist measures at the expense of the landowners.

In addition, **the relocation based on economic and social criteria of the structure of land ownership**, due to the partially reduced economic gap between the majority population and the minority privileged in the prior periods, **the land reform has helped to stop the phenomenon of overseas emigration**, especially of the Romanian population, which was characteristic to Transylvania, and mainly to the Târnava area.

As a natural follow-up of the events and facts that were part of the picture which illustrates how the land reform was implemented through *the same case study*, as well as the analyzes of the new information found in the scientific literature, in **Chapter 5** entitled *'The effects of the largest Agrarian Reform in Europe in the economic, social and political context'* we investigated the various dimensions of the immediate and future effects, of the one that proved to be the most radical land reform in Europe. First, we addressed the social and the economic impact that the analyzed reform had in the European and national context and especially in the former Târnava Mică County - Dumbrăveni. If from the social point of view, this act generated a short-term improvement of the living conditions of the majority of the rural population, its effects have proved that economically, they did not generate the expected results. Nevertheless, a number of positive effects that marked the economic life and opened new horizons in the economic construction of the Romanian village and in the economic development of Romania cannot be denied or put into obscurity. In this respect, the research has highlighted the importance of the reform in the light of the disappearance of the great latifundia, limiting the leaseholders system, strengthening a significant part of the peasant properties and providing the framework for forming a middle class of owners.

However, politically, those who have speculated and exploited by their manipulative actions the opportunities created by the analyzed reform, were the representatives of the major political parties, who have created themselves a fund of vulnerable voters, the majority of them with poor education or even deprived of the most elementary education and training.

In the echo generated in the international, European and national context, the impact of the First World War, which was added to the effects of the Reformation of 1921, in addition to

the relations of the economic dependency created, generated many opportunities for both business development, and for the development of trade, particularly with agricultural products, the communication system in response to the needs of transport, their assurance system of funding sources by stimulating lending to agriculture, but also to ensure a favorable environment for the development of the education system to form a skilled workforce.

According to the produced consequences, registers the issue of the optants, who occupied an essential place in legislation, especially in the public debate of the period. Citing the Treaty of Trianon of June 4, 1920, some of the great Hungarian landowners, speculating the opportunities generated by the possibility of arbitrary interpretation of the provisions on performing options for previously citizenship before the formation of new states in order to preserve the real estate, raised before international forums such provisions, but did not prevail. In fact, they sought to create a privileged regime in relation to other owners expropriated by evading or biased interpretation of this treaty.

Also, to have a global view in the context of the Agrarian Reforms in Europe and the effects on the development of properties, in some countries with modern agriculture, and in those with less developed agriculture, through the conducted research I outlined the main symmetries and asymmetries identified on this topic.

The achievement of the pursued objectives, both theoretically and empirically, by building in an innovative manner the scientific discourse, and especially by the way it has been implemented in the research carried out in **Chapter 6** entitled '*Conclusions and Prospects*' I emphasized the **importance and necessity** of the theme for the economic construction of Romania in the early twentieth century, and its timeliness.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In the context of the shown issues, it can be concluded that they needed **a profound change**, that besides **the rational development of agriculture**, it was necessary **to increase the role of the city in the life of the country**, as the engine for ensuring the sustainable development of the society as a whole, particularly in economic terms, and simultaneously **to draw a significant part of the available labor force in villages**.

The connotations attributed to different aspects of the analyzed reform, became the subject of many comments and debates on the topic, but with all its shortcomings, it can be said that **the Agrarian Reform has fundamentally contributed to the consolidation of**

Great Romania, to ease the social tensions by eliminating the old-fashioned landowning system, on social redistribution of land holdings and temporary improvement of the living standards of the peasantry. All these **contributed to the economic construction of the country devastated by the first major world conflict**, outlined new horizons, opportunities and expectations in which the modern agriculture can play a fundamental role.

Due to its results, **the carried out research can contribute to the development of the scientific literature** with new approaches to the agricultural issues, especially with the possibility of knowing the particularities of the application of the Agrarian Reform and its impact on the economic development of the researched geographic area.

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