

## RURAL AREA-DEFINITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

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***Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to emphasize specific aspects related to the notion of rural area. Rural represents a field in which, until now, a unanimously accepted definition has not been reached, although the multiple concepts and definitions given by specialists refer to the same physical (geographic) space. The rural space is not a homogeneous whole, but it is not an abstract space either. Rural area - is the expression of man's long-term effort to put the physical-geographical components of space, of nature, at his service. It is a space that man shaped over time, according to his needs, that he created through his work and filled it with his creations of an anthropic nature, thus being a true "rustic masterpiece" of man.*

**Key words:** rural area, definition, characteristics

### INTRODUCTION

The rural area, in the banal but real sense of the term, appeared on the surface of the earth with the sedentarization of man and the appearance of the first houses and the first facilities and primarily in order to achieve some agricultural productions (in the first place). In historical time, a series of lasting relationships were created between rural societies and the land taken into exploitation, strengthened by traditions, customs and interests, expressed in the landscape through different types of rural spaces.

Etymologically, the word "rural" has its origin in the Latin word "rus-ruris", which can be translated as field or territory, inhabited, occupied, arranged and inhabited by man. The word was taken into Romanian with its current meaning from French [12].

The concept of rural can be defined in different ways. There is no generalized definition of this concept. Rural can be defined in demographic, socio-economic, ecological and cultural terms.

The terms rural and urban highlighted, initially, the social division between agriculture and industry. The rural environment is considered, in general, as the one that produces food in traditional conditions, thus creating social relations based on kinship and neighborhood ties, on a high degree of social solidarity. These traditional relationships were imposed through a hierarchy based on authority, a fact that generated patriarchy and paternalism (as well as the relationships of seniority and vassalage born in feudalism, as well as the authority of the head of the family), but they thus contributed to the maintenance of traditions, of the identity of the peasants, who for centuries constituted the most numerous social class in the rural environment and in society as a whole.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main direction of the article is to identify the definition of rural area and its characteristics. To pursue this objective was used the qualitative research method, using several sources for information, from books to electronic sources. Thus were selected several authors which has given the most comprehensive definitions, and for were presented in the article, the purpose being to underline the importance of defining this area and the evolution over time.

### RESEARCH RESULTS

Among the multiple facets and definitions of the concept of rural space, we list some of the most important:

- rural represents a specific way of using space, characterized by the relatively low density of inhabitants and buildings, the preponderance of natural landscapes, the predominantly agro-silvo-pastoral economic activity [2];

- rural represents fields, peasants and, in general, all non-urban activities and territories [13];

- rural represents areas characterized by a relatively low population density and by the preponderance of agricultural activities. The rural space, contrary to the urban space, does not involve strong concentrations of people. Agglomerations are limited to village or burgh sizes. It is represented by a dispersed habitat in the form of hamlets or farms scattered in nature. The rural area lends itself to agricultural activities... [3];

- the rural area is divided into two sections that define, on the one hand, the purely agricultural problem, and on the other hand, the problem of rural life, for people who do not deal with agriculture [1,5,6].

Often, the term "rural" reflects a concept of a physical, economic, social and cultural nature, set in "contrast" with the urban term. Consequently, the term rural has a generic character, which expresses very different realities, being, in essence, a plurivalent, interdisciplinary and integrative concept. According to some specialists, rural is considered "a specific way of using space, characterized by the relatively low density of inhabitants and buildings, the preponderance of natural landscapes, the predominantly agro-silvo-pastoral economic activity". The concept of rural is interpreted by specialists from various fields in different ways. Among the multiple definitions of the concept, we note:

- rural represents fields, peasants and, in general, all non-urban activities and territories;

- the adjective rural is used to define everything related to the fields and in a general way to life in the rural environment, which is located outside the borders of the big cities [7];

- the rural area is not only the seat of agricultural activities, but also of industry, handicrafts, rural trade [8];

- the rural space is not an abstract, nor homogeneous space; it is a human-geographical and heterogeneous space [4];

- the rural area is divided into two sections that define, on the one hand, the purely agricultural problem, and on the other hand, the problem of rural life, for people who do not deal with agriculture;

- by rural is meant a certain kind of landscape, a surface of cultivated territory, a territory on which agricultural activity is intense, which generally bears the imprint of man: plowed fields, orchards, pastures, built-up areas, and in a certain sense the space rural became cultural;

- the rural designates a different ensemble from the urban one [9,10,11].

This last interpretation given to the rural space is the basis of the investigation of the rural space under economic, sociological and geographical aspects.

Economically, it refers to all the economic activities that take place in the rural area. In addition to agriculture, it also includes traditional activities (handicrafts, handicrafts, exploitation of local fauna and flora, etc.), as well as new occupations generated by urban civilization and which refer to the development of the industrial sector, services and infrastructure.

Sociologically, it refers to the definition of the characteristic features of rural communities, the village constituting an autonomous socio-economic community, made up of a multitude of individual households and a complex network of relationships and roles generated by actual agricultural activity and political life, moral, cultural. On a sociological level, an attempt is made to capture the specific features of the rural in comparison with

those of the urban and which refer to: the smaller territorial dimensions of the urban community; low population density; contacts between people are predominantly personal, all of which determine an inner unity of rural groups much more lasting than in urban communities.

Geographically, where the term rural has a conventional character to designate a delimited space, characteristic of village communities. From the point of view of administrative-territorial organization, the term localities is used, grouped into urban and rural. However, the most frequently used term is human settlements, classified into urban settlements (cities) and rural settlements (villages).

The attempt to define "rurality" led to the formulation of two basic aspects of rurality:

1. The locality - as a distinctive space at the local level;
2. Social representation - as a mental construction of the idea of rurality.

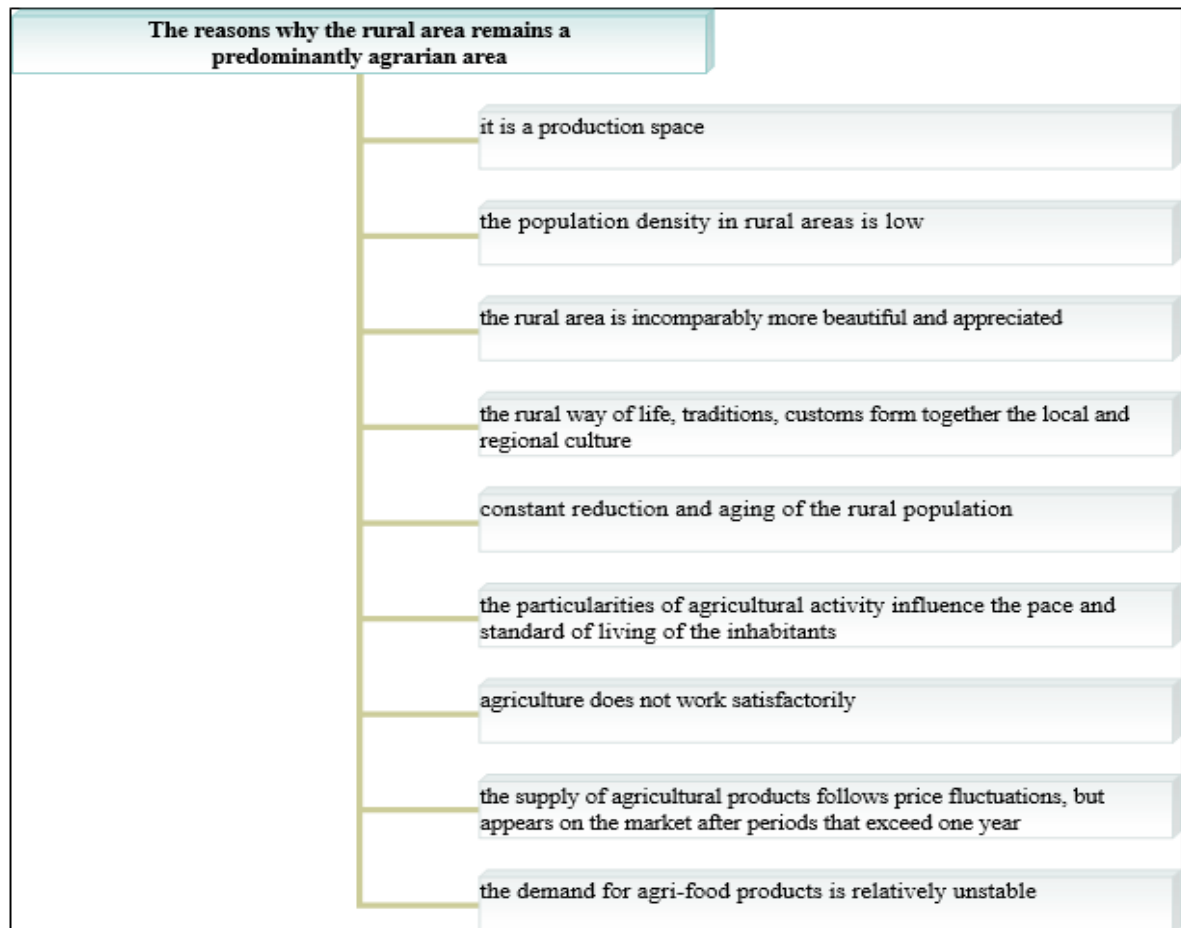
In current language, there is often a confusion between rural and agrarian space. These two expressions are not synonymous. Nevertheless, the rural area remains a predominantly agrarian area, a statement justified by several aspects:

- It is a production space, in which the activities of the primary sectors have a large weight. The rural population is often involved in both agricultural and non-agricultural activities;
- The population density in the rural area is reduced, which offers smaller and more humanized human settlements;
- From the point of view of the landscape, environment, flora, fauna, culture and popular customs, the rural area is incomparably more beautiful and appreciated;
- The development of the urban area attracted the exodus of the population from the countryside, thus explaining the phenomenon of constant reduction and aging of the rural population, with consequences on the economic development process of the rural area. In countries where major mistakes were made in rural exploitation, there are discussions about the phenomenon of deurbanization or ruralization;
- The particularities of the agricultural activity influence the pace and standard of living of the inhabitants of the rural area;
- Agriculture does not function satisfactorily in an economic environment only according to the laws of the market;
- The supply of agricultural products follows price fluctuations, but appears on the market after periods exceeding one year, during which changes may occur;
- The demand for agri-food products is relatively unstable, being dependent on the structure of consumption.

*The main objectives of the rural area*, defined by the European Charter, are:

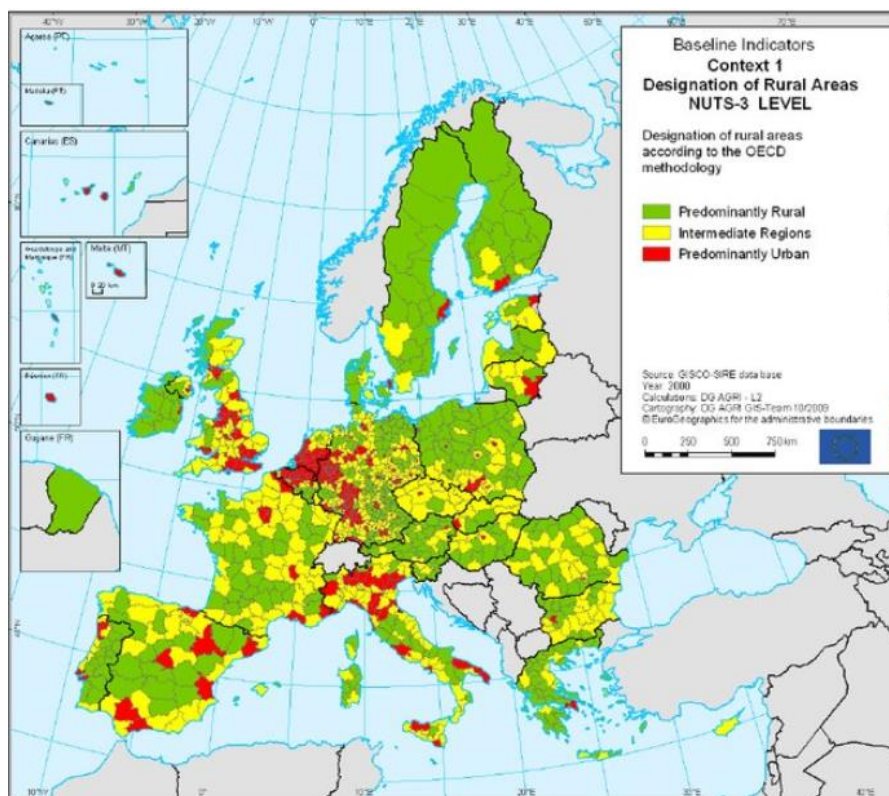
- promoting an agricultural production system that ensures: the food requirements of the population; a level of income - for farmers and their families - comparable to the one from other liberal professions with a similar level of responsibility; protecting the environment and ensuring the regeneration of production factors, so that the soil or water table provides favorable conditions for future generations, in the context of sustainable development;
- the production of raw materials necessary for industry and energy production;
- satisfying the requirements of small and medium-sized agricultural, industrial, craft or commercial enterprises, as well as the provision of services;
- ensuring the base of activities necessary for recreation and tourism;
- conservation of the basic genetic resources for the progress of agriculture and the promotion of biotechnologies;

- conservation of natural resources – soil, water, air, using them in a judicious and sustainable manner;
- maintaining and preserving the natural landscape;
- ensuring and expanding the socio-cultural role in the local associative life, as well as the development of relations between urban and rural populations;
- meeting the specific requirements of the national rural space, respecting the principles of European complementarity and solidarity.



**Figure 1. Rural area-an agrarian area?**

Rural area from Europe (see figure 2) is in a process of profound change, which will most likely accelerate. The European Union dealt with the problems in rural areas by implementing its own rural development policy. In the concept of rural development of the Union, the general objective of maintaining viable rural communities is imprinted. The main aims of the rural development policy of the European Union [14] are the following:



**Figure 2. Rural area from Europe**

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics> [15]

- To promote economic and social cohesion by maintaining and creating jobs;
- To overcome the barriers to development by encouraging the diversification and improvement of the infrastructure and giving easier access to new technologies;
- To increase the quality of life (by preserving the environment, giving access to basic services);
- To maintain viable communities while preserving their culture and traditions.

## CONCLUSIONS

The rural space was also defined in opposition to the urban space, as being an area characterized by a population and a low density and by the preponderance of agricultural activities. On the other hand, the rural space privileges the land as a factor of production, it is confused with the existence of a soil capable of supporting crops and feeding animals. In the context of global economic development, in the organization and arrangement of rural space, the concerns must be oriented towards:

- functional economic areas, the Western development model showing that there are relationships between global growth and agricultural growth, between the transformations of the global economy and those of agriculture. The natural agricultural region, the specific geographical framework of agriculture leads us to the definition of functional economic zones, in which the tertiary activities are conveniently distributed;

- the fundamental role of urban structures. In the development of the industrial society, the poles of growth are the urban ones. All hypotheses predict, in the next period, an increase of the urban population in the total population. In this context, the study of urban infrastructure leads to the development of rural centers that allow the village access to the benefits of collective investments regarding hygiene, health, education, sports,

culture and leisure, thus contributing to the mitigation of the significant differences between rural and urban areas;

- the urbanization of the communes. The general trend in industrialized economies is the decrease of the agricultural population, so the density of the agricultural population tends to become weak and in the future the vitality of rural areas will depend on the population of these areas with non-farmers.

In everyday life, the perception of the countryside is often more important than the formulated definitions. Many people associate rural areas with the idea of large open spaces, closely related to tradition and prudence in the face of change; beautiful spaces, but also poor. This happens due to the fact that we are dealing with a complex notion, which is "mirrored" in the object of study of several disciplines, among which we can mention economics, ethnology, geography, history, sociology, demography, etc. Each of these disciplines approaches the countryside from their point of view. We deduce, therefore, that we are essentially dealing with a multidisciplinary, multivalent and integrative concept.

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