

## SMALL-SCALE LOCAL AGRICULTURAL HOLDINGS IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD. DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

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### Abstract

*The agrarian reform of 1921 aggravated the contrasts between large, medium, and small-scale land properties, putting once more into focus the fact that the Romanian agricultural economy was based on the large properties, while the social economy was primarily focused on subsistence, which was specific to the second category of properties. The literature nevertheless shows that in December of 1918, the data on the population of the Kingdom of Romania were only approximate. With archival records indicating that from the last censuses until 1918, all the Romanian provinces experienced significant demographic changes caused by natural population growth, emigration, and immigration, colonization, and, above all, the impact and vicissitudes of the Great War, such data only served as indicative elements in estimating the post-war population with a view to a better understanding of the issues of the interwar rural areas.*

**Key words:** *the Agrarian Reform of 1921, Economic History, the Kingdom of Romania, Rural Economy, Small-Scale Agricultural Holdings*

**JEL Classification:** *B10, B20, C10, C18, J1, N00, N30, N40, N50, N53, N54, Q01, R1, R2*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The two great historical agrarian reforms of 1864 and 1921 mark the complex process of Romania's transition from the feudal to the capitalist agrarian system, which is based on large land holdings and tenancy development, but also on the settlement of numerous peasant households, although on small plots, with land potential sometimes reduced below the physiological needs of food consumption. According to specialized literature, especially the works of D. Șandru, the “Central Institute of Statistics” released a series of volumes after 1918 that captured the fundamental demographic patterns of Romania. The relative value of their findings is primarily due to the fact that they were derived through theoretical calculations rather than actual surveys.

Prior to 1918, the portrayal of Romania as an “undeniably agrarian country” was widely disseminated as a method of assessing economic reality and as an economic strategy. After this point, however, fewer, and fewer economists continue to support this core idea and theory. The problem of industrialization grew to dominate Romanian economic thought at the time in particular contexts. Not all opportunities that arose after 1918 were properly or fully taken advantage of. This was because of a number of internal factors, both objective and subjective, that had to do with the development of the bourgeois economy, and especially because of certain features of non-economic international exchanges and relationships between small and medium-sized states and Western superpowers. After a period of post-war recovery, the economy reached its pre-war level of development in 1924, followed by an upward trend that was unfortunately halted by the economic crisis of 1929-1933, which reverberated until 1936 in the primary sector. Social and economic progress continued thereafter, and the secondary sector achieved its maximum level of growth in 1938. According to many historical sources, during the time between the two world wars, the industry of the Kingdom of Romania was one of the most dynamic in Europe. This is an important fact and achievement, even if the main reason for it is that interwar Romania was not as developed as the large economies of Western Europe. Agriculture remained the dominant sector of the national economy, but the share of industry increased, so that in 1938, the primary sector accounted for 41% of the National Income and the secondary sector accounted for 30.8%, whereas industry contributed 19.6% and 22.2% of the National Income in 1912-1913 and 1929, respectively (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 5-12; Axenciuc, 2012, p. 35-574; Djuvara, 2002, p. 205-215; Totu, 1977, p. 228; Șandru, 1985, p. 11-106). Given the frequently relatively diverse compilation criteria, it is clearly apparent that there are differences between the data collected by the various available statistics. The industry's increased contribution to the total output of the primary and secondary sectors of the national economy was a major factor in the rise of material production, National Income, and international trade.

## II. METHOD AND MATERIALS

In the “Old Kingdom” of Romania (prior to the Great Union of 1918) the large properties exceeding 50 hectares, including those held by the state and other institutions, were managed by more than 5,000 individuals, representing about 0.6% of the total landowners, who held about 4 million hectares of arable land, meadows, and pastures, compared to the 3,850,000 hectares held by 920,939 peasant families. By taking into account the forested areas, the large landowners emerged as owning a total of 6,450,000 hectares or over 60% of the total agricultural and forested areas. The small-sized peasant households, on the other hand, owned and cultivated 4,150,000 hectares of land during the same period, or 39 percent of the total area (Şandru, 1975, p. 19). While the average size of the large agricultural holdings or landed properties was close to 1,000 ha, at the beginning of the 20th century the size of the peasant household was only 3.6 hectares (Şandru, 1975, p. 18; Şandru, 1985, p. 11-31, Murgescu, 2010, p. 126). First of all, the methods of studying the various extensive social and economic changes in interwar Romania still require the clarification of certain issues which, depending on the relative consensus, historians and different researchers tackling specific topics in the field of historiography have yet to fully agree on. Such approaches are, in most cases, required to determine more accurately the evolutionary trends observed in the interwar economic sectors, particularly in the context of the implementation of the 1918–1921 agrarian reform decrees. For the proposed research topic, qualitative methods (statistical-descriptive) must predominate, but quantitative or mixed methods must be used whenever possible. In spite of the objective need for quantitative methods, with a view to imperatively obtaining and presenting of results of a quantitative nature, complementary to assertions and assessments or conclusive descriptive-qualitative interpretations, it should be reiterated that, even at present, the necessity and implicit importance of more in-depth studies and putting to good use of accessible archival funds and book collections will often indicate the fact that qualitative sources of data are usually way more extensive than quantitative ones. By consulting even a small part of the contents of many interwar era archival records and published works, as well as contemporary field literature, it should be particularly noted and reiterated whenever the need for argumentation arises, that supporters of large landowners or institutions basically did not, at any point in time, stop emphasizing and praising the benefits and major role of large agricultural holdings after the agrarian reform of 1921 was passed and put into effect. Instead, they tried time and again to adapt their firm beliefs and standpoints to the new social and economic realities (Madgearu, 1999, p. 202).

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The extensive monographs and studies carried out after 1934 on the initiative of renowned professor Dimitrie Gusti, under the patronage of the “Prince Carol” Royal Foundation, and as of 1938 under that of the Social Service, are of particular importance (Şandru, 1980, p. 5-13; Murgescu, 2010, 221-268). From 1935 to 1938, more than 70 sociological research teams, each assisted by a doctor, a veterinarian, and an agronomist, worked in villages throughout country. With a total of more than 800 people, the main task and goal of the sociological teams had been to directly support the development of the Romanian village from an economic, social, and cultural point of view. By means of collecting funds from several neighboring communes, the establishment of a series of “model villages” was envisaged, which were to be provided with all the institutions necessary to uplift the living standards. In the summer of 1938, the “Prince Carol” Cultural Foundation dispatched 60 student teams, as follows: 3 in Lesser Wallachia, 12 in Greater Wallachia, 3 in Dobruja, 9 in Moldavia, 10 in Bessarabia, 2 in Bukovina, 12 in Transylvania and 9 in Banat. Systematic sociological work was carried out, with the goal of documenting and gathering of as much data as possible on the social aspects of rural areas. As a positive result, the condition of the property, agricultural inventory, the budgets of the peasant families, the sanitary state, level of education, just to name a few were assessed, thereby deepening the knowledge of the rural population. The population of these rural settlements was 125,000, so that every 254th village in the country and the situation of every 128th villager was examined. The documentary materials and findings that emerged as a result of the four campaigns of sociological research represent a source of information in the absence of which the study of the rural population would not be possible. While some of the results and findings were published in the series of volumes titled “60 Romanian Villages” and in the “Romanian Sociology” Journal, others, stored in the vaults of different county archives have not yet been properly turned to good account. These are supplementary material which adds to the understanding of many aspects that Statistics from the interwar period could not clearly identify or capture. As can easily be seen from the “School of Gusti’s” monographs, the health issue was the main subject of the study. Between 1937 and 1938, after adopting the sociological research method, the Ministry of Health undertook wide-ranging efforts to draft the country’s communal monographs in a standard form, which aimed at depicting features such as: local geography and climate, demographic data for the last five or ten years, disease burden and mortality estimates, housing data, a.s.o (Şandru, 1980, p. 5-13; Murgescu, p. 221-268). However, the research was carried out with the local available resources of the various villages and communes, mainly with personnel having basic knowledge and training with respected to issues that had to be addressed, so that little information provided by those particular monographs can be used. Overall, during the interwar period, some aspects of the rural environment were studied in depth, while some were

subject to systematic investigations only to a lesser extent, while others were not addressed at all (Ciublea-Aref, 2006, p. 269-332; Boia, 2013, p. 71-85; Șandru, 1980, p. 5-13, Murgescu, p. 221-268).

The 1930 census was the first to be carried out at the level of the entire territory of Greater Romania (with a surface area of 295,040 km and a population of 18,059,896 inhabitants) on the basis of the most innovative methods at that time. The general population census was conducted on December 29, 1930, thanks to efforts of the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Protection, on the basis of scientific criteria had been well-thought-out so as to address the population census, the census of industrial and commercial enterprises and the census of buildings and housing. As a novelty, three characteristics were recorded for the first time: ethnicity, religion and the native language, and the results had been processed using modern mechano-graphic equipment obtained with the aid of the "Rockefeller Foundation", which was later donated to the Central Institute of Statistics. Data from the 1930 census were made available to authorities, researchers, and all interested parties, proving to be of great importance particularly in the studies of demography, statistics, sociology, economics, and geography. The census carried out in 1930 was mainly aimed at establishing the national structure of the population of Romania as a whole, the civil status, age groups, the state of the households and if necessary - degree of infirmity. In addition, other aspects related to the place of birth, family relations and well-being, the size of households, community-related issues, citizenship status, the level of knowledge of the Romanian language, age in years, professions, and roles in the field of work, level of education and /or training, secondary occupations, jobs of foreign citizens, and many more were pursued. Other categories that were researched were commercial enterprises, industrial and transport companies; buildings and dwellings; comparative data with previous general censuses; the "Statistical Dictionary of the Urban and Rural Communes"; family statistics; the Romanian education system (Șandru, 1980, p. 14-43; Șandru, 1985, p. 32-106; Murgescu, p. 221-268).

The evolution of Romania's population between 1919-1939 was marked by a high birth rate and population growth which made for a constant increase in the number of inhabitants. The rural population played a major role in the population growth, both by accounting for 4/5 of the total and by the sheer birth rate, which was higher than that in the urban areas. The average evolution of the population's spatial distribution shows that the number of inhabitants of the county of Iași registered an almost constant growth until 1900, as a result of several factors, not least because of the successive appropriations of newly married couples and new settlers. The number of inhabitants of the city of Iași registered a decrease in the total population, a situation to be attributed to the loss of the political-administrative role of the city and the decrease of its polarization capacity after 1862. In the interwar period, on the other hand, the county of Iași registered an increase in the number of the stable population from 276,230 - in 1930, to 302,122 inhabitants on 1 July 1937 (Șandru, 1980, p. 5-13; Șandru, 1985, p. 32-106; A.N.R. Iași, 1930, f. 1-668; Murgescu, p. 221-268). At the end of 1939, the population of Romania accounted for 3.62 percent of the population of Europe ranking 10th among the 28 countries of the continent. Most notably, the exhaustive survey of 29 December 1930 not only provided data and information of undisputed historical value, but also eventually led to the reorientation of official policies, focusing on rural areas, on the one hand, so as to solve agrarian issues and, on the other, to accelerate the process of urbanization and industrialization. The census carried out at the end of the first inter-war decade was the necessary framework for implementing enhanced economic, social, sanitary, cultural, and educational programs and measures of significant importance and usefulness as a result of the better knowledge of the actual facts in Greater Romania.

The demographic, socio-economic and physical-geographical imbalances, and inequalities between the different counties of Romania was therefore created a divide in the growth of historical regions during the time between the first global conflagration and the Second World War. The efforts made by the Romanian population during the interwar period, both in the economic and social sector as well as in the political and cultural areas, were also reflected to some extent in the administrative structure also. Through all of its defining characteristics, the administrative-territorial structure of the Kingdom of Romania from 1919 to 1939 reflected the general trend of modernization, despite rather frequent policy and legislative changes (Cartwright, 1999, p. 33-170). Processes of social polarization gradually emerged in all economic sectors, leading to contradictions and conflicts specific to emerging capitalist societies, between wealth and poverty, growth, and decline, the urban and rural environment (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 227; Scurtu (Ed.), 2003, p. 101). The evolution of the national economy saw four stages of development, closely related to the phases of the global economic cycle: the first stage, 1919-1924, of economic recovery, after the widespread destruction caused by the military campaigns between 1916-1918 during which the Romanian economy was largely destroyed; the second stage, from 1924 to 1928, in which the domestic economy, like the world economy, experienced a relatively rapid growth in all sectors of activity; the third stage, 1929-1936, when the Romanian economy was affected by the global economic crisis, which wreaked havoc in all economic branches; similar to other Eastern European countries, the industry (1929-1932), agriculture (1928-1936) and finance and the banking sector (1929-1934) suffered the most; the fourth stage (1933-1939), which saw the gains of post-crisis recovery and the re-launch of economic growth, was suddenly interrupted by the beginning of the Second World War on 1 September 1939. Therefore, in the two inter-war decades, the Kingdom of Greater Romania benefited from a de facto growth of only ten years, the general balance being generally positive especially when considering the phenomena of expansion and strengthening of the exchange economy. The general economic and

social development, which reached its peak in 1938, was, according to many scholars, only partial, rather ineffective in harnessing the true potential of the human capital and the abundance of natural resources of the Kingdom of Romania. External factors had been impediments rather than development opportunities in this respect (Axenciuc, 1997, p. 227; Gusti, (Ed.), p. 353-428).

After the conclusion of the atrocious hostilities of the First World War in 1919, the Kingdom of Romania was inevitably burdened by a vast and complex array of pressing problems, including reduced industrial development and, in particular, the persistence of remnants of feudal relations, unique to the evolution of the agricultural sectors in this particular part of Europe. In addition, for a number of objective reasons, there was also an increase in the dominance or influence of foreign capital. In 1920 the Kingdom of Romania had a population of 15,542,424 inhabitants, while by 1935 the figure had increased to 19,087,770. At the same time, the rural population rose from 12,087,000 in 1921 to 15,531,000 in 1935, leading to a statistical rate of 230 thousand per year. The population of Romania had an eminently rural character, as recorded by the data of the general population census of December 29, 1930: approximately 79.8% of the total number of inhabitants, with a density of 48.9 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (compared to 61.2 - the combined average of the villages and towns) and also concentrating about 79.2% of the number of households and 55.2% of the then businesses (Şandru, 1980, p. 43; Şandru, 1985, p. 11-107; A.N.R. Iaşi, 1930, f. 1-668; Murgescu, p. 221-268). In the same context it should also be noted that, between 1919 and 1939, the importance of the rural environment and the complexity of the peasant agricultural economy was time and again eloquently proved by the fact that, according to most estimates, 3/4 of the population had accounted for about 50% of the gross overall output. The December 1930 census listed the population of the country according to 124 occupations, of which those resulting from the exploitation of the soil and forests are of great interest to the subject concerned, given that they were inextricably linked to the rural areas. As a nation with a fairly large agricultural sector, Romania's rural areas were home to the largest segment of the active population. Despite the fact that, after 1918, the secondary sector expanded to a certain extent, it was not large enough to polarize a significant part of the natural population growth. As a result, between 1927 and 1928, the total percentage of rural inhabitants who earned a living from agriculture increased to almost 83%, as different from other countries at the time. As regards the living environments and historical regions, the percentage of the active population varied considerably, depending on the level of regional development of each geographical area. While historical provinces such as Bessarabia (86.7%) and Moldavia (80%), topped the country average, Dobruja (78.2%) was close to the mean. With respect to Transylvania (77.6%), Bukovina and Crişana-Maramureş (76.4%) and Greater Wallachia (71.4%), it can be noted that they registered just under average percentages (Djuvara, p. 208; Şandru, 1980, p. 44-58; A.N.R. Iaşi, 1930, f. 1-668).

Inherently, the uneven distribution of the territorial profile of the rural population also led to significant differences in the average area of arable land owned by smallholders' families. Approximately 1/3 of the territory of Greater Romania included mountainous and hilly areas where arable land was simply not available. The high density of the inhabitants of these areas, 39.5% in the "Old Kingdom" of Romania, compelled many small-scale producers to look for other means of earning extra income, not just to rely on the exploitation of the forested areas, animal husbandry, fruit growing a.s.o. In the decades leading up to the First World War, the mobility of the population especially in the "Old Kingdom", internal and external and migration, was relatively limited, not representing a phenomenon with a significant impact on demographic evolution. Generally, the immigration process involved either trained specialists or workers from the industry branch, who had been contracted by long-term employers. In rural areas, the large landowners rarely resorted to hiring foreign nationals. However, it can be noted that in some cases several intensive agricultural holdings resorted to labor from other countries. According to most available estimates, between 30,000 and 40,000 seasonal workers from the Tsarist Empire, Bukovina and Transylvania were employed by large landowners. With regard to the broad issue of agricultural profitability, it should be noted that, between 1928 and 1929, the net income, measured as a percentage of the capital invested, was 8.41% for Romanian agricultural holdings, compared with 5.12% for farms in Czechoslovakia, 2.63% for farms in Switzerland and 2.27% for agricultural holdings in Sweden. Between 1936 and 1937, Romania's ratio of net income to invested capital was higher than that of other European states. While in Romania the indicator was 10.96%, in Denmark the figure was 2.33% for small holdings and 3.23% for large farms, in Sweden 4.55%, in Norway 3.95%, in Poland 3.42%, and Switzerland 1.78%. By interpreting the data on 71,684 households that was surveyed between 1930 and 1934, the Institute of Agronomic Research of Romania found that up to 58% of farms of less than 5 hectares and 35% of those over 5 hectares had actually been deficient in terms of capital. In his research of the structure of the costs of production author Gheorghe Ciulei was able to calculate and note that the interest rate on borrowed capital at some point rose to 33.78% in Moldavia. (Şandru, 1980, p. 72-88).

A demographic assessment of Romania's population reveals that, notwithstanding significant shifts, its evolution has consistently been among the most dynamic in Europe. Data from the second half of the nineteenth century indicate that the birth rate suffered significant changes in groups of years, the causes of which have yet to be fully explained. The birth rate was roughly 30 births per thousand inhabitants in 1860; ten years later, it increased at an average rate of 40 to 50 births per thousand people, and then leveled continuously at around 40 per thousand between 1890 and 1914. After WWI, the birth rate dropped dramatically, trending downward during the whole interwar period, in comparison to 1910-1914, especially among the rural population. Although the urban birth rate

did not follow a similar downward trend, it was lower than the rural birth rate as measured in births per thousand persons. Despite the rather downward trend of birth rates in Romania between 1918 and 1939, the country's vital statistics were higher than those of other European countries in terms of natality. Interwar Romania had one of the highest birth rates in Europe, if not in the world: 100% higher than those of Belgium, Germany, France, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, England, and Sweden. Sweden's birth rate was 15.2 per 1,000 people, while Romania's was over 30 per 1,000. Only in 1924 was the Kingdom of Romania surpassed in terms of births by Yugoslavia, which registered 38.6‰, compared to 37.9 per thousand in Romania. Data for a total of 24 European and non-European countries from 1926 to 1930 showed that the Kingdom of Romania ranked highest, with a birth rate of more than 35 per thousand, followed by Japan, with 33, and Poland, Portugal, Bulgaria, and Argentina, each with around 30 (Șandru, 1980, p. 1-43; p. 44-58; Șandru, 1985, p. 11-32).

Between 1918 and 1939, the Western and Southwestern regions of the country had the lowest birth rates, which was rather worrisome for state officials, as archival records clearly show. Transylvania, which had a lower rate than the other regions even before the 1918 union, was primarily responsible for the drop in the birth rate in the post-World War I enlarged Kingdom of Romania. Most studies and current field research highlight that during the interwar period, the birth rate in rural areas was consistently higher than in urban areas. In the early postwar years, the rural birth rate was 40.5 per thousand, whereas the urban birth rate was just 21.1 per thousand. Between 1931 and 1935, the country's average birth rate per thousand inhabitants was 32.9, rising to 35.5 in rural settlements but only 21.4 in urban areas. Although the rural birth rate was high, it was on an almost constant declining trend. The highest recorded birth rate was 44.2 in 1921. It remained over 40 until 1925, when it dropped below 40 per thousand, then fell below 35 per thousand beginning in 1933, reaching its lowest point in 1939, with 29.9 births per thousand inhabitants. Based on statistics and the results of several surveys and monographs, demographers concluded that in industrially developed countries, the birth rate was lower than in countries with a largely agrarian economy. In general, natality was directly related to the dynamics of the standard of living and that where it was higher, the birth rate was lower. However, as the head of the Romanian Central Institute of Statistics noted in 1940, study results at the time had yet to accurately delimit the role of biological and social factors in influencing natality. Roughly two million children succumbed in Romania in the aftermath of WW1 alone, far more than the average rate of any other European country (Șandru, 1980, p. 1-43).

MD-PhD Gh. Banu, who founded and edited the Journal of Social Hygiene from 1931 to 1944, did much research that clearly showed that excess mortality, regrettably countrywide spread, had a significant impact on rural areas, particularly among the younger age groups. The high rate of child deaths altered the very structure of Romania's population pyramid. Consequently, the national average life expectancy was also low, particularly lower in rural areas. The general death rate in Romania, like infant mortality, remained quite high after WW1. Although infant and general mortality rates in Romania were quite high between 1918 and 1939, considerable birth rate levels ensured a steady interwar population growth. The only factors that really determined the overall expansion of the population were the number of births, which averaged 600,000 a year, and deaths, which reached 350,000 a year. This led to a rise of 250,000 people each year. Since international migration was insignificant between the two world wars, it basically had no effect on the annual average rate of population growth in the Kingdom of Romania. From 1918 to 1939, data on births, infant mortality, overall mortality, and natural population growth indicate that there was an oscillating ratio and proportions game, with minimums and maximums that were sometimes dramatically contrasting. This fact essentially reveals how vulnerable a part of the population really was, mostly the younger age groups, who essentially never really managed to properly deal with their economic and social conditions, let alone get ahead of them. Different parts of the country did not have the same rate of annual population growth. Overall, the "Old Kingdom" and Bessarabia contributed a great deal to ensuring strong natural increase, whereas Transylvania lost numerical importance year after year. The country's population was 18,057,026 according to the December 29, 1930, census. The "Old Kingdom" accounted for 48.7 percent, Transylvania for 30.7 percent, Bessarabia for 15.9 percent, and Bukovina for 4.7 percent. The population density in the large historical provinces was 63.7 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> in the "Old Kingdom" of Romania, 64.5 in Bessarabia, 81.7 in Bukovina, and 54.2 in Transylvania in 1930. However, population density varied greatly from region to region. In several counties, the population density was roughly half that of the national average of 61.2 persons per km<sup>2</sup>. Old Romania's hamlets, villages, and rural communes were smaller, with an average of about 700 people, but they were more densely distributed over the landscape. The unified provinces of Greater Romania, on the other hand, had an average of 1,400 people, which provided them the proper prerequisites to further develop into more vibrant rural economic hubs of activity (Șandru, 1980, p. 1-43; p. 44-58).

So, between 1918 and 1939 the Romanian village was defined by its population, its rate of natural increase, and its absolute population growth, which was a key part of Romania's demographic change. It basically secured the nation's vitality by ensuring continued population growth, filling some of the gaps left by losses in the urban environment. Because the Romanian authorities regrettably lacked a clear and consistent demographic policy throughout the interwar years, the rural environment definitely took a heavy toll in the form of high infant and general mortality rates (Dropu, 2011, p. 84-132). At the time of the 1918 Union, the accurate ethnic composition of the population of the several Romanian provinces that merged in the enlarged nation-state that became known as

Greater Romania was unknown. The only thing known was that ethnic Romanians represented the overwhelming majority, as evidenced by earlier census statistics. However, there was a considerable period between their completion and the Union of 1918, during which, certain developments undoubtedly had occurred. Official total population estimates for Romania in 1920 revealed the following structure based on nationalities: Romanians - 11,805,000 (69.9%), Hungarians - 1,568,000 (9.3%), Ukrainians - 792,000 (4.7%), Germans - 725,000 (4.3%), Jews - 900,000 (5.3%), Bulgarians - 290,000 (1.7%), Gypsies - 285,000 (1.7%), Russians - 99,000 (0.6%), Poles - 37,000 (0.2%), Turks - 170,000 (1.0%), others - 226,000 (1.3%). According to Théodore Ruysen, author of the article on Romania in the Encyclopedia Britannica of 1928, out of the total of 16,925,600 inhabitants, there were 11,576,000 Romanians, 1,659,500 Hungarians, 804,000 Germans, 1,100,000 Ukrainians, 793,800 Ruthenians, 770,000 Jews, 251,000 Bulgarians, 62,300 Serbs, 230,000 Turks-Tatars, and 579,000 other nationalities. However both estimates were not precise, since they contradicted other statistics on the population, which was set at 15,541,424 people, so that the former suggests a higher total population, with 1,356,000 inhabitants, and the second, with 1,384,000 inhabitants. J. Bowman, who, referring to 1923, established that Romanians represented 74.9 %, Hungarians and Szeklers - 8.54%, Jews 5%, Germans - 4.43%, Bulgarians - 1.5%, Turks and Tatars - 1.0%, and other nationalities - 2.5%) provides a more realistic estimate, which was later largely confirmed by 1930 census data (Șandru, 1980, p. 44-58).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

The statistics on Romania's population in the interwar period show that in the urban environment, the increase in the total population was in fact rather slow, and in some areas unable to compensate for losses due to the general high mortality rates, while the birth rate recorded in rural settings was high. The birth rate per thousand inhabitants in Romania's urban rural environment was almost always lower than in the rural environment. The general mortality rate in urban areas approached that of rural areas, albeit slightly lower, so that natural population growth in urban areas remained insignificant over the years. According to research which studied in depth the available historical statistical data, the annual growth of the Romanian population between 1920 and 1939 was around 227,126 people per year, or 12.2 per thousand. Most fieldwork and archival evidence show that the cities of The Kingdom of Romania's Bessarabia and Bukovina had the largest contribution to the average yearly increase rate of Romania's interwar population. The problem of agricultural overpopulation was worsened by the overall level of economic development of the country, which essentially did not allow the absorption in industry of the entire surplus of the rural labor workforce who could not earn their livelihood in the primary sector. This problem also aggravated on the whole the so-called "agrarian issue", highlighting time and again the need for a long-term solution. It is important to note that during the entire interwar period, numerous researchers approached the many issues that beset Romanian rural settlements, including the extensive array of problems faced by the numerous small-scale rural agricultural holdings, while the subject of the rural space was studied in most cases taking into account the complex interplay of variables that affected its dynamics.

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