

**THE PRESENT RURAL SPACE IN SEARCH OF A NEW IDENTITY
NEW CHALLENGES - NEW OPPORTUNITIES
MĂRGINIMEA SIBIULUI - AGRICULTURAL COORDINATES**

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Abstract

Not only fields like auto industry, IT and services constitute resources of the economic progress known in the last years in the County of Sibiu. In its turn, the agricultural sector has considerable potential; reviving agriculture and revitalizing the rural environment represent possible new development engines, important sources of economic increase respectively, both for our County and at regional level.

The main purpose of our paper is to inquire into the economic specificities of Mărginimea Sibiului, one of the most representative regions of Sibiu. We are interested in analyzing the structure and the functioning of the agricultural exploitations from this area, and also in identifying which are the main assets of this rural zone and how the local resources can be more efficiently managed, in order to reinforce the position of Mărginimea Sibiului in the economy of Sibiu County.

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1. Agricultural Exploitations in the Sibiu County. Profile and Evolutions

As utilized agricultural area, the Farm Structure Survey (2013) shows for the County of Sibiu an area of 241.829 ha, more exactly a percentage of 14.27 % of the total agricultural area utilized at the level of the Centre region

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(1.693.990 ha) and 1.85 % of the total agricultural area utilized in Romania (13.055.849 ha).

Compared to the data of the General Agricultural Census (2010), we notice a slight decrease of the agricultural area used in the County of Sibiu, the downward trend applying to the entire utilized agricultural area as well. But at the level of the Centre region, a relative increase of the planted acreage is recorded.

Of the 47.199 agricultural holdings in the County, 46.376 (over 98 %) own utilized agricultural area, these representing a percentage of 1.30 % of the total 3.563.765 holdings falling into this category at national level. In the Centre development region, our County has a representation of 13.21 % of the total number of holdings of this type (350.857), being surpassed by the counties: Mureş (95.037 holdings/27.08 %); Alba (74.482 agricultural holdings/21.22 %), Harghita (65.196 holdings/18.58 %) respectively.

According to the usage categories, the biggest share in the agricultural area utilized in the County of Sibiu belongs to pastures and hayfields (154.213 ha/63.76 %), being followed by arable lands (82.745 ha/34.21 %), a modest representation characterizing the category of permanent crops (2.946 ha/1.21 %) and that of family gardens (1.923 ha/0.79 %).

Regarding the criterion of the agricultural holdings physical size, statistical data show, in the case of Sibiu, predominance of small farms, with dimensions below 5 ha. The holdings in this category, 39.943 in number, represent 86.12 % of the total number of the holdings that use the agricultural area in the County of Sibiu. They are followed by the farms with agricultural area between 5-50 ha: 5.891 holdings, more exactly 12.70 %, the share of the large size farms (over 50 ha) being a small one: only 542 of this type of holdings, which is a percentage of 1.16 % of the total agricultural holdings with utilized area in Sibiu.

Compared to the General Agricultural Census (2010), one can notice a decrease of almost 9 % of the number of small farms (39.943/43.766), of 10 % of the number of large farms (542/596) and an increase of over 21 % of the number of farms with surface between 5-50 ha (5.891/4.849).

If in numerical terms in the County of Sibiu the small size farms are overwhelming, from the point of view of utilized agricultural area, there is a shift in proportion. Thus, the largest utilized agricultural area is owned by large farms, with dimensions of over 50 ha. These include around 132.374 ha of the total agricultural area used at the level of our county (54.73 %), being

followed by the farms with areas between 5-50 ha (63.570 ha, 26.28% respectively) and by small farms, with utilized agricultural area below 5 ha (numbering 45.885, that is 18.29 % of the total agricultural area utilized in the County of Sibiu).

Unlike the previous census, there has been a decrease both of the surface and of the share of the small size agricultural holdings and of the large farms, in parallel with surface expansion and medium farms representation. Thus, according to the General Agricultural Census 2010, the farms above 50 ha utilized 142.030 ha, the ones in the category below 5 ha: 49.583 ha, the agricultural holdings in the category 5-50 ha owning 52.354 ha.

Taking into consideration all these evolutions, it becomes evident that the County of Sibiu is not different from the rest of the Centre development region. Thus, at regional level, one can remark the predominance of the small size farms, the 298.086 agricultural holdings covering up to 5 ha representing 84.95 % of the total 350.857 holdings with utilized agricultural area in the region. At the opposite, there are the large farms, of over 50 ha, amounting to only 2.974 holdings, that is, making the modest percentage of 0.84 % of the total, the farms with dimensions between 5-50 ha, 49.797 in number, having a representation of 14.19% at the level of the Centre region.

If, regarding their number, small farms come first in the Centre development region, considering the utilized agricultural area we notice, just as in the case of the exiting situation in the County, that the large farms are the ones that contain the largest part of utilized agricultural area (796.612 ha/47.02 %), being followed by medium farms (503.602 ha/29.72 %) and small farms (393.775 ha/ 23.24 %).

As concerns the average dimension of an agricultural holding, it is well known the fact that the restricted area of the Romanian farms is part of the current reality, representing, at the same time, a factor with strong negative influence upon the development of the rural economy. On average, in Romania, the utilized area belonging to an agricultural holding is of 3.60 ha. The Centre region is above this limit, with an average of 4.73 ha/holding, the County of Sibiu benefiting, also, of an average of the surface/holding above the national average, more exactly of 5.12 ha.

2. Agricultural Exploitations in Mărginimea Sibiului. Specificities.

Mărginimea Sibiului constitutes one of the ethnographic regions valued as a symbol in our Country. Situated in the western part of

Transylvania, Mărginimea Sibiului comprises 18 localities, namely: Boița, Sadu, Râu Sadului, Tălmăciu, Tălmăcel, Rășinari, Poplaca, Gura Râului, Orlat, Fântânele, Sibiel, Vale, Săliște, Galeș, Tilișca, Rod, Poiana Sibiului și Jina. The area has unquestionably been inhabited for a long time, the first signs of human settlement in the region dating since paleolithic, more precisely eneolithic.

The economy of Mărginimea Sibiului has always had a mixed character, agro-pastoral, the inhabitants of the region being involved in, besides agriculture, growing livestock, as well as a series of crafts, mostly connected with wood exploitation and woodworking, and the food/textile industry, etc. "Mărginenii" (the inhabitants of Mărginime) are renowned especially for their pastoral activities, shepherding, as an ancestral occupation, giving birth to the unique phenomenon of moving of flocks and of some well-known "shepherds 'paths".

Table 1: Agricultural exploitations (number) in Mărginimea Sibiului, per localities.

No.	County/ towns commune s	Total agricultur al exploitatio ns	Agricultural exploitations with areas for agriculture/grow ing livestock	Agricultural exploitations only with areas used for agriculture	Agricultural exploitations only with areas used for livestock
1.	Sibiu County	51.006	33.006	16.206	1.795
2.	Săliște	2.065	621	1.377	58
3.	Tălmăciu	1.036	629	373	34
4.	Boița	361	259	97	5
5.	Gura Râului	843	593	220	30
6.	Jina	1.311	567	251	493
7.	Orlat	796	524	213	59
8.	Poiana Sibiului	921	805	29	87
9.	Rășinari	1.457	937	448	72
10.	Râu Sadului	287	152	134	1
11.	Sadu	1.472	422	1.050	-
12.	Tilișca	760	387	344	29

Source: The General Agricultural Census 2010.

According to the data provided by the General Agricultural Census (2010), Mărginimea Sibiului, through the localities it comprises, totals 14.410 agricultural exploitations, of the total of 51.006 registered in Sibiu County (namely 28.25 %). Of these, the majority are mixed agricultural exploitations (with areas used for agriculture and for livestock). The 5.896 such exploitations represent 40.91 % of the total households in Mărginime, being followed as number/percentage by the exploitations focused on agriculture (4.536 exploitations/ 31.47 % of the total), respectively by the exploitations focused on growing livestock (868 exploitations/6.02% of the total households in Mărginimea Sibiului).

As regards the form of ownership, according to official statistics we can remark that the largest portion of the agricultural exploitations in Mărginime (10.263/71.22 %) are privately owned, the phenomenon of leasing and that of concession being under-represented (229 leased agricultural exploitations/40 agricultural exploitations in concession, namely 1.58 %, respectively 0.27 % of the total exploitations). What is more, in two of the localities of Mărginimea Sibiului (Boița and Jina) leasing or conceding land do not constitute a practice (our own calculations, based on the data from the General Agricultural Census 2010).

Table 2: Number of agricultural exploitations, according to ownership of the agricultural area used, per localities.

No.	County/towns and communes	Agricultural exploitations in property	Agricultural exploitations on lease	Agricultural exploitations in concession
1.	Sibiu County	47.811	1.382	302
2.	Săliște	1.972	19	20
3.	Tâlmăciu	980	5	3
4.	Boița	356	-	-
5.	Gura Râului	796	29	-
6.	Jina	818	-	-
7.	Orlat	699	37	5
8.	Poiana Sibiului	833	7	2
9.	Rășinari	1.336	60	5
10.	Râu Sadului	272	64	1
11.	Sadu	1.471	2	4
12.	Tilișca	730	6	-

Source: The General Agricultural Census 2010.

With respect to the agricultural area used, Mărginimea Sibiului occupies approx. 40.400 ha, representing a relatively low percentage (16.56 %), in relation to the total agricultural surface recorded at the level of Sibiu County (243.923 ha). This fact is justified by the specific of the region, the natural landscape of Mărginimea Sibiului alternating alpine areas with forested ones, respectively pastures and hayfields with deciduous and coniferous forests.

Referring to the average agricultural surface used per agricultural exploitation, in Sibiu County this is of about 4.78 ha, whereas in the case of Mărginime, the average varies between 7.79 ha/exploitation (Jina), respectively 1.38 ha (Sadu). Mărginimea Sibiului is actually part of a national trend, the fragmentation of the peasant households and the predominance of small exploitations being among just some of the causes leading to an inefficient agriculture.

Table3: Agricultural exploitations/agricultural surface used/average agricultural surface used per agricultural exploitation, per localities.

No.	County/towns /communes	Total agricultural exploitations	Agricultural surface used	Average agricultural surface used /agricultural exploitation
1.	Sibiu County	51.006	243.923	4.78
2.	Săliște	2.065	10.135	4.93
3.	Tălmăciu	1.036	3.487	3.37
4.	Boița	361	1.297	3.59
5.	Gura Râului	843	3.446	4.09
6.	Jina	1.311	7.035	7.79
7.	Orlat	796	1.514	1.90
8.	Poiana Sibiului	921	1.342	1.46
9.	Rășinari	1.457	6.163	4.23
10.	Râu Sadului	287	959	3.34
11.	Sadu	1.472	2.038	1.38
12.	Tilișca	760	2.978	3.92

Source: The General Agricultural Census 2010.

Over 86% of the agricultural surface used at the level of the localities in Mărginimea Sibiului are in property (34.788 ha), others 3.279 ha being leased

(8.11 % of the total agricultural surface), respectively 675 ha in concession (0.16 %). Poiana Sibiului is a particular case, being the only locality in Mărginime in which the leased agricultural surface (732 ha) is greater than the one in property (605 ha in the 7 leased agricultural exploitations) (our own calculations, based on data from the General Agricultural Census 2010).

Table: 4. Agricultural surface used (ha), according to the form of ownership, per localities.

No.	County/towns/ communes	Agricultural surface used in property	Agricultural surface used in lease	Agricultural surface used in concession
1.	Sibiu County	157.407	43.597	16.436
2.	Săliște	8.840	193.44	407
3.	Tălmaciu	3.459	1.97	0.14
4.	Boița	1.297	-	-
5.	Gura Râului	2.832	32.31	-
6.	Jina	7.029	-	-
7.	Orlat	1.120	185.75	109
8.	Poiana Sibiului	605.53	732.56	0.39
9.	Rășinari	5.166	793.49	158
10.	Râu Sadului	557.33	355.03	1.00
11.	Sadu	1.493	406.10	138
12.	Tilișca	2.384	578.60	-

Source: The General Agricultural Census 2010.

3. Conclusions

The County of Sibiu is undergoing lately an important process of development. The resources of this growth are divers, sectors like: industry, services, turism bringing their large contribution to the positive economic results achieved.

Nevertheless, finding new fonctions for its rural space and encouraging the local agriculture could be a possible key for a long term and equilibrated progress of Sibiu. In this respect, Mărginimea Sibiului proves its importance in the economy of the County. Especially its mixt, agro-pastoral character should be more efficiently exploited. The powerful sense of ownership and the well-known entrepreneurial skills of the habitants represent also strong assets

in a future development not only of Mărginimea Sibiului, but also of the economy of Sibiu County in general.

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