

SOCIOGRAPHY AND ION CLOPOȚEL'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF INTER-BELLUM ROMANIAN REALITIES

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Abstract: *The present work reviews some of the contributions of Ion Clopoțel (1892-1986), an illustrious personality of the inter-bellum period, to the understanding of social and economic life in Romania. The work contains a biographical sketch of Ion Clopoțel, then representative elements of his methodological perspective are highlighted: sociography with a significant economic component. We will show how the sociographic perspective of Ion Clopotel is actually a monographic one, but applied at the regional level. Historical, economical and related to household life aspects as well as psychosociological and linguistic aspects are targeted. Moreover, the data collected and analyzed with scientific methods were directly intended to underpin policies for the modernization and development of Romania. The scientific foundation was necessary, as Ion Clopotel suggested, because of the wrong policies of the governors of the time. They neglected the rural world, its modernization and industrialization, even though they were aware of the importance of this world for the future of the country. The conclusions bring to reader's attention, among other things, some of Ion Clopoțel's socio-economic considerations and themes of surprising actuality.*

Keywords: sociography, socio-economic survey, agriculture, social progress.

1. Introductory considerations

For Romania the inter-bellum period analysts say, was "a period of profound socio-economical, political and cultural transformations", the context being "a vast laboratory for reflection and action for the Romanian intelligentsia who was called to contribute to the positioning of our society on the coordinates of modernisation" (Negru, 2003: 7). Numerous personalities stood out in this context, some of whom having been directly involved in the act of the Great Union (December 1st, 1918), like that of Ion Clopoțel (1892-1986).

To begin with, ample presentations of Ion Clopoțel's biography can be found in several sociology dictionaries (Filipescu, 2001: 111-114; Negru, 2005: 113-116). Such publications present him as publicist, historian and sociologist (Filipescu, 2001: 111).

Ion Clopoțel was born in Poiana Mărului, in Romania's Brașov County and passed away in Bucharest. According to the above-mentioned dictionaries, he went to primary school in his native village of Poiana Mărului and later to gymnasium and high school in Brașov City. He completed his upper education in Budapest and Vienna, the time spent in Budapest "allowing him to have contact with the Hungarian Sociological Society under the direction of Iàszzi Oszkàr, opportunity which laid in front of him a clear path towards the social research of a sociographical nature" (Negru, 2005: 13). The sociographical type of sociological research is in fact field data-based research. More recent Romanian works define sociography as a frame for sociological knowledge "consisting in the collection of raw data on the objects, the phenomena, the relationships and the social processes, in the objective description of these, in their measurement and in the realisation of statistics (tables, graphics etc.) on the observed social phenomena" (Ungureanu, 1998: 554). According to some opinions, sociography - descriptive in its essence - is tightly linked to sociology in general and to *applied sociology* in particular (Sullivan, 1992; Steele & Price, 2008).

Ion Clopoțel's interest in sociology was also elicited by Vasile Goldis, another notable personality of the Great Union and an "avid reader and commentator of works of political sociology and social philosophy" (Negru, 2003: 13).

For being a militant unionist, Ion Clopoțel was "arrested and convicted to prison by the Hungarians (February to October 1918)" (Filipescu, 2001: 111). The day of The Great Union finds Ion Clopoțel as Director of the Press Office and member of the Great National Assembly representing the electoral college of the Arad County Romanian Press Office (Negru, 2003: 14). The event of the union and the preceding period have been described by Ion Clopoțel in his book *Revoluția de la 1918 și Unirea Ardealului cu România [The 1918 Revolution and the Union of Ardeal (i.e. Transylvania) with Romania]* published in 1926 by *Societatea de mâine [Tomorrow's Society]* magazine. During his career, Ion Clopoțel held progressive editing and contributing functions for numerous publications of his age. His journalistic career peaked with the publication and coordination of the *Societatea de mâine* magazine (Cluj, Bucharest, 1924-1945), publication to which we shall make further references in this study. Ion Clopoțel's professional portfolio would not be complete without mentioning also his Director of Bucharest University Central Library's tenure between 1946 and 1961. In politics he has been elected as a representative of the Făgăraș electoral college (Filipescu, 2001: 111). On a separate but particularly relevant note for this study, we will also mention Ion Clopoțel's assignment during 1938 through 1939 as General Inspector for Apuseni Mountains, one of the poorest regions of Romania

To list a few notable contributions of Ion Clopoțel to the specialty literature, one should include *Direcția realismului social-economic [The Direction of the Social-Economic Realism]*, "Societatea de mâine" Publishing, Cluj, 1926; *Sociografie românească. Anchetarea plășilor muntoase Margina, Almăj, Vașcău și Beiuș [Romanian Sociography. Survey of the mountain shires of Margina, Almăj, Vașcău and Beiuș]*, "Societatea de mâine" Publishing, Cluj, 1928; *Satele răzlețe ale României. Habitatul răsfirat din munții transilvani și bănățeni. Studiu de sociologie rurală [The Scattered Habitat of the Transylvanian and Banatian Mountains. A study of Rural Sociology]*, "Alba" Publishing, Alba Iulia, 1939. Numerous studies have also been published by Ion Clopoțel in *Societatea de mâine* magazine, some of them, mostly of economic problems, some being the object of our analysis.

2. The Economic background of the social problems

Andrei Negru remarked at one point that in Ion Clopoțel's opinion "agriculture constituted the main branch of the national economy, the farmer's household representing the very economic base of the Romanian state". In this context Ion Clopoțel "took upon him to criticise the authorities' lack of interest in the agrarian problem, arguing for the replacement of circumstantial measures with a rational agrarian policy that be based on a scientific and responsible analysis of the real problems of the Romanian rural area, in general" (Negru, 2005: 114).

According to Andrei Negru, Ion Clopoțel considered at the time that the main problems faced by the Romanian agriculture were: a) the excessive fragmentation of the agricultural property resulted from the defective allocation policy of the agrarian reform and from the retention of too much land for state reserve in comparison to the one allocated to farming households; b) the lack of an agricultural inventory of the new property owners after agrarian reform of 1921; c) the insufficiency of the financial means of the new land owners (Negru, 2005: 114). For more details on the agrarian reform of 1921 and on the agriculture of Romania during the inter-bellum period, one can also refer to Lup, Miron and Alim (2018).

Ion Clopoțel also pleaded, including as Member of Parliament, for the establishment of the agricultural credit. A broad study has been published in 1930, in which among other things, he expressed the spirit of his times: "Every citizen wishes for a larger and a cleaner house. Store owners are expanding their offices. Industrial firms are building more factories and are equipping them. All these aspirations need a financial correspondent to be created. The new

spirit and impetus cannot be strangled, stifled, diminished. One should push hard to create the great agricultural credit" (Clopoșel, 1930a: 350).

Institutionally, Ion Clopoșel proposed the creation of Chambers of Agriculture which in his view should have had attributes like: 1) support the supply of fertilisers for arable land; 2) encourage the expansion of orchards and facilitate the commercialisation of fruits; 3) reclaim degraded land through tree planting; 4) coordinate crop rotation, supply productive seed stock and promote the scientific exploitation of soils; 5) manage, for the state, the abandoned land; 6) takeover the land available to model farming and nurseries; 7) purchase the land from families without heirs or who cannot work it anymore; 8) control crops and facilitate equipment acquisition; 9) research the "naturalisation" of alien grains, plants and fruits; 10) organise an agricultural union and a "present-day peasant school" (Clopoșel, 1931: 402). A secondary set of attributes of the Chambers would have been objectives in agreement with the villages like: 1) the introduction of tractors and farming equipment with backing from communities; 2) the establishment of forestry cooperatives for timber and firewood management; 3) the construction of granaries and silos for grain storage; 4) the provision of state institutions with firewood; 5) the organisation in a cooperative model the commercialisation of agricultural produce and the market prospecting; 6) the provision of transport facilities; 7) the organisation of promotional expositions and fairs for varieties that were successfully acclimatised; 8) the initialisation, development and overseeing of the agricultural product processing industries; 9) the commercialisation of agricultural produce; 10) the development of superior livestock (Clopoșel, 1931: 402-403). Finally, a third series of attributions of the Chambers of Agriculture derived from their mandate to collaborate with the state: 1) the provision of credit to local development; 2) the provision of compensation for losses due to livestock epidemics and of accident insurance for farmers unable to continue their work; 3) the coordination of activities related to the distribution of agricultural produce on external markets (Clopoșel, 1931: 403).

Another very important aspect is the support of Ion Clopoșel for the industrialisation of agriculture (Negru, 2005: 114-115). In essence Ion Clopoșel "was criticising the doctrine of the peasant state" according to Negru, respectively "the idea of returning to the patriarchal village primitivism" and was arguing instead for "the possibility of rural development via the path of agricultural industrialisation" (Negru, 2003: 75).

An interesting thesis of Ion Clopoșel has been described in the following terms by Negru: "Being convinced of the superiority of the industrial nations over the agrarian ones, I. Clopoșel considered that the industrialisation of agriculture could contribute, in cases of agrarian countries like Romania, to the emancipation of their economies from the caprices of nature and, at the same time, to the consolidation of Romanian democracy as a result of the increase in welfare of the majority social class, the peasantry" (Negru, 2003: 75). In Ion Clopoșel's vision, the industrialisation of agriculture was linked to democracy and to the future of the Romanian people: "We cannot conceive an industrialisation of Romania on a grand scale without an organic correlation with the agricultural occupations. We are conceptualising the industrialisation as a rational employment of raw materials, so abundant in the hands of the rural population. Romania possesses immense sources of natural riches. The world economic encyclopaedias are conferring it the fame of being the granary, of being the owner of gold mines and oil, of forests and waterfalls, of zootechnical possibilities and of being an important supplier of fruits, wines, wools and other products... The industrialisation of agriculture is called upon to lay the foundation for democracy and for the future of the Romanian people" (Clopoșel, 1937b: 84). "We are now an anti-economic and romantic state", Ion Clopoșel was writing in 1927, at the end of an article on the economic policies. The transport tariffs on the Romanian railways and the high export duties (not to mention the "unofficial" duties) were hindering animal exports and the development of Romanian livestock. In that sense, Ion Clopoșel was concluding: "The transportation and the duty are the most obstinate enemies of national prosperity, as they bear on the whole capacity of agricultural production" (Clopoșel, 1927b: 432).

3. The economy and economic policies in the inter-bellum Romania

One of the worst economic phenomena with negative impact on the post-Union Romania was that of inflation. The inflation was framed on the unexpected background of abandonment of some of the ideals of the Great Union: "New provinces have been offended, their leaders ostracised, their flourishing institutions materially boycotted. The politically and economically-alive forces lay in idleness, paralysed by the obstinate supremacy of Bucharest's plutocracy" (Clopoșel, 1924: 310). The solution, as Ion Clopoșel saw it, was the consolidation of Romania's external situation, such that to become a collateral for an eventual foreign loan, simultaneous to the entrenchment of a broadly democratic regime (Clopoșel, 1924: 310). Few years later, in 1927, in view of the unchanged external situation of the country, Ion Clopoșel was writing: "The Romanian state has the duty to create at the earliest precise rapports with neighbouring states, to align its interest to each in accordance to their agrarian or industrial character, to decide on custom duties and transit charges and to affirm the courage of entering treaties that will bring a consolidation and a much-awaited stability" (Clopoșel, 1927a: 91). His critical comments were also aimed, in context, at the "Through Ourselves" slogan-centred liberal policies and at the neglect of the external economic problems.

The inter-bellum economic policies of the newly created Romania led to the collapse of the mining industry in Ardeal (Transylvania). Ion Clopoșel wrote on the subject: "We weren't able to ensure Ardeal's mining industry the prosperity it deserves. It is like our horizons have closed, our gaze has been sidetracked, and we ignored embracing with our attention a very fervent field of economic activity, one of the great sources of national wealth" (Clopoșel, 1925: 585). The coal mines were losing ground in the face of massive imports from Poland and Hungary, but also due to an overall decrease in demand for coal. Gold mines also were becoming unprofitable due on one hand to the low price imposed by the state on gold purchase and on high price of explosives it made available to miners, on the other (Clopoșel, 1925: 585).

The drastic budgetary cuts in personnel and salaries that followed during the crisis were agreed on by Ion Clopoșel, although he considered that the state had the obligation to take all precautions "without abdicating from its permanent responsibilities for the health and culture of its people (Clopoșel, 1930b: 446). In his opinion, the economic life of the inter-bellum Romania was scarred both by a "lack of a systematic, intensive and general productivity, and by the inability to quickly realise the value of the primary articles on both the local and the external markets". The industrialisation was appreciated by Ion Clopoșel as being "shy, uncertain, hopeless and without perspective". To it, regional unbalances should be added: "Some regions, due to a privileged situation (easier transit, closeness to big cities, a more elevated conscience of the trader) have scored successes in that regard. Others however, notwithstanding resources of the same quality, are crawling in sleepiness and primitivism" (Clopoșel, 1931: 402). Ion Clopoșel was at one point a supporter of decentralisation: "We are a state of hirelings which is being impoverished by the vast apparatus of administrations which disproportionately swallow the financial availabilities. This is where the immense advantage of decentralisation comes about and which would open avenues of validation for local elements, would awaken the spirit of enterprise and the conscience towards the obligations of existence..." (Clopoșel, 1937a: 36).

4. Scientific foundation: the socio-economic survey

At the base of all transformations, Ion Clopoșel considered, there must lie the "critical spirit" - that is the scientific analysis and presentation of the identified problems. This is why Ion Clopoșel militates for the institutionalisation of social research. He will lay the foundation of the "Societatea de mâine" Institute of study and subsequently of the "Socio-Economic Movement - the Association of Publicists and Intellectuals with Permanent Interest for the Socio-Economic Problems" (Negru, 2005: 115). The Institute, Filipescu explains, had the following sections: Economics (agrarian, industrial and financial), Sanitary, Cultural and

Minorities. The "Socio-Economic Movement" also had inter-disciplinary goals (economical, social, cultural, psychological and medico-social). The support for the "Socio-Economic Movement" was probably rooted in Ion Clopoșel's faith in the importance of the socio-economical role of the press who keeps the problems at the surface, is a permanent stimulus for their understanding (Negru, 2003: 22). He believed in fact that the press can elicit in the political agenda changes towards a closer interest in public's agenda, which is concerned with different economic and social problems. Such connections are also analysed these days in applied social psychology (Roskos-Ewoldsen R. D. & Roskos-Ewoldsen, B., 2005; Pascaru, 2012).

Under a methodological perspective, the monographical method is almost self-evident, but, as Filipescu notices, unlike the Bucharest Sociological School that studied the villages separately, the monographies promoted under the auspices of "Societatea de mânăne" had their object of study entire regions, like that of Apuseni Mountains. The accent fell on the determination of "economical complexes" (Filipescu, 2001: 113), fact that was reflected in the proposed data collection survey instrument.

The main field activity methods of Ion Clopoșel were the direct observation, the questionnaire-based survey and the family budget study, for which a special data collection form was designed by "Societatea de mânăne" Institute. One must not forget, Negru suggests, the analysis of the official and personal documents and, as well, that of official statistics compiled by authorities (Negru, 2003: 90).

Notwithstanding methodological aspects, very important was also the systematisation of the inquiry in conjunction with the institutionalisation of the system of inquiries. The systematisation of the inquiry implied a kind of standardisation resulted from the determination of common thematic directions; the institutionalisation was underscored through special provisions in "Societatea de mânăne" Intellectual Association's statute in 1925. As Negru states, the "Association" set itself the goal of "the initiation of inquiries and the cultivation of the socio-economic sciences" which was to be accomplished through: a) the research of the economic, demographic, sanitary and cultural situation of the population; b) the study of the specific situation of ethnic minorities; c) the synthesis of the documentary material and the development of solutions to the problems encountered in the field; d) the publication of informative briefs and theoretical studies; e) the organisation of conferences and open schools; f) the support of facilities for social science specialists' formation (Negru, 2003: 94-95). Similar objectives would also be found in the "Socio-Economic Movement" of publicists established in 1926. As Negru explains, the purpose of the movement was: a) to conduct inquiries and monographies on the Romanian social realities; b) to elicit intellectual interest in social problems through public conferences and periodical publications; c) to publish works with social and economic content; d) to gather information that was necessary to the understanding of cultural and social situation of different regions of the country and make the information available to researchers and to authorities alike; e) to establish any form of economic enterprises that would help it in achieving its goals (Negru, 200: 102).

Since the compilation with own means of a large number of monographies was difficult, in 1926 *Societatea de mânăne* magazine organised a *contest of regional economic monographies* that were to be compiled with the help of a *standardised questionnaire* designed by Ion Clopoșel. The questionnaire was designed to collect comparable data to be used for writing regional social synthetic abstracts (Negru, 2003: 98).

The analysis of the questionnaire reveals that it is remarkable in how well it embodies the idea of an instrument destined to monographic research (Otovescu, 2009), having features that can be found in later research, like that of Bucharest Sociological School (Bădina, 1966), of the French sociological school from the period of rural renovation, in the seventies (Mucchielli, 1976) or of the Cluj sociological school of the eighties (Pascaru & Vedinaș, 2011). Specifically, in *Societatea de mânăne* questionnaire that was published in 1926, the first items concerned historical aspects (sources, historical documents, monuments), geographical aspects ("showing

the geographical altitudes", land plots - agricultural or otherwise, ownership of the plots) and demographical ones (population by nationality or religion, mixed marriages). They were then followed by a series of items specific to the economic domain, to its objective dimensions, and to its objectives. We can quote as examples issues like "how many families can make a living from working their own land and from husbandry... (show land use according to old land registry records)", what is the population's propensity for saving, "how does it invest its savings, does it own shares, do they make loans, everywhere statements on the notion of money and to what average value is the family budget estimated", "what are they selling and purchasing in fairs and what markets are they usually going to", "do they have the notion of associations", "where do they hire the local proletariat and for what kind of works (agricultural, mining, wood processing etc.)" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The economy is next examined in its local context through issues like "what are the sources of income, how many workshops, large and small, stores and pubs are there (the description of the products and their quantities, the identification of the economic and cultural preferences and necessities of the region), what type of economic role is assigned to pubs and stores" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). A special place in the questionnaire was taken by questions on the local development opportunities, as seen by the inhabitants themselves and on the demands they might have. Respondents were expected to also provide suggested solutions to the problems they were stating. Another special area of inquiry included issues of nourishment and clothing of the subjects, of the exterior and interior aspect of their dwellings - dimension that can be related to the ones centred on the health of the population, with particular attention to specific social problems like alcoholism (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The questionnaire also reveals concern for the problem of education, querying on the existence of schools, on "how many students are committed, enrolled and how many are just trying the school", if there is a need for student accommodation, on "who in the village reads newspapers, books, calendars (and which ones), on how many writers has the village produced" or if "there are any students, since the Union, that made it to superior schools" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). The spiritual and psycho-social dimensions were also explored through questions on the existence of churches, if they are frequented by believers, on the existence of sects, on "what spiritual phenomena is being observed", on whether people are "quarrelsome, humane, kind, suspicious", on "what nature are most of the litigations and what kind of sums are demanded at trials" (Clopoșel, 1926: 564). A distinct section of the questionnaire brings together local social life with connections to the external world in asking questions on "what is the social life of the village (traditions, gatherings, games, meetings)", on "the citizenship thinking (thoughts on life in the state, on law, on political parties, on village community)", and on what direction are the markets developing (connections to economically-related communities). In a final note, linguistic aspects on items brought into play are being approached, explaining some of the particular terms employed (Clopoșel, 1926: 564).

5. Conclusions

As a promoter of sociology with a solid economic foundation, Ion Clopoșel embarked on answering mainly to some practical demands of the economic and social reality of the post Great Union Romania and of the aspirations of building the Romanian unitary state. One should keep in mind what Andrei Negru underscored, the fact that the research activity of Ion Clopoșel had "a pronounced applied character, being geared towards the effort of supplying solutions to the social problems of the under-developed areas of the country, to the rural population's problems, in general" (Negru, 2005: 115).

In today's more frequently utilised terms, we can say that Ion Clopoșel has raised the status of the socio-economical analysis and diagnosis to the level of law when it comes to the design of realistic economic and social policies, strategies and measures. Nevertheless, it is notable that Ion Clopoșel's analysis is not the product of a rigid economic determinism, but rather a rigorous system of economic, social and psycho-cultural dimensions. It is what comes

out patently from the investigation instrument proposed - the multi-dimensional socio-economic questionnaire.

It is important to mention here that the empirical aspect of the sociography does not exclude the theoretical one. The sociography cannot be accomplished according to Ion Clopoșel, without a preceding theoretical preparation (Filipescu, 2001: 112).

The empirical field data-based socio-economical analyses, as well as the solutions developed for the uncovered problems, are being subordinated, like in Ion Clopoșel's case, to a certain vision of the economic and social progress. Andrei Negru asserts that being concerned with the problems of social progress "Ion Clopoșel affirms that the human society travels an ascending path at the end of which there must be a social organisation that will realise the unity of the individual and collective interests" (Negru, 2005: 114). Andrei Negru even postulates a law of social evolution according to which "progress is directly proportional related to the possibilities for enrichment of popular masses and inversely proportional to the monopoly of a greedy and profiteering economic minority" (Negru, 2005: 114). Ion Clopoșel's economic and social conception can be anchored at one point in the main currents of economical thinking of the inter-bellum Romania: the liberalism, neo-liberalism, socialism and others (Ionescu, 2014). At the same time though, his thinking appears to express a certain opposition to the perennial allure of modernity in Romania, a modernity that tends to affect a limited part of society, being "partial and beneficial only to certain groups" (Schifirneț, 2009: 16).

On a historical scale, just by simply taking into account Ion Clopoșel's analyses, one finds striking similarities between the three decades after the Great Union and the last three decades of the past century, all the way to our times, in regard to the problems the country was and is still facing: the scarcity of foreign capital and the chronically poor management of it when it becomes available, the neglect of the problems of the rural world, an unbalanced regional development, and the lack of a genuine decentralisation.

Casting today a look over these past decades, the assertion of *Societatea de mâine* magazine as a genuine centre of economic and social analysis in the inter-bellum period, reminds us almost one hundred years later, of the special role the socio-economic publications and its supporters could have in the promotion of a realistic economic and social policy.

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