



Whereto land fragmentation–land grabbing in Romania? The place of negotiation in reaching win–win community–based solutions



Ruxandra Mălina Petrescu-Mag^{a,1}, Dacina Crina Petrescu^{b,*,1},
Ioan Valentin Petrescu-Mag^{c,d}

^a Faculty of Environmental Science and Engineering, Babes-Bolyai University, 30 Fantanele Street, Cluj-Napoca 400294, Romania

^b Faculty of Business, Babes-Bolyai University, 7 Horea Street, Cluj-Napoca 400174, Romania

^c Faculty of Agriculture, University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj-Napoca, 3-5 Calea Manastur Street, Cluj-Napoca 400372, Romania

^d Doctoral School of Engineering, University of Oradea, 1 Universitatii Street, Oradea 410087, Romania

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 20 September 2016

Received in revised form 5 January 2017

Accepted 17 January 2017

Available online 7 March 2017

Keywords:

Land grabbing
Land fragmentation
Agriculture
Legislation
Negotiation
Romania

ABSTRACT

The present study seeks to discuss and advance the understanding of land fragmentation and land grabbing within Romania's economic historiography landmarks, depicting how the origins of the land property issues are deeply embedded politically, socially, and culturally in history and still strongly exist in today's collective mind. Scientific evidence on the perceptions and behaviors of land owners regarding land grabbing was obtained through a non-probabilistic survey. The data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire, which was applied through face-to-face interviews to a sample of 52 Romanian land owners from various regions of the country. The results show that in the land owners' perception, if land is sold to foreigners, national security is the most vulnerable aspect. Regarding the preference for the nationality of the land buyer, the majority of the people investigated prefer to sell to a Romanian buyer, thus making a clear statement in favor of the Romanian ownership of the land. The empirical results are placed in the context of a bottom-up approach—negotiation, with a high potential, unexplored in Romania, for implementing win–win agricultural solutions. Negotiation is valued as part of the answer to land fragmentation–land grabbing, a “back and forth” matter. The study recommends several measures for land use policy, tailored according to specific Romanian conditions, such as using an open access electronic registry of foreign land acquisitions, establishing a threshold for these acquisitions, and securing the preservation of the agricultural destination of land. In a political and economic context where land fragmentation and grabbing are two realities that are hard to deny and separate, a significant implication of the research is the enrichment of knowledge related to the sources of the “chronical” nature of fragmentation and to land owners' attitude toward land grabbing, thus contributing to the design and implementation of future integrative land use solutions.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation

Using official data, the paper brings together relevant judgments on the evolution of Romania's agriculture over an extended period of time, starting from the process of affirmation of national consciousness (i.e., the Romanian Revolution of 1848) until after 1989 (i.e., the year of the fall of communism). This paper focuses on the issue of land ownership and assumes that natural capital

is an important pillar of economic performance for every nation (Gylfason, 2000). The Romanian people value land as a symbolic and material ground on which the state produces and reproduces itself (Wolford et al., 2013). Moreover, land as a natural resource (besides its social and material value) carries a cultural significance into which societies place those components of the nonhuman world that are considered to be valuable (Bridge, 2009).

For Romania, the issue of land ownership is judged as an agricultural vulnerability from at least two perspectives. The first one revolves around land fragmentation, with devastating consequences on agricultural productivity, triggering detrimental social, political, and economic impacts. The second perspective, which has been more visible since 2014, refers to foreign land grabbing. Twenty-six years after the fall of communism, Romanian agriculture remains captive to the major deficiencies of its

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: crina.petrescu@tbs.ubbcluj.ro (D.C. Petrescu).

¹ These authors contributed equally to this work.

ownership and exploitation structures, with excessive polarization (i.e., small family farms owned by elderly persons and large farms controlled by international corporations) (Hartvigsen, 2014), leading to decapitalization and stagnation for individual farmers and the consolidation of dominant position of foreigners, with negative consequences on environment or food security. Thereby, performances of the Romanian agricultural sector, which is constantly subjected to assessments and analyses, remain relatively modest in contrast to the sector's natural potential and to citizens' expectations to adjust it rapidly under the influence of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

1.2. Background, aim, and novelty

The agriculture sector of Romania has not enjoyed a favorable perspective, even after 1990. Agricultural activity was inefficient or insufficiently effective, and, until recently, it was avoided by investors. However, it continues to represent a hot spot for a significant share of the population. Agriculture still provides about 30% of the total employment in Romania, the largest share in the European Union (EU) and six times higher than the EU average (European Commission, 2015).

The focus of the paper on this sector is justified from the perspective of the social, economic, and political roles that agriculture has played and still plays, providing a "safety net" for people who are not able to find work or to get satisfactory wages in other sectors of the economy. More and more often, agriculture has to compete for land with other land use types, although it has historically been the main user of rural land (Maasikamäe et al., 2014). Many Romanian farmers practice subsistence agriculture, and the agricultural landscape is dominated by a large number of small family farms exploiting narrow strips of land without achieving significant economic efficiency. It is worth mentioning that Romania covers an area of 238,000 km². Of this area, the agricultural land represents 57%, while forest land is about 30%. Most of the farms, 92.2% of the total number, are typically subsistence and semi-subsistence holdings, with less than 5 ha and managing around 30% of the agricultural area. The average farm size is much smaller than the average EU farm (e.g., 3.4-ha farm in Romania compared to 14.4-ha farm in the EU) (European Commission, 2015). It is acknowledged that productivity varies, depending not only on the surface for a rural worker but also on the degree of use of the production means. Thus, the direct link between farm size and the level of endowment with technology becomes more evident (Mazoyer and Roudart, 2002) *apud* (Postoiu and Busega, 2015). Unfortunately, much of the agricultural output of these farms is destined for self-consumption, while agricultural markets are not fully functional, as many basic agricultural products can be marketed only for ridiculously small sums to intermediaries. Often, Romanian farmers dispute the low subsidies, which they desperately need, while facing too high production costs compared to the selling prices (Dona, 2013). Additionally, farmers seek protection against outside competitors, as they are struggling against a dramatic situation. They are not able to withstand foreign competition, and they face a number of shortcomings; however, they continue to farm because they have no alternative. Apart from these economic and social consequences, fragmentation also implies technical problems (e.g., low field efficiency, the restricted access of machines in irregular plots, and the loss of harvest between plots) (del Corral et al., 2011), which do nothing but aggravate the first two consequences, creating a vicious cycle.

Besides the negative aspects of land fragmentation, beneficial ones are also recognized by researchers (Latruffe and Piet, 2014), mostly because of its association with hedges and natural corridors that are proved to have a positive impact on biodiversity, water fluxes, and the environment in general (Thenail et al., 2009).

Based on a literature review, Latruffe and Piet (2014) underline several positive impacts of land fragmentation on farm performance: the allocation of crops across plots is optimized in terms of crop match for soil types or local climatic conditions and of labor synchronization, resulting in potentially higher overall yields, greater opportunities for risk diversification, reduced production risks at the farm level, and higher attention paid to the management of remote land, thus compensating the negative effect of transportation.

Fragmentation hides other recent but important and long-term social, political, economic, and environmental implications, which are difficult to completely evaluate for Romania. They concern, in particular, the problem of land grabbing by certain foreign landowners. New farmland investments target Romania and other Central Eastern European countries due to low production costs and good environmental services (e.g., abundant water and chernozem, proper climatic conditions, and rich biodiversity). In Romania, small-scale farms have been vanishing rapidly and have been replaced by large holdings: between 2002 and 2010, 150,000 small farms disappeared, while large farming increased by 3% (National Institute of Statistics, 2012).

It is undeniable that Africa is the land-grabbing hot point, but research shows it is happening everywhere (Azadi et al., 2013) from South and Central America to Asia and in many parts of the global North, the former Soviet Eurasia. Farmland grabbing is still limited, but it is becoming a phenomenon in the EU. The geographical distribution of farmland grabbing in the EU is uneven and is particularly concentrated in Central Eastern European countries, as official documents show (European Parliament, 2015). However, reliable and transparent data about the scope and status of land acquisitions in this part of the world remain elusive (Antonelli et al., 2015).

This research emerged from the confrontation with a complex issue: the perpetuation of negative effects of land fragmentation, the extension of land grabbing, the absence of official information on the real dimension of the latter, and a lack of understanding of its implications amid a recent virulent mass media campaign of raising awareness on the subject. On the one hand, the research problems lie in a *de facto* context in which the dramatic removal of social and cultural functions of the land up to its brutal commodification through the global phenomenon of land grabbing is becoming more and more visible and accelerated in Romania, entailing risks that go far beyond economic consequences and envisaging food sovereignty, national security, loss of rural cultural patrimony, or environmental disasters. Additionally, grabbing brings along the intensification of social class differentiation based on wealth or age (Vandergeten et al., 2016), with the potential of increasing the already existing social conflicts. On the other hand, a *de jure* framework is featured by a poor connectivity with the practical realities of the rural world. The focus on Romania represents a novelty, as most of the studies are mainly dedicated to other parts of the world where the phenomenon is more visible.

The present contribution seeks to place the discussion of land grabbing in Romania's economic historiography landmarks, which are connected to the origins of "land property issue." This served to identify the land grabbing roots and then to advance the analysis in the context of the use of a bottom-up approach—negotiation, which is valued as part of the solution to this "back and forth" problem, land fragmentation—land grabbing. The framing of the large land acquisition concerns toward a vision which considers negotiation as the most adequate means to tackle and to solve them and to generate long-term positive results for all stakeholders is a novelty. Negotiation fueled by knowledge of Romanian land owners' perceptions and behaviors, extracted from empirical findings like the ones reported in this study, presents itself as a smart tool to answer the current national land management challenges. Knowledge of land owners' attitudes is mandatory for integrative solutions. Land

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6460818>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6460818>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)