

## COMMUNAL OWNERSHIP AND ITS ROLE IN DOLJ CO-OPERATIVE IN THE FIRST INTERWAR DECADE\*

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**Abstract:** Due to the basic economic reports in which it functioned, the communal had a relatively brief existence, determined by the contract period and the possibility to renew when needed. However organisational improved might have been or even their share in agriculture, the communal ownership couldn't replace peasants' missing land caused by the agrarian reports in the first half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** The XX<sup>th</sup> century, Dolj County, co-operative, leasing cooperatives, property.

Appropriating land to peasants accounted for the ongoing concern of politicians in the last two decades of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the XX<sup>th</sup>. The decrease of the plot of land, received by the agrarian reform from 1864, the burdensome farming deals, the leasing of the land at high prices, all of them have caused a constant state of feud between peasants and landowners or the tenant farmers.

With the objective of solving the matter of land, particularly after the event from 1907, there were taken several measures designed to alleviate the agrarian matter from Romania. Thus in 1908 it was drafted a new law of farming deals, which forbade "the tithe and bribe" admitting leased-in money and tithe in products<sup>1</sup>. The provisions of the same law required minimum salary for labourer's work, maximum of lease for the peasants excused, setting the opportunity of lodging communal pastures by selling willingly land of their properties. On 4/17 of April 1908 was set up the Rural Fund, a banking society which was to buy the owner's estates put up for sale, cut up into parcels and then selling to peasants in lots of 5 acres<sup>2</sup>. If we look at the balance sheet in sight of the First World War we

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<sup>1</sup> Matei Ionescu, *Însemnătatea și urmările răscoalei din 1907*, in "Revista de istorie", year X, no. 2/1957, Bucharest, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 8; M. Iosa, *Legislația agrară din perioada 1907–1912 și aplicarea ei*, in "Revista de istorie", year XVII, no. 2/1966, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 309.

<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Șandru, *Creditul agricol în România 1918–1944*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, 1985, p. 14.

notice that the outcome was more than humble. The society acquired only 127.263 acres of land and sold to peasants 19.589 acres<sup>3</sup>. Under these circumstances, the peasant continued to resent the urgent need for land. As an example, in Filiași, Dolj anywhere near the appropriating from 1921, out of 540 peasants only 192 possessed areas of land between 0.25–2 acres. Simoultane ously in Lipov, same county, 750 families owned 1.600 acres being forced to consider leased-in another 1.400 acres<sup>4</sup>. The most important means to fulfilment until the agrarian reform from 1921, there was the leasing community<sup>5</sup>.

Concerning the law on the establishment and control of countryside cooperative societies of production and consumption, from 1905 there were authorized as legal entities the associations set up for leasing and buying land. The procedure for constituting a community, as well as the ways of monitoring by the State of all these associations there were legislated in 1908<sup>6</sup>. A defining moment in the development of the rental communities, was established by the enactment of the law from April 1909 whose provisions entitled them to rent State owned properties or by public institutions. This kind of rental directly to community led to the removal of the intermediate tenant farmer, who before 1907 was prime favourite in renting properties owned by State, church or different institutions. After 1910, rental communities received the appropriate legal settlement having the appearance of some cooperative associations. They were imputed by the Central House of Popular Banks and Village Cooperatives, from whom they received the financial and moral support<sup>7</sup>.

The actions taken between 1907–1912 “have limited – as I. Scurtu said – to an extent the abuses from landowners and tenant farmers, as well as the fierce exploit to which the peasants were subject to until then”<sup>8</sup>, and also gave stimulus to the developing o communities for buying or renting estates, communities that in our country had appeared sporadically at the end of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century<sup>9</sup>. Bound to bring recovery to economic life in the rural environment, the communities were set up by means of popular banks which sometimes interceded the conclusion of

<sup>3</sup> Matei Ionescu, *art. cit.*, in *loc. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Al. Anghel, *Răscoala țăranilor din 1907 în fostul județ Dolj*, in “Revista de istorie”, year X, no. 2/1957, Bucharest, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Gheorghe Cristea, *Evoluția obștilor sătești de arendare între 1907–1916*, in “Revista de istorie”, no. 7/1984, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, pp. 226–240; Paul-Emanoil Barbu, *Obștile de arendare*, in “Arhivele Olteniei”, New Series, no. 10/1995, pp. 49–64; Paul-Emanoil Barbu, Nicu Marinescu, *Agricultura României în perioada 1864–1918*, Craiova, Spirit Românesc Publishing House, 1996, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> “Economic Journal”, *Mișcarea cooperatistă în România*, year XII, no. 41/9 October 1910, pp. 384–385.

<sup>7</sup> Paul-Emanoil Barbu, Nicu Marinescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147; Georgeta Ghionea, *Instituții cooperatiste doljene. Obștile de arendare*, in “Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu-Plopșor»”, no. XV/2014, Bucharest, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, pp. 110–111.

<sup>8</sup> I. Scurtu, *Contribuții privind mișcarea țăărănească din România în perioada 1907–1914*, in “Revista de istorie”, year XIX, no. 3/1968, Bucharest, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 501.

<sup>9</sup> C. Filipescu, *Obștea, satul și noul regim agrar*, Bucharest, 1943, p. 9; Paul-Emanoil Barbu, Nicu Marinescu, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

contracts between the association and the landlord. Within the cooperative movement in terms of their importance the communities have taken the second place after the credit cooperatives.

After the first World War measures that exhorted to setting up the leasing communities, sometimes were met with hostility. The complaints were determined by the fact that in the organization status of communal there were provisions that worked against most peasants. Thus, art. 4 of the status laid down that members of the corporate law “be owners of tools and cattle labour” thereby ruled out a large number of poor peasants, and in the art. 33 of the same status specified that “members could not pick up the harvest unless full payment of leases established by law”<sup>10</sup>. In Sadova, Dolj at the beginning of 1919, the peasants considered that “the setting up of communes by the State are just scams so the people won’t fuss”, in Segarcea people refused “to work in communal and requested the land distributed in individual lots”<sup>11</sup>. Against authorities also raised people from Bralostita and Gogosi-Brabova, who prevented distributing the lots in communal leasing in 1919<sup>12</sup>. After the land reform from 1921, the role of this institution became insignificant in our agrarian economy, being favoured peasants’ individual ownership.

Over the number of communal leasing, listed in the official statistics of that time, it is appropriate to clarify a couple of points. The data concerning their development presents official points of view and it refers to institutions that concluded the yearly balance-sheet. Although required to published their financial situation in the press of that time, the small cooperative institutions haven’t sent periodically their balance sheet, causing unavoidable fluctuations relating their number. Thus in the balance sheet concluded on 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1929, in *The Romanian Statistic Yearbook* there were recalled for the Old Kingdom, 143 communal leasing<sup>13</sup>, and within a recorded statistics of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry from Craiova there are mentioned 133<sup>14</sup>.

The evolution of the communal ownership in Dolj was written in accordance with the terms of economic and legal system typical for the period 1907-1921<sup>15</sup>. As a result in 1907 in the county there was only a communal ownership, in 1911 there were 14 with 17.232 acres in use and a yearly rent of 494.017 lei. During the First World War part of the communal cut off their activity, managing to regroup after 1918. On 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1922, *The Romanian Statistic Yearbook* recorded in Dolj only 6 communal ownership with 656 members and 1.591 acres in use<sup>16</sup>. In a

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<sup>10</sup> Tr. Lungu, M. Rusenescu, *Acțiuni de luptă ale țărănimii din România între 1917–1921*, in “Revista de istorie”, year XIV, no. 2/1961, Bucharest, The Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 307.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 308.

<sup>13</sup> *Anuarul statistic al României pe anul 1930*, Bucharest, 1932, pp. 126–139.

<sup>14</sup> County Service of National Archives Dolj, Chamber of Commerce and Industry Craiova Fund, file no. 59/1931, ff. 5–6 (continue to quote as SJAN Dolj).

<sup>15</sup> *Anuarul statistic al României pe anul 1912*, Bucharest, 1912, pp. 242–244.

<sup>16</sup> *Anuarul statistic al României pe anul 1922*, Bucharest, 1923, p. 110.

statistic from 1926 made by *The Romanian Statistic Yearbook* there were registered three communal in the county with 650 members and 729 acres in use<sup>17</sup>, while at the same time at the Central House of Ownership there were registered 46 communal ownership<sup>18</sup>. In this case we consider also the occasionally communal which by their nature were set up for a short period of time, “until the permanent give in property of lots” without being a firm presence in which care there weren’t mentioned in the statistics. We also take into consideration the possibility of an error relating the submission of their number. The missing sources makes difficult the re-enactment their evolution in Dolj. Under the circumstances I have tried on the account of sporadic data existing in the archives to present a short list of the most important communal ownership in the county, societies that functioned in the first interwar years<sup>19</sup>:

No.	Community name	Village	Establishment Date	Initial number of members	Surface	Rental term
1.	Grindeni <sup>20</sup>	Grindeni	1906	17	200 acres	1906–1916 1919–1924
2.	Estera Djuvara <sup>21</sup>	Afumati	23 <sup>rd</sup> of April 1908	86	366 acres	1908–1924
3.	People Voice <sup>22</sup>	Cârna	1908	208	9.000 acres	1909–1919
4.	Maracinele	Tecanau/ Marza	1910	–	–	1910–1920
5.	Maglavit	Maglavit	12 <sup>th</sup> of August 1911	798	4.539 acres	1912–1923
6.	Isvoru	Floresti	23 <sup>rd</sup> of April 1914	127	286 acres	1918–1924
7.	Villager’s emancipation	Floresti	23 <sup>rd</sup> of April 1914	67	147 acres	1917–1924
8.	The Plowman	Rojistea	1916	–	–	1917–1922

<sup>17</sup> *Anuarul statistic al României pe anul 1926*, Bucharest, 1927, p. 86.

<sup>18</sup> SJAN Dolj, Central Property Office Fund, file no. 1/1927, f. 12.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, file no. 7/1923, f. 29.

<sup>20</sup> “Grindeni” Communal rented Zavalul estate, a State property. It was set up with a subscribed share capital of 3.620 lei during 1906-1916. Under the same name it was re-founded in 1919, with the purpose of using the estates: General Maria Dragoescu, N. T. Popp, Madona Dudu Vestry, Soparalita Church, a State property and Stefan G. Popescu, all of them being situated in Grindeni Village, in teh „Official Monitor”, no. 121/17<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 6.973 (further quoted as: OM).

<sup>21</sup> “Estera Djuvara” Communal was set up with a subscribed capital of 22.020 lei and a reserve fund of 1.006 lei. Afumati estate within the communal ownership was Estera Djuvara’s property having 138 growers. In 1919 it was set up Estera Tr. Djuvara II Communal with the purpose of exploiting the same estate in OM, no. 122/ 18<sup>th</sup> September 1919, p. 7.007.

<sup>22</sup> “Glasul Poporului” [People voice] rented Carna-Maces, a State property. There were working 305 cultivators. The subscribed capital was 20.000 lei.

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9.	Bucovatu <sup>23</sup>	Bucovatul	1918	308	956 acres	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
10.	Bratovoiesti <sup>24</sup>	Bratovoiesti	–	–	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
11.	Cernelele <sup>25</sup>	Cernelele	1918	222	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
12.	Simnicu <sup>26</sup>	Simnicu	1918	357	577 acres	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
13.	Cosovenii de Sus <sup>27</sup>	Cosovenii de Sus	–	–	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
14.	Teascu <sup>28</sup>	Secuiu/ Teascu	1918	–	–	–
15.	Barza <sup>29</sup>	Barza	1919	211	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
16.	Albina	Bratovoiesti	23 <sup>rd</sup> of April 1914	76	54 acres	1919–1925
17.	Bechet Communal <sup>30</sup>	Bechet	1919	269	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
18.	Progresul <sup>31</sup>	Dobresti/ Caciulesti	1919	122	–	–

<sup>23</sup> “Bucovatu” Communal was set up aiming at “using, exploiting and improving” the following lands: 456 acres, owner Iulian N. Vrabiescu; 135 acres owner Ilie N. Predoi; 230 acres owner Constanta General Argetoianu, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.083.

<sup>24</sup> “Bratovoiesti” Communal was set up aiming “at ownership” the estates Geormanele and Verdesoaica, situated in Bratovoiesti and Georocu-Mare. The communal comprised inhabitants from Bratovoiesti and Georocu-Mare, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September, p. 7.083.

<sup>25</sup> “Cernelele” Communal was set up aiming at “using, exploiting and improving” the fields disposed by Jean C. Mihail, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.083.

<sup>26</sup> “Simnicu” Communal was set up aiming at “using, exploiting and improving” fields disposed by Elena Oteteliseanu (Simnicu estate) and 64,2 acres from Albesti estate owned by Andrei Pascu, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p.7.082.

<sup>27</sup> “Cosovenii de Sus” Communal was set up aiming at “using” Cosoveni estate owned by G. Plesea, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.084.

<sup>28</sup> “Teascu” Communal was set up aiming at “taking into use” Teascu estate and Glodutu, owned by Grigorie Popescu and Col. G. T. Manolescu, in OM, no. 123/19<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.084.

<sup>29</sup> “Barza” Communal was set up aiming to “take into use, exploiting and improving” the estates Barza, Nitoiesti, Tuguresti, and Roaba, owned by Ioan C. Mihail and State property, in OM, no. 137/7<sup>th</sup> of October 1919, p. 7.870.

<sup>30</sup> “Bechet” Communal was set up aiming to “take into use, exploiting and improving” state estates Bechet and Ostroveni as well as Madona Dudu Church Vestry place in Grindeni, Dolj county, in OM, no. 121/17<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 6.973.

<sup>31</sup> “Progresul” Communal was set up aiming at rental the estates N. Zane from Dobresti and Crown Domain Sadova, in OM, 121/17<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 6.973.

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19.	Locusteanca <sup>32</sup>	Locusteni	1919	503	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
20.	Gighera <sup>33</sup>	Gighera	1919	453	6.032 acres and 81 areas	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
21.	Nedeia <sup>34</sup>	Nedeia	1919	449	1.250 acres	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
22.	Corlatele <sup>35</sup>	Corlatele	1919	1.117	–	–
23.	Marsani <sup>36</sup>	Marsani	1919	351	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
24.	Boureni <sup>37</sup>	Boureni	1919	–	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
25.	Balta Verde <sup>38</sup>	Balta verde	1919	152	287 acres	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
26.	Stoina	Stoina	1919	202	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
27.	Mierea Birmici <sup>39</sup>	Mierea Birmici	1919	380	–	“up to definite giving in property of the lots”
28.	Isalnita	Isalnita	1 <sup>st</sup> of April 1921	729	792 acres	1922–1923
29.	Avantul	Cemele/Atarnati	1 <sup>st</sup> of April 1921	293	355 acres	1922–1923

*Source:* data extracted by the author from the Official Monitor and County Service of National Archives Dolj.

<sup>32</sup> “Locusteanca” Communal was set up aiming “leasing” General Gigartu estate and Crown Domanin Sadova, in OM, no. 121/17<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 6.973.

<sup>33</sup> “Gighera” Communal, aimed at leasing Gangioara-Comosteni-Gighera, in the property of Brancoveanu settlements, in OM, no. 14/ 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1919, p.791.

<sup>34</sup> “Nedeia” Communal was set up to lease Gangiova-Comosteni, Gighera in the ownership of Brancoveanu settlements, in OM, no. 14/3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1919, p.791.

<sup>35</sup> “Corlatele” Communal was set up to lease the estate of M. B. Georgescu, in OM, no. 14/3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1919, p.791.

<sup>36</sup> “Marsani” Communal was set up to lease Sadova estate, in the property of Crown Domain, in OM, no. 121/17<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 6.073.

<sup>37</sup> “Boureni” Communal was set up aiming to “lease the estate” in the property of prince C. Basarab Brancoveanu, in OM, no. 122/18<sup>th</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.007.

<sup>38</sup> “Balta Verde” Communal was set up to lease the estate Balta Verde, in the State property, in OM, no. 01/15<sup>th</sup> of April 1919, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> “Mierea Birmici” Communal was set up to lease the estates Valuta and Mierea, in the property of N. I. Predescu and Dem T. Angelescu, in OM, no. 126/23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1919, p. 7.257.

The activity of these communal based on a series of principles of which brief transition into the journal is of interest even today. The communal had the necessary funds to practice a cost effective agriculture, made through their own financial means (subscribed and paid share capital and reserve fund) and foreign financial means (loans taken out by Central House of Popular Banks or directly from the popular banks). Their range of activity was in the village where inhabitants worked on communal ownership, social responsibility was solidarity and unlimited, communal functions and attributes were several (distributing land, supplying, ride-sharing of agricultural machinery, jointly sale of products etc.) and in the case the estate was larger than 500 acres and the communal consisted of financial means, the members had to practice a rational agriculture on the ground of a program drawn by an agronomist, the *specialist* who hold the use of the estate got leased-in<sup>40</sup>. As a whole the surface of the land leased-in relied on their economic power and workforce. Of the overall 29 that functioned until 1925 in Dolj 4 of them were over 1.000 acres. The largest communal ownership "People Voice" had 305 farmers and exploited a domain of State (Carna-Maces) of 9.000 acres<sup>41</sup>. A second place was taken by Gighera with 453 farmers, a communal exploited Gangioara-Comosteni-Gighera the ownership of Brancoveanu establishments with a surface of 6.032 acres and 81 areas. Next were placing Maglavit (4.539 acres) and Nedeia Communal (1.250 acres).

Concerning the average area for a corporate, that was changed from year to year with slightly growing but also decreasing. In accordance with legal depositions, each member could use at maximum 10 acres of culture field. If we take into consideration the data from the statistic yearbook, in 1913 in Dolj worked average size for a man was 4,30 acres<sup>42</sup>.

The peasant worked by himself the received lot with his own means in accordance with an exploiting plan established by the communal. The estate was seeded in compact fields with the same culture plant, the seed being used came from the State farms or from well-known farmers. The farm works performed along the year took place separately by each member with machines or rented tools bought by the communal.

In the interwar period the legal control upon the cooperatives in general and communal ownership, in particular has been exercised through the union of cooperatives from Oltenia. In the balance sheet from 1929, the control committee of the union had taken 113 sessions in which it solved than 241 cases of abuse,

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<sup>40</sup> SJAN Dolj, Madona Dudu Vestry Fund, file no. 35/1914, ff 28, 73; Mihai Serban, *Problemele noastre social-agrare*, Bucharest, 1914, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> *Anuarul băncilor populare și cooperativelor sătești din România pe anul 1909*, Bucharest, 1911, p. 348.

<sup>42</sup> *Anuarul statistic al României pe anul 1915*, Bucharest, 1916, p. 116.

majority within communal ownership<sup>43</sup>. The communal ownership and buying fields lost their importance after 1921, when the emphasis was on the development of small peasant household in agriculture. On 31<sup>st</sup> of December the Union of Cooperatives from Oltenia registered in Dolj 13 communal ownership and buying land, 2 of them being in a process of run-off<sup>44</sup>. Furthermore, at Romania's level at the end of 1939 there were 38 communal ownership with 4.421 members, accounting for less than 6% of all cooperatives from Romania.

Until the First World War the communal ownership have played an important role in the economy of the country. Seen as model farms, the peasants were accustomed to practice rational culture with better productions, to grow and maintain bred animals, all led to significant changes in their lifestyle. Definitely within the communal ownership the agriculture was profitable and overstepped rudimentary exploitation before 1907.

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<sup>43</sup> SJAN Dolj, Craiova Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fund, file no. 59/1931, f. 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Craiova Cooperative Union*, The management board's Minute and Auditor's Report to General Assembly from 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1933, Craiova, 1934, p. 9.