

The Contemporary Profile of the Romanian Peasant Portrayed in the ‘Village Antenna’ Radio Station Programs

Assistant Professor Mădălina Moraru, Ph. D.
University of Bucharest, Romania
moraru_mada@yahoo.com

Abstract: Media intake throughout the Romanian countryside takes into account the targeted audience, the final result being an adjustment to its needs. The metamorphosis of the Romanian village into a town and the EU policies are the main events which determined the radio stations whose main target was the rural population, to change their approaches. As a result, there could be noticed a discrepancy between the audience’s background and the data broadcast. The information is often so highly specialized that its abstract level does not reach the common people who do not listen to the radio station any longer. Therefore, the audience of the “Village Antenna” radio channel became more diverse, given the migration from villages to cities. This is a way of doing away with the traditional village, namely a change within the structure of the inhabitants: the present inhabitants also include small enterprise people, farmers, white-collar people, plus political and administration authorities. The genuine countryman still constitutes the large majority, but he appears either as a future European farmer or as an outsider since his interests and projects do not match his profile.

Keywords: radio, village, tradition, innovation, projects.

1. Introduction

Each national space is strongly represented by its old and classical communities, whose features can be described by the following words: people, life-style, activities, tradition. Romanian villages combine two perspectives on the countryside life: the traditional one and the new one, that is a result of political and economic globalization. Therefore, the peasant profile has been obviously changed in the last few years, as a consequence of Romania’s integration into the European Union in 2007. The new opportunities and perspectives given by this event have become the most frequent topics of media approaches. A niche radio channel, as “Antena Satului” (the “Village Antenna” radio station) broadcasts only for a specialized target, namely peasants, by exploiting their contemporary interests and values. Just like in advertising, the target dominates the marketing process, and its image must be reflected more accurately and in a very detailed manner. The impact on the

audience relies on how well the target can be profiled during a broadcast and how relevant the topic is for the listeners. A niche broadcast concentrates on one single direction and on a homogeneous target, who can be differentiated according to some details concerning their life in a very specific area, which is, in this case, the rural world.

2. The historical and traditional perspective on the Romanian countryside over the years

In the beginning of the last century, the philosopher and poet Lucian Blaga came up with the “matrix style” concept, which descends from the ontology of the rural community and regards the relationship between tradition and modernity. The spatial horizon is one of the factors included in this concept and it explains the spiritual style of a community and the inner dimension of its people (Blaga 1985: 200-202). The philosopher starts searching for a topos which explains the evolution of the Romanian village over ages, by finding a special space called “the mioritic space” (Blaga 1985: 111-118), inspired by a well-known popular ballad, “Miorița”. This space was a metaphor for the village resistance against time pressure, developed around its tradition, culture, life-style. The concept is based on Blaga’s opinion about two cultural types: *the major culture*, that glorified the state as a relationship between ethnicity-community-nation, and *the minor culture*, specific to the Romanian village. Later, Claude Karnoouh ([1990] 1994: 160) analyzed this perspective and concluded that Blaga’s concepts about village ontology may be explained as a rejection of the Occident:

Blaga’s search for a village ontology as an instrument of national spiritual restoration is related rather to a kind of far exorcism of the Occident. (translated into English by M.M).

In other words, Blaga strongly emphasized the traditional and immutable structure of the Romanian village over ages, despite the political and historical changes. In 1978 Constantin Noica continues to write about the Romanian spirituality and its stability over time against political pressure, in his book entitled *Sentimentul românesc al ființei/ The Romanian Sense of Being*. His main view relating to this topic was the harmony of our spirituality, that justifies the weaving of traditional roots with the innovations of time, without the rejection of novelty:

Both the nature of this folk culture and the way we meet its values do not go against the century innovations but they are interwoven better with them in an unexpected

way (Noica 1978: 11, translated into English by M.M).

According to his opinion, the economic and political novelty cannot completely change life-styles, the popular culture and the ancestral values of the Romanian people also have an important influence, as Blaga suggested.

Taking into account the major political change brought by the Romania integration into European Union (EU) in 2007, the present study will prove how far the Romanian contemporary village is from Blaga's perspective from the last century, and how close to Noica's view. The most appropriate study of the contemporary spiritual reality of the authentic Romanian nature belongs to Mircea Vulcănescu, in an article suggestively entitled, "Dimensiunea românească a existenței"/"The Romanian Sense of Being". Vulcănescu made a fine distinction between, on the one hand, the Romanian character of our people, which is unchanging, and, on the other hand, its social life in a community, which is very adaptable to new things (Vulcănescu 1996: 119-120). According to Vulcănescu, the peasant transferred into a bourgeois life may lose some of his roots, giving him the opportunity of being moulded according to the new social standards, because he is tempted by this new life-style. Since this analysis was written in 1943, when the village image was considered completely primitive and inferior to the city, the article bears the mark of the historical moment. Starting from Vulcănescu's perspective, we put forward the following idea: the Romanian village goes through a similar experience nowadays, as a result of the political progress of the country and of the new phenomenon of European synchronization. Eugen Lovinescu (1973: 404) associated the European synchronization with the cultural recovery during the interwar ages. At that time, Romania quickly caught up with the European cultural progress. Nowadays, our country is trying to recover from the economic and social gap, which is differently expressed in the rural world and in the urban one.

3. The evolution of the Romanian rural space throughout history

Even if it is not the appropriate time and place to make a historical review of the Romanian village, a good organization of its features over the ages might help us present the actual image of the peasants. Our intention focuses on discovering on the one hand, how the contemporary background has changed and on the other hand, how the traditional image of the Romanian village has preserved throughout time. According to Roman (2004: 161-166), there are three chronologic stages of rural space, each of them individualized by the main activities and life-styles in a village.

In the first stage, temporally located by the end of the first half of the last century, this space was completely associated with food production, based on land cultivation, and identified as “the area of the propensity of agricultural activities” (Roman 2004: 163, translated into English by M.M). The difference between the rural space and the urban one consists in the types of activities in both areas: the non-commercial work in villages in opposition to commercial and industrial work in cities.

The second stage, called “village urbanization” (Roman 2004: 163), was visible in the last half of the last century, after WW II. This was, without any doubt, the moment of agricultural industrialization and of professional specialization in this field. At that time, the village reflected the evolution of the closest city, and encouraged the agro-touristic development, as a form of reducing the distance between the rural and urban life-style. One of the biggest steps was the modernization of land cultivation, which meant the emergence of new professions, such as engineers, vets and farmers.

The next step is “the reactivation of the environment” (Roman 2004: 165), which means the transition from the rural village to the green village, as a consequence of the decrease in agricultural areas and land workers. By this time, the criteria for studying the village image rely on demographic and economic features, without any connection to the agricultural dimension. Another significant characteristic comes from the overlapping of the rural environment with the natural and ecological one.

As far as we are concerned, we can take into account another stage of the village in Romania nowadays, which can be called the time of the Europeanization in agriculture as a result of our integration into the European Union. In this case, we are faced with another form of “being traditional” and with a synthesis of all the previous village types. This perspective could be easily explained: the Communist regime changed the entire countryside image through forced collectivization and peasant pauperization. After Ceaușescu had destroyed many villages in order to have workers on construction sites, Romanian people came back to find another form of life, but not necessarily for making agriculture a profitable business. The old peasants did not change their life-style and their children refused to keep on living by working the land. Nowadays we have many demographic categories living in the same area:

- genuine peasants, who are old and not interested in working the land using modern tools;

- the new village inhabitants, who just live there, because they work in the cities nearby;
- the young specialists who try to change the village image, though not successfully every time;
- the middle-aged people who still make a living by commercializing products (so-called ecologist agriculture) very well sold in cities, such as milk, cheese, vegetables. They make a real business out of these products.

Therefore, the rural space is perceived as a green and bright space, on the one hand, and as a commercial one, on the other hand. The third image describes an old-fashioned and conservative space, where people still do not completely accept innovations. The question we want to answer in this article is what kind of rural profiles we can discover in this habitat.

4. Media approach regarding the contemporary image of the Romanian village

Before the Decembrist Revolution from 1989, Romanian peasants represented a main target for some TV and radio broadcasts on the national channel. At that time, the village demographic structure was quite simple: collectivized peasants and communist engineers, who had to exceed the annual production per hectare. Nowadays, the situation is different for a threefold reason:

- firstly, media production is more diverse and split according to the audience and target segmentation;
- secondly, old countryside people do not show a relevant interest in anything else but in tradition, agriculture not being their point of interest any longer;
- thirdly, land production became a political problem, because it was one of the most important factors which influenced the Romanian integration into EU in 2007. After this event, the magic word has become European funds whose purpose is to modernize our agriculture and to bring some profit. For these reasons, the media focuses on the political and economic life aspects that were integrated in the old broadcasts. Therefore, the old radio station “Antena Satului” /”The Village Antenna” and TVR 1 or TVR 2 preserved their classical broadcast formats dedicated to the rural world. “Antena Satului” is a national radio station, which came up on the market after the Revolution, on 25th December 1991 (on Christmas day)

with the niche positioning of a radio about the countryside life. It is the only radio station specialized in the problems and features of the Romanian village, it broadcast for only five hours in the beginning, and now it is active 16 hours a day, between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. This channel focuses on rural realities, on aspects of tradition and folklore, on popular music recorded inside the National Radio. The radio station has been improving its schedule yearly, focusing on new topics in different types of broadcasts. All they did was to adapt the program to the new interests of the target group without giving up the old formats and to attract the public's attention with some new topics.

The variety of broadcasts reinforces Bakenhus's opinion that modern radio is a "service provider" because it offers its listeners practical information: "As a provider of media services, the radio also represents the listener's agendas" (Bakenhus [1996] 1998: 46-47, translated into English by M.M). Broadcast formats are almost the same: the reportage (for example *Reporter pe drum de țară / Reporter along a countryside road*), the interviews and the seasonal soft news interwoven in between. They used to combine several radio formats, broadcasting the show by using the insertion technique, mentioned by Haas, Fridge and Zimmert [1991] 2001: 216). This type of broadcasting includes a special atmosphere recorded inside the village, as a credible sign of authenticity, and it is enriched by short calls, some voice insertions and short interviews. There are also some radio shows easy to be integrated in what Haas, Fridge and Zimmert labelled as "the monothematic broadcast", meaning that the whole program develops only around one single topic, such as *Fermier european/ The European farmer*, which focuses on the new land worker.

After this introductory and descriptive presentation, we are going to analyse several broadcasts in order to draw a contemporary profile of the Romanian village inhabitants. The connection between the broadcast and the target audience who listen to it will allow us to put forward the following hypotheses: (1) the listener has some features and interests highlighted by the main topic of the radio show; (2) these features framed in the radio shows provide several peasant profiles. These profiles are the result of the content analysis applied on the radio programmes that offered two perspectives on the peasant: on the one hand, there were profiles made by journalists and invited speakers, and on the other hand, profiles made by the countryside people who were interviewed.

5. Research methodology

The sampling of the actual research consisted in 19 radio programs, broadcast on the „Antena Satului”/ “The Village Antena” radio station, between May and June 2008. FJCS (The Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences) took charge of the survey as part of a project whose objective was to analyze the mass-media intake covering the Romanian countryside.¹ The main purpose was to provide a profile of the traditional and European identity throughout the Romanian countryside.

The programs we monitored were „Sat românesc, sat european”/”Romanian village-European Village”, „Orizonturi europene” /”European Horizons”, „Viața la țară ”/ “Life in the Countryside” and they displayed very similar subject patterns, the only difference lying in the balance between tradition and innovation. In order to test our hypotheses, we set down some research hypotheses, using content analysis. According to Winner and Dominick, the content analysis tests hypotheses of message characteristics and researches the media content of the rural world:

Many content analyses are reality checks, in which the portrayal of a certain group, phenomenon, trait, or characteristic is assessed against a standard taken from real life (Winner, Dominick 1997: 114).

Applying this method to the radio or TV media, research leads us to the development of several profiles and life-styles. We intended to compare the data provided by these programs and the needs of the rural inhabitants, in order to reach a profile of the radio listener. We aimed at interpreting the quantitative research data provided by the analysis. The approach made in this article does not follow the steps of the primary research. It only focuses on the informal parts, using the quantitative facts to drive down to the very core of the analysis. The variables used in order to mould the radio listener’s profile and the frequency criteria will help us to formulate the conclusions of the present research.

5.1. Research hypotheses

We formulated our hypotheses taking into account the very characteristics of the content analysis, where the record unit consists in the categories the media intake

¹ The research for this article was performed within the research project (Project IDEI –UB, Contract No. 12/2008) carried out by the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies (University of Bucharest) between 2008-2009 on the topic: *Models of mass media consumer in the Romanian rural world: traditional /local identities, European identities.*

focused on. The analytic unit is the statement, and the paragraph is the context unit (underlined by every person interviewed). Briefly, the hypotheses focus on the information provided in the show, on the guests in the show, on the balance of tradition and innovation and the media intaker life-style. We have built up the premises of the research progressively, preserving a mutual dependence between them:

- the information supplied by radio broadcasts aims at a certain type of audience;
- the relationship between the nature of information and the respective radio broadcast guest consists in a special profile of the target audience;
- the aspects of the agricultural world reflect themselves in the relationship between tradition and innovation, and between the Romanian village and the European village.

5.2. Selected variables

These variables are very important since they set up the proper information in order to shape the countryside media consumer. Directly linked to the above-mentioned hypotheses, these variables will be classified in specific areas of interest:

- the type of the broadcast guest: experts in agricultural area, farmers, peasants;
- information about the activities and occupations in the agricultural environment, such as beekeeping, growing domestic animals, cultivation of land, forestry, vineyard culture, fishing;
- information about the European Union: funds, projects, legislation, European associations;
- rural areas from Romania and from abroad (Serbia, Germany, Hungary, France, Austria).

The analysis of each variable has provided the following quantitative data:

5.2.1. Broadcast Guest Type: agricultural experts, farmers, peasants.

Out of the six programs investigated in our study, the frequency criteria show that the broadcast featuring the highest number of experts is “European Horizons”, namely 18. The explanation for this number lies in the format that the station chose

for the program on May, 29, namely as a live debate broadcast from the International Agricultural Fair.

Every other similar show actually invited professionals: engineers, Agricultural Institute professors, company managers. As the profile of the programs is concerned, there could be observed some differences if we take into account the provided data and the scientific approach of the issues. The presence of the simple countrymen is scarce and they are mainly present only through phone interviews. Within this category, we can also include the program “European Horizons”. We can infer that there is a balance between data providers and their receivers. There could be observed a discrepancy between the title of the program and the type of the guests. Such an example is the program “Romanian Village, European Village” which should have been focused on the farmers’ perception of European agricultural issues, but instead, during the period of our analysis, there was invited only one peasant. On the other side, “Life in the Countryside” hosts intellectual, academic people interested in life-style and tradition or foreign professionals who contribute through their expertise.

After the analysis of this variable, we can draw the following conclusion: programs hosting a large range of professionals cover many specific issues and reach out to a diverse audience. This conclusion is based on the diversified range of the guests, language peculiarities (stylistic registers), and the theoretical and practical approach to the given issues. Out of a total of 63 guests, 34 were professionals, namely 54%. Whereas the presence of professionals could be labeled as a sign of credibility, the presence of common people takes everyone closer to common life aspects.

5.2.2. Information about the activities and occupations in the agricultural environment, such as beekeeping, growing domestic animals, land cultivation, forestry, vineyard culture, fishing

“Romanian Village, European Village” broadcasts the largest and most diverse range of information, animal growing being the issue with the greatest coverage. The “European Horizons” program provided six issues on cropping and farming machines. Regardless the amount of information, it results that people focus towards a practical approach and procedures aimed to productivity. A new term, such as ecological farming, is not very often mentioned. The same phenomenon happens with issues on fishing, beekeeping, and viticulture because of the small number of entrepreneurs in these fields. The main broadcasts focus on cereal farming, the

wheat cereal, especially the final day of harvest, being the most mentioned issue.

The analysis of this variable shows that 77% of the items are focused on animal growing, the emphasis being laid on farm associations and on individual farmers. This quantitative approach also reveals that the most used view has a specific character, rather than a general one. Thus, we may shape the profile of the “Antenna Village” radio listener: the common peasant is interested in getting professional advice on topics such as animal growing or cereal farming from a highly specialized person.

5.2.3. Information about the European Union: funds, projects, legislation, European associations

It could be easily noticed that all the programs under study allow the greatest amount of time for issues on European projects and funds. The radio producers became aware of the importance of this topic and therefore, a large number of professionals were invited to talk about the necessary procedures, providing statistics and explanations about the whole process development. There are two main axes of debate: on the one hand, the attitude towards the requested funds and, on the other hand, the difficulties Romania has encountered in applying for them. Despite the great amount of time devoted to this issue, there could be noticed a tendency towards statements that are mainly based on predictions and promises since there are not mentioned too many particular cases and success-stories are scarcely presented.

The main purpose of these debates is to inform not only the village official representatives about the way in which to apply for the European funds, but also the common farmer who can get individual financial support from the EU. The conclusion that could be drawn from all these debates is that people are not informed correctly and in due time, that their involvement is not successful since there is poor communication between farmers and the official representatives of the county halls. Despite the fact that the presence of the farmers during the radio programs is very scarce, there could have been highlighted some shortcomings in the communication process between the farmers and authorities: the poor organization within the village halls, the lack of fund transfer from local authorities, the lack of European expertise.

To sum up, programs do broadcast information about European funds, but there is no visible efficiency. They rather try to take the pulse of the farming environment, providing no solutions. Therefore, we might conclude that these programs do not

reach their media consumption goal, because, chronologically speaking, there is no informational progress recorded, from one program to another. In addition, there is a very unbalanced extent of data distribution, depending on the variables selected for research, namely one cannot notice a relevant interest in what the whole problematic range is concerned. This data distribution consists in fleeting information about two important areas in the modernization of Romanian agriculture: local projects developed in the countryside and projects funded by the European Union. None of them is well-represented in our quantitative analysis: only 27.27% of the information focuses on agricultural projects and 20% on European funds.

5.2.5. Rural areas from Romania and abroad (Serbia, Germany, Hungary, France, Austria)

Every program in our analysis broadcasts a generous range of local information, collected from every county. This implies that informing the audience becomes more varied and reaches out to almost all the listeners in our country. Romanian villages are 48% present in the “Antenna Village” programs. Even more, there are provided particular data coming from different villages and rural communities (Letca, Râsuceni, Colonești), viewed as specific cases standing for strong proof of real experience, since the data are provided by local people. Some counties are a constant presence: Constanța, Suceava, Iași, Tulcea, Satu Mare, underlining the relevance of data provided from these areas. It is natural for most regions of Romania to be mentioned, but there could be noticed a quite high rate (32% of the total of mentions of regions) of areas from abroad mentioned during the “Antenna Village” programs. The International Agriculture Fair – Timagrim (6th edition) was the perfect situational context for the embedding of European guests who came into Romania to exhibit their farming machines and products. We consider that the geographical criterion (areas from Romania and from abroad) is very relevant since one important variable mentioned in our study focused on information provided by the European Union.

6. The listener’s profile – the qualitative data analysis

6.1. The information resulted from the quantitative analysis

As it can be inferred, the dominant type of information refers to the agricultural world. The main topic and the broadcasting context constitute important elements

for the information density. The data provided by the quantitative analysis was structured on a threefold aspect:

- the journalistic aspect (internal and external news that obviously report on events from agricultural area);
- the expertise aspect;
- the experience aspect (provided by broadcast listeners: farmers and peasants).

The first two aspects are very well represented in all the radio broadcasts studied, but the last one has been rarely observed. The monographic aspect (views on traditions and celebrations) is also present, but unfortunately it was mentioned only once in the "Viața la țară"/ "Life in the Countryside" program. The expertise belongs both to external and internal experts. Most broadcasts tackle the problem regarding the integration of Romanian agriculture into the European Union, but, unfortunately, statistics prove that the agrarian population is insufficiently informed about this issue.

6.2. The type of the rural target audience – an analysis of radio guests

6.2.1. Authorities of the rural world: the clerks in Local Councils and Town Halls

This target audience mainly results from the information on the European funds. The data refer especially to the necessary procedures to be applied for the various projects in order to receive European funds. This type of listener is also interested in the legislation concerning rural projects.

6.2.2. Farmers with initiative (a sense of self-initiative)

These people are often invited to participate in broadcasts, because they have the information on modern strategies in agriculture. The image the broadcast suggested about them is that of a listener with a high level of understanding, interested in innovation and progress. In most broadcasts, they are portrayed as the future European farmers, who can more easily accept the changes. They are also the ones receiving the information from abroad. New data come from fields, such as ecological or biological agriculture, their main target being the farmers since they are actually oriented on performance and profit. As for their age, this type of target audience is quite young, thus they come with an innovative way of dealing with these issues.

6.2.3. *The Peasants*

This type of target audience is less interested in technical information and in the scientific explanations. They mainly rely on their experience in the field and they accept changes with difficulty. The information for them often has a specific character, such as weather forecast, new species, new breeds, and guidance for improving crops. Peasants often own only small portions of land and many times do they have no information about European funds, because they do not use all the possibilities to get this money. In their world, radio is perhaps the only source of information. As for their age, they are quite elderly, living their entire lives in the rural area, and working the land in the traditional way.

6.2.4 *Intellectuals in the village world*

The members of this target audience have many ways of getting informed, but they have no clear interest in working the land. Their interest mainly focuses on monographic and educational aspects of the rural world. Most of the times, teachers are the ones that explain to children the influence of the environment or their involvement in village activities. Their role is to witness the events that take place in the agricultural space and to disseminate all this information.

6.3. *Listeners' profiles resulting from the information provided by the broadcasts*

6.3.1. The first profile is *the rural middle-class inhabitant* interested in and informed about the progress in agriculture, regarded as a source of income, as a profitable business.

6.3.2. The second profile belongs to *the totally uninformed peasant*, a mere land worker, interested only in practical data regarding the land cultivation or the weather forecast.

6.3.3. The third profile is *the specialist*: the engineer, the farming fair organizers, the farm manager, the agrarian economist, the authorities from the Ministry of Agriculture. These are interested in the progress of agriculture and in making projects that can be funded by the European Union.

6.3.4. The last profile refers to *intellectuals, specialists* preoccupied by monographic aspects, such as the study of traditions and local myths. This type of information is restricted and does not regard the peasant's relationship with his land, but rather his traditional, primordial way of living.

6.4. The Relationship between the informational level and the target audience

It is obvious that the level of the information which is made available is different from one target audience to the other. For example, the information specific to the agricultural field, put into a technical language, is not available to average peasants. The details on the legislation also need certain general knowledge and studies in law, so they are not meant for the average peasants. The experts' reasons being mainly focused on neologisms, there could be observed a mismatch between the profile of the average peasant and the level of the information given. Even if this result can look contradictory to the conclusion of the quantitative analysis, the discrepancy lies in the way in which the basic notions necessary to actual farming in Romania is "wrapped": on the one hand, there are presented few basic notions, and on the other hand, there could be observed a larger number of new data presented in specialized terms. Average peasants are not interested in biological or ecological agriculture or genetic modifications, but rather in guidance for obtaining their own crops.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the pattern of the broadcasts analyzed is focused on the modern farmers, who want to see the Romanian village as a European one. Moreover, most of the details about the agriculture sustained by European funds need the acknowledgment of specific steps and specific legislation, and even so the support is given mainly to those who see agriculture as a profitable business in the future. It is directed towards those who own large agricultural areas and built modern farms. This European pattern cannot be found in the life of the average, authentic Romanian peasants, who represent the majority of rural inhabitants in our country. Given these research results, the Romanian village re-shaped its image and came out with new interests which might go beyond the traditional and local aspects. The meaning of the old word "peasants" has been changing for a couple of years in the media, being replaced by the attention given to farmers, who must be the new generation synchronized with the European requests regarding rural communities. The target levels resulted from our study emphasize this transition from peasants to farmers, which is constantly mentioned in the media.

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