

DIOȘTI VILLAGE: A SOCIOLOGICAL MODEL TO FOLLOW

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Abstract

The model village represents an innovative idea and project of the Bucharest School of Sociology, which was brought to life in the interwar timeframe as part of the continuous efforts to improve the quality of life in the rural areas of Great Romania. Thus, thousands of work hours were synthesized and applied at Dioști village, a small village that was rapidly transforming into a living model-to-follow. The transformation was a holistic one: the architectural specificity was saved and promoted, the cultural and moral values were promoted, the administrative, economic, and social life was upgrading. The entire process was supervised by Gheorghe Focșa, one of Dimitrie Gusti's assistants that also managed to create a brief presentation of what had been done in Dioști in only two years of intensive work.

Keywords: Bucharest School of Sociology, model village, Gheorghe Focșa, social role, peasant civilization and spirituality.

The Bucharest school of sociology

The very existence of the cities is entirely dependent upon the production and success of the rural areas, and every imbalance in the city-village interdependence can put in jeopardy the entire national system (economic, political, social and cultural). This is a reality that was very well understood by the members of the Bucharest School of Sociology, an institution created by Dimitrie Gusti that gained the respect of similar theoretical movements across the globe (Europe and America especially) due to its advanced research methods and analysis in the field of sociology. The “nation’s science”, the holistic approach through monography and interdisciplinary teams, the law of sociological parallelism, the ethical and political systems created, the relationship between social will – model/ideal – cultural personality – national development, all were original innovations that put the Bucharest School on the map of sociological science.

To this list another idea that was put into practice was being added: the *model village*, a solution found by the Bucharest’s School of Sociology for the rural crisis. However, in order to better understand the concept of the model village, one must comprehend the scientific basis from where all started: the law of sociological parallelism.

The law of sociological parallelism

The law of sociological parallelism was presented for the first time at an international conference, held in Paris (1st–6th of September 1937), at the International Sociology Congress no. XIII. There, Dimitrie Gusti referred to it as “a true law of social equilibrium”¹.

Dimitrie Gusti stated that the social reality consists of *frames and manifestations*, which are in a permanent and functional threefold connection: between frames (cosmic, biologic, psychic, and historic); between manifestations (economic, spiritual, ethical-legally, political-administrative); and between frames and manifestations.

“...a parallelism between manifestations, a parallelism between frames, and a parallelism between frames and manifestations. This parallelism concerns at the same time the existence and functioning of the society ...”²

To synthesize the social parallelism law, one can state that social reality is a complex of manifestations conditioned by the frames, which is found in a relation of equilibrium. Thus, social disequilibrium is very easy to come by, due to the fact that any small imbalance in any type of the four types of frames or the other four kinds of manifestations can automatically lead to it. And this is why knowledge of social reality and good governance are vital in a state.

“But when social manifestations are alienated from their frames, or when the frames that are changing or wasting no longer support social manifestations, a social imbalance occurs with consequences of varying severity. Thus, the import through imitation of geographically and historically foreign economic and spiritual manifestations produces maladjustment from the very beginning, a social disequilibrium.”³

The model village found its way towards Dioști

The idea of the model village brought to light by Gusti’s school of thought is, actually, an older one. It all started from Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu who considered⁴ that there should be villages created and seen as “models-to-follow”

¹ „o adevărată lege de echilibru social” (Dimitrie Gusti, *Legea paralelismului sociologic [The law of sociological parallelism]*, Sociologie Românească, 1937, an II, nr. 9–10, p. 379, available at https://sas.unibuc.ro/storage/downloads/Teorii%20sociologice%20generale-8/DG37c.PARALELIS_SOCIOL.pdf).

² „...un paralelism între manifestări, un paralelism între cadre și un paralelism între cadre și manifestări. Paralelismul acesta privește în același timp existența și funcționarea societății...” (*Ibidem*, p. 382).

³ „Când însă manifestările sociale sunt străine de cadrele lor sau când cadrele schimbându-se, sau epuizându-se, nu mai sprijină manifestările sociale, se ivește un dezechilibru social cu urmări de o gravitate variabilă de la caz la caz. Astfel importul prin imitație al unor manifestări economice și spirituale străine de mediul geografic și trecutul istoric al unei țări, provoacă la început o dezadaptare, un dezechilibru social.” (*Ibidem*, p. 386).

⁴ Gheorghe Focșa, *Satul Model [Model Village]*, București, Ed. Fundației Culturale Regale „Regele Mihai I”, 1941, p. 28.

for the other social units close-by (but not necessarily), in order to improve the quality of life in the rural areas⁵.

The idea was revived by Dimitrie Gusti and his collaborators. In a country with more than 80% of the population living (then) in the rural environment, the purpose was to develop a strategy from which the rural areas will develop in a manner that will raise the general quality of life. And that meant eliminating all the issues that could block the development of potentiality into manifestation (according to the law of sociological parallelism).

The solution of the model village that was thought to stop the process which creates disequilibrium, in Romania's case, was very well documented and presented. The plan was to preserve the very best found in the peasant civilization and, in the same time, to modernize the life conditions of the people and the state institutions in order to create an independent social unit, with its own and proper instruments and resources, that can evolve into a self-regenerating system that can be, in the end, an inspiration to other localities. In other words, the stake was to transform the village from a weak chain that is being consumed by city into an equal partner.

The model village was set to be applied in Dioști village, a locality which was set on fire, accidentally, by a couple of children in 1938. The unfortunate event was seen as an opportunity to transform the village into a living model and maximize its potential, along with its rebirth.

The assistant of Dimitrie Gusti that supervised the reconstruction of the Dioști village and that succeeded to make a presentation of what had been done there is Gheorghe Focșa. One can say that the reconstruction of this particular village represents one of the most important realizations of the Bucharest's School of Sociology, as a concrete manifestation of all the ideas, conclusions and principles discovered and developed after thousands of hours of monographies in approx. 60 villages. All the monographies had the purpose to bring a solution at hand, and the work done in Dioști was the first of its kind and, unfortunately, one of the last (due to the coming of the Second World War and the communist occupation of Romania, which created a cultural and social fracture from which we never recovered⁶).

Gheorghe Focșa described this process as:

"... a harmonious synthesis of thoughts whose high dynamic triggered and sustained the most important and concrete creative act meant for the cultural rise of the Romanian villages."⁷

⁵ „There should be at least a hospital, a doctor, a surgeon, a small pharmacy – a model farm – if not everywhere, at least in every model village" for each administrative district, as the only effective means to stimulate the prosperity of social life of the villages and the remedy of life's shortcomings."

„Câte un spital, un medic, un chirurg, o mică farmacie, - o fermă model-, dacă nu pretutindeni, măcar în fiecare sat model" preconizat de el pentru fiecare circumscripție administrativă, ca singurul mijloc eficace pentru stimularea spre propășire a vieții sociale sătești și remedierea lipsurilor acestei vieți." (*Ibidem*, p. 15).

⁶ See Baltasiu Radu, Bulumac Ovidiana (eds.), *Fractured Modernities: Elites, Romania and Europe*, Ed. Universității din București, 2015.

⁷ „o sinteză armonioasă de gânduri a căror dinamică înaltă a declanșat și susținut cel mai important și concret act de creație pentru ridicarea culturală a satelor din România." (*Ibidem*, p. 15).

This dynamic process was the best opportunity to let the most refined principles and ideals become reality, guiding all those implicated in this elaborate process the entire period of time in order to accomplish what a model village was meant to represent:

“all the settlements, installations, means and elements of material, technical, economic, biological, administrative and spiritual elements, which refer both to the field of civilization and traditional spirituality, and to the field of modern civilization and culture, whose rational and balanced use in society will guide the complete social life of the village for its economic, biological and spiritual regeneration”⁸.

In order to accomplish such a resourceful task, there were some rules to follow:

“[1] All the works must be designed and executed in order to be a necessary complement for the increase of civilization demanded by the life of this village; [2] The architecture, the sculpture, the tools, the traditional costume, the interior design, etc. that local art and civilization have acquired from the lives of past generations must be utilized; [3] Stimulating the creative energy of the village and its work in its own interests, [must lead to] committing the actual participation of the villagers in the full work program”⁹.

Using the “internal” resources of a social unit in order to transform it into a model-to-follow was one of the principles that guided the entire process. This strategy had the purpose to revive and develop all the dynamic and creative forces that the village had, getting the people used to their potential, capabilities, but also the sacrifices and the work needed to be done in order to achieve such a state.

[The way to accomplish the project had to be] “understood as an effective opportunity for the revival, the increasing dynamics and development of all creative forces of the village jointly associated with work and sacrifices for the accomplishment everything needed to bring it [the village] back to life”¹⁰.

The intended effects of the model village project

A spiritual outcome

However, the goal could not be accomplished using only local resources (especially financial ones). Thus, the project needed an „external” boost which came

⁸ „toate aşezările, instalațiile, elementele și mijloacele materiale, tehnice, economice, biologice, administrative și spirituale, care se referă atât la domeniul civilizației și spiritualității tradiționale, cât și la domeniul civilizației și culturii moderne, a căror utilizare rațională și echilibrată în societate vor ghida întreaga viață socială a satului pentru regenerarea sa economică, biologică și spirituală integrală.” (*Ibidem*, p. 17).

⁹ „(1) Toate lucrările să fie proiectate și executate să fie un complement necesar pentru sporul de civilizație pe care-l cere viața acestui sat; (2) Să fie folosite arhitectura, sculptura, uneltele, portul, găteala interioarelor etc. pe care arta și civilizația locală a dobândit din viața generațiilor trecute; (3) Stimularea energiei creatoare a satului și a muncii lui în interese proprii, angajând participarea efectivă a sătenilor la întregul program de lucru.” (*Ibidem*, p. 17).

¹⁰ „Înțeleg că o oportunitate eficientă pentru reînvierea, sporirea dinamicii și dezvoltarea tuturor forțelor creative ale satului, deodată cu munca și sacrificiile pentru realizarea lucrărilor menite să-l aducă la viață.” (*Ibidem*, p. 19).

along with the (contested among politicians) decision of King Carol the 2nd to finance the model village implementation by offering the necessary money and all the materials needed. The idea was to create something that had a self-didactic function upon social life, using first and foremost the local resources and, only by exception, the “external help” from the state. In this way, by implicating local energies, the outcome is not only a material one, but also spiritual and moral, because the peasants learn what they are capable of, how to become specialists, and thus regain a sense of local pride.

[The possibility of generalizing the idea of the model village was] “... to generalize not only standardized material forms, but also the conception, faith, and creative impetus through extensive professional and social knowledge”¹¹.

Having these principles at the core of the entire project, it was possible to enrich the people that lived in the village with higher spiritual manifestations and moral references such as:

[A] “Enhancing people's diligence and enriching the mind with all the aspects of working in the household and preserving the body's health. [B] the spiritual orientation towards the ennobling of inner human desires and the improvement of human relations. [C] the return of man towards God, without which moral ennobling cannot be possible”¹².

A new dynamic heading towards affirmation

In this way, a new dynamic can be created in the village, one that is based upon:

“[1] the enthusiasm for renewing works, through concrete participation in the working process, [2] those who have the initiative of the creative work in their soul, triggering a process that leads not only to new settlements and material manifestations but also to a new superior content of spiritual accomplishments.”¹³

This is a method through which the village used to a life of shortages can outlive labels such as “poor”, “underdeveloped” or “backward”, heading towards affirmation, development, and modernization.

[The objective was to] “cover the shortcomings of our rural life with a vivid example of Romanian architectural affirmation, of social, material and spiritual endowment, of rational organization in households, indicating the way forward in the activity of future generations”¹⁴.

¹¹ „de a generaliza nu numai formele materiale standardizate, ci și concepția, credința și imboldul creator prin cunoștințe profesionale și sociale extinse.” (*Ibidem*, p. 48).

¹² „[A] stimularea hărniciei oamenilor și îmbogățirea minții cu toate aspectele muncii în gospodărie și păstrării sănătății corporale. [B] transformarea spirituală înspre înnobilarea năzuințelor umane interioare și îmbunătățirea raporturilor dintre semeni. [C] reîntoarcerea omului cu fața către Dumnezeu fără de care înnobilarea morală nu este posibilă.” (*Ibidem*, p. 32).

¹³ [1] Entuziasmul pentru reînnoirea lucrărilor, prin participarea concretă la procesul de lucru, [2] cei ce au inițiativa operei creatoare în suflet, declanșând un proces care duce nu numai la noi așezări și manifestări materiale, ci și la un nou conținut superior, de realizări spirituale.” (*Ibidem*, p. 31).

¹⁴ „de a acoperi deficiențele vieții noastre rurale, cu un exemplu viu de afirmare arhitecturală românească, de dotare socială, materială și spirituală, de organizare rațională a gospodăriilor, astfel indicând calea de urmat în activitatea generațiilor viitoare.” (*Ibidem*, p. 52).

Social solidarity

The concept of model village was planned as a project developed on the long run, not just because of the outcome, but also due to what was required:

“... processes and technical equipment, scientific methods and rational guidance for the multiplication of the practical knowledge required to perform the work of moral enlightenment and development of social solidarity”¹⁵.

In this way, through collective effort, the village would obtain social solidarity that would also generate intensifying spiritual manifestations.

Social renewal through the youth`s work

To replace something old that does not function in a proper way represents a universal need of humankind. In this sense, another important principle set at the heart of the model village initiative referred to the young people and their social role in the rebirth of the community. By definition, youth is prepared to be given such a role because they are the ones that have a high potential, desire and amounts of energy to spend on the social commonwealth, they have the necessary time to act and no strings attached that can hold them back (for example important family responsibilities). In this way, one can expect a double effect: [1] change created for the entire community, and [2] youth`s self-development.

[The young can] “enrich their own soul and that of their peers through the heroic austerity of creative social efforts, transforming themselves into a soul-uplifting example of physical and spiritual work, a progress which has its energy source springing out of the deepest love for their nation”¹⁶.

Instead of conclusion

The conclusion was written by Gheorghe Focșa himself. As a sign of respect for the work and efforts made by all implicated, and as a symbol of moral nobility, it is better for us to allow his words to reach the reader:

“The model village was conceived as a didactic element with principles and objectives that are related to a system of social regeneration of aspirations and of orienting all the villages towards a higher living condition, which is also useful for preparing the youth in the national reconstruction work that must start from the most realistic reality of our nation, the one of the village. The model village had an educational social function, of an ideal type, for the

¹⁵ „procese și echipamente tehnice, metode științifice și îndrumări raționale pentru înmulțirea cunoștințelor practice necesare îndeplinirii activității de ridicare morală și de dezvoltare a solidarității sociale” (*Ibidem*, p. 33).

¹⁶ „de a-și îmbogăți propriul suflet și cel al semenilor săi, prin austeritatea eroică a eforturilor sociale creatoare, transformându-se într-un exemplu sufletesc înălțător de muncă fizică și spirituală, progres ce are ca sursă de energie izvorâtă din cea mai profundă iubire pentru națiunea lor.” (*Ibidem*, p. 34).

harmonious union of the material and spiritual elements, within a high but dynamic limit of social life evolution, as a permanent imperative for the actions of growth and social renewal.”¹⁷.

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¹⁷ „Satul model a fost conceput ca un element didactic cu principii și obiective care sunt legate de un sistem de regenerare socială a aspirațiilor și de orientare a tuturor satelor către o condiție de viață superioară, care este utilă și pentru pregătirea tineretului în opera de reconstrucție națională care trebuie să pornească de la cea mai realistă realitate a națiunii noastre, adică cea a satului. Satul model a avut o funcție socială educațională, de ideal tip, pentru unirea armonioasă a elementelor materiale și spirituale, într-o limită înaltă, dar dinamică, a evoluției vieții sociale, ca imperativ permanent pentru acțiunile de creștere și reînnoire socială.” (*Ibidem*, p. 40).