REPEASANTIZATION THROUGH MIGRATION. MEANINGS ATTRIBUTED TO "LIFE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE" ON THE FACEBOOK GROUP "MOVED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE – LIFE WITHOUT A CLOCK"

Narcis Rupe[157]

ABSTRACT

Over the last century, the Romanian peasantry has faced a series of challenges. Today, the nature of peasant life is as follows: many of the cultural "ties" to peasant life have been "weakened" or have "disappeared". In this context, the phenomenon of "re-peasantisation through migration" is emerging people who have spent enough time in urban areas to accumulate the resources necessary for migration are 'moving to the countryside' because the "countryside" lifestyle is perceived as being "better" than "city life". Some of them even return to a "peasant" way of life: they work the land and rear animals on their own smallholdings to provide for their families' needs and to live in harmony with God. Re-peasantisation through migration is a social action, that is to say, it depends on the meanings attributed to it by the individuals concerned. To understand the phenomenon, we therefore analysed the meanings attributed to the "countryside life" by people who posted on a social media group dedicated to "moving to the countryside". The "countryside life" is associated with a certain sense of well-being. A positive one, in contrast to that specific to urban life. This "sense of well-being" is rooted in the place where they live (direct contact with nature), in human connections, in childhood (whether they are reliving memories of their own childhood or ensuring their children have the kind of childhood they consider appropriate), in freedom (of movement or the fact that one is in the position of 'master') and in beauty ("a corner of heaven").

Keywords: re-peasantisation, "back to the countryside", peasantry, lifestyle migration, Romania.

1. INTRODUCTION: THEORY, QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Over the last century, the peasantry has faced a series of challenges. As early as the interwar period, the ethnographer Ernest Bernea, a member of the Bucharest School of Sociology, noted that Romanian village civilisation was in crisis:

> "the old forms of organisation, their activities and meanings, and the entire social structure of the village have begun to disintegrate"[158].

[157] Researcher at The European Center for Ethnic Studies, Romanian Academy, E-mail contact: narcisrrupe@gmail.com.

[158] „vechile forme organizatoare, activitățile și sensurile lor, întreaga structură socială a satului au intrat într-un proces de destrămare", in Ernest Bernea, *Civilizația română sătească [Romanian village civilization]*, Bucharest, The "Țără și neam" Collection, 1944, p. 117.

The violent installment of the communist regime in Romania only accelerated the process: in the first phase, forced collectivization (1949 and 1965) "suppressed the traditional peasant way of life"[159], and, second, the policies implemented by the state were aimed at replacing the peasant with the agricultural worker, the rural equivalent of the industrial worker[160]. The fall of the communist regime after 1989 did not improve the situation of the "peasantry".

Today's "peasant situation" can be illustrated by the following analogy: many of the ties of peasant culture have disappeared, while others have "weakened," but it is up to each generation of villagers to rebuild and make the most of them in their own way.

This study focuses on the issue of the remaining "knots of peasant ties". To understand whether, in Romania in 2026, these ties "are still being knitted", we turned our attention to Romanians who, after spending enough time in urban areas to accumulate the resources necessary for migration, "move to the countryside". We approached this phenomenon through the concept of "re-peasantisation through migration".

"Repeasantization is also a twofold process. It is about agriculture being made more peasant-like again [and] It is also about increases in the numbers of peasants"[161]. There are many "peasant models", which is why we based our approach on the Romanian peasantry of the interwar period, as studied by the Bucharest School of Sociology, characterized by:

1. At the heart of the farmer's entire range of activities lies the "connection to the land" (caring for – that is, "cultivating" – it and raising livestock);
2. The peasantry represents a social stratum defined by family-based management of the essential means of production required for cultivating land and raising livestock;
3. Management takes place within the family household;
4. The substantive rationality of peasant household activity lies in meeting family needs – achieving an optimal balance between income and requirements – and in a traditional "anchoring in eternity", where work is frequently an integral part of symbolism and ritual.

When examined in the context of migration, repeasantisation takes on the following meaning: it refers to individuals who undergo a process of returning to a peasant-like lifestyle – where their daily existence becomes "tethered to the land" to

[159] "Collectivization, the process that has crumbled the national identity by abolishing the peasantry's traditional way of life, ended in April 1962, although the fencing endeavour of private property continues between 1962 and 1965", in Radu Baltasiu and Ovidiana Bulumac (coord.), *Fractured modernities. Elites, Romania and the "Europe"*, Bucharest, University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2014, p. 39.

[160] Ilie Bădescu, *Satul contemporan și evoluția lui istorică [The Contemporary Village and Its Historical Evolution]*, Bucharest, Scientific and Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1981, pp. 32–33.

[161] Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, *The new peasantries. Rural development in times of globalization*, Second Edition, New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 25.

secure familial needs and foster integration into cosmic Christianity – following a migration from urban to rural areas. In this context, we are not concerned with a simple relocation from one place of residence to another, but rather with a shift from an urban to a rural environment that is intentionally driven by a pursuit of "lifestyle migration"[162]: the "countryside life" must be perceived as "better" than "city life".

In this study, we will analyze the meanings attributed to the "countryside life" by individuals who, to varying degrees, fall into the category of "migratory repeasantisation". To this end, we focused our research on the Facebook group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas" ("Moved to the countryside – life without a clock"). This group is particularly relevant to our study for several key reasons. Primarily, it serves as a social media platform where individuals who have relocated to rural areas – after spending many years in cities within Romania or abroad – interact with one another. Within this space, they share the stories of their relocation, seek advice, and engage in discussions regarding the various facets of "country living".

The Facebook group was established by a Romanian who, after spending many years abroad (particularly in Great Britain), relocated to a village in the Apuseni Mountains. Within the group, he shared his personal journey, prompting other Romanians (all interactions occur exclusively in the Romanian language) to share theirs as well. By 2026, the group had reached a total of 381,000 members. Between 2022 and 2026, we identified over 5,000 posts. Furthermore, members are encouraged – as stipulated by one of the rules accepted upon joining – to contribute long-form texts. Consequently, we are provided with an in-depth exploration of various experiences regarding the "move to the countryside", reflecting a process of "repeasantisation" that is either more or less traditional in nature.

Through the content analysis method, we have successfully extracted the meanings attributed to the "countryside life", the process of "repeasantisation", and the motivations behind these actions within the 100 most viral posts between 2022 and 2026, ranked by the number of comments. The present study is thematic in nature. We have sought to capture the diversity of these meanings, while assigning secondary importance to quantitative aspects – such as determining which meanings are the most dominant.

In our research, we sought to address the question of repeasantisation:

What meanings do the individuals who post on the Facebook group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas" attribute to the "countryside life" – a concept closely linked to the process of repeasantisation?

Any social action occurs by virtue of a specific meaning attributed by individuals to their own behavior[163]; thus, we proceed from the presumption that "repeasantisation through migration" also takes place in accordance with the meanings that those who have "moved to the countryside" attribute to "countryside life".

[162] See Michaela Benson and Karen O'Reilly, "Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration", in *The Sociological Review*, 2009, 57:4, pp. 608–625.

[163] Max Weber, *Economy and society. An outline of interpretative sociology*, edited by Roth Guenther și Claus Wittich, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Londra, University of California Press, 1978, p. 4.

2. MEANINGS OF "LIFE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE" (THE "COUNTRY HOUSE")

For those who have "relocated," "countryside life" or a "country home," as the case may be, carry the following general meanings, which we have categorized into these subtypes: "a slice of heaven," nature, genuine connections, well-being, freedom, an environment conducive to a healthy childhood, and an alternative to city living.

We observe that we are referring to a particular sense of well-being attributed to "countryside life". This is a positive state, positioned in contrast to that which is specific to urban environments. This "well-being" is anchored in one's living space (direct contact with nature), in human connections, in childhood (whether one is reliving the memories of one's own childhood, or ensuring for one's offspring that childhood which one considers appropriate), in freedom (of movement or the fact that one is in the position of being a "master"), and in beauty, described as a "slice of heaven".

2.1. Nature

To begin with, let us point out that "movers", or those who intend to move but have not yet done so, associate the village with nature. The associations between the village and nature are so frequent that it is no wonder we encounter the notion that they have, in fact, moved into the middle of nature, rather than into "countryside life".

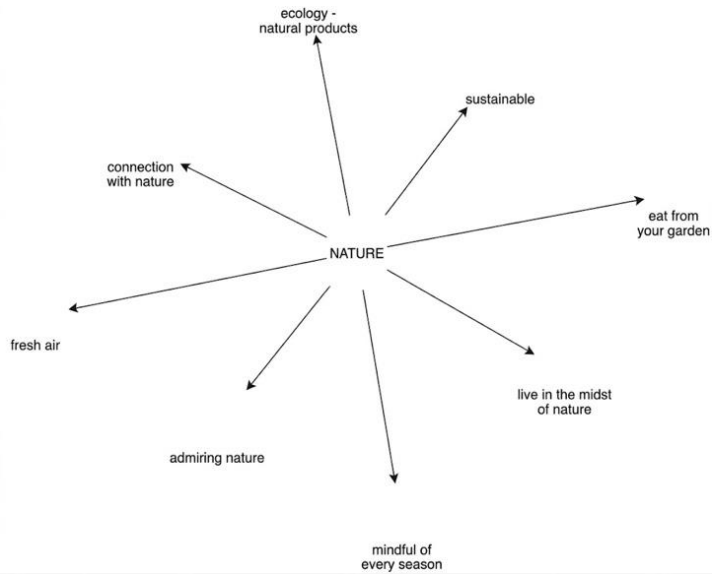


Fig. 1 – Meanings attributed to "nature." Infographic based on an analysis of posts from the Facebook group "Moved to the Countryside-Life Without a Clock".

The meanings attributed to "nature" oscillate between nature as a space to be admired and nature as a source of sustenance. The former interpretation should not surprise us, given that the individuals in question have lived for a long time "between blocks of flats". The nature to which one has retreated is the same nature encountered during mountain hikes taken before the move. There is, however, a difference between hiking and living in the midst of nature. In the countryside, you have the opportunity "to connect" with nature, rather than simply admiring it.

Regarding nature as a source of nourishment, this significance can only emerge for those who work the land they own. Moving beyond the stage of mere admiration occurs when the individual who has "relocated" cultivates the land to obtain produce (greenhouses, gardens, orchards, etc.). In doing so, one lives "sustainably" or "ecologically". One has the opportunity to "eat from one's garden" "natural products", rather than the ultra-processed goods found in the city. Only in such instances is the bond with the land – the very raison d'être of "countryside life" – fulfilled[164] it interweaves with the concept of "countryside life" – and by extension, the idea of nature. Connecting with nature means grounding oneself only when one is actively working the land. Naturally, not everyone who relocates also works the soil. Even the founder of the analysed Facebook group positioned themselves in a post against the idea that "one has not moved to the "countryside life" if one does not have a garden and animals":

> "It is not the garden that makes one's transition to «countryside life» complete. Neither are the chickens, nor the knowledge of how to plant tomatoes. These are merely activities that some individuals choose to undertake within this context – and they are certainly to be appreciated"[165].

It is the very act of working the land that makes those who have relocated conscious of the unique nature of each season. Specific agricultural activities are conducted during certain periods of the year. This contrasts with the urban environment, where jobs are, for the most part, repetitive – with no significant differences based on the season in which they take place. Thus, one gains a deeper understanding of "countryside life".

The newcomer only perceives the changing of the seasons if they have become "attached to the land" (working their own soil). Even those who do not tend to their

[164] See Gheorghiță Geană, „Un fapt social total. Legătura țăranului cu pământul" ["A Total Social Phenomenon: The Peasant's Bond with the Land"], in Ilie Bădescu, Ozana Cucu-Oancea and Gheorghe Șișeștean (coord.), *Tratat de sociologie rurală [Treatise on Rural Sociology]*, Bucharest, Mica Valahie Publishing House, 2009, pp. 235-238.

[165] „Nu grădina te face să fii mutat la țară. Nici găinile. Nici faptul că știi să pui roșii. Astea sunt doar niște lucruri pe care unii oameni aleg să le facă în contextul ăsta și sunt de apreciat", in ***, „«Nu ești mutat la țară dacă n-ai grădină și animale»" [" 'You're not really living in the country if you don't have a garden and animals'"], in *Mutat la țară viața fără ceas [Moving to the Countryside: Life Without a Clock]*, August 30, 2026, Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/740526862768545/permalink/3515128598641677/, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

gardens experience the distinction between winter and summer based on the presence of others. For those providing agritourism accommodation, summer is the season "full of people", whereas during the winter months, human presence outside of one's own family is absent or significantly reduced – a clear reflection of the cyclical nature of "countryside life".

2.2. "Well-being" and "genuine connections"

Living in the "countryside life" home is perceived as generating a greater sense of well-being than urban living. Dwelling amidst nature, working the land, and consuming "eco" products signify a healthy existence. "Doing it yourself" – in one's own household – represents a joy in itself for those who have relocated.

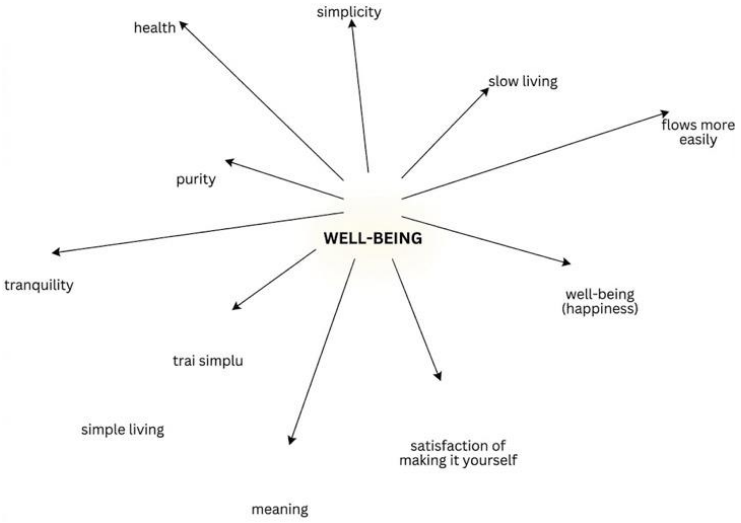


Fig. 2 – The meanings of "well-being". A figure created based on the analysis of posts from the group "Moving to the countryside – life without a clock".

"Countryside life" is perceived as simple and free from agitation, or "slow-paced", and it unfolds more easily than life "in the city". Although residents sometimes claim that they do not "have time" – since a rural home requires continuous maintenance – they assert that they do not feel the stress typically associated with a person full of activities. Having many tasks to complete does not translate, "as it does in the city", into being psychologically overloaded. Such social logic should not surprise us, given that some of "those who have moved" perform tasks in the countryside that are of much lower difficulty than those typical of their own professions. Even if the volume of household activities is high, they are not that complex for a person with a high level of educational training.

2.3. "A corner of heaven"

For some individuals, well-being is also linked to the religious dimension. They have either "come to know God" after moving, or they view their home situated in the heart of nature as "a corner of heaven", which "is taken from a fairy tale". For those who have returned from the diaspora, "countryside life" represents the "paradise" one can create within one's own country, rather than thousands of miles away. It is worth noting that "countryside life" compensates for the reduction in the material abundance typical of the city; here and there, the idea emerges that "happiness does not consist of material things and money".

The blending of heaven and nature brings to mind cosmic Christianity. Contact with nature can assist the newcomer in moving closer to the divine.

2.4. A conducive childhood

The sense of well-being derived from being surrounded by nature extends beyond those who authored the posts within the studied social media group. "Countryside life" also offers numerous benefits for the children of those who have relocated. A household is not merely a place where the land is cultivated, but also a "safe playground". Children can be raised in a natural environment, rather than the artificial one found in urban areas. It remains unclear whether this safe space is confined strictly to the household (the house and garden) or if it encompasses the entire village. In other words, following the social logic of "those who relocated", if children venture beyond the household, are they still considered to be safe?

Drawing an analogy with urban parks, parents enjoy the natural setting typical of a leafy city park within their own household, while also benefiting from the security of supervision similar to that of a playground. In "countryside life", one can supervise one's child as they play in a natural, healthy environment.

In some cases, parents want their children to have a childhood like the one they themselves experienced during the summers they spent with their grandparents. Back then, they used to play outdoors, untroubled by modern technology. It is no wonder that they encourage their own children to experience "country life" without "mobile phones" or "television":

> "Children should be engaged with their schooling and spend their free time in the garden. I do not permit my children to have mobile phones! They must have pursuits other than just playing games. They should learn to cherish nature, to water a tree, or tend to a vegetable. It is vital that they learn to love 'countryside life' – and to love plants!"[166].

[166] „Copiii cu școala și în timpul liber prin grădină. Eu nu le accept telefoanele copiilor mei! Ei trebuie să aibă altă preocupare în afară de joacă. Să învețe să iubească natura, să ude un pom, o legumă. Să iubească plantele!", in ***, „De trei ani de zile am găsit de cuviință că trebuie ..." ["For the past three years, I have felt it necessary to … "], in *Mutat la țară viața fără ceas [Moving to the Countryside: Life Without a Clock]*, May 10, 2022, Available at: https://www.facebook.com/groups/740526862768545/permalink/2138647876289763/, Accessed on September 9, 2026.

2.5. Liberty

Another meaning attributed to "countryside life" is that of freedom. Working within one's own household means "to be one's own master". Even if you work from home ("remote") for a "boss", within your household, you are the one who organizes your tasks and decides when and what to work on. "Moving to the countryside – life without a clock" also signifies, for the members who have posted, the absence of time management in accordance with the typical work schedule of the city.

Being free also relates to the sentiment of ownership. You become the holder of land in "countryside life". The probability that those who have relocated will rent their village residence is near zero. In the overwhelming majority of cases, those who have moved become the owners of the house and property in the village to which they immigrate – a trend that reflects one's desire for lasting stability.

2.6. "Countryside life" in contrast "with city life"

In the final typology regarding the description of "countryside life" or the rural home, we have included those elements that stand in opposition to the urban environment. Ultimately, the category of "relocators" consists of individuals who have resided in an urban setting for an extended period – sufficient to accumulate the resources necessary for moving.

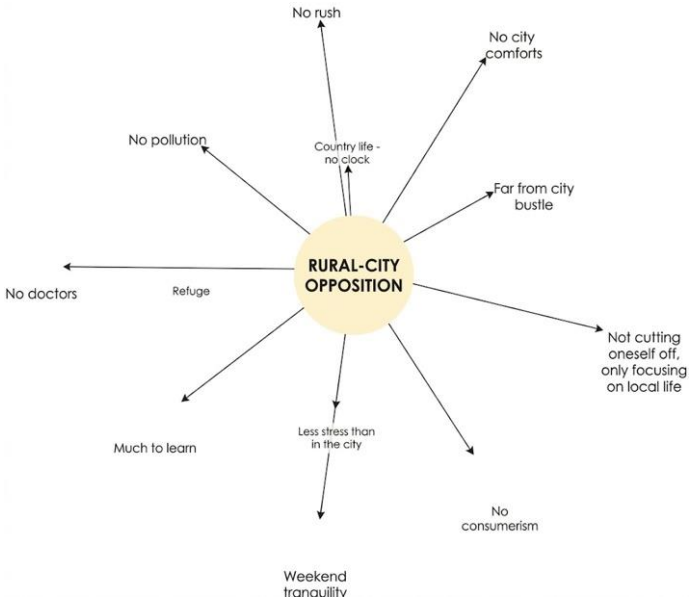


Fig. 3 – The meanings of "countryside life" in contrast to urban living. An illustration developed based on the analysis of posts from the group "Mutat la țară – viața fără ceas".

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Whether individuals have relocated permanently or not, "countryside life" is one that does not unfold "by the clock". It is not a life dominated by reflected will (Ferdinand Tönnies) – "composed of proper reflection, calculation and speculation, knowledge, egoistic and dominating attitude"[167], in which one programs one's time according to the clock and the calendar, as opposed to "countryside life" – a mode of existence governed by the rhythms of nature.

"Countryside life" represents a fresh start where the individuals in question "have much to learn".

The less prior exposure (before relocating) an individual has had to the management of a household – such as not having spent summers assisting grandparents in rural areas or not having originated from a village – the more one is expected to claim to have "learned a great deal" following the migration: "you have learned to do many things around the household because you previously knew nothing". It is worth noting that the "relocated individuals" carry out their professional activities both before and after the migration in non-agricultural sectors, and if one has had no contact with "countryside life", it will seem all the more significant that "one has learned a great deal".

Moving to the countryside and living there requires the mastery of certain skills that the studied individuals either do not possess or possess only at an underdeveloped level – having been away from the village for an extended period: digging the soil, planting, plastering the walls of the house one intends to renovate, or pruning the trees in the purchased orchard, among others.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Among the meanings attributed by those who have relocated to "countryside life" are nature as a "corner of heaven", genuine connections, and childhood as a source of traditional behavioural models. Nature as a "corner of heaven" belongs to the concept of cosmic Christianity (Eliade) –

> "a liturgy beneath the vault of the sky and the dome of the church which cultivates in the believer the wisdom to live in peace with one's fellows and with the nature that surrounds them"[168].

[167] Ion Ungureanu, *Paradigme ale cunoașterii societății [Paradigms of society understanding]*, Iași, Junimea Publishing House, 2002, p. 82.

[168] „o liturghie sub bolta cerului și cupola bisericii care cultivă în credincios înțelepciunea de a trăi în pace cu semenii și cu natura ce-l înconjoară", in Ion Ghinoiu, *Panteonul românesc. Dicționar [The Romanian Pantheon: A Dictionary]*, Bucharest, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 2001, p. 58.

Nature is a guide for the person seeking to draw closer to the divine. For those who have "countryside life" – in stillness, in peace, and in simplicity – it represents living in harmony with God.

The village is characterised, as F. Tönnies demonstrates, by relationships of kinship, friendship, and neighbourliness. These types of relationships are also found, to a greater or lesser extent, among those who have relocated to the "countryside life". Kinship bonds vary depending on whether individuals have returned to their ancestral village; if they have not, familial connections take precedence. "Countryside life" means that relocated parents have the opportunity to spend more time with their children than in an urban environment, with the household becoming a space where the playing child and the working parent interact constantly.

The data were insufficient to determine whether those who have relocated form friendships with other villagers. As for neighbours, this is a matter of "luck". One may have "reliable neighbours" – who might even feed one's animals when one is away from the village – or "noisy neighbours", as debates regarding issues associated with neighbours, such as loud music or theft, are frequently posted in online groups.

Another aspect of "countryside life" that is closely linked to the traditional rural experience is childhood. For parents, the childhood spent "in the countryside" – whether they lived in a village or visited their grandparents – has become the benchmark for the childhood they wish to provide for their own offspring. Their own childhood serves as a source of traditional inspiration, as they once "went caroling, or performed with the goat and the bear", meaning they were in direct contact with traditional customs and habits. It remains to be seen in future research whether parents endeavour to pass these traditional elements on to their children: do they encourage them to go caroling in a village where "caroling is happening less and less" with each passing year?

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