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Lessons For Modern Living:
Planned Rural Communities in
Interwar Romania, Turkey and Italy

A defining feature of the period between the two World Wars was the desire to modernise the rural world.[1] In the international arena, private charitable foundations such as Rockefeller, Carnegie and the inter-governmental League of Nations sought to address the problems of the countryside on a global scale, circumscribing the rural as a site of political intervention characterised by specific problems and needs.[2] On a national level, the countryside became a prominent arena where processes of nation-state building and consolidation took place. The interest in the peasantry was especially high in countries with large numbers of rural dwellers, from France to the Scandinavian countries to Southern and Eastern European states. The combination of modernisation in the guise of «development», and the national state-building ideology, formed a unique vision of modernity specific to the interwar period. This article examines three instances of rural planning in three countries. They allow us to see whether or not common traits of this underlying vision of rural modernity existed beyond the countries' respective political, social and economic differences.

Well-known examples of an interwar interest in transforming both the rural environment and the lives of its inhabitants include Mussolini's new towns in Italy, the Tennessee Valley Authority projects in the southern United States, and various model villages built across Eastern and Northern Europe.[3] Less known are the model villages

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1 Some of the more recent discussions on this are: J. Burchardt, «Editorial: Rurality, Modernity and National Identity between the Wars», in: *Rural History* 21 (2010) 2, 143–150; A. Ballantyne / G. Ince, «Rural and Urban Millieux» in: A. Ballantyne (ed.), *Rural and Urban: Architecture between Two Cultures*, Abingdon. 2010, 1–28; J. Scott / N. Bhatt (eds.), *Agrarian Studies. Synthetic Work at the Cutting Edge*, New Haven, CT, London. 2001.

2 This aspect has mainly been discussed in the field of public health. I. Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health*, Frankfurt a. M.. 2009; L. Murard, «Designs within Disorder: International Conferences on Rural Health Care and the Art of the Local, 1931–1939», in: S. Gross Solomon et al. (eds.), *Shifting Boundaries of Public Health. Europe in the Twentieth Century*, Rochester, New York 2008, 141–174; P. Weindling, «Public Health and Political Stabilisation: The Rockefeller Foundation in Central and Eastern Europe between the Two World Wars», in: *Minerva* 31 (1993) 3, 253–267.

3 There is now a significant literature on such schemes both in the field of history and in the history of architecture. R. Kargon / A. Molella, *Invented Edens: Techno-Cities of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA 2008; F. Caprotti, *Mussolini's Cities:*

built in Romania and Turkey, even though they exemplify a similar trend. One such case is Dioști, a small village in south-western Romania. Dioști was reconstructed as a model village after a fire in 1938, under the auspices of the authoritarian King Carol II.[4] The design principles stemmed from specialists in sociology and architecture. The Turkish model villages built during the ambitious social modernisation process of Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk, have received some attention from scholars working on the history of Turkish modernism and its political significance.[5] Nevertheless, because of Turkey's geographical position, Kemalist model villages have rarely been discussed as part of wider European trends of rural planning.[6] In this article, they provide a useful comparison that sheds more light on the case of Dioști. Whilst Dioști remained an exemplary case of a model village, and the only one that was fully realised in Romania, the Kemalist regime managed to complete a significant number of model villages by the mid-1930s.[7] The best known of the three case studies are the Italian New Towns. Italian fascist architecture was trendsetting, offering inspiration to other countries across the world. In the 1930s, small new towns were built across Italy as part of Mussolini's rural politics. The most famous ones were the towns built near Rome on reclaimed marshland, an area that became known as the *Agro Pontino*.[8] These three examples were not unique, and seem to represent a common trend present in other European countries. Drawing comparisons between them sheds new light on some of the key features of this trend. In doing so, the main focus is on the Romanian case of Dioști, while the Turkish and Italian cases are used to understand the Romanian one better.[9] This article thus offers a comparison that is asymmetrical, as it first zooms in on the Romanian model village Dioști. Dioști's transformation is analysed in more detail, and the Italian case is used as a point of reference from which to look at the other schemes.[10] This comparison serves to shed more light on the wider implications of rural planning in the interwar period.

In these schemes, planning involved not only the execution of construction work, but also the resettlement of people to various territories, the transformation of nature and the remodelling of people's lifestyles. These examples of rural planning can therefore be seen as episodes in the expansion of the «social» realm into the rural world. In

Internal Colonialism in Italy, 1930–1939, New York 2007; D. Ghirardo, *Building New Communities. New Deal America and Fascist Italy,* Princeton, NJ 1989.

4   For a more detailed discussion of this project, see R. Mușat, «Prototypes for Modern Living: Planning, Sociology and the Model Village in Interwar Romania», in: *Social History* 40 (2015) 2.

5   The main sources available in English on this topic are: S. Bozdogan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic,* Seattle, WA 2002; S. Bozdogan / E. Akcan, *Turkey, Modern Architectures in History,* London 2012.

6   A. Cengizkan / D. Kilickiran, «From the ‹Model Village› to a Satellite Town», in: A. Ballantyne (ed.), *Rural and Urban: Architecture between Two Cultures.* Abingdon, New York 2010, 190–207.

7   By 1933 there were 69 new villages. Bozdogan / Akcan, *Turkey,* 36.

8   On the Italian new rural towns, see: Caprotti, *Mussolini's Cities,* Ghirardo, *Building;* Kargon / Molella, *Invented Edens.*

9   R. Mușat, «Prototypes».

10 J. Kocka, «Comparison and Beyond», *History and Theory* 42 (2003) 1, 39–44.

the view of scholars such as James C. Scott and Paul Rabinow, the birth of modern forms and practices of governance meant that states became solely responsible for the transformation and eventual perfection of their societies. This led to the creation of a sphere of concern about the life and well-being of the population, generally defined as «the social». In his analysis of French modernity, Rabinow described the interplay between «the construction of norms and the search for forms adequate to understand and to regulate what came to be known as modern society».[11] If the norms corresponded to ideas about planning social transformation, the forms corresponded to the disciplines and technologies that gave real shape to these ideas. Over time, the sphere of the social expanded from the interest in the well-being of the elites to the working classes and eventually to the entire population.

The interwar period represented a key moment in the consolidation of a vision of modernity in which the rural world became an integral part of the social realm. My argument is that in each case, these newly planned communities represented models or metonyms for the transformation of the entire society, understood as an expansion of the state into its rural hinterlands.

There are important similarities between the social, economic and political circumstances that drove the desire to transform the rural world in the cases compared. Firstly, all three countries had significant peasant populations that had little formal relationships with the the state, living in what came to be seen as backward yet traditional conditions. In Italy peasants made up half of the population, whereas in Romania and Turkey they formed an even larger majority (more than 70 per cent). In all three countries, these rural populations played an integral part in the process of national modernisation. Nevertheless, demographics would not have counted for much had it not been for the active political need to transform peasants into masses of consenting subjects.[12] Secondly, all these initiatives represented the new cultural values of the regimes that invented them: Italian Fascism, secular Kemalism and the soft authoritarianism of King Carol II. In this sense, we could circumscribe these planning initiatives to wider «civilising missions» through which masses were to be educated and socialised into modern yet highly politicised ways of living.[13] Last but not least, the third important prerequisite that made these schemes possible was the presence and role of experts. Architects, sociologists, demographers and urban planners played leading roles in providing the tools and practices for this social engineering.[14] They were not only mediators between the state and the old or new inhabitants of these model settlements, but also carriers of ideas that provided the link between the international and the national

11 P. Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment,* Chicago 1995, 9.

12 V. DeGrazia, *The Politics of Leisure: The Dopolavoro and the Organization of Workers' Spare Time in Fascist Italy, 1922–1939,* Cambridge 1981.

13 N. Elias, *The Civilising Process,* Oxford 1978.

14 On how rural architecture has reflected different anxieties and problems of the modern world, see Ballantyne / Ince, «Rural and Urban». On interwar architecture in these countries, see D. Ghirardo, *Italy,* Modern Architectures in History, London 2012; C. Popescu, *Le style national roumain. Con-*

arenas. Architects and social scientists from Italy, Romania and Turkey were parts of international networks of knowledge that shared a common vocabulary and common categories about rural hygiene, housing and development. Architects and social scientists were connected to international discourses, sustained by conferences, fairs and journals. They thus were aware of common issues and of the different solutions that specialists from other countries had adopted for the countryside. Planning in rural areas therefore represented a terrain where, when given the opportunity, specialists could experiment with these ideas.

The remaining part of this article looks at these three cases in more detail, indicating the specific problems these projects were meant to address, as well as the ideas and expectations they shared.

1. Dioşti, a Pilot of Rural Modernisation

A new enlarged Romanian state emerged out of the diplomatic negotiations following the end of the First World War.[15] Despite the fact that its population and territory almost doubled and its ethnic mix was greatly increased, the new state remained overwhelmingly agrarian. Whilst this social make-up posed specific problems to the smaller pre-war Romanian kingdom and to the imperial governments reigning over the other territories that became part of greater Romania, the unification transformed the terms of the «agrarian question» entirely. Firstly, the «Romanian» countryside became even more diverse than before, incorporating rural dwellers that had lived under different political regimes and systems of land tenure. Secondly, the promises of the early post-unification period called for a redefinition of the place that the peasantry was to occupy both in economic and political terms. The 1921 land reform redistributed land to the majority of the peasant population and, despite its many flaws, did away with the large-scale agricultural (neo-serfdom) mode of production prevalent in the Old Kingdom.[16] The new vision for agriculture involved creating a new class of independent small-scale agricultural producers who would supply an internal market as well as become consumers of urban goods. This informed much of the political and economic debate of the period. Thirdly, the international post-war context and the unification led to a shake-up of Romanian politics. The old system of rotation that included the two main parties, Liberal and Conservative, collapsed, bringing along the total demise of the latter party that represented the class of landowners. The 1923 Constitution extended

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struire une nation à travers l'architecture 1881–1945, Rennes, Bucharest 2004; Bozdogan / Akcan, *Turkey;* C. Popescu, «Modernitate în context», in: idem, *(Dis)continuități Fagmente de modernitate românească în prima jumătate a secolului al 20-lea,* Bucharest 2010, 11–100.

15 H. L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State,* New Haven, CT, London. 1951; K. Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866–1947,* Oxford 1994.

16 D. Mitrany, *The Land and the Peasant in Rumania: The War and Agrarian Reform (1917–21),* New Haven, CT, London 1930; D. Mitrany, «The New Rumanian Constitution», in: *Journal of Comparative Legislation and International Law* 6 (1924) 1, 110–119.

the vote to the entire peasant male population, inviting them to participate in Romanian politics. New political parties sprung up, promising to represent, alongside other voters, the rural masses. Overall, these top-down transformations – territorial and legal – integrated the Romanian countryside, at least nominally, to the previously much smaller social, political and cultural spheres.

Whilst the actual integration of the peasant masses into the social and political spheres of the state occurred move slowly than the pace of legal reforms suggested, the work of Romanian scholars and social reformers transformed the rural world into a space of scientific and social experimentation.[17] In the 1920s and 1930s, specialists from a wide range of academic fields such as sociology, psychology, social medicine and urban planning translated well-known problems of rural life into the vocabulary of their respective disciplines, drawing attention to issues such as malnutrition, infant mortality and different «social diseases» (tuberculosis, typhus, malaria, pellagra, syphilis) that plagued Romanian villages.[18] In coining a new scientific understanding of the countryside, the main question, which specialists as well as politicians faced, was how to modernise the countryside while preserving the traditions of rural living and make peasants economic and political agents.

A vision of planning rural areas grew out of a series of related issues that gained importance for rural specialists after the war in 1918.[19] The first of these was the problem of rural housing. As architects, doctors and social scientists who undertook research in the countryside discovered, a great number of Romanian villagers lived in wretched conditions, sleeping in close proximity or even with their animals under the same roof, living in hovels or sharing the same bed with several other members of their family. Another facet of the housing issue was related to the population exchanges in the region that led to the construction of several new villages or sections of villages in different parts of the country, especially Dobrogea.[20] The concern with rural housing played an important part in the development of a new sub-discipline of urban planning, that of rural planning (known in Romanian as *ruralism*). Although clearly less

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17 M. Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania,* Pittsburgh 2002; M. Turda, *Eugenism și antropologie rasială în România, 1878–1944,* Bucharest 2008; R. Mușat, «Sociologists and the Transformation of the Peasantry in Romania 1925–1940», Unpublished PhD thesis, London 2011.

18 For an overview of these problems at the end of the interwar era, see D. Gusti / N. Cornatzeanu / G. Banu, *Rural Life in Rumania. An Abridged English Version of a Monograph «La Vie Rurale En Roumanie»,* Bucharest 1940; and G. Banu (ed.), «Problemele sanitare ale populației rurale din România», in: *Revista de igienă socială* X (1940), 1–6. For an account of Romanian peasant problems in a wider context, see D. Warriner, *Economics of Peasant Farming,* London, New York. 1939.

19 N. Lascu, «L'espace rural et l'architecture moderne durant les entre deux guerres», in: *Genius loci: national et regional en architecture entre histoire et pratique,* Bucharest 2002, 168–173.

20 F. Stănculescu, «Satele noui formate în legătură cu reforma agrară», in: *Arhitectura* IV (1925),: 28–29. On the details of the internal colonisation phases, see E. Grințescu, *Colonizarea: principii și realizări,* Bucharest. 1944 and V. Solonari, *Purifying the Nation Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi Allied Romania,* Baltimore, /MD. 2009.

prominent, this discipline developed in the 1920s and 1930s around several architects and publications of the period.[21]

Another area that influenced the development of rural planning was the concern with the health, hygiene and well-being of people living in the countryside.[22] These concerns were voiced by specialists of social medicine and social hygiene, domains that were blossoming in Romania, as in many other parts of the world. Thus, housing conditions became tightly linked with the need to «heal the rural world» by teaching peasants how to wash, eat healthier diets, trust modern medicine, etc.

The idea of creating «model villages», where locals would be encouraged to become models for their own neighbours or for people like them across the country, grew out of these different specialised discourses, which resonated with the wider international scene. Until the late 1930s, the model village and rural planning remained more widely at the stage of proposals, plans and debates rather than actual physical projects.

A third interrelated context that gave more strength to the idea of educating peasants through exemplary projects came from the discipline of sociology. The project of cultural work, initiated by Gusti, the director of the Royal Cultural Foundation and leader of the Bucharest School of Sociology, brought young specialists from different disciplines to the countryside in order to use their knowledge and skills to transform rural living conditions.[23] The project used competitions amongst villages as an educational method, designating model institutions or model villages to stimulate the locals to improve their habitat and lifestyle while preserving their local customs and traditions.[24]

All these different concerns found their realisation in the small-scale reconstruction of Dioști, a village in the south-west of Romania that had burnt down and was rebuilt as a model village. This project was the result of a set of coincidences.

At the beginning of 1938, King Carol II announced his personal dictatorship. Carol had initially renounced the throne in 1925, but reclaimed it in 1930 when he returned to Romania with the support of an important part of the political and intellectual elite. From then on, his rule was characterised by high-level corruption and fraud, intrigues and a continuous effort to undermine the power of the existing political parties. In 1937, the King took advantage of the circumstances created by the elections, when the Legion of the Archangel Michael, the home-grown fascist organisation, got sixteen per cent of the votes, appointing the leader of a less prominent extremist organisation to form a government. After a short term in office, famous for its anti-Semitic brutality,

21 F. Stănculescu, *Contribuții la afirmarea arhitecturiii românești,* Bucharest 1987; N. Lascu, «L'espace rural», 168–173.

22 Banu, «Problemele sanitare»; Bucur, *Eugenics.*

23 Z. Rostás, *Monografia ca utopie. Interviuri cu Henri H. Stahl (1985–1987),* Bucharest 2000; Z. Rostás, «Fundația Culturală Regală ‹Principele Carol› sau mișcarea echipelor studențești voluntare», in:

Z. Rostás, *Strada Latină 8. Monografiști și echipieri la Fundația Culturală Regală «Principele Carol»*, Bucharest 2009, 11–23.

24 For an overview of this project, see R. Mușat, «‹To Cure, Uplift and Ennoble the Village›: Militant Sociology in the Romanian Countryside, 1934–1938», in: *East-European Politics and Societies* 27 (2013) 3, 353–375.

Goga was dismissed and the King took a firm hold on power, declaring his personal dictatorship at the beginning of 1938. Unlike Mussolini's Fascism or Kemalism, King Carol's regime lacked a coherent ideological stance. The regime was, like the king himself, weak but ornate, heavy in propaganda and light on any real results. In its propaganda, the new regime was to end the petty struggle for power amongst various political parties and to bring a new fairer and more stable rule over the country. As part of his political agenda, the King was interested in creating a new alliance with the peasantry, who had become the target of the Legion.[25] Thus, after the instauration of the royal dictatorship, King Carol showed an increased interest in the reform the countryside. What better chance to show his royal mercy towards the rural masses than a natural catastrophe? That spring, droughts caused many villages to go up in flames, including Dioști, the place that was to be transformed into a model village.

The main project of rebuilding Dioști as a model village lasted only two years.[26] During this short time, the structure of the locality was redesigned according to modern principles of architecture, planning and sociology. The new section that was added to the existing part of the locality, which had not been damaged by the fire, consisted of a civic centre, a new road with model houses and several other public buildings. The architects used a stylised vernacular of the area for the private houses, which had many outbuildings and a rational, yet simple organisation of the interiors. The new public buildings, including the central Village Hall, combined simple functional structures with vernacular decorative motifs. Besides, the village was equipped with a stadium, a water pump and an electric plant.

Beyond the modern design, scientific knowledge and generous funds, the success of the rebuilding of Dioști required a minimum cooperation from the local community. Since it was in fact a major relief project, the representatives of the village elite met the initial proposals with great approval. This was understandable, given that they had lobbied for their village to become a model in the first place.[27] However, some resistance appeared when the plan started to be implemented in practice. Unlike other rural development projects that were built on «virgin land», this project involved some seizure or redistribution of land. This was the point at which some locals reverted to a customary distrust of all forms of external authority, refusing or seeking to resist the seizure of their plots even if they were promised a new house complete with an adjacent plot of its own. Despite the planners' hope to use this as a means of building new social ties between the state, voluntary workers and the local community, the villagers participated to different degrees in the construction of their own new model homes. Some people overcame their distrust and cooperated in the building of the model houses. Others, especially those who had not been directly affected by the fire, remained

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25 For works on Romanian Fascism and its rural projects, see A. Heinen, *Legiunea «Arhanghelul Mihai»,* Bucharest 2006; R. Haynes, «Work Camps, Commerce, and the Education of the ‹New Man›

in the Romanian Legionary Movement», in: *Historical Journal* 51 (2008) 4, 943–967.
26 G. Focșa, *Satul model Dioști,* Bucharest 1941, 26–27.
27 A. Ciobanu, Monografia comunei Dioști, 1973.

indifferent to the rebuilding of the village and proved unwilling to change the way they worked their own land. These shortcomings showed the limits of this elite, state-driven initiative with two contradictory aims: a fast, radical and therefore superficial transformation of the locality and the inculcation of a spirit of self-help and cooperation amongst the local community.

The reconstruction of Dioști as a model village, in which sociologists, architects, rural planners, the monarchy and the locals played a part, was designed as a pilot for a future large-scale project of rural modernisation. The project was realised as a concrete example of the monarch's new vision of the countryside, being a prototype for similar projects to follow.[28] Its overall aim was to transform this community both aesthetically and socially by combining the best from the traditional heritage of the area with the improvements of modern living.

The outbreak of the Second World War and the abdication of King Carol II meant that the project in Dioști was stalled and left unfinished for several decades. However, the plans for more similar model communities, some of which were started during General Antonescu's regime (1940–1946) show that this type of exemplary rural development persisted until the communist take-over of 1948.[29] After the take-over, for the following two decades, the communist regime proposed a very different type of rural transformation that focused on the collectivisation of agriculture and on industrialisation. New plans for the systematisation of the Romanian countryside only resurfaced on the political agenda of the Ceaușescu regime in the 1970s, when interwar ideas about rural planning were reinterpreted in a new light.[30]

2. Kemalist Model Villages

At the end of the First World War, the new Turkish state emerged from the ashes of a great but long-convalescing empire and, like Romania, it also embarked on a process of great social and political modernisation. The foundations were set during the authoritarian regime of Atatürk who believed that the key to his country's future was that of «modern civilisation». The reforms introduced in the mid-1920s and especially in the 1930s redefined what it meant to be a Turk living in the new Turkish nation. Starting with the mid-1920s, the old Ottoman establishment was dismantled piece by piece. The new secular republic had a civil code based on the Swiss model, a criminal code based on Mussolini's and a new Latin alphabet. Both men and women received the right to vote, although the regime was by no means democratic.[31] In the social and cultural spheres, the modern ethos expanded from the urban centres, where the educated elites were based, outwards into the countryside to enlighten and civilise the peasant masses.

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28 Mușat, «Prototypes».
29 Alina Drăgoescu, «Antonești, sat model», in: *Urbanismul. Serie Nouă*, 7–8 (2010), 76–82.
30 Stănculescu, *Contribuții*.
31 G. Lewis, *Modern Turkey*, New York 1974, 100–129.

The modernising reforms of the 1930s required the mobilisation of the country's intellectual elites who were given the task of translating them into actual «norms and forms». As with elsewhere in Europe, social scientists and architects became the mediators between the state and the social masses, especially rural ones, working to put the new ideas into practice.

Architecture played an important role in creating the visual identity of the new regime in Turkey. Inspired by their counterparts in Italy and Germany, Turkish architects adhered to the modern movement present in many other countries across the world at the time, drawing their inspiration from Le Corbusier, Italian fascist architecture and the earlier Garden City movement. Apart from working on urban areas, these experts of modern living became actively involved in the transformation of the countryside. The architect Adibin Mortaș made this clear by noting that «villages are of paramount significance in the nation building and must be designed by the professional architect».[32] The quote highlights the desire of professional architects to expand their expertise into the rural space, claiming their place in their country's state modernisation.

The model villages built in this period were examples of the practical implementation of Kemalist reforms. The first impetus for these projects was the housing need generated by the population exchanges resulting from the First World War settlements. The redrawing of European states' borders at the end of the First World War resulted in a major displacement of populations. For Turkey, this problem was compounded by the conflict with Greece that generated an important series of population exchanges between the Balkan states in the region, which in turn called for the building of new settlements.[33] However, model villages soon came to represent more than just a response to a demographic issue. Instead, they became part of a wider programme of rural modernisation meant to transform the Turkish peasantry and the countryside as a whole (*köycülük*). As Bozdogan noted, this «was an ideological, cultural and educational mission to be taken to the remotest, harshest, and most inaccessible corners of the country with revolutionary zeal, idealism and sacrifice».[34]

As in the rest of the Balkans, the vast majority of the Turkish population lived in rural areas often in poor conditions and formed a specifically peasant culture. As their perceived backwardness represented the backwardness of the country as a whole, the enlightenment of the peasantry and their transformation into loyal citizens of the state became a priority for the new government. Turkish leaders and rural specialists drew inspiration from the wide variety of projects and programmes employed to transform rural populations elsewhere. For example, their initiative to build People's Houses as community centres for popular education were influenced by the Italian *case del fascio*, whereas the principles of planning model villages were also often inspired by Musso-

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32 Bozdogan, *Modernism*, 100.

33 R. Hirschon (ed.), *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange* *Between Greece and Turkey*, Oxford, New York 2003.

34 Bozdogan, *Modernism*, 103.

lini's New Towns.[35] At the same time, the importance of the People's Houses initiative paralleled the Romanian initiative of building cultural centres in the villages supported by the Prince and then King Carol II. Planning in rural areas was therefore part of a widespread desire to educate and enlighten the countryside according to the rational principles of modern hygiene, health and civic conduct.

In terms of planning, the new model villages reflected the diversity of the Turkish architectural scene itself both in terms of ideas and of stylistic realisation. Some model villages, for example, were built in a very modern style, devoid of all ornamentation, whereas others revived and integrated elements from the vernacular styles of the region into their new designs. The «ideal republican village» designed by Kazım Dirlik faithfully reproduced the concentric zones of Ebenezer Howard's garden city plan. Another architect, Aptullah Ziya, proposed a more conservative take on the model village. This involved a square plan with a central square for the main local institutions and public places. Furthermore, his proposal that traditional materials be used in the making of the houses indicated a vision of the rural future emerging and growing naturally out of its own past.[36]

Planned rural communities in Kemalist Turkey reflected all the tenets of the regime: republicanism, nationalism, revolution, secularism, populism and statism. This indicates both the similarities with and the differences from the Romanian and Italian cases. Unlike Dioşti, the Kemalist villages represented radically new political and cultural values (secularism being the most important) that reflected the revolutionary essence of the regime. On the contrary, the drive to change rural life in Romania was a truly reformist one that sought to maintain the existing status quo intact as much as possible. In both the Romanian and Italian cases, religion was to be preserved as an important part of village life. On the other hand, these projects were similar in their drive to integrate the rural into the sphere of the state and into an idea of modern society with coherent cultural values and codes of conduct. This was realised through the research and work of experts – architects and social scientists – who in turn welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the improvement of rural living conditions and aesthetics. Thus, the political dimension indicates that radical political change combined with the power of authoritarianism made planning in rural areas a much more powerful tool than in Romania. The common element underlying these cases was that the development of planning as a set of combined disciplines harnessed the power of the state, allowing planning to expand into the countryside as part of a civilising mission.

35 Ibid., 93–95.
36 Ibid., 101–102.

3. Mussolini's New Towns

In the case of Italy, the rural population posed a different set of problems from those in the Balkans. Regionally, Italy was a country of great contrasts, with a rapidly industrialising North and a highly agricultural South, where the rural population was still working in wretched conditions for powerful landowners. In terms of overall numbers, almost half of the Italian population lived in rural areas and, although the fascist regime greatly supported industrialisation, agriculture remained one of the most important sectors of the Italian economy.[37]

In legal terms, the end of the war and the advent of the fascist regime did not radically alter the status of the peasantry as had happened in Eastern Europe (Romania included), where massive land reforms led to important redistributions of property. Instead, the fascist rural politics were aimed rather at building consensus and support in the countryside and at preventing the migration of peasants from the country to the cities.[38]

Similar to the other cases discussed above, the five new towns built in the Pontine Marshes area were a response to several interconnected social and political issues. They were part of efforts to govern the rural at a time of economic and political crisis, represented by the politics of internal colonisation and restrictions on internal migration. They were also tools of political propaganda for Mussolini and for fascism, representing the triumph of the regime over nature.[39] As the propaganda showed, the technology employed by the state was next to miraculous, creating fertile land out of malaria-ridden marshes. This indicates the similarities to the Romanian case of Dioști, where nature was also used as a contrast to the force of modern rational planning and of the royal mercy of another powerful leader, King Carol II. However, whilst the model village of Dioști was meant to preserve rural society more or less in a same form as before, Mussolini's new towns represented a step further: creating an urban settlement that had the social and moral order of the rural world. This desire of preserving the best of the two worlds, urban and rural, was by no means new, evoking the dream of the English garden city planners.[40]

The architectural design of the Italian new towns used the best of architectural innovation and skills present in the country at the time. The towns were built according to plans that had been selected after a public competition and reflected the aesthetics of the fascist regime. As in the other two cases, there was not a unique style in which all new towns were built, but rather different variations that ranged from a rational style to a modernist one that included vernacular influences. For example, the new town of Torreviscosa in Northern Italy included local Friulian influences, whereas Sabaudia,

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37 F. Caprotti, «Destructive Creation: Fascist Urban Planning, Architecture and the New Towns in the Pontine Marshes», in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007), 651–679.
38 P. Wilson, *Peasant Women and Politics in Fascist*

Italy: The Massaie Rurali, London 2002; DeGrazia, *Politics of Leisure.*
39 Caprotti, «Internal Colonization».
40 Ghirardo, *Building New Communities*; Ghirardo, *Italy*.

one of the Pontine towns, was planned by Luigi Picinato, who «drew much of his inspiration from Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City».[41] This shows how wide the vocabulary was, in which interwar architecture expressed visions of rural modernity. It would be wrong to say that fascist Italy had reached a definite idea about the future of the countryside. Instead, we should take these small-scale projects as samples or prototypes that reflected different solutions for the future.

Overall, the Italian new towns employed and displayed all the techniques of urban planning adapted to the different conditions of the rural. In designing the space of these new communities, planners preserved some elements of traditional villages, adding or altering aspects regarding public life. These new towns, like the model villages in Turkey and Romania, always displayed the presence of the state at the heart of rural life. This was a clear statement about the expansion of the public or social sphere into the private and in once-isolated rural areas. In the Italian case, the regime was represented visually through bold architectural statements such as the church in Sabaudia (*The Chiesa dell'Annunciazione*).[42] The civic centre, *casa del fascio*, a new addition that could be found in most new towns and even villages of this era, also represented the connection between the rural world and the state.

The relation between the state organisations and the colonists does however indicate that the planning of these new lands represented a negotiation rather than a one-way process. The recruitment of colonists proved harder than initially predicted and standards had to be dropped. The regime therefore ended up bringing in people who did not represent «model citizens», but often people who had nothing to lose in the areas where they were currently living. Since most of them were not agricultural workers, they often preferred having money to dedicating themselves to the land. This often led to a resistance to and negotiations with the main institution in charge of the project over the amount of money they were allocated.

4. Planning the Rural in the Interwar Period: the Comparative Dimension

The planned communities discussed in this article were by no means isolated and unrelated. Despite rather different political regimes, cultural spaces and economic modes of production, these instances of rural planning belonged to a common desire to build modernity in the countryside. Read closely, this desire showed various peculiarities from case to case.

The first point of difference was political. Despite all being non-democratic regimes, Fascism, Kemalism and Carol II's personal dictatorship represented different ideological stances and, to some extent, different modernisation impulses. These were reflected in the rural projects built by these regimes. In all three cases, the village

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41 Kargon / Molella, *Invented Edens*, 52.
42 Caprotti, *Mussolini's Cities*, 673.

represented both a «locus of the nation and of modernity», although the moral and social order proposed often differed. The desire to secularise, specific to Turkey, differed from the subordination of the church to the power of the state in Romania and Italy. The differences between these visions extend even further. In Turkey and Romania, despite the new designs of the houses, roads and public buildings, the model villages sought to keep peasants on the land, living rural lives. In contrast, the Italian case was more ambitious. In a similar vein to the earlier Garden City movement, the Italian planners and architects imagined a new form of living that combined the best of the urban and the rural. Their new towns emphasised rural social values despite being essentially urban spaces. However, at the same time, the high degree of invention and innovation was counterbalanced by the desire to preserve and to maintain the status quo and thus, to create political consent in the countryside.[43]

Other differences were present in the relation between the state and the inhabitants of these new communities. Unlike most of the Turkish and Italian cases, Dioști was built for the locals rather than for colonists. This involved a different negotiation with the existing community than those in the two other countries. In Romania, the planners had less leverage over the locals since the people owned their own land. This was different from Italy, where colonists were recruited from elsewhere and where the negotiations with the new inhabitants lasted several years. In Turkey, where colonists were the result of resettlements, people were under greater pressure to accept the new homes since in most cases, they had nowhere else to go.

This leads to another related point of difference: the scale of these projects. Whilst the Romanian one was a very small-scale project compared with the other two, the Turkish and Italian schemes were both extensive (scale) and intensive (time). This was due to the uneven power of the political regimes in these three countries, in terms of their ability to raise funds, organise manpower and deploy all of these within the territory to be transformed. The Italian and Turkish regimes, which had gained and established firm political control in their countries, were in a much better position to do so than the regime in Romania, where the political scene had been much more fragile and unstable. King Carol's authoritarianism was far from creating a strong state in 1938, a fact that was proven by the short-lived nature of his rule.[44]

In this context, the village of Dioști represented a mere pilot for a wider rural planning scheme that never really took off. The comparison with the other two more prominent cases does however bring out the wider implications and meaning of the project and of the Romanian efforts to modernise the countryside. Like its counterparts, Dioști represented a prototype of rural modernisation with high display value. This involved a triple visibility: as a flagship project of King Carol II's new regime, as a model of

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43 DeGrazia, *Politics of Leisure*.
44 I. Scurtu, *Istoria românilor în timpul celor trei regi.*
    Carol al II-Lea, Bucharest 2010.

expertise in the growing international field of social reform and as a way to educate the locals in aesthetic, moral and social ways. In addition, like the other two examples, Dioș ti combined the desire to transform and to preserve rural life.

Despite these differences, all three examples of rural planning were products of a similar process by which the state as an entity was expanding into the rural world, becoming involved in managing the lives of its rural citizens. On a more abstract level, the expansion of the state went hand in hand with what Lutz Raphael has called the «scientisation of the social», that is, the transformation of everyday lives of normal people into an area of professional expertise and into an important domain to be managed and improved by experts.[45] In all the countries discussed above, experts from different domains (be it architecture, planning, social sciences and others) contributed to the transformation of rural life into an object that could be planned according to scientific rules and aesthetic principles. Rural planning in fact allowed experts from peripheral countries like Turkey and Romania to distinguish themselves just as much as it allowed those in a more «central» country like Italy. This shows the rural world as a space for experimentation with new technologies, forms and norms of living more generally. Without offering eccentric or alternative lifestyles, the planned rural communities in Italy, Turkey and Romania were similar attempts to invent a new rural way of life that would allow the transition of the countryside into the modern world. The use of models, especially in the Romanian and Turkish cases, embodied the interwar vision of modernity whose drive for transformation was caught between the desire to preserve and to change the countryside.

45 L. Raphael, «Embedding the Human and Social Sciences in Western Societies, 1880–1980: Reflections on Trends and Methods of Current Research», in: K. Brückweh et al. (eds.) *Engineering* *Society: The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies: 1880–1980,* Basingstoke 2012, 41–56.

ABSTRACT | **Lessons For Modern Living:**
Planned Rural Communities in Interwar Romania, Turkey and Italy
The desire to modernise the rural world was a defining feature of the period between the two World Wars. The combination of modernisation in the guise of «development», and the national state-building ideology, formed a unique vision of modernity specific to the interwar period. This article compares three instances of rural planning in three countries – Romania, Turkey and Italy – in order to understand whether or not common traits of this underlying vision of rural modernity existed beyond the countries' respective political, social and economic differences. This comparison also serves to shed more light on the wider implications of rural planning in the interwar period.

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