

## THE SCIENTIFIC VISION OF PROFESSOR MIHAI ȘERBAN

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to present the social-economic vision of professor Mihai Șerban, important scientist, politician and rector of the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine in the interwar period. During this period, when the Romanian society in general, and the rural space in particular are engaged in a complex process of modernization and of integration in the European system of values and exigencies, the example of his scientific work, adapted to the current conditions, can and must be studied and continued.

**Keywords:** agrarian sociology, rural area, social agronomy.

### INTRODUCTION

Professor Mihai Șerban (1877-1947) was an important personality of the national academic space. Affirmed in agronomic education, in the agrarian economy, and, in a particular way, in the rural sociology at its confluence with the agrarian sociology, he was also involved in public and political life putting all his competence and energy in the services of these activities. As a result of the clairvoyance of the conception that guided him, his scientific contributions, as well as the example of his own life, are still, in many respects, current. Mihai Șerban's scientific activity was inextricably linked to his didactic and public activity. In essence, however, the unity of these fields is an essential, explanatory component of his lives. At the origin of this work was his desire to contribute effectively to improving the situation of the peasantry - the most numerous and important social category of society and the fundamental economic activity of the country - agriculture. He based his scientific work on the science of his time and on the direct knowledge, "live", of the Romanian agrarian and rural realities. The scientific experience acquired in different countries and academic centers, as well as the direct knowledge of the Romanian realities and needs, served him as a guiding principle in the didactic activity, as a teacher and manager and, further, in the parliamentary and public life. I noticed in the biography of Mihai Șerban, from the beginning to the end, an intellectual evolution dedicated to economic, social, agrarian and legal issues.

This will allow him to analyze the Romanian economic realities from multiple perspectives. At the center of all this was the Romanian peasant and village. But not as an end in itself, but as a foundation for a broader vision, of a sociological nature, and an action with a practical purpose, transforming in favor of the entire Romanian society, of the Romanian state. "I, for one, am convinced that our guild [of agronomic engineers] - especially in the current circumstances - has the most important mission for the economic and social upliftment of the Romanian people. I consider myself an agronomist born, not made. [...]. We made this choice not only out of vocation, but

especially seeing how much needs to be done in the field of our agronomy and how strongly the need for work and devotion of all is felt here. "(M. Şerban, 1932) . Respecting this program, all the directions of the activity (as well as the didactic and public ones), have as common denominator the major national interest. Opting for a causal, scientific research of the problems, Mihai Şerban appreciated that the meaning of the "agrarian issue" can find its causes "only if we investigate the whole economic, social and cultural development, which are all connected and only together form an organic whole of causality."

### MATERIAL AND METHODS

To achieve the objectives of this article, the method used was the analysis of the documents done in the past and who treated this subject. Document analysis is a fundamental source of social research in social sciences and, thus, in sociology. Also, in order to write this article, parts of the professor's scientific work was analyzed. Professor Mihai Şerban's scientific work, published in the country and abroad, referred with predilection, to the economic and social aspects characteristic of Romania at that time of the Romanian village and peasant of this time.

The analysis of the situation of agriculture and of the Romanian countryside in general from an economic and social point of view preoccupies him, from an early age, in *Our social-agrarian problems. (1914)*. The basis of knowledge of the rural reality, now in reunited Romania, will follow the concrete situation and future prospects of the Romanian peasantry in the work *Tendencies of evolution of the peasant class (1926)* - preface praised by Iuliu Maniu (important Romanian politician, prime minister, president of the National Peasant Party). A much-discussed issue - as far as its importance is concerned, is that of the agrarian reform of 1921 which M. Şerban will analyze in *The Consequences of the Agrarian Reform on the Social and Economic State of Romania (1929)*. The problem of the cooperative organization of agriculture, also studied in *Our Social-Agrarian Problems*, is the subject of the paper *Le role de la Coopération dans l'organisation de la petite propriété et dans l'augmentation de sa production (1929)*. The great economic crisis of the interwar period, especially its causes and effects on the economic and social situation of the Romanian village and peasant, are discussed, among others, in the *General Agricultural Crisis and the agrarian situation in Romania (1930)*; *The agricultural overpopulation ... and the future of the Romanian economy (1933)* volume consisting of 2 papers: 1. *The agricultural overpopulation produced by the mechanization of soil culture* (document presented and accepted at the Interparliamentary Conference in Rome, 1933) and 2. *The convulsions of the crisis and the future of the Romanian economy* (paper presented at the general assembly of the Union of Chambers of Agriculture Bucharest, 1933).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The way in which he applied this conception in the activity of manager can be seen in the Academy of Higher Agronomic Studies, report 1918 - 1938. The conference published under the title *Introduction to the study of social agronomy (1939)* contains the socio-economic theory of broad perspectives, theoretical and

practical, of professor Mihai Şerban. *The assertion potential of our agrarian state* (1944) is the theme and title of a paper that deals with the situation of Romanian agriculture and rural areas while affirming the main, inevitable role of industrialization for the country's existence and progress. Finally, his favorite theme, social-agrarian, retains it once again in *A Vital Problem of Our Social-Agrarian Future* (1944). M. Şerban dealt consistently, competently and responsibly with the most important economic, social, cultural and political aspects of agriculture, the village and the Romanian peasant in the first decades of the twentieth century. As such, he was a branded and authorized product and exponent of his time and his country.

Although the analyzes performed by him refer to a number of concrete aspects (economic, social situation etc.) all his approaches are made on the basis and for the purpose of a general, unitary conception. Regardless of whether he referred to the problems of property, organization and modernization of agriculture or the development of the level of civilization and culture of the Romanian peasant, M. Şerban treated these problems as a social whole. It is characteristic of him that, dealing with the concrete, particular aspects of this whole, he also studied the reciprocal connections, the interconditioning of the different aspects and of them with the respective rural and national environment of which they were part. He also interpreted the internal rural realities in relation to the international ones, deeply grasping the meaning of the contemporary development of mankind as privileging overall, "global" aspects.

Through all this, the scientific contributions of Professor Mihai Şerban lend themselves to a sociological analysis. Especially his work *Introduction to the study of social agronomy* is a major example of such a possibility. In this paper he summarizes a number of his previous analyzes and continues to give them an increased unity to the problems and areas of socio-economic activity to which these problems refer. Overall, M. Şerban's conception and method have an obvious systemic character, a fact that ensured his scientific validity, being at the same time a premise of his practical dimension. We also mention the fact that Mihai Şerban highlighted a thorough scientific, theoretical training and an in-depth knowledge of the country's rural realities.

His analyzes are characterized by objectivity and probity, a critical spirit towards the existing situation. However, concerned with the theoretical level of analysis, systematically based on this level, he never forgets the practical needs of social realities, proposes solutions and requires the application in practice of these solutions and the science behind them. Once again we emphasize the fact that, through the way he examines agriculture, the Romanian village and the peasant, the "social units" that these segments of reality form, his conception proposes an integrative sociological vision. It is no coincidence that M. Şerban always insists on the social dimension of the problems. In this context, his opinion on the role and importance of rural sociology (embodied by him in the theory of social agronomy) in the era of modern transformation of society is natural. And it is no coincidence that Professor Şerban's proposals include the introduction of rural sociology as a compulsory subject of study in agricultural universities. If his theoretical and practical work (both combined in scientific works, in didactic and managerial activity as rector and senior civil servant), arose from the interwar Romanian rural reality addressing it, in many

respects it is still relevant today. The twentieth century began, among other things, with a serious socio-economic problem - that of the village, agriculture and the Romanian peasant. Here that this century has ended with a similar problem and the beginning of the 21st century is facing the same rural problem. After the anticommunist revolution of 1989 in Romania, the problems of private property, of the technical-material endowment of agriculture, the problems of its organization returned. The fragmentation of the agrarian property, observed by M. Șerban, has also returned. The lack of modern tools and machines or technologies is still relevant today. The issue of "similarization" of education is also very topical, ie raising it in all its branches, including agronomy, to a high level, identical or at least close in all institutions and countries in the European integration process. In the same situation is the conception of Professor M. Șerban about the role of science and culture in the development - modernization of Romanian agriculture and rural areas.

### CONCLUSIONS

Considering the whole scientific work of M. Șerban we can appreciate that the global analysis, as a whole, of the economic and social realities in agriculture and the Romanian village will allow him the causal understanding of the problems, their historical evolution and future perspectives. We can also consider that his theory on "social agronomy", as a particular expression of a rural sociology, is largely the consequence of such an analysis, multilateral and causal. That is why it is necessary to have an sociological overview of his theoretical work. Also, the increasing role of science, culture, civic and political consciousness, school in rural areas remain current issues. Especially since almost half of the population in the year 2020 lives in the country and most of the rural people are employed in agriculture. Above all these problems is the basic idea of social agronomy as formulated by Mihai Șerban: "*Social agronomy is based on the concept that agriculture is not an end in itself, but a means for the material and cultural upliftment of the general population and the agricultural population in particular*". However, those who continue his work, professors and agronomy students, must have as a model the passion of the great forerunner for science and in the first line for the needs of agriculture, the village and the Romanian peasant. Especially in this period, when the Romanian society is engaged in a wide and deep process of modernization, transformation in the European sense, of integration in the system of values and exigencies of the occident, the example of his work, adapted to the current conditions, can and must be studied and continued.

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