

The Notion of Human Geography and the Origins of Rurality in the Hațeg Land

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Abstract

The attempt to outline and analyze comparatively a series of diachronic aspects of the social and economic evolution in a specific territory (region), through a connection with those of an area extended or situated on distinct geographic coordinates in other regions of the planet, revealed the preoccupations of introducing coordinates the Romanian inter-war geographic school had in the context of universal geography and alignment to the global concepts of human geography. In the mainly rural area of the Hațeg Land, communities in general relate to the past by practicing and keeping their ancestral traditions, against the increasing process of the current cultural external pressures. Ion Conea's research approach for his work regarding to Clopotiva - un sat din Hațeg was appreciated from the 1935-1940s as more than a unilateral and fragmentary presentation of geographic or ethnographic aspects; it was perceived as a new analytical paradigm in the entire domestic academic environment as in international scientific community.

Rezumat

În încercarea de a încadra și de a analiza comparativ aspecte diacronice ale evoluției sociale și economice dintr-un anumit teritoriu (regiune), prin raportarea cu cele ale unei zone extinse sau situate pe coordonate geografice distincte din alte zone ale globului, s-au relevat preocupările de introducere ale coordonatelor școlii geografice românești din perioada interbelică în contextul geografiei universale și alinierea la conceptele globale ale geografiei umane. Într-o zonă preponderent rurală cum este cea a Țării Hațegului, ansamblul comunităților care o populează se raportează la trecut prin manifestări de practică și menținere a tradițiilor ancestrale, contrare prezenței unui proces din ce în ce mai accentuat al presiunilor culturale externe. Perspectiva de cercetare a lui Ion Conea pentru lucrarea Clopotiva - un sat din Hațeg a fost apreciată încă din anii 1935-1940 de către comunitatea științifică internațională și de către întregul mediul academic autohton, nu doar ca simplă expunere unilaterală și fragmentară a unor aspecte geografice sau etnografice, ci ca o nouă paradigmă analitică de cunoaștere.

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1. Introduction

The definition of *human geography* requires the initial perspective of the fundamental notion of *geography*, from which it derived as a separate scientific branch. Etymologically speaking, *geography* was derived from the Greek term *γεωγραφία*, which includes the mythological name of the earth (*gêa*) and whose interpretation includes a “*description of the earth*”. According to the dictionary, *geography* is the science that studies the earth crust and its physical, economic, and biological features, and which deals with the description and analysis of the phenomena that occur on its surface.

Modern *geography* pays attention to the study of earth and its habitat, natural and anthropic complexities. Two of the current fundamental directions of research in the field of *geography* are represented by the notion of distribution, which is the spatial analysis of the relationship between natural phenomena and human ones and the study of the relationships between man and habitat. As a link between man and physical scientific notions, geography is split in two main elements: *human geography* and *physical geography*².

The field of *human geography* includes the concept of *classic geography*, of the geographical environment (landscape) by alternation with the one dedicated to the human universe, the universe of social (existence) and economic (activities), political and cultural components and behaviors. An examination of the core of this notion reveals the hypostasis of the *man-habitat binomial* as both support and origin in the analytical process of the *historic geography* involved by the assessment of the present in its relation and connection to the past³.

One main concept of *human geography* is man’s capacity to organize the geographical space as even notion of the logical association to spatial component and of the relationships between spatial elements.

2. Individualization unit of analysis

In Romania, scientific awareness of and interest in the analyses of the geographical space were launched in the inter-war period, influenced by the geographical concepts that were thriving in the West, actively promoted by France and Germany. They preferred fundamental concepts which would allow spatial configuration and the possibility to analyze the geographical space⁴.

Given the permanent diversification of the *man-nature* relationships within the habitat, triggered by demographic growth, by economic development and by an increasing complexity of territorial reality, the necessity to identify a set of instruments and actions which would enable the ordering, the systematization and the interpretation of geographic information and elements became obvious⁵.

In a global and exhaustive investigation, the results should include the whole of the historic, social, economic, cultural and spiritual aspects contained by the study of a territory. According to these multiple research directions, the adherence to interdisciplinary methods of analysis was required. Thus, the concept of *regionalization* became necessary, initially founded on intuitive analytical criteria as a reflection of the process of regional delineation: uniqueness, homogeneity, functionality and contiguity. Vintilă Mihăilescu was the first Romanian geographer who, in 1935, obtained a *geographical regionalization* of Romania. This operation revealed the necessity to relate territorial entities (units) to the relevant geographic facts for an efficient organization of the geographic space.

² <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geografie>

³ Constanța Rusenescu, *Concepția de geografie umană în opera lui Ion Conea*, study at the Bucharest University of Geography, 984, p.7-9

⁴ Ioan Ianoș, *Orașele și organizarea spațiului geografic*, Bucharest, 1987, pp. 24-25

⁵ *Ibidem*

Such an extension of the analysis was possible only after the theoretical framework and the research methodology were defined. The individualization of research along a limited dimension of a specific region through a territorial delineation (the regional study) generated the identification and the substantiation of general criteria of individualization of a territorial unit⁶.

From among the Romanian geographers who contributed significantly to the sedimentation of the principles of research according to detailed units, Ion Conea's theoretical vision stands out⁷. The originality of his works and methodological approaches argues for the definition of essential notions derived from a construct of *human geography*, through the presentation of synopses and interferences between the field of historic geography and the one of geographic toponymy. Their association focused particularly on those reserved to the French geographic school whose reciprocity of factors has been frequently invoked.

By promoting the principles of human geography and an original concept of sociological monograph, Ion Conea worked out in an integral and exhaustive approach the historical, geographical, biological conditioning of the habitat, as well as the social, economic, political, spiritual, administrative and legal manifestations of the community⁸. In accordance with the Latin proverb *Ab Uno Disce Omnes*⁹, the principles *analysis=synopsis, particular=general* were applied, while deduction – induction reasoning generalized a series of features for an extended rural region. The research methodology selected in a forefront of the analysis samples of elements obtained from the identification of reference points, examples of elements deemed most representative¹⁰.

3. Diversity and rural identity in Hațeg Land

The fact that relatively recent (post-2009) initiatives¹¹ of the Romanian academic community focused on the Hațeg Land and secondarily to the habitat, territoriality and aspects relating to the economic and social condition of the Hațeg communities confirms the scientific interest in the presentation of the diversity and identity of this area. Here, additional proof is the reediting in 2010 of one of the most representative contemporary monographs that included in one work a remarkable volume of studies and research on the Hațeg Land. Performed in the 1940s, the study *Clopotiva - un sat din Hațeg* was unanimously appreciated by the inter-war international scientific community owing to the profound dimension and originality of his innovative concepts. The locality Clopotiva was recorded as reference for a vast interdisciplinary theoretical notion characterized by attributes generalized and extended to the entire Land of Hațeg. Although apparently the topic of the study is a local monograph, Ion Conea's paper is in fact a synopsis of a large corpus of texts that gathered the collective conclusions of multiple research directions toward the study of Clopotiva in the commune Râu de Mori. The target of the analyses identifies a rural traditional settlement in the Hațeg Land, situated on the north side of the Retezat Mountain and near the intra-muros perimeter of the former capital of the province Ulpia Traiana Dacica Sarmizegetusa, essentially by bringing together the characteristics of the same habitat and its reflection on the community.

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ Ion Conea (born January 15, 1902, Coteana, county Olt, died June 22, 1974, Bucharest) was a Romanian geographer and geopolitical man, doctor-docent, specialist in historic geography and geographic toponymy. His significant contribution to the geopolitical science relates to his attempt to theorize the field, as well as to identify its research direction. Conea includes geopolitics in the large field of international relations and thus anticipates its importance in the study of inter-state relations and pressures. With a geographic perspective of the world, according to his training, Conea thought the political environment should be traced and defined on geographic grounds. Thus, Conea stated that geopolitics should be able to provide explanations for the aspects of the political map of the world; according to him, this map is the study object of geopolitics. In this context, politics is defined as the *science of the world political environment, a science of world political atmosphere or condition*. http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ion_Conea

⁸ Ion Conea, *Clopotiva, un sat din Hațeg*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2010, Cuvânt înainte pp. XVII-XVIII

⁹ *Ab uno disce omnes* – Latin for "From one, learn all" (Vergil – Aeneid II, 65.) <http://www.citate-celebre-cogito.ro/ab-uno-disce-omnes/>

¹⁰ Constanța Rusenescu, 1984, pp.8-9

¹¹ Beginning of the project for the *Preservation of bio- and geo-diversity as support for the sustainable development and economic and social increase in the Hațeg Land – Retezat*, funded by the mechanism of the EEA sustained by Norway, Ireland and Liechtenstein and executed by researchers on behalf of the Romanian Academia and the Bucharest University

The study is one of the critical analyses of texts, by establishing organic relationships at two tiers, one within the Hațeg village and the second in a larger territorial context, the overall rural Hațeg Land in the habitat of the depression where it is situated, as well as in relation to its geographic coordinates generally appreciated owing to the privileged position they hold in relation to orographic and morphologic implications. The investigation approaches the beginnings of rural Hațeg knowledge from the perspective of an archaic language specific to the inter-war; this involves a sensibly ideological discourse, but does not challenge the scientific purpose of the study; we could say it merely assigns it a touch of empathy and attachment to ancestral values and the memory of place:

“This knowledge should be first an analysis, for each and every village and then an overall synopsis of the overall country... the village, however, cannot be viewed and understood as it is today unless we look first to its environment and understand its past. In other words, we must see what nature gave man for his bodily living and then which historic spirit nourishes man’s soul (from the Hațeg Land, our note)¹².

According to Spengler’s view, the culture was just a product of extinct civilizations, being generated by a strong sense of space. Lucian Blaga set the spatial horizon of the unconscious in an organic and integrated connection with the landscape and *spatial pattern*, supporting this thesis with relevant historical and ethnographic evidence in rural settlements from Transylvania. These samples are characterized by individualized forms in a spatial landscape alternation: mountain-hill-plain. In these coordinates, in a landscape with high density spiritual interferences, overlapped features of a complex individual and collective creations¹³.

4. Milestones in the evolution of land (*terra*) ownership in Hațeg Land

In the foreground of the research approach we can see the investigations into the habitat (geographic settlement), into history (chronological and particularly historiographical frame) and, last but not least, into spirituality and religion (mythical aspects), relating to the *valuation of future* whose direction relates to the essence of *the present’s knowledge* and of the *understanding of the past*. It is only through this process that the optimal forecasts of a future action plan rely exclusively on the concept of *knowledge*. The notion of *knowledge* is built on the effects of a prior and absolutely necessary action and it is obtained for the stated and set purpose of mastering *the essence* as means of development and efficiency. This axiomatic approach is identified for a redefinition of the notion of *monograph* as an *administrative-political mission*.

With other Romanian territories and perhaps even more, given its history and geographical position in a central and privileged area of Transylvania, the people of the Hațeg Land went through the main evolutionary steps of the Dacian-Roman synthesis, through the more or less substantial effects of migrants, and were part of the Transylvanian principalities and voivodeships between the 9th and the 10th centuries. In accordance with their cross-regional and European destiny, they faced the invasions of the Magyar warriors of the Arpads at the beginning of the 10th century, but they have constantly affirmed the tendency to retain their ancestral identity and traditions, since the Middle Ages and until the present day.

The Hațeg habitat, outlined by the two archaic Sarmizegetusas, marked by the spirit of the place and a substantial memorial load, retains, after two millennia, the character of a *pastoral, unchanged life, preserved with all its primitive originality*, which, although an offshoot of an implicitly *retrograde* spiritual condition, is precious owing to its *authenticity (...true copy of what it may have been when Dacia was conquered, everything included – good and bad, weaknesses and qualities ...*

¹² Op. cit. Ion Conea, *Clopotiva, un sat din Hațeg*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest, 2010, p.4

¹³ Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii*, Bucharest, 2011, pp. 63-69

troubles – author’s note – 1940)¹⁴. We note the obvious closeness to which the Hațeg Land relates via the accounts given by the famous historian Camille Julian about the region *Gergovia*, famous Gallic capital city of *Vercingetorix*, the nest of ultimate resistance in the population’s fights against *Caesar*, where the *contemporary French peasant* is thought to possess most of the same ancestral features of the *Gallic peasant* during *Vercingetorix’s* glory era¹⁵... this region filled with ancient French history underwent reconstructions of the authentic *Gallic* living context based on sociological, ethnologic and anthropologic studies launched by the French historians of the inter-war.

We note that, during the Roman ruling of Dacia, markedly in the Hațeg Land, because of the aforementioned aspects, the ruralization of its territory was constantly related to the institutionalization of the legacy that we read, of course, from a semantic perspective limited to its archaic form of heritage and strict ownership of some immovable properties. To clarify the aspects of the legislative-juridical set and to understand the social-economic effects of such an action, we need to get closer to the coordinates of its social background. By default, the new imperial colonies that were founded after the Roman conquests assimilated Rome’s laws and accepted the establishment of the *ius italicum* convention, which meant that land ownership was disburdened; thus their citizens and rightful owners were fully exempt from land taxes¹⁶. We need to add this type of property was the main legal institution in the Roman Empire. The imperial authority in the territories of the provinces was performed by a governor (*legatus augusti pro consule*), *empire legate* of *senatorial* rank and *consular* degree, who exerted his full administrative, legal and military rights. In the province Dacia, emperor Trajan’s first delegate was governor Decimus Terentius Scaurianus, the one who performed the ceremonial proceedings for the establishment of the colony Ulpia Traiana, an event briefly recorded "By order of Emperor Caesar Nerva Traianus Augustus, son of divine Nerva, the colony Dacica was established through Decimus Terentius Scaurianus, its governor".

Thus, we can identify the right of property acquisition by the future citizens. By noting here the re-actualization and the elicitation of the sacred aspects recorded according to the rite of drawing the limits of the *citadel*, of establishing a new *axis mundi* and of the local reassertion of the concept of *Roma Quadrata*, we will assess the patrimonial aspects that related the *veterans’* apportionment of property by the direct involvement of the imperial authority. While Decimus Terentius Scaurianus dealt with the details of the ritual ceremony, two thousand veterans drew lots for the position and right of ownership of their personal parcel within the future *intra-muros*¹⁷. Additionally, the most privileged ones had the right to choose a second property in the *territorium* (extra-muros), where the perspective of building a temporary lodge for the hot season was contemplated (*villa rustica*); at the same time, an area of administration of a substantial patrimonial limit was calculated and it would allow the efficient management of agricultural or pomological crops. Thus, we can emphasize the notion of the direct local association of the inhabitants with the land (*terra*), while we also note the archaic premises of appearance of the condition of *teran* (peasant). We believe this detail reveals the origins of a defining aspect established from then on as an initial core of the sociological meaning of rural evolution in the Hațeg Land, all the while providing a plausible answer to the generic chronological dating of the Hațeg settlement by the ontological repositioning of the phrase "...as old as the hills": this is what peasant answer when asked about the origins of their village¹⁸.

¹⁴ Ibidem, pp.533-535

¹⁵ *Vercingetorix* (82 î.Hr.-46 î.Hr.) was chieftain of the Arverni tribe, who united the Gauls in a revolt against Roman forces during the last phase of Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars, according to <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vercingetorix>

¹⁶ <http://www.stiucum.com/drept/istoria-dreptului/Statul-si-dreptul-in-dacia-pro44716.php>

¹⁷ Alexandru Diaconescu, *Forurile Sarmizegetusei*, Mega, Cluj-Napoca, 2013

¹⁸ Ion Conea, 2010, p.17

5. Ascendancy of rural establishment(*fossatum*) in the territory

In Dacia, there are records, after the years 108-110, of many people who lived on the *territorium* within the colony Ulpia Traiana Dacica Sarmizegetusa. In its peak period, inside the ancient city, on its 34 ha, approximately 15-20,000 inhabitants lived, which is considerable when related to the representativeness of cities in the ancient time; these people also included those who could afford a withdrawal from the city during summertime, as well as those who carried out agricultural activities in numerous *villa rustica*. The traces of several buildings or lower rank settlements, rural in nature, were examined or are known on the *territorium* of Roman Sarmizegetusa for another 60-80 ha¹⁹. Rural localities were organized on two types of organization principles: some met the characteristics of the Roman model, while the others met the Dacian model. The Roman pattern would mean two other typologies: *pagi* (*pagus*), a name that denoted the rural localities founded on *municipality*-dependent territories (*intramuros*) and *vici* (*vicus*), rural localities founded within the territorial premises that did not belong to the cities. Rural localities configured according to the Dacian model, the village (territorial) communities (*obști*) were integrated in the province, but had the right over their own community, autarkical organization²⁰. Furthermore, settlements of mid-rank were also identified, placed between the rustic-rural level and the one of the capital-*metropolis*.²¹ Here, we can list those at Germisara (now Cigmău-Geoagiu), Aquae (now Călan) and Micia (now Vețel), which held a distinct juridical and administrative status²².

The colony Ulpia Traiana Dacica Sarmizegetusa kept its position of center of province authority until the year 271. The locality was advanced to the rank of *metropolis* (privileged in the empire) under Emperor Severus Alexander. Abandoned by Roman officials, the Colony underwent, in the next centuries, permanent damage under the influences and pressures exerted by the Barbarians who crosses the area of the Roman province, given the transformations known by the people who remained on the Romanized Dacia territory after the 3rd century. Although between the 3rd and 8th centuries these migrants crosses the Transylvanian territories, they did not establish their own states here. They merely issued a series of exclusive economic claims, with no substantial influence on the socio-political organization of the locals; in the end, they were assimilated by the latter because of the cumulative presence of a number of sedentary ethnic elements. To clarify the etymology of the notion of *village*, we mention that, in Romanian, it is derived from the Latin word *fossatum* which, initially, meant the primary presence of a settlement that appeared by the delineation of a place in the form of a *ditch* fortified by *palisades*. In Old Romanian, *village* (*sat*) did not mean the geographical, toponymic notion, as we may think; instead, it meant the demographic fact and a social notion, as an expression for the gathering of a community's inhabitants, which involves, as we noted, the territorial ascertainment of premises.

Basically, we can say that in this extended time interval between the 3rd and 8th centuries, the ethnic genesis of the Romanian people occurred an archaic economic and social organization of the Romanian villages, took place in a distinct relationship. The differences and inequalities between the social ranks whose appearance had been launched since then triggered the creation of the premises for the appearance of feudal relationships in the following period marked by powerful development. The population's increasing numbers meant naturally the increasingly significant appearance of the new rural settlements, the villages.

Revealed by the research archeological effort of the 1950s for the Hațeg Land, the existence of some village communities from the early 8th, 9th and 10th centuries is confirmed.²³ The

¹⁹ Gică Băeștean și Tiberiu Albușescu, *Monografie istorico-etnografică a localității Sarmizegetusa*, Deva, p.32

²⁰ <http://www.stiucum.com/drept/istoria-dreptului/Statul-si-dreptul-in-dacia-pro44716.php>

²¹ Daicoviciu 1966, p. 12., apud Gică Băeștean și Tiberiu Albușescu *Monografie istorico-etnografică a localității Sarmizegetusa*, Deva, p.32

²² Octavian Floca, *Muzeul de arheologie Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa*, Deva, pp.11-12

²³ Radu Popa, *La începuturile evului mediu românesc. Țara Hațegului*, Bucharest, 1988, pp.46-47

archeological findings relating to the beginnings of the medieval era at the Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa, which had become Grădiște and later Britonia, also confirmed by the appearance of the first pieces of written information, reflect the search for patterns of community stability, whose final execution was delayed only by unfavorable external pressures, because, in the end, the crystallization of this stability took place within a sufficiently defined territory²⁴. We conclude by mentioning that, in the Middle Ages, the evolution and social-demographic transformation of this habitat saw a particular mobility in the configuration of rural communities as main form of habitation. Village community (obști) unions were established in river valleys, in depressions, along some roads; they could “swarm” and established a union council for the settlement of common problems. Despite these favorable geographical circumstances, the historiographical diachronic aspects of the place confirmed establishments and disappearances of villages, shifts in hearths and village communities along the valleys where they were situated, changes in the use of natural resources by the local communities, resources required for the production processes and dedicated to the economic transformation mechanisms in general²⁵.

6. Interpretations and conclusions

For the territory of the Hațeg Land, Roman Antiquity instituted standardized main forms of spatial planning and the main poles of housing outside the city walls. The socio-demographic progressive metamorphosis of the depression habitat has recorded a dynamic layout of rural settlements for the medieval time. All development was based on existing infrastructure, and also was facilitated by these extremely favorable geographical circumstances. The maturity of medieval civilization in Hațeg area is revealed by an event expression of a spiritual life that proves a long tradition.

Although disseminated in a relatively small area, the communities from Hațeg Land have been preserved the immanence attributes acquired during two millennia of existence. The authenticity of built heritage, cultural identity, traditions and customs ancestral durabilities, and even more than all of them, shared to the visitor through the whole spirit of the place, can only be understood just through a detailed tracking of events and historical conjunctures they initiated forms and manifestations expressions.

The specificity is distinguished by the fact that in this area there were two realities which started the Romanian ethnogenesis. This was confirmed by the presence of a single matrix spatial center, one of the Dacian state, and also that of the Roman province of Dacia. The socio-political organization of the territory has evolved under swing and overlap in the same center of gravity, the representative vectors that determined the size of these two civilizations and combined the main issues of both.

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²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 49

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp.82-84

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