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# GEOGRAPHIC IDENTITY ASPECTS OF THE LAND OF THE MOȚI

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**Summary:** This paper focuses on analysing all the geographic and historical aspects that were involved into creating the geographic identity of the Land of the Moți, a region in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains. The purpose of the study is that of identifying and establishing the future strategies for the sustainable development of this region while underlining first the strengths and the weaknesses of the territorial system.

**Rezumat:** Lucrarea noastră este o analiză a tuturor aspectelor geografice și istorice care au dus la crearea identității geografice a unei regiuni din inima Munților Apuseni: Țara Moților. Scopul studiului este de a identifica și de a stabili viitoarele strategii pentru dezvoltarea durabilă a acestei regiuni, subliniind întâi punctele tari și slabe ale acestui sistem regional.

**Key words:** “land”, geographic-functional entity, resources, development, image.

**Cuvinte cheie:** „țară”, entitate geografică funcțională, resurse, dezvoltare, imagine.

# GEOGRAPHIC IDENTITY ASPECTS OF THE LAND OF THE MOȚI

The “land” type regional entities of Romania have been characterised by several fundamental features (‘fortified’ areas where the Romanian ethnics were protected, Orthodoxy, specificity of the ethnographic and toponymy components, etc.). On one hand, many of these attributes were common to all the Romanian “lands”, and, on the other hand, each of these geographic entities has its own features. For the Land of the Moți, the following characteristics are significant: *a different morphology from those of the other “lands”* - it is an “over the mountain tops land”, no depressions; *relevant historical and geographic features* (that imposed the community as a representative of all the Romanians during certain periods); *the existence of certain valuable resources* (such as gold and wood and thus framing the economic profile of the region); *poor or lack of agricultural lands* (triggering continuous mobility for the people in order to ensure their food), etc.

This paper focuses on analysing all the geographic and historical aspects that were involved into creating the geographic identity of this region in the heart of the Apuseni Mountains. A first image of the community and its features is that of the moți themselves and the second one, more important, is that of several other communities either from Romania and from abroad. The purpose of such a both delicate and scientifically rigorous study is that of identifying and establishing the future strategies for the sustainable development of the Land of the Moți while underlining first the strengths and the weaknesses of this territorial system.

## 1. THE LAND OF THE MOȚI – REGIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SYSTEM?

Our paper brings *new pieces of information for the geographic identity aspects of the Land of the Moți*, but is has *also fragments treated in several of our old papers* (Boțan, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, Boțan, 2006, Boțan, Ilovan, Pop, 2005, Boțan, Ilovan, 2006, Cocean, Boțan, 2005) as we felt *it is important to bring them to the attention of a larger audience* (the mentioned papers were mostly published in Romanian or only in Romania). In order that a territory is considered a *geographic region* (regional system) and defined as such it has to have several essential features (we have to draw the reader’s attention to the methodology for including certain territories into *the regional geographic systems category* which has become more strict in order to do away with the extant ambiguity during the recent periods).

Prestigious papers in the field (Cocean, 2005) show exactly the main features (characteristics) of the territory considered a *regional geographic system*. These features are the following:

- Well-defined spatial localisation. This is done according to certain mathematic coordinates that are compatible to the matrix of geographic orientation;
- Nuanced spatial extension including territories that allow generalisations;
- The existence of certain limits based on the areal distribution of the features selected for analysis – the limits are there where these features are no longer dominant (Cocean, 2005);
- A strict hierarchy although the typology and the extension may vary a lot;
- The existence of the components and features generating the specificity of the region as different from the neighbouring regions;
- The existence of certain functional relations among the components of the territory which ensure the continuous economic development of the respective region;
- Enough complexity that ensures that the region will not periodically undergo negative impact changes;
- Interrelations with the neighbouring units, as well as with the remote ones;
- Personal ethos for the respective territory in order to become well-known within the state and the continent;
- Certain internal capacity for modelling its negative characteristics and for inhibiting their potential impact (this may be done by promoting other, favourable features as viable alternatives), etc.

The projection of the above-mentioned features of a region upon the central part of the Land of the Moți renders possible the inclusion of the respective space into the regional geographic systems category. The arguments are the following (Boțan, 2006, Boțan, Ilovan, 2006):

- *Certainty and clarity of the limits*: the region lies in the superior part of the Arieș hydrographical basin. It is mostly delimited by the line of the peaks belonging to the nearby massifs including the convergent orienting slopes. The extension of the region and its limits are supported by the fact that they overlap the inhabited areas by those bearing the name of *moț* (the other human communities in the Apuseni Mountains that are outside the above-mentioned limits do not bear the same name and do not consider themselves moți). The limits of the Land of the Moți are sinuous, and are situated on the line of the highest peaks of the surrounding mountains: in the south-west, the west

and the north-west, this line follows the highest peaks of the Găina and the Bihor Mountains (e.g. Găina, Bihor, Biharia, etc.); in the north, the north-east and the east, the limit is situated in the Gilău and the Muntele Mare Mountains, on the following peaks: Bătrâna, Petreasa, Balomireasa, Muntele Mare, etc., then continuing to the south on the Arieșul Valley, on the interfluvium between the Ștefanca and Mușcanilor Valley, then following the peaks Vârșii Mari and Geamăna. To the south, the limit is situated on several other peaks such as Petriceaia, Brădișoru, Vulcan, etc., then coming to a closing towards south-east where the peaks Răchita and Știubei are situated. The seemingly exclusive geomorphologic character of the limit has strong functional meaning as it delimits a quasi-mountainous space, a human community clearly belonging to it, certain mental, economic, and significant ethnographic specificity;

- *Territorial extension that allows generalisations:* the Land of the Moți is large enough for generalisations. This is true mostly for the similar “land” type entities: the dominant anthropic component is the Romanian ethnic one, the Orthodox religion is best represented, and the economy consists mostly of wood exploiting and processing, etc.;

- *Functional intra- and interrelations.* Among this region’s components there are clear functional relations that allow its inclusion (although a difficult one) on the ascendant economic development trend. One may remark the existence of two different functional and economic subsystems: *the forestry one* polarised by Câmpeni and *the gold mining one* polarised by Abrud and Roșia Montană (Boțan, Ilovan, 2006). The main transport axis along which also the fluxes of mass, energy, and information are oriented is that of the Arieșul Mare river valley supported also by that of the Arieșul Mic. The development of the agricultural touristic field, of wood industry, and the correct implementing of the gold and silver exploitation project are several other strengths of the Land of the Moți, as a *functional regional system*, besides a certain mentality maintained from the difficult periods for the survival of the community. Relations with other geographic units are to be identified for the infrastructure and the means of transport in the region, as well as for touristic objectives that attract a lot of tourists, for the liberalisation of the labour market that offers opportunities for working abroad, etc.;

- *Impact of the critical features.* Any regional system is characterised by the “functioning” of several critical elements that endanger up to a certain degree the functionality of the respective entity. The quality and the complexity of the system is verified and certified only when those critical attributes are overpassed, and economic development follows an ascendant

trend. The Land of the Moți is no exception. Elements such as “*the critical character of the mountainous agriculture (that does not ensure enough food for the local community), the socio-historic conditions (these imprinted themselves on the collective mentality), the critical features of the nowadays demographical phenomena in the region (these render the Land of the Moți as one of the most fragile mountainous regions from this perspective), the extant state of gold mining (this situation is particularly related to the implementing of the mining mega project Gold Corporation that contradicts obviously the European laws in this field)*” (Boțan, 2005c) give at least a hint to the uncertainty for the vitality of the system without changing its direction of economic development.

Still, one may easily see that the Land of the Moți can be considered a regional geographic entity as it has real functional attributes and presents features that are similar to other mountain systems (figure 1). At the same time, a strong personal ethos is to be identified and thus originality is a feature of the analysed system.

**Figure 1. The Land of the Moți** (Boțan, Ilovan, 2006)

## **2. ELEMENTS OF GEOGRAPHIC IDENTITY OF THE LAND OF THE MOȚI**

### **2.1. Morphology** (Boțan, 2005a)

Morphology differentiates this geographic entity through several features that are not to be identified in the case of the similar regions of Romania (the “land” type regions). The Land of the Moți is spread on the peaks and platforms of the Apuseni Mountains and the defensive function is not ensured by the closed basin type of relief but by the high altitude, the great slopes, and the low access forests.

Morphology has both positive and restrictive features for the appearance and development of the regional system of the Land of the Moți. Its impact may be identified at the following three levels: first, *in the morphologic personality of the land*, then *at the level of the settlement system*, and finally *its restrictiveness for the development of agriculture*.

### **2.2. Hydrography** (Boțan, 2006)

The way in which the hydric component (especially the rivers) contributes to the identity of the regional system of the Land of the Moți is a very important one as there is an intrinsic relationship between the hydrography of the region and the appearance and

development of this functional region (Apolzan, 1987, Manciualea, 1997).

The first conditioning resides in the inclusion of the region into the superior part of the Arieş hydrographical basin and this imposes the flux orientation within the territorial system. From this point of view, one may notice a *privileged axis* within the Câmpeni-Bistra sector that goes also along the Arieşul Mare Valley down to Arieşeni. Most of the mass, energy and information fluxes in this “land” are oriented along this axis, approximately from the east to the west where the most important road of the region is situated. In our opinion, this axis has a double role. First, the role of creating *the regional cohesion* as the tributaries have a centripetal orientation, and thus all the fluxes merge to the main river. Secondly, *the centrifugal aspect* is also present as part of the system energy is lost both to the west (through the Vârtop Pass and later on towards the Beiuş Depression and to the western part of Romania) and to the east (along the Arieş Valley).

On the other hand, the hydrographical network was an *a priori* condition (because of its distribution) for settling the region. The human component followed the rivers, especially the Arieşul, the Arieşul Mare, the Arieşul Mic, and the Abrud. Thus, the first settlements were situated along the rivers into small depression basins: Avram Iancu, Bistra, Gârda de Sus, Gârda Seacă, Izvoarele, Câmpeni, Certege, Albac, Horea, Sohodol, Abrud, etc. Here we mentioned the initial nucleus of the respective settlements as they were the spots of the population's later diffusion to the high altitude plateaus. Two aspects should be underlined: one of them is that the first settlements (especially the commune centres), when they got short of the river meadow, reached to the nearby mountainous space, and the other aspect refers to the small villages that appeared later on and settled almost exclusively the Măguri-Mărişel platform (Surd, 1993). Therefore, in the river meadow of the Arieş there are only two major settlements (Câmpeni and Bistra), with a very small percent of the number of inhabitants in their central area (about 32% in Câmpeni and 20% in Bistra).

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, the hydric component induces a major paradox in the regional system of the Land of the Moţi related to the way the moţi perceive the importance of water. Along the rivers there are certain small spots where there are no households despite the fact that they are favourable to settlement. Moreover, the respective groups of households appear in the heart of the mountains where there is no water and it has to be carried from long distance. Many other resources seem to be more important than water in

that karst region: the horizontal platforms, the natural pastures and hayfields favourable to animal breeding, and the forests (Plăiaş, 1994).

### 2.3. Forest and forest capitalising (Boţan, Ilovan, 2006)

Out of the elements that influenced the life of the inhabitants within the Land of the Moţi, and of the Romanians, in general, during the centuries, was *the forest*. It had mainly the role of shelter during uprisings or invasions. During the calm periods, the forest influenced decisively the inhabitant's life, in this region, on an every day basis. His household, sheepfold, mill, and his church, in an archaic form, his furniture, his tools and his weapons, his means of communication, on land and water, as well as many of his customs, from his spiritual life, his literary and artistic creation were related to the forest. Thus one might speak of *a Land of the Moţi wood civilisation*, having its specific forms (from more than 15 hundred years) since Dacia province was left by the Roman legions.

As a commodity (processed or not), the wood had an ascendant trend as far as the price was concerned. During the Early Middle Ages, when the population was relatively scarce, within the context of the extended forest, the price of wood was very low. Therefore, anyone could use the wood for his household needs, cut or burn the forest in order to gain land for cultivating plants or for breeding his animals. The price of wood increased progressively, due to the increase in the number of the inhabitants and the higher degree of processing. The moţi were well-known for the products that they created during the centuries (this phenomenon drastically decreased), and therefore they were determined to descend from their mountains to exchange products or to sell their own.

In the Land of the Moţi, *wood* was the main source for the inhabitants' existence, *an existential monopoly*. Wood was transformed into valuable products, which the people transported to the field areas. In exchange, they received cereals and several food products. When the number of the inhabitants increased significantly and the markets started to expand, the peasants' right to cut the local forest was limited and then they were prevented from this activity (in the second half of the 19th century). At the same time, the price of wood increased as the people noticed that wood could be used not only for their houses, tools, vessels, their weapons or for obtaining coal by burning it (like in the Middle Ages), but also for chemically obtaining varied products such as paper, tar, and acetic acid.

Therefore, nobody will be surprised that the forest, so much linked to the moţi's heart along the

centuries, influenced the literary creation of the inhabitants within this region. Similarly, the artistic sense of the Romanian people manifested itself upon wood, more than upon stone. A proof is the moș's houses and churches, his tools and wood objects characteristic to his household. Even one of the leaders of a revolt (in year 1784, Horea), was a talented builder of wood churches.

Maybe, the most important element of social cohesion and uniformity in the way of thinking and reacting of the moș was *the forest* and most of all the sense that he, together with his neighbours, was the owner of the forest. The inhabitants of this region were first related to forestry and wood processing, and secondly, to mining.

In the central part of the Apuseni Mountains, *the home industry of wood* is very old and varied and is determined by the abundance of this resource, as well as by the low income that the people have from their secondary occupations (e.g. agriculture). Thus, the moș has been determined to become a good confectioner of all kind of wood products and this old occupation has led to identifying the moș with his forest, so that, in certain periods, not even the perspective of leading a better life could determine him to give up his old occupation.

I. Popa (2003), presents the moș's attachment to his native region: those who left for America for a better life, could not make it without their home and came back after 2-3 years of work; similarly, while travelling through the country in order to sell his products, the moș saw more welcoming places than his native one, but none could attract him, so that he came back to his dear mountains and forest. This affective relationship that the moș had with his mountains and forest explained also the failure of the action of colonising him in the proximity of the western border of Romania, where although he received fertile lands, he stayed there only during the agricultural works, while spending the rest of the time at his household in the mountains.

From what we have presented so far, related to the importance of the wood for the Land of the Moși, one may notice that the tradition of forestry and wood processing has an overwhelming importance for the every day existence of the people in this region.

The way in which the inhabitants reacted when they were in the situation to lose what was their most important good – *the forest* – was defining for understanding what the process of the appearance of a “land” meant: the real moși are those who fought for this resource. The forest was perceived as a sacred property by the moș, that was why significant social movements (proof of their social

cohesion) took place (e.g. in 1784 and 1848) (for defending their forest from the foreign rulers).

Wood processing, at a small scale, of handicraft dates back to very old times. But, at an industrial scale, in the Land of the Moși, wood processing is a recent one. Close to Roșia Montană, in Cămpeni, such an industrial unit has been functioning for several decades and, also at present; it offers jobs for about 1000 employees. After 1990, other smaller units that exploit the “green gold” appeared in Cămpeni.

#### **2.4. Gold Mining (Boțan, Ilovan, 2006)**

Another exception to the above-mentioned profile is that in the Abrud Valley basin the millenary gold mining replaced wood exploitation and processing. The economic complementarity did not modify the mentality of the people in the region, the ethnographic elements having the same contents (architecture, customs, and folklore, etc.). The specificity of the economic activities in the area of the Abrud Valley, as different from the rest of the Land of the Moși, determined some of the authors to identify two “*land*” type geographic entities in the centre of the Apuseni Mountains: one characterised by forestry specificity (the Land of the Moși) and another one with mining specific activities (the Land of Abrud). We disagree with this idea. If individualising such a “Land of Abrud” would draw our attention to some differences, its delimiting as a sub-system of the Land of the Moși would be a fact.

The importance of gold mining in the Land of the Moși resides in the population fluxes it oriented towards this region, in the high value of the metal, and in the instability it induces at present.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

We consider that the four above-mentioned and analysed attributes are the most important identifying elements of the Land of the Moși. Beside these, several others may be included, too: *social-historical conditions, the specificity of spatial individualising, the specificity of the climate, the features of demography, of tourism, and of the ethnographic component, etc.* Nevertheless, their impact is weaker in the process of creating the personality of the region.

What is surprising is that despite the “opposition” of some characteristics and their inhibiting role, this regional system is a functional one and may be considered a model for other “land” type regions provided that the promoted sustainable development models are implemented correctly no matter the difficulties. The Land of the Moși

remains a significant geographic entity inside Romania having the possibility of being included among the emblematic regions of the European Union.

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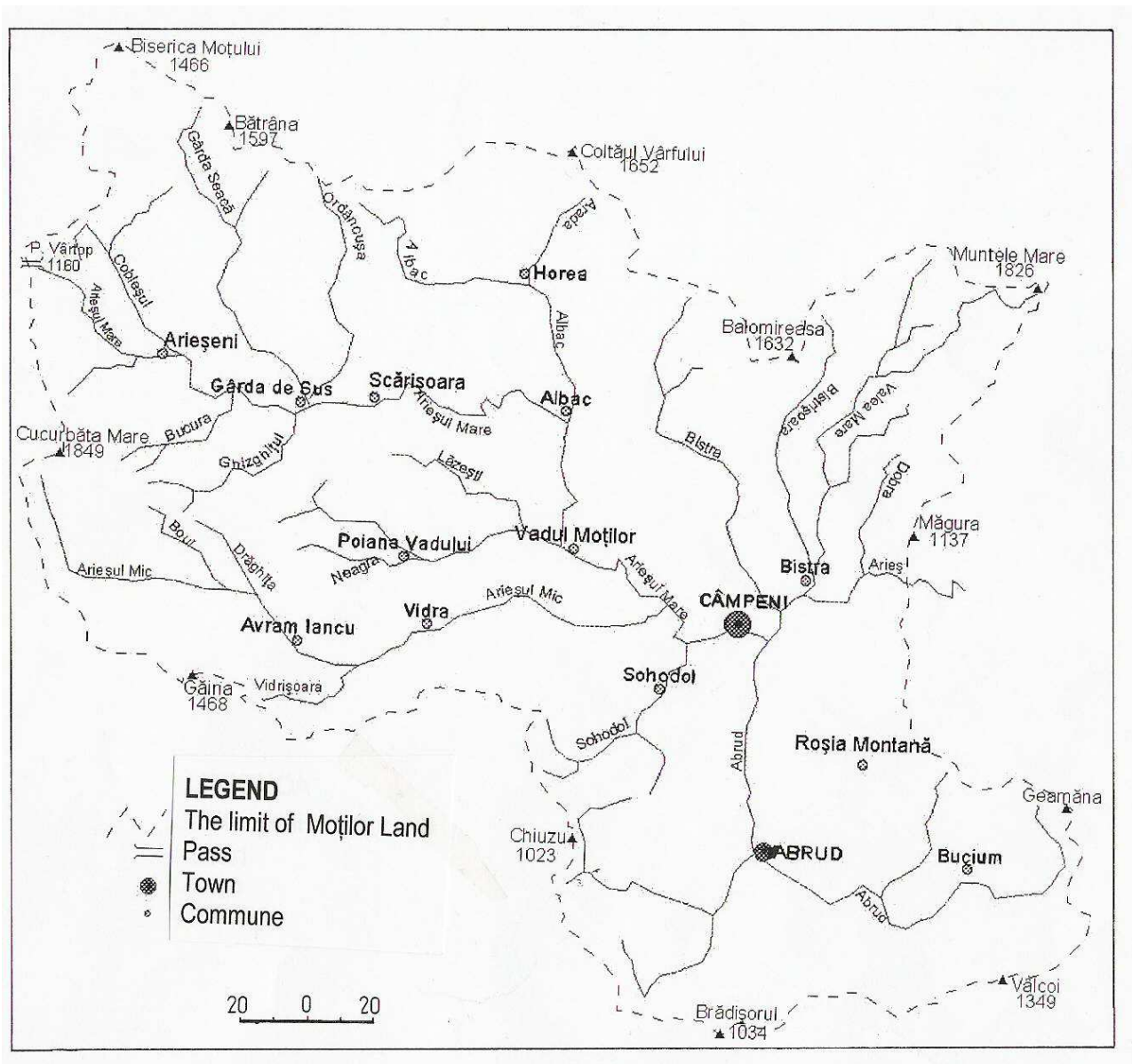


Figure 1 (see its place in the text)