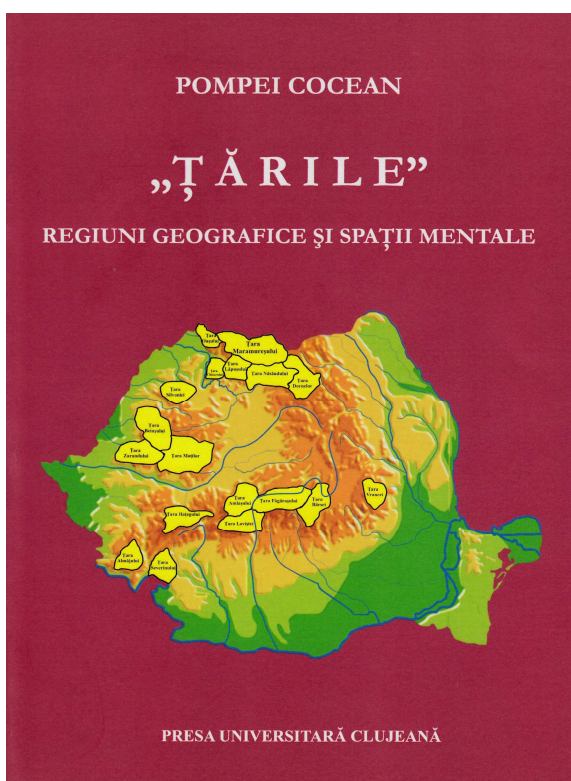


COCEAN, POMPEI - „ȚĂRILE”: REGIUNI GEOGRAFICE ȘI SPAȚII MENTALE [“The Lands” as Geographical Regions and Mental Spaces], Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, 247 p., 68 figures, including 115 book or study titles. ISBN: 978-973-595-328-7



In vogue for decades at the level of the European Union policy, the administrative-territorial entities represent areas within which any project comes to life. But many of them turn out to be unsustainable because they include a great heterogeneity in terms of both physical-geographical and human factors. Thus, it results a poor functionality, with divergent gravity axes and a mosaic of poles that function on opposing criteria. Therefore, the identification of some functional territories was required. It was the French who initiated this identification, having a predecessor in Paul Vidal de la Blache, by creating some territorial levels, intermediate to those existent and enacted, namely the inter-communal associations and the “pays” (“țară”/“land”)-type regions.

Paying special attention to the European context in which some viable regions have been identified and have shown a strong resilience over the centuries, Professor Pompei Cocean identifies

18 “land”-type regions in Romania. They are considered optimal constructions for providing territorial cohesion because they incorporate genuine mental spaces and basins of life. Most of the 18 regions, with strong historical, geographical and ethnographical reverberations, have been thoroughly analysed, but far from establishing sufficient or complete information.

The original approach to such a challenging topic, the outline of some forward-looking directions for the evolution of these regions, the pragmatic vision on some territorial units that can be invested as project regions, the elevated and straight writing are just some of the qualities which recommend this book to be read.

Starting from the predecessors’ studies, associated to the principles of resilience, the author makes an integrated approach to assign the attributes of a programme/project region to the “land”-type territorial units. Thus, he identifies the natural and anthropogenic centripetal-like gravity, the presence of a complex support basis, innovation capacity, the presence of some polarizing centres, the emphasis of a geographical mental space as mandatory valences, also turned into commune characteristics of these regions.

In fact, the entire book is permeated by the mental criterion, the one which combines the perceived regional space with the lived and the imagined one. The immediate result of this mix of elements resides in the following territorial categories: national mental spaces, provincial mental spaces, ethnographic mental spaces, habitational mental spaces, and metropolitan mental spaces - a category derived from the last one. Just like his forerunners and teachers – Simion Mehedinți, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Tiberiu Morariu, Ion Conea, Grigore Posea, the author identifies the lifeblood of the Romanians’ identity in the backbone of the Carpathians, the Romanian mental space having *waviness*, the *sine curve* as a defining characteristic (p. 38). Furthermore, as in any logical structure, the stages and the elements of the Carpathian archetypal space are mentioned in a well-thought-out reasoning.

The issue on the dissolution of the inhabitants’ territorial belonging is also brought to the reader’s attention. This issue, which is under the sign of borderlessness, allochthony, substitution or cosmopolitanism, is punctually reflected for each “land”-type region. This has inevitably led to the emergence of some *mental niches* that respond best to temporal shifts, as in the case of the deeply rural settlements in the

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Land of the Moți, the lands of Maramureș, Năsăud, Zarand, Almăj, Lovișteea, Vrancea, Severin or Dorna (p. 42).

In order to clarify the ambiguities generated by the semantics of some concepts, the discussion on “ținut” is not omitted either. That is an administrative-territorial unit invested with similar attributes to “lands”, but with a slightly outlined territorial cohesion, sometimes used only to render an imagined space, becoming thus a means of rendering a stylistic register.

The author integrates all the dominant peculiarities of “lands” into a very welcome book that synthesizes the results proceeding from the studies of regional geography dedicated to “lands”, with the obstinacy of the researcher eager to investigate the reality in the field, find its weaknesses and offer development alternatives. The Land of Maramureș corresponds to a civilization based on wood exploitation and processing, and also on a unique rural heritage. The Land of Oaș, located in its immediate vicinity, stands out because of its special natural and human potential, its strong territorial cohesion and its genuine characteristics. Moreover, the authors that tackled the two regions, due to their extraordinary capacity for interpretation, have managed to settle the authenticity of each region once more and eliminate any confusion between the two territorial units, confusion which is unfortunately perpetuated until today. Despite being overshadowed, the Land of Lăpuș and the Land of Chioar have got out of isolation, seized as a powerful space for preserving the customs and the mentality of the local people. The geographical location of the Land of Silvania in an open depression area, associated to a low corridor to its north and south border, was a decisive factor in the colonization of the Hungarians, which has influenced the evolution of this region. The early colonization of the Saxons and the Szeklers in the early Middle Ages had a major impact upon the evolution of settlements or the territorial identification of the population in the Land of Bârsa.

Perceived as slope lands, the Land of Năsăud benefits by the shelter function induced by landforms, counterbalanced by its relative isolation from the Someșul Mare Corridor, which makes it “a pole of spiritual diffusion”, while the Land of Făgăraș appears as a transition area between the polarizing areas of Brașov and Sibiu. The quintessence of the interrelations between man and nature is most clearly illustrated in the case of the Land of the Moți (“[...] a fragment, perhaps the most authentic, of the Carpathian archetypal space [...]”, p. 122). The overlapping of the Land of Zarand over three polarization areas (the Gulf of Zarand, Hălmagiu Depression, Brad Depression) has led to a centrifugal evolution of the region and a restructuring of the mental space. Another reconstruction model, of archaeological nature this time, is peculiar to the Land of Amlaș. The geographical position as central place or as transit area located on the route of the colonization from Maramureș and Transylvania and the superposition on the old village communities define regions such as the Land of Bârsa and the Land of Dorna, the Land of Vrancea or the Land of Almăj. The Land of Severin is a mental space governed by the second Romanian element, the Danube. Neither the peculiarities of the Land of Lovișteea, the Land of Hațeg or the Land of Beiuș were omitted.

The elements with strong reverberation in identifying some “lands” were not omitted either: *ethnic multiculturalism* (the Land of Maramureș, the Land of Bârsa), *forest* (the Land of Silvania, the Land of the Moți, the Land of Vrancea, the Land of Lovișteea, the Land of Dorna), *gold* (the Land of the Moți, the Land of Zarand), *shepherding* (the Land of Bârsa, the Land of Vrancea, the Land of Amlaș, the Land of Făgăraș).

The resilience of the “lands” will be provided, from the author’s perspective, through their investment as project regions with systemic attributes and through branding (folkloric, architectural, historical and ethnographical). However, in the case of all these regions, their fate is in the decision makers’ hands.

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