

## ADVOCACY FOR THE ROMANIAN “LANDS” AS PROJECT TERRITORIES

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**ABSTRACT** - The present study aims at becoming a manifesto in favour of the setting up of the “land”-type Romanian areas as project territories following an emergent sustainable spatial development. The “lands” are regional areas specific to Romania, with geo-historical peculiarities that enforce them as archetypal mental spaces of the Romanian people. Territorial cohesion, one of the distinctive particularities of the Romanian lands, is not valorised at all in the territorial development policies in Romania, although at European level it represents one of the objectives of regional policy. We consider that it is the duty of the regional geographers who studied these areas and worked out extremely valuable studies of territorial diagnosis to draw the attention of the practitioners dealing with territorial development on their usability. Thus, the main objective of this study is the scientific demonstration of the opportunity of such an approach, the theoretical support being given by the concepts of endogenous development, local development, “land”, mental space, project territory. In order to achieve this aim we started from bringing arguments for the role of regional geography and of the geographers themselves in the support and scientific validation of the territorial development, followed by demonstrating the distinctiveness of the Romanian lands and the opportunity of turning them into project territories, by comprising the aforementioned theoretical concepts. Last, but not least, we analysed France's expertise which provided the legal framework for the establishment of the “pays”-type areas as project territories and which, we believe, is worth being considered also in the case of the Romanian lands.

**Keywords:** local development, territorial coherence, project territories, “land” type areas

### INTRODUCTION

For two decades, the European regional policy has had as main objective the economic and social cohesion (Treaty of Maastricht, 1992) and territorial cohesion (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1996), significant resources being mobilized to improve them. Well-known in regional geography, territorial cohesion is considered by geographers to be one of the conditions for the existence of a genuine geographical region, being conditioned by two factors: functionality (which introduces order into the ensemble of horizontal relations and represents a connection between places) and cultural community (Dumolard, 1975).

At European level, the trend is to replace the genuine geographic region from the regional studies with the territory, seen as “cell of territorial management” (Brunet, Dollfus, 1990). Thus, instead of the territorial system, as a scientifically substantiated level for the implementation of the territorial development policies, other areas were enforced, suggested by the practitioners in the field of spatial planning, often under the prerogative of political power. In parallel, we are discussing about the programme regions or voluntary regions imposed at planning level – in fact territories which do not meet the requirements necessary to their establishment as regions - and about the genuine, functional geographic regions, conceived as territorial systems. Moreover, although the campaigning

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for the delimitation of areas for applying the territorial development policies by overlapping the territorial systems would be more effective (Cocean, 2004), one notices a tendency to direct the regional geography towards the study of these non-functional territorial structures.

Godron, J., 2003, asserts that, for approximately 25 years, the territory has gradually passed from a geographic, administrative recognition, to a more complex and rich one, being seen at present as an area that reunites around common issues and values, civil, economic, and social actors which together face a common objective: the development of that particular territory. The idea is that of passing from a strategic territory to a project territory, in an emergent sense, in which territorial collectivities are more and more called upon to build their future. Although the development of a territory cannot be improvised, presently, the strategic thinking when it comes to territory is almost non-existent. Obviously, regardless of the interpretation and scale perspective, the regional geographer remains the finest expert in the mechanisms of the structure and the function of the territory. Thus, after centuries when Regional Geography was considered “the real geography”, and the geographical region the centre of specialized studies, some natural questions arise regarding the path of this branch of geographic science: Will the genuine geographic region be slowly replaced by the territory, by the programme region? Will the regional geographers give up on their opinion that regions exist beyond the geographer and their role is to discover them and not create them? Or, on the contrary, the scientific results obtained from the study of the territory will be appropriately capitalized in practice, and the geographers will be fully accepted in the process of territorial planning and development, by supporting the implementation of the policies and the programmes of territorial development at the level of functional territories?

Although there are visible results of the application of regional policy in Romania as well, the adaptation of the European objectives to the national characteristics can be improved since there are situations of totally unexploited situations of local comparative advantage. It is the case of the “țară” (land)-type areas that benefit spontaneously by an outstanding territorial coherence, yet ignored by local authorities and totally unexploited by territorial collectivities because of the difficulty to ensure the transfer of knowledge from the scientific environment to civil society and administration. Therefore, the genuine geographical regions are functional, coherent territories, but totally unexploited in the practice of regional development, the Romanian “țări” (lands) and “ținuturi” (districts) being included into this category.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

In the broadest sense, the present study is to be an advocacy for the rigorous scientific grounding for territorial development, the regional geographic analysis, whose purpose is the veridical territorial diagnosis, ideally representing the support for any activity of territorial planning. Specifically, we suggest the adaptation in Romania of the idea of “project territory” as alternative to territorial clippings (to stimulate the setting up of new forms of inter-communal cooperation) intended for the implementation of sustainable development policies and strategies according to functional and scientifically validated criteria. Due to their peculiarity as emergent regional mental spaces, with a secular existence in the objective reality (therefore, not artificially-articulated territories), the support for the revitalization of the eighteen Romanian “lands” (Fig. 1) as project territories in order to valorise their originality through preservation, with view to a sustainable territorial development, becomes a professional duty.

The concepts that form the theoretical basis of the present study are as follows: endogenous development, local development, “land”, mental space, project territory.

*The endogenous development theory* has its origin in the work of Italian economists, who describe the development of “the third Italy” by forms of competition/cooperation and economic relations based on trust and links between local actors, attached to the territory. It is based on the internal attractiveness, built by the networking of the inhabitants of a territory, starting from a local resource – material or immaterial, which is not valorised.

*Local development* has imposed itself in Europe in the last few years in the context of an increased decentralization, this trend being evident also in Romania, in the papers specific to the field

of territorial planning. Local development is compelling us to reconsider the entirety of economic, social and cultural factors of the respective place. The mark of the idea of local development is the attempt to eliminate the rupture plans existent between the economic, social and cultural fields by the mobilization of all potential actors in the respective territory in order to carry out the development projects. As a general principle, there is no economic development where there are social turmoils, no social balance where there is poor economy and there is none of the two outside the culture established in historical time in the respective area (Pecqueur and Cuaresma, 1993).

As regards the “land”-type areas, we can assert that we are currently witnessing their “rediscovery” in Romania. That is the result of the new valences received by the “lands” in the context of their assessment as functional geographic regions specific to Romania and as mental spaces (Cocean, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2005), holding a special place in the structure of the Romanian geographical space. The study of “lands” in a double hypostasis (as territorial systems and as mental spaces, without minimizing the aspects revealed by other ways of analysis) highlights their real structure and functionality. The resonance of this type of analysis is amplified by the regional cohesion as it allows, based on a correct diagnosis, a reliable prognosis due to the relatively high rigidity of this type of system.



**Figure 1.** The “lands” of Romania

**I.** Land of Oaș; **II.** Land of Maramureș; **III.** Land of Chioar; **IV.** Land of Lăpuș; **V.** Land of Năsăud; **VI.** Land of Dorna; **VII.** Land of Silvania; **VIII.** Land of Beiuș; **IX.** Land of Zarand; **X.** Land of the Moți; **XI.** Land of Hațeg; **XII.** Land of Amlaș; **XIII.** Land of Făgăraș; **XIV.** Land of Bârsa; **XV.** Land of Vrancea; **XVI.** Land of Loviștea; **XVII.** Land of Almăj; **XVIII.** Land of Severin. (Cocean, P., 1997)

“The perception, lived experience and conception of the geographical space are extremely intense and represent the means to its delimitation in relation to other spaces” (Cocean, 2005, p. 62).

The interpretation of “lands” as *mental spaces* (Cocean, 2000) is the most recent approach of this type of spaces. These interpretations derive from the idea that the “land” is always a cultural space, uniformity and the functional criterion being not sufficient for its definition. If the physical space is easy to overcome, it seems that we bear within ourselves the mental space of the “land” of origin.

The concept of *project territory* is closely linked to those of local development and endogenous development. It is based on the idea that every space has a non-valorised potential, and a development project must be unique, adapted to the distinctiveness of the respective space. Within a project territory, space is a living reality, in progress, which evolves simultaneously as well (Pecqueur and Cuaresma, 1993):

- a space perceived by its inhabitants, of “pays” or “land” type;
- an exchange territory, as an activity and job providing space;
- a space of intervention for institutions and the elected representatives.

A project of local development implies boosting the overall economic and social life of a territory, even if, in order to reach this level, there is a need to activate a certain sector. Thus, project territories are areas created by territorial planning, resembling programme regions, in order to implement a project of sustainable territorial development.

The main question of the present study is part of the aforementioned issue, being as follows:

*Can the enforcement of “land”-type areas as project territories in planning, based on their territorial cohesion derived from their attribute as mental space, represent a choice for a sustainable territorial development, by applying the endogenous development theory?*

To answer this question, we started from bringing arguments for the role of regional geography and of geographers in the support and scientific validation of the territorial development, we minutely specified the interpretation perspectives of the “lands” as regional areas specific to Romania and analysed the opportunity to turn them into project territories, by intersecting the aforementioned theoretical concepts. Furthermore, we briefly analysed the experience of the French “pays” which benefited from a legislative framework that allowed their establishment as project territories. We believe that the differences between the two are in favour of the Romanian “lands”, especially since the French experience can serve as an example.

### **THE OPPORTUNITY TO INTERPRET THE ROMANIAN “LANDS” AS PROJECT TERRITORIES. THE EXPERIENCE OF FRENCH “PAYS” AS GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES**

The balanced territorial development, as a desideratum for any state preoccupied with the efficient and rational exploitation of the support basis of its evolution (the territory), proves to be a challenge, especially in the case of the states where, due to the historical past, the centralized planning of the spatial development was constant for decades. It is extremely difficult to articulate the institutional and legislative framework, the operational tools such as policies, strategies and programmes in a unitary approach to respect both the national distinctiveness and the framework of the European policy, the strategic component of the territorial planning, whose logic these activities are part of, being still rather less visible. Once again, the involvement of the territorial collectivities and of all stakeholders in the becoming of their living space according to the principles of decentralization and subsidiarity is a difficult and lengthy process, the inertia of the centralized planning system, in which the individual options are given minimum value, is high. In this “scenery” of the territorial development in Romania, the “land”-type areas stand out by their attribute of emergent territories (which are self-delimiting from the neighbouring territories and are perceived as such, both by the locals and by the neighbours). As already mentioned, the most important feature of a “land”-type territorial entity is the behavioural solidarity, unity, affiliation, born over time from the relations created between man and his living space, which asserted the “lands” as mental spaces with an extremely intense regional coherence. A comparative advantage of these areas in regard to others is shaping up in a Europe of globalisation and uniformity, the strategic territorial planning having the mission to recognize and financially support the distinctiveness of these archetypal spaces of the Romanians.

Although well known by the regional geographers, these studies have not found the necessary echo to be valorised in the practice of territorial development. Regional coherence, a feature of distinctiveness born spontaneously in the “land”-type areas, is not valorised at all in the territorial planning of Romania, even though it is a desideratum of the European regional policies.

By applying the principles of geographic regionalisation, P. Cocean (1997, 2011) identifies three levels of hierarchy in Romania, from the elementary ones (“lands” as territorial systems - level I) to the intermediary ones (the geographical-historical provinces, which are more complex and integrate the “land”-type entities both spatially and functionally – level II) and the upper one, with the highest degree of complexity (the unitary national state - level III). Each of them functions systemically, being simultaneously integrated into the upper rank system and integrating lower rank systems. In this interpretation, “lands” are the basic systemic cells of the national space, the same rank as other types of regions. Conceived as territorial systems, “lands” can therefore be studied based on the analysis of matter, energy, and information. The regional analysis becomes synonymous with the analysis of the structure and the function of “lands” as territorial systems, in order to optimize their exploitation potential and avoid situations of imbalance. Although the analysis of “lands” as territorial systems is a relevant and scientifically legitimate approach, we should not overlook the fact that they are, in their depth, mental spaces, a subtle and difficult aspect to quantify. Their originality has its springs both in their particular way of formation and in their current features and valences as spiritual entities, born from the ancient ties of the individual with his living area, which generate their special regional coherence. This territorial coherence generates a sense of belonging to the respective area and community, subsequently turned into the collective consciousness and even lifestyle. Their approach in terms of these features and, at the same time, as territorial systems, leads to clear regional diagnoses, with a definite practical value.

The issue of project territories is new to the Romanian literature. The concept, relatively recently introduced (Filimon, 2007; Filimon et al., 2011), was taken from the French literature, the very emergence of this concept being tributary to the territorial development in France, where, for about 20 years, local level has been an essential actor in the spatial dynamics, the territorial collectivities organizing their own development on local bases. Globalisation brings the dependence on the exterior and determines the trivialisation of local resources. Only the areas which know how to take full benefit of their own potential and distinctiveness, balancing the production capacity with the population and its own culture by means of an integrated project to promote territorial coherence will be competitive (Pecqueur and Cuaresma, 1993). In the light of the foregoing, we consider that the territories with a strong coherence, of the French “pays” type, of the Romanian “lands” or of other mental spaces, are most favourable to becoming project territories. Specifically, the aim of the present paper is by combining the concepts of “land”, mental space, sustainable development and endogenous development in order to create *a project territory* to lay the foundation of an approach from a different perspective on the issue of territorial planning, called to create strategies for sustainable spatial development. We believe that the geographical literature in Romania has already enough arguments that can become the scientific foundation of this approach.

At European level, the expertise of France in this regard can be capitalized in Romania. In the last decade and a half, we have witnessed a revival of the “pays”, geographic regions specific to France with similarities to the ones in Romania in terms of their valorisation in territorial development. The Pasqua<sup>3</sup> Law of 1995 on guiding the territorial development and planning (LOADT) introduced the concept “pays” for the first time in the context of territorial development, by providing the legal support for the establishment of these new types of territories. This was a new vision of territorial development, based on the principle that the “pays”-type areas best adapt the present policies of local development to the reality and the future sustainable development (Arlaud and Perigord, 1999). The Voynet<sup>4</sup> Law of 1999 supplements and amends the Pasqua Law. According to these, the “pays”-type territories are a French administrative planning category, of geographical

<sup>3</sup> La loi d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement du territoire (LOADT), 1995

<sup>4</sup> La loi d'orientation pour l'aménagement et le développement durable du territoire (LOADDT), 1999

character, designating a territory showing “geographic, economic, cultural or social cohesion” (Pasqua Law, article 22), in order to express “the members’ community of economic, cultural or social interests (Pasqua Law, article 23) and to allow the study and the achievement of development projects.

It is very important to mention that they do not necessarily coincide with the historical “pays” but they are the expression of a voluntary and contractual association of communes around a particular development project. In addition, “pays” are not territorial collectivities, but project areas. According to *Association de Promotion et de Fédération des Pays*, “pays” as project territories are “territories in which local actors – elected, socio-professionals, associated actors – themselves define a global and prospective development project “.

The success of this policy is illustrated by the 370 such structures created in France, covering 80% of the national territory (*Association de Promotion et de Fédération des Pays*), in the spirit of an emergent local development logic and around several project territories adapted to the local characteristics. There were also some examples of poor territorial management, in which “pays” were not designed as viable territorial constructions because of the competition. Last but not least, the 2014-2010 Cohesion Policy provides a particularly favourable framework to this type of approach and represents not only an additional argument for imposing the “lands” as supra-local territorial organization levels, but also a potentially substantial financial support. *Local development placed under the responsibility of community* is one of the key future directions of the cohesion policy. Although, the LEADER Programme has already made local communities major actors in their own development (Chevalier, 2010), there are several new elements for whose implementation “lands” can be ideal candidates. We refer to the territorial level of implementation, represented by sub-regional territories, to the introduction of a new development actor represented by local action groups including the public and private actors in the respective area and to the integrated and multi-sectoral strategies that take into consideration the local necessities and potential. It aims at stimulating innovation, governance and strengthening the capacity of local communities to project their own development. Local communities are encouraged to develop bottom-up integrated development strategies. Therefore, in the already complicated landscape of territories, at the level of which policy and territorial development and planning programmes in France act, the “pays” are particular territorial constructions. It is extremely important that they do not necessarily coincide with the traditional “pays”. Being a manifestation of the voluntary and contractual association of the communes around a specific development project, “pays” are neither territorial collectivities, nor cantons, nor public structures of intercommunity cooperation, but project areas. However, as a consequence of a poor territorial management, manifested through a limited visibility and a defectively consolidated authority, these project territories cover only a small part of France. Created as tools of local territorial development policy, their establishment was limited also due to the competition from other types of local territorial constructions, mainly the EPCI<sup>5</sup> type of intercommunity cooperation structures, and the commune communities. As a result, recently, the Law No. 2010-1563 of 2010 on the reform of the territorial collectivities<sup>6</sup> suppressed the possibility to set up new such territorial structures. However, the direct effect of this local development policy is the establishment of more than 200 such project territories in France, in the spirit of an emergent local development logic and around some territory projects adapted to the local distinctiveness.

Although the French experience in this field can be improved, we consider that it is an example that can be followed in Romania. The 18 such “land”-type entities identified by P. Cocean (1997) in Romania were studied in the form of doctoral theses, some of them already completed and published within the framework of the School of Regional Geography created at the Faculty of Geography in Cluj-Napoca. We dare to say that this extremely valuable scientific approach, which France did not have the opportunity to benefit by, should be naturally valorised and continued, by imposing the “lands” in territorial planning as “project territories” for a sustainable territorial development. By creating the legal, institutional framework and the financial support under the form

<sup>5</sup> Établissement public de coopération intercommunale

<sup>6</sup> La loi n° 2010-1563 de réforme des collectivités territoriales

of a national programme of local development for “lands”, they could become project territories similar with other structures of intercommunity cooperation, in fact functional systemic cells, intermediate between local and county level.

In the spirit of the aforementioned ideas, the endogenous development can become a policy of territorial planning based on the common culture, trust, and solidarity of the inhabitants of a territory that form perennial socio-economic networks, for the sustainable use of a local resource. The applicability of this theory is maximum in the case of some mental spaces, with a strong territorial coherence, such as the “lands” in Romania. The advantages are given also by the intervention in a relatively small area, whose regional unity is real (unlike the programme regions whose boundaries are set arbitrarily). In this way, one can intervene in the direction most favourable to the balanced and sustainable territorial development of the respective area, even though the optimum shows a high degree of conservatism. It remains one obstacle to overcome: the motivation and mobilization of the local authorities and territorial collectivities for this type of development strategy.

### CONCLUSIONS

In short, the conclusions of the present study are as follows:

- unfortunately, there is still no compliance between the genuine geographical regions, identified by geographers, and the territories artificially called regions, at whose level territorial planning takes place; geographers are still not given the rightful credit in the field of territorial planning and the results of their research are not taken into consideration by practitioners and applied in territorial development;
- the Romanian “lands” represent a genuine treasure of authenticity of the Romanian space, with a territorial coherence that singularizes them from the neighbouring spaces as emergent territories;
- their enforcement as project territories by a programme of sustainable local development, in the spirit of the strategic thinking of territorial development, would allow the valorisation through preservation of the local characteristics.

The context of the European regional policy for 2014-2020 legitimates local communities as actors in their own development, following an emerging bottom-up logic of the integrated development strategies, based on local characteristics. Governance and the sub-regional territorial level for the application of this new approach make the Romanian “land”-type territories perfect candidates for this type of development, according to the model of the French “pays” as project territories.

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