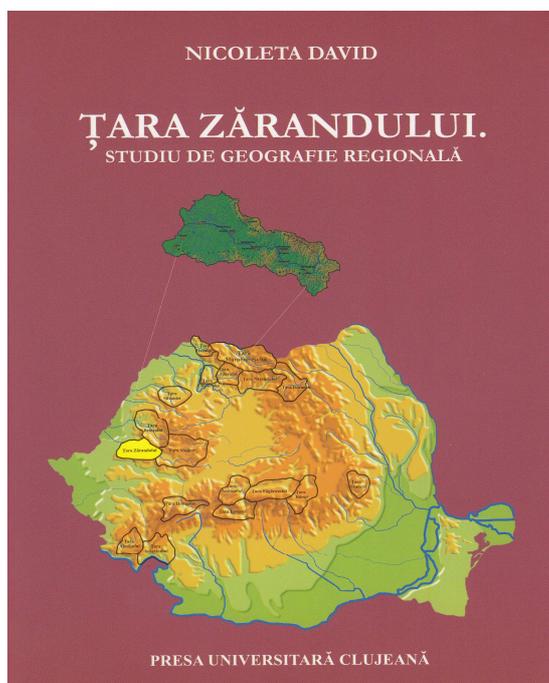


DAVID, NICOLETA – ȚARA ZĂRANDULUI. STUDIU DE GEOGRAFIE REGIONALĂ [The Land of Zărand. Study of Regional Geography], Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, 391 p. ISBN: 978-973-610-990-4.



Zarand enters the category of “land”-type territories first of all with a consistent political-administrative hypostasis. It was shaped beginning with Antiquity when the various subdivisions of the Roman Dacia integrated it partially (the western part remained in the area of the free Dacians). This stage was followed by the organization of the territory into *village communities* (“*obști sătești*”), “*jupanate*” - as autonomous groups of people interconnected through kinship or economic links, knezdoms (“*cnezate*”), voivodeships (“*voievodate*”) in the early Middle Ages. After the Hungarian conquest, the *shires* (“*comitate*”) appeared, the one of Zarand functioning since 1261. It was subdivided into districts (“*districte*”), six of them being Romanian and four Hungarian, information of great interest as regards the ethnic relations existing at that time. The administrative metamorphoses continued in the following centuries - the *circles* of the Habsburg period (“*cercuri*”), the *counties* (“*județe*”) and the *small rural districts* (“*plăși*”) after the Great Union, the *regions* (“*regiuni*”) and *districts* (“*raioane*”) between 1950 and 1968, the *counties* (“*județe*”) and the *communes* (“*comune*”) of the current period, illustrating a variety of forms of territorial organization.

A substantial chapter, *The Natural Prerequisites for the Individualization of the Land of Zarand*, highlights the role of relief, climate, water resources, bio-pedogeographical potential and resources in the genesis and evolution of the regional system. Relief participates with certain elements of favourability: the predominance of low altitude lands, with low declivity and fragmentation and limited geomorphological risks. Mountains have fulfilled for centuries the attributes of shelter and of complementary resources for the economic development (ores, wood, pastures). Highlighting the role of relief as a factor that individualizes the “land” allows other thoroughgoing studies, expected in further insights. The morphological configuration of the depression basin type has generated the shelter climate, so favourable for human activities, while the westward opening has provided its mild oceanic attribute. Water resources are abundant, generated by a dense network organized in the peripheral mountain areas, as well as by the large phreatic accumulations in piedmont and glaciais landforms. The Land of Zarand reveals a pedogeographical mosaic, favourable for the diversification of the agricultural land use, a zonal distribution of vegetation, from the forest steppe in the west to the forest levels (oak, beech, resinous forests) in the middle. Fauna fund is also rich, although the old and intense human intervention has exerted a restrictive action upon the biotopes of some large animal species. The underground resources are of great importance, especially gold and silver exploited since Antiquity. There are also coal deposits, various building materials, non-metallic ores, mesothermal waters, etc.

An ample segment is dedicated to the analysis of the demographic phenomenon, given that each “land” reveals certain peculiar features from this viewpoint. In this case, the age of the population must be highlighted, attested by numerous archaeological discoveries, but also its continuity supported by the diversity of resources (out of which, the gold of the volcanic knolls or the one disseminated in the riverbeds have represented an irresistible mirage for thousands of years). All in the context of a protective, sheltering environment, offered by the closed basins of Brad and Hălmagiu, as well as by the tight funnel of Zarand. The natural dynamics of the population generally follows the same trend with the entire country, mentioning just a slightly higher natural increase during the demographic fall after 1990. The spatial dynamics receives new intensities, directions and forms instead, dictated by the migrations for work imposed

BOOK REVIEW

by the destructuring of the existent industry due to the closing of mines and the bankruptcy of some industrial enterprises in the main urban centre, the town of Brad.

The ethnical structure introduces distinctive features through the mosaic-like character of the demographic fund in the western part, that of the gulf of Zarand, and the overwhelming share of the Romanian population upstream the “land”, namely in the depressions of Hălmaşiu and Brad. The correlation ethnic group-religious denomination is also constant, the Romanians belonging to the Orthodox religion, while the Hungarians belong to the Reformed or the Roman Catholic one.

An issue the book approaches in a less convincing manner is the self-identification of people with the “land” they belong to. The professional literature frequently mentions the population of “Moşi Crişeni”, inhabitants localized in the eastern part of the Brad Depression, towards the source of the Crişul Alb River. Because the integration of this area into the Land of the Moşi is improper, the respective population should be considered either a remnant of the demographic discharge wave from the nucleus proper of the “Moşi”, consolidated in the region of Câmpeni-Abrud, over the pass of Vâlcan to the west, either an inappropriate toponymic association.

The indissoluble relation between population and settlements is encoded in the originality of habitats in the Land of Zarand. Rural settlements prevail, some with deep rural characteristics, both mental and ethnographical. They are grouped in the favourable areas offered by depressions and glacis, climbing to higher altitudes on the Poieni Plateau or on the Bulzeşti Plateau (Ticera, Grohot, Tomnatec). If, initially, the fortress of Zarand was the polarizing centre, subsequently, because of strategic, as well as of economic and social reasons, it migrated inward, settling down in Brad, which became, especially as result of the infusion with facilities and functions in the second half of the 20th century, the pole of reference in the region.

The habitat in the Land of Zarand is haloed by the presence of some traditional occupations (woodcutting, mining, shepherding, pottery, lime-burning), but also of some special customs and traditions that represent a solid support for the existence of the homonymous mental space. The economic component of the territorial system has

agriculture and industry as basic vectors. In a mostly rural region, with a diversity of land suitability, a variety of types and forms of agriculture are present, from the intensive culture of cereals or the vineyards in the gulf of Zarand to the extensive animal growing on the mountain slopes. Having a millenary tradition and an important percentage of active labour force, agriculture still defines the economic profile of most of the rural settlements in the Land of Zarand.

Industry has developed due to precious metal mining, the Brad area being a peripheral territory of the gold quadrilateral in the Apuseni Mountains. Currently, this type of industry is in total decline, mines being closed, in conservation. In addition, coal exploitation in the Ţebea basin proved to be unprofitable, unlike the exploitation of building stones in the great quarries of Aciuţa or marble in Moneasa. In the case of Brad, the presence of small industries must be mentioned (textile, food, wood).

The territorial system of this “land” functions based on infrastructural, economic, social and mental (cultural) attributes, identified by the author in an inspired manner in the fifth chapter. As regards the geographical organization of the Land of Zarand, it ultimately aims at its spatial planning and sustainable development. As a method of introspection, the author uses the SWOT analysis, accurately identifying the strengths and the weaknesses of the region, as well as its risks and opportunities. The analysis concludes with the identification of some models of spatial planning, to which we generally subscribe.

The aureole of the study is represented by the chorem of the Land of Zarand, an original graphical construction that will not be found in any other “land”-type entity. The presence of three areas of concentration, of natural and human polarisation (the gulf of Zarand, the Hălmaşiu Depression and the Brad Depression), arranged in linear sequence, generates a three rhomboid-like spatial model with its extremities more active than the central area. Hence, the tendency toward a centrifugal evolution, manifested since the previous century (the gulf of Zarand westward, polarised by Arad, and the Brad Depression south-eastward, with ever closer relations established with Deva), which becomes an ever more prominent factor in the dissolution of the old “land” and the restructuring of its mental space matrix.

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