

THE DISTRICT OF CODRU – DISTRICT OR LAND?

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ABSTRACT. – **The District of Codru – District or Land?** The main objective of this paper is to demonstrate why the ethnographic Codru is a “district” (*ținut*) and not a “land” (*țară*) – the term used by most people. To achieve this goal, we analyzed the significance of the two concepts, as well as their characteristic elements. Following the first part of the paper we presented connotations that have known “district and land” over time, and in the second part we presented the differences between the two concepts, with application to the District of Codru. Presentation and analysis of the situation eventually led to support the fact that the ethnographic Codru is a “district” – a unique mental space.

Keywords: *district, land, The District of Codru, mental space, centrifugal polarized area.*

1. THEORETICAL ASPECTS

The two names: “land” and “district” have been used within the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space since a long time ago, when the “land” was used to designate actual spaces (Seneslau’s Land, The Land of Amlaș, Litovoi’s Land etc), and the “districts” mentioned by Dimitrie Cantemir were considered subdivisions of Moldova’s districts.

Throughout the years both names took multiple meanings (fig. 1): “land” is defined as a state, province (in the old political and administrative organization of Romania), territory, lowland, land, region (Boțan, C., 2010, p. 19), and the “district” took multiple meanings of territory, fragment, mental space, political and administrative unit.

For the term of “land” (from the Latin word *terra*=earth) the definition brought by the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (DEX 1998) is: *territory inhabited by an organized people from a political and administrative*

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point of view within a state;...unoccupied space between two fronts of battle; neutral zone...province (in the old political and administrative organization of Romania)...region, land, territory, lowland...the place where someone was born or is living; homeland...rural environment (in opposition to the town), village...the inhabitants of a country, nation....the village population; peasantry.

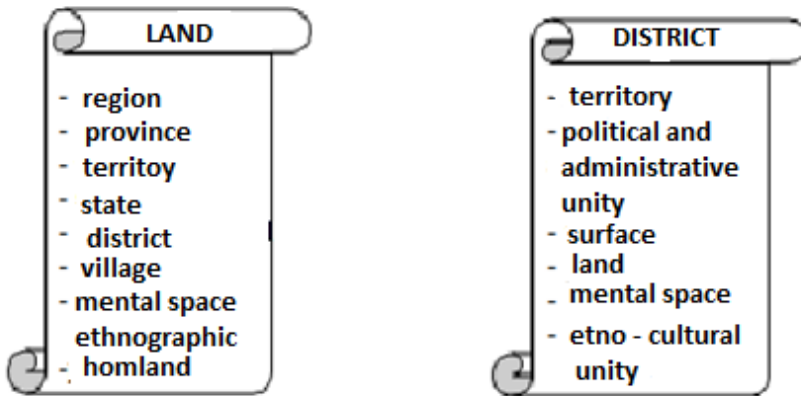


Fig. 1. The meanings of the terms “land” and “district”

For Cocean P. (2010, p. 70) “the land” represents “typical geographical regions of Romania, mental ethnographical spaces humanized by a population with the same traditions, customs, traditional/folk wear”.

The name “land”, used more and more in the specialized literature, is a very broad concept which takes historical, geographical, semantic and psychological connotations. From a semantic point of view, “the land” is regarded as a state – being politically and administratively organized, sovereign and independent; as a territory – being delimited by borders and inhabited by a population; as a motherland – being the native place of birth, the place where you grew up; and the meaning of village – being a rural settlement in which the main activity is agriculture. Psychologically, the name “land” refers to the people’s membership to a space, is the environment where man grows up.

The 18 lands present in the Romanian territory represent fragments of the old Romanian civilization, which offer evidence regarding the unity of the Romanian language throughout the Carpathian – Danubian – Pontic territory, being novelty ethnographic structures which keep with a great sanctity the customs, traditions and Romanian folk wear, as well as authentic mental spaces.

For the term “district”, the Romanian Language’s Explanatory Dictionary (D.E.X 1998) attributes the following meanings: *administrative-territorial unit according to the district from Wallachia...place, region...land*. From an etymologic point of view, the word “district” comes from the transitive verb “to hold”, with certain features generated by his derivatives to belong, to own, to maintain (Cocean, P., 2010, p. 5).

From all the connotations the term “district” has had, the most spread was that of territory, notion defined like a span of land in which a certain authority is exerted. Starting from this definition one can observe that in his work *Descriptio Moldaviae*, Dimitrie Cantemir specifies the district as being a subdivision of the provinces, equivalent to districts at that time. “In the past Moldavia was made up of three parts: Lower Moldavia, Upper Moldavia and Basarabia, in which 23 smaller lands were counted. Moldavia Inferior is made up of 12 smaller regions, which they call districts (The District of Iasi, Cârlișturii, Putna, Vaslui etc)” (D. Cantemir, 1973, p. 73). The districts received an organized unitary structure after the accomplishment of the first union of the Romanian countries, in 1600, by Michael the Brave and after the 1859 “Union” of Moldavia and Wallachia.

Making an incursion into history, to Dimitrie Cantemir’s districts and those from Carol the 2nd’s period, one can observe that they represented political and administrative entities in their time. Why this significance? Because Dimitrie Cantemir’s Moldavian districts were ruled by governors of different ranks (Suceava was ruled by the great hetman, the District of Vaslui was ruled by a chief magistrate, the District of Putna by a chief), and in the time of Carol the 2nd they were ruled by governors according to royal decrees.

The last administrative reform which took place after the installation of Carol the 2nd dictatorship by adopting a new constitution on February 24th 1938, had as a main effect the associations of the counties within new macroterritorial structures named “districts”, fact sanctioned by the administrative law on August 14th 1938 (Săgeată, D, 2013, p. 8). As per this law, which was enforced for 2 years, the territory of Great Romania was divided in 10 districts, made up by counties: Suceava with the residence at Cernăuți, Prut with the residence at Iași, Nistru with the residence at Chișinău, Someș with the residence at Cluj, Mureș with the residence at Alba Iulia, Timiș with the residence at Timișoara, Olt with the residence at Craiova, Bucegi with the residence at Bucharest, Danube with the residence at Galați, the Sea with the residence at Constanta. Widely circulated lately is the fact that the district is a mental spatial entity – of the membership of a man to a territory, mentally being a very important criterion in the delineation of a district. Why a mental space? Because „man became the main forming factor of the surrounding reality and the way in which he foreshadows and sustains it depends in an overwhelming manner on his adhesion degree to the space, on the transcendence of his characteristics in its own spirit.” (Cocean, P., 2010, p. 88).

Apart from all these meanings presented above, the district can also be analyzed as an *ethno-cultural unit*. In Romania there is such a district – the Szekler District, which is more special than other Romanian districts due to the fact that the inhabitants belong to the Hungarian ethnic group. The Szekler District is overlapping the territory from the East of Transylvania, in which the Szekely people were colonized beginning with the 13th century. As opposed to the Szekler District, the other ones distinguish themselves due to their ethnographic customs and traditions.

Analyzing all the connotations of these two terms – “land and district” – one may notice that between them there are similarities, but also differences. As a mental spatial entity, the district – a territory inhabited by a population with a spiritual and material culture tightly anchored in the reality of the place, comes very close to the regional system of the land, yet there are differences between them. As a result, we tried to explain in this study why this wonderful District of Codru is a district and not a land, as it appears in the majority of works.

2. WHY A DISTRICT AND NOT A LAND?

If in the case of land the birth pattern is represented by depressions either between or alongside mountain chains, except for the Land of Nasaud which is a slope land, and the Land of Moți which is formed on mountain peaks and slopes, the districts do not extend on a certain landform, they do not have a preference for a certain landform. Regarding the District of Codru, it is grafted on a land of hills (The Silvano-Somesan Hills), on a land of plains (a reduced portion of the Western Plain) and depressions (in the southern extremity of Culmea Codrului).

This territory develops on both sides of Culmea Codrului, named “the spine of the District of Codru”. Culmea Codrului (Codru Range) is a landform of hummocks, reminder of the crystalline mountains sunk in tertiary deposits, appearing as a giant horst, with a maximum height of 580 meters in the peak of Lespezi and 551 meters in the peak of Tarnita. Towards the peripheral areas, the altitude drops even under 400 meters. The specific climatic conditions favored the presence of forests (beech, sessile, oak) on wide spaces imposing in the toponymy of this space the name of Culmea Codrului “codru” means “woodland”), which is also known as Culmea Făgetului (“Beech Range”). The Homoroade Hills (Colinele Codrului) and the Hills of Asuaj (Piemontul Codrului) flank the two sides of Culmea Codrului, the first one to the West, and the second ones to the East. They are characterized by the presence of some vast meadows and pastures which favored the raising of cattle and have about 200-250 meters. The Hills of Sălaj situated between the corridor of the Somes River to the East and the valley

of Sălaj to the West, with altitudes that exceed 300 meters, are made of a crystalline base which appears under the shape of some islands in the Țicău Massive, and a sedimentary cover.

Lately the sustainable territorial development phrase is frequently conveyed as a fundamental component of the European Union's politics. This concept is designed to reduce the existing discrepancies between the European Union's country members or territories that belong to the same area.

If the lands constitute themselves "as models of territorial cohesion" (Cocean, P., 2011, p. 210), in the case of the districts the territorial cohesion is barely sketched. The territorial major force lines develop in different directions, do not work together, the mini-systems that comprise it do not form a single system, but diverge in different directions.

Within the District of Codru, placed on the territory of three counties – Maramureș, Satu Mare and Sălaj, the territorial development politics are different. This is also stated by the fact that there is not a Local Action Group (LAG) for the entire district, but there are such groups for every (mini-land) within every counties (LAG Someș-Codru in Satu Mare, LAG West Maramureș in Maramureș, LAG Tovishat in Sălaj), even though the district's inhabitants resemble through folk wear, traditions, customs, practically the only ones that state their membership to the District of Codru.

It is a well-known fact that the District of Codru is a disadvantaged area, but it is a compact ethnographic and folkloric area, argument which could be the starting point in the process of taking this unique land out of anonymity, which could be realized by the cooperation of the local public authorities of the three counties. A meeting of the local public authorities in work sessions is necessary with the purpose of establishing a local development plan, which would have as a starting point the district's ethnography and folklore, to which one can add the area's tourist objectives, the fertile fields (motivating the young people to establish agricultural farms), as well as the encouragement of young people to get involved in the cultural development of the district (wearing folk clothes, keeping traditions and customs).

The appearance of land in basin areas is a factor that determines the natural and human gravitation from the peaks of mountains towards their heart, convergent towards polarizing centres. In the case of the "land"-type territories, at least one polarizing centre is present, represented by an urban or rural settlement, a centre of attraction to which the whole region reports and manages the economic, social and cultural activities of the „land". The individualization of the polarizing centres "appeared at the same time as the human communities' crossing from the autarchy given by the village community to the one of well-articulated and hierarchical social and political structure" (Cocean, P., 2011, p. 19).

If the “land” type formations have at least one polarizing centre, within the “district” type formations there is the possibility that these centres do not exist on their territory. This is the situation for the District of Codru, a land polarized by centres localized outside their limits (fig. 2). Being placed on the territories of three counties, this district is polarized by the centre of each county: Satu Mare City, Baia Mare City and Cehu Silvaniei town.

From the discussions held with the district’s inhabitants one has realized that they consider each county to have its own District of Codru and each one has its problem and do not mingle, even though during the great fairs and festivals (ex. Asuaj onion market, Oțeloaia Codru Song Festival) all participate and there is no more difference between the Codru of Sălaj, Maramureș and Satu Mare.

The District of Codru specificity comes from the fact that its centre, marked by Culmea Codrului, that “spine”, comes from a spiritual centre which has the role of installing the moral values, to sustain the maintaining of traditions and customs, being the one that sustains the „codrean” concept, but it is not the centre towards which the natural and human gravitations takes place. This „*spiritual centre*”, the District of Codru covered by forests of beech and evergreen is in fact the one which offered shelter to the population from the invaders, it is the one to which the name of the autochthonous population’s name is tied up to – “codrean”, meaning that someone belongs to “Codru”.

The fact that the District of Codru is a district polarized by centres placed outside its territory is also sustained by the firms’ setup (with the sphere of action – agriculture or industry) towards the district’s exterior and not towards the “*spiritual centre*”. Why did the small entrepreneurs place their small firms in this area? The answer is simple. Because the closeness to the big urban centres (in our case Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Cehu Silvaniei) offer different advantages to small manufacturers: a marketplace for products, smaller amounts of time for the goods’ transportation, the promotion of products, a larger group of consumers, the competition which leads to the challenge of entrepreneurs to obtain high quality products for a higher consumption. To all of these one may add that the three polarizing centres also offer a larger number of jobs to the population, offer more possibilities to the young people who in their personal development search to study in those areas where the possibility of standing out is greater.

It is said that „the countries are genuine mental spaces” (Cocean, P., Ciangă, N., 2000), but are the districts really not mental spaces? The mental space represents a territory fragment, of extremely varied dimensions, where the real and imaginary become one unmistakable, unique entity. It exists, functions and evolves through the means of man. The mental space partially overlaps the geographical territory, ennobles it with new valences derived from adding elements of a spiritual order (Cocean, P., 2011, p. 34).

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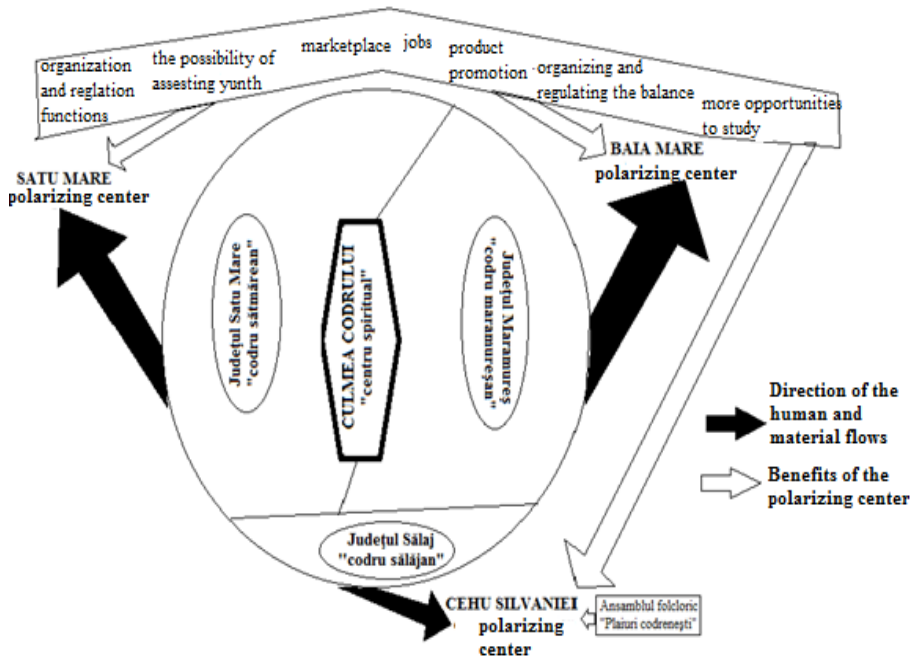


Fig. 2. The polarizing centres of the District of Codru and the directions of gravitation

The lands' mental space is formed around some elements, according to Cocean P, as it follows: the earth, the house, the people, the custom, the myth, the divinity (fig. 3). One can also find these components in the mental space of the district, in our case the District of Codru, because the land is the one that determines the Romanian in battle, as Mihai Eminescu also says „We do not have armies, but the love for the land is a wall/ Which is not frighten of your fame, Baiazid”; the house, a basic element in the organization of the village world; it represents the place of birth, of happy memories and mischief, the family is the one that represents the family relationships' nucleus of cementation, that important element in the life of the Romanian peasant, the one who kept from generation to generation an unwritten law – the custom, given from the parents to the children, a law that gives individuality, a law represented by the customs, traditions and folklore (The District of Codru is renowned for its celebrated folklore dances within the „Codru Folklore Festival” from the Forest of Oteloiaia, as well as the Sânzieni customs or the renowned „barn dance”). On top of all there is the Divinity summoned in all of the peasant's works as God is summoned in the wedding, christening, funeral, carol songs.

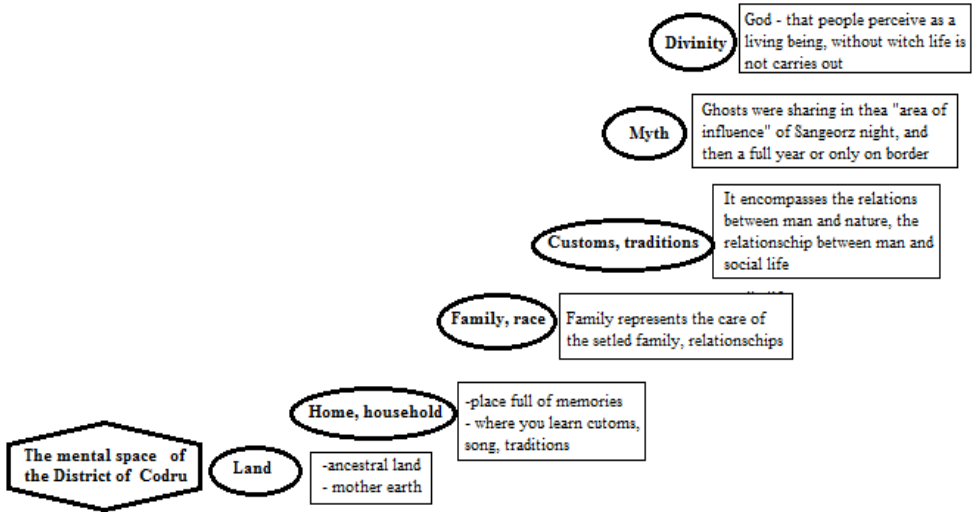


Fig. 3. The District of Codru –the structure of the mental space

If the elements which make up the structure of the lands' mental space are also the ones that are at the basis of the mental space contouring the District of Codru, however there is a difference among them. In the case of Romania's lands, the mental space is well put together, the inhabitants from a border to another certainly state that they belong to that land, have the same customs and traditions inherited from their ancestors. In the case of the District of Codru, the situation is a little bit different, maybe due to the historical and political events that took place on this territory, knowing that the villages within this territory once were part either from Satu Mare and Sălaj counties, either from Maramureş, Sălaj and Satu Mare counties, situation that left a mark on the inhabitants' membership to the District of Codru. A mark upon the inhabitants' identification to this territory with the term of „codrean” also has put its influences from outside the territory as well as the young people's modernization for the ones “who still wear a linen shirt and cioareci (pants that are specific to peasants) are considered obsolete”, as the Romanian teacher Bejan Adrian from Tohat tells.

The feeling of individualizing or not to this territory has been brought forward through the answers that were given to the applied questionnaire, whose purpose was that to mentally set out this district and to present the “Codrean” characteristics. The analysis of the answers obtained as a result of applying the questionnaire brought into attention the fact that being a “Codrean” and to belong to the District of Codru means that on the territory of the village in which

one inhabits there must be a forest, to keep specific folk wear – “the men’s folk wear made up of wide pants, a straight and tall hat made of straw, and a large shirt” (P.D, male, 50 years old, Băița de sub Codru), to be placed at the base of Culmea Codrului. The degree of membership to this territory dilutes gradually (fig. 4) until denial, towards the district’s outskirts. The answers received have strengthened the idea that this wonderful district is characterized by the presence of a “spiritual centre”, but not a polarizing one and that polarization is centrifugal within its centre, that all the human flows are oriented towards the land’s outskirts.

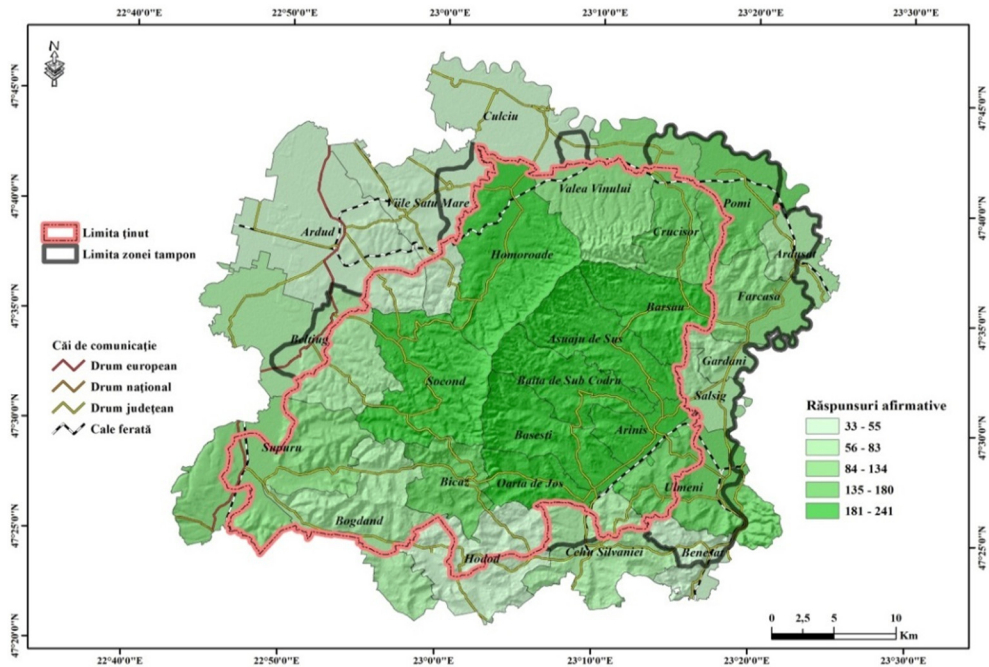


Fig. 4. The membership of the municipalities to the District of Codru mental space (number of affirmative responses)

The District of Codru mental space is given by the bond that people have with forests, around which settlements that are part of this district were born. To this one could add the elements that are tied up to the folklore wear, customs, traditions, elements of traditional architecture, famous barns, the ones that are more imposing and ornamental, which have decorated doors through fretwork with geometrical and floral elements; containing the stable that shelters cattle.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The problem of the dissipation of the customs and traditions of this ethnographic area is due to the fact that the majority of the young population has left and only the elders remained in the area. The area's inhabitants, especially the ones who are placed at the outskirts of the territory have been taken by this "urbanization process", which has brought them further from the traditions. As the professor Bejan Adrian said "you are traditional if you dress in the folk wear every day, like in old times, not just for the holidays".

According to a functional analysis of this micro-region, polarized centers are outside its limits, the presence of a "spiritual center" – Culmea Codrului (who gave his name) and the existence of a mental space, are some elements that support the idea that the ethnographic region of Codru is a "district" and not a "land".

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