

Appalachian / Carpathian International Conference Making Place: Transitional and Post-Industrial Development in Mountain Communities Editors' note

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This special issue prints a selection of papers presented at the fifth Appalachian / Carpathian International Conference, organized on October 2019, for the second time by Transilvania University of Braşov, in collaboration with Radford University. This biennial event has grown steadily over the last decade attracting more and more scholars from both sides of the Atlantic and from various disciplinary fields, all of them attempting to unravel the questions posed by the striking similarities and evident parallels between the two geographic and cultural regions: the American Appalachian mountain ranges and the Central and Eastern European Carpathian mountains. Thus, the 2019 event brought together 37 American academics and NGO activists, as well as 17 European scholars, in the heart of the Carpathian Mountains, the city of Braşov, Romania.

If the previous conference (October 2015) organized at Braşov focused more on highland traditions and, in general, on the pastoral aspect of these two cultural and geographic areas, the 2019 conference switched its focus on the historic extraction economies developed in them and the socio-economic void resulted from their gradual vanishing. The Columbian Exchange and the geographical similarities are not the only things connecting these regions. At the beginning of the twentieth century masses of people from the Carpathian region migrated to United States in order to work in the coalfields of Appalachia, which was the base for a cultural osmosis, the traces of which we can still observe today. This is evident not only in specific Central and Eastern European customs surviving intact or transformed in Appalachia, but also in the imprint that this departure left it on the folk consciousness in Europe: for instance in the Făgăraş region, close to Braşov,

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one can still encounter folk ballads recounting the tales of these departures. Coal histories in the two regions diverted though, as opposite political and economic regimes shifted their development in differing directions. Even if at the end of the nineteenth century, the Jiu Valley coal mining resembled the entrepreneurial capitalist model we see in Appalachia, the arrival of communism after the Second World War changed not only the traditions of coal mining, but also the miners' situation now, when the mines have either closed or are in the process of closing. David A. Kideckel, in his keynote address, opening this issue, brilliantly explains these differing situations in very clear terms. On the one hand we have an absence of state, and an overpowering presence of private enterprise and ownership, while on the other hand we have, on the contrary, an overpowering presence of state, and a waning sense of private ownership. This creates two different economic situations at the end of coal (for instance the institution, or lack thereof, of state pensions and health insurance), but also two different mindsets that he discusses in terms of asset-based culture, or, respectively, in terms of deficit culture. However, exactly these differences, developed in initially similar areas, constitute the very thing that may help us understand the situation at hand, and yet, even more important, the understanding of this situation at hand is the very thing that may help the people of these regions overcome the dire place in which they find themselves now.

The keyword for understanding these mining communities is dislocation. These people were first dislocated in order to become miners, they have dislocated other people in order for the mines to exist, and then they started dislocating the earth itself in order to mine. However, now, at the end of coal, there is yet another type of dislocation happening, one of a more apparent paradoxical nature: even if a lot of them are still physically residing in the same place, that place itself had simply vanished from under their feet. This is a dislocation happening without moving, with the disappearance of what was once a place.

Questioning concerning technology, Heidegger developed the concept of Enframing. The gathering together of all our ways of relating to the world around us through technology, the logic by which this world becomes a standing reserve, standing ready to heed our call, our challenge, is *Ge-Stell*, or, in the awkward but excellent English translation: Enframing. Heidegger was using examples from the Rhine Valley to uncover this logic, however, the Appalachian or Romanian mining stories and regions prove to be similarly adept at revealing it. The problem of Enframing is not necessarily that it transforms everything into a standing reserve, but that it transforms people essentially into a standing reserve. Blindsided by this logic we cannot conceive of anything, and of each other, in any other way. It is *the* dead end of our culture. The miners are embodying this very logic; they are

brought into being by this very way of thinking. When the coal resource is depleted, the human resource follows through. The mountain top removal mining is the ultimate expression of this: a mass emptying of a reservoir, turning the earth upside down in a demand to release the very last traces of what we challenge it to give. What is left in that place is exactly nothing. The challenge moves on. What is left of that place is exactly nothing.

But where danger lies, warns Heidegger, we find salvation too. Having Enframing as the very danger of our culture, we may find a way out exactly in our questioning of it – a questioning that would bring it before our eyes. Just as in an earlier meditation he would find that questioning “the nothing” is the essential metaphysical, and thus human, point of origin. The nothing, left behind after coal, the dislocated state of the people still there, their suspension into what once was and what is yet to come, might prove to be that very sought after way out. That is why the 2019 Appalachian / Carpathian conference had as a main underlying idea the making of place. The question is what can these two, disparate and yet similar, experiences bring together so that a new, different kind of place may root itself in these post-industrial mountain landscapes.

The issue opens with **David A. Kideckel's** keynote address *The Decline of Coal, Structural Power, Memory, and Future Choices in the Jiu Valley and Central Appalachia* which provides a thorough overview of the two mountain coal mining areas at the center of the conference debates. David A. Kideckel is interested to define the specific identity of these coal mining areas, through a combination of geographical, economic, and social factors, stating that history and the type of structural power relations play an essential role. Defining these regional identities is crucial not only from an anthropological point of view, but understanding them will provide an insight into the future of these communities. Subjected to different factors, the regional identities developed differently: the Appalachian communities are more engaged in asserting their power of the place, while Jiu Valley population may seem too detached from their future.

Ruxandra M. Zotta and **Tudor B. Ionescu's** article *Sensing Coal Legacies: A Comparative Analysis of the Jiu Valley and Boone-Raleigh County Mining Regions using Satellite Images* studies, through combined quantitative and qualitative methods, the impact of coal exploitation and deindustrialization in these two areas. The set of satellite images taken in 1986 and 2019 is subjected to an analysis taking into account the urban dwellings and the larger natural environment. The interpretation of data is enhanced by the reconstruction not only of the particular historical context of coal exploitation in these two regions, but of an *envirotechnical*

system, encompassing economic as well as ecological factors, regional, and global. The interpretation of the images clearly shows that in Jiu Valley, following the closing of the mines and the depopulation of the area, the forest grows back and the urban dwellings and the grazing land decrease. As for Boone-Raleigh County, the mountaintop removal technique determined a dramatic decrease in forest area, in settlements and a spectacular growth in grassland, as a consequence of tentative reclamation of the land.

Katherine M. Wright's article *Inter-Mountain Resource Extraction: A Comparative Study of Gold Mining in Appalachia and Carpathia* closely examines the similitudes in the history of mineral extraction and environmental changes in two gold extraction zones, Dahlonega, Georgia and Roșia Montană, România. Even if the places are separated geographically and have a different history and exploitation length, there is a pattern easily identifiable when addressing questions of structural power, regarding the direct ownership of the mines. Through a detailed comparative analysis, Katherine M. Wright reaches the conclusion that the disempowerment of these communities by external agents that view the land, its resources and people as commodities is the main cause of the socio-economic failure of the regions, environmental disasters, and also of the erosion of cultural identity. The solutions suggested by the author are local-oriented policies, ready to preserve the cultural heritage of these communities.

Iulia Salcă analyses in *The Impact of Mountaintop Removal Surface Coal Mining on Appalachian Communities* the multiple implications on the environment and on the local communities of this extreme coal exploitation known as Mountaintop Removal. Confronted with an almost irreversible destruction of their land, with the cynical choice between the possibility of becoming rootless or to suffer the degradation of one's life conditions, a situation interpreted as an "attack on culture, economy, family, health care, faith and community" by David A. Kideckel in his keynote address, the Appalachian communities have found the power to fight back. The second part of Iulia Salcă's article presents these communities' response, a coherent strategy of collective activism, from grass roots movements and NGOs, to university scholars and researchers.

Sudipto Sanyal's article *Silence, Invisibility, and the Violence of the Logos: Appalachian Resonances in Kashmir* stresses a daring but well documented comparison between two far apart mountain regions and cultures subjected to state power, violence, and invisibility. The historical facts interpreted here are the Battle of Blair Mountain, from 1921 in West Virginia, Appalachia, a critical moment

of the union fight, when the state deployed violence against its citizens, ultimately by bombing them, and the 2019 events in Indian Kashmir determined by changes in the Constitution. In both cases functions a stereotype of invisibility associated with mountain cultures, areas which can be therefore subjected to unremitted violence.

In the article *Modern Mythologies, Crime Narratives, and Developmental Contradictions: Nordic Noir in the "Transylvanian Alps"* **Caius Dobrescu** analyses the aesthetics and social implications of the transposition of a cultural phenomenon, Scandi crime film, in a well-known Transylvanian setting. The visual effect of the Nordic noir is enhanced by a preference for remote mountain places, and through the inclusion of social and moral problems of mountain communities. The translation towards the Romanian imaginary was made through the well-known visual landmark of Braşov's surrounding mountains, whereas the social and moral problems addressed by the *Silent Valley* film series was to integrate into the film narrative the Roma community.

In the article *The Effects of Industrial Railroad Logging on Batesville, Georgia* **Kelsie B. Mayes** traces back the dark history of the destruction of primary resources by the lumber companies in the Southern Appalachians that altered altogether the environment and the "yeomanesque way of life." The ruthless exploitation of wood is an act with profound repercussions on the Appalachian consciousness that still continues today. By losing their power of place, the Appalachian communities are subjected to a continuous process of invisibility, enacted by political and economic factors that do not belong to the region. The lumber companies from the 19th century are currently followed by private investors that built gated communities for wealthy people with no connection to the land. The irreversible changes on the Southern Appalachians can serve as an indicator for the same transformations happening in other mountain communities, for example those in Romania's Rodna National Forest.

In his article *Religion and Identity in Appalachia and Carpathia*, **Barry Whittemore** examines the way the Appalachian population was once again dominated through religious stereotypes, as part of the process of internal colonization in place at the end of the 19th century – beginning of the 20th century. For the mainline Protestant missionaries following the venture capitalists and industrialists, the specificity of the Appalachian religious identity, a blend of Protestant Christianity, Calvinist Presbyterianism and Baptist denominations was too exotic, therefore "heathen." Barry Whittemore considers that this pressure of the modern world was threatening both the autonomy of the mountaineer yeoman, and the communal

way of life, manifested through a religious congregational polity. This is a fundamental value that has to be defended in other religious contexts too, as in the contemporary examples of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, or the Transylvanian Unitarian Church.

Matthew R. Sparks discusses in *The 'Charm Doctors' of Leslie County: Oral Histories of Male Witches, Midwives, and Faith Healers in Leslie County, Kentucky 1878-1978*, the complex role of the 'charm doctor' in the mountainous communities of the Appalachians, illustrating through oral history data the syncretic spiritual views of the folk practitioners and their beneficiaries that resisted for more than a century. A particular mixture of magic and spiritual beliefs, belonging to the Scots-Irish "borderers," the Cherokee Nation, and the African-American Slave Medicine is reflected in the multiple roles one charm doctor can perform, as a faith healer, a prophet, a witch, a herb doctor, a male midwife, and a mountain doctor. The author suggests that this traditional inheritance is not just to be documented, but it may provide a way out of the current opioid crises in Appalachia.

The issue concludes with the article signed by **Jasper Waugh-Quasebarth**, *Listening for Musical Tonewood in the Appalachian and Carpathian Mountains*, a work of collaborative ethnography emphasizing the necessity of a sustainable exploitation of tonewood in the Appalachian and Carpathian forests. The author also pleads for an affective understanding of his domain of study, following the transformation of a fragment of a tree, detached from its life in the forest but made to live again as a musical instrument. The article shows not only a substantial part of the work of the anthropologist, but also the need to connect the two mountain regions and cultures through common interests and activities.