

Editor's Note.

Land, Labor, Protest: the Appalachian-Carpathian International Mountain Conference

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This issue brings together a selection of papers presented at the fifth Appalachian-Carpathian International Mountain Conference. This particular edition was the third one hosted at Transilvania University of Braşov, on October 3-4, 2022, following the 2015 edition, and then the 2019 one. As we are doing now, we also brought together papers from those editions in two previous issues of Transilvania University's Bulletin: "Appalachian/Carpathians: Researching, Documenting, and Preserving Highland Traditions,"² and "Appalachian/Carpathian International Conference, Making Place: Transitional and Post-Industrial Development in Mountain Communities."³

It became apparent over time, as this conference series developed, that there are two main strains of interests and research manifesting among our conference participants, and this is actually visible even in our Bulletin issues that resulted from them. If the 2015 issue seems to be more focused on rural traditions, ecology, and hay culture, the 2019 issue focuses more on extractive industries and what they leave behind in the mountain communities and landscape that they used. Of course, both of these trends, or strains, offer serious topics of concern, and, in fact, they should come together in their analyses more often than not. This is why we have decided for the 2022 edition to bring them together formally as well, under the title "Land, Labor, Protest."

"Land" and "labor" are deeply intertwined for all the mountain communities we are looking at, regardless of our research angle of approach. John Akeroyd, the

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² http://webbut2.unitbv.ro/Bulletin/Series%20IV/Summary/Summary_2016_01.pdf

³ http://webbut2.unitbv.ro/BU2019/Series%20IV/Contents_IV_SI.html

2015 keynote speaker, has brilliantly showed how important labor is for the extraordinary Transylvanian biodiversity of mountain pastures, while in 2019, together with David Kideckel, we focused more on the inner and outer dislocation resulted from the laboring of land as a standing reserve.

We added “protest” to “land” and “labor” in order to draw attention to people’s agency, and, perhaps, to open some ways for drawing paths that would move us away from this dislocating logic of the standing reserve. The Appalachians are traditionally a site of protest, regardless of how well this is, or not, documented or taught (as, for instance, the Battle of Blair Mountain – the largest labor uprising in the United States, that perhaps not many people know about), but so is Braşov in Romania, the industrial mountain city that prefigured the Romanian revolution with its 1987 labor uprising. Here we were joined, in 2022, by Emily Satterwhite and Adrian Lăcătuş providing us accounts and interpretations for ways people have engaged protests regarding their land and their labor.

To complete this particular bridging we have designed for 2022, we have invited John Akeryod again to act as a keynote speaker, seven years after his scrutiny of Transylvania’s future. His talk, focused on these years, as he updated his predictions and hopes once more. He based his observations also on his own experience with the ADEPT Foundation, a non-governmental organization aimed exactly at sustainably developing remote Transylvanian rural localities. His conclusions are very interesting as they seem to point to an underlying and undergoing, and unfortunately unexpressed conflict between several models of development. We are not yet at a point to indicate if one of them will win this conflict, however we can hope (and teach) for a future balance between the interests of both people and their environment.

Irina Neacşu, botanical artist, collaborated with John Akeroyd for the creation of a Transylvanian Florilegium, an exquisite work of art aimed at both preserving and raising awareness about this region’s extraordinary biodiversity. Her talk argued for botanical art as an interface between a wide public and the core scientific climate debates.

Christine Small, also a botanist, rounds up this group of articles very well by looking at the complex issues of wild-harvesting and forest cultivation in the Appalachian context. We see the same call to balance here that we see in John Akeroyd’s Transylvanian intervention, and also the same care to involve and listen to both sides of this complicated story, of the people and their environment.

Tom Hansell, Trevor McKenzie, and Julie Sheppard-Powell's intervention attempted to show another way in which art can become an interface, and even educator, for a wider public facing environmental issues. Their performance involving a mixture of film, music, and dance, was a direct reaction at living with the trash flowing down a river, a jam session inspired by plastic debris reworked into a movie.

In a similar line of thought, Kathleen Tomlin provides a concise history of music (folk songs in particular) being used in Appalachia for both protest but also to provide agency to people. It is an active resistance through folk culture, and a recourse to an oral tradition that, thus, escapes the impositions of power.

Music, and art in general, are not the only sites of resistance though, and this is what Emelie Peine is showing with her research on home made distilled liquors in both Appalachia and Carpathia. She unveils the complex social connections and cultural habits that form around the production of such liquors (essentially different from the fermented ones, due to the more complex method of production), and how they basically create an alternative space where resistance can happen.

Gabriela Chefneux provides a linguistic analysis of local Romanian newspaper articles debating mine closures in the Jiu Valley. Her conclusions bring her close to David Kideckel's 2019 keynote address, showing the specificity of Carpathian after-coal, with a very interesting observation of how, over time, the newspaper discourse shifted its focus from places to people.

Iulia Salca's article is an expression of this double strain that we have noticed in our conference series, in that it manages to uncover them engaged in conflict in an after-coal local community in the Jiu Valley. On the one hand we have the descendants of the people traditionally native to that place, still involved in a rural hay culture existence, while on the other hand we have the descendants of miners and the former miners themselves, a more cosmopolitan group caught in a postindustrial existence. While their interests should coincide, past resentments and prejudices are still dividing them.

Theresa Burriss provides a personal account of her scholarly journey between Appalachia and Carpathia, of how her teaching of Appalachia resonated with Romanian students, but also of how her meeting with the Jiu Valley artist and former mining engineer, Ion Barbu, resonated with her own experiences. Her account echoes Donald Davis' own journey (visible in his 2015 intervention), and, ultimately, the drive behind this conference as well.

We decided to end this selection of papers with Emily Satterwhite's intervention on the urgency of protest in what regards environmental issues. Her talk stands apart because she directly urges academics (using her own personal example) to become actively and civically involved with the issues they are drawn to, usually through their research.