TRACES AND SIGNS OF IDENTITY AND CONTINUITY IN THE PAPERS FOR OBTAINING THE 1ST TEACHING DEGREE. HIGHLIGHTS FROM A "GEOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION" IN THE SOUTH – EAST OF TRANSYLVANIA

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Abstract: *Highlighting the potential of the social, educational, cultural, economic and physical media on rural communities seemed a gesture of great responsibility to entrust this potential to teachers, particularly primary school teachers in some geographical areas from Braşov, Covasna and Buzau counties. The investigations conducted in the field belong mostly to an inductive qualitative-interpretative paradigm and the results show the mentality and lifestyle which locals have in this area, within the social and community context and which actually define the traditional rural culture in the Romanian villages from the mentioned areas. All these elements were amplified by writing and implementing school-decision optional courses which we can generically call spatial and temporal landmarks of a „Geography education" of the rural South – East of Transylvania.*

Key words: *rural communities, village, geography of education.*

1. Introduction

Highlighting the potential of the social, educational, cultural, economic and physical media on rural communities has been a constant concern for the last two decades. It seemed a gesture of great responsibility to entrust this potential to teachers, particularly primary school teachers in some geographical areas from Braşov county (villages at the foot of Făgăraş Mountains, in the vicinity of the villages that were studied by Dimitrie Gusti in 1935-1936 in the monographic campaigns in rural Transylvania), Covasna county (Întorsura Buzăului area) and Buzau county (Siriu-Nehoiu area), with developing educational monographs or school-decision optional courses, detailed in the papers for obtaining the 1st teaching degree. This has been done especially when the complex transformations of the Romanian society in transition, the profound and complex changes in rural areas, the different facets of penetration of globalization can be seen.

As stated in the *National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Romania. Horizons*

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2013-2020-2030: "Through the measures envisaged, the Romanian educational system reconnects the traditions of the Romanian school to the concept of education for sustainable development whose topics are integrated transversally in the formal, non-formal and informal education, at three levels: socio-cultural, environmental and economic, in contents of socio-cultural education embracing local and universal issues such as human rights, peace and security, gender equality, cultural diversity, intercultural education, health education and quality of life education, leisure education, good governance (transparency, freedom of expressing one's opinion, participation in policy making), *national heritage and local history"*. Also, *The measures sheet, Sub-measure 7.6. Investments associated with protecting cultural heritage* (http://www. Madr.ro/ docs/dezvoltare-rurala/programare-2014-2020/dezbatere/fise-masuri/Fisa_masurii_Serv) requires *"Supporting the preservation of cultural heritage and traditions aim at ... maintaining traditions and spiritual heritage…"*. Meanwhile, *the Conclusions of the Council on the role of education and training in the implementation of the Strategy Europe 2020* (Official Journal of the European Union, 2011), invoke the need to *"improve the adaptability of education and training systems to new demands and trends, to better meet the skills needed on the labour market and the social and cultural challenges in a globalized world"*.

2. School-decision Optional Courses

Our processing of the data collected by the authors of these papers has allowed us to gain a vision and a holistic, globalist perspective, an inter- and multi-disciplinary way of explaining and researching the sociocultural and psychoeducational phenomena presented. The investigations conducted in the field belong mostly to an inductive qualitative-interpretative paradigm and the results show the mentality and lifestyle which locals have in this area, within the social and community context and which actually define the traditional rural culture in the Romanian villages from the mentioned areas. All these elements were amplified by writing and implementing school-decision optional courses which we can generically call *spatial and temporal landmarks of a „Geography of education" of the rural South – East of Transylvania*.

We stress the fact that the research was mainly qualitative and the authors started from the premise that the three areas of investigation and research in the socio-human filed, *ethnography* (the description of a population, society, a community and its representative culture), *ethnology* (systematic and comparative reflection) and *anthropology* (meditation that tends toward abstraction, universalization of various constants of human nature, of the becoming of certain cultures and societies) are part of a problematic field. In fact, the consistency of the optional course is given by the authors' ability to translate the three areas of investigation into a coherent, expressive and authentic educational product. We believe in the value and in the positive impact that such research will have on the beneficiaries of these educational offerings.

The coordinates within which the authors have captured the effects that urbanization as a social phenomenon has produced on rural areas are: migrating to the city and the increasing development led to the gradual dismantling of communities and the destruction of social relations; manifestation of the mutual influences between the two areas; the urban culture was built at the expense of the rural culture; the phenomenon of acculturation in archaic communities materialized by preserving attitudinal elements from

the culture of origin at mental and behavioural level, as individuals risen in urban areas kept the thinking and behavioural patterns rooted in rural areas, drawn from their ancestors, etc.

The major objective of these optional coursed is to analyse the state of contemporary and current education in the Romanian (traditional!) village which would enable the identification of opportunities for regenerating and capitalizing on this space through the necessary balance of modernism and traditionalism, as well as the education that local institutions carry out for all community residents. The practical approach of the optional course is to illustrate the elements and life aspects which are specific to the traditional culture of rural communities (occupations and crafts, architecture and living space, costumes and customs, secular and religious characteristics as fundamental benchmarks of an existing cultural *topos*) and adding them value in activities embodied in celebrations, school magazines, cultural and artistic competitions, sports and crafts competitions, etc. The main conclusion is that all these manifestations produce educational influences and train behaviours and mentalities specific to the sociocultural environment in which they were born and where they still live. As a teacher, I feel the need to enter such steps in the series specific to culture pedagogy as the authors among those who advocate for this orientation, who considered the development of the human personality as a consequence of assimilating the cultural values of humanity and considered the spreading of culture as the main way of progress for a society. Education is the way in which these values are assimilated, and the process involves reception and creation, experience, vibration for ideas, awakening the aspiration for truth, beauty, good and utility. Through education, people go through all the cultural levels, up to the highest ones, and believe that human improvement through culture, the creation of a "*cultural personality*" is the only way that ensures the transformation of society.

Why are these works particularly valuable?

Because they analyse key social changes that preceded and marked the evolution of rural communities, with their implications on the socio-cultural level. There are highlighted the *phases of evolution or development* it has gone through:

a) an isolated, fast growth phase;

b) *a phase of growth through massive immigration* (evolutionary stages with a relative wealth and momentum);

c) *a demographic saturation phase* resulting in migrations from rural to urban areas, completed with the emergence of urban mutations felt across socio-cultural and spiritual levels.

Moments whose impact was significant for that community are captured, such as the context in which they were constituted as a community and the impact on rural communities; hence, an outstanding discipline and rigor of character which is defining for *peasant* from hill and mountain areas. *Good order* has had a major impact on the organization and keeping order associated with identity symbols: costumes, beautiful outfits worn in celebrations, which have introduced in the life of the communities elements that are based on a pedagogical and educational subject. They developed their own practices which have played an important educational role.

The environmental conditions, the mountainous terrain complete the psycho-moral, attitudinal and behavioural profile of the peasant living in these areas. We emphasize on the approach of culture from an anthropological perspective, enabling the transition from an empirical-descriptive understanding to an abstract, operational, logical one, with a

high degree of objectivity and rigor. The system of values is the core of culture. Culture is a collective phenomenon modelled by the individual's social environment and not by the individual himself. In essence, culture is the way of life and thinking of a social group which is transmitted from generation to generation. It represents the sum of related and creative behavioural characteristics which are important to all the members of the society.

We preferred the definition proposed by Raymond Boudon (1997) - as a set of changes in the original cultural patterns when groups of individuals with different cultures come into contact continuously and each culture is a system whose different elements are re-elaborated during these contacts, regardless of the situation (invasion, colonization, migration), and there are loans, exchanges and reinterpretations without one of them imposing totally over the other, although their contribution is uneven. Concerning the categorization and the different approaches of culture, the authors retain and develop the most significant ones. For example, the modern meanings of culture emphasizes *two meanings*: a) *the preparatory culture* - activity seeking to make intelligence able of fruitful actions, similar to that of the peasant who cultivates his land; b) *culture in a generalized sense* – a kind of intellectual life and spiritual ideal - and *a plurality of meanings*: a technical sense, meaning to bring together all elements of human life (both material and spiritual); c) culture within the meaning of *an ideal personality, an ideal individual* in terms of training and education; *spirit or genius of a people.* This typology is supplemented with five perspectives of defining and understanding culture (historical, philosophical, anthropological, informational, and sociological).

3. The Phenomenon / Process of Acculturation

The phenomenon / process of acculturation should be outlined. Its many meanings are highlighted. Thus, acculturation is:
- the result of the interaction of cultures after a close contact between people;
- the process by which a specific feature is absorbed by the receiving culture;
- the product in which the two aspects of the approaching cultures can be found;
- a means by which an individual appropriates models of his own society, unknown at that time;
- the ways in which certain cultural aspects are taken from a culture, adjusted and modelled in relatively equal proportions between the donor and the recipient culture;
- the situation in which the groups involved are in an essentially mutual relationship, where they both give and receive.

The authors count several types of acculturation: organized acculturation, spontaneous acculturation, global acculturation, partial acculturation, acculturation from the perspective of the changes it produces, acculturation from the ethnological perspective. Highlighting these meanings allows a deeper understanding and a more refined elaboration of the content put into the optional courses at school-decision. We aim to distinguish, from an ethnological perspective, the types of acculturation present in these communities: the acculturation typical for the societies which abandon their traditional institutions in favour of others, which they consider superior; acculturation, as a phenomenon itself; reverse acculturation – according to which *the "small" culture* imposes its patterns on the integrative culture (*the "big" culture*), in case of historical ruptures and social instability. We notice that, regardless of the type of acculturation present in those communities, the phenomenon involves the following processes:

1. reinterpretation - adopting traits and patterns of the dominant culture while maintaining their own cultural code (immigrant communities);
2. synthesis - a motivation in relation to one or the other of cultures in contact;
3. syncretism - a heterogeneous culture in relation to the cultures that have caused it;
4. assimilation - the negative form of acculturation, a type of failure that can lead to depersonalization. Assimilation is considered to be a better adaptation to the context;
5. counter acculturation - the process of brutal, sudden rejection of the culture.

Regarding the consequences of acculturation, it is worth noting that the material elements of culture (technical, instrumental) transfer easily, but the symbolic elements (values, beliefs, judgments, symbols) are more difficult to transfer. The effects of acculturation are recorded at the social system level, as a whole, and on the level of the individuals who compose and define it. As a result, individuals can join or conversely can manifest an attitude of rejection. Also, even if acculturation is not achieved on the level of the entire social system, it will affect the conscience of the individual.

The areas of investigation and research that the authors have chosen are part of a single problematic field, that of the socio-humanistic sciences: *ethnography* – the description of a population, society, community and of its representative culture, *ethnology* – the comparative and systematic reflection and *anthropology* – the mediator towards universalization, towards the abstraction of various constants of the human nature, the development of cultures and societies (Pălăşan, 2013).

4. The Research Design Elements

The research design elements are outlined: *the ethno-cultural and ethnographic study of traditional rural communities* (local communities from Lisa, Breaza, Recea, Sita Buzăului, Gura Teghii, Siriu, Cislău) with noting the essential elements, defining for the traditional rural identity *(values, traditions, customs, habits, rituals, myths, social practices, symbols*, etc.). The studies were conducted through observations, conversations, interviews and acquiring knowledge of the most suggestive, representative information that were collected from local informers. They were analysed, reflected upon and self-reflected, clarified; the social realities were presented and described in their depth, with all the implications for the socio-psycho-cultural and ethnic approaches. The research revealed a variety of aspects of rural mentality, specific to the village, to the authentic Romanian traditional culture in the rural space and there were outlined the directions and ways in which the authentic elements of traditional rural areas can be preserved. In this regard, the optional courses, generically called "Highlights of space and time for a "geography of education" in the rural south-east of Transilvania" and promoting projects and programmes to capitalize on the past of each rural community are the concrete proposals that we have found in the conclusions of the works referred to.

The research had as *main practical objectives* the following:
- identification of values, traditions, customs, social practices, rituals, symbols, meanings and significances which were representative, meaningful and significant for each community research and investigation.
- highlighting the elements of urban space that contribute to the restructuring and reorganization of the rural traditional reality on four dimensions: socio-demographic, socio-economical, psychosocial and attitudinal – behavioral, and sociocultural (the

rural-urban acculturation process), with profound implications for preservation of the traditional cultural community as subject of investigation and research.

- identification and promotion of the true preservers of the authentic traditions and forms of popular culture (traditions, customs, song, dances) and indexing the elements of rural life in the contemporary village community from historical, social, and psychological views, along with their specific manifestations (material, spiritual, cultural).
- updating and remembering information that oral culture (community collective memory) promotes, in order to integrate them in the specialized scientific approach to capitalize on the ethnographic materials collected.
- inventorying the values and the representative elements of traditional culture from the research community under investigation and identifying the forms and the effects of modernization, urbanization and acculturation with its whole arsenal of influences.

The main hypothesis was the traditional Romanian village was, through its specificity, an optimal model of psycho-socio-cultural functionality and its deep knowledge may be a source of functional optimization for the current village.

The working hypotheses:
- preserving, transmitting and promoting elements of the traditional culture are activities mainly specific to elderly people;
- local rural culture and traditional folk culture are characterized by a number of elements, symbols and special events, certain particular features and a certain identity.
- the rural traditional area, through its specific traditions, customs, rituals, attitudes and practices preserves, conserves and promotes the values, symbols, folklore, art and traditional folk culture;
- in the community under research and investigation, the ethnic population flows led to processes of assimilation and acculturation, whose consistency, stability and finality were based on a symbolic and subjective arsenal, favoured today by promoting democratic values.
- in the rural areas investigated, bordered by coordinates of space and time, the population's education and religiosity appear as elements of local culture, but also of social cohesion and community and involves both common features and significant differences depending on confession or ethnicity.
- elements and influences from the influential urban culture can be felt and interact / merge with elements of the rural culture, and they become visible on the four dimensions or sides of demarcation (socio-demographic, socio-economic, psycho-behavioural and socio-cultural).
- in a consensual culture, the subcultures enable the studying of community members' similar and different attitudes and behaviours concerning the same form of existence of the culture.
- urban-rural acculturation influences the collective mentality on the perception of reality, on the lifestyle of rural community members, with consequences in terms of respect for and promotion of symbols, values and traditional practices.

Sampling in some works was that of a "criterion" type and in others, a "chain" or "snowball". The approach was an ethnographic one and was based on adequate research procedures, instruments, and methods: the study of local and regional archives, analysis of documents, participant observation of lifestyle, free conversations, presentation of

experiences, views and opinions of the locals which facilitated the getting familiar with local history, facts, issues and life events, field diary or "logs".

4.1. The Results of the Studies

The results of the studies revealed:
- elements of local geography and history;
- the traditional Romanian village between eternity and modernity - transversal presentation;
- Lisa, Breaza, Recea, Sita Buzăului, Gura Teghii, Cislău, Siriu villages from an institutional perspective: the cultural centre, community meetings, church, family, school, kindergarten;
- elements of traditional mentality in the popular psychology;
- traditional rural collective mentality;
- space – element of identification and cultural and local identity;
- time in the peasants' mentality;
- the calendar and religious celebration in the rural collective mentality;
- symbolic elements in traditional folk culture: sun, fire, air, water and land;
- the bun as a symbolic and ritualistic element;
- tradition and spirituality of the Romanian people;
- tradition and spiritual identity;
- traditional rural community and spiritual life;
- the crisis of traditional values and the sacral problem;
- perversion of traditions – an attempt at the great values of the Romanian people;
- elements of material and spiritual culture, such as traditional art versus popular art;
- cultural heritage in the traditional villages investigated;
- traditional architecture - elements of rural architecture;
- the structure and organization of the inside of the house, the living room;
- folk art and traditional clothing in the researched areas;
- female traditional costumes;
- male traditional costumes;
- rural crafts and traditional occupations - aspects of the local economy;
- traditional customs related to work in the researched communities;
- Romanian folk songs and dances - communication, expression and mutations in values;
- carols and carolling on the folkloric, ethnographic and local history level;
- customs related to holidays of the year;
- the aphoristic literature - proverbs and sayings;
- witty sayings, orations; stories, tales, legends, anecdotes;
- initiation manifestations – the community meeting;
- agrarian rites or rituals – "the Crown";
- unconventional cultural background - incantations, charms;
- Romanian mythology and myths: mythological characters from the divine anthropogony;
- popular theology;

- the fates and fate;
- customs of the life cycle - rituals and social practices - rites of passage;
- customs at the birth of a baby;
- wedding customs;
- burial customs;
- folklore and folk pedagogy: popular education – model pedagogical ideas;
- local culture and intercultural exchanges and, inter-ethnic relationships - integration and assimilation in the investigated areas;
- essential institutions in preserving traditional cultural values.

In fact, the consistency of the optional course is given by the authors' ability to translate the three areas of investigation (*ethnography, ethnology* and *anthropology*) into a coherent, expressive and authentic educational product. We believe in the value and in the positive impact that research of this kind will have on the beneficiaries of such educational offerings. The stake of papers written for obtaining the first teaching degree, of bachelor's or of master's thesis, in this field of research, is to offer a solid background for optional courses generically called "Spatial and temporal landmarks of a "geography of education" of the rural area...".

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