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Publication indexed and abstracted in the Thomson Reuters Social Sciences Citation Index® and in Arts & Humanities Citation Index®, and included in EBSCO's and ELSEVIER's products.

ISSN 1221-1249

Printed in Romania by COLOR PRINT  
66, 22 Decembrie 1989 St.,  
Zalău 450031, Romania  
Tel. (0040)260-660598



[www.colorprint.ro](http://www.colorprint.ro)

**Transylvanian Review** continues the tradition of **Revue de Transylvanie**, founded by Silviu Dragomir, which was published in Cluj and then in Sibiu between 1934 and 1944.

**Transylvanian Review** is published quarterly by the **Center for Transylvanian Studies** and the **Romanian Academy**.

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# The Development of Geographical Education in Romania, under the Influence of the Soviet Education Model (1948–1962)

MARIA ELIZA  
DULAMĂ  
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*To understand the Romanian geographical education, we focused on its components: the aims, the contents, the educational strategies, the assessment strategies, and the time for instruction.*

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## **Introduction and Theoretical Background**

**T**HE INFLUENCE of the Soviet education model, established around the 1950s, reached both Asian and European socialist countries. Scholarly work on the influence of this model focuses on a multitude of aspects. While Stephen Heyneman<sup>1</sup> explores the way education and social cohesion in former socialist and Soviet countries deal with the historical legacy, Edward Wang<sup>2</sup> analyses the Chinese practice of Marxist historical writing during the 1950s and the early 1960s. Tuul et al. (2001)<sup>3</sup> focus on the role of teachers in curriculum development in the formerly communist Eastern Europe in the 1990s, and Iveta Silova<sup>4</sup> explores the historical roots of private tutoring

in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Similarly, Diana Burton<sup>5</sup> turns her attention to changes in the former socialist Europe in the light of neo-imperialism.

Taking into account the abovementioned approaches, in this study we used three perspectives (historical, geographical, and pedagogical) in order to analyze the development and features of the pre-university and university geographical education in Romania, at the beginning of the communist period, little known at both national and international levels. We used a cross-disciplinary approach in order to analyze the historical and political context, using historical documents and underlining the role of the most significant historical events and the factors that determined major changes in organizing and developing geographical education. As this analysis was based on a curricular approach, inspired by the pentagonal model of the curriculum,<sup>6</sup> in order to understand the Romanian geographical education we focused on its components: the aims, the contents, the educational strategies, the assessment strategies, and the time for instruction.

In this analysis, we answered the following questions that we also asked in a previous study:<sup>7</sup> (1) How did the historical and political context influence geographical education? (2) How was it organized and structured within the Romanian education system? (3) Which were the sources of geographical education? (4) What were its aims and objectives? (5) Which was the content that students had to learn? (6) Which were the main didactic methods?

There is little information about this subject in geographical literature (Ion Rădulescu;<sup>8</sup> Constantin Herbst and Ion Rădulescu;<sup>9</sup> Grigor P. Pop<sup>10</sup>), in that of the didactics of geography (Vladimir Budakov,<sup>11</sup> George V. Erdeli,<sup>12</sup> Petru Bărgăoanu,<sup>13</sup> Ioana-Paula Codrean<sup>14</sup>), of the history of the education system (Jean Banciu,<sup>15</sup> Florin Diac<sup>16</sup>), and in the text of laws and of other official documents on the education system.

We analyzed the situation of geographical education under the influence of the Soviet education model and of “the class conflict” (1948–the beginning of the 1960s), a phase identified by the historian Dinu C. Giurescu in the evolution of the Romanian school system.<sup>17</sup>

## Method

**T**HE RESEARCH material included the laws on the education system, political speeches, university courses, school textbooks, and scientific literature from the fields of pedagogy, history, geography, and of the didactics of geography. We studied the development of organizations for children and for the youth, and of the geographers’ associations and their role in geographical

education. We analyzed practices from the education system and from the entire society in relation to geography. In addition, we analyzed our own representations and those of other geographers about the evolution of the geographical education system in Romania, for the abovementioned period.

*Procedures.* University libraries and the Internet were the main sources for obtaining the information necessary for researching the scientific literature. We selected and systemized the results chronologically and according to their relevance. Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data included the following methods: participatory observation, discourse analysis, contents analysis, and visual methods (for images).

## Results and Discussions

**T**HE INTRODUCTION of the communist political system in Romania was marked by the proclamation of the Popular Republic of Romania, on 30 December 1947. We analyzed the impact of this political system and of the Soviet education model on geographical education, discussing the following: geographical education in the political and legal context, structural changes within the education system, literacy campaigns—“an affair of state,” the low quality of geographical education because of political-ideological purging, geographical education in universities and institutes, geographical education and school textbooks, the perspective on geographical education in the methodological literature of geography, and geographical education under the pressure of rituals, stereotypes, and cultural clichés.

### Geographical Education in the Political and Legal Context

**I**N THE education system, a major change took place through the “Stalinist reform of 1948,” approved by the Great National Assembly of 3 August,<sup>18</sup> through which the Romanian education system adopted the Soviet education model, which was centralized and authoritarian. By adopting the Soviet model, the Romanian education system gave up the modern European tradition and “the quality of the educational activity decreased.”<sup>19</sup>

Through this decree, the central authorities continued: “to democratize the education system”; to institutionalize the mass character of this system; to increase the cultural level, to decrease the illiteracy rate in order to reach its political and economic goals; to offer people the chance to read and write in their na-

tional language. The profound changes in the education system that this decree aimed at were the following: secularization and political-ideological orientation towards realizing “the communist education”; unification and the exclusive organization of the education system by the state (thus, the state took over the religious and the private schools); decreasing the duration of the compulsory general education system from seven years (as in the interwar period) to four years, and of the period for attending the general education system from eleven to ten years; teaching in the mother tongue to all grades for all ethnic groups, while learning the Romanian language began with the 1<sup>st</sup> grade; it was compulsory to study Russian in school, starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade; imposing a series of school textbooks, curricula, and educational plans taken from the USSR’s education system; training teachers by specialists in order to meet the requirements of “strengthening the popular democracy.”<sup>20,21</sup>

### Structural Changes within the Education System

**I**N 1948, the education system, extremely centralized and under political control, had the following structure: pre-school education (nurseries and kindergartens); elementary education (schools of seven years); education of four years (high schools, pedagogical schools, technical schools, vocational schools); university education (universities; polytechnic schools—4–6 years; institutes—3–4 years).<sup>22</sup> In this phase of the communist period, in the context of policies that promoted access to education for the “working class,” with the possibility to continue and complete their studies, especially as an opportunity for the political leaders, the authorities created various forms of school attendance (evening classes, programs without attendance, short duration) and alternative structures, all these causing changes of the educational plans, of the curricula and of the school textbooks, including those of geographical education.

For instance, in 1948, the authorities set up high schools only with evening classes, with a duration of four years.<sup>23</sup> In 1954, they set up evening schools of general culture<sup>24</sup> and general culture sections only with evening classes.<sup>25</sup> For the employees with unfinished education, the central authorities created special schools of general culture, with a duration of two years (shorter than that of the regular schools), without attendance, with a special curriculum and with admission tests. The graduates of such schools could sit for exams to university studies. The last series of graduates was in 1953.<sup>26</sup>

We remarked certain tendencies to return to the previous situation. If in 1948 only four grades were compulsory, in 1955 the education of seven years became general and compulsory in towns, centers with a high number of work-

ers, and in the seats of districts.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the education of seven years was generalized, becoming compulsory also in the rural areas,<sup>28</sup> aiming at reducing the disparities between villages and towns. Another positive change was the return to the education with a duration of eleven years, in 1956.<sup>29</sup> The general culture high school with a duration of four years, of the eleven years school, was set up in 1956,<sup>30</sup> and started its activity with the classes from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> grade in the 1956–1957 school year.<sup>31</sup> The new educational plans and the school curricula entered into force starting with the 1956–1957 school year only for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The first graduates of high school were those of 1959, and the last series of graduates was that of 1965.<sup>32</sup>

### **Literacy Campaigns—“An Affair of State”**

**T**HE LITERACY action that took place between 1945 and 1948, coordinated by the General Confederation of Labor, continued in a second stage from 1948 to 1956, when it became “an affair of state” and all educational institutions got involved. This action was declared finished in 1956.<sup>33</sup> After 1948, the campaign of eradicating illiteracy included literacy courses (two years) for the population 14 to 55 years of age who had not attended school.<sup>34</sup>

### **Low Quality of Geographical Education Because of Political-Ideological Purging**

**L** 1948 WAS the year of a radical purging of the education system: through the ministerial decision of 19 June 1948, the authorities terminated all contracts of the didactic and scientific personnel from the secondary and university education systems, stipulating that the new contracts were to be signed from 1 October 1948, according to the needs of the education system.<sup>35</sup> This decision created the circumstances for cultivating mediocrity, also by hiring didactic personnel on the basis of a personal file and exam,<sup>36</sup> and not due to professional competences. The exclusion of teachers, professors, and students because of the “political criterion of their social origin” continued also in 1957.<sup>37</sup> In 1958, the Party celebrated ten years since the education reform of August 1948 with the slogan: “A barrier between the bourgeois school and the new socialist one.”<sup>38</sup>

## Geographical Education in Universities and Institutes

THE GEOGRAPHY degree program continued to exist also in this phase of communism, in the three big Romanian universities in Bucharest, Iași, and Cluj. In May 1948, Ferdinand I University changed its name to Victor Babeș University, and, in 1959, it merged with Bolyai University, under the name of Babeș-Bolyai University.<sup>39</sup> In 1948, Cuza-Vodă University in Iași changed its name to Alexandru Ioan Cuza University.<sup>40</sup> Within this university, the Geography Department functioned in various faculties: in the Faculty of History-Geography created in 1948, in the Faculty of Geology-Geography created in 1950, transformed into the Faculty of Natural Sciences-Geography in 1956 and renamed Faculty of Biology-Geography in 1959.<sup>41</sup> After 1948, universities lost much of the academic freedom and autonomy granted to them by the laws of 1932 and 1938.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the situation in other socialist states, students' access to university was difficult because tuition fees represented over 50% of the average monthly income until the 1961–1962 university year.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the fact that for the generalization of compulsory education one needed more teachers, in 1957<sup>44</sup> the central authorities approved the setting up of pedagogical institutes with a duration of three years. They functioned from 1959 in various towns (Baia Mare, Suceava, Petroșani, Galați, Pitești, Constanța, and Craiova).<sup>45</sup> Starting with 1961, the Faculty of History-Geography operated within the Institute in Craiova, with the homonymous section.<sup>46</sup>

For the Geography teachers' continuous training and for the publication of papers on pedagogy and the didactics of geography, an important role was played by *Gazeta învățământului* (The education journal), published starting with 1949 (by the Ministry of National Education and by the Committee of the Alliance of Unions from the Education and Culture System), by the Institute for Pedagogical Sciences and the Didactic-Methodological Directorate in the ministry, the Institute for the Didactic Personnel's Continuous Training, set up in 1951, in Bucharest, and the methodology departments created in the seats of districts.<sup>47</sup>

After a period (1943–1947) when no geography books were published, in 1948, in Cluj, geographers published geomorphology (authored by Gheorghe Pop and by Laurian Someșan) and climatology books (authored by Tiberiu Morariu). Between 1947 and 1950, the publishing houses published certain translations from Russian,<sup>48</sup> mainly ignoring the research of Romanian geography professors. The absence of publications was caused by the nationalization and closing down of the publishing and printing houses in 1948, by the geography professors' and teachers' being purged and marginalized, and by their silent refusal to publish.



After an editorial break, in 1957 the works of Romanian geographers' appeared at the new "socialist" publishing houses: Ion Conea and Ion Velcea, *Scurtă prezentare geografică a Republicii Populare Române* (Short geographical presentation of the Popular Republic of Romania) (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică), Mihail Hașeganu, *Geografia economică a RPR* (Economic geography of the PRR) (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică), Traian Naum, *Geomorfologie RPR: probleme speciale* (Geomorphology of the PRR: Special problems) (Bucharest), Maria Sirbu, Ludmila Panaite, and Maria Chițu, *Manual unic de geografie fizică URSS* (Textbook of physical geography of the USSR) (Bucharest: Litografia Învățământului), and Andrei Bogdan, *Geografie fizică generală cu noțiuni de cartografie și petrografie* (General physical geography with notions of cartography and petrography) (Cluj: Litografia Învățământului).

In 1960, there appeared several books at the Publishing House of the Academy: The Institute of Geology and Geography, *Monografia geografică a Republicii Populare Române* (Geographical monograph of the Popular Republic of Romania), 2 volumes; Constantin Herbst, Ion Șandru, and Victor C. Tufescu, *Populația urbană și rurală* (Urban and rural population); Petre V. Coteț, *Evoluția morfohidrografică a Deltei Dunării: O sinteză a studiilor existente și o nouă interpretare* (Morphological and hydrographical evolution of the Danube Delta: A synthesis of existing studies and a new interpretation); Virgil Gârbacea, *Observații morfologice în partea de nord-est a Podișului Transilvaniei* (Morphological observations in the north-eastern part of the Transylvanian Plateau). Moreover, the same year saw the publication of: *Cursul de climatologie RPR* (The university course on the climatology of the PRR) (authored by Ștefan Mihail Stoenescu, Bucharest: Ed. de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică), *Anuarul statistic al RPR/1957* (Statistical yearbook of the PRR/1957) (Central Directorate for Statistics). A progress was indicated by the publication of the papers of *Congresul Internațional de Geografie Humboldt* (Humboldt International Congress of Geography) (Ion Șandru, ed., Iași, 1960), and of *Comunicări de geologie-geografie, 1957–1959* (Geology-geography papers, 1957–1959) (The Society of Natural Sciences and of Geography of the PRR, Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1960).

## Geographical Education and School Textbooks

**D**URING THIS period, geographical education focused on the Geography of the PRR, with two hours per week in the final grades of the education cycles<sup>49</sup> (the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the 7<sup>th</sup> grade—Geography of the PRR,<sup>50,51</sup> 1956–1965, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade—Geography of the PRR,<sup>52</sup> 1958–1962). They preserved this approach also after 1989, with a certain decrease in the hours per week.

From 1956 to 1962, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, students learnt about the geography of their region (e.g. the Stalin region/Braşov,<sup>53</sup> 1959–1960). Under the influence of the political factors and of the Soviet education model, they introduced the study of disciplines such as: the Soviet Union, the Popular Democratic Countries and the Main Capitalist Ones<sup>54</sup> (the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 1956), Economic and Political Geography of Foreign Countries (without the USSR)<sup>55</sup> (the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 1956), Economic and Political Geography<sup>56</sup> (the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 1957–1958). In gymnasium and high school, they continued with Physical Geography and the Geography of the Southern Continents<sup>57</sup> (the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 1956–1960), Europe<sup>58</sup> (the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 1960), and with Physical Geography<sup>59</sup> (the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 1956–1964).

### Perspectives on Geographical Education in the Methodological Literature of Geography

**A**FTER 1944, Geography got out of the influence of the ideology of the fascist-oriented regimes, of the “idealistic and metaphysical conceptions” which failed in “explaining scientifically the laws for the development of nature and society.”<sup>60</sup> Due to the new educational policy, in the geography school textbooks, the contents had a “scientific character,” they were based on the principles of dialectic and historical materialism and underlined “socialist” achievements.<sup>61</sup>

From 1947 to 1950, geographers published a series of translations from Russian: V. P. Budanov and Ion Gugiuman, *Metodica predării geografiei fizice: Îndrumător pentru profesorii școlilor medii* (The methodics of teaching physical geography: Practical guide for the secondary school teachers), Moscow: The State Publishing House for Pedagogical Textbooks, 1947; V. G. Erdeli, *Metodica geografiei: Manual universitar* (The methodics of geography: University textbook), Bucharest: Cartea Rusă Publishing House, 1950; V. P. Budanov, *Harta în predarea geografiei* (The role of maps in teaching geography; Karta v prepodavanii geografie, Moscow, 1948), but these had no significant or obvious impact on the Romanian geographical education.

Although 31 of Simion Mehedinți's works were banned,<sup>62</sup> geographical education preserved the understanding of Geography as “a unitary analytical science of the planet,” “of the relationship between the planetary layers” and the necessity “of developing students’ geographical thinking.”<sup>63</sup> During the interwar period, the inductive principle was also preserved,<sup>64</sup> as recommended by G. Vâlsan in 1931, and the role of the deductive principle diminished.

The importance of studying the geography of the fatherland during several grades, underlined in works on didactics, stemmed from the policy of the Ro-

manian Communist Party (RCP), and was promoted in political speeches, such as the one of “comrade” Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (general secretary of the RCP, 1945–1954 and prime-minister, 1952–1955),<sup>65</sup> supported by the Congress of Primary Teachers in 1952.<sup>66</sup> From this stage on, starting from these political speeches, in the Romanian schools the myth of the rich country appeared, expressed in a jargon characteristic of the communist discourse: “the wonderful beauties and the richness of our country”; “rich fields”; “waterfalls” with “still untamed power.”<sup>67</sup> From the perspective of “socialist patriotism” and of “proletarian internationalism,” “the working people” were encouraged to capitalize on the natural resources of the country in order to have a “rich and happy” life<sup>68</sup> in Romania—a country closed to any information and any new technology from the capitalist countries.

Despite the fact that in the papers on the methodics of geography authors took up fragments from political speeches, they still offered teachers methodological suggestions in order to make them stimulate the students to develop their geographical thinking: the use of the comparative method, doing geographical representations (e.g. map sketches, drawings) in the classroom, certain sketches, completing tables, studying geographical processes on the basis of photos, maps, and charts.<sup>69</sup> The variety of the illustrative materials that they offered as examples and the recommended methodology were meant to help students understand the relationships between geographical components and phenomena indicated the existence of a formative geographical education system.

Either as a result of instructions from the Party or of the ideas promoted by the founding fathers of the modern Romanian Geography, in the works of methodics they suggested the organization of certain learning activities near the school or in the home region (visiting exhibitions and museums, organizing trips, visiting factories and state collective farms, etc.). In order to accomplish the policy of the Party, the students from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> grade from the rural areas had the opportunity to learn through experience geographical knowledge and to understand certain geographical phenomena and processes through compulsory participation, at the beginning of the school year, in practical agricultural activities, with a duration of 12 days per year, 5 hours a day.<sup>70</sup>

## **Geographical Education under the Pressure of Rituals, Stereotypes, and Cultural Clichés**

**E**VEN IF during this period Romanian education was visually tainted with political slogans, written in white letters on a red background, the symbol of communism, and above the blackboard they exhibited portraits of

Marx, Engels, and Lenin, these “decorative elements” did not accomplish their ideological educational function, as teachers and students ignored them.

In this phase of communism, before starting classes, the flag of the fatherland was hoisted on a pole and students sang the national anthem: “Te slăvim, Românie, pământ părintesc,/ Mândre plaiuri sub cerul tău pașnic rodesc (We praise you, Romania, our fatherland/ Under your peaceful sky, beautiful places flourish).”<sup>71</sup>

An environment imbued with rituals, stereotypes and cultural clichés continued to be created through the Organization of the Pioneers. The objectives of this mass organization, which included students between 8 and 14 years of age, stipulated in a later statute (1967), were strongly influenced by the nationalist political propaganda: knowing, understanding and realizing the policy of the RCP; education “in the spirit of socialist patriotism, of boundless love and devotion towards our people, towards the Socialist Republic of Romania, towards the Romanian Communist Party”; knowing “the traditions and the glorious past struggles of the people and of the working class for national and social liberation”; “loving the beauty and richness of the country”; increasing “the patriotic pride with the results obtained while building socialism”; “developing the feeling of solidarity with the peoples’ fight for freedom and national independence, for social progress”; education for values such as: honesty, modesty, courage, discipline, love for physical work, respect for those who work, responsibility for assets; stimulating curiosity and interest for knowledge.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, by getting students involved in extracurricular activities (e.g. trips, practical activities, visiting museums, tourist orientation), organized in this context, they had the opportunity to acquire geographical knowledge.

After the age of 14, the youth got involved into mass organizations created especially for them. The Union of the Communist Youth, created between 19 and 22 March 1922<sup>73</sup> and dissolved in 1936, was active again after 23 August 1944 and it was disbanded in June 1945, when the Organization of the Progressive Youth was set up. In August 1946, the National Federation of the Democratic Youth of Romania was created, according to the model of the Global Federation of the Democratic Youth, created in October 1945 by the Soviet Union. In February 1948, the Union of Young Workers was set up, followed by a purge during which 33,800 persons were excluded. Then another 30,000 young people were recruited and the mass organization reached about 650,000 members, and, in 1952, a new purge followed. On 4 August 1965, the organization received the name of the Union of the Communist Youth.<sup>74</sup> Geographical education and making the youth aware of their responsibility to know and develop their country were realized within youth organizations, which frequently changed their names and experienced discontinuities in the organized activities.

## Conclusions

**I**N THIS phase of development for the Romanian education system in the communist period, under the influence of the Soviet education model and of “the class conflict,” the pre-university geographical education system was influenced by the following: a decrease in the duration of compulsory education from seven to four years and of the period for school attendance from eleven to ten years; the creation of new forms of school attendance (evening classes, programs without attendance, short duration) and alternative structures; a radical purge of the didactic personnel for political-ideological reasons, followed by a decrease in the quality of teaching; the pressure of communist cultural rituals, stereotypes and clichés; frequent changes of the school plans, curricula and textbooks; the imposition of new school textbooks, curricula and plans from the USSR. One notices major changes in the contents of school textbooks, the study being oriented towards the Geography of the PRR, the Geography of the Soviet Union, the Geography of the popular democracy countries and of the capitalist ones, and towards Economic and Political Geography.

The geographical university education in the three main Romanian universities in Bucharest, Iași, and Cluj was affected by: multiple movements of the Geography Department from one faculty to another; the limitation of academic freedom and autonomy; the political-ideological purging of professors and students; the setting up of pedagogical institutes including the History-Geography specialization; the banning of certain Romanian geographers’ books; the publication of certain translations from Russian between 1947 and 1950 and the publication, after 1957, at the new “socialist” publishing houses, of Romanian geographers’ books focusing on the Physical Geography and Regional Geography of Romania.

Geographical education was formative, students having various opportunities for learning (in a formal or informal context, in various forms and structures), but it lost very much because of the political purging of the didactic personnel and of university students, because the learning contents were tainted by the communist ideology and propaganda, and because of the creation of short term education programs which did not ensure knowledge quality. □

## Notes

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## Abstract

The Development of Geographical Education in Romania, under the Influence of the Soviet Education Model (1948–1962)

In this study, we used three perspectives (historical, geographical, and pedagogical) in order to analyze the development of geographical education and of the training of geography teachers in Romania, at the beginning of the communist period, under the influence of the Soviet education model (1948–1962). We underlined the role of the factors that determined major changes in the development of geographical education, on the basis of historical documents and of the most significant historical events. This research is relevant for geographers, historians, and educators, because we analyzed the development and features of the pre-university and university geographical education in Romania, at the beginning of the communist period, little known at the national and international levels.

## Keywords

education system, educational reform, school textbooks, geographical education