

The Development of the Geographical Education System in Romania, under the Impact of World War II and during the Transition to Communism

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Introduction

THIS STUDY, carried out from a historical, geographical, and pedagogical perspective, synthesizes the impact of historical events upon the Romanian geographical education system, little discussed in the scientific literature. In order to understand the development of the geographical education system during World War II, we first analyzed the legislative context and the situation of the education system at the end of the interwar period. Moreover, we researched the way in which the transition to communism (1944–1948), a period identified by Silvia-Nicoleta Tudosoiu,¹ influenced the geographical education system. We also analyzed the development of the Romanian geographical education system in a larger context, taking into account the stages established by the historian Dinu C. Giurescu.²

Theoretical Background

RESearchers documented the extent to which the political regimes had policy initiatives in the field of education and influenced its contents, focusing on the two periods considered in our research (education during World War II and during the transition to communism), but also on the impact of certain periods on recent education policies. Such research focused on countries as case studies and discussed, for instance, the school system in East Germany after reunification,³ education in Bulgaria during two economic regimes (from communism to EU membership),⁴ the effectiveness of education systems in achieving social and economic goals during the transition peri-

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od after the collapse of communism in eleven Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, which became EU members in 2004 and later,⁵ on educational reforms, in the 1990s, in the formerly communist Eastern Europe (with a focus on curricular changes and on Estonia),⁶ underlining the idea that “the past continues to shape the democratic trajectories of post-communist states”.⁷ Education in general, in relation to communist dictatorship, was studied after 1990 in an analysis of the role of Soviet communism and national socialism,⁸ with case studies for Romania,⁹ Yugoslavia,¹⁰ and Albania.¹¹

Researchers were also interested in the topic of travelling in the communist period as presented in textbooks (Polish and Czech history textbooks for secondary school students)¹² “to determine the awareness among today’s studying youth of the socialist period,”¹³ and in the production and regulation of school textbooks (and implicitly censorship) in communist Poland (the author presented the dominant role in this process of the Polish Communist Party and addressed the question of the Soviet communists’ influence), also underlining the constraints imposed in the field of education.¹⁴

The history of education during the transition to communism and in the communist period is better represented than that on the relationship between education and World War II. Educational historians, within the context of wartime schooling, were mostly from the USA and approached topics such as: the public school curriculum during World War II (in the USA),¹⁵ the emergence of racial tolerance education,^{16,17} multicultural education (in the USA, in New York),¹⁸ civic education and American identity and respect for diversity,¹⁹ the historical origins of reforms and United States educational policy,²⁰ the role of university education during World War II (Stanford University and the defense research agenda).²¹

The relationship between education and the state during World War II was researched also in a study focusing on Europe (German interference in Belgian education and the control over students and teachers)²² in which the author pointed out that this was considered “a neglected field of study in the history of education and the historiography of Second World War.”²³ Also, a study on militarization and the Israeli children’s culture (e.g. militaristic narrative for children) during Israel’s nation-building process (from the beginning of World War II in 1939, through the War of Independence in 1948, and during the first decade of statehood) highlighted the power of the state over the education system.²⁴

In the case of Romania, the challenges that institutions of geographical higher education had to cope with during these periods were presented in three books published by professors at the three largest universities in this country.²⁵

Method

WE USED university libraries and the internet to collect the research material (laws on the education system, university courses, school textbooks, and scientific literature from the fields of Pedagogy, History, Geography, and the Didactics of Geography, and political speeches). Discourse analysis and content analysis were the main methods for analyzing and interpreting the data (both written texts and the prac-

tices in the education system and society in relation to Geography), for making decisions on the relevance of the research material.

Results and Discussions

1. The Geographical Education System Under the Impact of World War II

AT THE beginning of WWII, the Romanian education system included primary, secondary, and university education. In 1939, the primary education system included: the nursery, the kindergarten, the primary grades (four years), schools for the illiterate, and special schools.²⁶ After 1928, the secondary education system included: the inferior cycle (three years: the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades) and the superior one (four years for the high school classes: the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grades). The inferior cycle of the secondary school was called gymnasium, and the superior cycle or the secondary school with both cycles included was called high school.²⁷ In comparison to the 1898 law of Minister Spiru Haret, when high school had 8 grades, after 1928, it was reduced to 7 grades and no longer had humanist and Mathematics and Sciences specializations in the superior cycle. In 1939,²⁸ the inferior cycle (gymnasium) had four years, and the superior one (high school) had variable duration (three years for the graduation certificate and four years for the baccalaureate diploma).²⁹ In 1943, the system with four years for gymnasium and four for high school was reintroduced.³⁰

1.1. The Geographical Education System and the Legal Framework

IN THE Law of 1939, one notices the concern of the Ministry of National Education (Minister Petre Andrei) with the following: compulsory elementary school attendance between the ages of 5 and 14; eradicating illiteracy; special education; education and an education system in the Romanian language in all state schools; an education system in the language of ethnic minorities in certain localities. In what Geography was concerned, the law provided for the compulsory teaching of Geography in Romanian, even if education was in the ethnic minorities' languages. In order to increase the quality of geographical education, providing knowledge about the environment and its protection by pupils coordinated by the primary teachers, several provisions were beneficial: ensuring the didactic material and the practical features; realizing the connection between school and the region students lived in; organizing trips, holiday camps, and other outdoor activities; editing the newspaper of the class, in which students presented events from their town; the existence of certain school spaces, such as the school library, the garden, and the school grounds.

This law underlined the status of Geography in pedagogical high schools, as a discipline for scientific education, beside natural, physical, mathematical and other sciences, but also as a discipline in which those who finished the 8th grade had an oral exam as part of the capacity exam. To ensure the future primary grades teachers' learning about the rural area, the law stipulated that every high school had to take care of a nearby village and to take part at the activities of the village Cultural Center.

This law provided information about accepting primary grades teachers in the education system, as well as about their obtaining the definitive degree in education, about introducing the didactic degrees (the second didactic degree, after three years as a definitive teacher and after an exam; the first didactic degree, five years after the second one, after a special inspection), practices that continued during the whole communist period for all teachers, at all educational levels (except for universities). One notices at the legislative level the preoccupation for improving the primary grades teachers' training through cultural meetings, study trips, compulsory courses (i.e. special courses, refresher and repetition courses), established through ministerial decisions, as a result of school inspectors' findings. At the county level, primary grades teachers were to meet every year at the general conference of the County Pedagogical Council and this underlines the interest for sharing their didactic experience.

Although this law proposed good measures for the education system, because of WWII and of the poor material situation in Romania, it did not have the targeted effects, especially in the rural area, where many children did not attend school because their parents asked them to stay at home and work, which favored illiteracy.

1.2. The Geographical Education System and the School Textbooks

THE LAW of 1928 brought centralization and a leveling of the curriculum in the whole country. Thus, the Ministry of Education had the obligation to develop the school curricula, the methodical instructions for each subject matter and the analytical tables of the respective subject matter, a working manner that endured and is characteristic of contemporary Romania. In the vision proposed by this law, the aim of high school was to provide students with general knowledge, and General Geography and the Geography of Romania—to be studied in gymnasium and in high school—served this aim. Centralized management and the leveling of the education system continued also under the law of 1939, which stipulated that school textbooks were to be managed only by the state and written on the basis of the curricula or syllabi drawn up by the school authority.

While analyzing the school textbooks published and re-edited from 1935 to 1946, one notices that they studied Geography in all grades within the secondary education system: *Introduction to Geography* (the 1st grade),^{31,32} *Europe and the Boreal America*³³ or *Europe* (the 2nd grade),³⁴ *The Continents (without Europe)* (the 3rd grade),³⁵ *Physical Geography* (the 4th grade),³⁶ *Physical Geography* (the 5th grade),³⁷ *Human Geography* (the 6th grade),³⁸ *Economic Geography* (the 7th grade),³⁹ and *Romania* (the 8th grade).⁴⁰ The main authors of Geography school textbooks with a strong impact on the school geographical system were Simion Mehedinți, especially in the interwar period and at the beginning of WWII, and Virgil Hilt, after 1935. Analyzing the texts of these school textbooks, one notices the accessible language, clearly defined notions, and the pertinent information. Informative and explanatory notes come with various discontinuous texts in form and contents (i.e. photos, maps, charts, and sketches), some of the drawings being included in the school textbooks published after 1989.⁴¹

1.3. The Geographical School Education System under the Impact of the Second Vienna Award

WWII HAD a negative impact on the education system in Northern Transylvania after the signing, on 30 August 1940, of the Second Vienna Award (Diktat). In the autumn of the same year, the Romanians, who were in the majority (with 400,000 children), no longer had schools using the Romanian language and their children had to enroll in schools using the Hungarian language, where they used the school curricula from Hungary. For the secondary education system, there were nine schools, which were Romanian language sections within the Hungarian language schools (except for two schools in Năsăud). History and Geography were taught in Hungarian in the Romanian language schools, too. The Law of February 1941 made provisions only for the Hungarian language to be used in the education system.⁴²

At King Ferdinand I University in Cluj, the Department of Geography operated in the Institute of Geography, within the Faculty of Sciences. After Northern Transylvania became a part of Hungary as a result of the Second Vienna Award, King Ferdinand I University from Cluj functioned in Sibiu and Timișoara from September 1940 until the spring of 1945, cities where geographers also published their studies.

A significant contribution to the development of Geography was that of: Vasile Meruțiu (director of the Institute until 1943), Sabin Opreanu (director of the Institute starting with 1943 and head of the Department of Geography starting with 1947), Ștefan Manciuș (associate professor starting with 1941), Tiberiu Morariu (with a university career between 1926 and 1973), and Gheorghe Pop.⁴³

In 1939, Tiberiu Morariu published studies about the Land of Maramureș,⁴⁴ and Ștefan Manciuș about the Tisza Plain.⁴⁵ During the period when the university operated in Sibiu and Timișoara (1940–1944), the geographers from Cluj published studies about the population's distribution in the west of Romania⁴⁶ and certain traditional occupations: gold mining (T. Morariu)⁴⁷ and shepherding (T. Morariu).⁴⁸ Some of the studies of the university professors, during their exile, focused on the populations' ethnical structure in Maramureș (T. Morariu)⁴⁹ and Banat (Șt. Manciuș),⁵⁰ on the Germans in Transylvania (T. Morariu),⁵¹ on the strong influence of the Hungarian ethnics on the towns and cities of Transylvania (T. Morariu),⁵² on Transylvania as depicted in the Romanian Geography books.⁵³ In the Regional Geography studies published in Bucharest, Sibiu, and Timișoara, the geographers from Cluj underlined the continuity of Romanians' habitation in Maramureș and Transylvania.⁵⁴ Geographers were not much interested in other geographical research themes. Thus, during this period, there was only one study on the Transylvanian Plain⁵⁵ and one on glaciation in the Rodna Mountains.⁵⁶ In 1942, the results of their scientific research were published in the journal *Lucrările Institutului de Geografie al Universității Cluj* (Papers of the Institute of Geography of the Cluj University) belonging to King Ferdinand I University in Cluj, relocated to Timișoara.⁵⁷

1.4. The Negative Influence of the War on the Geographical University Education System

IN THE interwar period, the training of Geography teachers took place in the universities of Cluj, Iași, and Bucharest. As a result of the Law of 4 November 1938, the names

of the departments of Geography at the University of Bucharest were changed (i.e. the Department of the Physical Geography of Romania, chaired by Vintilă Mihăilescu and the Department of General and Human Geography, chaired by Constantin Brătescu) and those departments were included in the Faculty of Sciences.⁵⁸ In 1943,⁵⁹ each of the three universities (Bucharest, Cuza-Vodă in Iași, King Ferdinand I in Cluj and Sibiu) included the Geography section in the Faculty of Sciences. Because of the foreign occupation of the territory of Romania, authorities closed the universities in Transylvania, Moldavia, and Northern Bukovina, and their activities took place in more secure places.

Cuza-Vodă University in Iași operated in Alba Iulia between the 25 March 1944⁶⁰ and the 13 May 1945,⁶¹ and the Department of Geography was moved to Zlatna.⁶² At Carol I University in Cernăuți (Chernivtsi) (named as such in 1918, and known after 1940 as the State University in Cernăuți), in 1933, Carol I and Ion Nistor set up the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Geography.⁶³ After the annexation of Northern Bukovina by the Soviet Union, Carol I University in Cernăuți was closed down by the Soviet authorities from June 1940 until June 1941, and, at the beginning of 1944, it was included in the Soviet university system, with courses in Russian and Moldavian (Romanian written using the Cyrillic alphabet).⁶⁴ In 1944, when the Soviet military troops took hold of Cernăuți, the university and its library were burnt down.⁶⁵ In Cernăuți, Constantin Brătescu (dean of the Faculty of Sciences in Cernăuți, beginning with 1930, a member of the Academy of Sciences of Romania in 1935, and also the head of the Geography Section at the University of Bucharest starting with 1938)⁶⁶ published research about the asymmetry of valleys,⁶⁷ “The Silver Coast,”⁶⁸ and about the population and morphology of the Quadrilateral (southern Dobrudja).⁶⁹ In Bucharest, he published studies about the Dniester Valley,⁷⁰ the oscillations in the level of the Black Sea,⁷¹ and the maritime border of Romania.⁷²

Of the geographers in Iași, remarkable contributions had Mihai David (corresponding member of the Romanian Academy since 1935, rector of Iași University from January 1941 to October 1944, member of the Institute for Geographical Research of Romania starting with 1944),⁷³ Constantin Martiniuc, Ion Gugiuman, Ion Șandru, and Gheorghe I. Năstase.⁷⁴ Under the impact of the war, the geographers from Iași published few studies, focusing especially on Physical Geography: the morphology of the Iași flank (Mihai David),⁷⁵ the river loops in Romania, and the Lohan Valley (Ion Gugiuman).⁷⁶ After the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union, Gheorghe I. Năstase published a study about the population of the Prut region.⁷⁷ Geographers published also Regional Geography studies: the settling of the Bukovina Carpathians (Constantin Martiniuc)⁷⁸ and the geographical region of Huși (Ion Gugiuman).⁷⁹ In 1944, as a result of relocating the school to Zlatna, Ion Gugiuman studied the hydrographical regime of the Mureș River.⁸⁰

Among the geographers in Bucharest, Vintilă Mihăilescu was the most prolific: research in Physical Geography (rivers,⁸¹ the formation of Roșu Lake),⁸² in Regional Geography (Dobrudja),⁸³ in Human Geography (on the population’s ethnic structure,⁸⁴ on towns and cities,⁸⁵ on the unity of the Romanian territory and people).⁸⁶ Victor Tufescu published studies about Moldavia (on seasonal migrations,⁸⁷ on the economic value of rivers⁸⁸ and of towns,⁸⁹ about Târgu Frumos)⁹⁰ and field trip impressions about French North

Africa.⁹¹ Nicolae Rădulescu published research on Anthropology and Human Geography⁹² as well as on the Economic Geography of the Danube region.⁹³

1.5. Scientific Literature for the Geographical Education System

DURING THIS period (under the impact of World War II), in the geographical education system continued the influence of some classical geographers (F. Ratzel, F. von Richthofen, A. Penck, Paul Vidal de La Blache, E. de Martonne, W. M. Davis, and V. V. Dokuchaev), of the founding fathers of the modern Western Geography (A. von Humboldt and C. Ritter), and of the founding fathers of the Romanian modern geographical education system (Simion Mehedinți and George Vâlsan).⁹⁴

One notices the influence of modern pedagogical thought (J. A. Comenius, J. Locke, J. J. Rousseau, J. H. Pestalozzi, A. Diesterweg, F. Fröbel, J. F. Herbart, and H. Spencer) from Western Europe, during the interwar period.⁹⁵ Starting with the interwar period, the development of the geographical education system was supported by the Romanian pedagogical literature: philosophical pedagogy (G. G. Antonescu, Ștefan Bârsănescu, and Constantin Norly), sociological pedagogy (Dimitrie Gusti, Stanciu Stoian, Simion Mehedinți, and Onisifor Ghibu), and the psychology of education (Ion Nisipeanu and Florian Șefănescu-Goangă).⁹⁶ Many didactic principles (intuition, accessibility, the conscious and active acquisition of knowledge, and the solid acquisition of knowledge and skills) and methods of the intuitive education system, presented by Comenius and by other educationalists, are valuable even today.

From this period to the present, we have preserved in the geographical education system certain elements of the educational method (developing students' intelligence through exercise, indicating the beginning of the active school, learning through action and the formative features of the education system; the principle of intuition; and the link between the inductive and the deductive components while teaching) presented by G. G. Antonescu, the orientation towards a traditional pedagogy in the spirit of work, promoted by Simion Mehedinți, certain methods used in mathematics (inductive, deductive, analytical, synthetic, and genetic).⁹⁷ In the works of the didactics of teaching Geography, they recommended using in lessons a series of efficient didactic strategies for understanding the geographical space (explanations using sketch drawings on the blackboard, exercises for reading and interpreting maps) and organizing various types of lessons.⁹⁸

1.6. Geographical Education and the Organizations

ONE OF the organizations significant in shaping the children's personality, but also their geographical culture, was *Straja Țării* (The Country Guards),⁹⁹ created by King Carol II in 1935 and dissolved in 1940. One notices the guards' uniform which resembles that of the pioneers from the communist period, and, in the creed of this organization, the focus on educating the young to work, to support the unity and development of the country ("I believe in work and in sacrifice—dedicating my entire being to the rise and development of my Fatherland; I believe in the Country Guards—the guarantee of the Unity of the People, of our Borders and of the Romanian Soul").¹⁰⁰

1.7. The Development of Geography in the Context of Professional Societies and Associations

AN IMPORTANT role for the geographical education system and geographical research in Romania, for the development of Geography as science and as school discipline and for training the Romanian geographers, for making Romania known internationally through Geography, was played by the Royal Geographical Society, which was set up in 1875, according to the model of the Western European scientific societies, but its activity was suspended during the war, more exactly in 1943,¹⁰¹ and it closed down in 1945.¹⁰²

Many geographers also activated in the scientific association called the Academy of Sciences of Romania. For instance, members of this association were Mihai David and Constantin Brătescu (starting with 1935), Vintilă Mihăilescu (beginning with 1939), and corresponding members were Gheorghe Năstase (starting with 1938), Sabin Opreanu, Victor Tufescu, and Laurian Someșan (beginning with 1942).¹⁰³ This association, set up on 11 March 1935, was forbidden to use the name of Academy through the Decree no. 2418/7 July 1938 (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 154/8 July 1938). On 24 September 1938, the General Assembly decided to change its name into the Science Institute of Romania. The initial name was resumed on 7 November 1940 through Decree 3714/6 November 1940 (*Monitorul Oficial*, no. 261, Part I).¹⁰⁴ During 1936–1944, they published original scientific research in the volumes titled *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences de Roumanie* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1936–1947).

The war strongly affected the educational process (buildings damaged or destroyed by Russian or German bombs; plundered universities, libraries, and schools; insufficient funding; the lack of school textbooks and didactic materials).^{105,106}

2. The Development of the Geographical Education System during the Transition Period towards Communism (1944–1948)

THIS STAGE began at the end of WWII (after 23 August 1944) and had an important impact on the Romanian education system and on geographical education as well: “Unfortunately, this event opened the country to Soviet influence and introduced the communist system that dominated Romanian education until 1989.”¹⁰⁷

2.1. The Geographical Education System in Political and Legislative Context

IN THE 1944–1945 school year, the education institutions were organized similarly to the previous school year.¹⁰⁸ The education system included: pre-school education, primary and secondary education, and high school education (the classes from the 1st to the 4th of high school), vocational schools, and university education.¹⁰⁹ In the second half of 1944, many schools suspended their activity because of the war taking place on the territory of Romania.

Even if the structure was maintained, the change of the political regime generated major shifts in the education system. During this period, two events had a strong impact on the Romanian education system: the government led by Dr. Petru Groza¹¹⁰ took over the leadership of Romania, on 6 March 1945, and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was elected general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, at the National

Conference of the Party in October 1945, when the main objectives of the education system were established: democratic reorganization, to eradicate illiteracy, and to ensure the younger generation's minimum general knowledge.¹¹¹

The communist governments, labeled as “democratic-revolutionary,” operated changes in all fields of activity, and the school had the mission “to increase,” in a responsible and active way, the “working people’s” cultural level and to prepare “the personnel” for all activity sectors, to “arm” them with “a scientific outlook on the phenomena in nature and society,” in order to have “a high level training,” “that would ensure the success of the measures taken by the party and the government.”¹¹²

2.2. Geography University Education

AT THE university level, we underline: the return, in Iași, of Cuza-Vodă University and the beginning of the academy year on the 13 May 1945¹¹³ and, in Cluj, of Ferdinand I University, in the spring of the 1945; the setting up of the Institute of Geography in Bucharest in 1944;¹¹⁴ the setting up, through Royal Decree no. 407 of 29 May 1945 of the Hungarian University in Cluj, which in December 1945 received the name of Bolyai University.¹¹⁵ Within the Hungarian State University, in the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, there was a Geography Section (1946–1948).¹¹⁶

Geographical research and publishing were strongly affected by World War II as well as by the transition to communism. After the University returned to Cluj, geographers published studies they had previously drawn up, on the western border of Romania (Tiberiu Morariu, Sabin Opreanu),¹¹⁷ on the role of the Macedo-Romanians in Transylvanian towns (Ștefan Manciualea),¹¹⁸ on the geomorphology of Banat (Tiberiu Morariu),¹¹⁹ or the lower course of the Mureș River (Gheorghe Pop).¹²⁰

After coming back to Cluj, the geographers' editorial activity was poor. In 1946, Constantin Martiniuc discussed the existence of a Sub-Carpathian region in the west of the Harghita-Perșani Mountains.¹²¹ The geographers in Bucharest published mainly lithographed university courses in the secondary field of Geomorphology (Vintilă Mihăilescu),¹²² of Economic Geography in general (Victor Tufescu),¹²³ and of the Geography of Romania (Vintilă Mihăilescu).¹²⁴ There was also a study on the formation of the Siret and of the Prut meadows (Victor Tufescu)¹²⁵ and a work on geographical sciences (Vintilă Mihăilescu).¹²⁶ In the Romanian education system, it was also available a translation from Russian of a Methodology for the teaching of Physical Geography.¹²⁷

2.3. Purging the Geographical Education System according to Political-Ideological Criteria

AMID THE “democratic” reorganization of the education system, the first decisions affected the human resources. After Ștefan Voitec (4 November 1944–13 April 1948) took over the leadership of the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Affairs (1941–1944), this ministry received the name of the Ministry of National Education¹²⁸ and it started “the purging according to political criteria”: at the end of 1944 and in 1945, many teachers and professors were dismissed from their positions,¹²⁹ and this negatively influenced the geographical education system.

In the geographical university system, the purges affected Mihai David, in 1945 (hired again, in 1953–1954, only as a draftsman), and Emil Diaconescu, in 1946.¹³⁰ In 1946 and 1947, the communists massively purged the professors of the University in Cluj for political-ideological reasons.¹³¹ For instance, Ștefan Manciușea was dismissed in 1947, probably because of his religion, and he was imprisoned.¹³² Sabin Opreanu, the manager of the Geographical Institute in Cluj, and of the Geography Department starting with 1947, was dismissed for political reasons in 1948. In 1948, many members were dismissed from the Romanian Academy, including Simion Mehedinți, who was reinstated in 1990 (post mortem).¹³³

2.4. “Purging” and Censorship of Books

THE MECHANISM of propaganda and censorship have been researched extensively for the communist period.¹³⁴ By Law no. 346 of 2 May 1945, a commission was set up in order to compile the lists with forbidden publications.¹³⁵ During 1945–1948, the activists of the communist regime randomly drew up black lists of books with the aim of destroying them or including them into “secret funds,” called “prisons of books.” These lists were printed on several brochures of the Commission for the enforcement of Article 16 of the Armistice Convention (12 Sept. 1944).¹³⁶ These lists included books on the Romanians’ national identity, maps and atlases with the state borders after 1918, scientific papers with other perspectives upon the world than the Marxist-Leninist one, and books in foreign languages, irrespective of their contents.

2.5. Literacy Campaigns

STARTING FROM the estimation of the communist newspapers that, in the autumn of 1944, 49% of the illiterate persons were in the rural area¹³⁷ and that, in 1945, about 25% of the total population was illiterate,¹³⁸ the communist regime started, in the winter of 1946, the campaign for eradicating illiteracy, focusing on the active illiterate population (16-56 years).¹³⁹ The minimal courses targeted basic reading, writing, and elementary mathematical calculations, not a solid education which would generate authentic progress in the Romanian society. The communist leaders denied the efforts to eradicate illiteracy of the previous governments,¹⁴⁰ as well as the initiatives meant to increase the adult population’s cultural level. These efforts were constantly and significantly present in the first part of the 20th century. Remarkable contributions had been those of Spiru Haret, who organized the first school for adults and involved teachers into educating the rural population; the Law of the Social Service (1938), which was important for creating cultural centers and schools in villages; Virgil Bărbat’s campaigns for making knowledge accessible in the rural area.¹⁴¹

2.6. Geographical Education and the Organizations

THE CHILDREN were part of the Pioneers’ Organization, which was set up in 1945, similar to the pioneers’ organizations in other socialist countries (in the Soviet Union, in the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, etc.). Nowadays, Pioneers’ Organizations operate in countries such as China (the Young Pioneers of China), Portugal (the Pioneers of Portugal), etc.¹⁴²

2.7. The Development of Geography in the Context of Professional Societies and Associations

THE ROYAL Geographical Society of Romania was dissolved in 1945, but its specific activities were resumed in 1949, within the Society of Natural Sciences and of Geography, at the order of the Ministry of Education, and continued until 1968.¹⁴³

The Academy of Sciences of Romania was active scientifically up to 1948, and its original papers, including those in the field of Geography, were published until 1947 in the volumes *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences de Roumanie* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1936–1947). In the written report dated 1 June 1948 and presented at the Ministry of Justice and on the 24 June 1948 at the Ministry of the Public Education System by a general vice-inspector for control at the Ministry of Justice, as a result of the control realized during 6 May–1 June 1948, he mentioned that the activity of the Sciences Academy of Romania had been “rich and sustained in the last five years,” “despite the hardships caused by the war and its consequences” and he recommended “continuing the scientific studies and research not only from a theoretical perspective, but also from a practical one, as the Academy of Sciences of Romania has done to the present.”¹⁴⁴

Conclusions

WORLD WAR II had a negative impact upon the geographical education system of Romania because of the Soviet and German bombing that destroyed buildings, the pillage and burning of universities, libraries, and schools, the insufficient funding, the lack of textbooks and didactic material, the closing down or relocation of universities, and also because of having to carry out activities in a foreign language.

In universities, the Geography specialization was included in the Faculties of Sciences at the University of Bucharest, at Cuza-Vodă University in Iași, at King Ferdinand I University in Cluj-Sibiu, and at Carol I University in Cernăuți. As a consequence of the Vienna Award (1940), after Northern Transylvania became part of Hungary, King Ferdinand I University in Cluj relocated to Sibiu and Timișoara (1940–1945) and there was a Hungarian university with a Geography specialization in Cluj. After the annexation of Northern Bukovina by the Soviet Union, the Soviet authorities closed down Carol I University in Cernăuți (1940–1941), and, in 1944, it was included in the Soviet system of higher education. In 1944–1945, Cuza-Vodă University in Iași functioned in Alba Iulia, and the Geography specialization in Zlatna. In the new locations, geographers continued geographical research, focusing on Physical Geography and Demography, and published less research than in the interwar period.

Under the impact of the war, the Romanian Royal Society of Geography suspended its activity in 1943 and ceased it altogether in 1945, as a result of the transition to communism. Many geographers continued their activity as members of the Academy of Sciences of Romania (Mihai David, Constantin Brătescu, and Vintilă Mihăilescu) or as corresponding members (Gheorghe Năstase, Sabin Opreanu, Victor Tufescu, and Laurian Someșan), and they published the results of their research in the *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Sciences de Roumanie*.

In the period of transition to communism, geographical higher education within the three big Romanian universities in Bucharest, Iași, and Cluj was influenced by the limitation of academic freedom and autonomy, the purging of the didactic personnel according to political-ideological and religious criteria, the ban on certain Geography books, and the censorship of publications.

The school education system operated, with some interruptions, during World War II, on the basis of the school curricula and textbooks from the interwar period. After the annexation of Northern Transylvania by Hungary, during 1940–1944, the Romanian pupils had to study in Hungarian, using the school curricula of Hungary. After the war, the quality of Geography studies in the school system was strongly affected by the lack of textbooks, the lack of didactic material and by the absence of Geography teachers, by the purging of the didactic personnel and books, by the precarious state of schools or by their absence, and by the precarious financing.

To sum up, during World War II, at school level, the geographical education system in Romania was characterized by stagnation and the preservation of the previous situation, except for Northern Transylvania, where the impact was strong because studies had to be done in Hungarian and on the basis of the curricula from Hungary. The university system was characterized by minimum development, determined by the relocation of the universities to Romanian territories. The transition to communism was the most unfavorable one for the Romanian geographical education system during its entire history (from the founding of the first schools in Romanian to the present day). □

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Abstract

The Development of the Geographical Education System in Romania, under the Impact of World War II and during the Transition to Communism

In this study, we analyzed the development of the geographical education system in Romania, in the legal context of the interwar period, then under the impact of World War II, and during the period of transition to communism (1944–1948). We focused our research on the evolution and changes in the university and school geographical education system and on the causes that generated the respective evolution and changes, which we identified using historical documents. We extended our research in order to include professional associations, geographical research studies and publications, and the educational role of geography within organizations. We carried out our study from several perspectives: historical, geographical and pedagogical, and it is a synthesis of the impact that historical events had on the Romanian education system, little described in the scientific literature.

Keywords

university and school system, education system, school textbooks, geographical education, geographical society