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PhD THESIS  
(Abstract)

**The Land of Severin. Regional study**

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**Key words:** *The Land of Severin, regional identity, the Banat of Severin, the Citadel of Severin, the Diploma of Ioanitian Knights, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, mental space, territorial system, "land type region"*

## Introduction

The present paper is the result of a three years research work, being the subject of my PhD thesis, and is included in the trend initiated by PhD professor Pompei Cocean regarding the complex regional analysis of the "land" type regions.

Besides the historical factors, the role of the natural and human factors is decisive for the organization of the settlements, but also for the easiness with which the human succeeded to adapt the environment to his personal needs. Although the region is a quasi-opened territorial system, most of the rural space kept the simplicity of an almost archaic life. Despite, the modern elements that penetrated especially in the urban area from where they continued to expand, the inhabitants of the region found the power and the means to keep their traditions that, as they confirm, individualized this region that connects Oltenia and Banat.

One of the most important characteristics of the severinean community is given by the people's powerful feelings toward the land. The land represents the connection with their ancestors, is a source of food and an identification element for the people with the place they live in, feeling that they truly belong to these lands.

Another aspect that contributed to the individuality of this functional system is the ethnic and confessional homogeneity preserved despite the tentative made by the Austria-Hungarian and Ottoman empires to impose the catholic or the Islamic religion.

The present paper has eight chapters. The first four chapters enclose the introductive part which refers to the studies and the works that mention the studied region, continuing with the criteria and the methods used to delimitate the Land of Severin. The fourth chapter is entirely reserved to the presentation of the natural component and its role in the delimitation of this land type region. In the following chapters I analyzed the characteristics of the human component starting with the geodemographical particularities (chapter 5), and continuing with the human activities developed (chapters 6 & 7), specific to the region, which define the regional social and economic development. The work ends with a synthesis of the regional system of the Land of Severin where I analyze the actual status, presenting the regional chorotype,

and where I make a few recommendations for the further social-economic development.

## **The “Land of Severin” as a typical region of Romania**

The term of “land” (*țara* = is a word coming from Latin and it means *land* or *county*) defines the areas very well delimited. These are historical-social remains from the Middle Ages that evolved in different ethnographic areas. Some of these areas co-existed with the old medieval lands (singular = *land*, plural = *lands*) being generally located along the rivers or in small depressions in sub-mountainous areas. Thus, the term of “land” has, first of all, the meaning of heart of an old civilization, with an ethnic, linguistic and ethnographic unit.

Thus, the narrative sources, as well as the medieval toponyms from the documents issued in 13<sup>th</sup> century and up to 18<sup>th</sup> century mention a series of *lands*, their names being used even nowadays: *the Land of Bârsa (Terra Borza)*, *the Land of Olt (or the Land of Făgăraș)*, *the Land of Zarand*, *the Land of Severin (Terra Ceurin)*, *the Land of Maramureș (Terra Maramorosiensis)*, *the Land of Moți*, *the Land of Biharia*, *the Land of Lăpuș*, *the Land of Chioar*, *the Land of Oaș*, *the Land of Vrancea* etc.

Although, extremely interesting due to its historical-social evolution that marked the specific social, economic and ethnographic features, the Land of Severin is a region that was poorly mentioned in geographical studies under this exact name.

The name of „*Severin*” is very old in Europe, and it is supposed to have been brought from Asia during the Celtic period. The root of this word is *sab*, and it means *hill, mountain*. The letter *a* from *sab* alternates with all vowels, resulting the following forms: *sab, seb, sib, sob, sub*; but in the same time also the consonant *b* alternates being transformed in: *f, m, p, v* and *p* from *seb*, resulting the following forms *sef, sem, sep* and *sev*, which are found in the word *Sev-er-in*; *er* meaning *high, big* and *in* from the end meaning *place*; therefore Severin has the meaning of „*a place at high mountain*”.

The medieval name of the Land of Severin could have three possible origins:

- *a Latin one*, associated to the *Septimiu Severus* emperor;
- *a Slavic one*, associated to „*severnâi*”, translated like „*from the north*” or „*northern*”. D. Onciul mentions that the name of the Land of Severin might come from an ancient autonomous political formation organized by the Bulgarians, the Northern Banat (*severnâi* = septentrional, northern). But the intention to derive this toponym from the Slavic word *siver\** (northern), or *seavâr* (the northern wind), is not justified, because for the Slavs located in Dacia, the *Severin* was not placed in the north, but in the south. According to

the historical manuscripts the name cannot have a Bulgarian origin, because the medieval citadel of Severin was built by the Ioanitian Knights (before the Bulgarian occupation) not by the Bulgarians (Hurmuzaki, 1887, 1890, p. 126);

- *a religious one*, associated to saint Severin of Noricum, the protector of the Latin Church, located inside the citadel during the Middle Ages, used by the catholic missionary friars coming from the region of Upper Austria (Noricum).

The first written documents which mention the Land of Severin as an individual region dates from 1233, and a few years later, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 1247, the Land of Severin (Terra Zeurino) is mentioned in the Diploma of the Ioanitian Knights, representing a donation document from king Bela the IV of Hungary.

The discoveries made demonstrate that at the moment when the Land of Severin was mentioned in official documents, this territory was organized and structured hierarchically. The historic events marked by foreign occupations (Austrian-Hungarian empire, the Ottoman empire, the Bulgarian empire) contributed to the modification and concentration of the historic limits causing the delimitation of a typical region that nowadays covers a much smaller surface, but which individualizes through the collective common conscience derived from the peoples attachment to the natural and spiritual elements of the space they live in (Cocean & Ilovan, 2005, p. 3).

In conclusion, the essential features which confer the homogeneity of a “land” type region refer to the following meanings of this term (Pușcaș & Nicoară, 2000, p. 132):

- the older meaning of this notion is the one of mountainous region (depression surrounded by mountains), having a specific territorial organization and economic functionality;
- the historic-geographical and political-administrative connotation specific to Middle Ages when these territorial entities started to arise;
- the specific of the folklore which confers its individuality compared to the surrounding regions.

### **The role of the natural background in outlining the territorial system of the “Land of Severin”**

The characteristic features of the natural component evidence the relation between the natural and human component that is based on the influence of the natural elements (relief, climate, hidrography, natural resources) and on the way they contributed to the human development and evolution, emphasising in time the human pressure upon the environment determined by the main activities developed within the occupied space.

The natural factor has an important role, being the main support for the human element, playing the role of a barrier for the climatic factors, but also for the historical, economic and social ones. The relief can also influence, by the nature of the rocks and the expositions of the slopes, the other natural elements like the climatic factors, the distribution of the biogeographic areas, the direction of the hydrographical network, all these contributing to the land use and to the industrial development by the exploitation and processing of the natural resources, outlining the functions of the territorial system under study. Depending on these factors, there were developed the first human settlements in the Land of Severin.

The particularity of the relief is given by the disposition in amphitheatre of the main form of relief, the Land of Severin being individualized on three altitudinal levels with the opening toward east and south-east. The three levels that define the specificity of the natural background are the eastern slope of the Mehedinți Mountains, the plateau and the lower level of the depression, assimilated to the plain due to the reduced altitudes (the Severin Depression, the contact depressionary culoir located on the east side and the depressionary culoir Cireșu – Baia de Aramă) (Fig. 17).

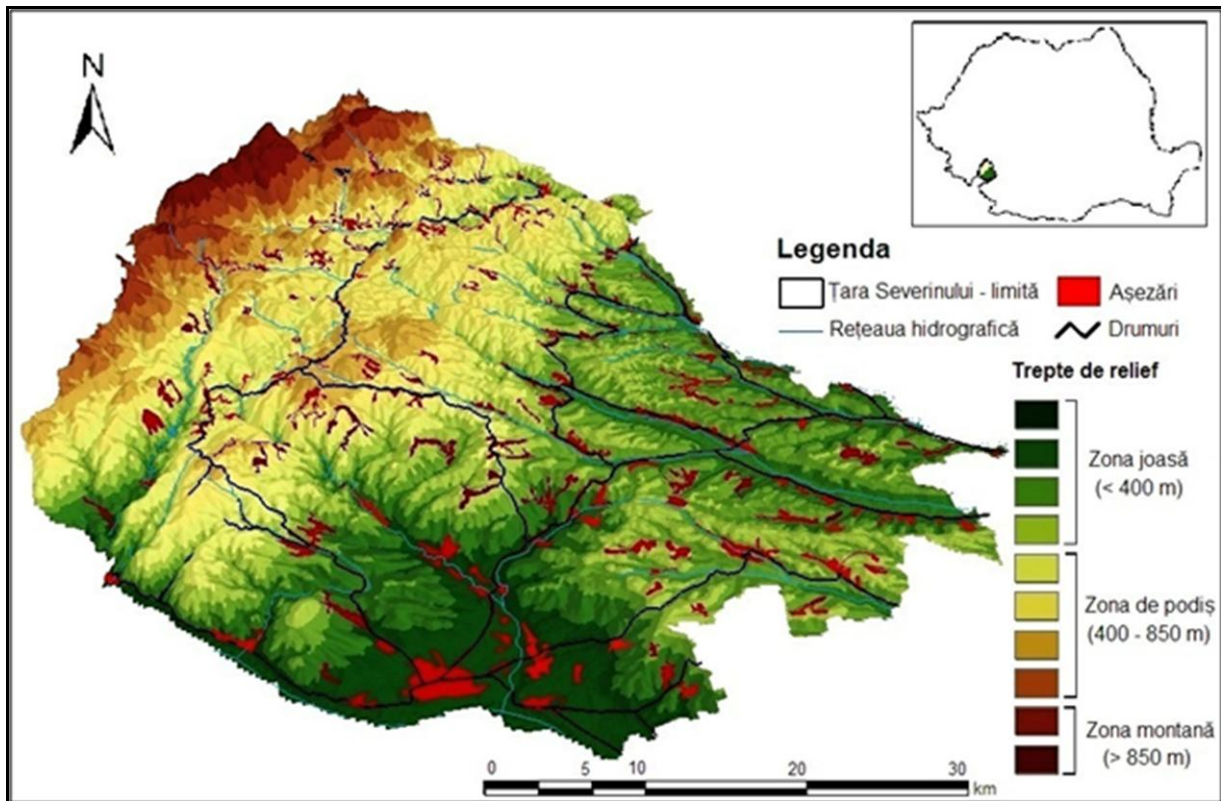
Despite the reduced altitudes of the Mehedinți Mountains, these areas were not very attractive for humans, because of the presence of the carstic relief which confers a reduced accessibility and less favourable life conditions, in this respect, humans preferred the plateau areas and the river valleys. The high concentration of the carstic relief specific to the Mehedinți Plateau and Mountains confers a specific image of the landscape given by the „cornete”, the steep slopes and the canyons contributing to the individualization of the general image of the region.

The major units of relief, as well as the general orientation of valleys have contributed to the location of human settlements, influencing also their form. The tenth levels of altitude evidence the minimum altitude (27 meters) and the maximum one (1,437 meters). The maximum altitudes are concentrated in the NW, in the Mehedinți Mountains and in the south of the Mehedinți Plateau, while the smallest altitudes are found in the Severin Depression and on the river valleys from the Coșuștea Hills.

The general orientation of the valleys is NNW – SSE. The highest density of human settlements is in the Mehedinți Plateau, except a small surface in its central part, where the restrictive factors of the relief did not permitted the extension of big human settlements. Although in this area, but also at the contact with the Mehedinți Mountains, there are extended surfaces on the watersheds where are located a great number of dwellings which are also called by the locals countryseats on: Culmea Draganovăț, Dealu Ponorăț, Dealu Glămei, Dealu Văcăriei, Dealu Buruiana etc. These



types of shelters had been abandoned or are being used only during the summer, as temporary shelters (Foto 8).



**Fig. 1: The Land of Severin. The map of the relief**



**Foto 1: Dwellings located at the contact area between the Mehedinți Mountains and the Mehedinți Plateau**

Another characteristic of the region is that in the hills of the plateau are the specific toponyms given by the locals to the western slopes, facing the mountain, called „backs”, while the eastern ones (favourable to agriculture and house building) are called „faces” or „săsturi” (Erdeli, 1996).

Analysing the direction of the main roads we can notice that they follow exactly the relief, as, most of the times, they are oriented along the main valleys (Fig. 17).

## **Demographic and habitational particularities**

### **Age, continuity and permanence of habitation in the Land of Severin**

Human component is one of the most important regional elements which contributed to the evolution of the regional territorial system, individualizing this "land" type region due to the particularities determined by the life style, the way in which he modified the environment and the way in which he adapted his home depending on the natural conditions and finally by peoples traditions and customs.

The oldest proves of inhabitation, given by the presence of primitive humans in the region are given by the quartz and silex instruments discovered in the Climente Cave and the Thieves Cave. The tribes of the primitive humans lived in the caves, the region being known for the presence and the extension of the carstic relief, with numerous caves that could offer shelter to humans during that time. These are the oldest traces of inhabitation in the area of the Iron Gates (approximate 40,000-35,000 years b.Hr.) (Chipurici, 1977, p. 6).

The archaeological evidences prove the existence and the development first of geto-dacic civilization and then the Dacian-Roman one, sustaining the idea of permanent and continuous inhabitation in this area, proving in the same time the high potential of habitation of the region.

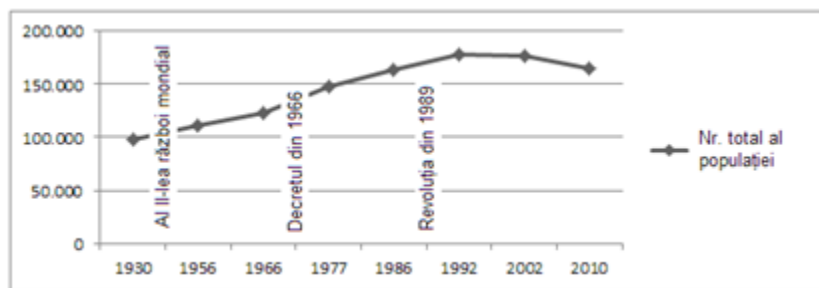
"At the beginning of the feudal period, once the trading was revived and the roads are intensively used for economic activities, there is noticed the development of bigger and better developed human settlements" (Erdeli, 1996, p. 36).

The discoveries made demonstrate that at the moment when the Land of Severin was mentioned in official documents, this territory was organized and structured hierarchically. The historic events marked by foreign occupations (Austrian-Hungarian empire, the Ottoman empire, the Bulgarian empire) "contributed to the modification and concentration of the historic limits causing the delimitation of a typical region that nowadays covers a much smaller surface, but which individualizes through the collective common conscience derived from the peoples attachment to the natural and spiritual elements of the space they live in" (Cocean & Ilovan, 2005, p. 3).

### **Geodemographic features and tendencies in the Land of Severin**

The demographic trend, along with other types of structures, outlines the human potential of the region. Also, the analysis of the demographic evolution and the causes which determined the characteristics of the evolution curve are also important for making a prediction regarding the evolution of the population in the Land of Severin.

The causes which influenced the population growth in the Land of Severin are according to the demographic processes occurred along the time at the national level, but, especially, with the local influences, dictated by some geographical particularities like the geographical position of the settlements to the possible polarization centres that have an important social and economic attraction and which, at a given time, had a certain impact upon the demographic potential determining certain changes in the demographic structure of the region. To these causes are also added other aspects as poor incomes, poor hygiene or the lack of equipment in the sanitary units. Social causes like diseases or illegal abortions (during the communist period) are also important for the evolution of the population growth.



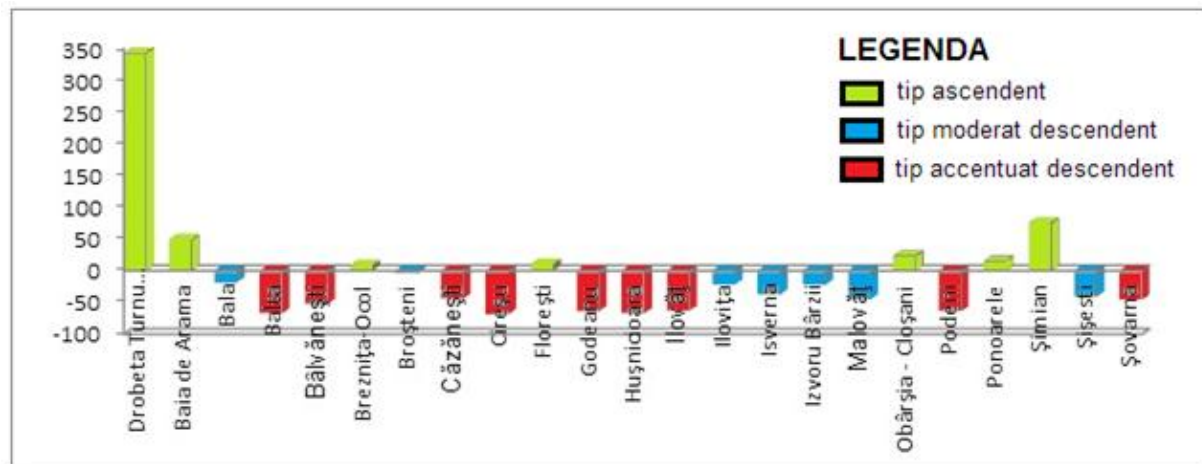
**Fig. 2: The population growth in the Land of Severin during 1930-2010**

By analysing the curve concerning the evolution of the population (**Error! Reference source not found.**), we notice that it slightly begins to decline compared to the maximum peak reached in 1992, registering a decrease of -0.46% in 2002, the overall population being of 177,240 persons. The downward trend is maintained for the next period; currently the total population of the Land of Severin is 164,322 inhabitants, thus reaching the level recorded almost twenty years ago, in 1986, of 163,815 persons. The rate of population decline, recorded in 2010 compared to 2002 is -7.26% and maintains its downward trend.

Observing the particularities of the population growth at the level of administrative unit (Fig. 47), in the Land of Severin there are three specific types of population growth: highly descendant, moderate descendant and ascendant.

Although it is important to have an insight on the trends of population growth or decline in the past (maybe even from the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries), which should be correlated with the political, historical and social events from the respective periods, we

must take into consideration especially the current trends that can help us issue a forecast over the development of certain settlements, to anticipate the danger of their disappearing and socio-economic problems generated by aging of the population or by the amplification of the migration phenomenon to more attractive areas.



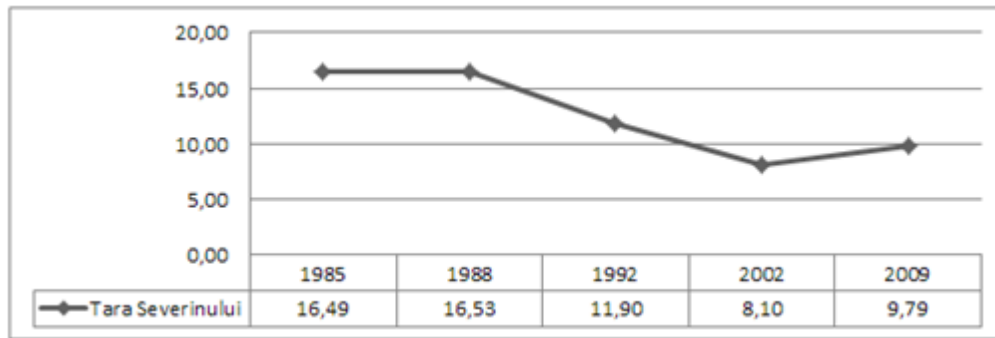
**Fig. 3: The Land of Severin. Types of geodemographical evolution according to the values calculated for the total growth rate of the population**

*The dynamics of the population and the evolutonal particularities in regional context*

The dynamics of the population includes the natural dynamics and the migratory one and is characterized by the transformations occurred in the total population number, due to natural growth (birth rate, death rate and natural growth) and migrations (populations' outgoings and incomings from/in the Land of Severin). This dynamic is influenced by all factors mentions in previous chapters.

**Birth rate**

The oscillations regarding the values of the birth rate, with significant reductions, are registered in the land of Severin especially after 1990, when important transformations occurred that marked profoundly the actual society. First of all, the fall of the communist system contributed to the transformations occurred in the people's life style, while the economical problems existent during 1991 and 1992 and the general confusion created by the new system caused the dramatic reduction of the values for birth rate. The maximum values of 16.53% registered in 1988 for the birth rate, in all 23 administrative units, where followed by a continuous decrease, reaching the minimum value of 8.10% in 2002 (Fig. 51).



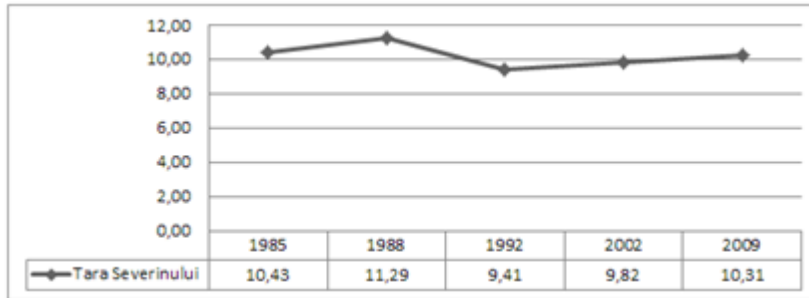
**Fig. 4: The evolution of birth rate in the Land of Severin (1985-2009)**

After almost 20 years of social and economic transformations, which marked the evolution of the number of the family members and family planning, we can notice some changes. Thus, in 2009, the birth rate registers values ranging between 5.38‰ (Florești) and 12.46‰ (Godeanu), while almost half of the administrative units included in the Land of Severin register in 2009 values above the average value of 9.79‰ which characterizes the entire region.

#### ***Death rate***

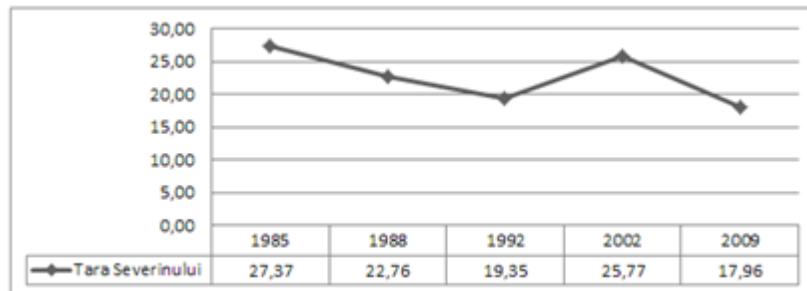
As a result of the social and economic progress and the one in the sanitary system registered after the Second World War and the eradication of some illnesses like cholera, syphilis or tuberculosis represented the main causes of mortality before the First World War. Also the structure of the deaths on main causes changed. Nowadays, most of the deaths are caused by circulatory and heart diseases. In case of the severinean region another death cause is represented by the Balkan Endemic Nephropathy affecting especially the population living in the villages from the east and south of the region.

The average value for the mortality rate registered in the Land of Severin during the last 25 years is almost the same (Fig. 55), registering values ranging between 9.41‰ (in 1992) and 11.29‰ (in 1988), but with values slightly increased compared to the ones registered by the birth rate during the last 10 years. After reaching the maximum value in 1988, the value of death rate dropped suddenly, reaching the minimum value in 1992. Presently, the values of the general death rate are slightly increasing, registering in 2009 a value of 10.31‰.



**Fig. 5: The evolution of the death rate in the Land of Severin (1985-2009)**

At the regional level, *the child death rate*, has a sinuous evolution curve (Fig. 58) starting from values of 27.37‰ (in 1985) and reaching to 19.35‰ in 1992, after this moment it rises again to 25.77‰ in 2002, followed by a sudden decrease to 17.96‰ only seven years later.



**Fig. 6: The evolution of the child death rate in the Land of Severin (1985-2009)**

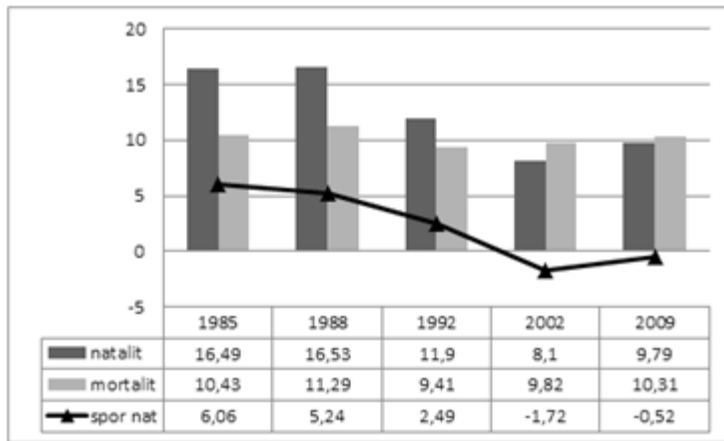
High values for the child death rate are registered in the rural area, where the sanitary system is poorly maintained, but lately I observed a reduction of the number of administrative units with high values for this index.

### *Natural population growth*

The evolution of the population or the natural population growth follows the same trend as the birth and death rate. The multiannual averages and the evolution of the values registered by this indicator outline important temporal and spatial disparities (Fig. 61).

The average values went from positive values of 6.6‰ in 1985 to negative ones of -1.72‰ in 2002 or -0.52‰ in 2009. Starting from 1985, and especially after 1992, it can be noticed a numeric decrease of population which subsequently started to accentuate reaching its climax in 2002.

The frequent negative values proves that the settlements from the Land of Severin began an evident demographic decline that only a sustainable economic



**Fig. 7: The evolution of population growth in the Land of Severin during 1985-2009**

development, capable to bring on young people able to revive the present situation. Nowadays, the highest negative values are registered in Balta (-15.79‰), Podeni (-21.15‰), Ilovăț (-17.98‰) and Șovarna (-16.91‰) communes (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

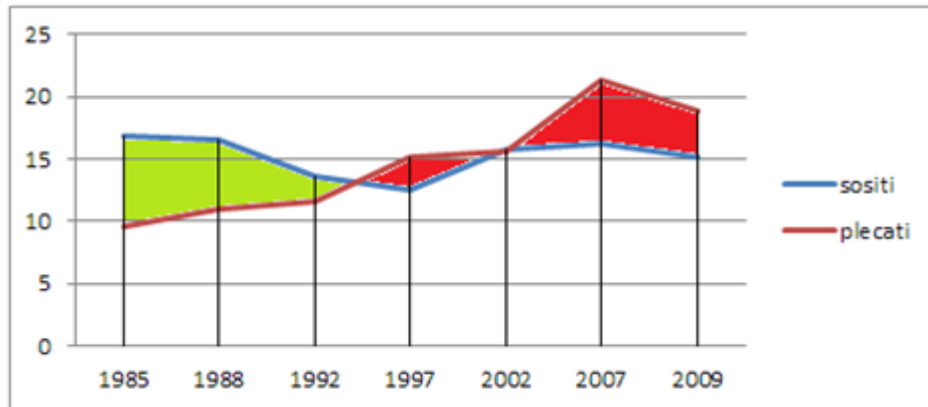
*The volume and the intensity of migrations in the Land of Severin. The causes and social-economic effects of migrations*

The migrations in the Land of Severin is mainly generated by economic factors, as, for example, the development in the south of the region is attractive for people looking for a job, while the underdevelopment in the plateau and mountainous area determines people to leave. Social factors also have an important role, especially in the areas affected by Balkan Endemic Nephropathy, to which are added the geographical factors generated by the attraction exercised by certain areas.

The migration of the population during the last two and half decades is characterized by the decrease in the number of incomers and the oscillatory increase of the ratio of persons leaving.

The beginning of the time interval considered for analysis, (1985-1995), is characterized by positive values for the entire region. In 1985 the value registered for migration was 7.23‰, constantly dropping toward the end of the interval when it reached in 1992 to 2.08‰ (Fig. 64).

The highest positive values were registered especially in urban area (Drobeta-Turnu Severin – 19,06‰ in 1985 and Baia de Aramă – 4,25‰ in 1992) as a result of the social-economic development, but also due to the revival of the copper exploitation, as the case for Baia de Aramă town, while in the rural space only three communes registered positive values for migration in 1992: Godeanu (3,75‰), Șimian (1,99‰) and Șovarna (9,14‰).



**Fig. 8: The evolution of migration in the Land of Severin**

The second interval, 1995-2009, is characterized exclusively by negative values, with two moments of climax, the first one in 1997 (-2.46‰) and the second one in 2007 (-5.17‰), when the number of the departed exceeds the incomers.

Regarding the rural-urban migration, it caused the increase of the number of population in the cities and maintained the total number of rural population to a relatively constant level (because of the balance between the natural growth and the migratory balance), contributed to the ageing of rural population (especially the agricultural population) and regeneration of the of urban population, by increasing the birth rate in the urban areas and reducing its values in the rural space, to the feminization of the labour force in the rural areas and causing the increase of divortiality rate (Sandu, Migrația și schimbarea structurii sociale în mediul rural, 1985).

**Table 1: Stages in the dynamics of the population in the Land of Severin (‰)**

Indicator	1985	1988	1992	1997	2002	2007	2009
Natural growth	6.06	5.24	2.49	-0.39	-1.72	2.59	-0.52
Migratory rate	7.23	5.46	2.08	-2.46	0.06	-5.17	-3.71
<b>Total balance</b>	<b>13.29</b>	<b>10.60</b>	<b>4.57</b>	<b>-2.85</b>	<b>-1.65</b>	<b>-2.58</b>	<b>-4.24</b>

\* calculated values

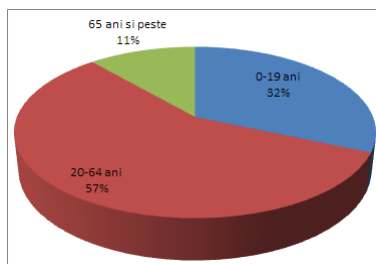
From the demographic point of view, the consequences of temporary or permanent migration are quite significant. The tendency to remain permanently in the destination countries is more and more acute and caused significant losses in the number of population. The consequences are related to the reduction in the rhythm of economic development or even the decline of the economy.



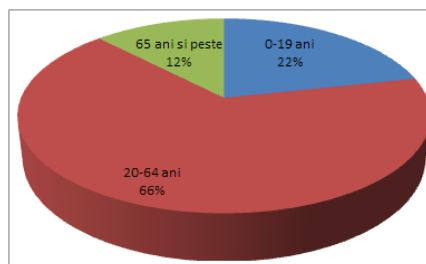
### *The structure of population on age and sex*

As the migration process intensified in the Land of Severin, the structure of the population was modified in both environments, as well as the structure on ages and sexes, in this process being involved especially the young population, which represented an “infusion of youth” in the urban population, as the cities represent the biggest attraction.

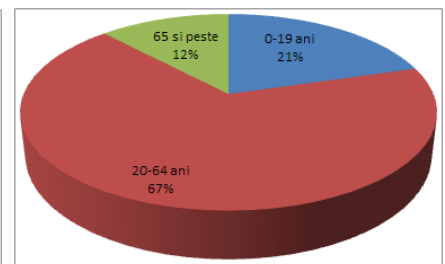
Regarding the structure of population on age groups, the new social conditions which contributed to the economic development of the region, caused certain changes in the structure of population in the Land of Severin, and changes regarding the values specific to the young population (age group 0-19 years) and the adults, namely the productive segment which supports financially the other two groups. The population in the third group (over 65 years) registered a slightly increase with 1% after 2000, from 11% in 1977 to 12% from the total number of population in 2002. The same value is registered also nowadays (Fig. 9).



**Fig. 9: The Land of Severin. The structure of population on age groups (1977)**



**Fig. 10: The Land of Severin. The structure of population on age groups (2002)**

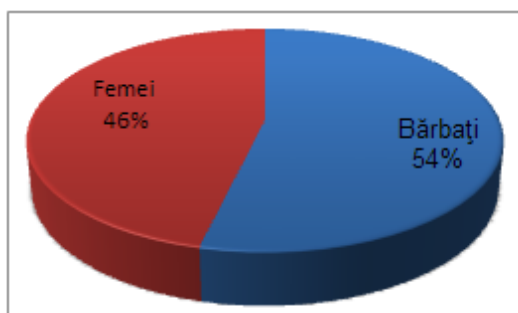


**Fig. 11: The Land of Severin. The structure of population on age groups (2009)**

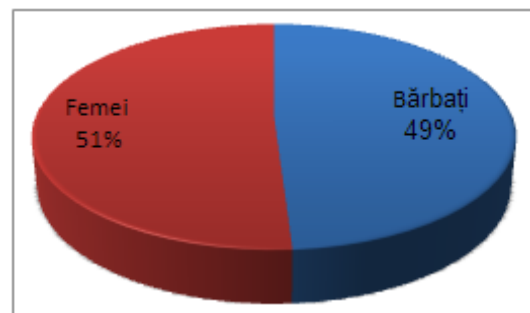
The age structure of the population has the characteristic mark of a demographic aging process owed to the decrease of the birth rate, but also to the intensification of migration, especially in the segment of adults, causing the absolute and relative decrease of the population with ages between 0 and 19 years. This fact will have future dramatic effects for the economy of the region, as the number of elders (persons over 65 years) will increase significantly. Therefore the social pressure will be high, obstructing the economic development. Also, the sustainable development of the region may be restricted because it misses the human resource.

Analysing the case of sex structure at the level of the Land of Severin in 1977 and 2009, we notice that the percentage of women registers an increase, as they represented only 43% in 1977 (Fig. 12). First of all, this fact is due to the male population arrived in

the region to cover the labour force needed in the industrial sector which, during the communist period, knew a spectacular development in the exploitation of natural resources and by processing the raw material. At the level of each administrative unit, the sex structure evidences once again the characteristic noticed at the regional level. The highest percentages of males are found in Drobeta-Turnu Severin (57.11%) and Baia de Aramă (57.37%) and in communes like Obârșia-Cloșani (66.62%) and Șimian (57.57%). At the opposite pole are the administrative units seen as emigration areas, where the female population represents the majority: Cireșu (56.96%), Podeni (56.36%) and Godeanu (56.08%). These areas are not only in a feminization process, but they are also in aging process which was strongly accentuated during the last period.



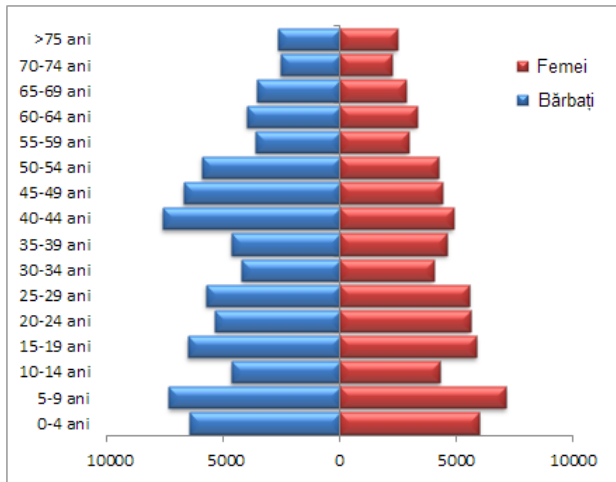
**Fig. 12: The Land of Severin. The structure on sexes (1977)**



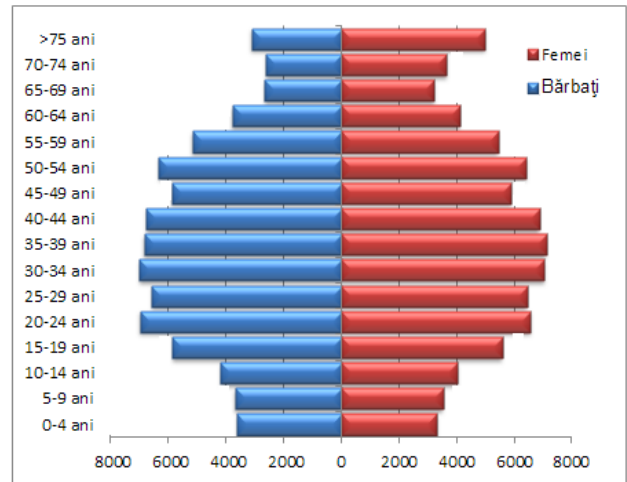
**Fig. 13: The Land of Severin. The structure on sexes (2009)**

The evolution of population on groups of age and sex and the prognosis regarding the direction of development of the territorial system resides also from the analysis of the differences in the pyramids shape at the regional level. The age pyramid is the one that reflects better the chronic of future generations evidencing the disproportions of the population within the Land of Severin. The year of 2009 reflects the future evolution trend having a narrow base, but a wide segment for the adults (19-60 years) and a slightly asymmetrical development at the upper of the pyramid which demonstrates the demographic aging trend and the feminization of the population at the age groups over 75 years (Fig. 15).

The demographic and economic effects of this evolution will be noticed in the Land of Severin in the following two decades, entailing a series of complex changes at the level of scholar population, the fertile population or the adult population. I as already pointed out, the effects of the aging process over the progress of the economic and social life will be intensely felt once the numerically reduced population will enter in the category of adult population, namely the persons born after 1990.



**Fig. 14: The Land of Severin – age pyramid (1977)**

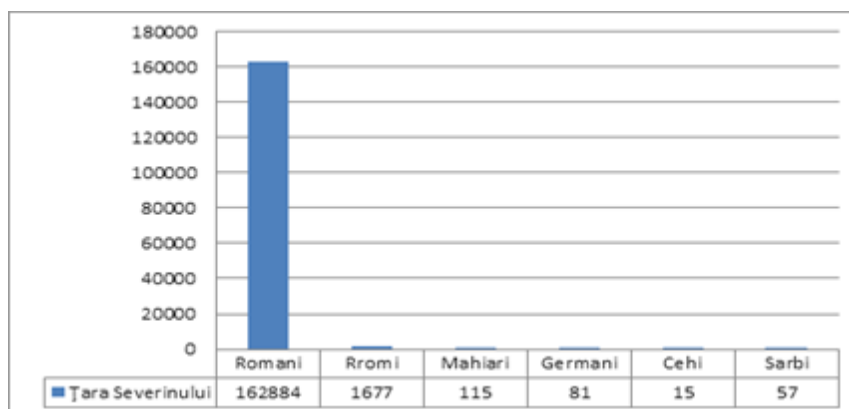


**Fig. 15: The Land of Severin – age pyramid (2009)**

*The ethnic structure of population*

Although the multitude of historical events and the uncertain situation that characterized the region named the Land of Severin along the time marked the limits of this land type region, but they did not had the same force over the ethnic structure of population within the Land of Severin. The migratory populations that came into this region left few material tracks, neither the Austria-Hungarian domination, nor the Bulgarian or the Turkish one brought important changes in the ethnic or religious structure to resist until the present, the Slavs, Hungarians or Turks being assimilated by the majority of the local population (Fig. 82).

Nowadays, the ethnic structure in the Land of Severin reflects the feature specific to land type regions that is to resist against external factors and to adapt (resilience). Despite the wide opening in the eastern and southern part, compared to the geographical isolation of other similar regions *the Land of Maramureș, the Land of Lăpuș, the Land of Oaș*, which tried to modify its uniqueness that confers the identity, the Land of Severin succeeded to preserve its ethnic homogeneity.

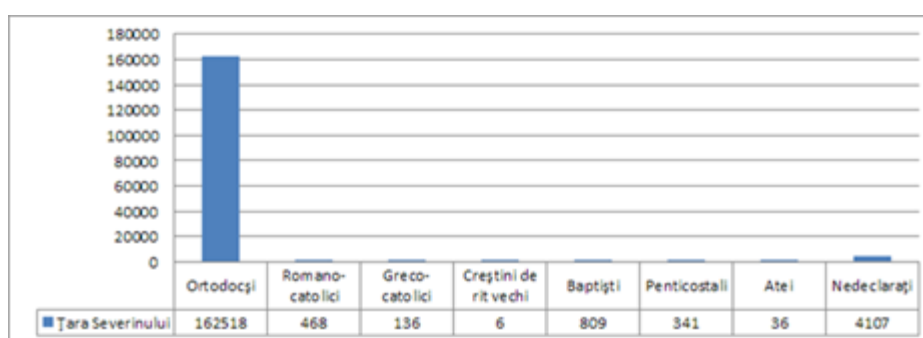


**Fig. 16: Structura etnică în Țara Severinului**

### *Religious structure of the population*

As the ethnic structure, in 2002, the religious structure reflects the same homogeneity proving once again the preservation of regional identity. This is also due to the fact that this region has an important religious history, as in 1370, at Severin was founded the Metropolitan Church of Severin by Vlaicu Vodă.

Though it did not lasted long (because of the unfavourable political and historical conditions), the Metropolitan Church of Severin had a very important role for the severinean region, included in Oltenia, in the sense of growing and defending the Orthodox belief. In this respect, the metropolitan bishop, Firmilian, stated that the foundation of this Metropolitan Church “remained the expression of the highest clerkly organisation in Oltenia region, based on an initial and rich Orthodox background and on the fights given to preserve this background which was, at the same time, also a national background”.



**Fig. 17: The religious structure in the Land of Severin**

In this respect, as proof is the majority of Orthodoxies (98.60% – Fig. 84), the other religious cults being insignificant as per the number of followers (under 1%). I noticed,

during the last period, the spreading trend demonstrated by certain cults, as the Pentecostalism and Baptism, especially in the rural area (**Error! Reference source not found.**). These religious cults have few followers, but their number is rising during the last few years. In villages like Florești, Broșteni, Obârșia-Cloșani, Izverna and even in Baia de Aramă town, there are Baptist and Pentecostal churches.

## *Settlements*

### *The dynamics of urban settlements*

Human settlements are the result of a long social-economic development process, outlining systems that are in a continuous transformation due to the economic, social, demographic and politic pressures. Along the course of their evolution, the economic and demographic factors were the ones that influenced the relations between human settlements, urban settlements being favoured as around them was outlined an area of influence with variable dimensions, depending on the rank and the development level of each city.

The role of a city in a certain territory, and especially its influence on the rural space, was initially studied by Cucu V., who stated in his article published in 1967 that the cities dominate the villages nearby *“through functions and their force of gravity ... the force absorbing the population and the local functions, through the power to establish compensating relations between the city and the village”*, in this respect, the same author contributing also to the development of the concept of sphere of influence. Being defined as systems with a content, structure and spatial organization, the dynamics of the cities results from the relations exchanging mass, energy and information which occur between the city and the area in its immediate proximity (Ianoș, 1987, p. 28), that materializes depending on the importance and the power of polarization exercised by the respective urban settlement in its area of influence. The limit of the influencing area varies depending on the importance and the rank of the city, extending into the rural area, in the same time with its spatial and territorial evolution. The inputs of matter contribute to provide the needs of the urban population, in its period of natural growth, the increase of built up areas, the increase of the density of buildings and the organization of the internal space (Ianoș, 1987, p. 30).

The influence area of cities does not correspond to their administrative limits. This area is more extended, as the case of Drobeta-Turnu Severin, or more concentrated depending on the size of the city and its importance at the regional level (**Error! Reference source not found.**). The extension of the influencing area depends on factors like: the geographical position of the respective urban centre at the territorial level, as well as the urban hierarchical position, the density of urban settlements in the area, the

development of the region or the proximity of certain major relief units. Most of the times, these factors confer to the influencing area a certain personality. Despite all these, to establish the limits that can be reached by the influencing area of a city is quite difficult, as this results from the multitude and the complexity of relations established by the urban settlements with the surrounding area, but also from the way their influence spreads at territorial level.

The two urban settlements from the studied region have a peripheral position, this precise location offering them the possibility to polarize the entire territory, but it is more intense the influence of regional development centre of Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

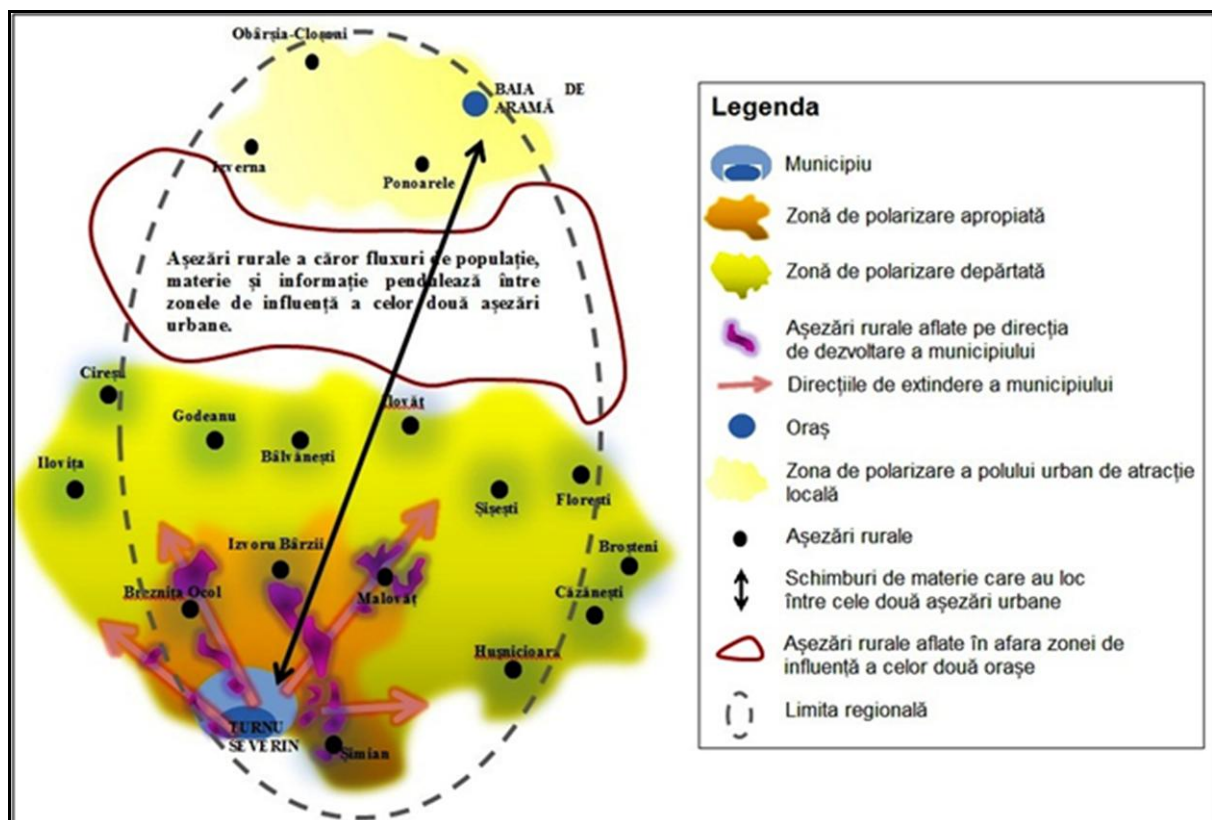


Fig. 18: The areas of urban influences within the Land of Severin

### *The evolution and specificity of rural settlements*

In the “land” type regions, the village represented and continues to be the most common type of human settlement, especially as number of settlements, but less as population. The rural areas in the Land of Severin represent 92% from the entire surface of the region, but enclose only 26% of the total population (38,887 inhabitants at the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010) living in 143 rural settlements.

Regarding the actual stage of the rural settlements in the Land of Severin, I must mention the fact that the events occurred in 1989 had a major impact upon the economic

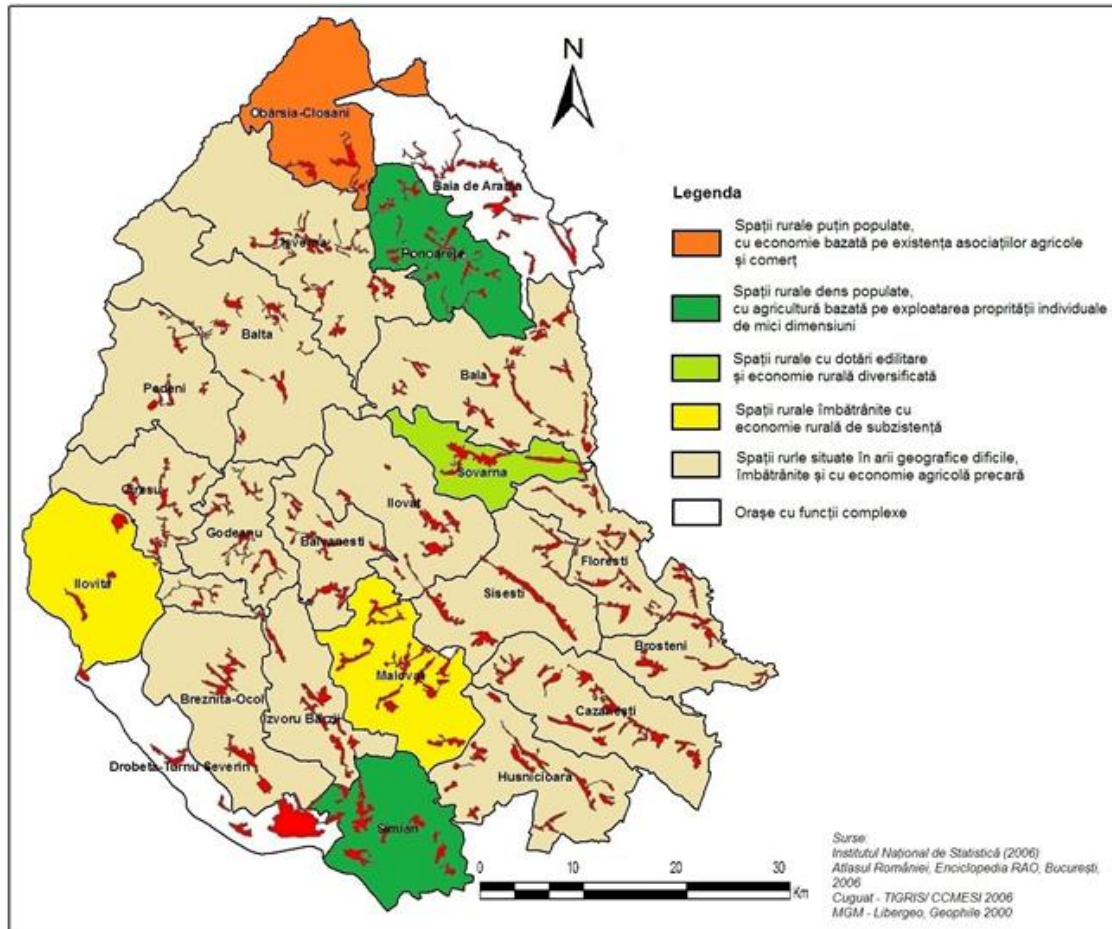
life at the national level, the effects being felt also in the severinean region, on multiple domains. Therefore, the period after 1990, also known as “the transition period”, is characterized by major transformations in the lifestyle of villagers from the demographic, economic and social-cultural point of view. As I previously mentioned before, as a result of economic and mental changes, the birth rate is decreasing continuously, the natural growth has negative values in most of the rural settlements, to which is added an increased death rate, as the result of old population. From the economic point of view, the villagers, after the law 18/1991 was issued, became land owners. In the present they are working in their own households. But, the actual form of agricultural land exploitation has also a negative aspect with reference to the land division. This aspect contributed to the reduction of productivity and agricultural efficiency due to the lack of agricultural machines and, especially to the impossibility to buy modern machines or due to the difficulties in paying for these services, therefore almost all field works are performed manually.

### **The functions of the settlements in the Land of Severin**

The functional profile of settlements within the severinean territorial system was influenced by the local and regional conditions, which in their turn; depend on the physical-geographical factors, but also on the economic development of the two urban centres. The functional feature of settlements is given by their predominantly economic profile for the rural space and mixed, based on industry and services, in the urban area.

The types and the functions of rural settlements were determined on the basis of eleven indicators: population density, average size of settlements, the degree of rurality (emphasizing the percentage of the population working in agriculture), agricultural stress, degree of aging, house comfort (if they have sewerage and potable water network), surface cultivated with wheat and sun-flower, average surface of agricultural lands and the average degree of agricultural exploitation associations (Fig. 97).

After 1990, the involuntary process of local industry created or developed during the old regime is accelerated, as it already started during 1980. As a consequence, toward the end of the 1990, the biggest number of the existent companies was privatized. After a period of relative stability, the world crisis began in 2008 aggravated again the situation of industrial producers in Severin.



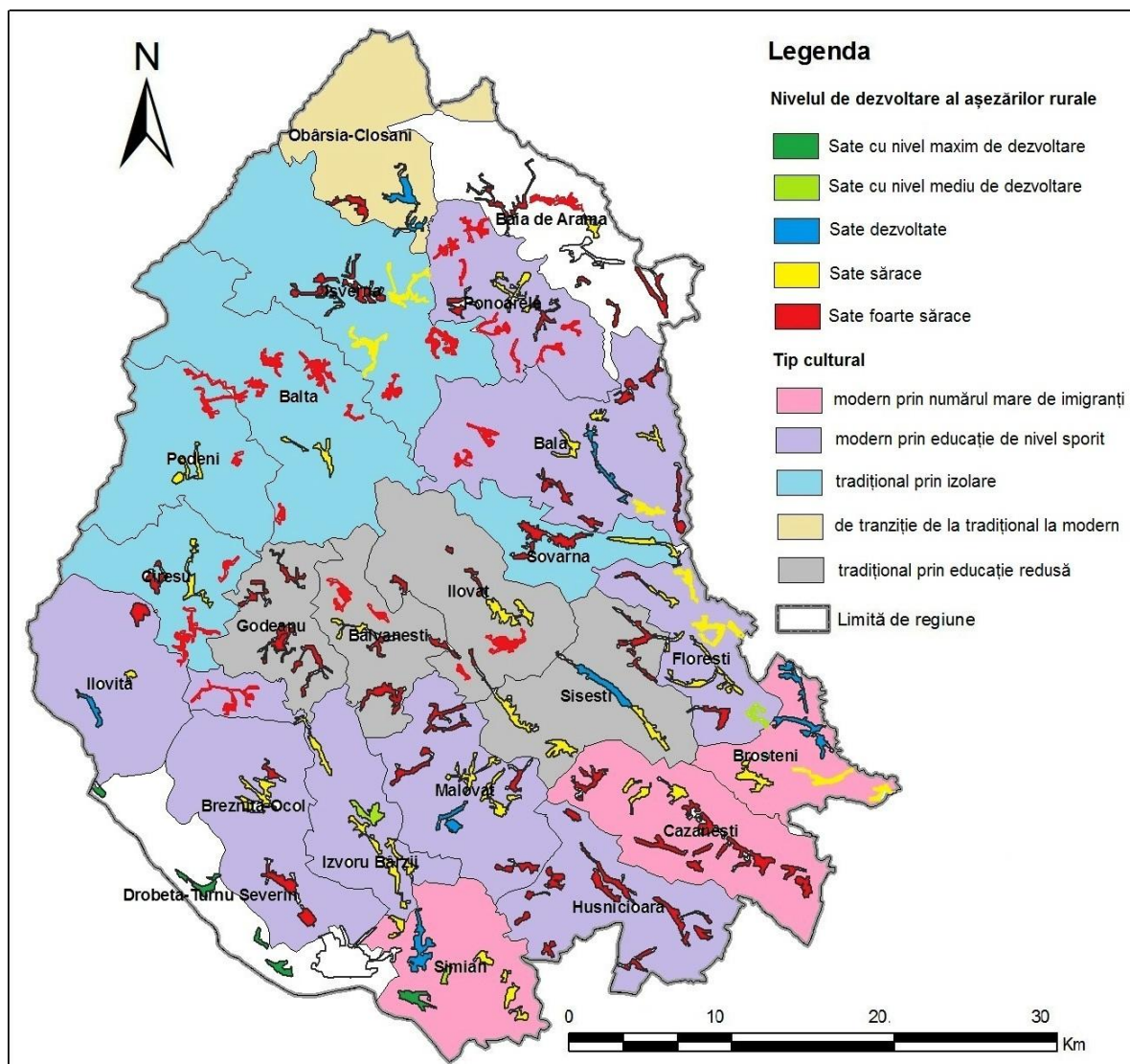
**Fig. 19: The type of settlements**

Source: the map of Romania (\*\*\*, Atlasul României, 2006)

The major differences, regarding the poverty of rural settlements, were correlated with the isolation degree, the proximity of an urban settlement, the existence of an European or national road, the social and demographic development level, the migration profile and the cultural type of the village depending of the intensity of the migration process. During the last period, a lot of settlements from the severinean regional system deal with the intensification of migration caused by poverty and the impossibility to find a job in this region.

As we can notice from the map below (Fig. 130), the settlements which are extremely poor are predominating, being distributed on all three levels of altitude (mountain, plateau, depression).





**Fig. 20: The level of development and the cultural type of rural settlements within the Land of Severin**

As I already mentioned, if we take into account the level of development, the most common are the rural settlements extremely poor – 56%, followed by the poor settlements representing 33% from the total number of villages (154), while the developed settlements are only 8 (7%), and those with an average development represent 2%. The rural settlements with a maximum level of development are located in the close vicinity of Drobeta-Turnu Severin, to a distance of 10-15 minutes from the city. These settlements are the most developed from the point of view of technical-edilitary endowments or considering the access to the European roads, railroads or modern national roads. All these settlements are located along the Danube or close to it (Șimian, Schela Cladovei).

## **The economic and geographic features of the region**

The economic profile of the region betrays the legacy of the economic tradition from the communist period. The entire region was deeply affected by economic transformations, determining a high unemployment rate, while the agricultural areas located in the eastern and south-eastern part have been deeply affected by the low level of productivity that contributed to the poverty level, especially in the rural space that was already known for the underdevelopment of traditional communities in the plateau and mountainous area.

Starting from 1999, the economic status of the severinean regional system registers a slight improvement, but insufficient to produce substantial mutations in the population's life standard.

The slow adaptation of economic agents to this transformation process, characterizing the new markets, led to the occurrence of dramatic syncopes for some economic operators (the butchery, the factory for concentrated forages, as well as most of the ranches). Also, the absorption of the qualified labour force, at the level of small trading companies, intensified, but it was extremely reduced for industrial companies that maintained or even developed their activities. The primary sector was the most affected one.

In the evolution of the industrial profile were distinguished two periods of transition: the excessive centralization during the socialist period and the post-Decembrist periods when the social economy started to be replaced with the market economy (Ianoş, Oraşele și organizarea spațiului geografic, 1987).

After the communist system collapsed, on the background of economic disorders and blockages in the payments owed to overdue debts between the companies, the heavy industry concentrated in the south part, in Drobeta-Turnu Severin, decayed being severely affected by the new market conditions.

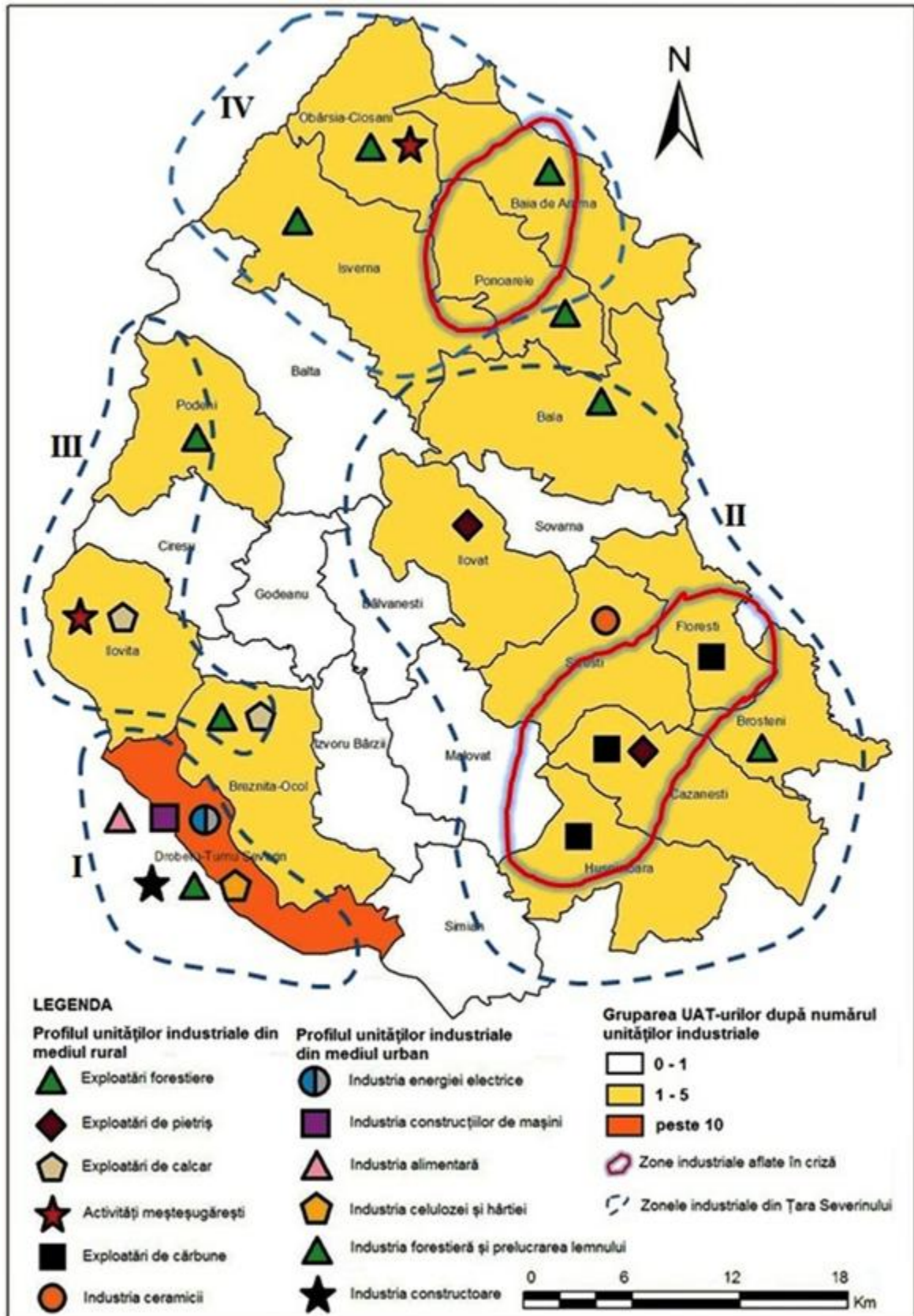


Fig. 21: The distribution of industrial activities in the Land of Severin

## The synthesis of the regional system of the Land of Severin

### The chorematic analysis of the Land of Severin

The entire region, which includes also the studied region, is in a stage of transformation, where the relations providing the optimum functionality start to be initiated and consolidated. The mountainous space is deprived of any development territorial nuclei, while the rural settlements cannot control efficiently the development factors on the background of a subsistence agriculture (Cocean & Filip, *Geografia regională a României*, 2008) (Fig. 131).

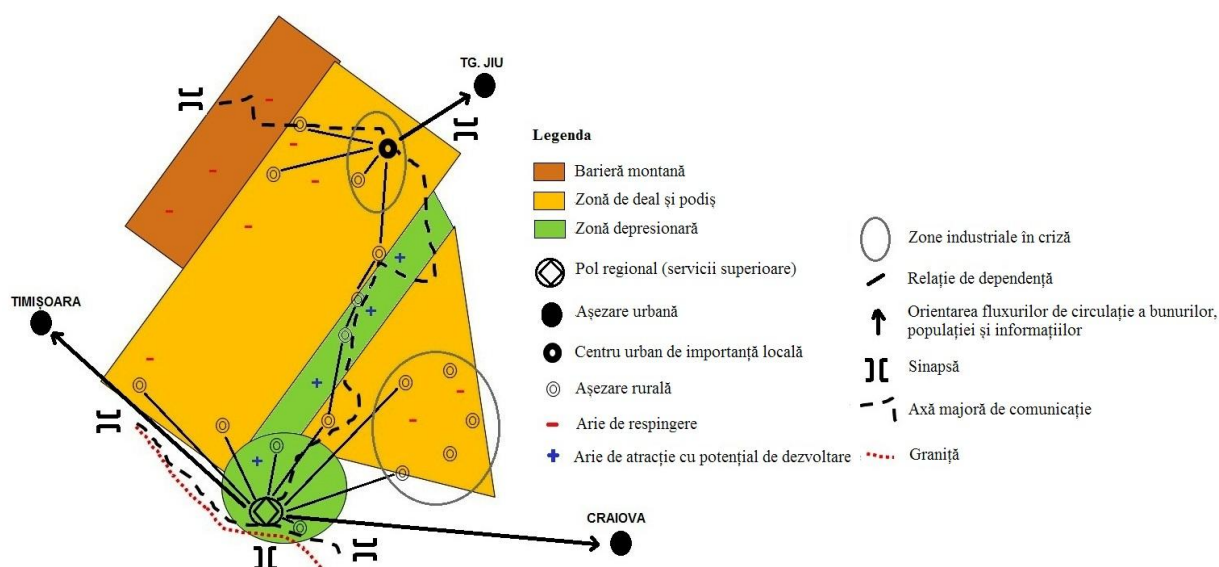


Fig. 22: The chorotype characterizing the regional system of the Land of Severin

The settlements are concentrated especially in the depressions (Cireșu – Baia de Aramă, the Drobeta-Turnu Severin Depression, Malovăț – Ilovăț – Șovarna – Bala).

In the region is registered a depopulation phenomena (migration toward the nearby urban centres which exercise an attraction for the labour force, but also toward the cities outside the studied region) and an aging process.

The regional connection axes are developed on the direction Baia de Aramă – Drobeta-Turnu Severin, noticing the missing supra-communal centres of polarization which may create functional spatial relations.

A particular characteristic is given by the existence of the polarizing centre of regional importance – Drobeta-Turnu Severin municipality, which begins to impose as

an actual developing pole. Due to the presence of the navigation channel on the Danube, the relations with Serbia, the national transportation culoir (E70 and the main railroad 1), the only municipality located in the south succeeded to reconfigure the lines of force at the regional level, exceeding the “complex of inferiority”.

During the last period, due to the concentration of the mining activities, in the area of Baia de Aramă appeared an industrial space in crisis concerning the exploitation of natural resources existing in the region. The same situation seems to threaten also the exploitation of coal in the area of Husnicioara and Zegujani, because of the same restrictions of mining activities.

A new functional axis, represented by the depressionary culoir in the east, might be outlined on the basis of the relations strengthened between the regional polarizing centre, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, and the other polarizing centre of local importance, Baia de Aramă.

Despite the restrictive elements (especially the natural ones), the regional assembly has a cohesion manifested at the level of mental spaces, as well as at the structural level on the background of spatial and functional complementarity (Cocean & Filip, *Geografia regională a României*, 2008).

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