

WARM THOUGHTS ON THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF EMERITUS PROFESSOR GRIGOR P. POP

AL. PĂCURAR¹

When I was a third-year student (1982-1983) at the Faculty of Biology, Geography and Geology of Alma Mater Napocensis, Professor Pop, who was an associate professor at that time, gave us a course on *“Romania’s Economic Geography”*. We, his “disciples”, were eager to meet the academic who was to teach us and supervise our practical training; his course had been published in two imposing volumes, of over 900 pages, which we approached with admiration and fear, at the same time, being anxious that we might not be able to learn “so much material”. It turned out later that we were fortunate to have a very good professor, because thanks to his inspirational



Prof. Grigor P. Pop PhD
born on 16th of September 1933,
Calna village, Cluj County

teaching presence, we managed to logically approach and assimilate what had, at first, appeared to be an intractable subject.

During summer practice, I was assigned, together with a fellow student, Angela Vasilescu, to accompany the Professor to Rușchița, where a contract was underway, so we were privileged to get to know him outside the department too, in the field, where his patient explanations became the answers to our many questions and curiosities, so natural at our age, since we were still at the beginning of our journeys through life. And what beautiful discussions we had in the midst of nature, along mountain trails, at marble quarries or on forest dirt roads, which led me to say, in the shadow of Eminescu: *“Now the machinery is hissing, / Sweet is the smell of pipes up in the air, / The Kümmel bottle’s so inviting, / And Milly’s laugh... what do I care!”*.

The spring semester of our third year as students gave us the opportunity to know another aspect of the Professor,

¹ Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, 400006, Cluj-Napoca, Romania,
e-mail: sandu@geografie.ubbcluj.ro

as he was the supervisor of the students doing scientific research and proved to be a rigorous and impartial evaluator of each and everyone's work when we presented our findings. This was occasioned by the national session of the students' scientific societies, organized by our fellow Geography students from the University of Bucharest, who were our most welcoming hosts.

After graduation from university (1984), during the period of six years when I worked as a teacher at the "Andrei Mureșanu" National College in Bistrița, I had no direct contact with the Professor, but I was always close to him as I read his work with great interest; in the autumn of that same year, his book entitled "*Romania. The Geography of Movement*" was published, focusing on a theme that was new in the Romanian geographical literature and that I would often approach with intense interest. I learned later that it had been printed in eight thousand copies, which had quickly sold out!

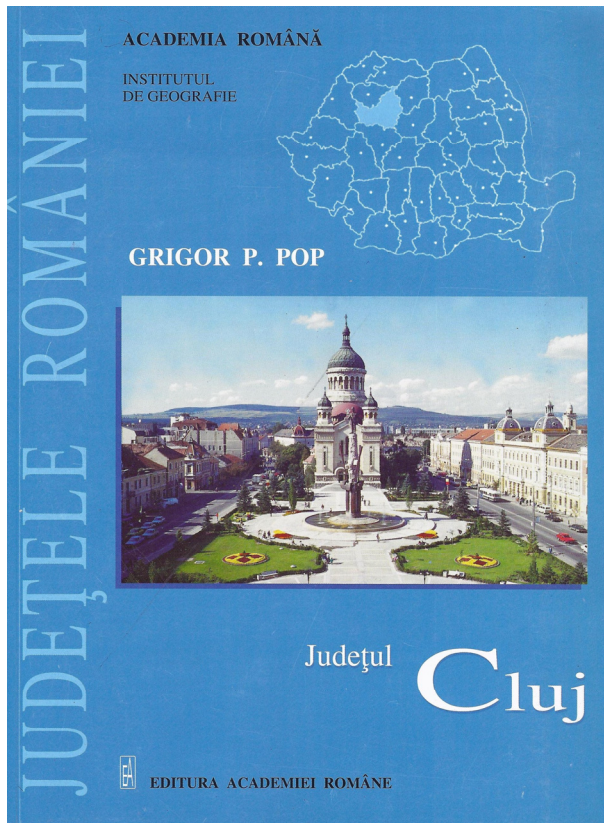
In the autumn of 1990, in a new context, when the first competitions for jobs in higher education were organized, Professor Grigor P. Pop, who was head of department and was familiar with the work I had done both before and after college graduation, the several articles I had published and my participation in symposia and the Geography Congress, urged me to apply for a position. Succeeding in obtaining it in the fall of 1990, I started my activity at the Department of Human Geography, where I have been working so far. As a result, I got to know Professor Grigor P. Pop in multiple roles: as the head of our department, as a school creator and, if I may say so, as a colleague. Each of these facets of his personality has revealed his inclination for work that is thoroughly done, always emphasizing a sense of measure and moderation in everything, as well as modesty, sometimes taken to the extreme... and being unproductive for this distinguished scholar.

As Head of Department and as a school founder, the professor has been driven by the desire to form a motivated, dynamic and determined team of humanist geographers. Always severe and rigorous, he has evinced these character traits and rules of conduct with decency and discretion, congenially rather than coercively imposing them upon his collective of researchers. We had all the support and freedom of movement, but at regular intervals of time we had to "show down" the outcome of our research, which resided in our studies, articles, maps, courses and printed books. In this sense, he constantly encouraged us to publish individual studies, since he did not look favorably upon teams of 5, 6, 7 or even 8 authors for an article of 8-9 pages and deeply resented the status some adopted as "coordinators" in order to have work published. Moreover, it should be noted that through these "ruses", some have built handsome careers...

In forming and consolidating the Department of Human Geography, Professor Grigor P. Pop was guided by the criterion of value. For him, it did not matter where the scholars applying for positions in this department came from (what region of the country, village or town), what their ethnicity was or what religious and political beliefs they held: what always mattered was the outstanding quality of these individuals, their level of training, reliability and inclination for study, as the Professor specifically appreciated their scientific curiosity, coupled with hard work. Thus, he managed to form a valuable team, with heterogeneous concerns and research directions, but which was homogenous in terms of its members' motivation, determination, and remarkable achievements, as well as solidly-structured, up to a point.

As Head of Department, Professor Grigor P. Pop was fair and honest, correctly dividing the responsibilities among the department members and distributing material rewards that were consistent with each and everyone's contribution.

As the creator of a school in the field of human geography, he has had unquestionable contributions to clearly defining the very concept of Human Geography and its sub-domains, suggesting to each and every one of us our "paths", that is our specialization areas. Thus, he initiated lines of research and contributed to the training of specialists in the field of Agricultural Geography, Political Geography, Land Planning, the Geography of Human Activities, including tourism, with significant results in each of these domains.



Towards us, the Professor has always behaved in a humane, warm yet not effusive manner, being a trust-worthy colleague to whom we could resort whenever we needed some guidelines or advice, who was approachable and ready to help, these traits of character becoming intensified after his retirement when, relieved of his teaching and institutional duties, he has, to this day, joyfully offered consultations to the young scholars undergoing training.

While he was intransigent in his scientific reasoning, in various other discussions on diverse issues of life he respected the opinions and viewpoints of others, invoking the phrase: *"I am halfway right, the other half is yours, it belongs to you!"* Moreover, he bore no grudge to anyone who had a different opinion or vision. This is a major

character feature of Professor Grigor P. Pop: the freedom of expression and opinion, a rare case amongst us, for we had somehow just regained our freedom of speech and were not yet accustomed to accepting those with different opinions, which have led even friendships and even family ties to crumble down.

Being honored to have him as my doctoral supervisor, I also got to know him in this capacity. He was a very demanding examiner, and I can say that he became the role model that has generously guided me in my professional and scientific development. In my "series", in which Mr. Liviu Nicoară and Csaba Kovács were also

included, oral examinations were conducted in the presence of the entire department, including the department secretary, that is, 12 to 15 people before whom you could not afford to make many mistakes, since these exams were not a mere formality! The Professor imprinted this rigor in all the twenty PhD students whose work he supervised, rejecting the temptations of inflating these numbers, to which some supervisors have fallen prey, compromising on the quality: the professor has always been immune to this type of “sirens”.

While Professor Grigor P. Pop’s temperament, character and personality have been easily noticed by his colleagues, collaborators and friends, his written work, published in numerous copies and totaling around 6,300 pages, is accessible to everyone, being hoarded in the great academic and public libraries in the country and abroad. This work includes over 210 titles of books, university courses, articles, studies, atlases, maps, various collaborations, and, in what follows, I will refer to a few of them.

As a student, I laid hands on and studied the voluminous course entitled *Romania. Economic Geography*, 940 pages, which was published in two editions. Several chapters and topics in it are still very vivid in my memory, as I consider them a genuine model of approaching this theme. Such are, for instance, topics like pisciculture, irrigation systems, viticulture, etc., remarkably synthetic, suggestive cartographic representations, as well as valuable sources of information and synthesis. In fact, as I was to discover with the passing of time, the entire written work of Professor Grigor P. Pop is accompanied by cartographical representations which condense the written information, a very rare case in Romanian geographical literature, especially today.

In the *Laudatio* of the Commission that granted him the title of Honorary Professor of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, when the centennial of the Geography Department was celebrated there in 2004, emphasis was laid on the efforts made by Professor Grigor P. Pop towards highlighting the human and geographical features of our country, reference being made to “...his monumental treatise, in two volumes, on *Romania’s Human Geography* [...], one of the most valuable sources of information available to entire generations of geography students in Romania!”.

I must confess that “*Romania. The Geography of Movement*” was the first specialized book that I bought after I was assigned my teaching position in Bistrița. When I saw the volume on the bookstore shelf, I experienced great joy to lay eyes on the book written by one of my professors, especially in an area that was as topical then as it is now, transportation geography. The building of the Romanian railway system, the configuration of this network, navigation on the Danube, urban transport or special transports were chapters with dense information, which shed full light on the subject.

“*Romania. The Geography of Hydropower*” is a unique work in the Romanian geographical literature, a veritable encyclopedia of the hydropower works that have been carried out in our country. Written with great precision, with substantial data, drawings and illustrative sketches, the book is a useful tool for those who want to become familiar with the effort undertaken for valorizing our hydropower potential by an entire body of hydrotechnic and construction engineers, foremost amongst whom is the figure of Dorin Pavel. I, for one, experience great satisfaction when I see the achievements of the Iron Gates I and II, Ciunget on the Lotru, Vidraru on the Argeș, Dobrești, the chain of hydropower plants on the River Olt and many others!

With the publication of the book *“Romania’s Carpathians and Sub-Carpathians”*, which came out in two editions (2000, 2006), the series of comprehensive and synthetic works on regional geography began, proving the author’s full scientific maturity. Having a thorough training and vast knowledge, as well as an extraordinary power of synthesis and of exploring cause-effect relationships, Professor Grigor P. Pop has published a series of works of reference in Romanian geographical literature. This has been the period when *“lifted above the forest”*, as he likes to say, he has acquired an overview of the entire phenomenon, which he presents in its most characteristic manifestations. I consider that this has been the period of his great geographical syntheses. With solid knowledge in the fields of Geology and Physical Geography, he has outlined the most interesting correlations with the substrate as a repository of natural resources and with the emergence and development of human activities in relation to the environment.

All these syntheses of Regional Geography are characterized by several features, including: the clear articulation of the reality of the places, without unnecessary digressions; the dense information they comprise, which is well chosen, being defining for the region analyzed; the rigorously drawn limits of the units and subunits, with logical justifications that leave no room for ambiguity; the geographic information and data contained in the texts are located on the maps, ensuring that there is a perfect concord between the scientific information and the cartographic representations; he mentions the impact and contribution of other authors in the field, often quoting them rigorously in essential fragments, thus proving his adherence to an irreproachable code of academic ethics; where he has a different view on the geographic space, he does not hesitate to support it with scientific arguments. Thus, for instance, he does not consider that there exist the so-called *“Transylvanian Sub-Carpathians”*, for the marginal geographical subdivisions East of the *“Central Unit”* in the Transylvanian Plateau did not emerge through the folding of the formations in the *“Vorland”*, but as a result of the appearance of saliferous strata; therefore, they are not the Sub Carpathians, but subunits of hills, and he approaches them accordingly in his work *“The Transylvanian Plateau”* (2001). It is also in this valuable synthesis that the author clearly delineates the boundaries and sub-units of the Someș Plateau, based on the relation between geology and morphology.

In his work *“The Western Hills and the Western Plain”* (2005), which represent his *“ground”*, for he studied a subunit thereof in his PhD thesis, under the supervision of the late Professor Ion Șandru from Iași, Professor Grigor P. Pop observes that *“the territory analyzed in this book has been a permanent love of mine since my youth”* (p. 3).

Being an erudite connoisseur of the region, the author marks the boundary between plains and hills by dismantling the phrase entrenched in the collective mentality whereby *“the Western Plain digitally penetrates the mountain sector”*, clearly delineating two relief units: the Western Plain, with multiple subunits, including high and low plains, and the Western Hills, where he distinguishes: the Silvano-Someș Hills, the Crișana Hills and the Banat Hills, which, in turn, have their own sub-units, delineating them with his characteristic accuracy and describing their defining elements.

The works of regional geography mentioned above have a list of contents and a summary in English, making them accessible to the foreign readers who are interested in the Romanian geographical space.

Devoted to the Department of Human Geography, he has developed it and endowed it, to the best of his abilities, with valuable items, strengthening thereby the entire Faculty of Geography. Professor Grigor P. Pop has devoted two monographs to this prestigious university institution and its publication: *"The Geographical School of Cluj 1919-2007"* (2007) and *"The Scientific Publication of the Geographical School of Cluj (1919-2010)"* (2010). Given the manner in which these two books, totaling 478 pages, were conceived and written, they are unique in Romanian geographical literature and represent a model of approach in the field. Forming one common body, they faithfully render the "trajectory" of the Institute of Geography from the University of Cluj since its founding (1919) until today. With his well-known thoroughness, the Professor outlines the stages of the institutional development of our faculty, in which a handful of enthusiastic forefathers laid the foundation stone of what, in time, would crystallize and become the Geographical School of Cluj. Several decades later, another passionate scholar would add another brick to this cornerstone, Professor Grigor P. Pop highlighting its subsequent development. He then accomplished a faithful reflection of what has been published under the auspices of the *Geographical School of Cluj*. The publication contents are reproduced (in printed format and on CD!), while synthetic tables and analyses of the structure of the articles' scientific content, fully and pithily convey everything that has been published in the *"Proceedings of the Institute of Geography from the University of Cluj"* and in *"Studia"*, the *Geologia-Geographia* and then the *Geographia* series. In the analysis he carries out, the Professor realizes that he knows of no cases of articles signed by two or more authors in the interwar period, whereas today it is quite common to have 4 to (up to!) 9 signatures on an article of 6-10 pages.

Incidentally, the Professor also deeply resents the practice of joint publishing (as mentioned before); moreover, he has never put his signature next to his PhD students!

Professor Grigor P. Pop has published many other works, and I will only mention here his collaboration to elaborating chapters and maps for treatises on the history of Transylvania. In this context, I wish to emphasize that he has introduced the concept of *"geographical-historical provinces"*, which is perfectly valid, given the primordial character of the geographical space upon which, in the past, the political, social, economic and cultural space overlapped, and which, due to its ancientness, has received the connotation of "historical". It would be helpful if geographers promoted this concept!

Professor Grigor P. Pop has undertaken commendable volunteer work. Let us recall that he was in charge of the Geography journals from Oradea – *"Scientific Papers, the Geography Series"*, for ten years, and *"Studia UBB, Geographia"* from Cluj-Napoca, for 23 years (1990-2012), a period during which the Cluj journal was published regularly: this reveals the passion with which he has dedicated himself to this demanding and laborious work of great responsibility. Let us not forget that thanks to the Professor's endeavors, the Geography journal of the University of Cluj-Napoca has reached the highest classification rate in the country, B +, now BDI indexed. Having been at the helm of these journals for a long time, the professor has a complete picture, from inside, of the efforts and contribution made by each and every one of us from this part of the country in the field of Geographical Sciences.

Professor Gr. P. Pop has not dissipated forces in multifarious activities and has sought to conduct them thoroughly, successively rather than simultaneously, one

by one. He has been a scholar, a true academic who has spent most of his time in his second family, his work place, dedicating himself to the institution he has served in exemplary manner. Providing ample living for his family, he could fully devote himself to teaching, doing research, focusing on institutional development, in a disinterested manner. With reference to some spectacular material accumulations after 1990, the Professor has a saying that *"you cannot do two things well at once"*, meaning you cannot simultaneously be an academic and a businessman... Clearly, he has had an unwavering loyalty to the students and the institution, to which he has dedicated his entire activity.

I could not end my humble presentation of Professor Grigor P. Pop's activity without a brief reference to his wife, Mrs. Mărioara Pop, whom I have met on several occasions. I believe that Professor Pop's achievements as an academic are also due to the unconditional and limitless support he has received from his wife, who "substituted" her husband in all the household activities that might have required his effort, allowing him to have complete freedom in his academic work, making possible a fully harmonious marriage, which God has blessed with two children.

Last but not least, as one who has been around Professor Grigor P. Pop for a moment more and who has learned so much from him, I would like to wish him health, happiness, joy in his family, and a sincere and heartfelt "Happy Birthday!"