

**In Memoriam:
Prof. Dr. Vasile SURD
(1946 - 2024)**



In times of carolling and waiting for Christmas, Professor Vasile SURD suddenly passed away. On the evening of December 14, 2024, he just stopped being, without any warning, walking the path of light in silence. Unfortunately, almost unbelievable, the always dynamic and energetic man disappeared silently. We are left behind, to look back with the regret that he is no longer with us, but also with the gratitude that we had the chance to meet him, to know him and to work with him, thus creating a common legacy through which he will remain visible and present in the professional environment and our personal thoughts.

Son of Gheorghe and Marița, Vasile SURD was born on July 22, 1946 in Micești village, Tureni commune, Cluj County, Romania. He attended the elementary school in his native village of Micești, between 1953 and 1960. In the summer of 1960, he was admitted as a high school student at “Mihai Viteazul” National College in Turda Town, but he was not allowed to attend classes as a full-time student because his parents were not enrolled in the Collective Agricultural Household (*RO: CAP*). In the autumn of the same year, he was admitted as a student to the Vocational School of the Cement Factory in Turda Town, which he graduated in 1963. Between 1963 and 1967 he worked as a trained worker at the Cement Factory in Turda. At the same time (1963-1967), he attended the night classes at “Mihai Viteazul” National College, in Turda.

In the summer of 1967, he was admitted as a student of the Faculty of Biology, Geology and Geography, of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the Geography programme, which he graduated in 1972. Upon graduation, he was appointed as junior assistant professor at the Faculty of Biology, Geology and Geography of the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Geography programme. Between September 1, 1972 and February 28, 1973, he completed his short-term military service, at discharge being ranked second lieutenant.

He started his academic career in 1973, and since then he has had tenure at the Faculty of Biology, Geology and Geography, the Department of Geography, subsequently the independent Faculty of Geography of the Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca (in 1994). He went through all academic ranks, from junior assistant professor to university professor: junior assistant professor (1973-1976); assistant professor (1977-1981); lecturer (1982-1990); associate professor (1990-1993); university professor (1994-2012); Emeritus university professor (2012-2024).

The entire identity of Professor Vasile SURD was shaped by his academic and research activities, collaborating with people, close to him and from afar, namely students, doctoral students, members of the national and international academic community, but also people from villages, local communities he never hesitated to learn about. He was the person who gathered and united, with a remarkable ability to communicate and inspire.

His scientific and teaching activity was marked by countless key moments that formed and enriched him until he reached his definitive self. He was awarded the title of Doctor in Geography at the University of Bucharest, in 1983, under the coordination of Prof. Dr. Ioan POPOVICI, with the thesis *“Geography of settlements in the upper basin of the Arieș River, with special focus on the socioeconomic systematization”*. In 1987, he attended a training course at the Institute of East and South-East European Studies in Vienna, Austria. Since 1974, he has been a member of the National Geographic Society

in Romania, and since 1990 a member of the National Geographic Society. At the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, in 1998, he founded the "Transylvania" Foundation for Rural Development, with the main purpose of developing and promoting rural development projects. Starting with 2005, he became a member of the Register of Urban Planners in Romania (*RO: RUR*) and obtained the title of geographer-urban planner, which gave him the opportunity to coordinate research projects and elaborate substantiation studies in spatial planning and urbanism. Between 2005 and 2015, he was vice-president of the Registry of Urban Planners in Romania, Cluj branch. In 2010, he initiated and contributed to the foundation of the Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism, at the Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, and of the scientific journal titled *Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning*, holding the position of Editor-in-Chief between 2010 and 2012.

During his academic career, Prof. Dr. Vasile SURD also held several administrative positions: Chancellor of the Faculty of Biology-Geography-Geology, in the periods 1992-1994 and 2000-2008; founding member of the Faculty of Geography (in 1994) (Doc. no. 38212 of 19 September 1994 establishing the Faculty of Geography, registration no. 6842/19 of September 1994; founding members: Prof. Dr. Andrei MARGA, Ph.D. - rector, Prof. Dr. Ioan MAC, Prof. Dr. Vasile SURD); member of the Senate of Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, in the period 1992-1996; coordinator of the international relations programme ERASMUS-SOCRATES, in the period 1997-2010.

School creator, founder and supporter of Geography as a scientific field, particularly Human Geography, Professor Vasile SURD has shaped not only careers, but also destinies. Starting with 1996, he became a doctoral supervisor in the field of Geography (specialisation: Human Geography), from which position he coordinated and collaborated with over 50 doctoral students from the Faculty of Geography, whom he guided in their scientific career to be awarded the title of Doctor in Geography.

He developed and proposed the inclusion of new courses in the curriculum of the Faculty of Geography in Cluj-Napoca, such as *the Organization of Geographical Space and Spatial Planning*, bringing innovation in the field of geographical higher education, but he also taught and transferred knowledge through several other fundamental university courses at bachelor and master levels, such as: *World Economic Geography, Geography of Population and Settlements, Rural and Urban Geography, Geography of Settlements* – course for foreign students, at the master level: *Management of Settlements, Quality of the Demographic Resources in Tourism*, and at the doctoral level: *Specific Forms of Organization and Planning of Geographical Space*.

As a dedicated mentor, he tutored numerous generations of students of the Faculty of Geography, guiding them with wisdom, modesty and kindness. He organized numerous study field trips with bachelor and master students, both in the country and abroad. He initiated and developed the first Erasmus international relations of the Faculty of Geography with universities from Austria, Germany, France, Belgium and participated in numerous international mobilities. He also held specialty courses at the universities of Würzburg, Tübingen, Klagenfurt, Glasgow, Novi Sad, Moscow, Vila Real, Alicante, Montpellier, Bratislava, Verona, Brussels, Belgrade, Salamanca, Beijing, Stockholm, Udaipur (India), Chambéry, Chişinău, Krakow, Haifa, and Sofia.

Throughout his university career he had a rich scientific activity. He participated in numerous national and international conferences, the most representative being the conferences of the International Geographical Union: Paris (France) – 1984, Washington (USA) – 1992, Prague (Czech Republic) – 1994, Hague (The Netherlands) – 1996, Seoul (South Korea) – 2000, Glasgow (United Kingdom) – 2004, Tunis (Tunisia) – 2008, Cologne (Germany) – 2012, Beijing (China) – 2016, Istanbul (Turkey) – 2021, and Dublin (Ireland) – 2024.

And, whenever possible, Professor Vasile SURD travelled, thus managing to reach six continents: North America (USA), South America (Peru, Chile, Argentina), Africa (Egypt, Tunisia), Asia (Turkey, Japan, South Korea, China, Jordan, Israel, India), Australia and Europe.

He, who was a great traveller, the man with a broad and deep vision of the world, a devotee of the rural areas and their socioeconomic identity, has offered us a valuable perspective on the importance of local communities and their traditions. He knew how to skilfully combine the love for people with the duty to science and education. He passionately promoted the Romanian identity and the ruralism, at the same time being a true patriot, who understood well the value of our traditions and culture. For this we have to remember Professor Vasile SURD as the one who initiated the International Conference on *“Rural Space and Regional/Local Development”* as a venue for the academia to debate on the most particular aspects that describe rural areas, event that became an identity symbol of the Faculty of Geography in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. He coordinated six editions of this scientific event in 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2014, in different locations, namely Cluj-Napoca, Turda-Miceşti, Baia Mare, Bistriţa, Sighetu Marmăţiei, and again Cluj-Napoca, gathering specialists from over 20 European countries, and from Israel, India, Japan, Iran, Mexico etc.

His research focus and scientific efforts are visible through an impressive number of publications (22 books and university courses, 9 coordinated volumes, 4 chapters in books, 135 scientific articles, 2 maps, and 5 extensive abstracts in collective volumes), participation in the scientific committee of

several scientific journals in the country and abroad, and the coordination and membership into several fundamental research projects, and spatial planning and urban planning projects.

A whole world knew him, and today everyone reverently thinks about what Professor Vasile SURD represented, a great teacher, but especially a great man!

With deep gratitude and sadness, we now say goodbye to Professor Vasile SURD, he who left a permanent mark in the field of Geography and in the hearts of those who knew him. Both in his scientific and personal activity, Professor Vasile SURD has become known for his exemplary correctness in his relationships with those around him and for his unconditional altruism. His legacy will not disappear, but will continue to live on in every student and colleague, in every project he has started, and in every corner of the world he has explored with an open heart. Professor Vasile SURD will forever remain a symbol of dedication, integrity and passion for science and people. He was a romantic, a pacifist and a man of great charisma, with a special sense of humor, who knew how to bring a smile to anyone around him. A true and fair colleague, a reliable friend, a wise and caring adviser, a fighter always ready to help everyone, and a very inspired storyteller.

He now leaves a huge void behind him, but also a spiritual legacy through all those he guided, helped and trained in his career as a *teacher*.

May God rest him in peace, and may we keep his memory alive every day!

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Vasile ZOTIC, PhD, and Diana ALEXANDRU, PhD
Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania