

THE TRADITIONAL VALORIZATION OF THE WATER RESOURCES IN VRANCEA REGION – CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY CONSIDERATIONS

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Abstract

The theme suggested for the International Conference with the title *Water resources and the wet lands/areas* offers a retrospective overlook towards the utilisation of the water resources from The land of Vrancea through an analysis of classical cultural Geography. Our study offers elements that concern the traditional exploitation through water mills and other technical instalations of countrymen, which unfortunately have dissapeared from the actual geographical landscape- from this perspective our study is meant to restore the geographical cultural landscape.

Keywords: the archeology of the geographical cultural landscape, The land of Vrancea, water resources

One of the ancient occupations, requiring little effort, still being practiced in Vrancea Region nowadays is fishing. This ensures the daily bare necessities, fish being a product that can be consumed fresh, in a certain day, in a limited quantity, not by far a means of making a living, as it really is for the villagers of the Danube Delta. Vrancea’s waters are filled with diverse ichtiofauna: trout and other species of fish. Some species can end up weighing one, even two kilograms. The water supplies of Zabala, Putna, Naruja, forming the “mills’ ponds” used to be filled with fish, representing a food source for the owners of these peasant manufacturing facilities. Woven wickers and nets were placed in the mill ponds. Besides these water supplies of mills and sawmills and of any other peasant facilities, there were ponds too. This is demonstrated by the existence of the hydronym “the Creek of the Pond” which is being searched into by Ion Conea¹, origin of which was unknown to the inhabitants. Though, the researcher states that it has a Romanian origin. In the upper area of the above mentioned rivers and their tributaries, the fish that is consumed by people is the trout. They have it fresh or smoked in fir-tree branches, a process called “harjob”². People use fishing rods to catch this fish, and in places where the water is deep they use - nets or empirical means – such as old things they no longer use where they place the bait³ that allures the fish. In some cases people have recently used large nets and electric current, and during the prohibition period, electrocution has occurred. As a source of food, fish is bought in stores not caught in the river, this activity being left to those practicing sports fishing.

Moreover, it is very interesting to know how people caught the fish in the past⁴, as part of their tools are still preserved today. The simplest way to catch a fish was by hand among the stones. Another way was fishing at night by means of a torch and spear (ostii). The torch made of resinous wood had a long lasting, vivid flame that attracted fish to the light. That was the moment when the fisherman thrust his spear into the fish. Although these two methods seem simple they required great skill and ability. Fishermen also used „cârstnicul”, „varşa” or the long nets (up to 100 -150 m). A square net spread on two wickers in X, suspended by a long stick (1.5 to 2 m) was “cârstnicul”. “Varsa” was a conic shaped net, resembling a sack, supported by wicker circles. It gave the fisherman the possibility to close it so that the fish could not get away. Another way of fishing, suggesting the man-nature communion was poisoning the water with the sap of plants such as *Euphorbia cyparisia* and *Euphorbia amygdaloides*. At present in Lepsa, there is a modern trout farm that sells the trout (Figure 1). It was set up in 1967 and it produced almost 4 tons of trout, and in 1978, due to the fact that the pools were filled with water from Putna river, the productivity rose to 12 tons. In 1980, they had a productivity of 4 kilograms of trout by square meter of water, for people’s consumption. That same year the mountain waters were populated with a quantity of 110 thousand indigenous trout. At present, although the farm was designed to produce 8.5 tons per year, they have got 10 to 12 tons per year, particularly because they started to feed the fish with imported food. 150 thousand up to 200 thousand indigenous trout have recently been released into the mountain waters. In 2003 the trout farm was modernized, they concreted 10 pools and they made over the water supplies. The trout farm has a water

¹ Conea, I., (1997), *Vrancea....*, op. Cit. p. 149 – 150

² Field note : Stanciu Ionică, 67, from Nistoreşti

³ Bait – food left overs such as polenta or worms, insects etc., that may be considered attractive, as source of food for fish

⁴ See Simionescu, D., *La pêche*, in *Nerej - un village d'une région archaïque*, Institut de Sciences Sociales de Roumanie, Bucarest , vol. III, pp. 133 – 138

surface of 3207 square meters, 20 pools, a concrete basin for breeding the young fish⁵ and 3 pools for breeding the indigenous fish, all of them filled from two water sources: the main one, the water entrapped from Putna river through a buried pipe, the secondary one, from Lepsa creek through an entrapment canal, both of these sources of supply having a flow rate of 300 – 350 liters per second. We can add to these, two nurseries, a food store and the owner's house.



Figure 1 – Trout farm in Lepsa

Going back to the reconstruction of a geo-economic cultural landscape, referring to the use of aquatic potential, we have to mention that the power of water was used by means of sawmills, mills or whirlpools. The fact that water power was intensively used by the sawmills was due to the irrational forest exploitation, as the local forest was made the property of an Austro-Hungarian firm. Thus, there were 48 sawmills belonging to 78 inhabitants in Nereju only, on Zabala river in 1936: 31 sawmills had only one owner, 13 had two owners, 3 had three partners, and 1 had four partners. These facilities did not work permanently because of the high cost – the reason for forming partnerships - , a reduced flow rate and frost, and because the basic equipment did not allow permanent functioning. Thus, out of 48 traditional facilities, only 5 worked 10 – 11 months, 14 were active 4-5 months. There were other 10 sawmills⁶ on Putna and Lepsa rivers . The 1852 statistics reveal the following situation: there were 13 facilities like “dârste” or sawmills, the latter being the predominant ones. There were also 54 millstones⁷. In the Monograph of Putna County, we can also find really interesting information about the types of sawmills: situated in the valleys with high water flow rates that use water wheels with paddles and in the valleys with low water flow rates that use flat hollow wheels. According to the flow rate, the sawmills have one or two saws, but there are also tandems of two, three saws, one of which entraps the water used by its neighbouring upstream. These processed approximately 35-40 thousand cubic meters. In Putna County, they said there were 200 sawmills, registering losses of 50%, out of which 150 were in the highland and six were operated by machines⁸. The same source shows us that peasant water or engine mills are in almost all the villages, 26 being in Putna County⁹. A current research of the popular technical facilities that use the potential of the hydrological vectors (river water) reveals the following situation: these facilities no longer exist, the places where they used to be can hardly be recognized, we can rely on the inhabitants' memory only. The few facilities left are in an advanced state of degradation, being just a matter of time until they completely disappear. “Dârsta” of Românești worked until 2005, when it was made dysfunctional by floods and almost entirely repaired in 2006, being its fourth generation¹⁰. Unfortunately, the facility was no longer functional, as its owner died, his son preferring to use the location to process wood electrically. In Spulber, there is a dysfunctional mill which should be immediately safeguarded. It functioned until 1986 on water and electricity until 1993, being held in co-ownership by a son (Constantin Porojnicu) and two sons-in-law (Măciucă Ion și Măciucă Cosma

⁵ When it was open in 1967, the fish farm had only 18 pools and two nurseries

⁶ Stănculescu, P. i Nerej – un village d'une region arhaïque, p. 151

⁷ Arh. St. București, Ministry of Home Affairs, I, Moldova, 15/ 1853, apud Constantinescu, Mircești, C., (1985), Archaic Vrancea. Evolution and its Problems, Ed. Litera, București, p. 101

⁸ The Monograph of Putna County, (1943), p. 106 – 107; 110 – 111, p. 122

⁹ Idem, p. 121, 123; our note – it is not mentioned how many have an engine and how many use the water power

¹⁰ I – first generation at ASTRA Museum in Sibiu, II second generation in Petrești Forest– researcher, Fănică Doldor, 83 – 2006, owner;

Nicușor – deceased in 1999 – and Grigore Chiriac) who used it for a week every three weeks¹¹. In the same village, two wood processing facilities worked till the beginning of the 1990's, benefiting from the same water supply, owned by Neagu Pavel. Unfortunately, these were demolished on 14 of June 2008. In 2005, a mill with a concrete canal water supply downstream Monteoru brook disappeared from the same water course of Zăbala in Nereju Mic¹² (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Remains of water mills in Nereju



The same year, other two mills in Năruja were swept away by the flood on Zăbala that burst its banks. On Putna Valley at the crossroads of DN2 D and Negrilești village road, we can hardly recognize the remains of such a facility. In Soveja, a mill was turned into a stable for livestock and it can no longer be there, as the owners expressed their definite intention to pull it down. There is an abandoned mill made into a “fire” one (electrical) by Vasile Ghinea, which is in an advanced state of degradation in Muncei – at the mouth of Hăulișca brook. In Ploștina, one can hardly realize that there used to be a mill, owned by Lungu Vasile. In the same village, Vasile și Toader Vatră transformed a mill into a hayshed. In Clipicești (Vitănești), there was Bogoroș’ Mill, having an impressive building, water supplies and basins transformed by means of electrical power. On Putna Valley, in Găgești, downstream the bridge that leads to Țifești, there is another mill getting water straight from the river. If, in the field, one can no longer research the traditional facilities that used water power, one is offered the alternative of the Ethnography Department of Vrancea Museum, situated in Petrești-Focșani forest. They have preserved here “piva” (“piua”) of Nistorești, “dârsta” of Românești (Nistorești), the sawmill of Lepșa, the mill of Spulber. As far as the quality of the water is concerned, there have not been cases of severe pollution, because there are no industrial establishments generating pollution. Exceptions make the numerous sawmills and electrically powered saws, their activity resulting in “mountains” of sawdust dumped in riverbeds. In some parts of Zăbala and Putna rivers, there is pollution. Fishing funds ensure more conditions for trout to grow but fewer for other kinds of fish. Big stones, the gravel in the riverbeds speed the water and oxygenate it, offering shelter to the fish, forming areas for egg laying. It is necessary to take some measures to optimize and raise the fish production: frequently releasing the young fish of the trout species; increasing the number of bridged waterfalls by making new ones; making over the existing ones; forbidding the exploitation of construction materials such as gravel from the riverbeds in the mountainous zone; making the guarding measures more effective in order to reduce poaching activities, keeping quiet in the breeding season (forbidding facilities such as sawmills that cause sound pollution near the riverbeds; restricting the tourists’ access to certain zones etc.); ensuring supplementary sources of food to the aquatic fauna.

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¹¹ Field note, Doru Nistor, 46, Spulber

¹² The process of supplying water through a canal was called „pihoabă”;