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## Identité et multi-culturalisme dans le Banat roumain

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*It is common for people to maintain an attachment to their native settlement or county but there are also wider regional identities which may not be fully reflected in official administrative hierarchies. The province of Banat was established by the Habsburg authorities on the southeastern edge of the Pannonian Plain as an experiment in mercantilist colonisation following the Turkish withdrawal. Although it was incorporated into the Hungarian state under the dualist system negotiated in 1867 it retained its multicultural character ; as it was the case after the partition which followed the First World War. Through its main urban centre – Timişoara – the Romanian section of Banat played a leading role in the anti-communist revolution of 1989 and attracted a high level of foreign investment during the subsequent transition period. The paper outlines the conceptual basis of regional identity, documents the multicultural heritage of the Romanian component of the Banat region and examines the results of a questionnaire survey –involving all ethnic groups- enquiring into identity preferences. A strong multiculturalism emerged (in the context of both internal and external contributions) and seems set to remain a powerful force in the future of regionalism in Romania.*

*Key-words: regional identity, multiculturalism, Romanian Banat region*

La plupart des gens ont un sentiment d'attache vis-à-vis de leur village de naissance, mais certaines identités régionales plus larges peuvent ne pas être reflétées par les hiérarchies administratives officielles. La province du Banat a été créée par l'autorité habsbourgeoise sur le flanc sud-est de la plaine pannonienne sous la forme d'une expérience de colonisation mercantile suite au retrait des Turcs. Bien qu'incorporé dans l'État hongrois sous le système dual négocié en 1867, son caractère multi-culturel s'est maintenu, tout comme cela a été le cas après la partition qui a suivi la Seconde Guerre mondiale. À travers son centre urbain principal – Timişoara –, la partie roumaine du Banat a joué un rôle déterminant dans la révolution anti-communiste de 1989 et a attiré de nombreux investissements étrangers au cours de la période de transition qui s'est ensuivie. Cet article interroge le concept d'identité régionale, s'intéresse à l'héritage multi-culturel de la composante roumaine du Banat et exploite les résultats d'un questionnaire par sondage auprès de tous les groupes ethniques portant sur les préférences identitaires. Un multi-culturalisme vigoureux émerge (issu d'apports internes et externes) et semble s'établir comme une force d'orientation puissante dans le devenir du régionalisme roumain.

Mots-clés : identité régionale, multi-culturalisme, Banat roumain

Emerging out of its origin as the Habsburg frontier at the edge of the Pannonian Plain, the Banat region[1] in today's western Romania, northern Serbia and southeastern Hungary is noted for its genuine multiculturalism which has emerged from its diverse ethnic structure and turbulent history linked with imperialism during an age of enlightenment (CARTER & TURNOCK 2000 ; BENNETT 1998). Since historical experience plays a fundamental role in the identity of the region today and, specifically for Romanian Banat (the largest part of a region divided by the post-1918 ethos of self-determination), this paper seeks to unravel the feelings that a particular territory and history can evoke as well as the effects that these feelings have on society and its constituent groups : especially the Romanians along with the Serbs, Hungarians and Germans who constituted the major ethnicities with their own villages and urban quarters. We then review the history of Banat with a focus on the theme of different identities coexisting within this specific *marginal* region (inside the ottoman, Hapsburg Empires as well as inside Romania) ; leading to the research outcomes and the profiling of the identities discernible today as the key to the region's ongoing multiculturalism (notwithstanding a Romanian majority that now exceeds 80%) ; and its reproduction, especially through the work of local government and the education service.

## 1 - Introduction: conceptual basis and research programme

While Banat historically extends into Serbian territory (east of the Tisa) and a very small part of Hungary between the Tisa and Mureş, our study of regional multiculturalism is limited to the Romanian component. We concentrate on the counties of Caraş-Severin and Timiş although many authors also consider small adjacent areas of Arad county (south of the Mureş) and Mehedinţi county (along the Danube upstream of Orşova) as historically part of Banat, while the existence of a West region (as one of eight large regions created as part of the EU project) will inevitably require some consideration of Arad and Hunedoara counties.

As Berdoulay argues (quoted by PAASI 1996: 11-12) a place is a mere network of social relations and a community is not necessarily bounded by a specific territory : only by discourse are the boundaries established, as is the community itself - showing to the world as the "*we*" is distinct from the "*other*". In other words, "when a group occupies a territory the group no longer defines the territory but the territory defines the group" (HERB 1999: 17). Of course, stories and narratives contributed by territorial elites will help to decide who joins and who does not : in this way the "*we*" will be separated

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1   See pl. 1, fig. 1, p. 52.

from the "*other*" by use of boundaries. But there may be rival narratives such as the Hungarian and Romanian versions of Transylvanian history (Paasi 1996: 8-10) ; boundaries being not only lines between states but invisible zones within which groups with the same iconography distinguish themselves from outsiders and mediate their contacts with them. Moreover "territories are not eternal units, but exist for some time and disappear in the transformation of the world state system" (Ibid: 3).

Banat formation takes place at different scales. National identity is one of the most privileged forms that tends to dominate others as bounded communities of exclusion and opposition (Herb 1999: 16-17) evoking stronger loyalty from its members than other communities, while sharing an idyllic and often primordial past and seeking a goal or destiny that makes the nation a politicised entity. There is an important distinction to be made between civic identity which is congruous with the territory of the state (the basis for nation states) and ethnic identity based on language and culture ; with the latter weakened by the lack of a clear national goal that contributes much of a nation state's "*we*" feeling. Although some regional movements may have national aspirations the EU is an example wherein regions gain more scope over economic, political and cultural matters. This is particularly significant with the collapse of authoritarian communist regimes. Some consequent ethnic instability (especially in the former Yugoslavia) has secured more political attention for problems of ethnic and regional inequality. Thus, because of political attention and economic aid, regional cultures are becoming more important and thereby institutionalised within existing political structures.

# 2 - History, territory and multiculturality

The native Vlachs or Dacians (named after the Roman province of Dacia) are widely assumed to have integrated in certain respects with the previous occupying forces before being left alone to face the new ethnic currents of the migration period when we hear of the Hun leader Attila referring to *Valahs* in what is today southern Romania (Popa & Sârbovan 1999: 150). Whatever new cultural influences were assimilated there is no credible alternative to the assumption of continuity of occupation by the Romanised Dacians (despite temporary settlement adjustments) and after a long period of invisibility we find these people graduating to a higher form of political organization in Banat under the prince (*voivodat*) Glad and his successor Ahtum whose centre of power lays at Cenad (with a territory extending from the Tisa to the mountains of Crişana). This entity was complemented by smaller tribal territories such as Caraş (1200) and Severin (1233), with the latter embracing the mountainous part of today's Banat and the western part of Oltenia and referred to as the Banat of Severin because the term *Ban* used by the governor. These are the earliest references to territorial units at the regional scale. However, the Hungarians were advancing across the Danube plains and made a contribution to the region's defences against Bulgaria through the organisation of the Mehadia base and complementary establishments at Caransebeş and Timişoara where the fortress built by Bela II assumed considerable economic and military importance. Indeed Timişoara became the residence of Carol-Robert of Anjou, which made Timişoara a royal capital : the palace became the nucleus of the town and the site is currently occupied by the Banat museum. However the Hungarian presence in the mountains and hills was not maintained and, despite the nominal jurisdiction of Hungarian kings, several distinct Romanian tribal districts can be identified under the rule of *cnezii* and *juzii* : Almăj, Bârzava, Caraş, Comeat, Fârdea, Ilidia, Mehadia and Sebeş (Caransebeş) in the present county of Caraş-Severin and Belint, Făget and Lugoj in the eastern part of Timiş. There were fortresses of the same name in Făget, Fârdea, Lugoj and Mehadia (also at Orşova and Sviniţa on the Danube) and Sebeş along with others at Bocşa (Bârzava) and Vărădia (Caraş) (Creţan 2006a: 53).

## 2.1 - The Habsburg Project

In 1526, the Ottoman conquest converted Timişoara into a *pashalik* and forced a Hungarian withdrawal which continued until 1716 when the Ottomans were forced to retire and the Banat of Temesvár was created with a boundary that extended into Serbia and attracted many Serb migrants (as well as a trickle of Bulgarian refugees) from what remained Ottoman territory further south. The Banat was accorded a measure of autonomy under its Habsburg governor (with the army playing a key role until 1751) until Hungarian administration and landownership resumed in 1778, and in the meantime a colonisation policy was implemented. There was some reserve in Vienna at the prospect of becoming embroiled with Hungarians and Turks but benefits arose when it was perceived that "the establishment of a Catholic crown land between the Calvinist Hungarians and the Muslim Turks would hinder their cooperation (Mitchell & Kicosev 1997: 20). Banat Plain was a marshy land with only 20 inh./km², so it needed to be drained and inhabited so that the settlers could defend the south-east border of the Empire. Settlers arrived from various parts of the Habsburg Empire as well as from the present territories of Bulgaria and France, with Czechs and Ruthenians arriving in the 19th century seeking an escape from famine. Creţan (2006a: 73) has mapped a total of 63 colonisation projects for the period 1714-92 on the Banat Plain and other lowland areas below (200m) extending along the Danube to Moldova Nouă, Orşova and Mehadia -comparatively with just 11 on the higher ground. Germans were involved in the great majority, with Hungarians at Sânnicolau Mare, Sânpetru Mare and Slatina and other nationalities at Cenad, Cruceni, Moldova Nouă, Tarmac and Vinga, as well as Lupac in the hills. But while this certainly represents a great effort after a period of endemic warfare, it is too easy to exaggerate Ottoman neglect in an area that was naturally marshy and shows little evidence of any effective pre-Ottoman flood control. A distorted view may well have been promoted by the improvers for propaganda reasons to boost the achievements of Habsburg mercantilism : highlighting previous mismanagement without mentioning the depredations of the Habsburg armies (Mitchell & Kicosev 1997: 21).

While it is widely assumed that agriculture was a major success the conditions on the plains were by no means good in the first half of the 18th century and there was always the

complementary interest in the development of a mining economy in the mountains which was particularly attractive to Vienna given the acute shortage of metals at a time when her continental rivals had access to American riches. Governor C. F. Mercy established *Banater Bergwerkenrichtungs-Kommission* in 1717 which revived the mining industry, leading to a copper smelter at Oraviţa and a blast furnace in Bocşa in 1718 and 1719 respectively : hence the dual attraction of agriculture and mining for the *erster Schwabenzug* of 1722-6 which brought in some 15 000 Catholic Germans. A shortage of timber made for a very protective attitude to woodland which was crucially important as a source of domestic and industrial fuel until coal was discovered in both the Anina and Reşiţa areas, leading to further growth in the mining and metallurgical industries (GRAF 1997). Anina coal was exported during the Crimean War, triggering the first attempt to constructing a railway from Oraviţa to the Danube at Baziaş and was subsequently used for coking to supply the blast furnaces at Anina and more particularly the integrated metallurgical complex at Reşiţa which became the core of the region's *montan* economy with a flourishing multi-ethnic community by 1914 (FENEŞAN 1991).

It is not possible provide a detailed review of the colonisation process that is well-documented elsewhere (CREŢAN 1999; 2001, 2006a) and the arrivals of the different groups, but it is worth emphasising that Serbs have been in Banat since Medieval times with numbers enhanced in the 18th century : their main settlement areas were along the Mureş at Cenad/Sânnicolau Mare and Sânpetru Mare; also Recaş, the Lipova Hills and the frontier strip extending as far south as the Danube. Croats and the associated *Caraşoveni* (living at Caraşova and neighbouring villages on the limestone plateau between Anina and Reşiţa) also have a long history in Romanian Banat with the last arrivals appearing in 1740 as a group of Albanians who were eventually assimilated by the majority Caraşoveni. Meanwhile Croats are associated with the villages of Ceneiul Croat and Checea Croată, established at the beginning of the 19th century. Germans formed majority villages throughout the area from the 1720s : not only Arad and Timişoara but other districts such as Buziaş (where Germans were connected with the growth of the spa), Deta, Liebling, Lipova, Periam, Recaş (where the German community grew to some 4 000) and Sânnicolau Mare as well as the mountain resource areas. By contrast, despite their presence before the Turkish period, Hungarians returned only to the territory south of the Mureş after 1790, with the greatest influx coming after 1867. Thus, Griselini's census of 1774 (included in Table 1) makes no mention of such a nationality. But they made a major contribution (along with others) to the growth of Timişoara with emergence of the new suburbs of Fratelia and Moşniţa Nouă before the First World War, as well as the more local growth poles of Cruceni, Deta, Făget, Gătaia and Recaş.

Present Slovaks have their ancestors in the time they arrived predominantly in the 18th century with a great concentration at Nădlac, which became a frontier settlement after 1918, although they are also present on the plain in the Gataia and Semlac areas. By contrast the Czech contingent was drawn more to the mining economy in parallel with German settlement in the Ferdinand (Oţelul Roşu) and Anina areas, as well as the area along and close to the Danube Gorge between Moldova

and Orşova where majority Czech communities developed at such places as Bigăr, Eibenthal, Gârnic, Ogradena Nouă, Ravenska, Sântelenă and Şumiţa during the 19th century. The main exception was some Czech settlement in the Pecica area linked with work on a large estate in 1855. Bulgarians also arrived at this time notably at Vinga which was transformed (as Teresiopolis) into a prominent cultural and market centre while some moved on in the 19th century (1842-62) to new land at Breştea and Colonia Bulgară where a Bulgarian majority was eventually secured through the departure of Hungarians before the First World War. Italians came as professionals (engineers, doctors and teachers) to the mountain industrial areas and although they did not remain indefinitely, a renewed influx of Italians is now being experienced through foreign investment in Timişoara. Ruthenians and Ukrainians came from Maramureş with the main arrivals coming relatively late (e.g. the 19th century at Pădureni and Scăiuş near Lugoj, with further arrivals in the 1970s) with a general focus on the hill country of eastern Timiş.

There could be no doubt about the scale of the ethnic diversity which extended from the main groups (Germans, Hungarians and Romanians) to include Bulgarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks and Ukrainians ; not to mention Jews and Roma while there are still some people in Banat today with French and Italians ancestors. However while the main urban and industrial areas were ethnically mixed, in the rural areas the various ethnic groups lived separately, with no explicit multicultural ethos. There was little intermarriage for reasons of both class and religion, although Serbs have enjoyed traditionally good relations with Romanians –sharing the same Orthodox religion (with a privileged position for Serbian Orthodox church until 1918) while both groups also shared a relatively inferior status as poor peasants in contrast to the higher class Germans and Hungarians. If anything, it was German culture that came to the fore as agriculture, mining and trade supported a growing middle class *bourgeoisie* ; though Germans made their culture and education system accessible to other ethnic groups. Germans were active in trade (German was also the language of trade), while German architecture predominated across the urban system and German enterprise secured a relatively dense railway network. Politically however it was the Hungarians who gained advantage through the historic compromise of 1867 that included Banat in a large Hungarian state within the Empire. Yet despite an overall diversity, there was a scattering of ethnicities and not all groups were visible within particular areas. Segregation was important because it enabled the smaller nationalities to cope with the threat of assimilation and so created the potential for multiculturalism (GREEN & POLLARD 2002). For isolated ethnic communities needed a measure of interaction and cooperation with others, this created a multicultural existence with many educated people able to speak three or four languages. Therefore, even if individual villages were ethnically unified surrounding communities would be different and hence the need for a measure of mutual understanding.

## 2.2 - The Interwar Period

The Romanians were politically weak during the Habsburg period (despite their large number) but the principle of self-

determination adopted by the Entente powers after the First World War worked greatly to their advantage, although Banat was eventually partitioned between three successor states after the Trianon Treaty which envisaged Romania taking half of the province. However this period was not greatly different (despite the change in subordination from Budapest to Bucharest and the partition of the province) and the retention of the former harmonious relationships between communities was significant because this is the period that older people remember (only those over 90 years of age can have any real recollection of life before the First World War). From a Romanian perspective, especially the inter-war years would offer a good advertisement of a multicultural Banat with elements of the older traditions combined with a tempering of the power of some non-Romanian ethnicities. It was a time when the establishment of a Romanian bourgeoisie was an important element in cultural policy and social mobility increased in comparison with the pre-war period when Romanians were mostly poor peasants as the Germans and Hungarians ran the economy and the administration (and were also prominent among the more affluent sections of the peasantry). The Romanian intelligentsia was now able to promote a progressive regional discourse based on a relatively strong economy embracing both agriculture and industry (given the crucial importance of such enterprises as Reşiţa) and thereby assume a sense of cultural superiority. This inevitably had some negative implications for other groups but key personnel could withdraw to post-Trianon Hungary, while German economic interests were not greatly affected and substantial economic growth offered opportunities for upward mobility, at least until the depression. However radical political currents during the Second World War resulted in the transfer of Jews and Roma to Transnistria and there were some smaller movements such as the transfer of poor Bulgarian families moved from Vinga to the southern Dobrogea after this territory was returned to Bulgaria in 1940.

### 2.3 - The Communist Period

It was problematic for Banat's various ethnicities, with some times of particular stress. Under a Soviet-inspired state, socialism language became more standardised and the minorities were effectively obliged to speak some Romanian even if other languages were used at home and within local communities. However, the assumption that it was a time of strong Romanian nationalism injurious to other ethnic groups should not be accepted without qualification. Initially the Red Army showed partiality towards the Serbs and encouraged them to provoke the Romanian authorities in Banat (Râmneanţu 1996) ; while subsequent discriminatory actions over the transportation of Germans to the Soviet Union after the war ended and expulsion of 12 800 families from the border strip with Yugoslavia in June 1951 (following Tito's defiance of Stalin and his expulsion from the Cominform) were down to Soviet policy, with the latter a blanket applied to all potential opponents of the communist regime who might possibly make contact with Titoist elements, including many Romanians (Marineasa 1995). The expellees were resettled in the Bărăgan amid great hardship and were only allowed to return in the 1960s when relations with Tito's Yugoslavia

were reopened and intensive economic cooperation followed including the Iron Gates hydropower and navigation project. Moreover, Romania's nationalist policy arguably involved more rhetoric than substance, in order to enhance the legitimacy of the Romanian Communist Party, first under Gheorghiu-Dej and later Ceauşescu. Romanian nationalism was hardly xenophobic (with the historical record one of peaceful coexistence despite discrimination) and well-connected groups like the Hungarians were treated with circumspection. It is true that funding for minority cultures became very limited and Romanians frequently took the key jobs in ethnically diverse areas ; yet Romanian culture hardly flourished after Ceauşescu looked to North Korea for his role model and the 1980s became a decade of austerity for all due to the priority for repayment of foreign debts. The rural *sistematizare* programme became a great threat when the original 1970s project was reintroduced a decade later with the intention of eliminating thousands of villages. Yet even in the demonstration area of Ilfov only a handful of small settlements were actually eliminated before the revolution and some of these cases arose from new water storages. Although it was still traumatic for those involved, most demolition actually arose in growth villages to make way for new *civic centres*. No ethnic village was ever destroyed however grim prospects may have seemed. Finally, as a result of the programme to increase the birth rate, ethnic villages increased in size and remained vibrant communities with the economic support of the logging industry and also mining (especially the copper mining at Moldova Nouă and the energy project to generate electricity from bituminous schist at Anina). Along with the scope for commuting to work in the large towns, this ensured employment for the remote communities of the Danube Defile and other villages stranded on the Yugoslav frontier. Some permanent movements took place for work purposes e.g. some Bulgarians moved a short distance from Dudeştii Vechi to take up employment on state farms in the Lovrin area.

Over the years since the boundary changes, the ethnic balance has changed quite drastically. The Romanians advanced from a total of 592 000 in 1910 -39,6% of the population of Banat as whole– to 511 100 in 1930 which represented 58,6% of the smaller region ; then 589 400 in 1956 (71,3%) and 945 000 in 2007 (82,9%). Meanwhile the Hungarian stake declined from 221 500 in 1910 (14,8%) to 97 800 (10,4%) in 1930 and 85 800 (10,4%) in 1956 –albeit with stability within the smaller territory. In the Timiş county the Hungarian minority is small but spread over all municipalities and thus less sensitive for isolation or ethnic tensions. But the Germans (*Swabians*) were the big losers in the long run. They retained their economic strength initially but became heavily involved with the German military during World War Two and suffered Stalin's retribution after 1945 when Romania (under Red Army occupation) was obliged to send all the male Germans of working age to the Soviet Union for forced labour, from which many did not return. The German community also suffered a loss of assets through nationalisation and collectivisation. Numbers declined from 397 500 in 1910 (26,6%) to 223 200 in 1930 (23,7%), 67 800 in 1956 (8,2%) and 39 200 (3,3%) in 1992. The Serbs also lost ground

**Table 1:** Distribution of ethnicities in Banat 1774-2007 (thousands)

| Census | Romanians | | Germans | | Hungarians | | Serbs | | Others | | Total population |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | |
| **1774*** | 181,6 | *57,1* | 43,2 | *13,6* | n.a. | *n.a.* | 78,8 | *24,8* | 14,3 | *4,5* | **317,9** |
| **1841*** | 576,2 | *57,3* | 207,7 | *20,7* | 14,3 | *1,4* | 207,3 | *20,6* | n.a. | *n.a.* | **1005,5** |
| **1871*** | 553,3 | *43,4* | 379,5 | *29,8* | 91,1 | *7,2* | 250,1 | *19,6* | n.a. | *n..a* | **1273,8** |
| **1910*** | 592 | *39,6* | 397,5 | *26,6* | 221,5 | *14,8* | 284,3 | *19* | n.a. | *n.a.* | **1495,3** |
| **1930** | 511,1 | *54,4* | 223,2 | *23,7* | 97,8 | *10,4* | 40,5 | *4,3* | 67,6 | *7,2* | **940,2** |
| **1956** | 589,4 | *71,3* | 67,8 | *8,2* | 85,8 | *10,4* | 40,1 | *4,9* | 43,7 | *5,3* | **826,8** |
| **1992** | 931,8 | *79,3* | 39,2 | *3,3* | 73,8 | *6,3* | 31,1 | *2,7* | 97,3 | *8,3* | **1173,2** |
| **2002** | 942,1 | *82,2* | 15,1 | *1,3* | 67,3 | *5,9* | 26,2 | *2,3* | 95,3 | *8,3* | **1146** |
| **2007** | 945 | *82,9* | 12,3 | *1,1* | 65 | *5,7* | 25,3 | *2,2* | 92,4 | *8,1* | **1140** |

The 1774 data for Germans includes French and Italians ; the 1930 and 1992 data for Serbs includes Croatians and Slovenians.
*Historic Banat (Serbian and Romanian Banat)
*Source: Popa & Sârbovan 1990 p.152 for 1992 ; Crețan 2006a p.55 for 1774, 2002 and 200*

from 221 500 in 1910 (19,0%) to 40 500 (4,3%) in 1930 but 40 100 (4,9%) in 1956, (Table 1).

## 2.4 - The Post-Communist Period

After the 1989 revolution, in which all groups opposed the communist regime new conditions arose for a multicultural Banat, although the Romanian position strengthened with the further erosion of the German population which had started through Ceaușescu's agreement with West Germany in 1978 when substantial amounts of hard currency were paid in return for exit visas ; with further movement after 1989 when the education tax imposed on emigrants was withdrawn, leading to a massive emigration of Germans in 1990-1 which cleared out whole villages like Brebu Nou and Gărina formerly dependent on the local agriculture and the heavy industry in Reşiţa. Small numbers of old people remain in places like Birda, Deta and Voiteg on the Moraviţa Plain. Meanwhile in view of the collapse of much of the local mining (especially the collapse at Baia Nouă and Moldova Nouă) many Czechs have left to take up the offer of employment in Czechia. Other communities are in decline e.g. the Serbs and others are experiencing the results of a falling birthrate and mixed marriages ; although there are some interesting anomalies : while Caraşova remains a distinct cultural area, based on its large *dolină* in the Caraş valley supported by its bilingual secondary school, the Caraşoveni of Cuveşdia, Goruia, Slatina Timiş have been assimilated by the Romanian majority. Similar situation appeared in the Serbian Banat where Romanians and other ethnic groups seemed assimilated but still preserved in some villages till nowadays (fig. 2).

However, the region has rediscovered its *multicultural past*. After 1989 anybody older than 55 could look back to the *multicultural thirties* as the recipe for new democratic society with an inspiration that is partly relevant to the conduct of affairs within the region but also a stimulus to regional



**Figure 2:** The ethnic map of Banat (2001-2002)
*Source: Romanian National Census, 2002 & Serbian National Census, 2001; local administrative units aggregated.*

self-confidence – most evident in Arad and Timişoara – in dealing with neighbouring states (and foreign investors) while assuming as posture of rationalist regionalism towards Bucharest. Multiculturalism is thus a kind of key word that may be translated in various ways : "no ethnic tensions", "living together in harmony", "cultural development", "regional pride and self-sufficiency" and "Europe".

The intellectuals from Banat were trying to highlight a history of harmonious inter-ethnic relations, but although

this was not strictly true -Batt (2002: 15) refers to the *Banat myth* upheld to promote a historical sense of unity- it was the Romanians who probably made the greatest concessions and were then rewarded by the support of other countries and the EU. Batt (2002: 18) went on to say that only the Hungarians are reluctant to support the *Banat myth* of multiculturism because they feel like people in diaspora who are being slowly integrated into Romanian society. It should be added that some contrary political currents have been in evidence ; notably the surprisingly high level of support for the nationalist Greater Romania Party (the very antithesis of multiculturism !) in the presidential election of 2000 reflecting a sense of disillusionment with central government after years of negative growth (1997-9) which undermined the reformist centre-right parties while failing to restore faith in the centre-left after its neo-communist agenda had been decisively rejected in 1996. This can only be seen as a fleeting aberration when the centre-right had temporarily lost credibility, although it sent shock-waves through Western Europe through the impression that Romanians were losing patience with democracy. But the opposite proved to be the case because the centre-right showed that it was prepared to turn out and back the despised Ion Iliescu for a further term in order to deny Vadim Tudor (the maverick GRP candidate) in the run-off between the two leading candidates.

Multiculturalism has clearly paid dividends through international economic and cultural support and foreign investment at a time when there was some trepidation about going into Romania on account of ethnic tensions (however over-exaggerated) and government ambivalence over reform politics. It is also a genuine cultural orientation since mixed marriages are now common in the villages as well as the towns, while cultural programmes and festivities (financed by county councils in cooperation with communes and municipalities) develop contact and understanding with neighbouring communities. The Timişoara Intercultural Institute has also done much to integrate civil society through education and cultural policy. Hence, a genuine *interculturalism* in Banat stands in contrast to the situation in Transylvania where there has arguably been greater prejudice between Hungarians and Romanians especially and a greater degree of separation, admittedly aggravated by the issues of sovereignty and autonomy. It is also true that as the fragmented ethnicities

become smaller and their remaining enclaves are phased out integration is all the more inevitable and the multicultural idea may be taken for granted. However, in Banat this is not a new orientation ; nor is it a regrettable necessity. Thus, the name *Banat* indicates respectability and a reassuring localism. Indeed, the name is used widely for newspapers as in the case of the Romanian *Renasterea Banateană* or the German *Banater Zeitung* while some entrepreneurs like the local BMW car dealer (*Banat Car*) trade under this banner.

Pride in people's own nationality might generate stronger feelings towards a Banat identity (based on multiculturalism) than is the case for Romanians but this does not emerge. Taking the results as a whole the positive feeling for Banat – for whatever reason – is encouraging, while people are also happy to identify with Romania despite ambivalence towards Bucharest ; implying perhaps that a Banat identity is a progressive version of a Romanian identity in the sense of strong economic development, liberal politics and a *western* orientation. And in addition to, or instead of these considerations there could be the ethnic factor –lack of tension with good multicultural relations– linking the two together.

**2.5 - Mental Maps**

Mental Maps of Banat were interesting in revealing a difference between Caraş-Severin where 47% think that Banat consists of only the two counties (Caraş-Severin and Timiş) while only 25% take this view in Timiş. In addition, there is only minimal acceptance of the view that Hungary and Serbia have anything to do with Banat (seven percent) compared with 31% in Timiş, although there is a lot of ignorance over this point in both counties. At the same time, a fifth of all respondents (slightly more in Timiş than Caraş-Severin) think that Arad and Hunedoara are parts of Banat : a view which is quite erroneous (although it shows a degree of appreciation of the unity of West Region) and is certainly not reciprocated among inhabitants in Hunedoara county. Although some people appreciate the historical realities they mean little to most people who see Banat simply as part of Romania, albeit with certain specific positive and progressive characteristics, but without any extra-territorial implications. Indeed some (especially the more radically minded) would reject the use of such historical names altogether as archaic and

**Table 2 - Identity feelings expressed by scholars and students in Romanian Banat**

| Identity feeling | 1st Choice | | 2nd Choice | | 3rd Choice | | 4th Choice | | 5th Choice | | 6th Choice | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| **Banatean** | 212 | 46,3 | 124 | 27,4 | 58 | 12,7 | 28 | 6,2 | 20 | 4,5 | 16 | 3,5 |
| **Own Nationality** | 70 | 15,3 | 80 | 17,7 | 90 | 19,7 | 67 | 14,8 | 87 | 19,4 | 60 | 13,2 |
| **Romanian Citizen** | 120 | 26,2 | 168 | 37,1 | 96 | 21 | 42 | 9,3 | 24 | 5,3 | 7 | 1,5 |
| **European** | 30 | 6,6 | 45 | 9,9 | 150 | 32,8 | 162 | 35,7 | 56 | 12,5 | 15 | 3,3 |
| **South-East European** | 6 | 1,3 | 27 | 6 | 45 | 9,8 | 132 | 29,1 | 215 | 47,9 | 31 | 6,9 |
| **Other** | 20 | 4,4 | 9 | 2 | 18 | 3,9 | 23 | 5,1 | 47 | 10,5 | 324 | 71,5 |
| **Total** | **458** | 100 | **453** | 100 | **457** | 100 | **454** | 100 | **449** | 100 | **453** | 100 |

*Source: Survey (april 2006), questionnaire for 554 scholars and students of +15 years old (mean age 17,2, 55% male) made in Timiş county (Timişoara, Sânnicolau Mare, Recaş, Faget) and Caraş-Severin county (Oraviţa, Reşiţa, Mehadia, Bocşa)*

liable to cause confusion. Finally there is only limited sense of integration between the Hungarian, Romanian and Serbian sections of the historical province despite the Dunăre-Criş-Mureş-Tisa (Duna-Kőrős-Marós-Tisza: DKMT) Euroregion established in 1992 (which goes far beyond the limits of Banat although the historical region forms the core and contributes an important sense of identity) and considerable contact through shopping tourism, transit travel and various forms of cross-border cooperation. The other Banat territories are bound up with their respective countries while ethnicities that transcend the national frontiers are bound up purely with ethnic social relations.

## 3 - Preserving Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a reality and no other part of Romania has such a diverse ethnic structure. But can it be maintained in a situation where Romanians comprise 86,2% by ethnicity and 88,3% by language (2002 – after 84,4/86,1 in 1992) – admittedly across West Region ; for the figures would be lower for the smaller area of Caraş-Severin and Timiş. Non-Romanian ethnicities are now free to organise in terms of politics, social development and media (e.g. *Uniunea Sârbilor din România* was formed in 1992 and *Uniunea Culturală a Rutenilor din România* in 2000) while education reforms have helped to improve schooling in minority languages. But it is still evident that minority groups are smaller in terms of language than their *declaration* would suggest and the process seems likely to continue as the younger people integrate (e.g. through Romanian school friends and later through employment, so that up to a third speak only Romanian) and only the elderly are left wedded to their own language with only limited knowledge and inclination to cope with Romanian – as a result of which they become more isolated as their number diminish and more dependent on the media, e.g. German newspapers for the small number of elderly Germans who still live in Banat – and also dependent on mother countries which are generally prepared to help with educational and other programmes. All the Serbs in Banat speak Romanian well and the younger people (below 30 years of age) tend to use it very widely ; raising the question of how far an ethnic group can maintain itself without its own language. Fortunately language is not the only way of expressing identity or culture in daily life, for architecture and landscape still keep the Habsburg era very much alive through the historic buildings (especially churches) and settlement structures – both urban and rural – dating back to a time when the Romanian contribution was quite minimal by comparison with the state-inspired construction of the communist period.

### 3.1 - Reproducing Ethnic Identity
In actual fact, there is no doubt that the counties provide substantial cultural programmes in cooperation with local NGOs, especially in Timiş, and events dealing with a single ethnic group are meant to be available for all e.g. *German art heritage in Gottlob*. Thus, county and local governments reproduce the intercultural character of Banat while leaving the identity of the different ethnicities intact. Programmes also take place on an international scale whereby counties and municipalities close to the border help to develop cross-border relationships. However although the counties claim good relations with each other there is no formal cooperation over the building of a Banat multiculturalism. As for national government, there is no willingness to reproduce or stimulate regional identities, for the regions are simply spatial units for the generation and redistribution of wealth ; although there is some support for tackling problems relating to culture and minorities while there is certainly no desire to constrain the development of ethnic and regional consciousness.

The media, the education service and the political parties play an important role in identity reproduction, having the mind for a top-down approach (e.g. by minorities and governments) to reproduce a specific minority identity but also for a bottom-up approach through which individuals can communicate their opinions to political parties. As for political parties, it is not clear whether they are thought to be at fault because people may be taking an unreasonably negative view in associating the main parties with national government, or there may be disinterest in the role of parties and the political process generally. On the other hand, it is a matter for some satisfaction that the media is seen as effective in giving an impulse to regional consciousness.

## 4 - The future of Banat multiculturalism in Romania's west region

The issue of central government is quite complex because as Romania becomes assimilated into the EU it must strike a balance between a traditional centralised system – exaggerated under communist dictatorship – and a formula for coexistence with the regions as the latter claim a significant share of political power. Regions are of course not new. The present West Region compares with the smaller Banat region in force during 1952-68 comprising the present Caraş-Severin and Timiş counties, minus the Sânnicolau Mare area which was then connected with Arad. In 1939, the country was organised into 10 *ţinuturi* of which one was called Timiş covering an area almost identical to today's West Region : the then counties of Arad, Caraş, Hunedoara, Severin and Timiş-Torontal. However, such a region was conceived for state coordination purposes and not to enhance self-expression. Then as now the counties were the fundamental building blocks (while during 1952-68 these units were suppressed in favour of a second tier of districts based on the towns of Arad, Caransebeş, Jimbolia, Lipova, Lugoj, Moldova Nouă, Oraviţa, Reşiţa, Sânnicolau Mare and Timişoara as well as the communes of Bozovici, Ciacova, Gătaia, Făget and Pecica).

West Region is one of the country's richest regions and given its economic strength, its position relatively close to the centre of Europe and the historical precedent for intercultural activity it is one of the most likely to seek greater autonomy. It is not clear to what extent this goal is active in the minds of those politicians who would naturally like to see a more liberal government with the regions having jurisdiction

over a greater share of their income. But the region is not homogenous and there are areas showing consistently strong support for the centre-left while the Jiu Valley (Petroşani) area of Hunedoara county is the home of the *mineriada* movement which acted illegally, in concert with a neo-communist leadership in Bucharest, to constrain economic and political reform. There are large sections of public opinion within West Region that do not identify with Banat in any way and, while accepting the need for good international relations, would prefer to see cultural development taking place within rather than across national boundaries. Equally traditional centre-left supporters – as well as the nationalists of the Greater Romania Party – might well advocate a greater bias in state capital allocations to the weaker regions as well as stronger measures for the high unemployment areas that have so far only attracted *Less-Favoured Area* status.

Today's eight regions were drawn up purely in connection with the EU accession process and it is not clear whether the decision to have eight units was determined by Brussels or the Romanian government. But despite consultation with the county councils, it is clear that the boundaries were determined on the basis of county groupings with the aim of achieving rough equality in population and with some regard to the ease of polarisation around a large city, even if this city was not chosen as the seat of the regional development agency. They were not meant to be greatly different in economic strength – although it was inevitable that a region comprising the bulk of Moldavia (the North-East) would be poorer than the rest while the Bucharest region would be the strongest – but would instead have greater internal differences through the combination of economically stronger and weaker counties (e.g. Arad and Timiş against Caraş-Severin and Hunedoara in West Region). The counties (and other local authorities) were to make decisions over regional projects with the regions having no political power of their own. But since the regions are being widely talked about and feature in geography schoolbooks and media presentations (albeit as a means of suppressing the historic regions) it will be interesting to see if they become the basis of new regional identities since there is already a tendency to associate *Banat* with West Region and it is the whole of this region that is now part of the DKMT Euroregion which might pose as a *Greater Banat* and the ultimate heir of a distinguished regional tradition.

As regards the *DKMT Euroregion* the objectives spelt out in 2005 are cooperation that benefits all parties, established on the principles of democracy and European development policies in an atmosphere of mutual trust ; best possible utilisation of regional potential through cooperation ; and transformation into a cultural, scientific and innovation hub in response to the challenge of globalisation. But progress has been very limited because of national differences in legislation and institutional practices ; infrastructural and financial constraints and a problematic international context with EU and NATO membership not shared by all three countries. Since 1996, there has been some progress through cultural and educational programmes including ethnic workshops and music festivals but relations with Serbia's Vojvodina province were complicated by the Kosovo War and remain difficult despite regular meetings between the foreign ministers of the three countries. Even for people living in the border region, crossing a frontier can be quite time-consuming (although movement between Hungary and Romania has been simplified since Romania joined the EU in 2007). However if the cultural integration is restrained there has been progress in terms of business links, scientific collaboration and cooperation over tourism as well as transport projects (such as the proposed reopening of the Bega Canal and restoration of the direct Timişoara-Szeged railway) not to mention *ad hoc* programmes of cross-border-cooperation which attract European funding (Creţan 2006b: 73-4 ; Turnock 1999 ; Turnock 2002).

## 5 - Conclusion

History over varying time-spans do provide a strong foundation for a regional multiethnic space. Differences between Caraş-Severin and Timiş were not expected but they could arise from the stronger economy of the Timişoara area as the core of the region. The historical dimension is understood thanks to continuing efforts at reproduction –particularly the tradition of multiculturalism- but the regional boundaries (as a reflection of history, mythology and memories) are clearly not well-known. Meanwhile, EU accession adds to the momentum for greater regional multiculturalism since the process has been responsible for the reappearance of a county grouping (named West Region) which is seen – albeit loosely – as a concrete expression of a unity above the county level to which the values of Banat can be applied ; while European support for the DKMT Euroregion provides a plausible link with the historic region (however much it may be *watered down* through the adherence of other areas that were not part of the original Habsburg project).

The Romanian state has not been a strong facilitator and mediator for regional multicultural reproduction, although it has not sought to hinder regional ethnic formation including its international dimensions and it is perhaps idealistic to expect more at a time of great change when the first priority must be to maximise cohesion at the national level. Banat is not an established region in today's terms because it has no official status – indeed it has been partitioned three ways, although there is a West Region which is acting to some extent as a vehicle for traditional values and the reality of economic progress.

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