DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE IN IASI COUNTY AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

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Abstract

Through this paper I want to analyze the religious landscape of Iasi County, how it is transformed and developed, after the fall of communism. This term of religious landscape is analyzed from the perspective of territory but also as society. The religious landscape is also studied from the regional differentiation perspective of denominations in Iasi county, this being one of the elements who led to the organization of society, during the process of transformation. I also took in consideration the processes which contributed to the development of new religious landscape of Iasi County. Also, I observe the course of religious denominations after the fall of communism, having as reference the censuses from 1992 until 2011, and after processing data obtained from National Institute of Statistics I analyzed the impact of religious structure of population on religious landscape of Iasi county. We have to take into account the fact that religious denominations are in a continue change after the fall of communism, fact that has effect on the landscape. The county faces a decrease in the number of orthodox people, while other religious denominations grow in the number of adherents. The religious landscape of Iasi became more diversified after the fall of communism, so now we can talk about religious freedom.

Keywords: 

development, religious landscape, Iasi, geography of religions.

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I. Introduction

Religious movements that came after the first world war had different values from the local people, and these values were not appropriate to patriarchal or rural life from other countries, being challenged by tradition and church. This hostility had diminished gradually and, in time, we could observe an assimilation of these values (Cobianu-Băcanu et al, 2002). Early modernization of Romania was blocked and sovietised by communism which lead to diminishing the role of religion in society’s life. After the removal of communism, it began the development of spiritual and religious life (Cuciuc, 2002).

Iasi County has not been bypassed by such development, religious freedom being established and the religious landscape became diversified, noting a growth in areal differentiation concerning the development of religion. The subject of this research paper is trying to observe the modifications which took place in time after the fall of communism, wanting to capture the “new” and the traditional. It is an analyze based on censuses from 1992 until 2011 of Iasi County, and it takes into consideration the transformations of the religious landscape and what are the main factors which led to this transformation.

II. Literature Review

When we talk about a larger territorial unit as a religious landscape we have to take into consideration both territory and society influenced by religious impacts, but also by individual sacral objects, all of these contributing to defining the character of landscape. A religious landscape is characterized by the presence of religious symbols and structers, in the number of these religious elements. An important fact for the religious landscape is the religious heterogeneity, both in society and in terms of territory (Havlicek, Hupkova, 2013). Religion is a major component of the landscape, being especially rich and complex in urban areas (Zelinsky, 2001).

A good understanding of the religious landscape also requires a good analysis of the social landscape. This is a general tendency of current research: heterogeneity, differentiation and diversity to highlight similarities, overlays and disjunctions of various denomination systems of the same space (Scheid, Polignac, 2010). The identity and the meaning of a landscape is socially constructed, rather than given, and it is opened to conflicts, contestations and negotiations (Kong, 2002).
After Horster (2010), the notion of „religious landscape” includes the ritual and cultural practices in the sphere of religion, the itinerary a pilgrim is obliged to take, the public or private area surrounding a walled sanctuary, fairs and markets, craftsmen and merchants who offer all kinds of services the pilgrim might need.

It is important to know that the construction of society and space is also based on religious practices, not only on institutional organizations but also on personal experiences, these being central to the spiritual life of the society. Space is considered a point of cultural and religious contact, exchange and sometimes conflict. The spatialities of religion is important in understanding its histories (Brace et al, 2006). We cannot identify the sacred landscape as a cultic landscape (a place which is devoted to worship, integrated within the diverse components of a landscape) or as a sacred space (a social space organized by the spreading and hierarchical of worship sites) (Scheid, Polignac, 2010).

Some changes that marked the religious landscape, and which will continue and be amplified, are founded on the larger phenomenon called globalization, being translated as a process of deterritorialization of the religious, in the sense which religious expansion or export of new religions will be made after a new logic – that of “demand and supply” (Gheorghe, 2008). Now we can see an attempt to replace religious traditions with rationality and scientifical knowledge, an open and flexible approach of the believers, the acceptance of religious pluralism, religious secularization, promoting individualism, and all these factors lead to the change of the religious landscape. The religious institutions try to adapt their present condition to the contemporary society (Ion, 2010).

III. A short historical background of religious landscape in Iasi County

There have been discovered an entire collection of archaeological objects which are from V-XII century and confirmed the existence of Christianity in Moldova, objects like clay pots with the sign of a cross (Botosana-Suceava, Sipote-Suceava, Murgeni-Vaslui etc.), rings with Christian symbols (Stoicani-Galati), 2 crosses (Adjud-Vrancea), 2 crosses made of led (Hlincea-Iasi). Also, in 1401 was founded the Metropolitan Church of Moldova in Suceava which signified the evolution of church organization, but in 1677 it was
permanently moved to Iasi (Ionita, 2012). In time, it was subject to many changes, being introduced Romanian language in church services, published the first book of prayers (1679) by Metropolitan Dosoftei of Moldova, under the ruling of Alexandru Ioan Cuza being introduced the Romanian alphabet, replacing the Cyrillic one, founding of seminars and Faculty of Orthodox Theology at the University of Iasi (Betea, 2012). In 1848, as N. A. Bogdan (1997) presents it, the orthodox population was in a percentage of 72%, while 20% were Hebrew and 8% other religion; meanwhile in 1899 the number of orthodox people had dropped to 45%, while Hebrew had a percentage of 50% in Iasi County. In time, the number of orthodox people grew, while the number of Hebrew was dropping. In the communist period the Orthodox Church was subordinated to the state, many priests being arrested if they had an anti-communism attitude, and many monasteries being closed. The main idea was to promote an anti-religious campaign (Stan, Turcescu, 2007).

On the Moldavian territory, Catholicism was brought by missionaries who came from Italy, Poland and Hungary, and founded episcopates at Milcov (1227), Siret (1371), Baia (1413) and Bacau (1607). After 1818, the activity of catholic missionaries of Moldova was coordinated from Iasi, where the Apostolic Vicariate of Moldova has activated (1818-1884), afterwards being founded in 1884 the Episcopate of Moldova in Iasi (ALDO, 2006). In 1886, at Iasi, was opened a seminar, being a Jesuit institution led by a polish priest. In the communist period there were allowed two dioceses, at Alba Iulia and Bucharest, and the other ones, including Moldova, had to continue in semi-clandestine. In a description made by the State Secretariat for Cults, the communists tried to convince them to cease any contact with the Holy See and to organize themselves into a national church. As in the previous case, some of the priests were imprisoned for their beliefs.

The religious reform managed to enter in Moldova during the reign of Despot Voda, between the years of 1561-1563. During his stay in Germany he became a follower of Protestantism, and later he tried to promote it in Moldova. Unfortunately for him, the Moldovans where not interested to become protestants, being faithful to Orthodox Church. Even if he did not succeed to spread the principles of the Reform in Moldova, he had an important role in the development of culture and education in Moldova, founding the Latin School in Cotnari (Cihodaru, Platon, 1980). The communist regime did not agree with
Christian denominations other than Orthodox, because they could not control them as they wished, because they had a global central authority outside of the country. With the beginning of 1948, it was elaborated a new constitution which changed the view over religious denominations. With the new regime, the denominations could be free, like Pentecostals, Adventists, and Baptists etc. In 1958, the communist regime tried to convince these denominations to stop their growth and impose the discernible of churches in order to reduce the number of served people. Even if they were subject to difficult situations they managed to resist and to grow further (Petcu, 2005).

IV. Method and methodology

This research paper is based on bibliographical study but also on censuses from 1992 until 2011 regarding the religious structure of the population of Iasi County, the data source being National Institute of Statistics. I processed the statistical data using Microsoft Excel and Philcarto, representing through cartographical maps the areal differences concerning the increase and decrease of orthodox, roman-catholic and Pentecostals in Iasi County.

V. Research Results

For this analysis I chose to take into consideration census results from 1992 until 2011, about the religious structure of the population in Iasi County. It is obvious that Iasi County has a diverse religious population, fact that is valid until nowadays.

Table 1. Estimated number of increase/decrease of religious structure of the population, in Iasi County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious denomination</th>
<th>Census 1992</th>
<th>Census 2011</th>
<th>Estimated increase/decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>757285</td>
<td>663522</td>
<td>-93733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman-catholic</td>
<td>39627</td>
<td>35303</td>
<td>-4324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek-catholic</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>-260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformed</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>-104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augustan Evangelical</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unitarian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>&lt;3</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old-rite Christian</td>
<td>2353</td>
<td>3561</td>
<td>1208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>914</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As we see in table 1, there are some religious denominations who have known an increase in their adherents, like Pentecostals, old-rite Christians, but the biggest number is of those who did not declare their religion. Another concerning fact is the increasing number of atheists, with a gain of 361 people. The religious denomination with the most decreasing number of adherents is Orthodoxy, with a loss of 93733 adherents, followed by Roman-Catholics.
Observing figure 1, we can see a decrease in the number of orthodox people across approximately the entire county. The most “affected” territories are Iasi city, Pascani city, Targu Frumos city and Miroslovesti. The main reason might be migration, especially employment and studies, the fact that people want a better job or students wanting a better chance for them to develop in other city/country who offers them many opportunities. Another reason might be the conversion to another religious cult, because some of the believers disagree with the position of the Orthodox Church when it comes to pressing problems of society. The areas which gained adherents throughout time are Miroslava, Ciurea, Barnova and Valea Lupului. Regarding the increase in these areas it may be due to a high birth rate, which leads to an enlargement of the orthodox community. It also may be the fact that many people migrated from urban to rural areas, wanting to live a healthier life.

Data source: National Institute of Statistics

Fig.2. Areal differences regarding the decrease/increase of Roman Catholics, between the years 1992-2011, in Iasi County
Concerning the number of Roman-Catholics (Fig.2.), compared with the orthodox map, the situation is not as bad. We can see a major decrease in Iasi city, Pascani city, Butea and Mircesti. A reason for this decrease may be represented by migration, entire families leaving to other counties or countries, so many priests remove from their registers families who have not given any sign for a long period of time. Also, we can speak of a low birth rate or a high mortality in some areas of the county. There has been an increase in Barnova, Ciurea, Miroslava and Valea Lupului. As it was said previously, in the orthodox case, it might also be about a high birth rate in these areas or about internal migration which lead to a growth of Roman-Catholics.

Fig.3. Areal differences regarding the decrease/increase of Pentecostals, between the years 1992-2011, in Iasi County

In the figure 3, I chose to represent the Pentecostals because they have experienced the highest growth. As it is seen, approximately the entire county knows an increase in their adherents’ number, but the major increase is registered in Iasi city, Voinesti, Mironeasa and
Todiresti. The growth across the county is due to missionary factors, Pentecostalism being known as a missionary movement, evangelism being at the centre of the church’s purpose in the world. This may also be due to a high birth rate, fact that is determined by their religious beliefs. At the base of this growth may stand the attraction which people have towards to Pentecostals beliefs, to their doctrine or maybe they relate with them. The main decrease is registered in Aroneanu and Rachiteni and quite a low decrease in some other areas. This decrease is probably determined by internal migration or emigration because of the difficult economical situation or studying in other counties, in another city or abroad.

VI. Conclusions
In conclusion, after the fall of communism the religious landscape got more diversified in Iasi County, and now we can talk about religious freedom. As we said previously, the orthodox and roman-catholic adherents are decreasing, while other religious denominations are increasing.

The decreasing number of adherents to some denomination in several areas is maybe because of a low birth rate/high mortality, internal migration or migration to other countries in search of a work place or for studying, conversion to other denominations, etc. The increasing number of adherents to other denominations may be due to a high birth rate which is encouraged by religious beliefs, the internal migration to areas which have known this increase, the attraction that people feel towards these denominations which leads to conversion etc.

After the demise of the communist system we can talk about the development of religious pluralism, not that it was not before, but about the territorial extension of it, about the heterogeneity of the religious landscape. Even if Orthodoxy is still the main belief and it has the most followers, we can also observe an increase of followers to other denominations.

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* ALDO (2006). Welcome to Iasi with an introduction by Constantin Ciopraga

Biodata

I obtained a bachelor’s degree in Geography and master’s degree in Tourism and Regional Development, from the Faculty of Geography and Geology. I obtained also a master’s degree in Management in Tourism, from the Faculty of Economy and Business Administration. I started doctoral school in 2012 at Faculty of Geography and Geology, Human Geography domain, having as a subject of study “Territorial manifestations of religious structure of the population in Iasi county”, under the coordination of Professor Ph.D. Ionel Muntele. I published several articles regarding the religious aspects of Iasi county, but also about the sustainable development of Rosia Montana.