

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF THE EMANCIPATION OF THE ROMANIANS LIVING IN THE NĂSĂUD BORDER DISTRICT

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Abstract: Ein großer Teil des heutigen Kreises Bistrița-Năsăud in Nordost-Rumänien war gegen Ende der Feudalepoche unter den Intellektuellen als „Năsăuder Grenzdistrikt“ bekannt. Es war auch die Heimatregion des II. Rumänischen Grenzregiments. Für die Regierung in Wien war es durchaus von Vorteil, das die große Zahl von Bauern-Soldaten nur geringe materielle Unterstützung brauchte und stets einsatzbereit war, andererseits stellte es sich aber auch als ein „geopolitischer Boomerang“ aus, da die einheimischen Rumänen vom Zeitpunkt der Emanzipation von dieser Situation profitierten. Der Năsăuder Grenzdistrikt war geodemographisch und ethnokulturell ein rumänisches Gebiet. Es gab zwar die Nachteile der strengen, z. T. rüden militärischen Ordnung, im Gegensatz wirkte es aber stimulierend für den wirtschaftlichen Fortschritt und den Wandel im kulturellen, konfessionellen und geographischen Kontext. Die Region spielte eine bedeutende Rolle bei der Bildung eines Nationalbewusstseins und Stolzes, was auch durch das Fahnenmotto: „Virtus Romana Rediviva“ symbolisiert wird.

Schlagwörter: Grenzdistrikt, kulturelle Emanzipation, „geopolitischer Boomerang“, politische Entität, militärische Entität, Verwaltungseinheit, Geoverhaltensentität

Beginning and evolution. Confronted with various internal dangers (the range of claims of the Romanian peasants exploited for almost three centuries by the Bistrițean magistrate) and external ones (the Russo-ottoman expansionism, the emigration and immigration phenomena, the overborder smuggling, the epidemic danger etc.), the imperial authorities foremost of whom was the empress Maria Tereza, decided to militarize the Rodna Valley, starting with the year 1762.

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During **the first stage**, 23 villages (21 on the Rodna valley and 2 on the Șieu valley) were militarized and transformed into politico-administrative and military-border entities.

The second stage materialized, in this geographical area, into the extension of the militarization (1762) over two communes on the Budacul valley, one on the Șieu, two on the Luțu valley and two on the Mureș valley, redeemed from their respective landlords. This stage practically ended in 1773 when, after the first visit of the emperor Josef II to the district, several villages were detached

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from some older border communes, thus becoming politico-military and administrative independent entities.

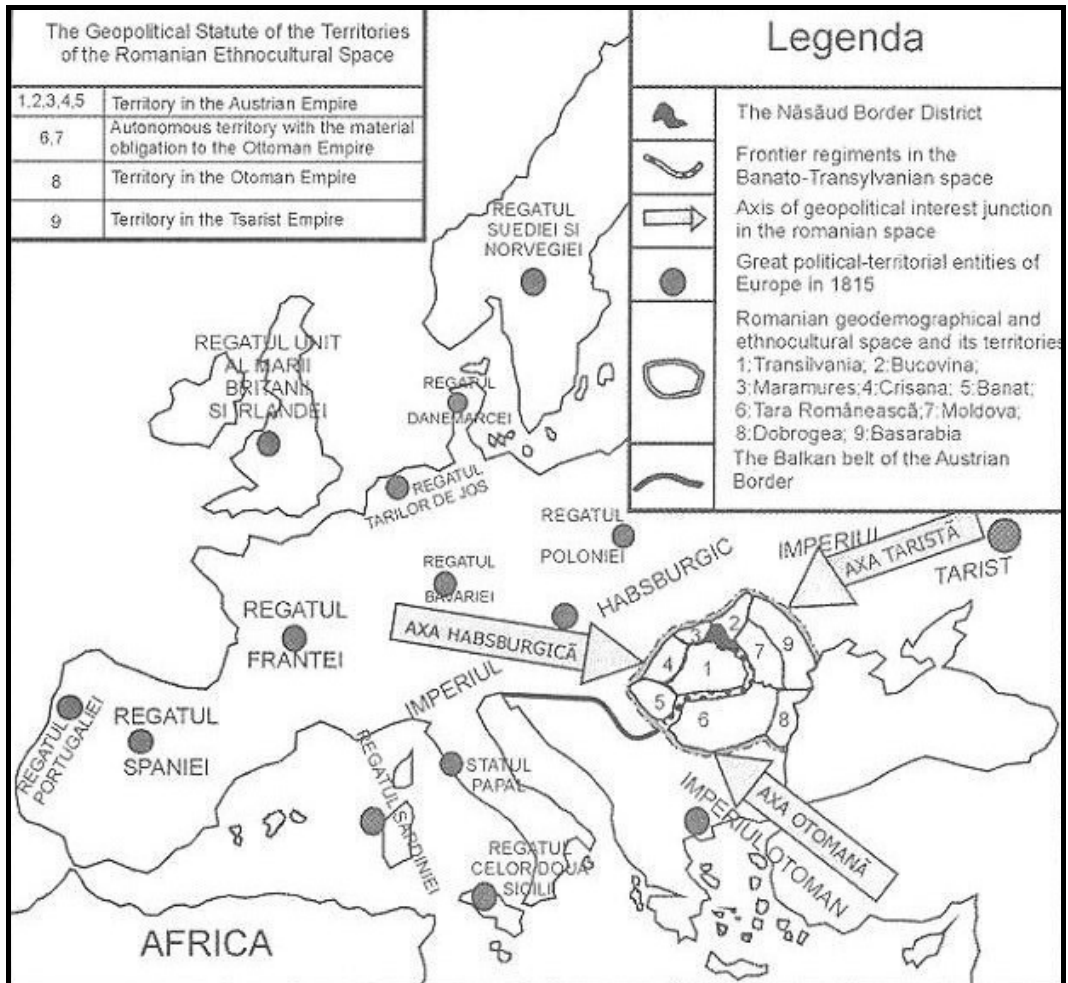


Fig. 1 The geopolitical regional, Romanian and European context in which the Border District of Năsăud functioned (the 1815's Europe, after the Vienna Congress)

The third and the last major stage was a consequence of the second visit of the emperor Josef II, in 1783. On this occasion, he ordered to include the eight Bârgău localities into the regiment territory, by redeeming them from the Bethlen family.

After the revolutionary events of 1848-1849, by the Disposition of January 22, 1851, they ordered to abolish the border regiments and on April 1, 1851, the communes of the Năsăud Border District were transposed under civil authority.

Political, administrative and military entity. Representing a part of the oriental policy of the Austrian empire and expressing the geopolitical and geostrategical interests of the House of Habsburg for this geographical and geodemographic region, the militarization of the Rodna Valley region conferred to the Năsăud Border District the status of a **political entity**.

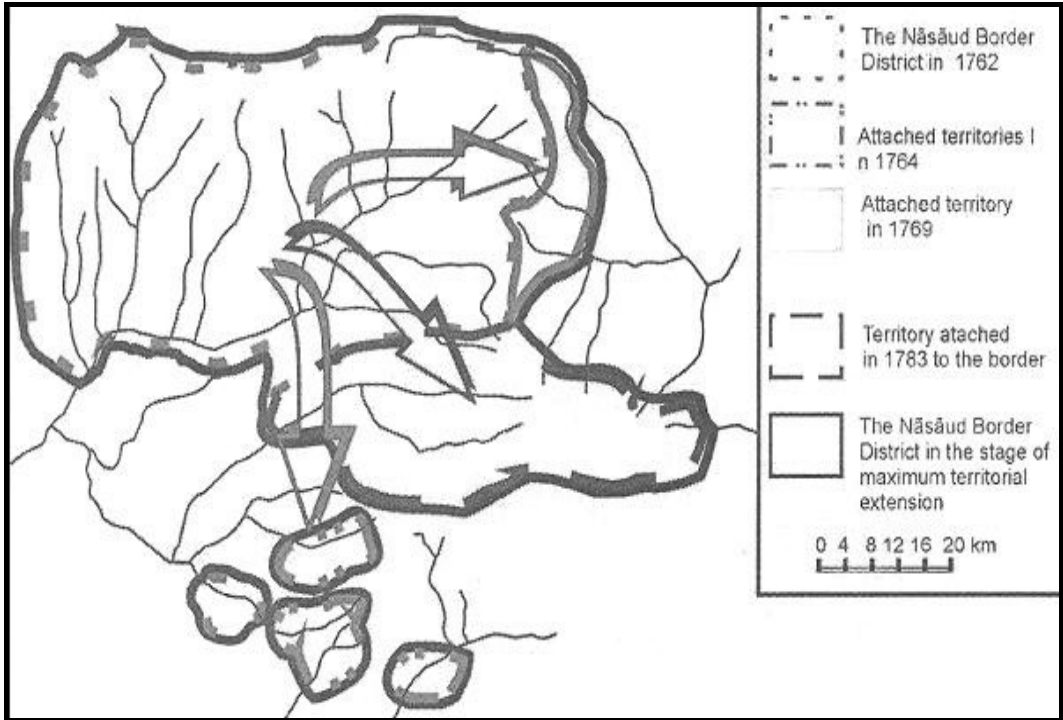


Fig. 2 Stages of the temporal-spatial evolution of the Năsăud Border District

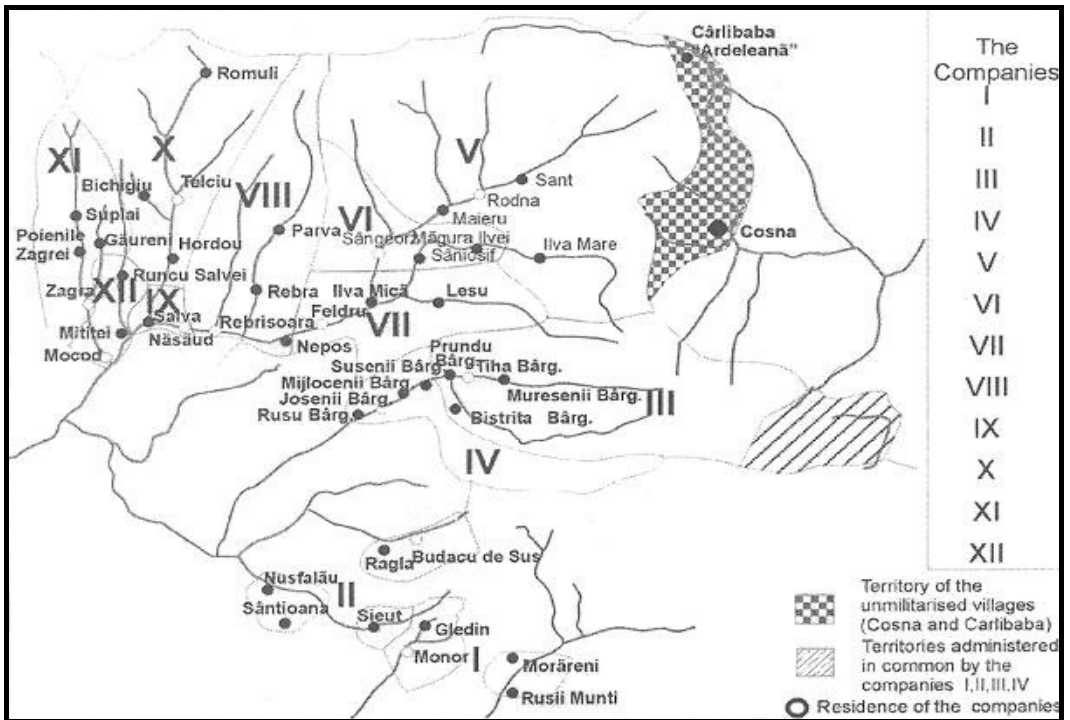


Fig. 3 The military-administrative distribution of the Năsăud Border District after the last reorganization (1816)

The authorities attempt to achieve their politico-military and geostrategical goals obliged them, considering the large mass of civil population in the district, to promote and obey laws or rules specific to the civil administration, which conferred to the district the status of **administrative entity**.

The internal and external politics of the House of Habsburg required the military organization of the Năsăud territory and its inhabitants, transformed into a “people of soldiers”, which attributed the district (first of all) the status of a **military unit**.

Social problems. The social geographical components were parts of a wide process of autodefinition and administrative improvement of the district.

On November 12, 1766 the “Border Statute” or the “Regulations” appeared; referring to it, G.Barițiu declared that it “formed one of the best foundations for joining the culture and civilization”.

This document settled, among others, several elements regarding the social domain of the inhabitants’ life, such as:

- the obligations and rights of the border inhabitants;
- the novelty of remuneration for the military activity performed;
- the settlement of the relations concerning the border family, adoption and home-community;
- the setting up and functioning of a military medico-sanitary office, rigorously organized aiming at the territorial epidemical supervision, granting medical care in time of war and peace and the application of the Austrian sanitary laws in all the affiliated communes.

Implications in the cultural and confessional evolution. There is no doubt that the geography of the Romanian Năsăud borders’ emancipation was achieved not only through material means, but also – maybe first of all – through changes in the field of education, culture and church, which, as fundamental institutions of the state, played an important role in the cultural development and progress of the Romanian masses .

The promotion of the enlightened despotism at the Court of Vienna in general, and its Josifinic variant, in particular, had favourable consequences for the Romanians in the field of education too; it was followed by the establishment of the first “**trivial schools**” – Trivial Schulen – (from **trivium** – in which three subjects: writing, reading and counting were taught) in Năsăud, Maieru and Monor, in 1770 and in Zagra and Prundu Bârgăului in 1786; all the subjects were taught in Romanian. Later, in 1816 out of social and military reasons the trivial school of Maieru was moved to Sângeorz and in 1837 the one in Năsăud was moved to Telciu.

From 1771 a Latin-German school, called “The Normal School” and later the “Superior Normal School” (“Normal-Hauptschule”) functioned in 1784, a “Military Instruction Institute” (“Militär-Erziehunghaus”) was also established in Năsăud, being unique in Transylvania.

During the second part of the border period, in all the border communes they set up **communal schools** or **national popular schools** (National Gemeinde Schulen) while in 1826, in Năsăud – a **girls’ school**. On the basis of an authoritative act in 1827, they organized “**Repetition Schools**” for the graduates of the village schools and in 1837 there were inaugurated the 6 months’ “preparatory” courses within the Normal School, aiming at preparing primary teachers for the communal national schools.

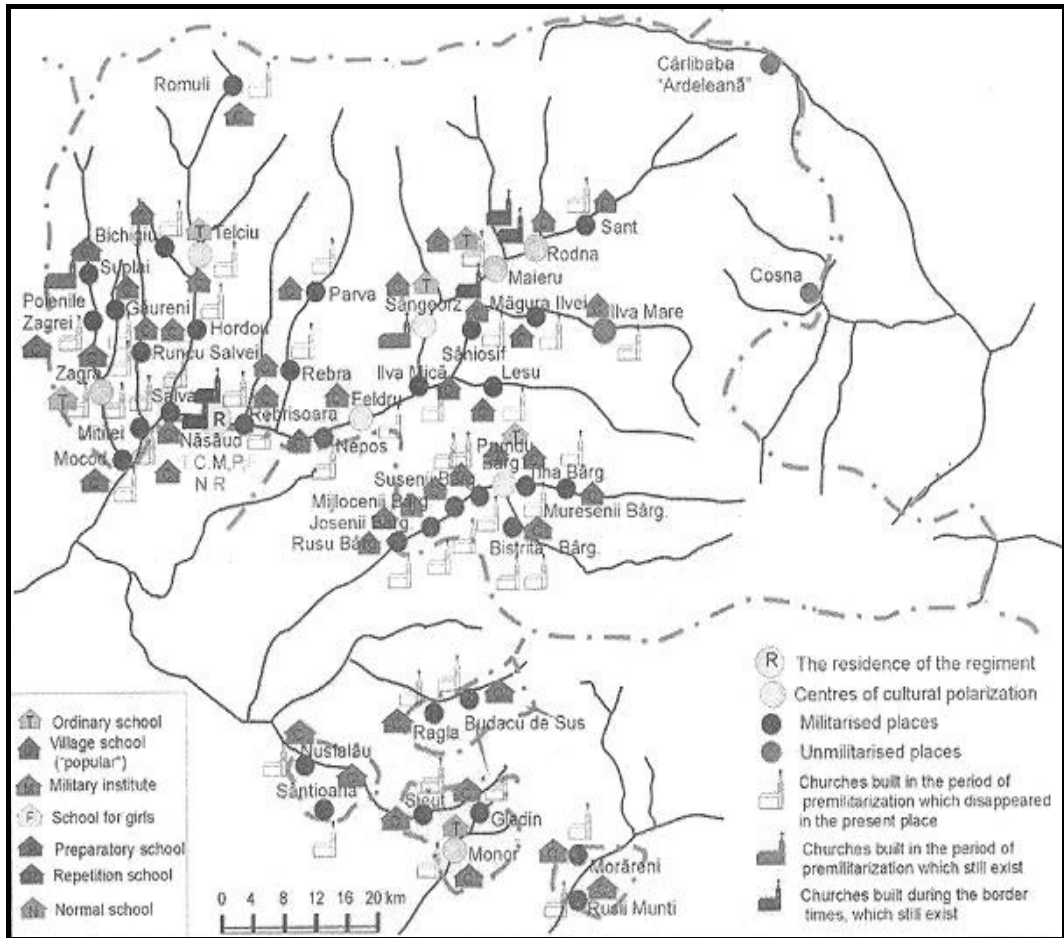


Fig. 4 The main cultural and confessional reference points of the border (1762 – 1851)

Considering the fundamental coordinates of the **confessional geography**, (fig.3) we find that, if over Transylvania there was a clear-cut contrast between the ideas and aspirations of the united intellectual elite and the predominant opinion climate of the village peasantry (proved by the orthodox resistance) within the territory of the Năsăud border, it was initially diminished through the authorities' policy related to the organization of the Greek-Catholic church and the consolidation of the union, and then, during the second part of the border, - through the activity of well - instructed clergymen, as well as of brilliant personalities such as the vicars Ion Marian and Grigor Moisil, all of them outstanding charismatic and confessional - cultural representatives, endowed with a considerable sense of history.

The border managed to strengthen the Greek-Catholic church and to line it up to the aspirations of the Romanian natives, also marking a crystallization of the church hierarchies and a certain disciplining and ordering of the ecclesiastic staff and clerical administration, according to the model of the rigorous catholic institutions. Worth mentioning was a greater involvement of the church into the ordering of the village life; despite the material difficulties, a lot of churches were built during the border period, while the old ones were renovated.

The Năsăud border also managed to solve the components related to the territorial organization of the rectorship and, later, of the vicarship; on the social level, it promoted in maintaining a reasonable status for the clergymen, according to their mission in society.

Economical development. Important **mutations** determined the militarization, in the **domain of economical geography** too, for this process developed in an eminently silvopastoral mountainous territory.

The militarization quickened the appearance of elements specific to the transition from the feudal to the capitalist economy, materialized in the district's manufactures, or extraction and trade; thus the relation goods – money extended and the internal market developed, under the circumstances of a consistent contour that the enlightenment was obtaining.

Besides the redimensioning of the traditional economical branches, there also take place, at the same time, an increase of the productive activities, the appearance of new other branches, which were facilitated by the new organizational frame of life within the border region.

Agriculture strengthens its role of fundamental activity, **the plant culture** (with special emphasis on cereals, potatoes, linen, hemp and fruit-trees) diversify and improve with a view to stimulating **the animals' breeding**, especially sheep breeding on the alpine meadows, the mountains and grasslands are given to the border communes.

The forest and mine activities are intensified by utilizing some other resources of the subsoil within this area (limestone, andesites, dacites, marble, mineral waters etc.)

The millings industry, alongside with **home spinning and weaving** on the **primary wood processing** acquire an unprecedented proportion. In Năsăud, a beer and alcohol factory is built, as well as a manufacture for skin processing, while at Prundu Bârgăului a paper factory ("mill") is constructed.

The communication roads geography also underwent important mutations, important linking roads being constructed between the district and other neighbouring territories; as well as several bridges, most of them covered.

The commercial activities were performed especially within periodical fairs, which took place in some of the important localities (Năsăud, Rodna, Zagra, Monor, Prundu Bârgăului, Morăreni).

Outlooks and behaviour. Being established after centuries of the people's isolation, for fear of the invaders and nature's hostility, after dominations of different kinds, which generated a state of obedience, of material and spiritual misery, associated to our secular traditionalism and a complex and inert empirism, the military conditions of the Năsăud border were to determine profound changes in the **geography of outlooks and behaviour**.

The fundamental coordinates of the geography of outlooks and behaviour could be found in the attitude of the border people towards certain elements of progress and civilization, which the new authorities endeavoured to promote in the district.

At first, the reaction to the **militarization act** was hostile and hasty, both for fear of the military service, and because of the "short-term" way of thinking of the Romanian, accustomed to expecting his major problems to be solved from day to day. The series of rebellions and exodus at the beginning of the border period justifies this opinion, while the diminishing of the above – mentioned phenomena, with the passing of time, is a proof of the outlook of fate-reconciliation, typical for the Transylvania Romanian peasant.

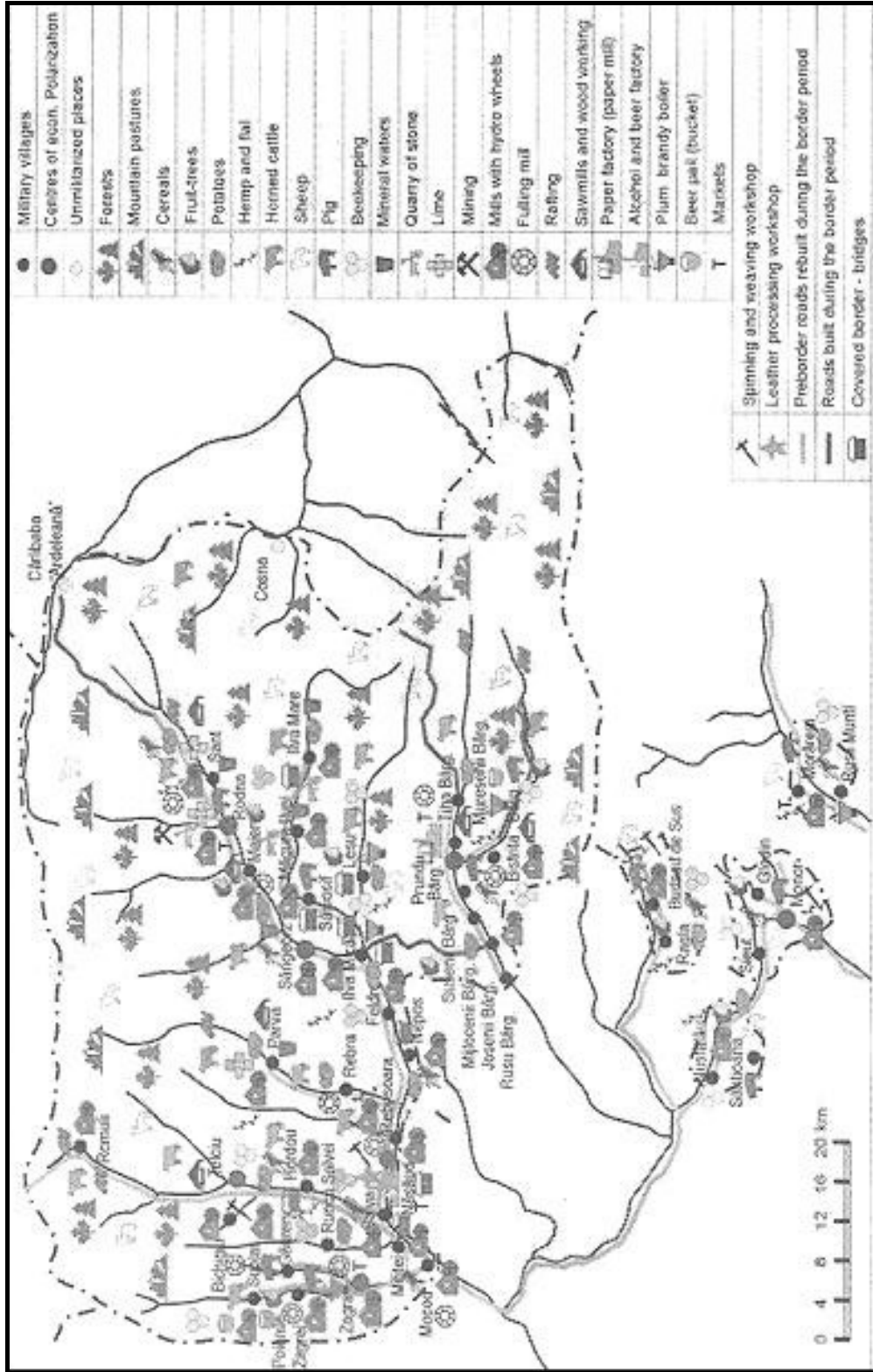


Fig. 5 The Năsăud Border District – fundamental coordinates of the economical development (1762 – 1851)

The outlook of many of the border peasants on the **health condition** and the necessity for the qualified medical staff to obey the sanitary regulations was rooted in the past, in superstitions, in local customs and level of instruction.

The outlook on the systematization of the border settlements was also reserved at the beginning; the advantages and superiority of life in such habitual units – well united and grouped – were to be then recognized by their people.

The outlook on school also underwent an interesting evolution, from the phase of an initial reserved attitude on the part of many border inhabitants to the acceptance of their children being schooled on short term and further to the awareness of the role of school in coming off an enslaving past.

As regards **the Romanian church united to Rome** (Greek-Catholic), the Năsăud peasants had firstly a hostile attitude, not from reasons of rejection of the imperial policy, through which catholicism was planted in the Transylvanian ground, but, purely out of an excess of traditionalism and fidelity to a way of thinking and life which had little changed over the centuries, and, last but not least, out of ignorance. However, towards middle of the border period, catholicism, in its Romanian cvasiorthodox variant, won, in favour of Romanian masses.

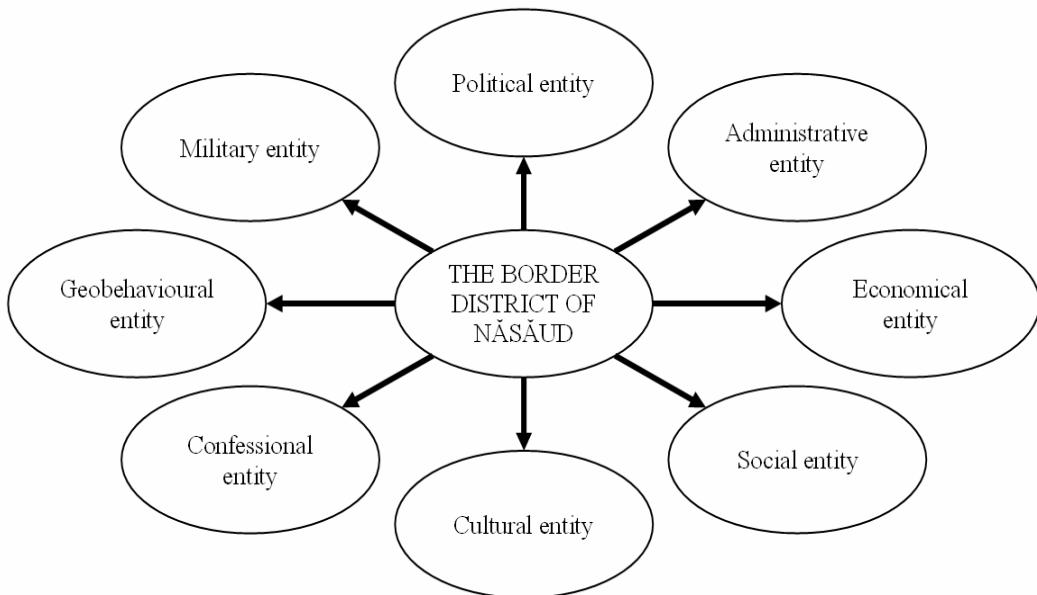


Fig. 6 The many-sided status of the Năsăud Border District

The outlook on time also developed, from the preborder period, in which the rural traditional and above all sedentary, with pastoral and agricultural preoccupations, expressed a certain indifference to time – to the military border society, in which the military-soldiers discipline and the border obligations determined a rationalization of time and another outlook and attitude to it.

Conceived as a defending instrument of this part of the Habsburg Empire, both against internal and external dangers, the Năsăud Border District developed and asserted itself as a **many-sided status**, concomitently a **political**

entity, an administrative entity, a military entity, a social entity, an economic entity, a cultural and confessional entity and a geobehavioural entity.

The many-sided status of the Năsăud border and the great victories of the autochthonous population in the field of economical, social, cultural, confessional, political and – above all – national emancipation, determined an impressive and extremely favourable spreading of the response of this institution through ages, front its end up to now; thus it has proved that The Năsăud Border District was, is and will remain not only a referential moment in the geography and history of these places, but also a state of mind, generating pride and hope.

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