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## **EURASIA'S RESISTANCE TO THE OCEANIC POWERS THE US-RUSSIA CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EU, CHINA OR INDIA**

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**Abstract:** Geopolitical Eurasia is the large continental mass with the Heartland core group: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia and so on, exporters of raw materials by direct land and the Continental Rimland: China, Germany, Turkey, Italy, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Thailand and so on, made up of Continental Powers, while the Oceanic Powers, led by the US dominating maritime trade and oceanic embargo capacity, brings together exporting powers: Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, UAE and so on and industrialized maritime powers: Great Britain, Japan, etc., alongside exporting states constrained by them, from Africa, Latin America and island Asia. If the US succeeds in the trade blockade of the Heartland, stopping the export of cheap and abundant raw materials, it indirectly brings the European Union, mainland East Asia (China) and South Asia (India) to its knees, delivering four strikes direct and preventing the emergence of a power that would take its place as world leader. If the Rimland manages to bypass the American embargo by continuing to import from Heartland, Britain will lose dominance in Europe to Germany, Japan will lose the dominance of Asia before China, Saudi Arabia before Iran and India will dominate the Indian Ocean, hence the 3+1 main regions taking over Africa, America and Australia, which will culminate in the decline of the US power, the dominance of the Eurasian world and of the continental powers before the maritime powers.

**Key words:** spheres of influence, dominant power, embargo, trade, raw materials, US dollar

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## INTRODUCTION

In Eastern Europe, there is hatred towards Russia since historical times, in Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, horrifying preparations are being made for war (which has been triggered in the meantime), and the USA is threatening Russia with a trade embargo like Iran (Barro, 2020). Taking the three current situations in turn, which spanned the entire end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we can see similarities at the global level.

In Eastern Europe, focusing especially on Romania, there is an endemic hatred against Russia, which has dominated this part of the world for the last century. This feeling is more present when we get closer to Russia, in states like Ukraine or Georgia, but even milder if we move away, in states like: Hungary, Serbia, Italy or Austria, where admiration already begins. Although Poland has suffered for centuries due to Germanic ambitions, the domination of Russia through the USSR in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, makes it look nervously to the east, to Russia. Instead, Greece, Armenia and even Bulgaria feel more embarrassed by the growing power of Turkey, Belgium or Denmark hate the ever-invading Germany, Ireland or the African states hate Great Britain, Latin America hates the USA that subjugated them economically, China hates Japan, which has always invaded its territory, and Vietnam is anxiously watching its ever-rival China.

Similar to human psychological situations, where strong people have always sought to subjugate and use the weak, so great powers dominated and made vassals of weaker states, mainly territorially close, where hatred of imperial power grew. Likewise, weak states, when they had support, assumed a role too large for their power, venturing to threaten much stronger states, thus doing the small country of Cuba, which, secured by the support of the USSR, dared to threaten with missiles of mass destruction even the great power USA, in 1962 or Georgia when it threatened Russia in 2008, at the encouragement of NATO forces, both states suffering the visible consequences even today (Bertonha, 2009; Rose, 1998). The same is happening now with Israel, which, although it has a small area and population in relation to its neighbors, is keeping up with the Arab powers, on the other hand, Hong Kong has already fallen before the rise of China's power, and Taiwan is going to suffer the same. in the future (Chomsky, 2019; Marshall, 2020). Thus, weak states, if they do not stand up to the great powers, risk their colonies, but if they rise up against them, they will most often suffer later when they run out of the external support that encouraged them.

Regarding the period of hatred and enmity, there is a continuous evolution according to the dominant power at the reference date. In Romania, before the current anger towards Russia, they hated Hungary (even during the Second World War, when the conflagration caused by the Germans did not affect Romania, being their ally, hence the respect for the German nation, for the products and the ethnic Germans who became the president of this country in the period 2014-2024).

Before the 1940-1950 period, Romania was hostile to Hungary for over two centuries, the main reason being that it was at that time the great European power next to Austria (in Austria-Hungary). In 1900, for example, Germany had 56 million inhabitants and Austria-Hungary 47 million people, with a huge

power and concentrated mainly on Europe (and the Romanian territories), while England, France, Italy, Spain or Turkey, they each held, in order: 39, 38, 32, 18 and 31 million, and globally, the major powers the United States or Japan held 76 and 43 million respectively (Kaplan, 2015).

Before this moment, Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) was a great rival, constantly destroying the economic power of the Romanian provinces, at a time when it possessed, for example in 1700, 25 million people, more than Russia which had only 13 million or Austria-Hungary with 10 million (Darwin, 2021).

And in the future the evolution of hatred will evolve, feeling a growing disappointment on the USA, which through the IMF encouraged us to destroy the economy and got involved in the country's politics with increasingly pronounced effects at present, and towards the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, probably the anger will focus on the Western European powers, especially the German ones, who are trying to transform the Eastern Europe that fled of Russia, into their own territory of delight.

We also find these evolutions of hatred worldwide. For example, in Latin America, before the anger against the USA, after the year 1500 the hatred was directed towards the Spanish conquistadors, who managed to destroy in a few years, millennial civilizations, in Africa it was against England and France and now it is growing slightly against China who takes them resources more and more greedily. In China, hatred has been directed towards Japan for centuries, then towards the USSR, which was strong and dominated its politics by occupying its territories, and now it is growing towards the USA, which is blocking its world domination. In Vietnam, the eternal enemy was China that invaded it 17 times in its history, then France and later to the USA that caused resounding wars throughout the 20th century, and now it starts again on China, a state that recently expanded into South China Sea (Stuart-Fox, 2003; Nguyen, 2017).

The second problem, that of the war in the world. It exists all over the planet, in Africa or the southern half of Asia or the Balkans in Europe where it manifests itself in the classic way, with weapons and direct victims. In Europe or Latin America with economic submission, in the USA with frequent "civil wars" of those who lose elections to those who win them (with the help of NGOs or instigators of all kinds), and in China with a state war -citizen, in which economic development is encouraged, but with clearly predetermined directions and consequences for mistakes made by citizens. In Romania we do not have inter-ethnic and inter-religious wars, nor inter-state wars with our neighbors, but similar to the other Eastern European countries, for these benefits we had to accept "Shock Therapy", we borrow billions of dollars that do not reach in the economy, we restrict industrialization and encourage the exodus of population to the allied powers in the west, similar to any state at war.

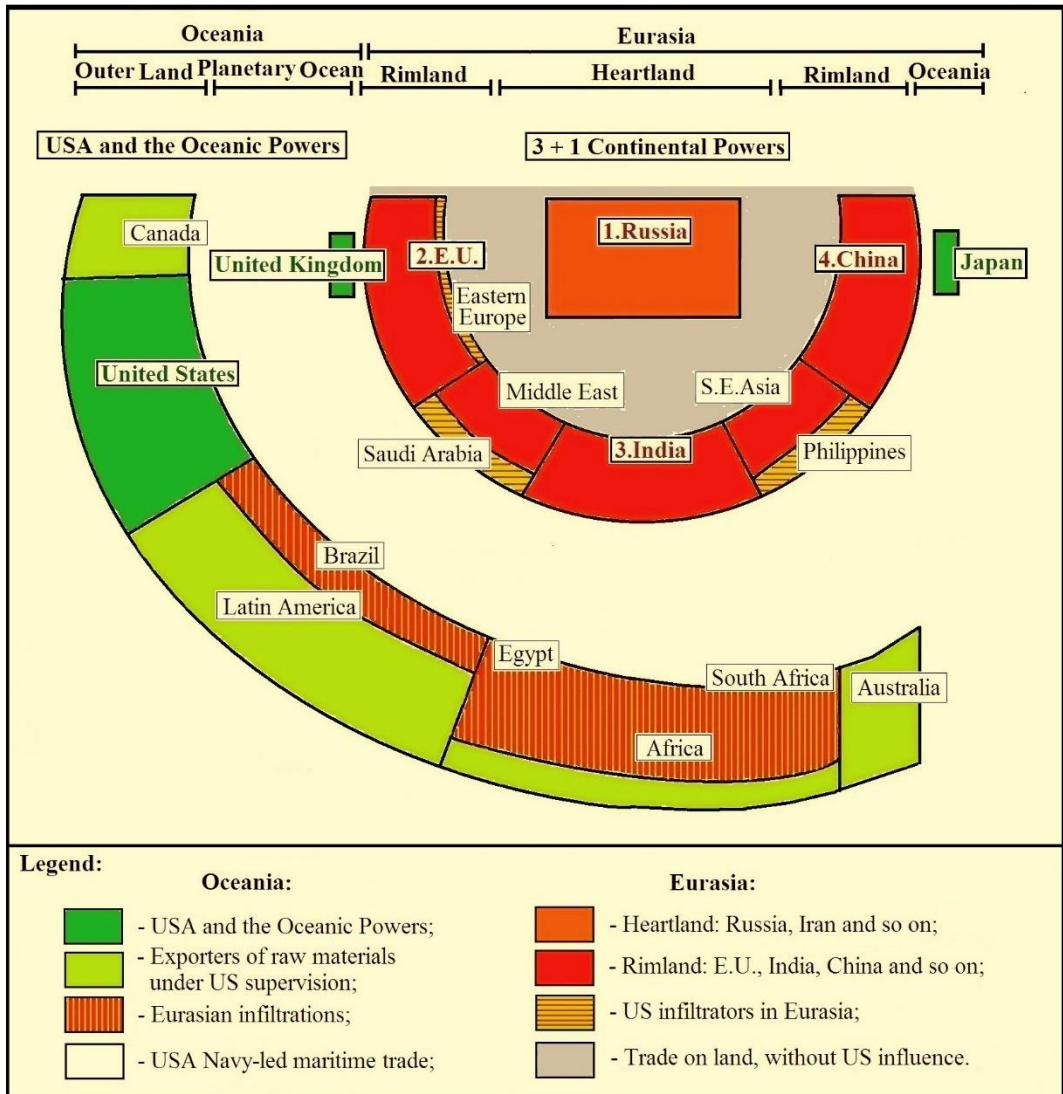
The third element, the US trade and economic embargoes on Iran or Russia, constitutes the main part of the article's study, this war having international connotations to be detailed.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

The observation of events in a country in contact with major world interests is the essence of this article, where troops of the current Anglo-Saxon world power are stationed, as well as French-Latin and Italian-Latin, a language family of which Romanian is a part, with German president and Orthodox Christian religion similar to eastern Slavic states including Russia, with trips to

Orthodox Greece and Islamic Turkey, pilgrimage to Jewish Israel, laborers from Vietnam, Sri Lanka or Nepal, Filipino nannies and Chinese manufactured goods, all these reflecting in the discourse of the political parties, of the news for and against, east and west.

The implementation of the two categories of power, continental and maritime, is a historical fact, and the emergence of communism and allied states in Eurasia, as well as the consolidation of US power in the waters of the Planetary Ocean, a fact materialized after the end of the Second World War, led to the drawing choremei spheres of world influence, the outline from which the structuring of the sub-chapters starts.



**Figure 1.** Chorema of spheres of world influence between the USA and Eurasia  
Source: appreciation of the authors



The data on human losses, the millions of war refugees, the accusations of one side and the other, all of which exist in abundance in all wars, were avoided. Civilians have always been part of the war, helped soldiers, made donations and sometimes, for the defense of family and material goods, they became military volunteers. The intended results are not to look for culprits, whether Russia is an unscrupulous empire, or NATO has always become a provocateur of wars through its expansion. The use of prohibited weapons is not analyzed either, rules that have always been violated. And only its extended implications, over periods of decades. We have not focused on Ukraine's abundant coal resources or agricultural land, nor on the highly skilled workforce expected by Western importers of these immigrants, nor on the historical correctness of its vast landmass with foreign territories. The information concerns similar situations in the past based on which a forecast of the following decades is attempted, for all of Europe, Asia or the USA. And these consequences are. We see how India is still massively importing weaponry from Russia, the US is threatening India with sanctions trying to break this state from the Eurasian power. Japan, influenced by the alliance with the USA and Europe, re-opens the issue of the Kuril Islands, Canada sends soldiers to Europe and Africa suffers from a lack of grain supplies, imported in the past from Ukraine and Russia. The war is far from local or short-lived.

We do not want to emphasize the changing spheres of world influence, a long-debated topic, these spheres being in continuous shaping, increasingly unpredictable in the last three decades. Calm was a rarity, with the great leaders always at the negotiating table, and the current war between Russia and NATO through Ukraine, increasingly visibly involves the entire planet. Maybe years from now it will be categorized as World War III, or another war with external implications, like Vietnam or Afghanistan, where weapons quietly infiltrated across the border and sent by apparently neutral states decided the fate of the conflict.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

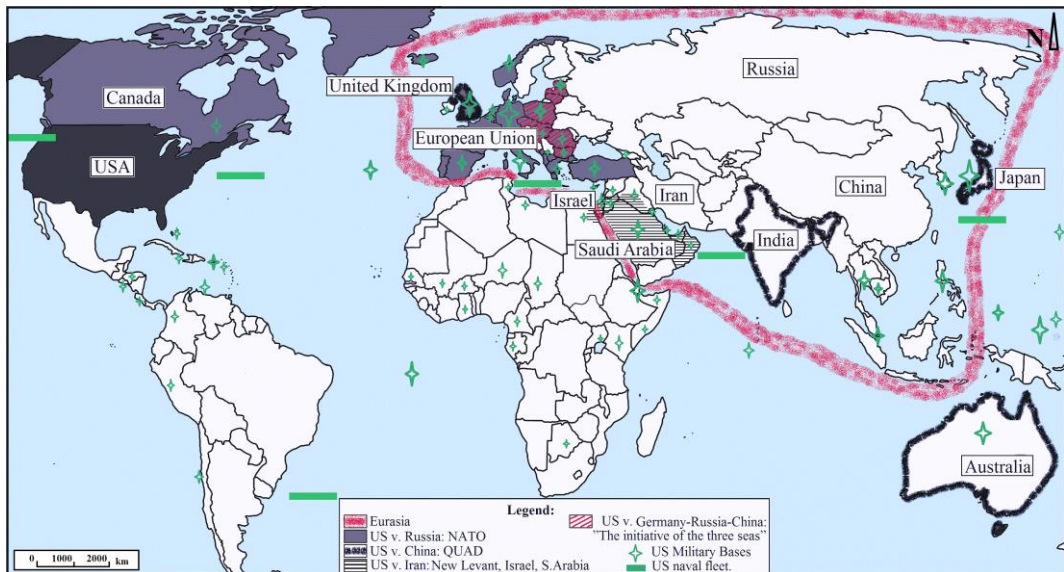
### **Two different supply systems. US ocean interests and Russia's continental interests**

Ocean trade carried out by ships approaches 90% of world trade volume, but only a fraction of this is long-distance, intra-continental trade. Among the states of the world there are some that rely exclusively on maritime trade, without the possibility of land trade with other states, and others have this possibility as well. The strongest overland trade between more than two states is in Eurasia, less in the Americas, and growing for the future in Africa. Exclusively maritime trading powers include: the USA, Canada (excluding trade with the USA), Australia, Japan, Indonesia, Great Britain, but also: Brazil, Malaysia, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, South Africa or Spain, which are powers semi-oceanic. Continental powers exclusively include Russia, Kazakhstan but also: China, Germany, Turkey, having a major semi-continental role and: Italy, Vietnam, India, Pakistan, Iran and even France, which have a geography that allows them both possibilities. Analyzing the trade of raw materials, we see two camps of exporters-importers. An oceanic one from: Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia and in the not-too-distant past: South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, etc. (states that are increasingly leaning towards Eurasia), towards maritime powers: USA, Japan and Great Britain. The second, which has double possibilities, both maritime and continental (via roads, railways but also pipelines) from the center

of Eurasia known as the Heartland: Iran, Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and so on, to states in the Rimland: China, the European Union, Turkey, India, Pakistan and so on.

The US owns mining companies in the sea-exporting states of: America, Africa, Australia and the southern half of Asia, but less in the mining states of deep continental Eurasia, this fact has recent historical origins, when there were USSR with 22, 4 million km<sup>2</sup>, China, Vietnam, Mongolia or the states of communist Eastern Europe (another 12 million km<sup>2</sup> in total), and American companies concentrated their investments outside this perimeter (Nolan, 2012; Caragea, 2009).

Also, although Russia has a land military power of great capacity, equal to that of the USA, that is, in a war near Russia, it would win, and the same is already the case with China, which would cope well with a conflict near it, both located in Eurasia, the US has military bases all over the globe and a huge sea power with nuclear powered aircraft carriers or submarines (Figure 2) which makes it able to dominate a war anywhere else on the planet except Russia or China at their home (Bianchini and Fiori, 2018).



**Figure 2.** US military power, decision and maritime, encircling Eurasian adversaries

Source: information processed by: Hastedt, 2020; Hook and Spanier, 2018; Diaconescu and Mazilu, 2021; Suci, Caunic and Muntele, 2010; Grumaz, 2013; Reid, 2004.

Because it owns an extensive fleet and dominates the planetary ocean but also the export of oceanic states with its companies, as well as the import of raw materials, it dominates the economy of: Great Britain, Japan, Canada, Australia, Saudi Arabia or other states in America, Africa and Asia insular. But it cannot enter inside Eurasia. Although it succeeded in forming alliances with the states of the Rimland to encircle the USSR in the past, now, with few exceptions (the expansion of NATO in Eastern Europe), it cannot penetrate militarily, economically and decisively inside the Heartland, which is largely dominated by only a few countries: Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Iran, Pakistan and so on, approaching 35 million km<sup>2</sup>. The US tried to penetrate the

continental space to destabilize Eurasia, but it left Yugoslavia, Vietnam and recently Afghanistan, the same fate having it in Iraq, while the prospect of conquering Iran is increasingly distant. And the powers economically close to the US seem to be playing tricks on him, with Turkey somewhat returns its weapons, as well as: Germany, Hungary, Italy, China and increasingly: South Korea, Thailand, India or Saudi Arabia, which tend to buy materials receive and trade with Eurasia, drastically hampering US influence over this large land mass. The time has passed when America was welcomed as a savior in the face of the expansion of the USSR, and today the trade of the South (Latin America-Africa-Asia) and the East (Eurasia, the states of the Indian Ocean, the North-West Pacific, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea or the Persian Gulf) is becoming increasingly difficult to coordinate with US influence.

### **Embargo of the Eurasian Heartland and 3+1 powers: EU, India, China + Russia**

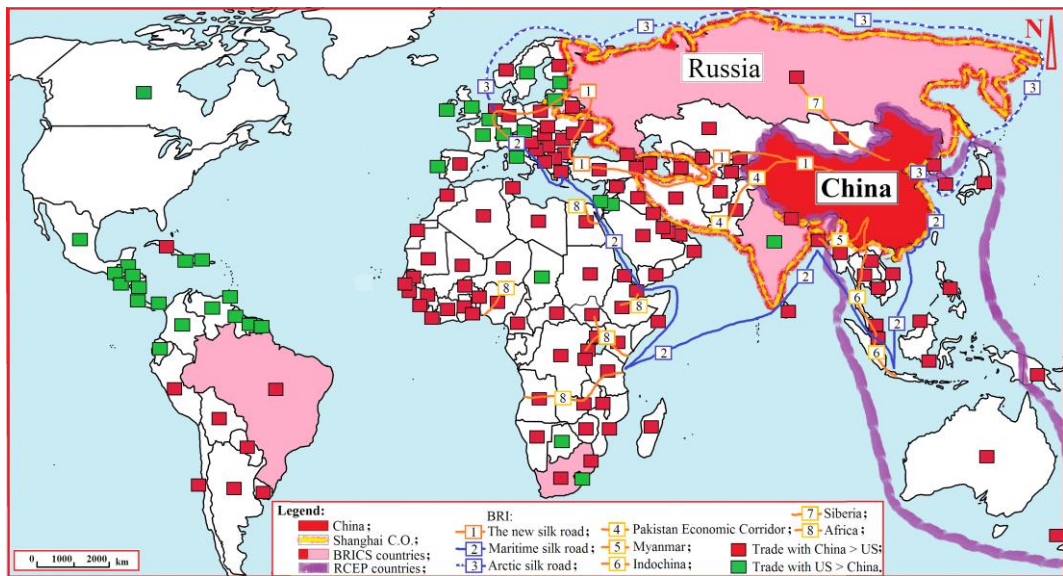
The USA has always had, since its formation as a great world power, the goal of preventing the emergence of a superpower in Eurasia, which could take its place. It was the case of Hitler's Germany, imperial Japan or later the USSR where exactly the power targeted was known. Currently, it is not clear whether the problem of denying the US as the only superpower comes from: China, India, Russia, the European Union (with the core of Germany-France) or from Iran or Turkey. There are chaotic military alliances (NATO, QUAD, Three-Seas) and multi-player allies (India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Germany) that bring instability to US actions.

It has been known since the time of the great world wars, that to decay the opposing power, you must stop its supply of raw materials, without which any industrial power will quickly capitulate. Or if the US worsens the embargo against Russia and Iran and imposes an embargo on the states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, maybe Turkey, etc. for violation of human rights, pollution, aggression or others, i.e. a space of 23-25 million km<sup>2</sup> with only 260-380 million inhabitants (depending on the states included), would cut supply to Central-Western Europe by 6 million km<sup>2</sup> and 600 million inhabitants, East Asia with 10 million km<sup>2</sup> and 1,600 million inhabitants and South Asia with 4.5 million km<sup>2</sup> and 1,800 million inhabitants, i.e. the big consuming centers of today and in the future, destroying and economically destabilizing not only Russia, but also the other states from the Heartland, but also the EU, China or India, i.e. the powers that threaten its primacy (Figure1).

In support of the US are the oceanic exporting powers, mainly Canada and Australia who are the most vocal towards Russia, and who hope that once the Heartland is blocked, the natural resources they export will increase their power, profit and influence (Friedman, 2009). On the periphery of Eurasia are Great Britain and Japan, who have always fought to prevent the emergence of a continental power that would endanger their influence. Great Britain fears the economic growth of Germany but also of France or Russia in Europe. Japan hopes that once the embargo is in place, China, deprived of the resources of Russia and the Heartland in general, will fall into economic crisis and disintegrate. Up to a point: Germany, France, Turkey, Poland, Saudi Arabia, India or China also support the American initiative, each with its own interests. The blockade between Russia and China would make India stronger, the decline of Iran-Russia-Turkey trade would give hopes of regional power to Saudi Arabia, stopping exports to Eastern Europe would intensify the current action of

Germany or China to buy only resources from Russia, and stopping a German-Russian trade, gives hopes to France that it will take the dominant place in the EU, to Turkey that it will be the export gate of raw materials from Russia to the Mediterranean Sea, and Poland dreams of dominating the Eastern European states (Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania).

Each of these Eurasian powers is waiting for another to make the mistake of complying with the US decisions and decay its economy by cutting off supplies from the Heartland, and it will be the beneficiary. An easy example already materialized in 2020 when India, for the sake of the US in the framework of QUAD (Figure 2), stopped certain investments and trade with Russia and Iran, seeing how immediately China took its place, what resulted, and among other reasons, to a slight Indian economic decline that was forced to increase its trade with much more expensive Australian and North American raw materials. Its economy decreased by -7.3%, while the states involved in the life of the Heartland (importing raw materials from Russia and active members in the New Silk Road implemented by China (Fig.3) experienced economic growth: Egypt 3.6%, Iran 3.4%, Bangladesh 3.5%, China 2.3% or South Korea and Pakistan with slight decreases of -0.9% each (Ayres, 2017; International Monetary Fund, 2021).



**Figure 3.** China, continental, economic power and the workshop of the world, seizing Eurasia, with the support of Russia

Source: information processed after: Frankopan, 2011; Goh, 2016; Favari, 2014; Pomeranz, 2009; Ramge et al., 2018; Mações, 2018.

### **The USA, the only market for Eurasian industrialized powers**

One could naturally ask why Germany and China, but also South Korea, the Netherlands or Italy do not give up their attachment to the USA, thus prospering with the help of the abundant trade in resources from the trade blocked states, which exports raw materials at a very low price. Nothing more difficult to achieve. Raw products arrive from the less industrialized states of the Heartland and beyond, to these value-added finished goods producing states, and they take the route of the US mainly, but also to other powers with

overvalued currencies such as: Canada, Australia and Britain. Basically, the USA mainly helped the economic launch of: Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany (now Germans after reunification), Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, or Thailand.

After 1970 and especially after 2000, its current adversary China also grew, making it the world's workshop and the most powerful nation in the organizations: "Shanghai Cooperation Organization" with the help of which it dominates the Heartland and the Southern Rimland; "Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership" through which it economically influences East Asia, Southeast Asia and Oceania; "Belt and Road Initiative" with a land side and a sea side, through which it implements the largest investment program ever known in the Island of the World (Europe, Asia, Africa) and the "BRICs" (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) through which it influences the whole world (Figure 3) (O'Brien, 2010; Carmody, 2013). Without the contribution of the USA and the opening of its own market, the Eurasian continental powers would not have become the 2nd, 3rd or 4th places in the world today, the model being now also copied by Vietnam, India or Bangladesh which follow the same direction of industrialization, with exports of finished products to the American market.

The overvaluation of the American currency, the US dollar, led to the industrialization of the western and eastern extremes of Eurasia, and now it is the beginning of the industrialization of the states of Southeast Asia and especially the South. We can say that the US he rescate his later opponents. And through them, it led to financial benefits and military expansion of some "indirect trade partners", which are now the great and visible enemies of the USA, such as Iran or Russia.

### **The strength of the US dollar, with the support of Eurasia**

The US maintains the economic growth of the main economic challengers to its supremacy, such as Germany with the EU, China with East Asia, India with South and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Bangladesh), and through them also the raw material exporting states such as Russia and Iran, which will create regional and global economic and military actors with its own financing. This means that by stopping the import of consumer goods from: Germany, China, India, South Korea and so on, the USA would secure a leading place in the future world power, while also developing its production capacity, owning its own underground resources, including the export of oceanic raw materials from: Australia, Canada or Saudi Arabia. In this way it would endanger the emergence of a power in Eurasia.

Technological transfer was achieved through the multitude of American companies in the production centers of: Japan, China, India, Germany, Italy, and so on (where American companies were welcomed with open arms, strictly to bring with them the innovation so necessary for the industrialization of these new powers). That is, the USA directly developed the industry from the new world powers, and with the help of its own market, it led to the economic miracle: German, Japanese, South Korean, Chinese, and now Indian or Vietnamese (Frank, 1998; Findlay and O'Rourke, 2009). Practically all connecting to this huge power, with megalomaniac multinationals, research centers and market backed by the strongest currency. The natural question would be, why doesn't the US stop import the goods, which anyway they destroyed its production capacity and challenges them of world supremacy?

The very fact that the US has a strong and attractive currency, a huge market but also an industry in severe decline, can make it a big importer. But this fact of importing a lot, leads to the export of the US dollar in the world, especially in China and Germany, but also in all East Asia, Western Europe and now in South Asia (Kagan, 2004; Khanna, 2019). Thus, in the opposite sense, if the USA led to the emergence of Eurasian industrial locomotives, it was precisely these that made the USA the greatest financial power in the world and maintains the world supremacy of a state with only 4% of the entire population of the world, managing to dominate Eurasia which collects 70% of the planet's population.

This situation leads to the US dominating the world market by exporting stamped papers, but also if Germany or China stop giving value to these currencies, they negate the power of their countries' huge deposits of US dollars (with which they make the world's investments and borrow the United States) but would also cancel its largest export market, going down economically.

### CONCLUSIONS

The war in Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, or the tense situation in Russia, or the embargo in Iran, are only surface conflicts in an interconnected world. By stopping the export of raw materials from any of the Heartland states (Russia, Iran and so on), the production centers of China, Germany, Japan, India and so on, suffer economic losses for the companies of Japan, Great Britain or the USA from these centers and beyond the American market that would be deprived of consumer goods, at reduced prices, hence the decline of the American currency, the US Dollar, which is the main exchange currency in trade with Eurasia.

Instead, precisely the export of dollars against the value of finished products practiced by the USA, leads to the jeopardy of its own production capacity, to the emergence of new economic powers such as: the EU, China, Japan or India, which challenge its superpower and here it strengthens the power of states like Iran or Russia, which do not respect the international norms developed and imposed by the American superpower. The fact that everything revolves around the USA gives it huge economic and decision-making benefits that it would not be able to maintain with its low population and far from the large landmass of Eurasia, if it focused strictly on industrialization, but precisely this constraint makes it the prisoner of the powers of Eurasia, which are in a huge economic expansion and begin to influence the states of Africa and Latin America, easily replacing the American power.

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## TOURIST PROSPECTION STUDY IN THE LUNCASPRIE, BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA

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**Abstract:** The development of tourism at the level of the Bihor tourist destination and the growing demand for new forms and alternatives to spend free time led to the identification of new possibilities for diversifying the tourist offer. In this context, the present study aims at the prospecting and analysis of tourism resources and infrastructure in order to capitalize on them through tourism. The opportunity for this approach is also given by the proximity of the Municipality of Oradea, as well as by the need of the residents of this city to escape at the weekend in an area totally different from the city.

**Key words:** tourism resources, natural and mad-made tourism resources, infrastructure tourism, tourism potential

\* \* \* \* \*

### INTRODUCTION

The analysis framework is a potential basic element in tourism activities, it has multiple functions, among which the material support of all activities, including tourism, decoration and finally, tourism resource (Herman and Tătar, 2015; Herman and Wendt, 2011; Herman et al., 2017; Ilie et al., 2017).

At the level of the studied area, it imposes itself as a basic, representative component in the geographical and landscape structure of the Luncasprie locality. The charm of the hilly landscape, with its forests of harmony, is complemented by the existence of numerous caves in the area, by the steep slopes in the Videi Gorges areas, by the caste forests or by the wonderful hunting grounds in the forest cantons area.

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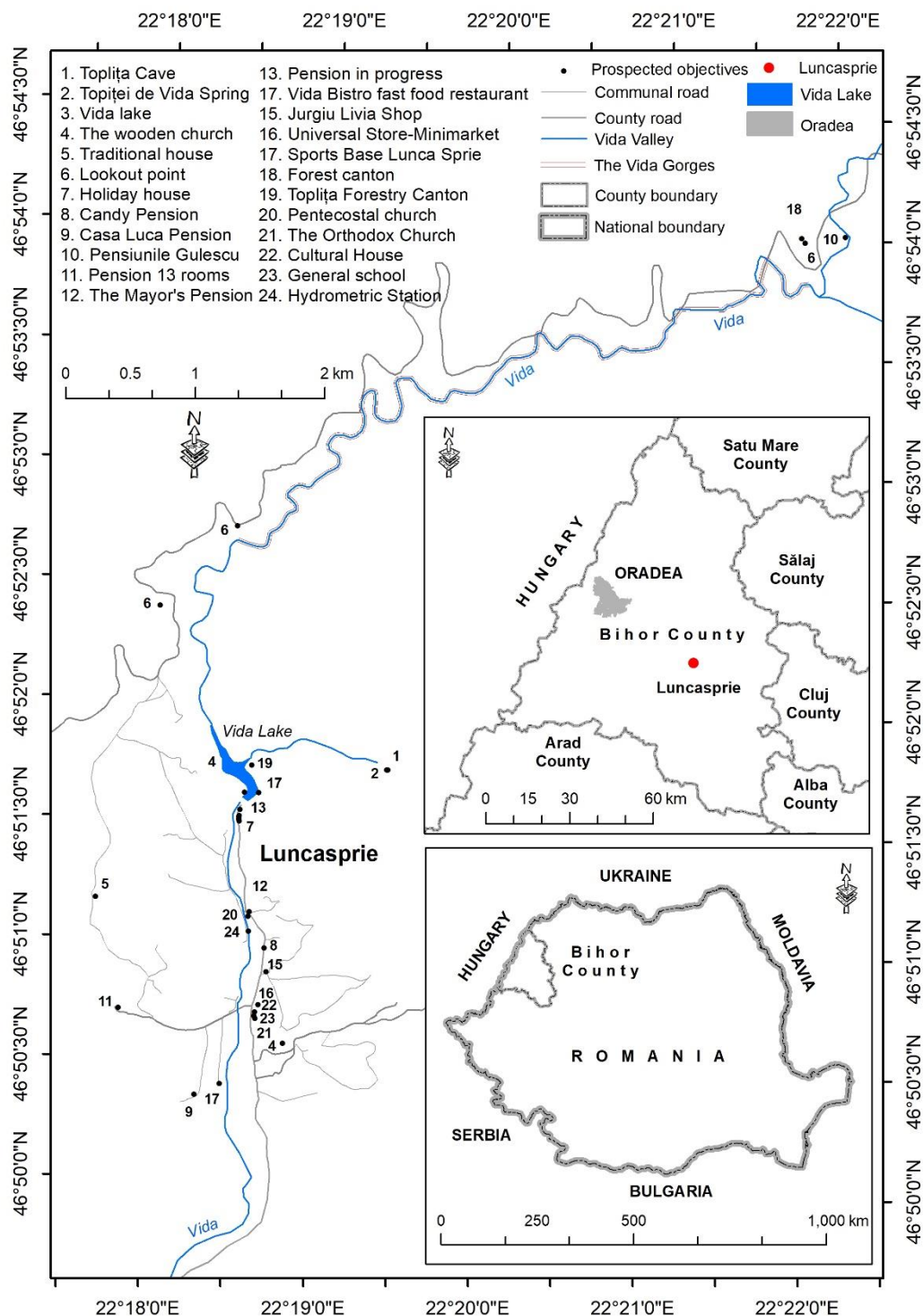


Figure 1. The studied area

The flora and fauna of the Luncașprie area are associated with the landscape components, complementing each other, and forming a unitary ensemble that hosts a tourist potential and agrees with high chances of capitalization in the immediate perspective.

The touristic and leisure value of the vegetation is increased by the existence of some species, among which stand out the maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), the forest cherry (*Cerasus avium var. silvestris*), the chestnut with edible fruits (*Castanea sativa*), etc.

The fauna was of touristic and recreational interest: species of hunting interest, among which stand out the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), hare (*Lepus europaeus*), pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*), etc.

The totality of the natural elements, together with the climatic ones, create in certain periods of time in this geographical space or comfortable atmosphere that determines a relaxing, relaxing, even sedative bioclimate, which makes these places attractive for visitors.

Against this background, the present study aims to prospect and analyze the tourist potential of the Luncașprie Locality, Bihor County, Romania, to establish the tourism development and capitalization strategy.

The town of Luncașprie is located in the northwestern part of Romania, in the central area of Bihor County, 52 km from the municipality of Oradea and 3 km from the commune of Dobrești to which it administratively belongs (Figure 1). The municipality of Beiuș is the nearest town, located at 35 km.

The study of tourism potential aimed at the analysis of tourism resources (natural and anthropic) and tourism infrastructure. Tourist resources represent one of the determining factors with a major role in the genesis, evolution and dynamics of tourism as an anthropic activity. From a structural point of view, tourism resources can be classified into natural and man-made tourism resources (Caciora et al., 2019; Herman and Tătar, 2015; Ilieș et al., 2013). The accommodation base represents the essential element of the material base on which the development of all tourist activities depends, having close links with the tourist potential related to the space where they appear and manifest (Herman and Tătar, 2015; Herman et al., 2019, 2020). Thus, these elements "represent a defining indicator in the shaping and evolution of tourist destinations" (Herman et al., 2020, p. 106).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study represents the results of the research undertaken in the specialized literature and in the field. In the time frame between 2021 and 2022, several field trips were undertaken to identify, analyze and map all tourism resources (natural and man-made resources) and tourism infrastructure. The tools used in this regard were the tourist prospecting sheets specially designed to capture the tourist potential. The software used for mapping the prospected objectives and drawing up figure 1 was ArcGis 10.6.

## TOURIST RESOURCES

### Natural tourism resources

The relief stands out for the variety of karst forms, their frequency in the territory, proportion and physiognomy. The main categories of objectives belonging to the relief in the studied area are gorges and caves (Cocșan, 1988).

The Vida gorges, with a length of over 10 km, are in the middle and upper basin of the valley, being bounded downstream by the homonymous lake, and upstream by the confluence of the valley with its tributary, Viduța (Cocean, 2000) (figures 2). A special charm of Vida Gorges is also given by the presence of numerous caves and caves (figure 3).

In conclusion, all these beauties that the Videi Gorges display are among the tourist attractions worthy of highlighting and which could be included in a relatively short time among the tourist routes of the area of which it is a part.

The Toplița cave is in the lower part of the Răcaș-Slavu Pleș karst plateau, in the Toplița Valley, approximately 20 m above the spring of the same name (Figure 4). In the year 2000, the cave was declared by law a protected area of national interest corresponding to the III category of the IUCN (cave nature reserve). It covers an area of 0.1 ha and overlaps the site of community importance Defileul Crișului Repede - Pădurea Craiului (Law 5, 2000; Olău et al., 2019).



**Figure 2.** Vida Gorges



**Figure 3.** Underground gallery



**Figure 4.** Entrance to Toplița Cave



**Figure 5.** Toplița Spring

From a touristic point of view, the hydrography of the karst presents two distinct features which, in turn, have a recognized touristic value. They are due to eruptions and groundwater draining the karst.

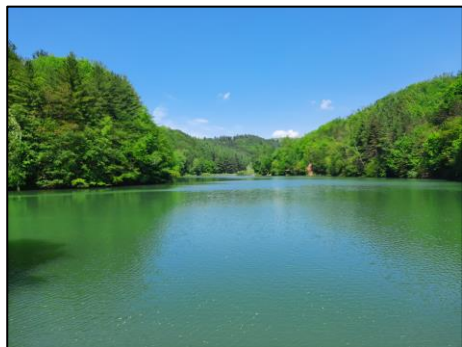
Topliței de Vida Spring or Cave no. 4, as it is also called by specialists from Topliței Valley, is located at 250 m altitude, being the source of the left tributary of Vida, next to the Vida Lake. This outcrop is carved in Cretaceous limestone, drains the waters of the karst plateau from Răcaș-Slavu Pleș (Preguz Cave 460 m altitude) and appears in the form of a cave mouth, occupied by the mirror of the siphon lake, with an average flow of 100- 120 l/s (Figure 5). The cave and its outlet are in the western part of the karst plateau at the lower level of the group of caves in Topliței Valley, arranged on four floors (Orășeanu, 2020).

A defining component of the geographical landscape, the vegetation leaves its decisive mark on the tourist values. Vegetation, respectively the forest, is the *sine qua non* condition for the existence of large fauna, which makes up the hunting funds so requested by sports tourists (hunters). Vegetation becomes a tourist attraction through its composition and the rare (endemic) species it contains. To protect them, natural areas were established. To a large extent, the eastern part of the administrative territory of the Luncasprie locality overlaps with the protected area Defileul Crișului Repede - Pădurea Craiului. The area was declared a site of community importance in 2007 and covers an area of 39.410 ha. The site represents a natural area, designated for the purpose of protecting biodiversity and maintaining a favorable state of conservation of wild flora and fauna, as well as some habitats of community interest that includes the northwest of the Craiului Forest Mountains and the middle basin of the Crișului Repede (Agency National for Protected Areas, 2021).

### MAN-MADE RESOURCES

The evolution of the spatio-temporal manifestations of the local community has led to the emergence of man-made tourism resources, among which the economic edifices with a touristic, religious, architectural function and the ethnographic particularities specific to the area stand out (Herman and Tătar, 2015).

The Vida Lake (the emerald paradise of Bihor) is a special point of attraction, especially during the summer, for the inhabitants of the commune of Dobrești, and in the latter period throughout the year, for as many tourists as possible who visit these places. Those who come to visit the place are impressed by the unreal color of the lake, which changes according to how the seasons dress the forest that is mirrored in the water's shine. The lake is in the lower area of the hydrographic basin of the Vida Valley, upstream from the locality of Luncasprie in a picturesque area, surrounded by high hills, covered with deciduous forests mixed with conifers, which gives it a special beauty (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Lake Vida



**Figure 7.** Vida Lake spillway funnel



It has an area of five hectares of water, is stretched over a length of 1.5 km, and houses a rich fish fund (not exploited to capacity), being also the drinking water reserve of all the villages of the Dobrești commune (Anca, 2008).

Another aspect, which makes it unique in Romania and represents a tourist curiosity, is the funnel-shaped spillway, through which the lake waters drain, with the role of normalizing the flow of the river when there is abundant precipitation in the area (Figure 7).

The wooden church, "Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavril" from Luncasprie is located in the center of the village on a high hill with steep slopes. It was built in 1650 in the form of a rectangular nave made of thick beams of gorun wood, fitted in a dovetail system, on the site where another, older church would have existed (Figure 8). This is proven by the old Romanian prints identified at this place, including the famous *Pravilă* from Târgoviște, printed as is known, in 1652. The place of worship is documented in 1725, and a few years after its construction, the church did not had painted walls, taking the place of painting icons on wood. The painting of the church executed by an anonymous painter in the year 1769 was damaged in 1935-1936 in that the monument underwent an uninspired renovation in which the walls were covered both externally and internally with a thick layer of plaster. It was also then that the old shingle covering was replaced with another one made of "horjita" or "mare" tiles, as the locals call it. The changes undergone over time, including those of 1949 and 1987, but also the disappearance of assets with artistic or documentary value have greatly diminished the historical value of the current church (Godea et al., 1978).



**Figure 8.** The wooden church

The traditional peasant houses of Luncasprie built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from interlaced beams and glued with mud (china) mixed with wheat straw and chaff, with gorun plank ceilings and whitewashed or blue washed. These houses have a simple architecture, they consist of two rooms and an awning (hall), access to the house being provided through the awning, opening to the two rooms, respectively to the sitting room and to the "clean room" from the street. On one side of the length of the house, in the side towards the bypass (courtyard), there is the porch (porch), a plan and elevation element with multiple functionalities (Figure 9). "Târnațu" is bordered by pillars inlaid with certain ethnographic elements, with local specificity.

Under the aspect of the proportions of the traditional houses in the Luncasprie area, the high height of the roof (in two or four bays), about the same as the height of the wall, suitable roof for the area with heavy atmospheric precipitation (especially in winter and early spring) should be emphasized, allowing rapid drainage towards the eaves of water or heavy snow that usually occurs in the area.



**Figure 9.** Traditional house

### **TOURIST INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure has an important place in the tourist and leisure offer, contributing to a great extent to the organization and development of tourism, influencing the level of tourism exploitation of the territory. It contains all the accommodation and catering units.

Regarding the type of accommodation structures, this represents a small range of accommodation units at locality level, there are only two functional units, a guesthouse and a tourist house, but also three other guesthouses under construction, one of which is completed, but we still entered the tourist circuit.

On the right side on the way up to Lake Vida there are four small holiday houses, consisting of two or three rooms that are rented only to friends and acquaintances, not being classified in any way (figures 10).



**Figure 10.** Holiday homes



**Figure 11.** Holiday home

Also, here near the lake, the accommodation capacity of the fifth holiday house has been increased, which now has six rooms (Figure 11).

From the analysis of statistical data from the last 10 years on the studied area, it shows us an upward trend regarding the opening of new tourist reception structures with accommodation function.

The first boarding house opened in the town of Luncașprie in 2010 is the "Candy Pension", classified as three daisies (Figure 12). Located almost in the center of the village on the road that goes up to the Vida Lake, the guest house consists of three rooms with double beds and private bathrooms, but also an apartment consisting of two rooms with double beds each, plus a sofa bed with one bathroom. Also, on the ground floor there is a kitchen, where you can cook and dine, and in the outer courtyard there is a gazebo, where you can grill.



**Figure 12.** Candy Pension



**Figure 13.** Casa Luca Pension

Located on the edge of the village, in its southern part, in a place away from the noise of cars, "Casa Luca Pension" (Figure 13) offers its tourists the opportunity to enjoy peace in the middle of nature. Opened in 2018, the guesthouse offers tourists four spacious rooms with double beds and tastefully decorated private bathrooms, as well as a kitchen where tourists can find



everything they need to cook and eat. In the courtyard there is a hall for various events (birthdays, baptisms, engagements, etc.) with a capacity of approximately 50 people, but which can also be used for relaxation through various games, such as billiards or table tennis.



**Figure 14.** Mayor Pension



**Figure 15.** 13 Rooms Pension

Located in the old center of the village, on the dam road, the "Mayor Pension" (Figure 14) is 100% completed but is not yet included in the tourist circuit. It has seven rooms with double beds and private bathrooms, as well as a spacious living room with kitchen.

The largest boarding house (Figure 15) that is to be opened in Luncasprie, is located at the entrance to the locality, on the side of the county road (DJ 767C) that connects with the Dobrești commune. This guesthouse is designed on three levels, is 95% complete and has a capacity of 13 rooms, all with double beds, of which only 11 have their own bathrooms. On the ground floor of the pension, there is a space for a bar, but also for a restaurant with a capacity of about 250 seats, which can be used for various events.

Another guesthouse under construction is in the immediate vicinity of the Vida Lake, it is structured on three levels and is approximately 70% completed (Figure 16). It has five rooms with their own bathrooms, and on the ground floor a living room and a kitchen where you can cook and serve meals. In the courtyard of the pension there is a gazebo where you can make various grilled dishes, also in the courtyard there is a water tank, which can be heated, where tourists can relax.



**Figure 16.** Pension in progress



**Figure 17.** Gulescu Pension



About 20 km from the town of Luncasprie, on Videi Gorges, in a secluded place in the middle of nature, in a clearing surrounded by coniferous and deciduous forests, the Gulescu Pension await their guests (Figure 17). The two guesthouses benefit from a number of 19 rooms and 15 bathrooms, a kitchen and a dining room. Gazebos are arranged in the courtyard of the pensions where you can prepare products on the cauldron or grill, especially from game meat because they are not only rented to those who are passionate about hunting.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the prospecting of the tourist potential of the town of Luncasprie, Bihor County, six tourist attractions were identified, three natural (Videi Gorges, Topliței Cave, Topliței de Vida Spring) and three man-made (Vida Lake, the wooden church, "Sfinții Arhangheli Mihail și Gavril" from Luncasprie; a traditional house). The tourist infrastructure was represented by the existence of 10 accommodation bases (four holiday homes and six tourist pensions). So, these elements identified and analyzed both in the field and based on specialized literature represent a nucleus around which a touristic microdestination for weekend and rural tourism can be developed. In this context, the present study represents the informational support for other necessary steps, among which we mention: perception studies of residents, tourist service providers regarding tourism; the necessity of setting up tourist routes, etc.

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## THE ILLUSION OF WELL-BEING IN THE TRIPOLAR WORLD

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**Abstract:** The US set the tone for modern development with ingenious tactics whereby the economy produces little and grows much, dominating the world market worker. Now, the European Union giving up industry, is trying to copy its strategy, but with a delay that can endanger the entire European Union, while China remains with the old strategy held by : Germany, the USSR or Japan in the past, of industrialization and production in mass for domestic and foreign markets. The three areas hold more than 20 trillion US dollars, being the mega-powers of the current world, while the rest of the states, with three exceptions (Japan 5 trillion, Great Britain and India each 3 trillion) have values below 2.5 trillion : Brazil, Russia, Canada, Australia and so on.

**Key words:** economic powers, geopolitics, GDP gross domestic product, development strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

The states of the world have been in fierce economic growth for over two centuries. The industry has reached new stages of development, the consumer population is rapidly increasing its requirements, the great world cities have civilizational centers like the West and prosperity seems to be knocking at the doors of any state.

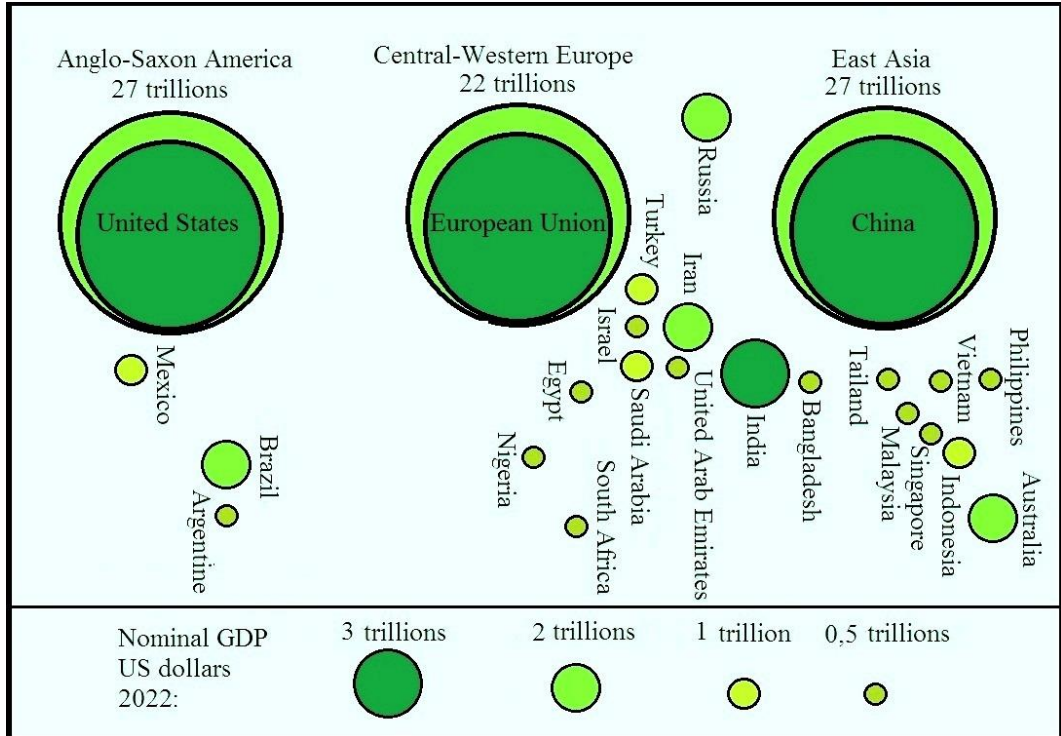
In all this commotion of the deluge of prosperity showered on the world, after so many years of unprecedented economic development of mankind, as presented in geopolitics books, news media and geography textbooks, yet the number of developed states seems to have frozen as it was in the past two or three decades and very little has changed in 70 years, and the world's rich, in ever smaller numbers, own ever greater percentages of world wealth.

After the end of the Second World War, the world map was colored with 200 states that are ready to take their own geopolitical route, starting on the path of prosperity so coveted during the years of colonialism (Herman & Grama, 2018).

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At a closer look, the situation seems far from shore, going in the same direction, with three developed areas: Western Central Europe, central North America and coastal East Asia, and with the rest of the world in the dark. The great world development is produced with bank loans, the money circulated is mostly US dollars, the sale of local products but also the purchases of citizens are made in chain stores, hodina is made in hotel chains, processed products are made in factories with western shareholders, and the final goods go to the USA, which in return exports the much-coveted green papers that have captured over 40% of the global money supply.



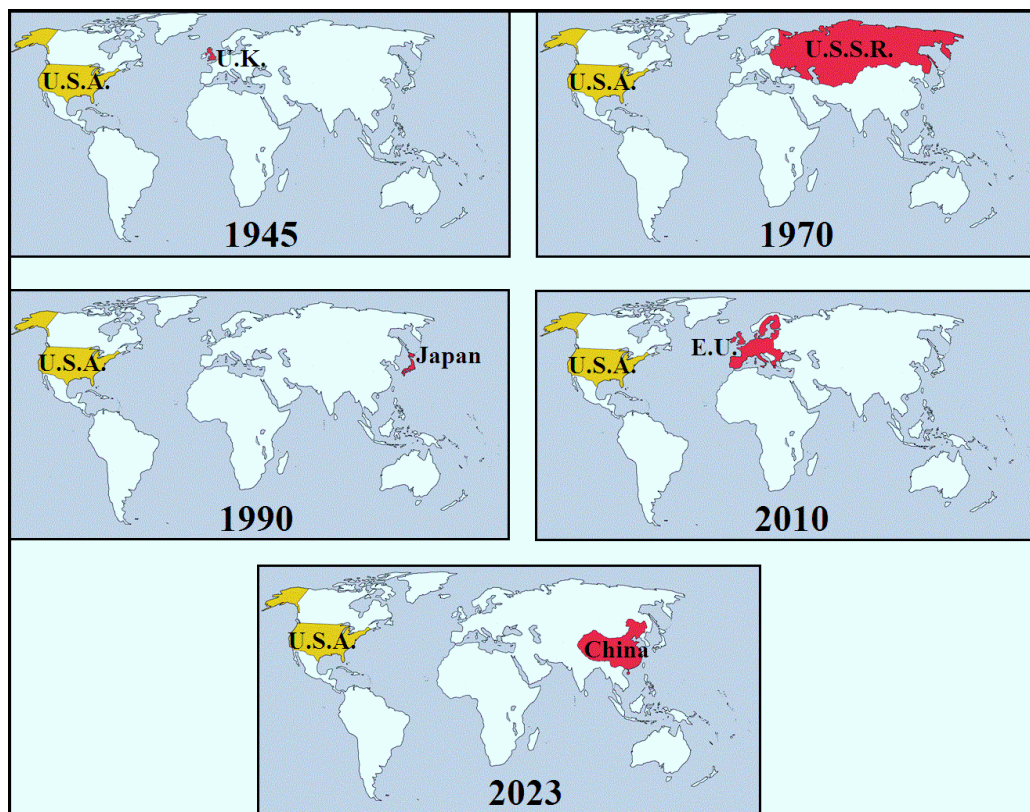
**Figure 1.** Tripolar economic world and comparison with regional powers  
(Source: processed by: I.M.F., 2022; Utonish, 2022; World Bank, 2022; Diaconescu & Mazilu, 2021)

## DATA AND METHODS

It is not understood why the US economy grows by more than 2% every year, but the average citizen of this state has an average household income almost unchanged since 1970 (Glock, 2020). Japan, although one step away from reaching the USA economically in 1997 (Bennett, 2010), has stagnated, leaving the American power five times ahead of it, while the EU tries to copy the North American model, but it seems that in a period when this trend has been mortgaged, and there is no more room for another world player remaining.

In the last two decades, Asia, with the end of the demographic explosion, seemed more and more economically calculated and the new dominant on the great chessboard of the world, but China seems to be stalling and India, suffocated by Western advice and the lack of resources that should have been

provided with imports directly by the state, give hope to the US that the two Asian powers will have the fate of Japan. In this direction, the United States is still the world's great power (with Europe as a trailer), having a bipolar world and in 2050, 2080 or 2120, with the US and, in turn: India, Indonesia (ASEAN) and Nigeria (Union of African or Central African States).



**Figure 2.** Dominance in the bipolar geopolitical world, in which the USA has been indispensable for over a century

(Source: processed by: Darwin, 2009; Tse, 2015; Joxe, 2002)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### World currency

US Dollar or Euro in exchange for raw materials and finished products American power managed the disaster (at first sight) of decaying its own industry, through greening programs, zero-pollution, reducing the exploitation of raw materials and getting the population used to living in a permanent vacation (Friedman, 2020; Brucan, 1968). The USA has come from the great producer of processed goods as it was noted after the Second World War, when the exploitation of wealth was closely linked to the import of raw materials, the endless factories and plants that produced for the domestic market, but also the export on all meridians of innovative and mass-produced American products. Now this route is provided by the Asian states, where the population explosion has ended in the east and is decreasing in the southeast and south (Pillsbury, 2016; Djuvara, 2008). The countries in this area have become the great workers

of the world, exploiting their own natural resources, importing massively from all over the world, working hard for their own people, and exporting the finished products to the American market mainly and less to the European market.

Something worse cannot happen, an economist from the 50s and 60s would have said if he had known the US strategy. But precisely through industrial decline, the American market became a huge importer of consumer goods. And the new industrial powers, so excited about the new export market, found themselves with an economy based on exporting to the US market and importing US dollars, which cornered their financial market. The great economic boom in East Asia, and more recently in the South and Southeast, runs the economy with a currency that does not belong to them and which they must keep at a high value, automatically increasing the value of their own dollar deposits. Thus the economic tigers and dragons of Asia, who gave the miracle of development, are hardly able, all together, to keep up with the economic power of the USA, which is based on influence, currency, army and strategy more than on labor and the consumption of its own resources.

### **Disciplined population**

Maintaining wealth in a balanced way for the entire population brings great risks of instability among the leadership of that country. But by printing an excessive money supply to reach the first rank of the rich, followed by an increase in prices, taxes and loans to be paid by the majority of the population, it brings wealth into the hands of a small number of people, who can easily to conduct.

In the USA the economic growth is of huge proportions, if we compare it with the economy of Japan for example. This generally increases by more than 2% per year, which is a lot for a state developed at such a level. The average income per capita reached for the year 2022 at 75.000 US dollars/year, compared to 40.000 as it is in Japan or Germany, 30.000 in Spain or Italy, under 15.000 in: Russia, China, Turkey or Brazil and less than 2.500 in India or Nigeria (World Population Review, 2022; Knoema, 2022). The period of growth after 1970 was downright explosive, a performance hardly equaled in the Western world.

But for all this growth, the average income of 80% of the US population has grown very little or stagnated over the past 50 years, with growth occurring only in the rich and very rich. Thus, the owners of the great wealth are as well known as possible, being easy to monitor and direct.

If wealth in the US had been closer to uniform, perhaps the African population of the Southeast would have wanted their own autonomy, the Spanish Mexican population of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California would have held annual independence referendums until the voting percentage exceeded 50% pro-state and Chinese investors would have bought the country with every bit.

The discipline of the US population is an example coveted by all the states of the world, a model of how in a democracy, prosperous and free, people are easy to direct, and the central leadership is stronger than in dictatorships. The ability to maintain political life with only two parties, little more than the single Chinese party, has made the US a state with few internal administrative problems, thus being able to focus its attention on the outside world, where power dominates world decision-making, financial and military.

Including the American governments care that citizens no longer work hard in factories and plants, the US economy no longer produces consumer goods that are abundant in the American market at a reduced price, with Asian origins that have infiltrated the market only in exchange for US dollars, it made the populace tacitly endear its government, thus beginning an enviable citizen-state collaboration.

### **Castling in the Garden of Heaven**

In the years 70-95 there was the economic miracle of: Japan, Argentina, South Africa, then followed: Taiwan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Iran, then there was: Brazil, Venezuela, Libya, Kuwait, then: Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and now it seems that: Malaysia, Singapore, China, or South Korea are experiencing strong economic growth. But the new series of states is already being prepared, such as: Colombia, Egypt, Kenya, Vietnam, Bangladesh, or India, and probably, in one or two decades, it will be the turn of: Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Nigeria or Peru, this change being in a continuous dynamic, but the West remains unchanged.

In South-Eastern Europe, the great powers were Turkey, then Yugoslavia, followed by Greece, then Hungary and now Romania, which according to the Western rhythm and calculation, the less it produces, the greater its economic growth, following as in a short time, to be deflated after this artificial growth, we will see Ukraine in full ascension.

This castling of nations keeps the West at the top of the world economic pyramid, leaving behind great powers that are not part of the privileged world.

Japan reached 6 trillion US dollars in 1997 while the United States had 8 trillion, but with much slower growth. From that moment, the Asian crisis set in, which kept Japan in decay for a period of 25 years, and the situation seems to continue (Peptenatu et al., 2005; Bessis, 2004). At the level of 1997, Japan held 6 trillion of a total of 40 trillion worldwide and close to the US, and in the year 2023 it will hold 5 trillion dollars out of 110 trillion as the world economy grew and 26 trillion as the economy reached US (Utonish, 2022). The European Union seems to be in a situation slightly close to that of Japan, which has made very little progress since 2008. If then it held 14 trillion, one trillion more than the US, in 2023 it has 20.6 trillion with 5 trillion less than the US, without considering that Great Britain chose another path in the meantime, thus the EU still holds only 17 trillion dollars, the power rated (Marga, 2017; Mazower, 2019).

### **The time has come for Europe to copy the US strategy**

The United States has become so confident in its development strategies that it no longer has any problem maintaining world primacy. Although there are a multitude of examples of the overestimation of empires at their peak, as was the case: the Roman, Mongol or English Empire, which were convinced until the last moment that they would tilt the fates in their favor and remain at the head of the world system of their time, so the US is still sure that just as it managed to isolate and curb the English economy in the 50s, Russian in the 80-90s, Japanese in 97 and European in 2008, so it will succeed in curbing China's economy, which will stagnate or, following provocations of protests and discontent, it will split between north and south or east and west between the rich coast and the poorer interior (Friedman, 2009; Eriksson, 2021). It is difficult to decide whether China will also suffer the fate of Japan and the European



Union, but the Americans are playing the smart card they have been betting on for the past decades, proving to be a winner every time.

When it comes to the European Union, through a series of sweeping reforms, with influence in justice, money supply and green energy, it has enriched a small number of people and companies, closed local productions and big economic concerns have taken the place of regional investors (Cooper, 2007). It is difficult to specify whether this whole program of indebtedness and deindustrialization is an external infiltration into the European economy, or whether it is an intelligent project of Brussels following the steps of the Americans in the last decades, of stagnation of the wealth of the majority population, submission to a central power of the few very rich population that will own most of the wealth, providing the population with consumer goods without having to work in factories for 8-12 hours a day and grabbing the exports of the newly industrialized countries, through a huge market, which also has no production capacity.

Perhaps the Euro currency will compete with the US dollar and the import of consumer goods from around the globe will save European natural resources and flood the world market with the new currency. Fewer but solid parties are taking shape in the EU, united by the political union that is in full implementation process, which will be completed with the assimilation of the American model on the European market.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In the tripolar world there are two regions with over \$27 trillion in nominal GDP and one with \$22 trillion. The rest, powers with 3 trillion (India), 2 trillion (Russia, Brazil, Australia, Iran) with one trillion (Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Turkey) and with 0.5 trillion US dollars (Argentina, Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Israel, UAE, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Bangladesh), i.e. a total of 21 regional powers, some of them with ambitions of world powers (India, Russia, Brazil), but which, together they manage to collect under 21 trillion dollars.

The first three zones, all in the Northern Hemisphere, the temperate zone, are composed of central North America, the western half of Europe, and the eastern half of East Asia. If in America the United States is defined as the main power and in East Asia China dominates the region, in Europe, slightly weaker economically (by 5 trillion minus) the power is dispersed among several states, mostly members of the European Union (Germany, France, Italy, Spain) and outside of it (Great Britain), understanding why the economic world is tripolar but the geopolitical world is bipolar, currently being divided between the US and China.

The old systems such as the colonial one that gave the mega-power Great Britain, the communist system with the mega-power USSR and the system of industrialization for export with the dominant role held by Japan, have just proven their inefficiency. Europe still does not have its own system, here there exist together industrialized states (Germany), with dominant agriculture (France) or financial banking (Great Britain), but with problems in identifying their development model.

The USA, on the other hand, as a great financial, military and decision-making power, created a still stable and credible economic miracle that continues to dominate the Western world. On the other hand, China, combining



the planned economy of the USSR with the forced industrialization specific to Japan's economy and with an international openness that tries to easily copy European strategies, managed to create a unique model with the help of which it dominates the East.

How far will this bipolar race in which the USA has been inseparable for 80 years stretch? In general, the periods were from two to 5 decades, and the losers followed in turn: Great Britain, the USSR, Japan and the last but which continues to be an economic (and less and less geopolitical) power, the European Union. If the United States or perhaps China wins, we will probably see the bipolar world of tomorrow where the winner will compete with: India, Indonesia (merged in ASEAN) and towards the end of the century, Nigeria (Union of Sub-Saharan African States). Between these, however, there may be assertion attempts by the Arab or Latin American world, but also two distinct powers within Africa, this continent becoming the most populated, by the year 2100 expecting to reach 5 billion people.

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## AN ASSESSMENT OF URBAN SERVICE DELIVERY IN IFE EAST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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**Abstract:** This study assessed urban service delivery in Ife East Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. It found that not all residents were fully aware of the statutory duties of the local government. Markets and motor parks were the only urban services with an acceptable condition; all other urban services were adjudged poor. The local government scored low on statutory responsibilities; however, residents identified corruption, lack of autonomy, and other problems adversely affecting the performance of the local government. Recommendations are proffered towards improved urban service delivery in the local government area and others in Nigeria.

**Key words:** urban services, local government, service delivery, Relative Importance Index (RII), Ile-Ife

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Background and problem definition

All over the world, local administrations, local governments or local councils exist primarily to ensure the promotion of effective governance. This is not to say that national (federal) and state (regional) governments are dispensable, but to make a case for the imperativeness of the local government as an essential complementary administrative appendage. The importance of local administrations is irrespective of whether the country is a developed or a developing one. However, the effects of local governments are usually emphasized in Nigeria and many other developing countries owing to the deplorable state of the countries' urban services. Evidences abound that one of

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the fundamental reasons for the establishment of local governments as the third tier of government in Nigeria was the need to ensure adequate delivery of infrastructure, utilities and services, especially for the benefit of the grassroots (Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014; Boris, 2015; Olojede et al., 2019).

In Nigeria, the rationale for the continued existence of local governments is their proven indispensability in service delivery. They are important because they make governance at the local level possible by playing the critical role of providing public goods to the people. Their service delivery system also affects the everyday livelihoods and total life of citizens (Ibok, 2014; Olojede et al., 2019). Thus, it could be safely said that local governments have a vital role in the overall development of any country. Their proximity to the grassroots also makes them essentially crucial in tackling socioeconomic problems in the local contexts; hence, the recognition accorded them in grassroots development planning. Consequently, it is convenient to regard them as the true engine and generator of national integration, administration and development (Adebayo, 2014; Lawal, 2014; Wunsch, 2001).

As provided for in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria, local governments are expected to provide a number of basic services. Among other services, they are to establish and maintain cemeteries. They are also to house the destitute and infirm. In addition, they are to establish, maintain and regulate slaughterhouses, markets, public transport facilities as well as public conveniences. Moreover, local governments are to deliver roads along with such associated infrastructure as streetlights, and drains; they are to construct parks and gardens, open spaces and other public facilities prescribed by the state's house of assembly from time to time. Other functions expected of them include road/street naming, house numbering, refuse and sewage disposal, pet-keeping regulations, regulations of outdoor advertising and various commercial service outlets as well as the licensing of liquor sales.

Moreover, in Nigeria, local governments have the responsibility of performing some functions alongside state governments. These are otherwise known as concurrent functions; they include providing and maintaining the facilities for primary, adult and vocational education. Local governments are also to develop agricultural and natural resources; however, they are not empowered by the constitution to embark on mineral exploitation; the provision and maintenance of health services; and such other functions as may be conferred on them by the state's House of Assembly (Akinyetun and Oke, 2021; Majekodunmi, 2012). An adequate provision of these and other essential services brings the presence of the government to the doorstep of the grassroots. However, in Nigeria, the poor condition of basic infrastructure and services reveals that the third tier of government is not living up to expectations in service delivery. This has resulted in the citizens losing faith in the local government system over the years.

The literature is replete with studies on the statutory duties' performance of local governments in Nigeria. For example, Alao et al. (2015) revealed that the challenges inhibiting efficient service range from undue intervention by the state governments, the structure, corruption, as well as the over-politicization of administration and staffing. These claims were corroborated by Olojede et al. (2019). In addition, Alao et al. (2015) argued that local governments in Nigeria generally manifest ordinarily as a subordinate subsystem or subunit of higher tiers of government which is only empowered by a statutory concession to perform mere residual legislative, administrative and quasi-judicial functions for

the grassroots. This partly explains the characteristic low-level performance of local government administrations in Nigeria over the years.

Many other works have exhaustively examined the challenges and problems of the local government as the third tier of government in Nigeria. However, only few of them are empirical. Particularly, studies that document case studies of how residents perceive performance of local government administrations in terms of their constitutionally defined statutory duties are hard to come by. This study is an attempt to bridge this gap. It investigates the general perception of residents on the urban service delivery performance of the Ife East Local Government in Osun State, Nigeria. The state and functionality of selected urban services in the local council area were assessed, and the factors responsible for the present situation were examined with a view to evolving a policy framework for the general overhauling of local governance in Osun State and Nigeria in general.

### **LITERATURE UNDERPINNING**

What constitutes a local government varies from one country to another. In Britain, for instance, it is a creation of the parliament. Its sources of revenue include tax receipts, income from sales, fees and charges, and capital receipts. Local governments in Germany are called municipal councils; they see to the planning, water management and social welfare, among other things. They are funded at both the federal and state levels, and have elected mayors and councillors who serve for four to nine years and four to six years respectively. The form of local government in New Zealand is a unique model loosely based on the British system where local authorities have traditionally been given the role of service delivery agents on behalf of the state. However, unlike Britain, New Zealand does not have an upper house of parliament; also, unlike most other western democracies, New Zealand has neither a written constitution nor the balancing influence of semi-autonomous states or provinces. For these latter functions, in most countries of the world, local government was essentially an agent of the state and was largely accountable to the state for the funding that the state provided (Cheyne, 2008).

Local government system in France has three tiers of local authority: the regions, departments, and communes. In India, the 73<sup>rd</sup> and the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Acts 1992 made all the local government tiers to be state affairs and given powers to enable them function independently. The country has 645,000 local governments as self-sufficient and self-enabled units (Alao et al., 2015). Although the local bodies provide certain services required by law, they can also provide other services on their own discretion. In Australia, local government has been less powerful in time past. The two other tiers of government (federal and state) have control over its activities. However, things are already changing. Local government system in United States, called municipal councils, have multiple tiers that are below the federal and state levels. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution makes local government a matter of state, rather than federal law, with special cases for territories and the District of Columbia. Although the state government has authority over them, they have their own autonomous powers such that both the government and citizenry believe that without it, government would have no vitality.

Generally, some countries recognize their local government constitutionally while others do not. Constitutional recognition of local government as an order of government in a federal system is a modern phenomenon. For instance, just like the 1787 Constitution of the United States of America, the 1848 Constitution of Switzerland did not say anything on the issue. Similarly, as provided for in the 1867 Constitution of Canada, local government was within the purview of provincial competence. According to the 1901 Constitution of Australia, local government was made subject to state power. However, the post-World War II period witnessed an increase in the featuring of local self-government in the federal constitutions of many countries. Incidentally, this was at a time many countries were returning to civil rule. The Federal Republic of Germany pioneered this trend with its 1949 Constitution. With focus on the establishment of what were known as autonomous communities, the 1978 Constitution of Spain also featured local autonomy. In addition, the coming back of Brazil to democracy was characterised by its all-encompassing protection of autonomous local government system. In the case of South Africa, with the country's achievement of democratic and developmental goals, a similar provision was made for the protection of autonomous local government in the country's 1996 Constitution. Nigeria also flowed in this tide along with other countries as the local government was implanted in its 1999 Constitution (Steytler, 2005).

The most important point to note is that irrespective of the country or how it is operated, the local government's primary role is directly meeting the immediate needs of the citizens; hence, its reputation as the closest level of government to the people (Chukwuemeka et al., 2014; Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010). Consequently, generally, according to Olojede et al., (2019), the most important features of the local government, especially in Nigeria, include operating within a defined geographical area; having a certain population living within the confines of a defined territory; operating at the local or grassroots level; having a range of constitutionally delineated functions to perform; having relative autonomy or independence; being a legal entity that can sue and can be sued; having its council composed of elected representatives; and being the lowest level of government wherever it exists.

The exact role of the local government in Nigeria has evolved over the decades. However, the most fundamental reforms in local government administration in Nigeria was heralded by the 1976 Local Government Reform. It was this reform that gave a formal recognition to the local government as the third tier of government in Nigeria. Thus, it empowered the local government politically, administratively and financially; practically, it provided both the foundation and platform for the current structure of the local government system in Nigeria (Olojede et al., 2019; Oviasuyi et al., 2010). Basically, the statutory functions of local governments in Nigeria are collection of rates (including tenement rates) radio, television and non-mechanically propelled vehicle licences (bicycles and trucks); establishment and maintenance of cemeteries, burial grounds, homes for destitute and infirm, market, motor parks, public conveniences, roads, drawn and recreation facilities (including playgrounds and parks); construction and maintenance of roads, streetlighting, drains and other public highways, parks, gardens, open spaces or such facilities as may be prescribed from time to time by the State House of Assembly.



Other statutory functions of local governments in Nigeria are the assessment of privately-owned house or tenements for the purpose of levying such rates as may be prescribed by the house of Assembly of State; naming of roads and streets and numbering of houses; licensing, regulation and control of the sale of liquor; control and regulation of outdoor advertising and hoardings, pots, shops, kiosks, restaurants and laundries; registration of all births, deaths and marriages; making of bye-laws. In addition, local governments in Nigeria are expected to participate in state economic planning and development; provision and maintenance of primary education services, adult and vocational education; development of agriculture and natural resources (other than the exploitation of minerals); provision and maintenance of health services; and other functions as may be conferred on them by the House of Assembly of the State.

For quite a long time, local governments in Nigeria have been undergoing unsparing scrutiny in terms of their statutory performance. On many occasions, there have been calls for the scrapping of this critical tier of government because its service delivery has been dwindling almost to the point of moribundity (Agba et al., 2013). Many pertinent issues have been raised and many germane questions have been asked. In response, studies have been conducted that revealed some of the reasons behind the service delivery failure of the local government system in Nigeria. Among the major factors found to be behind the failure of local government system in Nigeria are the lack of commitment of the staff, financial constraints owing to inadequate statutory allocations from the federal government, as well as the unending deductions made by state governments from the monthly allocations of local governments (Ibok, 2014).

Moreover, a notorious monster persistently dogging the local government administration in Nigeria is the pervasive and unacceptably high level of corruption which is often said to have eaten deep into the very fabric of the local government system in the country (Alao et al., 2015; Bolatito and Ibrahim, 2014; Olojede et al., 2019). Also, a high level of overbearing interference of many state governors, which markedly undermines the autonomy of local governments, is another major problem (Adeyemi, 2013; Eboh and Diejomaoh, 2010). This has on many occasions manifested in various forms such as the refusal of state governors to conduct local government polls but rather appoint subservient lapdogs from among their party loyalists, friends or relatives as local council administrators. This has ridiculed the local government system in the country very badly and has led to confusions, absurdities and uncertainties such that there is hardly any state that is without one form of illegality or the other (Adeyemi, 2013). An apparent manifestation of this is poor-quality staff who exhibit bad and unethical work attitude. Many local government employees are at best barely qualified; worse still, many of the qualified minority are not committed (Maduabum, 1990; Odiaka, 1991; Ogunrin and Erhijakpor, 2009).

Given the many problems plaguing the local government system in Nigeria, its service delivery has been adversely affected. Many times, Nigerians have taken it upon themselves to provide for themselves many of the services that the local governments should be providing for them. Thus, ordinarily, it would be quite difficult for most Nigerians to score their respective local governments high on service delivery performance. This is consistent with the findings of Olojede et al. (2019) and many other works that suggest a generally unacceptable level of the performance of the local government service delivery in Nigeria in its capacity as the lowest level of government in the country.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Study Area

Ife East Local Government Area is one of the 30 local government areas in Osun State, Nigeria. It has its headquarters at Oke-Ogbo in Ile-Ife and an area office at Oke-DO in Modakeke. The local government area covers 172 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 188,614, according to the 2006 population and housing census. The 2011 estimate was put at 221,340. There are 10 political wards in Ife East Local Government Area: Okerewe I, II and III, Ilode I and II, Moore, Modakeke I, II and III, and Yekemi. Whereas the first nine wards are in urban centres, Yekemi is a predominantly rural ward.

### Data sources and sampling procedure

The data for this study were obtained with the aid of questionnaire administration. The questionnaires were administered on sampled residents in the study area using multistage sampling technique. First, Yekemi, the only predominantly rural ward, was purposively dropped since the focus of the study was urban services. Following this, four (two-thirds) of the six wards in Ile-Ife were randomly selected while two (two-thirds) of the three wards in Modakeke were also selected. This gave a total of five wards (50% of the 10 wards in the study area). The selected wards were Okerewe II, Ilode I, Moore, Modakeke I and Modakeke III. In each ward, 60 respondents were sampled using convenience sampling. Thus, a total of 300 respondents, none of whom was a minor under the age of 18, were sampled.

### Data analysis

Since the convenience sampling employed is a non-probability technique, only descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of data. These included frequency distribution, simple percentages and the Relative Importance Index (RII). For a successful employment of the RII, respondents were guided through the rating of the variables of interest using the Likert psychometric scale (Likert, 1932). The scale was from 5 through 1 in a descending order of significance (Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor). The total weight value (TWV) for each variable was obtained through the summation of the product of the number of responses for each rating of the variable and the respective weight value. The mathematical expression for this is:

$$TWV = \sum (N_i * W_i) \dots\dots\dots \text{eq. 1}$$

where  $N_i$  = the number of respondents rating the variable, and  $W_i$  = the average weight value assigned to the variable by the respondents. Thus, the RII was computed by dividing the summation of all the responses to each of the five ratings on it by the total number of respondents who rated the variable of interest ( $N$ ). The mathematical expression for this is:

$$RICI = TWV/N \dots\dots\dots \text{eq. 2}$$

The closer the RII is to 5, the higher the residents' rating of the variable of interest; the farther it is from 5, the weaker the rating of respondents of such a variable. Following this principle, the Relative Awareness Index (RAI) was also computed. Similar uses in literature include Akinosun (2022), Olojede (2019), Olojede and Owolabi (2022), Olojede et al. (2017a, 2017b, 2019), and Sambasivan and Soon (2007).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Socioeconomic profile of respondents

Socioeconomic characteristics are important in such a study that hinges on psychometric analyses as this. This is because the socioeconomic profile of people significantly influences their perception. The summary of the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents are hereby presented (table 1).

**Table 1.** Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents  
(Data source: Authors' field survey, 2022)

Variable	Category	%	Variable	Category	%
Gender	Male	45.3	Marital status	Single	9.0
	Female	54.7		Married	73.0
Age	≤25	13.7		Divorced/Widowed	18.0
	26 – 35	15.3	Religious affiliation	Christianity	58.7
	36 – 45	25.7		Islam	34.3
	46 – 55	29.7		Traditional	6.3
	≥56	15.7		Other	0.7
Highest education	None	1.0	Household income	Low	58.0
	Elementary	2.3		Middle	25.7
	Junior Secondary	8.3		High	13.3
	Senior Secondary	33.0	Place of origin	Ile-Ife or Modakeke	57.0
	ND/NCE	22.7		Other part of the state	17.0
	HND/First Degree	24.0		Other state in Nigeria	21.0
	Postgraduate	8.7		Outside Nigerian	5.0
Occupation	Unemployed	1.3	Length of stay in the study area	≤5	15.7
	Schooling	22.3		6 – 10	23.7
	Primary	10.7		>10	60.7
	Secondary	32.0	Political affiliation	None	21.0
	Tertiary	15.0		APC	44.0
	Retired	11.7		PDP	31.3
	Uncategorised	7.0		Other	3.7

According to Table 1, 45.3% of the respondents were male while 54.7% were female. The age distribution shows that 13.7% were 25 years old and under; 15.3%, 25.7% and 29.7% were in the 26-35, 36-45 and 46-55 age brackets respectively while the remaining 15.7% were at least 56 years old. This distribution of the respondents' ages is even, to a large extent. Also, that all the respondents were adult is an indication that they should be aware of the variables being measured by the study and thus were able to give valid responses. Furthermore, in terms of education, the respondents were found to be mostly literate: only 1.0% had no formal education while 2.3% did not go beyond the elementary level of education. However, 8.3%, 33.0%, 22.7%, 24.0% and 8.7% had junior secondary, senior secondary, ordinary national diploma or national certificate in education, higher national diploma or first degree, and postgraduate qualifications respectively. The occupation distribution of the respondents shows that a good proportion (22.3%) were in school; however, this was not disaggregated. Also, 1.3% were unemployed, 10.7%, 32.0% and 15.0% were engaged in primary, secondary and tertiary production activities respectively while 11.7% had retired. The remaining 7.0% did not have an occupation that could be easily categorised.

In addition, the marital status of the respondents shows that 9.0% were single, 73.0% were married while 18.0% were either divorced or widowed. This implies that most of them had a family, a pointer to the likelihood of household political discussion no matter how passive. Further analysis shows that 58.7% of the respondents were Christians, 34.3% were Muslims, 6.3% worshipped traditional deities while the rest (0.7%) of the respondents did not belong to any prominent religious group. Religion is a relevant variable in political assessment as even religious organisations are also agents of socialisation. The largest percentage (58.0) of the respondents came from low-income families. A low-income family in the operational context of this study is a family whose combined/household monthly income was less than 100,000 naira (as of the time of this survey, 30,000 naira was the national [monthly] minimum wage). The middle-income family group (families earning between N100,000 and N200,000) accounted for 25.7% of the respondents while the remaining 13.3% of the respondents came from high-income families, operationally defined in this study as a family with a combined income of over N200,000 a month.

Another important consideration in this study was the place of origin of the respondents. According to Table 1, 57.0% of the respondents were from the study area (Ile-Ife or Modakeke), 17.0% were from other parts of Osun State, 21.0% were from other states in Nigeria while the remaining 5.0% were from countries other than Nigeria. Of these people, 15.7% had been living in the study area for at most 5 years, 23.7% had been living there for between 6 and 10 years while 60.7% had been living there for over 10 years. Thus, it is apparent that the largest proportion of the respondents had lived for a long time in the study area.

The political affiliation of the respondents was also examined as it influences how residents perceive the activities and achievements of the government. According to Table 1, 21.0% of the respondents did not belong to any political party. The All Progressives Congress (APC), the ruling party in the state as at the time of the survey, accounted for the largest proportion (44.0%) of the respondents while 31.3% belonged to the main opposition party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). The remaining 3.7% of the respondents identified with some other political parties.

### **Residents' awareness of local government's role in urban services provision**

In measuring the residents' perception of what the local government provides, it is pertinent to examine the respondents' awareness of the role of local governments in the provision of such urban services. Table 2 presents the summary of the findings of this study in this regard.

According to Table 2, generally, most of the respondents were not aware that it was the duty of the local government to provide such urban services as cemeteries and burial grounds (RAI = 1.7 or 34%), homes for the destitute or infirm (RAI = 1.4 or 28%), slaughterhouses and slaughter slabs (RAI = 2.0 or 40%), parks, gardens and open spaces (RAI = 1.8 or 36%), and control and regulation of keeping pets (RAI = 2.0 or 40%). However, the respondents were generally aware that such urban services as markets (RAI = 3.7 or 74%), motor parks (RAI = 3.6 or 72%), public conveniences (RAI = 3.5 or 70%), roads, streets, streets lightings and drains (RAI = 4.5 or 90%), naming of roads/streets, and house numbering (RAI = 2.6 or 52%), sewage and refuse disposal (RAI = 3.5 or 70%), as well as primary, adult, and vocational education (RAI = 3.3 or 66%)

were to be statutorily provided by the local government. This finding is significance because it would be quite difficult for anyone to objectively assess the performance of the local government on the provision of an urban service if such a person does not know the services should statutorily be provided by the local government.

**Table 2.** Awareness of Local Government's Role in Providing Urban Services  
(Data source: Authors' field survey, 2022)

Urban service provision by local government	Level of awareness						
	EA	MA	SmA	SlA	NA	RAI	%
Cemeteries and burial grounds	12	14	23	67	181	1.7	34
Homes for the destitute or infirm	5	12	11	33	234	1.4	28
Slaughterhouses/slaughter slabs	5	21	53	98	112	2.0	40
Markets	88	99	65	35	12	3.7	74
Motor parks	101	56	89	31	19	3.6	72
Public conveniences	76	77	54	46	28	3.5	70
Roads, streets, streetslightings and drains	182	102	5	7	4	4.5	90
Parks, gardens and open spaces	11	13	9	95	124	1.8	36
Naming of roads/streets, and house numbering	43	54	21	97	73	2.6	52
Sewage and refuse disposal	71	81	74	45	21	3.5	70
Control and regulation of keeping pets	21	16	28	104	126	2.0	40
Primary, adult, and vocational education	67	83	67	32	49	3.3	66

Key: EA = Extremely Aware, MA = Moderately Aware, SmA = Somewhat Aware, SlA = Slightly Aware, NA = Not At All Aware, RAI = Relative Awareness Index

### **Residents' assessment of the condition of local government-provided urban services**

Presented in Table 3 are the residents' assessment of the condition of the urban services provided by the Ife East Local Government. With RII scores of 3.4 (68%) and 2.6 (52%) only markets and motor parks respectively were the two urban services with an acceptable condition to the people. The condition of all the other urban services were, according to the respondents, poor. The duo of public convenience and the control as well as regulation of movement and keeping of pets were the statutory roles of the local government that were scored the least (RAI = 1.0 or 20% in each case). This indicates that residents did not feel the impact of the local government as far as these services were concerned. The perception of the respondents must have been influenced by how domestic animals and pets freely roam the streets and how open spaces and drains are often desecrated with excreta in the study area.

According to Table 3, other important urban services were also scored poorly in terms of condition. Parks, gardens and open spaces scored 1.1 or 22%; homes for the destitute or infirm scored 1.2 or 24%; cemeteries and burial grounds scored 1.3 or 26% while road/street naming and house numbering scored 1.4 or 28%. The condition of other urban service was also poorly rated: roads, streets, streets lightings and drains (RAI = 1.7 or 34%), primary, adult,

and vocational education (RAI = 2.3 or 46%), sewage and refuse disposal (RAI = 2.4 or 48%), and slaughterhouses and slaughter slabs (RAI = 2.4 or 48%).

**Table 3.** Urban Service Condition Assessment

(Data source: Authors' field survey, 2022)

Element	Condition/State							
	E	VG	G	F	P/N	RII	%	Rank
Cemeteries and burial grounds	0	0	4	53	181	1.3	26	8
Homes for the destitute or infirm	0	1	0	43	192	1.2	24	9
Slaughterhouse/slaughter slabs	32	43	21	87	102	2.4	48	3
Markets	78	51	87	54	13	3.4	68	1
Motor parks	21	38	112	56	63	2.6	52	2
Public conveniences (toilets)	0	0	0	4	245	1.0	20	11
Roads, streets, streetlightings and drains	13	11	15	98	163	1.7	34	6
Parks, gardens and open spaces	0	2	1	12	227	1.1	22	10
Naming of roads and streets, and numbering of houses	2	5	4	19	87	1.4	28	7
Sewage and refuse disposal	32	46	21	68	93	2.4	48	3
Control and regulation of movement and keeping of pets	0	0	0	4	81	1.0	20	11
Primary, adult, and vocational education	12	24	20	127	45	2.3	46	5

Key: E = Excellent, VG = Very Good, G = Good, F = Fair, P/N = Poor/Non-Existent

### Residents' assessment of local government urban service delivery responsiveness

Table 4 summarises residents' assessment of the local government's urban service delivery responsiveness. Using seven operative indicators of responsiveness, the respondents scored the local government generally low in its responsiveness to its statutory responsibilities.

**Table 4.** Local Government Urban Service Delivery Responsiveness Assessment

(Data source: Authors' field survey, 2022)

Responsibility	Responsiveness Assessment							
	E	VG	G	F	P/N	RII	%	Rank
Provision/Financing	13	4	11	97	173	1.6	32	4
Maintenance	2	0	6	102	181	1.4	28	5
Protection	0	1	0	95	201	1.3	26	6
Replacement	4	11	32	91	139	1.7	34	3
Upgrading/Retrofitting	0	0	1	12	274	1.0	20	7
Service Quality	32	21	43	87	111	2.2	44	2
Coverage/Adequacy	43	19	21	75	87	2.4	48	1

Key: E = Excellent, VG = Very Good, G = Good, F = Fair, P/N = Poor/Non-Existent

The respondents scored the local government 2.4 (48%) on coverage or adequacy of urban service delivery. This implies that urban services in the study area were, to a large extent, inaccessible. Service quality was scored 2.2 (44%); replacement of damaged urban services and provision/financing were scored 1.7 (34%) and 1.6 (32%) respectively. Maintenance and protection were scored 1.4 (28%) and 1.3 (26%) respectively while upgrading or retrofitting was scored 1.0



(20%). Thus, generally, the respondents felt that the local government was not responsive to its statutory responsibility of urban service provision in the study area.

### **Problems militating against local governments**

Presented in Table 5 is the perception of the respondents of the problems militating against the performance of Ife East Local Government and local governments in Nigeria generally.

**Table 5.** Problems Working against the Performance of Local Governments  
(Data source: Authors' field survey, 2022)

Issue	Perception as a problem: Level of agreement							
	SA	A	I	D	SD	RII	%	Rank
Lack of Autonomy	108	93	54	21	23	3.8	76	3
Poor Financing	121	97	23	17	18	4.0	80	2
Corruption	201	81	1	4	11	4.5	90	1
Inefficiency	98	63	65	43	21	3.6	72	4
Poor Staff Motivation	45	72	94	53	34	3.1	62	5
Tax Evasion	63	51	59	65	59	3.0	60	6
Poor Fund Mobilisation	53	28	56	71	63	2.8	56	7

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, I = Indifferent, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

According to Table 5, with an RII value of 4.5 (90%), corruption topped the list of the problems perceived to be dogging the local government. It was followed by poor financing (4.0 or 80%). Lack of autonomy, inefficiency, poor staff motivation, and tax evasion polled 3.8 (76%), 3.6 (72%), 3.1 (62%) and 3.0 (60%) respectively. Poor fund mobilisation scored 2.8 (56%) to be the least problematic issue working against the performance of the local government.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aim of this study was to assess, from the residents' point of view, urban service delivery in Ife East Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. It was found that, most of the respondents were not fully aware of the statutory duties of the local government relating to the provision of certain urban services. Moreover, it was found that only markets and motor parks were the urban services with an acceptable condition in the study area; the condition of all the other urban services that should be statutorily provided by the local government was adjudged to be poor by the respondents. Furthermore, employing seven operative indicators of responsiveness, the local government was scored low in its responsiveness to its statutory responsibilities. However, residents also acknowledged that certain problems were adversely affecting the performance rating of the local government. The identified problems were corruption, poor funding, lack of autonomy, inefficiency, poor staff motivation, tax evasion, and poor fund mobilisation.

The findings of this study have several policy implications for both the study area and the generality of urban centres in Nigeria. No urban centre can function maximally without adequate urban services that are largely lacking in many Nigerian towns and cities. Meanwhile, an effective local government system is crucially indispensable to functional towns and cities. Thus, concerted and conscientious efforts should be made to make the Nigerian local government

system work. For effective urban service delivery by local governments in Nigeria, the following policy recommendations are proffered.

First, public enlightenment should be embarked on for the uninformed to know the statutory roles of local governments in the provision of urban services. People who do not know what to expect from their government cannot hold their government accountable for even palpable failures. Also, the state of all urban services should be overhauled for enhanced urban functions. Moreover, local governments in the country should be alive to their responsibilities. Towards this end, all the identified problems working against the performance of the local governments in the country should be tackled head on, especially corruption and inefficiency on the part of the operators of this tier of government.

More importantly, better funding of local governments should be prioritised in all sharing formulae as the tier of government closest to the grassroots. In addition, fund mobilisation should be worked on by the local governments themselves. The payment of all taxes and rates should be enforced, and tax evasion of all forms should be decisively confronted. With the right steps firmly taken, urban service delivery by local governments in Nigeria can be improved. The benefits will also cut across the two other tiers of government in the country.

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## CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE OPERATION OF THE STATE SECURITY SYSTEMS IN POLAND

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**Abstract:** The undertaken research on the assessment of the operation of state security systems is an attempt to critically assess them from the point of view of a citizen. The aim of the work is to analyze the systemic approach to security in relation to its actual state. The work uses methods typical of social sciences, which include security sciences. To carry out the research, monographic methods, qualitative content analysis and comparative analysis were used. The work indicates that a number of security threats occurring in the country were analyzed. Among those causing the greatest problems, and at the same time neglected, are social threats related to demographic problems. Economic threats related to the current financial situation and threats resulting from poor protection of cyberspace. It was pointed out that, despite the existence of appropriate systems to counteract the threat, there is a lack of it. The repeatability of events constituting a threat and the lack of implementation of real actions that prevent threats were emphasized.

**Key words:** security, state, system, threats, Poland

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### INTRODUCTION

The state security system is the subject of interest of many researchers (Stańczyk, 1996; 2011; Kitler, 2011; Kitler, 2020) both in general (Ciekanowski et al., 2016) and international (Czaputowicz, 1998; Bógdał-Brzezińska & Wendt, 2020a) as well as in its individual components (Sosnowski & Zamiar, 2001; Wiśniewski & Zalewski, 2004; Leszczyński, 2011; Kitler, 2019). It is regulated by a number of legal acts (Kopczewski, 2020), from ordinances of individual ministers, through resolutions of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Poland, through strategies and laws, systematically amended, such as, for example (Act of October 12, 1990, 1990; Act of May 10, 2018, 2018; Strategy..., 2013; Regulation ..., 2004). The legal and organizational aspects of the

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introduction of states of emergency were examined (Brzeziński, 2007; Kitler et al., 2019), issues of the universal duty of defense (Tuz, 2019; Kamiński, 2019), personal data protection (Kitler et al., 2019), management and security structures (Spustek & Paluch, 2017), similar is the case of relatively poorly researched relations between geopolitical ideas and their shaping in the Internet space (Tyszkiewicz & Borowiec, 2020; Bógdał-Brzezińska & Wendt, 2021; 2022) which is especially current and visible during the current war between Russia and Ukraine). But also, in the case of the internal policy of each state and its institutions, especially democratic procedures, such as parliamentary elections (Wendt & Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020; Borkowski et al., 2021).

However, with the formally existing systemic approach (Szynowski, 2019; Usewicz et al., 2021), despite the efforts of individual services, apart from good or very good performance at the local level (fire brigade, emergency services, rescue operations in the event of disasters in road, rail, or air traffic, etc.), at the meta level it shows an astonishing lack of effectiveness. This is probably the result of the weakness of the state and the extreme inefficiency of most governments after 1989. Of course, in this period there are many successes, which, as usual, have many fathers, while threats to the security of the state affecting hundreds of thousands of citizens happen very often and, despite the media publicity, they teach us nothing. And it's even worse because they don't teach anything to the ruling elites.

The aim of the work undertaken and the analysis of the systemic approach to security in relation to its actual state is a critical analysis of the actual security of Poland. The result of such an analysis is an indication of potential threats and an attempt to answer the question why we do not prevent threats. The aim of the work chosen in this way does not allow to indicate all the threats to the security of the state that we are currently facing. However, it allows you to show an example and groups of threats, or those that have become a reality from the category of potential threats. Just like the causes of these threats, often resulting from the thoughtless actions of the authorities/services that were supposed to prevent them.

### **MATERIAL, METHODS AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH**

The material for the analysis consists of existing and potential threats (Ciekanowski, 2010) to the broadly understood security of Poland. Reported by the media or indicated as potential by specialists.

In the research and case analysis, methods typical for security sciences were used (Mickiewicz, 2010). Virtually all methods used in the social sciences and humanities are applicable in the theory of security (Mróz-Jagiello & Wolanin, 2013; Czapryński et al., 2017). The monographic method was used to identify state structures and institutions (or lack thereof). It was also used to assess the effectiveness of the activities of structures (services) and to develop concepts, improvements and development forecasts. Qualitative content analysis was used to examine existing, but also omitted content to show significant or unsaid (disregarded) threats. The work also uses the method of comparative analysis, confronting the effects of response to events defined as threats.

The most important limitations of the undertaken research include the problem of access to materials crucial for security and defining threats, which by nature belong to proprietary information resources. Attempts were made to solve this problem by using the available information from media materials, which,

although they do not inform about the details of the phenomenon but present its basic dimension.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The presented and analyzed threats have their spatial dimensions (Wendt, 2008), global, national, regional or local, but in each case, their victims, in the end, are individual, usually anonymous people. The scale of the threat to the state, to the lives of citizens, is tragically evidenced by the size of the so-called excess deaths, the number of which for the years 2020-2021 is estimated at about 140,000. In 2021, the most people died in Poland since World War II - over 506,000. That's about 40,000. more than in the equally tragic year 2020, when over 477,000 people left. Poles (68,000 more than in 2019). Part of this number (69,000) are deaths due to Covid-19, but the causes of death of Poles were definitely more. According to experts' estimates, almost 30 percent. of them could have been avoided. Most of these are diagnosed and undiagnosed COVID-19 deaths. People died at home without receiving help, and before they died, they were not tested and appear in the statistics with the causes of death: respiratory failure or pneumonia. The second group of people are those who died of other diseases due to overburdening of health care. These are excess deaths that are being talked about more and more during the pandemic. What does it mean? In simple terms, it is the ratio of the number of deaths in a given year to the average number of deaths from the same period in previous years. Today, the time before the appearance of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is taken into account. For Eurostat, whose data we discuss in this article, the years 2016-2019 are such a reference point. What is most important in analyzing redundant data is the indicator used. Analysts do not provide specific numbers, because it would not make sense in the context of comparing individual countries. 90 thousand the number of excess deaths that we had, according to experts' estimates, last year in Poland may be a very large number in our country, but in countries with a much larger population (for example in China) not necessarily. Conversely, in a country with a smaller population, such a result may be even more alarming than in Poland. Therefore, the statistics always show the percentage average increase in deaths. The number of excess deaths is very important information not only for demographers and politicians, but above all, it proves the functioning of the health care system in the country. It is the answer to the question of whether the health service is adequately invested (in terms of personnel, equipment, technology, services) so that it is able to help all patients in need. It is not only about their treatment, but also about diagnostics and health prevention, allowing to reduce the risk of getting sick or exacerbating various diseases that can lead to death. If we look at the statistics of excess deaths in European countries from this angle, Poland is definitely not doing well in this care. According to Eurostat data, last year we were on the podium several times in the list of countries with the highest rate of excess deaths in relation to the period 2016-2019. Of course, the health care system is there, it works, it has an increased budget, but since 1989 it's just so inefficient. No reforms, or poorly implemented. Just like the pension system, just like the system that is supposed to stop or at least slow down the country's depopulation.

A separate aspect is the country's defense system. The condition and size of the Polish army, its equipment, budget spending, organization of the armed forces. In terms of the navy - the media report the fears of soldiers serving on the



only submarine - it does not come out, it does not submerge, because there is a real threat that it will not surface. In turn, according to the Global Firepower portal, in terms of the budget (2022), we are ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in the world (the lower the ratio, the better), but already in the category of national debt we are ranked 111<sup>th</sup>. Professional soldiers - 31, and artillery - 140. Despite a relatively large budget, procurement programs are not implemented, indeed not always agreed with specialists from the army. Problems, or rather scandals related to the purchase of parachutes, Grot carbines, French helicopters, or equipping the army with armored weapons of several different types and manufacturers, the inability to effectively protect the country by air or against missiles in every conflict with Russia put us in a difficult situation. And the new law (system!) on defense of the homeland (March 11, 2022) in the current demographic and economic situation of the country is rather a set of wishes than a systemic, feasible plan to strengthen the security of the state. The 300,000 army alone, without the obligation of universal mobilization, becomes a pipe dream. The Demographic Yearbook of Poland (2021) states that there are only 380,000 men in Poland in the age group of 18-19 (conscription age), which means that about half of them (180,000 out of two generations) should supply the Polish army so that there can be an increase from the current 120,000 to 300,000.

Another failed system is the dislocation system for migrants (Wendt et al, 2018) and refugees from Ukraine. In fact, almost all the direct assistance provided to them was organized by NGOs and local government institutions. Neither an education system for hundreds of thousands of children was created, they were simply included in Polish schools with the possibility of taking exams in accordance with the program in force in Poland! As reported by the media, various systems of financing the stay of refugees have been adopted, depending on the partner/institution/organisation dealing with refugees. No systemic program has been prepared, apart from the allocation of PSL numbers and the possibility of access to doctors or education. Poles and local governments were left without real support.

The known problems and threats of the last ten years, which continue to this day, are financial problems caused by the weakness of state structures and systems (Stańczyk, 2020). What, apart from the indolence of the authorities, more specifically the financial supervision over the banking system, explains the financial threat to thousands of people who took out loans in francs despite the obvious exchange rate risk, or the case of the "Amber Gold" financial pyramid. Currently, the threat to the safety of many families is rising inflation, the effect of the activities of the National Bank of Poland and its head, or the next wave of Covid-19 cases, which has been growing since June 2022. As a result of the war in Ukraine (which lasted from February 2022), but also before the Russian aggression, the threat of increasing energy poverty areas and the real threat of a lack of supplies of energy resources have increased. Which is the result of over 30 years of indolence and ineffective state energy policy. At the state level, the huge public finance debt is a threat effectively concealed by the authorities. An additional problem is the payment of pensions by ZUS, the result of an incorrect policy and poorly conducted pension reform. Another meta-threat on a national scale includes the issue of black-out, power grids, despite high profits, are not modernized, and electricity supplies in the summer (air conditioning) or winter (heating) periods are additionally overloaded. Despite the knowledge, research and publications, we do not conduct any effective pro-natal policy, the latest

(preliminary) census data in Poland already indicate a decrease in the number of inhabitants, and forecasts by 2080 estimate a decrease in the population by 7 million, to the level of about 30 million.

Social security (Leszczyński, 2011; Gierszewski, 2018) and a systemic threat, according to the literature, is a matter of the operation of services, schemes, procedures, legal system, organization and management. So what if, despite the implementation of good systems protecting against data theft, the Polish army managed to publish over 1.7 million detailed data on the entire resources of the Polish army. What about the design, implementation and system operation, because in everyday life we do not follow basic procedures. Polish military aviators have learned nothing from the air disaster in Miroslawiec (2008), the crew and sixteen officers, pilots, returning from the 50th Aviation Safety Conference of the Armed Forces, died. Similarly, the increase in the number of covid-19 cases after arriving in the country for the holidays of thousands of compatriots from the British Isles did not teach anything. During the period in line with the virus replication cycle, two weeks later we had a high wave of covid cases and deaths.

Another issue related to social security is demographic security (Łakomy, 2016; 2017; Lewicka, 2016, Sofer, 2008). Covering the issues of the decreasing natural increase rate and the increasing number of deaths, including excess deaths. The increasing mortality, which results in a decrease in the population and an increase in the population of seniors (Bógdał-Brzezińska, 2020d) may pose a threat, in the case of small countries, even to their existence (Wendt, 2021).

Another of the analyzed threats is the issue of cyber security. The importance of the problem is perhaps best demonstrated on the one hand by the wiretapping scandal at the Sowa & Przyjaciele restaurant, in which numerous conversations of ministers from governments created by PO were recorded, including the bizarre one by the minister of internal affairs, as well as millions of data systematically published on portals linked to Russia, which are according to the publishers, copies of thousands of e-mails sent by numerous high-ranking officials of the current government along with the prime minister and his head of cabinet. What is again bizarre, the highest officials of the Polish state do not use secured e-mail systems secured by special state services (, but they choose commercial mail providers to communicate about even the most important matters of the state. And so, in principle, similar examples could be multiplied indefinitely in the field of energy security, health, demography, army, border protection or Polish defense.

## **CONCLUSION**

This, of course, does not change the importance and role of the state security system. It only leads to the conclusion that despite its existence, it simply does not work properly. Among those causing the greatest problems, and at the same time neglected, are social threats related to demographic problems. Economic threats related to the current financial situation and threats resulting from poor protection of cyberspace. It was pointed out that, despite the existence of appropriate systems to counteract the threat, there is a lack of it. The repeatability of events constituting a threat and the lack of implementation of real actions that prevent threats were emphasized.

Probably best sums up the current situation and the state and operation of the state's security systems in the words of politicians who describe Poland as a state made of plywood and cardboard. It is a pity that the effort put into the education of thousands of young people in the fields of national security or state and a number of decent, substantive studies, from the subject of energy security through border security or state defense, have such a small impact on the reality that surrounds us.

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## **TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS IN THE ROMANIAN SPACE. CASE STUDY OLCEA MUNICIPALITY, BIHOR COUNTY ROMANIA**

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**Abstract:** From the appearance of man on Earth until now, his most important concern has been (and is) to understand the world. A decisive role in this sense is played by culture, which represents the specific way of human existence. The curiosity of the spirit, the thirst to learn and understand makes this heritage to be passed on from one generation to another, to live it as a new experience, according to one's own possibilities, but at the same time to be passed on as a heritage to the new ones generations. In this context, the purpose of this study is to share with the whole world the cultural aspects specific to the Olcea Commune area, aspects that characterize us as a community. The present research aims to discover some of these aspects (a legacy embodied in myths, ceremonies, songs and charms, in the notches made on the wood of agricultural tools, etc.), in order to pass them on to the next generations. Thus, the obtained results highlighted and outlined a synthetic picture of the main traditions and customs in Olcea commune, Bihor county, Romania.

**Key words:** traditions, customs, Bihor County,

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The traditions and customs of human collectivities represent an invaluable storehouse of specific human values, values that have been created, tested and

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validated over time, in terms of human-nature communion (Herman et al., 2020a; Ilieș et al., 2008, 2009, 2010, 2017a). Thus, through all that it represents, traditions are nothing more than methods, ways of proceeding of man in relation to the other components of the environment, while customs are the immediate actions, during the life of a generation, they are being directed into a great extent by the informational component of the traditions and the concrete, momentary possibilities offered by the natural environment. Having said that, it follows that between traditions and customs there is a direct relationship of interconditioning, thus the change of traditions automatically requires the change of objects, which in turn involve new flows of information, matter and energy without which there is no change. Considering the changing nature of the environment, which is in a continuous process of transformation and change, as a result of the antagonistic struggles between the internal and external energies of the Earth, it is easy to understand that human traditions and customs are also defined by mutations and changes. The major problem, however, is the high speed of changes in terms of traditions and customs, which will lead to the disconnection of man from the component of the natural framework in which he naturally evolved over time (Herman et al., 2016a, b; Ilieș et al., 2014, 2017b, 2018). The context is favored by a series of factors, among which we can mention: the trend of numerical population growth; the increase in pressure induced by the large number of the population on the natural environment; the appearance of anthropogenic changes because of anthropogenic impact; consumption economy; globalization etc.

Although most of us perceive globalization as something negative/bad, I think it is not wrong to say that it is also a positive force for change (Herman and Grama, 2018; Herman, 2022). Global interaction offers new opportunities to discover people, places, to exchange ideas. And in this context, we recognize that in fact each of us has our own cultural identity, which we share with other people (Boc et al., 2022; Caciora et al., 2021a; Herman and Benchiș, 2017; Herman and Gherman, 2016; Herman and Wendt, 2011; Ilieș et al., 2020).

So, thanks to this interaction/globalization we were able to make known to the whole world the traditions and customs that we live and that make us who we are. Thanks to globalization, through our traditions and customs, millions of people were able to get to know our country, understand our culture or even fall in love with Romania. But so is the reverse, that is, due to the possibilities of travel and interaction, we have not only exported our traditions and customs, but imported new ones.

It must be emphasized, however, that the preservation of traditions and customs are very important because they have the role of putting a wall in the way of forgetting, they have the role of eliminating the challenges and disadvantages of globalization. Also, their role is to guide us through time, showing us where we come from and where we are going, a fact for which we must value them and pass them on to the generations to come (Ilie et al., 2022).

Another aspect, equally important, is represented by the opportunity to exploit through tourism the traditions and customs specific to local communities in tourist destinations (Ezenagu, 2020; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003; Tien et al., 2019; etc). The area of Bihor County represents a tourist space in a process of deep transformations, against the background of the intensification of specific tourism activities. Against this background, the numerous studies on tourism and the possibilities of valorizing traditions and customs through tourism, seen

as elements of local identity, stand out (Ban et al., 2021; Bădulescu et al., 2014; Caciora et al., 2021b; Herman et al., 2019, 2020a,b,c; 2021; Wendt et al., 2021; Tătar et al., 2020).

In this context, the aim of the present study is to identify, analyze and record the traditions and customs of Olcea commune, Bihor County, Romania.

Olcea commune is in the south of Bihor County, between the Crișul Negru and Crișul Alb rivers, in the Western Plain, in the historical region of Crișana, at the foot of the Codru Moma piedmont, being made up of four localities: Olcea (the seat of the commune), Călăcea (with the largest number of inhabitants), Ucuriș and Hodișel (Ile et al., 2022). From an administrative point of view, it borders the territorial administrative units: Tinca (to the north), Cociuba Mare (to the northeast), Șoimi (to the southeast), Craiva from Arad County (to the south), Apateu and Batar (in west) (Ile et al., 2022).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is the result of research activities - documentation both in the specialized literature and in the field. In the field, a series of introspections, unstructured interviews of the type of free discussions on the topic of traditions and customs were carried out with older local representatives who know well the studied problem from personal experience (Table 1). The discussions took place in 2018, in their households. The information acquired in this way was structured, organized and used in order to carry out this study. Although in some places they include a dose of subjectivism (due to the human nature of the issuer, being influenced by emotions, feelings, etc.), the information obtained in this way is important in terms of shaping a synthetic picture of local traditions and customs.

**Table 1.** List of consulted persons

No. Crt.	Name and surname	Localities	Gender	Age
1	Ana Sabău	Călăcea	female	81
2	Mărioară Râpan	Călăcea	female	70
3	Cornelia Păcurar	Călăcea	female	60
4	Moisă Mic	Călăcea	male	79
5	Mărioară Mic	Călăcea	female	71
6	Gheorghe Mihăeș	Călăcea	male	49
7	Teodor Ile	Călăcea	male	73
8	Ana Ile	Călăcea	female	72
9	Nicolae Ciucea	Călăcea	male	68
10	Gheorghe Gomboș	Călăcea	male	72
12	Ana Ștean	Călăcea	female	81
13	Mic Teodor	Călăcea	male	81
14	Mic Ana	Călăcea	female	79

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The rural community presents a wide range of manifestations with a strong spiritual character, in a repeatable way. An important role in the transmission of these traditions and customs was played by the oral tradition, so that from generation to generation, the traditions were passed on, undergoing small changes, depending on the era. Traditional customs, both those that mark the transition

from one year to another, called calendar customs, predominantly agrarian, and those that accompany the crucial stages of human life: birth, marriage, death - show many similarities at the level of the entire country (Crăciun, 2018).

### **Traditions and customs throughout the year**

They are represented by those traditions and customs related to church holidays and agricultural work, in which the whole community participates (Ardelean, 2018). The most important holiday of Christianity is the Resurrection of the Savior (Easter). Eagerly awaited by children, prepared with great care by adults, Easter represents the victory of good over evil, i.e. the dose of energy that a community needs, to move forward, to hope that it will be better. Holy Week (the week before Easter) is a very important one. This week starts with cleaning the house (spring cleaning); clothes are washed, interior items are painted (doors, kitchen cabinets), cracks in the walls are repaired (with clay), the exterior walls of the house are painted. The trees in front of the house are painted white, so that the village receives a new, fresh air of renewal (the return to life together with nature) (Ana Sabău, 2018).

On Good Friday, the entire community fasts (no food and no water), including young children. Of course, they can't fast all day, so a bean soup is boiled for them. In the evening, the eggs are usually dyed red. In the past, there weren't as many solutions for dyeing eggs as there are today, so onion skins were used, and older women used to coat the eggs with wax. Also, for a greater variety of egg decoration, leaves from different plants (clover, mouse tail, rose, etc.) were used. The procedure was simple and involved placing the leaves on eggshells, then placing them in a lycra stocking and boiling them in water with onion skins. In the end, the shape of the leaf remained printed on the egg, thus obtaining motifs of floral decoration applied to the eggs (Mărioara Răpan, 2018).

Also on Good Friday, the Easter lamb is sacrificed, and those who cannot afford a lamb, buy a lamb together with their neighbor (or relatives). On the evening of Holy Saturday, the whole community participates in the resurrection service. With candles lit, everyone surrounds the church at midnight, heralding the triumph of life over death.

In the old days, on Easter morning, children went from house to house "after eggs", with the "straita" on their shoulders, greeting "Christ is risen!", and the host answers them. "He is truly risen!". Each child received a red egg (Ardelean, 2018).

At noon, the children meet in the center of the village (in front of the school, which is opposite the church) and organize a kind of egg-scrambler contest to see who has the strongest egg. On the second and third day of Easter, the whole community celebrates by attending the religious service. So, from Good Friday until the Tuesday after Easter (inclusive), fieldwork is suspended.

Christmas is the other great Christian holiday. Preparation for this celebration begins at the beginning of December. In the weeks before Christmas, another traditional (Romanian) custom takes place, which is highly respected, the slaughtering of the pig (Ignatul), pork products (especially sausages).

In the week before Christmas, the table is prepared for the celebration. Braided cakes are baked, "cakes" are made, and in the evening of Eve, the streets of the village are full of carolers. The children's carol mentions the expected gifts: "Black chick put it in the bag / Hostess, give me a "colac" / Don't

give me a small one / Because I'm cold / Give me a big one / I like it / like a plow wheel / Fills the baby's throat" (Crăciun, 2018).

Another carol that expresses the feeling of solidarity and hospitality of the Ucuriș people sounds like this: "Daybreak pours / Leave us the host in the house / It's pouring rain outside / Good morning to Christmas / And his shirt is thin / And the rain passes through it / Good morning to Christmas / Good morning to Christmas in "tărnaț" / And he gives us some sausage / And a penny for the coat / Because the shirt is not warm" (Ardelean, 2018).

In the village of Ucuriș, on Christmas day, after the Holy Liturgy, the young people's caroling begins at the priest's house, continues at the mayor's and the teachers, and then at all the houses. Upon entering the house, they greet each other with "Christ is born!" and are greeted with "Truth is born!" of host. After the end of the carol, the host offers gifts, cakes, palinka, apples and nuts. At the departure, the carolers thank the host: "Thank you to our host / He is hardworking and beautiful / It was a good meal / A bottle gives a rattle / Taken it gives a beam / May God speak / The house, the table and the garden / Let us not longing / Cross-in-house, cross-in-table / Be a healthy host / We are going to another house" (Ardelean, 2018).

Another time, equally important and full of meanings for the local community is the New Year. On New Year's Eve, the children go with the "sorcova" and the plow, announcing the end of the old year and the beginning of the new year, wishing the host health and prosperity: "Happy "sorcova" / May you live, bloom / Like an apple, like a hair / Like a strand of rose / Happy birthday and happy birthday". For this, the host offers money to the children as thanks.

Since the agricultural calendar is very important in the village world, and because there were no weather forecasts (or at least they were not known in the village), there was a ritual for predicting the weather (from the perspective of agricultural work), the "onion calendar". 12 leaves were taken from an onion (each corresponding to a month of the year) in which salt was put. In the ones where the water collected, there was going to be a rainy month (coincidence or not, there were also sheets where the salt didn't even get wet, that meant drought). For this prediction to be valid, it had to be made only on New Year's Eve (Cornelia Păcurar, 2018).

In the village of Călăcea there was a custom (today it has disappeared) called "Turca", a kind of "Goat" nowadays. Thus, two people would dress up as an animal with a beak, which the locals called "Turca", doing all kinds of dances and jumps, after which "the beak yawns" and you had to throw money into it. Those who did not throw money were bitten or had their hats thrown from their heads. The most awaited moment was the shooting of the "Turca". Two men "armed" with a wooden rifle pretended to shoot him. To make the scene as believable as possible, there was also a hunter firing a real rifle into the air while the two pretended to shoot him. The "Turca" would fall as if dead and then the mourning would begin, until he woke up (Moisă Mic, 2018).

Among the superstitions related to the New Year, we mention: the "obligation" to have money in your pocket; the obligation to wear something (clothing) red; on the first day of the year in the householders' house, the girls are forbidden to enter in front of the boys because they bring bad luck; also on the first day of the year nothing is thrown/taken out of the house, as luck is thrown /taken out.

A beautiful custom that is still preserved today on these winter holidays is the reconciliation and reunion of families.

The winter holidays end with Epiphany on January 6. Before this date, the "priest goes with the cross" to sanctify the houses, accompanied by two children dressed in white clothes, who walk in front of the priest with "țângălău", singing "Jordan" to announce the arrival of the priest.

On Epiphany, unmarried girls put basil under their pillow, so that at night they dream of their future husband. In the old days, to know what the future husband will look like, the girls, fasting on the eve of the Epiphany, gathered at the house of a villager who was waiting for them with a "blid" (plate). Under it was a symbolic object: bread, money, coal, etc. The host invited the girls to choose one. The girl who found bread would have a husband as good as bread, the one who found money would have a rich husband, and the girl who found coal would have a brunette husband (Crăciun, 2018).

De Sânjorj (St. Gheorghe) – April 23, boys and men water girls to marry and barren women, as an act of purification and fecundity.

On the first Saturday, after the start of Great Lent, Sântoaderul is celebrated, on which occasion wheat is boiled and eaten sweetened with sugar. In the old days, it was a long-awaited moment of spring and "I remember sitting with the plate and waiting for my mother to put us boiled wheat" (Gheorghe Mihăeș, 2018).

During the holidays there are many superstitions such as: on Christmas, New Year's and Epiphany, money is put in the water where you wash; who sleeps on the New Year, the whole year will be sleepy; if it snows on New Year's Eve, it will be a rich year; whoever drinks water from "țângălău", when the priest walks with the cross, will have a beautiful voice, etc. (Crăciun, 2018).

### **Customs and traditions related to important moments in human life**

#### **Marriage – Wedding**

This event targets not only the two brides and grooms, but also their families, involving the whole community. It is a joy of the whole community, all citizens participating (to some extent) in this beginning of the road in the life of the newlyweds.

In the past, young people married very early, girls at 14-16 (at 20-25 they were considered old girls), and boys at 16-18 (after 30 it was said that only their daughters married them) (Cioș, 2018).

In a world where the main means of meeting was the "șezătoarea" or "claca", this was also the place where young people met. Unmarried girls went "with a pitchfork" in the evening to a host, and boys came to them "on the street". It was the place where the flirting started, where the boy got a kiss, at the "fountains" game (Moisă Mic, 2018).

When the boy left the lounge, the girl he was flirting with would follow him "to spend his time". They had a few intimate moments of "yes, not too many, the host was coming, if he was too late." When the boys who didn't have any sympathy left, the girls had to go out one by one, "to party" and "every boy she went out after had to be kissed" (Mărioara Mic, 2018).

If the young people agreed to marry (that is, the boy asked her to be his wife), the boy's family came to visit the girl's family, to fix other details of the marriage. It was a special moment, in which the girl's family had to organize a meal in honor of the occasion. There were also situations where the parents of

the young people did not agree with the marriage between the two. In these situations, most of them went over the will of their families (Teodor Ile, 2018).

Later, the parents, out of shame or because the girl became pregnant, welcomed them home. A funny episode happened at a religious wedding service, when the bride was pregnant, and the priest said, "may the Lord give the fruit of the womb" and the husband replied "he is, he is the father" (Moisă Mic, 2018).

Invitations to the wedding were made verbally, by people dressed in folk costumes, on horseback. Today, at Baptist weddings, the invitation was made at the Assembly (Baptist Church), and all those who wanted to participate were invited. Later, these methods are abandoned, the two young people personally going "to the Gentiles" to invite them (Ana Ile, 2018).

The preparation of the wedding table started on Monday, when the women brought: flour, eggs, nuts, cabbage, chickens, etc. Starting on Thursday, the women came to help prepare the dishes, noodles, bread, cakes, etc. On the morning of the wedding, the village girls would gather at the bride's house and help her dress. While they were cooking it, the bride's hora was sung.

On the wedding day, the groom's guests went to the bride's house. At the gate they were stopped by the bride's guests, and there a dialogue was taking place. The first told what they had come for, and the others introduced another girl or an old woman, with her head covered. After several negotiations, they "reconciled", giving each other something to drink (Cios, 2018).

After a short feast, the procession went to the church. They went before the bride and groom singing, dancing and rejoicing. At the church, most people stayed outside, where they continued to dance and sing, which mostly had nothing to do with the wedding: "your priest and ours / he was a great man" (Moisă Mic, 2018).

From the church to the house (where the party was taking place), those who came out to see the wedding were delighted, with shouts manufactured on the spot: "That's the playful girl / With trash by the door" or "That's a girl who gives a lot / You don't know how to put it in a bowl / From the door to the table / When she takes it all-over", and another says "How many tutes, how many mutes / All with leading men / You're the only one proud of yourself / You don't have a man, it's a shame" (Nicolae Ciucea, 2018).

Also on the way home, the street connects. In the middle of the road were two people disguised as "jamdarmis" with wooden rifles. When the procession reached them, he stopped them on the spot, on the grounds that there was a border and they could not cross until they spoke to their "emperor". Then a carriage was pushed along the road in which was a man sitting on a seat (throne), dressed as an emperor. After several negotiations, they passed, after the newlyweds paid the customs in the palinca. Sometimes they fought (Gheorghe Gomboș, 2018). This custom has been preserved to this day but has undergone some changes; The street is tied with string, with children and the godfathers give them money, without negotiations.

The actual party took place at the groom's house, if the weather was nice in the yard, if not, in the 2 rooms of the house. The "menu" consisted of "chicken soup", the second course of mashed potatoes, sarmales, "curichi" with meat, cabbage soup. The most common "cakes" were string cake with poppy, nut or shell, and the bride's cake was not even known. The children did not sit at the table, they each received a slice of colac corda and played outside (Teodor Mic, 2018).

The wedding gift usually consisted of various household items or clothes; very little money was offered (only the family). Mic Moisă remembers that he received a "chimeşe" (shirt) as a gift from the "nanny", and his wife (Mic Mărioăra) received a cloth (handkerchief), and the two families collected 100 lei.

Usually, until they built a house, the two stayed with the groom's family (very few had their own house), where there were also 2-3 daughters-in-law. This is very interesting because "then 3-4 daughters-in-law could live in the same house with their mother-in-law, today they cannot fit in a village" (Moisă Mic, 2018).

A more special case, from the point of view of marriage, was that of Pecu (Little Peter) who, after the wedding party, took his wife home (he had a household), after which he ran away with Dele Juji. Pecu remained single and never married again (Ana Mic, 2018).

The scale and importance of the wedding are very well represented by the numerous songs on this occasion: "White dress bride / You are dear to my father / Just to the ugly mother / But that woman married you"; "My dear bride / When will your mother-in-law be bad / Sweep the house with her / When your sister is bad / Lock in the barn / And close the doors / Lest the flies eat him"; "As long as you were at my mother's place, my mouth ate the cakes and my cheeks were rosy / But since you married me, my mouth eats courses and my cheek slaps and punches"; "Play well, it doesn't hurt you / Or you don't play with who you like / Because with whom you like / You would play but don't get married"; "This girl plays well / And teaches me too / This girl knows how to play, her mother teaches her"; "What a little girl / Jump up like a frog / After the hoe he does not stoop / After the hoe the need tramples it"; "Don't hit me with your hip / It will break my legs / Not even those legs / That break from the thighs"; "This girl knows how to play, because her mother was beaten / At school at Tinca, Dance with "Măria", Don't wait for her to say, that "Măria" is ashamed / If you play it, she likes it"; "Green leaf of risk / The bride after nimash / Green sheet of mulberry / Junele is cackling"; "Come on, don't try to pass me / Because you'll give me your kiss to rub it on me / Legs give ears"; "For a vine that gives oats, put the penance down / For a vine that gives poor, take the penance again"; "Repent, repent, yes, people don't leave me / When I go to assembly 2 o 3 get in my way"; etc (Ana Mic, 2018).

### **Birth and baptism**

They are essential moments in terms of family consolidation, in which the family and the community participated. The fear of the unknown, as everyone wanted a child healthy in body and mind, led young mothers to follow a series of superstitions: pregnant women should not kick the cat, because he who loves kittens loves children too ; if you put salt on the head of a pregnant young woman, without her knowing, and first put your hand on her nose, a boy will be born, and if you put your hand on her mouth, it will be a girl; don't tell a child who hasn't started talking "shut up", that he will remain mute; friday is good for weaning children etc. (Crăciun, 2018).

The birth was assisted by midwives (without education), who cut the "umbilical cord" and for 6 weeks came every day to wash the baby and see the mother. Because there was not much medical knowledge, the cleansing of the woman (removal of the placenta) was done slowly and over a longer period. Until she was cleansed, she was considered "unclean" and was not allowed to enter the church, therefore at the baptism, the godmother was the one who took the



child in front of the priest to baptize him. The water from the child's bath had to be thrown in the same place (where no one steps, until the baptism) or among the flowers, so that it would be as beautiful as the flowers. A red thread was tied to her hand to protect it from prying eyes. If the child was "blind-eyed", the mother or grandmother put 9 pieces of coal to put out in a cup of water, after each coal she put her right hand on the mouth of the glass, plugging it and holding her breath. With that water, the child was made the sign of the cross on his forehead and given to drink from it (Ana Ștean, 2018).

In the Orthodox church, the child is baptized in water, in the font, by immersion, witnessed by the godparents, who also testify on behalf of the child. When returning home, at the entrance, the godmother said three times "we went pagans and came Christians" (Crăciun, 2018).

In the Baptist Church, also at 6 weeks, the child is taken to the blessing, a prayer in which the pastor, the parents and the church ask for God's blessing on the child, he will receive baptism at an adult age, on his own initiative, when he can confess on his own baptism (Mic Teodor, 2018).

### **Death and burial**

The feeling of deep sadness and bitterness towards the missing, deceased is reflected on the funeral, when the relatives (family) of the deceased mourn and mourn. Although man is aware that life has an end, death is not expected in the same way as marriage or birth, because there is fear of the unknown, of what is beyond death. On the verge of death, the family members resort to various charms, as a cure, so that the sick person recovers, and if not, they call the priest (to pray for him and to confess him) to facilitate his passage to the afterlife (Crăciun, 2018).

As soon as he dies, the deceased is placed (on the hearth) and a candle is lit on his head (Baptists do not have this practice), to light his way to the underworld. The news spreads by notifying relatives, neighbors and the priest (for Baptists), and for the Orthodox, the bells are rung with one interruption if a child has died, with two interruptions if a woman has died and three interruptions for a man. The mirrors are turned to the wall so that the dead cannot be seen and the ghost of the dead can come without harming the living; the body is washed, dressed in new clothes and placed in the coffin. A white cloth is placed over the crossed hands, to have something to wipe the other world with, and a wax cross in the palms, a sign that he is a Christian, and a cloth is placed over the dead (Crăciun, 2018). From the date of death until the funeral, there is a vigil in which the close ones dress in black (mourning) and mourn their dead: "why did you die, ha, you didn't have a house, and what did you eat", "Wait, mother, in the detour / Let the empty carriage go / Your house, your detour / Without you, it's bad", "Mother, your new house / How to break the beam in two / There are two beams left / God take care of them / How does today and tomorrow / There is only one trace of you left / A single trace around the corner / Where did you put your bare foot" (collected from Hodișel by professor Mistor Ioan).

In the vigils of the Baptist community, after the vigil service, officiated by the parish priest, religious songs are sung until about midnight, after which only the family and very few relatives remain, who keep vigil until the morning. Regardless of religious denomination, the entire community is present at the vigil. Today, vigils are held at the mortuary chapel, and after the priest finishes

the service, around midnight, the dead person is locked in the chapel and everyone, including the family, goes home. On the third day after the death, the funeral service took place. In Călăcea, at the baptists, the service was held in the courtyard of the house (since the deceased was not allowed to enter the church, being considered unclean for the "Temple of God"), after which he was led on the last road to the Cemetery. Usually, the sermon draws the attention of the audience that man must prepare for the meeting with the Creator, because death can strike at any time, and this must be done while man is alive, because after death everything is in vain. At the pit, the pastor reminds those present that "we are dust and to dust we will return" (explanations of the Baptist pastor Mic Teodor, parish priest of the Călăcea Baptist Church).

In the Orthodox tradition, when the deceased is taken out of the house (feet first), upon crossing the threshold, the coffin is lowered and raised three times, and the doors close and open three times behind the dead (opening the way to the world of shadows). So that the dead person does not know to come home, the table (or chairs) on which the coffin was placed is turned, with the legs up. The lifeless body is then taken to the church, where the priest officiates the religious service and the singers sing the choir of the dead. From the church, the dead is taken to the cemetery. At the cemetery, money is thrown into the pit, so that the dead have something to pay their 24 air taxes, and as a sign of alms, a hen is given over the coffin to children from needy families. Also, there were cases when the tools and tools of the deceased were deposited in the pit, so as not to come after them. The priest said the prayer for sealing the grave and the coffin is covered with earth (Ardelean, 2018). On behalf of the family, the priest invites the participants to the "alms of the dead", with food and drink.

Other customs and beliefs "sântarea" or "sorozașul" (a custom regarding army recruitment), "străgoii" (who carried the milk from the cows); "to step on the wrong side" (if you walked through the forest at night you had every chance to step on the wrong side), etc. The lack of knowledge and information was ensured by these popular beliefs, which basically tried to explain the unknown.

## CONCLUSIONS

The most important annual holidays are Easter, Christmas, Sânjorju, Sântoaderul, etc. On these and not only, the Calacean community developed a series of customs and beliefs, some common to the entire Romanian space, others specific only here. As for the main moments in a person's life, as everywhere else, they stand out for the scale of their manifestations and significance: wedding, birth and baptism, and passing away.

Traditions and customs in the Romanian space abound depending on the geographical area, religious beliefs, ethnicity and historical past. Such a geographical space is also represented by the Commune of Olcea, where traditions and customs acquire a special value. These cultural values are valuable for the local community, representing at the same time a way of seeing and understanding the world (Manea et al., 2013; Otovescu and Parlea, 2021). Thus, the rural world tried to explain everything that was happening in the community, at the level of rural understanding, that is, by correlating events with religious life, thus giving rise to a series of myths, superstitions, ceremonies, songs and carols, symbolic meanings transformed by - over time in traditions and customs that dictated the course of events in human life, even "governed" the social life of the community.

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