

# ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN THE REGIONAL COUNTRY SYSTEM. INTERFERENCES, NOUNCES AND POLARITIES

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**Abstract:** **Ethnic diversity in the regional country system. Interferences, nounces and polarities.** The geographical position of the Târnave river regional system is defined by the bifurcated axial system of the two Târnave rivers. The ethnic groups that populate it have coexisted for centuries, interfering, influencing each other and enriching the cultural and social heritage. The majority ethnic group is Romanian (47.35%, according to the 2011 census), its antiquity and continuity being demonstrated by the numerous historical vestiges that can be found throughout the area. The other ethnicities that were or are in a more significant number, Hungarians (38.31% in 2011), Roma (8.81% in 2011), Germans (0.68% in 2011), Jews etc., reached the studied territory in certain historical moments and contributed to the nuance of the ethnic character of the regional system of Târnave. The general trend of population decline is noticeable, often at a dramatic rate, with the exception of the Roma minority, which is in an upward trend. It is possible to observe how the ethnic groups that populate the regional territory chose their living spaces differently: the Romanians, as an autochthonous population, preferred the hearths of the hill and the plateau (harder to work but easier to defend in the context of so many events that shook history), and the natives settled in open places, from where they could easily control, but also practice efficient trade and agriculture.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, census, population, trend, polarities, the regional system of Târnave rivers

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to its geographical position, defined by the bifurcated axial system of the two Târnave rivers, the regional system of Târnave is at the interference (contact) of several administrative-territorial units (counties), which makes its study difficult from the perspective of the complexity of the base of necessary data (collection, processing, connection, interpretation). Each part of the regional system has, in general, characteristics that harmonize with those of the neighboring

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spaces, resulting, in fact, in the specificity of the analyzed space. It can be observed how the ethnic groups that populate the regional territory chose their living spaces differently: the Romanians, as the autochthonous population, preferred the hearths of the hill and the plateau (harder to work but easier to defend in the context of so many events that have shook history), and the natives settled in open places, from where they could easily control, but also practice efficient trade and agriculture. The antiquity and continuity of the Romanians in these lands are demonstrated by the numerous historical vestiges that can be found throughout the area (Conțiu & Conțiu, 2019, 199-204) [5]. The other ethnicities that were or are in a more significant number (Hungarians, Roma, Germans, Jews, etc.) arrived in the studied territory at certain historical moments and contributed to the nuance of the ethnic character of the regional system of Târnave. We paid more attention to them in the present study.

## 2. DATA AND USED METHODS

In order to follow the specific ethnic aspects of the regional system of Târnave, comparative analysis was used as the main method. For illustrative purposes, some graphs were built to highlight both specific dysfunctions (related to urban and rural environments) and general ones (see the map at the end of the study). The analysis was spatio-temporally detailed, both "horizontally" (areal differentiation in the same unit of time) and "vertically", sliding on the time scale (using the data provided by the population censuses starting in 1850). We analysed both ethnicity as a unitary element (structure, distribution, evolution, characteristics) as well as inter-ethnic and ethno-spatial interferences (spatio-temporal nuances, polarities). Due to the fact that man can hardly be fitted into a matrix, difficulties have been encountered especially related to the "mobability" (adaptability, versatility, instability) and even "diffusion" (conversion, dilution, thinning) of some ethnicities in depending on the historical events that affected the region.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

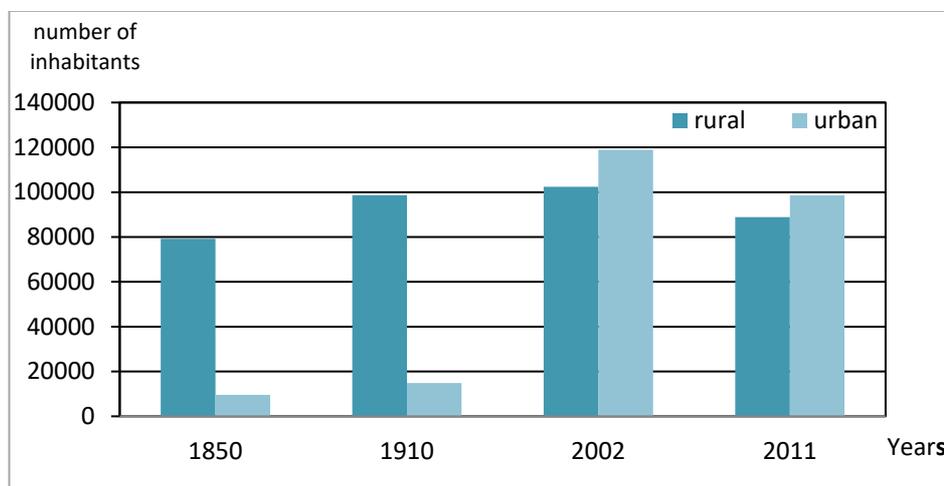
Following a detailed study of the region, it is noted that the ethnic structure has changed over time due to historical, economic, psychological elements. For example, the Romanians (the native population), during the invasions, preferred to go up from their native places towards the valleys and peaks in order to be able to shelter and defend themselves more easily, building (repositioning) their hearth in the hill and plateau spaces, even if the soil was not so fertile; while the non-native population settled in the open spaces (strategically and economically enhanced; color of the valleys, depressions) where the lands had higher productivity.

**The Roma ethnic group** has existed in these lands since ancient times. This fact is historically attested by the numerous archaeological remains discovered

throughout the studied region. For example, from the Neolithic: the Petrești culture in the localities of Feisa (from Jidvei commune), Ghirbom (Berhin commune), Mihălț (it is the center of the homonymous commune), Bernadea (Bahnea commune), Păuca (Păuca commune); Vinca culture, in Cristuru Secuiesc, Eliseni (Secuieni commune); Ariusd-Cucuteni culture, in Dejuțiu village (Mugeni commune) etc. [25] [26] [27] [28]; from the Bronze Age: the Wietenberg culture - named after the settlement on the Wietenberg hill or "Turk's Hill", located on the banks of Târnava Mare, near Sighișoara (cf. Petre Constantinescu-Iași et al., eds., 1960, 112) [1]; from the Iron Age, traces of fortified settlements were found in Mediaș, Șona etc. (cf. Pop, Năgler, eds., 2016, 56) [8]; after the Daco-Roman wars, a part of Dacia was conquered, numerous traces being discovered both in the rural and urban areas - Roman fortifications: Sărățeni, Inlăceni, Odorheiu Secuiesc; permanent auxiliary fort: Sighișoara (earth fort), border fort: Odorheiu Secuiesc, hearths of autochthonous Dacian settlements: Obreja, Slimnic, Boarta etc. (Pop, Năgler, eds., 2016, 141, 148, 151) [8]; between the years 900-1300, numerous archaeological discoveries were made, such as: pre-feudal pottery of the Mediaș type in Berghin, Boarta, Bratei, Mediaș, Șeica Mică or Târnava (Pop, Năgler, eds., 2016, 207 [8]; during the Middle Ages, along with native Romanians, other ethnicities also came, which was reflected in the territorial-administrative structures: Târnave county, the Szekler seat at Odorhei (originally called Telegd and which was the most important of the seven Szekler seats); Saxon seats in Sighișoara (documentally mentioned between 1302-1349; in this century the locality had between 3000-4000 inhabitants), and later in Mediaș and Șeica Mică, and Romanian districts (Pop, Năgler, eds., 2016, 240-245) [8].

In the censuses, certain inconsistencies are noted regarding the number of Romanians, especially before the Great Union on December 1, 1918, being moved to the "other ethnicities" column or not recorded. An example in this sense is the commune of Mugeni: in 1850, there were 498 Romanians listed in the census, only to find 20 Romanians 30 years later; probably they are numbered with another ethnic contingent or put in the category of other ethnicities; another explanation would be that part of the commune's population joined the Transylvanian trend of emigrating especially to Romania as a result of the economic crisis, "the abolition of the guilds, the customs war between Austria-Hungary and Romania", the unwillingness to performed "military service in the Austro-Hungarian army", etc., and in the period 1895-1920 they also emigrated to America, most of them emigrating from Târnava Mare or Târnava Mică counties (Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 246-248) [7]. In the countryside, where the authentic Romanian family matrix was preserved, the natural increase was higher, while in the cities it was lower. In 1850, Romanians accounted for 32.62% of the urban population, and 34.93% of the rural population. In 1910, the share of Romanians in the urban population decreased by about 5 percent, while that of the rural population remained constant. In the rural environment, in 2002, Romanians reached a share of 46.65%, and in 2011 they

decreased to 43.20% (which represents a decrease in the number of Romanians by over 13,000 people), due to both negative natural growth, the decrease in female fertility, the increase in the age of marriage, as well as other common factors for several ethnicities (the exception to this negative trend being especially the Roma). The population decrease is much more drastic in the urban environment: from 57.50% to 51.84%, representing over 20,000 people (Romanians) in just nine years (See also: Conțiu, Conțiu, 2017, 211-220 [3]; Conțiu, Conțiu, 2018, 313-322) [4] (fig. 1).

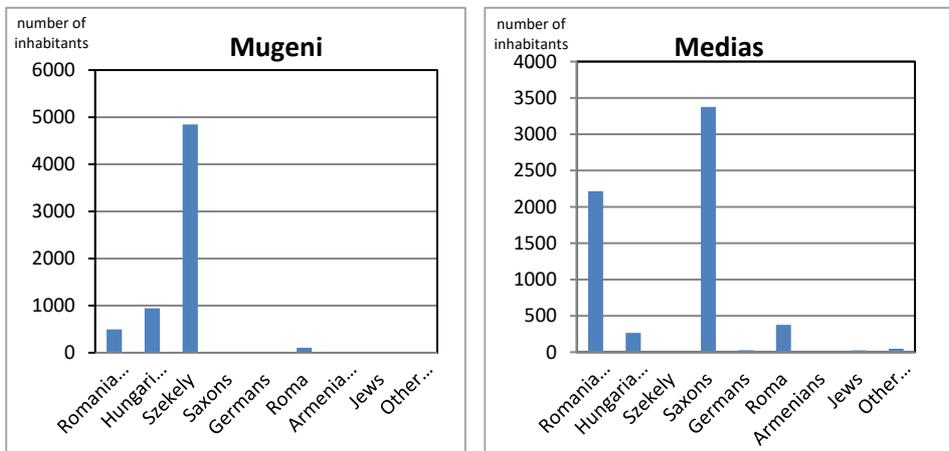


**Fig. 1. The regional system from Târnave river basin. The evolution of the number of inhabitants in the case of the Romanian ethnicity during the period 1850-2011 (Data source: Population Censuses 1850-2011) [9-24] [2]**

**Hungarian ethnicity.** The Hungarians were a nomadic population of Finno-Ugric origin. They came from the center of Asia and, after numerous battles, they positioned themselves in the Pannonian Plain in 895-896, from where they made incursions towards the neighboring states. After a while, they settled down. After the year 1000, when the Hungarian Kingdom was established, they set off for Crisana, Banat and Transcarpathian Transylvania. In order to be able to rule the new conquered territories, they were helped by the colonized population from the previously obtained regions. Thus, the Szeklers (“secuii”) were brought, who had the role of guarding the eastern edges of the country due to certain privileges. Their origin is uncertain. It is certain that they considered themselves a separate group until a certain moment when they were included among the Hungarians. It is interesting that in the region called “Country of the Szeklers” (“Țara Secuilor”), from the Odorhei Depression, 98% of the population (out of a total of approx. 62,000 people) are registered as Hungarians, with only 19 people declaring themselves as Szeklers. They reached Târnave river basin around 1150, and further east and southeast in 1200 (Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 54-59, 61-62 [7]; see also Pop, 2001, 49-50 [6]).

It is noticeable how in the censuses of the 1850s and 1910s the number of the Hungarian ethnic group grew faster than others. This phenomenon has three causes in mind: natural growth higher than the national average, emigration less than that of other ethnic groups and the process of assimilation that was very developed in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th by "Hungarianization of a part of the non-Hungarian population, as well as of the majority of immigrants" (Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 250) [7]. In addition to these, it can be added that not all censuses made a clear statement regarding ethnic affiliation and, in addition, during the dualism, the Hungarian authorities only recorded the mother tongue and not the nationality; by mother tongue is meant "the language that the respondent speaks better and with the greatest pleasure" (Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 251) [7]. It is observed that between 1880 and 1910 Jews, Roma (Gypsies), etc. no longer appear, they being almost entirely included in the category of Hungarians (Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 251-254) [7].

Another way in which they tried to "influence the ethnic composition" was through the "colonization of Hungarian peasants or foreign populations" in different parts of the province; however, they did not drastically change the ethnic structure, but only increased, in this way, the number of those who spoke the Hungarian language. (fig. 2)



**Fig. 2. The regional system of Târnave river basin. The ethnic structure of Mugeni and Mediaș localities, in 1850 (Data source: Population Census, 1850) [9-24] [2]**

Another observation regarding the two censuses is that, in 1850, Hungarians and Szeklers appeared in two separate headings (for example, Mugeni commune), while in 1910, they are taken together; the situation is identical for Germans and Saxons (for example, in Mediaș). In order to facilitate comparisons, in the present

study the percentages (weights) for the four ethnicities were taken as in 1910 by combining them into the two ethnic groups: Hungarian and German.

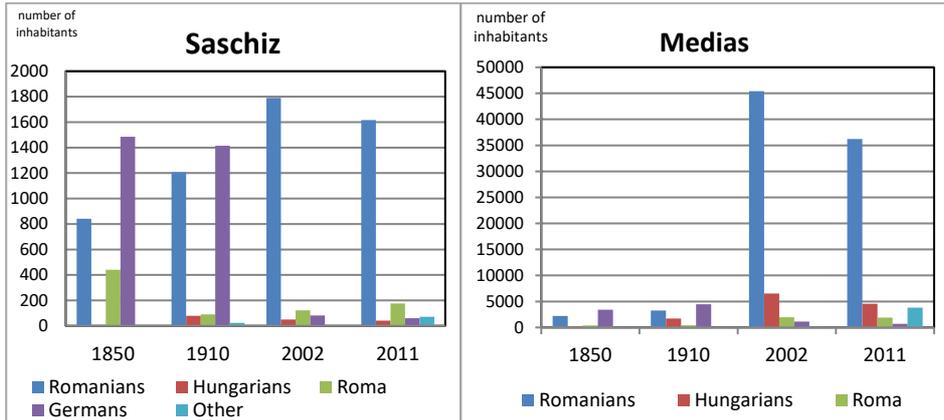
So, the evolution of the weight of the Hungarian ethnicity in the regional system, for the four threshold moments (census), is presented as follows: in 1850 they represented 38.69% in the rural environment and almost 23% in the urban one; in 1910 the situation changes (due to the causes stated above) with a percentage of 44.77% in rural areas and 41.24% in cities, so that in 2002 and 2011 it drops to around 43% in rural areas (2002) and then to 40.58% (2011) (approximately 10,500 people) and respectively 36.50% and 35.87% in urban areas (just over 7,000).

**German ethnicity.** The ethnic Saxons (most of them were of Germanic origin, from western Europe: Germany, northeastern France, current Belgium) were brought to this territory in the 12th and 13th centuries. They were positioned in the south and east of Transylvania with multiple privileges. With each group brought by the kings of Hungary, lands (surfaces of land) were taken from the natives, thus creating new internal conflicts (cf. Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 63-65) [7]. The ethnic Germans emigrated massively, in the 20th century, in several waves, starting from 1940 to 1996, towards Germany, the two peaks being recorded during the Second World War and after the fall of communism in Romania, in particular, and the communist bloc in general.

An interesting fact is the change in census data regarding the ethnic structure of cities in the regional system. If in 1850 Romanians represented 32.62%, Germans 35.59% and Hungarians 22.69%, in 1910 the situation changes as follows: Romanians decrease to 29.69%, Germans to 26.24%, while Hungarians increase to 41.24%. A Hungarianization of the cities is observed, especially as a result of the assimilation of other nationalities, especially the German bourgeoisie and the newly arrived Jews (cf. Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 255) [7].

The number of ethnic Germans was the largest in 1910 (51,500 people in the rural area, respectively 13,150 in the urban area), but the share was lower in 1910 (18% in the rural area, respectively 26% in the urban area) compared to year 1850 (when they represented almost 20% of the population in the countryside and 36% in the cities) (the causes were explained in the previous paragraph). In 2011, their share was very small: 0.67% of the rural population and 0.69% of the urban population (about 1300 inhabitants).

We opted for two case studies, considered representative: the localities of Saschiz and Mediaș (fig. 3). In the case of the *Saschiz* commune, there is a decrease in the German population from 1850 to 2011.



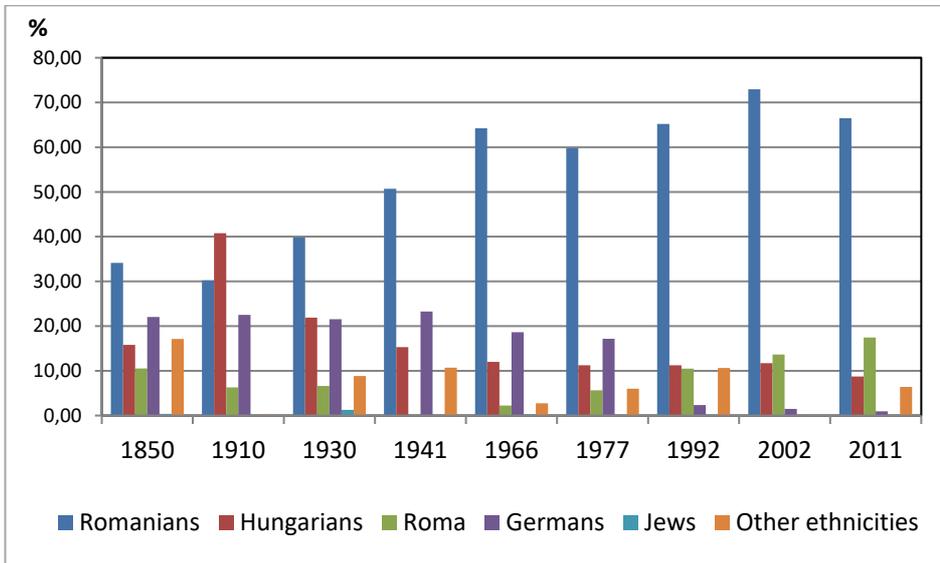
**Fig. 3. The regional system of Târnave river basin. The evolution of the ethnic structure of the population of Saschiz and Medias during the period 1850-2011 (Data source: Population Censuses 1850-2011) [9-24] [2]**

In the years 1850 and 1910, they were the most numerous (approximately 54%); meanwhile, the share of the Romanian ethnicity increases, so that later it becomes the majority (83%). The Roma ethnic group registered a decrease in the first two censuses and then an increase to 3%. Regarding the city of *Medias*, the situation is somewhat similar: Germans were the majority in the 1850s and 1910s (45%), later, the Romanian ethnicity became the majority (83% in 2002). The percentage of Roma increased to 4% in 2011. The number of inhabitants increased a lot with the process of industrialization and inclusion of some nearby towns.

Within the Roma ethnic group, there are many difficulties regarding their concrete number. It is known that the Roma came from South Asia and that their language would come from a more vulgar Hindu dialect. But how they arrived in Europe is not known exactly. Many times they do not appear in the censuses of the corresponding ethnic group but in others, and in some censuses they are not recorded at all. The share of the Roma ethnic group in the rural environment of the regional system of Târnave, of 5.66% in 1850, decreases to 2.5% in 1910, to then increase to 9.6% in 2002 and to 11.8% in 2011 (about 24,000 people); in the urban environment, the percentages are lower: around 5% in 1850, with a decrease in 1910 to 2.58% (1200 people), to later increase to 4.83% in 2002 and 5.53 % in 2011; it is necessary to specify that in the year 1850, in the cities, about 1,700 people declared themselves to belong to this ethnic group, and in 2011, over 10,500.

The case of the *Dumbrăveni* city is noteworthy, where the ethnic majority in the city was and is Romanian. The exception is only the year 1910, for the reasons stated above. Romanians represent 67% of the total population in 2011. The Hungarian ethnic group has a share of about 11% in the same year. The

German ethnicity experienced a dramatic decrease after 1990, reaching in 2011 a share of less than 1%. The Jewish ethnicity has reduced values in all census years taken into account, so that no person is currently reviewed. As in the other cases, only the Roma know an increase, in 2011 representing 17.5%. The maximum population was reached in 1977 (surprised by censuses). After that, it remained somewhat constant, around 10,000 inhabitants, and then decreased to around 7,400 people in 2011 (fig. 4).

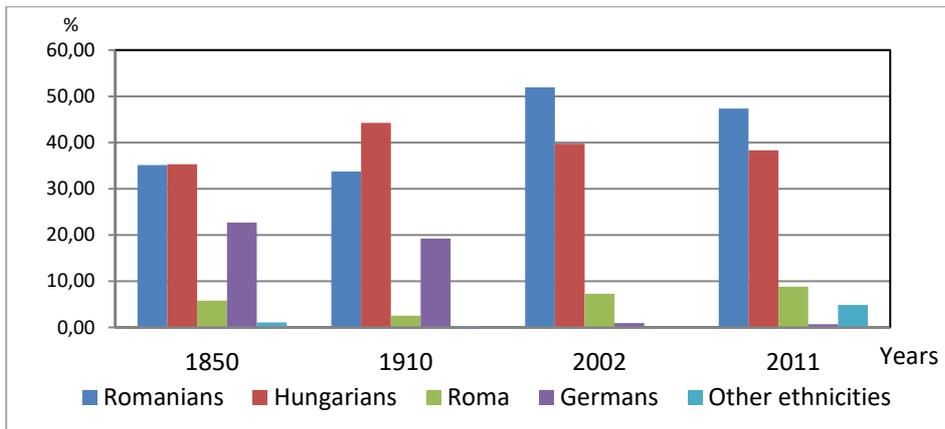


**Fig. 4. The regional system of Târnave river basin. The evolution of the ethnic structure of the population of Dumbrăveni during the period 1850-2011 (Data source: Population Censuses 1850-2011) [9-24] [2]**

**Ethnic Jews** emigrated mainly from Galicia and Russia. They were of the Mosaic religion but they belonged ethnically, in the censuses, to the Hungarian-speaking one (cf. Pop, Bolovan, 2016, 255) [7]. Among them, many emigrated in 1948, with the establishment of the state of Israel, and afterwards. In order to see their presence more clearly in the censuses, religion is taken into account and not the number in the column "Jews". In 1850, in Valea Lungă commune, for example, 283 people were registered for both ethnicity and religion, so that in 1900 the ethnicity column was empty and 124 people "appeared" for religion. Another noted case is that of the municipality of Blaj, which in 1880 did not have a single person of Jewish ethnicity recorded in the census, but 120 people were entered under the heading "Israelis", so that in 1930 there would be the same number for ethnicity and in religion, 227 people. To illustrate their numerical decrease, we continue, as

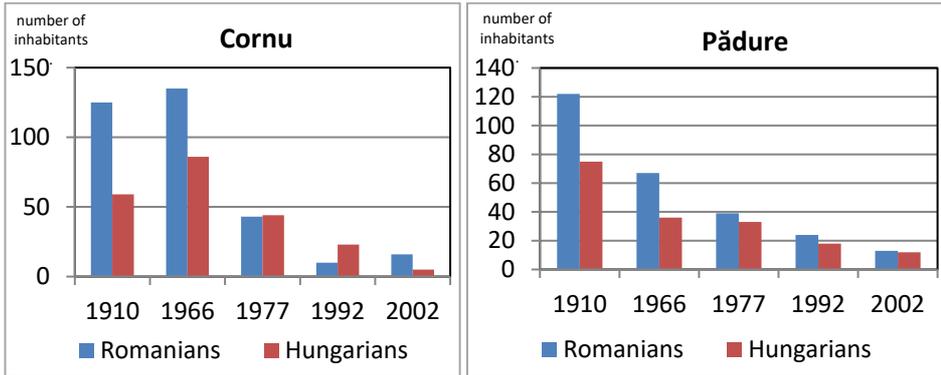
a case study, also with the municipality of Blaj: in 2002, two people were classified as "ethnicity" and another two as "Mosaic" religion; in 2011, under the heading "Jews" four persons are entered, as well as "\*"; and only "\*" appears under religions, which means that there is "a small number of observation cases (less than 3)" [24].

Along with the above-mentioned ethnic groups, there are also others such as: Poles, Serbs, Lipovian Russians, Greeks, Czechs, Italians, Ukrainians, Tsiangians, Macedonians, Armenians, Bulgarians, Turks, Chinese, etc., their number being reduced. There were also cases that did not declare their ethnicity or the information was unavailable (fig. 5).



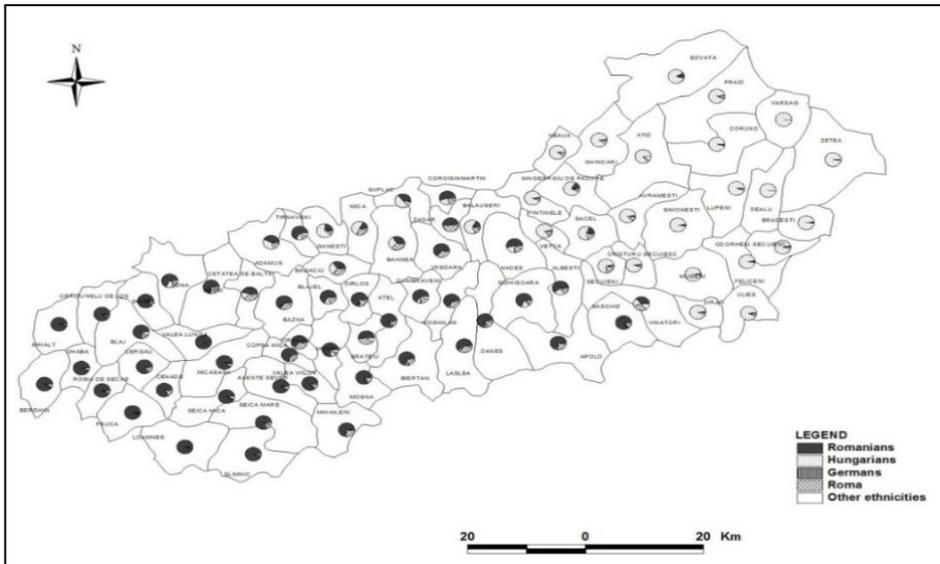
**Fig. 5. The regional system of Târnave river basin. The evolution of the ethnic structure of the population during the period 1850-2011 (Data source: Population Censuses 1850-2011) [9-24] [2]**

To complete the picture of our study, we also mention the existence of special situations represented by localities with problems regarding the drastic decrease in the number of inhabitants. For example, the village of Cornu in Alba county had only 21 inhabitants in 2002, and in 2011 there were still 8; fall into the category of "localities with certain disappearance". The ethnic structure is composed only of Romanians and Hungarians. In the village of Pădure from the same commune (Crăciunel de Jos until 2002 and Bucerdea Grânoasă in 2011) there were only 25 people in 2002, so that in 2011 there were only 11 (Coțuiu, Coțuiu, 2019, 213) [5] (fig. 6). These cases are not singular, unfortunately, and their number increases from year to year. Without the proper help, serious situations of social imbalances will be reached.



**Fig. 6. The regional system of Târnave river basin. Evolution of the number of inhabitants (Romanians and Hungarians) of Cornu and Pădure localities (Data source: Population Censuses 1850-2011) [9-24] [2]**

The spatial distribution of ethnic groups in 2011 (the last census) can be seen on the map of the region, which highlights important polarities (fig. 7). It can be seen how historical events still play an important role, even if some are centuries old: the Romanian population is overwhelmingly in the central and western regions and the Hungarian population predominates in the east; the Roma ethnicity is found throughout the region with fairly uniform values (increasing) and the German only sporadically (decreasing).



**Fig. 7. The regional system of Târnave river basin. Ethnic structure of the population in 2011 (Data source: Population Census, 2011) [9-24] [2]**

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, for the analyzed period (1850-2011), it can be observed how, for the entire studied region, the number of Romanians increased from 1850 (35.14 %) to 2002 (when they represented more than half of the region's population: 51.92 %), and decreased in the next census (2011) to 47.35%, while remaining the majority ethnic group in the region; the number of Hungarians continued to increase until 2002 (when they represented 39.75%) and decreased to 38.31% in 2011 (with the specification that the largest share of the ethnic Hungarian population was recorded in 1910, 44.25% ); German ethnicity represented 22.70% in 1850 and reached 0.68% in 2011 (about 2700 Germans); the only ethnic group that experienced an upward trend is the Roma, but its situation is quite unclear from the perspective of the real number; 1910 presented the lowest value (around 8,500 people, i.e. 2.53 %) and 2011 the highest - over 34,000 (8.81 %), under the conditions of a high natural increase, taking place a population rejuvenation process (in obvious contrast to the rest of the region).

In the regional system of Târnave river basin, the ethnic groups coexisted, interfering, influencing each other and enriching the cultural and social heritage of the region. A mix between traditional and modern has always been created. The majority ethnicity is Romanian; along with it, over time, others settled: Hungarians, Szeklers, Germans, Saxons, Roma, Jews, Poles, Serbs, etc. As a general trend, the population is decreasing, often at a dramatic rate. In this way the territory will be depopulated. This trend is specific for the whole of Romania but also for most of Europe. The Roma ethnic group seems to be the only one that continues its traditional course and positive natural growth. The social, economic, political, cultural, psychological dysfunctions are already visible and in the not-too-distant future the ethnic structure will experience substantial changes if measures are not taken to repopulate and adequately support life, because man does not represent a number but a sum of all the generations that were a premise for those that will be.

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