

# A Fishermen's Village: On the Lipovan Belongingness to the Danube Delta in Jurilovca (Northern Dobroudja)<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The present article is aimed at accounting for the social, economic, and cultural ways in which the Russian-speaking Lipovan inhabitants of Jurilovca village define and assume their belongingness to the biotope of Danube Delta in the North of Tulcea County, Romania. Two theoretical notions are followed in this regard, in terms of regional complex (according to Romanian geographer Simion Mehedinți), and cultural area (as authored by the American anthropologist Clark Wissler). A series of social, economic, and cultural characteristics of Lipovan villagers outline the importance of fishing for the local livelihood as well as worldview, i.e. ethnicity, kinship, ethno-history, technical vocabulary, seasonal work, barter exchange, folk cookery, and the socialism vs. post-socialism perception. Beyond their traditional and contemporary ethnography, the crucial issue for the native villagers in Jurilovca is that of the very continuity of “their lake’s [unwritten] law” (as a vernacular representation) in contrast to the politics of renting out the local fishing areas. Therefore, the perspectives of the Russian-Lipovan “regional complex” of fishing within the “cultural area” from the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve appear to depend on the degree to which local aspects of customary law might be reconciled with the official legislation with respect to traditional ownership, genealogical inheritance, and the right of preemption.*

**Keywords:** Russian Lipovan; Danube Delta; fishing; regional complex; cultural area; customary law.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** rușii lipoveni; Delta Dunării; pescuit; complex regional; arie culturală; drept consuetudinar.

## Introduction

My text is broadly concerned with the idea of native adaptation and integration of peasantry to local ecotypes (Wolf, 1966, 19) – an idea through which the discipline of cultural anthropology intersects with the science of geography as developed in the past in terms of *anthropogeography* (Ratzel, 1882, 1891) and *géographie humaine* (Paul Vidal de la Blache, 1922). According to Romanian geographer Simion Mehedinți (1868-1962, a disciple of

Ratzel), anthropogeography refers to “the geographic branch of researching the links between mankind and earth” (2006, [1938]). In the same esprit of a geographic contextualization of civilization and culture, *ethnography* was defined by Mehedinți as a study of origin, evolution, territorial distribution, and cultural variability of world populations (2006, [1935]). It is well known that, within the “the cosmological frame” of “social reality” in the research concept of Dimitrie Gusti’s Sociological School, major anthropogeographic work was engaged

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by one of Mehedinți's students, Ion Conea (1902-1974), with his monographic study of Clopotiva village (Hațeg County, Southwestern Transylvania) (Conea, 1940). Almost in synchrony with Conea's book, an "ethnographic and anthropogeographic study" regarding the Romanian villages from Transylvania and Banat was written by Romulus Vuia (1887-1963) from the perspective on their relationships with "external factors" like altitude, topography, soil, climate, water courses, etc. (Vuia, 1975, [1945]).

Dwelling on the abovementioned ethnogeographic references, the article below attempts to explore the manners in which the Russian-speaking *Lipovan* inhabitants of Jurilovca village define and assume their belongingness to the biotope of Danube Delta in the North of Tulcea County, Romania. "Belongingness" is here accounted for both the Lipovans' fishing specialization to the deltaic environment, and for their cultural integration into the local ethnic and economic diversity.

### **Regional complex and cultural area in their theoretical convergence**

As already exposed, in the interwar period, geographer Simion Mehedinți developed his own contribution to anthropogeography as an interdisciplinary paradigm devoting to the study of humankind's relationship with local ecological systems. What is especially significant for the discussion I propose below on the Lipovan belongingness to Danube Delta, is Mehedinți's notion of *regional complex* with its methodological implications. According to the Romanian scholar,

*For each area in question, an [ethnographic] issue should be regionally analyzed, with all its physical elements, [such as the] means of transport [...] as the 'regional complex' should be taken into account in its bearing on humans, animals, climate, animal taming (Mehedinți, 2006, [1935], 296). Humans' habits always fit with the area they live in. (Mehedinți, 1998, [1936], 221) A plateau, a hill, a plain, a meadow,*

*a forest, a steppe, a desert, a lake, a sea, or the ocean [...] all are, in their kind, like some 'schools' [...] (Mehedinți, 2007, [1937], 12 [my English translation of original Romanian texts]).*

As a matter of fact, in Mehedinți's argument (2008, 39-44), *regional complex* has to be seen in the interweaving of five disciplinary "complexes", three of which in relation to facts defined as "physical" (*anthropological*, *anthropogeographical*, and *technical* [also called 'ergologic' based on the *civilisation* instrumentarium needed in the process of human adaptation]). Two further complexes are enounced by Mehedinți in terms of "biopsychic" (as a synthesis of what *work*, *language*, and *society* are recognized to contribute to the human development), and "psychic" (as an incorporation of *culture* achievements in *science*, *ethics*, and *arts*). It is all these complexes that, following again Simion Mehedinți (2008, 49), eventually distinguish an *ethnos* as a human grouping. In its disciplinary endeavor, *ethnography* relies on the study of the abovementioned "complexes", which is undertaken at the level of "groups of regional facts", before approaching "typical elements" that may be "characteristic for a larger mass of people" (Mehedinți, 2008, 50-52 [my English translation of original Romanian text]).

Simion Mehedinți's conceptualization of *regional complex* appears to have been synchronic with (and apparently independent from) another theoretical approach – that of *culture area* – a formula which, under the authority of the American anthropologist Clark Wissler (1870-1947) - particularly concerned the regional design of anthropological research:

*All anthropological investigations are projected as regional. [...] Even if, in the end, there is nothing but materials of stone, metal, and pottery, the archaeologist can still give us the objective data for the growth of several important culture complexes, region by region. [We are interested in the] regional differences in material culture, social behavior, and social*

*evolution [based on] two issues: ecology and the tribal-group functioning. [...] The coincident culture trait distributions [are to be dealt with] (a) in terms of geography; (b) according to the constituent [social] groups; and (c) in the coincident relations of the traits, irrespective of [social] units. [...] What is the significance that all the tribes in one of these areas cook food in similar containers, perform the same ceremony, etc.? [...] It is this regional tendency to unity in procedure that presents a problem of interest to the social sciences. [...] Culture area [might be seen] as a formulation expressing the regional character of human social behavior. (Wissler, 1927, 881-891)*

In the above citations, three ideas are represented to converge between the geographic vision of Simion Mehedinți and the anthropological perspective of Clark Wissler, namely their methodological drawing, their holistic contour, and their environmental imprint. Indeed, for Mehedinți and Wissler as well, ethnography and (respectively) anthropology have to be undertaken at a regional scale. Secondly, where Mehedinți does insist on the humans' interdependency with climate, animals, and means of transport, Wissler speaks of the "culture-trait distribution" and "coincidence" among social groups and their geographic milieus. Last but not least, the two authors correlate the human "habits" (Mehedinți) and "social behavior" (Wissler) with the area where a given community lives.

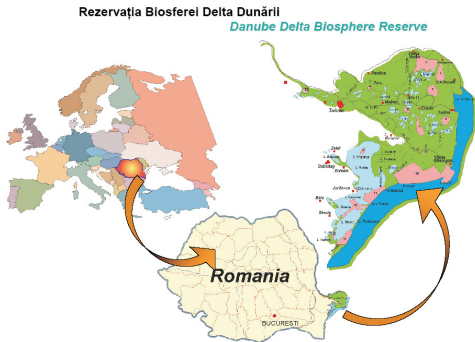
It is worth mentioning that Simion Mehedinți, relying on what he defined in terms of "biopsychic" and "psychic" complexes, refined his own notion of *culture*, which he defined (1998, 119) as "the summation of all spiritual (intellectual, ethical, and aesthetic) creations that facilitate an individual's adaptation to his social milieu." As such, culture is seen to be complementary with *civilization* as "the summation of all technical discoveries [food, dress, housing, and means of transport] through which the humans have adapt their earth milieu" (Mehedinți, 1998, 96).

To clarify now the "appearance" of scholarly-thinking affinities in the work of Simion Mehedinți and in that of Clark Wissler, one might remember what could be interpreted as their related intellectual filiation, in that Friedrich Ratzel – the magister of the Romanian geographer – is also recognized to have mentored the geographic specialization of the "father of American anthropology", Franz Boas (1858-1942). In his turn, Boas had been the professor of Clark Wissler.

### **Human and natural ecosystems in the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR)**

As positioned in Southeastern Romania (4461 km<sup>2</sup> in Tulcea county) and in Southern Ukraine (704 km<sup>2</sup> in Odessa Oblast), the Danube Delta is the habitat of a number of "23 natural ecosystems" (with their 2,383 vegetal species and 4,029 animal species) (according to the data published by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, at [www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro)). Besides, "seven human ecosystems" are also reported within the locally low-demographic density area (with its population of about 14,500 inhabitants in Romania, to cite again [www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro)), including – as main ethnic groups – Romanians, Russian-speaking Lipovans, and Ukrainians (see below the data of *Romanian 2011 Census*).

In 1990, the Romanian government established the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority, which the Romanian parliament endorsed with its Law no. 82/1993. This legislative framework was completed by the Romanian government's agreement on the Ramsar Convention (1991), with the Danube Delta assignment on the list of wetlands of international importance (see the map below). Based on recognition of the official conservation policy of protecting local ecosystems, the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve also became part of UNESCO's *Man and Biosphere* program (1991).



Source: [www.ddbra.ro](http://www.ddbra.ro)

**Figure 1:** Map of Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve

In fact, among locals, environment is reflected upon through divergent arguments of ancestral wetland vs. the state-administered regime of fishing-areas concessions (such as in the Lake Razim), rather than to be concerned with the “natural heritage” and the “international [ecological] importance” of the Danube Delta, as described in the official legislation about the local “Biosphere Reserve” (for further details on this subject, see Balaban et al., 2009, 15-18).

Indeed, elements of customary law – as expressed in phrases like “our lake’s [unwritten] law” – appear to still prove their relevance for the present-day social life in the deltaic villages (for example, in the case of genealogical memory of one’s “own water” and fishing areas). Such consuetudinary norms disagree with what Romanian and international legislation (including the 1991 UNESCO recognition and the 1991 Ramsar Convention) emphasize as the Danube Delta’s “natural resources” (fish, birds, reed, and so on), with little concern for the rural communities living there – as if they did not belong to the local “biodiversity reserve”.

As it will be seen later on, from an interwoven ecological and economical perspective, traditional fishing - with the local autarky of local villagers in socialist and post-socialist Romania – is overtly referred to by fishermen against the industry of fishing entrepreneurship. Indeed, in times of Romania’s accession to the European Union (2007), “the privatization of the fish” in the area is interpreted “as a means” for

the authorities “to justify a way of conserving fish, and the wider environment, whilst the state benefits from the resource” (Bell et al., 2004, 44).

Among the 26 local human settlements (of which six under 100 inhabitants) (Bell et al., 2004, 6), the deltaic traditional fishing is associated with the villages of Jurilovca (2,354 Romanians, 1,467 Russian-Lipovans), Mahmudia (1,883 Romanians, 347 Russian-Lipovans), Mila 23 (316 Russian-Lipovans), Sarichioi (3,308 Romanians, 2,328 Russian-Lipovans), and Sfântu Gheorghe (732 Romanians, 30 Ukrainians) (*Romanian 2011 Census*). Ethnicity in the Danube Delta makes a supplementary differential framework, but within which disempowerment is equally felt by Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian fishermen with their perspective on the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve as a top-down governed “reserve” potentially affecting the local ethno-linguistic communities’ sense of official recognition for their cultural identities.

The approach of the social, economic, and cultural realities of Danube Delta may obtain a regional relevance within a larger Southeastern European context of protecting lake areas, for example in Greece (Daoutopoulos and Pyrovetsi, 1990). As a matter of fact, the anthropological understanding of fishing livelihoods argues on the “multiple and contested notions of nature” and “natural resources management”, taking into account (in the Nemunas Delta, Lithuania) the local “competition for fish” between poachers and “other [non-human] predators of fish, primarily birds” (Hampshire et al., 2004). At a larger analysis scale, the study of the poaching and bird predation of fish in the Danube Delta, the Nemunas Delta, and in the Lake Kerkin (Greece), in comparison with the similar biodiversity of the Lake Pihlajavesi (Finland) is crucially applicable for any environmental politics in the area of an “integrated management of European wetlands”, especially relying on the “collaboration between those who design and implement conservation programmes and local people” (Bell et al., 2004, 171).

## The methodological framework of research

In the course of two fieldwork campaigns (in April 2003 and in August 2010), I conducted an oral-history research in the village of Jurilovca (Tulcea County), with the main objective of understanding the adaptive strategies of deltaic and marine fishing among fishermen in the area.

Jurilovca is a village in the south of Danube Delta, on the shore of what it is officially called “the Razim - Sinoe lake complex” and at the east from the Babadag plateau, in Southeastern Romania (see the map above). According to the last Romanian census, in 2011, Jurilovca village numbers a population of 3,935 out of which 2,354 Romanians, 6 Roma, 5 Turks, and 1,467 Russian-Lipovans. In the same census, there are mentioned speakers of Romanian (2,467), Romani (5), Ukrainian (5), Turkish (4), and Russian (1,387), as well as believers defined as Orthodox (2,017), Seventh-day Adventist (195), Muslim (11), Jehovah’s Witnesses (13), and Ancient-Rite Orthodox (1592) (see [http://www.recensamantul.Populației\\_și\\_Locuinelor;\\_2011](http://www.recensamantul.Populației_și_Locuinelor;_2011)).

The biographic interviews that I pursued in the field were taken with respect to the social, economic, and cultural changes in Jurilovca, from the postwar period to the contemporary realities of today. My interlocutors were chosen relying on their key-informant quality, rather than on a statistical representativeness of fishermen as a professional branch in Jurilovca. A core assumption of my research was that Lipovan fishing could have worked not only as an isolate pattern of subsistence economy, but mostly as a broader consciousness of ethnographic integration into the local ecology. Therefore, in collecting narrative information about a “fishermen’s village”, beyond a descriptive picture of what is technically undertaken during fishing in the Lake Razim and at the Black Sea, I became interested in fishing as a livelihood *as well as* a worldview. As a result, I asked my Lipovan interlocutors to report

their fishing experience through categories applicable to many other rural or urban groups – like “ethnicity”, “kinship”, “language”, “work organization”, “exchange”, and “cooking” – in order to synthesize next the distinct relevance of fishing *across* such “items” of a community’s general way of life.

It is based on the presence of a fish-related lifestyle that the “regional complex” (to cite Simion Mehedinti’s concept) of the Danube Delta allows for the possibility of identifying a “cultural area” (in Clark Wissler’s words) in the same environment. My hypothesis is that the deltaic *regional complex* and *cultural area* are equally originated in, and depending on, the fishing among the villagers of Jurilovca, eventually engendering their ethos of belongingness to the local wetland.

In the following chapters of the present text, for reasons of confidentiality, the names of my interviewees are reproduced by abbreviation.

## Ethnicity and fishing in Jurilovca village

As it results from the above-mentioned demographic data, Jurilovca is mainly a two-ethnic community with Romanians and Russian-speaking Lipovans composing the local majority of inhabitants. Such a twofold ethnic structure is further mirrored into the language and religion markers.

The Romanian and Lipovan groups explicitly maintain their ethno-religious identities, which does not exclude social relationships and interdependence between the two communities, however. Inter-marriage allows for such contacts, even if the ethnic endogamy is apparently still a dominant marital pattern among Lipovans:

*There are also mixed families [in Jurilovca], with the two ethnic groups marrying with each other. In the past, our strict norm was that a Lipovan girl could marry someone [non-Lipovan] else. We allowed this. The girls are not given the right to choose here. Instead, the [Lipovan] men have this right, so why choose*

*who knows whom, when one could make a choice for everyone wished from within his own “[ethnic] flock”...? As the girls have no such right, they were allowed to marry different people. And yet, even so, the scope was to convert those different people to our [Ancient Orthodoxy] faith! Well, nowadays all these are no longer respected... (IS)*

*Interbreeding occurs with Romanians marrying Lipovans, and with Lipovans marrying Romanians. There're so many interbred [families]...! God forbid that in the past! “Shall s/he marry a Romanian?!” These times... it is no longer the same, but it is freedom! Romanians and Lipovans equally marry with each other, what to do...? [...] When the bride is a Lipovan girl, her groom does follow our [religious] law. [...] Lipovan would-marry girls and boys use currently to follow the Romanian [religious identity]... Freedom is now everywhere...! (ES)*

To case of CI, a Romanian man who married a Lipovan woman, is illustrative not only for the existing incidence of intermarriage in Jurilovca, but also for the manner in which fishing – a traditionally Lipovan specialization – comes to be adopted also by members of other ethnic groups. Indeed, in spite of his origin outside of Jurilovca, CI is currently a local villager who engages in fishing collaboration with his Lipovan brothers-in-law. Broadly speaking, in doing fishing, the Lipovans in Jurilovca accept the reality of what they call the “[ethnic] mixture” (PH) – beginning with the socialist organization of fishing brigades.

*In the past, Romanians did not know the craft of fishing, but agriculture only. Nowadays, the number of Romanians [as fishermen] is getting higher as they learned to fish. (MH)*

Nevertheless, just like endogamy, fishing is recognized to traditionally belong to Lipovan people in Jurilovca, as an occupational pattern persistently defining their “community profile”. Local biographic narratives (like IF's) emphasize

the Lipovan preference for their ethnically-homogenous teamwork, with the exclusion of other ethnic membership in fishing by reasons of “language barrier”. Such ethnical mark of fishing is clearly highlighted by the Lipovan accounts:

*From generation to generation, Lipovans [in Jurilovca] deal with fishing; they were fishermen and still are the same. (PF) There were Lipovan [fishermen] mostly, while Romanians were few – two or three in a 16 member brigade – as they are not familiarized with the nature [the lake and the sea] and cannot resist cold weather or the storms... (IF) Fishing is the Lipovans' traditional occupation, that's the true. (CG)*

### **Fishing and kinship in Jurilovca village**

As if following the above-mentioned ideas of the ethnic characteristics of fishing among Lipovan villagers in Jurilovca, the local fishermen further describe their kinship-based work organization in either deltaic or marine locations of such occupation.

*My first fishing experience was with my father, during two or three years long. [...] My uncle and godparent were fishermen too. Together with my godparent [for instance], I did fishing about five years in the same team, by the năvod [drag-net] and by the vintir [fishing trap] as well. One of my sons [...] is also a fisherman. (MH)*

*My brother [...] who lives nearby and another brother of mine were fishermen as well. I live in the same neighborhood with my [married] son, a fisherman himself, he was subordinated to me, as I was our brigade chief. I taught him fishing and now he is a brigade chief in his turn. (PF)*

The intergenerational transmission of fishing craft within one's family is regularly evoked by Jurilovca villagers – Lipovan (CG) as well as Ukrainian (IC) – sometimes with reference to

the inheritance of boats and nets from parents to their offspring as a livelihood basis for a new family founded (ES).

Apparently, this kinship framework is an evidence of the enduring domestic and autarkic character of Lipovan fishing (see below the chapters on the “Lipovan ethno-history” and the “Lipovan vocabulary”). However, the villagers I interviewed (in 2003 and 2010) situate their retrospective accounts in the postwar socialist (re)organization of local fishing industry. Therefore, kinship networks may not be necessarily seen as an “undeveloped” or “traditional” phase in the history of fishing in Jurilovca, but also as a social adaptation of the local Lipovan community to “modern” or top-down politics of fish exploitation in the Danube Delta and in the Black Sea.

### **Fishing in accordance with the Lipovan ethno-history**

Fishing is not claimed to collectively characterize Lipovans in Jurilovca (and in other deltaic villages as well) simply in virtue of their present lifestyle or recent history. In this case, a central argument is the Lipovan remembering of the very beginnings of this Russian-speaking group in the Danube Delta, which (if following local ethno-history) would have occurred to the mid seventieth-century. In narrating their own past, the Lipovans deeply associate their settlement in the area (as a result of their migration from Russia, in circumstances of religious persecution, see Constantin, 2012a) with the practice of fishing.

*As far as I know, a few [Lipovan] families came to Jurilovca around 1640-1645... They thought to settle where the forest and the lake were in their close proximity... So they settled nearby the lake [of Razim], in order to find resources to live on. (IS)*

Actually, fishing is described as the basic economic strategy of the Lipovan newcomers, which they undertook within a family-

organization framework and benefiting of what the seemingly free environment offered them, in that medieval context.

*A couple of [Lipovan] families managed to arrive in these places, in Jurilovca, where few people lived by then. [The Lipovans] needed to run away, with their religion, to where Christianity is, here, in Romania... [...] Once arrived, what could they do? Fishing was their first occupation, as there is a wetland, all around here... [...] Seeing the surrounding [lake] waters, they made their own setci [gillnets], just as they were able to! They didn't learn fishing in school, but simply developed it locally... They used many sorts of tools.*

*Land-owning people were few in Jurilovca. Instead, most of them did fishing. It was the women who made the 'setci' [gillnets], which I did myself for my husband... Fishermen, then, made their living based on this. [...] Everyone used to fish wherever he wanted... Water areas belonged all to God, not to the people! (ES)*

Evocations such as above reiterate the foundational character of fishing for the memory of Lipovan generations and for their conservative ethnicity. Over centuries, Jurilovca is rendered as a sort of “gift of the Danube Delta” or, in any case, it is presented as an example of historical ecology. Wetland could have been a temporary micro-regional choice for Lipovans (as it was for other ethnic communities, first of all for Romanians and Ukrainians). It was the Lipovan tool-making that, as an adaptive behavior, turned the deltaic ecosystem into a long-run fishing “niche” and habitat, able to develop the future livelihood of the newcomers’ settling families.

### **Of the vocabulary of Lipovan fishing**

As I attempted to argue elsewhere, a series of terms in use among Lipovans in Jurilovca village could be considered as “vernacular items of a professional [fishing] taxonomy, exercised for centuries by local people” (Constantin, 2012c,

52). A brief scrutiny of this technical lexicon is pertinent both for the ethno-linguistic origin of Lipovans, and for their exchange relationships with various groups of populations with which they interrelated in time.

Thus, a series of words appear to have been inherited from Russian and cognate Slavic languages, such as the Russian words of *lotcă* (boat), *setcă* (gillnets), *vintir* (fishing trap), and *talian* (trawl), the Russian and Bulgarian word of *crap* (carp), the Bulgarian word of *plăticiă* (bream), the Bulgarian word of *biban* (perch), the Bulgarian and Serbian word of *știucă* (pike), the Russian and Ukrainian word of *ataman* (brigade headman), etc. Another category is heterogeneous as it includes terms borrowed from non-Slavic languages: the Greek words of *hamsie* (anchovy), *stavrid* (horse mackerel), and *scrumbie* (mackerel), the Turkish words of *cherhana* (fishery) and *mahuna* (boat), the Magyar word of *șalău* (perch), and the French word of *sardină* (sardine).

In what it was shown above, the vocabulary of fishing tools is basically Slavic (*lotcă*, *setcă*, *vintir*, *talian*), which, alongside the chieftainship term of *ataman* prove the ancestry of the Lipovans' beginnings in such craft since their Russian past (before 1650). The only foreign (Turkish) words here – *mahuna* and *cherhana* – seems to correspond to a kind of teamwork specialization in fishing, stemming from commercial reasons (in the area of Danube Delta and Western Black Sea), rather than from an autarkic economy. The same observation could be made as regards the origin of designating the fish species among Lipovans, with most of the lake fish described in the Slavic words of *crap*, *plăticiă*, *biban*, *știucă*, unlike the marine species of *hamsie*, *stavrid*, *scrumbie*, *șalău*, and *sardină*, which all belong to non-Slavic peoples as probably partners of Lipovan fishermen once they switched from their traditional subsistence fishing, to trading activities based on the fish industry.

Summarizing this lexical overview, one might say that during their tri-centennial history in Romania, the Lipovan villagers in Jurilovca

knew to keep the memory of what they used to do in the field of lake fishing (as still practiced in the Lake Razim). At the same time, the vicinity of the Black Sea led them to adopt forms of labor organization and fish exploitation generally echoing the requirements of a regional exchange economy in Eastern Romania.

### The seasonal organization of Lipovan fishing

Beside the socio-economic criteria of the fishing development among Lipovans from their traditional and autarkic enterprise to a modern and larger scale of regional trading, the two geographic coordinates of Lipovan fishing – the lake and the sea – are accordingly approached through a seasonally-oriented strategy. Following the yearly calendar of their occupation, the Lipovan villagers of Jurilovca alternate their fishing in accordance with the legal norms concerning the lake and the sea, which particularly involve tools and fish species for each location.

*In spring, we fished in March and April, after which there was the fishing prohibition for three months long. In July, we started to fish again, until the water was frozen.* (MH)

*In the Lake Razim, I did fishing by vintir [fishing trap] and năvod [drag-net], as well as with setci [boats] for the șalău [perch]... At the [Black] sea, I used the talians [trawls] only. We used to leave for the sea on March the 20<sup>th</sup>, and to stay there until the October the 1<sup>st</sup>. From the October the 1<sup>st</sup> on, we worked in the Lake Razim, where we fished by the năvod, up to the winter frost. [...] When the weather gets cold, with the coming of frost, the fish gets asleep, while in summer it is especially the carp that, because of the warm weather, jumps over the năvod!* (IF)

In accounts such as above, indigenous knowledge on the fish species is proven to be decisive for the appropriate tool use during either deltaic or marine fishing.



*In the sea, the talian (given its narrow texture) is used to catch thin species like the anchovy, the sardine, the horse mackerel. The năvod, instead, serves to the fishing of lake or freshwater species, such as the carp, the bream, the perch, and the pike... (PF)*

Alongside fish prohibition (in the spring period of species reproduction: April 1-June 30), the fishermen in Jurilovca also take into account the climate conditioning of their occupation, as they return from their marine fishing before the weather worsening in late autumn. The same villagers report their activity of reed harvesting in winter, which practically ends up the local working cycle in direct relationship with environment.

### **Lipovan barter and labor exchange in Danube Delta hinterland**

Whereas the Lipovans in Jurilovca are often referred to in terms of their ecological specialization in fishing, they do not portray themselves as a socio-economic enclave, but also mention their connections with the farming villages from the vicinity of Danube Delta. Agriculture and viticulture are thus described as seasonal outlets for locals who choose to work for rural landowners in Dobroudja.

*Land-owning people were few in Jurilovca. [...] From Jurilovca to the [neighboring] village of Lunca, some of us cultivated vine and kept selling their wine... [...] Other Lipovans decided to leave for working lands of patrons and landowners in Dobrodja. It was in such way that some of us plowed up lands to cultivate them with maize, and bunched the corn cob. [ES]*

Autobiographic memories contain information about Lipovan bartering activities in the past, as mainly based on fish in exchange for farming goods in the same hinterland.

*As my grandparents lacked possibilities to [locally] distribute their fish, they used*

*to load it in their carts (after salting it) and engaged in such exchanges for maize, wheat, and sunflower... Lipovans are great amateurs of fried sunflower! [...] My father too told me that he regularly went [bartering] together with his parents; he used to say, "I was like a cart's little dog! Every time I had to take care about our horses and about everything..." Thus, his father and he came back home with farming products... (AM)*

From another viewpoint (CI), the "exchange value" of fish during socialism in the Danube Delta concerned the fishermen's (informal) possibility to give their products for food items like sugar and edible oil (given the scarcity of such items in before-1989 Romania). Otherwise, the aged Lipovan fishermen remember the "Harvest Day" (usually held on each October first Sunday), actually an official socialist holiday of celebrating the autumnal production in various branches of rural economy, including fishing. The "Harvest Day" took place in Jurilovca and other neighboring localities such as Murighiol, Sfântu-Gheorghe, and Sulina, with the fishermen participating with their families and with their fish for sale.

### **Fish-based cookery among Lipovans in Jurilovca**

As the very expression of their daily livelihood, the Lipovans ascribe the fish the value of a locally representative cuisine, which they associate with their ethnic origin and socio-professional structure as well. In the following citation, the recipe of the *Lipovan fish broth* is described in terms of a "men's specialty", a "[community] ancestral tradition", and still – through ingredient composition and consumption habits – as a "particular taste".

*The [Lipovan] fish broth is a men's' "cooking specialty", as when they come back from their fishing! They use to clean their fish and then boil it. This is our ancestral tradition.*

[As ingredients] *Onion and potatoes are mainly used in broth cooking at the lake shoreline. A tasty fish broth is obtained from many fish heads, but not everyone likes them, except those who know eating the fish heads! Some people don't even taste the fish heads, though it is about a special taste, due to the delicious fish brain... Vegetables should boil properly, and, when ready, fish is added in. In cooking a little broth, one makes use of bream, crucian, and pike perch heads. Of the rest of pike perch, further meals will be prepared. [...] The fish bones should be cut (as the pike perch, the crucian, and the bream contain plenty of bones). To be eaten with its bones altogether, fish is cut narrowly. After putting the fish in the soup, also salt and vinegar are tastily added in, to harden the boiling fish. [...] As a rule, the Lipovans never boil their fish in a pot, but in a pan – not to break the fish into pieces, but to nicely serve it at the table. [...] When the broth starts boiling, a little bit of vegetables is to be added in, just to make it tasty...*

*Fish is a dominant meal [among Lipovans], especially when fresh. It is about a big lake fish. Herring, which is a delicacy, appears in the first [fishing] season; it is prepared in several ways. [There are] Several ways of cooking fish, as the fish species can be prepared in all sorts of meals, including cabbage-leaves meat rolls, stuffed peppers, and pumpkin with fish... Also salty, dry, and smoked fish is cooked [in Jurilovca]. (AM)*

According to such native viewpoints, the *Lipovan fish broth* is successively referred to in (1) its traditional contextualization, (2) its cooking process, and (3) its integration within a broader categorization of fish-based gastronomy in Jurilovca village – all at once claimed to bear the fishermen's folk distinctiveness in the area.

### **Socialist and post-socialist perspectives on fishing in Jurilovca**

When asked about their lifelong occupational experience, the Lipovan fishermen in Jurilovca use to evoke two biographic themes – in contrast

with each other – as regards the socialist and post-socialist “ages” of local fishing. In fact, the villagers in discussion argue on a sort of deprivation of their fishing craft in times of contemporary market economy and biodiversity politics, which they need to compare with a paradoxically better administration in the Danube Delta before 1989.

Thus, with respect to their socialist past, the Lipovans in Jurilovca constantly assert the efficiency of production organization within the “Piscicola” fishing unit, which, as the employer of as many as 500 local fishermen (MH), provided everyone with boats plus the necessary tools, and managed the good accomplishment of the *plan* (the planned quota of fish amount to catch by each fishing brigade). Such “plan” was established up to 160-170 tones of fish per month (MH, PF), which was relatively easy to do thanks to the rich fish resources in the lake or in the sea. While fish catching was the fishermen's job, the fish distribution was entirely in the state's hands; the state is remembered as the only “client” (i.e. employer and working partner at once) of local fishermen (PF). In the framework of the local state-directed fishing industry, the deltaic fishermen were able to build up their long-run career, during several decades, until their pension retirement (IC).

On the contrary, in post-socialist Romania, the privatization process in fishing is seen in terms of “dismantlement” of what, until recently, appeared to represent the basic source of local livelihood (MH, PF). The new authority of *patrons* who now rent out the fishing lake areas is hardly accepted by locals as they would undertake neither the tool supply, nor the fish regeneration. (New dikes built across local lake areas are severely incriminated to obstruct the natural regeneration of fish [IC]). Such issues are worsened by the difficulties in accessing European funds (as restricted on condition of co-financing by the potential beneficiaries [CI]), as well as by the disappointment towards non-loyal political representation (CG). In this context, the current incidence of poaching is explained as a post-1989 phenomenon, originating into the

continuous decrease of local fish natural stock (IC, CI, CG) (Constantin, 2012b).

## Conclusion

In explaining the methodological framework of my research, I have hypothesized the link between the indigenous groups' environmental adaptation and integration, and their ethno-cultural belongingness, which I have sought to conceptualize from two perspectives, one of which geographic (*regional complex*, according to Simion Mehedinți), and the other anthropogeographical (*cultural area*, in Clark Wissler's terminology).

In Jurilovca village, the Russian-speaking Lipovans' fishing specialization within what (since 1990) the *Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve* is governmentally designed in Northern Dobroudja, appears to match the interdisciplinary criteria followed by the two aforementioned theories. A series of social, economic, and cultural characteristics of Lipovan villagers outline the importance of fishing for the local livelihood as well as worldview. Indeed, the fishing is invested with ethnic representativeness basically relying on kinship in the work organization and a vernacular technical lexicon of such inter-generationally transmitted craft. Likewise, the practice of fishing is proven to have a foundational character for the ethno-historical memory of Lipovans and their settlement in the area, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In time, the Lipovans approached the particularities of the deltaic and marine ecology through their seasonally-oriented strategy of the alternation of lake-and-sea fishing locations. In economic terms, the Lipovan fishermen were engaged in bartering with the fish exchanged

for farming goods from neighboring farming villages in Northern Dobroudja, while the local fish-based cookery was developed as an ethnic cuisine. Socialist and post-socialist "ages" of fish industry provide with further evidences for the enduring tradition of fishing among and across Lipovan generations under different political regimes.

Since all these ethnographic traits are to be referred to within the administration of the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve, the crucial issue for the native inhabitants is now that of the very continuity of "their lake's [unwritten] law" (as a vernacular representation) in contrast to the politics of renting out the local fishing areas. Recent anthropological reports point out the existence of traditional ownership over fishing areas claimed to "belong" to particular families in the Danube Delta (Bell et al., 2004, 41), a fact which, among local villagers, is defined in terms of rights of "inheritance" and "usufruct" in the demarcation of "fishing corridors" (Alexandrescu et al., 2009, 31-32). As an indirect recognition of such customary norms, the current Romanian legislation in the region admits the right of "preemption" for the native deltaic inhabitants in the cases of concessioning or renting out the fishing areas by the Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve Authority (Balaban et al. 2009, 17-18). Therefore, the perspectives of the Russian-Lipovan "regional complex" of fishing within the "cultural area" from the *Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve* appear to depend on the degree to which local aspects of customary law might be reconciled with the official legislation with respect to traditional ownership, genealogical inheritance, and the right of preemption.

## Note

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