



PROPAGANDA-INFORMED VISUAL DISCOURSE IN GEOGRAPHY OF ROMANIA SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS, DURING THE 1980s

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the images (mainly photographs) included in four Geography of Romania school textbooks published in the 1980s, with the aim of identifying recurring themes that align with the broader propaganda discourse on socialist territorial development. By doing so, the study addresses a gap in the literature regarding the role of geography textbooks in shaping representations of the national territory in Romania during both the socialist and post-socialist periods. I conducted a thematic analysis of both the visual materials and the texts accompanying those images. After identifying the key themes, I interpreted them in relation to communist propaganda as manifested in Romanian society and the educational system. Accordingly, the study employs critical visual methodology for the analysis of images and discourse analysis for the textual material. The Romanian case illustrates the instrumentalization of geography education in reinforcing socialist ideology and cultivating a collective socialist identity based on reiterative representations of territorial unity and socialist development.

Keywords: communist propaganda, socialist development, geographical education, critical visual methodology, discourse analysis

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INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research on visual discourse during socialist Romania and the promoted geographical education has demonstrated that images (mainly photographs) in textbooks served as powerful tools for constructing meaning and shaping an entire narrative about territorial development during communism (Ilovan 2024a, 2025; Ilovan & Muntean, 2025). This was part of a larger (visual) discourse informed by communist propaganda, which enhanced representations about socialist development, while educating Romanians of all ages about the socialist nation (Copilaş, 2015; Dulamă & Ilovan, 2017; Ilovan & Merciu, 2021; Ilovan, 2022b, 2024a).

Territorial identity or identity of the place is grounded both in the material or physical environment and in discursive practices (Rose 2014; Silova et al., 2014; Paasi et al., 2018; Conţiu et al., 2022, p. 52; Ilovan 2024b). Therefore, for Romania, in order to understand contemporary representations of space and territorial identities it is essential to examine the processes of discourse production and reproduction, particularly as they occur through Geography of Romania textbooks (Caramelea, 2015; Ilovan, 2020b), an understudied topic. Because representations of space are transmitted across generations (Hajdú & Paasi, 1995; Silova et al., 2014; Ilovan, 2024b), they form an integral part of contemporary narratives concerning the identity of Romania and its people (Ilovan, 2024a). These representations are embedded within Romanians' structures of expectations (Paasi, 1986) and continue to shape contemporary decision-making processes. In the same vein, previous research has demonstrated that the construction of territorial identity



in socialist Romania, mediated through official imagery, contributes to “a pictorial inventory of nationalist tropes” or landmarks (Winiwarter, 2008, quoted in Ilovan & Maroși, 2018, p. 143; Ilovan 2022b, 2024a; Boia, 2025, pp. 153-164).

In this research paper, I aim to provide an overview of the images (mainly photographs) featured in four Geography of Romania school textbooks from the 1980s and identify key topics that may connect those images with the overarching propaganda discourse on socialist territorial development. Thusly, I fill in a gap concerning the role of Geography textbooks in shaping Romanians’ representations of their country during the socialist and post-socialist periods.

METHODOLOGY

Primary Data

The research material is drawn from four school textbooks, namely two editions of the 4th grade textbook and one edition for the 8th and 12th grade textbook:

1. Iancu, M., Motrescu, V., and Negulescu, M.B. (1985). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 4th Grade]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică. Textbook elaborated in 1960, reviewed in 1981, and re-edited for the 1985-1986 school year.

2. Iancu, M., Motrescu, V., and Florescu, V. (1989). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 4th Grade], similar variants published in 1960, 1986. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

3. Giurcăneanu, C., Mușat, I., and Ghica, Gh. (1986). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a, revizuit în 1981* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 8th Grade, revised in 1981]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

4. Tufescu, V., Giurcăneanu, C., and Mierlă, I. (1981). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 12th Grade]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

Data Interpretation

First, I performed thematic analysis on visual material and texts that accompanied the respective images in the four Geography of Romania textbooks. Once key themes were identified, I interpreted them in relation to the communist propaganda in both the Romanian society and the educational system. Accordingly, I performed critical visual methodology for the images and discourse analysis for the texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An overview

Aiming to provide an overview of the images (mainly photographs) featured in four Geography of Romania school textbooks,¹ I began with the hypothesis that the visual discourse possesses the capacity to capture students’ attention and shape their representations, which are subsequently transmitted across generations. My focus was on identifying iconic images that represented geographical processes and places. Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó, and Herbstritt (2018) previously analysed the visual content of three Geography of Romania school textbooks—the same ones examined in the present study—identifying the proportion of each type of visual material (such as photographs, maps, and charts) relative to the total number of visuals in each textbook, as well as the variations in these proportions over time. Tourism, industry, and infrastructure emerged as the most extensively illustrated topics. Among the images presented in textbook figures, this study conducts an in-depth analysis exclusively of the photographs. However, several charts were

¹ One is a new edition of the 4th grade textbook.



included to clarify the message of photographs. To highlight the recurrence of specific photographs across the four textbooks, their titles are included in Tables 1 and 2. It is evident that several sites were consistently represented across these textbooks. However, the titles of repeated or identical images were slightly altered by the respective authors from one textbook to another. In addition, I chose to present textbooks separately and not structure information on specific topics (i.e., related to Physical Geography and to Human Geography), so that it is possible to understand the expected progression of students' learning of the Geography of Romania from the 4th to the 12th grade.

Table 1

Photographs in Geography of Romania school textbooks of the 1980s

No.	4 th grade textbook (1985)	8 th grade textbook (1986)	12 th grade textbook (1981)
1.	View from the Harghita Mountains	Large view of the Rodnei Mountains	High mountainous summit in the Carpathians (placed not mentioned)
2.	View from Ceahlău Massif	The Ceahlău Mountains and Lake Izvorul Muntelui	Lake Izvoru Muntelui
3.	View from the Vrancei Mountains	Through the Bicalului Gorges	A part of mountain resort Poiana Braşov
4.	The Bicalului Gorges	Declivity view of the Bucegi Mountains towards Prahova Valley. Curiosities of nature: the Sphinx, the Old Women ²	Reserve of aurochs in Haţeg
5.	Piatra Craiului Massif	Idem	Pelican colony in the Delta
6.	The Bucegi Mountains – Babele (The Old Women)	Idem	Lake Saint Ana
7.	The Bucegi Mountains – Sfinxul (The Sphinx)	Lake Vidraru	Lake Herăstrău
8.	Cable car to the Făgăraş summits	Orşova – the new town built on the shores of the Iron Gates I Lake	Iron Gates Hydropower Plant
9.	Negoiul Peak in the Făgăraş Mountains	The Apuseni Mountains – a picturesque corner	Rogojelu Steam Power Plant
10.	View from the Retezat Mountains	Ponoare natural bridge in the Mehedinţi Tableland	Steel and Iron Factories in Galaţi
11.	The new town Orşova	The Danube Delta – a charming view ³	The Refinery in Brazi
12.	View from the Apuseni Mountains	The Danube at Giurgiu	Spray irrigation
13.	Beştepe Heights nearby Sfîntu Gheorghe Horn	Glacier lake in the Retezat Mountains ⁴	Harvesting with combines
14.	Aspect from the Danube Delta	Lake Saint Ana in Tuşnad	Bucharest-Otopeni Airport ⁵
15.	Winter aspect from the Bucegi Mountains	Lake Roşu (Red) ⁶	View from the seaside. Aurora resort
16.	Iron Gates – “Iron Gates I” hydroenergetic and navigation system. Grandiose works realised by our country in collaboration with R.S.F. Yugoslavia	Mamaia beach in mid-summer ⁷	
17.	The Olt River at Cozia	The University – Bucharest	

² Three photographs put together as in a collage.

³ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook, but with a comment “o privelişte fermecătoare”/ a charming view.

⁴ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

⁵ New photo, but same angle and conception of the representation.

⁶ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

⁷ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.



18.	The Lotru River	Intercontinental Hotel and the underground route/passage	
19.	Lake Saint Ana nearby Băile Tuşnad	Bucharest. A wonderful corner of The Youth Park ⁸	
20.	Lake Roşu (Red)	Aspect of the new urban landscape of Braşov	
21.	Mamaia, one of the most beautiful resorts on the Black Sea seaside	Union Square in Iaşi ⁹	
22.	Pelican in the Danube Delta	New buildings in Piteşti ¹⁰	
23.	Bucharest. The University Square	Industrial platform in Hunedoara city ¹¹	
24.	Bucharest. Herăstrău Park	Iron Gates I Hydropower Plant	
25.	Timişoara. View from the city centre	View from the Steel and Iron Factories, a workshop – Galaţi	
26.	View from Iaşi. Union Square	“1 Mai” Factory in Ploieşti	
27.	View from Piteşti	Electric Locomotive built in “Electroputere” Craiova	
28.	Field of bores in Ţicleni (Gorj County)	Work in the Car Factory in Piteşti-Colibaşi ¹²	
29.	Galaţi. Aspect from the iron and steel factories, the biggest “fire fortress” of the country	Gigantic tools built by “Heavy machineries Company” in Bucharest	
30.	Interior aspect from the alumina company in Slatina	Partial image of the Petrochemical Factories in Piteşti	
31.	“1 Mai” Factory in Ploieşti	Chemical Fertilisers Factories in Arad	
32.	“Dacia” car on the assembly line at the Car Factory in Piteşti	Interior view from the Synthetic Fibres Factories in Iaşi	
33.	View from The Chemical Factories in Craiova	General view on the Polygraphic Factories “Casa Scînteii” in Bucharest	
34.	Partial view from the Factories for Synthetical Threads and Fibres in Săvineşti	Wood Processing Factories in Tg. Jiu ¹³	
35.	Wood Processing Factories in Tîrgu Jiu	Wine Production Factories in Valea Călugărească ¹⁴	
36.	Interior aspect from the Sugar Factory “Siretul”, in Bucecea Commune	Rich harvest on the homeland fields ¹⁵	
37.	Harvesting wheat	Greenhouses in Tincăbeşti, near the capital city (Ilfov Agricultural Sector)	
38.	Harvesting corn	Cows of breed in a State Agricultural Company (Întreprindere Agricolă de Stat - IAS)	
39.	Vegetables	The bridge of friendship at Giurgiu-Ruse – with railway and road	
40.	Sunflower field in Bărgan	On the Sulina Horn	

⁸ Created in 1965, in southern Bucharest, which developed strongly during the 1960s and 1970s – served by two metro stations.

⁹ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹⁰ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹¹ With a related question.

¹² Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹³ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹⁴ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹⁵ Same image as in the 4th grade textbook about harvesting the wheat.



41.	Wine production Complex in Valea Călugărească	View from Constanța seaport	
42.	Cows in the Crișurilor Field	The Olt River at Cozia	
43.	Sheep flock grazing in the Perșani Mountains	Cable car in the Făgăraș Mountains ¹⁶	
44.	Aspect of a railway part (North Railway Station – Bucharest)	View from Poiana Brașov resort	
45.	Otopeni International Airport (Bucharest)	Mountainous landscape nearby Predeal, with Piatra Mare Massif in the background	
46.	Poiana Brașov – Postăvarul	“Lebăda” Hotel in the heart of the Danube Delta ¹⁷	
47.	Bușteni. General View	“Tropaeum Traiani” Monument from Adamclisi Commune (Constanța County)	
48.		Voroneț Monastery, Voroneț Monastery in Obcinile Bucovinei, one of the most valuable architectural monuments of our country	
49.		A beautiful place to rest on the Romanian seaside of the Black Sea	

(Source: Own elaboration)

Table 2

Photographs in Geography of Romania 4th grade textbook of 1989

No.	Photograph title ¹⁸
1.	The Rodnei Mountains seen from Băile Borșa
2.	Landscape from the Dobrogei Mountains
3.	The Vedea River nearby Alexandria City
4.	The Danube-Black Sea Canal
5.	Dam and accumulation lake Vidraru, on the Argeș
6.	“Izvor” metro station in Bucharest
7.	Cluj-Napoca. “Grigorescu” neighbourhood
8.	Iași. New neighbourhood
9.	Galați. Aspect from the Steel and Iron Factories
10.	Hunedoara. Steel and Iron Factories
11.	Baia Mare. The central flotation
12.	Iași. Aspect from the Factory for Plastic Products
13.	Scornicești. Interior aspect from the Clothing Factory
14.	Carei. Aspect from the Factory for Powdered Milk
15.	Aspect from a greenhouse for vegetables
16.	Bucharest-Otopeni International Airport
17.	Pietrele Doamnei in the Rarău Mountains
18.	Landscape from the Suhardul Mic Mountains
19.	On the “Transfăgărășan”
20.	With the ship on the Danube
21.	Poiana Țapului, well known resort on the Prahova Valley
22.	The Bicașului Gorges

(Source: Own elaboration)

¹⁶ Accompanied by a task for students – same image as in the 4th grade textbook.

¹⁷ And an advertising for tourists.

¹⁸ New photographs in comparison to the 1985 version.



An Examination of Photographic Content in the 1985 4th Grade Geography Textbook

The first analysed textbook is the one by Iancu, M., Motrescu, V., and Negulescu, M.B. (1985). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 4th Grade]*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică. Textbook elaborated in 1960, reviewed in 1981, and re-edited for the 1985-1986 school year.

The topics of the visual discourse in the 1985 4th-grade Geography textbook are outlined below. The textbook contains a total of 47 photographs. Based on their subject matter, I categorized the photographs as follows:

- Mountains – 13 landscapes;
- The Danube Delta – landscape; aspect from the Danube Delta, mentioning as a task to find images of this delta in the class album (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 41); pelicans in the Danube Delta;
- Two images with rivers: the Olt and the Lotru (both in the south of Romania), two with lakes: Lake Saint Ana and Lake Roșu (these two are situated in Transylvania);
- Mamaia – seaside resort;
- Iron Gates dam – for the section on rivers; about this objective, the political relevance is underlined by architects;¹⁹
- A new town: Orșova. Landscape changes induced by industrial platforms were prioritised in representations (i.e., the rebuilt town of Orșova);²⁰
- Two photographs with Bucharest (The University Square and Herăstrău Park);
- One photograph with Timișoara, Iași, Pitești. No towns from Transylvania are represented whatsoever.

The mountains represented are as follows: the Harghita, the Ceahlău, the Vrancei, the Bicăzului Gorges in (the Hășmașu Mare) with Lake Roșu nearby, the Piatra Craiului, the Bucegi (“Babele”/The Old Ladies and “Sfinxul”/The Sphinx, and a winter landscape), the Făgăraș, the Retezat, the Apuseni, and the Beștepe Hills. Three photographs depict the Bucegi Mountains, which are the most frequently represented, followed by images of the Southern Carpathians, then of the Eastern, and finally of the Western Carpathians.

Industry is depicted in nine photographs: oil extraction, iron and steel industry, alumina, “1 Mai” Factory in Ploiești, “Dacia” Pitești, Craiova (chemical factories), and a sugar factory. Three are from Moldova (Bucecea, Săvinești and Galați), and six from southern Romania (Țicleni, Gorj County; Slatina; Ploiești, Pitești, Craiova, and Tg. Jiu). Transylvania is notably absent from these representations of successful industrial activity. Regarding industry, four photographs depict interior views of factories, while the remaining five show external perspectives. These images depict industrial architecture situated on expansive industrial complexes, often accompanied by transport infrastructure or nearby resources and products (i.e., processed wood). Agriculture is depicted through seven images, including a photograph of the wine factory in Valea Călugărească. Two images are with machinery harvesting wheat and corn; one photograph with vegetables and herbs exhibited for sale; another photograph with a field of sunflower; one with cows (the Crișurilor Field) and one with sheep (the Perșani Mountains). Two symbols of agricultural activity—a tractor and a grain plant—underscore the prominence of economic progress and mechanization in the representation of socialist Romania’s agriculture.

Transport is represented by two photographs: one depicting the main railway station in Bucharest and the other showing Otopeni International Airport, also located in Bucharest. The Gara de Nord railway station is depicted in a grim landscape, which conveys the impression of aging and rusted infrastructure

¹⁹ “Industrial architecture not only remained at the heart of communist economic ideology, but also it could sometimes be endowed with additional symbolic connotations. For example, the huge steel mill at Galați or the Iron Gates hydroelectric plant were meant to boost Gheorghiu-Dej’s “dissident” economic policy, challenging Moscow and the Comecon” (Zahariade, 2011, p. 43).

²⁰ “[...] these buildings and industrial installations brought about spectacular changes in the physiognomy of the natural landscape”; “[...] one of the most spectacular terra-forming operations was the submersion of Ada Kaleh Island and the relocation of the city of Orșova to make way for the Iron Gates hydroelectric plant on the Danube” (Zahariade, 2011, p. 42).



rather than modern transport facilities. Tourism is represented by two images featuring the Poiana Braşov and Buşteni resorts in the Southern Carpathians. A romantic portrayal of the mountains is achieved by literary language, emphasizing the natural beauty and richness of the country:

Pietrosul (2,303 m), the highest of this mountains, seems to guard the surrounding beauties: pastures dotted with delicate mountain flowers, mountain lakes with crystal clear water, where the herds drink water, forested slopes and valleys where bears, deer, blackcocks, boars, and other forest animals live (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 14-15); [...] Ceahlău Massif raises proudly, formed of limestone and of other rocks that water could not equally grind. That is why many cliffs acquired curious forms, like straight walls and stone towers higher or lower, to which the people's imagination connected many legends. Ceahlău mirrors its grandeur in the blue wavelets of the big accumulation lake on the Bistriţa River (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 15).

People are depicted as an integral part of nature, engaging in activities such as camping in the Harghita Mountains, traveling by car or bus through the Bicz Gorges, or admiring the landscape in the Ceahlău Massif. No people are depicted within the mountainous landscapes of Pietra Craiului, Bucegi, and Apuseni. However, individuals are shown traveling by cable car in the Făgăraş Mountains, as well as walking and integrated into the landscape in both the Făgăraş and Retezat Mountains. A cable car is depicted in Poiana Braşov, while people are shown admiring the landscape in Buşteni (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 117). Three men are skiing while admiring the landscape in the Bucegi Mountains. The image of the Beştepe Hills shows a man, integrated into the natural landscape, gazing from the top of the hill. No people are present in the images of the Iron Gates or the Lotru River with its bridge; however, three individuals (two men and one woman) are part of the landscape along the Olt River at Cozia. An adult and a child are looking at Lake Saint Ana. Two individuals are shown in a boat on Lake Roşu, while another image depicts two men boating in the Danube Delta. Mamaia is represented during the summer season, featuring a crowded beach and a new block-type hotel situated in a green area in the background.

Bucharest is portrayed as a vibrant city, bustling with people on the streets and active traffic. Herăstrău Park is depicted in a photograph featuring two large tourist ships on the lake. In both Bucharest and Timișoara, photographs capture historic buildings and architecture located in the city centres. Iași and Pitești, in contrast, showcase examples of modern architecture. In all these photographs, people are integrated into the urban landscape, conveying a sense of vibrant and bustling city life.

Regarding *the technical characteristics of the images*, some photographs are presented in black and white: the Beştepe Hills, field of oil pumps in Țicleni, Galați, with the iron and steel factories, "1 Mai" Factory in Ploiești, the Sugar factory in Bucecea, and Otopeni airport. The black-and-white photographs convey the impression of sites captured long ago, contrasting with the colour images, which appear to depict the contemporary situation.

An Examination of Text-Image Connections in the 1985 4th Grade Geography Textbook

The text in this textbook is embedded within an overarching nationalist discourse, shaped and reinforced by the ideology of national communism in Romania (cf. Copilaş, 2015). The following analysis draws on a selection of quotations that underscore the connection between the geography of Romania and national identity. For instance, the landforms of the Romanian territory are described as harmonious and diverse, with their unity symbolically and geographically reinforced by the Carpathian Mountains:

Mountains are not too high, and they have numerous large valleys with passes enabling crossing. Therefore, although they are situated in the heart of our country, the Carpathians never separated Romanians, but, on the contrary, they united them (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 10).

or

[...] this land appears as an immense fortress hearth (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 8).

The perceived natural belonging of Transylvania to Romania is reinforced through the metaphor of the country as a fortress (RO: *cetate*), symbolically affirming the deep-rooted connection of Romanians to



their national territory. This is a recurring trope that links geographical features to the construction of the national idea: “this essential and essentializing metaphor, people are born and ‘rooted’ to the native homeland much like certain trees or flowers are native to the ‘national soil’” (Silova et al., 2014, p. 120). In this vein, the textbook promotes an organic conceptualization of the mountains, portraying them as integral to the natural and national landscape:

[...] today these mountains are dressed in the green clothes of woods and pastures, and one cannot believe that during their childhood they were enshrouded in fire, smoke, ash and melted rocks (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 13).

Students are informed that the mountains possess aesthetically pleasing and attractive forms (Figure 1). They are home to ancient towns and villages where, throughout the summer, the sound of sheep bells and shepherds’ whistles can be heard (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 14). They are described as majestic and of ‘rare beauty’ (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 23), covered in forests, and deeply embedded in old stories: [...] to which people’s imagination linked many legends (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 15).

Figure 1

*View from the Harghita Mountains*²¹



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 14)

The textbook characterizes the mountains as serving a defensive function, emphasizing their picturesque qualities. The cliffs are described as “sharp, like the towers of some fortresses” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 20), evoking a landscape imbued with romantic aesthetic appeal. The Southern Carpathians are depicted in a romanticized manner:

When the sunrise seemingly puts the sky on fire within a fire flame, and the mists melt in the bottom of the dark valleys, the crests of *Moldoveanu* (2,544 m) and of *Negoiu* (2,535 m) rise proud towards the blue canopy. These are the highest peaks of our country (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 22).

A military metaphor is employed to describe the construction of the first road—Transfăgărășan—through one of the highest mountains in the country (i.e. the Făgăraș; Figure 2). Masculinity and courage

²¹ Original titles were kept for all figures.



were portrayed as decisive factors in fulfilling the task assigned by the Communist Party (cf. also Ilovan 2020a, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a, 2022c):

Until 1974 there was no road to cross the proud chain of the Făgăraș Mountains. Answering the Party's call, thousands of builders, armed with various strong machinery, but especially with manhood and courage, penetrated the stone wall of the Făgăraș, building the most beautiful road that crosses these mountains: "Transfăgărășanul" (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 25).

Figure 2

Cable car to the Făgăraș summits. Negoiu Peak in the Făgăraș Mountains



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 24)

On another occasion, the Party's call was answered by the youth, who took part in the construction of a significant railway – *Bumbești-Livezeni railway*:

During the years of socialism, through the Jiu Narrows, they built the important railway of Bumbești-Livezeni, which connects the coal land of Petroșani with the south of the country. Answering the call of the Romanian Communist Party, thousands of the young took part at building this railway. The whistle of the trains that races through all the 38 tunnels of the Jiu Narrows reaches far away, to the highest crests of the mountains (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 26).

A rhetorical question serves to underscore the ostensibly encomiastic portrayal of individuals' presumed happiness in possessing such wealth:

How can your heart not swell with joy when you know that all this richness is ours, the people's (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 27).

The Othering of the past as a challenging era is demonstrated in the subsequent paragraphs, which juxtapose it with the prosperous and abundant present, exemplified by the contrast between fields overrun with wild grass and those cultivated with wheat:

Centuries ago, on large areas of the fields, only wild grass was growing. Today, fields were transformed into the largest wheat producers of our country (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 56).



During the years of socialist construction, due to research, they discovered new places with oil and other rich resources. They built numerous pipes for extracting oil, refineries and chemical factories for its processing (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 34).

New mines and towns are established, providing miners with renewed employment opportunities, while new constructions—such as factories and apartment blocks—emerge. Old industrial centres are undergoing modernisation; for example, Hunedoara continues to support the machinery manufacturing industry.

In the presentation of the Petroșani and Hațeg Depressions, a contrast is drawn between the past and the present:

Despite all the richness of this depression, during the bourgeois-landlord regime, the miners made acquaintance with poverty, unemployment, and abjectness. The miners' strike in Lupeni, of 1929, remains unforgettable in the history of our Homeland, which was squashed in blood by bourgeois-landlords. During the years of socialist construction, in the Jiu Valley, they opened new mines and new towns appeared. They raised modern constructions: Factories and block of flats. [...] *The Hațeg Depression*. In this depression, Hunedoara city is situated, and this develops much during the years of socialist construction. Here, by melting iron ore, iron and steel are obtained, so necessary to produce various machines (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 26).

The Beștepe Heights (Figure 3) are classified as tablelands, while the Danube Delta (Figure 4) serves as the subject of a lesson titled "Through the Delta." Dobrogea (Dobrudja) is portrayed as "ancient Romanian land," characterised by its old rock formations. The socialist period was marked by the discovery of new underground mineral deposits and the establishment of factories for their processing. The introduction of irrigation systems significantly transformed the landscape of the Dobrudja Tableland:

During the years of socialist construction, the appearance of the Dobrudja Tableland underwent major changes. In these places, they built irrigation channels through which they pumped water from the Danube. This way, large areas were transformed into rich wheat and corn fields, into wonderful vineyards and orchards (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 36).

Thus, during the years of socialist construction, tens of thousands of land hectares were given to agriculture (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 40).

Figure 3

Beștepe Heights nearby Sfîntu Gheorghe Horn



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 36)



Similarly, in the texts concerning various depressions, there is a discernible othering of decline within the temporal framework of “now and then”: decline is portrayed as uncharacteristic of the socialist Romanian society. Currently, new factories are being constructed in the vicinity of Brăila. Additionally, in a reading concerning the Danube Delta, emphasis is placed on the emerging industrial developments:

Only in the years of socialist construction the reed received a great importance. It is used for producing paper and other products. With this aim, nearby Brăila city, large chemical factories have been built (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 40).

Figure 4

Aspect from the Danube Delta



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 41)

The climate of Romania is illustrated through an additional depiction of the Bucegi Mountains (Figure 5), while considerable attention is paid to the rivers, because new constructions provide the essential electricity for urban areas and facilitate the development of the irrigation system:

At the foot of the Ceahlăul, on the Bistrița Valley, the ‘V.I. Lenin’ dam and hydro powerplant from Bicaz were built, as well as other smaller hydro powerplants downstream (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 50).

At Stînca (Ștefănești commune), our country, together with the USSR built on the Prut a big accumulation lake and a hydropower plant for providing water and electricity to towns and for extending the irrigations (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 50).

Institutionalised representations of Romania encompassed narratives related to hydropower plants. These large-scale projects served to bolster national pride. The period from 1960 to 1980 is regarded as the golden era of hydropower development in Romania (Ilovan & Maroși, 2018, p. 146). Concurrently, the iron and steel industry supplied essential products for the construction sector.



Figure 5

Winter aspect from the Bucegi Mountains



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 44)

In addition, the Black Sea serves as a conduit for fostering peace, friendship, and regional cooperation:

For our country, the Black Sea is a gate wide open to all the seas and oceans of the world, a gate of friendship and collaboration with other countries and peoples (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 54).

The seaside is distinguished by an architectural landscape that combines aesthetically appealing buildings with block-type constructions, all harmoniously integrated into a picturesque natural setting (Figure 6). The aesthetically distinctive apartment blocks of Mamaia have become integral to the evolving landscape of Romanian seaside resorts. The coastal area has long served as a popular destination for holidaymaking, including for youth groups such as the pioneers:

Along the seaside, there are long and sunny beaches, with fine sand, such as those in Mamaia, Eforie, Mangalia, etc., where numerous villas, hotels, sanatoriums and other buildings have been built for those who come to spend their holiday here. Unforgettable remain the wonderful sunny days the pioneers spent in the seaside camps (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 53).

From the ship, one sees in the western part the high coast, permanently hit by the foamy waves, and to the north of Constanța, one sees the beautiful blocks of Mamaia (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 54).

How pleasant it is to look at the Black Sea beach! – a pioneer exclaimed (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 55).

A depiction of the Danube Delta emphasizes the richness of its natural vegetation and the presence of various species of wild fauna.



Figure 6

Mamaia, one of the most beautiful resorts on the Black Sea seaside



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 54)

In Romania, industrial regions—alongside major urban centres—are among the most densely populated areas. The introductory section on population in these educational materials reflects key themes of Party propaganda, which are conveyed to students as part of their instruction. The discourse emphasizes several recurring ideological themes central to the socialist narrative. These include: the ongoing construction of socialism as a collective national project; the framing of the homeland as a space free from exploitation; the assertion that the nation's wealth and all labour achievements are the rightful property of the people; a historical continuity that legitimizes national identity by tracing Romanian origins to the Dacians and Romans; a unifying narrative of interethnic solidarity in the struggle for freedom and improved living conditions; and, ultimately, the promise of equal opportunities for all working citizens to attain a decent standard of living and to participate in the realization of a 'golden,' communist future. These themes function not only to legitimize the current political order but also to shape a particular vision of historical destiny and collective identity (Figures 7 and 8):

Today, all inhabitants of our country, irrespective of their nationality, enjoy equal rights, work and build together the golden future of Romania – communism (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 60).



The essence of all socialist transformations is encapsulated in the following phrase, which functions as a condensed articulation of the regime's ideological framework:

Under the wise leadership of the Romanian Communist Party, the working people continuously win victories in the enthusiastic work for our homeland flourishing (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 61).

The narrative of socialist transformation is constructed through a series of emblematic changes, presented as markers of progress and modernisation. These include: the proclaimed success of socialist construction; the expansion of urban life as a direct consequence of industrialisation; the mechanisation of agriculture to enhance productivity; the advancement of cultural life, allegedly supported by new infrastructure such as rural libraries, cinemas, and television—claims that, while ideologically significant, do not always align with material realities. Additionally, the systematisation of communes and the construction of new buildings and factories are framed as evidence of planned development. These changes are discursively legitimised through the stated goal of extending the benefits of 'civilization' to the entire population. The text thus functions to naturalise socialist modernisation as both necessary and universally beneficial, while masking disparities or contestations that may exist in practice.

The main cities of Romania are characterised primarily through their economic attributes, which are consistently prioritised in their descriptions. Cultural features, when acknowledged, are typically subordinated to or framed within the context of socialist and communist achievements. In the case of Bucharest, political and industrial prerogatives dominate the narrative, a pattern that holds true for most other cities as well. The capital is depicted predominantly as an ongoing construction site, symbolising continuous progress and modernisation. Similarly, Braşov and Constanţa are defined by their dual roles in industrial production and tourism. Iaşi stands as an exception, with its cultural significance highlighted first; however, this cultural identity is immediately linked to recent developments such as new residential neighbourhoods and factories, reinforcing a narrative of economic modernisation. Collectively, these urban centres are portrayed as larger, modernised hubs, praised mainly for their economic and economy-related functions, reflecting an ideological discourse that privileges material development as the marker of progress:

In Bucharest, there are the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the headquarters of the Great National Assembly, of the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania and of the country government. Bucharest municipium is the biggest industrial centre of the country, hosting factories of all industrial branches (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 64).

In Bucharest, there are many monuments and museums. One of the most important ones is the Monument of the heroes of the fight for the freedom of the people and homeland, for socialism (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 65).

Bucharest is a large building site. The constructions taking place in the new neighbourhoods change the look of our capital city from one day to another (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 65).

Iaşi is the biggest city of Moldova and an old cultural centre. During the years of socialism, they build many new factories, new and modern neighbourhoods that have changed much the look of the city (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 65).

Cluj-Napoca. [...] Similarly to the other cities of our country, in Cluj-Napoca municipium, during the years of socialist construction, industry has developed (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 67).

Within this ideological master narrative, socialism is posited as the definitive solution on the pathway to the homeland's development and flourishing:

The entire territorial-administrative organisation of our country creates the circumstances for a good activity of leading and management of the country's economy, for accomplishing the big objectives that are in front of the Romanian people, on the road to our homeland's development and flourishing (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 67).



Figure 7

Bucharest. The University Square



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 64)

Figure 8

View from Iași. Union Square. View from Pitești



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 66)

The economic narrative is constructed through a series of antitheses contrasting past and present, injustice and justice, and the exploitation of classes—particularly peasants—by wealthy elites with the purported contemporary state of equality. This dichotomy is further extended to an opposition between malevolent foreign adversaries and the current condition characterized by freedom and peace. Such binary oppositions serve to legitimise the existing socio-political order by framing it as a decisive break from a troubled past and hostile external forces. Communists are portrayed as the vanguard leading the struggle against poverty, with nationalisation depicted as a revolutionary act through which the people assume ownership of all resources. The Romanian Communist Party emphasizes socialist industrialisation as a priority, framing it as essential for the nation's progress and transformation.

The cooperativisation of agriculture is depicted as a revolutionary initiative led by peasants who recognise the advantages of collective labour and mechanisation. The success of Romanian agriculture is



attributed primarily to the implementation of machinery, chemical fertilisers, and irrigation systems. Educational materials for fourth-grade students provide extensive information to reinforce this narrative.

The overarching conclusion conveyed is that citizens live in the best country in the world, governed by the Romanian Communist Party, which is portrayed as committed to ensuring the well-being and happiness of all Romanians:

Through the revolutionary act of nationalisation from the 11th of June 1948, the factories, the plants, the mines, and the banks became goods of the entire people.

From the beginning, the Romanian Communist Party showed that the decisive role in the development of the economic power of the country and in increasing people's wealth belongs to the socialist industrialisation of the country. That is why, during the years of socialism, the industry of Romania developed very much. In the years after the liberation, we built numerous plants, and factories where we produced various machines, chemical products, building materials and consumer goods. Without a strong industry, neither agriculture, nor other branches of the national economy could have developed.

Similarly, in the country's *agriculture*, took place big changes. Peasants were convinced that by working the land together, with the help of machines, they would obtain richer crops, united into agricultural production cooperatives.

Due to using agricultural machines, fertilisers and irrigation, crops are richer and richer. Agricultural production was, in 1984, seven times higher than in 1945.

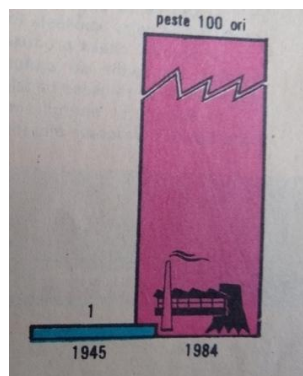
Realising the stipulations in the Programme of the Romanian Communist Party, of forging the multilaterally developed socialist society and of Romania's progress towards communism, makes that the entire economic life of our country develop more and more, ensuring thus the wealth and happiness of all inhabitants of our country (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 68-70).

A stark contrast is drawn between the period preceding and following the so-called 'liberation,' emphasizing a clear rupture that underscores the transformative impact attributed to this historical moment of communists coming to power:

In order to better realise how the industrial production of Romania has developed during the years of socialism, it is enough to look at the drawing below, where we notice that, in comparison to 1945, the industrial production of our country has increased 100 times up to 1984. One should pay attention to the fact that the fastest increase of our industry took place in the last 20 de ani (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 69).

Figure 9

*"This is how the industrial production of Romania increased between 1945 and 1984"*²²



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 69)

²² Over 100 times.



Romanian industrial products have also gained recognition and validation beyond the country's borders:

The socialist industrialisation of our country took our country out of poverty and economic backwardness, today Romania becoming a country with developed industry, whose products are known worldwide, and which ensures its people a continuously higher living standard (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 69).

Romanian oil is now processed domestically, contrasting with past practices when it was predominantly exported without added value:

During the bourgeois-landlord regime, the Romanian oil was very low capitalised. It was exported in crude state, at low prices, while processed oil products were imported to much higher prices. During the years of socialist construction, they discovered new oil reserves, numerous oil drills have been put into operation and methods of oil extraction were perfected. The entire oil quantity extracted to the present day is processed in our country, as well as the quantities bought from abroad (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 72-73).

Because oil is a high value richness, it should be used with much parsimony (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 74).

Additionally, coal production is experiencing a notable increase:

The coal production will increase continuously in the next years (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 76).

Understanding the developmental progress of a nation necessitates careful attention to change and the economic behaviours of individuals, including the avoidance of any form of waste, as well as a sense of pride and, ultimately, patriotism. In this context, the prudent use of electricity constitutes an expression of patriotism (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 76-77). Engagement with the map is essential for students to accurately identify the most significant steam power and hydropower plants (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 78). However, since the map is located on the reverse side of the task page, its accessibility and usability are hindered.

Transforming Romania entails enhancing its wealth and aesthetic appeal to guarantee improved living conditions for all citizens:

In future years, the production of electric energy will increase even more. This will contribute to changing the look of our homeland, making it richer and more beautiful. Similarly, it will contribute to raising the living standard of the entire people (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 78).

Socialism is linked to the concept of change in the recommended essays included in the textbook; however, these essays contain extensive information and technical details that may be challenging for fourth-grade students to comprehend:

On the Lotru Valley (Reading). [...] Not until long ago, the waters of the Lotru and its tributaries wasted their energy. During the recent years, the region has shaken off its millenary look, the man of the socialist society changing nature radically. The building site of the Lotru created, at 1,300 m, the accumulation lake Vidra for whose alimentation only the waters of the Lotru were not enough, and therefore, numerous galleries have been built through the mountains depths, and these gather the waters of the nearby rivers. The length of all these galleries is about 130 km – a true work of art. The plant in Ciunget receives the storm of the flood and it generates constellations. Its possibilities are big. The installed power surpasses that of the hydropower plants from Stejarul (on the Bistrița) and from Vidraru (on the Argeș), being unique in our hydro energetic system, at present the biggest on the interior rivers of our country – Mihai Iancu, from *Leagane și vaduri carpaticice* [Carpathian Cradles and Fords] (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 78-79).

Emphasizing growing quantities, development, living standards, and civilisation served to demonstrate progress:



The iron and steel industry has developed much in the years of socialist construction. Many new factories have been built, the old ones have been extended and modernised, and production increased yearly (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 80).

However, the texts are densely packed with extensive information that students are expected to memorise, primarily as an expression of patriotic duty. Industry of non-ferrous metals (Figure 10), of machines constructions (Figure 11 and Figure 12), and food industry are illustrated (Figure 13).

Figure 10

Interior aspect from the Alumina Company in Slatina



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 82)

Figure 11

"1 Mai" Factory in Ploiești



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 83)



Figure 12

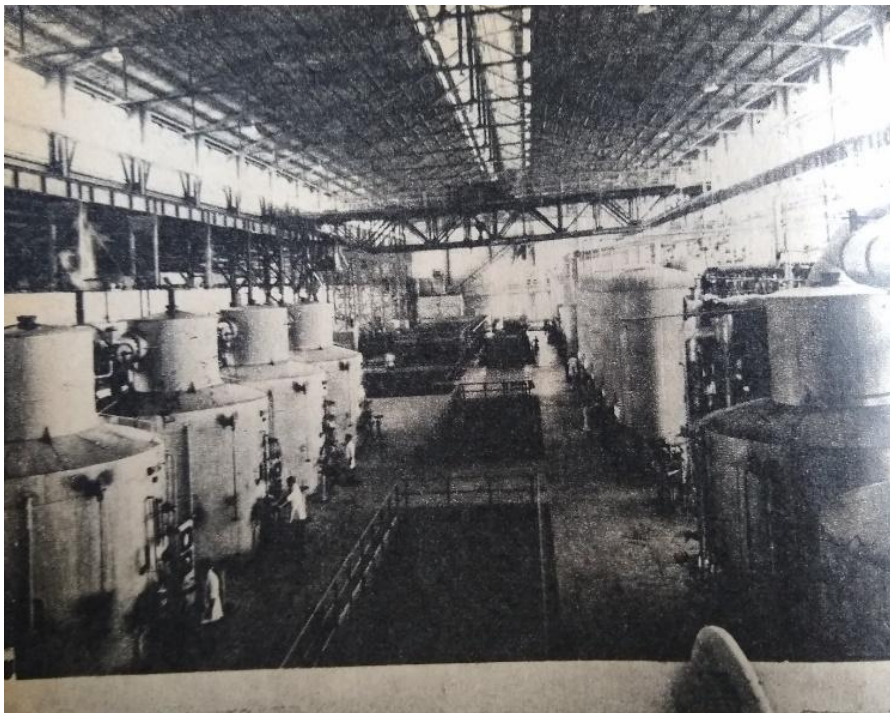
"Dacia" car on the assembly line at the Car Factory in Pitești



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 85)

Figure 13

Interior aspect from the Sugar Factory "Siretul", in Bucecea Commune



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 96)

Socialism, the Party, and the pioneers are depicted as the primary agents of development, alongside the working people, who, although not explicitly named, are acknowledged as the creators of the rapid progress in construction. Socialist agriculture is illustrated through the collective units established for peasants to collaborate, with detailed explanations provided regarding the organisation and functioning of these units for the students. Additionally, the plan for further agricultural development is outlined,



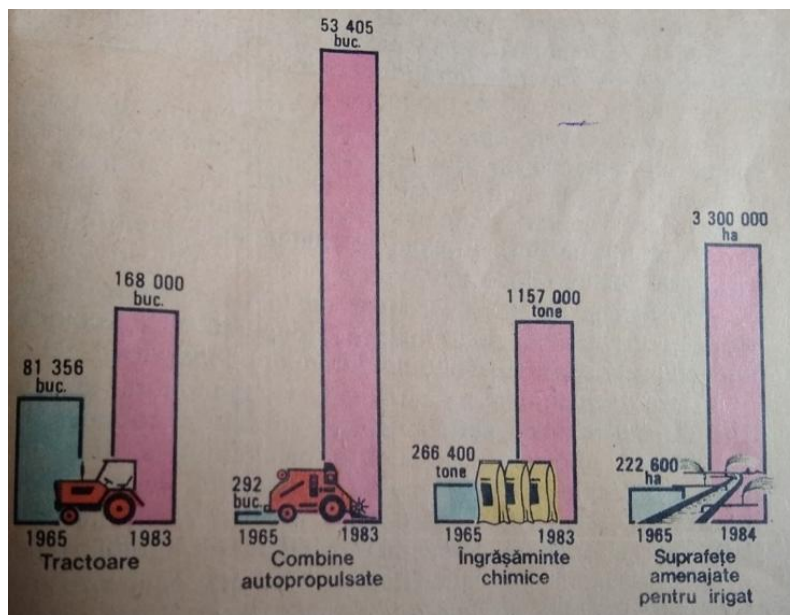
highlighting the interconnection between industrial products and the enhancement of agricultural labour and productivity. The Party is portrayed as the central authority overseeing all activities in conjunction with the state (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 98-99).

Agricultural production significantly exceeds that of the previous period, attributable to a range of modernising factors (see Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17):

Due to applying an improved agricultural technique, year by year, the cereal production of our country has increased. The drawing in the upper right shows that the annual production of grain cereals has increased during the years of socialism and especially between 1965 and 1984 (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 100).

Figure 14

"This is how the 'heritage' of our agriculture increased"²³



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 97)

Figure 15

Harvesting wheat. Harvesting corn

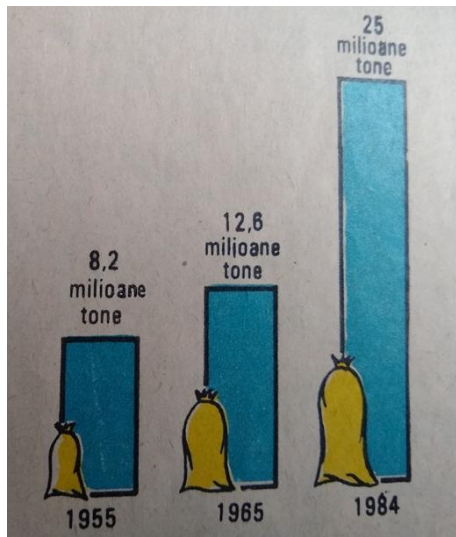


(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 100)

²³ Pieces of tractors, self-propelling combines, chemical fertilisers, area arranged for irrigation.



Figure 16
Cereal areas (million tonnes)



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 101)

Figure 17
Wine production Complex in Valea Călugărească



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 105)

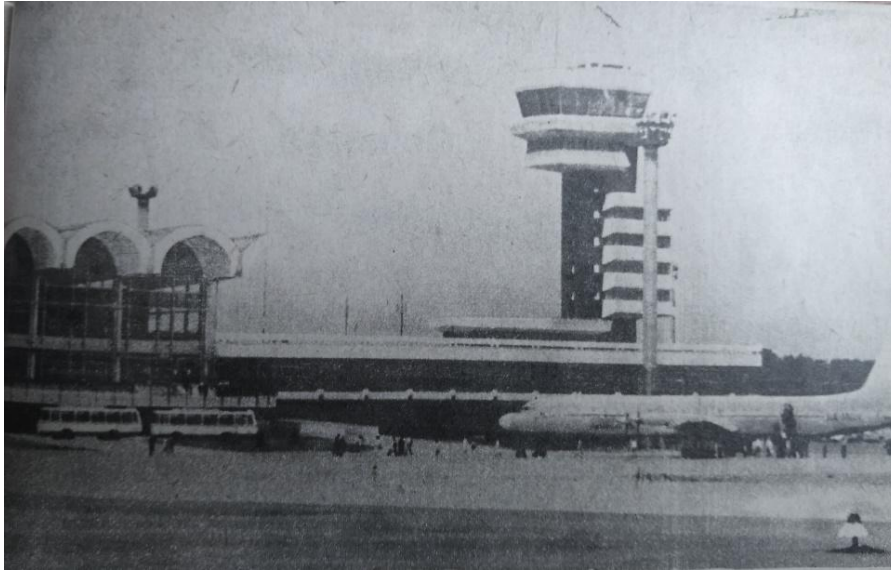
The modernisation of railway transport, along with the construction of new railway lines, is discussed, while air transportation is always represented through images of the international airport in Bucharest (Figure 18):

Railway transports are more and more modernised. Most of the steam engines were replaced with Diesel-electrical and electrical locomotives, and wagons for people are becoming more comfortable. Each year, new sectors of railway are electrified or doubled (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 110).



Figure 18

Otopeni International Airport (Bucharest)

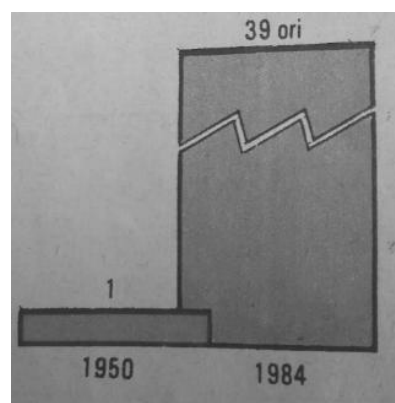


(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 113)

Domestic commerce, like industry and agriculture, is characterized as socialist in nature, encompassing both state and cooperative forms. The narrative highlights the contrast between exploitative capitalist systems and the benevolent nature of socialism, emphasizing the positive relations with other socialist states. The text also enumerates industrial goods designated for export, as well as imports considered essential for enhancing industrial productivity (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 114-115), underlining in quantitative terms its progress compared with the 1950s (Figure 19).

Figure 19

"The development of exterior commerce between 1950-1984" (39 times bigger)



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 114)

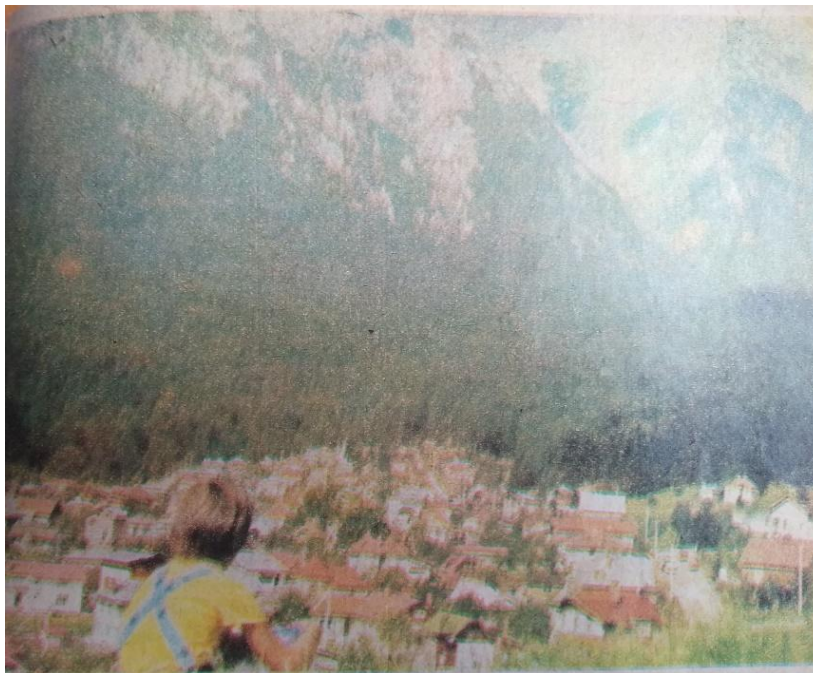
The Romanian people are portrayed as free individuals, and the country is presented as offering valuable experiences, including a restructured social organisation and a renewed way of life. Natural landmarks, historical sites, and achievements of human endeavour are highlighted as attractions worthy of exploration by both domestic and international visitors (Figure 20). According to Iancu et al. (1985, p. 116), tourism is conceptualised as the act of traveling within one's own country, rather than engaging in tourist activities abroad. Romania is metaphorically depicted as a flower, emphasizing its organic and harmonious



character. The necessary infrastructure for tourism—including transportation, accommodation, guided tours, and educational excursions such as school trips—is well established. The underlying objective of tourism appears to be the enhancement of individuals' productive capacity. Tourist attractions include major hydrotechnical projects, sites associated with Romania's historical struggles—particularly those linked to the communist movement and the locations where its members were imprisoned—as well as the rich heritage of folklore and traditional customs (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 115-118). The traditional landscape underwent transformation, as “villages and towns were reborn” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 118), symbolising the renewed sovereignty of the Romanian people, who are once again portrayed as the rightful masters of their homeland.

Figure 20

Bușteni. General View



(Source: Iancu et al., 1985, p. 117)

Guidance on environmental protection, attributed to Nicolae Ceaușescu, is also included, reflecting the alignment between Party directives and the will of the people:

Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, the president of the Socialist Republic of Romania, said at a National Conference: “It is a duty of honour of the Party, of our entire people, to do everything for ensuring the favourable environment for protecting the inhabitants' health, for keeping unaltered the beauties of our homeland, for transmitting to the future generations all the goods that nature has gifted Romania with” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 120).

The tasks associated with the use of images involve collecting visual materials for the class album, including illustrations of the Western Carpathians (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 30), rural landscapes, the Danube Delta, artificial lakes, specific natural lakes, regional flora and fauna, as well as representations of urban environments (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 38, 41, 52, 58, 67). These images are intended to enrich the class album and support educational objectives, but they mostly educate about the socialist nation. The textbook provides specific sources for such illustrations, encouraging students to collect images from newspapers and magazines that depict, for instance, “aspects from the petroleum labourers' work” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 74), as well as other work-related themes: “Complete your class album with illustrations that show aspects of the work in factories of machines construction” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 85).



Assessment at the conclusion of lessons is conducted through student responses to specific questions—for example, “Where were hydroelectric power plants built?” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 50)—as well as through prompts that require learners to provide examples or develop arguments, thereby reinforcing content knowledge and encouraging the application of learned material (e.g. “Give examples of reservoir lakes and explain their importance.” - Iancu et al., 1985, p. 59, Task 9).

Revision activities in economic geography focus on key sectors such as industry, energy production, the steel industry, and machinery manufacturing. Central questions include: “How did industry develop during the socialist years in all the counties of the country?”, alongside examinations of the organisation of agriculture and strategies for increasing agricultural output. Additional topics cover transportation, commerce, and projections for the future development of the national economy (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 123). These themes reflect the emphasis on economic planning and socialist achievements within the educational narrative.

Within the general revision topics, students encounter ideologically infused questions, which are effectively transformed into affirmative statements through their expected responses. These include themes such as the strategic significance of Romania’s geographical location, the “harmonious bonding of the Romanian land,” the “natural beauties and riches of our country,” and the economic and symbolic importance of the country’s rivers and the Black Sea. This ideological framing is particularly evident in revision points 5 to 10, where the content reinforces national pride and aligns with the broader narrative of socialist achievement and unity: “5. Why does our people today have the possibility to capitalise better the natural riches of our country?; 6. How do we obtain each year richer and richer crops?; 7. Why is it necessary to develop harmoniously all the branches of the national economy; 8. How has our people’s wealth increased in the years of socialism?; 9. How is the policy of the Romanian Communist Party achieved for the flourishing of all counties in our country?; 10. What do you understand through tourism and why has it developed so much during the years of socialist construction?” (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 124).

The emphasis on socialist development is particularly pronounced, with a clear focus on industrialisation as a central pillar of national progress:

Mark on the contour map of our country the most important hydropower and steam power plants, using the learnt conventional signs; Mark on the contour map of our country the settlements where there are the most important iron and steel producing factories in our country (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 125).

On the contour map of our country, use hachures for the areas where natural gas (with blue lines), oil (with brown lines) and coal (with black lines) are extracted from; [...] ‘Our Carpathians’; ‘In the fields’; ‘On the Hills of the Country’; ‘The Path of the Olt River’; ‘On the Argeş, upstream’; ‘Man and Nature’; ‘Beautiful and Rich is My Country’; ‘From the mountains to the sea’, etc. (texts on nature and socialist development, our note) (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 126).

The 4th grade textbook concludes with a two-page text celebrating the beauty and richness of the homeland. It presents Romania as a harmonious land, inherited from the ancestors, with protective mountains and landscapes emblematic of the now free Romanian people. The narrative emphasizes that all national resources and achievements belong to the people. A strong industrial sector, supported by hydroelectric and thermal power plants, is portrayed as functioning entirely for the prosperity and well-being of the population (Iancu et al., 1985, pp. 121–122). Economic progress is reflected in what is described as an increasingly “wealthier and wealthier life” for the people and in their rising standard of living. These achievements are framed as the result of the working population’s efforts under the wise leadership of the Romanian Communist Party and the exemplary model provided by Nicolae Ceauşescu (Iancu et al., 1985, p. 122).

Analysis of Photographic Content in the 4th Grade Geography Textbook (1989)

As indicated in the methodology section, the source is Iancu, M., Motrescu, V., Florescu, V. (1989). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a*, variante similare publicate în 1960, 1986



[Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 4th Grade, similar variants published in 1960, 1986]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

In the 1989 edition of the 4th grade textbook, my analysis focused exclusively on the images, excluding the accompanying text, with particular attention to identifying new visual content, as summarised in Table 2. *Regarding the thematic focus of the visual discourse in the 1989* edition of the 4th grade geography textbook, new photographic content is introduced. Mountainous regions are depicted both for their scenic value and their recognised touristic significance. Notable examples include the Rodnei Mountains (see Figure 21), the Dobrogei Mountains, the Rarău Mountains, the Suhardul Mic Mountains, the Bucegi Mountains—featuring the Poiana Țapului resort in the Prahova Valley—and the Hășmaș Mountains, highlighted by the Bicașului Gorges. At Pietrele Doamnei, individuals are integrated into the landscape, depicted sitting on a bench—a common posture in these *Geography of Romania* textbooks that conveys admiration of the natural surroundings. Similarly, in the Suhardul Mic Mountains, people are portrayed actively engaging with the environment by walking through the mountainous terrain.

New visual representations of river systems are presented to highlight key infrastructural achievements, such as the Danube–Black Sea Canal, as well as Lake Vidraru, formed by the construction of the Vidraru Dam on the Argeș River (Figure 22). Completed in 1966, the Vidraru Dam was built with the primary objective of hydroelectric power generation and was considered one of the tallest dams in Europe at the time. Additionally, the Vedea River is depicted through a landscape image, selected for its geographical proximity to the city of Alexandria, as indicated by the figure title in the textbook.

The “Izvor” metro station (Figure 23) of the Bucharest Metro (RO: *Metroul București*) is introduced as a significant milestone in Romania’s urban development, marking the inauguration of the country’s first metro line, constructed between 1975 and 1979. Notably, the utility of the metro system has remained uncontested both during and after the socialist period, as evidenced by Zahariade’s (2011, p. 140) assertion that “all these investments (with the exception of the metro) are merely ideological.” Additionally, for the first time, the emergence of new neighbourhoods is visually represented through images of Cluj-Napoca and Iași.

Heavy industry is depicted through newly included images of prominent industrial sites: Galați (view of the Steel and Iron Works), Hunedoara (Steel and Iron Works), Baia Mare (central flotation unit of the Aluminium Plant), and Iași (interior of the Plastic Products Factory). The photographs from Galați and Hunedoara emphasize the industrial landscape, whereas the images from Baia Mare and Iași provide interior views of the production process, featuring male workers engaged in factory labour.

Light industry is illustrated through a newly included image that carries both economic and ideological significance: an interior view of a clothing factory, depicting women working at sewing machines (Figure 24). The factory is located in Scornicești, the birthplace of communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu, a site that underwent a symbolic transformation during his regime. Originally a village, Scornicești was elevated to town status through a combination of industrial development and radical landscape alteration—including the demolition of traditional houses in 1988 and their replacement with apartment blocks. Another representation of light industry is provided by an interior image of the Powdered Milk Factory in Carei, where a male worker is shown operating machinery.

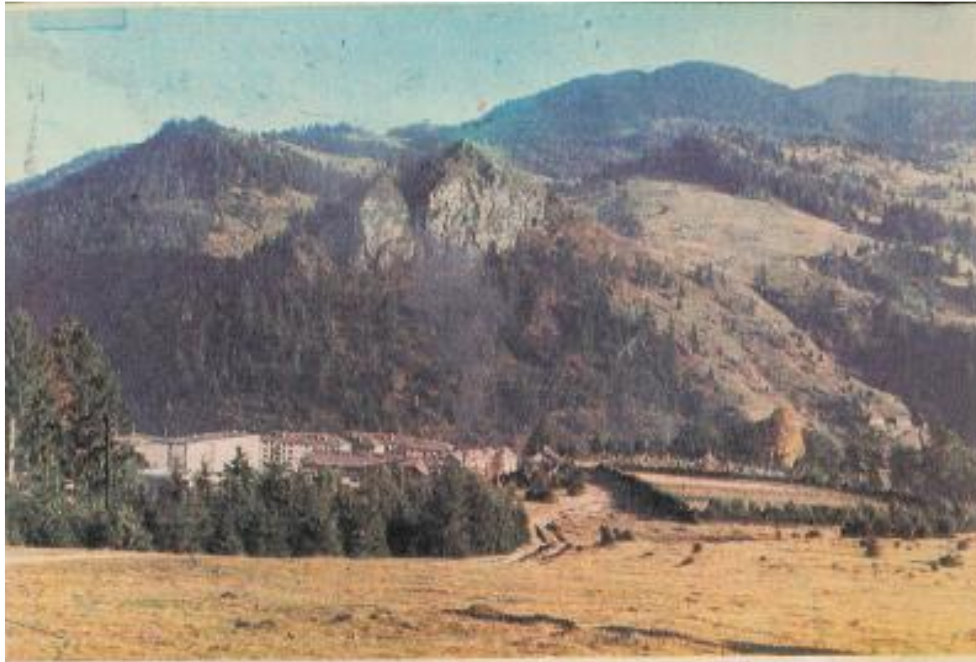
An image depicting the interior of a vegetable greenhouse (Figure 25) serves as a representation of the advancements in Romanian agriculture during the socialist period. Although the specific location of the greenhouse is not identified, the photograph features women engaged in agricultural labour. This, along with other visual representations of the socialist economy, reveals a distinctly gendered portrayal of labour, wherein women are predominantly shown in roles associated with light industry and agriculture, while men appear in heavy industrial settings (cf. also Ilovan, 2022c).

Bucharest–Otopeni International Airport continues to be featured in the textbook, now through an updated image that reflects its ongoing significance. In contrast, the inclusion of the “Transfăgărășan” (Figure 26) serves a primarily ideological purpose (Ilovan, 2021b, pp. 30-31). Additionally, the textbook places notable emphasis on the role of rivers and the energy they generate, highlighting their symbolic and functional association with the electrification of the country and the broader infrastructure projects of socialist Romania (cf. also Ilovan and Maroși, 2018).



Figure 21

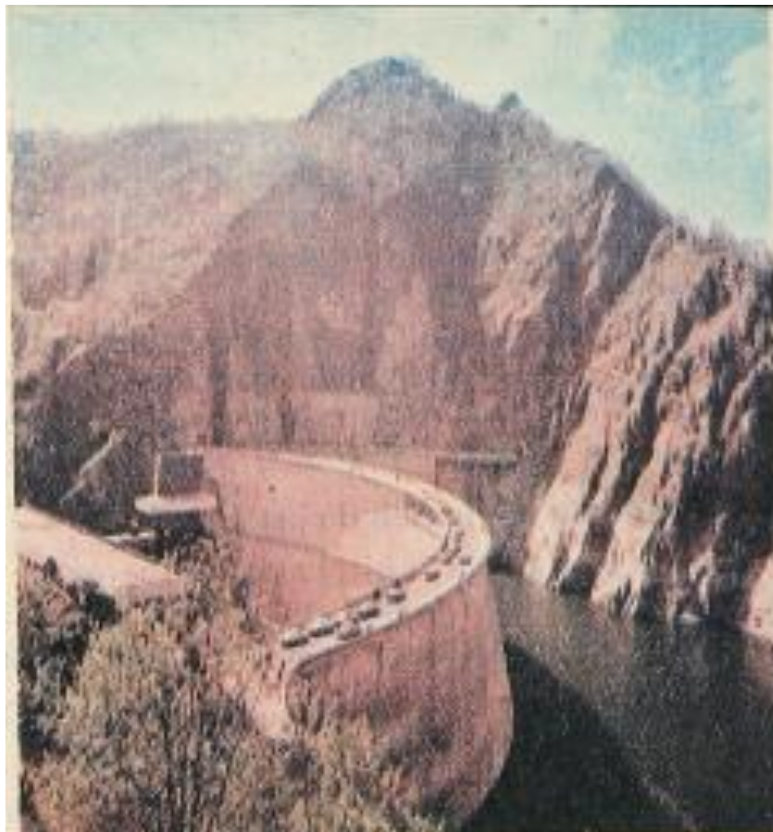
The Rodnei Mountains seen from Băile Borșa



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 17)

Figure 22

Dam and accumulation Lake Vidraru, on the Argeș



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 51)



Figure 23

"Izvor" metro station in Bucharest



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 66)

Figure 24

Scornicești: Interior view of the Clothing Factory



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 98)



Figure 25

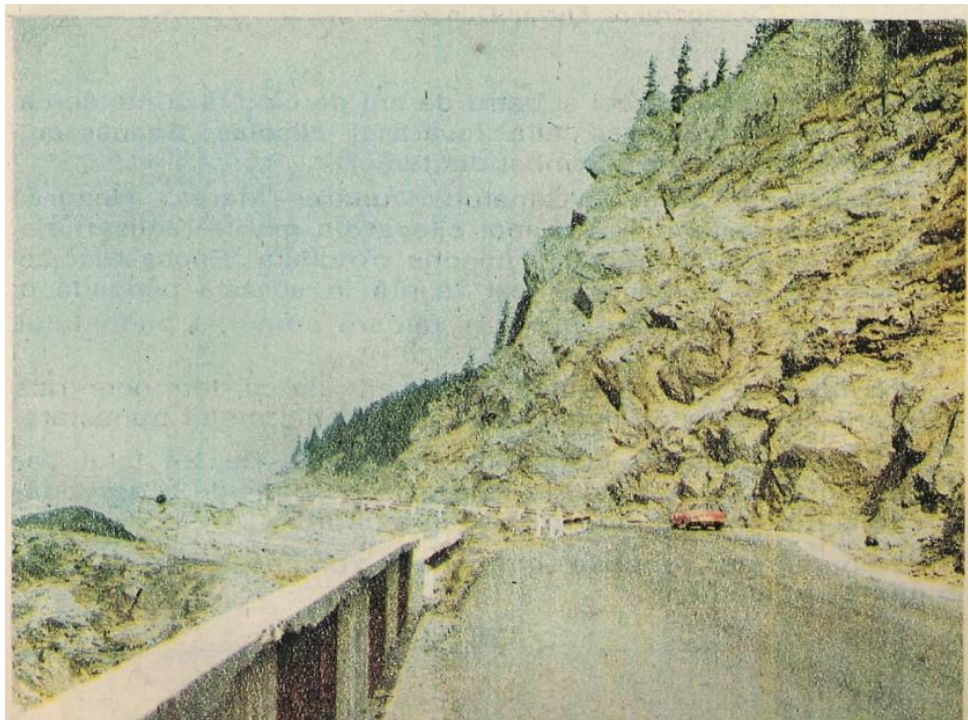
Aspect from a greenhouse for vegetables



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 108)

Figure 26

On the "Transfăgărășan"



(Source: Iancu et al., 1989, p. 127)



Analysis of the Photographs in the 8th Grade Geography Textbook (1986)

The source is Giurcăneanu, C., Muşat, I., Ghica, Gh. (1986). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a VIII-a, revizuit în 1981* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 8th Grade, revised in 1981]. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

The textbook contains a total of 49 photographs, of which eleven are identical to those found in the 4th-grade geography textbook. All images included are in colour, with the black-and-white photographs previously used in the 4th-grade edition omitted by the authors in this updated version.

The visual discourse in the 1986 8th-grade Geography textbook reflects several key thematic areas, which I have identified for both Physical and Human Geography. *Topics related to physical geography* in the 1986 8th-grade Geography textbook are illustrated through a range of natural landscapes and features. Mountainous regions are prominently depicted, including the Rodnei Mountains, Ceahlău Massif, the Bicz Gorges within the Hăşmaşu Mare (Figure 27), the Bucegi Mountains (Figure 28, appearing in three images), and the Apuseni Mountains. The Mehedinţi Tableland is included as an example of plateau geography. Several lakes are represented: Lake Vidraru (Figure 29), an unnamed glacial lake in the Retezat Mountains, as well as Lake Saint Ana and Lake Roşu. The Iron Gates area is featured extensively, with five photographs, and the town of Orşova is (re)presented as a settlement located on the shores of the Iron Gates I hydropower complex. Additionally, key hydrological features such as the Danube River, the Danube Delta, and the coastal landscape of Mamaia Beach are included.

Bucharest is represented through three photographs that highlight distinct aspects of the city's urban landscape: the University building, a newly developed park and the Intercontinental Hotel (Figure 30). Opened in 1971 and constructed between 1968 and 1970, the Intercontinental Hotel, with its 24 floors, was one of the tallest buildings in the city and became a symbol of modern Bucharest. Until the completion of the House of the People (*Casa Poporului*) in 1989, it remained the second-tallest building in Bucharest after *Casa Scînteii*. In addition to Bucharest, the textbook includes three other photographs representing urban landscapes in Braşov, Iaşi, and Piteşti. Notably, two of these image titles include the word "new," underscoring the emphasis on architectural and urban transformation during the socialist period.

Industrial activity is illustrated through eleven photographs depicting key economic centres across Romania. These include representations from Hunedoara (Figure 31), Galaţi, and Ploieşti—specifically the "1 Mai" factory, noted as the largest producer of oil equipment in Southeast Europe (Figure 32), as well as sites associated with iron, steel, and ferrous metallurgy. Additional images feature industrial sites in Craiova; Piteşti (with two photographs, one showing the Dacia automobile factory and the other depicting the petrochemical industry); Bucharest (including representations of heavy industry and the state-controlled press); Arad; Iaşi; and Tîrgu Jiu. Geographically, only one image originates from Transylvania, one from Moldova, and one from Western Romania. The majority of the photographs portray industrial activity in Southern Romania, thereby constructing a visual narrative that positions the south as the most industrialised region of the country. Notably, the Dacia automobile emerges as a key symbol within this discourse—representing both a point of national pride for the regime and a symbol of personal freedom for the population, albeit with differing ideological connotations (Zahariade, 2011, p. 86).

The textbook visually emphasizes Romania's industrial character by depicting a wide range of industrial branches. These include hydropower, iron and steel metallurgy, ferrous metallurgy, oil equipment production, heavy machinery, the chemical industry, locomotive construction, the polygraphic (printing) industry, wood processing, and wine production. Through this selection, Romania is presented as a strongly industrialised nation. In contrast, agriculture is represented in only four images, covering key areas such as viticulture and wine production, wheat harvesting, greenhouse cultivation near Bucharest, and selective cattle breeding within a state-owned agricultural enterprise. This imbalance in visual representation reinforces the socialist narrative of industrial progress as a defining feature of national development.

The textbook includes three images illustrating the development of transportation infrastructure. The first depicts the bridge over the Danube, construction beginning in 1954, which accommodates road traffic (two lanes), railway lines, and pedestrian pathways, linking Romania to Bulgaria. Initially named the *Friendship Bridge* by the Soviet authorities, it has been referred to as the *Danube Bridge* since the fall of communism. The remaining two images highlight water-based transport: one showing river transport in the



Danube Delta, specifically in Sulina, and the other depicting maritime transport at the port of Constanța. Together, these visuals underscore the strategic importance of both river and sea transport in Romania's socialist-era infrastructural development.

Romanian tourism is depicted through a selection of images highlighting both natural landscapes and cultural heritage. These include a cable car operating in the Făgăraș Mountains, scenic views of the Olt River at Cozia (Figure 35), and photographs from the mountain resorts of Poiana Brașov and Predeal. In addition, an advertisement for a newly constructed hotel in the Danube Delta is included (Figure 36), although the specific settlement is not identified. Cultural tourism is represented through the image of the *Tropaeum Traiani* monument at Adamclisi, commemorating the Battle of Adamclisi (101–102 CE), fought between Dacian forces and the Roman Empire under Emperor Trajan. The inclusion of this monument serves to establish symbolic continuity with ancient Roman-Dacian heritage and reflects the ideological emphasis on national identity through historical monuments during the socialist period (cf. Boia 2025, pp. 153-164).

Compared to the 4th-grade textbook, the 8th-grade edition introduces two significant new elements: the theme of Dacian-Roman ancestry as a foundational narrative of the Romanian people, and the inclusion of a religious monument – Voroneț Monastery (Figure 37) – valued primarily for its architectural significance. In this context, symbols of national consciousness are conveyed through historical and architectural references, rather than through religious sentiment. The captions accompanying the photographs are often written in a Romantic literary tone, characterized by abundant epithets and expressions of enthusiasm, particularly in images showcasing economic progress or urban transformation (Figure 38). Notably, there is a complete absence of rural imagery; no photographs of villages are included. Instead, the visual discourse is dominated by representations of industrial activity and urban life, which collectively emphasize modernisation and development while implicitly marginalising the rural world and associating it with backwardness.

A number of photographs in the 8th-grade geography textbook are of an interactive nature, as they are accompanied by questions or tasks designed to engage students in analysing their content. This pedagogical approach marks a departure from the 4th-grade textbook, where such interaction is absent. However, this feature does not persist into the 12th-grade edition, where the images are no longer accompanied by prompts, suggesting a shift away from student-centred engagement toward a purely illustrative use of visuals in later educational stages.

Figure 27

Through the Bicazului Gorges

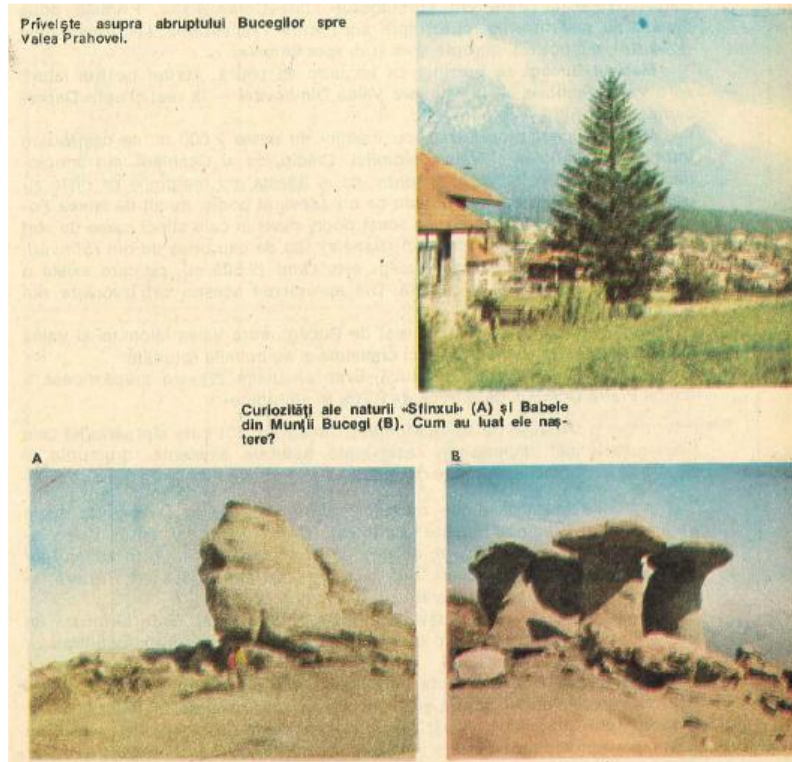


(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 24)



Figure 28

*View of the Bucegi Mountains' slope descending toward the Prahova Valley*²⁴



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 27)

Figure 29

*Lake Vidraru*²⁵



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 31)

²⁴ Curiosities of nature: The Sphinx, the Old Women. How were they created?

²⁵ With two related questions: "On which river does it lie on and which big hydropower plant is nearby?"



Figure 30

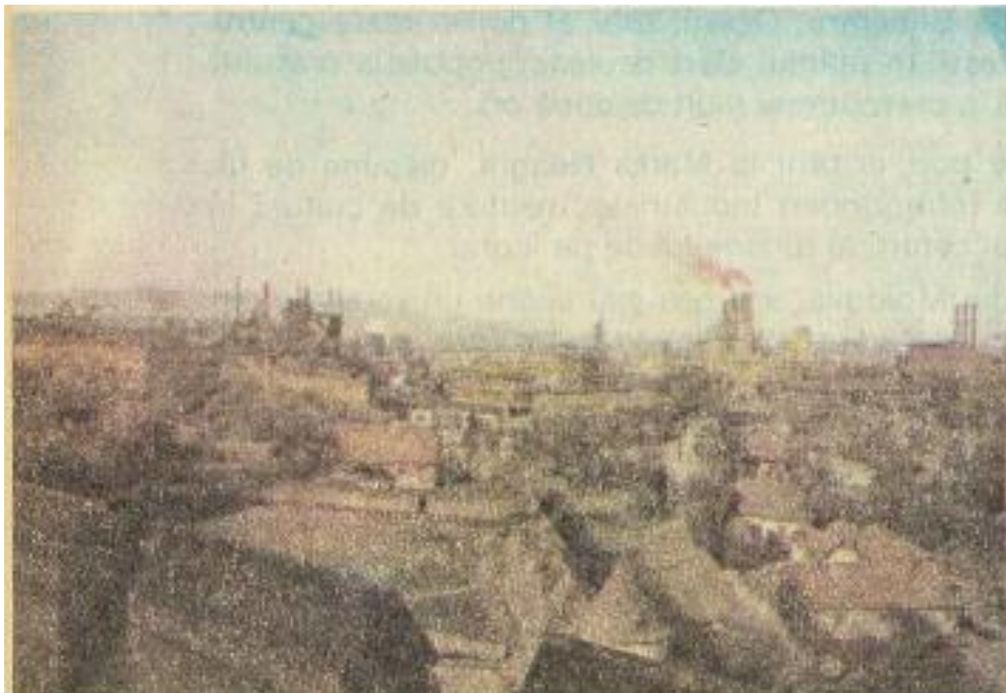
Images from the capital city of our homeland. The University. Intercontinental Hotel and the subway underground passage



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 95)

Figure 31

Industrial platform in the city of Hunedoara²⁶



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 98)

²⁶ With a related question “Which is the main industrial branch of this urban centre?”



Figure 32

"1 Mai" Factory in Ploiești. Electric locomotive built in "Electroputere" Craiova



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 120)

Figure 33

General view on the Polygraphic Factories "Casa Scînteii" in Bucharest²⁷



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 129)

²⁷ The presence of a red Dacia car in the foreground serves as a visual marker of Romania's modernisation, reflecting the regime's efforts to associate industrial progress with national pride and socialist development.



Figure 34

View of Constanța seaport



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 166)

Figure 35

The Olt River at Cozia. Cable car in the Făgăraș Mountains²⁸



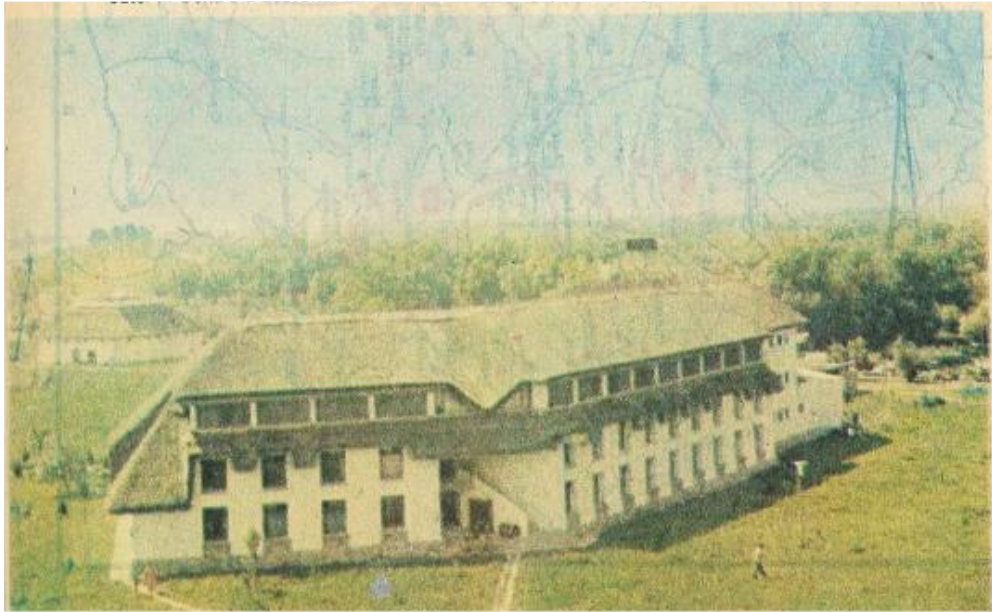
(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 169)

²⁸ And a task for the students: “Look attentively at the features of the valley”; same image as in the 4th grade textbook.



Figure 36

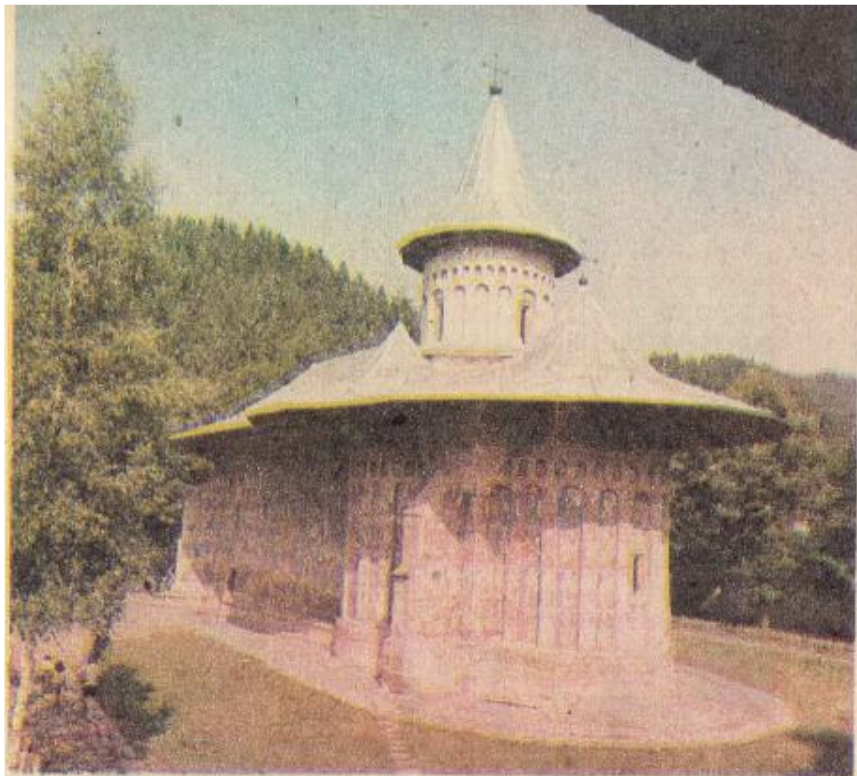
"Lebăda" Hotel in the heart of the Danube Delta²⁹



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 172)

Figure 37

Voroneț Monastery in Obcinile Bucovinei, one of the most valuable architectural monuments of our country



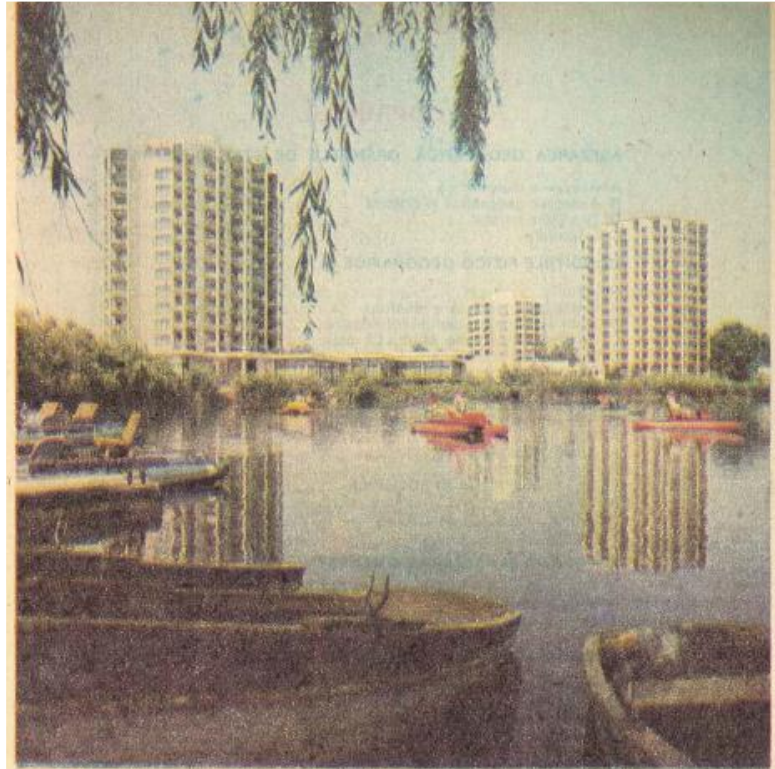
(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 174)

²⁹ And an advertising for tourists, mentioning that it offers tourists very pleasant accommodation, while underlining that in the Danube Delta tourism for hunting and fishing developed.



Figure 38

A beautiful place to rest on the Romanian seaside of the Black Sea



(Source: Giurcăneanu et al., 1986, p. 175)

Analysis of the Photographic Content in the 12th-Grade Geography Textbook (1981)

The source is Tufescu, V., Giurcăneanu, C., Mierlă, I. (1981). *Geografia Republicii Socialiste România. Manual pentru clasa a XII-a* [Geography of the Socialist Republic of Romania. Textbook for the 12th Grade]. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.

The following section outlines the key themes of the visual discourse in the 1981 12th-grade Geography textbook. All fifteen photographs included in this edition are new; however, they continue to depict topics and locations consistent with those featured in earlier editions, specifically the 4th- and 8th-grade textbooks. The underlying ideological messages—emphasizing Romania’s industrial prowess, national heritage, and socialist modernisation—remain largely unchanged. This visual consistency across grade levels functions to embed a stable narrative of national identity and development within the geography curriculum.

Concerning physical Geography, the natural environment, the textbook features a single image of a mountain crest or summit, the location of which is unspecified; as the sole representation of Romania’s mountainous terrain, it appears intended to symbolise the country’s entire mountain landscape. Additionally, a mountain resort—Poiana Brașov—is represented (Figure 39). Three lakes are depicted: Lake Izvoru Muntelui, shown with a boat; Lake Saint Ana, featuring two women and a man admiring the scenery (Figure 40); and Lake Herăstrău, with a boat on its surface and the Scînteia House visible in the background. The fauna is illustrated through images of protected species, including the aurochs in Hațeg and pelicans in the Danube Delta.

Industrial activity is depicted through four photographs focused on energy production: the Iron Gates I Hydropower Plant, highlighting its industrial architecture; the steam power plant at Rogojelu, with visible emissions of heavy smoke; ferrous metallurgy facilities in Galați; and the oil refinery in Brazi (Ploiești) (Figure 41). These images collectively emphasize contemporary industrial architecture and technological infrastructure associated with energy and heavy industry. Agricultural activity is represented by imagery



emphasizing technical innovation and mechanisation, including irrigation systems and mechanical harvesting, reflecting modernisation efforts within the sector.

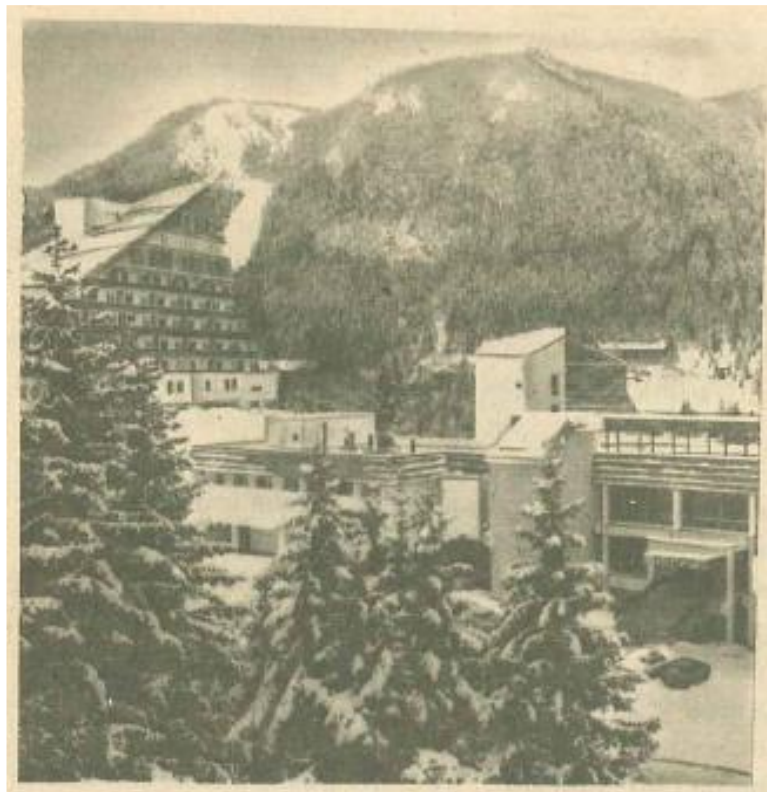
The visual discourse of the 12th-grade textbook introduces several new sites absent from earlier editions, including the Aurochs Reserve in Hațeg, the oil refinery in Brazi (Ploiești, Prahova County), the steam power plant in Rogojelu (Gorj County), and agricultural irrigation practices. Additionally, the Aurora seaside resort (Figure 42) replaces the previously depicted Mamaia resort, presenting new architectural developments in tourism. However, the image quality is insufficient to discern any individuals within the scene, limiting the portrayal of human activity.

Otopeni Airport is presented as the iconic image of Romania's entire transportation system and serves as a symbol of modernisation and progress in the field of transport infrastructure. Similarly, Aurora (also known as Cap Aurora) functions as a visual emblem of seaside tourism. Located within the administrative boundaries of Mangalia, Cap Aurora was completed in 1973 and is often referred to as "the Queen of the Romanian seaside." As the newest of Romania's coastal resorts at the time, it was notable for having been constructed in under a year, reflecting the regime's emphasis on rapid development and showcasing the achievements of socialist planning in tourism infrastructure.

The overall impression conveyed by the images in the 12th-grade Geography textbook is one of austerity rather than celebration. Unlike the 4th-grade (47 photographs) and 8th-grade (49 photographs) textbooks, which employ a larger number of coloured images to visually underscore national development and socialist progress, the 12th-grade edition contains only 15 black-and-white photographs. The limited quantity and monochromatic format contribute to a subdued visual tone, lacking the triumphant or propagandistic aesthetic typical of earlier textbooks. Moreover, the complete absence of human figures in any of the images further reinforces this impression, distancing the visual narrative from everyday life and collective participation, and contributing instead to a static and impersonal portrayal of the socialist landscape

Figure 39

A part of the mountain resort Poiana Brașov



(Source: Tufescu et al., 1981, p. 16)

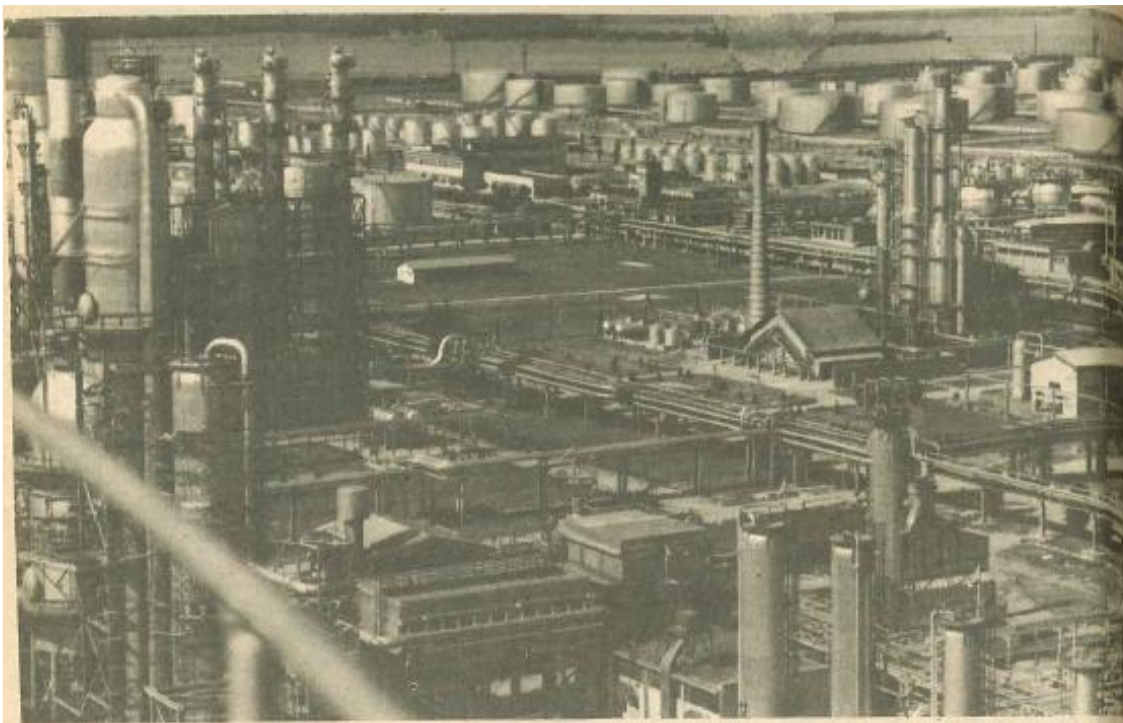


Figure 40
Lake Saint Ana



(Source: Tufescu et al., 1981, p. 45)

Figure 41
The Refinery in Brazi

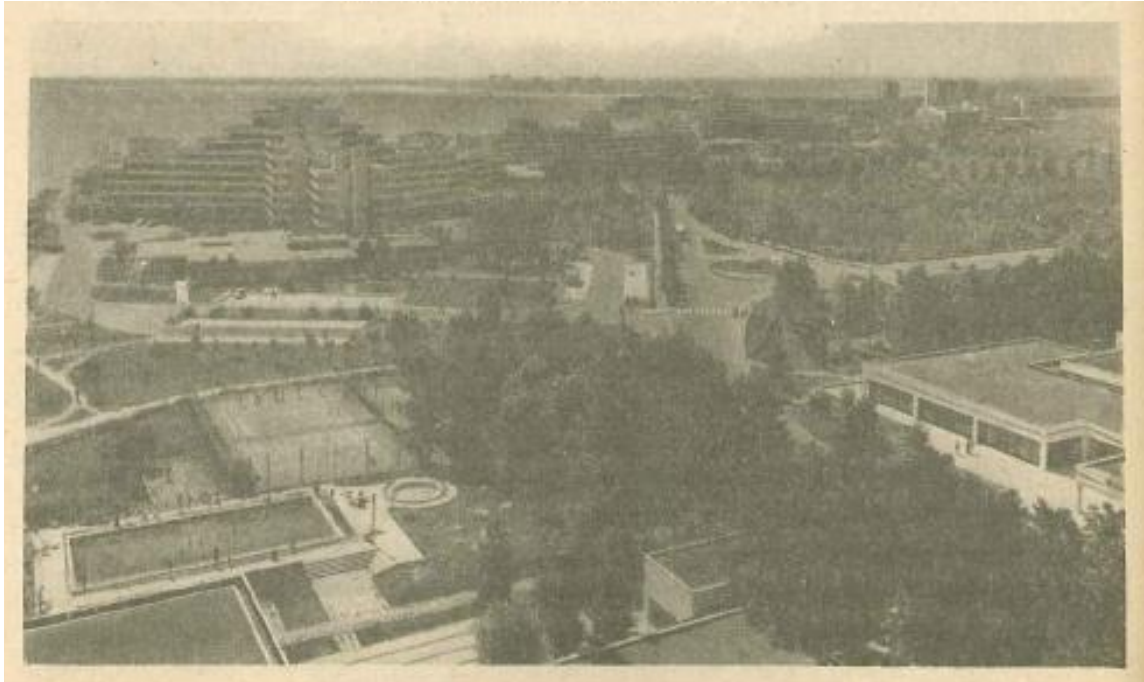


(Source: Tufescu et al., 1981, p. 88)



Figure 42

View from the seaside. Aurora resort



(Source: Tufescu et al., 1981, p. 130)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary objective of the visual representations in Geography of Romania textbooks in the 1980s was to disseminate knowledge alongside the dominant ideological values of the period (cf. Copilaş, 2015; Boia, 2025, pp. 153-164). Certain regions were disproportionately emphasized in the analysed textbooks, while others received minimal or no attention. This pattern aligns with observations made in the context of Hungarian and Finnish geography textbooks following World War I, supporting the assertion that geographical education functioned as a tool to demonstrate “the supremacy of the socialist system, emphasize its achievements” (Hajdú & Paasi, 1995, p. 45). The Romanian case similarly reflects this instrumental use of geography education in reinforcing socialist ideology and fostering a collective socialist identity, based on reiterative representations of territorial unity and socialist development.

Socialist Romania, characterised by its hygienic urbanism and emphasis on functional modernisation (Ilovan, 2022b), employed a normative mode of control through propaganda rooted in the promotion of values and value-based education (Dulamă & Ilovan, 2017; Ilovan & Muntean, 2025). The majority of photographs featured in these textbooks depict state assets and the working population as emblematic representations of prosperity and an enhanced quality of life. Intensive industrialisation is highlighted and valorised with clear propagandistic intent, constructing a narrative of Romania as a robust nation undergoing comprehensive development and experiencing rising living standards (cf. Ilovan & Maroşi, 2018; Ilovan, 2022b). However, this discourse of significantly improved living conditions is largely constructed within the textbooks and does not accurately reflect the socio-economic realities experienced by the population. The textbooks notably omit representations of rural areas and landscapes. Instead, the visual discourse exclusively privileges industrial and urban environments, with no depictions of villages or rural life, thereby marginalising the rural dimension of the national landscape.

Furthermore, the findings support previous research indicating that photographic images played a significant role in constructing national identity rooted in socialist development and values (Ilovan, 2022b, 2024a; Boia, 2025, pp. 153-164). This was achieved through a highly selective visual narrative shaped by



institutionalised representations (Silova et al., 2015; Ilovan et al., 2018; Ilovan & Maroși, 2018; Paasi et al., 2018). Photographs primarily served a visualising function, but despite their recognised visual impact (Rose, 2014; Conțiu & Conțiu, 2023, p. 18), these images contributed little to the facilitation of learning tasks or critical engagement with the content (cf. Ilovan et al., 2018). Their primary aim was to visually educate Romanians concerning the newly constructed territorial identity of socialist Romania.

All translations from Romanian into English were realised by the author.

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