The Forest Fund of Greater Romania: A Comparative Approach among Historical Provinces (According to the Unification Laws of 1925)*

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The 1918 Union brought Romania both political and territorial changes and new ways to manage its natural resources. The expansion of national territory through Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia integration brought together areas with distinct historical backgrounds and administrative systems. The forest fund management sector showed significant diversity because it held crucial value for economic development and environmental and social equilibrium. The forests of Greater Romania served two essential purposes because they provided wood for economic growth through construction and industry and foreign trade and protected against soil erosion and drought and climate instability. The lack of unified policies led to fast forest deterioration which harmed the entire agricultural system that controlled Romania during the interwar period.

The forested land of the national territory measured 7.2 million hectares when the Great Union took place in 1918 which accounted for 24.5% of the total national area. The forest fund of Greater Romania spanned between 7 million and 7.2 million hectares according to different sources and evaluation methods during 1918.[1] The forested area of the country started to decrease

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[1] Gabriel Duduman, *Scurt istoric al amenajării pădurilor din România*, in "Bucovina Forestieră", 19 (2), 2019, pp. 139–158.

gradually throughout the subsequent decades. The official records show that forested land covered 6,129,000 hectares across 25.2% of the territory during 1925 and 6,084,000 hectares across 24.7% of the territory during 1938. Historian Constantin C. Giurescu[2] reported a lower forest area of 5,955,000 hectares for 1938 through his research but his numbers differ from official statistics because he included or excluded wooded pastures and communal forests. The research uses official Statistical Yearbook data for consistency but includes Giurescu's alternative numbers[3] for comparison purposes.

The forested area showed minimal numerical reduction, yet different provinces experienced varying levels of forest preservation. The administrative systems of Transylvania and Bukovina succeeded in preserving their forest resources, but Bessarabia and the Old Kingdom of Romania lost more forestland because of weak infrastructure, inconsistent law enforcement and the 1921 agrarian reform.

The forestry sector faced special difficulties because each region that joined Greater Romania maintained its own separate legal system. The Austro-Hungarian administration in Transylvania and Bukovina[4] established a strict forestry system which Romanian state focused on creating standardized laws and institutions for its newly acquired territories after 1918.[5] They included detailed management plans, trained specialists and precise forestry codes. The Austrian Forest Code of 1879[6] received additional regulations that required sustainable forest management practices and forest regeneration. The Habsburg Empire implemented conservation policies in Bukovina which resulted in the development of forest roads and exploitation railways throughout the region.

The forestry management in Bessarabia operated under a completely different system than the rest of the region. The Tsarist administration treated forests as resources for extraction instead of protecting them as vital strategic assets.[7] The forest fund suffered severe degradation because the region lacked a unified

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[2] Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria pădurii românești: Din cele mai vechi timpuri până astăzi*, București, Editura Ceres, 1975, p. 98.

[3] Victor Giurgiu, *Amenajarea pădurilor cu funcții multiple*, București, Editura Ceres, 1988, p. 23.

[4] Gh. T. Kirileanu, *Cel mai vechi Cod silvic românesc: Orânduiala de pădure pentru Bucovina dată de Împăratul Iosif al II-lea în 1786*, București, 1908, p. 12.

[5] Ion Agrigoroaiei, *Marea Unire și unificarea*, in "Zargidava", 12, 2013, pp. 117–136. Online: https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/reviste/Zargidava/12-Zargidava–12–2013_117.pdf

[6] Lucreția Dogaru, *Codul silvic român. Prezentare evolutivă* (Ediția a II-a), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2008, p. 3.

[7] Svetlana Suveică, *Basarabia în primul deceniu interbelic (1918–1928): Modernizare prin reforme*, Chișinău, Pontos, 2010, p. 29.

forestry code and property ownership was scattered and there were no established local institutions.

The Forest Code of 1910[8] existed in theory for the Old Kingdom of Romania but its implementation remained scattered throughout the region. The institutions operated with limited funding while corruption and insufficient trained forestry personnel made it difficult to execute the policies effectively.

The Romanian state initiated a legislative unification process because of these circumstances. The Administrative Unification Law of 1925[9] created a unified legal structure for all provinces which enabled the development of a Forest Code that would apply across the entire country. The reform aimed to achieve four main objectives which included removing legal inconsistencies and creating centralized forest district management under national oversight, implementing management plans and annual cut limits and enforcing forest protection through reforestation rules and protective belt regulations.

The actual implementation of these standards depended on the availability of infrastructure and qualified personnel. The implementation of these regulations worked well in areas with established forest road networks and qualified staff (Transylvania and Bukovina). The lack of forest road networks and qualified personnel in Bessarabia and the Old Kingdom of Romania made the laws exist only on paper.

The forestry resources of Greater Romania became unevenly distributed throughout the territory after the Union established. The Old Kingdom of Romania which included Muntenia, Moldavia and Dobruja controlled 2,648,000 hectares of forestland which made up 43% of Romania's total forested area.[10] The large, forested area remained exposed to danger. The combination of weak forest laws, corruption, population growth and economic changes from the 1921 agrarian reform resulted in widespread forest destruction. The forest area of Transylvania matched the Old Kingdom's forested land share at 2,566,000 hectares which accounted for 41.9%[11] of the national forest area. The main distinction between these two regions emerged from their administrative systems because Transylvania operated with strict forest management through established plans and trained staff. The Habsburg administration maintained a high level of forest preservation and management in Bukovina through its

[8] *Codul Silvic al României*, in "Monitorul Oficial", no. 8, April 9, 1910, p. 1.

[9] *Legea nr. 95 din 13 iunie 1925 pentru unificarea administrativă*, in "Monitorul Oficial", no. 128, June 14, 1925, p. 1.

[10] Gabriel Duduman, *Scurt istoric al amenajării pădurilor din România*, in "Bucovina Forestieră", 19 (2), 2019, pp. 139–158.

[11] Iosif Leahu, *Amenajarea pădurilor*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 2001, p. 36.

539,000 hectares of forestland which made up 8.8% of Romania's forested area.[12] The area maintained its forested state through Habsburg era forest management practices despite its limited size. The forested area of Bessarabia reached only 376,000 hectares which accounted for 6.1% of the national forest fund. The province maintained the smallest forested area and operated with the least developed administrative system. The forested areas in this region existed in disarray because of uncontrolled logging activities. The total forested area in Romania reached 6,129,000 hectares by 1925[13] which accounted for 25.2% of the national territory. The uneven forest distribution between regions would create major challenges for forestry policy execution throughout the subsequent decades.

The forestry management of Transylvania operated as an independent system within Romania's forested territories. The Austro-Hungarian period established a complete administrative system which included detailed cadastral records and strict logging rules and mandatory reforestation programs. The Austrian Forest Code of 1879 maintained its influence on forest management operations throughout the period following Romanian unification. The forested areas of Transylvania contained abundant beech and coniferous trees which supported industrial wood processing and export activities. The processing and export industries-maintained stability through the rational exploitation of their resource base.[14] The forest infrastructure network of roads and forest railways and depots served both resource extraction and administrative oversight purposes. The integration of Transylvania into Romanian legislation after 1925 proceeded smoothly because local institutions were ready and forestry personnel received their education in Vienna, Prague and Lemberg. The well-organized system demonstrated its strength through controlled and slow forest area reductions which started after 1925.

Bukovina served as an example which showed how forestry administration-maintained continuity throughout the region. The Habsburg Empire established a tradition of forest conservation through sustainable resource management. The region experienced a well-managed forestry system during the pre–1918 period through established rules that governed logging activities and tree planting and soil protection practices. The forestry practices from before 1918 continued to influence forest management after Romania absorbed

[12] Gheorghe. T. Kirileanu, *Cel mai vechi Cod silvic românesc: Orânduiala de pădure pentru Bucovina dată de Împăratul Iosif al II-lea în 1786*, București, 1908, p. 12.

[13] Gabriel Duduman, Marian Drăgoi, *Amenajarea pădurilor: Organizare spațio-temporală*, Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare", 2019, pp. 28–34.

[14] Iosif Leahu, *Amenajarea pădurilor*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 2001, p. 112.

the region.[15] The 539,000 hectares of forested land in 1925 represented a small total area but the high standard of forest management made it a leading example. The forested areas received proper care through mandatory inspection programs and detailed reporting requirements under local forest laws. The region possessed superior forest infrastructure compared to other areas because it included well-developed forest roads and forest railways and depots which supported efficient forest management. The increasing timber export requirements during the 1930s created substantial pressure on the forest resources of Bukovina. The administration successfully preserved a proper balance between forest extraction activities and forest regeneration practices. The forested area in 1938 reached 536,000 hectares which matched the 1925 forested area exactly.[16] The local enforcement of laws together with institutional efficiency resulted in this period of stability.

The Old Kingdom of Romania which included Muntenia, Moldavia and Dobruja faced substantial difficulties regarding forest management. The Forest Code of 1910[17] established a modern legal framework, but its actual implementation remained insufficient. The forestry institutions operated with insufficient funding while corruption spread throughout the system and the workforce lacked sufficient qualified personnel. The 1921 Agrarian Reform created additional difficulties for the region.[18] The forested areas underwent extensive clearing for agricultural purposes because of high population density in Muntenia and Moldavia. The local population needed wood for heating and building purposes which led to widespread illegal timber extraction. The reforestation initiatives from the 1930s produced minimal success.[19] The planting initiatives received support from schools, the army and church institutions, yet their growth was restricted by insufficient funding and inadequate infrastructure.[20] The forested area in the Old Kingdom of Romania decreased to 2,644,000 hectares during 1938[21] which was 4,000 hectares less than the 1925 total. The small numerical decrease in forest area concealed serious environmental damage because of uncontrolled deforestation and excessive grazing and insufficient natural forest growth. The Old Kingdom of Romania started

[15] Dumitru Ivănescu, *Din istoria silviculturii românești*, București, Editura Ceres, 1972, p. 42.
[16] Marin Dracea, *Considerațiuni asupra domeniului forestier al României*, 1938, p. 8.
[17] Lucreția Dogaru, *Codul silvic român. Prezentare evolutivă* (Ediția a II-a), Cluj-Napoca, Editura Risoprint, 2008, p. 5.
[18] "Cuvânt Moldovenesc", no. 94, October 27, 1917, p. 3.
[19] Dumitru Ivănescu, *Din istoria silviculturii românești*, București, Editura Ceres, 1972. p. 43.
[20] Victor Giurgiu, *Codul silvic și gestionarea durabilă a pădurilor*, in "Revista Pădurilor", (4), 2007, pp. 45–46.
[21] Marin Dracea, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

the interwar period with a weak forest reserve which failed to satisfy both economic requirements and environmental needs of the region. The Romanian government started implementing modernization efforts after 1925 through forest district creation, cadastral mapping and reforestation programs. The implemented measures produced minimal, yet noticeable outcomes. The forest fund expanded to 379,000 hectares during the period from 1925 to 1938.[22] The region started to develop its forestry knowledge base through this small yet encouraging growth pattern. The region faced ongoing structural challenges because it lacked both necessary infrastructure and specialized personnel.

The development of Romanian forests between 1918 and 1938 depended mainly on three essential elements. The Agrarian Reform of 1921 emerged as the first determining factor. The land distribution to peasants through the reform resulted in extensive forest clearing throughout Muntenia and Moldavia. The redistribution of state-owned forests to new owners resulted in unsuitable forest management because these owners lacked both experience and sufficient resources.

The second element that influenced the situation was industrial requirements and export market forces. The wood industry expanded rapidly because Romania exported timber products and paper items to Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia, France and Italy. The forestry sector reached its peak export value when it reached 10–15% of the total national export volume. The economic demands forced the extraction of forest resources at high rates.

The third determining element involved the state's ability to manage the existing infrastructure. The application of forestry laws proved successful in Transylvania and Bukovina because these regions had established forest roads and trained personnel. The Old Kingdom of Romania and Bessarabia faced continuous threats because they lacked proper infrastructure and skilled personnel. The lack of public funding made these existing gaps between regions even more pronounced.

Conclusions

The development of Romania's forest fund between 1918 and 1938 illustrates how national forest policies interacted with different historical conditions across various regions. The institutions and conservation practices of Transylvania and Bukovina protected their forests from destruction. The Old Kingdom of Romania and Bessarabia demonstrated how weak forest

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management systems collapse when national laws fail to replace missing infrastructure and trained personnel.

The combination of the Agrarian Reform with industrial needs and export requirements created excessive pressure on forest resources. The 1930s reforestation efforts brought positive results, but they failed to make up for the total forest loss. The forest fund of interwar Romania spanned one-quarter of the nation but showed significant territorial differences and weak administrative control before World War II began.

The experience demonstrates that laws protecting forests become ineffective when there is no funding and no proper infrastructure in place. Forests need more than legal protection because they need operational institutions together with trained experts and sustained policies to achieve proper conservation. The findings from this period maintain their significance because modern society faces the identical problem of balancing resource extraction with environmental protection.