

**Cultural Identity and Community Strategies in the Area of Rosia Montana
(in the Romanian Western Mountains).
A School Ethno-Anthropological Field-Research**

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Purpose of the research: forming an ethnological team for the research intended, that is: Nostalgia, fourteen years after the fall of the communist regime. The case of the little town of Rosia Montana, in the Apuseni Mountains: the destruction of a community and of a settlement. The devastation begun in the seventies only accomplishes now. Past seems much more stable and rewarding to people than present-day entrepreneurial policies and authority ignorance. Responses.

Introduction

The research aimed to describe the general frames of territorial infrastructure of the little town of Rosia Montana, into the wider socio-economic and cultural context of the Southern Apuseni Mountains and in relation with other localities in the region: mai larg al zonei Apusenilor Meridionali si în interrelatie cu alte localitati din regiune:

- com. Lupsa, north of Rosia (with the villages Bârdesti, Geamana, Holobani; Bârlesti, Lazuri, Musca; Hadarau, Curmatura;Vinta);
- com. Mogos, south-east of Rosia (with the villages Mamaligani, Valea Giogesti);
- com. Bucium, south of Rosia (with the villages Valeni, Poiana; Bucium-Sat, Izbita; Valea Alba, Valea Negrilesii).

Some main trends were also followed in order to define the configuration of a cultural identity of rural communities in the area. We have to outline that this school-research centered on the territorial infrastructure of Rosia Montana, respectively on those rural communities which are affiliated to it (Soal, Vârtop - Gârda, Tarina; Ignatesti, Balmoesti; Bunta, Corna), following two main methodological levels:

1. a social-anthropological research on several rural communities, in the context of socio-economic mutations produced by “Gold Corporation” project, which, besides the mere dislocation of the inhabitants of Rosia, will have as consequence massive depopulation of the entire region, due to severe environment pollution, to drastic perturbation of traditional economic activities (agriculture, orcharding, animal rearing and mining) and to the disappearance of the communal center. In this sequence of the research, we found that Rosia Montana is the epicentre of a socio-economic “cataclysm” which will affect the whole region within a ray of some dozens of kilometers, between Câmpeni, Abrud, Bucium, Mogos, Lupsa and Bistra.
2. an ethnological and cultural-anthropology research, aiming the cultural portraying of several rural communities belonging to the commune of Rosia Montana: Rosia Montana, Corna, Vârtop, Gârda – in a first stage; Soal, Tarina, Ignatesti, Balmoesti, Bunta – in a second stage.

Methodology

Field-research was preceded by a preliminary information on the region, in the form of a library and archival research on the history of the area in focus¹ and on the social-economic and cultural data available in older documents (end of XIXth century² and XXth century³).

The properly so called research followed the norms of classical methodology, specific to Italian⁴ and French⁵ schools of ethno-anthropology.

Aspects followed by the social-anthropology research:

- (a) selection of a number of subjects representative for each age and social-professional category;
- (b) (auto-)biographical aspects (family and professional life, social and economic *situs* of the interlocutor etc);
- (c) community aspects (economic and social life in Rosia/village during the different stages of life of the interlocutor; mutations arisen in the community life during the last decades – informations differ in function of the age of the interviewee: the life of miners from Rosia before 1948 and afterwards, the interval '65-'89, the last 15 years; economic migration phenomena, attitudes toward the nowadays situation of Rosia Montana and of the region, as well as for the R.M. Gold Corporation project);
- (d) elements of political anthropology (dominant political options, relations with local officials etc.).

¹ Aurel Sântimbrean, Horea Bedeleian, *Rosia Montana – Alburnus Maior. Cetatea de scaun a aurului românesc (Rosia Montana – Alburnus Maior. The Stronghold of Romanian Gold)*, Editura Altip, Alba-Iulia, 2002.

² Gh. Candrea, T. Frâncu, *Românii din Muntii Apuseni (Motii)*, (*Romanians from the Western Mountains, called Motii*), Bucuresti, 1883.

³ Maria Ionita, *Drumul uriesilor (Basme, povesti si legende din Apuseni)*, (*The Path of the Giants. Fairytales, stories and legends from Western Mountains*), Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1988. Id., *Cartea vârvelor (Legende din Apuseni)*, (*The Book of Valve Legends from Western Mountains*) Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1982. Gh. Pavelescu, *Cercetari asupra magiei la românii din Muntii Apuseni*, (*Researches on Magic at the Romanians from Western Mountains*), Bucuresti, 1942. Lucia Apolzan, *Carpatii – tezaur de istorie. Perenitatea asezarilor risipite pe înalțimi (The Carpathians – Treasure of History. Perennial Dwellings Scattered on Heights)*, Editura stiintifica si enciclopedica, Bucuresti, 1987, pp. 181-258.

⁴ Alberto Mario Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne. Rassegna degli studi sul mondo popolare tradizionale*, Palumbo editore, Palermo, 1973, pp. 243-257. Barbara Fiore (a cura di), *Antropologia dello spazio*, în "Ricerca Folklorica", numero 11, aprile 1985, Grafo Edizioni, Brescia. Sandra Puccini (a cura di), *Alle origini della ricerca sul campo. Questionari, guide e istruzioni di viaggio o dal XVIII al XX secolo*, în RF, numero 32, ottobre 1995, Grafo edizioni, Brescia. Clara Gallini (a cura di), *Ernesto de Martino. La ricerca e i suoi percorsi*, în RF, numero 13, aprile 1986, Grafo edizioni, Brescia. Francesco Faeta, *Territorio, angoscia, rito nel mondo popolare calabrese. Le processioni di Caulonia*.

⁵ François Laplantine, *Descrerea etnografica (Ethnographic Description)*, Seria "Sociologie. Antropologie", Polirom, Iasi, 2000. Marie-Odile Géraud, Olivier Leservoisier, Richard Pottier, *Notiunile-cheie ale etnologiei. Analize si texte (Key-Notions of Ethnology. Analysis and Texts)*, Seria "Sociologie. Antropologie", Polirom, Iasi, 2001. Jean Copains, *Introducere în etnologie si antropologie (Introduction to Ethnology and Anthropology)*, Seria "Sociologie. Antropologie", Polirom, Iasi, 1999.

Aspects followed by the ethnological and cultural-anthropology research⁶:

- (a) morphological aspects (description and recording of facts of popular culture, made with extreme care for details);
- (b) the age of cultural facts (outlining, as much as possible, the age of the cultural fact investigated, on the basis of the information subjects provide and also as a result of a comparative approach);
- (c) location (the fact in focus is specific to only one community, or is it common to several);
- (d) diffusion (the scale of diffusion of each cultural fact in the context of the investigated community: the number of persons who are aware of and know that very fact, the age of the persons who know or practice the fact or ceremony. The vitality of a certain conception / cultural behavior is described in function of the age of the persons who know / practice it);
- (e) social environment (the investigated cultural facts belong to every social strata or only to a limited number; whether these are restricted to specific categories (peasants, shepherds, artisans etc.), whether they belong exclusively either to men or to women; “dominant” versus “subaltern” cultures, social levels and disruptions).
- (f) valuations, motivations (meanings and explanations given by interviewees in connection with every fact investigated: positive valuations with no restraints, critiques, polemics etc. Everything is becoming meaningful in a period of rapid and powerful social-cultural changes, as this present one is).

The (a), (c), (d), (e) data are objective (directly observable through facts), while (b) and (f) are documents of a more complex and problematic nature: answers and information submitted by interviewees do not tell us which is the real age or motivation of the phenomenon, but the age, motivation and value that *they invest* in the phenomenon. *Real age* and *effective* motivations (that is, generally, the value of the phenomenon within the investigated group) shall be researched at less superficial levels, during the analysis operations over registered materials.

Minimal circumstance indications: the locality where the document comes from, name and surname of the interviewee, age, birthplace, social condition, instruction/education, occupation.

Types of questionnaires we used:

- generic and extensive (Van Gennep⁷);
- specific and deepened (Ion Muslea⁸).

The questionnaire is not the departure point, but more likely the arrival of the research. The initial questionnaire, organized according to preliminary fixed objectives and to general or specific information disposable at the starting point, articulates itself all along the pursue of the research, at the end of which a more

⁶ Alberto Mario Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne. Rassegna degli studi sul mondo popolare tradizionale*, Palumbo editore, Palermo, 1973, pp. 243-257.

⁷ Arnold van Gennep, *Manuel du folklore français contemporain*, Tome I-er, vol. III (*Les cérémonies périodiques cycliques et saisonnières 1. Carnaval – Carême – Pâques*), Paris, 1947, pp. 551-552 si vol. IV (*Les cérémonies périodiques cycliques et saisonnières 2. Cycle de Mai – La Saint-Jean*), Paris, 1949, pp. 1072-1078.

⁸ Ion Muslea, *Arhiva de Folclor a Academiei Române. Studii, memorii ale întemeierii, rapoarte de activitate, chestionare 1930-1948 (The Folklore Archive of the Romanian Academy. Studies, foundation documents, activity reports, questionnaires 1930-1948)*, ed. critica de Ion Cuceu si Maria Cuceu, EFES, Cluj, 2003, pp. 279-362.

attentive exam of the material shall render ulterior problems and questions. If we're in front of interpretative questions, we are to pass to a different phase of our work (that of the "treatment"); if we are facing imprecise information, a new research is needed, with a further subsequently specialized questionnaire.

In order to avoid inconvenient questionnaires, too strictly organized, we used especially the technique of asking to our interviewees autobiographies or life-stories on themselves and the rest of the village, on labor etc. (*povestiri de viata*). These biographies and narratives can surely deliver a better situation of phenomena inside their social-cultural context, being at the same time part of the research itself.

Themes of ethnological interviews

1. Autobiographical and community stories/memories (*povestiri de viata*);
2. Narrative oral traditions: mythical-religious narratives (on the mine: *vâlva baii*, on the forest: *vâlva padurii*, in the wilderness: *vâlva-mireasa*, on the water: *vâlva apei/ceasu rau* – bad time, stories about gold: *povestiri despre aur*, about treasures: *vâlva comorii sau a banilor/flacari pe comori*, stories on the magical *mana* stealing: *bosoarce si morosnite*, on the weather: *solometul si sercanul*, on ghosts: *strigoi*, on the werewolf: *omul lup*, stories about devils and other beings: *povestiri cu draci, spiridusi, pricolici*, about the bad foot-trace: *urma rea*, beliefs on birds and animals: *credinte despre pasari si animale*, on fairies: *Frumuselile, vârtejul de vânt s.a.*);
Exceptional story-tellers: Nenea Dumitras (54 ani, Rosia Montana); Tanti Susana (74 ani, Vârtop), Tanti Sofica (76 ani, Vârtop), Baci Petre (81 ani, Vârtop), Napau Vasile (64 ani, Vârtop).
3. Magic practices (reverting the trace: *întorsul urmei*, tying the marriage: *legarea casatoriei*, magic stealing of the *mana* and counteracts: *furtul magic al manei si recuperarea ei pe cai magico-religioase*, charms, enchantments and spells: *descântece*);
4. Calendar cycle of customs (Christmas and The New Year / *Craciun si Anul Nou*, Epiphany: *Boboteaza*, ritual fires at the Forty Martyrs: *apinderea de focuri la Mucenici*, the Lent: *postul Pastilor*, the nine Thursdays: *cele 9 Joi*, St George's feast: *Sângeorzul*, the First of May: *Armindenul*, summer feasts and forbidden days: *Sfredelul Rusaliilor, Sânzienele*);
5. The cycle of family customs (birth, puberty, wedding, funeral).

Our team interviewed, so far, a number of 35 subjects in Rosia Montana, 8 subjects in Corna and 37 subjects in Vârtop and Gârda.

Valuation of the research

1. An ethnological volume (*Povestirile Rosiei Montane – Stories of Rosia Montana*) on oral mythical-narrative traditions from the region, able to value students' team research data.
2. Visual exposure of material from the field: digital-photography documentary (using 'PowerPoint') and two ethnological video-documentaries (*Povestitori din Vârtop-Gârda / Story-tellers from Vartop-Garda; Horincia de la Corna / Making fruit-brandy in Corna*).

Logistics

In order to fulfill our aim of going as a team, together with the students (COSMINA TIMOCE - 1st year, DIANA DAMIAN – 2nd year, PROFIRA PRICOB – 4th year students at the Ethnology Department of the Faculty of Letters of “Babes-Bolyai” University in Cluj-Napoca), in the field, I combined all resources at hand: I came with my own videocamera, my own tape-recorder and two photo-cameras, one analogic and the other digital, but I also took care of lending to the students who couldn't come with their own technical means the strictly necessary, in the form of my other tape-recorder, an external microphone to the second girl's machine and a sleeping-bag for the third.

I prepared a list of readings that became available two weeks before we were to leave; I organized a video-session with previous recordings with and about Rosia Montana. In the first evening on the field, I gave them an outline of the research we were about to do, which we discussed, as well as a set of questionnaires to every one of them; a notebook for field-information and rapid ideas, and I took care to discuss a bit – prior to the first confronting with the field – practical aspects while field-researching.

The first interviews were real school-interviews, as they were with the whole team: I meant to give an example of what could fit our project interests, of the manner of asking and waiting for answers, of my own field of research, in the idea that, whether or not they had previous field-experiences (one didn't at all, but was fascinated by the field and very dedicated; another had been gone with her year colleagues and the professors from the Ethnology Department, while the youngest had never been part of an organized field-research, but had already done on herself a splendid research of the very little investigated ceremonial of the Embellished Bull, in a village in Bistrita, her home-county) they could catch a hint and find and follow their own way. Which truly happened, as from the third day we began to split and look on each of us' account for informants. The two younger students looked in several occasions for my companionship, which was not restrictive, in the way that I let them ask their own questions, even if in some situations I felt they were 'ruining' the interview. We used every occasion to talk about our experiences on the field, about the difficulties we encountered, and more scientific issues, about the situation of ethnology, the role of the ethnologist and of the ethnographer, the degree of circulation of folkloric motifs and patterns and customs etc. As we were going on our own, we got to the situation, in Vartop, of interrogating the same informant with another colleague; but this was rather a good thing, not only because of the refreshment of memory we caused in that person, but also because in this way we were able to identify the best story-tellers: for example the old lady Susana, sister of Sofica, was discovered by Diana and is now subject of a video-documentary, after we all had the occasion to exhaust our forces in front of her inexhaustible exceptional qualities in narration and memory.

Of course, the best strategy we agreed upon is the future one, in the next field-research in the Rosia Montana area; not only that the two younger students hardly can wait for the next field we intend to do there in July, but a number of their fellow colleagues, even from other departments of the Letters Faculty, want to join our team, regardless of the material costs involved, which they intend to assume for the sake of this research that they perceive as serious and helpful in their formation in ethnology. What I mean is that teams like that are the real hope for our discipline growing mature again, fruitful again.

As for the practical ways, I spent the money in the following way: I bought audio tapes (that were frenetically used), video-tapes (as well), batteries for recorders and

photo cameras, photo films, photo services post-field, a number of DVD-s for post processing the video material, and the above-mentioned notebooks and paper.

We went by car, fitting into one transport. We were also able to use the car for other journeys once in the field – the neighboring villages, inside the little town of Rosia – apart from walking across the hills.

As for the living supplies, I bought several sorts of cheese, butter, sausages, salami, maize flour for polenta, bread and a number of canned food boxes, like fish and liver and vegetables; some halva, tea, chocolate, tomato sauce and mustard; I also bought medicines. We ate in common in the morning and in the evening, and for the day we were packing whatever everyone wanted from the list above.

As we went to live in the peasants house, we couldn't obtain fiscal bills for the nights; what I decided was to pay our accomodation with foods, generally – I know this from my previous experience on the field – uneasy to get up and far in a rural community; I also took the risk of having to contribute myself with money (after all we are discussing about Rosia Montana, where 'magnats' of gold manipulate enormous fonds, creating thus a new view of being able to sell everything, from hospitality to one's own house), which finally was not the case; I shall only have to make a lot of photos and video-tapes and give them back to our hosts, as the deal worked out. So I bought for the host: flour, sugar, oil, pasta, rice, tomato sauce, some vegetable cans, and we also shared with the three children of our hosts our own most praised reserve of chocolate, halva and minty candies.

I had no other way to pay accomodation, as we were not given the legal documents which release the amounts per diem (~100.000 lei) and per night (5.000 lei), that remain money (that happened for bureaucratic restrictions). As for the hotels, I would not stay in a hotel in the field if not in a desperate situation. Anyway, the nearest hotel was 20 kms away, down the stream of Rosia.

Generally the students had nothing against this way of eating, only particular tastes. Next time they can make suggestions or bring supplements from home. And maybe their own plates, instruments for eating, lanterns, drinking glasses, rain coats and sleeping-bags. Proper bags for the apparatus, proper shoes and clothes. Now they know what to expect. We all do.