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## The Paradigm Shift? - *Roșia Montană* between Industrialization and Post-Industrialization\*

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### Abstract

The paper will try to argue that the *Roșia Montană* protest phenomenon in Romania is significant for two main reasons. First, that this protest movement may have changed the nature of civic involvement in post-Communist Romania, especially with reference to the levels of participation and the new participatory environments. Second, that the *Roșia Montană* civic phenomenon may have also contributed, directly or not, to the changing of the paradigm of thinking economic processes in post-communist Romania, from a *developmental* approach to a *post-industrial* approach.

**Key words:** *Roșia Montană, Romania, social mobilization, post-industrialization*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Roșia Montană* has been, for the last 10 years, a heavily publicized case, both in the Romanian press as well as in the international press. The *Roșia Montană* (RM) gold exploitation project, which will be, if actually exploited, the biggest gold mining project in Europe nowadays, in terms of the quantities of gold and silver allegedly to be extracted from the mine's ore - according to the official site of the Canadian mining company, Gabriel Resources, an estimated 10,100,000 oz gold deposit - has nevertheless encountered, for more than a decade now, a hardened public resistance in Romania and abroad. Numerous national and international NGOs, public academic institutions, media outlets, political actors, eco-activists, public figures in Romania and abroad have expressed their open concern about the incalculable environmental and human risks involved in this gold mining project. The Canadian gold mining company Gabriel Resources, on the other hand, has lead, for more than a decade now, a relentless campaign in support of this project, also engaging - through its own direct investments in the mining area (nearly \$ 200 million), virulent advertising campaigns, the forming of its own public support, and the creation of a powerful local political lobbying - in a struggle to gain the support of the Romanian governments and also to secure the approval of the local community.

At first sight, the story of the RM appears to be simple. It is a story about gold in the developing world or, as Elisabeth Rosenthal put it, a "classic tale ... a rich North American company discovers gold under pristine land and encourages the villagers to leave, offering money, homes in the city, soft-focus TV ads that tout the

benefits of the project, and some tough talk. International environmental groups — complete with celebrities like Vanessa Redgrave — descend on the town to support the locals, claiming that the mine is illegal and polluting [1]."

However, leaving aside the public rhetoric on the issue, both corporate as well as anti-corporate, the story has rather much to do with a tragic story about destroying a community, selling one's ancestral land, displacement of the local population, poverty, depopulation, scarcity of jobs, disempowerment, harassment, buying off, alienation, heavy re-industrialization, desperation and confusion. In my opinion, it is not a story about environmental issue and eco-politics - although, undeniably, the environmental risk is the first major immediate risk in this case - as much as it is a story about alienated, disempowered people.

These last months of 2013, the pro- and con- forces began fighting for what seems to be the last stand of the battle. The government ruled by the PM Victor Ponta proposed a law in August that would give Gabriel Resources the possibility of conducting expropriations on the lands of *Roșia Montană*. If the Parliament accepts this law, the Romanian civil society will have no more say over this issue, warns the journalist Claudia Ciobanu [2]. According to her, the Romanians felt betrayed by Ponta who, while in opposition two years before, emphatically rejected the project. Now they accuse the government of corruption and betrayal of the voters' interests. In September and October 2013 protests erupted spontaneously, when thousands in the capital and in other major Romanian cities marched peacefully into the streets against the exploitation project.

The struggle over *Roșia Montana* had a long history over these 15 years, a history which I will not develop

here. It is enough to say that the issue sparked world-wide media attention; it generated a lot of opposition from national and international environmental groups and NGOs, a lot of NGO support from powerful organizations, including the Soros Foundation, whose involvement is now deemed controversial by some media outlets, and a fierce political struggle at the national level. It also generated a political reaction in neighboring Hungary, where, already in 2006, the government rejected the mining project for fear of “cross-border environmental problems [3].”

However, what I am interested in here is the Romanian civil society's reactions to this phenomenon and especially the motives behind this civic reaction. Besides the mainstream media coverage, which has and still is very consistent, the RM phenomenon generated the largest and the most persistent civic mobilization project in Romania since the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. This campaign, which lasted for more than 15 years made “slick slogans and banners, loudspeakers and tents, drums and video cameras” a common thing on the streets of Romania today. Some journalists spoke even about a small social “revolution” when referring to the RM phenomenon. One of the protesters' slogans is actually: “The Revolution begins in Roșia Montană [4].”

My thesis here will support the view that the RM protest phenomenon is significant for two main reasons. First, that this protest movement may have changed the nature of civic involvement in post-Communist Romania, especially with reference to the levels of participation and the new participatory environments. Second, that the RM civic phenomenon may have also contributed, directly or not, to the changing of the paradigm of thinking economic processes in post-communist Romania, from a developmental (development/backwardness) approach to a post-industrial approach (local/global, globalization/anti-globalization). I will refer to these distinctions later.

One important aspect here is the issue of labor or work [5]. In the following, I will argue that the topic of labor has also changed its meaning in contemporary Romanian society. Because of the fact that the ideology of labor, initially connected to the modern understanding of progress, is also an important item, at least rhetorically, in the debate concerning RM, the protests added new meanings to the term labor, when challenging, as we will see, the basic tenets of the modern ideology of labor.

## 2. LABOR IN POST-1989 ROMANIA

Despite the official ideology, Communism did not succeed in granting real dignity to workers in Romania. Although the figure of the worker should have been the cornerstone of people's power in Communism, free labor and the respect for the laborers' interests were far from reality. The only “proprietor” of work was the State itself, as an administrative entity, and it was the State, not the working individual, that decided the way in which work should exist in a Communist economy. Actually, the real “proprietors” were its representatives

with decisional powers in the system. Thus, despite the fact that the regime needed the creation of an urban working class to justify its presence as a political power and that it created that urban working class through a massive and forceful urbanization of an agrarian class that was two times bigger than the urban population at the end of World War II, Communist leaders from the upper echelons of the Party showed their indifference and contempt towards the workers of the Romanian “classless” society. This is evident especially in the case of work strikes, which were silenced in the name of social equality. Labor was ideologized as *propaganda of labor*, yet the interests of the working class were not really the system's priority [6].

Studies have shown that the alienation of the worker from his labor was experienced also in the Communist factories. The “means of production” were not in the hands of landlords or industrialists anymore, as in the XIX-th century, they were in the hands of “party managerial elites,” who were actually a “ruling class,” with status privileges in the economy, just like in the old status economy [7]. Although post-war Romania was a Socialist state, the real system of work still depended on a hierarchy of status.

Monica Ciobanu argues that the first years after the collapse of the Communist system in Romania lead to a “marginalization” of the working class in the official economic policies of the post-Communist elites. Massive unemployment and the collapse of the welfare system have deepened the political and economic alienation of the working class after 1989. Moreover, the workers were regarded with “suspicion and sometimes hostility by the more progressive, liberal, and intellectual sectors of society [8].” This means that the workers were considered “conservative,” “backward” by the liberals, and unfit for the “exercising of democratic rights,” and that they were also targeted by nationalists and populists who speculated their fears and anxieties against the newly established “democratic” order.

These objective aspects of labor explain the general tendency of Romanians to see labor (or work) in general as lacking the social and individual respect it deserves in a modern society and to tolerate a certain “work ethic,” i.e. certain behaviors that are seen as unethical practices in the West. Especially after the slow disintegration of all ancient forms of collective work in the pre- and post-war period, labor has been so integrated into modern society as an external, painful necessity, or mandatory labor - sometimes poorly paid, as in the case of the peasants – that the majority of workers (industrial workers and peasants), despite the official propaganda of the Communist regime, not only have been alienated from their work as any other modern worker, but also have been considered as socially inferior by the peculiar, status-oriented character of Romanian economy and society. Against all odds, this pattern survived throughout all the Communist decades, up to post-Communism.

Labor carries, thus, a special meaning in Romanian society. It is not valued as in other well-known Western societies, for reasons mentioned above. I've mentioned

*labor* since one of the cornerstones of Gabriel Resources' corporate rhetoric is that the gold mining will create thousands of jobs in the mining area of Roșia Montană. Due to the real situation with labor in Communism and post-Communism, Romanians tend to be quite skeptical when referring not to the labor itself, but to the real value attached to that labor by the employers of that labor. What is also ironic is that the same Romanian liberals who disdained the workers of the '90s are now the supporters of corporate work in the mining industry. It is therefore obvious that the campaign for the *corporate work* lead as a massive publicity campaign by Gabriel Resources collides with the general Romanian disregard for the official *propaganda of labor*, carried out for decades by the state apparatus of the Communist system.

### 3. PARADIGM SHIFT?

It is well-known today that *Roșia Montană* will be the Europe's largest open cast gold mining project, involving the involuntary resettlement of more than 2000 people. The project has been considered highly controversial both in terms of displacement of population, destroying the 2000 years cultural heritage, causing destruction to the environment, and leaving behind a massive lake of high risk toxic waste, as a result of mining. These aspects have sparked opposition from both expert institutions and civil society. Our paper will deal exclusively with the reaction of the civil society to the RM mining project. Actually, the RM case confronts us with a civic engagement issue: how was this phenomenon possible for such a long time and in such a manner in a country that just a few years ago ranked so poorly in terms of NGO activism and civic participation [9]?

In their study, Bădescu *et al.* emphasize that the motives for non-participation in civic life can be resumed to three: a. resources (since the time spent on civic activities depends on the economic resources of each individual); b. motivation (in the Communist regimes, the State did not encourage civic activities: civic life was atomized, the distrust among members of society was rampant, no "islands of sociability," and therefore no collective action); c. mobilization (in the Communist regimes, the mobilization was exclusively the political task of the State, and it was made forcefully). Thus, resources, motivation and mobilization would also be the items the emergence of a new kind of social and civic mobilization could be measured against.

Our first argument to the paradigm-shift thesis would be that the RM protest movement changed the nature of civic involvement.

In the years following 2000, we have reasons to believe [10] that the situation has changed visibly, in terms of resources, motivation, mobilization. The forming of a small but stable middle class that lives a moderate yet comfortable standard of life, especially in the developed urban areas; the birth of new generations of youngsters who did not feel the economic and social pressures of the 90's; the change in attitude of the population,

especially the young one, towards NGOs and other civic organizations; the change in the attitude of the NGOs themselves, who do not follow the old rule of "we promote democracy, we do not practice it" anymore [11] – these are all signs that the situation has visibly changed in the last years, and that it will change furthermore in the future.

These aspects account for the changes in the public attitude towards civic participation in general. Obviously, the amplitude of the reaction in the streets against the RM mining affair in 2013 can be accounted for also by other factors, such as the political and economic situation of Romania nowadays. However, the activity of the NGOs and the protests lasted for more than 15 years and grew with time. These phenomena of the last months were only the natural amplification given the circumstantial factors. In other words, we do not consider that these protests are just the elusive by-products of a contextual situation: they are just a part of a larger and more complex situation.

### 4. INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES

A decisive factor is the technological factor, one that is here to stay and defines more and more the society: since 2000, CMC (computer mediated technologies) have become a platform for civic communication and participation. Dan Mercea speaks of a "digital prefigurative participation" (DPP), in terms of "mobilization, identity-building, organizational transformation." DPP is "the interaction with either content or individuals through CMC which precedes engagement in offline protest [12]." Thus, the "physical act of protest, the interpretation of collective action and the organization of collective action" are all pre-formed in the digital environment. DPP is the forming of the protest in the digital environment "ahead of a physical protest event [13]." Mercea has shown that this kind of civic engagement is especially effective in cases of low-risk civic protests, such as *FânFest*, [14] which is the festival that supported the RM environmental protest. DPP provides amplification and building in terms of identity of the movement and levels of trust among the participants. In Romania, *FânFest* was the epitome of CMC protest: it was a "protest festival where activism and recreation were blended together (...) the protest festival embodies a drive to introduce a wide and unengaged public audience to environmentalism [15]." At *FânFest*, it is specified that "online resources" were "the main plank of the communication between the coordinators of the protest festival and the participants." Thus, in terms of mobilization and activation of those unaffiliated into the protest, the "majority of the unaffiliated were young, online and had the capacity to self-organize with the technology."

The sociologist Manuel Castells is the one of the leading voices in the analysis of CMC in the political and social sphere. In one of his texts from 2007, he assesses the communicational and social contexts of post-industrial societies and the role of CMC in the shaping of a new kind of social and political involvement. From a media-communicational

perspective, Castells argues that there are several distinct features of our age: a. the “predominant role of media politics and its interaction with the crisis of political legitimacy in most countries around the world;” b. the “key role of segmented, customized mass media in the production of culture;” c. “emergence of a new form of communication related to the culture and technology of the network society;” d. “the uses of both one-directional mass communication and mass self-communication in the relationship between power and counter-power, in formal politics, in insurgent politics, and in the new manifestations of social movements.” More precisely, he describes a shift in communicational paradigms, from a mass-communication to a “mass self-communication” phenomenon in the global network society.

From a social and political perspective, he describes post-industrial society as characterized by several features: a. “scandal politics,” a phenomenon that weakens public trust in formal political power and delegitimizes party politics in the eyes of the public; b. the emergence of new forms of social mobilization, which circumvent party politics or mainstream politics and rely heavily on “insurgent politics” and “social protests,” which sometimes go against the interests of mainstream politics. Their presence in the media space, Castells argues, is provided by the mass self-communication created by internet technologies. Because of mass self-communication that circumvent the usual, vertical channels of communication, the very act of “going on the internet” is already a form of “political power [16].” Subsequently, this online communication which is socially motivated creates networks of counter-power, defined by Castells as “capacity by social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society.” The main source of power challenged by networks of counter-power today is “global capitalism,” although e.g. patriarchy, among others, is also a source of protest. Global capitalism is opposed, for example, because of its manifest „productivism,” and confronted by counter-powers which argue for a “defense of a holistic vision of the natural environment and an alternative way of life.” Sometimes, these counter-powers can even promote “alternative without adjectives.” Thus, either reactionary or progressive, these alternatives try to shape the nature of the established power relations in society, and generally, as Castells admits, they shape in such a way and promote such values that are particular to the “society where they take place.”

Moreover, Castells is emphasizing that “without the means and ways of mass self-communication, the new movements and new forms of insurgent politics could not be conceived.” We witness, thus, a wholly new “cultural and technological paradigm,” that of the “social movements of the information age” and of the “new forms of political mobilization.” These new social movements rely heavily on “networks of meaning,” rather than on “networks of instrumentality,” as in the case of mainstream politics.

Castells will try to define this paradigm by describing several of its main phenomena: a. “the existence of the global movement against corporate globalization in the Internet;” b. “the building of autonomous communication networks to challenge the power of the globalized media industry and of government and business controlled media;” c. “the development of autonomous forms of political organizing in political campaigns, including fund raising and mobilization of volunteers to get out the vote;” d. “the spread of instant political mobilizations by using mobile phones, supported by the internet, (...) changing the landscape of politics [17].”

These studies assert that CMC can be a powerful tool in changing the landscape of political involvement and social mobilization in the post-industrial, informational society. As described, CMC was the best tool for motivation and mobilization in the RM protest campaign. In a few years, with the help of mass self-communication, the RM mobilization has boosted the phenomenon of civic mobilization in Romania. Because of the steady decline in formal political public involvement in the past years, partially because of “scandal politics” - also combined with the general poor motivation for mainstream political participation due to historical and economic factors in the post-1989 era – together with a low civic participation rate - here “civic participation” being understood as participation in a formal civic association – the post-1989 generation of Romanians has found a way to circumvent formal politics and mainstream media and express their hopes and fears in an anti-government, anti-corporate, anti-globalization, pro-environmentalist form of protest. This kind of “insurgent politics,” as Castells explains, relies on a “network of meaning,” created by mass self-communication, a network that, for the moment, is challenging not only government politics, but also global capitalism, seeking for and asking for an “alternative way of life.” This seeking for an alternative has also lead to the forming of new identities, as in the case of pro-environmentalist, anti-globalization leftist groups in support for RM, or to the “discovery” of older, “religious, ethnic, territorial or national” forms of identity, in the case of the pro-nationalistic, right-wing protest movements. In both cases, mainstream political power is challenged with the help of CMC and “alternatives,” based on different values, are sought for. Sometimes, these protests, as Castells describes, are not motivated by a clear alternative, but only by an “alternative without adjectives.” The crucial thing, nevertheless, is that „meaning” (culture) and not „instrumentalism” is built into these networks.

## 5. THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIC PARADIGM

The phrase “post-industrial economic *paradigm*” refers to the understanding of economic phenomena as being defined by certain value systems in a society and not by economic processes alone. This sub-chapter relates to our second thesis: that the RM civic phenomenon may have also contributed, directly or not, to the changing of the paradigm of thinking economic processes in post-

communist Romania. Subsequently, in the development of these social movements we may witness a shift from one paradigm to another, i.e. from a *developmental* (development/backwardness) approach to a *post-industrial* approach (local/global, globalization/anti-globalization) in relation to the understanding of economic phenomena.

The developmental approach has been part of Gabriel Resources' rhetoric for many years. The mining corporation and its supporters, including voices from the government, have argued several times that their opponents' rhetoric is part of a "Balkanist" understanding of modern economy, and that this rhetoric – either nationalistic, anti-developmental, ecologicistic etc. – is blocking the economic development of the country and is portraying "anti-Western," "anti-modern" and "anti-industrial sentiments." In short, that this rhetoric is a reminder of the old Romanian Communist-nationalistic approach to economy. The developmental approach has also been part of the economic liberal rhetoric of the 90's in Romania, when the voices of opposition against hasty privatizations, massive layoffs of workers from the Communist "unperforming" industries, lack of social security, aggressive market capitalism, extreme poverty etc. were deemed as "illiberal" by the majority of the economic actors, capitalism being accepted as the only, "inevitable" and "desirable" doctrine [18].

The post-industrial approach to economy has been best described by Daniel Bell in the 1970's. Bell opens the discussion by showing that the greatest problem of the late modern economy is the "increasing divergence of private costs and public costs." This imbalance increased with the development of large corporations in the US since the 50's. The corporate "performance," which is the main tenet of corporate economic strategy in post-war economics, reached its peak at the end of the 60's. In the 70's people began to question the ideology: "A feeling has begun to spread in the country that corporate performance has made the society uglier, dirtier, trashier, more polluted and noxious." It was the dawn of the environmental age in America and the beginning of a new era.

Bell will launch his thesis about the post-industrial society by operating a distinction between an "economizing" and a "sociologizing" mode of seeing economic phenomena. The "economizing" mode is based on a utilitarian calculus, and the economic process is thus understood as applying entirely to a "rationality of means." In other words, goods are economic goods, seen under the optic of "maximization, optimization, least cost." However, all goods cannot be seen as standard economic goods, as Bell argues: the limits of the economizing mode cannot account for all goods as economic goods. There are other natural goods, such as air, water, forests etc. that are best defined as social goods, and not just economic ones. The economizing rationality – embedded in the formula "more with less means" – cannot account for these kinds of goods. Moreover, the economic life often produces the so-called "spillovers" or "externalities," which, according to Bell, "become costs borne directly by other

private parties or distributed along the society." The result is that the externality is a "social cost," which cannot be accounted for by the economizing perspective. One more limit of the economizing mode is the "value system" of the society itself, which limits the value of the economizing mode to the unit of "individual satisfaction (...)," as the only unit "in which costs and benefits are to be reckoned." The economizing mode tends thus to exclude the social values from the economic life.

The "sociologizing" mode, on the other hand, is more focused on social values in the process of understanding economic life. We have seen that, in some cases, we cannot assess the economic value or the economic benefits of certain goods. The private goods are more than often created "at the expense of other social values." The economizing ethic of private consumption, private interest and private property cannot account for all aspects of economic life. If economy does not keep track of these social costs, it will lose sight of the most basic things necessary for life. Thus it is necessary, a "sociologizing" mode would argue, that we should be more careful with the economic needs of the society and not just with those of the individual.

Bell will thus describe the new paradigm, if only in a strategic way: the creation of more private goods at the expense of other social values should end. Individual consumption without any care for the goods of the environment is dangerous. The new economic age will be in need of a "communal ethic (...)" in a sense of the "movement away from governance by political economy to governance by political philosophy." This ethic is seen by Bell as a kind of "return to pre-capitalist modes of social thought."

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the 1970's, Daniel Bell argued that an economy's direction does not depend on the price system but on "the value system of the culture in which the economy is embedded." Since the 1970's, "corporate social responsibility," "environmental concern," "environmental risk," "social costs", "sustainable development", have been standardized as key phrases in contemporary social and economic theories. The social values of economic life have also become key values in nowadays Western economic discourse.

After 2000, these topics have become a matter of wide public concern in Romania. The disillusionments of the transition and the aggressive Romanian-style market capitalism have sparked criticisms against the standard liberalist economic ideology of the 90's. The new generations of Romanians are entering the post-industrial phase of capitalist economy with a critical eye on market capitalism. In this context, environmental values are more and more visible in society, due to the nature of the challenges. In the near future, social mobilization, which, from 2000 on, has changed considerably in nature, will heighten even more the public value of this type of socio-economic concerns.

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## Promena paradigme? - Roșia Montană između industrijalizacije i postindustrijalizacije

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### Rezime

U radu se iskazuje mišljenje da je fenomen protesta Roșia Montană u Rumuniji značajan iz dva osnovna razloga. Prvi, da je ovaj protestni pokret možda promenio prirodu ličnog učešća u postkomunističkoj Rumuniji, posebno imajući u vidu nivoe učešća i nova okruženja učestvovanja. Drugo, građanski fenomen Roșia Montană verovatno je doprineo, direktno ili ne, promeni paradigme o razmišljanju o ekonomskim procesima u postkomunističkoj Rumuniji, od razvojnog pristupa do postindustrijskog pristupa.

**Ključne reči:** Roșia Montană, Rumunija, društvena mobilizacija, postindustrijalizacija