

Is it Red or Green? The construction of social realities through photographs; the physical environment and community of Roșia Montană

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The guiding idea of this research is that the use of visual material in the analysis of social representations is fruitful, given the importance of image in producing and transmitting knowledge in our multimedia society. This paper is part of a larger research project which aims to study the social representations emerged in an environmental conflict which occurred in Romania after a foreign company proposed a gold mining project in the area of Roșia Montană. My hypothesis implies that groups involved in this conflict construct polemical representations and compete for influencing others to adopt them, in order to achieve social and political goals. The present study explores the iconic-code of expression of social representations about Roșia Montană site and community generated by the groups in conflict in the process of communication, by focusing on photographic images. Two sets of photographs that institutional actors (an NGO and the mining company) made circulate through internet were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Two different „realities” about Roșia Montană site and people are objectified by means of photographs. It seems that each photo-dossier was aimed to be a retort to the other, indicating the polarization of groups. This situation is stimulating each one to generate a representation of the object, which is occasioned precisely by the existence of the opposition (Moscovici, 1961-1976). The analysis reveals the emergence of two social representations about Roșia Montană, which are highly contrasting and stereotypical, and rooted in general irresistible beliefs. And they both pertain to the communicative genre of propaganda. My study can show how we can analyze „the battle of ideas” (Moscovici) in the emergence of social representations when divergent ideas are communicated through images.

Keywords : polemical social representations, environmental conflict, visual social representations

Cuvinte-cheie : reprezentări polemice sociale, conflict ambiental, reprezentări sociale vizuale

Social representations theory and the Roșia Montană environmental conflict

Environmental concern is rather incipient in Romania, dating only after the fall of the communist regime in 1989. It was during the communist period (about 40 years) when the country attended industrialization and the gigantic industrialization plans were implemented not only without any opposition but also with enthusiasm. The „Roșia Montană dispute” reveals a new environmental conflict in Romania, which arose after a Canadian company designed a gigantic gold and silver mining project for that area. The issues in controversy regarding the project are, foremost, the relocation of about 2000 persons inhabiting that area, the use of cyanide in getting precious metals and the building of a dam with contaminated water resulting from ore processing. The proposed project has met with strong opposition from a variety of groups, extending from the local to the global scale. On the side of the opponents to the project the main actor is the community based NGO Alburnus Maior, especially established to oppose to the mining project and named just as the ancient name of the place was, to which a range of different actors joined: NGO's (international environmentalists, civism promoters), public institutions (like the Romanian Academy, educational centers), religious institutions. They all gather round the slogan, „Save Roșia Montană”. On the favoring side the main actor is the Gabriel Resources Company with his experts but also a community based NGO. Each of the parts engaged in the last years in major publicly campaigns for gathering popular support and, implicitly, for influencing political decision. The debate around the Roșia Montană Project is now highly polarized.

This study is part of a wider research project aiming to analyze the environmental conflict in the Roșia Montană issue from a social psychological perspective, which is

the study of social representations, their properties, their origins and their impact (Moscovici, 2000), bearing in mind that, in analyzing social dynamics, „the conflict between groups” and the „conflict between social representations” are substitutable expressions (Rouquette, 1994). In this view, the mining project, as prime source of the conflict in the Roșia Montană issue, stands for a particular event that groups have to face in order to constitute and control their world, and gives occasion, thus, to the emergence of social representations which compete to the forming of social reality (Moscovici, 2000). Every part in the conflict constructs and transmits its own version of the Roșia Montană story and competes, thus, for legitimizing knowledge in the modern world where representations of different groups in society seek to establish a hegemony (Duveen, 2000). I will raise the question about the social and political consequences of the struggle between polemical social representations in the Roșia Montană issue or, as Howarth (2006) suggests, about the role of representations in the ideological construction and contestation of reality. I make the assumption that from this struggle the topic of environmental concern is outlined and, consequently, new social representations which will contribute to the shaping of pro-ecological ideology in Romania.

The approach is in line with a newly re-emerged research trend in social psychology, which defends the application of the social representations perspective to the environmental studies (Rouquette *et al.*, 2005; Fasanelli & Galli, 1996; Galli & Fasanelli, 2001; Castro & Lima, 2001; Castro, 2006; Baggio & Rouquette, 2006), thus following the first steps taken before with the work of Milgram and Jodelet (1976) and Milgram (1984). The advantages in attaining this linkage are related to the production of more effective explanations and richer descriptions by researchers in the environmental field, due to the methodological eclecticism of the social representations paradigm (Rouquette *et al.*, 2005).

Polemical social representations and visual communication

A social representation is always the representation of something (object) belonging to someone (subject) (Jodelet, 1989). It is social not only in the sense of the tautological definition referring to the social nature of the object itself, but becomes social in the very aspect of being shared. Polemical representations, as opposed to hegemonic or emancipated social representations, are always related to the limits of sharing of social representations in society as a whole due to the conflicting nature of relationships between groups (Moscovici, 1988). Rouquette (1994) suggests that every social representation has a polemical value, underlining the inter-group differences and intra-group identity. Being also opaque to itself, a social representation stands always for „a form of truth”. The practical consequence of the two aspects is that, when situated within inter-individual relationships, the confrontation between representations implies the intervention of specific rhetoric and even polemics, everyone trying to undermine the other's position and to impose his own „truth”.

From the very beginning of the elaboration of SRT in Moscovici's *La psychanalyse* (1961/1976), it was obvious that we should not separate social representation and communication. However, as Moscovici himself remarked in his dialog with Ivana Marková (1998), „when people talk about *La Psychanalyse* they focus on representation, but they usually overlook the second part of the book which deals with communication and language” (p. 402). He further states that representations are generated and expressed in the process of communication, and that it is this context which makes a social representation to be, I quote, „not a quiet thing consisting of an object and a science and the transformation of that object. Usually there is a kind of an ideological battle, a battle of ideas (...). I think that what is very much lacking in social

psychology today is concern with the strife of ideas.” (p. 403). The second part of *La Psychanalyse* is an analysis of the circulation of social representations of psychoanalysis in French media. Three communication systems or genres are detected and described (diffusion, propagation, and propaganda). According to Farr (1995) Moscovici's approach signifies a „retro-revolution”, a return to the healthy symbiosis between social psychology and media studies which marked American social psychology in an earlier time. Farr therefore states: „representations are in the media as well in people's minds: they form part of culture as well as cognition and they need to be sampled and analyzed in both contexts” (p. 8). The question remains where to start the analysis of social representations: is it in people's minds or in media communication?

The objective of the present study is confined to an analysis of visual productions (photographs) transmitted by each part in the conflict through the *new media* represented by the Internet. The progress in communication technology has thrown us in the „multimedia era” (Sartori, 1999) in which word, sound and image are unified, and they may be both „real” and „virtual”. In my opinion, rather than being reluctant in analyzing social phenomena in this new communicative environment, due to the methodological problems it could encompass, the researcher should take advantage and see this change as an opportunity to enrich his field of knowledge. With regard to social psychology, and social representations theory in particular, the suggestion has been by now made explicit (de Rosa, 1995, 2001). What the new media brings with is interactive communication, replacing the unidirectional flux of mass media (Windahl & McQuail, 1993). Internet offers an open space for expression – which although is „virtual”, it is at the same time public – where everyone concurs to be both the transmitter and the receiver of knowledge. Seen in this light, there is no reason not to consider internet one of the places, among others, of

confrontation between polemical representations. As regards my topic, there is evidence that it is indeed being used in this purpose. There are website pages entirely dedicated to the Rosia Montana issue, owned by both conflicting parts; plenty more websites belonging to different NGOs and public institutions where the topic is addressed extensively; an Internet forum discussion hosted by the Romanian Chamber of Deputies' website page; personal blogs where the topic is referred; and, of course, audio-video utterances about the Rosia Montana issue on the self-broadcast sites, like YouTube.

My interest lays here in the visual expression of social representations. I will analyze photographs produced by the groups involved in the Rosia Montana conflict and the fact that they are available also on the internet is, I assume, a certain guarantee of their circulation. Unfortunately, data about viewers' access to the photographs included in the research sample is missing, but this is an inconvenience inherent to the medium itself, where data about audience are more difficult to obtain or to gain access for, than it is for printed media or television. There is though some evidence, which we can drag by analogy, about the number of peoples interested in the issue who also used internet as a place of debate. For example, on the web forum that I just mentioned, that was launched at the initiative of the Chamber of Deputies' Committee for Public Administration Territorial Planning and Ecological Balance in October 2006, more than 8000 people accessed the web page in order to vote for or against the RMGC Project and to chat about the topic¹.

Nowadays there is a growing interest for analyzing visual productions, manifested in a variety of disciplines and approaches, such as semiotics, rhetoric, cultural studies, media studies, anthropology, sociology, neurosciences etc., and their contributions shape the emerging scientifically field of visual communication (Smith, 2005). This trend is explainable as the logical consequence of what Moscovici (1983) labeled „iconic

revolution”, the explosive return of images in communication in our world culture. It indicates also a double change in perspective about visual images: first, from considering them as an area of resistance to meaning, being an extremely rudimentary system in comparison to language, or being totally self-referenced because of their ineffable richness in signification, to the recognition that images include meaning (Barthes, 1985). And second, the acceptance that, in spite of the polysemy of images that makes individuals interpret them according to spatial and temporal context or to their personal psychological traits, the meaning attributed to images may well be common shared (de Rosa & Farr, 2001; Freyssinet-Dominjon, 1997).

Within the social representations paradigm there is acknowledgement that they are multiple ways of expression of social representations. Explicit suggestion is made in favor of switching from the „monotheistic” verbal centered approach, which dominates especially discursive psychology, to a more integrative perspective which admits that, besides words, there are other means, like images, sounds, conducts, rites, that contribute to the social construction of reality (de Rosa & Farr, 2001; Mamali, 2006). If the study of social practices has already a tradition in social representations research (Curelaru, 2006), new lines of research are evolving toward the study of the iconic aspects of social representations (de Rosa, 1987, 2001, 2004, 2007; de Rosa & Smith, 1998; Farr, 1995; Galli & Fasanelli, 1995; Fasanelli & Galli, 2001; Fasanelli, Galli & Sommella, 2006; Ullan, 1995; Sen & Wagner, 2005), and musical (Jodelet, 2006).

The investigation of the iconic/figurative way of expression of social representations characterizes an impetus from conceiving images only in pure ideational terms, like image-based thinking. Therefore, visual image is considered jointly: a *source* for activating and/or favoring the emergence of social representations; a *product* of social representations (the social representation

itself, as an iconic-symbolic synthesis, a materialization of one SR, a direct expression of the objectification process); and a *medium*, a form of transmission of social representations (de Rosa & Farr, 2001).

The focus is here on the content and transmission of social representations about the Rosia Montana site. The photographs included in the analysis are considered as *products* and *medium* for social representations. It is nevertheless true that they are purposed to be also *sources* aiming to activate or develop a particular representation about Rosia Montana for viewers. Their obvious intentional character links them much closer to visual rhetoric as communicative artefacts, than to works of art (Foss, 2005).

Visual images can be contained in a variety of displays, among which the photographs are only one of them. The choice for photographs as research tools is, in part, due to the fact that they were actually used and made circulate by the subjects in the conflict. But the reasons do not stop here. Photographs are especially attributed the power of naturalization (Barthes, 1985), due to the relationship of the signifieds to signifiers based on analogy, because of „recording”. The denoted message in the photograph seems to obliterate any connotation of the image. In fact, the denoted image „naturalizes” the symbolic message, providing by this „the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning” (p. 201). This process reinforces the myth of the photographic „naturalness” and objectivity and confers to mechanical obtained pictures an immediate emotional impact. Consequently, the photographs are taken for reality and truth itself. And, to this added, the fact that images „communicate more things, more rapidly and to the largest number of people ... [allowing] people to inhabit the Tower of Babel” (Moscovici, 1983 p. 569) makes them be a powerful medium to which propaganda of all types (political, ideological, commercial) resort. I believe that in this light we can interpret the meaning of the Chinese proverb: „An image is worth a thousand words”.

The photo-dossiers

There are hundreds of pictures showing the Rosia Montana’ site and people, which are flowing on the internet, hence deciding over the sample was not an easy task. Since my interest was to compare between differing pictorial representations, I had to collect photographs for two samples, which had to be representative for each of the conflicting parts. Three requirements were used in deciding over the samples :

- That the photographs to be (also) accessible on internet ;
- That the position vis-à-vis the Rosia Montana issue (FOR or AGAINST the RMGC Project) of those who produced and posted the photographs to be easy identifiable ;
- Then, the samples had to be alike in respect of the number of units contained.

All the pictures included in the samples were downloaded from internet sites². In order to respect the second criterion I didn’t include in the samples any private photographs posted on different internet sites or blogs, but chose the ones pertaining to institutional actors directly involved in the conflict.

In fact, the idea to carry out this analysis came to me after I went to see an exhibition of photography about which much publicity was made. The exhibition «Rosia Montana. The hooded light», took place on February 2007 in a hall of the Romanian Palace of the Parliament, in Bucharest and was sponsored by the NGO „Soros Foundation – Romania”³, as part of the „Save Rosia Montana” campaign. The architect Lorin Niculae took the shots presented. The foundation also provided a photo album, available for free in printed and in electronic format. The focal purpose of organizing the exhibition was clearly not for artistic reasons, but, as is mentioned in the preface of the album, for sustaining the community based NGO «Alburnus Maior»’ fight against the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation mining project. All 67 photographs from that catalogue

constitute the „AGAINST mining project” photo-dossier.

The „FOR mining project” dossier comprises 74 photographs that I downloaded from the photo-galleries of two closely related web-sites pages. One owned by the Rosia Montana Gold Corporation, the joint venture which holds the mining license in the area and which put forward the conflict-ridden mining project (51 photographs); the other one is the web home page of Gabriel Resources Ltd., the Canadian company which actually owns 80% of the Rosia Montana gold project (23 photographs). The reason for including in this sample photographs from two web sources was in respect of the third criterion.

Methods

I analyzed the two photo-dossiers separately, but according to the same rules. The analysis has been designed for achieving a comparison between the narrative structures and contents of the two photo-dossiers, and implied both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

I conducted first a visual content analysis of the photo-dossiers⁴. The first phase consisted in describing the iconic composition of each photograph by making the inventory of the objects represented and their arranging in the frame, or, of what the pictures depict. The unit of analysis was the photograph. Every picture was coded into a theme, depending on the focal object represented in that picture⁵. Next, themes were successively grouped into categories. Five major categories resulted: *people*, *environment*, *township*, *mining*, and *PAST*. In order to detect the salience of each category, the frequency of themes was used as indicator.

Quantitative content analysis proves to be limited for deciphering the meaning of the visual message because of its focus on the manifest content, i.e. the presented elements in images, disregarding suggested elements. This is why I completed also a semiotic analysis of the photographs. The aim was to identify the narratives that result

from the visual messages of the photo-dossiers; or, of what the pictures tell⁶. For the analysis I considered jointly: plastic figures (relevant for my analysis: composition, framing, colours and brightness); iconic figures (objects represented in the image and resemblance relationship); and the text⁷ joined to the image (name and foreword of the „Against” album, caption of the single photograph, heading in the photo-gallery).

Visual content analysis comparative results

Content analysis gives quantitative evidence for dissimilarities in the narrative structure of the two photo-dossiers. Figure 1 shows the amount of each category of pictures in every dossier.

Frequencies calculation was used to test the salience of every category of themes. According to this, we can determine the position has each category in the entire narrative structure of the dossiers. As the figure shows, the focus is dissimilar from one dossier to another. Photographs about the *environment*, *township* and *people* (in this order) from Rosia Montana organize the storyline in the AGAINST photo-dossier. *Township*, *environment* and *past* (in this order) form, in the FOR dossier, the subject matter about which the visual message is structured.

At this stage, we note some significant differences. First, the „Past” category of pictures is missing from the AGAINST dossier. In this category, I included all the 16 historical black and white photographs posted on the mining company’s website, showing the Rosia Montana town, surroundings and people in about one century ago⁸. The message the mining company transmits through visual images is constructed on the opposition between past and present „reality” of Rosia Montana.

Second, we note that there is a discrepancy in depicting persons. The frequency by which

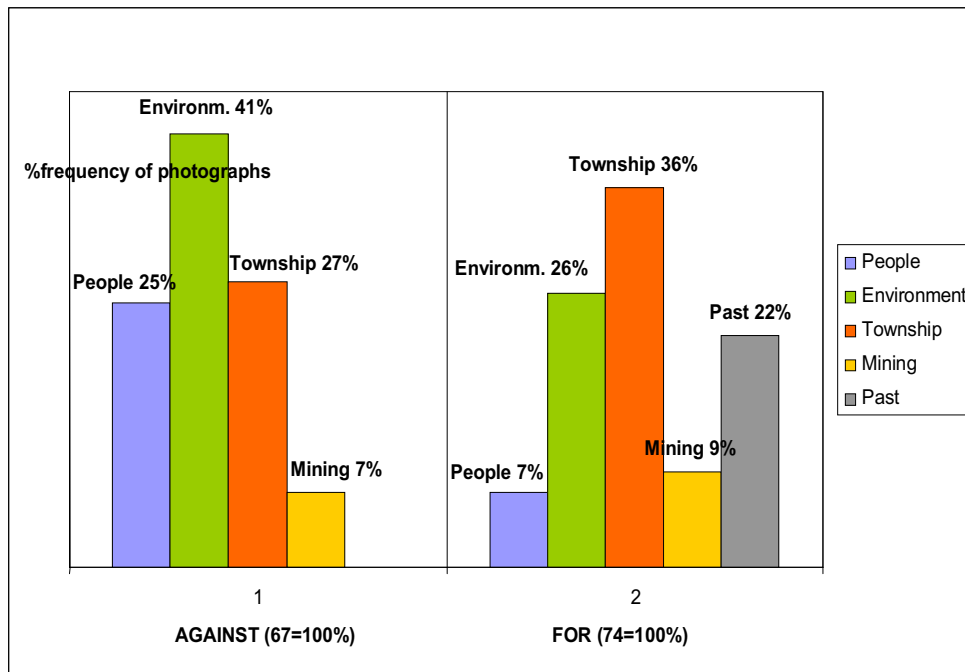


Figure 1. Salience of themes in the photo-dossiers

people appear in pictures posted on the company’s websites showing today’s Rosia Montana is more than three times lower than in those from the AGAINST photo-dossier. Within the FOR dossier we note that photographs of persons have the lowest amount and that pictures representing township occupy the top position. This evidence is already a clue for the symbolic message : Rosia Montana a village without people.

Is it red or green ? The „battle of ideas” through images

Two differing „realities” about Rosia Montana site and people are objectified by means of photographs. It seems that each photo-dossier was aimed to be a retort to the other, indicating the polarization of groups. This situation is stimulating each one to generate a representation of the object, which is occasioned

precisely by the existence of an opposition (Moscovici, 1961/1976). The analysis reveals the emergence of two pictorial representations about Rosia Montana site and people, which are highly contrasting.

The plastic feature that marks strikingly the difference between pictorial representations is the light. Photographs transmitted by the „against” group were taken mostly during serene days of beginning of autumn and the light effect makes that in almost all photos the colours to be bright and shiny. On the contrary, the photos presented by the mining company depict the site in cloudy days of late autumn, and objects represented are colorless and somber. „Beauty/ugliness” is one of the opposites from which pictorial representations of Rosia Montana are sourced.

For revealing the differences in the polemical representations contents, I will present the analysis’ conclusions simultaneously, ordered by the themes category previously identified.

The environment

In the „AGAINST mining project” photo-dossier

Photographs of Rosia Montana environment depict mostly natural landscapes, specific for the low height mountains of the area. The landscapes show rocky peaks of mountains, forest slopes, flower meadows, trees, ponds, sunsets over the mountains, animals on the meadows. The colours of the objects in the photos are light. When shot in daylight hours, the sky is always blue and cloudless. The predominant colour in the photos is green (the grass, the trees) but the vegetation is sometimes in the red-brown colour of autumn. Relevant for the comparison is the water aspect. In the ponds (stagnant waters), the water is clear and clean, people are even fishing. On their whole, the photos are presenting beautiful and clean areas, dominated by green nature, in brief a wonderful place to live in. The comparison with Scotland, suggested by one photograph's caption contributes to the message about the area's tourism potential.

Three kinds of the human influence over the environment are signified: by agriculture (mowed hay, orchards, and cultivable field), the mining in the pre-industrial period and some tracks of industrial activity. Agriculture, performed through traditional non-mechanized technologies is benefic (one of the photos representing an orchard has as caption „True gold”). Tracks of the gold extraction during the pre-industrial period (ancient mines entries, old bare mountain peaks now with trees and vegetation) are increasing the area's spectacular feature. Only four photographs represent icons suggestive for the industrial mining influences. Two panoramic photographs depict the open pit in the backdrop from far away; other two pictures show in front plan tailings (the waste resulted after ore has been extracted from rock). One of them, designated „Metastasis” helps us understand the connoted message: on the tailings hillock on which there

appeared ditches, some dry stumps indicate the trees whose life was affected by the toxic waste. However, only a few meters away, a small fir tree managed to survive, suggesting that there is still hope for environmental recovery in the area.

In the „FOR mining project” photo-dossier

The visual message is fundamentally different in this set. Two iconic figures are redundant in the photos: the water and the quarry. The open mine, depicted in close and in panoramic shots has yellow-gray shades, makes the impression of an alien area dominating the mountain landscape and is a proof for the extremely damaged environment in the area. Also is the water of Rosia River or in the puddles. Depicted in close and in very close shots, the water is red and dirty, due to its pollution with mineral residuals resulted because of long time gold extraction. The polluted river causes the further contamination of the rivers in which it flows. More, the domestic wastes thrown on the riverbanks suggest that Rosia Montana people do not care about the environment. The same idea is suggested by the depiction of not recycled scraps, abandoned in the field.

In pictures showing landscapes, the vegetation is either completely dry (due to the season) or in pale colours. In all pictures, the sky is gray. The hills slopes have little vegetation and show soil slipping. Therefore, the Rosia Montana site has no beauty, the pictures seem to suggest.

The township

In the „AGAINST mining project” photo-dossier

One third of the photos depicting Rosia Montana town and the other villages included in the commune⁹ were taken in panoramic shots and include iconic elements of the surroundings. It is represented the typical architecture of the villages in the

Western Carpathians, with houses spread out on the mountain slopes, the churches being the central element. Other photographs depict in close plan buildings in Rosia Montana: houses, churches, an ancient school building. Old and damaged, the houses are presented as cultural heritage of the area. The connoted message, strongly suggested by the texts indicating their historical attestation, is that the precious national heritage will be destroyed. An important element in the location's representation is religion. The churches and the graveyards, cultural monuments threatened by the company's mining project, suggest the religious tradition of the natives, allowing them to maintain the faith/hope that the town will not be demolished. In some pictures it is depicted the old square in Rosia Montana, deserted, with old neglected buildings or even ruins. Two separate photos are presenting in close shot the windows without glasses of two ruined buildings; one of them very old in the square, the other one is a block of flats build during the communist regime, deserted and with a panel „RMGC property” attached on the façade. The resulted message suggests that the main guilt for the degradation of the town has the mining company, who bought the people's properties, tempting them to leave. But, here again, there is among the photographs of the town one suggesting the optimistic view about the town's future: a recently built house by people who decided to resettle to Rosia Montana.

*In the „FOR mining project”
photo-dossier*

Today's Rosia Montana town is represented as a desolating place. The largest part of photographs in this dossier depicts houses in advanced deterioration state, with damaged walls and roofs or completely falling down. The courtyards of the still resided houses are uncared for, poultry wander unrestrained on the mud-covered streets or in the ditches filled with red water. In the center of the town square, a cow shows. Everything

suggests the extreme state of poverty of the inhabitants. This stereotypical image is constructed also in stark contrast to the town's ancient prosperity, connoted in period photographs showing the town mostly by panoramic shot (new built white houses, large workplace buildings).

The people

*In the „AGAINST mining project”
photo-dossier*

Rosia Montana's people are hardworking peasants living in harmony with nature. Nearly all of the photographs depict elderly or adult persons engaged in their daily activities in the open air. Their clothes and hands are dirty, symbolizing handwork. They practice agriculture by ancient methods, using traction animals (horses, bulls) as did their ancestors two thousand years ago. However, the connotation is positive: it is organic agriculture, not harming the environment. Despite hard work, Rosia Montana's natives appear healthy (they have red cheeks; even the very old ones are still capable of hard work) and content with their life. In one photograph that depicts an old man, stacking manually hay in rick, hay is associated with gold, symbolizing humans' worship of nature. Another photograph shows a little boy standing on a meadow. He has red cheeks and smiles serene. In the front right angle of the picture, appears the head of a cow. The meaning of the picture is linked to the healthy environment for raising children, which is priceless.

The suggested idyllic world is threatened by the company's mine project. Old people are presented as living a drama if forced to relocate because of their strong attachment to the place, got after a lifetime of living and working there. By the use of an interrogation as picture's caption (*Quo vadis?*) it is suggested that there is no other place for them to go. People are nevertheless prepared to resist. A photo shows an adult man with a straws hat on his head, tanned, with dirty

hands and scratched arms, with crossed arms on the chest (typical defense position), frowned and seeming angry. The text suggests he is firm to remain in Rosia Montana, despite his hard life and the compensation that the company offers for displacement.

Only two black and white photos are reminding of the inhabitants' previous employment in mining. They are suggestive for the contrast between the past (pessimism) and the future (hope). One shows three men at a table drinking during mid-day (unemployed) and the fourth, younger, shot from the backside, goes away. In the background is depicted a neglected building in the old square. The text-message „The Abandoned” suggests that nobody cares for them and their problems and that the mining company will dump the people from Rosia Montana after the exhaustion of resources. Another photograph shows a man in half dark on the stairs of a mine gallery. The caption is „The light from the end of the tunnel” (a frequently used expression in Romanian public discourse, suggesting the hope to get over the difficult moments of the transition towards the democracy and market economy). Two light sources are depicted: the daylight coming from the front door of the gallery (in the back plan) and the weaker light of an electrical lamp (in the front). The man is looking to the inside of the mine (where is located the camera), but his body's position turned to the right seems to suggest the fact that the former miner is ready to go outside but he stopped for a moment to say good-bye to his old occupation.

*In the „FOR mining project”
photo-dossier*

The people's portraits are infrequent in the „nowadays Rosia Montana” photographs posted on the mining company web sites. One picture depicts a lonely man sitting on a bench in the old square watching to a cow. Another photograph depicts four children and their teacher standing in front of their school building. The children are laughing.

They have just played in the snow but the building in the background indicates that they are studying in an old school without modern endowments. The same idea of lack of perspective for children and youngsters is suggested in another photograph representing two children spending their spare time among the garbage of the town's roads. By contrast, the image of the old town Rosia Montana is animated by the people's presence. At the beginning of the 20th century, in Rosia Montana gathered hundreds of people and their carts were crowding the square. According to their clothing, the people in the historical photos had the double socio-professional role of peasants and miners. Others are entrepreneurs and merchants. The opposition past/present suggests, as before, the past wealth of the people in that area, due to the mining industry.

Mining

*In the „AGAINST mining project”
photo-dossier*

The few photos referring explicitly to the mining activity situate it merely in the pre-industrial past. The Roman and medieval galleries are presented as historical artefacts of inestimable archaeological value. In three photos of ancient mine galleries, the light is orange and makes the indoor look fabulous, calling for visitors. The same is for the old wooden rails of the tubs that transported once the excavated ore out of the mine. The only depiction of industrial mining is in a black and white photograph of mine tunnels in which the mining company is negative connoted by an allusion: the text of the picture mentions a local superstition about the „Mine Ghost” who kills the greedy and dishonest (= mining company).

*In the „FOR mining project”
photo-dossier*

The current state of mining industry in Rosia Montana is on the wane. The pictures depict

some iconic figures of the communist legacy : equipments and infrastructure are busted ; the iron rails for ore transportation have rusted ; industrial establishments are abandoned. In stark contrast to the wealth that mining brought (as shown by the historical pictures of Rosia Montana), the suggestion is made clear : the community is dependent on mining industry. It is however important to note that not the communist past of intense mining is positively connoted but the mining during inter-war time, constructing thus a representations anchored in the „the golden age” myth, which for Romanians corresponds to that period.

Concluding remarks

The photo-dossiers illustrate different stories about Rosia Montana as social object and give evidence to Moscovici's idea (2001) that social representations occur in pairs, each one having its alternative. Even if they are very different in structure and content, the two identified pictorial representations are strongly connected, the rationale of each being to refute the other. Due to the confrontational context in which they occurred, their transmission pertains to the communicative genre of propaganda, whose principal ambition is, as Moscovici described in his seminal work (1961/1976), to generate a representation with a view to action. The efficacy of propaganda depends on its ability to transform a representation into a stereotype, and for achieving this rapidly it makes use of already existing representations.

Images possess the power of hypostatization, of transforming concept into substance, and that makes them particularly adapted to the representation of social stereotypes (de Rosa & Farr, 2001). By focusing on the iconic-code of expression of social representations, my analysis reveals the emergence of two highly contrasting but equally stereotypical representations about the site and people of Rosia Montana. They are both rooted in general beliefs which

coexist in Romanian social memory. The „optimistic” representation of the „against mining group” pertains to the general conception of Romania's natural and cultural richness and beauty, the idea highlighted in literature and arts ever since the emergence of the national feeling in the 19th century, and further overemphasized through the propaganda of the communist regime. Another „irresistible belief” (de Rosa & Farr, 2001) in which it is rooted exceed national frontiers : it is the belief in the healthy country life, of humans living in communion with nature, which is the essence of pro-ecological ideology.

The opposite representation finds its roots in an equally old belief about Romania's economic backwardness and poverty that was mostly re-emphasized after the fall of communism in Romania. However, the pro-development representation that the mining company tries to impose is reinforced by the myth of past prosperity pertaining, as mentioned, to the inter-war period.

The social representations theory explicitly states that reality is social constructed. I hope to have shown by this study one of the means by which different groups compete for the construction of reality, by developing social representations and attempting to influence others to adopt them, in order to achieve social and political goals, as it was still suggested as needed (Jost & Ignatow 2001). The photographs analyzed have a clear persuasive intention. The lay-viewer of the images is supposed to adopt a position vis-à-vis the Rosia Montana mining-project and the more one group's representation is accepted by the public the more this will render the group more powerful in sustaining its cause. At this stage we can only speculate over the impact that the polemical representations, expressed through the iconic-code, have. As mentioned, a separate study will be dedicated to examine their impact by using the photographs as source-stimuli in an experimental design. But the fact is that 10 years after it was initially submitted by the mining company, the project of gold and

silver extraction in Rosia Montana is blocked and this may indeed be due to the effectiveness of the „Save Rosia Montana” Campaign, to which the photographs of the „Against” dossier belong. The strategy of explicit personifying the enemy (achieved by denoted and figurative components of the image), which was used only in the photographs of this dossier, could be a clue to the understanding of the campaign’s success, proved, for example, by the evidence that more than 95% of those who expressed their vote on the public web-forum I mentioned before, voted against the mining project.

But above these speculations explanation is needed, and it could only be reached by linking „the media” and „people’s minds” representations, to put it in Farr’s words. Useful for realizing the connection seems to be the notion of context generativity of public representations proposed by Moscovici (1994)

to describe the fact that the more a representation is diffused in a culture, the more it becomes the context of communication in which meaning is anchored. Depending on the predominant aspect of the social representation – conceptual or iconic – the context „overflows the literal toward the metaphorical or the imaginary” because of the contagious association, but contexts have primarily an iconic origin (p.173). This is why Moscovici re-designates the „figurative nucleus” by the notion of figurative texture of the context in general. Concerning my research, the idea is that we can regard the contrasting and stereotypical representations expressed through photographs (which become thus prototypical images of Rosia Montana) as composing the figurative texture of the context in which people anchor meaning to the Rosia Montana conflict.

Notes

1. See : http://www.cdep.ro/informatii_publice/forum.dispSub?catid=2.
2. PRO : http://www.rmgc.ro/rosia_montana.php?page=galerie ; <http://www.gabrielresources.com/images.htm> ;
AGAINST : http://www.osf.ro/publicatii.php?pag=2#_catalog_Rosia_Montana.
3. Initially called „Open Society Foundation - Romania”, this NGO is part of a network of similar organizations all over Central and Eastern Europe created and financed by the businessman George Soros after the collapse of the communist regimes, with the goal of promoting the values of an open society (i.e. in Popperian terms : liberty, democracy, civic culture).
4. Visual content analysis is a systematic observational method used to test explicitly comparative hypothesis by means of quantification of categories of manifest contents (Bell, 2001).
5. In judging about the picture’s theme I was assisted by a colleague of mine, specialized in the discipline of Geography.
6. The main methodological problem faced when analyzing images is the difficulty of cutting the image in elementary units, since the picture seems to give meaning only seen entirely. A kind of paralysis is encountered by the researcher who wants to „read” the image and the feeling is that „it makes no sense, because it has too much sense”. To get over this problem implies „the stop on the image” and the description of the elements that compose it in order to transform the „visible” into „readable” (P. Fresnault-Dernelle, cited in Freyssinet-Dominjon, 1997, 279).
7. Barthes (1985), describing the anchorage of meaning in images states : „the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and to receive others ; by means of an subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance” (p. 198).
8. I decided to keep all this images together in a single category because of their striking difference compared to all other pictures.
9. Territorial and administrative unit in Romania. A commune can comprise several villages.

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