

## NĂDRAG VILLAGE - BETWEEN THE POWER OF HISTORY AND THE GEOGRAPHIC DESTINY

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**Abstract.** The characteristic of a settlement developed in a mountainous region is given, mainly by the combination of the natural and human components that give the unique impression of the landscape. Nădrag village started to develop within a space, which apparently wasn't very generous with its inhabitants, rather imposing restrictions than development opportunities. However, for centuries, the settlement has resisted and became emblematic through the continuously developing ferrous metallurgy plant. After 1989, after the great political and social-economical changes, the plant went under economical collapse and the settlement and its inhabitants were forced to find a new geographical destiny, which is the rural and ecological tourism.

**Rezumat.** *Comuna Nădrag - Între puterea istoriei și destinul geografic.* Specificul unei localități dezvoltate într-o regiune montană este oferit, în primul rând, de modul de îmbinare a componentelor naturale cu cele antropice, fapt ce pune în evidență amprenta de unicitate a peisajului geografic. Comuna Nădrag a început să se dezvolte într-un spațiu care, aparent, nu este prea generos cu locuitorii, impunând, mai degrabă, restricții decât posibilități de dezvoltare. Cu toate acestea, de secole, așezarea a rezistat, devenind chiar emblematică în regiune, prin dezvoltarea continuă a uzinei siderurgice. După 1989, odată cu marile mutații politice și socio-economice, uzina a intrat în colaps, iar localitatea și oamenii săi trebuie să își găsească un nou destin geografic, iar acesta rezidă în dezvoltarea turismului rural și ecologic.

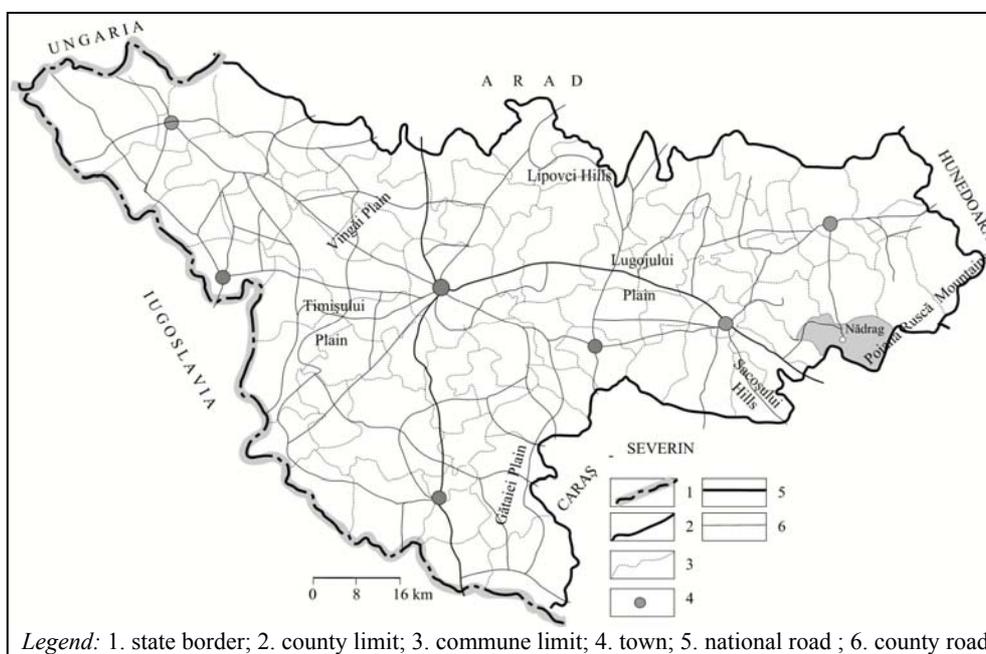
**Key-words:** *Poiana Ruscă Mountains, natural resources, ferrous metallurgy plant, economical collapse, tourism.*



**Cuvinte cheie:** Munții Poiana Ruscă, resurse naturale, uzină siderurgică, colaps economic, turism

## 1. PREAMBLE

Located at the eastern limit of the Timis County, at an altitude of 320 m, in an erosion basin formed by the crystalline of the Poiana Ruscă Mountains, rather isolated within the settlements network, *the village of Nădrag* has an old history which has imprinted the social and economical life for centuries and fights for gaining new geographic destiny.



*Fig.1. The geographical position of Nădrag commune within Timiș conty*

## 2. SHORT HISTORY OF THE SETTLEMENT

The settlement of Nădrag and the surrounding areas were first mentioned in the church records in 1393, as propriety of the Hungarian Kingdom, donated by King Sigismund of Luxemburg to Petru Petrovici, Ban of Timisoara and Caransebes for his valuable contribution in warding the empire boundaries.

During the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Nădrag village, as well as other settlements in Poiana Ruscă Mountains, belonged to the County of Hunedoara, where the exploitation of iron ore used for agricultural and household tools, was incipient (Șt. Pascu, 1986).

Old documents, kept in the State Archives in Caransebes and Lugoj, speak about a land of 232,47 hectares, mostly wooded.

The Hungarian historian Pesty Frigyes who has studied the former County of Caras-Timis and a part of the County of Hunedoara, relates that, during the reign of the voivode Sigismund and of Andrei Bathory, the settlements Nădrag and Jdioara are mentioned in the documents of voivodate chancellor's office, under this specific name.

Some 18<sup>th</sup> century documents confound the settlement of Nădrag with Crivina (presently a village belonging to Nădrag), although both of them were separate, distinct settlements as mentioned in 1393 church documents (kept in the Cenad church archive Pesty Frigyes referred to) or voivodal Austrian documents in 1590.

More detailed documents about the location of the actual village of Nădrag or Crivina are not to be found.

Some documents say that the first location of Nădrag was Crivina's, but this village is also mentioned in an equally old period as Nădrag.is.

More numerous records are from the 19th century, once with the enhancement of the iron ore and timber exploitation. Starting with 1845-1846, the history of ***Nădrag is mixed with the history of the ferrous metallurgy plant***, around which the entire population of this settlement and of the surrounding villages has gravitated: Fârdea, Hauzești, Surduc, Gladan, Mâtnic, Jdioara, Criciova, Cireșu, Găvojdia.

We can determine a few viewpoints referring to the *denomination of the settlement*:

- the name Nădrag comes from the river Nădrag, of Slavic origin. A legend speaks about a group of Serbians who tried to cross the marshy lands of the Timișului Plain and when they saw the mountains and the wilderness lying ahead of them, they decided to return and named the river Nădrag, which means "back";

- after another opinion, the name comes from the disposition of the two main rivers: Padeș and Cornet, in the shape of "trousers" which is the Hungarian "nadragi";

- another legend speaks about a group of Slovaks, timber cutters who supposedly got cholera and at the entrance in the valley, put a board which said: "na drag", that is "do not pass".

### **3. SHORT HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL SECTOR**

After the Hungarian historian Pety Frigyes and the plant archive records, the first mine field works are dated around 1844-1845, in the sectors called "Dâmbu cu Fier" and "Delinești" (the old mines near "Căpriorul" Hut) and were performed by the Nădrag iron industry society with headquarters in Jdioara, a village nearby. The society was called Zsidovares Eisenwerk Gewerkschaft and its main stakeholders were the Klein brothers. They colonized the region with workers brought from Bohemia, Czech Republic and northern Hungary.

There are no documents left to certify exactly the year the industrial output started in Nădrag, but as far as we know, in 1846 there had already existed a flattening mill, a forge, a

furnace and a foundry, working on the raw materials got from nearby, respectively iron and charcoal ore, produced locally as well.

In 1852, the company was forced to make a loan of 50,000 florins, bank currency for wages and other expenditures and until 1866 no profit materialized. Because of the bad financial situation, the company as declared insolvent, it was put up for sale and sold in 1871.

The entire patrimony of the former company was turned into the new stakeholders hands, who built a new company, Nadrager Eisenindustrie Gesellschaft, funded with Austrian capital. Among the new stakeholders were many of the former ones who continued to hold 50% of the company stock.

In 1896 the 25 kilometers long industrial railway with narrow gauge, connecting Nădrag with Găvojdia was put into function. Afterwards the railway was extended over the village land and the main valleys (Padeș, Cornet, Nădrăgel).

In 1912 the thin iron sheet flattening mill was built.

The period 1924-1926 was a hard one as the company "Nădrag Iron Industry" went into liquidation. Following the agreement between the representatives of the "Titan" group and those of the "Nădrag" group, on March 31 1924, an acquisition agreement was closed, as to purchase the Nădrag Plant. Consequently, all the equipments and possessions of the Nădrag iron industry, including the railway Nădrag-Găvojdia, were taken over by the metallurgical group "Titan". In 1926 the sale/purchase contract, which also included a house and a piece of land in Găvojdia, property of Nădrag Company, was signed on behalf of Max Auschnitt, the main stakeholder of the newly created company.

After 1944, the plant went under a gradual diminution of output and the capitalist economic crisis that had started in 1929, affected a great deal both output and workers. Then, concurrently with the 2nd World War, the plant turned to "war manufacture".

In May 1944 a tinning plant was transferred here from Galați.

Until the nationalization, the Nădrag Plant was made of the following sections: foundry, flattening mill, zinc, tinning, forge, brickyard, stoves, nails and mechanic workshops.

Starting with the year 1948, because of the political regime newly installed in Romania, the plant became state property underwent an intense build up of new sections. So, in 1965 the mining chains was built, on a surface of 4,990 square meters, in the oxygen station, in 1982 the steel cast parts (5,312 square meters), in 1984 the industrial chains section (3,360 square meters) in 1985 the non-ferrous cast section (1,110 square meters), followed immediately by a steam-generating station, a supercharger station, a moulding workshop and a lead covering workshop, a laboratory, a mechanic workshop and a tin lead covering section (this one on a surface of 4,021 square meters, but which fortunately did not enter into function!).

Subsequently to this unprecedented extension of the production capacities, at the end of 1989 the plant had about 2,000 employees out of which 700 coming from the surrounding villages (Crivina, Criciova, Fârdea, Hauzești, Surduc, Mâtnic, Gladna, Jdioara). In this respect, the commuters were the first "victims" of the economic reform, first on the disposable list.

Starting with 1990, by decentralization of the economy, the abolition of the Warsaw Pact and diminution of the national industrial output, the products of the S.C. "Ciocanul" Nădrag had no sale market anymore and this was the beginning of "the end" of

an industrial era. Thus, at the end of 1997 collapse produced because of the inability to pay the credits and afferent interests.

On June 1st 1998, the instance decided upon the judicial liquidation of the company and disposability of the entire staff with compensatory wages, so that, after 152 years of uninterrupted activity, the “decease” of the metallurgical plant was recorded.

#### **4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE LIQUIDATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL “COLOSSUS”**

Obviously the shock of the liquidation of this industrial unit, a colossus at the scale of a mountain village, has affected badly its population and the consequences are still apparent as the village confronts with depopulation and demographic ageing.

The social effects which followed are the mass unemployment and depopulation. The numbers are relevant in this respect. If in 1998 the village had 3,569 registered inhabitants, in 2002, after 4 years, they were less with 13%! And this drastic diminution in number cannot be taken on the account of the natural loss that is deceases, as they only represent 33% of the total of the persons who aren't registered as inhabitants anymore. So where is the rest? The answer is simple and sad at the same time. People are leaving! Some out of the country, others just out of the village, but they are leaving! And slowly, but after not a very long time, oblivion, dust and maybe non-existence will fall over the community...

These phenomena represent the desperation of an entire community: the compensatory wages ran out, unemployment and social support are insufficient for decently feeding a family, people living in blocks of flats voluntarily or not, g'renounced to the central heating, some of them even to electricity and gas, living in a terrible misery.

Although some attempts have been made to find investors or buyers, they failed. The lack of economical and financial facilities, an aged technology, an isolated geographical location, underground fights for easy profits and for political power converted then towards economy, made the few investors give up.

In 2001, the village was declared “disadvantaged area”, but this “mouthful of oxygen” came too late. The industrial future of the settlement is compromised, apparently for a long period of time. The only sources of income are the timber works (savagely performed!) and a small shoe factory, owned by an Italian investor who exploits the feminine workforce (very low wages, 10 hours workday, respiratory toxic environment, terror under the motto “nobody is unreplacible). Once again it was proved, here as well as in other places, that not even the solution “disadvantaged area” is viable.

#### **5. A NEW DESTINY**

Under these circumstances, the question is raised: “Is there a future for this community or it is condemned to disappearance?”

Most of the locals are either nostalgic over the times ended long ago – irremediably we hope- or think that the village is in agony, their future is dark and those able to work immigrate, most of them to Italy for undetermined periods of time (according

to each one's luck) or to towns with greater economical power that can still absorb workforce (Lugoj, Timișoara).

One might ask: "why don't people turn to agriculture again? After all it's a rural community!" The question would be redundant as when it comes to agriculture, the location of the village along narrow valleys with steep hillsides does not allow this economic field to develop. The only arable fields can be found in the Nădrag river flood plain and the Crivina, the village belonging to it. Thus, this agriculture is one of subsistence, based on a few crops (corn, potatoes, vegetables) and farming (breeding pigs and cattle) for own use. Within the land fund structure, the agricultural area represents 623 hectares (4.5% of the village area). In exchange, large areas are covered with leaf-bearing and coniferous forests (12,292 hectares – 90.5%).

Another question arises then: why don't they saw timber, it brings good income?" They do, we are not explaining how, at the moment, but forests are still owned by the state and only lately they have become the object of claims by inheritance.

So what is to be done? The industry has small chances to give life to place again, agriculture not even that much, to saw timber at a great scale is impossible...

STILL...tourism could represent "the motor" for bringing the community to life.

In this respect, the best "cards" are the geographic isolation, mountain proximity, clean air and water, wide grasslands, deep silence and calm, some natural touristic spots (a few caves, waterfalls, "sphinx" type human shaped rocks, refuges built in trees...).

There are also other advantages: the existence of a functional infrastructure (asphalted road, quality running water, sewage, digital telephony, cable TV, quite healthy housing resources, consulting rooms, drug store, a comprehensive educational system, some accommodation facilities already with touristic destination, shops and banks).

As for the minuses that are still impeding the local society to turn towards another economical destination, more profitable, healthier and environmental friendly, they come from the period 1990-2004 when the local administration was generally uneducated, without benevolence and interest for the public benefit and totally unprepared for tourism. Added the lack of information about the benefits granted to those who want to be involved in the development of this particular economic sector and with the population's inertia, tired with the concern of living "from hand to mouth

Again, what is there to be done? An obsessing question with an answer that could stand simply in the change of the historic destiny drawn on the development of the heavy industry on site, for another destiny, geographic, clean, environmental friendly, namely Tourism.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the history of the place, the major problems which confront the small human society of Nădrag, similar as a matter of fact with many other in the country, we deeply consider that for a community that has developed totally based on a part of the existent natural resources and which is also restricted by natural factors, *its geographic destiny could fulfill also by using its natural assets, but differently, by implementing the green tourism*, environmental friendly, which in some parts of the country and abroad, brings substantial income for the inhabitants on the one hand and it maintains the harmony between man and nature, on the other hand.

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