

# *MONO-INDUSTRIALISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE ROȘIA MONTANĂ GOLD-MINING PROJECT*

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## **ABSTRACT**

**This study proposes a critical discussion of a recent gold-mining project at Roșia Montană, Romania and of the alternative development solutions for the area. The aim of the research is to examine the socio-economic consequences of the mining project proposed by the multinational company Roșia Montană Gold Corporation and the struggle of the resistance movement to the mining project for an alternative development, in order to understand the complexity of development processes in rural communities in post-communist Romania. In analysing the socio-economic risks involved in conventional development, we focus especially on revealing the intrinsic limits of mono-industrialism and on the issue of population displacement by development. In the second part of the paper we discuss the feasibility of alternative development solutions for the area. The paper relies on a theoretical framework that combines the critical literature on conventional development and the recent debates on grassroots development.**

**Key words:** gold mining, mono-industrial areas, alternative development, NGOs, Roșia Montană

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1999 Roșia Montană Gold Corporation announced its intention to open four gold-mines in the area surrounding the village of Roșia Montană. The project is currently awaiting final approval from the Romanian authorities. In the last decade the project sparked numerous and heated debates, both in Romania and internationally, with regard to its social and environmental costs. It was also the catalyst for the emergence of one of the most significant environmental protest movements in Romania's history. Within this context

important debates about the social and economic development opportunities for the village of Roșia Montană have taken place, as well as controversy over conventional, industrial development and its alternatives in contemporary Romania.

Although the issue of the gold mining project is of public and scholarly interest, there are still very few studies published on the topic (Zaharia 2010; Egresi 2011). However, more numerous are the reports, position papers and policy papers on the social, economic and environmental impact of the largest mining project of its kind to be proposed in Europe and on

the current socio-economic context of the area (Alburnus Maior 2004; Richards 2005; IGIE 2006; Olaru-Zăinescu 2006; RMGC 2006; Toma 2012; Oxford Policy Management 2009; Academia Română 2012). While these documents provide useful information, the choice and interpretation of data is often shaped by actors' legitimation of various stances related to the mining project. As we demonstrate in this study, the socio-economic data cannot in itself offer a solid ground or ultimate motivation for or against the project. A decision on the mining project would inevitably be based on more complex arguments, including ethical reasons, cultural and historical considerations and environmental concerns. Therefore, exploring such arguments, in parallel with the analysis of the socio-economic data is essential to understanding the complexity of what has been labelled the 'Roșia Montană problem'.

Initiated in 1998, the project is a joint initiative of the Canadian company Gabriel Resources, owning 80.69%, and of the Romanian company Minvest with a share of 19.31% of the holding (RMGC 2006; Oxford Policy Management 2009). The RMGC mining project proposes to use open-pit mining technology and cyanide-based processes for gold extraction from the ore. If approved, the project will lead to the destruction of an entire mountain area, including the demolition of the 16 localities which form the Roșia Montană comună<sup>1</sup> and the resettlement of all their inhabitants. The size of the affected mountain area has been estimated at 1,277.8 hectares, to be utilised by the mining project as mines, waste dumps, dams and other project-related facilities (RMGC 2004). In the latest version of the plan the area of the project was increased to 1,663.89 hectares (RMGC 2006). However, an independent expert team claims that this surface would in fact be used only for the waste dumps and shows that the actual impacted area will be much larger and make any permanent human residences in the area impossible (Buza *et al.* 2001). A serious environmental risk of the proposed mining project is related to the use of cyanide, and especially with the construction of a 363.12 sq hectare decantation pond, which would be one of the largest in Europe.

In this paper we discuss the social and economic impact of the proposed gold mining project and assess the main alternatives to industrial development at Roșia Montană. We borrow concepts from theories of development studies, in particular with regard to critiques of industrial development and alternative development strategies for rural areas (Griffin 1999; Chambers 2005; Bunker 2005; Smith 2007). We add to the theoretical framework of alternative development the discussions on development-induced displacement, in order to reveal the complex social and economic costs of industrial development (Cerneza 2000, 2003; De Wet 2006; Koenig 2006). The related geographical analysis refers to the socio-economic assessment in small or rural communities (Bowles 1981; Barrow 2000; Burdige 2004; Taylor *et al.* 2004). Recognising that the environmental risks of the mining project are highly significant, we will focus instead on the social and economic consequences, given that they represent a distinct problem in industrial development, and in particular for Roșia Montană. In addition, we provide an analysis of the alternatives to industrial development recently proposed and offer a contribution to the debates on the development agenda for the area.

### CONCEPTUALISING INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ITS ALTERNATIVES

The so-called 'Roșia Montană problem' has been at the centre of numerous public debates during the last decade and consists in determining what is the best development strategy for the area and what potential costs and benefits the proposed RMGC project would bring to the area, the region and the country as a whole. The limits of the intensive exploitation of natural resources are widely discussed in the context of critical assessments of industrial development (Barham & Coomes 2005; Ciccantell & Smith 2005). The related topic of mono-industrial development is particularly relevant for understanding the consequences of the past economic development pattern of Roșia Montană and the prospects of the proposed gold-mining project. Several problems related to mono-industrialism are studied in Romania. Thus, Chiribucă *et al.* (2000) examine the decline of infrastructure in

mono-industrial towns, such as Călan, and also show that these are often in the situation of 'generating social unrest'. Other studies examine the consequences of mono-industrialism on public health and, in general, its environmental costs (Eckart *et al.* 2003; Smith 2007). Despite well-known problems involved in this model of development, it is still considered an important economic growth strategy, mining centres playing a pivotal role in this context. Such centres continue to be viewed as 'growth poles located at the border between centre and peripheral sub-regions' (Ramboll Group 1997, p. 5).

One of the most controversial consequences of big industrial projects is the forced migration of population or 'development-induced displacement', as it is commonly referred to in the literature. The field of development-induced displacement emerged both as a policy and as an academic response to the social and economic problems caused by population displacement, the majority of studies focusing on the interconnectedness of social, economic and political issues involved in this phenomenon (Cernea 1996, 2000; Turton 2006). The risks involved in displacement are cumulative and combine to generate a 'downward mobility', which can often reach the point of community annihilation (Cernea 2000, p. 26). In rural communities, these risks are basically connected to the loss of land. The phenomenon of community disintegration has been the subject of a number of studies (Scudder 1996; Stein 1998; Rew *et al.* 2006). The related concept of 'social disarticulation' was used by Cernea (2003, p. 40) to denote the combined consequences of forced migration and reflects the socio-economic and ethical complexity inherent in development-induced displacement, and continues to be carefully explored and documented in the recent scholarship on involuntary resettlement (De Wet 2006; Bisht 2009; Price 2009; Padel and Das 2010).

A critical component in resettlement planning is the strategy of livelihood restoration (Cernea 1996, 2000, 2003; Koenig 2006; De Wet 2006). A resettlement project in which people do not experience impoverishment, and social disarticulation does not occur, has better chances of acceptance, both by affected communities and by society in general. The

consensus in the field is that compensation alone is not sufficient for alleviating social risks, let alone sufficient for improving the economic welfare of the resettlers (Cernea 2003). The policy proposals for restoring resettlers' livelihoods range from the requirement to employ resettlers in the project (De Wet 2006) to offering the resettlers a 'share in the product of the project' (Fernandes 2000, p. 210).

A familiar distinction in development studies opposes conventional development to alternative development, the latter stemming from an array of new theoretical reflections and concrete solutions for developing areas. Several terms were proposed to refer to these new proposals in the field of development, such as people-centred development, grassroots development, 'development from below' or 'development-by-NGOs' (Thomas 2000; Willis 2005; Pieterse 2010). Initially situated outside the mainstream of development practices, they have gradually gained currency and influence both as a theoretical reflection and among institutions that shape development policy.

The main characteristics of alternative development arise from the critique of conventional development. If conventional development is centred around economic growth, based on a top-down approach, technocratic expertise and bureaucratic management, alternative development promises to offer a grassroots, participatory approach which empowers local communities, and engages them in development processes that aims to enhance their autonomy (Kingsbury 2004; Remenyi 2004; Chambers 2005). Similarly, if conventional development is based on a conception of sustainability that subsumes environmental issues to economic growth, alternative development places ecological concerns at the centre of the development agenda (Elliot 1999). Alternative development thus promises a model of development which is more open, democratic, participatory, socially responsible, environmentally sensitive, and sustainable in comparison to conventional development (Willis 2005). Gradually however, the vocabulary, not to mention several practices associated with alternative development, has found its way into the lexicon of conventional development (Pieterse 2010). This makes it more difficult to identify the discursive differences between

conventional and alternative development. In practice, and especially in underdeveloped areas, NGOs remain better adapted to facilitate an autonomous community development, although this is not always in itself sufficient for ensuring social and environmental sustainability in the longer term.

### IS ROȘIA MONTANĂ IN DANGER OF BECOMING A ‘GHOST TOWN’?

The ‘comună’ of Roșia Montană includes 16 villages situated in Alba county in western Transylvania, Romania (Figure 1). The village of Roșia Montană itself is one of the oldest attested settlements in the region. It was known as *Alburnus Maior* during the Roman Empire and it was one of the most important gold-mining centres in the ancient European world. Gold-mining activities have taken place there almost uninterrupted up until very recently. During the communist era the gold mines were further developed and attracted miners from other parts of the country. After the Romanian revolution in 1989, mining activities declined sharply, and the mines closed in 2006, amid rising unemployment and worsening ecological problems. This context calls for immediate social and economic development solutions, although it should be already noted that the kind of social problems witnessed in Roșia Montană are present in hundreds of other rural communities and small towns across the country. Currently the discussions evolve around the RMGC project and Romanian public opinion on the issue is divided into two camps, the defenders and the opponents of the project.

Assessing socio-economic impact is a key element in development planning, both in small communities (Bowles 1981) and in general (Barrow 2000; Taylor *et al.* 2004; Burdge 2004). As it was not our aim to undertake a broader social impact assessment, we analysed three main quantitative elements of socio-economic impact assessment of Roșia Montană: population growth, ethnic and religious structures as background for cultural diversity, and employment. The population of Roșia Montană gradually decreased from 3,290 inhabitants in 2002 to 2,609 in 2011, according to the last two censuses (Roșia Montană Town

Hall 2012; INSSE 2012a). After the closing of the mines, the population decreased significantly, mainly because of the lack of local employment opportunities. Mortality rates are presently among the highest in the country, due to a number of factors, such as work-related diseases and an ageing population. The ethnic structure and the religious diversity of Roșia Montană is closely related to the history of mining in the area. During the Habsburg era the area was colonised by migrant workers mainly of German and Hungarian origin, contributing to the multicultural diversity of the village. But if we compare data from the 2002 and 2011 censuses, it appears that ethnic minorities have sharply decreased both in absolute and in relative terms (INSSE 2012a).

During the communist period, a gold mine operated at Roșia Montană with 1,230 employees and a significant industrial output (Minvest S.A. Deva 2007). After 1989 mining activities continued, but there was a constant decrease in investment and in the government’s interest for the gold mining industry, which led to the decline of the industrial activities in the area. In 2006 only 360 persons were employed in the mining sector. The working conditions worsened, the ageing equipment and the deteriorating infrastructure took its toll on the general condition of Roșia Montană mines. Currently, employment opportunities at Roșia Montană are scarce and less diversified. Only eight companies are registered in the commune and the official unemployment rate is 15 per cent (INSSE 2012a). The preservation operations of the existing mines presently represent the most important job opportunity.

The demographic data above is of interest within a wider Romanian demographic context. If we compare the local data with national level data, it appears that Roșia Montană’s situation is far from exceptional. Similar data can be found in many other communities, especially in former mono-industrial areas. The demographic analysis is used by the RMGC in their advertising campaigns to demonstrate the need for immediate investment in the local industry. This campaign has had a considerable impact on public opinion in Romania, the majority now supporting the mining project precisely because it would offer employment opportunities for the local community. Accord-

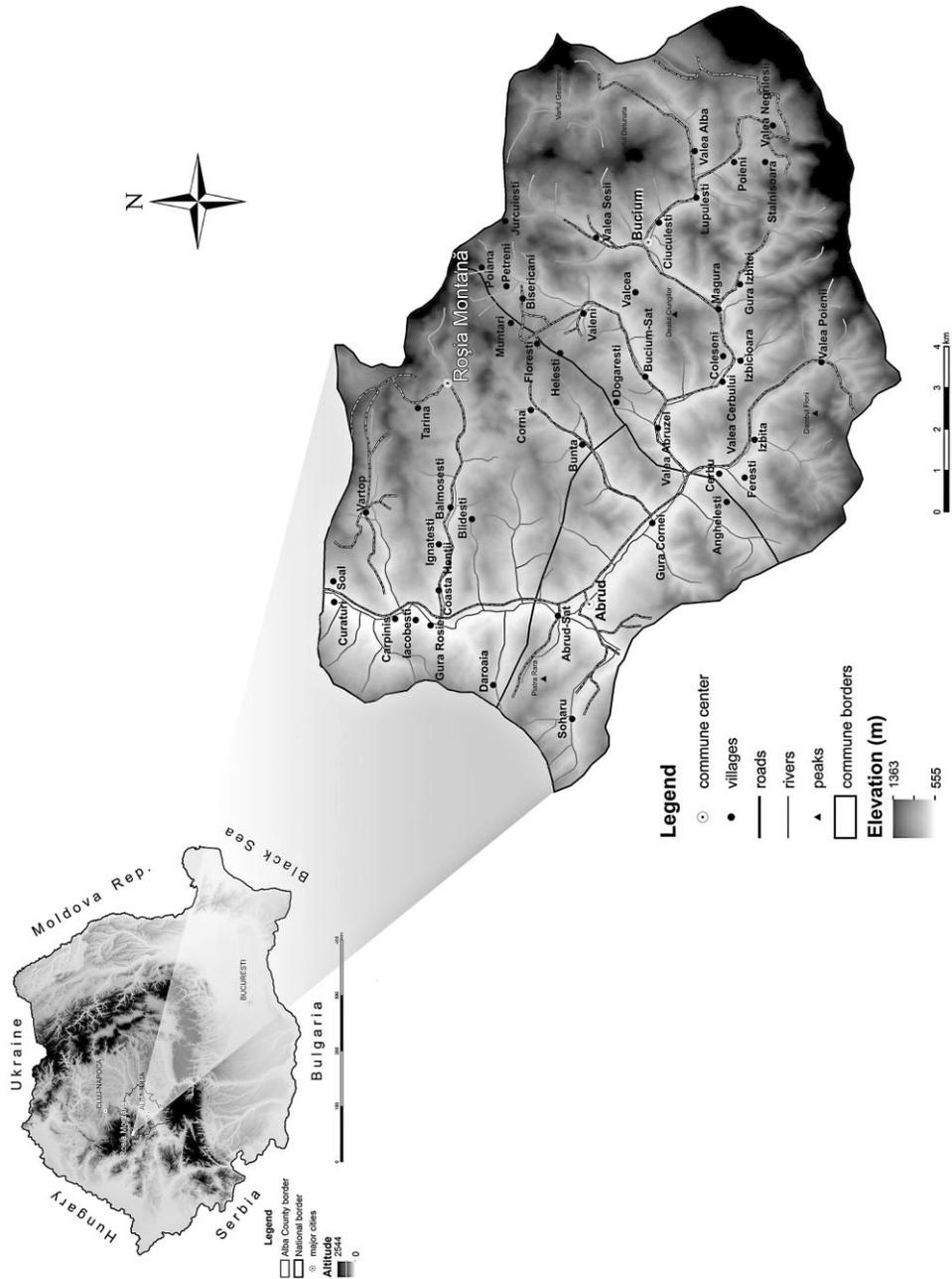


Figure 1. Location of Rosia Montana.

ing to a recent poll, no less than 80 per cent favour the beginning of gold-mining operations in Roșia Montană (Active Watch 2012). On the contrary, critics of the mining project usually point to demographic and geographic advantages on which alternative development solutions could be based (Olaru-Zăinescu 2006, 2012). This is in line with the argument that the mining project brings certain benefits for the local community, but at the same time it would generate significant costs for the rest of the population.

A significant stage was the inclusion of Roșia Montană, together with the entire region of the Apuseni Mountains in the less-favoured areas in 1999, a status which expired in 2008. According to Romanian law, less-favoured areas are defined as areas having at least one of the following conditions: are mono-industrial (with minimum 50 per cent of population employed in the respective industry), are closed mining areas, have more than 25 per cent affected by collective lay-offs, unemployment rates more than 25 per cent above the national average, or have an underdeveloped infrastructure (Annex 2, Law no. 350/2001, updated in 2006).

Mono-industrialism was a central issue in the public debates on the development strategies of the Romanian economy during the post-communist transition (Ianoș 2000; Crețan *et al.*, 2005; Dumitrescu 2007). Communist-era development policies strongly favoured the creation of industrial areas as a strategy of economic growth, but also as a means of bolstering autarky as a national economic principle. Numerous towns thus became highly specialised in specific industrial activities, such as the chemical industry in Copșa Mică, and steel production in Călan and Aiud, although in certain instances it was more a case of continuing the industrial development pattern from the pre-communist period. After the fall of communism, it soon became apparent that mono-industrial areas presented serious social and environmental problems, and were based on models of economic development that were considered incompatible with regional economic and political trends.

The declaration of less-favoured areas was at that time an important development strategy pursued by the Romanian government in many de-industrialised areas. Fiscal advantages were

offered to investors in these areas. The law also aimed at stimulating exports. Despite the expected outcomes, the actual impact of the strategy was rather modest (Renasco 2012). Among the main explanations for this record, we could mention a lower emphasis on community development, the lack of co-ordination among state and non-state actors involved in the strategy, the fact that bigger neighbouring towns and cities attracted more foreign investment, unrealistic goals, poorly defined development projects, and deficient staff training. The less-favoured areas strategy proved to be in itself insufficient in addressing the most pressing social and economic problems.

From a social perspective, mono-industrialism is considered dangerous because chances for a more socially sensitive development are generally lower than in more complex economic environments. Economically, mono-industrialism offers limited chances to access jobs outside the existing industrial profile and other economic initiatives are too dependent on the activities of the main industrial actor. From an environmental perspective, mono-industrial areas are usually among the most polluted and environmentally degraded areas in a country (Eckart *et al.* 2003). In practice however, investments in previously mono-industrial areas and the opening of new industrial sites boosted the confidence of the political decision-makers in the future of the mono-industrial towns. Examples of newly emerged or re-emerged mono-industrial towns in Romania are Mioveni with its automotive industry, Năvodari with its chemical industry, and Sănnicolau Mare with its automotive and IT industries. It is worth stressing that the proposed mining project at Roșia Montană raises precisely this fundamental issue of preserving the mono-industrial character of the area.

The total projected revenues in the proposed RMGC mining project were initially estimated at US\$3.2 billion and the Romanian state's royalties were set at 2 per cent (RMGC 2004). In an effort to obtain the green-light for the project, RMGC re-drafted the project and promises to 'infuse as much as US\$4 billion into the Romanian economy', to employ more than 2,000 people and to offer new opportunities for the development of the local community (Gabriel Resources 2012). The royalties were doubled,

being set at 4 per cent. In general, it is suggested that the mining project brings numerous advantages for the local community, for the economy, and also for the natural environment, which is currently affected by the previous gold mines operating in the region. In addition, the project would also have a significant horizontal economic impact, including stimuli for developing the connected economic sectors, especially the production of industrial equipment and construction materials.

The mining project requires the displacement of the entire population from the region, involving the resettlement and relocation of at least 974 households according to the data offered by the RMGC (2006). Population displacement raises a series of sensitive social issues. In the first phase the project, between 2002 and 2004, RMGC made extensive property acquisitions in the region, following the rule of voluntary relocation, on the 'willing seller/willing buyer' principle (RMGC 2006, p. 9). Then, the relocation operations were suspended because of significant protests against the mining project and because the final approval from the relevant Romanian authorities was postponed. Numerous independent experts signalled that the project is based on a superficial understanding of the economic and social context in the region of Roşia Montană (Bran *et al.* 2003; Toma 2012; Haiduc 2012; Moran 2012; Olaru-Zăinescu 2012). Beyond the stage of apparently generous financial compensations, the social problems of the community remain unaddressed and the resettlement project offers no policy guarantees that the current social problems would not persist or that a social crisis would not occur in the new community. The relocation started while the mining project was pending the authorities' approval, the mining company engaging in actions with enormous social and economic consequences before a legally defined framework for the case was in place (Vesalon & Creţan 2012).

### **CONSTRUCTING DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVES**

We have seen that mono-industrialism is intrinsically undermined by serious social, economic and environmental problems, which can be

overcome by the more complex strategies offered by alternative development, or by a combination of conventional and alternative measures. Alternative development strategies for Roşia Montană should first take into account its unique cultural heritage. This mainly includes archaeological sites, churches, and other historic buildings. The most important archaeological heritage consists of several old mining galleries dating back from the Roman period, but also valuable archaeological sites belonging to the old Roman Alburnus Maior settlement (Piso 2012). These are only partially open to the public. Apart from the Roman galleries, there are also valuable pieces of mining technology deposited in the local mining museum. The cultural heritage also includes several churches built mainly during the nineteenth century. Besides this, there are numerous other buildings which have a special value for the architectural patrimony, the Old Town Hall, and several monuments (Haiduc 2012; Piso 2012).

The richness of the local cultural heritage and of the environment is frequently mentioned as a significant economic opportunity for the community of Roşia Montană by the NGOs involved in designing alternative development projects in the area (The Golden Way 2012). The local environment merits particular attention. On the one hand, there is a mountain area composed of forests, pastures, valuable biodiversity, and scenery much appreciated by visitors. Of particular interest from a geographical point of view are the dispersed households, small farms and villages (Turnock 2005). But on the other hand, previous mining activities destroyed a part of this landscape by a large open pit and heavily polluted the area, waters streams being the most affected.

The socio-economic data from Roşia Montană portrays a community under significant economic, social and environmental threat. The existing data, corroborated with the estimated social and economic impact of the RMGC project indicate that both maintaining the current situation and beginning the mining project do not contribute significantly to improving the living conditions at Roşia Montană in the longer term. This calls for the elaboration and implementation of a different

development model, in which issues of community development and sustainability should be more carefully and comprehensively addressed.

Let us now briefly review several initiatives proposed by local, national or international NGOs as alternative development strategies for Roșia Montană. These proposals belong to different economic activities and cultural initiatives, all having in common the rejection of mono-industrialism, the opposition to industrial development in general, and a focus on participation and on enhancing the welfare of the local community. These proposals go beyond basic economic growth strategies and include initiatives which are more sensitive to social and environmental issues. The development proposals by NGOs can be grouped in several categories: tourism, manufacturing, small industry and farming (Figure 2). Different tourism activities have good potential. One is based on opportunities related to the local cultural context, especially the architectural heritage (churches, historical buildings, museums), ethnic and confessional heritage. The festivals and art camps recently organised at Roșia Montană (for example, the Fân Fest (Hay Festival) and the painting/wood sculpture camp) are also interesting initiatives. Another type of cultural tourism is based on the local archaeological heritage. Two different kinds of archaeological heritage are relevant, both related to the history of mining in the area. One is represented by the old Roman mining galleries, while the other is the more recent, modern mining facilities (mining equipment and galleries). In addition, mountain tourism and winter sports should present interesting options, with small initiatives already available, but which cannot develop further without investment in infrastructure. Local farming can also be regarded as an important resource for agro-tourism.

Alburnus Maior is the most known and active NGO, created to stimulate the coalescence of opposition to the RMGC gold-mining project and to offer alternatives. Their main campaign, 'Save Roșia Montană', has developed over a decade and through it the anti-mining campaigners and supporters of the preservation of the local community fought against the RMGC gold-mining project.

Although it is by no means the only organisation opposing the mining project in area, Alburnus Maior has become the core of the coalition against it. The contribution of international NGOs was also significant, their activities mostly consisting in organising protests and marches against the mining project, and various events to make known the problems of the local community at national and international levels. For example, Mining Watch constantly reported on the Roșia Montană problem, while Greenpeace was involved in organising protests against the mining project, its most recent action being a sit-in at the Ministry of Environment's office. Besides organising such actions, the NGOs contributed immensely to raising the public awareness of the social and environmental consequences of the mining project, to exposing prejudices, biases, and misinformation resulting from the pro-mining campaign of the RMGC, and to offer the background knowledge for future alternative development initiatives (Olaru-Zăinescu 2006). Not least, it offered a platform for public debates on the mining project and its alternatives in the area, and offered a voice to marginalised actors in the local community.

A well articulated alternative development project is the 'Gold Road', co-ordinated by the NGOs Floarea de colț (Edelweiss) and Alburnus Maior. Their goal is that of 'involving the locals from Roșia Montană in activities that can bring alternative income and empowering them to develop private initiatives' (The Golden Way 2012). This is a good example of an alternative development project in the field of eco-tourism and is among the most encompassing initiatives of promoting the cultural and historical heritage, but also the local environment, nationally and internationally. The benefits for the local community consist in the preservation of their heritage and the creation of new jobs in tourism and farming (agro-tourism). In more concrete terms, the 'Gold Road' consists in the creation of three tours which include the main architectural heritage (e.g. Roșia Montană's main square), the trip to the neighbouring mountains and lakes, the five local churches, and the visit to the smaller villages in the area (for example, Bucium) (The Golden Way 2012).

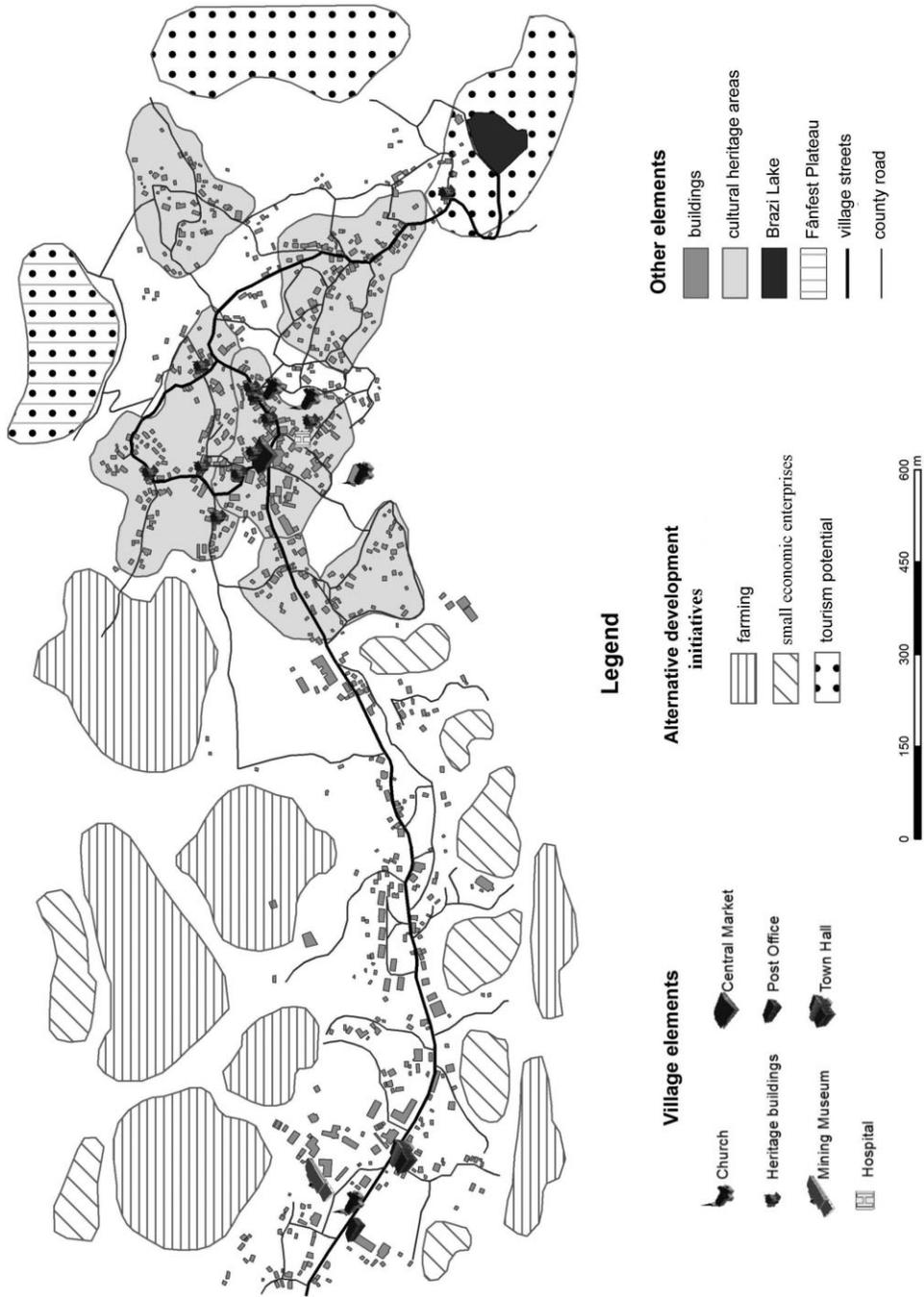


Figure 2. *Alternative development initiatives at Rosia Montană.*

The rich global experience in restructuring economic activities following the closure of mining activities offers valuable lessons for future projects in post-mining development at Roșia Montană. A significant aspect is that the very existence of the entire mining infrastructure is not necessarily a burden and can become a unique asset for future development strategies (Eckart *et al.* 2003; Harfst & Wirth 2011). In the field of mining restructuring and post-mining development various strategies were experimented with in the last decades. One main approach is to shift the industrial profile of the mining area. For example, the IT and electronics industry was developed as an economic alternative to coal mining in the Ruhr region in Germany. In Bochum for instance, a professional training centre was opened in the location of the former Zeche Holland mine (Eckart *et al.* 2003).

Shifting the industrial profile of a former mining area is not the only, and in many instances not the most appropriate, strategy for re-development. An alternative to shifting the industrial profile is the implementation of small, local initiatives which rely more on bottom-up, participatory approaches. From the numerous examples of such initiatives, we could refer to the case of the reconversion of mining in the north-eastern part of Belgium (Baeten *et al.* 1999) or to the situation in the Netherlands, in the region of Limburg (Derix 1989). Such cases show how the previous mining industry can be successfully replaced by small enterprises and tourist facilities.

The restructuring of mining is obviously dependent on the economic, geographic and social circumstances, the best new development proposals being adapted to the socio-economic context. For instance, a project like the 'C-Mine renovation' in Belgium, consisting of the creation of a cultural and tourist centre at Winterslag mine, near Genk, cannot represent a realistic alternative in other areas which are not close to important cities or lack a good transportation infrastructure (Inhabitat 2011). Mining galleries can also be used in a variety of small industries and manufacturing. Interesting proposals are, for instance, the opening of cinemas in the old mines or using the galleries as warehouses for a variety of products needing the temperature and humidity parameters

usually found in mines. A restaurant was opened in a former warehouse and the old gold refinery was transformed into a residential building in Yellowknife, Canada (Silke *et al.* 2005).

Besides other shortcomings, shifting the industrial profile at Roșia Montană is further limited by the poorly developed local infrastructure. Farming represents a more valuable, and currently under-utilised, economic opportunity. The land suitable for agricultural activities in the area includes 4,161 hectares, out of which only 225 hectares are currently cultivated with crops, the most important of these being fruit trees adapted to the local colder climate. The population employed in agriculture works mainly in cattle farming, the number of small, and subsistence farms being 1,042. Dairy products and home-made spirits are usually produced by these small farms. The agriculture equipment available in the area is scarce and old, for example only three tractors are registered in the entire 'comună' (INSSE 2012b). This shows that farming in the area has good potential, which is currently less exploited, but is potentially one of the most productive economic assets in the area. Additionally, opportunities which are at this time less exploited are recreational activities at the surrounding lakes, both significant assets for recreational activities in the context of agrotourism and mountain tourism. Other opportunities would require major investment in infrastructure and are therefore dependent on more complex development planning, involving local and central institutions and agencies.

#### **FRAMEWORK FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AT ROȘIA MONTANĂ: LIMITS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS**

The RMGC gold-mining project is criticised both for its social and environmental consequences, which calls for rethinking the development framework for the area of Roșia Montană. Tourism for example, avoids the specific environmental dangers posed by industrial development, while manufacturing and farming contribute to the prosperity of the families living in the area over a longer period of time. Cultural initiatives related to the local architectural heritage help the preservation of

the historical background of the area, enhancing the stability and sustainability of smaller economic projects. Other projects, such as festivals and arts camps help promoting the village both nationally and internationally. But alternative development projects have their own limits, which have to be carefully addressed in order to improve the prospects of a genuine alternative to conventional development.

Tourism is generally seen as a strategy for rapid economic growth, mainly in small towns (Prosser 1994; Giaoutzi & Nijkamp 2006; Ferreira 2007). There are different opinions on the development of tourism at Roşia Montană. While some authors (Paven-Gavrilă & Muntean 2012) agree that tourism is a unique alternative for the former mining community, others show that it could not be regarded as a panacea for the development problems facing rural communities in Romania (Matei 2010). In general, the limits of tourism-based development are connected to the stress on the environment and on the community. First of all, it can have a negative environmental impact, mostly correlated to winter sports, to the building of infrastructure (new roads and buildings, ski slopes, ski lifts), to road traffic and air/phonetic pollution. Another limit is the vulnerability to fluctuations in the national and global economy, meaning that during an economic slowdown fewer tourists would be attracted in the area. Tourism can also gradually change the local landscape and architecture, with newer tourism facilities replacing the traditional architectural landscapes and also changing the natural environment. Another important limit is related to the cultural impact, tourism transforming the local community into providers of services for tourism (Butler 1990). Sometimes, and especially in peripheral destinations, as the former mining areas, tourism can also deteriorate the social order of local communities (Buhalis 1999).

Development planning done solely by NGOs can also be vulnerable to other factors, such as lack of co-ordination among various stakeholders, implementation deficiencies or unrealistic estimations of results. Therefore, alternatives to industrial development have to be carefully integrated into more comprehensive frameworks and state institutions should be involved in ensuring infrastructure development, pro-

viding adequate economic incentives and an appropriate legal framework. For instance, the inclusion of Roşia Montană in mono-industrial areas limits the types of development projects which can be implemented in the area, basically of those projects which are not compatible with the declared main industrial activity (Toma 2012).

Alternative development initiatives are usually based on a shorter-term and project-based funding. While this ensures the flexibility of development planning, it also makes it vulnerable to changes in the local socio-economic context, to changes in the legal framework and also to changes in the national development policies. The recent experience at Roşia Montană shows that the contribution of NGOs with small projects is fundamental for exploring development alternatives. But it also points to the fact that the survival of such projects over a longer period of time depends on the capacity to fund their projects and on their full commitment to the role of stewards for the local community. As already pointed out, participatory approaches are further limited by the fact that the majority of the local population reportedly supports the mining project. By involving their specific goals and practices, global NGOs can also interfere with the participatory processes on which the local alternative development projects are based.

Another important limit is that NGOs do not always promote participatory development. NGOs opposing the mining projects are not the only organisations acting in connection to the 'Roşia Montană problem'. At least two local NGOs, Pro Roşia Montană and Pro Dreptatea (Pro Justice) are currently involved in supporting gold exploitation in the area. Leaving aside the ambiguity of their denomination, they co-operate with the miners' trade union Viitorul mineritului (The Future of Mining) and claim to represent the entire community's economic interests. Claiming that mining is a traditional activity in the region and that the RMGC project represents a unique economic opportunity for the local community, they participate in an active pro-mining campaign. Their main activities include the release of open letters to officials and stakeholders, organising public consultations, publishing materials on the RMGC project, and co-ordinating the

activities of the pro-mining activists (Pro Roșia Montană 2010). They are opposed to declaring the area a UNESCO site. Pro Roșia Montană was specifically created by the RMGC to defend the mining project and mobilise the local community and the general public in favour of the mining project. This demonstrates that NGOs can also be effectively used as tools for muting public discontent and disarticulating protests, as it happened with the counter-initiative against the anti-mining campaign. It should be therefore noted that NGOs are not in themselves a warrant that collective decision-making is always open and democratic, especially in smaller communities (Kapoor 2002a).

Participation is among the most sensitive issues in development. Alternative development promises indeed to offer a more participatory approach, but in practice this is tremendously complicated to accomplish. In the case of Roșia Montană, many development projects proposed by NGOs formally include the local community in designing, implementing and evaluating the proposed projects. However, the actual involvement of the local population remains weak and the proposed alternatives are many times perceived as unconvincing and unfeasible (Earth Works Action 2012). In parallel, RMGC mobilised them to defend the project and involved them in a well-funded pro-mining campaign, organised by media and PR professionals. The financial and human resources employed by NGOs and by bigger companies in promoting their projects are many times so unequal that the local population's preferences and representation of opportunities fall prey to the interests of the economically stronger actor. After all, alternative development remains a contested terrain, and the mere involvement of NGOs in development is not in itself a warrant of a democratic process. And there is always the danger of uncritically accepting alternative development simply due to its appealing rhetoric of offering a 'different' and an 'unconventional' development (Pieterse 2010).

Development-by-NGOs is generally considered the privileged method for ensuring a more democratic alternative to conventional development (Bebbington *et al.* 2008). However, in concrete contexts, it is not always possible for NGOs to offer the appropriate context

for participation. Organising public consultations for example, require complex logistics and funding which are not always available (Turnock 2004). Even when participation in development processes is guaranteed, there can still be a limited empowerment achieved for local communities. Thus, there is a risk in alternative development for communities to remain dependent on the support of external actors and less reliant on their own capacity to develop. Being formulated in a context of an environmental conflict, the majority of the proposed alternative development projects seem to last as long as environmental NGOs and other protesters are active in the region. These alternative projects are likely to disappear once the mining project is cancelled. Moreover, participatory development cannot always overcome the divergent interests within the local communities and the tensions between them and other stakeholders. Not least, sometimes the lack of an adequate theorisation undermines the framework for participatory development (Kapoor 2002b). This confirms that alternative development remains a contested terrain, where various interests meet and sometimes collide (Robertson & Shaw 1998).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The limits signalled above do not call for abandoning alternative development. At Roșia Montană, this should not be interpreted as an argument for industrial development and for the beginning of the mining operations. On the contrary, these limits draw attention to the fact that alternative development needs a better policy framework and a broader participation which should include the members of the local communities, NGOs, but also state institutions and other political and economic actors. The emphasis on local solutions sometimes leaves unaddressed the structural problems of the Romanian economy. Local development is vital, but is undermined by significant risks without a better and more complex co-ordination, involving all stakeholders and decision-makers.

The community of Roșia Montană was involved in proposing several alternative projects in co-operation with international and national NGOs. These alternative models were

produced in a context of environmental conflict and as a specific response to the resettlement and relocation plans of the mining company. The reinterpretation of the idea of 'sustainable development' was a vital aspect of the movement against the mining project. Members of the local community and a large coalition of NGOs participated in the debate for promoting diverse alternatives to the mining industry in the region, ranging from ecological farming and light industry to creating a national park in the region as possible alternatives to the mining project.

The protests against the mining project were integrated into a larger movement engaging many actors from Romanian society and numerous international NGOs. This is a unique case in Romanian post-communist history when groups from civil society opposed a business development project. The magnitude of the movement, the complexity and novelty of repertoires of action, the new language of protests and the magnitude of the coalition have no precedent in post-communist Romania. The capacity of the local community to challenge the conventional development agenda is one of the contributions to the movement against the RMGC mining project, with the international NGOs making a major contribution in shaping the counter-development discourse. To a significant extent, the movement against the mining project succeeded in reinventing public debates on the current transformations of post-communist economies and societies. In this respect, the Roşia Montană movement is more than a single-issue movement and acts as an important element in coagulating the contributions of civil society actors and state institutions to the creation of a new participatory culture. It was a valuable opportunity for the local community to interact with civil society and experiment with new forms of social action and eventually became the first case in post-communist Romania in which solidarity beyond narrow social or economic interests was reinvented.

The assessment of development alternatives for Roşia Montană indicates that the available alternative development projects represent challenging prospects for the local community. These projects include both tourism initiatives and small economic enterprises, which are able

to provide sources of income for the local population and respond to the imperative of a more socially and environmentally sensitive, but also a more democratic development. However, these alternatives should be integrated into a comprehensive development framework for the entire area, which includes opportunities for a broader participation and co-operation among different stakeholders and state institutions. The situation at Roşia Montană represents the most important challenge to the accepted development patterns in Romania and the first significant attempt to question the strategy of exploiting natural resources for short-time profits and disregarding the social and environmental consequences. It is, therefore, a unique opportunity to signal the deep-rooted problems associated with mono-industrialism, but also a chance to consolidate alternative development processes in post-communist economies.

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#### Note

1. In Romania, 'comună' is an administrative-economic unit which includes at least one village.

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