

DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC COMMITMENT IN RELATION TO ONE ROMANIAN CULTURAL SITE

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ABSTRACT

Romania has nine properties ranged by UNESCO among the world heritage sites, namely seven cultural properties and two natural ones. This study takes into account one cultural site, Rosia Montană Mining Landscape, famous for its diverse and outstanding underground gold mines which date back to ancient times when the territory of today's Romania was occupied by the Romans. Between 2010 and 2013, Roșia Montană was brought into sharp focus because of a mining project aiming at extracting gold using cyanide, which divided the Romanian society into two parties: for or against gold extraction in the area. In this context, the present study aims at analysing a series of discourses against the project in order to highlight the strategies and the arguments put to good use by public figures with the view to gaining the population's commitment. Therefore, we dwell upon two advertisements broadcast on the Romanian national television and one declaration written by the Romanian Academy and we argue that persuasion and commitment are reached by cognitive means and by exploiting the feeling of pain, caused by the potential loss of the cultural site, and the feelings of unity and belongingness, due to the preservation of national patrimony.

Keywords: Rosia Montana Mining Landscape, persuasion, emotion, public space, television campaign

Rosia Montană Mining Landscape joined the Unesco patrimony in 2016 and it is one of the seven Romanian cultural properties registered by this organisation. It “features the most significant, extensive and technically diverse underground Roman gold mining complex”¹ dating from the 2nd-3rd centuries. During the Roman occupation of the region, the site underwent gold-mining procedures which became known to the present time society due to the wax-coated wooden writing tablets found in the area, providing “detailed legal, socio-economic, demographic and linguistic information about the Roman mining activities”. (*Ibidem*) It is the only cultural site considered to be in danger and therefore requiring implementation of adequate urban development measures in order to keep being preserved as a historic monument.

Before becoming part of the Unesco patrimony, more precisely between 2010-2013, Rosia Montană became an important topic in the Romanian public space when a Romanian-Canadian gold extraction company aimed at starting the exploitation of the region through a cyanide-based technology. This decision, which also involved the Romanian government through the issuing of a law regarding the stimulation of the development of mining activities in Romania, largely impacted on the society itself which witnessed two opposite campaigns (for and against the implementation of the project) developed by partisans and opponents, respectively. Both parties displayed a large arsenal of tools (advertisements, official letters to authorities, talk-shows, etc.) in order to gain people’s commitment on their side.

If in a previous study (Scripnic, 2016), we have identified the pathos-oriented rhetorical strategies used in the discourse in favour of the implementation of the project, in this contribution we are interested in dealing with the discourse against the project from the same perspective, namely to identify what strategies are put to good use by the partisans of the project in order to persuade the public and to make them deliberate against its accomplishment. The fact that we chose to dwell upon two advertisements and a declaration is not random: on the one hand, the advertisements were largely publicised and therefore the public was familiar with their content; on the other

¹ <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1552/>

hand, we took into account one of the declarations written to the Romanian authorities by the Romanian Academy. These declarations were not so largely discussed upon in the public space, therefore the large audience was not fully aware of these proceedings.

The study is structured into two main parts: the first part presents the context of the research, with emphasis on the characteristics of the Romanian society as a sample of “cultural public space” (McGuigan, 2005, 2010); the second part tackles the discourse analysis *per se* (and the analysis of visual elements in the case of the videos) with the view to pointing out how commitment is targeted by means of rational argumentation (in the case of the official declaration) and of pathos-centred argumentation (in the case of the two advertisements).

1. Roșia Montană – the centre of a heated debate

Rosia Montană Mining Landscape takes its name from the village of Roșia Montană (in an approximate translation *the Red Mountain*) located in the Apuseni Mountains, Department of Alba, in the central-western part of Romania. The name of the village comes from the river that crosses it, namely the river Roșia (in an approximate translation *the Red River*), whose reddish colour is explained by the iron ores existing in the area.

Famous for the gold ores the region has borne since ancient times, Roșia Montană has attracted numerous investors, among which the Romanian-Canadian company called Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) which sought to “develop the most modern mine in Romania, in Roșia Montană, bringing major benefits to the Romanian economy”². Moreover, the company was due to “set up a new standard for responsible gold mining, both at the level of the European Union and worldwide”. (*Ibidem*)

However, the implementation of the project raised a lot of questions in relation to:

- the archaeological site which would have been damaged;
- the human community living in the area who would have been

² Taken from the official site of the company, <https://en.rmgc.ro/about-us/about-us.html>

relocated, together with local symbols such as churches and cemeteries;

- a possible ecological disaster because of the entire technological process and particularly the cyanide neutralization and the final tailings storage.

In this context, the Romanian public space witnessed numerous reactions from state officials, religious and cultural authorities, popular public figures, inhabitants of the area and ordinary people who did not hesitate to take stance and elaborate on the topic. We adopt in this paper the perspective on the public sphere put forward by McGuigan, (2005, 2010) whose concept of *cultural public sphere*, although drawing on Habermas’ notion of *bourgeois public sphere* (1989), better reflects the deliberation process which took place in the Romanian society. The cultural public sphere refers to “the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain through affective (aesthetic and emotional) modes of communication.” (McGuigan, 2010: 15). In this sphere, deliberation is sought for through both affectivity and cognition since “aesthetic and emotional engagement with lifeworld issues might be felt passionately and experienced as especially meaningful.” (McGuigan, 2005: 435)

If the debate on public issues is dominated, in Habermas’ terms, by valid arguments and reason, the cultural public spheres are largely influenced by emotion and feeling perceived as efficient tools in stimulating debate. (Popa, 2008: 110) In our particular case, the huge debate generated by the mining project intermingled logical argumentations and pathos-oriented strategies meant to raise awareness towards a crucial social matter and to make citizens commit to one of the two sides. According to Plantin (1996: 4), three operations are paramount in order to achieve the full persuasion of the audience: a discourse not only has to teach, but also to please and touch the audience because the sole intellectual, rational approach is not sufficient to bring about action.

2. Strategies to gain public commitment in relation to Roșia Moantână Mining Landscape

This second part aims at analysing a series of discourses against the project in order to highlight the strategies and the arguments put to good use by public figures with the view to gaining the population's commitment and to convincing the authorities of the inadequateness of the project. Therefore, we dwell upon two advertisements and the declaration of the members of the Romanian Academy and we argue that persuasion and commitment are reached by both highly irrefutable arguments such as statistical and scientific data as well as by exploiting the feeling of pain towards an irreplaceable loss and the feeling of solidarity and unity due to the preservation of national patrimony.

2.1. *The analysis of the two videos from the advertising campaign*

The two videos, filmed almost entirely in black and white, were made upon the request of a non-governmental organization named *Alburnus Maior*, settled in Roșia Montană (in fact, *Alburnus Maior* is the Latin name of the very village of Roșia Montană), whose main goal was to fight back the initiative of implementing the mining project. The videos last about one minute each and feature two very famous actors belonging to two different generations: the actress Maia Morgerstern and the actor Dragoș Bucur. They are filmed in the very heart of the Unesco heritage site of Roșia Montană and the majestic mining landscape can be seen in the background of each actor.



Image 1 – Print screen from the first video³



Image 2 – Print screen from the second video⁴

Both advertisements follow the same pattern, the same scenario: the actress/the actor walks to the centre of the arena and takes a

seat at a wooden black table; they introduce themselves, point out the purpose of being there; they take off all the golden objects they wear (one earring and a tooth are brutally pulled out) and put them on the table; afterwards they directly address the ones that want the Romanian gold; a zoom is made on the golden objects on the table (at this point the videos are no longer in black and white so the golden objects become salient) while on the screen is projected the message “*A man is worth more than the gold he wears*” followed by the image of the Unesco heritage site with a message that continues the previous one “*So is a country*”. The advertisements close with the invitation to the public to be interested in Roșia Montană (“*Learn the truth about Roșia Montană, not about its gold*) and to save this part of patrimony (*Save Roșia Montană*).

The advertisements strongly impact the viewers by meaningfully merging carefully chosen words and phrases, well written scenography, dramatic scenes, and emotional performance from the actors as well as devastating music. They reveal a pathos-centred rhetoric meant to persuade the public through the exploitation of feelings of sorrow and extreme pain and the projection of personal affliction to a larger scale, namely the suffering of a whole country: just as a person is in deep physical and moral pain when something valuable is taken by force away from him, so is a country when it is brutally deprived of its treasures.

However, the analogy between the human pain and the country’s devastation goes even further to another level of interpretation: people in the videos accept willingly to donate their gold, by causing themselves tremendous pain, they perform the act of pulling out earrings and a tooth – in the same way the country accepts without fight to have its gold extracted through environmentally toxic methods (the use of cyanide known to cause irreversible damage to a very large area surrounding the mining site). Thus, the message becomes an indirect accusation targeting the politicians⁵ who were in favour of the project. The extreme meteorological phenomena (the wind in the first

⁵ In 2009, the Romanian Minister of Economy announced “we want to include the swift start of Roșia Montană Project in the governmental programme as the gold market is prone to such projects” (The original declaration is available at <http://www.kmkz.ro/investigatii-2/rosia-verde/%E2%80%9E-cianura%E2%80%9C-sparg-e-guvernarea-romaniei/>)

video and the heavy rain in the second one) are also suggestive of the feelings of sorrow and sadness and complete the black outfit of both actors. The message of mourning is rendered at two levels, namely the symbolism of the colours (black) and the imagistic of the “nature in pain” suggested by the meteorological manifestations.

Moreover, despite the few words used in the advertisements, the discourse is worth analysing since it conveys a clear-cut message of opposition regarding the mining of the region. After introducing themselves, the speakers point out the purpose of being there: to make a donation to the ones who need gold.

“I am here to make a donation to those who desperately need gold” (1) “I am here to make a donation for those who are trying to extract all our gold” (2)

In this first part of both videos, the speakers refer indirectly to the other party as *“those who”* without naming them, but characterising them by their main feature, their need for gold. In the first video, the emphasis is placed on the subjective adverb *desperately* which is meant to label the other party as people who are willing to do anything to reach their goals: their desire of having gold goes beyond any reasonable explanation and argument. In the second video, the accent falls on the end of the sentence – *all our gold*. Thus, it is established an opposition between those people and us and our gold as they attempt to take what is ours and not part of it, but until the gold deposits are exhausted (*“extract all our gold”*). Therefore, the speakers perform indirect speech acts of criticising the ones in favour of the project by highlighting their defining feature: their boundless need for gold which urges them to take all that belongs to somebody else.

After taking off the gold they wear (a bracelet, a chain and two earrings in the first video / a wedding ring, a watch and a tooth in the second video), they assert:

“Here you have, gentlemen. All my gold...Just leave us alone!” (1)

“All my gold...I hope it’s enough...” (2)

In the first video, the speaker addresses directly the opposite party by using the appellative *gentlemen* and the injunctive phrase *“Just leave us alone!”* while blood is dripping from her ear as she pulled by force

one of the earrings. The message is: take my gold, I am worth much more than that. The pronoun *us* (“*leave us alone*”) including the speaker and all inhabitants sharing the same beliefs, echoes the possessive *our gold* in a co-referential process. In the second video, the speaker draws the conclusion – *I hope my entire gold is enough for you to take it and leave us and the country alone*, while his mouth is getting filled with blood because he used a dentist tool to pull himself a golden tooth from his mouth. The final act of spitting the blood out of his mouth is directed towards the opposition in a double-targeted movement: on the one hand, it points to the intensification of the sufferance felt by one individual, and through extrapolation by a lot of people in the country, and last but not least, by analogy and personification, the pain felt by the country itself; on the other hand, it is an indirect act of showing contempt and denigration towards those capable of coming and extracting “*all our gold*”.

The slogan of the advertising campaign (“*A man is worth more than the gold he wears...So is a country*”) comes at the end of the videos and is visually divided into two parts displayed on different images on the screen. If the analogy between the people and the country is covertly rendered during the videos, in the slogan, it becomes salient – the indefinite article *a man / a country* has a general value of referring to all human beings and all countries. The image moves from the gold one man can have and “donate” to the richness of a country. The analogy is facilitated by the connector *so*, linking the premise to the conclusion. The videos end with:

- an invitation to the audience (especially to those who are not fully convinced yet) to find out the truth about Roșia Montană, not about its gold, echoing the previous message according to which a country or a region are more valuable than the gold they may have: they bear history, natural sites and long-lasting traditions.

- a cry for help under the form of an injunctive phrase: “*Save RM!*”

2.2. *The analysis of the declaration made by the Romanian Academy*⁶

The full title of the declaration⁷ is “*The analysis of the Romanian Academy regarding the project of mining exploitation at Roșia Montană. Risks related to the environment and the sustainable development of the region.*” The introduction contains 21 arguments against the implementation of the project that are further explained and developed in the main part of the declaration. In the conclusion, the authors directly address the Romanian state which is kindly asked to closely look into the project before taking any final decision as Roșia Montană is “a spiritual sanctuary with heritage testimonies of unique universal value” and the Romanian state has “the moral obligation to respect, support and protect it, in order to transmit it to future generations with the same values and meaning.”⁸ The declaration closes upon a series of commented excerpts from the Romanian mining law (about 10 pages).

If the advertisements strive to gain the audience’s commitment through pathos-oriented strategies, the declaration seeks to reach persuasion through objective facts stemming from the analysis performed by specialists from the research institutes of the Academy. Therefore, at the very beginning of the declaration, the argument from authority places the subsequent argumentation under the range of highly irrefutable arguments, at least for the larger audience.

In order to convince the audience to be against the implementation of the project, the authors develop an entire *rhetoric of the damage* that pertains to different areas:

- *the damage of the community* (a 2000-year old community is destroyed as people are relocated and buildings, churches, historical monuments are demolished);
- *the damage of the archeological site of Alburnus Maior*, unique in the world and of great historical and cultural values;

- *the damage of the landscape* which is seriously “mutilated” during and after the surface exploitation and the creation of waste accumulation containers;
- *the damage of the environment* as the “huge quantity” of cyanide and heavy metals give real reasons for concern, while the dam built to prevent leakage does not guarantee protection in case of extreme situations.

Another direction of the argumentation developed in the declaration refers to *the poor project management* which involves that fact that:

- the whole process of extracting and processing gold is disadvantageously planned;
- it does not take into account the collateral risks such as the risk of earthquake propagation;
- the waste management plan should include not only monitoring activities, but also current operating activities; the same plan does not lay emphasis on the polluting potential of waste water;
- there is a far too simplistic approach of cost covering of any unforeseen event;
- there is no real guarantee regarding the investments in restoring the damaged environment.

Moreover, the financial aspect is also brought to the fore by the Romanian Academy:

- the financial benefits for the Romanian state cannot compare to the negative consequences of the project; Romania could find other ways of exploiting its national resources;
- the lack of studies and reports on the cost-benefit relation based on UE documents.

The last arguments are arguments from authority, creating thus a circular structure of the declaration which opened up with other arguments from authority (the institutes of the Romanian Academy): the authority of the European legislation that the project infringes; the authority of the civil society and institutions (such as the orthodox and catholic churches) which manifested against the project, the authority

of patrimony organisations, such as Europa Nostra, which enlisted RM site among the seven most endangered heritage sites.

For all these reasons, the authors conclude that the project is not a solution for the sustainable development, it is not an answer to the economic and social problems of the region. This is, in fact, the very first argument that opens the declaration of the Romanian Academy.

The overall intention of the declaration is to provide objective arguments based on scientific facts and on measurable data. However, some subjective axiological elements are purposely inserted in order to increase the commitment to the standpoint defended:

- adjectives: it is *unacceptable*, *catastrophic* effects, *bad* choice of the dam location, *huge* quantities of cyanide, *simplistic* approach, *insignificant* benefits, *large* lacks documents, etc.
- adverbs: it *seriously* endangers the region, *disadvantageously* planned;
- nouns: serious *mutilation* of the landscape, concern, *disagreement*;
- verbs and verbal expressions: the calculations *give the impression* they are accurate; the project *infringes* a series of conventions; it *endangers* the region.

Conclusions

In this study, we have firstly provided a presentation of Roşia Montană both as a village and as a mining heritage site. In the context of the mining project proposed by the Romanian-Canadian company, the Romanian public space has become a scene of vivid exchanges allowing for the deliberation in favour or against its implementation. Therefore, the commitment of the citizens is reached by both cognitive and emotional approaches, playing on reason, but mostly on emotion. The advertisements analysed mainly exploit, on the one hand, the feeling of greed of the project owners who want to take all the gold and, on the other hand, the sensation of tremendous pain felt simultaneously by people and country when the gold is brutally taken away. Moreover, the declaration of the Romanian Academy aims at getting people's engagement through objective data and scientific facts stemming from the institutes of the academy. However, numerous

traces of subjectivity could be identified in purposely chosen lexical elements. Both types of public manifestations (advertisements and declaration) represent an appeal to solidarity in order to save a part of the Romanian patrimony and rely on the idea that a national property, and more particularly a heritage site, should be neither estranged nor endangered.

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