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# Macro Structural Changes in Romania and Strategies for Local Development. Case Study of the Zărnești (Piatra Craiului) Area

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## Introduction

Romania, a new member of European Union since January 2007, has experienced a deep social and economic change after the end of the Ceaușescu regime. According to the World Bank (2005: 1), “Romania faced some of the worst starting conditions among the transition economies, including extremely distorted markets, all-encompassing state ownership, over-dependence on energy and heavy industry and a badly eroded capital basis, including a precarious physical infrastructure. Science, technology and intellectual capital were crippled by long years of international isolation”. Having in view the intense shock of the transition, the sustained economic growth was achieved only after the year 1999 (Stănculescu & Berevoescu, 2002: 189) and it was only in 2003 that Romania regained the GDP level it had in 1990: six years after Hungary and eight years after Slovenia. The turnaround was possible because major reforms paved the way for the surge of investments to exploit more effectively the opportunities provided by Romania’s labour market while a greater spending power has stimulated production for the domestic market. But we argue that this growth has also been positively assisted by a regional policy and by positive efforts made by the local government and NGOs to promote the potentials existent at the grass-roots; thereby encouraging investors to look beyond the most attractive locations that attracted a disproportionate share of foreign capital during the 1990s. While Bucharest – with earnings up to 100% higher than the national average (Leißle, 2006: 11) – has a low unemployment rate, the depressed North-East is growing much more slowly (Benedikt, 2006). In this paper we outline the interconnected key elements of the transition process before examining the spatial dimensions of planning and the development of local plans in a studied area: the Zărnești area, bordering the Piatra Craiului Mountains.

## Macro-structural changes in Romania

After 1989, the post-socialist states of Europe confronted with an economic downturn, largely due to the collapse of the markets of the old Eastern block. Romania was especially dependent on the former Soviet market and also embarrassed when the reunification of Germany part of the hard-currency trading sphere occurred; and also when most of the former Yugoslavia was engulfed in civil war and Serbia was subject to UN sanctions. But most countries in South East Europe struggled to adapt and some of them are still far away from the goal of EU accession. There was much uncertainty in the early transition years. With little available capital for state investment Romania’s priority lays in land restitution and limited support of industry.

Privatisation moved slowly until the European approach to a market economy was accepted by the centre-right government of 1996-2000 and extended into the energy sector during the period 2001-2004. Meanwhile the negative growth of the 1990s discouraged any foreign direct investment (FDI) as the country's low credit ratings did, while the poverty problem limited spending power despite a nominally large home market. Romania and the neighbouring Bulgaria find themselves now with the lowest purchasing power of all the former socialist states already members of the EU. As compared to the EU first-15-countries they merely have a quarter of their purchasing power; rising to 35% for EU 25-countries. The unemployment and the heavy rural dependence on subsistence farming combines with a low gross-hourly-wage of € 1,04 in 2005, as compared to that of € 14,88 for EU-15 (Leißle, 2006: 11). Fortunately the EU-accession process has been accompanied by a massive reform programme contributing to an accelerated economic upswing. According to the German Federal Foreign Trade Agency, GDP increased in the first quarter of 2006 by about 7,0%. There is a risk that the rising consumption will attract more imports with consequent inflation and overheating (cf. Bundesamt für Außenwirtschaft, 2006). A rising basic rate and other attempts to limit credit have had only limited success in restraining consumption (Anders-Clever, 2006) but fortunately, the investors' confidence remains high and the value of the Leu is rising against the Euro and especially against the US Dollar.

### **Sector trends**

As the Romanian industry found its markets dwindling and its products uncompetitive over quality and price, it was necessary to restructure it with a more efficient plant and a greatly reduced workforce (Wagner, 1996: 217); while the withdrawal of the state from economic management in favour of private ownership meant that manufacturing lost its former dominant macro-economic role. Between 1990 and 2003 the number of employees in the industrial sector decreased from 4.005 to 2.055 thousand people (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2004), but because the service sector could only gradually compensate for the job losses many of the unemployed persons had to return to work in agriculture (Dăianu et al. 2001: 33); thus, Stănculescu & Berevoescu (2002: 190) explain, "the structure of employment experienced two main shifts, one from industry to agriculture, and the second from the state to the private sector: employment in industry has substantially decreased (from about 40% in 1990 to 23% in 2000), while the share of the population active in agriculture massively increased from 29% in 1990 to over 40% in 2000" – despite a GDP share of only 13% for agriculture and forestry (own calculations after Institutul Național de Statistică, 2005). Hence the shifting of society into an agrarian one (Benedek, 2000: 42), as Romania's rural areas absorbed a large share of the 'losers' of the transformation process (Ursprung, 2002: 74). In Romania's rural areas 70% of the active population are working in agriculture as compared to the 30% of Hungary and Poland, and in some branches e.g. vegetable production, the contribution of subsistence agriculture reaches 90% (Bezemer & Davis, 2003: 7). Given the land restitution process and the overall decrease of waged employment it is inevitable that agriculture, for its most part, "is neither a source of prosperity, nor does it serve as an engine of economic growth" (Stănculescu & Berevoescu, 2002: 199). In the context of limited governmental investments in rural areas, rural living conditions are generally poor.

### **Current governmental strategies for national and regional planning**

A new start was possible from 2000 with the advantage of rising taxation income, improved financial ratings and EU money. The axes of the national plan were then geared to further economic growth and poverty relief (Turnock, 2004a). The first axis stresses upon the development of the productive sector and its related services, with greater competitiveness and the promotion for the development of the private sector. This called for an active investment policy for an ongoing process of industrial restructuring – including energy, mining, metallurgy,

engineering, chemicals and light industry (ANDR 2000: 311f). There was also a support for SMEs, hindered in rural areas due to the difficult access to finance and lack of supporting services such as marketing assistance and poor access to research and accelerated technology transfer.

The growth of tourism required the refurbishment of hotels and the development of rural tourism linked and associated to multi-activity strategies with special attention given to the projected Europa resort and Dracula Park project (both abortive), the Predeal-Azuga area and 'Golden Bucovina' areas and well as to the coast and the Danube valley (ANDR 2000: 313). Another aspect concerned with the strengthening of the human resource potential was enabling the workforce to adapt to the market demands. This meant a better educational qualified workforce through an enhanced capacity of the university system. The country's infrastructure, including modern energy and transport systems, was also highlighted. The social policy was essential for reducing inequalities and promoting social cohesion within communities, as well. This called for social assistance (initially social aid – 'ajutorul social' – organised by local authorities) but now there is a national system of minimum income guarantee) as well as for improved social services and faster job creation in new enterprises so as to reduce unemployment.

## **Regional Development**

The regional measures were initially taken ad hoc like the programmes for the Giurgiu and Vaslui areas launched during the 1996 election campaign; followed by a policy for 'less-favoured areas' in 1998/9 in connection with the restructuring of the mining industry. Then there were the 'restructuring areas' attracting support for SMEs within groups of towns with high unemployment rate; as Popescu (2000: 261) noted: "monoindustrial towns are severe 'poverty pockets' due to the lack of alternative activities and incomes. They are prone to economic crisis and social risk", sharply contrasting to cities like Timișoara, which were the main beneficiaries of FDI. There was also an encouragement of initiatives from the local authorities and private companies in setting up industrial parks, as well as European finance for cross-border cooperation. However by 2000, as part of the EU accession process, eight macro-regions were established. These comprise groups of counties - each with their own regional development agencies and councils (representing the constituent county councils, town councils and rural areas - created under the EU accession programme (Turnock, 2001b). They were also included in the national plan priorities because, for a balanced and sustainable development, it was "essential that responsibility and accountability be accepted at a regional level for the development of regional strategies" (ANDR, 2000: 330), without mentioning the broader concern over structural adjustment "to establish and drive towards competitive regional economies [by creating] the conditions for the development of an innovative capacity of territorial communities and for enabling them to undertake new activities (Ibid: 337) and also by "stimulating the endogenous potentials /competitive capacities of the various areas (Ibid: 338f).

## **Rural Areas**

Whereas many towns suffered from the high unemployment rate during the 1990s, most of them have the necessary resources to attract new industrial projects. But most rural areas (accounting for 46,6% of the population in 2003) are constrained by a relatively poor infrastructure (despite some recent improvements, notably through funding from the EU Special Accession Programme for Agriculture & Rural Development: SAPARD) and this is expressed by the high levels of community poverty, especially in Moldavia (Lazaroiu et al. 1999). The problem of access to services is all the greater where the population is highly dispersed among small villages. Indeed, Romania has a total of 13,000 separate villages (many with outlying hamlets) which have developed over the centuries in relation with the local agricultural potential. During

the interwar years actions were taken to formulate local plans on the basis of local agricultural potentials and baseline surveys were carried out in about sixty villages all over the country (Golopentia & Georgescu, 1942). Unfortunately the Second World War and the subsequent communist revolution occurred before the process could proceed, but a powerful eugenics movement made a significant contribution to public health (Bucur, 2000) and self-help was fostered through a royal fund under the leadership of sociologists (Rostas, 2000). When communism emphasized the 'top-down' central planning (which left local communities with little initiative) also creating a larger scale of farming through cooperative and state farms, a consolidation of rural settlement was contemplated. President Ceaușescu's 'systematizing' evolved as a draconian project to eliminate up to 8,000 villages and create stronger district units (each based on towns, set to double the number from c.250 to about 550) each of them looking after its constituent cooperative and state farms coordinated as a single complex associated to an enhanced level of local processing (Turnock, 1991a). There has been some return to this older methodology through the work of social scientists (Bădescu et al. 2000), who are now noting so much the traditional agricultural profiles as the opportunities in the secondary and tertiary sectors; the poverty levels; and the response in terms of emigration. The breakdown of commuting (Von Hirschhausen, 1998) and of a very low level of employment in manufacturing and services (Vincze, 1999) has forced the majority of the population into subsistence agriculture and the resulting poverty problem itself has generated a substantial corpus of literature (Teșliuc, et al., 2003). Rural diversification has become a priority (Government of Romania 1999) and the national development plan includes support for agriculture and rural development in admitting demographic ageing; a low and poorly-diversified level of employment emphasizing on inefficient agriculture and poor rural infrastructure. This objective is being advanced through actions that redistribute farmland and create larger, more viable holdings (Dumitru et al., 2004; Turnock, 2005a) and also by the EU SAPARD programme (Government of Romania, 2000) with a focus on rural infrastructure, farm modernisation and diversification, and food processing capacity.

### **The Carpathians**

A further dimension arises through the central importance of the Carpathians in the national life. Despite the lowlands with their major agricultural potential and their settlement systems involving relatively large compact villages, physical constraints limit enterprise choice and give birth to a 'rural model' grounded in multi-activity (Velcea, 1995), modified during communism through the rapid growth of industry inducing rural-urban migration and substantial commuter flows. Since 1989 the Carpathians have become a particular focus of interest due to the influence of veterinary expert Radu Rey, already evident under communism, by publishing an important book advocating more decentralisation in mountain areas (Rey, 1979) and again in centre-left politics in the early 1990s when a Commission (later Agency) for Mountainous Zones was established within the Ministry of Agriculture. Rey was able to introduce the Council of Europe mountain science agenda; emphasising the disadvantages suffered by the mountain regions (limited choice of farming systems due to climatic and topographical constraints) and calling for plans for each mountain area in terms of both ecological and socio-economic measures (Beckmeroff et al., 1996). Carpathian actions slowly occurred although rural diversification was much-discussed and research stations were opened (Turnock, 1993) for the centre-right government of 1997-2000 limited resources in favour of more comprehensive measures to relieve poverty (noting the problems in certain lowland areas that had good natural conditions for farming but with a large dependent population with little alternative for employment. But the succeeding government of 2001-2004 eventually passed the mountain law first envisaged in 1996: officially recognising a mountain region in terms of the relevant administrative units and providing fiscal advantages in terms of agricultural subsidies. There is a vision of multi-activity going beyond what has been achieved on short term as a response to poverty (Van der Ploeg & De Rooij, 2000).

At the same time, further external input arose through the WWF Danube-Carpathian

programme, endorsing national parks while proposing further protected areas, with sustainable development throughout the Carpathians, if we consider the mobility of large carnivores (Turnock 2001a, 2002). And although Romania was able to steer SAPARD's priorities away from agricultural-environmental programmes and point them to aspects of modernisation, the national development plan includes provision for protecting and improving the quality of the environment – solving pollution problems and supporting sustainable development and ecological reconstruction.

### **The need for local strategies: the 'local' in the Carpathians**

The Communist plans broke down into local strategies but almost always in the context of a 'top-down' rather than a 'bottom-up' process. There were attempts to reconcile ecological, economic and demographic parameters with intensive-labour agriculture and limited mechanisation where sufficient labour was available so that unemployment was theoretically impossible (Kovacs, 1996; Păcurar, 1996). There was of course a coercive element, while ecological considerations were compromised in the interest of plan targets. But the capitalist drive for high productivity introduces now a further complication. It may be that the scope for combining more accessible procedures for business start-ups and management training with a stimulating infant industry taxation (and local development organisations to consolidate agricultural surpluses) has not been completely exhausted to the point where it may still be possible to boost the activity and employment according to the potentials of each area and thereby generate the income with which to consume and create further demand. This would be in line with Doppler's (1994) concept of 'farming systems' specific to each area arising through the structure of farms and enterprises inherited from the communist past (and further back) and the nature of the transition process in each area: the opportunities and the way they are perceived by farmers. These ideas have a wide relevance across the entire region (Alanen, 2004) involving diversification which requires both adequate services supplied by accessible commercial centres (Maurel, 1998; Turnock, 1998, 2000) and the growth of entrepreneurship at the grass-roots (Smallbone & Welter, 2001). Such are the keys to a transition from rural poverty to rural development (Chirca & Teșliuc, 1999) with proper usage of the human resources (Ionete & Dinculescu, 2000). We therefore argue for paying attention on local strategies and it is particularly important that Carpathian *rural* areas should formulate a vision of the future which can then be promoted through political and business channels. Recognising the strong support structures of the Carpathians, Popov & Lubieniechi (2001: ix) consider that "the mountain communities with a tradition of independent farms and a long history of operating independent businesses are more able to develop business plans and initiate new business activity". And while recommending commune development plans, they also commend "partnerships among groups of communes with common problems where these can be addressed more effectively at a larger scale" (Ibid: .v.). There have been spontaneous reactions along these lines, with downsizing in factories and reduction in public transport services, leading to greater entrepreneurial activity, including rural tourism grounded firmly in the informal sector (Stănculescu & Ilie, 2001). Given the significant progress made in agro-tourism (Mitrache, 1996) it has been possible – as in other Carpathian areas (Slee, 1999) - to replicate the 'feel-good factor' arising from a modest growth of agricultural incomes within Polish villages where the perceived success of the first entries attracts emulation. The more dynamic rural markets are being promoted to urban status and there are surveys (e.g. Turcanasu, 1996) that point to the extension of this process to ensure that every rural district is close to a range of urban services (Surd, 1991; Turnock, 1991b). In this respect there is continuity with the communism's 'sistemizare' (systematisation) but without the coercion being applied to force rural dwellers to leave their homes. Instead of radical consolidation, inherited settlement networks are being protected and the infrastructure gradually reinforced.

But organisations are also important in the opinion of Popov / Lubieniechi (2001: v): while recommending commune development plans they also commend "partnerships among groups of communes with common problems where these can be addressed more effectively at a larger scale". Some progress has been made in developing local institutions, although the

development of NGOs is very much in its infancy and many of the organisations that do exist have only limited funds and perspective.

These groups may have a development focus like 'Pro Vişeu' in the Vişeu de Sus area of Maramureş; while others have an ecological one (Buza et al., 2001) reflecting the intensive activity in environmental education which is evidenced across the region (Turnock, 2004b). An interesting blueprint is provided by the town of Cugir and its constituent villages (Primăria Oraşului Cugir, 2006) although it is restricted to a single town council and is concerned very heavily with public spending.

### **The Cultural Factor**

A vision of the future will be based not only on the objective local resources but also on 'culture' that reflects local traditions and experience (Cobianu-Bacanu, 1998; Turnock, 2003). Thus, there are quite different levels of interest/commitment towards land-based activities e.g., stocking levels – partly as a result of the transhumance systems - were evident across seven Carpathian areas for statistical data were collected at a communal level (Turnock, 2005b). Reducing all animals to a single figure based on meat production and likewise reducing all land types to a single set of land units a clear contrast emerged between two areas that retained a high level of commitment to family farming and two others that have traditionally depended on the nearby industrial complexes. In the Apuseni Mountains there were 2.00 animal units per land unit on average during 1998-2000 and 2,23 units per household while Maramureş returned figures of 1,24 and respectively of 1,72. On the other hand in Reşiţa, despite the loss of industrial employment, the figure was much lower in relation to land units (0,47) and likewise in Retezat (0,72) adjacent to the Jiu Valley coalfield. Although animal units per household were comparable (2,30 and 2,36 respectively) there was a less intensive use of land. In case of the other areas, Buzău and Vâlcea inclined to the first strategy (1,13 and respectively 1,28 animal units per land unit) and the largely Hungarian Harghita district to the second (0,86).

Hence it is argued that perceptions will vary as to how feasible it is to exploit the land as opposed to other labour strategies including emigration. It should be added that stocking levels have decreased everywhere since the 1980s, partly because the fodder deliveries secured under communism in return for livestock production plans have been discontinued. But how can the basic agricultural activities be best diversified? In part of the Buzău area, multi-activity is being advanced by a return to farm-based distillation, using local plums and apples, and also by the use of redundant business premises for wood processing since the major forest zones lie only at a short distance to the North (Muică & Turnock, 2000; Muică et al., 2000). The promotion of a local market centre (Pătârlagele) to urban status in 2005 offers the possibility of a further growth in manufacturing and services. At the same time many young people are working away from the area – often abroad – and while this will inevitably continue, it is socially desirable that locally-based employment should be maximised. These local studies are discussed in greater depth elsewhere (Turnock, 1997: 43-63).

### **Case study: The Zărneşti area of Braşov County: characteristics and local development strategies**

We present this case study because it derives from our separate but complementary interests in the area that cumulatively extend throughout the transition period and in one case are ongoing. It is an appropriate area for our purpose (figure 1) because there are several development options, deriving from the proximity of a large city (Braşov with a population of some 290.000 situated 25 km to the South-East) which has played a key role in Romanian affairs since the medieval period. The city's role as an urban growth pole was reinforced under communism with its name changed for a few years to 'Stalin' (Bogdan et al., 1970). It attracted many migrants and commuters in the early communist years (Panaite & Chiţu, 1959) to the point when the typical village in area was strongly characterised by daily or weekly travel to work, as in the case of Drăguş near Făgăras (Barbat, 1980). Nevertheless the agricultural effort

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remained high e.g. on the edge of the study area like in villages such as Poiana Mărului although it was easier to increase income by working more shifts than keeping more animals (Beck, 1976; Randall, 1976). The demographic strength of the towns was set to increase through the rural planning ('sistemizare') (the systematisation) project which included the proposed new town of Feldioara (Sampson, 1984). However the study area also has a long-established local urban interest through a town within the district, Zărnești (25.000) where the original interest in paper and cellulose production has been diversified through armaments and engineering. Formal urban status was granted in 1956 and the blocks of flats built on the edge of the town contributed to the further growth of the town.

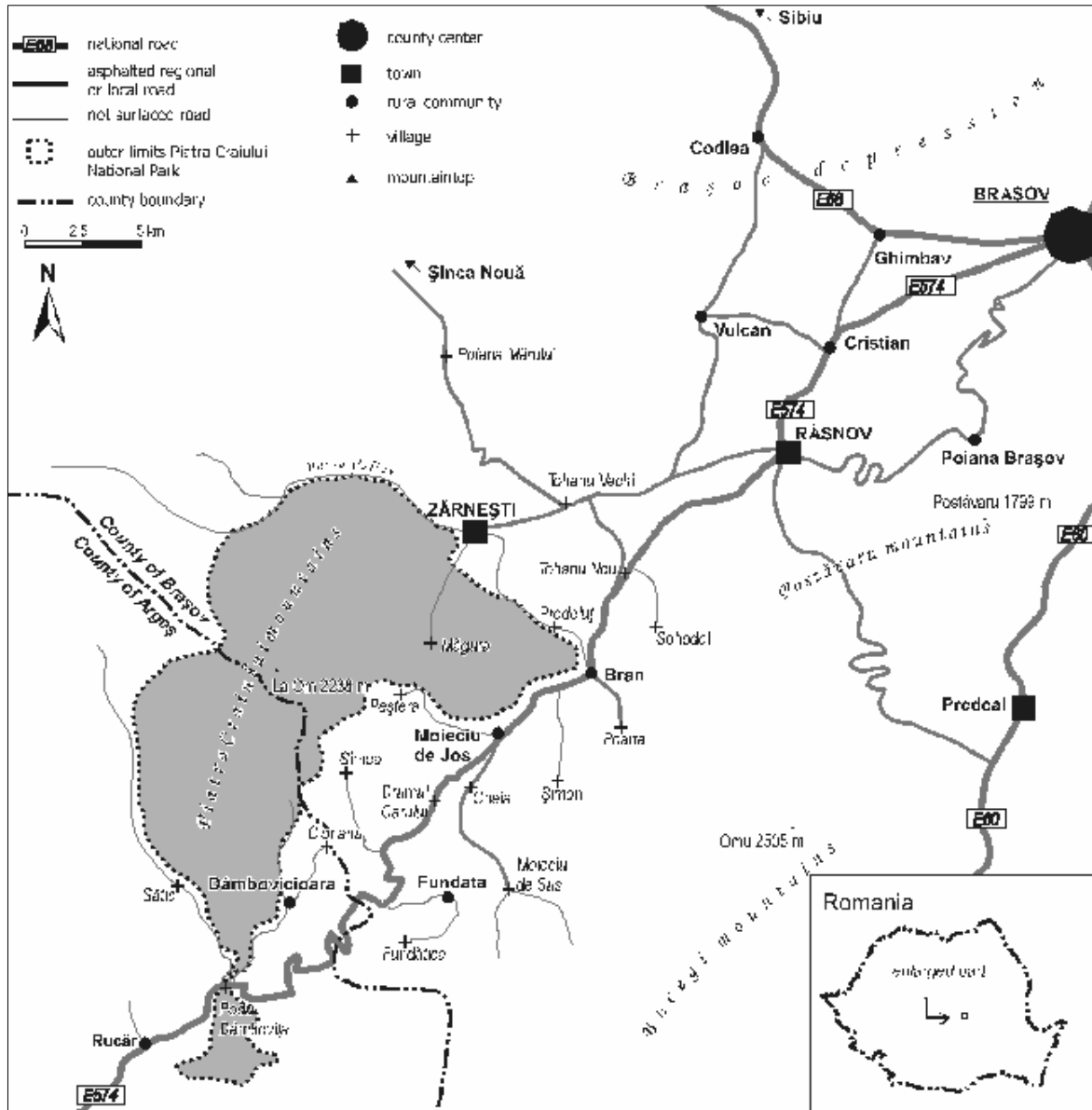


Figure 1. The study area

The villages in the surrounding communes of Bran, Fundata, Moieciu and Poiana Mărului comprise some large nucleated units complemented by highly dispersed settlements – such as Fundata, Măgura, Peștera and Șirnea - on high surfaces at 1.000-1.400 m in the foothills of the Piatra Craiului massif. The characteristically small farms concentrate on pastoral practices and although they were not collectivised under communism the forests were nationalised in 1948 this depriving the villagers of a significant source of income. As a result the

villagers became heavily dependent on the industries in Zărnești and “were able to combine the benefits of worker status (and the high wages paid in the engineering industry) with an element of self-sufficiency” (Muică et al., 1999: 306). However the infrastructure in the dispersed mountain settlements remained relatively poor both as regards consumer durables in the home (which could be proven by the empirical study) and community facilities like schools, shops and public transportation. There are certainly “problems for commuters and schoolchildren when the main road may be as much as five kilometres away (and when parents have to make tracks for the children in the event of snow” (Ibid: 309). As a result the younger families especially have tended to move down into the valley since 1989 which has meant demographic ageing among the people who remain. Finally ecological issues are involved in the study because the whole area borders on the Piatra Craiului national park (the Northern and Eastern sides) while the village of Măgura actually lies within it. With an area of 14.800 ha, it is one of Romania’s twelve national parks. It was created in 1990 and an administration was provided in 1999 based in Zărnești with the task of protecting both the environment and the local communities in a large relatively inaccessible area with a small staff. The special protection zone of the park (IUCN category II) contains some 4.100 ha of forest presently managed by the National Forest Administration and cutting is not allowed apart from sanitary needs (e.g. a bark beetle attack in 2004). In the buffer zone (IUCN category V) there are about 3.300 ha of forest (1.450 ha in Brașov County and 1.897 ha in Argeș).

Across the study area the population trends show a high degree of stability in the rural areas (figure 2).

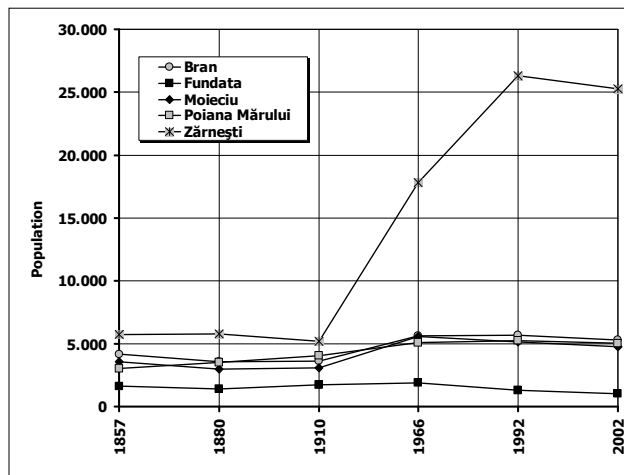


Figure 2. Population trends 1857-2002.

Source: Rotariu et al. 1997a; 1997b; Romanian census 1966, 1992 and 2002. 1910 data was obtained Romanian Academy files amending the Hungarian census to fit current local government areas.

Fundata has changed little over the last 150 years, while the other three communes show stability during 1857-1910 and again during 1966-2002 with a substantial rise between the two periods. However it is interesting to see that during 1857-1910 Poiana Mărului moved ahead of Bran and Moieciu, possibly because the traditional long-range transhumance was being scaled down

through the growth of arable farming on the plains and more use had to be made of local grazing with consequent expansion particularly on the Southern flanks of the Perșani Mountains above the central village of Poiana Mărului. Meanwhile, Zărnești shows relatively little change during the nineteenth century, but there was a five-fold increase from 1910 to 1992 followed by some decrease over the last decade.

### Preliminary strategies for local development

The town of Zărnești today has been confronted with a large unemployment problem of up to 40% since the restructuring of its factories led to massive job-layoffs. An industrial park was established in 2004 to revitalise the area and 16 companies were settled by the end of 2005. Meanwhile some people have left (hence the recent decrease in population) while the proportion of multi-generation households is well above average: a clear reaction to economic stress through the need for families to keep together. However the council is aware of the importance of conservation and tourism at the ‘entrance’ to the dramatic landscapes of the Piatra Craiului, readily accessible from Bucharest and one of the most frequently visited massifs in the country. The council has shown support for large carnivore conservation and related tourism initiatives by preventing harmful development in the Bârșă valleys including a quarry



project. And at the beginning of 2007 a new visitor centre was opened in the town, financed mainly by the Global Environment Fund as part of a larger biodiversity project in Romania. But the town will need to increase its attractiveness by rehabilitating decaying housing blocks and overcoming the problem of dust in summer arising from the many unpaved roads. Although there are twelve guest houses in use, tourist infrastructure (e.g. restaurants or tourist trails) must improve and the development of second homes in the Bârșa valleys should be regulated as suburbanisation trends could accelerate with the wealthier people moving out of the blocks in Zărnești. Industrial and commercial developments taking place across the Brașov area – much favoured by western industrial companies and commercial developers – could also pose a threat.

In some rural parts of the study area tourism has taken a firm hold. Bran, with around 5.000 inhabitants and lying just around 15 kilometres away from Zărnești, has been transformed into a centre for rural tourism in the last few years. Bran Castle, recently purchased by Brașov County after the restitution to the Habsburg family, is much-visited on account of its associations with the Dracula myth. The area is also popular for weekend-tourism, because of its scenic location between two mountain massifs: Piatra Craiului to the West and Bucegi on the Eastern side. Many guest houses have been built on the farms in the last few years and other households offer private rooms. Agro-tourism provides a means of diversification for subsistence-style agriculture and questionnaire surveys reveal that exactly a quarter of the responding households had some income from tourism in 2006 (as against 9,6% in the whole study area). Thus allowing for some under-reporting it seems obvious that tourism is not yet a viable source of income for the majority of the households. This becomes even clearer in the context of a mean guesthouse capacity of only ten beds and reports from over half the respondents with guest houses that tourism does not contribute for more than half of their household income. Meanwhile the outlying villages have been much affected by unemployment after 1989. 59.4% of those interviewed in Măgura declared that at least one member of their household was unemployed due to the restructuring of the industry in Zărnești (Piatra Craiului National Park, 2005). This led to an initial fall in the living standards - as noted in other mountain areas with limited salary income and a dependence on pensions and social benefits (cf. Muică et al. 2000: 165). However the situation has recently improved with the growth of guest houses and second homes. Although there are very few architectural and other controls and tax income, for the local authorities has been too weak to allow any improvement of the infrastructure, most of the households have positive attitudes towards these trends. The future of the business is partially dependent on the management of the national park where a threat is posed by the restitution of the forests in the buffer zone. In Brașov County about 800ha were transferred to the Zărnești council and some 100ha to private individuals (while large areas have already been returned to the Argeș County). There are also plans to restore some 80% of forests in the special protection zone to former owners – mainly villagers of the area (Costescu, 2006). The danger lies in the illegal cutting of forests. In the IUCN V areas, the maximum size of clear cutting has been reduced from three hectares to one in 2006, but this is still quite large for a national park and further (illegal) activity can easily stem from inadequate supervision and the limited sanctions that can be applied. Other threats arise from the overgrazing of the alpine pastures, illegal or semi-legal buildings and further uncontrolled tourism. While the park is well-known in the area, 81,1% of the respondents said they had only an 'imprecise' or 'very imprecise' knowledge of its boundaries.

## Conclusion

We have argued for local planning to provide a sustainable vision for the future (in line with what is already evolving in other areas such as Cugir) as a basis for the development of local identity, the search for investors and the drafting of appropriate physical plans. This should not be restricted to individual local authorities, but should involve cooperation between groups of communes with a central place that is an actual or potential town. Such projects could be useful exercises in local democracy and empowerment, stimulated by such initiatives as the European Commission's 'European Village' competition of 2005 which involves communities in

such matters as waste management and cultural projects (Infoeuropa, 2006). At the same time the plans should not be monolithic because, as the Zărnești example shows, there are clearly large differences within the study area in terms of income and age structures which need to be addressed in terms of micro-local development paths. Tourism should certainly expand in Bran, Moieciu de Sus and Șirnea in order to become a viable income source for the local households and this will require a more intensive marketing and an improvement of standards to also attract guests from Western Europe. The area will benefit from development in the Brașov-Prahova axis as a whole, also involving the city, the mountain resorts (Azuga-Bușteni, Poiana Brașov and Predeal) and the smaller towns like nearby Râșnov where the historical centre is to regain its medieval shape with the help of European finance (including a lift to the fortress). In what Bran itself is concerned, it will be useful to improve the connections with the national park e.g. the planned joint-venture between the park and Bran museum to build here apart a second visitor centre in the area (cf. Global Environment Fund 2003: 8f.) to stimulate interest in both the castle (in its Transylvanian context) and the park. But despite its importance in Bran, tourism cannot be important everywhere. It is hardly an option for households living in blocks in Zărnești and even Bran requires some income alternatives apart from tourism. For the outlying villages like Măgura and Peștera local infrastructure (roads and water supplies) are crucial for the retention of young people who have the greatest capacity to innovate and thereby diversify the agricultural interest - as Muică et al. (2000: 171) point out in similar situations in the Buzău Subcarpathians. Agro-tourism can certainly play a role on the basis of the traditions that make this area special; also in close cooperation with the park as a source of environmental education and with respect to local building traditions. But advantage can also be taken of forest restitution for sustainable development of the forests with a vision of community woodlands supporting more local processing rather than distant complexes (Ioraș et al., 2001). This would rest on the conception of Beckley (1998) recognising the diverse resources of forests and growing interest in certification for wood products involving a 'chain of custody' extending back to the raw material source (Fortech, 1999). In these ways traditional cultural values based on a 'love of the land' can be safeguarded over desires for short term profit driven by poverty.

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