



The Botanical Reservation in Zau de Câmpie (Mureș County) a Model of Management by Rural Wisdom

Vasile Cristea

“Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca
Romania



Abstract

The study presents, in nutshell, the main characteristics of the botanical reservation in Zau de Câmpie (Mureș county) and the way Marcu Sâncraianu, a countryman, has contributed to its management. We can refer, in this respect, to a threefold symbiosis: countryman-reservation-protected species (*Paeonia tenuifolia*), a symbiosis with great impact on the village's life. The examples of interventions and planning initiated by the “Latin-speaking countryman” can represent sources of inspiration for similar reservations.

Introduction

Considering the program and the topic of this symposium it is not misplaced to ask ourselves why a presentation on a botanical reservation when we want nothing but approach the important aspects related to the *Rural Space and Regional Development*? The answer to this question can be quite simple -because the reservation is located in a rural area or because it was the organizer's request - or developed:

a. because the rural area can not be limited only to the precincts of a village and to the surrounding crops;

b. because the regional development can not ignore the overall resources available in that area or in that village neither can it overlook the general principles for a lasting development stated by the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro (1992);

c. because, in our opinion, we should have an inter- and pluridisciplinary approach of these two components of the symposium as this represents the only successful global and systemic interpretation of

the socio-economic and ecological realities in a certain area; because such pluridisciplinary debates, already organized in the summer of 1996 (see CRISTEA V. coord., 1997), have led us to the most interesting conclusions and convinced us that, today more than ever, life can perpetuate on the Blue Planet provided specialists in all fields cooperate and that we make aware all the social and political forces. In a word, the aim of our presentation is to demonstrate (if it was necessary) that we can share experience having in mind the threefold symbiosis: a countryman (Marcu Sâncraianu, fig. 1.a).



Figure 1.a. The countryman Marcu Sâncraianu.

a vegetal species (*Paeonia tenuifolia*, fig. 1,b)

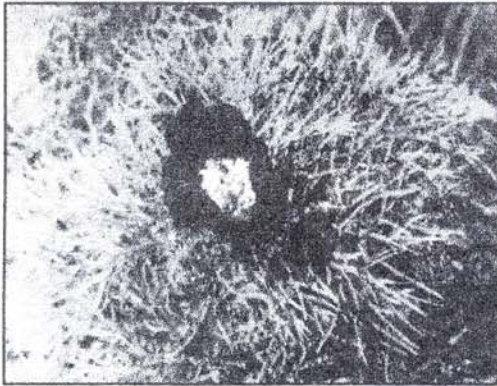


Figure 1, b. *Paeonia tenuifolia*.

and a reservation (Zau de Câmpie). Last but not least, we would like to pay homage in our lines to the Romanian peasant, in general, as a challenge for all who make common cause with the future generations.

1. A brief Description of the Reservation in Zau de Câmpie

Zau de Câmpie is a locality placed in the heart of Transylvania, 21 km far from the town of Luduș, considered one of the largest villages in the so-called Transylvanian plain (fig. 2 a and b). The botanical reservation, also known as the "field of peonies", stretches 3 km north-west from the center village on the place called "Valea Botei Mari". Here, on the southern-eastern slope of 15-20°, 455 m.s.m. altitude, a reservation was built up, thanks to professors Al. Borza's effort, which has had this status since 1932 (Act 1149). According to the present system that classifies the protected areas (IUCN) the reservation is in the IVth category, i.e. natural reservation of botanical interest. If it stretched initially over 2.3 hectares, later, thanks to the countryman we will talk about later, a new area of 0.2 hectares, 150 m far from the first plot, was made available to visitors.

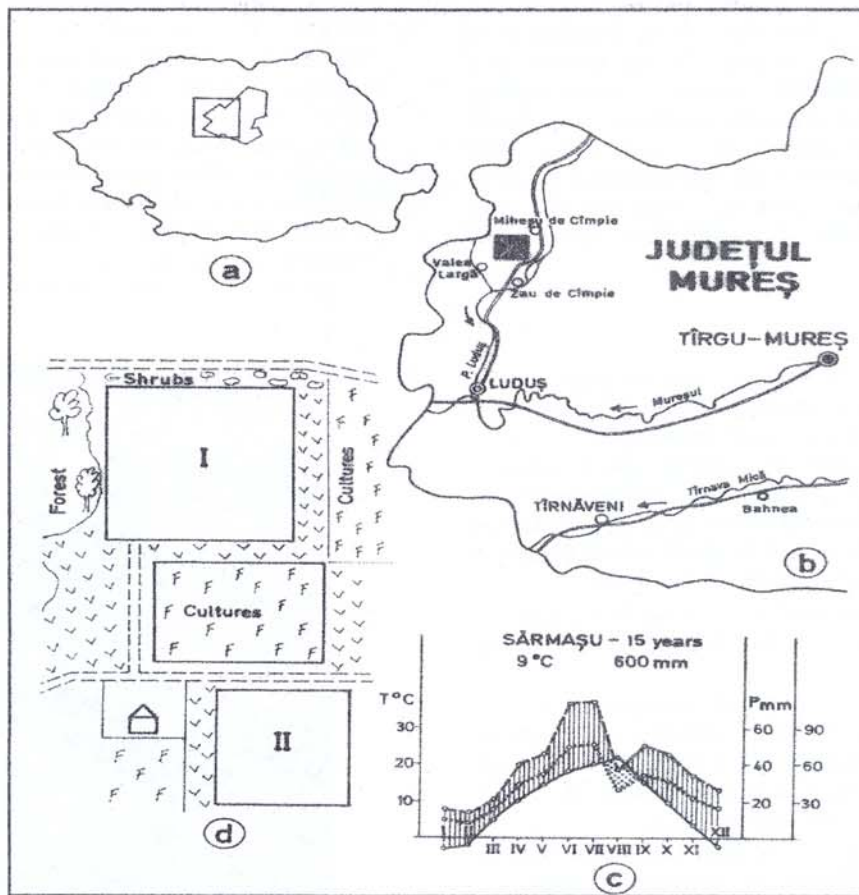


Figure 2. Location of Mureș County (a) and of the Zau de Câmpie botanical reservation (b). Climadiagram (c) and location of the two protected areas (d).

Though a small area, the reservation shelters and ensures the perenniality of the only species of *Paeonia tenuifolia* in the Carpathian arc. Typical of the Pontic steppes, this species is considered in Zau de Câmpie (but once in other surrounding localities, too) a xerotherm relic from the warm post-glacial period, perpetuated for about 10,000 years.

The orographic (south-eastern slope on the first plot, south-western on the second plot), geological (clays, diorite and tertiary sands), edaphic (medium leaching chernozem) and climatic conditions (600 mm rainfall, 9°C multianual average temperature, absolute temperatures of -20.5° C and +36.5°C; fig. 2, c) have facilitated the growing of a xero-mesophile grassy vegetation where rare and endemic species from Romania's flora can be found. Thus, besides the *Paeonia tenuifolia* we can mention: *Crambe tataria*, *Nepeta ucranica*, *Serratula wolffi*, *Centaurea trinervia*, *Cephalaria radiata*, *Jurinea mollis* ssp. *transilvanica*, *Salvia transsilvanica*, etc.

Within the reservation and its surrounding area, SĂMĂRGHIŢAN and OROIAN (1997) identified 359 sp. and 13 ssp. of cormophytes (12 taxons more than MITITELU, 1990), a high level of flora diversity if we take into consideration the area explored. Further to a complex analysis the authors concede that the locality belongs to the Euro-Siberian region, central European-east Carpathian area, Transylvanian depression division, Transylvanian Plain district (BORZA, 1960, ap. BORZA and BOŞCAIU, 1965) and underline the fact that "...the flora is highly Pontic-continental revealing its relic character..." (p. 274). The vegetation was related to two associations by MITITELU (1990): *Salvia nutantis-Paeonietum tenuifoliae* as.nov. (considered by the author a "...type of Transylvanian outpost of the Pontic, Dobrogean association...", p.18), covering almost the entire reservation and *Origano-Brachypodietum pinnati* Medw.-Korn.1963, with phytocoenoses located in microdepressions.

2. The Contribution of M. Sâncrăianu, countryman, to the reservation management

2.1 Who is this countryman ?

In order to make the reader understand why we paid attention to this countryman's achievements it is appropriate to introduce him:

- he was born on 25 September 1917 in a middle peasant family who were living in Zau de Câmpie;

- he attended the primary school in the village (four years) and then only two years of secondary school in the town of Luduş as he had to break it off because of financial reasons;

- in 1939 he was drafted into the army and remained on the eastern front where he was awarded two medals (1941 and 1942); throughout his military service his nickname was "*the peasant sergeant*";

- in 1944 he came back to his home village where he worked as a farmer as well as a farming agent for the mayoralty;

- for 54 years he has been involved in the reservation management and security without being assigned this task and without having his work paid. His devotion is due to professor Al. Borza who strongly impressed the child he was in 1925-1926, especially during his presence to the picnic organized on 10 May on the "*field of peonies*" and to his commitment to take care of these peonies;

- step by step, he was able to recognize all the plants in reservation and even to know their scientific name, thing that made the newspapers call him in the '70s "*the Latin speaking countryman*";

- he has been a devoted collaborator of the "Al. Borza" Botanical Garden, his name being mentioned in almost 20 issues of *Index Seminum*;

- he has a small plot in his garden where we can find the main species available in the reservation (he created the plot just to observe and study their development) and his beautiful library will impress us with the 5,535 books on natural sciences, history, literature and religion;

- for his work the Commission for Natural Monuments of the Romanian Academy awarded him the title of "*honorific custodian of reservation*";

- in one of his letters he was making us this confession "...I'm proud to be 1. a Romanian, 2. a member of the Greek-Catholic Church and 3. a peasant. All these reasons of pride are equally important for me. This is the earthling's holly Trinity...".

We invite the visitors to listen to the story of this human being in the first decade of May when the fire-like peonies and the beauty of the this eighty-years old countryman's words fascinate them and they will come again and again to learn from a Man's wisdom as it is reflected in his words and facts.

2.2 What is his contribution to the reservation?

It is not our intention to make a detailed presentation of all actions and efforts this nature lover has made and we shall, therefore, point to those aspects that can become source of inspiration for the management of other reservations with similar ecological conditions.

a. His first direct and decisive intervention took place in 1945 when he succeeded (with the support of police soldiers and personal connections) in saving the reservation from being plowed by some of the villagers (from Valea Lungă) and transformed into a farmland;

b. Taking advantage of his position in the village (secretary of the Commission for land appropriation and farming agent), Mr. Sâncrăianu saved for the second time the reservation when he had it out of the list of land that was to be appropriated to farming cooperatives and when he convinced the local decision makers to establish a severe system of protection, tough task in a period during which values were again and again overthrown;

c. two actions stand out and both took place before 1957:

- finding that 150 m further, on a sliding land, 60 samples of peony were growing he requested the mayoralty to allocate this land to the Academy where a second plot (fig. 2,d) was set with an important role today in training and education;

- noticing that in spite of the severe system of protection the species of *Paeonia tenuifolia* was dramatically disappearing (only 200 types were still existing) while bushes and weeds were growing all over the reservation, he asked for the CMN's permission to start the late cleaning and mowing of the protected area. He got the permission and found a practical solution: his fellows had some obligations towards the community they could not evade when building the new society was the buzzword!;

d. in order to recover the threatened species he started sowing seeds from the peonies belonging to both plots. Since he was not pleased with the germination percentage he sowed seeds using the mole heaps as women did in villages to cultivate different decorative plants in their houses. The outcome is 10,000 samples on the first plot and 20,000 samples on the second one! With a great sense of humor he told us the story concluding "I

have always had this principle to become friend with my enemies..." (the mole was initially considered an enemy for reservation).

The results in recovering the species of peony stimulated him to ask several times for funds to fence the two plots (from the regional management, Academy, different printing houses). He did succeed in 1968-1969 by using less orthodox means and beginning with that moment the first plot became "area of regeneration" forbidden to the public and the second one was organized for visitors. On the latter plot there is also an "experimental strip" where all the phases related to the growing of these plants (plowed during different years) can be observed.

Here is in brief the way a countryman saved a reservation and made popular a village on several continents, the way he has disseminated culture among all visitors making them to love nature and the author of these lines to pay much more attention to the Romanian peasant's wisdom.

We can not finish without asking ourselves the alarming question "will there be another countryman to continue the work of Marcu Sâncrăianu?" and without recalling the old and truthful saying "it is in man to be a blessing for his environment".

References

- Borza, Al., Boşcaiu N.,** (1965), Introducere în studiul covorului vegetal, Ed. Academiei, Bucureşti.
- Cristea, V.,** (1995), La conservation de la nature en Roumanie, L'uomoe l'ambiente, Camerino, 18: 1-104.
- Cristea, V.,** coord., (1997), L'espace rural: approche pluridisciplinaire, Ed. Risoprint, Cluj-Napoca.
- Ghişa, E.,** (1962), Rezervația botanică de la Zau de Câmpie, *Ocrot. nat.*, Bucureşti, 6: 11-30.
- Konya, I.,** Rezervația naturală de la Zau de Câmpie- ghid, Muz. Jud.Tg. Mureş.
- Mititelu, D.,** (1990), Flora și vegetația rezervației Zau de Câmpie- Mureş, *Contrib.bot.*, Cluj-Napoca: 17-23.
- Sămărghitan, M., Oroian, S.,** (1997), Caracterizarea generală a florei din rezervația botanică Zau de Câmpie, jud. Mureş, *Marisia-Studia Sci. Nat.*, Tg. Mureş, 25: 249-278.