

ȚARA MOȚILOR – A REGIONAL TERM BETWEEN ECONOMIC AND ECOLOGICAL INTERESTS. SOME EXPLORATIONS IN THE ROMANIAN PERIPHERY

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ABSTRACT - The term “Țara Moților” is very frequently used in the context of the planned gold mining project in Roșia Montană. The term is as well used in an economic and ecologic way and it is used by those who support the project as well as by its critics. There are a lot of articles in Romanian newspapers and brochures of the last three years combining the gold mining project and the Țara Moților topic. It will be analyzed in what different contexts the geographical term is used and the spatial image of Țara Moților that is produced in the respective context. Starting with a look into the history of instrumentality of the region it is obvious that there exists a long tradition in using this term for a strong mentality of people who defend their freedom. In an actual context the every day communication of the local population is reproducing this stereotype. The results of a questionnaire shows that the stereotypes used by developer and opponents of the gold mining project met with a strong response. By this way the production and reproduction of a spatial image called “Țara Moților” can be used successfully for the interests of the actors of both sides. But there exists a geographical differentiation on a small scale between mining and silvicultural areas.

This paper focuses on the term “Țara Moților” which is very frequently used when reference is made to the planned gold mining project in Roșia Montană. The term is also used in economic and ecologic studies and it is used by those who support the project as well as by its critics. There are many articles in Romanian newspapers and brochures of the last three years, which tackle both the gold mining project and the Țara Moților topic. Journalists and the public seem to be interested in this matter. I have relied on those arguments which are against the project, as pointed out in *Formula AS* and on a brochure published in 2002 with the sponsorship of the gold mining company involved in the project. We shall analyze the different contexts where the geographical term is used and the spatial image of Țara Moților produced in the respective context.

Key words: Țara Moților, gold mining, economic interests, ecological interests

ROMANIAN GEOGRAPHERS ON ȚARA MOȚILOR

First, we have to summarize very briefly, how the Romanian school of Geography used the term “Țara Moților” in the 1980’s. The 1987 *Geografia României* is the core of Romanian regional Geography and it can be seen as the standard. Țara Moților and Munții Arieșului are synonyms in this work (Oancea et al. 1987, Vol. III, p. 449) (fig. 1). This area is bordered exactly by the Arieșul Mare downstream from Gârda de Sus, the Arieșul Mic downstream from Avram Iancu, the whole catchment area of Albac and Abrud. Borderlines are also drawn by peaks, such as Belomireasa (1.632 m) north of Bistra, Vârșii Mari (1.271 m) east of Roșia Montană, and Știubeiu (1.327 m) south of Vidra. The borderlines are drawn according to the physical-geographical features. In the introduction to the “Munții Arieșului” chapter, we can read: “The historical significance and the hard fight for social and national justice” (p. 448) is a feature of Țara Moților. Namely, political-geographical aspects identify Țara Moților. The map in *Geografia României*, Vol. III page 431 (fig. 2) is relevant in this respect. Areas of Țara Moților from the Munții Metaliferi, the borders between Țara Moților and the Munții Biharia, or rather Muntele Mare, as well as areas of the Bihor Mountains is not included. However, the Geography textbooks do not give the significance of Țara Moților in the Romanian national history. Its importance must be seen in the broader context of the 200th anniversary of Horea’s revolt in 1848, the foundational myth of Țara Moților. In order to understand why Țara Moților could also become an important topic in global investment today we have to look at the instrumentalization of Horea’s revolt.

HOREA'S REVOLT IN 1784 AND ITS INSTRUMENTALIZATION BEFORE 1989

Firstly, we have to analyze closely Horea's revolt as the foundational myth of Țara Moșilor in the 1980s and 1990s because this is one of the national narratives, which survived its transformation process. The historical context constructs the background for the production and the reproduction of spatial images in nowadays arguments. In an abridged version, the core story behind the myth was the revolt of the oppressed population of the Apuseni Mountains against the feudal system, which introduced a more efficient taxation system. The feudal system was supported by the Habsburg monarchy, which crushed down the revolt and put to death the leaders of the revolt. These leaders were Horea, Cloșca and Crișan, all of them born in small villages of the so-called Țara Moșilor.

The 1984 celebration of the 200th anniversary of this event by the Romanian officials may be crucial in order to understand the attention given, today, by the Romanian public to Țara Moșilor as the “scenery” of Horea's revolt. There was a huge number of TV documentaries, radio reports, exhibitions at schools and libraries, as well as an opera, a feature movie, and novels dedicated to Horea's revolt (Verdery 1991: 228). Within the scientific community, there was a historical argument whether these historical incidents were a social revolt or a national revolution. Two books, one published in 1979 by Prodan and the other in 1984 by Pascu, constructed this debate. Pascu's thesis of the national revolution was, in fact, a successful redefinition of the historical incidents. Verdery followed, at first, the scientific argument, then its political dimension, and its nationalist instrumentalization (Verdery 1991: 215-255). By searching for the structures of political power which act most significantly in ways that are not obvious, but are especially important to identify and relying on Foucault's perspective, Verdery comes to the following conclusions:

“To redefine the past is to display mastery in the present: whether the redefinition is accepted is perhaps less important than the fact of its having been paraded. (...) Its vehicle has been something familiar to all – a personage from the past that nearly anyone with a fourth-grade education has heard of – and now something is being done with him: he is being changed” (Verdery 1991: 241).

Most important for this redefinition was the ubiquitousness of Horea. Verdery explained this omnipresent position, especially, on the local level. A 1984 scientific conference in Brad was not only the scenery for introducing Pascu's thesis of national revolution. The participants (scientists, party members, and other guests) also visited the places where Horea's uprising occurred, the very places where the events had taken place. Villagers, especially school children performed plays inspired from Horea's life for the conference participants. Verdery recognizes three effects of these performances upon the local population (Verdery 1991: 241f.): Firstly, these performances were unmistakably framed as political-ceremonial events. No villager who had ever watched television could fail to realize that this kind of tribute was identical with that given to the country's most important people. Secondly, the ceremonies communicated to these people the significance of their history. “The commemorative festivities engraved into people's neurons both the power of the state that subjected them and the historical notion of identity that was the occasion for it” (Verdery 1991: 242). Thirdly: The ceremonies showed the villagers the state's control of history. “The celebration quite literally embodied history and subordination as aspects of people's daily existence” (Verdery 1991: 242). Verdery characterized this influence as follows:

“Horea's celebration both displayed and further constituted power, by dramatizing subjection. Horea was a god sent to Romania's weak state: he provided an excellent pretext for projecting an image of strength, offering the populace a visceral experience of their subordination and building up their belief in the regime's power, which, of course, strengthened it in fact. Through commemorations like Horea's, Romanians gradually came to believe they had no alternative. This (...) constitutes a legitimating moment” (Verdery 1991: 242f.).

Today the school children of that time should be school children's parents themselves. It is probable that they have a good memory of the ceremonies in the villages of Țara Moșilor. The omnipresence of Horea's revolt continues until today through monuments and museums, pictures on the classroom walls, etc. For the local population, the well-known and accepted figure of Horea (and of Avram Iancu) is the most important element connecting the regional with the national. The reverberation of Horea's national reputation back to the regional level can be explained as an expression of the power over space held by opinion leaders (politicians, journalists, investors, and NGO members who have the means to capture public attention). He

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who held the power to define Horea, i.e. to show how Horea would act today, held control over people's beliefs of Horea's historical importance.

INSTRUMENTALIZATION IN TODAY'S CONTEXT

General data regarding the planned gold mining project

The joint venture company Roșia Montană Gold Corporation S. A. (RMGC) has proposed the Roșia Montană gold mining project. RMGC is composed of Gabriel Resources Ltd. (Canada) (80%), Minvest S.A. (19.3%), and other Romanian shareholders (0.7%). Gabriel Resources Ltd. (GR) is a company interested in the "acquisition, exploitation, and development of precious metal projects" and controlled by Vasile Frank Timiș, a Romanian Australian. GR has two mining projects in Romania: Roșia Montană and Bucium. However, it has no experience in mining. The Roșia Montană project aims at obtaining approximately 300 tons of gold and 1.600 tons of silver from processing 13 million tons of ore per year for a period of 16 years. Ore will be obtained from open mining in four peaks (Cetate, Cârnic, Orlea, and Jig).

The project also means the relocation of 910 households with about 2,000 persons from 740 houses and 138 flats, 10 churches and 9 graveyards. The project will affect an area totalling 1.827 hectares, covering 1.233 ha of private farms and agricultural land. In the spring of 2004 about 40% of the families accepted the RMGC offer. The company will pay up to 60 million US\$ for the resettlement and the relocation of the village. The destruction of the Piatra Corbului and Piatra Despicata natural monuments is planned as well as the creation of a decantation pond for the processed sterile deposits (on the territory of the present-day village of Corna) with a 185 metres high dam (fig. 3).¹

There has been a wide public debate since 2002. Public attention has focused on the economic and ecological consequences of the project. There have been arguments at several levels. Besides the local and the regional debate, an intense national discussion has begun. Politicians, journalists, scientists, NGO members, and CEO's of the gold mining company participated in the hot argument. There have also been discussions in the European and international institutions and NGO's as international media became interested in the matter, too. The inhabitants of the area also have their own opinions about the project and the term "Țara Moților."

"ȚARA MOȚILOR" IN THE EVERYDAY LANGUAGE OF THE LOCAL POPULATION

In the spring of 2004, 317 persons from different areas of the upper Arieș Valley were asked in a survey "What does "Țara Moților" signify for you?". Their answers are represented in fig. 4. 73% said that *Fetele de pe Găina* signifies Țara Moților as its best. This original marriage market has a long history and it has turned into a big event recently. There are up to 30,000 visitors every year. 72% think handicrafts and forests represent the term. More than three quarters of these answers are from people living in the rural area of the Arieșul Mare, and only 60% are from in the mining area of Abrud. The historical personality of Avram Iancu occupies the third place with 63% of the answers from the whole area. Only 43% of those who gave this answer are from the rural area, but 75% of the answers from small town of Câmpeni identify Țara Moților with Avram Iancu. The fourth place in this survey is an answer of great significance. Mining and gold are most significant for 84% of the people in the mining area, but only for 41% of those in the rural area. The fifth most frequent answer was Horea with 61% of all the respondents, namely 71% from the answers in the rural area, where Horea was born, and 58 % from the answers in Abrud. The array of this answer is not as wide as "mining" the economic indicator. Because of this survey, we can state that in the region Horea's revolt is more adequate for instrumentalization. This answer had a smaller percentage deviation than "mining," an economic indicator with big differences in the areas of the region called "Țara Moților".

¹ RMGC (2003): Resettlement and Relocation Action Plan; Report of the Academy of Economics Commission, Bucharest, On the Economic, Financial, Social, Environment and Sustainability Issues of the Roșia Montană Mining Project, May 29, 2003.

“ȚARA MOȚILOR” IN THE PRINTED MASS MEDIA AND BROCHURES

If we analyze newspapers as another source of (re-)producing spatial images it is obvious that they reinforce the Țara Moților-Horea-gold mining complex. Țara Moților and Horea are clearly instrumentalized.

Our survey includes articles on the gold mining project or the village of Roșia Montană published in the *Formula AS* magazine between February 2002- June 2004. *Formula AS* is against the project. We have also used the brochure “Marea Unire și Țara Moților – The Gold Project in Roșia Montană” which was published in 2002 and distributed on the occasion of the Romanian national holiday on 1st of December. Gabriel Resources sponsored it and it is a collection of articles about the history and the prospects of gold mining in the area. The project shows the advantages of the gold mining project.

Overall, *Formula AS* published 128 articles about the gold mining project (fig. 5). Only 18 articles (14%) focused on “Țara Moților” or “the Moți.” In this paper, we shall comment on only one article.

FORMULA AS

The headline of issue no. 501 from 4 February 2002 was “Moții, pe picior de război” (“The Moți, on a War Footing”). This article is the starting point of a long series combined with a public campaign against the gold mining project. The author, Horia Țurcanu, described the negative consequences of the gold mining project for the locals.

They have to fight against the project because they only have two alternatives: fight or die. In this negative manner underlined by a sub-title “Drumul spre Țara mo(r)ților” (“The Road to the Land of Moți/Death”) the author connected Romanian history and its best representatives:

“I am telling myself that these mountains are part of the Romanian soul, they are the mountains of Avram Iancu and of his legendary legion, they are the mountains of Popa Balint and of Horea, Cloșca, and Crișan” (Țurcanu 2002: lines 12-13).

The Moți are “proud” (“Moților mândri ai acestor munți”), and “very tough,” but ignorant (“Moții aceștia teribil de tari de-a lungul istoriei, știu ei ce li se pregătește?”) (ibid., lines 42; 48-49).

The opponents are like David and Goliath – the Moți are David fighting against Goliath, the foreign company (ibid. lines 51-52).

The journalist met the spokesperson of the local opposition group who emphasized the Moți’s traditional bond with the land, for which people are now compensated with money:

“People hope they will get a lot of money for their properties, but we believe that they will be tricked. (...) They have already acted so that the hills, the forest, and the fishpond are theirs. The city council has licensed them (RMGC, CW) to carry out mining activities and people will have no place where to take their animals or to chop wood, you see? (...) But we are not stupid either. We are Moți,...” (ibid. line 87-92).

Besides agriculture, the Moți’s tradition of gold mining is emphasized as well: “There were times when the gold was a way of life, the bread of the Moți” (ibid. lines 120-121). The fight over land ownership is exacerbated by gold ownership:

“The ancient memory of these people is telling them that the gold is theirs. But the Romanian reality of the 21st century contradicts them: the gold belongs to the Romanian State. But the Moți will never be able to understand this” (ibid. lines 122-124).

The determination of the Moți is connected to the well-known historical context. In this way the reader from all over the country is invited to sympathize:

“They share their stubbornness with Horea, Cloșca, and Crișan, or Avram Iancu, or Balint. All of them were Moți, all of them were heroes, all of them died tragically, because they wouldn’t give up their truth. For us, the people who have come from Bucharest, the heroes of the Apuseni are merely historic characters” (ibid. line 125-127).

History is immediately connected to the present and a continuity between the historical personalities’ struggle for freedom and the resistance of the present population is constructed:

“But to the Moți, Horea is still alive. In their homes, all those events happened just yesterday, Horea’s spirit can be seen by the Moți each moment, on the decrepit streets of Roșia Montană. History has the consistency of palpable reality. This gives them strength, stubbornness, that kind of resistance with a touch of heroism that refuses any compromise” (ibid. lines 128-130).

A supporter of the gold mining project draws a different picture of the Moți. This will be presented in the following chapter, which analyses the brochure: “Marea Unire și Țara Moților”.

The brochure

The main difference is in the characterization of the Moți. They are not poor but people fighting for their freedom, and potentially rich people. Frank Timiș wrote the preface of the brochure, now CEO of Gabriel Resources and it is entitled: “Roșia Montană – a God’s Present to the Moți” (“Roșia Montană – Darul lui Dumnezeu pentru moți”). Here is a passage:

“For more than 2000 years the Munții Apuseni has been a crock of gold. God wanted the Moți to be tested at times and benefit by work from this great treasure. (...) For thousands of years it has been obvious that this present is not to be rejected; we have (...) to continue our ancestors’ work because we are doing very well what we are doing, what the father teaches to the son: Let us be miners!” (p. 1).

The short preface combines local identity, divine authority, and the miners’ tradition. It means: we (the Gabriel Resources) will bring long-term development to the land of the Moți and we shall take history into consideration.

In the 20 chapters of the brochure, gold mining is tackled in various ways. In this paper we can be discuss only a few of these approaches.

The chapter “Rich Moți, Poor Moți” (“Moț bogat, moț sărac,” p. 20) compares the potential wealth of the Moți with the wealth in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. The Canadian company can increase the wealth of the Moți. The second chapter entitled “What Choice Do the Moți Have: Green or Yellow Gold?” (“Ce vor alege moții: aurul verde sau cel galben?,” p. 21) emphasizes that the 437 million US \$ is the only chance the Moți get and urgently need. (“Au nevoie moții de acești bani sau nu?”). There is only one alternative, the over-exploitation of the forests, the green gold of the region. To continue the gold mining activities in the old way is to increase the ecological disaster in the region.

Ecological risks are discussed in the chapter: “Foreign Investment – the Ecologists’ Fright?” p. 28. The author explains that the gold mining project will improve the actual bad ecological situation in Țara Moților. RMGC will invest 100 million US\$ in a new technology (based on a cyanide leaching process), to improve the polluted water of Abrud and Arieș by the ongoing gold mining activities. However, no precise explanation about how this will be done is given. To authorize the “clean” process of future gold mining the author uses a metonymy. The author says that the company will use Swiss technology. People all over the world associate Switzerland with cleanness and unspoiled nature. The use of Switzerland technology in Romania presupposes cleanness in Romania. The comparison between Switzerland and Romania continues in the next chapter entitled: “Little Switzerland” (“Mica Elveție,” p. 30). Țara Moților is considered a small Helvetia. Wealth is potentially available, but not in banks, as in Switzerland. Wealth is in the landscape. A stereotypical picture of a clean Switzerland is drawn. Nowhere can you see any pollution, chemical plants clean their water, etc. In the Munții Apuseni only Swiss technology paid by RMGC can clean up the environment. (“Așa cum trebuie să fie și Munții Apuseni, chiar cu cianuri dar cu stații de spălare a apei care costă una singură 100 milioane de dolari. Adică fără poluare. Ca în Elveția.”).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of spatial terms in every day communication gives us some hints of how space is used in different social contexts.

The case study of a single spatial term, “Țara Moților”, can have a wide range of meanings depending on contradictory interests within a social-economical conflict.

The opponents of the gold mining project give priority to the Moți as proud people and protectors of their land. This was proved by history, which comes forward as witness. The close link between the Moți and nature is expressed by the people’s willingness to spare the natural scenery. That is why a real Moț has to be against the gold mining project.

The gold project manager starts by declaring the economic prospects an opportunity for these traditionally poor people. Besides poverty, there is also another tradition: the Moți in the gold mines. This project will allow this tradition to be continued and poverty to be overcome. This is also a comparison with Switzerland. Equating Țara Moților with Switzerland symbolizes the connection of regional economics and the ecological well being with the company’s project.

The survey in the region shows that the stereotypes used by the developer and the opponents of the gold mining project met with a strong response. The production and the reproduction of a spatial image called “Țara Moților” can be used successfully for the actors’ interests. Our interest as geographers should be in the

small-scale behavioural differentiation with regard to the spatial image. The topics used by the developers seem to be impressive as the inhabitants of the Roşia Montană and the Abrud mining area also use them. On the contrary, the opponents of the project mobilize the agricultural region around the Arieşul Mare by using arguments from the cultural-historical context of such strong individuals as Horea.

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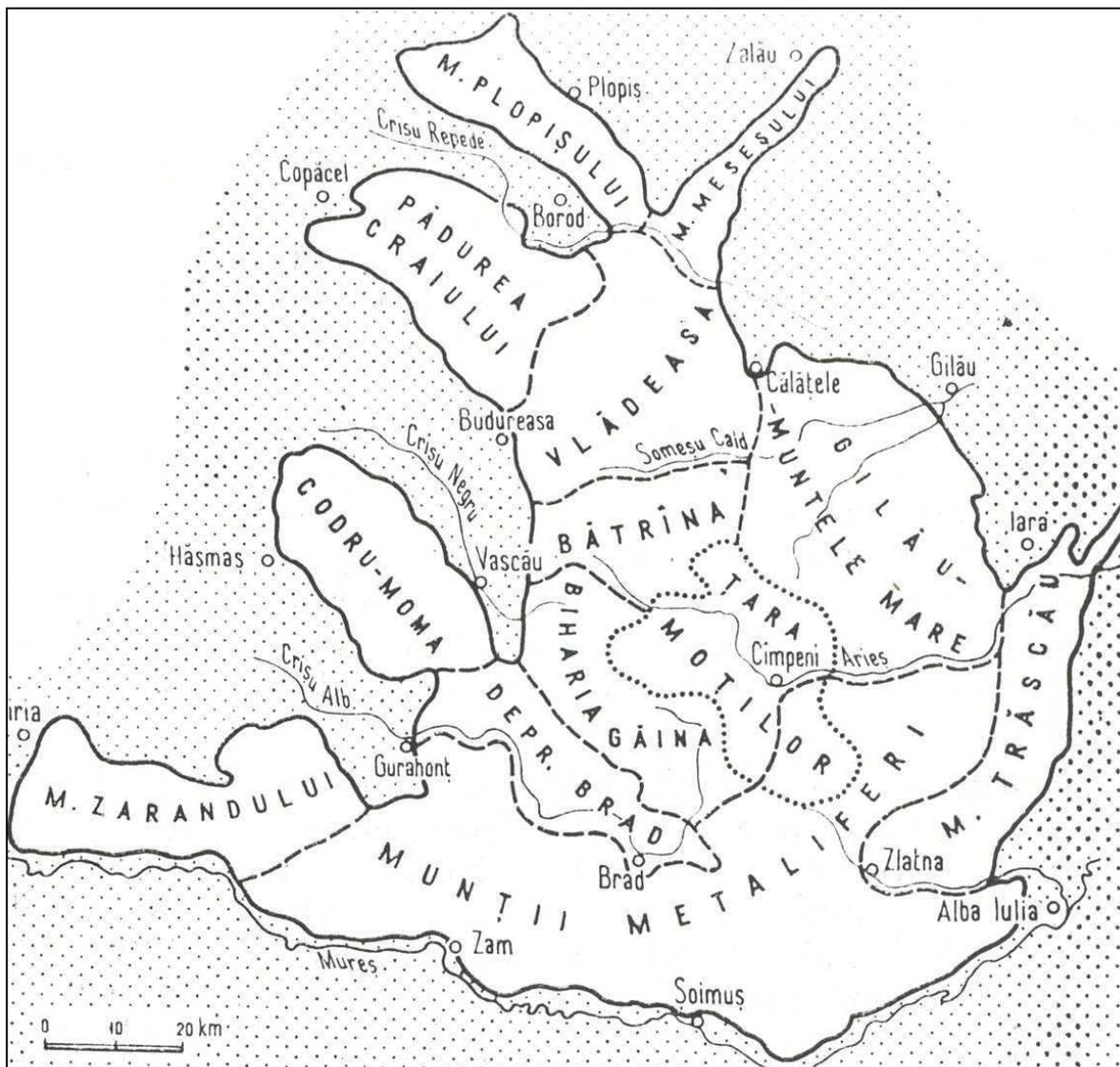


Fig. 1. Țara Moșilor and Munții Arieșului (*Geografia României* 1987, Vol. III, p. 449)

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Fig. 2. Munții Arieșului (Geografia României 1987, Vol. III, p. 431)

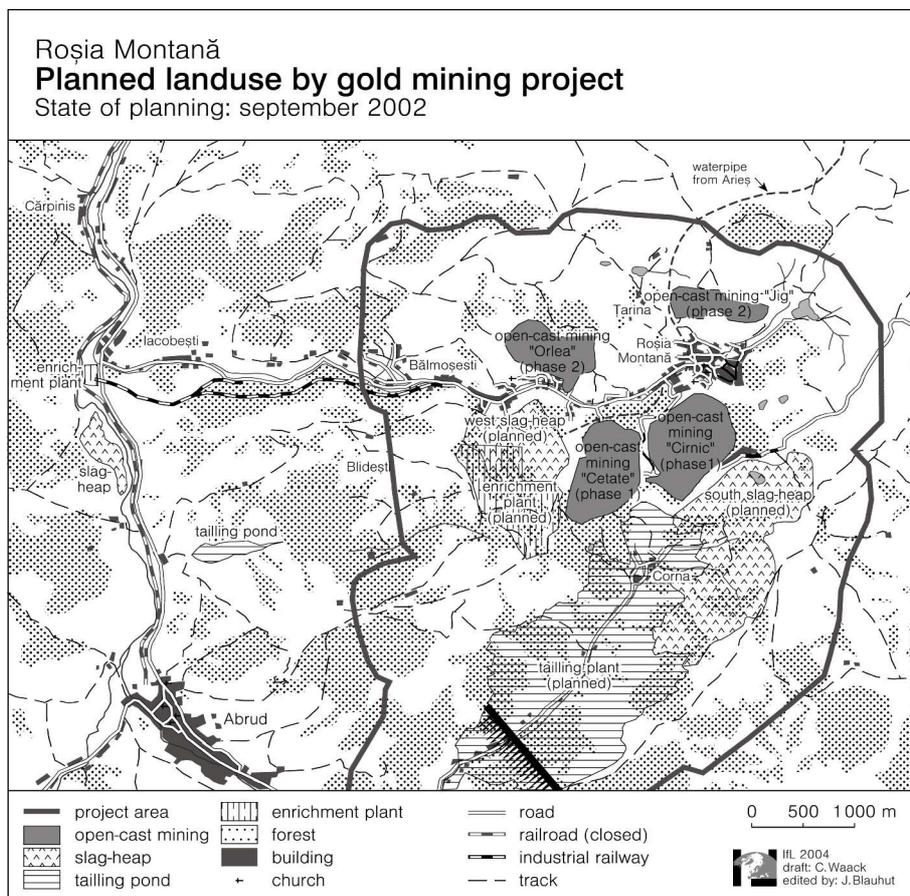


Fig. 3. Roșia Montană. Land use planned by gold mine project. Date of planning: September 2002.

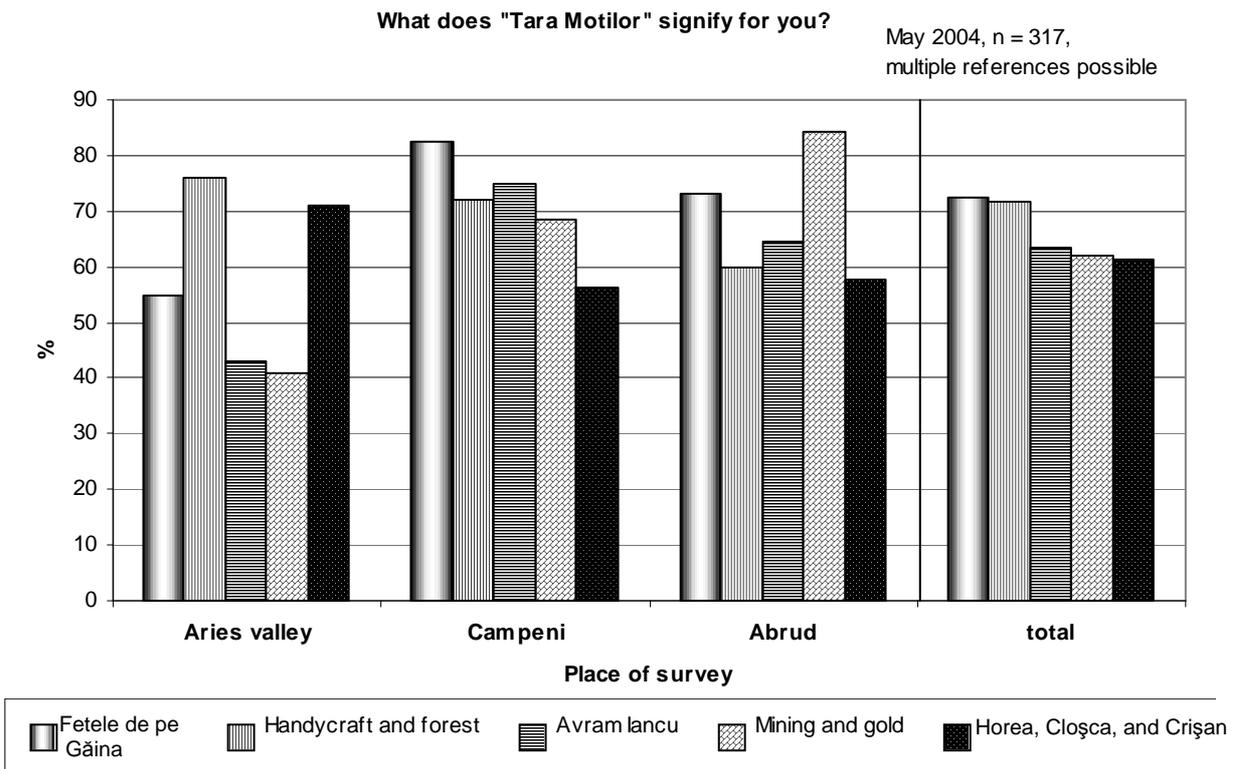


Fig. 4. The 2004 survey in Tara Moșilor

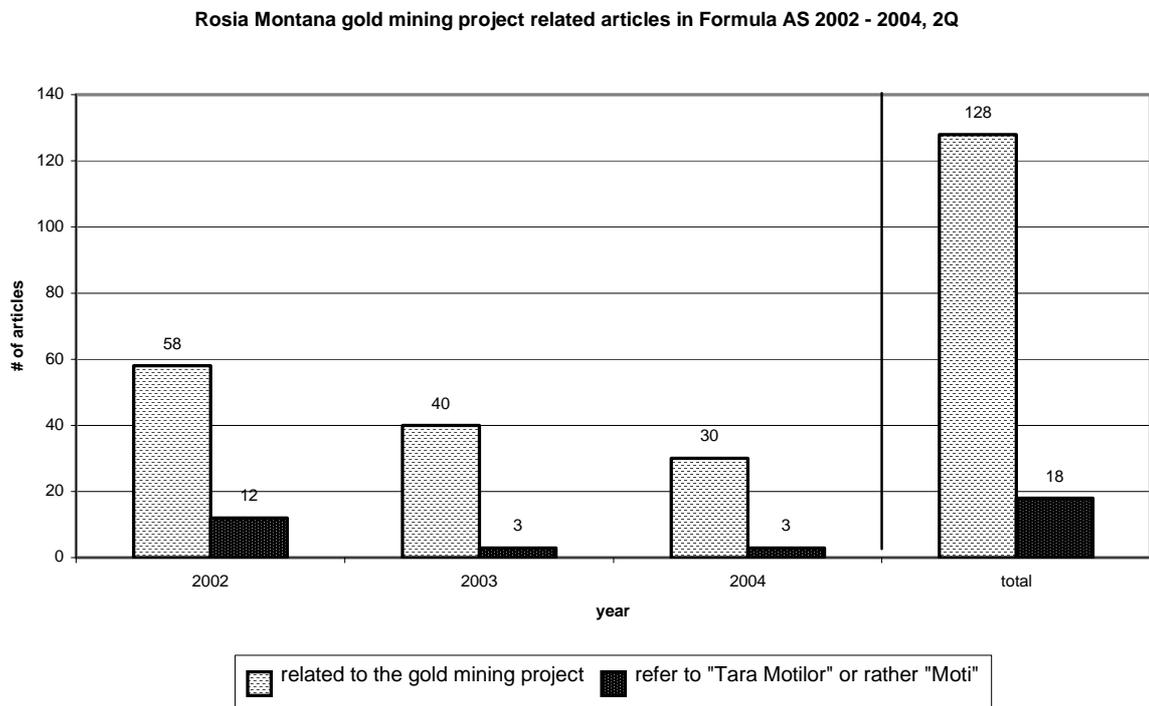


Fig. 5. The articles in "Formula AS"