
**SOCIO-ECONOMICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN A POSTCOMMUNIST FACTORY.
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY ON EXPERIENCES, STRATEGIES, AND DISCOURSES.**

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The aim of this research is to describe and analyse the social consequences of economic restructuring and deindustrialization. My research will be carried on the field of a sugar factory in the little town Ludus, Romania.

As trying to establish a theoretical background a list of concepts – which refer not only to a delimitable topic but also to the more general context of such ethnography – arise. Social change, economy, postcommunism and transition, deindustrialization, restructuring, social strategies, unemployment, etc. are terms which refer both to theoretical frameworks of analysis (e.g. should we consider the industrial enterprise according to instrumentalist, to finalist structuralist or to functionalist structuralist approaches etc.) and appropriate research aspects (e.g. decisive moments of the studied socio-economical process, attitudes towards work and politics, new economic strategies, discourses involved, experiences and life histories etc.) Analytical types and methods to be used require therefore to regard precise points of the research development, but not to neglect the relevance of the broader context within which those points are to be formulated.

Other points will establish the space, the history and the population involved in the research as related to the general theoretical framework, prospected analysis and methods, modes of ethnographic writings, other resources, etc.

Concrete topics will be previously evaluated as useful orientation on the plan research.

Due to the fact that my fieldwork is not properly initiated yet, many aspects presented here could surely suffer some particular changes.

As a final remark I have to consider the scarceness of similar approaches in Romania and on Romanian process of economic restructuring. This research could be seen, consequently, both as a necessary ethnography on unrevealed field, and as a way of reconsider the Western anthropological theory in a new context.

Keywords: factory, deindustrialization, economic restructuring, social change, postcommunism, Romania, social context, ethnographic textualisation, institution, ideology.

1. Introduction: theoretical framework and the scope of a critical ethnography

Some comments regarding main concepts as deindustrialization, postcommunism or social change could be useful, as well as precise motivation regarding the theoretical background and methodological approaches. In this respect it is important to take into account socio-economical concepts as *political economy, human action, conflict, competition, cooperation, tension, adaptation, institution, planning and institutionalization of change* etc., which comport a classical theory (Marx, Elias, Mises, Ogburn, Bell, Olson *et alii*), and observe how these could be integrated into a new research and new context. This could be important both as providing some key points

that organize the research, and as rethinking and reassessing classical conceptions and analyses. We should ask ourselves here: do we use terms like these because they are organizing the Theory or because they are organizing the interpreted reality? Herein, as the ethnography allows, we should consider, for instance, workers not as class but as contextualized individuals, where „context” could be seen as class, but also as workplace context, familial context, urban context, political context etc. Moreover, this, as we see, involves automatically a critique, not only toward classical terms as ‘class’, but also toward various anthropological social or economical statements (e.g. the theory that in small communities the economic relationships are more personal could be rejected by an ethnography that describes the contrary).

Terms

For instance the concept of *deindustrialization* could refer to, at least, two major different connotations: (1) regarding the theory of the “third wave” (Toffler, 1981), or the tertiarisation (Roth, 2002) or even the decline of Fordist manufacturing (Martin, 1988; Scott, 1988) which describe a *postindustrial* society (i.e. which does not involve the (mass) productions of goods anymore, but types of economic-social activities such as: services, administration, public order, tele/communications, justice, culture, education, healthcare, loisir); in such a postindustrial society deindustrialization signifies ‘the end of modern industry’. And, a second meaning (2) regarding the theory of a “*redevelopment*” (Massey&Allen, 1988) or “*remodernization*” (which does not imply the end of the modern industries but an *economic restructuring* of those which were ‘misdeveloped’ or ‘pseudo-modernized’). This latter is the very case of the postcommunist societies and economies, although the former is relevant too. The communist period *did* mean a modernization, but the postcommunist period does surely not mean a “postmodernization” in the sense of a ‘third wave’. There are still many premodern conditions and characteristics (from industrial production to mentalities), and there are many things that still have to be *modernized*. Ethnography is called here to put order among these things.

Discourses and critique

All these terms are certainly blended in ideological and political discourses. But, first of all, in a theoretical problem. Do we consider, as speaking about deindustrialization, the first subtext, or the second? What implications could have the fact of focusing just upon the ‘Eastern sense’ of deindustrialization and not taking into account the ‘global’ one? Could be associated postcommunist transformations in Eastern Europe with those of postmodern global changes within a unique analytical and theoretical paradigm?

These are few issues that arise this research. This is an example, as beginning with the very concept of deindustrialization, how questionable the theories involved could be.

And this is the first sense of the *critique*, which I already referred to, that such an anthropological approach might offer: a critique of the theories and the concepts involved as describing a socio-economical process. This is important as we noticed not only regarding the anthropological knowledge, but also as bringing into light a common investigation as it appears in the field and in a new context.

Let me refer now more precisely to the concept of *critical* as submitting to the second sense of this critique. Huge density of ideologies and economical and political assumptions are involved in the more ordinary discourses referring to processes as deindustrialization or economic restructuring. I think we could not detect important analysis regarding the social consequences of this if we do not take into account what this *discourses* are and what really they communicate, and how are they perceived. Speaking about discourses I consider a large concept of power (Foucault, 1996, Dirks, Eley & Ortner, 1994), *id est* also those of imposition, normativeness, national culture, rhetoric or ethos. And here are two main directions to be mentioned as anthropological critique regarding these (ideological) concepts. One is that proposed by authors like Gramsci (1971), Said (1978) and afterwards Hall (1992) who concern to the concept of *culture* as producing hegemonic meanings, and having to be replaced by a continuous reflection and intellectual deconstruction of it (in our case this could be seen as an analysis of hegemonic discourses on economic restructuring regarding the ideology of EU integration) and the other is that promoted by authors like Marcus&Fischer (1986) or Reed-Danahay (1997) which propose *experimental ethnographies* as describing these ideologies as they appear in contact with reality (e.g. discourses, attitudes, behavior). The two critical approaches are not separated but I refer to them in this way in order to indicate the importance of considering both theoretical and methodological this critique.

Theory and method

As regards the theoretical and methodological framework I consider therefore that would be important to intertwine a *rationalist approach* with an *empirical approach*. As a form of combining the two points of view I consider to be useful the *practice theory* presented by authors like Sherry Ortner (1984), and which refer both to (a) *symbolic* (Geertz, 1973, 1983) and *actionist sociology* (Boudon, 1997) paradigms developed on Weberian theorising on society, as it allow the interpretation of the *ironic, irrational or ideologic* aspects of social acts, and not just the *observable* ones; and to (b) *practice* as empirical observable facts, that confer a significant role not only to individual action but also to mass and social relationships, including in relation to social structures, social change or emancipation as it is presented on Marxist theorising of society. As effective approach we would consider the *social anthropological* British tradition of empirical studies (Kuper, 1973) on modern society and political-social-economical transformations (Massey&Allen, 1988; Graham&Spence, 1992) as well as analyses on postcommunist processes and changes (Hann, 2001; Verdery, 1996; Kideckel, 1988). In addition, the concept of *textualization* would be useful including as completing the critical ethnographic viewpoint presented above. Finally, regarding the anthropological analysis and ethnographic writing I would promote a large acceptance of the *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) manner of inscribing cultural contexts as interpreting socio-cultural phenomena.

The industrial factory has to be considered as fieldwork. Economic anthropology, industrial anthropology, statistics, human resources theories or institutional studies should be invoked as analytical background and as meaningful data. In this, a comprehensive survey of industrial establishment and urban context are to be conducted, which would seek information on a range of elements, including history, production, facilities, management, employment and labor force, technology, environment and worker health and safety, gender and ethnic dimension of labour and disemployment, markets, supplier and customer links and privatization or adjustment strategies. Primary data source are to derive from field visits to the factory as peripheral observation. Case study in-depth interviews are to be after that conducted, with people directly or indirectly involved. During these interviews, a series of semistructured questions are to be asked about issues that are to be outlined further in this paper. A tour of plant facilities and workshops are to be done, as well as participant observation in every moment when possible. A tour of town and visit to contacted

people are to be, also, done. Then, interviews are to be held with these people as well as with local government officials, trade unions and business groups, environmentalists, academics and representatives of national agencies, if necessary. Photos would also be useful, not only as illustrative, but also as helping the interpretation and final text writing.

The factory restructuring

The factory was the most important industry of the town of Ludus in the communist period. The economic and ideological reasons of its construction are to be established. It is well known that under more than four decades of central planning, large investments of human, financial and physical capital were made into the industrial sectors of Eastern Europe. These supposed not only economical interests, but also ideological (Gelb&Gray, 1991; Soulsby, 1994). But, one of the most remarkable developments in Europe in recent years has been exactly the collapse of centrally organized and planned systems of state socialism and the attempt, still very much in process, of Eastern European countries to shift to pluralistic political democracies with market-focused economies (Shapira&Paskaleva, 1994). This implicated that those large investments of human, financial and physical capital that were made into the industrial sectors of Eastern Europe during communist period became suddenly problematic. Social problems of restructuring these industries became a crucial issue. Moreover, a new ideology (industry restructuring, market economy, European integration) came to substitute the previous one.

All these processes affected and challenged people involved in the factory, especially workers.

How do we critically describe and analyse these processes and transformations? A preliminary answer, which is already suggested in the title, is doing a critical ethnography on experiences, strategies, and discourses. In this aspect a research in a restructured industrial factory, at the margins of a small town in a postcommunist East-European country has a triple dimension and significance: ethnographical, social anthropological, and critical.

2. Social history, human geography, and political economy. Matters of description

The industrial factory is situated at the margins of the 18,600 inhabitants town of Ludus, Mures, located in the center of Transylvanian plateau, Romania. The town has an interesting history. Positioned between two ethnic areas (i.e. Romanians, towards the Tara Motilor mountainous zone of Central Transylvania and Hungarians towards Szekely region of the Eastern Transylvania), the town had always an uncertain condition. It depended, consecutively, on medieval Hungarian administration, Transylvanian Dukedom, Ottoman Empire, Habsburgic Empire, Modern Romanian State inside which successively on department of Cluj and on department of Mures, etc. It could be identified four main periods of its social history: (i) The medieval period, when Ludus was a (Hungarian) estate. (ii) The modern period when Ludus was declared commune (1800) and a small rural district (*plasa*) was set here (1850). (iii) The communist period, which meant the development of an agro-industrial area as large rural district (*raion*) (1950) and town (1960) characterized by the construction of block of flats, migration of Romanian peasants from villages around to the developing town, and the construction of institutions and industries. (iv) The postcommunist period, when former communist institutions and industries are 'restructured' and people living here experience new histories of uncertainty.

After 1990, in the so-called 'transition' the new official ideologies and social discourses produced statements like this: „After the anticommunist Revolution in December 1989 our town experience the period of transition from dictatorship to legal state, from supercentralized planned economy to economy of change, of capitalist type. Land restitution to the former owners, privatization of state enterprises, free initiative, challenge, the access to non-reimbursable credits granted by European Community, the development of labour force market, the freedom of traveling abroad without visa into Western European states, partnerships with foreign businessmen, the right of working in a foreign country, the European Union and NATO integration perspectives – are just a few aspects of life which produced changes within the mentalities of people in Ludus. Their most ardent aspiration, in this anniversary year is Ludusan economic revitalization and the guarantee of decent life for all the members of the community.”¹[1]

The changing postcommunist urban geography and mentalities regards not only the pure perception on this area but refers to precise observed places and events. The one concerning the changes related to the *Sugar Factory* in the town could offer both a better understanding of this situation, and a more exactly diagnosis about the social effects of restructuring. Moreover, discourses and ideologies as cited above could be critically assessed as they appear in reality and in contact with real people.

The Sugar Factory is situated toward Ghesa, a Romanian village incorporated within the town area, along the Mures river. Due to its separate but close location as well as to its considerable size the industrial unit is visible from any point of the town. However its presence in town's life is revealed not only by its physical dimension, but also by its importance in local peoples' lives. Almost 50 percent of Ludus population was involved during communist period, more or less directly, into the factory production. Not only as workers within the beet processing and sugar production framework, but also as farmers on beet plantations or as relatives of those workers, farmers or other employees.

The political economy that created these industries in the communist period has to be inscribed in a *modernizing program*. This program entails economical and ideological interests. As regards the economical interests it is important to notice that the developing new socialist country, which Romania was in the 50's and 60's, had to confirm its economical independence. More and more population from countryside villages came to the growing towns. These "new citizens" were offered the possibility to work in new socialist factories, forge a new life, and participate to the new slogans of the State Party. Surely, the ideological task was more ambitious: not only to create a new life, but a new history. In this respect it is important to observe that for a town with an important percentage of Hungarian population in 1945, the process of industrialization was decisive for the "Romanianization" of the populace. Not only the ethnic structure of the population gradually modified, but also the social and the cultural conditions and standings. The communist program of modernization was a forced and strained one, in comparison with the expectations and the possibilities of the majority of the population. Concerning this I would refer further to the concept of 'mismodernization'.

A food industry in a modernized town was, therefore, a focal place for both an economical and ideological interest. This is the very background for what we aim to describe and analyze as a social process and its consequences. The research in *archives* would provide significant data regarding the number and characteristic of the workers involved during the communist period and after; regarding the structure and dynamics of this population; regarding the political and administrative functions of them; regarding decisive moments (economical, ideological, social) of the history of the factory; finally, regarding the exact process and steps of postcommunist restructuring of it. This would be annotated together with *considering restructuring as a social process*. Individual interviews with those involved would be interconnected with this documented or empirical description of the observable facts.

Official data regarding communist and postcommunist period of the factory, life histories of the workers or other people involved, other observable facts would try to encompass *topics* that would be presented in the third chapter of this article. Let me finish now this short depiction by presenting some general lines concerning the *industrial factory as ethnographic fieldwork*. There are two general perceptions towards a factory in a town. One, by the viewpoint of the employees who daily go to work, and another by the viewpoint of other people affected in some way by the factory (e.g. social, political, ecological etc.). I would just observe that the ethnographic endeavor is to combine the two visions in order to understand both the

employees' life and to reserve an exterior perception as well. I consider herein, that we cannot take into account just focused descriptions without considering the *social context* and *social text* of the whole town. In this, official documents regarding the factory, personal confessions referring to work and life within the factory and other accounts describing the people living in town and town history would be analytically interconnected.

This textualized perception entails in a compressed form the whole dimension of the human geography, social history and political economy of this industrial town; and it suggests also the first lines of an interpretation. Could it be achievable to interpret the two periods (communist and postcommunist) in contrastive terms or this is just a rhetorical way of describing the things? – we should ask ourselves, for instance. The interviews would surely clear this problem, and the textual form that such an ethnography of *experiences, strategies and discourses* would allow and offer a better description of it. This would imply not only the socio-geographical urban space of the factory and nearby, but also the other industries in the town or other similar or comparable places where people experiences should be placed as *socio-economic context* and *descriptive text* of this ethnography. Let me speak about all of that in the next section, as to provide also some research suggestions.

3. Economy and society. Some research hypothesis

Industrial development in communist Romania along with *hard industry* (civil and machine engineering, steel and metallurgy, oil and energy industry etc.), whose aim was to assure the „economic independence” of Romanian state, created also an important *light industry*. His aim was not less ideological, but in a more subtle way. As Katherine Verdery showed (1991, 1996), production and products of immediate necessity as food and clothes were drastically controlled by the centralized state apparatus in order to control resources, distribution and consumption, that was to control people's way of life, relations and the proper life as survival. We cannot and should not neglect, as talking about *sugar* in communist Romania, the fact that this precise product was a matter of need, symbol, fetish, relationship, and power.

After the war, as the Romanian Communist Party quickly consolidated its political power, focused both on economic modernization and social and national emancipation. There was a strong relation between the two. But these interests were encompassed in an ideological project of controlling people and human rights and freedom. In the 40's, village-based agriculture still employed more than three-quarters of the Romanian labor force. But, following Soviet development strategies, and, afterward, personal Ceausescu's strategies, the Party sought to shift Romania's economic base not only from agriculture to industry, but from free market oriented mode of production to hypercentralized and controlled market; and not only from small- to large-scale production (i.e. petrochemicals, mining and processing, machinery, foundry) that alienated workers from their family and local-based economy, but from a functional economy (in terms of economic necessities and efficiency) to a ideological economy (in the sense of economy as political instrument).

Centralized planning institutions were developed, with ministerial departments managing each sector of production, coordinated by State Planning mechanisms. A succession of five-year plans was practiced, with investment focused on industry. As many scholars studying postcommunist economies and societies have shown (Shapira&Paskaleva, 1994, among others):

The role – and distortions – of the central planning system under which the industries were developed is crucial to understand their present condition. The system maintained and emphasized the administrative allocation of resources, central control of investment, centralized management, controlled prices, production to plan, state ownership of industrial facilities and state management of trade. The

consequence: modern industries were developed, but they did so in ways embedded in the particular requirements and conditions of a planned economy linked to other planned economies in the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This historical reality goes a long way towards explaining the difficulties the industries are having in rapidly adjusting to the collapse of central planning and the emergence of a market-oriented economy. (Shapira&Paskaleva, 1994)

Moreover, the systems of production, technology, raw materials purchasing, exports or management were strongly linked to plan production and state political command, and had little direct contact with customers or suppliers. Besides, not only their interests, availability or improvement proposes were neglected, but maintenance, work condition and suitable labor of the employees were mistreated. A particularity of these communist industries was the fact that maintenance and equipment repair was done in-house, regularly in improper conditions. Many factories built their own thermal power stations or heating plants, often lacking proper pollution controls. Factories also provided eating, recreational, transport, medical and, in some cases, housing facilities for workers. But these were created as ideological facilities and not as responding to real problems. The way those services functioned and looked like is an important ethnographic topic, as it could reveal the way of life and the way state enrolled and uniformized people (as for instance offering just one compulsory option inside each those facilities).

This highly centralized structure ensured workplaces for everyone, facilitated security of supply, including labor supply as well as materials (even though raised costs and contributed to lowered efficiency and quality), and all these social services created a sentiment of security and paternal care. When this system collapsed, therefore, the first experienced reaction was that of insecurity. Even before being laid off, as the result of economic restructuring, employees, we should think, suffered this feeling. The interviews could offer here unpredictable accounts both reflecting that perverse relationship between state (industry) and private life, and those subjective interpersonal relations between people. (As for instance the relationships between managers – “Typically, plant managers had technical or engineering qualifications and/or satisfactory performance within the Party, whose approval was needed at district and central levels in order to be promoted. There was no need in most cases for marketing and customer relations personnel or quality training”, Shapira&Paskaleva, 1994 – and workers – generally indoctrinated and frightened with ideological apparatus, among whom *Securitatea* in the first lines).

Economy of shortage and society

We could not pretend, therefore, to understand processes initially presented without considering different contexts, more and more thickly, as: the communist political economy, the light industries, the food industry, the sugar industry; or, the political relationships, the economic relationships, the symbolic relationships, the workplace relationships, human relationships, the individual relationships, etc. We also speak about a temporal context: we should not aim to understand what happened after communist regime collapsed in 90's without considering, at least, the 80's. In this, the best reference we found is Verdery's theorizing on 'economy of shortage' concept proposed by János Kornai (1980) and applied precisely on the Romanian system case.

In a supply-constrained system [...] everyone scrambles for access to the pot, she write. At all points in the system, jobs or bureaucratic positions are used as platforms for amassing resources. Personal influence, 'corruption', and reciprocal exchanges are some of the major mechanisms. This sort of behavior goes on throughout the society but is especially important for bureaucrats, whose entire reputation and prestige rest upon their capacity to amass resources. Any bureaucrat, any bureaucratic segment, tends to expand its own domain, increasing its capacity to give - whether the 'gift' be

education, apartments, medical care, permission and funds for publication, social welfare, wages, building permits, or funds for investments in factory infrastructure. Throughout the bureaucracy, then, there is rampant competition to increase one's budget at the expense of those roughly equivalent to one on a horizontal scale, so as to have potentially more to disburse to claimants below. That is, what counts most in the competition among social actors within allocative bureaucracies is *inputs to one's segment*, rather than outputs of production. (Verdery 1991, p.424)

In other words, the deficient economy is deliberately maintained by the Party politics because of increasing the control power over the institutions and population. Verdery emphasizes here the systemic centrality of the 'second economy' in Soviet-type societies, and the peculiar role played by "culture", as a battleground between state and oppositional legitimacy. The importance attached to "culture" by a regime that professed materialism as its official ideology was indeed one of the more paradoxical features of the communist system, and Verdery assigns great importance to it. It is linked, in her theory, to the pivotal role played by the intelligentsia in Soviet-type societies, as well as to the sudden eruptions of nationalism that accompanied the breakdown of the Eastern communist world. More generally, Verdery describes the growth of East European nationalism as a result of the fragmentation of socialist societies into competing "semi-feudal" domains (Islands) (Nielsen, 2003). But, what interests us here is another aspect of this economy of shortage: the fact of being involved as individual in a „politicized" industry, as in our case the food industry of sugar, could confer a remarkable status of power in relation to others, especially in small towns. What Verdery claims to be a visible opposition in a form of a split between 'us' and 'them' inside communist relationships, organized not only a 'self' that conduces to ethnic antagonism and privilege (Verdery, 1996), but also a 'somebody' that conduces to social antagonism and privilege.

Verdery's conclusion is that communist state, despite his power, was a weak one. This state governed a society fragmented into islands (factories, enterprises, bureaucratic institutions etc.), that were ruled as semi-feudal domains by rival fractions of a *nomenklatura*-mafia (Verdery 1996). In this scheme, the state functioned as the primary redistributor of resources and wealth within a "supply-constrained" economy of shortages, and islands struggled for access to its wealth. A food processing and production industry, namely sugar, was therefore a good job because of the lack of food. And we could see the factory as an island fighting against other islands (i.e. institutions) in search of controlling resources. But there is another suggestion here: we may see including individuals in this position. Working at wrapping sector was not the same as working at beet processing. And the fact that sugar was one of the list of "strategic" aliment (along with sunflower oil, flour, meat and butter) could offer a better understanding of this symbolic approximation.

Deindustrialization: theory and practice

As I have noted in an introductory comment, speaking about deindustrialization in a postcommunist East-European context implies the consideration of a distinction. Deindustrialization is primarily a Western metropolitan phenomenon, and tertiarisation is the first meaning of this, as 'postmodern' process. Herein, *reindustrialization* could be considered most evident outside the large cities and around the major infrastructure routes (Keeble, 1991; Graham&Spence, 1995), and therefore in Non-Western economies. This observation involves direct reference to the concepts of pseudomodernization (Verdery, 1996), incomplete modernization (Roth, 2002), or mismodernization (Sakwa, 1996). Actually, the modernization that communism imposed in Romania was one that should be clearly contextualized. We speak, in this case, about a form of modernization (whose instrument was mainly, industrialization), which came off upon an archaic-type of society and mentality (in interwar period 80% from Romanian population lived in villages as peasants) and was made in a brutal manner and with strong ideological and political constraints and interests. What meant industrialization within the "flourishing" period of communist installation was, more or less, a form of reorganising resources and relocating people in order to control them. The social form of this industrialization meant, therefore, an artificial modernization as long as we could detect rural and strong traditional behavior and mentalities among peoples forced to move to the new industries and new blocks of flats. Consequently, we have to consider, as trying to understand postcommunist social processes, those processes and ideologies, and referring

to them as particular forms of modernization. Otherwise, we would not understand the deindustrialization process, in these terms. As Roth observed, „the postmodern social model functions at optimal parameters *only* in its completeness, connecting high technology, market economy, and contemporary democratic principles of political and social-economic organization. Incomplete modernization strikes back finally, sooner or later”. (Roth, 2002: 65). What is the appropriate sense of deindustrialization in postcommunist societies becomes thus an important and interesting question. As a preliminary insight I would consider that we have to take into account both this meaning of incomplete or pseudo- modernization and that of reindustrialization. Economic restructuring would be seen therefore as a more complex process that involves a large amount of suitable data and intricate contexts. *The fact* that around their new block of flats in the new communist towns people – dislocated from the ir medieval-like villages – constructed chicken coops is a reality that enhances a supplementary datum. Could be seen deindustrialization as a pass to postmodern tertiarisation when we observe the tendency of restructured unemployed workers to return to agricultural modes of production?

Surely, as trying to analyze what happened with Zaharul S.A. sugar factory in Ludus, we have to note the very rationale of its restructuring, and the observable elements of what one could name there deindustrialization. I do not reject even the possibility that this concept should be unuseful and unhelpful for such a research. But we have to take it into account, at least, because the observation above could offer a more subtle interpretation of the facts.

Economic restructuring since 1989

Romania, like other Eastern European countries, has been trying since 1989 to move to a market system and political democracy. There is an underlying consensus for Romania to become European, shifting to a constitutional democracy with private enterprise and private markets. With guidance and limited financial and technical assistance from international agencies, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Community, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the US Agency for International Development, Romania is now pursuing a restructuring programme, similar in principle to other Eastern European economies (Gelb & Gray, 1991).

The economic restructuring program was launched in 1997 and conducted to mass dismissal of the employees. They received compensated salaries no matter if they were seeking another jobs or were leaving the labor market. Dismissed people preferred to remain unemployed than to change their profession and work domain or to leave the zone they live in order to find a job in other region. Employment in alternative jobs or jobs acquired by new qualifications is still very reduced, and current statistical data are still insufficient to analyse these problems within labor market. More evident apperar the tendency to seek unqualified or subqualified but better payable jobs abroad.

Romania’s economic collapse has been felt most strongly in the industrial sector, where the contribution of industry to gross domestic product (GDP) decreased between 1982-2002 from 55.2 % to 38.1% (World Bank Data). Meanwhile, imports of products, as for instance food, mounted from 996 US\$ millions in 1992 to 1,174 US\$ millions in 2002.

Here is a comparison within the structure of Romanian economy refering to industry, agriculture and services and to importations:

% of GDP (gross domestic product):

	1982	1992	2001	2002
Agriculture	19.9	19.4	14.8	13.1
Industry	55.2	44.0	37.0	38.1
Services	24.9	36.6	48.1	48.8
Imports of goods		36.2	41.1	41.2

Imports of food (US\$ millions):

	1992	2001	2002
Food	996	1,207	1,174

World Bank Data

We should analyse here the increase of services (and even the increase of consumption) as a mark of tertirisation following deindustrialization. Nevertheless, as we discussed, this interest in services and consumption is not only the result of deindustrialization but a reaction to an econmy of shortage, which understanding implies more than economical analysis and, surely, more than quantitative data.

Romania's approach to privatizing its state enterprises remains subject to much political debate and change. A National Agency for Privatization was established, controlled by a supervisory board of ministerial officials. Excluded from privatization were enterprises like railways, energy or defense, and companies selected by the government to be exchanged for state debts with foreign creditors. The Privatization Agency moved slowly towards its goal of privatizing large amount of Romania's state enterprises and the big troubles were the so-called industrial mammoths. The progress was rest much behind schedule on its annual plans to sell even smaller enterprises. A great problem has been here the lack of complementary laws and regulations dealing with corruption, bankruptcy, securities, information provision, state share interests and the allocation of privatization proceeds. There should be therefore an interesting information learning about how *Zaharul Ludus* was privatized and the political-socio-economical context and conditions this privatization implied.

Sugar industry as case study for food industry and economy

Concerning sugar industry in postcommunist Romania the *Adevarul* newspaper published a relevant article on August 13th, 2003:

For Romania, sugar industry is the best example of the decline of a branch within food industry. Sugar beet culture almost disappeared. Romania became in few years a sugar importer, even if it posses natural potential for obtaining the whole requested quantity for inner consumption by own production. Besides the payment of 275.000 lei (US\$ 8.3) for the ton of beet and the subvention, on paper, for the beet seed production [...], the state does not posses another switche that stimulate the beet producers. The producers' representatives say that the 30% custom duty for gross sugar and the 40% for white sugar are not enough, as comparing to Republic of Moldova which practices custom duties of 45% for

gross and 90% for white sugar, and Hungary – 93%. The result is the counter-performance of cultivating just 40,000 ha this year [2003], comparatively with 275,000 ha in 1989.

A study of Bucharest Equity Research Group (BERG) rating agency points out the fact that a restraint of state-owned sector by circa 20 times comparatively with the private sector took place in last years. Sugar production increased to 65,000 tons in 2002, by 18% more than in 2001, but only 14% of inner consumption was covered, and gross sugar importations reached to circa 450,000 tons. “Processed or gross sugar importation annually costs Romania circa US\$200,000,000”, Marius Lupu, BERG market analyst, declared. By 33 [sugar] factories Romania had in 1990, presently still work only five factories which refine gross sugar. Annual sugar needs in Romania are about 500,000 tons, and by beet processing results only 10%, which means that circa 90% of consumption is provided by processing imported gross sugar and by importing refined sugar. Because the possibility of importing gross sugar, factories renounced to contract agreements with beet cultivators.

Annual average consumption of sugar decreased to circa 20kg/inhabitant, meanwhile in England this reached to 40kg/inhabitant, and France, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia consume 30-40kg/inhabitant. Regarding the producing sugar factory, those which evitated the economic failure all became private proprieties. From among 33 functional sugar factories before 1989, 9 were capitalized with Western producers’ help. Nowadays *Zaharul Romane sc* (Romanian Sugar) [...] and *Danubiana Roman* are Agrana (Austria) holdings – which have a quote of 30% by sugar market in Romania; *Zamur* Targu Mures and *Zaharul Ludus* are Merquenterr (France) holdings; *Zahar Carei* and *Zahar Oradea* are Pfeifer & Langen (Germany) holdings. Investors brought high technology in Romania and attempted to train local producers to be profitable. [...]

Only few Romanian factories still produce beet sugar, BERG study present. Moreover, as Ioan Armenean, president of Sugar Patronage in Romania [*and current manager of Zaharul Ludus factory*] states, all sugar factories had deficits of hundred of millions lei last year. “Without protection measures [...] Romania will become totally dependent on importations”, points out Armenean. On capitalmarket, the “sugar games” have been made. Market analysts say that current conditions show that sugar market could not be considered profitable investment for portfolio investors, as supposing a high risk by their part.

Small packets would be probably profitable just in long time and in conditions within which a strategic investor would show his/her interest to buy stock from market in order to reach to hold control in a sugar factory. The possibility to cash dividends is null, as the companies register deficits. “An additional reason for avoiding an investement in a sugar factory would be the fact that on Romanian market the games are made and majority packets of most important factories were taken over by strategic investors; no viable sugar factory posses any profitable shareware structure”, believes Marius Lupu. The only apparent modifications that could emerge would be majority share packets exchanges, in the case the majority shareholders would be interested to liquidate their positions or would come into business potential investors.

Postcommunist restructuring and socio-cultural consequences

Subsequent social problems provoked by various moments of economic restructuring of *Zaharul Ludus S.A.* are to be established. First of all, the social nature (unemployment, short hours, strikes, social protection etc.) of this restructuring, with all his reasons and dimensions are to be detected. The problems of restructuration not only as shifting (as more or less dramatical change) the scope, the modes and the aim of production, but also as regarding the infrastructure, the actives, the funds, the markets interests, and – sure, not finally – the human resources. And not only as a (political-economical-social) process, but also as a (human) reaction to it. The consequences of restructuring are to be, therefore, clearly tabled in few pigeonholes and ethnographically visited. But this does not mean that there are not links between these categories. Restructuring is to be seen as a whole process that affects various types of relations and structures, and that affect themselves, each other (and this is the reason I presented some economical details above).

The *institutional paradigm* could be used here (as for instance considering a corporatist dimension of the factory, see Miroiu, 2002), but, at the same time, a *transformational system* could be there observed, or more precisely, an affected social organization. It's very important, I think, to observe that this institutional and social transformations are recent ones, and in some extent they are still developing ones. Political, economical, social and cultural problems these changes bring are to be keenly detected. Among these, for example, the way how the unemployed status of individuals was accepted and assumed: what were the changes in personal everyday life of those involved, what changes suffered the relationships with the other (relatives, friends, neighbours, former workmates), or if they could think to start a new life with a new job, or what were their opinions regarding the new political economy of the industrial factory etc. These crucial questions should be seen as connected with a large social and cultural framework in which the data are to be interpreted. I refer here to the level of an economical culture or to the understanding of socio-political changes among the workers and managers. The perception, and even the acceptance of one's own status as 'unemployed', for instance, is surely determined by these knoweldges. I have not to presume that they (the knowledges) are very ample, but nor to neglect the fact that individuals have a sort of comprehension that could be relevant as trying to understand their position. A very culture of change has to be considered in this framework, also, as taking into account the fact that we could not speak about changing economics without referring to the entire changing paradigm, which includes changing political system, changing social relations and institutions, changing cultural behavoir etc., as well.

A critical ethnography on startegies, experiences and discourses would have, therefore, a multi-sided and stratified framework where interrogations and interpretations be placed.

Reinvestments and reconsideration of work

Socio-economic transformation will not be seen just as abridged phenomenon of a precise industry and precise people, and regarding just as the very process of this change. The change in itself involves also the idea of reaction, as we have already noted, but, moreover, the idea of replacing in some manner the things that had been changed. In this, the apparently 'technical' term of reinvestments (referring primarily to the economic reinvestments) submit to a 'reinvestment' of personal social status and new attitude towards work, as well.

Two things I consider to be important here: the fact that people involved are to be, again, placed as focus in our investigation, and second, that we can delimitate a new frame as discussing about restructuration, namely, the attitude towards work. This surely would imply the political-economical culture about which I have spoken before, but also a reconsideration of the social relations and social organizations during a process like this.

4. Conclusions. Industrial enterprise restructuration: main means and ideas of analysing this process

Short historical considerations and motivations

Within the anthropological studies of socio-economic behavior an *economic anthropology* developed, especially, since the '30s, afterward the crucial suggestions of authors like Malinowski (1922), Weber (1922) or Mauss (1924). Even our endeavor is not properly an economic anthropological analysis, but being more similar to Ortner's postmarxist and postgeertzian understanding of political economy, I would like to put here some useful points, which an *anthropology of industrial enterprise* could offer. Going along with Sugita's (1992) assessing of this domain, I consider the appropriateness of some of these points.

Developed in the 30's as following the theories of human relationships (Mayo, 1933) the anthropology of industrial enterprise was firstly dominated by a functionalist vision within which factory was seen as an isolable unity, in a state of "balance" (Holzberg&Giovanni, 1981), and starting with the 60's by considering also the historical, social and political context of the enterprise (Gutkind, Cohen&Copans, 1978). The main interest of such an anthropology was initial shaped by the point of view of applied anthropology, but gradually the field proved to be interesting also theoretically. In this, some major topics were:

- ? the importance of informal practical knowledge regarding the enterprise development (Linhart)
- ? the effective organization of work comparatively to the prescribed organization
- ? the visions of the actors (e.g. for the Japanese workers, interpersonal relationships inside the "work group" constitutes one of the conditions of productions, fact that demonstrates the importance of the social and cultural dimension of the industrial work, Sugita, 1987)
- ? the ritualized practices in the frame of the industrial unit (Gerome, 1984)
- ? symbolic dimensions of the workers' memory (ex: workers in Port-de-Bouc shipyard identified the industrial unit with the town, Cornu, 1984)
- ? the image of the worker condition
- ? the environment of the industrial unit (e.g. in Annonay, in interwar period, local life and political divisions coincided with the opposition between different economical sectors of the enterprise, (Ganne))
- ? the means of attenuate conflicts as influencing the way of managing and the economic results of the enterprise (P. d'Iribrane)
- ? *ethnographies of organizations*: concrete functioning, implicit logics of the individual or group activities, explicit logics of managing systems, conflicts between them (Berry)
- ? *ethnographies of institutions*: assessments of human action theory (Mises, 1966; Olson, 1993) within institutions seen as constraints of action and parts of free-market systems.

This theoretical and empirical background created an autonomous field: *industrial anthropology* (principally, regarding the industrial sociology and the sociology of work) and developed some methodological issues as: considering the industrial enterprise as anthropological fieldwork, considering the status of participant observation (should be suitable for the researcher to engage as worker?) or considering ethical problems (Althabe). In spite of all this, there is a small number of monographs and a quasi inexistence of comparative materials, as Sugita observes. Referring to East European area, and to postcommunist context, the anthropological knowledge in the field is even worse, as Hann (1992) signaled "[W]e know practically nothing about the new forms of habitat or about the socialist workplaces".

Points of methodology and fieldwork approach

The East-European, Romanian, little town postcommunist context; the forms of habitat and relationships; and the socialist/postsocialist workplace are to be questioned by two main methods: observation and in-depth interviews. Besides, a suitable documentation and interpretation of different documents would complete this methodology.

There are some methodological features and concepts that I want to refer here. First of all the *fieldwork team*: it consists of four non-experienced junior students (at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj) that I coordinate. The advantages of this team are:

- ? a team-based approach, that would benefit from the age, gender, ethnic, and cultural differences between team members (cultural differences refer here to the fact that they are from different country zones)
- ? they did not properly experienced communism (they had 6-7 as communist system collapsed); and communism should be considered here as a temporal (context) alterity
- ? they do not have so many prejudices or "obsessive" references regarding work and life in communism, but simple curiosity.

An associate who have lived in Ludus and know the settlements and many people there will introduce us in the field.

Another methodological point is the idea of the *semi-familiar setting* or the *homeblindness*. Doing fieldwork in our own society we surely do not detect some obvious, 'natural' things for us. But, we would consider the dissimilarity of a location as Sugar Factory in Ludus as comparing it, for instance, with the University, own home or city center of Cluj. In addition, the idea of communism as alterity should be integrated. Anyhow our intention would not be to "make strange" the familiar, but to try to understand as deeply as possible what we will research.

The idea of participating to local life is another delicate problem. We are aware the fact that we would hardly be accepted to live with or work together with other people (anyhow more difficult than trying to do so in villages), but we would prepare our strategies. The idea is to make at least four visits to the field, to observe, to participate and to talk to as many people as necessary and to interpret and describe the records in a relaxed but precise manner. In this, the idea of conferring critical liberty to those interviewed or not to refuse suggestions arisen in the field, we would regard as very suitable.

We consider, together with Van der Maren (1995) that a research problem in social sciences could not be well set without considering its context. As referring to qualitative techniques of collecting data, these similarly, get their validity as taking into consideration the context. Participant observation or non-structured interviews would be appreciated therefore including for their procedures that typically integrates their environment into analysis. In this, capturing the point of view of those observed or interviewed would not consist just of listening what they say, or of requiring explanations for what they do. It would imply the situatedness of description into its own context, and the members' depictions would be considered as research instructions. In this sense (here from a methodological point of view) I referred initially to a critical ethnography.

As general theoretical paradigm within which we will situate the methodology, we will adopt very narrow Sherry Ortner's *practice theory*, a practical actor-centered methodology. In short, practice theory examines the things people do (observation) and say (interviews) on a daily basis. By practicing or participating in these events people are strengthening the systems and ideologies, but the systems and ideologies also shape them. Ortner describes practice theory as "a blend of Geertzian *thick description* and a more politicized view of culture that focuses on the relationship between individuals and the overarching social and economic structures that organize their lives" (see also Levine 1996).

The *ideological context* – whose importance is well-known within any comprehensive paradigm, as practice theory is, – would assure so the development of a multi-methodological approach, mainly based on observation and interviews, as I already mentioned, but sustained by documents analysis, visual ethnography and fieldnotes as well.

Let me refer now to particular methods to be used, with direct reference to the research hypothesis and possible topics drafted ahead. An approximate division of labor inside teamwork will be made firstly (some of us will be responsible mainly with observation, some of us with interviews; some of us will interview precise persons; some of us will be in charge with gathering documents etc.)

- *Observation*: peripheral observation and, if possible, participant observation in work activities inside factory and participant observation in local small-town life are to be carried on; as clue objectives we would pay attention to facts, rhythm, exposition and relationships as they are expressed by spatial, temporal and verbal behavior and conversations. Main loci of observation would be, primarily the factory and their immediate surroundings, the houses and institutions of those interviewed, critical places like bars, railway stations, churches etc., other relevant locations people might perhaps indicate and our information and intuition could discover;
- *Interviews*: semi-structured and non-structured interviews will be practiced; opened questions and a specific technique of the dialog (including reformulations, showing enthusiasm, miming ignorance etc.) will be developed on different topics starting with the very general ones (as for instance the life during communism or the way people founded their own families in Ludus) and moving to more particular ones (as for instance referring to the very moment of restructuring or the things people did after ward). As sample interview questions that should be set referring to major aspects of the economic restructuring and its social consequences these could refer to: (1) how the role of restructuring is interpreted and whether it is perceived to be a political or economical process with differential outcomes. This would be examined both through direct questioning and through the interpretation of responses to questions on current political-economical and social practices; (2) relationships existing between restructuring politics, development interests and community/individual interests; how the boundaries to these relationships are constituted; and, most significantly, what is the resulting balance of power; or to (3) how the balance of power affects access to the restructuring politics and implementation (and to other sources of influence on the restructuring process) and the ability of various interests to have their priorities incorporated into restructuring decisions, as well as the participation at that ‘culture of change’. This would describe many levels, as for instance, what actually happened with facilities, depots and utilities, what restructuring aspects affected what individual aspects of life, what the local community reflected the restructuring and what in fact meant ‘restructuring’ subjectively etc.
- *Gathering documents and document analysis*: a range of useful documents regarding both general information about town history, town industry and social life in Ludus and official or semiofficial records (as for instance factory archives, official statements during communist and postcommunist period referring to Ludus socio-economical life or a confirmed *monograph of Ludus* made by a local Hungarian teacher). All these scriptural data would be interpreted based on the general theoretical assumption made before and with focal interest in factory and social consequences of restructuring. The rules of such an analysis would respect operations of delimiting themes and formes as categorization, contextualization, metaphorical reduction, formal analysis, structural analysis or textualization.
- *Visual ethnography*: a set of pictures would be taken or reintegrated into the finale ethnographic description. Photos made by team members, old and more recent photos, postcards or posters presenting town, people, people at work, significant moments of their

social history (such as communist manifestations inside factory unit or personal photos sent by former workers who now are working abroad) will consist not only illustrative support of ethnographic writing but also key point and source of suitable interpretation.

- *Fieldnotes* will be encouraged to be taken in order to organize fieldwork and clarify the things and events. These will contain both a personal adapted agenda of each teamwork member task and notes of corresponding observed facts. Moreover, personal questions, issues, doubts, ideas, reflections and conversations that are arising during fieldwork are to be put down here in order to enrich and explicit each step of the research process. We will consider very useful these fieldnotes at the moments of writing the ethnographic text, not only as reconstituting the context but also as rendering plural visions of the same object or problem, or transcribing a textual ethnography as integrating subjective notes on field in the final ethnographic writing.
- *In team discussing data*, carried on at the end of each research session, will thus respond to problems put in that fieldnotes and to other proposed ad-hoc. The data gathered at a given moment will be discussed on the basis of the proportions of the samples expressing specific opinions, according to the reasoning behind these opinions, and in terms of the implications of these findings. The categories used are of critical importance as being generated from the responses themselves; they could identify issues that might have been overlooked in a more structured questionnaire. So, despite inherent difficulties in large quantities of qualitative data, the discursive response would offer a more accurate reflection of reality by providing the very basis of the framework for analysis, rather than necessitating fitting responses into preconceived categories.

Concerning the *data validation* we will try to verify each information as the investigation develops. In this, we will consider the triangulation of the researcher (the records gathered by different researcher on the same topic will be compared), the methodological triangulation (that same information will be obtained by various methodological techniques), and the theoretical triangulation (some data will be interpreted within the framework of different theories).

Finally, as ethnographic writing techniques we will try to use primarily a transparent explicit language with precise references to things described. We will encompass, in a classical manner, the object starting from more general to more particular, but we will be also concerned about presenting – in a more postmodern manner – the ethnographer in the field with his/her subjectivity and personal influence on data. In this, fieldnotes would be very useful as I already mentioned, but even more, a textualized significance of the field would be emphasized. The final text would be therefore more likely to a thick description way of writing, with equal attention conferred to the voice of those investigated as well as to the voice of the ethnographer and with special consideration towards ideological aspects of economy, society and culture.

The study inside the text will have mainly, as object, the data such as experiences, strategies and discourses, placed in the framework of socio-economical anthropological realities as observed and questioned in the field, and in the framework of socio-economical anthropological theories and analysis as presented above.

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