

Roşia Montană Project

The case

Roşia Montană is documented since 131 AD, when it was named *Alburnus Maior*. Over time, the specific activity of this area was the exploitation of gold, which started in the second century during the Roman period. Roşia Montană is one of the oldest towns in Europe with tradition of precious metals exploitation. The prosperity climax of the region was achieved during the Austro-Hungarian period, when the town looked stylish with theatres and casinos.



The decline began with the communist period and the nationalisation of the mine. The place became famous when a Canadian company, Gabriel Resources, wanted to extract gold from the mine using a cyanide separation technique. Because of this project, local authorities gave up on the local tourism projects. Being one of the oldest mine field county, the history here is considerable. Alburnus Maior Citadel located on the Citadel Hill, the XVIII-XIX century houses and the First World War Heroic Monument are among the historical assets this county has together with the natural protected monuments, Raven's Rock and the Choped Rock.

The change process

Roşia Montană Project is a controversial project of gold exploitation in the area of Roşia Montană town in Apuseni Mountains, Romania. The project was initiated by Roşia Montană Gold Corporation society (hereinafter RMGC) which, after a period of exploitations, requested the legal approvals for surface exploitation of gold resources in the area. The company's request has encountered opposition from many local NGOs, worried about the ecological impact of gold exploitation with tailings cyanidation operation. In April 2011, the project still hasn't obtained authorisation for the deploy. Following the request, since September 2010, an analysis of the environmental impact has been in progress, being performed by the local environment minister.

The main argument in favour of the project is that its implementation would create jobs in a deprived area and would improve the population's way of living, through training in new professions etc. Accepting the idea that any major investment in the area is good and necessary, the risks involved must be analyzed and weighed without preconceived ideas, if these benefits are justified by the negative and predictable consequences and side effects.

RMGC mining company proposes a different approach to an economic project, which hasn't been applied in Romania yet, but operating successfully in other countries. Namely, the project involves deploying the mining activity in the same time with the reorganisation of the entire area so that interest targets for tourists will be enhanced to modern standards. Roşia Montană project includes a



rehabilitation, replanting and protection of wildlife program to ensure at the end of the mine life a harmoniously natural landscape.

For the protected species, there have been developed specific protection measures, such as replication of nesting and living habitats, and also the achievement of vegetation corridors, which provides the movement of animals between areas of vegetation, bypassing the industrial area.

The project will not change the soil situation in the project perimeter. When the construction of the mine will begin and through the whole development, the removed soil will be stored. At the mine closure, this material will be used to restore the soil profile. It will be replanted with local species of grass. After a year or two, bushes and trees will be planted. This way, RMGC is committed to rehabilitate the area with the same kind of soil on an area at least equivalent with the conditions before the project.

In total, the company will participate with a budget of at least \$45 million for research, conservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage in the area. So far, RMGC allocated over \$11 million to run the National Research Programme Alburnus Maior, the most important archaeological research program in Romania and one of the largest in Europe.

At the same time, in 2008 - 2009, RMGC tuned up a comprehensive emergency program for the lots in the protected area, a total of 160 lots interventions were realised. In addition, the restitution projects for 11 buildings in the centre of Roşia Montană were finished, some of them were classified as historical monuments. The first house was completely restored and rehabilitated at the beginning of 2010, and in present it accommodates the History of Mining Exhibition 'The Gold of Apuseni Mountains'.

Another benefit brought by RMGC project is to achieve the necessary work for collecting and cleaning acid waters and also to eliminate pollution caused by previous mining.

This site contains the largest gold and silver deposit in Europe (300 tones of gold and 1700 tones of silver). If the proposed project progresses, it will be active on a period of 22 to 28 years (about 2 years - construction, 16 years - operating, 4-10 years - closing and rehabilitation). After the mine closure, the site will be monitored at least 30 years after closing, according to the law in force at a national and European level. Costs for these works on closing, rehabilitation and monitoring after closure will be borne by the project operator (RMGC).

The company is determined to transform this mining project in a professionalism model and share the benefits with the community and region that have been exploited, impoverished and neglected for too long. The President of Gabriel Resources, Alan Hill, said several times: 'I have built all kind of mines in my life, but there is one kind of mine that I haven't built and I will never build it, namely a mine who will not bring benefits to the local community'.

If the authorisation and premises will be given, Gabriel Resources say they will use the best practices in the domain to implement and operate Roşia Montană Project. The new mine will work at higher safety standards than the ones

requested by the International Cyanide Management Code, formulated by the United Nations (UN). The project will respect the strictest environment protection standards in gold exploitation, and not just those imposed in Romania, but also those imposed by any countries in EU.

On the other hand, NGO's like Alburnus Maior, Save Roşia Montană, Greenpeace and other Romanian environmental NGO's have found that the ecological impact this project would be bigger than RMGC estimated. This is one of the reasons why RMGC still doesn't have the environment authorisation from the Romanian government. Natural protected areas and rare animals and flowers are involved, as they grow and develop in these mountains. Also, these NGO's think that the local possibilities for tourism could bring more money to the locals and the government.

Also, the president of Alburnus Maior NGO was threatened by two employees of RMGC and Alburnus Maior NGO also found out that RMGC tried to manipulate the mass-media by providing lapidary information and the people that were working on the environment authorisation by paying them in stocks, rather than in money.

Alburnus Maior won a lawsuit through which they accused the Romanian government and RMGC's project of violating the Aarhus Convention.

Greenpeace became interested in this project, as it would become the biggest mining career in Europe. Environmentalist from Greenpeace fight against the usage of cyanide, as the pollution effect can affect not only Roşia Montană region, but, by infiltrating in the water resources, also the Danube and parts of Hungary.



Also, RMGC lost the lawsuit in which they were accused of forced displacement of locals. The local priests founded an organisation that protects the rights of the locals and supports them when the company pressures them in relocating or, if the locals want to relocate, the organisation helps them in obtaining an offer that will respect their rights, so they won't be cheated.

The outcome

Greenpeace, Alburnus Maior, Save Roşia Montană and all the other NGO's have successfully delayed RMGC's project. Through their annual festival 'Fân Fest', they drew attention on the importance of the region and they also showed that tourism can flourish and bring more advantages under the right guidance than mining.

RMGC's campaign succeeded in showing the need of jobs and money for undeveloped regions in Romania.

Lessons learned

'Weighing the potential benefits and risks involved in the Roşia Montană mining project it results that in its present form the project can not be classified as work for 'public interest in the economic benefit of the country' and the benefits of private interests don't justify the risks and lead to the conclusion that the initiative should be abandoned before irreversible catastrophic consequences', says Ionel Haiduc, head of the Romanian Academy.

From the point of view of a person who observes the involved parts reactions in this project there are more conclusions:

1. The corporation can only realise a part of its project, that is a certain amount of the ore extraction. In order to take in account the EU regulations, 15% of the extracted ore would be possessed by the corporation and the rest by the state. In the same time, so that the social and natural environment protection would be realised, the state would give from its own initiative or 'donate' another 40% of the mining income from Roşia Montană Corporation. In this way, the EU requests will not be violated and the area could be developed.

2. According to the method of ore extraction, EU has priority. I think that every person from the Romanian or international community wouldn't approve using such a method because it will bring more damage than achievements.

3. From an archaeological point of view, the corporation should not exist in that place. There are many associations and corporations which would be interested in a tourist development based on the archaeological discoveries in the area. This way, the mining area would be closed and will protect both the environment and will bring proper development of the area. It's true that an important resource will be lost but the protection of the environment is more important than the mining use because the tourism could bring an income twice as bigger, not to mention the environment protection need shown worldwide.

From the three presented conclusions and the previous measurements taken by different NGO's, we can see that an area could also bring benefits by protecting the environment without disturbing it.

