

PRELIMINARY CASE STUDY ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY AND LIFE QUALITY IN THE ROMANIAN RURAL RUDIMENTARY COMMUNITIES

Gabriela Manea¹, Elena Matei and Adrian Tiscovschi

Received 19 March 2009; Accepted 18 September 2009

Abstract: In the present study, our intention is to reveal the positive and negative aspects of living, in the rural communities appearing in Romania in the last 5-6 decades; often, these have occupied territories with astonishing natural landscapes, situated close to large rural settlements with a century-old history. If, from the perspective of the quality of the natural components of the environment, inside the perimeter of these settlements we can talk about extremely favorable habitat conditions, from the perspective of the access to utilities and technical facilities, we can identify a primitive, rudimentary lifestyle, whose only goal is most oftenly, the access of the minimum resources for subsistence. This case study has been made on two communities, situated at the contact between the Subcarpathians of Arges and the Iezer-Papusa and Leaota Mountains, respectively: the Gura Pravat village, a formal settlement, which extends along the left bank of the Argesel river, north of Namaiesti tourist village and an informal village situated on the left bank of the Dambovită river, inside the Complex Reserve Cheile de la Cetateni.

Key words: rural communities, environment, life quality, Roma craftsmen, Gura Pravat, Cetateni

Rezumat: Consideratii geografice asupra mediului si calitatii vietii in comunitatile rurale rudimentare din Romania. Studiu de caz: asezarile Cetateni si Gura Pravat. In prezentul studiu, intentia noastra este de a identifica aspectele pozitive si negative ale locuirii, in comunitatile rurale rudimentare infiripate in Romania in ultimele 5-6 decenii. Prezentul studiu releva interactiunile dintre comunitatile de romi si mediul inconjurator, aspectele pozitive si negative ale locuirii, in contextul unui studiu de caz asupra a doua asezari rudimentare, aparute in Romania, in a doua jumatate a secolului XX : Gura Pravat si Cheile Cetateni ; acestea ocupa teritorii cu peisaje naturale de exceptie, situate in proximitatea unor asezari rurale de mari dimensiuni si cu istorie seculara. Studiul releva faptul ca, desi din perspectiva calitatii componentelor naturale ale mediului, in perimetrul acestor localitati putem vorbi despre conditii de habitat deosebit de favorabile, din perspectiva accesului la utilitati si facilitati tehnice, identificam un mod de viata rudimentar, primitiv, centrat adesea doar pe accesarea resurselor de subzistență. Studiul de caz se bazează atât pe

¹ Ass.Prof.Dr. Gabriela Manea, Ass.Prof.Dr. Elena Matei, Lecturer Dr. Adrian Amadeus Tiscovschi, Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest, N. Balcescu Avenue, no.1, sector 1, Bucuresti, Romania, e-mails: maneagabriela2002@yahoo.com, matei@geo.unibuc.ro, tiscovschi@yahoo.com

abordări inductive cât și deductive, pe analiza datelor din teren, în scopul identificării specificului relațiilor comunități rudimentare – natura – societate, la început de secol 21. Rezultatele obținute arată că aceste comunități rudimentare de rromi demonstrează o mare capacitate de adaptare la mediul natural - dobândită din experiența lor de grupuri marginalizate pe situri nefavorabile, care în timp istoric i-au obligat să migreze – și de conservare a tradițiilor, perpetuate prin autosegregare și legități specifice interne, ale etniei. Studiul pune în evidență faptul că, populația de rromi rudari din comunitățile analizate este încă în mare măsură dependentă de resursele oferite de mediul natural, ignorând cu desăvârșire impactul pe care multe dintre acțiunile lor îl exercită asupra mediului. Răspunsul oferit de acest studiu demonstrează, o dată în plus, că minoritatea rromă poate sedentariza în condițiile unui mediu natural favorabil, dar că are nevoie de educație ecologică și asistență tehnologică pentru a-și optimiza stilul de viață.

1. Introduction

The situation of Roma minorities in Eastern Europe has been a subject of debate for many scientific fields and projects, from law (Gounev, Ph., Bezlov, T., 2006; Ramet, S., 2008) to medicine (Mihailova, V. et al, 2007).

In Romania, the literature on Roma is more abundant before World War II and after 1990 and poorer under the Communist regime. There are a few difficulties in approaching the subject of Roma minorities. One of them is related to the census data, which, in the case of this minority, do not reflect the whole reality that generated many of the academic debates. Thus, while census figures denote a population of 535,000 Gypsies in 2002, researchers estimated that this number is in fact closer to 2 million (Stroschein, S., 2002). The EU reported almost 1,1-1,5 million Gypsies, as many of them declared having a dual ethnicity: Romanian and non-Roma (European Roma Rights Center). These differences in numbers are related to the fact that Roma communities are often associated with high crime rates, and therefore many of their members prefer not to disclose their belonging to the minority and declare themselves Romanian in order to avert any speculation and to improve their social and economical standing (Liegeois and Gheorghe, 1995). In fact, the history of the Roma minority is one of discrimination, including slavery which was abolished in 1856 and the segregation during the Antonescu regime in 1942, when Roma were shifted into separate settlements. During the communist regime, Gypsies have adapted to both rural and urban areas, but in most cases they remain closed communities, (Abraham, 1994).

Even after the 1990s, discrimination and deprivation against ethnic Romas are still common, in virtue of the ethnic affiliation (Ramet, S., 2008) and Romanians' negative perception of the community which is difficult to eradicate in spite of the country's accession to the EU. Although the anti-discrimination law was adopted in 2000, it was implemented only later, in 2002, when the Council for Combating Discrimination was established.

Even if the government made several attempts to align minorities' legislation with that of the European Union (Stroschein, S., 2002), the population has kept a negative perception about Roma. This may be related to the fact that the majority of Gypsies, are reluctant to attend the compulsory 10 years of education, which are free of charge and do not take any interest in improving their living conditions and reducing adverse environmental effects.

Many newspapers are still reporting violence and high rates of poverty and illiteracy among Roma communities, and thus many Romanians prefer not to have them as neighbors.

Although several ethnic political parties and NGOs consisting of Roma elites have tried to improve the communities' image and disseminated information on their traditions and rights in the media, Roma ethnics, either rich or poor, still preserve their segregation.

The case-studies presented in this paper, focused on two communities of Roma craftsmen (rudari²), located at the crossing point between the Subcarpathians of Arges, the Iezer-Papusa

² **Rudar** = Title given in the Romania's history regions to workers (Gypsy) who used to make wooden objects, p. ext. Gypsy handicraftsman who usually works with wood, wash basins, spoons, spindles. Source: DEX '98

Mountains and the Leota Mountains: the village of Gura Pravat, extended along the Argesel river, upstream of the tourist village of Namaiesti (belonging to the Valea Mare Pravat commune) and the informal Roma settlement developed in the proximity of the Cetateni village, on the Dambovitza river, within the area of the Cheile Cetateni Archaeological and Geomorphologic Reserve.

If in general, Gypsy houses can be found near Romanian settlements, rarely mixed within the heart of the settlements and usually occupying the poorer areas nearby, in this case they were atypically located in an area with a breathtaking landscape, close to forests, rivers, near two tourist resorts.

At this preliminary stage, the paper reveals the interaction between natural capital and informal settlements or rudimentary formal settlements as well as the impact of several human activities upon protected areas with natural and cultural heritage, in the absence of coherent strategies to preserve and use the surveyed area for tourism purposes.

Considering the relatively small number of studies on the environmental impact of Gypsy communities, this paper enhances the knowledge about this interaction and offers information and solutions regarding environmental issues affecting the Roma community at the beginning of a new millennium, which envisaged as an ecological one.

2. Theoretical aspects and methods of research

Reviewing a range of international literature dealing with Roma issues over longer periods of time (Legeois, JP, 1971, Lipsky, M., 1980, William P., 1989, Crowe, D., 1994, Stiftung, FE, 2003, etc., and the Romanian literature on the topic, written after 1990 and less during the Communist regime, the study takes into account both the theoretical frameworks exposed in the previous findings and practical elements of the case studies.

It relies on the work of historians, which partly filled this empty field of research with a long series of papers and books (Merfea, M., 1994, Achim, V., 1998; Anghel I. et al, 2000; Tamas, C., 2001 etc.) and the sociological research on minorities' interrelations (Abraham, D. et al, 1994), social perception (Bacanu, M., 1996), the social status of Roma in rural areas (Surdu et al, 1998), and Roma identity issues (Balasescu, A., 1997). In addition to this, it reviewed ethnological research on traditions (Cobianu, M., 1996; Badescu, I. Et al., 1994 etc.), language issues (Cherata, L., 2003; Kogalniceanu, M., 1997) as well as geographical work on population structure (Cucu, V., 1992); ethnicity (Costachie, S., 1997) and Roma regional patterns (Cretan, R., 2006 etc.).

The study was conducted both in a deductive way using the findings in the existing literature on Roma and in inductive one, through field observations on two atypical villages in Romania: Cetateni and Gura Pravat and modeling quantitative and qualitative data.

The study begins with a diachronic analysis of the two villages, followed by an evaluation of the environmental favorability for habitation; it identifies the human activities undertaken by communities, assesses their impact upon tourism and protected areas and ends with an evaluation of the quality of life using specific indicators such as housing, urban services, education, health etc.

In order to have some benchmarks in the appreciation of the impact upon the environment and the quality of living in the studied perimeters, we have examined several indicators.

In consistence with the Romanian legislation on the quality of the environment and the national data published in The Environment State Report (2008), the study uses: the rivers' water chemical and biological quality, (MO 161/2006), waste management and deforestation information. Air quality (gas emission, particle PM10) was investigated by the interviews.

In the quality of living approach we maintained the following sociological and geographical terms:

-*The quality of living* represents the degree to which basic needs are satisfied by the available living conditions and resources. In other words, the quality of living is measured according to the

internal environment, indoor and the external environment which corresponds to its proximity, (Nae. M, 2006);

-*The house* is a basic human necessity; it represents more than commodity, it is one of the basic constructions of society and an important determiner in stimulating the productive potential of human beings. Homes are important consumer resources.

The home was defined by its elements of internal and external environment which influence what we call *the comfort of living* and ultimately, the social quality of living.

The comfort of living was estimated:

- Qualitatively, through the appreciation of some factors of quality of the environment specific to the home (luminosity, thermo-isolation, ventilation etc.), (Matei, E. 2007);

- Quantitatively, through living indicators (number of people/room-P/R, living surface/person-S/P, number of rooms/home-R/H, size of home-SH, indicator of the living density –S/H)- (Vintila and Dumitrache, 2000).

To achieve these goals, the study is based on quantitative (shot techniques, questionnaire applied on 100 respondents) and qualitative assessment (semi structured interviews) and specific methods: diagnose analyses, comparison, mapping and field observations which were hinted to identify the habitation particularities in the two selected villages and the dimension of interrelations inside communities or between them and the environment.

3. The analysis of the observation sites

3.1 Diachronic analysis of settlements and the characteristics of their surrounding environment

The rural settlements studied occupy territories located at comparable altitudes, respectively 750-800 m, corresponding to a large valley corridor, in the case of the Gura Pravat village and a narrow valley, in the case of "Cheile de la Cetateni".

The Roma craftsmen community, occupying the medium sector of the Argesel Valley, was established back in 1952, when the first three families settled their houses on Carstii Valley (small river, streaming to the right of Argesel). In the 1990s, the craftsmen families (who became more numerous) were given the right to settle on the Argesel Valley, upstream of Namaiesti village. Today, the settlement counts around 900 people, who extended their modest households over more than 1 km, towards the upper course of Argesel.

While the old village nucleus was located at higher altitudes, the new settlements were developed in the low-lying areas, (fig.1). Their choice to live there, was related at first to traditions in crafting and the presence of some raw materials. After 1990, when this area was put under conservation and tourism developed, the Roma adapted their initial occupations to the presence of visitors. Thus, the landscape has changed, presenting a contrast between the pristine of nature or beauty of human attractions and the unstructured of Roma's settlements.

Cetateni, the informal craftsmen settlement on the quay of Dambovită (it stretches over 2.5 km in length) is located at the southern end of the Leaota Mountains, advancing on the left side of the river with over 10 km, beyond the Campulung Depression, in a natural reserve. The landscape value is given by the ridges of Leaota, which reach here a height of 950 – 1100 m and which are made alternatively from marble, clay, and conglomerates. The most representative elements for landscape are mountains, with steeped slopes, drained by rivers, like Dambovită's valley, where frequently one can see the cut ends of the harder layers, the secondary affluent valleys, the adjacent slopes often transformed in ridges with a ruin-shape aspect. The most beautiful ridge, with a length of over 1.2 km is situated on the left of the valley, having a West-East extension and a height between 600 and 750 m. It overlooks the valleys of Dambovită and of the two other tributaries through slopes of 150 – 200 m. Near the middle of the ridge, there are the ruins of a Dacian fortress (II-I centuries b.C.) and of a medieval one. At the end of the 15th century, a cave settlement named "The Convent of Negru Voda" was founded in this location. At the base of the slope of the main ridge, to the Dimbovită, the archeologists found the remains of settlements from the 13th and 14th centuries. The narrowness

of the valley and the steep slopes, as well as the position of the ridge, which offers a good perspective to the north and south, have been favorable elements for choosing this location as a point of observation and defense (The Fortress of Dimbovita), and later on as a customs point. In the middle of this magnificent landscape, on the left bank of Dimbovita, 2-3 km away from the developed village of Cetateni and at only 20 km away from the city of Campulung Muscel, 800 craftsmen live in conditions which are more than rudimentary. Some of them live in wooden or stone huts, built illegally, among the ruins of a church and of the oldest Dacian fortress south of the Carpathians.

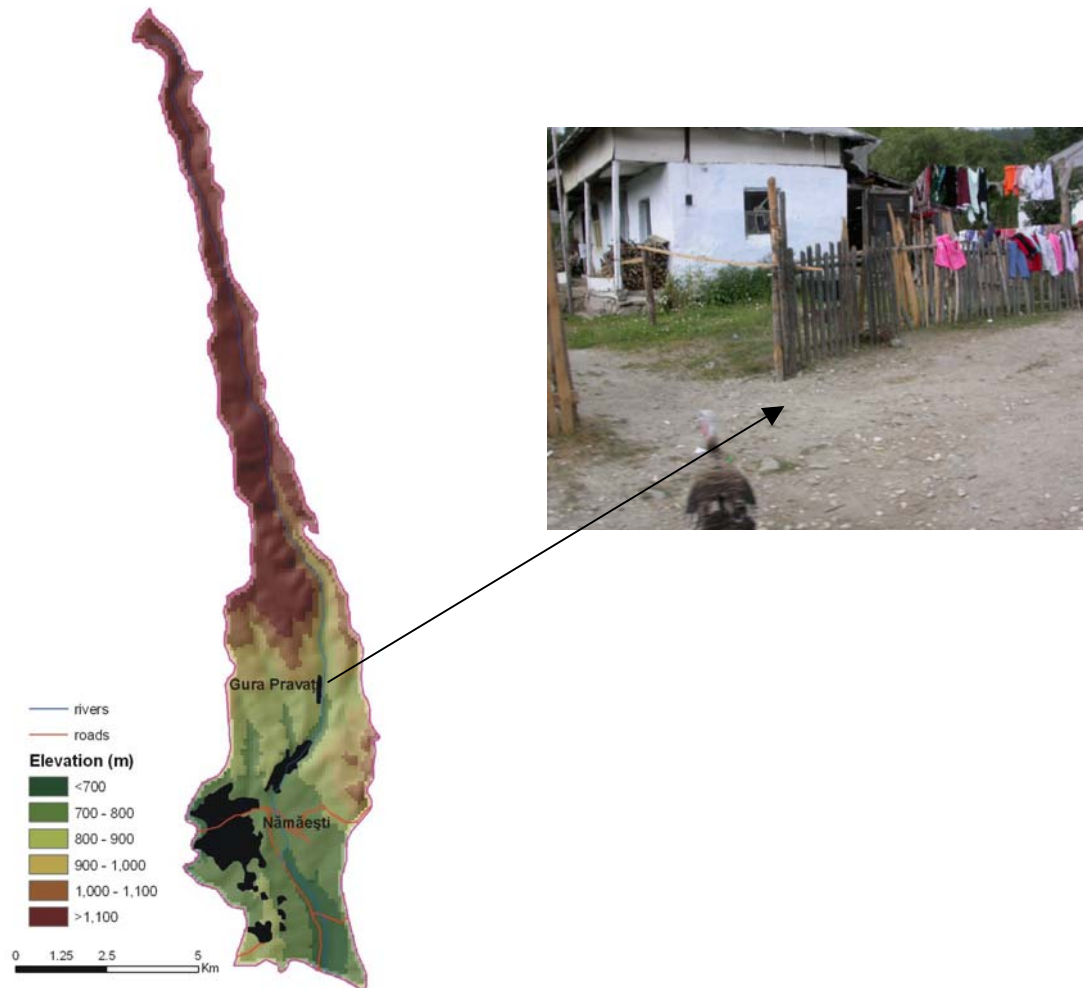


Fig 1. Gura Pravat Village. The landscape (Author Robert Dobre³).

3.2 The role of natural capital in Roma's decision to settle

It is widely known that there is a special relationship between the natural capital and spatial distribution of Roma communities generated by their past traditions, those of processing of the specific natural resources: wood, clay etc. These cases reflect this relationship in the spatial pattern of Roma distribution.

Gura Pravat village extended longitudinally, in the flood plain of the Argesel river and Cetateni, nearby Leaota Mountains benefiting from a variety of rocks: grit stones, shales, clay, conglomerates and large area of forests with soft wood species: fir-tree, lime-tree up in the mountain or willow and poplar nearby rivers as main resources for „rudari” Roma group.

The landscape value, given by the steep slopes on both banks, the conglomerate layers which are almost vertical and unusual landforms around peaks such as columns, „Babele”, has no relevance for Roma life. Though such elements are valuable for tourism, they may generate

³ Researcher in „Land Degradation and Geomorphologic Dynamics” Research Center, University of Bucharest

natural hazards such as the disintegration of blocks and debris flows down into Dambovită valley (fig.2).

The presence of water resource like Argeșel, tributary of the Targului River and Dambovită is precondition for settlement and practicing certain crafts.

Forests generally provide them with wood resources used by the Rudari group in practicing their traditional crafts and by all groups for heating while meadows support animal husbandry. Around the village of Gura Pravăț, the vegetation is dominated by beech – pure mountain beech forests (fagete), followed by a lower layer of bushes rich in wild fruits used both in their diet and earning an extra income by gathering and selling them in local town markets.

Both settlements belong to the high hilly climate, with annual average temperatures of 8-9°C, annual average rainfalls of 800-1000 mm, and moderate winds as speed and intensity. The geographical position within the valley corridors of the Argeșel and Dambovită rivers, offer sheltering conditions, due to the hilly and mountainous tops, situated on both sides of the two rivers. The characteristics of the climatic elements define the presence of a stimulating tonic bioclimatic in the analyzed territories, with a psychosanogenic effect (Teodoreanu, E., 1984) which means a high degree of favorability for living.

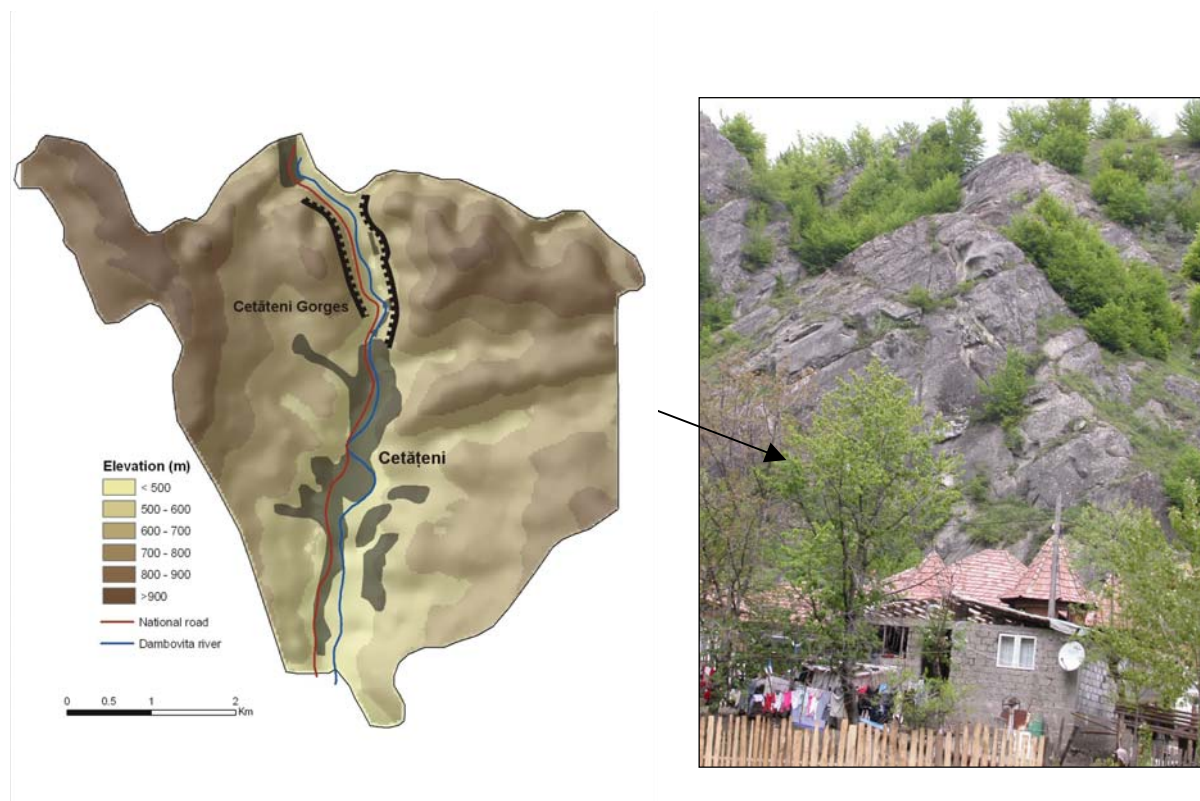


Fig 2. Cetățeni Village (Author Robert Dobre)

All landscape values: the general narrowness of the valley, on whose slopes, the steepness and ridges are quite frequent, the different topo-climates, imposed especially by the exposure and the high landscape energy (250-300 m), the variety of rocks, which led to the development of a rich herbal vegetation, in which, some plant species seen today both in the high altitude mountain regions or in the southern hills, as well as many endemic species are preserved in a protected area.

3.3 Economic activities practiced by the Roma craftsmen

Presently, the human activities are almost exclusively tied to the natural resources offered by the environment:

- the water of the Argeșel and Dambovită rivers, unsafely used for drinking water and dumping household waste;

- forest wood, used in constructions, as fuel and for various threaded handicrafts;
- the hygrophyte pasture lands on the brooks of the main rivers and their tributaries and the secondary pastures resulted through deforestation;
- wild berries;
- river stone.

During the communist period, the exploitation of the limestones in the Mateias Massive, situated in the proximity of the Namaiesti village, employed a large part of the labor force on the entire territory of the Valea Mare Pravat village, including the Roma craftsmen in the community of Gura Pravat. In the late 90s, when the Compound of Lianti Campulung was taken over by S.C. Holcim S.A., company restructuring resulted in an increase in unemployment among the craftsmen on the Argesel Valley, mostly employed as unqualified workers. Considering the fact that their families are generally large, by national standards (each family having at least 4 persons – at least 2 children or often as many as 4 or 5 children); the opportunities offered by the local economy are rather limited. In fact, the whole area of the Campulung Lowland – the town of Campulung Muscel and the surrounding villages - has been subject to economic restructuring, including the closure of the following industrial units: The “ARO” Vehicle Plant, The Compound for Wires and Synthetic Fibers and various production lines of the cement plant.

The limited opportunities for full time employment also limit the craftsmen's ability to gain sufficient money for a decent living. On the other hand, their education level is generally low and community has little interest in improving it, despite the local authorities' effort to facilitate the access to education for all children (in Gura Pravat, there is a school only for children belonging to the Roma community).

The interviews with craftsmen representatives have revealed an extremely interesting fact, which can be related to acceptance of their modest condition: being used for generations to live at the periphery of larger rural communities and perceived as with a superior development level, the Roma craftsmen consider that their place in society is well established, their role being that of offering various services to the “gentlemen” in the neighboring towns, in exchange for an amount of money or food products, clothes, household items or any other thing they wish to dispose of in their home. This mentality can be considered a way of consented social auto segregation (Bacanu, M. 1997). In turn, the “gentlemen” often rely on craftsmen for seasonal and household work (agricultural activities, building inside the household, cleaning, etc.). The relationship gentleman-craftsman is based almost every time on the respect of requirements of the former over the latter.

The second part of the interviews allows identifying the specific and the types of Roma activities. Among those with a seasonal character, we could mention picking and selling wild berries (strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, rose berries, mushrooms), practiced both on the move as well as stationary (in the second case, the target is the tourists passing through the Gorges of Cetateni). They do not use the land for farming activities and maintain the ancestral practice of fruit picking. Though they do not acknowledge having any impact on the environment, the practice of collecting wild berries does present certain safety issues in medical and environmental terms.

A more profitable activity compared to that previously mentioned, though illegal, is represented by *poaching for firewood*; the wood is traded in the near-by rural. In the past 6-7 years, as a result of the constant demand for firewood and its ever rising prices, the poaching activity has known an unprecedented proliferation. While the ones who practice it have the opportunity to make a generous profit, the local authorities have no coherent strategy to stop the illegal poaching. In time, wood poaching leads to social differentiation inside the craftsmen community, mainly visible in the aspect of their households and the consumer durables they possess.

An activity – which could be regarded as traditional for many craftsmen families- is *begging*. This has a negative impact on the relationship between the Romanian and the Roma communities, as the former tend to consider it as a constant nuisance. Begging is practiced both on the road - <<door to door>>, with the craftsmen shouting or knocking on the doors and asking Romanian families to offer them food or old clothes and household items – as well as in

crowded places (markets, fairs but mostly around tourist attraction). Such practices can be related to their tendency to accept poverty as a gift of fate. (Surdu, M., 1998).

3.4 Land use

Within the area occupied by craftsmen communities, the land use has a rather monotonous aspect, with most of the area being occupied by shanty buildings. Farming lands are limited to a few strips on which the community practices subsistence agriculture; the settlements are poorly connected to the near-by villages: in the case of the Gura Pravat settlement only through a forest road on the left bank of Argesel river while in the case of the Cetateni Gorges there are only a few tracks created over an area of archeological ruins.

3.5 Food resources

Gypsy craftsmen's diet is mainly based on animal products obtained in their own households (pork meat, poultry), on plants gathered from the surrounding environment (mushrooms, wild berries), products offered by those for whom they temporarily work (day work) or obtained from begging and least, by trading.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 The impact of human activities carried by gypsy craftsmen on the environment

The environment registered some episodic pressures, whose feedback can affect the Roma settlement themselves. The impact seems greater as it takes place in or nearby protected areas.

The main activity with a negative impact on the environment is represented undoubtedly by the *illegal exploitation and trading of wood*; the felling of trees is done especially at night, intensively and without a prior selection, according to health condition or age (fig.3.).



Fig 3. Ecological disaster due to the poaching for firewood nearby Cetateni

Consequence: progressive degradation of the forest ecosystems, through their frequent <<scraped-through>> felling of considerable forest tracts, with a negative impact on the hydrologic system and on the rhythm and intensity of slope processes (torrential erosion, bank crumble, erosion due to rainfalls etc.), (State of the Environment Report in Arges and Dambovită counties, 2008). On a long and medium term, the authorities' delay in applying severe sanctions may result in more gypsy craftsmen becoming involved in wood smuggling, with disastrous consequences for the environment, including limiting the habitat for certain endemic species, in the absence of any afforestation program (table 1).

<i>Activity</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Who</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>Recognized effect</i>
Illegal exploitation and trading of wood	night	horse owners	It is a necessity, Roma lives in a such way	none
General housekeeping	anytime	women	It's our way of organizing houses	none
Livestock farming	anytime	men	This is a tradition	none
Begging	anytime	children and old women	We have no education and we must live	none

Tab 1. The Roma perception of the impacts of their activities upon the environment. (Extract from the interviews, 20 July 2008, 20 July 2009.)

General housekeeping is on the second place among those activities with a negative impact on the environment. The craftsmen's households are in poor hygienic-sanitary conditions: lack of running water, built-up places for garbage containers, no septic tanks for collecting wastewaters and often – especially in the case of the households in Cetateni Gorges, no toilets. The main sources of drinking water are the two rivers, Argesel and respectively Dambovita; the rivers are popular for swimming, washing the animals and doing the laundry while also being used for waste disposal. As a result, the landscape in the Argesel and Dambovita valleys in the perimeter of the craftsmen communities is subject to biologic pollution (III quality grade) of the flowing waters and intense vegetation degradation, resulting from the nitrification of the soil; the species growing in the craftsmen's backyards and their proximities are by nettle, dock, sorrel, wild spinach etc. (Fig. 4).



Fig 4. Vegetation degradation in Gura Pravat area

According to the Targoviste Environment Protection Agency (APM) data, Dambovita River, downstream of Cetateni, registers the IInd grade both for chemical and biologic quality indicators (1.95 in 2008). The epidemiologic survey of the drinking water supply reports several cases of digestive diseases among Malu cu Flori population.

Livestock farming is destined for subsistence. Most often, the animals live together with people, without any separation between stables and yard. Many of the craftsmen rear horses as the carriage is their main mode of travel, (Fig.5.), both inside the settlement as well as outside it (during local holidays, the craftsmen go by cart to Campulung Muscel, unsafely using the national road DN 73).



Fig 5. Animals sharing the household space, without separate sheds

Carts are very important for firewood poachers. Apart from horses (usually only one), some of the households rear cattle and poultry.

Begging represents an activity with a negative impact, especially on the tourist activities in Namaiesti and around the archaeological site of Cetateni Gorges. Namaiesti village, situated downstream of Gura Pravat community, is famous for its monastery with original wall paintings, visited both by Romanians and foreigners. Visitors are often stopped at the entrance by begging craftsmen. Around the Cetateni Gorges, tourists driving from Campulung Muscel or Targoviste often stop to visit the monks' convent and the historical ruins inside the archaeological site located up on left-side Ridge of Dambovită River and park their vehicles close to the craftsmen's settlements. The latter often ask for money in order to watch over the vehicles. As a result, the owners are constrained to paying money, to feel safer. The perseverance with which the craftsmen and especially their children approach the tourists has a negative impact on the tourist experience of this spectacular site. Unlike the craftsmen in Gura Pravat, who legally own the land they occupy, the community in Cetateni abusively occupies the land and are tolerated by local authorities, unable to find a solution for their relocation.

4.2 Quality of living in the studied communities

According to the theoretical considerations mentioned above, within the area occupied by the studied communities, the notion of quality of living itself seems inappropriate. And yet, the natural potential of the environment in the perimeter of the Gura Pravat and Cetateni Gorge settlements is an exceptional one, if we refer to air quality and the extent of forested and aquatic surfaces. The members of Roma community appreciated in the interviews the importance of elements of the natural environment with landscape as the most important followed by the forest and water.

As far as the natural habitat potential, there are some differences between the two settlements, imposed by the particularities in the landscape morphology; these related to the opportunities for spatial extension offered by the landscape. As a result, in the case of Gura Pravat village, the larger valley of Argesel, with a well developed major bed on its left side, allows settlement expansion along both sides of the forest road. In the case of Cetateni Gorge community, the landscape imposes itself as a restrictive factor in the development of the built perimeter, due to the high inclination of both slopes of Dambovită on one hand, and on the other hand due to the ruin-shaped relief on the left side of the river, which restrains the accessibility and exposes buildings to the risk of rock downfalls. Another risk to which both settlements are exposed is flooding from torrential rainfalls (the annual average quantity of rainfalls can exceed 1000 mm).

The houses, as an insertion of human in nature, in both communities respect Roma traditions in architecture, density, shape and living standards.

The houses are not particularly comfortable. Luminosity is poor as rooms are built with small windows and doors. Thermo-isolation is offered by the walls themselves, which are made of wood, stone, clay and limestone. Roofs are made of modest materials. Ventilation is natural; many houses are not equipped with glass windows.

As far as living conditions are concerned, these are very low, especially in the case of Gura Pravat village. Most often, houses built by the owners themselves using local materials (wood, stone and sand) and are under-dimensioned, unsafe (fig.6), accommodating a large number of people (for a high quality of living, the international standards recommend 1 person/room); most of the homes have one single room for the whole family (fig.7). The medium size of houses (SH) is almost 10 m², with a high density of houses (13-20/ha).

The sanitary and hygienic facilities are non-existent, and most homes are not connected to any sewage system. Despite the precarious state of the settlements with regard to transport and water infrastructure, the majority of homes have electricity. The most important socio-cultural institution within the village is the primary school, in Gura Pravat. Unfortunately, teachers are reported a large number of students giving up their education.

The way of life in these rural communities is one focus on keeping traditions, except for the fact that sometime, among shacks, nowadays there are more and more signs of the 21st century: satellite antennas and often, expensive cars. It is true that lately there has been a slight emancipation of certain craftsmen families, whose houses tend to get closer and closer to the minimum standards of a decent home. The emancipation tendencies are welcomed, as long as the income sources of income are legal.



Fig 6. Houses in Cetateni -informal settlement

Despite these punctual issues, the life of Roma community is still dependent on natural resources, easily obtained from the environment and requiring little processing. The majority of Roma population refuses education and like Abraham wrote (1994) not very much attention is paid to the environment or society rules. The Roma communities continue to be affected by educational deprivation because of their high level of poverty.

They are highly adaptable and tend to sedentarily use local resources and find facile ways to make short-term financial gains. For the moment, housing and socio-cultural problems of this type of communities of Roma craftsmen are far from being solved, especially as their legitimacy of occupying the lands they use is highly debatable. However, low incomes together with the

social and economic marginalization do not visibly affect the optimism and the joy of life of the populations in question. Arguably, being used with this precarious but bohemian lifestyle maintained by entire generations, most of the Roma craftsmen do not wish to overcome their current social condition, maintaining segregation (Apparicio, P., 2000) by auto-exclusion (Sandu, D., 2005) etc.

Conclusions

Overall, as revealed by the two communities studied, there is a contradiction between the benefits that life in a natural environment can offer and limited opportunities they have in terms of socio-economic. Lack of access to decent living conditions almost overcomes the advantages of the natural living conditions. Life in Gura Pravat settlement and especially Cetateni Gorge into subjects the population to various constraints, which the community cannot overcome.

The way they built the settlement represents a serious risk to the environment and jeopardizes the chance to conserve resources and maintain a clean and healthy environment.

The pattern created in this case is similarly to other Roma (rudari) villages, where the same pattern of habitation bears little concern for the natural surroundings. Using all resources of a given site, Roma have little awareness of their own impact on the environment and how to reduce it, as a result of their lack of ecological education. The interactions between Gypsies and protected areas capitalize losses for nature and gains for themselves, in short, an unsustainable way of living. The Roma are highly adaptable but through their current activities undermine the village's future capacity to support itself. It is necessary, on the one hand, to improve Roma environmental education both as part of school curriculum and outside of it (via ONG programs) and, on the other hand, to draft a sustainable local environmental strategy, in compliance with the Minority Rights legislation and the Environment Law (137/1996).



Fig 7. The optimism and joy of life in a numerous family

Acknowledgement

The paper's results derived, somewhat, and helped the research process about minorities' patterns in the urban areas, studied in the National Plan II-No.292/2007 research project.

Many thanks for all reviewer's suggestions and, also, Alexandra Livia Petrescu, (King's College London) for her careful reading of the English version.

- [1] Abraham, D. & Badescu, I. (1994). Convietuire etnica si conflicte interetnice. In *Sociologie Romaneasca*, nr.2-3/1994. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
- [2] Achim, V., (1990). *Tiganii in istoria Romanini*. Bucharest: Enciclopedica Publishing House.
- [3] Anghel I. et al. (2000). *Rromii-Istorie si cultura. Aportul minoritatilor nationale in patrimoniul cultural romanesc*. Bucharest: OPRE.
- [4] Apparicio, P. (2000). Residential Segregation Indices: A tool Integrated into a Geographical Information System, *Cybergeo*, No. 134.
- [5] Arges County-State of Environment Report, (2009). Retrieved from http://www.apmag.ro/index.php?p=rapoarte_mediu
- [6] Bacanu, M. (1996). *Tiganii-minoritate nationala sau majoritate infractionala?* Bucharest: Bravo Press Publishing House.
- [7] Badescu, I. et al. (1994). *Fenomenul etnic intre stiinta si ideologie*, Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House.
- [8] Balasescu, A. (1997). Rromii-constructie identitara. Cazul comunei Cristian, judetul Sibiu, *Rev. Cercetari Sociale*, no 3/1997, IMAS sa Bucharest.
- [9] Cherata, L. (2003). *Dictionar al limbii romani*. Bucharest: Orion.
- [10] Cobianu-Bacanu, M. (1996). Mutatii in identificarea etnica a rromilor, *Rev. Sociologie Romanesca*, No. 1-2/1996. Bucharest: Romanian Academy Publishing House,.
- [11] Costachie, S. (1997). *Socio-demographic characteristics of Romania Gypsies Minorities*. Liverpool Hope Press.
- [12] Cretan, R. (2006). *Etnie, confesiune si optiune electorala in Banat*. Timișoara : University of West Press.
- [13] Crowe, D. (1994). *A history of gypsies in Eastern Europe and Russia*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- [14] Cucu, V. (1992). Consideratii geografice privind unitatea etnica a Romaniei, in *Terra*, No. 1-2/1992.
- [15] Dâmbovița County-State of Environment Report, (2009). Retrieved from http://www.apmdb.ro/download/starea_mediolui/Raport_stare_mediu_Dambovita_2008/Cap.4%20%20APA%20DB%202008.pdf.
- [16] *Enciclopedia Geografica a Romaniei* (1982). Bucharest: Science and Enciclopediae Publishing House.
- [17] Gounev, P. & Bezlov, T., (2006). The Roma in Bulgaria' s Criminal Justice System: From Ethnic Profiling to Imprisonment. *Critical Criminology*, 14(3), 313-338.
- [18] Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2002). *The Roma Population in South Eastern Europe*. N.p.: InterGraf-Verlag.
- [19] Kogalniceanu, M. (1997). Schita asupra istoriei, moravurilor si limbii tiganilor, in *Rromathan*, vol. 1.No 2 Bucharest: Info Design,.
- [20] Latea, P. (1997). *Les Tsiganes ou le destin sauvage des Roms de l'Est* – recenzie. In *Rromathan*, vol.I, nr.1/1997, Bucharest: Info Design.
- [21] Latea P., Cristea O. & Chelcea L. (1996). Dincolo de iluzia unitatii. In: *Social Researches Journal*, no. 4/1996, IMAS SA, Bucharest.
- [22] Liegeois, J.-P. & Nicolae G. (1995). *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*. London: Minority Rights Group.
- [23] Lipsky, M., (1980). *Level-Street Bureaucracy Dilemmas of the Individual in the Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- [24] Manea, G. (2005): *Zone si arii protejate si valorificarea lor in turism*. Bucharest: Credis.
- [25] Mărginean, I. (2008): *Condițiile de viață din mediul rural*. Retrieved from www.acad.ro/com2005/pv1031/Marginean.doc
- [26] Matei, E. (2007). *Ecologia asezarilor umane, O abordare din perspectiva geografica*, Bucharest: Universitara Publishing House.
- [27] Merfea, M., (1994). Cu privire la istoria rromilor, *Revista de Cercetari Sociale*, 1994(4), 156-165.
- [28] Mihailova,V. et al. (2007). Wilson's disease in two consecutive generations in a Bulgarian Roma family, *Journal of Neurology*, 254(10), 1462-1463.
- [29] Nae, M. (2006). *Geografia calitatii vietii urbane.Metode de analiza*, Bucharest: Universitara Publishing House.
- [30] Ramet, S. (2008). Redefining the Boundaries of Human Rights: The Case of Eastern Europe, *Hum Rights Revue*, 9, 1–13.
- [31] *Roma Housing and Settlements in South-Eastern Europe. Profile and Achievements in Serbia in a Comparative Framework. Summary and Recommendations*. Retrieved from Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights web page http://www.unhabitat.org.yu/pdfs/RomaSettlement/Roma%20housing%20and%20settlements_in%20English.pdf
- [32] Sandu, D. (2005). *Dezvoltare comunitara. Cercetare, practică, ideologie*. Iasi: Polirom.
- [33] Stiftung, F. E. (2003). *Rromii in Europa de Sud-Est*, Bucharest: Intergraf.
- [34] Stroschein, S. (2002). NGO Strategies for Hungarian and Roma Minorities in Central Europe, *Voluntas* 13(1), 1-26
- [35] *Studiu privind integrarea sociala a rromilor in localitati cu structura etnica mixta* (1991). Bucharest: CURS, Institutul de proiectare, cercetare si tehnica de calcul in constructii. (research report).
- [36] Surdu M. et al. (1998). Situatia Sociala a rromilor din judetul Buzau, in *Revista de Cercetari Sociale*, 1998(3-4).
- [37] Tamas, C. (2001). *Istoria tiganilor din Tara Romanesca*, Bucharest: Oscar.
- [38] Vintila G., Dumitrache L. (2000). Calitatea locuirii in mediul urban din Romania si impactul ei asupra populatiei. *Terra. Journal of Society of Geography from Romania*, 30(1), 42-46.
- [39] William,P. (1989). *Tsiganes: identite, evolution*, Paris: Syros Alternatives.