

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CAUSES THAT LED TO THE INVALIDATION OF THE REFERENDUM REGARDING THE RESTARTING OF MINING IN ROŞIA MONTANĂ

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Abstract: *In order to implement the gold and silver mining project in Roşia Montană, Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC) adopted the strategy of glocalisation in its interaction with the local community; as part of the same strategy, the referendum to restart mining in the Apuseni region was also conducted. The article presents, based on the data analysis technique, the results of the referendum, while also identifying the main causes of its invalidation. Among the causes referred to below, the disregard of the concentric circles model and the exaggerated extension of the areas (the localities) where the referendum was organized emerge as prominent.*

Key words: *mining; referendum; Roşia Montană; RMGC; the model of concentric circles.*

1. Introduction

Over time, mining has fully contributed to the development of Romania's national economy. The decision-makers need to understand the complexity of mining activities and the important role that they play in the country's economic sector. After the fall of communism in Romania, major transformations have occurred in the mining field, through reorganization, restructuring, concessions, the stopping of activities and finally the closing of mines, which have produced major negative effects on the economy and on the social life throughout the country (Mucea, 2018b, pp. 218-219). Mining communities were hugely affected, both in terms of their life quality (Pascaru, 2013, pp. 71-79; Pleşa, 2011, pp. 240-242; Pleşa, 2012) and as regards the level of inter-human relations specific to community life (Pascaru, 2007, pp. 28-38).

In Romania, and in other countries as well, the mining activity represented an opportunity for development and generation of jobs, and thus a path to modernity and sustainable development; producers used to focus on technology and development rather than on the impact of mining activities upon the environment and nature (Krueger, 2002, pp. 872-875).

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The focus was not on the destruction of the environment through mining activity but on the action of transforming the environment by mining (Bridge & McManus, 2000, pp. 12-15), therefore, the mining communities had to bear the consequences of the mining activity (Egresi, 2011, pp. 59-61). Nowadays, mining companies are subjected to a much stricter examination. They must pursue, in addition to their own profitability and sustainability, solutions for the community in which they operate (Mucea, 2018b, pp. 218-219). The old gold mining community from Roşia Montană had to adapt to the changes that occurred along with the globalization process, and to the outcomes of the presence in the area of Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC).

This new investor proposed a new project for the exploitation of gold and silver deposits in the area. From the beginning, the project aroused a lot of controversy among locals, and also throughout the country. The application of a new mining program in Roşia Montană would imply, along with sustainable development, irreversible changes in the life of the community living there. On the one hand, part of the community would be challenged to face the problem of relocation (Popoiu, Stoica, & Işfănoni, 2010, pp. 65-66) while for other inhabitants of the area, the presence of the foreign investor might represent a chance to restart mining activity.

Thus, the foreign investor was regarded as the only one who could offer jobs and sustainable development in a disadvantaged area (Mucea, 2018a, pp. 262-263). On the other hand, the re-start of the surface exploitation and the use of cyanide in the technological processes of obtaining the precious metals and the construction of a settling pond raised serious environmental issues.

Thus, the Roşia Montană case became one of public interest, generating controversy and street protests, political disputes and conflicts among various state institutions, economic entities and non-governmental organizations. In this context, the population of Roşia Montană and part of that of Alba County had the opportunity to express their opinion on the issue of restarting mining in the Apuseni Mountains by participating in a county referendum that was held at the end of 2012, on the same day with the parliamentary elections.

2. Methodology and Context of the Analysis

The methodology used for analysing and explaining the reasons that determined the referendum invalidation was the evaluation of documents. All the minutes of the polling stations were used in order to collect the data regarding the parliamentary elections of 2012. The information of interest is that related to the number of voters, those who cast a ballot in the elections, those included on the lists or those who voted on the supplementary lists. Regarding the information about the referendum, only the general results were made available by the authorities, the rest of the data being taken from the local media of that period.

The question that the citizens were invited to answer was the following: "Do you agree with the restarting of mining in the Apuseni Mountains and with the exploitation in the Roşia Montană area?" The cities whose inhabitants were invited to vote were the following: Abrud, Baia de Arieş, Câmpeni, Zlatna and the communes: Roşia Montană,

Sohodol, Bucium, Lupşa, Bistra, Ciuruleasa, Mogoş, Vidra, Vadu Moţilor, Întregalde, Ponor, Sălciua, Poşaga, Albac, Poiana Vadului, Avram Iancu, Almaşu Mare, Ceru Băcainţi, Meteş, Ighiu, Cricău, Galda de Jos, Stremţ, Râmet, Livezile, Rimetea, Ocoliş, Horea, Scărişoara, Gârda de Sus and Arieşeni. The total number of polling stations constituted for the referendum was 148, and the number of citizens registered on the voting lists for the referendum was of 72,490 persons, the number of who cast their ballot/vote in the referendum being of 31,319 persons.

However, after centralizing the data from the minutes of the parliamentary elections in the same polling stations, some noticeable differences emerged. Thus, the number of people registered on the electoral lists was of 73,336 persons, of whom 35,028 were present at the polling stations 988 people voted on the additional electoral lists (without taking into account the people who voted using the mobile ballot box).

It should be pointed out here that for the parliamentary elections and for the referendum the same polling stations were used, but different chambers were constituted by separate electoral commissions. As a result, citizens were not required to participate in both elections, they could cast their vote only for parliament and not for the referendum or vice versa. At the same time, voters on the supplementary lists of the parliamentary elections were not allowed cast their vote on additional lists for the referendum. Only those who had their domicile in the locality where they cast their vote those with their domicile in the localities where the referendum was organized participated in the referendum.

As regards the referendum question, it should be mentioned that it contained two questions in one. On the one hand, participants were asked whether they agreed with the restarting of the mining in the Apuseni Mountains (in that area, mining was done in several localities and other metals besides gold and silver were exploited). On the other hand, citizens were invited to say whether they agreed or not with the restarting of mining in Roşia Montană.

3. Results

Despite the fact that a significant proportion of the voting participants expressed their agreement with the restarting of mining (62.45% of the voting participants, i.e. 19,558 people answering "Yes" to the question on the ballot, the referendum was invalidated due to the quorum's failure. 31,319 people cast their vote this figure representing 43.20% of the number of voters included on the lists. For validation, the presence of 50% + 1 of the number of voters registered on the electoral rolls was required.

The percentage of those who did not agree with the restarting of mining in the Apuseni Mountains and answered "No" to the referendum was 35.90%, i.e. 11,244 people. 517 ballots were invalidated representing a percentage of 1.65%.

3.1. Voter turnout in the Referendum and Voter turnout in the Parliamentary Elections

First of all, the organizers of the referendum, the RMGC Company, as well as the various press trusts, presented the weather as a factor influencing voter turnout. This

argument was put forward as a factor that prevented the presence at the polling stations (on that day, a yellow code for snowfall and blizzard was issued), this being the main cause for which the quorum was not met at the referendum. However, despite the unfavourable weather in Alba county, voter turnout the referendum (43.20%) was higher than the national average voter turnout the parliamentary elections (41.72%).

Before starting the data analysis, it should be mentioned that the percentages of the referendum were full values (they were presented as such in the local media), and the authorities did not break down this data. In contrast, participation percentages in the parliamentary elections were represented by decimals. Thus, some representation differences might have occurred, in cases where percentages were less than 1%.

In the whole Alba County, voter turnout in the parliamentary elections was reflected by the following percentage: 41.66%. That percentage also included the localities in which the county referendum was not organized. But regarding votes turnout in the parliamentary elections only in the cities and communes in which the referendum was organized, this was 47.67% including the people who cast their ballot/vote on the supplementary lists and 44.44% if we consider voter turnout without the percentages formed by those who cast their vote on the supplementary lists (3.23%).

Therefore, it can be seen that citizens were more interested in casting their vote in the parliamentary elections than in the referendum. Figure 1 indicates voter turnout in Roşia Montană. Figure 2 and Figure 3 indicate voter turnout in all the 34 localities, in the referendum and in the parliamentary elections.

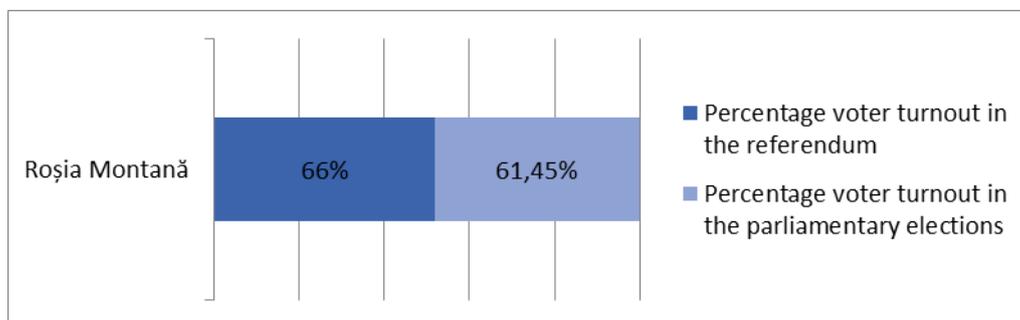


Fig. 1. *Percentages indicating voter turnout in the referendum and in the parliamentary elections in Roşia Montană*

The motives that determined voters to act in that way could be multiple and diverse; some of these can be intuited. On the one hand, citizens generally have a higher interest in participating in political elections, as compared to participation in citizen consultations, since politicians exert more power in terms of decision-making.

On the other hand, the popular will expressed on the occasion of a referendum is implemented by the political decision-makers. In addition, the interest of politicians is much greater in mobilizing people to vote for parliament than in the referendum, especially in places remote from Roşia Montană, where the connection with the exploitation there is weak.

Last but not least, the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections was much

stronger than the one for the referendum, with the media playing an important role in this regard.

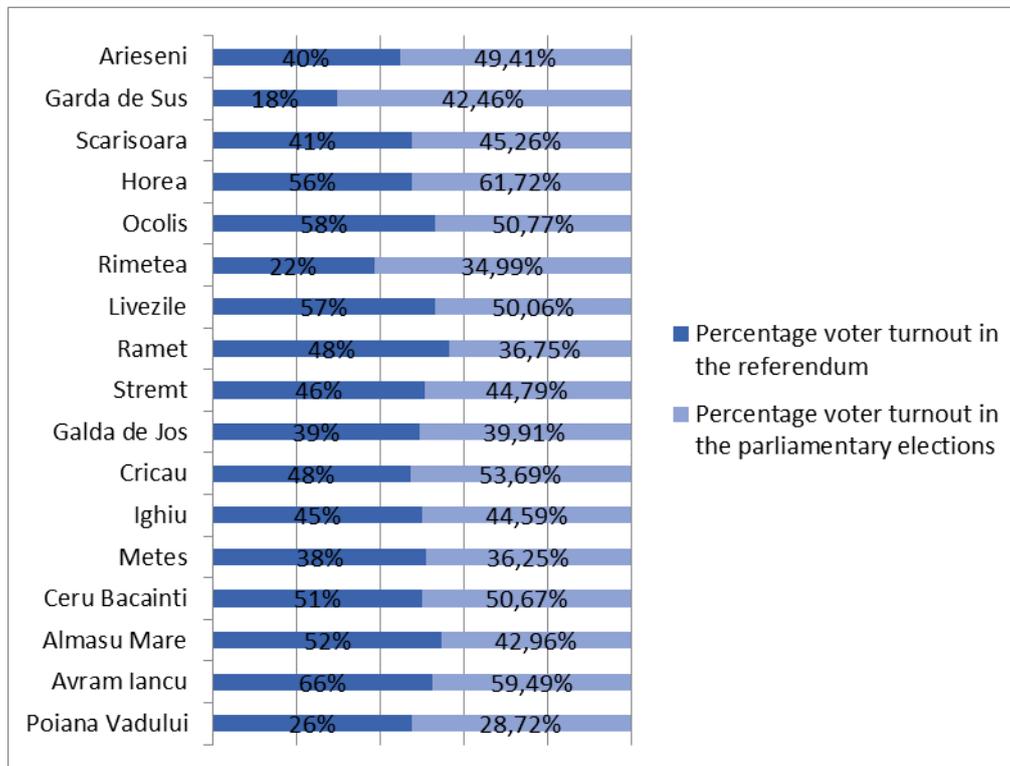


Fig.2. *Percentages indicating voter turnout the referendum and in the parliamentary elections in each locality – part 1*

Looking at the data presented above, we can consider that organizing the referendum on the same day with the parliamentary elections increased voter turnout in the referendum. Even if in Romania in general, and, therefore, in Alba county, voter turnout in the parliamentary elections is not very significant, compared to the local and presidential elections

If we compare the percentages of voter turnout in the parliamentary elections, excluding the additional voting lists, we notice that in most localities, this was much higher than in the referendum. An exception in this respect was represented, as expected, by Roşia Montană, where the interest in the referendum and the restarting or not of mining was the most prominent.

There, voter turnout in the referendum surpassed that in the parliamentary elections by 4.54%. However, in Râmeţ there was the biggest difference voter turnout between the referendum and the parliamentary elections, with 11.25% more citizens participating in the referendum than in the elections. Differences in terms of voter turnout were also observed in the following localities: Ponor (9,6%), Almaşu Mare (9,03%), Ocoliş (7,22%), Livezile (6,93%), Întregalde (6,64%) Avram Iancu (6,5%), Poşaga

(5,43%), Mogoş (3,47%), Bucium (2,45%), Meteş (1,74%) and Stremţ (1,21%).

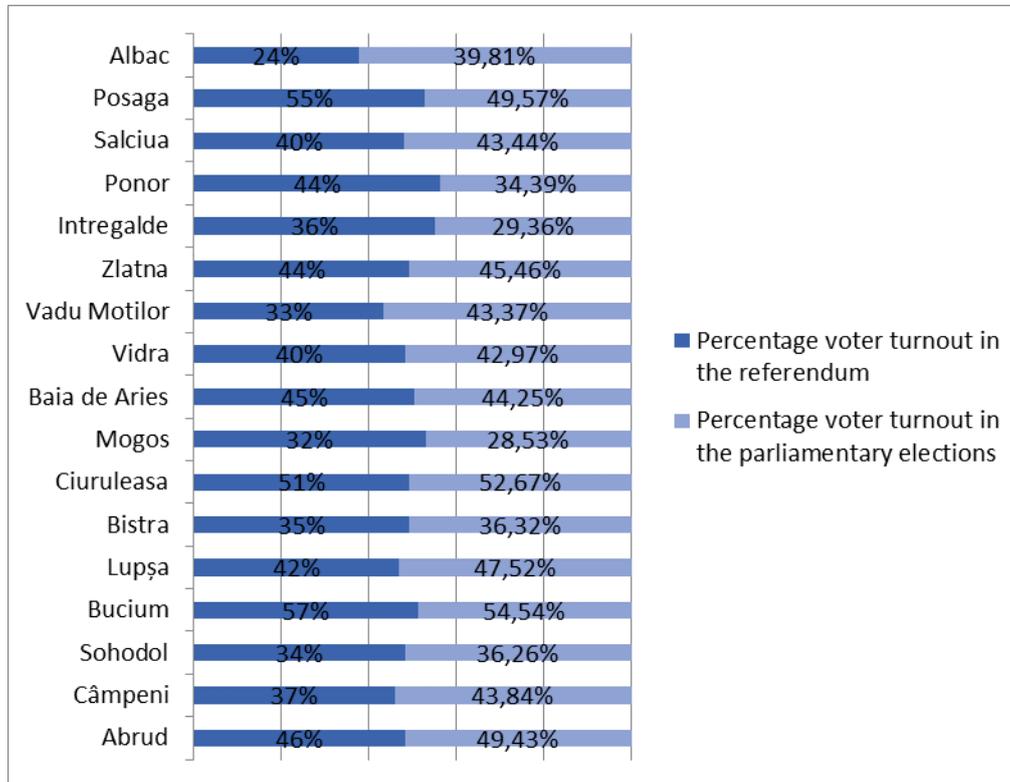


Fig. 3. Percentages indicating voter turnout in the referendum and in the parliamentary elections in each locality - part 2

But in the other 22 localities, voter turnout was either the same (Baia de Arieş, Ceru Băcăinţi, Galda de Jos, Ighiu), or it was higher in the parliamentary elections. Thus, the question arises, what presence and interest would this referendum have had if it had been organized on another day? Therefore, the strategy of those who organized the referendum was a good one, and the role of the mayors in the referendum campaign was a significant one. A “support group” of the Roşia Montană Project, proposed by those from RMGC, was also organized.

3.2. The influence of economic historical factors

The significant differences also relate to the economic historical aspect of each area. For example, mining played a crucial role in the development of towns such as Zlatna, Baia de Arieş and Abrud, but not Câmpeni. This aspect also emerges from the differences between yes and no answers. Thus, in Zlatna, 76.23% of participants answered “yes”, in Baia de Arieş 69.85% said “yes” and in Abrud 62.41% of the respondents agreed with the restarting of mining. In the town of Câmpeni, which has no history in mining, 44.05% of the voters opted for the restarting of mining in the Apuseni

Mountains, while 55.94% inhabitants were against it.

As in the case of towns, in the localities in the Apuseni Mountains, where mining was not the main activity of the locals, the share of responses that were against the resumption of mining in Roşia Montană was much higher. The locals from Albac, Gârda de Sus, Horea, Poiana Vadului, Vadu Moţilor, Sohodol and Vidra work mainly in the fields of wood processing, small agro-food industries and tourism. In their perception, the start of the Roşia Montană Project, producing effects on the environment, would have negative effects upon their way of life.

However, not all localities in the Apuseni Mountains, where wood processing, tourism and agricultural and food production activities represented the main activity of the locals, voted against the restarting of mining. In the communes: Arieşeni, Scărişoara and Avram Iancu the number of voters who answered “yes” was higher than that of those who answered negatively.

Another locality in which the largest share of the answers was against the restarting of the mining activity was Rimetea. The vote of the locals was an unexpected one because in this locality activities related to mining and primary iron processing used to be performed. In the rest of the localities, the share of responses in favour of restarting the mining activity in the Apuseni Mountains was favourable, even though there were significant percentage differences between „yes” and „no” answers in each locality. However, the referendum was invalidated, the main cause of invalidation being presented in the next section.

4. The Model of the Concentric Circles

In general, the concentric circles model presents the differences that exist between certain areas, starting from a central point and reaching a last circle, representing the area that is most remote from the central point. The easiest way to observe the model of concentric circles is when a rock is thrown into the standing water of a lake, thus creating concentric waves (concentric circles). It is very well known that the largest wave’s movements are created at the water impact area, decreasing in intensity as they move away from the central point.

In the present analysis, the model of the concentric circles refers to the localities where the referendum was organized. We start from the assumption that for the people from Roşia Montană it was of the greatest interest to participate in the referendum, and this interest decreased as we move away from the locality. In this analysis the interest was measured according to the participation in the vote for the referendum. It is worth mentioning that these localities were chosen by the organizers of the referendum, i.e. by representatives of Roşia Montană Gold Corporation, according to certain criteria that are not known to us.

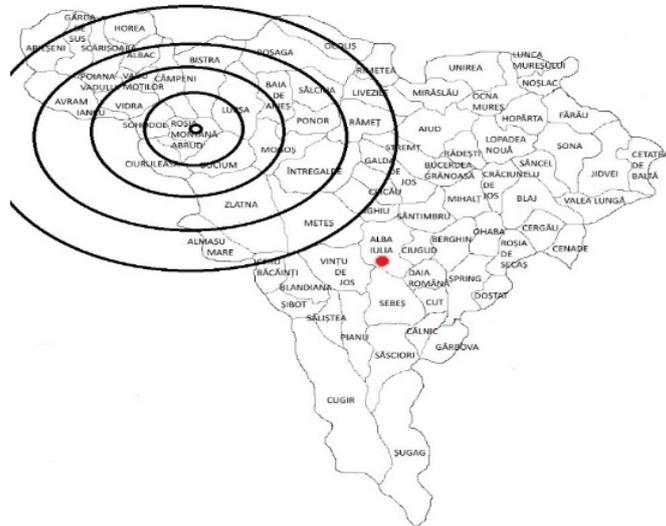


Fig. 4. Map of Alba County

Five concentric areas were identified, representing the localities in which citizens could vote in the referendum (Figure 4 and Figure 5).

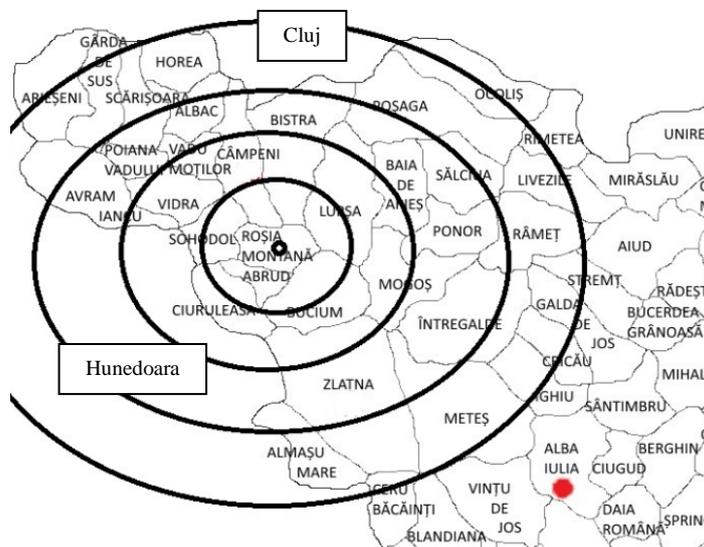


Figure 5. The five concentric areas of Alba County

In this study, Area 1 includes Roşia Montană, the central point of the discussion and the locality for which the referendum was organized, which is at the same time the most interested in the results of the vote and the restarting of mining. The name of the town is also present in the question on the ballot.

Area 2 (the second circle) includes the localities neighbouring Roşia Montană, that is,

those with which it shares a "common border": the towns of Abrud and Câmpeni, but also the communes: Sohodol, Bucium, Lupșa and Bistra.

Area 3 (the third circle) consists of the town of Baia de Arieș and the communes: Ciuruleasa, Mogoș, Vidra and Vadu Moților. This area includes fewer localities because, some localities through which the third circle "passes" are in Hunedoara county, and in these localities, even though they are close to Roșia Montană, the referendum was not organized, because they do not belong to Alba county.

Area 4 (the fourth circle) consists of the town of Zlatna and the communes: Întregalde, Ponor, Sălcium, Poșaga, Albac, Poiana Vadului and Avram Iancu. As in the case of the previous circle, within its radius there were also several localities from Hunedoara county, some localities that had close connection with the gold mining activity. Some of them being even mining localities, in which the mining activity was interrupted after the fall of communism, as it happened in the case of Roșia Montană. In the case of localities included in Area 4, foreign investors are present and would like to restart the mining activity.

Area 5 (the fifth circle) comprises the localities that are remote from Roșia Montană, but where the referendum was nevertheless organized: Almașu Mare, Ceru Băcainți, Meteș, Ighiu, Cricău, Galda de Jos, Stremț, Râmet, Livezile, Rimetea, Ocoliș, Horea, Scărișoara, Gârda de Sus and Arieșeni. This last circle, besides the localities from Hunedoara County, also includes some localities from the Apuseni Mountains, in the north of Alba County, which belong to Cluj County. As in the case of the communes included in Hunedoara County, the localities from Cluj County, though circumscribed by the edge of the fifth circle, did not participate in the referendum, as it was not organized there.

As expected, in Area 1 (that is in the Roșia Montană locality) voter turnout in the referendum was of 66%. It was the highest percentage registered, compared to all the other concentric areas, which surpassed even the percentage indicating voter turnout in the parliamentary elections (64.15%). The percentage in which the share of those who voted on the additional lists (2.7%) was also included. In fact, voter turnout the parliamentary elections was of 61.45%, if we are to refer to those registered on the permanent lists.

In Area 2, the only locality in which voter turnout in the referendum was above the quorum threshold (50%) is Bucium, where 57% of the citizens registered on the permanent electoral lists participated in the referendum. In the rest of the localities, voter turnout was less than 50%. The average voter turnout in the referendum of the whole area was of 41.83%, lower than the average voter turnout in the parliamentary elections, which was of 44.65%, without taking into account the percentage of the people who cast their vote on the supplementary lists. The average voter turnout in the referendum between Area 1 and Area 2 is 53.91%, which would meet the criterion for validating the popular consultation, i.e. 50%. Thus, if the referendum had been organized only in Roșia Montană and in the neighbouring localities, it would have been validated, with 5922 votes for re-starting mining and 4151 votes against it.

In Area 3, only in Ciuruleasa 51% of the voters participated in the referendum. The rest of the localities registered percentages below the validation threshold. The average voter turnout for the entire area was 40.2%, lower than the average voter turnout in the parliamentary elections, which was of 42.35%, a percentage calculated without the

percentage of those who voted on the supplementary lists. The average voter turnout in the three areas was of 49.34%, very close to the 50% threshold, but still below it. Thus, adding up the percentages in Area 3, to the ones obtained in the first two areas, a decrease in interest for the referendum could be observed.

Similar tendencies were registered in Area 4. The exception there was represented by the commune Avram Iancu, where voter turnout was very high (66%), a percentage similar to that registered in Roşia Montană. A high voter turnout was also registered in the locality of Poşaga (55%). The two localities raised the average of Area 4, which was 41.87%, slightly higher than the average of Area 3. However, if we average the presence in all four areas, this is even lower, registering a value of 47.47%.

Area 5 comprises most localities and thus differences in terms of participation rates distribution were registered. The average voter turnout in that area was higher than in areas two, three and four, indicating the figure of 43.93%. Two factors were considered in explaining that percentage: the relief and the weather. Most localities in Area 5 are located in the plain area of Alba County. Thus, as compared to the localities in all the other selected areas, where mountains predominate, inhabitants of Area 5 would not encounter major difficulties in terms of participating and getting to the polling stations, even in the context of unfavourable weather conditions. Therefore, after calculating the average by adding the last area, we obtained the voter turnout percentage 46.76%, which was nevertheless insufficient for the validation of the referendum.

As we allocated more and more areas (circles), achieving the average of the areas, the share of the referendum was decreasing. This fact was achieved even if in some localities, situated at longer distances from Roşia Montană, high percentages, of above 50%, in terms of voter turnout were registered. However, the high turnout was counterbalanced by the localities where presence in the referendum was low. Thus, as another area was further enlarged, the share of voter turnout in the referendum was lower, which ultimately led to the quorum not being fulfilled. Thus, it can be concluded that, as the referendum was extended in several localities far from Roşia Montană, the interest of the citizens in the subject was lower. People are interested in problems related to their spatial proximity.

5. Conclusions and Limitations

The organization of referendums for consulting the population on various topics, especially on sensitive aspects and issues of notoriety, with long-term economic and social impact, is desirable. However, in order to ensure that these consultations are useful, many aspects must be taken into account when organizing them. Neither the way the referendum was organized, nor the electoral campaign for the referendum were presented in this article.

The expansion of localities where the referendum was organized may be considered as the crucial mistake made by organizers. Thus, the resources were distributed in a more widespread area. Even though some of these localities voted massively in favour of restarting mining in the Apuseni Mountains, this could not make up for the low voter turnout. On the other hand, arguments may be brought against the idea of the

meteorological factor having an important influence, since we assume that, if the locals in the area near Roșia Montană had wanted to restart mining and had been convinced of the significance of the referendum, they would have participated in the vote, irrespective of weather conditions.

Some patterns of social-economic activity could be easily identified in some localities in the Apuseni Mountains. Thus, in the localities where wood processing and agro-tourism represented the main source of income for the locals, the share of those who opposed mining activity in the area was very high. The high number of negative answers might indicate their increased interest in the events taking place in their area. An impressive number of positive answers was recorded in areas that were more remote from Roșia Montană, for example in Ceru Băcăinți. Such a situation might be related either to the fact that the beginning of the mining process would not affect the locals to a high degree, or to the good electoral campaign promoting the referendum, carried out by Roșia Montană Gold Corporation.

In this paper we did not present the stances adopted by the political actors in relation to the Roșia Montană subject and the results of the registered parliamentary elections, correlated with voter turnout in the referendum and with the percentage of positive and negative answers. It would be interesting to see whether there is any connection between the results of the elections and the support or the opposition in relation to the project, depending on how the leaders of the political parties positioned themselves on this subject.

Another limitation of the analysis is the lack of detailed data on the results of the referendum. Whether in relation to the percentage of negative and positive answers, invalidated ballots, or the difference between the quality and accuracy of the percentages, for the referendum only the whole percentages were given, as opposed to the parliamentary elections, where the percentages with decimals were presented. On the other hand, the manner of setting the five areas was not entirely objective, as some localities were crossed by two area circles. However, they were chosen to belong to the area where more territory was included.

On the other hand, due to the spatial proximity, some communes are neighboring, but the connections between them are weak, for example, the distance in road kilometres is very large. This is the case of communes where the common border is delimited by mountains. Thus, some localities, even if they belonged to different areas, were more connected than others.

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