

ATTACHMENT TO FORESTS IN ROMANIA; DOES A HISTORY OF COLLECTIVISM MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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Abstract

Forests in Romania are facing significant environmental problems. Due to the large transformations the forestry sector has undergone as a result of the communist period, sustainable forest management is highly relevant. Rural communities, who are dependent on the forests for their daily livelihood, need to be included in discussions regarding sustainable forest management. This paper calls for the need of understanding how these transformations have affected rural people's attachment to the forests that have been for such a long time taken away from them. Two types of rural communities can be distinguished, those affected by collectivisation of agricultural land and those not. This paper addresses the functional and emotional attachment to the local forests of a former collectivized and of a non-collectivized community. We found that people in both communities are functionally attached to the forest, through a range of social benefits, mostly 'recreation' and 'healthiness', and economic benefits, especially the use of wood. Attachment was negative thru the economic detriments 'decrease of wood availability', 'high costs of forest management', 'wood theft' and 'ineffective forest regime'. People in both communities are emotionally attached to the forest through feelings triggered mostly by a sense of kinship with family members. As a final conclusion, in the former collectivized rural areas, people are less attached to the forest compared to people in the non-collectivized rural areas and these differences can be linked to the transformations triggered by the former collectivisation process, but also to the weak regulation of the privatized forests, the limited financial possibilities and access restrictions.

Key words: collectivisation, forest, nationalisation, place attachment, NE Region of Romania

INTRODUCTION

In Romania, forests cover 6.4 million ha, which is almost 28% of Romania's total land area. Romanian forests, especially the forests that are part of the Carpathian chain, are known for their rich bio-diverse ecosystems which harbour many endemic species and viable populations of endangered species, in particular many large carnivores and herbivores [7], [9]. The Romanian forests, however, are subject to illegal logging and prematurely wood harvest that lead to significant environmental problems.

According to the World Bank [19] private forests face the most significant environmental problems due to the weak regulation of privatized lands including lack of proper management, proper planning and silvicultural knowledge.

The private forestry sector has experienced important changes in Romania. Between 1948 and 1989, under the communist regime, all forests were nationalised. Consequently, in that period, all private forest owners were expropriated, including many peasants whose livelihood was based upon a combination of agriculture and forestry work [17]. Later on, in the 90's, when the private property law in

Romania was approved, some of the former forest owners could reclaim their forests properties. Hence, today, Romanian forests are a mixture of private and state-owned forest [16]. About 11% of Romanian forests are owned privately, with properties varying from 1 ha up to 10 ha [20]. Most of these private forests are owned by peasants living in rural communities close to the forests. Rural people depend on the forests for their daily livelihood (provision of fire wood, construction wood and grazing areas for sheep and cattle), however, they also want to make money from their forest properties by harvesting and selling wood, without necessarily considering sustainability [16]. Consequently, both for ecological and socio-economic reasons it is important that Romanian forests are managed well. In the communist period, however, rural communities were not only affected by the nationalisation of all forests, but also by the collectivisation of agricultural land. The period of communism transformed rural places significantly, which can lead to a rupture in people's affinity to the land [4], [5], [14], [8]. Not all communities, however, were collectivized; about 10% of the total rural area, particularly mountain communities, were excluded from the collectivisation process [3].

In this research we want to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships of Romanian rural people with their forests in two rural communities, one former collectivised and one non-collectivised community. We will use the concept of 'place attachment', which is a process through which people show a certain affinity to a place "*directly by giving attributes to the physical setting or indirectly through certain memories set in place or through important descriptive meanings to which people are attached*" [14]. Attachment can be either functional, which refers to the (dis)satisfaction of user needs in terms of quantity and quality of the place [13] or emotional, which refers to those dimensions of the self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the place [10]. We assume that rural communities

with a history of collectivism have less affinity to the local forests than rural communities that have not been collectivised. We are also interested to what extent present forest ownership influences forest attachment. As attachment is an important indicator for people taking care of a place, in this case, the forest, the presented findings provide valuable information for planners and politicians involved in rural development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have carried out a qualitative comparative case study research and selected two communities from East Romania, a formerly collectivised community called *Prohozesti* and a non-collectivised community called *Lapos*. They are situated only 15 km from each other in the county of Bacau which indicates that they are quite similar in terms of socio-economic, political and cultural conditions. Privately owned forests are located in the nearby mountains or at the edge of the village (Lapos) or further away from the village (Prohozesti). On average, the total surface of the owned forests does not exceed more than 5 hectares.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with inhabitants from both villages (N=13 for Prohozesti and N=13 for Lapos) covering a high range of individualities: age, gender, social status, and forest ownership. Respondents were mainly selected through snowball sampling [18]. The analysis of the data [6], was done according to the following steps: *familiarizing* with the data, *developing a coding scheme* for analysing the themes that occurred most, *indexing* or coding the data, *charting* or rearranging the data by theme in a table, and the last step was *mapping and interpretation* of the results by looking at relationships between and within the themes and the typologies developed from them. For more in-depth information see [1] and [2].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Functional attachment

Functional attachment was expressed *economically*, referring to material goods that

the can be derived from the forest, and *socially*, referring to immaterial goods. Both can be perceived *positively (benefits)*, which implies a high functional attachment, and *negatively (detriments)*, which implies a low functional attachment. Figure 1 depicts the economic and social benefits and detriments of the forests as perceived by the people from the two communities.

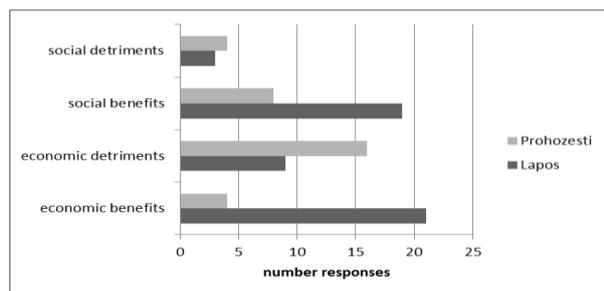


Fig. 1. Differences in functional attachment to the forests of Lapos and Prohozesti

Economic benefits

Wood (Lapos n=9, Prohozesti n=3). The most needed product is wood, as both communities are depending on it. This benefit is especially mentioned by people who earn a living as wood carrier and who, due to their often presence in the forest, also have knowledge about the quality of the wood. The quality of wood depends on how well the forest is maintained and it seems that people are not always satisfied with it as we will see below in 'economic detriments'. Wood carriers from Lapos consider it being profitable to bring wood for themselves and also to sell wood in the village: *"working in wood exploitation is profitable due to the satisfactory wood quality, hard wood and soft wood suitable for different needs"*. In Prohozesti, one wood carrier and two mountain forest owners showed this type of satisfaction.

Non-timber forests products. The most common activity for the people from Lapos (n=6) and to a lesser extent in Prohozesti (n=1) is picking wild mushrooms. It seems that it is not only a way to gain goods from the forest, but also a way to socialize with other villagers: *"I go every year to pick mushrooms and conserve for the winter time, I enjoy it very much especially because we join in a group of more people"*.

Money buffer was mentioned only among respondents from Lapos (n=5) who own either mountain forests or little forest patches in the village. It was expressed through people's willingness to *"keep the forest as intact as possible"* and *"let the forest grow beautiful and strong"* or to save it as *"a guarantee for old age days"*. According to these villagers, the forest holds long-term economic benefits.

Tourism income, although Lapos region is not a touristic area, someone sees the opportunity to earn money with a wooden chalet that was built at the edge of its forest property.

Economic detriments

Low availability of wood was mentioned in Lapos (n=3) among the wood carriers who assess the decrease in wood availability by looking at the change in the distance between the village and the forest: *"In the past you could find fire wood immediately you exit the village, nowadays I must travel 10 kilometres further from the village to find some wood"*. In Prohozesti (n=3), people complain either that the wood is too expensive to buy; either that there is little available wood for wood carriers *"After 1993, I stopped working in wood exploitation due to the fact that much deforestation occurred and the wood availability decreased much therefore I had to travel some 30 km to find some wood"*.

High forests maintenance costs were mentioned in both communities. In Lapos (n=2) people think that the price for marking the trees is much too high among wood carriers and among forest owners. In Prohozesti (n=5) the following reasons were mentioned as implying high costs regarding the forest: *"high transportation costs"* due to the fact that the forests are far located from people's homes, *"access to extract the wood is difficult"*, *"cost too much to mark the trees"*, *"cost too much to transport the trees"*, *"too high costs for guarding the forest"*. The fact that forest owners lack the funding and mechanized utilities for maintaining their forests is found across all forest owners throughout Romania [19]. These kinds of frustrations push people in working against the system. For example someone in Lapos

told that in order to avoid having some trees stolen from an easy accessible area, he cut down the trees without asking the ranger to mark them, because he found it too expensive. **Wood theft** occurs in both communities in the isolated forests patches where, contrary to the mountain forests, there is no guarding ensured by the forest rangers. This is mostly the consequence of the bad economic situation in Romania that pushes people, especially young people without a job in the position to chaotically deforest the forests and to sale the wood for some pocket money. In Lapos (n=4) wood theft takes place at a relatively small scale as only easy accessible individual trees from the little forest properties situated around the village are subject of theft, while in Prohozesti (n=5): *“they stole more than half the forest in this region”*. Because of this situation, for example in Prohozesti, people that own a patch of isolated forest were forced to deforested as much as possible before all the trees would be stolen by others. In Lapos, people manage to supervise their isolated forests because they are located near the village, so people have more control over their forests.

Ineffective forest management regime was mentioned only in Prohozesti (n=3). The following problems were mentioned: the price of the tree marking by the forest ranger was too high compared to the selling price, due to the intensive sheep grazing in the forest there is no chance for natural generation, and elsewhere the forests are better managed. In Lapos no one mentioned being dissatisfied with the forest management regime in their region; rather they expressed high trust in the work done by people working at ‘Ocolul Silvic’(administrative forestry district). They mentioned three reasons for this trust: the strict rules imposed by ‘Ocolul Silvic’ for wood exploitation and *“not chaotic like what has happened in Asau”*, single road access to the forest which means better guarding of the forest, and only few private forest properties while in Asau most of the people in that region received a patch of forest and *“since there is not much state control over the*

forests, the high deforestation rates that occurred in Asau”.

Social benefits

Recreation among respondents from Lapos (n=7) was expressed through a wide range of associations by which the forests gives people high levels of satisfaction: pure enjoyment (people like to see the forest for its beauty), positive energy (people claim to work better or to sleep better after being in the forest), unique views and sounds (wild animals, different view over the villages down the mountain, birds singing), solitude, freedom, no worries and escape from the daily life. One villager stated: *“When I am in the forest I do not think about any of the stress or problems I normally have”*. In Lapos, there is a direct road that connects the village with the forest; as well the village is surrounded by little isolated forests. These two aspects seem to influence people in attending often the forest and therefore their rich view of the benefits that can be obtained from it. In Prohozesti, recreation (n=3) was expressed as visual and audible enjoyment of scenery (*“it is beautiful and birds are singing”*) or as the possibility to do recreational activities in the forest, such as barbecuing.

Health in Lapos (n=8) was mainly described through the forest’s ecological functions such as: remediation of drinking water and as a source of fresh oxygen. Two respondents emphasized these functions as follows: *“without forests we cannot live”* and *“forests are the centre of the universe, due to the forests we can breathe, otherwise we will die earlier and because of the forests it rains on time”*. On the other side, in Prohozesti (n=3), healthiness was referred to only one type of ecological function: source of fresh oxygen. The few social benefits associated with the forest by people from Prohozesti, were mentioned by people that come in contact with the forest either because they are forest owners, or because they are involved in logging, or visit family that live in the mountain areas. The other people told that they find it too expensive to travel to the forest because of their low financial possibilities.

Safety (Lapos n=2 and Prohozesti n=2) was expressed through the forest's ability to prevent soil erosion and through flood control: *"The forest in this region is the principal pawn in flood control especially because in our region there is a big water dam situated at the edge of the forest"*.

Socio-cultural interaction for people from Lapos (n=2), the forest is also a place where socio-cultural activities take place. The two activities mentioned are: 'hramul manastiri' (commemoration day of the monastery which was the first settlement in this region) and 'rascolul oilor' (villagers summer gathering for counting of sheep that are left in the care of the shepherd to graze them in the mountains from the early spring to the late autumn). Socio-cultural activities related to the forest were not mentioned in Prohozesti.

Social detriments

A forest is not always a safe and pleasant place to be and therefore villagers mentioned also some social detriments. Regarding 'safety', in each community there were few respondents (Lapos n=3 and Prohozesti n=4), mostly among those that are exploiting wood, who referred to the dangers that they encounter in the forest: *"Because of the muddy road I could not control the tractor fully loaded and my son was almost crashed by a log"*. Regarding 'displeasure', it seems that the forests around Prohozesti are not that clean and this makes people feel unpleasant and therefore less attracted by forest: *"When I see plastic bottles thrown in the forest that makes the forest being less attractive for me"*. By summing all the forest outcomes relating to functional attachment -as showed in Figure 1- we can conclude that both socially and economically people from Lapos seem to obtain more benefits from their forests when compared with people from Prohozesti where the detriments seem to predominate.

Emotional attachment

The emotional attachment attributed to the forest was expressed mostly through verbal feelings but also through non-verbal feelings: facial expressions, crying, angry tones. The verbal feelings thought to express what the forest symbolizes or stands for in the view of

the respondents from both communities will be classified in 'positive emotional attachment' and 'negative emotional attachment'. Figure 2 summarises the aspects of emotional attachment to the forests mentioned by villagers of both communities.

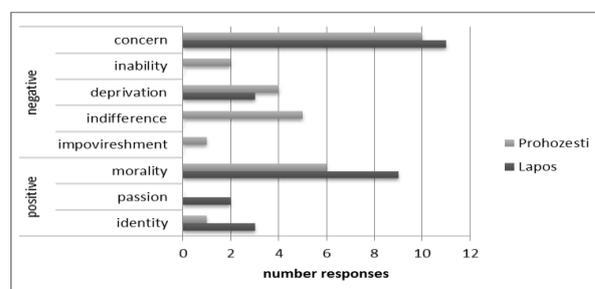


Fig. 2. Differences in emotional attachment to the forests of Lapos and Prohozesti

Positive emotional attachment

Identity (Lapos n=3, Prohozesti n=1) connects the place to respondent's sense of who they are as individuals: *"the child of the woods"*, *"people born in mountain area are strong and hardworking"*, *"feeling proud for being able to provide wood for the household"*, and *"I was born in the mountain area, therefore I love the forest and each tree"*.

Passion as an expression of love through the cycle of life was mentioned by respondents from Lapos exclusively (n=2): *"I love the forest, being there in the spring time it feels like I am reborn again"*.

The **moral duty** to preserve the forest in the family is mentioned frequently (Lapos n=9, Prohozesti n=6). It represents the ability to pass the forest to the children, translated here as 'continuity': *"I am very persuaded in my decision to pass the forest to my children and hopefully I will not be forced to deforest too much for myself"*. In Lapos, also villagers that do not possess a forest share this duty as they consider it a moral thing to pass the forests to their children in good condition so that they can also benefit from the same social and economic goods as their ancestors did: *"We cannot destroy our forests and pass barren hills to the next generations. People should be responsible for their actions. Our health, the quality of the drinking water and the landscape beauty depends on the forests"*. Secondly, moral duty relates to 'heritage'. As

the forest was once in their parent's possession, it is an important reason to be attached to it: *"I inherited the forest from my grandfather; he would twist in his grave if I will not take care of his forest"*. The third moral aspect is 'reconciliation with nature' and was mentioned only by respondents from Lapos as a form of easiness in accepting losses caused by natural occurrences such as attack of large carnivores on livestock and people, or wild boars that destroy the maize crops. As one of the respondents argued, people in Lapos guide themselves by the principle that: *"padurea ne da si padurea ne ia"*, which means *"the forest gives us, the forest takes from us"*. This attitude of accepting with ease the damage caused by wild animals was only present amongst people from Lapos.

Negative emotional attachment

Concern about deforestation and private ownership was expressed in both communities. Deforestation of local forests was a big concern for inhabitants of both villages (Lapos n=5, Prohozesti n=5). People noticed deforestation at a higher rate than in the past. Many interviewees got very emotional; they started crying or had an angry tone in their voice when asked to talk about the forests. They all said the same thing, that the forest is no longer what it used to be and that the older generations knew better how to cherish the forest: *"When I see the barren hills it breaks my heart. The forest is 80% destroyed (here he refers to the forests in Asau). The older generations knew how to really appreciate the forest. Until the 90's the forest was intact, with massive trees, and when you look now, there are now meadows instead of woods"*. Private ownership was considered to be a causal factor for deforestation and bad forest management in both communities (Lapos n=6, Prohozesti n=5). This was based upon personal experiences in their area: *"forest was better when it was the property of the state"*, *"forest was better under the state ownership"* or upon what they heard from other places like Asau region where forests were destroyed as a consequence of private ownership:

"much forest is deforested nowadays; did you hear what happened in Asau? People devastated the forest when they received it back from the state".

Inability to change the fact that their forests are subject to wood theft was expressed only among respondents from Prohozesti (n=2). People felt powerless because the forestry state department, the police and even their own children don't show any willingness in helping them out: *"the state doesn't help me at all and my children show no interest"*.

Feelings of deprivation, (n=3 in Lapos and n=4 in Prohozesti) expressed by people that feel deprived of forest benefits and the ones that feel deprived of ownership rights. The reasons for feeling 'deprived of forest benefits' are found to be different for the two communities. In Lapos this type of feeling was triggered by the restricted access since a large part of the forest in this area was claimed by an Austrian royal heir, who *"became forest owner overnight"*. The seriousness of this newly installed forest regime can be seen in the following expressions: *"If they catch you taking one mushroom from their forest, they put the trigger on you"*, *"Every day I see how fully loaded trucks are bringing wood away from the forests that me and many people from this region planted with our hands."* Thus, people feel threatened and restricted to do the forestry activities that they used to do in the past. In Prohozesti, deprivation of forest benefits was expressed by people that have a forest only on paper because the trees were cut down and stolen: *"People with tractors and chainsaws took advantage of the situation; all the others just watched and suffered"*. The second kind of deprivation feelings includes the people that feel 'deprived of ownership rights' who consider it unfair that they did not receive the inherited forest for different reason, either because of some administrative complications: *"Darmanesti is the only region where the city hall didn't find the right papers to help the people get their forest properties"*(Lapos), either because some other people in the region had higher priority *"Only elite people receive*

their forest properties, such as the mayor who got 10 hectares of forest without any ownership rights.” (Prohozesti)

Feelings of indifference (n=5 in Prohozesti, none in Lapos). One respondent showed its indifference by telling that the deforestation that takes place in the area is not of its concern as long as this is not its forest property. The other four respondents expressed their indifference towards the forest by not having the willingness or the interest in maintaining the forest or showed no interest in taking over the forest they should normally inherit from family relatives: *“I have no idea and no interest to know what happened to my parent’s forest property.”*

Feelings of impoverishment expressed among one respondent from Prohozesti who sees the forest properties of his father more as a burden: *“It is better that I didn’t claim the forest property inherited from my father because if it was in my name I would have to pay taxes starting next year, as it will be considered abandoned land”.*

In Fig. 2 we can see that in Lapos the richness in positive feelings is higher than in Prohozesti where people express rather more negative feelings, which means that the level of emotional attachment among people in Lapos is higher than in Prohozesti. In both communities, similar feelings determine largely emotional attachment: ‘feelings of morality’ accounts most for the positive attachment and ‘feelings of concern’ account most for the negative attachment.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A comparison of functional and emotional attachment to the forests of Lapos and Prohozesti

In both communities, the forest is an important resource as people are dependent on wood for their livelihood, particularly because most of them are not rich. This dependency contributed to the decrease of the amount of trees in forests and explains why people are not satisfied with the availability of wood that can be obtained from the forest. Although this is also relevant for Lapos, it especially

explains the low functional attachment of Prohozesti. In Lapos, people compensate this inconvenience with other benefits offered by the forests like the long term economic benefits such as ‘money buffer’. Thus, place attachment is not only associated with perceptions of present conditions but rather the anticipated future condition of the place make people stay attached to it.

Functional attachment also entails social benefits, such as recreation, health and socio-cultural interaction. Through the rich range of social benefits mentioned by people from Lapos, we can deduct that in Lapos people have a brighter view of what a forest can offer besides the economic goods than in Prohozesti. This can be explained by their intense contact with the forest. Moreover, they have knowledge about the elements that are part of the natural environment that they come in contact with. As the literature [15], [12] says that, people valuing the environmental values of the forest are being more responsible towards it, we can presume that perhaps the future of the forest in Lapos is in good hands.

Concerning the emotional attachment, positive emotional attachment is triggered mostly by a sense of kinship with family members. People in both communities expressed their desire to keep these properties in the family from a wish to pay respect to their ancestors and also the willingness to pass the properties to their children. But there is also a rich range of negative feelings expressed in both communities and these feelings are born from the negative aspects of the forest at functional level. In other words, the forest detriments trigger negative feelings towards that place. This can explain also the lower emotional attachment found in Prohozesti, especially among those that in general were negative about the economic benefits that the forest can offer to them.

2. The impact of the collectivism period

The forests in both communities were part of the same nationalisation system, which means that both regions were subject to similar transformations. Thought, the former collectivisation system that occurred only in

Prohozesti seems to have brought some indirect implications that may be linked to the differences found in the attachment between the two communities. In such, we can say that the inclination among the respondents from Prohozesti to value more the economic benefits than the social benefits could be related to changes of people's habits to be production orientated as they learned during collectivisation times and overlook other types of benefits.

A second implication found to be linked to the former collectivisation system is that in the affected community people lost the habit in raising horses which means that nowadays people don't dispose so easy of transportation means that could be helpful in maintaining or guarding more often their forests. In combination with the fact that the forests nowadays are under different management regime which seem not that effective as much uncontrolled deforestation occurs and wood theft and no chance for remediation, make people in Prohozesti to be less satisfied with their forests and also express a multitude of negative feelings.

3. The role of private forest ownership

People's negative feelings towards forests is also caused by the frustrations they got due to the shift from a state-owned forest to a mixture of private and state-owned forests, which created a chaos regarding the current management methods compared to past times. Contrary to the expectations, privatization brought many negative changes to the forests such as: poor guarding of the forest which leads to uncontrolled deforestation rates and wood theft, high maintenance costs for (new) owners and unequal distribution of the forest parcels as well lack of organization and falsity in the arrogation of the forest. All these changes lead to low satisfaction among forest users as they are finding it difficult to gain any profit from their forests, especially among people from Prohozesti where forests are valued mainly for the economic goods. This type of dissatisfaction that leads to lack of interest in the new properties seems to occur often in Romania among the new forest owners [11].

4. Other important factors

Two other factors appeared to be highly significant for people's attachment to the local forests. Access restriction influences people's attendance to the forest. The difficult access to the forest of those living in Prohozesti may be the reason for the people for not visiting the forests regularly and therefore having narrower views of what the forests may offer them besides wood. Consequently, people from Prohozesti are less satisfied about the social benefits than people from Lapos, for whom the contact with the forests is facilitated by the direct access road, smaller distance to the forests and possibilities to travel by horses. These types of questions may be the object of a further research in this area. Secondly, low financial possibilities restrict travel opportunities to the forest either for relaxation or maintenance. Again, this might impair the limited view of what benefits a forest can offer to people from Prohozesti. Low financial possibilities might also be the reason that uncontrolled deforestation occurs in the two communities, since many people with no job use the forest as a source of income. Because the deforestation is done mainly illegal and chaotic, it triggers low satisfaction and negative feelings among people from the two communities.

To resume, we cannot assume that the differences between the two communities in level of functional and emotional attachment to forests are only influenced by the former collectivisation system. They are also influenced by variables such as: the weak regulations of the forest privatization system, access to the forest and the low financial possibilities that people in Romania are facing nowadays. As a general conclusion, based upon our two cases, we could assume that in the former collectivized communities of Romania people are less attached to their forests than the people in the non-collectivized communities were functionally and emotionally they account for a more positive attachment. Based on these findings it would be advisory to take in account the historical background of the involved

communities in the proposed measures in rural developing plans.

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