



ROMANIAN ACADEMY

**FRANCISC I. RAINER INSTITUTE OF  
ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**TAMING POSTSOCIALIST NATURE: FLOODS, LOCAL  
STRATEGIES AND NATIONAL POLICIES ALONG THE  
LOWER DANUBE**

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**The Stage Before the Research – Phase 1/2013:  
Establishing the methodological and conceptual framework  
and the selection of fieldwork areas**

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## General and specific objectives of the phase

The phase 1/203 has three objectives and several activities which were fully met. The first objective was to set a conceptual and methodological background of the project for all members of the research group. This was very important as the research group has a multidisciplinary component: three anthropologists, one sociologist, two geographers and an agricultural economist. The second objective of the phase was to identify the historical component of the entire research which concerns the floods and the building of dykes along the Lower Danube. In order to do this we carried interviews and did archival research. The third objective was to select two villages in Romania and two in Bulgaria where the ethnographic fieldwork will be carried out. This objective fits to one of the main objectives of the project which supposes to analyze the local communities *strategies* to mitigate the floods. It also fits to the other main objective of the project which supposes to analyze the local and national *policies* to mitigate the floods.

Members of the group met for the first time on September 4, 2013, at 10 am at the Francisc I. Rainer Institute of Anthropology Bucharest (hereafter FIRIA). We discussed the following issues:

- The recapitulation of the research project objectives ;
- Checking the data which we have so far and the data we need to collect in the future ;
- How to improve the accessibility of all members to the information, the way we will centralize the data and how we are going to process it;
- Expected results for each phase
- The scientific approach of the project
- Preliminary conclusion

### **Objective 2: The identification of historical benchmarks**

I tried to distribute equally the tasks among the research team members. The two geographers from the Faculty of Geography of the University of Bucharest (Iulia Arma and Cristina Posner) carried fieldwork in Giurgiu-Gostinu area in order to identify the most suitable villages for our research. They made geomorphological analysis but also talked to local elite and made archival research. Mioara Rusu and Violeta Florian from the Institute of Agricultural Economics researched the national and international projects aiming particularly at those projects that focused on the Lower Danube. Oana Ivan researched the history of the floods in postsocialist Romania as were reflected in the mass-media.

### **Objective 3 Selection of test areas**

Stefan Dorondel, from Francisc I. Rainer Institute of Anthropology of the Romanian Academy (IAFR) and Stelu Serban, from the Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy (ISSEE) have realized the first ethnographic researches in different areas from the Danube Valley, on both sides, the Bulgarian and the Romanian side, in view of selecting the communes which were flooded often in the past, and which will be studied by quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The regions were selected, in the first stage of the project, on basis of complex, multidisciplinary criteria (historical, ethnographical, socio-economic and environmental).

### **Activities O1: multidisciplinary documentation**

As the project presupposes different methodologies, specific to all the disciplines represented in the project (social anthropology, geography, history, rural sociology and agrarian economy) a group of authors was established, to be read and discussed and a bibliography summing up different theoretical and methodological perspectives forming the political ecology field. There followed repeated meetings every two weeks, when members of the team debated the bibliographical themes and discussed field reports. Within these meetings were approached issues of political ecology, environmental anthropology, natural resources management and of environmental history, methodology (multisited ethnography, multi-species ethnography, translation sociology, multi-scale analysis), anthropological theories of the state and

bureaucracy anthropology and authors analysing the disasters anthropology (mainly floods) and the sociologists and the anthropologists who have analysed the social, political, economic and environmental impact of the dams building .

The political ecology is a relatively new discipline in Romania, but also in the Academic West European and North American environment, and was less applied in the East of Europe. Only very recently research which could be attributed to the political ecology has started (Dorondel 2011; Staddon 2009; Stahl 2010; Sikor et al. 2009). Political ecology but also environmental anthropology research as approached in this project are a new issue in the Romanian academic environment. Thus, within these meetings there were discussed authors as Paulson&Gezon (2005), Vayda&Walters (1999), Escobar (1999), Scoones (1999), Crumley et al. (2001), Asdal (2003) or Walker (2006). These authors (and others who were not cited but who were discussed while the debates) analyse the man-environment relationship as well as the main political, social and economic factors, which are influencing this relationship. They are helping us understand the plurality of interests and of the discourses towards the environment- in our case towards the idea of re-nature vs. agriculture practicing in floodable zones, the importance in the social analysis of geographical and environmental changes in the period after the dams building , the attention granted to the power concept which has an essential role in the relationship of the local communities with the State representatives, with the local, regional and national bureaucracy.

Also, it was discussed the literature regarding the State anthropology and the bureaucracy anthropology-classical authors as Scott (1998), Gupta (1995) or Kapferer (2008) or authors more recent as Bernstein & Mertz (2011) or Hoag (2011) who help us understand the State's and bureaucracy role in maintaining the dams, in taking the crucial decisions, as the breaking of dams after the flood, in the structuring of the social, economic and political relationships at local level.

## **Activity 02: Tracing the unitary methodological structure of the project**

Within the debates regarding the methodology it was discussed about the literature introducing the concept of hybrid (Latour 1988, 1992, Callon and Ripp 1992), extremely important within this project, because Danube is a hybrid between nature and technology. It was also debated the multi-scale research (for example Sheppard 2002; Neumann 2009) and the multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), both research directions are important, as both the research and the analysis of the field data in our project will be made at different levels . from the local to the global level. In the end, it was a discussion about the theories analysing the multispecies ethnography (for example Kirksey & Helmreich 2010) as in the project special attention will be given to the concept of %agency+ which the non-human has (animals or objects) in the social and environmental relationships (for example the situation of conflicts which seems to happen in practice on both side of the River when locals take their animals on the Danube' islands, practice forbidden by the State now, because these islands are now protected).

The literature regarding floods (very limited at world level) and the economic, social and ecological consequences after the dykes building helps to the understanding the methodological strategies applied by other authors and other research groups (for example World Commission on Dams 2000; Scudder 2006)

### **Activity O1: Making the web site**

The website has both a Romanian and English version. Under *the links box*, one can see the large number of research groups from prestigious universities (University of Cambridge, University of East Anglia, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München, Heidelberg Universität sau Université ParisTech) interested in working with our group.

### **Activity O2: Archive research on records of historical floods and local memory**

Stefan Dorondel and Stelu Serban have undergone preliminary research at the National Archives Teleorman County Department (November 19th-20th 2013) on the records that show how the dikes were built and on the data on

floods in Teleorman area, collected prior the embankment. Stelu Serban did library research in Sofia between November 10th-16th 2013 on the flooded areas between the two World Wars and also on the embankment process in Chernopole and Vidin area, in Vardim Plain, at the Iskar mouth.

The research done by established experts and geographers between the two World Wars, such as Boris Anghelov (1933) and Ivan Batakliiev (1935; 1939) is considered an important source of data on the age prior to the embankment of different areas of the Bulgarian margin and also on the debates regarding the types of suitable dikes.

Cristina Posner did research in the local archives of Oinacu (Giurgiu) and she found two plans from 1963 and 1980 regarding the mitigation against the flood impacts and local ordinances. The 1963 plan includes data on the flood affected farmed areas and other problems faced by the Oinacu village. All the researchers of the project team also took short interviews that suggest that the local memory on the economy and the ecology of the flooded areas prior to the embankment is still strong.

### **Activity O2: Analysis of the mass-media record on the Danube floods after 1990.**

Oana Ivan did internet research in order to understand how the major Danube floods on Romanian territory were recorded. The first results (that also have the highest number of hits) belong to two main sources: mass-media and institutions reports. For institutions, the website of IMNH, the report of Agentia Nationala de Imbunatatiri Funciare (National Department of Land Improvement) and The Atlas of maps for flood risk and hazard in Danube basin, 2012 (European Project %Danube Floodrisk+) revealed the most relevant data. The research done at the county level showed that the following areas are prone to flood:

1) Dolj county:

-Rast, Ciuperceni, Poiana Mare, Desa (2010)

-Rast, Bistret, Macesul de Jos, Bechet (2006)

2) Olt County :

-Gârcov, Corabia (2006, 2010)

3) Teleorman County:

- Turnu Magurele, Ciuperceni,Traianu, Seaca, Lisa, Viisoara, Suhaia, Fantanele, Zimnicea.

4) Giurgiu County:

- Prundu, Greaca (in special), Vedea, Gaujani, Malu, Slobozia, Gostinu si Oinacu.

As a preliminary conclusion, the analysis of the internet data show that the most affected areas are in Dolj and Olt counties,in Ghidici- Rast-Bistret-Nedeia-Jiu-Bechet-Dabuleni-Potelu . Corabia part, but also in Giurgiu county. This research was useful in the selection process of the areas where we would do both qualitative (ethnography, participant observation) and quantitative (questionnaires) research.

### **Activity O3: The geographic analysis**

The complex geographic analysis was based on the examination of bibliographic references and historical maps. The geological and geographical literature was systematised on genetic criteria and historical order, starting with the important contributions of G. M. Murgoci (1907) referring to Danube's floodplain and the deviation of a number of water courses in the Romanian Plain and the geological formations of Tertiary Period (which marks the beginning of Neozoic Era) making up the Oltenia Plain, the Danube terraces and the genetic types of soils from the Danube Plain.

In 1910, Al. Dimitrescu-Aldem publishes the paper entitled *Die Donau und zwischen Braila Turnu Severin*+about the geomorphology of Danube's Valley between Braila and Turnu Severin, attempting to solve the problems of genesis and evolution of the river, based on the assumption of a local faults system. In 1915 Al. Dimitrescu-Aldem resumes the research matter in a paper entitled *The Real Issue of the Romanian Plain*+. Research continues with George Valsan papers from 1915 and 1917. Other contributions to resolve the

issues raised by Danube's Valley from its exit into the plain up to Braila were made by Em. Protopopescu-Pache in 1923.

Important are the works of I.P. Ionescu Argetoiaia regarding the Pliocene formations from Oltenia and the tectonics of Getic Lowland and the works of Athanasiu and Sava from 1930 on the subject of Danube's river course movement towards South. Major contributions bring the work of Vintila Mihaliescu about the advancement of ploughing in Baragan Plain (1921), the study of Vlasia and Mostistea Plains (1914), as well as the study of river terraces (1931, 1937).

After the Second World War a number of new important works for understanding Danube's emerge. Of these the most important are those of Vintil Mihailescu (1957) on the issue of the Romanian Plain terraces and about the large regional divisions of the Romanian Plain, those regarding the issue of the Romanian Plain formation by N. Popp (1957), the works about the geology of the plain by E. Liteanu (1956, 1961), and works about the lakes situated along Danube by P. Gastescu, (1960, 1961, 1965, 1971).

After 1960 a number of important synthesis papers such as those of P. Cotet (1965, 1976) or Posea (1984), *The Monography of R.P.R.* (1960), *The Geography of Romanian Danube Valley (Geografia Vaii Dunarii Romanesti)* (1969), *Portile de Fier Atlas* (1972), the chapters concerning Danube's issues in *The Romanian Geography (Geografia Romaniei)* (1983, 2005), *The Limnology of the Romanian Sector of Danube (Limnologia sectorului romanesc al Dunarii)* (1967).

Especially after 1990, the issues concerning the Romanian Danube floodplain were studied by PhD students from the Geography Department of Bucharest University (some ongoing) and researched through projects funded from the state budget. Recent doctoral theses consulted for this project include: *The Danube Valley between Braila and Patlageanca. Geomorphologic Study* by Catalin Canciu from the Geography Department, Bucharest University published in 2008; *The fluvial-maritime Danubian space. Study of human and*

*economic geography*, author Ionica Soare, Dunarea de Jos University, Galati in 2004 and *The risk of floods in the Danube Basin* by Simona Mirela Patrut from The Physics College, University of Bucharest presented in 2010.

Among the projects funded from the state budget, two are the most important: *Geo-ecologic Study of the Romanian Danube Valley* (Beneficiary C.N.C.S.U. 1996-1998, CCMESI, Director Prof. Dr. M. Patroescu) and *Complex study of the Danube and surrounding areas between Bazias and the mouths* (Beneficiary: M.C.T. 1997- 1999; CCMESI, Director Prof. Dr. M. Patroescu).

The study of historical cartographic materials, in this phase of the project was focused on the earliest maps of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These are the first detailed maps based on surveys carried out by Austrians aiming to extend their boundaries: Schwanz von Springfels for Oltenia printed in Wien in 1723 and entitled *Tabula Valachiae Cisalutanae*; Specht for Tara Romaneasca Kingdom entitled *Militarische Karte der Kleinen oder Oesterreichischen und grossen Walachei* from 1790-1791. The Russo-Turkish wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have led to the appearance of first Russian maps, including the two maps of C. M. Roth (1771), one being entitled *Carte spéciale de la Principauté de Valaqui*. The map represents Tara Romaneasca Kingdom during the 1768 war, illustrating the natural environment, human settlements, monasteries, fountains, bridges etc. However, the most important Russian map from the modern period is the map of F.C. Bauer (Bawr) from 1788 entitled *Mappa nova geografic Moldaviae et Wallachiae ad recentiores observationes astronomicas I. R. yslenief et chartas geograficasconcinata*.

In addition to the Austrian and Russian maps there are other representative maps such as: Baptista Homano Map (1759), Rizzi Zannoni Map (1774), showing details of Danube Valley from Dobrogea sector and Schmidt Map (1774). Towards the end of the 18th century (1797), the map of the Aromanian, Veletin Rhigas comprising the entire Balkan Peninsula, which provides useful information about the Danube Valley is printed in Vienna.

During the following years the sources of information become more accurate due to the emergence of more accurate statistical data, the censuses starting with the one of 1861, high precision maps like the one published in 1864 by the order of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (scale 1:57 600) and publication of scientific reports on navigation improvement on Danube: Ch. Hartley (1857), T. Spratt (1857), E. Desjardins (1867), K. T. Peters (1876).

The beginning of the 19th century is marked by cartographic representations which are better documented, one of these maps being the Ivan Danielov's map (1812), which mentions the following towns: Giurcsow (Giurgiu), Cornizel (Mân stirea), Orash Flost (Fetesti), Braila, Matsin (Macin), Hirsowa, Czernavoda or the map of Hatov General (1828). The A. H. Brue Map (1822) mentions only three old towns: Giurgiu (Giurgevo), Braila (Braile) and Harsova (Hirsow), and two new towns: Kalarash (Calarasi) and Fetestie (Fetesti). The position of the last two towns as fords on Danube, but also at the end of important economic roads connecting the capital, Bucharest to the river have had an important role in their evolution and development. The most important map from this period is the Russian Map (1835 and the second edition of 1853), which illustrates the Romanian Kingdoms immediately after the arrival of the Russian troupes. This map is very important because it contains information regarding categories for towns (four categories), for villages (three categories) and it has representations of monasteries, churches, shepherd folds, restaurants and inns, post offices, water mills, woodcutters, mines, rivers, lakes, wells, bridges, lighthouses, roads (four categories), boundaries and ruins. A special attention is given to Danube, which is represented with many of its branches and lakes how they were at that time. A number of towns such as: Jurja (Giurgiu), Brailovi (Braila), Mamcini (Macin), Calarasi, Cernavodi (Cernavoda), Ghirsovi (Harsova) and localities such as: Fetesti and Oltenitu (Oltenita) were represented on the map. Between 1856-1857, the English Charles Hartley drew a map of Danube area as required by the European Commission of Danube.

For the selected area of study: Gostinu - Giurgiu a list of eight maps (presented in the list below) were used. These eight maps and the historical maps constitute the foundation for landscape evolution patterns analysis.

1. Land use in Danube Valley by Gh Iacob, L. Iordan, Ioana Stefanescu, Elena Timaru, I. Velcea 1965
2. Natura 2000 EU SPAs (<http://www.natura2000.ro/resurse/harta/arii/>) - ROSPA0090 Ostrovu Lung-Gostinu Map
3. Under Burnaz Danube Corridor - Geomorphologic Map by V. Sencu - R.S. România Academy, The Geology and Geography Institute
4. Lower Danube Atlas - WWF Vienna - Distribution Sheet No. 7
5. Floodrisk zones from Giurgiu County - Giurgiu County Council Floodrisk Study
6. RWA (ANAR) Polders and Wetlands Map - *Hidrotehnica* Magazine 2006
7. ANIF's map of Malu Roșu - Gostinu - Baneasa precinct
8. ANIF's map of Gostinu . Greaca - Arges precinct

The examination at this stage of existing cartographic materials, along with general geographic analysis for the entire area of study are aiming to support future activities in Gostinu-Giurgiu area during 2014, which will look at the historical transformation of the landscape. The evaluation of landscape dynamics will use historical cartographic material alongside with change detection type analysis based on Landsat satellite images acquired after 2000. These analyses regarding landscape dynamics will represent an objective support, which should help our understanding of the landscape - socio-political context - human component relationship. The resulted indices will constitute the items to be analysed quantitatively based on the complex field surveys, which will be carried out in 2014.

### **Activity O3: Fieldwork for identifying the proper field sites in Bulgaria and Romania**

During 4-10<sup>th</sup> of November Ștefan Dorondel and Stelu Șerban travelled along the right bank of the Danube, through several settlements from Tutrakan to Vidin, aiming to identify the two settlements of the future ethnographical

fieldwork. During 18-21<sup>st</sup> of November they did the same fieldtrip on the left bank, in Romania, from Suhaia, Teleorman district, to Gighera, Dolj district, looking for one settlement to be researched next year. Iulia Arma and Cristina Posner have completed this part of the project by seeking the fourth settlement of ethnographical fieldwork, in Giurgiu district, Romania.

The field research has covered several aspects. First, they were observed the flooded areas on the both Danube banks and the state of the dykes as well. In Bulgaria the dykes were severely degraded, covered with bushes and small trees, whose roots pervade in depth the soil of the dyke (the dykes are made mainly from compacted earth). In Romania, the dykes are comparatively in a better condition (one exception is the Gostinu dyke that is affected by Danube's shore rapid erosion at the 475th Km).

The second aspect of the field research was the conversations with the elderly. One observation is that on both Danube shores the agricultural practices and cattle breeding are quite common (the cattle breeding in the swamps/~~the~~ balta+, for instance, that happened in the socialist period too). The disturbing changes occurred after 1990, followed by the inclusion of many of these places in the category of special areas, either national parks (Persina in Belene, Bulgaria, and Russenski Lom in Ruse, Bulgaria), or simply protected, as Suhaia Swamp in Teleorman, Romania, and Zaval forest with Copani a island from Gighera, Romania. The technology and design of dykes were common in both Romania and Bulgaria. The local people were obliged to work for free by the political authorities and use their own work tools (cartfuls, shelves). The dykes building and drainage of the swamps have drastically changed the economy and ecology on larger areas near the Danube. One last point is that at least on the Romania's bank, the settlements that once were periodically flooded were moved on the surrounding hills and terraces. For instance, Suhaia village, Teleorman district, was moved in this manner, as it could be seen in the plans and maps from the State Archive, Teleorman branch. In some cases, the movement was slower, individual families changing the place of their households, but uninterrupted until the

entire village has been moved. The free places were used for agriculture after the water downsized, as well as for other connected works.

### **Conclusions**

Based on interdisciplinary research, briefly described in this report, a joint collection of concepts was accomplished, theories and methods that enable a unified approach of the practices, projects and policies for controlling the flood effects in communities located in the Danube Valley, even if disciplines differ. At this stage four localities were selected, where research will be implemented: in Bulgaria - rural area of Belene town and Slanotârn village, near Vidin and in Romania . Gostinu comuna (Giurgiu county) and Gighera comuna (Dolj county). The selection criteria were the following:

#### **General criteria:**

1. The area has been affected by floods during the postsocialist period.
2. The area to be flooded during the interwar period and the local economy has been based primarily on fishing and access to specific ponds resources.
3. The area has been dammed in the communist period, which means that after damming, the local economy is based primarily on cereal.
4. Presence, in two of the four selected communities, of a protected area or a national park. The existence of such areas radically changes the social, economic and political dynamics in the region, not only through specific prohibitions (which, in general, are in conflict with the community) but also by a stronger presence of various state agencies. In addition, in the research of international organizations, such as WWF, these areas enjoy international recognition, which raises economic and political stakes in the area.

#### **Specific conditions:**

1. Communities must not be very large in number, to be suitable for ethnographic researches.
2. Local authorities to be open to research and support us (through access to the documents from the local archives and to town hall records etc).

3. Identification of key informants who are experts in agriculture and ecology, who can help us in our research.

4. The presence in the localities of large landowners (which have economic interests, political power and who want to maintain an economic and environmental status quo in the region).

5. The presence of cross-border projects (as at Gostinu and Belene). So, Belene (with Persina National Park) in Bulgaria and Gighera with two Natura 2000 sites - ROSPA0023 (Jiu-Danube Confluence) and ROSCI 0045 (Jiu Corridor) and halophilous meadow from Gighera (protected area of national interest) in Romania were selected to be part of the study. In addition, there are also large landowners in both localities (in Gighera Italian and British citizens have settled locally, which brings again the international level in question).

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