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ROLE OF THE ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE ELABORATION OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Abstract: *When I conducted the anthropological study in view of elaborating the development plan for Țara Secașelor, I had the feeling that I was considered an obstacle, an enemy of the individuals who effectively aimed the change and "welfare" of the microregion. This article is designed to contribute to the legitimacy increase of the anthropologist involved in the rural development. It is very important to understand that the focus is not a critical spirit of the anthropologist, but a different vision on change and development following his different training in terms of the development. In conclusion, the active role of the anthropology is represented by these actual "criticisms", necessary for the elaboration of the development strategies, in order to reduce the eventual risks, related in particular to the economic reductionism.*

Key words: *anthropology, rural development, strategic planning*

Is there any currently recognized role of the anthropologist in the rural development in Romania?

In Romania, the anthropology generally continues to have a new character, shaping something abstract, theoretical, and thus it is outstripped by any expression or concept which includes the terms suggesting dynamism, as development agent, social contractor, community facilitator, hereinafter referred to as "developers".

In the situations where the development agent acts convinced of its good intentions and of the best ideological solution for the community welfare, the anthropologist reveals another attitude towards the changes. His "susceptibility" towards the "utility" of the change, towards using the power in order to fulfill the change, towards "improvement" is well known.¹ "Change does not have to be

considered as an actual value; it is useful to the extent where it brings benefits and it allows the preservation of the existing life style". In the evolutionary anthropology there is a law – Rommer's law – which states that the biological organisms change and adapt themselves, not in order to benefit from new opportunities, but to preserve their life characteristics when faced with certain outer changers. Outer changes often cause suspicious reactions without being assimilated by the communities, regardless of the fact that they would implement them by themselves, in the most natural way, after a while. The anthropologists who worked in community development projects insist that the projects to improve the local inhabitants' life are successful to the extent where they do not attempt to radically change the local institutions or the local means of support.²

Are the issues and needs discovered by the "developers" real?

¹<http://www.scribube.com/istorie/ANTROPOLOGUL-AGENT-DE-DEZVOLTA223710228.php>

² http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/schimbarea-spaima-romanilor-670063.html?id_domain=15

I will concretely present certain revealing aspects extracted from an anthropological study I conducted in view of elaborating the development plan of Tara Secaşelor microregion. Their goal is to reveal the anthropologist's involvement degree and contribution to the establishment of the development directions of an area.

ȚARA SECAȘELOR MICROREGION



Overall, the microregion includes 22 communes and a city. Țara Secaşelor includes small villages (under 500 inhabitants), medium villages (between 500 and 1500 inhabitants) and large villages. The urban centers defining the microregion are: Sibiu in South, Sebeș in West, Alba Iulia in North and Blaj in North – East.

The cultural typology of the villages reveals a differentiation of the life styles, not only under the aspect of contact with the city or the cultural consumption, but also for the life options adopted by the individuals. We are dealing with a mosaic of realities and mentalities, where it is obvious that there are no development networks generally consented. Thus, a long –term research is necessary, which would reveal the imperatives of the development directions, what is not possible and what has to be achieved. The anthropologist can provide such answers.

Various ruralism versions of the inhabitants exist among these types, more or less marked by traditionalism or modernity, mainly associated with the village type.³ From the standpoint of the subjective perspective, correlated with the economic dimension, the

youth living in the rural today display the will to live in villages or “under similar conditions with the ones from the city”, which involves both the desire to migrate in cities and the desire of a modern and satisfying life in the rural environment.

Which is the role of the anthropological study? Why does it help us to know how people live, what is their life style and what are their preoccupations? Because in the elaboration of the development strategy we will need the answers to the question: what type of change are the communities from Țara Secaşelor capable of? What does the adaptation for the preservation of the specific character imply?

REALITIES FROM ȚARA SECAȘELOR

For the following part of the paper, I selected some observations taken from the anthropological study⁴, apparently details which a developer does not consider given the short time to elaborate the strategies, but which are able to contribute, through the anthropologist's support, to the decisions taken in terms of the development directions: “approximately four years ago (the study was finalized in July 2010), anyone could obtain a personal credit in a relatively simple manner, and thus many had the possibility to fulfill their desire to “keep up with the others”. Among the individuals questioned, most of them would change something, but they require more money. Through the fact that people contracted certain credits under the conditions where the criterion that the monthly installment would not exceed 30% of the revenue is not verified on the long term, we draw the conclusion that their desire to keep up with the others, with the current times, is primordial. A credit implies constant monthly revenue, and most of the inhabitants of the villages in Țara Secaşelor do not “function” in a similar manner with the cities, namely with the status of wage earners. The installments and credit reimbursement can be sustained by

³ www.cuvantul.ro/articol/?artID=21&nr=330

⁴ Ileana Sădean, Anthropological Study of Țara Secaşelor microregion, to support the elaboration of the development strategy for Țara Secaşelor – “Leader” module, 2010 – unpublished



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working harder and thus having more goods to sell. The credit was present in many households I visited, being used to increase the number of animals. I encountered two situations: when people, in order to "modernize" themselves, respectively to change their furniture, to redecorate their façade, windows, etc., increased the number of animals in order to obtain more goods to sell and then, with the money raised throughout a long period of time, they manage to fulfill their dream; and a second situation which applies the reverse logics, they reduce the waiting time by contracting a credit and they undertake the payment of interest and monthly installments throughout tenths of years, followed by the increase of labor volume and number of animals. A developer only notes the increase of the animal numbers, but not the reasons underlying such increase.

While the elderly continue to raise animals because they cannot live without this activity, despite the fact that it is no longer economically profitable, the youth only keep them because they represent the main source of revenue. In other words, *ancient people for new times*.

Apart from the differences between the traditional and modern villages, in terms of the living standard there are mixed elements related both to tradition and to modernism within the same village. On the long term, the traditionalism will lose ground in front of the modernism. For a good evolution of the microregion, the population should be stabilized throughout the following years by insuring local labor places, but also through an efficient transportation for qualitative commuting. The structure of the population relies on the economic development and on the development policies. The highest changes will take place when the elderly are gone. They are the ones who do not change anything

substantial. They only participate to what the time subtly changes, but they are not the promoters of events. There is a significant divorce between generations. This can be easily noticed at the consumption level. In most of the cases where two generations, children with parents, live together, when the elderly were gone, namely the owners, the remaining generations set freely all their ideas into practice. These included the reassembling of the dwelling, consumption preferences, life style.

To the extent possible, we have to take into consideration the elaboration of the development strategy, the harmonization of the rural development with the valorization of the cultural, natural and landscaping patrimony. The development policies do not have to alter the rural means of life or to fall into the trap of the economic reductionism.

I presented below the conclusions of the anthropological study from Țara Secașelor, which attempts to draw the attention on certain "temptations" in development which, on one hand, could have negative effects on long term on the communities and, on the other hand, to underline certain "impositions" with positive effects on the long term:

1. The promotion and increase of the appreciation of communities for the labor performed by the woman, especially in the villages where the traditional family is dominant. The achievement of the financial independence could balance the power and authority reports within the family and thus the involvement of women, objective aimed by the Leader programme, through the development of certain projects.

2. We have to try to keep the youth in villages, especially in the villages with high depopulation index (thus, we preserve the local language, the dialect and subsequently the local culture), to avoid the risk of

becoming unpopulated. The attraction of youth established in cities, with the debatable solution to move with their parents, taking into consideration the mentality gap between generations. I noticed that most of the times the cohabitation based on cooperation is only proved on short – time basis. Along with the infrastructural rehabilitation of roads from center towards outskirts, current water, the spare time ruralism will develop and the population's displacement will be balanced.

3. Labor places have to be mainly created in the field of services provided to the inhabitants and to the individuals visiting the premises as tourists, due to a deficient social, cultural and health infrastructure and to the poorly represented non – governmental sector (NGOs). It can be a warranty for the improvement of the inhabitants' life quality, maintaining the youth in villages, supplementing the children for the elderly left alone, occupation of a labor place corresponding to the qualification.

4. The development of the rental fund has to be taken into consideration on the long term, based on the separation tendency of youth from parents.

5. The establishment of some residentially elderly centers will not be a facilely assimilated idea in the first place, due to the mentality of such category of individuals, but we have to consider the ageing process of villages, especially the villages from the center of the microregion. In this particular case, we can suggest projects which would not imply the dismemberment, but home services in a first stage. Thus, we can avoid the investment of certain funds and the education of population about the advantages provided by the elderly centers.

6. Support of the preservation activities related to the endangered material and immaterial cultural patrimony, due to the fact that the best information sources are represented by the individuals aged 65-70 years old or more.

7. Education and counseling of population in terms of providing certain solutions related to the modification of the architecture of houses, facades, contracting a credit, and in all the other challenges which imply an adapting

“effort”.

8. Valorization of the household and craft abilities and competences of the inhabitants through programmes of rural tourism, green tourism, agrotourism, creation of trade markets and distribution networks.

9. The development of a qualitative tourism will allow the dissolution of the border between the traditional and modern villages. The tourism acts on two levels, as an economic development factor and as a cultural modernization factor (cultural animator), especially for the isolated and aged villages.

Thus, the “active” role of the anthropologist in the community (rural) development represents the formulation of these conclusions to be indicated to the developers, the most adequate development sense for a better life of the communities.

The anthropologist's risk through his involvement in the rural development is to become an outcast of this space. It is a risk which the anthropologist has to take if he wants to remain an anthropologist. Modernization, as any other ideology, has its “rebels”. Whoever shapes himself as an anthropologist will inevitably be aware of such risk.⁵

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