

# PROJECTS FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE DANUBE DURING THE INTER-WAR PERIOD

**Carmen ALBERT**

Muzeul Banatului Montan Reșița

The Social Institute Banat-Crișana, founded in 1932 at Timișoara, proposed itself, according to the method of the Sociologic School of Bucharest, as main unit of investigation the village and the rural problems, succeeding during ten years, five monographic campaigns oriented in such a way to research and solve the main shortcomings of the inhabitants.

Since the beginning of its activity, this institute was attached to the idea of social reform promoted by the Romanian Social Institute in Bucharest, focusing on themes connected to the decrease of birth rate and the loss of the Romanian population's identity, organising several monographic campaigns in some rural localities, trying to solve them, appealing to the local and regional authorities and even to the government in Bucharest.<sup>1</sup>

In 1939 when Dimitrie Gusti was the minister of public instruction, the monographic researches have known a new paradigm. Anton Golopenția<sup>2</sup>, a former collaborator of Dimitrie Gusti has imposed his point of view regarding the reorientation of researches, moving the centre of gravity from the village as a social unit towards the region pursuing a common problem and of its solving can benefit a larger area than that of a village<sup>3</sup>. The law of Social Service, which started to be applied that year, is also added to these changes. This law was proposed during the short mandate of Dimitrie Gusti as minister of public instruction. Its application has represented one of the most successful examples of methods of community development during the inter-war period. The idea of a complete reform in which the sectorial changes should be integrated to the „social spirit” of assembly<sup>4</sup> was accepted also by the regional institute of Timisoara which was created on the pattern of that in Bucharest.

The year 1939 thus, also represented for the institute of Timisoara, a new approach of the research paradigm focusing its attention on a whole region, following then, to propose solutions for the encountered problems. As a rule the application of this law aimed at the community dimension and planned ways of sustainable development in the limits fixed by their own human, material and financial resources. The revitalization of the public interest activities were based on the community's participation being prefaced by the investigation of reality by a sociologic team.

<sup>1</sup> About the Social Institute Banat-Crișana, the most complete works belong to: Negru 1999, Bălan 2001, Albert 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Anton Golopenția (1909–1951), a famous representative of the Sociologic School of Bucharest, native from Prigor, Caraș-Severin County.

<sup>3</sup> Opriș 1997, Costea 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Zamfir/Stănescu 2007, p. 41

The region which best fitted the new principle of regional inter-disciplinary research was the Almăj Valley which enframed the administrative unit of Bozovici county. The 16 localities which composed the valley including the centre Bozovici presented some specific characteristics for an incipient urbanity as it results from the answers to the questionnaires given to the town halls<sup>5</sup>. The answers to these questionnaires also reveal some problems connected to the rural administration, malfunctions regarding the lack of electric current and the ways of communication which hindered the inhabitants' life, this is why, the notes in the field made by Cornel Grofşorean, the head of the team, give a special attention to this problem<sup>6</sup>.

One of the most important problems considered essential for the optimization of life conditions of the region's inhabitants was connected to the electrification possibilities. Without electric current the whole region was in danger to remain in the dark without having the perspectives of emancipation.

The region was electrified since the time of the School of Arts and Crafts in Bozovici. Its existence together with the consumption of domestic electricity ensures the profit for the current supplier. The school moved in the meantime at Oravița, and the domestic consumption did not ensure the necessary profitability. Thus, a new project for the electrification of the Almăj Valley was required and they had to highlight its necessity in order to persuade both the specialists who achieved it and the authorities who approved it.

The person, who led the campaign and drew the memoirs to inform the authorities, was Cornel Grofşorean<sup>7</sup>. In the memoir, addressed to the engineer Cornel Miklossy, to which he also annexed a map of the region, Cornel Grofşorean has presented the geographical situation and the course of the main rivers which were to be supplied with electricity. An older plan of Steg<sup>8</sup> stated that in the village Șopotul Nou, a small tributary stream Buceaua flows in the Nera River, where a big dam could be built. The dam would favour the accumulation of water in a lake and the village Șopotul Nou would have been moved. The water falls from 100 metres which would have favoured the obtaining of electricity. Although it was important, Steg did not execute the project probably due to the high costs.

The School of Arts and Crafts in Bozovici was moved arbitrarily, says Cornel Grofşorean *"because a headmaster wanted to spend his time in the town. This is how administration is done at us"*<sup>9</sup>. The local authorities in Bozovici have drawn a plan to dam the river Nera in the neighbourhood of Borloveniul Nou, just at the entrance of the Almăj Valley. The estimate was very expensive, around 17 million lei. If this dam had been built it would have ensured the electricity for the whole valley but as it was not achieved, the problem persists, Cornel Grofşorean says as a conclusion.

The problem had to be solved urgently because it was connected to the action of the Royal Teams where at Rudăria they built the Cultural House (Căminul Cultural), an action which started some years ago, which also needed electricity in order to function. At Rudăria the works started in 1934 and they lasted until 1939–40, because there was a great need first of all to demolish the old building of the city hall on whose place they started building the House. Because the Royal Teams worked a few months a year together with the inhabitants, the project was rather

<sup>5</sup> The questionnaires dated 1939 offer through the required answers some information about history, geography, the population structure, ethnology, folklore, the notary's role, the judges' efficiency etc. The final purpose was to draw a regional monograph.

<sup>6</sup> Albert 2002, p. 621–635.

<sup>7</sup> Cornel Grofşorean (1881–1948), a lawyer, a sociologist, a former county leader, sub-prefect, mayor of Timișoara, a deputy, one of the founders of the Social Institute Banat-Crișana.

<sup>8</sup> Grăf 1997, p. 207.

<sup>9</sup> Albert 2003, p. 141.

delayed. At Lăpușnic, the home village of the socialist deputy Eftimie Gherman<sup>10</sup>, the problem of electricity was also considered, especially when they built on his initiative the National House<sup>11</sup>. All these actions which had as the main aim, the electrification of the whole valley, were to be coordinated and integrated in a unitary plan so that the result obtained will be in the benefit of a large number of inhabitants of the 16 localities. On the field, Cornel Grofșorean found out that there was one more waterfall at Borlovenii Vechi, which could supply the electricity for this valley including some villages in the Severin County up to Iabłanița<sup>12</sup>.

The situation was brought to the attention of the engineer Cornel Miklossy<sup>13</sup>, the manager of the Electrical Factory in Timișoara, by this memoir he was invited together with the engineer Vasile Zbegan<sup>14</sup>, the manager of water supply and sanitation of Timișoara to come on the spot. On the date of 23 August 1939 they achieved some hydraulic examinations of the rivers Nera and Buceaia along the localities Șopotul Nou, the river Rudărița in the village Rudăria, Nera in the village Borlovenii Vechi. After the observations, the new graduate of the Polytechnic Institute of Timișoara and delegate of the Royal Foundations, Petru Boarnă had to achieve a plan of measures<sup>15</sup>.

Another problem which was noticed referred to the isolation of the region from the rest of the urban and industrial centres in Banat. The references to this situation are repeated and insistent. The lack of ways of communication, of infrastructure and especially their quality which should ensure the connection between the localities of the county and other regions was signalled both in the correspondence and in the reports resulted in the end of the campaign.

The solution was very simple, the problem being solved by the construction of a railway of around 40 km which would go in parallel with the Danube and would connect two segments of road Lugoj-Orșova and Oravița-Biserica Albă. In this way they will also supply the industrial and mining centres in Reșița, Anina etc. The project was thought even since the Austro-Hungarian Empire and they even had started the measurements, but after the union in 1918 it was abandoned<sup>16</sup>.

Cornel Grofșorean made a proposal by which he considered that this problem could be solved and implicitly it will ensure the profit of the electric factory, referred to the installation of a trolley-bus line on the segment Oravița-Iabłanița which will run on electricity. The consumption of this line would capitalize and ensure in this way the construction of the factory and the busy traffic would be uncongested on the line Oravița-Lugoj-Orșova or Reșița-Caransebeș-Orșova<sup>17</sup>. The idea seemed funny, the trolley-bus lines were only in towns, but it still was a proposal in the absence of a coherent plan achieved by the specialists. Meanwhile, Petru Boarnă has probably drawn such an intervention plan, it is not in the archive and in the collection of the magazine of the Social Institute Banat-Crișana where they usually published studies after the end of the researches, and it has not been edited. After the campaign, Cornel Grofșorean has published a study where some references at the Almăj Valley were made only regarding the ways of communication, insisting on the variant of building a railway Iabłanița-Bozovici-Anina and the road Globu-Craiova, without repeating the idea of the trolley-bus which should ensure

<sup>10</sup> Eftimie Gherman (1894–1980), born at Lăpușnicu-Mare, a socialist militant, participant at the union of Transilvania with Romania. In 1949, in Paris, he founded the Group of Romanian Socialists in exile. He came back in the country in 1977.

<sup>11</sup> Albert 2003, p. 274–275.

<sup>12</sup> Albert 2003, p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> Cornel Miklossy (1887–1963) an engineer, a teacher at the Polytechnic Institute of Timișoara, a member of the Romanian Academy since 1955.

<sup>14</sup> Vasile Zbegan (1892–1973), an engineer, a teacher at the Polytechnic Institute of Timișoara.

<sup>15</sup> Albert 2003, p. 283–284.

<sup>16</sup> Birăescu 1942, p. 563.

<sup>17</sup> Albert 2003, p. 141.

the connection between Almăj and Orșova-Lugoj. There were other projects started in 1922 and subsequently in 1934 by the Rangers Association. All the hopes were headed towards the end of the war when this ample work<sup>18</sup> could be done.

In the neighbourhood of the Danube, on the occasion of another travel in the summer of 1942, the institute was also focused on the locality Naidăș and other villages placed on the Danube's Gorge: Ciuchici, Petrilova, Bogodinț, Lescovița, Zlatița, Câmpia, Socol. The central theme of interest connected again to the infrastructure which seemed incondite in the whole area, the lack of roads which should connect these localities administratively distributed between the two counties: Sasca and Moldova Nouă. From the geographical point of view, the region was rather isolated; the connection with other counties of Banat must be produced without delay having in view that in the neighbourhood there was the Romanian-Yugoslavian border which should be taken into consideration having in view the war and the perspective of peace with territorial fragmentations. The development of this region could not be achieved because of the lack of means and ways of circulation. The isolation of the region just as that of Almăj could not be beneficial not even during peace, so much the more during war.

In the field, the researchers have observed the bad situation of the road Răcăjdia-Naidăș-Baziaș which passes through all the localities of the Danube's Gorge. The situation was the same for 20 years without taking any measures. The repairs of the road would have ensured a convenient travel connecting the 9 villages and facilitating their development. Likewise the national road did not have any modernised branches from Răcăjdia-Baziaș, only communal, natural roads which become impracticable three seasons per year. The inhabitants went to the market on difficult roads and the access to medical assistance was almost impossible. Likewise the court was at Sasca and the employees had to walk on feet on the "*exasperating miserable*" way Lescovița-Macoviște in order to reach the national road Oravița-Moldova Nouă.

If the network of roads was poor it was expected that at least the railway to function, but they were also insufficiently developed. The railway Oravița-Iam did not have any extension in order to connect the localities in the valley of the Danube. An extension was necessary from Răcăjdia-Baziaș of only 38 km, thus connecting all the localities placed on the Gorge. There is an older line unused for many years from Socol-Baziaș of 7 km which was a part from a longer segment Biserica Albă-Baziaș dating back to the time of the empire and it could be rehabilitated.

Other ways of communicating analysed which could get the area out of isolation were telephony and telegraph. They existed but they covered insufficiently and only fragmentary the region, thus, there was not a continuous line. Ciuchici-Zlatița had such a connection but up to Naidăș there were only the supporting posts, the only proof that there was a telephonic line. Between Nicolinț and Naidăș, a terrible winter broke all the cables for whose repairs they needed 1200 lei. The village did not approve the repairs, the post was uninterested and the population took profit of the situation and stole all the wires.

Analyzing the situation directly in the field, the team of monographers led by Cornel Grofșorean have observed that the present administrative sharing is not able to favour the economic and local development, the localities although close geographically were placed in administrative units which could be an impediment in their evolution, some belonged to the Sasca county and others to Moldova Nouă county.

The proposals of the team of the Banatian institute for the improvement of the situation, mainly for the introduction of the area in the regional and national circuit, first of all, aimed the establishment of Năidăș as centre of the county where there should be a doctor, a chemist's shop,

<sup>18</sup> Grofșorean 1942, p. 277.

a veterinarian, being the most well placed and economically visible. Thus, there was a coming closer of the inhabitants to the important public institutions and a closer connection to the administrative structures.

It was also necessary to build a railway from Răcăjdia to the localities on the border thus, also achieving the connection to the town of Timișoara. A visionary, Cornel Grofșorean tried to convince the authorities that a development plan in this part of Romania could integrate the region not only from the national point of view, but also European one, the chances of geopolitical and economic reconfiguration and reconstruction after the end of the war being high. Such a signal was constituted by a project published in one of the issues of 1942 of the magazine "New Europe" („Europa Nouă”) from Berlin, in which it was stated that in the future more dams would be built in the Gorge of the Danube. Thus, From Baziaș they could sail to Salonik which will connect the Danube to the Aegean Sea, Baziaș becoming a maritime harbour! Thus, Cornel Grofșorean anticipated the importance that can be obtained by this corner of the country ignored for the moment by the authorities, in the situation in which the economic potential of the region was valued before the beginning of the large constructions.

The plans exposed by the German Reich were not fulfilled, the war being won by the Allies which led indeed to the reconfiguration of the borders of the European continent but in another way.

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## PROIECTE DE DEZVOLTARE RURALĂ DE-A LUNGUL DUNĂRII ÎN TIMPUL PERIOADEI INTERBELICE (Rezumat)

Unul din obiectivele cercetării monografice din Banat, aflată sub influența Școlii Sociologice de la București, a fost și acela a analizei realităților rurale și optimizării condițiilor de viață sub toate aspectele. În perioada interbelică Institutul Social Banat-Crișana a întreprins mai multe campanii monografice dedicate satului bănățean și problemelor lui. Aspectele negative sesizate au fost aduse la cunoștința autorităților locale și regionale, chiar naționale încercându-se diferite modalități de rezolvare a lor. Una din propunerile de dezvoltare regională care ar fi atras după sine ridicarea standardului de viață a locuitorilor din Valea Almăjului viza rețeaua de transport. S-a constatat că potențialul uriaș de exploatare a resurselor din respectiva regiune este împiedicat de slaba sau chiar lipsa unei rețele de transport feroviare și rutiere. Ca atare o propunere îndrăzneată a avut în vedere construirea de căi ferate și șosele care să asigure legătura Oraviței cu porturile la Dunăre din Europa.



Picture 1 Dimitrie Gusti – in the remote plan at Rudăria in 1934 (archive Vasile Nemiș)



Picture 2 The Royal Teams demolishing the old building of the City Hall in Rudăria, in order to build the Cultural House in 1936 (archive Vasile Nemiș)



Picture 3 A part of the walls of the Cultural House of Rudăria were built in 1938 (archive Vasile Nemiș)