

The Post-communist Continuous Crisis and the Wake-up Call of Rosia Montana

Title of the session:

Citizens vs Markets: How Civil Society is Rethinking the Economy in a Time of Crises

Abstract

Romanians joke by saying “we feel no crisis here...nothing really has changed!” Despite the promise of ‘growth’, the region of former communist countries has witnessed a permanent economic crisis. First, my aim is to bring a critique to the prevailing perception that the CEE region is merely faithful to the ‘religion’ of growth. I will show that despite the consumerist seduction, Romanians have preserved and valued collective and kinship habits and practices that proved to be more sustainable during communism. My research has been an attempt to find such illustrations starting from the case of Rosia Montana, a semi-urban village in Transylvania where one of the largest open-cast gold mining projects in Europe is being pushed as the only alternative for development. Initially, the ‘new Europe’ of Rosia Montana seemed to be less about developing the practice of democracy and more about buying the formal consent to produce a desired economic order. However, starting with 2000, local opposition has gradually triggered one of the most durable social movements culminating with the largest protests in post-communist Romania during the autumn of 2013.

Based on my field-research, this paper examines various forms of resistance and alternative proposals to capital development in a post-socialist context; it will be looking at the discursive controversies of forging an alternative societal vision beyond the cliques of neo-liberal and the lingering realities of the communist experiment. I argue that learning from these controversies could be useful for research on de-growth because they are articulated from a position of anxiety with regard to both the communist and the neo-liberal experiments. What has disappeared after 1989 has not been a certain belief, but the strength to believe more generally, and to imagine alternatives. While some have used this moment of ‘meaning-emptiness’ to haste celebration of liberal democracy and capitalist growth, others have lament the lack in equalitarian democratic enthusiasm. Neither positions serve the aim of a potential transformation of these societies but ironically, they perpetuate the Cold War mentality. The more efforts to produce evidence for their truth the more effort to hide contingent production: they can only exist through self-referential performative repetition. The emptiness of these ‘master signifiers’ for post-communist societies has been recognized in multiple times and has left room for thinking alternatively.

Keywords: post-communism, movements, alternatives.