

OLD AND NEW IN VAMA VECHÉ AND 2 MAI

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Abstract. The article uses as a pretext the doctoral research work belonging to one of the authors (Tascu-Stavre, 2011), a study preoccupied with the institutional transformation of two settlements at the Black Sea. The first section presents the study background and methodology built around the Bloomington School analysis model developed by Elinor Ostrom. Under this model, the research aims to decipher the development trends and specific differences between the two geographically neighboring coastal villages. The second section summarizes the findings of the doctoral thesis and documents the applied nature of the research, as the author was directly involved in the process of re-institutionalization of the development policy in Vama Veche, and therefore had the opportunity to test the applicability of discussed theory in-situ. Starting from the presented material but also from the dilemma of managing the commons, the last section adds some comments attached to the relation between development and urban development, emphasizing the importance of the latter both as common (space) as well as a resource which requires technical and ethical management.

Key words: neo-institutionalism, transition, local development, tourism, commons, urban space

1. Pretext and research background

“Old and new in Vama Veche and 2 Mai” is not and does not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis of the institutional changes at the southern Black Sea coast. The current article represents rather a summary of the findings of an undertaking that has spanned over almost eight years and was finalized with a doctoral thesis titled “Institutional approaches of transition in Romania. An

analysis of institutional change in Vama Veche and 2 Mai” (The thesis has been defended is currently under publication). The analysis departs from a “case” which enjoyed a few years ago - although the term “enjoyed” is not in this context the most fortunate formulation - a surprising notoriety: that of the “battle” for the present and especially for the future of Vama Veche village located in the southern extremity of the Romanian

seaside. A "battle" that ultimately involved numerous actors with different interests and visions: local, regional and central authorities, entrepreneurs, NGOs, professional structures of various backgrounds, from scientific research institutes to rock bands, the media, artists, homeowners, tourists or "ordinary" citizens. It is our consideration that the prime merit of the approach is that it reached the profound symptomatology of Romanian transition, with its acute dilemmas. In this context the intuition was that Vama Veche provides a fertile ground for elucidating the "meanders of transition" in Romania through the chance of having at hand a relevant term of comparison: 2 Mai settlement, only a few kilometers away, having prior to 1990 an essentially similar profile.

The genesis of this analysis followed a reverse trajectory as to its final presentation, that is from the fieldwork to the library and from personal experience to institutional analysis (We have to mention here that Miroslav Tascu-Stavre began by being involved in the movement Save Vama Veche becoming familiar in a period of several years with the local situation, the people and the institutions and so gaining a broader perception of the dynamics of local changes, as well as of their interdependencies with strategies and policies at regional and national level). The main idea or working hypothesis is that the East European transition can be beneficially decrypted to the extent that the change is perceived as a specific reality built on two pillars: politics and economy. The aim of the work is to "understand and explain processes of change initiated in 1989 and how the institutional choices from this period will ultimately determine such different

performances" (Tascu-Stavre, 2011, p. 9). The methodological option is centered around the analytical framework of the "Bloomington School" developed by Elinor Ostrom (1985, 1986, 1990, 2007) which we believe provides an useful instrument for understanding and solving collective action problems. Based on Ostrom's model, the approach sought to highlight ways found by the two analyzed communities (we are referring to 2 Mai and Vama Veche) regarding organization and self-governance under the dependence on a shared resource, and finally explain the different development patterns of the two coastal villages" (Tascu-Stavre, 2011, p. 10).

There are several characteristics which distinguish the institutional analysis and development framework IAD developed around professors Vince and Elinor Ostrom from other types of institutionalism.

First, the model developed by Ostrom (which contributed decisively to the award the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009) focuses on a particular type of human situation which she calls "the problem of the commons" and includes among these circumstances the ones affecting between 50-15000 people or at small-scale as Ostrom calls it (Ostrom, 2007, p. 26). An essential element of the model, the result of several decades of empirical research, is the fact that the respective community is dependent on a common (in the case we analyzed the discussion is about the coastal area and the attracted tourists).

A second aspect is the use of analysis unit for the individual behavior called an action situation where the actors make decisions followed by actions. The way in which these decisions are

built is specific analysis framework. Thus, the decisions underlying human action constitute responses to an incentive structure consisting of a series of exogenous constraints and opportunities, and their perception by actors. According to this model, there are four internal variables affecting the choice of a strategy by the individual. These are the expected benefits, expected costs, internal norms and discount rates (Ostrom, 2007, p. 37). The novelty of the model is the flexibility, in the sense that it does not impose a restrictive sense to the rational behavior of the individual. The result is a more realistic view on the behavior of actors in situations of social interaction.

Thirdly, by separating all action situations of on three levels of analysis (operational, collective and constitutional) Ostrom succeeds to solve a difficult and controversial problem concerning understanding the way in which change occurs institutions. The questions which arise most often regarding the stability of institutions is why these are affected only under certain circumstances and how these institutions resist change in many other situations. Or, should we use the separation of analysis on several arenas, like Ostrom, there should not remain room for any confusion or debate about how change occurs. Thus, "making the choice of operational-level rules endogenous does not imply making the choice of collective choice or constitutional-choice rules endogenous at the same time (Ostrom, 2007, p. 52). To undertake the analysis, Ostrom tells us, we should start from the idea that there are some rules exogenous to the analysis.

To conclude, three arguments convinced us of the strong explanatory potential of neo-institutionalism: 1. the theory puts into the equation both formal and informal relations 2. attempts to explain the change through objective and subjective factors, granting citadel rights to individual subjectivity within social dynamics and 3. rejects the determined character of societal becoming. The assumption of this approach is that development patterns, whether economic or political, are specific to a particular institutional context, which has the ability to vary depending on the historical time and (national) geographical space. Accordingly, there cannot be a universal development model, but only specific institutional specific alternative models" (Tascu-Stavre, 2011, p. 22).

2. The case study - Vama Veche and 2 Mai

Once the methodological reference established, we will briefly outline the main elements of the case study. The case study follows a historical structure, discussing comparatively the changes taking place in the two settlements during several stages: before 1989, between 1990 and 1996, between 1996 and 2003 and since 2003 hitherto. Thus, this part proposes a specific conjunction between information based on the monograph methodology, of interviews ranged between journalism and sociology, statistical data and the call on a micro synthetic history of the Dobrogea region (space), especially its Romanian southern part. The question is how the two localities under same local government and with the same resources, experienced after 1990 such different community development

patterns. We believe that this second part of the paper has the quality of introducing explanatory elements for the differences between two social and human spaces, for two communities which ostensibly could have been considered similar, close.

To highlight these differences we comparatively analyzed several elements (from differences in local livelihood strategies of the two coastal villages and moving up to differences in urbanization). As previously argued, the key to understanding the different development trajectories is the specific institutional context of the two localities. Thus, the differences delineated within some formal and informal rules, have had a decisive influence on obtaining benefits from tourism in the two communities.

Practically, even since before 1989, between the two coastal villages (under similar environmental conditions) the local livelihood strategies were different. For a detailed analysis we recommend the works Miruna Tirca (2004) and Simina Guga (2006). Synthesizing the elements leading to this situation, we find that the two types of rules, one regarding the access and residence in the locality (we are referring to Decree no. 678 from 7/10/69 regarding the regime of the state border guarding in the Socialist Republic of Romania) and another to wipe out the settlement (See Communist Party of Romania, Central Committee Chancellery Note No 125/4221 of 23.01.1987), will influence decisively the community in Vama Veche. Thus, the regulations contained in Decree no. 678 of 7/10/69 will actually block the emergence and

development of a form of tourism similar to that of 2 Mai. In addition, under the spectrum of village dissolution, locals are beginning to voluntarily leave the settlement. As such, in 1989, a minority of households are still permanently inhabited, since the village is lacking any kind of municipal infrastructure, as shown in the statements of villagers.

The period between 1990-1996 was not chosen by chance, the reason of the delimitation is to capture the changes in the local institutional structure due to transformation of the rules at higher levels. As we have argued, despite radical changes in constitutional rules, strategies of the locals do not change substantially until 1996. In 2 Mai the practices of renting rooms during the summer season will continue, strengthening what Mihailescu (2005) called a "backyard tourism", while in Vama Veche the primary modality to insure the means of existence remains the agriculture. In addition, as a natural continuation of concerns related to providing tourist services, appear the first private initiatives among the locals of 2 May.

However, due to the repeal of regulations that restricted the access to Vama Veche, occurs the most important change of those years namely a significant increase in the number of tourists who discover Vama Veche and choose to spend their holidays here. The option of the tourists to spend their vacation in this place will "surprise" the local community. Thereby, unprepared to provide conditions similar to ones of 2 Mai neighbors, the locals will miss the opportunity to get additional incomes from tourists. In Vama Veche emerges

a "beach tourism" (see Mihailescu, 2005) based on the self-management of resources needed for spending the holidays. The beach becomes the central location around which further development of the whole village takes place. However, with time, due to the increasing number of tourists appear the first entrepreneurs. Again we see a difference from 2 Mai, as the local community misses the start in the competition with the "outsiders". The reason due to the people of Vama Veche fail to benefit from tourism is based on the following mechanism: the constraints from before 1989 prevented the arrival of tourists, in other words the practically zero demand for accommodation determined a close to zero offer (the exception being of course the "camp of Cluj people"). Under these circumstances, although after 1990 there is some demand for accommodation, it will not be satisfied, the built environment and the facilities being clearly inferior to 2 Mai.. This will influence the typology of public who chooses to come to Vama Veche, acting as a filter. The tourists in the first years after 1990 chose to "occupy" the beach by camping here. Like North (1990a, 1990b, 1997), we can say that history matters, in the sense that the constraints in Vama Veche (present until 1989) will block certain individual actions, which in turn will prevent the emergence of relations similar to those in 2 Mai. Finally, the strategies of the locals as well as the typology of tourism in the two communities will be different.

Perhaps the most obvious change takes place beginning with 1996. Basically, after 1996 the number of incoming tourists is relatively similar

in the two coastal villages. However, the strategies adopted by the two communities to benefit from the presence of tourists are different.

As mentioned, regarding the variables related to the real world, things look the same in the two villages. Both have the same environmental conditions, are located on the seafront and both have a beach. The differences, as results from analysis, are due to applicable rules and strategies adopted by the two communities regarding tourism.

Another important moment to analyze is represented by the events of summer of 2003, when the authorities decide to ban beach camping. The decision to clear the beach is an expected behavior of their behalf in the context of high season congestion in Vama Veche. By applying the beach camping ban, both local investors and authorities hope to increase the number of housed tourists since the accommodation offer is met or even exceeds the demand. What they did not anticipate at the time was the local traditional tourists capacity to react and to organize. The setting up in August 2003 of the Stufstock festival and the establishment of the Association for Conservation of the Bio-Cultural Protected Areas in the autumn of the same year will bring significant changes in both communities. Two of the newly created association actions will have a significant influence on the development of both settlements.

Firstly, blocking the use G.U.P. (General Urban Plan - settlement master-plan) will stop the already chaotic development and ensure protection of the coastal area (G.U.P

was missing a number of approvals, including the environmental approval). In the following period, through a series of actions, the association succeeds in persuading the central authorities about the need to develop a new G.U.P. The Minister for Transport, Construction and Tourism will organize a public tender in 2004 and commit to funding the elaboration of a new G.U.P. The design will be completed in the autumn of 2005 and is one of the most complex G.U.P. prepared for a rural area, as it includes besides planning regulations, a sociological study, a local development plan and a morphological and typological analysis of village.

Secondly, through the partnerships started in 2004 involving all stakeholders from Vama Veche, the association managed to defuse a conflict and provide a satisfactory formula regarding the beach use. Thus, 2005 is the year of the first partnership between the association and Department of Water - Dobrogea Littoral and Local Council Limanu. Under the agreement, which will be renewed in the coming years, camping on the beach is allowed on two clearly delineated sectors. At the same time, it provides the local investors the opportunity to earn income by leasing the remaining beach sectors. The third partner, Limanu Local Council has the opportunity to earn additional income from leasing beach activities and insure sanitation and lifeguard services. Unfortunately, despite the mentioned advantages, the possibility of extending or maintaining the partnership remains low. A number of institutional factors (frequent change of rules on managing beaches) or political factors (political affiliation of

local authority representative, respectively D.W.D.L.) are the vulnerabilities of this partnership. Regarding the implementation of planning rules we found that the application is delayed or made in a discretionary manner. This is explicable given that local authority representatives are equally originators and beneficiaries of local regulations (G.U.P or the partnership).

A conclusion of this endeavor would be that this paper highlights the opportunity of using a number of elements in the study of transition. Perhaps the most important contribution is the methodological approach and the option for the rational choice neo-institutionalism developed within the "Bloomington School". This is a choice we consider filled with cognitive resources, given the prerequisites of Elinor Ostrom's research. Basically she claims that radical choice between the state and the market is a false dilemma, as the reality tells us that "in the world, neither the state nor the market have always managed to enable individuals to maintain a long-term productive use of natural resources systems. Furthermore, the communities preferred to establish institutions that do not resemble those of the state or of the market, to govern some resource systems while achieving certain success for long periods of time" (Tascu-Stavre 2011, p. 52).

3. The common space

Vama Veche and 2 Mai are in a way just a pretext for Tascu-Stavre (2011, 2013) to open a discussion about the commons and common pool resources (CPR) and their management in a country where most likely the feeling

of community is altered by decades of socialism that has erased the boundaries between all types of property and with this altered the culture and understanding of distinctions regarding both private property (excludable, rival) as well as the public property (non-excludable, non-rival) and finally the common property (non-excludable, rival).

The subject of the commons requires a more elaborate discussion, mainly related to the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968). The subject has been approached equally by economists (Samuelson, 1954), sociologists and psychologists (Messick and Brewer, 1983) and political scientists (Axelrod, 1984). We will not venture into a discussion on the topic as the role of this section is to reiterate the idea that public space represents essentially a common good.

Bollier (2007) proposes a simple definition "the commons refers to that vast range of resources that the American people collectively own". In turn Berge and Laerhoven (2011, p. 162) state that "commons is understood as any natural or man-made resource that is or could be held and used in common". Although the first reference implies common natural resources (pastures, water, forest) actually the concept also includes intangible assets (cultural, societal, informational, and scientific).

One of the interesting ideas Tascu's study sends to the discussion about the (urban) space as a common good in the broadest sense - in the context in which the study area includes a specific natural environment (sea, beach, protected areas) - and this space

has to be managed "institutionally" by the community. The achievement of a G.U.P. at a level of complexity exceeding the limits of legal methodology proves the success of "neo-institutionalism" and the bottom-up approach of an otherwise rather rigid and lacking in nuance "classical" model (perhaps one of the main underlying reasons for the demonstrated harmful direction of development).

In a way, the addressed case studies convince that there is interdependence between the management of natural and man made resources. The reference to tourism phenomenon is quite eloquent - the tourist comes to consume something from both categories, to be decently housed in a clean environment, to taste and to enjoy local customs and cuisine, the landscape, the sea and the unique natural setting. The "chaotic" and "derogatory" urbanism, as Tascu-Stavre calls it, affects both built and natural environment, and as shown, may compromise this experience not only at the tangible level (low quality of architecture, unfortunate location on the beach) but also at the "intangible" level related to how the visitor perceives the space and its attractiveness.

We are all consumers of urban space - and so experience the interventions in both public and private urban space objectively or at least as the feeling and perception we get from interacting with the ensemble of buildings (the "background architecture" as Habraken (2006) calls it). Since G.U.P. is ultimately a set of regulations which refer to the settlement's (urban) space, whether it falls territorially into the

category of public or private property, we should regard this space as a common (good) - a resource collectively owned and whose management will undoubtedly affect everyone. In fact, any urban regulation has the role to provide the rules by which any public or private entity may use the space in a way that will not adversely affect the interests of others (neighbors, community, public sector) and to sustain a self and/or common interest reflecting a particular need, the need to preserve local values or to foster development (e.g. through tourism).

This is a quite thorny issue - in the sense that here (at the level of urban planning) meet the public and private, individual and collective interests. So naturally there are critics of the model proposed by Ostrom - although this is a model which supports free market mechanisms and monetary economy - unlike similar approaches based on rational use of resources like Fresco's "Venus Project" which also promotes judicious exploitation of common natural resources but outside the economic mechanisms and the exchange system based on money. Block (2011) argues that "the commons" is a non-ownership because of the unclear property regime and therefore inevitably leads to "the tragedy of the commons" as every non-owner will try to make the most of the common resource without thinking of preserving its future value, the same non-ownership status threatening the idea of private property. To avoid the pitfalls of complicated legal and economic debate - we will confine ourselves for the moment to say that for now we refer to the common

nature of urban space beyond its strictly legal or economic status - and mostly having in mind its role in setting and achieving a direction towards the sustainable development of the given the community.

Even in this non-combative approach, in the case of a post-socialist country in transition, things can become quite delicate - residents want to enjoy the private property (of which they had been historically deprived) and sometimes, in the absence of clear regulations or if rules are discretionary applied, they may become abusive in their intervention in the "common" space. In the same line of thought - the value of the public (common) good has been lost conceptually under the socialist model and is still far from regaining its meaning in either individual or collective consciousness, especially when discussing the institutional management approach. In the case of local urbanism - the tragedy is that it clearly failed to provide a suitable technical solution to the issue of common (space). The study methodology on the development of the two settlements can be easily applied anywhere in Romania. Here there are plenty of factors that can be discussed, but at the moment we stop to draw attention to a "negative" planning feature - the strict territorial-normative character of the G.U.P. (as it mostly sets rules for construction land occupancy) and displays a relatively mono-disciplinary design approach, often lacking integrated information considering environmental, societal or economic aspects (except those regarding the real-estate economic aspects). Under the influence of amoral and unethical management of

urban (development) issues - the conflicts surrounding the urban space escalated under false pretenses, investors often being unreasonably opposed by the public interest and the community often pressed with the "need" for investment and development.

We therefore believe Hardin (1968) to be right, the debate on the commons will not get answers only from the technical area - it requires not only the update of the technical and scientific instrument (in our case the G.U.P. and the approach on urban planning) but also a discussion on ethics in the management of urban intervention and development, considering the urban space as a common.

In the case 2 Mai and Vama Veche - the process began on both counts. At the technical level, the joint action (organized around the Association for Conservation of the Bio-Cultural Protected Area, also known as the "Movement Save Vama Veche") allowed to positively overcome the technical limitations by including in the G.U.P. additional studies (a morphological study, a sociological study and a development plan). On the moral count - the fact that this process could in fact take place and produce results, all barriers considered - proves that similar approaches can be replicated for other areas or settlements.

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