

Construcția și reconstrucția democrației locale. O analiză instituțională a obștilor și comunelor

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SNSPA, 2011

Rezumat

În cadrul unei paradigme evolutive de analiză instituțională, lucrarea de disertație are ca subiect studierea unui aranjament politic local special: arhetipul democrației unui stat arhaic din Europa de Est, încă funcțional. Lucrarea aduce o serie de revizuri în privința înțelegerii naturii sale, a descentralizării politice și funcționare, indicând faptul că a dovedit capacitate de adaptare, precum și calitățile democratice și economice dorite, care, în comparație cu substituentul său actual din România, comuna, se dovedește a fi la nivel superior. Prin urmare, concluzionez prin imaginarea unei unități politice locale noi, dar realiste rezultată din modificarea comunei existente cu instituțiile cheie ale modelului de guvernare reprezentat de *obști*. Profilul său este acel al unei comune corporatizate, manifestând performanțe economice și democratice superioare aranjamentelor actuale exsistente.

Scopuri și obiective

Lucrarea de față abordează două aspecte interconectate, dar diferite: arhitectura democratică locală (nivelul democratic local) și *obștile*¹ și *comunele*² ca studii de caz pentru sistemele locale de guvernare.

¹ *Obștea* is the archaic self-government arrangement of the village communities in Eastern Europe, characterized by a combination of private and common-property (*devălmașie*) as economic system and by democracy as political arrangements. The surviving, most resilient type, studied here, is defined by:

Common property – initially over all resources, later only over forrests and grazing fields;

Indivision – individual's part in the common property is not localized and is inseparable from the others';

Equality and democracy – the parts and rights over the common-property, as well as the decision/voting rights are equal;

Inalienability – the right cannot be sold;

The right is *associated to the residence and life* of an individual (is not inheritable and is lost or suspended by moving out of the village).

² The rural territorial-administrative unit of the Romanian state. It is led by a Mayor and was established in 1864.

Discursul istoric dominant prezintă democrația ca rezultat al luptelor pentru drepturi – libertăți față de state și conducătorii lor. Perspectiva este validă chiar și pentru nașterea democrației ateniene (crearea *demei* de către Cleistene în 508 î.e.n, urmând unei răscoale), și cu atât mai mult pentru democrația modernă prin Magna Charta, revoluții, războaie de independență, etc.

O cale diferită a fost cea a democrațiilor locale, de scară mai redusă, care s-au dezvoltat în afara statelor³ ori în mediul unor teritorii vag controlate. Apariția lor nu a fost datorată unor lupte politice și sociale violente ci unei dezvoltări oarecum organice și constructive, confruntată cu rezolvarea provocărilor autoguvernării pentru a asigura supraviețuirea pe termen lung și prosperitatea comunităților respective. Acesta din urmă este cazul aranjamentelor obștilor din Munții Vrancei, forma care a rezistat dintr-un aranjament rural de auto-guvernare mai răspândit din Europa de Est, iar interesul final al acestei teze se bazează pe extragerea lecțiilor de design instituțional relevante pentru entitățile politice locale de astăzi.

În urmărirea acestui scop, aplic o perspectivă teoretică instituțională și folosesc cadrul de analiză și dezvoltare instituțională (IAD) al Școlii de la Bloomington, adaptând câteva din trăsăturile sale și dezvoltând un model de evoluție instituțională (și devoluție) pornind de la unul original realizat de Cox (Cox, 2006) ⁴.

Astfel, încerc urmărirea obiectivelor următoare:

În primul rând sunt comparate două modele pentru descrierea și explicarea cauzelor evoluției instituționale a unei entități politice autonome, pre-state – aranjamentul obștii din Munții Vrancei. Interpretarea oferită de H. Stahl și cea a Școlii Monografice a lui D. Gusti este contraargumentată și îmbogățită cu perspectiva instituțională. Aceasta conduce la concluzii esențiale pentru capitolele celelalte, în timp ce deschide de asemenea posibilitatea unei aplicări extinse a teoriei instituționale asupra studiului evoluției și devoluției politice și pentru îmbunătățirea infrastructurii teoretice și teoriilor antropologice de integrare. Mai mult, perspectiva instituțională, sintetizată pentru acest demers, adaptările și generalizările care îi sunt aduse, reprezintă în sine un instrument deosebit de util pentru alte demersuri similare.

În al doilea rând vor fi puse în oglindă două aranjamente instituționale diferite: forma contemporană a obștii, și comuna (unitatea administrativ-teritorială rurală a statului român, începând cu anul 1864). Va fi arătată performanța superioară a primei forme de organizare, atât din punct de vedere economic cât și din punct de vedere politic. Mai exact, devălmășia se va dovedi o formulă superioară atât pentru guvernarea resurselor aflate în proprietate și administrare publică, precum și pentru exersarea democrației și autoguvernării.

³ De exemplu, acesta a fost cazul regiunii „Zomia” din Asia de Sud-Est (Scott, 2009). De asemenea, am notat mențiunea lui Tocqueville potrivit căruia sursele de inspirație ale Constituției Americane au fost constituțiile dezvoltate precedent de localități autonome.

⁴ To understand resilience of socio-ecological systems.

În al treilea rând, pe baza discuțiilor de mai sus, va fi adus un set de propuneri de design instituțional în direcția îmbunătățirii performanței instituționale a comunei, constând în corporatizarea organizării sale pe baza modelului obștii. Se va arăta că implementarea acestor propuneri poate conduce la creșterea competitivității entităților politice locale, adică la avantaje economice și politice decisive în contextul continuării procesului de globalizare. Fără a fi o simplă demonstrație de concept – „cum poate face bine teoria politică normativă” – acest obiectiv este unul cât se poate de pragmatic: sub forma unei idei, lucrarea construiește ceea ce poate fi o șansă importantă pentru toate comunitățile rurale din România.

Astfel, lucrarea de față constă într-o parte teoretică, empirică și normativă. Voi reliefa în cele ce urmează rezultatele principale ale fiecărei categorii.

Rezultate principale:

A. Rezultate teoretice

Sarcina cea mai importantă pe care o astfel de lucrare trebuie să o îndeplinească este înțelegerea conexiunilor cauzale implicate, cu un nivel de încredere probabil sau cel puțin plauzibil. Astfel de legături sunt, pe de o parte, dificil de separat de cele irelevante, în timp ce pe de altă parte, înțelegerea lor este momentan în sensul că legăturile cauzale, la fel ca și interconectarea acestora, schimbătoare de-a lungul timpului (Cox, 2008). Such connections are, on the one hand, difficult to separate from irrelevant ones, while on the other, their grasp is momentarily in the sense that causal connections, as well as their interconnections, misleadingly change over time (Cox, 2008).

Analiza instituțională este utilă mai ales în a ordona astfel de dinamici sociale prin furnizarea unei structuri analitice cuprinzătoare pentru toate nivelurile de guvernare. O altă calitate a sa este flexibilitatea de a modifica tipurile de întrebări de cercetare, a locațiile, vârstele, teoriile, metodologiile, condițiile fizice etc. Cu toate acestea, paradigma instituționalistă își menține relevanța pe scară largă pentru o varietate de provocări și întrebări de cercetare.

1. Instituționalismul a devenit din ce în ce mai mult curentul principal în economie, științe politice și chiar sociologie în ultimii 40 de ani. Am schițat evoluția ideilor și teoriilor instituționaliste în începutul acestui capitol pentru a delimita înțelegerea pe care ei o adaugă în ceea ce privesc categoriile sociale umane și evoluția lor. Mai concret, întrebarea este: cât de departe s-au dus în gaura de iepure? Ceea ce este acum cunoscut și ceea ce este acum posibil, și ceea ce nu a fost acolo în limitele restrânse ale lentilelor teoretice anterioare. (More concretely, the question is: how far down the rabbit hole did they go? What is now known and what is now possible, which wasn't there within the narrower confines of previous theoretical lenses?)

Abordez întrebarea din punctul de vedere al vechii debateri referitoare la opziția între libertatea agenției acțiunii umane și determinismul structurii sociale, numit de asemenea problema structure-agency problem

Concluzionez că progresele științifice instituționaliste sporească libertatea agenției față de determinismul structurii prin creșterea cunoașterii referitoare la agenție, la modul în care structura funcționează și, astfel prin deschiderea căii pentru aplicații mult mai eficiente de design instituțional. Atât cunoașterea și cât și capacitatea de acțiune, câștigate astfel de libertatea agenției îi crește gradul de libertate din structură.

2. De asemenea subliniez că cadrul instituțional de analiză și dezvoltare (IAD) dezvoltat de Elinor Ostrom și Școala de la Bloomington este paradigma instituționalistă cea mai cuprinzătoare în măsura în care reușește, pe de o parte, să asimileze și să sintetizeze majoritatea progreselor instituționaliste realizate în economie, științe politice, sociologie, în timp ce, pe de altă parte dovedește atât flexibilitate, cât și relevanța pentru o gamă largă de domenii de cercetare socială și de condiții.

În plus, se poate adapta la eventuale progrese ale modelului actorului rațional și ale modelelor psihologice, deși acestea nu au fost în mod semnificativ realizate până acum. Pentru toate aceste motive, susțin că IAD atinge vârsta unei științe instituționale normale în terminologia lui Kuhn.

Având în vedere aceste concluzii, capitolul 2 intitulat *Analiza instituțională a entităților politice* specifică și adaptează instrumentul teoretic la problema de față. Aici, aduc adaptări la unele concepte cheie în IAD, menite să extindă relevanța sa de la regimurile și aranjamentele locale de proprietate comună la organizațiile politice locale mai generale.

3. Încep prin a distinge două niveluri ale discursului științific cu privire la schimbarea instituțională. Cel mai general, cunoscut sub numele de *Paradigma Evolutivă privind schimbarea instituțională* este preocupat cu dinamica instituțională (The Evolutionary Paradigm Regarding Institutional Change is concerned with over-aggregated institutional dynamics)

La întrebarea asupra modului în care se schimbă instituțiile, aici răspunsul standard este: "Ele evoluează". Lipsând informații despre cazuri particulare de schimbări instituționale, tendința de la acest nivel este de a explica noile instituții pe seama celor mai vechi. Întrebările rezultate din acel răspuns pot fi abordate prin evitarea simplificărilor de genul : „oamenii înlocuiesc instituțiile vechi cu unele mai noi pentru a reduce costurile de tranzacție”, care while true as overall thrust, requires serious qualifications brought by the acknowledgement of at least three main non-evolutionary influences in institutional dynamics: path dependence, distributive benefits, and the influence of context.

The second level, more empiric and, I argue, more accurate level, is focused on the context-bound evolution of particular norms; that is, of norms to be found in a certain area or community in a particular period.

While path dependence acts at the aggregate level as well, all the four forces are present at the context level: evolution of norms, path dependence, distributive benefits and a myriad other particular conditions shape the institutional destiny of the context-bound local level. The reverse holds as well: most institutions later achieving world-wide spread and assimilation are initially invented and shaped at some organizational level.

Prin urmare, fără a fi primul care face astfel, argumentez pentru o *separare a și concentrare pe interacțiunile dintre entitățile politice locale și și mediul lor de funcționare ca loc de naștere al instituțiilor*. În acest context, o entitate politică locală este unitatea teritorială ne-familială cea mai mică în măsură să elaboreze și utilizeze instituții. Criteriul teritorial este folosit doar de a defini o comunitate mai mult politică, prin contrast cu o organizație exclusiv economică, cu toate că aceste limite sunt oarecum neclare.

4. Categoria de aranjamente studiată cel mai mult la acest nivel de către Școala de la Bloomington a fost a aranjamentelor de proprietate comună din întreaga lume, în special în relație cu impactul lor ecologic asupra resursei în discuție.

Universalizez cele două concepte folosite, rezistență și reziliență, pentru a fi utilizate nu numai cu referire la aranjamentele bazate pe resurse naturale și de proprietate comună, ci și cu referire la tipul de resurse care este folosit de o entitate politică, fie într-un regim de proprietate privat, public, impozitat sau de proprietate comună.

To do that, I replace the „state of resource” as main dependent variable of the robustness and resilience relationships with that of the „institutional state of the political entity”, taking it to describe more comprehensive variables within the system.

Dezvolt aceste concepte pentru a descrie cea mai relevantă caracteristică evolutivă a unei organizații politice: adaptabilitatea instituțională de a se confrunța cu schimbări exterioare și provocări din mediul de lucru (variabile independente) rezultând în comportament consecvent și performanțe. Înlocuirea este validă și necesară din cauza a două motive: pe de o parte, comunitățile pot și înlocuiesc resursele pe care se bazează în timp, în timp ce, pe de altă parte schimbă de asemenea regimurile de proprietate către cele mai eficiente date fiind condițiile specifice. Luând asta în considerare, opțiunile și adaptările teoretice realizez un set de instrumente teoretice pentru a înțelege provocările mai aplicate ale capitolelor următoare precum și pentru alte studii. Capitolele empirice 3 și 4 și capitolul normativ 5 se concentrează pe *interacțiunea între entitatea politică și schimbările exogene din cadrul mediului său de operare*.

Generalizările pe care le aduc sunt următoarele:

- I relax the assumption of SES dependence on one resource (which stems from the definition of an SES) by noting the possibilities to use several resources simultaneously and to change and diversify the resources over time. Between others, this shifts the attention towards the social and institutional side of an SES as well as towards its ability to shift resources and the infrastructure needed to exploit them.

- Susțin că o schimbare exogenă nu trebuie să fie în mod necesar un șoc sau o perturbație, ci poate fi de asemenea o oportunitate. Dacă este o tulburare sau o oportunitate depinde de natura sa, dar mai des de capacitatea entității politice de a o folosi în mod benefic.
- Mă refer la înțelesul rezistenței ca fiind capacitatea unui sistem de a asimila schimbările exogene fără a-și altera structura sa instituțională și reziliența ca fiind abilitatea sa de a-și schimba structura, uneori chiar radical, pentru asimilarea schimbărilor exterioare în timp ce încă își menține existența și caracteristicile de bază (socurile sale principale, instituțiile definitorii constituționale și de nivel colectiv etc.).

Din aceste perspective rezultă câteva consecințe importante: performanța evolutivă a entității politice derivă dintr-o combinație între rezistența sa (la rândul său derivată din capitalul pe care îl posedă) și din elasticitatea sa (observabilă mai mult în studii empirice de lungă durată, de genul acestuia de față); adaptarea se face treptat, în care schimbările exogene care nu pot fi aplanate prin robustețe conduc la adaptarea rezilienței și, astfel, către inovație instituțională; în plus, că scopul designului instituțional este de a crește robustețea și reziliența unei astfel de entități.

Modelul (în Ch. 3) are schimbări exterioare (perturbații și oportunități) ca variabile independente și stări fără modificări (rezistență) sau schimbări interioare (reziliență) în structura instituțională a sistemului ca variabile dependente. Cu aceste îmbunătățiri și redefinindu-i obiectele, mențin și folosesc forma modelului original (Cox, 2006) care este:

The model (in Ch. 3) has exogenous changes (perturbations or opportunities) as independent variables and states with no changes (robustness) or endogenous changes (resilience) in the institutional structure of the system as dependent variables. With these improvements and redefining its objects, I maintain and use the original (Cox, 2006) model shape which is:

O1-X2-Δ3-O4

Where O1 is the state of system's institutional variables at the initial moment, X2 is an exogenous change (to be received as either a perturbation or an opportunity), Δ3 is system's reaction or adaptation to X2, and O4 is the new state of the system after X2 and Δ3.

In a long sequence I must therefore study the Δs to discover system behavior and traits.

A most important proposition which can be derived is that political evolution is the increase of institutional complexity in the try to capture more and more benefits derived from an existing pool of resources or from

new resources that became available. Political devolution, on the other hand, is the simplification or reduction of institutional infrastructure resulting from the restraint of a political entity's domain and activities.

A second proposition is that the extreme resilience cycle is one in which institutional simplification (political devolution) went so far as to reduce the entity's existence to a genotype level, exclusively consisting of institutional information, and its organizational rebirth in a similar phenotype under a new and more favorable operating environment.

B. Analytical and empiric results

Taking the principles of institutional design set forth by E. Ostrom as hypothesis, and using the model presented above as guidance, I search the long history of the *obști* arrangements in Munții Vrancei for the key features of their resilience and the eventual lessons these can provide for today's local political arrangements. The data I use for the old period is mostly the one uncovered by Stahl and the Monographic School, as well as by other commentators from before the war. For today, I rely on data I collected myself within SNSPA-CNCSIS research projects A871 (project director: Adrian Miroiu) and TD300 (project director: Horia Terpe) as well on that of modern researchers like Monica Vasile and Liviu Manteescu and other public data.

Ch. 3 *The Political Devolution of an Autarchic Democracy* studies the impact of two historical exogenous changes: the expansion of the state and the expansion of capitalism over the institutional structure of a peasant's republic which existed in Vrancea Mountains beginning with at least the XVIIth Century, its remnants being still in place. Applying institutional analysis to the political devolution of the „old” Vrancea highlights several new aspects, which I will introduce in chronological order. They differ from and supplement the Marxist theoretical perspective which H. Stahl employed to interpret his information.

1. First, I argue that instead of supposing the primitive commune as the origin of this arrangement (as H. Stahl did), it seems more plausible that its equalitarianism derives from a time when most if not all economic activity was performed by collective action. Less efficient shifting (itinerary) cultivation and overall low work productivity made collective action unavoidable even to work the land, as well as for providing most basic goods and services. Only the later improvements in technology and therefore in productivity made possible a steady increase of the proportion of privately provided goods and services, which later gave rise to the capitalist specialization and exchange system. This progress is what made individualism possible as basis of social and community organization. The explanation I support does not require one to suppose that people are equals by nature and lacking individualist desires, but only that previously low productivity levels were forcing them to live tribally and collectively, unable to find protection and stability but in their number. However, they did not have equalitarian preferences per se, and their individualist preferences took over whenever productivity improvements allowed. In the case of Vrancea, I submit the hypothesis that collective action equalitarianism became institutionally embedded in the economic and political side of the arrangement before

the expansion of capitalism and it was thus transmitted over the capitalist expansion period. Privatization occurred progressively in agriculture (arable land), cattle rising, access to markets for individual trade and other rights but the collective system remained in place for common-property and public resources on a one man-one vote democratic basis.

Besides this factor of low productivity causing a collective-action based local economy, two more factors less arguably stand at the origin of the arrangement and its peculiar characteristics: the symmetric, *inter pares* economic and social relations between villagers, and the political stability early achieved through the confederative association of villages.

2. In what regards the political devolution of the arrangement and the eventual dissolution of its confederative level, I argue that the thesis set forth by Stahl is incomplete. According to his conclusion, capitalism intensified individual preferences towards privatization, which resulted in a process of boundary setting between the component villages and an assault of (sometimes successful) appropriation efforts undertaken by individuals from within and outside the arrangement, both of which led in the end led to insurmountable pressures over the arrangement. I fully agree that these pressures existed and made effects, but I argue they rather acted as individual and collective development opportunities than as perturbations. The well-experienced arrangement actually accommodated these processes for at least 150 years, administering the transition towards a more private production system, which was already in place by 1860. Therefore, the causes of its devolution and dissolution are to be found elsewhere: prior to capitalist expansion, the consolidation and later expansion of the centralized state took place.

On the independent side of the argument, the analysis exposes the action and pressures exercised by these two processes. State expansion came with three crucial changes: a. an increasing set of public goods provided by central authority and its resources, such as, first, defense, diplomacy, justice, police, religion and later others as well; b. the transition from collective to individual taxation, made possible by c. the establishment of local public administration, which on the one side increased the coverage of state-provided public goods with policing, roads, and other infrastructure while on the other facilitated the conduct of census and the enforcement of individual taxation. Capitalist expansion acted, on the one side, by increasing the value of resources (first, arable land, then timber and later by also increasing the diversity of valuable resources in a complex economy, such as hunting, forest fruits, tourism, etc) and on the other by increasing the wish and means to consume, improving technology and transportation, fueling demographic growth.

On the effect side, the horizontal and vertical expansion of markets increased the pressures to privatize common-property over arable land and later over forest, a process which took place gradually between the beginning of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th. State expansion diminished reliance upon endogenously provided public goods such as defense, diplomacy, policing, justice and, finally, collective taxation. The confederative arrangement arrived to a critical period, in the 18th Century, in which the only

function it still performed was the payment of the collective (per region) tax and its subsequent distribution over villages and then households. When the administrative reform of 1864 organized the territory in local units – the current “communes”, led by mayors- and stabilized the local public administration, the state gained the capacity to conduct censuses and to directly raise individual and household taxes, which removed even the last function performed by the confederative level of the villages. Its demise coincided with the actual introduction of local public administration and the consequent enabling of individual taxation.

Without the confederative level, and functionally displaced by the local administration, nevertheless the component local political entities continued to function on their own, under the statute of special forest associations since 1910, until the communist collectivization of land in 1950s. After communism and transition, the arrangements were reestablished in year 2000 starting from the information conserved and then took a new path of re-development, thus fulfilling an extreme resilience cycle.

3. Several crucial factors resulted as salient for arrangement’s consolidation, development and resilience over the whole period:

- **political stability** early achieved through the association of villages in the confederative level allowed critical time needed for resource accumulation, and the accumulation of social capital;
- the **democratic character**, while training social capital and self-reliance over time, later also had a negative effect by allowing to form a fatal dependence on the provision of collective taxation for the state. The lacking leadership was later introduced, therefore the government system would today count as **republicanism**.
- the **doubling of an particular economic organization** (*devălmășia*) **with a politic organization** (democracy) greatly strengthened resilience by forging identity, norms and social capital while it provided the right incentives for democratic participation;
- these incentives were key for the **alignment of interests between members and delegates** (the leadership structure);
- the **autonomy of component units** (the individual *obști*) was crucial for their survival after the demise of the confederative level, which later made possible its re-composition;
- several **external conflicts** opposing the arrangement to various external appropriators-would-be also strengthened identity and cohesion

Several economic endogenous factors also counted:

- the **abundance of the key resource** (wood)
- the **market-value of resource**, which continuously increased
- **resource diversity** (besides timber: arable land, grazing, nowadays tourism, forrest’ plants and fruits, hunting, etc.)
- **capital** (of various types)

This set of factors partly overlaps with the resilience variables and institutional design principles of common-property regimes synthesized by E. Ostrom (1999, 2005).

C. Synthetic and normative results

The reestablishment of these arrangements (the *obști*) in the forest-property association form set them after year 2000 on a rather successful development path, displaying institutional isomorphism with the old arrangement. Given its past and present, an institutional comparison between the current *obști* and communes is the next step to follow (Ch. 4 *Obști or communes? The Performances of Two Local Political Entities*).

1. I compare here the operating environments (economic and institutional) and the two institutional arrangements under the criteria of **economic performance** (resource management, resource diversification, and investments) and **political performance** (leadership: leadership loyalty, time preference and authority type; and democratic participation: monitorization, information flows and participation to decision-making). I conclude that the *obște* arrangement is superior on most counts, and that its superiority is especially due to the following endogenous institutions:

- members' participation in the arrangement is stimulated by co-ownership (*devălmășie*) and the individual and collective benefits derived from it;
- the interests of principals and agents are better aligned, including because of: the continuity of the political relationship, ensured by the annual stakeholders' meetings; the „republican” equilibrium between expert management, political leadership and participation; a flexible delegation system; delegates' longer time horizons; performance measurability and incentives for monitorization by members.

2. The comparison suggests one to make an exercise of imagination and construct a potential institutional arrangement (Ch. 5. *The “Devălmaș Communes”: the Basics of an Institutional Design*) obtained by replacing core institutions of the communes with some inspired from the working of the *obști* model over time. Mixing private and *devălmaș*-owned public property with a democratic political government, the resulting hybrid can be described as a **corporatized commune**, capable in principle of political and economic performances most probably superior to that of the communes and maybe even superior to that of the current *obști*.

Starting from the current arrangement of the communes, three main institutional changes are envisaged and designed in sufficient detail:

- The first is **the transfer of property rights over the public resources currently administered by the local public administration from the state to the citizens residing in the commune.**

- The second is **instituting the particular (*devălmaș*) common-property regime over these resources**, that is, allocating the property rights to the inhabitants according to the principle. Thus, citizens also become co-owners.
- The third is **instituting the political organization corresponding to the new property rights**, that is, a more corporate one based upon the experience of these arrangements, which largely resembles that of an association or firm with the sole difference that the stakeholders are the members and clients in the same time and some of them are also employees.

There is hardly more need to explain the new arrangement: all publicly owned and administered resources (be they public, toll, common-property or private in their economic nature) are to be owned collectively by the members of the local political entity. Their individual part is the total property divided by their number, but their parts are indivisible, not located (like shares) and not transmissible, either by selling or inheritance. The right entitles them to annual benefits (dividends), collective benefits (such as resulting from investing in schools, kindergartens, medical facilities, etc.), and to decision-making.

The citizens are to receive the right to the benefits of their share by birth, and their decision-making right (to voting and to be elected, to be informed and announced, etc.) when reaching adulthood. Both categories of rights (to property-share and decision-making) are to be lost by dying or moving out of the place. The overall local economic system therefore combines the best qualities of private property regime with those of public property.

In what regards implementation, a simple legislative option for a commune to be chosen by local referendum is enough; no enforcement is necessary nor is it encouraged. It is argued that the new arrangements are much more able to perform in a globalized economy and polity than the current rural administrative units are, and that they better realize democracy, as well as the wording and meaning of the Romanian constitution.

The institutional design would provoke a wide series of beneficial effects, both at the local level of the individual new communes as well as at the aggregate level of the Romania state.

In essence, it is the immediacy and substantiality of this share in the collective property (in contrast to the “abstract” share nowadays) which greatly increases the stakes each one has in his or her community affairs and its destiny. Both the current stakes and the benefits expected will produce an intensification of the political process, which I called the *corporate effect*: cooperation is more often exercised and intensified, which, between others, produces *social capital* and *stronger relationships* between citizens, on the one hand, and between the citizens and the local political entity, on the other. The effect also alleviates the democratic dilemma of why people should bother voting and provides for more intensive democratic participation, including in regard to information gathering, agents’ monitoring and all other involvement possibilities.

Instead of being a passive or even a liability, public property would become one of the main sources of local competitiveness – the key advantage in the context of today's and tomorrow's global economy and polity. Fiscally, the resulting transformation of the Romanian state will be towards a Cameralist local level, which is, decreasing the pressure on the tax system by providing alternative means of public income out of economic activities.

Besides the basic design, the freedom of each such new political unit to adapt its institutions and organization is encouraged, counting upon a secondary wave of overall improvements by an *example-following dynamic*: a wide array of institutional improvements would result out of replicating some of every entity's efforts to solve its local government problems. At the whole society level, this dynamic would increase both the economic benefits (by making the overall allocation of resources more efficient) and the social capital.

A third wave of positive effects would occur over the connected systems, especially over the political (party) system, the institutional and the international one. In the first two categories, I briefly mention the increase in the price of the vote, the improved political accuracy gained by localization of themes and a better achievement of the Hayekian (Hayek, 1960) separation of the administrative and law-making functions, as well as the more beneficial relationships between party's centers and local organizations.

In what regards the international-level consequences -and this is the key purpose of the design- the new communes would have all the prerequisites to compete globally, which cannot be said about the current ones. The former have the advantage of individual action capability conferred by the basic design (of the relationship between members, delegates and resources) as well as the freedom to self-organize. Acting as public corporation pursuing the interests of their stakeholders, they become equal to any other economic actors. Furthermore, not being any longer incapacitated by bureaucratic centralized coordination, they will form their own associative structures conferring protection and political stability, as well as the scale economies facilitating development. For all these reasons, the forces which caused the dissolution of the old arrangement will not be any longer received as perturbations or destructive agents, but as opportunities: even the direction of their action is thus inversed by the new organization.

Even wider than a possible solution for Romanian rural problems, I believe this institutional design can prove to be a novel solution to common-property problems with impressive generalization capabilities. Generalization is possible because the solution I bring forward is one of principle: ***doubling the equal democratic vote with an equal share of the public property***. This restoration would also make historical justice and repair to the social arrangements destroyed by the expansion of the centralized state and by the communist period.

Limits and objections

The merits which this paper may claim are the discovery and bringing to light of some more layers of truth regarding the construction of genuine local democracy in this part of the world, the comprehensive interpretation of its devolution, and the attempt to use the conclusions of these for the betterment of people.

Its limits are manifold, out of which I will resume here to review the two seemingly most important ones.

The singleness of the case under scrutiny is the first which comes to one's mind. Nevertheless, several factors compensate this to some measure. First is the fact that the surviving case was once just one – apparently, the most successful one- of a widespread class of genuine local democracies. Second, the institutional treatment I employed, without being insensible to empiric data, is actually researching its qualities as an archetype, more than as a classical empirical case study. The same procedure I use to distill the institutional characteristics of the commune. Third, the case is actually a cluster of cases, of the individual and autonomous *obști*. And fourth, it must be acknowledged that since its singleness is the actual empirical situation, as researchers we'd better adapt our theories and tools to make the most out of it, since the alternative is to let it escape scientific scrutiny.

Having elusive social reality as prime-matter, the thesis is perhaps objectionable as inexact, on the grounds of subject complexity and lack of key information. Subject complexity stems from the fact that a system of government and its evolution depend upon a very large, unknown number of factors. To this concern, the model I employed was so designed as to systematically distinguish the categories of factors, in which the most salient ones could become apparent. To the second concern, while I took all diligences to increase accuracy, there is the intractable fact that the further one goes in the past, the less information is available. It is in this situation where the only solution is to supplement scarce information with theory, or more exactly with theoretical retro prediction.

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