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SAVING ROSIA MONTANA: Online networks of protest

Social movements are a type of collective behaviour aimed to bring societal change through collective action. In recent years, with the advent of social media and Computer-mediated communication (CMC), social movements across the world have gained new abilities of mobilization, identity-building, and awareness-raising. Online communications have been instrumental in a series of recent social movements and protests, such as the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, the UK student protests, as well as the Euromaidan movement in Kiev. The pilot study investigated the potential of Computer-mediated communication for creating stable networks of protest between heterogeneous groups that have could potentially lead towards coordinated social action.



The pilot study investigated a Romanian social movement that has its roots in Rosia Montana, which is a small mining town in the Apuseni Mountains in West-Central Romania. The mining rights belong to the Toronto-based Gabriel Resources, which planned an extension of the mine by using cyanide exploitation techniques, with objectives to make it the largest open-cast gold mine in Europe. However, critics of the draft project argued that it would involve destroying the nearby mountain tops, and lead to the creation of a cyanide lake that could potentially infiltrate the subterranean

water network. Another issue that was raised was that of the necessity of relocating the local population. While the company managed to persuade most of the residents to move into a newly built residential project at the outskirts of the mining site, a few villagers resisted the move and formed an association in 2000 trying to stop the planned cyanide exploitation of the mine. This allowed the residents to set up an online presence, eventually attracting the attention of over 40 NGOs and environmental activists, both from Romania and from abroad. The extended network of NGOs, activists, and the original association gave birth to the *Uniti Salvam* (United we Save) social movement, which over the next few years grew into the largest collective action in Romania since the 1989 Revolution, culminating in September and October 2013 with global protests in 75 cities worldwide, with 25000 people in Bucharest alone.

By employing thirteen qualitative interviews in Bucharest and Rosia Montana, preliminary findings suggest that there are at least three distinct quasi-independent networks of protest that have formed in opposition to the mining project: in Rosia Montana, in Bucharest, and in Cluj-Napoca. The 2013 protests seem to be a coagulation of heterogeneous movements, activist groups, and ideologies, ranging from historical societies and environmentalists to Moldavo-Romanian nationalists or Occupy Romania. The movement had been shown to have a strong undercurrent of nationalism, which framed the protests as a battle against the Canadian-based company, as well as an empowerment of local communities against a corrupt government. The preliminary findings of the pilot advise for the future inclusion of additional methods, such as media content analysis, as well as further exploration of the nationalist theme.