

# ROȘIA MONTANĂ IN UNESCO. THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE ON PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND CIVIC MOBILISATION

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**Key words:** Roșia Montană, UNESCO, civic movements, Facebook, cultural heritage

**Abstract:** This paper shows how the Facebook group “Roșia Montană in UNESCO World Heritage” became the main source of information for the opponents of the mining project and a factor in multiplying the messages of the Save Roșia Montană Campaign in 2010-2013. Online searches for “Roșia Montană” reached a record of 200 million views in September 2013, amid protests that brought tens of thousands of Romanian citizens to the streets in order to save the town. Ancient archaeological remains (galleries, necropolises, artefacts, temple ruins and houses) and the built and industrial heritage dating from the medieval, modern and contemporary periods (houses, lakes, machinery) have been given new meanings and significance during the Roșia Montană debate, becoming symbolic goods, with a major contribution in raising awareness regarding the risks of the mining project planned in the area. The commitment for recognising the exceptional value of the local heritage for universal history and culture through the inclusion of Roșia Montană on the UNESCO World Heritage List has become the civic mobilisation engine with the greatest impact in the public debate.

**Rezumat:** Prezenta lucrare arată cum a ajuns grupul de Facebook „Rosia Montana în UNESCO World Heritage” principala sursă de informare a opozițanilor proiectului minier și factor de multiplicare a mesajelor Campaniei Salvați Roșia Montană, în perioada 2010-2013. Căutările online cu termenul “Roșia Montană” au atins cifre record, de 200 de milioane de vizualizări, în septembrie 2013, pe fondul protestelor care au scos zeci de mii de cetățeni români în stradă pentru salvarea localității. Vestigiile arheologice antice (galerii, necropole, artefacte, ruine de temple și case) și patrimoniul construit și industrial din perioadele medievală, modernă și contemporană (case, tăuri, utilaje) au primit sensuri și semnificații noi în timpul dezbaterii legate de Roșia Montană, transformându-se în bunuri simbolice, cu o contribuție majoră în popularizarea riscurilor proiectului minier preconizat în zonă. Implicarea pentru recunoașterea valorii excepționale a patrimoniului localității pentru istoria și cultura universale, prin includerea Roșiei Montane pe Lista Patrimoniului Mondial UNESCO, a ajuns să fie motorul de mobilizare civică cu cel mai mare impact în cadrul dezbaterii publice.

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## 1. Introduction. A Historical Impact

200 million views (Fig. 1). In September 2013, this was the cumulative impact of social media posts (especially Facebook) and online press articles, blogs, aggregators, forums, etc., concerning Roșia Montană. It was the first month of civic protests for Roșia Montană, protests which lasted until 10 December 2013. The international press symbolically named them “the Romanian autumn”.<sup>1</sup>

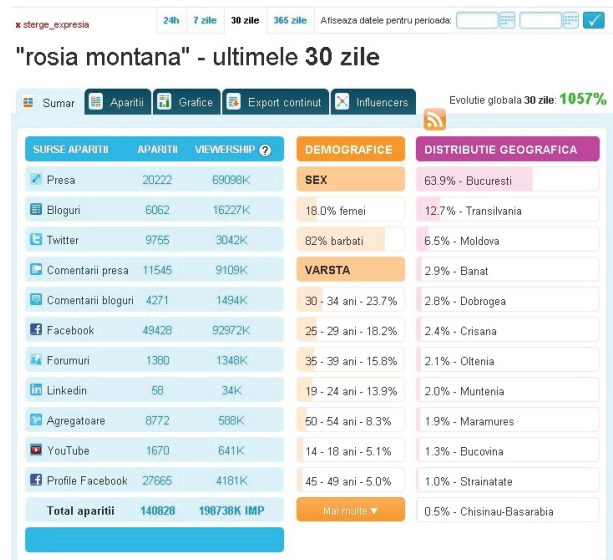


Fig. 1. In September 2013, more than 140,000 articles, comments and posts related to Roșia Montană were published online, gathering almost 200 million views (ZeList.ro/monitor).

The impact of “Roșia Montană” Google searches was also unprecedented among any other topics related to Romania, reaching the maximum measured by Google up to that moment, namely 100.<sup>2</sup>

By comparison, in the same month, Romania’s incumbent President Traian Băsescu had an impact factor of 4 (Fig. 2), Romania’s Prime Minister Victor Ponta had one of 2, and Romania’s top trending (at that time) showbiz star Bianca Drăgușanu had one of 34. The previous maximum historical impact of the three personalities was also much lower: Traian Băsescu a factor of 43 (December 2004) during the 2004 presidential elections and 37 (December 2009) during the 2009 presidential elections; Victor Ponta, 19 in July 2012 (collapse of the Ungureanu Government and appointment of the interim Ponta Government).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Digi 24 (the newsroom) 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Goțiu 2013a.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*