



The Relationship with the Forest and the Habsburg Resource Policy in Eighteenth-century Transylvania

Dr. Dorin-Ioan Rus

The General Assembly of the UN declared 2011 the International Year of the Forest. The title is used to raise the awareness on the modalities in which we can improve the health of forested areas currently covering 31% of the Planet's total land area, according to the environmental organization that had the initiative of the event.

The central point of the proposal is the analysis of the interdependencies between rural communities and the natural environment of the forest in eighteenth-century Transylvania, as well as the perils to which the environment was exposed as a result of this relationship. At the same time, the researcher will study the ways in which people perceived and approached their environment, thus revealing the contemporary normative procedures regarding the environment, with the possible outcome of a better understanding of the relativity of today's concepts of nature and the environment. By this, the project aims to provide a better understanding of the resource policy during the eighteenth-century wood crisis, thus creating the basis for making a comparison with the present global resource crisis.

The research will follow the anthropological constants that act at the structural level and often place the "usage" of forests chiefly for economic purposes and the "conflict" generated by the fulfillment of these needs in opposition, as well as the moral, customary, and juridical barriers that refer differently to the material resources of a community in general. That is why the present study will analyze how and to what extent the Enlightenment changed individuals and society's perception of the environment in Transylvania.

The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of the concept of "durability of forests," which is important not only regarding the economic functions, but also the ecological and social ones. The study analyzes the policy of the Viennese authorities regarding forests in

Transylvania, and the subsequent conflicts over forests it ignited. Thus, the forest can be differently described according to the cultural context, studying the conflicts over it and the trials these conflicts generated.

Furthermore, after the completion of this study, it remains to be seen to what extent the thesis on the emotionalization of forests in the eighteenth century still stands. The central point of the history of forests is to find out who, when, to what purpose, and from which perspective showed interest in forests.

The present research will contribute to the general European historiography on the issue of forests by means of its connection to the results of the schools in Austria, Germany, England, France, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries.

The study of the history of the environment's perception, especially the forest, is part of the new European tendency in the protection and development of the concept of durability in the current European cultural context in which we all celebrate the year 2011 as the International Year of the Forest.

Project funding: FWF
Project director: ao. Univ. Prof. Dr. Harald Heppner
Project number: P 24084-G18
Project duration: 01.12.2011 – 30.11.2014