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## 0. Abstract

The last century has ended with radical changes in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. These changes entailed social, economical and political effects as well. The forest, as a significant part of the environment and as a tool able to satisfy the various needs of the society, also took part in this change: one of its essential characteristics, i.e. its property structure has considerably been altered within a short period. The thesis compares the practice of forest privatization and its environment in the case of Hungary and Romania – neighbouring countries in the Carpathian basin, also closely interwoven historically. The reason of this comparison is the review of privatisation processes as well as the presentation of lessons learnt from them for experts from both – but not only – countries.

Key words: forest privatization, Hungary, Romania, comparison

## 1. Objective

Change in the economic and property conditions, following the social and political change of regime in Central-Eastern Europe has been incredibly fast by a historic point of view. Besides the alteration of the ownership of economic units, the most extensive and spectacular change affecting large groups has been related to the ownership of land. Several actors of the society own some kind of land. The aim of this thesis is to focus on the part of this wide social layer connected to forests.

Forests represent the second largest proportion of land usage following agriculture. Besides offering alternative and economically viable solution for the use of derelict or unexploited lands, they also satisfy various social needs, which exert strong influence at the financial evaluation of forests. Undoubtedly, the most important characteristic of goods produced in forests is their capacity for renewal, however their rich and diverse fauna and flora, or their ability to restore the carbon balance of the atmosphere are also non-negligible aspects. Therefore, careful management of forests is an overall need for the society.

Management of forests, unlike that of agricultural areas, goes well beyond the planning cycles used in economy, which phenomenon is due to the special characteristics, i.e. long life-cycle, richness and diversity of species, etc. Unforseeable results justify the need for a forest management based on responsible concepts. The first and most important concept is that of sustainability, a characteristic of forest management in the countries analysed for centuries. Clarification of land ownership, like any other form of management, exerts a strong influence on forest management efficiency. This, according to the author, is one of the most important characteristics of forest ownership. Similarly to the management of any other natural resource, activity carried out in forests is a complex process that can be evaluated from many different aspects. Therefore, besides the proprietary aspect, it can be studied from the site's, the manager's or the regulation's point of view. In order to better understand the processes, the thesis details all of the above listed aspects (see the Annexes).

Forest ownership has a long history in the area studied. Changes in forest ownership structure are already mentioned in 18<sup>th</sup> century literature. A weird circumstance of the history is the alteration of this natural development process and therefore, the upsetting of long-term concepts during the past 100 years (Trianon, nationalization, etc.). Usually, depending on tree species, this period is not considered long in the life of forests. In relation to this, the thesis highlights that although the 1989 change of economic and political structure provided a possibility to correct certain mistakes changes by then were drastic. This means that in the meanwhile a generation grew up and the respect for forests had another dimension in their scale of values.

Nevertheless, the 1989 changes can also be considered as radical ones in terms of ownership. First of all, it is important to note that radical changes inevitably imply losses. Ownership change, fast and often burdened with several conflicts inducing new, previously inexperienced changes, problems and questions, often-incited intense emotions. The period of change of ownership structure coincided with the decade when the environment consciousness of citizens had significantly improved and therefore double attention has been paid to private forests.

The past 15 years have emphasised even more conflicts in relation to forests. Obviously, one of them is the settling of forest ownership issues. Referring to the common historical background and the regional unit (the Carpathian-basin), the author presents processes already concluded or currently underway in the two countries of Central-Eastern Europe; Hungary and Romania, exploring their pros and cons.

### 2. Subject of the thesis

Clarifying the question of ownership is an interest of the society. This particularly applies in the case of forests, since while forest ownership affects a large part of the society, the enjoyment of forest goods affects everybody. Analysis and understanding of the societal and economic changes of forests is equally important from an economic, an environmental and a social point of view. Therefore, exploration of forest ownership may count on wide interest.

The author agrees with the statement according to which the careful examination of natural resources is always to be emphasised, as short-term adverse effects and processes may induce adverse effects lasting for several decades. Furthermore, forests are in the centre of increased due to the ecological, emotional and public welfare effects. Considering the great number of owners, forests got also near to society through ownership. However, several conflicts may be detected in the field of forest management that can only be resolved through the understanding of intentions and needs of the owners. Only a few of the fields burdened with conflicts are; the settling of forest ownership issues (high proportion of unregulated ownership), the confrontation of forest management that this thesis aims to explore.

Alteration of forest ownership structures is definitely a step of development for the society that may strongly influence the possibilities and relations of present, as well as future generations towards forests. The thesis casts light upon the fact that in parallel to ownership change, aims related to forests also change, even to an extent when the intensity of forest management may also be altered. A characteristic of the period is that one part of the new owners handles forests as a mean of instantaneous profit making. Put in other words, the new culture of private forest management has not been developed yet. Concerning other pressures affecting forests, it can be said, that as a result of the increasingly intensive forest management and large-scale afforestation, the proportion of natural and semi-natural forests decreases, while that of usually uneven, ecologically less stable planted forests increases. Other adverse effects exerted on forests, just to mention the most important ones, are the following:

- Clear-cutting of forests;
- Air pollution (acid rain, S, Nox);
- Changes in the levels of subsurface waters;
- Inadequate and excessive use of agricultural chemicals;
- Natural catastrophes,
- Epidemic viruses and mycosis, etc.

Sustainable forest management eliminates the negative effects exerted on forests by the above listed damages. Therefore, the change of ownership structure should be carried out in an environment having sustainability as its ultimate goal. On the other hand, this requires that both new and previous owners of forests understand fully the concept of sustainability, the value of their property and the social, biologic and economic expectations of forests. The thesis, that analyses this issue in details, may help to fulfil this condition.

Getting to know each others' achievements and mistakes is of same importance during the learning of sustainable forest management. Thanks to the common historical background and the geographical unit, exploration of weaknesses and strengths of the development of both countries during forest privatisation may be a benefit not only to both nations' foresters, but to their citizens in general.

### 3. Methodology

Basically two forms of scientific modelling may be distinguished: the use of the inductive and the deductive logic. In the case of deductive logic, the theory, i.e. the definition of the hypothesis precedes the operationalisation (real measurement of the variables studied, method of their identification) and real observations, all of which justify or contradict the theory built up. In the case of inductive logic, observation precedes the hypothesis that may be developed depending on the observations. On the basis of the above facts, the author has used the approach of inductive logic during the research work.

Since the thesis is mainly an investigative kind of analysis, not each phase is followed by a hypothesis. The comparison of the forest privatisation practice in Hungary and Romania necessitates the most indepth knowledge of developments and possibilities. Therefore, in order to achieve a better understanding, general presentation of the two countries is also needed. Within the frames of this general presentation, the author analyses the natural and the social-political characteristics of the two countries, the rate of their current economic development and their forest management practice (see the Annexes).

Answer to the questions defined as hypotheses are presented after the analysis of the forest privatisation processes of the countries concerned. In relation to this, the author mentions the characteristics of the countries, the background of the present situation, the implementation of the process and its results.

The chapter presenting the forests and the characteristics of private forest ownership of the neighbouring countries helps spatial localization of the privatisation processes. This is followed by a more detailed analysis concerning the state of forest managers from a forest policy aspect, in the two countries. In the last part of the thesis, the author summarizes all the experiences and recommendations collected during his research work. Mainly this chapter presents the practical application of the author's work both in the everyday life and in support of important decision-making processes. Considering the up-to-datedness of the topic and the increase of the parties interested, the targeted audience of the thesis is, presumably, the most widespread. Therefore, the author aims to analyse the state of forest privatisation and the environment in which this process is being or has been carried out in the most detailed way. Since the region of Central-Eastern Europe is a subject of international interest in its kind, the author has widened the presentation of circumstances in a way to make sense to everybody. Nevertheless, he, in the meantime, sets clear limits and communicates only the amount of information he judges necessary for the topic.

### 4. Main phases of the analysis

The thesis aims to provide professional and satisfactory answers, taking into account the present situation, to the following questions:

- 1. In what natural/economic/social, national and regional environment has the privatisation of forests taken place?
- 2. How the forest privatisation of the two countries has developed and what is the result of the process?
- 3. What questions of forest policy nature has been formulated?
- 4. Analysing the past period, how can the interventions be evaluated (positive and negative) in this field?
- 5. What conclusions can be drawn with our present knowledge, and what kind of recommendations can be made towards the forest owners and decision makers of the two countries?

The aim of the thesis is to emphasise the comparison of current or already achieved forest privatisation processes in Hungary and Romania, and therefore to provide a possibility to raise awareness of future difficulties on both sides. Other aims are to help solving actual problems and the eventual correction of bad decisions taken in the past, if such intention, possibility and will exist. The recommendations made may be of help in the co-operation of the newly developed forest ownership structure, when attempting to realise the common aim of sustainable forest management.

## 4.1. The environment of the forest privatisation process

During the debate of a question, it has to be placed in its environment. On the basis of this, the analysis of the problematic of privatisation cannot be complete without the general presentation of the area, region, or country concerned. The most comprehensive presentation of the environment enables the better understanding of outcomes. Besides the sector specific presentation of forestry, the thesis also provides a short presentation of the two countries.

Forest management and ownership is characterised by significant changes all over Europe, reflected by the thesis. The background of this consists of aims of forest management getting wider, the highlighting of environmental and leisure functions, as well as the different attitude of states towards the changes of forest ownership. In the meantime, private ownership structure is occasionally characterised by great disinterest. The above factors result in forest management becoming incomplete, not only from the aspect of the society's interest, but also from that of managers'. Also, unfolding social interests have to primarily comply with the interests of owners.

Besides being a long term method of land use, forests and their management are also important renewable resources. In relation to this, the thesis analyses the effects of natural factors exerted on forests. It can be stated, that the one-by-one interpretation in this respect is uneffective, since the effects exerted influence the forest, its management and its sustainability as a whole, apart from the form of ownership. It can also be stated, that the geographical location and the climate of the two countries makes possible the spreading of wooded population on their entire area, where allowed by other conditions (geology, hydrology). It is worth to watch the course of events in connection with the fact that the EU considers forest management being an alternative method of land use when switching to a different land management method. Such growth of forested area depends greatly on the subsidies provided for alternative land use, which, in its turn, depends on the strategic priorities of a given country. Only private initiatives receive such subsidy from the European Union. This leads, in the long-term, to the increase of the proportion of private forest ownership.

Considering the functionality of forests, the thesis confirms in general, that nowadays it cannot be realised without human intervention, or help. From the owner's point of view, management of forests, according to

the author, is a financial investment, which may be a long-term one if widely remunerated.

## 4.2. Development phases of forest privatisation

Since the entire process of ownership reform is based on market economy, no market economy can be developed without the reform of ownership. However, the reform of ownership does not mean only the privatisation, i.e. that everything that once belonged to state now belongs to private owners. According to the author, a mental approach, a decision of intentional-change also has to be paired with the change of ownership. This change is based on traditions in places where no drastic interventions occurred in the practice of ownership (e.g.: nationalization). Nevertheless, it is also required in situations when the change of owners has occurred within a short period.

Concerning the state of ownership, the thesis proves that the activity of forest management has been transformed in long-term, while professional forest management appeared besides farming, and became increasingly important. Social value of forests decreased during the past period, due to the disappearance of the traditional, forest and farm management approaches, as well as the narrowing of the relation of society towards forests, both induced by the aforementioned process. On the lower level of the society, forests became known as a form of making profit, for the exploitation of which, no efforts need to be done. In the view of the newly formed layer of forest owners, forests often represent a form of enrichment.

The dilemma of whether the politics or the professionals are competent in the decision-making process is also linked to the ownership issue. Undoubtedly, decisions related to ownership issues are made by the politics, which is especially true in the case of land property.

Obviously, the number of political decisions taking into account professional arguments makes a difference, which is presented in the thesis. One of the most important questions concerning ownership issues is the person of the owner. The thesis emphasises that only a small part of owners represent a responsible attitude towards their property. This finding applies rather in favour of state ownership, than the "state is a better owner than private persons" approach. According to the author, where the responsibility for the conservation of assets is increased, a need for the state acting as an owner rises. There are certain collective goals, e.g. the already mentioned environmental and recreational ones, easier to fulfil on state owned areas, especially during this period considered "transitional" from the point of view of ownership.

The influence of instantaneous decisions of politics can be observed both in the present structure and the road leading to it. On one hand, this influence should be in balance with the expectations of professionals and owners concerned, while on the other hand with that of the society.

#### 4.3. Results of interventions

Forests are priceless not only for the owners, but also for the entire society. Therefore their management should take into account the direct interests of other fields and people. Consequently, forest ownership, in such aspect, is a special form of ownership. Forest management is a very complicated, special form of management, of which outsiders, as well as members of the society, together the new and prospective forest owners often know too little.

The thesis emphasises that the temporary disorder occurring during the clarification of forest ownership issues resulted in the dereliction of certain forests and, through this, in the deterioration of their state. This inevitably led to social and ecologic problems, the handling of which cannot be solely arranged by market processes. According to certain sources, the state still has a dominant role in these processes. Whereas, the author believes, that it is not sufficient to assemble the financial means needed in the hands of the state; qualitatively new mechanisms have to be invented as well (innovation). Besides financial problems i.e. the amount, the form and the control of financial subventions, the thesis proves that management in forests, can only be done with a strong professional background of high standard, for forests serve widespread societal needs.

Following the 40 year nationalization of property, new ownership, dominantly based on private property and adapted to market economy, had to be created artificially in the forestry sector. This has imposed a great responsibility on forest policy, being part of the social and economic policy. According to certain sources, choice can be made out of three theoretical states:

- 1. Set back the status quo antecedent the nationalization,
- 2. Choose a pursuable model from abroad;
- 3. Shape the structure of forest ownership according to desirable future prospects.

The thesis presents that a lot of people knowing only a little or not knowing at all about forest management became forest owners during the past years. The author believes that organising a great number of professional and post-graduate training courses should be created for such owners in order to make them understand or comply, in their own interest, with regulations assuring sustainability. It is important to develop systems providing continuous professional counselling, marketing and information technology, for this is the only way to assure the catching up with economically more advanced regions.

Completely centralised management has not been a characteristic of Hungary even during the socialist era. Advantageous effects of this can be detected in the forestry sector as well. Forest ownership had not been entirely transferred to the state. Therefore, after a 40% rate of privatisation of Hungarian forests, the process of privatisation can be considered complete. Nevertheless, this aspect is only true in case we judge according to the official definition of the privatisation process. Privatisation process in Hungary is usually strongly criticised by everyone, for different reasons. The thesis attempts to detail the emerging questions and, although opinions differ greatly, all of them is worth to be subject of careful consideration. This observation raises the question, why forest privatisation is adequate in several cases, from different aspects and beyond this, what conclusions may refer to the parties concerned.

Romanian organisations in charge made an effort to restore the properties of claimants at their original location. The transfer of ownership has speeded up during the last years due to a Government incentive. Even penalties have been promised to the leaders of authorities who, in some degree, impede the completion of the processes. The 28% share of private ownership attained in such way, have been positively judged both by foreign and national professionals. However, the process cannot be considered concluded, therefore there is a possibility for the author to outline alternative solutions.

#### 4.4. Comparison and recommendations

The author analyses and classifies the forest privatisation process of the countries in his thesis.

While the forest privatisation in Hungary has been carried out in one single round, there have been two forest privatisation schemes in Romania. From this point of view the author judges the situation in Hungary more favourable. However, the way recompensation has been carried out in Hungary, received a less favourable judgement from the author than the restoration of previous ownership in Romania.

The observations of the author confirm the statement, according to which the regulation of property following privatisation is usually unsuitable for the advancement of property concentration efficiency. Nevertheless, fragmented property structure decreases the efficiency. Consolidation of private forest management depends on financial subventions. A decrease of the size of the minimal area allotted for financial subvention is, according to the author, required. Otherwise it will be difficult to motivate forest owners for the management of their forest, or the allotment of subventions should not be a condition of the ownership of a minimal area or membership of forest management associations. The author believes that a far better idea would be to match the offer of financial subventions to the aims of state and private forestry (protection of species etc.).

In terms of attachment to property, the two countries, unfortunately, do not differ much. The author expects from the advancement and maturing of forest privatisation processes the evolution of attachment and responsible behaviour during the development of proprietary mentality. Although processes of private forest management in Romania has speeded-up, implementation casts a better prospect ahead than situation in Hungary, where undivided, and in most cases non-functional common properies developed during the compensation.

The author's research work call attention to the fact that the increase of disinterest towards forestry may also result in the abandonment of management on certain properties in both countries. This, in turn, not only causes harm to the economy, but may also amplify adverse effects of natural processes (acceleration of erosion etc.) exerted on the environment. Recommendations include the improvement of the profitability of forest property, primarily by the involvement of secondary forest products. Other options to achieve the improvement are the remuneration of supplementary income etc.), or by the development of flexible organisational possibilities which would allow forest owners to associate to each other in order to sell products/goods derived from their property, and therefore attain a better, more advantageous market construction.

Occurrence of landscape impairment together with the protection of natural assets also require the settling of the present, disadvantageous (fractured) property structure and possessions, and the creation of regional conditions for land usage, matching natural characteristics. When settling property structures, and ownership of forestlands, the author advises to take notice of the transferee status of inhabitants.

The above-mentioned negative aspects may occur due to the already mentioned lack of sectoral knowledge. In order to fill this gap, the author recommends the preparation of the state apparatus or private initiatives (or both parallel). Judgement of Romania has improved during the past year in this field as well, while the developments in Hungary, following the initial reliable and perspective advancements, now stagnate.

Many of future forest owners live far away of their forest properties (must be typical urban dwellers), who show no concern at all about sustainable forestry. The author agrees with the opinion stating that the grouping of far living (urban) forest owners into associations should be encouraged. As a mean for this, he recommends the implementation of tax allowances for associated owners.

During his research work, the author found further development of legal conditions for the acquisition and distribution of land property (i.e. the possibility for property acquisition of legal entities or foreign citizens) strongly influencing the interests of owners in both countries. Furthermore, changes concerning the market price of land induced a sort of waiting in Hungary. Most probably this trend is to be expected in Romania as well. The author emphasises that, according to his own experiences, transactions (selling or purchasing land) amongst owners are primarily derived from economic reasons and are directed towards the self-supplying development of lands of economically usable size in both countries.

In relation to the market of forests, the author recommends to re-define the concept of forest estate, since while the value of the tree stand, an integral part of the forest estate is comprised in the financial obligation to be paid at the time of selling the forest estate, tree stand, qualified as estate, is transformed into product when harvesting.

It can also be demonstrated, that the need for forestry use differs greatly even within the area of a given country. The approach is obviously different in a less developed area, than in a region characterised by a higher standard of living. The possibility of property acquisition is also significantly influenced when the areas concerned are located in zones highly frequented by tourists. The author recommends the development of land properties of different sizes during the utilization of forests, adjusted to the diverse natural characteristics of cultivable land of the country, the regionally varying employment potentials and social conditions of inhabitants. Obviously, areas to be developed should correspond to the land utilization possibilities. The size of areas being developed may depend on the management method of the given area, of its origin, or of its production objectives. In relation to this, the thesis points out, that the plantationlike forest bodies showing earlier returns and smaller investment needs are subject to greater interest in first round for active (or potential) forest owners. Although a property concentration of smaller rate is needed on areas of less favourable characteristics and managed mainly due to social reasons, still, as their source expenses cannot be expected to be backed from production, the author definitely recommends the ownership to be settled with state subventions. Significant alteration in production structure and further soil protection measures should be taken into account in these areas.

Indispensable parts of the sustainable management of forestry are the planning of management and the surveillance of forests. He points out, that private planning of management is more common in Romania, while the surveillance of forests, in contrast to the Hungarian practice, is under development.

The thesis also mentions the problematic of ownership transfer of conservation areas to private owners, in relation to which the author recommends the earliest possible repurchase of such area, offering exchange lands or the recompensation of owners. According to the author, Hungarian professionals are more advanced in this field, than their Romanian colleagues.

On the basis of the thesis, forestry, even as a part of agriculture, should better adjust itself to the conditions of market economy following the EU accession, that necessitates the development of production to be oriented towards the production of quality products in the region. Nevertheless, this requires significant modification of the production structure. In contrast to the previously common, smaller, limited range of goods consisting of only a couple of products processed on a lower level, the development of a production structure consisting of mass produced products, processed at a higher level, satisfying high standard market demand of wide range quality products and the development of a production structure should be achieved. The EU accession of Hungary preceding that of Romania provides a possibility for both countries to present separately their resources and may serve as an indicator for new accession countries. With the forthcoming EU accession of Romania, another study could deal with the sharing of knowledge between the two countries. The author believes, that manufacturing of quality products and their distribution on EU markets requires increasingly the use of the proof of origin that both countries have to be prepared for. However, the proof of origin can only be realised if property and management conditions are settled.

At the end of the thesis, the author analyses the prospects of forest privatisation in Romania, by relying on his Hungarian experiences. He states that in case forest privatisation would get stuck on this level, processes will be closed of in the near future. This would mean, that the identification of forest owners would be over, what, according to the author, would probably make potential forest owners, who, for some reason, could not carry out or terminate their application for land restitution yet, highly indignant. Conversely, this process would represent a need for the reconsideration and the settling of the legal framework, what would cause the regulation of the entire process more transparent and therefore, covering of existing deficiencies, and gaps would become easier and more effective. Finally, the functioning of the present private forest owner structure would become more effective.

In case the privatisation of forests slowly improves, the process would continue at the same rate. The author believes that this is the worst scenario, since, as a result of the protraction of processes, unsolved difficulties may make active forest owners to give up their intentions. The author recommends in any case the earliest possible acceleration and settling of processes.

Complete restitution would reverse the present situation, since forest property owned by the state would decrease and therefore the role of state forestry institutions would change. Also, expectations towards forests would be regrouped amongst the participants. The role of the state organisation would consist of the surveillance of privately owned forests, counselling and management of protected areas. The first two would probably make possible the increase of efficiency of private forest management. However, private forest owner and manager structures developed in the meantime would, just like the state structure, require another legal background, creating in its turn a possibility for the complete reform of forestry and the construction of individual structures and solutions in the region.

According to the author, following the completion of the settling of property and management issues:

- Lands of a size required for market oriented production are developed;
- Lands needed for effective extensive subsistence economy and additional income are being formed;
- Areas to be protected, i.e. natural values or other aims, are separated and get into management providing special care;
- Altogether, the ownership and property structure needed for the environment-friendly and sustainable agricultural use of areas of different qualities may be developed.

# The author's publications related to the topic

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