

Humorous Approaches to Environmental Issues. The Case of Illegal Logging in Romania

Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu

University of Bucharest, Romania
mihaelaviorica.constantinescu@litere.unibuc.ro

Abstract

This article highlights the civic role of humour as revealed by the analysis of two Romanian online satirical publications (Times New Roman and Cațavencii). The analysis will emphasise different humorous strategies and the crisis narratives deployed by the journalists, in accordance with the profile of the publication. While a ludic frame is preferred for the Times New Roman authors, the authors from Cațavencii use aggressive humour or articles with humorous insertions in order to make accusations against public or private power structures. Satirical publications are not only meant to entertain the public, but also to raise awareness to critical issues such as the environmental aspects (for example, climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, etc.). The analysis will also tackle the appraisal of humorous articles by the public and the risk entailed by the lens of humour on the public's perception of the topic: illegal logging in Romania.

Keywords: satirical publications, environmental humour, humour appraisal

Streszczenie

Humorystyczne podejście do kwestii środowiskowych. Przypadek nielegalnego pozyskiwania drewna w Rumunii.

W artykule podkreślono obywatelską rolę humoru, co ujawniła analiza dwóch rumuńskich satyrycznych publikacji internetowych (Times New Roman i Cațavencii). Analiza skupia się na różnorodnych strategiach humorystycznych i narracjach kryzysowych stosowanych przez dziennikarzy, zgodnie z profilem publikacji. O ile w przypadku autorów Times New Roman preferowana jest ludyczna oprawa, o tyle autorzy Cațavencii odwołują się do agresywnego humoru lub artykułów z humorystycznymi wtrąceniami, aby w ten sposób rzucać oskarżenia pod adresem zarówno publicznych, jak i prywatnych struktur władzy. Publikacje satyryczne mają na celu nie tylko dostarczyć rozrywki społeczeństwu, lecz także podnieść świadomość na temat kluczowych zagadnień, takich jak aspekty środowiskowe (na przykład zmiany klimatyczne, wylesianie, utrata bioróżnorodności itp.). Analiza obejmuje także ocenę artykułów humorystycznych przez czytelników oraz ryzyko, jakie niesie za sobą prymat humoru dla społecznej percepcji omawianego tematu: nielegalnego pozyskiwania drewna w Rumunii.

Słowa kluczowe: publikacje satyryczne, humor środowiskowy, recepcja humoru

1. Introduction

Satirical publications are not only meant to entertain the public, but also to raise awareness to critical issues such as the environmental aspects (like climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, etc.), which emphasizes the civic role of humour. Considering this civic role, the article focuses, from a pragma-rhetorical perspective, on different humorous strategies deployed by the journalists of two online satirical publications, the most popular in Romania (*Times New Roman* and *Cațavencii*), when the topic of illegal logging in Romania is involved. The strategies reflect the profile of the publications: a more ludic frame (*ludic frame* is used following Bateson's 1955 famous "play frame") for *Times New Roman* authors (humorous strategies to place the articles on the *non-bona fide* side of the serious-ludic continuum), while a more serious frame appears in *Cațavencii*. The journalists from *Cațavencii* use aggressive humour or write articles with humorous insertions in order to make (serious) accusations of neglect, incompetence, etc., against public administration (local or central) or private companies, with regard to various social, economic, environmental, etc., issues. The analysis highlights the way "crisis narrative" – considering illegal logging as a type of environmental crisis – is approached by the two satirical publications. In order to capture the particularities of these narratives, the pragma-rhetorical perspective will be informed by different media or communication studies focusing on the way environmental issues are presented in various humorous genres (see section 3).

The article also tackles the way the readers appraise this type of humorous articles; the collection of the appraisal was made via an informal survey involving students and friends of the author in March 2023. Thus, the discussion of the results will consider the risk entailed by the lens of humour on the public's perception of the environmental topic.

The article is structured as follows: in section 2, a brief introduction to the topic of illegal logging in Romania is offered; section 3 discusses the relation between media and critical situations (environmental issues included); section 4 presents the two satirical publications and the methodology of data collection and analysis; section 5 presents the way the participants to an informal survey appraise two humorous articles, one from each publication; section 6 presents the conclusions.

2. Illegal logging in Romania – short presentation

Although Romania has an important surface covered with forests (*Institutul Național de Statistică* [The National Institute of Statistics] mentions 27,7% of forest coverage, in 2021, approximately 6,6 million ha), it ranks below the EU average (39%, Eurostat 2020). Nevertheless, Romania hosts an important part of Europe's virgin/primeval and quasi-virgin/old-growth forests: according to the data provided by the Minister of Environment (May 2023), Romania has 8.579,8 ha of virgin forests and 63.699,63 ha of old-growth forests.

During the communist period, all forests belonged to the state (the nationalisation process started in 1948). After the fall of the communist regime in Romania, in December 1989, forests restitution process to their ancient owners began. Since 1990, the process of deforestation and illegal logging has become extremely aggressive and has gained media – and henceforth public – attention (not only forests have been affected, but 5 forest rangers have been killed by illegal loggers, hundreds of rangers and activists have been attacked and threatened). Romania has 12 regions – approximately 24.000 ha – in UNESCO's heritage site (2020) “Ancient and primeval beech forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe”. Foreign and local NGOs affirm that there are more than 100.000 ha of very old-growth forest in Romania that are not acknowledged as such by the local authorities, thus putting them in immediate danger.

Illegal logging occurs in protected, as well as in unprotected areas: “There is extensive documentation of dramatic, large-scale clearcutting in virgin and old-growth forests in Romania's largest National Park, Domogled-Valea Cernei, covering some 61000 hectares. It contains three UNESCO World Heritage sites spread over 9732 hectares, as well as extensive NATURA 200 protected areas. Another complaint to the European Commission concerned more than 10000 hectares of clearcutting in NATURA 2000 sites in Maramureș County” (Luick *et al.* 2021: 61). As of 2020, Romania is under EU infringement due to illegal logging¹ (European Commission 2020).

The forests are a valuable source of income not only for the municipalities in the rural region of the Carpathians, but also for the private owners. An important part of Romania's population uses timber for heating (almost 80% of the rural population; almost half of the

¹ “The Commission is urging Romania to properly implement the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR), which prevents timber companies from producing and placing on the EU market products made from illegally harvested logs. In the case of Romania, the national authorities have been unable to effectively check the operators and apply appropriate sanctions. Inconsistencies in the national legislation do not allow Romanian authorities to check large amounts of illegally harvested timber. [...] The Commission also found that protected forest habitats have been lost within protected Natura 2000 sites in breach of the Habitats and Birds Directives.” (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF_20_202)

households in Romania, in both rural and urban areas). The major wood exploiters in Romania are HS Timber Group (formerly known as Holzindustrie Schweighofer), Kronospan and Swiss Krono, and Egger Group (Luick *et al.* 2021: 49). They use more wood than the legal production of Romania, so there is illegal wood used, either from Romania or from Ukraine or Belarus. It seems that IKEA (through IRI Forest Management/Investments) owns the largest private forest in Romania (around 70.000 hectares) (Netzfrauen 2017, *apud* Luick *et al.* 2021: 50; *Ziarul Financiar*, 17.08.2016, 07.02.2018).

3. Media and crisis. Humour and environmental aspects

A crisis could be construed having an agent as a central point, a (collective, social) agent that could minimise the impact of negative events (Huang 2020). Several researchers see threat, urgency, and uncertainty as the main three characteristics of crisis (Huang 2020): without appropriate intervention, something extremely valuable (for example, for the aim of this paper, the environment) is at risk (threat factor), the amount of time available in order to avoid the risk is limited (urgency factor), while the consequences of the events are, usually, negative (sometimes unknown, hard to predict, or lasting) (the uncertainty factor).

Nevertheless, a crisis appeals to the media, as it has “newsworthiness” (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 2014), reporting a crisis entails negativity, prominence, impact, novelty, etc., which are essential news traits. Media “narratives of crisis” allow to selectively blame different actors (institutions, persons, etc.), to offer solutions or “coping strategies”, and to shape the audience’s construal (Patrona 2018: 6) concerning not only the events, but also the actions of the parties involved.

One of the crises sometimes exploited by the media is the environmental/ecological one, usually presented in an alarming communicative way. Satirical publications offer an alternative to the dystopian environmental narrative of the mainstream media, as they allow “to promote and facilitate pro-environmental behavior in a positive manner” (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 3). Thus, a humorous (including satirical or sarcastic) rhetoric can help promoting environmental activism (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 9). Humorous news may offer the information needed in order to become effective against at least one of the characteristics of crisis (the uncertainty factor) (see Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 103).

Environmental issues (climate change, for example) represent “a relatively low political priority among most U.S. policymakers and the public, and is often given short shrift by many mainstream news outlets” (Borum Chattoo and Feldman 2020: 85), a situation that can be seen

in other countries as well; for the relation between the public/public institutions and their representatives and environmental issues see, for example, Riesch (2015), Pinto and Riesch (2017), Mayes and Center (2022). Since individuals are influenced by their social and interpersonal relationships with regard to different behaviours, the environmental behaviour included, pro-environmental communication has to consider a myriad of individual, psychological, societal, or ecospheric variables (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 88); lacking to adapt the message according to the characteristics of a specific type of audience “cannot be optimally effective” (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 88).

Borum Chattoo and Feldman (2020) mention a variety of humorous genres or genres that include a humorous uptake in the USA, among which media genres (satirical news shows, sitcoms, fictional films, documentaries, sketches, stand-up comedy, or advocacy campaigns; see also Zekavat and Scheel 2023, chapter 5). These genres cover a multitude of functions in relation to environmental issues: engaging people’s attention; offering hope and agency; avoiding partisan resistance; accepting solutions promoted by the scientists; encouraging the public to pressure the politicians, etc. (Borum Chattoo and Feldman 2020: 85, 92; see also Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 10, 72, 109).

It is considered that humorous discourse about environmental issues can help the public relate more easily with the topic, on a personal or (positive) emotional level (via hope and enjoyment), providing a sense of empowerment, while avoiding threatening and didactic approaches traditionally promoted by the mainstream media (Borum Chattoo and Feldman 2020: 90–91; Kaltenbacher and Drews 2020: 9). The effect on the public depends on its political preferences (for example, siding with the sceptics), on the explicitness of the humorous message, and on the target chosen by the humorous discourse (Borum Chattoo and Feldman 2020: 102–103; Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 48). The affective dimension is extremely important in the construal of the humorous message with regard to environmental issues (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 51). At the same time, there is a persuasive potential connected to the affective dimension: since processing humour entails a cognitive effort, the individuals focus more on the anticipated positive affective effects than on scrutinising the validity of the arguments (Young 2008, 2020; Martin and Ford 2018 *apud* Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 51).

Kaltenbacher and Drews (2020) summarise various studies on humour and environmental issues and notice that “humour is effective in a setting where the learners have humorous expectations” (Kaltenbacher and Drews 2020: 9); when humour is not expected by the public, it involves the risk of being considered a trivialization (Bednarek and Caple 2010; Pinto and

Riesch 2017; Kaltentbacher and Drews 2020: 9–10). In what follows, attention is given to a setting in which humour is expected – satirical online publications.

4. Satirical journals on illegal logging

4.1. *Times New Roman* and *Cațavencii*

Two online satirical publications have been selected for the analysis, the most popular in Romania, *Times New Roman* and *Cațavencii* (the Facebook page of *Cațavencii* has 235.000 followers, while *Times New Roman*'s old page, previous to September 2022, had 650.000 followers in 13 years). The sites of both publications allow for an automatic search within the archives. Using the key word *defrișări* ('tree cuttings'/'clearings'), 29 articles were retrieved from *Times New Roman* between 2011 and 2022, and 42 articles from *Cațavencii*, for the same period. The number of articles (around 70 in 12 years for the two sites) is visibly low if compared to the number of articles on political or social issues, or even on local popular celebrities. The density of articles was higher in 2015, the year when the forest legislation changed, following parliamentary debates on the topic.

The *Times New Roman* and *Cațavencii* sites give no information on the number of views for the articles. The comments posted for the articles selected for our analysis, on both sites, are not publicly available. One cannot discuss the popularity of the articles in terms of the audience's interest in the subject, as shown in the available website and Facebook pages data. The Facebook pages do not host the entire archive available on the two sites; consequently, the reactions of the Facebook readers/followers were not available for an analysis, since in the past few months there were no articles in connection to the topic of the illegal cuttings. As a result, an informal survey was prepared, in order to see the way the readers appraise this type of articles (see section 5).

The discussion on satirical publications has to involve the distinction between telic and paratelic states (Apter 1989). For example, reading mainstream journal articles is usually associated with a telic state, as individuals achieve the goal of getting informed; when they read satirical publications, they are in a paratelic state, since the aim is enjoyment. Humour experience depends on the activation of a paratelic state.

4.2. Data analysis

Most of the texts within satirical publications are pastiches: in a ludic frame, they imitate the articles from 'serious' (broadsheet) newspapers. As a genre, the model has formal autonomy,

identifiable linguistic and rhetorical traits, being invested with authority by the society. The texts in the satirical publications have a clear indication of their status as pastiches due not only to the paratextual indications (in the subtitle of the publications, in the disclaimers present on the online pages, etc.), but also due to their content and style (Maingueneau 2002: 423). Pastiches are connected to a strategy of *reinvestment* (Maingueneau 1991 *apud* Maingueneau 2002: 93–94): journalistic texts, as part of a society's interdiscourse, have a (variable) degree of authority; using them as a source genre confers legitimacy to the new, reinvested, satirical text as well. Caption and subversion are the two techniques of reinvestment. For satirical texts, caption is the most important technique, used in order to transfer the authority of the source textual genre to the reinvested text. This transfer of authority is instrumental for the civic role of satirical publications.

In *Times New Roman* (TNR), the problem of illegal logging appears as a side topic (18 out of 29 articles) in various articles concerning politicians, online school during the pandemic, problems with central heating in Bucharest, traffic surveillance, etc. but also commenting on environmental topics such as the pollution of the forests, wild animals affected by the deforestation, etc. Other articles have as a main topic the problem of illegal logging (11 articles). The main techniques used to trigger humour are fantasy humour and absurd logic (in this case, as a subtype of dark humour). These techniques can appear in combination with each other or with other mechanisms, such as intertextuality, sarcasm, manipulation of presuppositions, or colloquial-argotic lexis.

As far as *Cațavencii* is concerned, illegal logging usually appears as a main topic, but it is moved to the background by the political or economic critique of the agents mentioned in the articles. The main technique the authors resort to is sarcasm. Sarcasm appears together with irony, metaphors, and similes, rarely with fantasy scenarios, false concessions, or intertextuality. The style of the articles is dominated by markers of oral communication, including a rather critical, aggressive style of referring to the targets (which is in line with the sarcastic attitude). Besides metaphors, analogies, or similes, there are also other cues for sarcasm, such as rhetorical questions, repetitions, a direct dialogue with the readers (see Tabacaru 2019).

If the styles of humour discussed by Martin *et al.* (2003) are applied to these publications, then TNR illustrates mainly affiliative humour – enhancing the journalists-readers relationship, while *Cațavencii* illustrates aggressive humour – enhancing the journalists' self-image (and, implicitly, the readers' self-image) at the expense of the targets. The target (or object of evaluation) of the texts dealing more explicitly with illegal logging is usually represented by prominent Romanian politicians – (former) prime minister, the president, ministers of

environment, members of Parliament (MPs) involved in businesses related to wood exploitation, state institutions (and their representatives) that should protect the forests, as well as people and (foreign) companies involved in illegal logging.

The analysis will focus first on some examples where the illegal logging problem is the background for other topics, in TNR, and then on the examples dominated by the topic of illegal logging, from both satirical sites.

4.2.1. *Illegal logging as background*

When illegal logging appears as background for other issues (examples (1)-(6)), the main techniques used to trigger humour are exaggeration (1) and absurd logic (examples (2)-(3)), exaggeration combined with absurd logic (4), absurd logic combined with intertextuality (example (5)), mentioning an iconic character from *Twin Peaks* or with sarcasm (6).

(1) Se estimează că peste 150.000 de persoane încearcă în aceste zile să se rătăcească în Carpați, din care majoritatea sunt cetățeni români. *Din păcate, datorită defrișărilor excesive, șansele de rătăcire în munți devin tot mai rare și se estimează că până în 2050 Carpații să fie atât de chei încât de pe orice vârf se vor putea vedea localitățile din vale, cabanele și alte locuri unde există structuri cu acoperiș.* (Ovidiu Eftimie, 18.09.2022, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/life-death/zecide-turisti-rataciti-in-munti-refuza-sa-fie-salvati-ca-maine-e-zi-de-lucru/>)

It is estimated that over 150.000 persons, most of them Romanians, try to get lost in the Carpathians these days. *Unfortunately, due to massive cuttings, the chances to get lost in the mountains are decreasing and it is estimated that the Carpathians will be so bald that as of 2050 we will be able to see from any peak the towns and villages from the valleys, the huts and other places where there are roof tops.*

(2) Sfatul ministrului mediului. Incendiile trebuie prevenite. *Australia să treacă la defrișări masive!* (TNR, 11.01.2020, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/monden/13-moduri-in-care-romania-a-incercat-sa-ajute-australia-cu-incendiile-alea/>)

The advice of the Minister of Environment. The fires must be prevented. *Australia should begin massive cuttings!*

(3) Trebuie stopate defrișările parcurilor, că *nu mai avem ce pune pe foc* (TNR, 13.01.2019, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/monden/13-lucruri-despre-avariile-de-la-radet-si-frigul-din-casele-bucurestenilor/>)

The cuttings from parcs must stop, *we have no more timber for heating.*

(4) Cei mai ghinionişti elevi *s-au mutat* și de vreo 7-8 ori *dintr-un copac în altul, din cauza defrișărilor masive din ultima perioadă.* Așa că elevii știu ce-au de făcut în scurta vacanță pe care o vor avea: *vor planta copaci în zonele cu semnal bun, să fie siguri că au cum participa la orele online și pe viitor.* (Calin, 29.01.2021, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/monden/a-venit-vacanta-elevii-coboara-din-copacul-in-care-aveau-semnal/>)

The unluckiest students *moved 7-8 times from tree to tree due to the latest massive cuttings.* This way the students know what to do in the coming short holiday: *they will plant trees in the areas with good internet signal, to be sure they can participate in online courses in the future.*

(5) Doamna cu butucul e posibil să nu mai apară, că *e anchetată într-un dosar cu defrișări ilegale* (Advert Einstein, 22.05.2017, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/monden/10-lucruri-despre-noul-serial-twin-peaks/>)

The log lady might not appear in the film anymore, as *she is investigated for illegal cuttings*.

(6) *80% din pârtii nu ar fi existat dacă Verestóy Attila nu ar fi fost atât de pasionat de defrișări [...]* (TNR, 25.01.2016, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/life-death/descopera-romania-10-lucruri-despre-sporturile-de-iarna-din-tara-noastra/>)

80% of sky tracks might not have existed if Verestóy Attila would not have been so passionate about tree cuttings.

Example (1) is based on exaggeration (a hyperbole), as the rate of deforestation due to illegal logging is considered so high as to leave the Carpathians without forests (which will explain the possibility to see from above all the constructions with a roof top) in less than three decades. The absurd logic (examples (2)-(3)) appears in the recommendation of the Minister of Environment – if a country wants to avoid wildfires (in the case of example (2), Australia), it should use deforestation as means of prevention, and in what appears to be local interdiscourse – using the trees from the parks for heating. Absurd logic also appears as an important humorous strategy in other examples – the idea to plant trees in areas with good internet signal, to prosecute a fictional film character, or to have tree cuttings as a favourite hobby, combined with exaggeration (example (4) – the students forced to climb in trees in order to have internet signal for online courses), with intertextuality (mentioning the character from a 1990s popular series, *Twin Peaks*, that holds a log into her arms, example (5)), or with sarcasm (finding positive effects of clear cuttings – sky tracks, in example (6)). Two examples have a political target: in example (2), the target is the Minister of Environment, while in example (6) is an MP with a business interest in the wood industry. The other examples do not appear to have a distinctive target, but maybe the target is general (the entire society).

It is important to mention that awareness of the environmental issues, taking responsibility for them, trying to avoid a negative impact of one's actions to the environment, etc. are important for triggering a person's pro-environmental norms². In the above examples, the issue of illegal clearcuttings appears as an acknowledged and partly accepted fact. Usually, it is mentioned in the articles without being appraised. It seems an ordinary aspect of the everyday life, in contrast with the alarming narrative of the mainstream media. Perhaps the difference in approaching the

² See Zekavat and Scheel (2023: 43): “pro-environmental personal norms are activated by problem awareness (that is, being aware of the significance of pro-environmental behavior), ascription of responsibility (that is, taking responsibility for the consequences of failing to adhere to pro-environmental behavior), outcome efficacy (that is, identifying behavior that can reduce one's negative environmental impact), and ability or self-efficacy (that is, discerning that one is able to provide relief against environmental threats)”.

issue engages people's attention: due to the humorous presentations of the various situations, the non-alarming tone could strike back in an uneasy cumulative effect³.

4.2.2. *Illegal logging as main topic*

The main techniques used to trigger humour in the articles where illegal logging represents the main topic are wide-ranging: fantasy humour, absurd logic, a combination of fantasy humour and absurd logic, along with intertextuality, sarcasm, manipulation of presuppositions, or colloquial-argotic lexis.

Fantasy humour (Hay 2001) is reflected in some of the articles by fantasy scenarios, based on the incongruity of the aspects presented with what is considered "ordinary"; the way fantasy scenarios are created explains their combination with other humorous mechanism like absurd logic or intertextuality. They could also be considered a form of *comical hypothetical*, combining "storytelling, joking, and use of imagery" (Winchitz and Kozin 2008: 384), having as function relational work. Fantasy scenarios can have both a narrative and a descriptive discursive actualisation centred around "absurd, incongruous representations or perceptions" (Tsakona 2018: 231). Fantasy scenarios frequently draw on pop culture (films, TV shows, public events) and rely on intertextual strategies (Kotthoff 1999; Tsakona 2018). This allows to highlight a common ground between authors and readers and stancetaking towards various objects (persons, actions, or events). Stancetaking involves an evaluation differently expressed in a humorous context than it would have been in a 'serious' context (Tsakona 2018: 231).

Example (7) is constructed using a fantasy scenario in which the bear becomes a species of the plains, due to deforestation, changing its eating habits (turning into an herbivore; the same applying to the wolf) and possibly its colour:

(7) Cine a spus că jaful din pădurile României ne amenință biodiversitatea? Din contră! Cercetătorii spun că defrișările masive din țara noastră au dus, în ultimii ani, la apariția unor specii complet noi, precum maiestuosul urs de câmp.

„Ursul de câmp e mai blând decât cel obișnuit, pentru că în loc să vâneze, preferă să pască, iar când se apropie iarna, adună grăunțe pe care le ascunde în bârlogul său, exact ca un hârciog de 800 de kilograme”, explică Marcel Ducu, zoolog.

„Poate fi văzut de foarte departe, astfel încât nu reprezintă deloc o amenințare pentru om. O adevărată binecuvântare, acest animal superb, ursul de câmp. Singurul său dușman natural e lupul de câmp, cu care concurează pentru hrană – iarbă, semințe, flori de câmp”, adaugă nea Ilie, fost pădurar, actualmente paznic de câmp.

³ „[...] the core components for explaining pro-environmental behavior are goals, values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, and (perceived) behavioral control according to environmental psychology. All these determinants are defined on a subjective level. Their combinations may form an intention, which can facilitate or inhibit behavior.” (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 45)

Cel mai probabil, în următoarele mii de ani, ursul de câmp se va adapta la noul său mediu și va deveni verde, pentru a se putea camufla mai bine în lanul de trifoi, sunt de părere specialiștii. (Vasile, 3.12.2019, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/it-stiinta/din-cauza-defrisarilor-in-romania-a-aparut-o-specie-noua-ursul-de-camp/>)

Who said that the plunder from Romania's forests threatens our biodiversity? On the contrary! The researchers state that the massive cuttings from our country have led to the appearance of a completely new species, like the majestic plain bear.

„The plain bear is more gentil than the regular bear, because instead of hunting, it prefers to graze, and when winter approaches it gathers grains to hide in its den, like an 800 kg hamster/marmot”, Marcel Ducu, zoologist, explains.

„It can be seen from far away, so it does not represent a threat to humans. It is a true blessing this splendid animal, the plain bear. Its only natural enemy is the plain wolf, with whom it competes for food – grains, seeds, wildflowers”, adds uncle Ilie, former forest ranger, presently plain ranger.

Most probably, in the next thousand years, the plain bear will adapt to its new environment, according to the specialists, and it will become green, for a better camouflage in the trefoil field.

The logic of the characters animated in the news – the scientist and the former ranger describing the new species – is absurd, but consonant with the fantasy scenario: there are several incongruities, from the natural habitat of the bears (plain instead of mountain) to the eating habits or the chromatic changing of its fur. The comparison of the bear with a hamster/marmot raises other incongruities, especially with regard to size. Example (8) illustrates a combination between fantasy scenario and intertextuality, exploiting cinematographic references to fictional characters – the Ents from Tolkien inspired series.

(8) Măsurile epice în cazul defrișărilor ilegale. Tăietorii ilegali de lemne se vor confrunta curând cu un batalion de enți din Pădurea Fangorn, aduși special în țara noastră ca să protejeze pădurile. Enții, care au chiar și 10 metri înălțime, nu se vor mai sinchisi să ancheteze, să someze, sau să amendeze tăietorii ilegali, ci îi vor storci ca pe niște viermi, așa cum merită.

„Enții vor fi amplasați în locații încă nedezvăluite, dar ideea e că după ce 10-15 tăietorii ilegali vor fi găsiți prin pădure cu mațele atârinate de crăci, probabil că și ceilalți se vor potoli și vor lăsa drujbele jos”, spune Decebal Popescu, atașatul României în Middle Earth, de unde provin enții.

Spre deosebire de polițiști, jandarmi și membrii atâtor instituții de stat ale României, enții nu iau spagă, nu sunt în cârdășie cu tăietorii ilegali și mai ales nu iau bani de la exportatori sau de la firmele de mobilă, care ciordesc fără rușine pădurile țării. Un alt avantaj e că enții nici nu pot fi împușcați. Ei se strecoară pe nesimțite unde aud drujbele și îi calcă în picioare sau îi eviscerează pe hoți, măsuri mult mai eficiente decât amenda sau dosarul penal.

(TNR, 18.10.2019, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/life-death/romania-va-aduce-enti-din-padurea-fangorn-ca-sa-pazeasca-padurile-de-taierile-ilegale/>)

Epic measures in the cases of illegal cuttings. The illegal woodcutters will soon confront a battalion of Ents from Fangorn Forest, brought to our country to protect the forests. The Ents, reaching up to 10 m high, will not bother to investigate, to summon or to fine the illegal woodcutters, but they will crash them as maggots who deserve being crushed.

„The Ents will be placed in undisclosed locations; the idea is that after finding 10-15 illegal woodcutters with their guts hanging from the branches, the others will abandon their cuttings and lay down their rip-saws”, says Decebal Popescu, Romania's attaché to Middle Earth, the birthplace of the Ents.

Unlike policemen, gendarmes, and members of various Romanian state institutions, Ents do not accept bribe, are not connected to illegal woodcutters and, most importantly, they do not accept money from timber exporters or furniture firms, who nab shamelessly from Romania's forests.

Another advantage is that Ents cannot be shot. They creep in where they hear the ripsaws and step on or eviscerate the thieves, measures that are more efficient than the fine or the criminal record.

The Ents are considered real beings, incorruptible, capable to act against the illegal woodcutters more efficiently than other state representatives, coming from an allegedly real country – the Middle Earth, which has diplomatic established relations with Romania. Besides this incongruity between fiction and reality, the efficient methods of the Ents described in the article are incongruous to police and legal actions in a modern state: deploying deadly measures (“crash [the illegal loggers]”, hanging illegal loggers’ guts from tree branches, “step on or eviscerate the thieves”) involves an extremely aggressive imagery, consonant with the fictional and cinematographic representations.

Absurd logic is the main mechanism exploited in example (9): the faulty logic is attributed to (at that moment) prime minister Ponta:

(9) Premierul Victor Ponta a răspuns criticilor conform cărora guvernul pe care îl conduce tolerează defrișările de păduri din România și este de-a dreptul complice cu firmele care taie copaci în mod ilegal. „Vă îngrijorați pentru tot felul de fleacuri. Pădurile sunt neesențiale pentru o țară, uitați-vă la Dubai sau Quatar, ăia nu au nici o pădure și sunt plini de bani”, a spus premierul.

Acesta a atras atenția că o țară poate să câștige foarte mulți bani din deșert. Un deșert bine cultivat va da, în doar câțiva ani, petrol de cea mai bună calitate, totul e să ai răbdare. Totuși, cea mai costisitoare operațiune în amenajarea unui deșert este defrișarea, care trebuie făcută cu cap, astfel încât să nu mai rămână urmă de verdeață deasupra. [...] (Ovidiu Eftimie, 11.05.2015, <https://www.timesnewroman.ro/politic/ponta-nu-e-ingrijorat-de-defrisari-aia-in-dubai-nu-au-nici-o-padure-si-uite-ce-bine-o-duc/>)

Prime minister Victor Ponta’s answer to the accusations that his government tolerates cuttings in Romania and that is indeed the accomplice of the firms illegally cutting the trees. „You worry for all kind of trifles. Forests are unessential for a country, look at Dubai or Qatar, they have no forests, and they are loaded”, said the prime minister.

He drew attention to the fact that a country can win a lot by being a desert country. A desert that is carefully cultivated will provide, in just a few years, premium oil, the important aspect is to be patient. Still, the costliest enterprise in growing a desert is the process of clearcutting, requiring attentive planning, so that nothing green survives on top. [...]

The Prime-Minister apparently considers deforestation an important stage in turning the country into a desert, a desert in which petrol will “grow” (incongruity between the source of petrol and its potential “cultivation”, similar to growing plants). The faulty logic is also feed by a false analogy between what can constitute a valuable natural resource for a country like Romania and the natural resources of some Gulf states, like Dubai or Qatar.

As already mentioned, in the articles from *Cațavencii* the main technique is sarcasm. The style of the articles (see examples (10), (11), (12)) is dominated by markers of oral communication – which simultaneously act as cues for sarcasm:

(10) *Băi*, bine că a venit Costel Alexe *ăsta* în fruntea Ministerului Mediului, că altfel nu aflam cît de mare e dezastrul din pădurile țării. *Nu, domnule*, dacă nu aproba *Costel* acel raport în care se zice că ilegal se taie de două ori mai mult decît legal, rămîneam cu toții neinformați, *că doar cine are acces la toate anchetele, reportajele, filmele și pozele cu defrișări?* Vorba aia, *dacă un hectar de arbori pică în pădure și nu aude ministrul, a fost sau n-a fost defrișat?* [...] (A. Cristorian, 9.12.2019, <https://www.catavencii.ro/exploatare-forestiere-nu-defrisari-sa-fie-clar/>)

Man, it's such a good thing that *this* Costel Alexe became Minister of Environment, or we would not find out how big the disaster affecting the country's forests is. *No, sir*, if *Costel* did not approve that report stating that it is illegal to cut twice than the amount that is legal to cut, we would all have remained uninformed; *who else has access to all the investigations, documentaries, films, and images of the cuttings?* There's a saying, *if a hectare of tree falls in the woods and the minister did not hear of it, was it or was not cut?*

(11) Acum, că tot am văzut cum se face, de la *investitorii strategici de prin Austria ori de pe te miri unde, putem și noi să ne defrișăm singuri pădurile. Ce, n-avem și noi firmele noastre? Bașca*, atunci cînd e vorba de noi, *putem lua cu două mîini*. Unde mai pui că în unele cazuri sîntem, cum ar veni, obligați. *Adică trebuie, dom'le, și dacă e musai, atunci cu plăcere*. [...] *win-win, toată lumea cîștigă. Mă rog, mai puțin pădurea, dar asta e*. [...] (A. Cristorian, 1.07.2019, <https://www.catavencii.ro/mici-defrisari-obligatorii-si-justificate/>)

Now, that we have seen from *strategic investors from Austria or from wherever how it is done, we can cut our forests on our own. What, don't we have our own firms? Plus*, when it comes to us, *we can take with both our hands*. Not to say that we are forced to do it, in some cases. *That is, if we must [do it], we will happily oblige*. [...] *win-win, everyone wins. Well, apart from the forest, but that's life*.

One can notice rhetorical questions (“who else has access to all the investigations, documentaries, films, and images of the cuttings? There's a saying, if a hectare of tree falls in the woods and the minister did not hear of it, was it or was not cut?”, “What, don't we have our own firms?”), repetitions (the idea is repeated with variations: “Not to say that we *are forced to do it*, in some cases. That is, *if we must [do it]*, [...]”), and the direct dialogue with the readers (the direct form of address *băi* ‘man’, for example). The communicative attitude is critical, the style is aggressive when the authors refer to their political targets. For example, in Romanian, collocating a demonstrative with the name usually entails a depreciative attitude – *this* Costel Alexe; using only the first name for a minister – *Costel* – entails a familiarity that relates with the disregard of the referent. Ironically mentioning the private companies involved in the timber mafia: *strategic investors from Austria or from wherever*, is in line with the sarcastic attitude of the publication.

Sometimes, the authors use rhymes – *apa, aerul și fraierul* “water, air, and loser” (example 12), as well as many ironical comments targeted at the corruption and incapacity of administrating public funds to protect the forest.

(12) Se defrișează, da. Se taie și se fură ca în codru. Dar se și păzește. E, dacă vreți, un fel de circuit natural, în care *apa, aerul și fraierul* își dau întâlnire la buget și *protejează pădurea pînă o ia naiba*, cu vreascuri cu tot. Că, vorba aia, *nu pot ei tăia cît poate Romsilva proteja*. Sau cît poate plăti

Romsilva pentru fel și fel de servicii de protecție a pădurii. Căci, după ce au angajat firme de pază – *badigarjii pădurii, un fel de prietenii pădurii, dar pe steroizi* –, acum au decis să bage alte ‘jde milioane în servicii de pază pentru plantații, pepiniere și solarii aflate în proprietatea publică sau în cea privată, dar administrată de Romsilva. [...] Și, totuși, *o sumă la care te-ai fi așteptat ca vlăstarele de stejar și mesteacăn și brad să fie păzite de Navy Seals, cel puțin. Însă, nț. N-o să vedeți. Căci DSV Suceava a organizat ea niște licitații, pentru mai multe loturi de păzit, și le-a împărțit unor firme prietene. Unor firme care protejează pădurea și prin exploatare responsabilă. [...] dacă rămînem fără păduri o să ajungem să nu ne mai permitem un incendiu de pădure și ne facem naibii de rîs în fața Europei.* (A. Cristorian, 6.08.2018, <https://www.catavencii.ro/zeci-de-milioane-pentru-paza-viitoarelor-defrisari/>)

There are cuttings, yes. One cuts the trees and steals. But one also protects. Well, if you like, it’s a sort of natural circuit, in which *water, air, and loser* meet at the budget and *protect the forest until the forest goes to hell*, its brushwood included. Since, as they say, *they cannot cut as much as Romsilva can protect*. Or as much as Romsilva can pay for all kind of services to protect the forest. Because, after employing security firms – *forest’s bodyguards, a sort of forest’s friends, but on steroids*, now Romsilva has decided to spend more millions in security services for plantations, plant nurseries and solariums, in public or private property, but administered by Romsilva. [...] And yet, *it is a sum that gives the expectations that the sprouts of oak, birch, and fir tree would be protected by Navy Seals, at least. But ntz. It’s not going to happen.* Because DSV Suceava organised some auctions, for various places to guard, and offered them to friendly firms. To some firms that protect the forest by means of responsible clearcutting as well. [...] *if we run out of forests, we will not afford a forest fire and then we will be the laughingstock of Europe.*

In example (12), several elements are mentioned using pejorative, albeit ludic, terms or collocations: there is a mention of the incapacity to protect the forest (*nu pot ei tăia cît poate Romsilva proteja* “they cannot cut as much as Romsilva can protect”); to the security forces hired – in which the loan word *bodyguard* is written closely to its pronunciation in basilect Romanian (together with a morphologic adaptation for the plural form): *badigarjii pădurii, un fel de prietenii pădurii, dar pe steroizi* “forest’s bodyguards, a sort of forest’s friends, but on steroids”; an evaluation of the costs, which triggers the appeal to intertextuality – again based on cinematographic references – action movies: *o sumă la care te-ai fi așteptat ca vlăstarele de stejar și mesteacăn și brad să fie păzite de Navy Seals, cel puțin* “it is a sum that gives the expectations that the sprouts of oak, birch, and fir tree would be protected by Navy Seals, at least”.

Less frequently, the articles from *Cațavencii* appeal to fantasy scenarios, like the diary of a nineteenth century romantic poet, placed in present-day Romania and visiting IKEA to get inspiration (Dan Panaet, 6.01.2021, <https://www.catavencii.ro/mihai-eminescu-jurnal-de-pandemie-2/>). Intertextuality can be often observed in the titles of the articles (parodic transformations of famous verses from nineteenth century poetry) but the paratextual strategies are not in focus in this paper.

In the articles, sarcasm appears frequently alongside of irony, metaphors, and similes:

(13) [...] Problema defrișărilor ilegale din România a fost, de la intrarea noastră în UE, *ca un câine mort la intrarea Comisiei Europene* pe care toți s-au făcut că nu-l văd. *Dacă la trei scrisori cu statul de drept trimiteau una cu defrișările ilegale, și tot adunam de-o carte groasă cât Biblia.* [...] (Mihai Radu, 19.02.2020, <https://www.catavencii.ro/tara-de-dincolo-de-padurici/>)

[...] The problem of illegal cuttings in Romania has been, since our admission in the EU, *like a dead dog at the entry of the European Commission* that everyone pretended not to see. *If the Commission had sent for three letters concerning the rule of law one letter about the illegal cuttings, we still would have gathered a book thick like the Bible.*

(14) *Defrișările ilegale par că sunt „chestia” noastră. Noul Dracula* pe care încercăm să-l promovăm, ca să scoatem bani, să creștem turismul, să ne dezvoltăm. (Mihai Radu, 23.10.2019, <https://www.catavencii.ro/fiind-baiet-paduri-nu-defrisam/>)

Illegal cuttings seem to be our „thing”. The New Dracula that we try to promote, in order to get money, to develop tourism, to grow.

(15) [...] Vă prezentăm așadar *banditismul austriac de mediu, care își primenește sângele albastru aristocratic cu sângele verde al pădurilor noastre*, iar asta are un nume: Holzindustrie Schweighofer. *Ăștia ne fac țara talaș*, nu pentru ca să le dea o pâine silvicilor români, ci pentru că statul român îi lasă pe austrieci să-și facă de cap. [...] (Mălin Mușatescu, 11.02.2016, <https://www.catavencii.ro/romanul-frate-cu-rumegusul/>)

Thus, we present *the Austrian environmental banditry, who renews its blue aristocratic blood with the green blood of our forests*, and this banditry has a name: Holzindustrie Schweighofer. *They turn our country into sawdust*, not because they want to pay the salaries of Romanian woodcutters, but because the Romanian state allows them to do as they please.

In (13), the problem of illegal cuttings is compared to a *dead dog* whose presence is known both by Romanian authorities and the EU, but they feign not noticing it, while in (14) it is metaphorically presented as a country brand – *the new Dracula* promoted abroad. In (15), where the target is a foreign company, there are several metaphors or metonymies – *Austrian environmental banditry, green blood of our forests, They turn our country into sawdust*.

The isolated humorous phrases in the articles from *Cațavencii* could be used with the purpose of engaging the public's attention and as a tool for political/economic critique. The style of the articles does not indicate a pastiche, but a stylistic approach similar to the style of broadsheet papers editorials. Unlike the articles from TNR, which have a humorous core, the articles from *Cațavencii* are primarily serious, with some humorous (sarcastic) insertions. Promoting a satirical identity through the title, subtitle, disclaimers, and some articles and cartoons with a humorous core offers a self-evaluation which is not supported by the majority of articles. The latter reflects a serious, critical stance towards political, social, economic “objects” (persons, companies, events, actions, etc.). In fact, there is no reinvestment strategy (like for TNR), but a capitalization on the “basic” investment strategy (media authority). The style is rather one illustrating advocacy journalism (“journalism that takes a point of view”, Thomas 2018: 393; “a genre of journalism that combines reporting with a point of view”, Bachmann Cáceres 2019). The readers are transferred from a paratelic to a telic state.

The articles from *Cațavencii* present a narrative of the environmental crisis in which blame for illegal cuttings is assigned to politicians, state institutions, private investors, etc., a narrative emphasising the threat and the urgency; at the same time, the journalists try to shape the public's understanding of the events and actions of the public or private agents mentioned. It is a narrative that also appears in mainstream media when this type of environmental crisis is discussed. In contrast, the article from TNR seem to offer a counternarrative, which can act as “coping mechanism”: the representation of the situations alternates between creating post-crisis scenes (the threat, urgency, or uncertainty have disappeared, the worst already happened) and diminishing the threat, urgency, and uncertainty by attributing absurd viewpoints to (mainly) political agents.

5. The appraisal of environmental humour – an informal survey

What effect do the articles have on the public? What are the functions of humour, in the readers' opinion? Considering the complicated aspects of the effects of humorous genres and of their functions, I tried to map out the Romanian readers' reaction to two articles – the article on the plain bear from TNR (example 7), the article on illegal logging (example 12) from *Cațavencii* – using a questionnaire (Google Form), distributed via email to friends and students in March 2023. The two articles were chosen based on only one criterion – their length (they needed to be short, in order to allow a swift reading before completing the online questionnaire).

The questionnaire has as a model the questionnaire used by Pinto and Riesch (2017), to which 2 other questions were added, following some suggestions from Borum Chatoo and Feldman (2020). In the first part of the questionnaires, the respondents were asked to read the articles and then to rate their answer to 7 assertions: “I liked the article”, “I would like to read more articles similar to the sample”, “The environmental problem presented in the article is important”, “Humour helps presenting the environmental issue”, “I would prefer the environmental issue to be presented seriously”, “Reading the article, I became more attentive to this environmental issue”, and “I would like to do more for the protection of the environment” (obviously, the informal survey investigates the appraisal of the articles and only some vague behavioural intentions; see Zekavat and Scheel 2023, chapter 6). The questionnaire used a 7 points Likert scale: from 1 – totally/strongly disagree, to 7 – totally/strongly agree, while the choice 4 was considered the neutral option. Thus, the first part of the questionnaire allows for a quantitative analysis. There were 34 responses to the questionnaire on the *Cațavencu* article and 39 responses to the questionnaire on the *Times New Roman* article.

According to the second part of the questionnaires, concerning demographic factors, the respondents, mostly the same persons for both questionnaires, were in their majority women (89,7% for the TNR questionnaire, 94% for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire), students (58,8% for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire, 61,5% for the TNR questionnaire) or employees with graduate or postgraduate education, aged mostly 18-25 (55,9% for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire, 61,5% for the TNR questionnaire; 40-60 23,5% for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire, 23,1% for the TNR questionnaire). At the end of the questionnaires, the respondents have the possibility to provide some comments (which can be used for a qualitative analysis). There were only 7 comments, 4 at the end of the questionnaire on the *Cațavencii* article, 3 at the end of the TNR questionnaire.

Concerning the “attractiveness” of the articles, there are similar results, around 80%, but 59% of the respondents rated with 7 the TNR article, while only 32,4% of the respondents rated with 7 the *Cațavencii* article.

Table 1. The appraisal of the satirical articles and the behavioural intentions

	Agree								Neutral	
	Cat5	Cat6	Cat7	Total Cat	TNR5	TNR6	TNR7	Total TNR	Cat	TNR
<i>I liked the article</i>	14,70%	32,40%	32,40%	79,50%	12,80%	10,30%	59%	82,10%	8,8%	12,8%
<i>I would like to read more articles similar to the sample</i>	14,70%	17,60%	29,40%	61,70%	10,30%	17,90%	48,70%	76,90%	26,5%	10,3%
<i>The environmental problem resented in the article is important</i>	2,90%	14,70%	76,50%	94,10%	7,70%	17,90%	59%	84,60%	0%	5,1%
<i>Humour helps presenting the environmental issue</i>	26,50%	29,40%	35,30%	91,20%	10,30%	20,50%	53,80%	84,60%	2,9%	5,1%
<i>I would prefer the environmental issue to be presented seriously</i>	0	8,80%	20,60%	29,40%	2,60%	7,7%	12,80%	23,10%	38,2%	35,9%
<i>Reading the article, I became more attentive to this environmental issue</i>	20,60%	17,60%	26,50%	64,70%	12,80%	12,8%	30,80%	56,40%	17,6%	25,6%
<i>I would like to do more for the protection of the environment</i>	11,80%	2,90%	61,80%	76,50%	15,40%	20,50%	51,30%	87,20%	11,8%	10,3%

There is a noticeable difference between the reiteration of the reading of similar articles: 77% of the respondents for the TNR questionnaire answered that they would like to read articles similar to the sample, while only 62% of the respondents for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire affirm that. As for the importance of the environmental issue, the direct style seems important, since 94,1% of the respondents for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire answered that the issue is important, while only 85% of the respondents for the TNR questionnaire answered this way.

There is (slightly) more agreement that humour helps in the presentation of environmental issues and in triggering the readers' attention by the respondents of the *Cațavencii* questionnaire than for those appraising the TNR article; apparently, there is more engagement in the protection of the environment triggered by the TNR article on the questionnaire respondents. One should bear in mind that "the impact of (humorous and satiric) environmental messages is incremental and gradual, rather than immediate and definitive" (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 52).

The readers claim they would like to read more articles similar to the sample, but a rather high percentage of them is neutral with regard to the serious/nonserious take on the environmental issue. The readers also claim they would like to do more for the protection of the environment, but 25% of the TNR article readers, for example, are neutral to the "attention hook" factor.

It is interesting that for two questions there were significantly many options for the neutral variant: for the question "I would prefer a serious presentation of the environmental issue", there were 38,2% neutral options for the *Cațavencii* questionnaire and 35,9% for the TNR questionnaire. Around 25% of the readers prefer a serious presentation of the environmental issues. As regards the answers to the question "Reading the article I became more attentive to this environmental issue", there were 17,6% neutral options in the responses from the *Cațavencii* questionnaire and 25,6% for the TNR one. Thus, a significant part of the respondents seems neutral to the type of presentation and uninfluenced by the content.

Regarding the comments connected to the *Cațavencii* article, one person (40-60 age group) notes that "it takes civic spirit", another person (18-25 age group) writes that the article had a "powerful critical tone" and did not trigger laughter; a person over 60 notes that humour helps presenting various topics, the environmental ones included, but that the ironic nuances of the articles are not perceived by all the readers. The fourth comment, from a person in the 40-60 age group, claims not to be concerned with the environmental issues, but writes that the humorous presentation acts as a "hook".

The article from TNR triggered three comments: one, from a person over 60, notes that the humour was "forced", while another person (18-25 age group) states that the article was funnier than the one from *Cațavencii*. The same young person appreciates the fact that the article was accompanied by a visual element to "help sketch the absurd of the situation" (the image of a bear in a field) and also remarks that "The convention of the 'news' genre gave a serious tone (undermined by the content)". Another person from the same age group (18-25) observes that although humour seems to trivialise the topic ("to diminish the importance of the problem") it acts as an attention getter, and it offers important information about environmental issues.

Apart from the natural differences in evaluating the humorous effects of the articles, it is worth mentioning that the respondents notice the civic role assumed by the two sites, the fact that they inform the public about serious issues, and the attention-getter function (“hook”) of humour. They also mention the discursive convention (imitating the news genre) and the possible risk of trivialising the topic⁴.

6. Conclusion

There is a clear difference in style between the two satirical publications, in line with their general attitude (ludic vs sarcastic). For *Cațavencii*, advocacy journalism seems to be the appropriate label, not that of satirical publication.

Considering the responses to the questionnaires, the aggressive style seems instrumental for the appreciation of humour’s importance in presenting environmental issues, in triggering the readers’ attention, and in appraising the importance of the issues. Nevertheless, there is a significant number of neutral options of the readers with regard to the style of the presentation (serious/non-serious), and to the attention drawn to the environmental issue. Humour is appreciated, but it does not necessarily trigger a behavioural intention of involvement to support environmental protection (see Riesch 2015).

Satirical publications assume a civic role, but this is not always assessed as such by the audience. The way to react to an environmental crisis involves, in the case of *Cațavencii*, adopting the alarming tone and pointing clearly at various explicit political and economic targets, sometimes with didacticism (similar to the mainstream media); in the case of TNR, the strategy is to adopt a ludic tone, non-alarming, transforming the issue into a background well-known insolvable problem, usually without didacticism, but (sometimes) pointing to a political or economic target. The contrast with the mainstream media is prominent. The articles from *Cațavencii* reveal a media narrative of crisis which assigns blame and tries to shape the public’s interpretation of the events and actions of the various agents mentioned. The article from TNR seem to offer a counternarrative, which can be seen as a form of coping mechanism, in which the situation represented can be, sometimes, a post-crisis scene, in which there is no more threat, urgency, or uncertainty, the worst scenario already happened, while in other cases the threat, the

⁴ “[...] Feldman (2017, p. 323) argues that satiric news ‘may help foster public attention to, active engagement with, and understanding of science’; nonetheless, it also has limitations including ‘the challenge of conveying the seriousness of certain science issues while using humor, the potential for audience misreading of satiric intention, the inherent divisiveness of satire, and the tension between communication goals and the authenticity of satiric performance’.” (Zekavat and Scheel 2023: 47–48).

urgency, and the uncertainty are discursively diminished by the political agents made to support absurd viewpoints or actions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor *emerita* Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu and my colleague Bianca Alecu (both from the University of Bucharest) for their valuable feedback on my article. I would also like to thank the two reviewers for their comments and suggestions.

References

- Apter, Michael J. (1989) *Reversal Theory: Motivation, Emotion, and Personality*. London: Routledge.
- Bachmann Cáceres, Ingrid (2019) “Advocacy Journalism.” [In:] *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.776>.
- Bateson, Gregory (1972 [1955]) A Theory of Play and Fantasy. [In:] Gregory Bateson (ed.), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind. Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Northvale, NJ, London: Jason Aronson Inc.; 183–198.
- Bednarek, Monika, Helen Caple (2010) “Playing with Environmental Stories in the News – Good or Bad Practice?” *Discourse and Communication* 4 (1); 5–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481309351206>.
- Bednarek, Monika, Helen Caple (2012) *News Discourse*. London: Continuum.
- Bednarek, Monika, Helen Caple (2014) “Why Do News Values Matter? Towards a New Methodological Framework for Analyzing News Discourse in Critical Discourse Analysis and Beyond.” *Discourse & Society* 25 (2); 135–158.
- Borum Chattoo, Caty, Lauren Feldman (2020) *A Comedian and an Activist Walk into a Bar. The Serious Role of Comedy in Social Justice*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- European Commission (2020) *February Infringements Package: Key Decisions* (12 February 2020). Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/EN/INF_20_202. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Eurostat (2020) “39% of the EU is Covered with Forests”, 21.03.2021. Retrieved from: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210321-1>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).

- Feldman, Lauren (2017) "Assumptions about Science in Satirical News and Late-Night Comedy." [In:] Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dan M. Kahan, Dietram A. Scheufele (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Science of Science Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 321–332. Retrieved from: <http://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190497620.013.35>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Hay, Jennifer (2001) "The Pragmatics of Humor Support", *Humor-International Journal of Humor Research* 14; 55–82.
- Huang, Mimi (2020) "Introduction: Constructing and Communicating Crisis Discourse from Cognitive, Discursive and Sociocultural Perspectives." [In:] Mimi Huang, Lise-Lotte Holmgreen (eds.) *The Language of Crisis: Metaphors, Frames and Discourses* Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins; 1–20.
- Institutul Național de Statistică (2022) „Statistica activităților din silvicultură în anul 2021”. Retrieved from: https://insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/field/publicatii/statistica_activitatilor_din_silvicultura_in_anul_2021.pdf. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Kaltenbacher, Miriam, Stefan Drews (2020) "An Inconvenient Joke? A Review of Humor in Climate Change Communication." *Environmental Communication* 14 (6); 717–729. <http://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2020.1756888>.
- Kotthoff, Helga (1999) "Coherent Keying in Conversational Humour. Contextualising Joint Fictionalisation." [In:] Wolfram Bublitz, Uta Lenk, Eija Ventola (eds.), *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse: How to Create It and How to Describe It*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins; 125–150.
- Luick, Rainer, Albert Reif, Erika Schneider, Manfred Grossmann, Ecaterina Fodor (2021) "Virgin Forests at the Heart of Europe. The Importance, Situation and Future of Romania's Virgin Forests." *Mitteilungen des Badischen Landesvereins für Naturkunde und Naturschutz* 24. ISSN 0067-2528, <https://doi.org/10.6094/BLNN/Mitt/24.02>. Retrieved from https://www.saveparadiseforests.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2021/10/Virgin-forests_Romania_Luick_etal_2021.pdf. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Maingueneau, Dominique (1991) *L'analyse du discours. Introduction aux lectures de l'archive*. Paris: Hachette.
- Maingueneau, Dominique (2002) "Captation vs subversion." [In:] Patrick Charaudeau, Dominique Maingueneau (eds.) *Dictionnaire d'analyse du discours*. Paris: Seuil; 93–94.
- Martin, Rod A., Thomas Ford (2018) *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*. London, San Diego: Academic Press.
- Martin, Rod A., Patricia Puhlik-Doris, Gwen Larsen, Jeanette Gray, Kelly Weir (2003)

- “Individual Differences in Uses of Humor and Their Relation to Psychological Well-Being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire.” *Journal of Research in Personality* 37 (1); 48–75. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566\(02\)00534-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00534-2).
- Mayes, Eve, Evan Center (2022) “Learning with Student Climate Strikers’ Humour: Towards Critical Affective Climate Justice Literacies.” *Environmental Education Research*, online April 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.2067322>.
- Ministerul Mediului, Apelor și Pădurilor [The Ministry of Environment, Water and Forests] (2023) „Catalogul național al pădurilor virgine și cvasivirgine” [The National Catalogue of Primeval and Old-Growth Forests] 26.05.2023. Retrieved from: <http://www.mmediu.ro/articol/catalogul-national-al-padurilor-virgine-si-cvasivirgine/6233>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Netzfrauen (2017) “In Rumäniens Wäldern geht es zu wie in einem Krimi und das mit einer absoluten Starbesetzung! Der letzte Urwald Europas in den Händen von IKEA.” Retrieved from: <https://netzfrauen.org/2017/03/18/ikea/>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Patrona, Marianna (2018) “Crisis or the Media? Some Preliminary Reflections.” [In:] Marianna Patrona (ed.) *Crisis and the Media: Narratives of Crisis across Cultural Settings and Media Genres*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins; 1–14.
- Pinto, Bruno, Hauke Riesch (2017) “Are Audiences Receptive to Humour in Popular Science Articles? An Exploratory Study Using Articles on Environmental Issues.” *Journal of Science Communication* 16 (4), A01. <https://doi.org/10.22323/2.16040201>.
- Riesch, Hauke (2015) “Why Did the Proton Cross the Road? Humour and Science Communication.” *Public Understanding of Science* 24 (7); 768–775. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662514546299>.
- Tabacaru, Sabina (2019) *A Multimodal Study of Sarcasm in Interactional Humor*. Berlin, New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Thomas, Ryan J. (2018) “Advocacy Journalism.” [In:] Tim P. Vos (ed.) *Journalism*. Boston: Walter de Gruyter; 391–414. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501500084-020>.
- Tsakona, Villy (2018) “Online Joint Fictionalization.” [In:] Villy Tsakona, Jan Chovanec (eds.) *The Dynamics of Interactional Humour. Creating and Negotiating Humour in Everyday Encounters*. Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins; 237–255.
- UNESCO Heritage Site 2020 “Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe”, Retrieved from: <https://worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/explore-sites/wdpaid/903141>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).
- Winchatz, Michaela, Alexander Kozin (2008) “Comical Hypothetical: Arguing for a

Conversational Phenomenon.” *Discourse Studies* 10 (3); 383–405.

Young, Dannagal Goldthwaite (2008) “The Privileged Role of the Late-Night Joke: Exploring Humor’s Role in Disrupting Argument Scrutiny.” *Media Psychology* 11 (1); 119–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701837073>.

Young, Dannagal Goldthwaite (2020) *Irony and Outrage: The Polarized Landscape of Rage, Fear, and Laughter in the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zekavat, Massih, Tabea Scheel (2023) *Satire, Humor, and Environmental Crises*. Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge.

Ziarul Financiar (2016) “Ikea, cel mai mare proprietar privat de păduri din România, a mai cumpărat 12.800 de hectare de pădure pe plan local” [Ikea, The Largest Private Owner of Forests in Romania, Bought Another 12.800 ha of Local Forest], 17.08.2016. Retrieved from: <https://www.zf.ro/companii/ikea-cel-mai-mare-proprietar-privat-de-paduri-din-romania-a-mai-cumparat-12-800-de-hectare-de-padure-pe-plan-local-15576362>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).

Ziarul Financiar (2018) “Topul celor mai mari proprietari de păduri: statul, IKEA, o companie privată românească și mai mulți investitori străini au 51% din „aurul verde” al României” [Top of the Largest Forest Owners: The State, IKEA, A Private Romanian Company and Several Investors Have 51% of Romania’s “Green Gold”] 07.02.2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.zf.ro/companii/retail-agrobusiness/topul-celor-mai-mari-proprietari-de-paduri-statul-ikea-o-companie-privata-romaneasca-si-mai-multi-investitori-straini-au-51-din-aurul-verde-al-romaniei-16973781>. (Accessed: 19 September 2023).