

A Bridge between Education and the Environment: Greenly Magazine

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Abstract. Greenly Magazine (<http://greenly.ro>), the only online environmental magazine in Romania, emerged as a necessity in the Romanian academic environment, within the Geography Department of the University of Bucharest, in December 2011. Greenly is a unique volunteer-based project, delivering free and immediate access to environment-related scientific content, with new articles being posted on a daily basis. The articles can be grouped into 8 major thematic clusters, covering all environmental issues. The magazine also features a highly interactive platform comprising comments, questions and environmental consultancy and its weekly newsletter provides readers with the latest environmental news. 837 articles were posted online, generating 989 comments, from December 6th 2011, its launch day, to December 6th 2013. Greenly Magazine supported and was involved in more than 30 major national and international environmental projects.

1. Background

In a world where some still naively believe that planet Earth can indefinitely take any sort of abuse and “heal” itself while easily putting up with the indifference and unconsciousness of people, where there is a general belief that we can live happily ever after without worrying about the environment and this “home” – planet Earth which constantly interweaves its destiny with ours, Greenly Magazine (<http://greenly.ro>), the only online environmental magazine in Romania, emerged as a natural necessity, in the Romanian academic environment, within the Geography Department of the University of Bucharest, delivering free and immediate access to environment-related scientific content, with new articles being posted on a daily basis. Greenly is a volunteer-based project and was launched in December 2011.

2. Purpose of project and methods

In Romania, newspapers and magazines started migrating from print to digital in the early 2000s and, to date, no accurate online press record has been kept. In Romania, there are 12 online environmental magazines [1,2]. At a closer look, we see that, in fact, these 12 titles are not online environmental magazines, but environmental news and events websites, sponsored by institutions and/or companies, with or without actual on-going environment-related activities. Most of these sites feature advertising activities.

Given the fact that in Romania there were no online environmental reviews, in December 2011, a

team from the Geography Department of the University of Bucharest, made up of 13 BA, MA and PhD students, coordinated by Senior Lecturer Dr. Mănoiu Valentina-Mariana, decided to create such a magazine.

Greenly is the only online environmental magazine in Romania, a unique volunteer-based project in the Romanian academic milieu delivering free and immediate access to environment-related scientific content, with new articles being posted on a daily basis. Greenly was launched on December 6th 2011.

Greenly's articles provide scientific support for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students interested in environmental issues, as well as for professionals and ecology enthusiasts. For instance, Greenly is a very useful tool for students and faculty members of the Geography Department of the University of Bucharest, as it is for other institutions, allowing access to essential scientific information needed for courses and seminars. Greenly is also used by primary and secondary education students and teachers who want to improve their training.

Also, Greenly articles provide scientific materials for Master and PhD students interested in environmental issues, professionals in this field, or simply ecology enthusiasts. Therefore, Greenly constitutes a bridge between "*environment*" (scientific content, environmental understanding and awareness, means of action for environmental protection, eco-projects, the lifestyle change from "consuming life" to "Eco life", the habit of always thinking about the effects of personal actions on the environment, of what we leave behind us, and also thinking about those who will come after us) and "*education*", regarded as the optimal dissemination solution of all facets of the concept of environment, looking to transmute knowledge into practical actions, to perpetuate eco-habits and eco-lifestyle and to shape up eco-characters.

The Greenly website is modern, dynamic and interactive. The magazine ensures easy access to the desired content through its key pages and categories, which cover all environmental issues: air, water, soil, biodiversity, eco living, energy, waste, ecotourism and protected areas, events and a Wall of Fame (for "green" companies).

The magazine also features a highly interactive platform comprising comments, questions and environmental consultancy and its weekly newsletter provides readers with the latest environmental news.

In addition to the magazine's editors and coordinator, Greenly also accepts articles from other contributors of the University of Bucharest and other institutions.

All team members are volunteers and there is no financial support or sponsorship, contributors being driven by their passion and genuine interest in solving environmental problems and their eagerness to inform the public on all relevant aspects of ecology and the environment.

3. Findings and results

837 articles were posted online, generating 989 comments, from December 6th 2011, its launch day, to December 6th 2013. Up to the same date, the magazine's Facebook page reached 2019 fans and approximately 406.500 views (Fig. 1).

At the RoBlogFest 2012, a competition for Romanian bloggers held in April 2012, Greenly won an honourable *4th place out of 52 participants* in the "Collective blogs" section [3].

The articles featured so far can be grouped into the following major thematic clusters:

- A. Physical and socio-economic geography (in conjunction with various environmental issues);
- B. Ecology and environmental protection;
- C. Science (scientific articles about the environment);
- D. Practical tips (tutorials) on how to protect the environment, to reduce the consumption of our non-renewable resources, waste-recycling, etc;
- E. Nature protection activities;

F. Essays about the environment, nature, education (strong positive emotional impact);

G. Environmental events and legislation;

H. Engaging sections (“Wall of Fame”; “The right way! The wrong way! A campaign for a clean European environment!”; “Guests”).

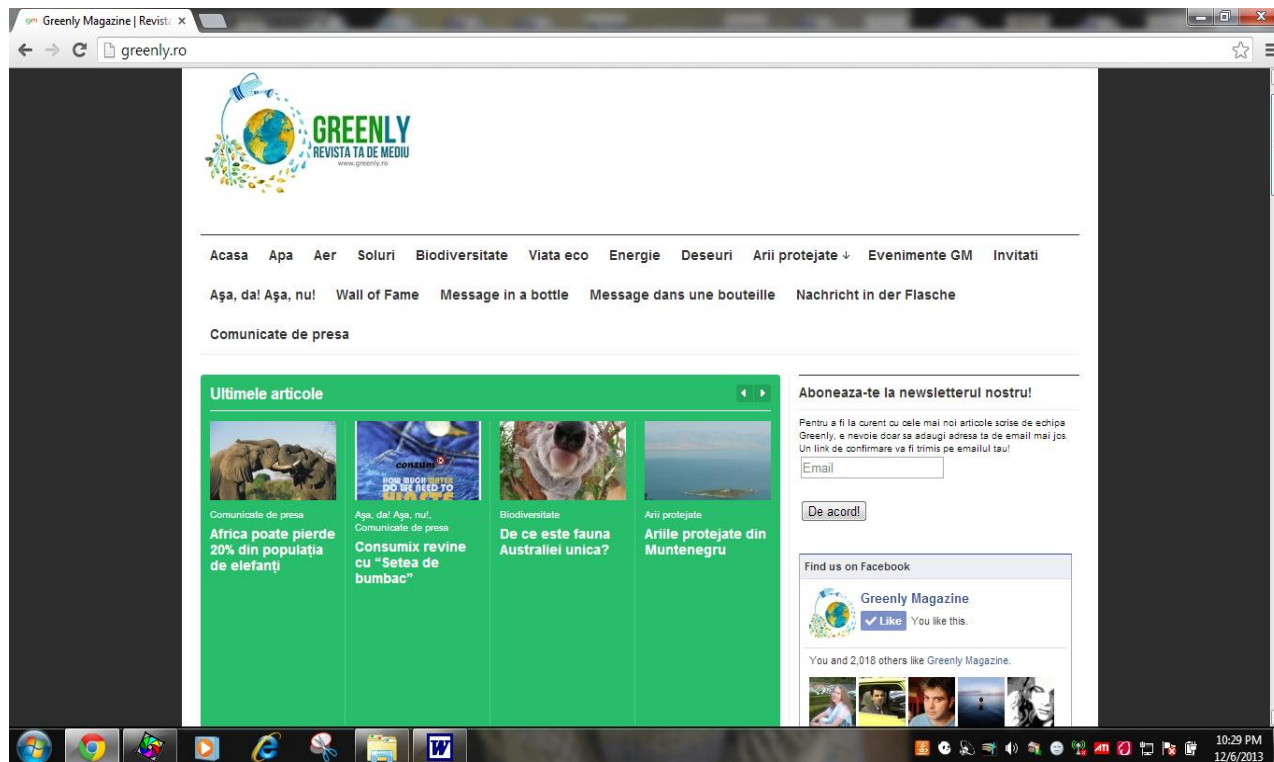


Fig. 1. Greenly's Facebook page

There are several important elements regarding the educational role of these thematic clusters, which can be identifiable through a careful analysis of the site.

a). The most read article to date is called “*One of the biggest environmental disasters in Romania*”/“*Unul din cele mai mari dezastre ecologice din România*” (Fig. 2). Using many dramatic images, the article describes the Sesii Valley disaster, from the former Geamăna village, in Alba County, Transylvania [4]. In this area, there is a pond of tailings resulted from the copper exploitation at Rosia Poieni, the largest of its kind in Europe. The pond completely covered Geamăna village, but the cemetery and church were not relocated. The church tower stands as witness that once upon a time, before the major changes took place, the area was a human settlement. The pond level, however, keeps growing each year and the discharges keep coming in consistently.

The article was meant as a warning sign for what is expected to happen in the Roșia Montană village, located in the same county (due to a cyanide-based gold and silver mining project). The piece was featured in many newspapers and online magazines, blog pages and Facebook walls, and was even used in a campaign for saving Roșia Montană, during the “*aNOther Festival Wien*”, which took place in Wien, Austria, on October 19th 2013.

The popularity of this article offers clear proof of the growing awareness on environmental issues in Romania, the desire to learn more about the activities affecting the environmental quality and also the clear intention to act by all possible means in order to see to it that the Rosia Montana mining project is banned.

b). Amongst Greenly's top 20 most read articles, six of them cover “energy”. The readers have shown interest in finding scientific information about little-known sources of energy (free energy, wind energy, geothermal energy, the energy willow, etc). Moreover, the article entitled “*Free Energy*

– *Clean Certainty for the Future (part III)*” [5], which holds the third spot on the top 20 list, is part of a 4-piece series on “free energy”, which is highly popular with the magazine’s readers.



Fig. 2. Greenly’s all-time top 20 most read articles

The determining factor for the progress of any civilization is given by its available energy sources. Nowadays, our society is overwhelmingly dependent on electricity, atomic energy, oil, gas and coal. These elements are the “engine” of our society but at the same time, paradoxically, also its break. Unfortunately, they are the major cause of pollution, as well as control over the ones who need these energy sources. Is it really worth paying the price for the “benefits” that they bring us? Are there alternatives for cheap and clean energy sources?

The research on unconventional energy sources has mainly been directed towards wind, solar and tidal energy. These sources are presented as non-competitive in relation to conventional ones, given several inconveniences related to each of them.

There is a paradox: the universe is full of energy, but still, we do not know how to capture and use it (or at least, that is what we are told by the media). A single atom stores within tremendous energy and the only way we were able to use it was through nuclear fission, meaning the destruction of the atom. However, many researchers have made major discoveries which are opening the doors to a fabulous energy independence and prosperity for everyone. *Greenly Magazine has had the courage to present these findings and the many ways in which they can change our lives – and it keeps on doing so!*

Although it may sound like “the horn of plenty” taken from the fairytale books, free energy is a proven scientific certainty for more than a century. The concept of free energy is based – primarily – on the zero point energy or vacuum energy. Free energy production is done by creating resonant systems which use the ultimate substrate energy or point zero energy. These systems have already been created and they work; fortunately, there are many directions to be taken in order to obtain free energy. On the down side, they are not available on the open market. What company or government, gaining its profits from oil, would support an engine running on water? As long as energy represents the key for controlling the masses, no government will support the development of independent and

almost free energy sources. Or is this an overstatement? The free energy issues have been recently brought up in the article “*Free Energy in the Alps*” [6], which excited the supporters of this movement by describing the project of Fabrice André from the Alps.

c). Among the 20 most read Greenly articles, there are a few covering the *Chia seeds* (nutritious, energizing, antioxidant), *the Wolf’s-foot Clubmoss* (*Lycopodium clavatum* – healing herb prized for curing tobacco and alcohol dependence), fruit and vegetables as a “health source”, *the Butcher’s Broom* (*Ruscus aculeatus* – a herb that treats cardiovascular diseases) and *the Bathurst Burr* (*Xanthium spinosum* – known as a natural remedy against prostate problems) [7,8,9]. The readers’ choice is not at all surprising, given the fact that healing through natural methods is consistently gaining ground in Romania and everywhere else.

d). One final remark about Greenly’s top 20 articles brings to light the ones talking about water. The articles which aroused the interest of readers described its abnormalities and mysteries, the potable tap water and rainwater usage.

In our recklessness, we treat water as if it is a trivial thing, amorphous and lifeless. Because of this ignorance regarding the approach and use of water, we have managed to endanger our very existence on Earth. The irrational use of synthesis chemical products and their penetration into the water through various ways, has led to the severe alteration of this precious vital resource.

Many scientists have focused on studying the unforeseen characteristics of water and have reached stunning conclusions for a Cartesian thinker, but not for a wise man that recognizes the secret voice of nature. They concluded that water is a “living being”, in the same way that the entire Earth is a huge living organism, seriously ill at this point, due to the behaviour of the human species.

In the article on *water mysteries* [10], there are presented studies and research on water, able to provide efficient and radical solutions for pollution removal and for ensuring energy sources and a clean, healthy and harmonious lifestyle, in full agreement with the wise laws of nature.

Greenly Magazine supported and was involved in *more than 30 major national and international environmental projects*. Here are the most important:

i. During the “A different kind of school” week (April 2-6, 2012), the Greenly team and children from the “Licurici” kindergarten and schools no. 30 and 161 in Bucharest were part of an eco-design project and made musical toys and an Eco Robot Army from waste materials [11].

ii. Greenly supported (through badges and articles) and participated at the *European CSR Lessons*, which took place on May 15th and 16th 2012, in Bucharest. Several multinational companies presented successful European instances of “Corporate Social Responsibility”. Big names such as Coca-Cola HBC Romania, Sonae Sierra, Gaea Greek or Papaellinas presented projects and strategies aiming to mitigate their activities’ environmental impact [12,13].

iii. Greenly was the media partner of the League of Romanian Students Abroad for the major *CAESAR Symposium – “Environment 2030”* project and participated at the event held on June 25th 2012, in Bucharest. The event’s goal was to set up a nationwide project to prevent flooding in Romania by 2030 [14].

iv. Greenly supported the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change in its effort to reduce nitrate pollution of the Danube, on Danube Day, held on June 29th 2012 in Gârla City, Mehedinți County, within the “*Integrated Nutrient Pollution Control*” project, funded by the World Bank and the Romanian Government and implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change [15].

v. Greenly supported the initiative of the Eco-Rom Ambalaje Company, held in the summers of 2012 and 2013 on the Romanian coast, where tourists were encouraged by volunteers to selectively collect packaging waste [16,17].

vi. Greenly presented an educational project of Finnish company UPM, a global leader in cellulose,

paper and timber production, consequently receiving an invitation to visit the company's Romanian branch, in order to better understand its activity. A long-term collaboration is likely to ensue (after a promising start in September 2012), UPM currently being the only addition to Greenly's Wall of Fame for "green" companies [18].

vii. On October 2nd 2012, Greenly launched a contest-campaign called "*The right way! The wrong way!*", in which participants were invited to submit articles on various environmental issues in Romania and worldwide [19]. The first phase was completed on December 1st 2012, the winners being awarded on December 6th 2012, just in time for Greenly to celebrate its first year of existence. The campaign ended on April 22nd 2012, on Earth Day.

viii. Greenly supported and participated at the "*Natura 2000 - the green option for Romania's wellbeing*" National Conference, held on May 21st 2013 by the National Centre for Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, as part of the InfoNatura 2000 awareness raising campaign which set out to reaffirm the economic importance of biodiversity and that of a clean environment [20].

Natura 2000 is a European network of protected natural areas, created in 1992 in order to preserve nature and ensure the long-term availability of the natural resources necessary for socio-economic development. It is based of two EU directives that regulate the sites' selection, designation and protection: Birds Directive (1979) and Habitats Directive (1992). Presently, about 800 plant species are endangered and most European fishery resources fell below the safety limit, which makes Natura 2000 an essential instrument for saving the European natural capital [20].

ix. As a natural consequence of the InfoNatura 2000 awareness raising campaign, in the summer of 2013, for 52 days in a row, Greenly presented 52 *biodiversity-related tips*, supported by images and case studies/examples [21]. This resulted in a public education campaign on biodiversity protection.

x. At the annual Street Delivery project, Greenly submitted an original project called *The Greenly Book for a people's Bucharest* that allowed visitors to answer the following question: *What is quality inhabitancy?* Between June 14th and 16th 2013, visitors were able to write down their ideas and hang them up in *Greenly's Green Idea Tree* (Fig. 3) – the answers will be featured in Greenly's Book for a people's Bucharest. This book will present the perception of Bucharest inhabitants of their own city.



Fig. 3. Greenly's Green Idea Tree

xi. Greenly published numerous articles on the Roşia Montană mining project in Alba County, the dangers of cyanide use in mining and alternatives to cyanide-based exploitation [22]. Greenly is convinced that this project will be stopped and banned.

The project entails setting up the largest gold mine in Europe in order to extract approximately 300 tons of gold and 1600 tons of silver through surface excavation in four 100-acre open pits, which will require the extraction of 220 million tons of ore. The gold extraction technology relies on treating the crushed ore with sodium cyanide solution. The rock waste is to be stored in two dumps of 66 and 70 hectares. The sludge resulting from the gold and silver extraction process will be stored in a pond of tailings (open lake) with a 250 million ton capacity and an estimated area of about 100 ha to 600 ha, behind a 180 meter-high waste rock dam. The project will affect 38% of the Roşia Montană commune's surface and about 1,800 inhabitants who will have to be relocated, and will involve the demolition of 740 houses and several churches and cemeteries.

xii. Our magazine published several articles on the hazards related to shale drilling through the use of fracking technologies [23]. Hydrofracking involves the artificial splitting of rocks through underground explosions in vertical drillings at depths of 3 to 6 km. At a pressure of over 1000 atmospheres, millions of litres of water mixed with chemicals are injected into the ground. This procedure creates fractures in a production well which is dug into reservoir rock formations.

While the procedure was introduced in 1974, the present fractionation technique was first used in the late 1990s in Texas. The energy resulting from the injection of a high-pressure fractionation fluid creates new channels in the rock, increasing the extraction rate and the fossil fuel exploitation efficiency. Fracking supporters argue that one of the main advantages of this process is the significant amount of hydrocarbons hitherto inaccessible that can now be extracted.

The main risks related to hydraulic fractionation technology are: land use modification, land contamination, noise pollution from drilling equipment and transportation, the use of millions of cubic meters of water per drilling at the expense of agriculture (as the land will no longer be irrigated). Also, groundwater and drinking water supplies can be contaminated, earthquakes may be provoked and the process may entail the generation of radioactive substances, methane and other greenhouse gases.

xiii. Greenly supported and participated at the 11th edition of the International Environmental Fair - ECOMEDIU in Arad, Romania, held between October 16th and 18th 2013. This fair focuses on promoting sustainable, innovative, environmentally friendly products, but also on environmental event planning, as was this year's international conference, which tackled "Environmental Practices and Experiences."

xiv. Greenly is involved in WWF's "*Mountain rivers: The Last Chance*" campaign, scheduled for November and December 2013 [24]. Through this public education campaign, WWF intends to raise awareness on the state of mountain rivers in Romania, small hydropower plants (SHP), their impact on mountain river biodiversity, as well as on current alternatives. In Romania, more than 430 SHP projects are in various stages of planning and construction, and over a quarter of them are located in protected areas or in their immediate vicinity. The construction of approximately 300 such SHPs has been approved without any type of pre-planning actions. Our country has already achieved 97% of the EU-set target to ensure a 24% share of renewable resource-based energy. Moreover, the excess energy cannot be stored or transported over long distances for export.

SHPs significantly affect river ecosystems and cause irreversible damage through habitat fragmentation and alteration of the richest aquatic invertebrate fauna in the country. These investments are not featured in any land-use planning reports, even though tens of kilometres of pipelines are located in or along riverbeds. These projects violate European directives and national laws, as they negatively influence riverbed dynamics, affecting debit values which ensure the natural habitat of countless species.

The campaign aims to create public pressure in order to change the SHP construction law by

designating unfit areas for such projects and introducing specific nationwide planning criteria.

xv. Our magazine is also involved in the *Consumix Campaign - The Art of Consumption*, held in November and December 2013 [25]. Consumix is a campaign focusing on today's consumer society, and consists of a series of videos, posters and stories on bad consumption habits and their consequences. The campaign aims to raise public awareness and to change consumption habits.

4. Conclusions

In Romania, similar to the rest of the world, there is a high demand for environmental information coming from all user-categories.

The emergence of such an online environmental magazine was absolutely necessary in Romania, a conclusion supported by the users' answers recorded by the survey posted on the first page of the magazine in the first half of November 2012 [2], as well as by the wide audience of the magazine, whose articles are frequently used by the mass-media.

Readers stressed the importance of the release and existence of an online environmental magazine in Romania, given the insufficient environmental information sources and the high necessity of an easily, free and accessible environmental platform [2].

Greenly readers appreciate the usefulness and quality of the magazine's articles, the relevance of the scientific information sources, as well as the presentation of the scientific information and timeliness of the topics presented. In fact, *most of the articles in the magazine's top 20 are part of the "Science" thematic cluster (scientific articles about the environment)*.

The Greenly team aims at the constant improvement of the scientific content of the magazine. For the near future, the team plans to translate as many articles as possible in international languages, a process which has already started, in order to increase the audience of the magazine [26,27].

Greenly Magazine, a strong educational vector which brings together the public interested in all facets of the "environment" concept, can be described using words such as authenticity, professionalism, scientific quality and the nerve to tackle sensitive scientific topics.

Caring for the environment starts in our minds; the action part comes only afterwards. Therefore, education is the "spark" that ignites the "nature and environment-love flames".

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