

ON URBAN TRADITIONS IN ROMANIA: EVOLUTION AND INVOLUTION

Mariana Borcoman

"Transilvania" University of Braşov

Abstract: Urban traditions have always been a benchmark for social and economic changes. The features of the economic environment have led to specific social classes, to new social categories and, consequently, to major changes in the urban social structure. The city has always lured people on the look for better, more facile or just survival living means or keen on pursuing a career, learning or doing politics. The decrease in the economic power of the Romanian village after 1950 as a result of the nationalization and collectivization of private property led to a massive migration of rural population to urban areas. Massive industrialization has been another phenomenon. Its effects are present to this day and its main impact consisted in the migration of the workforce to industrialized areas.

People's mentality also suffered changes, even though at a slower pace. Rural spirituality was paralleled by the one shaped by the new environment for two generations.

Keywords: rural areas, industrialization, economic migration, social adaptation, assimilation.

I. INTRODUCTION

To research human mentality is to understand the context and the social and political landmarks required for its development. This article focuses on the evolution of human perceptions and on human adaptation and failure in urban environments. Political changes in Romania after WWII led to enforcing new rules that were in no way similar to previous times and experience. The establishment of the *new order* was conducted through the presence of the Soviet troops on Romania's territory, with the political support of the communists brought from Moscow, as well as with the contribution of Romanian citizens. When new socialist values started being promoted, Romanian collective mentality was still anchored into the pre WWII world characterized by consolidated social structures and practices that

ran counter to the new reality. The military repression and terror regime imposed on the population, the nationalization of production means, properties and land led to the migration of a large number of people to cities and to the industrial nodes around the country. The political and religious Romanian elite was annihilated and put to prison for life. All of the above resulted in major changes to collective mentality in the next three – four decades. Romanians' behavior after 1990, that could hardly have been anticipated to take such forms of manifestation, made them even more visible.

Cities are inhabited by a heterogeneous population after 1990 and, even though there is some reminiscence of the old interwar period, the contemporary show is prevalent. Economic and political interests have led to the emergence of a fake elite while a lot of people lost their jobs and young people have chosen to study abroad. Consequently, this article is to approach two major landmarks for studying mentality, namely urban dwelling and leisure time activities.

II. HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

Historically speaking, two decades may generate major changes to a territory's political framework and map and historical time acquires value only through the lenses of a people's descendants. Similarly, human behavior can be influenced by economic and political factors.

The historical evolution of human behavioral patterns in the Romanian urban environment between the XX and XXI centuries is categorized by four periods:

1. The period between 1945 and 1962 characterized by a change in the political regime in Romania, the nationalization of production means and property, and the confiscation of peasants' land along with the establishment of collective agricultural production cooperatives. The rules of a new world were imposed, not necessarily as easily as it may have been meant, by relying on the Soviet armed force and Romanian Internal Security ("Securitate"). The owners of buildings in urban areas had to leave the houses that had been within their family heritage for decades and more often than not left wherever they could. Those resisting the nationalization process were put to prison for life. All buildings that were private property, houses, factories, hospitals, cinemas, would become communist state's property. This plague affected not only the urban areas, but also the rural ones. Peasants were forced to willingly give their land to the state and were thus left

with no living means. That was actually part of the authorities' scheme since driving people poor would make them easier to manipulate. Thus, a large number of people with no means to make a living had to look for poorly paid and underqualified work in the cities and on the state's building sites. Consequently, interwar mentality fades gradually and by force as a result of adaptation to the new environment. Nonetheless, that did incur victims along the way.

2. In the period between 1970 and 1990 Ceausescu's restrictive regime generated the migration and displacement of a large number of rural population to urban areas, especially in the industrialized regions of Romania. The leader's cult took concrete forms: the old architecture of Romania's cities and especially of Bucharest was levelled and megalithic buildings and dwelling places with no architectural personality were raised. People who had lived for generations in villages and fed on their land's products were brought to urban areas and accommodated in blocks of flats. The same dwellings hosted those whose houses in the cities had been demolished. Thus, heterogeneous groups struggling to preserve old values while keeping the pace with a tumultuous world took shape.
3. Between 1990 and 2000 communist industry collapses and Romanians need to face a new type of reality that makes them migrate abroad in search for means of living. After 50 years of having lived under an authoritarian regime, Romanians are faced with the latter's abrupt and bloody crash. Former megalithic industrial buildings decay slowly, while factories are privatized.
4. Between 2001 and 2016 dwellings are raised on the periphery of cities and towns, while in rural areas new houses' architecture is far from traditional Romanian style and heavily influenced by Italian, Spanish or French houses that Romanians saw during their stay for lucrative purposes in these countries. Compared to the communist regime that displaced rural families and brought them to cities, this time Romanian family uprooting occurs outside the country. Consequently, while facing the features of consumerist Western societies and learning foreign languages, Romanians try to preserve their national values as a means of survival.

III. THE HABITAT – A DEFINING FACTOR FOR SOCIAL STATUS

The furnishings of dwellings and of their adjacent facilities provide a lot of information on the dweller's social status, perception system, practices characteristic of the time and place, as well as on the collective mentality. During the interwar period, as a result of the social and ethnic heterogeneous urban environment, several types of dwellings can be identified:

- The dwellings of the bourgeoisie heavily influenced by the latter's social category economic and commercial interests and by European architectural trends. The representatives of this category hire highly fashionable architects of the time for their houses.
- The dwellings of the old aristocratic social group from Romania. The latter's houses were built in the neoclassical architectural style and were part of the family inheritance.
- The houses on the outskirts of cities inhabited by merchants, craftsmen and fiddlers. Their comfort standards were low and the hygiene was precarious.

The houses in the first two categories were sumptuous and positioned in central areas. Moreover, the house was merged with its facilities forming a whole. Thus, besides the dwelling place for the owners (consisting of rooms with their own bathrooms, living room, dance room and library), there were also separate facilities for those who served in the house.

The houses on the outskirts of cities consisted of at most two rooms inhabited by numerous families of four to five children, had no running water, nor any sewage.

The 50s led to major changes to the habitat. Most of the bourgeoisie's and aristocrats' houses were confiscated and became residences of the communist nomenclature and of the new world' people in power. As the 1960s a whole process of changing the outlook of cities begins. Thus, entire neighborhoods along with their churches are demolished to make room for the new blocks of flats. The latter accommodate not only the people whose houses are demolished, but also those brought from various rural areas from across the country to work in factories. The block of flats are a new type of habitat that, as a result of ensuring hygiene conditions, access to minimal recreational facilities lure a highly heterogeneous number of people: people who worked in factories, for the railway, subway or educated people (engineers, teachers, doctors) who worked in the newly built schools and hospitals. The apartments in these blocks of flats

were standard ones: two or three rooms, a bathroom and a balcony. To be accommodated in one of these people had to be assigned either by the place where they worked or by the party. Privacy was annihilated as a result of the multilayered structures of these blocks of flats and cohabitation led and preserved some strange attitudes. One of the drawbacks of these buildings and neighborhoods was the lack of green areas since the new human being, as the latter was depicted by Nicolae Ceaușescu, had to work and live conjointly.

Even long after 1990 Romanians continue to live in these blocks of flats, where the second generation was born, given the more comfortable environment they provide.

Nonetheless, another trend after the 90s becomes visible, namely the so called “ghetto” effect consisting in no longer taking care of these blocks of flats and transforming them in garbage areas. Thus, in some of the blocks build in the 60s, people of low or no income live in highly unhealthy conditions and with no running water or power. What is even worse is that neighborhoods like Ferentari and Zabrauți from București are inhabited by families with a lot of children and the phenomenon is on the increase: “Spatial segregation of the Roma population led to the creation of ghettos in the Romanian urban areas or to the so called second hand areas “[1].

There are also other types of changes that occur within the Romanian habitat after 1990, such as:

- A decrease (of considerable proportions in the rural areas) in the number of Romanian population as a result of people’s migration abroad on the look for employment opportunities;
- The relocation in the urban areas of workers or intellectuals who, until then, had been living for various reasons in the rural areas;
- The migration of the urban population on the outskirts of cities or even in the rural areas given their search for more peaceful and less polluted dwelling places. In most cases, these “hold dual residency given their need to be close to their workplace, to educational establishments where their descendants study, or to cultural establishments such as theatre, cinemas, etc.” [2].
- Building multiple storey houses with balconies and stainless steel in the rural area. The latter’s architecture is completely different from traditional Romanian architecture. The money used for these comes from the gains of those departed abroad and inherently, the architectural styles of

their houses resemble those from the countries where their workplaces are: Italy, Germany, France or UK.

The level of comfort in nowadays' dwellings and their furnishings are important landmarks for the financial status of the owners, but they are not necessarily related to the latter's level of education.

IV. VARIETIES OF URBAN TRADITIONS

Socially speaking, cities are heterogeneous environments. During the interwar period, in Romania, cities gathered several ethnic groups and represented the core of economic and industrial interests. Thus, people working in administration, students and pupils, categories of the bourgeoisie and politicians were some of the social groups to be found in these urban areas. This world was anchored in well-established values; its social layers were well established and benefitted from a variety of entertainment means. Bucharest, the capital city of Romania merged in an exquisite manner Balkan influence with Western eclecticism. The values were supported by political stability and the latter was the result of a Romanian families and owners contributing to the economy of the country. The neighborhoods on the outskirts of Bucharest hosted a variety of people, most of which were struggling to survive, but were nonetheless part of the urban area. The social classes were also visible in rural areas: on the one hand there were the land owners who would support their families by working the land, while there were also poor people who had no land and gained their wages by looking for daily employment with land owners.

In the two centuries that have passed until nowadays, the differences between the rural and urban area evolved or devolved.

The activities undertaken to spend the time represented a landmark for social status and for the mentalities of the time. In this respect, these activities in the urban areas can be grouped as follows:

- a. leisure time activities
- b. community behavior
- c. gender specific leisure time activities

a. LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

Before 1950, there were various manners to spend leisure time in the urban area: afternoon or Sunday afternoon walking on Calea Victoriei or on the high road (by coach or by car), in Herastrau or Cismigiu park (where there was also a band performing). Moreover, attending various shows or theatre performances was a regular activity in Bucharest. The end goal of these was to be seen. In towns, going out at the café, walking in the afternoon, going out for dinner or for tea were other means to spend time.

After 1950, the features of the *new world* imposed new ways of entertainment for a highly heterogeneous population that yet was aspiring for homogeneity, such as popular parties that “represented the only entertainment means especially during the Stalin period“[3]. Besides these, there were also secular parties like harvesting party, rural parties, May 1 and August 23. The events related to family life such as weddings, christening were organized in narrow groups of people and had to be discrete so as not to disturb communist authorities. Thus, the social framework of the urban areas acquires new features since increasingly people come to towns and cities to attend educational programs or to find employment. Elites are gradually replaced by representatives of the working class as directed by the communist party. Youth parties known by the names of *ceaiuri* (*tea parties*) or *bairamuri* (*wing dings*) were also organized in a discrete manner.

After 1990 the collective mentality unleashes. Nonetheless, the latter is still highly anchored into the features of the communist times and it takes Romanians a while to understand the reality imposed by a consumerist society. Even after 1990, cities represent focal points along with the parallel phenomenon of people’s migration abroad in search for a better life. An even sharper social stratification of the population occurs: on the one hand there is the small number of newly enriched people (who are also part of political parties and debates) and the average population on the other hand that struggles to live from one pay check to another.

Leisure time activities also depend on the material resource and educational background of people. Thus, the establishment of exclusivist clubs allowing for various sports to be practiced in exchange for a hefty monthly payment, casinos, and night clubs are to attract an increasing number of people from the urban area in the 90s to the detriment of attending a theatre performance, an opera show or to reading.

These sharp contrasts have become even more obvious after 2010. In this respect, the conclusions of the National Statistics Institute are relevant: “During rest days, the people aged 15 and above allocate 43% of their active life to leisure time activities. Out of the 6.12 hours available for these, 2.40 are spent watching TV. People aged 65 and above spend on their rest days 3.05 hours watching TV “[4]. Thus, another leisure time activity of Romanians is identified, namely watching TV. That is not only the cheapest, but the media itself transforms from a guard of public life into a shaper of opinions and, what is worse, under the pretext of entertainment provides pseudo models to follow that have nothing to do with the real world, nor with Romanians’ moral or ethical principles. Those who run TV trusts would do anything for audience rating and claim that they actually offer people what they require. In this respect, the only means to overcome such a situation is to identify other means to spend time.

Another leisure time activity of young people is represented by social networks. The Facebook network created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2005 inside a student campus has by far exceeded initial estimates and has become an international network. “Those who spend their leisure time in this way are teenagers and adults between 30 and 50 of age and who live in the urban areas. Thus, this type of leisure time activity involves four out of 10 Romanians from the urban area who are more than 15 of age. More than 39% of these people have had a Facebook account for more than five years “[5]. Such an activity, which is not necessarily just an urban one, presents some positive aspects: virtually connection with people that are very far away is made possible, while also having the chance to establish new relations with other people who are not necessarily acquaintances. Nonetheless, this activity incurs a number of negative effects like: spending hours on Facebook dramatically reduces the time that could otherwise be allocated to other leisure time activities; exhibiting private life issues and unconstrained access of people with severe psychological problems, the creation of fake personas that have nothing to do with real life, and

last but not the least, addiction. These negative aspects are signaled by psychologists and are just as negative as watching TV.

Both watching TV and Facebook addiction are nowadays phenomena that more often than not are negative in the long run. However, they are good indicators of the fact that Romanians lack financial resources to spend quality time in other types of leisure time activities.

b. COMMUNITY BEHAVIOR

People's reactions to those nearby and in the street are a measure of education and tolerance. If in the interwar period politeness was the norm (e.g. greeting people in the street or the gentlemen raising their hat when encountering ladies), after 1950 the social structures of cities, people's outfits and behavior also suffer changes. The urban population composition changes and inherently the behaviors of the new world heavily influence street behaviors.

It is worth noting though that despite the migration of the rural population to the cities, the former was heavily indebted to the moral norms of the family of origin, as well as to the norms of their communities. On top of that, the urban areas were also under the strict control of the police. The fear of antisocial behavior consequences was pretty high since incidents in the street would lead to detention. All people had to prove they had a workplace and begging was a crime in the communist regime. Even though the heterogeneity of the population could have allowed for certain flexibility in behavior, the latter was by no means a libertarian one. Children would go first to nursery school, to kindergarten and to school. As soon as adults graduated, they would find a workplace. The workday during the communist regime consisted of six days (Saturday included) and as a result leisure time was quite limited.

The political changes in Romania after 1990 led to a liberalization of human behavior. The influx of population in the urban environment increased and the goal of the new comers was to find their own place by either joining college or getting employed. Thus, the urban layers dramatically change during the 28 years after 1990. The heterogeneous nature of the population is still a fact but the urban mentality suffers changes. The youth who cannot find employment or drop out of school for various reasons make the unemployed class. Some of these become part of gangs and exhibit antisocial behavior and perpetrate terror in various areas of the cities. These

groups are well known for using force, collecting protection taxes, facilitating prostitution and thefts, as well as for drug sales and consumption.

Social freedom is understood at individual level and gives rise to street violence, a phenomenon that is mostly encountered in the urban areas. The new behavior exhibited in the street ranges from speaking very loud on the phone or with discussion counterparts, turning on and listening to songs, to dropping garbage. Society or passersby's reaction is nonexistent and it is not hard to anticipate that it might become dangerous to go out at night or to visit specific urban areas. It is obvious that the period after 1990 led to a change in mentality and the easy access to financial gains along with the lack of respect for others have shaped the perception that there is freedom without rules and even if the latter are in place they can be easily broken. The solutions to these problems are multifold and need to be supported by the education provided within the family and by schools, by the involvement of state via well targeted public policies, by respect to the others. It is only thus that the values that underpin urban behavior can be preserved.

a. GENDER SPECIFIC LEISURE TIME ACTIVITIES

Traditionally, women's duties in Romanian society were related to their household and consisted in:

- Cooking
- Household cleaning
- Fabric and shoes manufacturing
- Gardening and cattle raising
- Taking care of children

Social unity is ensured by families. Traditionally, women took care of the aforementioned activities while men would bring the income necessary to support the family. After the 50s women had a twofold role: taking care of the household and also having a job that secured an income for the family. The communist society would advertise the profile of the hard working and intellectual woman contributing to society goals, as well as the profile of the heroine mother who would give birth to three or four children. Nonetheless, society's and men's respect for women was low. Thus, dividing time between the two major roles was not an easy task and

leisure time activities consisted in watching TV for two hours (the standard time for broadcasting under the communist regime), participating in the events organized by the party or to family events.

After 1990, women's leisure activities have suffered changes. Education becomes a priority and that allows them to fill important positions in corporations, banks, universities, all of which requires a lot of time and effort. As a result, making a family and having a child are decisions postponed for later in life. The search for promotion opportunities and financial gain considerably reduces the leisure time and its related activities. Nonetheless, when such time is available, the activities are pretty varied.

Women's and men's division of leisure time is done by: entertainment and cultural events (theater and opera attendance), book reading, doing open door sports, various hobbies and computer related activities, watching TV shows or listening to radio programs

Some interesting statistics concerning gender differences between men and women in terms of leisure time activities show that: "There are important differences between women and men as far as economic activities are concerned: women work 7.6.hours on average whereas men work 6.5. Consequently, men significantly benefit from leisure time then women by 1.1 hours." [6].

Men always used to ensure the financial resources for their families and that was still a tradition even after 1950. Nonetheless, occupational changes occur after 1990 as far as men are concerned once they begin to fill positions in private companies and in politics. Inherently, changes also occur in terms of their leisure time activities since they begin to take up sports activities and travel.

Nowadays, time management within a family is about scheduling the manner in which the time during religious celebrations, annual and multiannual vacations is to be spent. Such situations can also be treated as entertainment and that is an important component of leisure time activities.

Another manner of spending leisure time is shopping. "Purchases have become a current activity in contemporary society given its *loisir* and need dimensions, which makes shopping places important scripts and landscapes for nowadays' society" [7]. This habit is tightly related to consumption society and the building of malls is centered on the idea of enabling city dwellers to

conduct most of their leisure time activities in places where they can find shops, cinemas, restaurants and cafes. Thus, one place manages to cover for the food and entertainment needs of people.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Cities have always been focal places for masses given the latter's needs for education, employment, better social status, doing politics. Mentalities and perceptions on these can be assessed based on living conditions. Dwellings are important civilization landmarks and, as far as the time periods covered by this article are concerned, they vary from aristocratic family houses, to blocks of flats and to ruins. Habitats and their organization tell us the stories of their dwellers: large spaces and facilities characteristic of aristocrats' dwelling places, blocks of flats of 2-3 room apartments hosting 25-30 families, or nowadays' ghettos and their improper management. Other features of nowadays are the groups of houses raised on the outskirts of towns and cities (as a means to escape from the urban stress) and the sumptuous houses built in villages from the money of people who left to work abroad and that more often than not are not inhabited.

Cities also determine a specific type of behavior that can be structured by layers. One of these is scheduling leisure time (which is done in a different manner depending on age and education level) either for the end of the day, of the week or for several periods of the year. Leisure time activities are: sports, reading, walking, vacation scheduling, computer use, social networks and watching TVs. The second layer is represented by street behavior. The heterogeneous environment made of people who are strangers to one another has led to developing violent behavior (swearing in the street, speaking out loud on the phone, arguing in loud voice, gang behavior). The third layer that allows an analysis of urban habits resides in gender differences. Women are responsible for taking care of their family but also have a career. They spend their leisure time shopping or at the mall, whereas men do sports or travel.

The analysis undertaken in this article allows signaling problems related to some urban behavior characteristic of nowadays. The solutions that can be proposed are self-control and good leisure time management so that stressful situations can be overcome and people may focus on living a healthy life.

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