

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE GLOBALIZATION PHENOMENON ON SMALL-SIZED COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: The present study is the result of a field research carried out in July 2022 in the municipality of Calafat in Dolj county. The findings of the study draw attention to global trends in urbanization. Currently, urbanization is an indicator of social development, and on a global level we find that societies registered on positive development trends also go through an intense process of urban development. This is also due to the fact that the city is at the same time both the result and the engine of the development of a society.

In the case of small communities in Romania, we observe a reverse process, of deurbanization of small urban communities. Forced industrialization from the communist period was followed by the lack of solutions necessary for economic performance. The consultation of statistical data and the correlation with the way the population of small towns perceives the reality allow the estimation that globalization has had a destructive effect on the incompletely developed small towns by focusing only on industrial production and ignoring all the necessities of the urbanization process.

Keywords: urban sociology, urbanization, globalization, development, small town.

INTRODUCTION

Sociological research carried out in Romanian communities highlights a series of complex processes and phenomena, which have turned into vicious circles that are difficult to approach from a reforming perspective. Prioritizing economic and social issues is a difficult and almost impossible task to implement in the short and medium term.

Field research highlights the challenges that the population must overcome. We find that the frequency of crises is so high that there is not enough time to return to the initial states. In fact, the rapid succession of crises becomes the normality that requires the development of social systems of resilience that can react almost simultaneously with the onset of crises. In only 15 years there has been an economic

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crisis due to the financial-banking system, a global medical crisis followed by economic recession and we are currently going through a period of geopolitical turmoil due to the war in Ukraine. The future becomes uncertain and in the next stage we can only talk about challenges that require careful preparation both at the individual level and at the community and governmental level. We reveal the complexity of today's economic crises: economic measures are not enough to limit the effects due to their origin: the COVID-19 pandemic generated significant economic problems, and the recovery was blocked by the overlap with the effects of the military conflict in Ukraine.

National policies lack substance without an international approach to the effects of delocalized events. For example, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic¹ were limited by almost identical measures adopted simultaneously by most of the world's states. Currently, the consequences of the energy resource crisis require international cooperation to reduce the negative impact.

Added to this economic and social context are the development policies that Romanian communities have needed ever since Romania's accession to the European Union. Searches lasted for long periods and were not always successful. At an overview, we find that there are different approaches: funding is cyclical and limited for certain periods of time, it is linked to European and national policies, and it takes place at a different pace than the ability of small communities to access it by assuming the international goals that underpin these fundings. Community development strategies were built according to the level of cultural, community and economic development of small towns, but there was no prioritization capacity in development stages according to European policies.

URBAN COMMUNITIES' COMPLEXITY

The systematic study of cities requires an effort to adapt the theoretical approach to the specifics of the community. Thus, the researchers' inspiration becomes essential in obtaining relevant conclusions.

The analysis of the scientific approaches revealed that there are common elements related to the urbanization process and which have the same foundations: industrialization, the intensification of exchanges and the flourishing of trade, the multiplication of economic and social opportunities. Human history records that there is an intrinsic link between emergence, development and industrialization, and the speed of economic growth has created differences in social development on a global scale.

¹ Gabriel Pricină, *The changing world: economic and social effects of the coronavirus pandemic*, in „Anuarul Institutului de Cercetări Socio-Umane «C.S. Nicolăescu-Ploșor»”, no. XXI/2020, pp. 267–276.

The historical perspective assumed by Max Weber gives each urban community the possibility of evolution as a place of exchange and trade, and development also requires a certain administrative and political autonomy. M. Weber's laborious explanatory effort covered a long period of time and an extensive geographical area, so that he could obtain conclusions relevant to the understanding of cities. Although military capability has played an important role in history, favoring the rise or fall of cities and states, yet the driving force behind political and economic modernization boils down to a single word: *urbanization*. Only this process can generate the bureaucratic and economic complex specific to modern capitalism².

We are currently witnessing the implementation of European and national policies, with desirable objectives but which, however, are mediated by the ability to connect local needs to these policies. A detailed analysis of the cities will reveal that there are differences in administrative capacity even if there is a common European legislative background. Although multiple explanations of administrative performance can be offered, however, Max Weber's vision retains its explanatory power regarding the process of urbanization.

Another author with a significant influence on the understanding of the characteristics of the urban environment is the German sociologist Georg Simmel, who appreciated the cultural novelty of cities due to the habits of the inhabitants and the speed of escape from traditions and the timeless world described by the concept of *Gemeinschaft* advanced by F. Tönnies³. The advantages of technological advances were considered superior to the negative aspects of urbanization. The pressure of urban life was offset by freedom from the "parochialism" and "surveillance" specific to small towns. In the paper "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (published in 1903), Simmel signaled that "the metropolis permits such an intense concentration of capital that the integration of space, time and social actors reaches a hitherto undreamed-of complexity", becoming the first thinker to address what was later called the "time-space compression"⁴. Simmel also identified the factors that led to the emergence of a new society: the speed and intensity of social and economic relations⁵.

Along with the two factors are added the tools necessary for urban relations: at the beginning of the 20th century, we are talking about the appearance of the pocket watch, an accessory that allowed the synchronization of urban activities, just as today the mobile phone is an accessory owned by every person⁶.

² Simon Parker, *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience*, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004, pp. 11–14.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 14–15.

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, 1st edition, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984, *apud*. S. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁵ David Frisby, *Simmel and Science. Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 113 *apud*. S. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁶ S. Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Money is seen not only as a measure of personal wealth, but also as an integrative means. Goods and services can be accumulated, without constraints as in traditional societies, money can ensure the cooperation of different people, from diverse social backgrounds and with heterogeneous concerns who would never cooperate with each other.

In Simmel's opinion, urbanization ensured the expression of individuality and autonomy at the expense of the rigidity of traditional societies, the metropolis providing the function "to provide the arena for this struggle, and its reconciliation"⁷. The risks related to the urban environment presuppose an excessive increase in the spirit of objectivity and rationality, on the one hand and the overexposure of the senses to external stimuli⁸.

Walter Benjamin, another pioneer of the study of urban communities and the process of urbanization, expressed his fascination with modernity and new lifestyles. He found the omnipresence of conflict in urban space, both between capitalists and workers, and in the surface aspects of things, in shop windows or cemetery tombstones⁹. He adopts an anti-historicist position considering that "the past cannot be explained only in terms of the past, since history is always viewed through the perspective of the present"¹⁰.

Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of the mode of production that integrates the results of history into capitalist "subsystems": trade networks, agriculture, institutions, science, law, taxation and justice. This integration is incomplete, it creates the illusion of a system which, however, is imperfect and incoherent, with many contradictions, and the perspective of some holistic characteristics is nevertheless limited by the lack of desired cohesion and homogeneity. Henri Lefebvre adopted a dialectical understanding of urban experiences, influenced by readings in Marx and Engels. It brought class conflict into focus with a spatial dimension expressed both physically and socially and imaginarily. He proved to be a philosopher of hope as he believed that just as revolutions could be achieved in politics and art, so the undesirable consequences of the city divided into social classes could be overcome provided the understanding of urban land beyond commercial value¹¹.

The complexity of the urban environment conditions theoretical approaches, forced to focus predominantly on dimensions limited to the specialization and objectives of researchers. The urban environment study methodology was presented to S. Parker¹² as giving meaning to daily experience. The theory assumes a major effort of abstraction with the aim of reducing the multitude of heterogeneous aspects

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

⁹ S. Parker, *op. cit.*, pp. 15–18.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 19–23.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 2–4.

to the characteristics of interest. Parker exemplifies the usefulness of abstraction by analogy with the schematic representation of London's subway network, made as far back as 1933: although the physical distances between stations and the length of subway routes are not represented to a precise scale, the lack of detail does not affect the understanding of travelers. They can orient themselves according to the desired direction and calculate exactly when they will get off the subway. Each traveler can set his own itinerary, and the schematic map provides the necessary landmarks. In reality, it is known that the distances between stations located on the outskirts of the city are greater than between those in the center, but the criterion adopted by travelers is that of the order of the stations and the moment they arrive at their destination, ignoring the distances between metro stations. Thus, by analogy, the analysis directions of the urban environment are established: the representations of the population according to the significant landmarks of the city, the understanding of the city as a symbolic and narrative space, the preservation of some memories, the formation of a behavioral and clothing style. The models of state intervention in the urban economy and knowledge of technological progress will be retained.

Overall, we find that the descriptive level of theoretical approaches to the urban environment becomes comprehensive through schematization. The differences resulting from the description of the characteristics of each city are blurred by urban development policies that have similar objectives, which transcend the current specifics.

Parker reduces the analysis of cities to four dimension¹³: culture, consumption, conflict and community. By culture are understood the beliefs of the population, together with the built environment, the contents and meanings of communication and traditional cultural productions. Consumption includes both the consumption of goods and services, as well as the exchange and production of goods and services. By conflict are analyzed acts of physical violence, riots, protests and social disorder, to which are added less visible conflicts, such as the struggle for resources, class conflicts and the different interests of several groups. By community are understood the demographic characteristics of the population, size, distribution and analyzes carried out under several aspects. This dimension is complemented by the value dimension of the term community, concentrated in the views of the population related to how people should live in association with each other¹⁴.

Efforts to define the city are dependent on the approach used and often focus only on certain aspects. For example, in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, the city is defined through the prism of the functions performed: "The city is a complex form of human settlement, with variable dimensions and building facilities, usually performing several functions: administrative, industrial, commercial, political and cultural"¹⁵.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, 2009.

Law 351/2001¹⁶ defines the urban locality according to the occupation of the majority of the population “in non-agricultural activities, with a diversified level of endowment and equipment, exerting a constant and significant socioeconomic influence on the surrounding area”. The city includes two components: territorial and demographic-socioeconomic. The increase in economic and socio-political significance elevates cities to the level of municipalities.

Allan Berger¹⁷ defined the city as “an accumulation of population in a limited area, organized in residential areas and aggregated into a residential whole”. The same author also offered a more comprehensive definition: “the city occupies a relatively large space with a high population density, permanently inhabited by heterogeneous individuals and groups of individuals, organized to perform or facilitate the performance of functions”. The Romanian sociologist Ioan Mihăilescu defined the city as follows:

“relatively large demographic volume; the preponderance of industrial activities; the existence of a social division of labor in numerous specialized occupations; social organization based on occupational division and social structure; the institutional, formal regulation of social relations; the low importance of kinship relationships; reduced mutual acquaintance relations; the rationalization of social life”¹⁸.

The conclusions of the theoretical approaches and definitions retained in this article highlight that the cognitive approach involves adapting the theory to urban characteristics. In the case of small urban communities, we find that the current economic and social context aggravates the obstacles in the way of the continuity of the urbanization process, the main condition for maintenance and development. The population is more concerned with the fulfillment of objectives “related to economic needs”¹⁹.

GENERAL ELEMENTS OF URBAN PLANNING

Urban planning requires the assumption of some principles that ensure success: first of all, spending resources on “frivolous” investments, such as speculative commercial real estate, must be avoided; the needs of the community

¹⁶ Law 351/2001, updated, regarding the approval of the National Territorial Development Plan – Section IV Localities Network.

¹⁷ Allan Berger, *The City: Urban communities and their problems*, Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Dubuque, Iowa, 1978, p. 9.

¹⁸ Ioan Mihăilescu, *Sociologie Generală*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing House, 2003, p. 272.

¹⁹ Andreea Mihaela Niță, *Cultural consumption of urban population in today's Romanian society. Comparative study communism – post – communism*, in “Revista de Științe Politice”, no. 33–34, 2012, pp. 68–69.

must be assessed, which will be compared objectively, a prudent long-term spending policy will be assumed, innovative solutions will be sought at the project level and a communication system will be ensured through which citizens can express their preferences²⁰.

The implications of such policies can be positive if the starting point is based on the knowledge that the level of quality of life in a city increases its attractiveness for businessmen and investors. The quality of the infrastructure is also a method of increasing the attractiveness of the city. Capital investments involve matching the needs of the private sector to facilitate the attraction of private investments that will turn into cores of urban renewal and growth. Mistakes in the design of public investments can have negative effects on cities. For example, the oversupply of land for industrial use can make it unusable for years, and the construction of social housing in locations far from jobs and markets has negative socioeconomic implications. Also, long-term investments must be analyzed from the perspective of the positive effects they produce, considering that capital investments involve annual expenses, which are added to the costs of the loans made²¹.

Estimating the costs of investments involves clarifying opinions about the needs of the city and the distribution of investments according to the destination of different areas of the city: work, industrial, commercial, business, residential, rest, leisure, etc. they can be divided into two large areas: the work area and the rest area. Systematization implies the assumption of an “administrative center characterized by monumentality, wide circulation paths, central position near all social factors and an intellectual center that will benefit from a special arrangement – large, comfortable, accessible, soothing space”²². In the same bibliographic source it is mentioned that in both areas the urban spaces must be differentiated according to the destination, so that the whole corresponds to the needs and destinations. In other sources we discover that urbanization is a „complex phenomenon and has had profound influences on the economic, political, social, cultural environment, etc.”²³.

Estimating public investments requires the use of methods such as annual life cycle costs, which zone the priority of public investments according to population density. Calculations made over a 75-year horizon highlight the differences in costs according to population density in different areas of a city: costs are calculated in areas with a low population density (approximately 22 residential units/ha) and with

²⁰ Olga Kaganova, *Guidebook on Capital Investment Planning for Local Governemnts*, Urban Development Series, working Papers, World Bank, October 2011, no 13, p. 4.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

²² Cincinat Sfințescu, *Pentru București. Noi studii urbanistice. Delimitări, zonificare, circulație, estetică*, Institute of Graphic Arts “Bucovina”, 1933, pp. 9–10, 30–41, *apud* Dana Cornelia Nițulescu, *Indicatori ai dezvoltării urbanei*, in “Calitatea Vieții”, XII, no. 1–4, 2000, p. 71.

²³ Andreea Mihaela Niță, Cristina Ilie Goga, *Cultural values of urban population. Case study: Cultural Values of the Romanians in the south-West Oltenia, South-Walachia and West*, in “Sociology and Social Work Review”, no. 1/2017, p. 9.

a high density of the population (approximately 272 residential units/ha). Areas with a higher density were found to have lower initial and annual life cycle costs than areas with a lower density of residential units²⁴. Although percentage differences may differ by country, region or funding abundance, we note that basic infrastructure costs nearly 200% less annually in areas with higher density.

The funding sources used to secure some public investments can be²⁵:

- ✓ Government transfers (grants), directed in particular to roads and water supply;

- ✓ The local budget, consisting of amounts not spent in previous years, local taxes and fees, payments made by developers and investors, fees paid by users of goods and services, including those related to the maintenance of existing infrastructure;

- ✓ Loans, made through cooperation with national and international financial-banking institutions, conditional, however, on the acceptability of citizens;

- ✓ Local balance sheet of land and property of local authorities. In the situation of the countries that went through the periods of planned economies, we reached the situation of some communities “rich in land but poor in cash”. The way in which this potential can be used must be calculated according to the costs of the planned investments, their life cycles and with caution in the use of public lands: the sale turns them into depleted resources, so a balance must be made between the community profit and the depletion of some resources;

- ✓ International grants obtained through the contributions of international institutions, such as the European Union;

- ✓ Contribution of the private sector, through public-private partnerships.

PERCEPTION OF URBAN PHENOMENA BY THE POPULATION. CASE STUDY: CALAFAT MUNICIPALITY

From the point of view of the population with a stable domicile, the municipality of Calafat is in fourth place with a number of 17,125 inhabitants on January 1, 2022, after the county seat city, Craiova, which registered 293,311 inhabitants, Băilești with 18,885 inhabitants and Filiași with 17741 inhabitants²⁶.

²⁴ Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation (CMHC), <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research> (website visited on 10.09.2022).

²⁵ O. Kaganova, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–22.

²⁶ National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online Database, <http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table- data processing> (site consulted on 10.09.2022).

The general characteristics of the city indicate a cumulative effect of phenomena with a negative influence on the city: from a demographic point of view, the population of the city decreased by 19.39% between the years 1992 and 2021, and in the last ten statistically recorded years, the population decreased by 9.76%. These population declines suggest that the city is unattractive, being affected by negative values of natural balances and migration. These demographic trends can be explained by the economic regression of the city, indicated by the 25.18% reduction in the number of employees between 2011-2020²⁷. The decrease in unemployment, the simultaneous decrease in the active population and the number of employees only indicate statistical changes in the share of people looking for a job or solutions to ensure a minimum standard of quality of life. Emigration appears as a solution for many young people considering that both the county and the region offer few opportunities from an economic point of view. The number of employees increased between 2020-2012 only in the municipality of Craiova by 20.26% and the municipality of Băilești by 11.37%.

This context can be found in the opinions expressed by the people who participated in the population consultation in July 2022. The urban landmarks are placed in the city's past, which involves two or three periods defined, from an urban point of view, in 1852 when the first plan appeared of street organization as part of the act of emancipation of the city, followed by the installation of communism and the year 1989, a period that continues today.

In the first stage we are witnessing an effort to systematize following the development of the small fishing village constituted as an urban community around port and commercial activities. The basic activities were complemented by the emergence of socio-economic activities that complemented the specific dimensions of an urban community: consumption and community, followed by the effort to control conflicts through the effort of urban systematization and the development of an architecturally remarkable center, which it provided a plus for cultural needs.

The communist period meant a stage of accelerated industrialization of the city, connected at that time to the national economic system. The city's population grew, and from the point of view of occupational attractiveness, Calafat was becoming a preferred destination for the population of the neighboring areas. The production of goods and merchandise has been favored, but we believe that the aspects related to housing and the perpetuation of a value system necessary to preserve the urban specificity have been neglected. The attraction of the rural population in industrial economic activities was not doubled by the maintenance of the urban characteristics of the population. Urban dynamics were characterized by rhythms specific to small communities.

The analysis of the answers collected from the population highlighted that the first factor that influences the perception of the population and, implicitly, the

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

answers given, is considered the social status of the respondents. Occupation and income level filter the opinions of citizens, and the prioritization of interests are correlated with the respondents' quality of life. The tendency is to value the city positively according to the superior quality of the quality of life.

In correlation with the quality of life factor, the problems that directly affect citizens and which are ranked from personal interests to community interests are specified: the quality of the streets and sidewalks on the street of residence, the supply of natural gas, the quality of the running water supply, the cleanliness of the city. But the lack of jobs occurs frequently and can be understood as a fundamental problem of the community.

The third factor that explains the population's perception is highlighted by opinions related to the possibility of increasing the quality of community and urban life: the population's recommendations are oriented towards investments in infrastructure and the appearance of the city, elements that, as we have seen above, influence the level of attractiveness of the city.

The fourth factor suggests a high level of subjectivity, being the result of assessments related to the geographical location, the tourist potential and the perspective of historical events (the War of Independence between the years 1877-1878).

The majority of respondents appreciated that Calafat municipality is poorly developed or not developed at all (54.8% in total), which provides a relevant picture of the current context. The current evolution of the city is stagnant, as felt by 53.6% of respondents, to which are added 22.8% respondents who mentioned that the city is in a period of regression.

The feeling of underdevelopment and stagnation or regression are elements that signal the slowdown or even blocking of the urbanization process, stopped or even blocked by the inefficiency of local administration after 1990.

CONCLUSIONS

By comparison with the theoretical references included in this article, we find that after 1990 the municipality of Calafat did not benefit from a local administrative strategy connected with modern urban development models. The life of the community unfolded chaotically, without meaning and without subsuming the public management to concrete objectives.

In the previous sections we highlighted that urbanization is a condition of social development and the increase of the quality of life. In the case of the present community, it can be seen that the negative aspects of urban life do not disappear with the slowdown or even stagnation of the urbanization process. Moreover, they multiply and generate increasing undesirable effects. Urban regression is actually a consequence of the interruption of the urbanization process which should have been the main objective of the public administration.

The answers collected highlight that the logic of the population, although influenced by subjective attitudes, retains elements of objectivity resulting from the public mind: the strong points of the community are the geographical position, the port, the civic center, Bascov beach, museums and monuments of the city. The weak points are unpaved streets and roads, lack of jobs, lack and insufficiency of building infrastructure, lack of sanitation and community dogs. The reasons why the community has stagnated are poor public management, lack of jobs, lack of investors, economic decline and population emigration. From this point of view, we find that the perception of the population and the opinions expressed are coherent at the collective level, however, the stages of resuming development trends require the qualified effort of development specialists, which, it seems, must come from outside the community, as well as well as the financial flows necessary to resume the positive meanings of urbanization.

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