

THE INFLUENCE OF URBAN PROCESSES ON THE COMMUNITY SPIRIT IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CRAIOVA

Gabriel Nicolae PRICINĂ*

ORCID: 0000-0003-4494-3361

Abstract: The present article results from the data processing of a study carried out in July 2023 in the Municipality of Craiova, the largest city in the Oltenia region. The study was scheduled as a stage in the preparation of a new General Urban Plan where the population consultation stage has the role of providing the local mayors with a set of information necessary for prioritizing the city's problems from the point of view of the population's expectations. The most appropriate research method was the sociological survey, through which opinions were collected by questioning 732 inhabitants on topics related to the degree of coverage of urban functions specific to a modern urban community, how they appreciate modern urban processes and comparative influences.

The main problem that is at the basis of such a study is that of harmonizing technical approaches, originating from fields of activity that assume knowledge from the field of exact sciences (architecture, engineering) and approaches that assume a background from the field of social sciences (sociology, anthropology, psychology). To a large extent, Romanian urban and rural communities have benefited from development programs segmented according to financing flows, prioritizing investments in favor of material ones, against the background of indifference to the preferences and expectations of the population.

The aim of this research was to mitigate the distance between institutional and community strategies with the aim of integrating community spirit into local development policies.

The analysis carried out proved that investments in the development of the city increased the degree of appreciation of the population and fueled value principles that lead to the overvaluation of some areas and the disinvestment of other areas, ignoring some synthetic indicators that contribute to the formation of realistic opinions.

Keywords: urban sociology, communities, development policies, European Agenda, urban regeneration.

* Senior Lecturer, PhD., Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Craiova; E-mail: gabrielpricină@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In the context of membership in the E.U. strategies based on the involvement of local actors are needed in order to ensure a harmonious development of urban communities. Internationally registered good practice models highlight a constant concern for connecting public investments with the population's expectations. Also, where the development principles are less known to the general public, from the point of view of the necessary procedures, a period of understanding and internalization of the goals of the actions to be implemented is ensured.

The risks of unannounced investments create the public feeling of an artificial intervention, not based on the public interest. Moreover, in numerous cases, exemplified by the best practice models, urban regeneration strategies were carried out by involving the population of the targeted areas. The population's participation in the measures to implement urban regeneration policies is conditioned precisely by the involvement of citizens as part of the modernization process.

In this sense, studying the opinions of the population has a double utility: on the one hand, it ensures the collection of useful data in the prioritization of investments intended for the development and revitalization of cities, and on the other hand, it opens the way between the community and the public authorities. The specific questions have the role of causing the respondents to reflect on issues they were not aware of, regarding aspects related to sustainability, the integration of spatial, economic, social and environmental components. The participation of citizens in the implementation of these measures, at least from the point of view of protecting and conserving investments, planning financial resources, as well as operational planning support the sense of community.

The questions of the questionnaire are aimed at obtaining general and particular information, regarding aspects related to the degradation of the built space, the quality of housing, the quality of the environment, urban services, etc. Also, the attitude towards urban processes highlights what citizens observe in their own city and the probability of valuing certain aspects that cannot be noticed from a one-dimensional view.

The Greek architect Doxiadis¹ emphasized the risks assumed by the preferences to imitate certain solutions, visible in other urban communities and to ignore the principles of “general validity to specific features of nature”. Construction and development efforts are plagued by a tendency to encompass only certain aspects of a city, usually limited to a smaller number of dimensions than their entirety. The same author specifies that attention is focused on shelters, networks and nature, but people and society are lost sight of, dimensions that generate economic, social, administrative, technological and cultural aspects. Thus,

¹ Constantinos A. Doxiadis, *Islamabad. The Creation of a New Capital*, in “The Town Planning Review”, v. 36, no 1, April 1965, p. 1.

for practical reasons and the need to include in the analysis the essential aspects of each dimension, depending on how certain aspects are prioritized, Doxiadis proposes a direction of action in which the activities answer the following questions: *Why? Where? How? What?*².

By analogy we can ask why a certain investment in the urban space is needed, where it should be done to obtain the most important positive effects, how it should be done and what should be done³. In the case of the first question, economic and social aspects must be assumed, where the economic aspects refer to the costs of land and the interests of land owners, to which are added the dynamics of prices under the conditions of public investments. From a social point of view, the existing social groups in the intervention area and how citizens are affected by the urban processes thus generated by such an investment become important. Technological and cultural aspects are important in terms of how people value certain principles. Modernization is not always appreciated, and changes are often accepted only to maintain aspects of the past valued by citizens. For example, it is observed how complicated the implementation of modern communication technologies has become against the background of low computer literacy of the population. In the case of the Municipality of Craiova, the characteristics associated with the largest city in the Oltenia region must be maintained, identifying the functions necessary for the city, the county, and the region.

The place where the interventions will be carried out is a subject of analysis of the following aspects: the legal situation of the land, the need for investments, the number of beneficiaries and the influence on the future development of the area. We specify that in this situation the opinions of the citizens will be influenced by reporting on the history of residential quality in each area.

In order to identify the best way of how to do it, Doxiadis recommends combining the existing possibilities, in the case of the city of Craiova, it is necessary to analyze housing conditions, transport networks, available land, the tendency of citizens to open or close compared to the citizens of other neighborhoods. What needs to be done requires an anticipated calculation of the effects: each social function correlates with the others and the opinions of the population will be influenced by the ranking of the investments made.

Starting from the considerations extracted from the vision of C. Doxiadis, we consider that the material parts of public investments are mostly considered, limiting the analysis related to what the Greek architect also remarked: society and the population are frequently ignored. In this sense, based on the study carried out, we will focus our analysis on explaining the situations in which community feeling is influenced by investments in the development of community functions, the perception of the dynamics of urban processes and the characteristics related to housing and the perception of the area of residence.

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 6–9.

The conclusions resulting from the data analysis will have the role of an x-ray of the moment, generating information needed in the possible regeneration, renovation, or urban development strategies, whether the community feeling is treated as a principle or only as part of a more complex urban development strategy, based on the principles of equity.

1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNITY FEELING

Urban space research highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach to unravel the relevant aspects of complex human communities. The difficulty of cognitive endeavors results from the interdependent relationships that develop in the case of these complex organisms.

Community sentiment is a diffuse form of reward felt by community members that has no specific functions⁴. Manifestations of the community spirit are found in the positive appreciation of the quality of life and the efforts made to improve conditions in the urban space. The degree of civilization ensured by the intensity of the community feeling is a condition of the orientation towards performance from the point of view of institutions and citizens. From a systemic perspective⁵ we appreciate that community feeling ensures, through a set of integrative norms and values, a sufficient level of psychological identification of community members, a voluntary adherence to norms and rules that facilitate and support the common existence of many people in a limited geographical area. However, community feeling is dependent on the degree of fulfillment of urban functions, identified by A. Berger⁶. The six functions are theoretically defined, but they can be multiplied, differentiated, or simplified depending on the type of urban community analyzed. Thus, we can understand the sense of community from the perspective of the degree of coverage with urban functions. Urban functions refer to integrative norms, the generation and maintenance of social solidarity, the provision of goods and services needed by community members, the socialization possibilities of community members, the ability to control the behavior of community members, and the provision of locations where community members can interact and support each other⁷.

The importance of community functions is very important in the evolutionary dynamics of a community, and the influence on community spirit is only one part

⁴ Roland Warren, *The Community in America*, 2 Ed., Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1972, pp. 138–142.

⁵ Talcott Parsons, *The Principal Structures of Community*, in “Structure and Process in Modern Society”, by Talcott Parsons, New York: Free Press, 1960, p. 250.

⁶ Allan S. Berger, *The City- urban communities and their problems*, Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, Dubuque, Iowa, 1978, pp. 30–31.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

of a whole. R. Warren warned that intra-community relations are horizontal, and those with the wider society are vertical and require interdependent relations. But the ability of the community to fulfill its functions is dependent on the stimulation of horizontal links, this being the only possibility to avoid “alienation and hopelessness in the life of the city”⁸.

The theoretical references regarding social functions have a guiding role with the development of cities worldwide and with the specifics of each geographical area. Currently we appreciate that we can talk about general principles that define a certain strategy, but which become insufficient by ignoring the specifics of each society.

For example, in the case of Europe, cities are real economic engines, with direct influences on national economies, while in underdeveloped or developing societies we can talk about the social role that large metropolises offer to the poor population, even in adverse conditions.

In the case of Romanian society⁹, we can talk about a special feature of the urban environment: if all over the world the population density in cities increases, either through natural increase or through immigration, in the case of many Romanian cities we observe that the demographic decline is cumulative with the economic decline. Thus, we are dealing with cities that develop slowly from an economic point of view, affected by a high dynamic of real estate investments, which congest central spaces, reduce the areas of green spaces, congest central areas and those valued as quality residential areas. The decrease of the urban population, due to the negative natural increase and emigration, can be considered a transitional period that can be used for the purpose of urban regeneration and limiting the effects of urban processes that contribute to the decrease of the quality of life.

2. EUROPEAN AGENDA

Supporting urban development requires a consistent policy at the level of the European Union, by providing strategic principles and the funding necessary for their implementation. The analysis of the European documents highlights the continuity of the efforts dedicated to the policies intended for the European urban environment.

⁸ R. Warren, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

⁹ Mihaela Bărbieru, *With or Without Regionalization? Realities, Challenges and Prospects in a European Union of the Regions*, in “Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques”, no. 47/2015, pp. 72–83; Idem, *Politica de dezvoltare regională a Olteniei după integrarea în UE a României*, in Anca Ceașescu, Ileana Cioarec, Georgeta Ghionea (coord.), *Comunități umane, modernizare și urbanizare în sud-vestul României*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, 2021, pp. 262–272.

A first step was taken already in 2007, under the German presidency through the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, where the following principles were established:¹⁰

Recommendation:

1. Priority use of integrated urban development policies
 - 1.1. Creating and ensuring high quality public spaces
 - 1.2. Modernizing infrastructure and improving energy efficiency
 - 1.3. Proactive innovation and education policies
2. Paying special attention to deprived neighborhoods in the context of the city as a whole
 - 2.1. Prioritizing strategies to improve the environment
 - 2.2. Strengthening the local economy and local labor market policies
 - 2.3. Proactive education and training policies for children and young people
 - 2.4. Promoting efficient and accessible urban transport

This stage was continued in 2010 with the Toledo Declaration¹¹, which aims to implement the Europe 2020 Strategy by achieving a smarter, more sustainable, and socially inclusive urban environment, the continuation of the Marseille process regarding the implementation of the European reference framework for sustainable cities and to strengthen the European Urban Agenda in the future.

In 2016, efforts were continued through the Pact of Amsterdam¹², made under the presidency of the Netherlands. It represents a new multi-level way of working for urban policy and practice, promoting cooperation between Member States, cities, the European Commission, and other stakeholders.

The priority themes established are:

1. Inclusion of migrants and refugees
2. Air quality
3. Urban poverty
4. Housing
5. Circular economy
6. Jobs and skills in the local economy
7. Climate adaptation, including green infrastructure solutions
8. Energy transition
9. Sustainable land use and implementation of nature-based solutions

¹⁰ For more details, see https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/12/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good, website consulted on 15.07.2023

¹¹ See <https://eukn.eu/>, website consulted on 15.07.2023

¹² For details, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/pact-of-amsterdam.pdf

10. Urban mobility
11. Digital transition
12. Innovative and responsible public procurement

In 2019, a new step was taken in the implementation of European policies dedicated to the development of the urban environment. Declaration from Bucharest¹³ was dedicated to analyzing the progress, opportunities, and challenges of urban development policies. As a result, the principles of the Pact of Amsterdam, the Territorial Agenda of the EU and the New Leipzig Charter were connected.

It was also emphasized the decisive role that local authorities have in the implementation of urban development policies as levels of governance close to citizens. The three pillars: “better regulation, better financing and better knowledge” have proven to be the right approach in EU policy-making regarding the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda.

In 2020, the New Leipzig Charter was drawn up¹⁴ emphasizing the transformative power of cities for the common good, focusing on their potential to be fair, green and productive spaces. The need for harmonized coordination of implemented measures, at all spatial levels to ensure coherence and avoid inefficiency, is emphasized. Policy design involves the approach at the level of neighborhoods, local authorities and functional areas.

In 2021, through the Ljubljana Pact¹⁵ the commitment to implement the urban agenda in the EU was renewed, reaffirming the principles of the Pact of Amsterdam. From 2023, the urban development agenda is placed under the coordination of the presidency of the Council of the EU¹⁶.

Analyzing the guidelines recommended and supported at the EU level, we find that the most important directions of action, from the point of view of their repeatability, are green spaces, air quality, environmental protection, organizing quality public spaces, creating jobs, facilitating urban facilities, implementing smart policies, developing the social characteristics of cities, ensuring quality and accessible public transport, developing education and training policies for children and young people, support for the circular economy.

3. COMMUNITY FEELING IN THE CITY OF CRAIOVA

Starting from the functions proposed by A. Berger, we found that the idea of solidarity between citizens is poorly perceived at the general level of the city. The

¹³ See <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda-eu/bucharest-declaration.html>

¹⁴ For more details, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/12/12-08-2020-new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good

¹⁵ For details, see <https://eurocities.eu/latest/urban-agenda-2-0-the-ljubljana-agreement/>

¹⁶ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/>

results of the study showed that there are several explanatory factors of the formation of the feeling of belonging to the community, this being a composite factor.

The research method used to fulfill the objectives of the study was the sociological survey carried out in seven of the nine areas of the Municipality of Craiova. The distribution of interview operators was made according to the problems identified in each researched area.

Data processing highlighted that the solidarity of citizens is perceived at a low level by 50.1% of citizens. The analysis of the collected statistical data involves the research of associations and correlations that can provide a concrete picture of the logic of the constitution of the community feeling.

A first significant correlation is the one between the appreciation of citizens' solidarity with the quality of people in the neighborhood ($r=0.73$, $df=696$, $p<0.001$). This correlation is followed by a set of three average correlations: the quality of housing ($r=0.47$, $df=698$, $p<0.001$), the safety of citizens' assets ($r=0.47$, $df=687$, $p<0.001$), citizen safety ($r=0.46$, $df=693$, $p<0.001$).

The intensity of the correlations decreases to a weak level with the following assessments: the quality of general schools and high schools ($r=0.38$, $df=681$, $p<0.001$), the cleanliness of the neighborhood ($r=0.38$, $df=691$, $p<0.001$), the quality of places of socialization ($r=0.36$, $df=681$, $p<0.001$), environmental quality ($r=0.37$, $df=697$, $p<0.001$), arrangement of green spaces ($r=0.36$, $df=638$, $p<0.001$), the sufficiency of playgrounds for children ($r=0.31$, $df=678$, $p<0.001$), the quality of drinking water ($r=0.31$, $df=693$, $p<0.001$), the sufficiency of green spaces ($r=0.31$, $df=690$, $p<0.001$), the sufficiency of parking spaces ($r=0.31$, $df=688$, $p<0.001$), the possibility of buying food ($r=0.29$, $df=699$, $p<0.001$), access to medical services ($r=0.29$, $df=696$, $p<0.001$), quality of playgrounds ($r=0.28$, $df=680$, $p<0.001$), quality of parks ($r=0.28$, $df=687$, $p<0.001$), the possibility of transport in city areas ($r=0.27$, $df=695$, $p<0.001$), the quality of public transport ($r=0.24$, $df=692$, $p<0.001$).

The associations found provide an x-ray of the prevailing logic. In order to identify the meaning of these associations, we resorted to the factor analysis of the data that contribute to the opinions related to the sense of community. The variants that influence the pattern of opinions expressed by the respondents has an explanatory power of 77.39% and consists of four factors, grouped according to the community functions proposed by A. Berger:

- The first factor has an explanatory power of 32.53% and refers to the quality and sufficiency of socializing spaces;
- The second factor has an explanatory power of 20.13% and refers to the sense of security noted by citizens;
- The third factor has an explanatory power of 13.20% and refers to services for the elderly
- The fourth factor has an explanatory power of 11.53% and refers to the congestion in the area.

The extracted factors also suggest the main stages that could contribute to the increase of community feeling, expressed by the feeling of solidarity between individuals. We deduce that this feeling is dependent on the possibility of citizens to interact with each other, to walk their children in green spaces designed to appropriate quality standards, to ensure the control of the behavior of community members, especially young people who tend to constitute in gangs, to ensure a space and services intended for people of the third age. Completing this set of services with the provision of areas free of congestion is a guarantee of the success of an urban regeneration strategy.

The results of this study have limited validity due to the socio-economic phenomena that influence social life at national and local levels. Economic and political crises, electoral polls, public controversies can influence the change of opinions observed at this moment, which suggests the repetition of such research at certain time intervals.

CONCLUSIONS

The method of this study represents only an evaluation direction in order to establish an effective strategy for the development of an urban community. From a statistical point of view, we specify that the above data assume the changes in the correlated data as follows: the change by one unit in the values of each factor contributes an increase equal to the explanatory power. For example, the establishment of quality green spaces in the community will influence opinions related to community spirit by 32.53%. The repeatability of such research will allow the identification of factors that contribute to the growth of community feeling and the provision of a civilized urban life. Also, quantifying the dynamics of the population's opinions can reveal the area not covered by the explanatory power of the factors, given the complex dynamics of social processes.

The results of such a study contribute to the understanding of current priorities, from the point of view of the population, favoring coherent decisions on the part of the public administration. The Romanian experience highlighted situations in which public investments did not contribute to strengthening the community feeling considering the lack of connection with the community.

The urban processes carried out in recent years in the Municipality of Craiova have determined the appearance of some phenomena perceived negatively by the citizens, considering the decrease in the areas of green spaces, the number of playgrounds for children, the realization of real estate investments that have contributed to the agglomeration of certain areas of the city and increasing the degree of insecurity of the population.

In conclusion, we find that limiting the possibilities of interaction between community members contributes to weakening the sense of belonging and psychological identification of citizens in the community. We believe that the attractiveness of a city is conditioned by both material and social aspects.

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