

ANALYSIS OF THE RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY FROM THE URBAN SPACE IN THE SUBCARPATHIANS' AREA BORDERED BY OLT AND JIU RIVERS DURING THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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Résumé: *L'analyse de la mobilité résidentielle de l'espace urbain du secteur souscarpatique bordé par les rivières Olt et Jiu, à travers la période de transition.* La présente étude synthétise les résultats d'une méta-analyse des données obtenues antérieurement (données statistiques, données d'enquêtes conformes au questionnaire et aux interviews demi-structurées, à l'analyse de contenu de la presse locale pendant la période de transition, à l'observation sur le terrain etc.) le long d'une recherche de géographie sociale sur les Sous-Carpathes entre Olt et Jiu – dont les résultats ont provoqué aussi l'idée de l'actuelle intervention – afin de poursuivre «des sorties» de l'urbain étudié, déterminées par la mobilité sociale (ascendante ou descendante) pendant la période de transition. Les résultats ont mis en évidence le fait que la migration contrainte par les causes matérielles avait été en grand consommée dans la première décennie de la période de transition et elle s'était produite en relais ou en cascade (du côté de l'urbain résidence de département vers les petites villes soumises d'une manière forcée à l'industrialisation et de celles-ci dans le rural profond/et d'origine) et la migration déterminée par l'enrichissement s'était généralement déroulé à partir de la seconde décennie, après une période de cumulation du capital.

Mots-clés: migration résidentielle, migration contrainte, transition, mobilité sociale.

1. Intent, theoretical and methodological elements

While tracing the circular aspect of the segregation and agglutination of the people with low income in certain urban areas, as well as the evolution of the dwelling spaces' number in relation to the socially determined residential mobility, within a social geography study of the Subcarpathians' area bordered by Olt and Jiu rivers, the idea of tracing the "exits" from the urban space under scrutiny which are determined by the social mobility (increasing or decreasing) during the period of transition, has emerged. The object of this paper is the result of this meta-analysis of the previously gathered field data (the statistic data, the data obtained through an enquiry based on questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, content analysis of the local press during the transition period, field observation etc.).

The reasons for the residential egressions from the urban spaces which occur at the base of the social pyramid are the congregation, segregation and social isolation which determine the diminution of the chances of later finding a job for the individuals with limited education and professional abilities – taken into account by the *Theory of Spatial Hysteresis* (see also Gaschet și Gaussier, 2004b) in addition to the elements belonging to another influential theory in the field – the *Spatial mismatch hypothesis* (Kain, 1968 quoted in Gaschet și Gaussier, 2004) with later development by Gaschet and Gaussier (2004a).

In order to understand the residential behaviour within the urban area for the transition years – a consequence of the pauperization of the population from some of the urban workers' districts (found mostly on the outskirts or adjacent to the industrial platforms) and consisting of a re-migration towards the rural areas of origin (mainly during the first decade of the transition

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period) – but also in order to comprehend the process of filtering and deterioration it has been subjected to, in as much as the residential stock is concerned, the specific aspects of how fragments of certain Romanian urban spaces have formed – especially from the 1960's to the 1980's – must be taken into consideration, as they are the result of, or have developed due to the rural-urban migration during the period of forced industrialization. Thus, in the urban context of the Subcarpathians we have studied, the peripheral districts with apartment buildings have been and are to the present day (although on a smaller scale), the first place an individual migrating from the rural, towards the urban space will come to, as well as the least developed residential space designed for the working-class in the communist period which had been centred on workers' districts (the large residential habitats).

Understanding the physical deterioration of the dwelling places and of the socio-economic status of those living in the workers' districts is closely related to understanding their background and implicitly that of the workers' quarters they have built (plastically signalled in the area under study, by Cepoi and Diaconescu, 1999). The dynamics within and from the urban space during the transition period continues the rural-urban migration process of the 1966-1989 period (a process generally repeated on the same pattern in numerous places in Romania) – it has been synthetically and comprehensively captured for a different segment of the Romanian space, namely the Bistriței Hills), by Benedek (1999). However, this evolution varies according to the way in which the economical industrial restructuring period, pertaining to the transition period in which takes place, is endured: it continues in the physical urban space or it involves a loop of the return to the rural one. Furthermore, the study of the impact the economical reform had on the small Romanian towns offers guiding elements in observing and studying the Romanian urban spatial context during the transition period, with its differentiation on the patterns and the issues of the American urban spaces.

On the other side, the urban exits occurring at the top of the pyramid of the socio-economic status need particular theoretical distinctions. Timar (1999, quoted in Kovacs, 2002) insists upon the importance of the necessity to have such a distinction – using the criterion of the determinant factors – between the typical suburbanization described by the western literature (determined by wealth) and the constraint migration (which is even considered a trait of the urban migration in the mid 90's). Moreover, the importance of rediscovering the (original) rural locations in the framework of the survival strategies have also been observed and highlighted in other post-communist urban contexts with an emphasis on similar strategies: “because in the rural environment people can maintain a level of subsistence even in the absence of a stable work place, for example due to the subsistence agriculture, the lower costs (for heating, transportation), the help of the relatives” (Kovacs, 2002, p.70).

Nonetheless, within the wealth suburbanization phenomenon for instance, it is quite probable that the differentiations recorded in defining it in the studied area (and not only) comparing to the way in which this phenomenon has taken place in northern America and western Europe, be caused by the different initial structures, which explain most of the differentiations' variability for the two space categories. The spontaneous, natural structuring of the urban space after 1989, especially from a social perspective – a quite accelerated one for such a short period of time, particularly when related to the economical, political and social realities of the Romanian milieu – is better understood when we first understand the limitations the previous period had enforced from this point of view and the superposition of the of some non-manifest effects previously accumulated over the stimulation of free development in the post-communist context.

2. The socio-economic and time-space framework of the mobility's manifestation

As it was to be expected, the considerable modifications in the population's structure and dynamics during the period of transition have been generated, or at least

accelerated by the changes in the structure of the working population occurring as a result of the re-dimensioning of the industrial activities. In the studied area the impact of the economical restructuring was deeply felt because although it isn't a major mining area, the impact was similar because it felt the consequence of such a case in the neighbour area, there plus it has undergone the most accelerated restructuring a mining unit could go through, regardless of its size.

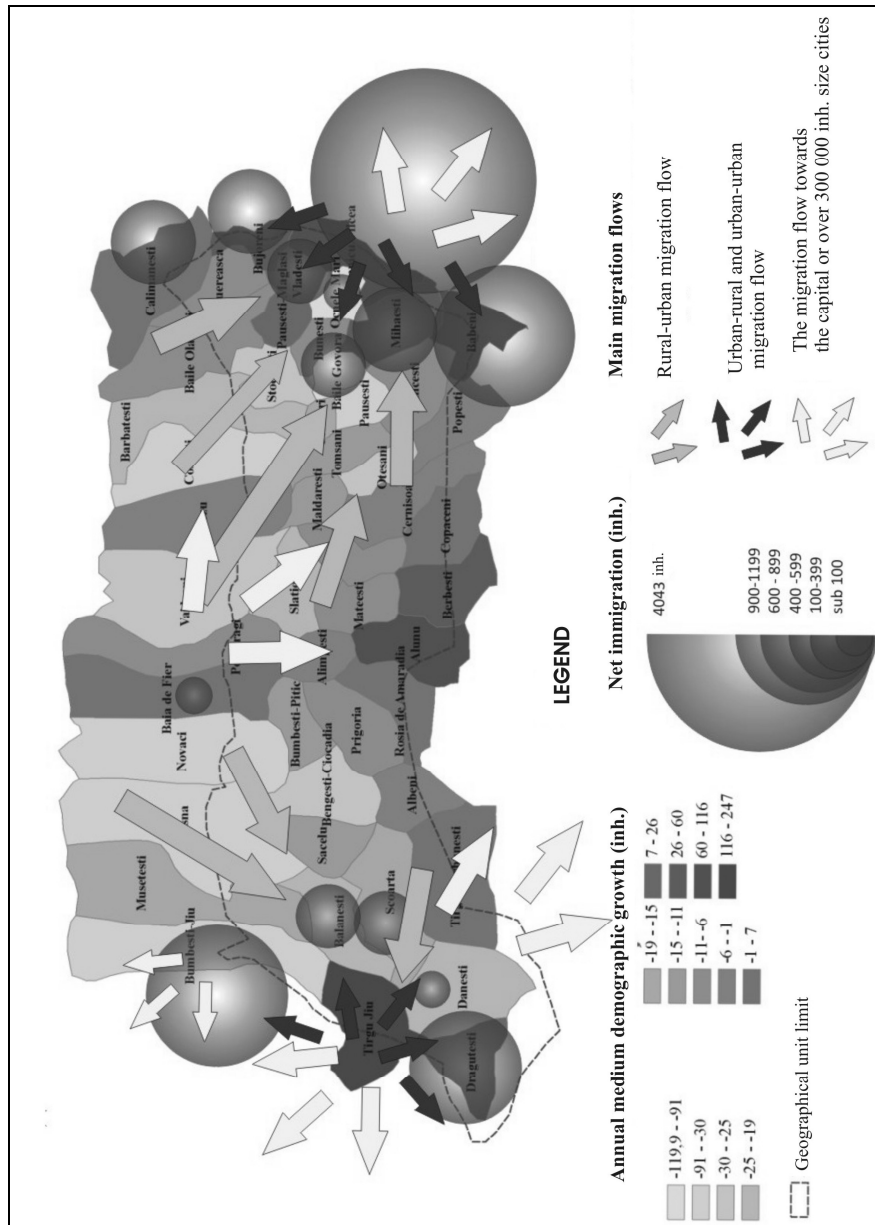


Fig. 1. Annual medium demographic growth and the main migration flows in the Subcarpathians bordered by Olt and Jiu rivers in perioda 1990-

The moment in time coincided with the beginning of the units' massive restructuring measures of 1997 (Bumbești-Jiu, Târgu Jiu, Govora, Râmnicu Vâlcea etc.). In Oltenia the discharge process in the mining activity have started in September-October 1997 and it took place in four stages, affecting 38,6% of the employees, given the fact that 75% of the discharged have left their work places in the first wave (Larionescu *et al.*, 1999, pp. 62-64).

The spatial mobility from and towards the county seats of the studied area (Fig. 1) takes place in the context of a spatial configuration of the total population balance as an accurate expression of the demographical potential's polarization, where it can be clearly observed – just as the dynamics of the rate of the natural increase spatial expression also reflects it – a spatial decantation of the rate of the natural increase on strips or concentric circles, which is dictated by the proximity to the major urban centre.

This decantation on concentric strips appears to be better defined, gradual towards the east around Râmnicu Vâlcea and more abrupt westward, a fact probably related with the perception the two cities have on the different development potential and the perspectives they have. More precisely, despite having similar demographical sizes (which on the scale of the Romanian demographical size categories would not generate any differences), Râmnicu Vâlcea has a greater capacity to settle individuals in its territory, than the administrative centre in the west – this aspect is revealed by the statistic data, especially as this phenomenon has grown between 2004 and 2006.

Its major advantages are its proximity to the national capital and its position on E70 and the Olt Valley. So the extremities of the studied area mirror each other and reflect, with slight amendments all the structural demographic tendencies due to the presence of the two county seats. Although this phenomenon is general and it also affects the rural areas, both urban administrative centres appear to lose significant amounts of specialized young population to the capital. For the western half of the area, namely Târgu Jiu plus Bumbești-Jiu, this loss is disputed to some extent by the city of Timișoara².

Regarding the temporal dynamics, in 1990 the urban population of the area under study was 62.8% of the zone's population, whereas during the transition period the percentage grew to 66.74% in 2006 with an annual medium demographic growth (S_{ma}) of 1017 people – 3.35 times less than the one recorded between 1977 and 1989 (3407 people).

3. Specific aspects

Two periods of the urban-rural migration can be highlighted diachronically, with different main characteristics and dominance in time: the period of *demographical balancing and residential mobility dictated by the economical conditions* took place in the first decade of the transition period, and after the year 2000: the *period dominated by the mobility or the residential constructions* in the proximity rural areas and the localities which were part of the urban area, *stimulated by the socio-economic prosperity* (secondary residences, main residences with secondary ones in the urban area as a consequence of welfare). These two stages are different not only through the residential areas they have created, the obvious suburbanization – generated by this mobility in the second case and by the absence of a stress of the specificity in the rural or suburban context in the first case – but also through the value booms registered by the real estate market which developed after 2000-2003 in the case of certain terrains belonging to urban or peri-urban zones (the prices of the terrains on the northern or south-western side of Târgu-Jiu have soared up to as much as 20 times their former value in only one year). Even if the two expressions of the urban-rural migration we have underlined – which can be mostly assimilated to the terms of “constraint migration” and the spatial reflection of the second with

² It is apparent in the concurrence for the sphere of students' recruitment – the first step towards definitive migration of the young highly qualified population being making their studies.

“welfare suburbanization” (Timar, 1999 quoted in Kovacs, 2002, p. 70; Korcelli, 2000 quoted in Kovacs, 2002, p.70; Benedek, Bagoly, 2005, p. 118) – have coexisted under various forms but in extremely different proportions in the two decades of reference, the process of economically conditioned migration has diminished beginning with the end of the past century, and the urbanization’s transfer elements to the rural spaces peripheral to the urban ones – at least in as much as their spatial expression is concerned – have radically modified the landscape only after the year 2000, even though they had been sporadically present during the transition period, namely in the 90’s.

For the urban sphere of the county seats we have studied, the first decade of the period of transition has been a time when the constraint migration was made manifest, or more precisely, three of its alternative versions, in one form or another:

- *the migration towards the rural area of origin* (the reverse of the phenomenon which took place between the 60’s and the 80’s) or the migration towards an accentually rural area with lower residences and terrains prices (when there is no support base in the zone of origin)

- *the migration towards the rapidly industrialized cities* whose real estate market suddenly collapsed after the decline of the economy due to the absence of demand, following the decline of the economical activity and the re-migration of those who had come from other regions of the country to their places of origin (especially Moldavia) combined with excessive for sale offers: Rovinari, Motru, Bumbești – Jiu, and rarely the towns found in the Petroșani depression – for the population of Târgu Jiu – and Băbeni, Ocnele Mari, Băile Govora, less so Berbești and Drăgășani for those living in Râmnicu Vâlcea, respectively.

The local press analysis points to the presence of a reflection of this social issue and of the adjustment mechanisms, as the term *exodus* is employed for the Târgu Jiu – Rovinari mobility: “Although it is a city with social problems, we still have a lot of demands for accommodations, namely over 2000. The prices have soared in Târgu Jiu because what happened there was a true exodus, and many people had problems. They sold what they had in Târgu Jiu with a billion Lei and came to buy a house with 300-400 millions, investing what’s left in other businesses or putting their children through college.” (*D.F., the mayor of Rovinari*, quoted by *Gorjeanu*, in the issue of 26.02.2006, p.5). How else would the high values of the urban immigration between 1992 and 1997 be explained, for towns such as Bumbești Jiu or Băbeni, values which exceed by far the demographic growth recorded in the peri-urban townships or the urban-component localities (fig.2), given the context of the economical activities’ restructuring and of the work places’ scarcity in those towns?

However, this alternative will temporarily solve a part of the problems – the housing issue and that of dissolving the debts which had been accumulated in the urban space of origin, through the difference between the prices of the buildings on the two real estate markets – offering at most, a start for supporting children in school or college. What it does not solve is the problem of employment and long term subsistence, the first alternative having in this case, a higher subsistence viability.

- *speculative migration* – a particular type of mobility found for instance, in the case of the migration from Târgu Jiu towards the towns of Bumbești Jiu or Rovinari, of the inactive population with a medium, almost upper middle socio-economic status prior to the transition period, that has degraded on the economic dimension during this period (mostly due to the withdrawal from work).

This mobility form is a form constrained only by the need to obtain two residences consequently to the young families’ incapacity to obtain a living space of their own, and not by the negative spiral of the urban life issues. In this category we have the people who neither possess the financial resources to offer their successors a house, nor to help them to this end (and thus the living density increases) and who sell an apartment in a central area of Târgu Jiu in order to buy an apartment in a less favourable district of the city and of another one in the town

of Bumbești Jiu – as a result of which the successors will live in the city and the initial family nucleus will retreat to Bumbești Jiu.

The exceeding number of residence for sale offers which has determined the drop of the real estate market prices is another discreet indicator of the convulsions the small, mono-industrial and rapidly industrialized urban spaces have experienced; this indicator is not all that obvious when we look at the simple demographic indicators' analysis, as the starting point, in the case of Bumbești-Jiu, was that of an 800 unsolved housing demands deficit for the year 1991 (*The mayor of Bumbești-Jiu*, quoted by *Gorjeanu*, 13.06.1991).

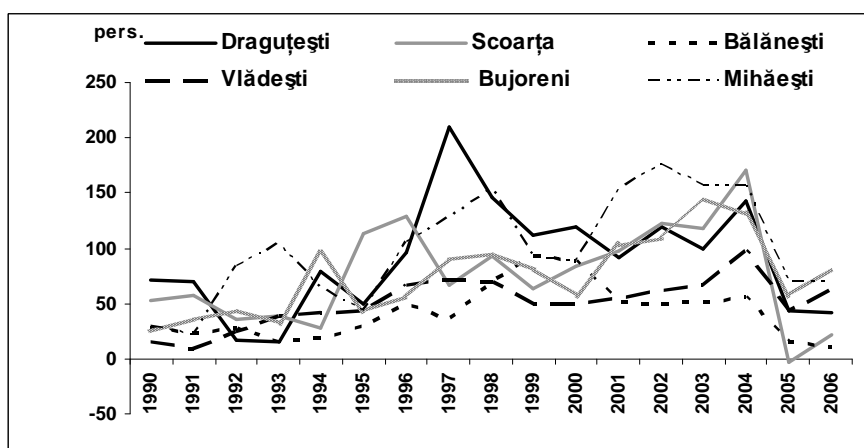


Fig. 2. The migration output dynamics in the suburban localities adjacent to the urban county seats (in absolute figures).

The immigration analysis of the suburban zones adjacent to the two county seats throughout the entire transition period (fig. 2) reveals a series of characteristic aspects:

- there is no noticeable unified tendency for the period immediately following 1990. The common parameter for the differentiated evolution tendencies of the suburban localities consists exclusively in the reduced intensity for all areas (except for Mihăești);

- the highest quotas have been registered by the settling in the rural areas between 1995 and 1999, coupled with the decrease of the salaries' purchasing power, the increase of the "urban life costs", the decentralization of the shared consumption of utilities in the block of flats residences and the accumulation of debts for these utilities, and later on, the discharges in the industrial sector. These relocations aim chiefly the more isolated rural localities that have difficult access routes (even if they are situated in the 30 km radius, in a straight line from the urban centre – Curtișoara, Tetila, Bălănești, Dănești etc.).

- after a period when the relocation's regime had stabilized, following the change of domicile determined by economical restraints and restructuring, the process of installation in the peri-urban rural areas has begun once more, reaching higher intensities after 2002, and being stimulated by completely different causes than before. This second period is set apart by the fact that the majority of people who decide to permanently reside in the suburban rural areas belong to a different population category: they have higher incomes and belong to the segment which has retired from productive activity, and in addition to them people who still work and who build a second residence.

3. Conclusions

Two urban-rural migration periods can be highlighted within the transition period, each having distinctive characteristics and characterising a specific period in time: a period of

demographic balancing and residential mobility dictated by the economical conditions, which defines the first decade of the transition period, and after the year 2000, a period dominated by the process of building residences in the proximity rural and the urban area's component localities, which was stimulated by the socio-economic prosperity.

We can speak of suburbanization only in the case of the two county seats, and of the coexistence of certain forms of zone expansion by the means of new buildings on the outskirts of, or as a continuation of towns in the case of the small towns, the old ones or which haven't been forcefully industrialized, such as Târgu Cărbunești, Novaci, Horezu and the hydropathic resorts: Băile Olănești, Băile Govora, Călimănești.

The first part of the transition period, right before the "boom" of discharges in 1997-1998 in the studied area, has determined the accumulation of financial debts to various services' providers, due to the decrease of the incomes, the increase of the unemployment rate, and the urban life's costs rise in the absence of employment possibilities. The final stage of this decline was the decision to join the residential mobility through one of the first two alternatives we have described.

The 1990-1992 period was one of the post-communist adjustments in the urban-rural nobilities, generating a balancing of the population's migration with a differentiated predominance of the emerging vectors in the territory. After 1992 those who later migrated towards the rural areas (or through the three forms we have mentioned), especially in the first decade, leaving one of the two county seats, make up the materially constrained migration.

The massive discharges of 1997-1998 have facilitated the persistence of the constrained migration until this phenomenon expired at the beginning of the transition period's second decade, when the welfare suburbanization as a form of urban-rural migration becomes apparent both statistically and in the suburban context or that of the real estate value map.

The soaring prices of the residences on the real estate market and the absence of the state repartitions of houses for the young families from the communist period, have determined the increase of the inhabitation's density in the transition period in the blocks of flats situated in the residential areas of an inferior status, especially in the workers' districts; this has later lead to a forced migration of the family's nucleus towards the rural areas (of origin, usually) or towards the smaller mono-industrial towns with no employment perspectives, where the real estate market had dropped significantly below the value of the viable cities, from the employment opportunities perspective.

To conclude, the first decade of transition has also meant a period of capital amassment for those who will mainly constitute the welfare migration towards the newly formed suburban residential areas in the second decade.

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