

THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF CERTAIN ETHNICALLY IMPRINTED URBAN AREAS, IN THE CASE OF TÂRGU JIU, HIGHLIGHTED THROUGH CONTENT ANALYSIS ON THE PRESS IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD

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Abstract. The present paper arguments in favour of (and justifies) using a combined methodological arsenal (qualitative-quantitative in trying to complete the geographical field research based on observation) for a more precise reading of the urban (social) space. The present study gives an account of the results of one of the components we have monitored in the local press analysis from 1990 to 2007, in our attempt to continue analysing the local inter-ethnic residential socio-spatial relations observed for the time span of almost two centuries, during the transition period, in the case of the Olt and Jiu bordered sub-carpathic urban space. The most interesting and complex results for this aspect have been obtained in the case of Târgu Jiu. For the analysis we have used the thematic and the relational analysis for the titles of the articles in *Gorjeanul* paper which referred to the monitored aspects, using emerging coding analysis in eight stages. The results have indicated: the intensity of the press representation of the different urban spaces which are strongly ethnically imprinted; the gradual modification of the perception and of the way these spaces are reflected; the social issue of these minority urban communities which are spatially concentrated; the way certain spaces and minority communities relate with predilection to political or administrative concepts from the local or national spheres, or to ethnical or official structures of organisation.

Keywords: Târgu Jiu, residential segregation, interethnic rapports, content relational analysis, ethnic communities, transition

Following a social geography study on the urban space of the two county seats of the Jiu and Olt bordered Getic Subcarpathians, carried out from the perspective of the spatial inter-ethnic relations' modification and the residential replacement in certain urban sectors during the last two centuries, the most interesting and complex results have been obtained from the study of inter-ethnic relations' dynamics and of the residential mobility/segregation, in the case of Târgu Jiu (see fig.1). Continuing the analysis of the inter-ethnic residential socio-spatial relations in the transition period, the present paper selects from it the results of a single research component examined within a multi-objective analysis of the local press from 1990 to 2007 – this analysis was performed in the view of completing the causal explanative elements and of verifying the results revealed through the investigation of certain social geography aspects of the transition period in the area of the Getic Subcarpathians between Jiu and Olt. These results perfectly complete the causal explanative gaps which have

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occurred in the research based on field observation – conducted in a previous period – and confirm certain conclusions obtained through other methodological solutions.

1. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The interest for deciphering the way in which – by deconstructing the language – certain social groups, and especially the Roma ethnic minority, have been subjected to practices of social exclusion during the transition period, made manifest by the means of cultural practices and articulated in speech, has come from the post-structuralist theoretical direction.

In addition to this, we have pursued further the previous interest (Mălăescu, 2005, Mălăescu, 2008a) in the way certain urban spaces are represented in the individual mental framing (those pertaining to the Roma communities revealing the most interesting results), and in the way they are reflected in the spatial behaviour and in the configuration of the living perimeter (of those living in the urban space) within these representations. If the above mentioned study (performed on 480 subjects) concluded that the urban spaces belonging to the Roma communities appeared as “blank spots” on the mental maps of the overwhelming majority, or were at most designated as “slum” (devoid of a street plan or of any other elements), to the contrary, these spaces have enjoyed in the press of the transition period a vivid representation (see fig. 2B for the frequency within the titles and fig. 3 for the general proportion of the dedicated articles, in the case of the four main communities). If they are blank spots on the mental maps and if they remain outside the limits of the living polygons of the subjects, as unused spaces, and therefore unknown, or if they haven’t been practiced for approximately 40 years (from the time when they were the actual “slums” of the city), it is only natural to assume that the representations provided by the press – and particularly in the single daily journal which has covered the entire period of transition – have considerably contributed to the mental constructions, the representations the inhabitants structure about those spaces and about the members of those communities. This particular assumption has determined the extension of the press analysis in this direction: a more careful analysis of the articles which reflect the spaces and the issue of the Roma communities, especially those from Târgu Jiu, and secondary, those from the rural areas.

The post-structuralism argues that the relation between the society and the space is culturally mediated through language, as the human being is configured and is given cultural significance by the means of language (Poster, 1995 quoted in Kitchin and Tate, 2000); therefore, the way we live within a society, the restraints and the empowerments that operate, are generated and affected by language (Kitchin and Tate, 2000).

Nevertheless, the method has been criticized, and we are especially interested in two domains which have issued reproaches, as the one appealing to this method is a geographer: *the support and the truthfulness of the interpretations*, on one hand, and *the limits of the interpretations* which they justify, on the other hand. The Anglo-Saxon literature is the one to question the text analysis most seriously: Silverman (2006, p.153-154) comments upon this fact: “Perhaps, in (what the French call) the Anglo-Saxon cultures, words seem too ephemeral and insubstantial to be the subject of scientific analysis. It might seem better, then, to leave textual analysis to the literary critics and to

concentrate on definite social phenomena, like actions and the structures in which they are implicated.” The same author illustrates in his paper how “qualitative researchers are quite wrong to neglect textual data. (...) texts are marvellous data for even novices researchers to analyse” (Silverman , 2001, p.121).

With regard to the limits of the extrapolations and of the theorization thusly obtained, as the group coordinated by Palmquist (2005¹) also briefly formulates, taking into account the fact that the conceptual analysis uses only the quantity data, the levels of interpreting and generalizing are very limited, but this does allow highlighting certain tendencies.

Referring to the arguments in favour of using the content analysis and Krippendorff’s rationalizations (1980, quoted in Stemler, 2001) – which point out that a large proportion of the content analysis is motivated by the search for techniques which would infer from symbolic data that which is either to expensive, longer possible, or invasive by the means of other techniques – we can add to these *the data which may be affected even more by the subjective element, or which may be even more inexactly accessed by means of oral history or interviews than those offered by the alternative use of the text analysis.*

Nevertheless, what is reproached the content analysis is precisely the somewhat unclear theoretic basis and the conclusions’ platitude (Silverman, 2004) mostly because if it is based on a previously given set of categories, it renders “an extremely powerful conceptual grid”. In all the subcomponents of this analysis direction the first premise has been the following: as a continuation of the analysis of the inter-ethnic spatial relations beginning with the second half of the 19th century up until the transition period, understanding the majority population’s perception and way of relating to these spaces is necessary and it contributes to *a realistic estimation of the chances these spaces have at social integration as social spaces of inter-ethnic interaction* (as they had become in the first years of transition, when the members of the ethnical majority used to come here to buy foreign products) or as spaces of development by exterior involvement. *Certainly, at least on a small scale, the perception and the image of these spaces influence the spatial behaviour of the urban space inhabitants.*

The press’ analysis has envisaged several components; the *thematic analysis* has envisaged the highlighting of the recurrent elements which compose the image reflected in the press, the problematic of the residential areas which constitute the superior and inferior extremes of the socio-economic status, the way the press reflects the issue of the residential areas or of the ethnically minority communities which are relatively compact urban and rural from the studied sector, and of the spaces of inter-ethnic interaction (flea markets, food markets etc.), including the nature of the inter-ethnic relations (without the quantification of every aspect’s weight) and the quantification of the respective weight of the negative, positive, neutral, edilitary-cultural etc. aspects.as well as the image of these spaces. In addition to this, a qualitative-quantitative analysis of the way the press reflected this ethnic minority and its relations with the majority, as a potential barometer of the local inter-ethnic relations for the transition period.

¹ Electronic format without page numbering and layout, arborescently organized based on individualized accessing of the sequences.

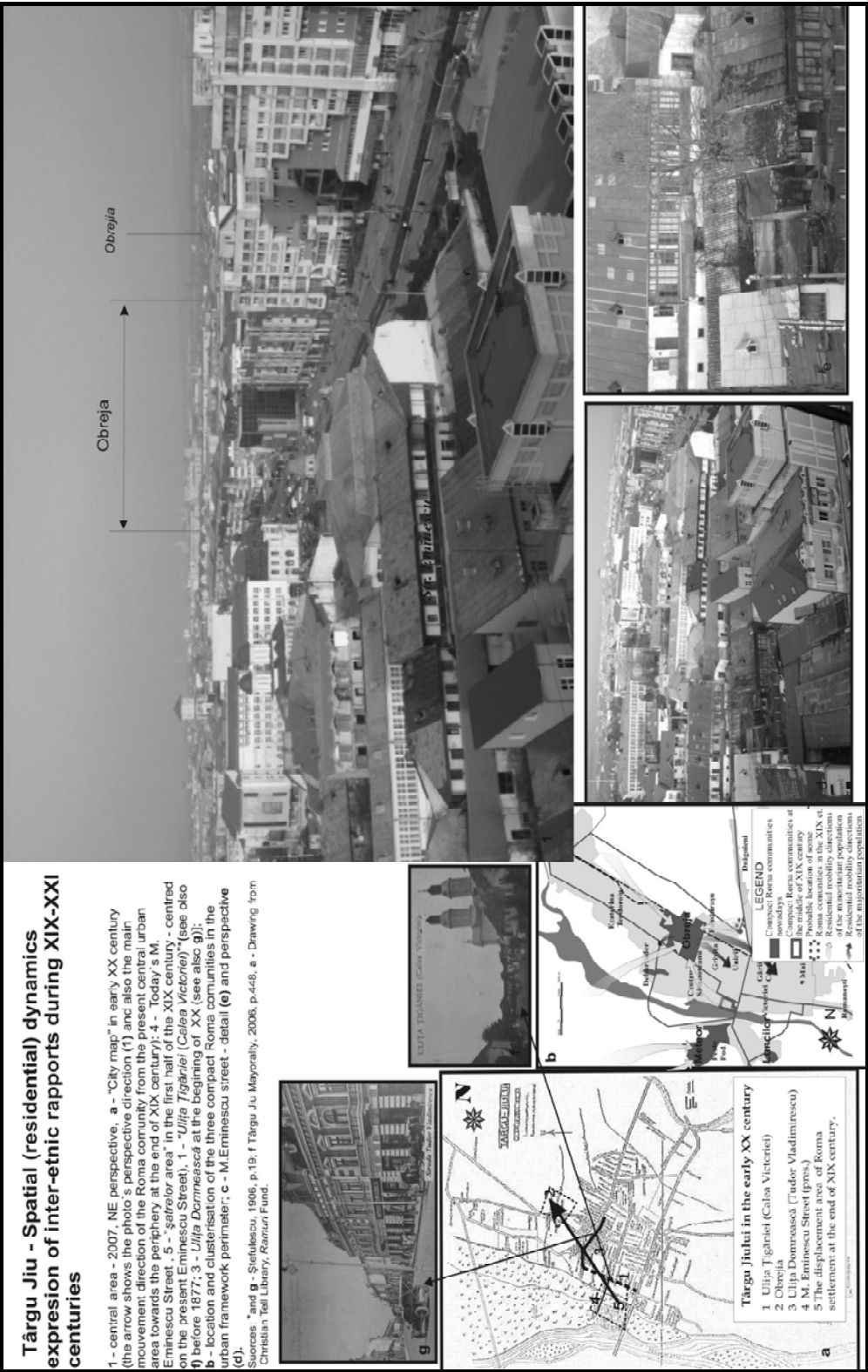


Fig. 1. Spatial (residential) dynamics expression of inter-ethnic rapports during XIX-XXI centuries in the case of Târgu Jiu

This analysis was rendered possible by the complementary use – except the thematic analysis – of a qualitative-quantitative analysis of the intensity of the press coverage for each neighbourhood/community throughout the transition period (the four ethnic areas of Târgu Jiu to which the “*Coleus*” (flea market) category and the “*food market*” category were added) and the rural communities. The proportions of the articles reflecting the extra-area minority spaces and of the articles which make no reference to a certain space (the “*non-localized*” category) have also been rated.

The coding unit in this case was the idea, with a physically measurable limit: the paragraph, respectively the final coding unit, the article (with a minimum of 3:1 paragraphs in the article for categorizing). The analyses have been performed in accordance with the procedure established by Carley (1992, quoted in Palmquist *et al.*, 2005)) which is structured on eight stages. In the initial negotiation of the categories we have used as a comparison support the articles considered to have an ambiguous content. Both in this analysis and in the content analysis of the titles we have used the same coding procedure: the emerging coding, the categories being established after the preliminary examination of the data, their negotiation and finally a definition followed by a validity and fidelity check.

In addition to this, there was the detailed relational content analysis of the 237 article titles issued in the *Gorjeanul* daily journal, for the period between 1990 and 2007, which referred to the minority involved. A conceptual analysis intended to quantify the association of certain districts with certain concepts or with the use of certain appellatives with negative connotations and of the term “*țigan*” („gipsy”), and later „*rrom/rom*” (“Roma”) in connection with positive or negative terms, by the association of which other meanings are generated, or certain central nuclei of the stereotypic contents about persons belonging to this ethnic group are authorized. Within the *relational analysis* – considering it to be the least susceptible to subjective considerations – the *proximity analysis* has been used, observing the co-occurrence of the terms designating either a certain neighbourhood, or the ethnic group or its members on the one hand, and other concepts on the other hand, in a five word window (except the prepositions). The final aim has been to identify for each space or for each ethnical referent a concept, determined by a conceptual matrix, or a conceptual matrix corresponding to each *a priori* concept taken into consideration.

As to the content analysis conducted in view of establishing – by means of quantitative-estimation – of the dynamics of the press representation regarding the ethnic group, the spaces and the issues of those Roma communities; after having extracted some initial categories, they have been discussed until the three researchers have overcome their dissensions. On a first sample group of 20 articles considered rather ambiguous as far as the information and the message to be sent are concerned, they have initially been examined separately, by completing a categorizing chart, and then together, by discussing every disagreement which occurred in categorizing, on a testing grid. In the initial stage we have obtained an inter-evaluators Cohen (K) coefficient of 0.65. As a result of this stage of discussions, dissolving the differences of opinion, we have refined discrimination dimensions between categories, as resetting of the subcategories have been operated and we have resorted to the re-operating of each category. We have coded the articles’ content and titles separately on the set of articles. On a new analysis sample of 20 articles each researcher has

independently re-categorized the articles on a new categorizing grid. The Cohen coefficient obtained between the three framing grids belonging to the three researchers on the 20 article titles was 0.87 in the case of the title analysis and 0.83 for the analysis considering the predominant allocation of the entire article from the favourability point of view. We have used this coefficient as an expression of the coding's reliability coefficient. The intra-evaluator reliability, or the ratings' stability at two weeks interval, has been figured by the correlation between the observation grids of the same evaluator, of 0.97, 0.92 and 0.89 and respectively, the reproducibility (or the inter-evaluator surety) as it has been previously described.

Prior to any form of text analysis, not only in the case of the inter-ethnic relations but also in seizing the image of the different neighbours, of the power's representations and its association with various spaces, or of the social issue, the study abided by Doel's principals (2004, p.512) on cultural texts' analysis: we had to determine *who* produced the text, *why*, *how* and *for whom* (n.n. *italics in the original text*) it was produced (sending to Gay and coll., 1997), investigating *the form*, *the content*, and *the assumptions* of the text in question, paying as much attention to the elements that were absent from the text, as to those which were present. The next step was to analyse the text in the context of its redaction, and comparing and contrasting it with other relevant materials (texts, life styles, systems of beliefs, practices etc.), investigating the way in which they have been used or abused, as mechanisms to articulate *the power* (*i.o.*) and the resistance with which a group of individuals or some individuals met the way it *works*, the way they have made their impact on society or on certain spaces.

2. THE ISSUES OF THE URBAN SPACES ETHNICALLY IMPRINTED IN THE TRANSITION PERIOD AS REFLECTED IN THE PRESS

The relational content analysis of the articles' titles from the *Gorjeanul* daily which referred to the Roma ethnics, during the transition period has revealed (fig. 2B) the fact that the district with the most intense press representation and the space of the most intense inter-ethnic interaction – the flea market – was the district of Meteor.

The **Meteor** community which developed in the western area of the city, spatially limited from the central area by the natural barrier of the river Jiu (fig. 1b), has developed by force initially, by the compulsoriness of the nomad Roma's settlement toward the middle of the previous century (a large number of the inhabitants having also to experience deportation in Transnistria).

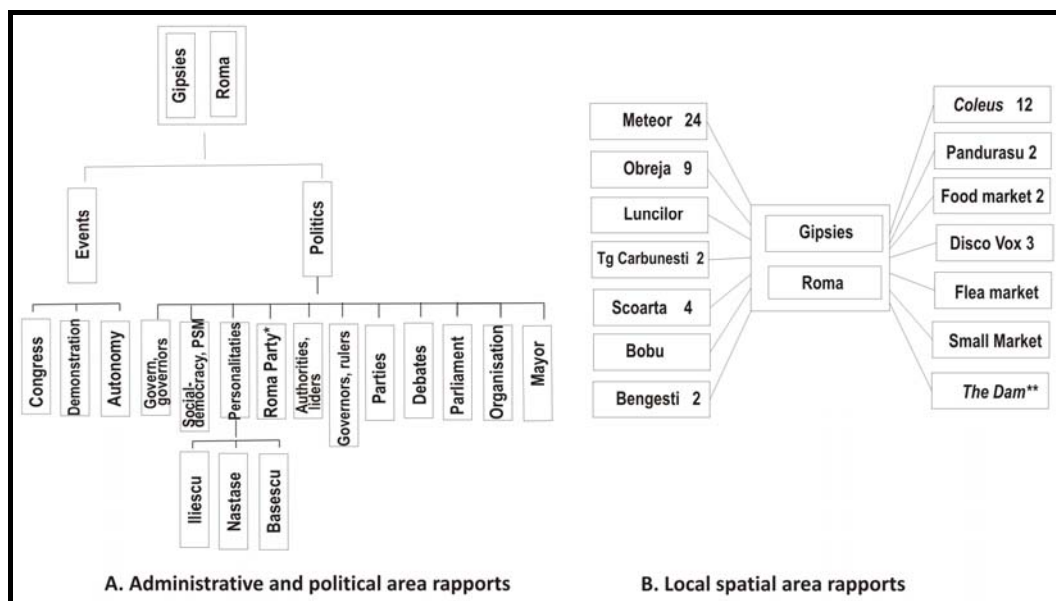
Nowadays it houses about 2200 inhabitants² (in approximately 200 households) Roma ethnics, plus on the eastern and southern sides, Romanians and mixed families. It is the Roma district with the largest and most intense press coverage (fig. 2-3) of the transition period.

The main thematic of the articles referring to this space envisaged the following:

Self-management and civic spirit, the works accomplished (asphalting, building kindergarten, improvements, constructions, local administrative lobby etc.) some of them dating back to 1993, with personal funds or by the strive to

² The source of the statistic data referring to the communities has been the Roma expert from the Prefecture of the Gorj County Council.

cultivate the relations with the authorities and the local, national and international structures. In the same section we have the articles (written either because the ethnic community seized upon a fact, or because the journal triggered an alarm signal) which signal the institutional neglect and salute the community's efforts of self-management, especially in what concerns improving the level of the infrastructure from private funds.



* "Partida Romilor" represents the most popular and numerous Roma Party in Romania.

** "Digul" (The Dam) – one early location of flea market generally known since that period as the synonym for the flea market or "Coleus"

Fig. 2. The relational analysis matrix for the titles of the articles regarding Roma ethnic group issued during 1990-2007 period on the local daily paper (*Gorjeanul*), reflecting its spatial, political and administrative reports.

The neglect shown by the local authorities in the first decade of the transition period was reflected by the press alongside the main problems the community faced (in I. Mihai's words, 1993, quoted in **G.** 15.02.1994, p 6.): "*the lack of terrains for building houses, the impossibility to properly organize their spiritual life*" due to the absence of the suitable spaces, exacting taxes to a community which fends for itself when the municipality does not perform its duty;

- self determination³ (as a continuation of self-management) particularly based on the recrudescence of the terrains problem – the manifestations spike in 1997 – but they continued to appear both in connection to the Meteor and the Obreja districts (see also Fig. 2 refers to the political and administrative manifestations);

³ It is noteworthy that the Roma have gained a social prestige at a national level, that they have a considerable capacity to organize this community politically and administratively, an active involvement in the problems of their ethnic group, the early presence of these organizational and representation tendencies (see the legal attempts to create the Roma state CEM ROMENGO in 1997 in the Meteor colony, or in those from the Obreja district).

- the association people make between the district and the high social status of the inhabitants (the low percentage of those who benefit from social aids in conformity with 416/2001, namely 1% of the population, along the absence of the inadequate residences may be an objective indicator) reflected in its built component: residences (“palaces”, “pagodas”, “villas” describe the opulence of the interior design), cars, even public interest buildings;

- it is the district which is most often associated with the idea of social and political power, with the presence of local personalities, from the traditional ones to those engaged in the national structures of their ethnic group especially (the presidency of the UGRR, *The National Union of the Christian Roma of Romania*, etc.) – this aspect is also observed in the case of the Obreja district – the two districts strive with one another for supremacy in this sense. It is also frequently associated with the idea of early political and administrative organization (from the very first years of the transition period), with political manifestation of different amplitudes (meetings, congresses, manifestations) held in Târgu Jiu, or in various countries.

In addition to this, there is the collaboration with, and the appartenance to the social network of the ethnical leaders at a national level (*King, Emperor*) their family connections or the early affiliation to these communities, the importance of the political organization and maintaining the connections with the political and administrative structures on different levels (fig. 2A), the connections with the European and global organizations of the Roma and their correspondent reunions etc;

- especially at the beginning of the transition period (1990-1997 until the toughening of the legislative measures) the articles were dealing with the scrap iron trade, the air, soil and water pollution determined by the presence of illegal non-ferrous metals foundries. In addition to this rise the topic of the illegal buildings (also present in Obreja) – in conformity with fragments from the reports issued by the *Department for Urbanism* (quoted in *Gorjeanul* (11.05.2001)) and from the cited daily paper (**G.**, 26.05.1993; **G.**, 20.03.2003) – and the land conflicts – which were primarily partially solved by an intervention of the local administration; then there were the individual agreements and a continuance of the process meant to legalize the buildings’ documentation (a part of these acts already existed in the 1950’- 1960’ when the people had settled here – see Șerban, 2005). The subject seems pervasive in the past few years, due to the evolution of the districts’ real-estate market: according to our conclusions, the main population speculates the Roma’s drive to buy terrains in the proximity of their fellow ethnics and therefore the prices of these terrains (50€/m²) reach the same level as those of the new residential areas with a superior status.

The journal triggers alarm signals and denounces inter-ethnic problems caused by the above mentioned issues. Alongside these particular subjects, which individualize this space, there are also those which are common to all communities (see also Mălăescu, 2008b).

The Obreja district is the oldest Roma district, being populated even at the end of the last century, with a greater demographical weight than the previous one; nowadays it has approximately 3000 Roma inhabitants (more ethnically homogenous than the previous one due to the sentimental pressure caused by the need to buy a house in this community of brick makers (*cărămidari*), and middlemen (*samsari*), as opposed to Meteor which is formed of pot makers (*căldărari*), and fiddlers (*lăutari*), constituted in around 500 families (400

households). The demographical pressure exerted on the available terrains for constructions has determined the sporadic settlement among the Romanians, outside the actual district, in the western and southern parts, but mostly in the eastern side – in the Pandurașu district – where there have been terrains available for constructions. This extension took place at the same time with the emergence of a certain social segregation within the ethnic group: those which migrated to the south-east, towards the Romanian residential area with a superior status (South Pandurașu) making use of the concessioned terrains which have undergone land ameliorations and drainage and consolidation works, and towards the east, on the northern side of the North Pandurașu district – the most improper terrains are concentrated in this zone – affected by the near surface ground water and the uncontrolled depositing of the garbage (also from the Obreja district) and of the dead animals' carcasses which come in contact with the temporary water sources, the canals which flow among the houses, the lakes and the ground water. Besides, the segment of the population with the higher social status is concentrated within this district in the central area (around central nucleus formed by the Kogălniceanu and Ioan Budai Deleanu streets) – with the natural exceptions caused by the lack of available terrains. Towards the northern and eastern periphery (along the railways), plus the recently extended sector of the Pandurașu, there are the sectors with the improper living quarters, with infrastructure problems which belong to a population segment with a low socio-demographic status.

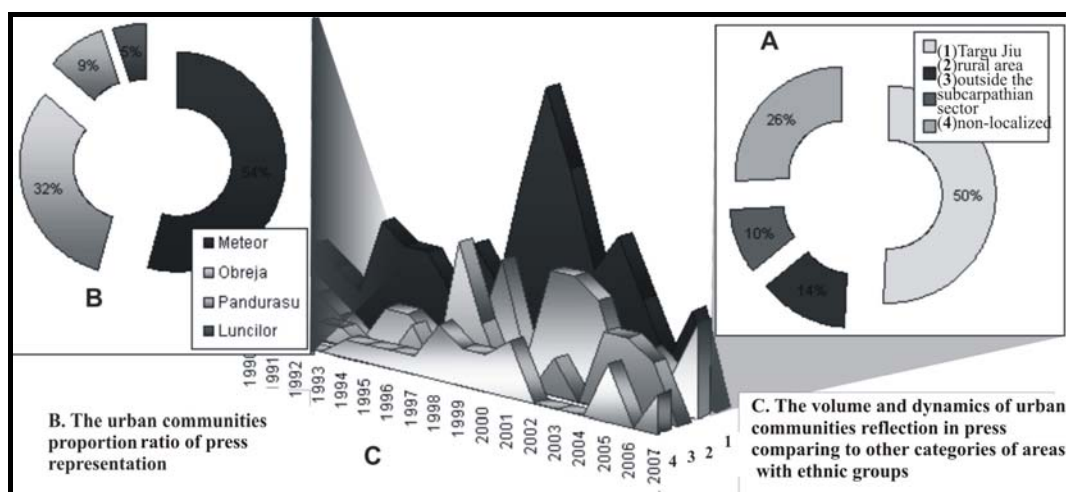


Fig. 3. Quantitative analysis of daily local press reflection of the urban and rural geographical residential areas with a major component of Roma residents and the problematic of those ethnic communities (ratio, structure and temporal distribution) from the total articles regarding this ethnic minority. Case Study on *Gorjeanul* daily paper in the january 1990 - december 2007 period.

In the first part of the transition period the district enjoyed an idyllic cultural representation, as a deposit of ethnographical alterity, unfortunately affected by under-development (both individual and infrastructural). Later on this reflection continued with the recurrent aspects representing the pervasive press subjects – some of which were emerging from the difficulty of administering a large community. They were represented by the garbage depositing and collecting, critical infrastructure, the issue of the inter-ethnic

relations of co-habitation fostered by the difficult conditions: the problem of the loose horses (given the horse breeders tradition) on the streets, the traffic problems, the generated filth, the destruction of the crops from the adjacent localities, the ensuing conflicts (1997), the incivilities and the tensions with the Romanian inhabitants from the northern side (Tuşnad Street, **G.**, 21.01.1998). There are a lot fewer articles denouncing the institutional neglect, the authorities which do not asphalt the streets, expand the electric network's infrastructure, never collect the garbage although the residents pay their taxes (just as in Meteor) (**G.**, 16.06.1993, p.1) .

The subjects covered for this area have been status, influence and power, especially their use in order to obtain aids, facilities or compensatory measures (such as the OIM project concerning the Deportation to Transnistria in 1943-1944, of over 80000 euros) for the members of the community, which have later also contributed to the development, are also present in the Obreja district.

The total of the constructed residences of the two districts with a population having a superior socio-economic status has been the topic of many articles, both depreciative and appreciative (**G.**, 6-7.05.2000, p.2).

The Luncilor community is a far smaller community than the previous ones, a structurally different one (mainly composed of wheel makers – *rudari* – with a far lower socio-economic status, and different basic occupations), less spatially homogenous, which faces the same infrastructure problems as the ethnical majority – some of the infrastructure's chapters have not been extended up to this south-eastern city limit, not even towards the zone with the high socio-economic status. This community is less present in the press except when the articles refer to the issue of the under-developed living quarters (the presence of kennels even during the transition period), of the obsolete traditional occupations in the urban environment (manufacturing brooms, cart and horse transportation) and the issue of the loose horses (1999).

The Roma inhabitants of the **Panduraşu** administratively belong to the Obreja community, in as much as they identify with the community as an internal form of organization. In the press reflection of the Panduraşu neighbourhood(district) the presence of the Roma is felt – even so, this space is not perceived as one whose image is defined by the ethnical imprint – but it is most commonly eclipsed by the another topic' attractiveness, namely that of the high socio-economic status of the residents from the southern area.

„Coleus” is a space of inter-ethnical interactions (probably the largest inter-ethnical interaction in the city), a space to which a considerable part of the press articles refer to (fig.2B); it is represented by the flea market which despite the fact that it has changed its geographical location three times during the transition period, has always had the same name: *Coleus*. Its previous location has been the Jiu terrace, which is full of stillwater surfaces and where the ground water level is very close to the surface – a sector later occupied by new residences extended from the Obreja district to North Panduraşu – a space physically unsuited for a market place. Regardless of these facts, this marked attracts not only the population of the city and of the Gorj rural area, but also visitors from the entire Oltenia and even from the cities and towns from the Jiu Valley, thusly cumulating up to 1000 visitors/day, according to the press. The subjects of the articles covering this social interaction space vary from the

quality of the interaction with the members of the ethnical minority, to the prices, the way people interact, the conditions of the physical support of this market, to the point of becoming a reliable barometer of the infractional environment (larceny), to the question of paying the taxes for the incomes obtained here, the problem of those families which subsist through this activity, but also the accelerated enrichment – contributing to the social development of the Roma urban community of Târgu Jiu.

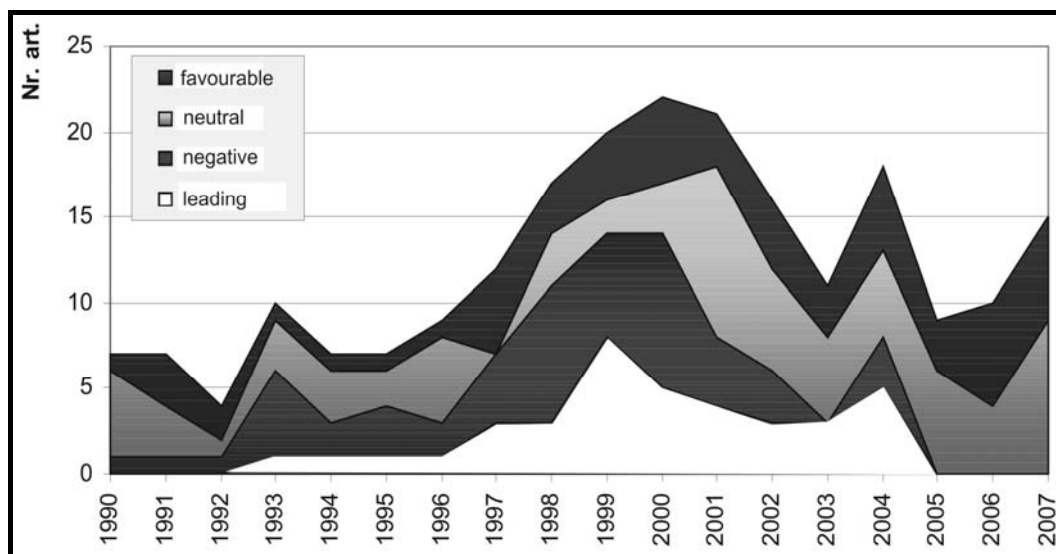


Fig. 4. The general weight(proportion ratio) and dynamics of the major favorability categories of the daily local press reflection of ethnic minority during the transition period.

These are the central aspects referring to the way these spaces and their problems are reflected by the press, revealed by the thematic analysis extended to the whole content of the articles – because ad Palmquist and his collaborators (2005) specified – with regard to the parsimony of the data obtained through conceptual content analysis – it is extremely useful and efficient in providing information when it is correctly carried out, but it is limited by its focus and by the quantitative nature of the investigations. For this reason, had the press analysis been limited to a content analysis, whether conceptual or relational, performed on the titles, the perspective thusly obtained may have probably been more rigorously methodologically controlled, but it would have nevertheless been far poorer. However, we believe that the caution employed in formulating conclusions or in deciding not to formulate them at all, can sufficiently correct this shortcoming.

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