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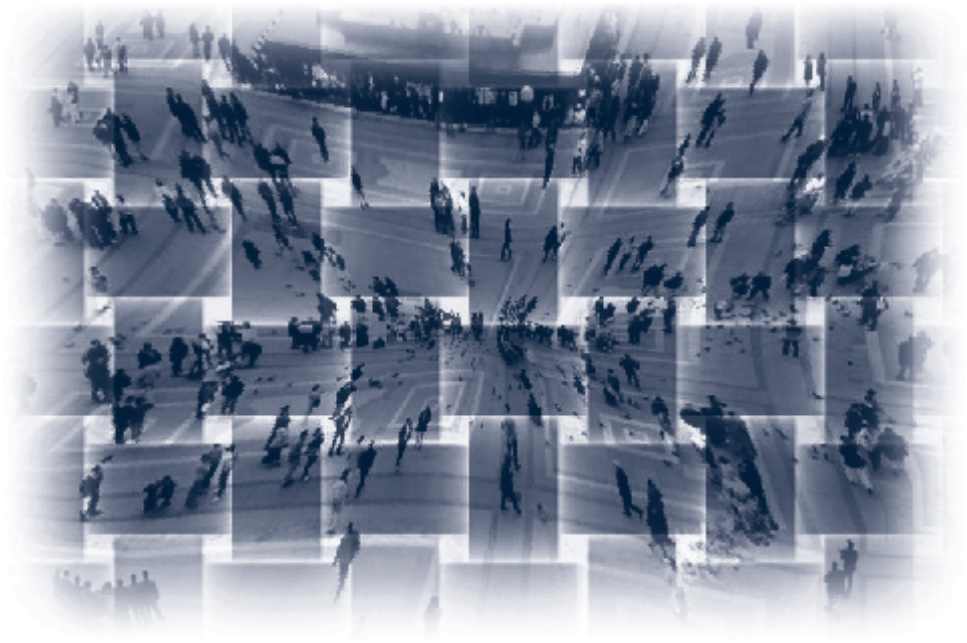

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Academic papers grounded in empirical research or focused on the social realities of Central and Eastern Europe are particularly welcomed.

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IN MEMORIAM TRAIAN ROTARIU,
EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT THE BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY (12.02.1943 – 28.12.2021)

Photo: Emeritus professor Traian Rotariu. Personal archive.

Traian Rotariu, emeritus professor of Sociology at the Babeş-Bolyai University, passed away on the 28th of December 2021, leaving behind an outstanding oeuvre for the Romanian social sciences and a legacy of institutional building that materialised in the creation of the Sociology Department after the fall of the state-socialist regime and, ten years later, of the Centre for Population Studies at the same university.

His academic career started in 1968, when he joined as a research assistant the Sociology Laboratory within the Babeş-Bolyai University, led by the late professor Ion Aluaş (1927-1994). At the time, he had already earned a BA in Mathematics (1965) and, after working as a high school teacher for a couple of years, he commenced studying for a second BA in Philosophy. Motivated by his increasing interest in social sciences and quantitative methodologies, he successfully competed for a scholarship of the Ministry of Education to pursue doctoral studies at Paris V René Descartes University (Sorbonne), under the supervision of Raymond Boudon, between 1974 and 1977. His PhD thesis, entitled *Education et mobilité sociale* (1977), addressed the problems of social mobility in developed capitalist societies and concentrated on the role of the school system in social reproduction. Its Romanian translation[1] was published in 1980. In 1977 he became research assistant and in 1979 lecturer at the Philosophy Department of the Babeş-Bolyai University. The late 1970s and 1980s meant an intensive period of empirical social research alongside professor Ion Aluaş and fellow young academics, despite the formal restrictions on social sciences imposed by the regime. They analysed the social changes induced by industrialisation and urbanisation, ranging from internal migration to social mobility, demographic changes, family life, and transformations of rural households.

In 1990 he became associate professor and four years later full professor of Sociology at the Babeş-Bolyai University. In these early years of post-socialist transformations he made a substantive contribution to the building of the Sociology Department, together with his lifelong colleague and friend, professor Petru Iluţ. He also acted for six years (2001-2007) as Dean of the newly established Faculty of Sociology and Social Work. Key-courses of the Sociology curriculum such as *The Methodology of Social Research, Social Stratification and Mobility,* and *Demography* were designed and thought by professor Rotariu. Among his numerous PhD students, many pursued successful academic careers at well-known universities and research institutes in Romania.

[1] Rotariu, Traian (1980). *Şcoala şi mobilitatea socială în ţările capitaliste dezvoltate [Education and social mobility in developed capitalist countries].* Bucureşti: Editura ştiinţifică şi enciclopedică.

Photo: Ion Aluaș (fourth person from the left, in white suit) and Traian Rotariu (fifth person from the right, with moustache) during field research in the early 1980s. The archives of the Sociology Department.

His books serve as state of the art for demography studies in Romania, but also for quantitative methodologies and social statistics. Most notably: *Demografia României în perioada postbelică (1948-2015) [The Demography of Romania in the post-wars period, 1948-2015*], co-authored with Dumănescu, L. and Hărăguș, M., Iași: Polirom, 2017; *Fundamentele metodologice ale științelor sociale [The Methodological Fundaments of Social Sciences],* Iași: Polirom, 2016; *Studii demografice [Studies in Demography],* Iași: Polirom, 2010; *Metode statistice aplicate în științele sociale [Statistical Methods Applied in Social Sciences],* co-authored with Bădescu, G., Culic, I., Mezei, E., and Mureșan, C., Iași: Polirom, 1999 and 2006; *Ancheta sociologică și sondajul de opinie [Sociological surveys and opinion polls],* co-authored with Iluț, P., Iași: Polirom, 1997 and 2006. He edited, together with Petru Iluț, one of the first Sociology handbooks for undergraduate students in Romania (*Sociologia,* Cluj: Mesajerul, 1996) and published a comprehensive handbook of social research methodology (*Metode și tehnici de cercetare sociologică,* university course, several editions: 1986,

1991, 1994). Besides several research articles and book chapters, mostly focused on socio-economic transformations in Romania, inequality, and demographic changes, he edited, together with Mezei Elemér and Maria Semeniuc, a series of archival studies based on the Censuses carried out between 1850 and 1930; these volumes were published between 1997 and 2011 at Presa Universitară Clujeană. He also served as an editor and later as a board member of the present journal, *Studia UBB Sociologia* and of the *Romanian Journal of Population Studies.*

Much of his contribution to the development of social sciences in Romania remains nonetheless anonymously embedded in the institutions he nurtured and in the professional undertakings of his former students. Professor Rotariu created around him a milieu of open-minded, empirically grounded, reflexive, theoretically meaningful, and socially engaged praxis of social research. Although he would be too humble to admit, he was the main architect of building a school of Sociology in Cluj after 1990.

Professor Rotariu will be remembered as a prominent sociologist, generous teacher, and supportive colleague. During the last two years of his life, withdrawn from the academia, he carried with discretion the burden of a devastating disease, helped by his much beloved family, and dedicated medical staff. Our thoughts and condolences are with his wife of 56 years of marriage, Elena, and their children and grandchildren.

His memory and intellectual legacy will continue to inspire future generations of social researchers and to shape the field of sociology in Romania, nourished by his lifelong academic work.

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CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL IN SOCIAL MOBILITY

TRAIAN ROTARIU[1]

ABSTRACT. The role of the school in the process of status attainment for individuals with different social origins should be analysed both from the perspective of social mobility flows (absolute rates of mobility) and inequality of social chances (relative rates and odds ratios). Inspired by Raymond Boudon's earlier studies in the 1970s, the author scrutinises the complex relationships between expanding access to higher levels of education, social mobility trajectories, and inequality of chances of status achievement in the context of persistent inequalities in contemporary capitalist societies. He concludes that at the societal level, an increase of the dependency of achieved social status on educational qualification will lead to greater immobility if the inequality of educational chances remains constant. At the level of individuals, the same process will lead to greater probability of upward mobility in the case of people with higher levels of educational qualification, and greater probability of downward mobility for those with lower educational qualification.

Keywords: social mobility, education, status attainment, inequality of chances

Introduction

Four decades have passed since I had the privilege to meet professor Raymond Boudon and benefit from his support for my doctoral studies on the relationship between school and social mobility. The choice of the topic was not arbitrary: he had recently published a book (Boudon, 1973a) that rapidly gained attention and appreciation from those preoccupied with the problem of social mobility and remained internationally recognised until nowadays.

[1] Traian Rotariu (1943-2021) was emeritus professor at the Sociology Department of the Babeș-Bolyai University. This article is a reprint from the 2004 second issue of *Studia UBB Sociologia,* Vol. 48(2), with revised translation from the original manuscript in Romanian.

As a young scholar coming from a virtually different world, where one could hardly access information about recent developments in the field of sociology, the topic of social mobility was, for me, entirely novel and I started to explore it with great interest. It became the central concern of my doctoral dissertation (Rotariu, 1977), sustained at the University of Sorbonne. Unfortunately, the study has never been published in French, and only a shorter book-version was printed later in Romanian (Rotariu, 1980). Given that the French original was available to the public only at a Parisian library, and that no second editions were printed in any other language but Romanian, the content of my study was known only by a small group of specialists and seldom cited outside of the borders of Romania[2].

After obtaining the doctoral degree, I returned to Romania and found myself again in the intellectual environment imposed by the totalitarian regime, which gave no room for my research topic. Thus, I had to shift my attention towards other domains, less sensible to ideological constraints, and decided to focus on methodological issues and the field of demography. My research on social mobility had been interrupted for considerable time, and although after 1990 I returned to its study, by now it no longer represents the principal focus of my research interests. Nevertheless, given that many of the arguments developed so long ago proved out to be still valid, I considered useful to write this short text for the present volume and elaborate on some ideas from my doctoral work in the light of more recent research on the topic.

The Problem of Social Mobility

The study of social mobility constitutes a major preoccupation for sociology, although it no longer occupies the central position it took during the 1960s and 1970s. The stakes of the issue became however increasingly evident as liberal [right-wing] ideologies[3] won major battles against left-wing ones. The latter were significantly affected by the failure of Marxism to provide practical solutions for the organisation of economic, political, and social life, solutions that offer alternatives for capitalism, which is essentially based on a liberal view. The salience of social mobility derives from the fact that it is ultimately identical with the problem of *equality/inequality of social chances*, as its scholars frequently remind us. The possibility to move in the *social space*, to use Sorokin's

[2] A notable exception is Weiss (1986).

[3] In the original text in Romanian, the author uses the concept "liberal" in its French meaning, which is closer to the political "right-wing", and differs from the American sense of "liberal" (translator's note).

broad but suggestive metaphor (Sorokin, 1959) is constantly evaluated with respect to individuals' initial social positions. Consequently, social mobility refers to the differences between individuals' trajectories, i.e. different chances to achieve certain destinations when starting-positions differ.

The nature of the problem becomes clear when we study *intergenerational mobility*, in other words when the *initial position* is assumed to be the social status of the family in which the individual was born and socialised, and the *destination* is her/his own social status during adulthood. The word *status* has a general meaning in this context: it might refer to different ways in which the social, cultural, economic, or other situation of individuals or their reference group can be mapped in the social space. In order to locate an individual, the most frequently used variable is the occupational status, considered to imply a certain level of prestige, education, income, relational capital, etc.

Intergenerational mobility means thus the possibility that individuals born and raised in certain social environments will finally attain different social positions; in other words, it evaluates the extent to which starting positions are predictors of destinations, the relative importance of *ascription versus achievement*. When social spaces are hierarchical, and studies of social mobility commonly use such hierarchies, one can say that achieving a superior position is in general desirable. Therefore, if achieved statuses are influenced by original social positions, there will be an inequality of chances between individuals with different starting points.

The inequality of chances is a type of inequality that cannot be as easily justified as some basic inequalities that become evident during processes of social stratification. Basic inequalities consist of mostly inborn interpersonal differences in the possession of certain socially valued characteristics, and they are employed to justify the unequal distribution of individuals on the social ladder. In this sense, hierarchies are seen as having "functional" legitimacy, as being necessary for the good functioning of social mechanisms and of the society as a whole, at least according to the adepts of functionalist theories. However, this argumentation of functionalist theorists cannot justify the inequality of chances and consequently the problem of social mobility remains a major challenge for social scientists.

Left-wing ideologies (Marxism, neo-Marxism, etc.) usually focus on the problem of absolute inequalities and show less interest in the ways in which members of various social classes are recruited. These ideologies essentially blame the phenomenon of social hierarchisation *per se*, the division of societies into dominated (exploited) and dominating (exploiting) classes. To put it shortly, left-wing ideologies militate for practical measures aimed at reducing absolute inequalities, whereas liberal ideologies promote the equalisation of social chances or at least the diminishment of the inequality of chances.

Already during the "classical" period of social stratification and mobility studies, encompassing the 1950s and 1960s, there was a noticeable difference between the approaches of European and North American social scientists. For the former, the social space is defined in terms of *class structure*, where social class position can be identified based on a set of variables, among which occupation is seen as crucial. Although apparently marked by the Marxist ideology, rather influential during that period, this approach cannot be reduced to the Marxist vision, given that it was also embraced by scholars who had no affiliation with that stream of thought. The names of Raymond Aron (France) and John Goldthorpe (the United Kingdom) ought to be mentioned here, the latter being a prominent fellow of the Nuffield College at Oxford, with a well-known contribution to the study of social stratification and mobility during the last decades. Closer to the Marxist perspective are the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Erik Olin Wright, who promoted "European" ideas on the American continent: a proof that the distinction in terms of continental belonging is broadly generalising, giving room to exceptions and unexplained details.

The conception about the nature of social stratification has important implications for the concrete analyses of mobility phenomena. On one hand, every movement in the social space becomes a "leap", a change of the social status, the crossing of a border, in other words the achievement of a new quality. On the other hand, the social structure ought to possess a certain level of simplicity, the hierarchy must contain only a limited number of classes – usually less than 10-15 possible categories are considered – otherwise the study of the mobility matrix becomes impossible. The main instrument of analysis is the *mobility table*, a quadratic table that contains the positions of origin in the rows and the destinations in the columns. If the social classes are put in a hierarchical order, from the bottom positions to the upper ones, the main diagonal will contain the flows of immobile persons in each class, i.e. those who started from a certain position and ended up at the very same position, and the rest of the cells contain the flows of persons who changed their positions, i.e. the mobility flows or mobility flux. This approach to the analysis of mobility has also considerable implications for the methods employed to measure the *degree (level) of mobility*, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. It is about estimating the intensity of social mobility, or social fluidity, and describing its changes over time. Implicitly, this refers not only to the directions considered desirable, but also to those predictable within the framework of different theories.

The American approach on social stratification builds on using quantitative variables which measure the positions of individuals according to income, prestige (measured on a score of prestige), education (number of years of schooling) or other variables considered to be responsible for determining

social status, which can be measured on metric scales: interval or ratio scales. Such a representation of the social space leads to the assumption that mobility is a continuous gradual movement from one score to another, a quantitative rather than qualitative change. An act of mobility can be thus measured as the difference between two numerical values, the score of a variable at the starting point and the score attained at destination. The degree of correspondence between the positions on the two scales (origin and destination), in other words the degree of social immobility, is approximated by the coefficient of correlation between the two variables.

The consequence of the above-described approach is that phenomena of social mobility frequently lose their priority in social investigation, becoming part of the larger concern for *status attainment*. The classic model of such research design can be found in the well-known work of Blau and Duncan (1967), which is focused on the relations among a set of variables by using the so-called path analysis. This type of analysis tries to map out the relations of influence (determination) existing among several variables, and to estimate the intensity of direct influences that variables exercise upon each another. Simple correlations coefficients are insufficient for these estimations, given that they encompass both direct and mediated influences. Variables that account for social mobility (e.g. father's occupation and respondent's occupation in Blau and Duncan's study) constitute only one set of the 5-6 variables that enter the path analysis, and thus both direct and indirect influences of individuals' origin upon their destination are measured. Even though the central variable in the model is individuals' status at the moment of the survey (i.e. status at destination), the status of origin is just one of the predictors in the model. Consequently, the relationship between the two variables *per se* is not the central concern of the analysis: the problem of social mobility melts in one of status attainment.

Let us remember that one of the central concerns in social mobility studies is the measurement of the *level of inequality of social chances*, in other words the "degree of mobility" in society. This objective is only an intermediary one in the pursuit to validate different theories, which have in common the assumption that in the second half of the 20th Century Western societies evolved towards reducing the inequality of chances, in other words an increase in social mobility. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to present these theories in detail; however, it ought to be mentioned that empirical evidence does not support the thesis that such an evolution exists. Neither longitudinal studies, which look at the evolution of a particular society in time, nor cross-sectional studies, which compare societies with varying levels of socio-economic development, offered convincing evidence so far that would indicate significant changes in the degree of mobility.

Not all social theorists subscribe to the idea of *the constant flux*, to use the Erikson and Goldthorpe's term (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1993); several researchers try to give concrete examples that contradict this idea, employing new and more sophisticated statistical tools in order to depict the existence of certain changes and evolutions (most notably, Ganzeboom, Luijkx and Treiman, 1989). In my view, even if modifications in the structure of social mobility over time can be attested, they do not necessarily converge into one concrete direction. Moreover, the extent of these modifications is not large enough to assure that they actually exist, and that they are not only induced by the research design, the modalities in which stratification variables were constructed and measured in different studies across societies over time. To conclude, even if there is progress towards reducing the inequality of chances, *this progress is so small that the results of data analysis are at the limit of statistical significance, and the conclusions that can be drawn hardly pass the threshold of sociological significance.*

This situation can be considered "normal" since the absolute inequality between individuals occupying different positions on the social ladder is evolving. In my view, when trying to explain the inequality of chances, absolute inequalities are often forgotten. Nevertheless, they are not independent from each other, and the former actually derives from the latter. There is inequality of chances in attaining superior social positions because these are preferable in terms of income, power, prestige, types of the labour performed, etc. and their attainment is the result of a social competition in which each individual or family employs the resources at their disposal so as they or their offspring might reach those social positions. Consequently, the larger the discrepancies between starting situations, *ceteris paribus*, the larger those between final situations are expected to be. The bigger absolute inequalities are, the bigger relative inequalities of chances may presumably be found. Studies on social mobility should thus consider the evolution of absolute inequalities as well, among which the easiest to evaluate might be the inequalities in terms of income and wealth.

Although my overview of current literature is far from comprehensive, I would like to mention that numerous studies indicate an increasing social polarisation in developed countries or, at least, the persistence of a certain level of economic inequality (Savage, 2000). Under these circumstances, one might normally expect to find similar patterns of persisting or even increasing inequality of social chances, unless there are certain social mechanisms powerful enough to compensate for the effects of absolute inequalities. However, the existence of such mechanisms is rather unlikely in contemporary developed societies, based on liberal principles of "free-competition" and intrinsically rejecting regulatory measures. The experience of post-socialist countries could be revealing for such

research purposes, given that communist regimes tried to abolish both absolute and relative inequalities by introducing some social criteria for professional (occupational) promotion as well as for access to higher levels of education.

In another order of ideas, it ought to be said that during the late 1970s there was a methodological turn in the empirical studies concerned with the evolution of mobility trajectories, studies which commenced in the 1950s and continue nowadays as well. Until the 1970s, at least in the Europe, these studies aimed at constructing an indicator of "net mobility" (free-, exchange-, or circular-mobility) by controlling for "structural mobility" (or forced mobility) generated by the changes of the social structure between the two moments of the analysis (Boudon, 1973b). The problem of the distinction between structural mobility and net mobility, although essential in order to measure the degree of mobility in a given society, did not receive an adequate solution: although present in theory, this differentiation could not be traced at the level of concrete mobility flows, i.e. at the level of the cells from mobility tables. Consequently, this approach to mobility indexes came to an end and an alternative approach was embraced, based on "relative mobility rates" that indicate "social fluidity". The ultimate purpose of the analysis remains the same: to determine the association between origin and destination by controlling for marginal distributions, i.e. the changes in the social structure between the two points in time. However, the indicators of association used are the *odds ratios*[4], meaning the ratio of relative chances to attain a certain position. Odds ratios can be computed for each pair of cells from the interior of a mobility table as the ratio of cross-products of interior frequencies from the cells situated on the same row and column as the given pair. Thus, their computation is based on interior frequencies and not on marginal distributions. Building on odds ratios, log-linear models can be constructed for the analysis of mobility tables.

Although the usage of log-linear models is an evident methodological progress, it has its own limitations that one ought to be aware of. The study of absolute social inequalities revealed that there were many modalities to measure inequalities, every technique leading to different results. None of these techniques is univocally superior to the others. The situation is rather similar, or even more complicated, when relative social chances are evaluated. By

[4] Let us consider a and b the interior frequencies of a mobility table accounting for the number of individuals having the original social class C_i who attain the social classes C_i and C_j. Correspondingly, c and d are the numbers of individuals who originate in C_j and attain C_i and C_j. The odds ratio in this case is $\theta=a*d/b*c$. It is considered that Leo Goodman introduced this statistical measure at the beginning of the 1970s. In fact, similar measures had already been used before, for example in Kendall's association coefficient, $Q = (a*d-b*c)/(a*d+b*c)$, which can be expressed as $Q = (\theta-1)/(\theta+1)$.

replacing mobility indices based on the distinction between net mobility and structural mobility with log-linear models, different aspects of the very same phenomenon (i.e. social mobility) came into light. However, one should bear in mind that results produced by employing different techniques cannot be fundamentally different. If progress were made and social mobility increased, independent of structural changes, less sophisticated tools would most probably reveal that as well.

Education as an Intervening Variable

The most widely invoked representation of the role of the school in social mobility is that of a chain of three subsequent variables: *original status* (O), *educational qualification/diploma* (E), and *achieved status* (S) at a certain point in life. This constitutes a typical descriptive model of the influence of selected variables on an independent (or "response") variable (S), which aims at revealing the social mechanisms responsible for status attainment. The model also constitutes a way to approach social mobility, given that by introducing both O and E it controls for the difference between O and E, a variable accounting for mobility. The classic reasoning underlying the model is the following:

(1) Individuals start at a certain social position (O) and attain a certain educational qualification (E). Given the disparities between economic and symbolic resources, as well as between value-systems at the social positions of origin, individuals might obtain educational qualifications that correlate with their origins: this is the problem of the inequality of educational changes[5]. At the same time, the school system appeals to many skills and personal abilities that do not depend on the environment in which children were socialised, and therefore the relation of dependency between original positions and educational qualification is not perfect: schools facilitate the access of significant proportions of people with different initial statuses to higher levels of educational qualification.

(2) The level of the educational qualification received (E) is a good predictor of the future social position of the individual (S). In modern societies, the educational system became a very effective means of status allocation. At the same time, there is large consensus over the attribution an increasing role in status attainment to formal education, given that it is regarded as a "democratic"

[5] The inequality of educational chances is used as an umbrella-term for different theories that try to explain the relative advantages/disadvantages in educational performance of pupils with different social background.

mechanism, seemingly very transparent, which replaces the pre-modern forms of status allocation through *ascription* rather than *achievement*. By allocating social status on the basis of formal education, i.e. the diploma received, the society is considered to gain the virtue of being *meritocratic*[6].

(3) If social status depends on educational qualification, and educational qualification on original social status, by reducing the inequality of educational chances the inequality of status attainment will be reduced, in other words social mobility should increase.

The above argumentation stood at the heart of expectations of many sociologists from the early decades of social mobility research, predicting the increase of social mobility based on factual data on the expansion of formal education and the presumption of decreasing educational inequality (Boudon, 1973a). However, the results of the empirical research did not meet their expectations. Let us look at two of the potential explanations. First, no social system can be perfectly meritocratic, in none of the senses suggested by our definition. On one hand, no society has been discovered so far where *the dependency between the original social status and the achieved social status of individuals disappears after controlling for their educational qualification*. On the other hand, *it is impossible to achieve a relation of perfect dependency between the level of educational qualification and the social status achieved by individuals*. There are many types of activities that can be undertaken while having different types and levels of educational qualification, and they might lead to various social positions having different prestige or popularity, wealth or income, power or influence etc. Consequently, ascription does play a role in modern societies as well, the economic and symbolic inheritance of an individual matters – although it ought to be added that it matters less than it did in pre-modern times.

However, there is no guarantee that once we reached at the current degree of dependency between individuals' original status and their attained social position, this would remain constant, and one cannot exclude the possibility that it would strengthen or weaken in time. In other words, the influence of schooling cannot replace entirely the influence of social origin because children's intellectual abilities are not always sufficient to convert the

[6] The term meritocracy is far from being univocal. In the present paper, two of its meanings are concerned. First, a society is "more meritocratic" when, after attaining a certain educational qualification, the status of individuals depends mostly on their diplomas and only to a small extent on their original social positions. In other words, after controlling for educational qualification, the relation between social origins and attained status disappears. Second, a society is "more meritocratic" when the attained social status of individuals is best predicted by their educational qualification. Perfect meritocracy is achieved when social status is fully determined by educational qualification.

resources of their family background in symbolic resources acknowledged by the school, and the latter are not always necessary for attaining a certain social status.

Second, even if assuming that there is perfect meritocracy in the society, i.e. the original social position influences the achieved status only indirectly, through the educational qualification obtained, the conclusion from point (3) remains valid only when *ceteris paribus* is added. A society has higher mobility than another one when it has a lower inequality of educational chances, all other conditions relevant for social mobility being equal. Nevertheless, which are these relevant conditions or factors? One might think of many such factors, and the American literature on social mobility offers good illustrations with respect to this: mother's occupational status (and not only father's), parents' educational levels, ethnicity, religion, area of residence, etc. Even simpler models could clearly highlight what issues are at stake.

Let us measure the intensity of the relationship between two variables with the correlation coefficient *r*. Under the assumption of perfect meritocracy, in other words of the independence between the variables S and O when controlling for E, we obtain a relationship that can be described by the formula[7]:

$$r_{OS}=r_{OE}*r_{ES}.$$

The correlation between social origin and achieved status, which reflects the degree of immobility, equals to the product of the correlation between social origin and educational qualification and the correlation between educational qualification and achieved status. In this formula, reducing the inequality of educational chances means reducing the value of r_{OE}, whereas *ceteris paribus* means holding constant the value of r_{ES}.

The influence of the coefficient r_{ES}, i.e. the correlation between educational qualification and the social status attained, is equally important for determining the value of r_{OS} (degree of social immobility) as the coefficient r_{OE} (the inequality of educational chances). Unfortunately, mobility studies, as well as theories and explanatory-models of social mobility, often lay the focus only on the former factor, the inequality of educational chances, and give much less attention to or even omit altogether the latter factor, the relation between educational qualification and status. One might seldom find analysis that go beyond superficial generalisations stating that in modern societies the role of

[7] In the case that *r* is the Bravais-Pearson correlation coefficient, the relationship can be obtained through the nullification of the partial correlation between O and S, after controlling for E. The formula is valid for association coefficients as well, in other words when variables are measured on qualitative scales, given that the transition matrix (OS) is equal to the product of matrices (OE) and (ES).

education for status attainment is more and more important. In terms of the above formula, this would mean the increase of the coefficient r_{ES} during this period. However, the increase of r_{ES} leads to counter-intuitive results with respect to the degree of social mobility: the more the achieved status depends on education, i.e. the society is more meritocratic in the second sense of this term, *ceteris paribus* the higher the degree of immobility in the society is going to be. In this context *ceteris paribus* means that the coefficient r_{OE} is held constant, i.e. the degree of inequality of educational chances remains unchanged.

The conclusions[8] of the above argumentation can be easily driven. From the practical point of view, a reduction of the inequality of educational chances can be counterbalanced by an increase of the dependency between educational qualification and achieved status, the conjunction of the two factors leading to a quasi-constant level of social mobility. From the normative point of view, a reduction of the inequality of educational chances has positive consequences on social mobility; the democratisation of education means not only the liberalisation of access to a certain good (i.e. education) of its own right, but also to an instrument of obtaining other goods (in our case superior social status). If societies contain mechanisms that generate inequalities of educational chances, they will be more likely to have great inequalities of social chances when there is meritocracy, in the sense that status attainment largely depends on educational qualification. In such societies immobility will be at its maximum when meritocracy is perfect, i.e. when social status is entirely determined by educational qualification. In this case, when r_{ES} equals one, and $r_{OS}=r_{OE}$.

The level of immobility is equal to the level of the inequality of educational chances. However, the letter cannot attain a maximum level given that the value of the coefficient is far from one. This is true because, as argued before, the school values certain individual characteristics and abilities which are not necessarily induced by the social environment of origin. Thus, educational institutions have a positive role in the generation of social mobility as well.

The ideas outlined above have a crucial importance for social mobility analysis. However, they report only on one of the dimensions of the relationship between school and social mobility, trying to answer the question: How is the degree of social mobility influenced by the degree of inequality of educational chances in a given society? This problem might have several facets: If the inequality of educational chances is reduced, can we expect an increase in social mobility? If access to educational qualification is more democratic, will social

[8] These conclusions remain valid even in the absence of the perfect-meritocracy assumption (in the first sense of the concept), i.e. when the relationship between attained social status and original position is more complex than the one reported by the model. Perfect meritocracy was assumed only to make a simpler and more transparent argumentation.

chances be more equal? From the practical point of view, this means to look at the variation of two indicators (better to say to sets of indicators) and estimate the extent to which they change simultaneously (analysis of concomitant variations). Unfortunately for social research, societies are too complex to submit to such simple comparisons and it is virtually impossible to secure that all other factors that might influence social mobility are the same in the societies compared. Therefore, the conclusion that indicators of social mobility are not sensitive to the decrease of the inequality of educational chances is not valid.

In another order of ideas, regardless of the formal statistical relationship, it is not difficult to realise that mechanisms of status-attribution based on educational qualification are not independent of the existence of an inequality of educational chances. It is rather utopian to believe that modern societies, however democratic they might me, evolve towards perfect mobility. As argued before, stratification always induces a certain level of immobility produced through social mechanisms[9] that are well articulated and accepted by the prevailing normative and value-system. If the school system has not only the role to give educational diplomas, but also social statuses, it will become part of the mechanism that reproduces the social structure and fulfil its role exactly through the inequality of educational chances. Thus, it is not reasonable to expect that the inequality of educational chances could be fully eliminated without renouncing at the role of diploma for status-attainment and "inventing" of a new mechanism of status-attribution.

Consequently, schooling is at the same time a mechanism of social reproduction, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) argued, and a facilitator of social mobility. These contradictory functions derive from the fact that schools take the role of status-attribution concomitantly with the role of levelling down initial social inequalities by giving a chance of upward social mobility to those who possess inborn abilities and are ready to invest in them. The achieved social status can be thus higher or lower than the status inherited from individuals' families. The market of educational qualifications becomes a field of confrontation between descendants from families with very different resources. However, obtaining a diploma does not depend solely on the material and cultural resources of the family of origin, but also on individual characteristics which do not necessarily derive from these.

[9] Although terms such as "mechanisms", "functions", "instruments", etc. might be frequently used in these paragraphs, they serve only as linguistic shortcuts and they do not mean that I embrace the functionalist perspective. These regularities ought to be interpreted as results of individual human action, materialised in rules, institutions, and other forms of organisation and regulation adopted within a certain type of society.

This ambiguity with respect to the role of the school in social mobility permitted social thinkers to give many different and often contradictory interpretations to it. From Bourdieu's point of view, the school is an institution that not only transmits or transfers inequalities from parents to children, but also legitimates these inequalities. From the opposite point of view, that of ultra-optimist liberalism, the school has a decisive contribution to eliminating the inequalities of chances between individuals with different social origins. The truth might be somewhere in the middle, and the complexity of the relationship between the three variables described above (original social position, educational qualification, and achieved social status) might be even larger than it is usually assumed. This is the reason for turning now to other dimensions of the relationship between education and social mobility, which received less attention in the studies on this topic so far.

The Development of the Educational System and Social Mobility

It is known that during the 19th century, but especially during the 20th century, the educational system developed rapidly and the proportions of students at different educational levels sharply increased. After the Second World War, in Western societies registered a real boom in higher education attendance. This development cannot be separated from the processes through which the school was invested with an increasing role in the professional formation of the young generation and in social-status attribution. In this way, demand for formal education increased and, concomitantly, diplomas lost their value. In time, the values of educational qualifications for status achievement significantly diminished. A good example in this respect is the high-school diploma, which in the past used to confer superior social position, especially for middle-class women who might have used it for successful marriage, whereas for the generations after the Second World War high-school diplomas became common and lost their value as university education expanded.

As university-level education becomes mass-education, there is an emergent stratification of higher-education diplomas, and distinctions are traced according to graduating only three-years (or college-level), earning Bachelor's or Master's degree, obtaining the title of Doctor, and engaging in post-doctoral qualifications. This leads to some changes in the formal process of selection and drop out occurs at higher educational levels. However, selection mechanisms remain essentially the same: the educational performance at the previous level to the selection-point (performance which correlates with individuals' social origin). Thus, the social status of the family still influences educational trajectories, regardless of personal abilities and educational performance.

The aim of the above argumentation was to highlight the fact that through the development of the educational system the inequality of educational chances is reduced mainly at those levels at which education becomes available to the masses. Educational inequality is not uniformly reduced at all educational levels. Superior levels remain highly selective, and they can be obtained primarily by those individuals you can cope with the increasing competition and can rely on family resources or other advantages of their social milieu. One should be careful thus to state that educational inequality is decreasing, because it is possible that these inequalities are moving from one point of selection to another. Nevertheless, mass-education clearly makes the educational chances of children with different social backgrounds comparable, at least at basic and medium levels of education.

Let us now turn to the question whether there is a link between the development of the educational system and social mobility *under the assumption that the degree of inequality of chances is held constant.* The reason for raising this question is that, in general, the development of the educational system and the reduction of the inequality of educational chances occur simultaneously and interdependently. However, it is important to estimate the separate effects of each of these two processes on social mobility by controlling for the effects of the other process.

First, one should demonstrate that the two processes do not necessarily accompany each other: it is possible that the educational system develops although the degree of inequality of educational chances remains at the same level. Let us distinguish between only two levels of educational qualification: an inferior level, E_1, and a superior level, E_2. The development of the educational system means that the proportion of people having E_2 increases from one generation to the other. The inequality of educational chances ought to be estimated with respect to the original position in the social structure. Let us thus distinguish furthermore between two social classes: a lower-class, O_1, and a higher-class, O_2. Based on these two variables, a bivariate distribution table can be constructed for the *n* individuals, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1.

Educational mobility

Social origin	**Educational qualification**		**Total**
	E_1	E_2	
O_1	k_{11}	k_{12}	**$k_{1.}$**
O_2	k_{21}	k_{22}	**$k_{2.}$**
Total	**$k_{.1}$**	**$k_{.2}$**	**n**

Source: Author's illustration.

One of the social inequality measures that can be computed for such tables is the ratio of relative chances, i.e. the odds ratio θ:

$$\theta = (k_{11}*k_{22})/(k_{21}*k_{12}).$$

The odds ratio has the value 1 (one) when there is a perfect equality of chances, in our case a perfect equality of educational chances among pupils with different social backgrounds. The greater the value of the odds ratio deviates from 1, the higher the degree of inequality of chances. For the present case, the larger the difference from 1, the higher are the relative chances of upper-class pupils versus lower class pupils to attain superior levels of educational qualification. **Table 2** presents a hypothetical situation for 1,000 individuals from the same generation.

Table 2.

Hypothetical situation for an older generation

Social origin	**Educational qualification**		**Total**
	E_1	**E_2**	
O_1	650	50	**700**
O_2	150	150	**300**
Total	**800**	**200**	**1.000**

Source: Author's illustration.

It can be noticed from that half of the individuals with an upper-class background obtain superior levels of educational qualification, whereas only 50 out of 700 individuals from the lower class do that. The value of the odds ratio clearly reflects this inequality:

$$\theta = (650*150)/(150*50)=13$$

Let us suppose that as time passes the educational system develops, and for a later generation 300 out of 1,000 individuals obtain the superior level of educational qualification. For the sake of simplicity, let us also assume that the social structure remained the same. It is possible thus to have the distribution from **Table 3**:

Table 3.

Hypothetical situation for a younger generation

Social origin	Educational qualification		Total
	E_1	E_2	
O_1	603	97	**700**
O_2	97	203	**300**
Total	**800**	**200**	**1.000**

Source: Author's illustration.

The value of the odds ratio is nevertheless almost the same as in the previous situation:

$$\theta = (650*203)/(97*97)=13.05$$

Consequently, although the proportion of those obtaining superior educational qualification increased by 50%, the degree of inequality of educational chances did not change. Other measures of inequality of chances lead to similar results, only the interior frequencies would slightly modify.

The second part of our demonstration concerns the achieved status of individuals. Assuming that the society is meritocratic, at least according to one of the meanings of this term, the social origin does not influence the achieved social status of individuals after they received their educational diploma. In a hypothetical situation, 80% of individuals having lower levels of educational qualification (E_1) achieve an inferior social status (S_1) and 20% a superior social status (S_2). For those having higher levels of educational qualification (E_2), the situation is reversed: 20% attain S_1 and 80% attain S_2. By holding constant this mechanism of social status attribution, social mobility tables can be constructed for the two generations analysed above. For the first generation, the mobility table is presented in **Table 4** below[10]:

[10] The figures from **Table 4** can be obtained in the following way: 530 is the sum of 520 (representing the 80% of those 650 individuals having O_1 and E_1) and 10 (20% of those 50 who have O_1 and E_2).

Table 4.

Hypothetical status attainment for the older generation

Social origin	Status		Total
	S_1	S_2	
O_1	530	170	**700**
O_2	150	150	**300**
Total	**680**	**320**	**1.000**

Source: Author's illustration.

The degree of social immobility or the degree of inequality of chances can be estimated with the help of the odds ratio:

$$\theta = (530*150)/(150*170)=3.1$$

For the second generation, the mobility table is presented in **Table 5**:

Table 5.

Hypothetical status attainment for the younger generation

Social origin	Status		Total
	S_1	S_2	
O_1	501	199	**700**
O_2	119	181	**300**
Total	**680**	**320**	**1.000**

Source: Author's illustration.

The degree of inequality of chances can be computed as:

$$\theta = (501*181)/(119*199)=3.8$$

The results are surprising: *the development of the educational system*, conceptualised as an increase in the proportion of those obtaining higher levels of educational qualification, *leads to an increase of the inequality of chances in*

status attainment, thus to greater social immobility, when the inequality of educational chances and the relationship between diploma and achieved status is kept constant. Several questions arise from these results: Can these conclusions be generalised? Do these results only derive from the specific hypothetical data used, revealing no more than an outlier case? If the situation were not unique, how could it be explained?

It is not possible to give a comprehensive answer to the first question. The situation is certainly not singular, anybody else could use different numbers and obtain the same results. In my doctoral dissertation from 1977 I have employed different indicators of social mobility, yet I demonstrated the fact that social immobility increased despite of the expanding educational system. Nevertheless, it ought to be mentioned that the results stand only when dichotomous variables are used as indicators of social status and educational qualification. This simplification permits to have a univocal conceptualisation of the development of the educational system as an increase in the proportion of those who obtained higher educational qualifications. When more than two levels of educational attainment are considered, the structural change becomes more complex and difficult to model. Thus, it ultimately requires simplification, and it will focus on a specific level of educational qualification, usually the one comprising the largest proportion of individuals.

The conclusions can be summarised as follows: *During those periods when only small proportions of individuals obtain high educational qualifications, an increase in their proportions leads to a decrease of social mobility, i.e. higher values of the social immobility index. There is a point of inflection of the curve modelling the value of the index, after which the slope sharply decreases, indicating rising levels of social mobility.* The position of this inflection point depends on the social structures at the two moments for which the mobility tables were constructed, as well as on the indicators employed for the measurement of the association between the two variables[11].

It is not difficult to find explanations for the above results, and they hold for more complex models as well. The expansion of the educational system is in general understood as the increase in the proportion of people who attain a certain level of educational qualification, from one generation to another. In order to evaluate it, one has to use a certain threshold of educational qualification and estimate what segment of the population reaches that particular threshold, e.g. graduates high-school, obtains a university diploma, etc. Intuitively, one

[11] These conclusions were drawn by using a model in which individuals with an inferior social status outnumber those with superior social status. Boudon's domination index was employed to measure the relationship between the three variables: O, E, and S (Boudon, 1973a).

might imagine that the development of the educational system resembles with the opening of a gate which has in front large numbers of people gathered waiting. When the door slightly opens, those positioned close to the gate manage to enter first. Similarly, when the educational system expands, those having the advantage of upper-class social origins will profit first. If the inequality of educational chances and the dependency between diploma and achieved social status are held constant, the latter will obtain proportionately more often higher education diplomas than those coming from families at the bottom of the social ladder, and consequently a higher proportion of them will have superior social statuses. When the gate opens widely, those from lower-class families succeed to enter as well, obtaining thus a diploma of higher education. If the relationship between diploma and status-attainment still stands, a larger proportion of those coming from the lower class will enhance their position on the social ladder, and the degree of social mobility will increase correspondingly.

The analogy might suggest that in order to enhance social mobility the educational system should be expanded. However, the reality is far from being that simple. The model is just a formal scheme resting on certain hypotheses, and the conclusions derive from those specific hypotheses. Going beyond this formal scheme, one might easily realize that the assumption of expanding educational system contradicts the assumption of constant dependency between diploma and status. When large proportions of the population obtain a certain educational qualification, the diploma loses its initial value and cannot grant high-status anymore. The society actually "invents" another point of selection, moves up the threshold of educational qualification above which people attain high-status. If we stick to the initial hypothesis of constant dependency between diploma and achieved status, the outcome will be the modification of the social structure, i.e. larger proportions of people attain higher statuses. In other words, if the diploma does not devaluate, the social status it guarantees will devaluate! Bearing in mind that social structures are more stable than educational structures, it is plausible to say that the expansion of the educational system leads to the devaluation of diplomas and a further fragmentation of the levels of higher educational qualification, with all its positive and negative consequences.

The Social Mobility of Individuals and their Educational Qualification

New aspects of the relationship between social mobility and education are revealed by moving the focus of inequality of chances analysis from the macrosocial level to the level of individuals. The hypothesis to be tested is

whether individuals with higher levels of educational qualification are more likely to be upwardly mobile, and those with lower levels of educational qualification to be downwardly mobile. The problem seems rather simple, and a straightforward solution consists of constructing an intergenerational mobility table which has as one dimension the level of educational qualification and as the other the mobility pattern of the individual: downwardly mobile, upwardly mobile, or immobile. It is expected to find a high degree of dependency between the two variables.

Raymond Boudon (1973a) draws special attention to the study of C.A. Anderson (1961), a Swedish sociologist who pointed out in 1961 that the analysis of mobility tables based on empirical data from Sweden, France, and the UK do not indicate a degree of association that meets the expectations of the above-stated hypothesis. Boudon called the result, a mobility table with the value of the association measure closer to zero than to the unit, Anderson's paradox.

To illustrate this situation, let me reproduce three tables. **Table 6** was built using the figures presented by Boudon; the data was gathered during an investigation in Stockholm, in 1950.

Table 6.
The association between educational qualification and social mobility. Stockholm data

Educational qualification	**Situation in the mobility table**			**Total**
	Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
Low	12.6	55.1	32.3	**100**
High	14.8	49.1	36.1	**100**
Total	**13.3**	**53.1**	**33.6**	**100**

Source: Author's compilation using data presented by Anderson (1961).

The second table (**Table 7**) can be found in my study from 1977, which used data from a large social investigation of the French Statistical Institute (INSEE) in 1964. Initially, I used seven categories of occupational status and four levels of educational qualification[12]. The results were the following:

[12] The classifications employed in mobility studies – the number of categories and their contents – are crucial for the results of the analyses. It can be seen in the present case as well that the more general the categories are, the less visible the association between them is.

Table 7.
The association between educational qualification and social mobility. INSEE data, 1964, Rotariu (1977)

Educational qualification	Situation in the mobility table			Total
	Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
E1 (inferior)	20.2	48.9	30.9	**100**
E2	16.8	52.1	31.1	**100**
E3	18.4	35.2	46.4	**100**
E4 (superior)	12.1	38.2	49.7	**100**
Total	**16.9**	**48.9**	**34.2**	**100**

Source: Author's compilation using data presented in his doctoral studies, Rotary (1977).

The third table (**Table 8**) portrays the situation in the UK during the mid-1990s, and it uses data presented by Mike Savage (2000). For the sake of simplicity, I have restructured the tables with four levels of educational qualification and five social classes.

Table 8.
The association between educational qualification and social mobility. UK data, mid-1990s

Educational qualification	Situation in the mobility table			Total
	Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
E1 (inferior)	34.1	48.3	30.1	**100**
E2	27.9	25.7	46.4	**100**
E3	19.3	30.8	49.5	**100**
E4 (superior)	6.9	43.9	49.2	**100**
Total	**25.8**	**32.1**	**42.1**	**100**

Source: Author's compilation based on data presented by Savage (2000).

The situations revealed by the above tables are not difficult to describe. The degree of association between educational qualification and social mobility patterns is rather weak in all three cases. Even in **Table 8**, although the percentages increase on the third column and decrease on the first one, the value of the association coefficient is small. Given that both variables are ordinal, Kendall's τ association coefficient can be computed. For the third table, the two Kendall coefficients that can be calculated are equal:

$$\tau_b = \tau_c = 0.17$$

Although these results confirm Anderson's previous analysis, undertaken almost four decades ago, they cannot justify his skepticism towards the influence of education on social mobility. It is a truism to say that the lack of association between two variables cannot be interpreted as the lack of dependency between the phenomena that those variables were employed to indicate. In a similar way, the existence of statistical association or correlation does not imply the necessity of a real relationship. Many debates would have been avoided if a third variable were introduced in the analysis. From another point of view, given that the variables have only a limited number of categories, ceiling-effects ought to be considered: persons coming from families at the top of the social ladder could hardly be upwardly mobile given that there is no superior class position they might ascend to. Correspondingly, persons from with lower-class origins might be categorised as belonging to the very bottom of the social ladder and thus having no lower position to descend to.

In order to shed light on the relationship between educational qualification and the mobility chances of individuals, the mobility tables ought to be constructed not at the level of the whole population, but at that of social classes of origin within that population. As the following tables reveal, in these cases the degree of dependency is closer to the expected level. For example, let us see the situation of *children of routine non-manual workers*, as reported by the reconstructed table (**Table 9**) based on data presented by Savage (2000):

Table 9.

The association between educational qualification and social mobility. UK data for children of routine non-manual workers, mid-1990s

Educational qualification	**Situation in the mobility table**			**Total**
	Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
E1 (inferior)	64	12	24	**100**

Educational qualification	**Situation in the mobility table**			**Total**
	Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
E2	42	29	29	**100**
E3	10	23	67	**100**
E4 (superior)	**0**	**10**	**90**	**100**

Source: Author's compilation based on data presented by Savage (2000).

It can be easily noticed in **Table 9** that among those children of routine non-manual workers who did not obtain higher levels of educational qualification 64% experienced downward mobility and only 24% upward mobility. For those who managed to obtain a diploma of higher education, the chance of downward mobility is virtually zero, and that of upward mobility is 90%! The situation is similar in the case of persons from other social categories of origin as well. In general, the mobility tables for intermediary categories are largely similar with the above-presented one, with high variations on the columns of mobility and, correspondingly, strong dependency between education and mobility patterns. For the categories close to the extremes of the social ladder, the mobility tables present higher degrees of upward mobility in the case of individuals with lower-class origins and higher levels of downward mobility for those with an upper-class background. Furthermore, education is a means for ascending on the social ladder for those coming from the lower-classes (i.e. mobility), and a means to conserve an upper-class position for those coming from high-status families (i.e. immobility). The failure to achieve higher levels of educational qualification generates immobility for those at the bottom of the social hierarchy and downward mobility for those at the top.

In the previous paragraphs, the focus lied on ceiling-effects; nevertheless, the relationship between mobility patterns and educational attainment is much more complex. Let us now turn to those investigations that use quantitative variables in order to evaluate both educational performance (e.g. the number of years of schooling) and social status (e.g. the score on a scale of occupational prestige). In this case, correlation coefficients can be computed, as well as a new variable (M), defined as the difference between the achieved social status and the original one:

$$M = S - O.$$

This relationship can be expressed with the help of the correlation coefficient between educational qualification (E) and social mobility (M). A high value of the correlation coefficient means that those obtaining higher levels of educational qualification are more likely to be upwardly mobile (positive values of S - O); correspondingly, those with low educational achievement are less likely to be upwardly mobile. For the sake of simplicity, only the covariance between E and M will be computed, as it provides the basis for the correlation coefficient. Let us consider *n* individuals, each having a certain social origin (x_i), an achieved social status (y_i), and a level of educational qualification (z_i). The covariance between education and social mobility is given by the following formula, where the bar above the letter indicates the average value of a given variable:

$$\text{Cov}(E, M) = \frac{\sum(z_i-\bar{z})*((y_i-x_i)-(\bar{y}-\bar{x}))}{N} = \frac{\sum(z_i-\bar{z})*(y_i-\bar{y})-\sum(z_i-\bar{z})*(x_i-\bar{x})}{n} =$$

$$= \text{Cov}(E, S) - \text{Cov}(O, E)$$

The correlation coefficient is obtained by adjusting for the standard deviances of variables, i.e. by dividing covariances to the product of standard deviances of the two variables. It is not necessary to proceed with the actual calculations to understand that, from the statistical point of view, the relationship between social mobility and education can be expressed as the difference between the correlation of educational qualification with achieved social status and that between original social position and educational qualification. Given that both covariances take positive values, we expect that their difference will be close to zero. Without adjusting for the standard deviances of variables, the dependency between educational qualification and mobility increases when the inequality of educational chances is reduced. Similarly, it is reasonable to predict that the dependency between educational qualification and mobility will strengthen when the relationship between diploma and achieved social status is stronger. The latter statement seems to contradict the conclusions of the previous section on the relation between the indicators of inequality of educational and social chances. More precisely, that an increase of the dependency between diploma and achieved social status would lead to the decrease of social mobility (strong association between social position at origin and achieved status), *ceteris paribus*. However, this contradiction is misleading, given that the two statements refer to different things. At the societal level, an increase of the dependency of achieved social status on educational qualification will lead to

greater immobility if the inequality of educational chances remains constant. At the level of individuals, the same process will lead to greater probability of upward mobility in the case of people with higher levels of educational qualification, and greater probability of downward mobility for those with lower educational qualification.

Conclusions

Given the synthetic nature of the above lines, it is unnecessary to summarise the main arguments once again. Additional details and illustrations might provide better insight into the underlying explanations and demonstrations, nevertheless, they would not alter their core. As a concluding remark, it ought to be reminded that the intention of the present paper was to highlight the complexity of the relationship between school and social mobility and warn against any hasty generalisation and commonsensical statements when analysing a social phenomenon so manifold in its dependencies and implications.

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A TYPOLOGY OF SHRINKING CITIES: THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DYNAMIC OF ROMANIAN URBAN NETWORK 2010-2020

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ABSTRACT[3]. The aim of the paper is to open the issue of multiple shrinkage trajectories in a context of extended urbanisation (Keil 2018) by delineating the different trajectories of Romanian cities. We employed principal component analysis to allow for a multi-criterial classification of Romanian cities based on k-means cluster analysis. Beyond the dominant representation of shrinkage as a process that is mainly correlated with population loss and economic decline, this paper calls for bridging together distinct dimensions which have been either under-studied, such as the aspect of human development, or studied separately across the existing literature, such as governance of shrinkage and economic growth. Therefore, the typology developed here accounts for understanding the process of shrinkage as a complex process, having multiple causes, which determine peculiar trajectories. The outcome confirms the existence of distinct and highly localised shrinkage identities (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, et al. 2012). We show that regrowth is not strictly related to the urban core, but it has more to do with a process of complexification of the landscape and social relations existing at the periphery of the city. Shrinking core cities coexists with growing peri-urban areas.

Keywords: shrinking cities, extended urbanisation, peri-urbanisation, growth poles.

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Introduction

The debate over the process of urban shrinkage continues to be relevant in the field of urban studies, gaining momentum in the decade following the 2008 financial crisis (Audirac 2018). While the phenomenon of urban depopulation became of concern in the 1990s with the demises of socialism in Eastern Europe (Mykhnenko and Turok 2008), a growing academic interest re emerged in the post-crisis era, which left a significant mark on peripheral European cities. The last decade witnesses a resurgent interest in case studies focusing on cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants (Haase et al. 2021). When studying the process of shrinkage there is a need to be place and time specific (Haase et al. 2014, 2016). Shrinkage identities (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, et al. 2012) emerged as a conceptual tool to account exactly for the multi-dimensional causes at interplay in localised ongoing processes of demographic, economic and social contraction (Rink et al. 2014). However, as Wolff et al. (2017) astutely points out, engaging mainly with larger cities, leaves out a considerable number of urban settlements with their specific shrinking trajectories. The aim of this paper is to develop a typology which includes the whole urban spectrum from Romania, and accounts for place and time trajectory. This is of great importance as 36,7% of Romania's cities have a population below 10.000 inhabitants, and 35,1% have a population between 10.000 and 25.000 inhabitants (Rotariu, Dumănescu, and Hărăguş 2017). In fact, the urban distribution of population in Romania is identical with the larger European one (Wolff and Wiechmann 2018), transforming this urban network into a laboratory to develop shrinkage typologies, without losing sight of local specificities.

Eastern Europe became the focus of research on urban shrinkage in the 1990s, but the focus of the literature was on post-socialist transformation. The process of urban contraction is generally analysed from a rigorous demographic perspective to address depopulation and recent demographic changes (Bănică, Istrate, and Muntele 2017; Eva, Cehan, and Lazăr 2021), or from the broader framework of deindustrialization (Popescu 2014). Moreover, the current literature follows the larger European academic trend of case studies on shrinking identities and trajectories, through in depth studies of Timişoara (Lucheş, Nadolu, and Dincă 2011; Rink et al. 2014), Bucharest (Ianoş et al. 2016) or the mining cities of Valea Jiului (Constantinescu 2012). However, recent scholarship emphasised upon the multi-causality of shrinkage (Haase et al. 2016; Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, et al. 2012; Wolff and Wiechmann 2018) and how localities respond to it (Pallagst et al. 2021). This paper aims to move away from the generic post-socialist framework and deindustrialization to build a typology of urban shrinkage in Romania by including variables that encompass the multiple dimensions of the process: demographic, floor space, economic, human development, urban governance, city expenditure and the environmental situation.

Moreover, the current paper discusses the process of shrinkage in its specific varieties and aims for a non-linear understanding of the phenomenon (Wolff et al. 2017). Despite population loss emerging as a general trend for urban settlements in Europe, more recently a reverse trend of regrowth has become evident in certain cities (Kabisch, Haase, and Haase 2010). The existing literature regarding regrowth follows two distinct paths. The first one is engaging with the idea of reurbanization and argues for the increase of population density within the city (Broitman and Koomen 2020; Kabisch et al. 2010; Wolff et al. 2017), while examining the impact on the built-up area and green spaces (Wolff et al. 2017). The second narrative distances itself from the argument for densification and the concept of reurbanization, by examining the current dynamic from the framework of extended urbanisation. Keil (2018) argues that what we witness is a new process, one which differs qualitatively from reurbanisation. The focal point in his analysis is that of suburbanism, which is ignored in the previous category as it is seen rather as a driving force for population loss. Keil (2018) considers the contemporary practices of urban peripheralisation to be structurally different and more complex than what are traditionally thought of as suburbs, naming the phenomenon post-suburbanism. To be more precise, the problem of regrowth is not one strictly related to the urban core, but it has more to do with a process of complexification of the landscape and social relations existing at the periphery of the city. Starting from this point of tension between the two bodies of literature, the present paper reflects on the ongoing dynamic of population regrowth and certain cities of Romania. Special attention is paid in this regard to peri-urban localities and their transformation in the last decade, as they are specific local examples, closely related to what Keil envisaged as post-suburbia.

The paper is organised in six sections. First, we discuss the literature on shrinking cities in the context of extended urbanisation. Second, we present our data, and the main indexes we use in this analysis. Third, we lay down the methodological strategy of the paper. The results are presented in three separate subsections: one that deals with the index construction based on principal component analysis, one that outlines the groups of cities based on a cluster analysis, and one that further divides the cities into subgroups based on a new iteration of the cluster analysis. The final section is a conclusion that summarises the findings.

Post-shrinkage in the context of extended urbanisation

While the literature on the process of urban shrinkage has been mainly case-study oriented (Haase et al. 2021), there is some recent scholarship which examines the existing body of knowledge with the scope of developing an

integrative conceptual apparatus (Bernt 2016; Haase et al. 2014). Hassel et al. (2014) observe here a tension between existing macro-theoretical debates and their empirical base. As Bernt (2016) argues, the existing literature tends to be either focused on single-cases – for example former mining cities (Constantinescu 2012; Martinez-Fernandez, Wu, et al. 2012) or larger cites –, or it tends to develop analyses based upon a single variable, for example population loss. The outcome is a simplistic understanding of urban shrinkage as a linear phenomenon, being opposed to urban growth (Haase et al. 2021). While typologies of shrinkage have been developed (Eva, Cehan, and Lazăr 2021; Wiechmann and Wolff 2013; Wolff and Wiechmann 2018), they rarely escape the tension between case studies or single variable use. That is why Hassel et al. (2014) calls for a multidimensional investigation that can accommodate the multiplicities of path specific urban shrinkages. Our paper responds to this call and our aim is to develop a multi-criterial typology of the Romanian cities. Such an endeavour has the potential to generate a non-linear account of the shrinking processes and it could potentially dissolve the apparent contradiction between shrinkage and growth.

As Haase et al. (2014) observes, the process of shrinkage, far from being new, has been documented extensively by different branches of urban scholarship, even if these literature strands did not always operate under the same paradigmatic umbrella. Nonetheless, the usage of the term of shrinkage itself has become widespread only during the first decade of the century (Bernt 2016). Beyond its recent rise, the three most researched topics regarding shrinkage refer to: causes of shrinkage, trajectories or certain typologies of shrinkage, planning responses and strategies developed by the governing bodies (Haase et al. 2021). A fourth, unexpected topic in connection to shrinkage is that of urban regrowth. Urban regrowth has been a phenomenon studied recently, present especially in big cities (Kabisch, Haase, and Haase 2010), gathering increasingly more academic interest in the past few years.

The existing debates revolve around concepts such as reurbanization (Kabisch, Haase, and Haase 2010; Wolff et al. 2017) on the one hand, and extended urbanisation (Keil 2018) and post-suburbia (Charmes and Keil 2015), on the other hand. Reurbanization is of concern for urban scholars who study suburbanization as concomitant with urban shrinkage. For much of this literature, the urban life cycle model of van den Berg, Drewett and Klaassen (2013) supports the claim that these two tendencies are distinct sequences in a cyclic model of growth and decline. Another central aspect to reurbanisation is the problem of densification, which is seen as happening either in the urban core (Broitman and Koomen 2020) or in certain places within the city. However, in this framework, while temporarily simultaneous, suburbanisation and shrinkage are perceived as an opposing spatial trend: core shrinkage fades away as population returns in the core from suburbia (Kabisch, Haase, and Haase 2010).

Extended urbanisation and post-suburbia are, on the other hand, key concepts in Roger Keil's analysis of contemporary urbanization (Charmes and Keil 2015; Keil, 2018). Post-suburbanism refers to the structural changes which alter the internal organisation of the suburbs. This is the outcome of the process of extended urbanisation which re-shapes the peripheries of the cities. Our paper follows this second corpus of literature, and we avoid a simple opposition between shrinking and growth and follow a more complex typology of urban dynamic. More specifically, we interpret the shrinkage of the urban cores as a process which pertains to extended urbanisation, without having some strong assumptions about urban life cycles.

In this paper, three hypotheses regarding the different trajectories of Romania's urban localities were tested. First, we hypothesise that *post-shrinkage growth* (core shrinkage and periurban growth) is mainly concentrated around the biggest urban growth poles of Romania, especially in their peri-urban area and the surrounding localities. Secondly, as the country experienced a period of economic expansion in the previous decade, in the aftermath of the 2008 Financial Crisis, we argue that cities with a growing manufacturing sector have experienced a period of relative growth. This is mainly concerned with the out-sourcing of manufacturing and industrial capabilities in the Eastern side of the continent. Third, we expect that indexes regarding human development and economic structure would reveal important social inequalities both within the cities and between themselves.

Data and definitions

The typology presented in this article is primarily intended to connect several different dimensions that have been considered separately. In a broad sense, all categories employed here are used in documenting urban shrinkage. The original contribution of this paper is to create a classification that considers the various bodies of knowledge and draws connections between them. After all, it is important to delineate various existing trajectories and understand the unique shrinking identity of Romanian cities. Therefore, existing indicators reflect a wide range of topics in shrinkage research, including demographics, economics, human development, governance of shrinkage, and environmental issues. The exact list of indexes can be found in Table 1.

The demographic dimension was, perhaps, the most documented across the existing literature (Bernt 2016; Haase et al. 2014). Population loss was the main concern, being marked as one of the distinctive features of shrinkage, and different explanations were attributed to this phenomenon (Martinez-Fernandez,

Wu, et al. 2012b). We have used three types of demographical indexes: the percentual change of the population volume, the newly born and the number of children. The children dependency rate captures whether the city has an increasing population of children compared with adults, a specific trait for the peri-urban cities and of the growing cities.

Economic structure is another influential aspect, as population loss was interpreted as being either correlated or caused by economic decline. Moreover, the process of shrinkage was intensely studied with a reference to deindustrialization, the best examples are those of mining cities (Martinez-Fernandez, Wu, et al. 2012). Another important feature within the shrinkage literature was that of the transition from industrial, labour intensive regimes to newer forms which require technology and less work force. To capture the economic specialisation of the cities, we computed the percentage of the labour force by sector, based on firm level data. The share of labour force employed in agriculture, industry, and commercial services was computed at city level based on employees across all the locations of the companies in Romania. We have used in the analysis just the commercial services and not the whole services sector, to introduce in the analysis, the more dynamic outsourced services.

To capture the difference between social transformations of the city given the city's position in the national and continental networks of supply in manufacturing, services, or agriculture, we have used three types of indexes. The first one is the percentage of workforce with tertiary education, either post high school or university diploma. This type of information is available at locality level only for 2011, the year of the census. *The baccalaureate promotion rate* is used in the analysis to capture the educational stock of a city. The decision is based on the observation that the academic achievements of upper secondary students in national standardised tests at city level are the result of the social composition of their classes as well as of the distribution of human resources among schools (Hatos 2010). The Local Human Development Index (ILHDI), put forward by Sandu (2020), is an adaptation of The Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI) proposed by Sen (2001). The ILHDI has three dimensions: *human capital* (approximated by internet connection index to 100 inhabitants), *health capital* (standardised rate of mortality) and *material capital* (average size of household area/dwelling, gas consumption per inhabitant, and taxes collected on turnover).

Governance is another point of concern in the literature debating shrinkage. Although a more recent focus, its importance is raised due to European research projects aimed at studying and understanding the process of how different cities adapt and plan their strategies to cope with shrinkage (Pallagst et al. 2021). We have used two different analytical categories: city

income and expenditure and the measure of e-governance (Urs, 2021). The income of a locality is strongly linked with the volume of its workforce, its income and disposable income. Based on the city's turnover we have generated three indexes: the gross local income for 2019, the local taxes from personal income, and the share of property taxes from the total city income.

Table 1.

Descriptive statistics: item used in analysis

Principal component	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Source
Growing cities	New floor space in the urban area 2009-2019	0.408	0.126	-0.028	0.899	NIS LOC103B (2021)
	Percent change of Population in the urban area 2009-2019	-0.032	0.137	-0.170	1.502	NIS POP107D (2021) NIS POP310E (2021)
	New floor space in the urban area 1990-2008	0.318	0.225	-0.007	1.547	NIS LOC103B (2021)
	Businesses per 1000 inhabitants, 2018	22	12	3.740	94	NIS COMP (2021)
	Share of peri-urban turnover, 2018	0.402	0.291	0.013	0.990	NIS COMP (2021)
Service Leaning	Average annual capital expenditures per capita (including EU funds) for 2008-2018	92	71	15	564	MPWDA (2021)
	Share of expenditures for staff salaries (average for 2008-2018)	0.436	0.107	0.025	0.821	MPWDA (2021)
	Share of employees in commercial services 2018	0.041	0.057	0.000	0.434	NIS COMP (2021)
Liveable cities	Attainment rate of the secondary school diploma, 2018	0.562	0.238	0.000	1.000	MNE (2018)

Principal component	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Source
	Children dependency rate 2018	0.225	0.047	0.121	0.509	NIS POP107D (2021)
	Local human development index 2018	60	9	25	96	Sandu (2020)
	E-governance index 2020	39	16	0	92	Urs (2021)
	Share of local taxes in City's Hall revenues, 2019	0.147	0.069	0.002	0.675	MPWDA (2021)
	Share of population less than 5 minutes away from a public transport station (2020)	0.349	0.216	0.000	0.884	Pascu (2020b)
Industrial Leaning	Share of employees in industry, 2018	0.131	0.167	0.000	2.151	NIS COMP (2021)
	Gross local income, 2018	90,80	11,247	376	12,8327	MPWDA (2021)
	Average personal income tax per capita for 2008-2018	191	114	0	1356	MPWDA (2021)
Sprawling cities	Workforce with high-school, post-high-school, or university diploma (2018)	0.257	0.097	0.062	0.517	Census, 2011
	Number of citizens for each city hall employee in 2018	354	169	45	1296	NACS (2018)
	Share of newly born in the peri-urban areas 2019	0.559	0.208	0.110	0.981	NIS POP201D (2021)
	Population changes in the peri-urban area 2009-2019	0.000	0.133	-0.190	0.986	NIS POP107D (2021) NIS POP310E (2021)

Principal component	Item	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max	Source
	New floor space change in the peri-urban area 2009-2019	0.315	0.220	-0.071	1.699	NIS LOC103B (2021)
Green cities	Air quality index (100 good, 1 bad)	61.467	7.151	31	77	Ioja (2020)
	Green spaces per capita (sqm)	25	44	0.724	677	Pascu (2020a)
	Share of employees agri-culture 2018	0.009	0.011	0.000	0.087	NIS COMP (2021)

Data source: authors' calculations.

The index of e-governance is a complex measure developed by Urs (2021) that quantifies five dimensions of engagement on behalf of the public administration with its citizens: (1) citizen participation and active engagement (participatory budgeting, newsletters, online audiences, surveys, social media, online debates, etc.), (2) online services (taxes, fines payment, online registration, online notifications and complaints, etc.), (3) the quality and volume of the information on the Mayor's Office webpage, (4) the design of the webpage, and (5) the security of the personal data.

The existing body of research points to the importance of environmental issues in the process of shrinkage but it rather refers to shock-events such as natural disasters. The aim of our typology is to stress the importance of environmental factors in developing a particular trajectory starting from indexes which facilitate creating a hierarchy among cities from this perspective. These indexes are the specific air quality index and the available green spaces per capita at city level. *The Specific Air Quality Index (AQI)* is an index constructed by Ioja (2020) and is determined based on the values of six indicators: particulate matter (PM10), ozone (O3), lead (Pb), carbon monoxide (CO), sulphur dioxide (SO2), carbon dioxide nitrogen (NO2). The noxious substances were reported at the maximum permitted concentration and were classified into four categories: very dangerous, dangerous, moderately dangerous, and not very dangerous. The index is the arithmetic mean of all monitored toxins. *Green spaces per capita* is an index developed by Pascu (2020a) and quantifies the natural areas with recreational potential. Even though there is a strong geographical effect in terms of natural areas in peri-urban areas, there are green spaces with recreational potential that cities can capitalise on to increase accessibility to quality green space.

Model specification

First, we summarise the datasets using principal component analysis, a method that reduces a large set of attributes to a smaller, more manageable one, synthesising the variability of the initial set into its principal axes of variation (Shlens 2014). The method depicts a clearer image of the initial complex spatial distribution reducing the relations between these variables to only six indexes without losing much information. To increase the interpretability of the data we used an oblimin rotation (see Table 4) to summarise the common variation (Clarkson and Jennrich 1988). The reduced data are related to the income of the workforce, the sectorial structure of the labour force, its wellbeing (public spending, residential space, green space, air quality) and data that quantifies the demographical composition (natural growth, age structure, volume change, human capital, and human development). The initial distribution of the 25 variables introduced in the analysis were highly skewed, given the very nature of the urban network. All the principal components are standardised variables, yet, they do not have a normal distribution. We did not perform any normalisation on the principal components, or the initial values, since that decision would have had important classification effects: cities that are quite different would have been grouped in the same cluster. We preferred to group the cities that are over-performing or underperforming on a component and have a container cluster with all the cities that score close enough to average on all components.

Second, we classify Romanian cities using a k-means algorithm (Hartigan and Wong 1979) based on the six principal components that summarised the initial set of data in the previous step. We obtained a classification of Romanian cities in seven classes. We have optimised the algorithm, by forcing it to form six clusters that uniquely capture each principal component, by providing initial starting seeds for the formation of the clusters. Since the principal components are standardised, the initial values were 1.98, that is the threshold for a significant departure from the value of 95% of the cases in a two tailed normal distribution. A seventh cluster was formed, which contained one third of the cities analysed and were scoring as average on all principal components – that is, they were around the null value.

Third, to further unpack the structure of the groups we drill down the classification for some of the clusters that had a bigger number of cases. At this step we also used variables aggregated at locality level to create clusters within the groups obtained at the previous step. However, this time the focus shifted to the sectorial structure of the capitals and the return on workforce for capital (the turnover per employee, the percentual change in employees between 2011

and 2018 and the share of employed from the working). These analyses used the same k-means algorithms (Hartigan and Wong 1979). To make the subgroups comparable we provide descriptive statistics for the drill down variables also at the level of the groups.

Results

Principal Components Analysis: multiple dimension of variations

Based on the common correlation between the 25 variables that capture the social composition at locality level in the last decade in Romania, the principal component algorithm identified six patterns (see Table 2 and Table 3). The names of the six patterns were chosen by the authors to compactly capture the sets of variables that correlate with each other. The analysis summarises 71,4% of the total variance of the variables. All indexes have high internal consistency, with a McDonald's ω greater than 0.850, with two notable exceptions: liveable cities and green cities. The reason for liveable cities dimension rests on the fact that the component captures the local state capacity, a highly contingent factor on local political configurations. The green cities component captures three highly structured spatial distributions, but which are coincidentally linked together – as explained bellow. Despite the lower internal validity, we opted to use these measures since they responded to theoretical expectations.

Table 2.
Principal Components Analysis: profile variables and their constituent items

Principal component	Item	Loading	Communality
Growing cities	New Floor Space in the Urban Area 2009-2019	0.827	0.300
	Population Change in the Urban Area 2009-2019	0.808	0.333
	Share of New Floor Space developed after 1990 in 2018	0.796	0.338
	Number of businesses per 1000 inhabitants	0.470	0.225
	Share of Peri-urban Private Companies Revenue in 2018	0.460	0.292
Service Leaning	Average Annual Capital Expenditures per Capita (including EU Funds) for 2008-2018	0.841	0.286

Principal component	Item	Loading	Communality
	Share of Expenditures for Staff Salaries (average for 2008-2018)	-0.679	0.283
	Share of Employees in Commercial Services 2018	0.476	0.253
Liveable city	Attainment rate of the secondary school diploma in 2018	-0.567	0.454
	Children Dependency Rate 2018	0.701	0.394
	Local Human Development Index 2018	-0.541	0.202
	e-Governance Index 2020	-0.496	0.537
	Share of Revenues from Local Taxes in 2019	-0.485	0.503
	Share of Population Less than 5 minutes away from a Public Transport Station (2020)	-0.489	0.431
Industrial Leaning	Share of Employees in Industry 2018	0.925	0.197
	Gross Local Income 2018	0.852	0.195
	Average Personal Income Tax per Capita for 2008-2018	0.490	0.207
Sprawling city	Workforce with high-school, post-high-school, or university diploma (2018)	-0.838	0.313
	Number of Citizens for each City Hall employee in 2018	-0.701	0.410
	Share of newly born in the Peri-urban Areas 2019	0.435	0.284
	Population Change in the Peri-urban Area 2009-2019	0.621	0.198
	New Floor Space Change in the Peri-urban Area 2009-2019	0.593	0.232
Green city	Air Quality Index (100 good, 1 bad)	0.764	0.388
	Green spaces per capita (sqm)	0.490	0.663
	Share of Employees Agriculture 2018	-0.508	0.623

Data source: authors' calculations.

The "growing locality" component: groups changes in population volume and newly constructed floor spaces in urban and peri-urban areas, with the location of the business in either urban or peri-urban areas (number of business per capita and the share of companies' turnover in the peri-urban area as opposed to the urban core).

The "service leaning" component: personal income is bigger in the cities with a larger share of employees in commercial services. Also, public spending is focused more on capital expenditure and less on staff salaries. Many cities scoring on this principal component are peri-urban cities, in need of public investments, since the growth of the population puts pressure on the existing infrastructure, currently sized for a smaller city. This component is correlated with the "growing locality" component (see Table 4), suggesting that several growing localities are also service leaning.

Table 3.
Principal Components Analysis: validity measure for variance summarisation

Profile variable	Total Eigen-value	Variance explained	McDonald's ω	Total Vari-ance explained	KMO	χ^2 (df)	p.
Growing cities	6.834	29.7%	0.908	71.40%	0.814	4512 (300)	<0.001
Service Leaning	3.550	15.4%	0.862				
Liveable cities	2.194	9.5%	0.557				
Industrial Leaning	1.524	6.6%	0.886				
Sprawling cities	1.266	5.5%	0.874				
Green cities	1.090	4.7%	0.650				

Data source: authors' calculations.

The "liveable cities" component: in the cities that score high on this component there are correlations between: (a) the human development index, (b) the attainment rate at the national standardised exam for the secondary

school diploma, (c) the number of online services offered by city hall and used by the population, (d) the share of revenues derived from local taxes, more specifically from property taxes, (f) and the coverage of the public transportation system. We have treated this component as an index of how liveable a city is since it captures the human development and human capital. The correlations all have the negative sign, except for the children dependency rate which can pe interpreted, therefore, as an adult to children ratio.

Table 4.

Principal Components Analysis: correlation between components

		A	B	C	D	E	F
A	Growing cities	1.000					
B	Service Leaning	0.257	1.000				
C	Liveable Cities	-0.056	-0.055	1.000			
D	Industrial Leaning	0.145	0.102	0.238	1.000		
E	Sprawling Cities	-0.136	0.056	0.253	-0.164	1.000	
F	Green Cities	-0.097	-0.002	-0.011	-0.135	0.045	1.000

Data source: authors' calculations.

The "industrial leaning" component: the correlation pattern summaries the cities that have a higher percentage of employees in the industrial sector, generally located in the urban core, with higher personal incomes on average. The wages aggregated at local level tend to be larger, generating higher gross local income at city level. This correlation pattern captures the variation of the cities with employees in the industrial sector.

The "sprawling cities" component: a distinct correlation pattern, condensed in the fifth principal component, is that which summaries growth of the population and floor space in the peri-urban area after 2009, and the share of the employees with post-secondary education and in commercial services in the urban core. The cities that load high on this component have a bigger ratio of citizens to city hall employees, suggesting a larger city. In these cities the natality in the urban core is higher in absolute terms to the peri-urban core, since it has more inhabitants in the urban core compared to the peri-urban area; yet the population in the peri-

urban area is growing at a faster pace compared to the population in the urban core. This component is correlated with the component that captures the liveability of the city (see Table 4).

The "green cities" correlation pattern: air quality correlates with green spaces per capita, and both are inversely correlated with the share of employees in agriculture. These correlation patterns emerge due to several contingent geographical distributions. The air quality index is highly correlated with meteorological conditions: the air pollutants circulate along the wind corridors (regional and continental) and are adversely related with heat (Di and Li 2019). In the case of Romania, the continental winds enter along the Danube from the western part of the country and circulate along the southern part converging in a whirl near the capital, where the air mass becomes stationary (Casado, Pastor, and Doblas-Reyes 2009). In the southern regions of Romania, Oltenia and Muntenia, the air quality index is the worst. In Bucharest, the air quality is simultaneously affected by wind stationarity and by the intense pollution generated by fossil fuel consumption of the city. Also, the continental winds that enter the Transylvanian Plateau, along the Someș and Mureș rivers, swirl in the basin formed by the Carpathian Mountains, becoming stationary in the middle of the Plateau (Casado, Pastor, and Doblas-Reyes 2009). These winds converge in the southern part of the Transylvanian Plateau creating another high point of polluted air. Therefore, a triangle of pollutants forms within the vertices represented by: Copșa Mica, Drobeta Turnu-Severin, and Bucharest (Ioja 2020). However, the intensive agriculture that engages paid workforce, especially for international grain production, is also in the southern part of Romania and the Transylvanian Plateau, forming a similar triangle. Therefore, the worst air in Romania inadvertently overlaps with its most richly employed agricultural areas. The two are also partially linked by mechanised agriculture's production of particulate matter which is a major air pollutant (Arslan and Aybek 2012). The third coincidence is in the distribution of agricultural land. In Romania, the distribution of natural areas with recreational potential overlaps with the mountain and sub-mountain geography. The plains and plateaus are largely occupied by agricultural land. Forests are organised in forestry administrations, and in terms of property they can be private, associative property or public. However, unlike agricultural land, most forests can be accessed by the public. Given this issue, Romania's south as well as its Transylvanian Plateau are best endowed with agricultural land cultivated by employees using mechanised tools, while the northern part of Romania has more recreational green spaces and forests. To sum up, air pollutants are less present where there are more green spaces and more present in areas with mechanised agriculture. Yet the link is not intrinsic to the three variables but is an effect of geographical contingencies.

Cluster Analysis: Groups of Cities

To group the 319 cities in Romania we have used the Hartigan and Wong (1979) k-means algorithm based on the principal components that reduced the initial data set of variables that described the labour force. The principal component scores were generated based on a regression using the Anderson and Rubin (1949) algorithm. To select the number of groups we based our decision on the minimum Bayesian information criterion (Schwarz 1978; McNicholas 2016), which suggested seven classes. That was not surprising since we used six principal components as input data and the seventh cluster emerged as a container for all the values that averaged around the null value. The cluster analysis captures 52,7% of the variance of the initial components. This suggest that there are important variational aspects that our analysis must still address. The "liveable" and dispersed" components are negatively correlated with the other four components. Therefore, a negative value on the liveable component means a more liveable city, as well as a negative value on the dispersed component means a city with a bigger peri-urban area. The interpretation of the clusters is based on the mean of each principal component across the clusters.

We name cluster 1 as "*Growth Poles"*. This category of cities groups the ones that score high on the sprawling" and liveable" components (both being negatively corelated with the rest of the components). On average, this group of cities (Brașov, Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Constanta, Craiova, Galați, Iași, Oradea, Pitești, Ploiești, Sibiu, Suceava, Timișoara) had a 32% increase in peri-urban population and a 40% increase in floor space. On average, the urban core population contracted by 3%, even if floor space in the core area expanded by 40% since 2009 and by 90% since 1990. These cities have, on average, the biggest human development index, and the highest attainment rate of the secondary school diploma (the exam is called "baccalaureate", as in the French educational system). These cities are Romania's most populous, visible in the high average of citizens for each city hall employee and have some of the best public infrastructure networks, visible in the high degree of the population coverage by public transportation systems. The number of new-borns in the peri-urban area is the smallest compared with all the other groups of cities since the ratio of urban core population to the peri-urban area is the smallest. More precisely, the peri-urban population represents 20% of the total sum from the urban core and peri-urban area – the share being 32% across Romania's urban network. Nonetheless, these are the cities that have expanded their urban footprint the most in the last 10 year, generating urban sprawl beyond their administrative boundaries. The gathering of cities in these clusters confirms the first hypothesis of a post-shrinking pattern that groups demographically shrinking cities that also have expanding peri-urban areas.

Table 5.

Cluster of analysis: Goodness of fit statistics

Sub-clusters	R^2	Silhouette	Dunn index	Pearson's γ	Entropy	Calinski-Harabasz index
Industrial cities	0.527	0.190	0.036	0.398	1.609	57.929

Table 6.

Cluster analysis: descriptive statistics and validation measures using analysis of variance

Index	Mean (Standard deviation)							F (6;312)	P	η^2
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6	Cluster 7			
Growing locality	0.585 (0.767)	3.201 (1.628)	-0.116 (0.547)	-0.477 (0.494)	0.047 (0.897)	-0.265 (0.486)	0.283 (0.593)	65.3	<0.001	0.556
Service Leaning	0.102 (0.937)	1.597 (1.389)	-0.242 (0.699)	0.064 (0.715)	1.832 (1.181)	-0.401 (0.676)	-0.282 (0.707)	41.2	<0.001	0.442
Liveable cities	-1.224 (0.599)	-0.333 (0.864)	-0.739 (0.753)	0.302 (0.682)	-0.577 (1.008)	-0.262 (0.558)	1.500 (0.7)	61.3	<0.001	0.541
Industrial Leaning	0.559 (0.452)	0.311 (0.97)	1.381 (1.526)	-0.209 (0.649)	-0.397 (0.511)	-0.197 (0.52)	-0.686 (0.419)	33.8	<0.001	0.394
Sprawling cities	-3.55 (1.897)	-0.184 (0.509)	-0.356 (0.768)	0.450 (0.342)	0.420 (0.36)	0.160 (0.559)	0.128 (0.45)	88.3	<0.001	0.629
Green cities	-0.296 (1.014)	-0.662 (0.956)	-0.06 (0.716)	-0.871 (0.821)	0.900 (1.722)	0.544 (0.559)	0.260 (0.617)	30.8	<0.001	0.372

Data source: authors' calculations.

We name cluster 2 as "*Periurban cities*". This category of cities are the receivers of the sprawl pressures from the urban poles of larger cities. Fifteen cities have been classified as peri-urban cities, even though, in terms of geographical position there are 62 peri-urban cities. The difference comes from the specific quality of being a major buffer for the expansion of the urban pole from the nearby. Bucharest has created a huge stress on its neighbouring cities (Bragadiru, Buftea, Chitila, Năvodari, Otopeni, Ovidiu, Pantelimon, Popești-Leordeni, Voluntari), but is not the only one. Brașov, Ploiești, Pitești, Constanta are surrounded by quite a large network of towns that grew both in population and in their urban footprint in the last decade. All the urban growth poles have generated sprawl in their periurban areas, yet many surrounding localities are communes. Most notable are Cluj-Napoca (with the spectacular population growth-burst of Floresti, Apahida and Baciu), Timișoara (with explosive growth of Dumbravița, Giroc and Moșnișa Nouă) and Iași (with the expansion of Valea Lupului, Miroslava and Rediu). Similar processes of peri-urban population growth by over 60% in the neighbouring communes happened near Brașov (Sânpetru) Craiova (Malu Mare and Carcea), Oradea (Paleu and Sântadrei) or Sibiu (Selimbăr). The peri-urban cities had on average a 36% boom in population and a 72% increase in floor space. The local human development index is the largest among all groups of cities, yet they have the lowest attainment rate for secondary school diplomas (36%). This suggests that peri-urban cities are places of major social inequalities among households and are affected by a selective filtering of students: children of well-off parents are commuting to better schools. The peri-urban cities are not only a site of population growth but are also expansion sites for businesses. A particular case is Baia-Mare, a county capital with an industrial profile and not an urban growth pole, yet it neighbours an expanding peri-urban city Tăuții-Măgherăuș where most of the peri-urban growth of Baia Mare is absorbed.

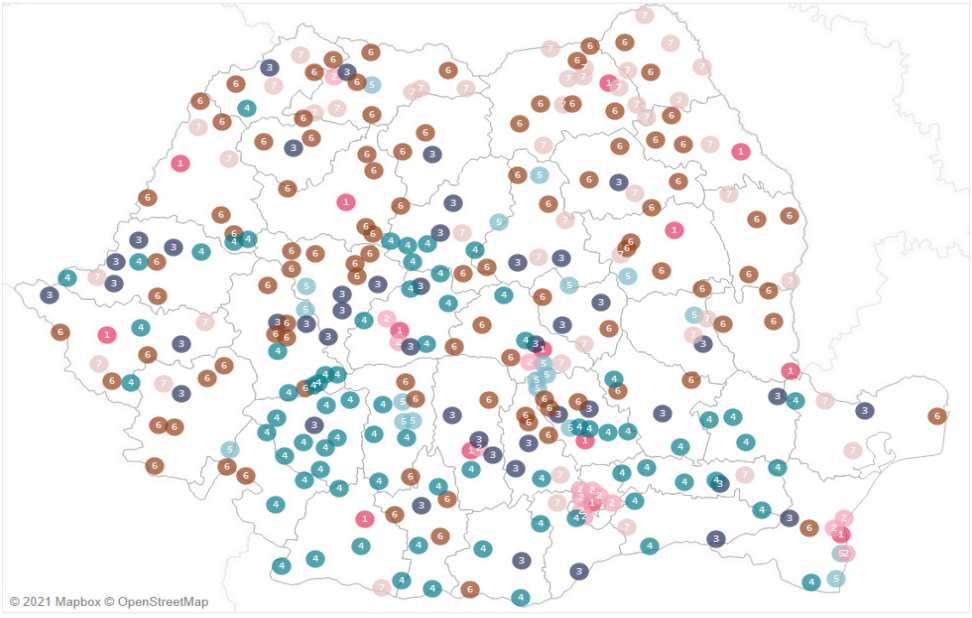
We name cluster 3 as "*Industrial Cities*". This category of cities has experienced a contraction of the population in the urban core, on average by 4% and they have witnessed a moderate growth in population and business within their peri-urban area but have avoided urban sprawl. They host large companies, with high numbers of employees, generating a significant gross local income per capita at city level. On average, one third of employees are industrial workers (i.e. Alba Iulia, Arad, Baia Mare, Bistrița, Brăila, Buzău, Focșani, Miercurea Ciuc, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Piatra Neamț, Satu Mare, Târgu Mureș) and these cities have personal incomes per capita above the national level. Both the human development index and the attainment rate of secondary school diplomas are quite high. To sum up, this class of cities scores high on the industrial leaning and the liveability components simultaneously. Nonetheless,

there are important variations in this class of cities in terms of size and rate of growth, hence a more detailed analysis is needed. This lends weight to the second hypothesis that the secondary cities have experienced economic growth as their industrial sector expended.

We name cluster 4 as "*Agri-Cities*" since they have a higher number of employees in agriculture compared with the national average. Nonetheless, the average percentage is quite small: 1,6%. However, these cities have, on average, the worst air quality, and quite modest green spaces per capita. The component that we call "green" captures, as mentioned, a geographical correlation between three relatively independent variables: employment in agriculture, green areas in hectares and air quality. Still, it groups the cities that have large agricultural lands at their disposal. The specificity of highly mechanised agriculture is that it employs quite a small workforce. Most of these cities are found in the Romanian Plain in the South of the country and in the Transylvanian Plain, the area with the worst air in Romania. There are 78 cities grouped in this cluster and the internal variability of the cluster is quite large, suggesting the need to further differentiate within this group.

Figure 1.

Cluster analysis: spatial distribution of the seven cluster
***Cluster 1:* Growth poles; *Cluster 2:* Periurban cities; *Cluster 3:* Industrial Cities; *Cluster 4:* Agri-Cities; *Cluster 5:* Tourist Cities; *Cluster 6:* the Catching-up Cities; *Cluster 7:* cities with internal labour reserves.**



Data source: authors' calculations.

We name cluster 5 as "*Tourist Cities".* They also score high on the "green" component, but they are the cities that have the best air quality and most green spaces per capita, on average. One in ten employees work in commercial services, and more specifically, in the hospitality industry. These are places with important social inequalities revealed by an above average human development index and a small attainment rate of secondary school diplomas. Many of these cities are surrounded by rural localities in their peri-urban area, which explains the higher peri-urban natality. Nonetheless, these cities were quite successful in attracting EU Funds and were able to invest the most in expanding their local infrastructure and amenities.

We name cluster 6 as the "*Catching-up Cities".* This is a generic catch all cluster; it groups cities that do not have any specific traits given our initial selection of variables driven by the interest to differentiate cities based on labour force composition. It groups 102 cities and, therefore, a more detailed analysis is needed to further describe these and to differentiate among them. This cluster confirms the third hypothesis that there are significant social and economic inequalities among the shrinking cities of Romania, given the major variation among them. Further analysis is necessary to capture this variability.

We name cluster 7 "C*ities with Internal Labour Reserves"* because they score, on average, low on the liveability index and industrial leaning components. The gross local income per capita is the smallest from all the clusters. These cities remain rather static in terms of population both in the urban core and the peri-urban area, yet the children dependency rate suggest a young population overall. These cities tend to be surrounded by rural peri-urban localities, that act as a continuous economic hinterland dominated by agrarian activities. There are rather few employees in the industrial sector and commercial services. There are 46 cities in this group and a finer grain drill down is needed to further describe this cluster. This cluster also confirms the third hypothesis suggesting that there are important inequalities among shrinking cities.

Cluster Analysis: Subgroups of Cities

In this section we describe the seven clusters based on variables that capture their economic sectorial structure and labour relations (waged or unwaged). We have used five variables: (1) the percentage of aggregate turnover in industry, (2) the percentage of aggregate turnover in services; (3) the average turnover per employee; (4) the percent change of employees at local level between 2011 and 2018; (5) the share of employees and employers out of employed in 2011.

In addition, we further divide the clusters that have high within-group variations (industrial cities, agri-cities, catching-up cities, and cities with internal labour reserves) into the subgroups. For each of these groups we further applied a Hartigan and Wong (1979) k-means algorithm using the five variables mentioned above. Each variable was standardised using the mean and the standard deviation for the whole set of localities from Romania.

Table 7.

Cluster of analysis: goodness of fit statistics within the four cluster of cities further divided into subgroups

Sub-clusters	R^2	Silhouette	Dunn index	Pearson's γ	Entropy	Calinski-Harabasz index
Industrial cities	0.721	0.410	0.151	0.600	1.190	41.124
Agri-cities	0.379	0.180	0.093	0.443	0.955	26.300
Catching-up cities	0.515	0.330	0.081	0.531	0.924	51.520
Cities with internal labour reserves	0.435	0.270	0.128	0.446	1.031	17.721

Data source: authors' calculations.

The growth poles are cities that are specialised both in services (54%) and industry (44%). In these cities there is a rather small percentage of self-employed and household workers, most of active age being employees or employers. The 16% increase in the number of employees stems from the expansion of the labour market. Productivity, as captured by the turnover per employees is high, the second among the cluster, after that of the peri-urban cities.

Peri-urban cities host several manufacturing and logistic facilities, which explains the higher percentage of turnover in the industrial sector (47%) and a higher productivity given the capital inputs, as captured by the average turnover per employee. These localities are the dormitory towns of growth poles, which explains the astonishing employee increase of 38%.

Industrial cities have the highest average turnover in industry among the seven clusters. The average is driven up by a sub-group of twenty-two cities that are even more specialised in industrial production. The rest of the twenty-

four industrial cities have a similar distribution of capital across the sector as the urban growth poles. Moreover, these mixed industrial cities have a similar percentage of aggregate turnover in services as the growth poles. In fact, these mixed industrial cities have experienced quite a dynamic labour force, with an average increase of employees in a decade. All industrial cities have a small percentage of self-employed and working in the household, and a high percentage of employees and employers.

Table 8.

Assets by cluster: validation measures using analysis of variance

Cluster	Index	df	F	p	η^2
Industrial cities	Turnover in industry, 2018 (%)	(1;44)	128.6	<0.001	0.745
	Turnover in services, 2018 (%)	(1;44)	122.3	<0.001	0.736
	Turnover per employee 2018	(1;44)	0.5	0.500	0.010
	Percent change in employment 2011-2018	(1;44)	1.0	<0.335	0.021
	Employees out of employed, 2011	(1;44)	6.5	0.015	0.128
Agri-cities	Turnover in industry, 2018 (%)	(2; 73)	65.7	<0.001	0.643
	Turnover in services, 2018 (%)	(2; 73)	30.7	<0.001	0.456
	Turnover per employee 2018	(2; 73)	21.0	<0.001	0.366
	Percent change in employment 2011-2018	(2; 73)	6.1	0.004	0.142
	Employees out of employed, 2011	(2; 73)	3.7	<0.098	0.098
Catching-up cities	Turnover in industry, 2018 (%)	(2; 97)	82.9	<0.001	0.631

Cluster	Index	df	F	p	η^2
	Turnover in services, 2018 (%)	(2; 97)	88.9	<0.001	0.645
	Turnover per employee 2018	(2; 97)	1.7	0.184	0.034
	Percent change in employment 2011-2018	(2; 97)	99.8	<0.001	0.668
	Employees out of employed, 2011	(2; 97)	2.3	0.109	0.045
Cities with internal labour reserves	Turnover in industry, 2018 (%)	(2; 44)	16.5	<0.001	0.428
	Turnover in services, 2018 (%)	(2; 44)	0.3	0.714	0.015
	Turnover per employee 2018	(2; 44)	0.8	0.471	0.034
	Percent change in employment 2011-2018	(2; 44)	1.7	0.240	0.063
	Employees out of employed, 2011	(2; 44)	40.339	<0.001	0.647

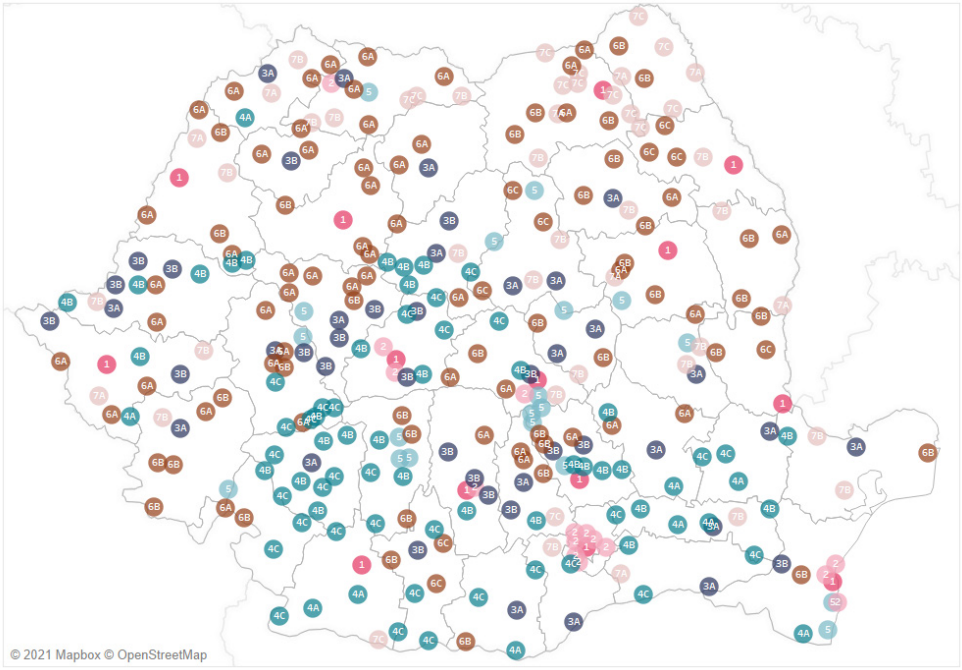
Data source: authors' calculations.

Agri-cities are cities that have smaller turnover per employee ratio compared with the previous cities. The turnover per employee can be also read as an added value of the employees. This suggest that, on average, these cities are less intensive in capital. The cluster analysis suggests that this group of cities can be further subdivided into three. First, there is a significant divergent sub-group of ten cities that, on average, use less labour force input per capital. This sub-group of cities has a specific sectorial profile that combines agriculture (41% of the aggregate turnover) with services (45% the aggregate turnover). The entire cluster has a relatively small share of employees from workers, suggesting significant internal labour reserves. Second, there is a sub-group of *agri-cities with industry*, which had an increase of 12% in the number of employees and has a distinctive industrial profile (66% of the aggregate turnover). Third, there is a sub-group specialised in services (shrinking agri-cities) and some agriculture (8%), which experienced a contraction in employment.

Figure 1.

Cluster analysis: spatial distribution of the seven cluster

Cluster 1: Growth poles; Cluster 2: Peri-urban cities; Cluster 3: Industrial Cities; cluster 4: Agri-Cities (3a. High-end Agri-city; 3b. Agri-city with industry; 3c. Shrinking agri-cities); Cluster 5: Tourist Cities; Cluster 6: Catching-up Cities (6a. Catching-up Industrial towns; 6b. Public services towns; 6c. Cities with expanding labour markets); Cluster 7: cities with internal labour reserves (7a. Small scale farming cities; 7b. Moderately expanding towns; 7c. Self-Sufficient Homestead Cities).



Data source: authors' calculations.

Tourist cities have a 55% of the aggregate turnover in services, more specifically in hospitality with 91% of the working being employed. In addition, the local economy is stabilized by a working industry.

Table 9.

Socio-economic groups and sub-groups of Romanian cities

	#	Turnover in agriculture, 2018	Turnover in industry, 2018	Turnover in services, 2018	Turnover per employees (euro), 2018	Percent change in employment, 2011-2019	Employees out of employed, 2011
Urban Growth Poles	**13**	**1%**	**44%**	**54%**	**54,932**	**16%**	**97%**
Peri-urban Cities	**15**	**1%**	**47%**	**52%**	**57,254**	**38%**	**96%**
Industrial Cities	**46**	**2%**	**61%**	**37%**	**48,717**	**19%**	**95%**
Mixed Industrial Cities	24	3%	44%	53%	50,998	23%	96%
Industrially specialized Cities	22	1%	82%	17%	46,002	15%	94%
Agri-cities	**78**	**12%**	**47%**	**42%**	**38,661**	**4%**	**83%**
High-end Agri-city	9	41%	15%	45%	67,123	4%	74%
Agri-city with industry	35	7%	66%	27%	38,745	12%	87%
Shrinking agricities	32	8%	35%	57%	31,451	-5%	82%
Tourist Cities	**19**	**3%**	**42%**	**55%**	**34,305**	**16%**	**91%**
Catching-up Cities	**102**	**4%**	**50%**	**45%**	**32,882**	**11%**	**89%**
Catching-up Industrial towns	52	3%	64%	33%	34,448	5%	89%
Public services towns	40	5%	35%	61%	31,240	2%	90%

	#	Turnover in agriculture, 2018	Turnover in industry, 2018	Turnover in services, 2018	Turnover per employees (euro), 2018	Percent change in employment, 2011-2019	Employees out of employed, 2011
Cities with expanding labour markets	10	6%	41%	53%	30,955	79%	83%
Cities with internal labour reserves	**46**	**13%**	**49%**	**38%**	**31,996**	**22%**	**69%**
Small scale farming cities	8	40%	23%	36%	33,581	18%	67%
Moderately expanding towns	23	8%	55%	36%	30,651	30%	83%
Self-Sufficient Homestead Cities	15	3%	56%	41%	33,106	11%	48%

Data source: authors' calculations.

Catching-up cities have a rather small turnover per employee, suggesting small sized companies. There are three distinctive sub-groups with relatively different profiles. A particular sub-group of cities had a spectacular 79% boost in employment, mostly in the industrial sector. Another group of 52 cities with a stable labour market are specialized in industrial production. A third group consists of forty cities specialized in services with a sizeable public sector and a small private sector.

The cities with internal labour reserves have an extremely low percentage of employees out of working. For some of these cities this is an opportunity for growth: for twenty-three cities, on average, employment expanded by 30% in the industrial sector. Given the small turnover per employee this suggests that the manufacturing sector is labour intensive. In a second sub-group of eight cities, in the agricultural sector the turnover grew by 40%, in a similar vein as the high-end agri-cities. However, the major difference resides in the fact that the turnover per employee is rather low, suggesting that the farming activities are small scale. A third sub-group of fifteen cities have an extremely low share of employees out of working (48%) and a just a tiny 3% aggregate turnover in agriculture, indicating that many households are engaged in un-waged labour relations.

Conclusions

The overall aim of this paper was to delineate the different trajectories of Romanian cities in the context of urban shrinkage. Far from being a unitary process, the outcome of this typology confirms the existence of distinct and highly localised shrinkage identities (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, et al. 2012). While shrinking has been originally seen as a linear phenomenon (for critiques of this perspective: Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018), the present analysis points to overlapping trends. Moreover, by including cities which have a population of below fifty thousand inhabitants (which constitute the large majority in Romania), the picture gains more complexity and opens the way for further comparisons. Beyond the dominant representation of shrinkage as a process that is mainly correlated with population loss and economic decline, this paper calls for bridging together distinct dimensions which have been either under-studied (such as the aspect of human development) or studied separately (such as governance of shrinkage and economic growth) across the existing literature. Therefore, the typology developed here accounts for understanding the process of shrinkage as a complex one, having a multitude of causes that determine peculiar trajectories (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, et al. 2012).

Our first hypothesis was that post-shrinkage growth (Wolff et al. 2017) affects the largest cities in Romania: while the urban core is contracting demographically, the suburbs are increasing and densifying. As it can be seen, several localities that have experienced growth are peri-urban settlements or towns situated around the main urban poles of the country. All Romanian cities cumulatively host 12.2 million inhabitants and their peri-urban areas another 5.8 million. The total number of inhabitants of the urban cores and peri-urban areas amass over eighteen million, which represents 81.4% of the total population of Romania. The urban growth poles are the most populous: together with their peri-urban areas they comprise 29% of the total population of Romania and 36% of urban dwellers. Following the extended urbanisation literature, we consider the inhabitants of the urban core and the peri-urban area as urban dwellers. All growth poles have expanded their peri-urban area, while, with a few exceptions (Alba Iulia, Bistriţa, Cluj-Napoca, and Iaşi) the urban cores all experienced population contraction. This tendency, coupled with the diversification of economic structure and the change in built-up area, is manifest of the process of extended urbanisation and to the structural changes that it implies.

However, there are places which are not neighbouring the biggest urban settlements and have experienced growth. This is our second hypothesis, the cities with sizeable manufacturing sectors have experienced relative growth. And indeed, our expectation was confirmed. The second most populous

cluster of localities includes the catching-up cities, that represents 23% of the total number of city dwellers. The third most populous category of cities are the industrial cities that make up of 18% the total population and 22% of urban dwellers. The economic growth can be attributed to direct foreign investments in sectors such as manufacturing or logistics, which have existed before at the locality's level. Therefore, here the problem of reurbanization needs to be addressed and studied further. That is, because the processes of urbanisation of secondary cities have a longer *durée.* The Romanian urban network developed after 1947, up until then 78% of the population was rural (Rotariu, Dumănescu, and Hărăguş 2017). The urban network was not really developed up to that point, however it had several strong regional capitals. Romania was formed by the union of several independent regions, at the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century. These regions had strong cities with administrative functions and command and control roles in the export of semi-processed materials and raw materials (Ban 2020; Poenaru 2016; Verdery 1983). Banat region had the most sophisticated urban network and a complex integrated hinterland system. After 1960, the communist regime invested in the development of the urban network, tilting, by the end of the 1980s, the balance of the population towards the growing urban areas (Petrovici 2018). One specificity of socialist urbanisation across the region is the attention given to the densification of the urban network (Pobłocki 2018), which explains why the catching-up cities are the second most populous cluster and a gradual transformation of the agri-localites in industrial localities. After World War II, the development of the urban network became a means of development across the national space. This type of policy has a specific modernist-functionalist background used to funnel the economic growth in the post-war era in Europe at large (Servillo, Atkinson, and Hamdouch 2017) and was partially changed by the policy of creating metropolitan areas (Fricke 2020), often criticised by the academic literature (Brenner 2004).

Our third hypothesis was that our social and economic factors reveal important social inequalities both within the cities and between themselves. In the beginning of the 2000s, the percentage of the urban population was a pre-accession condition to become a member of the European Condition. Larger communes made of several villages were re-classified as cities. The transformation of rural communities in urban localities between 2002 and 2004, increased the number of towns with an agrarian profile. These towns are geographically clustered in the Southern plains, the Transylvanian Plain, and in the Moldavian region. These new agrarian cities are placed, given their natural endowment, in two different clusters: "the agri-cities" of the South and Centre and "the cities with internal labour reserves" of the North and East. Employment opportunities

are rather scarce in these towns. Even if some of them are using more intensively capital resources, nonetheless the capital per employee is rather small compared with the cities from other clusters. Most of these cities have a very small service sector, effectively being only labour resources and not actual independent economic actors. The population loss in these cities (around 7% since 2003) is even more dire than the general demographic contraction in Romania (around 4% since 2003).

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SEMANTIC AMBIGUITIES AND CLASSIFICATION STRUGGLES IN THE POST-SOCIALIST INFORMAL MEDICAL ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT. In this paper I will engage in a process of highlighting the way in which liberal and, later, neoliberal political agendas regulate and establish formal semantic registers in the field of medical informal economy within the Romanian public healthcare system. How accurate is the legalistic approach, which classifies any extra-payment as a bribe? Despite the questionable legal status, the voluntary informal economy acquires the role of establishing bridges at human level between doctor and patient. Far from pleading to accept the conditioning of the medical act by an additional payment from patients or their family members, facts that obviously fall within the scope of illegality, I claim that the labels of "corruption", "bribe", "informal payment" cannot be correctly applied to the whole phenomenon of informal exchanges. Moreover, the gifts offered as a form of gratitude or to tame the "medical gaze" even have a role of social link between doctor and patient, helping to bind an unwritten human contract between the two who, in fact, are victims of the same system and its political decision-makers.

Keywords: informal payments, gift vs. commodity, medical systems, power relations, formalising common-sense on informality, symbolic power, strategic narratives

> **Motto:** *Social science works with realities already named, already classified, bearing proper names and common names, titles, signs, logos. In order not to risk adopting, without realising it, constitutive acts whose logic and necessity they ignore, it must take as its object the social operations of appointment and the rites of establishment by which these acts are performed.* (Bourdieu, 2012:135).

Circuits of exchange: Gift, commodities and hybrid hypostases

Social anthropology differentiates between two types of exchange in human societies: gift-based relationships (*gift relations*) and commodity-based relations (*commodity relations*, Mauss, 1954). This distinction is made according

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to the degree of sociability involved in the exchange; thus, the gift belongs to the sphere of personal relations, while the commodity is assigned to impersonal, commercial relations.

For Mauss, the gift is a label of pre-modern societies, while commodity-based exchange is typical of a modern societal organisation. Currently, it is believed that the gift and the commodity can exist simultaneously in the same society, giving up the attribution of gift-based relationships to cultures that precede modernity (Gregory, 1980). Reiterating the distinction "gift-commodity", Gregory (1980; 1982 apud. Rus, 2008) radicalised the Maussian model, opposing the gift to commodity. Commodity is a product of labor, being intended for exchange through a sale-purchase process. The exchange of commodity has a deeply impersonal character, and the transaction does not require long-term personal relationships, being exclusively dependent on economic rationality and obtaining added value.

In the capitalist social system, people are forced to think of exchange relations as a direct expression of the material properties inherent to money and goods. In his critical analysis of the capitalist system of production, Karl Marx (2013 [1867]) calls this optical defect "commodity fetishism": the inability of individuals to think of commodities and money as things "that are inherently full of social, power, and life." (Lewin & Morris, 1977: 173). Basically, this is because the economic or social production relations in such systems are very complex and very indirect, and people barely feel that they are part of an interdependent network of peers who essentially work for each other (idem). Commodities can be traded without creating lasting relationships between the originator and the recipient. On the contrary, gifts maintain a minimal connection with the person initiating the exchange by transferring its identity to the recipient of the exchange. The commodities are exchanged without involving residual obligations and relationships between the persons involved (Gregory, 1982), but the gift is permanently linked to the one who offers it, creating the obligation of reciprocity (Mauss, 1954). The gift creates an asymmetry in the relationship, forcing a "counter-gift" (Mauss, 1954; Adloff, 2006).

Transgressing the antagonism between gift and commodity, accused of betraying a gullible nostalgia for the social altruism of traditional cultures, Arjun Appadurai (1986) argues that gift- based exchange does not differ radically from the exchange of commercial items. Anthropological writings have exaggerated the contrast between gift and commodity, subscribing to a tendency to romanticise so-called primitive societies and end up marginalising the self-interested nature of trade. Appadurai does not believe in the usefulness of the gift- commodity antagonism, as objects produced as commodity can be traded as gifts and vice versa. Commodity-based or gift-based exchanges are not two mutually exclusive forms, but two ideal types of exchange, the analysis of the context of exchange (social and political) proving to be the only manoeuvre capable of achieving the

gift-commodity distinction (Appadurai, 1986: 11). In an attempt to open a broad discussion on the deviations and inaccuracies that have been perpetuated and deepened in the post-socialist health system, the anthropologist of Romanian origin Sabina Stan, claims that neither commodities nor commercial articles are traded on the Romanian public health services market and no gifts also (*"neither commodities, nor gifts"*, Stan, 2012: 65), the two being in a strange coexistence.

Any exchange, whether formal or informal, is a dyadic transaction between two stakeholders, being organised around the idea of balance, of parity in gain (Parry & Bloch, 1989:454). These transactions take the form of actions, motivated by the promise of what they can change for the benefit of the agents involved in the exchange. It would be naive to believe that the gift is a result of the generosity of individuals; similar to impersonal exchanges, and the gift involves a selfish calculation. If the gift hides a selfish interest, its fundamental feature cannot be identified in the motivation of the giver. The key word that distinguishes between commodity and gift is "to hide". It is not the contradiction between the apparent gratuitousness and the obligation of reciprocity that is essential to the nature of the gift, but the observance of those social forms that describe it as distinct from the payment of services, countertop, bribe or informal payment (Smart, 1993). The distinct character of the gift is constituted by an act of "misrecognition" (Bourdieu, 1977), a subtle approach to symbolic disguise, in which the way of offering is so constituted as to make it possible to deny the practical nature of the gift. "Without this will of non-recognition, (...) the intention to force reciprocity becomes immediately apparent and the gift is no longer what it claims to be" (Bourdieu 1977: 5-6). Without this self-deception, collectively approved and supported, the symbolic exchange of gifts could not take place (Bourdieu, 1977: 6). When the purpose of giving a gift becomes obvious, social relationships become endangered. Giving up the game of concealing intent "disregards and offends" (Mauss, 1954: 36). Informal exchanges in the post-socialist health system are not limited to payments for services, because the doctor does not want his services to be simply paid for, he wants the recognition of professional quality. He is not a worker among other workers, his expertise is not simply for sale.

Thus, the manner of giving a gift by the patient follows a standardised ritual, a twisted game, which succeeds when the performance is not interpreted as manipulative. The gift-based exchange relationship initiated by the patient conceals a "fair payment", a compensatory act designed to alleviate the frustration generated by the doctor's financial and social expectations and what the public service may cover. Knowing that the intent to oblige for a counter-gift must seem stripped of social or personal considerations (Mauss, 1954; Gregory, 1982), the patient pays close attention to the form and context in which the gift is offered. The gift is not independent of the absence of practical awareness of the gesture, of the instrumental purpose, but of the need to exclude from performance this practical dimension (the need to non-explicit). Behaviour is conditioned by "the

belief that interpersonal utility is feasible in the context of bilateral exchange" (Bell, 1991:156). By accepting the gift, the recipient — a member of the medical team — becomes obliged to return the gesture. The expected counter-gift differs from patient to patient, but the latent purpose of giving and accepting "attention" is to create and crystallise the social relationships that are generated between patients, their families, and the medical team. Moreover, the gift retains the social identity of the giver, imposing this identity on the recipient. We take part in a series of conversions that occur between economic and non- economic (Bourdieu, 1986), the monetary economy being transformed into a moral economy.

Gifts create reciprocal relationships between the giver and the recipient, the economic value being subordinated to a moral purpose, that of producing a sense of familiarity, of cementing social relations. It is also pivotal to understand that the gift is an instrument aimed at gaining social capital (Smart, 1993). Social capital consists of claims to reciprocate, and the gift is that resource that guarantees entry into a network of relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). The resulting connections and obligations are the product of investments that "aim at shaping or reproducing social relations" (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). In this perspective, exchange is "part of a system of practices in which participants express, preserve, loose and gain positions in the sphere of social value" (Gudeman, 2001:89-90 apud. Stan, 2012:66): the need to express, the need to engage in informal practices is felt by those in uncertainty on the background of poor health, medical staff whose reciprocity is always reactivated gains and retains its professional value. Patients also gain, because the gift restores the annulled social value in the context of an illness by reducing the being to a pathology, and those unable to reproduce the cycles of exchange terribly loose. The logic of the gift is performative; it creates social and moral relations between the parties involved in reciprocity. The really negative side of the scope of the gift and counter-gift circuit derives from the possible latency of professional expertise and the moral forum where some healthcare professionals are stationed in the absence of stimulation of reciprocity. Informal practices take place in the context of power relations that marginalise, stratify and exclude (Zerilli, 2013), and participants have no choice and, in order to maintain their "social right" to health, engage in these exchanges. Those lacking resources are excluded or condemned to benefit from leftovers, from the little that remains undivided as a result of assembling some energies, preferences, obligations and sensibilities.

The politicisation and incrimination of "giving / receiving" in the field of post-1990 medical informality

The plethora of articles, old or recent, whose stake is the definition and taxonomy of informal medical payments (Lomnitz, 1988; Ensor & Savelyeva, 1998; Lambertini, 1999; Thompson & Witter, 2000; Balabanova & McKee, 2002; Ensor,

2004; Sharma, 2005; Gaal et al., 2006; Savedoff, 2006; Lewis, 2000; 2007; Liaropoulolos, et. al., 2008, Vladescu et al., 2008; Stepurko, 2010; Stan, 2012; Baji, 2012; Palaga, 2015; Williams et al., 2016; Najar et al., 2017) avoids questioning the economic strategies and specific political agendas that dictate the use of one meaning to the detriment of another. The importance of the targeted choice of a certain definition of work for those payments made outside the institutionalised channels should not be underestimated, the practical consequences of establishing a discursive order on the informal medical economy being substantial. The classifications and attributes given by the media and the political class to the phenomenon of informal payments have the role of drawing the coordinates through which the public relates to this practice, dictating and forming opinions and behaviours among social actors. The legal implications of payments and public grids marching on the disavowal of the professional prestige of healthcare professionals requesting or accepting informal exchanges are essential in standardising the perception of the informal medical economy.

In the following lines, the analytical thread aims to deconstruct the political process of imagining one of the most pressing problem the Romanian health system is facing today: the corruption that revolves around informal payments. In addition to the exercise of identifying when the suppression of the informal medical economy becomes a leitmotif of the system reform requirements, I propose to make an analysis of the different positions that government decision-makers belonging to parties of different political orientation (a political left and right) adopts when it comes to managing an entire economy that takes place in the extension of the one regulated at the formal level.

The political, economic and social permutations that opened the last decade of the twentieth century announced an indispensable set of reforms aimed at stabilising Romanian society and placing it in the immediate vicinity of a democratic organisation. The reformist enthusiasm permeated mainly the system of medical services. The need to restructure the financing flows and the form of organisation of the entire Romanian health system since the early 1990s was highlighted by appealing to the narrative of "the state as the worst administrator". During this period, informal payments are not even mentioned in the reform requirements, the focus of criticism on the health system being the hospital infrastructure, the main resource consumer of this sector. It describes a huge health system, insufficiently equipped technologically and over- accessed, even in the absence of medical justifications. The reform measures focus on streamlining health services by reducing the maximum capacity to process medical cases, followed by a broad process of administrative decentralisation and encouraging private equity participation in the delivery of health services. It is important to mention that during the designated period, payments from the health system are part of the general diathesis of informality, along with most of the interactions between the individual and state agencies. The reform

grids have been drafted and implemented under the strict supervision of international actors such as the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development. One of the first reports meant to diagnose the problems of the Romanian health system, in the context of the transition to a market economy, was the one entitled "A Healthy Romania", a study conducted between 1992 and 1993, being financed by the World Bank. Among the report's recommendations, I mention: the creation of an independent, decentralised and self-administered national public health insurance fund, the creation of alternative private health insurance funds, the decentralisation of health services, the emphasis on the importance of primary health services, the autonomy of hospitals in resource use, as well as the creation and implementation of an accreditation system for health care providers, both for institutions and for healthcare professionals.

The first years of the post-December transition were marked from a socio-economic point of view by a deep crisis that led to a decline in the standard of living of the population and a to deterioration of the confidence in state institutions and public service sectors. During this period, the health condition of the population suffered, both as a result of economic precariousness and the deterioration of the public health system. Between 1990 and 1995, life expectancy in Romania decreased from 69.7 years to 69.5 years while the mortality rate increased (Vladescu et al., 2008:8). Romanian state institutions and the political class have failed to provide the population with the basis for a better life, long awaited immediately after the December 1989 revolution. "Democratically elected politicians have not been able to create public policies to protect minorities, vulnerable groups and restore confidence in state institutions" (Manea, 2014). Consequently, all public services have come to be viewed in an unfavourable light by Romanians: inefficient, underperforming, poorly managed and infested by the phenomenon of corruption. The healthcare sector is no exception to these labels.

In 2001, the World Bank[2] estimated in its report on corruption in Romania that in 47% of Romanian households there is a perception that almost all public health officials are corrupt. This percentage places the health sector at the same level as the Romanian Police and slightly below the Government and Parliament. In this period preceding Romania's integration into the European Union, one of the main reasons why patients or their relatives resort to informal payments is the access to doctors with a high reputation. There are thus a couple of disjointed perceptions about the competencies of doctors on the one hand and their seemingly questionable integrity on the other. However, it is

[2] World Bank, „Diagnostic Surveys of Corruption in Romania", 2001. Source: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/507421468776743543/pdf/289970RO0Di-agn1urveys0of0Corruptio n.pdf, last accessed on 20.04.2020

important to keep in mind that poverty and low wages were seen as the main causes of corruption (idem). This, coupled with the voluntary nature of most informal payments, leads to the conclusion that patients often offer these payments as a reward for treatments received and in the form of compensation between the actual value of the medical act and the low salaries received by healthcare professionals. The statement is reinforced by the levels of satisfaction with the medical services received, included in the same report of the World Bank, which have values of over 70%.

When do informal payments become central to the analysis of the critical points of the post-socialist health system? When are these stated as a social issue? The discourse on informality in the medical field is taking shape with the intensification of measures to liberalise the health system and due to the tightening of anti-corruption measures in the last two years prior to Romania's accession to the European Union. A turning point in the definition of political discourses on the specifics of informal payments is the legislative and presidential elections of 2004, which marked the shifting of the balance of power from PSD, the centre-left pole of Romanian politics, to the centre-right alliance "Justice and Truth", led by Traian Băsescu (President of Romania between 2004-2014). It is relevant to note that during the election campaign, the JT alliance took an extremely virulent stance against systemic corruption in Romania, for which it essentially accuses the leaders of the rival party, portrayed as successors of the communist system and main beneficiaries of informality, regardless of the field in which it manifests itself. Informal payments in the healthcare system are regulated in the legal framework for the first time in the article34 of Law number 46/2003, called "Patient Rights Law", which was approved by the Parliament during the PSD government. The text of the law clearly states that:

> The healthcare or non-healthcare professionals of the health units do not have the right to put the patient under any form of pressure to determine the patient to reward him otherwise than the legal payment regulations within the respective unit. The patient may offer additional payments or donations to employees or the unit where he was cared for, in compliance with the law.[3]

This specification appears as "the patient's right to medical treatment and care"[4]. Basically, the law adopted during the government of Adrian Năstase does not criminalise the informal payments offered as a reward for the medical services offered on the patient's own initiative. Therefore, we can notice the

[3] Law no. 46 of January 21, 2003, on patient rights, published in the Official Gazette Part I, no. 70 of January 29, 2003. Source: http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/41483, last accessed on 04.03.2021

[4] idem

relative tolerance from the legal point of view of the informal exchanges during the socialist government of PSD, a tolerance that disappeared, at least at a declarative level, after four years of neoliberal government. Thus, informal payments in the health sector are directly targeted as acts of "petty corruption" facilitated by "poor legislation" in the "National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Corruption in Vulnerable Sectors and Local Government (2008-2012)". The elaboration of this strategy took into account the conclusions of some institutional evaluations carried out in Romania, but also external sources such as the "Monitoring Report of the European Commission" (September 2006)[5], "Report of the European Commission on the evolution of accompanying measures in Romania after accession" (Published in June 2007)[6], Transparency International reports[7], as well as "GRECO - Council of Europe Reports." Informal payment is identified in these documents as a specific problem of the health system, establishing a clear delimitation in relation to the rhetoric of 1990-2000. With Romania's accession to the European Union, due to a centre-right government, the transfer of the label of "corruption" becomes visible, at a discursive level and legislative, to the informal material practices in the public sectors as well as the compartmentalisation and isolation of the informal practices on fields of activity, in conjunction with their identification as specific problems of the fields in which they are found.

In 2005, CURS, a private company that conducts social research and market research, published the results of a survey conducted for the Ministry of Public Health, which found that the total informal payments made in the Romanian health system in 2004 could be estimated at over 300 million, most of which taking place in public hospitals. The results of this survey are mentioned in a 2008 report of the Presidential Commission for the analysis and elaboration of public health policies in Romania, entitled "Citizen's Needs". Written by a team of health experts, the report directly mentions informal payments which "limit and hinder access to various hospital services, a practice which in many cases acts as a method of de facto rationalisation of the services provided". (idem) Starting with 2007, with Romania's accession to the European Union, there is an

5 Commission of the European Communities, "Report on the state of preparation of Romania and Bulgaria for EU membership", 2006. Source: https://insse.ro/cms/files/cooperare/raport_septembrie_ro.pdf, last accessed on07.04.2021

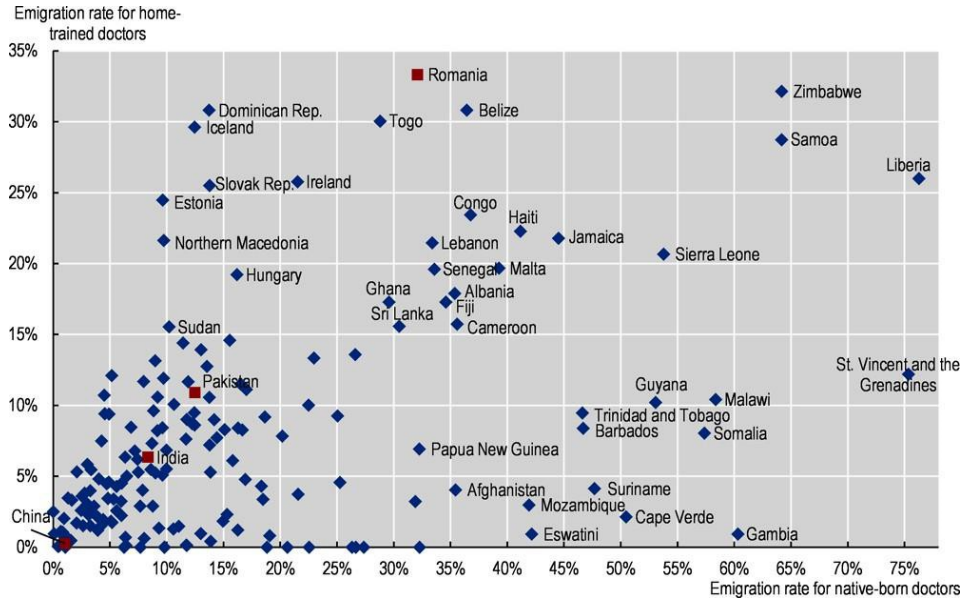
6 Commission of the European Communities, "REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEANPARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the evolution of accompanying measures in Romania after accession", 2007. Source: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0378&from=RO, last accessed on 02.04.2021

7 Presidential Commission for the analysis and elaboration of public health policies in Romania, "A healthsystem focused on the needs of the citizen", 2008. Source: http://www.old.presidency.ro/static/rapoarte/Raport_CPAEPDSPR.pdf, last accessed on 08.09.2019

exodus of Romanian doctors to the western states, the main incriminating reasons being the structural and financial problems of the Romanian health system. The reasons for these mass departures are many, the most frequently mentioned being the lack of respect from the state for the medical profession in Romania (exams, requirements, working conditions offered), low salaries but also lack of opportunities to progress in the country (public hospitals are outdated and run on a clientele system, hospital infrastructure private sector is still underdeveloped). More than a third of Romanian doctors with studies in the country choose to emigrate to practice abroad, according to a 2020 report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)[8] (please see Figure 1).

Figure 1.

Percentage of emigrant doctors, related to two coordinates: place of birth and educationin the local system.



Source: Taken from the article "Contribution of migrant doctors and nurses to tackling COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries"[9]

[8] OECD „Contribution of migrant doctors and nurses to tackling COVID-19 crisis in OECD countries"] Source: https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/contribution-of-migrant-doctors-and-nurses-to-tackling-covid-19-crisis-in-oecd-countries-2f7bace2/#figure-d1e1894, last accessed on 20.04.2021

[9] idem

This statistic places Romania on the first place in the world in an undesirable top of the percentage of doctors educated in the country of origin who choose to practice in other states. Although the press has raised numerous alarm signals and constantly lamented the way in which a health system is run, from which so many doctors decide to leave, some prominent voices in the political arena have taken neutral or even pro-phenomenon positions, thus hitting the reputation of Romanian healthcare professionals. For example, in 2010, the then president, Traian Băsescu, stated that doctors' departures should not be mourned because the state cannot integrate them into the public system and the large hospitals do not lack staff: "I agree that doctors go abroad for better salaries. The best thing was to liberalise the labor market. Let's not make a fuss about leaving. The Romanian state cannot pay its doctors and teachers as they deserve, that is the reality"[10]. The doctors who remain in the country, and especially those who return from abroad, are seen by some media outlets as heroes, who sacrifice their material well- being to fight for change in a poor system. The HotNews.ro news site published in 2013 a series of articles called "Doctor by profession in Romania"[11], created at the initiative and with the support of the Council of Foreign Investors. The series is described on the site as "a series of HotNews.ro articles that describe the lives of several doctors who, despite the conditions, remain to work in Romania, no matter how incredible their motives may seem." I note from the formulation of this characterisation, the position of the publication towards the Romanian healthcare system and its doctors: a framework in which the exercise of the medical profession is extremely difficult, but in which certain extraordinary professionals choose to remain for altruistic reasons. At the same time, there is a continuous degradation of the image of active healthcare professionals in public health institutions, who are incriminated as the main responsible for perpetuating the phenomenon of informal payments[12]. In order to exercise increased control over the conduct of the medical act, the Ministry of Health has set up an "Ethical Council" (ibidem) in each public hospital – a control body on how the treatments are carried out in state health units. The attributions of the Ethics Council include the control and registration of informal payments made by patients within the health unit

[10] Valentin Dimitriu, "Basescu: Let's not make a drama that doctors are leaving the country", August 4, 2010. Source: https://ziare.com/basescu/presedinte/basescu-sa-nu-facem-o-drama-ca-pleaca-medicii-din-tara-1033470, last accessed on: 20.12.2020

[11] Hotnews.ro, "Doctor by profession in Romania". Source: https://www.hotnews.ro/de_profesie_medic_in_romania, last accessed on: 08.03.2021

[12] Ministry of Health, "Order approving the composition and responsibilities of the Ethical Council operating inhospitals." Source: http://old.ms.ro/documente/Ordin%20Consiliu%20etic_1018_2022.pdf, last accessed on: 19.09.2016

and the submission of notifications regarding these payments to the state authorities. Thus, indirectly, informal payments, requested or accepted without being reported, are regulated as violations of deontological norms in medical practice. However, the text of the same order specifies that "so far (2010, o.n.) no solution has been found to limit/stop this phenomenon".

In the fall of 2009, the Ministry of Health proposes the introduction of health vouchers, starting with January 1, 2010, which are a form of additional payment for services in the public health system for treatments that do not fall into the category of emergencies. This form of co-payment was presented by the Minister of Health, from the Social Democratic Party (PSD) Ion Bazac, as a measure that would put an end to informal payments within a few months since the introduction: "It is a way of solving it, but it will not happen overnight. According to the polls, the hospital envelope is today the fifth cause of dissatisfaction of the population in Romania"[13]. The beneficiary of the amounts of money obtained from health vouchers is the hospital, and implicitly the state, as the administrator of the public health system, which is thus interposed as a front in the relationship between doctor and patient: "My thought is that people pay the tickets, not directly to the doctor but, let's say, at the cashier, they will be less tempted to come and give him the envelope too." (Ion Bazac, idem). Despite the political discourse, the public and the media perceived this system as an additional charge applied to a population largely unable to afford the standard costs of medical treatment other than emergencies. In reality, the introduction of co-payments for medical treatments in the public health system is a measure conditioned by the International Monetary Fund, meant to bring new funds to the Romanian state budget, the link between this system and informal payments being circumstantial at most. As the enactment of the co-payment system would have obviously been an unpopular measure, especially due to the economic crisis at the end of 2009-2010, the neoliberal government has discursively created a bridge between this system and the interests of the population through the prognosis of elimination of informal payments. Minister Bazac is replaced at the end of 2009 by Cseke Attila, amid the political renegotiation of the composition of the Executive due to the withdrawal of PSD from governing with the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) and the co-optation of the Hungarian Democratic Union (UDMR) in the majority alliance. Motivated by

[13] Adevărul.ro, "The medical ticket leaves the informal payment in the hospital", September 23, 2009. Source: https://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/tichetul-medical-lasa-spaga-spital-1_50acc1ba7c42d5a6638982d8/index.html, last accessed on 20.05.2021

IMF pressure, the co-payment is also supported by the new minister[14], PDL Prime Minister Emil Boc, insisting that the benefits of this measure be presented to the public. The political discourse no longer makes direct reference to the elimination of informal payments through co-payment, stating only that "the new system will improve the relationship between patient and doctor in terms of the quality of the medical act" (Emil Boc, idem). Two years behind the originally proposed timetable, the co-payment law was published in the Official Gazette[15], but the impact of this measure on informal payments proved to be minimal. On the contrary, instead of facilitating communication between doctor and patient, as the public discourse of politicians argued, co-payment has become a mere additional expense for patients, representing a detrimental factor the for access to medical treatment of an already impoverished population. A World Bank study, published in September 2010[16] and widely taken over by the Romanian press at the time, showed that informal payments in the healthcare system continued to amount to more than 300 million euros a year. Among the patients having admitted to using this practice, 89% said they offer informal payments to healthcare professionals "for fear that the doctor will not look at them", while the remaining 11% said they gave gifts to doctors as a reward for a very good quality treatment. However, the overwhelming majority of patients (unpublished percentage, o.n.) admitted that doctors did not condition the treatment on receiving goods or money, the main factor that led them to pay was the fear of the hypothetical consequences of not performing this act.

In the years 2009-2010, the legislative initiative of the Ministry of Health to introduce co-payment in the healthcare system, presented by the Government as a measure that would gradually lead to the elimination from the system of the causes underlying informal payments appears again: "It is a mentality that is not easy to remove, but with a good information campaign, informal payments will probably be gradually reduced. But as there is no such informal payment system in a private system, if we introduce co-payment and the patient is satisfied with the medical services, he will probably not use this

[14] Mediafax.ro, "Cseke Attila: We will prepare the normative act on co-payment as it is a document undertaken with the IMF", February 10, 2010. Source:http://www.mediafax.ro/social/cseke-attila-vom-pregati-actul-normativ-privind-coplata-intrucat-este-un-document-asumat-cu-fmi-5493038, last accessed on: 18.09.2016

[15] Official Gazette, Part I, no. 851 of November 30, 2011, last accessed on: 29.08.2016;

[16] PRO TV news, "World Bank study: 300 million euros, informal payment for doctors in one year", October 30, 2012. Source: http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/social/studiu-banca-mondiala-300-de-milioane-de-euro-spaga-la-medici- intr-un-an.html, last accessed on: 20.09.2016

type of services[17], said the then Minister of Health, Ion Bazac, about the impact of the co-payment system on so-called "informal payments" in hospitals. However, the impact of the co-payment system proved to be insignificant, even contrary to the initial intentions of the Government according to certain voices: (The patient, o.n.) will not only pay five to ten lei, because he is ashamed. The doctor will issue his receipt for ten lei, he will pay one hundred. Unlike France, Romania is not ready to adopt such a measure, because here the mentality is to give", said in 2012 Vasile Barbu, then president of the "Romanian Patients Association".

In 2011, the presidential administration strongly supported the **full privatisation of health services**, presented as the best way for doctors to reach competitive salaries that reflect the volume and quality of the work done, without a huge budget effort from the state. In fact, throughout 2011, the Cotroceni Palace strongly promoted, both in the political environment and in the media, the gradual transition to a private health system, also reaching the subject of informal payments. In August 2011, the "Presidential Commission on Health" submitted to the Government a report meant to be the basis of the new "Health Law". The text of the report contains four points whose implementation would have been meant to eliminate this phenomenon of informal payments[18], along with the revision of the salary scale for healthcare professionals: imposing clear sanctions against those who accept informal payments; introduction of mechanisms for formalising some of the unofficial payments (with measures to protect the accessibility of the economically disadvantaged groups); stimulating the development of a private health sector, both for private health insurance and for the provision of comprehensive health services, modifying service payment systems to encourage efficient services and professional performance.

With the installation of the technocratic government led by Dacian Cioloș, towards the end of 2015, the political discourse on the situation of informal payments was reoriented again towards the neoliberal specifics, identifying them with acts of corruption that are part of the pathology of a gangrenous health system. Although he was repeatedly accused by a politically affiliated media

[17] Gândul.ro, "The Minister of Health wants to give money legally to the doctor to get rid of the informal payment", April 26, 2012. Source: http://www.gandul.info/stiri/ministrul-sanatatii-vrea-sa-dam-bani-legal-doctorului-ca-sa-scapam-de-spaga-video-3950006, last accessed on 31.03.2017

[18] Raluca Pantazi, "What are the solutions for Health in the report of the Presidential Commission, which Băsescu said he was sending to the Government as a starting point for the new Health Law", August 4, 2011. Source:http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-9672621-care-sunt-solutiile-pentru-sanatate-din-raportul-comisiei-prezidentiale-despre-care-basescu-spus-trimite-guvern-punct-plecare-pentru-noua-lege-sanatatii.htm, last accessed on 02.04.2017

party of trying to privatise hospitals again, Cioloș denied this, suggesting instead that he wanted a revitalisation of state hospital infrastructure through a partnership with the private environment. The public-private partnership would have acted mainly in order to modernise Romanian hospitals through infrastructure works and providing them with modern medical equipment. At the same time, private companies would support the state in starting projects for new health facilities, so that the coverage of the medical network among the population will increase. Obviously, all these measures would have the effect of increasing transparency in the conduct of the medical act, facilitating access to logistical resources inside hospitals, thus cutting the chain of dual medical practice.

It is important to draw a parallel between the period of democratic-liberal government of the years 2004–2012 and its previous years, on the coordinates of the measures and political positions of the main actors in relation to the phenomenon of informal payments in the health system. A common feature of both chronological intervals is the minimal involvement of the state in the recovery of non-functional elements of the health system. Doctors' salaries have remained and patients' rights were regulated late by interpretable and ambiguous legislation. Under these circumstances, one can say that not only has the state tolerated or ignored informal payments in the health system in the first 25 years since the replacement of the communist regime, but it has even stimulated them.

During the 2014–2015 period, the media deals extensively with the subject of the membership of doctors employed in state health units in the category of civil servants. The subject is of particular interest for the purpose of this paper because, in 2014, Article 175 of the Criminal Code underwent amendments according to which doctors employed in public institutions are included in the broader category of civil servants, therefore, according to the same normative act, Articles 289–292, they are liable to be charged with bribery in the event of the acceptance of informal payments:

> By this decision it was established that the doctor carries out his activity in the performance of a service of public interest and that the doctor employed with a contract of employment in a hospital unit of the public health system has the qualityof a civil servant, falling into the category of those who' exercise a public function of any nature referred to in art. 175, para. 1., letter B, second thesis, Criminal Code"(Cristi Dănileț, member of the Superior Council of Magistracy[19]).

[19] Cristi Dănileț, "The doctor is liable in the same way as a civil servant if he commits corruption offenses", August 17, 2015. Source: http://www.contributors.ro/administratie/medicul-raspunde-la-fel-ca-un-functionar-public-daca-comite-infractiuni-de-coruptie/, last accessed on: 25.09.2016

Thus, the special cases stipulated in Law 46/2003 are eliminated from the legal framework — the unconditional material benefits, offered as a reward for the medical services on the patient's own initiative. The quality of civil servant of the doctor employed in the public health system was definitively confirmed by a decision of the High Court of Cassation and Justice on June 4, 2015[20], causing a wave of dissatisfaction from the College of Physicians in Romania. In order to understand how the legal quality of the medical profession has reached the attention of the media and the public, we must refer to the Emergency Ordinance number 2/2014, amending Law no. 95/2006, a measure of the PSD government led by Victor Ponta, by which the medical profession is granted a liberal status and, implicitly, is exempted from the provisions of the Criminal Code on corruption among civil servants.

Initially, the normative act was not promulgated by President Traian Băsescu, who expressed his objections to its provisions. In his request for re-examination sent to Parliament, the President stated that the removal of doctors from the category of civil servants diminished their criminal liability for "all offences in which the active subject is a civil servant within the meaning of criminal law"[21]. However, the Senate Health Committee rejected the president's arguments, justifying its decision by the need to align with the provisions of the other member states of the European Union, where the medical profession is "liberal par excellence". At the same time, the parliamentarians supported the need to liberalise the quality of doctor based on a series of "sociological studies" not indicated, according to which doctors leave Romania en masse due to the fact that they do not enjoy professional independence and are treated like civil servants. Practically, the Parliament equates conferring the state of the liberal profession on medical practice with an active measure taken to stop the migration of medical staff to other states. The College of Physicians in Romania welcomed the Government's measure in a statement on its website[22], considering that it is a legislative act that consolidates the independence of the medical profession, while defending the interests of the patient:

[20] Avocatnet.ro, „HCCJ Decision no. 19/2015 - doctors who are civil servants cannot receive additional payments or donations", August 7, 2015. Source: http://www.avocatnet.ro/content/articles/id_41160/Decizia-HCCJ-nr-19-2015-medicii-care-au-calitatea-de-functionar-public-nu-pot-primi-plati-suplimentare-sau-donatii.html, last accessed on: 21.09.2016

[21] Valentina Postelnicu, "President Băsescu promulgated the law removing doctors from the category of civilservants", October 8, 2014. Source: http://www.mediafax.ro/social/presedintele-basescu-a-promulgat-legea-care-scoate-medicii-din-categoria-functionarilor-publici-13372495, last accessed on: 18.09.2016

[22] Elvira Gheorghiță, "CPR against the HCCJ decision: Doctors are not civil servants, the legislation allows donations", August 14, 2015. Source: https://www.mediafax.ro/social/cmr-fata-de-decizia-HCCJ-medicii-nu-sunt-functionari-publici-legislatia-permite-donatii-14675821

> Given the nature of the profession, the doctor is not a civil servant and cannot be assimilated to such. Prosecutors will have nothing to look for in the doctor's office, because I had a case of a doctor arrested for a 3 kg jar of honey, considering that neither the doctor nor the patient complained. Now the law willhave to be enacted. (Vasile Astărăstoae, president of CPR[23]).

Interpreted in the form proposed by the Ponta Government, the law led to an acquittal in the case of military doctor Iancu Mocanu, who was exonerated of criminal liability by the Bucharest Military Tribunal in March 2014 for taking bribes and receiving undue benefits. The doctor was caught red-handed on September 23, 2013, when he took a bribe of 2,000 euros to operate on a patient. The doctor told investigators that the amount found in his pocket, in the left side of the blouse was received "as consideration from a patient's family member." The situation came to the attention of the Supreme Court, when it was referred to a lower court that found that there is non-unitary jurisprudence in the legislation, and the interpretation of the legal texts is unclear. On December 3, 2014, the Court ruled: doctors who are employed in state health units are civil servants, thus not being deprived of criminal liability in the case of bribery offences stipulated in the Criminal Code. As I mentioned before, the appeals against this decision were rejected without appeal by the High Court of Cassation and Justice in the summer of 2015, a decision virulently criticised by the new president of the College of Physicians, Gheorghe Borcean: "Since the legal official courts were unclear on this case, it is obvious that the law is not clear, it is not precise, it is not a working tool as it should be" (Gheorghe Borcean)[24]. Referring to the informal payments in the health system, he added that patients' practices of rewarding doctors for the treatments received have become a tradition in Romania, precisely because of the insufficient salary of hospital staff:

> At the same time we all know that it is a custom, it is a tradition this situation in Romania where the patient rewards the doctor's work for various reasons, because he wants it, because he knows that doctors' salaries are low. It is also well known that the doctor's financial situation has been embarrassing for years. I can't say how frustrating it is for a doctor to feel dependent on a consideration,a gift, a donation that the patient makes (...) All doctors will say that their income is dependent on this form of funding. (...) It is frustrating that these things are happening due to some legislative ambiguities, which do not honour us, the 40,000 doctors who work in Romania, nor our patients (...) (Gheorghe Borcean)

[23] colegiul-medicilor-vasile-astarastoae-sa-serbam-victoria-procurorii-nu-vor-mai-avea-ce-sa-caute-in-cabinetul-medical.html, last accessed on: 21.09.2016

[24] idem

From the statement of the President of the CPR, we can extract an image of informal payments, as they are seen by doctors — not as acts of corruption, but as donations and gifts that patients offer out of gratitude, with three main goals: strengthening the empathy of healthcare professionals for the patient, implicitly taming the medical gaze, facilitating the communication between the patient, his family members and the healthcare professionals and rewarding to an adequate value the services of the healthcare professionals, a remedy of the underpaid medical team. In August 2015, Prime Minister Victor Ponta and the Minister of Health, Nicolae Bănicioiu, announced that The government has begun work on a bill to regulate the legal conditions under which doctors can receive informal payments without being accused of corruption. Regarded by the media and the public as "legalising informal payments to doctors", the legislative idea that the prime minister demanded from the Ministry of Justice was to define three conditions for an informal payment to be considered legal: not to be conditioned by the doctor, to occur after the end of the patient's treatment and to be declared so that it can be taxed. Coming with an announcement of a 25% increase in salaries in the healthcare system from October 1, 2015, Prime Minister Ponta's statement directly ignored the decision of the Supreme Court, High Court of Cassation and Justice, regarding the doctors being civil servants.

The Government's approach must be understood in the context of the pressures exerted by doctors in 2015 to increase salaries in the system and improve working conditions, thousands of healthcare professionals forming a group called the "Alliance of Physicians" and threatening a large-scale strike[25]. The purpose of this legislative initiative was triple: on the one hand, the Executive wanted to alleviate the dissatisfaction of doctors, providing them with a legal instrument through which to receive informal payments, thus postponing the adoption of real measures to solve problems in the healthcare system. On the other hand, by introducing informal payments into the tax system, the state was to take a share of the total amount of previously unofficial and implicitly non-taxable transactions between doctors and patients — an amount not to be ignored, taking into account the estimates of studies conducted which constantly placed the total value of the annual informal payments made in Romania between 300 and 400 million euros[26]. Ultimately, the Government has sought to attract the sympathy of doctors and the public for the decriminalisation of this widespread practice,

[25] Formaremedicala.ro, "Doctors do not give up. The doctors' alliance declined the Government's invitation to participate in the talks", August 18, 2015. Source: https://www.formaremedicala.ro/medicii-nu-cedeaza-alianta- medicilor-a-declinat-invitatia-guvernului-de-a-participa-la-discutii/, last accessed on: 24.09.2016

[26] Digi24.ro, "What does the envelope for doctors contain and why do patients not give it up", July 9, 2016 http://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/ce-contine-plicul-pentru-medici-si-de-ce-nu-renunta-pacientii-la-el-540153, last accessed on: 20.09.2016

by removing doctors and patients involved from the provisions of the Criminal Code on the offences of giving and taking bribes, based on the adverse reactions of the College of Physicians regarding the decision previously taken in the same year by the supreme court — to place informal payments in the health system under the legal provisions on corruption. However, the result was completely opposite to the expectations of Prime Minister Ponta. Doctors have declared themselves offended by the idea of a law for legalising and taxing informal payments[27], and the media broke out against the Government, accusing the idea of "legalising the informal payments"[28]. Considering such pressure, the bill disappeared from the debate, and a possible piece of legislation was passed instead to allow patients to pay taxable amounts of money in order to choose the doctor to treat them, this fee being a payment for the reputation and experience of the doctor. This measure was not welcomed by the healthcare professionals either, the representatives of the Alliance of Physicians claiming that: "Lawmaking of the fee introduces inadmissible discrimination between hospitalised patients, state or private and predisposes to the violation of the rights of the patient, treated as a private in the public system, or the law must have a preventive role against possible abuses"[29].

In the following months, the attention of the public, the press and politicians was captured by cases of great corruption in the administrative and health systems, with the fire in the Bucharest club "Colectiv", which revealed major shortcomings in the way the Romanian health system works. We must mention that, following the street protests against corruption and the political class, PSD Prime Minister Victor Ponta resigned, replacing his government with the most apolitical cabinet since the Revolution, headed by former European Commissioner Dacian Ciolos. The new prime minister equally condemns all acts of corruption in the system*, urging citizens to distance themselves from the old habits of informal payments:*

[27] Denisa Miron, "Doctors' reaction to government announcement: We don't want legalization of informal payments", August 18, 2015. Source: http://www.stiripesurse.ro/reactia-medicilor-dupa-anuntul-guvernului-nu-vrem-legalizarea-spagii_964577.html, last accessed on: 25.09.2016.

[28] G.S., The Alliance of Physicians is "definitely against the legalization of informal payments" for doctors: This practiceis degrading for both the patient and the doctor", August 19, 2015. Source: http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-20366909-alianta-medicilor-este-categoric-impotriva-legalizarii-spagii-pentru-doctori-aceasta-practica-este-degradanta-atat-pentru-pacient-cat-pentru-medic.htm, last accessed on: 17.09.2016.

[29] PRO TV news, "What happened with the doctors' informal payments legalization project. Doctor: "What to ask fromthem? I can't say that the sick are rich", August 29, 2015. Source: http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/sanatate/proiectul-pentru-legalizarea-spagii-pentru-medici-a-disparut-la-fel-de-repede-cum-a-aparut-cum-e-stabilit-onorariul-actual.html, last accessed on: 24.09.2016.

> Here I am thinking of the «consideration» we pay at the counter to the money slipped into the doctor's pocket - with or without his will - here I am talking about our attitude, everyone's, to the corruption in the big infrastructure projects. Every act of corruption weakens the Romanian state and takes us away from a healthy society.(...)[30]

In conclusion, we can appreciate that the semantics of the official neoliberal discourse on "bribery" do not possess any dose of sensitivity about the ambivalence that the social actor - healthcare professionals, patient or family member - feels about informal medical payments. The political agenda, strongly based on imagining medical services in line with the strategic interests of a free, transparent and regulated by supply and demand market, resorts to criminalising informality, arguing in front of the public that the system will be released of the reminiscent problems of the socialist period. I believe that in post-socialism we are not talking about maintaining informal payments amid insufficient liberalisation of the health care market, but about adaptive strategies that the social actor recomposes as they face growing inequalities in access to health care. As we have shown in the pages above, in Romania we have witnessed an unprocessed emulation of systems and measures imposed by Western neoliberal institutions and European Union partners in the field of health, while the rights of doctors and patients have remained captive in a grey area, uncertain about the laws and measures that should have regulated and strengthened them. The ambiguous status of these payments allows for the updating of reprehensible attitudes, when tacit acceptance and their definition as a self-evident reality, beneficial rather than faulty, in line with the way government decision-makers imagine plans to reform one of the sectors with the highest stake in terms of allocated resources and public interest: the state health system.

At the beginning of 2020, the world was on the verge of a global epidemic caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV 2 virus beyond China's borders. Healthcare systems in almost every country in the world were going to be under enormous pressure that generated dramatic periods even in the most developed countries. As outbreaks spread throughout Europe, there were huge questions in Romania about the ability of the inefficient state health system to cope with a potentially huge wave of cases similar to those in China or Italy. Late in preparation for this challenge, the healthcare sector has once again shown its

[30] I.C., "Government launches new National Anticorruption Strategy", July 19, 2016. Source: http://www.hotnews.ro/stiriesential-21167877-live-text-guvenul-lanseaza-noua-strategie-nationala-anticoruptie-ciolos-atentia-care-acordam-ghiseu-baniistrecurati-buzunarul-medi-cului-coruptia-din-marele-proiecte-insfrastructura-fiecare-act-slabes.htm, last accessed on: 24.09.2016.

shortcomings: poor management, excessive politicisation, staffing crisis, inadequate provision of hospital facilities with modern technologies and equipment.

The COVID-19 pandemic in Romania started relatively simultaneously with the media coverage of a famous corruption case involving Sorina Pintea, former Minister of Health in the last Social Democratic government. On February 29, just 3 days after the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in the country, Pintea was arrested for bribery, being accused of receiving a sum of over 35,000 euros, representing 7% of the value of a modernisation contract, in the form of a public procurement of the hospital in which she operated as a manager[31]. At the beginning of the same month, a survey conducted by IMAS at the request of EuropaFM carried out an x-ray of the level of confidence of the population in the various components and institutions of the healthcare system in early 2020, amid the escalation of the health crisis. (Please refer to Figure 2). Thus, we can observe that at the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 60% of Romanians did not trust state hospitals and approximately 57% did not trust the Ministry of Health. On the other hand, doctors in Romania as well as private hospitals enjoyed the trust of the majority of the population.

Figure 2.

The level of Romanians' confidence in the main components of the health system at the beginning of 2020

***Source**:* Europa FM Barometer: *Do Romanians Trust State Hospitals? Do they agree with the optionalincrease of the retirement age?*, February 3, 2020

[31] Digi 24.ro, "Sorina Pintea, sent to court for taking bribes". April 30, 2020. Source: https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/justitie/sorina-pintea-trimisa-in-judecata-pentru-luare-de-mita-1299828, last accessed on 22.04.2021

The pandemic event that started in Romania at the beginning of 2020 and in which we are still, was a difficult test for the national healthcare system, registering major fluctuations in relation to the public perception of the healthcare professionals. While in the West the healthcare professionals enjoyed almost unanimous support and appreciation from them the media and the population, doctors, nurses and orderlies being portrayed and honoured as true heroes in the fight to limit the impact of the pandemic, in the spring of 2020 Romania was marked by public scandals generated by the transformation of hospitals into real outbreaks of the new coronavirus poor management at the medical unit level but also against the background of the acute lack of protection and training equipment regarding their use. Eloquent in this sense is the episode that happened at the beginning of the pandemic at the Suceava County Hospital where, due to management and communication errors, a large part of the healthcare professionals became infected even before they could take over and treat the flow of patients, fact which amplified the epidemic balance in this region of the country. If the dominant media discourse in the coming months focused on portraying healthcare professionals in the form of pandemic heroes, frequently presenting reports and articles praising the efforts of doctors and nurses, especially in the Intensive Care Units, where the severe cases of COVID-19 were treated, the perception of the population remained fragmented: a significant part of Romanians, dissatisfied with the restrictions imposed and the actions taken by the authorities to limit the pandemic, continued to deny the existence of the danger posed by the virus, to question the authenticity of tragic images in hospitals and to accuse occult interests in publicising the danger posed by COVID-19.

This polarisation of the public has been intensely fuelled by differences in the level of discourse of the main political actors, the year 2020 being loaded with a huge political stake: local and parliamentary elections. Thus, the opposition represented by the Social Democratic Party constantly criticised the governmental measures while the new parliamentary party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), with nationalist orientation, constantly organised protests with the stated purpose of provoking the lifting of restrictions such as compulsory wearing of protection masks, restricted movement, closure of the HoReCa sector or compulsory hospitalisation of patients diagnosed with SARS-CoV virus 2. An important event in the chronology of the pandemic occurred in June 2020, when Renate Weber, Romanian Ombudsman, a supporter of the previous governing alliance (PSD-ALDE) imposed monitoring of hospitals for

"prevention of torture or treatment specific to places of detention"[32], justifying this measure by the fact that patients did not have the right to be discharged upon request, the hospital thus falling within the definition of a detention unit in which patients are deprived of their liberty.

The action of the Romanian Ombudsman thus legitimised the opinions of that part of the population that sympathised with the radical positions of AUR and some extreme voices within PSD, namely that the restrictions violate civil liberties and human rights, hospitals are places where patients are illegally hospitalised and subjected to torment by healthcare professionals. The protests against the so-called "medical dictatorship" culminated in the spring of 2021, amid the deepening epidemiological crisis and the overburdening of the health care system. While the intensive care units were overcrowded, in a crisis of beds and staff, a vocal minority manifested itself, sometimes even violently, near hospitals with slogans such as "Assassins!" addressed directly to the healthcare professionals.[33] The manager of the "Matei Balş" hospital in Bucharest stated in March 2021 that:

> From the point of view of the attitude towards the medical and auxiliary staff, we are amazed, watching how we turned torturers, criminals, assassins from heroes. Let's see what happens next. At some point it becomes painful to spend the day in the hospital, the nights, and then to be labelled as criminal, a psychopath, a terrorist. All we do is heal or improve (...)[34]

With the improvement of the epidemiological situation in Romania, accompanied by the gradual lifting of restrictions, the demonstrations against doctors have ceased, but I note that even today no social and media consensus has been reached on the role of healthcare professionals during the pandemic. "Frontline heroes" for most are in the same time "killers" and "torturers" for others. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic caused two incidents that brought back to the public's memories of the tragedy that happened in 2015 in the "Colectiv" club: fires with loss of life occurred in Intensive Care Units. The

[32] Alina Mihai, "Renate Weber explains why hospitals are being monitored by the Romanian Ombudsman for 'prevention of torture or treatment specific to places of detention' ", June 11, 2020: https://www.mediafax.ro/social/renate-weberexplica-de-ce-spitalele-sunt-monitorizate-de-avocatul-poporului-pentru-prevenirea-torturii-ori-tratamente-specificelocurilor-de-detentie-19275263, last accessed on 28.05.202

[33] Dan Tăpălagă, "Who are these rioters?", March 31, 2021. Source https://www.g4media.ro/cine-sunt-acesti-revoltati.html, last accessed on 29.05.2021.

[34] Răzvan Căucean, "Doctors' reaction to protests in front of hospitals: "From heroes we became torturers and assassins", March 31, 2021. Source: https://dej24.ro/reactia-medicilor-la-protestele-din-fata-spitalelor-am-ajuns-din-eroi-tortionari-si-asasini/, last accessed on 29.05.2021.

first of these cases, which took place on November 15, 2020 at the Piatra Neamț County Emergency Hospital, had in the foreground the doctor on duty, Cătălin Denciu, who risked his life to get as many patients as possible out of a room in flames. The doctor, seriously injured, with burns on 80% of his body surface, was immediately considered a hero by both the Romanian and foreign press.

Painfully and outrageously, Romania was again, 5 years after the "Collective" moment, unable to treat the "great burned", the hero-doctor being immediately transferred to Belgium in order to benefit from the best care and higher chances of recovery. After years in which policymakers competed in promises to modernise state hospitals in order to cope with all kinds of emergencies and treatments, Nelu Tataru, the then Minister of Health, made an extremely controversial statement at the time by which denounced the collective guilt of all for what happened in Piatra Neamț in November 2020[35]:

> For 30 years, and for the local authorities and non-involvement, I think we are all guilty in this country, not only the healthcare system and not only the local authorities, because we have agreed for 30 years to live in such a medical situation.

Nelu Tătaru's statement is a call to make the population responsible for fighting the deficiencies in the health system: the state cannot fully solve the problems of the system and it is necessary that citizens no longer accept this "status quo" and change their mentalities regarding the medical situation in Romania.

From this unfortunate event, however, emerged the same opposition between the exemplary medical professionalism led to self-cancellation shown by Dr. Cătălin Denciu, and the inefficient, corrupt and outdated system that is maintained in a relative state of operation only at the cost of these sacrifices which are chosen by professionals who decide to stay in Romania to help their communities. Against the background of the measures of distancing and isolation during the pandemic, coupled with the concentration of resources of the health system to treat cases of COVID-19, I estimate that in this completely atypical period the phenomenon of informal payments has decreased in size. It will be important to note, however, how the system will readjust to "normality" as the coronavirus spread decreases. Will informal payments return to pre-pandemic levels? Will the Romanian health system enter a long-awaited

[35] G4Media.ro, "Nelu Tătaru, about the fire in Piatra Neamț: We are all guilty because we accepted 30 years to live in such a medical situation", November 15, 2020. Source: https://www.g4media.ro/nelu-tataru-suntem-toti-vinovati-ca-am-acceptat-30-de-ani-sa-traim-intr-o-astfel-de-situatie-medicala.html, last accessed on 29.05.2021

modernisation process marked by relevant reforms? And if so, how will this process affect the phenomenon of informal payments and the ways in which patients and healthcare professionals relate? All of these remain open questions to which I will look for answers in the future.

Conclusions: The scapegoat theory and the small (BIG) corruption

In the conclusion of this paper I consider it important to establish from the outset that there is a profound lack of understanding and consistency of the health and political authorities in Romania that have succeeded each other in the great decision-making positions on health in the three decades since the fall of communism, in how to approach the phenomenon of informal payments. First, informal exchange practices between patients and their family members, on the one hand, and medical staff on the other, are not a dark legacy of the declining communist regime, but an extension of the formal framework that remains necessary in the context in which the health sector is facing a worsening of chronic problems due to the concrete lack of action on the part of policy makers. Like any exchange, informal payments have benefits for both parties involved. The fact that these benefits, on the periphery of the legal framework, are necessary for the lubrication of the mechanisms of a cumbersome system, for which the functioning of the legislative levers has proved insufficient over the last thirty years, is reversed and transformed by the political discourse in the reason for which the long-awaited reforms are delayed. Thus, informal post-socialist relations become, from an ideological point of view, obstacles to achieving the objectives of restructuring the system and aligning with the standards of economic performance specific to developed countries in the West.

Aware of their roles as opinion leaders, the political class and the major media *outlets* have turned the informal economy into a public enemy of the first rank, regardless of its declarative significance for both health professionals and citizens who are aware that staying formal does not guarantee health needs. In terms of public sector funding, informal payments have become not only a main target of criticism, but also an excuse for underfunding and lack of reformist modernisation measures, while major acts of corruption, procurement, supply and large-scale public contracts continued relatively unnoticed until the tragic occasion of the fire in the "Colectiv" club in the fall of 2015. I noticed, however, that depending on the political colours of the parties or alliances that succeeded each other in the reins of power, the measures proposed to stop the informal economy varied according to party ideologies. If the increase in salaries for the

medical staff categories was a common promise of each Government, potentially or in office, approaches to the legal framework varied. The PSD Social Democrats, with a theoretically leftist orientation, have sought ways to allow legal loopholes for informal payments except for those conditioned by the provision of medical services, or even proposed legislative initiatives to assimilate them into the "white" economy over time, while right-wing governments after 2004 have labeled them globally as "bribes," "informal payments for doctors," or "corruption." Informality-as-gift, i.e. the situation in which the medical act is not in any form conditioned, most often seeks to replace the "medical gaze" with a human gaze, appropriate, non-hierarchical and non-paternalistic, "forcing" the healthcare professional to a type reciprocity that takes the form of recognising the other's humanity by personalising the therapeutic or care relationship.

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CENTRALISED MULTI-NATIONAL PRACTICES OF TRANSFER AND MANAGERIAL DISCREPANCIES: EVIDENCE FROM A ROMANIAN CALL CENTER

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ABSTRACT. This paper describes workplace dynamics in a call centre located in Romania, a subsidiary of a multi-national corporation (MNC). Positing a centralised practice transfer and global management strategy, the company relies exclusively on home-country decision makers. Placed within Romania's dependent economic profile alongside its deregulated employment relations, centralised managerial decisions create widespread organisational uncertainty with numerous hire and fire and downsizing procedures, followed by subsequent recruitment campaigns designed to replace the previously displaced workforce.

Keywords: multinational corporation; practice transfer; call centre; Romania

Introduction

Although Romania's economic profile is steadily reaching western EU levels in terms of export complexity (Ban, 2019; Ban and Adăscăliței, 2020), significant portions of its services sector persistently encompass low value-added outsourcing and offshoring initiatives. While regional economic hubs (primarily Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Iasi and Timisoara) represent stark exceptions due to their diverse economic landscapes, customer support centres are still characterised by increased levels of instability: company mergers, corporate takeovers and capital flight. In the realm of organisational practices, these conditions can contribute to workplace ambiguities with significant effects on the workforce.

By focusing on an online retail MNC, the paper contributes to existing literature on multinational practice transfers and workplace management strategies situated within global value chains (GVCs) (Fernet et al., 2012;

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Kristensen and Morgan, 2012; Harley, 2015; Welch and Bjorkman, 2015; Zhu and Morgan, 2018), highlighting their possibilities and constraints in Romania's dependent market economy. The primary argument lies in the contextual elements (mainly economic and legislative) that enable MNCs to engage in complex, yet erratic, management practices in their Romanian subsidiaries.

In contrast to Zhu and Morgan's (2018) depiction of IT companies, the studied company limits inter-firm collaborations along the supply chain, preferring to offshore various workflow elements. For example, customer support services are largely managed by Romanian offices, while manufacturing, logistics and retail operations are delegated to western European and Asian subsidiaries. Furthermore, despite the complex internal coordination requirements, the company assumes a centralised management scheme, relying on home-country office decisions, often leading to misinterpretation of global operation necessities. In turn, erroneous appraisal of global organisational activities imposes a volatile workplace. Namely, in Romanian offices, downsizing operations and hire and fire practices are exceedingly frequent. As is often the case, inconsistent decisions are followed by offsetting procedures, mainly recruitment campaigns destined to replace previously dismissed personnel.

Operating at the 'micro-organisational level' of MNC transfers (Ferner et al., 2006), the empirical data was collected using ethnographic methods: in-depth interviews and participant observation sessions. Fieldwork was conducted over a 12-month period, intermittently, during 2018. The interviews, 10 in total, took place in informal settings, interviewees holding various positions in the company: manager, HR specialist, office administrator and customer support (CS) specialists. Participant observation sessions, as a full-time employee with a temporary work contract, ensued in two distinct 3-month periods, February-April and October-December. Consent was obtained from the managing bodies of the company, under the condition of full anonymity.

A reflexive approach is assumed, making use of Burawoy's (1998; 2000; 2009) extended case method. Coupled with a strand of literature aptly named comparative institutionalist theory (Cooke et al., 2018), the study embraces both direct engagement with the field site and subsequently extends its scope to transnational contingencies from a historical, sectoral and institutional level. Initial contact with the field site started via an acquaintance, who provided insider knowledge and later access to the workspace.

The paper starts out by constructing the theoretical framework of MNC practices transfer and positioning Romania's dependent market economy within existing writings. The case-study depiction begins with the studied MNCs dynamics in GVCs, highlighting its global reach on three continents and shifting position in the chain by virtue of internal accumulation strategies.

Afterward, the narrative continues with the ramifications of centralised decision-making on HR practices and work management. Finally, assuming a first-person approach, the specific effects of the same practice transfers on employee well-being are presented.

Context-dependence and MNC transfer practices

Following numerous attempts to ease the 'shock of transition' from state capitalism to a global market economy in the first decade of the post-socialist period, Romania's liberal government instituted liberalisation initiatives under the guidance of World Bank and IMF experts. Fuelled by memories of its socialist past, the country's political establishment introduced an even more radical version of the neoliberal agenda than prescribed by global financial institutions (Ban, 2016).

Namely, the anticommunist discourse morally legitimised liberal policies while downplaying social policies. Furthermore, the anti-communist discourse also impacted the Romanian workforce. Attempts to negate unionisation initiatives and ideas of worker solidarity were placed in the same logic of communism versus democracy (Poenaru, 2017). The primary agenda was to increase employee subordination, stripping them of past work values (viewed as the socialist work ethic) and attempting to inscribe autonomy-based values adaptable to employer needs. These tendencies culminated with the deregulation of the Romanian labour market in 2011 (Varga and Freyberg-Inan, 2014). Amendments were made to the Labour Law, stressing the 'rigidity' problem reminiscent of socialism and the need for a flexible workforce suited to FDIs. Changes included additions for easing temporary employment, the possibility of dismissal in case of strikes and the substitution of unions by work councils. These circumstances implicitly contributed to the power inequalities in employment relations geared towards corporate incentives via state policies, while downplaying social measures.

The resulting economic trend materialised under what certain authors (Nolke and Vliegenthart, 2009; Tarlea and Freyberg-Inan, 2018) have called a "dependent market economy" (DME) of the neoliberal type, similar to the Baltic States (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012), consisting of a more radical market-oriented economy with reduced social implications. In more recent writings (Ban, 2019; Medve-Balint and Scepanovic, 2019; Vukov, 2020), the DME category is predominantly mobilised for depicting Romania's economic landscape. More specifically, the country is an outsourcing and offshoring site mainly for German and Austrian capital (Marin, 2006). As a result, between 2002 and 2010, the percentage of FDI from Romania's GDP increased from 10 to 43.9 percent, with 56 percent of investments aimed at the services sector.

Predominantly endorsing least-cost strategies, the country's economic profile is characterised by export-oriented production situated in the GVCs of more complex products and services – with mounting evidence of increased export complexity (Ban and Adăscăliței, 2020) – and outsourced services. Making use of low-cost labour power engaged in low-value added operations, largely without the possibility of collective action, constitutes the 'conditions of emergence' (Freyssenet, 2009) for MNCs. As "work organisation is always context-dependent" (Elger and Smith, 2005: 7), organising day-to-day operations without limitations presents no drawbacks for employers. However, these circumstances can subject employees to unquestionable managerial decisions and lack of viable legal actions.

MNC practices implementation originating in the country of origin generally divergent in subsidiaries either due to the local context or, as Ferner et al. (2006) argue, the outcome of interactions between parent and host countries' national business systems. Thus, context-dependence exhibits various factors inhibiting or enabling various practice transfers and management strategies (Lane, 2008). The direction of transfers can also vary, as Chiang et al. (2019) adequately summarise, from forward (home to host country) to horizontal (between host country subsidiaries) and reverse (host to home country) conforming to MNC operational strategies. Furthermore, transfers can be standardised when stemming from centralised management and localised in the case of independent subsidiaries.

Borrowing from institutionalist theory, Kristensen and Morgan (2012) highlight the fluctuating organisational practices in contemporary capitalism. The constantly shifting realities of the global economy drives MNCs to experiment and adapt to market dynamics. Through 'firm-level experimentation', companies can consolidate their market positions and establish future expansion strategies. Albeit global dynamics represent the focal point of their study, particular attention should be given to liberal and dependent institutional establishments, where forms of experimentation can resemble hire and fire operations and unpredictable work environments as is the case in this study. Furthermore, even though Zhu and Morgan's (2018) critique of worker depictions in certain writings is justified (for example, Bair and Werner, 2015), in deregulated contexts, employee agency can be severely limited. Describing employees as 'objects' is arguably warranted in unfavourable circumstances from a legal point of view, coupled with a lack of local job opportunities or meaningful income alternatives (Mihaly, 2015; 2021).

Shifting focus to manufacturing, as Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) state, MNC value creation strategies converge in productive models surmising distinct product policies, organisation of production and national employment relations.

Product policies are determined by the viability of products in various markets, while the organisation of production embraces the specific mode of manufacturing. Both are determined by host-country labour market characteristics. Certain features (corporate culture and work organisation) tend to be identical in host countries, while industrial relations are adapted to specific regulatory frameworks (Meardi et al., 2009). As is often the case, while home country regulations tend to be strict, subsidiaries are placed in deregulated contexts, such as those currently in Central and Eastern Europe. MNCs thus adapt managerial and productive practices to flexibility requirements, often transferring labour intensive processes to host-country facilities while also delegating managerial autonomy to these sites.

The company's global dynamics

The case study company is an online retailer, with business policies spanning over GVCs. Various sections of its transnational operations are allocated to different subsidiaries located in Europe and Asia. The company transfers practices from home country office to subsidiaries, although the specificities of these transfers vary according to operating requirements. For example, facilities in Romania are managed in accordance with operations in China, or vice-versa. Managerial decisions stemming from home-country offices take into account progress or regress in global affairs. Thus, personnel reductions in Romania can be the outcome of successful operations in China. Nonetheless, the home office functions differently compared to its subsidiaries, volatile management practices are designed and implemented exclusively in external facilities.

Global operations are centrally supervised by a home office managing body pertaining to various company departments. The diffusion of practices is standardised and oriented in a forward direction (Edwards, 1998), from home-country offices to subsidiaries. Given Romania's deregulated context, few obstacles can dispute centralised managerial decisions, in contrast with Ferner et al.'s (2012) depiction of possible opposition from subsidiaries. This state of affairs is also influenced by the lack of a home-country delegate in subsidiaries, thus central managers lack a credible grassroots perspective.

The company's merchandise ranges from home and garden décor products to furniture and clothing. While products were initially sourced from other vendors, the majority of items are manufactured internally, with a significant expansion of its repertoire. According to data collected from the company's internal archives, customers originate from Europe, USA and Australia. Various regions are covered by promoting approximately two dozen online shopping

platforms, with different brandings and website domains. Their online expansion can be traced via the establishment of said platforms. For example, in 2007, a German website was opened, 2008 a French one, from 2013 and onwards platforms for Austria, Greece, Spain, etc. In 2016, the company's domains reached 17 countries, including the USA.

New subsidiaries and departments also emerged on the backdrop of retail growth. The Romanian offices opened in 2016, tasked mainly with customer support operations, while logistics was off-shored to China. Global operations later included drop-shipment and marketplace options. Drop-shipment entails supplying other online retailers, mainly with furniture kits. In practice, drop-shipping essentially reserves specific products in the supplier's warehouses, without needing to physically receive them. After the order is received by drop-shipment client, they manage the shipping operations, even though the products are delivered from the drop-shipment supplier, the company in question. Marketplace operations entail product placement on the company's online platforms, external place-holding beneficiaries managing customer orders as if their own, in exchange for various placement fees in accordance with placed product values. In both cases, the studied MNC's position in GVCs changes as a result of drop-shipping and marketplace operations, assuming the role of supplier in the former and retail intermediary in the latter.

According to management documents, the main factors behind this accelerated expansion lie in market studies and extensive client feedback system implemented in online platforms. The company owns a single manufacturing facility in China destined primarily for furniture production, other types of commodities are assembled on per order basis or sourced from other vendors. However, the demand for garden and home furnishings far exceeds other types of products. Logistics operations are limited to each continent, mainly due to transportation costs, especially for large packages. As a result, "delivery zones" are disconnected from each other: products available in European warehouses are shipped only on the continent. Products are also selected based on consumption targets, price ranges and national or regional variation:

> We advertise products exclusively online, without any physical stores, and customers cannot see any item in person. So, we have a few stocked warehouses, in Europe, other regions, China too, USA also. Thus, we have websites for every country we are present in. These websites have products destined for that nationality so to say, or for a specific customer target group. For example, products on the Romanian website cannot be found on Italian or French platforms (F, 35 years old, Operations Manager).

Online orders are relayed to the nearest warehouse. Otherwise, logistics employees need to determine the optimal sourcing method and arrange transportation routes from other warehouses on the continent. In Europe, shipping routes are largely pre-determined and standardised seasonally. In the USA or Australia, product variety is reduced, transportation costs are significantly higher and sourcing possibilities limited. The company's headquarters is located in western Europe, adjacent to its largest warehouse, two other warehouses serve the America market, while another two are positioned in Australia. Table 1 contains further data.

Table 1.

Company information

Employees (global)	1400
Centers of operation (HQ and subsidiaries)	13
Branded products	23,000
Sales per day (average)	20,000
Packages shipped from largest warehouse per day	25,000
Road vehicles	125
Online visits (all platforms, in 2017)	~50 million

Data source: internal documents.

Work management and organizational urgencies

As mentioned, organisational practices are transmitted from home-country offices. Inter-office communication is largely unidirectional, subsidiary managers lacking input in centralised decision-making. Assuredly, decisions shape the local organisational context, determining significant changes at office level. Furthermore, given Romania's deregulated employment relations favouring employers, managerial choices are freely implemented, with considerable impact on employees. Similarly, HR Specialists are thrust in the frontlines of remedying the aftermath of inconsistent decisions. These circumstances include urgent recruitment needs for specific customer support teams, often calling for improvised recruiting methods.

The company's first facility in Romania opened in 2016, with 10 customer support employees, followed later that year by the second and third. The organisational structure is team-based, with two distinct categories: administrative-management personnel and customer specialists. While the former are the customary office administrators, HR specialists and management staff, the latter represent work teams grouped on different languages: English, German, Spanish, French, Finnish, Turkish, Romanian, Hungarian, etc. Each support team varies in size and designation in accordance with demand from different countries. For instance, orders from certain countries are less frequent or fluctuate seasonally (e.g. holiday season and the summer period), thus support employees with a reduced workload are relegated to other teams (mainly English or Romanian), based on their language skills. Moreover, the smallest office (15 employees) is dedicated exclusively for the German market.

The studied facility is the second largest in Romania, with approximately 100 employees, customer support employees covering 9 languages. Work contracts are mainly temporary, HR specialists inform employees of the possibility of further extension or permanent agreements after recruitment. The procedure was identical in my case as well, as a participant observer, an HR colleague telling me that:

> there is a possibility of a permanent work contract, but we cannot guarantee it will happen. Everything depends on the workload and board of (home-country) managers (F, 32 years old, HR Specialist).

Work hours are predominantly full time. However, administrative personnel have added flexibility: clock-in and -out intervals are flexible, and working from home was possible for a limited number of days per month even before the pandemic. Conversely, customer support staff has a fixed 9-17 daily schedule with a one-hour lunch break. Employees from the same team are required to alternate break hours in order to answer potential customer calls accordingly.

Taking advantage of deregulated circumstances, the company applies numerous employment strategies, temporary contracts, student internship programs, and work from home arrangements during the pandemic period. While the practice is less intrusive than in the case of temporary work agencies in Central and Eastern Europe (Andrijasevic and Sacchetto, 2017), personnel management strategies are adapted according to centralised decision makers' evaluation. More often than not, events of mass dismissals are performed in a relatively short timeframe without repercussions for the employer.

The workplace centres around the customer support specialists, who occupy the largest area in the office. Employees are positioned on two sides of a divider, loosely separating different teams. Work desks are segmented once more on both sides of said divider with movable screens, destined to accurately partition of teams for specific languages. The operations manager is positioned at the left-most edge of the large divider, a vantage point for viewing employees

on both sides. Noise cancelling headphones are mandatory for each employee in the central area. The administrative staff occupies adjacent offices along a hallway, while the kitchen and break rooms are situated next to lobby and floor entrance.

The recruitment process involves a number of standardised steps, following internal regulations. However, in essence, hiring boils down to passing a language (excepting native Romanian speakers) evaluation test on desired positions, prior experience and academic degrees are omitted:

> I saw the job posting on OLX (popular Romanian advertising platform). I was unemployed at the time and needed a job, so I applied. A few days later I was contacted by an HR Specialist and invited to a one-on-one meeting in the office. The interview was short, few questions and done, I was hired (F, 28 years old, Customer Support Specialist, Romanian team).

> After applied for various jobs, I finally found this one. It is a completely new sector for me, I would not have imagined working here, but it is an opportunity at least (F, 30 years old, Customer Support Specialist, Spanish team).

Shifting to an internal perspective, recruiters, at first, approach selected candidates with information about the company, the client services sector and their potential responsibilities as a customer support specialist. The ensuing language test is crucial in determining not only if the candidate has adequate spoken language competency level, but remuneration level as well. Financial offers are calculated based on language proficiency and candidate availability. For instance, a Finnish, German or French speaker would generally have higher pay compared to an English, Romanian or Hungarian speaker due to their availability nationally and locally.

As mentioned by an interviewee, job postings are advertised on various platforms: LinkedIn, OLX, or eJobs. Other postings target students, job-oriented groups on popular social media platforms are usually targeted. During urgencies, in the aftermath of personnel reductions, alternative recruitments methods are utilised. The depiction of a specific event exemplifies these circumstances. Throughout the summer period, an unexpected German speaker necessity arose. The precise origins are difficult to trace, however, a decision not unlike the ones usually relayed from the home-office was received and needed to be put in practice. Thus, the HR personnel posted job offers on the various university literature and language faculties and reached out to collaborating faculty departments in the effort of recruiting German-speaking students. Needless to say, it was a period of intensified work and heightened stress for the company's HR Specialists.

The referral system, a more stable recruitment procedure, is in place as well. Every newly hired employee is presented, during the initial onboarding session, with the possibility of recommending potential candidates. When new

positions are opened, typically with specific language requirements, employees can propose acquaintances for hiring. After successfully passing the recruitment process and the three-month probation period (required by law), the recommending employee receives a bonus of 300€. In certain teams, the majority of employees are referrals. For example, locally, Finnish speakers are exceedingly scarce. Thus, the Finnish team is composed mainly of students (various generations recommended by an employee) from a specific specialisation.

Work tasks range from answering emails, online platform chat and customer calls. The variety of possible issues can also vary from product inquiries to quality complaints and warranty issues. During the introductory training, employees are presented with standardised procedures:

> When employees join, they have an official 7-10 day training period. Usually, trainers provide instructions on issues encountered in teams employees will be part of. In practice, the training period is gradual, we start by only answering e-mails and chat messages, then we respond to calls. Later, if you are needed in other teams, only documentation is provided, without any formal training. If you have questions, you can ask your superior (F, 28 years old, Customer Support Specialist, Romanian team).

Employee evaluations through the global chain of command

The internal hierarchy consists of three distinct levels: customer support staff, team leaders and administrative-managerial staff. Customer support specialist and team leaders are subordinated to the operations manager, the highest-ranking local employee. The chain of command extends globally, with operations and logistics coordinated various high-ranking managers from China, while administrative staff from every Romanian office assists home-country managers.

Performance is measured via a percentage of customer issues, named 'tickets'. Customer support employees can visualise daily remaining tasks on their screens, each represented by orders with various issues. Tickets are divided into first- and second-line support. The former entailing hands-on contact with clients, warehouse staff and couriers. The latter requires assistance via e-mail or platform messaging. Furthermore, tasks can also range between pre-sales and after-sales – before and after an order has been placed – and seasonally – 'high' (usually from February to July) and 'low season' (August to January). These variables determine the difficulty and duration of work tasks:

> The order is placed by customer on our websites. It cannot be confirmed via phone or e-mail as the only payment method is with credit card. We (Customer Support Specialists) do not even have access to financial information, only to an order number via email and a few other notifications in various stages: when it leaves the warehouse, location of the packages en route, etc. (M, 33 years old, former employee).

> Tasks are always determined seasonally. During high season, we have 15 tasks to resolve per hour and have to divide our time between first- and second-line tasks: when you respond to chat messages, when you handle phone calls…it is difficult. As we are during high season, we are regularly working over hours, even from home (F, 29 years old, Customer Support Specialist, Italian team).

Customer support evaluation criteria are split into quantitative and qualitative key performance indicators (KPI). Quantitative KPIs measure the previously mentioned tasks per hour, including time required for completing tasks during low- and high-season: minutes and seconds spent replying to messages, emails and phone calls. The duration of tasks is adjusted according to experience in the company: 0-3 months, 3-6 months and 6+ months. These variables serve to evaluate employees and classify productivity into four categories: very good, good, average and improvement. Qualitative KPIs serve two purposes: to determine to content of relayed messages compared to required templates and employee adaptability and evaluate employee attitude. The latter is quantified in proactivity, flexibility and work ethic, all categories measured via break period and work hours consistency alongside absenteeism.

Evaluations are performed by team leaders once per quarter, and consist of individual discussions based on the mentioned criteria. Conforming to evaluation outcomes, various improvement plans are compiled, salaries can be increased or bonuses provided:

> Team-leaders collect information and after 3 months they offer feedback, what needs to be improved, needs to be done…based on these, you can have your salary increased, or remain with the same one and how to improve your work (F, 35 years old, former employee).

Procedures of uncertainty: downsizing and hire and fire

In the first few weeks as an employee, the constant impression of impending organisational changes loomed. Various informal discussions also hinted to an upcoming decision from the home office. When expectations materialised, the decision – personnel reductions in two work teams – was perceived without astonishment, a fact evidencing the commonality of unstable organisational management. For instance, a prior downsizing procedure was carried out in another Romanian office a few years before, resulting in the simultaneous dismissal of 50 employees. A few months later, the same number positions were opened in the studied office. Management's reasoning was based on the company's rapid expansion, the downsizing was justified under the guise of strategic reorganisation. However, considering the identical labour costs and the added costs of a renewed recruitment effort, the pertinence of the decision comes into question.

As mentioned, the depicted downsizing event started out as a rumor. Although initially limited to administrative personnel (and despite their efforts to confine the information), the news eventually turned into common knowledge. Doubtlessly, the work environment became tense, collective imagination revolved around the targeted individuals or teams. The operations manager was the only employee with precise information:

> At a managerial level, the decision was gradual. We expected it somehow, but we were not informed until the day in question. Thus, we could only inform the employees on the same day as well. Management was aware of this ahead of time and we need to implement it. A 2-3-month announcement in advance would be welcomed. No one said anything, X just decided and said: we will fire them! Reorganise the department! Management comes up with decisions and we have to implement them, there is no choice: now they told our manager that until X month our office can have only X agents. They do not care how we do it, just do it (F, 27 years old, Recruiter).

The downsizing event unfolded in a streamlined manner. The head of operations called for a meeting one day before the procedure was destined to take place. Employees were informed about the company's issues and another impending personnel reduction episode that will affect two teams. The meeting lasted for no more than 10 minutes. Reactions varied from laughter and sarcastic remarks to concern and anxiety. After the general meeting, the members of the two teams were called into the meeting room and the dismissed employees were announced. In view of the company's history, the required paperwork for dismissals is prepared beforehand in the eventuality of sudden downsizing decisions. As a result, the selected employees were presented with the paperwork and asked to sign. The recruiter recalled the events:

> It was not easy … after every employee signed, I was the one there, alone with all of them. I had to calm them, when everyone was voicing their discontent … I had to be emphatic and let them vent their frustration … it was fine in the end (F, 27 years old, Recruiter).

The selection criteria for dismissed employees consisted of KPI indicators, the lowest ranking members from each team were named. Apart from this rationale, no other justification was offered by local, nor home-country managers. In the interview with the operations manager, the sole motive for the frequent hire and fire practices was the company's expansion in a fluctuating manner:

> The customer support department is the most affected by these decisions, those employees are the most impacted…today you have X number of colleagues, you get to know them, then we go back to X number again. Today we expand teams there, then we move X team in another office. They (home office managers) proceed due to the business expansion, they reorganise a lot and change massively (F, 35 years old, Operations Manager).

However, it is uncertain how the company strives to expand, as evidence of innovation is scarce. The idea of 'making things work' is also disputed by employees. Apart from the dwindling morale, discontent was voiced mainly due to the sudden unfolding of events, lack of communication and the increased work load for remaining employees. While the downsizing unquestionable had an effect on the company's expenditure, the previous workflow remained. Furthermore, as a direct side effect of the latest downsizing procedure, approximately 10 more employees voluntarily resigned. Thus, the personnel reduction tended to indicate the company's contraction, not expansion.

A few months after these chain of events, similar procedures occurred in other Romanian offices, pointing at a comprehensive transfer of practices on a national level. From the approximately 100 employees in Romania, less than half remained as a result of downsizing practices. Erroneous communication and centralised managerial decision can contribute to these shortcomings. The transfer of home-country practices, by all intents and purposes, lack systematic justification and are perceived as random decision unnecessarily destabilising the workplace.

The company's external reputation also comes in question during recruitment campaigns. General perception in the local labour market is that of a company in constant reorganisation, unstable, suited mostly for seasonal work or as an intermediary job. During my final days as an employee, recruiters struggled to re-configure affected work teams, needing to improvise various part-time and short-term arrangements, all while facing numerous refusals and negative feedback. On the other hand, the external reputation is mirrored by the internal one, although the general opinion resembles resignation and futility toward managerial decisions:

> When you look at those empty chairs, you do not feel happy. They were, after all, colleagues of ours…and you hesitate to think if they are able to find another job, how they will pay rent or bank loans, how will they uphold their families…you automatically think that you can be in their place too and maybe this chair will once be empty…we need stability, to be able to somewhat relax (F, 28 years old, Customer Support Specialist, Romanian team).

Conclusions

The overall climate of uncertainty evidenced by interviewees and personal observation is determined by inconsistent centralised decision-making and their imposition as mandatory MNC practices in the host-country. Global operations are distributed to various off-shored facilities, each with their specific role in GVCs. Owing to the company's complex operational framework

stretching over three continents, centralised decisions transferred to subsidiaries provoke widespread organisational changes with repercussions on the workforce and the MNCs external reputation.

By fixating on a Romanian subsidiary tasked with managing customer support operations, the paper contributes to existing works on corporate management practice transfers (Fernet et al., 2012; Kristensen and Morgan, 2012; Zhu and Morgan, 2018). The main point of contention is represented by host-country economic and legislative circumstances enabling a wide variety of organisational arrangements and management strategies culminating with frequent downsizing procedures. As the presented data indicates, the internal hierarchy mainly consists of work teams entrusted with solving product-related issues via e-mail, online messaging or phone calls. The operations manager is the highest-ranking employee and the sole recipient of home-country managerial decisions. Employee evaluations are performed quarterly using quantitative (tasks per hour) and qualitative (quality of services and employee discipline) KPIs, taking into account seasonal variation.

Organisational changes are common occurrence, with various downsizing events taking place in all Romanian offices. The primary justification resides in a corporate expansion narrative. However, as the data shows, the origins and means of organisational growth remain uncertain. Nevertheless, the managerial discrepancies residing in personnel reductions in an office followed by recruitment campaigns in another point to misaligned managerial decisions with significant repercussions for employees, partly due to centralised corporate practice transfers. Placed in a deregulated context, employees have limited means of counteracting managerial decisions or providing meaningful alternatives, thus perpetuating the existing status quo.

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DISTANCE AND BOUNDARIES ISSUES IN THE TRANSITION FROM FACE-TO-FACE TALKING THERAPY TO ONLINE THERAPY IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT. The primary main aim of this article is to explore the changes and adjustments brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic to the therapeutic process in the transition from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy. Online therapy sessions, once a niche, have now become the norm in therapeutic work. This, more than ever before, raises the question of the efficacy of online therapy compared to face-to-face talking therapy. A related question is how the "classical" elements of in-person therapies (especially the psychodynamic, affective and relational-based), such as: the therapeutic alliance, the therapeutic containing space, the therapeutic relationship, etc. work in the on-line setting. This article draws on a primary qualitative exploratory research carried among Romanian clients who undergo a psychodynamic type of therapy and who transitioned from face-to-face to online therapy as a reaction to the new constraints engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic and after the measures were relaxed, the transition from on-line to in-person therapy. Our focus is on how they experience online therapy compared to face-to-face therapy in terms of intimacy, therapeutic frame and efficacy, as well as on the boundaries challenged, erased and created by the switch between the two types of therapy settings.

Keywords: online therapy; therapeutic boundaries; space and time boundaries; work-life balance; intimacy boundaries

Introduction

"Therapy, whatever its school or approach, was always to some degree teletherapy, the crossing of distances." (Peters in: Zeavin, 2021: xi). Teletherapy or e-therapy/online therapy/video-therapy is a form of telehealth which uses high-resolution, live video conferencing in the process of psychological treatment

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(Goode and Shinkle, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic forced both clients and therapists, regardless of their training, certification and experience, to switch from in-person therapy to online therapy (Mental Health America, 2021). One of the questions raised is the efficacy of online therapy in the long run and for every type of problem. A meta-analysis conducted by Mental Health America (2021) on the recent studies on teletherapy in the time of COVID-19 indicates that teletherapy is a useful therapeutic tool for the short-term and for emergencies like COVID-19, but that it shouldn't permanently replace in-person therapy. Another conclusion is that the therapeutic full presence, a necessary element for an effective therapeutic relationship, is compromised in the virtual setting, which does not provide the possibility to create an emotional connection and to build trust (Mental Health America, 2021).

The space, place, time, relationship, intimacy and personhood are the main areas impacted by the switch from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy (Mateescu, 2020). The question at stake is the efficacy of the therapeutic process in the online setting and how the therapeutic relationship and/or the therapeutic techniques can contribute to it. A related question is the online therapy's efficacy and suitability, depending on the therapists, on the clients' problems and the type of therapy (e.g. cognitive and behavioural therapies that are more technique-based, as opposed to affect-based and relational therapies) (Weinberg and Rolnick, 2020).

The switch from face-to-face talking therapy to e-therapy has hardened the therapist's ability to create a safe and containing space. The therapeutic space is regarded as one of the most important elements of the dynamic psychotherapy setting. It goes beyond the physical space and includes a series of elements such as intimacy, confidentiality, duration, time, frequency, fees, breaks, cancellations, etc. which all together contribute to the creation of a secure transitional space (Winnicott, 2005) and set the terms of the ongoing therapeutic relationship (Weinberg and Rolnick, 2020). In online therapy, the physical therapeutic presence, which is regarded as a critical element in therapy efficacy, (Geller and Greenberg, 2002) needs to be rethought. Along with these elements, the Self is negatively affected in online therapy, as it becomes a "disembodied self" (Weinberg and Rolnick, 2020). Conversely, Lemma (2017) argues for an embodied presence/self in online, mediated therapy, the difference lying only in the way we perceive and experience it. The individuals develop "internal models of space" (Dix, 2009) resulting from a mix between subjective and objective experiences, between real and imagined spatiality (Doyle, 2017). Thus, the online space becomes not only a metaphor, but a mix of concrete and virtual elements, constructed by individuals through cognitive and affective elements which allow them the "telepresence" (Berger, 2020). Lemma (2017) raises the

issues of "simulating presence", resulting from the alteration and mediation of intimacy by technology. Agar (2020) talks about a new kind of intimacy: the online/e-intimacy, which has similar traits to that of face-to-face therapeutic large groups such as a feeling of belonging and the creation of a cohesive climate.

Also, intimacy can be created through non-verbal communication, because even if the body-to-body communication misses, there is still emotional communication and body sensations in the online therapy (Weinberg and Rolnick, 2020). The therapist is required to focus on those visible non-verbal cues (i.e. eyes, posture, etc.) and on active listening. Some therapists impose distancing and seating rules in order to replicate the face-to-face physical space, but the fidelity of replication and the therapeutic effects are debatable (Weinberg and Rolnick, 2020).

All these elements build the setting for the therapeutic relationship. Other important aspects are also involved, such as the creation of the therapeutic alliance, the transference and countertransference processes, detachment and the end of therapy, which are all altered by the switch from face-to-face to online therapy.

Distance and boundaries in online therapy

> The main boundaries challenged, created or erased by the switch from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy are: therapeutic boundaries; intimacy boundaries for both the therapist and the client; space and time boundaries; social class and income boundaries. (Mateescu, 2020: 74)

The *therapeutic boundaries* are closely linked to intimacy, space, and time boundaries. They are the most challenged in online therapy, compared to face-to-face therapy (Drum and Littleton, 2014). Therapeutic boundaries and the way they are created and maintained are extremely important for the efficacy of therapeutic processes. *Spatial boundaries* allow for the creation of a secure, predictable, confidential and trustworthy space, of a personal, transitional space (Punzi and Singer, 2018). The transitional space is a mixture of external realities/boundaries and individual/shared phantasies (Punzi and Singer, 2018). In online therapy, the client/patient becomes a co-constructor of the transitional space in equal measure with the therapist (Mateescu, 2020). A study on teletherapy during COVID-19 and the transitioning from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy (Lokai et al., 2021) revealed a shift in the therapist's role, who was "normalised" by the patient and seen "more as a person". The therapists also indicated changes in the therapeutic relationship and in their role. For example, in one case, a therapist shared his therapeutic process notes with the

client, something that was totally excluded in face-to-face therapy. In some other cases, the therapist felt that his role had changed from therapist to a coach and problem-solver (Lokai et al., 2021).

Spatial boundaries are closely linked to *intimacy boundaries* for both the therapist and the client. The already mentioned study of Lokai et al. (2021) revealed an increase in the therapist's self-disclosure and the loosening of therapeutic boundaries in the transitioning from in-person therapy to online therapy. An analysis made by Zur, Williams, Lehavot (2009) about the effects that the Internet technology had on the classical therapeutic instruments of intentional self-disclosure and transparency also indicates a major change in the direction of their increasing and the lack of control of the therapist over it. The therapists can also get more information about their clients, and the change of the therapeutic frame offers direct and indirect information about the client's life and enhances the unintentional self-disclosure (Mateescu, 2020).

Another important change brought about by the online therapy is to *the geographical space and time boundaries*. Thus, clients from remote locations or from areas that lack therapy services can still benefit from therapy. It is also the case of those who are concerned with confidentiality issues that can be encountered in small communities, where there is a great overlap between social, personal, business and professional relationships (Alyami, 2015) and an informal information-sharing network (Helbok, 2003). Additionally, the online therapy provides expat clients with the opportunity to continue or to have therapy in their native language. It is an important benefit for the therapeutic alliance and the efficacy of the therapeutic process (Curtis, 2017), because the native language is more emotion-related, being learned in the primary socialization and it is an important factor in the development of an individual's identity (Caldwell-Harris, 2014).

The social class and income boundaries were also challenged by the online therapy. The underserved groups, such as low-income individuals, now have better access because there are no extra-costs (e.g.: transportation). Also, the social class differences are toned-down due to easier access to technology and an Internet connection (Liang et al., 2003). Another undeniable benefit is better time management and consequently, a better work-life balance (Lemma, 2017).

Distance and boundaries issues in therapy in the transition from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy in the time of COVID-19

The analysis of distance and boundaries issues in therapy in the transition from in-person therapy to online therapy draws on exploratory qualitative research. The data collection method is that of an in-depth unstructured interview. Each participant was interviewed over the online video platforms Skype and

Whatsapp and face-to-face, for a duration ranging between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. The participants are ten clients who are undergoing psychodynamic therapy. All participants experienced both in-person and on-line therapy. Nine of them experienced a transition from face-to-face talking therapy to online therapy as a reaction to the new constraints engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of them began the therapy online during the COVID-19 pandemic and then switched to in-person therapy, when the therapist re-started to work face-to-face. The participants' therapeutic processes are ongoing. They had on-line therapy for 6 months up to 1 year and 9 months and in-person therapy between 4 months and 3 years. Seven of them came back to in-person therapy when the therapist started to work face-to-face again, three of them continued to have therapies on-line.

The therapeutic space boundaries

In online therapy, the client becomes the co-creator of the therapeutic space. A common theme is the concern to create a space for therapy, in order to have intimacy and to separate it from the daily routine. "I moved into the living room, I needed the space to be clean, airy, and neutral. I needed to fill the space, not to be filled by it." (G.G.) Another common theme is the difficulty to connect with the therapeutic processes because there was no break between other activities or working schedules and the therapy sessions, they were a continuum. Those who had a previous face-to-face therapy experience added elements that helped them to recreate the atmosphere of the secure physical space, such as having a pack of tissues during the online sessions. "Before starting a therapy session, I prepare to have some tissues at hand. I knew that at the practice there were some on the table, so I also put them on the table." (A.R.). Also, they paid attention to the lighting, to the background, the sitting places, the phone position, the quality of the image and of the sound.

Another common theme is the tendency to perform, the lack of authenticity and the feeling of unnaturalness.

> The first (online) sessions were strange, there was a feeling of insecurity, I wasn't sure that I could talk about everything that bothered me, it was like I was performing in front of an audience assisted by a public. After a while, I got used to it, but not one online session was 100% as comfortable as a face-to-face session. (C.A.)

> When I do therapy in person, I leave a part of myself, I don't analyse myself so much, how I look and how other people see me. Online, it is like I film myself. It's more than mirroring, it is as if I recorded myself. And by using parts of myself, which is very personal, and combining them with technology is like I had to present my trauma on the news, it is like a disconnection. It feels like being part of a theatre play, a fictitious therapy session that is semi-real. (F.M.)

Intimacy

A common theme is the concern for having intimacy, which was difficult for those who do not live alone and even in those cases there was a concern for confidentiality, a fear that the conversation might be witnessed by the neighbours.

> The feeling of intimacy diminished. I had a strange feeling. I didn't feel the therapist was a strange person, because I already knew her, but I could feel a distance. (…) Many times I felt lonely, I was perfectly aware of the distance and of the fact that we weren't in the same room. At the practice, the rooms are small, cozy, perfect for the therapy, at home I have a big room, a living room, where there is an echo. The face-to-face therapeutic setting offers me much more safety, intimacy and there is a feeling of coziness. Maybe because I am a person who likes to be around other people, to feel their physical presence; pandemic or not, I used to like face-to-face meetings, I prefer the physical presence. I feel that I have a greater freedom to express my thoughts, I am not focused on a single point, which is the phone. It becomes an extra-worry. (Online therapy) is like having therapy by looking through the keyhole. (C.A.)

The therapeutic relationship

The therapeutic relationship wasn't negatively impacted by the transition from in-person to online therapy. In some cases, it was in fact reinforced, because it was seen as a secure continuity in a changing and insecure reality. Coming back to in-person therapy was described as a very happy and liberating process, as a sign of "normalisation" of life and a way to reconnect.

A recurring theme is that of a feeling of distance in online therapy, despite a good therapeutic relationship, while in face-to-face therapy the therapist is perceived as more able to "read", to "observe" and "to put pressure".

> I was happy to come back face-to-face. My body needed grounding, I needed to be pulled out of my spaces and to be exposed in this therapeutic relationship. (…) face-to-face I have the feeling that the therapist reads me better and can catch me more easily. (D.D.)

> When you are face-to-face, you are somehow 'forced' to be there. Online sessions are more sugar coated, you can make the therapy be less tough, less cruel. Online therapy is like a story in a frame. (F.M.)

Another recurring theme in how people describe their online therapy experience is that of a greater possibility to avoid uncomfortable topics as compared to face-to-face sessions. The defence mechanisms are strengthened by the screen-mediated communication and by the intimacy of the personal space.

> At the practice, I got used to talking, it is a space dedicated to therapy alone, there is a room only for that. Here, in my space, there is a lot of stuff. (At the practice), after I finish my therapy, I go on living my life, nobody knows what I said in there, it stays there. Here (online), I had the impression that I could avoid certain topics easier, there I feel somehow cornered, like I have to give an answer, even if I say that I don't know. It is easier, the therapist doesn't see me so well, I can tap my feet, I can look somewhere else. At the practice, the therapist has control, even if I believe I have it. That is her space, not mine. (M.M)

Conversely, in some cases the intimacy of the personal space favoured the openness to address difficult topics and show the vulnerabilities.

> (Online) It felt relaxing from the perspective of space intimacy. I felt more free, it is a space where I have the most intimate relationship with myself. Maybe it is more comfortable for a person who withdraws in her own space to be pulled out of it, to take a shower, to take a cab and to be pulled out of the suffering. At the same time, it is the space where I withdraw myself and it is like letting the doctor come to my place. (D.D.)

The question of the Self

A common theme is the body as a partial object, as a result of the screen mediation. In some cases, the fact that the clients could see their image and parts of their body on the screen had a negative effect on the therapeutic process, because it amplified previous body issues or because they could avoid and neglect bigger body issues (eg.: weight problems).

> You can see yourself on the screen. It is like a reminder. I look at my therapist a lot. Before I didn't look at myself, because I didn't like myself, but in fact, out of the corner of your eye you can see yourself. I can see myself up from my shoulders and that produces a disconnection from my body. I don't see myself entirely, I realised that hasn't only been happening in therapy, but also in the 2 years since I have been working on Zoom. As for my body issues, I no longer saw them, my body wasn't mine, it didn't belong to me. Now, I feel better and I have begun paying attention to it. (G.G.)

In other cases, it had a positive effect, because it gave the client the opportunity to self-observe, better understand the emotions and be more aware.

> I didn't like seeing my face. But, in a way, it was helpful, because I could see what I look like when I laugh, when I cry, when I don't know how to answer a question. For instance, I noticed I had a tic and now I try to get rid of it. I became more aware of myself. (A.A.)

There is a lack of visual cues in online therapy, from both the client and the therapist, that can compromise the perception and the interpretation on both parts. Also, it allows the client to better hide the emotional reactions to uncomfortable topics.

> (Online) there is a kind of securitization that can easily become a shield. There is a thin line. It can be a way of protection. It is important if you see someone's hand or not, if he/she taps her feet or not. It is easier to hide and you are tempted to do it. That's why for many people it is more comfortable to stay online. It is not only a question of time. (Online therapy) It helps you avoid difficult topics, it is somehow perverted, because you don't go to the practice, where you have to expose yourself. (B.B.)

Time boundaries

In terms of time management, online therapy is preferred to face-to-face therapy, because it allows more flexibility and continuity.

> Online, you finish faster and you can go back to your business, but it is debatable if that is good or bad for therapy. I like a hybrid system (online and face-to-face), because I don't have to be stuck, I can go on vacation or have leisure time and also have therapy. But I see it as a plan B. (C.A.)

> Online therapy is a good option in terms of time management, you can have your sessions almost any time after your work schedule, you can go on vacation and to take one hour for therapy. (A.R.)

> It is comfortable to know that, if need be, you can shift between face-to-face and online therapy and that there is continuity even if I decide to go away for 6 months. (D.D.)

In terms of therapy efficacy, the time frame allotted to face-to-face therapy is more efficient and represents a significant part of the therapeutic process. There is a common thread in how the interviewed subjects describe the time spent in order to go to the practice as a time of reflection and preparation for therapy and of the time after therapy as a time of reflection, accumulation and soothing.

> Online, you can save time by not traveling to the practice, but, in fact, the time you spend traveling in order to go there and then to go back home is very good, because that is a time for myself. I don't know why I don't allow for this time when I am online, maybe because I shift suddenly from one state of mind to another, the dog is barking, your cat is meowing. There, (face-to-face) it is different, there is a moment of I don't know what, of respite. Even if the therapy session is hard, I return in a good mood. If I didn't drive there by car it would be better. (M.M.)

Conclusion

The transition from in-person therapy to online therapy didn't impact the therapeutic alliance and relationship negatively, but, in some cases it attenuated the therapy efficacy for reasons of intimacy, lack of concentration on account of squeezing in therapy sessions among other domestic activities and/or work schedules, especially in the case of those who work from home. Another important factor that moderated negatively the therapy efficacy was the screen-mediated interaction, which transformed the bodies into partial objects and distorted the perception and the interpretation of visual cues from both the therapist and the client. Also, in some cases, online therapy was seen as allowing, more than face-to-face therapy, to avoid difficult topics and to hide some emotional reactions. In some other cases, the intimacy of the personal space in online therapy favoured the openness toward sensitive issues, because the clients didn't feel so exposed to the pressure of the therapist and of the physical interaction which formalises the process. Those participants who came back to face-to-face therapy after a period of on-line therapy felt more connected and more free to express themselves in a space that is dedicated only to therapy and assessed the non-verbal communication as better than in on-line therapy/sessions, even if at the practice both the therapist and the clients have to wear masks nowadays. Another important element that was regained and has been considered an added value to it is the time frame allotted in order to go to therapy, to undergo therapy and to come back, a time frame that is an important part of the therapeutic process and contributes to its efficacy. Also, there are some small rituals at the practice (i.e: having a cup of coffee or tea, sitting in the waiting room, etc.) before the therapy begins which are part of the therapeutic relationship and space and constitute a part of the therapeutic process itself.

Those participants who decided to continue the therapy online made this choice for reasons of time management. They consider the on-line therapy as effective as the face-to-face therapy, with a small disclaimer, that it lacks the energy and the connection of meeting in person.

All participants, regardless whether they prefer face-to-face or in-person therapy, consider that a hybrid system is workable and allows for more flexibility and continuity.

The transition from face-to-face therapy to online therapy erased some of the boundaries raised by face-to-face therapy in terms of flexibility, mobility, geographical distance, time management, work-life arrangements and efficacy in some types of disorders (Mateescu, 2020). At the same time, it creates some others, because of its perceived distance, poor visual cues, the body becoming a partial object, the lack of intimacy and the fatigue provoked by its insertion in the continuum of online activities that working from home entails, which have all become the norm in many types of jobs.

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Critical Reviews

Editorial Note:

This section provides reviews and critical reflections upon recent evolutions in social research, with focus on changing societies and current dilemmas.

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BOOK REVIEW

***Forma urmează situației: Orașul contemporan anticipat de situaționiști* (*The Form Follows the Situation: The Contemporary City Anticipated by Situationists*), Silviu Medeșan, București: Ozalid, 2021, 334 pages.**

VLAD BEJINARIU[1]

The book "The Form Follows the Situation: The Contemporary City Anticipated by Situationists", written in Romanian, focuses on a theoretical analysis of the contemporary city and its practices, in this case Cluj-Napoca, from the standpoint of the concepts developed by the Situationist International (SI). Silviu Medeșan aims for an alternate understanding and researching the field of urbanism, by rejecting the functionalist paradigm and switching to a see-from-below point of view (hence the title which intentionally distorts the modernist motto: *Form follows function*). The book is structured around three parts which develop the theory and the concepts used (as the first part), the three case studies (as the second part) and, lastly, tries to put them in dialogue and draw some conclusions. Besides these three main parts, the book also contains a photographic documentary which serves as an illustration for both the theoretical and empirical sections.

As I have mentioned above, the first part of the book is concerned with building (or, adapting) a theoretical framework for the research by referring to the writings and the artistic products of the *Situationist International*. The author underlines in the Introduction the need for a critical approach in architecture, in its imaginary of the public space and in its usage via experiments. It is divided in 9 chapters, each following certain concepts central to the Situationist practice, such as: Détournement, Dérive, Psychogeography or Unitary Urbanism. Although the concepts are separated in different sections, they are analysed by their relation to each other and seen as an integrated network (inspired from a leaflet of the IS movement) which is named *New Theatre of Operations within Culture*.

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The first 2 chapters, focused on Permanent Play and the artistic method of Détournement, are aimed at changing the relationship with the present and the existing conditions. Play is seen as central to live directly and act creatively. By becoming permanent, it needs to break away with the existing working relations and assure that human actors have unlimited time for playing. The following 2 chapters, building upon the concepts of Dérive and Psychogeography, are engaging with the way the contemporary city is felt by individuals and how their behaviour is influenced by it. If psychogeography is concerned with a rather abstract relation between the city and the inhabitants, the Dérive is seen more as an individual method of exploration and understanding the city, without accounting for a *specialised* definition. The problem of the *Situationist Architecture* is not so clearly determined, mainly due to the lack of such projects and its focus on the necessity of experimenting at a 1:1 scale, but it is mentioned that the architect should stem from the practice of *Unitary Urbanism.* The next 3 chapters (*Unitary Urbanism, Experimental Behaviour, Construction of Situations)* examine the possibilities of creating new forms which are set to start from people (being involved in the action) and their relation to the city. The most important is *Unitary Urbanism* which presupposes "the usage of all arts and techniques as means in contributing to compose a unified environment" (p. 65). It can be achieved by accounting for the *Psychogeography* a space dictates and by multiplying both the *Experimental Behaviour,* which aims for occupying spaces inside the town, and the *Construction of Situations*, which should break the duality of spectator and actor.

Lastly, the author tries to reflect upon the theoretical framework that he uses by claiming that it "is not a dogma, each concept serves as a starting point" (p. 79). Moreover, he examines critically the legacy of the Situationist International, its shortcomings and how some of its practices were used in modern urbanism and architecture.

The three case studies are focused on alternative urban practices and are localised in the city of Cluj-Napoca. Their aim seems to be common: by actively involving the local citizens, these projects try to break with the classical perspective in architecture and offer a different approach in building the city from below. They are all examined through the Situationist framework which has been developed previously.

The first project is the one that the author pays more attention to, due to his active role within it. *„La Terenuri. Spațiu Comun în Mănăștur"* is the initiative of a local NGO, by which the actors try to create a common space used by its inhabitants who are supposed to act as a community. Choosing the place, namely the neighbourhood of Mănăștur, implied Situationist methods (such as Dérive), but was also important due to its exemplary character (as an Eastern

European Socialist neighbourhood). The author follows the project in its temporal development, from assessing similar practices which inspired *La Terenuri* to spreading the project across a big part of the Mănăștur neighbourhood and trying to revive cultural institutions and cultural practices across it. The initiative started initially with the preoccupation for the green area within the larger space and how it is used and transformed daily by its inhabitants. Here, we can see the author's preference to use different Situationists methods and concepts to understand daily processes and their own activity as facilitators. Moreover, he is interested in exhibiting a new perspective of the architect, as an active participant within a certain community, working with the inhabitants in transforming the space according to how they perceive it (the psychogeography of the neighbourhood). When working with people, the group pay a close attention to the dissolution of the dichotomy between them as project implementers and the so-called beneficiaries of their initiative. That's in accordance with what the writer described previously as the *Construction of Situations*, where the prescribed roles seem to melt, and the people act together as creators of a new urbanism. Moreover, we can see his inclination for what he describes as an *Activist Architecture*, whose goal is to implement micro-policies and create a network between them which should act as a countermovement to what he describes as the hegemony of the process of uniformization.

The other 2 projects do not occupy the same central space in the book as the first one, being rather used as comparisons. They are useful illustrations of working with the public space regarding their position in the city's geography. The first case study follows the complicated history of the *Parcul Est* project, which was supposed to be situated at the periphery of the town. Being imagined during the socialist regime as an important place for recreation, sports, and other leisure activities (like concerts or exhibitions), it never came close to happening and it is now in the focus of the real estate agents. The other case study follows several activities known under the name of *Acțiune pe Someș,* being concentrated on the river flow through the city, especially the city centre. This project aimed to change the relation between the inhabitants of the city and the river by having different small interventions within the course of the river.

The last part brings into light the perspective of the author regarding the transformative value that the process of the *Construction of Situations* has. Following Debord's claim that the spectacle has a decisive role in fragmenting the society, the author claims that *Situations* should aim for a reunification of the society. To achieve that, he argues for the need of communication between different *Situations*, so a network could be established. This network is supposed to fight against the top-down logic imposed by both the capital and the state. The immediate goal should be the creation of *Common Spaces*, which would help the communities reclaim their resources and use it according to their desire.

Furthermore, the author proceeds for an analysis of the concepts used in the first part of the book (the theoretical one) and how they relate with the field experience he had during the 3 projects examined before. Although arguing for the importance of these processes, he finds the *Situationist* utopia to be almost impossible to attain. After he describes the main hinderances, he still claims his support for the network-building process as a tool for weakening the spectacle.

The book accomplishes its main objectives. By building a theoretical framework which starts from the concepts of the *Situationist International*, the author brings forward a new and meaningful perspective in the study of contemporary urbanist practices. Moreover, his own experiences (in the case studies) seem to take a common shape when they are examined via the constructed framework. Being able to integrate them at a theoretical level, might pave the way for what he calls the need of network-building. His perspective comes as well as a critique of the Modernist Architecture (or, how he calls it, Architecture with a big A) which encompasses a new way of seeing, that from below. The author's preoccupation, in the case study of *La Terenuri,* for how the inhabitants made their own use of the land, against the bigger logic of the state (the example of community gardens) seems to point in that direction. Also, the transdisciplinary dialogue between architects and sociologists/anthropologists is another strong point of this book.

Another contribution of the book is the description of the emergence and the dynamic of the teams who carried out the three projects. The author describes both the actual workings of the team, and the effort to even out the inherent power inequalities of the members. The book is filled with empirical examples that tackles the organisational issues and the challenges in creating a vivid dialogue between different professions involved in implementing the projects. This self-reflexivity can be seen is welcomed and a valuable contribution. Moreover, the author tries to put in perspective the case studies into the wider picture of Cluj-Napoca's left-leaning activist scene, formed mainly by students and young people.

There are sections in the book that could have benefited of a more attention. When discussing the legacy of the *Situationist International* movement, the author claims that different concepts were integrated in the practice of everyday architecture, but he stops at mainly naming them. It would have been useful for the reader to see how this framework, which came with a revolutionary promise, was domesticated and incorporated in the dominant perspective once the actual projects were carried out.

In addition, the issue of scaling up is of prime concern when discussing the transformative power of the *Construction of Situations*. Can the networks of *Situations* produce a larger urban change? Bottom-up approaches are becoming

increasingly popular across the European urban landscape. Although their aim is to produce a change, there is a wider concern whether they are genuine popular democratic initiatives or symptoms of wider neoliberal rolling back of the state. There is an important body of literature (Brenner and Theodore: 2002, Leitner et al: 2007) which examines the emergence of new models of urban governance as being simultaneous with the retreat of the state's intervention. Consequently, there is a territorial reorganisation of how social problems are approached and who should be responsible for tackling them (NGO's importance is growing in this sense). Bottom-up approaches are one of these forms of urban governance, which use local interventions as a mean for addressing the structural problems that stem out of the retreat of the state. Considering this existing tension, is it possible that local agencies (such as NGO's) to be rather working within the wider logic of the system? It is a certainty that local initiatives are fighting against the consequences of the neoliberal transformations, but here the issue of scaling up appears to be more evident and the transformative power of the network of local actions needs to be questioned. Furthermore, when studying the evolution of Cluj-Napoca, we must account for the ongoing transformations of the past 10 to 15 years, as the city became a favoured destination for outsourcing and offshoring business models. This tendency, aligned with the retreat of the state, produced a peculiar development which shaped the internal structure of the city and it gained Cluj-Napoca an important status within the region. Therefore, this begs the question of how local interventions might be interlinked with the city's developmental path and, if it is the case, how does it facilitate the existence of such initiatives?

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