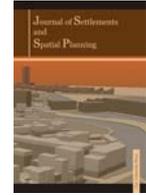




Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism

Journal of Settlements and Spatial Planning

Journal homepage: <http://jssp.reviste.ubbcluj.ro>



Neighbourhood Relationships between German Ethnic Groups from Romania. Case study: the Zipsers from Vişeu de Sus, Maramureş County

Ioana SCRIDON¹

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Geography, Centre on Research of Settlements and Urbanism, Cluj-Napoca, ROMANIA
E-mail: ioana.scridon@ubbcluj.ro

Keywords: *neighbourhood, zipser community, ethnical group, Vişeu de Sus Town*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project is to describe the actual neighbourhood of this place and to investigate the relationships between the Zipser community and the neighbourhood. The Zipser Neighbourhood is part of Vişeu de Sus town, Maramureş County. It has been built in the 18th century by German ethnic groups and by Zipsers. The orderly organization and the rigorous work of these groups allowed the town to keep up its texture until nowadays. The neighbourhood looks like a compact parceling situated in the northern part of the Vişeu and Vaser rivers' confluence. The Zipserei's architecture promotes the idea of creating a central entity, thus understanding the development as a functional neighbourhood.

1. INTRODUCTION

The specific organization forms inside the ethnic communities have different representations, influenced by the typology of the colonization, the time of their founding, the relief and also the fundamental activity of the inhabitants. One of the most important factors is the traditional origins and heritage found in the middle of the community. These had an incredible influence on the neighbourhood's relationships with other communities. The manifestation forms are different from one region (Maramureş, Bucovina) to the other, but there are some very well defined identity characters. Anyway the neighbourhood concept is a lot different now and this means that the relationships inside the community have changed.

2. CONCEPTUALISATION IN SPECIALIZED LITERATURE

The neighbourhood concept was used in a lot of different domains, especially in the ones describing an object, a point and its bench.

The neighbourhood appeared in a first place from the need of cooperation between the members of a community. It is very hard to define the limits of a neighbourhood because they are subjective. Even so, the neighbourhood was formed like a social institution, with different laws that usually establish which exactly are the neighbours, their expectations, but also their rights and liabilities [8].

The neighbourhoods are directly linked to the human communities. Sociological and geographical studies made to this environment tend to treat the human communities *grosso modo*, only from one point of view, their forms of organization. This is where geography and sociology/anthropology meet. Though its definition, sociology is connected to humankind and space and it forms when one culture and a totally different one unite, after accepting one another.

If the geographical point of view is the only one taken into consideration, well then the connections between the territory and a certain type of behavior can not be defined. In the other case, if the sociological point of view is the only one that matters, well, there is no background of the process. One of the most complex

ways of seeing the neighbourhood is like it is a: *"territory restricted through the special physically characteristics of the area on one hand and through the specific social characteristics of its inhabitants, on the other hand"* by Glass cf. Lee [5]. Even so, the origin, religion and the occupation of the people have a bigger influence on the neighbourhood than an orographic or hydrological block, like you can see in the example below.

Another way of assigning the neighbourhood is: *"an association of people, strictly according to the criterion of spatial continuity: all adult inhabitants of a street were grouped and organized in a neighbourhood. And if the street was too large, it was divided into several neighbourhoods"* [7], well, it is very complicated. Aside the sociological theories, Tönnies F. [12] trying to define society and the community referring to the extension, as number of individuals, but especially the interests that bring them together. Relationships, no matter their kind will be more intense inside a community than in a society, thanks to a single interest, even if it refers to culture, ethnic, social, etc. Now, the differences between the community and neighbourhood are very thin. The individuals of a community can develop different neighbourhood relationships in which are involved more or less. Also, having only one interest and common origin and culture elements does not involve a neighbourhood relationship, as it is only a subjective approach, an individual one. This can manifest between the individuals of the group, but also between communities. In the first case, these may have attraction points connected to brotherhood, mutual help, kin, platonic friendships. Also these can be restricted by the social class differences, past conflicts, religion, etc. To open one community towards another, the attraction forces are the ones that determine them to sustain themselves. Here deserve to be mentioned different traditional jobs which every community can have, the influence of sanguinity or the misery in which some of these communities live in. The restraining factors can be the ones that determine the mutual closure of one community toward another or even the ones that determine the beginning of different conflicts between them. These cases can refer to the differences concerning language, religion, social level, etc.

Mihali C. [6] is defining the current neighbourhood as being: *"both spatial and non-spatial, precise indentified place with separate physical, material or functional borders, but also a place without a place developed by the opportunity of the presence of the other ones"*, but that also wants to return to its original territory, required by the new chaotic reorganization of the individual forms of living, through the globalization of the social projects. This idea is shown in the evolution context of the society in which the individualization and the open isolation are

promoted. Another perspective was discovered during a study made by Lăzăroiu S., Burcea M. [4] by mentioning neighbourhood inside a group or a community and underlining the fact that this can be either supportive or refer to the private social environment of an individual. The ones from the first category are based on different types of behavior, lending money, certain visits. This kinds of relationships mainly based on trade are very common in the rural area. The ones from the second category have as base the affection, visions and dogmas that can involve holidays spent together, different close meetings, etc. in this case, Totelecan S. G. [11] sais that: *"it represents a socio-spatial entity, either individual or as a group (social group, whose members maintain primary relationships determined by their location in the same place, also embodies by the regular exchange of products, either barter or by the provision of compensation services). Thus, it becomes the argument for a well organized community space, although standing for the same place where the disintegration can start, as a result of no longer sharing the same way of being."* This means that the neighbourhood can transform itself into an individual organization form.

3. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

To underline the mechanisms the Zipser ethnic group had developed in comparison with other minorities from Vişeu de Sus, Maramureş, first of all it is very important to answer different questions like how, when, why, concerning this German culture and also to intercept, using sociological methods, the modification stages of the neighbourhood referring to the relationships between communities. Also the analysis of the community by establishing links between territory and space represents a first step. This study case of the multicultural space of the Tipserei from Vişeu de Sus neighbourhood that gathers at least five different ethnic groups that live together, is a good example used in showing the time settlement and mostly it is a good example of indicating the way of living together in an open community.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Retrospective

The German ethnic communities just like the Germans from Transylvania, Satu Mare or Banat, the Germans from Bucovina or Dobrogea have a common element, the organized settlements that were made either for defending the borders, for mining, work in the forest or agriculture. Also, the principles that stand at the base of early settlement are a lot different from the ones involved in the case of the late settlement (18th century).

In Vişeu de Sus lives one of the oldest German Community from Maramureş. The history of the Zipsers, name given after the origin region, Zips, Slovakia, is a simple one. Like all the other colonists, they were given land, wood for building their houses, free of paying taxes on a determined period and so on. The features of the new settlement were colonists ones, like it can be seen in other German communities, like perpendicular streets, houses arranged to have access to the main street, land for practicing agriculture offered in even allotment. The reason these colonists arrived in Vişeu de Sus is because Princess Maria Terezia said there is a lot of work to be done in the forests and also the exploitation are situated on the Vaser valley was something urgent. All the wood resources were making easier the salt transportation from the salt mine Sugatag and Solotvino (Slatina, Romania), now situated in Ukraine. The colonists that worked here needed to have experience in terms of transporting wood on a cork. The easiest and cheapest way of transporting was on water, and so, the corks built on the Vaser Valley were traveling on Tisa to Budapest and then on the Danube. This is how these Zipsers were colonized. They had a lot of abilities and also had the same geographical characteristics like Maramureş, a mountain area with a creep inside, where the main activity was mining and exploitation of wood, followed by agriculture and animal breeding. Because there were no violent conflicts between the ethnic groups that live here, the culture was very divers. Beside the Romanians, there are also Zipsers, Jewish, Armenians, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Ruthenians. Living together has made led to a very slow acculturation process [3].

The geographical position of this neighbourhood in Vişeu de Sus is a marginal one. On the North-West it has the Poduri agricultural terrace, in the South and East the Vaser valley and in the West side there is Vişeuului valley, which is called Borşa valley uphill (fig. 1).

From this point, the community has been influenced a lot by a population with an Austrian origin that refused to accept the Romanian community that was not interested in transporting wood on corks or working with wood and also, refused the Ruthenians that were not a majority.

For the Zipser community from Vişeu de Sus there are two ways of working with the neighbourhood. An interior one represented by the relationships built inside an ethnic group and an exterior one, meaning the way the relationships from that Romanian community or neighbourhood work and develop. The mechanisms these groups use for easing the communication and helping themselves along history will also be analyzed.

Like mentioned above, the Zipser ethnic group was a very harmonious one, socially and not only. This determined a very strong group cohesion determined by

the affective heighbourhoods between the group members. One of the first forms of manifestation regarding the group identity and helping each other, of unconditioned heighbourhood, was the creation of an organization to help the ones with special needs, called *Bruderschaft*. In a normal Zipser family, the man was the one in charge of the household from the financial point of view. He was out in the forest working from Monday to Saturday. The woman was in charge with the housework and agriculture. In case the man was injured or died, the family would receive a financial support from the organization. The money was raised from the monthly contribution of each member. This type of neighbourhood is a very common one especially in Transylvania's German villages. It is certificated from 1648 from Prejmer Germans [1]. This association is created on each street and the members are married men and women. In charge of these heighbourhoods is an administrator elected for two years which was in charge with the money and the archive. Also, he had the obligation of organizing regular meeting with other administrators for solving issues appeared in its own neighbourhood or another. Starting the 19th century, the Court of Vienne, obliged the extension of these forms of organization by accepting Romanian and Hungarian members as well. The aim was not only the mutual help, but also finding a solution to their problems through the Vişeu de Sus administration or preparing the Vaser and Vişeu for transporting wood using corks, but also preparing different study institutions. Now, this type of heighbourhood is no longer used and it started vanishing after the Zipsers left for Germany after 1970.

The church was another distinct element of the community that determined a development of the interior heighbourhood. The customs and traditions were very well preserved and were counting on the good cooperation between individuals. Traditions like the *Vişlaim*, the biblical theatre with 20 people paying and the *Klaka* were forms of consolidating the group cohesion. Everyone used the Zipser dialect and was a manifestation of belonging to a group with its own identity.

For the second situation, the one that refers to the heighbourhood relationships established between ethnic groups, like mentioned above, the hydrological barrier of the Vaser River does not represent a communication barrier between the Zipsers and their surroundings. The geographical position of this neighbourhood was established starting with 1809-1810, when the number of colonists was increasing numerically. Also these houses were built and placed separately from the Austrian community that arrived here before. Even though the language (dialect) and religion were the same, the competition referred to work and the easy access to different facilities the Austrians had.

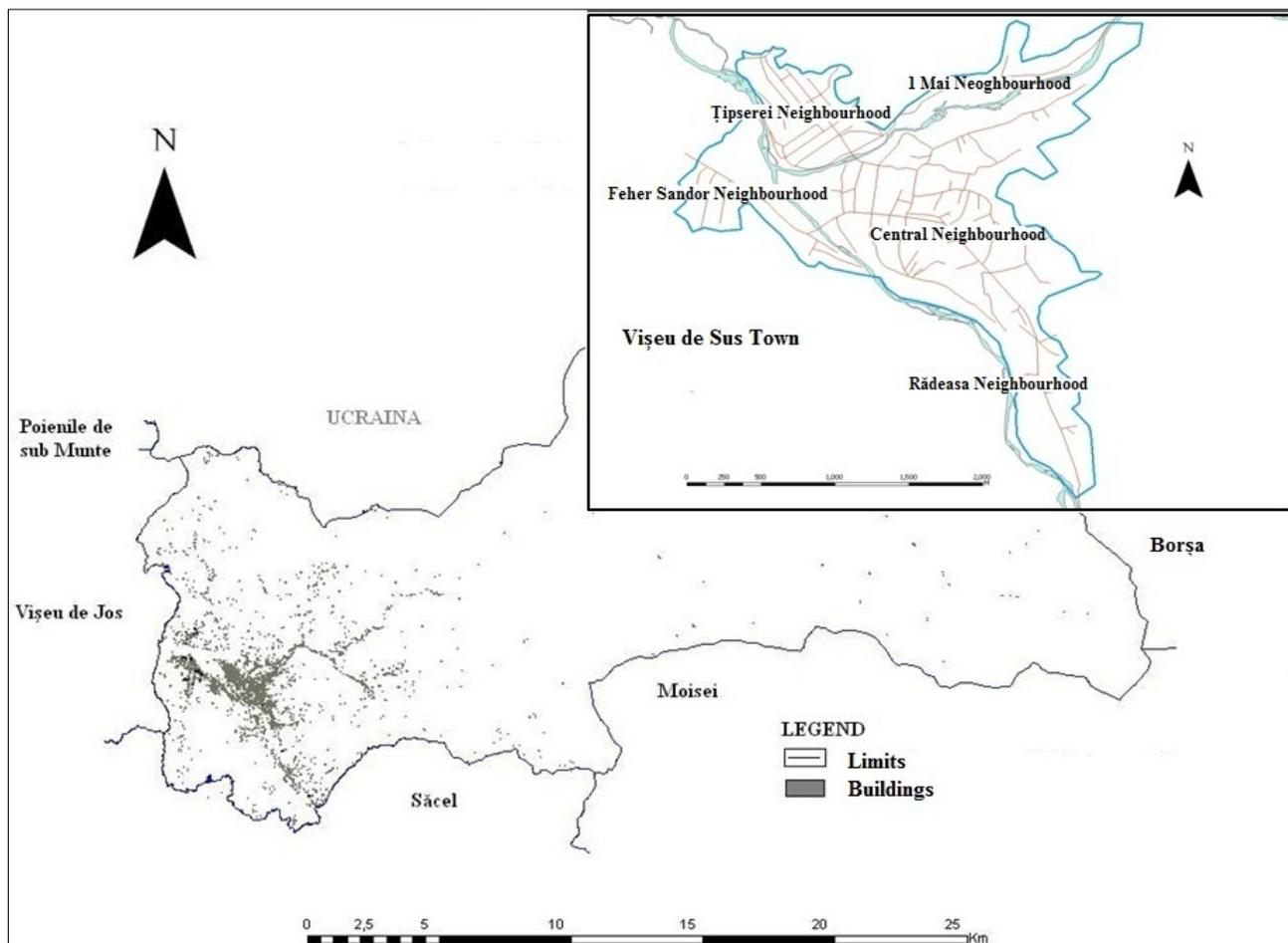


Fig. 1. The geographical position of Tîpserei neighbourhood in Vişeu de Sus Town.

As for the Romanian neighbourhood, it had developed an acculturation process and a cultural transfer. This can be noticed in the Romanian and the Zipser vocabulary and the other way around. A proof of the functionality of the neighbourhood is the use of Zipser words defining different house objects. The Romanian and Hungarian elements that appear in the Zipser dialect are: *avere (rom.)-Avera (zips.)-Besit(ge.) assets, gogoşar(rom.)-Gogoschar(zips.)-Fleischpaprika (ge.), red pepper* from Romanian or *imasch(zips.)-Bergwiese (ge.), Batschi (zips.)-Onkel (ge.)* meaning ranch and from Magyar or Ukraine *Drانيتzn (zips.)-Dachschindel (ge.)* [3]. In terms of language and work a lot of words appeared. Communication is essential for the well fare of society and so they were using the closer words possible from the other ones language, especially in agricultural markets or public institutions. The same happened with the work in the forest. It managed to transfer words from one side to the other, especially because on Vaser Valley the nationality of the workers was not important, everyone was working in teams so, certain words were used more than others.

From the cultural point of view, the transfer was not very powerful as every community had its own

closure degree. The Zipsers were limiting the entrance of strangers in the neighbourhood, the mixed cultural weddings, until 1970. This form of maintaining the identity of the community was recognized by all its members and so marriages were only held between Zipsers either from Vişeu de Sus, Rachiv or Iacobeni Vatra Dornei (Bucovina).

In this case, the distances between far away communities have been cancelled, the communication and movement in only one state was active. Actually, the three regions communicated while being under the coordination of the Austrian-Hungarian Monarchy. After 1918, the new borders have determined the reorientation towards other groups that share the same religion or language.

In this case, the Germans from Satu-Mare were the closest ones. The easiest way of entering the community was the religious one, especially though the Romano-Catholic one. Nowadays these kinds of problems are no longer an issue inside the community. The mentality changed so much that only the architecture of the buildings, the specific Zipser greeting and the country costume remained.

The question is why did the Zipsers gave up their dialect and adopted an Austrian idiom, as they

were the majority. One of the explications can be that the old Austrians have determined a certain culture and language frame, especially getting closer to the German language and culture that had another identity built during four centuries in a Slavonic space.

The Austrian dialect was closer to the literary German learned in schools and in Church and everyone wanted to know it. Linguists have determined that the new Zipser dialect from Vişeu de Sus, *Idiom der Wischaudeutschen*, is a Bavarian one. It was absolutely normal for a dialect to evolve especially in a multicultural place like this one, but the fact that families, on the streets and between relatives keeps using the Zipser dialect, said a lot about their defining features. After the interviews, the last person to use the Zipser dialect passed away back in 2010. According to the interlocutor, the dialect was so different from the language used now that it was very difficult to understand anything: *“If our parents wanted to talk to each other without us understanding, they were using the Zipser dialect”* (Sedlak J, 83 years, Vişeu de Sus).

Thanks to their way of building their houses and their handling, the relationship between Romanians and Zipsers was a very close one. Locally, the Zipsers were the best constructors of wooden houses. Also, because they were craftsmen and the other ones were making agriculture and breeding, bargains with products and sometimes with different facilities were very common.

4.2. Current situation

In Vişeu de Sus, things have degraded in a very drastic way during communism (1948-1989) when everybody, no matter the ethnic group had to give up their identity and the Romanization process was very intensive, starting with school, church and other public institutions. Then, because of massive emigration, mainly in Germany, in the neighbourhood appeared another population wave that unbalanced the situation, the neighbourhood relations remaining only official. This is how a new social chain of command was required because of the emigration and so took place an individualization of the ethnics.

Starting from identifying the existent relationships between the individuals, the ones referring to the surroundings and the supportive ones and passing from the supportive to the surroundings, the spatial functionalities can be established, like a space that satisfies the current necessities like food supplies, a medical office or school, a space where the ethnic uniformity is big, a space where the social interaction is strong and helps individuals identify with the space. The Zipsers are a small ethnic group, with its own identity, very harmonious and with autonomy when it comes to the city. The Zipser neighbourhood is

accepting the urbanism rules mainly the ones referring to the personal facilities and the public utilities. Even if in the past only the first ones were satisfied, nowadays, people are more interested on the public facilities that are useful for the stores, kinder-gardens, medical offices and veterinary offices. These are in the middle of the neighbourhood situated at about 10 minutes away from each other. The other facilities used rarely are situated in the 25 minute area. In this category are the clinics, post offices, police stations, parks, etc. The neighbourhood is defined as a place where the human group is mixed when it comes to the ethnicity. This hypothesis shows what the Zipser neighbourhood represents a mental space, an identification of the individual with the area, because only 15% of the existing population has a Zipser origin. Also this space is one where the social interaction is very strong behaving like a rural community inside an urban neighbourhood.

5. CONCLUSION

An ethnic group is developing in a regional way depending on its neighbourhoods. Even the neighbourhood with all its cultures, is influencing locally the types of organization in regard to others. This space, in the case of the Zipsers, represents a mental space now, because of the strong neighbourhoods inside the group and because it needs to have a normal connection with the community around. When it comes to the community, it can be observed that the neighbourhood is very loose when there are more cultures and when the group cohesion is stronger. One of the reason for this lack of harmony inside the neighbourhood leads to keeping a healthy identity. To be more precise, proves that indeed the neighbourhood can help maintain or can help destroy the community. The German Zipsers from Bucovina were colonized in a German neighbourhood, which determined their fast assimilation and later, their evanescence together with the German ones.

Neighbourhoods are not only spaces where people develop the traditional common mutual help, but places where individual resources are being highlighted, resources that help cooperation, common association, like the German democratic forum and its activities. In the same category can be found dance groups, theatre groups, solving different problems of the community, neighbourhood and the local administration. This German forum does not only represent the German ethnics, but the entire neighbourhood no matter the ethnic group. In different words, the neighbourhood is an instrument used for both personal and social interests.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Investing in people!

