



Spatial – Conceptual Changes of Settlements. Case Study: The Suburban Area of Târgu Mureş

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Introduction

The years following the change of regime in Romania brought about a general process of social change that had direct consequences which can be observed in the spatial manifestation of society. All changes that society undergoes are reflected in its spatial structure.

The socialist urbanization policy together with the administrative reorganizing of Romania's territory changed significantly the features of the settlement system.

The suburban settlements, which were formed near the medium-size or big cities, underwent specific changes. The concept of suburban village suffered changes of content, and it is constantly changing thus approaching the content described in the Western literature.

We want to highlight the driving force of the consumerist suburbanization characteristic for Central - Eastern Europe. We used the questionnaire method to approach the processes that produced this new spatial pattern. We revealed the controlled character and intensity of the migration processes. The multidimensional character of the dependency relationships, completing the attraction relations within the settlement system, point to an interesting development of the spatial adaptations of society. The direction taken by the development of the suburban space is significantly influenced by the issue of local identity.

Our research, through this case study, shows the circumstances, the way and the consequences of the appearance of some very new spatial elements, the suburban villages. These represent the nucleus of the expansion process of the suburbanization and of the urban lifestyle.

The dimensions of suburbanization

One of the immediate consequences of the industrial revolution was the onset of the population's centrifugal migration, which was accelerated by motorization. In Western Europe and in the North American states the features of this process were summed up in the content of suburbanization. The concept has preserved its spatially limited character, according to Heineberg (2001) the process of suburbanization is characteristic for the big cities and for metropolitan areas of the developed countries and it represents the outflow of population, industry and services from the nucleus of the city into the neighbouring settlement system. The temporal sequence and spatial localization of the processes forming suburbanization do not necessarily follow a rule, the spatial pattern of the process showing regional and local peculiarities.

The constant dimensional changes of the concept of suburbanization led to gradual content changes. The existence of suburban settlements is mentioned in other cultures as well, the group of industrial countries is permanently enlarged by examples coming from developing or former Socialist countries. The metropolitan areas of Latin America are characterized by the appearance of the poor neighbourhoods, the so-called "slums", suburban areas do not appear in the Latin American city models. The latest research identifies suburban areas for an increasing number of metropolises.

The countries of South- Eastern Europe are in a peculiar situation. The quick suburbanization of the cities began after 1989, first the capital cities then later, the bigger cities as well. The peculiarities partially remind us of the “catch up” suburbanization in Germany (*nachholende Suburbanisierung*). In the territory corresponding to the Western suburbanization model, i.e. the northern countries of South Western Europe, including Transylvania a welfare suburbanization took place, according to Kovács (2002). Contrary to this, in the southern states there is a forced migration process, which means that the urban population looking for a cheaper life moves to the neighbouring settlements, where city lifestyle is partly maintained but maintenance costs are smaller.

In Romania both models described by Kovács (2002) are valid and the reason for this is found in the historical past of Romania's present territories. Welfare suburbanization is characteristic for Transylvania, but we can observe forced migration as well.

The concept of suburbanization has been known in the Romanian administrative system since 1904 (Nicolae, 2002), but its content and appearance has recently approached the real meaning of the concept. Earlier, a series of administrative laws declared a number of villages as suburban, thus wanting to increase the urbanization rate.

The suburban villages created by the socialist legislation lay near big cities. Next, we will show the characteristics of the suburban area of Târgu Mureş.

The suburban area of Târgu Mureş

During socialist time four villages in the vicinity of Târgu Mureş have been declared suburban. During our research we enlarged this administratively limited area and included other villages as well. The present suburban area of the municipality is shown below:

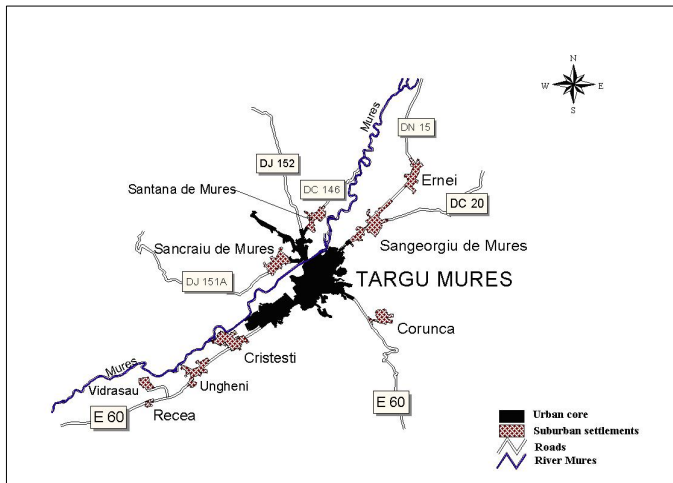


Figure 1. Târgu Mureş suburban area

We can observe all three sub-processes of suburbanization but population suburbanization is the most prominent, having several forms of manifestation.

The building of suburban residential quarters is characteristic for Corunca, Sâncraiu de Mureş and Sângeorgiu de Mureş. In Sântana de Mureş, Cristeşti and Ungheni, we can observe suburbanization related to industry and to services.

The organization of the spatial structures of suburbanization follows

certain rules. We delimited some major axes which were the traffic lines. In our opinion, suburbanization with its specific forms and intensity appeared along these localization factors. Extensive suburbanization appears at Corunca; the isolated one with tendencies towards a closed community appears at Sâncraiu de Mureş and the mosaic type appears at Sângeorgiu de Mureş. Describing suburbanization, a relatively new process was only possible after we analysed partially its structural characteristics and its spatial dimensions. The socio- economic factors behind the process have not been analysed yet, though these studies are of utmost importance for delineating the key features of suburbanization.

Methods

Our aim was to reveal the socio- economic factors behind suburbanization in the case of Târgu Mureş suburban area. To achieve this we chose three villages for which we used the questionnaire method. The people interviewed had to answer identification, open and closed

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questions related to their former residence, the number of years spent in that village, the localization of their work and shopping place, the means of transport they used and their local identity.

Features of the suburban

During our study we focused on three villages from the suburban are of Târgu Mureş. There are several reasons why we chose these three: they are very different as villages and they show different tendencies. Sântana de Mureş is characterized by industrial and services-related suburbanization, Sâncraiu de Mureş is defined by population – suburbanization, while Sângeorgiu de Mureş is characterized by both these phenomena. Furthermore we considered important the villages' position on the traffic axes. In this case, the situation of the three villages is very different as Sângeorgiu de Mureş has the most favourable position and Sântana de Mureş has the most unfavourable one (table 1).

Analysing the number of the population in the three villages, one can observe that it constantly increases while the number of population living in the city centre is decreasing. It is also clear that Sângeorgiu de Mureş is the most dynamic.

Table 1. The total population of Târgu Mureş and of the suburban villages we chose.

Village/Year	1910	1930	1966	1992	2002
Sângeorgiu de Mureş	1952	2170	5118	7273	7892
Sâncraiu de Mureş	1071	1544	5548	5948	6268
Sântana de Mureş	1250	1329	3643	3603	4266
Suburban villages	4273	5043	14309	16824	18426
Târgu Mureş	25517	38446	86500	165193	150041

With our identification questions we acquired data as related to the following: the answerers gender (66% male, 33% female, 1% no answer), nationality (56,3% Hungarians, 39,7% Romanians, 2,7% Gypsies, 0,7% Germans, 0,7% no answer), education (38,7% vocational school, 36,7% high school, 15% secondary school, 4,7% university, 3,3% elementary school, 1,7% no answer), age categories (17-81 years old). Out of the majority of the people we interviewed, 47,5% work at Târgu Mureş, 39% work where they live. The monthly income for 57% of the people we asked ranges between 2.800.000 and 7.000.000 lei.

The dimensions of the city – suburban relationship

According to the definition, the suburban village is administratively independent from its neighbouring polarizing centre, but functionally it has a very complex relation with the latter. This dependence can extend to the most various fields of individual activity. The economical activities and services prove an increased dependency.

In the case of the metropolises, a significant part of the population works in the city centre. This leads to increased motorization and to a high commuting rate. Under these circumstances developing the infrastructure and the means of public transport is a goal of major importance for the suburban villages; 47,5% of the people living in these villages and who answered our questions work in Târgu Mureş. Analyzing the results for every village, we noticed that 51% of those living in Sâncraiu de Mureş work in the centre; in the case of Sântana de Mureş only 46% work in the centre and in the case of Sângeorgiu de Mureş only 40%. In the other three villages percentages are as follows: 31%, 40%, and 46%. We concluded that we cannot talk about a great majority of people working in the city, which does not fit into the Western model of suburban. The explanation for this lies in several specific features.

Suburbanization in Romania is a relatively new process which started 15 years ago. This is also proved by the fact that 40,87% of those who moved to the suburban villages in the past 15 years work in Târgu Mureş, and only 25,64% work in the villages; 68,37% of those who

moved before 1989 work in the village. Those who moved from Târgu Mureş are active and are aged between 22 and 55. On this, we ascertain that 50,79% of those who moved from Târgu Mureş have monthly incomes ranging from 280 to 700 RON and 7,93% have incomes above 700 RON. This is a proof of suburbanization. But we must mention that 34,92% of those who moved have incomes under the minimal wage. Thus we can ascertain that the process of welfare suburbanization is followed by that of forced migration. At the level of villages we witness an interesting disparity, 56-57% of those who moved from Târgu Mureş to Sântana de Mureş or Sâncraiu de Mureş have a monthly income ranging between 280 and 700 RON. While in Sângeorgiu de Mureş this income category characterizes only 41,60% of those who moved; those who earn less than the minimal wage represent 41,60%.

It is noticeable that in Sângeorgiu de Mureş, the setting up of residential suburban areas was less planned than in other villages, and this was due to its economical indexes and its position - the most favourable, for people who cannot afford to live in the city but do not wish to give up city lifestyle.

We can also observe some ethnical preferences in people choosing settlements; 40% of those who move are Romanians and 58% are Hungarians. Sângeorgiu de Mureş (63%) and Sâncraiu de Mureş (57%) are preferred by Hungarians, while Sântana de Mureş (69%) by the Romanians. In the case of migration from the city to the suburban villages this ethnical differentiation is not that obvious; 50,73% of those who moved from Târgu Mureş are Hungarians, 38,09% are Romanians; 70% of those who move to Sângeorgiu de Mureş and 56% of those who move to Sâncraiu de Mureş are Hungarians. The ratio of the Romanians and Hungarians who move to Sântana de Mureş is equal, 42,85%.

The people who choose to live in the suburban area are mainly vocational (38%) or high school (32%) graduates, university graduates represent only 4%. In the past 15 years, high school graduates chose Sângeorgiu de Mureş and Sâncraiu de Mureş and Sântana de Mureş is preferred by those who graduated vocational schools. This tendency is linear in the case of Sângeorgiu de Mureş and Sântana de Mureş. As far as Sâncraiu de Mureş is concerned, there was a change and the people who moved in this village and who were high school graduates outnumbered those who were vocational school graduates. People moving from Târgu Mureş are mainly high school graduates. People who graduated vocational schools represent the majority only in Sântana de Mureş. Thus, we can affirm that the inhabitants of the suburban villages are people with an average level of education and with an acceptable income. We cannot talk about the suburbanization of the elite neither on educational nor on financial basis.

The inhabitants of the suburban villages are, in a certain degree, dependent on the facilities of the city. In the case of jobs, this dependence is determined by the local pattern of the suburbanization of industry and of services and the local pattern of facilities will determine the inhabitants' dependence on the city. We analysed this dependence in the three villages considered as far as shopping, official or religious issues and leisure are concerned; 41% of the respondents can do their shopping in the village. Only 28% are entirely dependent on the city, while 26% are dependent on both. Considering each village on its own, the figures are the following: Sângeorgiu de Mureş 57%, 18%, 22%, average percentages, in Sâncraiu de Mureş 39%, 28%, 28%, somewhat under the average and in Sântana de Mureş 27%, 38%, 28%, here we witness a more powerful dependence. Among these three villages Sângeorgiu de Mureş has the most shops including the 'cash and carry' type supermarket, Selgros. This explains why the inhabitants are relatively independent. As compared to that Sântana de Mureş has few shops, which are still at a rural level. We should highlight that four of those who moved from Târgu Mureş, 28% can do their shopping in the village, 15% are dependent on the city and 20% shop in both places. This rule is valid for those who moved from Târgu Mureş to Sângeorgiu de Mureş, as well (14%/ 4%/ 6%).

In the case of religious issues, 67-73% of the people are bound to the place where they live.

Only 42% of the official issues can be solved in the place where the respondents live, 32% must be solved in the city.

Leisure and visiting friends expresses the inhabitants' degree of socialization in the place where they live. Generally 37% of this process is feasible in the people's residence. Sâncraiu de Mureş is an exception as only 27% of spending free time is feasible there, 24% in Târgu Mureş and 35% in both places. In the case of those who moved from Târgu Mureş, the

process of socialization is the quickest in Sângeorgiu de Mureş, while in Sântana de Mureş these people are very closely related to the city and in Sâncraiu de Mureş this reaches 100%. In the case of Târgu Mureş its favourable position and the proximity of the city as well as its resort function might be an explanation.

The factor that accelerated suburbanization was motorization, making mobility easier but in the same time increasing the rate of commuting. In North America and Western Europe, the use of the car has reached unseen degrees and it needed an appropriate infrastructure thus determining the initiation and the growing of a sustained suburbanization.

The inhabitants of the three studied villages use various means of transport. We analysed the means of transport used for shopping, for going to work and other activities.

At the level of each village, we got similar results, the inhabitants use public transport or walk. Cars on the third place, so motorization is on a low level. Public transport is used on short distances, between the villages.

Thus we can affirm that the relationship of the three villages with the centre of the city is multidimensional, and dependency relations appear on multiple levels.

A very important problem related to the suburban villages is that of the local identity, which we would like to analyse in detail.

Local identity

One of the many issues related to the suburban villages is their local identity. Certain villages have used their identity to strengthen their administrative position, as it happened in the case of Ungheni, a village belonging to the suburban area of Târgu Mureş, and which was declared town in 2004.

One of our questions in this study was about the potential identity changes which these suburban villages would undergo in the case of a hypothetical unification with Târgu Mureş.

The answers we received to our open question move on a very large scale. Most of the people didn't answer this question, others answered that they did not know what the consequences of a hypothetical unification would be and those who answered positively did not give arguments.

Some respondents were afraid that a potential unification would bring about the necessity to change their papers, which would be an additional expense, or the problem of changing the names of streets. Others sensibly admit that land and real estate taxes would increase, and official problems would be more difficult to solve. Some respondents avoided answering saying that unification is not very probable to happen in the near future. An interesting point of view is that they recognize the status of the suburban, "whose urban elements fit the rustic surroundings". The most extremist ones would banish everyone who would want unification.

We can conclude that the local identity as the collective memory and conscience linking the inhabitants of the village is relatively weak in the studied villages. In addition to this there is a great number of people in favour of the unification.

Conclusions

We witness a special form of suburbanization in Târgu Mureş area, which resembles the Western model but in the same time carries the marks of the Romanian urbanization.

We have to take into account several factors when we want to define the driving force of the centrifugal movement of the people from the centre of the city towards the suburban area. The welfare suburbanization is doubled by the forced suburbanization caused by economical circumstances.

Taking into account their studies and income, the population migrating to Sângeorgiu de Mureş can be defined as middle class. The favourable position of the village (along main road No. 15), the suburbanization of the population, industry and services have created such circumstances which attract most of the people. We should also mention that the favourable

position and the good infrastructure have attracted people, who are forced to leave the city, but who wants to live a partially city life for less money.

The social driving force behind suburbanization created a simpler situation at Sâncraiu de Mureș. Its position is not that favourable, but due to a continuous and directed population suburbanization, the number of its inhabitants is permanently growing, these people being high school or vocational school graduates, mainly Hungarians, whose dependence on the city is relatively high. Its unfavourable position explains its less developed service system, thus decreasing its attractiveness.

The peripheral character of Sântana de Mureș is obvious, attracting mainly workers and people with low income, who increase forced migration. The inadequate service infrastructure, the companies which employ the workers and which are part of the industrial suburbanization have created a suburban of particular profile in Sântana de Mureș.

We can affirm that the localization factors of the villages studied strongly determine their attractiveness and explain the phenomena of spatial differentiation. The divergent development is doubled by a very weak local identity, which is determined by the early spreading of the urban lifestyle to these villages, thus endangering their independence. The building material of the most suburban villages is the immediate extension of that of the city, and its local identity is an important issue in the European conception, ensuring their administrative independence.

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