Place Attachment Assessment through the Lens of Territorial Identity:
The Town of Oraviţa as a Case Study (Romania)

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A B S T R A C T

This study focuses on the analysis of place attachment related to the elements of territorial identity in Oraviţa, a small town in the Mountainous Banat. Oraviţa played a highly significant role from an economic and administrative point of view during the Austrian domination: it was the urban centre that coordinated the mining activity on the territory of Mountainous Banat. This study aims to assess the place attachment to several symbolic buildings in Oraviţa that have been identified as elements of territorial identity. In order to fulfil the purpose of this study, the following research questions were established: What are the main elements of territorial identity in Oraviţa represented in postcards over time? Which of the identified elements of territorial identity are currently being promoted and valued by the local public administration? What are the elements of territorial identity of Oraviţa to which the population is attached? From a methodological point of view, the authors used postcards to identify the elements of territorial identity. Subsequently, the place attachment to the representative historical buildings of Oraviţa was interpreted based on the analysis of the information posted on sites developed by members of the local community. In conclusion, the authors highlighted the particular characteristics of the urban fabric of Oraviţa and their various ways of use, elements through which the physical and social attachment of the local population were preserved.

1. INTRODUCTION

Place attachment is a complex phenomenon that comprises different aspects of the bond between people and certain places (Lewicka, 2011; Low and Altman, 1992; Stedman et al., 2014), manifested by emotional features (affections, feelings, values, attitudes, memories; Brown and Perkins, 1992; Lewicka, 2008; Low, 1992; Low and Altman, 1992), cognitive characteristics (knowledge, beliefs), behaviours and actions (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Low, 1992; Proshansky et al., 1983 quoted in Low and Altman, 1992). These bonds connect individuals with the past and influence future behaviours (Scannell and

Gifford, 2014), implying the continuity of the individual's connection with the place, hoping that this bond will continue in the future (Lewicka, 2011).

Since the 1960s, this topic of interest was initiated by phenomenological researchers (Low and Altman, 1992). Phenomenological analysis highlights the specificity of particular places, place experiences and place meanings, while offering the possibility to identify in a broader conceptual framework the holistic, dialectical and generative aspects of places (Seamon, 2014, p. 11).

Over time, this topic included a wide variety of approaches. At a first stage, there is an approach of environmental-behavioural studies focused on place attachment from a psychological perspective, with an emphasis on cognitive aspects (knowledge, ability to understand, beliefs, cognitions about different environmental aspects; Low and Altman, 1992). These studies illustrate the diversity of emotions and feelings (belonging, identity, affection, esteem, pride, peace, security) experienced by people in connection with their place of residence (Lewicka, 2011; Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014; Manahasa and Özsoy, 2017; Seamon, 2014), or where they live as adults (Brown and Pekins, 1992; Fornara et al., 2010). Some authors highlighted negative feelings and emotions associated with places as a result of social transformations in the context of migration, changes in family structure, relocation (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Low and Altman, 1992; Seamon, 2014).

More recent studies focus on the analysis of emotional and cultural attachment that include approaches such as family and group space use or in relation to the local cultural context that may generate individuals' unique experiences (Low and Altman, 1992).

The multidimensional and complex concept of place attachment is further reflected in approaches to similar issues such as place identity (Banini, 2021a; Goussous and Al-Hammadi, 2018; Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014; Scanell and Gifford, 2014; Seamon, 2014), sense of place and rootedness (Amirshaghaghi and Nasekhian, 2021; Harun, Mansor and Said, 2015; Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014; Seamon, 2014), topophilia (or "love of place"; Tuan, 1964 quoted in Low and Altman, 1992), place dependence (Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014; Scannell and Gifford, 2014; Seamon, 2014), quality of life (Seamon, 2014).

In this study, the authors analyse place attachment in relation to the elements of territorial identity associated with Oraviţa through postcards and information included on the city hall website and heritage sites created by members of the local community or by people living in the Romanian Banat. The selected postcards represent symbolic buildings of the town, respectively cultural or administrative

institutions created in different historical stages that reflect the socio-cultural and economic development of Oraviţa under the impact of the political factor. In order to validate the information interpreted on the basis of the visual analysis, the authors evaluated the information posted on the town hall website in order to identify the elements of territorial identity that are still in the attention of the local public administration. Thus, the authors identified the narrative related to the elements of territorial identity of Oraviţa from the perspective of visual analysis and official discourse. The place attachment was assessed on the basis of information posted on participatory heritage sites where a number of historic buildings were promoted, and which have been identified by the authors as elements of territorial identity using postcards. Thus, the attachment of the local community is manifested through a series of feelings such as identity and belonging, the feeling of pride towards the elements of local cultural heritage, etc.

The authors outlined the main research questions: What are the dominant territorial identity elements of Oraviţa represented in postcards? Which of the elements of territorial identity are promoted and proposed for capitalisation by the local public administration in the current period? What are the elements of territorial identity of Oraviţa to which the population is attached? What are the dominant feelings associated with the elements of territorial identity?

The choice of Oraviţa as a case study was determined by the significance of the town between the late 18th century and the early 20th century, due to its administrative (residence of Caraş county) and economic (it was the administrative centre of the mining activity in Mountainous Banat) function. The economic and administrative role of the town contributed to the foundation of cultural and administrative institutions that shaped an intense socio-cultural life of the local community.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

The occurrence and maintenance of place attachment are analysed both from the perspective of objective terms associated with external factors of analysing the place (physical, geographical characteristics, social, cultural, political elements) (Lewicka, 2008; Goussous and Al-Hammadi, 2018; Jaśkiewicz, 2015; Zahid and Misirlisoy, 2021), as well as of those of a subjective nature (affective and cognitive representations), which reflect the rendering of the strongly interconnected relationship between man and place from a phenomenological perspective (Seamon, 2014). A detailed analysis of the concept highlights the connection of the word 'attachment' with the idea of 'affection', and the word 'place' refers to the

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characteristics of the territory to which the community is emotionally and culturally attached (Low and Altman, 1992).

The cultural attachment to the place is manifested in close connection with the physical elements as indications of the place history that function as "mnemonic aids" for the collective memory of the resident population (Lewicka, 2008, p. 214). By the monuments and their architectural style, the places remind of the people' memories who are connected to a certain place. Historic sites create a sense of continuity with the past, embody the traditions of the group and facilitate place attachment (Lewicka, 2008).

The old urban fabric has unique features that provide the city with authenticity. Different features of the urban fabric that have associated aesthetic value can influence the place attachment: architecture, shape and appearance of buildings, density and volume of buildings, public spaces, (external and internal) connection, green areas, pedestrian areas (Fornara et al., 2010; Jaśkiewicz, 2015; Mantey, 2015; Merciu, 2020; Zahid and Misirlisoy, 2021) and even functional elements (recreational services) (Fornara et al., 2010). The preservation of the unique characteristics of the urban fabric leads to the preservation of its identity and coherence and maintains the place attachment of the resident population (Trancik, 1986 quoted in Amirshaghaghi and Nasekhian, 2021).

Heritage buildings are the most appreciated historical monuments, which reflect the identity of a city at local, regional and even national level (Kaymaz, 2013 quoted in Merciu, Ilovan and Cercleux, 2020; Merciu, 2020; Nae et al., 2019).

The representation of heritage buildings is closely linked to the process of building the identity of a territory that is also influenced by policy makers, through official discourse (Banini, 2021b; Ilovan and Maroşi, 2018; Merciu, Ilovan and Cercleux, 2020; Merciu and Vasiloiu, 2022). Visual representations and official discourse play a key role in the process of building territorial identity due to the fact that they require the formation of opinions and attitudes towards the territory, which may or may not be shared. Also, the dominant visual representations and the official discourse incorporated messages that outlined the place attachment by referring to the common cultural meanings, to the feelings of identity and belonging of the local community (Banini, 2021b, p. 22), often related to the sense of the place due to the fact that heritage buildings include symbolic meanings for the local community (Watson and Waterson, 2010 quoted in Merciu, Ilovan and Cercleux, 2020, p. 38), often augmented by associating them with significant historical and cultural events.

Place attachment is linked to place identity (Goussous and Al-Hammadi, 2018; Mantey, 2015), both

of which refer to people's interaction with places (Lewicka, 2008), through which people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a certain place, which then becomes a component of personal identity (Stedman, 2002, quoted in Segers et al., 2021, p. 118). This definition limits the purpose of the personal identity concept to those dimensions of the self that develop in relation to the physical and material aspects of a place (Segers et al., 2021, p. 118).

From a psychological perspective, the links established between people and places also include the cognitive aspect, related to knowledge about certain features of the place that facilitate the individuals' approach to it (Scannell and Gifford, 2010).

The formation and maintenance of place attachment is influenced by socio-cultural factors (social norms, cultural processes). Attachment involves shared affective meanings due to the fact that people need emotional and spiritual experiences in the residential setting (Low and Altman, 1992; Amirshaghaghi and Nasekhian, 2021); thus, people feel attached to the places that provide the framework for social gatherings (Low, 1992; Segers et al., 2021). Public places are elements that provide the support space for social and cultural relations (Merciu, 2020; Riley, 1992). The place attachment can also be expressed in relation to intangible elements (occupations, cultural events, memory of the past shared by the local community, personal memories) (Belk, 1992).

Therefore, the relationship between the local population and the residential environment is strengthened by two dimensions of attachment: physical versus geographic characteristics and built space; and social attachment (the connection established through various social relationships, cultural activities in which individuals or social groups participate) (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Scannell and Gifford, 2010, cited by Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014; Mantey, 2015; Zahid and Misirlisoy, 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Case study

Oraviţa is a town located in the southwestern part of the country and the Romanian Banat (Fig. 1), which is characterised by a long historical evolution and cultural diversity influenced by the favourable natural environment and historical-political factors.

The locality belongs to the early industrialised (18th century) Mountainous Banat, under the impact of the annexation and administration of Banat in 1717 by the Habsburg Empire (Vultur, 2008). Originally a rural locality, Oraviţa evolved into an urban status, by uniting in time two distinct localities: Oraviţa Română, an old Romanian village, and Mountainous or German village

of Oraviţa, after the successive colonisations of miners and officials from different areas of the Habsburg Empire. Mountainous Oraviţa and Romanian Oraviţa merged in 1926, which led to social diversification, related to urban development due to the occurence of an ethnic and religious fusion (Simion, 2017; Vultur, 2008). This context provided Oraviţa with its multicultural nature, reflected in its lifestyle, socio-cultural practices and collective memory. Firstly, the development of the locality is related to the exploitation of local subsoil resources (copper, gold, silver, iron; Simion, 2017) located in its surrounding villages. In 1718 the first blast furnace was built in Oraviţa, and in 1723 the Superior Office of Mines was established which later became the Mountaineering Directorate of Banat whose administrative centre was Oraviţa. The Banat Mountain Directorate worked until 1856 (Gräf, 2007). In 1855 the factories in Oraviţa became the property of the Privileged Caesar-Austrian State Railway Company (StEG). In the same year, the Austrian Imperial Court sold all industrial units in Banat to StEG (Gräf, 2007). The importance of mining due to its various subsoil resources determined the creation in 1729 of the "Montanistic School for learning blacksmithing and mining", being the first professional school institution in Romania (Bota, 2008).
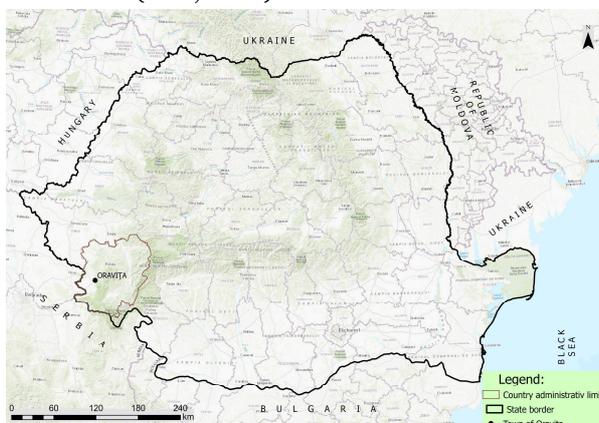

Fig. 1. Geographical location of Oraviţa at national and county level.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Macedonian-Romanians (wealthy merchants who invested in cultural settlements), Italians from Friuli (stone workers, and railway engineers came or settled from the Habsburg Empire), Slovaks, Czechs (Pemi), Germans, as well as families of settlers from Oltenia (coal miners, carpenters and carriers; Creţiu, 2007 quoted in Vultur, 2008, p. 180).

In 1926, Oraviţa became the capital of Caraş County until after the Second World War (Jurma, Ţiglă, 2017). Gradually, Oraviţa gains only the status of the cultural and administrative centre of the region, other localities such as Reşiţa (centre of metallurgical industry and machine building) and Anina (relevant centre of coal extractive industry) gaining economic

supremacy (Merciu, Cercleux and Merciu, 2021). During the Communist regime, the town lost its administrative function, which was assigned to the municipality of Reşiţa, due to its industrial function.

3.2. Data collection

To collect data, the authors used two key sources: images (postcards, photographs) from the pre-war and Communist regime, and accessed participatory sites created by community members or people living in other localities from the Romanian Banat, as well as from the site of a local NGO, to thoroughly analyse the place attachment. Secondary sources represented by books and articles used by authors for documenting the historical, economic and socio-cultural evolution of Oraviţa are added to these.

Postcards were used as a research tool to identify and analyse the elements of territorial identity by referring to "urban reminders". Collage-type postcards containing official discourse messages decoded by reference to the political and cultural context were also analysed. The postcards were related to the information and images posted on the town hall website to compare the dominant representations of the territorial identity elements. This comparison was considered useful in highlighting the continuity of representing the territorial identity elements of Oraviţa over time.

The selected postcards were sorted chronologically. Most of the image collection belongs to the authors. Another source of taking over the old images was represented by the digital archive of Oraviţa town hall. The authors selected and analysed those images in which the elements of territorial identity were identified: civil, religious buildings, public and recreational spaces from a collection of about 100 postcards.

3.3. Data processing

The authors used qualitative methods through which they deciphered the narrative related to the territorial identity elements of Oraviţa using postcards as interpretive tools that provide additional informational support in the critical approach to official discourse (Rose, 2013). Visual methods were used in early studies of sociology and anthropology, with images considered to be primarily "obvious" (playing a supporting role in researchers' conclusions) and "realistic": the camera "reflects" rather than "interprets" reality (Bateson and Mead, 1942, quoted in Stedman et al., 2014, p. 113). Images communicate details that words or numbers cannot provide (Stedman et al., 2014).

Postcards or old photographs have been used in various studies focused either on the analysis of place

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attachment (Manahasa and Özsoy, 2017), or on the identification of places of memory (Ilovan, 2019), or on elements of urban territorial identity (Ilovan and Maroşi, 2018; Ilovan and Merciu, 2021; Mareci-Sabol and Purici, 2020; Merciu, Cercleux and Merciu, 2021; Spennemann, 2021).

Visual representations can provide information about ideological meanings related to a particular place and identity (Ilovan, 2019; Ilovan and Maroşi, 2018; Ilovan, 2020; Mareci-Sabol and Purici, 2020; Merciu, Ilovan and Cercleux, 2010; Rose, 2013). The politics of representation is also visually reflected taking into account the power of images in the representation of cities (Rose, 2013). Interpretation of postcards requires a careful analysis of visual representations and other elements written on the front or back, as part of indirect observation (Maroşi, 2018), to identify as many details as possible about the place analysed (Ilovan and Maroşi, 2018; Maroşi, 2018; Rose, 2013): the names of the buildings that have varied over time during the period in which the postcards were published can be correlated with a historical or cultural event. These details are useful in the discourse analysis and have been correlated with the elements found in official documents (Banini and Ilovan, 2021; Banini 2021b; Rose, 2013; Ilovan and Maroşi, 2018; Mareci-Sobol and Purici, 2020; Merciu, Ilovan and Cercleux, 2020; Merciu and Vasiloiu, 2022), media (Banini, 2021a), websites (Banini, 2021a; Van der Hoeven, 2020). Critical analysis of information included in a postcard in conjunction with official discourse reduces research subjectivity as much as possible by increasing the authenticity of interpretations (Maroşi, 2018).

The visual methods were underused in the analysis of the place attachment, in relation to their significant contribution. Participatory observation is a qualitative method that highlights the role of the story, offering an in-depth exploration of place attachment.

The authors conducted on-site research to observe the particular physical characteristics of Oraviţa, identified as elements of territorial identity during three field campaigns (2011, 2014, 2020). In 2021, the authors carried out another field campaign in order to analyse the place attachment in relation to the elements of territorial identity through participatory observation. Thus, discussions were held with the local population regarding the elements of territorial identity that they appreciated. Members of the local community were asked to state their motivation for choosing the elements of territorial identity. Based on the given answers, the authors analysed the attachment of the locals to several symbolic buildings.

The information posted on the participatory heritage sites was analysed from the perspective of the citizens' attachment to the cultural objectives in Oraviţa in terms of the level of appreciation of the cultural heritage and their involvement in its promotion and conservation.

A qualitative analysis of the sites content was carried out in order to thoroughly evaluate existing media content. Particular attention was paid to the selection of heritage buildings presented on the town hall website and to the participatory heritage sites and their comparison with the historic buildings that were previously identified as elements of territorial identity. The authors used a thematic analysis of the information posted on the sites that allowed an in-depth interpretation of the data on the symbols of heritage buildings, their associated meanings (values) according to the citizens (Van der Hoeven, 2020). These details were useful to identify the attachment of the local or regional population to the cultural heritage buildings in Oraviţa.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Identifying the elements of territorial identity based on visual images

Oraviţa displays a particular urban morphology influenced by the conditions of the natural environment: the town is located in a narrow valley, on the western slope of the Semenic Mountains, having a mere, linear configuration. The peculiarity of the town's morphology is also given by the influence of German architecture. The town still preserves massive and sober constructions, reminiscent of the architecture specific to German boroughs (Simion, 2017). Another German influence in the vernacular architecture is represented by the almost imperceptible distances between buildings, an aspect known as "glued houses" (Simion, 2017). This aspect will be preserved in the construction of buildings from the period when Oraviţa became an urban centre. The morphology of the locality was reflected in various postcards published since the end of the 18th century (Fig. 2) when Oraviţa had a prominent rural morphology.

Fig. 2. Particular morphology of the German Oraviţa represented in postcards during the late 18th century *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

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Oraviţa underwent changes in the urban morphology once with its economic development and the acquisition of the city state. Thus, since the end of the 18th century, buildings with various functions (administrative, cultural, commercial) were built under the influence of urban architecture, some of them being really imposing. The urban evolution of Oraviţa is reflected in the 19th century postcards, the emphasis being on the representative new buildings, located on the two main streets of the town. The representations of the buildings highlight their location: the title makes a direct reference to the main street, mentioned in Romanian, in Hungarian ("Főutcza") or in German ("Hauptgasse") (Fig. 3 a, b). Thus, segments of the main street in which the authors were able to identify a series of buildings with commercial function whose frequency of representation reflects their quality of elements of territorial identity: Korona Hotel (figure 3a); bank offices: Oraviţa owned a branch of the National Bank, a savings bank and an industrial bank (Oraviţana) (Fig. 3b) are represented in the postcards.

Fig. 3a, 3b. Representations of the main street and of the commercial buildings *(source: Oraviţa Town Hall, Urbanism Service, online archive).*

A detailed analysis of the postcards reveals that some of the key institutions in the town related to its administrative function (county seat) were represented as singular elements: the old town hall (Fig. 4), the former prefecture (the current town hall) (Fig. 5), the financial administration and the court (some of the first buildings built by Austrian settlers).

The old town hall was built in 1796 as part of a large-scale urban development project in the central

area of Oraviţa. Initially, the building was the headquarters of the Monetary and Mining Administration between 1796 and 1801 (Vultur, 2007). The building housed the town hall of Mountainous Oraviţa at the initiative of the economist Ion Constantini, mayor of the locality between 1801 and 1855 (Bota, 2008). When Oraviţa became a town and the residence of Caraş County, it was necessary to create a larger and more imposing headquarters to house the prefecture. The old town hall building still housed the town hall offices, utilities, and services. Between 1951 and 1968, the building was the headquarters of the Oraviţa District administration within the Banat Region. Later, until the end of the Communist regime, the building was used as a hall and workshop for the School of Music and Fine Arts and social housing. After 1990, the building was used more for various cultural activities: as the headquarters of the School of Music and Fine Arts, as the headquarters of the Oraviţana Cultural Society, etc. (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. The old town hall represented in a postcard showing the baroque pediment on which is written the name of the institution (approximate date of the late eighteenth century) *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

Between 2017 and 2020, the building was included in an extensive restoration and refurbishment process: the History Museum of Caraş Valley Culture is currently being developed (Fig. 5).


Fig. 5. The old town hall building during the restoration and redevelopment as a history museum of the Caraş Valley (2021) *(source: Merciu G.).*

The arrangement of the old town hall building as a museum aims to bring to the inhabitants' memory the past of the city marked by a long evolution and

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many historical, political and cultural events with high significance for the local population. The museum will house objects and documents attesting to the cultural value of the Caraş Valley, whose polarising centre was the town of Oraviţa. The museum's exhibits will reflect the multicultural nature of the area, outlining the contribution of the Caraş area to the development of the Romanian and European culture, the scientific priorities of Banat, some of them being made on the territory of Oraviţa.

The prefecture is one of the administrative buildings most frequently represented in both postcards published in the interwar period and in Socialism (Fig. 6, Fig. 7).

Fig. 6. The prefecture building in the interwar period *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

Fig. 7. The prefecture building represented in a postcard from the Communist regime *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

Since 1923, discussions have been held on the construction of the prefecture headquarters, and the construction decision was approved in 1926 (Bota, 2018). An auction has been launched for the construction of the new administrative palace. The project competition was organised in Bucharest, the chairman of the commission being the famous architect Duiliu Marcu. The project carried out by the architect Henrieta Delavrancea together with the architect Dimitrie Boitor was declared the winner. The prefecture building is imposing and is one of the most beautiful palaces in Banat (Bota, 2008). The prefecture was built between 1927 and 1931 in neo-Romanian style with Italian influences. The first inauguration of the building took place on January 1, 1932. Later, it was arranged in front of the Central Park prefecture.

The inauguration of the Central Park marked the second inauguration of the Prefecture, an activity that took place on June 3, 1933 in the presence of King Carol II, voivode of Alba Iulia and prince of Banat (the title granted in Oraviţa then), of his son, Mihai I, of the poet Octavian Goga, of the famous sociologist Dimitrie Gusti and of other political county personalities. On this occasion, three busts from the Central Park made by the sculptor Romulus Ladea (Bota, 2008) were unveiled: the bust of King Ferdinand I the Integrator was placed in the middle, the bust of the poet Mihai Eminescu on the right and the bust of the Banat historian Damaschin Bojincă on the left. After the consecration of the three statues, there were parades attended by about 10,000 people, dressed in national costumes, each group having a sign and a flag specific to the commune (Diocesan Sheet, 1933, p. 3).

The capital function of Caraş County included Oraviţa together with other important cities of Romania, marked by numerous political events, cultural ceremonies hosted by the Prefecture, visits of political party candidates: the visit of the well-known liberal politician, George Pop de Băseşti, who submitted his candidacy for the position of deputy in the constituency of Oraviţa (Georgescu, 1935, p. 140).

The Central Park has been arranged as a public space with a highly articulated aesthetic character conferred by the landscaping. The arrangement of the central park, on the initiative of the prefect Ion Dongorozi, a well-known writer from the Caraş area, contributed to the decoration and modernisation of the town and implicitly to the recreational capitalisation of the park. Thus, the area of the former prefecture and the park became a promenade area.

On the occasion of religious holidays or ceremonies associated with political or cultural events, the Central Park organised cultural events attended by music groups and choirs from the Caraş Valley area, as well as groups of people, dressed in folk costumes. Cultural activities generated an extraordinary

emulation. The area between the current town hall and General Dragalina High School, located nearby, is the main promenade area of the town nowadays.

Along with administrative institutions, religious buildings, cultural buildings are often represented: theatre, library, old school, cinema, military or educational institutions (King Ferdinand's barracks, military school, music school).

The theatre has been represented in postcards since its construction (Fig. 8), being a building-symbol of Oraviţa which hosted various cultural activities that brought together members of the community.

Fig. 8. Representation of the old theatre in the interwar period *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

The square near the theatre was one of the promenade areas of the town in the early twentieth century (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Theatre Street – one of the city's promenades from the interwar period *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

In the interwar period, a street market with agricultural products was organised along the theatre by the farmers from the villages located in the urban area of Oraviţa (Fig. 10).

The cultural relevance of the theatre was also recognised in the Socialist period, the cultural edifice being represented in the collage-type postcards next to the prefecture's headquarters (Fig. 11). The representation of the theatre next to the headquarters of the mayor's office is not accidental, both buildings representing institutions with a key role in the

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administrative and cultural organisation of the town. At the same time, they are symbolic buildings related to the long historical development of the town.

Fig. 10. The organised agricultural market on Theatre Street *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

Fig. 11. The theatre represented in a collage postcard next to the headquarters of the former prefecture (dating: 1970s) *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

The Oraviţa Theatre was built on the model of the old opera house (Burgtheatre) in Vienna, but on a smaller scale (1/6). The exterior of the theatre, built in a simplified manner, retains the elements of the late (Viennese) Baroque. This is the oldest theatre in the country. The cultural building was created under the influence of the German culture. Before the theatre was built, in Oraviţa there was the cultural tradition of the performing arts; music meetings and theatre clubs were organised by amateur artists, usually in the protocol hall and in the garden of the Korona Hotel (Bota, 2018); the first club of dilettantes was built in 1806 and aimed to organise theatre performances with the participation of theatre troupes from the Habsburg Empire.

Due to the high frequency of cultural events held in Oraviţa, the club members took the initiative to build a cultural building with rooms and props for a theatre, an initiative that was enthusiastically received by the local community. A voluntary collection made for the construction of the theatre attracted donations from ethnic Germans, Macedo-Romanians, as well as Romanians from Oraviţa and other localities of

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Mountainous Banat. In a single year, the theatre was built and inaugurated on October 4, 1817 (Bota, 2018), which marked the centenary of the liberation of Banat from the Ottoman administration.

Initially, the inauguration was set in July, but it was postponed in early October due to the fact that the imperial family had planned to make the honeymoon to visit Transylvania and Banat, expressing their desire to visit Oraviţa. Thus, the first show of the theatre was attended by Emperor Francis I of Austria and Empress Carolina-Augusta of Bavaria (Bota, 2018).

During the two centuries since the inauguration of the theatre, it has hosted the most significant cultural and artistic events, impressive performances by bands or performers from different countries, in addition to local theatre and music troupes, contributing to the strengthening of social relations among community members (Bota, 2018).

The names of two outstanding personalities of the Romanian culture are related to the theatre in Oraviţa: the national poet Mihai Eminescu and the great composer George Enescu. In August 1868, Mihai Eminescu came to Oraviţa to accompany, as a sufleur, Mihai Pascaly's theatre troupe that was touring in Transylvania and Banat (Bota, 2018). The theatre will later be named after the national poet. The famous composer George Enescu performed in the theatre hall of Oraviţa on November 5, 1931 (Bota, 2018).

The theatre is still the most famous cultural institution in the town to which the community feels attached. During the four field campaigns, the locals indicated its location on their own initiative and recommended that we visit it. In 2017, the theatre underwent an extensive restoration process (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12. Old theatre during restoration (July 2021) *(source: Merciu G.).*

Currently, the most important cultural events organised in Oraviţa take place inside the theatre (for example, the International Music Days Festival in Oraviţa organised since 2007; some editions of the festival were organised together with the Vienna Philharmonic and Opera and the Philharmonic of Timișoara).

Another category of memorable buildings is the places of worship: these are buildings of symbolic significance as a result of their role in providing for the spiritual needs of community members. The places of worship in Oraviţa have a historical value due to their considerable antiquity. The Roman Catholic Church was built in the provincial Baroque style (Fig. 13) between 1718 and 1722 for the ethnics of the Habsburg Empire colonised in Oraviţa (Bota, 2008).

Fig. 13. Roman Catholic Church of Oraviţa in postcard (approximate date: 19th century) *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

The Assumption Orthodox Church was built in Baroque style between 1781 and 1784 (Fig. 14) (Bota, 2008). At first, the Orthodox believers in Mountainous Oraviţa had only one chapel. Frequent representations of the two churches (Orthodox and Roman Catholic) in Oraviţa reflect the value of these local culture elements.
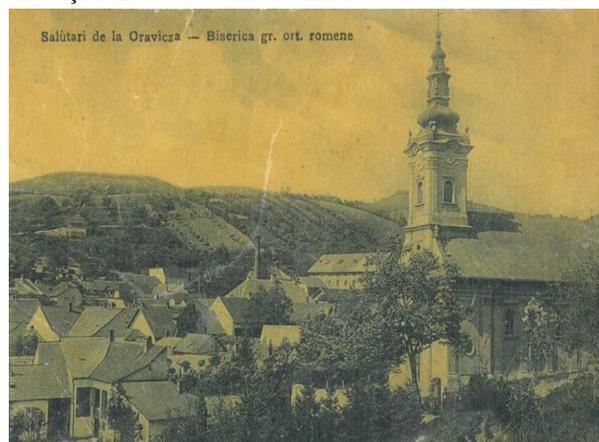
Fig. 14. The Orthodox Church represented in an uncirculated postcard *(source: Merciu F. C.).*

Religious buildings are some of the key elements of territorial identity to which the population is attached, due to the role of the church in bringing together members of the community on the occasion of major holidays or on the occasion of social activities. Oraviţa was an influential centre of the Catholic religious life, a place of pilgrimages and canonical visits of hierarchs (for example, in 1868, Balassa Gyarmati, the Primate of Hungary, came to Oraviţa; the first

Roman Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Timişoara, Augustin Pacha, visits Oraviţa in October 1929). In May 1937, the Roman Catholic parish of Oraviţa coordinated the religious music festival (Bota, 2019, p. 527).

On the occasion of the religious holidays, choirs from the adjacent rural area came to Oraviţa to hold artistic events in the square of the Roman Catholic Church, located near the headquarters of the former prefecture and the Central Park. Also, the square of the Roman Catholic church was one of the promenade areas of Oraviţa in the interwar period. Currently, there are a series of social activities related to the country fair that is organised in the square in front of the Catholic church in Oraviţa, in which members of the local community participate (Simion, 2017).

Another significant event with historical connotations is represented by the entry of the Romanian Army on August 3, 1919, in Oraviţa on the way to Timişoara to mark the union of Banat with Romania. On this occasion, a lavish ceremony was organised in the square of the Roman Catholic Church, represented by artistic moments supported by the representatives of the choirs and fanfares from the Caraş Valley area.

Although the unification of Banat with Romania was proclaimed on December 1, 1918, at the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, the takeover of the province's administration by the Romanian authorities was delayed due to the presence of Serbian troops in the region.

Another building-symbol of Oraviţa is the first mountain pharmacy in Romania, founded in 1763 by Edward Winter. In 1820, the Knoblauch family became the owner of the pharmacy. The building has the oldest representation in an engraving (Fig. 15) that can be seen today on the main facade of the building (Fig. 16) (Bota, 2008).

Fig. 15. Mountain Pharmacy illustrated in an old picture (approximate date: 19th century) *(source: Urbanism Service website, Oraviţa City Hall, online archive).*

Today the building is arranged as a History Museum of the Mountain Pharmacy, holding an impressive collection of pharmaceutical and medical devices, books and specialised treatises from 1682 to 1950 (Bota, 2008).

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Fig. 16. Former pharmacy today (2021) *(source: Merciu F. C.).*

Another symbolic building is the Oraviţa railway station, which is the oldest railway station in Romania. The building was inaugurated in 1847 and is related to the construction of the first railway in the country (Oraviţa-Baziaş – 62 km).

The station came into operation with the inauguration of the railway for freight in August 1854 and for passengers in November 1856 (Rusnac, 2011). The second segment of the oldest mountain railway in Romania (Oraviţa-Anina) is connected to Oraviţa station. This segment was built to transport coal (mined at Anina). From the port of Baziaş the coal was transported on the Danube upstream to Austria (Rusnac, 2011). Thus, Oraviţa was a valuable railway junction that developed based on the extension of the railway connections. Later, the connection with Berzovia to Timişoara was established.

The construction of the station is simple (Fig. 17). The building was equipped with an elevator-passage to ensure access to the platform above street level, this aspect being a premiere for the period when the station was built (Bota, 2008). The elevator no longer exists.
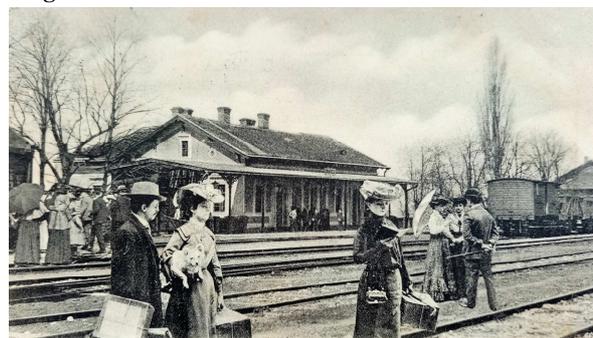
Fig. 17. Station represented in a postcard published in the early twentieth century *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

The role of the station as well as of the Oraviţa-Baziaş railway is reflected by numerous representations captured in postcards. The representations highlight the technological value of the railway (tunnels, viaducts): the viaduct located near the western part of the Old Town is represented in numerous postcards (Fig. 18).

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Fig. 18. Viaduct of the Oraviţa-Baziaş railways located near the old town of Oraviţa *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

Also, the station square was a meeting place for members of the local community due to its relevance, being a promenade in the interwar period. At present, the square in front of the station is a place highly frequented by the local population due to the diversified nature of the services that have developed in this area in recent years.

Fig. 19. Train station today (2020) *(source: Merciu F. C.).*

The station is one of the elements of territorial identity inside the collective mind due to its economic value and ensuring the mobility of the population from Mountainous Banat. Until the development of the road infrastructure, the railway was the main means of transport used by the inhabitants of Mountainous Banat for trips in the interest of service or for other purposes. For example, the rural population in the area adjacent to Oraviţa came by train to the town to solve their legal, financial or administrative problems. The presence of educational units (Catholic School for Girls, General Dragalina High School) gave Oraviţa the status of an educational attraction for the young population living in the communes around the town.

The station was the venue for the official delegations that were greeted with fanfare. Officials were taken by elevator from the platform to street level and were accommodated at the Korona Hotel. We can mention the visit of King Carol II and his son, Mihai, on the occasion of the inauguration of the former prefecture and of the Central Park; the departure of the members of the delegation to Bucharest was made by train (Diocesan Sheet, 1933).

The station remained in the collective mind as a result of its association with events that strongly marked the lives of Romanians and ethnic Germans and Serbs. During the Communist regime, Oraviţa was the centre of embarkation of Germans from the communes around the town deported to the former USSR. Also, the deportations of Romanians and ethnic Serbs from Moldova Nouă to Bărăgan during the Communist regime are added. The return of the ethnic Germans was also made through Oraviţa station, most of them later emigrating to their country of origin. The Oraviţa train station building is also associated with a series of socio-cultural events that individualise it among the elements of the town's territorial identity. A memorable event from the interwar period is the installation of Archpriest Virgil Musta in Oraviţa. Along the route, the delegation from Caransebeş was greeted by choirs from the Caraş Valley on the platforms of Forotic, Cacova and Oraviţa stations (Bota, 2019, p. 506).

The next emblematic building is the Shooting Garden, arranged on the land of the architect Ioan Bibel, which he donated to the Shooting Association for recreational activities. In the villa built inside the garden, characterised by a special architectural value, theatrical and musical performances were staged (Fig. 20) (Bota, 2008). The Shooting Garden hosted events of the Club of Intellectuals which organised literary meetings, exhibitions on the history of the town, etc.

Fig. 20. Overview of the Shooting Garden *(source: Urbanism Service, Oraviţa City Hall, online archive).*

Today, the villa hosts the headquarters of the Forest District. At present, the Shooting Garden is no longer used for recreational activities by the town's population (Fig. 21).

The Shooting Garden is a former recreational space that was part of the collective memory of the town, being an objective that illustrates the emblematic relationship of the built fund with the landscape, the initial destination being addressed entirely to the community.

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Fig. 21. Shooting Garden today: The open-air amphitheatre for socio-cultural activities on which vegetation has grown *(source: Merciu F. C.).*

The favourable characteristics of the natural environment determined the arrangement of a spa complex in Oraviţa, between 1886 and 1889, known as "Kneipp Baths". The ensemble included a spa establishment based on the capitalisation of a spring with a rich mineralisation due to the lithological structure (Bota, 2019). Arranged according to a landscape plan with a highly articulated aesthetic character, the structure of the ensemble also included a fountain, several terraces and a restaurant that changed the bathroom area into a recreation space frequented by the local population (Fig. 22).

Fig. 22. "Kneipp Baths" Spa *(source: Olaru M., personal collection).*

During the Communist regime, the spa was changed into a communal bath. After 1990, the spa complex is used as a medical centre for disabled people.

4.2. The elements of territorial identity analysed from the perspective of the current official discourse

In order to highlight the way in which the elements of territorial identity are reflected according to the representatives of the local public administration, the authors made a thematic analysis of the information posted on the website of the town hall, respectively of the Urbanism Department.

Based on the thematic analysis, the authors followed the main topics presented on the town hall website. The information is structured as pages associated with a blog created by the representatives of

the Urban Planning Service of Oraviţa Town Hall called "The way we build will build us". The information is structured on different categories of topics: historical monuments, urban plans, built heritage, projects, forms. The built cultural heritage has the most dedicated pages on the town hall website.

The attributes of heritage buildings are highlighted through various formats, such as old postcards, current photographs, plans, sketches, descriptions of buildings, etc. The predominant attributes presented are those related to the architecture of buildings, history, current state of preservation. The site also provides information on the current use of historical monuments.

The criteria for selecting the buildings by the representatives of the Urbanism Service is strictly related to their status as historical monuments and they are relatively numerous for the size of this town. It can be appreciated that the historical monuments that played a key role in the administrative and socio-cultural organisation of the town have a more detailed presentation (for example, the former prefecture headquarters, theatre, former town hall, train station and adjacent public space) where the description alternates old and new images, to which are added the renovation plans (the theatre), the redevelopment plan (the former town hall building, the theatre square, the proposal to rehabilitate the station protection area, the arrangement of public space in the station area). These monuments were identified by the authors as the main elements of territorial identity based on visual analysis.

Also, on the city hall website are presented historical monuments identified by the authors as elements of territorial identity of secondary importance; these were representative buildings for the political-administrative function from the pre-war period and appear less frequently in postcards: headquarters of the financial administration, the court, etc.

The information on the site also refers to the socio-cultural and recreational activities carried out in the town over time by reference to the buildings with cultural function: for example, the description of the theatre building includes details about the cultural activities organised in Oraviţa within the cultural edifice; mentions of the cinema closed in recent years due to its advanced state of degradation; the house of culture that hosted at the beginning of the twentieth century also cinema shows.

4.3. Analysis of the official discourse based on the interpretation of postcards and information on the town hall website

The messages of the official discourse transmitted through various forms (postcards, websites created by public institutions, mass media) have a

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symbolic and political charge (Ilovan and Merciu, 2021; Lewicka, 2008) through which the political administrative and socio-cultural achievements that have shaped the evolution of society are represented. At the same time, official ideologies convey information about collective memory that facilitates curiosity and interest in the history of the place of residence (Lewicka, 2008).

In postcards from the pre-war period are represented the buildings that were erected by the Austrian settlers to ensure the socio-economic and administrative development of Oraviţa, which marked its evolution from a simple rural settlement to an important urban centre. Postcards convey coded information indicating the relationship between living in the new urban environment, lucrative, educational activities, diversification of commercial, cultural and recreational services performed in a new political framework.

In some postcards the association between past and present is made. In Communism, two symbolic buildings built in different historical stages: the theatre and the former prefecture are representative for the cultural and administrative function of the town. At the same time, the selection of these buildings, which have a special architectural value, suggests the quality and aesthetics of the built space in a small Socialist town. Other elements of territorial identity of Oraviţa with historical value are not represented in the postcards from the Socialist period due to the fact that the dominant representations highlight the achievements of economic or Socialist urban planning (civic centre, new residential area).

There is an ongoing promotion of the key elements of Oraviţa territorial identity based on the interpretation of the visual representations and the information posted on the town hall website. Nowadays, the representatives of the Urbanism Service pay special attention to the conservation, promotion and capitalisation of the heritage buildings classified as historical monuments. Most of them were built between the 18th and 19th centuries, when Banat was annexed to the Habsburg Empire.

The elements of territorial identity are concentrated in the historical area of the town, developed on a length of 7 km along two narrow streets (December 1, 1918 and Mihai Viteazul). The two main streets host historic buildings with administrative, economic, socio-cultural function, as well as residential buildings.

On the one hand, the concern of the Urbanism Service representatives regarding the conservation of historical monuments is justified by the precarious preservation state of some buildings, for example, the enveloping of the facades which reduces their architectural and aesthetic value (Keller et al., 2016)

and implicitly the quality of the old urban fabric. On the other hand, the precarious preservation state of some historic buildings is correlated with time passing and the lack of restoring interventions due to the fact that this involves high costs. This is often the case in small towns because the local public administration does not have sufficient funds to restore heritage buildings. Therefore, the restoration of the Oraviţa Theatre was possible due to accessing European funds, the co-financing being ensured from the state budget.

At the same time, the selection of historical monuments by the representatives of the Urbanism Service influences the memory of the place directly by conveying historical information. The detailed description of the historic buildings helps to understand how the town has evolved. For instance, the former pharmacy or the old town hall are now reused as museums.

4.4. Participatory heritage sites as a means of expressing attachment to the elements of territorial identity

The authors identified various participatory heritage sites created by the local population and people from other localities in the Romanian Banat in order to promote several representative buildings for the culture and history of Oraviţa and the province to which it belongs.

Most participatory heritage sites are dedicated to the theatre and the railway station (including the Oraviţa-Baziaş and Oraviţa-Anina railways), to which other buildings are added: the mountain pharmacy, the former Prefecture and the Central Park, the Roman Catholic church, the Orthodox church, the Greek Catholic Church, etc.

The creation of heritage sites reflects the desire of the local population to promote among the general public the elements of cultural heritage of Oraviţa, an action that highlights the feeling of pride shown by the locals towards the heritage buildings of their hometown. Attachment to the hometown is suggested even from the title of one of the sites: Oraviţa is called "the town of my maturation" (Popa, 2012).

The historian, Ionel Bota, dedicates several pages of his blog to the history of the town highlighted by the description of the oldest railways in Romania which marked the history of national and European rail transport. Thus, Oraviţa is called "the first railway junction in the history of Romanians" (Bota, 2011). The presentation of the two railways connected to Oraviţa railway station reflects the attachment of the historian Ionel Bota to his hometown, which played a particularly significant role in the railway transport within Mountainous Banat and later through the Oraviţa-Berzovia railway, thus making the connection with

Timişoara, the capital of the Romanian Banat. Place attachment is also highlighted by referring to the feeling of national identity, expressed suggestively by associating the words "history of the Romanians". On the other hand, the historian Ionel Bota experiences the feeling of melancholy since the first mountain railway in Romania is no longer functional, as it appears from his reports in the subsection called: "History and Melancholy on the Mountain Railway" (Bota, 2011). The feeling of nostalgia is usually manifested in connection with preserving the elements of railway heritage, a feeling related to the industrial past (Peira et al., 2022) against the background of diminishing the role of technology (steam locomotives) and social life (Urry, 1990, quoted in Halsall, 1991, p. 152).

The promotion of the oldest railways in Romania was also carried out by people from other localities of Mountainous Banat (Rusnac, 2011, 2016). The historian Mircea Rusnac underlines the evolution of the first railways that included Banat in the circuit of European railway routes. He also describes the closure of the first railway in Romania as a "sad story", but which represents a reference for Banat (Rusnac, 2011).

The comments posted by the people of Banat regarding the oldest railways in Romania are particularly relevant. The comments suggest the appreciation of the railway heritage elements due to their historical and technological values, as well as their attachment to them: "Thank you for this history lesson. We do not forget history and we do not allow our wonders to be destroyed"; "Yes, that's right we have no right to forget or neglect what history has left us; All the more so to show indifference to the intent to preserve or destroy." At the same time, the analysis of the comments reflects the pride of the people of Banat towards the heritage buildings in Oraviţa and implicitly the concern for their preservation, which also shows their attachment to the historical province. The attachment of the people of Banat towards the historical province is explained by a heterogeneous collective mentality resulting from the interethnic coexistence in perfect adaptation to the environment that individualised the province according to the geographical coordinates which adds cultural, political and civilisation coordinates (Bota, 2009).

The theatre building is one of the most promoted elements of Oraviţa's territorial identity on heritage sites, created either by the Mihai Eminescu Old Theatre Cultural Centre or by people living in other cities in Banat. Most information on the websites supports the historical and architectural value of the cultural building (Demetrescu, 2021; Neagu, 2019). The information posted on some sites highlights the key role of the theatre in the dynamics of the current cultural life of the town as well as in the action of commemorating some outstanding personalities of the Romanian culture: i.e., the national poet Mihai Eminescu. A blog page is dedicated to the event "The Night Watch for Mihai Eminescu" which was hosted by the Old Theatre of Oraviţa between June 14 and 15, 2012, together with the Writers' Union of Romania, Timişoara branch and the Latin Orient Foundation of Timişoara (Ghinea, 2012). Thus, the theatre contributes to the dynamics of the cultural life of the members of the local community and to keeping the emotional attachment of the inhabitants of Oraviţa.

The experiential significance which refers to the way people relate to the urban heritage is added to the historical one associated with the heritage buildings in Oraviţa: the key cultural events of Oraviţa are hosted by the theatre, a building with historical and symbolic value for the town; at the same time, it is a historical monument of national importance, being the oldest cultural edifice in Romania. The relationship of the resident population with the elements of cultural heritage reveals the social value related to the collective meanings and the social relations between people, which generates social attachment. The presence of unique elements of heritage that are individualised as elements of territorial identity of Oraviţa, such as the theatre, explains a contouring of the feeling of belonging shared by the members of the community.

On the one hand the information achieved from the discussions with the members of the community highlighted the feeling of pride of the citizens of Oraviţa towards a series of unique heritage buildings that individualise the town between the cultural centres at national level.

On the other hand, the local population is concerned about the precarious state of preservation of some historical monuments. This situation highlights the population's attachment to heritage buildings and the identification of a sense of nostalgia associated with the fact that some historic buildings cannot be restored due to lack of funds. Studies on similar topics reflected the sense of loss felt by the resident population due the disappearance of particular places of symbolic value (Van der Hoven, 2020).

The collective consciousness of the local community, specific to the population from other localities in Banat, is closely related to the landscape, type and content of culture (understood as mental equipment in a collective consciousness) (Bota, 2009), these being strongly influenced by the mountainous environment of Caraş Valley where the mountain civilisation occurred. The mountain ensures this geographical and cultural unity that explains the strong links between the people of Oraviţa and elements of urban territorial identity. Also, the attachment of the local population is explained on the background of the history of the province in which Oraviţa fulfilled the role of administrative centre of Mountainous Banat, where

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multiple economic and cultural successes were registered, which reflects the presence of the feeling of pride to be from Oraviţa (Bota, 2009). The attachment of the people of Oraviţa is also fuelled by a strong feeling of local patriotism.

It is worth noting that the role of some elements of territorial identity in the socio-cultural life of the town has diminished over time, such as the cinema which due to the state of degradation is no longer used, the Shooting Garden and Kneipp Baths are elements towards which the local population expresses the feeling of nostalgia since they are no longer used as recreational spaces.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In this article, the authors analysed place attachment in relation to a series of symbolic buildings of Oraviţa highlighted as elements of territorial identity through visual representations and evaluation of information posted on the website of the town hall and several participatory heritage websites. The authors analysed the dominant representations of the elements of territorial identity from the perspective of the official discourse, decoding the symbols associated with economic, administrative or socio-cultural achievements, which have shaped the territory of Oraviţa over time. The authors analysed the elements of Oraviţa territorial identity that fulfilled or still fulfil an administrative function: the headquarters of the former prefecture that currently houses the town hall, the former town hall, the financial administration, and the court which were some of the first buildings built by Austrian settlers. To these buildings with a cultural function (theatre), religious buildings (the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church) and buildings with an economic function: the railway station (the oldest in the country) the former mountain pharmacy (the first pharmacy in Banat and Romania), public spaces with recreational function are added.

The identity of Oraviţa is strictly linked to a series of heritage buildings that individualise it among small towns at the national level: the theatre (the oldest cultural building in the country), some heritage buildings with an architectural value (the current town hall). The old part of the town has a particular aspect that justifies the feelings of belonging of the local community. Some historical monuments are in an advanced state of disrepair or have been improperly restored. These historical monuments generate to the local population feelings of nostalgia and regret associated with their precarious state of preservation. Thus, the proposals of the representatives of the Urbanism Service to carry out projects for the restoration and redevelopment of the historic buildings, representative of the local history and culture, are

justified: for example, the arrangement of the theatre square or the rehabilitation of the Shooting Garden. At the same time, the implementation of projects for the conservation and rehabilitation of historical monuments identified as elements of territorial identity will contribute to the intensification of their use by the local population. The reuse of some of Oraviţa's symbolic buildings as local museums will be associated with strengthening the feelings of belonging and pride of community members.

Also, based on the analysis of the dominant representations of the elements of territorial identity, it was concluded that the social value of heritage buildings is correlated with their role in facilitating various types of interaction among community members, building a strong link among them – the small size of the town also contributing to this. In addition, there is a social attachment to the places where cultural activities are organised, whether they are cultural buildings or public spaces. Oraviţa still hosts cultural activities of national and international importance that contribute to the intensification of the socio-cultural life of the local population. Oraviţa registered an urban development from a simple rural locality to a considerable urban centre with administrative function under the influence of political and economic factors. Although Oraviţa is a small town (12,372 inhabitants in 2021), it has particular characteristics of the built space, individualised by elements of territorial identity characterised by a historical and cultural continuum to which the local community shows physical and emotional attachment.

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