

Theoretical and methodological aspects of identity, topophilia and territoriality in terms of local and regional development. Case Study: Timisoara and Banat (Romania)

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Abstract— The perpetuation of inequalities of development in the last half century, despite numerous theories and models, has focused the researchers' attention towards the virtues of endogenous development and towards the importance of local communities as territorial actors. Expanding the paradigm of development studies led to the consideration of subjects such as: Social Geography and Behavioral Geography. Under the influence of phenomenology, these subjects provide the theory and methodology necessary to explore the essential elements for the success of developmental strategies, namely: identity, topophilia (attachment to the territory) and territoriality (territorial behavior). The article defines these concepts, also predicting recent developments in their structure and mechanisms of formation. The article presents methods of research and provides two case studies - one on local level (Timisoara), and the other on regional level (Banat region).

Keywords— Banat, development, identity, territoriality, Timisoara, topophilia.

I. INTRODUCTION

AN important issue for the scientific environment is that of development inequality and, mainly, its perpetuation and even augmentation, in spite of the preoccupations for local development starting with the second half of the 20th century [1].

Bottom up development, also called endogenous development or local development, became the alternative to the models and theories that proved their limitations in resolving the multiple particular cases [2].

Local development represents a way of approach rather than a model [3]- [5] and is understood as a method of social and economic intervention in a strictly localized territory [9].

Manuscript received August 25, 2011; Revised version received November 29, 2011. This work was supported in part by the Romanian National Council of Scientific Research in Higher Education under Grant PN II IDEI 1074 project CODE 1074 VESTPROSPECT, contr. nr. 971/2009.

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As reaction to globalization and placelessness [6], and not just to the failure of the models of exogenous development, local development thus recovers the territorial dimension of development [2] and is a component of the process of glocalization, by which local and global are built simultaneously [7].

The space becomes a space of involvement [8] where the main role is played by territorial actors. The studies of territorial actors, of the relations they develop with the territory, represent important premises for the improvement of the development process [9]-[10].

The scientific foundation of such an approach starts from phenomenology as well as from a series of concepts belonging to social geography, behavioral geography or regional geography. Treated more like epistemological curiosities, these concepts may and must become paradigms for the restructuring of the study of the human as inhabitant, main actor in the process of local development.

II. METHOD

A. Phenomenological approach

Phenomenology is the science of the conscience phenomena and a research method of the intentional (aimed at something) conscience which reveals the fundamental conditions in the establishing the objects of knowledge [11].

Starting from the idea that only interior perception may illustrate the existence of the object the term is often used with the limited meaning of describing the sensing abilities of seeing, hearing, namely to perceive main sensations. Nevertheless phenomenology implies more than that, focusing on the subjective, practical and social conditions of all human experiences- from the epistemological experience to the ethical, political, religious, aesthetic and daily experience.

Phenomenology is the study of the structures of conscience as a result of experience, from a first person perspective. The meaning of things in personal experience can be emphasized, i.e. the meaning of objects, events, the individual and the time.

The relevance for the development studies is given by the fact that phenomenology studies such concepts as perception, thought, imagination, desire as well as intention, action, social perimeter, activity.

Phenomenology focuses on the causes for everyday individual behavior, interrelating persons and social behavior (idem) - essential elements for the process of local development.

B. Social geography and the concept of identity

The definition as a geographic study dealing with the aspects of social life which determine differences in space [12], social geography interconnects with the field of phenomenology in its attempt to identify the causes of social behavior which influence space.

The Marxist current emphasized the economic causes such as labor division, organization of production process [2], [12].

In the '70s human geography rejected the model of homo aeconomicus, homo rationalis, and considered space to be a social product, a result of a coherent combination of systemic relations between groups and spaces [2].

The group, the main creator of the produced space, is more than a collectivity or social category; it is an association of people who share the same norms, models, values, representations [12]. These grant identity to the group.

Social geography studies groups with an obvious spatial component, whose long term history determined the adoption "of a space from economic, ideological and political perspective" [13]. Thus, the identity is enriched with a sense of belonging to that space which becomes territory due to its relationship with the group.

There are several scale levels of the territory according to national, regional and local identities.

National identity refers to the distinct features of a group as a nation (same descent, language, culture, religion) and also to the sense of belonging of the individual to these (recognition of a common name, planning of individual existence within a collective narrative context, perpetuation of traditions from an immemorial past).

The spatial component of the national identity resides in the ownership by the nation of a unified territory within the borders of that state. Thus, national identity and the sense of belonging to that nation imply a symbolic identification with the state and its symbols: emblem, flag, and anthem. The nation identifies with the state.

National identity generates a certain type of individuals, interconnected by the means of a special type of community: the state. The nation is an imagined community shaped by the institutionalization of citizenship practices and social reproduction [14].

Regional and local identity are defined in a similar way but they correspond to the inferior scalar levels of the territories of identification and refer to the distinctive features of a group and the sense of belonging to a group represented by perpetuation of language, preservation of specific traditions, customs, way of life and recognition of a collective depiction.

The process of modernization, characterized by spatial and social mobility, urbanization, fast transportation, telecommunications and globalization, determined the weakening and fragmentation of the traditional communities

and identities (meaning Tonnies, Durkheim) as well as an alienation of the individual from himself and space and a perpetual search for meaning [6].

In postmodern societies, local identity and sense of belonging are built by mobilization practices and collective participation which determine interaction on the grounds of a common objective between the members of the community.

The identity system is focused on the place of residence and the individual. It is implied that local political actors- in their desire to induce a co-operational and not conflict relation between the members of the community- are directly interested in the initiation of such an identity reconstruction processes.

Social geography studies the causes of such processes and the differentiation of space in relation with identity reconstruction, an element of the superstructure of the territory.

C. Behavioral geography and the concepts of tophily and territoriality

Behavioral geography studies – as its name suggests – the behavior of a human group within a territory.

The territory, main component of the group identity, has itself an identity of its own, made of a series of images with variable meanings, consequence of the experiences of the group during the historic time of the formation of the territory.

The territory preserves collective memories that withstand time and ensure the prevalence of the social body over individual existences [14].

The places "charged with meaning" are traditionally support for the transmission of messages between generations and are essential elements of collective identity and conscience and have symbolic function with role of mutual ideals.

The way in which the members of the group relate with the geographical space determines territoriality and includes the feelings of affection for the territory and the behavior of the group in relation with the territory.

The affection to the territory is called tophillia and is characterized by the use of the name of the territory – a shared code of identification, and by the ability to disseminate within the group an image, a full, global vision, as a discourse about the territory [15].

The mental reconstruction of the territory from its most significant places is a consequence of the examining and covering of the territory. Concrete experience of the space generates belonging [14].

The discourse on territory is a reconstruction of the perceived and represented space.

The perceived space and the represented space are defined starting from the acceptance of the two primary cognitive processes (perception, by which the psychic registers objects in their presence and representation, by which objects and phenomena are brought to mind in their absence) [13].

The represented space does not only reflect the mental features of the human spirit, or of the intensity of territorial perception, but preserves the mark of the codes and ideologies specific to the social group to which the subject belongs [13]. Every perception is thus charged with social imagination.

The revealing value of the represented space results in the way in which it is generated. The perception takes place first, i.e. the objects are represented in their presence, the perception being mediated by sense organs, age, sex, culture, motivations, social/economic status, qualities inherent to the subject, previous experiences, personal and group spatial experience, access to information [16]. The representation of a space is consequently built through the filter of the imagination and thought of the subject, through juxtaposing of symbols and signs and is considered “revealing for the meaning granted to the space by the inhabitants” because “to produce a representation of the space already implies a feature (...), a control, even if it remains within the boundaries of imagination” [17].

The study of representation of the identity territory is done by using topophilia questionnaires, which request the naming of significant places, the creation of a discourse on territory, and also by means of mental maps.

In this last case, each respondent is asked to draw the territory “the way he has it in mind”, without a model, therefore according to the representations he has on the territory. The result is “an abstract image of a seen / lived territory”, a mediated image – as it was presented- like any other representation.

The multitude of thus obtained images defines the shared image of the territory, a general representation of over- or underrated images in relation with the identification data of the respondents.

In the modern period, the behavior of the group within the territory was disturbed by the progress in transportation and communication technologies [18].

The possibility to cover vast territories led to the apparition of network territories, lacking continuity and which do not correspond to the surface managed by the territorial group.

On the other hand, communicational techniques eliminated the need of immediate spatial proximity and led to the erosion of the sense of rooting [18]. In developed societies the traditional territorial crisis materialized in de-territorialization, a fracture between the individual and space [6]. In the postmodern period the notion of de-territorialization and the intrinsic idea of de-territorialized identities are discussed in the context of globalization.

What type of belonging is possible today? Do the structures of the economic or political environment still correspond to the borders of the nation-states? Are the ancient territories which defined our lives still valid? We are living in a world of fluxes [14] which transcend identity territories formed in historic times, while dominant organizations transcend in their turn the social conventions of the cultural identities and local societies by means of the informational environment and technologies. We live like synapses in a network (idem).

A process of reconstruction of the strictly localized territoriality is taking place, focused on the space of residence, which bears meaning and can generate a feeling of belonging, territoriality being a consequence of the identity process, parallel to the process of local identity reconstruction [6].

The support sustaining the building of these new identities and territorialities may be a project space which was not historically individualized but is the subject of assuming and of management strategies similar to those of traditional societies.

This process of re-territorialization generates a strictly delimited local territoriality (idem) which tends to ensure a balance between individualism and the identity of the local collectivities, i.e. the spatial proximity and network proximity.

The new local territoriality is emphasized by the study of the living space/ living polygon defined as the area of the individual’s spatial practices.

This corresponds of the space frequented and covered with minimal regularity; it consists of attractive places, knots, synapses, around which individual existence is crystallized and answers to several needs of the individual – habitation, education, work, supply, recreation, socialization etc. The connection between attractive places is ensured by routes of circulation – often but not always recognized as important. Outside the attractive places and the circulation routes non-places are situated, with no meaning for the individual [16], [13].

The study of the life polygon and of the mental maps gives the possibility to reveal collective images of the space but also objectively invisible elements which give the landscape meaning and build the individual space in which the humans feels safe. This is absolutely imperative to ensure the equivalence between the space studied by researchers and the inhabited, covered, lived space [16].

Both local identity and local territoriality are the premises and the results of good local governance which, from the perspective of the theory of territorial systems, represents the organized form of the territory [15] which is responsible for its performance.

III. CASE STUDIES

The practical relevance of the phenomenological approach in the study of identity and territoriality will be illustrated below through two case studies, one on the level of the population of a city, a local - micro scale – level, and the other on the level of the population of a region – a mezo scale level of analysis. The studies highlight essential features of the population, which must be taken into account in formulating developmental strategies points on a local level and, respectively, on a regional level. Slogans adopted by local and regional authorities, the type of communication, the objectives they allege, all must be adapted to the type of identity that the population alleges, respectively to the type of relationship that the population retains with their local or regional area.

A. *Local identity and territoriality*

The study of identity and territoriality on a micro scale was performed on the school population in the city of Timisoara. The largest city in the west of the country and the third largest in the country, a convergence point of two roads of European interest and 12 main highways and railway lines, Timisoara is located 570 km away from the Romanian capital, Bucharest and less than 700 km away from the other 12 European

capitals, and is therefore considered "the main entrance gate to Romania from Central and Western Europe" (Fig. 1) [19].

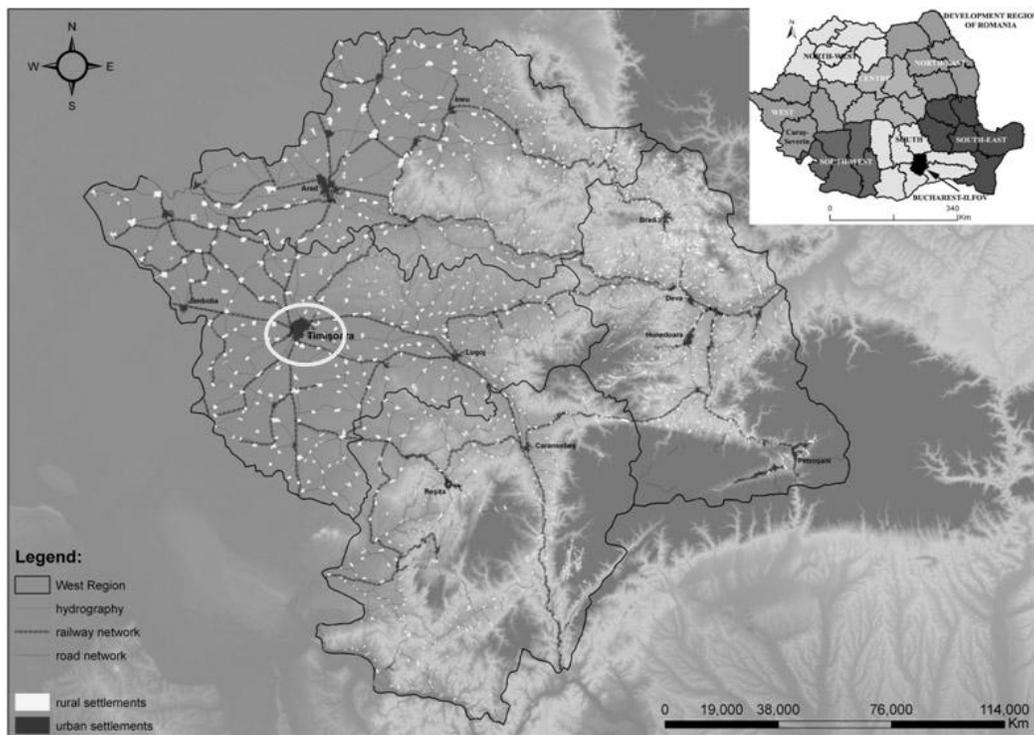


Fig. 1 Geographical position of city of Timișoara

A strategic center since the Middle Ages, the settlement became in 1718 the headquarters of the Austrian administration in the Romanian region of Banat, a moment that has decisively placed it on an upward path, of synchronous evolution - until 1945 - with the cities of Central Europe. Timisoara has developed gradually by diversification of the urban functions; the complex geo-economic potential of the regional hinterland led to the early development, in the eighteenth century – of a diversified manufacturing sector and then - in the nineteenth century – of industrial production and the city played the part of a true relay of modernity. Integrated in the national urban system, after the Unification in 1918, Timisoara has maintained its character of economic performance center and affirmed itself as one of the most important cities of Greater Romania - ranked 5th in 1930. The establishment of the Communist regime led to a rapid, oversized quantitative growth of its capacities of production. [20].

These traits have resulted in the city exercising a significant degree of attraction on the demographic flows, and establishing itself as a traditional endo-dynamic pole, with a significant proportion of allogeneic population - born in other cities and even in other regions of the country [20], [21]. The research aimed to emphasize the share of high school students born in other places, specifically whose parents or grandparents come from other places or even regions of the country in order to see the consequences on the identity they assume for themselves and respectively on their relations with

the urban space. The methods used were: the questionnaire, the polygon of life and the mental maps.

The analyzed group was formed of 600 students with residence in Timisoara.

Hypothesis no. 1: the majority of the students were born in Timisoara as a consequence of the radical diminishing of the migratory fluxes following the fall of the communist regime. Hypothesis confirmed: 89% of the respondents were born in Timisoara, 11% of the respondents were born in another region.

Hypothesis no.2: a large part of high school students are the children of the migrants established in Timisoara during the major industrialization period of 1970-1980. Hypothesis confirmed: the families of 80% of the students come from other places, 42% of these coming from other regions. The families of only 20% are from Timisoara.

Hypothesis no.3: the identity assumed by the students is determined mainly by the foreign environment of the families and not by the place of birth. Hypothesis confirmed: although 89% of the high school students are born in Timisoara, only 53% assume the identity of dweller of Timisoara, 17.5% assume a regional identity, 14% national identity, 4% identities of other regions and 7% ethnic identities.

Hypothesis no.4 considered the covering of the urban space: due to moving autonomy, need of social interaction and free spirit specific to their age, high school students cover regularly a large area of the urban space. Hypothesis partially confirmed: the students have living polygons extended at the

A. Regional identity and territoriality

To illustrate the application of the phenomenological approach on the regional level, a sample of 300 people from the region of Banat has been studied through the methods of questionnaires and mental maps.

In the consciousness and collective memory of the Romanian people, Banat was the cultural-historical region stretching from

Mures to the North, the river Tisza to the Northwest, the Danube to the West and - finally – the Carpathians to the East. Today it is a trans-frontier region, which stretches on the territory of three countries: Romania (which has 18 966 sq km), Serbia (with 9376 km) and Hungary (284 km) (Fig 6).

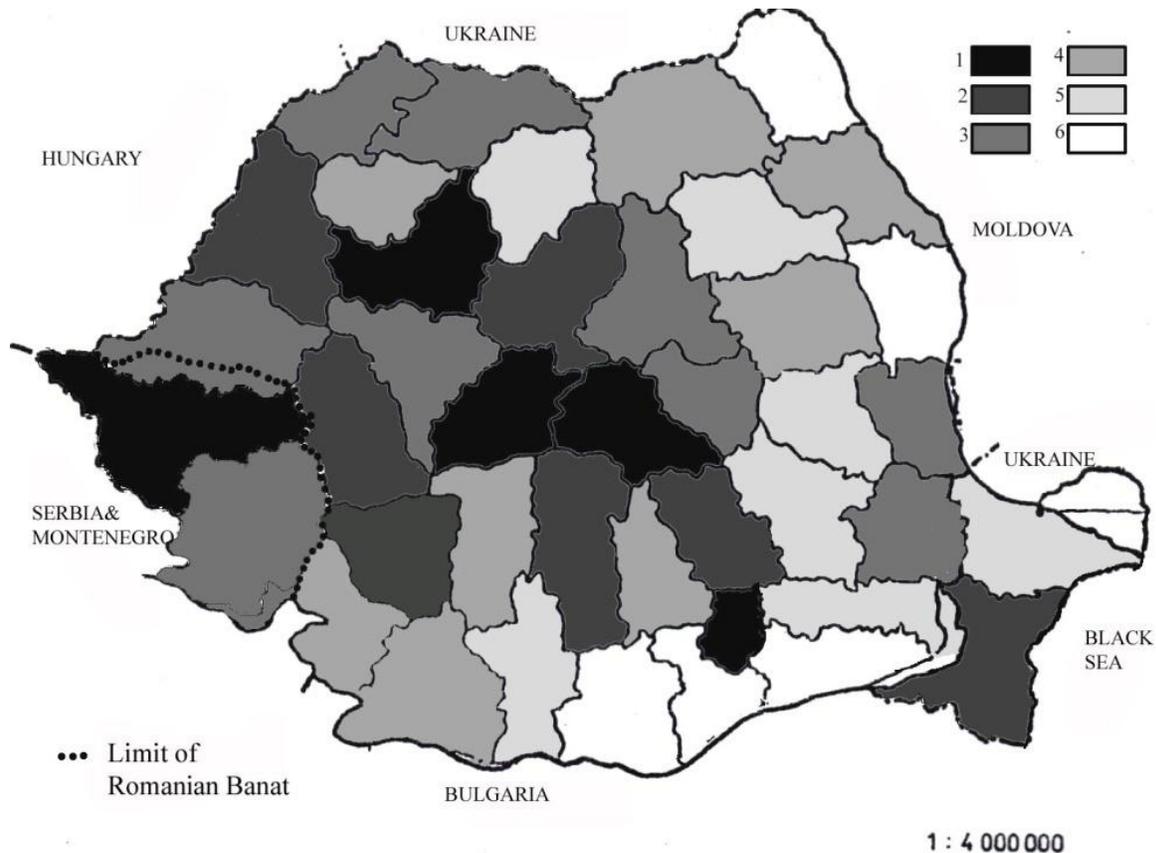


Fig. 6 Geographical position of Romanian Banat

It is one of the most developed regions of the country that has known a period of industrial development, in forms that were synchronous to those in Western Europe, for over two centuries.

This was a space of Romanian ethno genesis, disputed in the Middle Ages between Hungarians, Turks and Austrians, and belonging to the latter since the beginning of the eighteenth century.

A personal province of the House of Habsburg for almost a century, the Banat was an experimental space for the mercantilist theories of the time. This privileged status has occasioned the transfer of technology, the infusion of know-how and the allogeneic flows, all creating an effervescent environment, which was multiethnic and multi-confessional and creating a market economy that was adjusted to the demand of foreign markets. The intercultural pattern of takeover from the "other ethnics" of whatever best they had to

offer against a background of peaceful coexistence, has constituted a major coordinate for the Banat territory, which resisted even under less favorable political regimes (when the region was attached to Hungary, at the end of the nineteenth century).

Banat becomes part of Romania after World War I in a time when it undergoes demographic modernization. The involution of the population due to natural causes is doubled by emigration flows towards the U.S. in particular, an important phenomenon that afterwards provides an important capital injection, with Banat being dubbed "Romania's California" in the interwar period.

The establishment of the Communist regime, subsequent to the Second World War has delivered a serious blow to the traditional livelihoods of the Banat inhabitants, to whom private property was a guarantee of capital accumulation through profitable labor. Nationalization and the rigors of the

regime induced the migration of the ethnic Germans and of others, too, impoverishing the region in terms of traditions and culture in general. The economic concerns of the centralized regime have focused on the exploitation of resources and on heavy industry, huge production capacities required labor flows from other regions of the country.

On a spiritual level, the Communist regime in its form after the 60's, has promoted nationalism and the exaggeration of national virtues and contributions, as a guarantee of territorial integrity [22] considering regional identities, especially those from beyond the Carpathians, due to their traditional opening to Central Europe as elements undermining the Communist regime. Most communist leaders appointed in the Western counties of the country came from the extra-Carpathian area, and had been inoculated with the idea that the inhabitants of these regions were hostile to the regime and that this was a bastion of spiritual resistance. Of course it was impossible to eliminate the elements that used to define the culture of this region: typical architecture, interculturality, mentality. The offensive against regional consciousness and identity was fought on the level of the younger generations, politically enrolled, often unwillingly, from an early age.

The present analysis was aimed at demonstrate whether regional identity, still present, may form an advantage for the transformation of the individual inhabitant into a territorial actor.

May we still consider a Banatian identity (which would give the inhabitants of the region a sense of solidarity for a joint project)? What are its component elements? What relevance has regional identity today? Does it still represent a "code" for the preservation of the cohesion of the region? What are its ways of expression?

The questionnaire method and mental maps were used. The questionnaire focused of the comprehension of the represented space and of the elements forming the representations, including regional symbols, living space grounded on space practices, attachment towards places, associated identity discourse and to what extent a connection between these aspects and regional civic sense exists.

The main structural characteristics of the sample were as follows: 55% from the urban area, 45% from the rural area, 17.3% under 20 years of age, 64% between 20 and 60 years of age, and 18.19% over 60 years.

Hypothesis no.1: the use of the name of the region is a proof of the equivalence between the researched area and existential reality. The name is its identity code and the most powerful mark of the territory. Hypothesis confirmed: 95.5% of the respondents chose Banat for the name of the region in which they live. Consequently Banat is a shared and assumed name.

In a context where cultural and historical Banat is overlapped by several more delimitations - the two counties, Timis and Caras-Severin, established as early as 1968, but also the Western Development Region, established in 1998 and the more recent Euro-region Danube-Cris-Mures-Tisza – the way in which people here denominate the "region where they live" can be revelatory to their sense of belonging.

Only 4.5% indicated the names of local areas.

Hypothesis no.2: the name *Banat* is still operational. Hypothesis confirmed: 87.24% consider that this name is used *often*. The variants for the context for using the name Banat are very numerous: Include the communicational media outside the regional framework (radio and TV stations). Thus, at a rate of 62.24%, the name Banat is "*debated inside the logo sphere*" [17], and 27.04% of respondents stated that they were *using it in the context of current communication*.

Hypothesis no.3: Banat is not only characterized by its name, but also by a consistent image which the inhabitants may synthesize into a discourse. Hypothesis confirmed: The answers consisted only slightly (8.6%) in slogans, labels. But even their presence has an explanatory valence, highlighting an important fact, namely that this space has served as a support area for passing on a message from one generation to another [17]. The overwhelming majority of responses were complex, covering several "faces" of the region, respectively components of the territorial system:

- *representations of social life* - people, described as "hospitable and industrious" (retired, from Remetea Mare community), "good" (student, Sicvevița community) or "who solve their own problems" (adult, higher education, Timisoara);

- *cultural values specific to the inhabitants of the region*: "multiculturalism" (adult higher education, Timisoara), "tradition of tolerance and peaceful coexistence" (student, Timșoara), "good harmony, regardless of nationality" (retired, Sannicolau Mare)

- *landscapes* - symbolic and analogous representations "with an important function in territorial ideology [13] thus, the region is "a very beautiful territory" (adult higher education, Resita) "a beautiful region, full of wonderful landscapes" (student, Oravita);

- *anchors in the past*, "a historical period in which they were privileged by the rulers of a great empire" (retired, Giroc community), "a history based on multiculturalism and tolerance" (adult, higher education, Turnu Ruieni community).

The re-created image is far from being one "petrified in history", the past is also encoded through the exigencies of the present; Banat is thus "a developed region and therefore *suitable for investments*" (mechanical engineer, 38 years, Timisoara), "the Romanian America in the interwar period, now with an *important economic potential*" (adult, secondary education, Timișoara) a (region) that wants to be the first *truly European* region in Romania "(local development agent, 24 years, the city Faget) .

Banat is outlined this way as an "ideological reality."

Hypothesis no. 4: there is a mutual collective image of the regional space, consisting of places considered highly significant.

The question "What would you propose a foreigner to visit in the Banat?" was aimed at highlighting the way in which the ideological reality of the region is spatially circumscribed. The answers highlight the *experienced space*, which refers to the *representation* and the *imaginary*, but invites and even imposes a selection of sites at the same time, through a process of objectivation, so that the nominated places should have social and collective significance; this way the concept of

Hypothesis no. 6: the territory is a major feature in the construction of the relation with exteriority, otherness, that which does not belong to the group. Hypothesis confirmed: the place of birth and existence, as well as rooting, are the most quoted reasons for the assuming of regional identity.

Hypothesis no.7: there still exists a Banatian identity group positively appreciated. Hypothesis confirmed: 70% of the answers identify positive features of the group which reveal the unanimity of the group appraisal.

Hypothesis no 8: the declared affection towards the region and group materializes in interest for the evolution of the region. Hypothesis confirmed: more than 90% give an affirmative answer, revealing a feeling of solidarity.

Hypothesis no. 9: there is a low level of recognition of the role of territorial actor as a consequence of the communist period, when the political regime was the sole manager of the territory. Hypothesis confirmed: the answering persons show a modest willingness to get involved: 50% are potential active participants in the regional development projects, 25% are not interested, and 25% are passive / resigned. Banat is still a shared and assumed name which covers a reality rebuilt from a richness of symbolic images, a space which sometimes is a living space, sometimes imagined. Banatians affirm their strong regional identity, make the most of it, declare their solidarity at regional level, but are not aware of their role of major actor of development.

I. CONCLUSIONS

The integration of the phenomenological approach in the paradigm of social geography and behavioral geography enables the study of identity, its forms of manifestation and identity mechanisms of the communities. Thus can be identified spaces with good potential for endogenous development with strong identity groups, active as territorial actors, and spaces inhabited by communities which require the reconstruction of identity and re-territorialization for their transformation into identity groups. Besides its heuristic value, this research has a real practical value in showing the political discourse and powers the necessary elements which may ensure the social cohesion of the group with the development strategies, generating good premises for their success: the planned (project) space becomes a new identity territory.

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