Constructing Territorial Identities.
Theory and Practice

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Oana-Ramona Ilovan
Editor

Territorial Identities in Action

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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(editor)

TERRITORIAL IDENTITIES IN ACTION

Collection *Constructing Territorial Identities. Theory and Practice*

is coordinated by dr. Oana-Ramona Ilovan

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The collection appears under the aegis of the
Territorial Identities and Development Research Centre,
Faculty of Geography, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Territorial Identities and Development
Research Centre

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ISBN 978-606-37-1135-0

Book cover design: Dr. Zoltan Maroşi.
Academic proofreading & editing: Adrian-Daniel Muntean.

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PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

2021

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Foreword

This collective volume contributes to the academic literature on the topic of territorial identity, providing professors, researchers and students with theoretical, methodological and applicative insights. Territorial identity is conceived as a social construct, undergoing constant changes, being influenced by a variety of physical and human factors (cf. Banini, Ilovan, 2021a, 2021b; Paasi, 2021).

Individuals and communities use territorial identity as a resource for development and change at different scales: local, regional, national, and macro-regional. But what are the methods to identify and study territorial identity? This is the ambitious research question that Tiziana Banini's chapter answers, by proposing a preliminary methodology. Professor Banini underlines the usefulness of the local scale when the researcher employs a series of criteria to (de)construct territorial identity: "observable and measurable characteristics of the territory, representations, sense of belonging, and local practices" (Banini, 2021, p. 31).

Her contribution paves the way for both young and experienced researchers, by discussing how territorial identity can be defined and analysed, considering a series of specific aspects to its construction: "i) territorial tangible and quantifiable characteristics; ii) representations; iii) collective opinions and individual place bonds (self-representations); iv) shared social practices; v) local requests and proposals" (Banini, 2021, p. 19).

After a theoretical and methodological approach to territorial identity in the first chapter, the second one emphasises the relevance of "a realistic approach to identity", when discussing the historical conditions under which national identity emerges. In a very lucid and highly reflective analysis, Dr. Valeria Chelaru reassesses "the historical crucible in which Bessarabia united with Romania" (Chelaru, 2021, p. 43) in 1918, drawing on a certain political abuse of identity and on constructing identity narratives. The author points out that the Bessarabian identity is still a new and hot topic in the field of identity politics.

In the third chapter, authored by Lisa Gohlke, we are taken to the Republic of Moldova of the last two years. The author realises a detailed analysis of populism and the mobilisation of support for political projects, especially during political campaigns, showing the features of populist narratives during the local and national elections of 2019 and 2020. Lisa Gohlke analyses how the key actors (i.e. the elite, the people) are defined during a process of constructing territorial identities by means of populist mobilisation strategies, where references to the territory, norms and values govern the official discourses (Gohlke, 2021, pp. 90-99).

The fourth chapter showcases the role of territorial identities in social mobilisation and digital activism, emphasising the relevance of cyberspace in engendering communication and citizens' active participation in debates about the environmental crisis and climate change. Professor Albanese uses discourse analysis and sentiment analysis to investigate the territory-rooted narratives and collective identities by presenting the case study of the Global Climate Strike of 2019, in Italy. The author underlines the non-dualistic relationship between places and cyberplaces, as individuals' experience of them both is an intangible one. In addition, the role of visual and word-text discourses increases in the cyberspace, creating networks of shared collective identity, as well as impactful social and political commitment (Albanese, 2021, p. 128).

In chapter five, Ioana Alexandra Ciupe proposes second home tourism as a sustainable solution for preserving the local character within a natural reserve in Romania: the Apuseni Nature Park. The author highlights that second home development is an increasingly widespread phenomenon, not only in Romania but throughout the world. Therefore, we should consider the relevance of her analysis for restructuring rural areas in a sustainable way. Her research is a demonstration of analysing touristic practices that can foster the sustainable integration of protected areas into the general tourism system (Ciupe, 2021, p. 152), by capitalising on the local character and enhancing local territorial identities through economic development. This chapter is a valuable source of policy-related solutions based on rural local territorial identities.

Readers will find compelling arguments within theoretical discussions about territorial identity and illuminating case studies on current societal issues affecting our lives.

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Chapter 1. Towards a Methodology for Constructing Local Territorial Identities

Tiziana BANINI[1]

1. Introduction

Territorial identity is a complex notion that involves different dimensions: a sense of belonging and social practices, mainstream rhetoric and contested memory, local politics and territorial branding, narration and representation, discourses and silences, historical roots, and future trends.

Geographers have paid attention to territorial identity since the birth of the discipline, as it was mainly aimed at studying the specificities of places, landscapes, and regions. Territorial identity has been called by different names (e.g. personality, spirit, essence) and has referred to various conceptual categories (e.g. region, cultural area, place), but its meaning has always been the same: that which connotes a specific geographical context, distinguishing it from another. Even today, territorial identity refers to a geographical area connoted by cultural, social, or other specificities. In fact, notwithstanding the homologating effect of global processes, spatiality continues to be recognized as a key dimension in the formation of social, cultural, and territorial identities (Martin, 2005).

Territorial identity is a topic that can be examined under different lenses and referring to diverse related key concepts (place,

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sense of place, rootedness, attachment, etc.). However, most of the research produced so far, at an interdisciplinary level, has focused attention on one of those key aspects or concepts (Lewicka, 2011; Peng, Strijker, Wu, 2020). Over the past decades, many geographical contributions on territorial identity have also been published, although mostly on theoretical aspects (for a review see Antonsich, 2016; Sebastien, 2020) or on specific dimensions and case studies (e.g. Banini, Picone, 2018; Banini, Ilovan, 2021); researches dedicated to methodological questions are instead very few, if not absent. The development of a reasoned research methodology, discussed and legitimized by the scientific community, would help avoiding indiscriminate, distorted, and instrumental use of the notion of territorial identity, facilitating a conscious and critical use of it. But how can territorial identity be detected? By examining what aspects? With what methods and tools?

The aim of this chapter is precisely to propose a methodology for constructing local territorial identity, which integrates the dimensions related to the study of this notion into a single frame, highlighting tools, purposes, and mutual relationships. Attention will be focused in particular on the local scale, intended as an area of limited spatial and demographic size, starting from the premise that the study of territorial identity at a smaller scale, from subnational to supranational, requires other theoretical-methodological approaches (Capello, 2018, 2019; Paasi, Metzger, 2017; Terlouw, 2018).

After recalling some key concepts on territorial identity at the local scale, as developed within the A.Ge.I. (Association of Italian Geographers) National Research Group “Territorial identities”, of which I am the coordinator, this paper examines the aspects involved in the construction of territorial identity, specifying theoretical grounds, objectives and investigation tools, and then proposing a methodological framework, which interconnects the different dimensions considered in a dynamic and never-ending interpretative circle.

2. Defining territorial identity

Over the last decades, geographic research on identity has focused on three main issues: i) the spatiality of social practices related to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class or other social markers (*identity politics*), mainly in terms of control and resistance strategies; ii) social conflicts on the identity of specific geographical spaces (*identity of the place*); iii) geopolitical aspects of identity, mainly related to the regional and national scale (*political-territorial identities*). *Place* and *territory* have been the conceptual categories most used in studying spatial identities, but many researches also concerned the landscape (e.g. Ramos et al., 2016) and the region (e.g. Paasi, 2002, 2009; Paasi, Metzger, 2017).

In this chapter, attention is focused on the notion of *territory* elaborated by the territorialist approach (Raffestin, 2012; Turco, 2010), according to which *territory* is a complex, multidimensional and dynamic spatial entity, which incorporates the practical aspects related to the organisation and planning of the territory, as well as those that cluster around symbols, representations, and sense of belonging (Saquet, 2015; Storey, 2018). From a territorialist perspective, *place* corresponds to what specifically connotes a given territory, being the result of a process of historical evolution and transformation. According to Alberto Magnaghi (2001, p. 6, *my transl.*), for example, if *territory* "is the historical product of the cultural acts of man in a dialectical and co-evolutionary relationship with the natural environment", *place* "defines the identity of a given territory" and "includes the variable time in its definition since the construction of identity itself […] is a long-lasting historical process". This means that territories can also not be considered as places if by place we mean a *signifying space*, to which people associate meanings, values, feelings.

In that perspective, territorial identity assumes a multidimensional connotation: *relational*, because it is based on the relationships between the settled societies, the territory and its external environment; *dynamic*, being constantly subject to change, revision, modification, also in response to local and supra-local decisions and trends; *processual*, because it refers to a non-linear progress, that is studded with consents, conflicts and stop & go; *projectual,* since in order to acquire operative strength, territorial identity should be oriented towards a participatory project, a shared purpose; *transcalar,* because it is not self-referential, but open and connected to existent (or yet to develop) interlocal and supralocal networks.

The research group A.Ge.I. "Territorial Identities" focused its attention, in particular, on the local scale, understood as a restricted area of a big city, perhaps consisting of a few streets and a few buildings, or the district of a medium-sized city, or a small town, or an aggregate of small rural municipalities. In other words, a territory where, at least potentially, it is possible to organise or maintain the temporal continuity and physical proximity of face-to-face relationships.

Contemporary lifestyles and the increasing of individual mobility seem to have affected the relationships between people and places, apparently making them less intense and continuous. However, studies on the subject show that mobility intensification does not preclude attachment to place; rather, in some cases, strong individual mobility strengthens place attachment (Lewicka, 2014). Furthermore, digital communications have created new forms of virtual territorialisation (Lambach, 2020) going beyond the limits of physical proximity. Thanks to the wide spread of digital devices, new community-based sharing spaces have emerged, so that websites, social profiles and blogs host reflections, experiences and ideas on places and social action, as well as on the definition and implementation of alternative forms of development (Governa, 2014). Therefore, territorial identity can be intended as a social process built by the people who live and act in a given territory, but also by the interested "outsiders", through both face-to-face relationships and the sharing of opportunities offered by the Web.

But why is it important that local inhabitants/actors construct territorial identity? In very brief terms, for four main reasons. *First*, because the construction of a shared territorial identity contributes to creating social capital, which is a fundamental resource for the sustainable development, resilience and governance of the territories (Basile, Cavallo, 2020). *Second*, because the settled collectivities know better than anyone else the problems and needs of the local territory, and can therefore develop contextualized ideas, solutions, and proposals. In the territorialist interpretation, in fact:

> "the project is not predefined by the exogenous laws of economic growth but is immanent in the self-realization of the society established in a virtuous and synergistic relationship with the values of its own settlement environment" (Magnaghi, 2001, p. 5, *my transl.*).

Third, because through the participatory tools there is the concrete possibility for the inhabitants of the places to orient local policies and programs, hindering the top-down and de-contextualized decision-making logics that are often a source of conflicts, delays, or failures in local development. *Fourth*, because a territory connoted by an active, shared, and participatory territorial identity can promptly counteract hetero-directed decisions inadequate to the local context, rather than resort to hasty responses, motivated by the emergency.

Conceived in this way, territorial identity can be defined as a process of active, open and dynamic social construction, through which the settled collectivities (and all interested "outsiders") choose the distinctive features of the territory they inhabit or act in, giving shape to shared values, solutions, actions, and objectives (Banini, 2017, p. 18, *with changes*). It is undoubtedly a definition oriented on "how it should be", but many examples of local territorial "re-appropriation" by local communities show how the active participation of citizens in decision-making processes and the reconstruction of proximity ties restore social well-being and strengthen territorial resilience (e.g. Alaimo, 2012; Marengo, Lisi, 2009). A project based on a shared territorial identity has much more probability of success than one that is not.

3. Looking for a methodology

The elaboration of a methodology for the construction of territorial identity can help avoiding the opportunistic use of this term, both political and social, precisely because it requires to specify what territorial identity consists of and what are the criteria to build it. Moreover, it can be useful for comparing different case studies, and to facilitate the development of supra-local projects.

The preliminary question to solve in a territorial identity research is the choice of the territory to be examined. Apparently, the problem does not arise for some neighbourhoods or regions, whose toponym refers to a well-known and outlined territory (e.g. Trastevere district in Rome or Chianti Valley in Tuscany). But in the case of large urban districts or supra-municipal areas that are not well defined, from which territory could a research on territorial identity begin? Selecting which streets/squares or municipalities? Using what criteria? The issue is significant, considering that to select a territory (including/excluding parts of cities or entire municipalities) is equivalent to giving a preliminary identity to a territory (De Rubertis, 2013) or rather, to create the territorial reality described, and to give it an identity, obtaining social legitimacy and making it a field of political action (Paasi, 2002).

Administrative subdivisions do not always help in that regard, especially in reference to supra-municipal areas and neighbourhoods of large cities: at a supra-municipal level, borders generally create different areas depending on the social function/service based on predetermined user thresholds (school districts, health services, etc.); as for the neighbourhoods of big cities, they often include very different areas, in relation to both socio-economic features and perceived or experienced borders. Also in this case, detecting the opinions and perceptions of inhabitants and local actors would be important for i) knowing the differences between "official" top-down and "experienced" bottom-up borders, ii) selecting the research-action area, and iii) starting the process of constructing territorial identity. In particular, a preliminary questionnaire or the creation of mental maps could be submitted to settled collectivities, bringing to their attention an area larger than the direct or indirect experience of the researcher would lead to consider.

Overall, the methodology proposed below would give great importance to the perceptions and opinions of the settled communities, but also it would take into account other dimensions. In particular, the focus would be on five main dimensions, each aimed at examining a specific aspect of the identity construction of the territory: i) territorial tangible and quantifiable characteristics; ii) representations; iii) collective opinions and individual place bonds (self-representations); iv) shared social practices; v) local requests and proposals.

3.1. Territorial tangible and quantifiable characteristics

The alleged objectivity of geographical knowledge has been questioned with the progressive affirmation of poststructuralist movements and the idea that every geographical description incorporates the subjectivity of he/she who describes it (Murdoch, 2006). However, the emphasis attributed to representations, positionality, and the discursive construction of the realities under examination has generated various perplexities, due to the excess of relativism that could derive from it.

The paradox of geography, in comparison with other disciplines, lies precisely in the physical, material, concrete referent that connotes it, that is, the Earth's surface. In this regard, it has been said that geography can only generate a metaphorical knowledge, as it refers to something material (the Earth's surface) even though it is based on inevitably subjective and therefore multiple and incomplete representations (Dematteis, 1985); as Woodward, Dixon and Jones (2009, p. 403) argue:

> "no signifier can be presumed to stand in a one-on-one relationship with a real-world referent".

However, just because of its constant relationship with the Earth's surface and the physical space, geography cannot ignore the "objective" and quantifiable qualities of the territory and the settled population. As Peng, Strijker and Wu (2020, p. 15) underline, also because:

> "we can easily tell a mountain from a lake not because we ascribe high altitude to the mountain or water to the lake but because of the reality that a mountain is high and a lake has water".

In other words, territorial identity is closely linked to representations, discourses, practices, and interpretations, but we cannot overlook the material context to which it refers. If we did so, we would eliminate the main referent which is an integral part of the identity construction process of a territory, because it is from the relationship with the material context that sense of belonging, territorial ties, social practices, planning, and development policies take shape. The relationships of proximity, sustainability, conflicts, choices in land use, planning are anchored to the materiality of the territories:

> "they pass through material things linked to a where and a when, acting on which we act on the power and on people's lives" (Governa, 2014, p. IX, *my transl.*).

Therefore, attention should be paid to environmental characters, historical traces, demographic and settlement dynamics, economic activities, land uses, and everything that can be examined through the research methods of "traditional" geography: selection and analysis of scientific literature, collection and processing of statistical data, examination of historical and thematic cartography, direct observation of the territory, processing of maps and Geographical Information System. From a planning perspective, it would also be useful to consider the *attractiveness* of the territory under examination (in the form of infrastructures, services, cultural offer, creation of innovation), as well as the networks of supra-local relations (projects, cultural initiatives, management of public services, etc.) that link the examined territory to its *external environment*, to use the systemic language.

3.2. Representations

The *cultural turn* marked the shift of geography's attention from the description of the observed reality to the critical investigation of its representations, examining images, discourses and signs imprinted on landscapes and places (Kobayashi, 2009). As Hall (2013, p. 11) pointed out:

> "it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts […] to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others".

Even more with reference to a complex and connotative notion such as territorial identity, the construction process that leads to its definition cannot ignore the set of narratives, discourses, and representations on the examined territory, in the form of scientific (papers, books, research reports), literary (novels, short stories, etc.), artistic (films, music, visual arts, etc.), and media (advertising, websites, tourist guides, etc.) products. This is because identities are reproduced within narratives (Hall, 1996, p. 4), and most of the individual and collective opinions take shape from the discourses disseminated at the media level and often exploited at the political level.

The territory does not escape this frequent manipulation, given that the narrative structures reproduced on a media level very often serve to reiterate the power of decision-making actors. As Storey (2020, p. 5) underlines:

> “territory is intimately bound up with the discourses and practices of power and control which, in turn, serve to reproduce territory”.

The point is that all narrative constructions are more or less consciously oriented towards the pursuit of a goal. Making this objective clear, identifying its authors, tracing its origin and purpose serves to prevent stereotyped visions (or visions that do not correspond to local feelings) from being reiterated uncritically and taken for granted (Banini, Ilovan, 2021).

Images, representations, and discourses play a fundamental role in the process of territorial identity construction precisely because they solicit the formation of opinions and attitudes towards the territory itself, that can be shared or not, fought or not, changed or not. And it is also on dominant images, representations and discourses that place attachment, shared cultural meanings, sense of belonging to the local community take shape (Cross, 2015).

The main purpose of this part of the investigation would be focused on the search for the meanings associated with the narratives and representations of the territory under investigation: how has the territory been interpreted? Who built that representation/narrative? What descriptions and meanings were given? By selecting or omitting which aspects? For whose benefit? Between the main methods used for studying these aspects are content analysis, textual analysis, and visual analysis (Clifford et al., 2016; De Lyser et al., 2010; Ilovan, Doroftei, 2017).

3.3. Self-representations

The most significant part of a research on territorial identity (as above understood) concerns the self-representations of the territory under examination, that is, those produced by local collectivities, with reference both to the opinions, judgments, perceptions related to the territory under investigation, and the individual/collective bonds with the territory.

Starting from the reflections matured in humanistic geography, which first formalized the concepts of place, sense of place, and topophilia (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1974), many theoretical contributions have been dedicated to these topics (see Seamon, Lundberg, 2020). However, in geography, the distinction between *place* and *sense of place* is not always clear: often, "sense of place" is used both in reference to the characteristics of the place and the intimate bonds between people and places. Equally frequently, the notion of place and/or sense of place seems to be traced back to intrinsic and immanent qualities, typical of essentialist approaches, which do not agree with the idea of territory/place as an open, never-ending, and relational social construction. Moreover, the concept of territorial identity as a process of social construction from below, that is, starting from the settled collectivities, can only be understood in an open and dynamic sense, considering that people can change their opinions, values, and priorities over time (Martin, 2005).

In this sense, the contribution of environmental psychology, which also drew inspiration from the reflections of Tuan, Relph, Seamon and other humanistic geographers, was decisive, for having specified two fundamental notions: the "identity of place" and the "identity of the place". The *identity of place* is defined as "that part of personal identity that derives from living in specific places", the *identity of the place* is defined instead "on the basis of the most shared representations or images, at group and community level relating to the place in question" (Bonnes et al., 2009, p. 19, *my transl.*). The important thing is that in both cases the reference is to the subjective perceptions and evaluations, therefore any attribution of "objective" and "objectively" detectable identity is excluded, as well as any *a priori* identification with the place by individuals and groups. Furthermore, these notions make it possible to distinguish the two levels of discourse through which subjective perceptions and evaluations on places are articulated: that related to the place's experience of each person (e.g. a person whose "identity of place" is linked to his or her prolonged stay in two or three different cities);

and that referred to the judgments collectively attributed to certain places (by those who live or have bonds with those places).

The difference between "identity of place" and "identity of the place", however, is not always easy to understand; such notions are often confused or misunderstood. An attempt at greater clarity was made, in this sense, by defining the concept of "identity of place" as "people's place identity", and that of "identity of the place" as "place identity of a place" (Peng, Strijker, Wu, 2020). In order to provide an even clearer definition, this article proposes to re-name those two notions as *opinions on the place* and *individual place identities*.

3.3.1. Opinions on the place

This part of the research would be aimed at detecting opinions, judgments, expectations, tangible and intangible symbols of the place under investigation, obtaining them directly from the local population (residents, actors and stakeholders) through questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. Visual methods, in the traditional distinction between research *with* images and research *on* images (Bignante, 2011; Rose, 2016), and participatory tools (Kindon, Pain, Kesby, 2007) can be used as well.

Widely used in constructing the *identity of the place*, for example, is *community mapping*, which has been defined as:

> "the process and product of a community getting together to map its own assets, values, beliefs or any other self-selected variable" (Keller, 2014, p. 146).

The risk associated with the use of this tool, however, is that generally only a small part of the local community participates, so that the final product would be judgments and opinions of a few in the name of all; in other words, the risk is that this research-action tool turns out to be anything but democratic, despite the good intentions that support it (Bianchetti, 2013). On the contrary, the result of this part of the research would serve to detect the most shared images, opinions, expectations of the settled collectivities, but taking into large account those less mentioned, and generally given from marginalized social groups who do not recognize themselves in mainstream opinions and perceptions.

The *opinions on the place* under investigation, detected directly through qualitative methods, also serves to confirm or modify the orientations regarding urban planning, services programming, and economic development, starting from the assumption that a participated, shared territorial identity, built "from below", facilitates the creation and the development of contextualised economic activities. The link between territorial identity and local development has been widely dealt with in the territorialist approach (e.g. Dematteis, Governa, 2005; Pollice, 2006), while at the regional scale this topic has been mainly discussed in a critical key (e.g. De Rubertis, 2013; Paasi, 2013; Semian, Chromy, 2014). As an output of the process of territorial identity construction, the development of a *territorial brand* could also be elaborated, in which economic actors, stakeholders and inhabitants can recognize themselves, and through which to promote social, cultural, and economic initiatives.

3.3.2. Individual place identities

The premise of *individual place identity* is that:

> "the self-identity of the individual is structured by various more specific identities [...] such as sex, social class, ethnic background, occupation, religion, and still others, then it follows that there must be a place identity in this structure" (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155).

In other words, the personal identity of each individual can be ascribed to a set of components (age, gender, race, occupation, social status, ethnic background, etc.), including that referred to the places which have an importance for the person itself (mainly because he/she has lived in certain places). More precisely, place-identity (of individuals) has been described as a:

> “pot-pourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings” (Proshansky, Fabian, Kaminoff, 1983, p. 60).

Therefore*, individual place identity* can be defined as that part of the identity of each person that is due to his/her experience of living in certain geographical spaces during the course of his/her existence. It has also been defined as “individuals’ strong emotional bonds to particular places or environments” (Peng, Strijker, Wu, 2020, p. 12), as well as “patrimoine identitaire géographique” of each person (Guérin-Pace, 2006). However, the *identity of place* is not directly connected to place attachment: a person may develop a strong attachment to a place, but that place may not be identifying to the person himself; just as a person, for various reasons, may have developed a strong personal identity with a place, but he/she does not experience a significant place attachment towards it (Hernández et al., 2007).

Detecting the *individual place identities* (in our case that referred to local residents, stakeholders and actors of the territory under examination) is functional to understand the intensity and type of bond that people create with places. In this regard, environmental psychology has developed many contributions, based on surveys, specific measures scales and quantitative data processing (see Lewicka, 2011). In geography, some typologies of sense of place experience have instead been proposed, related to the quality and contents of the possible bonds between people and places.

Relph (1976), for example, has elaborated seven types of experience of place, based on the notion of insideness and outsideness, where the extreme terms are represented by *existential insideness* (the sensation of deep immersion in a place) and *existential outsideness* (the sense of estrangement from a place). Similarly, Porteous (1985), based on the concepts of insideness/outsideness (feeling inside/outside) and home/away (feeling at home/elsewhere), elaborated four main types of bond with places: 1) *home-insideness*, the deepest level of rootedness; 2) *home-outsideness*, the sense of imprisonment in a place to which one belongs; 3) *away-insideness*, the desire to travel and to know new lands and cultures; 4) *away-outsideness*, the total level of eradication, as in the archetypes of the vagabond and the homeless.

However, few empirical researches have been carried out in geography on sense of place and related concepts, including that of Shamai (1991), which aimed at examining the sense of territorial belonging of the young Jews of Toronto; that of Raagmaa (2002) on three small local communities in central Estonia; that of Sebastien (2020) on place attachment in some territorial contexts of France and Tanzania. Further research would therefore be necessary, using in-depth interviews or questionnaires, and taking into account that information about the link between individuals and places is not easy to obtain, precisely because it refers to the intimate and personal sphere of human beings.

On a theoretical level, a strong bond with the place of residence should indicate a potential interest in participating in the initiatives aimed at its protection and enhancement. To support this hypothesis are the contributions of environmental psychology, which highlight that not only place attachment is functional to the satisfaction of important psychological needs (Scannel, Gifford, 2017), but also that both place attachment and people's place identities are predictors of pro-environmental behaviour (Devine-Wright, Clayton, 2010).

3.4. Shared social practices

After the criticisms addressed to *representational geography*, for giving excessive importance to words and visual texts, the *non-representational theory*, starting from Thrift (2007), stressed the need of coming back to the materiality of mundane social practices, mainly to those that express "other" ways of relating to the world and giving sense to places (Cadman, 2009). This new perspective shifted the geographers' interest from representation to performativity.

Social and cultural practices are fully part of a territorial identity construction process. Secular or religious celebrations, commemorations, festivals, cultural events, and meetings are the way through which the settled collectivity celebrates its territorial identity and makes it publicly known. In the complex and never-ending dialectic identity/difference, these events perform the double function of i) reinforcing local social and territorial bonds, and of ii) communicating to the "outside world" the local distinctive features.

In this case, the survey would be aimed at detecting the origin, type and content of the event, as well as the way and words used to publicise the event, the organisational procedures, the actors involved in its organisation, the level of participation, but most of all the residents' feelings and emotions associated to those events. Among the methods that can be used for this purpose, in-depth interviews, focus groups with privileged witnesses, and participatory tools are the most common, as well as the observation (participant or non-participant) during the events (Clifford et al., 2016).

Another element of investigation included in this area of study concerns the analysis of local voluntary associations, groups, and organisations. As expressions of the social capital (Cecchi, 2006), organised social groups can be considered a sign of the capacity for self-organisation of a territory, and of the propensity to configure themselves as collective actors capable of exercising a role in decision-making processes (Banini, 2018). Also in this case, it would be appropriate to evaluate the numerical consistency of voluntary associations, their motivations and objectives, their composition, their areas of intervention, their territorial context of action, their national and international relationship networks, the projects and the initiatives carried out.

4. An interpretative circle

The dimensions of territorial identity discussed up to now can be considered as parts of an integrated research-action framework. More precisely, this framework could be named "interpretative circle" since it never ends, according to both the notion of "unlimited semiosis" (Eco, 1990), derived from Charles Peirce and developed within the poststructuralist debate, and the idea of territorial identity as an open, participatory, and never-ending social construction process. Each dimension is supported by a basic question, the answer of which is functional, in turn, to the subsequent basic question (Figure 1).

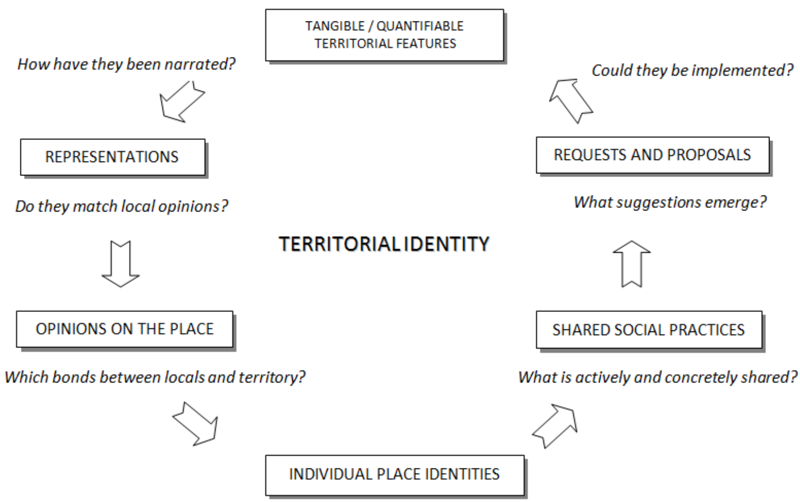

Fig. 1. Territorial identity construction process

The last step of the research process ("Requests and proposals") would be aimed at collecting ideas and suggestions regarding the sustainable management and enhancement of local resources, as well as the well-being of the settled community, in order to submit them to the competent authorities or to implement them through self-managed groups and initiatives. The eventual implementation of these proposals could correspond to a new configuration of the territory (a re-territorialization, in Claude Raffestin's words), from which to restart the territorial identity process of construction, with any related changes due to internal or external solicitations.

From an epistemological point of view, such an interpretative circle could be defined as "eclectic", since it deliberately uses and integrates different theoretical perspectives: from *realism*, aimed at examining the territory mainly in its material and quantifiable aspects, to *non-representational geography* centred on social activities and practices (Cadman, 2009; Waterton, 2019), from *representational geography* focused on the critical examination of written texts and images (Kobayashi, 2009; Scott, 2009) to *humanistic geography* (Seamon, 2018; Tuan, 1979), oriented to examine the subjective experiences of place. Each of those theoretical approaches was born in contrast to the previous ones, and therefore it might seem inappropriate to keep them together in a single framework. However, if territorial identity is a complex notion, consisting of multiple different dimensions, the path that leads to its construction can only be equally complex, putting in relationship the theoretical frameworks and methods that geography has developed in the course of its recent history.

Undoubtedly, this is a complex research path that could take a long time to be completed. However, some of the research steps can be done at the same time. In this sense, the actual research phases are three: 1) the detection of the tangible/quantifiable characteristics of the territory; 2) the representations of the territory under examination; 3) in-depth interviews or focus groups (opinions on the place, individual place identities, shared social practices; requests and proposals) and related results.

5. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, a methodology for the construction of territorial identity at the local scale was presented, that is, in reference to territories of limited spatial and demographic dimension. The proposal is to construct territorial identity using a series of criteria belonging to multiple survey dimensions: observable and measurable characteristics of the territory, representations, sense of belonging, and local practices. Each of these dimensions can be studied separately, and so has actually been done to date, looking at the extensive scientific literature on the subject. However, if the goal is to construct territorial identity in its complexity and towards contextualised and participatory projects, it would be appropriate to go through the entire process.

The premise of the social construction of territorial identity is the knowledge of the territory by the established communities and the awareness of its problems and potentialities, which has been defined as "place consciousness" (Becattini, 2015; Magnaghi, 2010). Informing the settled collectivities of the usefulness of building together a territorial identity, of the possibilities and potentialities of participatory processes and tools, involving them in research-action paths, would serve not only to recreate the sense of collective living but also to demonstrate that taking care of the territory is not just a responsibility of the decision-makers on duty.

The construction of the territorial identity would not be given once and for all, but constantly updated, reflecting the choices of the settled collectivities, being understood that, in the meantime, the traces of these choices remain impressed on the territory. As Raffestin (2003, p. 5) states:

> "Identity is built, deconstructed and rebuilt over time [...] There is no identity, but a succession of identities. These identities, even when they disintegrate, erode, and gradually cancel themselves, do not disappear with their load of people and things in the shipwreck of time, they leave material or immaterial traces".

Perhaps it is possible, then, to develop a methodology for constructing territorial identity, at least with reference to the local scale. However, only the practice and experience of this research path, in different local contexts, will validate or not these initial reflections, perhaps suggesting changes, additions or complete reworking.

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Chapter 2. The Bessarabian Nationalism and the Union with Greater Romania: A Realistic Approach to Identity

Valeria CHELARU[1]

1. Introduction

The emergence of "identity" into public discourse and social analysis took place in the United States in the second half of the 1950s and already in the mid-1970s the term started losing its conceptual grip. Scholars have pointed out that the abuse and misuse of "identity" loosen not only the language of social analysis of identity politics but also its substance (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000, p. 2). Moreover, the term serves both as a category of practice – used by ordinary actors in some common settings to distinguish themselves, their activities, or the way that they differ from the others – and a category of analysis. The usage of the term as a category of practice does not impede its employment as a category of analysis. The core problem is about the way that the term is used. As it has been argued, reification can help a great deal in this sense, as when explaining the processes and mechanisms of various "fictional identities", we can clarify a powerful reality (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000, p. 5).

In spite of the little agreement concerning the emerging importance of social identities (i.e. ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality, but not only), most specialists agree on the absence of a clear-cut definition of identity. Moreover, the concept of identity is

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rather defined by a high degree of volatility, as identities are fluid, plural, multiple, and intermingling with one another (Alcoff, 2003, p. 7). Most importantly, identity does not represent the result of a single individual for the fact that individuals can make their own identity, but not under conditions that they choose. The truth is that identities emerge, most of the times, under hard conditions of colonialism, racial and sexual subordination, and national conflicts; at the same time, they may reside in the specificity of group histories and structural position (Alcoff, 2003, p. 3).

Another fundamental feature of identity, as Liah Greenfeld (1992, apud Livezeanu, 1998, p. 166) has remarked, relies on the fact that it contains the self-perspective of the social individual. That is why it does, or it does not exist. Identity, in this case, equals perception. When a certain identity does not mean anything for a certain population, the latter simply does not possess that identity (Greenfeld, 1992, apud Livezeanu, 1998, p. 166). At the same time, in *Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness*, Hegel (1953, apud Alcoff, 2003, pp. 11-16) stressed the strong interdependence between the self of the individual and his socially recognised identity (Hegel, 1953, apud Alcoff, 2003, pp. 11-16). Along with him, thinkers and theoreticians having been pondering on identity politics concluded that identities are social objects intrinsically linked to a social space (Alcoff, 2003, p. 5).

The identity discussed in this chapter is closely linked to nationalism and state formation as it revolves around the events which had led to the unification of Bessarabia with its historical kin (Romania) in 1918. Consequently, a certain need for pinning down the term *identity*, in order to avoid its multiple meanings, might be required and this could be achieved, for example, by a simple dissociation between concepts such as *ethnic* or *national* identity. While the former could be understood as “self-identification of an individual with the ethnic group(s) he/she believes to belong to”, the latter could point out its political implication and the identification with a certain state.[2] However, considering the aim of this chapter, such effort would be not only gratuitous but would also exceed its scope. The current chapter does not represent an exhaustive work on the topic, but rather an attempt to honestly reassess the historical crucible in which Bessarabia united with Romania.

2. The theoretical approach to identity

The debates about Bessarabia's identity became particularly loud in the context of the dismemberment of the Soviet Union, after which the area between the Prut and the Dniester Rivers faced the challenge of becoming an independent state for the first time in its history. What is more, among its other Soviet "sisters", the new Republic of Moldova stood out due to the fact that it declared its independence in order to become part of another state (Romania), and not to fight for its own political future (Całus, 2016, p. 10). In a highly politicised atmosphere, identity started being reshaped through education and historiography in order to fit the main competing discourses on the topic – the pro-Russian or the pro-Romanian (Dumitru, 2014, p. 66).

In this chapter, I will try to avoid any historical or political bias related to political actors which had impacted the Bessarabian identity in the context of the Great Union with Romania. Likewise, the subject of identity will not contain here any theoretical debates on the issue and does not claim any direct input on the existing theories on identity politics. I rather intend to provide an accurate historical account of the events from which identity could resurface in new forms and could also present us a complex reality (Brubaker, Cooper, 2000, p. 5). Considering the "primordialist" assumption – typical of the twentieth-century political figures such as Woodrow Wilson, Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin, but not only –, according to which social identities were primordially given, the approach on

[2] These definitions of identity belong to Vladimir Kolossov, when dealing with identities in the post-Soviet space. See, Kolossov, 1999, pp. 71-72.

identity politics in this study brings out the "constructivist" view (Banini, Ilovan, 2021a, 2021b), which points out that:

> "identities are not inherited like skin colour [...] but constructed like an art object" (Laitin, 1998, p. 11).

Throughout their life, people are exposed to family, community, and national histories; their identities are further developed and nuanced within their wider societies due to other social categories, local, national, religious, and linguistic. The identities that they acquire during their life process can pressurise individuals at some point to choose the category that represents them the most and link them to a certain social group (Laitin, 1998, p. 11).

3. A few observations on historiography and methodology

As earlier mentioned in this article, the subject of Bessarabia's identity in the context of its unification with Romania in 1918 has become particularly politicised after the dissolution of the USSR and the independence of Moldova (read: Republic of Moldova). The scholars who started closely studying the history of this period have noticed a sizeable degree of partiality concerning particularly the events revolving around the reunion of Bessarabia with its historical lands in 1918.

Correspondingly, Ion Țurcanu – whose contribution in the field is remarkable due to a series of important and unrevealed documents of *Sfatul Țării* – has stressed that exaggerations concerning the unification of Bessarabia with Romania are typical of both the Romanian (or pro-Romanian Bessarabian leaders) and the anti-Romanian camps (Soviet or Russian, depending on the period). While the former tends to resort to an enthusiastic and even romantic depiction of the Bessarabian mood, the latter claim that the local population, regardless of its ethnicity, fiercely opposed the entrance of the Romanian troops into the region in January 1918 (Țurcanu, 2018, pp. 139-140).[3]

Both these outlooks are erroneous as they obscure a much more nuanced socio-political picture, and contrary to them, I try to bring out in this chapter an extended historical setting – divested of any political partiality – by stressing the challenge of modern politics, the overlapping national and regional identities, the centre-periphery relations, the new world of ethnic states which had triumphed in the centre of Europe to which both the Romanians and the Bessarabians, along with much of Europe, had to respond.

From this perspective, the current study can be ascribed to the group of research trying to counteract the politicisation of Bessarabia's history while appealing to more integrative and comparative approaches based on the general trends of the time (such as the emergence of nationalism), and the overall social realities. Briefly, the aim of this chapter is to reassess realistically the socio-political atmosphere in Bessarabia around the Great Union with Romania through the lens of the local identity, combined with the key events at that moment: the disintegration of the Russian Empire and the Great War. Its main contribution to the field can be primarily ascribed to the attempt to offer a more balanced perspective on the issue.

This chapter is mostly based on a relatively young and, to a certain extent, less orthodox sources (considering the still existing disagreements in the above-mentioned historiographies on the topic). The data I used to build my arguments and draw the conclusions for this study have been collected by a series of highly reputable scholars, specialised in topics related to the history of Bessarabia, and who have processed archival materials in Russian and Romanian (but not only). Among them are Ion Țurcanu, Svetlana Suveică, Andrei Cușco, Victor Taki, Petru Negură, Oleg Grom, Diana

[3] For the pro-Romanian romanticised approach, see Ardelean, 2019; Nistor, 2017, p. 305; Scurtu et al., 1994.

Dumitru, Iurie Colesnic, Alberto Basciani, and others to whom I apologise for not mentioning their names. When working on the current chapter, I relied on their valuable and fairly recent works in order to obtain a comparative picture of the historical events on the one hand; on the other hand, I tried to reconstitute the historical reality of the period, in order to offer an extended and new perspective on the topic here discussed.

The current work is structured in seven parts. In the first three parts, I present the theoretical approach on identity, the methodology, and the sources on which the arguments and conclusions of the article are based. In the fourth part, I argue that, since its incorporation into the Russian Empire, Bessarabia started developing a certain identity, different from the modern one, which later emerged in Moldova and Wallachia. Owing to its particularities, the new Russian *gubernia*[4] had not managed to generate its own nationalism but embraced it in a ready-made form when the time was ripe.

In the fifth part of this chapter, I reconsider the local moods in the region in the context of the First World War and the disintegration of the Russian Empire; I bring evidence for the fact that Bessarabia's interest in Romania had been motivated by pragmatical reasons than any patriotic leanings. The sixth part serves as an additional proof to the fact that the Romanian option had not been looked-for, but rather contingent on the general socio-political circumstances of the time. Faced with the insurmountable evidence of their irreversible incorporation into the new Romanian state, the local identities resurfaced in the form of their usual allegiance. The final conclusions will be drawn based on this core idea.

[4] *Gubernia* (Governorate in English) was the main administrative subdivision in the Russian Empire. The Bessarabian Gubernia was established in 1873; up until then it used to be an *oblast* (region) inside the empire.

4. A local identity and an imported nationalism

After 1812, when Bessarabia was annexed to the Russian Empire, the territory between the Prut and the Dniester undertook successive integrative and modernising processes. Its main cities – Chișinău,[5] Bălți and Tighina – were developed by and flourished due to the tsarist administrators. In order to populate the region, ample numbers of colonists from South-Eastern Europe, Central Europe, and Western Russian Empire had been invited to settle here throughout the 19th century.

For economic reasons, modernisation and progress were mainly the prerogative of cities and new settlements – much to the detriment of villages and local peasants (Negură, 2013, pp. 5-6). As the new transformation of Bessarabia was meant to serve primarily Russia's strategic and military interests in the area, the industrialisation and urbanisation generated new economic and social systems which greatly impacted the local identity.

On the eve of the First World War, 90% of Bessarabia's population were rural dwellers (Țâcu, 2020, pp. 119-120). The number of its inhabitants soared from 482,000 in 1817 to 2,686,000 in 1915 (Negură, 2013, p. 5). Out of the total number of 327,199 inhabitants in 1810, only 5% were not considered indigenous (Ciobanu, 1923, p. 20). As registered by the Russian census in 1897, the ethnic structure of the region included Ukrainians (19.7%), Jews (11.8%), Russians (8%), Bulgarians (5.3%), Germans (3.1%), Gagauz (2.9%), Gypsies (0.5%), Greeks (0.1%), Armenians (0.1%), and others (0.9%).

The autochthonous population accounted for 47.5% (Ernu, 2019, p. 7) and occupied marginal roles as members of the liberal professions (ethnic Moldovans represented 17% of the doctors, 18.3% among teachers, and only 11% among judges). Sparse as urban

[5] At the beginning of the 19th century, Chișinău was a meagre city with only 3,000 inhabitants. During the ten years which followed the transfer of the Russian administration from Iași and Bucharest, its population increased to 26,000. See Jewsbury, 2003, p. 150.

dwellers, they mainly lived on the outskirts, far from the cultural manifestations and the enlightened milieus (Basciani, 2018, p. 59). The overall picture was strikingly contrasting – while the rural population was passive, backward, and largely illiterate, the urban society (dominated by the Jews and Russians) was motley, dynamic, and highly philo-Russian.

On the one hand, the elites of Bessarabia – significant in numerical terms – were represented by the descendants of the local boyars. According to Russia's imperial policies during the first half of the 19th century, the newly gained province was administered with the help of the Moldovan boyars, who, by having settled in the region, acquired considerable rights and privileges. On the other hand, throughout the 19th century, the representatives of this nobility[6] became Russified and, correspondingly, many Moldovan families fully adopted the Russian identity (Grom, 2014b, p. 51). This was the case of the Krupenskii family, but not only, who along with many members of the local intelligentsia, such as Pavel Krușevan and Ieremia Cecan, advocated Bessarabia's assimilation into the Russian Empire (Grom, 2015a, pp. 87-104).

In addition, many members of the local nobility had strong family ties with their Russian counterparts.[7] The process of colonisation brought to the region new ethnic elites from different parts of the vast empire; as a result, in 1911, from the total of 498 noble families of Bessarabia, only 138 could claim local roots (Grom, 2014b, p. 51). Moreover, the first years of the indirect administration in the region had represented an unfortunate project for both the

[6] Petre Guran's interesting remark related to the autochthonous upper-class stresses that it represented a pre-national nobility who had identified itself socio-culturally, rather than ethnically; this could explain its easy integration into the Russian Empire. See Suveică in dialogue with Guran, 2014, p. 334.

[7] Vladimir Cristi, for example – the future deputy in Bessarabia's first parliament – had direct lineage to Trubetskoy family, one of the oldest noble families in the Russian Empire.

empire and the local population, considering the overall arbitrariness and carelessness.[8]

In 1828, Bessarabia was fully incorporated into the Russian empire not only structurally and politically, but also culturally: the local boyars were replaced by Russian officials and, by 1833, the Russian language became the language of administration. In line with the linguistic policies at the periphery, but not only, by 1870s, the local speech of Bessarabia had also been removed from education and church service. However, a concrete and purposeful language policy for Bessarabia had not existed – a fact corroborated by Russia's laxity concerning the alphabet of the Moldovan language. By the time when the experimental process regarding the scripts of the most imperial nationalities reached its peak between 1860 and 1870, the Moldovan language had been already out of the public sphere (Grom, 2014a, p. 11).

Considering the overall vague character of the local identity, combined with the existing stereotypes and the stance of many intellectuals, the belief that the Bessarabians belonged to the great family of the Russian state was quite common. Other features of the predominantly rural inhabitants, such as their traditionalism, conservatism, and the orthodoxy, in conjunction with their submissive nature, only fixed more deeply this idea of identity.

The orthodoxy represented an important linker between ethnicity and the imperial identity as it facilitated the access to the imperial cultural hierarchies. Considering that "Russianness" (*русскость*) – the core of the Russian nation – was rather relying on cultural affinities, it de-emphasised its ethnic dimension; their

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[8] For most boyars arrived in Bessarabia, the autonomy had been a form of swelling their incomes; while bribery and flagrant bureaucratic negligence were flourishing, the administration had been paralysed by inefficiency and corruption. Also, the most affluent families were exempt from taxes to the detriment of the peasantry, inhumanly burdened with heavy fees and public works. See Jewsbury, 2003, pp. 104-107.

common religion with Russia made the Moldovans, compared to other nations of the empire, a privileged people.

The entrance of the Moldovans in various Russian organisations (monarchist or nationalistic) was not only permitted, but also encouraged. For instance, while heavy restrictions were applied to the imperial nations of a different faith (the so-called *иноверцы* and *инородцы*), when they intended to join the Union of the Russian people – the far-right nationalist political party –, the process was regular for the Moldovans. Theoretically, every ethnic Moldovan had the opportunity to consider himself Russian, and speaking Russian seemed to be the only requirement in this sense (Grom, 2014b, pp. 53-54).

At the end of the 19^{th} century, Bessarabia was brimming with political effervescence as a consequence of the general crisis in the Russian Empire. Among the multiple forms of political ferment, national aspirations started being discussed by various students or members of the local intelligentsia. However, such manifestations occurred rather sparingly and were far from representing a general trend. Compared to the assertive nationalism in Transylvania, as Take Ionescu noticed, Bessarabia's nationalism and its Romanian population were non-existent (Basciani, 2018, pp. 58-59; Ghibu, 1992, p. 224; Ghibu, 1997, p. 460; Scurtu et al., 1994, p. 100).

Needless to say, alternative forms of local identities existed, and, in the preliminary phase of ethnic mobilisation, they were defined by a regional stance against the Romanian model. Young intellectuals, such as Alexei Mateevici and Gheorghe Stîrcea, while pleading for the preservation of the traditional values, opposed the Romanian national discourse, particularly for its modern undertones. However, they had never produced a clear-cut Moldovan nationalism, as they did not oppose later the pan-Romanian nationalistic project. This meek character of the region was typical of most social strata – along with the great majority of the passive peasantry,[9] the intellectuals had no assertiveness in building a local vision of their province inside the empire. Having lacked any theoretical underpinning, the Bessarabian nationalism was poor even compared to similar manifestations across the Russian Empire (Grom, 2015b, p. 180).

The adoption of the ready-made Romanian concepts, which developed throughout the 19th century, and their adjustment to local realities derived also from historical consequences. Illiteracy was a common phenomenon among the region's main population to which the promoters of nationalism mainly appealed. Since 1812, Bessarabia's historical kin – Wallachia and Moldova – underwent together a series of events and social processes which forged their common Romanian consciousness.

What is more, these historical events represented an important phase of modernisation which Bessarabia, already a backward region, missed out – the standardisation and the Latinisation of the Romanian language and alphabet, and the union of the two provinces into a Romanian state in 1859 (in 1866, Romania gained also its own German prince, later King Karol, and established its dynastic house in 1881).

As part of the Russian Empire, Bessarabia's alphabet and orthography remained faithful to its traditional purpose of serving the religious reading. For the local Bessarabians, the intricacies of the Romanian language through which the exponents of nationalism were addressing were way too complicated in both stylistic and linguistic terms. Correspondingly, choosing between the pragmatism

[9] The Bessarabian peasants had been always seen by the imperial authorities as the least subversive peoples of the Russian Empire; along with the local elites, the former did not manifest any particular resistance even during the process of Russification between 1860 and 1880. See Grom, 2014b; The same stereotypes concerning the local peculiarities and national/political identity are also reflected in the memoires of Bessarabia's governor, Sergey D. Urusov. See Urusov, 2019.

of being comprehensible to the masses and the symbolism typical of nationalism was a constant challenge to the local nationalists. Considering the scant public of Bessarabia, pragmatism was often chosen to the detriment of an original and indigenous nationalistic message (Grom, 2014a, p. 24).

The rural character of the region with its traditional society was a key factor in hindering progress and modernisation. In addition, the emergence of any vigorous intellectual class was impossible owing to the educational policies of the Russian Empire. All educated Bessarabians, having been formed in the milieus of the imperial universities, followed the path of the Russian intelligentsia in their relationships with the regime (Cușco, 2018, p. 48).

Moreover, the weakness of the local institutions and the absence of a social framework from which popular initiative could have sprung produced a late and feeble public sphere. In such circumstances, the inexistent local voices were replaced by the official discourse; they also reflected in the way that the masses responded to both the imperial and national strategies of political mobilisation. Traditional criteria of religious belonging and loyalty to the imperial dynasty could have had a greater impact on the mood of the peasantry than any stimuli based on ethnic solidarity with a hazy fatherland across the River Prut (Cușco, 2018, pp. 48-49).

By and large, Romanian political consciousness in the tsarist province was moulded outside the Bessarabian borders. Until the Russian revolution of 1905, the Romanians from Bessarabia were rather attracted by politics in general than by the Romanian issue; correspondingly, the populist ideas, which were permeating the Russian political life at that moment, were particularly appealing to them. This was partly due to the fact that most Bessarabians studied in the Russian universities – one of the most active and subversive in this sense was the University of Dorpat (Tartu), in present-day

Estonia, where socialist tendencies among the students were in full swing.[10]

Secondly, Bessarabia and its capital were strongly connected to the prosperous, yet alternative Russian cities such as Odessa and Kiev, where, starting with the second half of the 19th century, terrorist and nihilistic movements were taking their toll on Russia's political stability. Not to mention that the idea of a "national fairness" was strongly promoted by the populist groups; the members of the terrorist movement *Zemlya I volya*, for instance, paid particular attention to Russia's attitude towards its European nationalities. It is not surprising then that the populist and revolutionary ideas had seduced the future Bessarabia's national advocates such as Ion Pelivan, Petre Cazacu, Constantin Stere, and Zamfir Ralli-Arbore (Basciani, 2018, p. 60).

Since Russian became the language of the Bessarabian elites, the alphabet and the orthography were not the only hindrances for the nationalist activists. While working on the first publication in the Romanian language, *Basarabia* – printed in Cyrillic script though –, Theodor Inculeț noticed:

> "We wrote with difficulty [in Romanian] because we were thinking in Russian" (Grom, 2014a, p. 17).

For many local nationalists, Romanian was not their native tongue. This was the case of Alexis Nour, the editor of the liberal paper *Viața Basarabiei* (1903-1918), who learned Romanian as an adult and travelled to Romania for this purpose. Also, when Sergiu Cujbă arrived from Romania to help edit *Basarabia*, the language he spoke had nothing to do with the local one. Inculeț remarked again:

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[10] Ion Inculeț, Vasile Bârcă, Pantelimon Erhan, Zamfir Arbore-Ralli, Pantelimon Halippa, among many other Bessarabian political figures, had been the product of Russia's imperial universities.

> “Cujbă had to learn to write in Moldovan [language], otherwise the Moldovans would have not understood him” (Grom, 2014a, pp. 17-18).

5. The local moods and the Romanian option

Despite the fear of the imperial authorities concerning nationalism in all its manifestations,[11] identity politics in Bessarabia had not emerged prior to 1917, when it finally erupted in conjunction with the chaos and the violence of the war (Cușco, 2018, p. 43). Against the backdrop of the February Revolution in the Russian Empire, in 1917, the overall situation in Bessarabia is hard to imagine. Across Bessarabia, numerous alienated Russian soldiers from the Romanian front were looting and perpetrating various crimes against the civilians. While the southern and northern parts of the region were doomed to the Bolshevik pillage, across the rest of Bessarabia the households were burnt down to the despair of the devastated population (Nistor, 2017, pp. 303-304).

On the one hand, tens of thousands of Russian and Ukrainian soldiers were dispatched there in order to be used on the Romanian front; the anarchism among them was spreading at a devastating rate, having a tremendous influence upon the political atmosphere in the region. On the other hand, the multiple political parties, from which many were overtly supporting imperial Russia, ascertained that the dissolution of the tsarist behemoth would take a slower course if traditional ties were kept. Internal and external perils were equally threatening at that moment (Colesnic, 2016, p. 160).

As national and irredentist movements were proliferating across entire Russia, Ukraine’s national project was looming large on Bessarabia’s territorial integrity. In the context of the general turmoil, Ukraine’s attempt to incorporate Bessarabia within its borders was a

[11] For a relevant picture concerning Russia’s fear of Bessarabian “separatism” and irredentism, see Grom, 2015a.

real threat. The former's national assembly, the Rada, revendicated Hotin and Akkerman counties (with major Ruthenian population), and then laid claim on the entire province.[12] While Ukrainian expansionism was unanimously rejected by the existing parties of Bessarabia, the criteria for Bessarabia's political organisation were still under heated debate.

It is noteworthy that a conspicuous consequence of the February Revolution in the region was the increasing competition between the national and the social aspects inside the revolutionary transformations. Correspondingly, the general lines of the political debate between March 1917 and March 1918 derived from these two core issues. Three discernible camps were struggling to gain the popular support of Bessarabia's mainly peasant masses (during this period, there were also registered the first successful attempts to politicise, and to a lesser extent, to nationalise the Bessarabian peasantry (Cușco, Taki, Grom, 2012, p. 361). The local Bolsheviks and Social-Revolutionaries (SR) represented the "revolutionary" camp and were presenting the "agrarian problem" – pleading for the immediate distribution of the land to the local peasants –, as a core issue on their agenda.

Next in line followed the local "national activists", grouped around the journal *Cuvânt Moldovenesc* [Moldavian Word], and, later, members of the PNM (The National Moldavian Party). Represented by the so-called local (Pan Hallipa and Ion Pelivan) and the Petrograd (Pantelimon Erhan and Ion Inculeț) wings, the faction's discord regarding the future of Bessarabia prevented its unity. The third political group included the monarchists and the rightists, who,

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[12] Vladimir Cristi, appointed by the Provisional Government the commissar of Bessarabia, in 1917, has provided a vivid account of these astounding events. According to him, in July 1917, due to Ukraine's duplicitous policies, the Russian government included Bessarabia along with other nine provinces inside the Ukrainian boundaries. Only Bessarabia's threats to leave the front made Kerensky revise his decision. See Colesnic, 2016, pp. 159-163.

owing to the socio-political upheaval and the demotion of their social class, lacked the necessary strength in order to amass a supporting stratum (Cușco, 2018, p. 53).

The ethno-territorial principles promoted by the members of the PNM finally came to terms with the territorial criteria supported by the representatives of the other ethnic groups, which feared the transformation of multi-ethnic Bessarabia into a single nation-state. Regardless of the fact that the local process of nationalisation remained ambiguous up until the final events, which culminated with Bessarabia's incorporation within the Romanian Kingdom, the uncertain atmosphere of nationalism stressed the vulnerability of the numerous ethnic minorities; the resemblance of Bessarabia and Russia from an ethnographic perspective was evident, and so were the local leanings of the minority groups towards the ex-imperial centre.

However, the representativeness of the Bessarabian Parliament (*Sfatul Țării*) in July 1917 – whose legitimacy has been frequently contested by various dissenters of Bessarabia's union with Romania –, was fair and thoroughly prepared. Ion Țurcanu has noticed that the strength of the future legislature was its advantage of having been constituted on the largest democratic bases, despite difficult circumstances (Țurcanu, 2018, p. 24). As it follows, any party, institution, organisation, social or ethnic category which could have possibly asked to be deputised in *Sfatul Țării* had all the chances to accomplish their request. According to a British weekly report on the Romanian situation at the beginning of 1918, the Romanian *Sfatul Țării* included 150 delegates of various representative units of the region (Scurtu et al., 1994, p. 108; Țurcanu, 2018, p. 24). On the 2nd (15) of December 1917, the newly established parliament declared Bessarabia an independent republic within Russia (the Moldavian Democratic Republic).

It is important to note that in the context of the imperial disintegration, the idea of a single (Romanian) nation did not entirely appeal to the Bessarabian elites. Their multiple forms of identity had been nurtured by "distinct values and sentiments of belonging" inside the former imperial space (Suveică, 2014, p. 42). Except for a part of the nationalist camp in the region, the ethno-national arguments did not appeal to the great majority of the local elites, which owing to their education were more inclined to support a democratic and federal Russian project.

Moreover, the newly gained autonomy was standing out in deep contrast to the image of the Romanian Kingdom, perceived as undemocratic, culturally foreign, deeply corrupt, yet posing as a modern state. Briefly, while rejecting the ancient regime in its tsarist form, the Bessarabian elites were displaying a similar reluctance and aversion to the "national option" represented by Romania. As long as a faint hope for re-establishing a stable central government was still gleaming, the local Bessarabian leaders kept firmly in their imaginary Russian space (Cușco, 2018, p. 54).

At the end of 1917, under the threat of total anarchy, the Bessarabian political forces started reconsidering their options and turned for external help. All efforts to re-establish order in the region failed completely in January 1918, when the capital became fully controlled by the Bolshevik troops.[13] Despite the fact that the local politicians were still dismissing nationalism as a real option for the post-imperial context, confronted with the harsh geopolitical reality of the war, they chose the political survival of Bessarabia.

The negotiations with the authorities in Iași (the General Headquarters of the Romanian Front along with the diplomatic missions of the Allies) seemed now to be the best scenario not only

[13] Between May 1917 and May 1918, the so-called RumCerOd (The Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of the Romanian Front, the Black Sea Fleet and Odessa Region), a Bolshevik revolutionary organ, operated in Southern Ukraine. Its leaders, Cristian Rakovsky and Iona Iakir – the future important names in the Red Army – fiercely opposed the Romanian Army. Before the entrance of the latter in Bessarabia, the Bolsheviks took control of the region, dissolved *Sfatul Țării* and arrested many of its members.

for the Bessarabian elites, but also for the anti-Bolshevik Russian forces, and even for the German troops controlling the Eastern front. The Romanian position in the war was particularly interesting as its geopolitical interests had generated competing political factions, each having pressed for a certain military alliance, and, correspondingly, having expected certain territorial gains. Had the country joined the Entente (France, England, and Russia), it would have fought for Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina; otherwise, as an ally of the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary), it would have regained Bessarabia and enfeebled Russia, perceived as an old strategical enemy.

However, despite the fact that it had chosen the first alternative, owing to the new socio-political context, Romanian troops entered Bessarabia on the 13th (26) of January 1918 and this major military intervention changed again the faith of the region. The great majority of the local population welcomed the Romanian troops, but this was rather related to the hopes for order and stability than any kind of patriotic manifestation. Conversely, the peasantry (who dreamed of dispossessing the landlords to their own advantage) and many members of the minority groups overtly opposed the Romanians, while preparing to organise a proper military resistance (Basciani, 2018, pp. 104-105).

The military help sent to the Moldavian Democratic Republic was undoubtedly a concerted action based on the understanding that the Romanian troops were the solely available ones at that moment. In an appeal to general Scherbachev, the Commander-in-Chief of the Romanian front and the head of Russia's General Headquarters (*Stavka*), Pantelimon Erhan noted that *Stavka* could not provide any military assistance in order to secure the back of the front; the Romanian intervention, thus, was not only welcomed by Scherbachev and the allies, but also asked for (Ţurcanu, 2018, pp. 133-134).

This evidence proves that the entrance of the Romanian troops in Bessarabia did not happen independently as part of Romania's geostrategic plans. Of course, following the events, the Romanian government changed its attitude, yet it is important to bear in mind that up until the end of 1917, in conjunction with the disintegration of the Russian troops on the Romanian front, Romania had not been particularly interested in reacquiring the region. This change of heart took place when the Germans and the Austrians convinced Bucharest to accept Bessarabia for the loss of Dobrogea, which the former had promised to Bulgaria, their ally (Țurcanu, 2018, pp. 133-134).

Moreover, the government of the Moldavian Republic (*Council of the General Directors*) stressed the necessity of the Romanian troops to be subordinated to the local executive; the period of the Romanian militaries on the Bessarabian soil was about to be decided by the same political body. Prime minister Erhan pointed out the territorial integrity of the Moldavian Republic and the need for requesting official guarantees from both Ukraine and the allies concerning the status-quo of the young republic. As it follows, all the political actors involved in the Romanian intervention in Bessarabia – the leadership of the republic, *Stavka*, the representatives of the Allies, the chief of the French military mission to Romania (General Berthelot), and the Romanian government itself – agreed that the aiders would leave Bessarabia as soon as the order in the region was re-established. This order was an important task as it did not secure only the survival of the republic; first of all, it had to reinstate proper conditions for the Romanian front in order to rely on functional railroads and ample deposits of food, fodder, ammunition, and other paraphernalia valuable for the military operations.

However, with the new administration established in Bessarabia, the return to the previous status-quo became impossible. The regime defined as “military occupation” got the upper hand in all spheres of the local activity, in many cases having displayed gratuitous brutality. A shattering experience for the local population and the members of *Sfatul Țării* was the shooting of the deputies N. Grinfeld, V. Rudiev, V. Prahnițchi, I. Panțîri, P. Ciumacenko, and T. Cotoros. All members of the Moldavian legislative, they had opposed the help of the Romanian army; nonetheless, their killing without any trial, or even without announcing the Parliament, was even more appalling and irrational. The event particularly disappointed the Bessarabian nationalists, whose expectations for the Romanian patriotic empathy were replaced by the understanding of the futility of *Sfatul Țării* in the eyes of the Romanian leadership. Not only the Romanian military administration but also the Romanian government and its political classes perceived *Sfatul Țării* and the government as revolutionary bodies.

The peasantry was equally distrusted owing to its craving for the land on the one hand, and due to its protests against the abusive landlords – backed and "helped" by the Romanian army – on the other hand (Basciani, 2018, p. 108; Țurcanu, 2018, pp. 157-161). What is more, strong movements of the peasants in the countryside were voicing under Bolshevik slogans, and such manifestations were particularly frightening when the Bolshevik progress in Ukraine was taken into account. A probable Bolshevik attack on Bessarabia, in conjunction with the embittered peasantry, could have put an end to all local projects.

Up until the formal union of Romania and Bessarabia, the events had followed an unpredictable course. The hostilities between the Bolsheviks and the Romanian government seemed to be finally settled through the Averescu-Rakovski accord (9 March 1918). Accordingly, the Romanian troops had to leave Bessarabia during a two-month period, while the Russians obliged themselves to send over the Prut all Bessarabia's surplus of grain. Had the accord been enforced, all the Romanian influence in the region would have been lost. The earlier peace of Brest-Litovsk, signed between the Bolsheviks and Germany (3 March 1918) devalued the Averescu-Rakovski document. Finally, the preliminary of a separate peace between Romania and Germany was signed at Buftea (18 March) and recognised the former's rights over Bessarabia.

Once eliminated the Bolshevik menace and with the German consent, the union of Romania and Bessarabia became a political affair led by the Romanian government, which had requested from the local leaders only a formal approval. In their hope to keep the social reform at bay and to find more reliable allies in the Romanian old oligarchies, even the great majority of Bessarabia's landowners became supporters of the union.

Romania's guarantees concerning the local autonomy were rather vague, yet Alexandru Marghiloman (as prime minister of Romania) had to appease the Peasant faction and the great part of the minorities' groups in *Sfatul Țării*, which were still opposing the union. Correspondingly, *Sfatul Țării* was promised to be kept until the agrarian issue would be sorted out; the province was to be represented in the Romanian parliament, as well as in the government (by two Bessarabian representatives); local prefects were to be appointed by the government in accord with *Sfatul Țării,* and the laws concerning the administrative self-government would remain in place (Basciani, 2018, p. 110). With the help of the local nationalists in *Sfatul Țării*, such as Ion Buzdugan and Constantin Stere, the opposition was silenced, and the act of the union voted (27 March/9 April 1918) after only sixty-one days of local independence.

6. Reconsidering identities in light of the Paris Peace Conference

As many scholars noticed when having considered the general setting of the war and the disintegration of the Russian Empire, the presence of the Romanian military in Bessarabia produced a situation in which the majority members of *Sfatul Țării* decided to support the union with Bucharest in order to escape the Ukrainian expansionism, the Bolshevik threat, and the overall anarchy (Basciani, 2018; Cușco, 2018; Petrescu, 2002, p. 156; Țăranu 2018).

Likewise, the option of the union was backed by the affluent Bessarabian landowners (who already in January 1918 addressed a petition to King Ferdinand) with the aim to fortify their position against the turbulent requests of the peasantry. There was no secret for the Romanian leaders and their educated classes that up until 1917 Bessarabia had not been interested in the separation from the empire in order to reunite with its historical kin. The land had constituted the great concern of the peasants, and even their participation in the Great War had been determined by the devotion to the tsar than by their national liberties (Ghibu, 1997, pp. 460-461).

Undoubtedly, the interest in Romania increased among the Bessarabians when the former became Russia's ally in August 1916, yet this alliance blocked any attempts to spread nationalism across the imperial province and the back of the Romanian front. The loyalty of the Bessarabian elites and masses to the Russian state had been indisputable up until the spring of 1917 (Cușco, 2018, p. 53). As Andrei Cușco has remarked, owing to the war and the disintegration of the Russian Empire, this former western *gubernia* proved to be more preoccupied with its social upheaval – escalated due to the revolutionary situation – than by any national Romanian project. When they finally were allowed again to manifest their feelings, the educated elites of Bessarabia contradicted both the logic of the existing Romanian and Russian discourses: in its final act on the 27th of November 1918, *Sfatul Țării* voted against the conditions under which the act of the union was signed; a few days later Bessarabia became administratively the fully-fledged eastern province of the Greater Romania (Cușco, 2018, pp. 59-60).

In November 1918, when Romania was preparing to send representatives to the Paris Peace Conference,[14] Arthur Vătoianu arrived in Bessarabia in order to convince the local government to renounce the regional autonomy. As Vătoianu stressed in a private discussion with the head of the Peasant faction of *Sfatul Țării*, Vladimir V. Tsyganko, Romania needed a unified position to

[14] After the end of the First World War (1914-1918), the main leaders of the great powers, but not only, converged in Paris in order to redraw the borders of the three empires (Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman) which had disintegrated in the context of bursting nationalism. Despite the conference having been officially held between 1919 and 1920, the most important decisions about the post-war order were taken between January and July 1919. See MacMillan, 2019.

consolidate its interests in front of the decision-makers in Paris; at the same time, the autonomy would have kept Bessarabia isolated from the rest of Romania.

Despite his understanding that the Romanian option was the single solution in order to counteract the Bolshevik invasion of the region, Tsyganko held back from voting the union with Romania in April 1918. The abolition of the local autonomy half a year later convinced him even more of the transitoriness of the union and the common future of Bessarabia and democratic Russia (Suveică, 2014, p. 42). His position regarding the fate of the region had been consistent as he always claimed publicly that the local population identified with Russia and wished to be part of the Russian geographic, economic, and cultural space. Along with him, Ion Păscăluță was another member of *Sfatul Țării* who opposed the abolition of the local autonomy. Even though he voted Bessarabia's union with Romania, Păscăluță later joined "the anti-unionist movement" – the Odessa Committee for Saving Bessarabia –, which Alexandr N. Krupenskii founded in Odessa.[15]

According to Svetlana Suveică, the abolition of the autonomy brought together the members of the "old" and the "new" elite, despite their previous oppositions, to act concertedly against their common Romanian enemy. Despite their common perspective on Bessarabia's political future, their certainty about Bessarabia's belonging to the Russian space became unquestionable once the autonomy was eradicated (Suveică, 2014, p. 43).

Even during the Paris Peace Conference, Krupenskii, as the head of the Bessarabian "delegation", was fighting to co-opt adherents of the "Bessarabian cause". While having tried to counteract Romania's position, "the Bessarabians" at the event in Paris were also seeking European support for a Russo-Romanian

[15] The Odessa Committee for Saving Bessarabia was founded in February 1919 in order to fight against the Romanian annexation of Bessarabia. See Suveica, 2014.

mediation over Bessarabia (Suveică, 2014, p. 43). The "delegates" pointed out not only the Romanian "occupation" in April 1918, but also the cooperation of the Romanians with the Bolsheviks in order to destabilise the region. The threat of a bolshevised Bessarabia was increasingly frightening, considering the alienation of the minority groups, whose will to be part of a sovereign Russia had been suppressed. "The Bessarabians" in Paris, along with the Russian émigrés, were striving together to restore the Greater Russia, and return Bessarabia under its protection (Suveica, 2019, pp. 89-90).

Meanwhile, during the conference, the spread of Bolshevism throughout Europe made the Allies give in to Romania's exorbitant yet well placed territorial claims. Romania's prime minister Ion I.C. Brătianu – though having made a generally poor impression at the conference –, stressed his country's role in fencing off Bolshevik Russia. In an uncompromising approach to obtaining Banat, Brătianu even threatened the Allies to resign and leave Romania at the Bolshevik's mercy (MacMillan, 2019, p. 142). In addition, the idea of a *cordon sanitaire* against Russia, combined with that of a strong Romanian state as a counter-balance against Germany, was particularly attractive to France (MacMillan, 2019, p. 137).

Related to Bessarabia, Romania's prime minister explained at the conference (in February and July 1919) that after having accomplished the agrarian and electoral reforms, *Sfatul Țării* gave up its autonomy and proclaimed full union with Romania. The reality though had been way different and highly related to the victory of the Central Powers in the war. With its paths open to integrating Bukovina (15/28 November) and Transylvania (18 November/1 December) into the Romanian kingdom, and the forthcoming parliamentary elections, the Romanian government started reconsidering the conditions of the union with Bessarabia; not to mention that no one from the Romanian leadership had taken seriously the stipulations contained in the Declaration of *Sfatul Țării* (Țurcanu, 2018, p. 238).

Bessarabia's renouncement of autonomy would have served as a solid argument of the region's consent to its union with Romania, a card which Bucharest played at the conference in order to underline the legitimacy of the Great Union. Moreover, the very act of the abolition represented a decision taken in Bucharest, which *Sfatul Țării* had to formally ratify. The course of events had to follow the examples of Transylvania and Bukovina. Correspondingly, on the 27th of November 1918, despite complete quorum (only 48 out of the 160 members of *Sfatul Țării* were present), Pan Halippa initiated the process of voting; its outcome, though met with protests from some representatives of the minority groups, did not come as a surprise (Basciani, 2018, p. 129).

The circumstances in which Bessarabia was dispossessed of its autonomy are not totally clear. However, there is evidence that the Bessarabian deputies intended to carry out their activity based on the Declaration signed on the 9th of April (27th of March) 1918. This intention was expressed in the discourse of Nicolae Alexandri held in October 1918, and it was also included in the petition of 13 Bessarabian deputies, addressed to the Romanian government on the 20th of November 1918. Alexandri, the eldest member of *Sfatul Țării*, declared:

> "We, the ones that have got out of the tenacious paws of the Russians, we that have learned out of a bitter experience…, [we] cannot understand at all the psychology of those people who want to put the vessel remained intact in other hands, perhaps even more rapacious and more Asian. […] If we will not preserve the right to be our own masters, if the Romanian rules, which are being introduced with haste in our land, will be kept, then we will leap a hundred years backwards" (Țurcanu, 2018, p. 236).

In a common meeting held on the 14th of October 1918, the Peasant faction and the representatives of the ethnic minorities decided to request the plenum of *Sfatul Țării* on the 1st of November. Possibly, this move, combined with other "inconveniences" on the part of the minority groups, triggered on the 29th of October 1918 the arrest and expulsion of the deputies F. Stanevici, M. Starenki, A.

Osmolovski, K. Misirkov, I. Ponomariov, I. Krivorukov, and V. Kurdinovski over the Dniester River. When the vice president of *Sfatul Țării*, Pan Halippa, and his secretary, Boris Epure, reminded about the inviolability law of the deputy (adopted by *Sfatul Țării* on the 26th of January 1918), Vătoianu's subordinate, Manoilescu, replied that the measure had complied with "the request of the military authorities". Epure remarked later:

> "Our duty is to declare publicly with honesty … that, in general, now we do not have any power to do anything; [and] that in Bessarabia everything is done without us, and that the importance of Sfatul Țării has been literally reduced to zero, and that we decline our responsibility for everything happening" (Țurcanu, 2018, pp. 237-238).

Bessarabia's unconditioned renouncement of its own prerogatives meant not only the dissolution of *Sfatul Țării,* but also of its executive, the *Council of the General Directors*. Only few heads of the administrative offices retained their positions. Ion Pelivan, another member of *Sfatul Țării* noted in the context of the new changes that, while ethnic Moldovans had given up willingly the local autonomy, the representatives of other ethnic minorities had been reluctant. Nevertheless, many of Pelivan's colleagues in *Sfatul Țării* believed that not only the ethnic minorities but also the entire Bessarabian population were subject to a brutal process of colonisation, aimed only to cancel out at any cost the obvious differences between Bessarabia and the rest of the Romanian Kingdom.

All efforts proved the striving for a superficial and hasty assimilation and did not resemble a real integrative process. In its struggle to hurriedly carry out the annexation, derived probably from some considerations related to its reputation on the international level, Romania applied in Bessarabia the same policies and strategies as in the rest of its newly-gained territories. Emmanuel de Martonne, the French geographer and a sympathiser of Romania, pointed out this mistake:

> "after the union, Bessarabia is regarded as one of the provinces of the Greater Romania, like Transylvania. The situation of the two [provinces] is not the same, though. The indifferent peasant masses need to be won over in time. The overt or disguised hostility of the clergy and that of the old Russian functionaries needs to be surpassed. The intellectuals and the proprietors, Russified as well, will gradually change only with great efforts, on condition to remain safe, despite any political changes. The non-native elements, such as the Russians, the Bulgarians, and the Jews must be [slowly] prepared" (Basciani, 2018, p. 130).

The realistic account of the cumbersome and intricate process of Bessarabia's integration into the Greater Romania was further obscured by the romanticised vision – if not too patriotic and nationalistic – of most historians dealing with this subject. Despite its "short" belonging to the Russian Empire – two centuries compared to the previous period of common history with its Romanian kin –, these years of separation weighed more than any other period for both Bessarabia and Romania (Boia, 2018, p. 64).

On the one hand, they had brought tremendous transformations, on the other hand, they had impacted the already existing Bessarabia's local identity and widened the gap between the two historical lands. In the end, Bessarabia belonged to Romania only in the interwar years, when the relationship between the centre and the peripheries were far from being idyllic. Identity played without any doubt its role: it demonstrated once again that inasmuch as regular reference points – such as common language and common history – did not fit the handy approach on nationalism, "imagined communities"[16] as choices of individuals spoke for themselves and contradicted the inherited realities.

[16] "Imagined community" is a term coined by Benedict Anderson in relation to nationalism. In his book, Anderson (2016) argues that a nation represents a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group.

7. Conclusions

The Bessarabian identity as a topic of debate still represents a newcomer in the field of identity politics. As I stressed in this chapter, the issue provides food for thought first of all due to its politicisation – a reminiscence of the communist approach over the subject, as well as an indicator of the still existing tensions concerning the "Bessarabian issue". What I tried to do in this paper fits best the efforts to dismantle the first category of analysis, which to my mind affects the quality of research by serving rather political purposes than the accuracy of the historical events (not to mention its inflammatory undertones as an all-pervading consequence).

In addition, the "vagueness" of the identity dealt with in the current study was deliberately chosen. Namely, I avoided any sort of theoretical perspectives which could have tied me to pin down a clear-cut definition of identity among its multitude of forms. As earlier underscored, the Bessarabian identity here discussed was captured in a greater historical context and integrated into the general phenomena of the epoch to which not only the Bessarabians, but much of Europe had to respond. Corroborated by its previous "imperial" particularities and squeezed between the Russian disaster and the devastation of the Great War, the Bessarabian identity voiced its own reply to the events revolving around the Greater Union with Romania.

It would not be much of an exaggeration to boldly conclude that, first of all, even in the context of the imported Romanian nationalism, the Bessarabian identity remained local. Since its incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1812, due to the numerous integrative policies in order to serve the goals of the empire, the western *gubernia* acquired its own peculiar characteristics, distinct from those of its historical kin – Moldova and Wallachia.

The modern and reformative process on which the latter provinces embarked later made the differences and the border on River Prut even wider. Highly rural and illiterate, backward, submissive, conservative, and imbued with religion, the population between the Prut and the Dniester pinned their identity to the loyalty to the tsar and the Orthodoxy. When the Russian revolutions reached the peripheries of the empire, timing well with nationalism and the Great War, the population of Bessarabia had to choose the smallest disaster of all. Despite their imperial affiliations, the local elites resorted to the Romanian option as the only solution to saving the country from total anarchy.

Even in the menacing context of the war and the chaos of the Russian revolutions, the Bessarabian “national activists” were torn apart by the disputable future of the region. The lofty visions of nationalism in Bessarabia had been always subdued to most practical and urgent issues, such as the distribution of land and the certainty of the next day. Identity in all its essence was highly related to this reality, a fact for which the Romanians across the Prut would look down on the Bessarabians not only once.

Nevertheless, the fact remains an indisputable evidence, as well as a strong characteristic of the Bessarabian identity. (In conjunction with the following events, intrinsically linked with the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, the region’s identity will suffer a tremendous identity crisis (Chelaru, 2020, pp. 235-248). Despite the fact that this issue exceeds the scope of the current research, it can serve as corroboration for most arguments of this chapter).

Regardless of their consent to accept the Romanian military aid in order to reestablish lawful behaviour in the region, as well as to counteract the Bolshevik influence among the peasantry, the great majority of the Bessarabian elites never detracted from their Russian affiliations. A complete divorce from the milieu whose product they were was unimaginable even in the most turbulent period when the very existence of the Russian state was at risk. Seen rather as a temporary political compromise, the entrance of the Romanian troops in Bessarabia, followed by the actual union, started being contested particularly when Bucharest confirmed the local fears: the annihilation of the local rule with an iron fist. Considering Romania’s endeavour to consolidate its new state through a fervent campaign of administrative and cultural uniformity, the Bessarabian population's fear of being dispossessed of their identity was only natural.

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Chapter 3. How Do Populist Actors Mobilise Voters' Support? Populist Mobilisation Strategies and Their Appeal to Territorial Identities in the Republic of Moldova

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1. Introduction

National and geopolitical identity narratives have fuelled political mobilisation strategies in the Republic of Moldova (RM) since the early 19th century (Baar, Jakubek, 2017). To gain support for their political projects, different political actors have portrayed the inhabitants of today's RM as representing either the Moldovan or Romanian nation, by drawing from the Moldovenist or (pan-)Romanian national narrative (Ţîcu, 2016). Since the eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, these national narratives were increasingly combined with geopolitical narratives. To mobilise support for their political goals, political parties have depicted the Romanian or Moldovan nation in the RM as belonging to the European or Eurasian cultural, political, and geographical space (Cenuşa, 2017; Ţîcu, 2016).

Yet in the last few years, political mobilisation strategies in the RM have been increasingly marked by populist rhetoric. Several Moldovan political parties have sought to mobilise support by portraying the Moldovan society as divided into the majority of "the people" and the threatening minority of "the powerful elite". During the electoral campaigns for the Moldovan parliamentary elections in 2019, most political parties depicted, for instance, "the powerful, corrupt elite" as comprising either pro-Russian, pro-European, or

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pro-Romanian unionist political parties (Sprînceană, 2019). "The people", in turn, was portrayed as the Romanian nation, the Moldovan nation, or the country's citizens (Sprînceană, 2019).

This change in Moldovan political parties' mobilisation strategies seems to reflect the growing significance of populism worldwide since the beginning of the 21st century. To gain deeper insights into populism's apparent current appeal, scholars of populism and social mobilisation studies have increasingly focused on the mobilising features of contemporary populism (e.g. Aslanidis, 2017; Engler et al., 2019; Jansen, 2015). In line with these current scientific attempts, this chapter seeks to identify time- and place-specific as well as general key features of populist mobilisation strategies by focusing on populist political parties in the RM. As strategic appeals to identities are central to political mobilisation strategies (Aslanidis, 2017, pp. 310-311), the focus lies in particular on populist actors' construction of territorial identities for the mobilisation of support.

Territorial identities are defined here as multi-scalar social constructs that are based on a group's shared sense of "we-ness" because of specific real or imagined features of a territory and its inhabitants (Banini, 2017; Snow, 2001). Due to their varying functions, purposes, and the large number of actors involved in their construction at different scales, territorial identities can take different forms, such as regional, national, or civilisational identities (Banini, Ilovan, 2021b; Paasi, 2003). To shed light on the key features of contemporary populist mobilisation strategies, the chapter examines how, and which territorial identities Moldovan populist parties have constructed to mobilise voters for the three local and national elections in the country in 2019 and 2020. In addition, Moldovan parties' current populist mobilisation strategies are compared with their previous nationalist-geopolitical strategies to identify present advantages. Their comparison is grounded in the hypothesis that present Moldovan populist mobilisation strategies "recycle" previous national and geopolitical identity narratives by incorporating several of their key notions.

To confirm or refute this hypothesis, the chapter analyses populist mobilisation strategies of Moldovan political parties in the western part of the RM and excludes mobilisation strategies in the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (also referred to as Transnistria). It focuses on Moldovan political parties since parliamentary systems like the Moldovan parliamentary system incentivise (populist) mobilisation through political parties (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Moreover, in line with current calls to approach populism from the perspective of the social movement theory (Aslanidis, 2017), this chapter combines the ideational approach to populism with key assumptions of social movement theory. Accordingly, populism is understood as one possible political mobilisation strategy which political actors can employ to mobilise support for their time- and place-specific political goals and interests.

Grounded in this theoretical framework, the recent populist mobilisation strategies of the six most influential Moldovan political parties are examined. Their populist narratives are analysed with the help of their electoral programs and official party statements for the three local and national elections in 2019 and 2020. Based on the identified differences and similarities between the parties' previous nationalist-geopolitical and current populist mobilisation strategies, time- and place-specific and general key features of contemporary populist mobilisation strategies are identified. The research findings highlight that populist actors strategically construct different territorial identities by resorting especially to anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-establishment rhetoric, and the portrayal of "the threatening elite's" geographical proximity. In the RM, populist rhetoric also allows Moldovan political parties to appeal to territorial identities shared by most Moldovan voters in contrast to previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilization strategies. To compare territorial identities at the core of current and past Moldovan political mobilisation strategies, the development of political mobilising strategies in the country until 2019 is outlined first.

2. Political mobilisation strategies in the RM until 2019

According to the social movement theory, political mobilisation can be defined as the strategic organisation of political events such as demonstrations, electoral campaigns, or fund-raising drives that purposefully seek to alter or consolidate existing power relations (Lahusen, 1996, p. 1). Through such political events, incumbent governing political actors or their challengers (e.g. opposition parties, grassroots movements) seek to mobilise support for their political projects (Jansen, 2015, pp. 171-172). Central to their success in gaining support is the strategic appeal to collective identities (Aslanidis, 2017, pp. 310-311). By constructing and appealing to collective identities such as territorial identities, political actors can succeed in establishing affective bonds, moral commitment, and perceptions of (rational) interest alignment between individuals, groups of people, or organisations and their respective political projects (Aslanidis, 2017, pp. 310-311; Lahusen, 1996, pp. 10-12).

In the RM, political actors can, at least theoretically, construct and appeal to a broad range of territorial identities. Due to the country's frequently changing border demarcations and location in a geopolitically sensitive area in the past and at present, they can centre their mobilisation strategies on different regional, national, and geopolitical identity narratives.

According to Baar and Jakubek (2017, p. 58), especially national and geopolitical identity narratives have fuelled political mobilisation strategies in the RM since the Russian annexation of the eastern part of the Moldavian Principality in 1812. The Russian annexation in 1812 gave rise to early state- and nation-building projects of Russia/the Soviet Union and Romania on today's territory of the RM that were centred on the Moldovenist or (pan-)Romanian national narrative (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 54). After the country's independence in 1991, the (pan-)Romanian national identity narrative informed initial political mobilisation attempts of the Popular Front of Moldova (Baar, Jakubek, 2017, pp. 86-89). According to the (pan-)Romanian national narrative, the inhabitants of the RM are members of the Romanian nation (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 54). As the country is depicted as a second Romanian state, the goal of the Popular Front of Moldova and today's so-called unionist parties has been the reunification of the historical province of Bessarabia (today's RM) with Romania (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 51).

The (pan-)Romanian national narrative lost, however, in popularity after the end of the Transnistria War in 1992 (Ţîcu, 2016, pp. 54-55). Under the governing Communist Party (2001-2009), the Moldovenist national narrative gained in significance instead (Baar, Jakubek, 2017, p. 87). With its origins tracing back to the Moldavian Socialist Soviet Republic (1940-1991), the Moldovenist national narrative presents the country's inhabitants as the Moldovan nation with Moldovan cultural traits, language, and history that differ from those of the Romanian nation in the neighbouring country of Romania (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 55). In contrast to the (pan-)Romanian national narrative, the Moldovenist national narrative emphasises thus Moldovan statehood, sovereignty, and independence from Romania (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 55).

Especially since the EU's eastern enlargement in 2004, both the Moldovenist and (pan-)Romanian national narrative have been combined with geopolitical discourses for the mobilisation of support in the RM. Drawing from Russia's geopolitical discourse on Eurasia, officially left-wing parties such as the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova have emphasized the close historical and cultural ties of the Moldovan nation to Russia and the post-Soviet space (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 62). While seeking closer ties to Russia, they tend to interpret the increasing political, cultural, and economic influence of the EU and the country's potential European integration as weakening Moldovan sovereignty (Cenuşa, 2017; Ţîcu, 2016, p. 62). Unionist parties, in contrast, aim at reunifying the Romanian nation through the RM's and Romania's territorial reunification or the EU membership of both countries (Cenuşa, 2017). To justify this goal, unionist parties depict the RM as part of the European cultural, political, and geographical space similar to the portrayals of officially pro-European parties like the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Ţîcu, 2016, p. 62). Russia, in turn, is portrayed by unionist parties as the historical enemy of the Romanian nation and the main threat to the nation's current independence and sovereignty in the RM (Ţîcu, 2016, pp. 54-55).

Until recently, these combined national and geopolitical identity narratives have dominated the political mobilization strategies of most Moldovan political parties. As in other parts of the world, populist mobilisation strategies have, however, increasingly gained in significance. Prior to 2018-2019, only the Party of Communists was considered as having a populist streak (March, 2017, p. 227). The party presented itself as the defender of Moldovan Orthodox values to differentiate itself from allegedly corrupt oligarchic parties in power and their Western values (March, 2017, p. 227). Yet according to Sprînceană (2019), almost all parties resorted strongly to populist rhetoric during the electoral campaigns for the Moldovan parliamentary elections in 2019, including the winning Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and the NOW Platform DA and PAS. To examine the key features of their populist mobilisation strategies, this chapter combines the ideational approach to populism with the key assumptions of the social movement theory and the theoretical concept of territorial identities.

3. The populist appeal to territorial identities

From the perspective of the social movement theory, populism can be understood as one possible political mobilisation strategy which political actors can employ to mobilise support for their time- and place-specific political projects (Aslanidis, 2017; Jansen, 2015). To gain deeper insights into the mobilisation strategies of populist actors worldwide, several theoretical approaches to populism have been elaborated, such as the popular agency approach or the ideational approach. To identify populist mobilisation strategies in the RM and their employed territorial identities, the chapter relies on the ideational approach to populism as elaborated by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017).

The ideational approach defines populism as a:

> "*thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the* volonté générale *(general will) of the people*" (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6).

This definition of populism indicates six key features that allow to identify populist mobilisation strategies. At first, it emphasises that populist actors discursively divide a given society into two antagonistic groups: the assumed majority of "the people" and the minority of "the elite". Secondly, to distinguish between "the people" and "the elite", populist actors tend to refer to the general will of "the people" as the only source of legitimate political power. Drawing from Rousseau's (2000, pp. 66-67) distinction between the private interests of individuals (i.e. the will of all) and the common interests of the members of a legislative community (i.e. the general will), populist actors claim to promote and articulate the general will of "the people" (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6). The ruling political, economic, or cultural elite, in contrast, is depicted as exclusively focused on its private interests (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6).

With the help of selected norms and values, populist actors portray in addition "the people" as a "virtuous community" in contrast to "the corrupt elite" (Albertazzi, McDonnell, 2008, p. 6). The "virtuous community" of "the people" is, fourth, usually depicted as the rather powerless majority with shared social grievances that have been aggravated, ignored, or caused by the powerful minority of "the elite" (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 32-37). These real or imagined power relations, social grievances, and norms and values are explained by additional selected sociocultural, economic, political, or physical features of "the homogenous people" such as its shared history, language, or ethnicity (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 9-11).

Finally, for the selection of these additional features, social grievances, and norms and values, populist mobilisation strategies borrow notions from discourses and ideologies at different scales (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 5-10). As populism allows for the time- and place-specific combination of discourses and ideologies like nationalism, socialism, or neoliberalism, it represents, according to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, pp. 5-10), a "thin-centred ideology".

These six features of populism are not only key markers of populist mobilisation strategies. Far more, they serve populist actors for the construction of and appeal to different territorial identities of "the people". Territorial identities are defined here as collective identities that are grounded in a group's shared sense of "we-ness" because of real or imagined shared sociocultural, economic, political, or physical features of a territory and its inhabitants (Banini, 2017; Snow, 2001). From a constructionist point of view, they are constantly constructed through the assignment of meanings to objects of the material and immaterial world with the help of language (Banini, Ilovan, 2021a, pp. 5-6; Hall, 2013). Through the assignment of meanings, groups and individuals highlight the perceived homogeneity of the "own" group ("us") living within the geographical borders of a specific territory ("here") while differentiating it from other groups ("them") with perceived diverging features living outside of the territory ("there") (Paasi, 1996, pp. 11-15; Yuval-Davis, 2013).

In the case of populist mobilisation strategies, the homogeneity of "the people" is emphasised through the assumed common interests of its members (i.e. the general will), shared norms and values, joint social grievances and state of powerlessness, and shared sociocultural, economic, political, or physical features. By referring to the common interests of the members of the legislative community of a polity (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 6; Rousseau, 2000, pp. 66-67), populist actors also employ territorial references. A polity represents an institutionalised political entity that can take different territorial forms such as a province, (nation-)state, empire, or supranational and intergovernmental organisation. By claiming to represent the common interests of the majority of a polity, populist actors refer thus implicitly or explicitly to a specific territory that can either already exist or be envisioned to be realised and institutionalised in the near future such as a reunited RM and Romania.

Such territorial references serve for the distinction between "the elite" and "the people" as well. Populist actors like the Australian Country Liberal Party of the Northern Territory have, for instance, portrayed "the elite" as living outside the territory of "the people" (Smith, 2011, pp. 2-6). More commonly, populist actors depict the territory of a polity as inhabited simultaneously by "the people" and "the elite". In this case, populist actors often employ geographical references to depict "the elite" as exhibiting presumed "foreign" roots and features (e.g. ethnic traits), as acting on behalf of foreign powers, or privileging threatening "alien" groups (Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 14).

By distinguishing between the "elite" and "the people" and portraying "the people" as the homogenous group of inhabitants of a specific territory, populist actors construct, maintain, or contest territorial identities. Depending on their political goals, the selected polity, and depicted features of "the people", populist actors can appeal to various territorial identities that can range from urban to civic, national, or ethnic identities. By incorporating notions of various discourses and ideologies, populist actors can formulate these territorial identities in inclusive or exclusive terms and appeal to already existing or new territorial identities. To examine which territorial identities Moldovan populist parties construct for the mobilisation of voters, this chapter resorts to qualitative narrative research methods.

4. Political narratives of Moldovan populist parties

Riessman (2008) and Yuval-Davis (2013) maintain that narratives are central to both the construction of identities and political communication because they are inevitable sense-making tools for individuals, groups, organisations, or political entities. They allow to create, circulate, and attach meanings to objects of the material and immaterial world for the construction of social, cultural, and political realities (Hall, 2013; Riessman, 2008). As narratives allow for the construction of social, cultural, and political realities, political actors can organise and formulate their mobilising political events (e.g. electoral campaigns, fund-raising drives) around suitable narratives, as highlighted by the narrative approach to political communication (Lahusen, 1996, p. 290).

With the help of narratives, political actors can simplify complex situations and turn them into "good stories, gripping drama, believable (though not necessarily true)" (Bruner, 1986, p. 13) that appeal simultaneously to reason and emotions, intellect and imagination, as well as to facts and values (Fisher, 1984, pp. 14-15). Furthermore, narratives can succeed in mobilising support for political projects through the construction of identities. By creating, attaching, and circulating meanings, narratives allow to stipulate real or imagined sociocultural, economic, political, or physical traits of the "own" group of people to distinguish it from other groups (Hall, 2013; Snow, 2001). Hence, political actors can employ narratives about themselves, their political entity, or respective target group (e.g. voters) to construct, maintain, or contest identities for the mobilisation of support.

Narratives that are employed by political actors for the mobilisation of support can be defined as political narratives (Shenhav, 2006, pp. 245-248). In this research, political narratives serve for the analysis of territorial identities at the core of populist mobilisation strategies in the RM. The focus lies on political narratives with the help of which Moldovan parties have formulated their recent electoral campaigns for (1) the parliamentary elections in February 2019, (2) the local elections for the General Mayor in Chişinău in October-November 2019, and (3) the presidential elections in November 2020.[20]

In 2019-2020, in total 50 political parties were registered in the RM, out of which 20 were active (alegeri.md, 2021). This chapter analyses the political narratives of the six most successful parties which participated in the three local and national elections in 2019-2020 and gained at least 1% of votes: the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova (PSRM)),[21] the Dignity and Truth Platform Party (Partidul Platforma Demnitate și Adevăr (PPPDA)),[22] the Party of Action and Solidarity (Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate (PAS)),[3] the Şor Party (Partidul Politic „ȘOR" (PPŞ)), the Liberal Party (Partidul Liberal (PL)), and Our Party (Partidul Nostru (PN)).

The parties' political narratives for the three electoral campaigns are analysed based on their official electoral programs and statements that had been posted on their official homepages, social media channels, and those of affiliated organisations during the electoral campaigns. These official statements are gathered and

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[20] Since 2016, the country's President has been directly elected by Moldovan citizens.

[21] Article 112(2) of the Electoral Code states that "the term of office of the President of the Republic is incompatible with membership in a political party" (Timpul, 2020). Therefore, then President Dodon declared to run as an independent candidate in the presidential elections in 2020. As the PSRM, however, publicly declared its support for his candidacy and PSRM deputy Vlad Batrîncea was the leader of his initiative group, Dodon is considered here as the PSRM's unofficial candidate in 2020.

[22] The PPPDA and PAS represented the NOW Platform DA and PAS (ACUM) in 2019 and participated jointly in the parliamentary and local elections.

publicly available on the homepage of the non-governmental and politically unaffiliated Association for Participatory Democracy "ADEPT". However, ADEPT did not gather the candidates' official statements for the local elections in Chişinău in 2019. For these elections, the analysis comprises official statements that were published on the candidates' or their parties' official homepages in addition to their electoral programs. In the case of Andrei Năstase, the joint candidate of the PPPDA and PAS for the NOW Platform DA and PAS (ACUM Platforma DA şi PAS (ACUM)), official statements were derived from the online news platform TV8 MOLDOVA. Since ACUM's homepage had been dissolved after 2019, TV8 MOLDOVA was chosen due to its then close ties to ACUM.

To discern how and which territorial identities the six Moldovan parties were constructing during their electoral campaigns in 2019 and 2020, the content of their political narratives is analysed in two steps. At first, it is analysed whether the six parties have employed populist mobilisation strategies by focusing on the six key features of populism outlined in Section 3. After confirming the populist nature of their mobilisation strategies, the political narratives are examined regarding the specific territorial identity they were constructing. The territorial identities at the core of populist mobilisation strategies are identified based on the six features of populism, as well as on the territorial references incorporated into Moldovan parties' political narratives (see Section 3).

5. Analysis of findings

The analysis of Moldovan parties' political narratives reveals that all six parties have employed populist mobilisation strategies during the local and national elections in the RM in 2019 and 2020, albeit to different degrees. Central to all parties' populist mobilisation strategies were (1) the distinction between "the elite" and "the people" by referring to (2) the general will of "the people", (3) "the people's" shared social grievances, (4) norms and values, (5) additional sociocultural, economic, political, or physical features, and

(6) "the people's" assumed territory by using (7) notions of various discourses and ideologies. The following three tables (Tables 1, 2 and 3) illustrate how the six Moldovan parties have employed these populist elements for the construction of and appeal to different territorial identities during their electoral campaigns for the parliamentary elections, local elections for the General Mayor in Chişinău, and presidential elections in 2019 and 2020.

The three tables (Tables 1, 2 and 3) illustrate that all six Moldovan parties have employed the six identified populist elements in combination with territorial references for the construction of different territorial identities during their electoral campaigns in 2019 and 2020. To mobilise voters for the parliamentary and presidential elections, the parties appealed either to voters' Moldovan or Romanian national identity (PSRM, PL) or to their European or Moldovan civic identity (ACUM/PAS and PPPDA, PN, PPŞ).

For the local elections for the General Mayor in Chişinău, in turn, most parties constructed a Moldovan, European, or Romanian urban identity for the city's inhabitants. They created a specific image of the city including its inhabitants by emphasising selected natural, cultural, or historical components of Chişinău based on their associated meanings and memories (Ziyaee, 2018, p. 21). Only the PSRM constructed a European civic identity for the city's inhabitants. The party appealed to voters' feelings of belonging to the city community and highlighted their continuous contributions to the well-functioning community through voting or participation in municipal decision-making processes (Atkins, Hart, 2003, pp. 156-157).

At first glance, only the PL and the PSRM have thus clearly incorporated notions of the previous two dominant Moldovenist and (pan-)Romanian national identity narratives into their populist mobilisation strategies to appeal to voters' Moldovan or Romanian national identity for the national elections. Yet a closer look reveals that all parties continued employing previous geopolitical notions to mobilise voters for the elections at the national and local scale.

Table 1. Populist mobilisation strategies for the parliamentary elections in 2019

	PSRM[28]	PPŞ[29]	PN[30]	ACUM[31; 32]	PL[33]
Territorial identity	Moldovan civic/national identity	Moldovan civic identity	Moldovan civic identity	European-Moldovan civic identity	Romanian national identity
Who is "the people"?					
"The people"	The Moldovan people	Moldovan citizens	"The ordinary people"	Moldovan citizens	Romanian nation in Bessarabia
The general will	Source of legitimate political power	Serving citizens' interests	Source of legitimate political power	Serving citizens' well-being and good life	Serving citizens' interests
Norms and values	Orthodox religious and traditional moral values	- Honesty - Diligence	- Truthfulness - Rule of law	- European (democratic) values	European and Romanian national (democratic) values

[28] Sources: alegeri.md, 2019e; PSRM, 2019a

[29] Sources: alegeri.md, 2019d; PPŞ, 2019a

[30] Sources: alegeri.md, 2019c; PN, 2019a

[31] The PPPDA and PAS represented ACUM in 2019 and participated jointly in the elections.

[32] Sources: ACUM, 2019a; alegeri.md, 2019a

[33] Sources: alegeri.md, 2019b; PL, 2019a

Shared social grievances	- Liquidation of Moldovan statehood and identity - Close to a socio-political crisis	- Country on the brink of a socioeconomic collapse - Mass-emigration	- Country's deep political, moral, economic, spiritual crisis - A state captured by oligarchs	- Flagrant violation of human rights - A captured state on the brink of dictatorship	Country on the brink of a ferocious, medieval dictatorship and anew subordination to Russia
Additional joint features	- Orthodoxy - Moldovan language, history, culture - Inhabitants of a geopolitically neutral country	- Moldovan citizenship - Wonderful culture & traditions - Soviet experiences	- Poor and deprived majority - Inhabitants of a geopolitically neutral country	- European history and culture - Inhabitants of a future EU member state	- Romanian national history, language, culture - A European nation - Bessarabians
Who is "the elite"?					
"The elite"	- Pro-European and unionist parties (PDM, PL) - PPŞ - V. Plahotniuc - LGBTQ people	- Governing parties since 1991 - Pro-European and pro-Russian parties (PSRM, ACUM)	- Pro-European, pro-Russian parties (PDM, PSRM) - PPŞ - V. Plahotniuc	- Previous and currently governing parties - PSRM, PPŞ - President Dodon - V. Plahotniuc	- All non-European or non-unionist parties (PSRM) - PDM, PPŞ - President Dodon - V. Plahotniuc

Features	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Criminal - Non-traditional values	- Corrupt - Criminal - Rich - Dividing society geopolitically	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Criminal - Dividing society geopolitically	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Criminal - Supported by the Kremlin	- Oligarchic - Criminal - Dictatorial - Supported by the Kremlin
Territory & discursive references					
Territory of "the people"	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Bessarabia/Greater Romania
Discursive references	- Social conservatism - Moldovenist national narrative - Orthodoxy	Liberal socialism	Liberal socialism	- Democracy - Human rights discourse - European geopolitical discourse	- Democracy - (pan-)Romanian national narrative - European geopolitical discourse

Table 2. Populist mobilisation strategies for the local elections in Chişinău in 2019

	PSRM[34]	PPŞ[35]	PN[36]	ACUM[37; 38]	PL[39]
Territorial identity	(European) civic identity	(Moldovan) urban identity	Urban identity	(European) urban identity	European-Romanian urban identity
Who is "the people"?					
"The people"	City inhabitants	City inhabitants	City inhabitants	City inhabitants	City inhabitants
The general will	Serving inhabitants' interests	Serving inhabitants' well-being	Serving inhabitants' interests	Serving inhabitants' interests	Serving inhabitants' interests
Norms and values	Civic values (e.g. voting)	- Diligence - Honesty		Hospitality	Democratic values

34 Sources: Ceban, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2019f, 2019g; PSRM 2019b, 2019c.

35 Sources: PPŞ, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2019f, 2019g, 2019h.

36 Sources: Diacov, 2019; PN, 2019b; Usatîi, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d.

37 The PPPDA and PAS represented ACUM in 2019 and participated jointly in the elections.

38 Sources: ACUM, 2019b; Caragacean, 2019a, 2019b; Mihailovici, 2019.

39 Sources: PL, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e, 2019f, 2019g, 2019h, 2019i, 2019j.

Shared social grievances	Economic, social, and demographic crisis in the capital and country	- Disorder in the capital - Oligarchic regime of Igor Dodon in the city and country	Need to save the city from corruption, the mafia, and geopolitical power struggles	- City on the brink of a socioeconomic collapse - Real estate mafia in the city	- City Hall captured by Plahotniuc and Dodon - Russian mafia and propaganda
Additional joint features	- Inhabitants of the Moldovan capital - Multi-ethnic and multicultural - Future: Chişinău as the country's business card and a European metropolis	<u>Chişinău:</u> - Moldovan capital - A previously beautiful, hospitable, comfortable special city	<u>Chişinău:</u> - One of the most neglected urban localities - Future: pedestrian city with restored historical city centre	<u>Chişinău:</u> Future: modern European capital with "civilised" urban life (infrastructure, jobs, green spaces)	<u>Chişinău:</u> - Incomparable Romanian city - Future: European-Romanian urban development (living standards, infrastructure)
Who is "the elite"?					
"The elite"	- Current City Hall administration	- Current City Hall administration - Moldovan government (PSRM, ACUM)	- Current City Hall administration - PSRM - President Dodon	- Current City Hall administration - PSRM and its candidate Ion Ceban	- President Dodon - Moldovan government - V. Plahotniuc

	- Pro-European/ unionist parties (ACUM, PL) - V. Plahotniuc	- President Dodon	- V. Plahotniuc		
Features	- Corrupt - Incompetent - Dividing inhabitants geopolitically	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Supported by the Kremlin	- Corrupt - Employing power schemes of Vladimir Plahotniuc	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Incompetent	- Ties to Russian mafia - Liars - Thieves
Territory & discursive references					
Territory of "the people"	Municipality of Chişinău	Municipality of Chişinău	Municipality of Chişinău	Municipality of Chişinău	Municipality of Chişinău
Discursive references	Liberal socialism	Liberal socialism	Democracy	- Social liberalism - European geopolitical discourse	- Democracy - (Pan-)Romanian national narrative - European geopolitical discourse

Table 3. Populist mobilisation strategies for the presidential elections in 2020

	PSRM[40]	PPŞ[41]	PN[42]	PAS[43]	PPPDA[44]	PL[45]
Territorial identity	Moldovan national identity	Moldovan civic identity	Moldovan civic identity	Moldovan civic identity	Moldovan-European civic identity	Romanian national identity
Who is "the people"?						
"The people"	The Moldovan nation	Moldovan citizens	Moldovan citizens	Moldovan citizens	The Moldovan people/citizens	Romanian nation in Bessarabia
The general will	Source of legitimate political power	Serving citizens' and the country's interests	- Source of legitimate political power - A president of the people	Source of legitimate political power	Source of legitimate political power	Serving people's well-being

[40] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020c; Dodon, 2020.
[41] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020f; PPŞ, 2020.
[42] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020d; Usatîi, 2020.
[43] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020e; Sandu, 2020.
[44] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020a; PLATFORMA DA, 2020.
[45] Sources: alegeri.md, 2020b; Chirtoacă, 2020.

Norms and values	Orthodox moral and traditional values		- Down-to-earth attitude - Decency	- Fairness - Civic values (e.g. voting) - Honesty	- Democratic values - Christian morality - Tolerance	Romanian values
Shared social grievances	- COVID-19 pandemic - Economic crisis - Unprecedent-ed drought	- Country on the brink of dictatorship - COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis	- A captured state - Rampant corruption - Economic destruction	- Rampant corruption - Impoverish-ment - Health and economic crisis	- On the brink of dictatorship - COVID-19 pandemic - Economic crisis	- Stolen Romanian identity - Rampant corruption
Additional joint features	- Moldovan language, history, fatherland - Orthodox faith - Inhabitants of a geopolitically neutral country	- Unique historical and cultural places - Multiethni-city - Inhabitants of a geopolitically neutral country	Multilingual-ism and multi-ethnicity	- Inhabitants of a future EU member state - Multilingual-ism	- Part of the European cultural space - Inhabitants of a future EU member state	- Romanian language, culture - A European nation - Inhabitants of a future EU member state

Who is "the elite"?						
"The elite"	- All opposition parties - Unionist parties - V. Plahotniuc - LGBTQ people	All politicians in power	- Moldovan government - President Dodon - PSRM, PPŞ, PDM, Pro Moldova - V. Plahotniuc	- Current government - President Dodon - PSRM - V. Plahotniuc	- Politicians in power since 1991 - President Dodon - Regime in Tiraspol - V. Plahotniuc	President Dodon
Features	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Destroying Moldovan statehood - Non-traditional values	- Corrupt - Robbing the country - Incompetent - Dividing society geopolitically	- Corrupt - Heirs of Plahotniuc's oligarchic regime - Supported by the Kremlin	- Corrupt - Oligarchic Criminal - Undemocra-tic - Incompetent	- Corrupt - Oligarchic - Criminal - Supported by the Kremlin	- Corrupt - Anti-Romanian - Supported by the Kremlin
Territory & discursive references						
Territory of "the people"	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Moldovan state territory (incl. Transnistria)	Bessarabia/ Greater Romania

Discursive references	- Social conservatism - Religious conservatism - Moldovenist national narrative	Social democracy	Liberal socialism	- Democracy - Human rights discourse - European geopolitical discourse	- Democracy - Liberal socialism - European geopolitical discourse	- European geopolitical discourse - (pan-)Romanian national narrative

Such geopolitical references were, at first, used by most parties to emphasize the assumed homogeneity of “the people”. “The people” was portrayed as exhibiting shared European traits such as European values, culture, or history or as representing a European nation (ACUM, PL) and as the inhabitants of a future EU member state (ACUM, PAS, PL, PPPDA) or European metropolis (ACUM, PSRM). Alternatively, “the people” was depicted as the inhabitants of a geopolitically neutral country serving as a bridge between “the East” and “the West” (PN, PPŞ, PSRM) or as suffering under the continuous geopolitical power struggle (PN) and ongoing Russian propaganda in Chişinău (PL).

In addition, the PSRM drew on Russian geopolitical discourses by emphasising “the people’s” assumed joint (Eurasian) Orthodox religious and traditional moral values. Such geopolitical references also served for the portrayal of “the antagonist elite”. Accordingly, “the elite” was depicted as comprising either pro-European or anti-European political parties (PL, PPŞ, PSRM), as financially supported by Russia (ACUM, PAS, PL, PN, PPŞ), or as dividing society geopolitically for private interests (PN, PPŞ, PSRM).

Consequently, all six parties drew on previous political mobilisation strategies by incorporating notions of geopolitical and/or national identity narratives. In contrast to previous nationalist-geopolitical mobilisation strategies, most parties constructed and appealed, however, to new civic or urban identities (except for the PL and PSRM). For the construction of territorial identities, all parties’ mobilisation strategies also differed regarding the own group’s assumed “Other”. Previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies depicted the Romanian or Moldovan nation’s “Other” as living outside of the territory of the Romanian or Moldovan nation in the form of Russia or Romania, the Romanian nation, and the EU (see Section 2). During the electoral campaigns for the three elections in 2019 and 2020, however, all parties depicted the own group (i.e. the people) as facing within its own territory its “Other” in the form of the current political elite.

The officially democratic-socialist PSRM depicted so-called right-wing parties in the form of pro-European and unionist parties (e.g. ACUM/PAS and PPPDA, PDM, PL) as "the elite" threatening the country's statehood and identity:

> "During the nine years since the coming to power of the Euro-unionists, the country has reached the threshold of a large-scale crisis - political, economic, social. The attack on our statehood and identity takes place in all areas - from the educational system, where our children study the history of another state, to the Constitution, in which Euro-unionists intend to change the name of the state language from Moldovan to Romanian. With total negligence, and sometimes with the open support of the governing regime, unionist organizations are active in the country that aim to liquidate the Republic of Moldova" (PSRM, 2019a; *my translation*).

The PN and PPŞ, in turn, depicted parties with assumed pro-Russian (e.g. the PSRM) or pro-European geopolitical preferences (e.g. ACUM/PAS and PPPDA, PDM, PL) as the corrupt political elite (alegeri.md, 2019d, 2020d; PPŞ, 2019e). And the unionist PL and pro-European ACUM/PAS and PPPDA portrayed parties with assumed pro-Russian geopolitical orientation like the PSRM as "the corrupt political elite" within the country (alegeri.md, 2019a, 2020a, 2020b, 2020e; PL, 2019i). ACUM/PAS and PPPDA, as well as the PL, PN, and PSRM, also assigned the PPŞ to "the corrupt political elite". They made the party and especially its president, Ilan Şor, responsible for the "Theft of the Century" in 2017, when one billion dollars were stolen from the three largest Moldovan banks (alegeri.md, 2019a, 2019c, 2019e). Moreover, all parties depicted Vladimir Plahotniuc, until summer 2019 chairman of the Democratic Party of Moldova (Partidul Democrat din Moldova (PDM)), as one central figure of "the oligarchic elite":

> "For almost two years, our state has been ruled by a dictatorship unprecedented in the last 30 years – the dictatorship of the Democratic Party and its leader – Vladimir Plahotniuc, who through oligarchic methods, evading and defying democratic

> norms and practices, has established a bought parliamentary majority […]" (PL, 01.12.2018, as quoted in alegeri.md, 2019b; *my translation*).

In addition to Vladimir Plahotniuc and other political parties, the PSRM depicted LGBTQ people and their supporters as part of "the threatening elite" within the territory of "the people". During the parliamentary and presidential elections, the PSRM claimed that LGBTQ people and their supporters would threaten the assumed Orthodox and traditional moral key values of the Moldovan nation (alegeri.md, 2019e, 2020c; PSRM, 2019a).

Overall, the populist mobilisation strategies of the six Moldovan parties diverged from previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies regarding the portrayed "Other" and/or territorial identities they constructed to mobilise voters. The question is thus raised which advantages of populist mobilisation strategies might have induced Moldovan political parties to replace or alter their previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies.

6. Why the change towards populist mobilisation strategies?

There are at least four reasons that might have induced Moldovan political parties to replace or combine their previous mobilisation strategies with populist rhetoric. At first, Moldovan political parties might have been able to intensify their appeal to voters by portraying the own group of people as facing within its territory the presence of "the threatening political elite". As maintained by Taggart (2000), populist actors can particularly succeed in mobilising support through the portrayal of the collective ways, wisdom, and virtues of a community as threatened by "the elite". In the case of "the elite's" geographical proximity to "the people" such as both groups inhabiting the same territory, this threat can be perceived as highly pressing and thus generate support.

Second, populist mobilisation strategies represent a "catch-all political platform of grievances" (Aslanidis, 2017, p. 306). By referring to particular grievances, populist actors seek to convince the members of a given political community that those invested with political authority are deliberately ignoring or working against their needs (Aslanidis, 2017, pp. 306-307). In the RM, all six Moldovan parties depicted high levels of corruption in the country as the inhabitants' shared social grievance (see Table 1, Table 2, and Table 3). With this portrayal, the Moldovan parties were able to incorporate pressing worries of the Moldovan electorate into their populist mobilisation strategies, as highlighted by three studies conducted by the International Republican Institute in winter 2018/2019, summer 2019, and summer 2020.

According to these studies, Moldovan inhabitants were most worried about low incomes and pensions (38%/37%/23%), high unemployment rates (29%/27%/32%), and high levels of corruption (31%/20%/17%) (International Republican Institute, 2019a, 2019b, 2020). In reaction to these worries of their electorate, the six Moldovan parties made the political parties assigned to "the elite" responsible for the high level of corruption while presenting themselves as fighters against corruption and for a better life of the country's inhabitants. Similar to populist actors in other parts of the world like former US President Donald Trump, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili, or former Polish Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński, the Moldovan parties used anti-corruption rhetoric to justify their claims for immediate change in the country's political leadership and decisive political actions (Heinrich, 2017; March, 2017, p. 224).

Anti-corruption rhetoric has been a powerful mobilisation tool for populist and non-populist political actors alike in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe since the early 2000s (cf. Engler, 2016; Heinrich, 2017). In several countries, perceptions of corruption above the traditional corruption level have undermined public trust in the respective political actors in power and boosted the electoral support for political competitors (Engler, 2016). To deepen public mistrust in political actors in power, several populist and non-populist political competitors across the political spectrum have combined their anti-corruption rhetoric with anti-establishment rhetoric, similar to Moldovan populist parties (Engler, 2016; Engler et al., 2019). In the RM, the officially left-wing PSRM, centre-left PPŞ, centrist PPPDA, centre-right PAS, and right-wing PL and PN aimed at challenging the PDM-led government in the parliamentary elections in February 2019 (alegeri.md, 2021). Accordingly, they depicted the PDM and its chairman Vladimir Plahotniuc as central to the corrupt political system in the country which they sought to replace (see Table 1). For the parliamentary, local, and presidential elections, ACUM/PAS and PPPDA, PL, PN, and PPŞ also portrayed then-President Igor Dodon and the later governing PSRM as part of "the corrupt elite" (see also Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3):

> "We are starting the decisive round in the fight for the liberation of Moldova from the corrupt mafia regime, whose embodiment is Dodon" (Renato Usatîi, PN, as quoted in Usatîi, 2020; *my translation*).

By combining such anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric with geographical references, the Moldovan populist parties were, fourth, able to construct and appeal to the territorial identities of the majority of the Moldovan electorate. Previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies had divided the Moldovan electorate into the two large "pro-European" and "pro-Russian" camps and/or into national Romanians and national Moldovans.

In contrast to other post-communist Eastern European countries like Hungary or Poland, where nationalist mobilisation strategies have served for the construction of ethnic or national identities for the majority of inhabitants, previous nationalist-geopolitical mobilisation strategies in the RM had thus excluded larger parts of the Moldovan electorate. By constructing civic, urban, or Romanian/Moldovan national identities with the help of populist rhetoric, the six parties were able to appeal to most Moldovan voters. From the often multi-ethnic, multinational, and multilingual "people", they only set apart the respectively identified minority of "the corrupt elite".

7. Conclusions

Overall, populist mobilisation strategies have thus dominated the last three Moldovan local and national elections for which all six analysed Moldovan political parties resorted to populist rhetoric. Central to their populist mobilisation strategies were the construction of and appeal to already known or new territorial identities ranging from urban to civic and national identities.

In contrast to previously dominating nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies, the construction of these different territorial identities was not mainly grounded in geopolitical notions and/or the Moldovenist or Romanian national narrative. Rather, with the help of populist rhetoric, the six parties underlined the geographical proximity of "the corrupt political elite" within the territory of the Romanian nation, Moldovan nation, Moldovan citizens, or city inhabitants. This populist portrayal was combined with anti-corruption and anti-establishment rhetoric, similar to the mobilisation strategies of populist actors in other post-communist Eastern European countries.

By constructing different territorial identities with the help of anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-establishment rhetoric, and portrayals of "the elite's" geographical proximity, Moldovan political parties stressed the urgency of a political change in the country and/or in the city of Chişinău. To justify their claims for a change in the present political leadership, they presented themselves as fighters against rampant corruption, while making (other) political parties and politicians in power responsible for it. By referring to "the elite's" claimed proximity and threatening of "the people's" core values, achievements, and livelihoods, this change was portrayed as highly pressing.

The combination of anti-establishment rhetoric with anti-corruption rhetoric and notions of “the elite’s” geographical proximity also enabled Moldovan parties to construct and appeal to the territorial identities of the majority of the Moldovan electorate, in contrast to previous nationalist and geopolitical mobilisation strategies. In addition, it allowed Moldovan political parties to incorporate voters’ most urgent worries into their mobilisation strategies in the form of high levels of corruption, high unemployment rates, and low incomes and pensions.

As Moldovan populist mobilisation strategies have tailored anti-corruption rhetoric, anti-establishment rhetoric, and geographical portrayals to time- and place-specific worries and feelings of belonging of the majority of the Moldovan electorate, they highlight the malleability of populism in general. By incorporating notions of various discourses and ideologies, populist mobilisation strategies can be adjusted to the constantly changing socio-cultural, political, or economic circumstances in a given society. They thus exhibit a combination of time- and place-specific (e.g. specific members of “the elite”) and more common key features (e.g. anti-corruption rhetoric). This research suggests that such common and specific key features of populist mobilisation strategies can be identified and compared by focusing on their construction of territorial identities with the help of the ideational approach to populism, social movement theory, and qualitative narrative research methods.

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Chapter 4. Environmental Crisis and Climate Change: Social Mobilisation and Digital Activism Arisen from Territorial Identities

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1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is based on a collective hub of research, theoretical, empirical, and methodological debate. It aims of analysing diverse forms, experiences and practices of digital activism and socio-environmental movements, their relations with the territories and their heterogeneous claims and contestations in relation to politics and effects of the environmental crisis and climate change.

Social networks are shaping relations and socio-economic processes through the automatic production of space that generates new spatialities (Kitchin, Dodge, 2011) called cyberplaces (Meek, 2012). In fact, digital media are an ever-increasing presence in social movements: it must be considered that apps and social media are now integrated with geographic location data. This makes them a geographical fact also from a technical point of view (Elwood, Leszczynski, 2013). The understanding of different forms of activisms and civic commitment generated by these new spatial media (Crampton, 2009) and the impact produced on affected places are of crucial relevance. This is because geography information technologies and the data available to the public increasingly permeate social movements, bottom-up organisations, citizen groups and the local society. Consequently, the geographical aspects

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in this debate are both of a technical nature (about location-based technologies) and of a territorial nature (what relationships are established between new technologies, activists, and the place?).

As I recently wrote:

> "From softer forms of democracy to participation in real protest movements, the potential of these new forms of communication has re-shaped models and practices of mobilisation, self-representation and actions" (Albanese, 2021, p. 68).

Representations and narratives have widened the possibilities of democratic participation for minority groups and for social movements, activists and, in general, for local communities. Using participatory tools of territorial representation, digital activists have become interpreters and protagonists of the territorial socio-cultural value. Through the web, the new netizens renegotiate their needs, build narratives and mobilise new activists, by putting into question previous assumptions on which urban neoliberalism is based and using new tools to lay claim to their right to the city and spatial justice (Albanese, Graziano, 2020).

Starting from e-democracy conceptualization (Macintosh, 2004, p. 2), there have been a lot of e-participation phenomena with new forms of self-involvement essentially linked to the implementation of new technologies. Based upon Jessop, Brenner and Jones (2008), Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto (2008), Nicholls (2009), Kitchin (2011, Kitchin et al., 2017), this shows how contemporary spatiality emerges from several, different and complex spatialities, considering aspects such as scale, place, territory and network. These factors can no longer be ascribed to a single conceptual category, exclusively. On the contrary, they should be considered as a whole. This approach enables the understanding of space as a combination of different scales and functions, as well as of stakeholders and activities.

In order to bring together different spatial concepts and approaches within a spatial justice perspective, this chapter investigates the (assumed) alignment between spatial and network justice through the Italian *Sciopero Per il Clima*, the local version of the global climate strike promoted by the Fridays for the Future (FFF) movement, a collective action, rarely seen in a similar dimension. "Herein lies the difference with the customary practice adopted whenever such an alignment is deemed impossible to achieve, and the various levels are examined separately, one by one, relying on blurry and unclear principles" (Albanese, 2021, p. 68).

Methodologically, we can consider the examined hyper-place where the Italian strike took place as counter-place (Lussault, 2019). Counter-places are spaces where activist events become places. They will be studied using the visual and discourse analysis methodology. As a previous work of mine already experienced (Albanese, 2021), the aim of this chapter is to "read" the information freely from the semantic web. In particular, the contents expressed on the social web about digital activism will be "read". The study aims to detect the links among activists, real territory, and virtual territory, or between activists and cyberplaces (Meek, 2012, Wellman, 2001). The methodology relies on visual and discourse analysis. Sentiment analysis is an interesting investigation methodology since it provides information above all on the cultural, social, and ideological aspects of a community. Visual analysis clarifies the narratives about places, and is responsible for new forms, perceptions, and images.

2. Theoretical framework

This study is based on issues strictly related to the field of digital geographies and the field of climate change. Starting from the recent work of Jessica McLean (2020), who led the reflection on an amorphous context where, as she wrote, digital, environmental and social justice refigure the whole digital world, in this study, the space will be discussed in its more-than real version. Using the words of McLean:

> "the polar possibilities that shape digital geographies of generative and destructive processes in digital spaces- produce a

> space that could be understood as 'more than real'. Here, I am using the 'more than real' idea as a political strategy and to examine how digital technologies, humans and environments interact to produce changing digital geographies. As a political strategy, the more-than-real idea carries the potential to build on arguments on the materiality of the digital and the agency of non-human digital actors. […] The more-than-real concept inverts the diminishing that accompanies use of the terms 'virtual' and 'immaterial' as applied to digital spaces, moving away from tendencies to place these realms as inferior and subordinate to the 'real'. […] rather than reproducing binaries and resisting nondualistic thought, the more-than-real sits with ideas about how digital geographies are made, and are making us. The more-than-real concept does political, cultural, social and environmental work in assembling facets that cut across space/time compressions to produce polar activity-excesses of productive and destructive forces of social change with material entanglements (McLean, 2016). The more-than-real, then, is also building on new materialist thinking on the political ecology of things, including Jane Bennett's (2009) landmark 'Vibrant Matter' and conceptualisations of digital spaces as forming a sort of public sphere (Papacharissi, 2002)" (2020, pp. 2-3).

The more-than-real digital spaces lead us to consider another key element: the identities of digital territories and the different geographical forms of self-perceived citizenship at the local scale. Territorial identity is the binding element of citizenship, and citizenship plays a leading role in political digital activism.

This chapter is part of the debate on digital activism and places. The places, as already mentioned, are treated in their more-than-cyberplaces version and activism is reinterpreted under a geographical lens. The more-than-cyberplace dimension of territorial identities promotes democracy through contemporary digital activism, this being the reason we tend to observe how people take part in local and even global collective actions.

3. Digital activism and territorial identities in the more-than-cyberplace

In the last decade, the Internet seems to be the primary source for the involvement and implementation of social movements (Ackland, O'Neil, 2011). Social movements increasingly exploit the capabilities of widespread communication diffusion and the network structure of the Internet. These two characteristics are useful both *ex ante*, to identify the hottest social problems, and *ex post*, to bring about (or try to bring about) change. Digital social movements are based on the exchange of resources understood as practices and as symbolic intelligence that express themselves through hypertext links and online frame networks.

The spatiality of social movements (Miller, 2000; Sewell Jr., 2001) has adjourned social movements theories embedding spatiality into their conceptualisations. As Leitner, Sheppard and Sziarto wrote:

> "Concerted social action refers to forms of contestation in which individuals and groups organise and ally, with various degrees of formality, to push for social change that challenges hegemonic norms (whether the latter are located in the state, the market or civil society). In this view, such action entails developing strategies and practices that advance alternative imaginaries (cf. Leitner et al. 2007). Construction of such political alliances necessarily means engaging with and drawing in individuals and other organisations with distinct positionalities. These differences are negotiated, and contested, shaping the positionality of the group/organization itself vis-à-vis the hegemon" (2008, pp. 157-158).

It is evident that space matters to the mobilisation and territorial identities matter with it.

Here the term more-than-cyberplaces is used because it emphasises material interconnections between places and cyberspaces and, more importantly, this new concept takes from the more-than-real theory the idea of putting on the same level material and immaterial/digital geographies in a complementary, inter-connected, and non-dualistic sense.

Indeed, the geographies relating to the places of the protests are many: from the tangible to the virtual space, from the private to the public space, from the space of origin of the protesters to the one on which the dispute is expressed which, among other things, does not necessarily coincide with the space in which the protest takes place. For this series of reasons, the only concept capable of summarising the multiple shades of spatiality in digital activism is the more-than-cyberplace. In this way, attention is kept on the complexity of the interrelationships between the many spaces and the emphasis is placed on how these spaces shape each other, no longer being able to distinguish them except through explicit forcing.

All this inevitably reflects on the construction of the territorial identities of the activists. Taking a cue from the feminist intersectional theory, it is possible to argue that positionality takes over the localisation of a person, but to this, other elements are added that contribute to the definition of territorial identity. Among these elements, we must include the experience that a person has on/with places and certainly class and gender must also be considered. These latter elements do not exist in aseptic isolation and arise within and through the relationship with one another (Swar, Nagar 2003). In fact, as Diani and Bison (2004) write, the social networks used for the engagement of digital activists, build and reproduce dense informal networks in which multiple actors participate. The actors in these networks share a collective identity and the same social or political commitment. Consequently, the social ties among individuals, an expression of a collective identity, are important channels through which the resources necessary to pursue shared objectives are mobilised.

One of the criticisms of digital activism concerns the fact that it is a more symbolic than substantial movement, but this type of criticism is built starting from a dualistic vision of offline and online spaces conceived in a distinct way. As has been written, however, resorting to the concept of more-than-cyberplace means rejecting this anachronistic dualism. Furthermore, it is always useful to remember that online narratives, which are structured by images, videos, and short texts, are entrusted with a part of the symbolic control with which the territorialisation processes are structured.

As Hall (1996) taught us, territories are not only an expression of their own cultural heritage but also of their symbolic legacy and their representations: territories are discourses, they are supported by their own meanings. The places which we identify with, in which things can only happen if located and localised exactly at that point in space, are contained in the stories that are told about them, in the recollections, in the memories that are the key to the problem and hold the past and present together and, last but not least, in the images that are built on them. Places seen and heard, places as installations of the present to amplify one's own experience. This justifies the need to analyse the phenomenon with visual and discourse analysis.

Since the experience of places is intangible, as Gallarza, Saura and García (2002) write, images become more important than reality and images of places projected into the information space (or mediasphere), for the above reasons, will have a significant influence on images of places perceived (Govers, Go, 2009, p. 180) by actual or potential activists.

Jansson and Falkheimer (2006) speak, in this regard, of a new ephemeral geography of the symbolic flow created beyond the geopolitical space. We are talking about an ephemeral geography shaped by the advent of new technologies, whose cardinal points are symbolically connoted flows, relations and trans(actions) and whose meridians are spatial flows and relationships. The protest actions that originate with a virtual engagement, therefore, remain territorially rooted and, in their manifestation, communicate, act and are shared, in the matterless space of the web.

4. Climate change and digital activism: Global Climate Strike in Italy

Until recently, activism to promote social movements was identified exclusively with the circumscribed moments of marches and demonstrations of various kinds. For this reason, the recruitment and subsequent involvement, as well as the organisation of the participants, were very complex activities that involved efforts that could even last for years – except for the largest and best-supported movements. Currently, conversely, digital activism has simplified these aspects.

Thanks to social media, the merits of the networks within the movements have been increased and the relationships of spatial proximity able to shape the forms and functions of the protests that follow the online engagement phase have been expanded. Therefore, two coexisting and non-exclusive aspects characterise contemporary social movements: the physical proximity between activists, which is useful to cement the sense of belonging and anchor the actions to the territory; new technologies reconfigure the relationship between activism and urban spaces and influence the social geographies of the city.

As a demonstration of this, during the last ten years, we have witnessed, at different urban scales, the rediscovery of urban spaces as preferred spaces in which to negotiate the various identity and political interpellations. The rediscovery of squares to express dissent is part of an increasingly complex geopolitical framework, within which the square is no longer solely the real one, but also that of the more-than-cyberplace. In the more-than-cyberplace, taking to the streets is increasingly anticipated by practices of mobilisation and organisation on the web (Albanese, Graziano, 2020).

In this contemporary scenario, the strikes to point out the climate crisis have reached an important level of coordination throughout the world and, therefore, have been able to mobilise increasing amounts of people located in higher and higher numbers of places around the world. A predominant feature of this type of activism concerns civic engagement since the general objective of climate strikes is to put pressure on governments to tackle climate change in an active way, with lines of action, policies, and practices.

What is meant by civic engagement, is the many ways in which citizens participate in their societies with the aim of influencing communities, politics, and the economy (Fisher, Nasrin, 2020). There are various strategies for engaging more climate activists. Among these, the most effective concern direct and indirect involvement. Direct involvement means involving people to such an extent that they change the behaviours deemed incorrect (in the case of pollution, for example, we can mention the incitement not to pollute with chemical detergents, pesticides, etc.); indirect involvement, on the other hand, concerns the realisation of change through political and economic systems (this is what happens, for example, when strikes are organised).

To try to outline the genesis and improvement of civic engagement for the climate, two other particularly interesting data must be added: in democratic countries, citizens have the right to participate and freely express their opinions and this leads to a much higher participation in social causes than in other countries (DeBardeleben, Pammett, 2009). In addition, digital technologies facilitate the creation of supranational networks by fuelling various forms of activism that develop in different countries with different cultures. Social media, therefore, has a transformative effect on the organisation of collective action (Bennett, Segerberg, 2013; Earl, Kimport, 2011).

As Theocharis, Vitoratou and Sajuria (2017, p. 251) recall, all these elements converge around a common pivot which is the communicative nature of collective action to the extent that it involves efforts by people to cross borders by expressing or acting on an interest that is both public (therefore shared) and private or personal. In fact, climate activism is characterised by a peculiarity: the people involved are required to participate not only in collective activities (strikes, demonstrations) but also in daily activities by changing their consumption behaviours and their lifestyle habits.

With these assumptions, we want to pay attention to how the Global Climate Strike in Italy took place in 2019. The choice of this strike is due to the fact that, for a more precise semantic analysis, we want to avoid intersecting too many linguistic data related to the pandemic that inevitably characterised the most recent strike, that of 2020, and would make the results veer too much towards the contingency of the exceptional historical period we are experiencing.

On the 27th of September 2019, at least 150 nations joined the third global climate strike that followed the wave of the movement inspired by Greta Thunberg. In a single day, more than two million strikers joined the more than four million of the previous Friday and thus Climate Action Week was confirmed as the largest environmental demonstration ever organised. The mobilisation brought together about 7.6 million people on a global scale. In this scenario, Italy recorded the highest participation rates, with over one million demonstrators. Students of all ages, workers and retirees, adolescents and the elderly participated, with a social composition as varied as it was vast. 160 Italian squares in 150 cities were involved to ask for political action to save the planet.

The discourse and visual analysis in the next section will show how the territorial and collective identities from which such a social mobilisation originated, interacted and related.

5. Discourse analysis for Global Climate Strike in Italy

In order to deepen the understanding of the bonds and implications among digital activism, public space, territorial identities and territorial narratives, one of the two analysis methodologies proposed is discourse analysis on the web channels that are most used by certain groups and committees of activists representing different gradients of activism for climate change.

In particular, by carrying out a web search using the keywords “Global Climate Strike Italy”, thirty sources were found and managed, selected from a number of about two hundred sources in total. Those choices are the ones about which the topic has been most debated. The sources were selected by doing both a free search by keyword “Global AND Climate AND Strike AND Italy” on the online search engine, and by searching directly in the general-interest social networks: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The reason for choosing this type of sources lies in the need to listen to what is the dominant sentiment on the Net about our research topic because the more a topic is dominant on the Net, the more it will be able to act on perceptions and then memorial practices and then people’s mindset with respect to the territory in a spiral that starts from the web and takes shape in action.

This type of choice derives from taking into account the effects that the e-WOM (electronic word of mouth) phenomenon causes on human perceptions and actions. The digitisation of word of mouth has in fact created enormous changes in the world of communication: users freely express their opinion, and the resulting discussion often takes place simultaneously with the decision-making process of other users. In that case, monitoring these discussion spaces is extremely important. It has been observed, for example, how digital word of mouth generally has a great effect on the purchase of a product or service, when it comes from friends or peers, and when it refers to a negative rather than a positive experience (i.e. when discussing limitations or defects of a product rather than its strengths) (Duan, Gu, Whinston, 2008; Park, Lee, 2009). Digital word of mouth can also work implicitly: that is, sometimes it is enough to simply refer to a topic or show it in a photo, without any explicit recommendation about it, to influence people’s behaviour (Ceron, Curini, Iacus, 2014).

Therefore, after the survey of the sources carried out on the basis of the previous considerations, the App2check software was used to process the selected semantic data. The time range selected was from the 1st of January 2019 to the 31st of December 2019 to understand how the web talked about the Global Climate Strike in Italy during the year in which Italy was the nation with the highest number of people involved in those demonstrations compared to the rest of the world.

The tag cloud processed by the App2check software in Figure 1 provides a double indication: on the one hand, it detects the words that are more recurrent and are displayed as bigger, the more they are recurring; on the other hand, it uses information based on colour using red, yellow and green, indicating respectively a negative, neutral or positive sentiment. The more intense the colour, the more intensely the sentiment will be expressed.

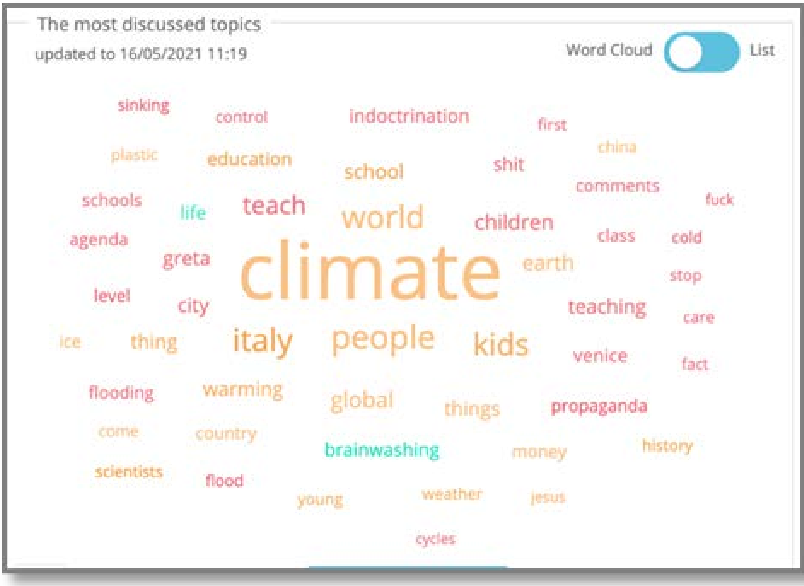

Fig. 1. The tag cloud for Global Climate Strike in Italy

Source: own results

This first image (Figure 1) is full of information and can be read like a photograph, but also as a hyperlink; in fact, when the software formulates this synthetic visualisation, it is possible to query every single word and find out all the comments where it was detected to better understand the sense of the sentiment it expresses. Therefore, for example, the word *climate*, which is obviously the most cited, is coloured yellow and expresses a neutral sentiment because, in reality, the comments in which it is present express very polarised judgments: they are extremely negative when dealing with the problem of climate change and very positive when instead they deal with the need to work to improve climate policies, the need to protest, the importance of global cohesion on this issue. This ensures that the average sentiment value that is expressed each time this word is mentioned is neutral. However, it is obvious that this is a non-significant median value. By analysing the words and phrases that contain them, in this specific case, we understand how sentiment provides little information.

Let us take the case of *global*, which is coloured yellow like *climate*. The software automatically determines the sentiment connected to the terms. We can see, for example, “Brainwashing” in green, maybe someone could expect to be red, however, the colour green has an explanation in the full text (available on demand by the software). The full text is about the brainwashing students received at school since the first class, to become more respectful and informed about the issue. The neutrality related to this word, once again, depends on the fact that either it is spoken of in totally negative terms (global responsibility, global capitalism and the like) or in totally positive terms (global climate strike, mainly). It is therefore a neutrality that expresses little, as it happens for many other words in the tag cloud. Rather, we are more interested in the words themselves. Other words, like *China, care, flood* and so on are irrelevant for the study also because of the full text of the comments which were red and analysed during this research.

There are two main themes around which the subjects on the topic we are analysing revolve; they are grouped around the theme of education and the social/youth theme. As for the theme of education, in fact, the following emerge: teach, schools, education, indoctrination, teaching, class, scientists, brainwashing; in relation to the social/youth theme, the following emerge: children, people, kids, young, Greta. What we can deduce from this is that, as Cavalli and de Lillo wrote as early as 1988, cognitive mobilisation, associated with a change in the value universe of young people, replaces the traditional forms of political mobilisation, activating innovative methods of involvement, which young people find hard to define as participation or interest in politics (Cavalli, de Lillo, 1988, p. 91).

A preferential narrative (Aroldi, Colombo, 2013) sees young people in a perspective of rift with respect to previous generations. These young people are characterised by an affinity for new digital technologies (Tapscott, 2009) and their activism is particularly visible from a transnational perspective. The capacity for transnational or global coordination at the level of political action is based on access to the internet and interactions on social media. The rhetoric of discontinuity has thus taken the form of a new digital world generation protagonist of a generational tear similar only to that produced by the Sixties generation (Aroldi, Colombo, 2013).

Young people, according to Norris (1999), are interpreters of the *critical citizen* syndrome and, consequently, develop reflective and critical attitudes towards hierarchy and authority (Inglehart, 1998). The plurality of social relationships, in contemporary times, thanks also to the massive use of social media, goes beyond the boundaries of the traditional political system. The opportunities for social and political expression offered by more-than-cyberplaces favour an expansion of participation in those unstructured (at least apparently so!) Web networks that manage to reach even those young people who, to quote Dalton (1998) and Henn (2002), are *sophisticated independents and engaged sceptics*.

It should be emphasised that one of the risks that forms of participation originating from digital engagement encounter is that of their fragmentation, due to the absence of a collective container that brings together a myriad of dispersed discourses in a container of meaning.

This dispersion is also evident from the temporality of the comments relating to the *de quo* event. As can be seen from Figure 2, the online conversations relating to the strike of 2019 were concentrated shortly before and shortly after and then completely ran out.

To understand how the discourses and the typically youthful social component are intertwined with the territory, we now associate visual analysis with discourse analysis.

To cite Banini and Ilovan (2021), the attention from reality to its representation is rooted in the post-structuralist turn where the term *representation*:

> "refers to the social mediation of the real world through uninterrupted processes of meaning, between referents (geographic object, facts and phenomena), their signifiers (narrations, discourses, images, etc.) and meanings (Vallega, 2003). [The visual turn and the materialist turn have] dismantled the limit between representation and performance, affirming the need to consider the space (and the world) as an inextricable intertwining of discourses and practices, narrations and embodied performances" (Banini, Ilovan, 2021, pp. 1-2)

With this interpretation, let us try to read the meaning of the images that appear from the same web search used for the analysis of the discourses. We insert the keyword Global Climate Strike into the most common search engine, Google, and try to investigate how the production, circulation and audiencing (Rose, 2016) of the most recurring images affect territorial identities.

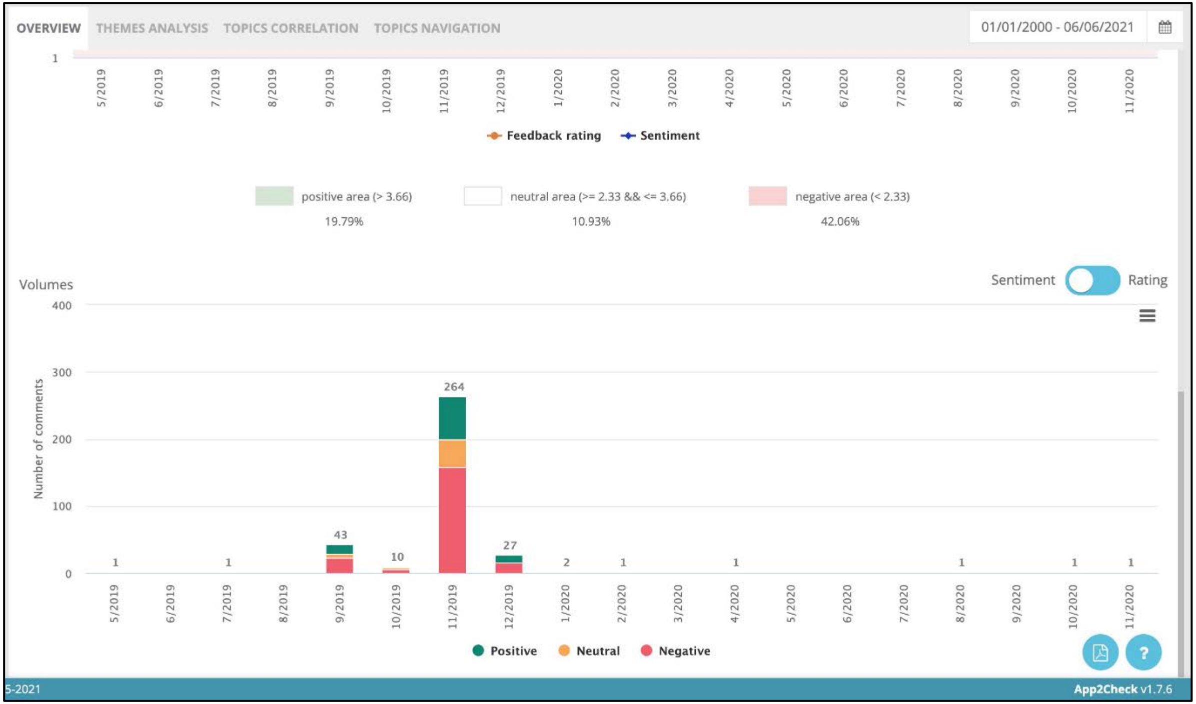

Fig. 2. The time range in which the comments are present

Source: own results

With the most recurring images which also reflect how the event took place from the north to the south of Italy, I have built a unique collage (Figure 3). The reference to the images is used to illustrate the analysis of the phenomenon in the urban space on the assumption that the images presented in the collage in Figure 3 have been heavily used to communicate the strike online and create engagement for the next strike. Social movements communicate online by drawing on the shared visual knowledge of the society in which they are rooted and the images we see above have also served this purpose. They were used to create new engagement by reinterpreting a pre-existing mindset through which to form a collective participant. The images, therefore, with their expressive power, have been an important means of mobilisation. This is understandable if we try to trace the symbolic process through which the mindset of dissent is built. It is generated starting from the presence of influential visual symbols; visual symbols are necessary for demonstrators to generate or reinforce the sharing of ideals and belonging to the collective subject (Doerr, Teune, 2012).

Fig. 3. Some places of the Global Climate Strike in Italy

Source: web photo processed by the author

Therefore, with the awareness that social movements use a narrative that is also composed of symbols capable of consolidating them and guaranteeing their continuity, we observe the recurring design elements and colours (Figure 4) used in climate strikes. The prevailing visual markers are green and blue, and images such as the Earth. In this sense, visual materials are repositories of shared activist identities and cultures capable of connecting different generationsof protesters and waves of contention (Doerr, Mattoni, Teune, 2013).

Fig. 4. The symbols of the Global Climate Strike

Source: web photo processed by the author

Moving on to the semiotic level of these images, the slogans are often written in English as well as in Italian. This is not strange because English is used as a global language in protests, and a symbol of traditional discursive rhetoric. Thus, while English involves the largest possible audience, the symbols that are part of the visual rhetorical set (Earth, flames) appeal to a specific audience. The union of symbols and language develop shared cultural values at a precise historical moment. Furthermore, the choice of using the Italian language also means that the object of the protest, in itself worldwide, also becomes a local issue. Thus, the use of the language (i.e. Italian), the physical proximity between activists, the sharing of space together with the sharing of an ideal, feeds the sense of territorial belonging, albeit ephemeral and ascribed to the moment of the protest itself and to its consequence.

This is possible because individuals operate their own ordering of space by proceeding along gradually diminishing degrees, through a decrease in density: they move from the large scale (in this case very large, it is the world wide web!) and, through the recognition of the ecological cause as inhabitants of the same world (large scale), they need ever smaller scales to determine territories that they interpret as belonging to.

Narratives are useful for recovering or redefining urban identities and walking, a bodily and discursive practice at the same time is useful for the same purpose. It is also through the action of walking that people operate an early form of sense of place, establishing vital, emotional, experiential, and social relationships with it that constitute a form of learning about the territory and, by walking, physically and psychologically limit the space. Therefore, walking through a specific place, sharing a common cause, speaking the same language, summarised in the same signs, exactly as in the case of protests, is a way of activating memorial practices that produce more or less temporary territorial identities. These atypical identities are modelled on experienced, practised, shared, observed realities, and the narrative on social media of these experiences is, in turn, able to establish that dependence between geographical reality and human reality, such that the perception of the same places through the digital images is absorbed with the same value as a declaration of reality.

6. Conclusions

In recent years, social movements have used the space of the Internet to create engagement, communicate, organise, and share the reasons for the protests. Digital communication is increasingly affecting socio-economic, cultural, and territorial systems. As Graziano (2017) wrote, urban spaces as a preferred stage of contestation must now be understood not only in their guise of physical squares in which to implement strategies but also by virtue of the symbolic implications that each practice of (re)appropriation of space drags with it (Graziano, 2017).

These re-appropriation practices are fortified by signs and collective action and therefore bring to light one of the qualities of the territory and in particular of public spaces: being a social construct, the result of the interaction of participants who use places in an articulated way, on the basis of shared and conflicting interests and identities (whether for or against the cause), in constant transformation.

The practices of digital activism are expressed in the more-than-cyberplaces and face the semiology of the landscape, of the cultures that breathe in it, of values, through the sharing of the common cause in digital media and in the territorial medium. The process of territorial identity, in its development, draws growth and reinforcement from the narrative moments that originate on the web during the engagement phase, in the territory during the event and finally back online to share and communicate the protest. This story can add to the configuration of identity and, nevertheless, contributes to its specific characterisation.

Every human being is a narratable self and every human being draws inspiration for the codification of his own experience from that narrative. The narrating subjects, in the role of photographers, painters or, in the case in question, in the role of protesters, contribute, more or less consciously, to the process of identity formation. With their actions and narratives, they provide data for the interpretation of the territories and the feelings that they evoke.

The narratives are, or would like to be, the evocative moment of shared experiences that refers to an emotional geography, a practice of experiences that help to trace a part of the individual life path and provide an image to an inner landscape. This is all the truer when the narrative focus shifts to the identities of the young activist protagonists of our case study. Striking is a preferred medium for narrating the value, cultural and political link between the human being involved and the places. It becomes a preferred source from which to extrapolate the key to grasping the territory, and produces scientific knowledge and legend, story, and project.

The analysis of the discourses and visual elements is useful precisely for this purpose: to try to understand the deep and complex meanings that signs and images transfer in social and political conflicts and to investigate the narrative rooted in the territory that they can generate. This narrative will be fertile humus for the consolidation of collective identities closely intertwined with the territory, understood in a two-fold sense: that for which they fight and that *in which* they fight.

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Chapter 5. Linking Second Home Tourism to Compatible Tourism Resources: A Sustainable Solution for Preserving Local Character in the Apuseni Nature Park

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1. Introduction

Second home development is an increasingly widespread phenomenon throughout the world. Even though different forms of seasonal dwellings used exclusively or partially for recreational purposes date back to very old times (cf. Ciupe, 2018; Hall, Müller, 2004; Tress, 2002), their contemporary version has prompted major changes especially in rural areas that have become one of the favourite destinations for many second home owners.

In recent decades, against the background of economic restructuring in rural areas, correlated with declining employment in agriculture, finding alternative development opportunities has become a priority. In light of this, the multifunctional rural development that involves the diversification process of social and economic activities and the introduction of "non-farming functions [...] to break the agricultural monostructure" (Kocur-Bera, 2017, p. 1092), respectively, constitute a trend in which second home development played an important role (Czarnecki, 2014, p. 154). Under these conditions, although second homes are generally seen

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as an option for rural development (Müller, Hall, Keen, 2004, p. 17), their contribution to the tourism industry has long been controversial. More specifically, in the literature, it has been discussed that second home development is more related to commodity trades, building, real estate and other sectors associated with housing maintenance, than the tourism industry, and therefore, second home owners' consumption patterns are much closer to those of permanent residents than to the ones of traditional tourists (Adamiak, 2014, p. 360; Flognfeldt, Tjørve, 2013, p. 343; Müller, 2002b, p. 346). On the contrary, in some tourist areas, second homes could be vitally important in maintaining the tourist infrastructure (Flognfeldt, Tjørve, 2013; Sonderegger, Bätzing, 2013, para. 6).

With this in mind, there has been much attention given to the role of leisure in the process of commodification in formerly agricultural depopulating rural areas. For instance, Cloke and Goodwin (1992) point out that a form of change in the rural environment consists in the:

> "commodification of rural idylls and rural lifestyles and in the use of the countryside as a new theatre of consumption (p. 328)."

Ilovan et al. (2016) reiterated this view, noting that landscape is:

> "a commodity when insiders adapt their actions and shape landscapes in order to answer outsiders' (i.e. tourists) expectations" (p. 24).

By the same token, second home development has often been linked to the concept of commodification in the literature. Müller, Hall and Keen (2004) point out that second home development contributes to the transformation of the countryside from "an arena for agricultural or forestry production" into places of consumption of "its amenities, its housing environments, and an imagined rural lifestyle" (p. 15). However, under those circumstances, there is no novelty regarding the conflicts and contestations that may occur between second home owners and the local population. Generally, the newcomers are often suspected of creating a:

> "'sanitized' socially-produced meaning of rural idyll" which "can be starkly different from the more realistic and pragmatic meanings which longer-term residence in rural areas can instil" (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992, p. 331).

Therefore, a multi-layered population with different socio-economic status and expectations may decisively influence the development trajectory of the rural environment. In this respect, in order to preserve tranquillity and to protect the imagined rural idyll, second home owners can counteract new general or large-scale tourism developments, some agricultural practices, or even new second home developments in the host area (cf. Jaakson, 1986; Marcouiller et al., 1996; Müller, Hall, Keen, 2004). However, the "museum-strategy" adopted in particular by second home owners (Müller, 2002a) could favour the preservation of the cultural and natural landscape, but at the same time, it can come in opposition to the real needs of the locals. Other researchers, however, have found more positive attitudes of second home owners towards new development but still with a "not-in-my-backyard" approach (Farstad, Rye, 2013).

With this in mind, there is a need to find a middle ground. In this vein, Müller, Hall and Keen (2004) suggest that:

> "planning should aim to maximise the positive impacts of second home tourism and allow services to adapt to the changes caused by it instead of trying to prevent development" (p. 25).

Moreover, some authors have drawn attention to the importance of awareness of changing tourism preferences, the real need for new strategic planning of second homes and the integration of their users into the local community (Czarnecki, Sireni, Dacko, 2020; Flognfeldt, Tjørve, 2013).

However, to the best of my knowledge, no spatial analysis of the relationship between the intensity of tourist services compatible with second home tourism has been addressed. Consequently, there are two primary aims of this study: to assess the characteristic and related tourist services and goods that are compatible with second home tourism in the studied area, and also that capitalises on the local character; to identify the spatial relationship of second homes with the intensity of tourist services mentioned above.

To achieve these objectives, the first section highlights the importance of local services and products in preserving the local character, raising awareness, and creating bonds between consumers and local population. This is followed, in a second subsection, by a more detailed examination of the literature regarding the goods and services preferred by second home owners. The third section briefly describes the case study, methodology and data used. The third section presents the findings of the research, focusing on the description of each category of services and their importance in relation to the spatial distribution of second homes. Finally, the conclusion gives a summary and critique of the findings.

The approach of this study represents a potential tool for rational management and spatial planning by bringing the tourist offer close to the second home users, and consequently, by fostering the sustainable integration in the general tourism system in protected areas.

2. Theoretical background

Tourist services and goods as a means of capitalising on the attractive resources also contributes to the promotion, and finally, to the understanding of the territorial identity of the area in question. The interaction between local community and second home owners is all the more important as the shaping of a place's identity has become, according to Banini and Ilovan (2021b, p. 4) "a result of dynamic, transcalar, material and unmaterial interconnections" that may contribute to the development of the local community's resilience (Banini and Ilovan, 2021a, p. 252).

2.1. Local products – a means of capitalizing on the local character

Recently, there is a growing interest among tourists in "products and services that protect the environment and respect local cultures" (Center for Responsible Travel, 2015, p. 2).

The importance of local goods and services is referred to in global action plans such as Agenda 21, which states that:

> "proper economic assessment of the creation and distribution of cultural goods – amateur or professional, craft or industrial, individual or collective – becomes [...] an attainment of the democratic right of peoples to affirm their identities in the relations between cultures" (United Cities and Local Governments [UCLG], 2008, para. 12).

However, according to Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001, article 8):

> "the specificity of cultural goods and services, as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods".

In the view of multifunctional rural development, Regulation No 1305/2013 (European Commission [EC], 2013) emphasises the importance of leisure and culture services in the sustainable development of rural areas (para. 18) and also encourages "projects that bring together agriculture and, rural tourism through the promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism."

Therefore, Renting et al. (2009) remind us that multifunctional agricultural activity, apart from the main functions, may facilitate the:

> "renewable natural resources management, landscape and biodiversity conservation and contribution to the socio-economic viability of rural areas" (p. S112).

In the same vein, activities or measures that contribute to the diversification of the local economy such as agritourism, care or educational farming, catering and accommodation services, biomass production, nature and landscape management, direct on-farm selling, quality food production (Kiss et al., 2020, p. 4; Marescotti, 2003, p. 5; Renting et al., 2009, p. 116) "helped to establish and deepen urban-rural relations" and therefore, foster awareness of rural environment and traditional practices (Kiss et al., 2020, p. 4).

For instance, typical products, which are promoted by the European Commission as a means of developing disadvantaged rural areas (i.e. European Commission [EC], 2021), are strictly tied to the identity of a given area in terms of material and immaterial resources (Blasi et al., 2015, p. 12; Kiss et al., 2020, p. 3; Marescotti, 2003, p. 2) and the experience of their consumption may signify the "sense of the local terroir" (Andersson, Mossberg, Therkelsen, 2017, p. 3).

Thus, new stakeholders that have changed the dynamics of the rural networks have emerged, and among the main actors are:

> "consumers of local products and services, new residents, environmentalists, new groups concerned in ethic consumption, tourists, enterprises and agencies involved in local development" (Marescotti, 2003, p. 5).

Therefore, the growth of new demand has proliferated new means of connection between farmers and customers, namely alternative food networks (AFNs) that come as a significant support for the development of rural areas. Thus, short supply chains are represented by: farm shops, farm-gate sales, local shops, basket/box delivery systems, mobile shops, roadside sales, pick your own box schemes, home deliveries mail order, special events, fairs, restaurants, tourist enterprises, dedicated retailers, etc. (European Network for Rural Development [ENRD], 2012, p. 3; Renting et al. 2003, p. 399). Such short chains favour the formation of genuine relationships between producer and consumer, and according to ENRD (2012):

> "the shorter the supply chain, the easier it is to maintain and communicate the authenticity and originality" (p. 5).

Thereby, as Garner (2016) claims, some producer-buyer exchanges are likely to transcend discrete transactions (related to money) and create communal exchanges or interpersonal relationships of empathy, informational support, advice, trust, etc. Moreover, Migliore et al. (2015) assert that some of the social effects of alternative food networks are the improvement of environmental sensitivity, food safety, and of the rural community (p. 897). On the other hand, according to the same authors, the environmental implications aspect could be:

> "preserving traditional food production, increasing environmental protection, protecting the rural landscape" (Migliore et al., 2015, p. 897).

Overall, whether it is food, or the wider spectrum of tourist goods and services, accessing local products improves awareness of the social, cultural and natural rural environment, and therefore plays an important role in sustainable development.

2.2. The second-home owners' consumption patterns

Invariably, tourist services accessed by the second home owners depend on the particularities of the host environment. Therefore, as Sievänen, Pouta and Neuvonen (2007, p. 228) claim:

> "one part of recreational home users sees the place as a vehicle for interesting activities, while others stress the cottage itself as a core interest."

Therefore, according to Hall and Müller (2004, p. 12), one of the main activities in which second home users are involved are of a local nature, such as creative work (e.g. property maintenance or refurbishment) or outdoor activities (berry or fruit picking, hiking). However, another category of seasonal owners chooses areas rich in tourist facilities on account of previous visits or based on recreational needs similar to those of traditional tourists (Adamiak, 2014, p. 367; Flognfeldt, Tjørve, 2013, p. 345).

Hoogendoorn, Visser and Marais (2009) identified that second home owners' consumption patterns in Rhodes villages (South Africa) focused on locally hired assistance (i.e. gardener and domestic worker), restaurants, art galleries and other leisure-related activities, services and goods (e.g. bird watching, hiking, fly fishing and the purchase of related equipment, guiding services, horse riding, mountain biking, 4x4 trails, snow-skiing, game drives) (pp. 80-81).

Adamiak (2014) found that in the rural region of Bory Tucholskie in Poland the most frequently used local services by second home owners were those provided by grocery shops, followed by other kinds of stores, and direct trade from local farmers. On the opposite side, the author noted the low frequency access to catering, construction, and renovation services (pp. 365 -366). Czarnecki, Sireni and Dacko (2020) analysed the consumption patterns of seasonal owners in Finland and found great interest in purchasing local food via the farmers' markets and shops such as vegetables, fruit, meat and honey, milk, eggs and cheese, cereals, bread, and homemade beer (pp. 6-7).

Likewise, Czarnecki (2014) found that second home owners in Poland tend to buy to the greatest extent food and everyday products and services from conventional stores and businesses, followed by agricultural produce directly from farmers and to the smallest proportion, informal services related to property maintenance. Oliveira, Roca and Roca (2015), in a study of the Oeste region (Portugal), noticed that a large part of second home users is not interested in local commerce and public services and facilities, but instead, restaurants and traditional retail stores (such as grocery stores and coffee shops) play an important role in their consumption patterns (p. 189). Furthermore, although in a lesser extent, seasonal owners access public services and facilities such as:

> "'events of local character, organized by associations or local authorities', visits to cultural centres, cinemas and theatres" (Oliveira, Roca, and Roca, 2015, p. 189).

Otherwise, according to the same authors, seasonal people are reluctant to tourist facilities in artificial environments (e.g. gyms and spas) (Oliveira, Roca, and Roca, 2015, p. 189).

In light of those considerations, however, the spatial distribution of seasonal consumption patterns is not uniform and depends on a number of factors. Czarnecki, Sirenia and Dacko (2020) proved that the availability and accessibility of local food plays a decisive role in shaping second-home owners' consumption patterns. Consequently, according to these authors, sparsely populated and marginal rural localities generally have a reduced availability of local food. Other factors mentioned by the authors were: high accessibility to grocery stores that can negatively influence spending on local food; weak social bonds with local community members diminishes local food purchases; second home's equipment standard and facilities.

One of the main issues regarding second-home owners' products consumption is their tendency of:

> "filling up their car boots with provisions before they arrive in the host area, thus reducing the potential spend in local shops" (Bevan, Rhodes, 2005, p. 56).

In this regard, Adamiak (2014) points out that these issues can be caused by the great distance between second homes and village service centre and retail outlets, respectively, and by the more competitively priced, higher quality and wider range of products of urban markets (p. 155).

Moreover, another factor that may influence second home owners' consumption patterns in the host area is the distance between main dwelling and second home. As such, a short distance implies frequent visits and great possibilities for purchasing products and services from the usual environment. On the other hand, a long distance presumes less frequent visits, limited transportation capacities and consequently, higher local purchases (Czarnecki, 2014, p. 155). Last but not least, additional factors mentioned in the literature are family connection with the place, way-of-life and lifestyle framework, the size of the locality of origin, and the degree of urbanization of the place where the second home is located (Czarnecki, 2014, p. 156; Sievänen, Pouta, Neuvonen, 2007).

3. Methodology

Apuseni Natural Park is a protected area with a surface of 75,784 ha (according to Apuseni Nature Park Administration, 2016), covering parts of three counties: Cluj, Alba and Bihor. One of the main goals of protected area management is the conservation of the cultural landscape resulting from human environmental interactions over time (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2013, p. 20). The well-deserved status of protected area is supported by the clearly defined identity of local communities through cultural and historical heritage, complemented by plenty of natural tourist resources (see Ilovan, Boțan, 2014).

However, against the background of economic restructuring and depopulation in recent decades, tourism has remained the main source of income in this area. Therefore, the local population has shown a growing interest in the tourism sector either as a main or additional means of income. Currently, according to the Ministry for Economy, Energy and Business Environment of Romania (2020 update of July 17 and 19) there are a total of 179 classified accommodation units and 38 public catering units, three resorts of local interest, two holiday villages (one of which consists mainly of second homes) and 298 informal tourist accommodation units (Ciupe, 2020).

In addition, according to field research, the number of second homes is almost double compared to the traditional or alternative accommodation units. Still, local authorities deal with second home development only in terms of urban regulation, wildlife and protected area management and are missing from general tourism planning and development strategies.

Therefore, this study is designed to address these gaps regarding the strategic and integrated planning of second home tourism by identifying hot spots of sustainable tourism services and goods that, in turn, are likely to be capitalised for second home tourism (see Figure 1). To achieve this goal, an amended and tailored suitability method was applied to the characteristic and related tourist goods and services, formal and informal, public, and private.

Fig. 1. The logical flow of study approach

The suitability analyses via GIS environment are common in the geographical assessment of urban planning and land utilisation, agriculture, epidemiology, hydrology, geology, etc. (cf. Madurika, Hemakumara, 2017; Roy et al., 2020; Sahdev, Kumar, 2020a, 2020b; Thapa et al., 2020), but at the same time, has become popular in tourism studies designed to identify favourable sites for winter sports resort (see Dezsi et al., 2015), ecotourism (see Bunruamkaew, Murayama, 2011), or other kinds of tourism development (see Pareta, 2013), or suitable locations for rural second homes (Jeong et al., 2014). However, this study addresses the intensity of local tourist services that, to the best of the author's knowledge, have not been the subject of sustainability analyses so far.

For the purpose of this study, the tourist service classification is in accordance with the World Tourism Organization recommendations (UNWTO, 2010, annex 4) and statistical classification of products by activity (CPA) (European Commission, 2014), but with amendments and adaptations to the particularities of the studied area. Thus, four major criteria and forty sub-criteria were considered: the food and beverage serving services criterion (with eight sub-criteria), the rental services criterion (with three sub-criteria); the recreational, culture and sporting and other related services criterion (twenty-four sub-criteria) and the retail trade services criterion (five sub-criteria).

The last component also includes the density of locals' constructions on the background of those mentioned by Czarnecki (2014) regarding the "informal" channels of distribution through which the locals sell products directly from the household, and therefore, are difficult to identify separately. Also, due to the local specificity of tourist services some criteria have been unified (i.e. road passenger transport services, water passenger transport services, and cultural services, sports and recreational services) resulting in the 'recreational, culture and sporting and related services' criterion. Moreover, the accommodation services for visitors criterion was excluded from the analysis for obvious reasons - the second homes themselves constitute a form of tourist accommodation.

Following this, after digitising the data in point format using GIS software, Kernel Density was carried out resulting forty distinct raster layers that represent each type of tourist services considered (see Table 4). The Kernel Density technique using the GIS environment has become popular in tourism studies recently. For example, a number of studies employ Kernel Density combined with other methods to identify regional tourism axes based on the spatial distribution of tourism attractions (Pazhuhan, 2020), to find suitable regions for the development of coal mine tourism (Wang et al., 2020), or to determine the activity locations of people visiting tourist attractions (Gu et al., 2016).

Based on the geographical peculiarities of the area, the parameters used for this research were 1 km bandwidth and 50 m grid cell. Once the Kernel Density heat maps were completed, the evaluation/estimation in quantitative terms and the establishment of the rating for each of the items that constituted the object of the approach (i.e. the four major criteria and forty sub-criteria) was performed. The task consisted of two major stages. First, the forty sub-criteria were assigned a score of 1-5 (1 meaning that the service has the lowest potential to capitalise on the natural and cultural landscape, and 5 meaning that the service has the highest potential to capitalise on the natural and cultural landscape). The data were subsequently normalised on a scale of 0-1. Second, the four major criteria were then given weightage using the multi-criteria decision-making analysis method by pairwise comparison matrix on a Saaty's scale (see Table 1). The weights were attributed based on the opinions of experts, the literature and the knowledge gained from field research.

Pairwise comparison matrix in multiple criteria decision making is an approach that has recently been introduced in sustainability studies (for example, most of the research exemplified above) in order to provide a more objective and accurate picture of geographical phenomena.

Therefore, after the formation of the ratio matrix (Table 2), the next step consisted of the normalisation and computation of the weights of each criterion (Table 3). The Consistency of the Comparison Matrix was subsequently calculated. The Consistency Ratio resulted is 0.08 (<0.10), which indicates that the weights achieved are acceptable. Finally, the ratings obtained in the first stage (of the 40 sub-criteria) were multiplied by the weights of each criterion obtained from pairwise comparison and thus resulted the total potential score of each sub-criteria (Table 4).

Table 1. Nine-point weighting scale for pairwise comparison

Intensity of importance	Description
1	Equal Importance
2	Weak
3	Moderate importance
4	Moderate plus
5	Strong importance
6	Strong plus
7	Very strong or demonstrated importance
8	Very, very strong
9	Extreme importance

Source: Saaty, Vargas, 2001, p. 6.

After assigning the final score to each layer, they were overlapped using the raster calculator according to the formula: (sub-criteria 1 * the corresponding total score) + (sub-criteria 2 * the corresponding total score) + (sub-criteria 3 * the corresponding total score) … (sub-criteria 40 * the corresponding total score) that in real terms means (Family or pension restaurants * 0.20) + (Classic restaurants * 0.15) + (Fish restaurants * 0.20) … (Locals' constructions * 0.17) = final heat map of the characteristic and related tourist services compatible with second home tourism.

In order to identify the relationship of the spatial distribution of second homes with the spatial intensity of tourist characteristics and related services, the final raster was classified into 5 categories: very low potential, low potential, moderate potential, high potential, very high potential, and areas without potential. Subsequently, through the extract value to point tool, the location of the second homes in relation to the areas mentioned above was identified.

Data on second homes were obtained through field visits. Also, data on tourist services were acquired from plenty of online sources (e.g. specialised websites of tourist accommodation units), but also official ones such as that of the Ministry for Economy, Energy and Business Environment (2020) for classified accommodation and catering units.

The boundaries of the studied area were downloaded from the official site of Ministry of the Environment, Waters and Forests of Romania (2015). However, for the purpose of this research, the surface of the studied area exceeded the official one. Moreover, the list of reservations and natural monuments was consulted on the Management Plan of the Apuseni Nature Park (Apuseni Nature Park Administration, 2016). The counties' administrative boundaries were taken from the National Agency for Cadastre and Real Estate Advertising of Romania (2020) and, finally, the list of historical monuments was acquired from the official website of the Ministry of Culture of Romania (2015).

4. Results and discussion

The current study found that tourist services are provided in an overwhelming proportion through classified and alternative accommodation units in the Apuseni Nature Park. Thus, the main features of the analysed categories and subcategories, as well as their importance in capitalising on the local character and the integrated development of second home tourism (see also Table 2 and 3), will be reviewed in the following subsections.

Table 2. Pairwise comparison matrix

	A	B	C	D
Food and beverage serving services (A)	1	7	0.5	0.33
Rental services (B)	0.14	1	0.14	0.14
Recreational, cultural, and sport services (C)	2	7	1	2
Retail trade services (D)	3	7	0.5	1

Table 3. Normalised pairwise comparison matrix and computation of criterion weights

	A	B	C	D	Criteria weights
Food and beverage serving services (A)	0.163	0.318	0.233	0.100	0.202
Rental services (B)	0.023	0.046	0.066	0.040	0.044
Recreational, cultural, sport (C)	0.325	0.318	0.466	0.575	0.421
Retail Trade Services (D)	0.488	0.318	0.233	0.288	0.331

4.1. Food and beverage serving services

Currently, according to the Ministry for Economy, Energy and Business Environment of Romania (2020, update of July 17 and 19), there are 38 public catering units belonging to the tourism sector. Among them, more than twenty are classic restaurants, six are family restaurants, and only one fish restaurant. In terms of beverage serving services, most of the units are buffet bars (eight), followed by bars (three).

Regarding their spatial distribution, a large proportion is located in the ski resort Vârtop (no. 8, Figure 2) and in a more moderate extent, along the Arieș valley and national artery (DN75) from Alba County (nos. 8-4, Figure 2) and in other villages – centres of communes. Other settlements with tourist functions that hold catering facilities are Fântânele Resort (no. 2, Figure 2), the holiday village Ic Ponor (no. 12, Figure 2), or the tourist zone of Padiș (no. 11, Figure 2).

From the standpoint of qualitative assessment, the highest score belongs to family and fish restaurants. Therefore, according to the methodological rules on the issuance of classification certificates for tourist reception structures with accommodation and catering functions, of tourism licenses and patents (National Authority for Tourism, 2013, Annex 2, para 1.2.1, 1.2.6), the fish restaurant offers a traditional framework “decorated with suggestive objects from fishing and fish processing" and a varied assortment of fish dishes, respectively. In the same vein, in general terms, the family restaurant provides a less standardized setting with a family atmosphere.

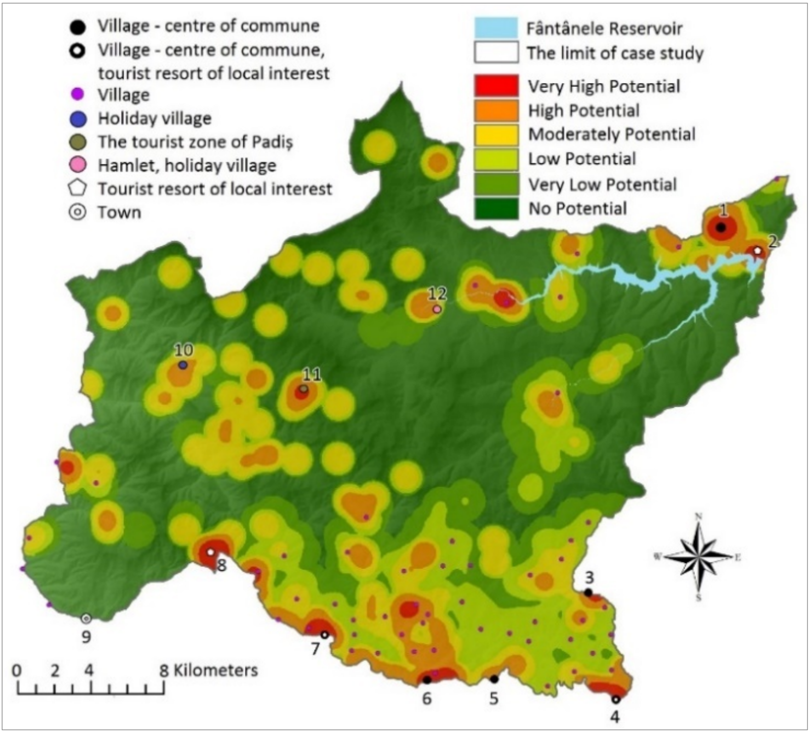

Fig. 2. The final classified heat map of the characteristic and connected tourist services in Apuseni Nature Park

1-Beliș, 2-Fântânele, 3-Horea, 4-Albac, 5-Scărișoara, 6-Gârda de Sus, 7-Arieșeni, 8-Vârtop, 9-Nucet, 10-Boga, 11-Padiș, 12-Ic Ponor

Author: I. Al. Ciupe. Data source: see section "3. Methodology"

In addition, other eating options in formal and informal establishments were identified in the studied area, such as food and beverage serving services in unclassified tourist accommodation units, other types of public catering units (e.g. cafes, bars, restaurants), or food trucks (e.g. traditional pies) on the side of the street or in areas with high tourist flow.

The weighting of the major category of food and beverage serving services was based on the following considerations. Taking into account the international literature experience exposed in the previous section (2.2. The second-home owners' consumption patterns) and based on our field research, the second home owners show a real interest in catering services. However, based on the structural and functional similarity between the second and the main home, namely cooking facilities, privacy and customised space, many of the seasonal owners choose to prepare their own meals. Consequently, following the pairwise comparison procedure, the food and beverage serving services criterion obtained a weight of 0.202 (see Table 3 above) which places it on the third position as importance for the second home tourism.

Table 4. Criteria and sub-criteria in tourism characteristic and connected products for second home development

No	Tourism characteristic and connected products (criteria)	Weight	Sub-criteria	Rating	Total score
1	Food and beverage serving services	0.20	Family or pension restaurants	1.00	**0.20**
			Classic restaurants	0.75	**0.15**
			Fish restaurants	1.00	**0.20**
			Buffet-Bars	0.25	**0.05**
			Bars	0.25	**0.05**
			Food and beverage trucks	0.75	**0.15**
			Other meal and beverage serving services provided by tourist	0.50	**0.10**

			accommodation units		
			Other meal and beverage serving services provided by general catering	0.25	**0.05**
2	Rental Services	0.04	Rental services of motorised recreational and sports goods	0.13	**0.005**
			Rental services of other sport and recreational goods	1.00	**0.04**
			Rental services of equipment for field games	0.50	**0.02**
3	Recreational, culture and sporting and other related services	0.42	Passenger transport services by funiculars, teleferics and ski-lifts	1.00	**0.42**
			Passenger transport services by animal-drawn vehicles	1.00	**0.42**
			Sightseeing microbus and light motor vehicles	0.13	**0.05**
			Sightseeing and excursion boat services provided by specialised local businesses	1.00	**0.42**
			Sightseeing and excursion boat services provided by tourist accommodation units	0.75	**0.32**

			Professional own-account tourist guides services	1.00	**0.42**
			Amateur own-account tourist guides services	0.75	**0.32**
			Tourism information centres	1.00	**0.42**
			Tourism fairs	1.00	**0.42**
			Services related to performing artists in large-scale events	0.75	**0.32**
			Services of performing artists in small-scale demonstrations	1.00	**0.42**
			Services provided by sculptors and other artists, except performing artists	1.00	**0.42**
			Museum operation services	1.00	**0.42**
			Services related to historical sites and buildings and similar visitor attractions	1.00	**0.42**
			Nature reserves services, including wildlife preservation services	1.00	**0.42**
			Access services to indoor and outdoor sports and recreational facilities	0.25	**0.11**
			Services related to outdoor or indoor sports events for professionals or	0.75	**0.32**

			amateurs by organisations with own facilities or by sport clubs		
			Support services related to sports and recreation activities	1.00	**0.42**
			Other sports and recreational sports services	0.50	**0.21**
			Theme park services	0.75	**0.32**
			Operation services of ski hills	0.13	**0.05**
			Miscellaneous recreational services	1.00	**0.42**
			Sports and recreation education services	1.00	**0.42**
			Cultural education services	1.00	**0.42**
4	Retail trade services	0.33	Retail trade in tourist accommodation units	1.00	**0.33**
			Retail trade in street kiosk or from the proximity of tourist attractions	1.00	**0.33**
			Retail trade in country fairs	1.00	**0.33**
			Retail trade in grocery stores and retail	0.50	**0.17**
			Constructions of the locals	0.50	**0.17**

Source: UNWTO (2010, annex 4), European Commission (2014) with amendments and adaptations

4.2. Rental Services

Rental services are more spatially widespread than the previous category, as most are provided by classified and unclassified accommodation units. Thus, due to the fact that the accommodation units are present with the highest intensity in Vârtop resort, along the Arieș valley (nos. 8-4 in Figure 2), in the village-centre of commune Beliș, and in other scattered villages (see Ciupe, 2020), the possibilities for renting sports and recreational equipment are relatively accessible throughout the studied area. Therefore, twenty offers for renting motorised equipment have been identified (e.g. all-terrain vehicle [ATV], motorcycle, powerboat, 4X4 vehicles). This type of equipment received a minimum score due to the possible environmental and noise pollution they could generate.

However, to a far greater extent (214 cases) were found rental services of other sport and recreational goods such as ski equipment, mountain or electric bikes, kayaks, water-ski, sledges, and pedal boats. Compared to the previous category, due to the low impact on the environment, this type of equipment received a higher score. However, generally, second home owners possess their own recreational and sports equipment. Thus, where necessary, rental services may be useful for their visitors (friends, relatives, etc.). Having said that, following the pairwise comparison matrix, this criterion accumulated a score of 0.044 (see Table 3), which means that it is of minimal importance compared to the other three components analysed.

4.3. Recreational, culture and sporting, and other related services

This criterion includes the widest range of characteristic and connected tourist services and the most widespread over the studied area, respectively. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the service categories covered are as follows: road/land and water passenger transport services, tourist guide and visitor information services, cultural services, sports and recreational services, cultural, sports and recreation education services.

Thus, for the road/land and water passenger transport services category, the highest score was awarded to the two ski lifts and one chairlift in Vârtop resort, and to the impressive number (81) of providers of horse-drawn sleigh/carriage services (with the highest concentration in the villages of Alba County). In the same vein, boat trips on Fântânele Reservoir provided formally by local businesses and informally by individuals, respectively, were considered an important means of awareness, education and knowledge of the local environment, however, on condition that they are not motorised ones. On the other hand, against the background of possible negative consequences on the natural environment, the car/van ride services for sightseeing visiting received a low score.

The tourist guide and visitor information services were considered very significant for the promotion and capitalisation of the local tourism potential. Thus, some owners of classified and unclassified accommodation units offer individual guidance services or organised excursions to the natural and historic-cultural landmarks. According to descriptions in advertisements, some providers declared themselves certified guides, while others amateurs. Also, other important means of promoting the identity of the area are the tourist information and promotion centre, the information centres held by the administration of the Apuseni Nature Park, and the National Rural Tourism Fair (organized in the village of Albac, no. 4, Figure 2).

Regarding cultural services, there were museum services, services related to historical monuments and similar visitor attractions (e.g. wooden churches and other historical monuments declared by Romanian Ministry of Culture, 2015), reservations and natural monuments services (with mixed profile, speleological, botanical, floristic-landscape or geological, according to Apuseni Nature Park Administration, 2016). However, to a greater extent, there were identified services provided by artists in small-scale demonstrations such as singing with traditional instruments (“tulnic” – in Romanian), bucolic celebrations, small events with traditional music and dances specific to the area, and other small artistic acts.

Moreover, in the studied area, there are organised large events such as contemporary music festivals (e.g. Smida Jazz Festival), cultural-ethnographic festivals (e.g. Festival of woodworking craftsmen - Horea village, no. 3, Figure 2), gastronomic competitions (within the National Rural Tourism Fair, Albac, no. 4, Figure 2), and other cultural, historical and religious events with local character. To a lesser extent, but of major importance, elements such as craft workshops for creating staves were also identified.

The category of sports and recreational services comprises theme parks, support services (e.g. mountain guides or fishing guides), sports facilities (sports field for football, tennis, basketball, volleyball, and an outdoor pool), hang-gliding, three ski slopes, a disco and a series of sporting events for running, cycling, swimming, fishing and other complex sports (i.e. triathlon).

The category of cultural education services generally included services through which tourists can experience the traditional life of the country. In this regard, the services identified are as follows: educational farm, interactive wood processing activities, assisted harvesting of berries, mushrooms or medicinal plants, discovering beekeeping, discovering flora and fauna, haymaking, milking, cooking classes, and so on. In addition, the category of sports and recreation education services mainly included riding, climbing, or skiing courses.

Thus, given the importance of the above-mentioned subcategories and the possibility of accessing them in the future by second home owners, the broad category of ’recreational, culture and sporting, and related services’ received a weight of 0.421 (see Table 3) that places it the first as importance.

4.4. Retail trade services

Last but not least, an important category for the second home tourism are the short chains carried out through tourist accommodation units, street kiosks, and country fairs. Due to their industrial character, the sale of products in conventional grocery stores and retail received a lower score, but their importance for the local economy should not be underestimated. Moreover, given the fact that the field research indicated a trend of direct sale from the locals' household to the second home owners or tourists (e.g. milk, berries), also confirmed by Czarnecki (2014), the constructions of the locals were also taken into account. Therefore, due to the importance of these types of services for second home owners, they received a weight of 0.332 (see Table 3) which gives them the second place as importance of services.

Regarding the spatial distribution of second homes with respect to the resulting potential areas (Figure 3), the largest proportion is located in areas with high capitalisation potential (38.3%) of local resources, namely in the holiday village of Boga, along the Arieș valley and inside the scattered villages.

The second-largest share of second homes is contained in the very high potential category with a percentage of 27.9%. Most of them are located in commune centres (e.g. Beliș, Arieșeni), but also in ski resorts of Vârtop and Fântânele. Second homes located in the moderate potential category are found in a proportion of 18% and generally refer to those located within the dispersed and scattered villages. The low potential category includes a proportion of 9.2% of total second homes and is represented especially by villages with a continuous depopulation and demographic ageing process (e.g. villages such as Runc, Costești, and Sohodol of Alba County). The areas with very low potential (with a share of 2.5%) are specific to the spatial extensions of second home developments in the vicinity of native settlements. However, there is a percentage of 4% of second homes located outside the area with tourist service opportunities.

Generally, this type of second homes is found in remote areas or on the shore of the Fântânele Reservoir.

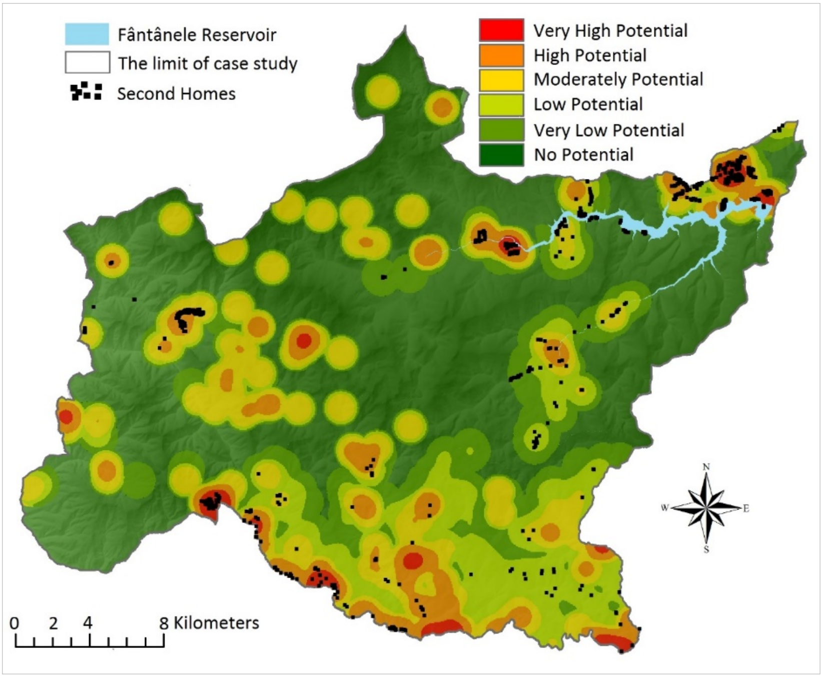

Figure 3. The relationship between the spatial distribution of second homes and the final classified heat map of the characteristic and connected tourist services in Apuseni Nature Park

Author: I. Al. Ciupe. Data source: see section "3. Methodology"

Therefore, given the recurrent nature of mobility, Cohen (1974) defines second home development as a marginal form of tourism (p. 540). Even so, some authors claim that returning to second homes may be constructed as loyalty, stability for local businesses and income security for a longer period (Flognfeldt, Tjørve; 2013, p. 347; Hoogendoorn, Visser, Marais, 2009, p. 80; Larsson, Müller, 2017; Mottiar, 2006, p. 590).

Having said that, the study suggests that actions of promotion and adjustment of secondary tourist offer could create a link between the locals and urbanities. Thus, according to the literature, the main benefits of accessing the tourist services provided by local producers could be:

- ✓ Fostering the second home owners' awareness of the social, cultural and natural environment through sensory, visual, and perceptual experiences;
- ✓ Educating the second home owners about the traditions, gastronomy and other customs of the places through the assistance of the locals – the most reliable sources – which would diminish the discrepancy between the two communities with different lifestyles;
- ✓ Providing economic support for local communities, given that the number of second homes exceeds the number of tourist accommodation units;
- ✓ Reducing the process of depopulation;
- ✓ Attracting new tourists to the area;
- ✓ Protecting the natural and cultural environment;
- ✓ Creating a favourable image of the area.

However, despite the importance of the second home matters outlined in this chapter, in Romania, this form of tourism is subject merely to urban regulation and is completely missing from tourism development strategies. Thus, as Müller, Hall and Keen claim:

> "Planning from the municipal and regional government perspective should not deal solely with housing regulations or planning controls, nor with the negative issues associated with second homes, but should also be created to effectively gain the most benefit from second homes now and in the future" (2004, pp. 31-32).

5. Conclusions

The main goal of the current study was to determine the possibility of capitalising on the existing local services through second home tourism in a sustainable way. More precisely, an attempt was made to find the services that contribute most to preserving the contemporary rural character of the area and, at the same time, that can be compatible with the unique form of second home tourism.

Therefore, the research has found that generally Apuseni Nature Park has sufficient such opportunities, and through integrated planning, second homes can overcome the 'inessential houses' (Wolfe, 1965, p. 7) status.

The second major finding was that most of the second homes are located in areas with the potential to capitalise on the natural and cultural landscape. Nevertheless, this may also be due to the urban regulation which requires that the new constructions be made as compact as possible, close to the locals' settlements.

Still, some second homes are located outside the areas with opportunities for tourist services. Therefore, due to the physical isolation of second home developments and poor interaction with the local population (Ciupe, 2019), sustainable and integrated planning efforts may be difficult to achieve in cases like this.

However, although this study yielded satisfactory results, a number of important limitations need to be considered. First, data quality can be problematic. In this sense, in order to make their offer as attractive as possible, the owners of tourist accommodation units can mention services that in reality they do not provide, and consequently, the data might contain some exaggeration. Second, there were difficulties in identifying second homes, due to their similarity to the informal accommodation units or in some cases the other secondary dwellings of the locals. However, these issues did not decisively influence the veracity of the analysis and the results may be valuable for future tourism development strategies.

Nevertheless, further research should be done to investigate the second home owners' perspectives regarding the consumption patterns of the tourist characteristics and related services and goods.

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ISBN: 978-606-37-1135-0