"THE CITY BENEATH THE MOUNTAINS" – IMAGES, PERCEPTIONS AND REPRESENTATIONS. A SAMPLE OF URBAN SOCIOLOGY[1].

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Abstract: *The hereby article promotes the results of a field research conducted as part of the doctoral studies under the aegis of the University of Bucharest. Through the case study conducted on the community of Novaci in Gorj, from Oltenia beneath the mountains, we advanced for the first time the innovative concepts of social and symbolic infrastructure.*

Key words: rural sociology; social and symbolic infrastructure; Romanian sociology; neointerpretative methodology.

1. Prologue or why should a distinct category exist?

What is the city but the people?
(William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*)

Between July-August 2010, a team from the Faculty of Sociology[2] (University of Bucharest) traveled to Novaci, a town located in Gorj district, in order to conduct a field research oriented on the *social molding of the economic crisis*. However, in the attempt of constructing a sketch of the social problems encountered in the studied area, the research team confronted with an unexpected *paradox*: the anticipated urban environment proved to be one of an *atypical substance,* constituted of elements that belong par excellence to a rural community (justification of actions, life philosophy, type of collective mentality, social relations etc.). The subject of this research project identifies its *starting point* precisely in this *confusion caused by the subjective realities.* The present paper reclaims itself from the urban sociology domain and is being carried into effect with the help of methods and techniques both from visual studies and sociology of representations. The study's *primary objective* consists of the identification, as far as possible, of a *new city typology – "the city beneath the mountains".* In the same manner, we bring into discussion and argue the fact that Novaci is the result of three major historical layers: the *traditional,* the *communist*, and the *post-Revolution* one, "unfinished" stages that combined and produced the today community.

Traian Herseni remarked the conditionality between the *social unit and the historical frame* (2007), and Novaci appears to be an illustrative example if we take into account the documented events[3] from the 19th and 20th centuries. Regarding the locality's historical background, in 1968, by the agglutination of 7 localities, the Novaci commune was forced to convert into an urban area in order to increase the national urbanization level. However, the

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[1] The article is part of the doctoral research which was completed in 2013: "Infrastructure and society. Theoretical considerations and case studies"

[2] Team of students and PhD candidates coordinated by prof. univ. dr. Radu Baltasiu (University of Bucharest).

[3] Interviews with key-persons of the place in discussion regarding the local and social, in addition to the ones already written in social documents and monographies received from the City Hall and parishes (in Romanian "obști").

institutional transformation did not bring forth the success of a *cultural product* by the name of *city* and this from a simple motive: the adaptability level of a (traditional) community relates to the *historical scale* and not to one belonging to an ephemeral regime (Bernea, 2005). After the communist period in which the community was facing *new challenges and powerful structural deployments*[4], currently, Novaci has a population of "34 thousand souls"[5], from which approximately 6 thousand are located in the main settlement.

       The researcher finds it difficult to label the settlement as a city, mainly because the Novaci community continues to emanate a self-force next to an economical autonomy desire, to build and look after the stabile social relationships *with intensity* (Durkheim, "dynamic density" concept), to possess the culture of "friendliness and familiarity" which, in the great cities, is exchanged with mistrust, social intimacy and materialism (Michael Young and Peter Willmott apud LeGates, 1997, p. 208). The Mayor that administered the community for two consecutive terms, a well-known Mathematics teacher and local leader, formulated the basic idea of the research: "*in terms of utility, Novaci is a city. But in terms of mentality, he remained a larger village*". The fact that, formally, the locality has the city status is objectively proven by the *infrastructure* and *institutions* present (hospital and regional police station, ambulance station, firefighters, 3 schools and a high school, water systems, bank branches, ATMs etc.). However, the researcher finds himself in front of a matter that is related to *the subjective reference* upon the lieu, the overwhelming majority of respondents referring to Novaci as to a *village* – both from the general aspect, and the type of the inter-human relations' perspective. For the reasons stated above, the need for an *urban sociology applied to localities with particular processes*, in our case the *cities beneath the mountains*, emerges*.*

2. Methodological aspects

       The city of Novaci comes into sight under the form of a *starting point*, a *sample-city* for a long-term research that will encompass an excursion in a series of ten urban centers with similar characteristics to the ones discovered in the Gorjan community. Thus, the *main objective* is located in the identification and validation of a *particular urban typology* in the Romanian reality design. The exemplification and verification in the field of the hypotheses will be followed up in a series of national locations, further established *after the empirical and theoretical definition of the category* in question.

       For reasons associated with time, finances and human resources, *the methodology used will be the neointerpretative one* that has a) powerful roots in the Sociological School of Bucharest's monographic type of study[6], b) a starting point in the *Weberian premises*, c) and influences from the *noological sociology*[7]. The goal of the neointerpretative approach is "the punctual identification of those elements that define the potential of survival and reconstruction of the rural world by the use of data 'extraction' techniques, rather than the 'uncovering' ones specific to the monographic methodology" (Baltasiu et al, a2009: 127). Furthermore, "its finality is the extraction of the local specificity without losing sight of the associated context, defined by the social actor himself" (idem, 137). As well, in order to determine the relational deficit we turned to the *Goffmanian paradigm* of reality *as a role play*, where the social relationship is the *masks*' stage. Our *hypothesis* was that, as the degenerative

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[4] The disintegration of the industrial economy, the development of the near-by major cities on the expense of the little communities (by draining the material resources and the most valuable demographic), the pressure exercised on the local community in order to 'urbanize' the daily conducts ('urbanization' that continued, in other forms, after 1989) are just some of the *processes with a destabilizing role* in the recent history of Novaci.

[5] Source: the police captain.

[6] This is through the belief that the reality is of an extremely delicate complexity described under the form of the "parallelism law".

[7] In which the experience is viewed in relation to the symbolical coordinates.

processes advanced over the community, the peasant communitarian order retired in front of a cvasi-urban Goffmanian reality.

The cadres, local manifestations[8] of interest and the associated actors are: *the political manifestations – city hall* (mayor, adviser, vice-mayor, former mayors and advisers) and the *establishments of political parties* (representatives of the local structures); *juridical manifestations – courthouse, police* (policemen and the head of the local police), *law firm* (lawyer), *notary; spiritual manifestations – school and high school* (elementary teacher, teacher (history, Romanian language) and school principal), *church* (priest, vicar, prior), *local paper* (journalist, newspaper executive), *other places* ('the village elder', self-taught characters, young people with a good financial situation, local personalities, formal leaders of parishes, forest guardian etc.); *biological manifestations – hospital* (doctors and hospital manager, midwife); *economical manifestations – market and the Sunday fair* (merchants, buyers), *milk factory* (owner), *international transport business* (owner, driver), *the Parâng hotel* (owner, receptionist), *inn* (bartender, 'most loyal customer'), *sheepfold* (shepherd). The chosen persons are both relevant authorities for the community recognized as such and Goffman's "non-persons" (2003). Further on, our approach will seek to identify the two stages that combined determine the local social realities: a) *the objective layer* and b) the one of *subjectivities*.

From an objective perspective, the interpretation of the *quantitative data* was followed by collecting them from the local authorities or other institutions significant for the researched area. Accordingly, a table was filled out according to the local coordinates (general, demographical, economical, urbanity, security or utility data etc.). We tried to utilize the quantitative data *in the context* from which it was collected, thus trying to avoid what Agar called "over-simplification" – the reality's reduction to its simple statistical and demographical matrix, depending on variables such as gender, age, education etc. (Agar, 198: 121).

Another highly reliable instrument that can provide objective data (Elizabeth Edwards apud Ruby, 1996: 1345) is the *sociological photography*. It does *not create* the image, but it *translates* it from reality to a visual space, having the capacity *not only to illustrate but to demonstrate as well* (Chelcea, 2004: 411). The main critique brought to such an instrument refers to the inherent limitation of the reality to the lens' power of coverage (Elizabeth Edwards apud Ruby, 1996: 1345). Thus, we tried to eliminate this problem by surprising *synaesthesias and contrasts, contexts and details, portraits or activities' developments*, facts that led to the *creation of new hypotheses* and to a clarification of the local realities. The third instrument, of a technical nature, is the *agenda* filled out with contacts data and planning of teams' activities that "must be made ... for every kind of problem ... [for] the most relevant informants known by the village" (Gusti, 1968: 447). "*The contact individuals*" (Baltasiu et al, a2009: 117) or "*the key-informants*" (Agar, 1980: 89) are those persons that assure the researcher's credibility and entrance into the community. The used entrance technique in the social networks is the *personal recommendation*. A final method utilized consists of the *social documents' study* (obtained from perishes, monographies from the inter-war timeframe, documents with relevant regional and national historical content, biographies of the most significant local personalities etc.). The documentary sources posses the *power to retrace the social life* (Chelcea, 2004: 496) and their analysis has as main objective the observation of the way in which *the old forms of social life maintain in the present,* reflect *in the contemporary typology*, and condition the present-time social forms* (Herseni, 2007: 335) – in other words, a determination of the *village's social evolution.*

From the subjective point of view, we kept trace of the social actor's *ways to adjust* to the place, community, locals or strangers; the *attitude types* associated with the local personalities and authorities; *the perceptions* over the objective reality regarding the social actuality; the predominant type of *mentality*; and, in the end, the *effects* generated by this entire constellation

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[8] Concepts of the Gustian paradigm.

of representations, perceptions, mental maps, symbols and images assumed by the individuals. In other words, we "seek for their ideas, feeling and aspirations, that is to say all the contents of their spiritual life and their orientations towards the physical surroundings and, in genre, towards the world" (Gusti, 1968: 428). Thus, we shall use once again the *sociological photography* as a main tool of documentation of the *in situ* social realities (Wright, 1999; 38), by highlighting its capacity to underline the significant detail *just as it is* (Baltasiu, b2009; 1; Pink, 2007: 12). Another instrument called upon in the neointerpretative approach is the *informal interview* or the *semi-structured one*. All the interviews were recorded and at the end of the field research they became the primary data for the *transcripts' content analysis* and its integration in the final report.

Gusti asserted in his *Works* first volume that in "sociology we are able to know the reality through participation, living, (personal) experience, objective intuition. ... The one that observes that the rural (peasant) life from outside understands it less than the one that participates in it, living a certain period of time in the village, together with the peasants" (Gusti, 1968: 443). The same duality between "going native" through participation and keeping the distance from the studied social fact is observed also by the anthropologist Agar, that suggests a conjunction between the two types of approaches (Agar, 1980: 51, 114). Thus, another method utilized in the Novaci-type of research is the *participative observation* that, next to the *field notes* (Agar, 1980: 111), complete with all the collected necessary information *the journal of the research* and *the preliminary reports*, a fact that led to a data ordination and identification of the study direction (idem, 113). Another method that tries to unveil the perceived symbolistic of the space, time and activities is *the subjective cartography of the local symbolic infrastructure*. For this type of situation, we asked the informants to draw on a piece of paper the Novaci town as they perceive it (physically, symbolically, architecturally, institutionally etc.).

3. Conceptual clarifications

In theory, there are two major forms of social aggregation, each with its own structures: *the village* and *the city*. *The village* represents a community based on a territory, grounded on family ties and in possession of a symbolic centre directly linked to faith (the so-called dwelling[9]), cosmic calendar and ancestors (Baltasiu, 2007: 386). *The city* is "defined as a population centre, more developed from an economic, socio-cultural and urbanity-household perspective" (Abraham, 1991: 125), structured on a network of interests and solidarities activated through the functional division of labor (Durkheim). This is a "relatively wide space, permanently populated by socially heterogeneous individuals" (Louis Wirth apud LeGates, 1997: 190) that are concentrated on professions in relation to their competencies (Max Weber).

Each of the two social areas presents an *inherent typology* in terms of social solidarity (Tönnies) and, simultaneously, a different way of referral to the world. Therefore, each instance of the human sociability determines the appearance of a specific type of individual, also defined by opposition: the *communitarian man* and *the social man*. The *social man* is permanently subjected to rigor and conventions, oriented by his own satisfaction of interests inside a system based on the social contract (Louis Wirth apud LeGates, 1997: 189-194). He is a member of a series of social groups (and segmented roles) maintained at a systemic level but with which he cannot fully self-identify (idem: 192), a fact that leads to the increase of the individual's alienation. On the other hand, *the communitarian man* is considered to be the depository of traditions, customs, and fundamental meanings of time and space (Bernea, 2005: 23) that, ultimately, act as vectors for the community. The postmodern sociology contributed to the crayoning of such distinctions, in the sense that it reduced the distance between them. For instance, Granovenetter, in 1973, demonstrated that *the urban space is placed on a network of personal relationships,* the so called "weak ties". This type of social relations appears to be

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[9] In Romanian 'vatra satului'.

qualitatively reduced, performing a functional role (the creation of connections and the conservation of the social harmony) of the individual's insertion in the social network by certain social segments of interest (based on the so-called "bridges") offered by the circle of relationships (Flanagan, 1993: 22) with a high intensity of the social contract. The network of weak interdependences in which the urban individual is located lies in contrast to the "strong ties", strengthened from inside of certain communitarian structures, populated by the *communitarian man*.

While the city is a conglomerate structured around an imposing *institutional centre,* based on the functionalist principle of social insertion of individuals by profession, the village is a community that is orbiting around a *symbolic nucleus* territorially, culturally and religiously defined. Both the physical and symbolic centre of the village is the dwelling: "from a territorial point of view, the village is a complex formed of the dwelling, the built terrain and estate, the productive land around it. In turn, the dwelling is shared by the living ones, and the village itself, with the dead ones, and the cemetery" (Ion Ghinoiu apud Baltasiu, 2007: 387). Thus, each type of human association generates a certain type of sociality: *social order* (city) and *peasant (rural) order* (village). The social order is based on the *paradox of society*, concept enounced by Tönnies, while the *peasant (rural) order* [10] is closely linked to Mircea Eliade's concept of *cosmic Christianity[11].*

4. Hypotheses and a short theoretical corpus

The first hypothesis is that the *social relations and the vicinity reports followed an expansion, without necessarily losing intensity, started with the locality's development and its status transition from village to city.* Such an affirmation will be probed once the networks of social contacts will be known and the Sunday fair phenomenon, activity with a regional character, will be studied.

4.1 Gusti and the operationalized cultural dimensions

In order to understand the general configuration of Novaci, we chose the Gustian cartographic method regarding the social relationships in the grid of the identified cultural types: *work*, *health, spirit, and mind culture*[12]. He claimed in his *Pedagogical Writings* (1973) that *the cultural processes are never in a definite state, but creations and "permanent becomings".* In other words, the types of cultural activities represent, actually, specific life forms that contribute to the community's formation and solidarity's consolidation.

The work culture refers to the spread of knowledge and experience exchanges regarding the agricultural activities, the work in their own household, the construction activities, the farming, the infrastructure development etc. *The main issue* is identified in the *lack of employments* for the inhabitants of Novaci. It is still practiced, at a large scale, the subsistent agriculture, and the entrepreneurial initiatives are minimal at a local level. *A secondary problem* lies in the relationship between locals and the banks that do not seem to trigger the local development due to the lack of lending systems (adapted to the local productive cycle) and of encouragement programs of local abilities. Thus, *work is no longer the engine of the economical life.*

A community's health culture does not represent anything apart of its *vitality*, next to its *strength* to conserve itself and develop inside its own logic, following similar coordinates. It

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[10] Family, work and social relations are the ones that order the community both socially and economically (see Bernea, pp.25-26).

[11] The spiritual order of space (symbols, holidays, rituals etc.), the existence of the cyclical and long-tern time etc.

[12] The names are taken from the studies of the Sociological School of Bucharest - see Lucia Apolzan - "Villages, cities and regions researched by the Romanian Social Institute - 1925-1945", with a preface by D. Gusti, Bucharest, ISR 1945.

can cross sectors like the demographic growth or the typology of frequent diseases. Its indicators are: a) the demographic growth; b) illness typology; c) abortion and contraceptive methods; d) individual-doctor relationship/pharmacy (interest or benevolence?); e) hygiene activities; f) physical culture. *The main problem identified* in this locality is the poor hygiene and unhealthy diets maintained by the lack of educational programs *for* the local community (environment, health, habitation), the latter being caused by the social indifference of legal authorities and institutions (hospital, city hall, ministry). A *secondary issue* is the drastic drawback of the number of doctors in the Novaci hospital, a central institution with regional reaching.

The culture of the mind and spirit is determined by individuals' manifestations in relation with elements such as tradition, place, belief or social connections. Operationalized, it can be extended on the following coordinates: a) the type of traditional culture (1. life philosophy; 2. the major pillars of the communitarian world: belief, family, work); b) the respect for authority (priest, doctor, teacher, mayor); c) the quality of leisure time; d) the school education; e) activities and places of culturalization; f) architecture and habitation. *The main problem identified* is the cultural inactivity of the population (determined by the lack of interest from the people with decision-making power – president of the House of Culture, mayor, and teachers) and the lack of social spaces of cultural value. *A secondary issue* is represented by the decline of respect for political leaders, doctors, teachers, all with the exception of those individuals considered 'local treasures' actively involved in the community's affairs. *A problem that will escalate in the future* is linked to the architectural style and its quality collapse in the area in discussion (massive and powerfully colored constructions, built without regard to the local architectural symbolism).

4.2. Hypotheses and typologies – the city beneath the mountains

The tension between city and community continues to be a central topic in the urban sociology studies (Flanagan, 1993: 13). Abraham noted that "an important dimension of the urbanization process in Romania is the *urbanization of the rural area*" achieved by the rural-urban migration (Abraham, 1991: 240). This leads to the "formation and development of a *new social space*, which takes place … through a more intense interaction between the two areas" (ibidem).

The identifiable elements that can prove the existence in Novaci of a rural (peasant) substratum in parallel to the urbanization tendencies are: the family relationships[13] as a source of social solidarity, the idea of work in households[14] as a logic and fundamental unity of family, the reference to divinity[15], time and space (conceptions, attitudes, techniques, practices – see Bernea), the coagulation degree of the communitarian social relationships[16], the means of survival and reference towards them in terms of the B*eing*[17], reporting to the hardships of life philosophy, etc. *According to our secondary hypothesis,* the *transition process was not*

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[13] The family, work and social relationships are the ones that give sense to the community both socially and economically (Bernea, 2006: 25-26).

[14] "'Household', thus, as a family's work unit, constitutes the nucleus of the village's social cell – p.34: the family" (Vulcănescu, 1997: 33).

[15] "Religion appears in our village's life as an expression of human's needs in finding a path of peace and stability in his worldly existence" (idem: 58), in such a way that religion, next to other of his expressions (family and work), arrange the social and spiritual life of any individual. In the peasant philosophy, "the man is sent from God and must work (fallen as he is) in His way" (idem: 57).

[16] "Almost never the man isolates himself from the others and when he does it he is considered 'crazy' or 'rogue' by his peers" (idem: 32).

[17] The synthesis of the peasant philosophy: orderliness (in Romanian 'rânduială'), sense (in Romanian "rost"), natural (in Romanian 'firesc'), totality (in Romanian 'întreg'), all next to God's will. "World's great orderliness redounds entirely, like the sun in the dewdrop, in the smallest things and deeds of the human inside the Romanian village" (idem: 25).

finalized due to the fact that the imposed modifications were not interiorized by the community in question which succeeded in changing merely part of its "internal data". In other words, the community is confronted with a *partial loss of its peasant substance* after the transition from a rural community to a peri-urban one by changing some of community's resistance pillars.

4.3. Urbanism – way of methodological approach

One of the most well-known methods of studying the city is the one proposed by Wirth which clearly distinguishes between the city and the urbanization process. The latter refers to *the extension of urban residential character* and takes place on three levels: *the socio-demographic aspects of the urban expansion; the economy of the urban extension; and the spatiality of the city*. Further, Wirth determines *three key variables – population size, density of settlement and the degree of heterogeneity* (Louis Wirth apud LeGates, 1997: 194) – through which can lead to *a typology of urban areas*. Thus, a first characteristic of the city beneath the mountains can be *its dimension no larger than 20 thousand inhabitants*, figure that will subsequently be statistically proven. A second feature is the *density of an increased social dynamic*, and a third is the *low social mobility.* Wirth's suggestion regarding the urban lifestyle approach implies three perspectives (idem: 194): (1). a set of *attitudes*, *ideas* and a constellation of *personalities* engaged in typical forms of collective behavior (2). a *system of social networking* that implies a typical social structure, a series of social institutions and a pattern of social relationships; (3). *a physical structure* (base population, technology and environmental policy). Consequently, we segment the research's results and the social problems into: (1). perceptions and images; (2). social relationships and vicinity; (3). urban aspects.

4.4. Perceptions: "the city beneath the mountains"

In 1981, Burton Pike – a representative figure in the Urban Sociology School of Chicago, published in his study *The City as Image* one of the city's densest definitions: *a social image* (Burton Pike apud LeGates, 1997: 246), comprised of the totality of visions, perspectives and perceptions of each relevant social actor. At the level of perceptions, we will operate with three situations: a) "the world viewed from Bucharest"; b) the world viewed by the elites; c) the world viewed by the locals.

"The world viewed from Bucharest". The perceptions that correspond to this first level encompass *the order, the landmarks and the cultural pattern* of the researcher. Simultaneously, they coincide with the order of the *national authority* that establishes the policies implemented in the territory. When we refer to the city *category,* instantly, we tend to address to a *mental identification of the concept*. Oftentimes, a city's definition is offered in terms of a *human conglomerate*, spread over a wider territory, with a considerable number of individuals involved in secondary relationships. In such a case when the researcher is seeking access to the social reality of Novaci, he gets off with a *toolkit wrongly applied on the city's conventional definition*. Thus, when realizing the incipient issue, the researcher is forced to change all his methodology and theoretical corpus of comprehension right on the spot.

The world viewed by the elites. The elites represent a social segment that benefits from a certain strategic placement (Flanagan, 1993: 98), has access to the levers of decision and to the decisions regarding the administering of the material and symbolical resources of a community. In 1987, Logan and Molotch showed that, when elites form a coalition, they transform into a "growth machine" directly linked to the economical profitability zone (ibidem). This appears to validate as well in the case of power and interest networks by joining the *kinship elements* with the *work responsibilities*. In Novaci, the world viewed by the *intellectuals* consists of two manifestation layers: one of the *local intellectuals* (that refer to the community as to a totality with a symbolic value) and the one of the *outside-intellectuals*[18] (that tend to manifest a

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[18] An intellectual that was not born or raised in the locality.

highly critical attitude towards the inhabitants). If in the latter category the individuals – as exceptions – achieve results *in the benefit of the community* they became considered *locals by means of involvement*, a phenomenon filtered by the mechanism popularly entitled "village gossip" (in Romanian "*gura satului*")[19] or utilized by Goffman under the name of *performing distortion* (Goffman, 2003: 83).

The world viewed by the locals. The layer in question is directly linked to the social order and the local socio-economical and cultural realities. This includes discussions on collective mentality, social development pattern, and cultural continuity – the symbolic coordinates of the local reality. What is interesting is that not only the community's personalities are the depository for the identity tendency, but also *common individuals still engaged in a spiritual and traditional social structure.* Michael Young and Peter Willmott in their studies approached the concept of *duration of living residential togetherness* and observed that in the places where there can be identified a long history of social contact and a "solid matrix of friendship", people refer to one another in terms of *character or physical traits*, the material ones being left on the last position in the hierarchy of frequency and importance of the referral itself (M. Young and P. Willmott apud LeGates, 1997: 215). The same thing can be observed in Novaci. *The businessmen* initially point out man's *personal traits* and then refer to his *ability and capacity* to start or develop a business. *The ordinary individuals* refer in a personalized way to the Other as long as the respective individual has no link to the power-making decisions – there are 2-3 exceptions illustrated by former political leaders (the mayor from the communist regime, the mayor between 2000-2008) seen as men of great character because *they permanently took into account the community* and not themselves. Another interesting referral is the one regarding the villa owners that built in opposition with the traditional architectural style: although the locals do not approve the changes occurred, they do not reproach them, but *kindly* refer to as 'lost' individuals. *The politicians* relate to the Other as to a "distressful and jobless individual that owns a cow and a tomato in the backyard" (vice-mayor). In other words, unlike the categories mentioned above, the politicians primarily refer to the *locals from a material standpoint.*

Lynch argues that people structure their perception of the city on two coordinates: "*paths*"[20] and "*edges*"[21]. In the case of Novaci, *the paths* that connect the local community both economically and symbolically are the *streets*, mainly the *thoroughfare*. Another significant example is the road to Rânca resort, a locality 18 km away that possesses tremendous touristic potential, motive of which Rânca is linked to the local hopes of development. Concerning the *symbolic edges* that separate the local realities, they can be: *from the past* (re-acknowledged as significant in the present) and the *present ones*. The *historical channel* is the Gilort River, the one

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[19] Dimitrie Gusti noted that the "village's public opinion is a psycho-social phenomenon of great interest for science because through it the tradition is being kept or abandoned and the conformism and customs are being imposed or replaced with fashion and innovation. The village gossip that, of course, has also an inferior and vulgar form of plain gossip and intrigue, fulfils a superior function by the selection and propagation of values. If it were not for the village gossip, a lot of customs with sense would have been deserted and a lot of extravagances brought by the will of the wind would have been adopted. If it were not for the village gossip, many of the fundamental institutions of social life such as morality, decency, mutual help would have been destroyed" (Gusti, 1968: 429-430).

[20] The pathes where there the circulation fluxes can be identified – both physical and symbolic create bridges between elements or different structures of the same community – "Paths are the channels along which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves. They may be streets, walkways, transit lines, canals, railroads" (Kevin Lynch apud LeGates, 1997: 99).

[21] The edges that differentiate the urban segments are those "linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes" (Kevin Lynch apud LeGates, 1997: 99).

that once socially separated two *districts* (Romanian-Novaci[22] and Foreign-Novaci[23] populated with migrants from over the mountains). Although for the time being the separation is no longer a consistent one, the researcher often received, without asking, details regarding the provenience of the interlocutor's family. In other words, *the local identitary reference exists but as a 'way of connecting' and not separating people.* Moreover, in the daily paths drawn by the interlocutors (mostly intellectuals and politicians), in a high proportion, the Gilort River appears as a *reference point* in the collective mentality. In present, the main observable traffic takes place, as shown above, on the thoroughfare. Beyond this road which is typical for any small town that goes through the central area where the main institutions and the market are localized, the circulation and traffic are extremely low, in the contrary, specific to villages. In other words, *the thoroughfare separates the "Novaci-village" from the "Novaci-city"* and where the local realities are, many times, if not opposed, at least distinct.

Another concept forwarded by Lynch is the "*nodes*". They represent those points with strategic value to the community, with an increased dynamic density that oftentimes has a strong symbolic value. These can be points of interest, of destination, concentrations of local energies, an intersection of paths in which this intensity of the social contacts was observed as extremely high. In Novaci's case, one of these nodal places is the *daily market*, but especially the *Sunday fair* established in the same area, a phenomenon for the entire regional area of the northern Gorj district. If we considered above (with reservations) the two sides of the river as two separate districts, we state with certainty that the market is a central phenomenon in the development of both districts. In terms of *symbolic infrastructure,* Rânca can be regarded as a *node* inside the social logic of Novaci, for reasons such as: all citizens (ordinary people or engaged in local decision-making structures) refer to the Rânca resort *on their own initiative*. Here, things are a bit complicated because of the *different frame of reference*:

- *For the local authorities,* the resort is a *means of political legitimacy* and a *constant reference point*, but a *non-introverted* one. Thus, Rânca is seen as the *"rescue and solution of the Novac community"*, both economically and socio-demographically;
- *For the businessmen,* the disproportionate buildings phenomenon with flashy colors and stylistically or functionally incoherency (even *i*rrationally located*)* reached its peak of development precisely in Rânca resort. *The hypothesis* is that this type of *limited vision* was and still is determined by the immediate desire to make money, without taking into account specific attributes of an entrepreneurial behavior.
- *For the common people,* the situation is completely different, them having only words of praise and smiles to share. However, in practice, *the Novacs were referring not to an approval of the chaotic architectural implementation in the resort, but to aspects entirely distinct*: *the contact with nature* (the locals were taking pride in the Rânca – Păpuşa area, saying that it was much more "prideful" (in Romanian "mândră") than Transfăgărăşan) and *the emotional referral*. For local people aged over 40 years, Rânca has an *identitary value* by inserting *personal meanings*, emotional even (on subjects of the youthful days of the past, with round dances (in Romanian "hore") on top of the mountains, the sheepfold seating (in Romanian "şezutul la stână") and the shepherd songs (in Romanian "cântece oiereşti" etc.).

4.5. The social relationships and vicinity

Although the urban forms and their design are those that compound the cities' *physical appearance* and *first noticeable aspect*, in urban sociology studies the focus is upon *the inhabitants* with all their individual aspirations and collective conflicts (Allan Jacobs and Donald Appleyard apud LeGates, 1997: 170) that hold the power to modify or restructure the entire social infrastructure. Thus, we refer to the city as to a *matrix of relationships* in which the

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[22] In Romanian "Novaci-Români"
[23] In Romanian "Novaci-Străini"

secondary ones[24] prevail (ibid.: 192). From this point of view, once again Novaci distinguishes itself from the classical typology of the city, *focusing on a history of social face-to-face relations, primary[25] and kinship*. In other words, *the predominant anthropological pattern is the one of the communitarian man*.

City suburbs like Levittown studied by Herbert J. Gans (*Levittown and America* - 1967), Novaci "permits most of its residents to be what they want to be – to center their lives on *home* and *family*, to be among neighbors whom they can trust..." (Herbert J. Gans apud Le Gates, 1997: 64). In other words, we have here a *lost sociability* by the typical booming city. The use of participatory observation highlighted the fact that *local work relationships (labor) are oftentimes also at the formal limit* (the firefighters, the high school's teaching collective, the city hall officials, etc.). In other words, *the communitarian relations are the social glue for the Novac social segments*, relationships that go beyond mere neighborhood[26] this because the community is *more than just a place*, it is "a set of social ties ... an extraspatial social phenomenon" (Flanagan, 1993: 23). However, neighborhood relations play an important role in the physical anchoring of the social networks, in particular by having "*a high level of identification with their place of residence*" and th*e quality and quantity of leisure time spent together*[27] (ibid.).

Kinship is the *main substance* that successfully gives shape to a broadened local community with the most surprising connections. Interestingly, this logic that includes familial attributes can be observed as being handed down including *at the level of the structures of power relations* existent in the studied community. In other words, the Goffmanian concept of "teams" (2003) has as a permanent and incipient structure the family connections. There was only one recorded case highlighted as an exception to the rule (the vice-mayor, did not get along with his first cousin, the milk factory owner), but this does not seem to have a serious impact of destabilizing effects at the general level of symbolic connections and paths in the community.

One of the formulated *hypotheses* refer to the fact the very own *kinship represents the social glue between the individual's life and the one of the community* by the constant production of social solidarity. However, especially after the '90s, in Novaci this assumption remains valid just in the case of *long-term residence*. Once the migration of young people to big cities and other countries started (encouraged by the emergence of two forms of individualism – "metropolis as fate and as chance", Georg Simmel apud Dungaciu, 2003, p. 173), this type of solidarity seems to suffer a *dissolution caused by the physical distance* which, in turn, produces *social distance*. In other words, the long-term vicinity (itself based on kinship-type of relations) is a source of solidarity as long as a *critical threshold* (which remains to be determined) is not achieved in relation to migration to new generations of Novacs. We highlight the similarities between this particular situation and the type of social networking that occurs in the cities studied by the Chicago School personalities, developed at the level of districts (Michael Young and Peter Willmott apud LeGates, 1997, p. 208, 211). Moreover, *the family is the base unit of the Novac*

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[24] Are those social contacts, with relatively short timestamps of interaction, with formal and impersonal aspects that reclaim the reciprocity cause and penalization in case of the malfunction of the latter (Saxton, 1986: 10). "One characteristic of social interaction is that it takes place in terms of *position* and *role* … because of the function each person can fulfill for the other. This *function* … is the basis of most social interactions in our society" (idem: 9-11).

[25] In opposition with the secondary **relations** are the **primary** ones that imply informality, liberty, spontaneity. In this case, the attention is distributed on the *personalized characteristics* of the individual and the relationship implies essential *values* like affectivity, acceptance, compassion, respect, understanding (Louis Wirth apud LeGates, 1997: 192).

[26] Vicinity is a symbolic space determined by the spatial proximity of the individuals and the afferent households, based on *mutual relationships in which support each other emotionally and materially*.

[27] In this logic, it remains for further research what does vicinity (neighborhood) actually means for every social category taking into account a classification function in relation with variables such as *gender, age, socio-economic status, household's placement, the networks 'degree of diffusion in territory*.

urban community and *the household remains* "the main family unit"[28], a workspace that offers family members a chance to avoid the threshold of poverty (Vulcănescu, 1997, p. 32) determined by the underdeveloped economic climate[29].

One element that seems to have undergone changes over time is *the mechanism of courtship*, the first step in the development of the family institution, a process that, on a basis of mutual attractiveness, determines the couple yielding (Saxton, 1986, p. 167). Until the abolishment of the village's round dance (1997), the system of courtship was usually a *traditional* one: the dance was performed under the gaze of adults and with their permission. The *assumption* made in this case is that the *symbolism of courtship disappeared at the same time with the elimination of the central element of the round dance*, an influence sent from the urban/metropolitan/media areas right into the collective mentality of the Novac youth[30]. *The lack of spaces with social or cultural significance* generated, in addition, *the appearance of courtship on streets, the terraces or at the mall in Tg. Jiu* a phenomenon which modified the relations *within* the couple (the "macho" immature male social behavior is encouraged, the alcohol redraws the pattern of social networking, weakened relationship substance, etc.). This hypothesis remains to be verified in what extent depends on the social or economical category, the type of family or education of which young people belong to.

An interesting feature of the Novac community is *the culture of friendship* and *the increased familiarity*. The greetings and foreigners' social recognition – who are not considered to be strangers *per se* but potential friends and confidants; the stopping of the car in the middle of the street just to greet a pedestrian; discussions on various topics (personal or politics related) while shopping with unknown individuals from the same locality; scheduled free time or, alternatively, randomly spent on nearby terraces; the *very high speed of information movement* (*without altering it*)[31] within the community; entrusting emergency chores to neighbors or relatives; leisure with family and work colleagues (plans that overlap) by "going out" or playing sport on the local high school's fields etc. All these examples show the high degree of familiarity among *all* city residents. In other words, we are dealing with a *city full of people who are not and do not behave as strangers to each other*, unlike the ideal type of city that is characterized by "mistrust, social deprivation and materialism" (Michael Young apud LeGates and Peter Willmott, 1997, p. 207). Moreover, the community distinguishes itself by an extremely low number of law-breaking events, an effect of the quality of the social contacts and the close network relations. Also, the degree of the familiarity and culture of friendship manifest themselves not by the locals towards locals, but also towards foreigners interested in studying the local realities. In other words, we recorded regardless of position, social status or location, *an availability of communication with outsiders* on behalf of the local inhabitants, situations that facilitated the researcher's insertion into the studied universe. Trying to start a conversation with and initiate any outsider interested of the local development proves *the community's openness towards its knowledge from outside.*

Typically, in urban areas we are dealing with an *intentional and preferential interaction of the individuals* (Flanagan, 1993, p. 25). However, in Novaci appears to be little interaction provoked by the nature of the social functions. Moreover, here one can identify a recipe specific

[28] "Of all the crossing social circles: age, mentality, interests, political or wealth adherences, the family group is of course the main one in a village's life and without its understanding, the village's life is incomprehensible. … Thus, family is the cell around which the entire social rural realities revolve. The family is understood both as a 'community of blood', and especially in the form of 'work and fate community' of those who live under one roof in the same household and form a working unit the same" (Vulcănescu, 1997, p. 33).

[29] Through the high percentage of unemployed workers or peasants who practice subsistence agriculture, lack of jobs for young people, the nature of occupations, etc.).

[30] "The young shifted from the daylight round dance to the night one" (mayor interview).

[31] A significant part of pedestrians were approaching and asking us if we are **the** Bucharest students. We were always greeted by persons even unknown by us – and all these were happening quite early, from the second and third day of the field research.

to the rural order: the *residential proximity* (which is rarely by choice) *determines the appearance and maintenance of a network of strong interactions*, simultaneously with *a behavior of mutual aid*.

The same Flanagan, following his studies in Boston, found that there was *a positive correlation between architectural design and social interaction in the neighborhood*, giving the example of women's social meeting, encouraged by the layout of the kitchen windows face-to-face to the ones of the house from vis-a-vis (ibid.). In Novaci, the fact that the houses' settlement is further from the fence which delimits the street from the property does not invalidate the above correlation which can be supported both by *the mechanism of ad-hoc meetings near the benches settled in front of the gates* and by *the daily work in the garden that encourages the social interaction with the people walking on the streets*. Furthermore, *the wooden benches represent an area of socialization*, especially for children and elders, which favors the idea of an *instrument of social control* of children left unattended by their parents who work during the day.

Because of the *physical distance*, we estimated above the consolidation of a *social distancing*. Louis Wirth claimed that "frequent close physical contact, coupled with great social distance, accentuates the reserve of *unattached* individuals toward one another and, unless compensated for by other opportunities for response, gives rise to *loneliness*" (apud LeGates Louis Wirth, 1997, p. 192), the very same thing that Georg Simmel identified as the *citizen's reserved behavior* or *antipathy* (Georg Simmel apud Dungaciu, 2003, p. 163).

In most cases, this detachment takes its early stages the form of a *generational rupture* between the young and adults (not necessarily older people.) The urban type of culture that surrounds the young ones leads to *a fracture of social contacts*, a fact recognized by both parties: *the young* refer to the Novac solidarity as to something "ancient", out of the current state of the present social functioning, which cannot provide solutions to faced challenges; and *adults* have two ways of addressing. The first is the *unspoken disapproval* because of the trouble caused by the change of the communitarian order (and saying "they with theirs, we with ours"), and the second perspective is one of *approval and encouragement.*

The adults' desire of a better future (and different from their own) for the kids leads to a change of the general idea in the community's development. They prefer to send them to study in the city, to have more opportunities, all at the expense of the household work and through serious financial efforts because of the absence of a real future (and professional status) in the community (no jobs). *This duality between rational and emotional begins to be crystallized into a major issue* that is more and more relevant in local collective mentalities.

It is interesting that in the discussion about social distance (between generations), the *television* is seen as *the main threat* to youth development and also to the whole community, *regardless of the social class or demographic category*. *It is considered responsible for both initiating or deepening the generational division* and *shifting of the mentality of youth*. In other words, *the main tool that inserts the urbanization tendencies and attitudes in the Novac mental is the media*. By promoting a "TV diet" (Clark, 1996, p. 125), overall, there is a tendency towards uniformizing spaces in terms of values, attitudes, expectations, representations and ambitions (ibid., p. 2-3) - of either material, symbolic or physical nature (ibid., p. 2).

As mentioned above, the nature of social interaction is given not by inserting the individual in the community in a functionalist way, but of the place related to an ensemble formed by kinship and the network of social contacts, established face-to-face. As a result, *the formal relations in Novaci are identified, in fact, to be very close to the formal limit*: most public servants are among *relatives* with one another, the local businesses are ordered on grounds of kinship and controlled by a small number of individuals (no more than 8 people), the work relationships are *de-formalized* by the frequent joint of the personal and professional dimension, the increased number of people who practice *subsistence agriculture* and do not need an institutional support, the lack of cultural centers to promote formal activities and to build on the existing *cultural heritage*, the low percentage of employees (6% of total population)

halved compared to 1997 etc. Thus, the principle of the Novac order is that of a *status hierarchy based on kinship*, in which the Goffmanian performance of appearances appears (or the so called "masks").

Moreover, regarding the relations *at the institutional level*, one cannot observe a *functional and constant connection*, and the main "beneficiary" of the system's failure and consequences is the community itself. A number of illnesses or even the quality of youth integration in the community could be explained by *ignorance* - in turn caused by a functional non-communication (sic!) between various local components of the formal social structure. For instance, if in the *school-hospital-city hall trio, instead of a role-play and exchange of social masks* (Goffman, 2003) *associated with an insertion linked to the kinship status*, it could be a continuous flow of information supported by permanent institutional collaborations, then it is most likely that the incidence of heart disease or cases of tuberculosis (due to *poor nutrition*) would be reduced, just like the health problems related to *basic personal hygiene* would be minimized in importance or frequency. Likewise, the lack of an interaction between *educational institutions and the House of Culture* or *the great exemplary personalities* leads to *a weakening in children's attachment for the community they belong to*. Thus, *the absence* of a minimal medical education or the "objective" deficiency in children's access to the local social history, along with a *non-assumed elite-role in the benefit of the community* demonstrates the weakened power of the very own local institutions. This, in turn, leads to a serious deficiency in terms of legitimacy for the key institutions.

Another type of formal relationship is the one between a local inhabitant and the parishes to which he belongs to. The common indivisible ownership (in Romanian "obşte devălmaşă") is an ancient formula organizing on legal and democratic principles (equal rights, decisions by majority vote, etc.), typical for the Romanian territory, in which the collectivity (the association of family households) has the power by law on a territory jointly ruled (Stahl, 1998, p. 29, 64). In these circumstances, the particular individual is the owner of an *indivisible* part of the land (meadows, forests, grasslands, mountains). However, sociologically speaking, *the parish requires a certain kind of social life, with an internal logic, specific laws and special individual behavior*. In the Novac community, there were nine historical perishes, rightened by law for the first time in 1910 by the Forest Regulation. They have continued to be *the main mechanism of organizing the village* until the community was affected by the communist "reform" in agriculture after 1949. Following the fall of the communist regime, the families heirs (once again owners in the joint property) have initiated a *series of legislative steps* to regulate the perishes once again from a legal standpoint and to restore the ownership rights to the heirs still alive. A partial result was achieved after 2001, when perishes acquired legal recognition by the 'Lupu' Law (no. 1/2000). It would be interesting to note that "most of today's pending in court litigations are those related to property reform in the Novac community"[32].

The *initiative* of an entire body of heirs of the lands administered by the perishes demonstrates *the people's need to return to the ancient order*, considered as "*just*". Currently, the reinstated and re-established perishes are from a legal point of view non-profit organizations, although the discontents regarding the *struggle for leadership positions in perishes* unveils the researcher a distinct *level of local businesses*. Typically, political leaders and large employers in the area get to manage the perishes from a *paid* president position that is no longer occupied by "the old and wise" (apud P. Stahl Stahl, 1998, vol. I). Moreover, *the voting activities inside a perish are governed by rules that change depending on the stakes of the decision*, through a *majority controlled* which does not coincide with the owners of the lots (approximately 10% of total number of owners).

Regarding the *subjective reality* of individuals, it can be directly influenced by *existing power centers* in a community (Weber). Some of them a) can be highlighted on a *symbolic*

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[32] According to the local Judge.

infrastructure basis (teachers, leading peasant, midwives, confessor, etc.) and endowed with a kind of *authority based on tradition*, b) others can be *delegated with legal authority*, providing the community 'formal' and 'depersonalized' legitimacy (mayor, priest, school or hospital director, lawyer, journalist, etc.) and c) the third segment can be one consisted of holders of *authority based on charisma*, informal leaders such as "village elder", the personality of the village, confessors, intellectuals, etc. Thus, *the more stable the community becomes, the more intense communitarian network of interactions appears between these centers and the local people*. In addition, *the greater legitimacy gained by the local power center, the "more settled" the community is.*

This social logic[33] oversteps the stage which Goffman called "impression management"[34] because of the fact that authority structures locally recognized generate a certain type of *symbolic social order*, next to the one resulting from the interests management. Thus, the locality remarks itself by possessing a *specific social capital*[35] (Putnam).

However, the Novac community appears to suffer from the erosion of not only the state institutions' authority, but also of the ones that, traditionally, benefitted from *respect and social recognition*. The cause appears to be the increased frequency of *the negative personal examples* which attract the respect lowering of the entire class of which they belong to. Thus, *doctors' authority* in the community is dropping, they are being perceived not as potential rescuers, but as "businessmen of people's money". A similar situation of *significant decrease in attributed social respect* is the one of the *religious leaders* that, with only one exception out of four priests, are no longer considered to be "doctors of souls" (one is a "ladiesman", another a "businessman", and the third "has no gift from God"). Whenever, in a dialogue with parishioners, we talk about them, we got the same expression in response over and over again that suggests a *disapproval of the "discovered" actions*: "one must do what the [Holy] Book says, and not what the priest does!". In other words, although the authority's erosion is visible, *the local people do not depart from faith, but only from the one that does not practice it (right)*. As proof, there is no confusion made between the idea of Church, priest or faith, which demonstrates *the establishment of the community's order and social logic (still) on a symbolic dimension*. Following the field interviews, *the general impression is that divinity and the world of the unseen* is always the referential. This can be illustrated even by the usage and its frequency of the religious connotation terms or transcendental substrate that seem to persist in the current language of the people (consciously or unconsciously used), paradoxically, even when the topic is a business one ("half-witted[36], he doesn't know how to do business. And more, he complicates mine!"; "I don't know where that soul might have come out of that girl cause I hadn't seen it", "we're sinners, what can we do?", "may God give to everyone!").

Regarding the *networks of local interests* within the Novac community, we identified and labeled, at a first analysis, two categories: a) networks with *symbolic and collective infrastructure* and 2) networks of interest *structured on the principle of individual interest*. In the first case we refer to those *social and cultural interactions, constant over the years but usually initiated before 1990, maintained with the local personalities* (usually intellectuals) considered

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[33] "Social life is essentially product or a creative individual result of interactions with significant others" (Goffman, 2003, p.11)

[34] The performance put in play has symbols and significances attached, that lead us to behavior patterns. Thus, the interaction is being attached to the control sign, the development direction referring to the control of the observant's impression over the emitter.

[35] Adjacent interest: are the individuals that left town and got in positions of success comming back to invest, using the levers of power in the locality where they were born in? For example, the hospital of which the mayor said was extremely well equipped due to a local character, a former minister. It is a perverse effect or a return to the basic idea that institutions are formalized expression of a social need? Successful businesses will be affected positively on the community or just the individual?

[36] In Romanian "e sărac cu duhu'!". It could be also mot-a-mot translated with "his soul is poor" (but this expression does not possess the religious connotation as it does in Romanian).

as symbol-persons. These aim to an *increased collective solidarity* and to the *preservation of local specificities*, and manifest a relatively large opening for those interested, even though they benefit from a social space more and more limited. The second type of local networks has a structure which mandatory combines two principles: 1) the need for a *political representative* in the decision-making core of the group formed and 2) the resulting loyalty to the initiator / initiators of the network by *interweaving interests with kinship* (either political persons, unemployed, entrepreneurs, civil servants, doctors, etc.). Such networks involve the business environment in the *wood processing industry* (private forest districts), *transportation* (international affairs), *food service* (dairy plant, bakery), *pharmaceuticals and utilities* (roads, gas station, auto service) in which are necessarily involved, as stated above*, key characters with access to the levers of local or regional power* (city hall, common indivisible ownership, prefecture, police) – *but* this does not automatically mean homogeneousness between the administrative authorities and local entrepreneurs.

In terms of *features*, these networks have a *limited number of members;* hold *key information*; present a kind of social solidarity of *mutual aid* ("one hand washes the other"). At the same time, the *requirements* imposed to the members are *availability, loyalty, keeping important secrets, the local management of impressions*. *The main purpose* of these units is a *financial* (obtaining maximum profit with minimum investments) and *immediate outcome* (most often labeled by the Novacs as "local bombs"). *The main problem* with this type of network operation is *the voidness of a useful public finality*. Impression management techniques in the public's eyes, next to the nature of the motives takes the researcher to the idea of a *theatre play* that, in the *backstage*, has unknown mechanisms to the audience. And *the main consequence* (on the long term) is *the fragmentation of social space*.

4.6. Urbanistic aspects

Since the late '70s, there was a trend in the urban sociology domain to research *correlations between human behavior and physical environment* (Fowler, 1987, p. 365). Although it failed to identify a strong link between architecture and its influence on behavior, one can operate with concepts of "bad and good design" (LeGates, 1997, p. 79). Following this point of view, we established a classification of the Novac accommodations which, apparently, follow three patterns of development that send to the idea of a *community's settlement in time*.

The first stylistical pattern is the peasant/rural one, characterized by *traditional architectural elements* (wood carving, porch, small windows, thick beams, etc.), *small scale dimensions* of the living space and *horizontally stretched* (Bernea, 2006, p. 141). The houses are made of wood (about 100 left) or brick and covered with "straws or tiles, depending on place and financial competence" (Vulcănescu, 1997, p. 34) and are assigned in a household peasant type of order, carefully budgeted.

The second type of space present in the Novac community is the one that emerged during the *communist regime*. There are *no significant differences* between these two first patterns of architectural development recorded. Similar to the traditional peasant houses, the homes in discussion are made out of brick and covered with plaster, small in size and placed near the alleys and streets, the only difference being the roof made of tin. Moreover, both types of constructions present *the house as part of the household*, and not just a living space. The household usually comprises: "1) the living house, 2) the yard with outhouses, 3) enclosed garden or orchard together with a wooden fence" (ibid.) and 4) space for animals (usually cows and watchdogs). The *garden* is seen as a *farm stead* (in Romanian "curte"), meaning *a place of work*, *daily life and peace*. However, there can be identified *a tendency of the garden's adornment through well-groomed and natural floral arrangements*, which are added to the *vine*. Regarding the *elements exterior to the household,* characteristic to the first two timeframes discussed, we can also mention the existence, on the streets and alleys, of still operating *communal fountains* (used mainly before the construction of the water and sewerage network), filled with

inscriptions of religious connotation or attached icons. The second element is the *bench outside the gate* which represents an *area of constant socialization*, of *ad-hoc meetings* and, at the same time, *an instrument of social control*.

The third stylistical level refers to the *chaotic order* (sic!) which has, in its turn, *three levels of manifestation*: a) modernization of old houses, b) construction of new houses to live in, c) construction of villas (holiday houses). *The modernization of old houses* belonging to the earlier orders and times (traditional or more recent, from the communist era), many times, create the idea of a *visual discomfort* because of all the contrasts (or lack of style). Another trend (which has no general character) is to build an annex or a storage place, out of AAC (autoclaved aerated concrete) covered with a metal roof or out of concrete in the yard for car parking, again lacking an identifiable architectural style.

The construction of new homes offers a perspective on the future architectural style of the Novac space, characterized by *stylistical fractures*. The buildings are made in contrast to the traditional ones and have a shock effect for the pedestrian: the *sizes* achieved are impressive, the development takes place both *vertically* and horizontally, the aggressive *colors* palette (pink, green, purple, red), *block* exterior type of aspect, with metal or shingled roof, double glazing windows. The *front gate* that separates the personal environment from the public space has a closure of a *maximum opacity*, and the *courtyard* is mostly covered with concrete, and the decorative items present are of a questionable quality. Thus, some *clear differences in reference* to the household idea can be deduced: it appears to have been replaced with the idea of simple *housing decoration* (flower pots, garden furniture, garden dwarves etc.) and filled with *kitsch* elements (as excess and low content) that take a central spot.

The recent housing neighborhoods, where there is a no network of social contacts with high intensity, the individuals' need to be respected is stronger than the one in a highly vascularized space. In order to minimize the social relations' quality deficit, individuals rely on "quantity of possessions with which the person surrounds himself" (Michael Young and Peter Willmott apud LeGates, 1997, p. 215), a trend identified in the Novac community. Following the investigations made, it was possible to identify the *socio-economic origin* of the owners, mostly *local shepherds* who, while investing a huge amount of money in construction and furniture, *choose not to live in them*, but in a separate small room without the facilities and conditions present in the newly built house. Although considered inadequate by the elite ("the place died in them") and by the local peasants ("it is neither here nor there"[37]), the phenomenon is not seen as "local snobbery" (ibid., p. 214), but as *a manifestation* of previously unfortunate deprivations from the past and of a typical shepherd's mentality ("to have more than your neighbor"). In most societies, the sign of growth in the socio-professional hierarchy of the urbanized individual is the house (ibid.).

The last manifestation level in the contemporary stylistical approach we are referring to is the *construction of villas or holiday homes* which do not differ significantly from the aesthetic elements mentioned above (*except for the living part*). While shepherds *choose* not to live in their new houses, the owners of the villas are Novacs that *left the community in the past* and reached a high professional development stage. In this case, their relationship to the Novac space has *suffered mutations through their alienation from the architectural traditional style of the area*.

Neil Smith argued in *The New Urban Frontier. Gentrification and the revanchist city* (1996) that "economic expansion today no longer takes place purely via absolute geographical expansion but rather involves internal differentiation of already developed spaces" (Smith, 1996, p. XVI). Gentrification is a tendency identified after the 70s that denotes the changing dynamics of housing axis that, "rather than leaving for the suburbs, some affluent urbanites were leaving established middle-class enclaves within the city for other inner-city

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[37] In Romanian "sună ca nuca-n perete", or mot-a-mot translation: "sounds like the nut-n the wall".

neighborhoods occupied by poor or less affluent populations ... The pattern, by now as well-known as suburbanization itself, came to be termed gentrification", a mechanism concentrated on the *afflux of private capital* (Flanagan, 1993, p. 68). Thus, we are able to identify in the Novac community a *gentrification tendency* or a re-urbanization process through the "*absent owners*". Still, such a *tendency of re-urbanization and modernization* of Novaci is yet on a lower development stage if we take into account the statistical data from the area. For a population of 6.000 inhabitants, in Novaci are registered 2245 homes, out of which 2.100 are made of brick and 100 made of wood, a fact that demonstrates the stability of the first two layers in the social (architectural and cultural) local order. Moreover, in town are no more or less than *5 blocks of flats*, with few floors, which denotes *the low degree of urbanization*. In other words, inside the community lies a *curious joint*, apparently non-conflictual, between two types of mentalities, unequally distributed, with direct manifestations on the architectural and living space level: 1) the mentality of the "newly enriched", centered on the house (that is gaining more and more ground), and 2) the rural/peasant type of mentality in which the housing idea, the family relationships and the constant social contacts come first.

For Le Corbusier, the street must become in the modern city a new type of organism, with a very well delimited functional role, around which the city must be projected (LeGates, 1997, p. 104). The social role of the street becomes a subject of interest, playing a role of both a socialization space or traffic management, and one of citizens' security. Regarding the security and safety, Jane Jacobs created a theory opposed to Corbusianism, that tries to retrieve the sociability segment of the urban community that is diluted by the city's mechanisms: in order to keep a city safe, the safety and control over the streets must be preserved (idem, p. 105); and such a thing is generated by the *quality and intensity of the local interactions*, next to the encouragement of *the direct social surveillance* made by the citizens themselves through the multiplication of the "meeting places", of the small shops or other socialization areas (idem, p. 106). The Novac community's safety is generated, on the one hand by the specificity of the social relationships, and on the other by the existence of places that favor the socialization process and group formation: downtown terraces (near the market), city hall, park, intersections dominated by monuments of historical value etc.

Novaci's mapping is easily done by identifying and revealing the *main crossroads* but outside this perimeter (locally defined as *centre*), the streets, the houses and the lack of wide spaces takes us, once again, to the locality's minimal level of urbanization. The first intersection (and most important, in the town's center) has 2 main axes where one can find: *the socio-economical axis* (dispensary and the base of the Forces of employment, city hall, the Parâng hotel and restaurant, the milk factory), *the symbolical value axis* (Monument for Heroes, school, market, Church up the hill). The second intersection has also 2 main axes where one can find the same socio-economical one next to the one linking the kindergarden, police, and population registration. We, thus, observe that the first axis is delimitated by 2 churches (the old one and the one up the hill), a fact that can gain a symbolic value. Regarding the *center town*, we can observe that the tendency of its value modification, of re-settlement from the dominant symbolic dimension to the mainly functional and institutional one. Another fact well noticing is the identification of two other streets with symbolic content: one of the *intellectuals,* where most of the cultivated individuals live, a tradition kept from the old village of Novaci, and the road towards Rânca, the pride, joy and hope of the Novacs.

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