

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING MARGINALIZED URBAN AREAS (ZUM) IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES OF SOCIAL SERVICES FROM TIMIȘ AND CARAȘ-SEVERIN COUNTIES

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Abstract: *The pilot research tries to identify the perception of the beneficiaries of social services from Timiș and Caraș-Severin counties on some aspects of a building-household nature, personal housing and degree of satisfaction with it, other aspects related to personal comfort - the way the house is heated, the way the electrical installation works, the location of the house in the neighborhood, the lighting of the house and the area, the way the garbage is collected. Other aspects related to the quality of life of the beneficiaries of social services are also of interest. An attempt is made to corroborate these data with the areas or neighborhoods where these beneficiaries live, in order to identify, in the future, potential marginal urban areas or areas at risk of marginalization. The research was carried out in two large towns and cities, one in Timiș County, respectively Timișoara Municipality, and one in Caraș-Severin County, Caransebeș Municipality. In addition, the pilot research also tries to identify current problems faced by the beneficiaries of social services in these two municipalities. These problems refer to the number of members in the person's household, the status of their studies, graduation from higher education, high schools or other forms of education, as well as social phenomena that affect the dynamics of the communities from which the beneficiaries come. In this way, an attempt is made to identify possible and potential social vulnerabilities regarding the situation of the beneficiaries of social services, from the localities of interest.*

Keywords: marginal urban areas, problems, social vulnerability, satisfaction

1. Social context

Although the economic and social development of the big cities, constantly observed after the accession to the European Union in 2007, has created a flourishing urban infrastructure, also facilitated by the infrastructure projects implemented with European funds, there are areas and urban areas from which mainly service beneficiaries come social. These areas could meet the criteria and therefore be defined as Urban Marginal Areas (UMAs).

The present study does not allow the concrete identification of such areas, for logistical reasons, considering that the sample of subjects cannot be a representative one. The dimensions of the research are relatively small, in the present situation we are rather talking about pilot research that could be continued in the future with a study of larger dimensions and which would highlight in depth the aspects identified beforehand. However, the conclusions of the present study are valuable because they identify and present concrete problems that affect the beneficiaries of social services and that often affect their quality of life.

The research aspects refer to the home/living conditions, its structure, the number of beneficiaries, respectively the way in which the home meets the needs of the people residing de facto or de jure. On the other hand, we are interested in educational aspects and considerations at the level of studies of the respondents and their family members.

Questionnaires were applied to a number of 50 beneficiaries from each community of interest, respectively 50 respondents in the Municipality of Timișoara and 50 respondents in

the Municipality of Caransebeș. The small number of respondents cannot provide the size of a representative study. However, the perspective of some urban areas where mainly beneficiaries of social services come from is taking shape.

According to a World Bank document, namely the Atlas of Marginal Urban Areas in Romania, we cannot speak at the level of a clear and legal conceptualization of the existence of these marginalized areas, so that, in current practice, we start from an analysis of existing studies regarding, perhaps, to poor, segregated, disadvantaged and marginalized communities. In this context, according to the same mentioned document, urban marginalization consists in the concentration of needy populations, living below the poverty line, in some communities located inside urban settlements - cities and municipalities. Therefore, marginalized urban areas can be defined at a theoretical level as components inside cities that are not able to satisfy an appropriate standard of living for their inhabitants, and here we discuss three criteria:

1. lack of human capital
2. low level of employment
3. improper living conditions.

The term extreme poverty is also related to housing, respectively, to improper housing conditions. It can be correlated with people/families without a home in ownership, the absence of durable goods and consumption expenses below the poverty threshold specific to the environment to which the home belongs. This, despite the fact that Romania experienced economic growth after joining the EU, managing to enter the circle of so-called countries with high incomes (Fina, Heider, Raț 2021:2). However, in relation to the opinions of the quoted source, which we rely on, there are significant imbalances, for example the average salary is among the lowest in the EU, and the life expectancy is more than five years lower than the EU average, our own and contributing to a paradoxical picture. On the one hand, we observe a certain economic and social development, on the other hand, in the big cities, we observe poles of poverty, areas with a low standard of living of the citizens. A significant part of the beneficiaries of social services may come precisely from these urban areas.

The quality of life of needy people in big cities and the understanding of some aspects related to housing - correlation housing education and finally income, is determined by statistical reasons. Although Romania is one of the least urbanized countries, less than 54% of the population lives in an urban environment (Fina, Heider, Raț 2021:8), and the apparent situation of those living in the urban environment is significantly better than in the countryside, however, a number of problems affect the urban poor. It represents a challenge to identify aspects related to the quality of life of the beneficiaries of social services in the two large cities in the west of the country, Caransebeș and Timișoara.

The two big cities have a different status, if Timișoara is in the center of a dynamic region with a strong economic development, just like Iași, Sibiu, Brașov, Cluj Napoca and Bucharest, Caransebeș is assimilated as being in the center of a rural region dominated by old industries and which often face economic problems. However, the two cities belonging to the West region are seen as benefiting from a more advantageous position, close to western markets less dependent on the primary sector and benefiting to a greater extent than other regions from foreign investments (Surd, Kassai, Giurgiu, Laura 2011:24).

2. The purpose of the research

Identification of the perception of the beneficiaries of social services in Timișoara and Caransebeș, beneficiaries of social services, regarding aspects related to the quality of life, in the area of residence.

3. Research objectives

1. identifying the degree of satisfaction with housing and living conditions
2. identifying how the homes meet the needs of the occupants

3. determining the level of education, correlated with absenteeism, school dropout, from the respondents' families

4. Demographic considerations

According to the data of the National Institute of Statistics, the population, by residence, in the Municipality of Caransebeș on January 1, 2016 was 30,495 inhabitants (INS 2016: 73) with the distribution by gender as follows - male 14718, female 15777. According to the mentioned source, (INS 2016: 128) the population of the Municipality of Timișoara on January 1, 2016 was 332,983 inhabitants, respectively with the gender distribution male 155720, female 177263.

The official unemployment rate in Timiș County, according to official data (Timișoara City Hall 2020:19), is one of the lowest in Romania, in 2020 being 1.27 percent. This rate shows a slight increase in 2020, compared to 2019, when the unemployment rate was only 0.79%. According to official data, this increase is explained in the context of the COVID 19 pandemic (Timișoara City Hall, 2020).

Specific to the situation of the Municipality of Timișoara, the proportion of the unemployed compared to the stable population aged 18 - 62 years, in 2020, has an upward trend. Compared to previous years, the unemployment rate is increasing. But we cannot talk about a significant increase. Thus, in 2018 the unemployment rate is 0.36%, and in 2019 it registered a decrease to 0.35%. However, in 2020, the share of the unemployed relative to the population aged between 18 and 62 increased to 0.71%. The data therefore show a doubling compared to the previous year. These data are in close correlation with the pandemic that affected society, starting in 2020. Regarding the distribution by age groups, in 2020 the 40-49 age group includes the most unemployed, and as a gender distribution, the number for women it is almost two thirds.

Examining these data objectively, we find that at the level of the Municipality of Timișoara, even in the context of the pandemic, the unemployment rate is extremely low. The employment situation is very good. At the level of employers, there is a major labor deficit, compensated more and more by labor force brought from outside Romania.

However, the number of unemployed, apparently insignificant, can create the perspective of marginal people, who with all the existing employment opportunities, do not manage to do it. This may be due to either non-existent studies or a situation of severe social marginalization linked to the inability to hold a job.

Moreover, these statistical data that report an extremely small percentage of unemployed people in the Municipality of Timișoara, have the gift of inducing the perception, otherwise objective, that unemployment is not a problem in the Municipality of Timișoara. However, unemployment itself is certainly not a problem, the situation of individuals, families and marginal social groups, who are not able to have a job, is an extremely objective one. Although statistically speaking the percentages seem insignificant, nevertheless from the perspective of social assistance, we are talking about marginalized people, living in conditions that do not allow them to get a job. The present study focuses on this category of people, who, in the conditions of certain employment opportunities, of an extremely low unemployment rate, do not manage to find a job.

Thus from the documents of the Directorate of Social Assistance Timișoara (DAS-CL Timișoara, 2021: 111), it appears that at the level of the municipality, data were collected in the field from a number of 1235 households, respectively 3874 inhabitants, from the Kuncz, Traian, Fratelia areas, Polonă, Ronat and Mătăsarilor. In the case of five areas according to the same bibliographic sources cited, the minimum criteria for human capital, employment and housing were met, which led to the areas being declared marginalized. In the case of the Mătăsaril area, the criteria were partially met. Moreover, starting from these considerations and material realities in the field, financing from European funds was requested for the

realization of some investments in the social infrastructure, correlated with the existing needs.

According to the documents of the Directorate of Social Assistance Timișoara (DAS-CL Timișoara, 2021: 113), in a research carried out in 2020, at the level of providers of social, medical, educational, public order services, poverty is a problem considered very spread by 37.5% of respondents. A similar percentage of 37.5% considers housing (difficult access bad conditions a very widespread problem).

As for Caraș-Severin County, the unemployment rate at the end of 2019 was, according to the data of the Caraș Severin County Directorate of Statistics, 3.1%. Thus, the unemployed registered within the County Employment Agency represented 3345 people, respectively a number of 1512 women and 1833 men. Correlated with the number of people, the unemployment rate is higher among women, respectively 3.2%. According to official data, unemployment was on a downward trend until 2019.

No official data was identified regarding marginal urban areas in Caransebeș, but the poor people surveyed in the study come from the North, Pîpirig, Balta Sărată areas. We make it clear that according to the results of this study, the areas mentioned above cannot be classified as marginal urban areas, but we do not exclude this classification either. The number of subjects surveyed is still insufficient to extract relevant data, but it can provide a preliminary perspective on some existing issues.

5. The target group

The target group consists of beneficiaries of social services, both from Timișoara and Caransebeș. Logistical difficulties meant that the target group was limited to 100 people, respectively 50 from the Municipality of Timișoara and 50 from the Municipality of Caransebeș. The essential condition for participating in the study is that the person is a beneficiary of social services - unemployed over 45 years old, belongs to a disadvantaged social group and has a de facto or de jure domicile, declared, in the two municipalities, for at least five years. This last condition is essential because newcomers, itinerant workers for example, may have difficulties in adapting and finding decent housing. But I considered that their opinion is not relevant for the study and would produce an alteration of the data in the sense of artificially emphasizing some social problems.

Unemployed people over the age of 45 are difficult to fit into the labor market and the legislation provides for some incentive measures for employers who conclude employment contracts with such people. However, unemployment among people over 45 continues to be a problem. It should be noted that in the present study, the quality of unemployment was not proven with documents, but by the simple statement of the person in question, participating in the study.

6. Opinions on housing and its quality

With reference to the situation or the way in which the home is heated, the subjects from Timișoara declare almost 60% dissatisfied with the heating method, while 30% declare themselves very dissatisfied. However, a percentage of 10% of the respondents declare themselves satisfied with the way in which the heating of the home is carried out.

In the municipality of Caransebeș, the situation is as follows - 46% or 23 of the respondents are rather dissatisfied with the way the house is heated, while 38% of the respondents (a number of 19) are very dissatisfied. A percentage of 16% of respondents declare themselves satisfied with the way the home is heated.

Similarly, the way the electrical installation of the home works is rather unsatisfactory. More than half of the respondents from Timișoara are dissatisfied with the way their home's electrical installation works.

In Caransebeș, a percentage of 48% of the respondents declare themselves rather dissatisfied with the way the electrical installation of the house in which they live works, while

36% of the respondents declare themselves very dissatisfied with the way the electrical installation of the house works and only 16% of the respondents are very satisfied with how the electrical installation of their own home works.

It is mentioned that, within the research instrument, the situation of the electrical installation of the own home was strictly individualized, and not the price of electricity, the quality of the services of the electricity suppliers and other aspects that do not relate to the home or the respondent's own context, but only individualized strictly on the home's own electrical installation.

The quality of the electrical installation is individualized by the number of sockets and their overload in relation to household consumers, the number of lighting fixtures and the quality of artificial lighting, the quality of the execution of the interior installation, the materials used, the year of execution, the existence of safety devices of the "Salva Vita" type that can provide protection in three situations e.g. short circuit, overload (when the consumption is exceeded) and differential (accidental current leaks), to protect life in case of accidental electrocution or goods - e.g. to overloads. It was repeatedly stated to the respondents that these aspects strictly refer to the quality of the electrical installation, the exclusive responsibility of the home owner, not the authorities, not the electricity supplier.

However, when asked about the collection of household waste, the majority of respondents from Timișoara declare themselves satisfied with the way in which this is done.

When asked about the degree of satisfaction regarding household waste collection, the respondents from Caransebeș declare themselves rather dissatisfied only in proportion of 20%, while the rest, in majority proportion, declare rather satisfied.

So close values, in the two municipalities, the degree of satisfaction regarding household waste collection is good and very good.

Regarding the respondents from Timișoara, 42% of them claim that their home is crowded, while 32% claim that the home is overcrowded and the number of rooms is much too small in relation to the number of household members. Only a percentage of 26% of the respondents think that they have no problem regarding the crowding of the house.

Regarding living conditions in relation to the number of household members, a percentage of 44% of respondents from Caransebeș state that their home is crowded, 34% of respondents claim that it is overcrowded in relation to the number of members or that the number of rooms is insufficient. A percentage of 22% of the respondents state that they have no problems with reference to the crowding of the home.

Between the two groups of respondents, Timișoara and Caransebeș, relatively equal values are recorded in terms of their own perception of the degree of crowding in their home.

As per capita housing area, the participants in the study who state that they face crowding, respectively overcrowding, benefit from a space of less than 14 square meters per inhabitant, in the case of crowding, respectively less than 10 square meters per capita per inhabitant, in case of overcrowding.

Dissatisfaction is in a significantly lower percentage, recorded in the chapter on how the house is lit during the day, although more than 60% of respondents from both communities of interest declare themselves satisfied, however there are respondents who declare themselves dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with the lighting of the home during the day.

The ambient lighting of the area/neighborhood, during the night as a public utility service, is not seen as problematic by the respondents. In both surveyed communities, the subjects were of the vast majority opinion that the streets are well lit and that there are no problems in this regard.

The location of the house in the neighborhood is not a problem for most of the respondents to the questionnaire questions. However, more than 50% of respondents state that if they had the opportunity and the related financial possibilities, they would move to another neighborhood.

For logistical reasons, aspects such as the existence of documents on the home, owning the home legally, carrying out constructions, expansions and improvements in compliance with construction legislation, respectively the possession of all necessary authorizations, are aspects to be taken into account in perspective, the present study did not touch on these aspects, this can be considered a limitation of the study.

7. School situation

Regarding the educational situation of the respondents, 43% of them state that they have completed 10 classes or vocational school, 31% have completed four classes, 17% state that they have completed eight classes. None of them completed high school and, implicitly, did not attend higher education. A percentage of 9% of respondents did not complete 4 classes.

Although the situation of the existing schools is considered by the respondents from both communities, by a vast majority, to be quite good in relation to the proximity of the school to the respondents' home, there is a percentage of 25% of the respondents who state that their family is faced with school absenteeism respectively with school dropout problems on the part of children.

8. Social phenomenon that can affect the life and dynamics of the family/community

Regarding the respondents' concerns about social data that include drugs alcohol community violence family quarrels in both communities the following statistical data are recorded 57% of the respondents are concerned about the phenomenon of drug use and other prohibited substances, 22% of the respondents say they are worried about alcohol consumption, 11% of respondents say they are worried about violence in the community and only 10% of respondents say they are worried about family quarrels. Other serious problems of the communities of interest, identified by the respondents - over 40% of the respondents from both communities consider vandalism, respectively the destruction of public goods, conflict between neighbors or noisy neighbors as serious problems.

9. Personal situation

To the question "do you consider yourself a poor person", 85% of respondents answered yes. To the question "do you consider that there are sufficient employment opportunities, adapted to your professional and educational situation, in the community you belong to", 80% of the respondents gave a negative answer.

10. Conclusions

There are some conclusions that emerge from the present study, potential marginal urban areas can have characteristics such as:

Poverty: The social service beneficiaries surveyed face significant economic hardship as they have limited access to employment opportunities and financial resources. Dissatisfaction with housing and living conditions is evident. Despite the fact that there are no dissatisfactions with utility providers, here we are referring to household garbage collection, respectively to public lighting, the homes are not intended to confer a particular degree of satisfaction. The overcrowding of the home, the heating situation of the home, the poor quality electrical installations, to which are added the subjects who answer that although the home is well located in the neighborhood, they would still move if they had the opportunity (answer provided by a proportion of 50% of the respondents) , lead us to conclude that there are strong dissatisfactions with living conditions. The dwellings, in terms of the surveyed subject lot, satisfy only a small percentage of the needs of the occupants, as it appears from the answers provided by them.

Limited education: Access to quality education is often reduced in marginalized areas, a fact confirmed by pilot study data. This fact can contribute to or lead to the perpetuation of the cycle of poverty. From the data provided by the respondents, it appears that they have a relatively low level of instruction and education, less than half of the respondents have completed 10 classes or professional education. In relation to the low degree of instruction, qualification and education, the low degree of employment can be correlated, respectively the self-inclusion of the beneficiaries participating in the study in the category of poor people. Although the unemployment rate in the localities/counties where the respondents come from is extremely low and the job offer is generous, the possibility of getting a job is extremely low in the case of people whose education is limited and inconsistent with the requirements of labor market. Another limitation of the study was that we did not focus on the degree of information of the beneficiaries of social services regarding the job offer existing in the community. A research theme that we propose for the future, starting from the conclusions of the present study, is the possible stereotypes related to the labor market, which the beneficiaries of social services develop.

Social phenomenon: Marginalized areas can have higher rates of social phenomena that can disturb the dynamics of the community, often related to social and economic problems. In the current research, the responses given to social phenomena that can affect the life and dynamics of the family and community are eloquent in this regard - a significant number of respondents declare themselves worried about the phenomenon of drug use, the share of those who declare such an opinion exceeds half of the lot in question. A significant percentage, moreover, to draw attention to potential indications of problem communities or urban areas. Last but not least, almost a quarter of the respondents declare their concern about alcohol consumption. Other problems identified are the declared concern about violence in the community and a smaller percentage declares their concern about the quarrel in their own family. The respondents also identified other problems characteristic of the communities they come from, such as: vandalism against public goods, some conflict situations between or neighbors or very noisy neighbors. This is how these potential marginalized areas can polarize undesirable social phenomena, implicitly drug trafficking and consumption, alcohol consumption, noise, arguments, thus outlining the picture of areas unfavorable for living.

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