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CONTENTS

FAMILY TYPE CHILD PROTECTION IN ROMANIA. LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS Ana-Cristina BACIU	11-22
SOCIAL CONFLICT IN IBN KHALDUN'S THOUGHT Ali ALIOUA	23-28
ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF USA MIGRANTS INFLOWS; EVIDENCE FROM EIGHT MAJOR ORIGIN COUNTRIES Ismail AMANI, Nadjat KACI	29-37
SOCIO-MEDICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INJECTING DRUG USE IN ROMANIA Timeea-Erzsebet PAP, Cosmin-Constantin SICREA, Felicia ANDRIONI	38-46
EATING TOGETHER FROM THE CLEANING WORLD: GATHERING ALL FOODS TOGETHER AS THE ULTIMATE FORM OF COMMENSALITY Diana Maria ARON	47-52
PRO-SOCIAL EDUCATION OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY Lumiņa BÂRLEANU (DOBRE)	53-58
LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SENIOR COUNSELING TO REDUCE POST-PANDEMIC ANXIETY Alina Maria BREAZ, Ovidiu TODERICI, Henrietta TORKOS, Elvis DOBRESCU	59-72
BODY, FOOD EATING BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: AN AGING PERSPECTIVE Marian CERCEL	73-80
RACIALIZATION, OTHERNESS AND SENSIBILITIES IN ARGENTINA. A CRITICAL APPROACH FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF BODIES AND EMOTIONS Ana Lucía CERVIO	81-92
EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ChatGPT ON ACADEMIC WRITING: A SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS Ecaterina COMAN	93-99
BREAKING BARRIERS: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF ROMA PARENTS ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN Alexandrina-Mihaela POPESCU, Gabriela MOTOI	100-107
POLITICAL VIOLENCE VS HUMAN SECURITY: A GENERATIVE AND CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIP FOR THE RESILIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY Claudiu COMAN, Igor COJOCARU	108-115
AGING WELL IN A ONE-FAMILY HOME, BALANCING AUTONOMY AND ADJUSTMENT Virginie DEJOUX, Matthieu GATEAU	116-126
IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DAILY LIFE Dalal DJABRI	127-132

THE WEB 2.0, BLOGGING, AND THE ARAB INTELLECTUAL: REALITY AND CURRENT CHALLENGES Fateh DJEBLI, Wahid DRAOUE	133-141
COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR LIMITS Cristina GAVRILUȚĂ, Alexandrina CUCU	142-148
THE SOCIAL WORKER'S IMPORTANCE IN FOSTER CARE CASES Gabriela-Felicia GEORGEVICI Petronela DRĂGOI	149-154
INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE SOCIAL ASSISTANT'S INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT THE ELDERLY Gabriela-Felicia GEORGEVICI, Ramona-Ana GRĂDEANU, Oana Lavinia FILIP	155-161
WOMEN OF THIRD WORLD AND GENDER EQUALITY Fadhila HAMEL	162-166
SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY IN EASTERN CAMEROON Hanse Gilbert MBENG DANG	167-175
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOREST RESERVE AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE COMMUNITY OF BELABO AT EAST CAMEROON Jacques Serge KOUADJOVI KALEDJÉ II	176-183
STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS AND THE ACTUAL ENERGY CHALLENGES Carmen Gabriela LĂZĂREANU	184-199
SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE BASED ON GENDER IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: A FIELD STUDY AT RIZAK MOHAMED ESSGHIR HIGH SCHOOL, AIN SINOUR, SOUK AHRAS. Adel LOULOU, Reda SELATNIA	200-208
ARMS CIRCULATION AND CROSS-BORDER INSECURITY: THE NEED TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF POROSITY OF BORDERS BETWEEN CAMEROON AND ITS NEIGHBORS Rose Nadine MAHOULA NDJOKWE	209-213
PERSPECTIVES OF MATERNITY AT ADOLESCENT AGE Elena-Monica MIHALCEA, Lavinia Elisabeta POPP, Claudiu Mihail ROMAN	214-220
PREVALENCE AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY AMONG ADULT POPULATION OF ALGERIA Abdellatif MOUSSOUNI, Adel SIDI-YAKHLEF, Houari HAMDAOUI, Amaria AOUAR Zakarya MOQADDEM	221-236
CAMEROON DIASPORA AND THE AMBIGUITY OF DUAL NATIONALITY/CITIZENSHIP IN CAMEROON Martin Dieka MUKETE	237-246

THE EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION'S INTEREST FOR THE TIMIȘOARA EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2023 PROGRAM Delia NADOLU, Bogdan NADOLU	247-255
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES: THE CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN CAMEROON TRAINING STRUCTURES FOR ENTREPRISES: THE CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZES ENTREPRISES IN CAMEROON Zacharie ONDOA, Frantz Stéphane ENYEGUE ESSO ABOUDI	256-264
A MULTIFACETED APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES Ecaterina COMAN	265-271
ANALYSIS ON FAMILY SUPPORT RESSOURCES AS PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT Andreea - Mihaela NIȚĂ, Mihaela - Cristina PÂRVU	272-286
THE RISKS TO WHICH CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT Carmen PALAGHIA	287-296
THE GRAY ZONES: ESSENTIAL VARIABLE OF EXPLANATION OF THE CONFLICTUALITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA Adamou Machou PARE	297-312
SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON MENTAL HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY Mădălina-Ioana RAȚIU	313-318
CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING MARGINALIZED URBAN AREAS (ZUM) IN THE PERCEPTION OF THE BENEFICIARIES OF SOCIAL SERVICES FROM TIMIȘ AND CARAȘ-SEVERIN COUNTIES Claudiu Mihail ROMAN, Lavinia Elisabeta POPP, Oana Lavinia FILIP	319-325
DISABILITY IN ROMANIA AT THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION Cosmin-Constantin SICREA, Gianina-Mădălina CHIRUGU	326-334
THE REDYNAMISATION OF THE RUSSO-AFRICAN RELATIONS: WHICH STAKES GEOPOLITIQUES AND GEOSTRATEGIQUES FOR AFRICA IN XXIE CENTURY? Timothee TOMO NDJOBLO, Stéphane Frantz ABOUDI ESSO ENYEGUE	335-344
QUESTION: MEASURING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE URBAN AXIS BISTRIȚA-BECLEAN - NĂSĂUD-SÂNGEORZ-BĂI, COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE URBAN AXIS TG MUREȘ-SUCEAVA-BAIA MARE-CLUJ-NAPOCA Alexandru Marius TĂȚAR	345-372
BOOK REVIEW: Hervé Marchal, Jean-Marc Stébé (2023). <i>Le pavillon, une passion française/The pavilion, a French passion</i> , Presses Universitaires de France, 276 p. Luminita IOSIF	373-374

FAMILY TYPE CHILD PROTECTION IN ROMANIA. LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

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Abstract: *The paper focuses on the most important steps taken by Romania in the legislative evolution in the field of children's rights protection. For this reason, we have divided the periods of legislative development into 5, namely: before 1989, the period 1990-1991, the period 1992-1996, 1997-2003 and 2004 until now. The stage before 1989 is characterized by a strong centralization of the responsibility for the protection of "certain categories of minors" by the state (Law no. 3/1970), the lack of resources and the failure to effectively offer protection. The next stage is one of emergency measures, followed by the first real steps towards a society focused on respecting children's rights. A notable evolution in the protection of children outside the biological family was the development of the foster care service, together with Government Emergency Order no. 26/1997. The real progress is Child Law no. 272 of 2004 with its subsequent amendments as well as other elements of legislation intended to facilitate its application.*

Keywords: child protection, family care, children's rights, maternal assistance, legislative evolution

1. Introduction

Concern for the child's well-being has been manifested and reflected in legislation differently, over time, in Romania. We can study this aspect in a systematic way by phasing the analyzed periods as follows: before 1989, then in the following period when a quick repair was attempted, of the crisis intervention type, in order to be able to lay the foundations for the reconstruction of the system - 1990-1991 -, the stage of transition, of some important but uncoordinated changes - 1992-1996 -, the stage of fundamental changes, of consolidating an adequate legislative base, called by Greenwell (2002: 2) "of real changes" in the protection of children's rights - 1997-2003 -, and the period 2004 to the present, of continuous improvements.

Since 2004, with the appearance of Child's Law, we can talk about a coordinated development, correlated internally and internationally, in the direction of promotion and guarantee by the state of all children's rights, as they are provided in the UN Convention of 1989. The study of the legislative evolution from the perspective of protection of children's rights was carried out and eloquently scored, for the period before 1989 and until 1999, in the volume *Protecția copilului. Dileme, concepții și metode* (Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999: 27-41), which proposed a phasing of the reform that would include the period 1990-1991, that of rapid changes, which the author, citing Elena Zamfir, calls it a period of the reparative regulations (Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999: 28), 1992-1996, when a series of regulations appear that focus mainly on material support for children, 1997 being the year of the beginning of the 3rd stage, a stage marked by "judicial reform of child protection" (Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999: 36).

2. Before 1989

Before 1989, the Romanian state promoted a pro-natalist policy, reinforced by Decree 770 of 1.10.1966, which led not only to the growth of the country's population in general, but also to an increase in the number of families who could no longer properly care for children, causing a high rate of admissions to residential centers. In this context, was published Law 3 of 1970 regarding the protection regime for certain categories of minors, in the Official

Gazette no. 28 of March 28, 1970. This law remained in force from May 12, 1970 until June 11, 1997, when it was revoked and replaced by Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997. In the statement of reasons to Law no. 3/1970 was stated that the state is the one responsible for the protection of children who cannot be cared for in their own family. For this, the document states, an important role is played by the Executive Committees of the Popular Councils which, through the guardianship authority, supervise the way children are raised and educated, supporting those who need special protection from the state. Article 2 of Law no. 3/1970 referred to the measure of family placement, specifying that it could be instituted with a family or a person who met the "necessary moral, material and sanitary conditions" (art. 2 para. 1, Law 3/1970). Next, it is specified that the measure can only be taken with the consent of the parent or guardian and that it can be ordered by the County Popular Councils through the social assistance body. The foster family was entitled, according to this law, to receive a maintenance allowance for the minor, the amount of which was established by a decision of the Council of Ministers. The children for whom the placement measure could not be instituted, but did not have the necessary and sufficient conditions to grow up in their own family, were directed to cradles and children's homes subordinated to the Ministry of Health, respectively Labor.

Starting with December 1989, Decree no. 770/1966 was no longer applicable, thus it was removed one of the causes of the high number of children protected by the state in cradles and children's homes.

3. From 1990 to 1991

The first major attempt of the child protection system, after 1989, was to build the foundations of a child protection system that would meet international standards of child rights protection capable of addressing the major problems facing the system at that time and making towards the transition from the protection of the rights of the child in the narrow sense to the protection of the child in the broad sense (see the definition of the child protection system in the narrow sense and in the broad sense according to Thoburn apud Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999: 17) in a decentralized manner. This involved shifting the focus, previously almost exclusively, from the situation of children deprived of parental protection and admitted to large residential centers, to all children who, at some point, became vulnerable and needed protection, through measures of a higher degree decentralization. Romania was among the first European countries to ratify, in September 1990, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989.

Law no. 18 of September 27, 1990, stated in the preamble, among other things, that the family is recognized as a "natural environment intended for the growth and well-being of all its members and, in particular, children" (Law 18/1990).

To overcome the crisis, Romania accepted significant international aid coming especially from important international non-governmental organizations such as Mediciens Sans Frontieres, World Vision International, International Red Cross, Save the Children International, SOS Children's Villages International etc. Gradually, they built their bases of action in Romania by establishing national and, later, even local branches. For example, SOS Satele Copiilor Romania was established on November 26, 1990, with distribution in 3 counties. World Vision Romania has been operating for over 30 years in our country since 1990, getting involved in supporting an impressive number of children in difficulty (over 24,000 cases in 6 counties in Romania, according to the information on the official WV Romania website <https://worldvision.ro>).

Regulations regarding the rights and protection of the child were included in the Romanian Constitution of 1991 which stipulated the right to life and to physical and mental integrity (chap. 2 art. 22), freedom of expression (chap. 2 art. 30), the right to education (chap. 2 art. 32) the right to health protection (chap. 2 art. 33), for all citizens of the country, without

discrimination and a decent standard of living (chap. 2 art. 43). Article 44 (chap. 2) emphasizes the equality of rights of children outside of marriage and those of marriage. An important role in the evolution of the regulations regarding the rights and special protection of the child is played by Article 45 (chap. 2) *Protection of children and young people*, in which the right of children and young people to a special regime of protection and assistance, to allowances of state, aids for sick or disabled children as well as other forms of social protection were stipulated. Any form of exploitation of minors is explicitly prohibited by law.

4. From 1992 to 1996

The period 1992-1996 is characterized by an accumulation of legislative measures aimed at addressing the problems in the child protection system after the first wave of crisis interventions, which assumed the emergency of some necessary laws, the modification of others and a massive infusion of material, financial, logistical, and training aid in the field. The year 1994 is the one of the professional debuts of the first graduates in the social work specialization after its abolition in 1969. Since it was found that these first measures were not nearly enough to reduce the number of children in cradles and children's homes, it was necessary to rethink the legislation in a more profound way even if, until 1997, the steps taken were only necessary fragments in a process that needed to be much larger. The appearance of Law no. 11/1990 with the amendments from Law no. 48/1991 regarding adoption and the numerous adoptions - both national and international - approved over time, the repeal of Decree no. 770/1966 and the first forms of organization of childcare alternatives in smaller residential centers (see, e.g., SOS Children's Villages) failed to visibly decrease the number of children who were protected in large residential centers. This is because the number of admissions to residential centers did not decrease in the short period after 1989 (even though abortions were legalized, and the number of unwanted pregnancies decreased). The continued pauperization of the population because of the transition crisis from the centralized to the market economy is becoming another source of causes for child abandonment. Added to this is a growing number of families established and reconstituted through cohabitation, single-parent families resulting from separation or divorce, susceptible to poverty more than typical families. This was complemented by greater freedom regarding the management of sexual life of adolescents and young people, without a minimum of relevant informational support from the perspective of sexual education.

To regulate the status of children abandoned in state institutions, the state adopted Law no. 47/1993 regarding the judicial declaration of child abandonment. This allowed not only the establishment of temporary protection measures for children in the protection system, but also of permanent ones.

Also in 1993, the National Committee for Child Protection was created by Decision no. 103, which stipulated, in article no. 4, the main attributions. This stage represents progress in the coordination of the necessary measures for the protection of the rights of the child because the Committee became responsible for the elaboration and proposal of strategies and legislation in the field, as well as for the coordination and supervision of all concrete measures and actions needed to be taken.

This period of legislative changes also included the issue of cross-country adoptions from the perspective of aligning Romanian legislative measures with international legislation on adoptions, thus, it was published in the Official Gazette no. 298 of October 21, 1994, Law no. 84/1994 for the ratification of the Convention on the protection of children and cooperation in the matter of international adoption, concluded in The Hague on May 29, 1993.

Government Decision no. 1.150/1996 regarding the operation of social services for child protection, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 299 of November 21, 1996, refers to the organization of social services for child protection in the structure of county councils and local councils of the sectors of Bucharest.

All these changes aimed at improving child protection measures left, for the most part, unresolved the problem of the large number of children institutionalized in large residential centers and did not cover the guarantee by the state of all the rights of the child, as they were assumed by signing, in 1990, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5. From 1997 to 2003

The real reform was glimpsed only in 1997, with the emergence of Emergency Ordinances no. 25 and 26 which brought regulations that were the basis of modern legislation on the issue of adoption and the protection of children's rights. Emergency ordinance no. 25/1997 would be approved, the following year, by Parliament as Law no. 87/1998, and Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997, as Law no. 108/1998.

Emergency ordinance no. 26/1997 on the protection of children in difficulty brings to the fore, for the first time, the idea of protecting children in difficulty - unlike Law 3/1970 which had been in force until that date, and which regulated the situation of the protection of "certain categories of minors" (Law 3/1970). Through this ordinance, although the notion of ill-treatment did not appear explicitly, the concept of a child in difficulty was defined, thus using an internationally agreed terminology (Roth-Szamoskozi, 1999, p. 37). Also important is the fact that Government Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997 (GEO no. 26/1997) stated that the responsibility for the well-being of the child is, first, of the local community of which the said child is a part, with the state having a distal role, supporting, and guaranteeing the application of legal norms.

GEO no. 26/1997 - published in the Official Gazette no. 120/12.06.1997 -, provided for the establishment of the Child Protection Commission and the Specialized Public Service (SPS) for child protection, specifying their duties. In order to respect the best interests of the child, the normative act stipulates a series of legal measures that can be taken in the case of a child in difficulty, as follows: entrusting the child to a family or a person, the specialized public service or an authorized private body, entrusting in order to adoption, placement with a family or person or within SPS, as well as emergency placement (art.7, GEO no. 26/1997).

Of major importance for the beginning of the profession of professional maternal assistant are art. 8 (2) in which it is specified that at the level of the Child Protection Commission it can be decided "to entrust the child to a family or a person who consents to it and who presents the material conditions and moral guarantees necessary for the harmonious development of the child", art. 23 para. (3) from Government Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997 which introduces the notion of a professional maternal assistant and his need to certify as a professional - an aspect subsequently provided for in Decision no. 217 of 1998 as well as art. 25 which stipulates the obligation of local public administration authorities to act for the identification, training, and evaluation of a territorial network of professional foster carers.

Another normative act relevant for 1997 is Decision no. 205 of May 19, 1997, regarding the organization of local public administration authorities in the field of child rights protection, which provides for the establishment of the County Directorates for the protection of children's rights, as well as their structure and attributions. Among the services that are established within the Directorates is the Service for supporting family-type alternatives.

Important, here, is the provision regarding the attributions of the Directorates according to which they should support "family-type alternatives to residential-type child protection" (art. 6, letter g, Gov. Decision no. 205/1997) and try to identify some permanent solutions for children. It is the moment when the state explicitly includes in a normative text the recognition of the superiority of childcare in the family compared to the residential environment. It also provides for the identification, evaluation, training and support of families or individuals to create a network of professional protective families at the county level, according to art. 6, letter j of Decision no. 205/1997, thus indicating the general framework for establishing the network of future professional foster carers.

Decision no. 217 of 1998 regarding the conditions for obtaining the attestation, the attestation procedures and the status of the professional maternal assistant establish the details of the selection, attestation and employment of the care person so that they can be included in a formal work framework at the level of the County Directorate for the protection of children's rights or at the level of a private body authorized in the field of child protection.

Law no. 108/1998 for the approval of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 26/1997 regarding the protection of the child in difficulty, adopted on May 11, 1998, marked an important legislative leap that was the platform for launching, in 2004, the Children's Law. It is the first regulation with legal status that addresses the child's right to protection from the state after Law no. 3/1970. GEO no. 26/1997 warrant, on the part of the state, the protection of the child's rights and support offered to the local community that has the obligation to protect the child in difficulty. An important aspect of this law is the regulation of the transfer mode of cradles and children's homes as well as the centers for receiving minors, which operated until that moment according to Law no. 3/1970, and their reorganization into placement centers and child reception centers within specialized public services.

The next important step in the legislative evolution was the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 192/1999 for the establishment of the National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights (NAPCR) which structures with a higher degree of coherence the work organized on a national level for child protection. Government Decision no. 260/2000, published in the Official Gazette no. 171/21.04.2000, aimed the approval of programs of national interest in the field of the protection of the rights of children in difficulty and emphasizes the importance of maternal assistance activity, stating the need to decrease the number of children included in the residential care system protection and shifting the emphasis towards family-type alternatives, with funding from the budget of the National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights and the budgets of county councils.

The year 2001 is marked by the request of the Adrian Năstase Government, addressed to the Romanian Parliament, to adopt a moratorium on international adoptions for one year, a request influenced by the country report presented in the European Parliament where attention was drawn to the negligent treatment of this aspect by the authorities of the state. As a result of the action taken, international adoptions were suspended in October 2001, which put some level of pressure on domestic families and residential alternatives.

Another element of progress in 2001 is the Government's Emergency Ordinance no. 12/2001 which provided for the establishment of the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption. This GEO was approved and amended by Law no. 252/2001 and art. 9 para. (3) from Government Decision no. 770/2003 with reference to the organization and operation of the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption. Thus, the coordination of the entire activity, on a national level, of the protection of children's rights rests with this new authority, recognized under the acronym NACPA, which receives additional powers compared to the National Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights – NAPCR. In art.1(4) of the GEO no. 12/2001, it was stipulated that this new authority is responsible for the application of policies and the development of strategies in the field of the protection of children in difficulty and those with disabilities, but also in the field of adoption, thus taking over the powers of the NAPCR. Decision no. 539 of June 7, 2001, specifies the government strategy in the field of child protection in difficulty for the period 2001-2004 as well as the operational plan for the implementation of this strategy.

Because the incidence of ill treatment applied to children did not indicate, over time, a decrease in the phenomenon, Ministerial Order no. 177 of 2003 which provided minimum standards for the child telephone, the counseling center for the abused, neglected and exploited child, as well as mandatory minimum standards for the community resource center for the prevention of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, provides important resources in protecting and promoting children's rights at the level of local communities. In 2003, the

Computerized Child Tracking and Monitoring System, CCTMS, was created. (Stănciulescu, Grigoraș, Teșliuc and Pop, 2016).

The conditions and procedures for attestation and the status of the professional maternal assistant are reformulated by Government Decision no. 679/2003 published in the Official Gazette no. 423/23.06.2003. Order no. 35/2003 established minimum standards necessary to ensure the protection of the child at the professional maternal assistant and offered a guide for the implementation of these standards, supplementing Gov. Decision no. 679/2003, regarding the attestation of the professional maternal assistant. The large time gap between the two elements of approved legislation - attestation conditions and procedures, respectively professional standards -, the first government decision for maternal assistant attestation being Gov. Decision no. 217/1998, illustrates the inertia that persists at the macro level in the field of child protection. From GEO no. 217/1998, which allowed professional parents to be certified, 3 years passed until the establishment of the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption and another 2 years until professional standards were drawn up. Practically, from the profession's outline to the establishment of its standards, it took 5 years in which the trials and failures of the system were paid with repercussions on the children's well-being. These elements of legislation in the field of child protection at maternal assistant were supplemented by Order no. 137/2003, published in the Official Gazette no. 702/7.10.2003, which concerned the curriculum of professional training courses for professional foster carers. Law no. 326/2003 is also important, establishing the rights of children and young people in specialized public services for child protection, of mothers protected in foster care centers, as well as those of children in placements with professional foster care assistants. This was later supplemented and amended by Law no. 111/2004 and Law no. 257/2013.

6. From 2004 to present days

The most important elements of recent legislation are Law no. 272 and Law no. 273 of 2004, regarding child protection - Law no. 272/2004 being also known as the Child's Law -, respectively Law no. 273/2004 regarding the regulation of national and international adoptions. It is important to mention here the fact that the legislator gives a higher degree of importance to family placement measures compared to residential ones, this aspect being also emphasized by the prohibition of the placement of children under 3 years old in the residential system, once the foundations of the family placement system were laid to the professional maternal assistant. Also, this year, Government Decision no. 1434/2004 regarding the attributions and the framework Regulation for organization and operation of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection (GDSACP).

In 2004, the European Commission issued a warning to Romania to stop the export of children in the form of international adoptions, otherwise risking the blocking of EU accession and the suspension of support funds. This results in the adoption law being amended in June and international adoptions banned. Prime Minister Adrian Năstase and French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin establish the need to set up an international commission that includes EU experts, assigned to evaluate cases of adoption outside the country.

In 2005, the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption (NACPA) was transformed into the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights (NAPCR), with the extension of its mandate in the field of protection and promotion of the rights of all children in Romania (Recomandările Comitetului ONU pentru Drepturile Copilului. A 51 sesiune, 2009: 2). According to the observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009: 3), some of the recommendations have not been fully implemented, one of them being the one regarding the development of the Child Monitoring and Tracking Information System (CMTIS) in a way unitary throughout the country.

Government Decision no. 1058/2005 approved the National Action Plan for the application of legislation in the field of child rights protection, and Government Decision

860/2008 provided for the National Strategy in the field of child rights protection for the period 2008-2013. The need for clarification regarding the implementation of the 2004 Children's Law was answered, in 2006, by the Manual regarding the implementation of Law no. 272/2004, manual made by NACPR with the support of UNICEF.

Decision no. 49 of January 19, 2011, establishes the framework methodology regarding prevention and intervention in the multidisciplinary team, in cases of violence against children, respectively the role of professionals in preventing and reporting them. In the absence of notification, even though the ill-treatment is established, the GDSACP employee or the teaching staff, who hold the status of civil servants and have the obligation "to notify the criminal investigation bodies about the act that is related to their service", are liable for "committing the crime of omission to report", an act provided for and sanctioned by art. 267 of the Criminal Code (Law no. 287/2009). We believe that this legislative provision is, on the one hand, little known by those who, by virtue of their profession, interact with children, on the other hand, its application/lack of application may be one of the reasons why reporting seems to be at the assessments of the adult who notices the problem. It would be interesting to know how many such situations have come to the attention of the legislator over time, since the inclusion of this provision in Law no. 286/2009. Also, any natural or legal person has the obligation to immediately notify the authorities if they become aware of the commission of an act that endangers the life or causes the death of a child, otherwise being liable for committing the same crime of failure to report (art. 267 Criminal Code), that is considered a particular form of non-reporting. Employers of child protection institutions have the obligation, by art. 102 of Law no. 272/2004, to notify the criminal investigation bodies and order the removal of the employee who committed any form of violence against the child, otherwise they are also liable to sanctions. Incidents such as bodily injury or accidents suffered by protected children must be reported in writing, according to the Standards of Order 21/2004 (XXI, 6), within a maximum of 24 hours after the occurrence of the event. The children themselves can report the violation of their rights, see Law no. 272/2004, art. 34 (Călian, 2019: 25). The changes from 2013, by Law no. 257/2013, on Law no. 272/2004 provide for sanctions for failure to report suspicions of ill-treatment, but they were not followed by the development of clear institutional procedures that establish a hierarchy of reporting responsibilities at the level of all institutions involved (hospitals, schools, etc.). For professionals working in the field of child rights protection, provisions are stipulated regarding responsibility and how reporting is done. This aspect of the law's evolution sets some benchmarks for responsibilities and avenues for resolving suspected maltreatment, including for highly publicized cases of foster care abuse and neglect. The year 2012 is marked by the fact that Romania amends the Law on Adoptions and resumes international adoptions based, however, on very restrictive criteria. Decision no. 299/2014 regarding the organization and functioning of the National Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights and Adoption, published in the Official Gazette no. 289 of April 18, 2014, reorganizes National Authority for the Protection of the Family and the Rights of the Child.

At the end of 2014, the National Strategy for the protection and promotion of children's rights for the period 2014 - 2020 and the Operational Plan for its implementation were adopted by Government Decision no. 1113 of December 12, 2014. In 2016, the policy regarding the resumption of international adoptions is continued by the Dacian Cioloș Government, Law no. 273/2004 undergoing repeated updates. The organization and operation of the Child Protection Commission is reanalyzed, and its new operating formula is published in the Official Gazette, Part I no. 596 of July 25, 2017, by Decision no. 502/2017.

Law no. 257/2013 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 272/2004, with its republication in the Official Gazette no. 159 of March 5, 2014, defines the best interest of the child, stating that it is limited to "the child's right to normal physical and moral development, socio-affective balance and family life" (art. 2, paragraph 11, L257/2013). In the case of children abandoned in maternity, for which art. 11, paragraph 7 provided that after the

registration of the birth, SPS is obliged to send to the GDSACP the act of registration of the child's birth, it is modified by specifying the deadline of 24 hours for carrying out this step. For the situation of children abandoned in maternity hospitals for whom the parents have not taken steps to register the birth, the obligation of the local SPS to take this step is stipulated (in art. 111). The same law introduces changes regarding the purpose of the service plan, so that, in art. 35, paragraph 4 states that it aims to "prevent abuse, neglect, exploitation and any form of violence against the child or the separation of the child from his family", different from the previous form where only the role of preventing the separation of the child from his parents was specified. Art. 54 is also amended, and a deadline provided by law is introduced, so that the GDSACP has the obligation to draw up the individualized protection plan (IPP) within 30 days after receiving the request for the establishment of a special protection measure or immediately after the director of the GDSACP ordered emergency placement. Prior to this change, it was specified that the GDSACP should carry out the PIP as soon as it received the request to institute the measure, without establishing a maximum time for this.

An interesting aspect, contained in the legislative amendment, which comes to make parents responsible for the efforts to raise and support their own children, is that for the parents of children for whom a special protection measure has been instituted, not only a contribution amount can be established for their maintenance but also, when this aspect is not feasible, the obligation of the able-bodied parent to perform 20-40 hours of work of local interest, monthly for each child, during the application of the special protection measure, within the city of the domicile or residence (art. 63, paragraph 4). Article 64, paragraph 11 introduces necessary and important additional clarifications with reference to the situation of children whose legal guardians are in the situation of being "detained, arrested, interned" or "cannot exercise their parental rights and obligations". Article 64, paragraph 12 explains the roles and obligations of public institutions in the cases provided for in paragraph 11, respectively the fact that the institution "which decided or ordered one of the measures provided for in paragraph (11) which led to a minor being left without parental protection or who, as the case may be, receives or hosts a person whom he knows is the sole legal guardian of a child" must inform the GDSACP responsible for the city to which the child belongs about his situation and his legal guardian.

Another important aspect of the legislative amendment brought by Law no. 257/2013 was the amendment of Article 64, paragraph 3 of Law no. 272/2004, namely the fact that, during the emergency placement of the child, the rights, and obligations regarding the administration of the child's assets pass from the responsibility of the president of the county council to the responsibility of the DGSASPC director. In article 66, paragraph 1 of the same law, the deadline for notifying the court regarding the measure of emergency relief is changed from 5 days to 48 hours. The amendment of Article 70 implies the extension of the period for monitoring the situation of the child reintegrated into the family, at the end of the placement, from 3 months to 6 months.

Law no. 52 of March 30, 2016, for the amendment and completion of Law no. 272/2004 brings additional clarifications regarding the situation in which the child who is domiciled with one of the parents is housed with the other parent or with other family members or persons with whom the child has developed attachment relationships.

The year 2018 is marked by the appearance of Law no. 9/2018 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 35/1997 regarding the organization and operation of the People's Advocate institution, which provides for the appointment of a Child Advocate for the Defense, Protection and Promotion of Children's Rights. Prior to that, the Deputy Ombudsman had duties also in the sphere of protection and promotion of children's rights, a position held only starting in 2007. Until that time, the Ombudsman received referrals from any citizen, adult, or child. Law no. 9/2018 gives the child the status of an equal member of society, at least from the perspective of the right to petition towards this state institution. Still, its visibility and, in this way, its real degree of accessibility remains problematic.

Law no. 286/2018 for the amendment of Law 272/2004 contained additional clarifications related to how the child's personal ties with family members, other than those at the child's home, can be established/maintained. Thus, in article 18 (1), where it is specified that the child's personal relationships can be maintained by hosting him with a family member with whom he does not normally live, it also provides that this measure can be decided either with the supervision of the hosting, or without it, an aspect that constitutes an element of novelty. Paragraphs (5) and (6) are added to the same article 18 of the law. Paragraph (5) refers to situations where the child's interaction with one of the parents negatively affects the relationship with the other parent, so he can request SPS to monitor the child's personal relationships for 6 months. In paragraph (6) it is specified what this monitoring activity consists of. These aspects, which come to regulate more precisely the rights of the parent/family members with whom the child who is domiciled with one of the parents does not live, are complemented by the clarifications of article 20 regarding the return of the child to the parent with whom he is domiciled, from the parent/ the relative who hosts him temporarily. An element of legislative change of major importance is the one contained in Article 64 which prohibits the placement of the child in any residential form of protection under the age of 7, except for the one dependent on permanent specialized care. This aspect puts increased pressure on the foster care system, which needs to be urgently expanded so that it can host a significantly larger number of children. Article 128 of the same law (Law 286/2018) provides for the modified amount of the monthly placement allowance calculated to be worth 1.20 RSI (reference social indicator). Article 129 provides for updated financial support measures, granted to children and young people for whom a special protection measure has been established.

A year of clear demarcation compared to the previous support policies for children who, for various reasons, cannot grow up in their own family, was 2019, when Romania discussed Draft Law no. 457/2019, respectively Law no. 318/2019, for the amendment and completion of Law no. 272/2004 on the closure of foster care centers for children, our country proposing to close all large residential centers by December 31, 2020. A first step in this direction was to stop any new entries in these centers, simultaneously with the reorientation of children to smaller residential centers or in the family placement system, including to the professional maternal assistant. Obviously, the measure was applied differently in different regions of the country because the modernization of the child protection system was at different stages, in different counties. In 2019 in Cluj County, for example, there was no large residential center for which the issue of its closure and the inclusion of children in other forms of protection could be raised. For the preparation of this deinstitutionalization measure, in January 2019, was issued Order no. 26/2019 regarding the approval of the Minimum Quality Standards for family-type social services intended for children in the special protection system, published in the Official Gazette no. 103 bis of February 11, 2019, followed by Order no. 81/2019 regarding the approval of minimum quality standards for maternity centers.

In August 2020, the consolidation of Law 272/2004 is carried out, which is based on its version republished in the Official Gazette, Part I no. 159 of March 5, 2014, including the amendments brought by the following acts: GEO 65/2014; Law 131/2014; Law 52/2016; Law 286/2018; GEO 30/2020; Law 45/2020. Law no. 191 of June 28, 2022, for the amendment of Law 272/2004, published in the Official Gazette no. 652 of June 30, 2022, includes asylum seekers among the categories of children who benefit from this law (art. 3, letter b). An important change is the one that occurred in the definition of the extended family, a change found in art. 4, lit. c, which specifies that this refers to relatives up to the 3rd degree (as opposed to the previous definition which assumed relatives up to the 4th degree inclusive), a fact that eases the work of evaluating the existing resources within the extended family when it is necessary to establish a special protective measure for a child in difficulty. The same change was made to the definition of the substitute family, which will include relatives up to the 3rd degree (art. 4, letter d).

Consistent with the other clarifications contained in Law 272/2004, which assume that protective measures for the child who has reached the age of 14 can only be taken with his consent, it is introduced, in art. 17, a new paragraph, para. 6, where it is specified that the schedule of personal relations, in the case of the child who has reached the age of 14, is established only with his consent. If he refuses to express his consent, this program of personal relations can only be established by the court (art. 17, paragraph 6). Article 21, at para. 1, lit. d, introduces relevant aspects for the methods of evaluation and proof in court of the ill-treatment applied to the minor, stating that the history regarding the violence of the parents on the child "can be proven through medico-legal certificates, evaluation reports made by the social worker or expert reports, psychological examination of the minor, listening to the minor in the council chamber, corroborated with any other evidence provided by law" (art. 21, paragraph 1, letter d), aspects that were missing from the previous form of Law 272/2004. In article 41, para. 2, which specifies the obligation of SPS to inform the GDSACP regarding the finding or suspicion of ill-treatment applied to the minor, the phrase "to notify immediately" is replaced by the specification "to notify within 24 hours" (art. 41, paragraph 2) fact that leaves no room for interpretation of the legal term for the approach in question. A new paragraph is inserted in Article 55, para. 4, which states that young people who leave the special protection system can express their agreement regarding the subsequent monitoring of their situation by the GDSACP. Another important provision is the one introduced by a new article, 55¹, which specifies the obligation of the GDSACP to take steps to prepare young people for independent life one year before they leave the protection system.

Article 62, para. 2, which makes clarifications regarding family placement, is completed with the specification: "The person or family can also receive in foster care a child whose domicile is in another administrative-territorial unit", specifying the fact that the measure must follow the child's interest, a relevant aspect and for placement services with the maternal assistant. Of great importance is the new element introduced by Article 64, paragraph 2, which specifies that the exception to the prohibition of placement of children under 7 no longer applies to all children under 7 years that require permanent specialized care, but only for those between 3 and 7 years old, respectively: "the placement in a residential type service can be ordered for the child aged between 3 and 7 years old, for whom it cannot be insured empowerment/rehabilitation in other types of services" (Law 191/2022, art. 62, paragraph 2). This amendment, like the previous one, which provided for the increase of the age limit from 2 years to 7 years for children who can be placed in a residential environment, puts pressure on the network of foster carers who are supposed to be ready to receive a larger number of children, an aspect that deserves to be analyzed.

According to the amendments made by Law 191/2022, article 67¹ is introduced, which refers to the protection of data relative to the foster family, prohibiting the Child Protection Commission from disclosing to natural parents' data "regarding the address, income, property owned, medical or psychological condition" of them (art. 67¹, Law 191/2022). Article 74 of Law 191/2022 regulates the monitoring of the situation of children for whom a special protection measure was previously taken, which ends when the child is reintegrated into the family. Regardless of whether it is a residential placement or a family placement (e.g., with a professional foster care worker), upon termination of this measure, the social worker is obliged to monitor, through evaluations and quarterly reports, the evolution of the child in the family for a period of two years. Articles 76 and 78 bring additional clarifications for children seeking asylum, as well as for those who are beneficiaries of international protection in Romania. Relevant here is the fact that also for these categories of children, the measure of family placement is also provided (art. 78, par. 1).

7. Conclusions

The essential legislative elements, which concern family placement and placement with the professional maternal assistant from 1989 until now are the Emergency Ordinance

no. 26/1997, Law no. 108/1998, Law no. 272/2004 as well as the government decisions regarding the attestation of the professional maternal assistant and the ministerial orders regarding the training program of the maternal assistant.

During that time, there was no consistent concern for preventing separation. For the time being, there has been a shift from residential type care (large residential centers) to care in family-type centers and in substitute families. The prevention of separation should be mainly achieved through services provided, but at this moment the focus in assisting families falls on the provision of benefits rather than services. Another reality is that the protection of the child in difficulty is not sufficiently based on prevention in general and preventing the separation of the child from the family, an important part of the measures being the protection of the child outside the biological family.

However, progress has been made in that the GDSACP's have established a few child and family counseling centers, community resource centers that should balance the emphasis on preventing child separation and, implicitly, on prevention of abuse and neglect.

Residential centers, even small ones, often do not give children the chance to form a secure attachment to an adult, the identification of a positive attachment figure being relevant for the balanced emotional development of the child and adolescent, as well as for prevention or early detection of the bad treatments applied to children. Overall, from 1990 till present, there were made important steps to define and refine child protection in Romania.

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SOCIAL CONFLICT IN IBN KHALDUN'S THOUGHT

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Abstract: *The study of social conflict in the Arab and Islamic reality cannot be approached using frameworks built in contexts different from the unique social and historical context of these societies. Each society possesses social, cultural, and historical characteristics that necessitate a genuine exploration using approaches tailored to this social fabric. We believe that understanding the Arab and Islamic social reality, especially in its conflictual aspect, requires a return to historical and sociological theoretical heritage, including the legacy of Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Khaldun attempted to comprehend social conflict based on the concept of "asabiyyah" (social cohesion) and other variables related to the development of these societies. Hence, our aim is to shed light on social conflict according to Ibn Khaldun, attempting to analyze and simplify the concepts associated with it in this context.*

Keywords: social conflict, social cohesion, social reality, Ibn Khaldun

1. Introduction

Social conflict in the realm of philosophy is known as dialectical materialism, signifying that everything undergoes change and transformation. This logic traces back to ancient Greek philosophy, which views the world as composed of ever-changing particles or atoms. According to materialists, these particles or elements have a material nature, such as fire, air, or the limitless. This perspective is also influenced by the theoretical framework of evolution and advancement put forth by Darwin, asserting that everything in the universe is living matter evolving through conflict with itself and its environment, including social, psychological, and cultural entities. It sees these entities as evolved living matter, generating social systems, patterns, values, and psychological phenomena through their interactions. This perspective is often referred to as historical materialism, especially by Marxists who posit that the governing principle of the universe is the law of continuous motion and change, in contrast to idealistic or static philosophies prevalent in the functional structural framework of social sciences.

The conflict school perceives humans as inherently good, suggesting that the surrounding social conditions are what turn them into evildoers. This viewpoint bears resemblance to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's perspective, asserting that humans are naturally good, but their transformation into participants in an unnatural, artificial society turns them into malevolent beings who kill and plunder. Therefore, the logic of social conflict can be traced back to an unnatural transformation and change in human history.

The French Revolution in France, the Industrial Revolution in England, and the emergence of the working class associated with industrial growth contributed to the rise of an intellectual and philosophical perspective known as the social conflict or class conflict perspective. This perspective draws its epistemological foundations from German idealistic philosophy, especially the dialectics of the German philosopher Hegel, who aimed to continue the work of the French Revolution beyond its perceived failures.

In the following discussion, we will focus on the concept of conflict in the writings of Ibn Khaldun. This approach is closer to the Arab reality as articulated by Ibn Khaldun, leaving behind a sociological legacy worthy of attention and detailed examination.

2. Organizational Conflict under the Lens of Ibn Khaldun's Asabiyyah

Ibn Khaldun's predecessor, contemporary, and subsequent admirers, both from the Arab-Muslim world and the European-Western sphere, have not spared effort in exploring and analyzing the profound intellect of this eminent scholar. While some limited works have sought to highlight weaknesses in his writings, the majority of writings, both in the East and the West, unanimously recognize his immense contribution and scientific leadership in areas of knowledge untouched by his predecessors among scholars, historians, and philosophers. Numerous testimonies from Western intellectual luminaries exempt the researcher from defending the authenticity of Ibn Khaldun's contributions and the historical significance of his ideas.

When delving into the realm of social organization and specifically organizational conflict, a thorough examination of Ibn Khaldun's thought on conflict within political organizations is imperative. Ibn Khaldun focused on the state and various institutions as key organizational entities in his study. In Chapter Six of the Introduction, he discusses the nature of rulers and the nature of governance systems, ranging from despotism and oppression to leniency and justice. The behaviour of subjects, according to Ibn Khaldun, is influenced by the rulers' approach, and if rulers are known for leniency and justice, subjects naturally exhibit cooperative behaviour. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 220).

Conversely, if rulers govern through coercion and intimidation, subjects tend to become passive and withdraw. When rulers employ a punitive logic, punishments diminish the strength and enthusiasm of subjects, as punishment accompanied by a lack of self-defense leads to the humiliation of the subjects. This dynamic is evident in the relationship between rulers and subjects in disciplines such as discipline, education, crafts, sciences, and religions, where disciplinary actions reduce the resilience of subjects, making it challenging for them to defend themselves, as seen in the case of students of knowledge. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 271).

In the first chapter of the third section of the "Introduction," Ibn Khaldun links the struggle for power or kingship to personal interests, akin to Durkheim's concept of "la division du travail social." He expressed this linkage using the terms "pleasures" and "desires," considering kingship as an honorable yet coveted position encompassing all earthly experiences and physical pleasures. Consequently, competition arises around it, and few can withstand the struggle unless they overpower others. The contention results in conflict, leading to dominance achieved through Asabiyyah (group solidarity). The struggle between different Asabiyyahs becomes apparent in the pursuit of various pleasures and desires, and it is this conflict that prompts cohesion and collaboration within one Asabiyyah against others. (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 271).

A - The Power of Organization as a Cause for Reduced Conflict Intensity:

Ibn Khaldun adds that formal organization, like a fortress, contains a set of working organizations. There must be a restraining authority that encompasses all other organizations; otherwise, conflict, discord, separation, and dispute become the fate of these organizations. Thus, Abdul Rahman Ibn Khaldun indicates the conflict, but in the language of Asabiyyah. In this specific context, Asabiyyah refers clearly to organizations and the management of conflict. "Then, even if the tribe is divided into separate houses and multiple Asabiyyahs, there must be an Asabiyyah stronger than all of them, overcoming and uniting all the Asabiyyahs into one major Asabiyyah. Otherwise, separation leading to disagreement and conflict will occur." (Introduction of Ibn Khaldun, 2005: 154).

Ibn Khaldun drew attention to the existence of specific social dynamics that the world and social researchers should explore. These dynamics manifest in the form of social conflict led by the factor of "Asabiyyah" or social groups that meet all conditions of cohesion, mutual support, solidarity, and unity, with the aim of achieving their goal – the control and acquisition of authority or "power" in its entirety, along with an economy that matches or surpasses any

potential rival group. Additionally, their goal includes the protection and preservation of governance and power for the longest possible duration. Furthermore, these dynamics encompass the generalization of control over all weaker social groups and the entire society (Fredj Stambouli, 1970: 216).

B- With increasing prosperity, conflict diminishes: Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun points to a highly significant issue, namely that group cohesion weakens when individuals find their livelihood needs met. When people live in prosperity and enjoy a comfortable life, tribalism, roughness, and Bedouin characteristics fade away, according to Ibn Khaldun's expression, indicating their persistence and non-disappearance. This is a result of the state's control and demonstration of its strength, as individuals no longer aspire to compete and struggle for governance. Instead, they harbor other hopes related to acquisition and a comfortable living. Ibn Khaldun states: "...in proportion to its dominance and the state's demonstration of power. If the state is strong to the extent that no one desires to seize its affairs or participate in them, people submit to its authority and become content...Their aspirations do not rise to the level of contention for rule, but rather focus on gain and a comfortable life..." (Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, 2005: 155).

C- Positive Conflict According to Ibn Khaldun: Ibn Khaldun, in Chapter 20 of the Introduction, highlights a crucial human attribute: "competition." He considers competition a healthy phenomenon within an organization, explaining it deeply as a natural inclination and characteristic of humans. Evil, on the other hand, is an animalistic trait. Ibn Khaldun argues that since kingship is a natural state for humans, closer to goodness than evil due to its social nature, people naturally compete for good deeds such as generosity, forgiveness of mistakes, patience in the face of hardship, and fidelity to agreements, even going as far as spending wealth to protect honor (Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, 2005: 158).

D - Wise Leadership as a Conflict Avoidance: We find that Ibn Khaldun did not overlook the element of leadership in his famous introduction in many chapters. For example, he states, "... and submitting to the truth with the caller to it, seeking justice for the oppressed from themselves, sacrificing in their conditions, submitting to the truth, humbling oneself to the poor, listening to the complaints of those in need, adhering to laws and worship, upholding and understanding them and their reasons, abstaining from betrayal, deceit, and treachery, breaking covenants, and the like. We have learned that these are the qualities of good politics" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 158). The leadership characterized by the virtues mentioned by Ibn Khaldun prolongs the life of the organization and instills tranquility within it. This is an indication of social justice through generous values, directly resulting in the avoidance of conflicts between individuals and groups.

3. The Fundamental Social Processes Discussed by Ibn Khaldun

Ibn Khaldun describes social processes as the ways in which people connect with each other to perform the necessary functions for the maintenance of any social system, working towards its growth and expansion. The interactive energy resulting from people's connections leads to the establishment of social structures for groups. Based on this, interaction - the connection and communication among people - is considered the fundamental social process because it constitutes a central factor in all aspects of human social life. It is behind the organization of various behavioural patterns (systems) from the individual to society.

Since interaction reflects a recurrence in social relationships, sociology views it as the basic unit of research and analysis. Ibn Khaldun examines various forms and models of this interaction as they manifest in social life, whether in the form of cooperation, competition, conflict, consensus, representation, change, etc. (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 158).

In the context of these concepts and issues that modern sociology has embraced and a review of Ibn Khaldun's writings in the introduction, we can observe to what extent Ibn Khaldun's ideas align with this understanding. A close examination of Ibn Khaldun's

discussions on cooperation, conflict, social change, and dynamics supports the relevance of his thoughts to contemporary sociological understanding.

A - "Cooperation: It is not coincidental that Ibn Khaldun begins his social research in the first section by addressing the process of cooperation in society. He considers this social process fundamental to the construction of economic systems.

"He is forced to seek the cooperation of his fellow human beings, for without this cooperation, he cannot obtain sustenance, food, or ensure his survival" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 47). He must rely on the assistance of his fellow humans to defend against the aggression of animals because an individual's ability to procure food is limited. Gathering a multitude of his fellow kin is necessary for acquiring sustenance for himself and for them.

Moreover, the capacity of an individual human is insufficient to resist the power of certain predatory animals, especially formidable ones. He is incapable of defending against them collectively. As for the weapons required to repel predatory animals, the power of an individual human is inadequate for their manufacture. Therefore, in all of this, collaboration becomes essential "He is forced to seek the cooperation of his fellow human beings, for without this cooperation, he cannot obtain sustenance, food, or ensure his survival. He becomes prey to animals" (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 280).

Some have interpreted Ibn Khaldun's statements on cooperation to assert that economic activity is the primary reality for producing social life. For example, the production of a day's sustenance from wheat requires many cooperative activities, necessitating the gathering of a multitude of one's kin to obtain sustenance for oneself and for them. Through collaboration, an adequate amount of sustenance is obtained for more individuals than the collaborators themselves.

Just as material means of livelihood require cooperation, the survival, continuity, and defense of the human species against sources of aggression also necessitate collaboration (Mohammed Ali Mohammed, 1986: 55-56).

B - Conflict: It was not coincidental that Ibn Khaldun addresses the principle of human aggression against each other, repeating it in several places in the introduction with various expressions and greater clarity. He emphasizes the need for a restraint that prevents this aggression, meaning that when he discusses the social conflict among humans, he is paving the way to talk about the necessity of a political system, meaning kingship, authority, or the state, to resolve this conflict.

Ibn Khaldun states, "Among the traits of humans is injustice and aggression against each other. When one's eye reaches the possessions of his brother, his hand reaches out to take them, unless there is something to restrain him" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 140). He also remarks, "Injustice is a characteristic of souls, and if you find...someone who refrains from it, perhaps he does not possess the inclination for injustice."

Furthermore, he asserts, "Human beings cannot live and exist except by coming together and cooperating to obtain their sustenance and necessities. When they gather, necessity calls for interaction, meeting needs, and each one extending his hand to take what he needs from others. Due to the animalistic nature of souls, injustice and aggression prevail, some against others. One resists another by means of anger, pride, and the human force inherent in that. This leads to disputes that escalate into fighting, resulting in chaos, bloodshed, and the loss of lives. This leads to the interruption of the species, making their survival impossible without a restraint to prevent one from harming another" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 208).

C - Struggle for Power: It is noteworthy that, according to Ibn Khaldun, social conflict or struggle does not cease even after the establishment of monarchy and statehood. Ibn Khaldun discusses the different stages of the state and the varying conditions and populations in each stage. In the second stage of the state, the stage of individual glory, the ruler tends to authoritarianism and monopolizes glory without sharing it with his people. Ibn Khaldun states, "The owner of the state seizes glory for himself, monopolizes it, and becomes exclusive

in it" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 323). This may reach the extent of killing anyone who challenges his exclusivity. Ibn Khaldun emphasizes that those who contributed to the establishment of the monarchy strive to maintain their status and continue participating in glory and the fruits of rule. This leads to animosity between the ruler and his early supporters, and the ruler can only overcome these problems through allies and subordinates, as the nobility of his lineage and tribe obstructs him.

Ibn Khaldun notes that this social conflict for power between the ruler and his early supporters continues for a certain period. If the ruler prevails in this conflict, the state enters the third stage (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 267).

4. Tribalism and Tribal Conflict in Ibn Khaldun's Thought

Some researchers suggest that understanding Ibn Khaldun's views on tribalism and its relation to conflict requires referring to the chapters on tribalism in the second and third books and one chapter in the fourth book.

Ibn Khaldun states, "The dwellings of the Bedouins are only for the tribes, the people of tribalism..." (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 140). Tribalism, according to Ibn Khaldun, is a natural tendency in humans that leads to cohesion and solidarity among individuals of the same lineage. It requires each individual to be persistent and devoted to their tribe, leading to collective responsibility and collaboration in repelling aggression and achieving common goals.

The nature of nomadic life necessitates strong tribalism because defense of the tribe is carried out by the recognized brave individuals, and their defense is only trusted and increased when they are united by lineage and one tribal identity.

"And the people of urban areas, their affairs are related to defending their wealth and themselves to their governor, the ruler who governs them, and the protector who takes charge of their security. They do not have a strong need for tribalism" (Abu Khaldun Sat' al-Husri, 1961: 233).

The importance of tribalism in nomadic life can be seen in the organization of tribes and their leadership. Ibn Khaldun states, "I know that every living group or core of tribes, even if they are one united band in general lineage, there are other tribalistic affiliations among them. These are specific lineages that are more closely knit than the general lineage, such as one clan, one household, or brothers from the same father. Leadership among them is in one portion of them, not in all of them. Leadership remains in that portion, passing from one branch to another, and it does not transfer to the stronger among their branches" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 145).

Similarly, the importance of tribalism in urban areas is related to the establishment of the state. Ibn Khaldun states, "The ultimate goal that tribalism serves is kingship" (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 135). Tribalism provides protection, defense, and the means to make claims. Ibn Khaldun argues that humans, by their nature, require a restraint and ruler in every society. This control must be achieved through tribalism; otherwise, the ability to control is not possible. This domination is kingship, which goes beyond rulership because rulership is leadership with followers and does not involve coercion in its judgments. In contrast, kingship is dominance and ruling by coercion (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 135).

In summary, the roles of tribalism in social and political life can be outlined as follows:

- ✓ Cohesion and Solidarity: Tribalism encourages individuals to unite, collaborate, and defend collectively. It fosters protection, defense, and common objectives that require collective action.

- ✓ Necessity in Struggles: Tribalism becomes essential in any matter that compels people to fight, such as in the establishment of prophethood, kingship, or a call to action. Fighting is inevitable in such situations, and tribalism is necessary in warfare.

✓ Leadership and Dominance: Leadership can only be achieved through domination, and domination is achieved through tribalism.

✓ Kingship: Kingship is attained through dominance, and dominance is possible through tribalism (Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, 2005: 174).

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ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF USA MIGRANTS INFLOWS; EVIDENCE FROM EIGHT MAJOR ORIGIN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: *This study aims to assess the main determinants of migration inflows to the United States of America, especially the economical ones. To answer the study problem we use a gravity model based on theoretical and empirical studies estimated by Panel Least Squares method. Migration inflows are used as endogenous variables, while exogenous ones include geographical distance, common frontier and language, income and unemployment in origin and destination countries. This model is applied to data from 2010 to 2019 for the eight major origin countries of migrants' inflows in the US. Results show that geographical distance, origin country income and destination country unemployment have a negative impact on migration inflows. While the existence of a common frontier or language, destination country income and origin country unemployment raise migration flows to the US. Ranked by order of importance, the existence of a common frontier, the destination country income and the origin country unemployment, in this order, are the most important factors of migration inflows from concerned countries.*

Keywords: Migration, Inflows, USA, Gravity, PLS

1. Introduction

Migration is a universal phenomenon that concerns all countries at different degrees. It is currently one of the major issues of the world's economy, animating economic and social policy debates in both origin and destination countries. This phenomenon is accentuated by civil and interstate conflicts that generate illegal migration (Cohen, 1996). Both legal and illegal migration could have positive and negative consequences for origin and destination countries at different levels.

In 2020, no less than 280 million people migrated to different regions of the world. These numbers have been rising steadily since 1995, 174 million migrants then, to reach 249 million migrants in 2010 and 272 million in 2019 (IOM, 2020). The United States of America has been the leading destination country for international migrants since 1970. Since then, the number of foreign-born residing in the country has more than quadrupled, from less than 12 million in 1970 to about 51 million in 2019 (IOM, 2020).

To note that the percentage of migrants in population, both permanent and temporary, is still low in the Americas as a whole, at 1.6 migrants per 1,000 people. But this percentage is higher in the United States, where it is estimated at 8.8 per 1,000 people, and in Canada, where it is close to 16.6 per 1,000 people (OECD, 2016). Intra-American migration has also been ongoing, especially since the establishment of MERCOSUR and the introduction of free movement of people within the zone, which has increased migration flows in most countries of the zone.

But incoming migrant flows to the United States are not only from this region, but that are also motivated by geographical proximity. A large part of them comes from other countries especially Asian ones, mostly China and India. This population's migration could be motivated by other strong factors, especially economical ones, that could compensate for the cost of migration that increase the more geographical distance is large.

Hence, this research paper aims to assess the determinant of migrations inflows to the United States. To do so, a gravity model is used and estimated using a PLS method, this model is applied on the incoming migrants, as dependant variable, from 2010 to 2019. Data concerns the eight major origin countries; Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, China, Vietnam, India and Korea.

But before this, a theoretical literature review is presented first to determine the possible factors affecting migration flows. Then, characteristics of these migrants will be analysed in order to determine their components. Finally, the determinants of migration flows to the US will be assessed empirically.

2. Literature Review

According to the neoclassical approach, migration is a rational action that maximizes utility. Thus, individuals compare the satisfaction they get from their current location with the one they could get from a specific destination. So, residential dissatisfaction leads to movement (Rossi, 1955)

Until the 1990s, traditional theories of international migration depended mainly on the difference in income that could exist between the different countries of origin and destination, which is qualified as human capital in relation to the leading works of (Sjaastad, 1962) (Harris and Todaro, 1970). Indeed, the level and characteristics of human capital have an influence on the susceptibility to migrate, as is the case for qualified people. On the other hand, migration can constitute a strategy for increasing human capital. An international mobility can allow the acquisition of a diploma or experience that can be valued upon return to the origin country (Piguet, 2013).

In addition, recent studies have focused on the self-selection model of migrants set out by (Borjas, 1987) (Borjas, George J., 1994). This model takes into account, not only income inequality between countries, but also the qualifications of migrants from both of them. These theories were later extended to the theory of Welfare magnets (Borjas, George J., 1999), which states that once the migrant is self-selected, he or she may choose to settle in the country with the highest social benefits (Péridy Nicolas, 2010).

These models have been extended to take into account the determinants of migration in terms of the costs it can generate, including travel costs related to the geographical distance between the two countries, language differences, and differences in living costs (Péridy Nicolas, 2010)

Several other costs have been identified; costs related to border effects, which fall under the measure of specific border crossing costs (HelliWell, J., 1997) (Hunt, H; Mueller, R, 2004) and costs related to human or economic networks loss resulting from migration. Hence, some authors showed that endogenous migration costs decrease with the level of past migration (Carrington, Detragiache, and Vishwanath, 1996), as well as the costs generated by migration policies. Several authors have shown that migration decreases when migration policy becomes restrictive as it increases migration costs (Benhabib, 1996) (Bianchi, 2006)

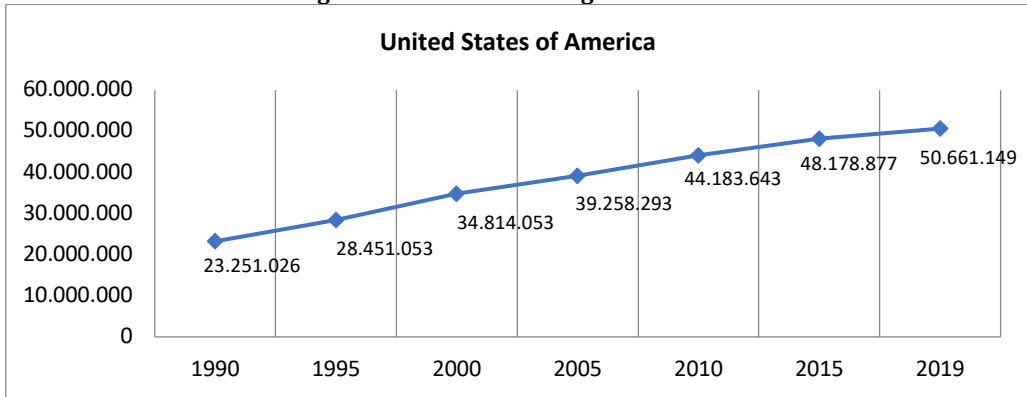
Finally, most recent theories study the relationship between migration and trade. They establish a complementarity relationship between trade and migration if concerned countries have different levels of technology, an imperfect competition or economic distortions (taxes, production, subsidies ...) exists between them. In this situation, the authors consider that migration flows become necessary and complementary to international trade (Wagner, Head, K, and Ries, J, 2002) (Co, Euzent, P, and Martin, T, 2004)

3. A Bird Eye on USA Immigration Inflows

Immigration is an ongoing source of tension in many societies around the world. Especially illegal immigration that is higher in the United States than in most other industrial countries. This is a situation common to all industrial societies (Hirschman, 2001)

In recent years, legal immigration to the United States has ranged from 700,000 to 1,000,000 new permanent residents, with an upward trend (US Department of Homeland Security, 2019). Indeed, only half of legal immigrants are newcomers to the country. The other half are adjustments of current residents who were able to obtain an immigrant visa due to a change in employment or family status. On the other hand, many refugees are able to obtain a permanent resident immigrant visa.

Figure 1: International migrant stock US

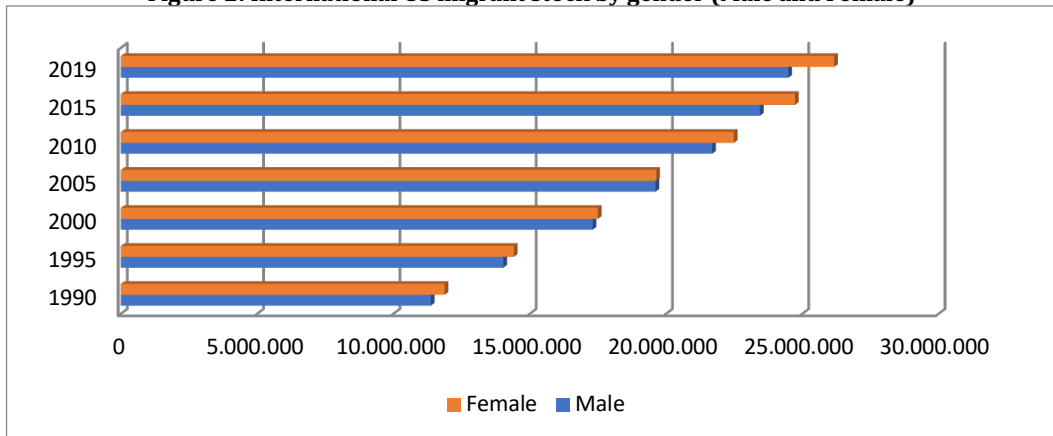


Source: Realised by authors, data from UN DESA International Migration Database 2019

The figure above shows the evolution of the total number of migrants to the United States over the period from 1990 to 2019. We see an evolutionary trend in the number of people going to the United States, from 23 million migrants in 1990 to 39 million migrants in 2005 to 50.66 million migrants in 2019

This increase also corresponds to an increase in the total number of migrants worldwide, from 153 million people in 1990 to 271.64 migrants in 2019 (UN International, 2022). Thus, people who integrated the US in 2019 represent almost 19% of the total migrants in the world compared to 15% in 1990.

Figure 2: International US migrant stock by gender (Male and Female)

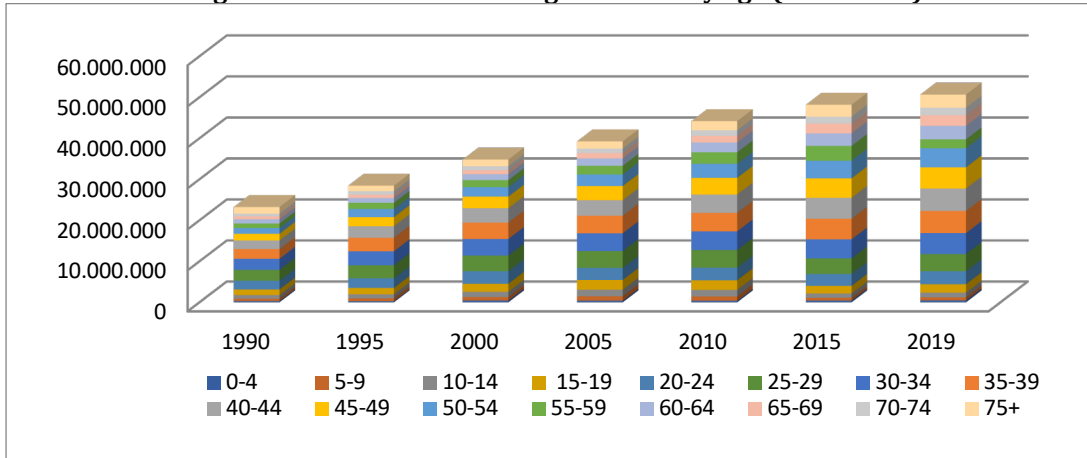


Source: Realised by authors, data from UN DESA International Migration Database 2019

The figure above shows the number of migrants to the US from 1990 to 2019, from its analysis we see that the female share of migration is slightly higher than the male share, this gap continues to widen over time reaching 500,000 migrants in 2019. Between 2015 and

2019, the number of female migrants in the U.S. has diverged from the number of male migrants, reaching 11.8 million female migrants versus 11.3 million male migrants.

Figure 3: International US migrant stock by age (both sexes)



Source: Realised by authors, data from UN DESA International Migration Database 2019

From figure 3, we conclude that the number of migrants to the United States is much higher for people between the ages of 20 and 50 years, they are individuals with the ability and age to work, whose number reached nearly 6 million migrants over the entire period studied. On the other hand, the number of people over 70 is much smaller, as are the individuals between the ages of 0 and 14, whose highest number of people is only 1.6 million. In general, the number of migrants in all age groups has increased significantly between 1990 and 2019.

4. Methodology

4.1. Empirical Model

Econometrical models, especially gravity models, have been the most important tool to analyse determinants of the migration inflows and outflows in the world. These models explain the difference in quantity of incoming migrants between different countries. They include geographical, historical, economical, social and other control variables of both the origin and destination country.

Initially this kind of models have been created to study bilateral trade flows TDF (Tinbergen, 1962) and (Lindemann, 1966), depending on 3 factors; distance between the two countries, origin country income and destination country income both represented by their respective gross domestic product. Later on, this model has been augmented by integrating a wealth effect, represented by GDP per capita instead of GDP, in origin and destination country and the existence of a common frontier (Frankel, Stein, and Shang-Jin, 1995). Other studies have also added a positive effect of sharing a common language between the two countries (Baier and Bergstrand, 2007). Thus, the mathematical formulation of the initial gravity model is written as follow:

$$TDF = f(Dist, GDPP_i, GDPP_j, Contig, Lang)$$

Hence, the model used in this paper is inspired by (Bertoli and Moraga, 2017) that elaborate a gravity model from different factors affecting international migration. Some elements are also taken from the study of (Péridy Nicolas, 2010) that goes from a micro-economical perspective.

Thus, the gravity model measures the factors that impact migration inflows MIG, dependant variable, from an origin country j to the United States of America, destination country, i. These factors, exogenous variables, consist of migration costs represented by geographical distance DIST between the origin country and the United States, and if a common frontier FRONCOM or languages LANGCOM exist between the two. Economic factors include income in origin and destination country represented by the GDP per capita, GDPP, and the unemployment rate UNMP in both origin and destination country.

The function is written as:

$$MIG_{ij} = f(DIST_{ij}, FRONCOM_{ij}, LANGCOM_{ij}, GDPP_i - GDPP_j, UNMP_i - UNMP_j)$$

The estimated mathematical model is expressed as:

$$MIG_{ij} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 DIST_{ij} + \alpha_2 FRONCOM_{ij} + \alpha_3 LANGCOM_{ij} + \alpha_4 GDPP_i + \alpha_5 GDPP_j + \alpha_6 UNMP_i + \alpha_7 UNMP_j + \varepsilon$$

The coefficient $\alpha_1, \alpha_5, \alpha_6$ are expected to be negative according to theoretical review, while $\alpha_2, \alpha_3, \alpha_4, \alpha_7$ are expected to have a positive value.

4.2. Data

Data used to estimate the model covers a period of time from 2010 to 2019 for the 8 countries with most immigrants in the USA, more than 1 million. These countries are Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Philippines, China, Vietnam, India and Korea.

The dependant variable is represented by the migrants' inflows from each country to the USA, statistical data has been taken from CENSUS¹ bureau website. For exogenous variables, economical ones, GDP per capita and unemployment have been taken from the World Development Indicator WDI, World Bank database. While geographical and historical variables; distance, common frontier and language have been taken from the CEPII² gravity database. All used variables have been transformed into logarithm except binary variables.

5. Results

Before estimating the elaborated model, we assess if it involves random or fixed effects. All used tests including Chow, Hausman for period random effects and Lagrange for cross-section random effects proved to be inconclusive.

Hence, the model has been estimated using a Panel Least Squares PLS method, results are shown in the next table;

Table 1: PLS Estimation Results

Adjusted R-Squared:	0,95	
F-Statistic:	240,43	
Prob. (F-Statistic):	0,00	
Variable	Coefficient	Prob.
C	-6,71	0,25
LDIST*	-0,17	0,00
FRONCOM*	2,50	0,00
LANGCOM	0,05	0,47
LGDPPI*	2,15	0,00
LGDPPIj	-0,10	0,08
LUNMPI*	-0,03	0,00
LUNMPIj*	0,45	0,00

Source: realised by authors using Eviews1

¹ CENSUS United States Bureau, <https://data.census.gov>

² CEPII Research and expertise on the world economy, www.cepii.fr

Estimated model is significant as the probability of the f-statistic test is inferior to 5%, while the endogenous variables explain 95% of the endogenous one, represented by the adjusted R-squared. Residuals are random, Jarque-Bera test having a probability superior to 5%, and are not autocorellated, going by heteroskedasticity LR test.

As about variables coefficients we note first that all of them have their theoretical sign and their coefficients are significant besides the variable representing the common language. Geographical distance, DIST, has a negative effect, so the more countries are far the less migrants come to the USA. While the common frontier has a positive one, meaning neighbour countries residents are more likely to migrate to the USA. These coefficients are conform to the theoretical literature of both general gravity models and migration specific ones, confirming the effectiveness of these kind of models to estimate migration flows.

Destination income, GDPPI, has a positive impact while origin income has a negative one, this result also correspond to migration theories, all arguing that migrants move from low income countries to high one, and base their decision on the difference of income between the two. In the opposite side, destination unemployment has a negative impact on migration flows while origin unemployment has a positive impact. This result confirms that people move seeking for job opportunities when there is a lack of them in their origin country.

As an order of importance, a common frontier between origin country and the USA is the most important determinant, which facilitates their movement to the USA. As factors go, migrants come to USA mostly seeking a higher income in their destination. This factor is followed by the unemployment in their origin country, people moving mostly to seek job opportunities elsewhere when they lack them in their countries. Thus, migration inflows to the USA are highly dependent on economic situation on the origin country and the one of the destination one.

6. Discussion

Incoming migration to the USA is mainly due to its economic and political influence in the world, especially in the era of globalization (Bonzom, 2015). This is even more evident for neighbour countries as Mexico and Cuba, where its influence was great since 19th century and has been enhanced by regional agreements like ALENA, since 1994. As has been shown in results, regional attractiveness, distance and frontiers, is still highly effective despite strong debate between defenders of economic needs in workforce and opponents calling for restrictive measures. USA is still facing a mass migration incoming from Mexico and in a lesser extent other Latin American countries, even after migration policy tightening last decade.

Moreover, since early 20th century American influence has grown even further in the rest of the world thanks to its strong economy and its participation in the two world wars. Helped by media, people from over the world moved to the USA looking for the “American dream” seeking good jobs and prosperity. Thus economic motivations, having a strong impact in the estimated model, represented mainly by an escape from unemployment and low incomes in origin country, seeking job opportunities and a better quality of life in USA.

To reduce this flows that can be seen as a threat for both origin and destination countries, even if some see them as an opportunity especially low population destination countries, international institutions have set some measures to react against migration determinants, especially economic ones. In fact, based on millennium sustainable development goals SDGs put on September 2000, the United Nations Development Program UNDP gave many recommendations for developed countries to apply (CentreAvec, 2005) in the same optic of this paper’s findings.

First, adjusting agriculture exportation policy for a more fair trade system. In fact, actual policies impoverish little producer’s regions where citizens produce for firm’s exportation instead of their self-consumption and benefits. While they must import a big part of their necessary consumption, facing sometimes huge costs. In this sense, WTO and

multinational firms must work for a more sustainable trade policies especially in this sector, and create more fair and durable job opportunities.

Second, international institutions must help origin countries to improve their macroeconomical situation. It can be realized through financial aids, a better loan conditions for these countries and technical assist to improve their financial resource use. In fact, fiscal incomes must be directed toward social sectors, health and education to create better life conditions in these countries and thus reduce their outcoming migration flows. These institutions could also help protecting social, cultural and environmental resources in developing countries that could be exploited to reduce poverty.

Third, guarantee respect of human rights all over the world and work toward reduction of inequalities and discrimination, both gender and racial. This can be expanded to eradicate and prevent internal and external wars and conflict that push even more people to migrate seeking stability and safety.

Finally, media have a great power toward people's perception of both their original country, sometimes described worse than reality, and destination country, especially USA in our case, described as perfect life places, or what is called American dream. In this sense, they must adapt their countries' picture by focusing on advantages of every individual country encouraging them to work for success wherever they are.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the determinant of migration inflows to the United States of American. Theoretical and empirical literature suggested many factors, traditional ones as difference of income or geographical distance between the two countries and extended factors by introducing social factors, welfare factors and migration costs related to the existence of a common frontier or language and network losses.

In order to evaluate these determinants a gravity model estimated by PLS method has been estimated and applied to migrants' inflows to USA from the eight major origin countries in a period of time from 2010 to 2019.

Results were according to theoretical statements and so showed that geographical distance has a negative impact on migrants inflows while existence of a common frontier or language raise them. This result confirms that migration costs affect their move decisions. In the other hand, concerning economic factors, migrants inflows raises the more the difference of income is important between the destination and origin country, represented by a positive impact of destination income and negative impact of origin country income, while the difference of unemployment have an opposite effect. Thus, migrants are more willing to move from high unemployment countries to low unemployment rate countries seeking for job opportunities and a better economic situation as all.

Classified by order of importance, the existence of a common frontier is the most important determinant of migration inflow, this explain the large number of migrants inflow from Mexico to the USA. This factor is follower by the destination country income that represent a seek of welfare and better life conditions. The third determinant by order of importance is the origin country unemployment, in the same line as the precedent factor, migrants move from low opportunities country to higher opportunities one to raise their chance for job positions and better life conditions.

In this way, many solutions have been proposed by PNUD to reduce migration flows for more benefits for both origin and destination countries. These solutions mainly focus to create job opportunities and reduce cost consumption costs for a better quality of life in origin countries through a more fair international trade system especially in agricultural sector goods. They also recommend more technical support from international financial institutions to poor countries for a more optimal use of their fiscal resources and promoting their natural resource's exploitation. Furthermore, countries must enhance their picture for both their

population and the world encouraging citizens to work for success in their original countries while offering a guarantee for equality and human right respect.

Finally, acting in favour of migration is a way to create a more inclusive economic growth and reduce income difference between developed and developing countries. But, destination countries can still benefit from aimed migration to cover some specific needs in labor force, especially in qualified workforce.

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SOCIO-MEDICAL IMPLICATIONS OF INJECTING DRUG USE IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of injecting drug use is becoming more and more present in our country. With a relatively recent history, the socio-medical implications on the communities of injecting drug users in Romania end up being more and more highlighted. The risks of exposure to HIV or hepatitis infection are directly proportional to the lack of sterile disposable syringes in these communities. The lack of legal mechanisms meant to facilitate the access of injecting drug users to prevention services and continuous monitoring, make most of them vulnerable to exposure to risks. Fear of some coercive measures from the authorities pushes more and more drug users not to declare the combinations of substances they inject. Most of the users arrive late at health facilities refusing methadone substitution treatment. The stakeholders in the field are most often represented by non-governmental organizations, which, however, are outnumbered by the phenomenon. The prevention of drug use, although it can represent a solution, is carried out poorly and has a limited character.*

Keywords: injecting drugs, vulnerability, HIV infection, disease, stigma, risks

1. Conceptual delimitations, general considerations

Conceptually, drug is a term that encompasses all psychotropic substances that may be addictive. A psychotropic substance influences and alters a person's mental state (Romanian Harm Reduction Network). Since 1976, the World Health Organization has defined the concept of drug addiction as a mental and sometimes physical condition resulting from drug use, characterized by behavioural disorders, always including the need for compulsive ingestion to experience the mental effects or to avoid the withdrawal symptoms caused by the lack of the drug (Rus, 2021: 685). At first glance, the specialized literature defines drug use with a simple terminology. Concepts such as drug, addiction, deviance and disease are often used in a general, non-critical context. Such a reification of concepts then implies that they map a reality that is taken out of context and not in relation with the historical evolution of the phenomenon. This epistemological position of naïve realism contrasts with a long tradition in the social sciences that highlights reality as a social construction made up of changing cultural and historical contexts (Klaue, 1999: 47). A brief history of drugs shows that few of them were originally illegal at the time of their discovery. In general, drugs were defined as illegal only when problems arose from their use. Many now-illegal drugs enjoyed a period of legal freedom among the upper and middle classes. Originally, they were used to relieve physical pain, as cough medicine or to improve performance at work. After World War I in the United States, the Harrison Act attempts to change the legal status of drugs to illegal substances. So there is a reduction thereof in medical prescriptions and the middle class ends up not being able to use psychoactive substances anymore. Access to drugs becomes more visible in various "outside" groups such as musicians and minority groups. Since World War II, drug use has become much more widespread. Initially, it was found in the ghettos of the black population in the United States and from there very easily ended up being distributed to

middle class students. Even so in many parts of the world drug use among the middle class of the population was limited by legal sanctions (Robins, 1980: 8).

In the current situation, of the year-on-year increase in the number of users and the quantities of confiscated drugs, this tends to turn into a social phenomenon towards whose control all the actions of governmental and non-governmental organizations must be directed (Pap, Andriani, 2023). In our country, after the 1989 events, illicit drug use became a social reality. Drug use is currently found in almost all social classes and its effects can be devastating for the drug users, their family and the community they belong to (Manea, 2021). After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, a process of political, economic and socio-cultural changes began in Romania, which led, in 2007, to Romania's accession to the European Union. Along with these socio-economic changes, the health risk behaviours of young Romanians, such as illicit drug use, have also undergone several changes (Lotrean and al. 2015). The transition and political changes contributed to the increase in drug consumption through the elimination of borders, the evolution of tourism and the alternative routes of drug trafficking (Elekes and Kovács, 2002: 166). The segment of the population most exposed to drug use is represented by teenagers, who are in a period of transition due to the age that is characterized by the search for their own identity in relation to society (Mărgineanu, 1999). Of course, we cannot exclude the risk of exposure to drugs for all age groups, especially since the phenomenon is increasingly present among the adult population as well. Although it is known that consumed psychoactive substances have a direct impact on the mind and body, it is important to mention from the outset that substance use does not only affect the person using the substance, but also have a negative impact with social consequences (Aspenridge Recovery Centers). The social consequences of drug use are represented by the progressive deterioration of social relationships, increasing the risk of social exclusion, diminishing the chances of social and professional reintegration, suffering of family and friends, disinterest in relationships with others, involvement in criminal activities, and so on and so forth. The most commonly consumed drugs worldwide remain alcohol and cannabis-marijuana. Although these substances are legal to some extent in the vast majority of countries, they can still lead to a number of negative outcomes and health problems if consumed in an addictive manner. Apart from alcoholic beverages, cannabis is the most cultivated illicit drug in the world (World Population Review, 2023). Although we come to classify substance use disorders on the basis of observable indicators, including the type of substances that have been used, this classification helps more formally, but not sufficiently to describe the overall picture of the problems on experienced by a user of prohibited substances. Another major problem that must be taken into account is that of the differences between substance users who, although they are addicted to the same type of substance, often end up behaving differently (Saber, 2018).

As for injecting drugs, it is estimated that approximately 13.2 million people were injecting drug users at the end of 2021. This estimate is approximately 18% higher than in 2020 when just over 11 million people were addicted to injecting drugs.

In the community of injecting drug users (IDUs), the risk of acquiring HIV infection transmitted parenterally - by direct injection of the drug into a vein, is 35 times higher than in the general population. The joint venture between the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) through the United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates that approximately 12% of HIV-positive people diagnosed globally use injecting drugs while in the region of Eastern Europe the proportion is approximately 25.4%.

Consequently about a quarter of the HIV-positive population in this region, in addition to drug addiction, is diagnosed with HIV infection (World Drug Report, 2023). Estimates of the number of injecting drug users and seroprevalence rates among them are an essential feature in assessing how HIV-AIDS is spreading. Thus, the predictions of intervention programs and planning of health care resources should be able to ensure social and medical assistance both

now and in the future. Unrealistic estimates of injected drug use and minimizing the impact they have on the individual can hinder the implementation of disease prevention policies within drug-using communities (Turner, 1989). The identification of risk factors associated with drug use (Sicrea, Androni, 2023), as well as their adverse effects could bring immediate benefits in the design, direction and implementation of health education with the aim of preventing the use of psychoactive substances. However, the phrase *easier to prevent than to cure* hides a number of ethical and political issues. This can be applied when there is evidence that the benefits of prevention outweigh the benefits of cure both at the individual level and at the community and political level. For this, the risk factors involved must be highlighted, as well as the way in which they interact together. However, there are voices that question both the ethics and the effectiveness of policies based on the primary prevention of drug use (Rhodes, 2003, p.304). At a global level, attention is drawn to the vulnerability of exposure to HIV infection resulting from injection drug use. Methadone treatment programs remain some of the most effective mechanisms for replacing opioid use and improving the quality of life of people who use injecting drugs. Updating knowledge about HIV infection in drug user communities and promoting risk-free behaviours are key to maximizing the results of drug use risk reduction programs (Nguyen, 2019: 1).

2. Methodology

The article has two main components:

a) The theoretical part and specialized literature that aims to explain concepts such as drugs, addiction and the risks to the health of the population in a context of the historical evolution of drugs.

b) The practical, applied part aims to analyze and interpret the existing statistical data in a context of the effects on health following the consumption of injecting drugs at the level of our country.

3. The phenomenon of drug use in Europe and Romania

In Romania, through the 2013-2020 National Anti-Drug Strategy, illicit drugs are specifically addressed. The strategy was designed following stakeholder consultations and takes into account the 2013-2020 European Union (EU) Drugs Strategy. Like in the case of other European countries, Romania evaluates its anti-drug policies and strategies by periodically monitoring specific indicators. In this direction, progress reports on the implementation of the activities of the current strategy are made with the help of the National Antidrug Agency (ANA) (European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2019, p.2). However, both nationally and globally we face a growing illegal drug market that generates hundreds of billions of dollars a year for organized crime worldwide. Moreover, overdose deaths and limited access to sterile injection equipment increase exposure risks for HIV or hepatitis infection each year. As part of global efforts, Romania makes its contribution, including through active involvement with the United Nations Office on Drugs and the World Health Organization. At home, Romania has updated its national anti-drug strategy for the period 2022-2026 (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2023).

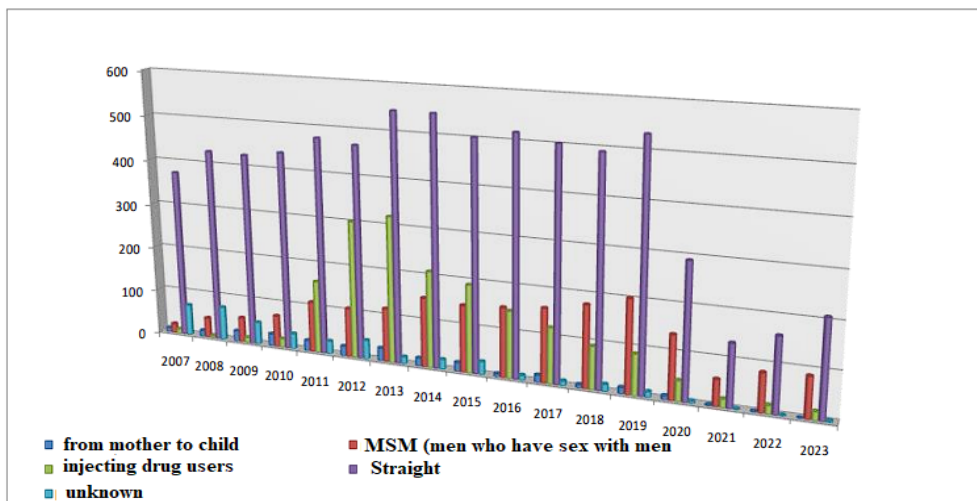
The new National Anti-Drug Strategy for the 2022-2026 period was approved by the Government of Romania in 2022 and aims to ensure the continuity of previous activities in this field, being aligned with the objectives established in the resolution adopted during the 30th Special Session of the European Union through the 2016 UN General Assembly on the world drug problem and the objectives set out in the 2021-2025 EU Drug Strategy. Romania's new strategy was developed, involving and establishing responsibilities for all relevant sectors and stakeholders, including the National Anti-Drug Agency, police, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Family, Youth. and Equal Opportunities, local authorities and civil society (Scîntee, Vlădescu, 2023).

Romania is generally targeted by international networks specialized in drug trafficking due to its geographical position, the size of the population and the political developments that have undergone changes also reflected in the growth of the criminal environment. All the more so since Bucharest has become an important business center **with** international airports that can create loopholes for organized criminal activities. As a European capital with approximately 3 million inhabitants, usually described as a cultural mix of foreign investment and nightlife, Bucharest has contributed to the development of drug user communities both inside Romania and outside its borders (Maftai, 2012: 192).

According to the reports of the Romanian National Anti-Drug Agency (ANA), over 10% of the population aged between 15-64 have experienced the consumption of narcotics at least once in their life, and 6% of the mentioned population have consumed prohibited substances in the last year. The young population between the ages of 15-34 is the most exposed to drug use. The period of adolescence in particular exhibits an increased vulnerability to drugs with onset ages under 13 (Teodorescu, 2023). These data come to support the existing indicators at the European level regarding the availability in the drug market for all types of substances. Market that is currently characterized by the availability of a wider range of prohibited substances. Thus, large seizures of drugs have continued to be detected being trafficked into Europe in sea containers, with commercial supply chains a key target for infiltration by organized crime groups. Europe also remains an important production area for some substances, particularly synthetic drugs and cannabis. Illicit drug use causes a number of chronic health disorders that contribute to a global burden of drug-related diseases. Despite the decline in injecting drug users over the last decade in Europe, this behaviour is still responsible for particularly negative health effects. It is estimated that half a million Europeans have used injecting drugs in the last year, a figure that underlines both the extent of the challenges that still exist in this area and the harms associated with injecting drug use (European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2023).

In our country, the most widely used drugs administered by injection are heroin, along with methamphetamine, ketamine or drugs such as Vicodin or Adderall. (National Center for Mental Health and Anti-Drug Fight). In addition, drug use plays an important role in the spread of HIV infection in addition to injecting and by adopting a disorganized lifestyle characterized by high-risk sexual behaviours with partners already infected with HIV. The psychotropic effects of drugs can alter both judgment and inhibition and cause people to engage in activities under impulse pressure. Moreover, people addicted to drugs can end up having sexual behaviours in the risk zone to get drugs or money to buy them (NIDA, 2021).

Figure 1 Trends in HIV transmission by route of transmission 2007-2023

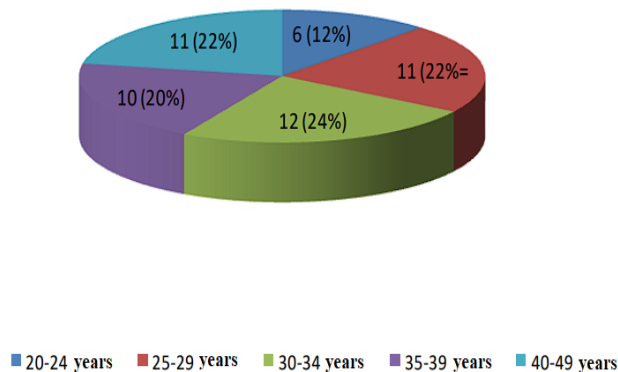


Source: Ministry of Health, National Institute of Infectious Diseases "Matei Balș" Bucharest, 2023

Although the transmission of HIV infection was noted in Romania in the 1990s through the explosion of pediatric AIDS cases detected in orphanages and hospitals in our country, parenteral transmission resulting from medical practice is not the only way of spreading the disease. Currently, 3 main ways of HIV transmission are known: parenterally (injecting) or the shared use of insufficiently sterilized instruments, vertically (from mother to fetus), sexually without a condom (anal, vaginal, oral).

Even if the main way of transmission of the disease in these past 16 years is represented by sexual contacts with heterosexual partners, we cannot ignore the increased risk of illness through injecting drugs. The transmission of HIV through the use of injecting drugs represents a complex challenge, but through adequate prevention and treatment efforts, it is possible to reduce the risk associated with this way of transmitting the virus. It must be stated that the drug itself does not cause the disease and does not increase the risk of infection. The mechanism of infection consists in the fact that an injecting drug user (IDU) ends up using the injection equipment (needles, syringes) together, even if they come from unknown people in the entourage and have already been used. Since 2011, there has been an increase in cases of HIV infection among IDUs. This trend is maintained until the end of 2014 when we witness a slight decrease in the number of HIV-AIDS cases detected in IDU communities in Romania. The lack of disposable syringes and their recovery after injection continues to be a challenge for injecting drug users. In this direction, the only ones who try to remedy this situation are a few profile NGOs who end up having a limited range of coverage in general in the Bucharest-Ilfov area. Nationwide coverage has so far not been able to be implemented by the authorities. According to the data in figure 1, we can see that in recent years we have witnessed a decreasing number of people infected with HIV following the use of injecting drugs. This was mainly due to the stakeholders in the field but also to the NGOs who often made a common front with civil society to educate the general population about drug use.

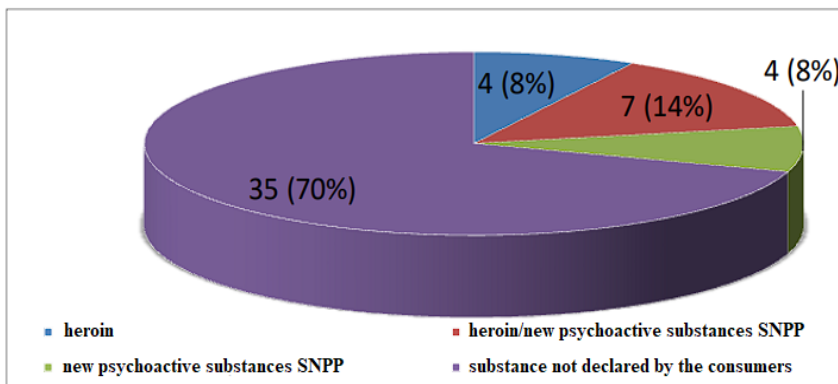
Figure 2 New cases diagnosed with HIV-AIDS recorded in 2022 among injecting drug users by age group



Source: Ministry of Health, National Institute of Infectious Diseases "Matei Balș" Bucharest , 2022

Compared to the years 2010-2014, when more than 300 people from among the IDUs were diagnosed with HIV-AIDS every year, injecting drug use became a major public health problem when it comes to HIV transmission in Romania from 1.5% of newly diagnosed cases before 2010 to 31% in 2013 (Temereanca, 2017). Currently, at the end of 2022, we have only 50 reported cases of HIV infection or AIDS. So that after more than 10 years, in 2022 almost a quarter of IDUs diagnosed with HIV-AIDS are in the 30-34 age group, closely followed by the 25-29 age segment. We are therefore talking about the young adult population that could benefit from counseling, health education or social reintegration programs. We should mention that the Romanian National Anti-Drug Agency is a structure of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI) which by its nature has a coercive force over the population. So that all data on the age of drug users or the age of onset of substance use often ends up not being declared in health facilities for fear of sanctions. In the present situation we can have a picture that partially tells us the reality.

Figure 3 Types of drugs used by IDUs diagnosed as HIV positive in 2022



Source: Ministry of Health, National Institute of Infectious Diseases "Matei Balș" Bucharest, 2022

Most of the IDUs diagnosed with HIV-AIDS in 2022, namely 70% of them refused to officially declare the combination of psychoactive substances used for consumption, while 14% end up using combinations that contain both heroin and other psychoactive substances to intensify the effect of the administered drug. For 8% of IDUs diagnosed with HIV-AIDS in 2022, heroin was the main drug they consumed. Illicit drug use can generate stigma, which ends up being associated with serious health damage, with socio-economic implications for the users or their family. Within health care services in general there is a low rate of disclosure of substances used by IDUs for fear of reporting them to the police or due to stigmatizing experiences and stereotypes that may be present within health care systems. Thus, through this practice, the screening of the substances used and their associated risks become difficult to map at the level of the health units that come into contact with the IDUs. Addiction to the injected substance causes most to resume this habit of injecting once they leave the health facilities. Most end up refusing the help offered by the National Antidrug Agency, being a structure of the MAI. The fear of coercive measures makes most people refuse specialized help. The only effective way to stop the spread of HIV-AIDS and other infectious diseases is to use sterile syringes. In this direction, the main stakeholders involved remain those from the specialized non-governmental organizations. The Romanian Anti-AIDS Association (ARAS) has been developing a *mobile unit* since **2008** as a social street intervention service for drug addicts, sex workers or other vulnerable categories offering psycho-social counseling services, distribution of sterile syringes and their recovery after use, primary medical care, rapid testing for HIV, hepatitis B and C or syphilis. An alternative in the

direction of disease prevention in IDU communities would be for our country to adopt legislation that would allow the establishment of sterile injection rooms. Illicit injection drug use is associated with high rates of HIV infection and fatal overdose, as well as community concerns about public drug use. Thus, the existence of supervised injection rooms could provide injecting drug users with sterile injection equipment, overdose intervention, primary health care and referral to other health and social services (Kerr, 2006).

4. Conclusions

Intravenous drug use has many negative social implications. This type of drug use can affect both the individuals who engage in this practice and the communities in which they live. The health risks are primarily due to injecting the substances directly into the bloodstream, which can significantly increase the risk of transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV, B hepatitis and C hepatitis. This may lead to epidemics of infectious diseases in communities of origin. Another risk is that of combining several substances at the same time or of excesses that can lead to death or significant damage to the health of the IDUs. Thus, intravenous drug use causes rapid physical deterioration that requires significant costs for medical care and treatment. Most people who inject drugs end up denying or actually not reporting their use of psychotropic substances for fear of legal enforcement. So they end up requesting help late in the health facilities. This makes it even more difficult to initiate substitution treatment. The lack of supervised injection rooms in our country negatively influences the health of IDU communities. We must not ignore the behavioural changes of IDU especially in terms of the tendency to engage in illegal activities such as theft or prostitution to support their addiction. This can lead to significant legal and social problems.

The social implications on the family and social stigma are often felt by IDUs which can make it more difficult for them to integrate into society and access essential services such as health care or housing. Intravenous drug use generates significant costs to society, including costs to health services, criminal justice systems and social services.

These costs can be significant and affect the entire community. Addressing these problems often involves integrated social, medical and governmental efforts to provide support and treatment for people affected by intravenous drug addiction, as well as to prevent the spread of infectious diseases associated with this type of drug use.

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EATING TOGETHER FROM THE CLEANING WORLD: GATHERING ALL FOODS TOGETHER AS THE ULTIMATE FORM OF COMMENSALITY

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Abstract: *Food is a social and cultural symbol and seems to have a long history in anthropology and sociology. Commensality, or the act of eating together, seems to have social effects in creating or consolidating a group. This study examined why workers in the cleaning industry choose to eat together and how this habit is related to high job satisfaction. Factors that seem to promote relationships within the group and subjective well-being appear to be influenced by the need for socialization during work breaks. The main conclusion of the study is that shared meal breaks, which involve eating together (not from separate plates), make cleaning employees feel more socially connected and increase cooperation among them. The research aims to highlight the meals organized by cleaning workers. The goal of understanding how cleaning agents experience and attribute meaning to these moments of eating together is an important part of understanding their activity in the social context of life.*

Keywords: eating together, Food and Ritual, Commensality, Symbol

1. Introduction

"Homo sapiens settled alongside Homo sapiens and ate together to survive together." (Dragomir, 2021) Commensality or the act of eating together has been proven to have social effects in creating or consolidating a group (De Vriese, 2022). Food is a necessity for all species, but we are the only ones who cook the food we eat. Thus, "cooking becomes more than a necessity, it is the symbol of our humanity" (Fox, n.d., 1). But what happens when we share the food we have? From a cultural perspective, food traditions differ not only in terms of the type of food consumed but also in how the food is eaten at the table (Wooley and Fishbach, 2019).

"If you share food with a stranger, it means you humanize them" (Dragomir, 2018). Sharing food and the time spent to nourish oneself becomes a symbol. Generosity is linked to social generosity and can create alliances. In the workplace, everyone has the right to a lunch break, sometimes even with food provided by the companies they work for. What is truly important is what we do during that break, who we choose to spend our time with, and how or if we share the food we have.

An analysis of the meal break process for employees in the cleaning industry is relevant for understanding the relationships that occur within the group. People do not simply consume food, but they have an entire ritual. The handling of food, the type of food, and the way it is served are signs that ensure distinction. Thus, the meal break can be viewed from both the perspective of what the worker eats and how they do it. The first perspective can capture the food and its connection to theories in the sociology of consumption. We have a system in which food, through the meanings it conveys, contributes to the positioning and differentiation of individuals in society. The second perspective, which is the subject of this work, is related to how meals are taken. We witness an intersection between food consumption and work relationships around it. Individuals can choose to share the food they eat, choose not to share, or put it together. Taking all these aspects into consideration, we can say that by analyzing the meal break of an employee in the cleaning industry, a profile can be constructed. Another perspective captured in the phrase "Leaders eat with people" is a viewpoint developed by Csibi and Predescu (2023) in their book "Leaders Eat Last," another

perspective by Sinek (2017). Both capture hierarchical relationships alongside an important practice - eating together. Although it is not part of the subject of this research, hierarchical differences among those who eat together remain a subject on which we can reflect.

In a broad sense and as a starting point in developing the topic at hand, we have considered dimensions such as meal-taking practices, attitudes and beliefs about meal-taking, and work relationships. I will investigate the importance of food sharing and the meal-taking process in work relationships. The perception of food sharing and the process of eating together can be related to socialization, culture, social values, rituals, and associated symbols.

Employees in the cleaning industry do not have private space or personal time. The space dedicated to the cleaning team is generally shared with colleagues and materials for carrying out the tasks. While employees are encouraged to share the limited space, they are not encouraged to take breaks together. Breaks can vary from 10 minutes to half an hour or even an hour. If you have ever tried to enforce rules to prevent them from taking breaks together, you know that it is almost impossible to make them not take breaks together. And according to studies, it seems that we should not even desire that.

2. The conceptualization of commensality

Research on work typically focuses on issues related to interactions with others during the course of an activity, rather than during meal breaks. On the other hand, research in the field of food is based on directions such as "dining at home, in our local community, and while traveling" (Roberts, 2021, 15). There is less research that specifically focuses on the practice of having meals at the workplace, especially lunch together for workers in the cleaning industry. The practice of sharing a meal has been considered to have a key influence on eating behaviour (Bjornwall et al., 2021). According to a comparative study, the authors have shown that in most situations, eating alone was examined in relation to depressive symptoms compared to eating together (Bjornwall et al., 2021). Additionally, studies in the field show that those who eat together with others less than once a month had a significantly lower rate of subjective well-being (Ishikawa et al., 2016).

Everyday life is invaded by a multitude of interactions we have with various other people, objects, or devices. Breaks and moments when we pause our activities are oases of tranquility. An analysis of the process of taking these breaks reveals important social aspects, but especially the types of work relationships and individual characteristics. Commensality, as the practice of sharing food or eating together with people sitting at the same table (Fischler, 2011), has gained increased interest in food studies. The importance of commensality is linked to social interactions (Sobal, 2000, Bugge and Almas, 2006), the positive consequences it can have on health (Marshall and Anderson, 2002), or even as an expression of the core of a society (Koponen, 2020). Furthermore, Fischler (2011) views it from a perspective that differentiates humans from animals. Studies in the field (Soban and Nelson, 2003; Makela, 2009; Holm et al., 2016; Koponen, 2020) suggest that commensality can be expressed in different ways. In Holm et al. (2016), we find the idea that having dinner on the couch in front of the TV is not considered commensal eating, while Soban and Nelson (2003) raise the idea that sharing a beer with neighbors can be considered a commensal act (Koponen, 2020).

The main actor of this practice is the cleaning employee. They generally belong to the lower class of society and have limited resources. This implies that they would be more tempted not to share these resources and, consequently, the food. For cleaning staff, self-fulfillment is a value. Workers who struggle with dirt have a worldview that is strongly linked to nepotism, strong ties within the local community, and the need to be appreciated for the work they do. Their relationships are based on needs. Specifically, this means that they feel a greater need to belong to a group. Expanding and strengthening the relationships they have operates on rules related to "genealogical humanity," meaning their relationships are still tied to their place of origin, the community they come from, and, implicitly, the workplace. Lunch

breaks can provide cleaning employees with a space between work and leisure time where they can get to know each other better and form trusting relationships.

Grignon (2001) in his study highlights the idea that eating certain foods in certain ways defines a group. I believe that a moment when everyone's food comes together and forms a meal from which everyone can eat as much as they want and whatever they want can be considered an act of supreme commensality. To understand the relationships that form at work, it is useful to see the process of meal taking within the group. Studies such as Wooley and Fishbach (2019) bring to light an extremely important subject for understanding the social context of eating together. Specifically, they have shown that sharing food from a single plate has led to increased coordination among those involved, made them behave more cooperatively and less competitively towards each other, compared to those who eat from separate plates. Common actions such as pooling all the food together and subsequently eating them involve behaviours that lead to better cohesiveness among group members (Haidt, Seder, and Kesebir, 2008).

Consuming food from a communal plate, as Wooley and Fishbach (2019) argue, stimulates the growth of closeness, so people feel more socially connected. Furthermore, people who eat together seem to be perceived by others as more connected (Kniffin and Wansink, 2012).

The difference between eating and dining is the metaphorical difference between eating one's own food or sharing the food with others. Based on the distinction between eating as the purpose of nourishing the body and dining as "putting food into our mouths" (Sandy, 2012), we can extrapolate to the difference between one type of commensality where we sit at the same table and eat our food, and another type of commensality that we have named supreme, in which we share the food we have. "It's about people and what happens around our tables, and it's good for our souls" (Sandy, 2012).

3. Research methods and tools

The article is structured on one hand on qualitative research where we explored through interviews the cognitive processes behind having lunch breaks with coworkers, and on the other hand, a qualitative research where we observed this practice among workers in the cleaning industry.

Based on the qualitative survey and in-depth interviews, I discovered the experiences and feelings of 16 cleaning agents who helped me answer the research questions: How do employees symbolically relate to lunch breaks? How do they spend their lunch breaks? What types of interactions do cleaning agents have during lunch breaks? Regarding the observation of the practice of eating together, I was able to see how this practice unfolds.

The main objective of the research is to synthesize the symbolic processes through which agents in the cleaning industry build their relationships based on lunch breaks. The aim was to observe and understand if this practice builds and supports work relationships and interactions within the group.

People adopt a certain type of behaviour towards other people or objects, taking into account the significance they attribute to them. The idea put forward by Blumer (1986) in explaining symbolic interaction is the starting point in understanding the relationship between the interaction that I refer to as material with everything that encompasses the lunch break. Therefore, I will now focus on the common experiences regarding lunch breaks and how they take place as an aspect of the daily life of employees in the cleaning industry.

4. Lunch break at work: A redefinition of commensality

The approach of sharing all food and meals to be consumed together serves as a main point for considering work lunch breaks. A new type of commensality shows how employees in the cleaning industry tend to bring food, vegetables, cooked meals to work, which they will share and serve to everyone. The role of food is not only to satisfy a basic need, but it also

equalizes and creates equality among workers in the cleaning industry - "We eat together, we are all the same" (Alina). The discourse around sharing food can be considered related to humanity because "If someone doesn't have, we give to them. Other times, if we don't have, they give to us. We have to be human" (Maria). We can reach the idea that lunch for most cleaning agents we have discussed with or observed during the break is linked to the idea of fairness. The moment when "everyone brings what they have, a tomato, cheese, bacon, it doesn't matter" (Nelu) creates a moment when "we feel good, we rest" (Alina), and for cleaning employees, it creates relationships based on "friendship, colleagues, together. And so we don't have time to meet. We are just at work and at home" (Maria).

All of this is nothing more than projections of a meal taken together with friends, colleagues, who are not "always at home with their spouse and children" (Ileana). What Ileana says can be interpreted in terms of the need to spend time with other people in close proximity. But what is so special about sharing food together?

The configuration of the table is different depending on the relationships that exist between those people. By simultaneously observing two standard meals - one of the employees working, for example, in a department, and one of the execution employees within a cleaning services company, we can observe a difference related not only to the consumed food but also to the configuration of the table. Of course, there are situations where department employees have communal meals or situations where each cleaning employee eats their own food. The idea expressed earlier is related to the frequency with which these types of communal lunches occur. Relationships, discussions, at first glance, may seem the same, but looking closely and discussing with them, you will find that "we are closer. It's nice to eat there, you know, together. It's still together even if everyone has their own sandwich from home, but... I don't know... I like it more when everything is communal" (Ioana).

Seems like communal meals are suitable only in certain contexts, in a specific environment, and only with certain people. However, despite the differences, both types of lunch experiences create a sense of well-being and closeness among employees. "And if we argued or if I got annoyed that day, sometimes we make up when we eat" (Mihai). Therefore, it is possible to view the practice of eating together at work as "a moment we look forward to. We all expect it and eat together" (Nelu). Regardless of how they are divided during work shifts, the same types of practices exist. "I don't like everyone, but we eat together" (Victor) is a statement that can undermine any belief that breaks should not be taken together. I believe that welcoming everyone to the table and sharing food together allows the act of commensality to take on new forms and be redefined.

From discussions with employees in the cleaning industry, I have understood that socializing during mealtime is important for group cohesion. Furthermore, by observing how they eat, I have learned the importance of having such moments in the day that can build relationships that underpin better work performance.

5. Conclusions and discussions

Feeding is a basic necessity, but commensality or the act of eating together has social effects related to group consolidation and the creation of trusting relationships. As an indicator of familiarity, there is a difference between eating together (even if accompanied by the question "Do you want to taste?") and eating together by sharing all the food. The lunch break naturally brings people together, but the way food is eaten and consumed matters more in terms of cooperation among people.

Considering the individual's need to interact, create relationships, and be perceived as belonging to the group they are part of, we can consider that this way of spending lunch breaks at work will lead to the creation of more united groups, with the definition of common goals and the identification of shared values. All of these can lead to social interaction pressure, but in the long run, they can create a stable team around a core. However, there are fine lines that separate work connections with increased productivity from destructive

connections for the activity they perform. In other words, there is a risk that cleaning staff will spend more time in such interactions and less time actually performing their paid tasks. Eating meals together, in conjunction with work relationships, creates a pleasant work environment and can lead to a higher declarative level of subjective well-being, which implicitly demonstrates teamwork and better results in the activities carried out, as long as all of this is done within dedicated break time.

Sharing food is not an uncommon practice for workers in the cleaning industry. The tendency to eat from the same food, from a common plate, is a practice that is often found in the discourse of workers as well as in the stories of their direct supervisors. This is a common practice in collectivist Asian cultures (Wooley and Fishbach, 2019) and, according to the literature mentioned in the previous section, it brings benefits in terms of cooperation and collaboration. This is certainly not the only way to create cohesion within a group, but it can be considered.

So what does it mean to eat together, with shared food? It can be interpreted symbolically as communion, a group based on customs and consolidated through a practice that involves more than just individual interaction. The practice of sharing what you have translates into behaviour that governs our sociality, with cross-cutting effects on the practice itself. We found that, declaratively, sharing food from the same plate or eating together seems to positively influence employee behaviours, making them feel closer and more cooperative.

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PRO-SOCIAL EDUCATION OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

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Abstract: *Punishment is appreciated as the way to reduce the commission of criminal acts, being appreciated as representing the instrument of coercion used by the legal system of all times and by all societies until now. Over time, the punishment took various forms and manifested itself in different ways, standing out as a coercive measure, used by the legal system against those who committed acts criminalized by the criminal law. The current criminal policy is in a continuous development, the role of penitentiaries also knowing another dimension, namely that of educating the prisoner, but especially of reducing his criminal potential, through the educational action, to determine him to fulfill and exercise social roles and statuses in accordance with the values and social norms generally accepted by society and protected by legal norms. In the current conditions and in accordance with the legislative recommendations, the penitentiary acquires educational values of great importance, its mission being primarily to reduce the risk of recidivism through the educational actions and programs carried out inside it.*

Keywords: punishment, prisoner, pro-social education, educational programs, remodeling

1. Introduction

In that article, I started from the hypothesis that in the penitentiary environment an essential aspect regarding the educational act is imposed, namely that the curriculum must be consistent with the educational deficiencies of the prisoner, with his educational needs and not a general one. Many of those serving a sentence have a low or very low level of schooling, a low level of culture or come from social environments where committing crimes is a way of life, a normality, in some cases also presenting various alcohol addictions or drugs.

Education in penitentiaries is a topic that is increasingly debated, because this action aims to redefine the identity of the criminal, to reshape his moral and personality traits, to return him to society at the time of his sentence, as an individual capable of living in harmony and in accordance with the requirements of society and in the spirit of respect for the law.

For people who have committed crimes, there are punishments provided in the criminal codes, and the magistrates have the mission of applying the punishment provided by the legal norm, after a deep analysis of the act and based on evidence that inevitably leads to the fact that the person in question is the perpetrator. The application of the punishment is not a simple aspect, it must be thoroughly analyzed, so that it is useful, corrects the one who broke the law, but also represents a protection offered to the members of the community. By the application of the punishment, the correction of the convicted person is considered in particular by educating a conscientious attitude in order to fit better into the realities of social life, to produce at an intrinsic level a positive legal and moral change in his personality. The prison, as a place of execution of the sentence, must represent a second chance for the individual, offering him the opportunity to obtain some social achievements, some behaviours and moral values necessary and useful to him at the time of his return to the community.

At the same time, deprivation of liberty produces significant changes and has traumatic effects on the personality of the person who is serving a sentence. The penitentiary environment determines a series of behaviours totally different from those he had in freedom, the carceral universe, its specific activities, the group of individuals that make up this world are factors that determine readaptation behaviours, institutional coexistence, the feelings and frustrations that appear in this context causing the prisoner to be hostile and reluctant with those around him. „the measures imposed in the penitentiary, the opinions developed, the

treatment from which the inmates benefit from both colleagues and staff become obstacles for the way they conceive their future life" (Florian, 2016 : 62).

Although a series of educational programs exist and are applied in penitentiaries, there are situations, not pleasant, in which they do not fully fulfill their intended purpose. We affirm this aspect because it has often been observed that the phenomenon of recidivism has not remained at a low level, with cases of reconviction and return to the prison environment. The phenomenon is given by the fact that the person did not have the ability to reshape his will, to implement and respect the notions transmitted through the educational process, to effectively manage his feelings and social actions. Gheorghe Florian emphasized that "the expected goal of the execution of custodial sentences is the re-education of the recidivist." (Florian, 2016: 3). In the same way, Aura Preda appreciates that, "the re-education of the prisoner represents the proof of the effectiveness of the treatment applied in the penitentiary." (Preda, 2018: 32).

2. The need for pro social education in the prison

The permanent concern for improving the quality of life of incarcerated persons has led to major changes regarding the mission of penitentiaries, their aim being to reduce the risk of recidivism through the actions and educational programs carried out inside them by means of teaching staff and other specialists. If in the past, this institution had more the role of a place of execution of punishment and the application of coercive measures in case of non-compliance with the rules and regulations, nowadays its mission can be seen from another perspective, namely that of re-educating, reshape and transform people in conflict with the law into people capable of accepting and respecting fundamental values. The appearance of the new criminal codes, the framing of the acts and the method of individualizing the punishments resulted in the considerable reduction of the incarcerated population, but also a much more efficient management of the way of educating and reshaping people who have committed criminal acts. Hiring specialists in human resources management made it possible to manifest, determine and motivate high performing behaviours, as well as obtain beneficial results regarding human conduct. The effective use of resources, their involvement in human growth and definition was the object of the development of stimulating educational programs for obtaining increased motivation and changing criminal behaviour into a prosocial one. Education in the penitentiary is based on the assessment of the individual regarding his abilities, emphasizing his resources in order to achieve pro-social goals as well as facing and overcoming certain difficulties.

Through education, both the acquisition of specific knowledge and the formation of prosocial behaviours, characterized by actions with positive consequences found in interactions with community members, are aimed at. So, prosocial behaviour can be understood as "that intentional behaviour, carried out outside of professional obligations and oriented towards supporting, preserving and promoting social values". (Chelcea, 1996: 439). Acquiring and applying positive behavioural actions have beneficial consequences and contribute to the mental and physical well-being of other people. Prosocial education in the penitentiary environment represents an intervention and a direction of the individual, by providing support and support in order to acquire and respect social and moral values. It is essential that the programs and activities are compatible with each other in order to give efficiency to the interventions in the key areas and to facilitate the inmate's participation as much as possible in specialized educational actions tailored to his needs. The prisoner's main educational needs are related to learning needs, different addictions, antisocial behaviours and attitudes. The correct and timely identification of these deficiencies makes the educational act have a quick and reparative intervention, and the educational programs are related to the needs of the prisoner, especially those that, if properly met, lead to prosocial behaviour. Educational actions take into account the evolution of behaviours and attitudes and represent a framework conducive to changing the beliefs and attitudes that were the basis

for committing crimes. The quality of prosocial education ensures a favorable environment for changes and is measured by the decrease in the crime rate. At the same time, it allows for discipline at the settlement level, with the inmates showing more respect, understanding and tolerance in their relations with each other and with the penitentiary employees. Not infrequently, multiple negative manifestations take place in the penitentiary space, determined by a multitude of disruptive factors. That is precisely why the need for prosocial education is especially important when the sentence begins, because the individuals are not socialized with this environment, they come from different cultures. The beginning of the execution of the sentence in a custodial regime can cause a deviant behaviour, especially since the prisoner is required to comply with some regulations and social norms determined by the prison setting. The social standards in the penitentiary are different from those he was familiar with in the external environment, now and here, the person serving the sentence will have to accept, learn and apply the rules of coexistence, respect the values and norms of the society he belongs to part. "At the same time, individuals are not socialized in a culture common to a single or the entire society, but in a series of different cultures and even subcultures." (Otovescu, 2010: 377). That is precisely why, on the date of incarceration, there is a period of accommodation, called quarantine, during which the individual deprived of liberty is evaluated from an educational, socio-economic, psychological perspective, but also prepared for life in detention, in order to comply with the rules provided by the Rules of Order interior of the penitentiary. This moral training aims to reduce "any act, conduct or manifestation that violates the written or unwritten norms of society or of a particular social group." (Zamfir, Vlăsceanu, 1992:167). Depending on the quality of the educational activities, we can talk about the reduction of failure on a personal level at the time of release, about the success of social and professional reintegration and implicitly about the reduction of post-execution recidivism. Prosocial education will have to strengthen previous educational acquisitions, allow the accumulation and completion of higher levels of education, so that the educational subject persists after the completion of the educational act, in the application, compliance and manifestation of the tendencies of adherence to social norms and values. Returning to the community at the end of the execution of the sentence, implies an effort to readjust to the outside world, and the existential niches in which the individual will live will be perceived with changes and numerous challenges that he will have to face. From the date of release, he will have to "accumulate the capacities and skills necessary to adapt to the organizational environment available to exist". (Popovici, 2003: 167). The idea is also found in the following statement, "... we can increase the frequency of social behaviours by increasing people's skills, teaching them how to give help, helping them to know the terrain." (Constantinescu, 2004:23).

Prosocial education in penitentiaries does not exclusively belong to the activity and competence of the educator, in this educational process a series of specialists with specific duties are involved such as: social workers, psychologists, therapists, but also personnel assigned to guard and protect. „ The programs offered by the prison administration are classified into educational, vocational training and therapy programs. Their goal is common, to get the prisoners to behave, act and think in a socially accepted way so as to avoid the phenomenon of recidivism". (Florian, 2016: 21)

Prosocial education is based on providing the information that inmates may need for their reintegration into society, and the information provided will vary depending on the individuals involved and with specific attributions. Social skills are constantly changing, that is why their performance largely depends on the ability of those who have the mission to translate them into educational activities, but also on the positive response of those who participate in the educational act. The more the person involved in the activity is confronted with various social situations, the greater the acquisition and performance, and the subsequent application of what has been learned will have a positive impact in effective relations with the community to which he will return after serving his sentence, having the

ability to develop harmonious relationships and to initiate behaviours accepted by society. The efficiency of programs based on prosocial education will take into account that the prisoner continues to develop his social skills after the execution of the sentence, and the behavioural rules learned within the programs allow him to have positive interactions with the environment he returns to, at the same time offering him the premise of respecting the norms and social values, but also the lack of interaction with the factors favoring the commission of antisocial acts.

Isolation from the social environment through the execution of the sentence in the penitentiary represents the favorable environment for acquiring poor performances, for learning delinquent behaviours, aspects that can lead to a series of problems after the execution of the sentence. Starting from this aspect, education and its related activities will consider the operationalization of society's values, the success of the educational subjects being found in the way they will manage their life and activity after the execution of the sentence. „In any form of education, individuals will have the right to a high-level education that delivers what it promises, will help them achieve their goals, will advance them up the ladder of performance as they are capable or as high as they want to go. arrive". (Popovici, 2003: 256). In the prosocial education course, the inmates are the ones who have to assume the choice of the fields they want to study, and the participation has to be completely voluntary. During the activity, they will be able to express their point of view without becoming aggressive, they will learn how to apply for a job, social assistance or deal with a problem, live independently, without the risk of involves committing another criminal act. The educational activities in the penitentiary environment do not have a neutral character, based only on the transmission of some information, but aim at a process of remodeling, transformation and inoculation of practices and actions from which they will evolve in subsequent experiences. Through this activity, the specialists in the penitentiary environment have in mind the formation of a behaviour embodied in models and practices accepted and shared by society. The provision of educational programs is aimed at strengthening prestige and self-esteem, identifying alternatives regarding the professional career after release, future prospects as well as creating moral convictions that can lead them to avoid criminal activity. "Counseling programs also aim at controlling aggression, impulsivity, addictions, adjusting irresponsible behaviour, training parental and social responsibilities, and decision-making skills in risky situations." (Ilie, 2019: 184).

3. The remodeling of the human personality in the penitentiary

In the penitentiary, the individual forms a new perspective on himself, comes to adopt and share the point of view of the other inmates regarding the environment in which he lives and the society that composes him. In this way, the prisoner develops different attitudes towards the staff, those at liberty and will try to integrate into the informal group. Knowledge, opinions, rules learned under the pressure of the group to which he joined become obstacles in the implementation of educational interventions. Added to these pressures are those exerted by regulations and their compliance. In detention, the educational process is much more difficult compared to that in the external environment, because here it is about the need to destroy learned behaviours and replace them with new ones, for which motivation and involvement of the learner is necessary. The programs carried out in the penitentiary must follow the evolution of the behaviours of the incarcerated individual and imprint a correctional orientation. The most important responsibility that the penitentiary must assume is the preparation of the prisoner for a new life, and the continuation of this effort will have to be organized after the execution of the sentence. The quality of the educational act leaves its mark on the destiny of each person and implicitly of each society. The opportunities to develop skills must be as close as possible to the opportunities for release, and the change offered in this environment is defined by giving a second chance, respectively to reduce the return to criminal behaviour. The educational activities as a whole have the purpose of

rebuilding the moral and social values of the person deprived of their freedom, they aim at improving existing skills or acquiring new ones as well as assimilating some value systems that will help them acquire social performances by putting into practice what they have learned.

4. Conclusions

The penitentiary unit, as an institution with an educational role, must respond to social challenges, by expanding the scope of activity, by developing and providing programs that ensure progress both during detention and after the execution of the sentence. Education in this environment must stimulate their positive potential and make them aware of new possibilities, with the mission of helping them decide for themselves that giving up delinquency is a major step towards social and professional reintegration. The extent to which prison education reflects the qualities of the best education will increase the likelihood that at least some inmates will continue their education after release. In this sense, it is appreciated that "the whole community should be involved in ensuring a qualitative educational process". (Constantinescu, 2018: 108).

Educational activities have a special role and importance because they help the incarcerated to express themselves and develop their mental and physical skills, it will reflect on their positive qualities and potential, it will make them feel more human and connected by the society outside the penitentiary. Thus,, ...that both nature and nurture are essential to development, and the interaction between these factors is the crucial influence for each individual." (Constantinescu, 2008: 25).

In penitentiaries, the educational intervention must focus on the plurivectorial instrumentation of the person deprived of liberty so that after the execution of the sentence or on the date of conditional release, he has the necessary resources to overcome the harmful consequences of social labeling and relational failure. The conception and design of the educational approach intended for this category of people constitute complex actions oriented towards the investigation of the personality and the appreciation of each individual's own resources. From this perspective, persons sentenced to custodial sentences belong to a special population category with specific psycho-socio-educational needs. Many of the people serving a custodial sentence did not graduate from high school, the motivation to learn and engage in cognitively educational activities is an unknown territory. In Penitentiary Phenomenology, Gheorghe Florian emphasized that, to this is added the lack of desire to change and, often, self-satisfaction, the conviction that they have nothing to complain about. The still unresolved legal problems of the prisoners, which concern them so much that they are not able to think about anything else, should not be neglected either" (Florian, 2006: 81).

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LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF SENIOR COUNSELING TO REDUCE POST-PANDEMIC ANXIETY

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Abstract: Background: The pandemic generated by the COVID-19 virus has affected the entire structure of society, including the economic, social, public relations, etc. One of the groups with an extremely high risk was represented by the group of elderly people. The institutionalized elderly, although isolated to a certain extent, had an increased risk, the centers becoming foci of infection where the virus spread rapidly. All these aspects, to which is added the lack of knowledge of the long-term effects of getting sick with COVID-19, nor of the effects of the vaccine, have demanded the maximum of people's adaptive capacities, requiring the formation of new skills and lifestyles that will allow them to face the challenges of the pandemic. **Objective:** based on previous research carried out by us in 2021, the long-term effects of counseling the elderly in reducing reactive anxiety to the dangerousness of the COVID-19 virus were followed. **Methodology:** the Hamilton Anxiety Scale was used, applied to 12 elderly people from the Care Center for the elderly, Arad. **Main results:** the results showed in the first research an obvious decrease in anxiety following counseling. The application of the same scale after one year reveals a slow progressive decrease in anxiety as a result of counseling in which new techniques for managing stressful situations were acquired and the emphasis was placed on acquiring increased skills to adapt to stressful situations. **General conclusion:** the counseling system used has proven its effectiveness in the long term, but new future research is needed, on an increased number of subjects, to be able to be implemented in the elderly centers as a method of preventing the increase of anxiety in crisis situations.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety, elderly, counselling

1. Introduction

Senior counseling is a form of therapy that is designed to address the unique needs and challenges that older adults may face. This type of counseling can cover a wide range of topics, including grief and loss, life transitions, relationship issues, mental health concerns, and more.

Senior counseling can be provided by a licensed therapist or counselor who has specialized training and experience in working with older adults. This type of therapy can be conducted in individual or group settings, depending on the needs of the client.

During senior counseling sessions, the therapist will work with the client to identify areas of concern and develop a treatment plan that is tailored to their specific needs. The therapist may use a variety of techniques, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, mindfulness practices, and psychoeducation, to help the client work through their challenges and achieve their goals.

Overall, senior counseling can be an important tool for older adults who are struggling with a variety of issues. By working with a trained therapist or counselor, seniors can gain new insights, develop coping skills, and improve their overall quality of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult and stressful time for everyone, but seniors have been particularly affected. Many older adults have experienced increased anxiety and fear due to their increased vulnerability to the virus, isolation from loved ones, and disruption of daily routines.

Post-pandemic anxiety in seniors may manifest in a variety of ways, including:

Fear of leaving the home: Seniors may be reluctant to leave their homes and resume normal activities due to concerns about the virus and potential exposure.

Social isolation: Seniors may continue to feel isolated and disconnected from loved ones even as restrictions are lifted, which can contribute to feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Health concerns: Seniors may be worried about their health and the long-term effects of the virus, which can lead to increased anxiety and stress.

Financial worries: The pandemic has caused economic instability for many people, including seniors who may be on fixed incomes and struggling to make ends meet.

Uncertainty about the future: The pandemic has caused a great deal of uncertainty about the future, which can be particularly unsettling for older adults who may be facing health issues or other challenges.

If you or someone you know is experiencing post-pandemic anxiety, it's important to seek support. This may include talking to a therapist or counselor, staying connected with loved ones, practicing self-care, and seeking out information and resources to help cope with the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

2. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic was a phenomenon that impacted the entire social structure, from the economic to the social, medical, and even personal. Despite the restrictions, the researchers continued their investigations in order to determine the consequences of this pandemic at all levels and to seek new solutions to the unprecedented situations that have arisen. Following a review of the specialized literature, research was divided into several categories: effects in the general population, effects on the risk group comprised of the elderly, quality of life for the residential elderly, and specific research related to anxiety during this period.

Stanton et al. are conducting a general population study in 2020 to determine how people's health and habits have changed since the pandemic. Despite the fact that the evidence obtained on a group of 1491 adults is somewhat limited, it is still possible to highlight a change in health-related behaviours reflected by: decreased physical activity (48.9%), sleep disorders (40.7%), increased consumption of alcohol (26.6%), and tobacco (6.9%). The authors linked these changes to depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. Finally, it suggests that adopting and maintaining positive health behaviours should be used to address psychological suffering during the pandemic and in the post-pandemic future.

Varshney et al. (2020) point out that the greatest emphasis was placed on testing, finding a cure and preventing illnesses, neglecting the psychological problems that the vast majority of the population faced. They consider a systematic and longitudinal assessment of the psychological needs of the population necessary, which would allow governments to carry out holistic interventions for those affected by the disease.

Throughout the pandemic, the elderly has suffered disproportionately more adverse effects, including more severe complications, higher mortality, concerns about disruption of daily activities, reduced access to care, and difficulties adapting to new technologies (such as: online medical appointments). Although the elderly has a lower stress reactivity and better emotional regulation, many studies have emerged that have raised concerns about the mental health of the elderly during this period. The concern has been with older adults, both at home and in nursing homes, where contact with friends, family, and caregivers has become limited. (Vahia, Jeste, Reynolds, 2020).

Lopez et al. (2020) investigated the psychological well-being of the elderly during the pandemic, which they regarded as a stressful and uncontrollable life event. Seclusion measures have disrupted daily life and have had a significant impact on the health and well-being of older adults. When confronted with adversity in life, mental well-being plays a protective role. According to the findings of their study, the nature of the impact of COVID-19

may not be as important as the assessment of personal resources for crisis management. Except in the case of a loved one's death, this is not the case. Their findings indicate that sociodemographic factors influence the well-being of the elderly. They established positive correlations between perceived health, family functioning, resilience, gratitude, acceptance and personal growth and life purpose.

According to Armitage and Nellums (2020), social isolation among older adults is a "serious public health concern" due to their increased risk of cardiovascular, autoimmune, neurocognitive, and mental health problems. Self-isolation disproportionately affects elderly people whose only social contact is outside the home, such as at daycare facilities, community centers, and places of worship. Those who do not have close family or friends and rely on voluntary services or social care may be put at greater risk, as may those who are already lonely, isolated, or secluded. Isolating the elderly may reduce transmission, which is critical for delaying the peak in cases and limiting spread to high-risk groups. Such mitigation measures must be implemented in a timely manner to prevent transmission while minimizing the morbidity associated with COVID-19 and affective disorders. This effect will be felt most strongly in more disadvantaged and marginalized populations, which should be prioritized for prevention strategies.

Brooke and Jackson (2020) conducted a comprehensive study in which they examined the situation of elderly Persians in terms of isolation, risk, and age. The data obtained at the Oxford center show a clear link between mortality risk and age: a mortality risk of 3.6% for those aged 60, rising to 8% for those under 70 and 14.8% for those over 80. The global recommendation for older populations included social isolation, which entailed staying at home and avoiding contact with others for an extended period of time, estimated to be three to four months. Social isolation included avoiding social contact with family members and friends, organizing the delivery of essential items such as food and medicine, where social contact must also be avoided by maintaining a distance of two meters from the person delivering the goods. It's interesting that the authors distinguish between social isolation and loneliness, which, while related, are distinct concepts. Social isolation is defined as a lack of contact or physical separation from family, friends, or larger social networks, as well as a lack of participation in social activities, and is caused by environmental constraints rather than an individual's ability to form or maintain social relationships. Loneliness is a complex, subjective emotion that manifests as a sense of anxiety and dissatisfaction due to a lack of connection or commonality with others, as well as a gap between the actual and desired quality and quantity of social engagement. Social isolation and loneliness are, albeit weakly, related.

In his study on the mental health of the elderly, Vahia (2020) paints a much more complex picture. He stated that clinicians and researchers all over the world recognized that the resulting isolation and quarantine measures posed significant challenges. These include the disruption of regular clinical services, the difficulties of transitioning services to telecare, and, most importantly, the disproportionate impact on nursing home residents.

Banerjee (2020) investigates the pandemic's impact on the mental health of the elderly. Pandemics have a substantial psychosocial impact. The main branches are health anxiety, panic attacks, adjustment disorders, depression, chronic stress, and insomnia. Mass hysteria is caused by misinformation and uncertainty. The elderly are particularly vulnerable among them. While social isolation has been a major strategy for combating COVID-19, it has also been a major source of loneliness, particularly in settings such as aged care or nursing homes, which is an independent risk factor for depression, anxiety disorders, and suicide. Social connection is especially important during times of declining public health, especially when "ageism" becomes a stigmatizing factor in this marginalized population. This results in apathy and therapeutic nihilism. Because most seniors are unfamiliar with smartphones or media terminology, pandemic precautions must be explained to them in their own simple terms. Cognitive impairment, as well as issues such as wandering, irritability, and psychotic symptoms, can exacerbate panic and make it difficult for them to adhere to social distancing

and hand hygiene precautions. Furthermore, during such a crisis, people with mental health disorders (including the elderly) are more vulnerable and prone to exacerbations. Other factors contributing to their poor care during the COVID-19 outbreak include discrimination and a lack of health-care utilization. The significant stress of "information overload" can lead to paranoia and mistrust of health care, causing people to avoid quarantine, which can have serious consequences for public health.

According to Bailey et al (2020), cocooning or shielding, or staying at home and reducing face-to-face interaction with other people, was an important part of the older people's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there are concerns about the long-term negative effects of cocooning on their physical and mental health. Half of those polled said their quality of life had declined. They conclude that in such situations, policies and clear advice for older people on strategies for maintaining social engagement, managing loneliness, and continuing physical activity, as well as timely access to medical and rehabilitation services, must be prioritized.

Many studies have been conducted to assess the effects of the pandemic on the cognitive functioning of the elderly. According to a 2021 study conducted by De Pue et al in Belgium, 93% of COVID-19 deaths occurred in people aged 65 or older by the end of August 2021. Other countries have reported similar trends. As a result, older adults were identified as an at-risk group, and the government imposed strict restrictions on them. This has caused them to be concerned about their mental health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants reported a significant decrease in activity levels, sleep quality, and overall well-being. Depression was strongly associated with reported declines in activity level, sleep quality, well-being, and cognitive functioning. Their study shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the mental health of older adults. This means that this at-risk group needs the attention of governments and healthcare.

Another analysis aims to synthesize existing research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated isolation and protection measures on older adults. Another objective was to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated isolation and protective measures on older adults with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (Lebrasseur et al., 2021). Psychological symptoms, exacerbation of old age, and physical deterioration were reported in the included studies in older populations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, decreased social life and fewer in-person social interactions were occasionally associated with lower quality of life and increased depression. Access to services was also difficult, as were sleep disturbances and a decrease in physical activity. Their findings highlight the importance of proper containment and protection measures. Older adults are a diverse group, which may explain the contradictory findings in the literature. Individual, organizational, and institutional strategies should be developed to ensure that older adults can maintain social contacts, family ties, and the ability to give and receive assistance during the current pandemic.

Van Tilburg et al. (2020) discovered that many states' isolating policies resulted in a decrease in population well-being. They discovered (on a sample of 1679 people) that political measures of physical distance did not result in excessive social isolation (considering the existence of mass media networks). Personal losses, pandemic concerns, and a decrease in trust in society's institutions had the greatest impact on increasing mental health problems and emotional loneliness. They argue that the long-term consequences of social isolation and population health must be monitored even after the pandemic is over.

The elderly was a high-risk population group throughout the pandemic, owing to the multiple associated comorbidities that this age group presented. In the context of a pandemic, older adults face challenges such as a lack of attendants to assist them with daily tasks, difficulty in accessing medical help, and a perceived fear of an adverse course of existing morbidity. Repeated warnings, publicized in the media and through every other channel of

communication, of a high risk of potentially fatal complications if infected with the COVID-19 virus, increased feelings of helplessness and anxiety. (Vahia, Shah, 2020).

COVID-19 posed a particularly high risk, according to specialists, particularly for those with comorbidities. According to the reports, this includes both elderly people living in the community and those living in Debatran asylums or community care centers (Applegate, Ouslander, 2020). The increased risk of mortality among the elderly emphasized this point (Ho et al., 2020). Their study of 438 people found that the higher mortality rate of COVID-19 among the elderly can be explained by other risk factors, specifically the associated comorbidities. The elderly who were considered healthy had a much lower risk than those who also had morbidity. They conclude that advanced age is an independent predictor of COVID-10 mortality in the elderly.

All public health agencies agreed that in the case of the elderly, a measure of social isolation must be imposed. The study conducted by Chu et al. (2020) draws attention to the fact that social isolation contributes to the emergence and maintenance of depression and feelings of despair, and it contributes to the worsening of cognitive decline in the elderly with dementia. Social isolation measures, while beneficial in theory, can have disastrous long-term consequences for the mental health and quality of life of the elderly.

The elderly people in the residential centers were also in the attention of the researchers. Bethel et al (2021), proposed as an objective to summarize research literature linking social connection to mental health outcomes, specifically among long term care residents, as well as research to identify strategies to help build and maintain social connection in this population during COVID-19. They examined 133 studies and concluded that published research among long-term care residents has linked positive social connections to better mental health outcomes. Some evidence on approaches to addressing social connection in this population comes from observational and intervention studies. Although more research is needed, the sudden and severe impact of COVID-19 on social connection in long-term care residents necessitates action.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused untold fear and suffering among the world's elderly. According to the World Health Organization, older adults in nursing homes are more likely to contract the infection because they live in an enclosed environment with others. This article takes a qualitative approach, employing Colaizzi's phenomenological method, to investigate older adults' lived experiences during COVID-19. COVID-19 has posed unprecedented challenges and a disproportionate threat to the lives, relationships, and well-being of older adults. The overarching message was that older adults believe that "this, too, shall pass," and that they will regain their freedom lost during the pandemic. (Chee, 2020).

Nursing homes for the elderly have been especially hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, owing to the vulnerable populations they house and a lack of preparedness for the outbreak. Because the psychosocial and mental health needs of nursing home residents are poorly understood and addressed during Covid-19, Kaelen et al. (2021) set out to better understand these needs and how staff might respond accordingly. The study revealed residents' and nursing home staff's knowledge at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. Clearer outbreak plans, including psychosocial support, could have prevented residents' and staff's mental health from deteriorating. A holistic approach is needed in nursing homes, where tailored essential restrictive measures are combined with psychosocial support measures to reduce the impact on residents' mental health and improve their quality of life.

O'Caoimh et al (2020) investigated the effects of COVID-19 visiting restrictions on measures of perceived loneliness, well-being, and caregiver quality of life among visitors of residents with and without cognitive impairment in an Irish residential care center. COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted the elderly. Visiting restrictions implemented in residential care facilities since the outbreak's inception may have a negative impact on visitors, including close family and friends. According to the findings of this survey, many residential care visitors experienced low psychosocial and emotional well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Visitors to residents with cognitive impairment report significantly lower levels of happiness than those who do not. Additional research is required to understand the importance of disrupted caregiving roles resulting from visiting restrictions on well-being, particularly on visitors of residents with cognitive impairment and how residential care homes and their staff can support visitors to mitigate these.

Mo and Shi (2020) reviewed existing research on the psychological effects of COVID-19 on nursing home residents and staff. Loneliness and emotional anxiety were identified as the most significant psychological consequences for nursing home residents, whereas uncertainty, hopelessness, work overload, and role conflicts were the most significant psychological challenges for nursing home staff during the pandemic. They then summarized the existing strategies and interventions to address the aforementioned challenges. They suggested that this overview could help nursing home administrators understand the major psychological challenges and how to deal with them during a crisis.

During the pandemic, the most common symptoms among the elderly were anxiety, loneliness, and social isolation. Koverova et al. (2020) investigated the role of socio-demographic and psychological characteristics in predicting anxiety, stress, and worry in older adults during the first and second waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings indicate that older adults had moderate levels of anxiety, stress, and concern about the COVID-19 infection. Helplessness, intolerance of uncertainty, optimism, and coping self-efficacy explained the most variation in anxiety and stress. The perceived danger of COVID-19 was the best predictor of fear of infection.

Parpalani et al. (2020) investigated the psychological responses of older adults during the pandemic's acute phase. The pandemic of COVID-19 has imposed a psychological burden on people all over the world, including fear and anxiety. During public health emergencies, older adults are thought to be more vulnerable. During the quarantine, the elderly's vulnerability to loneliness was quickly highlighted. Research that identifies factors that may contribute to loneliness during a public health emergency makes it easier to implement supportive interventions. Being prepared to address and manage loneliness in older adults can help to limit this harmful emotional response both during the pandemic and after COVID-19.

The risk of morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19 has been identified in institutionalized older adults in nursing homes and long-term care facilities. According to the findings, the major issues identified by the elderly, residents, and caregivers in homes were fear and anxiety, social disconnection, and economic difficulties. The findings revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic's physical health impact is not a major issue in homes. However, the main issues identified by older residents and caregivers in the homes were fear and anxiety, social isolation, and economic hardship (Ekoh 2021).

In their study, Oguzhan et al (2020) looked at the anxiety and loneliness levels of the geriatric population in home quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic. The elderly are more likely to die from COVID-19. Access bans have been imposed on people over the age of 65 in order to reduce contact with others. They wanted to know how anxious and lonely people who were quarantined at home felt, as well as other factors. They believe that quarantine increases anxiety and loneliness in the elderly population, and that there is a positive relationship between anxiety and loneliness. Anxiety levels were also associated with a chronic illness and a history of psychiatric disorder. The majority of their worries are about their family members and their future social and economic lives. It has been observed that television has become an essential source of information in the pandemic for the geriatric population. Authorities should respond to the psycho-socio-economic needs of the elderly and correct information should be provided.

Guner et al (2021) also studied the effect of loneliness on death anxiety in the elderly during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to their results, it was found that the elderly experienced acceptable levels of loneliness and moderate death anxiety.

Das et al. (2021) investigated anxiety and depression in the elderly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The elderly is a vulnerable segment of the population who are vulnerable to physical, mental, social, and economic deprivation. COVID-19 has had a worldwide impact on all age groups, with an especially high mortality and morbidity rate among the elderly. Their research sought to ascertain the psychological morbidity of the geriatric population during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anxiety and depression affected 8.7% and 15.2% of the elderly, respectively. Their findings revealed that the elderly had lower levels of anxiety and depression. Greater resilience in older people, as well as strong family support, could explain this unexpected finding.

Mowla et al. (2021) wanted to compare symptoms of depression and anxiety in elderly survivors of COVID-19 with a control group. In their findings, they point out that the rate of depression and anxiety symptoms in older COVID-19 survivors and controls was found to be elevated during the pandemic. However, the survivors of COVID-19 suffered significantly more.

Research is beginning to focus on the directions and lines that will need to be followed in similar situations in the future. The 2019 coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) is affecting all aspects of society, including mental and physical health. Holmes et al. (2020) investigated the psychological, social, and neuroscientific effects of COVID-19 and identified immediate and long-term research priorities in mental health science. The collection of high-quality data on the mental health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic across the population and vulnerable groups, as well as brain function, cognition, and mental health in COVID-19 patients, is an immediate priority. There is an urgent need for research into how to mitigate the mental health consequences for vulnerable groups during pandemic conditions, as well as the impact of repeated media consumption and health messages surrounding COVID-19. The development, testing, and refinement of mechanistically driven interventions to address the pandemic's psychological, social, and neuroscientific aspects are required.

Wu stated in 2020 that the world was in the midst of a historic moment with an unprecedented challenge during the global COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 outbreak will have far-reaching and long-term consequences for the health and well-being of older people. One of the most detrimental health outcomes is social isolation and loneliness. Social isolation and loneliness are major risk factors for poor physical and mental health. He discusses several approaches to addressing the issues of social isolation and loneliness. These approaches include promoting social connectedness through public health messages, mobilizing resources from family members, networks, and community resources, developing innovative technology-based interventions to improve social connections, and involving the health system in the process of developing methods to improve social connections.

According to Marston et al. (2020), community participation is critical in the collective response to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), from lockdown compliance to steps to be taken as countries ease restrictions to community support through volunteering. Communities are clearly eager to assist. Every society has community groups that can help co-create a better response to the pandemic, and health services and politicians must be encouraged to include these voices. Such public participation will highlight policy gaps and potential negative consequences of any response, as well as ways to address them collaboratively. Community engagement has the potential to mitigate the immediate damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic while also building future resilience.

3. Research

The research had two distinct stages: the first stage took place between March and June 2021, and the second stage in June 2022. In the first stage, we were requested to intervene in the care center for the elderly in Arad, due to the reporting of an acute increase in anxiety people in care. In the second stage, June 2022, we performed a new assessment of the level of anxiety in the same batch of subjects as in the first stage.

Research questions

What is the main way in which we can on long term reduce anxiety in seniors, by counseling?

Objectives of the study

- Finding ways in which counseling can be available in social assistance among seniors;
- Recognizing the importance of counseling in the field of social assistance;
- Researching the area of anxiety in elderly care centers, post Covid.

4. The importance of counseling in the social assistance field

Counseling can play a crucial role in social assistance programs by providing support and guidance to individuals who are facing difficult challenges or life transitions. Social assistance programs are designed to help individuals and families who are experiencing financial or other hardships, and counseling can be an important tool in helping them overcome these challenges and improve their overall well-being.

Here are some of the ways in which counseling can be beneficial in social assistance:

- Emotional support: Many individuals who receive social assistance may be experiencing significant stress, anxiety, or depression due to their circumstances. Counseling can provide emotional support and help them develop coping strategies to manage their emotions.
- Goal setting and planning: Counselors can work with individuals to set goals and develop plans to achieve them. This can help people feel more empowered and motivated to take control of their lives and work towards a brighter future.
- Skill development: Counseling can help individuals develop the skills and tools they need to overcome challenges and navigate difficult situations. This may include communication skills, problem-solving strategies, and coping techniques.
- Community connections: Counselors can also help individuals connect with community resources and support services that can help them address their needs and improve their quality of life.
- Overall, counseling can be an important component of social assistance programs, helping individuals overcome their challenges, build resilience, and create a better future for themselves and their families.

Sample

The batch included a number of 12 elderly people from the Arad Elderly Care Center, 7 women and 5 men, aged between 66-75 years. Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic (which still existed in March 2021), the intervention was done individually, counseling groups could not be organized and the number of patients with whom the amputee worked was thus limited.

Research objective

In the initial stage, the main objective was to reduce the anxiety level of the subjects by using a specific counseling method. In the second stage, our main objective was to see if the techniques learned for managing stressful situations and the way of positive thinking are maintained in the long term (one year after learning them).

Methodology

In the first stage, two types of methods were used: *anxiety assessment methods*: the Hamilton Anxiety Scale and *anxiety reduction methods* - individual counseling was used.

The counseling was mainly based on learning some methods and techniques to help the subjects to sort and correctly analyze the information regarding the pandemic, the virus and its mode of action and spread; to understand the necessity of vaccination and to know the

positive effects of the vaccine; to find new activities to distract them from ruminations regarding the increased risk and increased mortality of the virus in the case of their age category; to maintain telephone or online connections with friends and possibly family, in the case of subjects who had family; learning relaxation techniques. At the end of the counseling, the Hamilton Anxiety Scale was administered again in order to correctly assess the progress made in reducing anxiety (Breaz, 2022).

In the second stage of the research, only the Hamilton Anxiety Scale was applied to determine the degree of anxiety compared to last year and a Likert scale to assess the degree to which what was learned during counseling was helpful during this year, in managing other stressful situations they faced.

4. Results and discussion

The 12 subjects who were selected in the initial research presented the highest scores on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale (Breaz, 2022). Table 1. Shows the shares of the 12 subjects regarding the level of anxiety compared to the first evaluation and after the three months of individual counseling.

Table.1: Comparative results on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale March-June 2021

	Odds Hamilton Anxiety Scale			
	easy	moderate	severe	very severe
March	0	0	5	7
June	1	7	3	1

Source: Breaz, 2022

Anxiety refers to states of restlessness, worry, premonitions of unpleasant events, states of insecurity, irritability, anticipated fears.

A qualitative analysis of the answers of the subjects included in the batch, shows that they obtain maximum ratings for anxiety, the feeling of fear being present so often that it can be said that it is part of the subject's daily life and being very difficult to control. The highest scores are also obtained for items that indicate a somatization of anxiety such as: muscle pain, cardio-vascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal symptoms, vegetative symptoms, insomnia.

Some depressive elements were also associated with 8 subjects, in the table presented at the initial assessment, and which refers to the verbal / non-verbal communication of sadness, depression, despair, lack of help, loss of interest, lack of pleasure in entertainment.

The counseling started with learning some methods by which the subjects manage to sort the correct information about the pandemic. Being in a closed environment and unable to perform other activities, the subjects listened to the radio or watched television, which continuously broadcast alarming news about the pandemic, the alarming evolution of daily infections and the increase in the daily number of deaths. This information listened to and viewed throughout the day ended up oversaturating the subjects who could no longer differentiate between correct and exaggerated information transmitted by the mass media and received by them.

The next problem addressed was that of the anti-Covid-19 vaccine. For our subjects, it was necessary to explain to them, in their understanding, the necessity of the vaccine and its importance in reducing the number of infections or in reducing the intensity and severity of the symptoms induced by the virus. All the negative information about the vaccine heard on some media sources or, unfortunately, even from some of the center's employees, had to be combated. Official data were presented with the real effects of the vaccine attested by the decrease in the number of infections and deaths, as well as with the possible adverse reactions

that the vaccine could have. In this way, an attempt was made to reduce the ruminations related to the danger represented by the virus and the fear of death, which many of the subjects thought was imminent.

Then we moved on to finding some activities that would give them a different concern and divert their thoughts from the actual pandemic situation. For this, the individual discussions focused on the preferences and possible hobbies of the subjects in order to choose those activities that could be carried out under conditions of maximum safety. They were offered various activities such as: reading, solving crosswords, sudoku, crocheting or knitting, drawing, etc. Although they are individual activities they can provide a lot of satisfaction when they are completed, leading to the reduction of anxiety and the centering of concerns in other directions. By performing various activities during the day, which they could alternate, the subjects could significantly reduce the somatization phenomena of anxiety and no longer focus only on possible somatic symptoms and their exaggeration (Breaz 2022).

One of the big problems that all of our subjects had was a strong sense of excessive isolation. This was due to the gates and the ban on visits from outside the center during the pandemic, which made them feel much more alone and abandoned than before. In addition, they no longer had the right to go out in the city, so they could no longer meet friends outside the center or participate in some cultural events that they could participate in before the pandemic. This fact only increased their feeling of isolation and abandonment. That is why, in the continuation of the counseling process, the subjects were taught how to get in touch with friends outside and possibly with some members of their family, not only by phone, but also online. In this way, the subjects had the impression that, thanks to the conversations they had with those they knew and were close to, they were not as isolated as they had felt before.

In the final part of the counseling, the learning of some gymnastics exercises was used to contribute to maintaining the tone of the subjects and increasing the feeling of well-being. In addition, simple relaxation techniques were learned, taken from the Schultz autogenous training technique, with even the introduction of intentional formulas such as "I feel good, getting better". The purpose of learning these techniques was to equip subjects with means to help them relax and reduce the negative effects of anxiety on physical and mental health. In fact, the entire counseling activity had the ultimate goal of increasing and improving the quality of life of the residential elderly during the pandemic.

From table 1 it can be seen that out of the 12 subjects, who at the initial assessment were in the categories of severe and very severe anxiety, only 4 remain in these categories after the end of the counseling. We had only one subject who remained in the very severe anxiety category and three subjects who were in the severe anxiety category. The remaining 7 subjects (almost 2/3 of our group) were enrolled in the moderate and mild categories: 7 subjects were classified in the moderate anxiety category and 1 in the mild anxiety category.

These results clearly highlighted the utility and effectiveness of the counseling program used in reducing anxiety in residential subjects. Practically, the subjects regained some of their pre-pandemic disposition and learned how to better manage the existing situational conditions in order to improve their lifestyle.

The qualitative analysis of the subjects' responses highlights a significant reduction in the anxiety, somatizations and insomnia that the subjects complained about at the beginning of the research. Muscle pain, cardiovascular, respiratory and vegetative symptoms were almost completely reduced, and sleep improved significantly, reducing insomnia and nightmares during the night.

After a year, in June 2022, I applied the Hamilton Anxiety Scale again to the same 12 subjects to see to what extent what they learned during counseling helped to keep their anxiety at a tolerable level and helped them overcome other stressful situations they faced during this period. The results are presented in table 2.

The results show us a very good situation of the evolution of the subjects in the last year. We have no subject with very severe anxiety; 2 subjects still remain in the category of

severe anxiety; 6 subjects are included in the moderate anxiety category and 4 subjects in the mild anxiety category. The two subjects in the severe anxiety category each had a very close person die due to the COVID-19 virus and still have insomnia and nightmares related to this event. For most of the subjects, anxiety decreased considerably within a year, not only because the pandemic ended, but also because they were able to use what they learned during counseling. Many chose various activities for entertainment and relaxation: painting (3 subjects, reading 5 subjects, crocheting 3 subjects, computer game 1 subject).

Table 2: Comparative results on the Hamilton Anxiety Scale June 2021-June 2022

	Hamilton Anxiety Scale			
	easy	moderate	severe	very severe
June 2021	1	7	3	1
June2022	4	6	2	0

Source: generated by the author

Moreover, they continued to perform all this time the learned gymnastics exercises as well as the relaxation techniques, which, according to their statements, helped them to keep in shape and to detach themselves from the stress of everyday life. That is why they were less psychologically affected by other social events that deeply marked the population of the country: the war in Ukraine, the increase in the price of food and energy, the fear of a nuclear war, etc. The positive way of thinking, acquired during counseling, helped them sift through the multitude of information in these fields and analyze them relatively objectively, without exaggeration.

In order to appreciate the effect of what was learned during counseling during the period of one year, we asked the subjects to appreciate these aspects on a Likert scale (where 1 = very much and 5 = very little) (see table 3).

Table 3: Assessing the effect of long-term counseling

	Degrees Likert scale				
	1	2	3	4	5
positive thinking	8	3	1	0	0
hobbies	10	1	0	0	0
relaxation exercises	7	4	1	0	0
information analysis	8	2	2	0	0

Source: generated by the author

The subjects appreciated that the effects of counseling were especially evident when they had to deal with catastrophic news about various social events. One of the great shortcomings of the mass media is that it repeatedly broadcasts the same information about negative social events. For the elderly in residential centers who have no other entertainment, listening to the same news all day leads to a catastrophic and disastrous attitude, which increases panic and anxiety about the future. They have no other information possibilities than those offered by television and the endless discussions with other fellow residents about the ongoing events. So, it is not surprising that these events take on huge proportions in their minds and represent severe threats to the progress of their daily lives.

Our subjects were able to objectively analyze the information and give it its real value, not the one obtained from rumors or general hysteria. In this way, the events remain at their

real value and do not acquire exaggerated dimensions that affect their mental or physical well-being.

Although the acute phases of the pandemic have passed, there are still many problems that need to be studied: the sequelae of getting sick with COVID-19, the long-term effects of social isolation (especially on children and adolescents), readjustment to everyday life, the loss of close people, etc. All these aspects require complex research to help people overcome them and contribute to finding solutions and ways to improve the quality of their physical and mental life.

5. Conclusions

The two-stage study backs up the idea that an appropriate counseling model can help reduce the anxiety of elderly people in nursing homes not only immediately, but also in the long run. The effectiveness of the counseling method was demonstrated not only objectively (by the obvious and progressive reduction of short- and long-term anxiety), but also subjectively (by the subjects' personal assessments) (see Likert scale). More research is needed to validate these findings on a larger population before the general implementation of a specific counseling program that will contribute to the physical and mental well-being of the elderly and increase their quality of life in the residential environment. In addition, the application of these counseling methods could lead to the prevention of other mental disorders that may appear post-COVID-19 or in case of other social events with a major impact on the population.

Acknowledgment: We hereby state that the subjects involved in our research were informed about the voluntary character of participation in this research, about the understanding of information and of the fact that withdrawal from research is possible at any time without negative consequences upon the participant. The research complied with all ethical research standards, the research participants/participants' guardians giving their consent to participate in the research.

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BODY, FOOD EATING BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL CONTEXT: AN AGING PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *This paper makes a journey into the sociology of the body, especially with regard to food consumption. Consumer behaviour is also the subject of study of several disciplines. In this paper we will analyze it from the point of view of the intersection between marketing and sociology. And finally, we will analyze the body and the modes of consumption as they have been socially constructed through lenses, such as “body project” a concept of sociologist Chris Shilling, mobility as described by John Urry or from the perspective of “life as a show” (Goffman, 2003). All these lenses can be viewed reflexively. Nick Crossley (2006) considers that bodily reflexivity is a general feature of current societies, societies in which the body has become an important factor in the field of social relations. Eating behaviours include a high amount of body reflexivity that is largely based on the fear of illness in this “risk society” (Beck, 1992)*

Keywords: body, behaviour, age, reflexivity, mobility

1. Introduction

Jean-Claude Kaufman says that what every sociology researcher should do is never forget an essential question: “What is a society, how does it work?” (Kaufman, 2009). This paper presents the innate nature of food consumption phenomena and the explanations of consumer behaviour in close connection with the current social context, on the one hand, and the transformations of subjectivity, on the other. A new culture of health has developed throughout the world – which is becoming more and more visible in the Romanian cultural space as well – whose indicators may be the following: the increase in consumption of food supplements according to statistics, the emergence of supermarket sections specializing in organic products, the emergence and development of dedicated fairs, the increasing presence in the public space of nutritionists who find their voice, the introduction of numerous websites, the development of the “Plafar” network, the increased social visibility of physical activities in the public spaces, but also on a discursive level, the emergence and the development of gym networks, etc. Under these circumstances, several questions should be asked: How do individuals acquire and develop such consumption guidelines? In social terms, how is the subjectivity associated with these behaviours (perceptions, representations) built? What is the link between these consumer practices and the social context in which the body plays an important role for social identity? What is the relationship between these behaviours and the body-related concerns coined by Bryan Turner (2008) as “somatic society”? How does the level of scientific literacy influence the orientation towards such consumer behaviours?

The present project aims to provide answers to these questions, answers that allow an explanation of both the social context (of what is outside the individual) and the subjective meanings that become causal structures for the analyzed behaviours. Therefore, the project proposes a qualitative-quantitative methodological approach based on some theoretical perspectives.

2. Body, food eating behaviour, social context and aging: theoretical perspectives

Jean-Claude Kaufman says that what every sociology researcher should do is never forget an essential question: “What is a society, how does it work?” (Kaufman, 2009) Having this question in mind, we are on our way to unlocking the elements that make up the title of

this subject, namely body-consumption-society, all from the point of view of aging, both as a whole and as separate elements “filled with meanings”.

We are born, we grow, age and die. This is the course of life from which nobody escapes. “The quest for explanations for why we age is nearly as old as the written record, going back to long before Ponce de Leon’s fabled search for the “fountain of youth” in the early 1500s.” (Cutler and Heendriks, 2002).

There have been references to the body of human beings since the existence of writings in caves, and the physical evidence is infinitely older. However, the body as a study element in general and as a study element in sociology in particular is a relatively recent field.

If, before the mid-19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, “the body was for (almost) everyone, only the temporary home of an immortal soul” (Corbin, Courtine and Vigarello;2008), and it “was subject to the rigors of fasting even in the case of children at risk of death” (Barbulescu, 2015), now “your body belongs to you and you alone, since it is the very evidence of the self” (Kaufmann, 2009: 89). This transition has taken place over the last 200 years once “vision became the dominant sense of modernity” (Le Breton 1990: 106 in Kaufman 2009: 144). In the age of modernity, “the social competence of the eye is vast” (Gofman, 1988: 153 in Kaufmann). Thus, we can say that we are witnessing the “social construction of bodies”, the body being “the product of social construction” (Bourdieu, 2017: 20,42).

We can see how many of the theories related to the body come from Berger and Luckmann's constructionism. Thus "in the process of interaction people do not just obey the rules, rituals, traditions, they create, construct meanings and symbols" (Vlasceanu, 2013: 64).

The same happens with the aging process. Cutler and Hendriks (2002) in „Gerontology” an article in the „Encyclopedia of Aging” say that "old age is socially constructed" and is "a multilevel passage".

Consumer behaviour is a subject of research for several disciplines, each of them focusing on particular aspects of it. For example, in marketing studies, the social dimension of consumer behaviour is often limited to socio-demographic analysis. The socio-cultural background underlying consumer behaviour is often ignored. These types of studies ignore the fact that through the consumption of some products, that is, through the body, sociability is created. Moreover, a number of consumer behaviour have generated cultures with a strong ideological component. This article complements this dominant perspective in marketing studies with a sociological perspective. An important factor that has produced major changes in society in terms of food-related consumer behaviour was the medical discourse. Scientific medicine as a social institution and as an important consequence of modernity has acquired a strong hegemonic character (Le Breton, 2002). Basically, with the reinforcement of scientific medicine, many non-medical fields of medicine have turned medical. An important area in this regard is food consumption. About this is talking Peter Conrad (2007). For the author, medicalization means the societal tendency to develop some types of drugs to solve any problem a person may have, suggesting that even food must have the approval from a social institution that it is or not suitable for human consumption. Of course, this medicalization process is closely correlated with the aging process of the population and the increase in life expectancy. In this direction of analysis one question may be asked: how does the societal process of medicalization influence the development and forms of food consumption? For example, an easy noticeable direction of manifestation of medicalization is the renewed organic approach to food consumption expressed in the appearance of organic, natural products and nutritional supplements.

A paradox emerging as a result of the medicalization phenomenon is that, although the food industry was based on the medicalization of food consumption – in the sense of creating control over it – it has generated numerous discussions in the society, in the public space, about certain compounds and about whether they are natural or not. Another paradox of the medicalization of society and of the dominant, hegemonic character of medicine is, as

David Le Breton (2002) argues, the maintenance of other practices of “parallel medicine” as an element of “crisis of the hegemonic model” that have begun to take on increasingly bigger importance nowadays. The author includes the following among these: acupuncture, homeopathy, massage, etc. An interesting case from this point of view is product Oscillococcinum. When consuming this product, one can see how the crisis of the hegemonic model of scientific medicine makes Oscillococcinum, which is neither a drug, nor a nutritional supplement and which “is not a homeopathic remedy per se”, a great success. New trends in food consumption (vegetarianism, veganism, etc.) have obviously developed in relation to the idea of disease. Disease and, implicitly, health, is the key to the symbolic construction of these types of consumer behaviour.

This involves the idea of “bodily reflexivity” that is well reflected in food consumption. The author of this concept, Nick Crossley (2006), considers that bodily reflexivity is a general feature of current societies, societies in which the body has become an important factor in the field of social relations. In my opinion, eating behaviours include a high amount of body reflexivity that is largely based on the fear of illness. Also, body reflexivity is closely related to the aging process, people nowadays being more attentive to their bodies than people 100 years ago.

Another important concept that reflects the innateness of eating is the concept of “body project” (Shilling, 2003). Some consumer behaviour are largely based on a certain image of consumers about their own body and involve a plan, a project in relation to their own body, which is often ignored by research marketing. In this regard, there are many examples of individuals who want to look younger than they are, so they turn to diets, maybe even aesthetic surgery (especially for women but not exclusively) or people who want to look older than they are in order to appear as being more reliable.

As I said, consumer behaviour is the object of both marketing and sociology studies, although it seems that there are not many collaborations and joint papers to deal with this topic. Moreover, I think that although marketing and sociology have many common bridges, there are few joint theories and studies. This has been pointed out by Christen T. Jonasen since the period when the two disciplines were on the rise, but it is still visible today by simply counting the quotes by sociologists in marketing papers and vice versa (Jonasen, professor of sociology is among the few who wrote in the *Journal of Marketing* about sociology's contribution to marketing).

In classical sociology there are many references to consumption and consumption behaviour. Thus, Marx considers that consumption is induced by capitalism as a need. Weber, on the other hand, in *Protestant Ethics* (1958), considers consumption as an element of hedonism.

From the point of view of Zukin and Maguire (2004), none of the classical sociologists offered an empirical demonstration on consumption. Zukin and Maguire consider consumption as “a social, cultural and economic process of choice of goods, this process reflecting the opportunities and constraints of modernity.” In the article published in the *Annual Review of Sociology* in 2004, Zukin and Maguire give examples of numerous studies and biographies that “demonstrate how the desire to consume goods is socially built by developing industry and marketing practices in one hand (“offer”) and on the other hand due to demographic changes and new social practices (“demand”).

But let's see what consumption means for marketers:

According to Blackwell et al. (2006), consumer behaviour is defined as “the activities that people undertake when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their personal needs.

From these two definitions it may be noticed that although they refer to the same topic, they handle it completely differently. Thus, if in the definition by Zukin and Maguire one notices how the emphasis is placed on the socially built desire for consumption of goods,

Blackwell – a marketing professor – provides a definition that is more focused on the economic aspect.

Thus, unlike previous definitions, the term “desire” is introduced, an element that is fundamentally social. And this desire is also closely linked to the aging process, generating specific consumption behaviours.

There are a few researchers who have studied age-related consumption. Sharon A. Devaney has been studying out-of-home food expenditure and health expenditure related to age groups.

But let us take a look at the social context. The social environment, the social context, the socio-cultural context or the environment refer to the immediate physical and social conditions in which people live or in which something happens or develops. It includes the culture in which the individual has been educated or is living, as well as the people and institutions with whom they interact.

If we look at the body and eating behaviours through the lens of the mobility paradigm, what does this tell us? “All the world is moving” (Urry and Sheller; 2004). What tell this to us? That certain food-related consumer behaviour that were established due to the traditions and customs of our country, for example, but also the climatic constraints that allow the production of grain change under the pressure of the mobility of products, people, services. An experiment conducted in Germany where on the shelves of the store were only products of national origin proved that the store shelves were 90% empty. This shows how much consumption has changed in the last 100 years. We have meat all year long due to the refrigeration capacities, we have oranges and bananas and other food produced at the other end of the world all year round. Moreover, traditions and habits change with other cultural influences. Now we eat shawarma instead of lard and onion or hamburger instead of polenta.

3. Forms of age

As Settersen and Mayer said “age structure may be formal” or “may also be informal.” (Settersen and Mayer, 1997: 235-236)

The formal part of an age is related to the institutional framework and the social structures that create certain limits and so little opportunities.

The informal part of age is related to behaviours considered “close” to each age. Also, Birren and Cunningham discusses four types of age: biological age, social age, psychological age and functional age (Birren and Cunningham in Settersen and Mayer, 1997, p. 236). All of these variants described by Birren and Cunningham are not related to chronological age. But let's see how this age can be related to food consumption. Thus, first of all, the biological condition of a person is closely related to food consumption. Thus, it is well known that people who look younger than they actually have a balanced lifestyle in terms of food consumption.

But let us see how formal and informal age manifest in the Romanian society and what is the influence of these consumer behaviour in general and food consumption in particular. As I have stated, formal age often matches the chronological age. For example, when we go to school, when we engage in certain activities and when we retire, they are all socially determined by age. All these landmarks are highly social and are – with small variations – the same around the world. In Romania the retirement age is 65 years for men, while for women it grows progressively, and it should be 63 by 2030. Obviously, there are exceptions that we will discuss below, in particular objective exceptions (e.g. early retirement, earlier retirement for army and police staff, retirement as a result of sickness and, last but not least, socialist agriculture pensioners are a special case).

But how can this chronological barrier affect eating behaviour?

First of all, retirement represent a psychological and social issue. In modern society, man spends about one-third of his time at work, one third sleeping and the rest of the time is divided between his other personal and family activities. Thus, with retirement, people wake up on average with one third of their time they must cover with other activities. Some people

decide that 65 years is just a psychological barrier and continue to work, but most of them face the unknown. Their activities may include physical activities, especially for people living in a rural household, raising grandchildren, or simply spending their time watching TV, reading or taking walks. Obviously, these changes have important implications at the psychological level and at the level of social interactions of individuals. In connection with the food consumption some changes may occur, especially related to the caloric requirements of the body. People are much less active than they were in the past, and as a result, their caloric requirements are lower. Also, EFSA data shows that meat consumption decreases in retired people compared to adults by approximately 10% on average and will fall further for seniors over 75 years. But all these changes in consumer behaviour are also related to the social interactions of individuals. This is also noted by Sylvia Sherwood who says “Another variable that has been considered to be positively related to dietary intake and nutrition in elderly is social interaction” (Sherwood, 1970).

Secondly, retirement is also the beginning of the period when people begin to suffer more and more from certain diseases, many of them, such as heart and circulatory diseases, and diabetes, being accompanied by many food restrictions. Thus, by analyzing the consumer data provided by EFSA, we notice that there is a radical change in the food consumption after the age of 65 (see appendix 2). The three main categories I would like to point out are meat consumption, alcohol consumption and fruit consumption. While the first two categories suffer a severe fall in consumption after the age of 65, we notice a significant increase in fruit consumption. Although it is impossible to correlate them because they are different research studies, we cannot help noticing the similarity to a research conducted by Ministry of Health from New Zealand showing that the degree of obesity of individuals increases up to the age of 65, and after this age it decreases slightly, dropping even more after the age of 75 (see appendix 3).

Thirdly, retirement comes with a reduction in cash availability. Compared to the period before retirement, cash resources of individuals are often reduced by half. Obviously, this affects the food consumption, especially in people who live alone and do not have a large family. This is a national constraint that brings changes to the consumer behaviour.

We have seen some objective factors that come with retirement, but let us see some informal age-related elements that make this age seem like any other age, without changing too much people’s consumer behaviour:

An important element is the desire of people to pursue an active life. Thus, some people decide to continue working, others engage in long-term personal projects, such as building a home. All these elements are closely related to the social context in which these individuals act, and here I mean the family, friends, social ties.

An extremely interesting example also refers to Romania. During the communist period in the rural area many of the active people worked in agriculture, but the income from that activity and their pensions were later on extremely low. So, those people had an extremely high percentage of consumption from self-production throughout their lifetime, relying heavily on what they produced in their own households. Thus, for those people, the age of 65 was just a number and they continued to do what they had done for, virtually, all of their lives, namely providing for themselves to a great extent through their own work. In rural areas, being 75 and older is by no means an impediment and does not prevent people from working alongside younger people. On the contrary, it is believed that these people have even greater stamina, as they are “accustomed” to hard work. Obviously, this cohort effect is also changing in Romania, too, subject to modernity. Slowly but surely, farming is becoming mechanized, raising livestock is more profitable when done in specialized farms. It is difficult to say when this transition will complete, but the effects of modernity are making themselves felt here, too.

4. Age and cohort effect in Romania

Cohort is used for an aggregate of individuals anchored together in historical time (normally defined on the basis of birth year)” (Settersen and Mayer, 1997: 235). There are 2 major categories of population in Romania where the cohort effect has different influences.

Thus, the first category consists of people who were born before the 1989 revolution. Thus, in these categories of people the food consumption was originally based on significant lack of food. Who does not remember the empty shelves before 1989? Immediately after the fall of communism and the liberalization of trade, food offer began to diversify. There are, however, many voices who argue that at that time the food market was very poorly regulated and that was why many of the foods that were on the store shelves at the time complied to little or no extent with the legal requirements on food safety. These effects are more or less found in all the Eastern European countries that were under communist repression.

But what exactly does this consumer behaviour of the pre-revolution cohort mean? Once people have gone from a huge food shortage, from rationing bread, sugar and oil to their availability everywhere, from soy salami to cold cuts and bologna easy to find anywhere they have started to consume more and more. The quality did not matter (as I mentioned earlier), it was all about the quantity. Communism that had restricted them for so many years had fallen. But what was the cost of this for consumer behaviour? This effect is only beginning to be noticed due to the increase in cardiovascular diseases (as a result of the increase in obesity) and the incidence of cancers (as a result of many foods that are poorly regulated from the point of view of food safety).

This food consumer behaviour is still highly visible in people over 50, meaning there is a large amount of food available immediately.

The second major cohort is the people born around the 1989 revolution or later. These people are now 35 years old at the most and the food consumer behaviour change is visible. Especially in the last few years. A change in the food consumer behaviour in particular and a societal change in general may be noticed in these people. We can say that a new culture of health is being formed in the Romanian space (worldwide it began long ago). But what are the visible effects of this behaviour? In every supermarket we have a specialized section for organic products, the space allocated to fruits and vegetables has grown greatly, the number of people running in parks is noticeable, the number of gyms has increased greatly, the number of sports events involving running has also increased greatly. If, for example, 15 years ago there were 2-3 marathons in Romania, now there are a few dozens. Also, the number of people participating in these races (including children) has increased. Thus, International Bucharest Marathon has gone from several hundred participants 12 years ago to about 20,000 today.

What conclusion can we draw on the consumer of older people in Romania today? Of course, there are many effects that shape the consumer behaviour of today’s elders, some of these effects we have covered or will cover in this paper, but a strong effect is the cohort effect. The fact that they have lived more than half of their lives in the communist period has shaped and further influenced the consumer behaviour of people over 65 years of age.

Life expectancy in Romania vs. EU

The food consumer behaviour mentioned earlier in close connection with the historical constraints and the development of the country (it should be stated here that Romania and Bulgaria are the far eastern communist countries, the last to join the European Union, the ones less well developed – this having a major influence on the health system which is underfunded) has made Romania and Bulgaria the countries with the lowest life expectancy at birth in Europe.

We can see that life expectancy at birth increased in Romania between 2005 and 2012 by 3.8 years compared to the European average, which has increased by 2.5 years. However, the difference between Romania and the EU average is still consistent, i.e. over 5 years, and

the difference is even greater if we take into account the developed countries. In the case of developed countries, we also have to make a note about food consumption, namely, although Spain, Italy and Cyprus are among the developed countries, without however taking the lead in front of Germany or France, their life expectancy is higher. We can assume that this is largely due to the food consumer behaviour, namely, the famous Mediterranean food that involves eating olive oil, cheese, lots of vegetables and seeds and less meat.

One of the reasons for Romanians' life expectancy compared with the rest of the European countries is disease-related mortality. This cause is closely linked to food consumer behaviour, especially for those born before 1989.

We can explain life expectancy and the incidence of diseases in Romania compared to other European countries if we associate them with meat consumption. According to data provided by EFSA, meat consumption in Romania is about 35% higher than the European average. Should this consumer behaviour be a social construction of the fears of Romanians during the communist era when it was difficult to buy meat? It is possible, but surely, this food consumer behaviour also changes in Romania with the opening of the economy and the placing of foreign products on the market.

5. Conclusions

We are born, we grow old and we die. This order of events cannot be changed by anybody, but during the course of human evolution aging has undergone numerous changes. These changes can be grouped in two main categories.

First, we refer to physical changes. The process of aging was different a few hundreds of years ago. While hundreds of years ago people's life expectancy was around 50 years, now in most countries of the world it exceeds 70 or even 80 years. It is said that 20 years from now old people over 75 will live a second old age period. These things could have been possible due to the evolution of modernity, increased living standards and food security.

Second, we refer to changing attitudes about the aging process. As we have shown, aging is a socially built phenomenon, there are many objective and subjective factors that influence the way people see the aging process. In this paper I have referred only to some of them. Even more than the aging process, the feeding process has an even greater social and cultural burden. The intersection of the two variables only leads to a great deal of possibilities in the investigation of the social process as a researcher.

Obviously, this paper is only a small part of the enormous possibilities of studying food consumption phenomena and behaviours in close connection with the aging process. This is becoming more exciting because these phenomena are being studied by other disciplines as well. Moreover, these consumer behaviours change and evolve under the influence of marketing so here I am, launching a new challenge: Are some of these consumer behaviours the result of modern marketing?

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RACIALIZATION, OTHERNESS AND SENSIBILITIES IN ARGENTINA. A CRITICAL APPROACH FROM THE SOCIOLOGY OF BODIES AND EMOTIONS

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Abstract: *This article critically reflects upon the production and reproduction of the formations of otherness in Argentina from the emergence of the Nation-State to the present day, highlighting the tensions and transformations that have converged in the category “black,” which is defined as the privileged locus of the processes of the sub-alternization. The documentary analysis carried out enabled, firstly, the systematization of some strategies of “invisibility” of the Afro-descendant population on a national level. Secondly, the article studies, from the Sociology of Bodies and Emotions, the process of “negrification” of otherness as part of the politics of sensibilities and reflects upon the “politics of the gaze” as an essential analytical key to observe current practices of racialization. Finally, the conclusion suggests that since the 19th Century Argentina has witnessed a constant and complex process of the racialization of otherness that, coupled with class, has defined “superfluous humanities” concerning the extinction of blackness, first, and its widespread sub-alternization, second, reproducing the pattern of colonial dominion and exploitation even well into the 21st Century.*

Keywords: Racialization, Afro-descendant, sensibilities, politics of the gaze otherness.

1. Introduction

Why are there no black men or women in Argentina? For some time this question has surfaced in the collective imaginary, which elicited various dubious answers suggesting that the disappearance of all African traces in the country is an objective and inescapable reality.

The transatlantic slave trade from the 16th through the 19th Centuries explains the presence of African people¹ in Argentina, and in the Latin American region. However, various historiographic and anthropological studies have revealed that the African “component” of the social and cultural life in Argentina has been considerably underestimated. Scholars argue that this misjudgment is a consequence of the project for a “racially white and culturally European” Nation conceived by the “Generation of 1880”².

The narrative of “whiteness” and the promotion of European immigration, which were conceived as state policies, have been the two great pillars of the “myth of origin” of the Argentine Nation (Adamovsky, 2012; Segato, 2007). This narrative demanded to renounce to any ethnic or racial claims in order to become a citizen. A double denial followed: one issued by the State, and the second one encouraged by Afro-descendants, who designed “whitening” strategies to be considered a part of the “national” group.

This scenario increasingly dislocated the collective of Afro-descendants, displacing them practically and symbolically towards the position of a “prehistoric otherness that had disappeared, i.e. without significance for the history of the country” (Lamborghini, Geler and Guzmán, 2017: 70; translation by author).

Some scholars argue that academia’s almost complete disregard for this issue furthered the invisibility of all African trace demanded by the project of “the whitening of Argentina” (Frigerio, 2008; Geler, 2016). Research from the 20th Century on this issue, which

¹ During this period, the slave trade that populated the American territory entailed the largest forced diaspora in history involving between 10 and 11 million persons. Studies agree that between 50% and 60% of enslaved people were forced to disembark in Latin America (Borucki, Eltis and Wheat, 2015; Klein, 2010).

² Ruling political and intellectual elite between 1880 and 1916.

consisted of few studies, disregarded intermixing (*mestizaje*) while assuming “beyond doubt” the local “disappearance” of black people.

The 1989 Spanish translation of the book *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires*, by the American historian Reid Andrews, was the first to dispute the premise of the “disappearance” of Afro-descendants in Argentina. This publication raised new questions that renewed the theoretical and methodological strategies for the study of Afro-descendants in Argentina.

This article will critically reflect upon the production and reproduction of definitions of otherness in Argentina from the foundation of the Nation-State to the present day. The text will underscore the tensions and transformations of the category of “black,” defined as a privileged *locus* of the process of subalternization in the country.

The article will outline the arguments as follows. Firstly, the documentary analysis leads to the systematization of some strategies of “invisibility” of the Afro-descendant population on a national level. These strategies have underpinned the dynamics of erosion/erasure of the racial other originated in 1880. Secondly, the article understands the process of “negrification” of otherness as part of the policies of sensibilities and reflects upon the “politics of the gaze” as an essential analytical key to observe current practices of racialization. Finally, the conclusion suggests that since the 19th Century Argentina has witnessed a constant and complex process of the racialization of otherness that, coupled with class, has defined “superfluous humanities” concerning the *extinction* of blackness, first, and its *widespread subalternization*, second, reproducing the pattern of colonial dominion and exploitation even well into the 21st Century.

2. The Invisibility of Afro-Descendants as a Politics of National Sensibility

The building of the Nation-State was not a uniform process throughout Latin America. In Argentina, the production, dissemination, and legitimization of the narrative of “whiteness”—which was presented as the core element lying in the origin of its population—was an integral part of the local “civilizatory” project of capitalism.

The birth of the Nation-State entailed an authentic “erasure” of those populations that did not “fit” its basic principles (fundamentally, Africannesses, and indigenous people). In consequence, institutional and structural racism was one of its core foundations. It is worth mentioning that Argentina formally became independent from Spain in 1816, yet only in 1853 the enactment of the Constitution of the Argentine Nation abolished slavery. This Nation-State enjoyed four decades of independence with slaves inhabiting its territory. This illustrates the framework of racism, violence, and discrimination that became the basis for the foundational project, leaving discernible social, political and cultural traces in the future of this Nation-State.

The invisibility of the African “component” in the country materialized in various ways. The three main operations that jointly built the “great myth” of Argentina as a “white and European” land were the systematic promotion of European immigration, historiographic denialism, and the manipulation of the racial variable in statistical records (Alberto and Elena, 2016; Barbero, 2020; Frigerio, 2008).

In relation to the latter factor, a review of the first municipal censuses of the city of Buenos Aires shows that the erasure of the racial other began locally with the statistical “annihilation” of the Afro-descendant population. In fact, between 1838 and 1887, the black population declined by 7 thousand people representing 1.8% of the total population of the city in contrast to the previous 26.1% (Reid Andrews, 1980).

Conventionally, scholars have located the “disappearance” of the Afro-Argentine population in the second half of the 19th Century. In consequence, various conjectures emerged to explain the phenomenon, which have survived and have become a deep-rooted idea of common-sense knowledge.

The first conjecture suggests that the cause for the disappearance of the black population was the death toll from the war of independence and the civil strife of the 19th

Century. The second conjecture identifies as a cause the intermixing that followed the massive casualties of black men in armed conflict. The third conjecture revolves around the yellow fever epidemic that broke out in Buenos Aires in 1871. Finally, the fourth conjecture centers on the decline in slave trade. This version sustains that legal dispositions – i.e. the abolition of slave trade and the Freedom of Wombs Law, passed in 1813– blocked the importation of African slaves at a large scale, which hindered the possibility of “compensating” for the high mortality among black men and women registered in the country.

Reid Andrews (1980) carried out some research in Buenos Aires to test the abovementioned hypothesis. He examined documents available in archives and libraries in the country and concluded that the effects of the yellow fever as well as the death toll from the wars and civil strife have been overestimated as explanatory factors. Likewise, the unusual vitality that this researcher observed in Afro-Argentine organizations and periodicals – particularly between 1873 and 1882– constitutes further proof to disprove any hypothesis related to the “disappearance” of this population.

Reid Andrews (1980) explains the “discrepancy” between census data and the information from the archives suggesting that Afro-Argentine people were underrepresented in the 1887 census –even when considering the exponential growth of the European population in the city¹. Therefore, Reid Andrews highlights the mechanism of “erasure” of the Afro-descendant population that reinforced the narrative that accompanied the process of the strengthening of the Nation-State.

In the same vein as the previous hypothesis, the author affirms that since 1816 censuses have popularized the category “*trigueño*” to label, particularly, individuals at prisons and the Army as well as employees of the city of Buenos Aires. This category is essentially ambiguous and opaque. The term is applied to dark-skinned people (*trigueño* means literally “wheat-colored”), while not necessarily implying African descent, in contrast to the terms “*mulato*” or “*pardo*.”

Reid Andrews formulated the idea of “statistical transference” to argue that official records enabled two converging strategies aimed at strengthening the already existing process of the “whitening” of the population. On the one hand, Afro-Argentine people were forced to self-identify as “*trigueños*” to avoid the stigma of their past of slavery. On the other hand, anyone with “racially mixed” features was labelled as “white.” In consequence, this author argues that the drastic decline in the Afro-descendant population of the city of Buenos Aires between 1838 and 1887 owes to the fact that lighter-skinned individuals were labelled as “white.”

The dominant narrative of the newly formed Argentine Nation-State consolidated since the early 19th Century, and developed “whitening” strategies, channeled through the redefinition of racial categories, which shaped the Argentine national project and plenty of the State policies of the 20th Century. The power and efficacy of this narrative is apparent in the way an “original mythology” consolidated, first, by placing the “extinction” of black men as the cornerstone of the birth of the Nation-State and, additionally, by displacing and considering as “foreign” all those individuals and objects that were not “white,” “European,” or “modern.”

The continuous “discoloration” of Afro-Argentine people, which is the outcome of the widespread implementation of census categories defined to mask African ancestry, lead to a twofold process. On the one hand, the amount of Afro-descendants fell dramatically in official records. On the other hand, Afro-Argentine people and lighter-skinned *mestizos* appropriated ambiguous racial categories (e.g. “*trigueño*”) as a means to achieve upward mobility in a deeply hierarchical and racialized society. The adoption of these ambiguous racial categories contributed to the “erasure” of all African trace in Argentine society and culture, which was promoted by the local political and intellectual elites.

¹ This growth was the outcome of European immigration, which was promoted by a general policy for the “betterment of the race” from mid-19th Century (Barbero, 2020; Bastia and Vom Hau, 2014).

Consequently, already in the late 19th Century, the category “black” lost its intrinsic and particular characteristics and shifted towards a notion applied to those bearing simultaneously a few and very specific physical features: black skin, kinky (or very coarse) hair, a broad nose, and thick lips. Reducing “blackness” to a bare minimum of phenotypic traits, coupled with the high rate of intermixing, resulted in a sharp decrease of the number of Argentine citizens that could be identified as “real black people” (Frigerio, 2008).

Within this framework, “whiteness” gradually became the norm that defines and restricts the social characteristics associated with what is “normal,” “native,” and “national.” In contrast, “blackness” (exclusively defined by a group of visual and physical markers) became the “exception,” which was associated with various situations involving the strange, the exotic, and the foreign (Cervio, 2020a).

In sum, while scientific research and the initiatives and re-actions of the local Afro-descendant community have disproved the hypothesis that offer explanations on the “disappearance” of black people in Argentina, these ideas are still part of this country’s social, political, and cultural imaginary. This proves that the erasure of the “afro” component is not only a metaphor but also a successful politics of sensibility, in force in the present, which produces subjects and society.

3. The “Negrification” of Otherness in Argentina

The processes of racialization have functioned as political, economic, and moral arguments for the foundation of Nation-States in the 19th Century, leading to distinct consequences in the structuring of national sensibilities (Quijano, 2000).

This article analyzes racialization, defined as a political and ideological subjectivation process (Tijoux and Palominos Mandiola, 2015), in relation to the policies of sensibilities, which have historically produced and explained racial differences as “natural” and “necessary” foundations for colonial domination. The concept of policies of sensibilities refers to a group of practices that go unnoticed while organizing every-day life, the ways subjects shape their preferences and values, and the parameters and configuration of the time and space of social interactions (Scribano, 2017). Within this theoretical framework, sensibilities (re)produce capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial fabrics of domination (Grosfoguel, 2011) masked as “everyday” practices and feelings. The enormous social and epistemic power of sensibilities rests on the daily, inconspicuous, and socially regulated operations that govern the feelings of individuals (i.e. how they feel and how they react to those feelings).

Sensibilities intersect with the racialization processes, which operate as the common ground for the daily experiences of various social groups. Racialization involves a social, political, and epistemic process through which domination “produces” racialized subjects. This process takes place within the frame of a power structure that names, categorizes, and classifies individuals according to ancestry, linguistic, geographic, and phenotypic criteria, among others (Banton, 2002; Miles and Torres, 2019). In everyday life, racialization functions through social categories that name, distinguish, fix, and distribute racialized typologies of subjects, giving this ontological production the *status* of an “objective reality.”

In Argentina, the racialization of poverty constitutes a dynamic that shapes practices, subjects, and spaces across various social spheres. Since the 19th Century, “black” has become the quintessential term to refer to subaltern groups. Therefore, terms such as “*negros*” (literally, “blacks”)¹, “*cabecitas negras*”² (literally, “little black heads”), “*negros villeros*”

¹ The term refers to migrants from Argentine provinces other than the capital –with darker skin and hair color, in comparison to those prevailing in the Pampas and the central region of the country– who travelled to Buenos Aires and other urban centers in the 1940s and 1950s due to the industrialization process fostered by the Peronist administration (Ratier, 1971). Other terms employed during these years were “*descamisados*,” “*grasitas*,” “*orilleros*,” or “*negrada*,” all of which were equally stigmatizing.

² Shantytowns are urban settlements representing the “paroxysm” of poverty and informal housing in urban areas of Argentina. The dwellers of these shantytowns, contemptuously called “*negros villeros*,” are “portrayed” with images

(literally, “blacks from the shantytowns”), and “*negros del plan*” (literally, “blacks on social welfare”)¹ testify to the various ways *to name otherness* that have been employed in Argentina in the last 150 years. The figure-stigma of the *black person* (in terms of race or class) encompasses the abovementioned terms defined as “social surplus.” Particularly since the mid-20th Century, the category “black,” once associated with African descent (which at the time was considered an “extinct otherness,” as abovementioned), shifted to symbolize a subaltern status linked to popular and poor classes (Geler, 2016; Cervio, 2020a).

Framed in this stigmatizing dynamic, the term “black” consolidated as a metaphor for a perpetual colonial experience (Fanon, 1986), therefore, becoming the political, cultural, and semantic field to name the remainder and the dissimilar, i.e. that which accumulates within “the pure power of the negative” (Mbembe, 2017, p. 11). Consequently, in the 21st Century, the term “black” –in a similar way as the terms poor, undocumented, urban outcast, or migrant– is not limited to skin color but encompasses the *superfluous humanities* whose existence has been restricted to their condition as objects.

The definition of blackness, as *surplus*, enables the government of these “superfluous” bodies via stigma, imprisonment, exploitation, and even torture, and death (Mbembe, 2016). Theory shows that the ways societies organize the administration and government of the bodies/emotions respond to the policies of sensibilities, which serve as foundation for the power relations (Scribano, 2017). Now, these sensibilities need the “policies of the senses” to “naturally” organize everyday life according to structural precepts. These policies –defined as essential nodes of sensibilities shaping domination across its various scenarios– socially signify, produce, locate, and distribute particular ways of smelling, touching, hearing, seeing, and tasting from a particular society in a given time period, which constitute a radical intersection between class, race/ethnic group, and gender (Cervio, 2022).

In consequence, bodies that occupy the place of the social “non-place” embody the registers of the foul smelling, the untouchable, the dis-sonant, the despicable, and the repulsive of a given space and time frame². This article will adopt the analytical viewpoint of the “optical effect” because physical traits outweigh the rest of the characteristics of subjects in the practices of racial stereotyping and stigmatizing. A brief digression follows that reflects upon the politics of the gaze and its links with the processes of the racialization of poverty.

4. Outline of a Politics of the Gaze

In Western societies, sight is the hegemonic sense (Berger, 2009; Urry, 2003; Rodaway, 1994; Le Breton, 2017). One learns that with only opening their eyes their understanding potentially dominates the relation of the subject with the world and its becoming. Common-sense knowledge dictates that sight is related to a series of rational actions such as knowing, examining, comparing, and proving. By definition to see means the group of capabilities involved in the sense of sight, which theoretically raises the possibility to gain a “clear” knowledge of things. Therefore, sight is the privileged sense of the surface, i.e. sight locates and projects the subject in front of various objects and phenomena through which the world spreads or expands.

Sight exclusively adjusts things to the surface, which positions this sense at the top of its hierarchy since Antiquity (Howes, 2014; Rodaway, 1994). Precisely, in a social and economic accumulation regime in which the power of objects imposes as language and world, mediating the modes of construction, acknowledgment, and acceptability of the social (Marx, 2007), the predominance of sight over the rest of the senses cannot be “over-looked.” Sight

related to violence, decay, and excesses. These classifications marginalize the subjects who are regarded as exotic objects, erasing the sociological, historical, and economic conditions of social inequality (Cervio, 2020b).

¹ The term refers to the recipients of social welfare and state programs.

² For example, in Ahmed’s study of otherness (2000), the strangers are defined as “bodies out of place.” According to the author, the recognition of strangers involves an “economy of touch”, as well as a “visual economy”.

pervades, defines, and produces meaning over social relationships according to colors, shapes, perspectives and depths.

This article aims to reflect critically upon the racialized otherness, or upon the negrification¹ of otherness, which leads to defining the politics of the gaze as an essential node of the sensibilities that build the “other” as *surplus* in current societies².

From the viewpoint of sociology of bodies/emotions (Scribano, 2012), this article defines the *politics of the gaze* as a dynamic group of intersubjective constructs that give rise to particular ways of looking exerting a differential impact on social relations. The intersection between the race, class, and gender of the subjects who look and of those who are looked at radically affect the politics of the gaze, which becomes meaningful within the framework of the scopic regime of capitalism –where *to look involves a way of touching from the distance*. The tactile dimension of the gaze allows subjects to position themselves in relation with the object or subject being looked at, to anticipate the impact, and to foresee courses of action. The characteristics associated (here and now) with the objects/subjects that are being looked at forcefully project on them, revealing the definitive nature –*in aeternum*– of the judgements of the gaze and the social relations it enables or hinders.

Following the abovementioned ideas, the politics of the gaze challenges the exclusively biological nature of sight, thus clearly underscoring its unquestionable social nature³. In fact, to see is not an action restricted to the projection of the world on the retina. Sight defined as a physical sense is active and selective. Sight is capable of *willingly* scanning the most distant horizons and, then, returning to a close place in a fraction of seconds. Sight may capture objects, which are visible from a particular position thanks to light, and also build ways to come closer or move away from these objects to place them in a more favorable angle or perspective. This power shows that the sense of sight cannot be isolated from the body movements of the eyelids, the legs, the head and the torso, among others.

In the essay “*The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of Senses*”⁴, Jonas (1954) sustains that most of the capabilities associated with sight are enabled by body movements. This author argues that the continuum between the animal body and the human body appears fundamentally in the possibility to perceive distance, sight being the privileged sense to achieve that.

Jonas (1954) sustains that sight enables animals to perceive distant objects and, at the same time, to develop more “complex” capabilities, given that sight triggers directed long-range motility aimed at approaching their prey or, on the contrary, at escaping danger.

The difference between the sight of animals and the sight of human beings lies in the fact that the latter entails not only the capacity for perceiving objects at a distance and intentionally heading towards them, but also the faculty for image-making based on the objects which are perceived. This means human sight is not limited to a mere instantaneous perception but that it can abstract the shapes of objects. This capacity widens the distance between the human eye and its surroundings given the mediacy of the image (*eidos*). The image, understood as the abstraction of the perceived object, is independent of the contact-

¹ Fanon explains that negrification is *an* efficient device of subjectivation that names, identifies, describes, and morphs feelings towards the other, who becomes that who “has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man” (Fanon, 1986, p. 83).

² The approach of this article assumes *that* the five senses supplement and influence each other while shaping social and sensible relations (Howes and Classen, 2013).

³ This article draws from the renowned work by Marx on the social value and the origin of physical senses and their relation with the construction of human sensibility. Marx argues that human sensibility comes to be only by virtue of *its object*, i.e. “humanized nature” (Marx, 2007). Social human beings *affirm* themselves in the objective world precisely through and because of the physical, practical, and mental senses (love, will, intuition, etc.).

⁴ The philosophy of life of Jonas aims at understanding the ontological continuum between the organism and the human being. Jonas argues that the human body is similar to the rest of the bodies of living beings and, therefore, the author seeks to prove the biological foundation of “highly spiritual” capabilities.

sensation. Therefore, human beings manipulate images, in lieu of the real objects, and, in this way, they experience the latter.

In addition, Jonas affirms that sight is the ideal distance-sense. In contrast to touch and hearing –which need proximity to the objects to gain better information–, the advantage of sight lies in distance. Distance improves the quantity and quality of information that sight collects on the environment, improving its faculty to prevent and anticipate situations. In consequence, the author maintains that the best view is not the closest view because that relies on taking the proper distance. The power of sight rests in keeping some distance. By moving away from the object, sight may capture the simultaneity and the extension of the environment, producing strategic information for the observer to move/displace themselves with some degree of certainty. Inversely, reducing the distance weakens the strength of sight given the possibility to get in “touch” with the object.

Drawing from the theory of Jonas, this article affirms that sight operates exclusively in the register of appearances. As such, sight fills the distance between the eye and the object, building images that reduce the “real” to merely the “perceived.” Images constitute a kind of surplus of reality, i.e. a *construct-other* that the observer produces to move around the world and deal with its various differences. Thus, sight, understood as a body disposition, incessantly weaves images to assess, guide, or consider with certain discernment the actions of the subject in-and-with-the-world. The *eidos*, resulting from a special process of abstraction of the object being perceived, constitutes not only the outcome of the work of the sense of sight but also the raw material from which the world gets trapped in the superficial “simulation” of things (Jonas, 1954).

By analogy with the intellectual superstructure, sight is one of the main guarantees for truth in contemporary societies, where *to see* is a synonym of *believing*, *knowing*, and *comprehending*. The evident enters the realm of that which cannot be denied, that which is stable, and even fixed and eternal, ruling over the empire of appearances. Visual sensations, which are simulations of the real, “swallow” the singular traits of things, replacing them with images that are familiar, strange, unusual, ordinary, spectacular, etc. These images project themselves in an infinite and diffuse manner as (perceived) proof of the world.

For sight to transform into the gaze¹ requires an active subject, who can exercise the will to look, as well as various other choices linked to the focus: what to look, how to look, and from what perspective, etc. (Berger, 2009).

In strictly biological terms, eyelids mediate the shift from sight to the gaze. The sociology of the senses, which draws from and expands the questions phrased by Simmel (2009) in dialogue with Marx’s ideas (2007) on human sensibility, fosters a debate on the social dimension of eyelids. Social, economic, and cultural history leaves traces in these membranes, a history that is updated each time we close and open again our eyes. In the process of opening and closing the eyelids, and focusing and defining the visual field, emerge the subjects who look and project themselves in each gaze. The objects and subjects on which the gaze focuses, the perspectives from which they are looked at, and the meanings attributed to them constitute socio-historical constructs that depend on the intersectionality between race, gender, and class, conditioning the autonomy of the subjects that look and of those that are looked at. This conditioning turns the gaze, as it does with the rest of the senses, into an unavoidable problem for a sociology that is committed to the critical comprehension of the social world and social practices as well as of the ways subjects live and feel them.

This framework defines the gaze as the action of apprehending and selecting through the eyes parts of the world via their contemplation and assessment from an individual viewpoint on the surface, but that is historical and social regarding its origin and results. To

¹ *Seeing* is not a synonym of *looking* nor of *observing*. These three dissimilar sensitive positions affect in diverse ways the social relations involving our own eyes and those of others as well as their signifying structures. For further analysis, see *Cf. Cervio, 2015*.

look is to impose a perspective that outlines the word, and to focus the attention (“to fix one’s gaze”) on an object, subject, or situation for a period of time. One of the differences between the actions to see and to look is that the latter implies an extent of time, which is tied to an undivided and meticulous attention focused on details.

This subjectivation of the gaze, on the one hand, enables the subject to act in the world, and, on the other, entails the cost of reducing the “real” to the perceived. This issue assumes crucial importance when studying –as this article does– the processes of negrification of otherness, which entail social ties subjected to the judgment of appearances in the first place (Fanon, 1986).

In relation to the links between racialization and the gaze, Mbembe (2017) adopts a critical position on the perspectives that define race exclusively regarding the optical effects. This author argues that race is not only defined by skin color and a series of body markers but also by a primal representation sending us, above all, back to “surface simulacra” (Mbembe 2017, p. 10). Domination explains race through its visual effects in order to “essentialize” the concept and build it as an objective, stable, and natural category, leading to concrete consequences given its power “to distort the real” (Mbembe 2017, p. 32). Race is defined by the fundamental characteristic of always engendering a mask, or a substitute, i.e. the universal replacing the particular and subsuming the subject (their history, affections, desires, conflicts, and resistances) under the characteristics of their bodies. Despite this, the “other” is built as something they are not. Racialization does not produce the other as a *fellow* human being but as a threat to be “neutralized.”

Drawing from the works of Fanon (1952/1986), in connection to the guiding ideas of psychoanalysis, the Cameroonian thinker argues that race lacks any essence. This phenomenon is not genetic or anthropologic. The race is the product of colonial power relations and, therefore, has a political and economic origin with effects that may be “measured” through the fear, torture, and suffering it fuels. In consequence, race, as well as racism, entails fundamental processes of the unconscious (Mbembe, 2017).

Noticeably the racialized subject “is not reduced to” their phenotypic traits. The racialized subject results not only from their body appearance but also from the act of racial assignation, i.e. “the process through which certain forms of infralife are produced and institutionalized, indifference and abandonment justified, the part that is human in the other violated or occulted through forms of internment, even murder, that have been made acceptable” (Mbembe, 2017, p. 32).

The disregard for subaltern groups is an essential part of power relations, thus, the traits universally associated with these subjects (laziness, weakness, ignorance, ungratefulness, crime, irresponsibility, etc.) are key to justify the set of rules, norms, and institutions that, jointly, present the colonial situation as an “eternal,” “natural,” and fundamentally “necessary” condition for life (Fanon, 1986). In consequence, (neo) colonial power needs to name, describe, and (dis)qualify the “other” to dominate, whether through its security forces or through the government of the “social question” via public policies.

The “other” is subjugated to this subjective transformation, which consists of the imposition of a series of negations indisputable at first sight. “Far from wanting to understand him as he really is, the colonizer is preoccupied with making him undergo this urgent change (...) It consists, in the first place, of a series of negations. The colonized is not this, is not that. He is never considered in a positive light; or if he is, the quality which is conceded is the result of a psychological or ethical failing” (Memmi, 2003, p. 127-28). Therefore, the lives of the subaltern become intelligible through their (ethical, economic, psychic, aesthetic, political, etc.) failures projected –eternal and infinite– over every aspect of their subaltern existence. The operation of the politics of sensibilities, intrinsically connected to the power structure, becomes clearly distinct in the folds of the abovementioned process.

Paraphrasing Mbembe (2017), the *becoming black of the world* forcefully leads to reflect upon the radical difference and distance between the colonizer and the colonized

sustained by and from an unquestionable material surface, i.e. the body/emotion. At the core of this process lies the distinction between the human and the non-human, which is based on a chromatic metaphor that refers not only to skin color but also to the *superfluous humanities* produced and enclosed by the regime of life and death of capitalism beyond color. In other words, in the 21st Century “black” –defined as the material and sensible field of otherness– still represents a sign of inferiority, insult, and submission. “Black” constitutes the universe of emptiness, of absence, of flaws, and of error. Overall, “black” is an accurate synthesis of the “out-of-place” that cannot avoid being looked at (from a certain distance) with eyes filled with horror but also with fascination¹.

5. Conclusions

In 1996, during a diplomatic visit to the United States, the Argentine president at the time, Carlos Menem, was asked about the black population. His answer was unequivocal: “In Argentina black people do not exist; Brazil deals with those issues” (Ocoró Loango, 2018, p. 284; translation by author). This answer by the former head of state provides irrefutable proof of a national feeling deep-rooted in common-sense knowledge that has been building “history” and “society” for more than 150 years. The statement by the former president perfectly illustrates that the question of Afro-descendants in Argentina not only *is an issue* (which is non-existent in his opinion) but is also limited to two converging dynamics that ostensibly evidence the virtual “non-existence” of the issue, i.e.: the *extinction* and *subalternization* of any form of “blackness.”

The genealogy of this question is lengthy, complex, and contradictory. This article aimed at depicting this genealogy with the focus on some of the various intervening factors. Consequently, the first section analyzed the key role that the classifications of surveys played in the “whitening” process of the population, which was enforced by the newly formed Nation-State in the 19th Century. In the same vein, the hypothesis of the “statistical transference” (Reid Andrews, 1980) outlines that the manipulation of survey categories explains the “disappearance” of black people in Argentina in a more adequate way than epidemics or the massive “casualties” on the battlefield.

As abovementioned, the rejection of the populations that did not “fit” the blooming national principles (i.e. mainly indigenous and black people) lead to the assumption that Afro-Argentine people had gradually become “extinct.” Consequently, an original mythology consolidated establishing the “disappearance” of all African ancestry as one of the cornerstones of the emergence of the Nation-State. Additionally, this mythology displaced and characterized as “extinct” all those who were not white, and European. Halfway through the 20th Century, the category “black” returned as part of a social strategy to identify subaltern bodies: fundamentally, migrants from the Northern provinces and the Littoral region of Argentina who were drawn to the main urban centers by the industrialization process. The “*cabecitas negras*” synthesize the bodies-*others* (Peronists, the poor, workers, and inhabitants of shantytowns) *produced* by the urban elites of the 1940s and 1950s based on despise and a purported classist and racial supremacy.

Race –publicly and/or silently–pervades the everyday lives of societies that were shaped by the processes of racialization, which stem from their colonial past (Fanon, 1986). This process occurs through gestures, acts, words, or omissions that place the “other” within the universe of the insult, error, and absence. In this way, adopting the *definition* of sensibilities presented in this article leads to understanding racialization, firstly, as a dialectical game between the accumulated effects that the “other” (who is racialized by the colonial reason) *produces* with their (physical, remote, or imaginary) presence on the

¹ On the tension between the horror and seduction embedded in the gaze, see the notion “cannibal delicacy” conceived by Robert Louis Stevenson in *In the South Seas* (1998), which Georges Bataille recovers in *Story of the Eye* (1977).

colonizer and their institutions. Secondly, racialization implies the effects this asymmetric, unfair, and painful social relation *produces and will produce* (in practical, cognitive, material, and affective terms) on the body/emotion that systematically is and has been its object.

The skin becomes the marker par excellence that establishes hierarchies and that defines the thresholds of humanity. Consequently, the practices of racialization, which weigh heavily on the everyday lives of certain groups, are ingrained in the bodies producing different registers of feelings that inexorably become particular ways of perceiving and doing in the world of the subjects. Within this framework, race, class, and sensibilities are essential dimensions to *understand* the neo-colonial landscape of the present. From the viewpoint of a sociology of the bodies/emotions, the abovementioned aspect provides “fertile” ground to reexamine the spaces and conflicts linked to the inequalities perpetuated in the Global South.

The politics of the gaze constitutes an essential node of the policies of sensibilities that serve as foundation for the organization of the neocolonial relations of domination, which at “first sight” classify subjects and objects based on their appearances. Consequently, the politics of the gaze becomes a powerful analytical device to understand how differences are normalized as social inequalities. The analysis of the negrification of otherness performed in this article opens some analytical considerations outlined below as a momentary conclusion and as an agenda for future research:

- *Particular/universal*: the gaze classifies and racializes enabled by depersonalization and dehumanization. This gaze unifies, encompasses, and swallows the subjects defined by their faults and deficiencies, projecting towards infinity the “insurmountable” differences and distances between the eyes that look and those that are looked at. The colonial gaze transforms the *you* into an anonymous and uniform *them* replacing the particular with the universal. The definition of the substantializing features of subaltern subjects –as if these *objects* enjoyed a universal status– entails alienating the other from their social and historical background, their life courses, and their various desires, and resistances. In this way, the body/emotion is the main *locus* of the colonial struggle.

- *Distance and truth of appearances*. The gaze that classifies and racializes prevents social relations from adopting any shape other than the one marked by despise and subordination, which are linked to the objectification of people. The gaze that keeps a certain distance replaces any other possible relation given, firstly, the series of faults, deficiencies, and flaws that universally characterize the “other,” and, secondly, the fact that every dimension of subaltern lives faces some kind of threat over the future. This pre-emptive and accusatory gaze draws sustenance from the truth of appearances. Keeping some distance constitutes a way to “avert” the impending dangers of the presence of the “other” in order to erect abstract and tangible walls that divide these seemingly antithetical lives. The other (in terms of race or class), who is stripped of their humanity, is reduced to an “unreliable,” “dark,” and “wild” outward instance that only the “managed” distance of the gaze can foresee because “knowledge at a distance is tantamount to foreknowledge” (Jonas, 1954, p. 519).

- *Negrification / Inferiority*. The gaze that classifies and racializes is productive because it constitutes a powerful device for the creation of subalternized subjectivities. As part of its policies of sensibilities, the colonial situation turns the “negrification” of otherness and the “epidermalization of inferiority” (Fanon, 1952/1986, p. 4) into two crucial processes to shape the subaltern experience in at least two converging ways. On the one hand, the subjects are *fixed* in an essence alien to themselves. The stereotypes that shape the other confirm the “reasons” that justify the differences between “us”/“them,” which are the foundation for the colonizing act. Additionally, the “other” bears on their bodies/emotions the burden of all the things the colonizer intends to expel outside of themselves (impulses, faults, etc.). Therefore, the other becomes the “scape goat” of a society governed by the principle of economic accumulation based on the material, vital, and sensible expropriation and dis-possession. The colonial gaze produces the “other” based on an external (body, skin) feature, which projects as the quality-substance of the subject performing ways of acting, feeling, and

perceiving the world. Within a dialectical relation with the rest of the policies of the senses, the colonial gaze turns the “other” into an inferior being, an essence, an object that becomes an *opaque being*. The colonial world constantly strips the “other” of the space and time of humanity, compromising their chances to attain autonomy and emancipation.

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EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ChatGPT ON ACADEMIC WRITING: A SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract: *The use of ChatGPT in academic writing is a hot topic at the moment, being seen as a threat to academic integrity. It is used both by students in completing assignments and by researchers in writing articles. The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of ChatGPT on academic writing, by analysing the existing literature related to this topic, and to identify which are the research directions in this field. To achieve the purpose of this paper, a scientometric analysis was performed, using the Web of Science database. The results reveal three research directions: 1) The implications of using ChatGPT in academic writing: benefits and limitations; 2) AI-generated content detection methods and tools used to prevent cheating, and 3) Establishing generally accepted ethical standards for using ChatGPT in academic writing. The analysis of the relevant articles included in these clusters highlights the impact of ChatGPT on academic writing, both its potential benefits and technical limitations, but also the ethical challenges it raises. This study calls for a collective effort to establish generally accepted ethical standards and discuss evaluation methods, which should be adapted as AI technology continues to advance.*

Keywords: ChatGPT, Academic Writing, AI-generated content, ethical standards, scientometric analysis

1. Introduction

ChatGPT is a chatbot based on the GPT (Generative Pretrained Transformer) model, that is trained to understand natural language and generate human-understanding texts based on prompts (Cheng, et al., 2023). OpenAI first published GPT in 2018 (Radford, 2018), and since then, its learning parameters, as well as its neural network, have expanded, enabling it to generate texts of progressively higher quality (Floridi and Chiriatti, 2020). ChatGPT is a variant of the GPT-3 artificial intelligence language model, and it was officially launched by OpenAI on November 30, 2022 (<https://openai.com/>). Although there have been concerns regarding the potential misuse of GPT-3 to create 'fake news' and manipulate public opinion (Floridi and Chiriatti, 2020), the launch of Chatbot, which is very easy to use, has raised a series of concerns in the academic community, being a hot topic now. Large Language Models (LLMs) are considered a potential menace to academic integrity at all levels, on the one hand because they help students to cheat on assignments, and on the other hand, they facilitate plagiarism in scientific papers (Williams and Fadda, 2023). Primarily because people are always trying to find easier and more efficient ways to accomplish certain tasks, and in the case of academic writing - to write articles and various projects. But how should teachers and publishers react in this case? The point is that there are still no generally valid rules governing the use of ChatGPT by students and researchers. Banning its use is not a solution because the world is evolving, but it is important to be aware that there are certain limits or even threats that could affect the quality of scientific production in the coming years. The aim of this paper is to analyse the existing literature related to the application of ChatGPT in academic writing, to identify which are the research directions in this field, and to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of its use by students and researchers.

2. Materials and Methods

To achieve the purpose of this paper, a scientometric analysis was performed, using the Web of Science (WoS) database. As ChatGPT was launched at the end of last year, it was not necessary to set a specific time period regarding the publication date of the articles, with

all identified articles being published in 2023. Articles containing the terms "ChatGPT" and "academic writing" in the title or abstract were searched. These terms were used to ensure that the resulting articles would refer to the application of ChatGPT in academic writing and not in other domains. The search was carried out on September 20, 2023 and only 56 works were identified, of which only 52 articles were included in the analysis, being excluded from the analysis letters. The raw data was downloaded as *plain text files* from the Web of Science database. The results were analysed using *VOSviewer software* version 1.6.16 through which scientific mapping can be performed to analyse the titles and abstracts of scientific papers. A term co-occurrence map based on text data was created, the chosen counting method was full counting. Subsequently, a term occurrence threshold was applied such that a term must appear in at least 5 different articles to be considered for inclusion in the semantic map. In order to create the semantic map, the software assesses the relationships between terms using the association strength measure and recommends the optimal number of terms to be included in the map. In the case of this research, of 1461 terms identified, 78 are used more than 5 times. For each of 78 terms, a relevance score was calculated and only 60% of them were selected (47 terms). In addition to this analysis, a short review of the literature was carried out, the most relevant articles from each cluster generated by VOSviewer being analysed.

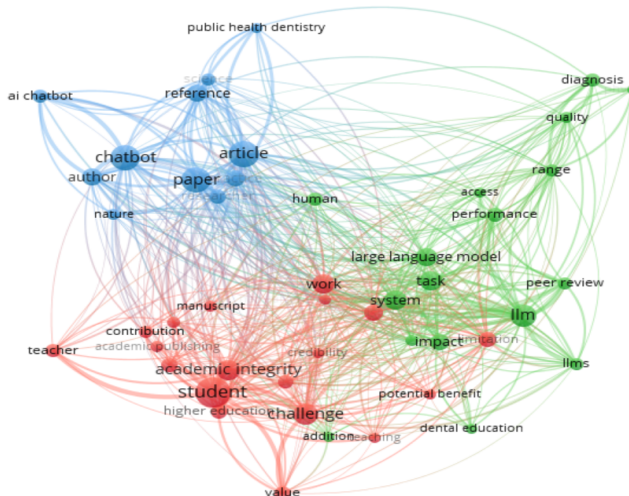
3. Results and Discussions

Three research directions were identified in the studies undertaken related to application of ChatGPT in academic writing, which correspond to the three clusters identified through the scientometric analysis, as can be seen in Figure no. 1. Although there are three distinct clusters, the terms are very interconnected, being many articles that address several aspects related to this topic. The topic's size on the map corresponds to the number of papers associated with that topic. Terms are that frequently appear together in articles are positioned closer to each other.

By analysing the key terms identified, as well as the articles that are associated with each cluster, we can state that the main research directions are:

1. The implications of using ChatGPT in academic writing: benefits and limitations.
2. AI-generated content detection methods and tools used to prevent cheating.
3. Establishing generally accepted ethical standards for using ChatGPT in academic writing.

Figure 1: Static image of the Network Visualization of ChatGPT applications in academic writing



In the following, the relevant articles for each cluster are analysed, identifying the most important aspects specific to each research direction.

4. The implications of using ChatGPT in academic writing: benefits and limitations.

The potential applications of ChatGPT in academia are vast. It is very effective in summarizing information (Xie et al, 2023; Emenike M.E. and Emenike B.U., 2023), feature that can be helpful in the learning process, because AI generates an objective and unbiased summary (Dergaa et al., 2023). However, it may limit the length of certain sections of a paper, without taking into account that certain paragraphs would deserve more detail than others (Lingard, 2023). It is very good at giving structure to complex ideas and can connect them with other ideas. ChatGPT excels as a brainstorming tool for tasks such as generating titles, creating outlines (Lingard, 2023), it can be used to generate a list of potential research questions related to a specific topic (Dergaa et al., 2023), to improve the review process, to enhance metadata, correct grammatical mistakes (Lund et al, 2023) and polish academic papers and presentations to improve readability and language (Cheng et al., 2023). Therefore, Generative AI technologies could improve academic writing and enhance research productivity (Dergaa et al., 2023). But any invention also has negative implications, and ChatGPT as well.

From a qualitative perspective, researchers note that the information provided by ChatGPT is often incorrect (Day, 2023; Williams and Fadda, 2023), even if the results are well written and seem plausible (Howell and Potgieter, 2023). In fact, ChatCPT bases its answers on information from the Internet, which can contain a significant amount of biased, toxic, or erroneous information (Emenike, M.E. and Emenike, B.U., 2023) and, unfortunately, it cannot judge whether the information on which its answers are based is correct or not. Moreover, AIs responses can be influenced by the biases of their developers (Dergaa et al, 2023). Research also shows that ChatGPT fabricates bibliographic resources, generating fictitious citations and references (Day, 2023; Williams and Fadda, 2023; Xie et al, 2023; Ariyaratne et al., 2023). Hence, incorporating AI generated information in research may lead to inaccurate or biased information being inadvertently incorporated into academic papers, which may cause unintentional plagiarism and misattribution of ideas and thus the quality of future scientific production may be affected. Hence, if you are looking for information on a topic that you do not master and you cannot determine whether the information provided is correct, then all the information generated by AI must be double-checked (Lingard, 2023), as in the case of Wikipedia.

As for students using ChatGPT to cheat in exams, that is not a good idea because its performance is low. Williams and Fadda (2023) evaluated ChatGPT's ability to correctly answer various exam-type questions in Carbohydrate Chemistry and Glycobiology. They found that the free version of ChatGPT provided 70% correct answers to the multiple-choice questions, while ChatGPT Plus (the subscription version) only answered 55% of the questions correctly. In terms of true/false questions, both versions of the Chatbot had major difficulties. Instead, it answers well, in a pleasant manner, to descriptive questions about general knowledge. But if several students ask the same question, they may have very similar answers. However, the integration of AI-based technologies into academic learning could help improve the quality of academic outcomes (Hung and Chen, 2023), if it is used “as a learning companion” (Emenike M.E. and Emenike B.U., 2023) to help students better understand concepts, structure information or ideas, counterarguments, etc.

Various limitations derive from the way the prompts for ChatGPT were formulated, as it is essential to define the requirements effectively (Williams and Fadda, 2023). Giray (2023) highlights the common pitfalls of writing prompts, including ambiguity, reinforcement of bias, lack of context and unintended consequences. If the prompt lacks specificity, the resulted output will also be a generalized overview. To have the most accurate results that will be in

line with research objectives, it is necessary to introduce in the prompt distinct parameters and clear guidelines, to eliminate biased language, and to incorporate relevant contextual cues.

5. AI-generated content detection methods and tools used to prevent cheating.

Identifying AI-generated content presents challenges for academic integrity, especially as AI-generated content is increasingly sophisticated. Elkhatat et al (2023) evaluated different paragraphs with AI content detection tools crafted by OpenAI, Writer, Copyleaks, GPTZero, and CrossPlag and found out that these tools showed higher accuracy in recognizing content created by GPT 3.5 compared to GPT 4. Therefore, continuous refinement of AI-generated content detection tools is necessary, especially that in certain cases the instruments presented inconsistencies when human-written paragraphs were analysed. Cingillioglu (2023) states that this has become a challenge and proposes the SVM (support vector machine) algorithm that records 100% accuracy to identify human-generated essays. Even if at this moment the tools for detecting the content generated by AI are good, we must bear in mind that with the development of tools to detect content generated by artificial intelligence, methods to avoid point detection are also being developed, therefore the tools must be continuously reevaluated and improved.

Without access to AI content detection tools, Waltzer et al (2023) claim that high school teachers can tell that certain papers are written with AI assistance in only 70% of cases. To distinguish with the naked eye the work written by an AI from that written by a human, we should look for patterns or anomalies in the language; check the references; verify the accuracy of information; check the grammar and spelling - humans make grammatical errors, unlike robots; analyse if the text is tailored to a specific context or not; verify the originality – if students use similar prompts for a specific task, the content would be very similar (Cotton et al, 2023).

Another way to distinguish between human-written and AI-generated works involves the extraction of linguistic features. Corizzo and Leal-Arenas (2023) use five categories of linguistic features: Text, Repetitiveness, Emotional Semantics, Readability, and Part-of-Speech. Humans use longer sentences and paragraphs than AI, and more punctuation. AI-generated content is characterized by “monotonous writing and lack of narrative and linguistic diversity”. The authors specify that, from a semantic point of view, texts created by people are more subjective, semantic, and emotional. Based on the same principle, Desaire et al (2023) created a model with 20 features based on which it can be determined with 99% accuracy if the author is human or AI. These features are of four types: the complexity of the paragraph; punctuation marks; diversity in sentence length and popular word or numbers. The authors state that human tend to use a more equivocal language, often using words such as: “however”, “but”, “because”, “although”.

Therefore, we can say that there are different methods of identifying if students and researchers misused the chatbot for their papers, but what does „misuse” mean? It is imperative to establish generally accepted ethical standards for using ChatGPT in academic writing, as well as for applying GPT technologies by practitioners in different fields (Cheng et al., 2023). Also, it is necessary to provide training and support for teachers on how to use different methods to detect and prevent cheating (Cotton et al, 2023), as well as on how to guide students in using ChatGPT: how to fact-check the information provided by AI (Day, 2023), how to appropriately incorporate citations and references, and how to optimize the intellectual outputs generated by Chatbot (Hung and Chen, 2023).

6. Establishing generally accepted ethical standards for using ChatGPT in academic writing.

We have been using technology to assist us in the research and article writing process for many years now. Without software such as SPSS, NVivo, Reference Manager or Grammarly,

the process of writing a scientific article would take much longer (Lingard, 2023). Therefore, ChatGPT can also assist us in the research and writing process, but in order to prevent de misuse of ChatGPT in the academic community it is necessary to develop generally accepted policies and procedures. However, this is difficult to achieve considering that AI technology evolves rapidly, and the academic community is always one step behind. Certain policies and rules for the use of generative AI established today may no longer be adequate tomorrow.

Perkins (2023) states that the decision to classify any particular use of LLMs by students as academic misconduct depends on the academic integrity policies of each university, however, in an increasingly globalized world, it is important to have some generally accepted ethical standards. Unfortunately, the research conducted in this direction does not provide clear suggestions on how standards/rules should be established, but only emphasizes the ethical concerns that the use of AI in academia raises. Cheng et al (2023: 594) claim that using Generative AI in academic writing is ethical if “it does not replace key researcher tasks like interpreting data and drawing scientific conclusions.” Altmäe et al (2023) stated that ChatGPT should be seen as a valuable tool that helps authors not get stuck in the writing process and accelerate it, but not actually replace the author's work. On the other hand, Yan (2023) states that it is necessary to reconceptualize plagiarism, because what the students do now by using ChatGPT in their works is not necessarily called plagiarism.

ChatGPT has received authorship recognition in preprints and peer-reviewed published articles. However, it is important to point out that ChatGPT cannot be held responsible for any information provided (Springer Nature Press), and an author has to assume all the responsibility for the correctness of the information and compliance with ethical standards and copywrite legislation. Considering that it is difficult to detect academic dishonesty, some researchers believe that the use of ChatGPT in academic writing should not be prohibited, but its use must be mentioned in Methods or Acknowledgements sections (Lingard, 2023). Some authors go even further, arguing that to ensure transparency, it is necessary for authors to mention the use of any NLP software, including Grammarly and ProWritingAid (Dergaa et al, 2023). In fact, these proposals are about the honesty of the authors, and in this case other researchers can make informed decisions - whether it is worth citing in their paper an article that used ChatGPT or not. Furthermore, Dergaa et al (2023) state that grey literature, should not currently be regarded as valid sources for referencing, as it encompasses materials and research that have not undergone a rigorous peer review process and may have been generated by AI.

At the same time, researchers raise the issue of student evaluation and devaluation of degrees. Students should no longer be evaluated based on descriptive tasks but based on the ability to solve problems/critical thinking, because otherwise people who have access to ChatGPT will have an advantage over those who do not. Teachers could ask students send a preliminary version of their work for assessment prior to the ultimate submission and to present their works in class and evaluate the way they answer the questions. Although now AI systems are free, in the future it is possible to start charging for the services offered, which could raise equity concerns if we do not change the evaluation method (Emenike M.E. and Emenike B.U., 2023; Cotton et al, 2023).

7. Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive exploration of the implications and challenges of using ChatGPT and other Generative AIs in academic writing. In the last year the studies related to this topic have focused on the following research directions: the benefits and limits of using ChatGPT in academic writing; identifying and testing different AI-generated content detection methods and tools to prevent cheating; discussing ethics and academic integrity concerns and establishing generally accepted ethical standards for using ChatGPT in academic writing.

ChatGPT can be of great help to users in summarizing, structuring ideas, improving the revision process. It excels as a brainstorming tool for tasks such as generating titles, creating outlines. However, ChatGPT should be used with utmost caution, bearing in mind all its current limitations: inaccurate content with the risk of generating fictional information, limited knowledge, fake references, the potential for bias, plagiarism, lack of originality. As for the tools and methods for detecting AI-generated content to prevent cheating on assignments and plagiarism, they need to be continuously improved, considering the rapid advancement of technology. If at this moment there are many tools that allow the distinction between AI-generated content and human-generated content, new versions of AI have learned to "fool" the detection tools. Researchers and students must also consider the ethical, copyright and transparency concerns, as well as the threat of contributing to information epidemics. There is a need for a collective effort to establish generally accepted ethical standards, scholars advocating for transparent reporting and ethical guidelines. At the same time, there is a need to reconsider traditional assessment methods to ensure equity, to evaluate more the ability of students to support their point of view and critical thinking, and less the ability to perform descriptive tasks.

Ultimately, ChatGPT represents a powerful tool in academic writing, but its integration into the academic environment must be accompanied by clear ethical standards, accepted by the entire academic community, and should be combined with careful evaluation methods, adapted according to technological advancement.

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BREAKING BARRIERS: EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES OF ROMA PARENTS ON THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN

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Abstract: *Our article reveals a significant positive correlation between heightened parental involvement and improved academic outcomes among Roma children. Active participation of parents in their children's educational journey emerges as a crucial factor in fostering a supportive learning environment. Moreover, culturally sensitive educational interventions, designed to resonate with the unique cultural context of the Roma community, are identified as catalysts for enhanced educational engagement and achievement. The findings underscore the potential of collaborative efforts between educators, parents, and community leaders in shaping educational experiences that align with the cultural identity of Roma children. By tailoring interventions to be culturally sensitive, educational programs become more inclusive and effective in addressing the specific needs of the Roma community.*

Keywords: Roma Education, Parental Involvement, Inclusion/Exclusion, Educational Disadvantage

1. Conceptual analysis: on minority's inclusion/exclusion

The ethnic group is characterized by "pr-structure or 'constitutive foundations' (physical anthropology, demography, language, territory), structure (economy, social classes, culture, and consciousness), and poststructure or the completion, perfection of the structure (political and urban organization)." (Nedelcu, 2003: 29).

The term "minority" can be used in a general sense to characterize populations with a different language, nationality, religion, culture, lifestyle, or any other characteristic accepted as parts of a reference group. In sociological terms, a majority represents a segment of the population that numerically surpasses all other segments. The term "minority" is inevitably associated with political movements related to assimilation, wherein the minority group loses its distinctive traits and is absorbed into the dominant group. Thus, minorities emerge living alongside the majority, and in some scenarios, they find themselves in conflictual relationships. Etymologically, the word "minority" is derived from the French term "minorité," which traces its roots back to the Latin "minoritas, minoritatis." In sociology and voting theory, a minority is a subgroup that constitutes less than half of the population and, as a rule, is numerically surpassed by at least one other subgroup, not necessarily from the majority. This term can be used to characterize populations with a different language, nationality, religion, culture, lifestyle, or any other characteristic accepted as parts of a reference group.

The European Commission has thus received the impetus to strategically combat poverty and social exclusion. Several studies point out that „a paradigm shift took place during the 90's, at European level, namely from “poverty” to “marginalization” - that relies on the antagonist concepts of *exclusion* and *inclusion*. (Niță and Pîrvu, 2020: 105). The concepts of "exclusion" and "inclusion" (Zamfir, Stanescu, Briciu, 2012: 17) were introduced at the level of European social policy within the context of the three EU programs to combat poverty from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s.

The term "discrimination" is perhaps most commonly used (Goga, 2013: 176) and it refers to the "unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on certain categorical traits

such as ethnic, racial, religious, or class membership," including gender identity, and "involves prejudice against an individual or group." (Zamfir and Vlasceanu, 1998: 174-175). A specific form of discrimination is racism, a "process of discrimination, as well as beliefs and ideologies according to which human races can be classified from inferior to superior based on biological characteristics" (Zamfir and Vlasceanu, 1998: 485).

Social inclusion aims to combat the process of exclusion, particularly marginalization. The requirement for social inclusion is considered fulfilled when each individual is accepted by society and has the opportunity to fully engage or participate in its life. Differences and distinctions are consciously recognized within social inclusion, but their importance is limited or even nullified.

Social inclusion serves as a strategic objective of European social policy. Europe envisions an increased social dimension. Although social policy is generally considered a matter for member states, approaches to a common social policy can even be found in the Treaty of Rome (European Union, 1957). The joint development of nations, cultures, economic systems, and social life is regarded as an irreversible evolution aimed at ensuring peace, freedom, prosperity, and social security for all Europeans. Articles 1-19 of the "European Social Charter" encompass fundamental rights to: work; fair, safe, and healthy working conditions; fair remuneration; freedom of association / trade union rights; collective bargaining; the rights of children and adolescents to protection; the rights of women to protection; the right to guidance and vocational training; the right to health protection; social security; social assistance and the right to benefit from social services; the rights of persons with disabilities to vocational training and integration; the right to family protection; the rights of mothers and children to protection; as well as rights to free movement, associated with the right to protection and assistance (Council of Europe, 1996).

2. Theoretical-explanatory perspectives on the low participation of Roma in Education

Any of these theoretical perspectives presented below can have a certain relevance, specificity, or limitations for certain aspects of the Roma issue. In their complementarity, however, they are oriented towards obtaining a detailed and extensive scientific understanding and explanation. Attitudes towards Roma are, to a greater or lesser extent, negative and are based on prejudices and stereotypes, determining similar attitudes from them. Roma seems to be a common reality for everyone; almost anyone can express an opinion, often categorical and negative, regarding them.

The perspective of social reaction (Gay, 2000, Grattet, 2011), described by *labeling theory*, is particularly useful in understanding the issues faced by the Roma. Labeling occurs in the context of awareness and experience of difference in terms of lifestyle and behavioural reactions as a response to social stimuli. This leads to marginalization and exclusion, as well as self-marginalization and self-exclusion, posing significant obstacles in any effort towards achieving social inclusion. The *labeling theory*, associated with Howard Becker, examines how societal labels influence individuals' self-perception and behaviour (Becker, 1963). In the context of Roma education, negative stereotypes and stigmatization may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, where Roma individuals internalize these labels, affecting their educational engagement.

A theory that brings a complementary perspective to the one previously presented was proposed by Boudon and relates to *economic constraints* (Boudon, 2016). In accordance with this, a good education requires financial resources, meaning that the academic success of children depends on the financial resources of their families of origin. In the case of parents with lower financial resources, the investment in the continued education of their children proves to be less cost-effective compared to families with material resources. Rooted in Marxist sociology, the *social reproduction theory* explores how social inequalities are transmitted from one generation to the next. Persistent poverty, discrimination, and limited

access to quality education within the Roma community may contribute to a cycle of educational disadvantage (Bourdieu, 2018).

In accordance with the thesis of cultural reproduction, the education system functions to maintain the hegemony and privileges of dominant social groups: the education system reflects class structure and contributes to legitimizing inequality in access to employment opportunities. In this case, the school would play a role more inclined towards the marginalization and exclusion of vulnerable groups and supporting the success of elite children.

The *theory of social capital* and its role in educational equal opportunities offers another useful perspective in understanding the phenomenon of educational equality (Coleman, 1988). Central to this concept is the relationship between parents and children. When the parent-child relationship is problematic for various reasons, the resources held by parents cannot provide support for the child's development.

The theoretical-explanatory perspectives on the low participation of Roma in education also raise questions about the level of the originating environment. Opportunities for personal development and successful integration into society are much more limited for a child coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or who has already dropped out of studies before completing at least compulsory education. Cultural or language barriers, limited access to support services for learning activities, or the lack of resources for extracurricular activities are examples of factors contributing to reduced access or an increased risk of early school dropout.

Most often, pupils who drop out of education come from families where parents have no more than eight years of education. However, there are exceptions. Quite frequently, there are students in abandonment situations who wish to complete their education to avoid becoming like their parents—simple day laborers with limited chances of success in life. The educational model provided by older siblings is much more influential. In families where there are older siblings who dropped out of education early, younger siblings tend to reproduce this pattern.

Family disorganization leads to material difficulties. Divorce, alcoholism, and family violence are signs that often precede the decision to drop out. Other risk factors that can be mentioned include involvement in borderline legal activities, entering the labour market, and circular migration. At the community level, the most important factors determining early school dropout are early marriage norms, acting as a hindrance to continuing education, especially in rural communities, and a lack of security in the area.

3. Methodology

The general objective of our research was to study the relationship between the internalization of prejudice mechanisms generated by the psychosocial environment and the attitude towards education among ethnic minorities. Within this scientific endeavor, several specific objectives were addressed to delineate each action of the study undertaken by us. We present them in the following paragraphs:

Objective 1: Examine Barriers to Educational Access: Identify and analyze the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder Roma children's access to quality education.

Objective 2: Explore Parental Perspectives: Investigate the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of Roma parents regarding education for their children.

Objective 3: Examine Parental Involvement: Investigate the level of parental involvement in the educational process and its impact on Roma children's academic success.

Research hypothesis: Increased parental involvement and culturally sensitive educational interventions positively correlate with improved academic performance and educational attainment among Roma children, ultimately contributing to enhanced social integration and breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage within the Roma community.

This hypothesis suggests that there is an expected positive relationship between two key variables: parental involvement and culturally sensitive educational interventions. The anticipated outcome is improved academic performance and educational attainment for Roma children.

In order to test this hypothesis, our questionnaire was applied on a sample of 76 parents of Roma children, who were attending lower secondary and secondary school (high-school).

4. Results

The purpose of education varies from individual to individual; it can be represented by money, acquisitions, personal development, personal achievement, and career. Education is thus a means to obtain the necessary things, and beyond all this, it can be a challenge and responsibility. The individuals represented in the questionnaire responded, with a percentage of 29.2%, that for them, the purpose of education is financial.

Table 1: What is, in your opinion, the purpose of education?

	%
Financial goal	29.2
Professional achievement	16.5
Personal development	8.0
Obtaining the necessary means for living	8.0
The opportunity to advance in a career	6.1
Don't know/ N.A.	32.2
Total	100.0

The finding that 29.2% of individuals in the survey indicated financial goals as the purpose of education can be understood through the lens of functionalist sociological perspectives. In this context, individuals who prioritize financial goals as the purpose of education may be influenced by societal values and norms that emphasize economic success and stability. Also, conflict theorists might interpret the emphasis on financial goals as a reflection of social inequality and the unequal distribution of resources. In a society marked by economic disparities, individuals may view education primarily as a tool for upward mobility and economic success. The pursuit of financial goals through education can be seen as a response to the unequal distribution of opportunities. Thus, the emphasis on financial goals could be a result of the symbolic meanings attached to education within a particular cultural context. In some societies, success and status may be closely tied to economic achievements, influencing individuals to prioritize financial goals in their educational pursuits.

The way individuals use their earned money is closely tied to their needs, motives, and interests. These are conditioned by learned and reinforced behaviour, economic development, and the pursuit of immediate or delayed benefits, such as in the case of starting a business. The majority of individuals who participated in this research responded, with a percentage of 27.7%, that they would invest the extra money earned in opening a business. Opening a business and purchasing a home can be seen as fulfilling functional roles within the economic and social structures. Starting a business contributes to economic growth, and homeownership contributes to social stability. The decision to open a business or buy a home may be influenced by the symbolic value attached to these actions within a specific cultural context. For example, starting a business could symbolize autonomy and entrepreneurship, while homeownership might symbolize stability and success.

The percentage of 28.3% belongs to individuals who would use the money to purchase a home. Starting a business and purchasing a home can be seen as ways of converting cultural capital into economic resources, contributing to social mobility.

Table 2: If you were to earn more money, what would you do with it?

Preferences	%
Opening a business	27.7
Trips/travel or entertainment	3.2
Purchasing a car	10.7
Ensuring a decent living for the family	10.7
Buying a home	28.3
Saving	6.1
Investing in children's education	6.1
Setting up the child's room	3.6
Using money to support children/family	1.8
Investing in studying abroad	0.9
Home renovation	0.9
Total	100.0

Education exerts a significant influence on the thoughts and actions of individuals, even when they may not always realize its overwhelming importance, regardless of their financial situation. Several studies have demonstrated that education can stimulate personal development, as well as empathy and compassion. Regarding respondents' opinions on changes in people's behaviour under the influence of education, the response is affirmative in a percentage of 26.8% and negative in 67.1%. From this, we deduce that there are prejudices regarding the role of education in life change.

Table 3. What is the main reason your child is absent from school?

Reason	%
Difference in social status	42.9
Living in isolated areas	10.4
Financial constraints	15.1
Discrimination	11.8
Being marginalized by other children	7.5
Not liking school	11.3
Total	100.0

The high percentage (42,9%) suggests that a significant number of Roma children skip school due to perceived differences in social status. This might be linked to feelings of exclusion or a sense of not belonging to the mainstream social structure. It could indicate that social inequalities and perceived status differences contribute to disengagement from formal education. Also, geographic isolation can pose challenges such as limited access to educational facilities, transportation issues, or a lack of educational infrastructure, which may contribute to irregular school attendance.

A significant proportion of Roma children (11,8%) skip school due to experiences of discrimination. Discrimination within the educational system or the broader society can create a hostile environment that discourages attendance and engagement with formal education.

The percentage of 7,5% reflects instances where Roma children feel marginalized by their peers. Social dynamics within the school environment can play a crucial role in determining whether a child feels included or excluded, influencing their willingness to attend classes regularly.

Table 4. What measures have you taken to improve your child's attendance at school?

Measure	To a large extent	To a small extent	Not at all	NS/ NR	Total
I spoke with the child	8.5	34.0	42.9	14.6	100.0
I spoke with the class teacher	7.5	31.1	48.6	12.8	100.0
I scolded him/her	4.7	29.2	52.8	13.3	100.0
I didn't take any measures	42.9	32.5	17.0	7.6	100.0
I punished him/her	23.6	34.4	27.4	14.6	100.0
I promised rewards	10.4	41.5	34.4	13.7	100.0
I discussed it within the family	12.3	55.2	23.1	9.4	100.0
I monitored his/her social circle	11.8	49.1	28.8	10.3	100.0
I blamed the school, due to prejudices	10.8	51.9	26.9	10.4	100.0

The data reveals a spectrum of parental responses to improve their child's school attendance among Roma families. Notably, 42.9% acknowledged not taking any measures, suggesting a significant proportion faced challenges in addressing this issue. Communication emerged as a prevalent strategy, with 8.5% engaging in substantial discussions with their children, reflecting an awareness of the importance of dialogue. Similarly, 7.5% sought communication with class teachers, emphasizing collaboration with educational institutions.

Disciplinary actions were evident, as 23.6% resorted to punishment, while 4.7% admitted to scolding their child. The promise of rewards as an incentive was embraced by 10.4%, showcasing efforts to motivate through positive reinforcement. Family discussions (12.3%) and monitoring social circles (11.8%) underscored holistic familial involvement.

Interestingly, blaming the school due to perceived prejudices was a strategy for 10.8%, reflecting potential mistrust or frustration with the education system. The variability in responses highlights the complexity of factors influencing school attendance. A significant percentage refraining from action indicates the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms for these families. Overall, these results underscore the multifaceted challenges Roma families face in navigating their children's educational journey, calling for nuanced and comprehensive approaches to foster improved school attendance.

Table 5. Do you know people of Roma ethnicity who have succeeded in life through education?

	%
Yes	14,6
No	85,4
Total	100.0

According to the percentage values, the majority of respondents (75.4%) do not know individuals of Roma ethnicity who have succeeded in life through education. This lack of awareness may be influenced by stereotypes or prejudices existing in society regarding the Roma ethnicity, which can lead to an underestimation of individual successes.

In contrast, 14.6% of respondents know individuals of Roma ethnicity who have achieved success through education. These respondents, with a different perspective, could provide examples of positive role models, contradicting stereotypes and demonstrating that educational success is possible regardless of ethnicity. These individuals have managed to distance themselves from societal norms and have become sources of inspiration for other members of the Roma community.

This contrast highlights the importance of changing perceptions and countering negative stereotypes by promoting successful role models within the Roma community. These

role models can positively influence the motivation and aspirations of other individuals of Roma ethnicity regarding education and personal achievements.

Table 6. Do you consider that the traditions and culture of the Roma can be better preserved if taught in school?

	%
Yes	21.2
No	65.1
Don't know/ N.A.	13.7

A minority (21.2%) of respondents express the belief that the traditions and culture of the Roma can be better preserved if they are taught in schools. This suggests a recognition among a portion of respondents that formal education can play a positive role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. On the other hand, the majority (65.1%) of respondents do not believe that teaching Roma traditions and culture in schools would lead to better preservation. This could reflect skepticism or concerns about the effectiveness of the formal education system in adequately addressing the preservation of Roma cultural practices. These results indicate a diversity of perspectives within the surveyed population. While some see potential benefits in integrating Roma cultural education into formal schooling, a significant majority remains skeptical about the effectiveness of this approach.

Conclusions

In conclusion, our research underscores the pivotal role of heightened parental involvement in shaping positive academic outcomes for Roma children. The correlation between active parental participation and improved educational achievements emphasizes the importance of fostering a collaborative relationship between parents, educators, and community leaders. By actively engaging with their children's educational journey, parents contribute significantly to creating a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, our findings highlight the effectiveness of culturally sensitive educational interventions in enhancing educational engagement and achievement among Roma children. Tailoring educational programs to align with the unique cultural context of the Roma community is crucial for promoting inclusivity and addressing the specific needs of Roma students. This study advocates for the development and implementation of educational strategies that not only recognize but also celebrate the cultural identity of Roma children. Through collaborative efforts, educators, parents, and community leaders can work together to break down barriers and create an educational landscape that empowers Roma children to thrive academically and culturally.

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE VS HUMAN SECURITY: A GENERATIVE AND CHALLENGING RELATIONSHIP FOR THE RESILIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: *In this paper we support the idea that politics as a system can generate important structural shocks and changes. Politics has long been associated, or even identified with violence. We must highlight the idea that political violence is not a new problem, only that it has been widely reflected by scientists since the 20th century and is mainly due to the events that marked the last century – wars, revolutions, massacres and world terrorism, which have constantly attacked human security. The political violence Europe faces today is to a certain degree surprising for the 21st century, at least for the countries that have gone through World War II, as well as suffered from repressive political regimes or many terrorist aggressions. However, this has not prevented armed conflicts and the topic of violent political objectives. Nevertheless, despite the hardships of political violence, research suggests remarkable strength and resilience within individuals and communities.*

Keywords: political violence, human security, wars, societal resilience, generative relationship.

Among the most current topics under discussion in political science, we have chosen two for this paper: political violence and human security. As reflecting on them separately would be too sterile, we propose, *as the goal of this work*, to analyse them within a generative and challenging relationship to the resilience of the European society. Following this goal we also define some objectives. First of all we would like to agree on how we *define political violence*. After that, going through several sources and thoughts of different authors, we want to *justify the consideration that political violence represents a generative phenomenon*. As we have specified in the goals of the paper, our third objective is to elucidate the *relationship between political violence and human security*, and finally to *reflect on the perception of human safety and security* as a result of the aforementioned relationship.

In the contemporary society, politics contributes to the achievement of several objectives that vary according to the political systems and the specific values of a society. These may include establishing social justice, promoting economic well-being, guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms, protecting the environment, resolving conflicts and promoting cooperation, ensuring security and stability, preventing conflicts and violence, and others. Therefore, the concept of human security involves these objectives emphasizing the protection of people as well as of the states or their borders.

In recent years, the concept of human security has gained increasing attention within the international community and has become an important element in the development of security policies and strategies.

On the other hand, the second concept we touch upon – political violence is not a new problem. We just have to mention it has been widely studied by scientists in the XX century, and is mainly due to the events that marked the previous century - wars, revolutions, massacres and global terrorism, which constantly threatened the human security.

The development of the concept human security is, in some ways, an obvious response to the political violence that humanity has gone through in the past. Therefore, we support the idea that politics as a system can generate shocks and important structural changes, which, in

turn, affect the resilience of any society in different ways, and currently particularly of the European one. In the same vein, we consider appropriate the theses highlighted by Sousa et al., citing Summerfield, Bonanno, Norris et al., (Summerfield, 1999; Bonanno, 2004; Norris et al., 2008 cited in Sousa, Haj- Yahia, Feldman, Lee, 2013, pp. 3-4), who argue that despite the hardships political violence creates, research suggests remarkable strength and resilience within both individuals and communities that tend to effectively manage the factors of stress, showing substantial resistance and demonstrating a much more positive functioning than might be expected. Also, as with other stress factors, in the context of political violence, resilience may well be part of a normal, expected course of adaptation to trauma for both individuals and communities.

Transposing the individual and collective qualities to the whole society, as Dumitrașcu mentions citing Manca et al. (Manca et al., 2017 cited in Dumitrașcu, 2020, p. 291) “*a resilient society is able to face and react to shocks or persistent structural changes, either resisting it (through absorptive capacity) or adopting a degree of flexibility leading to changes in the system (through adaptive capacity)*”.

In a methodological context, we would like to mention that the stated theses come from several sources specific to the next domains: political science, sociology, psychology, which gives the proposed subject an interdisciplinary approach. In turn, this allows us to take into account the multitude of social, economic, political and cultural factors that underlie the formation of individual and collective resilience. The basis of discussing the present subject is the analysis of specialized literature that deals with the concepts: political violence, human security and individual and collective resilience, combined with the results of specialized studies and debates carried out on the presented issue. Great attention is paid to the historical method that allows clear elucidation of the events generated by political violence and which marked human society as a whole and the European society in particular. Comparing the conclusions presented by various authors in the field lets us highlight certain particularities of resilience in terms of culture, values, politics, etc.

Politics covers a wide range of issues, including the establishment and implementation of laws and rules, the organization and functioning of governments and political institutions, the interactions between different interest groups and citizens, the formation of political alliances, the promotion and defence of individual rights and freedoms, the management of resources and economic politics, international relations and diplomacy etc. The exact definition of contemporary politics may vary depending on the perspective and context in which it is used. However, in general, contemporary politics addresses current themes and issues such as human rights, social inequality, sustainable development, migration, climate change, globalization, terrorism, human security, technology and other challenges and opportunities specific to the 21st century. At the same time, it has long been associated or even identified with violence.

There are several definitions to identify ‘violence’ in the explanatory dictionary of the Romanian language, but the following fits best in our case: *The act of using brute force; coercion, violence; rape; violation of the legal order*. Correspondingly, political violence predominates the main part of the fact: brute force, coercion, rape that is directed towards obtaining or holding political power, defence or achievement of political goals.

Some thinkers, including humanists such as John Locke and others, recognized the legitimacy of violence directed against the abuse and violation of human rights, the usurpation of power and the enslavement of citizens, as well as in the conditions of a defensive war. In the same context, the German philosopher Düring considered violence as crucial for social

development, and Weber, Mosca and Spenser, in their works regarded violence as a tool for maintaining or changing power.

In this context we can also state the thesis that political violence is inevitable and to a certain extent it is justified by the classic adage of the Italian philosopher Niccolo Machiavelli “the end justifies the means”. Beyond the ethical dilemma, the author argued that political leaders can and must use any necessary means to preserve their power and achieve political goals. However, we must emphasize that there are also approaches that reject any form of political violence and argue that there are peaceful and non-violent alternatives to solve political problems and conflicts. These approaches focus on the values of democracy, human rights, negotiation and dialogue as means to promote change and achieve political goals.

We have to admit that currently there is no single definition of political violence and this is primarily due to its complexity. Effectively all authors who dealt with the subject tended to regard it from their point of view. However, we can highlight some common features such as Kirwin and Cho’s (2009) “*the use of force to achieve a political result*”, Lischer’s (2000) “*violent activity organized for political purposes*”, Los Rios’s (2004) “*violence politics refers to the acquisition of power through violent acts*” taken over by the United Nations Development Program in the study *Political Violence in West Africa: A critical analysis of the role of parliamentarians and political parties* (Kirwin and Cho, 2009; Lischer, 2000; Los Rios, 2004 cited in UNDP, 2010, p. 2) or in the works of such Russian authors as: Kugay (1993) “repression or coercion of the free will of a social subject who aspires to political power”, Lipatov (1989) “the use of coercive means to acquire, preserve, exercise state power, to obtain political domination on the international arena”, Pidzhakov (2008) “physical coercion used as a means of imposing the will of the subject in order to seize power, primarily state power, its use, distribution and protection” (Lipatov, 1989; Kugay, 1993; Pidzhakov, 2008 cited in Kovrizhnyh, 2010, p. 74). Basically, most of the time international subjects (especially states) behave like any other political actor - obviously to the extent s/he can aspire, and international political dominance has more often tended to be achieved by starting wars. In fact, the entire history of mankind is a history of wars. Some historians believe that humans have started more than 15,000 wars, some of them being of duration, others of proportions, the third from an interest of domination, but there were also those which started as a misunderstanding, etc. The fact is that they all created a state of shock and stress for the society. In this context, a recent history of wars has shown us that since the creation of civilization, mankind has lived in peace for only a few hundred years, compared to the millennial existence of human society.

In most cases acts of violence led to violent responses. In this sense, we believe that **political violence can also be considered a generative phenomenon**, because it can generate or amplify political, social and economic tensions, leading to new forms of violence and conflict. For example, a terrorist attack may lead to an increase in xenophobic or racist reactions from certain groups of people, who may respond with violence against minority groups.

In the same vein, Solvit’s theory suggests that war is a generative and self-modifying social phenomenon. According to this theory, war is not only the result of initial political stakes, but is itself a dynamic process that generates changes and new political stakes. For instance, during a war, new political alliances, interests and aspirations may emerge and these may influence the course of the conflict and lead to significant changes in terms of objectives and outcomes. (Solvit, 2011, p. VII)

In these conditions both a war in particular, and political violence in general can be considered **generative and resilient phenomena**, but resilience capacities can help reduce the negative impact of political violence and create a more stable, secure and better prepared society to face such events. Likewise, political violence can also be a resilient phenomenon, as people and communities can learn to cope with it, find ways to adapt and recover. Research suggests that despite the hardships that political violence creates, there is a remarkable force

and resilience within both individuals and communities. By developing resilience capacities such as social support, conflict management skills, and material resources, people can cope with trauma and find ways to build societies that are more stable and resistant to political violence.

There are also examples of societies that have managed to overcome their history of political violence and find lasting solutions to their conflicts. For example, Germany managed to get over the “stigma” of fascism, condemn the historical past, assume the consequences caused in the Second World War and become one of the states most dedicated to peace. Another example is the South African Republic that has managed to move away from apartheid to a pluralistic democracy and address historical issues of racial inequality. People can talk about past abuse and find ways to move on to create conditions for the development of prosperous, democratic and secure relations from internal and external dangers. On the other hand, to promote human security, it is essential to try to solve the root causes of political violence and to promote peace, respect for human rights, dialogue and reconciliation or realisation the preventive measures such as the promotion of democracy, justice and social inclusion.

Generative and resilient phenomena have the ability to create and innovate while maintaining their integrity and ability to recover when facing change or disruption. These phenomena are important to ensure progress and development in different fields, such as technology, culture or economy, but also to help us adapt to changes in the environment and defy the stressors and challenges we face daily.

Culture is an example of a resilient generative phenomenon. Culture can be considered generative because it has the ability to generate new ideas and adapt to social and historical changes. Culture can also be considered resilient because it can survive and recover from traumatic events or dramatic changes in society, such as wars or major political changes.

The relationship between political violence and human security is complex and can be analyzed from several perspectives. As previously mentioned, political violence adversely affects human security, bringing threats to the life, liberty and well-being of individuals and communities. In this context, following those exhibited by Cavaropol (2016), we can highlight some aspects that characterize the relationship between political violence and human security:

1. Physical threat - acts of terrorism, armed conflicts, repression and political persecution are forms of political violence that endanger individuals' lives, result in the loss of lives or injure people and create a sense of general insecurity.
2. Limitation of freedom - through the use of force, authorities or violent political groups can impose control and oppression, limiting the freedom of expression, the freedom of association and the freedom to choose one's political beliefs.
3. Impact on welfare - political instability and conflict can disrupt the economy, destroying the infrastructure, affecting the business environment and creating financial insecurity for citizens. Political violence can also generate forced migration and refugees, increasing the burden on public resources and services.
4. Impairment of social cohesion - when people experience violence and conflict based on political, ethnic or religious differences, trust and social cohesion can erode. This can create a climate of tension and social instability.
5. Impact on sustainable development - political violence can hinder social, economic and ecological progress. This can discourage foreign investment, affect access to natural resources and prevent the implementation of sustainable development programmes.

Under these conditions, the relationship between political violence and human security can be characterized as close and interdependent. Political violence has a major impact on human security by affecting civil rights and liberties, destabilizing society and endangering people's lives and property.

On the other hand, human security is necessary to prevent and counter political violence. In order to ensure human security, a holistic approach that takes into account the social, economic, political and cultural factors that can influence political violence is needed. This may include actions to prevent conflict, protect civil rights and liberties, promote economic and social development, improve governance and the justice system.

We believe this relationship can be generative because it has got the ability to generate new ideas, concepts or behaviours and to adapt and return to a state of equilibrium or normal functioning after being subjected to a disturbance or significant change.

Under these conditions, we consider it important to continuously evaluate **the perception of safety and security** both at the individual and the collective level. Numerous schools and institutions aim to identify this level by suggesting and evaluating different criteria that can create a more objective picture of a society's perception of the level of safety it is in. Thus, at the NATO summit in Rome in 1991, the importance of the multiple approach to security and the need to analyze the different dimensions of the security of human collectivities were emphasized. The following “sectors” have been put forward for the analysis of the security perception of the human collective: military, ecological, economic, social (*societal*) and political. Later, the authors of this methodology, representatives of the Copenhagen School, Buzan, Wæver and Wilde (1998), in the work *Security: a New Framework for Analysis*, develop the ideas regarding these sectors and claim that each of them has a distinct importance and is interdependent with the other. Such as:

- *the military sector* refers to the ability of a state to protect and defend its interests through military means. This involves both the defensive and offensive capabilities of states and the ability to recognize and anticipate the actions of adversaries.

- *the environmental sector* refers to the protection of the biosphere and the natural world. This involves the sustainable management of natural resources, the conservation of biodiversity, the fight against climate change and the prevention of environmental pollution and degradation.

- *the economic sector* refers to the ensuring of the state economic well-being and the efficient management of resources and capital. This includes energy security, access to international markets and the protection of the economic infrastructure.

- *the social (societal) sector* focuses on ensuring the collective rights and values of human communities. This includes the protection of human rights, cultural diversity, national identity, language and religion, as well as community support in specific situations where these rights are violated or threatened.

- *the political sector* focuses on maintaining the stability and functionality of the governance systems of states. This involves ensuring robust political institutions, respecting civil rights and liberties, and preventing internal and external political conflicts.

In our view, these five dimensions of security constitute the fundamental level of human security. For example, political instability or armed conflicts can negatively affect social and economic security, while environmental degradation can lead to social and economic conflicts and tension. Therefore, a holistic approach to human security involves managing and promoting all these dimensions in an integrated way.

On the other hand, as it has been mentioned before, such analyzes are currently carried out by different institutions. The following can be considered as the most recent: the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2022. Measuring peace in a complex world (*Global Peace Index 2022. Measuring peace in a complex world*) and the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2023. Measuring the impact of terrorism (*Global Terrorism Index 2023. Measuring the Impact of Terrorism*), carried out by The Institute for Economics and Peace from Sydney.

These reports provide scores for each country and region separately on the following components:

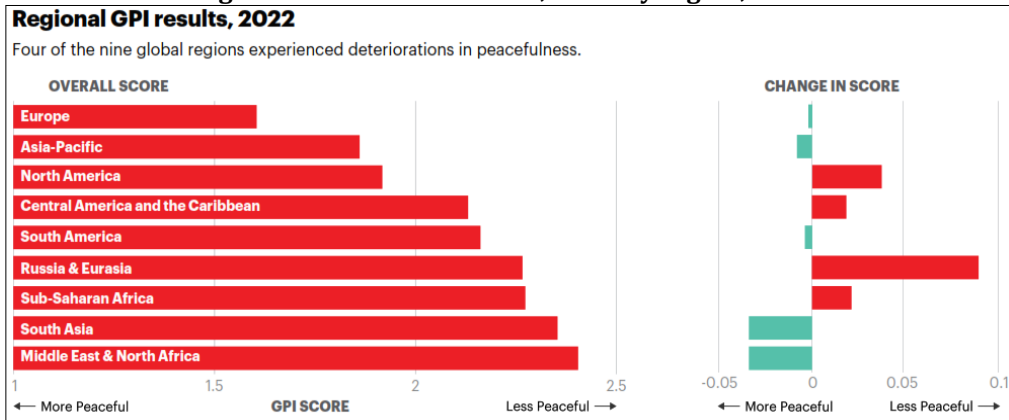
- GPI - militarization, safety and social security and ongoing conflict (GPI, 2022, p. 83);

and

- GTI - the total number of terrorist incidents in a given year, the total number of deaths caused by terrorists in a given year, the total number of injured by terrorists in a given year; the total number of hostages, caused by terrorists in a given year (GTI, 2023, p. 86).

According to the GPI 2022 index (GPI, 2022, p. 2) the average level of peace worldwide worsened by 0.3%. The greatest deteriorations were registered on the following scales: political terror, relations with neighbouring countries, intensity of internal conflict, number of refugees, internally displaced people, and political instability. The most peaceful countries in the world are located in Europe: Iceland, Ireland, Denmark and Austria; and Europe remains the most peaceful region in the world. It should be noted that Russia and Eurasia, in this report, are seen as separate regions. Along with neighbouring states in Europe, Russia and Ukraine are two of the 5 countries in the world with the greatest damage to peace. As the authors of the report claim, the conflict in Ukraine has had an immediate impact outside Russia and the Eurasia region, especially on the indicator of relations with neighbouring countries, which worsened sharply. Of the ten countries in the Europe region with the greatest deteriorations of peace in 2022, six share a common border with Russia or Ukraine: Slovenia, Finland, Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia (GPI, 2022, p. 17).

Figure 1. Global Peace Index, score by region, 2022.



Source: GPI, 2022, p. 15

In the Russia and Eurasia region, the Republic of Moldova is the most peaceful country (position 62 globally), although it has suffered percentage decline compared to previous years, but incomparable with the index registered by Russia, which is at the other end of the list (position 160 out of 163 globally), the least peaceful countries are Syria, Yemen and Afghanistan (GPI, 2022, p. 19-20).

Table 1. Russia and the Eurasia Region, regional score 2022

Regional position	Country	General score	Score dynamics	Global position
1	Moldova	1.882	0.034	62
2	Armenia	1.992	-0.024	83
3	Uzbekistan	2.001	-0.031	86
4	Kyrgyz Republic	2.028	0.109	91
5	Tajikistan	2.031	-0.027	92
6	Georgia	2.065	0.049	95
7	Kazakhstan	2.071	0.153	97
8	Turkmenistan	2.116	-0.028	104
9	Belarus	2.259	0.034	116
10	Azerbaijan	2.437	0.151	128
11	Ukraine	2.971	0.413	153

12	Russia	3.275	0.237	160
Regional average		2.261	0.089	

Source: GPI, 2022, p. 19-20

According to the GTI 2023 report, on average, for three percent of those surveyed, “war and terrorism were the greatest source of risk to the safety of their daily lives in 2021, and 6.1 percent of respondents in Russia, Eurasia and Europe indicated war and terrorism as their main concern.” (GTI, 2023, p. 40)

Of the nine analyzed regions, Europe is the third best performer in terms of terrorism, after Russia and Eurasia, Central America and the Caribbean. Four countries have also experienced damage in the past year: Sweden, Belgium, Norway and Slovakia, while sixteen European countries have not experienced any terrorist attacks since 2017. Turkey remains the most affected country in Europe in terms of terrorism, although it has seen a significant improvement in its score due to a reduction in deaths and attacks over the past four years. Greece ranks second in Europe with 35 attacks in 2022, down 34% from the previous year. France positions third, seeing an increase in terrorist attacks and deaths in recent years. Slovakia recorded its first terrorist attack in ten years in 2022, leading to a significant increase in the GTI score. Norway also saw a significant decline in 2022, recording its first terrorist attack in 2019. Finland has got the biggest improvement in its score in 2022, followed by the UK and the Netherlands. As for Finland, it has not had a single terrorist attack since 2017, and the UK has recorded its first year without a single terrorist death since 2014. (GTI, 2023, pp. 45-46)

The political violence that Europe faces today, and here we do not only refer to the terrorist acts committed in the European states or the war in Ukraine, are somehow unexpected for the 21st century, at least for the societies that went through the Second World War, as well as suffered from repressive political regimes or many terrorist attacks. However, this does not prevent armed conflicts and the designation of political objectives achieved through violence.

On the other hand, we suggest that the whole European society can be characterized by a high level of preparedness in dealing with and adapting to crisis situations, especially threats to security and other unforeseen events that can affect the well-being and stability of the society. European societal resilience, therefore, consists in developing the necessary capacities and resources to manage and prevent crises, including learning from past experiences and increasing the capacity for collaboration and coordination between different entities and sectors of the society. This approach is based on such principles as social inclusion, equal opportunities, protection of fundamental rights and freedoms and respect for common European values.

Overall, we believe that this purely descriptive approach was carried out in accordance with the announced purpose and objectives, and at the same time urges us to carry out much more extensive empirical research. In this context, we want to highlight some thoughts we have identified as conclusions, and that can serve as a basis for future scientific investigations.

There are differences of opinion regarding the legitimacy and justification of political violence in different contexts and circumstances. Some thinkers recognize that political violence can be justified as a necessary means to combat abuses of power, human rights violations, or to protect fundamental political interests and values. This is a realistic, pragmatic perspective that takes into account the aspects of power and conflict that are inherent in the political sphere.

Political violence can threaten human security in a number of ways, such as direct attacks on individuals, the uncertainty and instability it generates, as well as the destruction of

the infrastructure and resources necessary for people's well-being. At the same time, political development and security can play an important role in building and strengthening the resilience of the European society facing these threats.

The relationship between political violence and human security can be generative in the sense that it can generate new ideas, concepts or behaviours. For example, facing threats to human security, innovations and initiatives that promote alternative solutions to conflict resolution and reduce political violence can emerge.

This relationship can also be resilient in the sense that people and communities can develop resilience capacities to cope with political violence and to recover. By developing social support, conflict management skills, and material resources, people can find ways to adapt and build societies that are more stable and resilient to political violence.

It is important to understand that human security is not only about the absence of threats or violence, but also about creating an environment in which people can live in safety and prosperity. Therefore, identifying and assessing the collective perception of the level of security in each sector is a crucial aspect in understanding the population's needs and concerns, and in developing effective security policies.

As the state of security may vary over time and context, it is important to be aware of recent developments and promote in-depth studies to identify higher, better and more sustainable levels of resilience both individually and collectively.

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AGING WELL IN A ONE-FAMILY HOME, BALANCING AUTONOMY AND ADJUSTMENT

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Abstract: *After providing an overview of the housing conditions of people aged 65 and over in mainland France using population census data, this article adopts a qualitative approach to examine the representations and practices of people who choose to grow old in their own homes. Against the backdrop of an inevitably aging population, a significant proportion of the elderly, often with deep territorial roots, are intent on remaining at home. This article sheds light on the main determinants that enable people to do so: mobility, accessibility, sociability and solidarity.*

Keywords: aging, housing, adaptation/adjustments

This article examines the living conditions, housing perceptions, housing adaptations and lifestyles of older people who choose to age in single-family homes, usually in suburban or rural environments. At first glance, this type of environment may seem ill-suited to aging residents, particularly as detached houses, rarely built and designed for an elderly public (Caradec, 2010), can in themselves constitute “an environmental obstacle to living at home” (Balard and Somme, 2011: 106). However, it appears that many older people live in such homes, whether before or after retirement: according to the INSEE, 66.7% of the homes occupied by people aged 65 and over in 2017 were houses.¹ When autonomy is preserved (as we shall discuss later), single-family homes are very much in demand among this aging population.

Given this apparent contradiction, our aim will be to demonstrate that staying at home in an individual dwelling is the result of a number of socio-economic and health-related trade-offs that take into account the entire residential career of the people concerned.² Having spent one’s (working) life in an apartment, a bungalow or a detached house and having raised a family there and/or spent the main stages of one’s lifecycle there, are elements which necessarily have repercussions on the residential wishes and choices of the elderly. But that is not all: these choices are also conditioned by a number of strong and recurring criteria, including easy mobility, proximity to shops, services and other conveniences, the possibility of modifying one’s home and of maintaining a form of sociability that is essential to living in comfort at home. We shall also see that the feeling of being comfortable in one’s home varies according to the representations and symbols associated with it, whether the house to which one remains attached is the place of family memories or whether the neighborhood generates a sense of familiarity (Gateau and Marchal, 2020). The single-family home - a valued social marker - is also often seen as an intimate, protective cocoon, a place of “reassurance for one’s

¹ Source: INSEE, *Enquête nationale sur le logement* (National Housing Survey), 2017. For information, it is estimated that in 2016, 59% of French people owned their own home, while in 2018, there were 19.3 million single-family homes out of a total of 34.5 million dwellings (Marchal and Stébé, 2018). Very often, and without being the only model, the single-family home is embodied by the traditional detached house surrounded by a yard. This urban form, although the subject of much criticism, continues to embody a kind of residential ideal for almost 87% of the French population (Gateau and Marchal, 2020; Marchal and Stébé, 2023).

² The residential career corresponds to the articulation of the various residential sequences and positions occupied by residents over time, and enables us to look at the diachronic evolution of residential choices (Authier et al., 2010).

old age” (Berger et al., 2010: 47), where the elderly feel secure and, above all, project themselves, or even deploy strategies to be able to stay there.

From a socio-demographic perspective, and following a presentation of the qualitative and quantitative survey data employed, the first step will be to draw up an overall picture of the aging population in France, and then in Burgundy, the region where the surveys on which this work is based were carried out. This region is particularly and strongly affected by the aging of the population. We will also analyze national data on the elderly and housing, more specifically in single-family homes, taken from the 2013 National Housing Survey (*Enquête Nationale Logement*, ENL). A second phase will examine the practices and representations of elderly people aging in single-family homes, which will be captured in a more qualitative way through their discourses on the pragmatic modalities of their lifestyle. The aim will be to grasp what seems to make life in a home a success for aging people, but also the adjustments, strategies or renunciations that this implies. In this respect, mobility and the mutual aid practices it may entail, the adaptability and plasticity of the dwelling, and the redefinition of the universe of possibilities (gardening, stairs, maintenance of relational networks and relationships with neighbors, etc.) will be particularly closely examined.

Introduction to our sources

Before introducing the subject, it is necessary to present the qualitative and quantitative sources that were used in writing this article.

Population censuses and housing surveys (INSEE)

The exhaustive population census introduced in 1801 was replaced in January 2004 by annual census surveys. Communes with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants continue to be counted exhaustively every 5 years. Communes with a population of 10,000 or more are now subject to an annual survey of a sample of 8% of the population, scattered over their territory. Census results are produced from the five most recent annual surveys, dated at the mid-point of the period. For example, the 2018 census is based on data collected between 2016 and 2020. The population census provides results that are representative of the French population at all geographical and administrative levels (national, regional, departmental, municipal and even IRIS neighborhood levels). The information provided enables us to analyze changes in population structure, as well as to describe the main characteristics of housing. Housing surveys, which have been carried out since 1955, supplement the information obtained from censuses, which do not include financial data: data on rents, utilities, financing plans and incomes. These surveys also provide a more detailed description of the quality of the housing of French households.

Qualitative data

This article follows on from the authors’ previous work and reflections, and consequently draws on a disparate set of surveys carried out - and in progress - over nearly ten years. The main interviews were conducted with people aged 65 and over, spread across the four departments of the former Burgundy region. What all our interviewees have in common is that they live in single-family homes, most of them in detached houses. Here, we took care to mix the interviews, paying attention both to the diversity of situations (standard of living, age, state of health, geographical location) and, of course, to the recurrence of the elements of discourse that were analyzed. Since 2012, these interviews have taken place in the homes of the respondents, generally lasting between one and a half and two hours. Below each extract are the main identifying details of the interviewee (name, age, marital status, place of residence, etc.). For ethical reasons, the names of the participants and their places of residence have been anonymized.

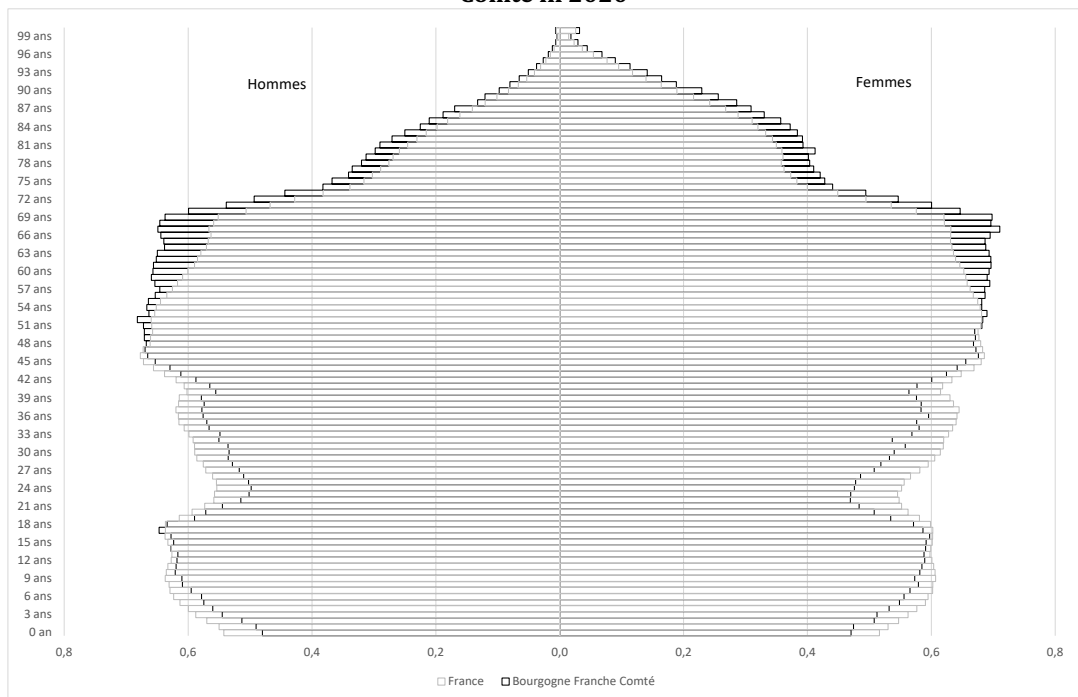
1. Overview of the aging process: what are the housing conditions of the elderly?

1.1. An inevitable aging of the population

Thanks to a relatively stable fertility rate, rising life expectancy and, more recently, the entry into old age of the “baby-boom” generations, France’s population has been aging for many years. Today,¹ with over 13 million individuals, people aged 65 and over represent more than a fifth of the population (20.7%). Clearly visible in the evolution of age pyramids over the last twenty years, this aging process is unavoidable in the years to come, insofar as it is inscribed in the current age pyramid (Robert-Bobée, 2007) and, according to INSEE projections, is set to continue over the coming decades. Blanpain and Buisson (2016) show that, using the central projection scenario,² of the 76 million people in France in 2070, more than 34% will be aged 65 and over.

In Burgundy, if recent demographic trends continue, the region’s population will stabilize in the coming decades at around 2.8 million. However, the structure of the population is set to change as it continues to age, with almost 31% of the region's inhabitants aged 65 and over (Bertrand, 2018). Although this increase in the number of elderly people is part of a national trend towards an older population, it is nevertheless more marked in this region than overall in mainland France (27.3% aged 65 and over, see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Comparison of age pyramids for metropolitan France and Burgundy-Franche-Comté in 2020



Source: based on INSEE, *Recensements de la population*, 2000 and 2020.

¹ Based on Ined data estimated as of January 1, 2020.

² The main indicators associated with the central population projection assumption are: 1.95 children per woman, average maternity age of 32 from 2040, life expectancy for women reaching 93 and for men 90.1 by 2070, net migration of over 70,000 per year.

1.2. Seniors' specific housing conditions

Since the end of the 1960s, the number of homes in mainland France has risen sharply, from 18.7 million in 1968 to over 35 million in 2018. At the same time, the characteristics of these homes have undergone profound changes: “the installation of telephones, running water and toilets inside homes are just some examples, as are the increase in the number of rooms and changes in heating methods. These evolutions were made possible by the growth in the stock of dwellings (construction on new land), its renewal (replacement of old buildings by new ones) and its rehabilitation (restoration of old housing).” (Dejoux *et al.*, 2019)

In 2017, according to the ENL survey, of the 35 million homes in France, around 8 million were occupied by a reference person aged 65 or over (including 2.7 million aged 80 or over). Of these 8 million dwellings, 2/3 (66.7%) were single-family homes.¹

As residential mobility is low after the age of 50 (Lafferère and Angelini, 2009), it is not surprising to note that the elderly, on average, live in older homes than the rest of the population. In fact, half (50.2%) of the homes of the elderly were built before 1970 (compared with only 38.9% of those of younger people aged 65 and under). In addition, only 13% of homes owned by the elderly were completed after 1991, compared with nearly 36% of those owned by younger people.

We can conclude from the above findings that the elderly seem to be quite firmly anchored in their living quarters. In fact, in almost 57% of the homes occupied by people aged 65 and over, the residents have lived there at least 30 years. In contrast, among younger people, almost half (49%) moved into their homes less than 10 years ago (compared to only 13.8% among those aged 65 and over).

All in all, this anchoring, to which we shall return, is strong and shared. This is also reflected in the fact that 53.3% of elderly reference persons live in the department (*département*) where they were born (49.8% for the under 65 age group). In other words, rootedness in one's home, commune or department is a first indicator of long-term sedentarization and attachment to one's living environment.

An even stronger trend in Burgundy-Franche-Comté

Of the 1.6 million homes in this region, almost 400,000 are occupied by a reference person aged 65 or over, of which 73.3% are houses. The proportion of older homes among the elderly is even more pronounced in this region, with almost 57% built before 1970. In addition, almost 60% of elderly households have been living in their homes for over 30 years (source: INSEE).

Almost all elderly people live alone (41.7%) or with a partner (53.1%). Thus, while the average number of people per household for the under 65 age group is 2.8, this drops to 1.6 for those aged 65 or over. With little residential mobility, over 80% of retirees live in the same dwelling as before retirement (Blanchet, 2020). It is therefore not surprising that they live in dwellings similar in size to those of younger people (4.7 rooms on average, compared with 4.9 for those under 65). These figures illustrate that, for a significant proportion of the older population, aging does not imply a change of residence but, on the contrary, the continuation of life (as a couple or alone) in a large dwelling. As we shall see, the home is often the object of various adjustments and other reconfigurations, depending on its plasticity.

With the departure of children from the home and with widowhood, older households are more exposed to the risk of under-occupation than younger ones. According to the 2013 housing survey, 63% of elderly households experience pronounced or very pronounced under-occupancy,² whereas this is the case for only around 37% of households where the

¹ All the quantitative data analyzed in the following article concern single-family homes in which the reference person in the household is aged 65 or over.

² In the housing survey, under-occupation is defined as very pronounced when the number of rooms in the dwelling is greater than the number of rooms required for the household +2 (if it is equal to this number, it is considered

reference person is aged under 65. At the same time, 20% declare that the size of their dwelling exceeds their needs, twice as many as younger households. In addition, “large homes” may be difficult to maintain or may generate significant costs (Dejoux and Gaimard, 2021).

We have shown that the majority of elderly people live in “large” detached houses. In the current context of an aging population, it is now worth exploring the recurring motives that lead older people to prefer this type of housing and the lifestyle that accompanies it.

2. What does it mean to be elderly and to age in a single-family house? Representations and practices of the elderly

First, we will see that the very possibility of living in a single-family house as one ages is linked to a set of indicators that make living in this type of dwelling realistic, primarily in view of the autonomy it implies. Secondly, we will examine the adjustments, trade-offs and other tensions that have arisen for elderly people who continue to live in single-family homes despite advancing age. In the end, we shall explain that, given the trajectories of each individual, remaining at home in a detached house seems to be a real opportunity to age well, or at least more comfortably. However, this choice requires regular readjustments to maintain a secure lifestyle over time.

2.1. The preference for single-family homes: mobility, accessibility, territorial roots, interactivity and sociability

Many of the elderly people we met living in single-family homes come from middle-class backgrounds¹ and have benefited from various schemes to encourage home ownership: almost all of them own their homes, which they have finished paying for. For these aging, sedentary residents (Gateau, 2017), staying at home is above all conditioned by the possibility of mobility or, if not, by that of finding and implementing strategies to meet daily needs. For the mobile people we met, there are three main scenarios: either it is still possible to drive a car or daily trips can be made on foot or by public transport (one hypothesis not excluding the other). In the second case, the possibility of getting around is intrinsically linked to the presence or absence of such infrastructure.

The elderly subjects in our survey live in single-family homes in small and medium-sized towns in Burgundy, a region marked by its rural character and the dispersion of its housing, as described, for example, by E. Charmes in relation to the urban area of Dijon, which is particularly fragmented (Charmes, 2019). In these rural and peri-urban areas, automobility is a shared norm - including for the elderly (Gateau, 2020). In fact, overall, only 3.4% of households in which the reference person is under 65 do not own a car, rising to 15.9% among those aged 65 or over and to 33.6% among those aged 80 or over. Even so, this means that the majority of aging people continue to drive, especially in rural and suburban areas.

In addition to the issue of accessibility to facilities, this observation is partly the result of the fact that “the construction of vast residential housing developments did not anticipate aging in their organization (...). Single-family home developments were built around a specific image of a lifestyle combining home ownership, nuclear families, car ownership and domestic autonomy” (Gateau and Marchal, 2020: 17). Thus, to grow old in these peri-urban but also rural areas, where the problems are similar, the use of the car is absolutely essential. Numerous testimonials indicate that owning and driving a car, over and above the very

pronounced). The number of rooms required for a household is calculated on a normative basis (e.g.: one living room for the household, one room for the reference person, one room for single people aged 19 and over, one room for two children if they are of the same sex or under 7, otherwise one room per child).

¹ Although frequently used in the political sphere as well as in scientific fields, where it is the subject of much controversy, the notion of middle class has not been precisely defined in France. However, as it covers a large proportion of the population in the center of the social scale, the middle class is often used as a relevant indicator for estimating a country’s economic and social developments.

practical aspects (going shopping, to the doctor, not being dependent on others and continuing to enjoy a certain freedom), is also the vector of a feeling of security and a form of tranquility, particularly in the event of health problems and at least until “there comes a time when loss of autonomy forces a person to give up their car” (Mondou and Violier, 2010: 84).

For others, depending on the distance to the nearest town center and the infrastructure in place, public transport constitutes an alternative (Benlahrech, 2001), although our respondents explain that they use public transport either when they have no other alternative or only occasionally because of the constraints it entails (frequency of service, areas served, time spent away from home due to fixed timetables). Others, particularly the less physically fit, also mention the difficulty or even the fear of taking this form of transport, particularly when getting on and off buses, despite the increasing number of low-floor buses. Other factors, such as the distance between the stop and the home or place of work, the need to stand for long periods of time, or difficulties in orientation in terms of space and time, are also frequently cited by those who make little or no use of public transport.

For these people, whether they have given up using public transport or whether their community has little or no transport provision, alternative strategies must be implemented both for day-to-day needs and for more complex errands (medical or administrative appointments, for example). In these cases, mutual assistance from neighbors, relatives and acquaintances is a prime resource. The occasional use of a cab company, supplemented by the use of home delivery services, is another. Huguette, born in 1933, is a widow living in an outlying house in a small village of a few hundred inhabitants in the Nièvre region. Disabled,¹ she depends on the regular presence of domestic help and the alternating weekly visits of her two children:

Fortunately, the children take turns with the shopping once a week, and sometimes they drop in to surprise me with a loaf of bread or a newspaper. But they work and have families of their own, so I can't ask much more of them! Then there are the home helpers from the ADMR (aide à domicile en milieu rural; domestic help in rural areas), who are very helpful and run little errands for me if I need them, or take me to the doctor. When I'm not feeling well, the nurses drop in too... and they're nice company! But of course, they're the only ones, because I don't have any neighbors and... I don't leave the house anymore.

Huguette's situation shows that, in the face of reduced autonomy, outside help is needed not only for daily activities, but also to maintain a minimum of sociability, which is known to be important for a sense of well-being in one's home (Gateau and Marchal, 2020). This extract from the interview also highlights the role of family solidarity in the choice and possibility of remaining at home.

In all cases, the interviews show that, without being absolutely essential, staying at home is a little more manageable when the respondents' communities are located in an urban environment. This is exemplified in Michel's testimony. Born in 1942, with one child, he has lived with his wife for some forty years in a small one-story bungalow in a small town in the south of the Yonne department:

The advantage here is that my municipality has everything I need right on the spot! I can do everything on foot, even now that I have difficulty walking. The small supermarket is just ten minutes away, and so is the doctor... and the buses run quite regularly, so you just

¹ Huguette was a stay-at-home mother, her husband a construction worker. As a result of various health problems, she finds it extremely difficult to move around. However, she does not want to leave her home - and cannot afford a nursing home (EPHAD) - explaining that she does not know “where to go” or “what she would do there” because she feels so “comfortable” at home. Moreover, as for other respondents, EPHADs are synonymous with disruption and loss of freedom, and the mere mention of them often leads to talk of the risk of accelerated, overall decline.

have to get organized. Sometimes we order things delivered by La Poste too, we're modern... in any case we don't lack for anything, even if it was easier of course when I was still driving.

A home owner who still considers his house suitable despite the physical effects of his aging (various aches and pains, difficulty with mobility, etc.), Michel no longer drives and has therefore been obliged, over the last few years, to diversify his mobility practices. He now combines walking with the use of public transport or home delivery services, enabling him to continue moving around the local area without any apparent lack. It is also why he wants to stay, especially as he is as attached to his home as he is to his community, having lived there for over four decades. We know that this attachment, in addition to the length of occupancy associated with homeownership (Berger et al., 2010), also involves a number of social, economic, emotional, temporal, symbolic, material and spatio-temporal dimensions (Desprès and Lord, 2009).

This testimonial also brings to light another essential dimension of successfully maintaining elderly people in their own homes: territorial anchoring (Rémy, 1996) and all the relational and emotional dimensions it entails. Among the elderly who seem to age best in single-family houses, this anchoring is a strong motivation to stay in their own homes. As Émilie explains so well:¹

I've always lived in this town, because I was born here and I've stayed here ever since. I built a little further on, on Rue de la Gare, and then circumstances forced me to sell. I bought this place a few years later. But I've never left my village. I really like this house, I love my village, I'm very involved in it (...), it's a nice place to live, it's comfortable. People are nice, and I know so many people!

As well as praising her place of residence as a “miniature city where everything is at your fingertips,” Émilie insists on the fact that she has known “everyone” for as long as she can remember. Although during her working life she had little time to meet new acquaintances or socialize with others, she says she has always maintained polite relations with other residents, above and beyond her professional activity. Deeply attached to her village, Émilie is also attached to her house, which is a place of family memory (Gateau and Marchal, 2020) and of family gatherings. Her home is also associated with a network of local contacts that is the result of a lifetime spent in the area, which has provided her with a great deal of social capital. Since retiring, her roots have been strengthened by the development of a dense, local social network through her involvement in multiple social spaces in the village: she is involved in several associations and is in her second term as a municipal councilor. Émilie is one of those “captives” who are captive by choice, contrary to what this notion usually implies (Rougé, 2009).

Sociability is therefore one of the elements that help older people enjoy living in their own homes. Although not always as well-developed as in Émilie's case, all our respondents - with the exception of those who live in relative isolation, like Huguette - maintain social relations with those in proximity, mainly with their neighbors. In the majority of cases, as with other segments of the population and age groups, social minimalism (Baumgartner, 1988) is the norm, punctuated by polite exchanges and, at best, the rendering of occasional minor services. The preservation of privacy and the maintenance of a reasonable distance are often invoked to justify this choice of cordial but guarded interaction, without seeking to further develop relational ties. Some of our subjects, because of their socialization, affinities (Héran, 1987) and length of time in the home, have been able to forge more profound relationships -

¹ Divorced and mother of two, she was born in 1952 in a Saône-et-Loire village of 1,500 inhabitants. She grew up there and later took over the family clothing store. Now retired, she has been living for 30 years in her third home, a comfortable house set on a large 2,500m² plot (with swimming pool).

reflected in more or less frequent visits, the exchange of services, sometimes joint activities or a form of “mutual vigilance” - and explain that they are attentive to shutters that are not opened or to changes in rituals (checking the mail, watering the plants, etc.). In any case, there is a form of familiarity made possible by the identification (albeit partial) of the neighborhood, a familiarity that in some cases can go hand in hand with solidarity.

2.2. The need for autonomy: consequences and practical adjustments

With the related functional decline occurring with advancing age, the elderly face multiple obstacles in the most ordinary activities of daily life: getting up, getting dressed, preparing breakfast, fetching mail, doing laundry or shopping (Piguet *et al.*, 2017). Another important indicator of the possibility of remaining at home, and of well-being in one's own home, therefore concerns the relationship maintained with the individual home and above all the way in which it can be adapted to advancing age. This is one of the *sine qua non* conditions for remaining at home: if daily life is impossible or very complicated (for reasons of mobility within the home and accessibility to certain equipment or rooms - bath, upper floor, household appliances, etc.), staying at home may become too dangerous, and leaving the single-family house becomes imperative.

Hence the importance of a certain plasticity in the home, with the possibility of adapting its spaces and equipment. We know, for example, that among households in which at least one member is aged 75 or over, a third have difficulty accessing the outside of their home, and around one in five explain that they have accessibility problems inside the premises¹ (Dejoux and Gaimard, 2021).

While this is nothing new, given the sharp rise in the number of people aging in their own homes and wishing to remain there (or even spend the rest of their lives there), and given the number of detached and single-family houses they occupy, this adaptability has become crucial. First of all, there is the question of access to the upper floors for all those who do not live in single-story homes. And in the majority of cases, because of the cost of converting a floor or of installing a mechanical stairlift,² the choice is often to close off areas that are difficult to access and no longer usable. This is the strategy chosen by Huguette, who, because of her reduced mobility, has redesigned her interior:

I've been here so long... I can't see myself going anywhere else. I've just rearranged the rooms, I've transformed the office a bit, which is my son's old room where there's nothing but junk... he's even stored some of his things in there because there's more room than at his place! And I've also moved into the living room, where I've set up my bed, because since my husband died (in 2015), I don't feel like sleeping in our bedroom anymore, and since it's upstairs and I can't move around as well as I used to, it's easier. Because really, I'm happy in this little house where all my memories are... and I have my little garden where I still have a few flowers growing... it's small, but it's enough for me and doesn't require much upkeep. And the house is well insulated because we had some work done (...) So you see, here... I like it, I don't see why, as long as things are going well, I should leave.

Huguette's story illustrates how the family home has been adapted to her limited autonomy, and at a minimal cost. Here, the upstairs has been closed off, and the other spaces are used differently. Other adaptations, such as the installation of several handrails

¹ These difficulties are linked, for example, to the narrowness of doors, unsuitable for disabled people, the presence of steps to move from one room or level to another, bathtubs that are too high, the absence of handholds or appropriate railings and so on. In addition, homes that have become too large often become difficult to maintain (physical cost) or generate excessive current expenditure (financial cost): exterior maintenance, heating, roofing, etc.

² Part of these costs and other assistance, subject to certain conditions, may be covered by various public policies, via the National Housing Agency (*Agence Nationale de l'Habitat*, ANAH) or through pension funds, local Community Centers for Social Action (CCAS), etc.

(bathroom, kitchen, toilet), have enabled her to remain at home, under the regular supervision of her children and the various caregivers who come and go almost every day to ensure her comfort. The adaptations to this home cannot be understood without underlining the process of disengagement Huguette is undergoing as an aging person (Gateau and Marchal, 2020). Ultimately, if she insists on “feeling good” in this familiar environment, every nook and cranny of which she knows and very often associates with anecdotes and family memories, it is because, over the past thirty years or so, she has largely appropriated places that are marked by forms of routine. In her eyes, her home, rearranged as she describes it, with spaces deviated from their original function, is more than enough for her, and continues to underpin her identity (Veysset, 1989). Her testimony also reveals the interweaving of objective factors, such as the physical adaptability of the home, with more subjective factors associated with feelings, a certain perception of well-being and the desire to remain in her home, even if it is a rearranged one.¹

In this respect, our various surveys reveal that all the elderly people we have met exclude whenever possible the eventuality of sharing their home, for example by subletting part of it to young workers or students. In other words, the hypothesis of intergenerational housing does not seem to concern those who wish to age peacefully in their own homes, preserving their privacy and precluding any risk of intrusion by “strangers,” in the sense of unfamiliar people, into their homes. Some of those surveyed already confess to difficulties in tolerating household help for example, and regret not being able to prepare their own meals - and therefore being “obliged” to “share” their kitchen with these helpers or agree to have meal trays delivered - and this list is far from exhaustive. In other words, it is clear from interviews with the elderly people we met, who are still independent but slowly moving towards dependency, that the intrusion and presence of others in their homes is resented. Piguët *et al.*, once again, emphasize that the elderly insist on “the imperative need to preserve their autonomy, biographical continuity and dignity,” adding that “the dimension of autonomy consists in preserving one’s self-determination, one’s freedom to make decisions at the core of one’s daily life, including, if necessary, the delegation of such decisions.” (*ibid.*: 97).

This is exactly what Daniel, born in 1948 and retired from the automotive industry, explains so clearly. He has lived in a small, single-story house on the outskirts of Dijon for over thirty years, and has lived there alone since the death of his wife in the early 2000s. Childless, Daniel had always been completely autonomous and “accustomed” to his solitary life until a stroke in 2015 forced him to accept the presence of various health professionals and home helpers in his house. This was the condition for remaining there alone:

I was better before my stroke, in every way. I was doing fine, I had my little routines. Now, I have to live with the carers and housekeepers who come and go. I know that if I want to stay at home, that's the price I have to pay. That's true. But it's changed everything a bit... sometimes I don't really feel at home anymore, I can't do what I want when I want, and because they must be underpaid, especially the housekeepers, they are always changing. As a result, I don't know them very well and it's very strange to see people, strangers, working in your own house. And let's face it, there'll be no going back... in fact, I only hope I'll be able to live out my old age here, even if... it's not as peaceful as I'd hoped.

Daniel’s words are powerful, raising the question of both intrusion and the end of life. Although he hasn’t reached that point yet, he wonders about the future and points out a kind of “discomfort.” Because of the frequent presence of others in his home, he has not only lost his routines, but also his privacy and even a form of freedom. Well aware that he has no other

¹ We echo here the words of Piguët *et al.* (2017: 99): “Nothing is left to chance in the organization of the living space [...] The spatial arrangements, sometimes calculated to the precise millimeter, are designed so that you can support yourself, dress yourself, adjust your balance and rest on your way from one room to another. The desire for control is explicit. It is clear that even the smallest details are thought out and anticipated by the elderly person.”

choice, Daniel is bitter, even if, in his eyes, the most important thing remains to grow old in his home, to which he remains strongly attached despite his health problems and the practical consequences on his daily life.¹

Conclusion

This article, now drawing to a close, has highlighted a number of determining factors which, in very concrete terms, help us to understand what constitutes the basis for successful aging in a single-family home. Between mobility, accessibility (of the dwelling itself, of shops and services, etc.), sociability and solidarity, particularly within the family, elderly people whose health allows it or who are well looked after can remain at home, even if this means reorganizing or even rethinking the spatial and material organization of their dwelling. As we have seen, this is the primary wish of this segment of the population, the majority of whom have been living in their own homes for several decades, and are therefore strongly attached to them, even going so far as to claim a strong territorial anchorage on the part of those who have spent their entire lives, or almost their entire lives, in the area.

However, the balance struck remains precarious: between difficulties in maintaining the home, gradual isolation or the onset or even worsening of health problems that can change the situation, the future of our respondents is necessarily uncertain, even beyond the consideration of advancing age. This text also shows that the question of autonomy and remaining at home must be approached on a case-by-case basis, according to the evolution (sometimes rapid or abrupt) of each person's situation. Daniel's story is a good illustration of this. When the material conditions for staying at home are no longer satisfactory, other means can be implemented to prolong the stay: recourse to home help and care, meal delivery, family involvement and mutual aid, etc. However, we have also seen that this presence of others, even when it is occasional, may be negatively perceived, undermining essential aspects of aging well, whether objective or more subjective: these include intimacy, freedom and feelings of decline in particular. This may lead to a kind of biographical rupture, which seems to constitute a turning point (Grossetti et al., 2009) when things change irrevocably, prompting the elderly to re-examine the spatial, material and social conditions of their final years.

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¹ Since his illness, Daniel, who has a small garden that used to be his beloved vegetable patch, can hardly set foot in it anymore. It's the neighbors now who occasionally mow the lawn, giving a semblance of life to this small plot of land, which looks like it has been abandoned. Afflicted with mobility difficulties and chronic fatigue, Daniel now spends most of his time in his living room, where he watches a lot of television, and in his bedroom, where he spends his nights.

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IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF DAILY LIFE

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Abstract: *The study of daily life shows us how a person can innovate and devise different and creative actions, with which he contributes to reshaping his reality, although there are other influences and factors that impose themselves or determine the main aspects of social behaviour, such as roles, standards and common expectations. ., However, individuals tend to perceive reality around them in different and varying ways depending on the nature of the backgrounds in which they grew up, from a sociological point of view, understanding the conditions of social interaction helps in understanding and studying daily life. Accordingly, the aim of our work is to introduce the contributions of sociology to the study of daily life.*

Keywords: Daily life, sociology, sociology of daily life, sociological theory.

1. Introduction

From a sociological point of view, understanding the conditions of social interaction helps in understanding and studying daily life. Other theories that are out there system of perceptions, predispositions, and perceptions acquired until they become the rules that generate practices (habitus), that is, that personal tendency that frames our preparations without assuming full awareness on our part to obey certain models of behaviour and thinking.

Daily life represents the different modes of social interaction that an individual lives during his day, and he performs his various regular and daily activities, these interactions that enable him to build and form his meanings and perceptions towards situations, individuals and ideas.

2. Daily life

The scientific definition of the concept of daily life is not much different from the linguistic concept, most of them agree that daily life is everything that is routine and is characterized by monotony from the various actions of real daily life, and the difference between them lies in diagnosing the details of daily life.

Daily life is one of the most important topics that preoccupied the minds of researchers in various disciplines, and the first use of this term was through the Chicago School, which used it to clarify the course of life in the urban center and not others. (Sheikh Ali and Farouk, 2018, p: 133).

Edmund Husserl is considered the first to refer to daily life and use the concept of the world of life, stressing that the world of life is the world from which individuals derive their culture, and it is a given world that individuals have nothing to do with its formation, a world with a temporal dimension (past, present, future) and spatial (geographical extension), this is according to the actor's daily movement. (Zayed, 2003, p: 21)

Calvin Schrag, in his approach, combines Martin Heidegger and Gadamer. He believes that we can read daily life just like a literary text. However, the text is characterized by stability, unlike daily life, which is in constant motion.

Calvin Schrag defines daily life as a tapestry (in the sense of text) of experiences generated by living in the world of life... It is a context in which concerns and interests related to experience overlap within the general economic and social system, and thus it limits daily

life to personal experiences and aspects of practical behaviour, which appear in the form of a text that can be read in the general social and economic context.

On the other hand, Ahmed Zayed defines daily life as the living and cultural milieu that is linked to human existence, which is the state of apparent existence or immediate existence (existence as it is), and it is a state of existence that is not limited by the regularity or habitus that individuals live in. It also involves the cultural component that regulates this living environmental makes him justifiable or demeaning, and he is responsible for exchanges.

3.Sociology

Sociology was interested in studying the major social problems, especially those related to Western civilization. The writings of the first founders of sociology were in response to the events of the French and Industrial Revolution. Many theories about development and underdevelopment in the Third World were crystallized, in response to the crisis of development and the economic and political transformation in the world, which made sociology to be somewhat far from the problems of society.

At this stage, sociology was concerned with the analysis of institutions, organizations, social structures, and the social relations that form them, influenced by what the natural sciences had reached and trying to simulate them. In Article laws. These trends, despite their differences, were concerned with the various transformations that industrialized societies experienced and compared the ancient systems with the modern ones, focusing on the major structures and general and general laws, i.e. focusing on the large-scale macro analysis.

In the light of these analyzes, the individual and daily life and the basic theoretical models in sociology were absent. For long periods, the basic analytical categories were the group and not the individual.

At a time when sociology tended this institutional tendency, a new trend towards interest in daily life emerged, as new directions emerged that focused on analyzing human action away from major theories, especially the Weberian approach, which made sociology a science of social significance and symbolic reasons, through which the understand what it is Hidden and apparent together in light of the interpretation of individual and collective behaviour (Giddens, 2005: 159).

Sociology, in its constructive approach, distances us from understanding the meaning that is evident in contemplating symbolic practices and social and historical conditions, which made many sociologists present other theoretical insights related to lived reality or what is called the sociology of daily life.

4.Sociology of daily life

Sociology of daily life: is a branch of sociology that deals with the organization and meaning of daily life, and equates it with the social study of small units (microsociology), as well as the qualitative study of the various types of experiences and experiences of daily life, such as the behaviour of passers-by in the street, sleep, and conversations Telephony, work experiences, speech, and dealing with time.(Sheikh Ali and Farouk, 2018: 124).

The study of daily life shows us how people can innovate and devise different and creative actions, with which they contribute to reshaping their reality, although there are other influences and factors that impose themselves or determine the main aspects of social behaviour, such as roles, standards and common expectations, other than That individuals tend to perceive reality around them in different and varying ways depending on the nature of the backgrounds in which they grew up, and the motives, incentives and interests that they want to achieve, and because individuals have the ability to act creatively, they always reshape and reshape their reality (Giddens, 2005: 156).

The study of daily life in the conditions of social interaction is called micro-sociology or micro-sociology, and in such studies the analysis takes place at the level of individuals and small groups. (Giddens: 2005: 160-195).

The most important points about the sociology of daily life can be summarized as follows:

- Social interaction is a process that includes action and reaction to those around us and many aspects of our daily lives.
- Face-to-face interaction is a second name for micro-sociology.
- Non-verbal communication represents the exchange of meanings and ideas through facial expressions, gestures and body movements.
- The gender dimension is an important dimension in oral interactions.
- The ethnomodological approach is concerned with the study of speech and ordinary conversation between people.
- Social interaction can be studied in a way that reveals its subtleties using the theatrical model. (Giddens, 2005: 181)

5. Contemporary contributions to daily life

5.1. Frankfurt School

The Frankfurt School is considered one of the most prominent contemporary Western philosophical schools, which shined due to the philosophical productions produced by its pioneers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Karl Otto Abel, Axel Honeth...The school constitutes an important turning point in the course of contemporary European thought, as it had a significant and effective impact on the formulation of a critical theory, dealing with sociology, philosophy, politics and culture, as overlapping and intertwined dimensions, and the study of social theories and the cognitive and civilizational horizons that accompanied developments and transformations he witnessed European society in the fields of economics and politics (Hamdawi, 2015: 126) Since its inception, the Frankfurt School embarked on a project to build a social philosophy whose legitimacy derives directly from Marxist and Hegelian philosophy. This social philosophy, which Horkheimer announced since his inaugural lesson, is considered the general framework for the project around which the efforts of all the pioneers of the school in its various generations centered Despite their different philosophical treatises, this discrepancy does not mean the absence of a bridge of communication between its different generations.

Today, the Frankfurt School is of great importance due to the richness and diversity of its writings that are open to the various major philosophical references on the one hand, and its keeping up with the complex problems raised in contemporary societies, and On the other hand, the intellectual, social and political transformations of our contemporary world. (Jamil Hamdawi, 2015: 128).

The rapid pace of scientific and technological progress and its access to very advanced levels made some thinkers sense the seriousness of the situation, so they hastened to warn of the repercussions of this development and its negative repercussions that threatened the human situation as a whole, so that the means that man used to control nature had taken control of himself.

The pioneers of the Frankfurt School raised many questions about the various fields of knowledge, and the urgent need emerged to reconsider many of them based on their criticism of philosophical and social thought and their refusal to identify with the theses of the social system that existed at the time and criticize its ideology.

Their criticism did not stop at the limits of society and its institutions, but rather went beyond that to touch the intellectual and political structure of this society, with the aim of

reaching a formulation of a critical theory of society, and this new critical approach, which was crystallized by the Frankfurt School, made it the focus of the intellectual elites.

Theodor Adorno says that the only place in which he finds the truth is not in the whole or in the complete unity, but rather in those overlooked parts of the individual's experience that resulted from the weight of this whole, and this saying confirms the theory's attention to the daily life of the individual, through Considering reality as inherent in one's experience.

The achievements made by the mind eventually led to the transformation of the mind into a tool to curb daily life, which has become lacking in any form of consciousness, but rather has become passive of consciousness. Subordination of daily life to the official institution and the resulting ideas or culture leads to the loss of the value of the mind. In man, the mind turns into a dampening energy More than being an assistant to achieve a better life (Zayed, 2003: 53).

Herbert Marcuse, in his book *The One-Dimensional Man*, explains the domination of the power of the machine in societies and its role in producing a pattern of relationships between the individual and the institutions that control social existence and his daily consumer life and direct his awareness towards achieving the goals of the state.

He also explains through his analyzes that literature, art and emotions are absorbed within the framework of the wave of consumerism and commercialism, which makes culture a one-dimensional daily consumer food. (Hamdawi: 130).

Jürgen Habermas, for his part, started from two hypotheses:

- Thought must be separated from the dilemmas of social life.
- The philosophical and social thought must have a critical role and turn into a mental and critical program.

One of the central concepts of Habermas is the communicative rationality: it refers to the way people work in their interaction in order to reach understanding, as he referred to the science of life and the technical world, including the social world, and each scientist uses different criteria for honesty with regard to communicative rationality.

Attention and attention to the world of daily life appeared at the Frankfurt School through its criticism of the capitalist.

5.2. Avatar Interaction

The theory of symbolic interactionism is one of the social behavioural theories that combines pluralistic behaviourism and the direction of social action. (Abbas Al-Bayati: 64)

The owners of this theory trace its roots back to the ideas of the sociologist Max Weber, (Hamdawi, 2015:14), who emphasized that understanding the social world takes place through understanding the actions of the individuals with whom we interact, and then developed it by a number of scholars, including George Herbert Mead.

George Herbert Mead

Mead was interested in studying symbols in social life and focused on the importance of language and its meanings and its impact on the patterns and quality of social interactions between individuals in small groups. He also believes that language enables individuals to develop self-awareness of their individuality, and enables them to see themselves as others see them.

He also focused on the communication process, and classified it into two categories: symbolic communication, and non-symbolic communication. With regard to symbolic communication, it clearly emphasizes the use of ideas and concepts, and thus language is of importance in relation to the communication process between people in different situations, and accordingly the social system It is the product of actions It is made by members of society, and this indicates that the meaning is not imposed on them, but rather it is a subject subject to negotiation and deliberation between individuals.

Herbert Blumer

He agrees with George Mead that symbolic interaction is the defining feature of human interaction, and that this special feature involves translating the symbols and events of individuals and their mutual actions.

Symbolic Interactivity Hypotheses:

Herbert Blumer (1969) presents it in an abbreviated form:

- Humans act about the objects in their world on the basis of what those objects mean to them.

- These meanings are the product of human social interaction.

- These meanings are mutated and modified, and they are circulated through interpretation processes used by each individual in his dealings with the signs he encounters. (Hamdawi, 2015: 119).

These hypotheses correspond to the sections of Mead's book, which are the mind, the self, and society, where he started from discussing the characteristics that make man superior to animals, and making language a special feature that distinguishes man from other beings, as well as his ability to coding, using symbols, and exchanging meanings from through it.

The symbol gives humans the ability to reflect on their reactions, and to prepare for them in their imagination, and the existence of language is what enables us to move away, think, and then choose, and this is what Blumer referred to in his third hypothesis.

The signifying symbol evokes in myself the same reaction that it evokes in others, that it enables me to look at myself as others see me. (Cribb, 1991: 121).

Herbert Blumer also formulated his ideas in his book published in 1969 and entitled: *The Perspective and Method of Symbolic Interactivity*, in which he criticized the systematic analysis based on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, as he believes that it is an analysis of exact sciences and cannot be transferred to sociology without modifying it.

The justification provided by Blumer is that social life is extremely complex and consists of interrelated processes that cannot be limited in this way, and in order to overcome this obstacle, it is necessary to acquire detailed knowledge about various phenomena and then build a system of thought specific to the social sciences that differs from that adopted in the natural sciences, and To achieve this, the researcher must liveThe phenomenon as it is in reality and to be exposed to the life experiences of the people he studiesEach stream of symbolic interactionism focuses on a particular aspect of theory. The Chicago school focuses on the flow of interaction, the hermeneutical processes, and the ways in which meanings develop and change.

While the Iowa School focuses on transforming ideas into measurable variables, Mead's opinions are used as a tool to describe what was observed... There is also another current called role theory, and it looks at the way in which the internal conversation is a mediator for the self to present itself in the roles, and the works of Ralph Ternes are the most organized works in this field. (Cribb, 1991: 121)

Irving Goffman

Goffman's perspective is often described as the theatrical perspective, a term he uses himself. Roles (i.e., the expectations that others have about our behaviour in certain circumstances) are like texts that we represent, and therefore he is interested in explaining the methods we take to perform our roles.

Goffman's work is mainly a descriptive work, and a classification of role-playing methods and their strategy.

Goffman's work is mainly a descriptive work, and a classification of role-playing methods and their strategy--- The book: *Introducing the Self in Everyday Life* (Perception of the Self in Everyday Life, published in 1959) This book embodies Goffman's theses known as theatrical theory, in which he shows There is a great similarity between theatrical performance and stylesThe role we all play.In fact, Goffman believes that social life is, in fact, only a theater in which individuals play roles, and they have to pretend that they take seriously the roles of others, and when the individual comes out of the show in order to return to the scenes, the individual can then reduce control over his behaviour and act comfortably. more.

The school of symbolic interactionism is concerned with issues related to language and meaning. Language gives us an opportunity to reach self-awareness, realize ourselves, and feel our individuality. It also enables us to see ourselves from the outside as others see us. The main element is the symbol, that is, the sign that represents meaning or something else. , and the words you useTo indicate specific things are in fact symbols that represent the meanings we mean.The symbolic interactionist perspective may shed light on the nature of our actions in our daily lives, but it is subject to many criticisms because it neglects the broader issues of power, the structures in society and the way in which they control individual action. (Giddens, 2005: 76-77).

Conclusion

The sociology of daily life is a branch of sociology that deals with the organization and meaning of daily life. It examines the influences and factors that impose themselves or determine the main aspects of social behaviour, regarding the various situations that an individual may encounter during his interactions with others, based on the assumption that the individual has the power to act The creative innovator, as he is constantly reshaping and reshaping his reality.

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THE WEB 2.0, BLOGGING, AND THE ARAB INTELLECTUAL: REALITY AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *The emergence of new information and communication technologies, social media platforms, and the called WEB 2.0, has led to a new digital revolution. This cyber-era has witnessed profound social transformations. Blog and blogging today extend beyond just writing with limited influence. Individuals from diverse social backgrounds, institutions, affiliations, and ideologies have their own or shared spaces to talk about various topics such as daily life, economics, politics, religion, leisure, sports, and others. Intellectuals are not the exception, as they have been seamlessly integrated into these digital spaces. In the Arab world, many social movements and revolutions have gained great momentum using social media platforms and technologies and through the presence of intellectuals, policy / decision-makers as well as ordinary citizens. This paper aims to provide a modest exposition about the reality of the intellectual participation of actors (intellectuals) in the field of blogging in the context of social media platforms and technologies. It also addresses some of the challenges that intellectuals faced in these dynamic, rapidly spreading and developing digital environments.*

Keywords: NTIC, Social Media, Numeric revolution, Blogging, Arab Intellectuals.

1. Introduction

The advent of the internet has triggered a digital revolution and ushered in substantial transformations across multiple facets of human existence. The multiple effects and dimensions of this social revolution encompass a wide range, including the political, cultural, economic, psychological, and other domains. The examination of these transitions from a social perspective is confronted with a multifaceted terrain and a diverse array of comprehensive digital records.

It is important to acknowledge that media and communication outlets serve as valuable analytical publications that facilitate the reporting of social facts in their entirety, encompassing cultural, political, anthropological, economic dimensions, and prior to their transformation into catalysts of change or their underlying reasons.

Lucile Merra observed this in her thesis, where there has been a shift from "social link" to "social impact" (Lucile, 2013: 25). That mean, the way we perceive, understand, and experience social relationships has evolved, leading to a shift in the traditional concept and analysis. The "social link" has not vanished, but according to Casilli (2010), it has transformed into a novel manifestation of human interaction - the realm of digital connections.

Despite this shift and some differences, it is emphasized that these platforms have the potential to promote the development of social interaction, even more than they contribute to its impoverishment (Lucile, 2013: 25).

According to Boyd and Ellison, social media encompasses systems that "support interactions from individual to individual, from individual to several individuals, and from several individuals to several others. Some enable interactions among many people and facilitate the creation of spaces for people to gather and form audiences. It refer to these spaces and the resulting communities as 'networked publics. Usenet, the blogosphere, and social networking sites are all examples of networked publics".

“Social media includes systems that support one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many interactions. Some enable many-to-many interactions and support the creation of spaces for people to gather and publics to form. I call these spaces, and the resultant collective, “networked publics”. Usenet, the blogosphere, and social network sites are all examples of networked publics.” (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Analyzing the Arab societies, attention has always been oriented to the occidental perspective regarding social change, as well as discussions about mutation and technology surrounded by the modernity and tradition discourse, Hammami observed that:

“The prevailing discourses surrounding information and communication technology (ICT) in Arab societies, when analyzed, in relation to their connection with modernization tensions, constitute a highly interesting field for monitoring the experimental methods to achieve a model of “reconciliatory modernization” in the realm of communication, as well as within the cultural context from which the description of social uses emerges. In this sense, we can distinguish [...] types of prevailing discourses concerning information and communication technology. They are closely linked to the “reconciliatory modernization” model, despite their distinct differences and the diversity of the elites that support them. These discourses coexist in the public sphere and do not necessarily contradict each other; sometimes, they even intersect.” (Hammami, 2006)

It is important noting that during the period known as the “Arab Spring and Arab revolutions,” international discussions regarding the internet and its media revolved around the issues of neutrality and the need for regulating the digital space (Crosnier and Schafer, 2019). Meanwhile, Arab societies saw the beginning of intensive political and social exploitation of digital media for social communication, with intellectuals, politicians, and the people actively engaging and using these platforms.

2. Literature review

Writing about the topic of intellectuals and blogging in the age of technology is important and not easy, especially in societies with multiple specifics and social, political, and economic dynamics. The past 13 years have witnessed many events in the Arab world, both social and political, which have brought Arab intellectuals to the forefront. The digital spaces have amplified the impact of these events and brought a new world of writing and blogging to the forefront. Therefore, we are discussing the reality of intellectuals in the Arab world in a world of social media technology and digital blogs.

Defining the concept of the intellectual and blogging requires special attention and a substantial discussion, considering its historical context and the cognitive debates surrounding the intellectual and the current impact through blogging. Here are some ideas, which are the result of reviewing relevant literature:

When it comes to discussing the intellectual, it is a concept that piques special interest. Nader Andrawos and Alaa Badr expressed it by saying:

“The term often carries expectation, authority and perhaps a bit of uneasiness.” (Andrawos and Badr, 2020)

Therefore, the concept of the intellectual in contemporary Arab writings was most prominently embodied during the 1960s, influenced by the Gramscian approach and the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, both of whom focus on the social and political role of the intellectual. The translation movement of the works of these two thinkers at that time facilitated the reception, and the concept of the intellectual in the Arab world was primarily understood through the functional description. This perspective saw the intellectual as the critical and confrontational self against authority. (Mufleh, 2020)

However, this view has become limited in our contemporary era, where we can consider the Arab "intellectuals" as a social characteristic, intellectual practice, and a psychological and social structure with a historical dimension that exists in the present. It serves to express reality, the present, the past, and looks forward to the future, just like any other member of their society.

Regarding blogs, we rely on the simplified and clear definition by Matthieu Paldacci: "Weblogs, or simply blogs, are online journals that operate according to a specific format for publication on the internet. They are characterized by a sequence of dated entries or posts that are accessible to the public. These posts can contain text as well as digital documents (such as images, music, videos) or hypertext links. Blogs also feature a network of hypertext links (links that point to other preferred and frequented blogs) and a commenting system (a system that allows readers, whether they are bloggers or not, to express their opinions on a post). These elements contribute to the societal dimension of this technical format for publication." (Paldacci, 2006).

Regarding the challenges faced by Arab intellectuals in the world of technology and the information explosion, researcher Ahmed Mohammed Saleh outlined a set of challenges in an article published in "Al-Hiwar Al-Mutamaddin," with the most important ones being:

- The ambiguous relationship between the intellectuals and the authority has consistently been one of the greatest challenges for Arab intellectuals. However, the Information Age has made this relationship even more tense and turbulent. Advanced information and communication technologies, despite being an empowering force for democratic culture, also lead to control over information, which can help maintain power.

- The decline in informational levels, even among the elite, and the prevalence of digital illiteracy when dealing with computers and the internet, along with the dominance of technological fear, and the weakness of the English language as the prevalent information language.

- The ongoing battle between conservators and modernists, those who want the present to be a private and traditional past, and those who reject the past and tradition, advocating for emulating the West and its civilization.

- The challenge associated with the Arab reality, which indicates a state of stagnation that isn't easy to overcome. Illiteracy, poverty, ignorance, unemployment, intellectual poverty, the brain drain, all exacerbated by reports of human development, are in a state of poverty and oppression. Limited economic opportunities, social exclusion, neglect of public services, and bias, among other factors, are primary sources of human deprivation and, consequently, a contraction of freedom.

Although these challenges were agreeable to their author at the time, the situation today is significantly different. The circumstances have changed in many aspects of life, including the reality of technology usage, where, in itself, it has become a mechanism in the hands of intellectuals to produce knowledge, form opinions, as well as engage in critique, confrontation, and the shaping of public discourse and consciousness.

Said Hareb, considered that "the widespread use of technology pushed the role of the traditional intellectual into the background, almost obliterating it. Emerged generations in the Arab societies have become familiar with technology before they became familiar with the intellectuals." (Hareb, 2012). Hareb, further explains that information technology has turned intellectualism into a self-sustaining industry with its own facilities, commodities, and services. It has introduced new concepts in various fields to the cultural lexicon.

On the contrary, Ali Mohammed Fakhro raised concerns about the traditional state of writing and blogging, the era of "pen, paper, and ink." He considered that communication and media technology had negative effects on the human mind and its intellectual output. He criticized the form of writing and the language used in technology-mediated communication, which he sees as lacking creativity, consisting of simple and short texts unlike traditional writing, which, in his opinion, is richer and more expressive. The author stated:

“Considering the studies and experimental findings that confirm the negative outcomes resulting from human interaction with communication technology, particularly the internet, the foremost of these outcomes is the comparison of the abilities and efficiency of students in reading and writing using a computer versus using pen and paper. In other words, it is a comparison between modern technology and old technology. The results confirm that using books, paper, and pen yields better outcomes in terms of longer and more vocabulary-rich sentence structures and better comprehension and deeper understanding of what the student reads”. (Fakhro, 2011)

We may partially agree with the writer on some details; indeed, there is an impact of technology and its repercussions on educational processes in general. However, I firmly believe that this perspective is severely lacking and does not provide objective justifications or the complete picture. When it comes to the richness of a student's language, it is worth noting that digital and virtual technology has contributed significantly to the proliferation of digital writing and blogging. Thousands of platforms for publishing digital books and accompanying applications, numerous blogs dedicated to intellectual, political, literary, and artistic issues, tens of thousands of concise accounts, pages, and blogs on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, among others, daily disseminate excerpts from the works of their authors, along with their opinions, ideas, and emotions regarding contemporary and current issues. All of these cater to categories that include elites, academics, researchers, and Arab intellectuals. Therefore, the writer did not provide or reinforce his idea and stance with convincing justifications or references to what he relied upon.

In this context, there was a response and comment from Walid Abbas regarding this article, where he says:

"The writer criticizes computer programs in the same context due to the efficiency of programs that facilitate reading, writing, or research. He considers that this reduces the use of the brain's natural capabilities to overcome challenges or mysteries in fields such as reading and writing. This might be true, but it allows humans to utilize their brain's capabilities in more complex tasks and to solve scientific and intellectual problems more significant than the everyday use of language. Here, the writer should be reminded that he is talking about the fundamental function of technology, which is the invention and innovation of tools that relieve the brain from basic or primitive functions so that it can devote its efforts to developing more complex ideas and solving bigger problems." (Abbas, 2011).

We agree with this comment and critique. Today, artificial intelligence indeed reflects how the human mind is no longer just a classic description of intelligence, memory, storage, and perception. It involves complex processes of the mind's ability to innovate and create, erasing its past and dazzling with its future.

3. Objectives and methods

This qualitative study relied on various literary sources related to the subject in general, addressing issues related to intellectuals and the knowledge society in the era of technology. We also drew upon the contributions of Arab bloggers on the subject. Furthermore, we relied on our own observations as researchers and individuals interested in the topic, which were derived from daily experiences in the digital space.

The study's objectives are related to attempting to analyze and understand the reality of the Arab intellectual in the digital spaces, as well as identifying the challenges and issues they face. Additionally, the study aims to present some of the opportunities available to Arab intellectuals through modern social communication technologies and platforms that facilitate blogging and provide diverse and important opportunities.

This study represents an initial attempt to address a topic that raises various knowledge-related questions. We started by attempting to familiarize ourselves with the topic and some related discussions, and the project may eventually produce several papers.

4. Results and discussion

1- NTIC and blogging: reality, discourse and practices

Information and communication technologies, along with their digital communication channels and platforms, have significantly and profoundly influenced the process of blogging in general. They have played a crucial role in shaping the blogs and pages of Arab intellectuals, making access easier and dissemination wider.

Sociologically, media and communication technology have shifted perspectives on social concepts, or at least, some have become intricately linked to the socio-cultural impact of technology. For instance, social capital has become more extensive and less costly in the digital communication world because ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) have made it easier for individuals to access the latest information (Shim and Eom, 2009). This quickly leads to the formation of multiple and intensive social networks.

This new reality has not any segments of society, including the subject of our study. Their blogs, in various forms, have found their place within the process of social change and digitization. While some researchers argue that the occurrences related to digital technology cannot be entirely ascribed to it alone, emphasizing that its historical development and overall influence far outweigh the secondary effects assigned to it, regardless of their significance. (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2012).

The nature of Arab states and societies, often characterized by authoritarianism and a value system and culture that enforce various forms of strictness, sometimes coercion, and constraint, has led to limited spaces for free writing, editing, and expression.

However, media and communication technologies, despite everything, have contributed to amplifying the voice of Arab intellectuals on one hand and diversifying discourse for the recipients, thereby influencing the degree of society and the state's response in different ways on the other hand.

Observing the reality of blogging among many intellectuals, it is evident that much of what was once prohibited and taboo is now accepted, circulated, and spread. This contributes to the dynamics of freedom of expression and its accompanying practices and impacts."

2- Promoting digital culture and the proliferation /confrontation of fake news

In the past, one had to wait for conferences, cultural events, and exhibitions to access the discourse of Arab intellectuals and interact with them. Today, with the momentum of technology and communication, many intellectuals engage in digital and virtual blogging. Accessing their ideas and engaging in discussions has become readily available and incredibly fast.

Impressions and reactions can now be gathered in real-time, regardless of the direction. This has contributed to the formation, or at least the beginning of the formation, of a digital culture, driven by technology and the presence of intellectuals through social media platforms.

The nature of Arab states and societies, characterized by a regulatory framework and a value system and culture that enforce various forms of strictness (UK GOV, 2007), and sometimes coercion and constraints, with limited spaces for writing, editing, and expressing oneself freely, has posed significant challenges.

However, media and communication technologies, despite everything, have contributed to amplifying the voice of the Arab intellectuals, on one hand, and have diversified the discourse received by the audience, influencing the level of societal and state responsiveness in this regard, on the other hand.

It is noticeable that in the realm of blogging, many intellectuals are now able to discuss and circulate ideas that were once prohibited and taboo. This contributes to the dynamics of freedom of expression and its associated practices and impacts. This Dynamic, are faced by many challenges such as the Fake News.

The presence in social media spaces, especially for the Arab intellectual, constitutes a significant challenge, especially in the face of the challenges imposed by the nature of the virtual world and global events.

What is known as "fake news" has raised many concerns because determining the accuracy of news and opinions and identifying their sources require vigilance and diligence from all parties. "Identifying what makes people less likely to endorse false information and believe in it is an important and timely issue in a practical sense" (Bowes and Tasimi, 2022).

Fake news is not merely a contentious matter; it is a dilemma in the world of "information," involving intellectuals, recipients, the media, and especially social media and their narratives. This has led Johan Farkas and Jannick Schou to consider that: "The dominant narrative of our time is that democracy is in a state of emergency caused by social media, changes to journalism and misinformed masses. This crisis needs to be resolved by reinstating truth at the heart of democracy, even if this means curtailing civic participation and popular sovereignty." (Farkas and Schou, 2019).

This challenge places the Arab intellectual in a sensitive position, especially in societies with collective and emotional cultural backgrounds, where every piece of information has its impact. This makes the intellectual also responsible for "the development of digital competences."

Social media and the rapid technological advances in communication make the Arab intellectual face a unique challenge, a social and ethical challenge towards their society.

The societal sensitivities, especially in Arab and Islamic communities, towards topics such as sex, the body, freedom, extremism, and more, make intellectuals prisoners of their ideas and their social reception. Digital media is a tool for widespread and rapid content dissemination. The reception categories are not filtered, as was the case in previous situations, whether in books, cultural opposition, publishing roles, or intellectual sessions, where dissemination was limited, and there might not be widespread "public" impact, only within the circle of participants, interested parties, and attendees at the event. This is an important challenge and issue facing the Arab intellectual in particular.

3- The culture, identity and language challenges

We were discussing the issue of blogging and its challenges for the Arab intellectual, where social and technological changes make the topic more complex. Cultural and linguistic identity is an important, even concerning element in a globalized world and in spaces with a high flow of information, ideas, and ideologies.

If we consider that most crises are not separate from stirring elements of culture and identity, then digital spaces accelerate that, and the echoes of the conflict become prominent.

Any element that is raised has repercussions on cultural, religious, and heritage components, and in reality, this is an age-old human issue.

4- Knowledge production

Knowledge production, in general, and through blogs, is at the heart of a significant debate. To begin with, we question whether what is being exchanged among Arab intellectuals is genuinely producing knowledge, or is it a matter of reposting and disseminating knowledge that already exists?

The production of knowledge, in general, cannot be discussed outside its cognitive, historical, theoretical, and empirical frameworks, and institutional factors may intervene in the legitimacy of knowledge or its nature. What we are heading towards is that in the digital world, through modern technologies and media, it allows intellectuals the opportunity and the necessary resources to attempt knowledge production or at least contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and development.

The competitiveness enabled by presence in the digital and virtual world is an advantage for improving the quality of knowledge, discourse, and thought. At the same time, it poses a significant challenge to the Arab intellectual.

It involves building a knowledge society that harnesses its resources on one hand and utilizes available resources, especially technology, on the other hand. Here, the most significant challenges faced by Arab societies and consequently, the intellectual elites, come to the forefront. According to a report titled "Building Knowledge Societies in the Arab Region: Arabic Language Gateway to Knowledge" published in 2019 by the UNESCO office in Cairo, this report clearly highlights a contradiction represented by the relative backwardness in the development and production of information and communication technology compared to advanced countries on one hand, despite its widespread use in the Arab region on the other hand.

Assuming that personal responses to news and messages are a simple means to enhance collective knowledge and expand it, consequently creating "intelligence" from "knowledge" (Pór and Molloy, 2002), where it can be inferred that blogs provide a forum for learning. Therefore, the experience of generating collective knowledge can / should be applied to traditional educational environments. This underscores the capacity of blogs, both in general and particularly those belonging to intellectuals and individuals interested in various issues related to human existence, to produce knowledge. (Williams and Jacobs, 2004).

It is challenging to conclusively ascertain the creation of knowledge within the domain of Arab intellectual blogs or research in a genuinely, meaningful and profound sense. However, studies demonstrate that historically, and through various pathways exercised by blogs and various platforms, knowledge accumulation processes have occurred. This is an important factor and, at the very least, a facilitator for producing various types of knowledge.

5. Conclusion

The ongoing discussion regarding NTIC (New Technologies of Information and Communication), blogging, intellectuals, and social media activities gives rise to a multitude of unusual inconsistencies and contradictions. The pivotal aspect of this discourse revolves around the roles of intellectuals, which have historically, persistently, and will continue to be central to the dialogue, particularly concerning their ability to stay informed about current developments. In Arab societies, intellectuals have consistently been expected to articulate stances on concurrent matters and occurrences. However, the ironic aspect of this subject, as observed and pondered by Cusnir et al:

"Are we currently witnessing the inevitable decline of the intellectual figure, as it was magnified during the Dreyfus affair era and the post-war decades? If the model of the intellectual, epitomized by Jean-Paul Sartre among others, has lost its luster, intellectuals have not completely vanished from the horizon. Instead, they have been marginalized and replaced by high-profile figures who have emerged on the scene, posing a risk of overshadowing the slower, foundational work undertaken by less famous individuals." (Cusnir, Pélissier and Rieffel, 2021).

Revisiting the original concept, even if we contemplate the intellectual in the role of a political participant, the role they play in confrontation, criticism, support, or justification is a subject of debate. "Reducing the intellectual to merely a political actor implies a kind of trivialization of the liberating roles of culture and thought in society" (Abdul Latif, 2023).

It's worth noting here that digital social platforms have become a significant opportunity for intellectuals to express themselves, their communities, and their interests, and even to promote their products. The digital market is also a given reality, with various challenges surrounding it taken into consideration.

The current contradictions, enhanced by technology or at the very least accelerated in their emergence, are evident in the online spaces, blogging platforms, and others. While these spaces may demand specific or diverse roles from intellectuals, in the midst of the "buzz" and

"trend" phenomena, they provide opportunities for media dominance by what are often referred to as social media celebrities and influencers, groups that are typically considered "purveyors of frivolity" (Abdul Latif, 2023).

The revival of the intellectual's identity required a form of critical confrontation, on one hand, and engagement with the production of new actors, as they now fill various aspects of our cultural life. Alongside the roles of the intellectual in criticism and enlightenment, there emerges today the task of capturing and containing the content of virtual spaces as another essential role. These spaces have gained significant influence in shaping many aspects of shallowness and superficiality in our society. Today's intellectual is tasked with a new role in virtual spaces, which have, in recent years, been filled with blogs characterized by conservatism and a lack of connection to the scientific, intellectual, and technological advancements in this new world (Abdul Latif, 2023). It is a role that leans more towards intervention than expression and criticism.

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COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND THEIR LIMITS¹

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Abstract: *Starting from a classical literature in the field, but also from a series of more recent papers and researches, the text aims to identify new communication strategies in public administration and to make a theoretical analysis of them from the perspective of advantages and disadvantages that such structural changes can bring in relation to the public. The premise of our analysis is that, regardless of the tool used, communication is an avatar of democracy. We also show that the entire reading we make of the phenomenon is circumscribed to an epistemological approach that privileges an approach through which technologies and tools used by man and in society have the status of generative metaphors (N. Free) in the sense that they recreate and reconstruct public space and beyond. From this perspective, participatory democracy is a new democratic formula of the old representational democracy, technologically restored. The pluses and minuses arising from this change at the communication level in public administration provide enough ground for reflection when research results correlate with mental and social data.*

Keywords: communication, public administration, public sphere, representative democracy, participatory democracy, communication strategies, new technologies

1. Public communication in administration – an avatar of democracy

Local public administrations have as main role the administration of the community within which they operate. This implies organization, management, intervention, involvement and solving problems that may interfere with the proper functioning of society. In addition, communication with the public is an important activity ensuring transparency of all activities and decisions in the field of administration.

If in authoritarian regimes the communication activity is unilateral, discretionary, put at the service of the regime and with the role of permanently refining its image and the administrative apparatus that serves it, in democratic regimes things are completely different. In the second case, communication is under the sign of the democratic game and the relationship it establishes between the governed and the governed, between the administration and the citizens. Therefore, beyond the routines of the administrative apparatus or the bureaucratic thickets that characterize it, democracy establishes a partnership between public institutions and citizens. In fact, the basic principles of social life, common living are aimed at recognition, reciprocity and cooperation (Todorov, 2009). Thus, public communication in administrative institutions and not only, through the principles and objectives underlying it, presents itself as a true avatar of democracy.

In *representative democracy*, the act of governing is enshrined by majority vote. Citizens delegate their representatives to govern and promote their interests. Elected officials are invested with power and authority in local or central leadership, but also with

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responsibility towards citizens by virtue of a social contract enshrined by vote. They are accountable to voters for all their decisions and actions. This responsibility is a certain form of communication between elected officials and citizens, between the administrative institutions they coordinate and the community. In this case, in the case of local administrations, communication plays mainly the role of informing and obtaining feedback from the population, the basis being electoral platforms and projects that convinced the population to choose one way or another. Basically, at least theoretically, trust is manifested between the governed and the governed. Under these circumstances, the act of public communication is a democratic exercise that enshrines the trust granted by voting, but also an important lever of image and control exercised by both parties.

Participatory democracy is a concept that proposes a new approach to the relationship between the governed and the governed. This new formula of democracy seems to have emerged as a necessity, as an alternative to representative democracies weakened by partisan and individual interests, backstage games and all kinds of manipulations, electoral arrangements and calculations and, above all, by the poor quality and performance of the people selected to represent us. Some authors believe that the emergence of participatory democracy is nothing more than a direct expression of the failure of representative democracy, an attack from within it, the fault being borne by both elected officials and voters. (Nichols, Th, 2022). Others, on the contrary, see in it not only a reaction, but a form of adaptation and rebranding of the old democracy in direct relation to new technologies and forms of communication. "If we are to focus on practices considered par excellence to be characteristic of the participatory approach, then we should list the local referendum, public debates, animation of public spaces (Nonjon, Bonaccorsi, 2006), local governance – including in electronic form, blogs, online protests, forums, publications and neighborhood councils, participatory budgets, consultations, (new) alternative media, and even electronic civil disobedience (hactivism). The list can go on and on, and it is easy to assume that it will expand considerably in the near future. What do all these participatory practices have in common?" (Grădinaru, A. 2010: 70) The new communication technologies seem to be the common denominator of the different participatory formulas that come to save the old representative democracy and place it in a broader, inclusive and global orbit. In fact, the globalizing virtues of technology were noted a long time ago, the expression "global screen" (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2008), is a suggestive one in this sense. However, participatory practices are also seen as complementary formulas of the representative system and not as alternatives to it. (Grădinaru, 2012: 137)

In this regard, Thomas Zittel (Zittel, 2003: 1-31) identifies the need for participation in several democratic formulas. *Expansive democracies* see the mechanism of participation and involvement as a saving gesture for democracy in the face of citizens' disinterest and absenteeism, which could produce a greater rapprochement between decision-makers and administrators and citizens. This kind of participatory democracy proposes an extension of democratic practices to the administration area by mobilizing citizens as active and informed partners, but, equally, it has as stake the control of behaviours.

The integrative democracies mentioned by the same Zittel have as their main purpose shaping and empowering citizens through participation. They target a series of structural changes at the behavioural level through awareness and education. In the case of local public administrations, their activity and decisions are assumed at community level through communication, participation and involvement. In *efficiency-oriented democracies*, *cost-benefit* economic calculation prevails. Access to new technologies facilitates access to the administrative act, makes it more efficient and greatly reduces costs related to information, consultation or other communication activities for the public. We believe that all three democratic forms analyzed by Zittel are forms and expressions of participatory democracy, each with specific accents. What unites all of them, beyond their specificities, is the

mechanism by which they could be put into practice and function. It focuses on communication through new technologies.

In fact, like representative democracy, participatory democracy emphasizes the role of communication in information, participation and engagement. What differs are the tenhic tools they privilege. From old printing presses to new digital tools, a journey has been traveled that can hardly be ignored. An epistemological perspective promoted by Northop Frye, which is rather circumscribed to an anarchic relativism, considers that "the objects and technologies that man invents and uses have the role of resetting human existence and paradigmatically inscribing it in another orbit. They become metaphors that interpose between man and the object of his knowledge." (Gavriliuță, 2019: 253) From this perspective, we rewrite and recreate reality according to the tools we use. Oral, written, visual and digital communication can be considered *generative metaphors* (Postman 2016: 31) according to which we can rewrite knowledge, democracy or other forms of human coexistence.

2. A strategic effort in the realm of communication in new media

If in 1920 Edward Bernays tried to change the emphasis in public communication from the activity of informing the public to that of understanding it, today the emphasis is also on the participation and involvement of citizens in decision-making in administration. The reason, expressed through official documents, would be to strengthen democracy and increase trust in local public administrations. The documents elaborated at the level of the Romanian Government through the "Open Government Partnership. The National Action Plan 2020-2022" shows that:

"This Guide has been structured starting from these desiderata, but also from the principle that open government constitutes a paradigm shift for governments, public administrations, civil servants, citizens and stakeholders. Thus, the basic premise of open government starts from the idea that citizens can participate fully in life democracy of their country throughout the electoral cycle, as demonstrated by numerous studies OECD2, which confirmed increased citizens' satisfaction with concern governments to increase open government reforms and attempts to fill the need implementing mechanisms and instruments that can adequately respond to growing challenges complexes of current global and domestic policies. (...) In fact, societal changes, global economic dynamics, but also institutional techniques and approaches that need to be much more flexible, efficient and efficient create the right context for the paradigm shift at the level of policies targeting the new institutional design of the instruments through which the administration interacts with citizens. (...)" (Open Government Partnership. National Action Plan 2020-2022".. Source: General Secretariat of the Government, <https://sgg.gov.ro/1/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Ghid-final-12.11.2021.pdf>)

Inspired by international policies in the field (OGP - Open Government Partnership, OECD - The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) and sociological studies, the guide aims to develop an entire informative, consultative, deliberative and participatory mechanism at the level of public administration according to a series of models already tested in the English-speaking space (O'Grady, 2020: 518-521).

This mechanism is based on the current technological infrastructure on which new media operate. It is about new technologies, digital and the virtual space they make available to us. Basically, the digitization of communication and its move to the virtual world rebuilds not only the idea of communication, but also that of the public sphere. *The global village* of Marshall Mc Luhan (Mc Luhan, 1962, 1964) begins to exist today and thanks to public policies at national and international level. "The electronic market that provides citizens with an environment in which they can meet by surfing the Internet has been considered by many experts as a modern translation of Habermas' concept of the public sphere" (Bentivegna, 2002: 51-52).

Specifically, at the level of public administrations, new forms of communication with citizens are beginning to be established, such as *dedicated websites* and *social networks*. Among them, *the press* is a classic information formula that works in parallel with new methods of communication.

Email, dedicated Facebook group, WhatsApp, dedicated online platforms (YouTube) become useful communication tools with working groups, i.e. with a series of selected people who have specific skills in areas of interest. Therefore, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of communication in public administration, which has an impact not only on citizens and on the act of administration. The administration of a community is no longer just an activity that only those in the administrative apparatus delulate by virtue of norms and platforms assumed in electoral campaigns by candidates. It is a joint effort of the citizens of the community, the administration being the one that implements the common ideas and solutions. According to the new communication strategies, the informed citizen becomes an active and involved partner in the administrative activity of the community to which he belongs. At least theoretically and at the level of current policies and projections, this is the case.

However, it is illusory to imagine that the new public sphere created thanks to new communication technologies is homogeneous, and people show an equal and continuous interest in the field of public administration. As it currently stands, in Romania, citizens' participation and involvement is at an early stage, it is fragmentary, lacking consistency and not fully assumed. A simple online check of these communication tools of local public administrations in the Romanian space indicates a modest interest of the population for a partnership of this kind. It grows when there are more exciting themes at stake from the point of view of an audience or groups. In our opinion, the new public sphere reproduces and even augments in the virtual space differences of opinion and perspective and the particularities of different categories of real-life society. It consists of audiences and stakeholders (groups formed on specific areas of interest).

"In public relations, the term public encompasses any group of people who are linked, albeit weakly, by common interests and concerns that have consequences for the organization." (Newsom, Turk, Kruckeberg, 2010: 141). Any communication strategy within the public administration must take into account this diversity. In fact, in the specialized literature is built a typology of the public depending on the level of participation in debates on different topics. Thus, J.E. Grunig and F.C. Repper (Coman, 2004: 15) identify:

- *Active audience* represented by those who participate in all debates
- *Less active audience*, with sporadic participations and interventions
- *Activated groups* that react only to certain topics, generally to topics that come into the media's sights that turn them into hot and current topics.
- *Total inactive audience* is a category that we add and about which little is known. They do not express their opinions publicly and do not want to get involved in this partnership with administrative institutions. Probably, this category is recruited from among those who fuel electoral absenteeism.

In all this area, marked by different forms and degrees of participation, we cannot ignore the imitative behaviour of the crowd debated and analyzed in the psychology and sociology of the crowd by classic authors such as G. Tarde, G. Le Bon and others. As can easily be seen, the new public sphere formed in the virtual environment shows tendencies to differentiate and aggregate opinions and attitudes according to context, themes, comments and according to the message. In the same way, we notice a certain instability of attitudes at the level of the public, especially at the level of the uninformed public. This type of behaviour is easily visible in the online environment and represents a new form of contemporary tribalism, if we think of M. Maffesoli's saws (Maffesoli, 2000) resumed and adapted to the new technological contexts by the Romanian sociologist V. S. Dâncu (Dâncu, 2015). All this heralds a decline of individualism in its classical version. It is a decline at the value level that transfers

to the attitudinal, behavioural, communicational and relational level. The new tribalism gestated by digital communication technologies marks the triumph of *weak thinking* (Vattimo, 1995) and a permanent pendulum in a perpetual relativism. The transparency of the decision-making act at the level of public administration thanks to new communication technologies and cooperation with citizens can lead to a transparency of the public sphere in the sense of a randomly and inconsistently manifested interest subsumed to *weak thinking*.

In this context marked by a formidable openness to the public of decision-makers and administrative institutions, but also by the danger of inactivism and relativism, the new communication strategies could rebuild the public space in the sense of want, that of cooperation for the common good. Solutions are at hand and they are related to:

- A solid education of children and young people and educating the public in using new technologies in communicating with public authorities;
- Hiring staff specialized in online communication, on different platforms;
- Launching public awareness campaigns on the importance of involvement in decision-making through new communication formulas;
- Correct management of information delivered to the public in the sense of brevity, clarity and value;
- Proper management of information coming from the public, capitalizing on it in decision-making and providing feedback.

3. Advantages and limits of new forms of communication in administration

The effort to adapt the administrative activity to new technologies is a natural one. It is circumscribed to broader concepts of *good governance* and *e-government* and translates into large projects at European and national level¹. They involve providing information and services to citizens via the Internet in order to ensure transparency of decision-making and to improve governance and administration. A new tool represented by the online environment is interposed between the administration and citizens in order to facilitate access to the administrative institution and the services offered by them, but also to cooperate with citizens and gain their trust.

In 2019, the Authority for the Digitization of Romania was established in Romania "within the working apparatus of the Government and under the coordination of the Prime Minister, with the role of carrying out and coordinating the implementation of strategies and public policies in the field of digital transformation and information society"². Today, in 2023, there is a Ministry of Digitalization that has as main purpose the digitization of activity in different sectors of the public administration apparatus and beyond. In this context, the administration and governance activity is reconfigured both in relation to its tasks and in relation to the public.

Undoubtedly, all this marks a new beginning that promises a lot:

- It is a new expression of democracy;
- Transparentizes administrative activity;
- Facilitates access to information and services for the public;
- Informs in due time about the activities carried out, situations and problems;
- Facilitates citizens' participation in decision-making;
- Facilitates the process of notifying problems in the field;
- Provides feed-back;

¹ Research report published on the website of the National Agency of Civil Servants, signed by Anca Bucheru: "Public Administration closer to citizens through Social Media", project funded by EEA grants 2009 -2014, within the NGO fund in Romania, Component 1 – INVOLVEMENT, 2014, <http://www.anfp.gov.ro/R/Doc/2015/Proiecte/Social%20media/Raport%20cercetare%20social%20media.pdf>, consulted on 2.01.2022.

² The website of the Authority for the Digitization of Romania indicates the legislative basis on which it operates, as well as the duties it fulfills: <https://www.adr.gov.ro/atributii/>

- Provides a platform for discussion, debate and participation of citizens on topics of common interest;
- It ensures efficiency in terms of invested resources and capitalization of the population's feedback in decision-making plan. "(...) if pressing public policy issues are presented *online* in detail, and users are motivated to frequent sites specially designed for this purpose, it is possible that administrative institutions can benefit from solutions proposed by users or from emerging debate, starting from a negligible investment of resources" (Gherasim-Proca, 2014: 7).

The limits of this change in administrative activity through new communication strategies could be:

- A delimitation of public opinion only at the level of those who frequent the new media;
- Virtualization of the relationship with the public and the illusion of participation;
- Dilution of original information through takeovers, rollovers and reinterpretations in the online environment;
- Seizure of communion by certain social categories and groups irrelevant to the image of public opinion;
- Algorithmization of communication;
- The existence of communication barriers in terms of conceiving, perceiving and interpreting the message;
- Activating mechanisms to defend the public in front of an information avalanche, receiving only what they like or what they like (Abric, 2022: 16).
- The polarization of opinions and their radicalization due to an exaggerated narcissism cultivated by new communication platforms (Nichols, 2022: 107-108);
- Instability, pragmatism and relativism in expressing opinions and making decisions.

The results of a research (Beciu, 2009: 193-214) conducted by Camelia Beciu in 2007-2008, draw attention to aspects that betray a certain specificity of Romanians towards new projects and strategies regarding digitization and new forms of communication with local administrations. The author identifies among the investigated persons a sporty attention to the *procedural aspects* of digitization that help us *enter the ranks of the world*. Thus, respondents' attention is focused on forms and not on content, that is, on the profound changes involved in setting in motion a new mechanism of communication and relationship with citizens. Behind these attitudes could lie a series of mental aspects built over time, in our concrete relationship with institutions, authorities and standards that we have had to face over time.

From this perspective, it is worth reflecting on whether the new communication strategies in public administration and the entire e-government process are not perceived at a social level in all its complexity, the whole effort risking to have the fate of forms without substance.

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THE SOCIAL WORKER'S IMPORTANCE IN FOSTER CARE CASES

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Abstract: *The paper addresses the topic of family placement, this field being a very complex one, full of benefits, difficulties and of course problems. Social work in the field of foster care emerged as a response to the multitude of social problems that target abandoned children or children coming from dysfunctional families, who cannot live with their biological family, thus living with a "substitute" family. The qualitative research aims to identify the indicators that contribute to the success of a foster care case, the importance of the work of the social worker and the multidisciplinary team and the problems they face. In conclusion, foster care, although it has many shortcomings and problems of an organizational nature, is a second chance for less fortunate children to have a family and a life as close to normality as possible. The social worker plays a crucial role in the foster care process, aiming to create a safe and supportive environment for the child and facilitate a smooth and beneficial transition into his new family environment.*

Keywords: social worker, abandoned children, foster care, special protection, personalized intervention plan.

1. Introduction

According to specialized literature, the child protection system is characterized as a set of social services offered by the state, with the aim of supporting children who encounter various difficulties, and through social assistance services it can offer : material aid, a home in case of abandonment, medical and educational assistance (Roth, 2000: 70). Child protection services mainly address the following categories of children: victims of abuse, children who are or are to be adopted, children who have been temporarily or permanently abandoned in state institutions for various reasons, children who are part of marginalized minorities, family placement or substitute family, victims of discrimination, orphans, etc. (Zanca, 2010: 85).

The child protection system has two primary roles (Zanca R., 2010: 82): to offer specialized services to children facing difficulties of any nature and to persuade the legislative framework to be able to provide the best services to children.

One of the main institutions active in the field of child protection is the General Directorate of Social Care and Child Protection (GDSCCP), whose mission is to provide social care services that meet the needs identified among vulnerable groups, in order to improve the quality of life and provide a certain level of social security to the beneficiaries. GDSCCP has duties regarding the protection of children in situations of family abandonment, ill-treatment of minors, more precisely in everything related to the physical and mental safety of minors.

2. Social work and foster care

With the aim of protecting the child's best interests #, social services seek to satisfy the child's needs, for example: physical, educational, psychological development, belonging, etc. (Roth, Antal and Călian, 2019: 12).

In order to be able to offer a child the highest quality services, social services collaborate closely with all the institutions that influence the child's development, the most important ones being: the school (since education is a factor of great importance for his life and future), the medical system (the health status of the beneficiary is paramount), and of course the foster care system, if this is the case and the child has been separated from the

family (maternal caregiver or foster family), etc. Specialists conclude that this collaboration, if carried out in good conditions, can be extremely beneficial in the physical and mental development of the beneficiary, being like a “corporate parent” for the assisted young person and define it as a “professional protective shield” for children in need (Guishard-Pine, McCall and Hamilton, 2007: 110-111).

In our country, the services offered to children are characterized by preventing institutionalization and choosing an alternative care method such as: family placement, placement with a professional maternal assistant or adoption, which are much more favourable for the child’s optimal development, by offering a family environment to heal the wounds acquired as a result of abandonment (Zanca, 2010: 85). Family placement with a person with whom, preferably, the child has an attachment bond, for example: a member of the extended family, is more beneficial because it minimizes the risks of rejection, for this reason, it is a method that takes precedence over placement to the professional maternal assistant (Grigore, 2021: 406).

Every child needs attention, love, protection and a sense of security in order to have a proper development, these aspects being characteristic of a healthy family environment. Unfortunately, many children do not experience this, some come from toxic environments, suffer traumatic experiences, witness tragic events, experience unimaginable abuse (physical and mental) or are abandoned, and these factors leave a permanent imprint on their psyche (Luke, 2014: 15-16).

Since ensuring the child’s safety always comes first, the legislation in force opts in favour of placing children with extended family members, up to and including fourth degree relatives, and if this fact is not possible the best alternative is the professional maternal assistant whose aim is to care and raise the child (Grigore, 2021: 407).

In the case of a child under 3 years old, this can only be entrusted to the extended family, a residential type service and the maternal assistant, depending on the case and possibilities. In the case of a child up to 7 years old, who suffers from some form of disabling, serious locomotor problems or is in a state of dependence, this will be placed in a residential centre (Roth, Antal and Călian, 2019: 13). The placement measure is implemented only after the case manager performs a complex matching process in order to identify the family, person or foster carer who is the most suitable compared to the child’s needs and preferences (Grigore, 2021: 408).

Bejenaru (2011: 73-74) considers institutionalization to be a form of child protection with a very high insufficiency because it directly affects the children’s psychological development in a negative way and has substantially harmful effects on them, it being desirable to resort to alternative methods such as fostering or adoption. The development of social, emotional and cognitive skills, in the view of the authors Collins W. A. and Laursen B., has the most important point in childhood, being able to affect functional adaptation and the future of interpersonal relationships in adult life (Golu, 2021: 46).

An extremely important aspect in the case of placement is stability. Numerous studies have been carried out, which indicated that the placement measure has a beneficial impact on the children’s psycho-motor development, if they do not experience changes in the foster carers or the foster family. Every child has the right to feel loved, protected and to lead a life without considerable deprivation, and this is the parents’ responsibility, but unfortunately there are many cases where, for various reasons, this responsibility remains with the extended family, relatives or specialized authorities (Grigore, 2021:404).

3. Involvement of the social worker in family foster care cases

Abandonment is a traumatic, dehumanizing experience that can have serious lifelong repercussions. Many parents, constrained by situations and problems, have decided to abandon their children, to give them up for adoption. This decision has long-term

repercussions and is a period generally characterized by strong emotions, thoughts and remorse (Onici, 2021:88).

The social worker working in child protection has many duties and responsibilities, the main obligation being to respect the child's best interests and with priority to try and keep the child in the family environment. If life with the family of origin represents a risk for the child, then the social worker responsible for the case must identify the "resource persons" presented in the beneficiary's life, more precisely those with whom the child established attachment bonds, is familiar with (extended family, friends), so that the trauma of separation from one's parents not become "deeper" and to be able to feel safe (Grigore, 2021: 412).

According to the legislation in force, the social worker has the following obligations towards the beneficiary: to ensure that the child can develop positively from a physical and mental point of view, to have a family and socio-affective balance, to involve the child's family actively in taking decisions and in following the child's development and even care in the family environment, depending on the child's maturity, to take into account the child's wishes and opinions, to thoroughly analyse the child's history, taking into account the potential toxic, dehumanizing situations to which the child may have been subjected, and to maintain a good relationship with the people with whom the child has emotional ties (Law 272/2004, art. 2).

In specialty literature, according to the interviews conducted by Butler I. and Williamson H., the social worker's characteristics are presented according to the children's views:

- to listen to what the children have to say without ridiculing them,
- not to judge them, nor try to impose their ideas, but to explain them and suggest the actions they would like to implement,
- to be open and not look at them with superiority,
- to be able to make a joke to set the mood,
- to be direct in expressing, not make empty promises,
- to keep confidentiality and ask for the children's opinion when they want to pass on information (Zanca, 2010: 98).

Another characteristic belonging to a good practitioner is the effective collaboration with the multidisciplinary team. In order to overcome the crisis situation, the social worker must analyse and mobilize the client's capacities to face the problem (Hurubean, 2011: 529). In order to provide specialized assistance to families and children in need, in many areas of interest, the multidisciplinary team can be made up of: social worker, psychologist, counsellor, psycho-pedagogue, doctor, etc. (Gherguț, 2011: 959).

4. Qualitative research

The qualitative research *aimed* to identify the indicators that contributed to the success of a foster care case, the importance of the social worker's work and that of the multidisciplinary team and the problems they faced. The method used was a sociological survey based on an interview guide.

The formulated *objectives* were:

- *Objective 1*: Success of a foster care case.
- *Objective 2*: The importance of the social worker's work and that of the multidisciplinary team.
- *Objective 3*: Problems faced by social workers in foster care cases.

Three thematic units corresponding to 11 support questions were formulated and the interview guide was applied to 39 social workers from the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Caraș-Severin.

After analysing the data from the conducted interviews, we can conclude the following:

- ✓ According to the social worker's view, the success of a family placement case can be evaluated by several criteria, and these depend on the specific objectives and needs

belonging the child involved. The specified indicators that can help define success in a foster care case are:

- The child's wellbeing and development:
 - health status: if the child's health status improved and was properly managed during the placement;
 - school progress: school performance and participation in educational activities;
 - emotional and social development: the child's ability to form healthy relationships and cope with emotional changes.
- The child's adaptation to the family through the degree of connection and stability in the relationship with the family and the child's involvement in family activities and the relationship with other family members;
- The reunification with the biological family by evaluating progress in this direction;
- The support provided to the biological family: assessing how the biological family receives support and resources to improve parenting skills and solve family issues;
- The integration into the community by involving the child in community activities and services, thus developing positive connections outside the family environment;
- Advice and support to manage challenges that may arise during the placement.
- ✓ The social worker's activity in the context of family placement consists of: initial assessment, preparation and training of foster families, monitoring and evaluating the child's evolution of the child in the new environment and in relationship with the foster family, emotional support, steps to reunify the child with the biological family. This involves assessing the child's well-being and identifying any problems or difficulties that may arise.

✓ The multidisciplinary team plays an essential role in foster care to ensure that all relevant aspects of the child's life are considered and addressed appropriately. This team involves professionals from different fields such as social workers, psychologists, doctors, educators and other specialists who work together to support the child and the foster family. Here are some aspects of the roles of the multidisciplinary team in foster care as stated by the respondents:

- the members of the multidisciplinary team contribute to the assessment of child's needs and capacities and those of the biological family, as well as the foster family. This assessment may include medical, psychological, educational and social aspects;
- psychologists and social workers in the team offer counselling and emotional support both to the child and to the families involved in the placement process;
- the multidisciplinary team works together to develop and implement a care and support plan for the child. This involves coordinating the services provided by different professional areas to ensure a holistic approach. It also regularly monitors the child's progress in the fostering environment and in the relationship with the foster family. Periodic evaluations ensure the necessary adjustments in the individualized protection plan;
- members of the multidisciplinary team collaborate to encourage and facilitate bonding between the child and one's biological family, including exploring reunification options.

✓ Social workers face a number of challenges and problems in managing foster care cases. These may vary depending on the specific circumstances of each case, but there are some common issues they may face:

- the rigid bureaucratic system - social workers unanimously believe that bureaucracy makes it difficult to carry out one's activity and reduces the time they can allocate to meetings with the beneficiary and the foster family,
- the cases overload - all specialists believe that the workload is too high and affects their well-being because they face a lot of stress, fatigue, even depression. They believe that it would be ideal for a social worker to have between 20 and 30 cases at most, but the reality of the system does not allow it, and even shows increases in this regard.

- the stigma of foster care services - social workers presented incidents from their professional lives, in which they were confronted with the fact that this field is controversial, especially due to the fact that the population does not understand that the purpose of the measures taken by them is to defend the child's interests. The social work in foster care is misunderstood due to mass misinformation and this fact causes specialists to face misconceptions, as: "*you want to take people's children? To ruin families?*"
- the lack of staff - the reasons why the Caras-Severin Child Care Direction constantly faces staff turnover are due to workload, stress and the need for modernization. This human shortage directly affects the beneficiaries because they do not have a stable social worker-client relationship, this needing time to strengthen as such.
- insufficient resources are a problem, because there are more children in difficulty than the existing funds, so there is a limitation of actions that can be taken.

5. Conclusions

Foster care is a form of alternative care for children who, for various reasons, cannot remain in the care of their biological parents. This type of care involves placing children in the care of a foster family. The main purpose of foster care is to provide a safe and stable environment in which the child can grow and develop.

Success in a foster care case depends on an ongoing commitment of all parties involved, including social workers, foster families, children and other professionals from the multidisciplinary team. A supportive environment and adequate resources help maximize the chances of success in foster care.

Factors that can facilitate a smooth course of a family placement case were also identified: the counselling offered to the beneficiaries, the harmonious relationship with the foster family and the beneficiary (this factor having a high importance in avoiding conflicts, establishing collaboration and effective communication), but also the social worker's behaviour (being empathetic, understanding, without prejudice and not having an attitude of superiority towards anyone).

Through the collaboration of the multidisciplinary team members, an attempt is made to create an integrated and coherent environment that supports the development and child's well-being during the foster care period.

The social worker is extremely important in the implementation of family placement. Social workers encounter many difficulties and strive to provide quality services even though they are overworked and overloaded. Due to the large caseload, social workers may have difficulty providing individualized monitoring and support to each child and each foster family.

Administrative requirements can add additional burden and delay processes, affecting the effectiveness of the intervention. Social workers must navigate a complex legal framework, including placement proceedings. Also, difficult cases, which frequently involve situations of suffering and trauma, can have an emotional impact on social workers. Solving these problems often requires collaborative efforts between social workers, other involved professions and the community as a whole. Also, continuous support from the administration and adequate resources can help improve the effectiveness of social services.

The social worker, together with the multidisciplinary team, plays a very important role in the family placement process, aims to create a safe and supportive environment for the child and facilitate a smooth and beneficial transition in the new family environment.

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INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND THE SOCIAL ASSISTANT'S INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT THE ELDERLY

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Abstract: *Social care for institutionalized aged people refers to the services and support provided by social care professionals in care centres and homes for the elderly. The main aim of social care in this context is to improve the quality of life and well-being of the elderly by providing appropriate care and support. The quantitative research was carried out in the residential centre "Bocsa Home for the Elderly" with the aim of analysing the quality of social services in the centre, as well as the social worker activity and the interaction with the institutionalized elderly. The purpose of the qualitative research was to underline the social workers' opinions regarding the quality of social services offered at the Bocsa Home for the Elderly, according to their needs, as well as the collaborative activity of the social worker in relation to the elderly. The social worker's role in nursing homes is essential in ensuring the well-being and quality of life of their residents. A well-designed individualized plan can ensure adequate care and support, while also respecting the individual preferences of the institutionalized elderly and promoting a higher quality of life at this stage of life.*

Keywords: elderly, social worker, institutionalization, quality of services, multidisciplinary team.

1. Introduction

Becoming old is as a natural and inevitable biological transformation, where each individual has a rhythm of aging (Sorescu, 2010: 327).

Old age refers to "the final period of life, which begins with the age of 60-65 years, after the adult period, the period of old age is obviously characterized by the gradual decrease of physiological functions, with its particularities and characteristics" (Bodi, 2017: 41).

Age and aging are discussed by specialists from different points of view. The dimension we think of most often is chronological age, defined as the number of years since birth. A second dimension is biological aging, which refers to the physical changes that "slow people down" as they enter middle and older years. A third dimension, psychological aging, refers to the psychological changes, including those involving mental functioning and personality, that occur as people age. Gerontologists point out that chronological age is not always the same as biological or psychological age. Some people who are 65 years old, for example, may look and act much younger than others who are 50 years old (Rowe and Kahn, 1998: 88-89).

According to a definition provided by the World Bank, the social protection system is the one responsible for capital improvement and protection measures, the one that intervenes in the labour market and in the case of public unemployment or old age insurance. The International Labor Office refers to the public measures that society must take in Favor of its members, so that they are protected against economic, social or medical problems (Enache, 2019: 9).

2. Theories of aging

There are several theories that address aging and the aging process of the human body and mind. Here are some of the most popular theories:

a. The theory of disengagement takes into consideration the withdrawal of the person from the field of work and the focus on one's person (Potâng and Popescu, 2022: 115).

According to this theory, society withdraws some social roles from the elderly, a fact due to the decrease in their functionality, giving the elderly more time to enjoy life.

b. The continuity theory shows that the adult's progress is a continuous process, without interruption, not very well understood. It is shown that the elderly have a habit of engaging in similar activities to those realized before retirement. The solution to being able to stay within society is to stay active by practicing a hobby (Bodi, 2017: 77-79).

c. The transpersonal theory according to which the human personality in social care covers, in addition to the biological, the cognitive, moral, social and the spiritual dimensions. It focuses on the human soul, on the spirit; its ultimate target being the relation between the personality and the total self. People are a build of a mixture of important elements: emotional, physical and spiritual that bring a state of balance and understanding to the human being (Măța, 2018: 57).

d. The activity theory is based on the premise that older people must remain active and engaged in social and productive activities to maintain their satisfaction and well-being. According to this theory, engaging in physical, intellectual and social activities can contribute to healthy aging and a high quality of life. Some of the authors claim that a lot of factors can influence the relationships of dynamism and lifestyle: socioeconomic status, personality traits, etc. (Bodi, 2017: .74-75).

e. The Biological Aging Theory focuses on the biological and genetic processes that underlie aging. Biological aging occurs with aging and is due to the changes that occur at the level of all organs (Stanciu, 2016: 508).

f. The role theory, when it comes to the elderly, transposes this age as a subject or theme of adaptation to role changes (Curaj, 2010: 283).

g. The Cognitive Reserve Theory suggests that the individual can develop and accumulate cognitive reserves throughout life, which can provide protection against cognitive decline associated with aging. Cognitive reserves can be built by engaging in intellectual activities, continuing education, cognitive stimulation and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

h. The theory of social change has very important contributions in the social status and in the expectations of others towards the roles of the person analysed. The social and economic status lead to the exclusion of the elderly population, where economic infrastructure and social class, through limited access to matter, make the difference (Curaj, 2010: 284-285).

3. The causes and effects of institutionalization

There are several causes that can lead to the institutionalization of elderly people. These include (Măța, 2018: 73):

- The loss of health and the inability to live independently: health problems, such as chronic diseases, physical or cognitive disabilities, can make an elderly person no longer able to care for themselves or live independently.

- The lack of family or social support: sometimes elderly people may face the absence of family or social support networks. Lack of emotional, financial or physical support may result in the need to be institutionalized to receive adequate care and assistance.

- The lack of financial resources: The high costs of home care services or care in a community can exceed the financial resources of an elderly person. In such cases, institutionalization may become a more financially affordable option.

- The lack of adequate care services in the community: Some communities may have a limited offer of home care or support services for the elderly. The lack of these services may cause the elderly to turn to institutions where they can receive adequate care and assistance.

Institutionalization of the elderly can have various effects on them. Some of the most common effects include (Bucur and Bucur, 2011: 1047):

- The impact on the emotional and psychological state: institutionalization can have a significant impact on the emotional and psychological state of the elderly. Separation from the

familiar environment and usual routine can cause feelings of sadness, loneliness, anxiety and depression. Adapting to a new environment and interacting with other residents can also be challenging.

- Declining health: institutionalization can be associated with a deterioration in the general health of the elderly.

- Loss of autonomy and independence: institutionalization can lead to a loss of autonomy and independence. Elderly people may be subject to strict rules and a predetermined routine within the institution. The ability to make decisions about their own lives may be limited or diminished.

- Changing social relationships: Institutionalization can affect the social relationships of the elderly. Separation from family and close friends can lead to isolation and lack of emotional support. At the same time, interaction with other residents and facility staff can provide opportunities for socializing and creating new social bonds.

- Quality of medical and social care: Nursing facilities can vary in the quality of medical and social care provided. The quality of services and the attitude of staff can influence the well-being and satisfaction of older people. Access to appropriate medical services and specific treatments can also be an important factor.

- Increased risk of abuse and neglect: In some cases, institutionalized elderly people may be exposed to the risk of abuse and neglect. Lack of proper supervision or physical, emotional or financial abuse can have a negative impact on their health and well-being.

Due to these causes and effects, creating an individualized plan for an institutionalized elderly person is essential. This is an important tool for ensuring personalized care and assistance tailored to the resident's individual needs and preferences. This plan should be developed in collaboration with the older person and take into account the initial assessment of needs and resources available in the facility.

4. Quantitative research

The investigation consisted in carrying out a quantitative research at the residential centre "*Bocsa Home for the Elderly*". To further analyse this theme, an opinion survey was applied to the elderly, which is a specific form of sociological survey.

The purpose of this research was to find out the opinion of the beneficiaries of "*Bocsa Home for the Elderly*" about the quality of social services offered within the permanent centre, as well as the activity of the social worker and the interaction with the institutionalized elderly.

Objectives:

- the care provided by "*Bocsa Home for the Elderly*" ensures the continuation of life in a decent manner;

- the duties and activities of the social worker are consistent.

The starting assumptions were:

- If the services quality standards are respected, then the elderly will integrate more easily to the conditions in the home;

- If the social workers carry out their activity according to their duties, then the elderly will be satisfied.

The questionnaire was applied to a number of 50 beneficiaries, aged between 64 and 87 years, from the "*Bocsa Home for the Elderly*", it includes a number of eleven closed questions.

Following the application of the questionnaires and the quantification of the data gathered, one can observe the validation of the hypotheses as follows:

- 91% of the elderly declared that they had received informative materials presenting the residential institution;

- the home services provided by nurses are appreciated by 55% of the beneficiaries;

- over 65% of the beneficiaries were accompanied by their family at the time of institutionalization;
- regarding the living conditions in the dormitory, the majority of the elderly (90%) are satisfied;
- the beneficiaries of the centre are satisfied with the hygiene and food conditions in the dormitory (52% are very satisfied and 46% are satisfied);
- according to the quality of the services offered by the Bocsă Home for the Elderly, 52% of the beneficiaries are very satisfied and 42% of them are satisfied with the quality of the services offered in the home.
- the elderly know the assessment of individual needs which is carried out by the multidisciplinary team in proportion to 94%;
- when analysing the identification of the activity to adapt to the home, a percentage of 92% of those questioned believe that the social worker has identified the individual needs during the adaptation period;
- the social worker encourages the beneficiaries to live an active life (88%), activities in which the elderly from the residential home take part;
- all the social workers support the beneficiaries in their relationships with the family (94%);
- the elderly are satisfied with the activity of the social worker, as well as with the interaction the social worker (60% very satisfied, 36% satisfied).

5. Qualitative research

Qualitative research is a research that is based on the appropriation of social facts. It supervises the processing of data that is used in achievements rich in content. (Chelcea, 2022: 55)

The purpose of the qualitative research was to identify the social workers' opinion regarding the quality of the social services offered at the Bocsă Home for the Elderly, when discussing the needs of the elderly as well as the collaborative activity of the social worker in relation to the elderly.

Objectives of qualitative research:

Objective 1: The offer of the home for the elderly and their relatives;

Objective 2: Quality of social services offered at "Bocsă Home for the Elderly";

Objective 3: Socialization and active life of the elderly.

The interview guide was applied to two social workers from the "Bocsă Home for the Elderly". The interview guide was applied through the interviewing technique and its structure was based on three thematic units and ten supporting questions.

Thematic unit 1: The offer of the home for the elderly and after institutionalization, maintaining the connection with the family.

Support questions: *Does the centre have information materials for the elderly and their relatives?* (question no. 1)

Social worker (SW) 1: *We present to the elderly, as well as to their relatives, the offer of this home, the service contract and the contribution of the beneficiary.*

SW2: *Yes. At the level of social services, there must be informative material about and for the elderly, and this consists of information on the activity and services offered, the organization and operation of the centre, the purpose, function and admission to the re and last but not least, the obligations and rights of the beneficiaries .*

Support questions: *Does the home support beneficiaries in maintaining contact with family?* (question no. 4)

SW1: *Our support in maintaining the relationship between them and their families, where appropriate is represented by immediately carrying out an assessment of the existing*

relationships and making available a visiting program within the home, public phone in the unit where they can call their close people without restrictions.

SW2: Family members and friends can visit the beneficiary during the time interval set by the centre.

Thematic unit 2: The role of the social worker in increasing the quality of social services offered at the Bocsa Home for the Elderly

Supporting questions: *How is care for beneficiaries done? (question no. 2)*

SW1: When we talk about the care offered to the beneficiaries, I can say that in our home it is done with great professionalism. Care takes place on three broad levels: social, socio-medical and nursing. The medical ones include primary medical care, recovery and rehabilitation, body care services, hygiene, feeding, mobilization, movement, dressing and undressing, etc. and social activities are cultural, sports, artistic, recreational, socializing and many leisure activities.

SW2: Each of the beneficiaries is assisted and cared for in the centre based on an assessment of individual needs.

Support questions: *“What are the biggest problems of the elderly in the home?” (question no. 6)*

SW1: Lack of affection, various pathologies, feeling of uselessness.

SW2: The problems of the elderly are diverse, but the biggest ones are of a medical nature, loneliness is also present, we are talking about the feeling of “abandonment” by the family and relatives, the lack of living at home, that is, the environment they were used to being a part of and he from the problems of the elderly in the institution.

Support questions: *“What is your involvement in improving the quality of social services?” (question no. 7)*

SW1: The home involvement in increasing the quality of the social services provided is according to the needs of the beneficiaries, according to the individualized care plan.

SW2: It is a major involvement, according to the individualized care plan.

Support questions: *“What do the elderly in the centre mean to you?” (question no. 8)*

SW1: The elderly are a source of wisdom, love and maturity.

SW2: We love them, we respect them and we want to help them in the last period of their lives.

Support questions: *“How important is the intervention plan drawn up by the social worker, together with the multidisciplinary team?” (question no. 9)*

SW1: The intervention plan is developed based on the evaluation/re-evaluation of the beneficiary's needs, the data contained in the documents issued by the structures specialized in complex evaluation, in the medical evaluations and recommendations, in the documents issued by other specialized structures, carried out by the social worker together with the multidisciplinary team in a mandatory manner.

SW2: The total evaluation of the elderly is carried out by the multidisciplinary team and the beneficiary admitted to the centre is evaluated from the point of view of physical and mental functional status, health status and degree of preserved autonomy, family and social relationships. The re-evaluation is carried out annually, as well as when necessary, when there are significant changes in the physical and/or mental health of the beneficiary.

Support questions: *“Does the centre provide services to each beneficiary according to an individualized assistance and care plan?” (question no. 10)*

SW1: The residential centre provides services to each beneficiary according to an individualized assistance and care plan, an intervention plan that is developed based on the needs of the beneficiary, the data contained in the documents issued by the structures specialized in complex assessment, in the medical assessments and recommendations and includes information such as : name and age of the beneficiary; the name and profession of the people who developed the plan; the name of the case manager; the activities carried out or the services provided to cover personal care needs, maintaining and/or improving health and physical and

mental autonomy, functional recovery needs, social integration/reintegration needs; scheduling activities and services: daily, weekly or monthly; plan review deadlines.

SW2: The intervention plan that is developed based on the evaluation/re-evaluation of the beneficiary's needs and represents the monitoring of the beneficiary's situation and the application of the individualized assistance and the care plan is carried out by a case manager, who in our centre is the social worker.

Thematic unit 3: *“The importance of socialization and maintaining an active life among the elderly”*

Support questions: *“Are there socializing activities in the centre?”* (question no. 3)

SW1: Social activities are our high point. Some of these are: interactive games, sports, household, trips, birthdays of each senior, reading hours, watching movies and documentaries, receiving visitors, etc.

SW2: Yes, there are socializing activities, we celebrate seniors' birthdays, March 8th, religious holidays, etc.

Support questions: *“Does the centre encourage the active life of the beneficiaries?”* (question no. 5)

SW1: The centre develops a monthly program of activities to promote active living.

SW2: We have different programs of activities for all categories of beneficiaries, projects with direct involvement in the community, participation in a healthy lifestyle (sports, gardening, volunteering) and we encourage an active aging of the beneficiaries.

Conclusions of the interview guide

An elderly person adapts more easily to the conditions of a residential home if the quality of services reaches high standards. Involvement in increasing the quality of services is done according to the needs of each person, according to the individualized support and care plan.

From the dialogue with the two social workers, one can say that the social workers contribute to informing the elderly with explanations and informative materials that include: a brief description of the centre and the services offered, other services and facilities offered, the manner in which the contract can be concluded and, as the case may be, the method of calculating the beneficiary's contribution.

The elderly were satisfied, the social worker performed activities according to the duties. The active life of the elderly is encouraged by social workers, with participation in a healthy lifestyle and a monthly program of activities. Family members can visit the beneficiaries after a well-established schedule by the centre, with the beneficiaries having a public phone where they can call their relatives.

We can state that the care offered to beneficiaries is done with great professionalism, it is executed in three directions and the care is done based on an assessment of individual needs.

Family members can visit the beneficiaries after a well-established schedule by the centre, with the beneficiaries having a public phone where they can call their relatives.

Some of the problems identified in the elderly are uselessness, lack of affection, lack of living at home, abandonment, etc.

Involvement in increasing the quality of services is done according to the needs of each person, according to the individualized assistance and care plan, which is carried out by a case manager, in this case the social worker.

The intervention plan is developed based on the evaluation/re-evaluation of the beneficiary's needs, the data contained in the documents issued by the structures specialized in complex evaluation, in the medical evaluations and recommendations, in the documents issued by other specialized structures, carried out by the social worker together with the multidisciplinary team and which is mandatory.

Various socializing activities, interactive games, birthdays and religious holidays are celebrated in the centre.

The active life of the elderly is encouraged by social workers, with participation in a healthy lifestyle and a monthly program of activities.

For social workers, the elderly, the beneficiaries of the institution, represent sources of wisdom, love, respect and help them in their last period of life.

6. General conclusions of the paper

The situation of institutionalized elderly people in Romania can be influenced by several factors, including the financial resources available for social assistance, the quality of the services offered and the infrastructure of the institutions. These care facilities for the elderly are mainly intended for elderly people who need constant assistance and care, either due to health problems or due to the absence of a family support network.

Nursing home social care management involves planning, organizing, coordinating and monitoring the activities and resources needed to provide adequate care and support to institutionalized older people. It involves managing both administrative and operational aspects as well as aspects related to the care and well-being of residents.

The multidisciplinary team in the context of nursing home social care services is made up of different people with complementary expertise and skills who work together to ensure appropriate care and support for residents. Each member of the team has specific role and responsibilities, contributing to the overall goals of care and well-being of older people.

The role of the social worker is to assess the residents' social and emotional needs, provide support and counselling, coordinate social assistance services and facilitate the integration of residents into the community. Its activities include initial and ongoing assessment of residents' needs, development and implementation of individual care plans, support in solving social problems and organization of recreational and social activities.

The quality of services in care facilities must be an important concern. A person-centred approach to elderly care is important, focusing on their individual needs and preferences and actively involving them in the decision-making process. Ensuring adequate living conditions, well-trained and sufficient staff, and adequate social and medical assistance is essential. Strict supervision and regulation of care facilities is necessary to ensure that quality standards are met.

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WOMEN OF THIRD WORLD AND GENDER EQUALITY

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Abstract: *Many questions appear in minds are connected to the woman's role and position in political ball, whether she is an affective player in decision-making, or she is just a doll who satisfies man's needs. Thereon, this article examines female struggles in decision-making. Also, it studies basic notions that are related to women of third world and gender equality. Without any doubt, woman is the mother, the sister, the daughter and the wife, she is the person who brings to the world a new life, and she is considered as the core of the family. Therefore, the purpose from this work is to draw attention to this unfair bias against equality of the genders; which has gradually broken down when the time has come for women to demand for their rights as citizens, and also challenging men in their political, social and economic world. Moreover, the growing global interest in the issue of women's development enables them to achieve their roles successfully by holding a series of seminars and conferences that emphasize the need to support the role of women from the importance of their position in society. The result from this research ends with the fact that women were able to show the world in general and men in particular, that they are accomplished to succeed the responsibilities that are related to both relatives and regime. Besides, they confirm that politics is not only man's game.*

Keywords: gender-equality, politics, power, society, third-world, woman.

1. Introduction

Much of Western feminist states theory in the 1900s has largely ignored the experience of the Third World women under the post-colonial situations, because most Third World states can be categorized as 'weak' states. Moreover, women in these circumstances were not aware about their rights. Thus, this chapter illustrates how women from underdeveloped countries could challenge the difficulties that made by males in order to control females and asking for their privileges and rights.

2. Woman and Third World Society

The third world which is known as 'backward', 'underdeveloped', 'undeveloped' or 'developing' is considered as less developed to the first, or second world which consists of the African, a quantity of Asian, and a number of Latin American countries. All are witnessing an explosion in demographic and urban growth, with repetition economic sectors (industry sector modern and traditional), and its dependence on the export of raw materials plus semi-finished materials and failure to achieve self-sufficiency in food. In addition to the increasing foreign debts, and economic dependence of the former colonial countries, these facts did not stop the western feminism spring of twentieth century which went beyond the European continents to get in touch with the third world women who strongly were influenced by the courage of the first world women.

Nevertheless, before the mid of the twentieth century the Indian writer Chandra Mohanty (1991) stated that, "For too long, women in the third world have been considered not agents of their own destiny, but victims". (Ray, Kortewge, 1999: 47). For the reason that, most of the third world women were suffering from racism, discrimination, widow burning (in India), female infanticide (i.e., the practice of killing an unwanted newborn), and female genital cutting (FGC) which is also known as "infibulations". According to the definition of the World Health Organization (FGC) refers to the partial or total removal of the external female genital, or injury the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. Moreover, the table below

shows the countries that use the female genital cutting (FGC) to their girls. This tradition still applies until the present day.

Table 1: Popularity of FGM percent in the Third world

Country	Prevalence of FGC	Country	Prevalence of FGC
Somalia	98%	Ivory Coast	36%
Djibouti	96%	Nigeria	27%
Guinea	93%	Kenya	27%
Egypt	91%	Senegal	26%
Eritrea	89%	Cent. African Rep.	24%
Mali	98%	Yemen	23%
Sierra Leone	88%	Tanzania	15%
Sudan	88%	Benin	13%
Burkina Faso	76%	Iraq	8%
The Gambia	76%	Ghana	4%
Ethiopia	74%	Togo	4%
Mauritania	69%	Niger	2%
Liberia	66%	Uganda	1%
Guinea-Bissau	50%	Cameroon	1%
Chad	44%		

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/feb/06/what-is-female-genital-mutilation-where-happen>

Accordingly, the table above illustrates that most of African and even Muslim counties as Egypt, Mali and Sudan using the custom of the **Female Genital Cutting** without any specific reasons, forgetting human rights and the pain of their daughters and wives. Unfortunately this act is still until today in some African tribes.

3. Women's Wakefulness

Third World feminist in the twentieth represented a challenge to the dominance applied by Western feminism in the context of the development of feminist thought, which always tends to ignore the specific capabilities of the ethnic groups that are outside the Western cultural perceptions. Hence, during the 19th and 20th, most Western female were describing the Third World women as sisterhood but when those females were granted their rights in the 1900's some of them started treating the women of developing countries in their literary works "as passive victims of barbaric and primitive treatments".(Haleh Afshar, 1996: 10)

In other words, the Western feminists closed the eyes to the role and experience of the Third World women during the post-colonial era. So as retribution to what was written against the Third world women many feminists' writers from the backward appeared and astonishing the Western with their writings such as, the Indian novelist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak with her famous novel *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In (1988), Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Sheila Sandoval who criticized the stereotype image of the Middle East and North African women (MENA) which were given by Western feminists who are not relating to the third world women's culture and did not have any idea about how those women were living. Relating to this, Chandra Talpade Mahonty in her book "Under Western Eyes " (1991) criticized first world feminists for their view on the third world's females as well as she drew a method reductive portraying by ordinary women in the Third World in feminist discourse. In fact the Western women were portrayed as; knowledgeable, modern, and in control of their bodies who have the right to share their ideas in a public and political sphere, with enjoy the freedom to take decisions. Whereas women that belong to the Third world were portrayed as; living a bitty life, because they are ignorance due to the lack of education, uncivilized and living in poverty as well as they obey the traditional culture which ruled by men. In this point,

Chuchryk a Chilean woman writer (1989) illustrated that, most of women in developing countries stayed with their husbands for the sake of their children when she said:

“I married when I was 14 years old.... I have been living with my husband for thirty years.... When the girls were born, I slept with them, after working like a dog all day long. He never helped me, slept in the other room. Then, when the girls were still, he would come and get me. He would fulfill himself and that was it. Me, never.... But because of my daughters I put up with everything. I live for them.” (Haleh Afshar, 1996: 69)

This events and the thought of Western women on (MENA) made women of the Third World recognizing that feminist movement does not mean only the demand for equal right but in fact it goes beyond this, it is about creating spaces with the purposes and objectives of engaging into cultural boundaries, and this idea was identified by Talpade Chandra Mohanty as ‘imagined community’. As well as, they were looking for tools in order to improve that they were capable to obtain their right as the western females did in the 1900’s.

4. Women’s Struggles in the Third World Nations

The Third World witnessed a variety of women’s liberations that were searching for freedom from enslavement and racism. However, when Western women were struggled to expand their political privileges in the nineteenth and twentieth century, women in the Third World were experienced the authoritarian and military regimes of the colonialism at that time especially in Africa. The movements in the Third World emerged as a nationalist movements seeking for the independence from colonialism. Before addressing in this issue, the one should know that the National liberation movements from the eighteenth until the mid of the twentieth century have a fundamental influence in highlighting the position of Women who played an essential role in the war against the colonialism.

4.1. Women’s Suffrage in the 20th Century

Women’s struggle in the Third World was invisible under the control of males in decision making. Thus these women were often used terms as motherhood and ‘complementarily’ instead of equality with the aim of achieving some possessions as comfort life and safety for their children. Furthermore, the women in both Asia, Africa and Latin America were struggled for their own benefits differing with the Western female who were fighting not only for their personal sakes but also to climb the highest position in the state.

Therefore, Azerbaijan was the first Muslim nation that enfranchises women in (1918) after the collapse of Russian empire in the country. In addition to The Brazilian women who could win the suffrage right on a national level in (1933), and in (1988) they became completely equal to men in all the legal aspects, where the nation observed a huge participation in social and economic employments in (1970) and (1980) furthermore many female ministers entered the the Brazilian cabinet in the government of João Baptista do Oliveira Figueiredo (1979-1985).

Also, females in Indonesia were granted the suffrage right in November (1941), and Roden Ajeng Kartini was one of the famous women who sopped the women’s movement in Indonesia as well as she was best known by her speech, “*Habis Gelap, Terbitlal Terang*” i.e.,(After Dark, comes the Light). Additionally, Japan gave women the suffrage right in (1945), also women in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were gaining the right to vote in (1947) and Women in Argentine gained their suffrage rights in (1947) but many struggles happen after that during the government of the dictator Gorgy Rafael Videla in (1976) who was kidnapped about 500 children from their families in order to train them as soldiers. Thanks to the Argentinean women’s revolution and the strong demand for their captured children who never comeback could end the rule of Gorgy Rafael Videla in (1981).

Concerning the women in Arab countries, most of them granted the right to vote after the independence such as Turkey in (1930), Algeria in (1962), Iran in (1963) with the exception of Kuwait who first granted women in (1985) but later it was removed than granted

women in Kuwait for the second time in (2006) while women in Saudi Arabia did not have the right to vote. Thereon, by the end of the nineteenth century almost all the women were giving the right to participate in elections thanks to the women’s struggles and help of many feminist conferences that hold for the aim of assisting the Third world women.

5. Famous Conferences Supporting Women’s Rights

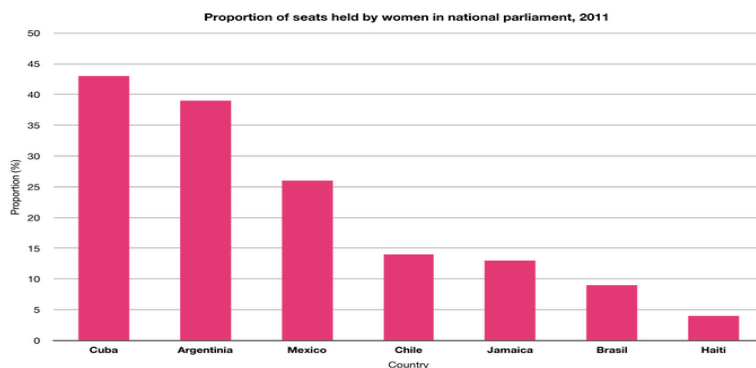
There were four famous world conferences which took place between (1975) and (1995) with the intention of raising the idea of freedom for women that was used first by Western feminism. Furthermore, the first conference on women was in Mexico City in 1975, than in Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995. the aim and the focus of these conferences was to give women liberty as any other citizen. In addition to the Conference on Environment, and Development (1992, Rio de Janeiro), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993, Vienna), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994, Cairo), and the World Summit on Social Development (1995, Copenhagen). Hence, the purpose from these last conferences was to seek the problem of violence against women in the world.

Women’s groups in both Western and Third world actively participated in these conferences and had a positive effect on the processes, results and decisions exploring how the key issues and perspectives dealt with each conference that can carry with it a precious chance for evaluating the tasks of the modern international women’s movement. The theme of all four UN conferences on women, were “Equality, Development, and Peace”. This notions looks at two key issues: first the politics of development and second building solidarity across differences. According to these conferences on women’s issues, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

“The authority of government is grounded in the will of the people. Half, even more than half, of ‘the people’ are women. Yet for far too long, women’s will, women’s voices, women’s interests, priorities, and needs have not been heard, have not determined who governs, have not guided how they govern, and to what ends. Since women are amongst the least powerful of citizens, with the fewest social and economic resources on which to build political power, special efforts are often needed to elicit and amplify their voice.” (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. 2008/09: 30)

Gratitude to these conferences which were done in order to create a kind of equality between men and women in political participation women - although they still marginalized in decision-making particularly in the Third world - they could put their hands on some seats in national parliament during the 21st century as it is shown in the subsequent diagram.

Figure 3: Third world women in national parliament seats in 2011.



Source: www.Womenindecisionmaking.com (images)

This diagram shows that women in both Cuba and Argentina are members in parliament with more than 35% (Cuba +40%, Argentina 40%) also women MPs in Latin America increase to 25%, Chile and Jamaica with 15%, whereas, women as MPs in Brazil and Haiti enhance less than 10% of seats in national parliament.

6. Arab Women and Political Participation

Arab Women usually suffer from inequality and discrimination between them and men in many social and political spheres, and this goes back to the leftovers of the colonialism in the 19th century and early the 20th century, particularly in the Arab countries and the Third world generally where corruption and hypocrisy are threaten those societies. Actually it is prohibited for an Arab Muslim nation to accept a woman as a president.

Even so, Islam gives women their rights as equal as man without any vague and the best proof of this is the number of fences that mentioned in the Qur'an which Enhance the status of women in the life. On one hand, some believers support the notion of Political Rights of Women in Islam. On the other hand, there are no legitimate limitations or officially authorized on the participation of Arabian women in political parties, parliament, government and decision-making, nevertheless, the only problem here is the lack of female participation in controlling political power to the community as a governor.

7. Conclusion

Although women are still marginalized in some Third world and Arab societies, but they bravely could challenge men in decision-making. The realization of the principle of equality and to guarantee the participation of women in the administration of the state and politics is very important in order to build strong nations that stands on freedom, equality and democracy, and this is not because the woman is a major contributor to the production of material goods and spiritual only, but also, she considered as an essential product for life also. Woman from the backward was able to build her own strong personality and to be among the characters in both the cultural and the political sphere such as the Brazilian President [Dilma Rousseff](#) in (2011); [Sonia Gandhi](#), President of the Indian National Congress Party in (1998-2004); [Cristina Fernandez](#), President of Argentina from (2003 to 2007). In addition to [Yingluck Shinawatra](#), Prime Minister of Thailand in (2011), and [Laura Chinchilla](#), President of Costa Rica in (2010). All these women confirmed that women are capable government leaders equal to men.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY IN EASTERN CAMEROON

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Abstract: *The recurrence of conflict and violence in the CAR in the 1990s and early 2000s underpinned the movement of people from this country to Cameroon. The avalanche of people fleeing war, atrocities perpetrated by politico-military groups and highwaymen along the eastern borders, constitutes a serious security threat. This threat can be understood in terms of its immediate effects and long-term impacts on East Cameroon. The dynamics of these cross-border migratory movements have had direct repercussions on the political, economic, social and physical life of the populations of Cameroon's eastern fringe. Based on empirical documentation in the form of books, articles, press clippings and newspapers, directive and semi-directive interviews, and field observations of various actors and protagonists, this article aims, in short, to show and highlight the impacts of cross-border mobility on security in East Cameroon, a geographical entity contiguous with the Central African Republic.*

Keywords: Impacts, Cross-border, Mobility, East Cameroon.

1. Introduction

In Central Africa, due to its geographical position (bordering almost all the countries in the sub-region) and its political stability, Cameroon has been hosting, since the early 1990s on its eastern side, populations fleeing exactions linked to socio-political unrest in CAR (UNHCR, 2013: 7), mutinies and various crises. According to statistics from the United Nations Population Division (UNPD), taking into account forced mobility, the total immigrant population in Cameroon was 246,171 in 1995, 228,383 in 2000 and 211,880 in 2005, or 1.2% of the total population. Forecasts by this United Nations agency put the number at 196,570 immigrants in 2010 (DPNU, 2009). This high rate of migration put Cameroon in a strong position. In addition to this massive influx of refugees (forced mobility), in the eastern part of the country, Cameroon experiences cross-border, seasonal and animal criminal mobility, facilitated by the fluidity of its borders and political instability. These mobilities are often at the root of arms trafficking, narcotics trafficking and serious crime, causing serious political, economic and humanitarian problems; the result of a major threat to individuals and communities alike. The avalanche of cross-border mobility is at the root of socio-political, socio-economic, physical, environmental and diplomatic insecurity in East Cameroon. There has been an avalanche of attacks and an upsurge in criminal mobility (armed gangs, hostage-taking, etc.), to the extent that people have described East Cameroon as a laboratory for mobility and social problems since the security crises in CAR. Indeed, the geographical position of East Cameroon with the Central African Republic has facilitated the fluidity of rebel factions and refugees who are difficult to control. Just this year, in Tocktoyo, a town on the border with the CAR, Police Commissioner Félix Ngando Ndalé was execrably murdered by Central African gunmen whose irruptions into Cameroonian territory are traditionally carried out in defiance of borders (Messing Menanga, 2014: 98). Events of this magnitude are intensifying and multiplying in this eastern fringe of Cameroon.

1. Cross-border mobility and growing social problems in East Cameroon

The mobility of people between the Central African Republic and Cameroon has had an alarming social impact on life and social security in the eastern part of the country. Foreign immigration, which is difficult to control, has inevitably given rise to social problems such as

an increase in the number of robberies and assaults, hold-ups, depravity of morals and an upsurge in public health problems.

1.1 Trend in the number of robberies, hold-ups and assaults from 1990-2017

The problem of insecurity is not a recent one in this part of the national triangle. A long-standing phenomenon, it has taken on worrying proportions since the 1990s up to the present day, characterized by migratory movements across the eastern borders with neighboring countries. As a result, robberies, physical assaults and armed robberies abound in the statistics of the law enforcement and defense services in charge of cross-border and urban crime. The phenomenon of insecurity in East Cameroon has existed historically since 1965 with the creation of a special gendarmerie post in Garoua-Boulai to alleviate the problems of constant theft and aggression in this part of the country (Kaiwé, 2017). However, since the advent of the mutinies and the violence in the Central African Republic in 1990, which was one of the corollaries, the populations of the eastern part have experienced and continue to experience turbulent times that remind them of the events of independence and have provoked a psychosis like no other. The 1990s coincided with the emergence of violent crime. This was characterized by robberies and assaults. Hard-to-identify criminal gangs roamed the borders, engaging in cross-border crime in towns and cities along the eastern border. The arrival of these people and the movements that have led to it have had a perverse impact on the security of people and property in the East, as the pervasiveness of various insecurities has called into question the lives of the population. Crime statistics show that the vast majority of thefts recorded between 1990 and 2012 were simple thefts.

What's more, before 2013, the phenomenon of insecurity had always been observed in certain mining localities. This is the case of Bétaré-Oya, where the attraction of populations from all horizons created the rise of the phenomenon in 2000 after the revival of the solid mining sector by Cameroon. Armed assaults became commonplace. Gold miners lost their quest because of the development of the phenomenon of assaults on the roads leading to the site. Despite the existence of the mining police and the gendarmerie, assaults at the Bétaré-Oya, Colomine and Kambélé sites have increased with the Central African crisis. These violent attacks on gold miners are also perpetrated by highway criminals, who sometimes come from the country's big cities or from foreign countries. These gold miners are robbed of their gold and money (Jowe Yamo, 2016). The seizure of power by the ex-Séléka in March 2013, which was marked by the inevitable collapse of the Central African state, generated a surge of collective violence (Crisis Group, 2015: 1), the impact of which was the massive displacement of Central African populations once again to the nearest lands.

1.2. The proliferation of Mototaxis, increasing robberies and exacerbating urban and rural insecurity

The cross-border mobility that has penetrated the capillaries of Cameroonian society has not been without consequences for urban and rural security (Evina, 1998). Indeed, this mobility has meant that the populations of the eastern part of the country live under the sway of bandits who scour the arteries of rural and urban localities. As a result, rapes, burglaries and hold-ups are reported every day at police stations in the eastern town (Sali, 2022:313). Robbery is perceived as an armed attack, with the main target being cash deposits, whose actors form a well-structured group to succeed in their odious act. It is therefore an association of criminals grouped around a boss and operating on the basis of a social division of labor within the group (Chouala, 2001: 11). In other words, it's a grouping of thugs with their own means of administering violence (Sali, 2022: 313).

From 2013 onwards, robbers began to invade East Cameroon, this time sparing no target and even attacking symbols of law enforcement. The years (2013, 2016, 2017) were marked by spectacular hold-ups. From July 30 to 31, 2016, in a single night, five cases of burglaries were recorded. These thieves, all of Central African nationality, sheared off the locks

and took a television set, a gas bottle, a smart phone and a computer from a shopkeeper's home in Mandjou (Passer, 2010).

1.3. The development of prostitution and the resurgence of public health problems

The Central African war, which led to the massive displacement of the Central African population, claimed numerous victims among the population of the eastern part of Cameroon through the spread of infectious diseases due to the depravity of morals indulged in by many of the refugees. This has led to an increase in cases of prostitution and various other diseases. The practice of prostitution is condemned by morality in Central African society, insofar as it is considered an affront to modesty according to article 85 of the Central African penal code (Sali, 2022: 317). This phenomenon had become a veritable scourge throughout the country, with young girls giving themselves over to the joy of selling their bodies to the four corners of the Central African Republic in order to escape from want. This widespread phenomenon in the Central African Republic gradually spread to East Cameroon between 2000 and 2017, with the influx of new refugees and illegal immigrants.

For many, prostitution thus becomes a survival network (Ovono Essono, 2013: 269) that consists of putting one's body to good use. To this end, it appears to be a form of commerce, i.e. selling one's body to earn some kind of money. The vulnerability that characterizes some refugees leads them into this type of "trade" to be able to provide for their vital needs. But for other refugees, the phenomenon has become a veritable industry, as Jean Marc Ela points out: "In view of the serious situation, many women are organizing themselves to invest in the sex industry. As they say: "Our bank is our thighs, our buttocks and our breasts" (Ela, 1994: 112).

-Recurrent cases of malaria, measles, polio and other epidemics

The massive arrival of refugees has transformed the sites into zones of intense malaria transmission. The influx of refugees has led to their concentration in overcrowded camps. Camps where, unfortunately, access to drinking water and healthy food is not always easy. These camps are a priori an ideal environment for the spread of infectious diseases, notably polio, measles and even more so malaria (World Bank, 2005, p.58). These refugees, infected as they cross rural areas, will then expose the local population to malaria, as described above. Since the influx of Central African immigrants, the health situation in the eastern part of Cameroon has been quite worrying (Ndoyong, 2015: 71). This is justified by the ever-increasing number of consultations. According to the health services in the east, the number of consultations in the Garoua-Boulai district hospital, to take just one example, rose from 500 to 3,500 from 2014 to 2015 (MINSANTE, 2015). The sources of this increase include the reappearance of measles and polio epidemics and the resurgence of waterborne diseases such as infectious diarrhoea and typhoid fever (UNHCR, 2014, 2015).

-Vulnerability to food insecurity

To begin with, it's not easy to talk about food insecurity in Cameroon if one looks at the political discourse of the past and present. Indeed, these discourses valorize, magnify and sing the hymn of a Cameroonian model of food self-sufficiency, making it the granary of Central Africa (Socpa, 2005: 19). However, in the eastern part of Cameroon, bordering the Central African Republic, the problem of food security has attracted the attention of the Cameroonian authorities since the crises in that country. This problem is described by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) Henri Eyebé Ayissi during the 38th World Food Day celebrated on October 16, 2017 in these terms: "migrations are gaining in intensity and generating serious consequences on the socio-economic activities, food security and rural development of the countries concerned (Cameroon Tribune n°11477/7676, 2017).

In recent years, food production in East Cameroon has not kept pace with the demographic growth of the urban population and surrounding villages. As a result, the areas hosting Central African refugees face complex challenges, including access to food. The

number of food-insecure people is increasing in the eastern part of the region. In the Central African refugee zone in the east, 15% of the host population is food insecure (Rapaid EFSA, 2014). Among host population households, 15.5% are food insecure with less than one percent severely food insecure (WFP, 2014: 35). These figures compare with those of July 2013, when among host population households, 6% were moderately food insecure and none food insecure (WFP, UNHCR, 2013: 33). Similarly, among refugee households arriving since December 1, 2013, 37% were moderately food insecure and 8% food insecure (UNCHR, SI, 2015: 10).

2. The implications of cross-border mobility for the economic and social life of Cameroon's eastern fringe

Cameroon and the Central African Republic share a large number of elements that make them natural partners, including a common but porous border, populations with the same cultures, reflecting linguistic similarities and having maintained in the past intense exchanges that have generated high mobility of people and goods, common problems dealing with border security management (MINEPAT, 2014: 2).

2.1. Sectoral effects of migratory flows

Since the 1990s, the influx of Central African populations into East Cameroon has not been without consequences for the national economy in general and for the local economy and social well-being (Ndoyong, 2015: 75) in particular. On a sectoral level, the after-effects of the security crisis, the consequence of a migratory flow that is not always well controlled, are felt not only in transport and trade, but also in the accommodation and leisure sectors, as well as the environment. Criminal mobility has had a negative effect on the transport and trade system. As a result of criminal mobility, cross-border insecurity has paralyzed transport and trade activities between Cameroon and CAR. This paralysis results from regular border closures due to clashes between rebel factions (Séléka, Anti Balaka) and Cameroon's armed forces (Sommo Pende, 2010).

The fact that some trucks are parked in Garoua-Boulai is a clear sign of the disruption to truckers' activities, and hence to trade flows between Cameroon and CAR. This disruption has had the immediate effect of slowing down economic activity in both countries. As in a relationship of cause and effect, it is goods traffic that is seriously affected. According to Cameroon Radio and Television (CRTV) news of November 04, 2015 (economic dossier), Cameroon's GDP has fallen precisely because of the drop in trade to regional markets, mainly to the CAR (Ndoyong, 2014: 75), whose goods trucks were constantly being attacked on the road between Bangui and Garoua-Boulai. Measuring the scale of the consequences, the armed forces of MINUSCA, the United Nations mission, organized convoys to ensure the safety of transporters, this following the attack on Thursday August 27, 2015 on a convoy of military and civilian vehicles leaving Garoua-Boulai for Bouar. Another sector largely affected by the influx of migrants is the environment. Indeed, the impact of migration on the environment is widely decried. The settlement of thousands of refugees in certain sites in the East inexorably implies heavy pressure on environmental resources and a threat to ecological and biological balance (Ndoyong, 2015: 76). Presumably, refugees have no choice but to resort to firewood for culinary needs and for the construction of makeshift shelters. As the UNHCR and other NGOs have made no provision for supplying refugees with domestic gas, they will depend to a large extent on their immediate environment (Pouïra, 2011).

The truth is that criminal mobility and the transmigration of armed gangs have led to the deterioration of wildlife and the plant environment, with heavily armed bandits attacking protected species, looting available natural resources and carrying out cross-border raids. Attacks on Baka pygmy encampments, the Mbartoua cave and the Doumé fortress cast a shadow over tourism, which could contribute to economic development if properly maintained.

2.2. Implications for employment, public finances, households and basic necessities

The criminal mobility of the Séléka rebel factions since 2013 and the migratory flows of Central African populations have affected several sectors of socio-economic life on Cameroon's eastern fringe. In addition to the sectors mentioned above, we have observed that employment, tax and customs revenues, public expenditure, agropastoral activities and the rising cost of living are all the consequences of the forced mobility of populations.

From the outset, the employment sector experienced a surge of activity in 1973 with the creation of the Société Forestière Industrielle de Belabo (SOFIBEL) in East Cameroon. This company provided many jobs for immigrants. However, in the 1990s, the company's activities came to an abrupt halt (Boussougou, 2010). This had a considerable impact on the employment sector. Many immigrants went into the informal sector, stealing, a scenario that will continue in 2013 with the influx of Central Africans.

The influx of immigrants to this region has not been without impact on the employment sector. While it's clear that most of the former refugees have become shopkeepers, we also note that the newcomers, because of their vulnerability, constitute cheap labor for the owners of leisure facilities (bars, restaurants, inns, hotels). The informal sector in the host society has played a role both in terms of its short-term capacity to absorb employment and its long-term production capacity (Boussougou, 2010). Refugees have not only lowered the cost of labor in the informal sector, but have also reduced the chances of young people in East Cameroon finding work (Ndoyong, 2015: 77). The lack of jobs, asphyxiated by the exponential development of the informal sector, has pushed some locals and Central African immigrants who want to earn big to enter the sale of products away from prying eyes.

Repeated exactions by the Séléka rebels since 2013 have darkened the world of economic transactions on Cameroon's eastern borders (Sai, 2022: 344). The disruption of trade caused by criminal mobility has had an impact on the regular and quantitative mobilization of tax and customs revenues by the services in charge of customs in the east. As the barometer of the health of public finances, customs is entrusted with a mission whose faithful execution is the guarantee of the realization of State programs or the coverage of public expenses (Pahimi, 2014: 119). Demographic pressure linked to the massive arrival of Central African refugees and Malian, Chadian, Congolese, Rwandan and Burundian immigrants in the eastern part of Cameroon since 1990 has not been without consequences for the household food basket (MINEPAT, 2014). It has led to a total metamorphosis of basic necessities in East Cameroon (Nangtour Natolrone, 2005: 34). The mobility of Central African herders and pastoralists to Cameroon has disrupted the agropastoral activities of the host pastoral society. Indeed, during their mobility, Central African immigrants, mostly Fulani and Mbororo, took with them their cattle herds and small ruminants (AnKogui, 2018). Central African pastoral mobilities have also spawned another zoonosis. This is anthrax a bacterial zoonosis caused by a bacterium called *Bacillus anthracis*. Contamination occurs when handling animals or ingesting animal products containing spores. The disease can affect humans, cattle, goats, horses and carnivores.

3. The political and diplomatic repercussions of mobility on Cameroon's eastern fringe from 1990 to 2022

The prevalence of violence in Nigeria, CAR and Chad has had an impact on Cameroon's political landscape. The stay of refugees fleeing the atrocities in these countries has had both political and diplomatic repercussions.

3.1. The versatility of nationality and its impact on the electoral process

The problem of acquiring nationality has always been a crucial issue in many countries around the world. Indeed, nationality is defined as legal membership of the

population of a state (Larousse, 2001: 1067). It is on this basis that an individual is recognized as belonging to a particular country (Todjimbe and Tsama, 2012: 71). In Cameroon, this nationality is acquired after birth, by operation of law or by a decision of the public authority (Amayena, 2012: 16). Cameroonian law also allowed children of foreign parents to be Cameroonian if they so wished. However, people sharing the same nationality are generally united by a community of territory, language, traditions and aspirations. In its June 1999 sessions, the National Assembly returned to the delicate question of acquiring Cameroonian nationality. The elected representatives of the nation of this legislature strongly denounced the ease with which foreign nationals stay in Cameroon and acquire the nationality of the host country (Nzekou, 1999: 24). To become established, you need a birth certificate, a certificate of nationality, a marriage certificate and an extract from the criminal record.

With thousands of Central African refugees and many foreign nationals filling the capital city of East Cameroon, it's difficult to say who is really Cameroonian if we have to rely on identity papers alone as a referent of Cameroonian nationality (Sali, 2022: 356). This is all the more true as refugees from the Central African Republic have their birth certificate issued, which is an important document in the acquisition of a certificate of nationality (Souman Zanminy, 2014 and Tamekue Tagne, 2008). But after observing the social environment in the eastern part of the country and meeting several Central Africans, it's surprising to see them with a Cameroonian national identity. How do they acquire it? In the light of oral sources gathered, it's by means of coinage, while others have taken advantage of the birth certificate issued to them by municipal and local authorities. For some, this means paying a bribe and requesting the complicity of police officers to support the process (Todjimbe and Ntsama, 2012: 72). For neighborhood chiefs and certain authorities, the stakes are electoral. In fact, the majority of traditional authorities are allies of the ruling party, and issuing identity documents to refugees gives them a large electorate (Taubic Falna, 2013: 145).

The acquisition of national identity cards by the general public calls into question the delicate issue of securing Cameroonian nationality mentioned in chapter two. Political entrepreneurs take advantage of the presence of refugees and foreign nationals to garner as many votes as possible during elections. This mania makes Cameroonian nationality versatile and sold-out (Badjangba Nken, 1993: 17). The versatility of Cameroonian nationality helps us to understand the impact of electoral migration on electoral deadlines in the eastern part of Cameroon (Taubic Falna, 2013, p.147). The influence of Central African refugees on voting is a truism insofar as we are surprised at police level to see them withdraw the original CNI indicates a Commissioner deploring it.

3.2. Increasing diplomatic and security crises between Cameroon and the Central African Republic

The growing number of cross-border attacks and threats is a major factor in jeopardizing diplomatic relations between Cameroon and the Central African Republic. In some respects, these attacks by "noxious" criminals have triggered a diplomatic incident between the two states, potentially damaging their relations. This incident stemmed from the provocative action of Central African armed forces and criminal gangs. The incursions by Central African armed groups, which left one Cameroonian soldier dead and many others wounded in Gbiti on November 16, 2013, and the murder of a Cameroonian police officer in Tocktoyo on August 19, 2013, are illustrative examples of the complexity of the difficult relations between the two countries. This could justify, in part, Cameroon's procrastination in taking an active part in the Central African crisis in 2014 (Tamekamta, 2014). The Cameroonian president's almost habitual absences from subregional summits on the CAR were notable in this regard. This was the case at the extraordinary ECCAS summit on January 9 and 10, 2014 in Ndjamena devoted to the Central African crisis.

The cross-border insecurity that has arisen as a result of cross-border mobility situations has called into question the sulphurous neighborliness that was once the result of

economic factors and emotional relationships (Ngamondi, 2011). This stemmed from the competition for access to natural resources between the two countries and the almost obsessive fear of the refugee seen as a sword of Damocles hanging over the head of the regime in Yaoundé (Koufan Menke and Tchudjing, 2001: 337). This situation gave rise to a diplomacy of suspicion between the Central African Republic and Cameroon. The Cameroonian president's refusal to grant Michel Djotodia an audience in June 2013, while the deposed president Bozizé was on Cameroonian soil before flying to France, reflects this state of affairs (Lele, 2013). Following a diplomatic incident, negotiations initiated by his Central African peers finally enabled the Cameroonian President to reverse his decision (Tamekamta, 2014: 6).

Insecurity, on the other hand, is justified for citizens by the carelessness or corruption shown by the forces of law and order and security when dealing with refugees. In other words, once corrupted, those who were peacemakers become complacent in their duties. This absolute protection of refugees presents enormous risks. Not only can they go into hiding to prepare new attacks or affronts in their own country, but they can also prepare a rebellion in the host state or, to a lesser extent, acts of criminality (Lombroso, 2013). While safeguarding territorial integrity demands and requires active diplomacy and consequent means (Abouraman Halirou, 2013: 98), the multiplication of criminal mobility on the eastern borders squares the circle for Cameroon, whose glorifying praises sing the hymn of a stable country. Despite its position as a stable country in Central Africa, Cameroon is surrounded by countries that have experienced tumultuous wars and crises over the years. This could explain and justify why Cameroon receives multiple attacks and heinous crimes from these countries. Cameroon thus runs the risk of being such an unstable country when it receives criminal incidents.

3.3. The Central African crises and the rise of serious cross-border crime: Cameroon's diplomatic mistrust of the Central African Republic

Political crises in the CAR have led to an exponential increase in cross-border crime. With these crises originating in neighboring countries, diplomatic relations are becoming increasingly strained. Central African rebels frequently occupy gem-rich mining areas in Cameroon for their own ends. To this end, the involvement of Central African soldiers or rebels in increasing insecurity along the common border is likely to aggravate tension between Cameroon and CAR, for example (Ngamondi, 2011: 134). The existence of criminal mobility between Cameroon and Central African Republic has added further problems to those already existing (Kaiwé, 2017). Indeed, with Central African rebel attacks and exactions, Cameroon views the CAR with diplomatic mistrust (Ngamondi, 2011: 135). As a result, Cameroonians living in CAR are not exempt from police harassment and discriminatory measures. This is why today, all criminal threats call into question relations between Cameroon and Central African Republic.

Conclusion

In view of the above, political crises and cross-border mobility between Cameroon and Central African Republic between 1990 and the 20th century have triggered a host of problematic security situations in the eastern part of Cameroon. The prevalence of social, economic and politico-security problems is the result of these transnational, criminal and seasonal migrations. Thefts, physical assaults, the multiplication of criminal and environmental attacks are the situational occurrences in the eastern fringe. The presence of refugees and foreign nationals, who are difficult to control, is a serious security problem. The Central African herders who have infiltrated and penetrated the region have brought with them a number of diseases, which have had a number of consequences for Cameroonian pastoral society. In terms of taxation and customs, for example, the various movements have had a serious impact on tax revenues on the one hand, and on public finance on the other. As

for criminal mobility, it has had an impact on cross-border trade between Cameroon and the CAR, in that many traders are unable to move around freely to meet their commercial needs. From a political-diplomatic standpoint, this mobility has called into question the perfect security of Cameroonian nationality, and has had a political impact on elections in the eastern part of the country, in that many refugees fraudulently possess Cameroonian nationality and vote alongside the ruling order. The high level of criminality observed between CAR and Cameroon has jeopardized diplomatic relations between these countries since 1965, insofar as the Cameroonians regard this neighboring country as destabilizing the Yaoundé regime, given the threats it poses (Sali, 2022: 364).

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOREST RESERVE AND DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES IN THE COMMUNITY OF BELABO AT EAST CAMEROON

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Abstract: *Our research seeks to define whether this new development model, contributing to increasing the investment capacities of the municipality and the transfer of power from a central level to a local level, can constitute a framework for sustainable and participatory management and to evaluate the socio-economic environment of the villages bordering the Deng Deng forest reserve, transferred to the commune of Belabo. The forest plays a crucial role in physical and physiological, and previously biological, purification of air and water. Human health ultimately depends on society's ability to manage the interaction between human activities and the physical environment. The plant absorbs CO₂ for the photosynthesis reaction to take place (which it needs for its survival), releasing oxygen. The gas destroying oxygen is at this level absorbed by the plant, it slows down, reduces the effects of this harmful gas from the atmosphere. Let's remember that in places where there are no plants, CO₂ will quickly pass or release into the atmosphere to initiate the greenhouse effect phenomenon. The living being needs oxygen for its survival, without this substance man cannot live, it therefore helps him for his survival. Man also releases a little CO₂ in the absence of forests; humanity would suffer because it fights effectively against the perverse effects of global warming. The Belabo forest reserve allows for better management of altitudinal stratification. The forestry management of large concessions and that of small community forests, certain municipalities in Cameroon like Belabo have recently embarked on the sustainable management of forests handed over to them by the State. These communal forests represent an intermediate forest development between these two types of concessions. A development plan is drawn up and participatory management must be carried out in order to take into account the uses and interests of local populations.*

Keywords: Development, Forest reserve, Development, Municipality, Belabo

In Cameroon, poverty remains an essentially rural phenomenon. In 2001, 84% of the poor lived in rural areas and the incidence of poverty was higher there than in urban areas. Agriculture, livestock breeding and fishing constitute the main production activities and sources of income in rural areas. They should therefore find themselves at the center of the problem of poverty reduction (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 17). In its ongoing concern to remedy this situation, the public authorities have engaged in a process of progressive establishment of an institutional system, which will allow populations in rural areas to appropriate and sustainably manage the resources present in their localities. . This commitment increased further following the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and under the impetus of donors. It resulted in the adoption in 1994 of a new forest code whose objective is to promote sustainable management of Cameroonian forests, by encouraging the participation of all users in the forest planning and management process. Also, this commitment is translated by Law No. 96/06 of January 18, 1996 revising the constitution of June 2, 1972 which gave new impetus and an increased and determining role to decentralization to improve and boost political development, social and economic of Cameroon; as well as by Law No. 2004/017 of July 22, 2004 on the orientation of decentralization which sets the general rules applicable to territorial decentralization. This law defines decentralization as a transfer by the State to decentralized local authorities of specific skills and appropriate means. Thus, municipalities can invest their financial resources in the sectors covered by their general missions of local development,

improvement of the environment and living conditions of the populations (Kemajou, 2009). In this way, in the implementation phase of the decentralization process and in the forestry sector, forest areas are returned by the State to certain municipalities, which manage and exploit them for the benefit of the entire population: it these are Communal Forests (FC). The latter are subject to intermediate forest management between the two types of concessions, notably Forest Management Units (UFA) and community forests. On the one hand, they share with the large concession model a sophisticated technical development centered on commercial timber resources. However, unlike UFAs, they are obliged to deal with the aspirations, interests and uses of local populations. These forests are thus closer to the model of community forests. The FC thus constitutes a recent framework for real participatory forest management where the sustained exploitation of trees must be combined on a local scale with the improvement of the well-being of citizens (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 15).

However, any activity carried out in a municipal forest must, according to the law, comply with its development plan. This development plan is drawn up at the request of municipal officials, in accordance with the requirements of article 30 of the forest code. The creation of the development plan is based on various preliminary studies, in particular, flora and fauna inventories; as well as a socio-economic study. Thus, the zoning plan for the southern part of Cameroon potentially identified the Belabo forest massif as a communal forest, which could be subject to classification in the permanent domain. It is with the aim of seizing this opportunity which will undoubtedly increase the income of the municipality that this study is carried out.

1. The commune of Belabo : geography and history

The commune of Belabo is a district capital. It is located in the Lom and Djérem department. About 80 km from Bertoua, capital of the Eastern region, Belabo covers an area of 6,000 km², 2/3 of which is represented by dense rainforest and 1/3, grassy and wooded savannah. It is limited: to the North by the District of Bétaré-Oya, to the East by the Municipality of Mandjou; to the South-East, by the Communes of Diang and Minta; to the South by the Municipality of Nsem and finally to the West by the Municipality of Yoko.

1.1. Location of villages and the communal forest

The commune of Belabo has four cantons subdivided into approximately 46 villages. These are distributed along the different road axes : the Belabo - Deng-Deng road axis ; the Bertoua – Belabo road axis ; the Viali - Deng-Deng road axis. The Belabo municipal forest is part of the permanent forest estate. Bearing the name of the city which shelters it, it is located in the Eastern Region, Department of Lom and Djerem, Arrondissement of Belabo. Its surface area is 59,214 hectares). It is located between the Bertoua-Belabo road axes on the one hand and Bertoua Deng Deng on the other hand. This forest is very rich in plant and animal biological diversity with the presence of endemic species. The presence of the research and teaching blocks of the University of Dschang and IRAD; of the ANAFOR branch as well as the creation of the Ndeng-Ndeng UTO in this forest massif sufficiently demonstrates its richness in biological diversity. The proximity of Deng Deng National Park with contagion effects confirms this richness (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 16).

1.2. Climate, flora and fauna

The climate of the area is of the Guinean equatorial type with a Sudanian tendency towards the north. It is characterized by the alternation of 4 seasons: a long dry season, from December to mid-March; a short rainy season, from mid-March to May; a short dry season, from June to mid-August; a major rainy season from mid-September to November. The town receives between 1500 and 2000 mm of precipitation per year. It rains on average 135 days per year in the forest zone, 130 days in the transition zone and 110 days in the savannah

zone (CIEFE, 2010:12). The maximum temperature is 30°C against a minimum of 18°C during the year. However, the average fluctuates between 23 and 25°C. The wind regime is moderate because of the layout of the relief; vast traffic corridors (winding valleys densely covered by gallery forests). The erosive power of the winds is therefore minimized by the presence of a diversity of plant formations. However, at the beginning and end of the season, storms cause tree falls. Disturbances have been observed in the alternation of seasons in recent years, thus significantly disrupting the agricultural calendar (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 18). Eastern Cameroon is classified among the regions of the country best equipped with fertile soils, and is made up of laterites and areas rich in sand. As for the area covered by the municipality of Belabo, the soils are essentially made up of ferralitic soils with three variants: typical ferralitic soils (red ferralitic soils derived from metamorphic rocks); numerous ironclad ferralitic soils (deep horizons of locally ironclad and exposed red ferralitic soils, ferruginous concretions) towards the south; and complex savannah soils (disturbed soils, concretions and armor debris) to the north (EDC, 2010:10). Within the commune of Belabo, the plant formations encountered are as follows: The semi-deciduous forest with Sterculiaceae and Ulmaceae. The main species are: *Triplochiton scleroxylon*, *Ceiba pentandra*, *Uapaca guineensis*, *Sterculia rhinopetala*, *Ricinodendron heudelotii*, *Alstonia boonei*, *Azelia africana*, *Entandrophragma cylindricum*, *Hymeno cardialyrata* and *Chatacme aristata*. The semi-deciduous forest with Sterculiaceae and Ulmaceae of the northern type. The species present are approximately the same as in the previous type, sometimes with a different order. However, there are also abundant recruit species such as *Funtumia africana*, *Myrianthus arboreus*, *Markhamia alutea*, *Chatacme aristata*, *Olaxsub scorpioides*, various *Albizia*. The main species of these recruits are: *Ceiba pentandra*, *Piptadeniastrum africanum*, *Milicia excelsa*, *Albizia glabra*, *Irvingia gabonensis*, *Terminalia superba*, *Olaxsub scorpioides*, *Funtumia elastica*, *Markhamia alutea*, *Chatacme aristata*, *Hymeno cardialyrata*, *Lanne anigrifera*, *Xylocarpus ethiopicus*, *Harrisonia*. Savanna species such as *Albizia coriaria* and *Dichroa chyscinerea* persist in the forest (CIEFE, 2010:5).

The Belabo forest massif experienced heavy exploitation during the period of activity of the Société Forestière et Industrielle de Belabo (SOFIBEL) (PDC de Belabo 2009-2013, 2009: 10). This is what justifies the presence of numerous recruits. Today, in this highly degraded forest, the current activity is cutting firewood and wild sawing. The vegetation of the commune of Belabo thus presented is distributed into three large forest areas in the cantons of Pôl, Képéré-Deng Deng, and Kepere-Woutchaba. The types of activities carried out there make it possible to distinguish the following distribution: two UFA (Forest Management Unit) in the Deng Deng forest massif, operated respectively by the companies PLACAM and SFW (Société Forestière Wandja); a UFA in the locality of Woutchaba, operated by the Pangeotis-Marilis company; a community forest in operation in Koundi, owned by GIC Doh; The change of status of part of the Deng Deng Forest Reserve into an extension of the national park; A forest reserve (Deng Deng) whose management has been transferred to the communes of Belabo (Communal Forest); two blocks of research and experimentation forest belonging to the branch of the University of Dschang and IRAD in Belabo. However, the wealth of the Belabo communal forest is not limited only to the exploitation of wood, alongside woody species; we find an assortment of NTFPs, which are the subject of exploitation by the local populations of the FC. It should be remembered for all practical purposes that the natural and current stands of this municipal forest are of the adult and young secondary forest type, in which several fast-growing species have developed, such as fraké (*Terminalia superba*), *Ricinodendron heudelotii* known as the Ndjansan tree, and the Ayous tree (*Triplochiton scleroxylon*) (Poissonnet et al, 2005: 22). The fauna of the forest area of the commune is very diverse and includes several species, some of which are threatened with extinction. The mammalian fauna is made up of Primates, which regularly come to the growing area close to the forests, notably gorillas (*Gorilla gorilla*), chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) and the magistrate (Colobe

guereza). Other mammals represented by the forest elephants (*Loxodonta africana cyclotis*) and savannah elephants (*Loxodonta africana africana*), the lion (*Panthera leo*), the panther (*Panthera pardus*), the aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*), the aquatic chevrotain (*Hyemoschus Aquaticus*), the Potto, the bongo (*Tragelaphus euryceros*), waterbucks and duikers (CIEFE, 2010: 5). It should be noted that duikers are of great importance in the region, due to their ease of trapping and the role they play in feeding populations. Among the species mentioned above, those threatened with extinction are elephants, panther, gorilla, chimpanzee, magistrate, potto, aardvark, aquatic chevrotain and lion. It is possible that the systematic, floristic and faunal inventory, which will be carried out subsequently, will complete the list of mammalian species already identified in the municipality. The absence of data on the aquatic fauna of the watercourses in the area (Sanaga, Sesse, Lom and other lagoons) does not make it possible to assess their potential. However, according to surveys carried out among the population, the aquatic fauna of the commune includes: catfish, carp, pike, captains, snake fish, shrimp, crab, caiman (which is not captured) and many other species not identified by the fishermen. Fish caught using rudimentary techniques not only constitute a source of animal protein for populations but also a source of income (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 22).

2. Description of the socio-economic environment

The Municipality of Belabo was created in 1982 after Belabo was established as a district. The populations agree that the Belabo station and SOFIBEL (Forestry and Industrial Company of Belabo) are at the origin of the creation of this administrative unit. Indeed, with the construction in 1969 of the said station and in 1977 of SOFIBEL, the economic activities around the platform attracted populations in search of employment and forced them to settle not far from the rails, forming over time years a large city. The commune of Belabo is made up of 46 villages (Bigombe, 2007: 3).

2.1. Previous uses of the space allocated to the municipal forest massif

Law No. 94 – 01 of January 20, 1994 on the forest regime is the legal framework for the request for classification of the Belabo municipal forest. The option for the commune of Belabo to obtain a communal forest is further reinforced by ministerial decision no. 1354/D/MINEF/CAB of November 26, 1999 establishing the procedures for classifying forests in the permanent forest domain of the Republic of Cameroon. This framework highlights the need for the participation of decentralized authorities and communities bordering forests in the sustainable management of natural resources in order to combat poverty in all its forms. But, upstream, it should be noted that in 1994, the forest law had integrated the existing forest reserves into the Permanent Forest Domain (DFP). Fortunately, the 1995 zoning plan and the proposal for the creation of the Lom Pangar Territorial Operational Unit (UTO) provided for: the creation of two Forest Management Units (UFA) in the eastern block of the Deng Deng forest massif ;the creation in the three western blocks, respectively from North to South: a sanctuary for great apes; the transfer to the municipalities of Belabo of a forest reserve (Deng Deng) of 69,500 ha; teaching and research forests, belonging to the branch of the Institute of Agronomic Research and Development (IRAD) and the Faculty of Agronomy and Agricultural Sciences (FASA) of the University of Dschang. This enthusiasm for obtaining a municipal forest demonstrates the importance that such a source of wealth can have for the municipal executive and all neighboring communities. Thus, with a view to supporting the efforts of forest municipalities and in particular that of Belabo, in the management of forest heritage, the Technical Center of the Communal Forest (CTFC), provided its technical support in July 2008, to the classification project of the Belabo Communal Forest (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 23).

2.2. Sociodemographic and economic characteristics

The commune of Belabo is located in the district of Belabo whose current total population is approximately 43,953 inhabitants distributed in 46 villages. The average density is 7.3 inhabitants/km². Statistical data from the District Medical Center (CMA) of Belabo shows a birth rate of 9.8% and a mortality rate of 3.8%. This suggests that the demand for land by populations will undoubtedly increase and consequently, we will see a probable reduction in forest areas. The above reflects the fact that the forests surrounding the large towns of the commune will be absorbed by them which will gradually urbanize like B elabo, Deng Deng, The average household size is eight people in urban areas, around ten people in rural areas. 65% of the population of the commune of B elabo is between 15 and 30 years old. Despite the dynamism of the population and the numerous potentials available to the locality for the creation of income-generating activities, rampant poverty is rife in both rural and urban areas. Generally speaking, housing within the commune of B elabo is grouped and the majority of populations settle along the road and railway. Four categories of houses are present in the area: Clay houses, rectangular in shape and with a two-sloped roof, covered with mats or corrugated iron in some cases and where the floors are not covered. The huts made of clay and mat boards are more numerous in the villages of the three cantons. The majority of residents in this housing category do not have access to electricity. The lighting method frequently used by them is storm lamp lighting (Bigombe, 2007: 3).

The populations of the villages of the commune belong to three (03) main indigenous ethnic groups, namely the Bobilis, the P ols and the Keperes. The table below represents the villages bordering the FCB. Religious beliefs within the villages of the commune are diverse and well represented. Thus, we find: The Catholic church which has the largest number of faithful. It has a Cathedral whose construction work is in progress as well as other large buildings and places of worship; Islam brings together the Muslim populations of the far north and a strong concentration of the Bamoun community. It has a mosque on the slopes of the city hall hill in the Socopao district. We also note the presence of other religious denominations such as the Protestant Church of Cameroon, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Pentecostal Church, the Presbyterian Church and the 7th-day Adventist Church (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 25).

The Belabo district is relatively poor in socio-economic and cultural infrastructure that equitably offers basic services to the entire population of the district. On observation, those that exist in this administrative unit are strongly concentrated in the town of Belabo. The local economy is mainly based on agriculture, livestock, fishing, hunting and the exploitation of various forest products. It employs around 90% of the rural population, jobs in the private sector and small businesses occupy a tiny part of the population (Bigombe, 2007: 13). This small business is often carried out on makeshift counters set up in front of the house and on which a few products such as kerosene, matches, and whiskey in sachets are displayed. Logging is characterized in the villages bordering the FCB by illegal logging activity and the exploitation of NTFPs, within this forest as well as in those surrounding these villages. This illegal cutting is practiced by natives and non-natives, but the involvement of non-natives is favored by the natives. The trees to be sawn are placed in the plantations of the natives, the latter sell them standing at a price ranging from 50,000 to 100,000 CFA francs, the price depending on the species and its volume. The products of this activity (boards, slats of several types of wood, etc.) are intended for the urban market. This exploitation is not limited to the illegal cutting of wood, it also concerns the cutting of firewood. A large volume of wood is taken from the forest for food heating in rural and urban areas (Bigombe, 2007: 13).

The production system is traditional, practiced with rudimentary techniques on small areas varying between 0.5 ha to 5 ha not far from the village depending on the speculation. It's slash-and-burn agriculture. The cropping system is mixed with an average fallow duration of 2 years. Some farmers sometimes travel significant distances of 8 to 10 km to reach their plantation, especially when it comes to crops such as cucumbers. The periods of high agricultural intensity are located in the intervals January-March and June-September (Kamgnia et al, 2006:

26).

The low technical capacity of farmers constitutes an obstacle to the development of agriculture. Added to this are marketing difficulties (poor organization of producers, difficult accessibility, difficulty in preserving products, etc.). The majority of farmers met remain powerless in the face of these constraints which require large investments and significant support resources. The main food crops are cassava, corn, macabo, plantain, sweet banana, peanut, cucumber or pistachio and yam. The majority of production is intended for consumption. Among these crops, the main one, which is cassava, requires more savannah land than forest land (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 26).

This sector is more occupied by women. This situation constitutes a favorable factor for the preservation of forest areas because it prevents the deforestation of the massif allocated to the CF. Among these products, cassava is the most processed and consumed in the form of couscous. Other products, although part of consumption, constitute a source of income for these populations. Sweet bananas and plantains, for example, are bought by traders and sent to the northern part of Cameroon by train. These crops are grown in association or monoculture depending on the production objective. Corn is sometimes grown as a monoculture when the main objective is sale. Peanuts are grown in association with cassava, corn, macabo and other crops sprinkled in the field for consumption (wild tomato in places, chili, vegetables and combo, etc.). Plantain and sweet bananas are sometimes produced in association with cucumber and macabo when the field is newly created. The crops that lead to the clearing of vast areas are plantain and cucumber followed by macabo and corn. Harvests and sales take place gradually throughout the year. The quantities sold per sale are not large. This detail of production is due to rudimentary storage and packaging systems. The houses are narrow to store a large quantity of production and the lack of packaging (Bigombe, 2007: 19).

3. Exploitation of NTFPs: right of access and right of use

In the villages bordering the Belabo Communal Forest, it is the right of use, that of usufructuary, which is the most practiced. The law confers title to the forests on the State, but authorizes local populations to harvest Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) free of charge. However, customary law makes the local populations owners of this forest area. There is therefore a conflict between customary law and Cameroonian forestry regulations. Access to this forest is governed by customary law (Bigombe, 2007: 13). Natives of riverside villages are free to harvest NTFPs while foreigners go there through a native in a village who introduces them. The collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is carried out up to an average distance of 15 km (Bigombe, 2007: 19). In this communal forest, people collect NTFPs of animal and plant origin. These NTFPs are used for food needs, and sometimes marketed or exchanged for other goods. The part of the Bélabo FC massif most exploited for research on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is that close to the surroundings of the town of Bélabo where the population is galloping. The forest portion of the Deng Deng commune is under less pressure for NTFP research. However, the collection of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) is an activity more practiced by women and children. It is carried out seasonally depending on the species of Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) to be harvested and being within the municipal forest (Nasi, 1997: 10).

3.1. Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) harvested in the Belabo municipal forest : packaging and marketing

In the villages bordering the Belabo Communal Forest, there is an impressive number of NTFPs that the populations exploit for food needs, traditional medicine, and socio-cultural practices. These Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) ensure the food security of the populations living near the Bélabo Communal Forest as well as that of all Cameroonians through the sale of these products in different markets. Certain Non-Wood Forest Products

(NTFP) are used to make sauces (snails, caterpillars, mushrooms) thus ensuring a supply of animal proteins. Other Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFPs) are used as essential oils (Moabi oil and honey). Djangsang and Adok (wild mango are used to thicken sauces in large families. Forest products collected in the Bélabo Communal Forest are packaged in several ways. Some are crushed or dried for sale. This is the Djangsang, wild mango, pepper, four sides (Bigombe, 2007: 19). Others are consumed directly after the harvest, caterpillars, snails, mushrooms, cockchafers, etc. The treatment, that is to say the drying, packaging of all these products is done in an artisanal and manual manner. These treatment, storage and preservation systems do not allow producers to have consistent yields. They record losses after the harvest. They are forced to sell these products at low prices due to the lack of perfection of the storage systems. Djangsang, wild mangoes and pepper can be stored for a long time in jute bags protected from humidity. The sale of these Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) harvested in the FC of Bélabo is done in the various markets of the locality (Bélabo, Bertoua, etc.). Part of the harvest is sold on site and purchased by travelers who go to Bertoua, Yaoundé and even Ngaoundéré (Kamgnia et al, 2006: 30). Income from the exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) contributes significantly to improving the conditions of these populations. This income is used on a daily basis to cover expenses linked to schooling, health, clothing and household operations (Bigombe, 2007: 20).

Due to the use of rudimentary tools when harvesting Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and the lack of knowledge on the protection of biodiversity, local populations are exposed to the following problems :

- The destruction of the stems of Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFP) during the removal of the economic parts. This is observed for the harvest of species such as the pepper plant, the bark of bitter cola, etc. These tears and wounds let in parasites and fungi which gradually eat away the species which eventually dies. This contributes considerably to the reduction of the resource;
- Ignorance of the law on the exploitation of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) because of the existing conflict between customary law and this forest law. They are subject to arrests by the Water and Forestry services when traveling to sell their harvest;
- The arduousness of extracting seeds and bark from certain Non-Wood Forest Products (NTFPs). Case of Ndjansang, wild mango tree, white pepper.

3.2. Village perceptions of communal forestry

In the development plan, a regulation of the right of use, accompanied by a NTFP management plan, will enlighten everyone and limit the frustrations of local populations; destruction of sacred sites, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) trees, and agricultural plantations; the disappearance of certain forest species and certain Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP); lack of space to cultivate in the future. The economic activities of the villagers take place extensively within the massif to be classified. On the side opposite the central road, activities are not so intense because the land is not as fertile and is very swampy. Will the remaining land after classification of the municipal forest be able to meet the needs for arable land today and especially for future generations? Deforestation and flight of animals caused by noise from logging (Nasi, 1997: 12) the villagers fear that the mayor will appropriate the communal forest and ignore the priorities of the populations; the non-involvement of rural populations in forest management; the misappropriation of funds from forest exploitation. Indeed, the management of this income was a recurring subject in discussions during this study. For the populations of the villages concerned the problem of governance remains acute. The fear of corruption among the representatives of the populations and the municipal council was clearly perceptible during the interviews. Thus, strengthening the financial and managerial management capacities of those involved in the implementation of the forest management plan will contribute to improving local forest governance. The fears of rural populations towards others. The populations also raised a certain number of grievances reflecting their expectations of the Belabo municipal forest

development project. Generally speaking, these are the following grievances: Rehabilitation and construction of classrooms in the different schools in each village. Equip them with teaching materials, without forgetting to assign new teachers; Construction of drinking water points by the town hall; Improvement of roads to allow easy evacuation of agricultural products to Bélabo; Transparent management of revenues from the exploitation of the communal forest with effective involvement of the populations in the management of revenues from the exploitation of the communal forest; Electrification of villages; Construction of health centers; Ensure the recruitment of local labor in the communal forest exploitation project. The development of the municipal forest reveals potential positive and negative impacts. They boil down to: the creation of jobs and the development of riverside villages through the implementation of the development plan; the conservation of faunal and floral species favorable to the perpetuity of traditional rites and pharmacopoeia; forest regeneration favorable to climate regulation; reducing deforestation; increasing the revenue of the municipality. These concerns: the restriction of the use rights of local populations; the weakening of social cohesion due to the mixing of populations linked to the needs of labor for logging (Nasi, 1997: 15).

The present analysis aimed to understand the socio-cultural, economic and natural environment in the villages bordering the Bélabo forest reserve, a forest massif to be classified as communal forest in Belabo. The aim was to evaluate the use that these communities make of the massif in question, in order to better assess the degree of dependence of these local populations on this forest. The purpose of this study is to take into account social factors that may have an effect during the development and implementation of the development plan. The analysis of the socio-economic environment in the villages showed that they are not yet equipped with the minimum in terms of basic infrastructure (educational, health, hydraulic) and other facilities (roads and electricity). Thus, there is a lot to do in all these riverside villages to talk about sustained development; this in terms of strengthening the supply and services of the hydraulic, educational, health, electrical sectors, etc. In terms of productive activities, local populations essentially live from traditional agriculture, livestock breeding, artisanal fishing, picking and collecting NTFPs, and to a lesser extent from hunting and 'craftsmanship. In the context of their activities, they still encounter many difficulties linked, for the most part, to technical, material and financial constraints. Local populations depend significantly on the forest massif to be classified. In fact, they develop agricultural, hunting, fishing and gathering activities there (presence of several camps and a few fields). The main fears and expectations expressed by the populations are closely linked to these activities, in the sense of being reassured of the continuity of their right to exercise in the area of the massif to be classified; but also the availability of arable land for future generations. A very important fear is also that relating to the good governance of income from the exploitation of the municipal forest.

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STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS AND THE ACTUAL ENERGY CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *Research on energy resilience seeks to identify how increases in electricity costs influence income or "unbalance the budget" in the existing economic situation, a health crisis, an increase in inflation, a war situation at the country borders that also favored the energy crisis. The new conditions affect the social well-being of the population not only in Romania but also for other EU countries. The investigation carried out tried to highlight the changes in the behaviour of the population in order to achieve the reduction of energy consumption and implicitly the costs that for some income categories affect their budget. This study tries to demonstrate the need for sustainability, in order to maintain social welfare for all categories of the population affected by these price increases. The situation affects the entire population if we take into account the fact that 10% of the population investigated through qualitative analyzes mention that: "they do not have money for paying the bills", 14% "don't have money to eat" the residual income left after paying the bills is not enough for a satisfactory daily shopping basket in the conditions of an uncontrollable market, 7% cannot pay the bank rates and interest and 75% of the population are unable to reserves and consumes from the created deposits.*

Keywords: crisis, behavioural changes, sustainability, resilience.

1. Introduction

In the current context of the health crisis, the economy of many countries, including Romania, suffered a shock, thus highlighting the vulnerability of some systems such as the health, educational, economic, social, etc. The budget granted to these systems had to be supplemented, especially in the health field, in order to limit this virus and to increase the resilience of these services in a crisis situation.

The health system has become a subject of national interest and security, the education system, directly involved, was necessary to face the challenges of the digital transition. To these were added the public services, the chains of commercial units, which also had to adapt on the fly to the newly created situation. The return to normal conditions with economic recovery depended and still depend on epidemic episodes, which are repeated periodically, slowing down the process of return and recovery.

The social context imposed a new political approach, with public policies adapted to crisis situations, with a public budget divided according to the needs arising in the social context, which determined better collaborations between the private sector, the state and the authorities, to overcome the effects of the pandemic. The adequacy of the labor force at the level of demand and supply of the labor market was dependent on the evolution of the pandemic, a fact that also affected the level of investments.

The social policy assumed the realization of recovery plans with institutional, financial and normative measures for the population. Against the background of these crises, the EU faces a series of new challenges in the field of energy, following the war in Ukraine, which include negative aspects such as increasing dependence on imports, on fossil fuels (natural gas, oil and coal) from Russia, high energy and fuel prices, increasing global demand for energy, risks affecting the security of producing and transit countries. Added to these are macro-level changes such as climate change, decarbonisation, the share of renewable energy, transparency and good integration in energy markets. The EU aims to create an integrated

energy market by implementing an energy policy based on a set of measures to ensure the security of energy supply and the creation of a long-term energy structure (europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/68/policy-Energy-policy).

In this context, the "REPowerEU" plan was proposed, which includes measures to reduce dependence on Russian fuels and urgently implements the European Green Plan. (cdep.ro/afaceri_europene/afeur/2022/fi_3519.pdf).

It is stated that this "REPowerEU plan is a plan for achieving:

- energy saving;
- the production of clean energy;
- diversification of own energy resources (commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repower-eu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_ro).

1. The resilience plan for Romania

It is mentioned by economic analysts that Romania will be able to obtain EUR 1.39 billion through REPower EU until 2026, having the possibility to use the financing. In this sense, Romania must present projects that state how this money will be used, which represents a great opportunity for the development of new production capacities from renewable sources to ensure long-term energy independence (bursa.ro/repower-eu-another-opportunity-for-the-development-of-the-national-energy-system-61294848).

The sudden jump in energy prices in the EU and around the world occurred in the second half of 2021 in the context of an economy affected by the pandemic (Covid-19) followed by a post-covid period of relaxation of travel restrictions. The price increase started in 2021 and continued in 2022 was accentuated by Russia's military aggression in Ukraine. In 2022, Russia unilaterally decided to stop the supply of natural gas to some EU countries, a fact that favored the increase in natural gas and implicitly electricity prices due to the way energy markets in the EU work. The sudden increase in energy prices in Europe led governments to introduce measures to protect consumers. Some of the measures, in response to the energy crisis, were the reduction of excise duties on petrol and diesel.

In Romania, the following measures were taken: on September 7, 2021, (Raluca Nicolae, 2022 economia.ro) the Parliament has passed a law that protects vulnerable consumers from rising energy prices. The allocated subsidies were for heating the home, for energy consumption, for energy-efficient household equipment and for the purchase of products and services that improve the energy performance of buildings or for connection to the energy network. On October 4, compensation is granted both for the supply of electricity and for gas. On October 31, the Romanian Parliament voted on the draft law for the mentioned measures and for charging an exceptional tax on producers (for revenues exceeding 91 euros/MWh for their financing, Raluca Nicolae, 2022, economia.ro). On January 11, 2022, the government announced a new form of production for household consumers with a monthly consumption of up to 300KWh with a VAT reduction to 5% as well as compensation for the green certificate and cogeneration bonus for consumption. On March 20, the government imposed a one-year cap on electricity and natural gas prices (Raluca Nicolae 2022, economia.ro). On April 11, the coalition government announced a series of subsidies and vouchers worth 3.5 million euros to help the vulnerable population (adevarul.ro). Low-income families and 4.7 million pensioners will receive food vouchers basic, as stated. On September 1, it was announced that the ceiling on energy prices would be maintained until the end of August 2023. On September 9, state aid amounted to 4 million euros (Raluca Nicolae 2022, economia.ro).

2. Resilience plans and measures regarding the quality of social assistance services in Romania

High energy prices are already affecting the industry. Large consumers of electricity and gas have "operated this year at break-even levels". Many companies are closing down, and the year 2023 could bring a significant wave of unemployed (mentioned Adrian Negoescu - economist analyst, 2022, www.digi24.ro). Added to the mentioned perspective is inflation that exceeds the rate at which Romanians' incomes increase, affecting their purchasing power, so consumption. The economy of Romania is also affected by a possible recession in other countries. Thus, "in commercial terms, the German economy is entering a more serious recession and in this situation the commercial orders to the Romanian industry will decrease. The same is true for Italy, which are the main partners of Romania in the EU", (says Bogdan Glăvan - economist analyst, 2022 www.digi24.ro).

Regarding social assistance, the implementation of the VMI reform is aimed at updating the legislative framework for the granting of benefits and social assistance services according to existing means, without increasing the risk of dependency (Press release August 26, 2022 - mmuncii.ro/j33/index.php/ro/communication).

3. Review of scientific literature. Relevant articles on the topic

Against the background of the crises faced by the EU during this period and the challenges in the energy field following the war with Ukraine include negative effects, as mentioned, by increasing dependence on imports, high energy and fuel prices which led to measures to increase population resilience of the EU energy sector/system and the country.

The need to optimize energy consumption and the use of resources in general, achieving savings, was also emphasized by Kardung and Colab (2019), who frequently explain the concept of resilience in this economic context of energy impoverishment, it is proposed to explain this concept used in many fields by researchers. In this sense, Nijkam (2021) in the work entitled "Resilience and regional convergence in the European Union", tries to present the concept in a new systemic vision, integrating five dimensions: economic, social/individual, institutional, environmental and geopolitical, by overcoming some conceptual and methodological barriers. In other works, the concept of resilience is defined starting from the fact that it is increasingly used lately in various fields from the individual to the societal level, being included in the policies of the EU and of some international institutions and companies (Cosmin-Mihai, 2022). Dinu (2012) presents in the work "Consumers' education and information from the perspective of their awareness and ecological behaviour" the practice of consumers who must be educated towards the economy, towards the ecological sense for the conservation of resources. "Resilience in business" (Ana Maria Gardiner, 2020) is an article in which the author explains the term resilience as a state of resistance to the shock and the concept has been used mainly in human resources, psychology and psychiatry. It is assumed that these people, through defense mechanisms, do not let emotions take control and influence their decisions (Ioan-Cosmin, 2022).

Resilience in the economy, the resilience of the resources at our disposal has determined the awareness of the negative impact of excessive consumption patterns on the environment, which has led to the emergence of more and more ecological attitudes of the population (Yu, 2014) to preserve resources and saving up. Some specialized works in the financial field emphasize on national resilience, supply chains for example (Popa, 2013) or population resilience reflected in the community's ability to face risks, threats of crises caused by natural disasters, called economic disasters (crashes banking), disasters determined by the lack of control over nature (nuclear accidents, radiation, ionization) - called "act of God" and the people "atomic veterans" (Ellen Janosik, 1994). Stoican (2015) analyzed unemployment as an indicator of regional resilience capacity (Ion, 2015).

"Energy saving and clean energy in the building" (Chisăliță, 2022) refers to the quality of the internal environment in the context of energy rehabilitation of homes, which is not only

a problem of saving but also of health. "Climate resilience and energy performance" (Constantinescu, 2020) presents daring responses of renewable energy sources in the form of Voltaic Panels (PV) mounted on buildings in order to save energy but also for the climate resilience of buildings in the case of their own extreme climatic demands specific of the cold and the summery seasons for buildings included in the NZEB energy class.

The "Newsletter-News, analyzes and developments" magazine of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Euro-Atlantic Center for Resilience no. 4(2022) presents the EU measures for managing the energy crisis and resilience.

Golovanov (2022) and Dumitru Ene (2022) in the articles: "Nuclear fusion energy" and "The role of nuclear energy in cogeneration - the challenges generated by climate change" show that in advanced economies nuclear energy is the largest source of electricity with low-carbon emissions, providing around 40% of total low-carbon production.

4. Description of the problems of data collection and analysis

In order to collect the data, a model was made between December 2022 and January 2023, which was built using the "snowball sampling" method, the respondents being asked to distribute the questionnaire to other people. The analyzed database includes 110 subjects, the main characteristics of the model, which is homogeneous and belongs to the same cohort, are based on gender (61 male subjects and 49 female subjects), on the environment of origin (urban 46 respondents and rural 64 respondents), age is between the limits of 19-62 years, and the average income of 3240.

Table 1. Classification of respondents according to gender, age and origins

Model volume	Sex				Age limit (years)	Average income	Origins			
	male		female				urban		rural	
	no.	%	no.	%			no.	%	no.	%
110	1	55,45	9	44,54	19-62	3240	46	41,90	4	8,20

The working hypotheses that "exist in an unconscious or non-specific form even when the researcher tries to study a reality as «objectively» as possible, without preconceived ideas" (Rotariu, 1991) are for this investigation:

H1- Energy poverty represented by high energy costs, low incomes and low energy efficiency constitutes a priori condition to affect the social well-being of the population called "social welfare";

H2- The high percentage of energy expenditure from low incomes, for a large part of the population, make the residual income indicate a poverty of the population below the officially considered threshold at the moment;

H3- Energy poverty through the consumption factor disrupts the indirectly productive sector (cultural, educational, health etc.) especially in rural areas, affecting the social structure, forms of communication and well-being of the population;

H4- The social indicator presents a degree of selection of natural energy sources (wind, photovoltaic cells, low consumption) the resistance of the population in the acquisition of these energy sources consist in high initial costs, in our country, according to income;

H5- Social prices for vulnerable consumers (so-called social tariffs, vouchers, social benefits, supplement for payment of expenses for the remaining energy, limitation of disconnections, etc.) can constitute measures of protection and social resilience.

It is mentioned, for example, "that a lot of assumptions are used in the construction of any questionnaire". Such hypotheses can be tested empirically in the research or can remain open and appear as a result of an investigation (Rotariu, 1991). The interview used is of opinion and guarantees certain validity and fidelity for the working tool used and structured

on themes having a scale, or using a three-point attitude scale. Table2 shows the effects on the budget after the winter of 2022–2023.

Table 2. Degree of budget impact in percentage after winter 2022–2023

Percentage representation of the degree to which the budget was affected (as a percentage)	No.	Percentage %	Cumulative percentage
0	3	2,7	2.8
1	2	1,8	4.7
5	4	3.6	8.5
6	1	.9	9.4
7	1	.9	10.4
8	1	.9	11.3
10	12	10.9	22.6
11	1	.9	23,6
12	1	.9	24.5
15	1	10.9	34.9
18	1	.9	35.8
20	14	12.7	49.1
25	19	17.3	67.0
30	16	14.5	82.1
35	3	2.7	84.9
40	4	3.6	88.7
45	3	2.7	91.5
50	6	5.5	97.2
60	1	.9	98.1
70	2	18	100.0
Total	106	96.4	
Missing system	4	3.6	Missing system
Total	110	100.0	

Table 3. Energy consumption costs can unbalance families' budgets

Budget imbalance	No.	%
yes	56	50.9
no	31	28.2
don't know	23	20.9
Total	110	100,00

Table no. 3 shows that 50.9% of the respondents indicated imbalances in the budget as a result of energy consumption, and 28.2 did not specify this, which indicates reduced consumption or higher incomes. The percentage of 20.9% of respondents who mentioned that they do not know, are either indirect consumers or have low consumption and did not notice these increases in bills that would affect the budget.

Reducing energy consumption in households representing the resilience capacity of the population and can be achieved by changing the behaviour of consumers, by reducing consumption by household users who can be used at reduced capacity, by reducing heat and water consumption using sustainability methods (e.g. vouchers) (Table 4).

Table 4. Ways to reduce energy consumption and budget costs

Ways to reduce energy consumption through behavioural changes	Behavioural modes	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
	replacing some consumers	45	40,9	40,9
	reducing consumption	55	50	90,9
	cessation/interruption of consumption	10	9,1	100,0
Use of household energy consumers	at full capacity	40	36,4	36,4
	at reduced capacity	66	60,0	96,4
	stop/take out of service	4	3,6	100,0
Reducing heat and hot water consumption	to initial parameters	51	46,4	46,4
	low consumption	57	51,9	98,2
	by stopping/interrupting	2,6	5,5	100,0
Reducing energy consumption by using vouchers	yes	48	43,63	43,6
	no	32	29,0	72,7
	don't know	30	27,3	100,0
Total		110	100,0	

From table no. 4 it appears that within the ways of reducing energy consumption through behavioural changes, 50% are represented by consumption reduction. When using domestic energy consumers, the largest share of 60% is the reduction of operating capacity. The reduction of heat and water consumption also has increased weights on the 51.9% reduction in consumption. It can be mentioned that in rural areas the use of green mass is much higher than in urban areas (in the form of firewood or pellets). The use of vouchers, for electricity to which food vouchers worth 250 RON are added, is a way of resilience of the population in this period of crisis, economic recession. 43.6% of the respondents chosen this method of sustainability, by vouchers.

Table 5. Ways to reduce energy consumption in the agricultural and industrial sector

Reducing energy consumption in agriculture	Criteria	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
	Same level	49	44,54	44,5
	reduced	57	51,81	96,4
	stop/replace	4	3,63	100,00
Reducing energy consumption in industry	consumers/producers	49	44,5	44,5
	workers/unemployment	51	46,4	90,9
	doesn't know	10	9,1	100,0
	same quality	13	11,81	11,8
	decrease in quality	73	66,4	78,2
	product replacement	24	21,8	100,0
	Total		110	100,0

Table 5 shows that the greatest share in the reduction of energy consumption in the agricultural sector is represented by the reduced consumption of 51.81% and in the industrial sector, the impact of workers has the largest share 46.44% and the decrease in the quality of products 66.4%. The percentage of 9.1% of respondents who answered that they do not know represents the fact that their activities are aimed at other sectors.

Table 6 highlights the impact of energy and fuel reduction in indirectly productive sectors such as culture, education and health.

Table 6: The effects of energetic consumption in culture, education and medical sectors

	Criteria	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
How energy reduction affects the didactic education sector	yes	53	48,2	48,2
	no	40	36,4	84,2
	doesn't know	17	15,4	100,0
	school attendance	56	50,9	50,9
	the absence of teaching staff	29	26,4	77,3
	the quality of the didactic act	25	22,7	100,0
How reducing energy consumption influences the cultural act	is maintained at the same level	46	41,8	41,8
	are reduced	54	49,1	90,9
	are interrupted at time intervals	10	9,1	100,0
How it influences energy reduction in the medical sector	hygiene	20	18,2	18,2
	Medical equipment/equipment	67	60,9	79,1
	the quality of the medical act	23	20,9	100,0
	Total	110	100.0	

From table 6 it appears that the largest share was given by the respondents who answered affirmatively, 48.2% considering that the didactic process is affected, 15.4% answered that they do not know whether the didactic process is affected or not, on the grounds that they do not carry out activities in that sector. A high weight also recorded the school attendance at school 50.9%, school absenteeism registering quite high rates. Thus, in the 2021–2022 school year, the number of students/preschoolers enrolled in mainstream education, per day, decreased by 1,165 in the urban environment and by 104 in the rural environment, registering an increase in the total number of absences in the first semester of the year 2022 compared to the school year 2020–202, thus 245,977 absences in primary education of which 170,964 were unmotivated, secondary school 593,185 respectively 356,184 unmotivated, and in high school 359,176 absences of which 112,632 were unmotivated. At the level of Iasi county, 1,442,751 were registered, of which 811,140 were unmotivated (<https://www.bzi.ro>absenteeism-si-abandon-lacote-alarman-te-inscolile-din-lasi-tot-mai-putini-elevi-Imanage-to-get-pass-marks-4398873>).

According to the respondents, cultural activities suffer reductions (49.1% mentioned this perspective) and the medical sector will be more affected by the technical part/medical equipment that consumes energy (60.9% mentioned this criterion).

Table 7 shows how the use of the personal car, the individual consumption, effects the preference for the use of cheaper fuels and green energy.

Table 7: Preferences for green energy consumption

	Criteria	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
The use of a personal vehicle	is the same level	63	57.3	57.3
	lower	41	37.3	94.5
	has been stopped/interrupted	6	5.5	100.0
Economical fuels	on liquefied gas	51	46.4	46.4
	diesel	43	39.1	85.5
	benzine	16	14.5	100.0
Green energy	Wind power	29	26.4	26.4
	photovoltaic panels	72	65.5	91.8
	reduced use	9	8.2	100.0

A fairly large share of respondents (57.3%) stated that they use the car at the same level and that they would prefer liquefied gas to save money, which they consider to be a fuel of the future (46.4%). From the discussions with them, it emerged that they would also be open to electric cars, but the problem that arises is the rather high prices for their purchase, the lack of charging stations (9%). Despite of the high fuel costs the purchase of cars this year increased with 70% compared to 2021. However, those interviewed mention that "all diesel and gasoline are from the future". In the purchase of electric cars, China is in first place, followed by the United States, which shows a 7 percent increase in electric cars this year compared to last year. Regarding green energy, a large percentage registers photovoltaic panels 65.5% of the respondents, mentioning when they were interviewed, the high prices at the initial purchase that make these panels not yet have the necessary opening for purchase. Renewable resources in the EU have increased by almost 5% in 2021 compared to 2022, according to the European Statistical Office (Eurostat). The share of renewable electricity sources, gross consumption increased after the recovery of the economy by only 0.1 percentage points, from 37.4% in 2020 to 37.5% in 2021. Wind power and hydroelectric power accounted for more than two-thirds of the total electricity generated from renewable sources (37% and 32% respectively with the remaining one third coming from solar energy 15%), solid biofuels (7%) and other renewable sources (8%). It is stated that the fastest growing source was solar energy, which in 2008 represented only 1% of the electricity consumed in the EU. In 2021 more than three quarters of the gross electricity consumption in Austria (76.2%) and Sweden (75.7) was generated from renewable sources. These Member States The EU is followed by Denmark (62.6%), Portugal (58.4%), Croatia (53.5%), Latvia (51.3%), Spain (45.9%), Germany (43.5%) and Romania(42.4). At the opposite pole, the lowest share of electricity from renewable energy sources was in Malta (9.7%), Hungary (13.7%), Luxembourg (14.2%), Czech Republic (14.5%) and Cyprus (14.8%) (agerpres.ro/economic-extern/2023/01/27eurostat-production-of-electricity-from-sources-of-renewable-energy-in-the-union -European-is-increasing-1049687). Other forms of reducing energy consumption and solutions for the future offered by our country are:

- replace old cars that generates high emissions and high consumption;
- the decarbonization plan proposed by C.E. Oltenia;
- the adoption of advanced technology;
- reducing losses in distribution networks;
- intelligent medium and low voltage energy distribution systems;
- encouraging the exploration of resources in the Black Sea, an important element for securing independent energy. (energy.ee.europa.eu/system/files/2020-04/ro_final_necp_main_ro_0.pdf)

Table 8: The motivations in the choice of domestic users

Criteria in the choice of home users	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
Romanian brands	30	27,3	27,3
Expensive products	71	64,5	91,8
Cheap products	9	8,2	100,0
Technical quality	49	44,5	44,5
Low consumption	55	50,0	94,5
Grant	6	5,5	100,0
Total	110	100.0	

Table 8 shows that the largest share of responses is recorded by the expensive products criterion 64.5% and low consumption products 50%.

The Cluster analysis used in this research involves the creation of homogeneous groups of people according to the degree of impact on the quality of life in the conditions of the energy crisis after the end of the pandemic and in the situations where inflation and the "speculation of war" affect a large part of the population. The research also focuses on the perception of how the energy crisis affects different sectors of activity and socio-economic life in general. The cluster analysis resulted in two cluster groups: cluster 1 with a lower degree of damage compared to the energy crisis and cluster 2 with a higher degree of damage.

The profile of the respondents in cluster 1 with a lower degree of damage to the energy crisis is 69.1% male, 61.8% rural, over 25 years old with an income between 2000–4000 RON. The population with a higher proportion of males, explains the use of the car at the same 100% level with a higher percentage, compared to cluster 2 formed by a higher proportion of females. Likewise, water consumption is maintained at the same level (52.7% of respondents from cluster 1). The behaviour inclined to reduction occurs in the case of domestic users (for 50.9% of the respondents). It can be noted that the budget was affected in the winter of 2022–2023 to the extent of 25.1% more in cluster 1 than in cluster 2. However, the respondents felt less affected, the budgets being less unbalanced.

In cluster 2, as can be seen in the table below, 62.5% are women from rural areas 56.3%, over 25 years old with an income between 2000–4000 lei, a fact that explains less the use of cars 83.3% of respondents, for personal needs; household users are used at reduced capacity in a higher percentage than men in cluster1, at 70.8%; cluster 2 shows a lower inclination to purchase branded products, 50.0% of respondents, compared to men in cluster1 and a lower consumption of heat and water, 52.7% of respondents, compared to cluster 1.

utilizatorii casnici sunt folosiți la capacitate redusă într-un procent mai mare decât bărbații din cluster1, de 70,8%; prezintă o mai mică înclinație în achiziționarea de produse de firmă 50,0% dintre respondenți, față de bărbații din cluster1 și un consum mai mic la căldură și apă 52,7% dintre respondenți, comparativ cu cluster1.

Below are the two clusters:

Figure 1. Budget unbalance

Clusters		
	Input (predictor)	Importance
Cluster	1	2
Label		
Description		
Size		
Inputs		
	The use of the car for personal needs is at the same level (100.0%)	The use of the car for personal needs decreased (83.3%)
	Budget imbalance no (38.2%)	Budget imbalance yes (75.0%)
	High-performing domestic energy users are used at reduced capacity (50.9%)	High-performing domestic energy users are used at reduced capacity (70.8%)
	Factor in the purchase of household appliances technical quality of the products (58.2%)	Factor in the purchase of household appliances low energy consumption (66.7%)
	Type of household products purchased quality brands (78.2%)	Type of household products purchased quality brands (50.0%)
	Heat and water consumption considered to be at the initial parameters (52.7%)	Heat and water consumption considered to be low consumption (58.3%)
	By what % did energy affect the budget in winter 2023 vs winter 2022 (25.16%)	By what % did energy affect the budget in winter 2023 vs winter 2022 (22.69%)
	% allocated to energy and heat (22.80%)	% allocated to energy and heat (24.15%)

Table 10. The profile of the respondents from the two clusters according to the gender, place of residence, age and income

Cluster	Sex	No.	%	Place of residence	No.	%	Age	Income		No.	%	
								No.	%			
	Male	5	71.4	urban	4	57.1	<25 years	7	100,0	2000-4000	3	42.9
	Female	2	28,6	rural	3	42.9				4000>	4	57.1
	Total	7	100,0	total	7	100,0				total	7	100,0
1	Male	38	69.1	urban	21	38.2	<25 years	39	70,9	>2000	8	14.5
	female	17	30.9	rural	34	61.8	25 years+	16	29,1	2000-4000	5	45.5
										4000>	2	40,0
	Total	55	100,0	total	55	100,0	total	55	100,0	total	5	100,0
2	Male	18	37.5	urban	21	43.8	<25 years	30	62,5	>2000	3	27.1
	female	30	62.5	rural	27	56.3	25 years+	18	37,5	2000-4000	6	54.2
										4000>		18,8
	Total	48	100,0	total	48	100,0	total	48	100,0	total	8	100,0

Table 11. Statistics for income and age

Cluster		Age	Income
	N	7	7
		0	0
	median	21.00	5714.29
	standard deviation	1.528	4256.927
1	N	55	55
		0	0
	median	24.96	3977.07
	standard deviation	7371	2557.794
2	N	48	48
		0	0
	median	25.19	2870.58
	standard deviation	7482	1195.844

From table 11, it can be seen that the average age is 24 years with an orientation to the right being greater than 21 years and a median deviation of 7371, in cluster 1 and in cluster 2 it is 25 years with an orientation also to the right and with a standard deviation of 7482. The average income is 5714.29 for the entire population group, in cluster 1 is 3977.07 and a standard deviation of 2557.794 and in cluster 2 it is 2870.58 with a standard deviation of 1195.844.

Table 12. The profile of the respondents from the two clusters according to the income and age

Cluster	Income	No.	%	Cumulative percentage	Age	No.	%	Cumulative percentage
	2000-4000	3	42.9	42.9	<25	7	100.0	100.0
	4000>	4	57.1	100.0				
	total	7	100.0					

1	>2000	8	14.5	14.5	<25	39	70.9	70.9
	2000-4000	25	45.5	60.0				
	4000>	22	40.0	100.0	25+	16	29.1	100.0
	total	55	100.0		total	55	100.0	
2	>2000	13	27.1	27.1	<25	30	62.5	62.5
	2000-4000	26	54.2	81.3				
	4000>	9	18.8	100.0	25+	18	37.5	100.0
	total	48	100.0		total	48	100.0	

The cluster analysis resulted in three homogeneous groups of people depending on their perception of how the energy crisis affects different sectors of economic or social activity. The three cluster groupings present different degrees of pessimism regarding the resilience process in the conditions where the looming energy crisis is accompanied by the inflationary phenomenon of 15.5% recorded in 2023 (media sources) and, as I stated, "speculation" that reaches high levels. Many of the respondents stated that 7% of their residual income is paid for bank interest. 14% stated that they have no money for food. 10% that they cannot pay the bills and 75% that they cannot accumulate reserves. The three resulting cluster groups by degrees of pessimism are: Cluster 1 – the least pessimistic; Cluster 3 – the most pessimistic; Cluster 2 – medium level of pessimism.

Figure 2. Energy consumption impact on sanitar, cultural and educational systems

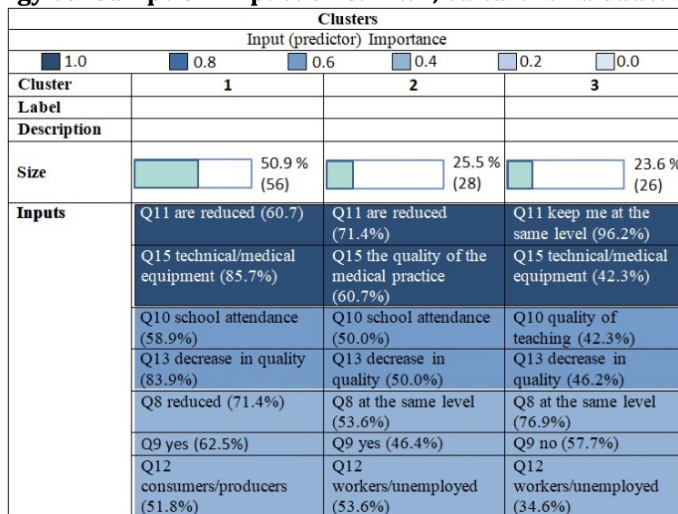


Table 13. Description of clusters from point of view of age, residence and income

Cluster	Variables											
	Sex	No.	%	Place of residence	No.	%	Age	No.	%	Income	No.	%
1	male	17	65	urban	9	34.6	<25 years	22	84.6	<2000	4	15.4
	femal e	9	34.6	rural	17	65.4	25 years	4	15.4	2000-4000	9	34.6
	total	26	100.0	total	26	100.0	total	26	100.0	4000>	13	50
2	male	15	53.6	urban	10	35.7	<25 years	15	53.6	<2000	6	21.4

	femal e	13	46.4	rural	18	64.3	25 years	13	46.4	2000-4000	11	39.3
	total	28	100.0	total	28	100.0	total	28	100.0	4000>	11	39.3
3	male	29	51.8	urban	27	48.2	<25 years	39	69.6	<2000	11	19.6
	femal e	27	48.2	rural	29	51.8	25 years	17	30.4	2000-4000	34	60.7
	total	56	100.0	total	56	100.0	total	56	100.0	4000>	11	19.6
										total	56	100.0

Differences in behaviour according to socio-demographic characteristics are achieved by applying the chi-square association test, which verifies whether there is an association between the behaviours of people in a state of energy crisis and the income category. Statistical method that allows categorical evaluation in a data set.

The crosstab used in this research is an analytical tool also known as contingency table analysis often used in categorical data analysis (nominal measurement scale). The cells of the table report the frequency of the number of respondents in each cell. Cross-tabulations describing row and column variables or tables in sequential form. Column variables are called Bennere and row variables Stubs. In the research presented, the working hypotheses were verified using the Chi-square association test (chi-square).

Table 14: Association between personal income and budget imbalances

Categories	Budget imbalance				Chi-square Test	Values	df.	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Income	Yes	No	Don't know	Total				
<2000	16	5	0	21	Person chi-square	15.929*	4	0.003
2000-4000	28	17	9	54	Lichelihood Ratio	18.953	4	0.001
4000>	12	9	14	35	Liner-by-Liner Asociation	14.339	1	0.000
total	56	31	23	110	N of Valid cases	1		

The null hypothesis assumes that there is no significant association between a certain type of behaviours and income category. If Sig.>=0.1. then the null hypothesis is not rejected. If Sig.<0.1 the null hypothesis is rejected. In the case above. Sig.=0.003<0.1, the null hypothesis is rejected for an assumed risk (significance threshold) of 10% being able to state that there is a significant association between the person's income category and the unbalanced budget. The energy factor unbalances the budget and implicitly the well-being of the family in the case of small budgets. Hypothesis confirmed in the current context of inflation of 15.5% and speculation existing after the pandemic and the war situation in Ukraine.

Table 15: Association between individual income and household users

Categories	Mode of use of home users				Chi-square Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Income	At full capacity	At reduced capacity	Stop/deactivate	Total				
<2000	8	12	1	21	Person chi-square	1161*	4	0.885
2000-4000	19	34	1	54	Lichelihood Ratio	1197	4	0.879
4000>	13	20	2	35	Liner-by-Liner	.021	1	0.884

					Asociation			
Total	40	66	4	110	N of Valid cases	110		

In this case Sig=0.885>0.1

The null hypothesis is not rejected as a result there is no association between household users as a mode of use and budget although the behaviour of the respondents is to use them at reduced capacity for all income categories.

Table 16: Association between people's income and heat and water consumption

Categories	Heat and water consumption							
Income	To the initial parameters	Low consumption	Stop/deactivate	Total	Chi-square Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
<2000	9	10	2	21	Person chi-square	9820*	4	0.044
2000-4000	23	31	0	54	Likelihod Ratio	7950	4	0.093
4000>	19	16	0	35	Liner-by-Liner Asociation	2142	1	0.143
Total	51	57	2	2	N of Valid cases	110		

Sig.=0.044<0.1

In this case, the null hypothesis is rejected, so there is a correlation between the heat and water consumption and the family budget. In almost all cases, low consumption is recorded even for income >2000 RON, the boilers are taken out of operation.

Table 17. Association between people's income and the use of the car for personal needs

Categories	Use of the car for personal needs							
Income	At the same level	Decreased	It has been stopped/interrupted	Total	Chi-square Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
>2000	9	11	1	21	Person chi-square	9000*	4	0.061
2000-4000	27	23	4	54	Likelihod Ratio	9322	4	0.054
4000>	27	7	1	35	Liner-by-Liner Asociation	5882	1	0.015
total	63	41	6	110	N of Valid cases	110		

Sig.=0.061<0.1

In this case the null hypothesis is rejected. It can be mentioned that there is association between income and car use that is reduced for all income categories and even stopped for periods of time for those with low and especially middle incomes 4%.

Table 18: Association between people's income and the purchase of household appliances

Categories	Motivating factors in the purchase of household appliances							
Income	The technical quality of the products	Low energy consumption	Guarantee	Total	Chi-square Test	Value	df	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
>2000	7	13	1	21	Person chi-square	5617	4	0.230
2000-4000	22	30	2	54	Likelihood Ratio	5685	4	0.224
4000>	20	12	3	35	Liner-by-Liner Asociation	1608	1	0.205
total	49	55	6	110	N of Valid cases	110		

Sig.=0.230>0.1

In this case the null hypothesis is not rejected. It can be mentioned that the purchase of household users is not associated with income or did not emerge from the applied test but those with low energy consumption are sought by respondents from all income categories.

Table 19: Association between people's income and the purchase of household appliances by manufacturers

Categories	Type of household products purchased							
Income	Romanian products	Quality products	Cheap products	Total	Chi-square Test	Value	df	asymptotic significance (2-sided)
>2000	4	15	2	1	Person chi-square	833*	4	0.586
2000-4000	15	33	6	4	Likelihood Ratio	232	4	0.520
4000>	11	23	1	5	Liner-by-Liner Asociation	631	1	0.202
total	30	71	9	10	N of Valid cases	10		

Sig.=0.586>1

In this case the null hypothesis is not rejected as a result there is no correlation between income and the type of producers for household products. The majority are inclined towards quality products and less towards the cheap ones or those of Romanian origins.

As can be seen from the application of the association test, there are associations on certain categories of income and energy consumption that is more or less aware as a factor of increasing the quality of life comfort. The confirmation or refutation of the working hypotheses is presented as follows:

H1. Hypothesis confirmed by cluster 2 from presentation set 1 (Fig. 1). Chi-square test Tables 14.15. 17 and 18.

H2. Hypothesis confirmed by cluster 2 presentation set 1 (Fig.1). Chi-square test Tables 14. 15. 17. 18.

H3. The hypothesis is confirmed cluster 3 and 1 from presentation set 2 (Fig .2) Chi-square test Tables 14. 15. 17. 18.

H4. The hypothesis is confirmed for 65% of respondents who mentioned photovoltaic panels and 26.4% wind energy.

H5. The hypothesis is confirmed for 43.6% of the respondents and 27.3% answered that they do not know and 29.15 answered negatively because they do not meet the criteria to receive vouchers or are unsatisfactory with their current consumption.

5. Conclusions

The results of this research highlight the existence of a relationship between social well-being and energy consumption in the conditions of the existence of an economic crisis, one can even speak of a recession according to some specialists on the background of a pandemic and a border war that encourages speculation and an uncontrolled product market. The use of green energy much encouraged by the EU is experiencing some difficulties. The connection to the renewable energy sources to the electrical networks requires special measures at the energy system level to maintain the operation of the energy systems while the increase of AC frequency, as some specialists say, would cause congestion in the network. These shortcomings led the decision-makers to include in the 10-year RET development plans investment measures that would provide "the necessary support for the evacuation of the energy produced in the wind-type power plants in the areas of Dobrogea and Moldova, but also in Banat and southern Muntenia".

The issue of internal markets was raised, which in the secondary plan can contribute:

- encouraging energy storage capacities, a fact that favors securing the energy factor with impact on the Internal Market on energy prices;

- supporting the "Research-Innovation initiative adopting technologies with functionality in areas such as the Internet of Things, Blockchain Decentralized Storage and Smart Applications."

- encouraging the implementation of consumption and dispatch measures (Demand Response). This implementation involves adjusting prices in such a way as to change the behaviour of the consumer at peak hours by shifting the load towards off-peak hours.

- aggregation - encouraging customers to participate in organized electricity markets directly or through aggregation if they have a power approved by the connection certificate of more than 500KW (energy.ec.europa.eu). An important aspect is the fact that the energy resilience of Romanians is represented by 3.5 million households in the rural area that use solid fuels as a heating source, approximately 2.8 million families use firewood (a fact also reflected by the research, the majority of respondents being from rural areas). The annual consumption of firewood and biomass by households is approximately 14 million, the annual consumption of gas amounts to approximately 35.2 million MWh. Recommendations regarding the economy focusing on reducing the pressure on the gas component increasing the cooling temperature in the houses by setting a lower heating temperature (reducing by 1°C higher you can reduce electricity consumption by 10°C), installing smart devices that could reduce consumption of 15%, installing solar panels, improving the insulation of houses will reduce energy consumption and are often subsidized by the state. Replacing boilers with heat pumps that make a long-term difference will ensure resilience. In conclusion, an important role is played by the sustainability program, which can be diversified and extended to larger population groups.

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SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE BASED ON GENDER IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT: A FIELD STUDY AT RIZAK MOHAMED ESSGHIR HIGH SCHOOL, AIN SINOUR, SOUK AHRAS.

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Abstract: *The aim of this study is to identify the levels of symbolic violence among students at the Rizak Muhammad Al-Saghir Secondary School in Ain Sennour, Souk Ahras, with its three dimensions represented by "symbols, signs, and meanings." The first dimension consists of 5 phrases, the second dimension "hidden and shadowed violence and suppression" consists of 5 phrases, and the third dimension, "freedom violations," consists of 3 phrases. The study sample included 159 students from different academic specializations, including scientific, literary, and technical disciplines. We adopted a descriptive approach to achieve the objectives of this study. In this research, we used a questionnaire developed based on theoretical literature, and we calculated its reliability and validity. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 23, utilizing statistical methods such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The study showed that the level of symbolic violence based on gender was high among the study sample, with a total mean of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.7, with no statistically significant differences attributed to the gender variable.*

Keywords: violence, symbolic violence, gender, school environment

1. Introduction

In the context of the nation-state, the school has become the sole option for individuals to educate their children and provide them with principles and values aimed at producing a coherent and integrated generation within their society and environment. The school also serves as a reflective mirror of social dynamics, as it encompasses various social categories that constitute social fields. It is influenced by the interactions and dynamics occurring in society, giving rise to diverse social phenomena with variable outcomes.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his sociological research on education, particularly focused on the school, presenting his unique concepts and theories formulated by synthesizing the theoretical heritage of sociology. He developed a critical social theory that aims to transcend symbolic violence, in addition to addressing male dominance and its relation to the emergence of feminism as a movement that challenges the unequal and subordinate position of women in society. This study seeks to apply Bourdieu's theories and examine the manifestations of gender-based symbolic violence in the school environment.

2. Research Problem and Questions

Violence is one of the most important social phenomena that sociologists are interested in. Violence within educational institutions has witnessed a significant increase, as evident from lived experiences. Violence is the result of interactions between individuals and groups, and therefore, it can be approached from various perspectives, such as psychological and legal perspectives. Additionally, violence becomes more pronounced based on gender.

The sociological legitimacy of this topic lies in the sociological approach adopted by the sociological researcher. The sociological dimension differs in its levels between what is visible and sensory perceptible, and what is hidden and understood through meanings and symbols. Pierre Bourdieu labeled this hidden dimension as "symbolic violence." Therefore, we have decided to examine this type of violence through its presence and manifestations among

students at Rizak Muhammad Al-Saghir High School in Ain Sinour, Souk Ahras. This leads us to the following question: What are the manifestations of symbolic violence towards gender in Rizak Muhammad Al-Saghir High School, Ain Sinour, Souk Ahras?

From this main question, the following sub-questions arise, which we seek to answer:

- What are the attitudes of high school students towards the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the school environment based on gender?
- Are there statistically significant differences, at a significance level of 0.05, in the forms of symbolic violence attributed to gender?

B. Study Hypotheses:

Attitudes of high school students towards the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the school environment are characterized by negativity.

There are no statistically significant differences, at a significance level of 0.05, in the forms of symbolic violence attributed to gender.

C. Study Objectives:

To identify the nature of attitudes of high school students towards the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the school environment.

To determine the existence of a statistically significant correlation in the forms of symbolic violence attributed to gender.

3. Defining the concepts of the study:

A. Definition of violence: Ibn Manzur stated in his book *Lisan Al-Arab* that violence is derived from "unfairness" and it is the opposite of kindness. It refers to someone who is harsh and not compassionate in his actions. "To enforce" means to take something forcefully. In a saying, it is mentioned that God gives more importance to kindness than to violence, indicating that violence stems from intensity and hardship.

In English and French, violence is derived from the Latin words "Violence" and "Violentai," which refers to the unlawful use of force. Violence is the use of force without legal justification, rejecting law, justice, and submission to any authority. It is a characteristic of a person who is fierce, and it includes meanings of punishment, rape, and interfering with the freedoms of others. It is also defined as "the use of physical force (such as hitting, imprisonment, or execution) or the exertion of social pressure, and its legitimacy depends on societal recognition" (Semestre, 1993).

In terms of terminology, scientists have provided various definitions for "violence." However, they agree that it is a complex social phenomenon and a mechanism for self-defense against the dangers faced by humans for survival and continuity in life. This defensive mechanism is one of the innate instincts that awaken and activate in defensive or aggressive situations, where both humans and animals are equal.

Adler defines violence as a compensatory response to the feeling of deficiency or weakness (Al-Zain, 1986: 194).

Levinas believes that violence is "any act in which the individual behaves as if they alone exist, as if the world around them exists only to receive this act of violence" (Levinas, 1948: 20-23).

According to the Dictionary of Social Science Terminology, violence is "a strict expression of force exercised to compel an individual or a group to perform specific actions desired by another individual or group. Violence can take a physical form (such as hitting, imprisonment, or execution) or take the form of social pressure, and its legitimacy depends on social recognition" (Mohammed et al., 1985).

B- Symbolic violence: Pierre Bourdieu defines it as "any influence that succeeds in imposing specific meanings and imposing them through legitimate meanings, thus obscuring the power relations that underlie its own power, adding power relations to this specific,

symbolic power" (Bourdieu, 1994: 5). The aim of symbolic violence, according to Bourdieu, is to impose domination and control over others, with the response of the other being voluntary based on their belief in the legitimacy recognized by the individual.

Bourdieu also sees symbolic violence as "hidden, unnoticed violence that affects the ideological and mental level and succeeds in imposing social representations by giving them legitimacy for domination" (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). The practice of violence is invisible and imposed on individuals through these social representations, which are the means to confer legitimacy to dominance and control through the imposition of meanings by legitimate force.

C- Definition of gender: Gender is a social concept used to refer to "social relations between sexes" or "socially and culturally constructed relationships between women and men." When we talk about gender, we are referring to social gender, which is socially constructed through socialization and encourages specific behaviours or attitudes. In other words, gender refers to the social and cultural classification between masculinity and femininity.

Gender is associated with behaviour that transmits social and cultural understanding of self as male or female. It is something acquired through life according to the social and cultural attributes assigned to masculinity and femininity.

D- Definition of the school environment: It refers to the school building in terms of space, division, location, and its surrounding environment. It includes the design of classrooms, ventilation, lighting, heating, and everything related to the external courtyard. On the other hand, the school environment includes the set of conditions and factors available within the school (teachers, curriculum, activities, diverse services, peer group, buildings, facilities, etc.), as well as the internal relationships and other factors related to the student that influence and affect them with the aim of forming a comprehensive and interactive personality with the surrounding environment (Razaiqia, 2022).

4. Previous Studies

Study 1: "Perceived Symbolic Violence and its Relationship to Learned Helplessness Among University Students" by Ali Hussein Ayid aimed to explore "perceived symbolic violence and its relationship to learned helplessness among students of the College of Arts at Al-Qadisiyah University." The study conducted a field survey on a sample of 200 randomly selected male and female students. The data collection instrument consisted of a 22-item scale for measuring perceived symbolic violence and a 24-item scale for measuring learned helplessness. The researcher employed appropriate statistical methods to analyze the data and reached several conclusions at the end of the study, including the existence of differences in perceived symbolic violence attributed to the variable gender. This study shares the independent variable, which is symbolic violence, and the use of a data collection instrument with our current study, although the populations' study differs.

Study 2: "Attitudes of Secondary School Students Towards Violence in the School Environment in Light of the Gender and Academic Specialization Variables" by Ali Mohammed aimed to examine "the attitudes of secondary school students towards violence in the school environment" and perceive differences in students' attitudes towards violence based on the gender and academic specialization variables. The sample consisted of 146 male and female students from L'aroussi Arab Secondary School in the Tiarat province, who were randomly selected during the 2018-2019 academic year. A questionnaire was used to measure attitudes towards violence in the school environment. The study found negative attitudes among students towards violence in the school environment, with males exhibiting more violent attitudes compared to females and literary students exhibiting more violent attitudes compared to scientific students. This study aligns with our study in terms of the research community and the data collection instrument, which relied on the symbolic violence scale, referring to the theoretical heritage of the variable. However, the results differed in terms of

students' attitudes towards symbolic violence, with males exhibiting more violent attitudes compared to females.

Study 3: Pierre Bourdieu's study titled "Symbolic Violence" in French secondary schools in 1972 is one of Bourdieu's most important propositions. Bourdieu's study reveals that there is violence practised by the official institution represented by the school through the entrenchment of arbitrariness and cultural domination experienced by learners within this social field. Bourdieu believes that the implicit goals of the school serve the integration between the school and the dominant class by highlighting mechanisms that reproduce social structures and legitimize class divisions within society.

5. Study Methodology

A. Used Methodology: This study aims to shed light on the phenomenon under study, which is symbolic violence in the school environment. To achieve this, the researcher employed a descriptive methodology, by obtaining and analyzing the respondents' answers and interpreting the phenomenon.

B- Spatial and Temporal Boundaries of the Study: Spatial Boundaries: The researcher conducted this study at Rizak Mohammed El Saghir Ibn Omar Secondary School in Ain Sennour. Temporal Boundaries: The field study was conducted during the months of January and February of the academic year 2022/2023.

C- Study Population and Sample: The study population consists of secondary school students at Rizak Mohammed El Saghir Ibn Omar Secondary School in Ain Sennour, Souk Ahras province, with a total of 357 male and female students for the academic year 2022/2023. Three key characteristics of the sample were identified, which are believed to have an impact on the study results: gender, academic level, and specialization.

Regarding the sample, a stratified sample of 159 male and female students was selected from the study population. This was done using the statistical equation (K. Thompson, 2012, pages 59-60) as follows:

$$n = \frac{N \times p(1 - p)}{[N - 1(d^2 \div z^2)] + p(1 - p)}$$

This study deals with students ranging in age from 16 years and above 18 years. They represent the first, second, and third year of secondary school, with a total of 159 male and female students. They are distributed according to personal information as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Individuals by Personal Information

Gender		male	%	feminine	%	total
			48	30.18	111	69.81
Specialization	scientific	34	53.12	30	46.87	64
	literary	10	11.76	75	88.23	85
	Technical	4	40	6	60	10
Educational level	The first is secondary	16	23.52	52	76.47	68
	The second is secondary	22	43.13	29	56.86	51
	third year in high school	10	25	30	74	40

Source: Prepared by researchers

A. Statistical Methods Used in the Study: In order to answer the research questions, after the field application stage, the researcher collected and processed the questionnaires using statistical software known as SPSS version 23. The following statistical methods were employed:

- ✓ Cronbach's alpha and Spearman's correlation coefficient for reliability and validity.
- ✓ Frequency distribution and percentages to describe the responses of the sample individuals.
- ✓ Mean calculation for obtaining the weighted arithmetic mean.
- ✓ Standard deviation to measure the dispersion of the respondents' answers around the mean.
- ✓ One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the significance of differences among means of three or more groups on a single dependent variable.

B. Study Instruments: The researcher utilized two instruments according to the study requirements:

Symbolic Violence Scale: Pierre Bourdieu defines symbolic violence as "subtle, invisible violence that remains unrecognized by its perpetrators and victims simultaneously. It manifests in values, emotions, ethics, and culture, employing symbolic tools such as language, images, signs, meanings, and frequently occurs through ethical symbolic practice against victims." Based on this, the dimensions of symbolic violence can be identified as follows:

Set of symbols, signs, and meanings: Imposing power or authority indirectly to assert the legitimacy of rights and the legitimacy of symbolic violence.

Limiting freedoms: Imposing compliance and submission on individuals subjected to symbolic violence, aiming to establish social beliefs and consolidate them in their minds.

Hidden justified violence and despotism: Violence that, along with other forms of violence, causes harm and damage to others. It differs in its performance and appearance as it is hidden and not clear.

The questionnaire was chosen as the primary data collection tool because it aims to consult the respondents on the topic and, based on the theoretical literature, measures symbolic violence. Some of the relevant scales used were:

Al-Saadi's scale for symbolic interaction.

Scale by Buthaina Mansour Al-Hulu and Faten Abdul Jabbar Al-Khazraji.

The adapted questionnaire consisted of 13 statements formulated in a descriptive style, each of which was answered on a five-point Likert scale, as shown in the following table:

Table 2: Types of Response and Degree in the Symbolic Violence Scale

Adoption Rate	Approve Strongly	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Strongly Disapprove
Estimation	5	4	3	2	1

✓ The first dimension, "Symbols, Signs, and Meanings," consists of the following items: 1, 3, 4, 10, 12.

✓ The second dimension, ". Hidden Projected Violence and Oppression," consists of the following items: 6, 7, 8, 11, 13.

✓ While the third dimension, " Violation of Freedoms," consists of the following items: 2, 5, 9

C- Psychometric properties of the study instruments:

Reliability of the measurement tool: The reliability of the measurement tool was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient as an indicator of the tool's consistency. The results obtained are presented in the following table:

Table 3: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Reliability

Domains	Expressions	The Cronbach's alpha
Symbolic Violence	13	0,84

Source: Prepared by researchers based on SPSS 23 output

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the items of Symbolic Violence is 0.84, which exceeds the threshold of 0.70. Therefore, the measurement tool demonstrates a high degree of reliability and is suitable for study and analysis. It can be inferred that the scale exhibits high validity and reliability, making it appropriate for data collection.

Internal consistency: Internal consistency is based on the correlation between each item and the total score of the dimension. The Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated to assess its significance statistically, as follows

Table 4: shows the correlation coefficients with the whole questionnaire

Expressions	Correlation coefficient	Expressions	Correlation coefficient	Expressions	Correlation coefficient
1	,538**	6	,626**	11	,754**
2	,384**	7	,477**	12	,577**
3	,678**	8	,565**	13	**655,
4	,721**	9	,607**		
5	,497**	10	,624**		

Source: Prepared by researchers based on spss 23 output

Based on Table 4 we can observe that all correlation coefficients are positive, indicating a strong positive monotonic relationship, as they approach +1. This is statistically significant at a significance level of 0.05.

6. Analysis of the descriptive study results:

First, let's present and discuss the results of the first hypothesis, which states that the attitudes of secondary school students towards the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the school environment are predominantly positive. To test the validity of this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation were used. The test results are shown in Table (5).

Table 5 illustrates the attitudes of secondary school students towards the phenomenon of symbolic violence in the school environment based on gender

The number.	The phrases.	The repetitions and proportions.						Mean	Standard Deviation	Adoption Rate	. Order
			Approve Strongly	Approve	Neutral	Disapprove	Strongly Disapprove				
1	My colleagues ignore the individual who they perceive as seeking to bother them.	ك	63	72	24	/	/	4,24	0,7	Large	6
		%	39,6	45,3	15,1	/	/				
2	My colleagues deliberately provoke others under the pretext of joking	ك	50	54	55	/	/	3,96	0,18	Large	13
		%	31,4	34	34,5	/	/				
3	My colleagues turn their faces away to express their rejection of others.	ك	56	72	31	/	/	4,15	0,72	Large	11
		%	35,2	45,3	19,5	/	/				
4	My colleagues express mockery through contemptuous glances to insult others.	ك	70	64	25	/	/	4,28	0,72	Large	5
		%	44	40,3	15,7	/	/				
5	My colleagues disregard the presence of others who are of lower status than them.	ك	75	56	28	/	/	4,29	0,75	Large	4
		%	47,2	35,2	17,6	/	/				
6	My colleagues succeed in belittling their opponents who disagree with them.	ك	63	65	31	/	/	4,2	0,74	Large	8
		%	39,6	40,9	19,5	/	/				

7	Minimizing the significance of others makes it easier to control them.	ك	70	67	22	/	/	4,3	0,7	Large	3
		%	44	42,1	13,8	/	/				
8	My colleagues believe that many people deserve to be ridiculed.	ك	58	71	30	/	/	4,17	0,72	Large	10
		%	36,5	44,7	18,9	/	/				
9	My colleagues interrupt the conversation of those who disagree with them.	ك	60	77	22	/	/	4,23	0,67	Large	7
		%	37,7	48,4	13,8	/	/				
10	My colleagues use body language to express their anger.	ك	52	55	22	/	/	4,18	0,65	Large	9
		%	32,7	53,5	13,8	/	/				
11	My colleagues feel happy when they mock someone in front of others.	ك	77	64	18	/	/	4,37	0,68	Large	2
		%	48,4	40,3	11,3	/	/				
12	My colleagues tend to convey their ideas through hand gestures.	ك	38	102	19	/	/	4,11	0,58	Large	12
		%	23,9	64,2	11,9	/	/				
13	My colleagues put others in embarrassing situations to mock them	ك	96	56	7	/	/	4,55	0,58	Large	1
		%	0,4	5,2	,4						
The weighted arithmetic mean.								4,23	0,7	Large	rg

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS program.

Table 5 shows the results of the SPSS program using descriptive statistics, indicating that the mean of symbolic violence in the school environment is 4.23, with a standard deviation of 0.7. This indicates that the level of symbolic violence among secondary school students at Rizak Mohammed Al-Saghir Intermediate School is positive and high, which confirms the first hypothesis stating the level of symbolic violence practiced by the studied sample.

The thirteenth phrase ranked first in terms of frequency with an average of 4.55 and a standard deviation of 0.58. The eleventh phrase ranked second with an average of 4.37 and a standard deviation of 0.68. In the third rank, the seventh phrase had an average of 4.3 with a standard deviation of 0.7, followed by the fifth phrase with an average of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.75. The fourth phrase came next with an average of 4.29 and a standard deviation of 0.72. The sixth rank was occupied by the first phrase with an average of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 0.7. In the seventh rank, the ninth phrase had an average of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.67. The sixth phrase came in the eighth rank with an average of 4.20 and a standard deviation of 0.74, followed by the tenth phrase in the ninth rank with an average of 4.17 and a standard deviation of 0.72. In the eleventh rank, the phrase had an average of 4.15 and a standard deviation of 0.72, followed by the twelfth phrase with an average of 4.11 and a standard deviation of 0.58. The last rank returned to the second phrase with an average of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 0.18.

This can be explained by considering the spatial location of the institution and the nature of the area. Despite not being an urban area, its proximity to the state headquarters, which is only 9 km away, allowed the residents of this village to have more interaction and dealings with the state headquarters. This led to the simulation of urban living and the adoption of the same behaviours. This also resulted in a lack of social relationships among its members, which was reflected in the school community, specifically secondary school students. The researcher observed that they tried to keep up with urbanization and were fascinated by it. Their behaviour was characterized by symbolic violence, which aims to assert and prove their existence and control over others. This aligns with the adolescent stage, which is characterized by personality development and the assertion of one's existence as a symbol of maturity and freedom.

These results contradict the study by "Ali Mohammed" entitled "Attitudes of Secondary School Students towards the Phenomenon of Violence in the School Environment in light of the variables of gender and academic specialization." The study found a negative orientation of the researched individuals towards violence in general in the school environment. However, it agreed with the study by Ali Hussein titled "Perceived Symbolic

Violence and Its Relationship to Learned Helplessness among University Students (Abed A, 2016, pp. 337-377)."

This result can be interpreted according to Bourdieu's theory that students perceive the forms of symbolic violence they are subjected to by their peers. The students' responses to the research questionnaire revealed that they suffer from their peers' lack of interest in them and their attempts to impose their opinions and ideas without providing them with an opportunity to discuss or participate in decision-making. This has led the students to experience symbolic violence and indirect violent practices directed towards them, which affects their psychological and social well-being.

These findings indicate the need for intervention programs and educational initiatives that promote positive interactions, empathy, and conflict resolution skills among secondary school students. Additionally, raising awareness about the consequences of symbolic violence and its impact on individuals' mental health and overall well-being is crucial for creating a safe and respectful school environment.

As for the second hypothesis, which posits that there are statistically significant differences at the 0.05 level attributed to the gender variable, to test the validity of this hypothesis, the following method was used:

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to examine the significance of differences among means of three or more groups on a single dependent variable, The test results are shown in Table 6.

Table No. 6: Represents the results of the differences, in the forms of symbolic violence attributed to gender

Statistical treatment dimension	gender	sample	Arithmetic mean	standard deviation	D. Freedom	significance level	Sig value	estimation
Symbols, Signs, and Meanings	males	48	4.20	0,36	3,08	0,05	0.025	"Statistically significant"
	females	111	4.19	0,44				
Hidden Projected Violence and Oppression	males	48	4.34	0.39	5.63	0,05	0.42	"Statistically insignificant"
	females	111	4.31	0.49				
"Violation of Freedoms"	males	48	4.18	0.51	2.19	0,05	0.022	"Statistically insignificant"
	females	111	4.16	0.44				

Source: Prepared by the researcher based on the outputs of the SPSS program.

The average score for males in the dimension of "Symbols, Signs, and Meanings" was 4.20 with a standard deviation of 0.36. For females, the average score was 4.19 with a standard deviation of 0.44. The independent t-test revealed a calculated p-value of 0.025, indicating statistically significant differences in symbolic violence attributed to the gender variable.

Regarding the dimension of "Hidden Legitimized Violence," the average score for males was 4.34 with a standard deviation of 0.39, while for females, the average score was 4.31 with a standard deviation of 0.49. The independent t-test resulted in a calculated p-value of 0.42, indicating no statistically significant differences in this dimension based on gender.

However, in the third dimension, "Violation of Freedoms," the average score for males was 4.18 with a standard deviation of 0.51, and for females, the average score was 4.16 with a

standard deviation of 0.44. The independent t-test revealed a calculated p-value of 0.022, indicating statistically significant differences in the dimension of violating freedoms based on gender.

In summary, the study found significant differences attributed to gender in the dimensions of "Symbols, Signs, and Meanings" and "Violation of Freedoms," with males scoring higher than females in both dimensions. The school environment faces challenges in shaping individuals' behaviour and integrating them into their external environment due to factors such as social upbringing, media openness, and social media.

7. Based on the findings, the following recommendations can be made:

Direct the educational staff to improve positive interaction among students, particularly in the third year of secondary school, and reduce academic pressures and burdens. Engage guidance counselors in addressing and mitigating the psychological and social effects of symbolic violence. Highlight the importance of addressing hidden forms of violence and their impact on individual development and adaptation to the environment. Explore the relationship between symbolic violence and other variables, particularly inputs and outcomes of the educational process.

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ARMS CIRCULATION AND CROSS-BORDER INSECURITY: THE NEED TO MEET THE CHALLENGE OF POROSITY OF BORDERS BETWEEN CAMEROON AND ITS NEIGHBORS

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Abstract: *Cameroon's borders are known for their porosity. While they are vital economic interfaces, they also crystallise political and security tensions, both in the context of inter-state conflicts (Bakassi) and internal conflicts involving rebel, secessionist, or autonomist groups (NOSO crisis). But Cameroon's borders can also be exploited as a resource to fuel these confrontations through trafficking, arms circulation, smuggling and corruption, as well as by offering the protection of a 'diplomatic sanctuary'. So, what explains this porosity of the borders? Furthermore, what are the strategies developed by the Cameroonian state in the face of this porosity, which is a source of cross-border insecurity? This reflection, based on archival documents, oral testimonies, and bibliographic documents, aims to highlight the link between security risk and border porosity. It then presents the two main types of border preservation mechanisms: on the one hand, « walls » and other strategic devices that mobilise well-known means but also new technological innovations; and, on the other hand, security forces that choose to be mobile and, to guarantee their effectiveness, must take up the challenge of national and international cooperation.*

Keywords: Circulation, Arms, Borders, Porosity, Cameroon

Cross-border porosity is a reality common to the borders of Cameroon and those of neighboring countries. Several factors are at the origin of this porosity which leads to insecurity on our borders. The probable causes behind this porosity would be political instabilities, insurrections and immigration of populations to neighboring countries. This clearly poses the problem of pooling efforts between CEMAC member states, in the phenomenon of porosity as highlighted (Saibou, 2006: 119), of border surveillance. Because despite the efforts made by the Cameroonian State, the porosity of Cameroon's borders is a historical truth of La Palisse. We therefore wonder about the remedies to stop this phenomenon which is undermining our borders. Better yet, what strategies has the Cameroonian State developed to deal with this porosity, a source of cross-border insecurity? This work aims to firstly highlight the link that exists between security risks, the porosity of borders and the circulation of arms or their trade, then, mechanisms and strategies centered on technological innovations. In addition to this, the classic mobilization of security forces to guarantee the effectiveness not only of borders, but also to meet the challenge of bilateral cooperation between neighboring countries.

1. Relationship between security risk and cross-border porosity

The link between security risk and the porosity of borders is very close, because the border presents itself as a kind of "entry and exit gate" of a country. And, the neglect of border control can, according to (Fall, 2003: 90), lead to an emergence of crime fueled by the trafficking of arms, drugs and precious stones. This situation, as Ndongo Epok points out, certainly prevails in West Africa, but is also a sad reality experienced on a daily basis for residents of the border areas in Central Africa. Cameroon shares its borders with Nigeria, Chad, Gabon, Congo, Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Republic. By domino effect, the phenomena experienced are similar. The second factor which establishes the close link between security risk and porosity is the illicit sale of weapons across the borders, thus creating notorious insecurities both in Cameroon and in its neighboring countries. This

insecurity could give rise to gangs of thieves and criminals, taking advantage of this border porosity to invigorate the war economy or the crime economy in organized gangs within each neighboring state.

Since the almost simultaneous independence of the countries of Central Africa, the porosity of the borders is one of the reasons for the political instabilities of certain countries in this sub-region. The Noso and Boko-Haram wars, where attackers armed with weapons transit through Cameroon, are palpable illustrations of this. These are rebels and militias who accentuate cross-border crime, leading to insecurity in Cameroonian territory if necessary. The porosity in our borders (Danga, 2020: 332) implies mass and illicit transfers of dangerous devices. This pernicious use of borders as a source of violence makes the historian Saibou I say that border areas are the sanctuary of rebel movements, due to the lukewarm imprint of the State on these areas far from decision-making centers and sometimes deprived. State repressive apparatuses to perpetuate trafficking, with illegality being legitimized by the actors. The border therefore becomes a place where criminals mobilize, taking advantage of this porosity to invigorate the economy of war or the economy of crime in organized gangs in the different borders linking Cameroon to its neighbors. The map below takes stock of the war economy in Bangui, and of the militia bands in Cameroon, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, and even to the borders of the South and North Sudan entities (Fall, 2003: 102). The consequences of the porosity of our borders are explicitly highlighted, with the immediate corollary of cross-border crime, the exploitation of local wealth, linked to trafficking and the non-control of significant flows of arms, munitions and drug all sorts. This situation is at the origin of several actions encouraging the abuses of the “Noso”, “Séléka” and “anti-Balaka” rebels. However, in view of the analysis made in this map, we deplore the tracing of the different zones of trafficking and illicit circulation of weapons and by extension the negligence in the control of drugs, ammunition and weapons of all calibers. Which reinforces the idea of reinforcement in the numbers of the Cameroonian defense forces? It is clear that the porosity of borders is a factor which is equated with insecurity and its consequences. It is therefore capital thought (Ango, 2001: 100) for the State, in order to preserve national sovereignty, to strengthen prevention and security mechanisms through technological innovations.

1.1. Mechanisms and technological innovations of Cameroonian border control

As a factor of insecurity, the porosity of borders is a phenomenon at the heart of debates in Cameroon. And despite the surveillance techniques developed by the Cameroonian State in our borders, insecurity is increasing, hence the establishment of new mechanisms to reduce this porosity. Before talking about the border preservation mechanism, it is important to briefly present the real border situation. Indeed, the porosity of our borders is due to the lax nature not only of the government in the choice of security personnel, but also to the methods used to restrict this growing porosity throughout Cameroon's borders. Because this insecurity, it should be noted, leads to a significant deficit in the control and regulation of products entering through the borders of Cameroon and neighboring countries. This insecurity is in fact marked by the rise of terrorism, maintained by the militias who circulate without embarrassment in the States of Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, the Central African Republic and South Sudan (Bangoura, 1996: 215). The fight against cross-border porosity (Adam, 1997: 300) becomes an absolute imperative to face the security problems to which Cameroon and neighboring states are exposed. Thus, the protection mechanisms put in place to guarantee peace, security and local development would be disarmament, demobilization, the involvement of considerable numbers of law enforcement forces in the peacekeeping process and securing our borders and disarming smugglers.

1.2. Mechanisms for preserving and securing borders

It follows in fact that cross-border porosity supported by the unhealthy behaviour of certain crooked “men in outfits” has pushed the Cameroonian government, as stated, (Danga,

2020: 298) to take “the bull by the horns”. To this end, the mechanism adopted by the Cameroonian government is the establishment of seasoned military units along the land and maritime borders, for the surveillance of material goods entering the towns near the borders and later throughout the country territory. The phenomenon of corruption, laxity in control operations along the border posts and above all the rapid desire of certain customs officers to enrich themselves require a redeployment of the strategic system of the defense forces on the borders of Cameroon because, as the officer underlines André Bertrand Mvogo: “the weak presence of the State in border control amplifies maritime and land piracy of our borders”. This alarming cross-border situation means that joint control of the army, gendarmerie and police is at the center of the fight against porous borders. Colonel Youssa will speak about preventive and repressive surveillance as an inseparable factor in tracking down terrorists, smugglers and transnational offenders “polluting” the borders and creating notorious insecurity not only in Cameroon, but also in neighboring countries (Fall, 2003: 105).

Notwithstanding the criticism addressed to them regarding their behaviour and their state of corruption on the borders, the Cameroonian police and customs play an important role in the battle against the illicit circulation of goods and especially the fight against cross-border crime. The example of the Cameroon-Nigeria maritime border near the town of Akwaya is one illustration among many others of the determination of the Cameroonian police and customs in the fight against the violation of our borders by faithless attackers nor law which plunder Cameroon's wealth and fuel terrorist networks in Cameroon and its neighborhood. Despite the persistence of border porosity, it should be noted that the control mechanisms set up by the Cameroonian government in the fight against porosity in our borders have progressed over time, space and in intensity. However, for a guarantee of lasting cross-border security, it would be wise for the Cameroonian government to introduce innovations in cross-border control to reduce the high rate of porosity of the borders.

2. Technological innovations in border control

The attempt to analyze technological innovations in securing Cameroon's borders encounters numerous difficulties. Indeed, the policy of good neighborliness as advocated by President Paul Biya somewhat weakens the establishment of real security of Cameroon's borders. However, some innovations are being implemented to solve this pressing problem of cross-border porosity.

2.1. Insufficient manpower in the Cameroonian army

Subsequently, and given the insufficient numbers in the Cameroonian army, the government will set up an Elite unit responsible for effectively combating the phenomenon of insecurity on our borders. The rapid intervention battalion (BIR) with the special mission of neutralizing rebel bands and combating insecurity has succeeded as much as possible in calming this growing insecurity in Cameroon and more precisely in the North with the harassing presence of cutters of road. In fact, this corps is the essential link put in place by the Cameroonian government to combat the insecurities plaguing the entire territory, hence the creation within this same corps of a special “Delta” unit which had to intervene effectively in the Cameroon-Nigerian problem on the Bakassi peninsula (Danga, 2020: 300). And even if this body experiences some difficulties relating to the number of its elements, it is a reassuring palliative for questions of cross-border insecurity. In the same vein, the creation of the National Borders Commission (CNF), a consultative structure on border issues, was set up for cross-border security. The policy of effective occupation of these border areas protected by traffickers from different sectors is necessary and urgent to fight against this security threat. As another innovation, the government has erected “barrier walls” which make it possible to filter objects entering the territory, and to channel flows around border points to facilitate the surveillance of objects and people. All that remains for the law enforcement forces operating in the border area is to truly fulfill their role. In the same vein, the strengthening and

alternation of elements of forces in border posts are two other elements which guarantee the reduction of porosity and by extension the phenomenon of cross-border insecurity. The measures undertaken by the Cameroonian government have certainly reduced the rate of insecurity at our borders; however, much remains to be done because acts of corruption, cronyism and above all the crisis of personnel to ensure the maintenance of order at the borders remain current. Hence the necessary cooperation of CEMAC member countries to stem the porosity that is a source of insecurity on our borders (Danga, 2020: 305).

2.2. Challenges of bilateral sub regional cooperation

Talking about cooperation between neighboring countries is essential for the preservation of peace in the different countries concerned; and the governments of these countries should get involved in order to put an end to these crises fueled by the fraudulent penetration of illicit goods and small arms (SALW) into the sub-region. To do this, the establishment of an International Joint Patrol (PAMI) is necessary to ensure not only the interests of Cameroon but also those of neighboring countries in an area which could generate “war” if nothing is done. Because, let us note, since 1966, the countries of Central Africa have been going through security crises thanks to the transfer of arms which takes place on the border with Cameroon. As such, the Cameroonian gendarmerie carries out border security missions on a daily basis jointly with elements of the Central African gendarmerie; these control forces fight against cross-border threats. Cameroonian Colonel Youssa also specifies that: “the history of the national gendarmerie is closely linked to the preventive and repressive security of the territory”.

In other words, the gendarmerie occupies a special place in the fight against porosity in our borders. It would therefore be wise to also place the latter at the center of this fight for naturally better performance. For better performance, it would also be wise for Cameroon and its neighbors to strengthen the logistics and equipment of customs officers and gendarmes (Ngwounfo, 2017: 344) to fight against smugglers. On another level and still speaking of the challenges in terms of cross-border cooperation, it is important for the governments of Central African countries to create jobs to reduce the unemployment rate by investing in sustainable projects to guarantee stable and remunerative. As most Central African states have a significant number of unemployed, on average 70%, the majority of young people find themselves confined near the borders where terrorist groups, drug traffickers, weapons of war, small caliber and conventional ammunition.

Thus, the difficulty in monitoring these borders becomes obvious. Indeed, cross-border security reform remains a requirement for the governments of Central African countries because the crises in Chad, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and even Cameroon require a pooling of efforts to stop the trafficking of objects, illicit goods and weapons on the borders. It is also necessary to dispatch the army of each neighboring State in the policy of implementing the defense of the integrity and security of the borders of the sub-region because the porosity of the borders remains a notorious source of traffic Illicit weapons and ammunition by extension, smuggling of SALW. It is therefore urgent that African heads of state and the international community resolutely take decisions to carry out the various disarmament operations, demobilization of irregular forces, for the protection of our borders. For this, an effective occupation of these border areas confiscated by smugglers is necessary and urgent to stem or even neutralize the threat. CEMAC member states should also involve populations in this fight to denounce any abuse relating to the trafficking of illicit goods and objects entering the territory of the regions concerned (Danga, 2020: 310).

In this vein, the identification of target areas is necessary for operations of mixed defense forces. The ECCAS set up among others by the 06 member countries of the CEMAC contributed in its own way to putting an end to the threat which existed at the borders of these States. For the particular case of Cameroon, the government for these operations has set

up “falcons, Nomade, Harmattan” along certain routes, to fight against cross-border porosity on the Cameroon-Chad border. Because these winding routes traveled by the phenomenon of highway robbers are a very dangerous path for the populations of both countries. Hence this strengthening of patrols by mixed law enforcement forces. This cooperation between countries bordering Cameroon is necessary to the extent that precautions taken by States contribute to the reduction of insecurity in almost all countries bordering Cameroon. President Paul Biya, for his part, began a disarmament and demobilization campaign in 2018 aimed at destabilizing the fighters of Boko-Haram and Noso armed groups. The Gulf of Guinea Commission was entrusted, within the framework of inter-state cooperation, with the mission of securing the borders against all kinds of piracy hindering security in CEMAC member countries. This cooperation between the heads of Central African States must respect a certain ethics with regard to the strategic and sensitive nature of the border because it could, through a laxity observed on the part of the government, favor a route of destabilization for the security of states.

At the end of this exploratory reflection on the questions of porosity and cross-border security, the exploitation of the data and the analyzes carried out show that, more than a reality, cross-border porosity leading to territorial insecurity is a fact. On this note, the presence of mixed patrol forces, the strengthening of elements of the armed forces, and better equipment for customs officers are essential in the fight against smugglers present on the borders. A frank and sincere collaboration between Cameroon and its neighbors is essential for the harmonization of cross-border operations between Cameroon and its neighbors. And even if the collaboration of mixed patrol forces does not prove obvious given, for example, the diversified interests of the latter, it nonetheless remains true that the general objective must be the re-establishment of security, reduction in illicit trafficking and the tracking down of smugglers at the borders linking Cameroon with its neighbors.

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PERSPECTIVES OF MATERNITY AT ADOLESCENT AGE

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Abstract: *The present study aims to analyze motherhood at the age of adolescence in Romania, highlighting the risk factors and the impact on mothers and newborns. Risks include premature pregnancy and medical complications, in the context of low education and limited access to resources. Antenatal education and community support are crucial, and access to adequate antenatal care is essential to monitor maternal and fetal health. The tool used in this research was the semi-structured interview, applied to a sample of 14 mothers aged between 13 and 18 from Vâlcea county. The results highlighted the fact that, for the most part, pregnancies at this age are unplanned, also because of the reluctance of teenagers in relation to contraceptive methods. In the context of predominantly poor socio-economic status, with low schooling and limited family support, teenage motherhood is not without concerns, lack of newborn care skills and health problems. All these are also reflected in the emotional health of underage mothers, who end up facing anxiety.*

Keywords: pregnancy, adolescence, prenatal care, contraceptive methods, newborns.

1. Introduction

Placing ourselves in the specific sociocultural context of Romania, the analysis of underage mothers becomes essential in light of the impact it has on individuals and communities. The phenomenon of teenage pregnancy in Romania is not only a demographic problem, but also a complex issue that reflects the interactions between socio-economic, cultural and public health factors. Within this framework, it is imperative to explore not only the frequency of these situations, but also the underlying issues related to education, family support, access to health care, and financial resources.

In Romania, early pregnancy is a complex and sensitive issue, influenced by a variety of causes and factors. One of these factors is the low level of sexuality education, both within the education system and in communities. Young people may have limited access to information about contraception and sexual health, which contributes to unwanted pregnancies.

The moment of initiation of sexual life is, however, influenced by biological factors, as well as cultural, environmental and social factors in general. Thus, this decision, sometimes premature, is influenced by their peers or even parents. However, studies show that the optimal age to become sexually active is between 18 and 22, when the individual is mentally and physically mature. Thus, the early initiation of sexual activity can be associated with medical problems (cervical cancer, breast cancer, HIV infection or other sexually transmitted diseases), but also with risky behaviours (alcohol consumption, drug use, unplanned pregnancies, abortions, multiple sexual partners, risky sexual activities) (Rada 2014).

However, the chronological age of the mother, independent of cultural and socioeconomic influences, cannot be considered a predictor for pregnancy, but corroborated can constitute risk factors for teenage mothers and their children (Stativa et. al. 2021). Thus, although young people may have difficulty in making responsible decisions about sexual relations, and lack of experience and maturity may contribute to high-risk behaviours,

situations of poverty, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and culture may contribute to increasing the risk of early pregnancies.

The causes that lead to teenage pregnancies are not only the poor economic situation, low level of education, early marriage specific to certain ethnic groups, unprotected early intimate relationships, disorganized family environment, older partner, rape, alcohol and drug use but also other environmental influences (Florescu, Temneanu and Mindru 2016). Getting pregnant in adolescence is correlated with emotional problems manifested in stress, depression, anxiety, but also with social problems such as school dropout (Mantescu et. al. 2021).

The fact that, most of the time, underage mothers become single mothers causes them to face poverty and adopt risky behaviours such as smoking. The entire context is later reflected in the behaviours of their children who, in turn, are more likely to have lower school results or even drop out of school to which is added a higher prevalence for health problems (Stativa et. al. 2021). In addition, these children are more likely to have behavioural problems, and in their adolescence to experience substance use and even early sexual relationships (Van der Starre 2017).

In the absence of support from the family, the pregnant teenager will not receive appropriate prenatal care, embodied in medical checks and analyses aimed at detecting possible problems that may arise both in the mother and in the child. Thus, quick action by specialists will not be possible, despite the fact that, from the perspective of age, the medical consequences of giving birth at the age of adolescence are the most diverse (difficult birth, low birth weight, prematurity, anemia, malformations, disabilities) (Florescu, Temneanu and Mindru, 2016). The risk factors associated with these consequences are both biological and medical in nature and include the mother's diet, which is often inappropriate, sexually transmitted infections, inadequate prenatal care, the use of tobacco, alcohol, or drugs during pregnancy. pregnancy, incomplete development of the mother (Dimitriu et.al. 2018; Mantescu et. al. 2021).

Thus, health problems in children born to teenage girls are closely related to the fact that the woman is not anatomically and physiologically prepared to procreate without risk. In addition, children born to underage mothers are vulnerable from this point of view because they are usually premature and come from pregnancies that have not been medically monitored (Radu et. al. 2022). On the other hand, the complications that can occur both during pregnancy and at birth can be fatal for underage mothers, representing the second cause of death for girls between the ages of 15 and 19 all over the world (Florescu, Temneanu and Mindru 2016).

Roma families, known in Romania for marrying at an early age, for dropping out of school, for large families and, implicitly, for early sexual relations encourage pregnancies even at the age of 12, not following contraceptive methods or visits to the gynecologist (Diaconescu et. al. 2015). Continuing the same idea, Radu et. al. (2022) explains that the majority of underage mothers are of Roma ethnicity by the fact that ethnicity-specific values and education are very different. Early marriages, without a legal basis, concluded only according to the rules of the community to which they belong, respect for ancient traditions, culture and customs, the large number of children and the low number of divorces are just some of the specific characteristics of this ethnic group.

2. Research design and methodology

The present research aims to achieve the following general objectives: the identification of risk factors that lead to the occurrence of a pregnancy at the age of adolescence; capturing the impact of a teenage pregnancy on the mother; capturing the impact of a teenage pregnancy on the child, both at birth and in the long term, during their teenage years.

The present work uses a qualitative methodology, being based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Open-ended questions and empathy can help gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and pressures teenagers face. The questions will address interpersonal relationships, access to information about sexual health, but also family or social support available. It is essential to create an open and safe environment to encourage teenagers to freely share their experiences and concerns. The interview thus helps to create a favorable climate between the interviewee and the researcher, giving the latter the opportunity to explore unexpected aspects.

The sample used in this research was a non-probability, available one : illiterate 14 mothers between the ages of 13 and 18 (8 Roma) who gave birth in Vâlcea county, either in the maternity ward or at home, were selected. To protect identity and confidentiality, interviewees' names have been coded with initials in the results section.

The data collection was carried out from August to November 2023 based on an interview guide, with an emphasis on the following topics: the socio-economic situation of the mothers' family of origin, the onset of pregnancy (changes and concerns), interpersonal relationships (partner, persons of support), physical and emotional health during pregnancy, implications of birth and emergence of the newborn (accommodation and changes). Thus, the present research aims to analyze the changes in the life of a teenage girl from the time of pregnancy to the appearance of the newborn, with environmental implications.

3. Results

Socio-economic situation of mothers

Nine of the fourteen mothers interviewed, reported on the precarious economic situation of the family of origin, with below average income and unsatisfactory living conditions: *"10 people lived in 3 rooms, with grandparents, aunts and cousins"* (RM). At the same time, with the exception of one person, the others came from disorganized families, with divorced, deceased parents or were simply unrecognized on the paternal line in the civil status documents: *"when I asked my mother who my father was, she said that it's better not to know"* (CP), *"my parents separated when I was very young, they both remarried... but I grew up only with my grandmother"*(EB).

Regarding the level of schooling, only four of the mothers interviewed reported that they had attended school until the moment of birth, the others not being schooled or having dropped out of school years ago. The eight Roma mothers communicated the fact that, in the environment they come from, girls are not encouraged to go to school, two of them later enrolling in a form of education with the support of some programs, being financially or materially motivated: *"I might never have signed up, but they promised us money; if I learn to bathe, it's still good"* (AG).

The onset of pregnancy (changes and concerns)

Only two of the fourteen mothers interviewed, stated that they wanted the pregnancy and planned it with the intention of escaping poverty and thus forcing me to leave the family to live with my partner: *"my mother would not have let me move in with him, but because I got pregnant, he was ashamed of the world to raise the child alone, and that's how I escaped"* (SI); the others admitted that the pregnancies were unplanned, but they conformed to reality and got used to the idea that they would become young mothers: *"I had met my husband 2 months before, he was much older than me and I trusted that nothing bad would happen"* (CC), *"I didn't know what it was like to become a mother at 14, but that's how it is with us (roma), I'm neither the first nor the last"* (AG).

In what concerns the contraceptive methods, most of the mothers interviewed, especially those of Roma ethnicity, stated that they are not followers of these methods and have never used such methods. Being asked if they know such methods or if they would be

willing to try them in the future, I noted the same reluctance on their part, not having correct information: *"I heard that you can get cancer from the IUD"* (AG).

Regarding the changes that occurred with the onset of pregnancy, all the interviewed mothers specified physical aspects (weight gain, malaise specific to pregnant women), and 2 of them also mentioned emotional changes: *"it was a shock for me, I was crying a lot, I couldn't bear seeing myself in the mirror... I actually hated myself"* (AM), *"I was passing by on the street and I would hear <<look at this one is pregnant>> and then I felt like I had a disability ... I felt like dying"* (SM).

Regarding the worries that appeared with the pregnancy, the majority stated that they had no worries, only three of the mothers mentioned certain thoughts that they had during that period: *"my parents found out a month before giving birth that I am pregnant... they always told me when I was little that if I did it, I will leave their house; all this time I was wondering where I was going to live"* (AS), *"I was worried about the fact that I didn't know who I got pregnant with and I didn't want my son to grow up without a father"* (DR), *"I thought that I wouldn't know how to change his diaper or have milk to give him, that I wouldn't sleep at night or spend enough time with my boyfriend or that he wouldn't like me anymore if I were fat"*(SM).

Interpersonal relationships

In what regards the fourteen mothers interviewed, four are single mothers. Furthermore, one of them stated that she did not know who the child's father was because she had several sexual partners at the same time, and the other 3 confessed that they were left when they learned the news: *"his parents never accepted me, we secretly loved each other, but they didn't want to accept the child in any way"* (EG), *"when he found out that I was pregnant he made me have an abortion; then I also found out that he also had a wife and a child"* (MC).

Regarding other support persons, the 8 Roma mothers, who were married according to their culture, were supported by their partners' families. The others said that they were supported by parents, grandparents, siblings or other people from the extended family: *"my family didn't welcome me home, they were very angry with me... I had stayed with an aunt for about 5 months, and then they came and took us, they did the baptism and we have all been together since then... it helps me a lot"* (AS), *"we managed as best we could, my sister also sent me money for diapers, clothes..."* (NC).

Physical and emotional health during pregnancy

Only two of the fourteen interviewed mothers stated that they went to the doctor during the pregnancy for tests and monitoring, the rest coming to the attention of the doctors only on the occasion of the birth: *"if I am not sick, why should I go to the doctor?"* (SI), *"I didn't have money to spend on the means of transport that should have taken me, it was far and there are no buses to go to the city"* (LB), *"I didn't go because I was ashamed to undress in front of them"* (NC). No particular health problems were recorded during the pregnancy, apart from seasonal colds, nausea, dizziness or other pregnancy-specific problems of this type. In each case, the treatment was self-administered without asking a doctor.

Regarding the emotional state of the mothers, they unanimously highlighted an increased sensitivity, states of anxiety, states of restlessness that set in upon learning the news, for some persisting even after the birth: *"I was left with such a sensitivity, I cried about everything, I had restless sleep, but I had to recover"* (AM).

Implications of childbirth and emergence of the newborn

Regarding the moment of birth, the mothers described it as a stressful, difficult and painful event that marked them, without any pleasant memories. Unanimously, the mothers stated that the births were complicated: *"I gave birth very hard, I struggled a lot, I don't even want to remember; I thought I was dying then"* (CP), *"the doctors were also surprised that I finally managed to give birth; after a week, at discharge, they told me that they were afraid I was*

going to die" (AS). Two of the fourteen mothers interviewed, gave birth at home, later arriving at the hospital for medical care: *"I didn't think I would give birth then, my mother-in-law called the ambulance but it arrived too late"* (DR). Four of the people interviewed talked about the fact that they could not give birth naturally, and the doctors ultimately decided that they needed a caesarean section: *"at the moment I didn't feel anything, but then I had terrible pain"* (SM).

According to the mothers, seven of them stated that meeting the newborn scared them at first: *"I couldn't believe it was my child, I expected it to look different, more beautiful"* (CC), *"I panicked when I saw how small he was, I was afraid to take him in my arms, and he was crying very loudly and I was crying with him"* (RM). Regarding the breastfeeding process, only five of the mothers interviewed breastfed their newborns, while the other mothers fed them with powdered milk: *"I had milk, but I heard that your breasts would become loose after breastfeeding and I didn't want to risk it"*(EG), *"it was easier because I had milk to give him, otherwise I should have had to get up at night to prepare it and it would have been more difficult"* (CP).

Regarding the newborns, 6 of the 14 were born prematurely. One of them suffered from a diaphragmatic hernia and required surgery from the first days of life, and another suffers from Turner Syndrome. All 14 newborns had a lower birth weight for gestational age.

4. Discussions

Although it is not a universal valid truth, the majority of underage mothers come from dysfunctional backgrounds with a poor material and financial situation, which adds an additional dimension of complexity to managing pregnancy and parenting responsibilities. These mothers may face pressures to provide the child's basic needs, such as food, medical care and adequate housing. The economic and social impact can negatively influence access to education, thus limiting future prospects. However, as we also noted in the results section, it is important to also observe examples of resilience and determination in these situations, where underage mothers make efforts to overcome obstacles and provide a stable environment for their children.

The appearance of a pregnancy at an underage girl, whether planned or not, is a stressful event for mothers because their body is neither sufficiently developed nor prepared for the pregnancy and, implicitly, for the moment of birth. Even though the maturation of sexual organs occurs around the age of 14, the onset of sexual life during puberty exposes girls not only to health problems, but also to risky sexual activities, to marital instability, affecting their ability to have a stable relationship in adulthood (Rada 2014).

At the same time, the appearance of a pregnancy at a young age also involves problems of the young mother with her parents, where they are present, or with the partner, respectively with the child's father. Thus, adolescence is a period strongly influenced by childhood events and implicitly by the family environment, which is why girls from disorganized families, with reduced material and financial possibilities and with poor education, are more prone to early pregnancies, outside of marriage (Radu et al. 2021).

Compared to adult mothers, minor mothers are prone to give birth to premature or much heavier babies for gestational age, a fact confirmed by the results of the present study. Given these characteristics, newborns require longer hospital stays. Moreover, newborns can present other health problems, which in the absence of careful monitoring of the pregnancy (mostly, underage mothers do not receive adequate prenatal care) cannot be anticipated nor avoided (Boia et. al. 2016).

As we saw in the results section, half of the interviewed mothers admitted that at the first contact cu the newborn were scared. This is due to the fact that, in most cases, mothers are not psychologically mature and are not responsible enough in relation to the needs of a newborn. Moreover, they do not have the necessary skills to take care of it properly (Radu et. al. 2021).

Also, due to the absence of prenatal care or inadequate prenatal care, both the mother and the newborn can face various health problems that normally could have been anticipated, avoided or treated in the early stages. This fact can lead to various conditions among newborns and even mothers that can result in frequent and prolonged hospitalizations or, in dramatic cases, can even culminate in their death (Radu et. al. 2022).

5. Conclusions

Motherhood at a young age in Romania comes with it a series of challenges, both for mothers and for newborns. Risk factors are diverse, from the mother's family background to inadequate prenatal care, and can affect both the mother's health and the child's development.

Underage mothers face significant risks, including premature pregnancies and medical complications. The low level of education and limited access to financial resources increase the vulnerability of these young women. The present research highlighted the fact that young mothers mostly have a low level of schooling or, in the case of Roma, are uneducated. In addition, they lack correct and complete information about contraceptive methods, which makes them reluctant to do so.

This context can have a negative impact on the development of the fetus, with an increased risk of low birth weight and health problems in newborns. We noticed, therefore, in the results section that many children are born prematurely or with low weight, a fact that requires a long hospitalization and specialized treatments.

Adequate prenatal care is a key element in this equation. Although the present study highlighted the fact that most minor mothers do not go to the doctor during pregnancy for monitoring citing financial reasons or reluctance to medical services, antenatal care contributes to monitoring the health of the mother and the fetus, while providing the opportunity to provide useful information and advice. Programs that promote prenatal education can support teen mothers in making informed decisions and improving health outcomes for themselves and their children.

In addition, the ability of underage mothers to provide adequate care may be influenced by a lack of experience and family support. Prenatal education and counseling programs are imperative in developing these mothers' skills in pregnancy management and child care. These conclusions are necessary because the mothers interviewed in this research showed their lack of skill in caring for newborns and the limitations in exercising their responsibilities after birth. Family and community support are crucial in ensuring their access to health and social services.

Therefore, to tackle this complex problem, it is essential to have an integrated approach involving both preventive measures and effective interventions. The implementation of appropriate and accessible policies, together with social and educational programs, represent important steps towards improving the living conditions of the mother and child in the context of motherhood at the age of adolescence in Romania.

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PREVALENCE AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY AMONG ADULT POPULATION OF ALGERIA.

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Abstract: Background: Obesity is considered to be one of the major risk factor for emerging non-communicable diseases. The objective of this study was to estimate the prevalence of overweight and obesity among Algerian population, and to investigate socio-demographic behavioural and clinical factors, related with these conditions. **Methods:** This is a descriptive cross-sectional study involving individuals aged 18 years old and above. Analysis based on data from the national survey to chronic disease risk factor surveillance conducted in Algeria between 2016 and 2017 according to the World Health Organization STEPwise approach. Continuous variables were compared between groups using the Student's *t* test, while differences in prevalence between underweight, normal weight, overweight and obesity were assessed using the chi-square test. We also looked at the potential associations between independent factors and the prevalence of overweight and obesity using a logistic regression model. **Results:** The prevalence rates of overweight and obesity were 35.3% (95% CI: 34.1–36.6%) and 24.7% (95% CI: 23.7–25.7%) respectively. Overweight was more common in males than to females while obesity was significantly higher among females compared to males. According to multivariate logistic regression analysis, age, separated or divorced category of marital status, raised blood Pressure and raised total cholesterol were the strongest risk factors of overweight and obesity. **Conclusions:** Overweight and obesity are highly prevalent and epidemic in the whole Algerian population. Quantification and monitoring of their risk factors is urgently needed to plan effective public health intervention measures, in order to reduce this burden and prevent other non-communicable diseases, especially cardiovascular disorders.

Keywords: Overweight and obesity, Risk factors, Non-communicable diseases, World Health Organization (WHO) - STEPS approach, Algeria.

1. Introduction

Overweight and Obesity have become a major public health issue affecting both developed and developing countries (Reilly, 2006). They are generally defined as an excessive and abnormal fat accumulation in human body that presents a health risks (substantial morbidity and disability, impaired quality of life, and increased mortality) as well as economic costs (WHO, 2021). Body mass index (BMI) has recommended by The World Health Organization (WHO) as the most common measure of overall overweight and obesity (WHO, 1998) used for population and clinical screening. A person with a BMI equal to or more than 25 kg/m² is considered overweight. A person with a BMI of 30 kg/m² or more is typically regarded as obese.

According to the WHO, the global epidemic of overweight and obesity is still increasing. In 2014, 1.9 billion adults (18 years and over) were overweight, and over 600 millions of these people being obese (WHO, 2021). By 2030, 2.16 billion people are expected to be overweight, and 1.12 billion obese (Kelly et al., 2005). Aside from being a potentially modifiable risk factors for the emerging pandemic of chronic non-communicable Diseases

(NCDs), including cardiovascular diseases (CVD), diabetes mellitus, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, metabolic syndrome, osteoarthritis, different types of cancer, stroke asthma, and respiratory issues (World Medical Association declaration of Helsinki, 1997; Must et al., 1999; WHO, 2003; Dalal et al., 2011).

The majority of deaths worldwide are now caused by NCDs. In 2012, Of the 56 million people global deaths, 68% (38 million) were attributed to these conditions, with 74% of deaths occurring in low and middle income countries (WHO, 2014).

Several epidemiological studies indicated that the etiology of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents is multifactorial, involving genetic predispositions, environmental influences, and complex interactions between them. Examples of these factors include socio-economic transition characteristics, rapid urbanisation, increasing incomes, and access to calorie-dense foods, extensive use of technology, as well as a rapid shift from an active to a sedentary lifestyle (Alaba and Chola, 2013; Han et al., 2010).

These determinants weight heavily on patients' health care costs, particularly given that managing chronic diseases is time-consuming and expensive. All these considerations prompt us to think about the early screen and control overweight and obesity which have become a requirement for reducing the risk of common health problems. It is crucial to note that overweight and obesity, along with their related NCDs, are mostly preventable (WHO, 2021).

In the recent decades, excess weight prevalence has increased significantly, with currently more than half of the population in Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development nations -OECD- (52.6%) being overweight or obese (OCDE, 2013). The African continent has seen also a rapid rise in overweight and obesity prevalence as well as associated comorbidities (Abubakari et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Algeria, as an emerging country, has experienced rapid demographic, nutritional transition as a result of urbanisation process, adoption of western lifestyles, and epidemiological transition which has resulted in an increased in the overall prevalence of overweight and obesity, as well as the prevalence rate of non-communicable diseases (TAHINA, 2005; WHO, 2018).

To our knowledge, only a rare or even less studies investigated the epidemiology and the etiology affecting excess weight in the adult population of Algeria. Therefore, using descriptive data from Algerian national Cross-sectional survey (STEPwise reports), the present study aims to assess and estimate the prevalence of overweight and obesity, as well as also identify significant factors associated with it among individuals aged between 18-69 years old. The characterisation of these factors is indispensable to help health professionals and policymakers to address overweight and obesity by developing behavioural modification strategies that would promote a healthy lifestyle and appropriate planning to target preventive public health interventions in Algeria.

2. Methods

2.1. Study design and data source

We performed secondary analyses of data available from Algerian national survey according to the WHO STEPwise approach to chronic disease risk factor surveillance. A detail methodology of The STEPS and the sampling procedures were presented elsewhere (WHO, 2005; Riley et al., 2016; STEPwise Algeria 2016-2017 survey, 2018). The survey database was obtained from the STEPwise official website (NCD Microdata Repository).

In brief, the STEPS is a descriptive cross-sectional study conducted in 2016-2017, and was a collaboration between Ministry of Health, Population and Hospital Reform - General Directorate of Prevention and Health Promotion, National Institute of Public Health with the support of WHO HQ-Geneva and WHO- Algeria representation office.

Based on STEPS approach, in the main survey data on a representative Algerian sample of 7450 participants, aged 18 and above, drawn at random from households

throughout the country, collection consisted of three steps: 1) Collecting socio- demographic information and behavioural measurements by pairs of investigators (doctor and health worker) through interview with selected participants; 2) Measuring anthropometric features including measuring height, weight, waist circumference, hip circumference and blood pressure (BP); 3) performing biochemical investigations including measuring blood sugar, and blood lipid ... (Riley et al., 2016; STEPwise Algeria 2016-2017 survey, 2018).

The risk variables studied (STEPS core modules) were tobacco and alcohol use, low fruit and vegetable consumption, physical inactivity, overweight and obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and dyslipidemia. Optional modules on oral health, mental health, trauma, violence and anti-tobacco policy were also included.

2.2. Anthropometric measurements and definitions

Weight and height were measured in each subject with a portable electronic weighing scale and a portable height/length measuring board. The eligible participants were measured in standardised conditions, wearing underwear, no head gear, no shoes and no socks. Weight was measured in kilograms, while height was estimated in centimetres (WHO, 2005). Body mass index (BMI) was then calculated as weight in (kg) divided by squared height in (m). Using the WHO thresholds (WHO, 2000), BMI categories were defined as follows: underweight (BMI < 18.5 kg/m²), normal weight (18.5 kg/m² ≤ BMI ≤ 24.9 kg/m²), overweight (25 kg/m² ≤ BMI ≤ 29.9 kg/m²), and obesity (BMI ≥ 30 kg/m²). We further categorized obesity in 3 levels, according to its severity (I class obesity: 30 kg/m² ≤ BMI ≤ 34.9 kg/m²; II class obesity: 35 kg/m² ≤ BMI ≤ 39.9 kg/m²; III class obesity: BMI ≥ 40 kg/m²).

2.3. Study variables

The explanatory variables were selected a-priori based on prior studies; reviews of the relevant published studies and were extracted from available information in the STEEPS datasets.

Socio-demographic-level factors, such as sex (male and female), age (18–29, 30–44, 45–59, and ≥ 60 years), marital status, education level, work status, wealth index, area of residence (rural or urban) and geographical zone. Behavioural-level factors, such as cigarette smoking and physical activity. As for the frequency of alcohol consumption, it was not included among the risk factors because of the low response rate of respondents in the database, especially females. Clinical-level factors such as raised BP, Diabetes and raised (TC). They were defined by self-report, based on the questions: "Have you ever been told by a doctor or other health worker that you have raised blood Pressure? "Have you ever been told by a doctor or other health worker that you have raised blood sugar or diabetes? And "Have you ever been told by a doctor or other health worker that you have raised cholesterol?". On this basis, a dummy variable was created and categorized as "yes" or "no", which takes the value "yes" depending on the respondent's answer.

Moreover, with regard education level, marital status, geographical zone, work status, cigarette smoking and physical activity, were reclassified and recalculated into original data for analysis convenience and results interpretation. Education level was classified into five groups (no formal education, primary, middle, secondary and university). Marital status was restructured into three categories: married, divorced/separated and widowed. The 48 departments surveyed were divided into five geographical zones according to the government division of 1995; Central, East, West, Southern East and Southern West regions (Brahamia, 2010). Wealth index was estimated according to the monthly income declared by the respondent. Its categories were constructed on the basis of the national guaranteed minimum wage. This allowed us to categorize the individuals into four groups from the least wealthy to the richest. Physical activity was assessed in three different domains: work, transport and leisure. Activities were classified as vigorous, moderate. "Vigorous-intensity activities" were activities that require significant physical effort and cause large increases in breathing or

heart rate. "Moderate intensity activities" were activities that require moderate physical effort and cause slight increases in breathing or heart rate. On this basis, an adult should perform at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity work or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity work or 60 minutes of combined vigorous and moderate intensity work per week. If the reported physical activity did not meet the WHO recommendation, participants were classified as physically inactive (WHO, 2010). Cigarette smoking status was self-reported and classified as current daily smoker, ex-daily smoker or non-smoker.

2.4. Statistical analysis

All analyses were performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25 (IBM Statistics, USA). In the descriptive statistics, means and standard deviations (SD) were obtained for relevant anthropometric variables while frequency tables were also generated.

Continuous variables were compared between groups using the Student's t test, while association of each of the categorical variables (explanatory variables) with underweight, normal weight, overweight and obesity was tested with the Chi-square test (χ^2). Normality of continuous variables was verified through the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($p < 0.05$).

Risk factors of overall overweight and obesity were examined using a univariate binary logistic regression model. Variables showing statistically significant association with the overweight and obesity ($P < 0.05$) were considered as potential risk factors.

Subsequently, these variables were simultaneously subjected to the multivariate logistic regression model to eliminate potential confounders, and to determine the significant explanatory risk factors of overweight and obesity. The results of regression analysis (crude and adjusted prevalence's) were reported as odds ratios (cORs and aORs) with their respective 95% confidence intervals (CIs). Statistical significance was set at p -value < 0.05 .

The final multivariate binary logistic regression model was found to be consistent with the results of the Hosmer- Lemeshow fit test.

3. Results

3.1. Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of the Respondents

The study was carried out with 7450 adults, of whom only 6989 were interviewed; i.e., a response rate of 93.8% (3082 males and 3907 females, aged 18–69 years). Out of these 6989 participants, 360 were excluded from our study due to missing or outlier data for anthropometric measurements.

As depicts in Table 1, of the total 6,629 study participants included in this study, 54.9% were female. The majority of participants were currently married (68.3%), had a better level of education (67.4 %), ranging between moyen or secondary school and higher education, and lived in urban area (67.7%) with a predominance of demographic density especially in the northern geographical zone of the country compared to those in the south. Regarding to the work status, homemaker (28.5%) was the most common occupation, followed by the unemployed (24.0%), government employees (17.5%), non-government employees (10.7%), self-employed (12.0%), and retirees (7.4%). In terms of wealth index, 67.7% of respondents earned more the minimum wage or less than or equal two times the minimum wage (lowest and second lowest), Cigarette smoking was distributed between 76.3% of non-smokers versus 11.4% and 12.3% of ex-daily and current daily smokers respectively. The proportion of participants who exercised physical activity was 74.4%. Moreover, 24.9% had raised BP, 21.2% had diabetes, and 27.3% had raised TC.

Table 1 Participant characteristics, by BMI category

Variables	Overall		Underweight		Normal weight		Overweight		obesity		Cramer's V and p-values
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	
Sex											
Male	2991	45.1	114	3.8	132	44.3	109	36.6	456	15.2	0.210 ; p<0.001
Female	3638	54.9	106	2.9	62	30.3	58	34.3	1182	32.5	
Age group (years)											
18-29	1413	21.3	115	8.1	776	54.9	352	24.9	170	12.0	0.156 ; P<0.001
30-44	2566	38.7	60	2.1	878	34.2	946	36.9	682	26.6	
45-59	1867	28.2	29	1.6	540	28.9	729	39.0	569	30.5	
60-69	783	11.8	16	2.0	234	29.9	316	40.4	217	27.7	
Marital status											
Never married	1655	25.0	128	7.7	895	54.1	434	26.2	199	12.0	0.161; <0.001
Current married/Cohabiting	4521	68.3	85	1.9	140	31.1	174	38.5	1290	28.5	
Separated/Divorced	204	3.1	3	1.5	58	28.4	83	40.7	60	29.4	
Widowed	241	3.6	5	2.1	68	28.2	81	33.6	87	36.1	
Education level											
No formal school	1123	17.0	24	2.1	331	29.5	420	37.4	348	31.0	0.056 ; <0.001
Primary school	1034	15.6	26	2.5	376	36.4	357	34.5	275	26.6	
Moyen school	1561	23.6	57	3.7	601	38.5	533	34.1	370	23.7	
Secondary school	1534	23.2	61	4.0	567	37.0	554	36.1	352	22.9	
Higher education	1362	20.6	52	3.8	546	40.1	474	34.8	290	21.3	
Area of residence											
Urban	4484	67.6	149	3.3	158	35.3	161	36.1	1134	25.3	0.041 ; 0.012
Rural	2145	32.4	71	3.3	846	39.4	724	33.8	504	23.5	
Geographical zone											
North-Centre	2388	36.0	92	3.9	873	36.6	853	35.7	570	23.9	0.051; <0.001
North -West	1439	21.7	45	3.1	592	41.1	482	33.5	320	22.2	
North -East	2068	31.2	50	2.4	675	32.6	754	36.5	589	28.5	
South West	210	3.2	11	5.2	89	42.4	72	34.3	38	18.1	
South East	524	7.9	22	4.2	199	38.0	182	34.7	121	23.1	
Work status											
Unemployed (able and not able to work)	1588	24.0	95	6.0	714	45.0	438	27.6	341	21.5	0.145; <0.001
/Student/No paid government employee	1155	17.5	24	2.1	415	35.9	458	39.7	258	22.3	
Non-government employee	708	10.7	24	3.4	328	46.3	255	36.0	101	14.3	
Selt employed	792	12.0	32	4.0	325	41.0	302	38.1	133	16.8	
Homemaker	1882	28.5	33	1.8	464	24.7	676	35.9	709	37.7	
Retired	490	7.4	12	2.4	176	35.9	209	42.7	93	19.0	

Table 1 Participant characteristics, by BMI category (Continued)

Variables	Overall		Underweight		Normal weight		Overweight		obesity		Cramer's V and p-values
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)		
Wealth index (Family monthly income quintile)											
Lowest (less than or equal to SMIG)	1154	28.5	34	2.9	467	40.5	406	35.2	247	21.4	0.044; 0.020
Second lowest (More than to SMIG, less than or equal to 2x SMIG)	1588	39.2	49	3.1	565	35.6	559	35.2	415	26.1	
Midle (More than to 2x SMIG, less than or equal to 3x SMIG)	676	16.7	29	4.3	225	33.3	267	39.5	155	22.9	
Second highest (More than to 3xSMIG, less than or equal to 4x SMIG)	266	6.6	8	3.0	94	35.3	100	37.6	64	24.1	
Highest (More than to 4xSMIG)	362	8.9	7	1.9	121	33.4	136	37.6	98	27.1	
Cigarette smoking											
Never smoked	5058	76.3	152	3.0	1672	33.1	1818	35.9	141	28.0	0.138; <0.001
Past Daily smoked	756	11.4	14	1.9	304	40.2	299	39.6	139	18.4	
Current Daily smoked	815	12.3	54	6.6	452	55.5	226	27.7	83	10.2	
Physical activity											
Low (< 150 Min/week)	1455	25.6	56	3.8	491	33.7	482	33.1	426	29.3	0.079; <0.001
High (More 150 Min/week)	4227	74.4	139	3.3	1671	39.5	1487	35.2	930	22.0	
History of Raised Blood Pressure											
Yes	1205	24.9	6	0.5	243	20.2	439	36.4	517	42.9	0.217; <0.001
No	3643	75.1	113	2.5	1359	37.3	1320	36.2	851	23.4	
History of Diabetes											
Yes	413	21.2	7	1.7	82	19.9	160	38.7	164	39.7	0.098; <0.001
No	1536	78.8	21	1.4	445	29.0	594	38.7	476	31.0	
History of Raised Total Cholesterol											
Yes	533	27.3	6	1.1	90	16.9	209	39.2	228	42.8	0.163 ; <0.001
No	1416	72.7	22	1.6	437	30.9	545	38.5	412	29.1	

3.2. Prevalence of overweight and obesity

Table 2 describes the main anthropometric characteristics and the distribution of BMI categories by sex. Mean age (\pm SD) was 41.45 ± 13.25 years, with males 41.63 ± 13.10 and females 41.31 ± 13.37 years. Mean height was 165.81 cm, mean weight was 73.76 kg, and mean BMI was 26.93 kg/m² (25.61 in males, 28.02 in females).

There was no difference between males and females regarding mean age and mean height. Conversely, there was a significant association in terms of sex by mean weight (<0.05) and mean BMI (<0.001).

Overall, 3.3 % of the Algerian adults were underweight, 36.6 % were normal weight, 35.3 % were overweight, likewise, and 24.7 % were obese. Additionally, 17.0 % of the Algerian adult population had a I class obesity, 5.4 % a II class, and 2.3 % a III class obesity.

The prevalence of overweight was more common in males compared to female participants (36.6 % vs 34.3 %, $p < 0.001$); while obesity was significantly higher among females compared to male participants (32.5% vs 15.2 %, $p < 0.001$). All classes of obesity were also more frequent in female participants.

Furthermore, as shown in table 1, prevalence of obesity observed in correlation, with the highest prevalence rates found among participants who were aged ≤ 45 years, currently married, no formal educated, living urban area especially north east geographical zone, not married, being homemaker, earned more the minimum wage or less than or equal two times the minimum wage (lowest and second lowest), never smoked, not exercised physical activity, and who had raised BP, diabetes and raised TC. Findings were similar regarding highest prevalence rates of overweight, except for participants who were aged ≤ 30 years, retired and having government employee, earned more than two times the minimum wage or less than or equal three times the minimum wage (Middle), never and past daily smoked.

Bivariate statistical analyses indicated a high significant difference ($P < 0.001$) between almost all socio-demographic, behavioural, clinical independent variables and BMI categories.

Table 2 Mean values for age, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI) for 6,629 Algerian adults aged 18 years or over, and sex prevalence according to categories of BMI

	Overall	Sex		Statistic	p value
	(n=6629)	Male (n=2991)	Female (n=3638)		
Age [years]; mean \pm SD	41.45 \pm 13.25	41.63 \pm 13.10	41.31 \pm 13.37	2.719 ^a	NS
Height [cm]; mean \pm SD	165.81 \pm 9.93	172.79 \pm 7.68	160.08 \pm 7.64	1.922 ^a	NS
Weight [kg]; mean \pm SD	73.76 \pm 14.95	76.44 \pm 14.38	71.55 \pm 15.05	5.914 ^a	<0.05
BMI [kg/m ²]; mean \pm SD	26.93 \pm 5.74	25.61 \pm 4.66	28.02 \pm 6.29	161.317 ^a	<0.001
BMI [kg/m ²]; % (95 % CI)					
Underweight	3.3 (2.9-3.8)	3.8 (3.1-4.5)	2.9 (2.4-3.4)		NS
Normal weight	36.6 (35.5-37.8)	44.3 (42.6-46.1)	30.3 (28.8-31.9)	0.635 ^b	
Overweight	35.3 (34.1-36.6)	36.6 (34.9-38.3)	34.3 (32.8-35.8)	29.607 ^b	<0.001
Obesity	24.7 (23.7-25.7)	15.2 (14.0-16.5)	32.5 (31.0-34.1)	284.809 ^b	<0.001
Class I	17.0 (16.1-17.8)	12.1 (10.9-13.3)	21.0 (19.6-22.2)	155.167 ^b	<0.001
Class II	5.4 (4.9-6.0)	2.6 (2.0-3.1)	7.8 (6.9-8.7)	139.262 ^b	<0.001
Class III	2.3 (2.0-2.7)	0.6 (0.3-0.9)	3.7 (3.1-4.3)	108.098 ^b	<0.001
				324.122 ^b	<0.001

SD standard deviation, CI confidence interval

^a Continuous variables were presented as mean \pm SD and compared using the *student t-test*

^b Categorical variable was expressed as percentage (95 % CI) and analyzed by the *chi square-test*

3.3. Factors associated with overweight and obesity

According to the results of crude logistic regression analysis, the explanatory factors significantly associated with overweight or obese were female sex, age groups : (30-44 years), (45-59 years) and (60-69 years) , marital status, no formal education level, urban residence, north-east geographical zone, work status (government employee, self-employed, homemaker and retired), wealth index (Second lowest, middle and highest), low physical activity, raised BP, diabetes and raised TC. However, past and current daily smoked appeared to have a protective effect.

After adjustment, when all these significant factors were entered into a multivariate logistic regression model (table 3), the analysis revealed that age was significantly related to an increase in the probability to be either overweight or obese. When compared to the younger age group (18-29 years), this risk was more than two and a half times higher in the (30-44 years) age group (aOR = 2.651; [1.580-4.450]; $P < 0.001$), more than two times higher in the (45-59 years) and (60-69 years) age groups , respectively, (aOR = 2.344; [1.339-4.103]; $P < 0.01$) ; (aOR = 2.200; [1.105-4.380]; $P < 0.05$). Separated or divorced category of marital status had a higher risk to having either overweight or obese compared to those never married (aOR = 6.237; [1.704-22.823]; $P < 0.05$). Similarly, being overweight was substantially associated with adults who had raised BP (aOR = 1.719; [1.209-2.443]; $P < 0.01$) and raised TC (aOR = 1.564; [1.087-2.251]; $P < 0.05$). In contrast, the adults who past daily smoked were

less likely to have overweight or obesity and even seemed to have a protective effect (aOR = 0.595; [0.370–0.958]; P < 0.05). Interestingly, no difference was found in terms of overweight or obesity patterns by sex, education level, area of residence, geographical zone, work status, wealth index, physical activity and diabetes.

Table 3 Risk factors associated with overweight and obesity

Variables	normal weight		Overweight / obesity		cOR (95%CI)	P value	aOR (95%CI)	P value		
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)						
Sex										
Male	132	46.1	155	53.9	1		1			
Female	6		1							
	110	31.2	243	68.8	1.885	(1.702, 2.088)	<0.001	0.855	(0.534, 1.369)	NS
Age group (years)										
18-29	776	59.8	522	40.2	1		1			
30-44	878	35.0	162	65.0	2.756	(2.401, 3.164)	<0.001	2.651	(1.580, 4.450)	<0.001
45-59	540	29.4	129	70.6	3.573	(3.077, 4.150)	<0.001	2.344	(1.339, 4.103)	<0.05
60-69	234	30.5	533	69.5	3.386	(2.801, 4.093)	<0.001	2.200	(1.105, 4.380)	<0.01
Marital status										
Never married	895	58.6	633	41.4	1		1			
Current married/Cohabiting	140	31.7	303	68.3	3.050	(2.706, 3.439)	<0.001	1.393	(0.887, 2.187)	NS
Separated/Divorced	58	28.9	143	71.1	3.486	(2.527, 4.809)	<0.001	6.237	(1.704, 22.823)	<0.01
Widowed	68	28.8	168	71.2	3.493	(2.589, 4.713)	<0.001	1.327	(0.578, 3.046)	NS
Education level										
No formal school	331	30.1	768	69.9	1.658	(1.400, 1.964)	<0.001	1.221	(0.698, 2.136)	NS
Primary school	376	37.3	632	62.7	1.201	(1.015, 1.422)	<0.05	1.318	(0.745, 2.332)	NS
Moyen school	601	40.0	903	60.0	1.074	(0.924, 1.248)	NS	1.386	(0.861, 2.229)	NS
Secondary school	567	38.5	906	61.5	1.142	(0.981, 1.329)	NS	1.121	(0.728, 1.729)	NS
Higher education	546	41.7	764	58.3	1		1			
Area of residence										
Urban	158	36.5	275	63.5	1.199	(1.077, 1.335)	<0.01	1.122	(0.795, 1.584)	NS
Rural	846	40.8	122	59.2	1		1			
Geographical zone										
North-Centre	873	38.0	142	62.0	1.071	(0.879, 1.305)	NS	1.398	(0.768, 2.544)	NS
North -West	592	42.5	802	57.5	0.890	(0.723, 1.095)	NS	0.917	(0.483, 1.740)	NS
North -East	675	33.4	134	66.6	1.307	(1.068, 1.598)	<0.01	1.411	(0.762, 2.612)	NS
South West	89	44.7	110	55.3	0.812	(0.583, 1.131)	NS	0.684	(0.256, 1.827)	NS
South East	199	39.6	303	60.4	1		1			
Work status										
Unemployed (able and not able to work) /Student/No paid	714	47.8	779	52.2	1		1			
Government employee	415	36.7	716	63.3	1.581	(1.350, 1.852)	<0.001	0.938	(0.548, 1.606)	NS
Non-government employee	328	48.0	356	52.0	0.995	(0.830, 1.192)	NS	0.678	(0.342, 1.344)	NS

Selt employed	325	42.8	435	57.2	1.227 1.463)	(1.029,	<0.05	0.561 1.118)	(0.282,	NS
Home marker	464	25.1	138	74.9	2.736 3.166)	(2.364,	<0.001	1.308 2.173)	(0.787,	NS
Retired	176	36.8	302	63.2	1.573 1.944)	(1.273,	<0.001	0.667 1.262)	(0.352,	NS
Wealth index (Family monthly income quintile)										
Lowest (less than or equal to SMIG)	467	41.7	653	58.3	1			1		
Second lowest (More than to SMIG, less than or equal to 2x SMIG)	565	36.7	974	63.3	1.233 1.443)	(1.053,	<0.01	1.163 1.722)	(0.785,	NS
Midle (More than to 2x SMIG, less than or equal to 3x SMIG)	225	34.8	422	65.2	1.341 1.639)	(1.097,	<0.01	1.178 1.876)	(0.740,	NS
Second highest (More than to 3xSMIG, less than or equal to 4x SMIG)	94	36.4	164	63.6	1.248 1.651)	(0.943,	NS	1.549 2.813)	(0.853,	NS
Highest (More than to4xSMIG)	121	34.1	234	65.9	1.383 1.775)	(1.078,	<0.05	1.300 2.229)	(0.758,	NS
Cigarette smoking										
Never smoked	167	34.1	323	65.9	1			1		
Past Daily smoked	304	41.0	438	59.0	0.745 0.872)	(0.636,	<0.001	0.595 0.958)	(0.370,	<0.05
Current Daily smoked	452	59.4	309	40.6	0.353	(0.302, 0.413	<0.001	0.559 1.015)	(0.307,	NS
Physical activity										
Low (< 150 Min/week)	491	35.1	908	64.9	1.279 1.451)	(1.127,	<0.001	0.921 1.264)	(0.671,	NS
High (More 150 Min/week)	167	40.9	241	59.1	1			1		
History of Raised Blood Pressure										
Yes	243	20.3	956	79.7	2.463 2.879)	(2.106,	<0.001	1.719 2.443)	(1.209,	<0.01
No	135	38.5	217	61.5	1			1		
History of Diabetes										
Yes	129	22.2	453	77.8	1.729 2.136)	(1.399,	<0.001	1.404 2.107)	(0.935,	NS
No	886	33.0	180	67.0	1			1		
History of Raised Total Cholesterol										
Yes	114	17.5	537	82.5	2.116 2.662)	(1.682,	<0.001	1.564 2.251)	(1.087,	<0.05
No	468	31.0	104	69.0	1			1		

4. Discussion

Several studies have suggested that we are facing a worldwide epidemic of overweight and obesity. In order to assess the prevalence and determinants of key NCD risk variables (socio-demographic, behavioural, and biological risk factors), the current study was performed on a representative sample of 6629 adults using data from the Algeria national survey according to the WHO STEPwise approach.

The results showed that Algeria has a particularly high prevalence of overweight 35.3 %. Compared with females, males are slightly more likely to be overweight (36.6 % vs 34.3 %). Findings regarding increased percentage of overweight in males were in line with the literature (Ahmad Kiadaliri et al., 2015; Maruf and Udoji, 2015). In addition, this BMI category distribution matched that of developed countries, where male and female ratio to overweight is almost the same (Santos and Barros, 2003). However, the proportion of overweight obtained in this study was lower than the 53.3% reported in adult Northern Nigerian population, with a statistically higher prevalence among females compared to males (62.0% vs 41.9% 8 imp 2), and was higher than reported in in Bangladesh (13%), and in Pakistan (25%) (Janjua et al., 2015; Rawal et al., 2018).

This slight decrease of overweight among females likely reflects a reduced social acceptability of overweight and obesity.

For obesity, the overall prevalence was 24.7 %, with a significantly higher prevalence among females compared to males (32.5% vs 15.2 %). These findings were in agreement with data from industrialised, and many developing countries, like some populations of Europe, Latin America, South-east Asia and Africa indicating that all face the same striking increase in the prevalence of obesity, with the average prevalence in males lower than that in females (Millar, 1987; Kruger et al., 2012; Janjua et al., 2015). Moreover, the same result has been revealed in many other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, for example Botswana and Nigeria (Letamo, 2011; Olatunbosun et al., 2011). Our overall prevalence of obesity was almost close to the value of 21% reported in Nigerian populations (Ojofeitimi et al., 2007), and was higher than found in Canada (14.8%) (Katzmarzyk, 2002). This is however lower than that reported in the United States where the prevalence of obesity increased from 22.9% in the late 1980s to early 1990s to 30.5% between 1999 and 2000 (Flegal et al., 2002).

Despite there are many causes contributing to the increased prevalence rates of overweight and, the possible explanation could be that Algeria is just undergoing a rapid epidemiological transition (as confirmed by the increasing overweight and obesity rates among both females and males). It probably reflects profound changes in lifestyle, particularly dietary and behavioural patterns over the last few decades. These had a significant impact on risk factors as well as on the incidence of obesity, cardiovascular morbidities, and diabetes. There is also undoubtedly the genetics which plays an important role of the increase in percentage of overweight and obese people. Human being carry a number of genes associated to body size, but environmental influences the phenotype expression of these genes (Barsh et al., 2000).

4.1. Risk factors

Different prevalence rates of overweight and obesity may be explained by many variables, including sex, age, income levels, educational opportunities, ethnicity, and globalization. Such results have implications for socially or geographically targeted interventions addressing this condition.

Although our bivariate statistical analysis showed a high significant correlation between almost all socio-demographic, behavioural, clinical explanatory variables, and the prevalence of overweight and obesity, only a few significant influences were retained in the multivariate analysis using logistic regression.

The odds of overweight and obesity was still significantly associated with age. Adults (30 to 69 years) were more than twice as likely to be either overweight or obese compared to younger age group (18 to 29 years). These findings are in line to what has been documented in most previous publications on African and around the world that revealed that increased age was significantly related with overweight or obesity but that weight seemed to drop again after the older age (Al-Mannai et al., 1996; Badr et al., 2013). The scientists speculate that this is due to a process of demographic transition that has occurred in the Arab countries with an increase in numbers of old age population leading increase in percentage of overweight or obese people (Saxena, 2008). Also, this might be connected to metabolic changes, aging-related physical inactivity and other health impairments.

Similarly, with reference to marital status, the results of our study indicate that divorced or separated as compared to either single or married adults are associated with a high prevalence of overweight and obesity. This finding was inconsistent with many studies conducted around the world and other Mediterranean regions (Wilson, 2012; Shah et al., 2015), which showed that getting married was correlates with weight gain because couples together eat more food, spend more time watching TV (which is sedentary), and exercise less (Pearson and Biddle, 2011), while leaving marriage was associated with weight loss (Jeffery and Rick, 2002; Sobal et al., 2003). Hence, the relationship between marital status and

overweight or obesity underline how Socio-cultural characteristics can have a great influence on healthy habits, diet, physical activity, and consequently body weight (Sobal et al., 2003).

Furthermore, as in many previous studies, it was discovered that overweight or obesity in Algeria's population was strongly correlated with raised BP and raised TC. These results are in broad agreement with the existing literature on the metabolic syndrome; dyslipidemia and risk factors for cardiovascular disease (Galassi et al., 2006; Mahjoub et al., 2010). Urbanisation and the nutritional transition associated to the risk of metabolic syndrome are the direct reasons of this affinity (Li et al., 2016). Moreover, other research, suggest that the correlation may be explained by a number of additional processes, such as impaired insulin sensitivity, liver fat accumulation and dysfunction of adipose tissue (Klötting et al., 2011).

The high rate of risk factors that define the metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular morbidity underscores the need to create early preventive action against overweight and obesity and improve levels of physical activity could lead to better and mortality figures in the near future.

In terms to diabetes, the present study showed no relationship with overweight or obesity, contrary to what was pointed out in several research that demonstrated a strong link between the levels of insulin secreted and weight gain (Hanson et al., 1995; Mahjoub et al., 2010).

Furthermore, we found no significant difference between the prevalence overweight or obesity and cigarette smoking, and there was even a protective effect of past daily smokers versus never smokers. It could be explained by a number of factors, on top of which is Algerian population with low proportion of smokers and ex-smokers. However, this finding is in disagreement with other data suggesting that ex-smokers were more frequently overweight or obese than never smokers, confirming the overall evidence of substantial weight gain after smoking cessation (Flegal et al., 1995).

Interestingly, no association was observed among female compared with male sex in terms of overweight or obesity. This finding contrasts with those found by some studies which revealed that females had a significantly higher prevalence of overweight or obesity compared with males mainly caused by pregnancy, which may contribute to weight gain through decreasing the ability of participation in vigorous activity, and postpartum depression (Al-Mannai et al., 1996).

Moreover, our results did not show a significant correlation between geographical zone, area of residence and overweight or obesity. Several studies (Al-Mannai et al., 1996; Wilson, 2012; Pradeepa et al., 2015) have noted that people living in urban areas had a higher risk of overweight and obesity; however its trend is increasing at rapid pace in rural residence (Aitsi-Selmi et al., 2012). This could be interpreted as a change of lifestyle in these urban areas, including dietary habits, like consumption of carbonated drink, having access to fast food, high-fat, and energy-dense frozen food, (WHO, 2003) and the availability of transport, all of which contributed to increase in physical inactivity. Adoption of a more westernized, sedentary lifestyle with urbanisation has also been shown to be major driving factor for the increasing obesity epidemic in urban areas in Africa (Sodjinou et al., 2008).

The rates of overweight and obesity were also unaffected by education level, work status and wealth index. This pattern is inconsistent to the findings presented in the literature. Many research have found that overweight or obesity is more prevalent in less educated, low-income, unemployed individuals, notably housewives (Monteiro et al., 2004; Roskam et al., 2010), while others studies stated the opposite (Katulanda et al., 2010; Pradeepa et al., 2015). However, this should be interpreted cautiously as residual confounding between these socio-economic factors may have influenced findings. Many factors may be connected to these observations. It is assumed that illiterate or less educated people with disadvantaged economic status, because of their lower earning capacity and reduced knowledge of healthy

diet, were more exposed to high-calorie foods and simple carbohydrates, which are cheaper and easier to access (Lahti-Koski et al., 2000).

Additionally, it's likely that homemakers and retirees have a greater impact on overweight and obesity than other occupations due to a growing sedentary lifestyle, lower levels of physical activity, mechanised and automated work, motorised transportation, and passive leisure activities, which are particularly related to urbanisation and globalisation (Monda et al., 2008; Pan et al., 2021). Despite the fact that numerous researches indicated that physically active individuals had lower levels of BMI than inactive individuals our findings ran counter to these (Ramadan and Barac-Nieto, 2003). The plausible explanation could be an upsurge in physical activity among North Africans in recent years (Nejjari et al., 2013; Eman et al., 2018), that caused an energy imbalance between calories intake and expenditure. According to the WHO, persons between the ages of 18 and 64 should engage in at least 150 minutes of aerobic exercise each week to maintain a healthy weight (WHO, 2010). Finally, the above important mentioned findings highlight the necessity to plan and implement prevention programmes against the risk factors for overweight or obesity in our country.

4.1. Limitations

Though the STEPS methodology is designed to provide standardized data on important, modifiable risk factors for NCDs that may be identified in population-based surveys without the need for high-technology instruments, some limitations should be considered in this study.

First, given that the main study is a national cross sectional epidemiological study, we cannot discount the possibility of reverse causation bias and recall bias as well as we also cannot allow for the generalization of findings to the entire population.

Second, even though a survey implementation guide had been created and the anthropometric and biomedical measures tools had been periodically calibrated, it is still possible that certain measurement errors could have introduced bias. Also, the study excluded participants who were under the age of 18 or older than 69, which may have distorted the study's findings regarding the overall prevalence of overweight and obesity in the population.

Third, the variables examined in this study can only partially account for the risk factors associated with overweight and obesity. Also, no research was done on the relationship between genetic variables and the high prevalence of overweight and obesity.

5. Conclusion

The present study revealed a significantly higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among Algerian adults aged 18 years and above. This increase is potentially related to some key explanatory factors in this study. These results postulated that there is an urgent need to help curb or reduce this proportion by effectively managed on their modifiable risk factors with the aim to prevent the development of NCDs. However, interventions on modifiable risk factors will require cooperation from numerous sectors and disciplines as well as individual and population-level prevention, especially those that are environmentally focused. In order to inform the public about this preventable epidemic, it is also vital to develop health awareness efforts, particularly those that encourage healthier lifestyles including healthy eating, regular physical activity and smoking cessation.

Finally, considering these variables can help the nation's health policy makers create and implement national preventive and control action plans of a world-class healthcare system and policies to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity and its associated chronic diseases as well as to prevent the increase in health expenditures concerning in the coming years.

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CAMEROON DIASPORA AND THE AMBIGUITY OF DUAL NATIONALITY/CITIZENSHIP IN CAMEROON

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Abstract: *There is increase attention in scientific literature on the relationship between governments and their diasporas. This relationship is characterized by the response given to diasporic needs such as the right to vote in their countries of origin, dual nationality and governance in general. Cameroon is no exception. The nationality law in Cameroon however does not provide for dual nationality and/or citizenship. This poses a real challenge and dilemma to the diasporic community between retaining Cameroonian nationality while in foreign land with the need to be able to enjoy the advantages offered to their citizens. The second challenge stems from the fact that the nationality law although it does not provide for dual nationality, some nationals and/or members of the diaspora can be seen possessing foreign passports while still recognized as Cameroonian citizens. These “dual nationals” are sometimes officials, sporters or even identified form their political affiliations. This poses a real problem of ambiguity in the application of the nationality law. Such ambiguity and subjectivity despite the law is often decried by the Cameroonian diaspora who suggests several measures such as the amendment of this law to embrace dual nationality for every citizen, or a strict application of this law, thereby promoting impartiality and equality in rights and obligations.*

Keywords: Cameroonian diaspora, nationality, dual nationality.

1. Introduction

Nationality refers to the membership and subjection to State law and power, citizenship refers to the notion of collective self-determination, the freedoms, and rights guaranteed by membership in a political community. Dual citizenship or dual nationality refers to an individual being a citizen of two countries or a legal status by which a person becomes a citizen of two countries. Dual citizens have two passports which essentially makes them live and travel freely within their native and naturalized countries without immigration constraints.

Until recently, dual citizenship was a marginal issue which primarily concerned Cameroonian athletes (particularly professional footballers) in Europe. However, today, as a result of the activities and establishment of vibrant and ever-growing Cameroonian Diaspora communities around the world (particularly in Europe and America) and the equally growing number of children of Cameroonian parentage born in these foreign countries, the issue of dual citizenship has become a critical one – even though it is yet to become part of the national discourse back in Cameroon (Tande, 2022). In fact, in the rare occasions when the issue of citizenship has made the headlines in Cameroon, it has been in the context of the fraudulent acquisition of Cameroonian citizenship by foreigners; a situation which according to the Government daily (CameroonTribune, 2002), may result in “a person of doubtful nationality could someday become the Prime Minister of Cameroon as was said to be the case elsewhere”.

2. Legal Framework on nationality in Cameroon

The legal framework on nationality is enshrined in Law No. 1968-LF-3 of 11th June 1968 to set up the Cameroon Nationality Code often cited as Law No.68-DF-3. This law of 1968 defines the principles and conditions under which Cameroonian nationality is acquired, retained, or lost. Although it does not define the term citizenship, it makes illusion to the traits and characteristics of citizenship. This explains why in this article; it will be regarded as nationality.

3. Acquisition of nationality

Sections 2 and 3 define the general provisions for acquiring Cameroonian nationality *de facto* by birth and how it can be lost by law or a public authority under the law. Section 5 of the law also stipulates how Cameroonian nationality is extended to unmarried minor children below the age of 21 under the person concerned. Chapter 2 of the law defines modalities under which nationality is bestowed from origin. Thus, under nationality of origin, we can identify nationality by descent and by birth.

By nationality of origin as covered in Chapter II, it refers to the easiest means through which by birth or by descent, a child is born by both parents, both of whom are Cameroonian nationals. This also applies to a child born legitimately to at least one parent of Cameroonian nationality. He or she is also eligible to claim Cameroonian nationality if desired. However, for a child that was born illegitimately, his/ her cameroonian nationality can only be obtained if the parent to whom the connection is first established is a Cameroonian national. This can also be possible in the case whereby the first established parent has no or unknown nationality, but the second-established parent has Cameroon nationality. A legitimate child also born in Cameroon is eligible for nationality when at least one of the child's parents, even of foreign nationalities, was also born in Cameroon, while an illegitimate child can also claim Cameroon nationality only if the first-established, foreign nationals were born in Cameroon. The law also makes provision in this chapter for children born on Cameroonian soil with the exception of those born from diplomatic and consular mission staff that are foreigners. This chapter further explains how nationality can be attributed to a child born in Cameroon if it is established that they are unable to claim any other nationality. This provides the first step of conditionalities to possessing Cameroonian nationality according to the law.

The second method in acquiring nationality can be through marriage. This is contained in Chapter 3a sections 17-19. This type of nationality can be obtained when a foreign woman marries a Cameroonian national. She may expressly request to acquire Cameroonian nationality at the time of celebration of the marriage. This also applies in the case of a marriage, whereby a woman whose national law permits her to retain her nationality of origin may declare at the time of celebration of the marriage and in the form prescribed by law, signs before the judge or president of the Civil Court at the chief town of the sub-division in which she resides, that she declines the Cameroonian nationality even while residing in Cameroon. This therefore implies that the court or the law in Cameroon where the foreigner intends to get married to a Cameroonian woman gives her the possibility to retain her nationality of origin or acquire that of the state in which she is getting married. It is normal that a woman once married, automatically retains the name of her husband and any child born in the course of this marriage obtains the nationality of the father. This implies that a Cameroonian woman may decide to retain her nationality at birth or may in turn become a national of the country in which the marriage is celebrated or that of her husband.

Nationality can also be obtained by naturalisation. The law also makes provision for this form of acquisition of nationality in Chapter II. This section explains that Cameroon nationality may be acquired by foreign citizens who have met the minimum residency requirements within Cameroon and are judged to meet character and health standards and whose main interest are based in Cameroon. This acquisition is however subjective and provided by government decree and as such is ultimately subject to government approval. The process may be simplified for foreign nationals that have married a Cameroon national woman, and were born in Cameroon, have rendered exceptional services to Cameroon or whose naturalisation would be highly advantageous for the state. Similarly, children born in Cameroon by foreign parents or adopted by Cameroon parents may adopt Cameroon nationality at majority if residency requirements are met.

4. Loss and forfeiture of Cameroonian nationality

Cameroonian nationality like all other nationalities can be forfeited and/or lost. The law on nationality makes provision for circumstances under which this is possible under Chapter IV. There are three main ways someone can lose or forfeit a Cameroonian nationality: acquisition of a foreign nationality, voluntary renunciation and by government decree.

By acquisition of a foreign nationality, an individual who resides in Cameroon and willingly acquires the citizenship of another country or state automatically loses the Cameroon nationality. This is also true for any Cameroonian immigrant or member of the diaspora who becomes a naturalised citizen of a foreign state. He or she according to the 1968 law on nationality in Section 21, automatically loses its Cameroonian nationality. Moreover, children of parents of different nationalities amongst which a Cameroonian are asked to choose a given nationality on attaining the age of majority which is 21. The law in Cameroon does not allow an individual to retain more than one nationality. Renunciation of Cameroonian nationality is seen in a situation whereby the nationality law also gives the possibility to individual residing in Cameroon to renounce his or her nationality. The law makes explicit mention of the renunciation of nationality where a Cameroonian woman and national gets married to a foreigner, such a person can renounce his or her Cameroon citizenship to acquire the foreign one upon marriage (Section 32). This form of loss of nationality by the Cameroon woman also depends on the provisions of the nationality law of the country of her husband.

Nationality can also be lost by government decree. In this case a Cameroonian may lose his or her Cameroonian nationality if he or she insists and continues to work in a public service of an international organisation or foreign body despite an order by the Cameroonian government to resign from it as contained in Section 31c. Such a decree can also be made for Cameroonian nationals who have gained their nationality through marriage or naturalisation within the previous 10 years. In this case the government may revoke their nationality by decree, especially if the individual in question is convicted of an act defined as a criminal act or an offence against the internal or external security of the State as seen in Section 34 (1968-LF-3, 2023).

5. Dual nationality and citizenship: a major concern of Cameroonian diaspora

The issue of dual nationality has become a major concern for Cameroonian diaspora when examining the meaning of dual nationality/citizenship and the rights and obligations that go with holding a Cameroonian nationality and the constraints faced by Cameroonians abroad who desire to naturalise in their countries of residence while keeping their Cameroonian nationality.

6. Understanding dual nationality/citizenship

David Leblang defines National citizenship as connoting a set of exclusive rights and responsibilities that apply to members of a country's political community; a community that is generally defined by a nation's borders (Leblang, 2013). Citizens of a country often have the right to own property, are eligible for employment, and entitled to public education, and other social programs and, in democracies, are often vested with the right to vote. With these rights come obligations including, but not limited, taxation and, in some cases, compulsory military service. Citizenship is, thus, a political construction with implications for social and economic life. Dual nationality, also referred to as multiple nationalities, is the legal status held by a person simultaneously in two or more States (Nguindip, 2017). It can be acquired at birth in connection with naturalisation of immigrants in their country of residence or with the re-acquisition of nationality by expatriates or ethnic minorities in their homeland. Dual citizenship is sometimes incorrectly used synonymously with dual or multiple nationalities. Thus the term multiple nationalities refer only to the legal status in several States and does not specify the rights and obligations a person holds vis-à-vis the state of second or third

nationality where the person does not currently reside. Multiple citizenships, or dual citizenship, were, for a long time, seen as a problem by states; security risks, dual voting rights, consular issues, and lack of loyalty were among the issues discussed. It was generally argued that dual citizenship might compromise one's allegiance to the state. International and regional conventions on citizenship reflected this concern. However, the stance towards multiple citizenships has, at least partly, shifted during recent decades, and the Council of Europe convention concerning nationality from 1997 is neutral on the issue.

Having dual citizenship allows an individual to possess political and economic rights in multiple countries; it often presents the citizen with the ability to enter the workforce and to exercise political rights. From the perspective of an immigrant, dual citizenship is advantageous as it eliminates the need to obtain a visa to return home and allows the expatriate an opportunity to purchase property and make investments in her homeland. More importantly, it involves the introduction of systems to allow citizens to experience a growing number of such rights without returning home. The expansion of voting has been most widely studied. It is now the case that the large majority of countries have systems in place to allow their citizens to participate in national elections. Other rights that may be exercised from overseas include social protection, such as the receipt of pensions or welfare benefits outside the country. Investment opportunities, certain occupations, or rights to own property are frequently restricted to citizens yet can be extended to operate externally as well.

The international norm of the 19th and 20th centuries held that individuals would denounce home country citizenship rights before naturalizing in another country as holding multiple citizenships was seen as a moral failing. The rationale behind the abhorrence of dual citizenship prior in the 19th and early 20th century as explained by Koslowski was that, it was consistent with the *realpolitik* view of international politics: dual citizenship was rejected because it blurred the lines of diplomatic protection and military obligation (Koslowski 2003); it potentially decreased the incentive for assimilation and participation in the host country (Renshon 2005), and it was thought to promote "disloyalty and deceit, divided allegiances and torn psyches (Spiro 2002). The dislike for dual citizenship finds expression in how countries treat their expatriate populations, often referring to them as "traitors" who have turned their backs on their countrymen. Countries treated their expatriates "as prodigal sons and daughters who had abandoned their national family and who therefore should not be allowed to retain the original nationality" (Martin 2003).

For Faist, by granting diaspora members legal status, through such things as dual citizenship and the right to vote, governments can strengthen the nation-diaspora connection by building symbolic nationalism and engaging diaspora members in transnational activities (Faist, 2002).

7. Constraints of "single" nationality/citizenry for Cameroonian diaspora

The negative implications of restricting Cameroonian nationals from acquiring and retaining foreign nationality extend a broad and deep set of predicaments which take form across a spectrum of scales stretching from personal, family trauma to macroeconomic trends of the country. This phenomenon of dual nationality has caused Cameroonian immigrants in foreign countries, but who do not want to lose the native nationality, to be limited by their inability to adopt a second nationality. Also, Cameroonian immigrants to foreign countries who embrace the benefit of taking their adopted home's nationality are reticent in their ability to return to Cameroon with the skill and prosperity they have accumulated while abroad due to the loss of their original Cameroonian nationality. The complications from prohibiting dual nationality in Cameroon vary from the legal, economic, political and even social.

The legal complications of prohibiting dual nationality in Cameroon are amongst the most explicit consequences and the most primary act in which most Cameroonian considered it as most severe but also more nebulous detriment. This can be seen from the various problems that can be faced when applying the principle. For instance, limitations on

Cameroonian immigrants who choose not to become naturalised citizens of their destination country will be addressed with regards to the effect those restrictions have on hindering economic and educational success in the destination country. Similarly, the legal complications that forfeiting Cameroonian nationality has on voting and domestic property holding has acted as a dilemma to many Cameroonian who intend acquiring dual nationality. When the country discovered that a Cameroonian is in possession of dual nationality, such a person loses all participatory political rights stipulated in our legal texts as everyone having that right to vote being a fundamental and citizenship obligations (Nguindip, 2017).

Economically, obtaining naturalised citizenship in a destination country can enable or speed the ability to support immigration of family member to share in the enhanced economic opportunities. In their countries of residence, Cameroonians usually have to take pragmatic, severe and even unavoidable steps in order to forfeit their original Cameroonian nationality. Thus sending money to their loved ones back home only in the detriment of forfeiting their original nationality is really a painful element to Cameroonians living in these countries. This is even more sad when they must change their nationality of origin in order to have some financial gains so as to help their families back at home, and once they do this, they forfeit their Cameroonian nationality. Cameroonian immigrants to developed countries who wish to keep their native nationality are placed at a strategic disadvantage in their destination nations' economies. This disadvantage can translate directly to hinder ability to succeed professionally, meaning that Cameroonian immigrants who assume the nationality of their destination country face significantly increased difficulties in reinvesting their foreign economic gains into the Cameroonian economy. Though foreign property ownership is technically recognised in Cameroon, the dysfunctional judiciary and administration which handle property matters make such investment precarious. Many Cameroonians abroad who have adopted the nationality of their destination country have been reported to have significantly faced difficulties in reinvesting their foreign economic gains into the Cameroonian economy. This difficulty still persists although, foreign property ownership is technically recognised in Cameroon, as a result of some dysfunctions in the judiciary and administration handling property matters, this making such investment precarious.

Socially, the prohibition of dual nationality to Cameroonian diaspora often limits the ability of native Cameroonians to acquire very high quality of education, while this may discourage the return to the country for those who drop Cameroonian nationality in the course of acquiring a foreign nationality. This results in a brain drain that of some category of professionals. Similarly, the need for immigrants to choose between their native Cameroon and the potential prosperity of their destination country can create misperceptions of having forsaken their homeland and generate a division of isolation despite deep and continue feelings of loyalty.

The political constraints of the ban of dual nationality resides in the fact that a naturalised Cameroonian in the country of destination loses all participatory political privileges, most especially and specifically, the right to vote. This is even more evident with the law of 2011 on the right to vote for Cameroonians abroad. This is a huge concern for this diaspora that esteem that political apathy runs rampant and the validity of elections is routinely questionable. Such a sacrifice may appear minor to anyone contemplating naturalisation. As explained by Nguindip this becomes more complicated when the immigrants discovered that denouncing Cameroonian nationality and maintaining that of destination will be more economical and advantageous to him, he or she will have no option of denouncing its Cameroonian nationality (Nguindip, 2017). This aspect of the nationality law has caused lots of controversies when it comes to the democratic participation of the activities of the country. As a result, some Cameroonian expatriates would not be able to influence items with potentially far greater immediate impact to their lives, such as the tax rates, local administration, transportation plans, education policies and a host of other matters settled by, or at least subject to, the ballot box of their destination country.

8. Dual nationality: Legality against practice with Cameroonian diaspora

The issue of prohibition of dual nationality as stipulated by the 1968 nationality law as argued by Cameroonians abroad would have been less ambiguous and subjective if there weren't "dual nationals" with Cameroonian nationality. This explains the different advocacy strategies that have been developed by this diaspora over the years to draw the government's attention on the need to either revise the existing law to meet up with global trends on nationality that allow for dual nationality. In the case where this is impossible, most arguments are for an impartial application of the law.

9. Dual nationals with Cameroonian nationality

A respondent on expressing what he termed the "political instrumentalization of the 1968 nationality law" gave the example of how after Cameroon won the first Afro-Asian football finals against Saudi Arabia in Jeddah in 1985, the Saudis refused to hand over the trophy on grounds that Cameroon had fielded an ineligible French player during the first leg encounter in Yaoundé. The player in question was none other than the legendary Roger Milla who had showed up for the game with his French passport. The Cameroonian government insisted that even though Roger Milla carried a French passport he was still a bona fide Cameroonian citizen who had the right, in fact the obligation, to defend the colours of his native land. The issue was resolved months later following high-level diplomatic exchanges and the mediation of the world football governing body, FIFA. About a decade later, the same Cameroonian Government barred another Cameroonian icon, the irascible novelist and critic Mongo Beti, from running for the 1997 parliamentary elections on grounds that he was not a Cameroonian. When Mongo Beti returned from exile a few years earlier, he had entered the country using a French passport. Until his death a few years later, the Biya regime continued to describe Mongo Beti as a foreigner who was ceaselessly meddling in the affairs of his host country Cameroon. From the case of Roger Milla and Mongo Beti, the members of this diaspora are of the opinion that the 1968 nationality law is generally enforced only when it is in the interest of the regime in power to do so. From this example, they explain that the only reason Mongo Beti was consistently branded a foreigner and barred from contesting parliamentary elections was because he was a virulent critic of President Biya and his regime. Mongo Beti's treatment was quite different from that of Professor Hogbe Nlend, another prominent Cameroonian who had sought exile in France during the Ahidjo era. Hogbe Nlend, who later became the President of the influential Bordeaux chapter of the ruling CPDM party in the late eighties and early nineties, was eventually appointed a minister in Biya's cabinet in 1999 on the UPC ticket even though he carried a French passport just like Mungo Beti. These three incidents involving passports from the same foreign country to him, clearly capture the "schizophrenic and arbitrary application" of Cameroon's outdated and highly restrictive nationality law (Loi no. 68-LF du Juin 1968 portant Code de la nationalité) which is out of step not only with the reality of Cameroonian society today, but also with current world-wide trends. Other examples that can be cited in this article will be those usually cited by some members of the diaspora of ministers within the government that are holders of more than one passport including that of Cameroon. These citizens have been seen to have more than one nationality enabling them to travel to other countries with ease and even carry out investments in such countries. This is often decried by Cameroonian migrants who esteem that the application of the nationality law is very subjective, instrumentalised and outdated given globalisation trends in today's modern world.

10. Diaspora advocacy efforts for revision of nationality law

From the diverse groups such as: "Cercle Felix Moumie" in Belgium, the "Dermokratisches Netzwerk fur Kamerun" in Germany, the "Front pour l'Evolution et la Republique" in Belgium amongst others, they all mobilized in 2005 to create the CODE (Collective of Democratic Organizations of the Cameroonian Diaspora). In her original form,

CODE also regroups representatives of opposition political parties and exiled opposition leaders that continued to express their rejection of the regime despite the distance with homeland (Moise Yanou Tchingangong, 2017). Mobilizations in transit towns or during the trips of the President of the Republic as well as commemorative days of the ruling party, testify of their determination to make their dissatisfaction more and more visible. The activism for the amendment of the 1968 nationality law by the Cameroonian diasporic community has been carried out through the use of several approaches ranging from peaceful meetings to violent protests.

The use of pacific methods for advocacy and lobbying is evident in the meetings between the Cameroonian diaspora resident in Europe and other parts of the world, and some government officials during official visits and meetings. A vivid example is during the visit of President Paul Biya on the 5th of February 2013 at the Le Meurice Hotel in Paris. During this meeting, the representatives of the diaspora thanked the Head of State for having permitted them to participate in the presidential elections of 9th October 2011, and their wish to have a dual nationality (CamerounTribune, 6th February 2013). The request for an update of legislation on nationality in Cameroon to allow for dual nationality has been a constant fight of the diaspora. This is evident in the multiple meetings between the Cameroon diasporas, her representatives/organisations and many officials of the Cameroon government during their visits/missions abroad. Such rare occasions for example are perceived when during a visit to the United States in 2001, former Prime Minister Peter Mafany Musonge conceded in a press conference in Chicago that the issue of dual citizenship was an important one and intimated that Cameroon may eventually have to follow the trend towards dual citizenship if it intended to fully exploit resources and skills of its ever-growing Diaspora community. Dr. Elvis Ngole Ngole, a prominent member of the Musonge delegation, even advised the Cameroonian Diaspora in the United States to mobilize its resources and energetically lobby lawmakers back home in view of amending the 1968 Citizenship law. However, when Musonge's successor, Ephraim Inoni, visited the United States four years later, he simply brushed aside the issue of dual citizenship, insisting that Cameroonian law was very clear on the matter, and that change was not in the horizon. According to respondents from this specific diaspora, they consider that the fact that most Cameroonians living in Europe especially and the USA are considered opponents of the regime, and that the dissonant calls for dual citizenship legislation have been coupled with demands for Diaspora voting rights has not helped matters. It has inadvertently created an emotionally-charged and partisan environment where a reasoned and informed debate on the issue has become virtually impossible since many in the regime consider the granting of dual citizenship rights to the Cameroon Diaspora as an unnecessary and reckless reward for the very people who are trying to bring down the regime in power. The issue of dual nationality was also brought up during consultations held by the Prime Minister Chief Dr Dion Ngute in prelude of the national dialogue held in 2019 as a means of finding solutions to the ongoing anglophone crisis. One of the main actors in these consultations was the diaspora represented by some of her organisations such as the CCD (Cameroon Council for the Diaspora). The aim of this consultation was to understand the grievances of the diaspora and also assess their contribution in finding lasting solutions to the anglophone crisis.

Another pacific method worth noting in this article is that of increase in the peaceful protests that have been witnessed in the different cities in Europe and the USA with many grievances amongst which the denial of dual nationality of Cameroonians abroad who have adopted another nationality. In several studies carried out amongst the different diaspora to understand why these protests were usually organised out of Cameroon, respondents explained that peaceful manifestations are usually declared but not authorized when they do not align with the ideologies of the ruling party or do not serve their agendas. Therefore, forceful “unauthorized” manifestations are usually sanctioned on claims of terrorism following the 2014 law on terrorism (Mukete, 2023). The members of this diaspora therefore

insisted based on their explanations that, although these laws exist, their applications are not guaranteed and the rights provided by these laws are not “secured”. This therefore serves as a reason for their activities to decry the non-application as well as the intricacies in the application of these laws on one hand, and the guarantee of these rights in the European cities under this study provides an enabling environment for their activities and a leitmotiv thereof on the other hand. (CRTV), C. R. (2019).

Picture 1: Authorized protest against the Cameroonian Government in Paris



Source: Mimi Mefo.Infos 2018

Members of Cameroonian diaspora sometimes resort to other approaches for government’s attention. These methods used by the diaspora apart from pacific protests and meetings include but not limited to social media, violent manifestations etc.

The use of social media by the diaspora for mobilisation of sympathisers has known an exponential growth since the era of globalisation and the bloom of ICTs. In this regard, we can cite the creation of social media platforms by some members of the diaspora and their movements for example the BAS, CODE and CDD. Some popular accounts of diasporic organisations such as BAS, Bobbi Tanap or even of some individuals like Valsero and Wilfred Ekanga can be mentioned. These accounts are justified by her content creators as meant to create awareness on some “ills” like the holding of passport for other countries and of Cameroon by some members of government, illegal arrest and detention of opposition party militants, rampant embezzlement of public funds, significant increase in corruption and mismanagement , poor state of health and educational infrastructures, increased in the prices of basic commodities without a corresponding increase in the purchasing power of Cameroonian, the prolonged and unresolved Anglophone crisis orchestrating more than Five thousands deaths and with more than seven thousands internally displaced persons etc. This has led to the increase in the creation of social media accounts by other diasporic movements and organisations in Cameroon that are pro-government. The aim in the multiplication of these accounts and the increase in their activity is in order to counteract the activities and propaganda by the specific diaspora, whose ideas and discourse are often considered by the government as “unpatriotic” and against values promoted by the constitution of Cameroon. In summary, they agreed that today, with the help of technology, new economies, dominated by

information and communication technology have created opportunities for previously suppressed voices like theirs to emerge. These technologies of persuasion and dissemination in the public sphere have helped this specific diaspora and others in that, it has been beneficial for Anglophone Cameroonians to popularize their claims on the Internet.

They further support that though silenced within Cameroon; diasporic voices critical of the government can still be heard virtually on the Internet. An example can be seen through the creation of some Youtube channels, creation of facebook accounts with live sessions on trending news in Cameroon, organised events/activities among others. There is no doubt that social media is a powerful tool and has shaped the way the government and the specific diaspora have communicated in recent times. An example is seen below in the use of Facebook by the specific diaspora to attract sympathisers and mobilise the public opinion on facebook around one of her causes.

Cameroon Stop Repression

*La diaspora Camerounaise qui a manifesté le samedi 17 juillet à Genève n'a pas manqué de rendre un hommage aux prisonniers politiques, injustement incarcérés dans les prisons du régime de M. Biya. À *TAGNE Jean Singhor*, ici sur le t-shirt de cette manifestante, nous pensons très fort à toi, ainsi qu'aux autres.*

Source: <https://cameroonstoprepression.org/les-prisonniers/>, Facebook 2022

The use of violent manifestations is an approach that has been used by the diaspora to state their claim for dual nationality for Cameroonian immigrants that had acquired a foreign citizenship and still desired to keep their Cameroonian nationality. These violent manifestations have increased in the last decade in some towns especially Berlin, Paris, Geneva and New York. The justification provided by the diaspora responsible for these protests that are sometimes violent lies in the reaction or feedback they have gotten from the state after other methods have been used. For example, in an online news article report by “The Africa Report”, it recounts that in 2020 following the protests of the diaspora in some cities in Europe especially Berlin and Paris, the President of the Republic referred to the protests in his traditional 31 December speech, criticising the “excessive behaviour of some compatriots in the diaspora” and questioning “whether they are or are no longer Cameroonians”.

“I think they should, out of patriotism, refrain from negative comments about their country of origin,” he said. “One should always respect one’s homeland, its institutions and those who embody them.” President Paul Biya (Dougeli, 2020)

However, this attempt to sound reasonable is unlikely to smooth relations with his critics in the diaspora. Some interviewed respondents explain that by distinguishing between those who are Cameroonian and those who are no longer Cameroonian, he is, in effect, creating a category of second-class citizens. While Cameroon does not recognise dual nationality, those who have acquired a new one and have therefore in principle lost or renounced their original one, with all the rights attached to it, are nonetheless subject, according to the President, to the obligation to be patriotic. Otherwise formulated, « they have no rights, only duties ». Another explanation recounted in this study was the quote from a respondent in these terms; “*How can one demand a love of country from people whose exclusion was planned by national laws? Men and women who are both ineligible and banned from voting but also subject to visa requirements to go on holiday or visit their families in their home countries?*”. They further explain that they will never accept a shadowy nationalism that questions the loyalty of the diaspora and treats it as the “eleventh region” of the country or the “fifth column”, as the case may be.

Some of the respondents interviewed have also used terms like “pseudo-patriots” to refer to the members of this specific diasporic movements. In a reaction to the call for boycott to Ben Decca’s concert, the journalist Paul Mahel referred to the BAS in the following words “I

was sad to read Ben Decca's very classy press release, announcing the cancellation of his show in Germany ..., in the face of the threat of some pseudo patriots" (Mahel, 2023).

11. Conclusion

Cameroon like every other country has a right to a nationality law based on her interests, specificities, aspirations and prospects. However, the issue of dual nationality amongst other concerns of the diaspora cannot be ignored. This is because, in order to achieve the SDGs or the NDS30, the government needs all her citizens. Furthermore, the update of the nationality law does not demonstrate the will of the government to build an inclusive Cameroonian society but also to improve her relations with the diaspora. With the rise in demonstrations against the government of Cameroon by the diaspora it becomes evident that there is a high need for the government to either establish dual nationality, as many countries on the continent have done, which has a more respectful and rewarding approach to the diaspora. This measure would have the advantage of removing obstacles to mobility and would make it possible to reap the economic and emotional benefits of openness. It could also maintain this retrograde and counterproductive arrangement, which is concerned with excluding rather than bringing together. But it will then have to resolve to live with this "enemy from within". The government can either decide to maintain her stand on "no dual nationality". This implies that no government official or individual should be given preferential treatment in applying this nationality law. The second option is on revising the nationality law, thus providing for dual nationality for every Cameroonian who desires to do so. This will give a sense of belonging to Cameroonians that have accepted another nationality to still return and contribute to the development of Cameroon.

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE POPULATION'S INTEREST FOR THE TIMIȘOARA EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE 2023 PROGRAM

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Abstract: *Timișoara has won in 2016 the title of European Capital of Culture for 2021 (ECC), but due to pandemic reasons, the title was postponed for 2023. There were made several sociological researches, before and after decision, concerning the public interest for this program. In this paper we make a comparative analysis on the evolution of the population's interest for this program during a decade. For this we have used the databases from the studies made in 2013, 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2023. The main conclusion is that the population's interest has a strong connection with the public policy concerning this program. So, if at the beginning, the involving of the public administration and the population support was very high, after obtaining the title, the problems from the inside management of the program have generated a significant decrease of the public support. The slight shift in perspective occurred right before 2023, year in which the situation was partially solved due to the rising interest of both the locals and tourists towards the various cultural events. Regardless of the current tendencies, we still have to wait until the program is finished in order to make a proper evaluation, that will be included into the next sociological research of the TmECC2023 program.*

Keywords: Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023, population's support, public policy, cultural program, sociological research.

1. Introduction

On 16th of September 2016 Timișoara has won the title of European Capital of Culture for 2021 against stronger competitors city, such as București, Cluj-Napoca and Craiova (initially 14 candidate cities). The preparing of the candidature was a very consistent five-year approach, with an extended involvement of various cultural stakeholders (public administrations, NGOs, creators and artists). A dedicated NGO (Timisoara 2021) was created for the elaboration of the bid-book, and a consistent creative energy of the city was involved to participate, under a professional supervision of some very important foreign experts in similar projects from abroad, such as Ektor Tsatsoulis, Jiri Sulzenko, Elsa Soro, Mattijs Maussen and so on. The preparation of the application was a real success, and Timisoara obtained the title on the base of a very good structured and elaborated bid-book.

In the evolution of this process, three distinct stages can be delimited: the preparation of the application (2010-2016), the preparation of the program (2016-2020) and the reconfiguration of the process (2020-2023). Into the first stage, the preparation of the bid-book was coordinated by the "Timisoara European Capital of Culture 2021" NGO and its director Simona Neumann. During this period all the (quite limited) resources and all the creative energy was focused on the elaboration of a very consistent document with the local cultural strengths, specificities and the planning of further activities. The local administration was directly involved and a large support from the stakeholders and from community was obtained. The public interest for the program was at its highest level from the very beginning. Into the second stage, after the obtaining of the title (2016-2020) the situation has significantly changed. Due to various reasons, (including the perspective of further significant resources), the communication among stakeholders has blocked and several tensions appeared along with a transparency issue related to the evolution of the program. The focus has moved from the configuration of the contents to administration of the benefits. In 2020,

with only one year before to start, the general opinion of the public and cultural actors was that the city is not ready for the title. The political change at the Timisoara City Hall and the pandemic period has defined the third stage when the program was reconfigured and prepared to be implemented with the new approach. During this decade several sociological studies were carried out and the results reflect that the population is aware of the evolution of the program management. The fluctuations in the administration of the coordination process of TmECC 23 have been directly reflected into the public opinion and into the population interest for voluntary involving in various dedicated activities. Despite all these dysfunctionalities, Timisoara is European Capital of Culture in 2023 and the follow up analysis from next year will reflect if it was a success.

2. Methods

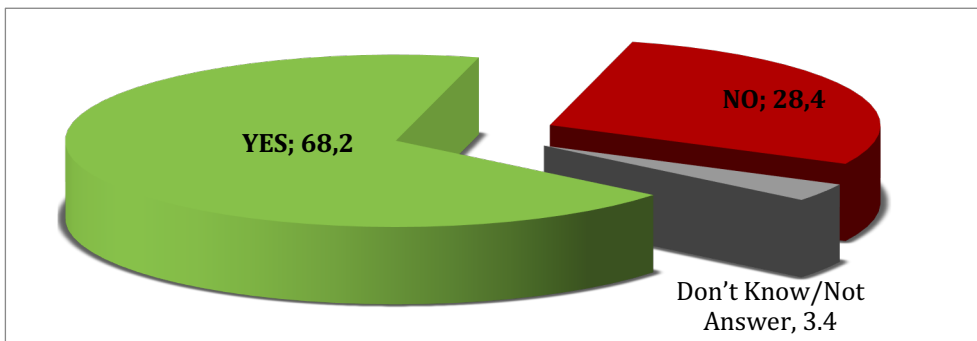
For the approaching of this topic there were used several sociological researches conducted in Timisoara in 2013, 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2023. The first study in this series was made in 2013 for the “Timisoara European Capital of Culture 2021 Association”, the NGO that has prepared the bid-book, with on field questionnaires with a sample N=1064 people. Three years later, in 2016 the research was repeated with a similar approach (N=1060). In 2018 it was organized another sociological research for the evaluation of the Cultural Strategy for Timisoara municipality and the topic was again approached (N=1000). During the pandemic period another evaluation was made online and by phone, with a dedicated questionnaire (N=815). Finally, in 2023 it was accomplished the Cultural Barometer with a questionnaire that also has approached the topic of European Capital of Culture (N=1152).

Starting from these results, we are trying into the next pages to analyze the evolution of public impact of the TmECC23 preparation and program. It is not a metanalysis, but only a comparative approach with an adequate contextualization of the public interest, perception and support of this program. These aspects were included into the questionnaire with various forms, but several comparison can be made easily, at least as a level of perceptions.

3. Results

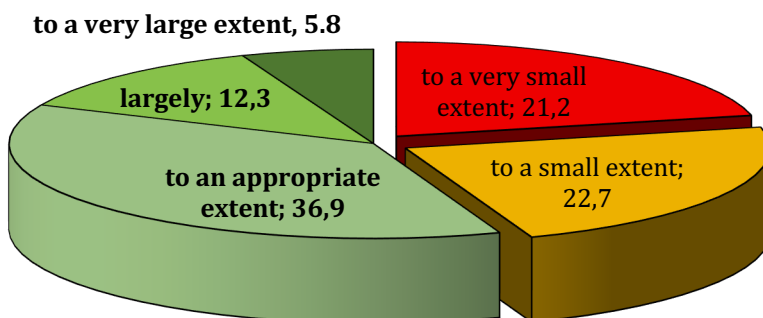
The first study, applied in 2013 was accomplished into a context when the public agenda from Timisoara has very few references to the intention of the municipality to apply for the candidature at European Capital of Culture in 2021. There was no yeat promotion about this perspective, and the public knowledge about the meaning of this program was almost zero. This first study was made also as a first sociological diagnosis of the potential of community to coagulate around a new and challenging idea. There were applied 1064 questionnaires on an interconnected quota sample (age and gender). Even without a minimal understanding of this EU competition, the general pro-Europe profile of Timisoara’s population was confirmed again by the recorded results. Thus, a direct question was related to the minimal knowledge about this intention (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Have you heard about the initiative of the Municipality of Timisoara to apply for the title of European Cultural Capital in 2021? (applied in 2013)



According with this distribution, more than two thirds from the population have heard about the program at the very beginning stage of preparation of the candidature. It is not clear how much there was social desirability into the answers, but a mostly positive perspective was quite sure. Of course, the hearing about the program and the knowledge of the content are two different things, but is important to accept that, the population from Timisoara was good connected with the idea of European Capital of Culture, several years before the time of the award. And, even it was not exploited at its maximum potential, this was actually a very important resource, as it can be seen into the next graph (Figure 2)

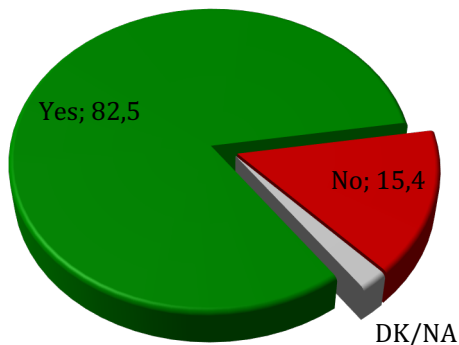
Figure 2 - Q6. Would you personally be willing to get involved in supporting this project? (applied in 2013)



Thus, more than half of Timisoara’s population has declared its availability to support the project at least at an appropriate extent. This declared voluntary support represents a very positive context for the preparing of the program and it was included as a relevant resource into the bid-book. The people who have expressed a decreased support for the program, probably chose this option into the questionnaire due to a very limited knowledge about it.

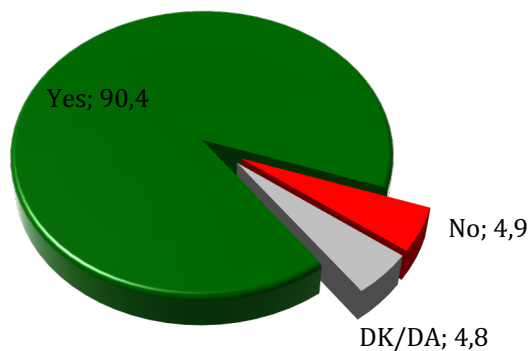
As it was expected, three years later, using a similar sampling technique, the level of awareness has increased significantly, both as information and as support for Tm ECC21 (Figure 3 and Figure 4):

Figure 3. Q7. Have you heard about Timisoara's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2021? (applied in 2016)



In less than three years (from November 2013 until June 2016) the level of public knowledge about the program has increased by almost 15%, and thus before the winning the title of ECC. Even apparently it is not a huge step, the public's involvement suffered a significant rising:

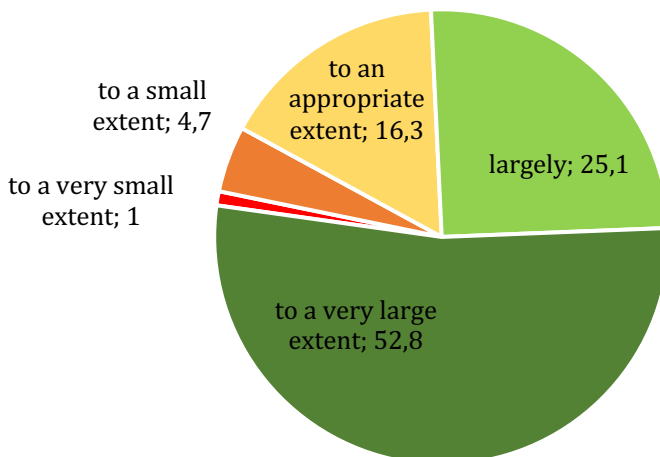
Figure 4 - Q8. Do you personally support Timisoara's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2021? (applied in 2016)



With over 90% of the population virtually available to be involved voluntarily into the organization of the ECC program, the city was very good prepared for the contest's decision. This decision came in September 2016, against all prognoses, into a very tight competition, with Bucuresti, Cluj-Napoca and Baia Mare on the final list.

The topic has become one of high interest among the locals and plenty of expectations were generated from the magical year 2021. Even if detailed knowledge of the main content of this EU cultural policy (European Capital of Culture) has remained limited, everyone symbolically associated the TmECC21 with funds, events, tourists, urban regeneration, and a general opportunity for Timisoara. The association of the Tm ECC21 title with the expected very positive chance for the city was generally accepted as a certainty (Figure 5):

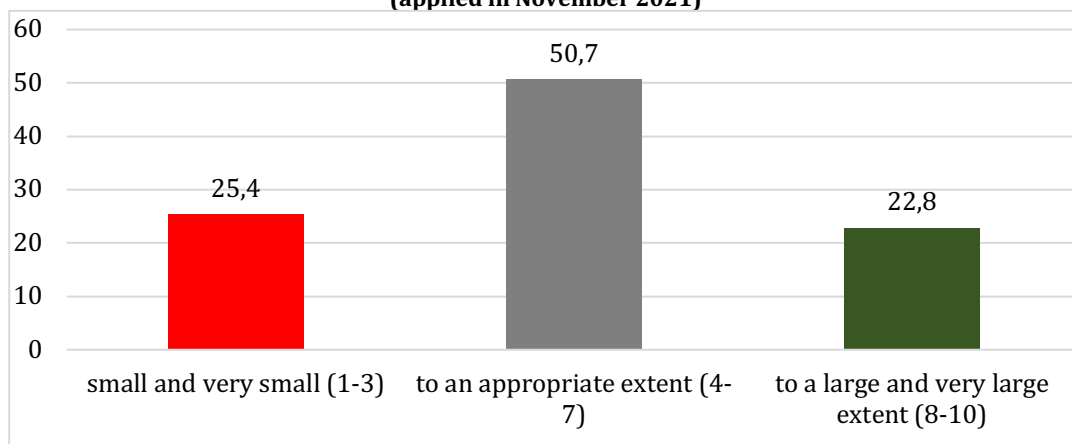
Figure 5 - Q31. To what extent do you think that obtaining the title of ECC 2021 will contribute to the development of the city of Timisoara? (applied in 2018)



According with this data, 94.2% from Timisoara’s population considered that winning the title of ECC for 2021 would have contributed to the city development, at least at an average level. Into the same time, only 1% estimate that there will don’t be any advantages. By other hand, the engagement of the population was, at least, at an optimal level, despite the asperities and the conflicts among the stakeholders.

After obtaining this title the perspective of a significant budget and profitable business has generated a lot of discussions, conflicts, tensions and lack of coordination into the administration of the program. The delaying of the expected actions and urban interventions has become more present into the public space. The Covid-19 pandemic period has postponed the program for 2023 and also has accentuated the feelings that nothing was happening. As a result, the public’s perception of the program decreased consequently (Figure 6):

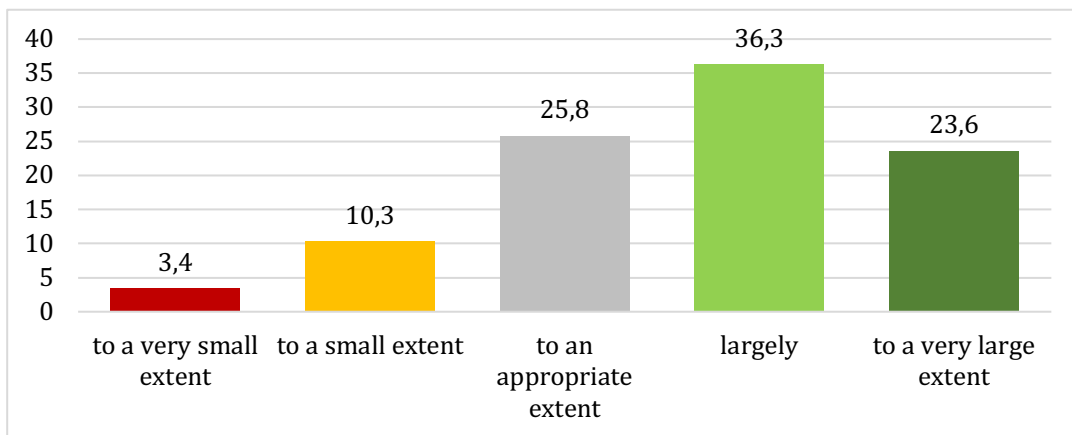
Figure 6 - Q9. From a general perspective, to what extent do you consider that Timisoara is ready to become the European Capital of Culture in 2023 (from 1 to 10, median = 6)? (applied in November 2021)



Thus, at the end of 2021, the year when the ECC title was firstly granted, more than half of Timisoara’s population believed that the city is not quite prepared for this: and of course, they do have a lot of reasons to affirm so. By the other hand, the public opinion about

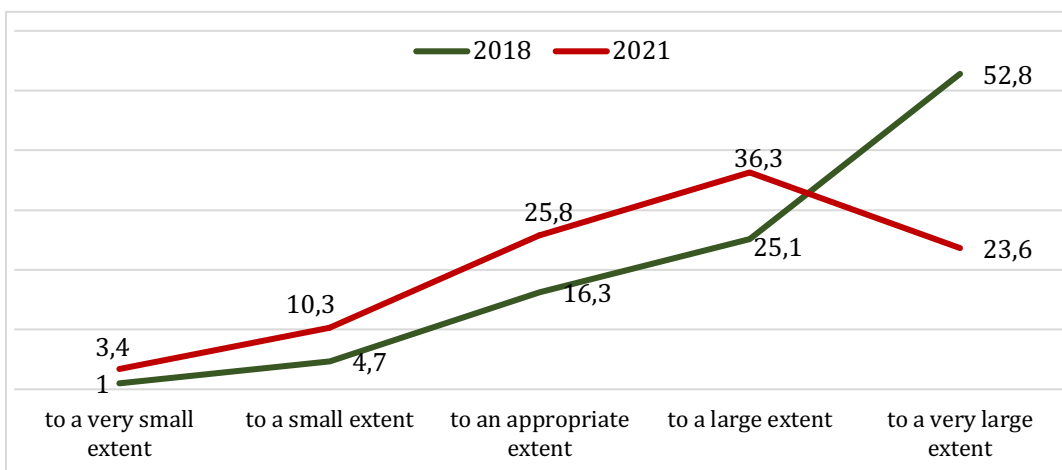
the utility of the program has also slightly decreased, but remained at a quite high level (Figure 7):

Figure 7 - Q12. To what extent do you think that the Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2023 project will help the development of the city? (applied 2021)



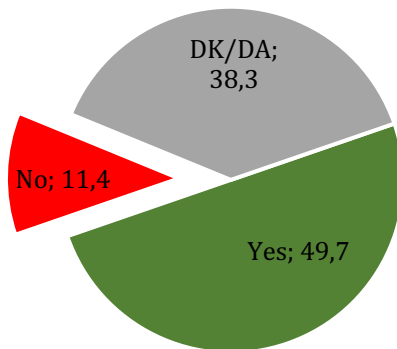
This evolution of the population’s expectation about the utility of the program, based on a several negative subjects consequently presented into the public space, has decreased in only 3 years with 11,1% in pondered values (and with 29.2% for the *Tm ECC 21/23 will help the development of the city to a very large extend*), as it can be observed into the following graph (figure 8):

Figure 8 - Q31 vs. Q12. To what extent do you think that the Timișoara European Capital of Culture 2021/3 project will help the development of the city? (2018 vs. 2021)



As a direct consequence, the interest of the population to sustain this program has recorded a similar decrease, almost half of subjects expressing their hypothetical support:

Figure 9 - Q13. Are you personally willing to support this project through volunteer activities? (applied in 2021)



First of all, following these data, it can be observed a significant increasing of the people that doesn't know (in 2021) if they will offer support for this program, comparatively with 4,8% in 2016. With other words, from 2018 until 2021 the public opinion was moved from "yes" (I will sustain the program) to "don't know/don't answer", and not to "No" (I will don't sustain the program).

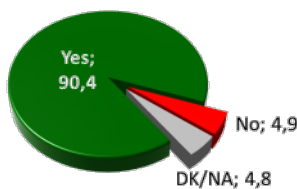
Secondly, a direct association among the public discourse about the TmECC21/23 program that was delivered by the local stakeholders, the population estimation of the preparation of the city for hosting the dedicated activities and, more important, the availability of the people to sustain these. When the general image about the managing of the program was a positive one, everything looked great. When the inside troubles appeared on the public space, the population had a direct reaction, accordingly with these:

Figure 10 – The evolution of the answers about the public support for Tm ECC 21/23 in three previous studies

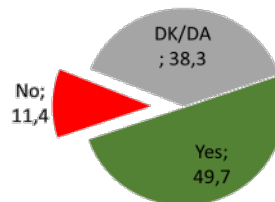
Q6. Would you personally be willing to get involved in supporting this project? (applied in 2013)



Q8. Do you personally support Timisoara's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture in 2021? (applied in 2016)



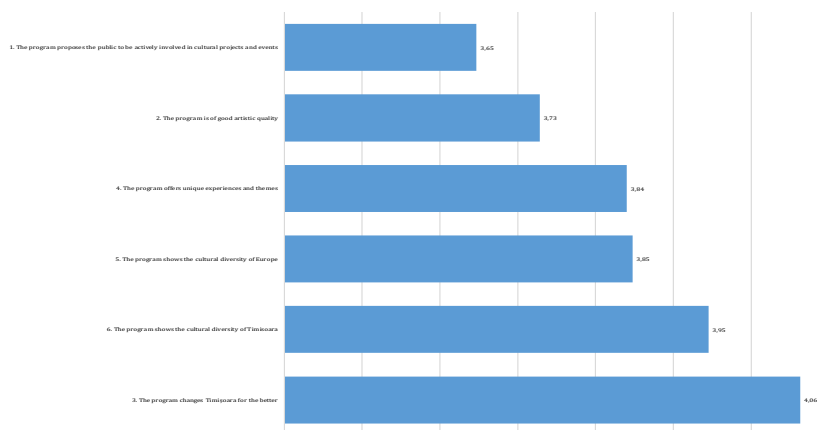
Q13. Are you personally willing to support this project through volunteer activities? (applied in 2021)



The losses of around 40% from the support of the population, even only at the opinion level, represent quite some negative circumstances under which the program actually started in February 2023. Again, is not about the refuse of the implication (only 11.4% said that in 2021), but is about the transformation of the public support into an expectative

position. If the involved stakeholders don't find the adequate frame of cooperation, why people should be enthusiastic about the cultural offer of the Tm ECC23 program? And this is nothing but a common social reaction to some incoherent behaviours into the program management: the intention of the municipality to take over the first NGO (Timisoara European Capital of Culture 2021) and the replacement of this with a new structure (Center for Projects Timisoara 2023) after the political change at the Timisoara City Hall. Plenty of voices remained into a critique negative direction despite the previous perspective such as a higher level of beneficial, long lasting changes for the city as European Capital of Culture. The last sociological survey applied in July 2023 with an item on this topic reflects the direct consequences of losing the public connection with the program:

**Figure 11 - Statements about Tm ECC2023 - weighted values
(1 = strongly disagree / 5 = strongly agree)**



The best rated statements were related with the positive impact of the Tm ECC23 for Timisoara (4.06 from 5, equivalent with 81.2%) and the opportunity of this program to express the cultural diversity of the city (3.95 from 5, that is 79%). At the opposite level, the least rated statements were about the artistic quality of the program (3.73 from 5, that is 74.6%) and the actively involvement of the public (3.65 from 5, and that is 73%). With an average score of 3.84 (from 5), equivalent with over 76% level of positive appreciation of the Tm ECC 23 (by these six dimensions), we can estimate that the mid term evaluation of the entire activities related by this program reflect a quite high favorable perspective. Beyond the quality of the activities included in the program and the methodology and selection criteria, the performance of all these cultural events brought a consistent added value to the image of Timisoara

4. Conclusions

One of the most important dimensions of the European Capital of Culture program is the involvement of the local population into dedicated activities, orientated toward the extension of the educational role of culture. With a community directly involved into the cultural manifestations, an ECC has achieved its main goal, to increase the cultural level of the regional area, and, by this, to update the quality of life. In the case of Timisoara, it is quite certain that the Tm-ECC23 program has started below the real potential of engaging of bettering the cultural resources of the city. Many of the suspicion's thoughts and negative feelings regarding the public space could have been avoided if the entire preparation of the program, from 2016 until 2023 would have been done into a more transparent and convergent way. But the benefits for the city can be already seen, from the renewed faades

until the cultural revitalization of neighborhoods. The ECC23 program has transformed Timisoara into an attractive cultural destination, and plenty of tourists have come from all over the world. Many of valuable public spaces, such historical squares, pedestrian streets and old abandoned buildings (like The Barracks U) have been revitalized and reintegrated into the city life. The local cultural institutions have prepared a very dense program with several main international events very attractive even for the international participation.

The increased public interest for the cultural activities and the upgrade of the creative sectors will be the main indicators for the further evaluation of the Tm ECC23 impact. The next researches will evidence the global social impact of the entire program, during this year and, very important, during the following years. All these data will show us if the city will reach an upgraded cultural vitality, or if it will remain only with some special memories.

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BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES: THE CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN CAMEROON TRAINING STRUCTURES FOR ENTREPRISES : THE CASE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZES ENTREPRISES IN CAMEROON

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Abstract: *After the independence of African countries, many companies were created under the impetus of the public authorities to initiate the march towards development and industrialization. These countries then exercised a strategy of supervision in the creation various economic and financial crises that occurred from the 1980s, the Member States Africans have generally experienced a failure in this policy of protectionism economic. Most of the large compagnies created are successively liquidated due to bankruptcy, or quite simply privatized for the benefit of foreign investors. In view these challenges, small and medium enterprises (SME) have played a fundamental economic and social role, by allowing covering the lack of large investments in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa by general and Cameroon in particular and have created a primary economic fabric that has favoured the development of these economies.*

Keywords: Cameroon, Company, Development, Economy, SME

In the aftermath of the accession of African countries to international sovereignty, many enterprises were set up by the public authorities to initiate the process of development and industrialization. African countries then applied a strategy of supervision in the creation of companies, favoring a protectionist policy of their economies. With the economic crisis that began in the 1980s and the beginning of 1990, African states generally experienced a failure of this policy (Missoka, 2013 : 2). The effects of this crisis are numerous, both economically and socially. Faced with this context, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) appear to be a major support for economic activity. Indeed, SMEs have demonstrated their ability to withstand economic crises, given the flexibility of their financial strength, and their modest financial investments, favouring their low involvement in the interdependent international financial system. Indeed, in sub-Saharan Africa, these companies represent between 95% and 98% of the total business population and provide between 60% and 70% of jobs. In Cameroon, most companies are SMEs. They intervene in all sectors of the economy. Thus, given their importance in developing economies, their survival is strongly threatened by international competition, favored with the opening of borders and the dismantling of customs duties, with the entry into force of the Economic Partnership Agreements with the European Union. The importance of SMEs is growing and attracting political interest from public authorities. It is therefore a question in this reflection to question the problem of the difficult emergence of the SME sector in Cameroon from 2004 to 2022. In a diachronic approach that relies on the adequate work of researchers historians, political scientists, lawyers, economists. Having already addressed the issue of Cameroonian companies, we will, firstly, trace the birth of SMEs and their supervision by Cameroonian administrative structures and, secondly, decipher the difficulties they encounter in Cameroon.

1. Ethiology of small and medium-sized enterprises in Cameroon

Small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular were born in the aftermath of independence. In order to function better, they benefit from the multifaceted framework of administrative structures.

1.1. Genesis of SMEs in Cameroon

After the independence of French Cameroon in January 1960, the country was not yet in a phase of advanced industrialization although there was already a beginning of development, thanks to some commercial and industrial companies specializing in import and export. More than the result of local initiative, it was the legacy of colonization. The type of Cameroonian enterprises commonly encountered were small artisanal production units or retail trade. The Investment Code at that time did not contain any specific measures in favour of SMEs. The various regimes of the Code were reserved only for investors with sufficiently significant financial skills.

En 1962, the main assistance body resulting from Franco-Cameroonian cooperation was the As.F.C.A , which in 1965 created a special AFCA/PME service (Mbenda Georges, 1989 : 17) whose main field of intervention was the training accounting and management of craftsmen. The A.F.C.A followed its former students and gave them advice. ; It had helped organize artisans exhibitions and set up several cooperatives (F. Colas, 1981 :). The A.F.C.A followed its former students and assisted with its advice. She had helped organize artisans exhibitions and created several cooperatives.

In 1968, concerned about the promotion of SMEs, the Cameroonian government decided, through the Investment Code, to establish a special tax regime for SMEs consisting of the application of an overall rate reduced to 5% of the duties and taxes levied on the import of materials and materials directly necessary for the exploitation, production and processing of products. When SMEs were approved under the Internal Production Tax (TIP) regime, they were no longer subject to the payment of import duties and taxes on raw materials. Assistance missions were entrusted to two French organizations: the A.F.C.A. and the Technical Aid and Cooperation Company (S.A.T.E.C.), both supported by funding from the Aid and Cooperation Fund (A.C.F.) The S.A.T.E.C. had the following objectives : to interest Cameroonians with some savings to participate actively in the creation of SMEs; study with them all financial, administrative, technical and commercial aspects of projects; participate in the creation of production units by providing full support to promoters; ensure that the enterprises are monitored during the first months after the projects have been carried out (F. Colas, 1981, p. 3).

In order to better establish its action to promote SMEs and to be able to evolve on the basis of more autonomous bases, the Cameroonian government then developed a national support structure for the SME. By Law No. 70/LF7 of 20 May 1970 (Mbenda Georges, 1989: 18). He created the National Centre for Assistance to Small and Medium Enterprises (CAPME) which only became operational in August 1973 with the appointment of its first National Director. In addition, by adopting Decree No. 71/DF/502 of 14 October 1971, the Government established the principle of a Credit Guarantee Fund for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. Its implementation became effective only with the adoption of Decree No. 75/238 of 2 April 1975 by which the previous one was repealed and created the Fund for Assistance and Guarantee of Loans to Small and Medium Enterprises (FOGAPE) (Mbenda Georges, 1989: 18), under the aegis of the Cameroon Development Bank (BCD), which had already been operating since 1960. It shows that 30% of SMEs were set up between 1960 and 1975, 56% between 1975 and 1980 and 14% between 1980 and 1985. The table below is an illustration of this.

Table 1: Periods of creation of SMEs in Cameroon in relation to the different legal forms, according to a sample of 140 FOGAPE guarantee files

Forms Legal Creation period	E. I	S.N.C	S.A.R.L	S.A	TOTAL
60-65	4	0	3	1	8
65-70	11	0	2	0	13
70-75	15	0	2	4	21
75-80	60	1	13	5	79
80-85	9	0	6	4	19
TOTAL	99	1	26	14	140
Percentage	70,7%	0,7%	18,6%	10%	100%

Source: FOGAPE

1.2. Advantages for the development of SMEs

Cameroonian SMEs have real assets to promote activities thanks in particular to a number of key factors to their development, namely: the flexibility of their activities, the opening of markets, the accessibility of raw materials and the rapid innovation recognized to this type of company. Activities refer to all the processes leading to the creation of products in SMEs. The small size of SMEs appears to be an element favouring the optimization of the resources present in enterprises. Indeed, the extraordinary adaptability of this type of company to the sometimes violent changes that have occurred in the environment are edifying. (Fongang, 1992:31).

Activities within SMEs are grouped and specifically oriented towards the main missions of the company and the achievement of objectives. This is because the small business can do things that the big one cannot. Its simplicity and small size should give it a quick reaction, flexibility, and the ability to concentrate its resources (Peter Drucker, 1975: 687). Thus, the activities of SMEs show a great clarity of the progress of the production and marketing of products. Management is flexible, with low hierarchical levels and close proximity between managers and employees, promoting the consultation of points of view and the dynamisation of activities. Indeed, small firms present a simple organization of the managerial structures of the main theories of enterprises with three main functions, the administrative function, the production function and the marketing function (Peter Drucker, 1975: 386). It is also important for SMEs to know the actual performance of each employee, as well as the effectiveness of each decision for an optimal allocation of resources already insufficient in SMEs.,

Cameroonian SMEs are not exempt from this requirement for flexibility, which can be considered as an element of competitiveness for these companies. Moreover, several SMEs, especially those in the agri-food sector such as SOPROCAM, PRODICAM, or SODIPANCAM have a strong clarity in the execution of their activities, from the supply of raw materials to marketing, including processing. This flexibility in the execution of tasks helps these companies to develop the flexibility to understand their markets, and to adapt their offer. According to the latest General Business Census (RGE) of the National Institute of Statistics (INS), there are 93,969 companies in Cameroon, about 99% of which are SMEs (Prudence Missoka, 2013: 3).

1.3. Market opening

Understanding the markets is crucial in the development of SME activities. Understanding markets concerns all activities revolving around the collection of market information and its dissemination in the company. Cameroonian SMEs have the advantage of offering their products directly to target markets. Indeed, market research with relatively high costs is difficult for small businesses to carry out. (Philip Kotler and Bernard Dubois, 2000 :46). In Cameroon, most SMEs offer their products directly to customers locally close to the production unit. This proximity to markets makes it possible to reduce the sometimes high

costs of distributing products, promoting a certain availability of products on the markets. Similarly, the proximity of SME markets allows them to understand the environment in which they operate, and to quickly adapt their activities to changes that can quickly affect this environment (Guy Samuel Ntoh, 2009). SMEs can thus take into account competition, which represents one of the forces intervening in the business environment. All these factors can have a major impact on the competitiveness of Cameroonian SMEs. In order to understand markets, the proximity of companies appears to be a decisive factor in providing marketing information as reliable as that resulting from market research that is difficult for SMEs to achieve and promoting their integration and development within markets.

2. Accessibility of raw materials

Cameroon has a variety of agricultural, mining and forestry resources that ensure the availability of raw materials for its industry and give it a comparative advantage both locally and internationally. The major advantage possessed by Cameroonian SMEs, especially those operating in the textile, agri-food or industrial sectors, is the wide availability of raw materials necessary for the manufacture of their products. Most SMEs in these sectors process agricultural and livestock products into finished food products. Indeed, the availability of raw materials allows companies to reduce the risks related to stock-outs and coverage of the target market.

The availability of raw materials appears to be an essential element in the competitiveness of SMEs which must be fully taken into account in the company's commercial policy. Indeed, supply management is a fundamental component of marketing management that promotes the optimization of commercial strategies (Philip Kotler and Bernard Dubois, 2000: 42).

In Cameroon, SME supplies focus on the main inputs needed for processing and packaging products. These products are mainly available on the local market, imported products mainly concern chemical preservatives. The objective of these companies is then to ensure and rationalize supplies through better inventory management, and price negotiation with suppliers, in order to reduce the various supply costs.

2.1. Rapid innovation in SMEs

The low hierarchical level within SMEs promotes proximity between managers and employees, reducing decision-making times. This facilitates the convergence of skills leading to rapid innovation in SMEs. Cameroonian SMEs have the opportunity to develop new strategies at the product or marketing level. The proximity of markets makes it possible to detect new consumer expectations whose satisfaction requires the creation of new processes. The flexibility of SMEs' activities thus allows the rapid diffusion of an innovation, in order to adapt to new changes in the business environment.

The diagnosis of the SME environment shows that companies operate in an environment that is not very favourable to the development of their activities. Added to this are internal and external obstacles to the optimal functioning of their productive capacities. In the current context of globalization of economies, the environment for SMEs is increasingly modified and increasingly competitive. Indeed, market opening has several effects on SME markets, as well as on their activities (Guy Samuel Ntoh, 2009).

2.2. Strong framework for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Cameroonian SMEs benefit from legal support and the supervision of administrative structures for their operation, such as the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and Handicrafts, private sector organizations (GICAM) and international organizations. Since 2010, Cameroon has adopted a law promoting SMEs, thus materializing the desire to regulate this key sector of our economy. Law No. 2010/001 of 13 April 2010 on the promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises in Cameroon had the merit of laying the foundations for the

development of SMEs (MINMPEESA). It established a definition of VSEs and SMEs built around two elements: turnover and the number of people employed. In addition to the definition, the law set out the support mechanisms for SMEs, in particular, support for their creation, the incubation strategy; their development; support for funding and its consolidation. SMEs are subject to a number of obligations, non-compliance with which is subject to sanctions. In order to take into account developments in the SME sector and align it with local realities, the 2010 law was revised in 2015. Thus, Law No. 2015/010 of 16 July 2015 amended and supplemented some of its provisions. The SME has been redefined as any company, regardless of its sector of activity that employs no more than one hundred (100) people and whose annual turnover excluding taxes does not exceed three (03) billion (MINMPEESA).

As part of the improvement of the business climate and, in order to harmonize procedures in the OHADA area, the Cameroonian legislator has, by Law No. 2016/014 of 14 December 2016, set the minimum share capital and the modalities of use of the services of the Notary in the context of the creation of a SARL (MINMPEESA). Thus, the minimum share capital at the creation of a SARL is set at 100,000 CFA francs, divided into equal shares whose nominal value may not be less than five thousand (5000) CFA francs and the use of the Notary now optional. With regard to the incubation strategy for SMEs, the Prime Minister, Head of Government, in application of the provisions of the 2010 law, signed Decree No. 2020/0301/PM of 22 January 2020 which sets out the procedures for carrying out the missions of small and medium-sized enterprise incubation structures (MINMPEESA). In the same vein, Orders issued pursuant to the Decree have also been signed. They concern, on the one hand, the form, the elements of the content of the act of approval of private incubation structures and the conditions for its renewal, on the other hand the content of the Partnership Agreements between the MINMPEESA and the public incubation structures as well as the related specifications.

2.3. SME management structures and their missions

The supervision of SMEs in Cameroon is provided by a number of institutions, namely: institutional bodies, employers' organizations and SME associations. These are the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts and the Competitiveness Committee. SMEs play a very important role in the economic and social fabric of Cameroon. Taking this importance into account marks the creation of a Ministry in charge of small businesses, and the social economy more visible in the informal sector. Indeed, it is to meet the needs of supervision and information that the Cameroonian Government has set up a Ministry in charge of SMEs. MINMPEESA was established on 8 December 2004 by Presidential Decree No. 2004/320 on the organization of the Government (Guy Samuel Ntoh, 2009). This ministerial department, which enters the institutional scene, has as its main mission the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the Government's policy on the development of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Crafts.

The missions of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts are mainly: The promotion and supervision of small and medium-sized enterprises and crafts; The establishment, in liaison with professional organizations, of a database and projects for investors in the small and medium-sized enterprises and craft sectors; monitoring the activities of bodies providing assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises and the craft sector; in liaison with the relevant professional organisations; monitoring of professional organisations for small and medium-sized enterprises and crafts; monitoring and studies on developments in the informal sector; the identification and study of the possibilities of migration of actors from the informal sector to crafts and micro-enterprises; the study of all measures to promote information and training for actors in the informal sector.

2.4. The Competitiveness Committee

The competitiveness committee is not specifically concerned with the competitiveness of SMEs, but with the Cameroonian economy in general. The Competitiveness Committee is attached to the Ministry of the Economy. It is "a permanent framework for high-level consultation between the public and private sectors. It serves as an interface between public authorities and actors in the productive economy, with a view to finding solutions to problems of competitiveness of the economy and enterprises. Its mission is to identify obstacles to the competitiveness of the economy; to propose all measures aimed at lowering factor and transaction costs and increasing Cameroon's attractiveness to private investment; to monitor in the interest of the Parties the implementation of the decisions adopted and the reforms implemented. Among these organizations, prominently feature: the Groupement Inter patronal du Cameroun, the Patronale des PME, the Groupement des PME du Cameroun and international organizations.

3. The Cameroon Inter Employers' Group (GICAM)

GICAM was created on June 12, 1957, and was formerly called the Interprofessional Group for the Study and Coordination of Economic Interests. It was in November 1992 that it became GICAM (Guy Marcel Ntoh, 2009). Its main purpose is to serve companies, providing members with training on business issues, defending the interests of companies and the point of view of their leaders on matters that directly or indirectly concern them, so that they benefit from a favorable business environment. It carries out three main missions, including services to its members; the representation of the private sector and the defense of the interests of companies, the promotion of free enterprise and the Cameroonian economic space.

3.1. SME employers

The SME Employer is a body bringing together today 126 SME members active in business consulting, hospitality and tourism, agro-industry, transit, construction, textiles, New Information and Communication Technologies (NICT), industrial maintenance, forestry, microfinance, bakery, energy, cosmetics, etc. The SME Employers' Association facilitates the search for financing for SMEs, as well as the implementation of commercial partnerships between SMEs. The Cameroon SME Group is an association of SME promoters set up in 2005 to create a consultation framework specific to Cameroonian SMEs. GPMECAM collaborates with MINPMEESA in the implementation of the institutional missions of the Ministry and the development of effective strategies to promote SMEs in Cameroon. GPMECAM is led by a permanent secretariat and has branches in all regions of Cameroon, promoting the implementation of its vision of SME development. The supervision of Cameroonian SMEs to ensure their development and competitiveness is also provided by certain international organizations. These include the International Finance Corporation and the Economic Commission for Africa.

3.2. The International Finance Corporation (IFC)

The International Finance Corporation, which is a subsidiary of the World Bank, offers a diversified range of services for Cameroonian companies. Indeed, the IFC conducts studies in the field of private entrepreneurship development in sub-Saharan African countries, and encourages international investors to integrate promising sectors. The IFC also makes financing available to African companies, but whose eligibility conditions are not always within the reach of Cameroonian SMEs. In order to increase investment, the International Finance Corporation provides technical assistance to improve the business climate, mobilize investment and build the capacity of SMEs in Africa to foster their development in the context of globalization.

3.3. Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

The Economic Commission for Africa regularly conducts studies on Cameroon's economic environment. ECA thus proposes reports on the competitiveness of enterprises and that of SMEs in particular. The 2004 ECA report on enhancing the competitiveness of African SMEs shows that management is a key factor in the competitiveness of SMEs because of the fragility of their activities (ECA, 2004). The competitiveness of SMEs therefore requires the establishment of the technological and commercial means inherent in enterprises. These performance efforts must be framed by a favourable regulatory framework and institutional support for SMEs to assist their activities. Cameroonian SMEs contribute enormously to Cameroon's socio-economic development, but still face many difficulties that hinder their operation. In its Report on the theme: "Promotion and financing of national SMEs", the Economic and Social Council highlights the main roles played by SMEs in Cameroon. These roles are also related to the advantages enjoyed by the flexible and small structures of SMEs. The main advantages are: the existence of simple technology and reduced capital; accessibility to a fairly broad platform of domestic investors; the possibility of establishing itself throughout the national territory, even in the most remote areas; the privileged place that creativity and innovation can take.

With these different advantages, SMEs can play their multiple roles, the first of which is "job creation" at a reasonable cost in relation to the investment made. A survey conducted among the Cameroonian population shows that Cameroonian SMEs employ about 40% of the active workforce. (Cameroon Business Review, 1986: 58). A CAPME activity report (Table II) shows that the cost of job creation is clearly in favour of national or foreign SMEs in Cameroon.

The second role of the SME is the revaluation of local raw materials by processing them on site using simple and adapted technology. The third role of SMEs is to ensure that the vital needs of the populations are met, even in the most remote regions of the country, through the establishment of small industrial units, services and businesses corresponding to the realities of each region. This allows the Cameroonian SME to contribute validly to the emancipation of a large number of nationals both socially and in the acquisition of various entrepreneurial experiences. Finally, SMEs contribute to the establishment of real economic independence, by reducing the many imports of foreign products. Despite multiple efforts made by Cameroonian promoters, with the assistance of government actions, to support SMEs in fulfilling their main roles, they do not seem to evolve with much ease in our economic environment. There are many difficulties that hinder their progress.

4. Obstacles to SME development in Cameroon

Two main causes can explain the difficulties faced by Cameroonian SMEs: endogenous causes and exogenous causes.

4.1. Endogenous causes

The internal causes of the company correspond mainly to difficulties in the supply of raw materials, inappropriate production techniques and technologies, insufficient compliance with quality norms and standards, difficulties in accessing the external market, to name but a few. With the globalization of trade, the probable entry into force of EPAs and especially an export-oriented industrialization strategy, to conquer foreign markets, the adoption of quality approaches and compliance with standards are very decisive for the survival of our SMEs.

However, the concepts of standards and quality are still very little anchored in Cameroonian companies, due in particular to the lack of information on standards and the inadequacy of a quality approach. Indeed, many products do not yet have standards despite the coordination of standardization activity at national level.

4.2. Difficulties in accessing the external market

SMEs face difficulties in accessing external markets due in particular to a lack of business partnerships, insufficient marketing and advertising/communication policies. As a result, their openness to international trade is weaker. Exports of SMEs from 2005 to 2007 are on average 585 million FCFA while imports over the same period are estimated at an annual average of 250 billion FCFA (National Institute of Statistics).

The main difficulties in reaching these foreign markets lie in the lack of strategic vision and interest in exporting, fostered by a lack of training and information for SME managers on the mechanisms of international trade, and on the lack of infrastructure, which are external obstacles to the competitiveness of enterprises (MINPMEESA, October 2008).

4.3. Exogenous causes

External causes for the competitiveness of Cameroonian companies and SMEs in particular include access to finance, the environment in which SMEs operate and the lack of basic infrastructure. The financing of SMEs is the basis for the development of their activities over a wide field of intervention. The financing of SMEs in Cameroon, although a major concern of the Government, does not present a coherent approach allowing SMEs to access the necessary financing, not only for their creation, but also for their development. Following the particular example of the agri-food sector, the Support Programme for the Creation and Development of Processing SMEs set up by MINPMEESA is insufficient and suffers from major administrative burdens.

Indeed, the problem of financing is crucial and decisive in the activities of Cameroonian SMEs. SMEs face enormous difficulties in accessing finance, as credit risks are very high due to their lack of professionalism and limited client portfolio. As a result, the conditions of access to credit are restrictive, particularly in terms of guarantees. This is why, despite their effective excess liquidity, banks lend very little to SMEs (David Fongang, 2001 : 67). The environment in which Cameroonian SMEs operate is marked by an unfavourable institutional framework and a suffocating tax burden. The current institutional framework is not very favourable to the creation and development of SMEs, due in particular to an inadequate legislative and regulatory environment characterized by a tax system that provides little incentive and is not adapted to SMEs. Among the most difficult obstacles to conducting business in Cameroon, uncertainties related to the legal environment are the most decried, both by local products. SMEs must submit their projects to the departmental delegations of MINPMEESA, in order to be forwarded to the regional delegations where a technical committee selects the most relevant ones, which are sent to the Ministry for funding study (Gyu Samuel Ntoh, 2009). With the absence of a consultation framework between MINPMEESA and other administrations for the development of SMEs, and the lack of popularization of the legislative and regulatory texts in force, very few economic operators are aware of the various texts that govern their sector of activity.

SMEs face difficulties in accessing external markets due in particular to a lack of business partnerships, insufficient marketing and advertising/communication policies. As a result, their openness to international trade is weaker. Exports of SMEs from 2005 to 2007 are on average 585 million FCFA while imports over the same period are estimated at an annual average of 250 billion FCFA (National Institute of Statistics). The main difficulties in reaching these foreign markets lie in the lack of strategic vision and interest in exporting, fostered by a lack of training and information for SME managers on the mechanisms of international trade, and on the lack of infrastructure, which are external obstacles to the competitiveness of enterprises (MINPMEESA, October 2008). With the globalization of trade, the probable entry into force of EPAs and especially an export-oriented industrialization strategy, to conquer foreign markets, the adoption of quality approaches and compliance with standards are very decisive for the survival of our SMEs. However, the concepts of standards and quality are still very little anchored in Cameroonian companies, due in particular to the lack of information on

standards and the inadequacy of a quality approach. Indeed, many products do not yet have standards despite the coordination of standardization activity at national level.

Ultimately, the development of SME activities and their supervision have become beyond political attention, a necessity in the functioning of the economy in almost all countries of the world. In Cameroon, this interest has been manifested by the creation of a ministry in charge of SMEs. This is the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Social Economy and Handicrafts. The Government of Cameroon, in the new global economic context, has decided to make the private sector, particularly SMEs, the main engine of economic growth and poverty reduction. This sector is set to become the appropriate instrument for the creation of wealth and jobs. Only SMEs in the formal and informal sectors face a number of problems and constraints both in terms of the external environment of the enterprise and in terms of internal operational capacities. Nevertheless, it appears that, despite the harmful effects of international competition on their activities, Cameroonian SMEs have the means to survive and grow in their markets. Because of their low financial capacity, due to difficulties in accessing credit and a low self-financing capacity, SMEs experience enormous difficulties in supplying raw materials both nationally and internationally (Jean Pierre Sallenave, 1978 : 15). They are faced with the unavailability of most intermediate goods and raw materials, the main inputs to their production process. Most Cameroonian SMEs, especially those in the agri-food sector specializing in the processing of cereals whose raw materials are available on the national market, face insufficient or poor quality transport infrastructure, high transaction costs; These further increases production costs and affects their competitiveness.

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A MULTIFACETED APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: *The Human Resource Management (HRM) function is a critical one within the organization, having a significant impact on its success and competitiveness. However, often HRM practices are established only from one perspective, without considering other approaches that may reveal important practical implications. It is necessary to use a multi-perspective approach that includes different dimensions if we want to have a comprehensive understanding of the field. This article presents a holistic exploration of HRM by presenting twelve distinct perspectives that can be used in the analysis of various organizational phenomena, offering insights into strategic alignment of HR practices with company objectives, behavioural change, integration of new technologies, ethical and cross-cultural considerations, employee career management at every stage of life, legal compliance, economic evaluation, environmental sustainability, knowledge management, employee voice and employee well-being. The article can be useful to both HR professionals and researchers, highlighting the importance of using different perspectives when examining a particular phenomenon.*

Keywords: Human Resource Management, multi-perspective approach, HRM perspectives, practical implications.

1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) plays an essential role in the performance of organizations because companies can maintain a competitive edge in today's dynamic business environment primarily through employees. To understand the full scope of HRM, it is advisable to adopt a multi-perspective approach, highlighting the different facets that influence human resource management practices. The multi-perspective approach involves exploring the same phenomenon by using several perspectives (Larkin, Shaw and Flowers, 2019: 182). It allows an integrated, enriched, and balanced picture of a situation to be presented.

Since the early 1920s there has been a tendency in Human Resource studies to divide the field into different disciplines, and often these separate wings are unable to communicate with each other (Kaufman, 2014). In very many cases researchers tend to study only one side of the coin and completely ignore the other (Wright, Nyberg and Polyhart, 2018: 142). For example, early studies in the domain of Strategic Human Resource Management delineated the concepts of "commitment" and "control" in the relationship with employees, but later it was found that these would be different ends of the same spectrum. While scholars enjoy the luxury of choosing to focus on one aspect or another, organizations must analyse phenomena from multiple perspectives, because a decision made from one perspective could lead to favorable outcomes from one point of view and unfavorable from another perspective. Therefore, if HR research is to have a greater impact in practice, it is necessary to address both sides of the coin simultaneously (Wright, Nyberg and Polyhart, 2018:148).

Although the evolution of the field has produced a memorable journey from control to commitment, researchers' view of HR practices should be broadened from a preference for commitment to a realistic acknowledgment of the necessity to manage and regulate employee behaviour. Therefore, research should have an approach from multiple perspectives and try to create a complex picture of the studied phenomena/concepts, so that the research results can

be easily applied in practice. Additionally, HR researchers tend to focus more on larger companies and executive ranks, leading to a bifurcation of the field.

The aim of this paper is to present a holistic exploration of HRM by presenting different perspectives that should be used to analyse the same phenomenon. Often HRM policies are established considering the analysis of some phenomena from only one perspective, which could lead to inefficiency. In this regard, seven main perspectives, which are more often used by both researchers and practitioners, and five additional perspectives have been identified. The latter provide additional dimensions through which HRM can be analysed and are particularly relevant in today's evolving work environments where sustainability, knowledge management and employee well-being play an important role. The choice of perspective depends on an organization's priorities, values, and goals.

2. The Strategic Perspective

The interest in aligning different organizational functions with business strategy led to the emergence of a new discipline called Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM), with the first relevant papers appearing in the early 1980s (Wright, Ulrich, 2017). Wright and McMahan (1992) defined strategic human resource management as "a pattern of implementations and planned activities for the management of human resources carried out with the aim of enabling an organization to achieve its objectives". A more recent definition presents SHRM as "the study of HRM systems (and/or subsystems) and their relationships with other elements that comprise an organizational system, including the organization's external and internal environments, the multiple players adopting HRM systems, and multiple stakeholders that assess efficacy and determine long-term survival" (Jackson, Schuler and Jiang, 2014). This definition highlights the relationship between human resource management systems and other elements of the organization, including organizational performance and effectiveness.

This perspective emphasizes HRM's role in driving business success and ensuring organizational sustainability. Strategic HRM involves the determining decision-makers regarding human resources practices, the structure of human capital reserves (skills and aptitudes), the specification of the necessary behaviours in the field of human resources and the analysis of the effectiveness of the decisions taken (performance, satisfaction, absenteeism, etc.), considering the strategies of business and competitive situations (Wright and McMahan, 1992). By linking HRM practices with strategic goals, organizations can optimize their human capital and enhance their competitiveness. Employees should no longer be treated only as "workforce" involving short-term expenses that must be minimized as much as possible, but as human capital assets that provide long-term value and must be maximized (Kaufman, 2015, pp. 389-390).

But this perspective assumes that recruitment, assessment, and development processes deal with people who have consistent skills sets, which can be objectively examined and measured, and thus being possible to predict job performance. However, people are more processual, context-dependent, and their performance can be affected by changes in personal life or some elements of the work context, like job/task characteristics, resources, social relationships etc (Poncheri, 2006).

3. The Behavioural Perspective

The behavioural perspective focuses on the interactions among an organization's employees and how these interactions influence human resource management practices. In order for an employee to excel in their job, the ability to perform is not enough. The willingness to perform (motivation, job satisfaction, personality, values, and expectations) and the opportunity to perform (working conditions) are also needed (Blumberg and Pringle, 1982). A positive workplace environment and strong employee-employer relationships are essential to the overall well-being of an organization. Research from this perspective focuses

on human behaviour, understanding the factors that determine employee engagement, and promoting organizational health.

Guest (2017) argues that organizations need to pay more attention to employee well-being, both for ethical reasons, as employee interests are often neglected, even though they are important stakeholders, and to increase performance. Considering social exchange theory, companies that promote employee well-being and positive working relationships will reap mutual benefits.

From this perspective we can also analyse some negative experiences that affect employee well-being, namely stress and burnout, which can be caused by poor job design, tasks, job characteristics and resources. Jobs that contain more tasks than employees can handle are experienced as stressful, leading to burnout. Companies should find ways to improve performance without the negative effects of work intensification. Negative experiences can lead to negative behaviours, i.e. stress at work can undermine work-life balance, thus causing conflict in the family. Certain HR practices can influence voluntary turnover or the appearance of intention to leave the organization, such as organizational/procedural injustice, perceived fairness of the reward system, violation of the psychological contract by the employer.

On the other hand, positive experiences favour the appearance of positive attitudes and behaviours, which could influence organizational performance. Positive experiences can be considered: psychological safety, well-being, organizational/procedural justice, job satisfaction, career satisfaction, knowledge sharing, intrinsic motivation, perceived organizational support, supervisor support, job autonomy. The positive attitudes and behaviours that can result are work commitment, organizational/affective commitment, organizational identification, self-efficacy, creativity, innovative behaviour. An important aspect is maintaining the work engagement of employees who are close to retirement age. This issue should be analysed also from the Employee Lifecycle Perspective.

Another aspect that influences the employees' behaviour is workplace flexibility, that needs to be looked at both from the behavioural perspective – as it allows employees to improve their work-life balance – but also from the strategic perspective. Flexible employment forms force the adoption of HR practices that focus more on talent, neglecting other employees.

4. The Technological Perspective

In an era characterized by digital transformation, the technological perspective of HRM focuses on the integration of technology in the management of human resources. Therefore, today we talk about Electronic Human Resource Management (e-HRM), which was defined as the application of IT for the collection, storage, retrieval, and dissemination of [HR] data for business purposes (Stone et al, 2015: 216). In this case one can discuss the use of HR software, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and automation to streamline HR processes. Advances in technology have streamlined administrative activities, improving the experience of both employees and employers. The adoption of technology has revolutionized the field of HRM, making it more efficient and responsive. However, the widespread implementation of e-HRM technology doesn't automatically guarantee the effectiveness of organizational e-HRM (Wright, Dunford and Snell, 2001). Moreover, Bondarouk et al (2017) empirically examined the relationship between e-HRM and HRM service quality, and they concluded that if organizations do not have a strong HRM system to begin with, the implementation of e-HRM will fail. From this perspective, it is imperative to prioritize the HRM content over the IT content. Based on empirical research (Galanaki, Lazazzara and Parry, 2019), four types of e-HRM configurations were identified, which were named: "non-usage", "HR primacy", "Integrated e-HRM", and "IT primacy". The adoption of HRM technology is more widespread among large companies, and globally one out of five organizations have "non-usage"

configurations. This phenomenon can be better understood if we also analyse it from the Cross-Cultural Perspective and Employee Lifecycle Perspective.

5. The Ethical Perspective

From this perspective we can analyse whether decisions and actions related to human resources are taken with integrity, fairness, and transparency. We can address issues such as diversity and inclusion, equal employment opportunity and ethical decision-making in HR practices. Diversity offers a lot of opportunities, but it also presents several challenges that managers must face. Given the increasing individual differences, can all employees be treated the same? (Robbins and Judge, 2017) From this perspective, and from Legal and Compliance Perspective, practices regarding women on the labour market and gender inequality, harassment at work can be analysed and implemented.

6. Cross-Cultural perspective

Cross-cultural HRM emphasizes the impact of culture on HRM practices, especially in multinational organizations. Analysing practices from this perspective focuses more on creating HRM strategies that are culturally sensitive and effective in a global context. But are these practices still ethical? For example, diversity can also be analysed from this perspective, and if multinational companies adopt different HR practices for different cultures, because they are context sensitive (Cooke, Veen and Wood, 2017), how can we talk about equal treatment of employees, non-discriminatory?

7. Employee Lifecycle Perspective

This perspective considers the entire employee lifecycle within an organization. It involves HR processes related to recruitment, onboarding, development, retention, and retirement of employees. These aspects are also important from the perspective of experiential marketing, as companies must strive to provide positive experiences for employees at every stage in their careers in order to retain them. Therefore, companies must not only offer a job, but a lifestyle, a career adapted to the expectations and interests of employees (Grăjdieru, 2018). HRM practices must integrate micro and macro perspectives – individual, organization, society, action and structure. They must mediate between rigid structuralist approaches, which see careers as constituted by social structures, and individualistic approaches, which overemphasize individual actions and strategy (Mayrhofer, 2004: 189-190).

8. Legal and Compliance Perspective

From this perspective, HRM practices take into account legal and compliance considerations, which involve compliance with labour laws, regulations and industry standards. This perspective includes employment contracts, anti-discrimination laws, occupational health and safety regulations, and data privacy laws. The purpose of these procedures is to prevent legal problems and protect the rights of employees. However, these practices can often have implications from a behavioural perspective.

9. Economic Perspective

An economic approach to human resources involves evaluating HRM practices in terms of their economic impact on the organization, such as the return on investment (ROI) of HR initiatives (Phillips and Phillips, 2009). HR decisions that can be analysed from an economic perspective are related to staff development and reward. Based on research assessing the effects of different training initiatives on the operational and financial outcomes of 50 Canadian companies, it was found that enhanced organizational performance is closely tied to training efforts that demonstrated substantial benefit-to-cost ratios (Benabou, 1996). However, these aspects can also be approached from the behavioural perspective, as they can lead to the improvement of the working climate, absenteeism reduction, they can increase or

decrease motivation or affect organizational commitment. Studies show that there is a positive correlation between training and the affective and normative commitment components of the organisational commitment (Bashir and Long, 2015). But some companies take some precautions when sending employees to training programs to ensure that they recoup their investment, forcing them to sign an addendum to their employment contract requiring the employees to pay for the training or part of it if they will not remain in the company for a certain period. This practice can affect motivation and performance. Therefore, such decisions must be analysed from other perspectives, not only from the economic one.

10. Environmental Sustainability Perspective

This perspective considers HRM's role in promoting sustainability and environmental responsibility within the organization. This approach is increasingly important, considering the environmental legislation to which companies must adapt, as well as social responsibility actions. From this point of view, we can analyse practices related to eco-friendly workplace initiatives, green HRM, and reducing the organization's ecological footprint or other practices that align HRM with environmental goals and support sustainability efforts. These aspects can also be approached from behavioural, legal and compliance, or strategic perspectives.

11. Knowledge Management Perspective

This perspective explores HRM's role in managing, sharing, and leveraging organizational knowledge and intellectual capital. Key aspects that can be addressed from this point of view are knowledge creation, transfer, and retention, as well as the development of learning organizations. In a general sense, it investigates how the organization's intellectual assets can be capitalized. These aspects should also be analysed from the employee lifecycle perspective, because it is important to keep knowledge in the organization, even if employees leave.

12. Employee Voice Perspective

From this point of view, management styles can be analysed and to what extent the employee is allowed to "speak" in the company. This perspective emphasizes the importance of employee participation, feedback, and input in HRM processes and decision-making. From this perspective, the methods by which employees have the opportunity to express their opinion must be established (employee surveys, feedback mechanisms), as well as the mechanisms for employee involvement in decision-making. It is important to empower employees, improve communication, and enhance the quality of HRM practices through employee input. This perspective should be connected to Cross-Cultural, Knowledge Management and Employee Lifecycle Perspectives.

13. Employee Well-being and Health Perspective

This perspective addresses HRM's role in promoting the physical and mental health, safety, and well-being of employees. The concept as occupational health and safety programs, wellness initiatives, stress management, burnout syndrome, and work-life balance are usually studied together with work commitment, satisfaction, different types of leadership, motivation. Therefore, employee well-being can be analysed from a behavioural point of view - as it affects work motivation and performance, ethical - if there is a certain perceived inequity, from a cultural point of view - people from different countries can have a different stress tolerance, the stage in career and employee voice in the company.

14. Conclusions

Exploring the field of HRM through a multi-perspective approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of the field. These perspectives are interconnected, as SHRM can have ethical implications or involve the economic evaluation of certain practices, the

integration of technology can change employee behaviour and the company's environmental protection policies.

Moreover, the business environment is constantly changing, shaped technological changes, social dynamics, and global business trends. For instance, the number of people who want to work remotely or on the basis of collaboration contracts is increasing and these changes force HR practitioners to adapt their strategies and practices. The integration of technology in HRM has the potential to revolutionize the way employees are selected, developed and the way knowledge management is carried out within the organization. Considering the impact of globalization on the labour market, ethical and intercultural perspectives are becoming more and more important. At the same time, the trend of sustainable development of companies leaves its mark on HRM practices.

HRM is a multi-faceted field, which can change considering the dynamics of the business environment. The perspectives discussed in this paper were identified based on an analysis of the specialized literature, but we do not exclude the possibility that there could be other less studied perspectives. But even so, the conclusions of the study are not affected. A multi-perspective approach allows us to better understand the complexities of the field and the interdependencies between different dimensions. Given the complexity of the business environment, practitioners cannot afford to set policies and practices from a single perspective, and researchers must provide support by continuously exploring these perspectives. If practices are based on research results from one perspective, they could lead to negative effects within an organization from other perspectives. Of course, it is difficult for HRM policies and strategies to be satisfactory from all points of view, but we should be aware of these implications and try to analyse the phenomena from several perspectives in order to have the best possible results.

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ANALYSIS ON FAMILY SUPPORT RESSOURCES AS PREDICTORS OF SCHOOL DROPOUT

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Abstract: *Understanding the factors influencing school dropout rates is crucial for developing effective educational policies and interventions. High dropout rates not only affect individual students but also have significant societal and economic implications. In the sociological exploration of the phenomenon of children's school abandonment, the intricate dynamics of familial characteristics emerge as a compelling focal point, considering that they form the sociological landscape where the predictors of academic disengagement may find expression. In correlation with other indicators, known as early warning signs – like poor attendance, academic struggles, behavior problems, and disengagement from school activities, these can signal that a student is at risk of dropping out. Understanding and addressing the resources of support within the family unit is essential for creating effective educational policies and interventions. By recognizing the influence of family support resources, educators and policymakers can develop strategies that empower families to actively contribute to their children's academic success and overall well-being. This paper embarks on an analysis of the relationship between school-aged children and their families, aiming to unravel the extent to which these contribute to the educational success rate and the prevention of school dropout, a phenomenon that still marks the Romanian society.*

Keywords: family, vulnerability, family support, formal education, school dropout.

1. Introduction

School dropout is a pervasive issue that poses a formidable challenge to educational systems worldwide. The consequences of individuals prematurely leaving the education system extend beyond the classroom, impacting their future prospects and contributing to broader societal issues. To address this complex problem, it is essential to delve into the various factors that contribute to school dropout, with a particular focus on the role of family support resources.

High dropout rates can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit opportunities for personal and professional development. Individuals who do not complete their education often face increased challenges in securing stable employment and accessing higher education. This, in turn, can lead to economic disparities and hinder social mobility, fuelling a cycle of disadvantages across generations.

Furthermore, the societal impact of school dropout is not limited to the economic realm. It can contribute to social inequality, exacerbate issues related to crime and public health, and strain social welfare systems. Understanding the root causes of school dropout is, therefore, a critical step in fostering a more equitable and prosperous society.

By specifically examining the influence of family dynamics and characteristics, we can uncover key determinants that either support or hinder a student's educational journey. This knowledge is fundamental for designing targeted interventions and support systems that address the unique challenges faced by students within the family context, ultimately working towards reducing dropout rates and fostering a more inclusive and effective educational system.

2. Key- concepts

The following key-concepts are at the focal point of our analysis: family, formal education and school dropout.

A *family* is a fundamental social unit typically consisting of individuals who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption. It is a dynamic and evolving entity that serves as the primary context for socialization, emotional support, and the transmission of cultural values and traditions. Families come in various forms, and their structures may include parents, children, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other extended relatives. The concept of family extends beyond biological relationships and can encompass individuals bound by strong emotional ties or shared experiences. Family is a central institution in society, influencing individual development, well-being, and the broader social fabric. The conceptualization of family has evolved over time, reflecting cultural, societal, and demographic changes. Specifically, amongst the family models recognizable within the Romanian society, we distinguish:

- the Nuclear family: traditional conceptualization involving two parents and their children living together in a single household. This model emphasizes a stable and self-contained family unit;
- the Extended family: includes relatives beyond the nuclear family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Extended families often provide a broader support network;
- the Single-Parent family: comprises a single parent and one or more children. This notion recognizes diverse family structures and highlights the challenges and strengths associated with single-parent households;
- the Blended or Stepfamily: arises from the blending of two families through marriage, where at least one parent has children from a previous relationship. This concept acknowledges the complexities of family dynamics in non-traditional settings;
- the Cohabiting Family: involves unmarried couples living together with or without children. This conceptualization recognizes the changing trends in family formation and acknowledges non-traditional living arrangements.

The conceptualization framework of family is diverse and multifaceted, reflecting the complexity of human relationships and societal changes. Different perspectives provide insights into the roles, functions, and challenges associated with families in various cultural and historical contexts.

Formal education refers to the structured, systematic, and organized learning that takes place within officially recognized institutions, typically following a prescribed curriculum. This type of education is intentional, planned, and guided by trained educators, and it often leads to the attainment of formal qualifications, such as degrees, diplomas, or certificates. Formal education is commonly associated with schools, colleges, and universities, where students progress through grades or levels, and the learning process is subject to specific regulations and standards.

Formal education serves as a foundational and widely accepted means of providing individuals with knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal and professional development in various fields. It is a cornerstone of educational systems worldwide and is often mandatory for a certain period in many countries.

School dropout refers to the premature departure of a student from the formal education system before fulfilling the requirements for completing a specific grade level, course, or educational program. This can occur at various stages, including primary, secondary, or higher education. School dropout is a critical issue with significant implications for individuals and society, as it can limit opportunities for personal and professional development and contribute to broader social and economic challenges. Various risk factors contribute to the likelihood of school dropout. These may include academic challenges, socio-

economic disadvantages, family issues, health concerns, lack of motivation, and negative school experiences. School dropout can have far-reaching consequences for individuals and society. It may limit future employment opportunities, hinder access to higher education, and contribute to a cycle of poverty and social inequality.

3. Theoretical perspective

In examining the complex relationship between family dynamics and support and school dropout, this analysis is guided by a multidimensional theoretical framework that incorporates key sociological perspectives. The chosen theoretical frameworks provide lenses through which to understand the intricate interplay of factors influencing a student's educational journey and the likelihood of dropout. Two primary theoretical perspectives are particularly influential in shaping the analytical approach:

- the Social Capital Theory, developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986) and further expanded by Robert Putnam (Putnam, 2000), posits that social networks, relationships, and resources within a community or social group contribute to individual and collective success. It emphasizes the importance of social connections, shared norms, and access to resources in influencing educational outcomes. This framework will be utilized to explore how the family, as a social unit, acts as a source of social capital. Examining the quality of family relationships, the extent of social networks, and the resources available within the family context can provide insights into their impact on a student's educational resilience and ability to navigate potential dropout risks.

- the Ecological Systems Perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explores how families interact with their broader environment, including the community, culture, and societal structures. This perspective considers the multiple influences on family dynamics.

- Functionalism (Parsons & Bales 1955) views the family as a social institution with specific functions, such as socialization, economic support, and emotional care. This conceptualization emphasizes the role of families in maintaining societal stability.

These theoretical frameworks complement each other, providing a comprehensive understanding of the social, relational, and systemic factors influencing school dropout. Additionally, this approach acknowledges the interrelation of various factors, such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and individual characteristics, within the broader social structure. The goal is to illuminate the nuanced ways in which family dynamics and characteristics operate within the larger sociocultural context, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the predictors of school dropout.

4. The role of family support in preventing school dropout

Family dynamics and characteristics play a pivotal role in shaping a child's educational journey, influencing their academic performance, socio-emotional development, and overall well-being.

The family serves as the primary environment where a child's early learning experiences take place. Positive family dynamics, characterized by support, encouragement, and engagement, create a foundation for academic success. Furthermore, family dynamics strongly influence the cultural and educational values instilled in a child. Families that prioritize education and intellectual growth tend to foster a positive attitude towards learning, creating an environment conducive to academic achievement.

On one side, the level of parental involvement and support is a critical determinant of a child's educational success. Supportive parents who actively participate in their child's education, attend parent-teacher conferences and provide homework assistance contribute significantly to academic motivation and achievement.

On the other side, family characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, impact a child's access to educational resources. Families with a higher socioeconomic status have

more resources, including educational materials, extracurricular opportunities, and access to quality schools, giving their children advantages in their educational journey.

Family dynamics shape a child's aspirations and career goals through role modeling. Parents who value education and pursue lifelong learning inspire their children to set ambitious educational and career objectives, also contributing to the child's emotional well-being, by creating a stable and supportive environment. Emotional stability is linked to better concentration, cognitive functioning, and resilience, all of which are crucial for academic success.

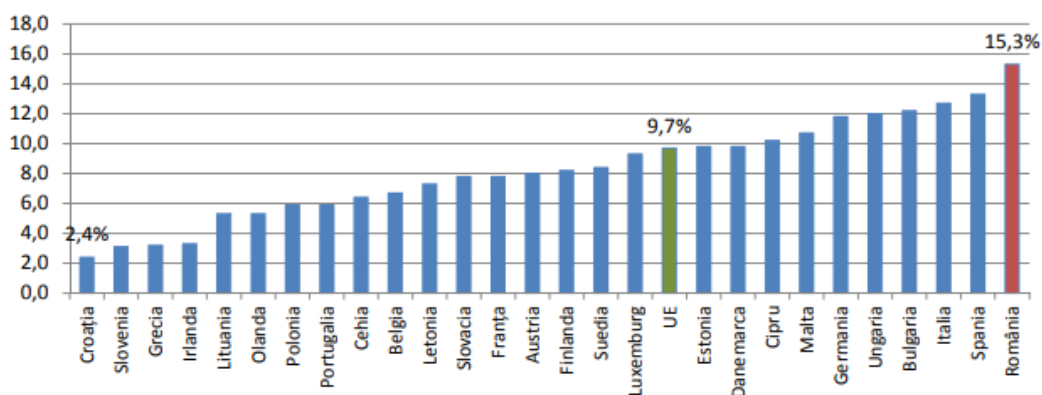
Of great relevance are also the communication patterns within the family that significantly impact a child's language development, but also the crisis and challenge mitigation abilities. When facing crises, such as bullying or academic struggles, family dynamics play a crucial role in reducing the negative impact on a child's educational journey. A supportive family environment can provide the necessary resilience and coping mechanisms.

5. Facts

Dropout rates can vary across demographic groups and socio-economic backgrounds, contributing to educational inequality. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may face additional challenges that increase the risk of dropout.

A report published by the Romanian Ministry of Education in 2022 (Ministry of Education, 2022), citing data published by Eurostat, showed that, in 2021, Romania had the highest early school dropout rate in the EU, namely 15.3%, much higher than the European average rate of 9.7%. This indicator measures the number of population aged between 18 and 24 years that at most finished secondary studies and are not comprised in any form of education or professional qualification at the moment of the analysis.

Figure 1: Early school dropout rates in the EU- comparative analysis



Source: Ministry of Education, 2022

Also in 2022, the Ministry published a list of 3235 schools with a high and moderate risk of school abandonment, at national level, identified with the aim of being included in a National Program for the Reduction of School Abandonment (Ministry of Education, 2022). In Dolj county, there were 117 schools with an abandonment rate over 26%, out of which 56 schools at high risk. Out of these, 22 schools were in the urban environment and 95 in the rural environment, where the school dropout risk is higher due to poor socio-economical conditions.

A more recent report, published by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2023), mentioned a number of 4.461 students that abandoned school in 2023 – the equivalent

of 178 classes with 25 pupils each. From the 179.563 8th grade students in 2023, at national level, only 161.652 took part in the national assessment exams, which means that 17.911 students will not attain highschool education.

Social Monitor data (Social Monitor, 2023) show that the school drop-out rate is closely correlated with the country's employment poverty rate, i.e. people who have jobs but do not earn enough for a decent living. Our employment poverty rate is 14.5%, one of the highest in the EU and well above the European average of 8.5%.

Research shows that the two rates (school drop-out and in-work poverty) are perfectly correlated. Eurostat data shows that more than half of early school leavers are not currently working or looking for work, or at least not working formally, with proper documentation. Moreover, Romania also has the highest percentage of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU (34.5%), according to Eurostat data. Early school leavers tend to remain strained from the labour market for long periods of time or, if they find a job, they tend to be underqualified for it, or, in other words, this job will bring them an income below the level of decent living.

6. Risk factors for school dropout

The majority of researchers on education, sociology of education and social work in the international field identify, amongst the main risk factors for school dropout, the following categories: individual factors – family environment, family involvement, interest and engagement towards the educational outcomes of their children, personal motivation etc; economic factors: the family's income level, the accessibility of educational services in the community; and social factors like: school environment and climate, peer relations, teacher-student relationships, bullying and harassment.

In Romania, according to the *Strategy for the Reduction of Early School Leave in Romania* (Ministry of Education, 2014), the main risk factors for school dropout are the following:

- low household income level as a financial constraint to meet costs;
- collateral costs of education, especially among poor and disadvantaged families;
- low territorial accessibility of education services in remote rural areas;
- involvement of children in seasonal work and care of younger siblings;
- migration of parents from some communities abroad (leading to temporary withdrawal from school);
- education level of parents, especially mother's education level;
- perceived benefits of home schooling;
- children with disabilities and special educational needs;
- health, early marriage and/or pregnancy, other personal reasons;
- poverty, low employment opportunities and low parental participation in education in many rural/suburban communities; high rates of early school leave among Roma children are also associated with high rates of poverty;
- in some cases, cultural factors.

These findings are confirmed by a study performed in 2021 in a rural community in the South-West area in Romania, amongst parents and caretakers of children aged between 6 and 16 years, revealed the main risk factors for school dropout. "lack of material resources of the family, poverty (38.9%); they are part from disorganized families (21.5%); large distance from home to school (11.8%); their parents left them and went to work abroad- (13.2%); low level of education of parents (5.3%)." (Niță, Motoi & Goga, 2021:26).

The study further points out the importance of the family factor, that plays a major role in motivating and supporting the child's determination to attend school: "As far as the influence of the family factor on school dropout, our research has highlighted the fact that children from poor families (where at least one parent does not work), where parents are devoid of education (especially those who are part of the Roma ethnic group) or have a low level of education (neglecting the educational activity of children), tend to follow the models

offered by parents and their concepts, according to which education is not a priority and the attendance of the school does not increase the chances of a better future.” (Niță, Motoi & Goga, 2021: 30).

Risk factors associated with dropout occur over the course of schooling, and over the last decades, no significant changes in the presence or disappearance of certain factors became noticeable, regardless of country or educational system. The only significant changes occur rather in the prevalence of a factor or another within a risk group. (Badulescu, Csintalan, 2016: 458)

According to some authors, no single risk factor can be an exact and exclusive predictor for school dropout, but the probability of dropout increases with the prevalence of each. (Bowers et al, 2013).

7. Methodology

The main objective of our research was to identify the role of family involvement and support in preventing school dropout, or, in other words, family support as a predictor for school dropout.

Our research was based on the quantitative method, given the necessity to obtain measurable results. We addressed a survey to a target group of 210 students enrolled in the primary and secondary formal education system. The batch was selected from 3 secondary schools in Dolj county, one from the rural area, one from the large urban and one school from the small urban area, for a representative coverage. The study was performed during the period September- October 2023.

The questionnaire was structured according to 2 sections: A. “You and your family” and B. “At school” and included questions with pre-formulated answers, scaled according to the Likert scale sample.

We analysed the results from both sections, with a particular focus on the perspective of the family-student relationship, in order to be able to extract a relevant conclusion regarding the influence of family support on the risk of school dropout.

8. Results

In the following, we have selected the quantitative results, generated through SPSS, from both sections of the survey that we considered to be most relevant for the subject of our study.

Questionnaire for the assessment of school dropout risk

Section A: You and your family

Question A1: *When you think about your parents, to which extend do you agree with the following statements?*

Answers:

A1.1. I feel that I can trust my parents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Neither agree nor disagree	6	2,9	2,9	2,9
Agree	111	52,9	52,9	55,7
Totally agree	93	44,3	44,3	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

The majority of the respondents (97.2%) stated that they feel they can trust their parents.

A1.2. If I talk to my parents, they try to understand how I feel

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	39	18,6	18,6
	Agree	138	65,7	84,3
	Totally agree	33	15,7	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0

81.4% of the respondents agree or totally agree that their parents would try to understand them if they need talk to them, but 18.6 percent do not clearly perceive this empathy from their parents.

A1.3. My parents listen to me when I have something on my mind

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	22	10,5	10,5
	Agree	137	65,2	75,7
	Totally agree	51	24,3	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0

10.5% of the participants in the study are not convinced that their parents would listen to them when they are worried about something.

A1.4. I can ask my parents to help me when I have problems

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	14	6,7	6,7
	Agree	151	71,9	78,6
	Totally agree	45	21,4	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0

93.3 percent of the respondents agree that they can ask their parents for help when they have problems, but 6.7% are not sure about this.

A1.5. If I had any personal or social problem, my parents would advise me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	11	5,2	5,2
	Agree	162	77,1	82,4
	Totally agree	37	17,6	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0

94.8% of the children participating in the study count on their parents' advice if they had a personal or a social problem, but 5.2 percent are undecided about it.

Question A2: *When you think about your parents, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?*

A2.1. My parents make sure that I do my homework

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	3	1,4	1,4
	Neither agree nor disagree	10	4,8	6,2
	Agree	146	69,5	75,7
	Totally agree	51	24,3	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0

Only 75.3% of the children state that their parents check if they did their homework.

A2.2. My parents make sure that I go to school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	1	,5	,5	,5
Neither agree nor disagree	24	11,4	11,4	11,9
Valid Agree	130	61,9	61,9	73,8
Totally agree	55	26,2	26,2	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

Almost 10% of the students taking part in the study are not sure about their parents checking if they went to school or not.

A2.3. My parents praise me when I have good results

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	3	1,4	1,4	1,4
Neither agree nor disagree	12	5,7	5,7	7,1
Valid Agree	113	53,8	53,8	61,0
Totally agree	82	39,0	39,0	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

The majority of the respondents are encouraged by their parents when they have good results, but 5.7.% of them hesitated to respond and 1.4% disagreed with this statement.

A2.4. My parents support me in order to have good results in school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	4	1,9	1,9	1,9
Neither agree nor disagree	42	20,0	20,0	21,9
Valid Agree	128	61,0	61,0	82,9
Totally agree	36	17,1	17,1	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

78.1% of the children taking part in the study are being supported by their parents in order to obtain good educational results, but there is a consistent percentage – 20.0% that are not sure about this support and 1.9% that do not receive this type of support.

A2.5. I talk to my parents about my future

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Disagree	4	1,9	1,9	1,9
Neither agree nor disagree	32	15,2	15,2	17,1
Valid Agree	143	68,1	68,1	85,2
Totally agree	31	14,8	14,8	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

More than 17% of the children would not talk to their parents constantly about their future.

A2.6. My parents consider that education is important for success

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Disagree	4	1,9	1,9	1,9

	Neither agree nor disagree	25	11,9	12,0	13,9
	Agree	149	71,0	71,3	85,2
	Totally agree	31	14,8	14,8	100,0
	Total	209	99,5	100,0	
Missing	System	1	,5		
	Total	210	100,0		

The parents of only 85.8% of the respondents consider that education is important for success.

Question A4: *What expectations do your parents have about you?*

A4. What expectations do your parents have about you

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
	I don't know, I don't think they have any expectations about my education	11	5,2	5,2	5,2
	To finish 10 classes	6	2,9	2,9	8,1
	To finish high school	30	14,3	14,3	22,4
Valid	To finish a professional school	28	13,3	13,3	35,7
	To finish high school (12 classes) with a degree	23	11,0	11,0	46,7
	To pursue my studies and finish a post-secondary or technical school	11	5,2	5,2	51,9
	To pursue my studies and finish university studies	101	48,1	48,1	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0	

Regarding academic expectations, less than 50% of the respondents state that their parents would want them to pursue university studies, 11% of the parents want their children to finish high school, 21.4% have expectations about their children finishing 10 classes or a technical/ professional school and a worrying percentage of 5.2 are supposed not to have any expectations about their childrens' education.

Section B: "At school"

Question B1: *When you think about your school, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?*

B1.2. I feel that I belong to this school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
	Totally disagree	1	,5	,5	,5
	Disagree	5	2,4	2,4	2,9
Valid	Neither agree nor disagree	52	24,8	24,8	27,6
	Agree	123	58,6	58,6	86,2
	Totally agree	29	13,8	13,8	100,0
	Total	210	100,0	100,0	

2.9% of the children totally disagree with belonging to their schools, while 24.8% are unsure about this aspect. 72.4% feel like they belong to their schools.

B1.3. I would recommend other children to come to this school

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Totally disagree	1	,5	,5	,5

Disagree	5	2,4	2,4	2,9
Neither agree nor disagree	27	12,9	12,9	15,7
Agree	160	76,2	76,2	91,9
Totally agree	17	8,1	8,1	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

2.9% of the respondents would not recommend this school to other children, while 12.9 % nether agree nor disagree.

Question B1: *When you think about your teachers, to which extent do you agree with the following statements?*

B4.1. I feel that I can trust my teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	5	2,4	2,4	2,4
Disagree	15	7,1	7,1	9,5
Neither agree nor disagree	54	25,7	25,7	35,2
Agree	118	56,2	56,2	91,4
Totally agree	18	8,6	8,6	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

9.5 percent of the students in the study do not trust their teachers at all, while 25.7 % are not sure about this, which leaves only a percentage of 64.8% of children that trust their teachers.

B4.2. I think that, if I talk to my teachers, they would try to understand me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	12	5,7	5,7	5,7
Disagree	21	10,0	10,0	15,7
Neither agree nor disagree	71	33,8	33,8	49,5
Agree	74	35,2	35,2	84,8
Totally agree	32	15,2	15,2	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

15.7% of the respondents think that their teachers would not try to understand them when they approach them.

B4.3. When a certain thing bothers me, the teachers listen to me

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	12	5,7	5,7	5,7
Disagree	17	8,1	8,1	13,8
Neither agree nor disagree	49	23,3	23,3	37,1
Agree	118	56,2	56,2	93,3
Totally agree	14	6,7	6,7	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

The perception of 13.8% of the respondents is that teachers would not listen to them if they were worried about something.

B4.5.If I have a personal or a social problem, my school counselor or mediator would advise me what to do

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Totally disagree	5	2,4	2,4	2,4

Disagree	6	2,9	2,9	5,2
Neither agree nor disagree	66	31,4	31,4	36,7
Agree	120	57,1	57,1	93,8
Totally agree	13	6,2	6,2	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

5.3% of the respondents disagree or totally disagree with the fact that they would receive advice from the school counselor or mediator if they had a problem.

Question B6: *In the past 12 months, how often were you in one of the following situations?*

B6.1. You were upset that the other students called you names

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	82	39,0	39,0	39,0
Disagree	87	41,4	41,4	80,5
Valid Neither agree nor disagree	28	13,3	13,3	93,8
Agree	13	6,2	6,2	100,0
Total	210	100,0	100,0	

6.2% of the children were upset that their colleagues called them names. 13.3% didn't either deny or confirm this fact.

B6.2. Other students in school forced you to give them money

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	176	83,8	83,8	83,8
Disagree	28	13,3	13,3	97,1
Valid Neither agree nor disagree	3	1,4	1,4	98,6
Agree	3	1,4	1,4	100,0
Totally agree	210	100,0	100,0	

1.4% of the respondents stated that other kids in school demanded money from them by force, while 1.4% neither agree nor disagree.

B6.3. Other students threatened to hit you

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	192	91,4	91,4	91,4
Disagree	14	6,7	6,7	98,1
Valid Neither agree nor disagree	3	1,4	1,4	99,5
Agree	1	,5	,5	100,0
Totally agree	210	100,0	100,0	

The majority of the respondents denied that they received threats about physical violence from their colleagues, but the rest of 1.4 % either hesitated. There is on respondent that admitted to have received threats.

B6.4. Other students hit you

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Totally disagree	193	91,9	91,9	91,9
Disagree	13	6,2	6,2	98,1
Valid Neither agree nor disagree	2	1,0	1,0	99,0
Agree	2	1,0	1,0	100,0
Totally agree	210	100,0	100,0	

2 children (1%) confirmed that they were physically aggressed by other colleagues, 1% didn't either agree or disagree with this statement, while 98.1 % denied this.

Conclusions of the research

In the following, we will try to summarize only the negative results of the study – namely the children's negative perception on a supportive attitude from their parents towards their school performances and – in section B- their negative perception about the school environment, considering these possible predictors for the risk of school abandonment.

Table no. 1. Summary of Section A - Family

Identified issue	Percentage - %
Not sure they can trust their parents	2.9
Not sure that their parents try to understand them	18.6
Not sure that their parents would listen to them	10.5
Not sure that they could ask their parents for help	6.7
Not sure that they would receive help from their parents	5.2
Parents do not check homework or not sure about that	7.6
Not sure about parents checking if they go to school	11.9
Parents do not praise good results or not sure about that	8.5
Not sure that their parents support them for good results in school	21.9
Parents do not support them for good results in school	1.9
Do not or do not constantly talk to their parents about their future	19
Parents do not value education as being important for success	15.8
No expectations about their education	5.2

According to the results of our study, significant percentages of students in the primary and secondary schools from we selected the batch of respondents do not feel understood by their parents (18.6%), they are not sure about their parents' availability to listen to them (10.5%) or do not feel that their parents monitor their school attendance to a sufficient extent (11.9%). Moreover, 21.9% of the students are not counting on their parents' support for obtaining good results in school and for 15.8% of them, education is not enough valued by their parents as an important factor for success. Also, 19% of the children in our analyzed batch do not constantly talk to their parents about their future.

Table no. 2: Summary of Section B – School

Attitude towards school	Percentage - %
Not sure that it is a good school	8.6
Disagree that it is a good school	1.4
They feel that they don't belong to this school	3.4
Not sure that they belong here	27.6
Would not recommend this school	3.4
Not sure to recommend this school	15.7
Relationship with teachers	Percentage - %
Do not trust their teachers	11.9
Not sure if they trust their teachers	35.2
Teachers would not understand them if they talk to them	21.4
Teachers would not listen if they had a problem	19.5
The school counselor or mediator would not help if they had a problem	7.6
Not sure that the school counselor or mediator would help if they had a problem	36.7
Relationship with other colleagues	Percentage - %
Other children called them names	6.2
Other children forced them for money	1.4
Other children hit them	1

Regarding the results in section B of our research, more than a quarter of the students are not sure that they fit in their school and 15.7% would not recommend their school to other children, which proves a low satisfaction degree towards their school environment. As for the teacher-student relationship, a significant number of children do not trust their teachers (11.9%) or are not sure if they can trust them, 21.4% are convinced that teachers would not understand them if they needed to talk to them or that these would not listen to them (19.5%). Also worrying is the lack of trust that children manifest towards their cooperation with the school counselor or mediator, in case they would need advice: 36.7%.

There is also a “red flag” that signals bullying behaviors in the school environment: verbal – 6.2%, financial – 1.4% and physical – 1%.

There are also some assumptions that we could make about the results of both sections of our research, namely that consistent percentages of children often respond with “neither agree nor disagree”, which may indicate either a lack of self confidence and awareness, either a certain lack of interest about the topic. Usually, a child’s lack of confidence in personal life and in his/her family translates as lack of confidence about school and education in general and about his/her ability to pursue and achieve goals.

Possible correlations

As also confirmed by the results of previous studies in the field, the family-student relationship plays a major role in building a child’s positive and consistent attitude about school. Children who do not trust their parents or their parents’ personal or educational support are, usually, prone to exhibit the same lack of trust in their teachers and school, in general. On the contrary, parents with higher education levels or with respect for education and academic performances as a condition for a successful life are more likely to support their children about going to school and finishing more education stages, to monitor their school performance, to engage in stable communication with the school, to provide their children efficient counseling about coping with problems and about building healthy social relationships.

It is known that socio-economic factors, like poor material resources, parents migrating abroad for work, parents’ unemployment etc. influences access to equality of chances and may expose the child to marginalization and bullying in the school environment, significantly causing low self esteem and lack of confidence.

9. Conclusions

The long-term impact of school dropout extends beyond the individual, affecting communities and societies. It can contribute to economic disparities, increase the likelihood of involvement in criminal activities, and strain social welfare systems.

Understanding the factors contributing to school dropout and implementing effective prevention strategies are crucial for fostering educational attainment, social mobility, and overall societal well-being. Addressing this issue requires a holistic approach that considers individual, familial, and systemic factors influencing students’ educational experiences.

There is, also, another essential component of the family factor that must be taken into account: the quality and strength of family bonds, the involvement of family in the relationship with the school, the core values and beliefs that the family passes on to the child, especially the vision on school and education, family’s trust in education as a tool for the child’s future success and life quality.

10. Proposals and recommendations

As assumed in the *Strategy for the Reduction of Early School Leave in Romania* (Ministry of Education, 2014), Romania had to reduce the target of reducing the school dropout rate to 11.3% by 2020. As shown before, it failed to reach this objective, as the dropout rate was, in 2021, of 15.3% (the highest of all EU member states).

Although the Romanian's Government efforts are undeniable and financial allocations were substantial in order to plan, support and implement measures to address this issue, efficient and focused action still remains a high priority; educational and social policies must be further developed and harmonized with the aim of gaining coherence and relevance. Amongst possible causes for this failure, we may find that the Strategy did not lay a particular focus on the quality of the family-student and family-school relationship, as well as on the bullying phenomenon in the Romanian school environment as predictors for school dropout. Our research showed that there are a significant number of children for which family is not a resilience building environment, revealing lack of trust and confidence, poor involvement of the parents in the relationship with their child and a deficient attitude towards education and cultivating and promoting educational goals. This attitude reflects upon the children's trust in their teachers and counselors, as well as in a sense of non-belonging in the school environment, at times marked by rejection and bullying.

Efforts to prevent school dropout often involve targeted interventions and support programs. These may include mentoring, counseling, academic assistance, and community engagement initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying causes of dropout. Governments, educational institutions, and advocacy groups must continue their work to develop and implement policies that address the root causes of school dropout. We recommend a more detailed mapping and analysis of risk factors and on their variation according to family background and models, as well as according to socio-economic particularities.

We also recommend and encourage more initiatives focusing on improving educational quality, providing support services, and promoting inclusivity.

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THE RISKS TO WHICH CHILDREN ARE EXPOSED IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *In contemporary times, the cyberspace is the environment where socialization takes place, especially for children. In this context, a new form of violence among students, cyberbullying, also known as "internet aggression," has emerged. It is characterized by harassment mediated through electronic forms of contact (mobile phones, computers, laptops, tablets, email, blogs, instant messaging, etc.), particularly prevalent among adolescents. The purpose of this work is to highlight aspects related to the "dark side" of internet usage. Anonymity and disinhibition facilitated by the virtual environment can lead people to say and do things that they wouldn't in real life. The main objective is to detail how online violence has intensified and how harsh it has become. Malice has become an accepted reality, and the conditions of the online environment can turn cruelty into a "competitive sport," with posts quickly escalating in some cases from offense to insult or sadism. Sadistic teasing of children and adolescents represents a "sick sport" for trolls. In the virtual environment, children can interact with "pathological strangers" who take advantage of their innocence and manipulate them, either for amusement or for other equally malicious purposes. The article presents risky games for children, such as the Blue Whale, the Russian Coin, and other challenges they may be exposed to online. Our goal is to underscore the need for clear and well-defined norms regarding the way we use this 'tool,' which is the internet.*

Keywords: virtual environment, cyberbullying, suicide, Blue Whale Game

1. Introduction

Cyberpsychology represents a new emerging subdiscipline within applied psychology that studies digital psychology. It emerged in the late 1990s, with a primary focus on investigating the relationships between individuals and technologies. It analyzes and understands how this interaction influences human behaviour and functioning. In other words, it explores how we communicate through technological devices, how we use them, and with what motivations and intentions. Additionally, it aims to uncover how this interaction modifies or alters our way of thinking, feeling, and behaving, among other factors involved (Robaina, 2022: 17-19).

Cyberpsychology primarily addresses the main risks and repercussions of this type of interaction in virtual environments and beyond, in offline situations. This new field of study utilizes specific studies from other related disciplines, including educational psychology, social psychology, forensic psychology, health psychology, consumer psychology, or psychopathology. These disciplines apply and adapt various theories to understand and explain psychosocial processes and human behaviour characteristics underlying the interconnection with technologies. The interaction between "person-technology" is practically examined in a holistic manner, taking into account the context of this integration, in contexts such as education, leisure time, health, and interpersonal relationships. It has been defined by the Cyberpsychology Section of the British Psychological Society as "an interdisciplinary scientific field that focuses on psychological phenomena resulting from human interaction with digital technology, especially the internet" (Robaina, 2022: 17).

The bullying phenomenon has always been present in student dynamics, with aggressions often being "hidden." However, with the advent of computers, and implicitly email and social networking, the phenomenon has gained a new dimension. Harassment is an "extreme form of aggressiveness among children, where a stronger student intentionally and repeatedly aggresses and intimidates one or more colleagues more vulnerable than him" (Mennuti, Christner and Freeman, 2016: 319).

Maurice Cusson emphasizes that students in Quebec have coined the ironic term 'taxation' for their racket, meaning 'extortion of goods through intimidation or using force' (Cusson, 2006, p. 95). The criminologist uses the term "terrorism" for bullying, describing a situation where "the same student is the subject of repetitious outrages," indicating a report of persecution in which the aggressor repeatedly harasses, humiliates, and steals from the victim, and the repeated intimidation becomes terrorization (Palaghia, 2016).

Vulnerability is certainly not exclusive to children, as adults become victims in various situations, both at work and elsewhere (Palaghia, 2019a). Vulnerability "characterizes not only certain populations but also each individual found in certain relationships with external reality, with some social contexts of individual action, and can be a result of the individual interpretations given to these contexts" (Cojocaru, 2005: 30-31). The same author concludes: "If we propose to identify vulnerable populations, we must recognize both the individual and collective actions that lead to the manifestation of vulnerability" (Cojocaru, 2002: 130). As victims appear to others as insecure individuals, especially passive and unable to react when they are attacked, the aggressors choose their victims especially among children who do not complain and who appear to be physically and emotionally weaker, being tempted to look for colleagues' attention. Student victims generally have parents or teachers who are overly caring, and as a result, they fail to develop strategies to deal with conflicting situations (Palaghia, 2019 b, 2021c).

Many victims seek approval from their aggressors, even after facing rejection. Some continue attempting to interact with the aggressor. Most of the times, the student victims are solitary, have no friends, and are attracted as a magnet by their aggressive peers who satisfy their need for power by aggression. Of course, there are cases where students can be victims of their colleagues because they are simply „different”, either physically or mentally handicapped, or belonging to another ethnic or other religion etc., also indicating cases in which aggressive students focus on a particular colleague for no particular reason, but the victim remains with the impression that something is wrong with her and remains with the tendency to be blaming themselves (Palaghia, 2021b).

Katzer (2018) analyzes how the Internet changes the human behaviour, and she states that individuals can free themselves from their true identity and take on a different role in this environment. The author presents the concepts of cybermobbing and cyberstalking, characterized by the fact that online marginalization, mobbing, and stalking have taken on a new dimension in cyberspace because the videos made with a mobile phone may be posted in a few seconds, which can show aggression, such as a girl being raped in the gym, the image of a schoolmate in the toilet, a young man being beaten in the school yard or in another space where he is lured, or nude photos, sometimes fake, which can be made available to the general public on social networks or on video portals, so that they are accessible to hundreds of thousands of Internet users. The victims feel that they can no longer find a corner where to be protected and carry their cybermobbers "with them in their pockets on their smartphones" (Katzer, 2018: 92), in which the aggressors enter directly into the space where the victim is at any moment, so the consequences are much more serious than in the case of traditional mobbing.

Outlining a dynamic of the victim-aggressor relationship specific to the bullying phenomenon, traditional or cyber, we can specify whether abusers lack empathy and ferocity, they are usually dominant and strong in the peer group, whereas victims become anxious, they do not trust themselves, they get isolated, they no longer interact with anyone, there are situations when they choose not to go to school for fear of meeting the abusers again. However, the worst consequences are the ways in which victims turn their aggression to themselves by self-mutilation or even suicide. The cyber victim is an isolated person, with low self-esteem, strongly focused on networking and disconnected from the real world, which is exploited by aggressors who take every opportunity to mock him/her. Parents who are overly caring and give their children too much may expose them to cybermobbing. The reasons why adults and

children end up cybermobbing are different. In the case of adults, it is about envy and rigid hierarchies at work whereas the triggering factors are restructuring processes at work, therefore, the fear of change or losing their job but also boredom and pure pleasure play a very important role. The adolescents' own satisfaction is on the first place of the etiological approach; they develop a pleasure to harm others, or out of boredom and lack of occupation they seek, recognition from other Internet users, who can reward them by "click", "share", etc. It is also possible to develop a competition among colleagues who have the most embarrassing and degrading videos about another schoolmate. Another triggering factor for aggression may be the desire for revenge, as a victim of traditional bullying can transform into a ferocious aggressor in the virtual environment (Palaghia, 2021c).

From February to March 2017, the Romanian media reported 'a wave' of suicides. However, in Russia alone, over 130 deaths occurred among teenagers who chose to play a deadly game called 'Blue Whale.' In Romania, specialists sought help from parents and teachers through TV channels and police websites to raise awareness. Parents were advised to 'pay special attention to how their children spend time online' to prevent the consequences of this game. Additionally, there was a 'prevention week' during which students, parents, and teachers discussed 'safety in the online environment.' The game came under the scrutiny of the Control Commission of the Romanian Intelligence Service, recognized as the only institution capable of taking appropriate measures (Palaghia, 2018).

At the beginning of 2018, the death games spread to the USA, Mexico, and other states. They were almost forgotten in Romania until recently when, on September 6, 2021, the media reported that a 14-year-old girl from Cotu Miculinți village, Coțușca commune, Botoșani county, committed suicide after participating in a suicide game (Palaghia, 2021 a). The police did not confirm hypotheses but seized the girl's devices for the investigation. Representatives of DGASPC revealed that the teenager's parents were working abroad, and she was being looked after by an uncle. She came from a good family and was well cared for. Following this news, articles in the media warned parents that the phenomenon of suicide games had not been eradicated, and there are always 'leaders who find pleasure in the pain of children' (www.ziare.com, September 9, 2021).

Subsequently, there was the Russian Coin game in which children participated by spinning a coin on a hard surface, aiming to keep it spinning as long as possible. The child who failed to keep the coin moving was 'punished' by other children, who hit their hands with the coin. The game gained public attention after being shared on TikTok, where clips depict pupils of various ages with visible injuries on their hands. Nationally, campaigns have been launched to prevent such games that promote physical and emotional violence against children (bzi.ro, bzb.ro, ziare.com, November 25, 2022).

2. Suicide among victims of (cyber)bullying is a real problem.

Suiciding is a "worrying phenomenon to any society, has an even more alarming impact nowadays" (Stan, 2021, p. 144). In recent years, particularly in the United States of America, the media have highlighted the causes of suicide among victims of cyberbullying, signaling an extremely concerning phenomenon where victims are portrayed as being harassed 'until death.' Names like Rebecca Sedwick, Kristina Arielle Calco, Amanda Todd, and many others represent teenagers who took their own lives due to cyberbullying. Additionally, isolated cases of suicide among children, initially attributed to misunderstandings with parents, have emerged. Later, especially in the context of the pandemic, an increasing number of suicide cases or attempts among students have been reported, coinciding with a rise in reports of cyberbullying. The severity of both cyberbullying and traditional bullying began to be more widely recognized (Palaghia, 2018)

Openshaw (2008: 234) states that 'suicide is the second leading cause of death among children and adolescents. People who contemplate suicide are frequently ambivalent about killing themselves and usually respond to help. This is because people who have a suicide plan

may not want to die but only to be free from their current situation, and suicide seems to be their only viable option. Suicidal students often try to communicate their feelings indirectly prior to attempting suicide.

During the conference organized and presented by Gabriela Alexandrescu of Save the Children, titled 'The Dramatic Consequences of the Pandemic,' it was revealed that anxiety among students became more frequent during the pandemic. There were increasing cases of aggression both in schools and in the online environment, leading to numerous suicide attempts among children who felt they had no other solution to escape bullying and/or cyberbullying than by taking their own lives. The presentation included the case of a sixth-grade student, a victim of bullying, who jumped out of a school window. Shockingly, some of his classmates even encouraged him to do so.

The study 'The Impact of the Pandemic on the Socio-Emotional Health of Children,' conducted by the organization Save the Children, reveals that more than 90% of recent diagnoses made by psychologists were attributed to the pandemic context. Ignored children and those living in poor economic conditions are the most affected, especially given the suspension of social and medical services in the same context. The study also highlights that primary school students felt the negative impact of isolation more strongly, while teenagers experienced feelings of loneliness, sadness, or anger.

Durkheim defined suicide as 'any case of death that results directly or indirectly from a direct or indirect act, positive or negative, committed by the victim himself, and of which he knows what result it will produce. The attempt is the act thus defined but stopped before death occurs' (Durkheim, 1897: 13). The sociologist delineated the etiological elements of violence against oneself and stated: 'People commit suicide because they suffered family troubles or disappointments in their own love, sometimes because they were poor or ill, sometimes because they blamed themselves for a moral mistake, etc.' (Durkheim, 1897: 307). While Durkheim did not consider circumstances as 'determining causes of the preceding act,' the renowned sociologist recognized their important role in the decision-making process.

The act of suicide is defined by some authors as 'escape behaviour - the ultimate escape,' through which an individual 'gets out of a critical situation that causes unbearable suffering.' Suicide is also outlined as an aggressive act directed toward oneself (Neamțu, 2003: 249). There is a diversity of 'motivations' and circumstances that can 'precipitate the option for the suicidal act,' but research has shown common characteristics of suicides. For instance, 'the purpose of any suicide is to find a solution'; it is not a random act but a way to solve a problem. The child may not identify another solution and wants 'to end the suffering, or at least not to be aware of it anymore.' Mental suffering stimulates any act of this kind, as 'the suffering of becoming aware of suffering is severe suffering' (Neamțu, 2003: 251).

Among the risk factors for suicide in children, we mention 'early affective frustration,' the lack of parental attachment, which determines 'the absence of affective identification,' as well as 'feelings of insecurity and anxiety in cases of authority abuse,' which can trigger the fear of not being sanctioned. In Romania, there are also 'pseudo-suicides,' unpremeditated acts of children that have a playful and imitating character. In adolescence, any suicidal act may be based on conflicting states 'impregnated by intense affective experiences.' Suicide by imitation and 'protest suicide' involve factors from family, school, social, and personality domains. Risk situations include the death of a loved person, wrong communication with the family, acute stress periods, and conflict situations, among others.

3. "Blue whale", a simple game or cyberbullying?

The suicide games first appeared in Russia, and in a short time they spread among teenagers in Ukraine and the Transnistrian region, then, in quite a short time, it resulted in the death of about 200 children. Over 130 teenagers committed suicide from November 2015 to May 2016 in Russia alone because of death games, of which the most publicized was the one called "Blue Whale". In the Republic of Moldova, the first case was registered on 8th March 2017

when two teenagers jumped from a 16-story building. This was not the only virtual game that encouraged suicide, there were also "Quiet House", "Wake me up at 04:20", "Run or Die", "50 days until...", "f57 – f58", "Niapoca", "Sea of Whales"; all of them asked players to complete 50 missions that resulted in suicide.

The creator of this game is Filipp Budeikin, a young man aged 21. "It all started in December 2013, when the young man moved near Moscow created on the social network vKontakte, a kind of Russian Facebook, the first group of death, called "F57". Hundreds of teenagers were curious or vulnerable because of some personal problems, so they answered to the invitation of the unknown "Filipp Lis" and entered his virtual game. Some of them insisted on going to the end and died of their own free will," because the Blue Whale was a diabolical game that could be won only by the suicide of the one who had begun to play it (<http://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/cine-e-tanarul-ainventat-balena-albastra-jocul-mortii-index.html>), accessed on 19.03.2017).

We are presenting below a publicized fragment of the answers that Filip gave to a reporter, in which he referred to the victims of these games and the motivation that made him start them:

Reporter: "Do you really push young people to kill themselves?"

Budeikin: "Yes! Don't worry, you will understand. Everyone understands. They die happy. I give them everything they can't have in real life: warmth, understanding and communication".

"It all started in 2013. I wanted to clean the world of the people who harm the society. I created the F57. And it attracted people. In 2014, it was banned. Later, I thought about the project, the concept, in different phases and levels".

"The game begins. It is necessary for the tasks to be carried out, so I talk to them about themselves, we communicate. During this dialogue, it becomes clear who is who. Then I start a conversation on Skype to find out more about their lives. Then I make the decision. The more tired the teenager is and does not sleep at night, the more accessible his mind becomes".

Speaking about a victim: "He was a student. He only had one parent, they were poor, his mother used to beat him, and in his free time he killed dogs. So it was better for everyone, especially for him."

Among the family factors of the deviant behaviour, Associate Prof. Dr. Mihaela Rădoi PhD. mentions the disorganized family that can be: "the incompletely united or illegitimate family, the family broken up by the departure of one of the spouses, after the annulment of the marriage, separation, divorce or abandonment, the family of the type "empty home", where the spouses live together without real communication and without being an emotional support for each other, the family in crisis, due to the absence of one of the spouses by: death, detention, illness, the existence of situations that determine the failures of the marital behaviour, caused by certain types of deficiencies or ailments, either of the children or of one or both spouses" (Rădoi, 2015: 95).

Among the testimonies of people who knew the young man and his family, there were frequent arguments and misunderstandings among its members, and they were described as a problem family: "The family of this young man originally lived in Uhta, a town in the Republic of Komi. Filipp grew up there with his two elder brothers, Denis and Evghenii, with the frequent arguments of his mother. "The relations between the members of this family were very tense. The mother scolded her sons almost every week, even in front of strangers. The brothers rarely spoke to each other. Filipp was very reserved, and sometimes he had to be pushed to say something. When he walked on the street, it was as if he did not even see the others. He was very angry most of the time", said a neighbour who described "a strange family". According to life.ru, he studied in a class of troubled students and did not make any friends because of his aggressiveness. Later, he was admitted to a vocational school. He moved to Solnecinogorsk with his mother in 2012. Once he got there, he was suddenly interested in the Internet and books about information technologies. He would have tried to find a job, but he did not succeed. Gradually, his life became increasingly virtual. All his acquaintances and all his projects were

behind a computer monitor" (<http://adevarul.ro/international/rusia/cine-e-tanarul-ainventat-balena-albastra-jocul-mortii-/index.html>, accessed on 19.03.2017).

When Budeikin was asked about his first victim, who was a 16-year-old girl with the pseudonym Rina Palenkova, who committed suicide on 23rd November 2015, while taking a selfie, refused to answer the question: "What did the girl do wrong?" and he only said that she was part of a cult.

The children who are very exposed and at risk in front of such "games" are the ones who "sit quietly" in front of the monitor, by accessing Internet sites unknown to the parents who should constantly monitor the children's behaviour such as: the addiction to internet, the lack of appetite, the lack of sleep etc. The introverted children are at risk of depression and anxiety, so they became extremely vulnerable to the wrong-doers.

The obligations of the player were not easy and the consequences were extremely harmful for a still young mind such as that of a child. He had to scratch all kinds of words and drawings on his skin, he had to watch horror movies and to wake up at unusual hours at night.

The messages received on the phone contained the following words that aimed at attracting in the game (According to the producer of the show "Special B1" broadcast on the B1 channel, on 18.03.2017):

Curator: "Are you a girl? Are your friends betraying you? Did your boyfriend leave you? Do you often listen to sad music? Subscribe to "Upstream Whales!"
Victim: "I want to play the game"
Curator: "Are you sure? There is no going back."
Victim: "Yes. What does that mean, no way back?"
Curator: "You can't leave the game once it starts!"
Victim: "I'm ready!"
Curator: "You will carry out every task carefully and no one must know about it. When you have finished a task, send me a photo, and at the end of the game you will die. Are you ready?"
Victim: "What if I want to go out?"
Curator: "I have all the information about you. They will come after you!"

An analysis of the conversation reveals the fact that the Curator stimulated his victim to identify with the target group and the child had the impression that he was going with people just like him who could understand him. For the child, everything is a game, he understands it as being for his age and the idea of the game is attractive to him. "Although it seems quite absurd and we can look at these phenomena with some reluctance, especially because it is not very clear how the manipulation in the game can result in such disastrous results, we must take into account the fact that we are dealing with young minds, who grow up and can be sensitive to even the smallest dangers and temptations, especially if the latter offer them the attention and warmth that they do not normally have in their lives. The game is simple but its implications are more serious. Upon the registration, the participant starts to be monitored by an administrator, who "guides" him through the tasks he has and will "help" him to fulfill his "obligations". These are not obligations in the real meaning of the word, because no one is tied by the hands and feet, and forced to do those actions on themselves, but the game does not give them many options. The administrator constantly reminds them that once they started the game, there is no way to escape, and when the players hesitate to do what is asked of them, he resorts to threats against them and their families. It is quite difficult to look at the trees, if we are fascinated by the image of the forest. Thus, no matter how much we invoke the freedom of the players, so their possibility to evade the imposed tasks, we must take into account that here we are dealing with a kind of limited freedom, also called the freedom of the slave. Basically, the players have two options: either they do what they are asked to, or they die" (<https://playtech.ro/2017/balena-albastra-cum-ii-determina-pe-adolescenti-sa-se-sinucida-game-rules/>, accessed on 19.03.2017);

The stages of the rally were:

1. Identification with the target group; "Are your friends betraying you? Did your friend leave you? Do you often listen to sad music?"
2. The rule that instills fear and by which the curator exercises his authority: "There is no way back";
3. The imposition message: "You will die!"
4. Threat, coercion, emotional blackmail: "We have all the data about you!"

A simple "click on an attachment sent by e-mail can enable the entry into a computer or computer system, through which the hacker or the spy can take control of the private life, professional activity of the concerned person or the institution where he belongs. The same happens in the case of Internet games accessed by children. Cyber aggressors usually use sophisticated malware, an application from the category of viruses, Trojan horses, worms, etc., who steal data from the computer system. Once the computer is compromised, it sends information to the hacker every two seconds. It searches by a word for the information it needs and it enters the files. In the same way, they can also enter the smartphones from which they can obtain personal information, phone numbers, etc., as it happened recently to a teenage girl from Timisoara who accessed the Blue Whale game." (<http://www.evz.ro/legaturi-balena-albastra-spioni-cibernetici.html>, accessed on 19.03.2017).

"The game" was taken very seriously by the organizers. According to the testimony of a teenager, she was told that if she did not take "the final step", then she would be helped. The curators' lines were similar to: "If you don't do what is asked of you, then we will help you. We know your name, we know where you live". These were the messages of the bullies to the victims, thus they made the children to be stressed, to feel constrained, terrorized, they became more and more vulnerable to the individuals who bullied them. It is worth noting that, in fact, this "help" was actually intimidation and the threats were often direct; the children were afraid that their parents would be killed if they did not do what the Curator wanted.

4. The effects of the "Blue Whale Game" in Romania

In Romania, specialists asked for help from parents and teachers on TV channels and on the websites of each county police, with the purpose of making them aware. The latter were advised to "pay special attention to the way in which their children spend their time online", with the purpose of preventing the consequences of this game among teenagers. There was also "a prevention week" in which pupils, parents and teachers discussed about "safety in the online environment". The game started to be in the attention of the Control Commission of the Romanian Intelligence Service, recognized as the only institution capable of taking appropriate measures.

A series of investigations were also carried out at the national level, after the reported cases, especially by the teachers.

In Târgu Jiu, a pupil scratched her arms with a needle, after searching on the Internet for information about the "Blue Whale" game because of misunderstandings with her mother, who did not let her spend her free time as she wanted.

In Galati, 7 children with scratch marks on their forearms were discovered in class by a teacher. The pupils declared that "they were curious to experience great sensations". In Dâmbovița, 6 pupils, aged from 8 to 17, went through several stages of the virtual game. The pupils were advised by the school psychologist and by the police whereas the incident preceded several prevention activities carried out in the educational institutions.

Some teenagers "define their identity" by fearlessness, they want to stand out; therefore, it is important that the teachers point out "positive competition" among pupils. In Iași, 5 children from the 6th grade got to the hospital after participating together in a mission in the "Blue Whale" game.

Fragments of the pupils' dialogues were posted online as they followed the instructions of the game about which they said that they learned from the Internet:

"You kneel down like this, and the other person sits behind you.
-How many times do you do that?
-Many times, until you feel dizzy!
-Where did they find out about this?
-From the Internet!
-But is it a game or something?
-They said it's a game, I said it's dangerous, that they could end up in the hospital, but they said it's a game!
-What's the name of this game?
-The Blue Whale."

Source: <http://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/balena-albastra-cinci-copii-asfixiati-la-scoala>, accessed on 19.03.2017

In the center of Alba Iulia town, a blindfolded girl sitting on a bench sparked controversy among passers-by when she was photographed and later posted on the Internet. The teenager remained silent, showing no reaction to those around her and refraining from answering questions. Some suspected that she might have followed one of the game's instructions.

Specialists found that students who 'entered the game of death' were essentially attempting to 'prove their courage' or 'display bravery,' wanting to 'see how long they could endure the pain.' However, over time, they admitted that they began 'not to realize what they were doing.'

Psychologist Stelian Chivu, in a TV show, revealed that the game, spanning over 50 days, follows the programming of 'the subconscious mind' for 49 days, as outlined in the stages mentioned earlier in this article, with the last day being fatal. The specialist emphasized that even if the children who accessed the game didn't end up committing suicide, they would be affected in the long term, especially in terms of their receptivity.

Children with communication problems with their parents or close individuals were also at risk. Responsible adults must continually learn how to behave as parents, ensuring their own well-being and, above all, that of their child.

Symptoms of post-traumatic stress can significantly impact the overall development of pupils who fall victim to school bullying. They may struggle to form healthy relationships with their peers, exhibiting characteristics such as suicidal ideation, depression symptoms, low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, anxiety, mental health issues, low popularity, difficult sociability, and eating disorders (Palaghia, 2022, 2023a).

In the cyber environment, individuals can shed their true identity and assume alternate roles. Here, marginalization, mobbing, and stalking take on a new dimension. In mere seconds, videos recorded with a mobile phone can be posted, depicting aggressions like the violation of a girl in the gym, an image of a schoolmate in the bathroom, a child being beaten in any space where they are drawn, and nude photos—sometimes manipulated—made available to hundreds of thousands of internet users. Victims feel they can no longer find a corner to be protected, carrying their cyberbullies 'in their pockets,' on their smartphones, where aggressors can directly intrude into the space where they find themselves at any moment, with consequences much more serious than traditional bullying.

The Blue Whale Challenge has heightened awareness about the potential dangers of online influence and underscored the importance of promoting online safety and mental health awareness, especially among young people. Child victims may face anxiety, depression, behavioural and emotional disorders, and even dramatic consequences such as the suppression of their own lives. In cases of cyberbullying, children may commit suicide out of fear, correlated with loneliness and the interpretation of personal experiences as failures, along with the lack of hope and helplessness. Ambivalence characterizes these individuals—a situation in which they 'want and, at the same time, do not wish for death.' In the case of 'death games,' victims experience 'self-suppression by coercion,' certainly due to vulnerabilities specific to their age. We emphasize the need to respect children's rights in the age of technology and to learn ways to develop (cyber)resilience (Palaghia, 2023b).

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THE GRAY ZONES: ESSENTIAL VARIABLE OF EXPLANATION OF THE CONFLICTUALITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Abstract: *This scientific production brings out the conflictual dynamism which characterizes the political climate in Africa during the post bipolarized period. The type of anarchy³² that characterizes the contemporary world today is the continuation of international relation during the pre-cold war era. This situation was a result of the lack of world hegemony punctuated by the absence of a power which could regulate the world on its own. That is what serves as a distinction between internal political sphere and international political life. This political ovni which are gray zones characterizes a period marked by the deliquescence of interstate system from which it is derived. Systematized by a manipulation and the instrumentalisation of different actors who participate in the internal game, the safeguard of their self-interest is their main goal, to the expense of the population whose sovereignty is not only compromised but the concept of development is also utopic. The geopolitical and geo-economical assets cuts across the ambiguity of gray zones that is the existence of resources and the paradox of under development; which complicates the understanding of a state which has difficulties in managing and is weak so to say.*

Keywords: Gray zones, Variable, Conflictuality, Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Introduction

The defense of interest and especially the search for power incites a race to armament which gives a configuration of which the manifestations constitute the spectacular events that the world has known: That is cold war (Hans, 1993). This system was that of military condominium (nuclear) spear headed by the USA (United States of America) and USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) leading the world to what Raymond Aron called «Impossible peace» «improbable war» (Aron, 1984). It becomes difficult to instaur state authority and the circumscription of this situation takes the political appellation «zone grises» gray zones constitute space (geographical space) in which insecurity has become rampant not only because of the weakening of the «authority of legitimate violence» as thought by Max Weber, but also because of extortion of certain resources thought criminal acts (Bayard, Stephen and Hibou, 1997: 20) notably in regions generally at the frontier between two states at least. Border regions and particularly very rich in resources (natural resources) for certain people and strategic for others, gray zones illustrate themselves through their tendency of creating conflict. On the internal plan it is the desire to obtain these riches that make states in a region to enter into endless wars. This is completed by other external factors which arise from either western countries³³, non-Gove mental organization and other who invest by sapping principles which regulate the existence of the states in a general framework and sub-Saharan Africa in particular. That is what is at the origin of chaos in the gray zones of which the materialization is found in the conflictual nature of this part of the African continent. As such some questions have to be posed. How can we understand the concept of gray zones and its implication in the post bi-polar period? How does gray zones constitute the profound factors in the comprehension of the proliferation of conflicts in Africa? What explains the existence of lawless zones?

³² Anarchy is not in the common sense of disorder, but in the scholarly sense of absence of central authority over sovereign states.

³³ Allusion est faite à la France, aux Etats-Unis d'Amérique, la Grande Bretagne et autres

In the framework of this study the technique is first of all qualitative which has the advantage of integrating description, analytical and evaluative methods in the empirical implementation of the notion «gray zones. This model being limited due to the nature of the subject, we are going to also make use of historical and sociological approaches which apprehend international relations as social facts. An analyses of the geopolitical and geoeconomical framework of sub-Saharan Africa is apodictic meddling the influence of factors which the dynamism of relation between sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world bringing out the complexity and diversity of actor in gray zones of which the presence is a source of conflict and tension.

2. Gray zones : a multi-purpose concept

The expression «gray zones³⁴» comes from aeronautic control vocabulary which designates the areas of the sky which is not covered by the action rays of radar. Therefore «gray zones» may be designated as those areas of the world which because they are confronted by crises and frozen conflicts are plunged in areas of lawlessness, drama usually internal for which these are hardly solution. In these areas parallel economies flourish, transnational traffics and illegal goods proliferate and international illegal actors find a fruitful zone.

A more precise definition is given by Pascal Gauchon and Jean-Marc Huissoud (2010) who identify “gray zones” as an area where the rule of law is absent and where state sovereignty is not really exercised or where criminal powers living from guerrilla or terrorism and illegal traffic exercise power. In these region government who know these realities have difficulties in applying the minimum rule of law. For Jean Christophe Ruffin these «gray zones» prosper in the third world since the end of the cold war, due to the failure to institutionalize the concept of Nation state in the western world (Ibid.). These zones are prone to the existence of armed groups and criminal organizations which reinforce themselves mutually and contribute to the sustainability of conflicts transformed into states for delinquent networks. The term designates an area of a country usually a border between two countries of which there is little or no public administration. They are areas where the fight against criminality (organized) is an objective of defense of external policies. It is following this perspective that Medhi Taje apprehends the expression «grey zone» as a «puzzle» of strips of spaces (areas) indecisive oscillating according to movement of forces from political center stable and well defined (Taje, 2010). If then it is true that a grey zone is a zone that escapes the control of one or more states, is the state not responsible. What Luc Sindjoun (2009: 241) calls «Archipelagic Sovereign» limited only in towns and less in hinterlands and interiors which favors the implantation of extremist groups in disfavoured zones (Gregoire, Bourgeot, 2011: 6). They are characterized by the situation at the border, ethnic diversity, the existence of natural resources and at the same time they are affected by all sorts of convulsion meddling elements of interstate war, civil war interethnic wars, inter religious and social conflicts (Encyclopedia Universalis, 2002 : 241). These zones can be termed gray since they are not found in neither in «white» an area of established peace (frontiers recognized and accepted, stable states, dialogue mechanisms and cooperation between states) nor in the «dark» area of anarchy³⁵ and war³⁶. As such which all these shades «gray» symbolizes states that are intermediary between white and dark, licit and illicit, legal and illegal. The term that suits well the idea of gray zones is without any doubt that of “failed state”. This question of failed state, of those regions where the attachment of the state to the west is difficult has become omnipresent in the circle occupying international relation.

³⁴ Empty space left by a given state where the seeds of anarchy and international terrorism are developing.

³⁵ From the Greek term *anarkhia* (absence of leader) used for the first time by English Dickinson in 1916 in the scholarly sense of absence of central authority over the sovereign state.

³⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz conceives the war as an act of violence, conflict of great interests which is regulated by the blood.

However, the universe of globalization and the subsequent demands of diplomatic relations between states, of democracy and its requirement of norms and principles which take into consideration human values and laws which regulate the relation within the international community. These model states through laws have to have transparency and especially a read-through strength which gives way to some minimum security in their space. Such states have to be mutually linked by crossed networks of pacts and practices that contribute equally to predictability and security. Whereas gray zones do not fit in this pattern. They are instead areas of conflicts between diverse legitimacies some established and others in search of positioning. As such the germ of anarchy and terrorism cannot find a better theatre of develop.

I) The diversity of actors in gray zones

The apprehension of gray zones as area with the absences of the rule of law where conflicts are frozen and or where administration (public administration) is ineffective and is at the origin of multitude of actors who each one, because of the safeguard of their egoistic interest do not favor a situation of optimum peace. The presence of many actors in gray zones can also be justified by globalization which prone the opening of borders for an economically uniform world notably with the establishment of planetary village. To the above we can add the wealth of the soil, the sub-soil and the presence of multiple traffics which are very vital for both internal and external factors.

A) INTERNAL FACTORS

In gray zones there is more than one actor who render the climate precarious and make conflicts to persist. We can name the states and transnational forces.

1) STATES THEMSELVES

One of the most tumultuous and hottest zones in the globe is found in Africa and precisely in sub-Saharan Africa. In this part of the continent many gray zones can be identified and owing to the definition that a gray zone is a border area between at least two states it results that states are principal actors. In fact, a gray zone is an outcome of conflict which stems from the deliquescence, the will to take illegally the lands of your neighbor or more exactly to violate territorial limits between states. This can translate the will of power which ends up putting at logger heads states which seek to defend either the integrity of their territory or the limits of their borders from invaders. In other words, the fact that gray zones are characterized by real instability result from the lack of political will by these states which can through diplomacy and negotiations can create peace and stability in gray zones. This said stability or instability of gray zones depends largely on states which share a conflict linked border.

States which are the basic structure of the international structure are privilege actor in the international scene. Certain conditions regulate the existence of state which is a population, a government and a territory. Even though international public law does not require particular condition pertaining to territory it is on it that state exercises their sovereignty. As concern, gray zones which are found in border areas they are legal lines which mark the limit of territory that separate two states, we have amongst others territorial limits which include the atmospheric space over the landed territory and territorial waters (de Prince Pokam 2008: 60). As such even though these exist zones³⁷ which can go out of control of sovereignty of states. This sovereignty will permit the state government to control and safeguarded the limit of its territory in order to submit the population to established rules. However gray zones suffer from the absence of the state which is at the origin of many

³⁷ The hint here is made to the high seas area for example.

unending crises. This situation of uncertainty further complicated with the entry or infiltration of other internal actors such as transnational actors.

2) Transnational actors

Transnational groups can be defined as institution or organization that are well structured or on the country or informal groups of which the member are united or at least have a similar behaviour enough to be considered as unique actors (Gnanguenon, 2008: 4). Existing be the advent of globalization these groups reveal the existence of a transnational dimension which is not only economic. Generally, the strategy of transnational actors rest on bi-passing political institution. In order to apprehend this transnational phenomenon social sciences have made reference to the notion of defined network as a social organization composed of individuals or groups of which the dynamic aims at perpetuating the progress of the activities of the members in one or more socio political spheres.

The number of transnational actors has increased in the international scene. There exist in gray zones transnational firms and multinationals which are financial operators. They participate in the growth of international exchanges and the phenomenon of economic globalization. Also, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) have multiplied with the development of international institutions and are created by states to serve their common interest. As a matter of fact, one of the preoccupations of NGIO (International Non-governmental Organization) is the search for new sources of legitimacy susceptible to modify interstate organization and questioning the functioning of state or interstate institutions³⁸. A strategy which brings problems to sub-Saharan countries who already suffer from crises of authority.

Religions actors are not left, out given that religion is considered as the most ancient transnational phenomenon. In fact, intercultural exchanges after the expansion of Islam permitted notably from the IX to XIV century, the creation of "orders" and brother hoods³⁹ which orchestrated in Africa in general and sub Saharan Africa in particular, many interreligious wars. In Western Europe, religion institution date back from middle ages and at this époque only urban corporations and the Catholic Church permitted the exercise of philanthropic activities to the benefit of the less privileged. But now a day clandestine or recognized by the state religious institutions possess their international networks and fit themselves in diverse manners in relations between states. As such religious movement remain amongst the most influential transnational actors which take the farm of ideological movements or radical mode of action aiming to stop save aspects of state prerogatives.

We can also cite actors evolving in an informal sphere who seeks to integrate actors whose origin are not transnational neither of clearly established illicit relation with the state. In fact, there exist here diverse types of actors like traffickers, mafia, terrorist that benefit from the advantage of transnational networks. These groups of transnational actors find it favorable that their networks are implanted in gray zones in Africa (sub-Saharan). It attains it summit in areas with absence of rule of law and many wars are the perfect illustration in sub-Saharan Africa. Even though internal actors in conflict zones in sub-Saharan Africa do nothing to promote peace and stability, (social stability) external actors who are search of position (strategic position) go a long way to perpetuate this situation.

B) The external actors

In gray zones there are many other actors who if they are not behind the scene they participate directly or indirectly in a means to safeguard their interest in activities that are not often legal and as such we have traditional and new actors.

³⁸ This is one of the major challenges that is straining the authority of the state.

³⁹ www.ingenieurumaroc.com/indexbibliotheque.html#41, viewed on 09.08 2017.

1) Traditional actors

Sub-Saharan Africa today is an economic and strategic yard for many European countries amongst which are France and Great Britain. This is what Simon-Pierre Seims to say in the following terms «In the beginning of XIX century the only European powers present in Africa (west Africa) are France and Great Britain» (Ekanza, 1995: 63). Present in Africa for years, the occupation of Africa by western powers led to the Berlin conference 1884 to 1885 consecrating *ipso facto* the partition of Africa. The conference decided the partition of Africa in the absence of African representatives (Gourevitch, 2004: 155). From this partition, France had Senegal and Gabon where Brazza concluded a treaty with Makoko king of the Bateke's, France extended its protectorate to the Fouta-Djalon (Guinea) and to the west bank of the Niger up to Toumbouktou. France also possessed some areas like Cote d'Ivoire and Dahomey and installed itself in Bamako where it constructed a railway linking Kayes to Bamako (Gourevitch, 2004: 156).

To be more explicit France implanted itself in sub-Saharan Africa in the area constituting states of AEF (French Equatorial Africa) and of OAF (Occidental French Africa). In fact France obtained strategic position in Africa south of the Sahara which were reinforced from 1929 in order to ensure resources to the French national economy. In fact, France involved public and private mechanisms and official or unofficial channels. As such France exercises a certain diplomatic and strategic influence in Africa in general and sub-Saharan in particular. Due to its international status as a great diplomatic power it presents itself as a spokesman of African states. Despite the fact that French diplomatic position faces competition France remains present. This presence in sub-Saharan Africa is reproduced through official channels and legitimate political representation, economic, techno scientific and sociocultural representation⁴⁰.

Just like France, Great Britain also invested in sub-Saharan Africa its objective being to establish strategic bases. The presence of Great Britain in this part of the continent was already manifest in South Africa, West Africa as well in East Africa. As such we could talk of British colonies in Africa. It is important to note that at the beginning of the XIX century the position of Great Britain was more comfortable than that of France in West Africa and during this period the influence of Great Britain in the Gulf of Guinea was notorious (Ekanza, 1995: 63). As a matter of fact, Sierra Léon was the first British establishment created by humanitarian in the end of the XVIII century (Ibid: 64). Gold Coast belonging to Great Britain a colony is established in the coastal zone in 1874. Still in West Africa Gambia which is the small country in Africa because a British colony very early from 1765, Nigeria also remained a British colony up till 1963 (Fleury, 1999: 34). Great Britain was also present in Africa (central) through Cameroun mandate status notably the position with France in 1922 (Ibid: 37). East Africa was not left behind also called imperial British East Africa, the British were implanted there. As such Kenya because the English protectorate from 1895, Uganda up to 1962 and this British presence extended to Tanzania a country created in 1964 with the fusion of Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Ibid: 40) to the above list of countries we can add the following countries from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Swaziland, Somalia and others.

The implantation of France and Great Britain is at the origin of the quest for position in the continent by other actors which we term new actors.

2) New actors

The exceptional growth registered by the world before the crises had many consequences. It permitted African countries to register a growth rate of more than 6% between 2003 and 2008 and even more for countries producing hydrocarbons (Chochez, 2011: 11). This world euphoria brought emerging countries such as China, India and Brazil on

⁴⁰ These are representatives such as embassies, consulates, economic missions, representation of the French development agency, French cultural center, research institutes such as the IRD, advisers and technical assistants

the economic front. This growth provoked sudden increase in the demand of raw materials. In the hypothesis of shortage prices increased and consuming countries wanted to ensure their supplies in Oil, minerals and cereals. Of which Africa south of Sahara is found of the center of an oil boom and we are expecting an increase of production from 5,6 million barrels per day in 2007 to 6,9 million barrels per day in 2015. That's an increase of 23% in the period whereas world production will be limited at 4% (Meierding : 4). This seems to be the reason why oil companies and importing countries deem it necessary to establish access to African oil as a result of this prevision (forecast). Also the waters of the Gulf of Guinea contains one of the three most important hydrocarbons reserves in the world (Cochez, 2004: 12), which could explain the new rush of developed countries and emerging countries.

For behind Great Britain and France are emerging countries such as China, Brazil and India, South Africa, to name but a few, of those who invest in Africa too, the objective being to guarantee their own share of energy resources.

The intervention of China in the Africa continent mostly in the energy sector attracted large attention sometimes alarming.

China is active with African governments in order to transpose their model to the continent. Apart from identified zones as indicated by Martin J Davies executive director of the center for Chinese studies in the University of Stellen Bosh (South Africa) «during the next three years it is nine other zones which would be created with the aid of China Exim Bank» (*Le journal les Afriques*, n°1 Juillet/Aout 2007 : 11). Clearly, China is present in African countries which possess natural wealth this to exchange mines and concessions of exploitation for manufactured products and realizing infrastructures with its own labour force.

China is not the only country to show interest in Africa wealth. For year India has had privileged relations with many African countries such as Mauritius, Kenya and South Africa. Indian enterprises are present in manufacturing and services this is the case for example of the TATA group present in about ten countries in Africa and which envisages to invest about 50 millions of dollars in the continent during the next three years (Ibid: 12). In 2006 and 2007 new projects were initiated in South Africa (ferrochrome telecommunication, automobile) in Uganda (soluble coffee factory) and in Zambia (an electric plant) (Ibid: 12). As such as earmarked by Stephen Gelb, director of edge institute in Johannesburg, the center for independent research on Africa economic policies «What is new since two or three years is that India is also interested in the wealth Africa's sub soil» (Ibid: 13). So Indian group controlled by Lakshmir Mittal is already present in the production of steel through its subsidiaries in Africa and Algeria. In Angola, the other oil giant in the continent, India announces projects of refining.

It is the great geographical and sectorial diversity that characterizes South African investments in the continent: mining sector, housing infrastructure, energy, banking, telecommunications, distributions and others.

Brazil is not left behind in this great reconquest of Africa. Greatly interest in the riches of continent this rising power multiplies declarations of solidarity towards the African continent in order to find a means to participate and consolidate its position vis-a-vis Africa. In fact, the relationship between Brazil and Africa has remained strong. Since the advent to power of Lula Da Silva both political and commercial relations between Brazil and Africa have been amplified. The amount of commercial exchanges between Brazil and Africa has been multiplied by four since 2002 and 12 more embassies have been opened in the region (Lafargue, 2008: 17). As such President Lula underlined that «we reaffirm the links that unites us with all the African continent and disposition to contribute actively so that it develops its enormous potential». The Brazilian agronomical research company Embrapa has opened a laboratory in Ghana in February 2007 in order to transmit to many African states his knowhow in the manufacturing of Ethand from cassava. In total the Brazilian diplomacy aims henceforth to create relationship with all African countries in such a way that Brazil and

Nigeria were at the origin of the first Africa-South America summit which took place in the month of November 2006 in Abuja.

It is important to note that Africa is subject of interest in the domain of economy and strategy by emerging countries and developed countries such as the United States.

The geostrategic interest of Africa for the USA is relatively recent. The 2001 terrorist attacks destabilized relations between the United States and the Arab world. The hostilities were aggravated by the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003, the growing tensions with Iran has eliminated a potential supplier of oil and the growing antagonistic relations with Hugo Chavez has cooled down the hopes to be able to count on the import from Venezuela. These multiple obstacles make the implantation and exploitation difficult both on economic and political perspective. According to Boyer, assistant director of the foundation for strategic research, the sudden or increasing interest of America is explained by series of reasons amongst which are the presence of raw materials necessary for the American economy, petroleum in particular of which the import for the next ten year surpasses the volume coming from Saudi Arabia (Boyer, 2008). As such the American government has encourage exploiting companies to invest in production of oil against financial advantages, has created closer diplomatic relations and has provided military and to oil rich countries of the region. Concerning the above, the deployment of American power in Africa was observed in the transfer of American Arms in Africa from 1966-1975 and 1976-1980. From 1966-1975 the value of transfers were 361 million dollars with a percentage of 11,5% and from 1976-1980 the value was 830 million dollars (Duignan, 1984: 382). The USA turned to the Gulf of Guinea to ameliorate their security in energy due to the discovery of considerable asserts in the 1990's in the region.

II) Sub-Saharan geopolitics to geoeconomy

A) The geopolitical framework

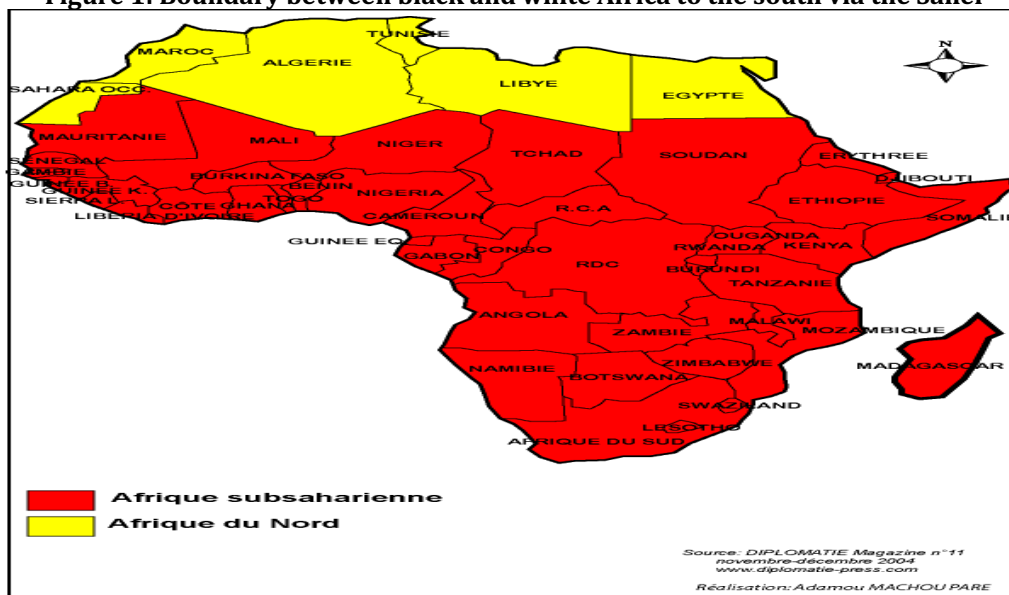
Geopolitics is the discipline that throws light on unending relations between space, time and politics. For Defarges: «geopolitics is all what has to do with power, these is question of power when individuals or groups of individuals compare themselves, evaluate their assets and liabilities and out of these calculations make choices, adopt stance to take and policies. Geopolitics is a question of power which draws inspiration or their source in divers' factors with aim and stakes power and strength» (Defarges, 2008: 11-24).

We can apprehend geopolitics as a method of analyses which seeks to understand the behaviour of states in the international scene on one hand and the other hand to interpret international relations. As written by Francois Thual it is to «identify the actors, analyze their motivation, write their intention, to repeat alliances in gestation or on the contrary alliance that are towards deconstruction be it at local, regional, continental or international» (Thual, 1996: 4) geopolitics takes into consideration all actors present in the international scene be they state men, men of diplomacy, men of army, NGOs or public opinion. But what interest geopolitics is the expansion or contraction of states (Defarges, 2005: 8). The importance that geopolitics gives to space is not doubt at the origin of Lorot's affirmation « geopolitics will and should be the geographic conscience of the state. Its finality is nothing but the study of the great connections vital man to day in today's space. Its finality is the coordination of phenomenon linking the state and space» (Lorot, 1995: 25).

1) Spacial study

Sub-Saharan Africa is also called black Africa because it is mostly populated by individuals of black color contrary to North Africa which populated by whites.

Figure 1: Boundary between black and white Africa to the south via the Sahel



Source : <http://www.archives-fr/novo/press.info>, consulted the 12th of March 2018.

It designates the part west of Africa and central south of the Sahara it is also used for the French colonial empire beneath the Maghreb (Demeulenaere 2009: 23).

The use of the adjective “black” implies a racial connotation. This is why modern studies prefer terms such as sub-Saharan Africa or Africa south of Sahara. Sub-Saharan Africa generally subdivided into four sub regions known as West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and South Africa. West Africa is made up of 15 countries⁴¹ and a population of about 300 million in habitants of which 60% are less 25 years old. The total surface area is more than 5 million km² 10 times that of France.

South Africa on its part comprises of all territories situated south of the Africa equatorial forest. Attached to it are the African Islands situated in the south west of the Indian Ocean around Madagascar which is from the Mozambican canal to the Mauritius Island and Reunion and also African Islands south east of the Atlantic Ocean (www.wikipedia.org). Primitively occupies by the Khoisan⁴² people and later by the Bantous⁴³. It forms the entire countries that are South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambic, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Central Africa is a region south of the African Sahara comprising, the south of the Sahara, the eastern shield of West Africa and west of the rift valleys. It comprises of countries like Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo), Rwanda, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the republic of Congo.

The spatial (territorial) study of Africa south of the Sahara brings out with sufficiency the geographical centrality of it and the dynamism of its population. This shows the influence of geopolitics on its position and enormous sociopolitical stakes.

⁴¹Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone,

⁴² Khoisan also known as Khoesan or Khoe-san is a name given to two ethnic groups in South Africa who share the same physical and linguistic characteristics as the majority Bantu in the region.

⁴³ Bantu in the Kongo language means « humans » and refers to a set of people speaking some four hundred related languages known as Bantu. They are present from West to East of Gabon, Comoros and from North to South Sudan to Namibia.

2) Socio-political stakes

Apart from the many riches of the subsoil and the soil the space that hosts sub-Saharan Africa has other factors and the population seems to have its own perception of reality.

The awareness of the riches and social realities explain the attachment that Africans have on their land thus, the refusal to pass on their lands to others. The possessive character stimulates a hostility vis-a-vis strangers, predators of Africa and their countenances. In fact, the geopolitical conscience in political scientists its already a factor that can generate conflict for undermining the conscience of geographical reality, resources, the call for an acquaintance from the population at the point of leading them into wars in order to preserve them.

Despite the situation of awareness of their riches in the Africans, Africa in general and sub-Saharan in particular is the continent which is most scrambled for by western countries. They are more than in need of the riches of Africa to remedy the apparent shortage in many sectors of development works. This state of things is no doubt at the origin of the ill feelings observed in sub-Saharan Africa. We have as example Niger where a faction which is rebels in the Niger delta have burnt infrastructures of American petroleum companies. It was the case in Gabon with former president Omar Bongo who permitted the French multinational company ELF (Essences and Lubricants from France) to win markets in the construction of railway infrastructure in Gabon. This was objected by the opposition which decided to Sap the construction of the railway undertaken by ELF which slowed the project. This situation implies on the political plan a certain number of actors and stakes such as the heads of state of sub-Saharan Africa and those of exploiting countries. These persons influence significantly the political domain for they define foreign policies, those which require the signatures of treaties with international organizations. Through the definition of politics by states, they have knowledge of the stakes that have to be given exploitation of this or that resources to one country instead of another for it is clear these is in this relations a counter strategy of western countries vis-à-vis political actions of African presidents. It's the case of Libya which under the reign of Khadafi dispossessed Great Britain of the exploitation of its oil it the benefit of China and local companies' haven acquired the know-how.

If Africa is a continent with geopolitical variables, its main assert remains its geoeconomical situation.

B) The geoeconomic framework: the preponderance of oil.

The geoeconomy acquired a place of choice in the interpretation of international fact in the aftermath of the cold war. Economy has become a factor of power in the international scene. The strength or power of a state results from its economic might this is what seems to justify the sayings of Pascal Lorot: «with the end of the cold war the military might of developed state constitute no more the main factor of their power in the international scene. The period of frontal military opposition between industrialized states is over. The economic might of a country is what is used to judge the power of a state» (Lorot, 1999: 111).

Geoeconomy was developed in the USA by Eduard Luttwark⁴⁴ and in France by Pascal Lorot⁴⁵. It is apprehended as the analyses of economic strategies notably commercial decided

⁴⁴ Cantor of the first geoeconomy, he announced in the early 90s, the advent of a new international order where the economic weapon replaced the military weapon as an instrument at the service of the states in their will power and assertion on the international scene « military threats and alliances have lost their importance with the pacification of international trade. On, economic priorities are no longer overshadowed and come to the fore. In the future, it is perhaps the fear of economic consequences that will regulate litigation, and certainly more political interventions motivated by powerful strategic reasons. And if i twill still need an external threat to ensure the unity and internal cohesion of nationals and countries, this threat will now be economic or more exactly geo-economic ». In Edward Luttwak, *The Endangered American dream*, quoted by Pascal Lorot, p.110

⁴⁵ In 1997 he created the quarterly geo-economic magazine published by Choiseul. It shows the limits of the « first geoeconomy» which seems to him too narrow, even somewhat dated, to effectively reflect the economic and strategic

in the framework of policies aiming to protect their national economies or to protect it from certain countries, to help their national enterprises to acquire the mastery of technology and to conquer certain segments of the world market in relation to the production of commercialization of a product or a group of product, of which their possession or control confers to the holder, state or national enterprise, an element of power which reinforces its economic potentials and social potential (Lorot: 114). Just like geopolitics, geoeconomics is not the control of territories it is to acquire technological and commercial supremacy. From this inexhaustive definition of geoeconomy, Africa in general and sub-Saharan Africa in particular constitute a hegemony in terms of riches of its subsoil and soil and its influence and its weight will be considerable in world commerce.

1) Mineral resource

Nature has greatly gratified Africa with resources even though this does not give rise to a veritable human and economic development. But the Berlin conference which consecrated the partition of Africa created a new scramble for Africa and its resources increasing the appetite of world powers.

Sub-Saharan Africa is potentially very rich. As resources we have gold which we can find in many countries such as South Africa, Zambia, Congo, Ghana, Niger and Equatorial Guinea, to name but a few. Thereafter, we also have precious stones in Rwanda, Burundi, Sierra Léon, Central African Republic, Botswana and South Africa. Furthermore, we also have timber and the greatest producer of cacao in the world is from sub-Saharan Africa. It's Côte d'Ivoire which is the main supplier of western countries. Coffee, cotton and many other agricultural products of export like groundnut are produced in many countries amongst which are Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Sudan (Lemarchand, 2006 : 84) etc. Mineral exploitation constitutes one of the oldest forms of industries dating back from antiquity. We can find different types of minerals in Africa south of the Sahara which are: Minerals energy (coal, uranium), minerals metal and other like (iron, molybdenum and titanium), precious metals (gold, platinum and silver) and common metals (bauxite, cobalt, copper, lead, zinc and nickel). We also have further nonmetallic minerals like construction minerals (cement, clay, granulates, sand and gravel) and precious stones such as diamond. These minerals produce many manufactured products.

Table 1: Segmentation of the mining industry in Sub-Saharan Africa

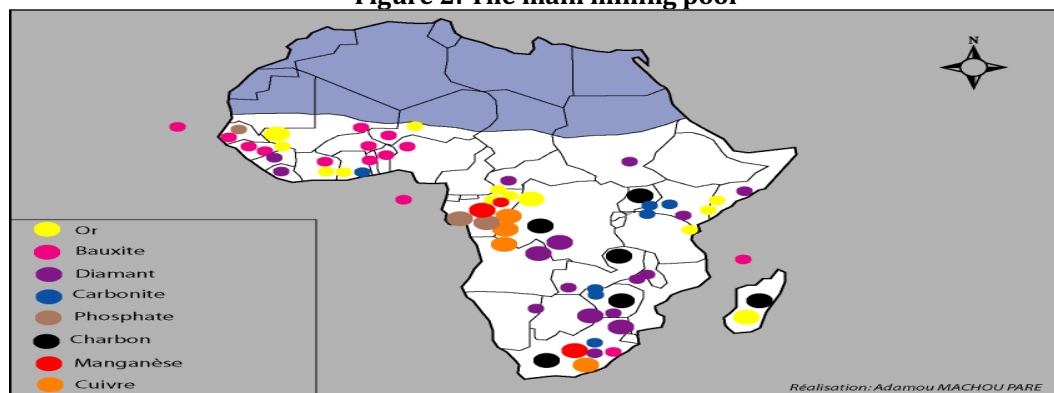
<i>Minéraux</i>							
	Minéraux Énergétiques	Minéraux métalliques			Minéraux non métalliques		
		Métaux ferreux	Métaux précieux	Métaux communs	Minéraux de construction	Minéraux industriels	Pierres précieuses
<i>Minéraux</i>	Charbon, Uranium	Minéral de fer, niobium, tantale, titane	Or, Platine, argent	Bauxite, cobalt, Cuivre, plomb, magnésium, molybdène, nickel, zinc	Briques de pierres de construction, ciment, argile, granulats, gypse, sable et gravier, ardoise	Bentonite, carbonates industriels, kaolin, magnésie, potasse de sel, silice, soufre	Diamant, pierres
<i>Utilisation finale</i>	Electricité, produits chimiques, organiques combustible industriels	Activités aérospatiales, construction, électroniques, ingénierie, secteur manufacturier, sidérurgie	Joaillerie, fabrication de monnaie, industrie	Construction, électricité électronique, ingénierie, secteur manufacturier	Construction	Céramique, chimie, fonderie, moulage, pigments, combustible, gaz, sidérurgie, traitement des eaux	Joaillerie, industrie

Source : http://www.africa-segmentation-de-industrie-minièrre/.../index_fr.htm, Viewed on 09/11/2017

reality of the end of the 20th century. Not only does it limit the scope of this new mode of interpreting power rivalries to western nations alone, but it also assigns the state exclusivity in the formulation of geo-economic policies.

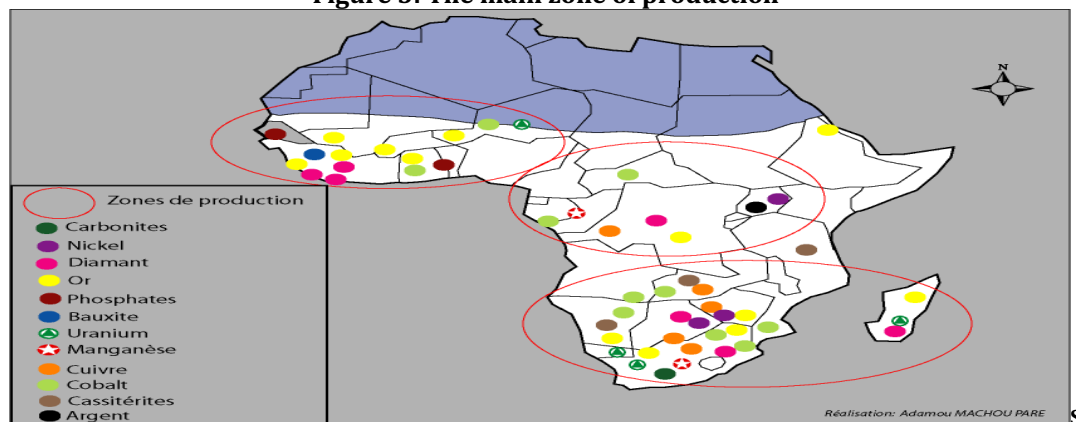
The mining sector was essentially exported by state enterprises but with the effect of globalization, the mining industry has face profound changes amongst which the liberalization of the sector in fact sub-Saharan is a zone with a soil rich in mineral resources beside Canada and Australia. The exploitation of mines is a preponderant activity which is the first sector of export of most African countries. The mining riches of the sub-soil is estimated at 46200 billion dollars us⁴⁶ and these exist many mines and many zones of production in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 2: The main mining pool



Source: *Journal les Afriques* available in www.performancesconsulting.com, viewed on 02-12-2017

Figure 3: The main zone of production



Source: *Journal les Afriques* available in www.performancesconsulting.com, viewed on 02-03-2018

With the implicit encouragement of the world bank, south Saharan African state which still maintained exclusive control of the mining sector have opened to foreign investors. It is with Ghana which at the beginning of the 80s was the first African state to liberalize their sector to foster its development.

Mining exploitation in south Sahara Africa is oriented towards economic development for mining legislations in Africa are based on the principle that mineral resources are the property of the state and are applied equitably to all investors whether it's the public sector, private, national or foreign⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ *Journal les Afriques*, available in www.performancesconsulting.com, viewed on 02-02-2018.

⁴⁷ <http://www.africahistory.net/imf.htm>, viewed on 25.02.2018.

Africa disposes of one third of mineral resources in the world, but the 2008 financial crisis impacted the production of resources like gold, diamond, irons. As such the production of classical resources such as gold and diamond oscillates between 20% and 50% of world production (www.wikipedia.org). In west Africa for example the crisis favored the production of gold (Mali, Ghana) while extraction project of iron were abandoned in Senegal and Guinea. In central Africa on the contrary, we witnessed the restructuring of the mining sector with the revision of mining codes and exploiting licenses attributed, with Congo notably and the rival of exploiting activities in mining like in Cameroon and Gabon.

Paradoxically Africa in general and Sub-Sahara in particular which disposes of a great part of mineral wealth remains the poorest continent. The impact of mineral industries in Africa is limited by insufficiencies, opacity mismanagement in the governance of the sector. The outcome expected from mineral exploitation on the economies of African countries and its population is less perceptible due to bad governance and corruption and the fact that the resources from mining exploitation are sometimes swindled for personal benefits. Central African Republic is a perfect example where a recent report⁴⁸ denounced financial mismanagement in the mining sector. This is the consequence of the weakness of the legal framework of the majority of these countries, thus the necessity for this fruitful sector to rationalize the management for the great interest of their nations which is a vector of development. Sub-Saharan Africa is also reputed for the greatness of its oil reserves which is found in many parts of West Africa.

2) Petroleum products

Petroleum is a strategic product by excellence, it is the most important source of energy and it is at the base of many manufactured goods which are: fuel, solvents, gasoil, liquefied gas (propane and butane), lubricant etc. In addition, petroleum provide too a variety of raw materials for chemical industry like petrochemistry from which comes 90% of products that surrounds us which are: medicine, plastics and others. Michel Kounou defines petroleum as being a natural resource lying which gains an active value, we decide to extract it from the depth of the earth or waters (Kounou, 2006: 27).

In fact, the major tendency in international energy geopolitics which pushes external states and their companies to intervene in sub-Sahara Africa comes from the increase in world demands. But who could believe this bouncing back of Africa through its resources? Regarding the actual expectation and future ones of industrialized powers in relation to petroleum in sub-Sahara Africa in general and the Gulf of Guinea in particular, we will be right to question the validity of the analyses which at the beginning of the 1990 which supported the idea that Africa had lost its strategic interest for great powers (Jeune Afrique Economie, 1999: 17) with the end of the cold war. Hereupon, as such we are witnessing the strategic redeployment of western powers in the continent. It is notably the case with the USA which after the September 2001 events adopted a more prudent relation with its energy partners like those in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia in order to reconsider its energy policies. Hereof, their new policies finds solutions in Africa and particularly in the gulf of guinea. So this redeployment of great industrial powers in Africa is no more based on the model that was the case during the cold war. The new Franco-American dynamics in Africa (Pondi, 2000: 49-54) symbolizes the orientation taken by this redeployment just like the entry into scene of China.

Sub-Sahara Africa in general and the region of the Gulf of Guinea⁴⁹ in particular are presently the zones considered as richest in petroleum with off share zones where the cost of exploitation is relatively low due to the proximity with the coast permitting the exploiters to

⁴⁸ Report of the l'ITIE (Extractive Industries for Transparency Initiative). International standard for companies to publish how much they pay and governments to disclose their revenues. In this report, it is clearly indicated that the missing sum amounts to 573.804.1529 CFA (Franc of the French Colonies of Africa), this sum which should be paid by the mining companies of the Central African Republic State has been diverted.

⁴⁹ This zone refers to the zone from the Niger Delta to the Congo Basin.

more without supplementary transport fair their products from Africa. Besides, Sub-Sahara Africa accounts for 68% (<http://www.ceri-sciencespo.com>) of the production of petroleum in Africa and many exploiters rush for exploitation. In effect, this part of Africa is covered by 154 oil wells situated in a sedimentary basin (Tedom, 2008). In fact, sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions that attract particular attention today. This interest is as a result of a series of discoveries of petroleum fields in the Gulf of Guinea. More than that, at the end of the 1990s the Gulf of Guinea became one of the pivot regions in the game of petroleum geopolitics of the start of this 21st century.

Africa was declared as have one of the greatest petroleum reserves in the world as demonstrated by 2001⁵⁰ statistics which place Africa in the third place. The reserves of Africa are centralized in two précised zones: North Africa with countries such as Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and the Gulf of Guinea with Nigeria, Angola, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Cameroon to name but a few. In 2003 the reserves of these two groups of countries were evaluated at 77 billion barrels. 42 billion barrels for North Africa and 34 billion barrels for sub-Saharan Africa (Favennec and Copinschi, 2003, cited by Kounou : 33). Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly the Gulf of Guinea is one of the rare regions in the world still having vast reserves of light grade oil.

However, between 2006 and 2008 the world consumption of petroleum increased from 76 million barrels to 86 million barrels per day. In parallel, prices increased to a record high of 147 US dollars a barrels in 2008 (Meierding, 2022 :2). This what explains the rush of western countries with the objective of creating and safeguarding goods relations with oil producing countries in sub-Saharan Africa. If it is true the Africa in general and sub-Saharan Africa in particular has many petroleum resources, it is not less true that beyond of its participation in the development of this zone, it is source of conflict which can attain disturbing proportions. This is what Michel Kounou seems to reveal concerning the zone around the Gulf of Guinea when attests that:

«The dramatic political repercussions of the exploitation of petroleum in the gulf of guinea is the orchestration of civil wars which are devastating. In this perspective, the Biafran war and that two bloody civil wars in Congo Brazzaville just like the war in Chad, in Angola and Sudan, are grievous historical fact pertinent permitting the establishment of a correlation of phenomenons of petroleum exploitation and the militarization to the society, permanent degradation of social factors and political fragility, in sub-Sahara Africa» (Kounou: 123).

Such a situation can be favored by the absence of a democratic management of resources (petroleum) by the African political elites which only care about the egoistic interest and especially their stay in power. It can also be linked it the fact of collusion of interest which exist between political leaders in Africa and multi-national petroleum firms with strategic objectives which can intervene in the local management of questions of petroleum (Tchetchoua Tchokonte, 2010: 4).

In summary, with a production of 4 million barrels per day of which the essential comes from the Gulf of Guinea, sub-Saharan Africa has a production capacity of 6% of world production (Ibid: 5). These numerous riches of the subsoil or soil of Africa in general and sub-Sahara Africa in particular has given Africa a new face and new consideration and an impact in the relations between Africa and the external world in various plans.

C) The influence of these factors between Sub-Sahara Africa and the external world

Africa presents a less splendid image in the international community. This affirmation stems from the weak role that Africa plays in the international community like UN (United

⁵⁰ The near-middle East with 66,4% of world crude oil reserves, South America with 9,2%, Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa with 7,2%, Eastern Europe with 5,7%, North America and Mexico with 5,3%, the Far East with 4,2% and Western Europe with 1,6%.

Nation), IMF (International Monetary Fund), WB (World Bank) of its absence in international conferences that treat great contemporary problems, or still in information of media an action imprecise entity. Of which owing to its diversity (54 states) possessing enormous natural resources and a population estimated at 1 billion, one would be expecting a great representation. Despite all these potentials Africa is still at the margin of the international community. This can be observing in the institutions of the international community like the UN where the African continent has a good representation in the general assembly without influence. In fact while studying the various decisions issued by the Security Council or the general assembly, one notices that very few are initiated by Africans. It is the same with the other international institutions of the international community like the world bank, IMF which are institutions aiming to preserve a certain ideology by the emission of decision or action for all countries of the world.

However there exist in the continent certain entity which from their new status in the world occupy more and more important positions in the international community. We can talk here of south Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Angola which due to their structured national potentials and their major role in the continent such as initiators of development programs in the continent NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) are considered as dynamic actors in the international community. They are invited to participate in big international economic fora, to give their position on political problems of the times such as the place given to South Africa in the G20 conference held in 2009 at Pittsburg on the international financial crisis. The conjunction of all these factors has repercussions on relation between Africa and the rest of the world. It is materialized by the importance of the cooperation which is manifested through public aid for development, exchanges and sustainable development to name just these. In fact if cooperation between Africa south of Sahara and the world is particularly important, it is marked by some hidden agenda which hides the real intentions of western countries which weakens African countries. This is manifested by the control of political regimes in Africa by western powers.

Conclusion

If conflict is found at the center of international relations, the dialectic of peace and war can be considered as a permanent stake in international relations. After the cold war, relations between states are entering a new period of turbulence and impetuosity. Ethnic and tribal antagonism breakout in many regions. These conflicts reveal the artificial and complex nature of international relations. The ethnocentric and tribal dimensions of post-cold war conflict exposes the inconsistency in the education of relations between states in two different worlds with incompatible interests: The club of developed countries and those that are less developed. It is the period of the rush for interest and the quest for power designing *stricto-sensu* new causes of conflicts: The quest for natural resources, factor generating power has as consequences, the conflicts in gray zones and the resurgence of new actors in the international scene. The problematic of gray zones at the center of the management of states reveals a certain difficulty. This management creates problems as gray zones find themselves in situation of unending conflicts. As a matter of fact, the inability to perform states regalia duties in most sub-Sahara African countries is at the origin of instability in gray zones. Given that, one of the characteristics of gray zone is the natural resources it has, states have to be vigilant against threats be they at the borders or internal threats. Many regions have become gray zones in Africa south of Sahara like Bakassi between Cameroon and Nigeria, the Island of Mbanié between Gabon and Guinea, the presence of terrorist groups in countries such as Mali, Nigeria, or Cameroon taking the control of vast territories at the detriment of the above mentioned states, giving rise to bloody conflicts between stats and sometime between states and terrorist groups like Boko haram. According to political scientist, geopolitical factor are vectors of conflicts. Also edifying is the geo-economics factor which brings out the unavoidable character of conflict. An so it was necessary to put in evidence the asserts and

riches of the subsoil and soil of Africa marked by the preponderance of oil notably the discovery of oil wells in the Gulf of Guinea. Given the fact that the economic health of a country is used to determine its power, great powers of the world have turned to Africa to ensure their security in terms of energy. Not without negative consequences on Africa, this geostrategical race on Africa's natural resources and that Sub-Sahara Africa in particular revealed to be a factor of division and conflict of all type which are at the origin of gray zones.

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SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON MENTAL HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY

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Abstract: *As they age, older people face significant health challenges influenced by both external factors such as social and environmental elements, and internal factors such as biological decline. Focusing on the mental health of the elderly, we see that disorders such as anxiety, depression and insomnia can occur at this stage, with a significant impact on the quality of life. We also bring in attention some of the social influences on the mentioned illnesses, such as social isolation, widowhood, inability to meet with peers or death of friends and neighbours. These challenges require a personalised and careful approach to the care of the elderly, bearing in mind that the elderly are exposed to a wide range of health problems and risks.*

Keywords: elderly, social influences, anxiety, depression, suicide, insomnia, dementia.

1. Introduction

Ageing is a process manifested by a gradual decline in molecular, cellular, tissue and body functionality. As individuals advance in age, they become more vulnerable to disorders and are more likely to develop disease, which increases the risk of mortality (Booth and Brunet, 2016).

The global population is ageing rapidly. Today, the older segment of the population, i.e., people age 65 and over, accounts for 7% or more of the total population in many regions of the world - with the notable exceptions of Africa and parts of Asia, as well as Latin America and the Caribbean. Projections indicate that by 2050, only 33 countries will have a proportion of older people below 7% of the total population, which is a significant decrease from 115 countries in this situation in 2015, show He, Goodkind and Kowal, (2016).

As a senior, maintaining an active social life can bring a multitude of benefits to mental health. Engaging actively in social and mental activities represents an affordable and low-risk approach to preventing anxiety, depression, suicide, insomnia or even dementia.

2. Understanding ageing

Old age comes with many significant changes in the way a person perceives themselves and the world around them. These changes affect working life, relationships with family and friends. Some of these changes occur within a specific time frame and require immediate adaptation (Sion, 2003: 228-231).

Nowadays, people in the transition to old age are generally in a better psycho-affective state, enjoy better health and have more financial stability than previous generations. They tend to be more like middle-aged adults than older adults. For example, most people aged 65 to 75 enjoy similar health to middle-aged adults. Although some abilities may obviously be impaired, they are still able to function well (Sion, 2003: 228-231).

To investigate the causal relationship between social networks and health status, various explanations have been proposed. Rennemark and Hagberg (1999) found that there are two types of links between social factors and health status. First, social aspects of an individual's environment, such as social class, number of friends and the lifestyle associated with these aspects, were found to have a direct impact on health and well-being. Second, social functions, such as the presence of a close friend and the feeling of being valued, act as protective mechanisms against psychological stress, thus contributing to the promotion of health and well-being. The aforementioned authors argue that it can be assumed that people

with healthy social structures and adequate social functions perceive, report and, in fact, exhibit physiological reasons for less severe symptoms of health conditions.

3. Social factors influencing mental problems in the elderly

Older people often find themselves with smaller social networks as their friends are likely to disappear over time and their children become more independent and, for various reasons, move to other places (such as for education, jobs or to live with their partners), and some of the people with whom they previously had contact may have died (Levula et al., 2015).

It is clear that poor mental health is correlated with both social isolation and subjective aspects such as perceived social support or feelings of loneliness, aspects that have attracted increasing interest from researchers in recent decades (Wang et al., 2018). Social isolation refers to the absence of social relationships, while loneliness refers to the perception of social isolation, not social isolation per se. In older adults, both social isolation and loneliness have been shown to negatively impact a range of health-related aspects.

Although the association between social networking and depression is well recognized (Santini et al., 2015), it has not yet been fully established whether loneliness causes depression or depression contributes to feelings of loneliness, or whether both scenarios may be present, with contrasting results in the literature. The relationship between anxiety and social factors has been less studied than that with depression, but researchers have explored both directions of this relationship: anxiety disorders can affect social support, contacts with extended family, and the quality of neighbourhood relationships, and social difficulties experienced by patients with depression or anxiety can predict a diagnosis of depression or anxiety, notes Domènech-Abella et al., 2019.

4. Mental health problems of the elderly

4.1. Anxiety

Zhao et al., (2022) consulted a series of studies from around the world and discovered that anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern in the elderly, impacting social functioning, overall quality of life, and life satisfaction, and potentially leading to suicide. Recognized as a crucial coping mechanism for anxiety, perceived social support refers to the assistance an individual perceives from their social network. A study conducted in Italy, authors note, revealed that perceived emotional support was negatively associated with anxiety symptoms in older outpatients. Additionally, factors such as gender and social support played influential roles in anxiety levels. Protective effects of social support were identified, mitigating anxiety in older adults, while elderly Arab women reported higher anxiety levels compared to men (Zhao et al., 2022).

Although most older adults with generalized anxiety disorder report onset in childhood or adolescence, between 30 and 40% report onset later in life, suggesting that late-onset anxiety is not a rare phenomenon (Le Roux, Gatz and Wetherell, 2005). The same is true for panic disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder that first appear later in life, Woods and Clare, 2008 (p. 104-108) extract from the literature. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is found to be common in older adults. It is an anxiety disorder characterized by a traumatic event that is experienced or relived even long after its initial occurrence. This, in turn, leads to avoidance of certain stimuli and changes in normal reactivity (such as a narrow range of affect) and lack of future perspective. Although most cases of generalised anxiety disorder seem to start early in life, some older adults do not report such a history before their current anxiety problems. Those older adults with generalized anxiety disorder who report an early onset of anxiety, argue Woods and Clare, 2008 (p. 104-108), tend to have more severe anxiety and are more likely to additionally have depressive symptoms.

4.2. Depression

Social isolation is a significant risk factor for functional difficulties in older individuals, leading to feelings of emptiness and depression when important relationships are lost. Singh and Misra (2009) observe that positive relationships offer a sense of control and independence, while the absence of relationships can result in isolation and depression. The distinction between obligatory family relationships and voluntary friendships underscores the importance of perceived internal control over social interactions in alleviating loneliness. As individuals age, forming new friendships becomes more challenging, but those with greater resources maintain social "capital" that facilitates the pursuit of new relationships and social involvement.

Patients suffering from depression at the end of life have a variety of clinical features and history, as well as concurrent medical conditions. Compared to older adults who experience a depressive episode in their youth, those with onset of depression later in life are at greater risk for neurological abnormalities. These can include obvious deficits on neuropsychological tests and age-related changes in the brain that go beyond normal limits. Furthermore, these patients are at increased risk of developing dementia in later life. In older adults with depression, low mood may not be as common as in younger adults with the same condition. Instead, irritability, anxiety and somatic symptoms may be more present. It is also important to note that psychosocial stressors, such as the loss of a loved one, can trigger a depressive episode in older adults. However, it is essential to distinguish between these transient reactions to major life events and a diagnosis of depression, according to Taylor's (2014) observations.

In addition to its association with other health problems, depression can predict further cognitive impairment and even dementia. This finding opens a debate as to whether depression might be a direct risk factor that can be treated or should be considered more as an early manifestation of dementia. The results of a meta-analysis suggested that there is reason to view depression as a risk factor for the later development of dementia. Several subsequent studies have confirmed this hypothesis. Depression appears to be a strong predictor of cognitive decline, with the ability to consistently predict a decline in global cognitive functioning and information processing speed, regardless of the relevant factors that might influence it, according to van den Kommer et al. (2013).

4.3. Suicide

It appears that the elderly have a higher suicide rate than young people. Although there are far more suicide attempts in teenagers and young adults. Approximately 2 to 4 seniors who attempt suicide succeed (Brooks, Burrss, and Mukherjee, 2018). This statistic may be explained, in part, by the increased social isolation associated with older age, making no one available to detect or prevent such actions. Another important factor in "successful suicide" among the elderly could be their frailty, as they are less able to tolerate violent trauma caused by self-harm. Depression and social isolation are consistent and independent risk factors for suicidal behaviour, the authors also argue. A crucial risk factor is untreated depression, which often goes unrecognised. Studies indicate that family members and friends can accurately identify these risks. highlight Brooks, Burrss and Mukherjee (2018).

Apart from the supportive roles of family and friends, various other social risk factors contribute to suicide among older individuals. These factors include social isolation, neglect, absence of religious affiliation, social conflict, economic constraints, and depressive states, claims Lyndon et al (2021). The lack of religious affiliation has frequently been linked to elevated suicide rates, not solely because religion offers a sense of purpose and hope, but also because the belief systems and spirituality are presumed to serve as coping mechanisms.

In many respects, older people perceived that their lives had come to an end. They were facing the loss of aspects of life that made it valuable in their eyes. The impact of illness, functional decline and, in some cases, tensions within the family made life unbearable. The

sense of loss of autonomy and freedom of action negatively affected their self-esteem and they felt they were losing themselves. They had a realistic perception of the future: they expected further functional decline. However, their attitude towards approaching death was one of acceptance, and many of them had expressed a wish to die for some time already, according to Kjølseth et al., 2010.

4.4. Insomnia

Kamel et al. (2006) point out that sleep disorders can negatively affect health-related quality of life, increasing the risk of accidents, sickness, and chronic fatigue. Poor sleep quality is associated with memory problems, reduced concentration, and decreased performance in psychomotor activities. Sleep disturbance is also associated with a higher risk of falls, cognitive decline, and increased mortality.

Insomnia, if left untreated, can lead to significant morbidity rates. Evidence suggests that the greatest risk is in mental illness, where older people with insomnia have a 23% higher risk of developing symptoms of depression. Several studies have shown a link between insomnia and increased risk of depression in older patients. Patel et al (2018) found in a meta-analysis that insomnia was associated with heart disease, with risk rates ranging from 1.47 to 3.90 after adjusting for age and other cardiovascular risk factors. Insomnia and sleep loss were also linked to high blood pressure, myocardial infarction, and possibly stroke.

Due to the prevalence of insomnia in the elderly population and the availability of effective treatments, screening for sleep disorders in the elderly is crucial. Patients need to be educated about the normal changes in sleep related to ageing and be made aware that sleep problems are not inevitable with advancing age. Comprehensive evaluation for insomnia includes a detailed medical history, medication review, a thorough physical examination and appropriate blood tests. In some cases, referral to a sleep disorder specialist may be necessary, as suggested by Kamel et al. (2006).

Jensen et al., (1998) note that the intensity of insomnia showed a correlation with past experiences of loneliness or the anticipation of future loneliness. Research they consulted indicates that maintaining social rhythm stability is crucial for sleep in the context of late-life spousal bereavement. In individuals aged 75 and over, the data revealed a higher prevalence of sleep-related symptoms in socially disadvantaged groups, underscoring the substantial impact of social factors on the quality of sleep among the elderly.

4.5. Dementia

Stuart-Hamilton (2000: 163-186) considers dementia to be a progressive loss of memory, intellectual and language skills, typically accompanied by radical changes in personality and sometimes motor skills. Symptoms vary significantly between patients, but in general the different forms of dementia can be distinguished by their developmental patterns. Several diseases can be mistaken for dementia because of a superficial similarity of symptoms, but they can usually be easily identified. On a physical level, dementias often differ in their patterns and type of atrophy, but the correlation between lesions and psychological symptoms is far from certain. Nearly all intellectual functions deteriorate in dementia (especially Alzheimer's disease, which has been most studied). Although there are some interesting qualitative differences in functioning, it should be noted that these are usually only seen in patients in the early stages of the disease - as the disease progresses, patients usually no longer have sufficient psychological abilities to understand or perform the tasks presented to them. It must also be remembered that in dementia, like many other illnesses, it is not only the patient who suffers, but the illness can also be a great source of stress and burden to their carers (Stuart-Hamilton, 2000: 163-186).

The severity of the symptoms of dementia can lead to an exaggerated view of its prevalence (Stuart-Hamilton, 2000: 163-186). Thus, it is important to remember that only 5-6% of all older people will develop symptoms of dementia and many will have only a mild

form of dementia in later life. It is also inaccurate to perceive dementia as exclusively a disease of old age, as if it were an inevitable consequence of ageing. As noted, all forms of dementia can begin before the onset of old age and some, in fact, are rarely seen after the age of 65. Moreover, the psychological performance of patients with dementia is qualitatively different from that of older people without dementia, demonstrating that dementia is not a natural extension of the ageing process. Stuart-Hamilton, 2000: 163-186, notes that it has been suggested in the literature that because very early-stage dementia is difficult to distinguish from ageing without dementia, there is a continuum. This is plausible, but it can equally be argued that at the onset of many diseases, a patient still shares many of the characteristics of a healthy person. However, this does not preclude the existence of a distinct health condition.

Matsuoka et al., (2011) observe that occurrence of cognitive decline showed a significant association with social disengagement and also individuals engaging in a high level of leisure activities, particularly those that involve intellectual factors, experience a reduced risk of dementia.

5. Conclusions and openings

Older people face many changes in their lives, and it has been shown that some respond differently to these changes than others (Butler and Ciarrochi, 2007). As the years go by, chronic diseases become more and more present in the lives of older people. These conditions impact not only on the body, but also on psychological well-being and social relationships. Chronic diseases can limit an individual's mobility and independence, changing the way they perceive life, relationships with others and their own identity. Sometimes these changes can develop into sadness, but they can also trigger conditions such as depression, anxiety, anger, sleep problems and substance abuse (Morewitz and Goldstein, 2007).

So, we can already see that the future of ageing faces significant challenges as the world's population ages rapidly. It is therefore necessary to focus on developing and implementing innovative programmes and services to address these issues, as it was previously proved that the social life of elderly has a significant impact on their mental health. Technology and telemedicine could play an important role in providing access to mental health care for the elderly, especially in remote or resource-limited communities. It is also crucial to continue research into the mental health of the elderly to better understand risk factors and develop more effective prevention and treatment methods. Collaboration between communities, health professionals, families and older people is essential to create a supportive and encouraging environment for those facing such problems.

In conclusion, ageing brings with it complex challenges, but with collective efforts, education, and innovation, we can ensure that older people get the care and support they need to have a better quality of life.

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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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DISABILITY IN ROMANIA AT THE CONFLUENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

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Abstract: *Disability has accompanied society in all historical periods. The disability approach should be carried out in a multidisciplinary context with medico-social implications. Although there is still a tendency to treat disability and handicap as purely medical conditions, these preconceptions must be overcome all the more since activists campaigning for the rights of people with disabilities have brought arguments to support the importance of approaching disability using a social model. The article aims at highlighting the current implications of disability reflected in the social level of our country, taking into account the fact that in recent years the relationship between disability, poverty and social exclusion is increasingly highlighted. The current trend of the phenomenon both at European and national level is on an upward slope of new recorded cases of disability, for which social protection measures are requested. From a social, educational and professional point of view, Romania currently does not have a strategy to encourage employers to integrate disabled people into work. The only forms of support for many disabled people remain social benefits in the form of allowances under Law 448 of 2006.*

Keywords: disability, social protection, exclusion, inclusion

1. Conceptual boundaries, theories and models used in the definition of disability

Many of the historical accounts regarding disability did not have as a starting point the conception of the person affected by the disability being approached from the perspective of the expert who ends up treating the disabled persons or their condition and who ends up being perceived as the primary source of the disability (Bredberg, 1999: 190). Linton in 1998 presents disability as embedded in an interdisciplinary field based on a socio-political analysis of disability. Approaching disability as a social construct rather than as an individual characteristic can bring an influence on the perception of specialists involved in special education, social reintegration or assisted vocational training (The American Historical Review, 2003: 765). On the other hand, a purely medical approach to disability makes us refer to the biomedical model that approaches disability as a problem that science and medicine can and must fix, thereby normalizing disabled people. In more and more countries around the world, the principle of normalization comes to dominate political power and the resulting activities in the care of people with disabilities (Moser, 2000). In the context of these people's rehabilitation we come to reconsider the prerequisites for the social inclusion of people with disabilities. Activists for the rights of people with disabilities sought to replace or at least complement the biomedical model of disability with a social model (Diedrich, 2005: 653-654). The medical model focuses on individual pathology and tries to find ways to prevent, cure, or, in the absence of the latter, care for people with disabilities. Policy makers tend to rely on medical definitions of disability to assess the prevalence of disability or to provide treatment and support services that promote social integration. In a broader sense of the international definition of disability, we should take into account the International Classification of Impairments, Disability, and Handicaps (ICIDH), which complements the international classifications of the World Health Organization. Thus, disability is defined as any limitation or lack of ability to carry out an activity within a framework considered normal for a human

being (Marks, 1997: 86-87). However, from the perspective of sociological systems theory, disability as a phenomenon can only be analysed in relation with the social environment, remarking that individuals with disabilities are part of the environment. Consequently the individual becomes part of a system through the specific codification of that system that attributes a certain meaning to the condition of individuals in relation to their state of health and illness, work ability or incapacity (Michailakis, 2003: 213-214). From a legal or administrative point of view, disability can be viewed through the prism of the distribution of welfare and benefits to people with disabilities. Legislation is used to separate people who are or are not eligible to receive support from the state, often containing definitions of what is considered to be a handicap (or 'sufficiently' invalid) in relation to a particular benefit. Beyond the purely biological or legislative aspects there is also the perspective of subjective disability through which *a person perceives himself or herself as having a handicap*. Therefore, according to this situation, the inclusion in the category of "persons with disabilities" becomes voluntary. Unlike other approaches to disability, using a subjective definition result in a sample of people who are subjectively self-labelled as having a disability (Grönvik, 2009: 2-3). The definitions of 'impairment', 'disability', 'chronic illness', 'disorder' are constantly changing, particularly in the manner they relate to what is understood to be disabling. Armstrong, maintaining a critical position, notes that the emergence of concepts such as "chronic disease" come to be related to the medical pathologizing of aging. This may indicate an increasing emphasis on how patterns are understood in the biomedical sciences, rather than based on collective experiences of disability in an austere way (Berghs, 2016).

2. Social inclusion of disabled people

At first glance, legislation in the European Union and the United States promotes equality through anti-discrimination laws, which have often been called "equality laws". In a general context of inappropriate behaviour towards another person for reasons related to race, sexual orientation or social vulnerability, these are just some of the situations mentioned in anti-discrimination laws. Deviations from the idea of equality are justified by direct reference to the distribution of resources or opportunities that are equal for all people. For instance, for equal opportunities, there is more and more talk about removing barriers within public utility institutions (Collins, 2003). More than 50 years ago, the anthropologist and sociologist David Pocock described the processes of social inclusion and exclusion as specific features of all social hierarchies. Pocock guides the discussion of inclusion and exclusion in his effort to define what might be called "social" by the social positioning of groups in a hierarchically structured society. Such a social ontology was described by Sibley in 1995 as a landscape of exclusion through social, economic and political power that invariably results in forms of oppression and exploitation (Allman, 2013: 2). Atkinson in 1998 also pointed out that exclusion can be a "property of a group of individuals rather than of individuals, and therefore can manifest itself at the community level. Social exclusion becomes multidimensional and reflects a combination of inter-related factors (Saunders, 2003). In contrast to what the concept of inclusion should represent, social exclusion at the European level was first used by René Lenoir, the French Secretary of State for Social Action in the Government of Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, at the end of 1974 who described it as follows: "someone is unfit and marginalized due to physical or mental causes, due to behaviour, not being prepared to meet their needs or requiring constant care either by their own decision or by the community's". Social exclusion is a multidimensional phenomenon with a significant negative impact on various fields such as: social protection, the labour market, education, financial services, justice, health, public administration, culture, transport, information and communication. It also appears as a result of deficiencies and failures in the systems and structures of the family, community and society as a whole (Birău, 2019: 3).

As the degree of disability increases in society, the need to understand the concept of social inclusion becomes increasingly important. For example, in recent years, the relationship

between disability and poverty has been highlighted more and more often. For these reasons, there is a tendency to change the way of thinking about the definition of disability, moving from the traditional medical model to a social model that can channel all the necessary efforts for a better integration of people with disabilities into society (World Health Organization, 1999).

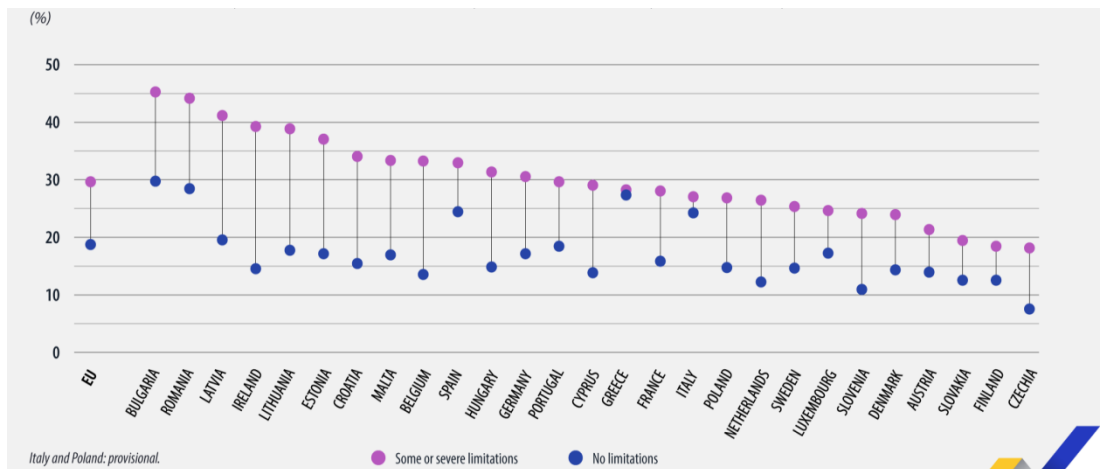
3. Research methodology, data analysis and interpretation

The research methods used in this survey were based on the comparative analysis of statistical data, thus being a descriptive analysis. In order to highlight the phenomenon of disability in Romania, we took into account the analysis parameters already used by Eurostat at the European level and the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPDPD) within the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity in Romania, along with the legislation in the field. These statistical and legislative parameters at the level of our country are centralized by ANPDPD. The purpose of the study is to highlight the current trends of disability as a phenomenon in Romania. All states must be able to guarantee the non-discriminatory protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. Disabled persons should be given equal recognition before the law to exercise all their fundamental rights, such as the right to work, marry, found a family or vote, and thus make decisions in all aspects of their lives. Equal recognition before the law is necessary to ensure that the decisions of any person produce legal effects (ANPDPD, 2021: 64).

4. Disability in Romania and Europe

A significant number of people in the European Union are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, and people with disabilities are at a much higher risk of poverty. At the end of 2021, according to Eurostat data, 21.7 % of the European Union population was exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion. People with disabilities end up being exposed to a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion given that 29.7 % of the EU population aged over 16 who currently have a disability continue to be at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 18.8% of people who do not have a degree of disability.

Figure 1: Share of people aged 16 years or over at risk of poverty or social exclusion

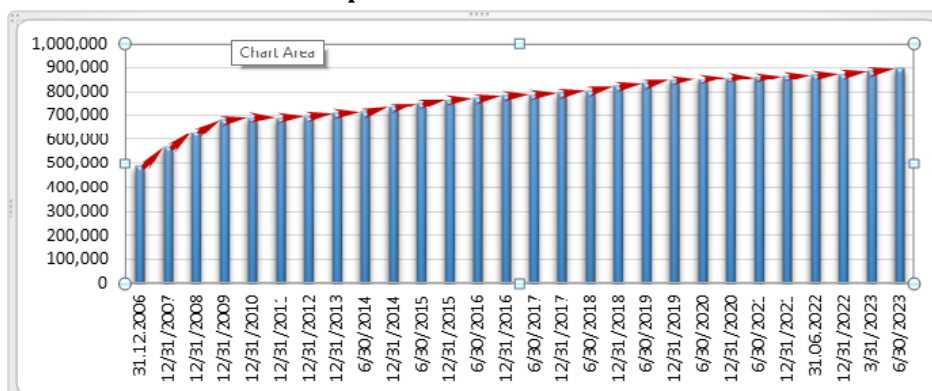


Source: Eurostat 2022 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20221214-2>

In the context of an increasing risk of social exclusion, reference is made to the social theory of disability, which becomes more and more relevant in explaining the impact of disability on the social inclusion process. For example, employers may be less interested in

integrating people with disabilities into the labour market and the labour supply may be reduced if the disabled person has a lower exercise capacity as a result of the disability. Thus people with disabilities, although they may be at the age where the career could be developed, end up not being able to reach their potential and consequently are exposed to lower levels of income and more likely to the risk of poverty (Gannon, 2007: 1427). Around 87 million people in the European Union (EU) have some form of disability. Many disabled people in Europe do not have the same chances for a social and professional life compared to other people in society. Schools or jobs, infrastructure, products, services and access to information often end up being inaccessible to this category of people. Not infrequently, disabled people experience discrimination, stigmatization and social marginalization in a context of vulnerability (European Commission). Taking into account these aspects, the development of social policies and the provision of services to promote the social inclusion of people with physical or mental disabilities are essential steps in achieving a more inclusive society (Grammenos, 2003). In Romania, according to the statistical data available at the level of the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ANPDPD), on June 30th 2023, 899,066 persons with disabilities were officially recorded. Among these, **98.20** % (882,911 people) are in the care of families or live independently in a non-institutionalized form, while **1.80** %, i.e. 16,155 people, are in public residential social assistance institutions for adults with disabilities coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity through the National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023).

Figure 2: Evolution of the recorded cases among people with disabilities in the period 2006-2023



Source: National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023

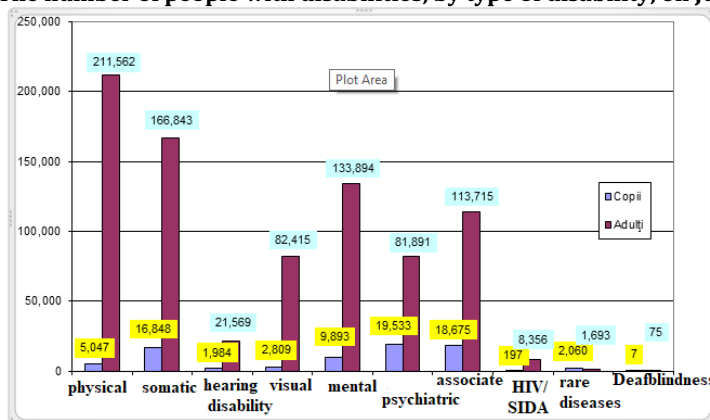
The numerical evolution of disabled persons registered in the 2006-2023 period has exhibited an upward trend of diagnosed and registered cases in these past 17 years. This is mainly due to the technological advancement in medical diagnosis of conditions that in the past ended up being difficult or almost impossible to diagnose. The upward trend of the number of disabled people in our country is also influenced by the expansion of criteria or medical conditions that can be classified as a disability. So that currently many more medical conditions can be evaluated by the evaluation commissions of disabled people being fit into a degree of disability.

However, even if we end up classifying one person as disabled, compared to other EU member states, Romania is not doing so well in pursuing the objectives of the European Disability Strategy (EDS) 2010-2020 or the targets regarding ensuring equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Moreover, official Romanian statistics face a serious challenge in realistically presenting the situation of disabled people in the Romanian society and on the

labour market, since, from a legal and financial point of view, the figures we have are those reported by The General County Directorates of Social Assistance and Child Protection centralized at the national level by the Ministry of Labor, but which refer exclusively to disabled persons for whom a disability certificate has been issued and which represent only a part of the total number of such persons (Baciu, Lazar, 2017: 6-7). The European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 identifies 8 directions of action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and Training, Social Protection, Health and External Action and aimed to create a Europe without barriers (International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus). So that at the level of the European Commission, in order for there to be a continuity of the old strategy, the Development of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the period 2021-2030 is required to address the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. This new strategy aims at making progress in all areas of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both at the EU and Member State level. The aim of the new strategy is to create the context of equal opportunities for people with disabilities, education, free movement, civic participation and non-discrimination (European Commission, 2021).

In our country, according to the ANPDPD data, approximately 4% of the people currently suffer from some form of disability. Romania has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2011. Legislation and regulations in the field require Romanian authorities that public places, means of transport and housing be accessible and adapted for persons with disabilities. In this direction, a series of measures have been promoted by the Romanian Government meant to facilitate the accessibility of disabled people by marking parking areas; installation of elevators and adapted toilets in public utility buildings; improving accessibility in housing, financial incentives, installation of special lighting for visually impaired people and provisions specially adapted for motor vehicles. As for the urban mobility, public transport and access to public utility buildings are better adapted in Bucharest or large cities, in international airports and big hotels. Even so, access to public transport is not adequately marked for the visually impaired and people with disabilities may face obstacles when trying to access public transport. Often where there are disabled equipped buses, a disabled person may find that the bus stops right in front of a parked car thus limiting access. Furthermore, platforms may be narrow, steep and slippery, especially in subway stations. Central public institutions and supermarkets tend to be slightly better equipped for disabled people (Disabilityinsider.com).

Figure 3 The number of people with disabilities, by type of disability, on June 30th 2023:



Source: National Authority for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2023

According to the ANPDP statistics in Romania, people with disabilities who are beneficiaries of a form of social protection, i.e. who have been issued a disability classification certificate, have a series of complex pathologies. So that almost half of the disabled people in Romania have a physical or somatic disability. In figure no. 3 we can observe a heterogeneous "map" of disability in Romania. After physical or somatic disabilities, mental illnesses or the accumulation of associated illnesses represent the next category from a numerical viewpoint. The integration of disabled people aims at all aspects of the social, economic, cultural and educational life of a community, without any form of discrimination. The goal of inclusion is to make sure that all people, regardless of their disabilities, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and the opportunity to live their lives in the most independent and fulfilling way possible. In our country, Law 448/2006 with all subsequent amendments regulates the protection of persons with disabilities. Access to education for people with disabilities according to Law 448/2006 aims at creating the necessary premises for a quality education favouring social inclusion. This involves the provision of inclusive education services that allow children with disabilities to attend schools and educational institutions alongside other students. For this, it is necessary to carry out individual assessments to identify the specific needs of each disabled person. This assessment can help determine both the resources and services needed to facilitate the learning process. Adaptation concerns both learning resources and teaching methods or didactic materials. These adaptations may include, for example, structural changes at the level of each school by using Braille textbooks, providing technical assistance or facilitating accessible learning environments. Unfortunately, the most difficult to adapt educational resources remain the human ones. The training of teachers becomes more than necessary so that they acquire the necessary competences for the differentiated approach of students with disabilities for their adaptation and integration in the classroom. In theory, this ideal framework creates the prerequisites for inclusive learning. In reality, children and young people with special educational needs (SEN / CES in Romanian) and with disabilities may no longer be able to attend classes in educational institutions, if they do not have specially trained teaching staff. The legislative proposal passed the Chamber of Deputies in May 2023 and reached the Senate, to be voted on. But organizations that defend the rights of these children do not agree with this and say that if it is adopted, they will organize protests (Focuspress, 2023). Despite the fact that all 27 member states of the European Union have ratified the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights, violence continues to affect the lives of millions of children throughout the European community. In this context, a report by the FRA (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights) identifies children with disabilities as being particularly vulnerable to abuse. Moreover, children and young people with disabilities often end up being subjected to different forms of "disability-specific" violence because they are related to the disability status of these children but also to the treatment or services they receive (Crețu, childhub.org).

The integration of children and young people with special educational needs in the regular schools has been a topic often addressed in special education in the last 25 years. More recently, however, the term "inclusion," which encompasses a range of assumptions about the purpose and meaning of schooling, has come to replace "integration" in the vocabulary of special education teachers. However, school integration comes to depend on how children are given a chance for education in the "least restrictive environment", and integration becomes a matter of "placement decisions" (Avramidis, 2000) . In this context, the "blame" is divided between various institutions and the schools end up freeing themselves from this burden.

Along with education, disabled persons' right to work is regulated in Romania by Law 448/2006. Thus, any person with a handicap should be able to benefit from a workplace adapted to disabilities or, as the case may be, integration into a protected unit for people with disabilities (National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection, Law 448/2006). In Europe, the concept of a protected unit is also known as a social enterprise for work integration (Equal

Access to the Labor Market, 2015). From the perspective of employers, although positive attitudes towards the principle of integrating people with disabilities into the labour market have been found, they are becoming reluctant to actually employ these people. Reasons given by employers in Romania include concern about lower productivity, need for closer supervision or regular absence due to medical problems (Angela, 2015).

The interaction between people with disabilities and companies is stipulated and regulated by legislative frameworks, well defined both by Law 448/2006 and by EU directives. From a legislative perspective, any person with disabilities but who is able to work should be included into the labour market of Romania by adapting the workplace (Angelescu, 2016). Despite all these efforts and the last decades of economic growth and development, the employment of disabled people has not been equally improved. On the contrary, the participation in the professional life of people with disabilities is decreasing compared to other social groups present on the labour market. In a study published as back as 2009 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) it was showed that the labour market integration of people with disabilities was low, and these people were exposed to the risks caused by poverty and lack of income. The labour market integration of employees with disabilities in Romania is much lower compared to other categories of workers in good health (Dănăciță and Cirnu, 2014). The main form of material support for more and more people with disabilities in Romania remains that of the social benefits in money offered by the Romanian state in the form of disability compensation or accompanying carer in case of severe disability.

Conclusions

Disability essentially refers to a condition that limits in some way a person's ability to perform certain activities or fully participate in society. The handicap may be physical, mental, intellectual or sensory in nature and can range in severity from mild to severe. It may be present since birth or may occur lately in life as a result of accidents, disease or other factors that are independent of the person's will. Romania continues to have an increasing trend of newly detected cases of disability. Educational integration remains a current challenge for Romania, which is not yet ready from a logistical, legislative and human point of view to offer an inclusive education in mainstream education to children and young people with disabilities. The lack of qualified staff in schools, high schools and universities remains an obstacle difficult to overcome in Romania's current context. People with physical or somatic disabilities represent approximately 40% of all disabled people in Romania. Faced with this scenario, quick solutions must be found to facilitate the access of these people to everything that means mobility and urban life. Urgent measures are required regarding the accessibility of people in wheelchairs to public utility buildings, public transport, medico-social assistance and leisure. Not infrequently, cases were reported in which certain health facilities did not have built-in access ramps for people in wheelchairs, so that the accompanying carers had to carry up the stairs the persons immobilized in wheelchairs. The absence of active measures to encourage the socio-professional inclusion of disabled people will lead over time to an increasing dependence on social benefits in money in the form of disability or accompaniment allowances, a fact that will put even greater pressure on the budgets for social insurance in Romania. Sanctioning all forms of discrimination against people with handicaps could reduce the phenomenon of discrimination often reported in the current context of our country.

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THE REDYNAMISATION OF THE RUSSO-AFRICAN RELATIONS: WHICH STAKES GEOPOLITQUES AND GEOSTRATEGIQUES FOR AFRICA IN XXIE CENTURY?

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Abstract: *The attractiveness of Africa today is undeniable. All areas and sectors of activity are coveted by all of its partners, as evidenced by the proliferation of international investments and the multiplication of diplomatic actions on the continent. Considered as a continent of all opportunities, Africa represents a new center of the world with regard to the diversity of the areas at stake: the economy, education, the environment, security and many others. Partnership relations between Africa and external powers are very old. But they will intensify at the end of the cold war from the 1990s. However, the situation seems to be balanced with the rise of Russia in Africa, which have long-standing relations. They have recently taken a new turn, with several bilateral initiatives and the rise of the BRICS multilateral forum where Russia is very active.*

Keywords: Russia, Africa, partner, diplomatic action, power

1. Introduction

The African continent arouses a great interest that today, one regularly intends to say by specialists as Anthony Mangeon who "Africa is the future of the world" (Mangeon, 2021). In spite of the recurring difficulties, the objective reasons of such a renewed interest for Africa in XXIe century are actually well-known. Since the middle of the Fifties until the brutal change of the national and foreign policies, associated the reforms undertaken by Mikhail Gorbatchev at the end of the Eighties, the Soviet Union was very active in the African continent. In its fight against the imperialism, the USSR really discovered Africa only tardily, and paradoxically at the moment of the decolonizations. Admittedly, it supported movements of release Marxists and anti-impérialistes, though enough mollement at that time. But, with the wind of the emancipation, the new independent States gradually will escape from now on the colonial supervision, while being able to diversify their foreign relations. Especially, they saw even arriving at the capacity of the often penetrated teams of culture Marxist-Leninist, moreover sometimes acquired in Russia.

Actually, the Russian presence in Africa did not resist weakening, then with the fall of the USSR, nor with the domination without division for a time of the Western world and the United States. However, after a long successive period of withdrawal to the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991 (Kozovoi, 2023), the Russians develop today a policy of return on the African continent (Arkhangelskaya, 2013). Undoubtedly, this renewed interest of Russia for Africa intervenes overall today, at the moment when the African States are activated to diversify their partnerships more, inter alia escaping dependency of China become impossible to circumvent on the continent, or with that of the traditional partners who are the Western countries. Jointly, one binds these last years the return somewhat accelerated of Russia on the African continent, particularly with the first crisis ukrainienne of 2014.

2. Birth of a tumultuous ideological relation between Moscow and Africa of 1950 to 2002

As of the years 1950, many programs of exchanges and formation began. The Soviet Union signs hundreds of agreements with the African countries. Approximately 25 000 Africans are trained in the universities and Soviet technical schools, in multiple fields, and thousands leave the military academies and political of the USSR. But the situation changes

with the turning of the years 1990, with the "fall" of the Soviet Union and other political and social changes. This new era is marked by the rupture of the diplomatic relations with the majority of the African countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union cuts practically all the bonds and puts an end to the ideological mission of the USSR for the propagation of socialism.

2.1. The engagement of post-war period of the Soviet ex-Union in Africa of 1950 to 1980

The engagement of post-war period of the Soviet ex-Union in Africa started in the middle of the years 1950 with the Conference of Bandung (1955) of the Asian and African countries non-aligned. The Soviet approach of "against-impérialisme" was the official ideology which emerged during second half of the years 1960 (Barratt, 1981). However, actually, the African policy of Moscow was a mixture of ideology and realpolitik which had been worked by the geopolitical competition of the USSR at the time of the cold war until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Matusevich, 2003). Russia and the majority of the African leaders shared a common vision of the anticolonialism, "modernization" and construction of the nation, stimulated in particular by the Russian interest for the resources and the markets of Africa. A remarkable example is the support of Nikita Khrouchtchev for the first Prime Minister of the democratic Republic of Congo independent (in the past Belgian Congo), Patrice Lumumba, who was assassinated by allies of the Occident because of leaning sound supposed for the "communist" ideologies.

Although Moscow considered African socialism, as propagated by Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Sékou Touré of Guinea (Conakry) and Modibo Keita in Mali, like a deviation malvenue of "true" Socialism Marxist-Leninist, it provided a help, a military support and an authorized capital, for example, grants for African students, studying in Russia (Kohnert, 2022: 2).

Immediately after the independence of the old African colonial States at the beginning of the years 1960, and the cold war, the students of almost all the African countries, that they are of socialist "or" capitalist "orientation", studied in the USSR. A major destination was the University Patrice Lumumba of Moscow, founded in 1960 to help the developing countries recently become independent. On the whole, 56 000 students of the ASS studied in this most significant university for the Arab and African students within the old socialist block (King, 1964: 139-143). When the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, it counted 47 312 graduates of the Arab countries and 43 500 more of the African countries, for the majority studying medicine or engineering (King, 1964: 139-143). Since 1979, the African students in Russia were more numerous than those which studied in the United Kingdom. However, the University of Lumumba was often considered by the Africans a discriminatory institution, even racist.

Thus, the African countries virtually exceeded socialist "and" capitalist "competitor blocks the" Westerners at various levels. After Perestroïka, the attractivity of the Russian universities for the African and Arab students strongly declined before being rectified gradually at the end of the years 1990 (Yengo and Saint-Martin, 2017: 226).

According to its policy of "against-impérialisme", the Kremlin was sufficiently opportunist to cooperate with a broad range of country, energy of more "the progressists" to more "the reactionaries". In West Africa, that included/understood for example beside Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Senegal also the Côte.d'ivoire and Nigeria, the second greater economy African, beside South Africa, where Moscow supported the ANC during the fight anti-apartheid (Legvold, 1970). The relations Nigerian-Soviet reached their apogee during the civil war Nigerian of 1967-1970 in Biafra (Matusevich, 2003).

2.2. Russian disengagement of the African continent of 1990 to 2002

If the decade 1990 is marked by a generalized retreat of the positions of Russia on the international scene, except notable for China, Africa is the area of the world where this

process is fastest and most marked. Since 1992, Moscow announces the closing of its diplomatic structures and arts centres of which it laid out hitherto on the continent. The majority of the offices of the news services ex-Soviet which were often used as cover to the KGB and with the GRU, are dismantled fault of financings and interest on behalf of the Center. Trade between Africa and Russia does not represent any more but less than 2% of the trade foreign of the country (Birgerson, Alexander, Kozhemiakin, Kanet, 1996: 154).

In the prolongation of the policy of Gorbatchev (Webber, 1992: 15), the Eltsine administration disengages Russia of Africa, synonymous with economic arrieration and ruinous geopolitical adventures for Moscow. The priority is from now on - according to the remarks of the Foreign Minister of the time, Andreï Kozyrev - "to join the community of the civilized States". Russia unable to maintain to its subsidies on the diets "customers" and Africa moves back in its priorities. The relations with certain African States are tightened at the end of the year 1991, when president, Boris Eltsine, stops any foreign help and requires the immediate refunding of the unpaid debts. With the economic revival in Russia, but also under the effect of the broadmindedness whose proof the new leaders make, the situation gradually will improve.

In any event, even if certain countries were inspired openly by the USSR in their economic and political management, "African socialism" was especially marked by nationalism, the panafricanism and of the strong capacities. It did not imply necessarily an international alignment on the sights of Moscow, if it is not for a hard core made up of Angola at the beginning, of Mozambique, of Ethiopia or then of Somalia. The Africans regretted for a long time that Russia does not grant practically any development aid, being satisfied to propose its support for the fights émancipatrices against colonialism. The economic failures of the nationalizations, the power of the Western economies, the abundance of their financial assistance and the attractivity of their political model contributed to the obliteration of the Russian influence.

3. Return of Russia in Africa under the sign of economic and sedentary pragmatism

It was necessary time so that post-sovietic Russia, whose power was restored, returns to Africa. But it is only into 2001 that one observes the first sign of a tangible interest of postsovietic Russia for Africa. In December, the former Prime Minister (1998-1999) and ex-minister of the Foreign Affairs (1996-1998) Evgueni Primakov, named by new president Vladimir Poutine with the head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Russia, carry out a round which leads it in Angola, in Namibia, in Tanzania and South Africa (Kalika, 2019: p.20). It will however be necessary still nearly five years so that the first Russian opening of this century occurs on the African continent.

3.1. New orientation of the African policy of Russia (2006 -2013)

The presidency of Dmitri Medvedev (2008-2012) confirms the renewed interest of Moscow for the African continent. The visits of president Poutine in South Africa and Morocco in 2006, then in Libya in 2008, marked the beginning of the great return. Dmitri Medvedev, widened the circle while visiting in 2009 Egypt, Angola, Nigeria and Namibia ("to catch up with" wasted time, he said). The voyages of the Foreign Ministers in the two directions multiplied. A meeting of the ministers and members of Parliament African were organized, without much success, in 2010 in Moscow. But this time, it was not any more question of ideology, if not to proclaim that the modes were taken as they were, and then one did not give lessons. The openings of embassies followed one another, and 40 Russian embassies are mobilized today in Africa to promote the economic interests of Moscow, to rejoin the votes with UNO and to allot purses or training courses. It was a question of opening the door at the large Russian firms in the mining areas or metallurgical, of selling weapons or cereals. Moreover, before even the Western sanctions related to the annexation of the Crimea, Russia

was déjà exporting cereals. The Russian firms thus started to survey the Continent. Apart from the already old presence of *Rusal* in Guinea-Conakry then in Nigeria, one saw appearing *the Renova* consortia in Namibia, South Africa and in Gabon for manganese, *Alrosa* for the research of diamonds in Angola and soon in RCA, *Nornikel* for gold in South Africa and Bostwana and soon undoubtedly in Mali, *Lukoil* for the exploitation of oil in Libya, Côte.d'ivoire and with Ghana, ARMZ for uranium in Tanzania.

But the Russian presence is not limited to the raw materials, it also appears by construction or the levelling of the railroads in Algeria or Libya (project signed at the time of the visit of Poutine in 2008 and put at evil by the Western intervention against Kadhafi), the sale of four nuclear engines in Egypt or the signature of civil cooperation agreements nuclear with a score of African States of which Nigeria, Sudan, Ethiopia, Rwanda. These contracts want to be the prelude to the sale of power stations by *Rosatom*, including "the small" power stations, whose Russia currently holds the monopoly.

When Vladimir Poutine takes again his districts in the Kremlin in May 2012, Russia thus reappeared in the African landscape, but its return still is limited geographically, economically and politically. It will change scale after 2013, with the favour of the historical reunion with Egypt. Carry of entry of the USSR to Africa and in the Middle East in the middle of the years 1950, then principal ally of Moscow in the Arab world, this country kept its distances with Moscow since the rupture of 1972 initiated by Sadate, even if contacts had been joined again at the end of the years 1990 via Evgueni Primakov. Thus, the bringing together Russo-Egyptian from now on will be articulated mainly around three major axes: sales of weapons, civil nuclear power and co-operation in regional files such as Libya and Syria.

As of November 2013, the Russian Ministers for Defense and Foreign Affairs, Sergueï Choïgou and Sergueï Lavrov, go to Cairo. On this occasion is finalized a first series of contracts of approximately 3 billion dollars (Delanoë, 2016: 38).

3.2. Hard repositioning of Russia the African continent through the renewal of partnerships (2014-2022)

Already sanctioned at the time of the annexation of the Crimea in 2014, Russia of Vladimir Poutine is, since the invasion of the Ukraine on February 24, 2022, confronted with an increasing insulation on behalf of the Western States, Europe and the United States at the head. Indeed, seven waves of measures adopted until up to now and aim at "weakening" the capacity of Moscow to finance the war and "to impose" economic and political costs on the Russian elite, according to the European Commission, which ensures that they "do not block" exports of foodstuffs and agricultural produce. The Western powers agreed on prohibition to import a long list of products in the energy sector (coal and oil), but also of many raw materials and other goods (iron, steel, wood, cement, gold, alcohols, etc). Besides the European Union imposes a prohibition to export advanced technologies (semiconductors, computers, etc), products of luxury, goods and technologies necessary to the refining of oil, energy, or for sea transport. Economic sanctions, without any doubt, aim at the financial system: ousting of certain Russian banks of the system of international exchange Swift, prohibition of public financing or investments in Russia. Also, some measurements touch more than 1200 personalities considered to be close to the Kremlin with a prohibition to enter the European Union their credits held in Europe remain cold.

In this context, coupled with the financial difficulties related to the pandemia of Covid-19. "With its natural resources abundant and close to Europe, its 54 votes with the General meeting of the United Nations [...], Africa are a gravitational arena for Russia within which it can pursue her goals at economic and political costs limited", estimated, in March 2022, the authors of a report/ratio of Tony Blair Institute for Global Exchange devoted to the Russian spheres of influence in Africa (Vittot, 2022: 3).

To mitigate the effects of the sanctions imposed following the annexation of the Crimea in 2014, Russia invests itself more and more in Africa. In Egypt for example, beyond

the Camp David agreements signed in 1979, Cairo received from Washington an annual help of 1,5 billion dollar, mainly to finance the acquisition of military equipment manufactured on the other side of the Atlantic, Russia benefits today from consecutive American disengagement Arab spring to approach president Al-Sissi-Sissi elected in 2014 and to sign a contract of armament of 3,5 billion dollars. In 2019, the two countries sign a contract, which envisages the delivery of Russian fighters Known-35 in Egypt. The United States then warns their Egyptian partner and agitates the threat of sanctions, with the title of the law *Caatsa*, which makes it possible to sanction any entity making deal with the Russian industry of the armament.

If North Africa (Algeria, Libya and Egypt in particular) constitutes well the entrance point of Russia on the continent, it is not today any more the only point of anchoring of Moscow in Africa. The study of the Russian presence in Central African Republic, in Madagascar, in Angola and in Sudan testifies to the evolution of the strategy of Russia in Africa. Since 2017, the stress is laid on the deepening of the sedentary co-operation on the one hand, by the signature of agreements of defense and the deployment of private military companies, and on the media influence on the other hand. This formula proves particularly gravitational for a certain number of African modes wishing to be maintained with the capacity (Vittot, 2022: 8). With the passing of years, Russia succeeded in being essential like a central actor on the continent, by offering in particular an assistance as regards safety less demanding than the Occident (human rights and governance). Moscow thus provided 28 % of the weapons to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa between 2008 and 2017, in front of China (24 %), the Ukraine (8,3 %) and the United States (7,1 %) (Sipri, 2019). It is interesting to stress that China as Russia do not hesitate to sell weapons with countries under embargo, like Sudan and South-Sudan, thus contributing to feed the African conflicts. A contrario, Moscow wished to join in 2008 the military operation of the European Union Chad and in Central African Republic (operation Eufor Tchad/RCA).

Russia seeks nevertheless to diversify the structure of its exchanges by privileging the sectors of high technology. It positions for example on the market of launchings of satellites, on behalf of Angola, in 2017, but also of Tunisia, since 2020. In the field of the civil nuclear power, *Rosatomb* multiplied the agreements with countries firstly-reaching on the installation of dies, for example in Zambia, in Sudan or Rwanda. Russia is also very active in the field of the medical co-operation, testifies the organization to it to vaccination campaigns against the Ebola virus or the export of treatments against Covid-19 (Vittot, 2022: 9).

3.2.1. Dedication of the Russian presence in Africa to the top of Sotchi in 2019

The objective of the first Russia-Africa top in Sotchi these October 23, and 24 2019 was to officially mark the return of Moscow on the African continent. With the program, plethora of African leaders, a very voluntarist speech of the Russian president and, especially, a beautiful occasion for Russia to expose one of the fields in which it excels: the armament.

This top was concluded by the proclamation from ambitious objectives (doubly of trade from here at 2024) and the signature from several bilateral treaties. The final declaration gives a report on "92 agreements, contracts and draft-agreements [...] of a total value of 1 400 billion roubles". In order to dissociate itself from China, marked to involve Africa in surendettement, Moscow proposes its policy of obliteration of the debt, inherited the Soviet time, and its will to found a balanced co-operation, respectful of the sovereignty of the African States. During five last years, Russia thus signed agreements with a score of the countries, most recent being those with Mali (June 2019), the Republic of Congo (May 2019) and Madagascar (October 2018). These agreements envisage the training of officers in Moscow, traditional lever of Russian influence in Africa, the delivery of military materials or the maintenance of equipment already in equipment, of the common exercises, the fight against terrorism and maritime piracy. These components vary according to the situation of the countries and their concerns.

If the opening of permanent military bases in Africa is not on the agenda, Russia starts again in March 2022 a basic project naval in Sudan, which would offer to him a strategic access to the Red Sea. This project, which was to make it possible to accommodate 300 men and to four warships, actually goes back to 2017 but it was suspended following the fall of Omar El-Béchir in 2019. The coup d'etat of General Al-Burhane in October 2021 and the return to the capacity of a military junta have rebattu the charts, recreating conditions favorable to a co-operation reinforced with Russia.

In addition to the militaro-sedentary shutter, the greatest success of Russia in Africa east to have improved perception of its role and its media and informational influence by the means of operations of misinformation. This policy of misinformation is based in particular on certain media of State like RT and *Sputnik*, which managed to be essential as sources on the significant audience in many countries. Their leading line insists on the absence of colonial past Russian in Africa and on a pragmatic co-operation without counterparts in terms of governance intern and democratization.

Russia, which carries out in Africa a "hybrid war" combining average conventional and not-conventional, is again regarded as an actor able to offer to his African partners an economic and sedentary co-operation. Moscow is today likely to represent "third a diplomatic way" between the Westerners - generally perceived like intrusive on the question of the human rights.

3.2.2. Deployment in Africa of the instruments of influence of long term

Whereas the concept even of *software power* causes sometimes skepticism in Moscow, Russia deploys in Africa of the instruments of influence of long term. One of the most visible demonstrations of this approach is the role played by certain media of State (RT, *Sputnik*) in languages Frenchwoman (Shaft horse, 2018), English, but also Portuguese, which are essential as sources on significant audience in many countries of the area. Russia is also very active in the field of the medical co-operation: the Russian ministry of Health and RUSAL thus organized a vaccination campaign against the Ebola virus in Guinea. The total assistance of Russia to fight against the epidemic is assembled to 60 million dollars. This subject was also discussed at the time of the visit of Mikhaïl Bogdanov in democratic Republic of Congo in December 2018. A few days earlier, Russia had delivered equipment to Zimbabwe to fight there against an epidemic of cholera.

The assistance of Moscow is generally brought within the framework of multilateral programs of WHO, the world UNICEF or the Funds of fight against the AIDS, tuberculosis and paludism (100 million dollars were poured by Russia with this last). Teaching and the formation represent another pillar of the Russian *software power* in Africa. In 2013, the number of African students according to a university course was estimated at approximately 8 000 (Arkhangelskaya, Shubin, 2013: 20). According to the deputy manager of the Rossotroudnitchestvo Agency in charge of the cultural and scientific radiation of Russia abroad, Alexandre Radkov, nearly 30 000 young Africans deposited candidates' files this year, the quota of free places offered by the Russian government being however limited to 1 819 (Koulikova, 2019: 6).

The sedentary aspect of the Russian policy in Africa is priority even dominating. According to the SIPRI, an independent international institute dedicated to research on the conflicts, the armaments, the control of the armaments and disarmament, Russia delivered, between 2000 and 2015, for 15 billion dollars of weapons in Africa (Korendiassov, 2017), of the figures which do not reflect the last Egyptian contracts nor those concluded recently with Equatorial Guinea for example. According to Dmitri Chougaiëv, director of the federal Service to the co-operation militaro-technique (FSVTS), the wallet of contracts of Rosoboron-export with the only countries of sub-Saharan Africa rose, in 2018, to 3 billion dollars. In addition to the ministry for Defense, another actor is particularly active in the Russo-African sedentary co-operation: Nikolai Patrouchev, the secretary of the Security Council national. It is by its

mediation that the Russian services of information discuss with their African counterparts, in particular in margin of its annual conference on the questions of safety to which it invites representatives of the information agencies of the whole world. It is the case, in May 2019, when one take place with Oufa, of the discussions with the head of the services namibiens, Philemon Malima, like with representatives of the information agencies of Burundi, of Tunisia, of Uganda, of Egypt and Congo.

4. Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian war on the relations between Russia and Africa

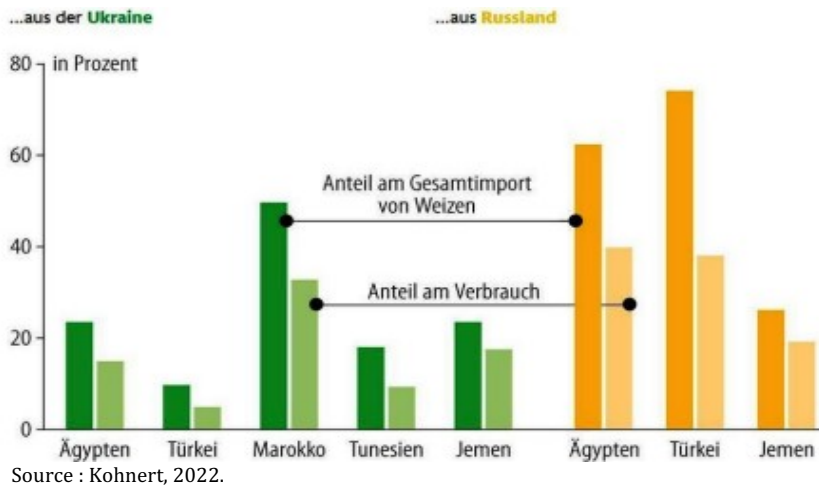
The Russian aggression counters the Ukraine which began on February 24, 2022, the greatest military attack against a European country since the Second World war, constituted a turning in the history of the Russo-African relations. The majority of the African countries are countries with low income which suffer more, in particular the poor Africans. The repercussions of this war still will increase the hunger and poverty (Kappel, 2022.). The rise in the prices of energy and the foodstuffs, the reduction of tourism and the potential difficulties of access to the international markets of the capital increase the vulnerability, in particular in the African countries which have a room for minimal political manoeuvre to counter these effects of the external shocks.

4.1. An alarming flight of the prices for food safety

This phenomenon inevitably touches all the economies, independently of their current relations with the markets Russian and Ukrainian. In the short run, the blaze of the prices is likely to be much more alarming than the real shortages of products of first need. The Russo-Ukrainian crisis represents a major risk for food safety and energetics in Africa. A prolonged conflict could still more put in danger corn exports towards the area and continue to make climb the prices. The annexation of the Crimea by Russia in 2014 had made leap the prices of corn of 25 % in two months, which lets predict extent of the impact to come within the framework from the current conflict.

The current conflict should not occult the fact that, already before the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia on February 24, 2022, the world prices of the foodstuffs reached historical tops, causing a two-digit inflation of the foaad prices: +60% for oils and +30% for cereals on average in 2021 compared to 2020 (FAO). These spectacular rises then had already a disproportionate impact on the households, in particular the urban households poorest. The world food prices were never also high. In March 2022, index FAO of the prices of the foodstuffs, which follow the monthly trend of the international prices of the foodstuffs most usually exchanged in the world, reached its higher level since its creation in 1990, at 159,3 points, that is to say more than 34% of more than its value one year before. Into Egypt, the deficit of exports ukrainiennes of corn results in imports of more than 17 % and the imports of other cereals would decrease by 19 %. South Africa would import 7 % of corn in less and more than 16 % of other cereals in less. The imports of other cereals are also weaker in Cameroun (-14 %), in Algeria and in Libya (-9,6 %). the corn imports would fall appreciably in Ethiopia (-9,6 %), in Kenya (-7,9 %), in Uganda (-7,1 %), in Morocco (-6,2 %) and Mozambique (-6 %) (Heidland, 2022).

Figure 1: Dependency of North Africa with respect to corn of Ukraine and Russia (share of the total corn imports and share in consumption in %)



Thereafter, the high prices of the energy, whose Russia is a significant exporter, also entrainé an increase in the cost of living and transport on the scale of the continent. According to the extent of the mechanisms of fixing of the prices of oil at the national level, the consequences are also made feel on the balances in the budget. On the ten countries most vulnerable to the rise in the price of oil, i.e. very dependent on the imports, eights are fragile States (Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Guinea, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda and Sudan). The price of the gas oil had already more than triplet in mid-March in Nigeria, first oil producer crude in Africa but very depend on the imports.

Also, when the Russian aggression began at the end of February 2022, of many African students in Ukraine tried to flee towards the European countries. However, they were maltreated by the forces of safety Ukrainians through racial shaping and by preventing them from going up on train to cross in the close countries.

4.2. Africa: a simple theatre of strategic confrontation enters the dominant powers?

In the Great play in prospect, Africa seems a marginal entity deprived of means necessary to affect the strategic decisions of the international system. It is as to fear as the African concerns of economic development and political stability are relegated to a second rank, so much the dominant powers would be more inclined to deal with their geopolitical surfaces.

In addition to the risk of marginalisation, Africa could become a theatre of confrontation between foreign powers in search of solidification of their alliances and extension of their influence. On this point, the war in Ukraine acts like an at the same time revealing and accelerating factor. Revealing in the direction where the competitions between the world powers in the African continent were already observed. Thus, the notable opening carried out by Russia in a certain number of African countries such as Libya, the Republic of Central Africa and Mali, and the return of its marine of war in the Mediterranean and Rouge, where the talks with Sudan for the construction of a naval base were very advanced, had irritated the Occident. Similar, the presence economic, financial and military Chinese in Africa is looked of an eye very skeptic by the Western powers (Machrouh, 2022: 6).

In this reconfiguration of the reports/ratios of force, it is not to exclude that the three powers would seek to increase their African ground competitions substantially. The stake would be at the same time to secure the votes of a rich continent of its 54 seats in the

international organizations, and to exert a kind of control on the raw materials African to guarantee their respective strategic autonomies. The "African tank" could be, as an example, requested by the Western pole to prevent Russia to use of its capacities of hydrocarbons and foodstuffs as a weapon, on the one hand, and to refuse, or at least to limit the access of China to the natural resources of Africa in the intention slowing down its rise to fulgurating power, on the other hand (Machrouh, 2022: 6).

Russia still does not have a "African policy" on the scale of the continent. Its principal economic interests and of safety remain largely concentrated in North Africa, in spite of the efforts, moreover rather coherent, aiming at developing its bonds in Southern Africa. Zone where it has old contacts, many and high level but which are long up to now in taking effect on the commercial level. The rise to power of the sedentary shutter, which goes hand in hand with the increasing implication of the ministry for the Defense and the Security Council national, raises the question of the overall coordination of the Russian approaches. In the same way, the great active groups Russian in Africa play their partition in solo up to now, which reflects at the same time the competitions between the oligarchs concerned, but also the practice of the bulk-heading at these often official entities, which operate in significant sectors. The community of the Russian Africanists, it, is parcelled out, very few, and its weight within the bureaucracy in Moscow remains still weak, consequence of the prolonged disinterest of the Kremlin for the continent. The mobilization for the Forum of businesses and the top of Sochi, all the same contributed to make evolve/move the things. But the stake for the actors of the Russia-Africa relations will be to maintain the degree of implication of the machine of State on a level raised in the duration.

5. Conclusion

The will to develop all kinds of relations with Africa, in particular soldiers, culminated with the top of Sochi in 2019. At the time of this meeting, and throughout the period 2015-2019, Russia presented itself at the Africans like strong and proud of its success in Syria, going until evoking the quality of the Russian armament tested with the combat. However, the relations of Russia with Africa are old, going up at least in XVIe century, but they took an institutional character only at the end of the XIXe century. At the time, Russia sends an official military aid to Ethiopia and opens a diplomatic legation there. The chronology of the bonds between Russia and Africa indicates that the posture with regard to Europe initially, and the Occident in the second time, determines the degree of implication of Russia and the calendar of its actions in Africa. For the tsars, the Soviets or Poutine, Africa is a theatre of confrontation with the Occident and fight against the European projects. In other words, Russia is in a race for its strategic positioning in Africa. The Summit and economic Forum Russia-Africa are a "weapon" of the Russian diplomatic offensive. Moreover, the voyages of Sergueï Lavrov in Egypt, in Republic of Congo, Uganda and Ethiopia are a tangible example of positioning geostrategic in Africa and a message tending to show that Russia maintains its position on the international scene in spite of the many sanctions of Europe and its allies.

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QUESTION: MEASURING THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE URBAN AXIS BISTRIȚA-BECLEAN - NĂSĂUD-SÂNGEORZ-BĂI , COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH THE URBAN AXIS TG MUREȘ-SUCEAVA-BAIA MARE-CLUJ-NAPOCA

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Abstract: *This questionnaire provides a profile of the quality of life in the community of Urban Axis 1 Bistrita-Beclean -Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi and Urban Axis 2 Tg Mureș -Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca based on survey data collected in the period 2021-2023. The survey captures five major community quality-of-life constructs, plus demographic data. These are (1) resident satisfaction with selected local businesses, plus resident satisfaction with local businesses in general (the survey item capturing residents' overall assessment of local businesses); (2) resident satisfaction with selected local government services, plus resident satisfaction with local government services in general (the survey item capturing residents' overall assessment of local government services); (3) resident satisfaction with selected local nonprofit services accompanied by resident satisfaction with local nonprofit services in general (survey item capturing residents' overall assessment of local nonprofit services); (4) resident satisfaction with local conditions; and (5) resident satisfaction with quality of life in the community in general, other areas of life, and satisfaction with life in general. In addition, demographic items were included in the survey.*

Keywords: Measuring the quality of life, urban axis, resident satisfaction, five major sets of community-quality-of-life constructs, inhabitants of the urban axis.

1. Introduction

This survey provides a detailed picture of the community quality of life among City residents in the geographic axis based on survey data collected from 2021-2023. The survey includes five major sets of community quality of life constructs plus demographics these are:

A. Resident satisfaction with local conditions (survey items capturing satisfaction with the physical environment, neighbourhood, housing, public safety, street lighting, cost of utilities, real estate taxes, etc.);

B. Residents' satisfaction of specific local businesses (survey items capturing satisfaction with banking, insurance services, transportation services, restaurants and clubs, supermarkets, speciality stores, private healthcare, telecommunications, and electricity services .), accompanied by residents' satisfaction of overall local businesses (survey item capturing residents' global evaluation of local business);

C. Resident satisfaction with specific government local services (Survey items capturing satisfaction with the fire department, rescue squad, water services, postal services, police, voter registration, and public health services.), accompanied by resident satisfaction with overall local government services (Survey item capturing residents' overall assessment of local government services);

D. Resident satisfaction with selected local non-profit services (survey items recording satisfaction with alcohol and drug abuse programs, crisis intervention programs, adoption and adult care services, support groups, chamber of commerce, legal assistance, mental health services, senior citizen programs, adult education, homeless food and shelter.), accompanied by residents' satisfaction with local nonprofit services in general (Survey item comprising residents' overall assessment of local nonprofit services);

E. Residents' satisfaction with the quality of life of the community in general, with other areas of life (work life, financial situation, health, education, leisure life, spiritual life, cultural life) and satisfaction with life in general;

For each segment, the demographic characteristics of the respondents are analysed and an impact analysis by segment is also carried out.

Period of application of the questionnaire 2021-2023, for each segment in the researched article the following response period is allocated:

- Segment A - January 2021 - June 2021;
- Segment B - July 2021 - December 2021;
- Segment C January 2022 - June 2022;
- Segment D July 2022-December 2022;
- Segment E January 2023-June 2023.

2. Theoretical Model

2.1 Conceptual Background

The conceptual model underlying the Community Quality of Life (CQOL) (Sirgy et al., 2000; Sirgy and Cornwell, 2001). The CQOL measure is essentially based on the bottom-up theory of life satisfaction, a theory widely accepted in quality-of-life studies (e.g., Andrews and Withey, 1976; Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers, 1976). The basic premise of the bottom-up theory is that the life satisfaction of community residents is influenced by the satisfaction they experience about their life domains and sub-domains. Specifically, life satisfaction is construed to be on top of a satisfaction hierarchy and is mostly determined by satisfaction with life domains (e.g., satisfaction with community, family, work, social life, health, and so on).

Satisfaction with a particular life domain (e.g., satisfaction with community life), in turn, is influenced by lower levels of life concerns within that domain (e.g., satisfaction with services provided in the local community). Hence, residents who feel highly satisfied with their various life domains (i.e., high satisfaction with community life, health life, work life, family life, neighbourhood life, and leisure life) are likely to generally express high levels of life satisfaction. The effect within those life domains spills over vertically to the most super-ordinate domain (life in general), thus determining life satisfaction. Similarly, satisfaction with community life is mostly determined by satisfaction with the life conditions/concerns associated with the community life domain such as services and conditions in the community.

As shown in the figure, residents' satisfaction with specific local businesses (e.g., banking services, insurance services, taxi services, restaurants and nightclubs, supermarkets, healthcare services, telecommunications, and electricity services) influences their overall satisfaction with local businesses. Similarly, residents' satisfaction with specific local government services (e.g., fire department, rescue squad, library, sanitation/refuse services, water services, postal services, police, voter registration, motor registration, and public health services) influences their overall satisfaction with local government. Furthermore, residents' satisfaction with specific local non-profit services (e.g., alcohol/drug abuse services, crisis intervention, religious services, support groups, chamber of commerce, legal aid, mental health services, senior citizen services, adult education, food and shelter for the homeless, youth services) influences their overall satisfaction with local non-profit services.

Residents' overall satisfaction with local business, local government, and local nonprofit services, in turn, influence their overall satisfaction with community quality of life. Their overall satisfaction with community quality of life is additionally influenced by residents' satisfaction with other local conditions (e.g., quality of the physical environment, neighbourhood, and housing).

Residents' overall satisfaction with community quality of life influences their overall life satisfaction conjoined with the influence of their overall satisfaction with other life

domains (e.g., work life, financial situation, health, education, friends, leisure life, spiritual life, cultural life, and social status).

The core of the Community-Quality-of-Life survey comprises satisfaction with specific local businesses, government services, and nonprofit services as well as satisfaction with local conditions. These constructs and measures have been administered in a variety of communities in the United States and other countries to capture the well-being of community residents in towns, cities, and other geopolitical units (e.g., Forjaz et al., 2011; Gullion et al., 2015; Potapov, Shafranskaya, and Bozhya-Volya, 2016; Rezvani and Mansourian, 2013; Rezvani, Mansourian, and Sattari, 2013; Sirgy et al. 2000; Sirgy and Cornwell, 2001; Stephenson and Yerger, 2013; 2014) and validated in terms of its prediction of constructs such as overall satisfaction with community quality of life, and overall life satisfaction.

2.2 Structure of the questionnaire

Eight hundred (N = 800) residents were randomly selected from the mailing list—100 residents for each component city of the axis.

The situation of the answers : Bistrita: 100, Beclean: 100, Năsăud 100, Sângeorz -Băi 100, Tg Mureş 100, Suceava 100, Baia Mare 100, Cluj-Napoca 100. thus 800 answers out of the 800 proposed were obtained as follows: 70 % in the field, 30 % online. All sampled residents in the urban axis completed the survey by its closing date, an acceptable response rate given previous studies of community resident surveys.

3. Results and Discussions

A. Resident satisfaction with local conditions

A. Resident satisfaction with local conditions

How do you feel about the following local conditions?

- The quality of green spaces

Fig.1 Opinion about Quality of Green Spaces in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi Urban Axis

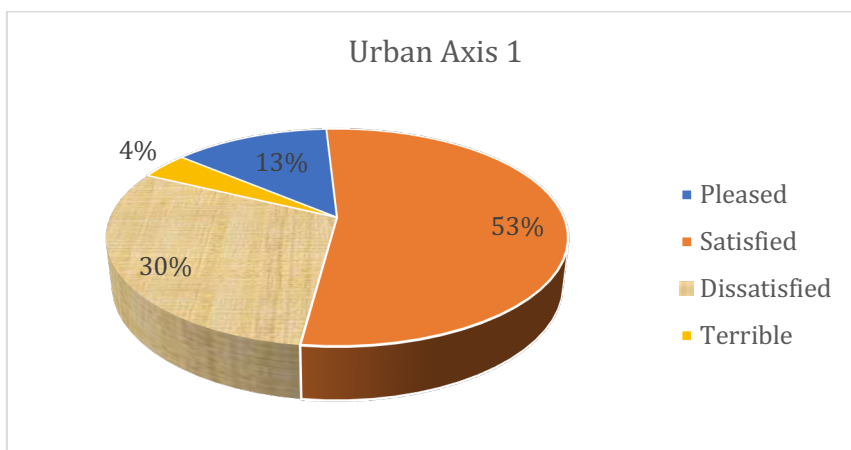
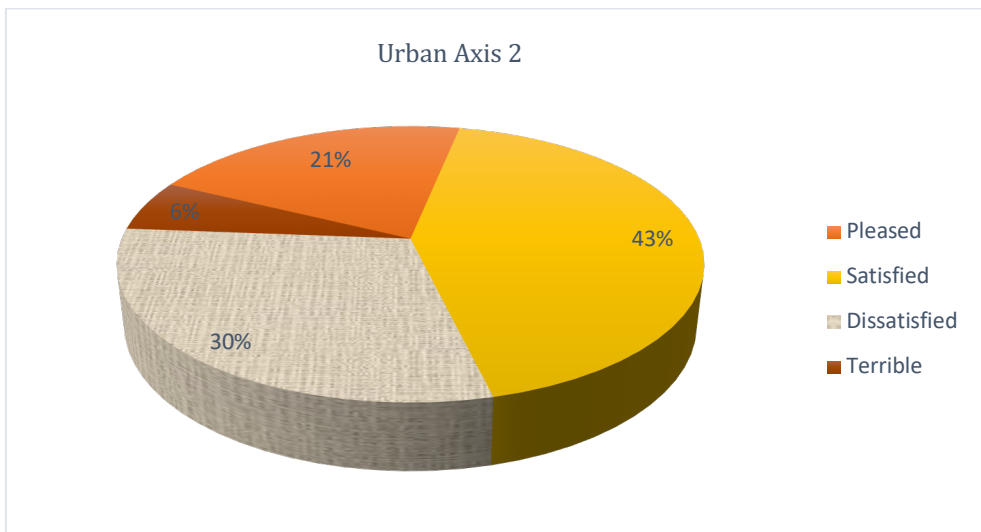


Fig.2 Opinion about Quality of Green Spaces in Tg.Mureş-Suceava-Baia Mare-Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- Neighbours

Fig.3 Opinion about Neighbours in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângerz-Băi urban axis

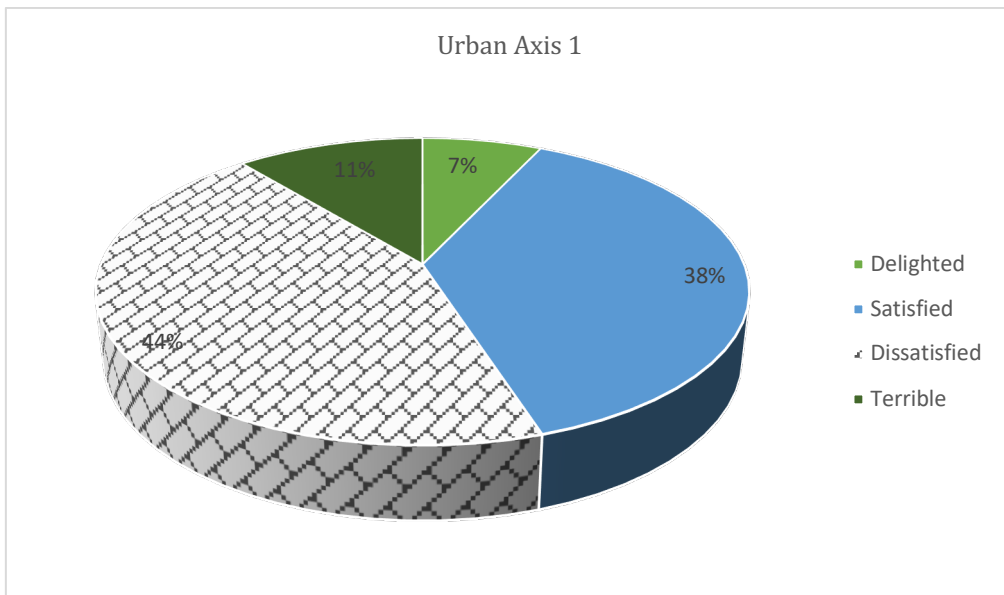
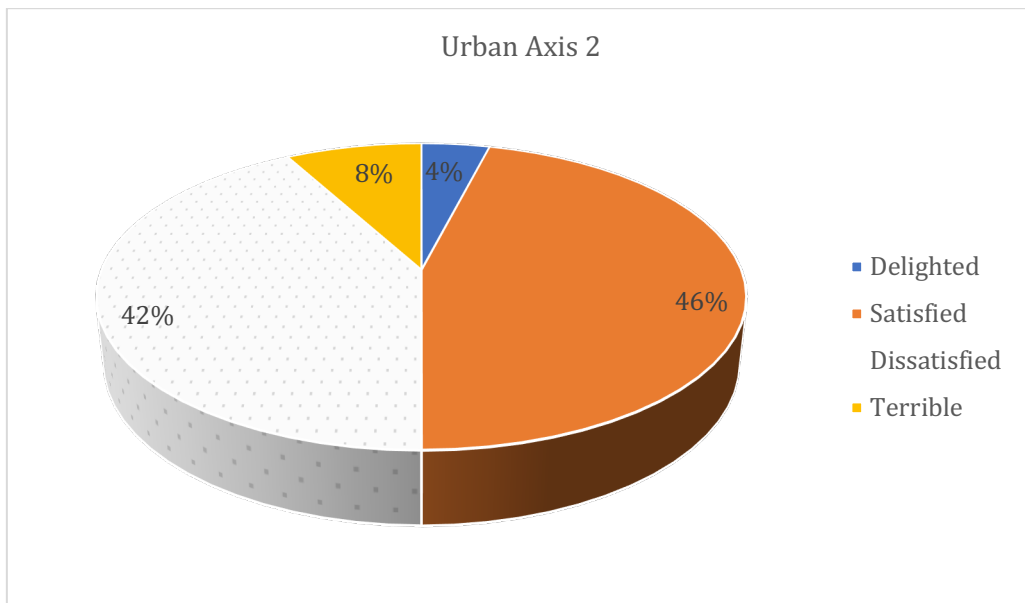


Fig.3 Opinion about Neighbours in Tg. Mureş-Suceava-Bais Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- Available accommodation (apartment)

Fig.4 Opinion about Available Accommodation (apartment) in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

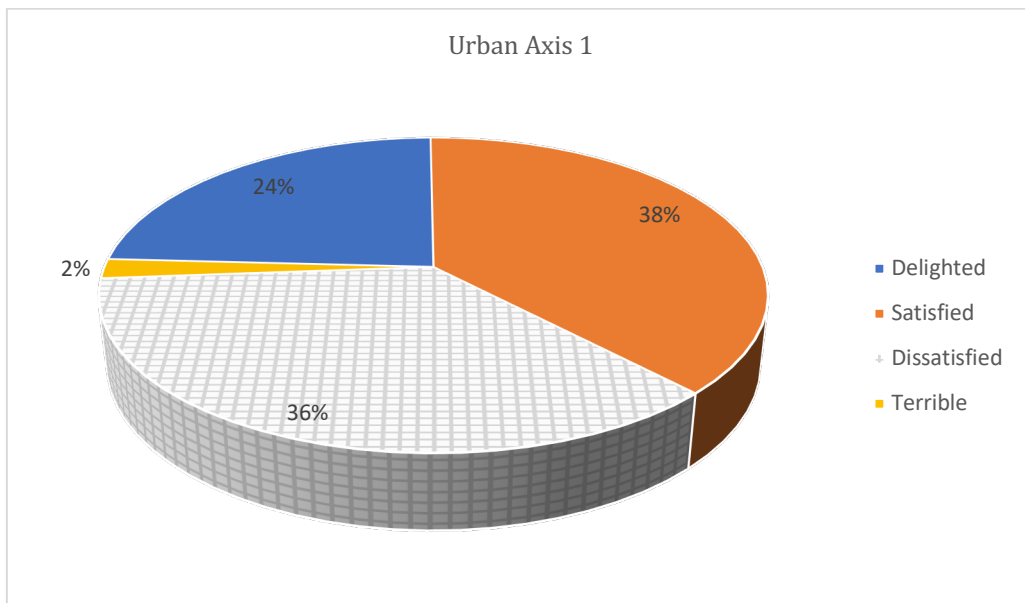
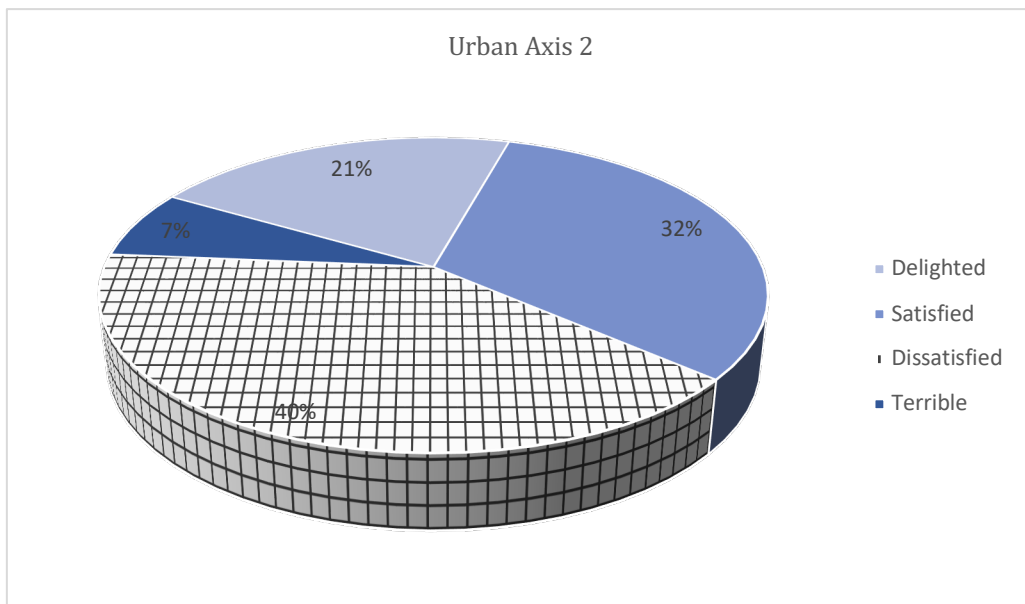


Fig.5 Opinion about Available Accommodation (apartment) in Tg. Mureş-Suceava-Baia Mare – Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- Public Safety

Fig.6 Opinion about Public Safety in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

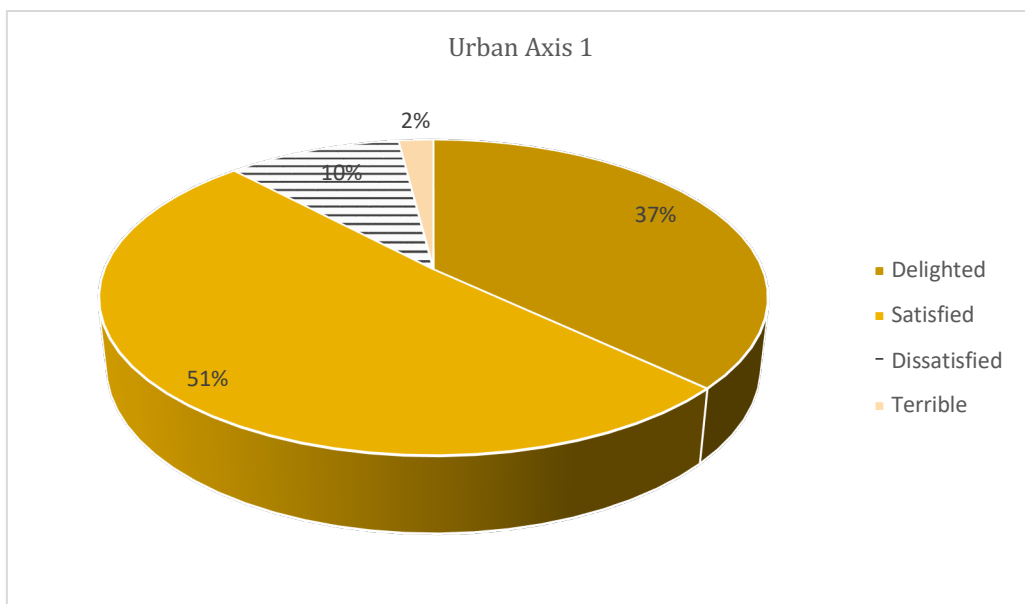
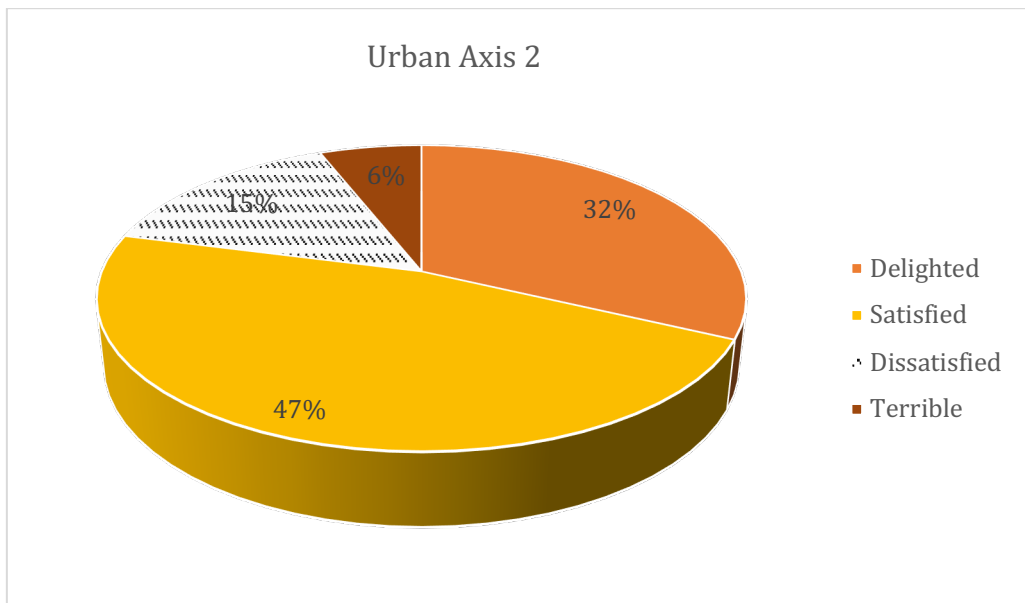


Fig.7 Opinion about Public Safety in Tg.Mureş-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- Street lighting

Fig.8 Opinion about street lighting in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

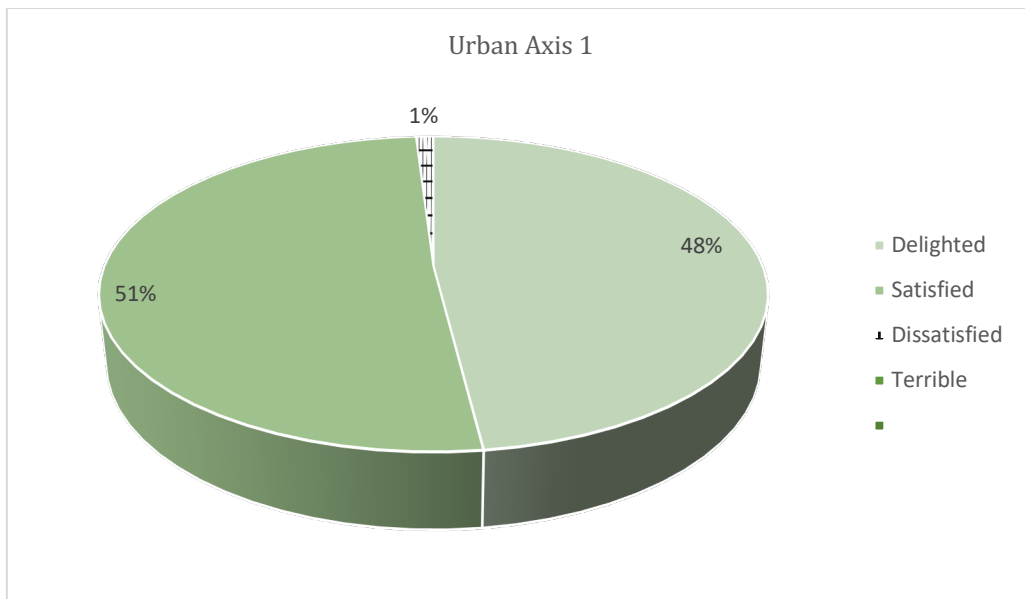
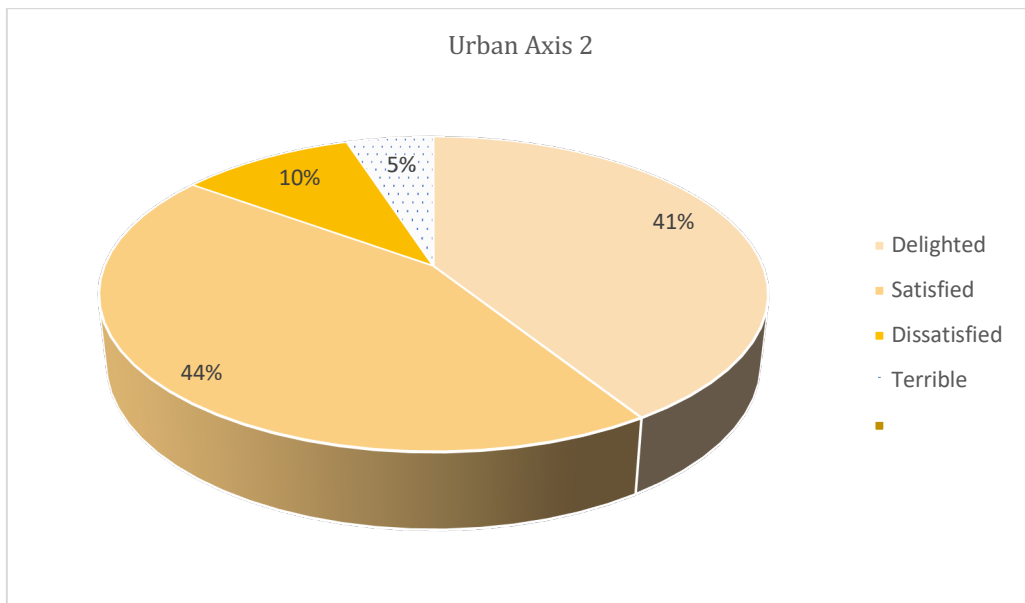


Fig.9 Opinion about street lighting in Tg.Mureş-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- Utility costs

Fig.10 Opinion about utility costs in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

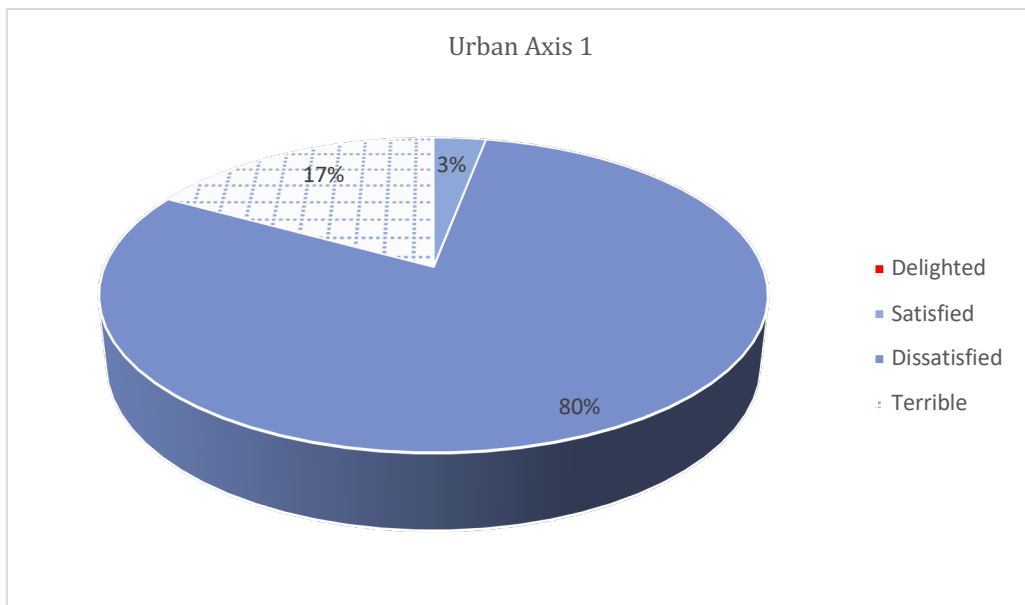
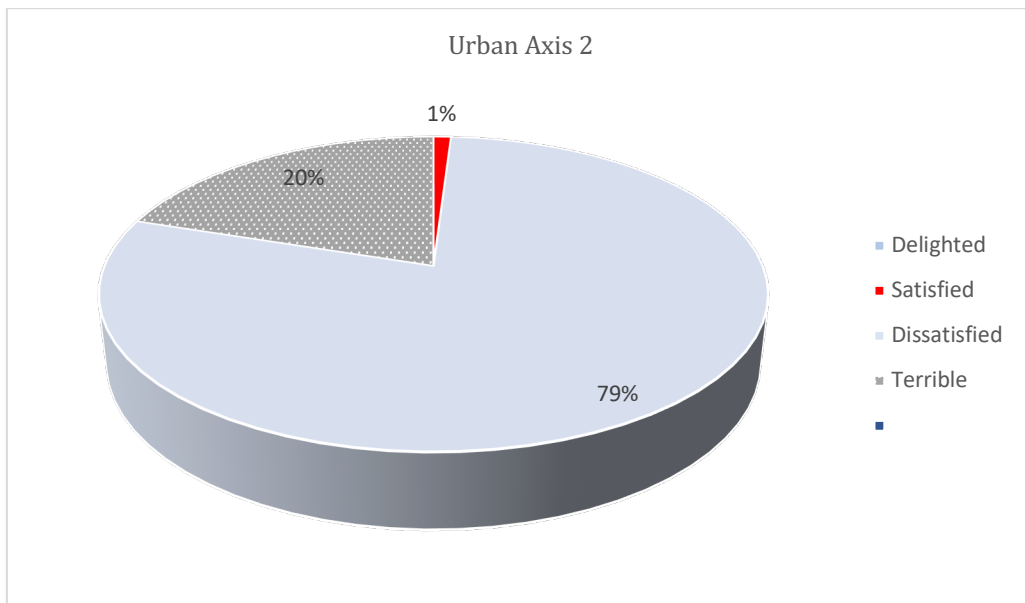


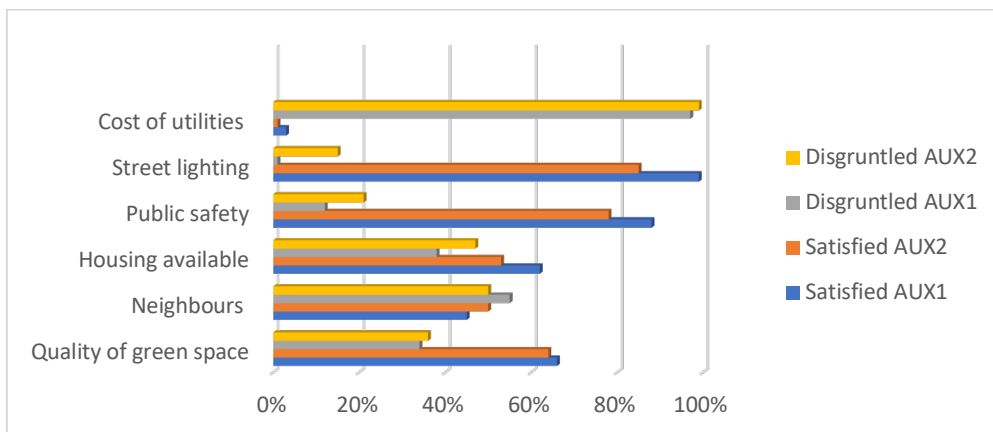
Fig.10 Opinion about utility costs in Tg.Mureş-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



➤ Impact

Analysis of the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the inhabitants of urban axis 1 Bistrița-Beclean -Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi compared to urban axis 2 Tg Mureş-Suceava-Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca. The aim is to determine the degree of satisfaction of the citizens of the urban axis in terms of quality of life for the topic A Satisfaction of Inhabitants with Local Conditions;

Fig.11 Analyse the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction in Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2 and compare the two axis



The study begins by looking at residents' satisfaction with local conditions. Resident satisfaction was above average for the physical environment, housing, public safety, and street lighting, and below average for the neighbourhood, utility costs and property taxes.

As such, we recommend that the city government pay particular attention to developing new programs and policies (or strengthening existing ones) to increase resident satisfaction with the neighbourhood, utility costs, and property taxes.

➤ Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents applied for topic A of the questionnaire is as follows: out of 800 answers 400 for each axis.

Fig.12 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 1

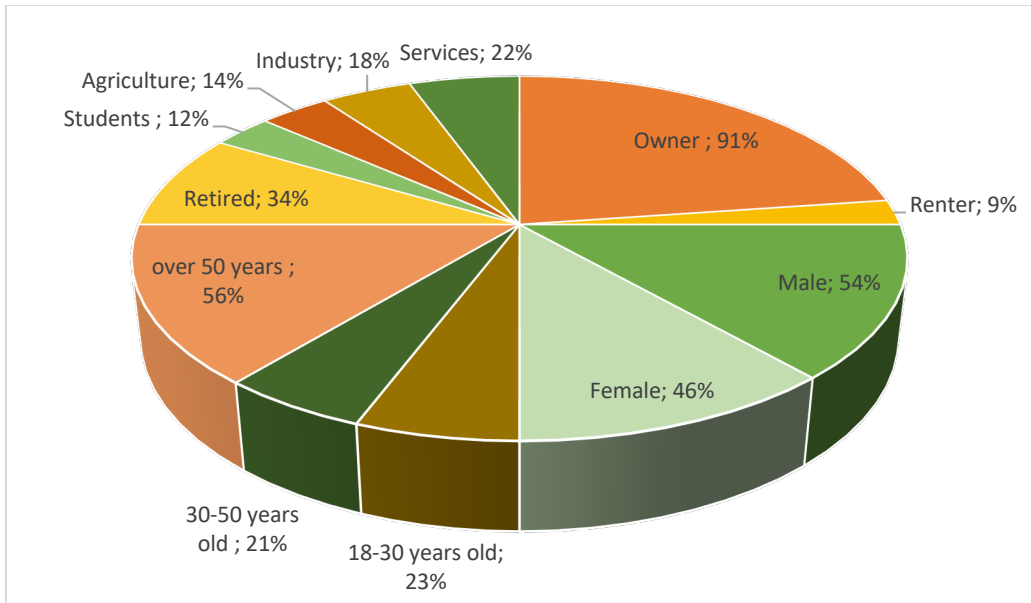
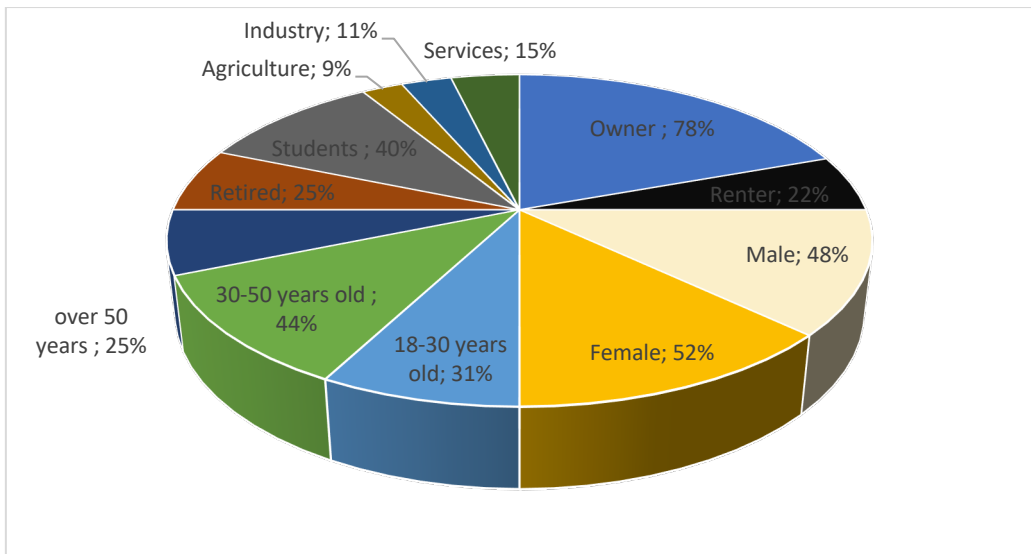


Fig.13 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 2



B.Residents' satisfaction with specific local businesses

How do you feel about the local businesses' activity?

- Banking - insurance services

Fig.14 Opinion about Banking insurance services in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

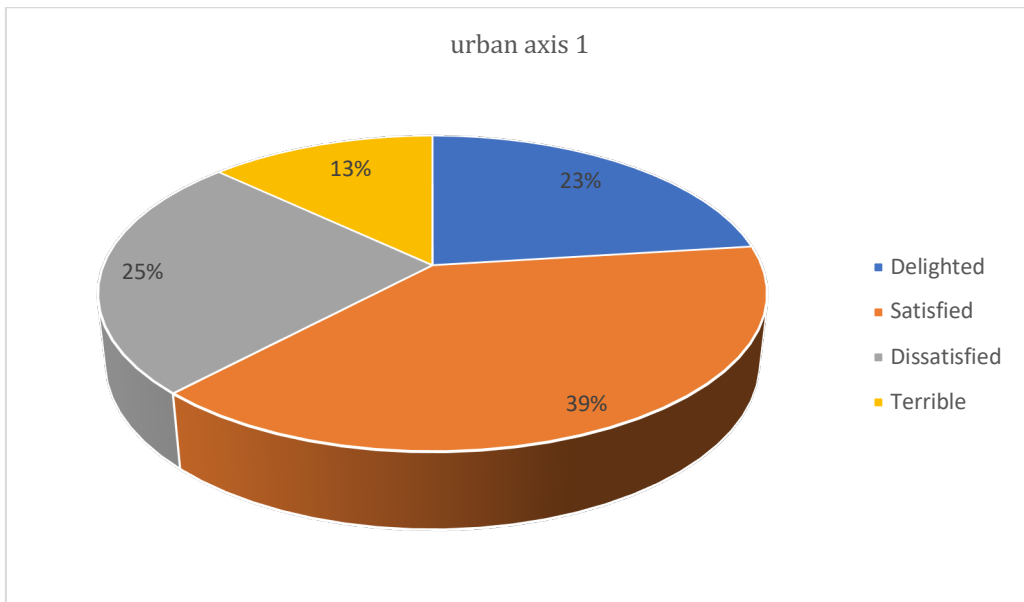
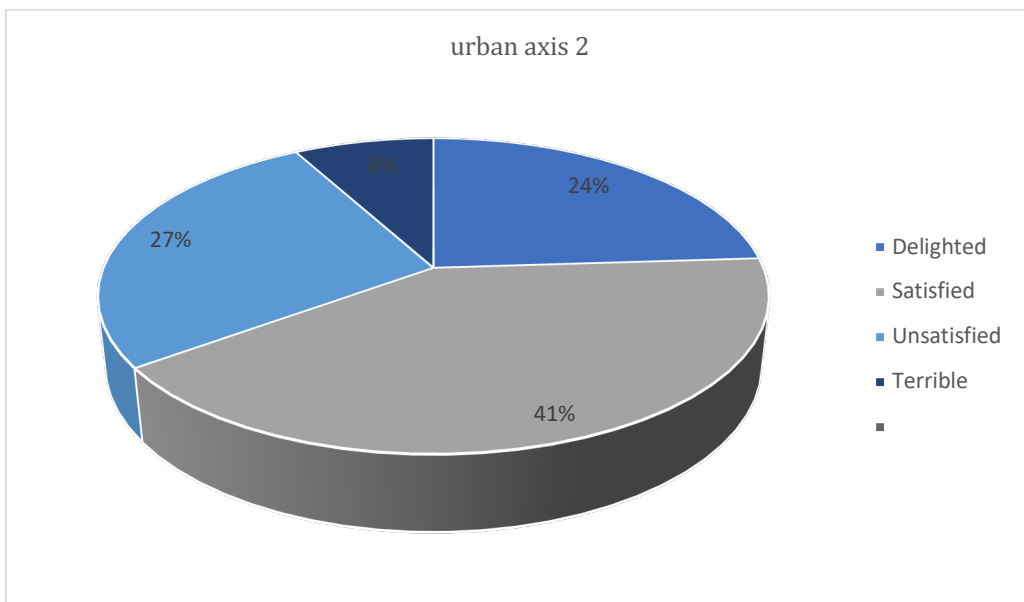


Fig . 15 Opinion about Banking insurance services in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- transportation services

Fig.16 Opinion about transportation services in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

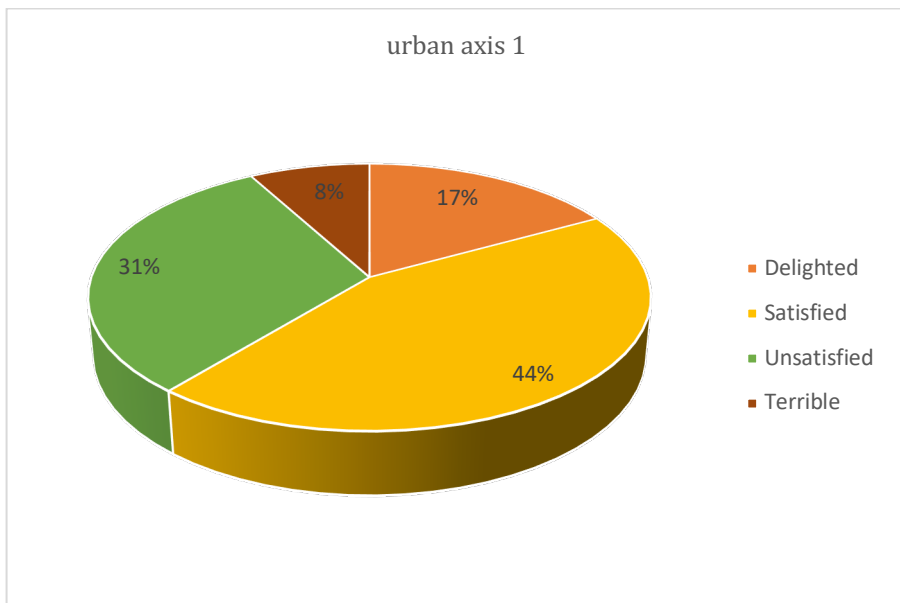


Fig.17 Opinion about transportation services in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis

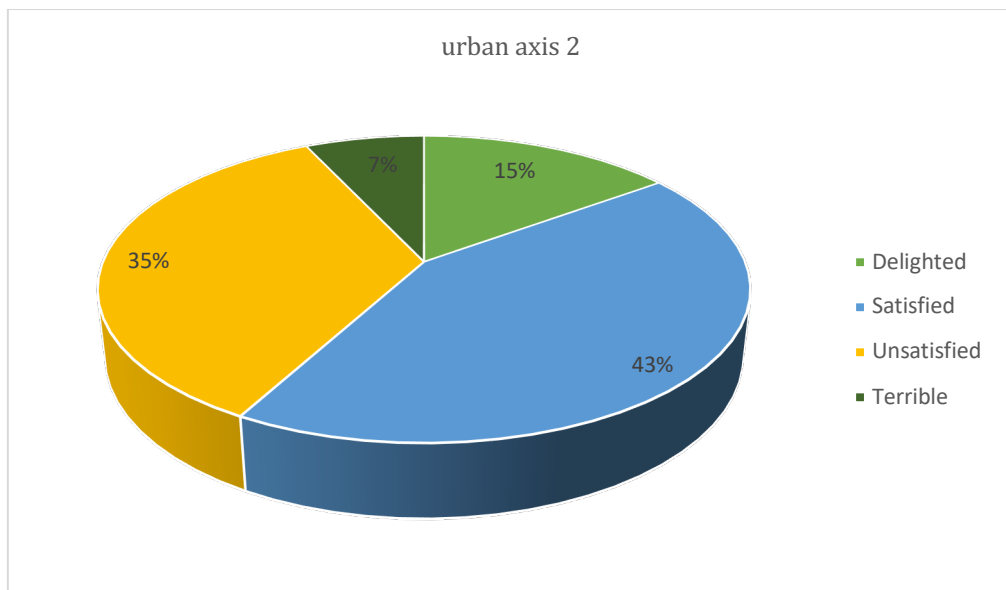


Fig.18 Opinion about restaurants and clubs in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

• restaurants and clubs

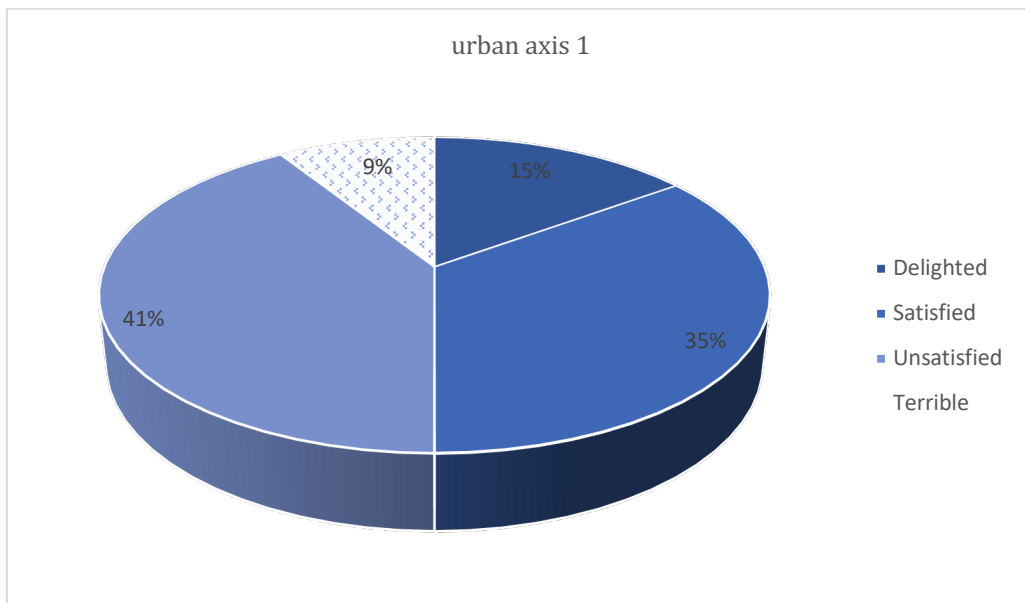
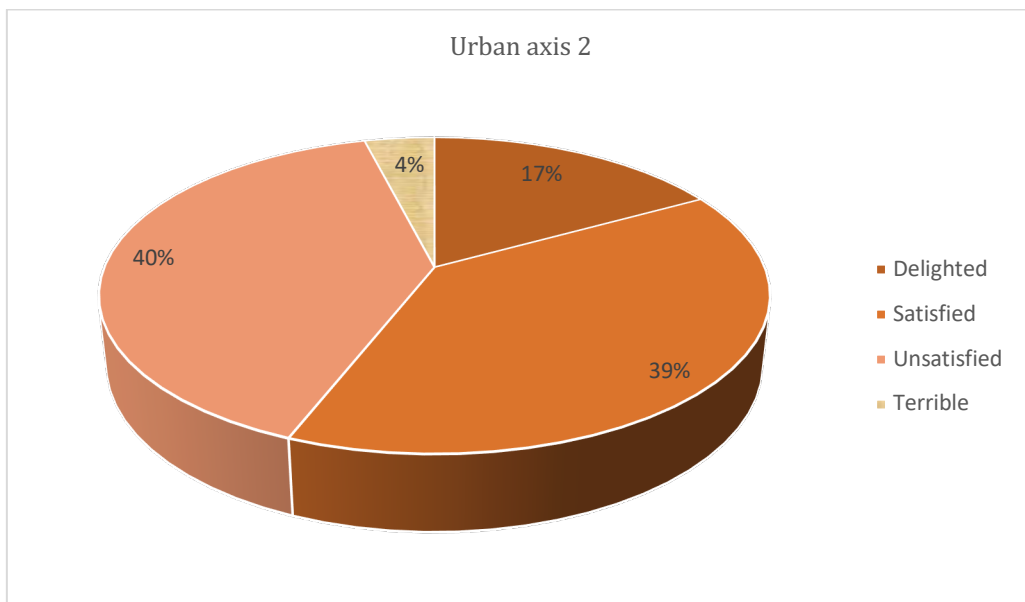


Fig . 19 Opinion about restaurants and clubs in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



• **supermarkets - speciality stores**
Fig.20 Opinion about supermarkets - speciality stores in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

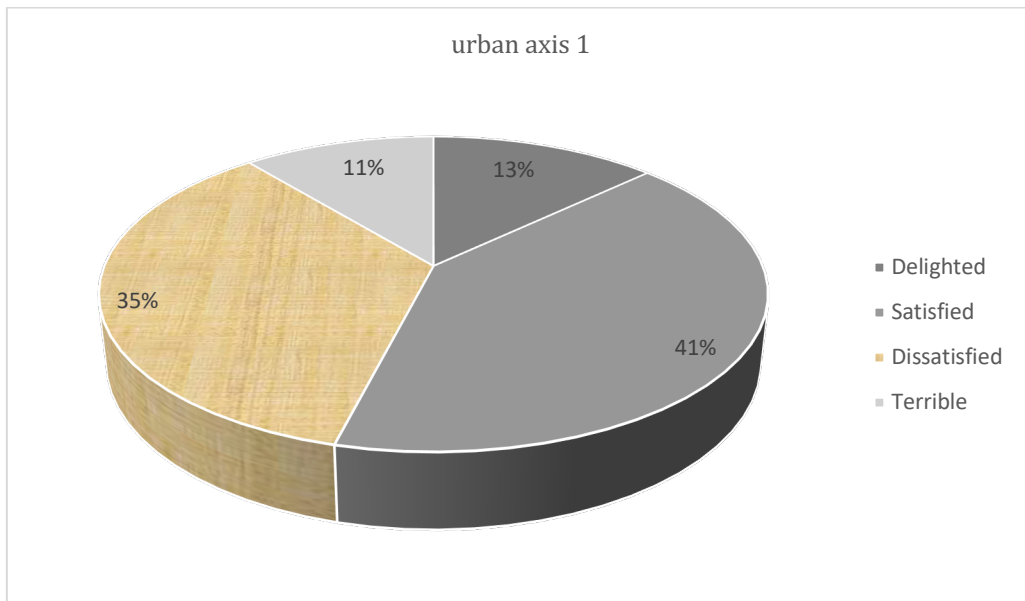
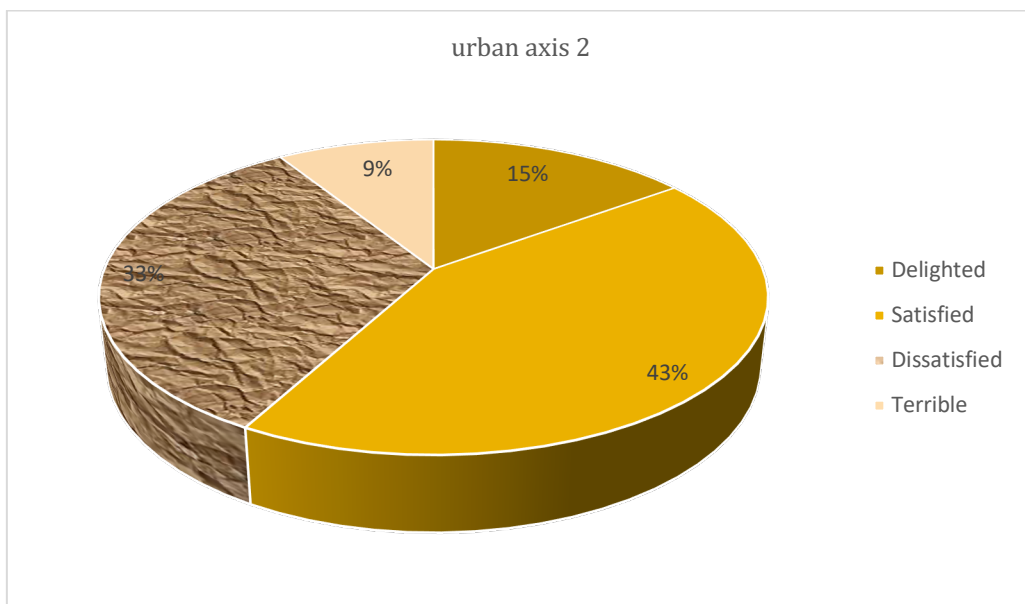


Fig.21 Opinion about supermarkets - speciality stores in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



• private healthcare

Fig.22 Opinion about private healthcare in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

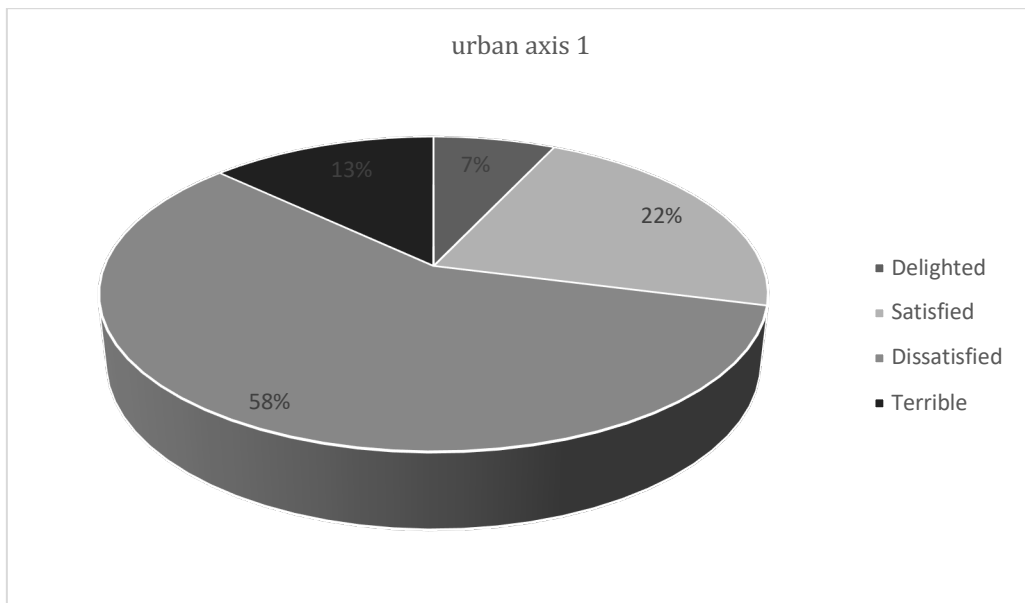
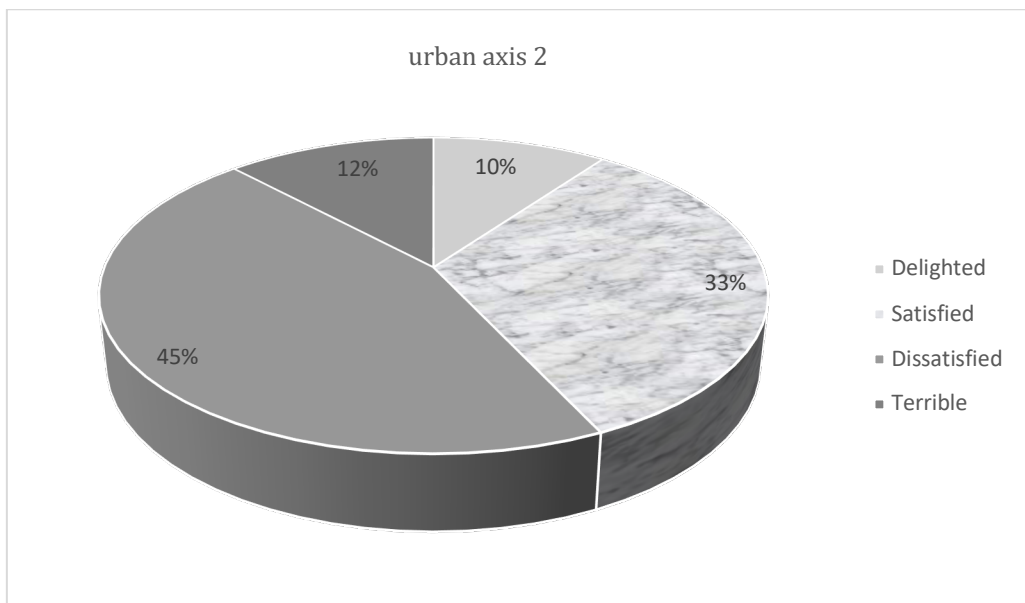


Fig.23 Opinion about private healthcare in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



- telecommunications and electricity services

Fig.24 Opinion about telecommunications and electricity services in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

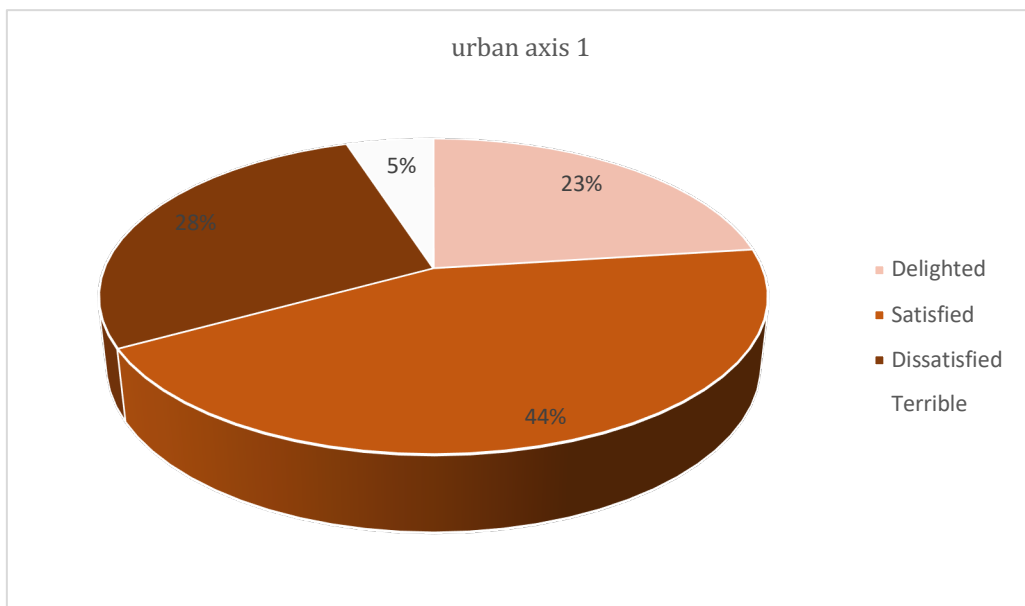
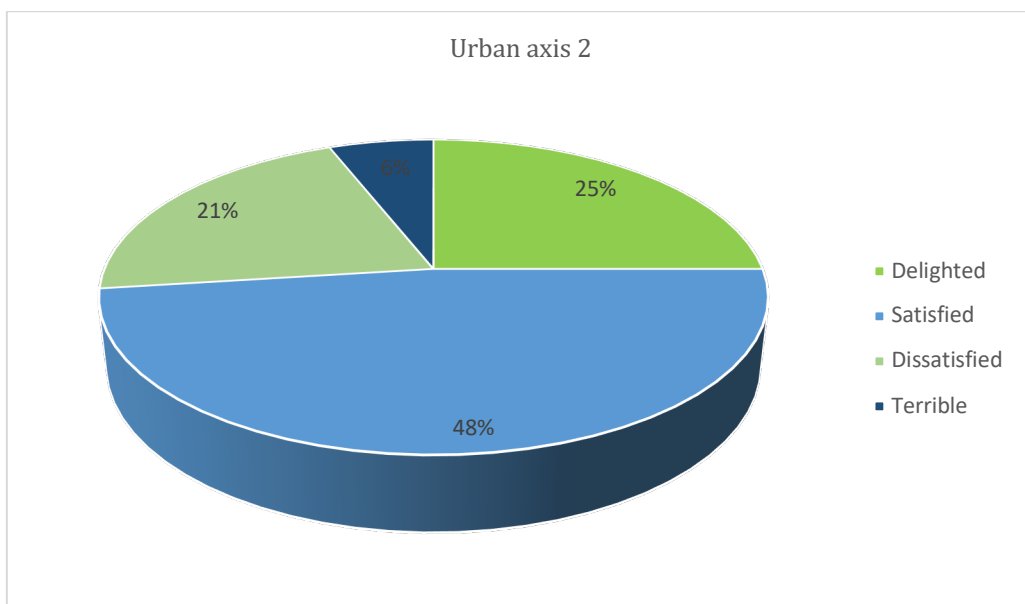


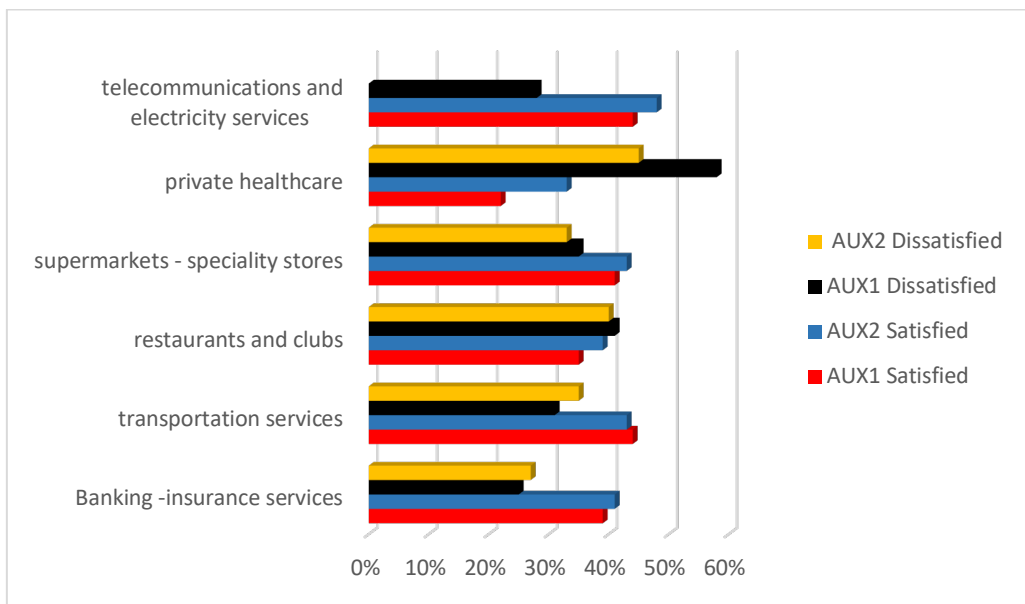
Fig.25 Opinion about telecommunications and electricity services in Tg.Mureș-Suceava -Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca urban axis



➤ Impact

Assessment of the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the inhabitants of urban axis 1 Bistrița-Beclean -Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi compared to urban axis 2 Tg Mureș-Suceava-Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca. The aim is to determine the degree of satisfaction of the citizens of the urban axis in terms of quality of life for theme B Residents’ satisfaction with specific local businesses.

Fig.26 Review the satisfaction/dissatisfaction in Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2 and compare the two axis



Concerning residents’ satisfaction with local businesses, the survey results revealed that residents’ satisfaction was above average concerning banking and financial services, transportation, healthcare, utilities, real estate and home repairs, news and communication, and legal services; and conversely below average about food and restaurants, stores and shopping, education and childcare, and events and entertainment. as such, we recommend that city administration pay particular attention to develop new programs and policies (or strengthen existing ones) to increase residents’ satisfaction with food and restaurants, stores and shopping, education and childcare, and events and entertainment.

➤ Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents applied for topic B of the questionnaire is as follows: out of 800 answers 400 for each axis

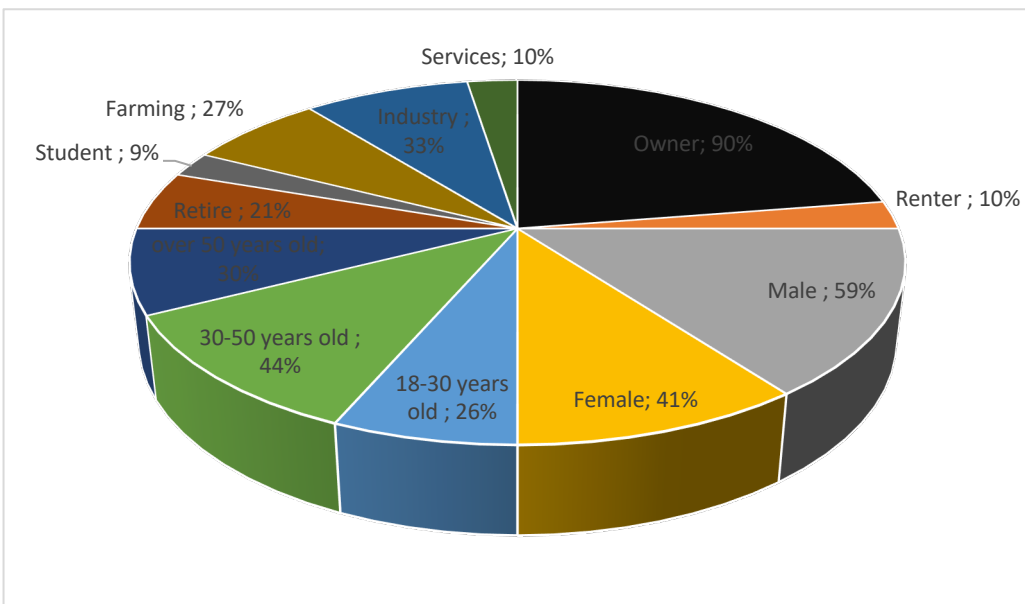


Fig.27 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 1

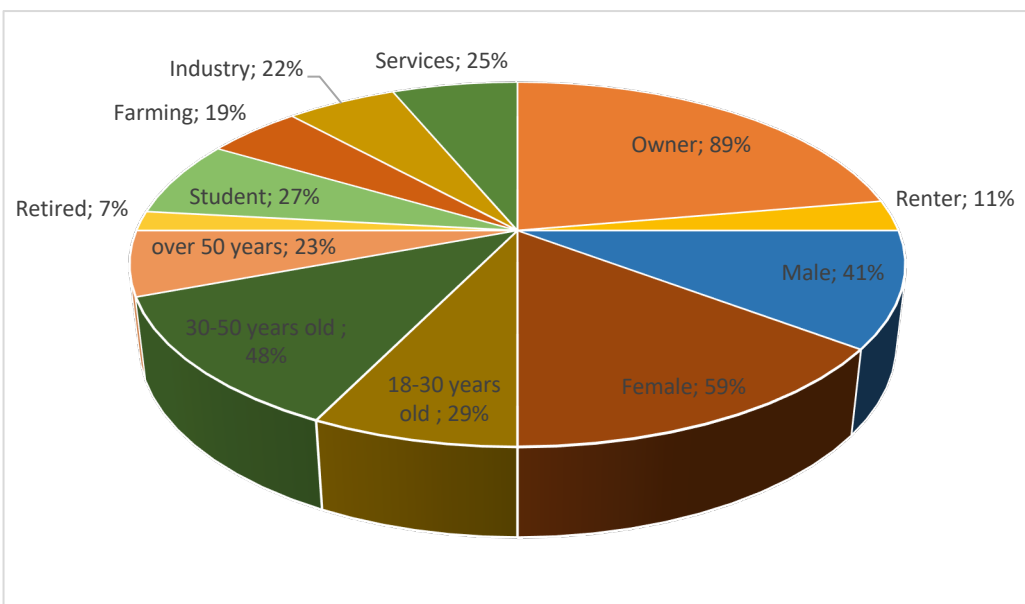


Fig.28 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 2

C. Resident satisfaction with specific government local services

What do you think about government local services?

- fire department, rescue squad, police, and public health services.

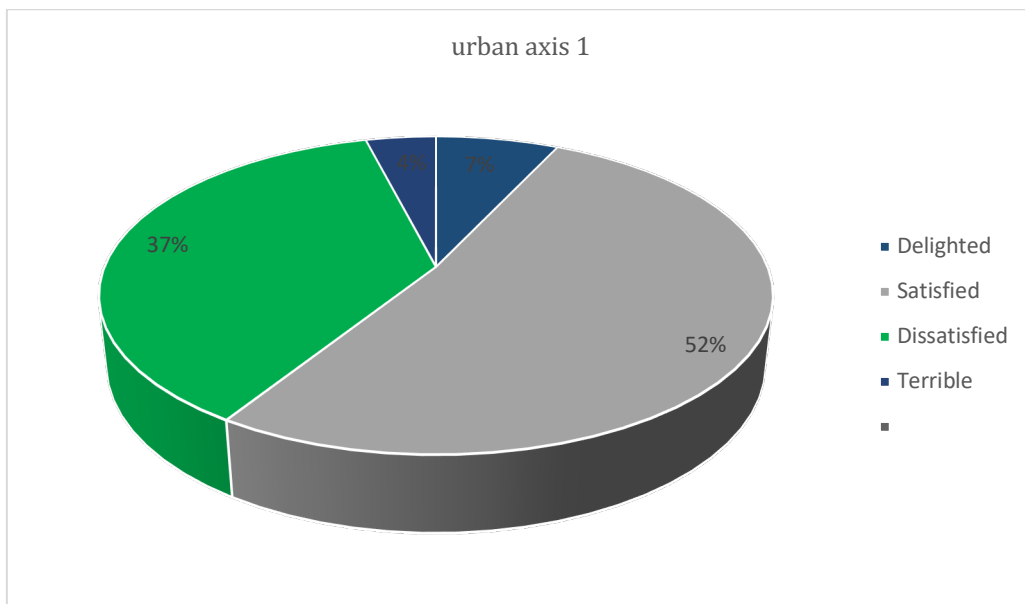


Fig.29 Opinion about government local services in Bistrița-Beclean-Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi urban axis

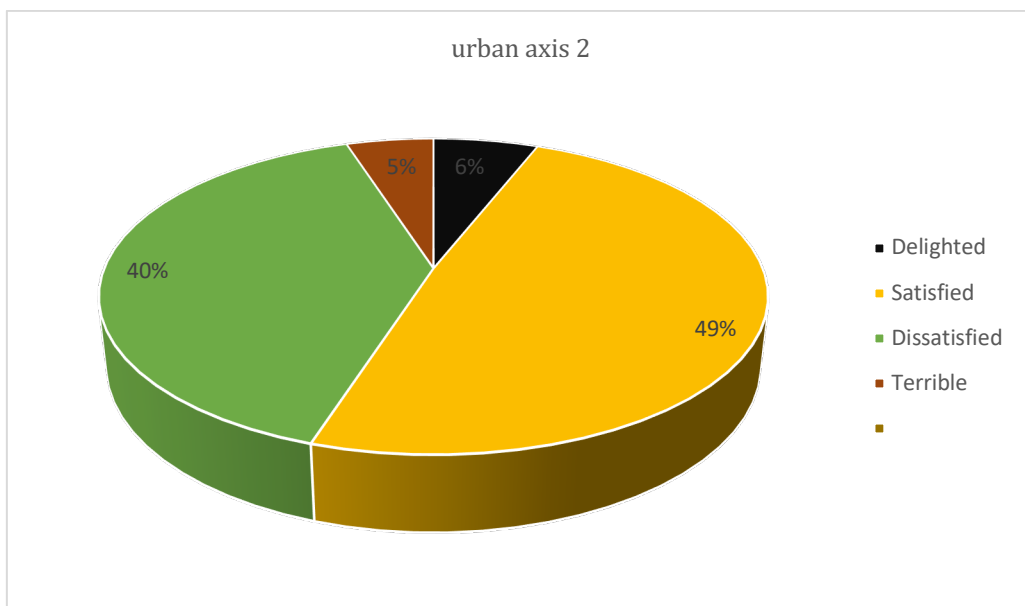


Fig. 30 Opinion about government local services in urban axis 2

- water services, postal services, and voter registration

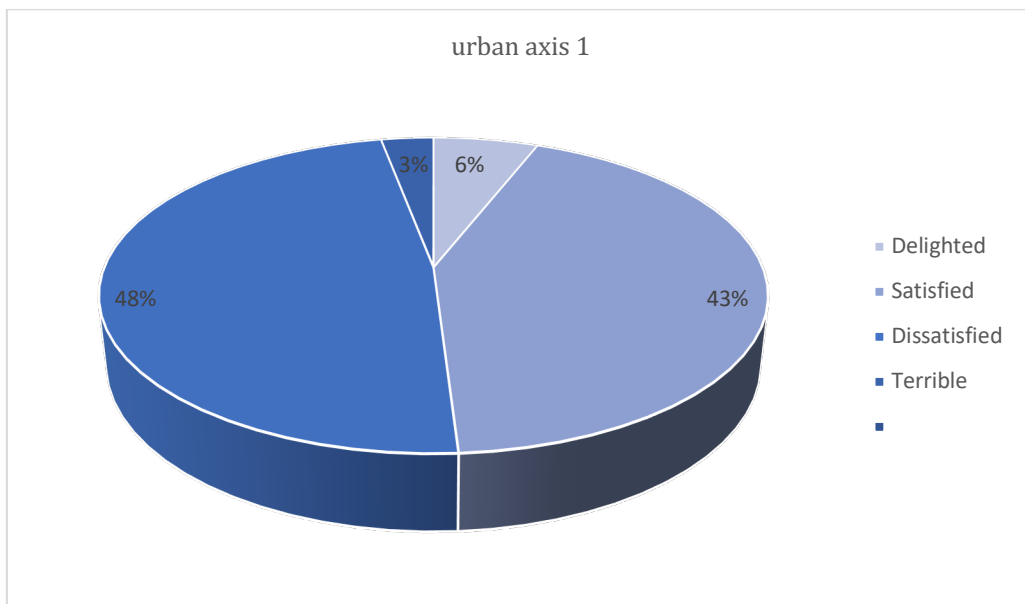


Fig.31 Opinion about water services, postal services, and voter registration in Urban Axis 1

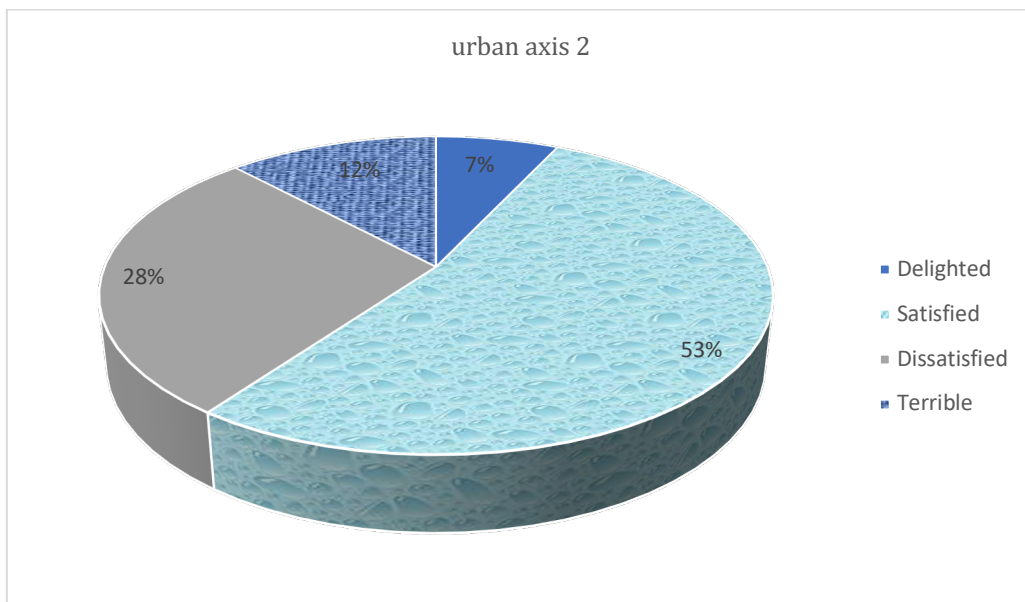


Fig.32 Opinion about water services, postal services, and voter registration in Urban Axis 2

➤ Impact

Evaluation of the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the people living in urban axis 1 Bistrița-Beclean -Năsăud-Sângeorz-Băi compared to urban axis 2 Tg Mureș-Suceava-Baia Mare -Cluj-Napoca. The aim is to determine the degree of satisfaction of citizens in the urban axis in terms of quality of life for topic C Resident satisfaction with specific government local services.

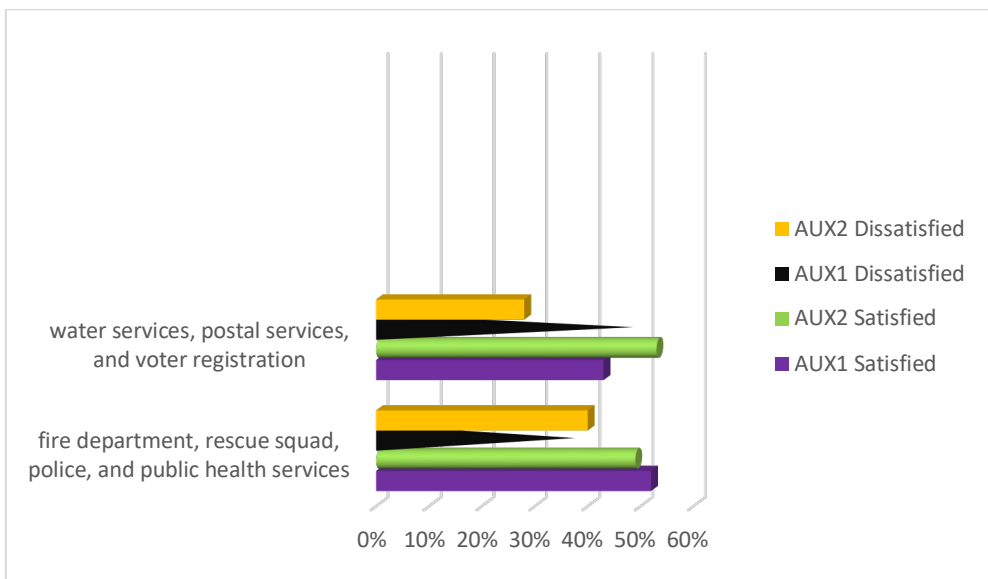


Fig.33 Investigate satisfaction/dissatisfaction in Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2 and compare the two axis

In terms of residents' satisfaction with local government services, survey results show that residents' satisfaction was above average for health and sanitation, utilities and postal services, registration services and employment assistance, and below average for police and emergency services, recreation, administration and planning, and development. Based on these results, I recommend that the city government develop innovative programs and policies (or strengthen existing ones) to increase resident satisfaction with police and emergency services, recreation, administration, and planning and development.

➤ Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents applied for topic C of the questionnaire is as follows: out of 800 answers 400 for each axis

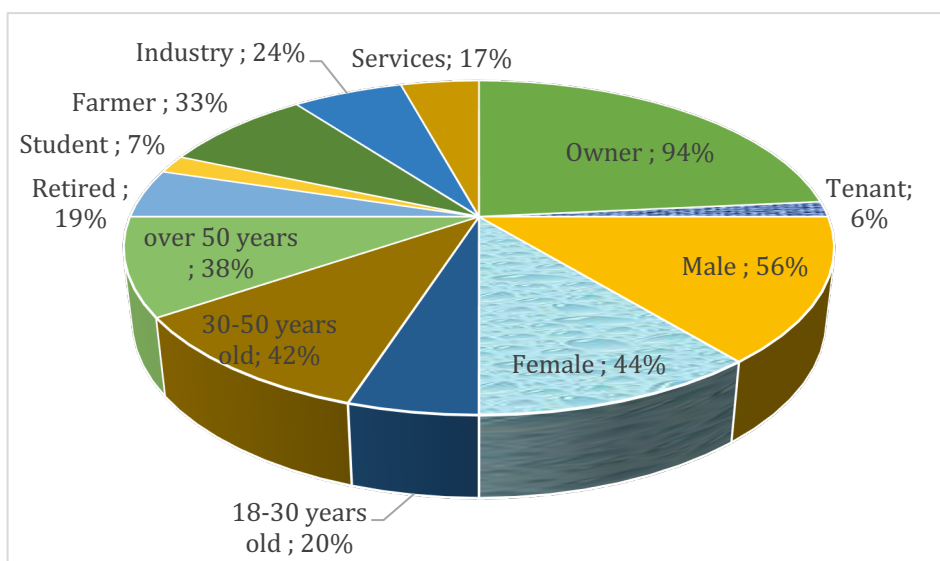


Fig.34 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 1

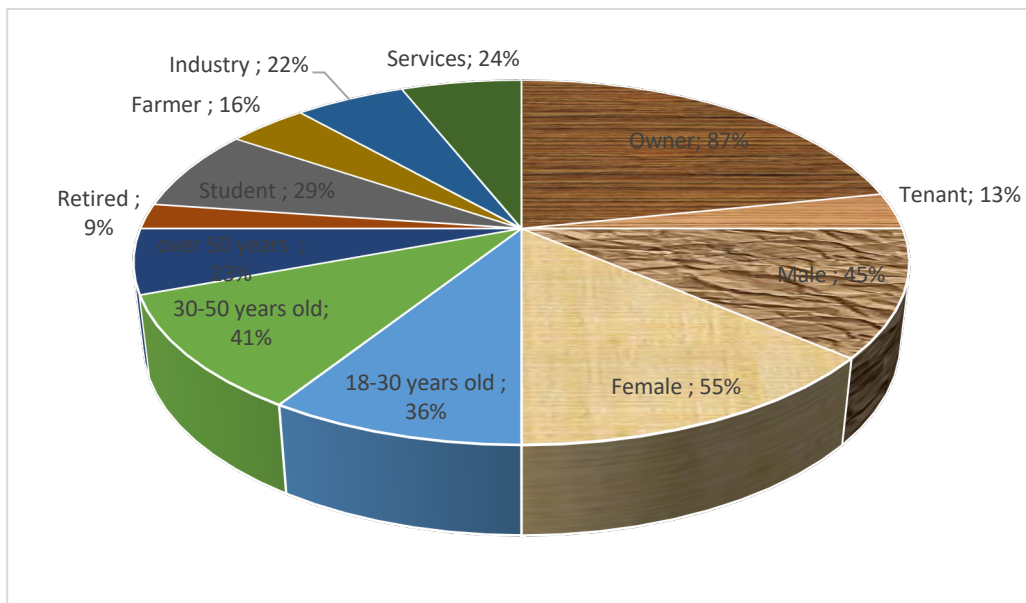


Fig.35 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 2

D. Resident satisfaction with selected local non-profit services

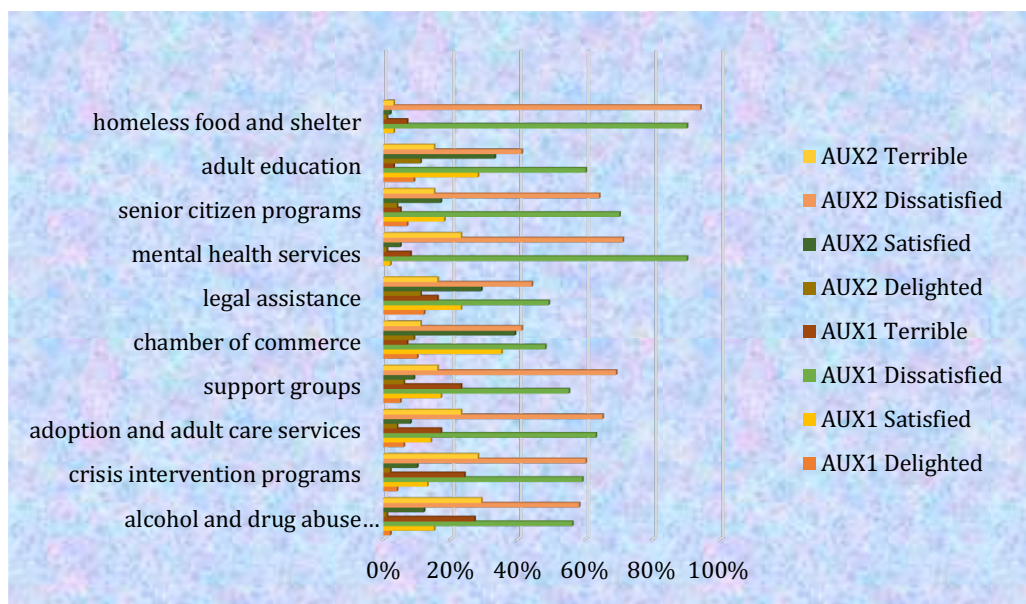


Fig.36 Satisfaction results in Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2

➤ Impact

Regarding resident satisfaction with local nonprofit services, survey results indicate that resident satisfaction was above average for substance abuse and crisis intervention, family services, religious services, chamber of commerce, disabled, senior and health care services, and shelters; and below average for legal services, education, volunteers, and cultural and recreational services. Based on these findings, it is highly recommended that the city government develop innovative programs and policies (or strengthen existing ones) to increase residents' satisfaction with legal services, education, volunteers, and cultural and recreational services.

➤ Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents applied for topic C of the questionnaire is as follows: out of 800 answers 400 for each axis

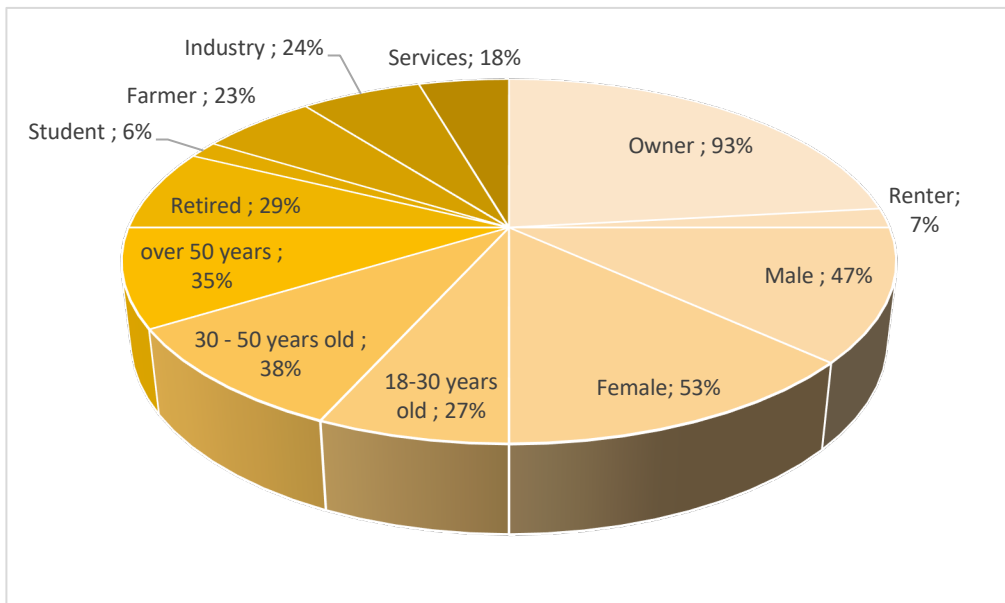


Fig.37 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 1

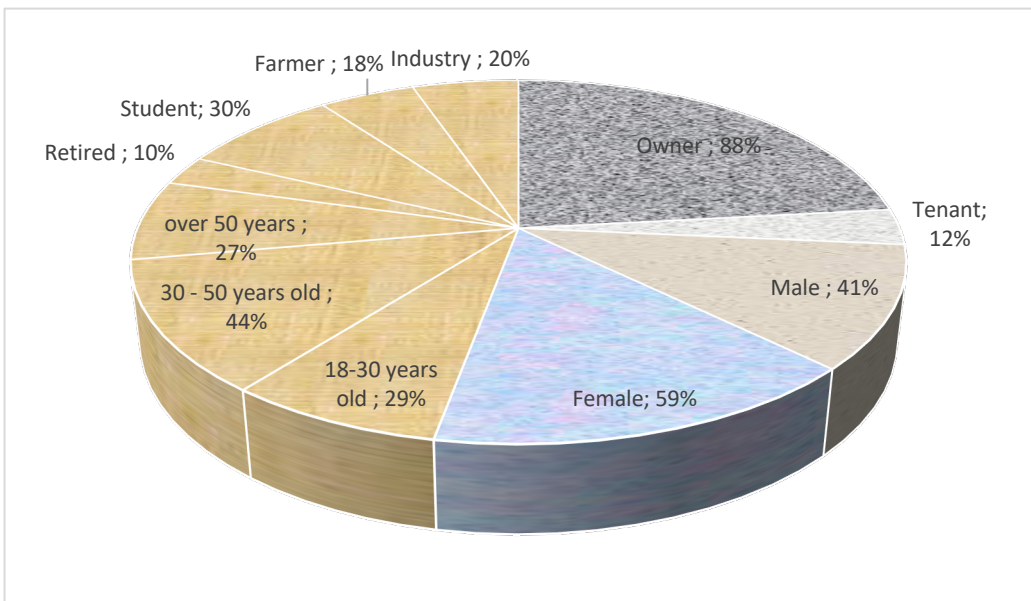


Fig.38 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 2

E. Residents' satisfaction with the quality of life of the community in general

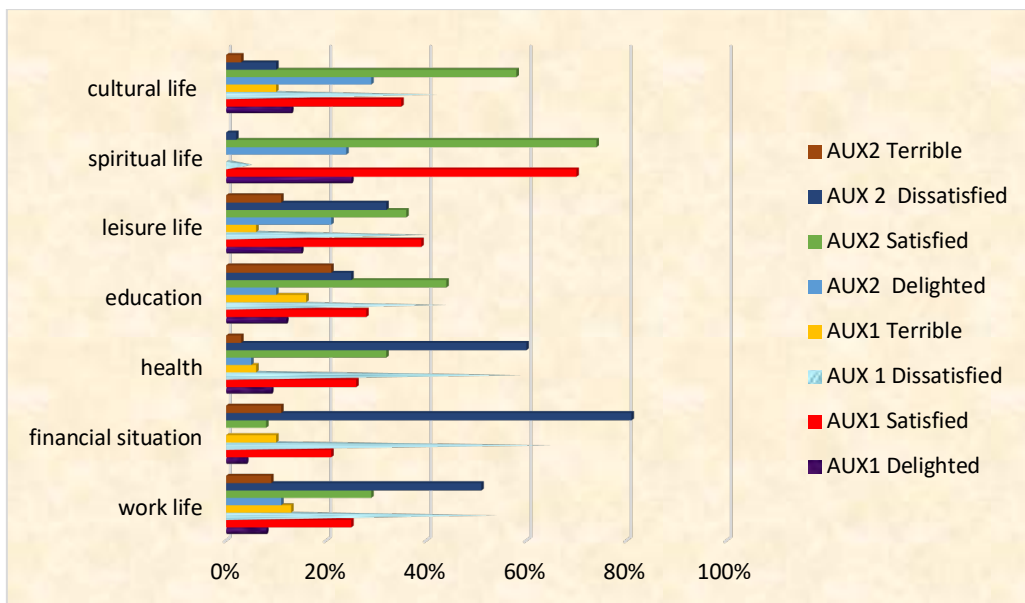


Fig.39 Satisfaction results in Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2

➤ Impact

The survey results also show that residents’ satisfaction with other life domains (other than community life) is above average in work life, financial life, social life, spiritual life, and cultural life.

However, residents’ satisfaction with health, education, and leisure life is below average. Again, city administration in cooperation with other city leaders could work hand in hand to develop new programs and policies (or strengthen existing ones) for the specific purpose of increasing residents’ satisfaction in health, education, and leisure life.

Doing so is likely to increase residents’ satisfaction with life overall.

➤ Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic composition of the respondents applied for topic C of the questionnaire is as follows: out of 800 answers 400 for each axis

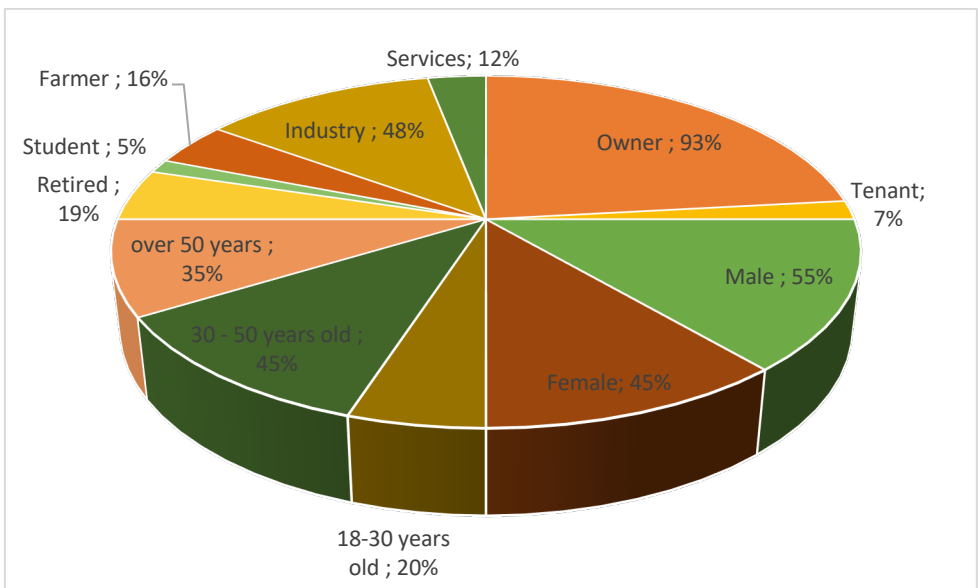


Fig.40 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 1

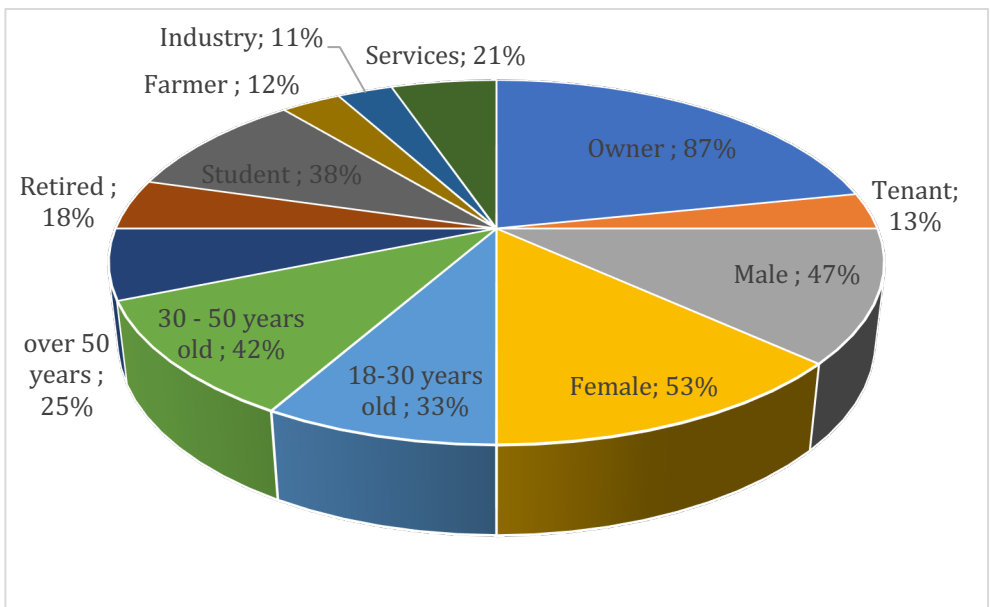


Fig.41 Demographic characteristics of the respondents in urban axis 2

4. Integrated analysis on measuring the quality of life in the investigated urban area

Literature shows that QOL has subjective as well as objective attributes and thus it should be observed and measured using both objective and subjective perspectives (Shumaker SA, Berzon R 1995), (Rapley, Mark 2003). The objective measures perspective focuses on external factors (the surrounding objective environment) while the subjective measure centres on internal factors (personal perception of the objective environment).

The objective measures use quantifiable social, economic and health indicators to reveal the extent to which human needs are met regardless of personal experience or perceptions of the environment. For instance, objective measures such as economic production, literacy rates, and life expectancy can be assessed based on objective data/statistics without collecting opinions from individuals. Objective, quantifiable data are usually provided by official governmental agencies, including the census.

However, since the objective indicators are weak in reflecting people's experience of QOL and well-being, some scholars hold that there is a need to use subjective indicators to measure QOL (Andrews FM, Withey SB 1976).

Subjective indicators are designed to collect primary data at the individual level using questionnaire surveys. Although subjective measures are criticized for biases and difficulty in comparing across regions, many subjective measures have been developed to measure QOL (Camfield, Laura 2005), (Diener 1995). Subjective measures of QOL are advantaged for their ability to capture experiences which are important to individuals.

The subjective approach relies on the individual's judgment and can provide a natural way to aggregate various experiences which reflect people's preferences, culture, values, education, temperament, etc. A subjective approach is indispensable also because spirituality addresses issues of meaning, inner harmony, peacefulness, faith, and a sense of comfort which are ignored in the objective approach. The subjective approach not only measures personal aspects such as happiness, pleasure, and fulfilment but also measures social indicators, including the sense of community, material possessions, social cohesion, job satisfaction, sense of safety, relationship with family, perception of distributional justice, class identification, etc.

Literature shows that objective and subjective indicators are often poorly correlated (Al-Qawasmi J 2019), (Hagerty et. all 2001) and thus it is customary practice to include both in research (McCrea et. all, 2006). The weak correlation between subjective and objective indicators implies that the objective real conditions may differ from the perceived ones, as indicated in the questionnaire. Assessing QOL in a local context should also be clear about the level of aggregation, whether at the individual or collective (family, community or national) level. Thus, to adequately conceptualize and investigate QOL in the Urban Axis 1 and Urban Axis 2 context, there is a need to adopt an integrative framework that integrates several types of indicators –subjective or objective to capture information at proper levels; the aggregate and disaggregate levels.

Conclusion

The paper reports on an ongoing research project that aims to contextualize the QOL concept and set up criteria to measure QOL in urban axis cities. Applying the QOL concept to urban settings in a developing country such as Saudi Arabia is a challenging task, as it requires extra attention to local interpretations of QOL and to the particularities and needs of the region including its sociocultural aspects that belong to distinct culture compared to majority of studies in the QOL field.

The study showed that there is no universally accepted definition of QOL. The diversity of definitions of QOL and research approaches is not a sign of conceptual weaknesses. On the contrary, it highlights the fact that QOL is a value-laden, complex, and multi-dimensional

concept, and underscores the importance of the intrinsic characteristics of the place and local context.

Thus, defining and operationalizing the QOL construct should be at the core of any project that aims to measure the QOL urban context. To operationalize the measurement of QOL and to obtain relevant data that capture the local aspects and interpretations of QOL, the study pointed out the need to adopt a multi-dimensional integrated approach that uses both a top-down and a bottom-up approach and incorporates secondary/objective data and primary data obtained through a survey questionnaire.

An integrated framework to contextualize, operationalize and measure QOL in the urban axis 1 and urban axis 2 contexts has been proposed based on a critical analysis of the literature. The study also showed the importance of selecting appropriate domains and indicators to measure and assess QOL.

The proposed framework indicates that while selecting QOL domains and indicators in the questionnaire, it is critical to operationalize each indicator by adopting a set of variables or parameters as well as developing proper measurement methods and delimiting the unit of analysis. Such a structured approach will enable us to obtain real measurements that capture local aspects of QOL without losing the potential to compare data between different cities or regions.

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BOOK REVIEW:
Hervé Marchal, Jean-Marc Stébé (2023). *Le pavillon, une passion française/*
The pavilion, a French passion,
Presses Universitaires de France, 276 p.

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The authors of *Le pavillon, une passion française/The pavilion, a French passion* emphasize a research theme of urban sociology, the quality of urban life, through an analysis of housing during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The work is structured into five chapters (*A France of Pavilions/ A little story for a great passion/ An assumed passion/ The enchanted pavilion of the wealthiest/ The disenchanting pavilion of the less well off*), Introduction and Conclusion part.

The first chapter, “A France of pavilions”, poses the problem of the individual house by analyzing its situation in France. Through this approach, the authors seek to understand the preference for the pavilion, which reappeared especially during the confinement due to the Covid-19 pandemic, after “following the health crisis, it appears that the house with garden is by far the urban planning form which best responds to what is akin to an anthropological turning point in our ways of living” (Marchal and Stébé, 2023: 10). Likewise, the gender criterion is presented “women prefer not to move too far from their workplace... and think that the apartment has the advantage of being easier to maintain; this male penchant for the individual house strengthens at the time of retirement, where men more often than women consider retiring to the countryside to cultivate their garden” (Marchal and Stébé, 2023: 15).

Entitled “A little story for a big passion”, the second chapter presents a sociohistorical image of the suburban market in France (supply and demand). This

part highlights the private and public institutions, which influence housing policies, taxation, or real estate actions. However, collective housing has long been at the center of housing policies, especially after the Second World War, in the form of various projects that responded to the needs of the time and the vision of architects of the modern movement such as Le Corbusier. Based on data from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) and INED, the statistics show that individual houses represent 55.4% of residences in France and others - oversea (excluding Mayotte). This ratio is consistent with property ownership, since in 2021, approximately six households out of ten own their main residence, compared to 35% in 1954 and 43% in 1968.

Sociological, philosophical/psychoanalytic visions are critically integrated in the third chapter “An Assumed Passion” to depict the image of the “total inhabitant”. This perspective, although idealistic, also embodies inequalities in terms of housing (for example people living in underpopulated houses and others living in overcrowded collective housing).

The summary work proposes in the last two sections, a pavilion typology, from the “enchanted pavilion” to the one that poses a problem, due to its eccentric position or the age (too old) of its owners, for example. In this sense, the authors analyze nine ideal figures -typical of the pavilion. The first five are the secure pavilion, the clubbed pavilion, the gentrified pavilion, the ecological pavilion, and the friendly pavilion. This typology refers to urban spaces such as gated communities (Cottineau and Pumain, 2022) or peri-urban municipalities and characteristics (sustainability).

There are also other figures of the pavilion such as the *unaccomplished* pavilion, the *unsociable* pavilion (marked by neighborhood difficulties), the *eccentric* pavilion (based on residential mobility by car), and the *unsuitable* pavilion for the elderly.

This work, accessible to both students and researchers, covers an urban subject that will be useful to analyze for other European countries.

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