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City Image – Operational Instrument in Urban Space Management – A Romanian Sample

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1. Introduction

One of the fundamental realities that have marked mankind's existence on Earth is the *urban reality*. Throughout the ages, in all geographic regions, the fascination of the city has set in motion people, resources, ideas, generating forces of unforeseen intensity that have continuously modelled the planet's surface. Invoked in lyrics, pinned in eternity – “I know: the city will be” (Russian poet Vladimir Maiakovski, 1893-1930) –, interrogated by sciences, object, subject and support of various professions, the city continuously challenged human knowledge. Virtually, there is no science that has not attempted to unravel its mysteries, either sequentially or wholly, without leaving behind concepts which later evolved into professions or academic disciplines. Over time, a strange blend of academic disciplines and professions accompanied the evolution of knowledge regarding the city and as the study's complexity increased these professions and disciplines also prospered.

Theories and concepts have succeeded, gathered, refined, but some issues remained constant throughout generations of residents or various specialists: the urban space is much too complex, too vaguely defined, too hybridised, with a stunning mix of functionalities, polysemantic, with a much too confused image in its own residents' minds, with an many interests that must be mediated and problems to be managed. Dilemmas remain in this complexity of elements: quantitative or qualitative approach? System or phenomenon? Reality or image? Are residents prisoners of the urban habitat or beneficiaries that actively take part in the urban planning and re-planning? How can we fully and sufficiently address such a complex set of issues?

In the end, all these should serve one philosophy: the city must be a good place to live and work in.

But how can we measure the impact the intervention in the city's quantitative dimension (elements, flows, shapes) is going to have on the residents' spatial behaviour and attitude?; how can we use the residents' perception – “the mental city” – in planning the future ways of urban space organisation?

This study aims to: 1. Emphasize *geography's role as a science in the integrated approach of spatial manifestation phenomenon and processes* – geography is, first of all, the science of places (with all that a place's spatial reality means; the city is a place!) and 2. *Identify and test the role that*

city image can play in the process of urban space organisation and in a broader scope, in the integrated process of urban planning.

It is the intrinsic need of today: the integrated approach of the concepts that operate in the urban space, concepts which although make the object of study for various social sciences or their branches in areas such as economy (e.g. *urban marketing and branding*), town-planning (*urban design*), sociology (*urban segregation*) or urban psychology (*urban behaviourism*), target, above all else, *processes with a spatial/territorial manifestation*.

In this spirit, geography's participative-constructive role becomes obvious for at least two reasons: 1. most of the processes and phenomenon that are part of the approach to city issues have a spatial character and space is one of the essential variables in socio-human systems (from economic activities to matters of sociology and psychology); 2. this science has specialised, over the course of the last decades, in microscale spatial analyses (neighbourhood, city etc.).

It is thus felt the dire need of identifying an operational instrument to mediate all these urban space approaches and that would provide a link between the residents, the urban planners, the urban subspaces "producers" (economic entities etc.), specialists, theoreticians, in other words an instrument that would connect all interests... Over the course of time, the city "belonged", more or less discretionary, to one category, but never to all categories at the same time. But which would be the instrument that could provide the link between spatial reality and human will, between urban actors and their interests, between the city-system and the city-phenomenon, between function and meaning...? One possible answer: *city image*.

And there is another thing: globalisation. Globalisation catalysed to an unprecedented intensity both the processes and their phenomenology. Today's cities are being restructured according to new rules and forces, overcoming national borders. The city of the present competes both for attracting new residents and for retaining its old ones with cities all across the planet, aiming to increase the standard of life it offers, imprinting a way of life that would distinguish it from the other cities, a way of life that is essentialised and synthesised in an image that would impress in the residents' minds. It is that city's brand, its "signature", a guarantee of quality and added value to the offered conditions of life. It is the image being sold and that can currently determine its place in the global hierarchy. It is a set of symbols in which the residents can identify themselves. We currently live a genuine image myth. Nothing sells better than image and it has some unsuspected resorts in stimulating decision... All our pieces of information are included in images, as our emotions and feelings likewise, we sell and we buy images, we are worshipers of the image cult.

The aim of this study, as stated above, also substantiates the *topicality of the research*, even the *scientific freshness, analysing the city image and integrating it into a specific conceptual context* (its relation with other operational concepts from the urban sphere such as *urban planning* and *urban design*, with *urban marketing and branding*) individualising a complex approach from multiple perspectives – urban-sociologic-economic -, while using a geographic (integrating) thought process. From the science of places (the science of [geographic] space) to the science of planning and creating the place (space).

2. Urban space – Elementary operational entity in analysing regional planning

Space, geographic space, urban space. Concepts, semantics, approach

Starting from one of the questions of this research – what role could geography, as a science, play in organising urban space and which could be the practical valences with which a geographer could take part in a mixed team of specialists that would plan a model of organising urban space? –, we immediately have the opportunity to identify some viable answers. And these could be synthesised as such: understanding space (metabolism, phenomenology) and using an integrated approach for it.

Above all else the city represents “an objective form of existence of a human community on Earth” (Neacșu, 2010a), a highly anthropic “piece” of space resulted and modelled in time by the action of all the geospheres (with a clear dominance of the anthropic or socio-sphere component). The city occupies a concrete space, precisely located, visible through its morphology and components – *urban landscape* –, is the result of the corroboration and interaction of several geographic conditions – *urban environment* –, it acts and functions as an optimally open thermodynamic and informational system, with a dissipative structure (Ianoș, 2000) – *urban system* –, it represents such a specific way of life that it influences attitudes, behaviours, ideas and value systems becoming a true phenomenon – *the urban phenomenon* –, generating through its dynamic countless new urban subspaces.

Even though there are some answers, the city still remains sufficiently complex and complicated, with a larger number of unknowns than known (sort of a “grey box”), which trouble urban spaces specialists and managers, still being too difficult to answer questions such as: *but, still, what is the city? How can we control it?* A true methodological and semantic thicket has accompanied, over time, analytic studies of urban space, so defined and yet without definition, so clarified to the smallest of details and yet obscure from an analytic point of view, the city is in every époque, for every generation of specialists, always surprising and seeming to increasingly sediment the idea that a city is more auto-organising itself than it can be organised, managed.

It is not this study’s purpose to attempt a more comprehensive, synthetic and essential definition, but in the spirit of the analytic process we could select two definitions of the city, one from Antiquity and the other from the beginning of the third millennium, both synthesising the method of understanding, the semantics and the expectations of an era. Thus, if in the 4th century BC Aristotel (384-322 BC) saw the city as a desideratum – “a city must be built to offer its inhabitants security and happiness” (as cited in Cucu, 2001) –, present times maintain the desideratum in an implied manner, insisting more on accepting the city as an objective reality – “the city represents a superior form of organisation of space with concrete attributes, quantifiable, more or less delimited from an administrative-judicial point of view (...) imprinting new qualitative characteristics to life (...) [of type] *urbs*” (Cucu, 2001).

Many meanings can be extracted from the previous two definitions, some becoming advanced subjects of analysis for sciences that operate today with the urban conceptual arsenal– for example urban sociology and the residents’ perception approach of the state of happiness or public security (could the present studies referring to these aspects or

recent events in European cities such as Paris, London, etc. have disappointed Aristotel?!)
–, but we will only stop to analyse two of them: 1. The city must be built (planned!) and 2.
The idea of space.

If we take a look at the two phrases – *planning* and *space* – and we track them in several schools of thought we will notice very important nuances (Table 1).

School of thought	The philosophic category – frequently used terminology		
	Space	Urban space	Urban planning
German school	<i>Raum</i>	<i>Städtischen Raum</i>	<i>Stadtplanung</i>
French school	<i>Espace</i>	<i>Espace urbain</i>	<i>Aménagement du territoire urbain,</i> <i>Aménagement urbain</i>
Anglo-Saxon school	<i>Space</i>	<i>Urban space</i>	<i>Urban planning</i>
Italian school	<i>Spazio</i>	<i>Spazio urbano</i>	<i>Pianificazione urbana</i>
Spanish school	<i>Espacio</i>	<i>Espacio urbano</i>	<i>Planificación urbana</i>
Romanian school	<i>Spațiu</i>	<i>Spațiu urban</i>	<i>Organizarea spațiului urban</i>

Table 1. Notions of *space*, *urban space* and *urban planning* in various schools

Thus, if the phrase “space” or “urban space” is similar, even keeping the same root, even in the case of different linguistic families (the case of Roman and Germanic families, just Anglo-Saxon!, probably showing the same linguistic source of the expression; no longer the case of German language), in terms of the phrase “urban planning” things change significantly, the terms’ semantics inducing a net differentiation. As such, if in the Anglo-Saxon literature the most used term for the concept of urban space organisation is *urban planning* (similarly in the German school, but also the Spanish and Italian ones), in the French one appears the phrase *aménagement*, while Romanian authors frequently use the term *organisation*. This semantic translation from the original phrases of “space” and “urban space” can only confirm both the complexity and the prudence in approaching the urban space and space in general, when it comes to planning and management.

What are the identified nuances of the three schools of urbanism and urban geography in the specialised literature? The three phrases – *planning*, *organisation* and *improvement* – have different meanings, which express three intermediate phases of the same process: *voluntary intervention in the relocation or resizing urban elements/components, shapes and flows*, synthesising the definition of urban planning. Thus:

- *planning* represents the immediate action following the intention to intervene; it is the chain between thought, intention and deed, the actual action; it represents the theoretical and mental laboratory in which the action plan that will be used in all phases of the intervention is being elaborated, sketched, prepared; as an actual product we can have the millimetre paper on the architect’s draw board, or the computer software that foresees and includes all the details, structures them on phases and well delimited stages, with well drawn and predicted effects and expectations resulted from mathematic models;

- *organisation*, the frequent phrase in Romanian literature, is a follow-up of planning (but it can include it as well, representing the activity between the crystallisation as a thought of the intention to intervene and obtaining effects) indicating the set of coordinated actions in virtue of the elaborated plan, in order for the objectives to be achieved; from among the intrinsic associated phrases to this concept the following cannot be missing: making it work organically, as a whole, methodically coordinate after a well thought plan, synchronise, systematise, rank, prioritise, sort actions and activities;
- *improvement*, the phrase used by French authors leaves the passive spectrum bringing an increased active participation; already designates the preparation of a terrain (space, territory) for a certain use.

All this terminological and semantic interrogation illustrates one aspect: not only the more or less developed predisposition for either the theoretical spectrum or the practical, applicative aspects of the mental type that dominates one school or another (this would have meant that the French and Anglo-Saxon mentality would have inversed their roles, taking into consideration the highly theoretical-analytical inclination of the French and the especially pragmatic and practical approach of the Anglo-Saxons), but the differentiated approach and reference to the concept of *space*, in general, respectively *urban space*, in particular. If we introduce into the equation adjacent phrases such as *geographic space* or *territory* (the city occupies a portion of this on the surface of the Earth, in a specific place, but also interacts with the other geo-spheres), at least from a theoretical point of view, with the afferent practical implications, the things seem to get hugely complicated.

In this context, the geographer could play a very important part in decrypting these phrases and operating with them in some complex trans and inter-disciplinary analyses, such as the ones related to the interventions on the urban space. In the end, the geographic space “seems to be geography’s privileged project (...) the king concept of [geographic] science” (Dauphiné, 2004, as cited in Neguţ, 2011), more often than not both French and Anglo-Saxon representatives of the schools of human geography slowly “melting” the word “geographic” from “geographic space” for a better cohesion and coherence on the spatial analyses shrine, a fact well revealed also by a representative author of the Romanian school of urban geography who entitled an important part of a paper “Space – central variable in economy and systems of settlements”, emphasising the idea that geography is a science of space, the geographer being a mandatory part in any spatial analyses, from micro to macro-scale (Ianoş & Heller, 2006).

We consider this fine delimitation of terminological phrases, the understanding of the metabolism of these urban space entities significant because planning different models of urban planning depended on the way space/geographic space was perceived and understood and ultimately the quality of human life and of the urban habitat depended on the results of those models. On one hand space, through its characteristics, influences human attitude, behaviour and perception, the human’s image of space and on the other hand human behaviour falls, as a feedback, on the method of planning, the method in which space is conceived, on the way it is filled with meanings. Again, a new model of planning will influence man’s perception and image. It’s a causal chain.

As for the notion of *space*, in a general, philosophical approach, this defines *an objective form of existence of matter*. It is an intrinsic law of existence of matter (concrete, visual shape of energy), to which one can add: permanent movement and time (dynamic).

Space is defined by some metric properties (distances, surfaces, volumes), it implies an ordering of objects, processes and phenomenon based on the logic of mutual relations and it has a series of specific qualities, among which: continuity, coherence, multi-dimensionality, **self-organisation** and others (Ianoş & Heller, 2006). From here results the idea that when we approach a series of subspaces (urban, rural, agricultural, industrial, transport, commercial, touristic etc.) in the general context of “regional planning” we’re in fact referring to short voluntary human interventions at certain levels of scale (neighbourhood, city ... locally, regionally, nationally etc.), with effects in certain timeframes in which prevail, for a certain moment, the continuous character of self-organisation of space, of macro scale self-organisation.

For a geographer space represents the essence of his science, all the analytical approaches of a phenomenon, process or element, referring to space, distribution in space, conditioning this model with the spatial characteristics and meanings etc. Individualising *geographic space*, as a particular space came by itself. This is the space on the surface of the planet (terrestrial space) where the geo-spheres meet and where the complexity and intensity of their interactions is at maximum. To facilitate its analysis, geographers resorted to a necessary reductionism substituting the terminological notion of geographic space with *territory*, which became a fundamental operational entity and at the same time a “total barometer” of the condition human-space-time – “the localisation of the economic space, the materialisation of the psycho-social space and the temporisation of the historic space” (Beaujeu-Garnier, 1971, as cited in Căndea & Bran, 2006) –, as French geographer, plastically and in a reductionist manner, stipulated, in defining geographic space.

In this epistemological order, *urban space* is only a subspace of the geographic space, a taxonomic level for which it takes and keeps all the rules of the first, but with its own capacity to develop certain dominant properties.

Thus, there are at least four perceptive dimensions of space, as they were crystallised over time, four different ways of reporting man and society to space, or, citing another French geographer (Dauphiné, 2004), terrestrial [geographic] space is *given* (the “first space” at Thrift, 2003 and the “absolute space” at Cocean, 2002), *produced* (“relative space” at Cocean, 2002 or “space of connections” at Thrift, 2003), *perceived* (reflecting a “second reality” – the subjective reality –, which derives from the “first reality” – the objective one – being filtered by human sensors and receptors) and *lived* (at Frémont, 1976; the “third space” at Soja, 1996 or “interpretative space” at Zierhofer, 1999; it is a synthesis of the first two physical spaces – absolute-relative – and imagined, a hybrid space, a space of direct, lived experience; it is a space of simultaneous representations, of simultaneous, transposed spaces).

Space becomes a social product, made up of many subjective spaces, generated by multiple actors. Soja (1990) introduces the notion of “hyperspaces”, putting forward the idea that space is not given, is not a stage on which a drama is being played, neither a box that needs filling, but a cultural product, part of the second nature (the subjective one, “the second reality”) which transforms both the physical space as well as the psychological one (imaginative).

City paradigms. The mix between urban “systemology” and “phenomenology”

Urban space, as a particular subspace, made no exception from this evolution of the approach philosophy, from this dynamic of understanding and deepening the rapport

between man and space in general, all currents of thought of the 20th century marking the researches of urban geography, urbanism and so on. The semantic translation of the rapport man-space was different, being able to be enrolled in a general binomial: physical-mental, modern-postmodern, system-phenomenon, function-image, given-product, determinism-possibilism etc., every epistemological terminal marking the periods and studies that Minca (2001) named “academic fashion” in one of his works.

All these approaches of urban space, from the determinist current („environmentalism”) that marked empirical studies, to matters of the “philosophy of morality” from the beginning of the new millennia, from the modern approach to the postmodern one, no new current of thought escaping profound critics, with numerous returns to epistemological reflections, crystallised several ideas:

- it is not a problem of accepting or rejecting one or another of the approaches because the human society’s way of thinking is in a constant process of change and the philosophy of perceiving and accepting urban space has the same dynamic based on the necessities, purposes, values and mentality of every generation. Countless spatial analyses studies have emphasised new research niches and have brought new ways of understanding and managing urban space.
- although the dynamic of these currents of thought has followed a chronological line, one current or another dominating a certain period, based on whether the urban space was in focus, either as an objective geographic reality or as a social construct, or the residents and their spatial behaviour were, reality proved that quantitative analyses must not exclude the qualitative ones, that “positivism” cannot fill the role of “behaviourism”, ultimately that a positive statistic – a large number of kilometres of street, trams, water pipes, wireless networks or various public utilities – does not guarantee a better perception of life in the urban environment, a residents’ state of happiness and satisfaction (remembering Aristotel’s definition from the end of Antiquity: the city must offer its residents security and happiness! This desideratum has remained valid to this day...).

“What makes a good city?... Cities are too complicated, too far beyond our control and affect too many people, who are subject to too many cultural variations, to permit any rational answer. Cities, like continents, are simply huge facts of nature, to which we must adapt. We study their origin and functions because that is interesting to know and handy for making predictions.” (Lynch, 1984) – starting from this well-known American urban planner theoretician’s assertion we just cannot help but repeat his thoughts, almost obsessively “What makes a good city?...”: a larger number of kilometres of urban infrastructure and town network or a stronger place identity?; public security, urban accessibility, efficient transport or a stronger feeling of membership to that place and that urban community?; uphill statistics or meaning, orientation?; a town drawn by specialists, technicians, urban managers or a city of the residents? Are the people just prisoners in the urban habitat or active players in urban planning?...

The city between quantitative and qualitative approaches: both (Fig. 1). It is an equation with many unknowns, but which functions as a two-stroke engine: one piston is the quantitative part, the other is the qualitative one; they strengthen each other.

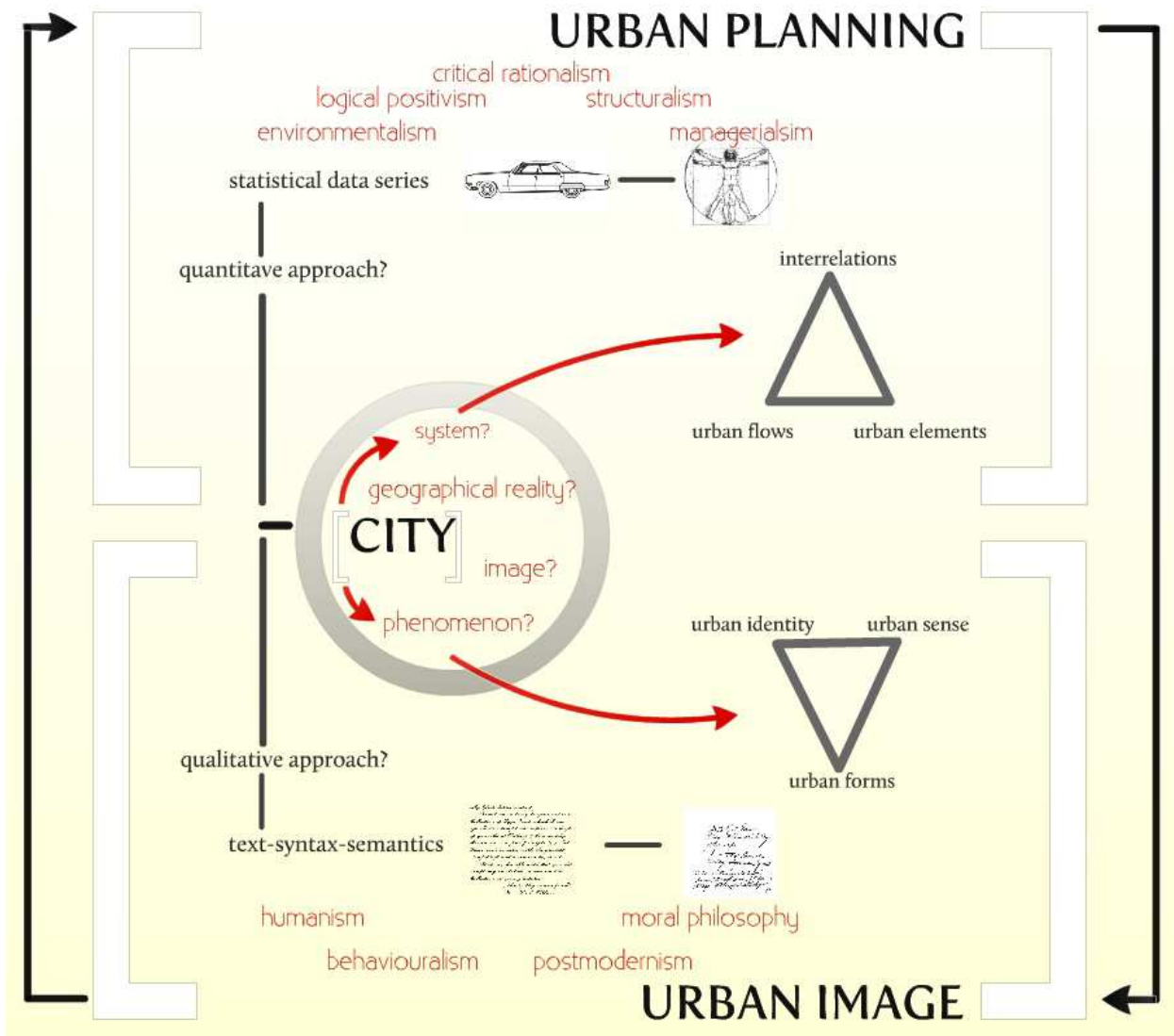


Fig. 1. City paradigms: The mix between urban “systemology” and “phenomenology”

The physical city is doubled by the mental one. The mental city shapes or should indicate the dysfunctions of the physical city. People are no longer the “prisoners” of a predefined, wholly determined urban model, but instead they like or manifest a repulsive attitude towards certain urban subspaces, shaping several types of spatial behaviour: topophilia, topophobia or topoindifference. Inhabitants thus become an active element in reshaping and resizing the urban architecture and shapes.

3. City image: A possible “key” to a good urban planning

3.1 City image concept

Short literature review

The American urban-planner Kevin Andrew Lynch (1918-1984), one of the most representative theoreticians in the field of urban design and planning, with a rich publishing activity, coins the term and concept, using it as a title for his 1960 study – *The image of the city* –, although the frequently used expression throughout the book is that of

“image of environment” (in reference to the urban environment, having three representative case studies – the cities of Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles). Also, studying the specialised literature (see Neacșu, 2009, 2010b), reveals at least three main directions in which the concept can be pursued:

1. *proper city image* as it was entitled by its founder, as a mental projection of the city – „(...) every citizen has had long associations with some parts of his city, and his image is soaked in memories and meanings” (Lynch, 1960). Lynch also initiated several theories in the field of urban design, among which the most expressive is the one related to good city forms, in which he attempts to prove that urban landscape design is not a purely physical determinant, but social and psychological factors also weigh in considerably, the essence of his publishing and professional activity consisting of the way the habitual environment is perceived by its inhabitants (opening a research area – besides the work aforesaid he also published *What Time is this Place?* in 1972, *A Theory of Good City Form* in 1981 and several articles – see also Banerjee & Southworth, 1995 – to which other authors adhered, such as: Jacobs, 1961; Sommer, 1969; Downs & Stea, 1973; Alexander, 1987; Hiss, 1990; Nasar, 2001; Ianoș, 2004 etc.).
2. *in the sphere of mental maps and connected concepts*. In this context it experienced a larger publishing activity, starting from the field of psychology and neuropsychology (worth mentioning the *cognitive map* idea’s and phrase’s debut moment – Tolman, 1948 and the monumental academic „debate” between Kosslyn and Pylyshyn from the 80’s regarding the origin, structure and properties of the mental image) and finding itself as an idea in numerous phrases: *topological plans* (Griffin, 1948), *environment images and city image* (Lynch, 1960), *topological representations* (Shemyakin, 1962), *space plans and cognitive plans* (Lee, 1968), *conceptual representations* (Stea, 1969), *cognitive representations* (Downs & Stea, 1973), *mental images* (Pocock, 1973), *mental maps* (Gould și White, 1974), *orientation plans* (Neisser, 1976), *cognitive configurations* (Golledge, 1977), *cognitive systems* (Canter, 1977), *spatial representations* (Allen et al., 1978), *cognitive images* (Lloyd, 1982), *mental representations* (Gale, 1982), *world’s graphics* (Lieblich & Arbib, 1982), *cognitive atlas* (Kuipers, 1982), *cognitive space* (Montello, 1989), *abstract maps* (Hernandez, 1991), *configuration representations* (Kirasic, 1991), *place plans* (Axia et al., 1991), *cognitive collage and mental spatial model* (Tverski, 1993) and so on.
3. *the city image, as a technique of urban marketing – urban branding*, where it was found as an idea in works of authors such as: Ashworth & Voogd (1990), Ashworth (1998, 2005), Kotler et al. (2002), Metaxas (2002), Kavartzis (2004), Deffner & Liouris (2005) and so on.

Definition

The *city image* makes its appearance on the scene of scientific research when the humanist currents of thought (*behaviourism, humanism*) bring a different light over the accepted urban space, as a reply to the rationalist, machinist, determinist approach (based on *environmentalism* and even more on the *positivist* current).

The city is not only a given space (absolute), but also a socio-cultural construct imprinting in its residents’ minds a certain image that generates specific spatial attitudes and behaviours. The operational instruments with which a geographer can “map” the *image* or *mental map* and/or the *cognitive map*, thus capturing the territorial differences regarding the individual or group perception and meaning (identity) over a certain geographic space (city, neighbourhood etc.). As such, the *image*, for the above purposes, essentialises

the information from the “lived space” („l’*espace vécu*” used by Frémont, 1976, also used by Lefebvre or Soja) as a result of daily experience and as a hybrid complex between reality and its perception, experimented simultaneously. Most of the time the daily city life does not assume us directly perceiving it (as we did the first day we moved in), but indirectly, through a lens, by mentally rebuilding past sensory experiences, however continuously enriched by new information or new sensations, feelings imposed by (re)perceiving a certain place currently undergoing a certain change, modification, forced by its natural evolution (either by its internal dynamic, or by factors that control and manage urban space).

Thus, *the city image* represents “an essentialised reality at city level, filtered by a subject and put in circulation as information” as Ianoş (2004) stipulated.

- “reality” expresses life lived in that urban space, in all its complexity, with all daily events and emotions, feelings and sensations generating by those experiences. This reality is essentialised at the lived space level (the interaction between the physical space, of direct experience, and mental perception, of the emotions forced by this experience).
- “the subject” is the individual, but also the human group, and based on their source they can be: residents (that perceive the city directly, daily) and non-residents (that perceive the city directly, through limited experiences – temporary residence for study or work, commuting, touristic transit etc. or indirectly, by means of oral communication, mass-media, advertisements, articles or books etc.). The variables through which the generic subject synthesises the information are very complex and from a sociologic point of view they can be classified into at least two categories: independent (sex, age, health condition and so on) and dependent (education level and cultural “background”, income and so on).
- “the information”, extremely complex as a construct and content, is also synthesised at the impact generated by the city’s visual personality (a result from the balance between the urban space’s functionality and its malfunctions, between a planned way of organising and using terrains and the city’s evolution), at the general impression people have of a place, which quite frequently expresses the positive or negative characteristics that the place’s name invokes mentally and sensory (Cowan, 2005).

Characteristics and specific elements

The perception of a place is complex and is not a simple result of direct observation, visual or otherwise, but a stored construct, constantly updated with new information, that keeps the memory of past experiences and carries emotions, sensations, meaning and identity. But in order for a city to be “good”, according to Lynch, it must present certain properties obtained from practices of urban planning and urban design such as:

- *legibility*. It is a notion that expresses the *urban landscape’s degree of clarity*, meaning the ease with which any part of the city can be identified and its image organised in a coherent model. Thus, the city is capable of generating a lower or higher visual quality for the receiving subject.

To this end, Lynch associates the urban space to a grammatically and literary coherent and correct text, which through its coherence and logic is capable of producing strong impressions to the reader. A city’s residents or passers-by must be able to, in a similar

manner, easily “read” the city, resulted from the current planning method, which means that understanding and organising information, orientation in the urban landscape are facile. Landmarks, strong visual elements are easily recognised and at a mental level, symbols are assimilated after a coherent cognitive structure.

On the city’s degree of legibility depends the city image’s quality, registering in a complex spectrum from the negative dimension to the positive one. It is intuitive that a city or neighbourhood with a good, positive image will always attract investors, tourists and new residents at the expense of another with a less favourable image.

Urban legibility also carries an important social role through the strong collective image it can generate, increasing the sense of identity, of affiliation to a certain place – “(...) the city must be readable, legible. If the residents do not see the purpose of urban spaces and these do not generate a certain sense of identity that can help them easily find a certain route, the city loses an important part of its informative capacity, making it hard to reach” (Bohigas, 1999, as cited in Cowan, 2005) –, thus guaranteeing a sort of *emotional security*. Expressing a city’s visual quality reception, capable of generating unified and coherent image (Miles, 2004) legibility becomes an *imperative function of urban design and planning*.

- *imageability*. It is also a notion introduced in the work „Image of the City”, targeting *a city’s quality to provoke a strong image perception to an external observer* (Lynch, 1960). To this quality contributes not only the respective urban landscape’s visual personality, but also its coherent structure and the sense of identity that the city is able to generate. Because a “good place” is the one that can be mentally mapped by individuals, with a spatial organisation easy to remember, the American urban-planner fixes several elements of the urban space that can become strong landmarks of mental maps, among which: *routes, ways, directions of movement, limits or discontinuities, neighbourhoods, nodes and landmarks* (for more details see Lynch, 1960).
- *liveability*, invariably associated with a city’s ability to promote a good quality of life, a high standard of living, through qualitative urban services and infrastructure (for everything that means living conditions in the urban environment – the quality of the neighbourhood, of the street, of the utilities network, accessibility, public security, public spaces for recreation and so on). The relation with *city image* is also based on mutual conditioning: if a city is a good place to live in, in terms of living conditions and standard of living, it will generate a good image and an attractive attitude; in reverse, a low quality of life will promote a negative mental image and a repulsive attitude towards that city.
- *linkability*, introduced by Nasar (1997, as cited in Nasar 2001) refers to a place’s ability to generate a positive feedback (similar to Lynch’s “imageability”, a place’s ability to generate a strong image), this indicating several essential characteristics of the urban space, with a prominent role in an observer’s perception and evaluation of a certain place: degree of naturalness (the more an environment keeps a higher accuracy of the natural shapes and elements, the more its attractiveness level increases, individual perception feedback is stronger and the role in qualitatively evaluating that place is higher); the elements’ degree of order (and the coherent distribution of urban elements and shapes in space); complexity (a certain space degree of complexity can generate a certain degree of interest from the observer and can become an emotional stimulus); degree of spatiality (openness); historical meaning (spaces with historical

significance have a strong impact on human perception generating a strong mental feedback).

As any cognitive process, *the construction of the city image* implies the existence of two entities: 1. The city (the observable reality) – urban elements and shapes, processes and phenomenon (that are combined in a unique manner conferring distinctiveness) in a constant dynamic, perceived at different spatial-temporal observation scales, a dynamic that maintains a permanent change of information; 2. The receiving subject (resident or non-resident) – perceives the city through his own variables, selecting, organising and loading the “urban information” with meaning and importance (Fig. 2). Based on the image’s genesis, the predominant element, the type of observer, the generated type of spatial attitude and behaviour etc., the city image can be classified as such: natural or built image (“brand”), economic image, cultural or mixed, endogenous or exogenous, positive, neutral or negative etc.

3.2 City image and its role in urban planning. Relations with other concepts

First of all, urban planning targets the city’s functionality, as a system: either redesigns the disposition of urban components, or resizes the inter-conditionings between them and the territorial flows. Thus, the target is always the maximum optimisation of the functionality of urban spaces and the spatial configuration of the new model of urban planning is projected at the residents’ mental level, influencing their spatial behaviour by developing certain attitudes towards certain places in the city, attitudes that can be negative, repulsive, or diametrically opposed, positive, attractive.

These mental meanings of the residents transform a city’s population into a pressure component over urban spaces, generating territorial imbalances, respectively balances, in a successful space management. As such, the city image keenly receives all the malfunctions in the actual way of urban planning.

Operationalising the image is done by means of *mental maps*, which individualise the attractive areas (topophilias), the neutral and the repulsive (topophobias) ones. But, a place’s image, by itself, has no strong practical operational value if it’s not put in a larger context and looked at as a *philosophy of space management* with all that implies, respectively the interface between the physical, real city and the human perception of it; from among the space “managers” and “producers” (government, local authorities, private entities, economic entities etc.) and “consumers” (residents and non-residents); a current and past management; a current model of space organisation and a future one, emphasising the malfunctions perceived by the individuals, lastly an interest mediation platform which is individualised at the urban space level.

Geography’s contribution becomes so much more important because of the *city image* concept’s spatial character, mental maps being able to find various territorial imbalances regarding the perception of aspects such as: the quality of life, the quality of public services, meanings, feelings induced by the manifestation of certain phenomenon – the perception of the state of fear, insecurity, affiliation to a place, attractive areas (topophilias) and repulsive areas (topophobias) and so on, matters of fact without which no correct philosophy of the place’s management can be perceived. As such, mental maps can become an operational “key” in *the decision making process*, a difficult and complex

process today if we take into consideration the number of variables involved in what is called control and benefit regarding the model of organisation of a territory (authorities, law, owners, beneficiaries, functionality, design, experts, conflicts of opinion and interest, technical methods etc. etc. etc.).

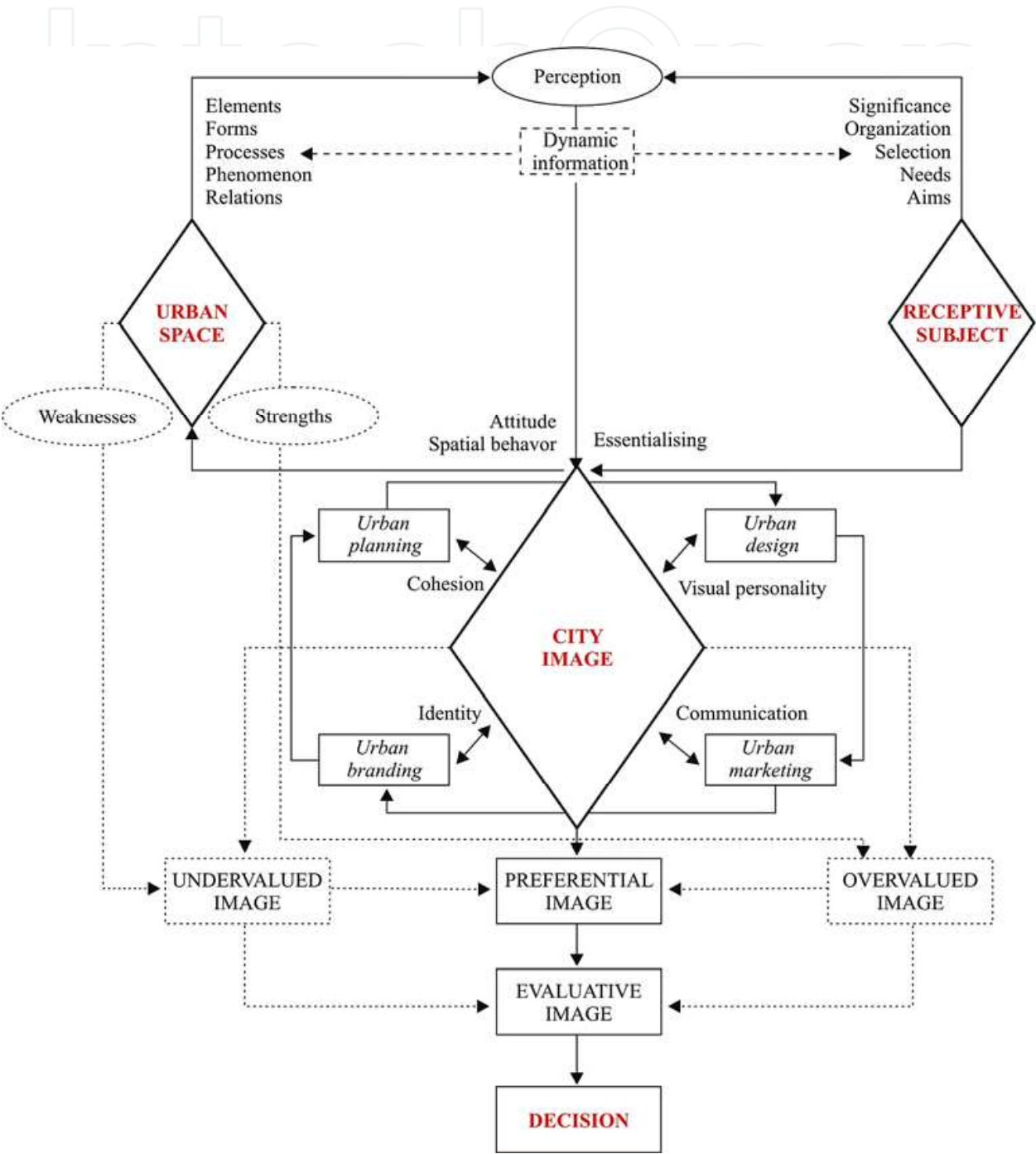


Fig. 2. City image, an instrument in the decision making process. Relations with other concepts (see also Ianoş, 2004; Neacşu, 2009, 2010a)

Thus, the city image can become an “extremely useful instrument in identifying strengths or weaknesses” of urban subspaces, the first generating, by exaggeration, an “idyllic” image at a perceptual level, while the latter an “inhibiting” one, a mediation between the two leading to a “constructive image”, as operational as possible in the decision making process (Ianoş, 2004).

Another strength of the *city image*, in the spirit of the territorial reality approach philosophy mentioned above, is the fact that it can amplify other operational concepts and instruments in the urban space approach (Fig. 2) and it can have an integrator character, the urban planning model, the city’s visual personality generated by urban design practices have repercussions in the city image, while the urban marketing techniques can influence how the city is perceived. In turn, city image can function as a pressure element in the decision making process to intervene in the current way of urban planning.

4. Case study: Ploieşti city (Romania). Integrating the *city image* into urban planning

4.1 Methodological aspects

Theoretical substantiation implied, as a method of research, using *interpretative analysis* in scanning specialty literature. This route was individualised by underlining the main markers in developing “the *city image* theory”, basically, the development of notions such as: *urban space*, urban space perception – *mental image*, *mental map*.

The city of Ploieşti has been chosen as a case study, considering the mapping of the city image at a micro-scale level (city and neighbourhood) and the forecasting of some future scripts of evolution through the integration of the city image obtained in their elaboration.

Mapping the city image elements and, in general, the perception of residents (endogenous) and non-residents (exogenous) upon the living conditions of Ploieşti, but also the general impression towards the city has been done by using the *questionnaire method*.

Thus, a survey was done, through a questionnaire, in two temporal sequences and two different ways: a) in 2001, through direct approach, on the street, stochastic (350 interviewees, 36 have refused the interview, the rate of representativeness being 89,7 %) and b) in 2004-2006, by using a web questionnaire unfolded over the Internet (200 interviewees).

The results of the two researches are almost similar, but we can still enumerate a few limitations of the obtained results such as: the comparison between the two moments is relative taking into account the different techniques of sampling; samples are experimental, one being interested by the tendency and not by their generalisation.

The application of this questionnaire aimed to, in essence, shape the image evoked at a mental level by the city of Ploieşti, also resulting a few other secondary objectives: the people’s perception of the urban habitat (living conditions), the correlations that can be established between the perception of the city and different independent variables selected in the questionnaire’s header – sex, age, studies, civil state, for how long has the subject been living in the neighbourhood etc., identifying new relations of causality between the perception of different living and dwelling conditions in the city (urban habitat) and the general image of the city, shaping new territorial disparities and mapping a new mental map.

Regarding urban planning, the diagnostic analysis of the current model was followed by the use of the SWOT analysis through which, thanks to the main factors that condition the city’s evolution, identified and oriented into the four categories (favourability, vulnerability, opportunity and risk), have been identified four possible (theoretical) evolution scenarios – 1. Sustained development, 2. High development potential, but in a risky environment, 3. Favourable environment for development, but with a low potential and 4. The regress situation, of impossible development. The real evolution of the city will be within these limits. This method has been chosen for forecasting a future evolution model of the urban system and a future organisation model of the urban space.

4.2 Ploiești city – Illustrative sample of the Romanian urban environment. Urban planning model

<p>Rank: municipality, county seat;</p> <p>Localisation: Southern Romania – 60 km North of the capital, 100 km North of the Danube, 300 km West of the Black Sea;</p> <p>Population: > 230 000 inhabitants;</p> <p>Area: 58 km²;</p> <p>Resources: oil, gas, salt (the Northern Subcarpathian area), agricultural resources (Southern plains) and others.</p> <p>Urban dynamic: before 1600 – village; 1600-1800 – borough (commercial and trade activities); 1800-1850 – trade center (commercial, trade and transports); 1850-2nd WW – industrial city (oil boom); 1945-1989 – municipality (socialist economy, county capital, complex industrial city); 1990-2007 – transition to capitalism (strong industrial restructuring); 2007-present – mix functional city (EU regulation alignment).</p> <p>Urban functions: complex (economical, social, cultural, administrative, residential etc.)</p> <p>Other characteristics: polarising centre for the cities in the Southern part of the county (a ratio of 6/1 of the hypertrophy index of county urban network), development centre of regional significance.</p> <p>Website: www.ploiesti.ro</p>	<p>Ploiești – urban profile</p>
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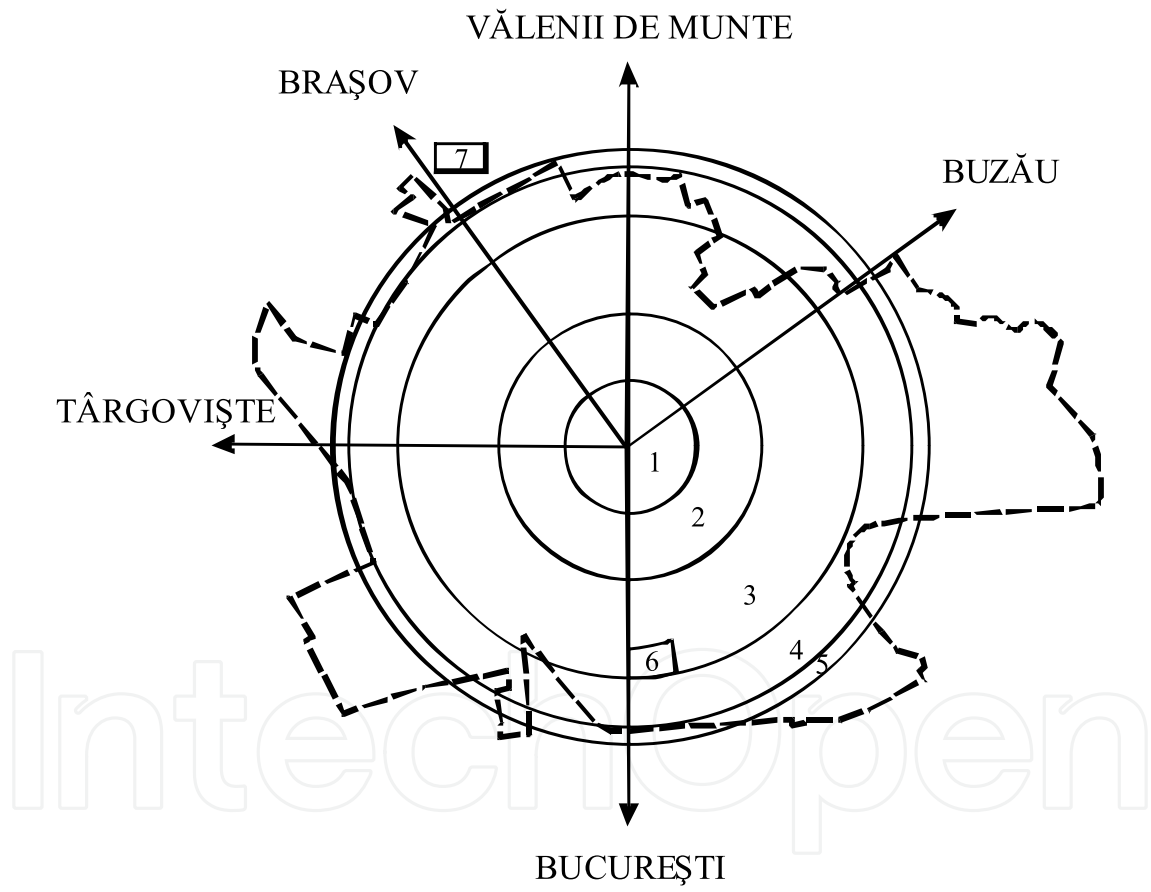
The Romanian urban space presents a “fertile ground”, in general, for studies of urbanism, urban geography, social geography, behavioural geography, being a true laboratory, if we take into consideration the effects of transitioning from “communist systematisation” towards western “urban design” practices, that combine the community’s economic and social needs with those of cultural and historical preservation.

The city of Ploiești is illustrative for the Romanian urban environment, synthesising it through its dominant characteristics: large city (over 230 000 inhabitants), complex functional structure, polarising role in the superior administrative unit it is part of (Prahova county), having passed through all the urban evolution phases specific to the Romanian urban environment, ever since its documentary attestation in 1503. Also, being a part of the generation of medieval cities and, among those, one of the demographically larger, Ploiești, from an urban dynamic point of view, can be considered a “miniature” evolution of

Romania’s capital, given its proximity to Bucharest (60 km), but also its similar organisation and architectural personality.

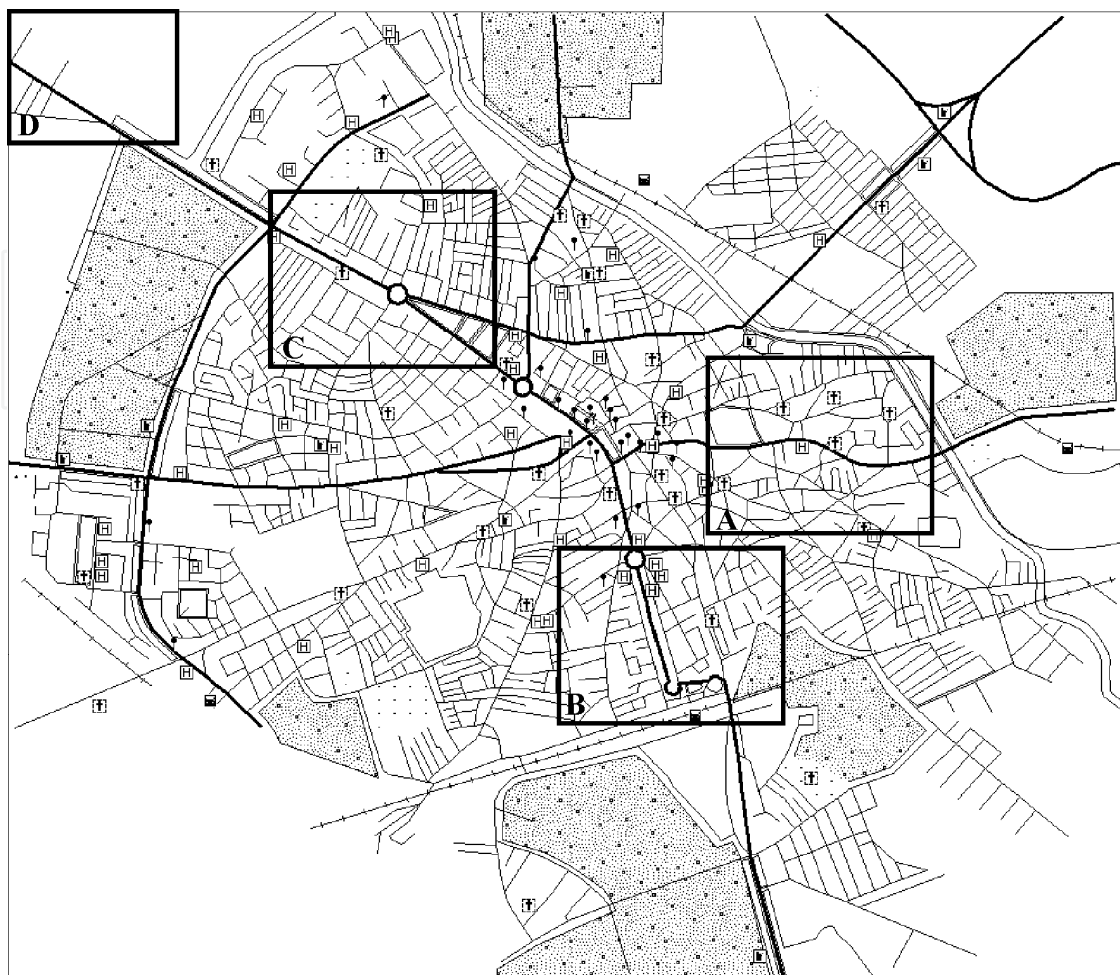
The analysis of the functional-territorial structures of Ploieşti, as well as the morphology of its street network, lead to the individualisation of a specific spatial organisation model that could be synthesised to a *radial concentric model* (tolerated by the lack of natural constraints imposed by the configuration of the permissive plain relief) with certain distortions imposed by its evolutionary and contextual dynamic in the regional and national urban system frame (the historical periods which had different impacts and urban policies, the communication axes that penetrate the city in a radial manner from all cardinal points and that have “altered” the ring morphology, territorial decentralisation etc.).

By comparing it with the fundamental theoretical models of urban planning, Ploieşti’s urban planning model presents many similarities with E.W. Burgess’ „concentric zones model” elaborated in 1923 (Fig. 3).



1. Mixed space: business, administrative, tertiary, cultural, residential (a “local” and modified version of CBD). 2. “Traditional” residential space (old neighbourhoods). 3. New residential space (large communist urban habitats – so called “worker districts”). 4. Specialised industrial space – petro-chemistry (discontinuous) and machine construction, chemical and food industry etc. 5. Transport space (railway ring and the highway system ring road) and residential (fragmented). 6. University space 7. Commercial space (Metro)

(a)



A. The oldest part of the city, the central settlement in existence for over five centuries. The irregular street network with short and tangled roads, the traditional inspired toponymy (tanners, fellmongers etc.) express the old age of space organisation. **B.** Interwar organisation sequence, but “perfected” by post interventions. The street network has a somewhat linear geometry imposed by the development of this Southern part of the city along the axis that connects the Centre to the South Railway Station and continues with E60 towards Bucharest. **C.** Geometrised street network – parallel streets. It represents the communist organisation sequence (1945-1989). Unjustified toponymy from the national history registry prevails (names of heroes, rulers or historical places that have no connection with the city space). **D.** New type of residential area (villa type houses on the city outskirts or in its immediate proximity) resulted from decentralisation, after 1990.

(b)

Fig. 3. Radial-concentric model of urban planning in Ploiești (a) and street network (b) Therefore, the city’s central part with a complex and mixed functionality (from administrative to services and from cultural to residential) is surrounded by the first residential ring (old neighbourhoods, in which individual houses are predominant, “retouched” reminiscences from previous centuries), doubled by a second residential ring, mostly built in the communist period, with large urban habitats that had to host the influx of new residents attracted by the opportunity of having a job on the industrial platforms. Towards the exterior there are the industrial space, organised in “compact platforms” in all the four cardinal points, transport space (the railway and road ring), university space (at the city’s Southern periphery) and commercial space.

4.3 Integrating the *city image* in *urban planning* in Ploiești

Ploiești's visual personality was imprinted by its spatial-temporal dynamic, its effects being found in the urban landscape configuration, but also in the community's mental projection. The centralisation and interpretation of the two analyses mentioned above, for the analysis and evaluation of the city's image, showed the following:

- individualising an **attractive space**, relatively continuous, overlapping the Central Civic Area, with extensions on the city's main functional axis, North-South (Republicii Boulevard –Independenței Boulevard), towards which the residents and other categories show a topophilic behaviour, the flows of people converging towards this territorial "corridor";
- identifying and demarcating three clear cores that represent **repulsive areas**, located on the city's outskirts, beyond the industrial and railway rings, spaces heavily marked by the residents' topophobic attitude and behaviour;
- shaping a **neutral space**, concentrated between the previous two, larger and relatively continuous, marked by topoindifferent spatial attitudes and behaviour (Fig. 4).

The *Central Area* represents "the heart of the city" towards which all the roads converge, being best known for its functionality – a space for shopping, financial-banking services, administration (the City Hall and Local and County Councils can be found here), culture (The Palace of Culture which holds the largest public library in Ploiești – Nicolae Iorga, the Toma Caragiu theatre, the Philharmonic, main high schools from the entire county - I.L. Caragiale, Mihai Viteazul, the Clock Museum, the National Museum of Oil etc.) and is also, in a smaller degree, a residential area. The second and third places in the *attractive areas* hierarchy converge in the residents' perception because of the presence of green space, Independenței Boulevard surnamed the "Chestnut Boulevard" (in weekends the road traffic is forbidden) and the Mihai Viteazul Park (Republicii Boulevard), with recreational valences, to which we can add the semi-commercial function of Republicii Boulevard. Important to add is also the fact that the two boulevards represent the city's vital axis, oriented from North to South, on which an intense traffic is done both towards Brașov (North), but also towards Bucharest (South).

As for the neighbourhoods that are mentally identified as negative, generating repulsive attitudes and topophobic urban behaviours (Bereasca, Mimiș and Vest I), the three areas are located on the Eastern, Southern and Western outskirts of the city, beyond the "limits" that separate them from the city's body – Dâmbu stream and the railroad (East), the railroad and industrial platform (South) and the West road (West), outskirts situated in proximity of the industrial platforms, true "colonies" in which the problems of infrastructure and urban services (street quality, cleanliness state, public lighting and security etc.) are numerous. Also, it was noticed a distortion of perception regarding these areas, the main reason being ethnical segregation (the presence of "Roma" communities in the area of these neighbourhoods).

Urban elements that evoke strong mental images fall under either one of the following categories of urban spaces: impressive through their functional characteristics (e.g. "Central Area", "Chestnut Boulevard", "green spaces"); identity sphere ("the city's history", "oil", "old buildings", "cultural personalities" associated with the city's name); cultural sphere ("theatre", "festivals"); utilities facilities; social – personally motivational ("it's a tranquil city", "I was born here" etc.). In the same context it is worth mentioning as another attractive element the city's proximity both to the capital and to touristic areas (Prahova's valley and others). Urban

elements that provoke a topophobic attitude are also numerous, but can be classified in several categories. Predominant are the ones of a social nature (ethnic segregation, not integrating the Roma communities, the more or less acute feeling of public insecurity) and the ones regarding utilities equipment (lack of parking spaces, poor road condition, insufficient sanitation, insufficient green spaces, pollution, poor sewage network etc.). Another voiced issue is the lack of interest in rehabilitation of patrimony buildings.

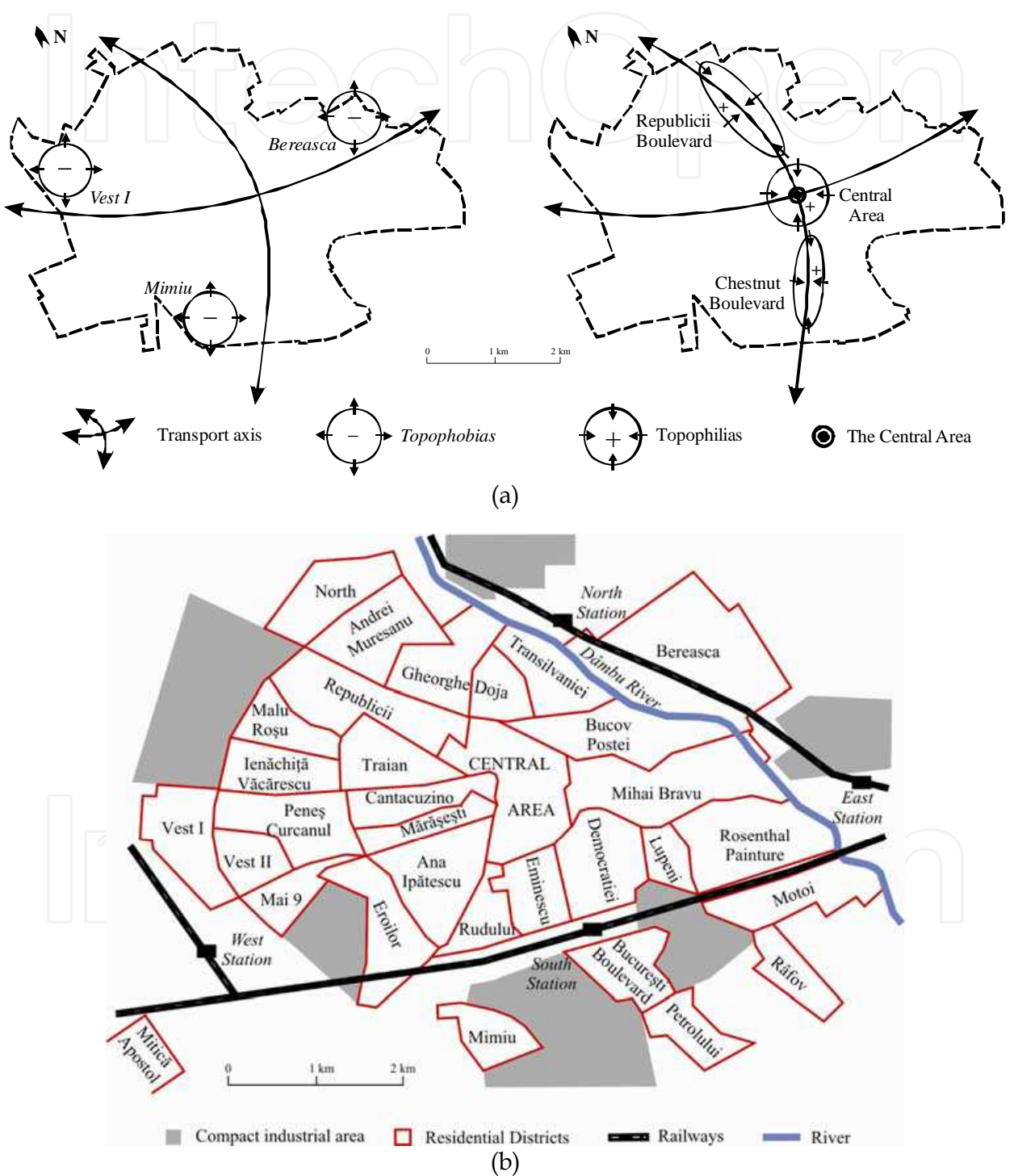


Fig. 4. Topophilias and topophobias (a) identified in Ploiești (chorematic representation) and main residential districts (b)

City image and urban planning in Ploiești city. SWOT analysis

With over 230 000 inhabitants and with an economic profile dominated by services and industry, the city of Ploiești has, in its territorial relations, the role of a convergence centre for human and material flows and as a centre for diffusing information flows.

These processes of concentration and dispersion of territorial flows define Ploiești's urban space configuration, its organisation being a result of the constraints imposed by a series of components, classified in four categories: 1. Core components – geographic constraints (geographic position, permissive topography, resources complementarity), human (over five centuries of tradition), political and administrative (obtaining preferred ranks in the regional urban network at different moments in history – fair, leader city, county seat, municipality, communist systematisation, community laws, the appearance, from a functional point of view, of some new territorial unities such as the “metropolitan areas” or the “development regions”) and economical (oil “boom”); 2. Restrictive components – the high degree of urbanisation of the Prahova county and the competition over the same local resources, proximity to the capital (until 1989 Bucharest concentrated most of the territorial flows in Ploiești's detriment, but the transition towards market economy transformed this element from a restrictive one towards a favourable one, Ploiești benefiting from the moving of some activities from the capital – the presence of some production units of strong multinationals, more of them choosing to bring their “decision centres” here as well); 3. Incentive components – being located on one of the main urban and economical axes in the country Bucharest – Brașov, an axis found in all historical sequences as part of the intra-extra-Carpathian transit space, from Central Europe towards the Danube and the Black Sea, local resources, oil manufacturing “tradition”, 150 years old in this area, “alive” in its residents minds (a fact highlighted by the questionnaires), existent infrastructure and the city's technological calling, its proximity to the capital; 4. Pressure components – the demographic element and massive industrialisation (representative for the communist period), the real-estate “boom”, the political element (laws, community regulations), foreign investments, being the components that generated “pressure” on present urban spaces.

Taking into account these reasons and the above mentioned premises, we can “visualise” a future model of planning and management of Ploiești, taking advantage of the city's radial-concentric structure. To this end, using the SWOT analysis in order to identify several possible evolution scenarios and forecasting several future models of urban planning and management in Ploiești has revealed the following (see also Neacșu, 2009):

Scenario 1. It is the ideal future development situation, resulting from the perfect convergence of the city's strengths and the capitalisation of all the opportunities, together with the full minimisation of the risks and the elimination or change of the vulnerabilities' tendency to slow the settlement's economic and human growth.

As strengths, the city of Ploiești mainly “counts on” its geographical position. It is a location that enables intra and extra-Carpathian transit (between Transylvania and Muntenia and from here on towards the Danube or the Black Sea), transit on Prahova's Valley, with profound historical roots, a corridor that is a part of the urban-industrial axis Bucharest – Ploiești – Brașov, but also a segment of the pan-European communication corridors TEN IV (Berlin – Budapest – Bucharest – Sofia – Istanbul), heading from West to East and IX (Helsinki – Sankt Petersburg – Chișinău – Bucharest – Plovdiv), heading from North to South and in proximity

of corridor VII (transcontinental waterway Danube – Main – Rhin). This location and reconfirmation of Ploiești as one of the most important road and railroad nodes, allowing access from the Capital towards Transylvania and Moldova, is doubled by its proximity to Bucharest, respectively to the “Henri Coandă” International Airport (approximately 35 km).

To the favourable geographic position we can add: the permissive topographic surface of the natural units in proximity which ensures a complementarity of resources, the intra-city available space and the polarising role of the city, being the residence of the most populated and urbanised county in Romania, which assures a pretty consistent human resource pool, thus the disadvantage of demographic aging and natural population deficit can be minimised by attracting young students from the University in Ploiești and “settling” them through programs that would guarantee a profitable relation between studies – research and the market of work – production. On the other hand, as far as the workforce quality goes, the city has at its disposal a specialised workforce, a great deal of it working in the manufacturing industry (one third), while most of it works in the tertiary system.

Although it has a manufacturing tradition, seconded by an industrial one, the city has a poly-functional structure presenting economical alternatives, for instance the boom of the tertiary sector (in which case, at least hypothetically, the workforce specialisation could have worked as a “break”, through the stiffness manifested towards professional reconversion). Also, even if it concentrates only a third of the county’s population, Ploiești produces more than 80% of the overall county commercial value.

Another strength is the good equipping of the territory, the modernising and extension process following an ascending curve, to which we can add the pronounced dynamic of the constructions sector, as proof of a high development potential. Also as a plus, we can add the municipality’s capacity to apply for various European projects and attract investment funds, for instance the high number of projects unrolled during the last few years, such as: infrastructure projects (for example *„The Municipal Project – Ploiești Begins From the Neighbourhoods Towards the Centre”*, which had as a subject the infrastructure rehabilitation and redefining the city image at a neighbourhood level (were also included in the project the neighbourhoods identified in this study as spaces that generate repulsive attitudes), projects within partnerships between public institutions, projects within public-private partnerships, European projects (*„The Local Agenda 21”*, *„CiVitas-SUCCESS”*, *„SpiCycles”*, *„Practise”*) and so on.

Scenario 2 represents the situation of a high development potential, but in a risky environment. The main risk categories which might affect the city of Ploiești are either natural (earthquake, floods, global warming etc.) or technological (the proximity of the industrial platforms to the residential areas, secondary activity, plus traffic jams ensure a high atmospheric pollution), legislative (the dependence of the economic area on the political one and the clear inseparability of the two, the frequent substitution of policies, instability or legislative ambiguity etc.), social (social segregation, economical poverty, stiffness to professional reconversion) or economical (Ploiești and other cities of the county, compete on the same niche of resources and activities).

Scenario 3 is the obvious reverse of the previous one, the environment being very favourable, but the development potential rather low due to the identified vulnerabilities. The favourable environment is maintained by the general historical and socio-economic context

in which our country currently is (member of the EU, situated at the Black Sea on the route of Caspian energy from the Asian space towards the large Western European consumers), this offering the possibility to obtain structural funds for developing and modernising the infrastructure to the Union’s standards. On the other hand, the “appetite” for foreign direct investments is rather high, taking into account that Romania is a rising market, unsaturated, therefore a “fertile field” in terms of costs, corroborated with certain facilities offered by the authorities to attract investors.

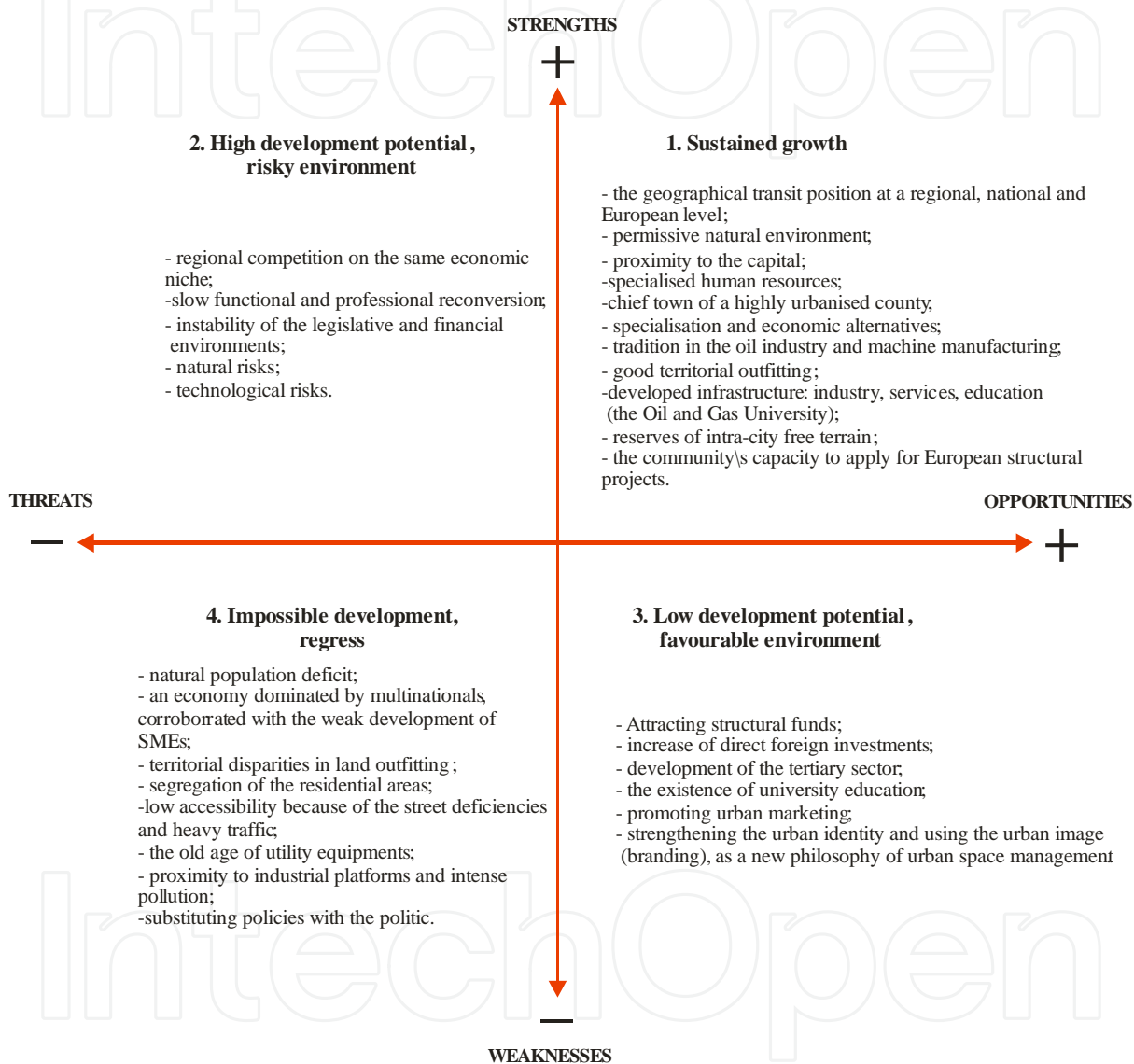


Fig. 5. Theoretical diagram of the SWOT analysis in the Ploiești city

Also, the industrial restructuring has allowed a fast paced development of the tertiary sector, services rising considerably in volume and value over the last few years. At the same time, in the urban space, different marketing techniques have broken through, urban marketing becoming a main component of space management in the city. To all of the above we add the attempt to revitalise the city from an identity point of view, creating images, brand-images to revive the consciousness and civil spirit of its residents. Worth mentioning are: *UNESCO Year „I.L. Caragiale”* (cultural program conducted with the occasion of 150

years since the birth of the great dramatist), *The International Festival of Poetry „Nichita Stănescu”*, *The National Contest of Classical Music „Paul Constantinescu”*, *The International Festival of Caricature with the theme „Home at Caragiale”*, *The “Chestnut” Festival* (with contests and folk music), international festivals of classical music etc.

Vulnerabilities have been identified in several fields, such as: *demographic* – accelerated population aging and natural deficit both in Romania and in Europe. These have repercussions on the workforce, the problem of developing a coherent policy of attracting immigrants from the Eastern part of the continent or Asia becoming more serious every year; the effects are: emergence of ethnical segregation, problems with cultural integration in the adoptive community etc. In Ploiești the rate of the natural growth was of approximately -1 ‰ over the last few years; *economical* – local economy is dominated by monopolistically multinational companies, the SMEs field being weakly represented; *social* – social segregation, manifestation of the poverty phenomenon etc.; *city-planning* – low accessibility in the intra-city space and in the city outskirts, the road network presents discontinuities in its radial and ring-like structure, exponential growth of motor traffic surpassing by a lot the existent infrastructure leading to traffic jams, the old age of utility equipments and so on; *ecological* – intense atmospheric pollution, the risk of polluting the waters or soil with oil, phonic pollution etc. and *political* – excessive politicisation of local structures and interference in the economical sector.

Scenario 4 is totally situated in the negative area and can appear as a result of the convergence between risks and vulnerabilities, economical development of the city being impossible under the conditions of an unfavourable, risky environment, with a low profitable capacity and having a low development potential.

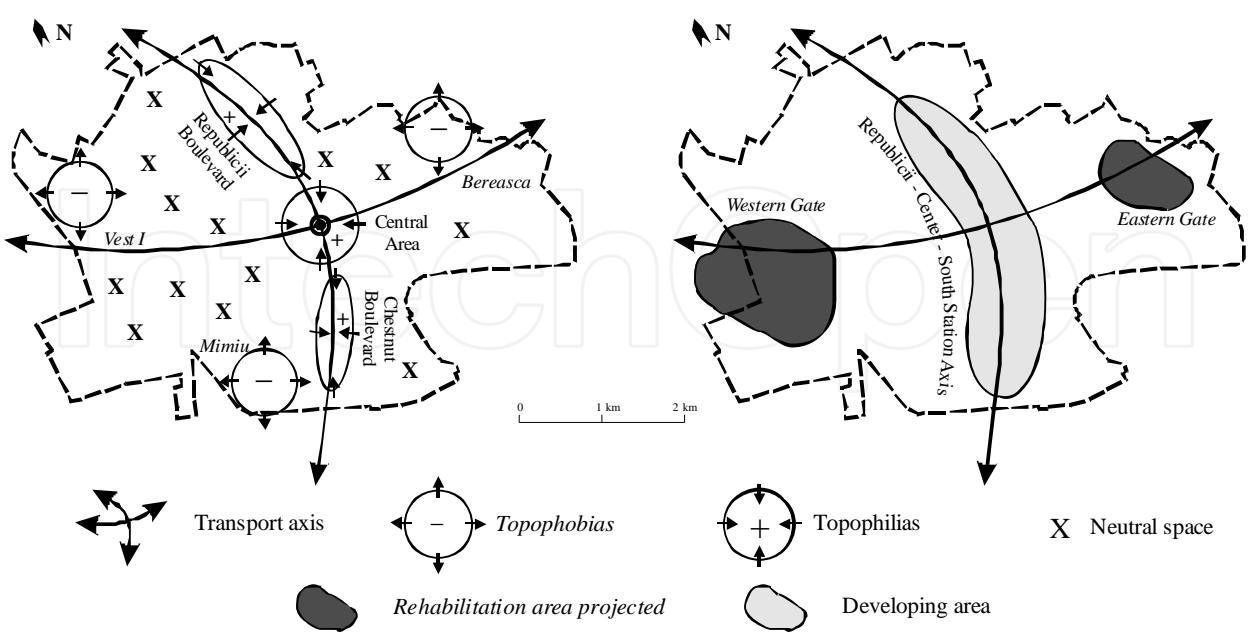


Fig. 6. City image (left) and urban space management (right) in Ploiești city

The above analysis of the possible evolution scenarios, but also of the main categories of components that could influence future development, show several priority directions regarding urban planning and management. Captured in “The development strategy of Ploiești 2007-2025” (Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies Romania [IHS], 2007), the above mentioned priority directions fully illustrate the integration of the city image, of the city’s mental maps individualised in this study:

- *spatial-territorial integration through a connection to the European transport network.* Thus, four major categories of infrastructure investments have been identified: 1. the „Mărășești” road passage: continues the homonym street and connects the city, over the Bucharest – Brașov railroad, with the National Road 1 (E 60), on which the TEN IV pan-European corridor is overlapped. Thus, approximately 12% of the intra-city space re-enters economic circulation and also, the Ploiești Vest Neighbourhood (Mitică Apostol), at the moment “isolated” from the city’s “body”, is territorially integrated; 2. the ring road South Railway Station – West Railway Station – North Railway Station – Bereasca – Râfov – South Railway Station which will enable the cleaning and regulation of the Dâmbu stream, increasing mobility and accessibility, plus eliminating an important part of the traffic from the city centre, with effects such as reducing pollution, preventing traffic jams etc.; 3. completing the tram ring (or surface subway) which will connect the South Railway Station and the West Railway Station, with positive long term effects: a viable, high capacity, fluent and ecological public transport system. 4. rehabilitation and introduction in real estate circulation of fields from the South part of the city, today enclosed between the industrial and residential areas, situated beyond the Southern railroad.
- *completion of integrated projects – „The City’s Gates”.* *Western Gate.* Integrating in the urban texture the Ploiești Vest Neighbourhood (Mitică Apostol) by increasing accessibility (Mărășești passage) and by raising the residents’ living standard (introducing basic utilities, specific to the city, water, sewage, gas or modernising the existent ones; the neighbourhood is today more of a suburban village, with a rural aspect). Given its proximity to the Ploiești Industrial Park, developing complementary economic activities, high end industries or research institutes integrated into a research – IT – production area, is compulsory. *Southern Gate and Central Axis.* Developing the urban axis South Railway Station – Central Area – Republicii, based on a future relation (centred on the Oil and Gas University) – CBD (Central Business District), with a mix of activities, taking into account the attitude of attractiveness towards this area revealed by the results of the research. *Eastern Gate.* Rehabilitation of Bereasca and Râfov neighbourhoods, identified in the residents’ perception as repulsive areas, development of the ecologic axis of the Dâmbu stream by cleaning and regulating it, modernising the infrastructure and raising the quality of life.

As far as the East and the West of the city are concerned, the research field materialised through the mapping of the city image has emphasised the strongly repulsive attitude of the residents towards these areas, their rehabilitation becoming a priority.

- *Imposing a new vision towards urban marketing* by implementing new marketing techniques, such as urban branding.

5. Conclusions

The analytical in-depth analysis of the *city image*, both as a theoretical concept in itself and also in its immediate relation with *urban planning* and its role in future planning models, has led to several conclusive ideas that crystallise the nature of the conceptual relations between the analysed notions. Thus, *city image*:

- **expresses a spatial analysis necessity, synthesising and essentialising a territorial and phenomenological reality in manifestation.** As most concepts that interact in the city's theoretical field, due to the decline of some "traditional" concepts that no longer managed to capture reality, city image expresses a spatial analysis necessity, managing to mediate two states of the city – system (function) vs. phenomenon (meaning) -, in the context of mutations in the urban dynamic and morphology stimulated and catalysed by globalisation (thus a change in conditions). Even more so with today's approach philosophy oriented towards sustainability – environmental balance: man – territory – and micro-spatial analyses.

What synthesises the *city image*? The total number of perceptible malfunctions in the urban habitat, which create certain spatial attitudes and behaviours: of attractiveness, indifference or repulsiveness.

What essentialises *city image*? The global image's integrator character of a place (neighbourhood, city etc.), this being a result of the interaction between individual images. A *positive image* points to an (mentally) *attractive space* which gives birth to a *topophilic behaviour*, a *neutral image* defines an *indifferent space*, in which case the individual develops a *topoindifferent attitude or behaviour*, while a *negative image* shapes a *strongly repulsive space*, towards which the individual or a certain community show a hostile attitude, a *topophobic behaviour*, of rejection (which affects territorial mobility within the city, investments, real-estate prices etc.).

- **leads to generating mental maps.** Zoning the perceptions of urban spaces or subspaces, expressed through different emotions, states, attitudes and behaviours, leads to the generation of *mental maps*. Mental maps help an individual organise all the information regarding a place, despite its complex structure, to "navigate" in an external environment and it influences his spatial behaviour or can modify his attitude towards that place. Also, these products of mental mapping complete the images that form the whole picture of a certain territory. The city or neighbourhood are perceived by the individual or community as generally being "good" or "bad". Local authorities using mental maps in follow-up settlement development policies (or sectors of it) can become the measure of success. Neglecting or avoiding them can lead to major dysfunctions in "understanding" that space, dysfunctions that can generate repulsive attitudes or topophobic behaviours, in which case the respective city or urban area begins to decline.
- **quantifies the mistakes in understanding urban space.** In this regard, the city image has the ability to express the way residents, both individually and collectively as an urban community, perceive the city/neighbourhood as a whole, mediating between objective necessities (community's interests) and subjective ones (individual's interests). Any mistake in "reading" the urban landscape has repercussions, at a mental level, in the form of either an overvalued image, or, on the contrary, an undervalued one. In this

case, the positive spectrum generates topophilic spatial attitudes and behaviours of attractiveness, while the negative one generates topophobic and repulsive ones.

- **operationalises the relation between individual/urban community and space.** Zoning the residents' perceptions of urban spaces and mapping them shows urban attitudes and behaviours (topophobias, topoidifferences or topophilias) that individualise associated mental spaces: repulsive, neutral, attractive. Thus, the city image concept's applicative valences result from the fact that it can become an instrument in planning the future model of space organisation, an instrument that will have to accompany a city's development policies in the spirit of good management.
- **it is an urban habitat's barometer.** At micro-scale level the city image individualises the main malfunctions, imbalances between activities, functions and afferent urban spaces. In fact, it only crystallises glitches of the current model of urban planning. Thus, the "strengths" or "weaknesses" of an urban space can be detected, even though they do not result exclusively and univalent from quantitative analyses.
- **it is an expression of urban identity.** Identity is what gives an urban community's life coherence and continuity, what makes the city appear like a structured and stable system. Translated into image, the city's image, perceived by the local community, identity represents the system's internal coherence. Identity cannot be separated from its structure and coherence, from the visual configuration it gives to urban shapes and forms, with a strong impact on individual's and community's perception. City image coherence mostly reflects the structure's coherence.
- **a stimulator decision factor to intervene in urban planning.** Any urban space or component is characterised by certain strengths and weaknesses that, at an analytical-theoretical level, cannot be the privilege of statistical data or individual or group perceptions, but of a balanced combination between the quasi-objective reality of spreadsheets and the perception in the residents' minds, who, through experience and meanings, feelings and sense associated to places, complete the urban reality picture. By overlapping the two images – the objective one, resulted from mathematical modelling of statistical strings of data and the subjective one (at the urban community level), obtained by mapping perceptions of urban elements and shapes – we can emphasise the following distortions: either the trend of *overestimating the city's image* (generated by an ultra-positive image based on personal emotional considerations – a place of birth or a place loaded with certain meanings), or the *under valuating* one (given by an extremely negative image). Correcting such distortions leads to a *preferred* or *evaluative image* as close as possible to the objective territorial reality.
- **is a mediation interface.** The city image can become a communication platform between various actors – residents (urban community), local authorities (political decision, urban planning), specialists (theoreticians and experts) –, mediating between territorial reality and all these categories of interests that converge on the urban spaces level. All these aspects iterate the idea that the city image is a component element of both the diagnosis process of the urban planning mode, functioning as an important factor in the decision making process and of the prognosis one, the positive city image being also a goal in the marketing process (city branding or rebranding).
- **create "couple of elements" with other operational concepts in the spirit of community oriented urban planning.** The mix between the physical and mental spaces, between systemic and semantic understanding of the city, between the city as

a machine-system, a product of rational organisation and scientific logic, and the city as a “text”, its meaning interpretable at a perceptive level, between the city as a territorial support of men and their activities and the city as a result of man’s perception and imagination, loaded with meanings, enhance the spectacular approach of the concept of *city image*. This gains a special value only in relation with the other operational concepts of the urban space, especially when each one’s strengths empower the other’s.

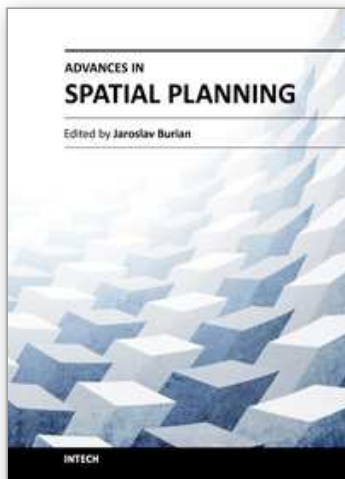
Taking the functional cohesion given to the urban space by the planning model, the visual personality generated by the shapes’ aesthetics of which urban design is responsible, loading itself with identity meanings and the sense given by the plus value of that “place’s story” (its brand) and gaining an excellent communication potential, as information, through marketing techniques, *city image* validates once more its exceptional ability to capture the territorial reality and, in this respect, its remarkable applicability potential.

- **can become a success factor in the urban marketing, in a visionary acceptance of urban planning.** If we imagine the city as an “urban product”, the municipality as an urban places image “producer” and the residents and other inhabitants as future “consumers”, then the *city image*, in a “good” social marketing philosophy (oriented towards the consumer’s needs, not towards the product), can represent a *success factor* and the image can become a symbol, a *brand-image*, for several reasons:
- it carries the semantic load of the *city’s identity* and the brand represents the synthesising of the place’s “story” at a symbol level; if the residents find identity anchor points in this story then the brand-image is durable, consistent, viable and becomes an image of the standard of life promoted by that city, even a warranty of it;
- through its identity and personality, the brand-image gathers the unique set of qualities that confer *distinctiveness* to a city in comparison with others and a certain *rank* in the local, regional or global hierarchy;
- the brand-image, through its unique character and plus value that it brings to urban spaces, insures the *residents’ loyalty* (as “consumers” of urban spaces and services);
- the brand-image becomes a *social interaction platform*, inviting people to interact, exchange opinions, ideas, knowledge and, most importantly, to take action. Thus, the brand-image becomes more practical, generating active people and even activists in the respective spirit.

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