

THE GHETTOS OF BUCHAREST: BETWEEN DEVIANCE AND NORMALITY

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The article is based on the results of a pilot study, centred on a group of inhabitants of two ghetto-type areas in Bucharest: the Zăbrăuți and Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys. The main objective of this study was the identification of elements, specific to the subculture and life in these areas. This study follows Loïc Wacquant's observations (1996), regarding the main features of ghettos: social stigma and discrimination, organisational desertification and marginalisation, crime and insecurity, division among the community members. The results allowed for the distinguishing of certain characteristics of the surveyed population: almost complete absence of cultural activities, existence of groups which promote drug use, high frequency of both deviant activities (high pupil dropout rate, lack of good manners among children etc.), and illegal activities (thefts, drug trafficking, illegal trade of flats and houses, usury, etc.), establishment of solidarity relations between the inhabitants, lack of means to exit the ghetto space, powerful stigma associated with the area and ethnicity, most of the residents being members of the Roma ethnic group, and the widespread culture of poverty.

Keywords: deviance, discrimination, ghetto, stigma, subculture.

1. INTRODUCTION

Poverty nowadays represents one of the most debated social problems worldwide. The fact that this phenomenon creates a new social class of the underprivileged (incapable of adapting to the changes the last century brought along, such as: urban development, industrialisation, the evolution of capitalism and technological progress, changes which go along with the specialization of labour and the increase of prerequisites needed in order to climb up the social stairway) determines the emergence of segregation areas for these individuals. Hence, neighbourhoods which incorporate all the unwanted elements in society start developing. These elements range from race and ethnicity differences to socio-demographical elements, such as income, education, profession etc. and are meant to protect the image of the society, the safety and strength of social order and structure, and the ones who cannot keep up with the ever changing world a safe environment, in which the negative effects or the possible attitude of disregard

coming from the others cannot harm them. If the first aspect can be viewed as accomplished, the second one represents a dire failure. These neighbourhoods are evermore associated with constant isolation, continuous marginalisation, stigmatization and the amplifying of inequities. The residents take no advantage whatsoever from living in such an area. On the contrary, they are exposed to extreme poverty and regress in the social structure, which pushes them to seek refuges in certain activities or in a certain lifestyle that lead to the characteristic subculture of these deprived neighbourhoods.

The idea of ghetto comes from the parallel drawn between the Judaic neighbourhoods from the medieval period, which were mini-societies within the large one and were named ghettos, and the present-day phenomenon, by which remote neighbourhoods came into being and developed their own culture. The term recently came into use in studies regarding underprivileged areas in Romania, and was quickly assimilated by the common vocabulary.

Taking into consideration the large scale at which the ghetto phenomenon is presented, especially in the media, a thorough investigation on the subject was needed and, subsequently, an analysis of the extent to which the information in sociology books applies to the ghettos in Romania. On this line, the objective was to establish how much do the international image and the one presented in the press correspond to reality. Also, an attempt was made to identify some characteristics of these areas, considering them proof of the existence of a specific subculture.

In this sense, the study tries to identify characteristics of the Zăbrăuți and Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys areas, which are considered to be two representative cases for the ghettos in Bucharest (many scientists have categorised them as ghettos), keeping in mind the following questions:

- A. Which are the specific elements of the subculture in the surveyed area?
 - a. To what degree are the inhabitants of this region stigmatized, and what is the reason for it?
 - b. Which are the characteristics of crime in the surveyed ghettos?
 - c. To what extent do the inhabitants benefit of the services provided by public and private institutions?
 - d. To what degree are the communities from these areas divided?
 - e. Which are the most frequent problems associated with living in this area?

2. THE GHETTO – EVOLUTION, CHANGES AND CHARACTERISTICS

According to Richard Sennet (1992, apud Marcuse, 1996), the term *ghetto* comes from the Italian word *gettare*, which used to describe foundries where poor people worked, while the *Oxford English Dictionary* (apud Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004) gives it as an equivalent of the Italian term denoting a border, boundary. On the other hand, in other studies, such as *The Oxford Encyclopedic*

Dictionary of the English Language (1996, p.803), the term *ghetto* also comes from the Italian *gettare*, which in this case means *to throw*, or from *Borghetto*, *borgo*, meaning crossroads, suburb, small village on the city outskirts.

Although the etymology of the concept remains unclear, its origin is clearly in Italy and the term was used in close relation with people of Judaic religion. In 1516, an order was given to separate the Jews from the rest of the Italian community, because the latter considered the Jewish minority to be so different in religious practice and philosophy that it needed to be isolated. Initially, this undertaking was saluted by both Italians and Jews, who established their own neighbourhood within city limits, and could keep and practice their traditions unabashed, without being exposed to the hostile attitude and sometimes violent actions of the Christians. The idea of a ghetto was perceived as having a positive connotation and brought genuine improvement to the lives of both categories, until 1566, when the Church decided to bereave the Jews of their properties and completely isolate them from the rest of the society by erecting a closed wall around them, the concept of ghetto becoming similar to exile. (Cuceu, 2002)

So, the initial meaning of the term denoted “an area which houses a people concerned with perpetuation of a peculiar (and different) culture” (Weaver, 1948, apud Marcuse, 1996, p.180). As Marcuse notes (1996), in the modern city, which suffered changes due to urbanization and industrialization, this meaning is enlarged with new features, which change the attitude people have towards this type of area.

At first, the isolated Jews were an important element of the national economy, working inside the community and periodically leaving these areas to complete certain assignments or fulfil their duties. Thus, the inhabitants of the above-mentioned neighbourhoods were dynamically interacting with the rest of the territory. With the coming of World War II, the interaction came to a standstill, the Jews being completely isolated from society, with no opportunity to create their own resources, due to the fact that they were considered inferior and inimical to the national economy (Marcuse, 1996). So, two extremely important aspects appeared with the passing of time, regarding the way in which these areas are identified: “ties to the mainstream of economic life in the outside society, and internal resources (partly as a consequence) permitting its residents to draw strength from their very ghettoization” (Idem, p.179).

A new definition of the ghetto is to be considered: “an area in which space and race are combined to define, to isolate and to contain a particular population group held to be inferior by the dominant powers in society” (Idem, p.179). Thus, the residents of this area become outcasts of society, economically and socially speaking, being rejected on all levels, forced to survive by illegal means and developing deviant behaviour and attitude, which do nothing but worsen the reputation of the areas in which they live and brings along increasingly obvious stigma. Ghettos become areas in which those considered different, useless are isolated, marginalized. Those who find themselves living in severe poverty, the

unemployed, some of those suffering from diseases, those of different ethnicity or race are obliged to settle in these deprived areas. That may be done through two channels: a formal one (through exclusive politics) and an informal one (through the discriminatory and stigmatizing attitude of the others). However, they have the possibility to leave these areas once they have gained the necessary resources for the process. This scenario is almost unrealistic, due to the fact that they are isolated from the rest of the society and from the resources needed for economic, social and cultural rehabilitation (Wilson, 1978, apud Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004).

Taking all these factors into consideration, it is understandable why the ghetto is such a closed space, literally and figuratively, in which degradation of the housing conditions, relationships between residents, even their personality and decline of the community and surroundings are a constant, due to the lack of internal resources or possibilities to achieve them, so as to improve the image of this type of neighbourhood. The residents find themselves locked into a state of affairs in which they are incapable of finding a workplace, integrate into society, establish and maintain relationships with those from the outside, start a family or live a normal life, according to generally accepted standards. In reference to these areas, Loïc Wacquant (1996) identified a series of characteristic elements.

Firstly, the individuals are *deprived of social power, due to the stigmatization and disdain that come from others*, without being able to prove the contrary because of the negative labelling. Once the individual gets to live in the ghetto, he automatically gains the traits and features specific to the area and his new community, no matter whether they are real or only perceived (Wacquant, 1996). In the USA, these deprived areas were defined and characterised by the racial difference, stigmatization and isolation being caused by physical differences, namely skin colour. On the other hand, in France and Europe in general, social exclusion comes as a result after the establishment of new communities with different religion, ethnicity and culture than the rest of the society (Stănculescu și Berevoescu, 2004). The residents of the French suburban areas can no longer be judged according to racial or skin colour criteria, and have the possibility to partially and temporarily integrate into the society, in other words to blend in. But still, labelling is inevitable when one discloses his or her home address, cultural differences being instantly attributed to that person. For that reason, Wacquant states that the black belt (the American ghetto) “is a racially and culturally homogeneous universe” (Wacquant, 1996, p.237), while the *red belt (banlieues, cités)* is rather “fundamentally heterogeneous in terms of both class and ethno-national recruitment” (Ibidem). The essential difference between the two types of areas can be defined as the nature of the stigma: the residents of the American ghettos are labelled and judged both because of their skin colour and because of the place where they live, whereas those living in the cités are marginalized only because of their belonging to the immigrants’ community of the deprived areas, reducing their isolation degree (Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004). However, the features suggested by Wacquant can be applied to both France and the USA.

Secondly, these types of areas feature a *small array of organisations*, in the sense that public and private services are nearly non-existent, and in the case they exist, their service quality is meagre and doubtful. The ghettos almost completely lack facilities such as public transport connexions to the rest of the city, electricity, sewerage, communication networks (phone lines, internet) and even shops, grocery stores, bank branch offices or parks, which would allow them to acquire the necessary resources to satisfy their basic needs. The residents are thus deprived of the free services provided by schools, medical centres and Police. Even if these institutions are represented in the above-mentioned areas, their services are meagre. By extension, the desertification of the ghettos means the isolation of the individual from the rest of the society, and the worsening of social exclusion of the resident, a feature connected with the third characteristic of the ghetto, which refers to the *high degree of inferiority of the institutions* in the deprived areas (Wacquant, 1996).

All the above-mentioned features have a *splitting effect inside the community* and transform it in a space of continuous struggling and fighting between individuals who are stuck in the same state of affairs. That is the last defining characteristic of the ghetto. This consequence is due to the fact that everyone blames the other for the image of the whole area and for the stigma. In their quest to overcome their outcast status, the residents of the deprived neighbourhoods try to isolate themselves and break off any ties with those around them, lowering the solidarity degree inside the created subculture; as a consequence, the risk of division and separation appears (Idem). To support his statement, Wacquant mentions the case of the French neighbourhood *Quatre mille*, which he defines as a *cités-ghetto* and is viewed by the outsiders as homogeneous because of the stigma. But, “what appears from the outside to be a monolithic ensemble is seen by its members as a finely differentiated congeries of ‘micro-locales’: those from the northern cluster of the project, in particular, want nothing to do with their counterparts of the southern section, whom they consider to be ‘hoodlums’ (*racaille* or *caillera* in the local youth slang), and vice versa” (Idem, p.238).

Thus, living in a marginalized neighbourhood, a ghetto, means waging a prolonged battle with social labels and stereotypes, with the impossibility and incapacity to achieve superior status and resources, with the problems and norms of the newly formed community, with one’s own frustration and with the specific discomfort which comes from not being able to satisfy one’s needs (Idem).

In Romania, the term was recently introduced (after 1990), after the bankruptcy of the large socialist enterprises and the intensifying of the social stratification process. Manuela Stănculescu and Ionica Berevoescu (2004) and Cătălin Berescu and Mariana Celac (2006) include in their definition only comfort 3 and 4 type blocks of flats and former hostels for workers or the young, which are characterized by a high degree of degradation, squalor and “are localized in a penurious habitat, deprived of urban facilities (without parks, playgrounds) and have much lower prices than the rest of the city” (Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004, p. 102).

The communist regime promoted assimilation politics towards the Roma minority, moving them to marginal and central areas of the city, in order to ensure their sedentarization. Furthermore, to ensure the proper functioning of the communist economy and state, a massive recruitment of work force was needed. In the process, people from the countryside and different cities were transferred to big industrial cities, to work in factories and other production facilities. Since they needed a place to live, special apartment complexes such as blocks of studio flats or hostels were constructed in areas with bad reputation, while using materials of doubtful quality to ensure as low of a cost as possible.

After the Revolution of 1989, these blocks of flats were forgotten and the state failed to react to the progressive degradation these areas were undergoing. This came as a consequence after the large socialist enterprises went bankrupt and left the workers unemployed and with no opportunities of reintegration into the labour market, because of their low qualifications and also because they were lacking the resources to maintain their homes. The interest in these areas and their inhabitants dropped steadily until the year 2000, when public awareness was directed towards this problem, and different techniques and strategies for the reintegration of these individuals were discussed (Stănculescu and Berevoescu, 2004).

However, the inhabitants' economic and social problems have gone from bad to worse until now. The main activities they have taken up to live through the difficulties, such as trading flats, have determined neighbourhood's current demographic structure. As a result, the number of persons living under the poverty threshold has significantly increased, and the standard of living is dropping, since the inhabitants cannot afford to pay their debts to the state and are deprived of running water, electricity and heating. The given state of affairs exacerbates the feeling of being marginalized, socially excluded and amplifies the stigma associated with poverty and lack of education. It also emphasizes the idea that the majority is Roma.

3. THE GHETTO AS A SPACE WHERE A SUBCULTURE EMERGES

It is obvious that ghettos essentially differentiate themselves from cities and incorporate certain specific cultural elements, which can be identified and interpreted according to the characteristics pointed out by experts in this field of research.

Taking into consideration that living in such areas presupposes a certain label that is attributed, a certain degree of stigmatization, isolation and marginalisation coming from the society, the residents are forced to develop surviving mechanisms and protect their social identity. In the process, they create a particular set of norms and values and put together strategies and plans to obtain a minimum income. In time, this phenomenon becomes clearer and clearer, and expands to the whole group. Thus, by adopting a specific lifestyle, clothing style, certain traditions,

survival and working techniques and hobbies, a new culture, peculiar to these areas, emerges. Anthony Giddens (2000, p. 31-33) states that the diversity of the industrialized societies is the main cause for this development. That is exactly what determines a particular subculture to emerge and influences the common interests, aspirations and realities of the residents.

While analysing the concept of subculture, Sorin M. Rădulescu and Dan Banciu offered a short explanation of their emergence inside a society. They are “subdivisions of the cultural models, to which some social groups participate” (1990, p. 69) and appear as a form of protest, as a reaction of those whom are totally or partially denied access to society’s resources, to decision making and to the community’s evolution. Hence, they form communities with a certain profile and ensure their material and spiritual welfare by creating their own set of norms and values.

The term *culture of poverty* was introduced by Oscar Lewis (1966), who, after surveying more than a few poor areas in Latin America, observed similarities between lifestyles, habits, values and problems shared by their residents. Thus, he extended these features to all poor neighbourhoods with low degrees of welfare, no matter in which city or country they are located.

The main idea of his theory is that a low living standard causes the development of a certain behaviour, which allows the individuals to survive and preserve their identity in spite of the stigma and marginalisation they face from others. The major issues which this social category faces are: “a chronic unemployment and underemployment, low wages, lack of property, lack of savings, absence of food reserves in the home and chronic shortage of cash.” (Lewis, 1966, p. 221). Thus, the persons who live in poverty make use of different methods (sometimes illegal) which are usually avoided, in order to ensure an income that would allow them to live from hand to mouth and satisfy their basic needs. The result is an obvious vicious circle from which the inhabitants of these deprived areas can hardly move away.

The culture of poverty has a significant impact on the character of the individuals who live inside the poverty-stricken areas and Lewis points out that those who are born and raised in such a social and cultural context “has a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority” (Idem, p. 222). The helplessness comes as a consequence of the individual’s inability to overcome his meagre welfare standards and climb up the social hierarchy, the dependence is a result of one’s incapacity to integrate into the labour market and relying on welfare, and the feeling of inferiority is naturally associated with the stigma and labelling one has to suffer, being treated as someone who has failed to gain a decent and respected social status, instead of an equal.

In what concerns ghetto-type neighbourhoods, they are renowned for the high levels of delinquency and high degree of dangerousness for living or simply walking the streets of these stigmatized districts. This is also one of the essential features and is caused by the dominating poverty.

4. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE SUBCULTURE IN SOME GHETTOS OF BUCHAREST

The ghetto has been a popular subject in different studies and columns, and has thus generated curiosity. The present study is based on Loïc Wacquant's research regarding the differences between the ghetto *South Side* in Chicago and the *banlieue Quatre mille*, and is centred around the four specific features of these areas: "the powerful territorial stigma that attaches to residence in an area publicly recognized as a 'dumping ground' for poor people, downwardly mobile working-class house-holds and social outcasts; the second dimension, crime and insecurity, is of central importance not only as a major determinant of the quality of life but also because it feeds stigmatization and crucially affects local housing and economic conditions. The third, closely related, dimension of organizational density and diversity concerns the provisioning of the basic needs of residents and impacts their sense of inclusion in or isolation from the broader society. The fourth and last section takes up the question of the social divisions and bases of conflict operative in stigmatized neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty in France and the United States, and briefly considers the different social mechanisms that fuel urban tension and ethno-racial hostility in the two settings" (Wacquant, 1996, p. 237).

Alongside these specific elements identified by Wacquant, other variables have been taken into consideration, in order to define a culture, peculiar to these areas: socio-demographic indicators, survival techniques, hobbies and other ways spend free time, the interest towards work opportunities, cultural activities undertaken etc.

The definition of the ghetto concept was taken from Manuela Stănculescu and Ionica Berevoescu (2004), who include the comfort 3 and 4 type blocks of flats in it and the former hostels for workers or the young, which are now suffering from severe degradation. Thus, the survey samples have been selected from the inhabitants of such neighbourhoods. Although, according to foreign studies, the ghetto concept also incorporates other poverty-stricken zones such as landfill or old city centres, I have chosen to narrow the interest area to the above-mentioned blocks of flats.

Furthermore, the concept of subculture is used in the sense of "a set of common and complex features, specific to some social groups" (Mihăilescu, 2003, 388). In this study I will refer to marginalised groups, which, according to Sorin Rădulescu (1998, pp. 107-109), embrace a specific set of norms and values, different from the rest of society and which can vary from one community to the other. The features of these subcultures can be noticed in "focal interest areas" (Idem, p. 108), which denote what the individuals value most: the specific vernacular, the accepted norms, traditions, habits and the values shared by the members of the subculture.

Because surveying all ghetto-type neighbourhoods in Bucharest would presuppose too many survey samples, the researched area was limited to Zăbrăuți

Street and Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys; both areas are situated in the neighbourhood of Ferentari in the Fifth District of Bucharest. The survey samples were both men and woman, regardless of age, because their impression of the area helped create a detailed image of it, aside from the socio-demographical conditions. The councillors with the Probationary Service of the 3rd District of Bucharest were also among survey samples, due to their rich experience in working with the inhabitants of the above-mentioned areas.

The interview contained four main parts and was used as instrument for surveying and in the operationalization of the concepts. The questions it contained were structured into two main categories: questions inquiring about socio-demographic characteristics (income, occupation, ethnicity, education etc.) and referring to elements of subculture (ways of spending free time, specific habits and traditions, cultural activities undertaken, complaints or perspectives etc.), specific for the surveyed area and population. A total number of fourteen persons were interviewed, from which ten were inhabitants of the two areas of interest and the rest of four were counsellors with the Probation Service of the Court of Bucharest, who were directly involved in cases located in the two areas. In their case, the interviews were adapted for their observer position. The whole procedure took place in May 2010 and covered the Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys in the neighbourhood of Prelungirea Ferentari (5th District of Bucharest), and also included the above-mentioned Probation Service precinct.

The Socio-Demographic Structure

This dimension was considered important because it allowed determining if there are any predominant socio-demographical elements, which would strengthen the idea that persons with similar traits are seeking refuge in a determined and bounded area, or, put simply, form a community.

Regarding the average income and the employment status, all residents of the ghetto-type areas stated that their income is low because of their insufficient qualifications and impossibility to find a workplace. This aspect is in close connection with career preparation and education.

Inquiring about the financial aspect, we noticed that almost all answers pointed out the fact that a room may be occupied by up to eight individuals, who are sometimes in no way related to each other. This may be considered as a clear indicator of the extreme poverty of many households from Zăbrăuți, Livezilor and Vâltoarei.

On the other hand, the councillors expressed a different point of view, saying that many of the residents have a comfortable income, but are not willing to declare them to not lose their right to welfare and prefer keeping this image of general poverty. Among other things, they mentioned that many of the inhabitants have renovated their homes with parquet and double pane glass.

However, all counsellors mentioned the fact that there are indeed many cases of very poor households, because their members cannot find a proper workplace. This is due to their lack of skills and insufficient qualifications. The meagre income also reflects itself in the shockingly low habitability of their homes, which, in most cases, lack doors, windows, essential pieces of furniture (bed, table, chairs etc.), utilities (from warm water to electricity) and are full of cockroaches.

Furthermore, referring to occupational status, twelve respondents mentioned the high unemployment rate and frequency of cases where individuals are illegally employed, without a career record book. However, few of them have no occupation, and live only of welfare.

The low average education level is also a problem of ghetto's inhabitants, with eight respondents confirming that the education provided in the area is meagre and the pupil dropout rate is soaring.

The probationary counsellors also mentioned that the average education level in the area is low, most young people preferring to abandon school after finishing eight classes. This situation seems to get worse, as neither the children nor the young people want to go to school.

After scrutinizing the results of the inquiry referring to the average education level, the results showed that 3 residents had a bachelor's degree, 2 had not finished any type of school, only 4 grades, and the rest of five had finished high-school.

All respondents replied to the question about the ethnical majority in the area, that the Roma people represent a large part of the population in the surveyed ghettos. Most of our interlocutors are unhappy about the fact that outsiders identify them as Roma, only because of the place they live in, as a result of stigmatization and labelling. It is important to mention that many Romanians underwent a process of "Gypsyisation", borrowing a large part of the behaviour and habits of the Roma people, a fact which arouse the criticism of others because of the created inconveniences.

The features of the Zăbrăuți, Livezilor and Vâltoarei ghettos in regard to the socio-demographical aspects coincide with the observations made in different studies, according to which the flats are mostly occupied without the assent of the public authorities, the density of inhabitants is high, the material resources and utilities are missing, the residents have insufficient qualifications or none at all and as a result, they earn their living through temporary assignments or informal, even illegal activities (Clark, 1996). Although Wilson (1984) considers the predominance of the young a defining feature of the American ghettos, it is obviously missing in our case. The residents perceive the young-old ratio as being equal, but there is a tendency of household enlargement, among those with more than four members.

Stigma, Labelling and Discrimination

The surveyed districts can be described as segregation areas for the under-privileged because of low average educational level, specific occupational status,

meagre economic background and predominance of the Roma people. This state of affairs also presupposes low quality public education and lack of a workplace and sufficient income, in other words high unemployment. Most of the inquired confirmed that the majority of those who end up in the district are people in need, who cannot afford a flat in another area because of the paltry sums they own. For that matter, eight persons said that they moved to the Zăbrăuți or Livezilor and Vâltoarei blocks because the flats are cheap, but intend to renovate them or move to another district if their financial conditions improve.

The stigma and discrimination become visible when the residents try to integrate into the labour market or make an attempt to access banking services. They cannot contract a loan because of the district they live in, and it is impossible for them to sell their flats and move to another area due to the lack of buyers, and the mistrust of outsiders. Moreover, many complained about the negative labelling as a consequence of where they live and of the specific ethnic structure. It is common for them to be identified by others as members of the Roma minority, and face the mistrust caused by the link between this ethnic group and the tendency to commit crimes and live in squalid conditions. This phenomenon is mentioned in Romanian studies on this subject: “the research on how the Roma identity is perceived at the social level has showed that the residents of areas labelled as Roma (gypsy) may be used as an indicator to identify a person as being of Roma ethnicity (gypsy) when he or she denies it. (...) Living in an area labelled as *gypsy* has clear disadvantages when its inhabitants introduce themselves, given the stigma associated with the Roma identity in Romania.” (Rughiniș, 2004, 55)

Regarding the outside perception of the district, many of the respondents mentioned that taxi drivers often refuse to drive into that area, because they fear being attacked. Furthermore, everyone that has never been to those districts have preconceived ideas about the residents, labelling them as poor, lazy, refusing to work and committing crimes to ensure their income.

Surprisingly, four of the respondents said that there is nothing wrong with other people labelling them as a potential threat to their physical and moral integrity, because the latter naturally tend to protect themselves and avoid contact with persons they consider dubious at first sight. All the more so since these persons come from a place, infamous for the illegal activities which their residents undertake.

However, there are persons (four) who say they do not feel stigmatised, pointing out the fact that, in time, they have made a good image for themselves in society and in their social circle. They are respected for their qualities (loyalty, industry, reliability, honesty etc.), which help them overcome the bad first impression after revealing the district in which they live. These answers were given by people who were either born and raised here, or were allocated here before 1990, when the environment and reputation of the district were better.

From the conversations we had with the residents and probationary counsellors, we noticed that all of them are aware of the fact that public policy has negatively influenced the discrimination degree and the image of those blocks of flats. The minimum interest shown towards these areas has caused the degradation of the blocks, the inhabitants were left without any help and no projects were launched to help them reintegrate into the labour market. Furthermore, the public authorities allocated the flats in the area to those in extreme poverty, aggravating the state of lack of resources and enforcing the idea these areas are special refugee districts for the poor. Moreover, all respondents insisted that they cannot move from this area because of their limited resources, and thus, there are no move outs in the district.

The social stigma and discrimination are a consequence of the large percentage of Roma people in the area, which, in time, developed the reputation of Roma neighbourhood.

Thus, it may be concluded that the residents are stigmatised to an extended degree, and it is due to the association with the area, the infamous neighbourhood, in which the Roma people, the uneducated and the unemployed are segregated. Wacquant observed that these areas are characterised by the powerful social stigma which is associated with that particular territory, and which affects the inhabitants of a district, known to house the poor, the lower working class and social outcasts (Wacquant, 1996). His observations are confirmed by the features of the neighbourhood of Ferentari.

Organisational Desertification and Social Isolation

In this part of the study, the main focus was the frequency with which the public authorities get involved into solving the problems of the above-mentioned areas, the density of offices for public service and branch offices of private companies, as well as the access of the residents to them and to different goods. Wacquant (1996) states that ghetto-type areas have certain features, such as social isolation, which is caused by the very small density of the public authorities' offices, as well as the doubtful quality of the goods and services they provide.

However, given all these aspects, none of the respondents complained about the absence of public authorities or of different organizations during the inquiries, stating that these are well-represented in the area.

The inhabitants are pleased about the fact that there are schools nearby, which have been recently renovated, offering better conditions for learning. Moreover, all educational institutions are well equipped and furnished, and have everything from clean restrooms to fast computers. The quality of the provided services is good, as well as in every other neighbourhood of Bucharest, and they also have counsellors on social and ethnical problems in every school of the area.

On the other hand, there are no bank offices, as the respondents said, but they do not complain about it, since they do not have any loans to repay. Moreover,

there are no big shops or supermarkets, just small ones that do, however, cope with the demand in the area. In the case of Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys, the inhabitants mentioned that there are no police precincts or medical centres nearby; this can be of great disadvantage if health emergencies should occur or conflicts should escalate.

Authorities rarely and superficially intervene, causing unrest and discontent among the residents. The police are rather passive about any conflicts which appear in the area, either because they are afraid of the inhabitants' reaction, or because they have struck a deal with them and agreed to close an eye to the illegalities committed by them. However, the neighbourhood is kept under control at some degree through regular raids, which are meant to take the pulse of the community. The state's and local authorities' interest towards these deprived areas is minimal and limited to election campaigns, when the residents are offered different temporary benefits in exchange for votes.

Twelve of the fourteen respondents underlined the fact that they are profoundly discontented with the ignorance and disinterest shown by the local authorities, and indicated that they have ties to the big families of the district, who commit most of the crimes. When the inhabitants file requests, they are completely ignored because the local councillors have left the area uncared for and the residents have low social power.

In regard to the access to public services and utilities, it is important to mention that many households are officially not connected to the water supply network, district heating and electricity network. The inhabitants practically steal electricity, but there are no phone lines in the area. The poorest inhabitants take advantage of different special offers given by the cable television operators or phone companies, and use their services for a short time, but are eventually cut off because they cannot afford to pay their debts.

Furthermore, there are enough means of public transport in the district, but a big problem continues to be the absence of services offered by waste management companies. As a consequence, the environment degrades at a fast rate, is polluted, and extremely dangerous to the residents' health.

Thus, the inhabitants' main problem is the disinterest shown by the local authorities, which is active only during election campaigns and take advantage of their meagre financial situation to win votes.

Crime and Insecurity

The crime rate in the surveyed ghetto-areas could represent a specific subcultural feature, in as much as certain deviant or illegal acts occur with a high frequency in these areas, but not in other districts. Hence it was important to determine the specific deviant elements and what types of crime occur with high frequency.

Every respondent indicated that violence is usually used in the family, but street gangs also make use of violence when they clash with each other. Mugging

(only few cases) and thefts also happen in this area and imply a certain degree of violence. However, what drew our attention was the fact that every respondent, including the probationary counsellors, said that the serious crimes are committed in richer neighbourhoods. This phenomenon can be explained by the respect the residents have for each other. Hence they do not bring any injury to their neighbours, since they are aware that all of them share the same problems and social situation.

Many of the respondents indicated the high pupil and student dropout rates as problems, which also leads to juvenile delinquency. This evolution undermines the young people's intellectual growth, and their ability to understand, accept and respect the moral and social norms which govern our society, and finally adapt to it. As a consequence, they have difficulties of gaining a necessary and respectable social and economic status, which translates into a deviant and antisocial behaviour. Those elements are bound to affect the security and integrity of other citizens.

The parents' lack of interest and control over their children, the insufficient resources to procure school supplies are prerequisites for their decision to abandon school. The youngsters are negatively influenced by those who encourage skipping school and lack paragons, who can show them the right attitude towards education and change their misconception according to which finishing school does not bring one any advantages. This misconception is fuelled by the high unemployment rate, even among those who have a high education level. They also find advantages in abandoning school (more free time, the admiration of the entourage etc.)

Another extremely dangerous aspect indicated by the residents of the surveyed ghetto areas is the extraordinary high density of drug users. Drug trafficking represents an important source of income for those who are not able to earn a living legally and integrate into society. As a normal consequence, there are also many cases of drug use, as they represent the means of evading reality for those incapable of adapting to the moral, social and economic norms. Other reasons why the youngsters turn to drug use and drug trafficking are the lack of affection they receive, the instability and uncertainties in the family and the absence of cultural or moral role-models. The possibility that they may turn aggressive or even mug people because they need money to procure narcotics is not frightening the residents. What does frighten them is the large amount of syringes used, "at every street corner" and in every basement. This represents a huge risk of contamination. The many children who are playing on the streets could be stung by a needle and get infected with anything from Hepatitis to AIDS. The probationary counsellors have also mentioned the high percentage of drug users, who encountered persons who were taking IV drugs on each of their assignments in the area.

Aside from the inhabitants' tendency to commit petty crimes (stealing flower pots from the stairways of blocks or from rich houses and selling them, dealing currency under the counter, illegal business with clothing, contraband with cigarettes etc.), the residents are fairly quiet and do not stir any serious conflicts.

Being asked about the risk one takes when coming from the outside, all fourteen respondents said that there are no risks of being attacked without reason. However, if one were to verbally provoke the inhabitants or aggravate them by wearing ostentatious clothes, one would expose himself or herself to certain risks. Moreover, women who enter the area may very well be the subject of vulgar remarks. On the other hand, one of the probationary counsellors mentioned that on his first assignment in the Zăbrăuți area, he was close to being attacked, because the inhabitants thought he were from the Child Protective Services, and came to take away their children.

Another problem indicated by the respondents is the vulgar, gutter language used between inhabitants and especially children and teen-agers, aspect which contributes to the creation of a deviant environment and is especially harmful to the youngsters' social development.

The other's groundless general attitude of rejection towards the inhabitants of these areas determines the latter to adopt a hostile, unfriendly, sometimes violent behaviour because of their accumulated frustrations. Due to their inability to integrate into society, the Roma people and other residents are forced to earn a living through committing crimes. This is also a consequence of the fact that it is impossible for them to be accepted in Romanian social circles. Another important aspect that has to be mentioned is the unwarranted lack of respect they face, coming from the public authorities. This spreads the discontent and hostility among the residents.

There have been registered numerous cases of juvenile delinquency, as a consequence of the disorganisation within the family and the education they receive at home. Given the high frequency of alcoholism cases, it is clear that the reasons for which young people turn criminal is their parents' priority to buy alcohol, alongside with insufficient financial resources and the poor management of the family budget. At the same time, domestic violence starts to take shape. Its consequences are severe and persistent, in some cases even permanent for the victim's psyche. These individuals may end up with serious frustrations and psychological deficiencies, will be unable to adapt to society and will take up different deviant behaviours.

The theories of "delinquent subcultures" and "groups from behind the block" (Rădulescu and Banciu, 1990, p. 69-71) also offer explanations for the high degree of juvenile delinquency in these deprived areas. The young people are acting against the stigmatization they face for being residents of that area and against the meagre living conditions in which they are stuck. So they gather groups which promote values, opposite to those of the society, and fight to create the image they really deserve, and for social equity. Other motivations could be the search for means of recreation, the desire to showcase their originality and the need to find others who share the same values. Due to the lack of resources to fulfil their aspirations, they turn to illegal means of achieving their goals and attract new

followers of these antisocial values, whom they will integrate and form real criminal groups.

Thus, the features crime in the Zăbrăuți, Livezilor and Vâltoarei alleys include the predominance of minor, deviant and illegal acts (illegal trade and currency exchange, electricity thefts, thefts of goods which do not have a high value etc.), but also of more serious ones, but which do not have a devastating effect on other individuals or on the whole society (drug use and trafficking, domestic violence, high pupil dropout rate, usury – also mentioned in the Romanian scientists' studies, illegal trading of flats, muggings etc.).

The Degree of Division inside the Community

This represents another of the ghettos' features, which have been identified by Wacquant (1996). It determines the feeling of safety, stability and the definition of an own set of values and an own identity, if the relations inside the community are close, peaceful and based on a certain social order. In the opposite case, it may lead to division inside the community and the forming of distinct inside groups which weaken its resistance to the attitudes, preconceived ideas and actions of the outsiders.

Every respondent said that the relations between themselves and the neighbourhood are very good, and that there is no frequent quarrelling going on. Everyone has his or hers own life, has certain interests, and looks to pursue them without bringing injury to others.

However, five of the respondents indicated that we can talk about friendship relations only in a few particular cases. In reality, many quarrel over unpaid debts or misunderstandings, but as a rule, they are settled quickly. It is true that vulgar and violent words are used, but the quarrels do not turn into fights, physical violence or revenge.

Furthermore, probationary counsellors confirmed the fact that the residents know each other very well and protect each other if the police or other public authorities investigate a certain matter. This was also proven by a chat between two women, in which one asks the other for advice on how to contract a loan, which she was unable to get at first. Moreover, five respondents said that there is a tacit agreement between them, and they borrow certain things from their neighbours such as food or household appliances.

However, this state of affairs is rather inconvenient for some of the inhabitants, as three of the respondents stated. In all three cases, the reason was the lack of money of the assailant.

When asked about common activities, all respondents said that they do not undertake anything special, but meet, usually on Saturday or Sunday, for a drink, chat and sunflower seeds. Moreover, the young people spend their time together, organised in different groups according to their age and interests, and walk around the block without undertaking any useful activity for their cultural or personal

development. The majority cannot afford to go out to terraces, cinema or theatre because of their meagre financial resources. However, four of the respondents, three of whom had finished at least secondary school, said that they undertake cultural activities. One of the interlocutors stood out as, although illiterate because of the poverty in his family, he succeeded in registering for school. He is 20 years old, in the first grade, interested in reading and goes out with his friends in the city centre, to the cinema or in the park.

Therefore, there is a certain harmony that governs these areas, the relations are cordial, apart from minor quarrels, but one can notice that a clear distinction is made between the Roma group and the Romanian group. In seven from ten interviews taken from the residents, the distinction “we” versus “them” is made. In spite of all this, no tendency towards hostility between the two groups has been taken note of, and it is obvious that all of them live in peace and understanding most of the time, as opposed to the state of affairs in the American ghettos.

Conclusions

This study tries to include as much information as possible about a very debated in the media subject, which has only briefly been covered in Romanian studies. Although this was a pilot study and the number of interviewed persons was limited, continuing to study this subject may lead to building a clear representation of the specific subculture in the ghettos of Bucharest and to formulate relevant conclusions regarding the life in these areas and how it influences the individual and the whole society.

The main conclusions drawn after completing this study are centred on the idea that these areas incorporate a culture with certain specific elements, which derive from the territorial segregation of the persons with meagre financial possibilities. They have attempted to integrate into the fast-changing society, but ended up as refugees in these areas, where they bewail their social and personal failure, as well as the ignorance and disdain they receive from others.

There is a tendency among residents to seek refuge in activities which they can easily undertake, without trying to overcome their state of need. The causes of this phenomenon are the high degree of stigmatization associated with the area and ethnicity, many of the residents being of Roma ethnicity, the disinterest shown by the local authorities, especially by the mayor’s office, for the problems of the neighbourhood and the impossibility to move to another area and satisfy personal needs, other than physiological ones. Although they want a better social status, they indulge themselves into the present situation, because they are aware of their public image and know that society refuses to help them. Certain features have been identified as specific for the subculture of the Zăbrăuți, Livezilor and Vâltoarei ghettos. These include the existence of groups which use drugs on a regular basis, undertaking deviant activities (frequent dropouts, lack of good manners among children, for example, not saying “thank you!” or “please!” and

using vulgar and aggressive language etc.) and even illegal activities (thefts, drug trafficking, illegal flat trade, usury, illegal currency exchange etc.). The solidarity is strong between the inhabitants, since they share the same life experiences and living standards.

Hence, the present public image of these deprived areas, which constantly makes the headlines, is largely exaggerated. These areas are presented as infamous neighbourhoods, in which one cannot lay foot without bearing serious consequences, as they are the source of crime, which spreads to the whole territory of Romania. However, in these areas only minor illegal activities take place, which do not have a serious impact on social evolution. But if these continue to be ignored by the public authorities, with no actions being undertaken to improve their economic and social standards, the neighbourhoods will continue to offer more individuals who are frustrated, aggressive and indignant at the system and the whole community.

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