

Hedonic hybridization: suburbanized ruralities in Romania and Switzerland*

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Abstract. The process of suburbanization of formerly rural villages is common to many places in developed and developing countries. This paper, in defying methodological nationalism, explores whether common patterns can be found between rural suburbanization in a Romanian and a Swiss case study region. Interviews with several key persons in the Gilau and the Vorderthal region and the analysis of some sequences by objective hermeneutics reveal the patterns of hedonic hybridization. A large variety of different social realities assemble and merge in suburbanized ruralities, more often co-existing next to each other than creating commonalities. This process is strongly driven by individual utility-maximization. Therefore, it is suggested that hedonic hybridization is a general phenomenon of our society but can be found in suburbanized ruralities in a very strong form.

Keywords: Lebenswelt, suburbanization, hybridization, local milieu, hedonism

I. Introduction

There is a controversial debate about the relevance of suburbanization in rural areas. While Champion (2001) sees suburbanization mainly as a phenomenon of the past, Wild and Jones (1988: 288) recommend to direct future research on “the many complex social changes accompanying these physical transformations” connected with suburbanization.

Several case studies from the last two decades indicate that the process of suburbanization has caused significant migration and other social transformation in areas long considered as rural. The radius around agglomerations in which people with urban lifestyles and occupations settle is apparently expanding fast. This is the case for the United States (Cromartie, 1998; Howley, 2005), but also for a number of European countries like Switzerland (Mann and Gennaio, 2011), Romania (Totelecan, 2010; Egon, 2006), Bulgaria (Hirt, 2008; Dittrich and Jeleva, 2005), the Netherlands (Overbeek and Terluin 2006; Horlings *et al.*, 2005), Finland (Andersson, 2005), Ireland (Scott, Russell and Redmond, 2005), Estonia (Tammaru *et al.*, 2004), Hungary (Kok and Kovács, 1999) or Portugal (Lawrence-Zuniga, 1999).

As all these scholars emphasize, suburbanization goes beyond territorial transformations, and it has to do a lot with the social space; it is a continuous transformative process in which the world of newcomers has to find a place to settle *within* and/or *without* the native’s life-world. Willingly or not, under the “same roof” of a chosen suburban locality live two types of taken-for-granted beliefs and practices which from time to time are in conflict and rarely in cooperation. Increasingly talks about suburbanized *non-towns* with only

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a weak sense of community, in which the “moral order of avoidance prevails” (Salamon, 2003a: 18), makes research in a suburban milieu also a topic about social disintegration (Salamon, 2003b) and community (faraway from Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft*) dissolution (Totelecan, 2003). So, suburbanization is not only a socio-historical curiosity or some issue regarding current social changes. It involves much more, namely concerns about the future of “community” life in ambivalent contexts where *neither-nor* instead of *either-or* is the *Lebenswelt* (Schütz and Luckmann, 1975; Husserl, 1936; Heidegger’s *In-der-Welt-Sein*, 1927; Dilthey’s *Lebenszusammenhang*, 1910) basic ingredient.

This paper is concerned with the more general question whether the suburbanization of rural areas has relatively uniform social impacts, or whether they are strongly tied on the cultural, economic and social situation of the special case. For this purpose, case studies from two European regions which are both concerned by rural suburbanization but could hardly be more distinct in every other respect are presented. The phenomenon of peri-, sub- and counter-urbanization are explored in Section II. After the development in the Southern Lake Zurich Region in Switzerland and the neighbouring area of Cluj-Napoca in Romania has been outlined in Section III, the methodology of comparing the social situation in the two regions is presented in Section IV. Section V describes the realities which were found in the two regions. Through stressing similarities rather than differences, the concept of hedonic hybridization emerges and is outlined in Section VI.

II. Peri-, Sub-, Counter- urbanization in the cosmopolitan frame

For several years already, various scholars emphasize the fact that we need to go out of the box, theoretically and also empirically. For many, *the box* seems to be the nation-state container which have moulded our sociological imagination, the categories of perception, self-understanding (Beck and Willms, 2003), and even the central concepts of our social sciences: “Until recently, social theory has taken the nation-state as its implicit unit of analysis; the terms ‘society’ and ‘culture’ implicitly referred to what have been perceived as discrete, self-contained and relatively homogenous entities bounded by national borders, institutions and legal frameworks” (Beck and Grande, 2010: 412). Captive (or not!) in our *methodological nationalism*, “the unquestioned framework which determines the limits of relevance” (Beck and Willms, 2003: 13), we were only able to produce universalistic social theories which, as Beck and Grande (2010: 410) make us to believe recently, are *out of date* (“because it excludes a priori what can be observed empirically: a fundamental transformation of society and politics *within* Modernity (from First to Second Modernity)”) and *provincial* (“because it mistakenly absolutizes the trajectory, the historical experience and future expectation of Western, *i.e.* predominantly European or North American, modernization and thereby also fails to see its particularity”).

At least for the cosmopolitan camp, it became evident that the shift from solid to *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2000), a modernity with people, money, images and information in a permanent movement (Urry, 2004), on the run, makes social scientists to give up their static, fixed and given categories of the up today social theories, and overcome their methodological nationalism. Embracing methodological cosmopolitanism, and looking at reality through the cosmopolitan lens instead of nation-states and/or national societies' frames sounds easy, but in fact is very hard to find a pertinent answer to questions such as: "How can research units *beyond* methodological nationalism be found and defined, which allow us to understand processes of cosmopolitization and compare varieties in cosmopolitan modernity?" (Beck and Grande, 2010: 426). Beck and Grande's urge is to (re)search either for units of analysis like transnational spaces, processes and structures or after thematic units derived from sociological theory of reflexive modernization such as *individualization* process with its four basic features: "1. detraditionalization; 2. institutionalized dis-embedding and re-embedding of the individual; 3. compulsory pursuit of a 'life of one's own' and the lack of genuine individuality; 4. the biographical internalization of systemic risks" (2010: 420).

This second line of thoughts was more appealing for us, maybe because in the last several years came up from our fieldworks – from both Swiss and Romanian milieus – various proofs of social practices that we could easily label as individualization. As Calhoun (2010: 615) highlights: "This is not to say that there is nothing new – in scale and perhaps even in quality. But to see what is new we need more precision and the situation of sociological accounts in stronger historical contexts". Individualization appears to be a constant in human development: from Roman Empire (Calhoun's example), to Enlightenment (Sznaider's example, 2010), afterwards in the modern era, and now, more aggressively, in the second/reflexive/liquid/late modernity with its complicity of the local and the global (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006). A new phenomenon, even in the era of industrial revolution, when migrants from villages to cities surely experienced dis-embedding and re-embedding (Calhoun, 2010), is the new pattern of sociability in our societies, "sustained (*but not produced*) by the new patterns of urbanization, as suburban and exurban sprawl" (Castells, 2001: 129).

The growth of suburbs (but also of urban and rural population) has to do much with *residential environment choice*, with the opportunities, social networks and experiences (Feijten, Hooimeijer and Mulder, 2008) which a particular environment is able to offer: from institutions of higher education, large concentration of jobs, shops and entertainment services to quality of housing, of public space, quietness or traditional lifestyle. Being a spatial choice, residential environment selection is "subject to spatial preferences, resources and restrictions" (Feijten, Hooimeijer and Mulder, 2008: 144). Unfortunately, various

examples from socialist/communist Eastern Europe could undermine this assumption. An aggressive state-plan for rural urbanization, and the conversion of the peasants into workers, was done in the name of socialist ideology and communist idyll, simply because the industrial modernization, and the associated working class, were considered as the main driving forces towards the golden communist era. Frances Pine also stated, in her investigations of Poland, that “both ideologically and practically, socialism and modernism were inextricably linked” (Pine, 2007: 187).

Erasing rural life (*i.e.* villages, habits, traditions, identities, communities etc.) from the map, and *re-locate* it in the peripheral areas of towns or cities, in the newly-built, match box style, blocks of flats, and in the steel plants or mining factories – as the new working places, was a harsh way to show that proletarian communism has the same, or even higher level of modernization/urbanization than the repulsive bourgeois capitalism. For a not so well trained eyes into socialist period of Eastern Europe, and especially on the Romanian case (ended not so long ago), that striking reduction of rural realities sure has to be distinguished from the classic concepts of urbanization. At best we can talk about a *truncated/reduced peri-urbanization* – an *incomplete* and *counterfeit process*. On the one hand, the mentality, the life-style, the know-how etc. of the urbanized (and former rural) inhabitants, did not shift into city-like dwellers only because they became townsmen, and on the other, that *forced migration* had nothing to do with the free will of people. That type of historical accident brought rurality at the fringe of the city, and have almost cancelled the *in-between transitional space*.

Enhancing the living conditions and standards is relevant in all parts of the world. People's movement have started to overturn, nowadays from places in a state of more concentration to a state of less concentration, towards areas with *deconcentrated settlement patterns* – labelled as counter-urban by Clare J. A. Mitchell (2004). Various categories of inhabitants mingle, ranging from middle-aged gentrifiers to the urban poor. Some of them are *land consumers* (*e.g.* the middle class inhabitants from the city who move out to the surroundings and buy houses in a rural quiet milieu), while others, *e.g.* pragmatically minded ecologists (Willis and Campbell, 2004) with some green learnings (Andersson, 2005) are much more involved in the process of *landscape consumption*. It can already be seen that the theoretical frame of the process of rural suburbanization shows a lot of facets and many different personal profiles. It will be subject to analysis whether this theoretical diagnosis can be confirmed by empirical studies under different socioeconomic environments.

III. Fringes of metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca and Zurich agglomeration

A ranking of EU-27 member states' population is placing Romania in the 7th position, following Germany, France, UK, Italy, Spain and Poland. According to official data, less than

an half of the 21,5 millions of Romanian inhabitants are spending their life in the countryside (see below table 1). As the Swiss government has no statistical definition to distinguish between rural and urban municipalities, no comparable figures are available. Before going further with the statistics, we have to make a short detour into the world of numbers for questioning the so-called “ontological reality” of such figures.

Do we have an operational definition of “urban” and “rural” which can be employed by statistics when the Census period comes, or within the 10 years gap between the estimation periods? Furthermore, are these concept so flexible that they are able to capture the continuing urban-rural dynamic? Well, the answer is not only a Romanian particularity, it can be seen in all the places where the juridical-administrative definitions appear more powerful than the socio-anthropological ones.

We have a pre-made usage of two words (urban and rural), dependent, in the Romanian case, on the *juridical status* of the locality in which people live, and nothing that could incorporate the socio-economic-cultural aspects of local milieu. In short, if the local authority decides that it wants to apply for an urban denomination of our locality, and that will be approved by an upper authority, we will find out that from now on we are living in a town, the old label being rejected. The other way around: if the same authority has decided that it is appropriate to stay rural (e.g. to get more subsidies, EU money for infrastructural development etc.), doesn't matter that your village is outnumbered comparatively with a town, or the built environment is very much city like (see the concept of *urban village* by Marcus and Asmorowati, 2006), inhabitants have to wear with pride the rural label. Yes, people were asked at the censuses: please check one of this two boxes regarding your living place, either urban, or rural, but they always stayed close to the label of their locality and not on the living reality around them. In sum, not everything that is rural (or urban) in the eyes of statistics might be like that in reality, without even taking in consideration the increasing number of hybrid entities, of *rurban places* (Esparcia and Buciega , 2005), which are completely absent of whatever statistics. We have to remark that these *categories without realities* are part of the Eurostat NUTS system (The Nomenclature of Statistical Territorial Units) and are used for various comparative purposes.

Romanian population is covering 41 counties plus the capital – the city of Bucharest. Each of this units contains a various number of cities, towns, communes and villages, in total about 320 urban localities and around 13100 villages. It is important to notice here that for rural areas the administrative units and also the statistical points of reference are not the villages but the communes (*i.e.* the higher units above the villages which can enclose several villages within them; the largest commune in Romania has 13087 inhabitants and the smallest only 101 people – the average is about 3372 people). In order to examine the characteristics of suburbanized ruralities, we choose a municipality which is counted as

being rural, but within 15 kilometres distance to one of the largest Romanian cities, namely the Transylvanian *Gilau commune* of the Cluj county. The county includes 75 communes and 5 cities plus the county seat Cluj-Napoca with its 307215 inhabitants – the fourth largest Romanian city, after Bucharest, Timisoara and Iasi.

Table 1
Romania's population distribution in 2010 by administrative units (%)

NUTS	Urban	Rural	Total
NUTS-1: Romania	55,07%	44,93%	21462186
NUTS-3: Cluj county	66,56%	33,44%	692339
NUTS-4: Gilau commune	-	100%	8511

Switzerland with not even 8 million inhabitants is a much smaller European country compared to Romania. In addition to the missing distinction between rural and urban municipalities, another important difference between the countries is the size of administrative units at the municipal level. There are still many villages with less than 100 inhabitants and an own administration. It is therefore difficult to define something as coherent as one commune as a counterpart.

The Zurich area is both the largest and the most vibrant metropolitan agglomeration in Switzerland. Regarding this region, the Swiss government does a similar definitional step as the Romanian one, as it defines a “metropolitan area” around Zurich in which 1,9 million people live, one quarter of all Swiss. Our examination of the rural-urban fringes uses the Southern border of the Zurich metropolitan area. Vorderthal, a village of around 1000 inhabitants in the Schwyz Canton is one case in point, but adjacent municipalities were also included in the analysis in order to compare areas of similar sizes and population. The area is not only at the Southern fringe of the Zurich Metropolitan area, but also at the Northern fringe of the Alps, Europe's largest mountain region. The population in this area is traditionally catholic and also politically conservative.

Gilau is also located at the mountains foothills, in the north-eastern part of Apuseni (half taller than the Alps), *in-between* remote-mountain and city-close communes. Its landscape, including the three important reservoir lakes (done in the *communist era*: Tarnita, Somesul Cald and Gilau), is used as the most important recreational spot for the inhabitants of Cluj-Napoca city. It hosts more than 500 holidays homes, but also motels and camping areas, almost all built in the *democratic era*.

Both Vorderthal and Gilau communes (in Hungarian *Gyalu*, in German *Gelu*, *Julmarkt* or *Jalmarkt* – an *ethnic mixture* of Romanians 83,4%, Hungarians 9,5% and other minority groups like Gypsies 7%; and also a *religious* one with orthodoxy in the core) are historically

documented since the XIII century. In the last one and a half century, the population of the Romanian municipality has grown almost three times (see Figure 1 for the dynamic of the last part of this evolution), being nowadays of 8511 inhabitants (116,82 km² is the surface of the commune with a population density of 72,86 people/square kilometre), placed into three villages: Gilau (includes around 72% of the commune population), Somesul Cald (7%) and Somesul Rece (21%). This is particularly remarkable if one considers the fact that the Romanian population as a whole is steadily declining since the early 1990's. As can be seen from Figure 2, Vorderthal has faced a less stable population development. It is likewise remarkable that Vorderthal faced a downward population trend over several decades, while Switzerland's population has always been rising. This development can be attributed to structural change in agriculture. Until the 1970's, Vorderthal was dominated by farming activities, but the small average farm size, pressure on prices and increasingly attractive employment opportunities in other regions and sectors led to the abandonment of many smallholdings.

Despite the fact that with the beginning of the 1990s Gilau's inhabitants regain their land ownership rights (the 18/1991 Romanian Law has started the reform of the land – not yet fully completed – and by the restitution of the land, an important percentage of the population became land owners; nowadays the state was left with around 10% from its former communist state ownership), they are not so much involved in agriculture, even when they have land (Totelecan, 2009). From 2257 households 9,31% do not have any agricultural land in their possession, 22,82% less than one hectare, 34,87% up to three hectares, 22,37% between three and five hectares, and 10,63% from five to ten hectares (Șteiu, Sfârlea and Someșan, 2004). Instead, more than 280 private entrepreneurs are officially registered there, but is very much possible that some of them are inactive or in bankruptcy, as much as others could be very active and not yet captured into local statistics. Among the registered enterprises, five units are engaged in poultry related activities, one in trout business, six in woodworking, eight have an industrial profile, nine a touristic one, agro-forestry activities is the main field for another six, and the remaining ones are mostly commercial entrepreneurs or small firms that are active in services sector.

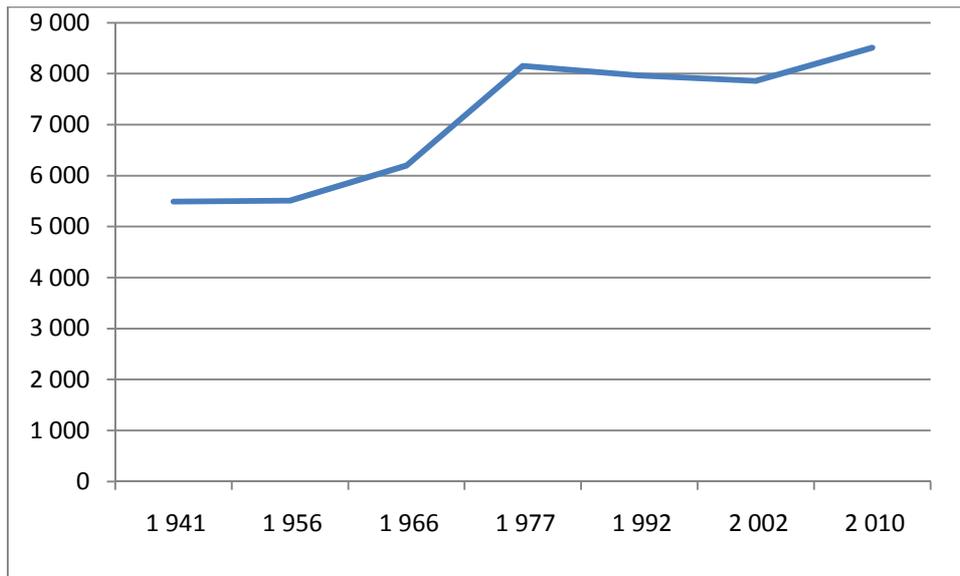


Figure 1: *Population development of Gilau*

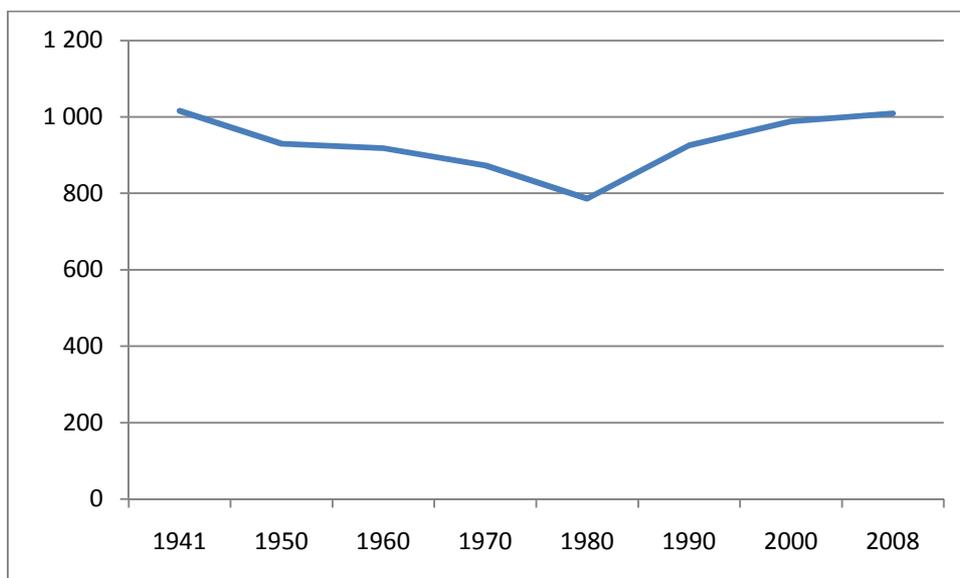


Figure 2: *Population development of Vorderthal*

Only 22 per cent of today's working population in Vorderthal are busy in the agricultural sector, and many of them only on a part-time base. The majority of the working population (57,5%) commutes into other municipalities for work, almost everybody of them of course into the Zurich metropolitan area. Some enterprises in the village like wood construction or restaurants exist, but play only a minor role for local employment. In this respect (of agricultural labour force) both municipalities looks alike, however, the path in the course of attaining this comparable position was rather different. They were always swinging between *agricultural policy and spatial policy* (Ward *et al.*, 2005, qtd. in Galdeano-Gómez *et al.*, 2011: 56) trying to find some kind of optimal course but have had dissimilar frame of

reference in doing that. The *two-opposite-alternatives* can be brought into the light if we have a short look at the national workforce of their belonging countries. The 2008 data issued by OFAG (2009: A3) and EC (2010: 47), said that the agricultural labour force from the total workforce is of 3,98% in Switzerland and of 28,8% in Romania.

IV. Methodological overview

Policy, economy and sociality were the three boundaries within which we wanted to capture the *Lebenswelt* of two local contexts, far from being untouched by globalization, less rural than they used to be with a couple of decades ago, and not yet entirely urban. These two places are surrounded by a beautiful landscape, inhabited by a complex mixture of natives and newcomers, situated not very far from a dense urban site (*i.e.* the metropolitan area of Cluj-Napoca city and the urban agglomeration of Zurich), but also away from crowds, pollution and other components of what we might call the basic ingredients of a stressfully life.

Capturing the life-world of a particular context is far from being an easy task. For that duty we asked for help three guardians, very much related with the boundaries of the policy-economy-sociality triangle, by assuming that they must know something about: a) the developmental policy agenda of their own locality – and in this case the target was the mayor of Gilau and Vorderthal, b) the business climate and local praxis (we interviewed one entrepreneur in each locality), and c) the socio-spiritual life of the inhabitants – two relatively young priests (an orthodox for the Romanian case and a catholic one for the Swiss case) have been our respondents. To attain more background information, additional interviews were also carried out, but the main focus of the analysis was put on the three comparable cases.

Before getting a truly insight in their perceptions of local milieu, we had to deal with two upstream research technicalities: 1. the conversion of the interview partners' mother tongue jargon into English; 2. to domesticate our subjectivity involved in the comprehension of their worldviews. Writing in English, the "master" language of modernity is, like Sznajder (2010: 632) noticed: "in itself a levelling mechanism [...] the language acts like a screen. You can only see what the curtain is letting through". Romanian and Swiss German languages are less sharp than English, and their metaphors are not always easy to translate, and when that is possible, some of the realities embedded in the words/concepts of the local language are left outside. For example, Native – Newcomer, the central dyad of this paper, is the understated version of the Romanian *Bastinas – Vinitura* or of the Swiss German *Eingeborene – Zugezogene*. Their meanings are related to words like indigenous, autochthonous, aborigines or even tribal people, important local connotations, not enough reflected by the today sense of native. The contextual meaning of newcomer is also

embellished with various subtexts in both Romanian and Swiss milieus, e.g. people who live behind drawn curtains, being one of the powerful metaphors behind it. At length, these words designate the struggle between the *praxis of belonging* (Borneman, 1992, qtd. in Willis and Campbell, 2004) and the *praxis of survival*.

The *reality at hand* was firstly reduced by our respondents, by their ways of looking, seeing, interpreting and describing their local life. We, “in need of texts” (Hitzler, 2005: 3), did another shrinkage through the translation of their outputs. It was our scientists’ duty to encompass somehow all those resulted “microscopic holes” (but still important) into the final texts work. That was possible as soon as we went (with our different professional backgrounds and cultural biases) in both our investigated localities, and did “old fashion” observation. In this way, at least we got the image, if not the full understanding, of that local milieus.

Willing to do something more than a thin description (Geertz, 1973), and also to evacuate as much as possible the East/West stereotypes, which dwell inside us, we decided that the Eastern scholar should analyse the Western reality and the Western scholar stayed focused on the Eastern context. Afterwards, at the kitchen table of textual analysis, we had together various readings, arguments and disputes connected with the decoding process (Savage and Warde, 1993) of the meanings embedded in the transcripts. Many aspects of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann, 2004; 2001; 2000) were used for the analysis of selected sequences of the texts. The microscopic analysis of these sequences enabled the scientists to jointly reconstruct the *Lebenswelt* of the Gilau and Vorderthal regions as closely as possible.

V. *Lebenswelt* realities

V.1. Economic activities

Both regions share their agricultural past, although, as outlined in Section III, Switzerland has overcome this past much more thoroughly than Romania. Likewise, the Vorderthal region is shaped less through agricultural activities than the Gilau region, where over 90 per cent of households are still owners of agricultural land on which they often produce some food.

What differs even stronger than the realities of food production in the two regions, is the social role that the “rural” element plays in the narratives of the people. For the Gilau region, an outright social superiority of urban versus rural lifestyles appears at many points of the interviews, more often in an implicit rather than an explicit way. In Romania, many public utilities like water, gas or reliable electricity are still associate much more with urban areas than with rural, so that rural lifestyles bear the image of deprivation and poverty.

For Switzerland, any gap in infrastructure standards, between urban and rural areas, is clearly a thing of the past. Agricultural life plays much more a folkloristic role in the Vorderthal region, where, for example, dressed cows march through the village to mark the end of the Alpine period in September. The notion that Switzerland as a state has been founded by peasants is still omnipresent in this part of the country, and farmers enjoy a high, albeit romanticized image. The positive impact of agriculture in the Gilau region is the availability of agricultural products directly from the farmer.

In both regions, some industrial activities exist, but they are rather on the fringe than in the core of social life, in the Vorderthal region more so than in the Gilau region. While Volvo, a major trucking company shape some outskirts of Gilau, Vorderthal's carpenter or elevator construction company are integrated in the village in an unobtrusive way. It is visible that this location serves mainly as a dwelling place; the partition of work between suburbs where people live, and economic centers where people work, has become rather clear-cut during the recent decades.

The scope of tourism in the Gilau and Vorderthal region fits nicely in this picture. The regions do certainly not attract heaps of international visitors coming there to view spectacular attractions. However, people from the nearby cities who are looking for recreation in a natural environment enjoy to spend their weekends in the Gilau and Vorderthal area, in the beginning just during the day, later they may buy a holiday home, and after a while they may even decide to settle in this area.

V.2 Construction activities

In both locations, recent decades have seen a high speed of construction activities, and most of them were detached houses, more often than not for in-migrants from other localities. There are both underlying economic and non-economic forces for this development. Among the economic forces, the availability of (comparably) low-priced land is one argument that is often stressed by the Swiss interview partners. It is still possible for middle-income families to buy detached houses for themselves in localities like Vorderthal, while this is certainly not the case closer to Zurich. And while the Romanian entrepreneur complains about "pretty high" land prices, he admits as well: "If they cannot afford to buy land in Cluj they will buy in Floresti and most of them in Gilau". This reveals exactly the same driving force of the suburbanization of rural areas as in Switzerland: people are rather willing to make compromises on the distance they have to commute to work than on the size of their dwelling. There is an obvious trend to follow comparatively low land prices to formerly peripheral areas in order to be able to afford a decent house.

The scope of building activities differs between the two regions due to the considerable differences in the formal and institutional framework. In Switzerland, the

municipal council has to define building zones which have to be approved by the Cantonal administration. In Romania, while similar regulations exist, the construction activities take place even if not fully approved by the law, *i.e.* the compliance to the legal frame is generally lower. In both cases, however, the institutional framework does not prevent the accumulated addition of more residential houses in formerly rural regions. And it can be observed that the construction activities generally concentrate on attractive places: sunny hills are more likely to be filled with houses than dark valleys, and sites with landscape amenities more than industrial quarters.

All of them are “a bit away from the stuff” but still close to the working place, at an half hour of Cluj or Zurich; “having a bit of family and kids and they say: yes, a small school with around 100 students, we will place the kids in a school here than in a large town”. Being outside of a stressful urban life seems to be for in-migrants a very important criterion for the selection of this place for living.

V.3 Social life

Locations like Gilau and Vorderthal departed as traditional villages which therefore contained a rather typical social structure of a Romanian or Swiss village. The suburbanization of recent decades influenced this social fabric markedly. The number of restaurants in Vorderthal, for example, has decreased significantly during the last years. While restaurants have always been an important centre of social exchange, it appears that the needs of social exchange, particularly by the newly in-migrated, are increasingly transferred to locations outside the residential place like Zurich.

Likewise, the number of associations in the Vorderthal region decreases steadily. Traditionally, every village had clubs for skiing, for gymnastics, for singing and for carnival. Now, these associations are often losing members and even sometimes are dissolved. There is only one example reported about new associations: in Schwändi (another village in the Vorderthal region), parents formed a playground association in order to refurbish an old playground site. This worked well, but after a few years the interest vanished so that the association became inactive. Only a few years later, when the next generation of children had grown into the playground age, the association revived again and continued to improve the facilities on the playground.

Is it the Swiss social web in danger? Following Vorderthal's case, it will be unreasonable to keep going with a strong “no”. It illustrates how social life is gradually shifting from the leftovers of habermasian public sphere (Habermas, 1962) to private sphere, and locked within the visible/invisible walls of the private space. The Romanian example has provided a comparable state of affairs, yet with an important distinction. There, the private realm did not integrate yet toward public or at least parochial realms (Lofland, 1998). Many

reasons are behind this, a large amount of them being rooted in the culture of mistrust, dating half a century ago, prior the change of the system in the 1990s. At that time it was unthinkable for Romanians to have free-will types of public manifestation. As a matter of fact, the latest years of communism prohibited any kind of associative forms, except those offered by the State party. Consequently, instead of active, critical, open, realistic, trusting, inclusive, friendly, truthful, honourable, altruistic, rational groups, the switch from communist planned economy to market economy which followed, brought into the light passive, deferential, secretive, distorted, suspicious, exclusive, antagonistic, deceitful, self-interested, greedy, irrational, excitable (Alexander and Smith, 1993, qtd. in Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003) social entities.

Being in its early stage of development, the associative life of Gilau, as everywhere in Romania, has primarily exogenous engine. The Humanitarian Association HILF-RO (the offspring of Swiss Foundation Hilfe für Rumänien) or the local branch of World Vision, both involved in social care activities with vulnerable social categories, are examples of grounded trans-national experiences in the local context. Still in top-down manner, but this time initiated at regional levels, are acting various inter- and intra- communitarian associations such as: The commune association of the Cluj county, or Cluj Metropolitan Area Intercommunity Development Association. Following this path, in the last three-four years emerged diverse associations which look after minorities interest (e.g. Pro Gyalu Association, Şindy Humanitas Foundation), or try to mobilize and empower community members (AGIL Association for community development). Unlike in the case of Schwändi, these are not ad-hoc, spontaneous or informal associative forms, but rather the first steps en route for the *institutional construction* of the local social web. Drawing the line we can say that Gilau has an upward development of the social fabric but, if we question its kind, we will see that the growth is more on the paper (as registered NGOs and Associations) than in reality (as community members involvement).

Further on, using the Western rationale that pubs and restaurants are important centre of social exchange, and as soon as their number goes up the social life will become more vivid, we should say that Gilau is far ahead of Vorderthal. The motel of Gilau on the lake shore, Milenium Touristic Complex, Eldorado Camping & Restaurant, more than ten pensions with their own large dining place, a couple of restaurants, bars and a pizzeria in the core of the village – and even more are expected in the next years, should do a lot in empowering the community links. In fact they are not making much difference from a social capital point of view. *Culturally*, in Romania, the above mentioned places are by design for drinking and eating and less for talking, sharing, exchanging, projecting etc. The former time of *Securitate* (i.e. the secret service of Communist Romania) might have an important contribution in silencing people's voices in public places. *Socio-economically*, is not

affordable for a middle-class person to have a meal in a restaurant either alone or with the family (plus for that, the concept of being out of office at the lunch hour was not yet implemented in Romania), and as result cooking with supermarket ingredients is the best choice. For whom then all the restaurants if not for *ordinary* local people? Cynically but true: for all the others.

V.4 *Spiritual life*

Sociologically, religion plays very different roles in Romania and Switzerland. While the acceptance of religious denominations is very high in Romania (it should be noted that there is a large discrepancy between religious statements and practices), the Western European trend of a strong secularization has easily included Switzerland. This applies in particular to urban centres: in the Zurich Canton, the non-religious have recently overtaken the reformists as the most frequent denomination. And many people who are still inscribed have ceased to attend church long ago.

The catholic vicar of Vorderthal, having immigrated from Germany, perceives Vorderthal very much as a peasant community. This reflects less the objective situation, but rather the fact that only the traditional natives of the village, being full- or part-time farmers, attend Sunday services and come into contact with religious authorities. The families that came from other places into Vorderthal do not only relinquish to integrate into the place's associations, but also into the traditional spiritual institutions that have contributed to define Vorderthal's identity for centuries. *Moving in* is one thing and *taking part* at the local (community) life is rather different issue. For sure, not every newcomer wants to become native and to wear the burden of being subject of local gossip or other forms of social surveillance. That is why many have decided to *stay invisible*, to have a low profile.

The impact of rural suburbanization on the religious life in the Gilau region is rather different: As the orthodox priest recalls: "I was very impressed in the winter when I was with the cross from door to door that Hungarians, reformed by religion, asked me to go inside and saint their house and food". While the newly in-migrated Swiss close their door in front of any religion, the newly in-migrated Romanians open their door for any religious service.

VI. Hedonic hybridization

The two rural suburb regions are at the crossroad of *everything*, they have a little bit of *anything* without being particularly remarkable for *something*. They are one of these places traceable everywhere on the glob nowadays, where local and global, urban and rural, secularized and religious, the first and the second modernity, the now here and the nowhere are gambling at the same table. Different biographical backgrounds come as much together

as different religions, including secularism, different social reference points and different life aspirations.

Optimists see these new formations as creating a flexible and cosmopolitan localism (Griswold and Wright, 2004), while pessimists stress their divisiveness. In this new era of “hybridity, collage, *mélange*, hotchpotch, montage, synergy, bricolage, creolization, mestizaje, mongrelization, syncretism, transculturation, third cultures” (Ulf Hannerz, 1997: 13), it is probably the time to abandon the XIX century hybridity paradigm, within which purity matters and everything else needs to be rejected and blamed.

“Each of these concepts registers the agency of quotidian social actors in critically engaging with and transforming global cultural phenomena in accordance with perceived local cultural needs as well as values and beliefs” (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2006: 173).

Developments in natural sciences, from genetics to crop rotation and back try to convince that the mixture is good for us. In this respect, nowadays social reality (pre-given, though being able to reconstruct it) is significantly different: we do not create hybrids, as our hard science fellows do, but the *hybridity shapes us*. Not so long time ago, in the colonial world of anthropology, culture was seen as being territorial, localized, *Gestalt* configuration. Instead, post-colonial writings teach us about the proliferation of new hybrid or creolized cultural forms (Canclini, 1997, qtd. in Smart and Smart, 2003), that people shifted their angles/perceptions/understandings towards an outward-looking sense of place, which, by definition, is an *our-and-their place*, a mixed context. Furthermore, pushes from the global pressures generates local reinterpretations, “ongoing interaction or mediation between global and local factors” (Park, Jang and Lee, 2007: 349), which makes new cultural hybrids (Griswold and Wright, 2004).

In this process of hybridization the newcomers turn into embedded actors, and at some point they may well become the dominant social group. What is a hybrid then? Is it an exceptional socio-spatial entity? Or the social fabric makes it a banal communality, and since is *everywhere around us*, is pointless to search it only in “exotic” milieus. If this is the setting will be highly important to distinguish how individuals differentiate themselves in late-modernity, and “make claims to specific traditions or legacies, both material and symbolic” (Willis and Campbell 2004: 328).

The remarkable process about the generation of such hybrid places is that they have been created by hedonism. People have migrated to suburbanized villages because there they were able to afford a large house, because they enjoyed the natural environment and because they felt their kids would be safe in the village. They have not engaged in traditional associations because they saw no use for themselves, but they happily exploited the opportunities of new NGO, be they transfer projects as in the case of Romania or a new playground as in the case of Switzerland. They use church services only if they feel a

benefit, no matter from what denomination, and they make money in areas where this is better possible than in their dwelling places.

What Forman (2002: 31) calls the “postmodern transformation of the modernist orientation – from dutiful, however ideological, aspiration to wilful, romantic, self-satisfaction” has repeatedly been described to be a growing pattern in society (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Collier, 1991; Bell, 1996; Paff and Buckley Lakner, 1997). The look on the Gilau and Vorderthal regions, however, has shown that this pattern has strongly influenced localities’ development. This hedonic hybridization is a societal development which does not exclusively occur in suburbanized ruralities. It is, however, not on many places that the pattern of hedonic hybridization becomes as clearly visible as in these places.

VII. References

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