

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

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Abstract

Generally, the expression “urban culture”, through a variety of elements that set up its profile (like, for example, history, personalities, language, art, architectural style, fun or music), becomes synonymous with the culture of the elite, the intellectuals or the people of culture. In Romania, this phenomenon of urban culture is new and still in progress, with a constant balancing between preserving the local elements and connecting to the values of modernity (Stan 2010). The aim of the present paper is to highlight the manner in which the urban culture of a Romanian provincial town, Bacău, is shaped through English, in its attempt to adapt to the European values.

Keywords: *Bacău; urban culture; min axis; store names; street events.*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the great majority of people lives in towns or cities, a fact which leads to a constant changing of the concept of “urban culture” - from its broad understanding as the culture of towns and cities to its more specific reference “as any of the behavioral patterns of the various types of cities and urban areas, both past and present” (Chen 2011: 15). No matter the interpretation given to this concept, a fact is clear: urban culture represents the quintessence of a city, reflecting “the urban development continuation” (Xiao et al 2012: 278). Nevertheless, if for the western European cities the urban culture, impacted by capitalism, implies a common set of recognizable elements, for the cities

in the Eastern Europe it reflects not only development, but also a tendency to imitate the capitalist western world.

2. Urban culture

We cannot speak about urban culture without speaking, first of all, of the constituent words of this expression. Sociologically speaking, *culture* is a set of artistic, sporting and cultural processes shared by groups and materialized in language, gestures, clothing and so on. In its turn, the *urban* experience begins with the urbanization of cities and, consequently, of the population: living in agglomeration conceptualizes the modes of perception, of relationships with others.

The term *urban culture* was first used in the United States (in the '60s). In the aftermath of the great wars, the reconstruction of spaces, lifestyles and social relationships took off, allowing urban culture to invent and create itself by using little known or even stigmatized modes of expression in an effort to bring people together around positive values and make them aware of the notions of sharing.

The character of any town or city is shaped nowadays by its urban cultural landscape, which includes the urban life and the urban space. The phenomenon of modernizing the urban culture is very accelerated nowadays and this may be noticed in these two components: lifestyle and space. Due to the multiple "faces" that urban life displays, urban culture covers all cultural, artistic and sporting practices from the urban space: from street festivals to graffiti, street art and street sports. They are closely linked to the idea of creating physical, social and interactional conditions for urban living, in such a way as to counteract a set of phenomena, such as stress, social distance, impersonal interaction and anonymity. A great contribution in this respect is brought by the re-thinking/re-adapting elements of the urban cultural space that could transform it into places that bring people together, ensuring their social interaction in a relaxing atmosphere.

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

According to Wei et al. (2019), the urban cultural space can be divided into three categories: integral space, functional space and service space.

In their opinion, the integral space – that has in view the way in which the city is spatially structured - informs about “the overall style of the city, the spirit of the city and the image of the city” (Wei et al. 2019: 3).

The functional space represents groups of spaces with similar cultural functions in the domains of education (schools of all grades, universities), industry (industrial parks), history (museums, various types of sites), ecology (city parks).

The third type of space – the service one – refers to “public cultural facilities, serving the citizens as the main function” (Wei et al. 2019: 3); it includes all spaces where various public events take place, buildings destined to cultural and commercial activities (theaters, cinemas, bookstores, libraries, shops/stores, restaurants) and street events.

3. Bacău's urban culture

A former fair and traders' center, Bacău is a town caught between two worlds: a conservative one (being a town situated in the eastern part of Romania, Moldavia, the most traditional region in the country) and a modern one (struggling, like the entire country, to demonstrate its belonging to the European Union). Because of this duality, it lacks a coherent urban culture both in terms of tradition and in terms of modernity.

Wei et al.'s (2019) classification of the urban cultural space mentioned above helped us identify the following characteristics of Bacău, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

a) Its integral space is made up of one large street, Calea Mărășești (part of the European road E85); it becomes the main axis of Bacău, while crossing the centre of the town. The spatial structure of Bacău is characterised by a radiation development along its main road.

b) As far as the functional space is concerned, Bacău has one public and one private university, 17 colleges, one industrial park and three leisure parks, a history museum, an art museum, an astronomical observatory and several memorial houses.

c) Bacău's service space includes one concert hall, two theatres, two big commercial complexes with cinemas and numerous bookstores. It also houses numerous street events.

Type of space	Characteristics
Integral space	Calea Mărășești street (the main axis)
Functional space	universities, colleges, industrial park, leisure parks, museums
Service space	theatres, concert halls, libraries, shops, bookstores, street events

Table 1: Urban cultural space in Bacău

4. Framework for analysis

The theoretical perspective we take for our analysis is that of symbolic interactionism, preoccupied with the study of the process of human verbal and non-verbal interactions, through which people construct meanings from the objects/things in their environment and from the other people's actions. They act towards the respective things on the basis of the meanings that "the things have for them" (Blumer 1969: 2). Things and actions are endowed with symbolic meanings, which people convey to each other via language. Through these symbolic meanings, people construct worlds of experience. The process of meaning modification is helped by people's self-reflection while they symbolically interact with those around them and share information. The fact that meanings are created, interpreted, re-interpreted and modified through language during people's constant interactions, gives culture a dynamic character. Symbolic interactionists try to evaluate the influence of meaning interpretation upon culture.

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

Language has the power to create culture and words “do indeed make worlds” (Bowman et al. 2016). The processes of uttering or reading words are followed by those of mental image development and comprehension of the conveyed information.

5. Methodology of research

Having in view the purpose of our paper, we have selected only those elements that focus on the change of paradigm (from tradition to modernity) in the field of the urban space of the town, insisting on transformational aspects of the service space, in relation to and with consequences on the integral space of the town.

We started from two easily noticeable things of Bacău's urban service space, which may be considered real change trajectories for the town:

1. new trends in the architecture defining this type of space;
2. an “explosion” in the use of foreign linguistic elements (English, French, Italian, Chinese) that help to create a certain identity of these spaces, a “western-modern-contemporary” (Taşkin & Sarioğlu 2011: 109) way of living and, implicitly, contribute to the identity of the town as such. The use of such elements also indicates more attention given to the “psychological comfort” of the citizens; thus, they create images of/comprehension of:
 - a) belongingness to cosmopolitan lifestyle;
 - b) past experiences (for the cases in which Romanians came back from Italy, after having worked there for years, and invested their money in a restaurant/bar, for example);
 - c) being at home (the case of Chinese people living in Bacău).

The paper aims to be both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis of the English linguistic elements (as they seem to outnumber other foreign elements which were identified) that make up the urban cultural space of Bacău. We researched this case in order to better understand the different urban forms and experiences that shape the town in search of its place and identity.

The analysis was based on three research questions:

1. What elements of Bacău's urban culture can be depicted within the sphere of the service space?
2. What English linguistic elements can be depicted in Bacău's service space?
3. What is the role of these English linguistic elements in shaping Bacău's overall urban culture?

6. Data and analysis

Within our sphere of research, we have identified two main elements of interest, helping us to answer the research questions: a) restaurants and stores, on the one hand, and b) street events, on the other hand.

Stores are necessary service spaces, which take the role of providers of supplies and materials for people's use.

Restaurants inform about the lifestyle of the city, as they are providers of social settings that reunite family, friends or business partners in a relaxing atmosphere. They ensure the space/place for socializing practices routines. Practices, nearby values, beliefs, symbols, artifacts are important elements of culture (Karahanna et al. 2005).

Street events combine the two above-mentioned elements (commerce and socialization). In our opinion, they up-grade the function of streets, transforming the space into a place ("...a space charged with particular meanings" (Bolzonella 2016).

a) Restaurant/bar and store names along Bacău's main axis

The names of the restaurants and stores generally have a double purpose: to serve as an identification for the business and as an appeal to the potential customers (Ainiala and Östman 2017: 184). They comprise a linguistic component, made of local or global features (Sjöblom 2013: 5). The linguistic features labelled as local are those that "can be understood and interpreted only by a local language community or by a local culture" (Ibidem: 8). On the other hand, the

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

linguistic features that display a global character “promote the process of globalization in one way or another” (Idem).

At the same time, the context where these names are used is of vital importance, as they can acquire different meanings and interpretations depending on the language community where they are used (Ibidem: 7). Consequently, restaurant and store names result from a process of “negotiation between localism and globalism, from the transfer of values from one context of use to the other” (Bugheșiu 2015: IX).

Along Bacău's main axis, in its integral space, there are 123 restaurants and stores (10 restaurants and 113 stores - a number resulted from direct observation). The great majority of them display Romanian names, followed by English names (or names with at least one English linguistic component) and French names. Figure 1 illustrates the frequency with which they occur:

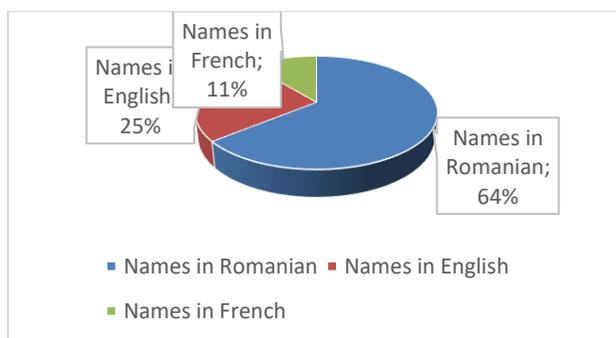


Figure 1: Names of restaurants and stores along Bacău's main axis

The names in English or with at least one English linguistic component fall under the following categories:

1. English names

One-word names contain words or acronyms easily recognizable by the great majority of Romanians due, first of all, to their resemblance with Romanian words. This is the case of a clothes shop whose name is *Sense*, easily associated with the Romanian *sens* which

has the same meaning. Almost the same case is with the restaurant name *Viking's*, as the Romanian term is similar: *Vikingi*. Names such as *Shoes*, *Fresh* or *VIP* are equally recognizable because the first two are among the first English words learned in school by the Romanian learners, while the acronym *VIP* almost plays the role of a common noun in Romanian nowadays. Their appeal to prospective customers is made through two language elements - clarity and economy- and the symbolic images they create are linked to the idea of calming/relaxing feeling (*Sense*); power/importance (*Viking's*; *VIP*) or health (*Fresh*).

Two-word names contain, in their turn, simple terms which are part of the basic English vocabulary, understandable at a first glance by Romanians: *Justine Style*, *Creative Store*, *Your Friend*, *First Coffee*, *Sweet Miss*, *Neo Fashion*, *Joy Next*, *China Shop*, *Sisters' Grill*. They give the potential customers the feeling of affiliation to a larger group - les connoisseurs - and that of walking/hanging around western-countries streets.

Three-word names either contain a proper name, like in *Hong Kong Shopping*, or an enumeration, as in *Wine, Beer and More* or *Cosmetics and Nails Boutique*. There are also noun phrases showing the type of business: *Original Jeans Store*, *Total Shoes Land*. The symbolic idea of abundance and that of "being carefully attended to", which the names create in people's mind, sound inviting and awake feelings of importance.

2. English and Romanian names

They may contain English nouns suggesting the type of business followed by the name of the town (*Bike Sale & Service Bacau*), the name of the Romanian owner followed by the English possessed noun (*Roxana Style*), the Romanian name describing the type of service offered followed by its English name (*Cofetaria Story*) or the other way round, the name of the store in Romanian, followed by an English explanation (*Lampalux - the lighting shop*). The symbolic idea of this language mix is that of preserving the tradition while aspiring to be and feel European.

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

3. Miscellaneous

Being similar to the category discussed above, these names generally contain possessives, where the possessors are depicted through their names or the initials of their names, which cannot be clearly pinpointed as being Romanian or English, and are followed by the possessed English noun denoting the business: *Sara's Shop*, *Ovia Store*, *A&C Shoes*.

Given the fact that all these names do not contain any specialized terms, the explanation for the use of English terms instead of the Romanian ones would be the former's cosmopolitan air, which seems to render more power and credibility to the shop/restaurant than in the case the name had been in Romanian.

b) Street events in Bacău

There are various forms of festivals and events that are staged in different urban public spaces. The street settings, generally used as service spaces, often become hosts for free cultural festivals and sport events, while the plazas and parks, as functional spaces, are used as stages for more commercially oriented events.¹ "In the contemporary era, festivals and events offer opportunities for urban public spaces to be reimagined as more welcoming and more diverse spaces encouraging different behaviours." (Cudny 2016: 5)

Festivals have recently become a fruitful field of investigation, as they cover all cultures and have as main functions to attract visitors and to shape city identities, "generating social consequences, and improving the well-being of host communities." (Wang 2015: 10)

In Bacău, the great majority of festivals takes place on the main axis of the city, namely in the city center, in Piața Tricolorului and in the parks (especially in Cancicov Park). For the present study we are going to refer to the events that took place in Bacău in 2019.

¹ <http://heranet.info/projects/public-spaces-culture-and-integration-in-europe/festivals-events-and-inclusive-urban-public-spaces-in-europe/> - June 20, 2020.

The most well-known street festivals in Bacău in 2019 had English names: *Street Food Festival*, *FoodFest*, *Gourmand festival*, *Street Delivery*. Although their number is smaller than the ones whose name is in Romanian (as it can be seen in Figure 2 below), they have a great appeal to the public (noticeable in the number of people present) due not only to the products displayed or activities involved, but also to the short, explicit and widely understandable names, which make people feel they are part of a bigger event than just a local one.

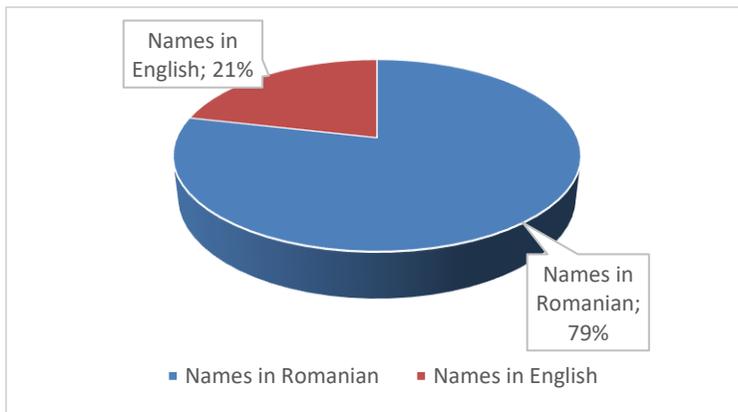


Figure 2: Names of street events

Out of these street festivals, one in particular stands out, and this is *Street Delivery*. It is an urban architecture and arts event that takes place every summer not only on the streets of Bacău, but also on the streets of other major cities in Romania. The purpose is to recover a street from the domination of cars and give it back to pedestrians for a whole weekend. The name of this event, ambiguous in English, would have been even more confusing in Romanian. Table 2 below offers the profile of the event, while Figure 3 discloses percentages of the names given to activities and workshops that took place during *Street Delivery*.

Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

Characteristics	
Location	Aleea Parcului, at the entrance of Cancicov Park
Edition in 2019	3 rd
Number of days	3
Number of activities	31

Table 2: Street Delivery Profile

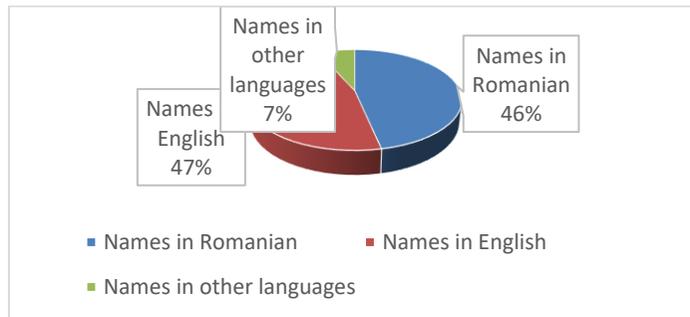


Figure 3: Names of activities and workshops during Street Delivery

As Figure 3 above reveals, half of the activities and workshops during *Street Delivery* in Bacău in 2019 had foreign names, the great majority being in English. One project during *Street Delivery* was *ZidArt*, with a blended Romanian-English name, whose main purpose was the creation of large murals on some of the buildings in town. Half of these works bear English names: *Inclusion*, *Openness V*, *Seeing the Future*.

Other activities during *Street Delivery* in 2019 included:

- NGO's initiatives, with 5 out of 11 (45.45%) names in English: *Greenpeace*, *Fridays for Future*, *Nesthub Business Canvas*, *End the Cage Age*, *Get it right!*

- arts and crafts - 1 out of 8 (12.5%) names is in English (*Crazy Stickers*) and one is half in Romanian and half in English (*Bijuterii Steampunk*)
- workshops - 2 out of 4 (50%) names are in English (*Wood & Resin Art Deco, Pedal Shop*) and one is half in Romanian and half in English (*Parada SkirtBike*)
- exhibitions - 4 out of 5 (80%) names are in English: *Lunar Bond, Schoppel Cut, Museum of intimacy, Let's Trip*

Being created by teenagers and young people and targeting especially the younger population in Bacău, the activities and workshops during *Street Delivery* bear more precise names, with terms that speak to youngsters through the symbolic images they create.

Seeing the Future (the ZidArt mural) or *Fridays for Future* (the NGO initiative), through the use of the noun *future*, appeal especially to young people, to those who have a whole life ahead and who feel "more European" than the older generations. *Crazy Stickers* creates the image of young rebels who like collecting things, while *Pedal Shop* and *Parada SkirtBike* symbolically aim at (nonconformist) bikers.

Nesthub, which explicitly hints at the idea of togetherness (in thinking, acting and spending time) and *End the Cage Age* - suggesting desire for freedom - address the youngsters with two of their most loved conceptions of life: being close (just like family members) to those of the same age and enjoying freedom of thought and action (as part of the modern lifestyle).

The names of activities that are formed of short exclamatory sentences (*Get it right!* and *Let's Trip*) symbolically represent the vivacity and spirit of action that characterize the young generation.

Table 3 below summarizes the ideas already presented.

Service space	Symbolic images
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Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

Restaurants/stores	Calming/relaxing feeling Power/importance Health Affiliation to a larger group Aspiring to feel European Belonging to Europe
Street events	Rebellion Nonconformism Vivacity Spirit of action

Table 3: Symbolic images within the service space

Conclusions

Starting from the classification of urban cultural space, we have identified the characteristics of Bacău in terms of integral space, functional space and service space. Within the larger sphere of service space (at the interference with the other two spaces), we have depicted two main elements that help shape Bacău's urban culture, the naming of restaurants and stores, on the one hand, and the names of street events, on the other hand. The balance between tradition and globalization is still in favour of the former, as only 25% of restaurant and store names along Bacău's main axis and only 21% of event names bear English linguistic markers (they are entirely English or contain at least one English element, generally a noun). The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism helped us interpret this tendency of using English names instead of Romanian ones: the former create symbolic images that help the people from a relatively small provincial town (still in search of its cultural identity) feel more connected to the rest of the world.

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Shaping Bacău's Urban Culture through English

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