

TERRITORIAL ATTACHMENT IN URBAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract: *The paper reviews a series of results from several territorial attachment and pride surveys. Territorial pride is seen as a direct expression of territorial attachment. The core of the data was collected in two surveys administered in the city of Alba Iulia, Romania in 2012 and 2016. Some common conclusions have been stated at the end of the study. They refer to several predictors of territorial attachment like gender, level of education etc., as well as to the connection between attachment and the critical spirit of the inhabitants.*

Key words: *territorial attachment, territorial pride, self-identification, critical spirit.*

1. Preliminaries

In a recent study, we noticed that the territorial attachment notion is being invoked within different contexts and in different disciplines ranging from geography, migration studies and social psychology to sociology and marketing (Pascaru, 2017, pp. 24-25). We were mentioning in that context that Irène Micha and Dina Vaiou (2015) were looking at the multicultural neighbourhoods of Athens, where they identified specific forms of attachment. These forms of attachment involved a familiarisation with diversity, led to controversies and required enormous investments in time and effort in order to obtain the harmonisation of the relationships among inhabitants with different cultural background (p. 174). Such neighbourhoods, we remarked, can become battlefields and are prime sources of fear and insecurity; and that the state of things tends to deteriorate further during periods of crises (Pascaru, 2017, p. 25).

In the same 2017 study (p. 25), we also mentioned that a different form of connection between the territorial attachment and patrimony was identified by Bianca Botea-Coulaud (2013). To begin with, the researcher made a series of observations on the distinction between *house* and *home* (Botea-Coulaud, 2013, p. 261). The sentiment of being *at home*, the author said, can become a driver of return migration. The particular case Botea-Coulaud was looking at was that of the Swabians returning home to Jimbolia (Romania) even after having obtained residence and living for many years after that in their ancestors' original home country of Germany. One interesting aspect of this case was that the feeling of being "at home" was in part supported by elements of collective memory and of patrimony grouped around the local Swabian museum.

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On this issue, we mentioned in 2015 Noël Jouenne, who in a study on the mobility in a Toulouse neighbourhood, was examining the role of neighbourhood's history in the integration of newcomers and in the harmonisation of the relationships between them and the existing population (Jouenne, 2015).

Another observation we made in 2017 was on the notion of territorial attachment, which in its more popular forms of *attachement au lieu* (Fr.) or *place attachment* (En.), appeared more and more frequently in marketing studies (Pascaru, 2017, p. 26). Alain Debenedetti published a paper on leisure time services in which he also reviewed the works analysing this notion. Left behind by a research focused on new situations in a world of instability and change, the notion of territorial attachment - the author contended - came back under the spotlight together with the renewed interest in the relationship between the individual and his birthplace. Territorial attachment is seen by the author as a positive identity connection between a consumer and a specific place (the place becoming an extension of the self), which is characterised by durability, even if it varies in intensity (Debenedetti, 2005, p. 3).

Our 2017 study also recognised the analysis of the residential attachment by Mirela Maria Nae (2007) whereby residential attachment was considered a newer form of territorial attachment. The author linked residential attachment to residential satisfaction, which, in its turn, depends on a plurality of factors of social and physical nature. (Nae, 2007, p. 121). To the extent to which we accept the existence of strong connections between living and territorial attachment - at least for the Romanian realities - we were right in 2017 to suggest that works like Dumitru Sandu's *Viaţa socială în România urbană* (2006) and especially Bogdan and Madalina Voicu's 2006 study may also be reviewed under this perspective (Voicu & Voicu, 2006).

2. Research of Territorial Attachment and Territorial Pride

Within the same study of 2017 we mentioned that territorial attachment has been approached more or less explicitly in previous social research before and after the year 2000 (Pascaru, 2017, p. 27). At the beginning, our investigations have been undertaken in rural communities. In a series of studies in Horea commune in Alba County (Romania), we identified elements of identity (Mucchielli, 1986) and of identity strategies (Kasterstein, 1990) and finally proposed the notion of *toponymical and territorial identity* (Pascaru, 2003; Pascaru, 2004).

We also undertook in 2003 a series of important investigations in the village of Corna, Alba County, which was set for flooding in order to accommodate the local mining plans for a sedimentation pond. At the level of inhabitants, 57.2% of those agreeing in principle to the destruction of their village, 92.3% of those *reluctantly* agreeing and 95% of those vehemently disagreeing to, also stated strong and very strong attachments to their village (Pascaru, 2007, p. 68).

A more ample research of diverse social and local governance aspects in the Livezile-Rimetea micro-region of the same Alba County was conducted under our coordination in 2007 and was mentioned in our 2017 study. The data that was collected with that occasion allowed us to also conduct an analysis of possible predictors of territorial attachment (Pascaru, 2010).

The first investigation we made in urban communities was in 2012 for a diagnosis of Alba Iulia city (Primăria Alba Iulia, 2012). For the purpose of this research, territorial attachment has been expressed as inhabitants' pride to reside in a particular neighbourhood. The intensity of pride was measured on a scale of 1 to 10 whereby 1 stood for "not proud" and 10 for "very proud". The overall average of 7.99 told us that the Alba Iulia city dwellers were proud overall, but not very proud of their neighbourhood. The average pride of people residing for over 10 years was slightly higher than that of the more recent ones, fact mentioned also in our 2017 work (Pascaru, 2017, p. 31). Our 2012 research did not find relevant differences between women and men's averages (7.98 for women and 8.01 for men). Age wise, higher values were identified at the margins (8.28 for the 18-25 year segment and 8.04 for the 65-plus one). Occupationally, higher pride was displayed by those unable to work (8.59), students (8.15) and the unemployed (8.11) - the inactive population in a nutshell. In terms of education, respondents lacking it displayed the lowest degree of pride (6.31), having presumably to do with the quality of the neighbourhood in which most of them were living. Ethnicity, however, resulted in some differences with Romanians stating an average of 8.06 while Hungarians 7.00 and the Roma 6.38. The level of income was generally irrelevant as a predictor, although we should mention that the lowest pride (7.00) was stated by those with incomes smaller than EUR 70 per family/ month.

In our 2017 study we stated our opinion that the connections between neighbourhood attachment and local development can also be revealed by the problems expressed by neighbourhood's inhabitants, if this expression is associated with a certain type of attachment or, more precisely, with a certain type of pride to live there (Pascaru, 2017, p. 32). The most interesting finding was that out of all those declaring no problems in their neighbourhood, the majority (57.5%) stated the maximum level of pride. They were followed by those stating a level of 9 out of 10. None of those stating a pride of 1 and 2 were among those who could not find problems in their neighbourhood.

As we noted in the 2017 study, the pride to live in a particular neighbourhood can also be linked to some aspects of local government. More dwellers stating a lower degree of pride were claiming the need for a neighbourhood's own administration (28.6% of them stating a pride of 3 and 40% stating a pride of 4) than those stating a higher level of pride (13% of them stating 9 and 9.8% stating 10). Also, more of the less proud claimed being "to a greater extent" necessary to have representatives in the Local Councils (50% of those with pride levels 4 and smaller compared to 31.1% of those declaring pride levels of 5 and higher) (Pascaru, 2017, p. 33).

We concluded at the end of our 2017 study that the investigations on territorial attachment revealed a series of important issues for further research: 1) the significance of local pride as a dimension of territorial attachment; 2) the effectiveness of predictors of territorial attachment or of territorial pride; 3) the connections between attachment (pride) and critical spirit revealed by the ability to identify problems specific to the territory; and 4) the possible connections between attachment (pride) and the governing needs of a smaller territory like that of an urban neighbourhood (Pascaru, 2017, p. 34).

3. Territorial Attachment in a Local Community Barometer

The Barometer of Local Community - Alba Iulia City 2014-2018 is an ample research coordinated by Dr. Lucian Marina, Associate Professor at the University of Alba Iulia.

Our first contributions to the overall research were mostly theoretical and editorial (Marina and Pascaru, 2014; Pascaru, 2014). The theoretical contributions referred primarily to different aspects of participation. As we showed with previous occasions (Pascaru and Butiu, 2010; Pascaru 2014) in the existing literature on *participation*, the concept seems to be directly connected to *civil society* in its plenary forms of manifestation (Kumar, 2007). The results of the Barometer have been published in a volume (Marina and Pascaru, 2014) that was made available primarily to local authorities, but also to other stakeholders. Few months after the publication, some of the results have been inserted in a series of interviews with local councillors, part of a process of *results restitution*. The interviews were conducted in 2015 by Dr. Rodica Stanea, Lecturer at the University of Alba Iulia. Based on the interview data we published a synthetic study (Pascaru, 2016) which can be considered as a *sociologically induced participation* dedicated study, as we called at that time the process of bringing to the authorities' attention the opinions of local citizens on the problems facing the community (Pascaru and Butiu, 2010).

The research through the local community barometer continued throughout 2016, the data gathered becoming the basis for a new report to local authorities (Marina et al., 2017). These findings are currently undergoing a process of academic validation through the publication of articles and studies examining them. This is the context within which we propose the analysis that follows.

3.1. Territorial attachment: forms and amplitude

Within the Barometer of the Local Community - Alba Iulia 2016 study three forms of attachment have been considered: 1) the attachment to the city of Alba Iulia; 2) the attachment to the place where the respondents lived during their childhood (if other than Alba Iulia); 3) the attachment to the place where the respondents are working (if other than Alba Iulia).

On the first issue, 93.7% of respondents declared themselves much and very much attached to the city as one can see in Table 1.

Concerning childhood place attachment, 92.2% declared themselves much and very much attached (Table 2). High was also the frequency of those declaring much and very much attached to the locality of their workplace (Table 3).

The level of attachment to the city of Alba Iulia

Table 1

Level of attachment	Frequency	%	Cumulated %
Very much attached	623	74.3	74.3
Much attached	162	19.3	93.6
Moderately attached	35	4.2	97.8
Little attached	10	1.2	99.0
Very little/Not at all attached	8	1.0	100.0
Total	838	100.0	

Attachment to childhood place (if other than Alba Iulia)

Table 2

Level of attachment	Frequency	%	Cumulated %
Very much attached	437	70.9	70.9
Much attached	131	21.3	92.2
Moderately attached	34	5.5	97.7
Little attached	8	1.3	99.0
Very little/Not at all attached	6	1.0	100.0
Total	616	100.0	

Attachment to the place of work (if other than Alba Iulia)

Table 3

Level of attachment	Frequency	%	Cumulated %
Very much attached	277	65.0	65.0
Much attached	94	22.1	87.1
Moderately attached	33	7.7	94.8
Little attached	7	1.6	96.5
Very little/At all attached	15	3.5	100.0
Total	426	100.0	

Taking into account all three forms of attachment, we can now conclude that those much and very much attached manifest their attachment firstly to the city of Alba Iulia (93.6%), secondly to their place of childhood (92.2%) and thirdly to the place where they work or had worked in the past (87.1%).

Examining on different independent variables like gender, civil status, education or occupation, the 2016 research allowed us several conclusions: 1) Gender does not play a role in the level of attachment to the city of Alba Iulia; 2) More single persons declared themselves moderately attached to Alba Iulia (17.1% compared to their 9.3% share in the sample); 3) More of those with high school diploma declared themselves moderately attached to the city, while those with primary school studies (grade 1 through 4) declared themselves very much attached; none of those with secondary education (grade 5 through 8) declared themselves little and very little attached; 4) More of inactive respondents declared themselves moderately attached (28.6%), little attached (20.0%) and very little attached (25.0%) than their 12.7% share in the sample.

What we find interesting is that being born in Alba Iulia does not imply much or very much attachment to the city; 63.6% of those only moderately attached were born in the city. Also, none of those born in the Apuseni Mountains (the vicinity area that traditionally supplied many residents to the city of Alba Iulia) declared themselves very little or not at all attached to the city. More of those who had spent their childhood away declared themselves little and very little attached to the city of Alba Iulia.

3.2. Attachment and Critical Spirit

The 2016 Barometer also tested inhabitants' evaluation of local authorities' implication in education in the city. Among the responsible stakeholders, aside from the school and the family, was also the local administration (City Hall). According to the

results of research, 77.1% of the respondents considered that the City Hall takes very much concern in education at local level. Among them, were 84% of the very much attached and 61.5% of the much attached to the city of Alba Iulia. To conclude with, more of those declaring themselves very much attached to the city appreciated that the City Hall takes very much concern in education in the city. Noticeable is also the fact that none of those declaring little or no attachment considered that the City Hall takes much concern in education.

4. Conclusions

We will base our conclusions on results from both urban studies, from 2012 and 2016 alike. As mentioned previously, territorial attachment was approached directly in 2016 and indirectly in 2012 through the notion of the pride of living in a particular neighbourhood. In spite of the different approaches, we would underline several important features that are common to both.

Gender plays an insignificant role in eliciting more attachment or pride to be living in a place. Education has some influence in the sense that less educated respondents are more attached to the city than their respective neighbourhoods. So does employment whereby inactive respondents were prouder of their neighbourhoods than of their city.

Beyond the attempt to identify the behaviour of important pride and territorial attachment predictors, the existence and function of a specific critical spirit is another common issue of both 2012 and 2016 studies. We found that the critical spirit was more acute in those displaying a lower degree of pride of their neighbourhoods or a lower level of attachment to the city of Alba Iulia overall.

Notwithstanding its exploratory character, the research undertaken with the occasion of the Barometer of 2016 revealed two important aspects. They pertain to the relationship between attachment to the urban community and the place of origin (childhood) on one hand, and between attachment and the place of work, on the other. While on the first relationship we cannot fully confirm an obvious connection, we appreciate that overall, the attachment to the place of residence is more frequently declared than the attachment to the place of origin or to that of employment.

We are reiterating here the recommendations that we inserted in the 2017 study and which refer primarily to the need for a more profound theoretical acknowledgement. Such a study could examine the connections between territorial attachment and identity and pride on one hand, and between territorial attachment and the satisfaction with living in a place, on the other. Within the same context, from a methodological point of view, we appreciate the need for more precise territorial attachment measurement instruments, in order to avoid the cases - like those encountered in our research - where the majority of respondents tend to cluster towards both ends of the measurement scale. While we do not exclude the possibility that such clustering reflects reality, we still think that a more precise instrument is necessary. Finally, we consider that the use of qualitative techniques may become mandatory in one's desire to better understand, beyond the explanatory model of quantitative research, the structure and functionality of the territorial attachment concept (Pascaru, 2017, p. 34).

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