

THE VICINITIES OF DRĂGUŞ PAST AND PRESENT

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Abstract: *Social life, in every form of manifestation, takes place within social units. In their sphere of inclusion, predominant of families and households, then kinsfolk (relatives), vicinities and many more, each of these is invested with a major or minor role, in the daily life of Romanian villages. The vicinities are worth being brought out of the great destiny of the rural settlements. Present in ancient times only in the coexistence of German Transylvanian village settlements, the vicinities gradually also made their way to the orderliness of the Romanian villages. Such a vicinity association was mentioned in the research monograph of the Romanian Sociological School of Bucharest in the pre-war times of the past century, in Drăguş village (near Făgăraş). Drăguş has been appreciating this model of vicinity organisation, by keeping some of the meanings and their initial attributes to obtain new ones.*

Key words: *Drăguş, vicinities, social units, fathers of vicinities, Husari Club, counselling house.*

1. Introduction

The Olt Country, one of the "oldest local Romanian organisations" within Romanian area also includes the village of Drăguş with "its properly delineated lands." Located in the second row of villages between the Olt River and the mountains, Drăguş is part of the settlements which have remained truly Romanian, despite the foreign conquering enemies. Steadfastly kept in God's orderliness and benefactor influence of hard work, hierarchy and communal harmony, a keeper, to the fullest extent, of the old and special ways of living, this village, with its "clustered rows of houses, on a few thoroughfares, where narrower paths depart (a blocked thoroughfare)" and "caught in a place similarly to that of beehive attached to a branch" [Amzăr, 2013, p. 59], was given an everlasting name. Drăguş was depicted as "a typically Romanian village" through the scientific endeavor of the monograph teams of the Romanian Sociological School of Bucharest, which brought to light the lasting patterns of this community's past and its selfmeaningful customs still alive in rural life. According to Henri H. Stahl, a dominant influence in the life of Drăguş village was

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given on the one hand, by the *"individual households, designed into "the hei", meaning "the lands designed for the houses situated in the hearth of the village" and the arrangement of the vicinities on the principle of "hei" rather than on the principle of kinship"* [Stahl, 1981, p. 126] and, on the other hand, structuring the village customarily based on vicinities (groups of neighbouring houses along the thoroughfares, being subject to spatial conditioning, and with the responsibility of supporting the others in life's various circumstances).

The modern administrative organisation chart doesn't use the "vicinity" institution anymore as an intermediation method between the village and the local administration, as it used to be done in the past. However, the vicinities of Drăguş have maintained most of their roles, as they preserve the old distribution methods.

In the following paragraphs, I would like to portray aspects of their history, past and present.

2. The Vicinities of Drăguş. Distribution Methods

The main *The vicinities* are social structures. Therefore, any vicinity, as a social structure, consists of a group of individuals (the living, dynamic element, life generator), an organisational structure (which mediates a distribution of statuses and roles, establishing rights and obligations), an operational method, manifestations of life, relationships (spontaneous or standardised by the organisation), processes and trends. Beyond all of these, the ordering principle of the vicinities is that of spacial proximity (and conditioning). It is accountable for the intense relationships between households, reflected in the increased degree of mutual acquaintance and interactions of the constituent entities. For the moment, we will focus on the structure of the vicinities, precisely on the ones in Drăguş.

The existence of vicinity organisations in the community of Drăguş was shown in a more comprehensive analysis by Henri H. Stahl (1936), and also by Traian Herseni (1931), who integrated the problems of vicinity into a more comprehensive framework of the sociology of space. The two sociologists, prominent members of the Sociological School of Bucharest, had taken notice of the roles of the vicinities in the distribution of the local social life and its importance during the research monograph of Drăguş in 1929. Since the beginnings of Drăguş, the vicinities trace back to the middle of the 19th century (we will outline the arguments in a further approach of this topic, as the limited length allocated to this article forces us to conclude it). It is worth noting that in the interwar period of the past century, the vicinities were fully planned and invested with social meanings derived from the needs of the village community.

The heart of Drăguş, crossed by thoroughfares from place to place, these highly useful corridors of the village life in the distribution of the households, included, between 1929-1932, according to Henri H. Stahl's records, twelve vicinities, incorporating the whole Romanian population of the Drăguş community (Annex 1), regardless of *"the kinship differences or social background"* [Stahl, 1936, p. 19]. Today, in Drăguş, there are eleven more vicinities (Annex 3), reconfigured, naturally, by the change of time, subjected to all kinds of temptations. The vicinities are preserved in their deepest layers, in the pattern originally tailored.

Each vicinity is structured, as simply as possible, relying at all times on two well-defined and dynamic structures:

a) **Vicinity meetings** where fathers of the family, either men or widows, depending on the households, invested with the responsibility of electing the ruler of the vicinity were included.

b) **The ruler of the vicinity**, under whose control, care and administration is the vicinity, once elected by the vicinity meeting.

In Drăguș, there were not any rulebooks or guiding regulations to guide the life of the community, their functional requirements were put in place by the ruler of the vicinity. Electing the ruler of the vicinity does not involve complicated procedures, but it implies some steps regarding the election date, length of their mandate, criteria and the practical way of assignment.

The date of the election is not a fixed one: it is usually planned, as a general rule, in the period that does not involve field work (e.g. New Year's Eve, Epiphany, after reaping, etc.). Later on, their term of office was not regulated, starting from a year ("no matter how poor it could be") and even reaching, rarely, a decade, if they served the community well. A long time ago, the ruler of the vicinity's attributes were: "having a pleasant character", being a good householder, a religious man, being an expert of the local rules, having a peaceful family, not having broken any laws, being a good leader – all these attributes making him a respectful member of the vicinity, but also of the entire village. Today, according to the villagers, these requirements are not as valuable as in the past, "it is not a symbol of a Drăguș resident anymore". Nowadays, life experience, being a good public speaker and having travelled around are more relevant. Procedurally, the ruler of the vicinity is elected by vote or by auction.

1. The Roles of the Vicinities.

The The vicinities were created in order to fulfill certain community roles (functions) "on the simple basis of the principle of the economy of forces" [Herseni, 131, p.142] . Originally, the vicinities used to have a limited number of functions focusing on "intermittent mutual aid". The diversification of their functions was done gradually, this addition empowering them enough in the effort to maintain a stable system of the village communities in their eagerness to rise above their fates.

A list of specific roles "that served the vicinities of Drăguș as it was configured in the interwar period" of the past century explained to us due to Henri H. Stahl's efforts (Annex 1) included all the social manifestations (economic, political and administrative, spiritual and ethical). On this occasion, we will make a short but hopefully useful analysis of some of them.

3.1. Funeral arrangements

The residents of Drăguș are religious people. They confess through their prayers, within a deep care and a rigorous holy duty the ancient belief of our nation. Due to it, they matched

their fate and meaning of life, from birth and until the transition to eternal life ("the great departure"). Therefore, the villagers have an everlasting belief in God's orderliness and in all the intersections of human fate, as well as in the passing to the great "beyond", which ends the earthly life, at the coming of time. A part of what is needed, arranged to be fulfilled at the funeral is taken care of by the vicinity and has been strictly honored since then. Upon digging the grave and bringing the deceased to the cemetery, the men are lined up in an order that includes all the members of the vicinity, except for the ruler of the vicinity, who is exempt from this obligation (there are six individuals digging the grave and four carrying the deceased one). The ones that bear the crucifix and the "prapor" must not be akin to the deceased. Then, the widows are chosen to wake the dead body, to take care of the candles and to arrange the apple tree branch and decorate it with the necessary items in line with the tradition. The godparents are the ones to receive it, to eternal remembrance of the deceased one. This way, the vicinity relieves the grieving family of the arduous part of the funeral and relates it to the fact that this suffering may ease off those burdened by fate and that they may be comforted and relieved.

3.2. Counselling House. Husari Club

Drăguş has been a community with a continuous zeal for spiritual uplifting, with each generation. The village intended to leave the memory of those who built schools but also the counselling house "for the benefit of the community" in the testimony book of our nation. This "counselling house" was publicly consecrated under the title of Husari Club (attended especially by the residents of the Husari vicinity without overlapping with it). Having a sense and historical nature (composed predominantly of the descendants of former serfs, as a natural reaction against the social emancipation), Husari Club was "a truly social unit, in which, by its objective character and its specific structure, expressed a richer reality than the sum of its shareholders" [Herseni, 1944, p. 94]. The club defined itself as a "group of equal men" with a coherence and a solidarity deriving from a "favourable harmony", as well as from a firm, unitary attitude "serving the public affairs". Its informal character relieved it of the constraints of strict rules of club membership (such as membership fees, regular meetings, rules of conduct, etc). All these gave it a full freedom of expression in criticising the activity of the local administration, and to present remedial plans before the law, becoming a "good counselor of those who used to rule the village".

Husari Club does not exist any longer in Drăguş. I have briefly described it in view of the noble and assumed mission to develop "the thirst for learning", to reinvigorate the village life back to its origins.

2. Preparation of Koliva on Saint Theodor's and Saint Demetrius' Day

For several decades, the vicinities of Drăguş have introduced the preparation of two koliva dishes, as an element of innovation in their way of life as a symbol of faith, fertility and abundance, namely one on Saint Theodor's Day, when the grains of wheat, sown in the fall, "blossom" to bear fruit, and another one on Saint Demetrius' Day, in gratitude for the

bountiful harvest that enriched the villagers' households. From sowing to harvest, the fields are under the care of God. Wheat is always present in the daily life of humankind, and also in all of the traditional holidays. It is also called "the body of Jesus". The koliva (made from boiled grain), symbolizes, on the one hand, the death of the human nature, and, on the other hand, the Resurrection. This is what the Holy Apostle Paul says: "As the grain of wheat, in order to sprout and bear fruit must first be buried in the ground to rot, so must the human body be buried and rotted, to be reborn again into a pure form".

The villagers of Drăguș, people who have been preserving their ancestral belief, express it this way along with the belief in immortality and Resurrection.

3. Conclusions

All the details presented above in short, regarding the activity and roles of the vicinities, their past and present, show the intensity of the village life of the past with its orderliness. It can also become a source of inspiration for modern administrative divisions.

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ANNEX 1: Number and names of the vicinities of Drăguş and their meanings (1929-1932)

Ref. no.	Name of the vicinity	Remarks
1.	Bisericii Vicinity	
2.	Trâmbiţaşi Vicinity	
3.	Husarii de Sus Vicinity	
4.	Husarii de Jos Vicinity	The Meadows
5.	Codrari Vicinity	
6.	Vâlcereni Vicinity	
7.	Lăscari Vicinity	
8.	Grădinari Vicinity	
9.	Nicheşti Vicinity	
10.	Rogozari Vicinity	
11.	Răceşti Vicinity	
12.	Uliţa Mare Vicinity	

Ref. no.	The meaning of the vicinities	Remarks
1.	Funeral Aid	
2.	Works done together (in the benefit of the village)	
3.	Spreading of the official news	
4.	Mutual support	
5.	Garbage collection (acquisition)	
6.	Meeting and counselling "house"	Husari Club
7.	Planning the village border guards	
8.	Health supervision in the vicinity	
9.	Place of political propaganda	
10.	Expression of the village public opinion	

ANNEX 2: Vicinities and fathers of the vicinities in Drăguş (2020)

Ref. no.	Vicinity	Father of the vicinity	Remarks
1.	Rogozari	Gheorghe Stoia	retired
2.	Uliţa Mică (Bisericii)	Matei Jurcovan	retired
3.	Trâmbiţaşi (Andreiaşi)	Dorin Viorel Andreiaşi	retired
4.	Husarii de Jos	Ion Rogozea	retired
5.	Husarii de Sus	Aurel Stoia	retired
6.	Codrarii de Sus and Vâlcica de Sus	Ioan Sofonea	retired
7.	Codrarii de Jos and Vâlcica de Jos	Nicolae Borzea	retired
8.	Nicheşti	Vasile Pop	retired
9.	Grădinari	Gheorghe Jurcovan	retired
10.	Lăscari	Ion Guşeilă	retired
11.	Uliţa Mare	Ioan Sofonea	retired

Source: Retired teacher Lavinia Rogozea, 78 years old, Drăguş