

# City image. The dynamic of inside perception between 2001 and 2004

## Case study: Ploiești

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*The purpose of this review is to sketch briefly the history of place marketing from its origins within marketing science, geography and public sector place planning to its present applications in the Western city and its emergence most recently as place branding. The questions posed are, 'what are we doing and why are we doing it?' and, 'is it both theoretically valid and practically effective?' City image. The dynamic of inside perception between 2000 and 2004. The aim of this paper is to identify changes in inside perception of the Ploiești city, a real sequence of Romanian urban habitat, giving the effects of the communist urban planning policies. On the other hand, city image, which represents the mental perception of the city, could be the solution for a "good" planning in order to develop a "good" place for living. Also, the paper examines inner image of Ploiești city, identifying "attractive" and "repulsive" areas as they were indicated during the two questionnaires made in 2001 and 2004.*

Key words: *city identity, city image, city planning, urban geography*

### Premises

The city, seductive from the point of view of scientific approach, has known different and multifarious approaches throughout the academic community, over the years, while its meanings became more and more complex.

What it is that determined this "anthropic power", unequalled on Earth (as George Bugliarello names the urbanisation process, *Rethinking Urbanization*, 2000) is not very clear, but its roots go deep into the sedentary process, induced by the agricultural revolution from the Neolithic. Disregarding the laws that it has obeyed during its evolution, or the geographical spaces that it has configured, this particular type of habitat has set its sole "beneficiary"

as being mankind. And the human community is acknowledged to be the pressure factor concerning the urban space organisation.

Therefore, it turns interesting to analyse the mental meanings that the city and the urban forms generate. Is this to say that the man is prisoner of the habitat, or may, the habitat, in this particular urban context, be modified under the empire of that particular human community's perception?

In 1960, year that marks the start of an especially scientifically fertile decade, because of the new concepts that arose from the academic debates and the university scientific groups, on the background of the modernist trend that used to dominate the society, and researchers' opponent

opinions related to its consequences (the depersonalisation of cities, and of urban life, the attempt to understand the city, and the way it works, as an engine, as a system, the human community remaining a simple quantitative component in this whole gearing; the exaggerating of geographic determinism and the models' monopole in the scientific approach of cities), the American citizen, Kevin Lynch launches the concept of *city image*, as an idea and as an expression, in the pages of the work "The image of the city", whose promoter he was, along with Jane Jacobs, Christopher Alexander and others.

Therefore, urban elements and forms create certain connexions and meanings in the mind of the urban actors. The physical part of the city is doubled by the mental one (the mental map, the urban image). The mental city outlines, or at least should indicate the lacks in functionality in the physical city. People are no longer prisoners of a predefined urban model, determined in its whole, but now like or have a repulsive attitude towards certain elements or forms that appear in the urban landscape. The inhabitants, therefore, become an active element in the reconfiguration and resize of the urban architecture. For Lynch, the city is a "text" that is deciphered, decrypted by the inhabitants, or by the simple bystanders of that particular ur-

ban life. Therefore, the city must be "readable". If it is "readable", then it is decoded and correctly perceived by people, that is it has **meanings**. If the elements and the urban forms are loaded with significances, then, *the city has an identity*.

**The organisation of the urban space / urban planning** are completed by the **urban design**, a complex interface through its interdisciplinary, among many disciplines that study the urban space, with a significant applicative power at detail level. The urban design influences the human perception, creating, therefore, a certain **city image**. The city image becomes, then, a work device strong enough for a future organisation of the urban space, as well as by nature of the impact that it may have on the business environment interested in that city, setting a certain course regarding **city marketing**. By the nature of its activity and image evolution, the city has become today a genuine "urban product", producing, and being through itself, a "brand" – **city branding**. The attempt to relate urban space with economic profitability becomes, more than ever, an essential philosophy of urban space organisation, and not only an instrument used for blurring the lacks in functionality and also for solving some problems regarding urban planning.

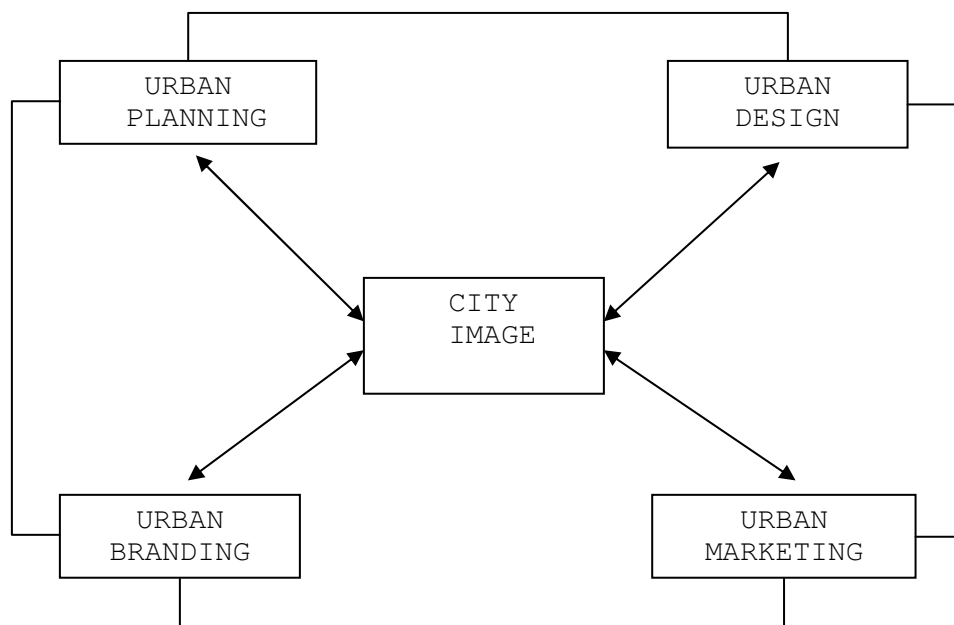


Figure no 1. The relations between *city image* and other concepts that approach the urban space

**The city – identity and image. Theoretical considerations**

Each city from the map of the world is identifiable through a series of qualitative or quantitative attributes that make it unique in the world urban “tissue”. Therefore, the geographic coordinates, the demography, the localisation, the shape, all of them constitute just as many exterior “dimensions” that offer the possibility of an indubitable identification.

Although all the cities may be identified precisely, not all of them have a “clear” identity, on the contrary, many of the contemporary cities raft across a genuine identity crisis.

**The city identity** designates that unitary set of characteristics, capable of having the same meaning for each inhabitant of the city (Brunet & Ferras, 1992), reflecting itself at a mental level through a symbol, adopted and “built” in time, by each generation, symbol that insures the

coherence and the continuity of life in that urban community. (G. Dematteis, 1994).

Also, the identity of a city is the expression of the ways the urban space has been planned in the past, materialised in external, voluntary interventions, whose effects have been amplified, diminished, or even annulled by its own, internal organisation of the city - **self organisation** - which is dominant and permanent. This is how the identity becomes an expression of (self) organisation, of the city as seen in the “past”. If we try to approach the “present” or the “future” city, its identity is transposed into image - **city image**. This is nothing else than the mental representation of the city at an individual/urban community level.

Basically, there are “two” realities:

- a) the **objective** reality, resulted from a complex of geographical conditions, that act independently from human will and that is submitted to cosmic laws
- b) the **perceived** reality, which is in accordance with different dependent or

independent variables (sex, age, education, income, health etc.), and with the perception scale.

As such, city image represents the perception of present urban reality – “the first reality” (the objective one) –, practically, a mental representation of it, “a second reality” (Racine, 1994) or “a second city”, the one identifiable through social inquiries.

Likewise, for any city there is a **collective image**, a mental product of the human community that populates and represents it, but also, **individual images** of the urban actors, unique images, mental representations of the city, of its neighbourhoods, of its streets, through some physical directly perceptible landmarks, which sometimes become animated, more or less, by different social meanings of some objectives, areas, by their history or name.

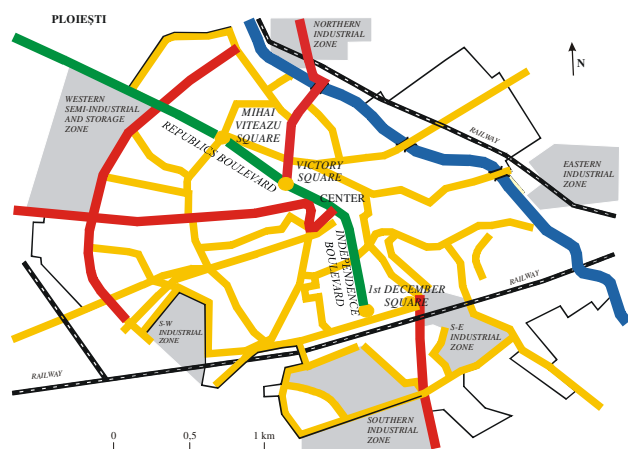
Lynch’s idea resides in the isolation of some urban elements and the diagnosis of the inhabitants’ view of them, searching for the meanings that they have on a mental level. As such, some distinctive elements are aimed:

- The **paths**. They are ways of access along which the observer (a simple inhabitant of the city or a visitor) passes by, occasionally or potentially, with the purpose of reaching certain objectives, either by foot (and it is interesting here to observe the quality of the sidewalks and of the pedestrian crossings), either by a vehicle (case in which the dominant of the perception is given by the quality of the traffic road).

For most of the inhabitants, the **streets are the predominant elements of the city image**. People observe the city

when they pass through it and some elements of the urban landscape are allotted in space and spotted in terms of their localisation along a street, a boulevard, etc.

Therefore, for the inhabitants of Ploiești, as well as for the ones outside it, who come here, **The Republics Boulevard** dominates their image of the city, through the clear express in the urban landscape, as well as through the fact that, the starting point, as well as the destination of the boulevard are clear and well known, fact that confers it a stronger identity, with more powerful accents in the perception of inhabitants, as well as through the functional characteristic associated with it, as the Republics Boulevard represents a genuine commercial thoroughfare of the city, not disregarding the creative valences manifested in the green zone in Mihai Viteazu Square, whose dominant symbol is, of, course, the regnant. Also, there are other elements of the city landscape associated to the boulevard, deeply rooted in the inhabitants’ memory - the headquarter of National Company of Electricity, identified by its colour, as it is known as the “Red House”, the Cemetery of the Russian Soldiers, etc. In the same way, the Independence Boulevard (which leads to the South Train Station of the city) represents, for many of the ones interviewed, an **attractive area**, especially considering its particularity - the presence of a remarkable street alignment, the route being known by the inhabitants as the **Boulevard of Chestnuts**, with leisure valences, its identity plus being offered by the fact that during the week-end, the road traffic is forbidden, therefore becoming a re-creative space for the week-end.



- **The nodes.** These are “strategic” places or points, penetrable by an observer, from and towards his destination. Some of these “nodes” represent the nucleon of those districts, that constitute themselves as symbols for that particular area and around which they clearly show their influence.

Well marked in the urban landscape, through squares, and roundabouts (signalled by Kevin Lynch as being genuine “breaches” in communication, where the rhythm or direction is sensibly changed) are the crossings situated along the Republics Boulevard and the Independence Boulevard that go through the city from north to south - Mihai Viteazu Square, The Heroes Square, The Victory Square, the 1<sup>st</sup> of December Square -, along with other secondary nodes of local importance.

- **Landmarks.** They are another type of reference elements for the city image, with a particular typology; they are external, impenetrable by the observer.

This category is constituted from reference elements that have a certain local utility, when they can't be “seen” except from certain places or from certain angles. This is the case of certain road posts, shop windows, some institutions or churches (St John's Cathedral, for example, in Ploiești),

different elements (the “Clock” from the Civics Centre, the Central Halls) or other details of the urban landscape that “fill” the inhabitants' image.

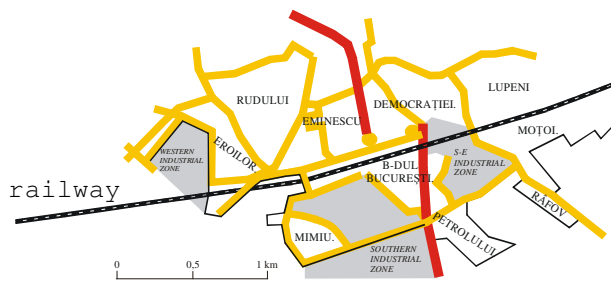
- **The Neighbourhoods.** They are fundamental “cells” of the urban social space, with a remarkable internal cohesion through which that urban community perceives the whole city. Therefore, in most cases, the district image is reflected on the general qualitative image of the city, taking into account the time spent inside that particular neighbourhood. Also, the district may set a certain social behaviour to its inhabitants.

The neighbourhood is acknowledged through a certain characteristic (texture, space, forms, details, symbols, type and colour of buildings, social significances with a certain emotional meaning, type of activity, functions, inhabitants, degree of maintenance/usage, topography, etc. - Kevin Lynch, 1967), which allows the observer to identify it, if he is inside it (endogenous perception), characteristic that transforms itself into a basic reference, if the subject is outside it (exogenous perception). As such, the districts are relatively wide areas of the city, which may be mentally identified by the observer, and that have certain own internal quality. Practically, at a perceptive level, **each district is unique**, impressing a certain belonging spirit to its inhabitants, which may sometimes be identified as a strong urban community held in a tight internal cohesion.

Under these aspects, the city of Ploiești, as most cities in Romania, for that matter, knowing the communist systematisation, seems a city lacking in history, with an almost chaotic aspect, with functional spaces that imbed, the districts, in their

vast majority, keeping the monotony of serial buildings, with grey, lacking in personality facades, specific to work districts, spread in most part of the city, especially in the western side, not presenting a distinct, internal differentiation, for many of the people interviewed.

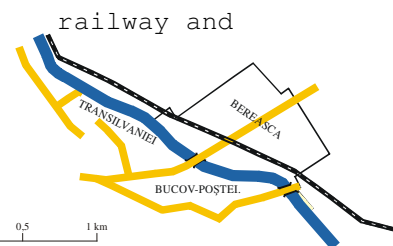
- **The limits (discontinuities).** These are linear elements with a precise identity for the observer, diametrically opposed to the access ways. These are frontiers between two types of precincts. Therefore, it is worth mentioning the **railway** from the south of Ploiești, brutally



The concept becomes extremely interesting, especially in the urban Romanian environment, on the first hand because of the excessive centralisation and the nationalisation of the intention to act at the level of urban space, through the creation of new urban spaces or the reconfiguration of the already existing ones, in its functional, and also aesthetic dimension (“a sense of beauty” absolutely specific to the architecture and the communist regime’s urbanism, that had to mark a city with working ambitions), and on the other hand, because of the situation created after 1989, when private urban space appeared, and everything failed in the other side’s court: an excessive tolerance, urbanistically speak-

ing and the arise of some spaces and urban forms out of local urban community’s control and acceptance. In both cases, the man is the “prisoner” of the urban habitat, whom he can only perceive, but his perception does not contribute to the outline of that city’s identity.

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The quality of life in the urban environment is tightly related to the quality of the public services, along with the feeling of belonging to that particular community, and the fact that certain elements or urban forms express common meanings for each of the city’s inhabitants. The city image reflects in a very high proportion, the urban identity. And the latter one may be preserved, strengthened, and even changed

through the activity of local authorities who promote the urban spaces, in their attempt to attract investors.

The above presented elements constitute the “rough material” that lies at the basis of drawing up a city image. These do not appear as singularities, but are put into a scheme; they receive value and significances through the relations among them. This is why the **perception scale** (the “geographical resolution”) is essential for the general outlining of a **city image**. As such, a landmark means nothing unless the resolution is increased (the perception scale is reduced), if it is not inserted into a scheme on the street, in a crossroads, in a neighbourhood, in a part of the city, city reflected by a number of mental individual images, number proportional with the number of inhabitants.

### Methodological aspects

This study has been carried out using two questionnaires that were conducted in 2001 and 2004 in Ploiești city, on two experimental focus groups (250, respectively 200 inhabitants). The selection of the focus group in 2001 has been done randomly, on the street, and it was conducted under the form of an interview, considering a qualitative questionnaire, and in 2004, the study was conducted through an online application on the Internet, on the web pages of the city (with all the advantages and disadvantages that incur from this).

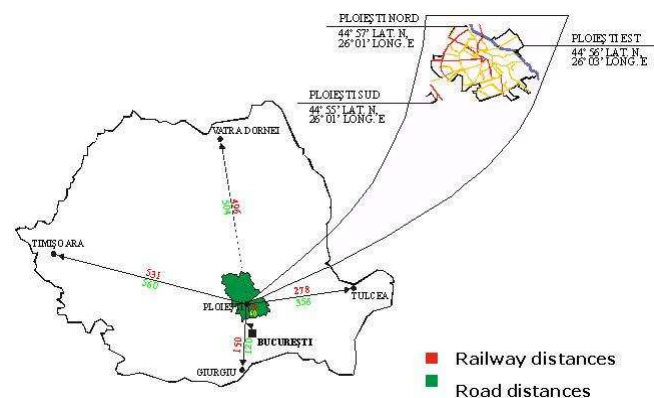
The questions were closed, semi-open that offered the opportunity of attaching personal details (following the model of something else/what?) and open, especially the ones aiming “deficiencies”,

“solutions” or “prognoses” (for ex: *How would you see Ploiești city in twenty years’ time?*)

Objectives:

- a) the perception on urban habitat and the inside perception on city image;
- b) the links that may be established between the perception on the city and different independent variables, selected in the heading of the questionnaire - sex, age, education, the length of time spent living in that district, etc (the *bi square* significance test);
- c) the identification of causal relations between the perception on different life and urban living conditions (the urban habitat) and the perceived quality of the city image;
- d) the outline of some territorial disparities and of some opinion regions (**perception maps**).

### Case study: Ploiești



### Identification elements.

The municipality of Ploiești is one of the large cities in Romania (250 000 inhabitants), situated in the SE, 60 km north from the capital Bucharest,

fact that has constituted both a favourability factor, but also a restrictive one, in certain moments of its evolution. Situated in the plain, right at the contact with the sub-Carpathian frame from the north, it has benefited from the complementarity of the resources, developing as a true district capital, with a functional complexity of the spaces, being, altogether, a developing pole on the urban-industrial axe of Bucharest-Brasov .

**Identity elements.** When hearing the name of Ploiești two things come to mind, before anything: *oil* and *the one day Republic*. The first imprinted it with the functional dominant for almost a century; at Ploiesti the price of oil in the world was set towards The First World War, and the second marks a sequence of its historical evolution, which began over 500 years ago. Each evolution phase marks different particular features of the habitat, and also, phases in the organisation of the urban space:

○ **Village (before 1600)**



In this phase, the hearth of the settlement was in the SE of today's city. Although it was in an active transit space between the Carpathians and the ports from the Danube, Ploiești was nothing but an insignifi-

cant village compared to the surrounding blossoming townlets – Targosor, Gherghita, Filipești, etc, where the agrig activity was preponderant in the life style.

○ **borough (1600-1800)**

The period is defining for the town's ulterior evolution. In 1599, Ploiești takes a considerable leap, becoming a borough, which had as premises: the position at the crossroads of the commercial ways coming from Transylvania and Moldavia with the ones from Walachia, as well as the protectionist system instituted by Mihai Viteazu, (weekly market in Ploiești and the forbidding of this thing in the other surrounding townlets).

The commercial and trade activities (professionals from Brasov are prompted) come to have a special amplitude, imprinting a chaotic development to the borough, which expands greatly towards N and S, along the Dambu brook.

In the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ploiești becomes a **chief town**, acquiring administrative functions.

○ **Trade centre (1800-1850)**

In this phase, the town expands towards W, increasing its *built surface* from 1.9 square km to 5.2 square km, following especially the penetration arteries from the W (Targoviste) N (Brasov), and S (Bucharest).

Concomitantly, the population Increases, especially due to the migration of the inhabitants from the surrounding townlets (who did not beneficiate from the political protectionism), but also, due to the foreign immigrants (for example Bulgarians, fled after the Russian-Turkish wars)

Meanwhile, the *commercial function* intensifies, being doubled by the *communica-*



tion one, when the quick diligence service is set on the Prahova Valley, as regular journeys were made between Brasov and Ploiești, and from here, towards Bucharest.

It is also now when the *pre-industrial* activities know a significant development, betraying the “industrial vocation” of later, in 1821, the skilled workers outnumbering the tradesmen twice.

- 1854 - Ploiești is tied to Bucharest through a telegraph line;
- 1857 - the first oil distillery in the world (the property of Marin Mehedinteanu) in the SE of today's city;
- 1858 - Ploiești, the second city in the world illuminated with lamp oil (after Bucharest,

### Industrial city (1850 – The First World War)

It is the time of the “*oil boom*”, when Ploiești expands considerably, when the city increases its surface four times, reaching over 19 square km in 1912, and approximately 50 000 inhabitants, Romania's fourth largest city after Bucharest, Braila, Craiova, with a population density that was over 2000 inhabitants per square km.

International interests are inserted in the area, the petroleum societies being based mainly on German, French, English, Dutch and American capital. The great oil pipelines of the state (Ploiești-Constanta, Ploiești-Giurgiu) are doubled by the many private oil pipelines that surrounded Ploiești.

### Capitalist industrial city („interwar”)



After the First World War, Ploiești expands, from a territorial point of view, but the deficient capitalism imprints it a chaotic development, the rank of city being kept mostly through functions than through the urban aspect, the public-private mixture imprinting it with negative visual connotations, with regards to its image.

The agric reform (the appropriation of the land to the peasants) leads to the population settlement in the rural medium, the annual growth rhythm according to the censuses from 1930 and 1948 reducing to half of the one from the period in the beginning of the century, from 2.4% (1912-1930) to 1.2% (1930-1948).

The lack of concordance between the city's territorial expansion, favoured by the topographic conditions, and its population materialises in the poor valorisation of the urban space.

### Municipality (the “socialist” phase)

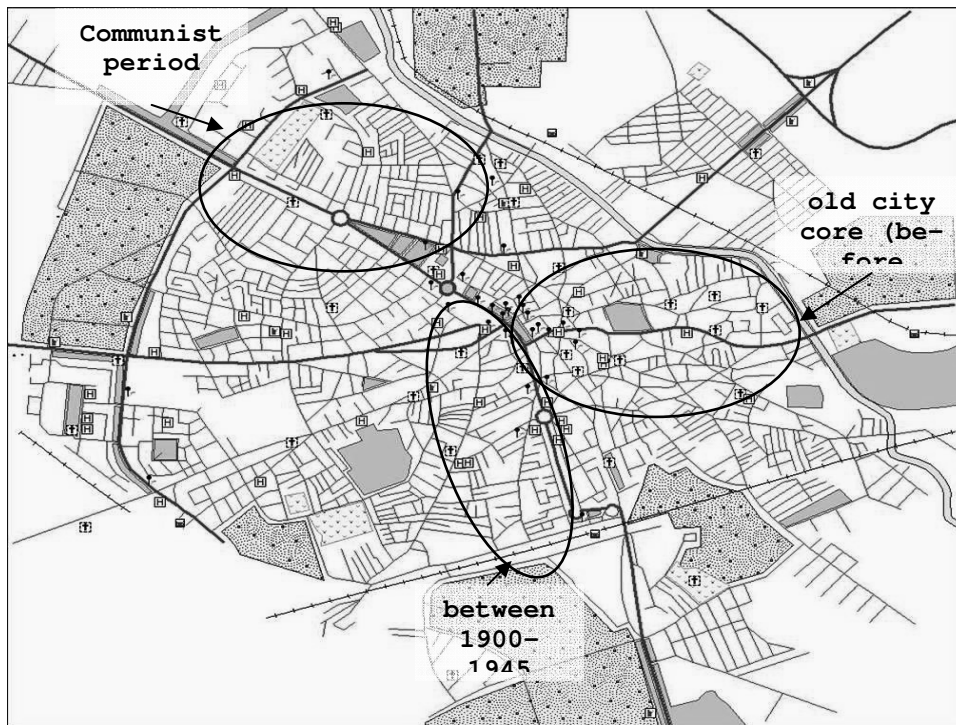
After the Second World War, the horizontal expansion diminishes in favour of the vertical one. The city does not expand considerably in its territory, but the population increases in a rhythm without precedent, due to the socialist policy from the post-war period.

The setting up of the communist system draws important modifications to urban life:

- The vigorous implant of industry begins;
- Homogeny policies are applied, regarding the territorial repartition of the production forces;

- The systematisation (the building of new neighbourhoods or the rebuilding of older ones which had a low building density) which brushes up the spatial distribution of the population;

- A fairly numerous available work force is created due to the collectivisation from the rural medium;



Sequences in urban planning, by street network (Ploiești, Romania)

It is the time of the great petrochemical platforms of Ploiești – Brazi, Teleajen – which absorb the young work force from the surrounding settlements, but also from much longer distances, especially from Oltenia and Moldavia. Between 1966 and 1977, the city generates over 60% of the industrial production of the district, and more than 90% of the commercial trade is made with products finalised in the city. It is also worth noticing

that in the same time, the city consumed over 10% of Romania's electrical energy.

After 1980, on the fund of a political crisis of a super centralised system, the inhabiting conditions begin to deteriorate.

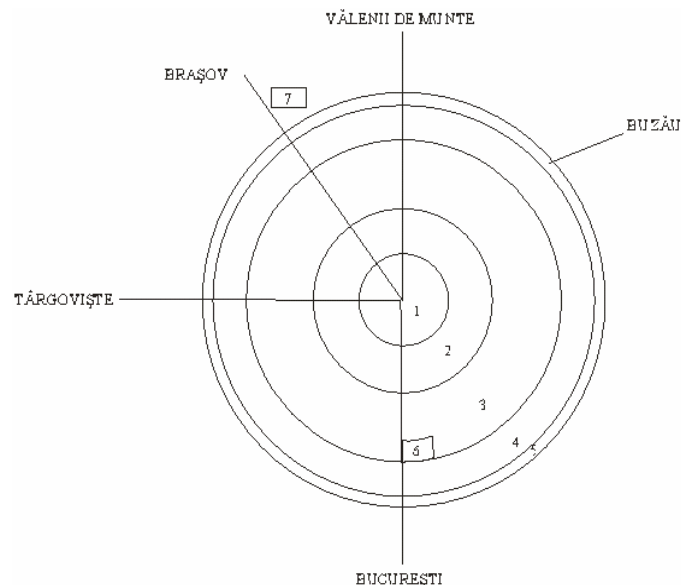
- **After the implosion of the communist system**

The radical change of the political system draws mutations and reconfigurations of the urban space. Some functional spaces modify both on the fund of the in-

dustrial restructuring, as well as also due to the appearance of the private domain. The services' sector especially develops, and at the periphery of the city, new industrial units (especially from the alimentary sector – Coca Cola, the largest from the South-east of Europe, but also in the field of car constructions – Yazachi, etc) appear.

Today, the city of Ploiești has the image of a quasi-concentric developed city, the street texture suggesting a circular-radial morph-structure.

The **central area** is individualised, with multiple valences – *administrative* (The Administrative Palace, which holds the residences of the City Hall, and of the Local and county Councils), *cultural* (The Palace of Culture, which holds the largest public library of Ploiești – Nicolae Iorga, the “Toma Caragiu” Theatre, the Philharmonic, the National Colleges “I.L.Caragiale” and “Mihai Viteazul”, The National Museum of Petroleum, The Watches' Museum, etc.), *tertiary* (the subsidiaries of the important banks, the tourism agencies, the commercial centres, etc) and *residential*, this in fact representing the settlement's centre of gravity, towards which all the main city penetration arteries converge - N (Brasov-Cheia), NW (Brasov-Campina), W (Targoviste), E (Buzau).



1. Administrative, services, cultural, residential
2. Residential (traditional – old neighbourhoods)
3. Residential (communist – block of flats)
4. Industrial
5. Transports (railway)
6. University of Oil and Gas
7. Commercial (Mall - Metro) and new residential

*Functional zones (Ploiești, Romania)*

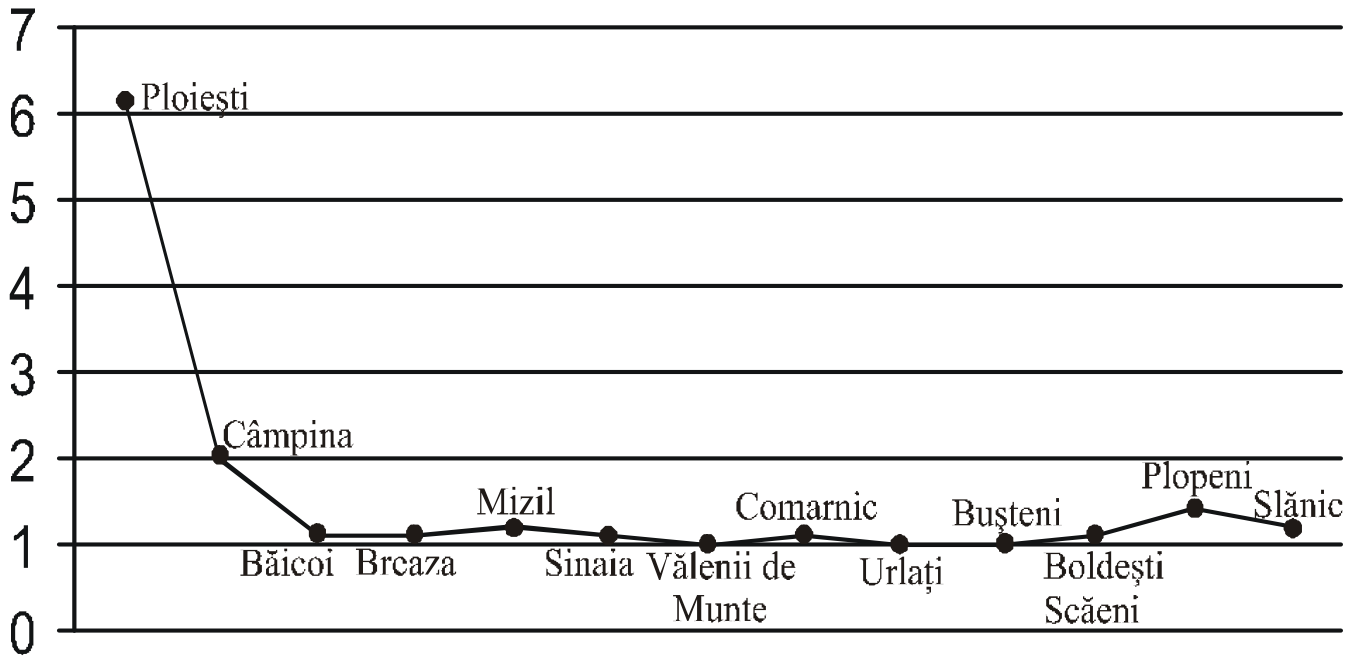
Around the central area the residential space concentrically distributes itself, *the older neighbourhoods* in which houses predominate lying in its proximity, towards the exterior, lying the *newer “worker” neighbourhoods*. It is worth mentioning that the residential area expands over the ring of railways, especially in the S area of the city.

Well individualised and located in the territory, in general outside the road and rail ways ring, i.e., in the proximity of the city, the four **industrial areas**:

- *The Northern industrial area* – compact, of relatively reduce dimensions; the petroleum refining, polluting industry predominates;
- *The Eastern industrial area* – traditional (refining) industrial activities, thermo-electrical power station;

- *The Southern industrial area* – oil distilleries, petrochemistry, car constructions; it is dispersed in the territory, being strongly stifled by the residential area, the transport, etc.
- *The Westen semi-industrial and deposit area* – alimentary industry and warehouses.

The **green space** is extremely dispersed. The city disposes of almost 3.7 square km (6.4 % of the city's surface) of green space, as 11 to 15 m<sup>2</sup> are due to each inhabitant (much below the W.H.O medium of 50 m<sup>2</sup> per inhabitant).



Ploiești – the hypertrophy of the urban network in the Prahova county

segment

### City Image. The dynamic of inside perception between 2001 and 2004.

Firstly, between the two although quantitatively similar samples, some clear differences have outlined, as a result of the way of “selecting” the respondents: in 2001, *street questionnaire, random selection*, whereas in 2004, *Internet questionnaire* (hosted by different sites of Ploiești)

Therefore, some differences have been outlined:

- A population segment, aging between 18 and 25, with 20% larger than in the case of the street questionnaire, difference that is perfectly reflected in the age

segment of over 55 (23% in 2001, as opposed to 3% in 2004);

- The two sexes are represented almost equilibrate in 2001 (42% masculine and 58% feminine), whereas in the second poll, it seems to highlight mostly the masculine perception (67%);

- It seems that, at least at the level of 2004, the Internet has been accessed by people owning a university degree (approximately 70%), as opposed to a third in the classical poll;

- Regarding the type of residence (one level house or block of flats), the differences are insignificant; in both cases pre-

dominate the owners living in blocks of flats;

- The perception of the inhabitants regarding the city image of Ploiești is relevant through the large percentage (approximately 70%) of the ones living in this city for over 15 years.

*The perception from micro-scale to macro-scale.* It is obvious within the two sequences of the study, the differentiated perception from the micro-scale (residence level) to the macro-scale (neighbourhood and city), the percentage of the people who appreciate the quality of their own residence as being good and very good (86% in 2001 and 65% in 2004) knowing a significant decrease as regards to the appreciation of the street, the neighbourhood, or the city, case in which there is a growth in the percentage of the undecided (*I can't tell*, respond, with regards to the neighbourhood between 14 and 35% of the people interviewed). The results highlight an absolutely natural thing, considering that each man knows its own residence better than the street or the neighbourhood he inhabits.

*Correlation between variables and the acuity of perception.* Applying the *hi-square test (the test of the null hypothesis)*, it has resulted that the perception is distorted inversely proportional to the own income. As such, in the case of the people with low income, the acuity of the perception as regards to the living conditions increases.

*City image.* Although there is an entire segment in the questionnaire that aims the living conditions, the last part of the poll is interesting with regards to identifying the perception on city image. As such, according to the results of the questionnaire, it seems that the city of Ploiești is

not an attractive place from the point of view of the business opportunities, as at the statement "*The city offers many employment possibilities and business opportunities*", 77% have stated that they "*disagree*" or that they "*partially agree*". The negative perception is enhanced by the high percentage (over 65%) of the ones who respond in the same manner in the case of the statement "*Ploiești is an extraordinary place for me to live in along with my family*". In return, over 40% perfectly agree with the statement "*It is a city with a working aspect (series of grey blocks) which has not preserved its historical past.*"

Also, the inhabitants of Ploiești name precisely the first three things they dislike most in their city, as the analysis of the responses for the afferent question outlines predominantly the sector of public services (street cleaning, illumination, and public security, but no lastly, the behavioural hazard), a small percentage of the people interviewed indicating also the architectural aspect.

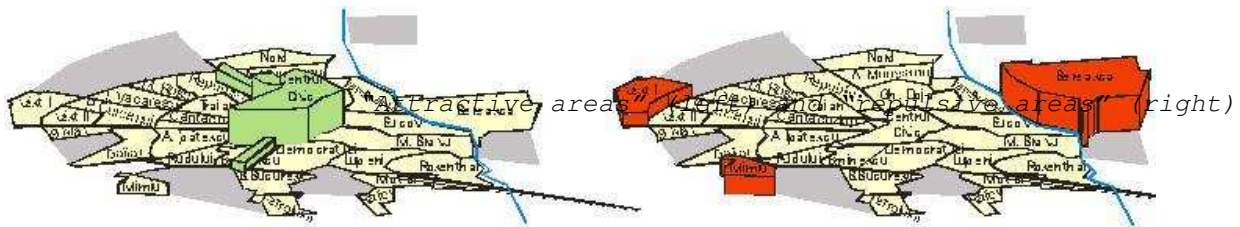
The question "*Which are the first three things that you like most within our city?*" also highlights some interesting aspects:

- Firstly, the diffusion of the perception in a very wide spectre: from concrete elements (The Chestnut Boulevard, which in 2004 has the highest percentage, the Palace of Culture), and diverse social aspects or elements related to the urban services.

- A significant percentage (17% from the 2004 questionnaire) does not respond to this question, although they have given answers to the former one.

- 55 % of the people interviewed in 2001 and a similar percentage in 2004 are not satisfied with the ensemble image of the city of Ploiești.

„Which do you consider to be the symbol that represents the city of Ploiești?” is the edifying question from the questionnaire, with regards to the perception on the city image or identity. And the study has showed that over a third of the inhabitants who were interviewed indicates as symbol or associates the city image to the petroleum or the connected elements (oil distilleries, The University of Petroleum and Gas or the Museum of the Petroleum).



### I. Centre

- „the city core”; all urban fluxes converge to it;
- Administrative space (The City Hall and local government headquarter);
- Cultural space (The Palace of Culture which covers the largest public library “Nicolae Iorga”, the Theatre “Toma Caragiu”, the Philharmonic, Museums - Watches Museum, Oil Museum etc.);
- Services (banks, tourism agencies, the shopping centres);
- Residential space

### II. The Boulevard of Republic

- It has large squares with green space (“Mihai Viteazu” Park, with a towering equestrian statue of the prince);
- Commercial;
- the northern axe of the city (North-Centre);

## Conclusions

Romania, and in general, the countries from the former communist block constitute a “fertile” ground for complex studies of urban and social geography,

*Mental maps.* The results of the study have allowed the identification and outlining of some attractive and repulsive areas in Ploiești, highlighting, in the first case, the central part and the axe of the boulevards that go across the city from North to South, and in the second case, the peripheral neighbourhoods.

### The outer neighbourhoods

#### I. East

- the oldest part of the city, over Dambu River and the railway (double discontinuity);
- one level houses are predominant;
- scarcity of public utilities (the quality of streets, salubrity, public illumination etc.);
- ethnical segregation;
- a large part of the interviewed people want to move away.

#### II. South

- situated out of the city across the railway from the southern part;
- periphery located in the middle of industrial space;
- poorness aspect of the neighbourhood;
- less public security;

which are very attractive to the researchers in the area, as we are in the phase of crystallising some work models.

Although the *city image* is an especially attractive concept to the geographers, it requires an interdisciplinary approach

and the understanding of the way in which the concept may be fully operable in the following urban planning studies.

There are no clear perception differences between the two opinion polls made in Ploiesti (2001 and respectively, 2004), especially regarding the attractive and repulsive areas of the city, although the samples from the people interviewed have been sensibly different regarding the structure. However, on the basis of this primary perception, repeated polls must be made, with a more and more profound degree of detail and specificity.

The results of this study have shown that the social status and the quality of life distort the acuity of people's perception of the city they live in, regarding the aspects related to identity, symbols, etc.

The mental maps and the situation of the perceptions have outlined an attractive area on the North-South axe of the city, crossing the central part, with a complex functionality, while a general totally negative perception is represented by the neighbourhoods situated outside the area of the "city body", beyond the discontinuities (railway etc.) at the periphery of the city, in the proximity of the industrial platforms. It seems to be a typical situation for the forced industrialised cities that are going through functional and why not, identity reconsideration times.

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