

Habilitation Thesis

IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CHANGE.

**Cartographies of the Cultural Dimensions, Self-Construal Strategies and
Transgenerational Patterns of Values and Attitudes in Post-Communist Romania**

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Abstract

The research I completed over the span of time 2002 – 2013 embraced an interdisciplinary approach, reuniting the different outlooks specific for Social Psychology, Ethnopsychology and for Cross-Cultural Psychology. My research project focused on the study of various types of changing social identities in post-communist Romania.

My first block of research results examines the imaginary Banat and its traumatic identities (Gavreliuc, 2002b, 2003/2006, 2011a). Resorting to an overwhelmingly qualitative interpretation of the social – through oral history interviews – I investigate the capacity of individual subjects to reconfigure the qualification of their own social destinies in terms of value orientations, by symbolically converting the world of “to have”, which they were severely disowned of, to the world of “to be”. Therefore, the subjects who experienced a traumatic social experience (such as deportation) appear to possess a positive social attitude and an engaging identity, proving capable of dominating political discrimination.

Over the above-mentioned period I have also analyzed the inter-ethnic and inter-regional relationships in Banat, highlighting the ways in which the image of “ethnic otherness” (“German”, “Serbian”, “Hungarian”) is more favourable for the Banat “Romanian” individuals than the image of “regional otherness” (“Moldavian” or “Wallachian”). This is a result of the fact that the Banatians share a historically rooted, mutually rewarding relationship with the former set of ethnic representatives (Gavreliuc, 2002c, 2003/2006, 2011a). Moreover, by tracing the dynamics of these relationships, I have attempted to conclude the ways in which these inter-ethnic and inter-regional relationships have been preserved throughout the last decade, depicting a Banat where inter-ethnic relationships are more generous than in the other regions of the country. Nevertheless in Banat the concept of “otherness” proves to have been constructed on more critical grounds as compared to the dawn of the third millennium (Gavreliuc, 2011a).

A second epicentral topic which I examine was the map of the social capital in the region, the symbolical “centre”-“margin” relationships and the forms of tolerated deviance (Gavreliuc, 2002c, 2003/2006, 2008, 2011a; Gavreliuc, Jinaru, & Gavreliuc, 2009; Gavreliuc, Maricuțoiu, 2005). Pleading for a polycentric ideology in public policies, the assessing review describes the richness of the Banat social capital (with the related species of trust) in comparison to other regions of Romania. At the other end of the spectrum, it is paramount to mention that a quite negative general attitude has been preserved towards the “centre’s” policy, concerning the needs of the “province”, regardless of the political orientation of those who held the last governmental mandates.

A third block of my present academic research deals with the topic of cultural dimensions within the organizational environment in general and within the educational environment in particular. In completing my investigation, I have applied two major paradigms from Cross-Cultural Psychology: the Hofstede model and the social axioms model (Gavreliuc, 2009, 2011a, Gavreliuc & Gavreliuc, 2012, Gavreliuc, Cîmpean, Gavreliuc, 2009). The afore-mentioned studies theorize a specific type of individualism in the Romanian organizational environment, qualified as autarchic. The results certify that the young cohorts and the professors in the university environment, in comparison to the older cohorts and the didactic personnel in the pre-university environment appear to be higher in power distance and uncertainty avoidance. What is more, they show more pronounced social cynicism, which illustrates the acquiring of a functional relational strategy inside the system, characterised by interpersonal authoritarianism, fatalism and duplicity.

Next, the studies focused on the relationship between regional or ethnical belonging on the one hand and the individual variables (parental behaviour, attributional styles, depression, school performance) on the other hand have outlined the role played by the cultural factors in the specific modelling of individual profiles of attitudes and behaviours, as well as the impact exerted by the regional factor in generating certain disparities in the parental behaviour and allocating resources for educational success (Gherasim, Butnaru, Gavreliuc, Iacob, 2013).

One further block of research underlines the existence of transgenerational patterns of value and attitudes in contemporary Romania (Gavreliuc, 2011b, Gavreliuc, 2012a). Studies confirm the *la longue durée hypothesis* (the preservation of the fundamental structures of values and attitudes, despite historical ruptures). Therefore, the social strata investigated on the regional, generational representative samples are characterised by the transgenerational

prevalence of conservative values. They are furthermore characterised by assistential and disengaging attitudes, which might shed more light upon the inconsistencies within the Romanian public life. At the same time, these longitudinal studies have specifically analyzed the portrait of a problematic generation (“decreșei”, the cohort exposed to the consequences of decree no. 770/1966 given by Nicolae Ceaușescu to prohibit abortion). The present generation has reached the knot of social networks, unable to mask its identity vulnerabilities.

Further on, the studies centred on activating certain behavioural scenarios (implicit or explicit) in urban contexts, elaborated within the paradigm of social constructivism and narrative psychology have developed the concept of social autism, described as a group process that leads to “communitarian alienation” and “loneliness next to the other” (Gavreliuc, 2011a, 2012b).

Lastly, the research conducted on the topic of identity motivations within the cultural context, which collected data from thirty seven national cultures (including Romania), has tested whether the reason to attain a distinctive identity is sometimes considered to be stronger within or even specific for those socialized within individualistic cultures (Becker, Vignoles, ..., Gavreliuc et al., 2012; Owe, Vignoles, ..., Gavreliuc et al., 2013). The analysis proves that the reason for distinctiveness is not weaker – but, rather stronger – in more collectivistic cultures. However, individualism-collectivism was found to moderate the ways in which feelings of distinctiveness were constructed: distinctiveness was associated more closely with difference and separateness in individualistic cultures and more closely with social position in more collectivistic cultures.

My future research projects are aimed at exploring the aforementioned topics on a deeper level: the inter-ethnic and inter-regional dynamics in Banat, the research of cultural dimensions and self-construal strategies, the identity profile of the “decreșei” generation, as well as behavioural scenarios conducted in the urban space, in order to better comprehend these topics which prove crucial in understanding the changes that contemporary Romania has and is undergoing.