THE CITY IMAGE AND THE LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
A WORKING TOOL IN URBAN PLANNING

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Abstract

The goal of this study consist of identifying and testing in operational terms the concept of city image in the decision-making processes, both as far as the urban planning and the future policies of local and regional development are concerned or in the management of public spaces. It is well-known the fact that the simple series of statistical data and the models based upon them do not sketch out a complete image regarding the urban reality, the perception of habitants at a micro-scale level about habituation conditions, illustrated by the city image, presenting itself as a barometer of the dysfunctionalities encountered in the city. Thus, the practical implications of this concept based on a new vision in the philosophy of the management of urban spaces are likely to be interesting enough. Using this tool in the policies and in the activity of public administration, in urbanism etc., complementarily to statistical analyses, should accompany any type of local development policy in order to enhance life quality and to transmit a certain life style, well appreciated by the residents which should bestow the city distinctiveness and a particular status in the regional and national hierarchy. The conceptual scheme of this study is based on three elements: theory (what does the city image represent?), method (how could we map at a micro-scale level?), case study (which are the results and the tests of the applicability in the city of Ploieşti).

1. Introduction

The city, seductive from a scientific point of view, has known, with the passing of time, different and diverse approaches in the academic community, according to the complexity of its concerns and in perfect correspondence with the scientific trend of the moment and the state of knowledge at the time. Thus, the attempt to understand the urban metabolism and its dynamic so as to maximally optimise the functionality of urban spaces was almost naturally followed by the mental, perceptive dimension.

A dilemma was born: the urban "characters" are "prisoners of their own habitat" or are they its "beneficiaries", the city having to provide, besides habitual security and identity, satisfaction, significations, meaning? As such, there is a shift from urban systemology to urban phenomenology (Figure 1), and the conclusion which is settled is obvious: from the point of view of scientific analysis, the city possesses a character thoroughly interdisciplinary.
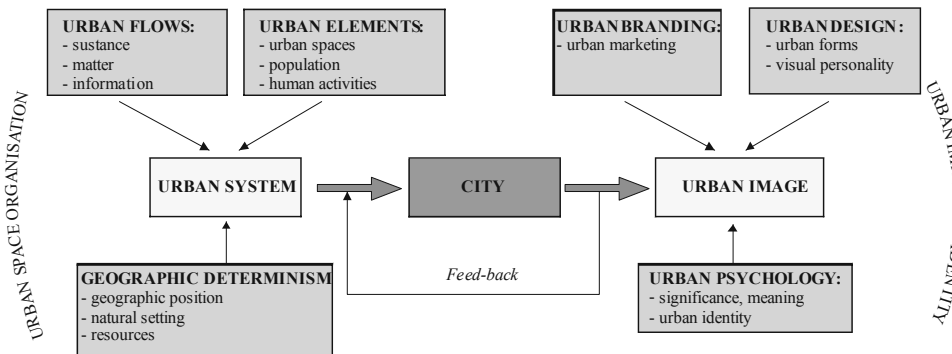

Figure 1: City paradigm

In fact, the urban space paradigm, situated between objective existence and social construct, between real city and mental city, between the city as a machine/system and the city as an image, between the city as a "function" and the city as "text" with meanings and significations occurs as a result of the encounter of two trends of thinking and ways of perceiving the urban space: the modernist one, appeared as a reply to the industrial city of the coal century (the 19th century), in which the city was a product of rationality, with a logical and hierarchical organisation and the postmodernist one, according to which the city is an incomprehensible complex, a result of the manifestation of triple spatiality: perceived space (the objective one, of material shapes), conceived space (mental) and lived space – a hybrid space of direct experience, in which the first two are simultaneously transposed; it is a social space, of physical and imagine-symbol representations (Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1996).

For the American urban planner Kevin Lynch, the city should be like a „text" to be deciphered, decrypted by the inhabitants or by simple spectators of the respective urban life. Thus, the city should be „legible" (Lynch, 1960, pp. 1-2). If it is „legible" it is decoded and correctly perceived by people, meaning it carries significations and

promotes a sense of place – genius loci (Jive'n and Larkham, 2003, pp. 67-81). If the urban elements and shapes are loaded with significations, the city has an identity.

Thus, urban shapes and elements create certain connexions and significations in the mind of urban actors. The physical city is doubled by the mental city (city image). The mental city shapes or should indicate the dysfunctions of the physical city. People are no longer "prisoners" of a predefined urban model, totally determined, but manifest a repulsive attitude towards certain elements or shapes that appear in the urban landscape. Inhabitants thus become an active element in the (re)configuration and (re)shaping of urban spaces architecture and significations.

Thus, the policies of local development, the management of public spaces, urbanism and other disciplines and professions which have as a study and activity object the city, can no longer exclusively rely on the objectivity of statistical analyses that offer an analytical image at a macro level, but which do not bring to light the detailed dysfunctionality, connected for example to the fact that the inhabitants of the city have a certain attitude and a different spatial behaviour towards particular places (neighbourhoods, streets etc.) – some of them are seen as attractive areas while towards others they show repulsiveness or neutral attitudes.

In this context, the city image could become a communicational platform, an interface by means of which one can mediate the relationship between territorial reality, specialists (theoreticians and professionals), local authorities (political decision) and that urban community and on the other hand, a working tool in elaborating the policies of local development.

2. The City Image – Operational Tool in the Activities of the Local Administration

For understanding why the city image can be an operational instrument in activities specific to the local public administration we must first briefly present the concept and also several directions in which the local public administration can use it in an applied manner.

The interpretative analysis of the literature for achieving the current study has set off at least three dimensions for pursuing the concept of city image: the sphere of mental image and related concepts (Tolman, 1948; Kosslyn, 1980; Golledge, 1977, Montello, 1989; Tverski, 1993, Pylyshyn, 2002), the city image properly (Lynch, 1960; Jacobs, 1961; Downs and Stea, 1973; Nasar, 2001) and as an urban marketing technique or branding (Ashworth, 1993, 2005; Kotler *et al.*, 2002; Metaxas, 2002; Kavaratzis, 2004; Deffner and Liouris, 2005).

The current study will focus on the concept of city image, as a standalone theoretical notion, and through its interpretative analysis, by presenting its essential characteristics we will highlight the major role it could play in stimulating the decision processes at an administrative level. To this end, we consider it well timed to present its main characteristics.

Generally speaking, the image of a place has a large connotation representing the visual impact, as a whole, of a place or the general impression people have about a

place or simply, qualitative characteristics (positive or negative) that the name of a place evokes (Cowan, 2005, p. 192). If visual impact is determined by the perceptible attributes which accompany a place (everything that can be seen in the ensemble of conditions which manifest, invisibly at first, behind the visual personality of that place), the other meanings attributed by literature (urban marketing and branding) are more related to the image as built information about a specific place.

The concept of city image

The „Father" of this concept is considered to be the American town-planner Kevin Andrew Lynch, who cements the notion of city image both terminologically and conceptually, in 1960, in his fundamental work: *The Image of the City*[1]. In relation with the concept analysed, Lynch introduces several notions regarding the perception of urban space: legibility and imageability.

The first notion expresses the degree of clarity of the urban landscape, meaning the easiness with which any part of the city can be identified and its image organised into a coherent model. „Legibility" defines the degree in which a city is capable of generating a lesser or broader visual quality for the receiver subject[2].

On the city's legibility degree depends whether or not its image is positive or negative, a perception that, through its dimension, forms attitudes towards that town. It is natural that a city with a good, positive image will always attract investors, tourists and new residents in detriment of a city with a less favourable image. Also, during the search process of the best way between two places in the town, the image of urban space – the mental image generalised at an individual level, a product of both the immediate perception and past memorised experiences, becomes a reliable instrument in interpreting and organising information that can be used in making a decision. The image of the

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[1] By using three cities as case studies (research done over the course of five years) – Boston, Jersey City and Los Angeles, Lynch brings into discussion the way the inhabitants perceive their own city during their daily travels through it, how they organise this information at a mental level (building cognitive/ mental maps) and how these constructs influence their bearing, decision making and behaviour. For the American town-planner "each inhabitant identifies with a certain part of the city in which he lives and his image of that place is loaded with significances and meanings" (Lynch, 1960, p. 7). The perception of a place is complex and is not the simple result of direct, visual or any other sensory observation, but a memorised construct, permanently updated with new information which retains the memory of past experiences and carries emotions, sensations, meaning, significance, and identity.

[2] In that direction Lynch associates urban space to a coherent and grammatically and literary correct text which, through its coherency and logic, is able to produce a strong feeling to the reader. Residents or passer-by's must be able to similarly and easily "read" the city, as a result of the current mode of organisation and planning, which means that understanding and organising information, orienting through the urban landscape, are easy. The marks, strong visual elements, are easily recognisable and at a mental level symbols are assimilated after a coherent cognitive structure.

place hereby works as guide of the decision making behaviour. A city or a place well decrypted and understood by its inhabitants leads to a very clear image. A clear image of the place dictated by a systematised organisation of the urban environment and easily decipherable can be a frame of reference in organising the activity or cognition, a starting point in receiving and accumulating future information, contributing to the individual development.

Urban legibility also carries an important social role through the powerful collective image it can generate, thus contributing to the development of an identity feeling, of membership to a certain place, guaranteeing a type of emotional security. A good image of the external environment can stimulate a positive attitude and a harmonic behaviour in the same way as the feeling of disorientation, determined by an undecipherable or hard to decipher urban landscape, strengthens the sensation of fear.

The second notion, imageability, refers to a city's quality to induce the perception of a powerful image to an external observer. To this quality contributes not only the visual perspective of the urban landscape, but also the coherent structure and the feeling of identity that the city is able to generate. A "good place" is the one that can be mind mapped by individuals, with an easy to memorise spatial organisation.

Building the city image

Being a cognitive process, creating a city image implies the existence of two entities (Figure 2):

> ➤ The city

Through its genetic nature, urban space confers distinctiveness (elements, urban shapes, processes and phenomena) and relations to the observer. Its dynamic is permanent and can be perceived at different space-time observation scales, a dynamic which fuels a permanent change of information.

> ➤ Receptive subject

Each individual that intersects with the city becomes an observer who receives information offered by the external environment by means of his own purposes and needs (which means that for the same given space, perceptions are different and personalised at an individual level), selecting it, organising it and loading it with meanings (which carry emotional states, attitudes, behaviour). At this moment, the observer has essentialized the processed information from the urban space as a mental image which updates permanently, at the same time with filtering any informative flux and which in time will reach the coherence of a mental map ("mental city").

The city image's accuracy and coherence increases as the individual familiarises with the external environment, assigning identity and meaning to urban elements and shapes, sometimes even generating stereotypes (a resident can easily identify a gas station or an apothecary in any city). On the other hand, an element with a strong visual personality will leave its mark on the perception of space.

Lynch (1960) also stated in his work that town-planners, as manipulators of physical shapes are directly interested in the visual impact of new forms that (re)create, morphologic modifications of the urban landscape being able to show resistance or facilitate the image creation process.
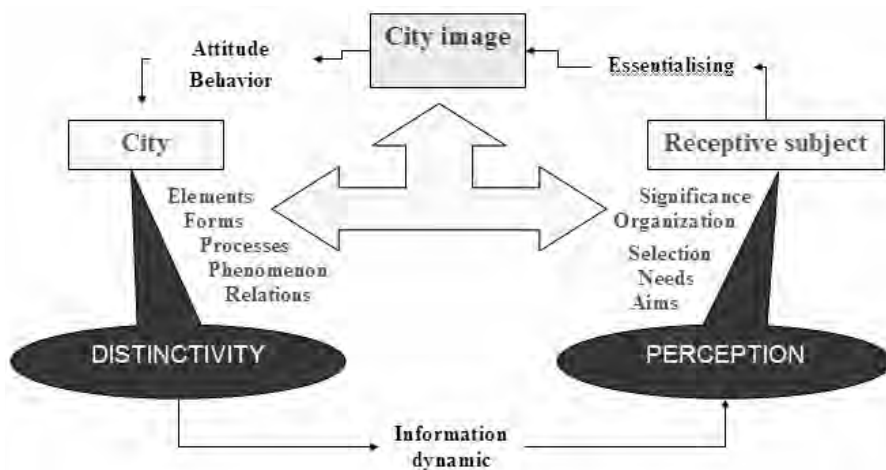

Figure 2: Building the city image

Synthesizing, the city image (Table 1) represents "a city level essentialized reality, filtered by a subject (directly or indirectly, active or passive, official or unofficial, unintentional or deliberate) and placed in circulation as information" (Ianoş, 2004, p. 185).

Reality expresses life lived in that urban space, in its full complexity, with daily events and feelings, emotions and sensations. This reality is essentialized at a dwelled space level (the interaction between physical space, of direct experience and that of mental perception, of emotions imposed by it). The subject is both the individual and the human group, and based on their provenance, they can be: residents (who perceive the city directly, every day) and non-residents (who perceive the city directly, through limited experiences or indirectly, through means of oral communication, mass-media, publications, articles or books etc.). The information, incredibly complex as construction and contents, is also synthesised to the impact generated by the city's visual personality (a result of the balance between urban space functionality and dysfunctionality, between a planned way of organisation and terrain usage and the city's evolution as such), to the general impression that people have towards a place, which most of the time expresses positive or negative qualities that the name of the place invokes at a mental and sensory level.

Thus, the city image can be considered an integrating interface that mediates the conflict between urban space perceptions and acceptations, adequate to just as many urban actors, that participate directly or indirectly, actively or passively, officially or unofficially, deliberately or unconsciously to building the city image.

Table 1: Types of city images, attitudes, behaviours based on their genesis

Urban Actors	Type of Perception	City Image	Types of Mental Spaces (city, neighbourhoods)	Urban Attitude/ Behaviour
Residents	• direct	• positive • neutral • negative	• attractive • neutral • repulsive	• topophilia • topoindiference • topophobia
Non-residents	• direct, comparative (ex temporary residents) • partially direct (commuters, occasional visitors) • indirect			

Source: Adaptation after Ianoş, 2004, p. 186.

The city image and its role in urban planning and management

In the ratio between the two notions: city image – micro scale urban planning, the first one is an instrument used to identify dysfunctionalities and discontinuities in the relation individual/ urban community – urban space, while the second one refers to the complex process of functionally streamlining and optimising space and its characteristics, an expression of urban management and development policies.

Thus, city image, by shaping the perception of the city/neighbourhood at a mental level, constitutes an urban habitat "barometer", emphasising the "mistakes" in understanding urban space, in fact, dysfunctionalities in the organising manner at that time. The relation with space shapes attitudes and human behaviours both at an individual level and also at a social group or community level. Zoning and mapping them leads to the individualisation of associated mental spaces, respectively: repulsive, neutral, attractive. As such, the applicative valences of the city image concept incarnate through the fact that it can become an instrument for designing the future model of space organisation, an instrument which will have to accompany the development policies of such a complex territorial system as the city.

Any urban space or component of it is characterised by certain strengths and weaknesses, which at an analytical – theoretical level, cannot be the exclusive privilege of statistical data or individual/group perceptions, but a balanced combination between the quasi-objective reality of figures tables and its perception in the minds or urban residents, who, through experience and meanings associated to the places, fill the picture of urban reality. In that direction, the city image can become "a valuable instrument in identifying strengths (opportunities) or weaknesses" that a city or urban space confer (Ianoş, 2004, p. 189). The same author states that exaggerating the two extremes can lead to two types of city image: an "ideal" one and an "inhibiting" one, a mediation between the two leading to a "constructive image", as operable as possible in the decision making process (Figure 3).
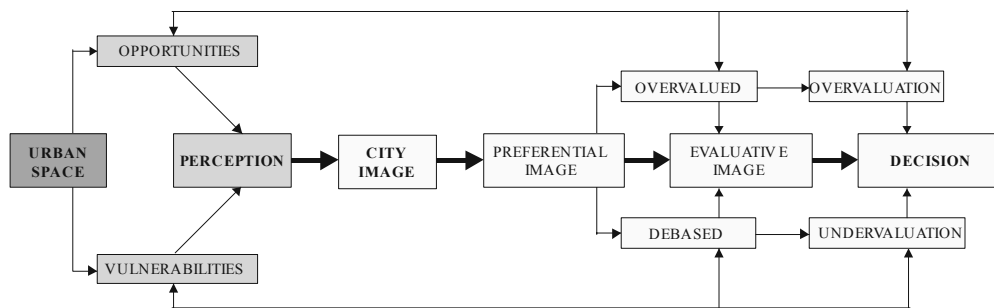
Figure 3: City image, an instrument in the decision making process (adaptation after Ianoş, 2004, p. 190)

3. Methodological Aspects

Theoretical substantiation implied, as a method of research, using interpretative analysis in scanning field literature. This route was individualised by underlining the main markers in developing "the city image theory", basically, the development of notions such as: urban space, urban space perception – mental image, mental map.

The city of Ploiesti has been chosen as a case study, considering the mapping of the city image at a micro-scale level (city and neighbourhood) and the forecasting of some future scripts of evolution through the integration of the city image obtained in the elaboration of these ones.

Mapping the city image elements and, in general, the perception of residents (endogenous) and non-residents (exogenous) upon the living conditions of Ploieşti, but also the general impression towards the city has been done using the questionnaire method.

Thus, a survey was done, through a questionnaire, in two temporal sequences and two different ways:

 – In 2001, through direct approach, on the street, stochastic (350 interviewees, 36 have refused the interview, the rate of representativeness being 89,7 %) and
 – In 2004-2006, by using a web questionnaire unfolded over the Internet (200 interviewees).

The results of the two researches are similar, but we can still enumerate a few limitations of the obtained results such as: the comparison between the two moments is relative taking into account the different techniques of sampling; samples are experimental; one being interested by the tendency and not by their generalisation.

The application of this questionnaire aimed at, in essence, shaping the image evoked at a mental level by the city of Ploieşti, also resulting a few other secondary objectives: the people's perception of the urban habitat (living conditions), the correlations that can be established between the perception of the city and different independent variables selected in the questionnaire's header – sex, age, studies, civil status, for how long has the subject been living in the neighbourhood etc., identifying new relations of causality between the perception of different living and dwelling conditions in the city (urban habitat) and the general image of the city, shaping new territorial disparities and mapping a new mental map.

Regarding the mode of organisation and management of the urban space, the diagnostic analysis of the current model was followed by the use of the SWOT analysis, through which, thanks to the main factors that condition the city's evolution, identified and oriented into the four categories (favourability, vulnerability, opportunity and risk), have been identified four possible (theoretical) evolution scenarios: 1. Sustained development; 2. Development imprinted by a high potential, but in a risky environment; 3. Development influenced by a favourable environment, but with a low potential; and 4. The regress situation, of impossible development. The real evolution of the city will be within these limits. This method has been chosen for forecasting a future evolution model of the urban system and a future organisation model of the urban space.

4. Case study: Town of Ploieşti. Integrating the city image into urban space management

Centralising the questionnaire's results, applied in the two temporal sequences, has led to the shaping of the following results:

- The direct relation between the perception of living conditions and the mental image, based on the observation scale, ambiguity (corresponding to a diffuse, unclear image) rising at the same time with the shrinking of the observation scale (from city level to neighbourhood and then street);
- Shaping attractive, indifferent and repulsive areas in the town of Ploieşti.

Thus, the following have been individualised (Figure 4):

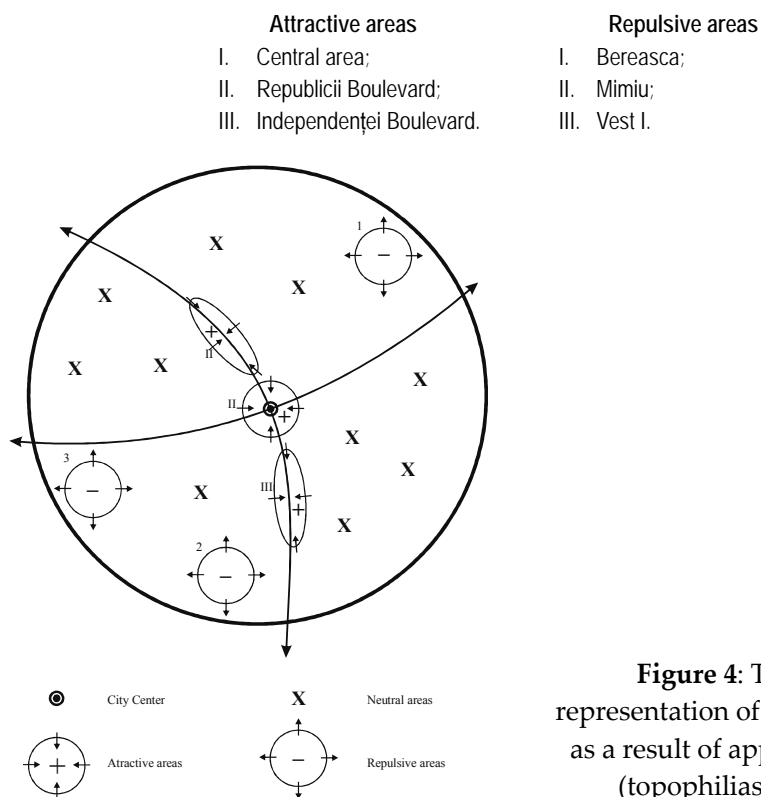| Attractive areas	Repulsive areas
I. Central area;	I. Bereasca;
II. Republicii Boulevard;	II. Mimiu;
III. Independenţei Boulevard.	III. Vest I.

Figure 4: The chorematic representation of the image of Ploieşti, as a result of applied questionnaires (topophilias şi topophobias)

The Central Area represents "the heart of the city" towards which all the roads converge, being best known for its functionality – a space for shopping, financial-banking services, administration (the City Hall and Local and County Councils can be found here), culture (The Palace of Culture which holds the largest public library in Ploieşti – Nicolae Iorga, the Toma Caragiu theatre, the Philharmonic, the National Colleges I.L. Caragiale and Mihai Viteazul, the Museum of Clocks, Oil etc.) and is also, in a smaller degree, a residential area.

The second and third places in the attractive areas hierarchy, converge in the inhabitants' perception because of the presence of green space, Independenţei Boulevard surnamed the "Chestnut Boulevard" (in weekends the road traffic is forbidden) and the Mihai Viteazul Park (Republicii Boulevard), with recreational valences, to which we can add the semi-commercial function of Republicii Boulevard. Important to add is also the fact that the two boulevards represent the city's vital axis, oriented from North to South, on which there is an intense traffic both towards Braşov (North), but also towards Bucureşti (South).

As for the neighbourhoods that are mentally identified as negative, generating repulsive attitudes and topophobic urban behaviours (Bereasca, Mimiu and Vest I), the three areas are located in the Eastern, Southern and Western outskirts of the city, beyond the "limits" that separate them from the city's body – Dâmbu stream and the railroad (East), the railroad and industrial platform (South) and the West road (West), outskirts situated in proximity of the industrial platforms, true "colonies" in which the problems of infrastructure and urban services (street quality, cleanliness state, public lighting and security etc.) are numerous. Also, it is noticed a distortion of perception regarding these areas, the main reason being ethnical segregation (the presence of Rroma communities in the area of these neighbourhoods).

Using city image in urban space management; SWOT analysis

With over 230 000 inhabitants and with an economic profile dominated by the tertiary sector and industry, the town of Ploieşti imposes itself in the territorial relations as a converging centre of human and material fluxes (the ratio of the hypertrophy index being 3/1 up against the second town of the county, Câmpina, also concentrating half of the economic agents present in the county, in comparison with Câmpina, which concentrates only 8%) and also as an information flux diffusion centre.

Applying the SWOT analysis with the purpose of identifying several possible evolution scenarios and forecasting future organisation and urban space management models for the town of Ploieşti has revealed the following situations (Figure 5):

Scenario 1 is the ideal future development situation, resulting from the perfect convergence of the strengths it has and the capitalisation of all the opportunities, together with the full minimisation of the risks and the elimination or change of the vulnerabilities' tendency to slow the settlement's economic and human growth.

As strengths, the town of Ploieşti mainly "counts on" its geographical position. It is a location that enables intra and extra-Carpathian transit (between Transylvania and

Muntenia and from here on towards the Danube or the Black Sea), transit on Prahova's Valley, with profound historical roots, a corridor that is a part of the urban-industrial axis Bucharest – Ploieşti – Braşov, but also a segment of the panEuropean communication corridors TEN IV (Berlin – Budapest – Bucharest – Sofia – Istanbul), heading from West to East and IX (Helsinki – Sankt Petersburg – Chişinău – Bucharest – Plovdiv), heading from North to South and in proximity of corridor VII (transcontinental waterway Danube – Main – Rhin). This location and reconfirmation of Ploieşti as one of the most important road and railroad nodes, allowing access from the Capital towards Transylvania and Moldova, is doubled by its proximity to Bucharest, respectively to the International Airport Henri Coandă (approximately 35 km).

To the favourable geographic position we can add: the permissive topographic surface of the natural units in proximity which ensures a complementarity of resources, the intra-city available space and the polarising role of the city, being the residence of the most populated and urbanised county in Romania, which assures a pretty consistent human resource pool, thus the disadvantage of demographic aging and natural population deficit can be minimised by attracting young people from the University studies in Ploieşti and "settling" them through programs that would guarantee a profitable relation between studies – research and the market of work – production. The constant growth of students registered in the public superior education institutions, from a little over 3 000 in 1991 to over 10 000 in 2006 is remarkable. This rise is due to the introduction of economical and humanist education to the University of Ploieşti, besides the traditional specialisations in oil industry.

On the other hand, as far as the workforce quality goes, the city has at its disposal a specialised workforce, a great deal of it working in the manufacturing industry (one third), while most of it works in the tertiary system (approximately 65% in 2006).

Although it has a manufacturing tradition, seconded by an industrial one, the city has a poly-functional structure presenting economical alternatives, for instance the boom of the tertiary sector (in which case, at least hypothetically, the workforce specialisation could have worked as a "break", through the stiffness manifested towards professional reconversion). Also, even if it concentrates only a third of the county's population, Ploieşti produces more than 80% of the overall county commercial value.

Another strength is the good equipping of the territory, the modernising and extension process following an ascending curve, to which we can add the pronounced dynamic of the constructions sector, as proof of a high development potential.

Also as a plus, we can add the municipality's capacity to apply for various European projects and attract investment funds, for instance the high number of projects unrolled during the last few years, such as: infrastructure projects (for example „The Municipal Project – Ploieşti Begins From the Neighbourhoods Towards the Centre", which had as a subject the infrastructure rehabilitation and redefining the city image at a neighbourhood level (being included in the project the neighbourhoods identified through this study as spaces that generate repulsive attitudes), projects within partnerships between public

institutions, projects within public-private partnerships, European projects („The Local Agenda 21", „CiVitas-SUCCESS", „SpiCycles", „Practise") and so on.

Scenario 2 represents the situation of a high development potential, but in a risky environment. The main risk categories which might affect the city of Ploieşti are either natural (earthquake, floods, global warming etc.) or technological (the proximity of the industrial platforms to the residential areas, secondary activity, plus traffic jams generate high atmospheric pollution), legislative (the dependence of the economic domain on the political one and the clear inseparability of the two, the frequent substitution of policies, instability or legislative ambiguity etc.), social (social segregation, economical poverty, stiffness to professional reconversion) or economical (the second city of the county, together with many other cities compete on the same niche of resources and activities).

Scenario 3 is the obvious inverse to the previous one, the environment being very favourable, but the development potential rather low due to the identified vulnerabilities. The favourable environment is maintained by the general historical and socio-economic context in which our country currently is (member of the European Union, situated at the Black Sea on the route of Caspian energy from the Asian space towards the large Western European consumers), this offering the possibility to obtain structural funds for developing and modernising the infrastructure to the Union's standards. On the other hand, the "appetite" for direct foreign investments is rather high, taking into account that Romania is a rising market, unsaturated, therefore a "fertile field" in terms of costs, corroborated with certain facilities offered by the authorities to attract investors.

Also, the industrial restructuring has allowed a fast paced development of the tertiary sector, services rising considerably as volume and value over the last few years. At the same time, in the urban space, different marketing techniques have broken through, urban marketing as such, becoming a main component of space management in the city. To all of the above we add the attempt to revitalise the city from an identity point of view, creating images, brand-images to revive the consciousness and civil spirit of its residents. Worth mentioning are: UNESCO Year „I.L. Caragiale" (cultural program unfolded on the occasion of 150 years since the birth of the great dramatist), The International Festival of Poetry „Nichita Stănescu", The National Contest of Classical Music „Paul Constantinescu", The International Festival of Caricature with the theme „Home at Caragiale", The "Chestnut" Festival (with contests and folk music), international festivals of classical music etc.

Scenario 4 is totally situated in the negative area and can appear as a result of the convergence between risks and vulnerabilities, economical development of the city being impossible under the conditions of an unfavourable, risky environment, with a low profitable capacity and having a low development potential.
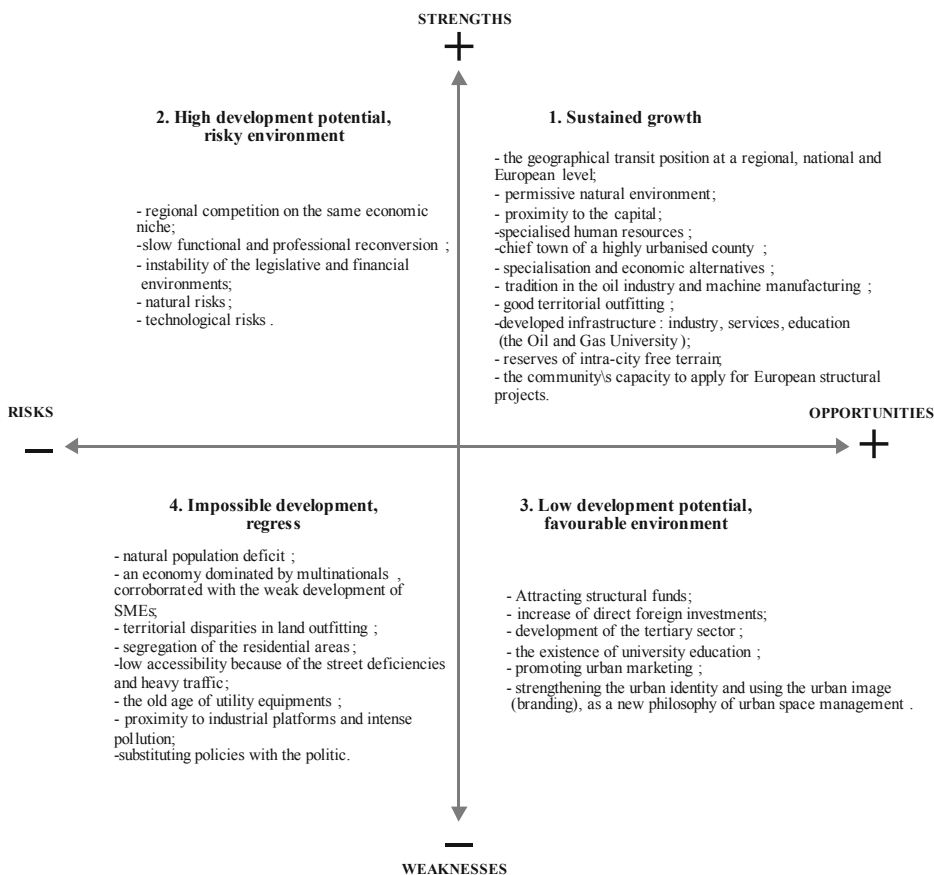
STRENGTHS

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| **2. High development potential, risky environment** | **1. Sustained growth** |

- regional competition on the same economic niche;
-slow functional and professional reconversion ;
- instability of the legislative and financial environments;
- natural risks ;
- technological risks .

- the geographical transit position at a regional, national and European level;
- permissive natural environment;
- proximity to the capital;
-specialised human resources ;
-chief town of a highly urbanised county ;
- specialisation and economic alternatives ;
- tradition in the oil industry and machine manufacturing ;
- good territorial outfitting ;
-developed infrastructure : industry, services, education (the Oil and Gas University);
- reserves of intra-city free terrain;
- the community\s capacity to apply for European structural projects.

RISKS ◄————————————————————————————► OPPORTUNITIES

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4. Impossible development, regress   **3. Low development potential, favourable environment**

- natural population deficit ;
- an economy dominated by multinationals , corroborrated with the weak development of SMEs;
- territorial disparities in land outfitting ;
- segregation of the residential areas ;
-low accessibility because of the street deficiencies and heavy traffic;
- the old age of utility equipments ;
- proximity to industrial platforms and intense pollution;
-substituting policies with the politic.

- Attracting structural funds;
- increase of direct foreign investments;
- development of the tertiary sector ;
- the existence of university education ;
- promoting urban marketing ;
- strengthening the urban identity and using the urban image (branding), as a new philosophy of urban space management .

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WEAKNESSES

Figure 5: Theoretical diagram of the SWOT analysis in the town of Ploieşti

Vulnerabilities have been identified in several fields, such as:

– Demographic: accelerated population aging and natural deficit both in Romania and in Europe. These have repercussions on the workforce, the problem of developing a coherent policy of attracting immigrants from the Eastern part of the continent or Asia becoming more serious every year; the effects are: emergence of ethnical segregation, problems with cultural integration in the adoptive community etc. In Ploieşti the rate of the natural balance was of approximately -1 $^0/_{00}$ over the last few years.

– Economical: local economy is dominated by monopolistically multinational companies, the SMEs field being weakly represented.

– Social: social segregation, manifestation of the poverty phenomenon etc.

– Town-planning: low accessibility in the intra-city space and in the city outskirts, the road network presents discontinuities in its radial and ring-like structure, exponential growth of motor traffic surpassing by a lot the existent infrastructure leading to traffic jams, the old age of utility equipments and so on.

– Ecological: intense atmospheric pollution, the risk of polluting the waters or soil with oil, phonic pollution etc.

    – Political: Excessive politicisation of local structures and interference in the economical sector.

The above analysis, of possible evolution scenarios, but also of the main component categories that may influence future evolution leaves to loom several priority directions for urban management and space organisation in the near future (Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies Romania, 2007):

➢ **Spatial-territorial integration by connecting to the European transport network.** It is an immediate priority because the main element of economic development is infrastructure. In that direction the problems related to maximising intra-city and city outskirts accessibility must be solved. Also, Ploieşti is situated on the urban, economical and communication axis Bucharest – Braşov, a future segment of panEuropean transport corridors. Thus, four major categories of infrastructure investments have been identified:

1. the „Mărăşeşti" motorway: continues the homonym street and connects the city, over the Bucharest – Braşov railroad, with the National Road 1 (E 60), on which the TEN IV panEuropean corridor is overlapped. Thus, approximately 12% of the intra-city space re-enters economic circulation and also, the Ploieşti Vest Neighbourhood (Mitică Apostol), at the moment "separated" from the city's "body", is territorially integrated.

2. the motor ring South Railway Station – West Railway Station – North Railway Station – Bereasca – Râfov – South Railway Station which will allow: cleaning and regulating the Dâmbu stream, increasing mobility and accessibility, plus eliminating an important part of the traffic from the city centre, with effects such as reducing pollution, preventing traffic jams and so on.

3. closing the tram ring (or surface subway) which will connect the South Railway Station and the West Railway Station on the route of the following streets: Democraţiei – N. Bălcescu – Gh. Doja – Şoseaua Vestului, with positive long-term effects: a viable, high capacity, fluent and ecological public transport system.

4. rehabilitation and introduction in real estate circulation of fields South of the city, today enclosed between the industrial and residential areas, situated beyond the Southern railroad.

➢ **Fulfilment of integrated projects – „The City's Gates".** Western Gate. Integrating in the urban texture the Ploieşti Vest Neighbourhood (Mitică Apostol) by increasing accessibility (Mărăşeşti passage) and by raising the residents' living standard (introducing basic utilities, specific to the city, water, sewage, gas or modernising the existent ones; the neighbourhood is today more of a suburban village, with a rural aspect). Given its proximity to the Ploieşti Industrial Park, developing complementary economic activities, high end industries or research institutes integrated into a research – IT – production area, is compulsory.

Southern Gate and Central Axis: The development of the urban axis South Railway Station – Central Area – Republicii, based on a future relation (centred on the Oil-

Gas University) – CBD (Central Business District), with a mix of activities, taking into account the attitude of attractiveness towards this area revealed by the results of the research.

Eastern Gate: The Rehabilitation of Bereasca and Râfov neighbourhoods, identified in the residents' perception as repulsive areas, development of the ecologic axis of the Dâmbu stream by cleaning and regulating it, modernising the infrastructure and raising the quality of life.

As far as the East and the West of the city are concerned, the research field materialised through the mapping of the city image has emphasised the strongly repulsive attitude of the residents towards these areas, their rehabilitation becoming a priority.

- **Orienting towards local economy competitiveness**. Mentioned and detailed before, among the city's strengths we also find its favourable position and technological reputation which represent attractiveness factors for investments. Leading these investments towards knowledge, innovation and high technology specialization is necessary. Thus, the following actions are mandatory: supporting cooperation with the private environment and developing the business environment, supporting cooperation with the University environment (creating a research – development area centred on the University of Ploieşti), professional reconversion and workforce specialisation in the non-polluting and high end industries.

- **Reducing territorial disparities**. Territorial disparities are strongly highlighted in the fields of quality of life, public services, infrastructure and territory equipment between the old Eastern part of the city or the outlying neighbourhoods and the central area.

- **Cleaning the city**. Through its position and economic functionality, the city is subjected to natural risks (earthquakes, floods), but mostly to technological risks, pollution being a major problem. It requires complex waste management programs, soil and used water cleanup, extending and modernising the sewage and gas network, especially in the East and South, outside the railway ring, cleaning and regulating the Dâmbu stream, as well as creating detailed plans of action in case natural disasters occur.

- **Imposing a new vision towards urban marketing** by implementing new marketing techniques, such as urban branding. Under the conditions of global competition and in the context of the post-industrial society, to which we add the experience of "ex"-industrial Western cities, it is required an economic revitalisation of the city through culture, seconded by a powerful image marketing. It is necessary to "rehabilitate" the city's cultural identity and create a brand that would bring extra value, by reviving the cultural traditions of poetry, music, theatre etc. Thus, it becomes necessary to rehabilitate unique Romanian museums or very rare in Europe, such as The National Museum of Oil or the Museum of Clocks. It could also be done a theme-cultural park, bearing in mind the oil manufacturing tradition which is the base of most of the urban identity, to which we can add the increase of public domain attractiveness.

5. Conclusions

The analytical thoroughgoing study of city image, both as a theoretical concept and in immediate relation with urban space management and organisation has led to several conclusive ideas. Therefore, city image:

➢ Appeared as a necessity to analyse, synthesise and essentialize a territorial manifesting reality;

What does city image synthesise? All the perceptible dysfunctionalities in the urban habitat, which create certain spatial attitudes and behaviours: of attractiveness, indifference or repulsiveness.

What does city image essentialize? The integrating character of global image, over the respective place (neighbourhood, city etc.), this being a result of individual image interaction. A positive image indicates an attractive space (at a mental level) which gives birth to a topophilic behaviour while a neutral image defines an indifferent space, towards which, an individual manifests a topo-indifferent attitude or behaviour. On the other hand, a negative image shapes a strongly repulsive space towards which, the individual displays a hostile attitude, a topophobic behaviour, of rejection (with effects on the territorial mobility within the city, investments, real estate prices etc.). This highlights the operational availability that the city image creates in relation with the local public administration, taking into account its integrating character at a city level.

➢ It is an operational instrument in the decision making process;

Any urban space or component of it is characterised by certain **strengths** and **weaknesses**, which at an analytical – theoretical level, cannot be the exclusive privilege of statistical data or individual/group perceptions, but a balanced combination between the quasi-objective reality of figures tables and its perception in the minds or urban residents, who, through experience and meanings associated to the places, fill the picture of urban reality. Thus, *city image* can become an operational instrument in tracking these "strengths" or "weaknesses" of an urban space when they are not the result of statistical analysis or mathematical modelling. And this can only be achieved with the help and through activities specific to the local public administration apparatus.

➢ City image can become a method or instrument of diagnostic analysis of urban planning;

By overlapping the two images – the objective one, resulted from mathematical modelling of statistical data and the subjective one (individual and at an urban community level), obtained by mapping perceptions over urban elements and shapes – the distortions have become visible: either the tendency to super-evaluate the city image (generated by an ultra-positive image based on affective considerations of a personal nature – birthplace or a place loaded with meanings of a certain nature), or to under-evaluate it (generated by an extremely negative image). Correcting these distortions leads to a preferential or evaluative image closer to the reality of territorial objectivity.

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