Research report on pubs and 'pub culture' in Constanta and Tulcea

Raluca Petre

The setting:

Constanta and Tulcea are the two urban settings where we carried the research on pubs and 'pub culture'. These are the two largest cities in the Romanian region of Dobrogea. The city of Constanta has approximately 330000 inhabitants while the city of Tulcea some 96000, according to the census of 1996. The characteristic of Constanta is that it dwells a large harbor, this being the main source of income of the city. It is also a touristic site in the summer months for the tourists that come to the beach of the Black Sea. Industry is underdeveloped in the city provided its marginal location on the map of Romania, thus the difficulty of distribution. The city of Tulcea is more industrialized, ranging from heavy industry to alumina production and yachts production. Traditionally, the city being by the Danube, some traditional occupation was that of fishing. The population of both cities decreased during the transition years.

Background

In this part we will try to draw a short picture of the spare time spending habits of the Romanians in the last decade. During the nineties, the characteristic of spare time spending was that of being rather private, namely taking place in the house in front of the TV provided the hardships of transition[1]. At the same time, for the same period we can say that going out was rather a privilege than a commodity. The entertainment offer on the market was rather sly during our conversations with the informants we came to know that previous to the year 1999 there was no club or pub on the Mircea Street, for example. We chose to mention this street because now it is crowded with entertainment sites. Another characteristic of the entertainment market in the city of Constanta is that there

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[1] We base this statement on statistics broadcasted in the media about the spending time habits of the Romania and these results are not specifically for Constanta and Tulcea.

are quite a lot of clubs that no longer exist, being active for just a few years or months even; this is the case for some of the pubs as well, as we shall see. We should mention that there was no pub in town previous to the year 1999, or there are sites that existed but were not bearing the name of pub; therefore we consider the pub phenomenon as a new one. In Tulcea there is no place that is called pub but there is one place that resembles one and it dates previous to the year 1999.

Theoretical grounds :

The theoretical framework that became articulated in our approach to the issue of the pub culture had as departure point the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz and the interactions and roles in the everyday life Erving Goffman is approaching. We tried all the way to be aware of the situatedness of the research and of ourselves as observers and interviewers, some of the ethnomethodological ideas helping us be aware of our limits and our position within the inquiry. The concept of 'habitus' developed by Pierre Bourdieu in his work offered the glasses through which to look on the human landscape met during our work, as well as when approaching the different tastes and arrangements of the sites Last but not least the 'hybridization' concept introduced by Homi Bhabha helped us get over the panic of not having what to write about as we could not find a genuine pub culture in Constanta and Tulcea. The concept was used for the identity of immigrants but we found it useful to describe the changes that the local produces on the standard 'pub', hybridizing the 'pub' proper. The urban environment under scrutiny was a specific element; therefore we felt the need to realize some of the categories and specificities of it. We came encountered with Robert Park and, with all the limitations that the site of his interest was in the United States, we did find important elements that would help us explain the city. Last but not least the literature on the methodology of qualitative research provided us with tools for carrying observation and interview or simply informal discussions with our informants.

Hypothesis: the concept of 'pub' is changed and hybridized according to the social structure and realities of a given setting. The hypothesis was tested by means of considering the variables that explain the concept of 'pub' in its classical understanding,

namely a drinking area where people socialize characterized by the institution of permanent clients. There is some live music or simply singing from the part of the clients, there are also some games like darts or pull played. Besides the social aspects that compose the concept, there are also the material ones that are taken into account, namely decorations[2]. The quality of being casual in a pub is another element considered to be specific. We selected the variables according to the definitions and characteristics of pubs we detected via specialized internet resources (www.irishabroad, www.irishpub.ro, www.wikipedia)

Methodology:

The research has been carried in the cities of Constanta and Tulcea, with a special emphasis on Constanta. The research was carried over the period of several months, namely from November 2003 till May 2004. We started by monitoring some of the literature on qualitative data and on carrying qualitative research in parallel with the theoretical acquisitions. At first the locations have been determined, the subjects of the research have been located. The first identification mark we used was the 'pub' designation inserted in the name of the site on the Constanta touristic. Another mean of selection was by searching on the internet the pages dealing with the city of Constanta and finding the places described under the category of 'pubs'. We came to choose to work with the official site of the local administration (ccina.ro) considering it more legitimate than other sources. This way we identified some other 'pubs' even if the name was not present in the designation but as a category in the entertainment page. The third way of detecting pub was by simply going around in the city, entering different entertainment places and trying to realize the extent to which these fit at least some of the criteria (see the table below). We also used the knowledge of the students in order to identify our subjects. We came to realize quite soon that there are not many pubs in Constanta and even less in Tulcea, and at first we also entered some ethnic restaurant just to have a look. This would be a very appropriate subject to research in a region like Dobrogea.

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[2] wooden furniture and long wooden bar, decorations above the entrance door and inside the location, pictures or illustrations, smoky windows, a public room, games: pool etc. lately also electronic games in the British Pubs

We formed teams of two and respectively of three students that have been asked at first to do participant observation as clients of the sites selected. They have been asked to follow some observation lines: the decoration, the action, the people and the possible meaning they can give to the things they observe at the same time taking notes on the nine variables that would define a pub. They all tended at first to look for unusual things as they are students in Journalism; and find most of the just observing exercise as not very interesting. Nevertheless, we came to realize together that we try to understand the regular things and the way they function and not to write a newspaper article. The observations have been gathered and the first conclusions shared.

In the second phase of the research the students and myself had interviews with different informants, namely from pub owners to bartenders or simply clients. We tried to understand the way the pub was started, why it is considered pub by the respondents, which are its characteristics, who are the clients and what they do, and how they perceive their place among the pubs in the city. In Tulcea thre are few places that meet the criteria for being called a pub, namely 'Carul cu bere', 'Tresim' etc. On the other hand, we noticed that on the socialization variable as well as on the casualty one, Tulcea scores higher than Constanta, maybe because the population is not that big and the prices are lower, thus allowing people to be more comfortable.

Description:

We started by identifying t fifteen 'pubs'[3] in Constanta and two in Tulcea according to the name at first and then following the variables in the table below. From these 'pubs', some no longer exist: City Club - Pub, some were not yet opened as functioning only in summer time: Casa Mures S.R.L. - Pub, some were discos: Megalos Pub, some restaurants: Oxford Pub, etc. Thus, the name 'pub' does not necessarily carry the classical understanding of one. We had to narrow our focus and concentrate on the sites that score at least on more than half of the variables as pubs.

One of the commonalities that we encountered and was confirmed during the interviews was an almost complete lack of socialization in the pubs in Constanta. People

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[3] In Constanta in alphabetical order: Adry's Pub, Asterix Pub, Bourbon House, Captain Mondy's Irish Pub – Pub, Casa Mures S.R.L. Pub, City Club Café, Club F – Pub, Epava, Megalos Pub, Deep Pub, Irish Pub, Oxford Pub, Seamen's Pub, Student Pub

would not in most of the cases come to start spontaneous talks. The arrangement of tables enhances a centrifugal type of social space, namely the largest number of seats at a table is of six in nine of the cases. The area at the bar would be a socialization site and it does function but in places where there are regulars: Irish Pub, Epava. There is some extra-socialization, namely the flirting of the rich men with the pretty ladies but we do not consider this to be the pub type of socialization. We tried to explain this situation by the specificity of Constanta as a large urban centre in which basically atomized people live and on the lack of industrial plants or production areas where many people work, know each other and then go together to have a beer. We consider the Constanta pub institution as being hybridized mainly on the socialization lines and on the casualty ones. The pub did not turn out to be a commodity for the inhabitants, rather (in 11 of the cases) a site where the prices are high[4] and we presumed this to be another element that enhances the lack of casualty.

Some other element that hybridizes the initial concept is the dancing factor. Some of the locations under study are also dancing sites, especially in some days when it gets crowded or when special events are organized. Some of the pubs organize special events on a regular basis: Irish Pub, Bourbon House etc. When people get excited they rather start to dance then to sing live was the idea derived from the stories of several informants.

We had to consider vicinity as an important explanatory factor for the spirit of a certain pub. The pubs that are situated close to high-schools are populated by students at least in day time, by night the composition of population changing quite importantly. Thus, Asterix Pub is located close to an important humanistic high-school 'Geoge Calinescu' while 'Adry's Pub' is close to 'Energetic' high-school. At the same time, Student Pub, located close to Adry's has its target stated in the name and is very close to an important dorm area for university students. Seamen's Pub is located in the port and the main clients are the sailors coming from the sea and the people that work in the harbor, these coming for lunch.

In other cases, two pubs located on the same street are positioned differently: Epava is a small place that qualifies as 'pub' on seven of the ten variables we considered.

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[4] we took as point of reference the prices in the supermarket and realized that a beer is two times, even three times more expensive in a pub

It only functions in the non-summer months. At the same time, Irish Pub, located still on Mircea Street is the most fancy place, considered so both by the clients of the place and by the owners and workers of other pubs (all informants from other pubs pointed on Irish Pub as 'the pub' in town). This place scores quite high on decoration[5], live music, regulars, socialization among the regulars but scores very low on casualty. One of our informants pointed on us that some genuine Irish people coming to this place have been really disappointed about the formal atmosphere of the place. At the same time this pub is part of a larger network of Irish Pubs and it also has its own webpage, actually being the only one to have a web page in Constanta or Tulcea(www.irishpub.ro). This is the place where rich people of Constanta go out as well as the foreign tourists or foreign people that work in the city. The pub also has a terrace that faces the sea.

Some hard night losers pointed that going to pubs used to be quite a fashion in the yearly 2000 when this type of location was new in town but meanwhile some chose to change it for clubs or discos, the dancing element being quite central in the argument. Some pointed that few years ago people were dancing in the pubs at the tables, on the tables and on the bar (Cosmin). At the same time, in some of these place, it is customary to organize special events, or thematic events as there is need on the market for this kind of manifestations. The owner of Bourbon House Pub pointed on us that his place is 'pub in day time and club at night'.

We asked the owners about the way they started and what made them to have a pub and the three of whom we had direct talks with pointed out that they previously had been abroad and liked the concept then tried to import it to Constanta. They consider it as a business and even if the regulars are usually their friends, these are rich people that work in the private sector that do not care to spend quite a lot of money in order to feel good, be with their friends and maybe watch football games. At the same time, in all the cases in which we reached this subject, we realized that the owners are men[6]. Maybe this would be an interesting element for a further research on the men and women in the entertainment business in Constanta.

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[5] yet, the tables are or four people reminding rather of a restaurant in this respect; the wooden decorations and the long wooden bar are of a genuine pub
[6] yet, we did not ask specifically about this but found it interesting later when, when putting together the information

Variable	Sites
name has 'pub' in it	Constanta - Adry's Pub, Asterix Pub, Captain Mondy's Irish Pub – Pub, Casa Mures S.R.L. Pub, Club F – Pub, Megalos Pub, Deep Pub, Epava Pub & Bistro, Irish Pub, Oxford Pub, Seamen's Pub, Student Pub – Tulcea - none
decoration	Constanta - Adry's Pub, Asterix Pub, Captain Mondy's Irish Pub – Pub, Epava, Irish Pub, Seamen's Pub Tulcea - Caru cu bere (wooden tables and chairs, decorations on the walls, long wooden bar, etc.)
socialization	Constanta - Adry's Pub, Asterix Pub (close to high-schools where students know each other), Bourbon House (many thematic parties organized), Seamen's Pub (sailors), Epava, irish Pub (the regulars) Tulcea - Caru cu bere, Tresim
casualty	Constanta - Bourbon House, Seamen's Pub Tulcea - Caru cu bere, Tresim
life music, singing	Constanta - Irish Pub, Oxford Pub, Bourbon House Tulcea - none
regulars	Constanta - Epava, Irish Pub, Seamen's Pub (for lunch) (+ Adry's,. Asterix – high-school students) Tulcea - Tresim (+ Caru cu bere – high-school students)
beer drinking / alcoholic drinking	Constanta - all, / Tulcea - both
eating	Constanta - Epava, Irish Pub, Captain Mondy's Irish Pub, Asterix, Seamen's Pub Tulcea - none
games: pull, darts etc.	Constanta - no games Tulcea - Caru cu bere, Tresim

watching football	Constanta - Epava, Irish Pub, Tulcea - none

Conclusions:

The 'pub culture' we found in Constanta is mainly a hybrid type of a location that has the decoration features of a pub but where the life derules according to different rules, quite others than the ones that animate the pub in its classical understanding (born in the anglo-saxon space). Thus, during our spending time in pubs we came to realize that these are quite formal environments in Constanta, where the social distance also enhanced by the social setting of the space is kept. The pub culture in Constanta is one of quite high prices, it is not an working class institution rather one for the *nouveaux riches* of the city. It is a male space basically, the regulars and the owners being mainly men. These are also the main consumption force, being customary that they also pay for the female companion they happen to be with. We tried to understand why people go to pubs in Constanta and some pointed on the fact that it is not for making friends or knowing people but for meeting the old friends and spending money in a nice environment, last but not least for showing off. The institution of the regulars is well developed in only a few of the sites under scrutiny (only two). There were also voices stating that the population coming to pubs is not that of youngsters but rather of active persons, meaning people that already have a place to work. In Tulcea, we did not find places that bear the name of 'pub' but we happened to detect the spirit of one, thus we considered those part of the general picture.

It turned quite difficult for us to gather a common picture of all the places visited as each is defined by rather other aspects than the pub ideology. The locality, the prices are elements that highly influence the population composition and the spirit of a certain place. At the same time, the pub is not a traditional element in Dobrogea, Romania but an imported institution that takes the shape of the place where it set and that can tell us more about the new site, the mores of the places following the very lines of change. The analogy with the non-canonical religious paintings of popular artists in the Orthodox area is helpful to understand the concept. The peasant artists were the ones to bring the local

context and specific in their paintings, thus unconsciously allowing the contemporary people to understand the culture of the moment.

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Internet resources:

http://www.ccina.ro/ct_stat.php

http://www.irishabroad.com/Culture/Pubs/

http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow/snowpub.html

www.irishpub.ro

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_house/