

*Mihaela-Daniela Preda, Iuliana Vijulie,
Ana Irina Lequeux-Dincă*

The Palace Architecture of the Roma Population in Romania

Abstract

Contrasting the local specific architecture through an obvious opulent style, “palaces” of Roma population in Romania generate controversial debates. The present study analyses this phenomenon from a socio-geographic perspective in its attempt to draw attention to the new constructions appearing in the post-communist period after 1990. The Roma palaces are a choice of a showy non-constrained way to manifest an ethnic socio-economic status at the local level are perceived differently in Romanian society by the Roma community and by the Romanian population respectively. Our research methodology was correlated with the particularities of this topic and has been very infrequently approached until the present moment. It has hence used as its main tools direct observation, a social survey based on semi-structured interviews and media monitoring. The results of the study have mainly showed that the appearance of the new type of residences is a consequence of the change in the socio-economic statute of the Roma population, the size of the house being directly proportional to the status of the *privileged* within a community. Moreover, we have already witnessed architectural trends in the aesthetics of these constructions, which were mainly perceived in a negative way by the Romanian respondents and in a positive way by Roma respondents.

Keywords: architecture, palace, aesthetics, perception, Roma, Romanians

Introduction

The *palace* architecture found on Romanian territory is closely related to the presence of Roma groups. The Roma population has a long-standing existence in Romania, which was mentioned for the first time in documents dated from the sixteenth century. Until the nineteenth century, the members of this ethnic group had the official status of slaves. There were three types of slaves: the ones belonging to church who were living in *bordeie* (half-dugout shelters) not having the right to own their properties; the ones belonging to noblemen, who similarly to the monastery slaves were allowed to live on the land owned by their lords, locally called *boyars*; and kingship slaves who were nomads and as slaves obeyed the king directly, who were guaranteed the right to wander freely on the territory of the country to look for gold which once found was delivered to authorities. After their liberation (in the nineteenth century), a number of these slaves lost their customs, traditions and language while another group continued to practice a nomad life, being more conservative (Posavec 2000; Preda et al. 2015).

Previous studies about Roma population focused on issues connected to their cultural identity (Burtea 1994; Chelcea 1994; Levinson and Sparkes 2004; Pavelescu 2007; Preda 2010; Theodosiou 2011), their health conditions (Zeman et al. 2003; Garcia-Campayo and Alda 2007), education (Gay y Blasco 1999; Levinson 2005) and their social integration (Kendall 1997; Van Cleemput 2010). The architecture of Roma houses haven't been studied so far by specialists and it drew public attention after 1990. In fact the topic of Roma houses architecture is a recent one being defined through new trends in building home dwellings displayed by certain Roma groups (Celac 2005; Ruegg and Boscoboinik 2009; Tudora 2009; Smith and Greenfields 2012; Ruegg 2013).

The particularities of Roma houses and households should thus be analysed, taking into consideration the historical conditions which has determined the way of life for Roma population through the centuries (Tomlinson 2007; Gräf 2008) through a series of allogeous elements from populations with which this ethnic group entered into contact that were transformed and adapted according to the Roma's own needs (Calzi et al. 2007; Voroneanu 2012). Hence, Roma houses or households don't only include elements that we found exclusively within the communities

belonging to this ethnic group, as this population had the right to establish its own property only after manumission.

The structure of households, including those for Roma dwellings, was tightly connected to the socio-economic statute which the population experienced during different epochs (Suciu and Culea 2015). The changes in Roma architecture elements are generated mainly by the rich (Vincze et al. 2013). In fact, most of the Roma population had a nomad life in the past which was incompatible with the existence of a permanent built home dwelling. Displaying aspects connected to a nomad way of life and to a late sedentarisation, Roma population cannot define specific elements for its houses and households (Burtea 1994).

Therefore the purpose of our study was to explain the appearance and dynamics of Roma palaces contrasting with the local landscape within the communities in which they were built. They were built in different parts of Romania after 1990 on the background of the freedom of expression won in the postcommunist period through the transition from a dictatorship to a democratic political system. More than a simple ethnical expression of an aesthetic taste that these constructions are, in fact, a way of displaying a socio-economic statute established and recognised for their members within Roma communities.

The goals of this study focused on explaining the position of traditional Roma communities within residential areas connected to their need for social assertion, noticing the architectural elements specific for *Roma palaces*. The endogenous and exogenous perception of the existing architectural trends characterised these impressive buildings, as well as an emphasis placed upon the aesthetics of beauty/ugliness represented by *Roma palaces*.

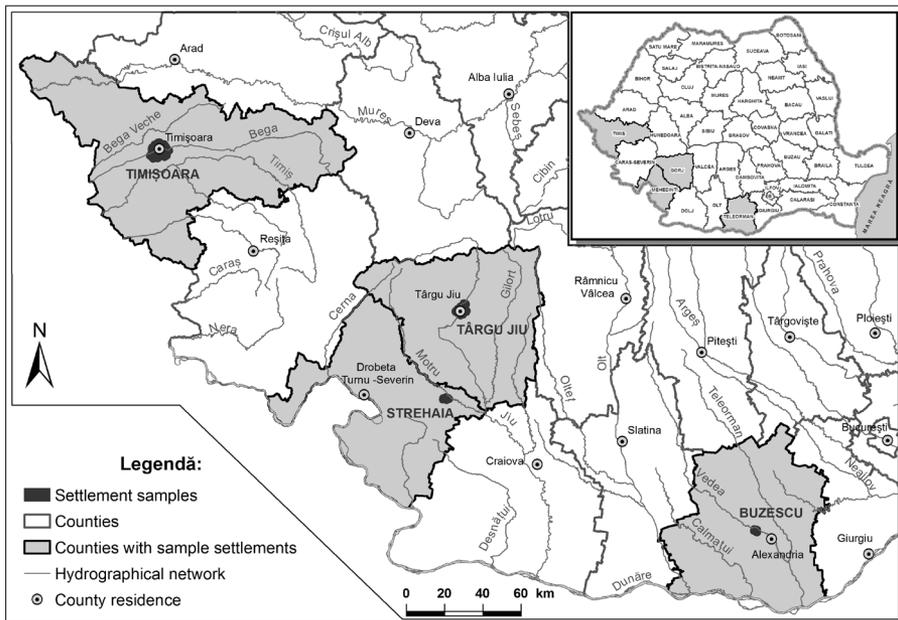
The study area

The palace architecture belonging to the Roma population in Romania and connected to the traditional gypsy groups appears almost without exception in every region of the country. However, one should remark upon the architectonic similarities of these buildings no matter which region is concerned and which may be considered as patterns of cultural diffusion for the content on the ground of geographical proximity factor (Smith and Crano 1977). It seems that the fashion of these constructions was initiated in the Regions of West, South–West (the periurban area of

Timișoara in particular is mentioned in this respect) in geographic regions in which this ethnic group is representative of the regional identity. This and a local demographic profile has subsequently led us to define our sample communities.

The *palace* architecture created by Roma groups was consequently analysed by focusing on representative sample areas for the presence of traditional gypsy groups that appealed to this type of architecture, namely: Strehaia (Mehedinți county), Buzescu (Teleorman county), Timișoara (Timiș county) and Târgu Jiu (Gorj county). All of these groups overlapped the geographic position of traditional Roma communities that appealed to architectonic palace characteristics (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The position of the study area on Romanian territory



Methodology

The main methods of research that we have used in order to study this phenomenon have so far been less analysed by scientific methods, but intensely mediatised as a consequence of its pregnant and contrastant

presence in the local geographic landscape were: direct observation, the survey method (semi- structured interview) and the monitoring of the online environment and of media sources.

The utility of direct observation is evidenced by its vital role in capturing the originality and the novelty of this phenomenon, as well as understanding its complex constructive, social and economic particularities displayed generally by the Roma ethnic group (Delépine 2007).

Hence, to understand the perception of the members of local communities on the *palace* architecture, as well as the deep significance of this phenomenon which swings between a way of life embracing old customs and an aesthetic fashion, the authors have appealed in this study to a range of semi-structured interviews. The analysis has focused both on exogenous (non-Roma people) and endogenous (Roma people) perceptions of these buildings by local communities, with the purpose of underlining a concept of beauty and/or ugliness regarding the architectural aesthetics of *Roma palaces*.

The interviews here have focused on key words and freely expressed ideas by respondents. In this context, the semi-structured interview was considered the optimum method. The target group comprised of two categories of population, namely: the Roma population and the non-Roma persons having the residence in the sample settlements. There have interviewed 20 persons from each category belonging to different age groups comprised of those between 20–80 years, of both genders and with varying levels of education. The persons were interviewed between 15th–20th April and 1st July–31st August 2015.

The questions in the interview guide has focused on the following aspects: the attractiveness of the *Roma palaces* architecture; the reasons why the architecture is considered attractive/unattractive; the architectural elements that the interviewed person appreciates within *Roma palaces*; the sources of inspiration used in the palace architecture; the matching of *Roma palaces* within the local architectonic landscape; the social message transmitted by the owner in displaying this kind of building as his home-dwelling; the identification of a trend or a fashion for the architecture of such houses; and how the respondents would define in their opinion a *beautiful* house.

The questions had as main purpose to define the perception towards a home-dwelling aesthetics and the analysis of the reasons determining the choice of the sources of inspiration for a classic recognised or a random architectural style, depending on the owners' preference. The perception of respondents on a concept defining an *aesthetics* of beauty and/or ugliness, as well as the type of message transmitted through the display of the *palace* architecture were also aspects focused through the interview method.

The answers obtained from the interviewed persons were further analysed using the Nvivo 11 software as a programme which optimally corresponds through its functions to the KWIC – Keywords-in-Context analysis method (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2011). In this respect the answers were coded taking into consideration the profile of the interviewed persons (ethnic group, sex, age and level of education).

The use of this software has allowed data mining through questioning the word frequency. In this way, a words cloud was generated allowing us to make a hierarchy of the problems approached in our study, according to their importance defined by both Roma and non-Roma respondents' perception. In order to study the congruence or the divergence of the points of view of sample respondents, a comparison cluster dendrogram was created based on the similarity of words (an analysis based on Pearson Coeficient). For comparison reasons between the answers the Pearson index was calculated for each of the two interviewed groups: Roma and non-Roma. The coding of respondents took first into consideration the ethnic identity as the answer samples belonging to R – Romanian and G – Roma ethnics were separated. Other important encoding criteria were the gender: W – woman, M – man; the level of education: PP – primary school, SS-secondary school, C-college; and the age: Y-young (under 30 years), YA-young adult (31–50 years), OA-older adult (51–70 years), O-old (over 70 years).

The press monitoring (Table 1) had as its main purpose the need to underline the phenomenon studied at the level of the entire country (within which our sample settlements outstand) while, at the same time emphasise the presence of palace architecture connected to Roma groups, as well as the general perception regarding these buildings in Romania.

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/Access date
Romania	BBC romanian.com	Who is afraid of the “Gypsies’ palaces”?	21 st July 2005	The article refers to details of the interior architecture of gypsies’ palaces and the use of naive painting or of Romanian frescoes from ethno-folklore representations.	http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2005/07/050721_mariana_celac.shtml (15 th October 2015)
Romania	Observer cultural.	An architect: Mariana Celac (II)	14 th September 2004	The article considers gypsies’ palaces as a social and architectural testimony of an ethnic category with a nomadic past. Copied elements from Schönbrunn, Escurial, Cretzulescu Palace or Casa Poporului (Ceaușescu’s megalomaniac palace in Bucharest) are mentioned.	http://www.observercultural.ro/O-arhitectura-Mariana-Celac-(II)*articleID_11736-articles_details.html (15 th October 2015)
Romania	Sharetis.ro	Gypsies’ palaces in Romania	14 th June 2014	The article brings into discussion a series of architectural elements of gypsies’ palaces, from Hunedoara such as a replica	http://sharetis.ro/2014/06/14/palatele-tiganesti-din-romania (15 th October 2015)

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/ Access date
Romania	Rf. romania	Igloo makes an inventory of the Roma palaces	17 th June 2008	of the Statue of Liberty or the Eiffel Tower. A photo gallery with details referring to their interior design has been added. “They are massive and shock through opulence and the mixture of styles. It is an unbuttoned postmodern architecture lacking rules. These are some of the characteristics which individualise the so-called <i>gypsies’ palaces</i> . The album “Kastello – Palaces of the Roma in Romania” published by Igloo Media, illustrates this cultural phenomenon”.	http://www.rfi.ro/articol/stiri/cultura/igloo-inventariaza-palacele-irromilor (15 th October 2015)
Romania	Ocasapezi.wordpress.ro Blog de arhitectură	All the houses have an architect!	11 th March 2009	The article focuses on Nicolae Busilă – the gypsies’ architect mentioning his experience and opinions about the works he was ordered to execute.	https://ocasapezi.wordpress.com/2009/03/11/toate-casele-ai-un-arhitect/ (15 th October 2015)

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/Access date
Romania	Kanal D TV show: Asta-I România / This is Romania	Gypsies'palaces will become tourist attractions	1 st August 2013	The TV show is particularly focused on sensational news with significant impact. Obviously, this episode aims to produce an impressive effect on the audience through the images of gypsies' houses with enormous dimensions, opulent ornaments and luxurious furniture. Their riches are contrasted with the official poor statute and the undeclared revenues of the owners.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sw_uezkgZM8 (15 th October 2015)
Buzescu, Teleorman	ZZonline.ro	National Geographic: Gypsies' palaces from Buzescu (photographic report)	31 st August 2012	The article represents a review of the photographic report made by National Geographic in Buzescu village.	http://www.zigagonline.ro/povesti-povestiri/national-geographic-fotoreportaj-despre-romania-palatele-tiganilor-din-buzescu-judetul-teleorman.html (15 October 2015)
Buzescu, Teleorman	National Geographic	Home of the Roma Kings	October 2012	Photographic report – The Houses of Roma population in Buzescu.	http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/09/wealthy-roma/gachet-kashinsky-photography (15 October 2015)

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/Access date
Strehaia, Mehedinți	www.ziare.com Adevărul.ro	The palaces in Strehaia raised from suspicious business which don't exist in official documents.	27 th February 2012	The article focuses on money laundering and undeclared goods including gypsies' "palaces"	http://adevarul.ro/locale/turnu-severin/palatele-strehaia-ridicate-afaceri-dubioase-inexistente-acti-1_50ae473b7c42d5a6639b45b2/index.html (15 October 2015)
Strehaia, Mehedinți	Informațiade-severin.ro	The palaces of gypsies in Strehaia built on state fraud	30 th January 2013	"Gypsies' palaces" in Strehaia have always defied good taste but especially during period of crisis. If, in the following years after the Revolution in 1990, the gypsies competed among them in terms of the number of towers ornamenting their houses, in the last five years real palaces have been raised in Strehaia. They were built following the last housing trends and include pools, garden pavilions, artesian wells and fitness rooms. These	http://www.ziare.com/severin/stiri-actualitate/palatele-tiganilor-de-la-strehaia-construite-din-tepedate-statului-3570970 (15 October 2015)

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/Access date
Ciurea, Iași	Zanea. The gypsies' Wall Street		12 th June 2013	<p>are houses that cost millions of Euro and which may be afforded only by powerful business people.²⁹</p> <p>The article also approaches the opulence and oversize of the more and more numerous gypsies' palaces which appear in the rural settlement of Ciurea, Iași county (eastern Romania), in spite of the statute of extreme poverty displayed other gypsies in the same village. It supports the fact that these buildings have appeared on behalf of money laundry practiced by their owners.</p>	http://www.7est.ro/exclusiv7est/reportaje/item/1609-exclusiv-zanea-wall-street-ul-tiganilor-palatele-ridicate-din-evazi-une-text-integral.html (15 October 2015)
Timisoara, Timis	Adevarul.ro	Miracle at Timișoara: the new Roma generation demolishes the	10 th March 2015	<p>²⁹The mayor of Timișoara made a <i>big impact</i> announcement on Tuesday in which he presented the first case in which the owner of a palace with <i>little</i></p>	http://adevarul.ro/locale/timisoara/minune-timisoarana-generatie-romi-demoleaza-turmuletele-palatelor-celebrelumea-arhitect--e-alta-generatie-

Table 1. The monitoring of on-line media sources with regard to Roma palaces.

The area to which the article refers	Newspaper/ Media source	The name of the article	Publishing date	The way in which Roma palaces architecture is referred	Site/Access date
		towers of the famous palaces		<p>towers demands on his own initiative for their demolition. Besides the case presented by the mayor Nicolae Robu, the newspaper "Adevărul" has identified one more building which has already had a <i>cosmetic</i> surgery on its owner's request. The architect who was in charge of the two projects declared that the new generation doesn't share anymore the taste for little towers."</p>	<p>nu-mai-gusta-lucruurile-astea-1_54ff1501448e03c0fd6d46e8/index.html (15 October 2015)</p>

The analysis of these media texts has certified the particular visual impact these buildings have within the autochthonous local landscape. In fact, this new architecture is the clear expression of a socio-economic power deliberately displayed in an opulent and original way; it has hence generated a tide of opinion caught and publicly disseminated by important media sources, TV channels and within the online space (BBC, 2005; Adevărul, 2012; Kanal D, 2013; Pro TV, 2013). All the articles mention the usage of multiple architectonic styles which determines a generally negatively perceived puzzle from the aesthetic point of view (Stăncioiu 2011). Media sources also bring into discussion the abandoning trends for the houses embellished by small towers and their replacement with new modern constructions.

Results and discussion

Explaining the placement within the residential areas of traditional Roma communities vs their need to affirm themselves through the display of architecture

The Roma population represents a very old and visible ethnic group in the landscape of local Romanian communities. Their peripheric placement within residential areas is mainly explained by historic factors. Roma people were, in the past, a nomad population, partly being forced to settle down through slavery. Moreover, they didn't enjoy property ownership of estates except in the case of boyards or on monastery estates.

The Roma gained the right of ownership during the 19th century when groups of gypsies settled on empty, barren lands at the edge of cities or villages forming compact communities based on their belonging to different craft groups. The new residential nuclei on the Romanian territory are called *rudarii* or *tzigani* and were often positioned at the outskirts of settlements (Preda 2010).

The social conditions of people living in *rudarie* or *tziganie* were poor all through the period following their release from slavery; a condition that didn't improved considerably during communism, despite uniformisation and the economic integration of non-discriminatory state policies. The nuclei of Roma settlement continued to be peripheric except for the newly employed young families who received appartments in the recently built

socialist blocks, but Roma people were still not owners because of the inequalities engendered by the state ownership system.

After 1990, the socio-economic conditions of some Roma communities changed radically as a consequence of the new freedom of movement secured by the fall of the dictatorship which allowed many Romanian citizens to lead their life abroad and to invest their revenues within the household. Many peripheric neighborhoods enjoyed a change in the quality of their living conditions, being obviously improved as Roma ethnics built themselves houses of villa or palace type. The newly enriched Roma population then showed a new trend in buying estates in the central part of the settlements and gave up their traditional living within compact communities.

The dimensions of their houses and the construction of gypsies' palaces is a proof of their post-communist socio-economic evolution. It was also an effect of their wish to find restoration for an unjust past and to create a goal founded on a collective imaginary. The contrasting architecture draws attention in the Romanian rural or periurban landscape and became a *brand* of the rich Roma ethnics, displaying their family status through their house and proving a trend, today inevitably a victim of the consumerist kitsch which defines the society of today.

Several architectural elements specific to gypsies' palaces

The specificity of the house within traditional Roma communities is distinguished through a homogenous evolutive tendency towards *palaces*, the architectonic elements differing on the subjectivity in which owners perceive the beauty on this topic.

In this way, the households of traditional Roma groups have undergone significant changes in their style of construction being nowadays an extremely modern one and very different from a house to another. The architecture of their houses are reminiscent of Asian styles or renowned architectural styles, such as classic, art nouveau, renaissance etc. Among the materials used one should mention the marble and the various types of stones, steel or aluminium. This trend is met among the members of gypsies' communities who have a higher financial level, especially the copersmiths and the tin coaters, but also among the *ursari* (bear trainers), brickmakers or silversmiths.

The combination of different architectural styles with associated elements found in Asian temples – like the terraced pointed roofs with elements of modern architecture in the construction of oversize houses – has led to the controversial debates about their esthetics as they are also very visible in the landscape.

The houses with *turnulețe* (little towers) covered by shiny roofs, painted in vivid colors and build in very original styles became an icon more and more often present within the communities of rich gypsies (Figure 2 a, b). The financial success of their owners is often displayed by the households' opulence, the size of the houses as well as the exaggerated accessories of both the house itself as well as of the courtyard which obviously emphasise the richness of the Roma families living there.

Figure 2 a: Houses of coppersmith in Băilești (Dolj county); **b.** Houses of tin coaters in Drăgănești Olt (Olt county); **c.** Houses of coppersmith in Caracal (Olt county); **d.** Interior of a Roma house (Caracal-Olt). Foto: Preda Mihaela, 2009



a.



b.



c.



d.

Consequently, the particularities of the house are like a non-printed visit card, easily remarked by the other members of the community, giving to the owner a privileged position and making him win the respect of other citizens. After 1990, the amplification of the building phenomenon for such houses was characterised as rather kitsch. One should observe though an intersecting tendency a unitary architectural style manifest in the Roma ethnicity.

Roma houses are easily identifiable through both exterior and interior elements, such as shiny roofs, little towers, overlapping cornices, plaster ornaments, travertine and marble columns and pillars, bay windows, accessories made in cast iron, crenels, massive chandeliers, mural paintings and exotic essence wooden floors all of them leading to the existence of an acknowledged style met exclusively to owners creating an authentic Roma style (Figure 2 c, d).

The above illustrated style is a seal of coppersmiths (one of the richest Roma groups), who attributed themselves the role of *creators* and which was taken over to a lesser extent by the other Roma groups. Their outstanding buildings of palace type sometimes even have fifteen rooms, assuming substantial investment which could be supported by a small number of Roma families.

The endogenous and exogenous perception upon the architectural trends

These perceptions of Roma architecture are explained by applying a semi-structured interview in the sample settlements comprised of numerous old and recent gypsy palaces built after 1990.

The endogenous and exogenous perception upon the architectural trends showed the existence of two trends. The first one, between 1990–2000, is characterised by *palaces* similar to pagodas with terraced tin metal roofs and with painted walls using geometric forms (Figure 3 a).

Some houses copied the architecture of famous buildings (e.g. the Court house in Caracal city), the subjectivism of their esthetics demonstrated by personalised elements such as the owner's name, statues, etc. (Figure 3 b). The second trend appeared after 2000 and is characterised by the appearance of palaces with saddle roofs (roofs with two slopes) or hip roofs (roofs with four slopes) using the clay or metal tiles and displaying big glass windows from vividly coloured thermoplastic material.

Figure 3. Buzescu village, Teleorman county: a. Traditional architecture, specific to the 1990s; b. Borrowed architecture, a copy of a neoclassic building in Caracal city. Foto: I. Vijulie, 2014



a.



b.

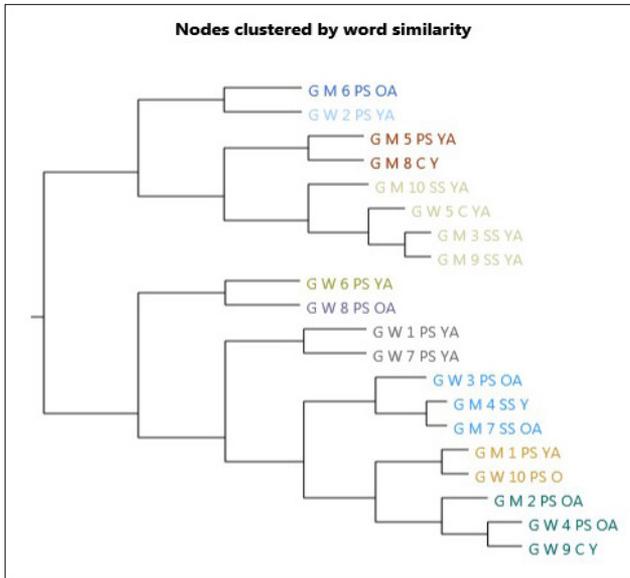
Our analysis clearly suggests that these houses are positively perceived by both Roma and Romanians, within local communities which also identify the existence of trends for Roma architecture. Its purpose was further emphasised in the attempt to identify the materials and the techniques of construction for Roma palaces.

As an important result, one should remark upon the fact that in the first cluster composed of GM 6 PS OA, GW 2 PS YA, GM 5 PS YA, GM 8 CY, GM 5 PS YA, GM 3 SS YA and GM 9 SS YA (Figure 4 a, b), an important number of respondents (40 per cent) affirm the fact that Roma people do not build according to a fashion. However, each of them builds his house as he wishes, the differences also being deepened according to the type of construction materials they use, with some proving to be more and more modern.

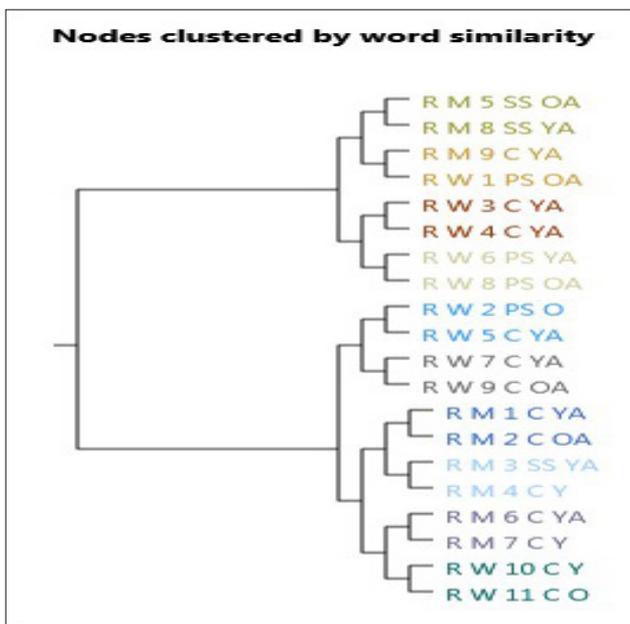
The second cluster, comprising of 60 per cent of respondents, considers contrary fashion trends in the architecture of Roma palaces. The first trend identified by respondents (GW 6 PS YA, GW8 PS OA, GW 3 PS OA, GM 4 SS Y, GM 7 SS OA, GM 1 PS YA, GW 10 PS O) correspond to the 1990–2000 period and is dominated by the houses with pitched metal terraced roof. The second trend is considered by respondents (GM 2 PS OA, GW 4 PS OA, GW 9 CY) a more recent one and is characterised by houses that use modern construction materials, glass surfaces using thermoplastic materials and enameled or nickeled handrails.

Figure 4. Cluster dendrogram of architectural trends **a.** Gypsy respondents; **b.** Romanian respondents. Source: Extracts from Nvivo 11 outputs.

a.



b.



The exogenous analysis of the 4b cluster dendrogram shows the same situation, respectively a group of respondents (RM 5 SS OA, RM 8 SS YA, RM 9 C YA, RW 1 PS OA, RW 3 C YA, RW 4 C YA, RW 6 PS YA si RW 8 PS OA) who affirm the fact that there has not been a different evolutive phasis in the way that Roma houses have been built because they were built randomly according to the owners' preferences generally oriented to oversize houses to display their welfare. The second cluster is made up of respondents (RW 7 C YA, RW 9 C OA) that support the existence of trends in Roma architecture, respectively the fashion trend of the 1990s when gypsies were building pitched roof houses followed by the adoption of a modern style.

Therefore, one may affirm that there are fashion trends in the architecture specific to Roma communities that are recognised by both Roma and Romanian respondents. However, the contrasting architecture of palace type inevitably loses ground, being often reinterpreted and even abandoned in favour of the modern one, under the influence of contemporary consumer tendencies (Figure 5 a, b).

Figure 5. Buzescu village, Teleorman county: **a.** Modern architecture built in 2010 (using modern roofing tiles); **b.** Detailed picture. Foto: I. Vijulie, 2014.



a.



b.

In this way, the new residential districts include enormous buildings that are used in their steel, glass and aluminium construction, alternating with brick materials, often in their appearance rivalling new buildings for institutional headquarters. This construction style proves the fact that the tendency is to keep up with the new building materials, as the modern outlook of Roma houses has gradually replaced the old style (illustrated

above) which will probably disappear (Figure 6) in parallel with the mysterious traditions and other cultural elements of this surprising ethnic group.

Consequently, the highly debated Roma palace architecture loses ground in favour of the modern one. In this context, it does not have the premises to become an established, officially-recognised style specific for Roma communities and so looks more like a passing fancy.

Figure 6. Strehaia town, Mehedinți county: Modern and old architecture. Foto: I. Vijulie, 2016



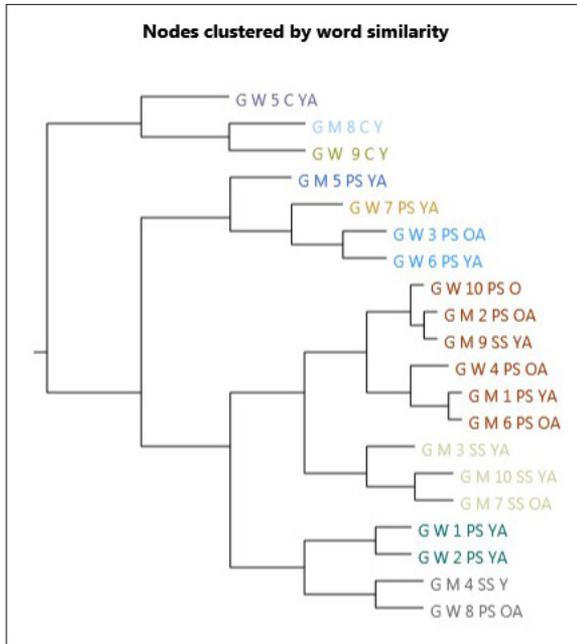
The endogenous/exogenous perception upon the aesthetics of beauty/ugliness

The aesthetics of beauty/ugliness generate powerful controversies at the level of the exogenous and endogenous perception, determining an aesthetic dilemma which, as an issue, oscillates to define a specific ethno-cultural manifestation or a hybrid modernism associated with inaesthetics. In the present case study, the architectural trend associated with gypsy palaces is the reflection of a hierarchical power expressed economically within a society lacking a well-defined system of values and for which the *house* is one of the symbols of the contemporary social success.

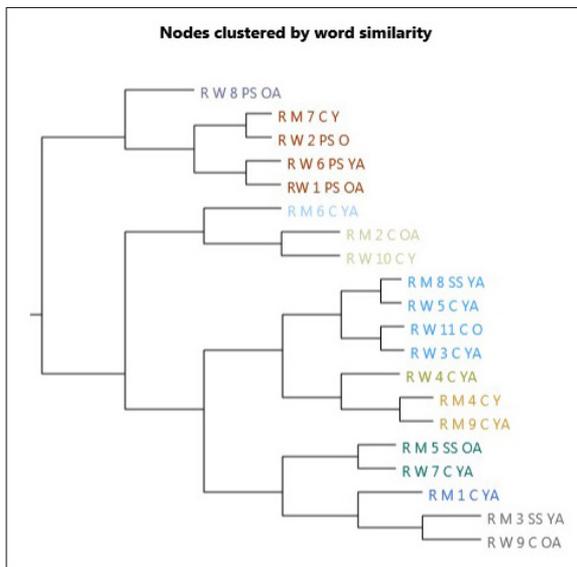
In analysing the type architecture specific to gypsy palaces, our study has referred to the perception of all interviewed persons both Roma and Romanians, which was further analysed in Nvivo11 through the word-cloud

Figure 8. Cluster dendrogram of architectural perception **a.** endogenous perception **b.** exogenous perception. Source: Extracts from Nvivo 11 outputs.

a.



b.



already share a negative perception upon the *palace* architecture (GW 5 C YA, GM 8 CY, GM 5 PS YA). This aspect is suggestive in indicating an existing change of taste, regarding the style and construction materials on the basis of the inconstantly evolving concept of beauty, dictated more by economic than cultural reasons in the case of Roma villas.

In fact, these answers were given by respondents belonging to young and young adult groups representing college graduates and, consequently, by a younger and more educated new social layer displaying other tastes in the domain. The negative perception of respondents here was motivated by the presence of a varied mix of architectonic styles, of the too vividly and stridently colours of houses or towers and other incompatible ornamental elements.

The exogenous perception of the aesthetics of beauty/ugliness (Figure 8 b) shows the fact that a section of the respondents consider the differences in architecture as a source of disequilibrium and incongruity at the level of aesthetics sometimes appreciated as a form of visual pollution. The analysis of this architectural phenomenon at the level of Roma communities has demonstrated the fact that the exogenous perception is rather a negative one (75 per cent of the answers). The reasons for the exogenous negative perception on these houses are driven by the same architectural specific, considered this time by outsiders or the majoritary ethnic group (Romanian population) as being too stridently kitsch and not integrated in the landscape, hence incompatible with the other styles present in the settlement area (by the RM 6 C YA, RM 2 C OA; RW 10 C Y, RM 5 SS OA and RW 7 C YA1 subclusters). One disagreement regarding the houses with little towers is also mentioned (subclusters RM 8 SS YA; RW 5 C YA, RW 11 C O and RW3 C YA) (Figure 8 a, b).

One may also remark on the fact that the majority of the respondents appreciating the beauty of the architecture of Roma houses had a low level of education (graduates of primary school) as, for them, the beauty is expressed mostly by the opulence of the construction perceived not in aesthetic terms, but as a way to affirm themselves in society and display their wealth. Hence, when they describe the aesthetics of the beauty, they rather identify attributes linked to the size of the house, the expensive building materials as the marble and the travertine or the luxurious objects such as the furniture made of exotic essence wood, the cobalt or crystal chandeliers, the mural paintings or even the insertion of golden coins in

the walls (RW 8 PS OA, RM 7 CY, RW 2 PS O, RW 6 PS YA, RW 1 PS OA). The positive perception of Romanian respondents doesn't refer to the style mixture, colours or the type of the roof. In fact, the dwellings of Roma communities are considered attractive by some Romanian respondents as a consequence of their opulent appearance which obviously displays material welfare.

From the opposite perspective, the negative perception towards Roma houses belongs rather to persons with a higher education level, no matter if they are Roma or Romanian ethnics. In their case, the mental representation of the aesthetics of beauty means moderation in ornamenting and homogeneity when interpreting an architectonic style. As regards the category of those with a positive perception on Roma houses, one should remark upon the fact that for them the beauty of these constructions overlaps the oversized houses, so visible in the landscape to reflect opulence, material welfare, social power and, consequently, a higher socio-economic stratum.

Powerfully contrasting with the local architectural landscape, gypsies' palaces represent a specific style which recently appeared as a cultural way of manifestation of an important ethnic group in Romania – namely, the Roma population – and which, in spite of the opposite reactions it generates, should be accepted and be the subject of appropriate urban planning and architecture legislation.

Discussion

The above study has assumed a series of research limitations determined by the reduced number of scientific papers on this subject in both the international literature and based in Romania. It has also examined the existence of controversial opinions in autochthonous media sources that show clear tendencies to characterise Roma architecture as being inaesthetic. Moreover, the absence of a data basis may certify the existence of such architectural units, except for metadata obtained through field research etc.

In this context, our study may be the starting basis for elaborating future research on this topic, which may expand their focus on confronting the reality on field with the urban plans of Romanian settlements comprising a representative Roma population. These studies could adjust and correct the inconsistency between the content of released building authorisations

and the household characteristics, which is a situation frequently encountered within Roma communities in Romania.

Conclusions

The study of *palace* architecture specific to Roma communities in Romania has focused on a less approached topic by the scientific literature up until present moment. According to the results of the study, one may remark upon the fact that before 1990, Roma communities were positioned at the peripheric areas of residential districts within the settlements studied here.

The much-debated style in terms of concept, but non-validated by specialists as being an architectonic style and obviously typical for Roma communities shows at least two fashion trends, namely. One of the first palace buildings with little towers recalls pagodas, while other more modern villas are built in a manner similar to Western office buildings. The second one constitutes a fashion determined by taste and education level, and not least by the power of purchase and the need to impress economically than an expression of some architectural traditions which are culturally fundamented. Thus, we may affirm that the trend of houses with little towers is already belonging to the past as it didn't have the time to become a recognised style and being gradually replaced at present by modern houses.

The fact that the aesthetics of beauty are taken from the point of view of both endogenous (respondents within Roma community) and of exogenous (respondents outside Roma community) perception shows us that the Roma houses phenomenon is characterised by attributes connected to the size and the opulence of the dwelling and not by specific architectural elements. The aesthetics of ugliness is seen from the exogenous and endogenous point of view as being conditioned by the house's appearance, the taste in combining the architectural style, the accessorisation degree as an oversized house is not necessarily beautiful.

The positive perception on the *palace* architecture is supported by both Roma and Romanian respondents through their mentioning of characteristics connected to the size of the house, the luxury and the quality of the used materials and not necessarily to architectural elements. These perceptions obviously reflect the display through the intermediary of buildings of an implicit economic and social power. As with any other type of construc-

tion, with a new generation Roma palaces have fallen out of fashion their aesthetic elements still enthrall their owners, even today. However, they are no longer liked or appreciated by the young Roma people who opt for elements considered to be more modern, both as technique and in a way of construction and in terms of external ornamenting.

References

- Adevărul 2012 Palatele din Strehaiia, ridicate din afaceri dubioase, inexistente în acte. Available at: http://adevarul.ro/locale/turnu-severin/palatele-strehaia-ridicate-afaceri-dubioase-inexistente-acte-1_50ae473b7c42d5a6639b45b2/index.html (15.11.2015).
- ANR 2012 Raport de activitate. Available at: <http://www.anr.gov.ro/docs/rapoarte/Raport2012.doc> (12.02.2016).
- Burtea, V. 1994 Neamurile de romi și modul lor de viață. *Sociologie Românească* 2(3): 257–273.
- Calzi, R., Corno, P., Gianferro, C. 2007 *Gypsy Architecture: Houses of the Roma in Eastern Europe*. Edition Axel Menges.
- Celac, M. 2005 Cui i-e frică de palatele țigănești? Available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2005/07/050721_mariana_celac.shtml (12.02.2016).
- Chelcea, I. 1994 *Țigani din România*. Monografie etnografică. Bucharest, Romania.
- Dancea, D. 2015 Minune la Timișoara: noua generație de romi demolează turnulețele palatelor celebre. Available at: http://adevarul.ro/locale/timisoara/minune-timisoara-noua-generatie-romi-demoleaza-turnuletele-palatelor-celebrelumea-arhitect--e-alta-generatie-nu-mai-gusta-lucrurile-astea-1_54ff-1501448e03c0fd6d46e8/index.html (12.02.2016).
- Delépine, S. 2007 *Quartiers Tsiganes*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Garcia-Campayo, J., Alda, M. 2007 Illness behavior and cultural characteristics of the gypsy population in Spain. *Actas Espanolas de Psiquiatria* 35(1): 59–66.
- Gay y Blasco, P. 1999 *Gypsies in Madrid: Sex, Gender and the Performance of Identity*. Oxford, UK: Berg.
- Grăf, R. 2008 'Palatele țigănești Arhitectură și cultură', ISPM, Working Papers 2009(9).
- Kanal, D. 2013 Asta-i România. Palatele țigănești vor deveni obiective turistice. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sw_uezkgZM8 (15.10.2015).

- Kendall, S. 1997 'Sites of resistance: Places on the margin — the Traveller home-place' in T. Acton (ed.) *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity*, University of Hertfordshire Press.
- Leech, N. L., Onwuegbuzie, A. J. 2011 Beyond constant comparison qualitative data analysis: using nvivo. *School Psychology Quarterly* 26(1): 70–84, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0022711>
- Lefter, I. B. 2004 'O arhitectă: Mariana Celac II', *Observatorul Cultural* Available at: [http://www.observatorcultural.ro/O-arhitectura-Mariana-Celac-\(II\)*articleID_11736-articles_details.html](http://www.observatorcultural.ro/O-arhitectura-Mariana-Celac-(II)*articleID_11736-articles_details.html) (15.10.2015).
- Levinson, M. 2005 The role of play in the formation and maintenance of cultural identity. *Gypsy Children in Home and School Contexts. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 34(5): 499–532, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605279018>
- Levinson, M., Sparkes, A. 2004 Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33(6): 704–734, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241604269323>
- National Geographic 2012 Home of the Roma Kings. Available at: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2012/09/wealthy-roma/gachet-kashinsky-photography> (15.10.2015).
- O casa pe zi, 2009 'Toate casele au un arhitect!' Available at: <https://ocasapezi.wordpress.com/2009/03/11/toate-casele-au-un-arhitect/> (15.10.2015).
- Pavelescu, V. 2007 Palatele țigănești- kitsch architectural. Available at: <http://www.ziuaconstanta.ro/stiri/reportaj/palatele-tiganesti-kitsch-arhitectural-220129.html> (15.10.2015).
- Posavec, K. 2000 Sociocultural characteristics and the position of gypsies in Europe – From expulsion to integration. *DRUSTVENA ISTRAZIVANJA* 9(2–3): 229–250.
- Preda, M. 2010 *Etnia rromă din Oltenia între tradiție și modernitate. Geografie umană*. Editura Universității din București, Bucharest, Romania.
- Preda, M., Vijulie, I., Manea, G., Mareci, A. 2015 The customary identity of the Coppersmiths clan in Oltenia: between tradition and modernity. *Eastern European Countryside* 21(1): 63–80, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/eec-2015-0004>
- Rfi 2008 Igloo inventariază palatele rromilor. Available at: <http://www.rfi.ro/articol/stiri/cultura/igloo-inventariaza-palatele-rromilor> (15.10.2015).
- Ruegg, F. 2013 Gypsy Palaces: A New Visibility for the Roma in Romania? *Urbanities* 3(1): 3–20.

- Ruegg, F., Boscoboinik, A. (ed.) 2009 *Nouvelles identités rom en Europe centrale & orientale*. Special Issue *Transitions* 48(2), Université de Genève.
- Severin, Ziare 2013 *Palatele țiganilor de la Strehăia construite din țepe date statului*. Available at: <http://www.ziare.com/severin/stiri-actualitate/palatele-tiganilor-de-la-strehaia-construite-din-tepe-date-statului-3570970> (15.10.2015).
- Sharethis 2014 *Palatele țigănești din România*. Available at: <http://sharethis.ro/2014/06/14/palatele-tiganesti-din-romania> (15.10.2015).
- Smith, D., Greenfields, M. 2012 *Housed Gypsies and Travellers in the UK: Work, exclusion and adaptation*. *Institute of Race Relations* 53(3): 48–64, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396811425985>
- Smith, F., Crano, W. 1977 *Patterns of Cultural Diffusion: Analyses of Trait Associations Across Societies By Content and Geographical Proximity*, *Cross-Cultural Research*, 12(3): 145–167, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/106939717701200301>
- Stăncioiu, D. 2011 *Palatele țigănești din Câmpia Turzii, exemplu negativ în toată Europa*. Available at: <http://www.campia-express.ro/stiri/international/palatele-tiganesti-din-campia-turzii-exemplu-negativ-in-toata-europa> (15.10.2015).
- Suciu, A. I., Culea, M. 2015 *The risk of losing national identity in the twenty-first century Romania, or national identity from adaptation to self-censorship*. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 18(1).
- Tănașă, C. 2013 *Zănea*. *Wall Street-ul Țiganilor*. Available at: <http://www.7est.ro/exclusiv-7est/reportaje/item/1609-exclusiv-zanea-wall-street-ul-tiganilor-palatele-ridicate-din-evaziune-text-integral.html> (15.10.2015).
- Theodosiou, A. 2011 *Multiculturalism and the catachresis of otherness: Settling Gypsies, unsettling Gypsy belongings*. *Critique of Anthropology* 31(2): 89–107, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X11399971>
- Tomlinson, E. 2007 *The “Palaces” of the Romanian Roma: A claim to citizenship*. *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 19(1): 77–90.
- Tudora, I. 2009 *Case frumoase/case urâte în peisajul bucureștean*, in Mihăilescu, V. (Editor), *Etnografii urbane*. *Cotidianul văzut de aproape*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, Romania, pp. 51–64.
- Vincze et al. 2013 *Mapping roma marginalization in local context*. *STUDIA UBB SOCIOLOGIA* LVIII(2): 111–154.
- Voroneanu, M. R. 2012 *In whose image?: Building a gypsy identity, one image at a time*. *International Journal of the Image* 2(2): 89–96.

Zeman, Cl. et al. 2003 Roma health issues: A review of the literature and discussion. *Ethnicity & Health* 8(3): 223–249.

ZZonline 2012 National Geographic: Palatele țiganilor din comuna Buzescu. Available at: <http://www.zigzagonline.ro/povesti-povestiri/national-geographic-fotoreportaj-despre-romania-palatele-tiganilor-din-buzescu-judetul-teleorman.html> (15.10.2015).