

E-Learning Urban Landscape Changes in Post-Socialist Romania Using Digital Mapping

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Abstract

This paper is based on the research results of an internal fellowship project implemented in 2019 and supported by the STAR-UBB Institute, belonging to Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The project is titled “Digital Cluj-Napoca: Enabling Learning and Research by Integrating the Most Recent Trends for Knowing about and Using Urban Areas”. The aim of this project was to create an open source online digital product (i.e. an interactive map integrated into a new website) to be used by Geography university students and their professors during the educational process within Human and Regional Geography, when studying the theory of representations. This interactive map is created for Cluj-Napoca and, together with other information on the website, it (re)presents the urban changes it has undergone from late 19th century to the present day, using diverse images and text as media for obtaining the necessary information (photographs, remote sensing images, Google street view, mass-media articles, etc.). Our focus was on industrial sites. For this paper, we chose two of them: “Ursus” Breweries and “Flacăra” Clothing Factory. Using the product ensures correct learning of concepts and supports users’ development of their critical thinking and professional skills for territorial analysis.

Keywords: Representations, Web sources, Digital map, Urban development

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Geography higher education in Romania was the focus of a series of studies in recent years, aiming at describing students’ competences to explore, present and represent space. The urban space and its changes has been a generous topic in this educational context (Bagoly-Simó et al., 2016; Ursu et al., 2019), while attention to land use changes in general, in post-socialist Romania, has been a hot research theme (Petrișor and Petrișor, 2018).

The opportunities of e-learning Geography enabled Romanian researchers to consider the use of diverse tools and software: Facebook (Dulamă et al., 2015), GIS (Ilovan et al., 2016a), Google

Earth (Osaci-Costache et al., 2015), all this taking into account the relevance and usefulness of online research methods for Geography (Ilovan et al, 2016b). In addition, studies assessed the influence of media on education (Cuc, 2014b), of communication systems (Cuc, 2014a) and of learning programmes (Manea, 2015) on supporting education, besides other factors that lead to academic success (Cuc, 2019; Stan and Manea, 2015). To sum up, studies on academic success and assessment in higher education have shown the high diversity of factors influencing students' learning achievement. These research results form the basis of our educational project.

Developing university students' competences to explore, present and represent the urban space, so relevant for their professional improvement (Ursu et al., 2019), was an objective of this project. However, the aim of this paper is to offer university students feedforward – proved to be highly useful (Dulamă and Ilovan, 2016) – when working with digital sources, like the website we created: <https://a60194.wixsite.com/digitalcluj> and the integrated interactive map (Echipa Digital Cluj-Napoca, 2019a).

This website was created within the project *Digital Cluj-Napoca: Enabling Learning and Research by Integrating the Most Recent Trends for Knowing about and Using Urban Areas*, coordinated by the first author. The project was financed by STAR-UBB Institute (The Institute of Advanced Studies in Science and Technology), within an Advanced Internal Fellowship (didactic excellence informed by scientific research). This fellowship project was hosted by the Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism belonging to the Faculty of Geography, and unfolded in July and August 2019. The aim of the project was to realise an open source online digital product, with a didactic aim, for the professors, researchers and students of Babeş-Bolyai University and not only. This digital product is based on the theory of representations considered in Human Geography and in other sciences as well (Sociology, Architecture, Anthropology, etc.).

Specialty literature renders the researchers' interest in studying human communities and their living environment using this theory, but there are not enough digital products that enable university students' fast learning of its main ideas and ways of integrating it in research and didactic projects. This project fills in the gap and, in addition, gets participants involved in activities based on the online environment (collecting the data, digitising data, creating the interactive map, and creating the website itself).

The final products of the project (map and website) present information about the factories of Cluj-Napoca Municipium, where the urban changes from the end of the 19th century to nowadays are rendered by means of using varied images (photographs, remote sensing images, Google street view) and text. In this paper, we chose two factories as case studies: "Ursus" Breweries and "Flacăra" Clothing Factory to exemplify the urban landscape changes, while connecting the theory of representations with ICT within the project is the topic of another forthcoming paper (Ilovan et al., 2019).

2. Material and Method

2.1. Data Collecting, Procedure and Research Material

The research material was represented by the research process carried out by the authors of this paper, the Internet mediated documentation and the use of the printed sources, as rendered in the references part available on the website created for Digital Cluj-Napoca (Echipa Digital Cluj-Napoca, 2019a). We collected the data through bibliographic research, using visual methods and the content analysis method for interpreting the data. We also considered how to analyse and interpret data in educational sciences (Magdaş, 2018). Both statistical-based methods (with their

debated relevance and challenges – Petrișor, 2019) and qualitative ones (Ilovan and Doroftei, 2017) were used when approaching online information within our project on Digital Cluj-Napoca.

2.2. Participants

The fellowship project had as target group the members of the Centre for Research on Settlements and Urbanism, teaching staff and researchers of the entire Research Strategic Infrastructure of Babeș-Bolyai University, as well as Bachelor, M.Sc. and Ph.D. students, who would freely use the online digital product, and colleagues who created the digital product (map and the website hosting it). The latter formed the Digital Cluj-Napoca Team and are the authors of this paper: one full professor from the Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, one associate professor from the Faculty of Geography, and, from the same faculty: two Ph.D. students and three M.Sc. students. As mentioned above, the scientific coordinator (Dr. Oana-Ramona Ilovan, the fellowship holder), participated in research, in July and August 2019, and guided the process of completing the study.

3. Results and Discussions

This section includes six sub-chapters, presenting and discussing the following: the use of web sources and its challenges; information quantity on the website; analysis of the digital map; information quality and suggestions for the future users of the website and digital map; analysis of the urban landscape changes, based on online mass media articles; analysis of the online information, similarities and differences between the two case studies.

3.1. The use of web sources and its challenges

Taking information from the online environment may seem easy, but there are issues concerning information clarity and veracity. Specialists from Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) (information analysts) research open sources: mass media, written publications, and web sources. Such research supposes attention and high synthesis capacity when collecting relevant information (Cernat, 2017). Because most of the information analysts activate in fields of national security, they pay a lot of attention to information credibility, relevance and completeness (Nițu, 2011). Analysts mix analytical methods with conventional and non-conventional ones, observing scientific rigour, and also using their imagination and intuition (Nițu, 2011).

At present, the syntagm “fake news” – “syntagm of year 2017” according to Collins Dictionary – (Singh, 2017), is present in the official declarations of important statement (Trump, 2017) and in numerous papers and books, especially about fighting fake news (Bârgăoanu, 2018). The Romanian Information System posted on its Facebook page an educational video (SRI, 2019) on ways of controlling fake news and questions that help us establish information veracity in the online environment (“Has anyone else written about this topic? How credible is the information source? Has anybody signed the article? Who is the author? Is the tone neutral and informative? Does the content match the title? Is the publication date recent? Who is quoted?”) (SRI, 2019).

Popa (2015) proposes four criteria for selecting and capitalising information. He suggests realising a table (Table 1) for “preliminary assessment”, and proposes information analysis on three levels (low, medium, high), in order to select the most relevant true information.

Table 1. Preliminary assessment of data and information sources

Document title	Source	Preliminary assessment			
		Credibility	Objectivity	Accuracy	Relevance

Source: Popa, 2015, p. 162

Considering the strategy proposed by Popa (2015), we notice that official declarations have high credibility level, and publications provided by national and international bodies have a high level of credibility, objectivity, accuracy, and relevance. Assessing information from sure sources is easier, and the analyst establishes only the information relevance for his or her study, whilst assessing mass media articles is more difficult.

The above-mentioned theoretical information was very useful for us when we realised the website for our project, because most information was from mass media articles.

3.2. Information quantity on the website

For each factory, the information on the website was structured in an (a) abstract about its evolution, (b) images (photographs or other representations of the factory in the online environment or in printed books), and (c) the list of references for text and images.

For “Ursus” Breweries, we posted on the website 18 images and their sources as well as 11 sources (accessed between 1 and 9 July 2019) for the abstract on the history of this factory. For “Flacăra” Clothing Factory, we posted 75 images and their sources and 15 sources for the text (same accession period as above). In addition, five other sources – monographs of Cluj-Napoca Municipium or of the Cluj County – were used for each. All the available online sources for the text of the abstract were used and mentioned in the reference list posted on the site for each factory, while a selection was realised in the case of the images. However, most of the images we found for each factory were uploaded.

3.3. Analysis of the digital map on the website

In this part, we included only a synthesis of the results of the entire project related to the map, as details are available in a forthcoming paper (Iovan et al., 2019). The map was titled *Digital Cluj-Napoca Map (1850-1989)* (<https://a60194.wixsite.com/digitalcluj/evolutia-industriei-in-cluj-napoca>). The structure of the map is explained by the legend, and the following elements were represented: the transport network (European, national and county roads, tram line and railway) and the hydrographical network, the industrial units according to four evolution periods (before 1918, 1919-1947, 1948-1960, and 1961-1989) and the industrial areas (East, Central, and West). It is a map of the main industrial units of Cluj-Napoca during 1850 and 1989.

It was realised in Autodesk AutoCAD 2015 programme. Geographers usually use GIS programmes, but we considered here that AutoCAD was more appropriate because, in Urbanism and in city mapping at large scale, the details are very important and AutoCAD is realised for high precision. Its disadvantage in comparison to GIS is that it lacks certain automatism in realising maps. Therefore, realising this map in AutoCAD was mainly a manual process.

3.4. Information quality and suggestions for future users of the website and digital map

Text information is objectively presented in the form of short or longer text abstracts. For further information, the users should access the references included on the website for each factory, especially the mass media links that were at the basis of most of the presented information. Information was presented in a chronological order related to the evolution of factories and many concrete data are included (e.g. number of employees, production). In addition, for each factory a visual discourse is made up of images from diverse online and printed sources.

In case users take website information for their projects, they should make a synthesis of this information first. Information on the site is filtered and more complex studies require more in-depth research. Users should compare the information from the website (map, text and images) with information from other sources (direct observation, oral history, printed and online sources).

3.5. Analysis of the urban landscape changes, based on online mass media articles

The presented information about the two case studies (Tables 2 and 3) had as source the online mass media. In Tables 2 and 3, we systemised this information in several categories (causes of factory closure, situation after 1989, impact on the urban landscape, and conclusions), but without including here the source of each information piece. Identification of sources can be realised on the website of the project, where information from other sources is available as well (monographs of Cluj County and of Cluj-Napoca).

Table 2. Urban landscape changes following the closure of “Ursus” Breweries (set up in 1878)

Causes of factory closure	High operating costs; lack of flexibility of the factory location; pressure for the respective spaces to be used more efficiently; city sprawl; factory location in the central city area which prevents its extension and is against urbanism regulations.
Situation after 1989	In 2006, the factory was taken over by SAB Miller, which decided closure of production four years later. In 2010, the factory was closed and in 2013 was partly demolished. A small beer house was set up, with terrace and restaurant, and the rest of the land was sold by SAB Miller to influential businessmen of Cluj-Napoca. In 2016, “Platinia” commercial and residential complex was opened (187 varied-size apartments, with an average price of approximately 1,500 Euro/m ² ; 400 Euro/m ² is the price of land in the respective area). If “Ursus” Breweries decided to sell the land of the former factory, its price would reach about 4 million Euro.
Impact on the urban landscape	They have kept one building where unfiltered beer is produced for the “Cluj Beer Factory” Restaurant (the clients can see how the technological process takes place). The area formerly occupied by “Ursus” Breweries is occupied at present by “Platinia” commercial and residential complex. A radical urban landscape change has taken place: from industrial landscape to a modern luxury residential and commercial one. A landscape contrast is to be noticed between six or eight storeys high “Platinia” complex and the much lower “Ursus” Beer Factory. Transition was made from an industrial unit to spaces for the tertiary sector. Another contrast is introduced by their functions (small production unit, on one hand, and large consumption areas on the other).
Conclusions	Landscape radically changed and people are now interested in its residential and relaxation functions (“Platinia” Mall). The initial idea of creating a beer museum would have increased even more the attractiveness of the area from an architectural point of view, and a cultural landscape would have been created which would have been more consistent with the modern building services complex.

Source: Echipa Digital Cluj-Napoca, 2019b

Table 3. Urban landscape changes following the closure of “Flacăra” Clothing Factory (set up in 1948)

Causes of factory closure	Low profit and fiscal value of the factory; large debts and insolvency; investors were not able to fully regenerate the buildings of the former factory; permanent changes in shareholding.
Situation after 1989	The factory was set up in 1949, and at the beginning of the 1950s it produced military uniforms; later on, it produced clothing for export and it was privatised in 1997. In 2002, it underwent partition and its land and buildings were bought by a real estate company. In 2008 (a real estate boom), the land of the former factory – 18,000 m ² – was sold for almost 1,000 de Euro/m ² . The factory underwent partition, and the machineries were taken over by the underwear producer Jolidon, and the real estate assets were sold to a foreign company: LBBW Immobilien, the real estate division of a German financial group. The latter even got approval to erect a part of the buildings the investors wished for (there were plans for a mixt functions assembly planned to be

	<p>20 storeys high). They eventually sold their shares to iQUEST company.</p> <p>In 2009, there were plans for a grandiose project. This was a multifunctional assembly with five towers and two entries from different streets, underground parking on three levels, with a total of 1,100 parking lots and, between the buildings the architects planned green areas for recreation, restaurants and coffee shops, and even a swimming pool for residents.</p> <p>Another stage in the factory history was when spaces were rented for approximately one Euro/m² to young artists. They did not receive any utilities for the rent, but their presence was important for these utilities to be introduced and the more comfortable spaces had high rents.</p> <p>In 2015, iQUEST company announced that they would move their headquarters from Cluj-Napoca to an A class office building, on the industrial platform of the former “Flacăra” Clothing Factory. The total land surface was of approximately 18,200 m², the offices occupying 6,000 m². A promise realised in the mass media was that the company would keep and renovate the factory buildings, but this did not happen. They built the new building for the headquarters of iQUEST on the place of the former factory which was demolished.</p>
Impact on the urban landscape	The construction of the building for the IT company determined complete erasure of the former “Flacăra” Clothing Factory. The industrial landscape was transformed radically into a modern one, with high stately buildings. Transition was made from industrial units to services.
Conclusions	<p>A defining element is the factory partition in smaller factories and real estate companies belonging to businessmen influential in the city.</p> <p>The area has become more attractive to people because of the aspect of the buildings and the promenade. If the initial idea of arranging sports fields would have been maintained, the attractiveness of the area would have been higher and the cultural landscape created would have been one for recreation activities.</p>

Source: Echipa Digital Cluj-Napoca, 2019c

3.6. Analysis of the online information for the two case studies

Similarities. Similarly to industry at the national level, the industry of Cluj-Napoca had approximately the same fate: factories were not modernised and thus their productivity and profitability were decreasing down to eventual bankruptcy. After most of the factories were closed, the land owners sold the respective plots, following real estate development with commercial and residential functions. “Ursus” Breweries (set up in 1878) and “Flacăra” Clothing Factory (1948) observed the same pattern. Both factories were in a critical situation at the beginning of the 2000s and soon their activity closed.

The causes leading to closure and demolition were: the decrease of their fiscal value and profit, insolvency, location problems, lack of regeneration for buildings, sale of their land to businessmen that built real estates for residential and service purposes. The economic factor was the one that dictated land use. The factories, having large land surface, were sold at small prices (because of the state of buildings and soil) and with few improvement works, the price of the ‘clean’ land was higher than the initial one.

A major change of landscape has taken place: from authentic industrial landscape to one with large and high modern buildings for residential or service purposes.

Differences. In the case of “Flacăra” Clothing Factory, the management was unstable. This was generated by factory partition, which led to the appearance of new shareholders who did not succeed in straightening the situation. In the case of “Ursus” Breweries, even if a big part of it was demolished, investment was made for setting up a small beer house with terrace and restaurant, besides the fact that the rest of the land was sold to those who built “Platinia” residential and commercial complex. The small beer house created a contrast in landscape to “Platinia”, while “Flacăra” Clothing Factory was completely replaced by the new headquarters of the iQUEST IT

Company. However, the building of the clothing factory hosted for a short period artists' workshops (similarly to the Paintbrush Factory), but that was not considered profitable by the owners of the building.

4. Conclusions

Using the digital map and the website, besides enabling correct learning of geographical concepts, it supports its creators' and users' development of critical thinking and of some necessary competences when realising territorial analyses (i.e. analysing maps, analysing and interpreting territorial relations at the urban level, identifying solutions to real territorial development problems).

A follow up to this project could be the involvement of the target group in field research to get direct contact with characteristic problems of the former and present industrial areas (e.g. economic, social and environmental).

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