THE EFFECT OF ETHNIC MINORITY. THE POWER OF EXAMPLE – THE GERMANS IN ROMANIA

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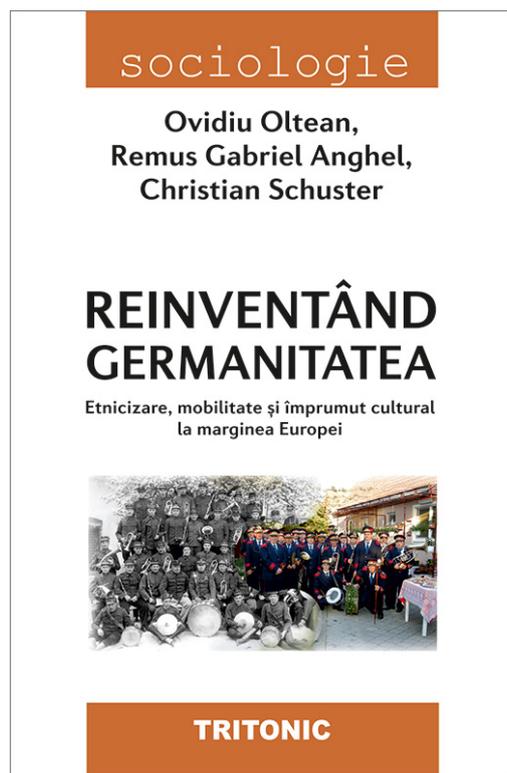scridon.ioana@yahoo.com

THE GERMAN WORLD AND PHILO-GERMANNESS IN DISCUSSION

The volume *Reinventing Germanness. Ethnicization, Mobility, and Cultural Borrowing at the Margins of Europe* saw the light in Bucharest, in 2017, at Triton Publishing House (one of the best ranked publishing houses in Romania), under the close supervision of the researchers Ovidiu Oltean, Remus Gabriel Anghel, and Christian Schuster. In the 390 pages of this volume, one of the main issues is the German world within the current context and in different fields, with specific examples of the 2017 realities.

The topic of this volume is of interest to editors, authors, and specialists with research in History, Philosophy, Sociology, and Geography, on issues like migration, ethnicity, tourism, cultural heritage, ethnic identity, anthropology, and electoral behaviour.

The volume contains 12 papers divided in 4 chapters: *Heritage of values and branding; Migration, mobility and social change; Public images and identity ideologies* and *Cultural borrowing and local dynamic*. The publication also includes an extended summary by Remus Anghel, Ovidiu Oltean, and Christian Schuster, and a section titled *Introduction. The theoretical and empirical dilemmas of a paradoxical process,* by Remus Anghel and Ovidiu Oltean.

The idea of this volume and the hypothesis stated in the abstract started from a research project ("Getting back the migrants' voice. Local perspectives on migration, development and social change in Romania"), which the editors had in process between 2011 and 2016.

TiD

Ioana HAPCA
The Effect of Ethnic Minority. The Power of the Example – The Germans in Romania

137

The field study developed during this project aimed at discovering the real situation of the Germans from Transylvania: the depopulation of their villages and traditional households; the houses with German architecture inhabited by other ethnic groups; associations or dancing German groups where a very small number of members are Germans; the transfer of German identity to other coexisting ethnics; as well as traditions and specific holidays celebrated by other ethnicities.

The topic of the volume is a very interesting one given the fact that very few studies really analyse German ethnics after the 1990s exodus (*cf.* Michalon, 2003a, 2003b; Anghel, 1999, 2012, 2013, 2016, 2018; Cercel, 2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2017; Kührer-Wielach, 2016; Baier, 2015, etc.), and there are even fewer that gave credit studying such a variable and sensitive subject like the rebirth of Germany or its cultural transfer. Most scientific case studies, already published and presented in scientific groups, focus on the relevant events in which the ethnic groups from Romania took part.

Each of the coordinators of this volume handled this subject of the German world, at a small and also at a large scale, through personal experiences, like outsiders of the German space or from the perspective of the researcher familiar with the German ethnicity, but without being involved in cultural activities, or from the perspective of the researcher with German ethnic origins, as his own experience and assumed Germanness.

The changes in representation of the German group from Transylvania were influenced mainly by the migration of the Germans from Transylvania, leading to the process of Germans becoming Romanians, turning German traditions into Romanian ones, or adopting the German culture as a reconfiguration of its own identity. The Germans' emigration phenomenon was the one that determined some positional changes not only within the German community, but also in other communities living there or even among Romanians, as the majority of the population.

The volume aims at focusing on the importance of this phenomenon as well as on the social effects which have led to the end of the Germans' emigration process. It is actually about the rebirth of Germans through the social and cultural embracement event (i.e. the assumption or adoption of the German identity elements such as language, religion, and tradition) at the margins of the German space, places that were left without German population starting with World War II and ending in the 1990s, when the exodus reached its peak. The questions that grounded this research wanted to highlight the true reasons of this identity rebirth: which are the reasons for the presence of Germanness in Romania in the absence of or with poor presence of ethnic Germans?

Within the field of the social sciences, the topic refers to the German world – ethnics and speakers – through different identity transfer processes using different tools, like schools with German language courses, customs and traditions, tools which produce effects in terms of dynamics of the German identity in Romania. Also, the German companies in Romania have become more relevant and are turning towards centres where there are German speaking people and this is how the interest in activities and social projects increases through foundations, and associations developing tourism from a German space to a Romanian one. The presence of a material German heritage in Romania is an opportunity for the development of ethnic tourism. In the Saxon settlements (with few Germans), where NGOs and other institutions are involved in informing and promoting the Saxon heritage, there has been ascertained a high level of awareness of the heritage value and inhabitants' significant increase of involvement into the maintenance of local specificity.

Ioana HAPCA

The Effect of Ethnic Minority. The Power of the Example – The Germans in Romania

138

All these issues are very topical. This volume imposes scientific research rules and it presents an on-going perspective of future research. The rebirth of Germans is a phenomenon which underlines the current status of German ethnics in Romania and it presents the perspectives which were dark until the 1990s and reflected the decrease of the German ethnics and the slow extinction of the German population in Romania.

From the point of view of mobility, the situation of the German minority was interesting. They return regularly to Romania, even for a short period, to visit their property (houses and land), not only to remember the life spent in Romania, but also to maintain the relationship with the Romanians that benefit from their sold or donated property. In time, the cooperation between the former and current owner has become a good example of interethnic cooperation based on reciprocity and acceptance. Through school, church, heritage, inter-cultural marriages, participation to specific German events and so on, these all have led to a specific feeling of membership to the German community until entirely embracing the German identity.

The authors of this volume have kept a trend of interest for the German community in different research papers which have shown that the models for living together are found everywhere in Romania, resisting the political instrumentalization, which is becoming more and more popular. Remus Gabriel Anghel, for example, leads the Institute for Studying National Minorities and he is also a professor at the Faculty of Political and Administrative Studies and Communication of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca and Christian Schuster is a lecturer at the Faculty of European Studies, Department of International Affairs and German Studies, part of the same university, and also a researcher for NetPOL (Network Political Communication) at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz.

STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

The logical structure, with well-shaped chapters and papers for each chapter, put together interesting themes which complete a painting. The subjects approached build a puzzle of knowledge and continue in an active way to build the process of knowing the Romanian society and the ethnics' shapes of manifestation. This volume can build the premises of forming a theory of manifestation and representation of the ethnic identity in Romania. The bibliographies of the papers start from the most known social theories, being highlighted through case studies of Germans in Romania.

INDICATIVE SUMMARY

This book is grounded on three coordinates through which the analysis was brought to light: (1) reinventing the German identity or the transfer of identity from a German population to a non-German population, (2) material and immaterial heritage valorisation and (3) migration and social changes.

Because of the social context of Romania after 1990, the German identity has lost its roots. Due to the presence of material elements of German heritage, the reinventing process has found ways to be transferred towards the Romanian population and even to the Hungarian one. Using the migration recipes of connecting Romania and Germany, the German ethnics have kept alive the memory of German places. This demonstrates that the German identity has not disappeared with the Saxons' emigration, but will disappear when they lose their place in local memory.

Ioana HAPCA

The Effect of Ethnic Minority. The Power of the Example – The Germans in Romania

139

If the Germans from Transylvania or other Germans keep close with their relatives and friends from Romania after the emigration, they will determine the transfer of ownership of different duties towards Romanians. Considering this an asset, the Romanian population and administration have used the heritage as a way to preserve the connection with the German ethnics through the Church, which has preserved religious traditions and different practices. These brought foreign investors who can offer financial support and maintain the interest for the language and the German culture, encouraging the development of cultural projects, financing schools and classes for employees and not only. At a national level, the German world has been used in different regions in Romania as a growth element in terms of credibility and openness of Romania towards the Western world, designating Romania as an important bridge when it came to join NATO.

The methods used to highlight the heritage refer to branding which has become a magnet for tourists in the communities where Germans lived. Even if we are talking about culinary values or built heritage, many opportunities were left to the Romanians. Sibiu was the European Capital of Culture in 2007, together with Luxembourg, by raising the German city as a national brand. These are only a few powerful examples.

The migration and social mobility have determined several social changes by which the Germans are remembered, through the built heritage especially, which has led to interesting phenomena of reinventing the Germans in a superficial way. Practically, the same cultural landscape, but with other inhabitants. The Germans were replaced in their houses by Romanians and Hungarians. Good collaborations have determined local actors to be involved in remembering and regenerating these settlements, reinventing spending free time, reorganizing dance classes, which in most cases, for Romanians for example, do not mean much.

German is being used by media, TV or political speeches which encourage the cooperation and openness for inter-relationships. Both political images (e.g. the electoral behaviour characteristic of the population from the South of Transylvania influenced by the Democratic Forum of Germans in Romania) and identity ideologies (e.g. a majority *formed*, during the Romanian socialist period, to be less sensitive to ethnic identity topics for ethnic minorities) not only rediscover the past and underline the present, but also project the future. The German media from Romania shaped an image of victimisation, through the documentaries and reportages, in terms of social and political events, which has led to a decrease of the number of Germans in this country. It has forgotten to approach the subject in an integrated context.

The cultural blending and the local dynamics have been highlighted by specific holidays of Germans which reminded of the German identity. However, without their ethnic content, these are only replicas of a veritable German world. The German forum from Romania did not have the same success in politics like in the case of cities such as Sibiu, due to a strong political competition at the national level.

VALUE JUDGEMENTS

This volume is a good canvas of information about the current status of German ethnics in Romania and about the way in which the Romanians have tried to replace German ethnics taking over their attributes of public manifestation through the art of performance or participation to specific German events and so on. Also, the volume clarifies the mechanisms through which the Germans have managed to sell the properties and through which they have managed to reinvent the German identity. Most studies bring light on what has survived in this identity transfer process.

However, there is a lack of research in the sphere of Germanness that shows what has been lost through this reinvention of identity. The "new Germanness" in Romania is a superficial way to live and feel the Germanness.

On the other hand, this new German identity is mostly embraced by facts and very little by feelings. Maurice Habwachs (1992) believes that if we have identity elements, or the memory of places and people, these identity elements will not fade away: "Whereas land is fixed and physical objects, if not fixed, retain their properties and appearance, so that in both cases identity through time is assured, human beings may change location as well as inclination, capacity, or effort. An individual or several individuals acquire property rights only when their society grants the existence of a permanent relationship between them and an object, one as immediate as the object itself" (p. 7). Thus, what takes place is a transfer of the responsibility to the Romanian population of keeping the German memory produced by the German ethnics.

This volume can be seen from a sociological perspective, representing the ethnicity of Romania, surrounded by many ways of interpretation by other ethnic communities, not only by Germans, but also by various associations (e.g. through philo-Germanness to Europeanity), comparisons (e.g. the strategy and the activities management of the programme European Capital of Culture Sibiu vs. Luxembourg), and obviously highlighting a few theories and policies (i.e. the conservative theory of the ethnic heritage preservation, multicultural policies for mobility or the integration of heritage policies in economic, cultural and social local strategies for preservation of territorial identity).

CONCLUSIONS

Most studies in this volume are based on cumulative causality, within the social process of reinventing the German world. The *re-fresh* of German identity was only possible through changing the social context of Romania, given by the deportation of the German ethnics in USSR (1944/5-1948), selling the Germans (1968-1989) and the exodus of German ethnics after 1990. Until World War II, the ethnic borders were impenetrable, and now they have become soft ones with the Romanians' increased interest to support the communities through German regeneration and local German specificity. The inter-ethnic collaboration is not just the result of national politics and local processes, but of multiple offsets between nations. The German world breaks physical borders and mental ones. From the Romanians' perspective, the Germanness has become a form of modernity due to its link to Western Europe.

Replacing the Germans, in their homes, on their properties, other ethnics emerged who have managed to fit in and to even increase the ways of transferring the German identity. The value of knowing the German language has determined more and more Romanian families to send their children to schools working in German, driven by intrinsic and extrinsic causes, as well as by the opportunity of finding a well-paid job fast after graduation, in order to become a social differential category taken into consideration.

The German world was reinvented also through examples of good practices in which different associations, like The Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation in Romania, have improved the inter-ethnic communication and have managed to implement awareness campaigns in terms of shared heritage. The long history of Germans in Romania, more than 800 years (Saxons, Swabians from Satu Mare or Banat, Zipsers, Germans from Bukowina and Dobrudcha), hosts good examples of cooperation between Romanians and Germans. The economic relations with the countries from Western Europe have been highlighted in many fields, like culture, tourism, and commerce, political and international cooperation, respectively.

Ioana HAPCA

The Effect of Ethnic Minority. The Power of the Example – The Germans in Romania

141

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