The research analyzing the use of space by young people in Miercurea Ciuc (South-East Transylvania, Romania) is based primarily on a study of small town subcultures that took place in 2001–2002.¹ The goal of the research was to discover and describe the various social groupings within the city's youth using the methods of ethnography and cultural anthropology, and to grasp the local specifics in terms of lifestyle and leisure trends, based on which the use of space and the role of musical genres can be described within these groups.

The study is important and relevant for a number of reasons. The changes that have been taking place since the fall of Communism within Eastern European societies affect the youth as well. The role of traditional institutions (e.g. family) is diminished; at the same time, other institutions that prescribe cultural examples arise (media, civil society). The effect of parents upon their children is also diminished, while the influence of peer groups in socialization is increased. We hope that through the study of youth culture we may get closer to understanding the social changes that affect us.

1. The Field of Study

The question of what types of subcultural youth groups exist based on associations with musical genres in Miercurea Ciuc, and how they use the city's public spaces, cannot be answered without an analysis of the city itself, its public squares and their formation—that is, we must place these elements in a broader socio-historical context.

Miercurea Ciuc is located within the mountain range of the Eastern Carpathians, within the Ciuc Basin and on the shores of the Olt River, 656 meters above sea level. The population of Miercurea Ciuc in 2002 was 42,029, of which 33,891 were people of Hungarian ethnic origin, and 7,290 were Romanians. The local administration also includes four villages that were once independent: Zsögöd to the South, Csíktaploca to the North, Csíksomlyó and Csobotfalva to the Northwest of Miercurea Ciuc have been incorporated into it. In the second half of the 20th century, the demographic structure of the country is reorganized: while in 1930 the urban population was only 20% of the country's total population, this ratio rose to 50-50% in 1980. The main reasons for this change were the collectivization of agriculture and the expansion of industry. When Miercurea Ciuc was chosen to be the county seat in the 1968 administrative restructuring, its population was still only 13,000. Starting in the 1970s, as a result of industrialization and job creation, commuters, migrants, and vocational-technical school students moved into town. Researchers studying this phenomenon distinguish between two distinct faces of urbanization: one model appears as dynamic urban development that can be expressed through quantifiable data: job growth, population increase, the development of educational and cultural

¹ Independent research was conducted in two Transylvanian and two Hungarian small towns (Miercurea Ciuc, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Tatabánya, Pápa), under the supervision of Magda Szapu, as a continuation of her field work among the youth of Kaposvár (Szapu 2002). The accounts of the research were published in 2004 (Szapu 2004).
institutions, the material conditions of households. The other is a different picture of urbanization: a phenomenon seen as a stabilization strategy, which led to a transitional lifestyle between the urban and the rural (Biró 1994: 102). The unique difficulties faced by first-generation newcomers do not allow them to enjoy all the opportunities of urban life. Instead of cultural and leisure activities, it is values and interactions characteristic of rural communities that are reproduced. Our study tries to elucidate the ways in which the structure of the city's public spaces have been transformed since the demise of the Communist regime.

2. Research Methods

The methods of study were the following: participatory observation, regular visiting places of entertainment and public squares, informal discussions, interviews. The following visual materials and documents were analyzed during the field work: fliers, concert tickets, leaflets, and Panoráma (later renamed Orígó), a catalog of cultural events in Miercurea Ciuc, as well as photographs that provide greater insight into the aforementioned places of entertainment and public squares.

A total of thirty interviews were conducted, of which we possess about 20 hours' worth of auditory material. In the present paper, I indicate the coding in parentheses: the respondents' gender, age, school/degree, occupation/group, and number.²

At the initial stages of field work, I tried looking at those fields, situations, events, and related periods, which are regularly manifested in the public sphere of city life, and that make the research comprehensible—after all, young people spend the bulk of their free time on the street, in bars and internet cafes—i.e. in public spaces that are generally unsupervised and not monitored. Life in the public spaces of Miercurea Ciuc, and the resulting infusion and creation of meanings assigned to them, as well as an analysis of the subcultural activities taking place within these public squares, were some of the questions I wanted to explore throughout this study.

The public square is an essential element in the processes of group- and identity formation of everyday life. The squares of the small town analyzed by me differ from the concepts of the public square as “non-places,” developed through studies of large cities. Non-places can be grasped in the real place/non-place dichotomy. Real places are the traditional terrain for ethnology, the symbolic constitutive elements of individual and collective identity; non-places, on the other hand, represent places of consumption, transportation and communication—for instance, large commercial spaces, airports, train and bus stations, subways and highways—and the anonymity, loneliness, and invisibility of those inhabiting and using these spaces (Augé 1992: 100). Whereas the differences, diversity, and meanings that cross each other tend to neutralize one another in large cities, in small towns it is rural territorial behavioral models that can be observed. The public squares of the town are interwoven with social networks; these are also places where one internalizes proper ways of public behavior, and cultivates education and communal relationships. Therefore, we discuss the public square as a product of society. Every

² Example 1/25/L/E/Ro/18: 1—male/25—age/L—local (or P—provincial)/E—employed (or: 1—Márton Áron College Preparatory School, 2—Performing Arts High School, 3—Kájoni János Vocational-Technical High School, 4—Venczel József Vocational-Technical High School, AT—studies in another town, UE—unemployed, C—college student)/18—number
society creates its own public squares, which are both physical and mental in nature. The public square is not merely a given; rather, it is created. Its social construction alludes to the physical environment, which is but one aspect of the public square. Another aspect of the creation of the public square is its construction through interpretation, which is, in effect, a form of sociocultural internalization. Urban studies nowadays often use the concepts developed in the context of theories of the public square, which interpret the city square as a collection of knowledge related to mental representations, everyday practices, routines, and memory (Mester 2005: 71).

It is in this regard that I examine the use (taking possession) of public squares relative to their change in time (chronological perspective), as well as from the point of view of various events throughout the year: weekdays/holidays (Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, the weekend, etc.), school year/vacation, winter/summer. I created the following typology in terms of places and public squares: 1. schools, 2. cultural institutions, 3. places of entertainment, 4. open-air city squares.

3. The “good” places

Tilos

Tilos started as a literary cafe in 1993. In the beginning, many Hungarian literary magazines could be found there (Nappali Ház, Holmi, Kortárs, etc.); it also hosted exhibitions, poetry nights and competitions, and concerts. Its target clientele was the intellectual class; anyone from people in their forties down to interested high school students came gladly. It was perceived as such an important and serious institution that the local daily, Hargita Népe once said that “Miercurea Ciuc is situated around the feet of Tilos.” There are no more similar cultural events today, but a circle of regular patrons has developed. It is a space of local publicity where the newest local public issues are discussed. A bulletin board displays classifieds, postcards, pictures of past parties, and newspaper articles. Older regular guests are on the first floor (six tables); younger patrons are usually upstairs. The latter have tea or beer, and they tend to sit around with a single drink for a while, much to the amusement of the first-floor regulars that “these [kids] are having tea again.” Rockers like to gather here, and the music played is also usually classic rock, alternative, sometimes pop, with a lot of Hungarian music. Many people come in just to look around, who are looking for someone, or are there to drop off or pick up a message or a package. One can also exchange Forints, look for cars going to Hungary, etc. The place has a website, where they present friends and regulars in a witty fashion.

I was done with the 8th grade, and they told me that this new tea place opened on Petőfi Street, about how cool it was, “let's go there,” and I've been going there ever since. After school, or perhaps when I didn't have class, and afterward, when I worked at the Performing Arts High School after having gotten my high school degree. Tilos has its own regular patrons, who usually sit downstairs, and then there's the youth that sits upstairs. There's this group of rockers—good, normal rockers, in leather pants and wesco boots... (1/23/L/C/Ex/8)
Bahia

*Bahia Tea House* operated between 2001 and 2005. It tended to be frequented by those who were bored with *Tilos*, or did not find tables there. Lovers of alternative and electronic music, and the “extremes” liked coming here. In wintertime, there were traditional Hungarian dance parties; they played live music and danced in one of the rooms. College students from Sapientia University came here as well. Electronic music, rock, folk, world music was characteristic of this place. The tables were bigger and there was more room than at *Tilos*. Romanian youths also came here more frequently than in the case of *Tilos*.

*Bahia suffers from an identity crisis. Tea house, traditional dance place, it tries everything. It wants to be everything all at once. When Bahia was created, there was a demand for it, because Tilos didn't have room for enough people since everyone went there—by 7 pm, it was standing room only. So the Tilos people were divided; those who didn't fit in Tilos, particularly the younger ones, went over to Bahia. And then, the older, real Tilos people were gone. They grew old, moved to Hungary, got married.* (1/30/L/E/Ex/10)

Saláta

*Saláta* is really the entrance building to a swimming pool, which includes locker rooms, a buffet, and an upper level. For years, *Saláta* was synonymous with Saturday night; it was worth going there from *Tilos* at 1 am or so, when there was enough room to dance. During the winter of 2001-2002, there was a revolution in style: the snowboarders demanded new music. The revolt was against nostalgic, rhythmic Hungarian music, pop, and hit songs, and in favor of drum and bass.

The locale did not operate between 2002 and 2006. The furnishings, carpet, futons and comfy chairs in the new *Saláta* create a club atmosphere. It is frequented by college students on Wednesday nights, and “extremes” on Saturdays.

Ami

Operating in the basement of the Labor Unions' House of Culture, this locale went through a number of owners, names, and styles. *Ami* is still a very multifaceted place, different each night. Mondays are rock nights, Tuesdays there is alternative, rave, “people's music” (undefined), Wednesday is disco night, Thursdays are rock nights as well (mainly for college students), and Fridays are a mishmash of all these styles. Music is played from a computer. At the end of the 1990s, a local rock band, *Role* used to play every Friday, but there is no more demand for them, since the audience knows their repertoire by heart (1960s and '70s beat, rock). The interior was revamped a number of times, and walls removed. There are computers by the bar, where the young people browse the Internet and chat online, despite the noise. Darts, a pool table, and a ping-pong table are also available for the guests.

*Well, I really like the Ami. Saláta people usually come here. Every day there is something at Ami, but I'm talking about Fridays. Although there were times when I used to go there every weekend, and even every day, since that's where we had band practice, and those who worked there were our friends, so we were*
there all the time. I went clubbing there as well, to real disco nights, although not recently. The name Ami is actually an abbreviation of Agenția de Management și Impresariat Artistic.

In any event, Frici did a lot for youth to have a good opportunity to have fun. He used to play in the TraktovRock band, had a studio as well, although I think he has since sold his equipment piece by piece, but he took over the Labor Unions’ basement. Before him it was Kerezsi, then Füleki.

Frici did the rock nights for a while, between 1996-97, inviting bands to play as well. There was live music. And I think Ami is a place that can be filled with different people and atmospheres every night. The bar isn’t too expensive either; I don’t go to Flash, but I think they are very expensive. (1/23/L/C/Ex/8)

**Flash**

The Flash nightclub has operated on the outskirts of the town for a while. It is considered to be a dangerous place by the townspeople, mainly because of the fights.

For those looking to go clubbing, Friday is the day at Flash, when there is a big party. It is frequented mainly by people in their 20s and 30s, those who can afford to spend hundreds of thousands of lei in one night.

Students drink on Petőfi Street, have their beers, then come over and buy a single beer, hanging on to it and walking around with it all night. The fact of the matter is, drinks are expensive here, depending on who can afford what. There’s everything, from soda pop to whiskey. (1/27/L/E/Di/25)

On Thursdays, people go to Dzsungel in Odorheiu Secuiesc, come here to Flash on Fridays, and go to Eclipse in Ciceu on Saturdays. Everything is different in Odorhei. Here, we’re all kind of backward and keep to ourselves. At this time of the night, everything is full in Odorhei, everyone is out, but here... The problem is that [Flash] is on the edge of the town; if it were downtown, it would go much better. People only drive or take taxicabs out here. (1/27/L/E/Di/25)

4. The Public Square as a Stage

Analyzing the public squares and the groups sensing and inhabiting them, and filling them with meaning, theatrical concepts come to mind. “As Richard Sennett also observed, the street in a modern city is not merely a place of transportation, but a stage, where people manifest their political, economic, social, or cultural will, and where different groups use symbolic tools to make their social presence known” (Müller 2005: 117).

From this perspective, one of the most complex public squares of Miercurea Ciuc is Szabadság [Liberty] Square. It was in the place formerly occupied by middle-class homes destroyed in the 1980s that the regime created the immense square as a place representative of the Communist authorities, whose role it was to be a political tool of social control. Supervision was realized through the transparency of the immense, open square on the one hand, and through state festivities organized there on the other. This is where its other name, Tapstér or Taps-Place
[Applause Square] originated. This square was where the revolution took place in Miercurea Ciuc, and it is since then that it has been known as Szabadság Square. On the cognitive maps of the population, however, it is still represented as Tapstér. Michel de Certeau characterizes public squares created by the powers that be as based on the exclusivity of the space's occupation, prescribing that there can only be one place in a place, as well as what the correct behavior is in a particular place. What correct and incorrect forms of behavior can be detected in the public square in the years of democracy that have followed the fall of Communism? Who uses the square, and how? Who owns it? In his book, The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), de Certeau uses the expression “spatial praxis.” For him, the public square is never ontologically given, but is rather mapped discursively and practiced physically. Places only become real places when people create them through active occupation and movement.

On weekdays, the connective function of Szabadság Square is realized: it is used by people who go by in a hurry. On sunny days, seniors and parents with small children enjoy the sun on the benches along the edges of the square. There is a business that rents kids' cars in the middle of the square. The square acts as a gathering place for youth at night.

There are two special events, lasting a number of days during the summer, that involve the central town squares: since 2001, before the Pentecost pilgrimage of Csíksomlyó, there are the Harghita County Days, and since 1998, in August, the City Days fill downtown with events and participants. For these occasions, an enormous stage is built in the square, and folk dance, pop, rock, and artisans entertain the townsfolk, tourists and guests drinking beer and eating their traditional mititei.

The symbolic occupation of the public square is done, and its concomitant discourse practiced, by the person who can occupy the position of a legitimate speaker; i.e. the one in power. Those symbolic acts that take place in the square are tools through which identity can be represented and strengthened. Zsolt Szijártó points out two characteristic methods of organization of the public operating in the town square: one can be seen as a stage, and the other, as behind the scenes (Szijártó 2004: 1167).

In the first instance, we are speaking generally of a cultural form defined and operated by the political and power elite, whereas the second case is created as a result of the self-contained activities of various subcultural groups (Szijártó 2004: 1169).

Those important town events mentioned above—the City and County Days, respectively—can be interpreted through this process of identity formation. Without this ritual work, the public square would only exist as a physical space. Sometimes the powers that be strengthen their legitimacy, and, during these yearly events, “identity is formed (or strengthened) in the process of the parade—at once ritual and theatrical—within the space of the town's parade route” (Szijártó 2004: 1168).

While these public events that mobilize great masses of people take place in the limelight of the media on the various stages, with significant budgets and organizational work, there are also spaces situated in the background of social interest, behind the scenes. These are spaces where emotions, desires and fantasies are able to represent themselves; they count as meeting points where people can meet those with similar interests and hobbies.

“The new town squares that arise during festivals are condensed into pictures that have
economic value, and transformed into images offered up for visual consumption. Then, at the next stage of this process, the tools of mass communication (TV, photo albums, documentaries) record and spread—that is, they instrumentalize and make available for mass symbolic consumption—this visual repertoire. Finally, various symbol industries, such as mass communication or tourism—denote the exact local values of these local esthetics and town square images within the sphere of consumption” (Szijártó 2004: 1168).

The subcultures and groups living in the town use it in different ways. The flat surface in front of the two buildings on either side of Szabadság Square—the Labor Unions' House of Culture, and the County Council building—serves as an excellent meeting place and practice grounds for the roller skaters, skateboarders and bicyclists.

During the field work in 2002, there was a bilingual prohibition displayed in the window of the Labor Unions' House of Culture: “The patio and stairs of the House of Culture are parts of the building, not a playground! Play and practice that involves roller skates, bicycles and skateboards damages the surface and interferes with activities, and is strictly forbidden.”

In the interview excerpts, a recursive theme of skateboarder discourse is the town's lack of adequate places for practicing extreme street sports. “They chase us away, because we damage the stairs in front of the House of Culture. We have to ask for special permits. This is the sport of the new generation, this is where we practice when it is not raining. We learn from each other” (1/15/L/1/Ex/21).

Passers-by look at the youths wearing their characteristic clothes, and practicing their dangerous sport, in a strange and alien manner. They are the ones who, it seems, are not behaving “properly” on the public square, since it is not a sports arena, or a playground. Their presence is not legitimate: “special permission must be granted.”

5. Conclusion

I analyzed the entertainment habits, use of space, and association based on musical genres of the youth in Miercurea Ciuc. In formulating the research questions, I was primarily interested in the creation of the public squares of Miercurea Ciuc, and their use according to leisure activity and youth groupings.

Having researched the lifestyle of youth in Miercurea Ciuc, I group my conclusions around the concept of change. On the one hand, change refers to the changes that have taken place since the fall of the Communist regime: in the public school system, access to information (fashion, needs, TV, radio, imported forms of behavior, the creation of public squares and their increase in value, the formation of various groups based on musical genres, etc.) On the other hand, I am thinking of changes that took place during the actual research process: new places of consumption opened, and were filled with new meaning, reorganizing structures already formed, and delineating the circle of consumers.

It can be said that Western or big city trends have not reached the town yet, or that it is only in small circles that Western forms of entertainment are known. College students pursuing their education in big cities or in Hungary, as well as friends and acquaintances living in the West, can be considered intermediaries. Music and cultural patterns transmitted through tools of mass
communication touch the enthusiasts of disco and house music. In Miercurea Ciuc, the primary importance of Hungarian music can be observed; local radio stations broadcast hit songs. Romanian music is particularly popular in clubs and on TV- and radio stations.

The use of public squares delineates the different youth groups, a fact reflected in the use of names: “tilos-ers, flash-ers, bahians, Saláta people.” In case of a lack of space, it is time that structures leisure time, reflected for instance in the daily changing profile of Ami.

Petőfi Street is the most well-known street on the mental maps of young people.

These places of gathering and entertainment constitute an important terrain for socialization. The interview excerpt below shows a number of important points: what a young person should be like in the eyes of her parents, and according to her peer group.

*She doesn't go anywhere. She leaves for work, comes home after work, that's it; she lives very simply, not taking advantage of her young years, which is one of the reasons why we're angry with her, because she takes things too seriously. She hasn't taken a vacation in three years. She goes out with her coworker; goes to a bar, has a Coke, or a pizza, and that's it; or sometimes they go to the movies. Dancing? She doesn't do it. She doesn't have a circle of friends with whom she could hang out someplace and have fun. If there is a wedding or a graduation in the family, she doesn't come. She cleans and cooks at home. She rarely reads; household chores occupy most of her time. My mom likes this, and she's glad she doesn't have to do the chores herself, but this won't lead to anything good. This is why there's conflict with my parents, whenever we talk about how something should be done with E. My parents say that she's serious just the way she ought to be, but I don't think my parents see the situation correctly.* (1/23/L/UE/Q/12)

One potential strategy is following the family model; the other is socialization within one's peer group. A family framework and the usual rules are not enough for problem solving anymore. Subcultures are well worth studying from the perspective of socialization. Their tangible differentialization fits into the process of formation of a pluralist society, given that young people have access to more and more paths of socialization that leads them into adult society. Subcultural participation also requires socialization.

“The subculture is a relationship of preferences that incorporates cultural taste and style (see its symbolic communication and its 'messages'), but behavioral elements as well. Cultural preferences can create cultural deficits or surplus (cultural capital) during the process of transition to adulthood. Both influence the future socioeconomic status (level of education, position and occupation) of adolescents later on in their adult life” (Rácz 1998: 138).

*That is why my twin brother looks down on everyone his age. Because he doesn't belong in any group. He doesn't even really understand them, except for their appearance. So there is a part of this town that doesn't go out anywhere. It is totally weird. And, in the end, developing like this is not healthy, in my opinion. Every age has its own problems, and if you don't go through them, then later on in life you will be very, very alone, and won't be able to solve your problems. But I think the main goal is that you're able to solve your problems, or treat them,*
not to be broken by them, and if you can't solve them, that you can at least get over them. Those who don't go out anywhere and really only have work and home, that's absolutely not good; I'd rather him be a rocker, or anything else, but growing up like this, without any problems, he'll have to hit an obstacle at some point, because otherwise he won't even know what life is. He'll just grow up by himself, and end up alone. (1/23/L/UE/Q/12)

How do adults see young people today—how do parents perceive their children, or teachers, their students?

Beyond the problem of generational differences, actual urban problems include staying out until the morning, general apathy, young criminality, a lack of parental and teachers' authority, aggression, alcohol, cigarette smoking and drug consumption.

They are equally distrustful at home and in school. There is no dialog with parents or teachers. It can be defined exactly when the mistrust starts: around ages 12-13. Mistrust can easily be overcome; they are grateful for any attention, and they give feedback. But teachers and parents are insulated, they avoid problems. (2/25/L/E/F/26)

Adults and young people agree that those spaces that serve as places of entertainment today in Miercurea Ciuc are not adequate. It is mainly a public square necessary for quality entertainment, club activities, and live concerts that is lacking. This square was described by adults as a bright, airy, intelligently guarded and controlled (that is, supervised) places. Young people, on the other hand, want their own spaces, without any supervision. Lacking any other option, they frequent the already existing ones, and inhabit those squares that are given.

“Going to bars is the typical way to spend time. But they also like hiding, sometimes in an empty apartment, an abandoned house, or garage. This creates opportunities for common activities. The family is not enough for an adolescent anymore; naturally, he looks for ways out. It would be nice to have an intelligently guarded and controlled place, or places, of entertainment” (225/L/E/F/26).

A fundamental point of reference is Hungary, since it is from there that different models of behavior and trends can be imported through first-hand experience. Romanian big cities also have an effect upon the various groups. Different styles of clothing, and sets of tools for entertainment and leisure can be obtained in Cluj (for rockers), Brasov, or Timisoara.

There are none in Miercurea Ciuc; in Targu Mures, there is Rockstar; there is one in Cluj as well, or else we bring them from Hungary. They can be ordered as well; there is a business in Timisoara that deals with that. I have never ordered. When I go to Hungary, I always take a look at these stores. . . . There are these hooded sweatshirts, which can't really be found around here unless you order them, or other special stuff, videotapes, and very large CD collections. It is mainly I who is interested in it. It's different, you see, since CDs are not really in vogue around here since they're very expensive; people usually just copy music off of audio cassettes. In my group of friends, many don't have a CD player. I like CDs better, because they are more durable. Unless you put jelly on it, it'll
last forever, unlike cassettes, whose quality declines over time. (2/16/L/1/Ro/6)

The presence of Romanian youth is a topic of research that would complement and nuance the picture formed so far. There are references in the interviews, but there is either no common ground (“I don't know where they go,” “they go someplace else”), or it problematic nature was otherwise not noted. It can be established that they form separate groups, with different habits of occupying space. Romanians are not dominant in the town's entertainment venues, or they hang out with their Hungarian friends.

The formation of urban micro-squares can also be described from a uniquely East European socio-historical approach. The rural modes of behavior of the primary communities that moved in during the 1970s led to the strengthening of the private sphere. The use of public squares was restricted by the representative publicity of the Communist regime and the curfews imposed at the end of the 1980s. After the regime change in 1989, new meanings were imposed upon the previous ones, and new places of consumption arose (bars, pubs, shops). In the process of creation of the new meanings, the two main actors are the events organized by the powers that be on the one hand, and youth groups and subcultures on the other.

Accordingly, the different generations “read” the public squares differently, and the concept of public forms of behavior is posed differently. Young people bring personal elements to the public square, while they differentiate themselves from each other based on school, and habits of consumption, spending leisure time, and listening to different kinds of music. The fact that there is permeability between the various youth groups, that they are not fully isolated from each other, signifies that the small town preserves its rural character. Thanks to technological progress and increased mobility, the spread of Western patterns points to the urbanization of that segment of youth most open to innovation.
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