

From degradation to potential urban regeneration? Residents' perspectives on a historical neighbourhood in Timișoara, Romania

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Abstract. Recent studies have indicated that residents' perceptions on urban neighbourhoods are a multidimensional indicator that refers to an individual's perception of their own position in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns in various social contexts. Our article makes theoretical and empirical contributions to discussions on the perceptions of residents of a historic neighbourhood and how they experience changes in the the context of post-socialist period. Using a questionnaire launched to Timișoara residents (N=480), in the historic district of Fabric, the findings of our study indicate that the degradation of historical buildings, the living space and living conditions are the main causes of dissatisfaction on the part of residents. Although the advantages of the Fabric neighbourhood are its historical heritage and the central location in Timisoara, the state of decay of the historical buildings and the lack of safety are among the major problems of the neighbourhood identified in the narratives of the respondents.

Key words: Residents' perceptions; Heritage; Post-socialism; Fabric neighbourhood; Timișoara; Romania.

1 Introduction

Recent studies of perceptions on urban neighbourhoods involve evaluations of individuals to determine continuities or discontinuities in their perceptions on changes of the neighbourhood landscape and how satisfied they are with that particular urban landscape [1, 2]. The present study is an x-ray of the perception of the population of Timișoara, Romania on the historic district Fabric, also known more recently as Traian neighbourhood.

In spite of the rich history of Fabric, as the first district of the city after the one formed around Timișoara's Bastion area/the Middle Age Fortress of the city, but also in spite of the reputation it once had as a "social district", where the "good people of the city" used to gather in the evening, Fabric remains today an area of contrasts, formed with the migration during the communist regime of the Jewish and German residents and the arrival in their place of a population with modest incomes, who even today cannot take care of the appearance of their own buildings.

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These problems, together with the long period of time during which the local administration did not take care of the rehabilitation and redevelopment of the area, have made Fabric an underused district. Furthermore, the question through which the issues of the present work can be highlighted is: how is the historical neighbourhood of Fabric perceived by the inhabitants of Timișoara and what are the solutions that local residents propose in order to have a better wellbeing and to overcome the current state of degradation of the neighbourhood? We try to better understand the problems of the neighbourhood which lay between decay and lack of safety, the current frequency of visits and visit purposes in the Fabric neighborhood, the level of satisfaction with living in the neighbourhood, and respondents' solutions for neighbourhood development.

The article is structured as follows: first, we draw a brief literature review on resident perceptions on historical neighbourhoods. Second, we design the methods and data that we use in this study. These are followed by presenting the results and conclusions of our study.

2 Conceptual aspects

Perceptions on neighbourhood degradation and local people's wellbeing are usually approached interdisciplinarily, because although the concept has strong sociological origins, an important role in building a relevant research paradigm is played by sciences such as psychology, economics, ecology and geography, especially social and urban geography [3, 4]. Therefore, geographical studies characterized by the definition of the spatial character of the focus mainly on the inequalities that occur within urban communities [5, 6]. Understanding individuals' perceptions of the space in which they live, as well as understanding the causes that lead to them, is a geographical field par excellence.

Sensitive urban areas are a recent sociological term given to those metropolitan areas that are part of a so-called "urban circuit of disadvantages", characterised by: lack of a suitable living environment, lack of employment opportunities for the population, lack of social services, lack of education and professional training of the inhabitants, unemployment and indolence. All of these factors give the urban space a negative external perception, with residents often falling victim to the stigma of the place they live in [7, 8]. On the other hand, disadvantaged spaces can be studied based on the intensity of phenomena that degrade the way and environment of life of the population of cities, as well as the socio-spatial concentration of these phenomena [4, 9]. In other words, it considers the state of a community in a state of inferiority in relation to the surrounding society, which can be generated by: lack of access to quality education and health services, unfavourable housing conditions, lack of jobs, insufficient income, etc. [10]. In this context, marginality or marginalisation is a complex social and political process, seen as a form of exclusion, which individuals and human groups experience, they are often subject to humiliation, caused by disparities brought about by various cultural and economic factors, leading to so-called "spaces of exclusion", characterised by unequal and unfair treatment among the population, and to a "contingent marginality", characteristic among those disadvantaged in the labour market [6]. Furthermore, bad neighbourhoods or no-go areas are characterized by the existence of poor social classes [11] and by phenomena of delinquenc, drug trafficking and crime. These, together with lack of education and urban pollution of any kind, tend to degrade and deteriorate the way and environment of life of citizens and lead to the formation of sensitive spaces [8].

When we talk about wellbeing, we are also referring to issues of urban heritage conservation. It involves those activities that prevent and slow the deterioration of historic properties, protecting their integrity. Typically, preservation involves providing public policy for the protection of historic monuments, with the goal of preserving the historic, architectural, cultural and aesthetic significance of the structure, thereby stabilizing declining

neighborhoods and enhancing property values [12, 13, 14]. Urban heritage restoration is the process of restoring the authentic legibility of a historic building by removing accretions or reassembling existing components without the introduction of new materials. Restoration is based on respect for the original materials, previous design and existing historical evidence [15, 14]. At the same time, urban heritage rehabilitation is a technique that allows to extend the life of a building by modifying its functionality and by upgrading it to increase energy efficiency but also to increase its comfort and quality [16, 17]. An important role in the urban neighbourhood is played by urban regeneration, which involves the revitalization of urban areas, with the aim of improving living conditions, to increase the economic potential of a given area and to facilitate the creation of new and dynamic communities, this process being carried out with the help of all the actors involved, eager for change [18, 19].

3 Tools and methods used

In order to gather the objective and subjective data necessary for the writing of this paper, various research methods and tools were applied, which, on the whole, have a major impact in understanding the proposed theme, thus completing the proposed methodological grid. First of all, there was a phase of analysis of the literature on the socio-spatial dimension of the resident perceptions on the Fabric neighbourhood. Secondly, we applied 480 questionnaires (247 face-to-face and 233 online) to the population of Timișoara municipality (May 2022-March 2023), both online and in the field, analysed in *IBM SPSS Statistics* software. To determine whether there are statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable we used the Kruskal-Wallis H test (one-way ANOVA on ranks).

The demographic variables that were taken into account in the present study referred either to the socio-demographic data of the respondent (sex, age, marital status, educational and occupational level, ethnicity, denomination) or to data related to their spatial location (type of dwelling and neighbourhood of residence). As regards the gender distribution of the respondents, the proportion of female respondents who answered the questionnaire questions was 58.4%, while male respondents accounted for a total of 41.4% of the respondents. In terms of marital status, the majority of respondents stated that they are married, 38.9%, with the highest percentage of respondents being single/single (29.1%) and those in a relationship (23.7%). With percentages of less than 5% each, there are widowed people (4.4%), divorced (4.4%) and those who have never been married (4.4%). More than half of the people surveyed have completed higher education (55.5%), followed by those with completed secondary education (38.7%). In last place are those with primary/middle education, with a share of only 5.6%. More than half of the respondents to the questionnaire work either in the private (31.4%) or public sector (20.6%). In terms of ethnic structure, the questionnaire of the present study collected responses mainly from the Romanian ethnic group, in the proportion of 90.6%, together with other ethnicities representative for Timișoara and Banat: Hungarian, German and Serbian. Roma, Czech, Iranian and Moldovan also had at least one representative. The majority of respondents are Orthodox, 70.5%. The next two places are occupied by those who declare themselves to be Catholic and neo-Protestant (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, etc.), both with weights of over 5%. Also of note are those who declare themselves to be atheists, agnostics or of no religious affiliation, who account for 6.2% of all respondents, with Protestants (Lutherans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Methodists, etc.), other religions (Islam) and those who did not know or did not wish to give an answer to this question coming last. More than half of the respondents live in collective housing, the majority living in blocks of flats built before 1989 (48.6%). In second place are those living in individual houses, with 18.1% of respondents. With percentages of less than 10% are the categories of those living in historic city buildings (9.8%), in a shared courtyard

(4%), in a duplex (3.7%), in student dormitories (2.5%) and, last but not least, those who refused to specify this aspect (0.8%).

The mapping of the neighbourhood and the mapping of the features of interest were done in ArcMap. Also, from May 2022 to March 2023, participatory observations were carried out, participating in most of the public debates, conferences, seminars and cultural events in the neighbourhood, during which the main points of interest were also photographed.

4 Study area

Timișoara is the largest city in western Romania, 570 km from Bucharest and less than 700 km from 13 other European capitals. The total surface area of the city is 100.6 km², 38% of which is covered by urban land and the population of the functional urban area is over 300,000 inhabitants.

From a political-administrative point of view, the city under analysis is located in the centre of Timis County, being at the same time the county seat and the city that polarizes the entire Western Development Region of Romania. Its role as a polarizing centre is also amplified by the convergence of two roads of European importance (E70 and E671), 12 main roads and railway lines, and the presence of an International Airport. The favourable location is also enhanced by the possibility of access to the pan-European waterway corridor via the Bega Canal. From a historical-geographical point of view, Timișoara is part of the historical Banat region, a fact that is reinforced and emphasised by the integration of the above-mentioned counties into the European region of cross-border cooperation, DKMT, together with Hungary and Serbia, Timișoara being the largest and most representative city of this Euroregion. The Fabric district is located in the central-eastern part of Timișoara, in the vicinity of the Cetate district, being a continuation of the historical city centre. In terms of functionality, the study area could be described as complex, with commercial, financial-banking, educational, cultural, medical, recreational services, etc., as well as residential buildings. Most of the buildings in the Fabric district are monumental buildings with a considerable cultural-historical heritage, generally built in a Gf+1 or Gf+2 structure, with commercial services generally located on the ground floor (Fig. 1).

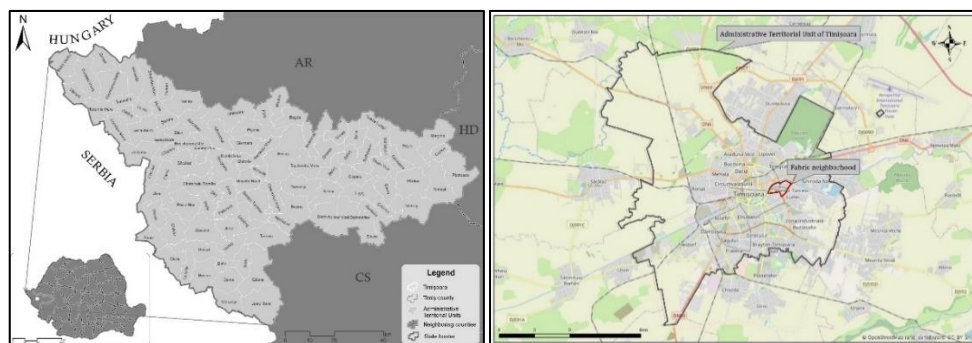


Fig. 1. Location of Timișoara municipality in relation to political-administrative elements (left) and location of Fabric district within Timișoara municipality (data source: *geofabrik.de*, *Open Street Map* 2023).

The Fabric district was born in the first half of the 18th century, after the Habsburgs conquered these territories from the Ottoman Empire. The early district was made up of several nuclei: the town of the Serbs, the town of the Armenians, the town of the Germans, initially independent, and from 1782, officially integrated into Timișoara [20, 21]. The name of the district under analysis comes from the numerous workshops, factories and

manufactories of postav, silk, flour, beer, etc., which initially provided the residents with jobs and gave them the prosperity, prestige and industrial character of the district [22, 20, 21]. Its industrial character in its heyday was also felt in the commercial field, with numerous inns, cafes and restaurants, famous in those days for the social life they hosted, which, however, over time, have disappeared [23]. Therefore, the Fabric district proved to be of utmost importance in the 19th century, both because of the manufacturing units that lined its main roads and access routes, and because of the concentration of more than half of the population of the entire city at that time, a population marked by a particular ethnic, linguistic and social heterogeneity [24]. Hungarian, German, Serbian, Romanian, Roma, Greek, Italian, Jewish, Armenian, Czech, French and Spanish, this mosaic of ethnicities gave the district its obvious multicultural character, but also an interesting mix of buildings specific to minorities. [23, 24, 25]. The three places of worship in the neighbourhood: the Millennium Catholic Church, the St. Elijah Serbian Orthodox Church and the Fabric Synagogue symbolise the diversity of communities existing here, as well as the peaceful coexistence between them [21, 26]. Other heritage buildings, such as the Mercur Palace, have a secession architecture and had commercial functions in the past (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The Mercur Palace (source: Adelina Camelia Tuță's own photo).

Even if the neighbourhood initially enjoyed a particular multiculturalism, this was removed when the communist regime came to power, which removed from the neighbourhood ethnic groups, which were largely represented by wealthy people, and their housing was nationalized, and then transformed into social housing, offered to the poor social class with limited financial resources (Law 119/1948). After the 1989 Revolution, some dwellings were reclaimed either by their original owners or by tenants who had come to live

in historic buildings in the neighbourhood (Law 112/1995). This uncertain situation, brought about by the class struggle and communist nationalisations, led to the advanced deterioration of the historic buildings in the Fabric district, as a result of tenants who had neither the financial resources to preserve them nor the slightest recognition of their special historical and architectural character, and this effect is still felt today [21, 26]. Despite the long history and the great architectural potential that the district possesses, it is currently marked by an intense state of decay, with only 10% of the buildings having been restored. The remaining 90% are found to be in a poor state of preservation, with only 8% of them partially consolidated [27]. Although historically the neighbourhood has been known for the saying : *"All good things come from Fabric"*, in recent history the study area is known as a bad place, a sensitive space dominated by problems and deprivation.

Although there have been some regeneration projects in the neighbourhood in recent years, the lack of communication and relationship between residents, local actors and the public administration has led to a tense environment with many differences and conflicts. Also, the ethnic and generational diversity living in the neighbourhood means that opinions on these projects also diverge, with people resistant to change and people who would like to regenerate the neighbourhood but who are hindered by various obstacles. Ethnic and generational diversity also leads to disjointed communities that do not communicate effectively, are mutually exclusive and result in several parallel realities in Fabric, which brings many disadvantages on several levels. Last but not least, the generous space of the neighbourhood and its daily dynamism have given people with initiative in Timișoara the desire to make the most of it and to highlight it through events and actions undertaken by them, especially in recent years. Therefore, from our initial observation in the field, we found that many residents of the neighbourhood were reticent about the actions of the neighbourhood's main activists, a good number of whom felt either that there were too few events or that they were missing altogether.

5 Results

The questionnaire was based on six frames of questions which generated the following themes: the advantages of Fabric - between historical heritage and its central location, the state of historical buildings, the problems of the neighbourhood which lay between decay and lack of safety, the current frequency of visits and visit purposes in the Fabric neighborhood, the level of satisfaction with living in the neighbourhood, and respondents' solutions for neighbourhood development. Therefore, the results for each theme are presented below.

5.1 The advantages of Fabric: between historical heritage and central location

According to the respondents' opinions, Fabric's greatest advantage is its architectural heritage (17%), followed by its favourable position within the city (15.8%), its rich history (11.6%), and the beauty of the area which gives it great tourist potential (8.7%). Respondents also mentioned that Fabric is very well connected to the rest of the city by a lot of public transport (6. Another part of the respondents consider that the sights such as the Millennium Catholic Church or the Traian Square are the main aspects that make Fabric an important and culturally rich neighbourhood. A significant proportion of respondents mentioned the community of the neighbourhood, with one 11 year old student mentioning her own neighbourhood as *"very welcoming"*. However, it is worth noting that 24.5% of respondents did not know or did not want to give an answer to this question, with a good proportion often mentioning that Fabric has no advantages (Fig. 3).

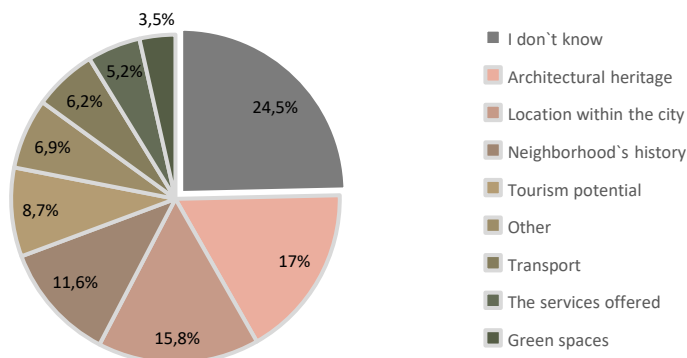


Fig. 3. Advantages of the Fabric district.

In the follow-up study we applied the Kruskal-Wallis test between the advantages mentioned by respondents and their socio-demographic and spatial categories, the results showing that certain variables (religion, education level, occupational status and respondent's neighbourhood) stochastically dominate the sample. Therefore, when cross-referencing the data with the last school completed ($H(5) = 14.187, p < .05$), it can be seen how respondents' responses change with increasing educational level, so that most "don't know/don't answer" responses are recorded for those with primary/middle education, while the fewest are recorded for those with higher education. Also, for people with secondary and university education, the services offered are no longer a significant advantage, as is the case for other respondents. For people with higher levels of education, the most important advantages of the neighbourhood are the architectural heritage, the geographical location of the neighbourhood and its tourist potential.

If respondents from various other neighbourhoods of Timișoara ($H(25) = 49.246, p < .05$), mentioned the advantages of Fabric neighbourhood as being related to its location, tourist potential, services, heritage and history, the most diverse range of responses given by respondents is found precisely in the case of residents of Fabric neighbourhood, with the favourable location within the city being in first place in their preferences, and the tourist potential in last place.

5.2 The problems of the neighbourhood: between decay and lack of safety

To the question "What do you think is the biggest problem in Fabric?", most respondents answered "Degradation", which can refer to the poor condition of the buildings as well as to the deterioration of the streets or the pavement. Another problem faced by the population in the area is the lack of safety, the filth, the presence of the Roma population and the lack of interest on the part of the management. Other disadvantages, less pronounced but still present in the minds of the Timișoara people, refer to public transport, lack of recreational spaces, especially those dedicated to young people, lack of feelings of inclusion and acceptance among the population, inaccessibility, lack of public institutions and high quality services, noise, pollution and poor water quality. In terms of the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test, significant associations were found only for variables referring to the respondent's spatial location. Therefore, from other neighbourhoods of the city ($H(25) = 45.226, p < .05$), the respondents who claim degradation as the biggest problem of the area generally reside in other historical areas of the city. Unsafety is particularly complained about by those living in neighbourhoods built during the communist period (see Fig. 4).

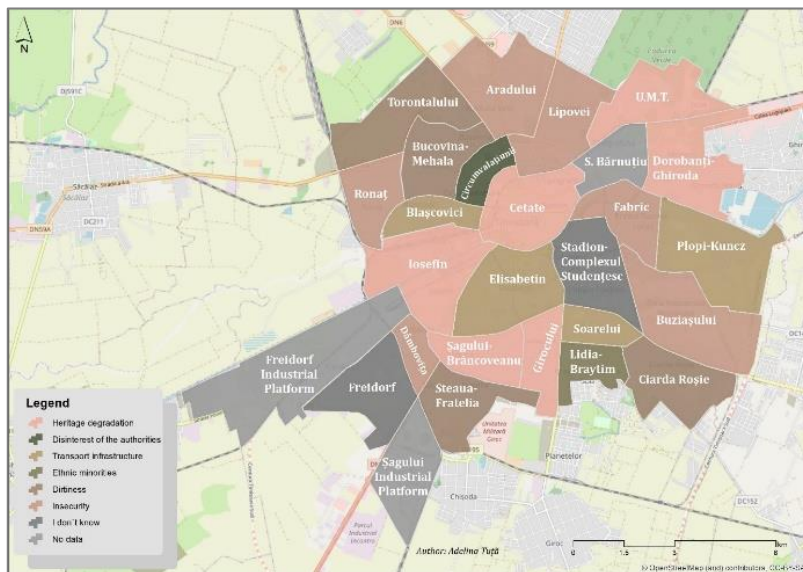


Fig. 4. Problems of the Fabric neighbourhood by respondents' neighbourhood of residence and their first choice.

In terms of respondents' housing type ($H(7) = 16.319, p < .05$), the most diverse range of problems is found among those living in a historic building, with respondents generally citing unsafety, dilapidation and the presence of ethnic minorities as the most acute problems in the neighbourhood. The most similar responses can be observed among the categories of those residing in Timișoara's blocks, whether built before or after 1989. At the opposite end of the scale are the students living on the student campus, 58.3% of whom say they do not know the answer to this question (Fig. 6).

After analysing the responses to the open question *"What services are missing in the Fabric neighbourhood?"*, more than half of the respondents to the questionnaire could not provide an answer. Some of them were very radical, stating that the neighbourhood should have more services relevant to the century we live in, complaining that it *"got stuck somewhere in the 90s"* (respondent, male, 42 years old). Others communicated that *"many service providers have gone out of business or moved their business after 12-18 months in this neighbourhood"* and stressed that *"the lack of services needs to be discussed in a primary way"* (respondent, female, 40 years old). With their exception, a good proportion of respondents complain about the lack of doctors' surgeries and pharmacies. A considerable proportion of the population questioned also mentioned the need for services in the leisure sphere: *"Terraces with service, at affordable prices"* (respondent, female, 41 years old). Several respondents suggested that their main need was for sanitation services, while also citing the development of civic spirit and *"care for the environment"* (female respondent, 19 years old).

5.3 The state of historic buildings : is there a continuous state of deterioration?

When asked *"How do you rate the condition of the following buildings in the Fabric district?"*, respondents were able to rate the condition of the listed buildings by choosing one of the following response options: "very well cared for", "somewhat well cared for", "somewhat dilapidated", "very dilapidated" and "don't know/don't answer". Therefore, in the

perception of the respondents, the main types of buildings in an advanced state of decay are residential buildings (65.7%), buildings serving public services (56.2%) and buildings for cultural purposes (51.3%). Being a historic district, many of the buildings mentioned above cannot be renovated according to the owners' own taste, as several laws, rules and regulations are taken into account when rehabilitating them. As they require the agreement of several decision-making structures, their rehabilitation often puts obstacles in the way of those who want to improve the buildings. At the same time, the lack of sufficient material funds for such renovations is another stumbling block for the residents of these buildings. Residents also complain about the lack of interest shown by the authorities in possible interventions and changes to the neighbourhood, a lack which is felt most keenly by the architectural jewels of the Fabric, but the history and emotional charge of these buildings is very fragile. At the other end of the scale are places of worship, educational institutions, buildings housing cafes or restaurants, as well as those housing shops, with percentages of over 50% in terms of respondents' perception of the degree of care of these buildings.

Also in the case of building condition we cross-checked the data obtained with the gender and age of the respondents, testing their validity using the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test. In terms of gender, a significant association was observed for the variables: 'residential buildings', 'buildings serving public services', 'churches', 'schools, kindergartens, nurseries' and 'shops', with all these variables showing, as in the case of the cross-referencing of wellbeing with respondents' gender, that men tended to be more pessimistic than women, stating that most of the buildings in Fabric were in a state of deterioration. Regarding the age of the respondents, all the variables analysed in the case of the state of deterioration of the buildings in the Fabric district were validated by applying the Kruskal-Wallis test, with a sig of p less than 0.05. In the case of this analysis, it was observed how people aged between 35 and 44 have a negative perception of the condition of the buildings in the neighborhood. In other words, middle-aged adults claim that in most of the cases mentioned, the buildings are in an advanced state of disrepair. On the other hand, the most optimistic in this respect are young people, both young and old.

5.4 How often and for what purpose is the Fabric neighborhood frequented?

A first result of the questionnaire shows that more than 50% of the people who frequent Fabric are not residents of the neighbourhood, but only frequent the area for various purposes. Most of the respondents visit the analysed area once every few months or less often (39.9%), the second most frequent being those who live in the neighbourhood and visit the analysed area daily (28.7%). Next are those who visit the area several times a month (13.9%), several times a week (11%) or even once a week (6.2%) (see Fig. 5.) Cross-referencing the responses to the question "*How often do you visit the Fabric neighbourhood?*" with socio-demographic and spatial variables, we observed statistically significant correlations with the age, marital and occupational status of the respondents, as the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test returned a positive response, with all the mentioned associations having a sig of $p < .05$.

In terms of age categories ($H(6) = 54.610, p < .001$), it can be stated that the area analysed is mainly frequented by elderly people, 64.5% of whom stated that they visit the neighbourhood every day. It should be noted that although it is very close to the Student Campus area, the neighbourhood seems to be forgotten and rather bypassed by the young population, with more than half of them stating that they pass through the study area once every few months or even less frequently. The adult population tends to split their responses evenly between constant and low frequency, while minors show significant percentages for daily and weekly frequency, which may also be due to the presence of a middle school and the neighborhood's English High School. Correlated with age is the marital status of the respondents ($H(4) = 39.576, p < .001$), as even from here we can tell that the study area is

frequented mainly by older people, by the fact that 80% of widowed respondents and 47.4% of divorced respondents spend daily time in the Fabric neighborhood. At the other end of the spectrum are people in a cohabiting relationship and single or unmarried people, around 50% of whom visit the neighbourhood once every few months or less frequently.

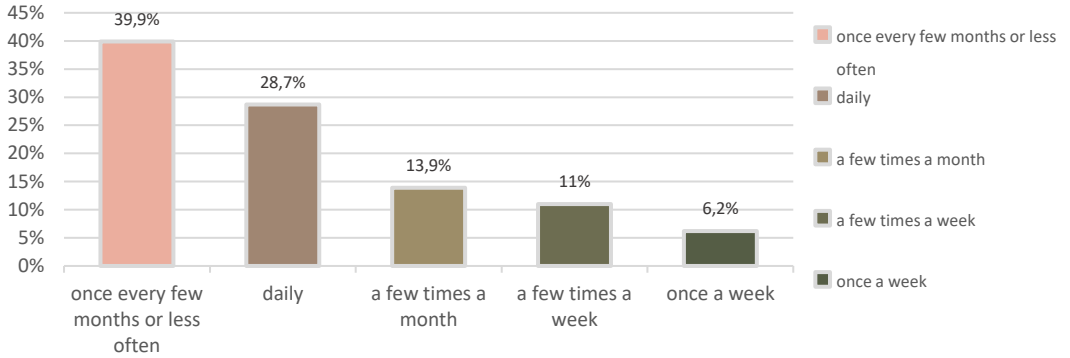


Fig. 5. Frequency of visits made by residents to the Fabric district.

In terms of occupational status ($H(5) = 46.006, p < .001$), we can state that Fabric is dominated by retired and unemployed people, with more than half of the people in each of the above categories spending time in the neighbourhood every day. At the opposite pole are pupils/students, 56.1% of whom visit the area once every few months or less frequently. Also, a significant percentage of entrepreneurs (26.5%) visit the area several times a week, precisely because of the small businesses opened in the neighbourhood.

In terms of the purpose for which respondents visit the Fabric neighbourhood, we find that most of the respondents treat the area as a simple transit place to other destinations. The second place is occupied by residents of the neighbourhood, with 117 respondents living in the neighbourhood under question. Also significant are the responses concerning recreation (17.5%), shopping (17%) and socialising (15.4%), with the significant percentages of respondents using the neighbourhood for these purposes demonstrating its very importance, which remains today. Mirrored are financial, religious and medical purposes, along with other services such as beauty salons, dog training services and volunteering opportunities offered by local neighbourhood actors (Fig. 6).

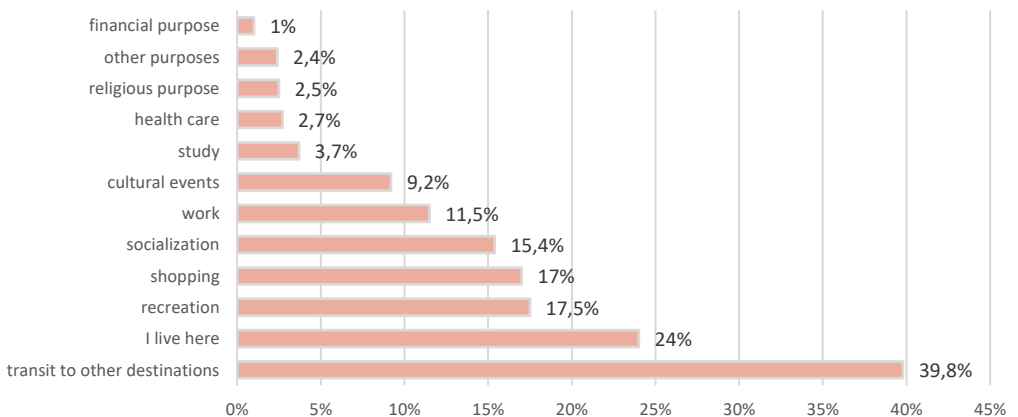


Fig. 6. Purposes for which the respondents of the questionnaire frequent the Fabric neighbourhood

5.5 Level of satisfaction with living in the historical neighbourhood

When asked how satisfied they were with various aspects of their life in the Fabric neighbourhood, respondents were able to express their satisfaction with these by answering "very dissatisfied", "somewhat dissatisfied", "somewhat satisfied", "very satisfied" and "don't know/don't answer". According to the responses received, citizens surveyed are mostly satisfied with the neighbourhood's churches, shops, public transport, green spaces and educational institutions, with each of these dimensions exceeding 20% in terms of satisfaction. On the other hand, cleanliness, accessibility for people with reduced mobility, road layout, bike lanes, safety and parking are some of the issues that residents of the neighbourhood face on a daily basis. Pedestrian space, cultural events, cafes/restaurants and public services are on the borderline between positive and negative opinions of citizens. During the fieldwork, respondents often stressed that *"there is room for improvement"* in all of these areas and were often disappointed with the way their neighbourhood looks.

By juxtaposing the above-mentioned variable with the respondents' gender and age and applying the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test, we identified several significant associations. In terms of gender, the categories that had a p-sig less than 0.05 refer to the degree of satisfaction with: roadway, pedestrian space, bicycle paths, street lighting, green spaces, cafes/restaurants, schools/kindergartens/daycare centers, health services, churches, cultural events, accessibility, cleanliness and safety. Analysing the data, we observed a much higher degree of pessimism on the part of male respondents, with the percentage difference between the two genders in terms of satisfaction often exceeding 12%.

In terms of age of respondents, almost all variables passed the Kruskal-Wallis test except: public transport, school and pre-school institutions, churches and safety. Of note within this category is the trend of increasing dissatisfaction with dimensions of wellbeing with advancing age, with the peak of dissatisfaction being reached around the age of 55-64, followed by a slight increase in the level of satisfaction in most cases over 65. Also, analysing the data and extracting responses from the field, we can say that older people are not aware of the open cafes/restaurants and cultural events in this neighbourhood, which could be a sign that they are not very visible or accessible and that they are mainly aimed at younger people.

5.6 Respondents' solutions for neighbourhood development

The solutions proposed by respondents for the development of the Fabric district are quite varied. 23.9% propose the rehabilitation of buildings as soon as possible: *"I would propose the introduction of legislation regulating the responsibility to rehabilitate privately owned heritage buildings. And if this is not possible, I would offer various benefits to citizens living in such historical buildings that should be rehabilitated/renovated (tax exemption, free parking pass anywhere in Timișoara, etc.)"* (respondent, female, 21 years old), with a good number of respondents even invoking *"the rehabilitation of historical buildings and public space with the help of European funds"* (respondent, female, 30 years old).

13.5% propose greater involvement of the authorities in the regeneration process of the neighbourhood, through a *"firm policy on the ownership and maintenance regime for the built heritage"* (respondent, male, 45 years old) or by providing *"real help for owners of historic buildings"* (respondent, male, 47 years old). The ranking is then followed by citizens who propose infrastructure rehabilitation works such as: repairing roadways, upgrading tram lines and providing bicycle lanes: *"Repairing tram lines and roadways, providing bicycle lanes"* (respondent, female, 20 years old).

Also, a good number of those who responded to the questionnaire are dissatisfied with the cleanliness, the presence of the Roma population, the services offered, which do not attract the young population, but also the lack of careful care of green spaces, urging

immediate action by local actors to solve these problems. Another part of the respondents suggests attracting more tourists by putting the former factories on a circuit, or by *"turning the square into a small international culinary hub"* (respondent, male, 42 years old).

A 41 year old respondent offered through the questionnaire a number of specific solutions for the regeneration of the neighbourhood, namely: *"supplementing street cleaning services, upgrading garbage collection solutions, identifying a financial support program for housing renovation (for any location in Fabric, not only for buildings in the historic site), redevelopment of green spaces, construction and upgrading of children's areas in parks, implementation of the area modernization project started by the City Hall, presence of local police on the streets"*. Other specific solutions offered by the other interviewees refer to the establishment of *"creative industries popularised during and after the period when Timișoara will be the European Capital of Culture"* (respondent, male, 45 years old), but also to *"the construction of a football/basketball field in the Lune area"* (respondent, male, 37 years old).

To sum up, the analysis of the responses regarding the Fabric district of Timișoara several important results were noted. First of all, the most well-maintained buildings in the neighbourhood are churches and the least well-maintained are residential buildings. The district has many advantages (its outstanding architectural heritage, its position within the city, its long and rich history, etc.), but these are overshadowed by a number of problems (decay, insecurity, squalor, etc.). Secondly, the neighbourhood is populated and frequented mainly by the elderly population, the main reason why respondents come to Fabric being the simple transit of the area. The most known tourist attractions of the area analyzed are the churches (Millennium Catholic Church, Fabric Synagogue and St. George Church), the Water Tower and the Water Bell. With regards to the conditions of living in the analysed neighbourhood, the respondents declare to be very satisfied with the churches, public transport and shops of the neighbourhood and very dissatisfied with the cleanliness, the bicycle paths, accessibility for people with reduced mobility, safety and the condition of the roadway of the area analysed. Secondly, respondents came up with a number of specific proposals and solutions, in particular to rehabilitate the buildings through greater involvement of the authorities, as well as to organise as many cultural events and revitalise services as possible in order to create new human and capital flows. When it comes to relaxation, responses were divided between those who decide not to spend their leisure time in the neighbourhood, citing the unsafe and poor state of public spaces, and those who choose Regina Maria Park as their place of recreation.

We would like to stress the importance and the necessity of such a study in Romania and the need for similar studies in post-communist cities in other Central and Eastern European countries. Moreover, the indispensability of the present study lies also in the fact that it can represent a very good research that should be taken into account during the urban regeneration of the district, since by means of questionnaires and interviews applied, it is possible to find out very easily the opinion of the people regarding a series of problems of the Fabric district. Therefore, the Fabric district of Timișoara remains today one of the most controversial areas of Timișoara, a district where the local heritage and assets are overshadowed by the many negative aspects presented above as a consequence of post-communist transition. Lately, however, a number of associations and non-governmental organisations have been undertaking more and more activities in the neighbourhood, which gives Timișoara residents hope that the Traian area will once again be placed high on the authorities' list of priorities.

6 Conclusion

If the studies of resident perception on historical urban neighbourhoods are numerous worldwide [1,2,3,4,28,29,30], little is still known about the aspects related to the perception of local people on the historical urban neighborhoods in East-Central Europe.

Our study reveals that there are historical neighborhoods which although have a central position in post-communist cities are still remained behind in terms of elements of building renovation, aesthetics, and a more precarious wellbeing of the people who live in the neighborhood. The transition from communism to capitalism in Romania determined that such neighborhoods were neglected by local actors, with an impact not only on the residents, but also on passers-by or visitors to these neighborhoods. In the case of the Fabric/Traian neighborhood, this trend of abandonment by the local authorities of such urban areas can be observed.

Certainly, there are some limitations of this study. We do not include in this study the opinion of the local administrative actors, because this is an objective for our future study. However, we consider that the results of our study can be used as a barometer of opinion for the local authorities in Timișoara, so that future local policies take into account not only the attraction of European funds for the rehabilitation of historical buildings, but also an involvement of the authorities in support and aid policies the population living in the Traian neighborhood. Future studies can be carried out on other neighborhoods in the post-communist urban environment, so as to observe if the residents' perceptions on this neighbourhood have the same trend as in the case of the Traian neighborhood of Timișoara or if other specific aspects related to post-communist urban transformations could appear.

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