

Empowering local communities as a form of good governance.

Case study: the locality of Novaci through the lens of mental mapping

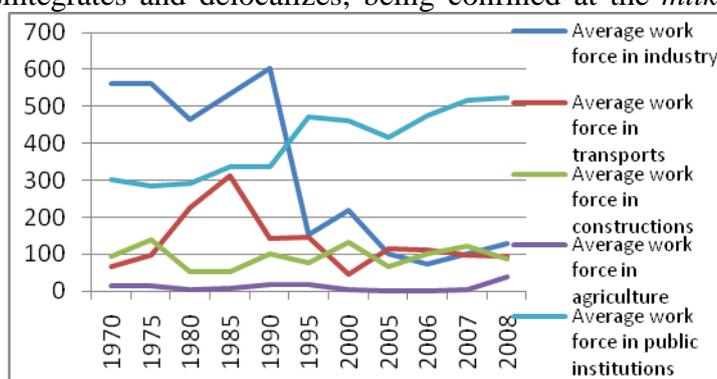
Part II

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After 1989, the material axis disintegrates and delocalizes, being confined at the *milk factory and market*. The locality no longer has the capacity of offering jobs on the local dimension, and from a financial and banking perspective, it loses its national valences once owned (the difference between the banking



institution as an organic product with collective finality, built from local initiative to national influence, and the banking institution built on the idea of profit *without public utility* as the main axis of development).

Figure 5 Novaci: The local work force. The local public institutions (local administration, education, health system and social work) absorb the larger part of the work force (after 1990).

All this time, *the main employer* remains the state through the City Hall and other public services and a *small milk factory*¹, built with European funds. The problem with the milk factory is its relatively comprador integration in the circuit of the local economy, which is why

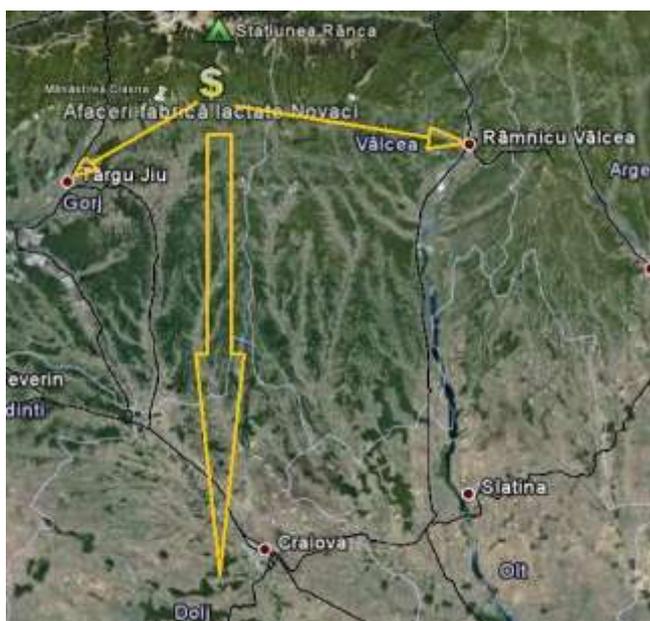


Figure 6 The sales market of milk factory in Novaci.

¹ “Exploitation of peasants by the milk factory (0.4-0.5 RON/liter), although we were told that the factory has a price of 0.7 to 1 RON per liter of milk and it is collecting milk from an area of 25 km, further distributing it in an area of 80 km. The turnover is 30 + billions and profits exceed 20%”. Preliminary Report, Novaci, July 2010.

it does not generate an increase in the milk offer on a local scale and, consequently, does not contribute significantly to the internal economic market, thus not generating extra income for producers. Economy becomes autarchic. Even after the parishes' re-emergence, some of which recorded encouraging economic results², the economic configuration is not much improved. Not surprisingly, none of the subjects had a mapping representation of the parishes, the latter skipping from the identified mental maps.

Concerning the market³, it does not represent anymore the intersection between the demand and supply side produced in the area, being an element of *outside-centering and income drainage* towards the exteriority of the community: an overwhelming majority of products are imported, including agricultural ones, the rest being produced in other parts (bread) or fake (with “infusions”, often not allowed, in milk products, for example). The case of expansion through the *outside-centring* of the internal production is illustrated by the outlet of the milk factory in Novaci (right) which comprises a distribution perimeter of almost 80 km² (Gorj, Dolj, and Vâlcea Counties) and further on, the owner sustaining negotiations with one of the biggest hypermarket chains in Romania for penetrating the Bucharest market.

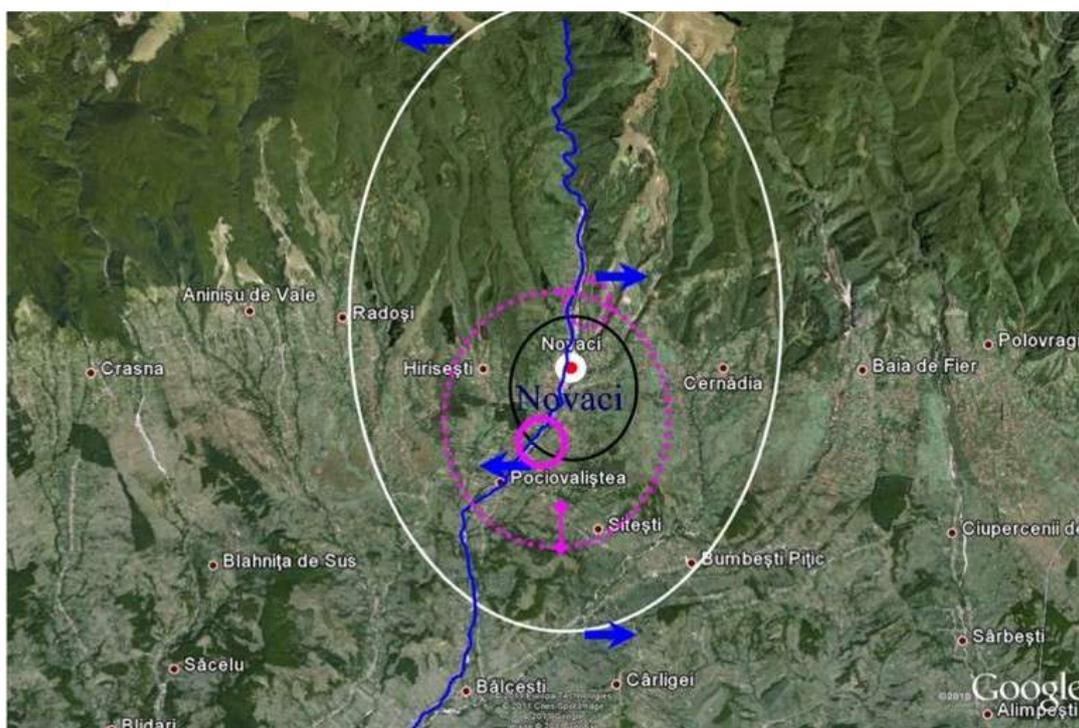


Figure 7 Novaci: the action spheres of the material axis after 1990. The sawmill has disappeared. In the northern part the only economic vector that still remains is the hydropower plant that, together with the southern one, are integrated in the national energetic system and not directly in the local economy. With a pink dotted line is the sphere of economic and

² Interview Novaci, July 2010.

³ “The economic nodes of Novaci are hard to trace, considering the individual nature of profits. The market is visited only once per week for lack of funds and thanks to the fact that people obtain from their own household a lot of products. A notable event is the fair of second-hand clothes held once a week, at which a large part of the inhabitants participate”. Final report, Novaci, July 2010.

social action of the milk factory that collects the milk from the surrounding lands (under unprofitable conditions for the peasants) and assures a small number of jobs in industry. The local industry, thus, does not necessarily contribute to the growth of the community (phenomenon illustrated by ); white – the area of the sheep breeding social and economic action that maintains in a certain way but which is clearly directed towards the individual interests of the sheep breeders and towards a good part of the grey economy in the area; black – the area of the market's social action that is limited to the distribution of imported food supplies and household use for Novaci and some of the surrounding localities.

The symbolic axis is composed of “*engineer Cuțuliga*”, “*The Church on the Hill*”, “*The Saint Elijah Fair from Polovragi*”, “*the School*”, the “*Rânca resort*” and the *Sunday fair*. During the field research, we surprisingly observed that “the Church on the Hill” and engineer Cuțuliga (the first director of the Novaci hydropower - 1936) were constantly in focus or in the individual mental projections regarding the way of life and order in Novaci. As a living personality and thus inside a network of status competition not yet fully understood, although all our interlocutors sent us to engineer Cuțuliga for “stories of Novaci”, none of them registered him on the map as a symbolic center. But almost all have indicated “the Church on the Hill” as the main symbolic core of the community, emphasizing its role more or less (the size of the circle that they drew on the map).

Also as a result of the field discussions, we have identified ‘the Polovragi fair’, found at approx. 15 km of Novaci, as one of the temporary community centers, held on St. Elijah’s day. But the “center Cuțuliga” and also the “fair Polovragi” are cores with partial and non-permanent activity in the projection of the collective mental space, poorly internalized, somehow outside the everyday activities. Neither is the church an adept of the daily affairs, given the widespread mistrust in some priests, but by its imposing presence on the peak that dominates the community and by the respect for the sacred virtues, it is a constant presence in the collective project of the space. “The Polovragi Fair” as it was perceived by direct observation by our teams is rather part of a sacred reduced to a profane aspect, dominated by a degraded genre of music (“manele”), goods (Asian imitations), food and show (for the young people, in particular, it is an opportunity to measure prestige through clothes, cars and types of behavior).

Before 1989, the school had a greater importance, both symbolically and institutionally (out of three schools, today only one is functional, although the pupils’ population is relatively constant)⁴. However, none of the subjects linked school with prosperity, although the majority of the good pupils go for the most developed western town of Timișoara in order for them to continue their education, probable having in the background the older concept that “one is incomplete without education”.

⁴ See National Institute of Statistics Gorj county department, Locality of Novaci data sheet, 24 February 2010. The charts for the 1990-2008 and 1975-1990 periods were obtained with the support of Gorj and Novaci authorities.

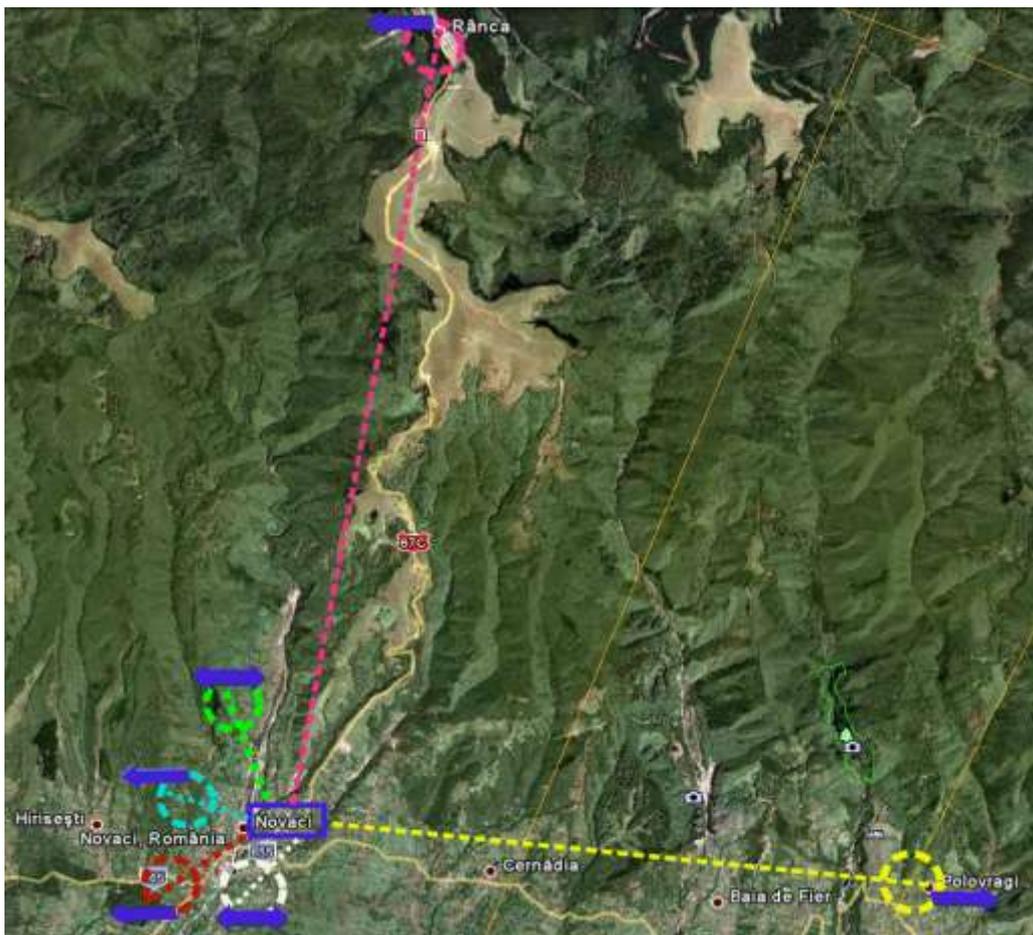
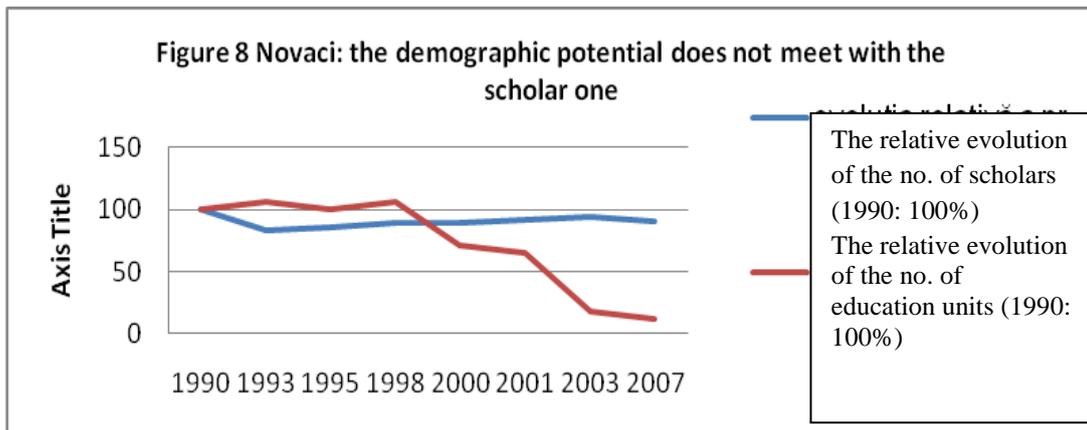


Figure 9 Novaci: the symbolic axis. The green circle illustrates the house of engineer Cuțuliga, and the blue one the Sunday fair. The white circle represents “the Church on the Hill”, with red the school, while the “Polovragi fair” is illustrated with yellow. Finally, the pink circle is Rânca (resort with a symbolic role for the Novaks). The arrows represent the centring (bidirectional) or outside-centring (directionated towards Novaci’s exterior) of the symbolic place. The ones oriented towards the community (localo-centred) are poles of coagulation and social, economic and symbolic growth. The outside-centred places, even though they are significant to the inhabitants, are actually places of dissolution for the community (school – gathering place for the future migrational work force), sources of conflict (Rânca) or of low solidarity manifestations (Polovragi fair).

The administrative axis – the City Hall and the market – are important from a functional perspective. No matter if you have interest in these institutions, you go by them anyway. Novaci

has also a few branches of important national banks, but none of them are inserted into the collective projection over space, a fact which confirms their presence separated from the community life (even non-functional). Regarding the City Hall, it is pretty highlighted and present in the collective mental, but often times in a negative manner, being more perceived as an obstacle after 1990: “mainly responsible for the problems Novaci is dealing with. Another irregularity is the fact that building permits are constantly given for the Rânca area even though they are not accorded with the main urban planning, and the parishes must pay the fines that normally the owners of the houses should have received. And yet, it seems that the mayor is in his second term, which he won given by sharing the EU paid food in his name”⁵.

The authorities are perceived by the community as working outside the local public interest. Here, the real subject is the public interest component of the work provided by the local institutions that are separated from the idea of welfare of the community and seen as a means of obtaining a salary (associated with a “good life”) without contributing in any real way to the local development. Thus, work in institutions is perceived as an act of rather personal than public purpose.

The perception is sustained by a series of subjective data according to which there is no collaboration in the local administration (“here they eat each other”) referring to the inability of a coherent management and resolution of problems such as cleaning the street or eliminating the stray dogs issue, the serious salubrity concern in Rânca, etc.



Figure 10 The green circle represents the City Hall (mostly negatively perceived) and the black one the market (whose supply of products comes mainly from the outside of the community). The axes most frequently used are with yellow, and the main interest points are illustrated by red dots.

⁵ Final report, Novaci, July 2010.

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