**Postmodern Openings**
ISSN: 2068-0236 | e-ISSN: 2069-9387
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2020, Volume 11, Issue 3, pages: 129-144 | https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.3/203

# The Representational Space of the Jiu Valley: Space Perceived Through Direct Experience

**Esther PETER (ANDRAŞ)[1], Andrei ANDRAŞ[2]**

[1] Ph.D. Student, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, Arad, Romania,
esther_peter2004@yahoo.com
[2] Lecturer Ph.D., University of Petroşani. Petroşani, Romania,
andrei.andras@gmail.com

**Abstract**: Over the past twenty years, the increasing significance of virtual spaces created by the internet, GPS and multimedia communication networks has played a major role in the growing interest attributed to the study of space. The promises and the menaces of globalization, the political and economic events which have reshaped the world in the last decades are just a few examples of the re-spacing of the globe. Accordingly, in the humanities and social sciences in general, the questions of space and place have marked a shift to inquiries about location, political space and mobility. The approaches and concepts proposed by the prestigious theorists Henry Lefebvre, Bertrand Westphal and Yi-Fu Tuan serve as a methodological framework for this paper. This study is intended as a reflection on the interconnection between the space of the Jiu Valley and its representation, far from exhausting all the possibilities of research and debate. The reading of space is accomplished through the direct and sensorial perception of space, covering various manners in which a person constructs reality and allowing for an understanding of the Jiu Valley in critically imaginative ways. Interviews conducted in situ provide an authentic interpretation of space, describing how individuals interact with their environment. By offering an alternative perception of reality, we hope to accomplish a value judgement of the Jiu Valley's unique setting and its animated community.

**Keywords:** *Jiu Valley; representational space; polysensoriality; direct experience; social space.*

**How to cite:** Peter (Andraş), E., & Andraş, A. (2020). The Representational Space of the Jiu Valley: Space Perceived Through Direct Experience. *Postmodern Openings, 11*(3), 129-144.
https://doi.org/10.18662/po/11.3/203

## 1. Introduction

The recent Spatial Turn, as a transdisciplinary phenomenon, has been both a product of, and a reaction to the postmodern condition. This shift in social thought reveals a change of perspective in the economy, culture and politics of the contemporary world which aids us to comprehend the role of space in our lives. Space and place have surfaced as a determinant of human identity and culture, a vital force that produces social actions. They provide the premises for the construction of human activities and relations and exert a significant influence on perception as it determines aesthetic appreciation and a vast range of experience. While a modernist approach to the study of place favoured the selection of a label which emphasized its function, the postmodern appreciation of space rejects singularity, incorporating a multitude of images which reveal infinite possibilities of understanding the world. Construed from a single source, the knowledge of a place is limited, restricted, as the perspective of a single person. A multifocal dynamic is a pivotal object of spatial analysis.

The characteristics of the Jiu Valley substantiate the assumption that this natural and anthropic environment is an extraordinary laboratory for exploring spatial causality. We applied Bertrand Westphal's (2011) model of multifocalization and polysensoriality to accomplish an examination of the Jiu Valley as a sum of individual perspectives derived from direct experience.

The goal of this paper is to achieve a dialogical understanding of the Jiu Valley that challenges pre-established perceptions and attitudes, revealing a noteworthy place with spirited inhabitants.

Approaches to space and place have concerned researchers, at least throughout modern history. With the rise of global movements, the significance of virtual spaces, political constellations and changes in identity which have reshaped the world, spatiality has become a prominent concept in social sciences and humanities. The intersection between disciplines occupies a significant place in this new line of research. For instance, forms of mimetic art (film, photography, painting, computer graphics etc.) can contribute to the study of spatial representation. Sociology, anthropology, psychology and philosophy support spatial analysis by providing an ample set of heterogeneous points of view which all converge in a given place.

The concept of polysensoriality proposed by Bertrand Westphal (2011) underlines the notions of how the senses produce multiple responses to place. For Westphal (2011), polysensoriality contests the supremacy of the gaze, stating that the "experience of an environment comes from all the senses" (Westphal, 2011, p. 132). He cites Yi-Fu Tuan and Paul Rodaway,

two of the most illustrious sensorial geographers and explains that every person possesses their own way of perceiving reality. Certain senses are more active than others. The individual perceives through all the senses, receives information and develops that information through a mental process. Consequently, sensoriality enables the individual to align to the world, to structure and define space.

"The hierarchy of the senses … is not culturally universal", Westphal (2011, p. 132) notes. He employs the examples of the aboriginal Eskimos who interpret space more by sound rather than sight and the Australian aborigines who rely on smell as a primary sense. In terms of representation, space is subject to the unlimited diversity of sensory perception. The endogenous, exogenous and allogeneous points of view have correspondents in the polysensory perception of the world.

Westphal distinguishes between *sensory landscape* (*smellscape, soundscape*) as the perception of the world through one of the senses, and *polysensory world* or *allscape* as a combination of several senses. He reproduces the term *synesthesia* introduced by Fontanille (1999, p. 17), to denote simultaneous perceptions. The individual makes use of either one of the five senses as a means of representation of the environment or employs a synesthetic approach which brings together two or several senses.

In the analysis of a complex space, such as a city or metropolis from a polysensory perspective, synaesthesia emerges as the most conclusive means of representation of space. Synesthesia, as the perception by senses of an individual and collective or intersubjective synaesthesia, defined by the group or community are the two facets of human space seen as a sensory space. A city is the sum of the individual polysensory perception and the homogenous perception of the community. Depending on the artist/writer/observer, the chromatic spectrum of a city may be intensified or corrected, the soundscape may be recorded as noisy and discordant or subtle and harmonious and the smells may be unpleasant or fragrant and sweet. The multitude of representations allow for a complex reflection and study.

## 2. Literature review

The grounds of this paper have originated from a number of theories and concepts related to space and place, emphasizing the notable contributions in this field by the most influential spatial theoreticians. The reinsertion of space into modern consciousness was a prolonged and arduous process. In the 1920s, The Chicago School of Sociology and

Geography attempted to introduce space into urban analysis to investigate human behaviour as shaped by social structures and physical environmental factors rather than biological factors. The rapid expansion of the urban centre of Chicago and its accompanying social problems was the focus of the new line of research.

In 1937, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) introduced the term *chronotope* (translated as "time-space") to define "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 84-85). Bakhtin acknowledges having borrowed the concept from Einstein's Theory of Relativity. In literary criticism it expresses the inseparability of space and time, displaying semantic and representational significance.

The importance of space and place in humanistic studies was radically reasserted in the turbulent 1960s by Henry Lefebvre (1965) and Michel Foucault (1967) within the so-called "Spatial Turn" phenomenon. As Warf and Arias (2009) observe, "the reassertion of space came to embrace various aspects of human subjectivity, everyday life, and the multiple dimensions of identity that are central to any coherent understanding of social life" (Warf & Arias, 2009, p. 4). This line of thought was continued by Edward Soja (1996) by adding a "Thirdspace" perspective, a trialectic of spatiality-historicality-sociality. The human geographer, Yi- Fu Tuan (2001) proposes a more direct and intimate interpretation of space through the filter of senses and feelings. Robert Tally Jr. (2015) argues that "a place does not become a *place* at all until it has distinguished itself from the undifferentiated spaces of which it is a part, and places are invested with significance only by being noticed *in the first place*" (Tally, 2015, p. 559). Also, central to our methodology is Bertrand Westphal's geocritical model (*Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, 2011) which involves the convergence of a spectrum of individual optics, inscribing place in a dynamic perspective. Westphal's geocentred outlook focuses on the transformation of place in time, the cumulation of multiple points of view, intertextuality and the perception of the world through senses.

In this paper we will undertake an examination of The Jiu Valley, employing the concepts and models suggested by Henry Lefebvre (1991), Bertrand Westphal (2011) and Yi- Fu Tuan (2001) as spatial critical methodology. In *The Production of Space*, Henry Lefebvre (1991) distinguishes between three modes in which natural space can become a more complex social space. Firstly, he defines "spatial practices" associated with "perceived space," pointing to a paradoxical intertwining between daily routine and urban reality. Secondly, Lefebvre (1991) delineates the "representations of

space," which correspond to the knowledge we have about a space: "… conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers …" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). Thirdly, he identifies "representational spaces" "as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also some artists … writers and philosophers …" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). The aim of this social theory was to reassess the concept of space from given to produced, emphasizing its function in the construction and transformation of social life. Lefebvre and Foucault began a radical rethinking of the ontological, epistemological and theoretical relations between space and time, a phenomenon which was later acknowledged as "The Spatial Turn."

In his comprehensive work, *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011), Bertrand Westphal examines the complex interface between the geographical referent and its representation, proposing a multivalent synergy between spatial and discursive practices. The central principles of Westphal's theory are rendered through four methodological perspectives: *geocentrism, multifocalization, polysensoriality*, and *stratigraphic* perspective.

Westphal suggests three variations in which multifocalization is expressed. According to the relations between the observer and the space of reference, the points of view can be divided into: endogenous, exogenous and allogeneous. The first category, the endogenous point of view, is limited to a familiar space which is perceived through an autochthonic filter. The second category, the exogenous point of view, mirrors the perspective of the traveller. Finally, the allogeneous point of view is situated between the aforementioned. It is the vision of those who have settled in a place but are considered foreigners by the native population. The collision of subjective points of view nurtures variability and rejects all that tends to be the singular.

A notable contribution in this field was made by human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan with the publication of his book *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience* in 2001. The work describes how humans interact with space and place and is organized around three themes: the biological factors, the relations of space and place and the range of experience and knowledge. Tuan argues that humans acquire the notions of space and place according to the stages of their development, "[h]uman infants have only very crude notions of space and place. In time they acquire sophistication" (Tuan, 2001, p. 6). For Yi-Fu Tuan, in *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience,* space becomes place when it becomes familiar and is attributed a value. Place denotes "stability" and "security" while space equals "openness," "freedom" and "threat." "'Space' is more abstract than 'space'" (Tuan, 2001, p. 6). The

interpretation of space and place can be achieved directly or intimately or indirectly and conceptually, making use of symbols. Tuan encourages the reader to take into account the different modes of experience (vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste) in order to understand and interpret space and place through the filter of feelings.

## 3. Methodology

In order to substantiate the various attitudes and perceptions of the Jiu Valley we have conducted interviews both with residents who are familiar with the natural environment, the urban space and the social and economic changes and visitors / tourists.

This qualitative study aimed to answer three open-ended questions:

**Question 1**: How would you describe the city of Petroşani? What challenges your senses and what do you find unattractive?

**Question 2**: How would you depict the landscape of the Jiu Valley? What stimulates your senses?

**Question 3**: Has the Jiu Valley changed after the closure of mines?

Face to face interviews represent the selected research method which creates opportunities to investigate the topics of interest.

### *3.1. Participants*

A convenience sampling approach has been used to address participants within particular groups (residents, tourists). The number of participants in the study: 12 persons. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 85 years old. The territorial coverage comprised the entire area of the Jiu Valley. A small number of participants helped to build closer relationships between the researchers and the interviewees, leading to more authentic conversations and more accurate data. The inclusion criteria were: persons who were born in the Jiu Valley (to assess the endogenous point of view), persons who settled in the Jiu Valley (to examine the allogenous perspective) and tourists, university applicants who have a brief contact with the area (to express the exogenous perspective).

### *3.2. Ethical considerations*

Ethical issues have been considered during the research. The persons participating in the interviews have been entirely informed about the purpose and the expected findings of the study. They gave their consent to contribute to this project. All respondents have engaged voluntarily, aware of the possibility to withdraw at any time. Identifying information has been

excluded from the published article, ensuring the anonymity of the participants.

### *3.3. Data collection and analysis*

The objectives of the study were established. Our research was based on open-ended questions to accomplish a valid evaluation of the Jiu Valley through the filter of individual perspectives. We defined the target respondents and the modalities to reach them. A pre-test of the questions was performed to identify the confusing points. The face to face interviews were conducted in Romanian and then translated by the authors of this study. The interviews took place in areas free from distractions and at times and locations that were most suitable for participants. One interview unfolded online, via a videoconference application. Qualitative content analysis was performed to interpret the data obtained from the interviews. The collected data was structured according to the pre-established areas of interest.

## 4. Findings

The collected data offers insight into how different categories of people perceive the Jiu Valley through direct experience. The main themes of research are approached and several illustrative responses reveal the participants' attitudes and perception.

**1.** The content analysis showed that the vast majority of interviewees (11 of the 12 respondents) expressed dissatisfaction regarding the infrastructure of the city of Petroşani, the economic and cultural centre of the Jiu Valley. The consequences of coal mining are still visible as the sooty buildings are not a pleasant sight. Interviewee No. 2 remarked: "Petroşani is a town of contrasts, where the beauty of the mountains is altered by the ugliness of the blackened houses and blocks of flats, still covered in the soot of coal. It is a quiet town, with serene and kind people, always willing to help. The smell of coal is a scent I bear in my clothes and soul but the awful odour of unsanitary sewers is something that upsets my senses."

The endogenous participants reveal a strong feeling of attachment to their home town and disappointment in the authorities for the lack of interest in the exploitation of coal or investments in the city's infrastructure or tourism. Interviewee No. 6 stated: "The town of Petroşani is a clean and quiet place, surrounded by many tourist areas and with a high tourist potential due to the location at the foot of the Parâng Mountains. The economic trend of the region is continually decreasing due to the lack of

interest in the exploitation of coal. Aesthetically, I am dissatisfied as there have been no investments in the infrastructure of the area and its surroundings."

**2.** As we have anticipated, all the interviewed persons described the landscape of the Jiu Valley in most flattering terms, claiming that their senses are delighted with the variety of geographical characteristics, the flora and the fauna. Interviewee No. 10 observed: "As my first substantial experience outside of North America, the people and environment of Petroşani challenged my senses at times. I found Petroşani's surrounding landscape to be beautiful, from the Parâng peaks to the rural areas on the edge of the city. The rural beauty contrasted with relatively unattractive city blocks."

For those participants who settled in the Jiu Valley, the natural scenery was a decisive incentive. Interviewee No. 4 stated*:* "I think that this is probably one of the most beautiful places on earth. I now believe the elders' saying: He who drinks water from the Jiu Valley will always return here!"

**3.** Most participants (7/12) expressed disbelief in the economic and social revival of the area. The majority (9/12) indicated a state of gradual deterioration of the infrastructure and the citizens' living conditions. The answers provided by the participants helped us identify several consequences of the closure of mines which impacted upon people's perception of the Jiu Valley:

**4.1. High unemployment rate;** Interviewee No. 9 remarked: "The alterations produced by the closure of mines are visible. The active population does not have many employment opportunities."

**4.2. Aging population;** Interviewee No.3 stated: "Our children are forced to leave their home towns in order to find a job. Soon, only old people will inhabit the area."

**4.3. Economic collapse;** Interviewee No.1 showed a highly pessimistic attitude regarding the future of the Jiu Valley. He concluded: "The Jiu Valley has indeed become the Valley of Tears since the closure of mines. The government has not come up with any viable economic alternative until the present day. The entire Valley in facing collapse and our hands are tied."

**4.4. Migration;** Interviewee No.11 observed: "The young generation doesn't have any reasons to stay here. There are no jobs, or any prospects of future improvements. Migration seems the only solution. People move to the major cities in Romania or even abroad."

One respondent was able to find a positive consequence of the closure of mines, Interviewee No. 2, respectively, who remarked: "The

closure of mines generated discontent on the part of the local inhabitants. On the other hand, we are thankful for the appearance of cultural entities such as Planet Petrila."

The aim of the interviews was to generate a representative sample of public opinion on the topic being investigated. The descriptive questions were intended to encourage the participants to talk about their direct experience in detail. The multiple points of view allow for an interpretation of space from more than a set of eyes, painting an authentic picture of the Jiu Valley.

## 5. Exploring the Jiu Valley through direct experience

This paper explores the urban experiences of individuals physically moving through the landscape of the Jiu Valley. Experience is a term which covers all the various modes through which a person constructs a reality. A human being perceives the world through all his senses simultaneously. Inhabitants or visitors, walking around the urban space, individuals have their own personal experience. Human spaces reflect the quality of the human senses and mentality. As Soja remarks, "[h]uman spatiality is thus more than the product of our capacity to separate ourselves from the world, from a pristine Nature, to contemplate its distance plenitude and our separateness" (Soja, 1989, p. 133).

A region such as the Jiu Valley is perceived in terms of a unique physical setting, odours and street noises. "An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind" (Tuan, 2001, p. 18). Pop claims that "Tuan's view has a much more phenomenological connotation, closer to Christian Norberg-Schulz's or Martin Heidegger's philosophy, for whom the notion of place is related and linked to the act of dwelling or inhabiting - namely the act of assimilating and identifying oneself with a certain place" (Pop, 2014, p. 279). For residents, although the representation of space is intimate, it may lack accuracy due to the absence of the outside perspective. Tourists may have a distorted image of the place assimilated from guidebooks. Thus it is imperative to look at a place as a sum of individual perspectives.

In archaic times man's enjoyment of nature was more direct and robust. Nowadays, physical contact with the natural environment is no longer direct and occurs occasionally. Unfortunately, according to Cox et al. (2017, p. 79), "experiencing nature regularly appears to be the exception rather than the norm, with a person's connection to nature being positively

associated with incidental and intentional experiences". The contemporary's man involvement with nature should be free of constraints, unselfconscious, similar to a child's openness of mind. In order to experience the natural scenery of the Jiu Valley in a polymorphous manner, one must surrender completely to all their delectable physical sensations. Just by lying on the grass near a brook, in old clothes, one is assaulted by a multitude of simultaneous sensations: the sweet smell of flowers and fresh grass; the irregularity of the ground, its warm and rough feel; the light and pleasant wind; the gentle caress of the sun; the soothing sound of water flowing through the rocks, the tickling of a spider climbing on the arm.

The farmer's fondness of the land is different and more profound. Nature is perceived as means of existence. The peasants' calloused hands are evidence of the direct experience with the land. Their lives are connected to the great cycles of nature. Although aware of nature's beauty, the farmers' aesthetic appreciation often remains unarticulated. Their relationship to the land can be characterized as more utilitarian. Space is a dichotomized concept as nature can be both friendly and hostile, determining a dualistic attitude and behaviour.

In ancient times, the mountain was regarded by people with wonder and respect. It was unreachable, hostile and dangerous. In some cultures, the mountain was the meeting point between the sky and the earth and the centre of the world. Until the eighteenth century, the mountain represented an inhospitable place. It was not until Romanticism that the beauty of the mountain was appreciated and praised in poems and epic writings. The attitude towards the mountain changed as the century progressed. Its accessibility, the enjoyment of travelling and the scientific purposes contributed to the reversal in mountain evaluation. Also the mountain appeared in a different light when medical researchers demonstrated its healing properties. By the middle of the nineteenth century, people's mentality regarding the mountain had been completely revised.

While the mountains are ladders to the sky, the home of the gods where man used to build protective shelters or places of worship, the valley appeals to individuals for many reasons. "Symbolically the valley is identified with the womb and shelter. Its concavity protects and nurtures life" (Tuan, 2001, p. 118). Human beings are greatly dependent on water sources. The valley collects water in its rivers, brooks and lakes. The rich soils of the valley promise a good livelihood, bringing the inhabitants into closer contact with the earth. The physical characteristics of the Jiu Valley reveal a bountiful space, standing for wisdom, spiritual comfort and holiness.

Today the inhabitants of the Jiu Valley view the mountain within a wide array of perceptual judgements and experiential attitudes. Firstly, the mountain equals sublime nature. The forests, the rivulets, the song of the birds and the proximity of the sky awake the senses and provide comfort and peace. Secondly, persons who engage in the collection of herbs, and berries, fishing and hunting add another dimension to their direct experience. Those who practice hiking or winter sports possess a more accurate appreciation of the mountain's surface, the uniqueness of its trails and the quality of snow, displaying rich vocabulary in designating them. They are also accustomed to the cycles of nature and the caprices of the mountain, and always follow unwritten rules lest they should offend the mountain and suffer the consequences.

Alexander notes that "senses of place (in the plural) emerge from the engagement of our five senses not only in apprehending but also in actively making places, and in making sense of the worlds in which they take place" (2017, p. 39). The cities of the Jiu Valley offer a great variety of settings which challenge our senses. The streets alternate between wide straight avenues bordered by trees and jammed with cars and narrow lanes, packed with pedestrians during rush hour. Pedestrians are deafened by the decibels of automobiles, the rumble of heavy trucks and the roar of motorbikes. The street scene is dominated by sooty apartment blocks which rise to four or more stories. The character of the commercial streets has changed through time. The diversity of business establishments from the industrial period has been replaced by supermarkets and second-hand stores. Bars, casinos and sports betting agencies cater for the vices of the unemployed and addicted. The markets are busy and noisy, bustling with life. The smell of fresh fruit and flowers alternates with the unbearable odour of Chinese petrochemicals. People come to the market not only to purchase products, but also to meet friends and chat. The flea markets are a cluster of bazaars and disposal sites, giving off an odour of antique and mouldy. The social whirl stops after dark as city people get up early and retire to the intimacy of their homes soon after dark. The traffic becomes non-existent, allowing for silence and tranquillity to take over. The church steeples are dominant features of the skyline. The spires of catholic churches contrast with the immense domes of orthodox churches. The places of worship are numerous in the Jiu Valley and are often the most assertive architectural elements of the post-industrial communities.

The town of Aninoasa considered one of the poorest towns in the area, takes pride in possessing a Tulip tree, whose story is linked to the famous writer, Jules Verne. The tree displays a history as interesting as its

delicate flowers. It is said that this tree blooms every seven years, delighting the senses of the inhabitants of the region and not only. Legend has it that the story of the tulip tree begins around 1880, when the Maderspach Baron, who had inherited vast areas in the region, built a castle surrounded by a wonderful garden with various species of plants. His wife, Anne Margarette, decided to ennoble the garden with the special tulip tree brought precisely from Paris. It was said that the young woman corresponded with her friend abroad, the writer Jules Verne. People say that Jules Verne wrote "The Castle of the Carpathians" inspired by the places and picturesque landscapes described by Anne Margarette in her letters. Today, the inhabitants of the area call the old tulip tree "Jules Verne's tree" and tell its legend every time they have the chance.

Civic pride and economic competitiveness have often combined to give places labels, in terms of nicknames or epithets, which aim to reveal their uniqueness. The Jiu Valley is quite rich in nicknames. Petroşani and its centre represent the attractive segment of the region. At the opposite end, the districts called "Bosnia", "Dallas" and "Şerpărie" symbolize danger, utter destitution and high crime rate. It is also interesting to note how nicknames change with the transformation of a place. Once a prosperous region which attracted many people from the country and abroad, the Jiu Valley was a symbolic El Dorado due to its industrial status. Today, the economic and social changes produced by the closure of mines, have redefined space under the label of "the Valley of Tears".

The life style of the poor is not a pleasant sight or delight for the senses as they live in decaying environments. Their dwellings are visibly deteriorated and neglected, with cramped and airless rooms, unwashed windows and piled up refuse which gives off an unbearable smell. The buildings lack the basic utilities and services which makes them unsanitary and impossible to use. Unemployed men and vagrants wandering around or attending taverns and pawnshops are a common sight. Their places to sleep usually range from shop thresholds to stairwells of deserted buildings. The young try to make up for their condition by immersing into fantasy or committing acts of violence. Cultural edifices are minimal but bars, casinos and betting houses abound. Some children sense the physical decay of their neighbourhood or town. Others are not aware of the outside world. Their role-models are hip-hop artists, vloggers and even notorious offenders. As Popescu observes, "[w]hen factories and blocks of flats are torn down or allowed to decay, communities are deprived of motivation and means of effective action. At the same time, the altered landscape creates a new sense

of place, and living in a deteriorating environment reinforces feelings of insecurity that often accompany job loss" (2014, p. 193).

Many places display visual emblems which set them apart and confer them individuality. As Shortell and Krase observe, "through their social interactions and their material traces, urban dwellers fill social space with expressive, conative and phatic signs of their collective identity" (2010, p.1). The towns in the Jiu Valley lack visual identity. They do not exhibit or sell postcards revealing the beauty of the town or its natural surroundings. This denotes a lack of confidence in the worthiness of different sights or monuments. They may even follow the idea that the public's negative perception of the Jiu Valley cannot be suspended. On the other hand, there are writers and artists who strive to redefine a visual identity of the region in their books, photographs, mural paintings and museums. A notable example is represented by Boboc Marian's books: *The Jiu Valley – all inclusive* (2017) and *Pribegii turistice în Valea Jiului* (2011) which offer an impressive collection of inspiring photographs and writings. Visual emblems of the region are also Mihai Barbu's artistic products on display at the various museums he has created and the vividly coloured paintings on the building walls in Petrila.

"The components of cultural landscape elements play a significant role in defining the sense of place," according to Mohammad et al (2013, p. 507). An interesting exercise which involves naming the first thing associated with a given place, for example, Paris – the Eiffel Tower, could generate lively discussions around symbols and landmarks. The Jiu Valley is often associated with coal mines by outside observers and visitors. From the endogenous point of view, the most notable landmarks in the Jiu Valley are the Miner's Statue in the Carol Schreter Park in Petroşani, the Parâng and Straja mountains, "Planet Petrila" and the Tulip tree in Aninoasa.

The lifestyle of a community is dictated by the sum of their economic, social and mundane activities. Soja states that "[t]o be alive is to participate in the social production of space, to shape and be shaped by a constantly evolving spatiality which constitutes and concretises social action and relationship" (1985, p. 90). The closure of mines transformed the character of the region and man's relationship to his urban environment. Knowledge of a place varies enormously from person to person. The rich images and attitudes that a person acquires from his immediate environment in the course of daily existence form specific responses on the level of thought. What people see in their urban environment and how they respond to it can be inferred directly due to surveys and interviews. These opinions and attitudes add richness to a place, enabling a multifaceted perspective. It is often the place itself which generates these impressions. A person's

attitude to space is shaped by their biological traits, education, profession and physical setting. An entire community's attitude is linked to the group's cultural history and experience related to space. The role of space in determining culture cannot be neglected. These concepts provide complementary perspectives on the nature of the perception and attitude towards the environment.

Hoover states that "[o]ur cultural identities are rooted in the knowledge of *home*. Home is the place where you belong, a place you are attached to. Through adventure, exploration, into unknown places we can and do expand our idea of culture and understanding of home" (2015, p. 40). The neologism "topophilia" defines the human love of place, including "all of the human being's affective ties with the material environment" (Tuan, 1990, p. 93). These rapports are more permanent than the aesthetic response to the environment or the one derived from the senses. The intensive feeling of topophilia is generated by the familiarity of a place and the past memories associated with it as it is considered home by the individual. While visual or tactile appreciation is ephemeral, the pleasure is more personal and eternal when it embraces human memories. Knowledge of the past is a significant component in the love of place. People invest feelings in their homes and neighbourhoods and develop strong attachment to their home ground. Thwaites and Simkins contend that "meaning and value can be attributed to places by individuals or groups because they hold particular social significance, perhaps as places where regular recreation takes place, or for ceremonial occasions, such as births, marriages and deaths. Such places become imageable in the lives of people because of these associations and this can be strengthened by the presence of prominent physical features that come to symbolise them, or represent them in physical form: the particularly recognisable form of a church and its surroundings, for example" (2005, p. 5).

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper we proposed a more direct interpretation of the Jiu Valley space through the filter of human senses and personal experience, following the concepts of representational spaces, polysensoriality and direct experience. The natural setting and the urban space were subject to sensorial appreciation from endogenous, exogenous and allogenous points of view, offering a valid evaluation of space. The interviewed residents showed an aesthetic response to the environment and a strong topophilic sentiment, while the visitor's fresh perception was unbiased and rational.

It can be concluded that space is unquestionably an effective tool for producing both fictional and empirical reality. The examination of the Jiu Valley through direct experience was intended as a reflection on the multiple possibilities of space interpretation, far from having exhausted all the opportunities of discussion and research. Supported by an extensive bibliography drawing on the fields cultural geography, sociology, psychology and the philosophy of space, the present study provides an attempt to rediscover the Jiu Valley from a variety of angles, and most importantly, to change the general perception of this fascinating place and its stout-hearted community.

## References

Alexander, N. (2017). Senses of Place. In Robert T. Tally (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space* (pp. 39-49). Routledge. http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781315745978-4

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays.* Austin and University of Texas Press.

Boboc, M. (2017). *Valea Jiului all inclusive.* Editura MJM.

Boboc, M. (2011). *Pribegii turistice în Valea Jiului*. Editura MJM.

Cox D. T. C., Hudson H. L., Shanahan D. F., Fuller R. A. & Gaston K. J. (2017). The rarity of direct experiences of nature in an urban population. *Landscape and Urban Planning, 160*, 79 - 84. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2016.12.006

Fontanille, J. (1999). Modes du sensible et syntaxe figurative. *Nouveaux actes sémiotiques, 61*, 1– 68. Presses Univ. Limoges.

Foucault, M. (1967). Des espaces autres. Conférence au Cercle d'études architecturales. In *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, *5*, 46 - 49.

Hoover, D. S. (2014). Returning to Water: Understanding Place as Cultural Lens. *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts, 2*(1), 31 - 42. http://dx.doi.org/10.30958/ajha.2-1-3

Lefrebvre, H. (1965). *La proclamation de la Commune*.Paris.

Lefrebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Blackwell.

Mohammad, N. M., Saruwono, M., Said, S.Y., & Hariri, W.A. (2013). A Sense of Place within the Landscape in Cultural Settings. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, 105,* 506 - 512. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.11.054

Pop, D. (2014). Three Approaches in Defining the Space-Place Relationship. *Acta Technica Napocensis: Civil Engineering & Architecture, 57* (3), 278 – 286.

https://www.academia.edu/11540904/Three_Approaches_in_Defining_the_Space_Place_Relationship

Popescu, C. (2014). Deindustrialization and Urban Shrinkage in Romania. What Lessons for the Spatial Policy? *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences, 42* (E), 181 – 202. https://rtsa.ro/tras/index.php/tras/article/view/97

Shortell, T., & Krase, J. (2010). Place, Space, Identity: A Spatial Semiotics of the Urban Vernacular in Global Cities. In *ESA Research Network Sociology of Culture Midterm Conference: Culture and the Making of Worlds*.

Soja E. W. (1985) The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Retheorisation. In: Gregory D., Urry J. (eds) *Social Relations and Spatial Structures. Critical Human Geography* (pp. 90-127). Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27935-7_6

Soja, E. W. (1989). *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Verso.

Soja, E. W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell Publishing.

Tally Jr, R. T. (2015). Spatiality's Mirrors: Reflections on Literary Cartography. *English Language and Literature, 61*(4), 557 - 576. https://doi.org/10.15794/jell.2015.61.4.002

Thwaites, K., & Simkins, I. (2005) Experiential landscape place: Exploring experiential potential in neighbourhood settings. *Urban Design International, 10* (1), 11-22. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.udi.9000134

Tuan, Y. F. (2001). *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience*. 1977. University of Minnesota Press.

Tuan, Y. F. (1990). *Topophilia. A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*. 1974. Prentice Hall.

Warf, B., & Arias, S. (2009). *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Routledge.

Westphal, B. (2011). *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Spaces*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119161