

# **Life in Post-Socialist Mono-Industrial Communities: The Case of Bălan**

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Annotation: Industrialization in Central and Eastern Europe during socialist times led to the creation of new districts and towns built around emerging workplaces: plants, collective farms, mines (Stenning, 2005). How does life in a “company town” change as it is created and when the company suddenly disappears? What aspects remain unchanged? The paper will seek answers to these questions examining the case of Bălan, a small mining town, artificially overdeveloped during Romania’s socialist past. The case will be analyzed through the lens of theoretical literature on socialist forced industrialization and urbanization and post-socialist change (Kotkin, 1995; Stenning, 2005).

Keywords: post-socialist town, identity permanence, identity change, mono-industrial community, over- and under-urbanization

The socialist urban experience has received much attention in the past decades in the literature on urban development. The demise of communism in the Soviet Union and its satellites in Central and Eastern Europe allows researchers to evaluate some of the earlier theories on the topic and prophecies of socialist urban change by looking at individual cases of cities in transition.

There are two points of view in the literature regarding urban development in socialist Central and Eastern European countries, not necessarily contradictory, but rather two sides of the same coin. The first theoretical approach was put forward by Szelenyi (1981) who argued that urban industrial output grew faster than the urban population, because the over-investment in industry could be supported only at the cost of lower spending on urban infrastructure and housing, causing “underurbanization” of socialist cities. According to this line of thought, urban population should grow naturally after the collapse of socialism.

The second point of view in the literature is that state-sponsored artificial industrialization boosts the urban population (Harris, 1970, cited in Mikhnenko and Turok, 2007). However, this “overurbanization”, when coupled with heavy industrialization, would lead to a “underurbanization” in the Szelenyian sense. More recent authors have also described the phenomena of over-industrialization and over-urbanization as a distortion generated by socialist policies (Gornostaeva, 1989, cited in Mikhnenko and Turok, 2007). According to this latter view, the collapse of communism should lead to corrections of these excessive urbanization and industrialization processes, caused by relocation of production factors based on market mechanisms and shifts in competitiveness (World Bank, Cities in Transition report). The result of these relocations would be de-urbanization, caused by unemployment and migration of the population from these towns to rural areas or other more competitive cities, while former towns decay.

While these works deal with the study of the urbanization processes at the macro level and mostly quantify the changes, there have been some exploratory case studies that analyzed the social implications of forced over-urbanization in individual towns. Probably the most famous is the case of Magnitogorsk, a steel industry town in Russia that was built from scratch around an important iron ore mountain during the early period of forced Stalinist industrialization and reached a fabulous population size of 250,000 in just four years (Kotkin, 1995). In Central Europe, a case with similar evolutions and implications is that of Nowa Huta in Poland (Stenning, 2005).

The present paper is one case of mono-industrial mining town that was over-developed under socialism. The topic is of special relevance for Romania, where mining employed 10% of the working population by the end of the ‘80s, and the massive layoffs generated by the mining

industry restructuring led to the creation of depressed urban areas (World Bank, 2004). Most studies on the depressed mining regions and the effect on urban life have been conducted on the Jiu Valley region, which had a particular visibility because of the large number of miners employed – over 30,000 – and several riots during the early '90s (Kideckel, 2004; Crăciun, 2003; Stan, 2003).

Bălan was selected for analysis for a number of reasons. Firstly, from the point of view of size and industrial characteristics it is quite similar to other towns that emerged through communist policies in Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries, so the analysis of the changes in its social structure and urban identity could be further considered for research and possible extrapolation to other cases. Secondly, at the same time, as a mining town it is different from the better-known Jiu Valley region in Romania by its spatial isolation and complete lack of other resources. Therefore, the analysis of Bălan provides a new angle from which the identity change of life in a Romanian mining town can be viewed, as the impact of the industry birth and restructuring can be captured without the influence of other factors (such as the existence of alternative industries). The major finding is that some aspects of urban and social identity are permanent – those more related to traditional values, whereas other elements are more volatile – those that adapt with the change of environment and increased openness towards the exterior world. The paper does not claim that the case is representative for urban development in mining towns, but only illustrative.

In Bălan itself, extensive sociological research has already been conducted by specialists from ANDZM, a Government agency that manages social regeneration projects in former mining regions. However, in this (unpublished) research, rather limited attention has been paid to the change and continuity of life itself in the town, as the purpose of the authors was to gain an understanding of what concrete measures could be implemented to improve the living condition of miners in depressed areas. The present paper will build on the results of this previous sociological research and examine the impact of mining development and restructuring on the place, on city life and appearance, in the isolated settlement. Additional information was collected through interviews with ANDZM and World Bank specialists, and a field visit in 2007. The approach in the case study resembles that of Kotkin's study of Magnitogorsk (1995) and Stenning's analysis of Nowa Huta (2005). While these two concern steel processing towns, the evolutions during socialism noted by the two authors are very similar to the observations on the mining town Bălan.

### **A rural community**

Like most of the mining towns that shared its fate, Bălan started up as a village located remotely in the mountains. In the early 16th century, settlers looking for copper in the ore-rich Eastern Carpathians established a small village, Balabanya (Bălan). The community consisted of a few hundred adventurers and their families, who put down roots in an area that promised a relatively good standard of living. Indeed, by the 18th century, the region became one of the most productive copper mines in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ensuring prosperity for its inhabitants. By 1825, after a steady growth in population, the settlement gained for the first time administrative autonomy from the neighboring community Sândominic, and self-government was maintained until 1894 (Bălan city hall website).

In spite of the mining activity, the life and social organization was largely that of a rural community, and people complemented the income from mining with gains obtained from small agriculture activities. Most of the houses built during the period were small one-storey mountain dwellings with few rooms, and a tiny land plot on which some vegetables could be grown. The harsh, mountain climate is not favorable for domestic animals, except small numbers of pigs and poultry.

### **Socialist urbanization**

The advent of communism in 1945 would transform the life and identity of the settlement only very late, in the mid '60s. Unlike in the rest of the country, no expropriations took place

in the early '50s, because the land usable for agriculture had insignificant value. This meant that the life of the people went on undisturbed for two decades (ANDZM, 2004).

However, in 1967, the identity of the place changed radically, almost overnight. With Ceaușescu's accession to power in the mid '60s, Romania's new leadership became obsessed for self-sufficiency on natural resources in order to symbolically assert independence from the Soviet Union. Similar changes affected most places where natural resources were available: in Bălan, the incentives provided by the government for the extensive extraction of copper caused a massive immigration of people from Eastern Romania in the early 60s, who populated the mining colony. For more than thirty years, the community would be a socialist mining town; the collapse of socialism would brutally reshape the town's existence again, this time based on the tough rules of the market (Marcovici, interview, 2007).

This development was typically socialist. It combined the ideologies behind Marx's "idiocy of rural life" – transforming peasants into workers -, and the need to catch up fast with industrialized countries by implementing "massive programs of industrialization and urbanization" (Hamilton, 1979, cited in Stenning, 2005). The dimensions of the settlement before this political move matched the existing resources, and the town would have been viable for many decades, fading out gradually as resources would have declined (ANDZM, 2006). Instead, the huge inflow of people, the massive investment in mining exhausted the copper in just a few years, leaving behind tens of thousands of jobless miners with little opportunities to move or work elsewhere. These are exactly the problems governments in Romania and other former communist countries (Poland, Czech Republic) have to deal with when restructuring the mining industry to a market economy, and have largely failed as of now (ANDZM, 2004).

### **Housing and spatial segregation**

Just like in the case of Magnitogorsk or Nowa Huta, the immigrants of the late '60s had to be accommodated quickly, in order to start work in the mine as soon as possible. Initially, the first incomers lived in improvised housing (wooden barracks), while constructors temporarily contracted by the mine were quickly building blocks of flats and urban infrastructure, first water, then sewage (Cozmaciuc, interview, 2007). The rush in expanding the mine's operations can still be seen in the low quality of the first blocks of flats, which are located in the South of today's Bălan: they were officially labeled as "comfort III and IV", with shared facilities. But after an initial large inflow of colonists in 1967, the immigration in Bălan slowed down in 2-3 years and continued slowly until 1989. Thus, the growth in demand for housing stock stabilized at a more sustainable level and the housing built in the '70s and '80s was of better quality.

### **Up-class North vs. depressed South**

According to the official ideology, even in housing policies, "the socialist city would glorify the collectivism of the new life in which there is no room for social segregation" (Zahariade, 2003). However, spatial segregation existed even during socialist times; what is more, it was cleverly used as a material incentive for work performance and compliance with the regime, incentives used to various extents also in Magnitogorsk and Nowa Huta. In Bălan, the location of a miner's house defined the miner's identity and social position within the community. The town expanded from the South towards the North, with better housing being built as the town expanded. Therefore, the blocks in the North were of better quality than the Southern ones and more comfortable. Since the mining company was the owner of the housing stock, allocating housing to the miners was an effective manner to reward the more efficient and hardworking employees; such material advantages were offered also to the members of the Communist Party (Marcovici, interview, 2007). Southern houses were occupied by less qualified workers and newcomers, who were perceived by the older community members as outsiders, and social pressure stimulated even more competition for better work performance. The inhabitants of the Southern quarter were identified as lower class and called "gypsies" by the Northern community, even though the first insisted to be called "Romanians" (ANDZM, 2006).

Even today, after the privatization of the housing stock in the early '90s and the complete closure of the mine, the location of one's house remains an important element in defining the social position of Bălan's inhabitants. What is more, spatial segregation even increased after 1990, a fact captured by the inhabitants with humor as they nicknamed the Northern quarter "California" and the Southern "Texas". As the mine was gradually closing and people were laid off, the first to leave the town were, logically, the most recent newcomers and the people who were less anchored socially in the community (Marcovici, interview, 2007). The remaining empty apartments were never occupied again and were vandalized by the remaining inhabitants of the town in search for items that could be reused. The phenomenon contributed to the increase in spatial segregation and the deepening of inequalities. It also contributes visually to the overall impression of desolation in the town.

### **Ethnic change**

The change concerned not only the economic structure, the housing stock or the overall appearance of the place, but also the ethnic composition of the inhabitants, with effects on the isolation of the town from neighboring localities. The mine's recruiting department sent its representatives around the country to attract new staff, using propaganda to allure young people to Bălan with work and homes. The strategy was most successful in employing people from Moldova, who lived just across the mountains. Some of the recruits came from near another mining region (Comănești) and the idea of being employed in mining appealed easily to them, while others were young peasants coming from families impoverished after the agriculture collectivization in the '50s and who were eager to earn more than they would in the collective farm (Marcovici, interview, 2007). Today, Bălan's population of 7,500 consists mostly of Moldavian (two thirds) with a Hungarian minority (one third). By comparison, the surrounding settlements have over 90% Hungarian inhabitants, which probably contributes at least psychologically to the settlement's social isolation and little communication to the outside world (Marcovici, interview, 2004).

### **Permanence of rural traditions**

In spite of the attempts to transform the community into an urban industrial settlement, Bălan remained rather an oversized village with people stacked in blocks of flats instead of houses with gardens. Officially, once the population exceeded 10,000, Bălan was declared an independent town with its own local administration. However, just the numerical increase of population could not change the identity of what was essentially a rural settlement into an urban one. For example, even the infrastructure itself was less developed for Bălan to be called an urban settlement: the town had two schools, a highschool, a small hospital, a small police station, but no fire brigade (ANDZM, 2006).

The old Hungarian population and the incoming Moldovan settlers retained some of the essential characteristics of the rural life. A significant element of identity permanence was represented by the continuation of family lives in traditional rural ways. Since 59% of the families residing in Bălan originate from rural areas, men continue to have authority over wives and children, and this characteristic was further reinforced by the employment in the field of mining itself. As miners received generous material benefits during the heyday of the mine, they could afford to keep their wives at home and women led mostly a domestic life, taking care of the children and of the house (ANDZM, 2006). This happened in spite of the fact that Bălan is geographically very close to two larger cities, in which women were more actively engaged in formal economic activities, and in contradiction with official policies of promoting equality and female employment (Vișa, interview, 2007; Sheldon, interview, 2004). The explanation resides in the fact that Bălan was quite isolated from external influences by its relatively poor connections to the outside world and the town was also economically self-sufficient.

In some cases, the state itself cultivated the preservation of several features of identity that seemed favorable to reaching its own goals. The regime understood the need for ideological compromise in order to attain miners' allegiance and increased productivity. The state

cleverly reinforced miners' motivation to work and submission to the Communist Party by the use of a complementary authority, the church. The population, of rural origins, was more inclined to be submissive to traditional authority. This is why the state, in spite of the official atheist ideology, supported the construction of churches. An Orthodox Church was improvised of wood soon after the arrival of colonists, in 1972, and an expensive stone church was built with financial support from the Patriarch himself in 1976. The existing Romano-Catholic Church was also re-established in 1968 (Bălan city hall website).

### **Life around the mine and socialist propaganda**

Once the mining developed, Bălan became a "one company mining town" (Gentile, 2006), with all the characteristics that derive from it. Since the mine was the only industry of the town, not less than 83% of the working population was either employed directly by the mine or in a related activity (ANDZM, 2006). Not surprisingly, the mine acted as a coagulant for the small community for years; it consolidated social relationships and shaped the behavioral patterns of the community members. This is particularly true considering that most of the town's population consists of first and second generation of colonists from Moldova, whose sole connection to the place and other community members used to be the mine itself.

The mine played the role of a formal institution of support and assistance, around which revolved the whole life of the town. As Stan (2003) argues, in Romanian mining communities the specificity of the miner's work (difficult and risky) contributes to the consolidation of very close ties among miners which are maintained to different extents and forms outside the work. A miner's work is the foundation of his identity. In addition, the strong personality of the mine manager (Racz Attila), who was perceived as a paternal figure by the miners, increased the dependency of the miners to the company. Even in times when salaries were low, the mine could support financially individual miners when these needed help (ANDZM, 2006). This over-dependence remained as a feature after the mine was closed, with miners having difficulties in taking responsibility for their own lives: they failed to save the amounts received as redundancy payments and spent them on consumption goods immediately (Marcovici, interview, 2007).

The identity of the mining town and of the people was supported through the official propaganda of the socialist regime. Workers in general were portrayed as the source of all value and cultural and scientific achievement. Propaganda included an official socialist historiography, portraying the heroic achievements of miners in the past (true or invented), such as a legend according to which twenty-two miners had been shot by the representative of the right wing Peasant's Party in 1929 at the Lupeni mine in Jiu Valley (Kideckel, 2001).

The extensive means of propaganda used were efficient: workers have developed a strong sense of pride for the occupation which gave their life a true meaning. This was enhanced by elements such as an exclusivist holiday ("Miner's Day") which was celebrated during the good times of the mine and is still a good occasion in the present for social gatherings and drinks with former colleagues. A hard day at the mine was always concluded with a last drink at the "bodega", the local pubs, where miners had the opportunity to relax and talk. Even after mine closure, pubs remained just as popular. During the worst times of depression (1999-2001), only the pubs continued to flourish as viable economic enterprises. They also represented a meeting point for small trades, such as with mushrooms collected by children from the nearby forests, an activity that can be seen today (ANDZM, 2006).

Thus, a whole "cult of labor" was carefully created during communism, which currently "elicits workers' nostalgia and other people's derision" (Kideckel 2001). This has widened the gap between miners or workers and the rest of the population and increased the antagonism after 1989, making social support from the state budget very difficult.

### **Post-socialist depression, de-urbanization of identity, and permanencies**

Soon after the collapse of communism in 1989, industrial workers in general, and miners in particular, became one of the least respected categories. There were several transformations in

the social and economic background that had a contribution to this change, particularly for the miners (Stan, 2003). First, there was the bankruptcy of the Romanian economy, which could be supported only through costly subsidies.

Second, several miners' riots and marches to Bucharest during the '90s (the so-called „mineriade”), called by Romania's president in office to intimidate opposition through shocking displays of violence, created a generalized antipathy of the urban, educated population against the miners. The events contributed to Romania's isolation from Western Europe and the reduction of foreign direct investment (Stan, 2003; Kideckel, 2001). Under the circumstances, mine restructuring with large social protection measures would have been extremely unpopular with these categories.

If miners were perceived as the „nation's heroes” and the avant-garde of development during communist times, in the public opinion they were deeply resented after 1990 or, in the best case, despised or neglected. The lack of will for restructuring was blamed on the leverage that miner unions seemed to have and the permanent hidden threat of another „mineriada” (Gallagher, 2005). While miners from isolated regions such as Bălan did not take part in any of the „mineriade”, they had to bear the stigma attached to their profession through these events.

The identity of miners and mining communities, and the projection of miners' identities in their own consciousness were seriously shaken by the closure of the sector in the late '90s. Bălan mine's restructuring and gradual closure started in 1994; in 1999 the largest wave of layoffs took place and the mine ceased operations completely in 2006. In 1997 Romania's Government started a massive lay-off program for workers in all branches of industry, in an effort to restructure the economy and reduce the heavy subsidy burden on the state budget. Miners received a very generous package through Ordinance 22/1997, consisting of a severance payment of twenty months for miners with more than fifteen years of work, which would be granted to those who resign voluntarily. At the beginning, miners were particularly enthusiastic about the package, allured by the large amount, and the demand for redundancy exceeded the Government's expectations. However, this was an expression of miners' excessive reliance on the state and little capacity to fully accept responsibility for one's future (Kideckel, 2001). Miners simply did not expect the state to stop helping them after the mine closure (Marcovici, interview, 2007). They expected to find jobs quickly after the mine closure, with the support of the state, which never happened. Since unemployment was unheard of before 1989, the failure to get a job was a social stigma (Stan, 2003). This created a feeling of depression, isolation from exterior communities, loss of trust in public authority, and lack of involvement in economic activities. Most people started to look for basic subsistence activities, such as collecting mushrooms or basic agriculture on the very small plots, for those who had one (only 7% of the population). Stan (2003) finds that with the dissolution of the professional community, together with the increase in poverty and unemployment, active and dismissed workers are changing from professional solidarity focused on the mine to family solidarity and have trust only in close relationships.

### **A light of hope**

After the initial shock of seeing one's values become worthless all of a sudden, some improvement was seen in the last years. In 2001, the road connecting Bălan to its neighboring village Săndominic and to the national roads and railways was repaired with foreign funding and ensured a quick communication route to the exterior world (Bălan website). As people started to travel more easily in and out of the town, some of the younger people found employment in two towns a few kilometers away from Bălan and started to commute daily. Also, others went abroad to work (Marcovici, interview, 2007). The trends are too recent and quite feeble to claim that they will be sustainable; however, some change in people's mentality, a slow recovery of self-confidence and the lower expectations and demands from the state can be seen already (ANDZM, 2006). The external influence and increased welfare, while not quantified officially, can be seen from the appearance of two-three new houses with

small gardens which are probably financed from workers' remittances. Infrastructure around Bălan today: better communications with the outside improved life standards in the isolated community, but additional connections are needed

## **Conclusion**

The paper has examined the impact of forced socialist industrialization in the case of Bălan, and the effect of socially unassisted restructuring of the mining sector on an isolated small town. While the results should not be extrapolated to other cases without further analysis, several important conclusions on the changes and permanences of life and identity in socialist towns can be drawn.

Over four decades, the development of the mine attracted peasants from poor rural areas and attempted to transform them into an urban working class – with limited success. The process of transformation was substantially influenced by the official state propaganda praising the miners' "heroism", as well as by the paternalism of the mining company and its leadership. Strong social ties were created around the mine and preserved for years until the mine's final bankruptcy and closure. Deprived by the sense of control and responsibility over their lives, geographically and culturally isolated from its neighbors, the mining community was particularly vulnerable to economic restructuring and was reduced to extreme poverty. The feeling of vulnerability was additionally reinforced by a loss of faith in authority, in one's own abilities, and in what the future might bring. However, a new, positive change seems to appear slowly at the horizon: with improved communication and access to the outside world, the former miners seem to regain hope and dignity as they seek better economic environments and new employment opportunities.

The main finding of the paper is that, in the case of a small town like Bălan, some of the elements of life identity remain permanent or change very slowly, while other transform easily. The slow-changing elements of identity are represented mostly by the core values of individuals (such as traditions, family life, or religious practices). Others transform easily – those that are related to the adaptation to a work environment and a new community, which happens with increased openness to the exterior world. In this category can be included several habits and practices connected to the mine, such as social drinking and gatherings after work, which appeared after the colonization. Such routines persist today, after the essential core of the social life in Bălan – the mine – disappears, because the community remains the same. But what is encouraging, some negative features of identity, such as over-dependence to a social context and seeming incapacity to take full responsibility for one's life, can be changed with exposure to exterior environments, as is already seen from the outcome of the increased openness to the exterior of the town.

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**The European city** is an urban concept grounded in the tradition of European sociology. The concept aims to summarise the specifics of European urban settlements, such as high population density, a mixture of functions and populations, and the city's active role in ensuring social cohesion.

The original idea of this website was to present the results of the workshops organized by seven European NGOs working in a joint project **Cultures from Around the Block** financed by The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 (a key sponsor of the website). The workshops were targeted especially to the immigrant but in some cases also to non-immigrant youth.

Beside this, the website will try to become a platform for the interdisciplinary urban studies. The editor of the web is Ondřej Daniel, Multicultural centre Prague.

## **CITY**

<http://www.evropskemesto.cz/cms/index.php>

## **Cultures from Around the Block - project description**

The project aims to bring together young people from different ethnic groups living in the same city and, through workshops where they will document their surrounding with various mediums, facilitate intercultural dialogue with an aim to build long-lasting ties between those in different communities.

## **Cultures from Around the Block**

The urban setting is both a place of integration and division. The Multicultural Center Prague recognises the important part dialogue between divided group can play in overcoming the problems that often persist in ethnically diverse cities, and thus has undertaken the project Cultures from Around the Block, a flagship project as apart of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008.

The project aims to bring together young people from different ethnic groups living in the same city and, through workshops where they will document their surrounding with various

mediums, facilitate intercultural dialogue with an aim to build long-lasting ties between those in different communities.

The Project activities include:

- Local media projects in Bratislava, Brussels, Bucharest, Coventry , Offenbach, Pragu and Warsaw.
- Creation of a website about local integration. Making use of the media items from local workshops and providing additional background information, users are offered a vivid picture of European cultural diversity by strolling virtually through diverse European neighbourhoods.
- Production of the documentary film "Your Street. My Street" with direct involvement of students from local media projects.
- Presentation of the project results in the Festival "Dialogue of Cultures".
- Public presentation of project results in Brussels.
- The active encouragement of cross-country partnerships between all actors involved.

There is seven such local projects across Europe in Offenbach, Prague, Bucharest, Coventry , Warsaw, Bratislava and Brussels which will be glued together by the 'linking elements' that bring the local achievements to a European stage.

The first such element is the documentary film 'Your Street – My Street' which will take children from each of the selected neighbourhoods, and have them guide the film team through their city as well as the activities they realise during the local workshops.

The Dialogue of Cultures festival held in Prague from October 2nd – 5th will be the second gluing module, bringing together performers from the participating cities as well presenting the workshop's outputs through a multicultural tombola. The work of the young people will also be exhibited during the third linking element at the Mediterranean Movies Festival in Brussels (from 28th November to 5th December) in Brussels.

The project website European city will not only serve its purpose as the fourth and final amalgamation of the product of Europe wide intercultural dialogue, but also aims to become an online source for articles, studies and reports on urban issues. The website was launched in summer and will be contributed to by a series of debates, student research seminars and blogs.

### **Local projects**

The project "Cultures from Around the Block" aims to bring together young people from different ethnic groups living in the same city and, through workshops where they will document their surrounding with various media, facilitate intercultural dialogue with an aim to build long-lasting ties between those in different communities. There is seven local projects across Europe in Offenbach, Bratislava, Brussels, Bucharest, Coventry, Prague and Warsaw.

### **Belgium**

Children selected from a school in an ethnically diverse part of town, working with those from a youth group in a different part of the city made a series of short documentary films under the guidance of the Brussels Centre for Intercultural Action. Upon choosing the films thematic focus the children were trained by professional journalists and technical specialists, and attempted to create professional final results which may later be used on Belgian television.

### **Czech Republic**

Armed with cameras and a passion for black & white documentary photography, children from the vastly different districts of Zizkov and Modrany explored each other's

neighbourhoods on a fortnightly basis throughout the first half of 2008. Amongst other activities, children learned to work with the camera, take pictures and to develop and enlarge their own pictures. Maybe the most important feature of the project methodology was the fact that the kids from the participating schools did meet several times in common workshops.(\*). Thanks to these workshops the students not only became acquainted with a different part of Prague, but also came in contact with kids that are of the same age but from a different social and cultural background. The project methodology rests on the idea that common activities alongside pride in results are an effective way to overcome social barriers and prejudices, which otherwise often block interaction and communication beyond the borders of ethnic communities. The results of their documentation along selected thematic lines will be exhibited in the participating local schools as well as in a public space close to the city center. (\*). - <http://www.mkc.cz/en/news-79/intercultural-photo-workshops.html>

### **Germany**

Interaction between different groups is even more challenging when faced with language difficulties, but Rejs e.V. (Plotki) hope that artistic means can help overcome these problems and facilitate intercultural dialogue. This summer a group of refugee teenagers in Offenbach, met their middle-class German peers for a week long intensive photography workshop. The tangible output of the workshop was a series of screen printed designs, put onto t-shirts and bags which can be worn as well as displayed in exhibitions.

### **Great Britain**

Coventry is a diverse city, and children with migratory backgrounds mixed with children of second or third generation migrants as they photographed symbols of culture in the local neighbourhoods. Sessions on the meaning of intercultural dialogue as well as photographic techniques did allow the children to explore both cultural concepts as well as their artistic sides. The results of the work were shown in the schools as well as at a local carnival in the summer.

### **Poland**

At the end of the intensive film workshop, a group of ethnic Vietnamese and 'white' Polish children have produced their own film, set in the Praga district of Warsaw. Fundacja Nowa Ameryka selected children from different ethnicities and started them working together in groups. These young people acted as directors, camera operators and protagonists as they created a series of short films which were cut by a professional editor under their guidance to produce the final film. The film will be premiered in the Vietnamese Cultural Centre before moving on to be shown elsewhere in the city and abroad.

### **Romania**

Utilising either the medium of sound-scaping or photography in three different schools, the Bucharest part of the project took children from the Roma community along with 'ethnic Romanians' and over a period of many months introduced them to the different methods of documentation as well as to each other. The different schools and media will come together for common exhibition in the local communities and city center in the autumn.

### **Slovakia**

Children from the Panenská neighbourhood in Bratislava did not only enjoy inter-cultural but also inter-generational dialogue as they delve into the past of their neighbourhood. Throughout the year they started to develop a portfolio about different aspects of their city, made up of a collection of aural testimonies as well as photographic and material evidence. The results of these investigations facilitated by Milan Šimečka Foundation will be displayed during a neighbourhood barbeque, scheduled for the end of summer as well as in local cafes.