People shape discourse and discourse shapes people. Narrative structures are undoubtedly among the most pervasive and powerful forms of discourse. People live their lives telling stories about themselves, about other people, about the places they live in. Since Freud, and his reflections on nachtraglichkeit, it became a commonplace assertion that our stabilizing identity narratives are ongoing reconstructions of memories. We construct the stories about ourselves continuously, on the basis of memories fabricated in the present. This process is framed by social and individual forces. Group memories and individual memories acquire narrative shapes in a dialectics that never ends, and that can never be grasped in its entirety: every narrative on the shaping of narrative carries potentially distorting associations precisely because of its narrative form. Furthermore, any investigation on the shaping of narrative will alter the narrative produced; the investigator is co-author in a double sense: he/she co-creates a situation that sparks off differences in the life-history as told by the subject, and necessarily re-writes the story afterwards, at home.
Petruta Teampau, Kristof Van Assche

When there’s water, there’s no light

The literature on discourse, narrative, memory, identity, their intersections, imbrications and implication is massive, and spans a variety of disciplines. (See Herman et al, 2007 for an overview; also De Fina et al, 2006) Previous paragraph is one of the many narratives that can be derived from that literature, and we choose to locate ourselves in this particular one (adopting therefore a perspective related to, partly derived from Rosenthal, 2006; Bruner, 2003; Chang, 2005; Pine et al, 2004) We like to carry its development a bit further by analyzing carefully a case study, Sulina, a small town on the edge of Romania’s Danube Delta, where, in summer 2007, we interviewed 30 elderly people, and observed their discussions, focusing on internal and external (in)consistencies of narratives about self and place. Most of the attention went to the period before, during and after the Second World War. Our goal was to investigate the intertwining of personal and group narratives about Sulina, and in this, the roles of memory.

Before analyzing our findings, we will briefly reiterate a few storylines in the development of the concepts of memory and narrative in the social sciences. Next we introduce our locale, Sulina, and our analysis of interviews and (informal) focus group. We conclude with a general reflection on the role of narrative in the interweaving of individual and social memories, and the role of memory in the interweaving of individual and social narratives.
Narrative in Memory Studies

Ever since Halbwachs’s far-reaching contribution that the process of “remembrance” is always socially “framed,” the idea has become commonsensical knowledge in the field of memory studies. Every memory we have as individuals, we have it as members of a community, of a social group, and must be consequently validated within it. The social – *par excellence* – character of memory explains its functions as a cohesive element of a community: we are a group because we have common memories or, rather, because we belong to a group we have to remember what that group authorizes as “legitimate” memory.

Brockmeier calls these memory frames and practices “contexts of cultural participation”, and, as members of such contexts, “we remember according to several social frames that emphasize different aspects of our experienced reality” (Brockmeier 2002: 23). In other words, “the recollections that individuals have of a certain event are influenced by the others’ recollections of those same events. Hence recall is constituted and stabilized within a network of social relationships” (Jedlowski 2001: 31).

Unquestionably, memory is intimately connected to the common identity of a group: “Collective memory unifies the group through time and over space by providing a narrative frame, a collective story, which locates the individual and his and her biography within it, and which, because it can be represented as narrative and as text, attains mobility” (Eyerman 2004: 161).
Life itself is a narrative writ large, and “there is a point at which a person’s life and the stories she tells about it begin to merge. However, stories require interlocutors, and the right to establish authoritative versions never rests with the individual telling the story alone. It shifts from communal institutions and collective memory to the domain of experts and beyond – to market forces and the power of the state” (Antze and Lambek 1996: xvii). Stories we narrate depend on our own insertion into a social medium: not only for having our “truth” validated, but also for placing ourselves securely into the community, for the feeling of belonging and of viewing our story as part of the general narrative – thus conferring it substance and significance. “We are at once author and reader of our stories, acts which are continuous unless preempted. The meaning of any past event may change as the larger, continuing story lengthens and grows in complexity. As readers we are continuously re-exploring the significance of earlier episodes of the story in light of what transpires later, as we are caught up in

Particularly interested themselves in “the cultural shaping of memory” and “the interpenetration of individual and collective discourses,” Antze and Lambek build their own interest on the basic premise that “memories are never simply records of the past, but are interpretative reconstructions that bear the imprint of local narrative conventions, cultural assumptions, discursive formations and practices, and social contexts of recall and commemoration” (Antze and Lambek 1996: vii). In other words, what is the role of external factors on how and what we narrate?

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...
Narrative is central for the functioning of memory not only for being “capable of playing a number of different (cognitive, social and emotive) roles at the same time” (Brockmeier 2002: 27), but certainly for allowing a vital space for the play of identities, for the reconsideration of what is being remembered and, most importantly, of the self of the narrator amidst these (its positioning in the life of the community – and its collective memory). As Antze and Lambek point out, “people emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms” (Antze and Lambek 1996: xviii).

Narrativity as a tool for social inquiry has known a recent upsurge in many domains of social science. As Elizabeth Bird emphasizes, “it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and through which we constitute our social identities” (Bird 2002: 520). Stories people tell about places serve not only to position them in a desired location, but also to delineate social boundaries, to assert who “belongs” and who doesn’t, to clarify who “we are:” “shared narratives serve culturally to construct a sense of place and, with that, a sense of cultural identity that includes some people while excluding others” (Bird 2002: 520).
We are interested, in this paper, in the interrelation between memory and narrative, on one side, and the social framing of individual recollections, on the other. In other words, what is the role of personal narratives (including autobiographical information) in elaborating a collective mnemonic account and how are these “personal” stories being framed and shaped by existing official versions of memory. We plan to follow these issues in looking at a small city at the Eastern edge of Romania, Sulina, where people tell their stories on the background of a powerful official narrative of the city’s unique history, trying to appropriate it by projecting their individual trajectories as part of the “big story.”

The Story of Sulina

Sulina, the only town of the Delta, is a small place at the mouth of the Danube, the most Eastern locality of Romania, and since January 1st 2007, of Europe. A city looking rather like a village, with a dwindling population and a decaying urban landscape, actually built on a narrow tongue of land between the Danube and the Black Sea shore; lost in between waters, in the margins of Romania and of Europe, with no land connection to neighboring localities, Sulina is a unique place.

The “golden age” of Sulina coincides with the functioning here of the European Commission of the Danube (1856-1939), a flourishing period, marking the tangible birth of the city. Before the middle of the XIX century, Sulina was a small locality with a very bad reputation, that of a pirates’ nest and home to all kinds of evildoers. A Romanian traveler describes it, in 1856, as “a collection of adventurers that came from the entire Orient to settle here in a very humid environment, full of mosquitoes,
waiting to find an opportunity to make money, even with the risk of their own life, which they do not cherish too much” (Tatu 2005: 229). Home of pirates, with extremely harsh fiscal regime and high taxes for transit, Sulina was also end of the line for many ships that sank in its perilous waters. By the end of 1856, Sulina reportedly had between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants, dealing with navigation for some time of the year and engaging in heavy drinking for the rest (Tatu 2005: 287).

During the XIX century, the political-administrative authority in Sulina belonged, in turn, to the Ottoman and the Russian Empire, which encouraged, or at least tolerated, this state of affairs. However, the economic interests of the other European powers transformed, by the middle of the XIX century, the problem of the Danube into an issue of international politics. Thus, following the Crimean War, through the Peace Treaty in Paris (March 18/30, 1856) the European Commission of the Danube was established (with representatives of France, England, Austria, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia and Turkey), establishing its headquarters in Sulina, for an initial mandate of two years.

Actually, CED would stay in Sulina for almost a century, marking what came to be remembered later as the “golden age” of the city. Besides its duty regarding the amelioration of navigation on the Danube, rendering the Sulina channel safe and navigable, the Commission was actively involved in the life of the community, in a kind of beneficial colonization.² At the beginning of the XX century, in Sulina there were two Romanian schools, two Greek, one German, one Jewish and a French pension. On the beach there was a casino; the city had many restaurants, a theater, a typography and two newspapers (and certainly several thriving brothels).
This increasing progress was cut short with World War I, during which Sulina was literally turned to ruins. But after 1920, the city is reconstructed, with more schooling institutions and in 1932 Sulina becomes a fashionable resort for thousands of tourists. This period also brings to the fore strategies of the Romanian state for the “colonization” of this cosmopolitan city. Part of the newly born Romanian kingdom since the War of Independence in 1878, Dobrudja was the subject of what Constantin Iordachi called “internal colonization:” “demographically, Northern Dobrudja served as an “Internal America” for Romania, a dynamic frontier zone of new settlements for expanding the national economy and ethnic boundaries” (Iordachi 2001: 122).

Between 1878 and 1913, Northern Dobrudja was subject to a separate, extra-constitutional administrative organization, meaning that the inhabitants were denied political participation and the right to acquire properties outside the province. Dobrudja became “a melting pot of regional differences and a laboratory for fostering Romanian national identity”3 (Iordachi 2001: 135).

However, the prosperous life of Sulina started to decline after Constanța, another harbor city on the Black Sea coast, became the new focus of development, and it was definitely brought to an end with World War II, when the place was heavily bombed by both allies and enemies. Shortly after the war, the power was seized in Romania by the communist regime (1947), which has inaugurated for Sulina a very different path of development and ended an epoch. During communism, Sulina developed a local industry (mainly in fishing and tinning fish, in making

Ваквиот растечки напредок беше прекинат со Првата светска војна, за чие време Сулина буквално беше претворена во урнатини. Но, по 1920 година, градот е реконструиран, со многу нови образовни установи и во 1932 година, Сулина прерасна во модерно место за илјадници туристи. Овој период, исто така, во преден план донесе и стратегии на романската држава за „колонизација“ на овој космополитски град. Дел од новонасешаното романско кралство од војната за независност во 1878 година, Добруџа беше предмет на она што Константин Јордаци (Constantin Iordachi) го нарекува “внатрешна колонизација“: „демографски, северна Добруџа се користеше како „внатрешна Америка“ за Романија, динамична гранична зона на нови населби за проширување на националната економија и на етничките граници“ (Iordachi 2001: 122).

Помеѓу 1878 и 1913 година, северна Добруџа подлежеше на посебна вонустановна административна организација, што значи дека на жителите им беше онеовозможно политичкото учество и правото да стекнат сопственост надвор од provincијата. Добруџа стана „лонец за топење на регионалните разлики и лабораторија за одржување на романскиот национален иденитет“3 (Iordachi 2001: 135).

Сепак, просперитетниот живот во Сулина почна да опаѓа откако Констанца, уште еден пристанишен град на брегот на Црно Море, стана нов центар на развој, а дефинитивно заврши со Втората светска војна, кога местото беше тешко бомбардирано и од сојузниците и од непријателите. Кратко по војната, комунастичкиот режим ја превзе владата во Романија (1947), што за Сулина означи многу поинаков развој и крај на една епоха. За време на комунизмот, Сулина разви локална индустрија (главно рибарство
The demographic structure changed radically; most Greeks, Armenians, Jews – urban populations *par excellence* - have left the country; due to the communist politics of intense urbanization, the population was heavily “Romanianized”, and many Lipoveni from the neighboring villages in the delta came “to the city”, in the 70’s, to find work.

Since 1989, after the revolution that has brought down the communist regime, most of the local industry has dismantled; people have lost their jobs, the unemployment rate become one of the biggest in the country, and the city continued to slowly destroy itself. Sulina lost its centripetal force of attraction, as “the city” of the region and became the place everyone wanted to leave behind. This is, roughly, the context in which people in Sulina started to “remember” and celebrate the “good old days.”

**Remembering Collectively**

“How diverse social groups ‘remember’ the history of a city is crucial in the historical process and therefore in the making of identities in various social spaces”, wrote Bélanger (2002: 72). Although the crucial role of collective remembering in building and sustaining a community tends to conceal the fact that remembering is quite always an unfinished negotiation, we have to acknowledge that “there is a plurality of social memories in every city – each particular to a different group and routed in the material and mental spaces it has experienced”. However, in practice “some memories have always been able to stake a broader claim to public legitimacy than others. This is partly a function of the resources that dominant groups have been able to mobilize to make
their interpretations count, a matter of historical timing and, in part, historical evidence combined with political art. Hence, I am referring to the ability to successfully deploy a persuasive, inclusive voice that links historical/spatial memories, identities and aesthetics to a distinctive political program” (Bélanger 2002: 78).

In Sulina, people tend to recollect the past in the frame of two main intertwining narratives: that of prosperity and that of intercultural tolerance. Sulina was *porto franco* and a harbor; people came and went. There was indeed a unique blend of ethnicities, religious confessions and languages. Nevertheless, nostalgia tends to even out the rough edges, to “forget” the conflicts and to present the past in a blissful color.

Actually, those very ethnic groups that made Sulina the “most cosmopolitan city in the country” are no longer there. Jews, Armenians, Turks, Greeks were traditionally urban populations, involved in commerce and trade; they made the city a multicultural space built around these occupations and embedded into a particular fashion of urban inhabitation. Today, most of the inhabitants are either Romanians, or Lipoveni, who came to Sulina, “to the city,” from neighboring villages. Very few are old enough to actually remember Sulina before the war; some of them learn anew about Sulina’s glorious past, and should be less likely to long for a past they have no connection to (biographical and/or affective).
We intend to investigate the mutual relation between collective remembering and personal memories, by looking at how individual - autobiographical - accounts are being socially and politically framed and shaped, and how the unique and particular context of each personal account is negotiated – through narrative – to comply with the official version of collective memory.

As said, this article is based on interviews conducted with elderly people, most of them members of the “Local Initiative Group.” At a first glance, what the interviewees had in common was that personal memories revolved mostly around the period of the Second World War and its aftermath (when the respondents were young or even children). Starting with general questions about how Sulina used to be/is remembered, autobiographical accounts were complemented with indirect “memories,” usually taken from parents, colleagues, elder people etc. In the end, although all respondents subscribed to the idea of the prosperous, multicultural flourishing life of Sulina before the war, the personal details of their lives (including ethnicity and social status) sometimes flagrantly contradicted the master narrative.

However, if memory does work as a cohesive element of a group, and can even create a new community whose recollections go beyond people’s own direct experiences, as scholars have shown, than it is only natural that all current inhabitants of the city seem to agree on Sulina’s wonderful history. In broad lines, they “remember” pre-war Sulina as a flourishing city, attracting resources from the region, especially from the Vâlcov area (now on the territory of Ukraine). Stories about huge amounts of...
od областа на Вилков (денес на територијата на Украина). Приказни за огромни количини зеленчук, путер, месо и друга храна која била продавана на улиците од селаните и трговиците, постојано се појавуваа во интервијуата, заедно со детали за местата и локациите специфични за урбаниот космополитски живот (продавници, кафеери, ресторанти, театри, бордели).

На проти овој квази-митски просперитет,9 „запомнет“ од постарите сговорници како дел и основа на среќното детство, дојдоа годините на Втората светска војна која за Сулина и за регионот донесе серија тежни настани: земјотрес проследен со поплава во 1941 година, потоа период на суша, глад и сиромаштија веднаш по војната во 1944 година која стави крај на епохата. Педесетте години сведочат за постојана модификација на демографијата, со изумирање на старите буржоаски навики и места во услови на општа бреобразба од неодамна воведениот комunistички режим.

„Митска” меѓувоена Сулина

Во периодот помеѓу војните,10 кога ЕКД беше сè уште присутна (сè до 1939 година), градот живееше како и било кое друго космополитско пристаниште. Како дел од општиот наратив за „старите добри времиња,“ грчки испитаник (Г-ѓа Н., 75, родена во Украина, венчана со Грк и која се декларира како Гркинка) се сеќава на Градскиот парк и на фанфарите на градската концертна сала со јавните перформанси кои се одржуваат секоја недела. „Дамите носеа долг фустани, убава облека, шапки; имаше продавници со англиска и увезена облека“. На втората улица имаше продавница на еден Ерменец, Синтеран. Луѓето беа мощне елегантни. „Животот во Сулина помеѓу војните vegetables, vast quantities of butter, meat and other foods sold in the streets by peasants and merchants constantly pop up in interviews, together with details of places and locations specific to an urban cosmopolitan life (shops, cafes, restaurants, theaters, and brothels).

In opposition to this quasi-mythical prosperity,9 “remembered” by older informants as part and background of a happy childhood, come the years of the Second World War, which brought for Sulina – and the region - a series of sad events: an earthquake followed by flooding in 1941, then a period of drought, hunger and poverty immediately after the war, in 1944 - that ended an epoch. The 50’s witnessed a constantly modifying demography, with old bourgeois habits and places dying out, on the background of general transformations by the recently installed communist regime.

“Митска” međuvoenija Sulina

In the interwar period,10 when CED was still present (up until 1939), the city had the life of any other cosmopolitan flourishing harbor. As part of the general narrative of the “good old times,” a Greek informant (Mrs. N., 75, born Ukrainian, married to a Greek and declares herself as such) remembers a Public Garden and the fanfare of the City Hall, with public performances every Sunday. “Ladies would wear long dresses, nice cloths, hats; there were stores with English and imported fabrics.” On the second street was the shop of an Armenian, Sinterean. People were very elegant.” Life in inter-war Sulina is painted in light colors (somehow blind to ethnic and class differences): “The Greeks organized very fancy balls,
where people had to wear formal dress” (Obviously, the Lipoveni fishermen had no knowledge of such codes).\footnote{11}

All these details of a long-disappeared bourgeois world are mixed, in the case of Sulina, with traces of a multicultural prosperous urban life. “There was a café with cookies, a lemonade shop held by the Zamfiropol family, who were very secretive about its recipe. Another Armenian, Echmegean, had a lemonade-shop. Peasants came with food to the market: lots of yellow butter, flour.”

Our Greek informant reconstructs from memory a typically Mediterranean landscape: “First Street was not very circulated by cars or carriages. Many cafes in the street, with tables along the Danube, many flowers, especially leandru. There was also the pharmacy of Mr. Petra, it was incredibly clean, one was afraid to enter. In the building of the library was a café, owned by the Greek Pesos. Incredibly good cakes. Also Vasiliadis, near the pension Vihocencu. Ladies would go to these cafes, and gentlemen to bars. The Turk Maxut had a shop, another one a café.”

When our informant was a child (early ‘30s), Sulina was still very developed, a thriving harbor with cosmopolitan connections. “Many ships brought citric to the city and loaded grains here. The waterfront was full of ships loaded with wheat. This kind of commerce was in the hands of the Greeks. It was a very silent city; there was no dust because there was only one car in the city, belonging
прав бидејќи имаше само еден автомобил во градот, кој му припаѓаше на Ерменецот Хурсуд. Мојот татко беше пристаништен работник. Повисоко платениот автомобил луѓе работеа во Комисијата и не беа локалци. Евреите, повеќето од Ерменците и Грците беа вклучени во трговија, но другите беа сиромашни и помалку образовани. Пред војната имаше малку Липовени во Сулина. Мојата маа работеше 15 дена во месецот, но платата беше доволна семејството да живее целиот месец.12 По тој отид на локалното професионално училиште и стана бродски бојаџи“.

Г. З. (исто така Грк, 80), со неверојатна меморија за детални, помни слична урбана средина: „Првата улица беше скоро исключиво исполнета со продавници, кафетерии со апартмани одозгора, а повеќе од 80% од сопствениците беа Грци, неколкумина се Ерменци и Евреи исто така; 26 кафетерии, 6 пекарници (5 грчки и 1 ерменска); 60 продавници; чевлари; сите можни занаети, од кои Евреите најчесто продаваа текстил, или железни работи, печки итн." Секој трговец во градот правеше листа на продукти што му беа потребни, што му ги носеа секоја недела со брод. Втората улица беше најмногу за живеење, со поголеми градини. Се секавам, секој требаше убаво да се облече за Велигден, во нова облека, па за тоа одевме кај Евреите кои продаваа текстил; тие ќе го викнеа ерменскиот шивач, на кој продавачите на текстил однапред му плакаа. На луѓето им се веруваше и плакаа на кредит“.

Нашнот сговорник имаше убави сеќавања за меѓукултурниот живот во Сулина, со сите заедници кои учествуваат во религиозните празници. „Можеше да се отиде и во цамија доколку некој сака, само требаше да ги собуе челите и да ги следи до an Armenian, Hurşud. My father was a harbor worker. Higher paid people working for the Commission were not locals. Jews, most of the Armenians and Greeks were involved in commerce, but the others were poor and less educated. There were few Lipovans in Sulina before the war. My father, like all harbor workers, worked for 15 days a month, but the pay was enough for the family to live for the entire month.12 Then he went to the local professional school and became a ship painter.”

Mr. Z. (also Greek, 80), with an incredible memory for details, remembers a similar urban landscape: “First Street was almost exclusively made up of shops, cafes, with apartments above, and over 80% of the owners were Greeks, some Armenians, and Jews too; 26 cafes, 6 bakeries (5 Greeks, 1 Armenian); 60 shops; shoemakers; all possible crafts, with Jews mostly selling textiles, or iron stuff, ovens etc13. Every merchant in the city made a list of products they needed, brought to them every week by ship. The second street was one of residences mainly, with larger gardens. I remember everybody was supposed to dress nicely for Easter, in new clothes, so we went to Jewish textile sellers; they called the Armenian tailor, who was paid in advance by the textile sellers. People were reliable so as to buy on credit.”

Our informant also has nice memories about the intercultural life of Sulina, with all communities participating in religious festivities. “One could even go to the mosque if wanted, just had to take off shoes and follow the rules; others were outside waiting, nicely
дressed; after the religious service, the imam came out and said to everyone in Romanian: ‘Hope to see you again next year,’” He personally went to different weddings (Lipovan, Russian, and Turkish), had friends form different ethnic groups, and played in a band with Lipoveni mates.

“Greek” narratives have in common a certain impression of the antebellum life in Sulina, with emphasis on the commercial aspects and details of a day-to-day comfortable life. However, there is a reverse to the medal. Mr. C., 66, son of a widow, was born on the other side of the river, in Prospect neighborhood (which used to be called in a derogative manner mahala). He attended the elementary school in Prospect (at Mila 4), then “crossed” the river into the city to continue with his studies. He had to drop school very soon and began working at an early age as a servant and then as a construction worker. He worked on the restoration of the Commission Palace, damaged during the WWII where he heard many stories about the city from his elder co-workers. When 16 (mid-‘50s), he started working as a helper on the extension of the dike. Before that, there were very few jobs available in the city for young people. One needed to have connections in order to get a good job. With a widowed mother and an impoverished family, poor owners of a cow and two geese and a small plot of land, he could only find manual laboring jobs.

His memories of inter-war Sulina are the memories of a child fascinated with the life of the people “across” river, with the wonders and pleasures of “urban” life (as opposed
живот (наспроти сиромаштијата и тешкиот живот во маалото). „Веднаш до катедралата имаше кино познато како Елени. Се сеќавам дека бев фасциниран од гласната музика и електричното осветлување во киното. На приземјето на Жан Барт (денес Жан Барт е хотел и ресторан) имаше книжар позната како Кај Думитра. Госпоѓа Думитра (Украинка) беше злобна жена, секогаш врескаше и ги псуеше младите момчиња. Таа имаше две добри пријателки, Фросина, Гркинка и Гулбиден, Турчинка. Каде што денес се наоѓа хотел Корал, порано беше Домот на армијата (офицерски клуб). Сулина беше полна со војници и имаше многу ред и дисциплина во градот“. Според неговото мислење, „Липовените се добри луѓе, но не сите од нив. Тие биле добри рибари и понекогаш им нуделе риба и на другите“. Колку што знаел, „многу убави Липовенки од Сулина успеале да се омажат со добри мажи надвор од Сулина, иако некои од нив не биле многу морални жени“. Истото важи и за украинските женки; многу од нив дошле од Бесарабиа и работеле во градските бордели. Потоа тој ги спомена Евреите, кои биле „много лоши луѓе. Тие имале продавници и ги третирале лошо нивните помошници“ (неговата мајка работела како слугинка за еврејско семејство и често била тешка бидејки доцнела со купени продукти). „ Грцитите биле некако циции, но понекогаш воене гостоприемливи“. На крајот, овој квази-митски период на Сулина е само антитеза на сегашноста, како што истакна нашиот сговорник: „Претходно сите живееја во хармонија, но денес сите сакаат да ги повредат другите“. 

In his opinion, “Lipovans are good people, but not all of them. They were good fishermen and occasionally offered fish to the others”. To his knowledge, “a lot of beautiful Lipovan women in Sulina managed to marry good men outside Sulina, although some of them were not very moral women.” The same goes for the Ukrainian women; a lot of them came from Bessarabia and worked in the city’s brothels. Then he mentioned the Jews, who were “very bad people. They had shops and they used to treat their servants badly” (his mother worked as servant for a Jewish family and she was beaten often for being late with the groceries). “The Greeks were somewhat stingy but occasionally quite welcoming.”

In the end, this quasi-mythical period of Sulina is just the antipode of the present, as our informant emphasizes: “Before, everybody lived in harmony, but today everybody wants to hurt the others.”

Writing about a certain melancholy of remembering the mahalle (old community of neighborhood) in Istanbul, Amy Mills uncovers a rarely mentioned truth about...
In Sulina, remembering “the old ones” and their current absence in the life of the city is performed in a special frame: the narrative of the peculiar “ethnic” character (as exponent of an entire community, now gone). With the exception of Mr. Z., with his fastidious memory and his detailed knowledge of the cosmopolitan life of the interwar city, other respondents remember interesting characters, such as Mr. Ardaşe, an Armenian who owned a soda and lemonade shop, and married a former prostitute from Bessarabia, a very beautiful woman; Zadik Ervant, the uncle of the last Armenian of Sulina, who lived as a homeless person and gave birth to the local saying (about vagrants): “he is like Zadik;” the Greek Camberis, the rich owner of an elegant hotel, still standing as a ruin on First Street, who once announced his house was burning, but he wouldn’t move until he finished his coffee (he is still remembered as a man of his habits); the Armenian dentist, former housepainter, a short fat guy, who smoked a lot, walking around with his little bag with tobacco and dental instruments, and a pipe; he used to pull teeth after rubbing salt on the gums.
All these “ethnics” are now heroes of funny stories or narratives told with a benevolent smile in the corner of the mouth.

“The war, I know it by heart”

The Second World War is “remembered” by the elders in Sulina as part of a long row of disasters that included an earthquake, flooding, drought and, in the end, a long famine. When the war started, people used to hide in the swamp, running to neighboring villages; while many others took refuge in Ialomiţa County (Socarici). Mr. C. remembers his mother telling him “people were transported like cattle on all manner of ships. People in Socarici were not very happy to shelter refugees; they called the people from Sulina ‘Gypsies’ and ‘stinky Russians’. For the first days, they had to sleep in people’s yards. After a couple of days, people in Socarici were ordered to treat the refugees humanely.”

When they came back to their homes, “the city was a real disaster, heavily bombed. My mother used to tell me that every night, in the direction of Sulina, the sky was red with fire” (Mrs. P., 70). Another lady remembers that “when the Russians came people were receiving them with flowers and icons, as heroes” (someone else added: “But they didn’t give a shit about icons”), while Mrs. C. remembers the entrance of the Russians in her village Rosetti. “They came through Periprava, singing nice songs, which I still like.” The “liberators” “cleaned up” the place (there were still German soldiers left behind). Some people remember the latter “jumping in the Danube, with cars and motorcycles.”

Most “stories” about the war are being framed in religious terms. Mrs. C. develops a small legend about her village,
Identities

The village church has a name which refers to the cloths of Saint Mary. While all the other villages around them where being bombed, they were spared. (Probably because they had a lot of trees, and the houses were covered in clay, so that it was not so noticeable from the air). However, people started saying “that Saint Mary protected them, by covering and hiding them from enemies.”

Mrs. P. has a similar, autobiographical story. When her mother asked a young Russian soldier what they were doing in war at such young age, he answered that they are a whole regiment of former prisoners, which Stalin liberated, if they agreed to fight in the frontline. There were seven or eight soldiers staying in their house, so when her mother heard that, she got afraid and fainted, because Russian soldiers were infamous for rape, and there were four girls in the house. Then the man asked for a glass of water, from one of her older sisters. She said: I will give you the water, if you cross yourself. He did so and also showed a medallion with a golden cross that was hanging around his neck. Only then was her mother relieved.  

People had different strategies for surviving the famine. Mr. C., remembers how they, as kids, used to make a hole in the ground, put bones in them and start a fire. When the bones started to crack, they putted river lobster in to roast them. Mrs. P., (70, Lipovan) remembers her whole family hiding in the swamp, under an upside down boat, for weeks, eating nothing but fish, if their father was able to catch any. Most of the people just ate roots or boiled spini.  

With the beginning of war and Romania having just taken over the jurisdiction from the European Commission,
in 1939, the overall decline of Sulina commences. The rich people start to leave the “sinking ship.” After WWII, Sulina never was the same city again. “The war was harsh and painful for Sulina because it was the closest city to the Russians. It was the first Romanian city to be bombed and ruined. The city’s decadence continues after the war, its commercial activity disappears. This confirms the saying of a Dutch engineer working in Sulina: ‘after we have left, this city would turn into a fishermen village.’”

“Well, the old ones are gone, now there are only lipoveni and haholi.”

Changing Scenery of the Post-War City

The communist period, at least in the beginning, seems to have kept Sulina, unlike other places in Romania, still in a marginal position, in a kind of grey zone, with no clear rules (or not so harshly enforced). Long Mitza, the owner of a brothel, is still there in the 50’s as a respectable tobacco shop owner, with her stylish blue dress as a reminder of another era. People may or may not have jobs, many of them coming to Sulina from rural areas, trying to escape the communist nationalization of land, and life goes on.

The urban scenery of the city, however, undergoes drastic changes. Following the war, many of the old houses were demolished, while the official propaganda presented this process as a ‘renewal’ of the city. Some people remember that after the war, “it was mostly empty plots and a few houses here and there, due to heavy bombing,” while others remember “a stupid, unschooled mayor who, after
The interrogation of urban nostalgia presents insights not only on the process of remembering/forgetting, but also the politics of place transformation,” writes Chang (2005: 248). In the case of Sulina, the urban palimpsest currently speaks the language of decay and transformation, but also stands witness to the city’s better epochs, and to subsequent political upheavals.

Bélanger contends that “the memories attached to a particular area of the city such as old waterfronts, monuments, and buildings contribute and become inseparable from the way urbanites live transitions and changes around these places” (Bélanger 2002: 81). In Sulina, nostalgia for the former landscape of the city (illustrated by a shared remembering of the many channels that cut the place across) speaks actually about (longing for) a status quo ante. “Sulina also had a lot of river channels, made by the Commission. These had a role of communication (people would use it as a travel route) and they relieved the pressure from the Danube at high tide. When we went to the seaside, we would pass along the bridges, and could see the fish in the clear water, with water lilies and willows. That was very nice. But then they drained it. They drained it for agricultural reasons, which wasn’t really productive anyway. Then they had to
Повеќето жители на Сулина негодуваат около начинот на кој комунистичкото урбано планирање агресивно го промени локалниот пејсаж (затворајќи ги природните канали и обидувајќи се да го трансформира околното земјиште на градот за земјоделски цели) како присилно наметнување во „нивниот“ град. Спротивно, врекање на овие бескорисни земјоделски земјишта во нивната природна состојба символички би значело врекање на старата Сулина.

Според една друга приказна, „комунистите ја сметаа делтата за нешто вредно и на почетокот планираа да ја претворат во огромно место за риболов. Сите приватни рибници беа национализирани и на луѓето им требаше посебни дозволи за риболов. Сите беа претворени во регистрирани државни рибари. Поголемиот број рибари беа Липовани и, билејќи беа државни работници имаа привилегирана положба, како што е пристапот до резервите со храна. Сепак, во тоа време ситуацијата беше многу поинаква, риба имаше во изобилство и луѓето можеа да преживеат и покрај тоа што поголем дел од уловот мораа да го дадат на државната рибарница“.

Политичките промени очигледно имаа свои реперкузии врз меѓуенетничките односи во градот. Барем во првата декада, Липовените во Сулина се чини дека беа под закрила на комунистичкиот режим (имаа предност во локалната администрација, уживајќи одредени привилегии како пристап до

build the dike to protect the city from flooding, because the channels were closed. This dike compromised the beauty of the swamp” (Mrs. N.).

Most inhabitants of Sulina resent the way the communist urban planning bluntly changed the local landscape (closing the natural channels and trying to transform the plots around the city for agricultural use) as a forced intrusion onto “their” city. Conversely, turning these useless agricultural plots back to nature signifies symbolically getting old Sulina back.

According to another narrative, “the communists considered the Delta an asset and, at the beginning, they planned to turn it in a big fishery. All private fisheries were nationalized, and people need special authorization to fish. They were all turned into state registered fishermen. The vast majority of the fishermen were Lipovans and, because they were state employees, they had a privileged position like access to food rations. However, back then the situation was very different, fish was abundant and people could survive even though they had to take most of the catch to the state owned fishery.”

Political changes, obviously had repercussions on the interethnic relations in the city. At least in the first decade, the Lipovans in Sulina seemed to have been the protégées of the communist regime (occupying preferentially offices in the local administration, enjoying certain privileges such as access to food etc.). For the
In the majority of the narrations of people who “came” to Sulina, the place was not a very welcoming one, having obviously lost its interwar appeal. Mrs. P, 96, Ukrainian, and probably the oldest person in Sulina, remembers that when she came to Sulina, “nobody had gardens. There were only fishermen, and nobody had gardens.” Also, Mr. S., 73, Lipovan, has a very austere recording of his coming to the city: “In 1953, when I came, the city was old, old. Old buildings. No hotels. We cut some reed and slept on it in a building, we were 30-40 men working at ice-cutting. The city was degraded, mostly Turkish buildings. Very cold. Until the ’70’s, the 6 street only had a few houses. That’s when they started building in this area.”

Mr. H., although Lipovan, went to Romanian school (in the ’50s). “We had teachers who were sent here as political punishment.” Simion Teodorici Bunescu, he taught math. When we came to the Romanian school, there were the Androcencu sisters, who were very elegant. And we, the Lipoveni kids, were wearing gum shoes and cloths re-tailored from our brothers, you can imagine. But we were very good at math.”

In a kind of symbolic “compensation” for the loss of the interwar prosperity of Sulina, some of the informants “remember” the good times of the communist period (when the porto franco functioned in one part of the city...
зоны функционираще во еден дел од градот и овозможуваше луѓето, користејќи различни полу-легални стратегии, да се провлечат и да купат поефтини продукти, а подоцна да ги продадат за повисока цена во „другиот“ дел.\footnote{21}

Како дел од истата приказна, други со задоволство помннат како краделе од големите количества шеќер, на пример, кои биле товарени на бродови во таа област. Методите и ситуациите неодоливо потсетуваат оние полу-пирати/полу-крадци, жители на Сулина од 19 век.\footnote{22} Ова, вкушност, е дел од една постојана приказна која се чини го формирала сегашниот локален идентитет, како некој вид гордост заради избегнување на таксите и заобиколување на законот. Просперитетниот период – за некои – на комунистичкиот режим во некои приказни се чини претставува компензација за богатиот меѓувоен период и спротивност на сегашната несигурност од транзицијата.\footnote{23}

Овде доаѓа до разидување во „сеќавањата“. Дури и ако постои официјална, некако „планирана“ носталгија за периодот на ЕКД, повеќето луѓе ја посакуваат (претпоставената) сигурност – социјална и економска – на комунистичкиот период. Сепак, како што појаснуваат Пине, Канеф и Хауканес, конфликтот на сеќавањата не се однесува само на историската вистина, тuku и на претензиите и на моќта на идентитетот (Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004: 3-4). Во овој случај, разидувањето во сеќавањето може да го прикрие основаното, премолчено разидување меѓу групите кои развиле лојалност и сеќавања за различни времиња. И покрај се, многу Липовани и Романци работеле за Грци и Ерменци – главните карактери во носталгичните нарации – понекогаш како домашни помошници. Дури и кога тие учест-

Part of the same narrative, others remember, with visible satisfaction, how they used to steal from the huge amounts of sugar, for example, that was being loaded on ships in that area. The methods and situation are strikingly similar to those of the half-pirates/half-thieves inhabitants of XIX century Sulina.\footnote{22} This is in fact part of a recurrent narrative that seems to inform the present local identity, as a kind of pride taken in avoiding taxes and gently working around the law. The prosperous – for some - period of the communist regime seems to act, in certain narratives, as a compensation for the affluence of the interwar period and in contrast with the current uncertainty of the transition.\footnote{23}

This is where the waters of “memory” come apart. Even if there is an official, somehow “programmatic” nostalgia for the CED period, most people also yearn for the (presumed) security – both social and economic – of the communist period. However, as Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes make clear, conflicts over memory are not only about the historical truth, but also about identity claims and power (Pine, Kaneff and Haukanes 2004: 3-4). In this case, divergence over memory can hide an underlying, tacit divergence between groups, who develop loyalties and memories of different times. After all, many of the Lipoveni and Romanians used to work for the Greeks and Armenians – main characters in the nostalgic narratives - sometimes as domestic servants. Even when they participate in a common mnemonic account of Sulina’s “good times,” details of their own
biography locate them in different social strata and places.

Discussion – Conclusions

In our interviews and observations of conversations, it was not always easy to discern neatly delineated narratives. As many others pointed out (many authors in Herman et al 2007, e.g.) narrative research is necessarily ‘messy’ since it cannot ignore the complexities of discourse (Chatman 1978). Discursive and narrative structures need to be distilled slowly from the complexity. In some cases, like in ours, like in Sulina, a master-narrative is easily picked up – here the golden age of the CED, bringing prosperity, multicultural tolerance, sophistication. Yet precisely the easy visibility of this master-discourse, with its classical master-tropes of prosperity, stability, sophistication, makes it easy to overlook:

1. Counter-narratives,
2. Changing forces shaping reinterpretations and revalidations of the master-narrative,
3. Personal narratives negotiating places inside or outside the master-narrative,
4. Personal experiences struggling to acquire stable narrative form.
   (Or undermine a narrative form one feels increasingly weary about)

Ad 1: As in many post-socialist places, there still is a narrative, albeit often silenced in official media and
Regarding group memories, we noticed the continuing subterranean existence of group cleavages during the communist period. From the CED period, too few people with actual memories are left, but all elderly people did experience communism, and some of the divisions that were created under and by communism, work through in the present use of communist stories. Lipoveni, the Russian-speaking old believers, had a complicated relation with communism, being privileged for a little while after the war, and according to some Romanians, dominating local politics in an often unpleasant manner. Lipoveni identity is currently under pressure, and many of them assimilated into the master- narrative, defining themselves nowadays more as “from Sulina” than as belonging to an ethnic/cultural group. That situation makes it more difficult to figure out whether “their” position under communism, and an accompanying cleavage with other groups still colors their use of communist stories. (Compare Bamberg et al 2004)
On 2, the changing forces working on a seemingly identical master-narrative, one can say that the CED right from the start promoted that narrative (See Iordachi 2001). The CED publicly presented itself, all over Europe, as the initiator of benevolent development programs, promoter of peace and multicultural tolerance. During communism, the CED period was perceived as imperialist, capitalist, and non-Romanian, but presently the expanded European Union became a new source of identification. The EU was seen as identical to the CED, “the Europeans came back,” as protagonists in a cyclical tale of heroes and villains (the villain role being less stable than the hero) The fullness, opulence, stability projected in the European past and future betray a traumatic past and present in a marginalized place (Antze & Lambek 1996). Before and after the CED, Sulina was in many ways marginal, and those experiences and stories led to a second counter-narrative, that of the outlaw, pirate, very “flexible” with laws that are seen as emanating from centers one does not identify with. At present, the “pirate” story, a narrative with some historical substance in the late Ottoman period, continues to exert a fascination on many local people; it seems to represent a past and a present one is and is not proud of. Present tales of assimilation in a modernized and unified Romanian state (Iordachi 2001), and a European past and future, never stick completely, never fully put to rest contradictory memories and experiences. “The pirates, they still exist” is postulated every now and then, yet it is kept vague whether one considers oneself pirate or not. The marshes surrounding the town on three sides, form an empty canvas for projection of any feeling and any story.
After a few drinks, it does become easier to combine the contradictions, to be for and against the rule of law, to believe and not believe in the master-narrative, to be the same and different, “yeaahhh, we are the pirates!” and “the Europeans will bring us the money again.”

Regarding 3. and 4., regarding the tensions between personal and group narratives, we can refer to many frictions small and large between the personal experiences as recounted by the aging people and the master-narrative, being restated often enough by them. The counter-narratives were not always deployed in those situations, they did apparently not always offer an acceptable form to diverging experiences, whether observed by the storytellers themselves, or not (Rosenthal 2006; Benwell et al 2006; Bamberg et al 2004). As we mentioned earlier, often the story highlighting the CED glories, all its trappings, blurred social distinctions, and effaced social issues in that period, while extending the glories of the period silently to a generalized past, “the old days.” Often people told us about the hardships they encountered – see our title - about local smoldering conflicts, about the very humble position their (Lipovan, Romanian) families occupied vis-à-vis the merchant minorities, the unfairness, obvious envy, yet five minutes later the familiar story about democratically shared wealth, equality, absence of conflicts was repeated uncritically. As noticed before and by others, this, this socially cohesive function of a multicultural, affluent, stability narrative, forceful enough to smoothen out
It is easier to love the Armenians, Greeks, Jews when they are gone, and when their role in the local narratives of self and place is reduced to anecdotal episodes and harmless side-kicks, sometimes comical (the Armenian vagabond, the Armenian with the car). Their crucial role in the creation of the CED-era wealth and urban culture, is systematically forgotten, as well as the problems of living together in close quarters, with many different cultures, having access to greatly different resources, in a place that expanded rapidly under foreign influence, without the gradual process of “getting used to each other” one would typically find. Significant in this regard is the absence of any coherent narrative about the Armenians and their present absence. (Berteaux 1981) Whenever the famous multi-ethnic graveyard of Sulina is mentioned, the Armenians are a blank page, and when asked directly, it is said that “they left, and took their graves with them.” If asked whereto, the answer is “back to their homeland.” What really happened, is cloaked in silence, and there is not even an attempt to construct a cohesive and persuasive narrative, to make sense of it all.

The anecdotal Armenian is appreciated as “couleur locale” in stories about the fabled past, but their real motivations for coming and going are left unexplained. The same holds for the other merchant minorities. At the same time, the remaining Greek identity still brings personal and group contradictions, is easier when the most different groups, and the potentially most destabilizing inequalities are gone (Mills 2006; Belanger 2000).
some prestige and attraction, albeit a Greek identity that is simplified, and tailored to fit the dominant narrative of the CED glories. Even our most prodigious Greek informant had one non-Greek parent, and did not speak Greek anymore. He remembered a wealth of (often technical) details about life during the CED period (shipbuilding, commerce), while glossing over some of the less appealing aspects. He remembered stories about other Greeks in Sulina, and fragments of stories about his Greek relatives abroad, but even for him, the closed narrative worlds of Romanian communism and of his marginal, eccentric town, made it really hard to make sense of the Greek presence and experience in Sulina. Everything is subsumed under the master-narrative, and storylines on the various ethnic groups are not developed, even if one identifies proudly with one of them (compare Bruner 2003; Polkinghorn 1987).

It seems as if the Sulina of the CED was “too good to be true” and too complicated of a construct to be fully grasped by any of the local participants (Meister et al 2004; Polkinghorn 1987; Bruner 2003). A product of a complex mixture of local, regional, international forces and people, of geopolitics embodied in village schools, the Sulina of the CED was hard to understand for anyone. This complexity, the strong rhetoric of the CED itself, in addition to the present EU rhetoric, as well as the distance in time and absence of possibly opposing minority views, all contribute to the local dominance of the master-narrative of an affluent, stable, tolerant, sophisticated European past and future. The master-narrative reshaped to a certain extent the ethnic identities locally, and this in turn shapes the negotiation between personal experience, personal narrative, and group narrative. In the process, memories shape narratives and narratives...
shape memories. Despite the stabilizing function of narrative, it can never succeed completely: the eternally unstable Lacanian Real cannot be contained forever in any discursive structure, and after a while, every socially constructed meaning, will necessarily shift or shatter.

Further investigation in Sulina is needed. Things we could not cover in our research yet, include the workings of historical trauma (see Antze & Lambek 1996 e.g.), the impact of short-term interaction, e.g. in a focus group, on the construction of narrative of self and place (e.g. Moissinac & Bamberg 2004), and the negative mold for local discursive formation, formed by regional and national narratives on Sulina and the surrounding Danube Delta. Green, ecological discourses, and related discourses on corruption undermining the green goals, dominate the discussion on the Danube Delta, while Sulina in the Romanian imagination, is the epitome of marginality, “the dying city on the edge of the world,” a narrative that is fiercely resented by the people in Sulina.

Потребно е натамошно истражување во Сулина. Работите што не можевме да ги опфатиме во нашето истражување, ги вклучуваат и дејствувањето на историската траума (види Antze & Lambek 1996), влијанието на краткотраените интеракции на пример во фокус група, за создавањето на наратив за себе и за местото (пр. Moissinac & Bamberg 2004), и за негативниот камп за формирање на локалните дискурси, создадени од регионалните и националните наративи за Сулина и околината на делтата на Дунав. Зелените, еколошки дискурси и со нив поврзаните дискурси за корумпирана која ги поткопува зелените цели, доминираат во дискусиите за делтата на Дунав, додека Сулина во романската имагинација е пример на маргиналност, „град на умирање на крајот од светот“, наратив кој им е многу одбивен на луѓето од Сулина.

Превод од англиски јазик: Марина Ковачиќ
Notes:

1. According to a report written by an employee of the newly established CED.

2. CED has built a hospital (1867-1869), the water castle (1903), the CED palace (1868), a telegraphic line linking Sulina to Tulcea and Galați (1857) and a telephonic line since 1903, has organized the cemetery (1864 – the Christian one, 1871 – the Muslim one), has introduced public illumination with petroleum (electricity since 1910). Also, CED had a very active role in sponsoring all religious confessions, contributing to a milieu of multicultural tolerance (1865 – the Catholic Church, 1866 - the Russian Orthodox, 1869 – protestant and Greek Orthodox, 1870 – a moschee). By 1930, CED had 359 employees (208 Romanians), adding 746 temporary workers (567 Romanians), all generously paid in golden francs.

3. We could also argue that, due to the fact that many people, especially Turks, Greeks, Armenians, have emigrated from Dobrudja after WWI, the melting pot metaphor does not hold completely. See for further reference “Dobrogea,” published in 1940 by The Romanian Academy, Bucharest.

4. The construction of the Danube-Black Sea Channel cut Sulina off the map of navigation and gave priority to Constanta as harbor.

5. Almost certainly, the functioning of CED with its many representatives and employees of different ethnicities, working together and communicating on a daily basis had an important share in the “cosmopolitan” outlook of the city. However, the French, the British, the Dutch, Italians, Germans etc. are not “remembered” (except for few cases where the informants’ family had personal connections to them). Those who stayed in the collective memory are people who were part of the multicultural day-to-day life.
останале во колективната меморија се луѓето кои биле дел од мултикултурното семејствено на градот, вклучени во неговите мрежи и во самото ткиво на урбаниот соживот.

6. Всушност, многуина новодојденци се асимилирани во овј наратив и заземаат простор и време во согласност со него, а истовремено можат одново да се измислат себеси како космополитски „сулијанци”.

7. Група формирана под великолушното и храбро водство на локална библиотекарка Илинка Михайла, која беше мощне корисна и ни даде огромна поддршка во нашето истражување.


9. Слика што ја користеа медиумите за да го нагласат сегашното пропаѓање на градот.

10. Ова може да се толкува како дел од општиот наратив во пост-комунунизтичка Романија од „златните години“ на меѓувоениот период, кон кој луѓето (и политичарите) се навраќаа кога сакаат да го избегна компонениот период.

11. Пишувајќи за „nostalgia of the waterfront“ во случајот со старите заедници на Ред Хук во Бруклин, Њујорк, Филип Касиниц (Philip Kasinitz) и Давид Хилјард (David Hillyard) го истакнуваат, како дел од ваквият приказ на минатото, значењето на идејата за заедницата како запомнет детаљ: „Надминувајќи ги семејните врски, староседелците се носталгични за ‘автентичните социјални врски’ како дел од „згуснатоста на општествениот живот кога ‘сеќој го знаеше секого’“(Kasinitz and Hillyard 1995: 153)

6. In fact, many newcomers are being assimilated into this narrative and they appropriate space and time according to it, and simultaneously they can reinvent themselves as cosmopolitan “sulineni.”

7. A group created under the generous and full-hearted guidance of the local librarian, Ilinca Mihaila, who was also very supportive and helpful with our research.


9. An image that has been employed by mass media coverage in order to emphasize the current decadence of the city.

10. This could be interpreted as part of an overall narrative in post-communist Romania of the “golden ages” of the interwar period, where people (and politicians) turn to when they want to elude the communist period.

11. Writing about the “nostalgia of the waterfront” in the case of the old-timers community of Red Hook in Brooklyn, New York, Philip Kasinitz and David Hillyard emphasize, as part of this portrayal of the past, the importance of the idea of community as recollected detail: “Beyond family ties, old-timers are nostalgic for the ‘genuine social relations’ of peer groups”, as part of the “density of social life back when ‘everybody knew everybody else’” (Kasinitz and Hillyard 1995: 153).
12. According to a very popular narrative, the pay for one day of work on the harbour was about 500 lei, while a pair of lacquer shoes, very fancy, was 25 lei. A worker on the docks could easily afford a steak and a bottle of wine in the restaurant every day.

13. In the case of the old-timers in Kasinitz and Hillyard’s study, in a nostalgic article about Red Hook’s better days, they included “every business anyone could remember as ever having been on the street. Retold as myth, all of these businesses were imagined as having existed more or less at the same time” (Kasinitz and Hillyard 1995: 158). Sulina seems also to be recollected in a kind of “continuous present of myth,” since the actual physical space of the city would not allow for such agglomeration.

14. According to another similar narrative, “people were paid in golden pounds but these could not be used in the Romanian side of the town. Jews were those who exchanged the golden pounds in Romanian currency and made great fortunes. Greeks were mostly involved in grains commerce. Armenians also lived of commerce Romanian and Lipovan workers did the lower paid jobs” (Mr. G., 83).

15. “When they walked on the street, people used to whisper “look at that tramp, she found herself a good husband. She always replied: “When you see a dog on the street, you don’t ask ‘whose dog was this but whose dog is this?’” Mrs. Ardaşe confessed to me that she had to prostitute herself because she couldn’t survive otherwise. After she married, she became a respectable woman” (Mrs. T.).

16. “His father was a respectable man, but Zadik Ervant wanted to be free. He did not steal or beg, he collected paper, bottles, and scrap iron” (Mrs. T.).
17. Religion used to be very important for the Lipovan community, especially in old times, as shown in other narratives also. In another interview, Mr. H. says “all that mattered was the church writings and readings. The old men considered that somebody who knew how to read and write the church language [Slavonic], even if he only had 4 classes, was more educated than me, for example, after graduating from high school.”

18. The thorny fruits of a wild plant growing in the swamp, on water, whose core tastes like reddish.

19. “Sulina changed. I left in the 60’s from Sulina, and came back in 1973. And it was different, I don’t know what, but it changed” (Mr. H., 64).

20. “This was, so to say, the Siberia of Romania” (Close to Sulina, at Periprava, was one of the most severe political prisons during communism).

21. “In the porto franco, people that were selling milk were allowed to get in, they were selling the milk and then hide forbidden merchandise in the cans. Even textiles, they would put it around the waist underneath the cloths, to avoid the taxes at the customs” (Mr. P., 72).

22. Also, with sugar was very nice...We used to go by boat close to the ship, and they gave us sacks of sugar, we filled up the boat. And we just paid very little. Periprava was full of sugar, Sfistofca was full of sugar. Even so, the owners used to come here as the only place where there is no stealing. Because in other places it was even worse. And for those quantities, the stealing was insignificant (Mr. H., 64).

23. However, during communism, Sulina suffered the same privations as other localities in Romania (lack of water, heat and electricity). Hence, the local (still quoted) saying:
“Sulina, Sulina/Cand ai apa, n-ai lumina” (Sulina, Sulina/When there’s water, there’s no light).

References:


