

EDITOR'S CHOICE OF THE MONTH

ISSUE 9.4 | DECEMBER 2024



**CENTRUL PENTRU STUDIUL DEZVOLTĂRII
INTERNAȚIONALE ȘI MIGRAȚIEI**

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MIGRATION

Editor's Choice

BUCHAREST, A CITY IN CHANGE. THE SAME CITY WITH DIFFERENT DWELLERS

Remus Gabriel ANGHEL

Professor, Faculty of Political Sciences – SNSPA

Director of DIM

Public transportation offers unique glimpses into local social change. I have a personal history with 105, a bus connecting Drumul Taberei neighbourhood to The House of the Free Press building in the northern part of the city. The House of Free Press was named during communism "The Star House", a big Soviet-style building housing many communists newspapers and a big printing house. I have travelled with 105 since 1980s, going to my fathers' job, who was a journalist in a newspaper that had disappeared after 1990. I therefore associate the bus with the smell of newspaper ink, still remembering today. I also used the bus during weekends going to promenade to Herăstrău park, recently renamed King Michael Park, to the Peasant Museum or to Kiseleff Boulevard for a stroll. I therefore associate it with leisure time as well. I remembered waiting endlessly for the bus during communism, how crowded the bus was, with people hanging on the stairs and with poor travel conditions, especially disturbing during hot summers or cold winters. Like many people of my generation, I have lost touch of it after being away for more than twenty years. More recently I started to reconnect with it gradually having a recent job in the same part of the city. And as before, I also live in Drumul Taberei, using regularly the same bus I have used before. The 105 bus thus re-entered my daily life, but this time in a new way.

I grew up in a city where migration was a constant. My parents and very many others came from other cities, and many of my friends, colleagues, or acquaintances did as well. Many came as well after 1989, in a context where life in Bucharest was more bearable as it was in the country, where the economy was in full fall. Migrants were thus always featuring this

city, even though there were until recently people coming from other Romanian regions. My new experience of the city is yet of a different quality. The bus 105 has changed and it surprised me. Passengers were different. Once getting in the bus I noticed several Ukrainian Roma refugees – mostly mothers and children. Two stops later, 3–4 workers from Asia got on, and after some more stops afterwards, a few more, possibly from Africa.

The city was always heterogeneous and diverse in ethnic terms even before in spite of being considered homogeneous – I had neighbours, colleagues, and friends who were Jews, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians and mostly Roma, but it was an east European heterogeneity, something that people from Bucharest were “used to,” something familiar. Slowly, after 1990, people began coming from other countries and continents – mainly Moldova, but also China, the Middle East, and even Latin America. But one had always had a visual experience of a “Romanian” city, with “foreigners” just passing through. The social reality changing now, is new and it is global. Migrants from Asia listen to music from Nepal or Sri Lanka on their smartphones, talk to relatives and friends far away, one can hear several different languages spoken daily. Food delivery workers are mostly migrants, the majority coming from Asia. Bucharest dwellers eat at Indian, Turkish, Vietnamese, and Lebanese restaurants. Heterogeneity is increasing and will continue to do so, especially as many Romanians have left the country and birth rates are poor.

Romania is becoming increasingly heterogeneous and multicultural. It is not only the growing percentage of the Roma population – underestimated in statistics, but especially through newly arriving immigrants, who will only be more numerous. Bucharest people never fully understood each other, even when speaking the same language; they understand each other even less now, as many migrants do not speak Romanian. In spite of being a city with heterogeneous population people lived without major ethnic strife and even not being hospitable, people cared less about each other and arguably, indifference could be also seen as a form of tolerance ultimately, helping people to live close to others. Newcomers coming from abroad today need as well a tolerant social context – not just rights, institutions and equal treatment – but a helping hand. Generosity may not be not necessarily our strong suit, but we will have to learn it. One form of generosity is empathy for the others which – even if it doesn't force people to offer anything, pushes them you out of their comfort zone. After all, both older and newer dwellers of Bucharest live in the same

city, which they have to accept. Newly arriving immigrants, these new Romanians, are gradually becoming an integral part of the city's social fabric, similar to what happens in other Romanian cities. Older ideologies and ethnic stereotypes prevailing in Romania may not be of use addressing migration and they may change; newcomers bring an entirely different history, personal stories, may have different needs than other minorities living in the country. This new multicultural reality forces us to exercise new forms of tolerance and interethnic relations. It also requires not just the existence of a social contract between locals and immigrants, but also the realization that the older dwellers cannot live without the new ones – they working in services, hotels, restaurants and hospitals of the city. For Romanians and people from Bucharest this is a new reality they have to come to terms with.