



Working together
www.rcis.ro

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială

ISSN: 1583-3410 (print), ISSN: 1584-5397 (electronic)

Selected by coverage in Social Sciences Citation Index, ISI databases

BEGGING PHENOMENON IN BUCHAREST CITY: DIMENSIONS AND PATTERNS OF EXPRESSION

*Elena MATEI, Liliana DUMITRACHE, Gabriela MANEA,
Octavian COCOȘ, Carmen MIHALACHE*

Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială, 2013, vol. 43, pp. 61-79

The online version of this article can be found at:

www.rcis.ro, www.doaj.org and www.scopus.com

Published by:

Expert Projects Publishing House



On behalf of:

„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University,

Department of Sociology and Social Work

and

Holt Romania Foundation

REVISTA DE CERCETARE SI INTERVENTIE SOCIALA

is indexed by ISI Thomson Reuters - Social Sciences Citation Index

(Sociology and Social Work Domains)



Begging Phenomenon in Bucharest City: Dimensions and Patterns of Expression

Elena MATEI¹, Liliana DUMITRACHE², Gabriela MANEA³,
Octavian COCOȘ⁴, Carmen MIHALACHE⁵

Abstract

The past two decades have had a profound impact on Bucharest's social landscape resulting in the addition of a number of fringe elements reflecting phenomena such as homelessness, drug use and begging. The present study focuses firstly on the analysis of begging as a controversial social phenomenon, including beggars' activities profiles, the causes of begging, the preferred areas for begging and its ensuing effects on the social landscape and secondly, on locals' perception of and attitude towards beggars and the series of measures proposed to reduce the impact of the phenomenon and provide support for beggars. The methodology used includes field observation and interviews, with data processed using QSR Nvivo 7. The research indicates that despite the legislative levers in place to eradicate the phenomenon, it is still pervasive in Bucharest mainly due to locals' acceptance of begging as an indicator of social exclusion and economic deprivation rather than an antisocial phenomenon in its own right. Although measures have been implemented to reduce or even prohibit begging, the authorities are overwhelmed by its prevalence and alternative approaches are needed to address it.

Keywords: begging, Bucharest, spatial-temporal pattern, social phenomenon, qualitative research

¹ Bucharest University, Faculty of Geography, Bucharest, ROMANIA. E-mail: e_matei58@yahoo.com

²Bucharest University, Faculty of Geography, Bucharest, ROMANIA. E-mail: dosaredumitrache@yahoo.com

³Bucharest University, Faculty of Geography, Bucharest, ROMANIA. E-mail: maneagabriela2002@yahoo.com

⁴ Bucharest University, Faculty of Geography, Bucharest, ROMANIA. Email: octaviancocos@yahoo.com

⁵ "Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Agricultural Science and Veterinary Medicine, Iasi, Lawer, Law Society, Iași, ROMANIA. E-mail: av_carmen_diaconu@yahoo.com

Introduction

Urban habitats, where individuals are to some extent alienated from their surroundings, are a suitable environment for various fringe social groups such as the homeless, beggars or drug users. While some of these groups can be associated with social exclusion (or auto-exclusion), others fall within the spectrum of crime and delinquency. Begging is an ancient phenomenon first documented in the Bible, which mentions disabled beggars (Luca, 18: 35-43). While it is an act of mercy to help an individual genuinely in need and unable to earn a living, begging in itself, as an occupation is considered a sin as *'the beggar deceives and exploits others in order to support himself rather than make use of his physical and spiritual strength'* (crestinortodox.ro).

In historical works, they are presented either as disabled people or mimicking a handicap by tricking. To eradicate begging the history mentions a number of strict laws with regard to their status. Thus, in Great Britain "The Vagrancy Act" has been applied since the XV century for poor people, which generated beggars or vagrancies. Later, in 1824, a new "Vagrancy Act" version was applied in England and Wales. This law was amended throughout history till now and regulates the status of homeless people sleeping out, vagabonds, beggars and disorderly persons (www.legislation.gov.uk).

In Romania, the first attempts to control begging were provided in the document of 1652 called "The Straightening Law", which provides disabled poors a "book of peace" (Livadă-Cadeschi, Stahl, Lambru & Ghebrea, 2002). Begging is widely found in developing countries as in developed countries *'patterns of social integration are institutionalized and fairly clearly defined, but mostly developing states where, must define firstly what is 'normal' and, therefore, what is outside accepted norms is more complicated'* (Ruhi, 2007). South Asia, especially India as well as Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal, etc. is home to the largest number of beggars, reflecting the large proportion of the population living below the poverty line; while some of the beggars live the extensive slums of New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai or Calcuta (Kundu, 2003), others are homeless (Goyal, 2005) and their children are exposed to these dangerous informal activities (<http://www.street-children.org.uk>). In Africa, where child exploitation, malnutrition and extreme poverty are common, begging is also prevalent in most of the large cities throughout the continent, from the West, in Nigeria (Esan, 2009; Onoyase, 2010) to the East in Ethiopia (Abebe, 2008). In larger cities in South and Central America, begging is an issue on the agenda of both local and central authorities which attempt to reduce its prevalence through urban planning initiatives. While in Quito, the capital of Ecuador, most beggars are indigenous people, especially women and children (Swanson, 2010), in Mexico City, children are largely involved in street begging (Mongelluzzo, 2006).

In the European Union, these issues are the subject of the European platform for combating poverty and social exclusion that member states must subscribe to. Eliminating social exclusion would be conducive to a reduction in antisocial behavior such as begging. Europe has its own beggars, from England (Kennedy and Fitzpatrick, 2001) to Belgium (Adriaenssens & Hendrickx, 2011) or France, where Romanian immigrants make up a large proportion of the urban beggars. In this situation, many European states, like Luxemburg, Switzerland, Lithuania etc., prohibit the begging, while other countries are dealing with the introduction of laws against beggars (Norway, Austria etc.). Romania, as a recent EU member, is a European country well known for the begging phenomenon in urban areas, despite that the panhandling is a criminal offence punishable by 1 month to 3 years in prison according to the Romanian Criminal Code, article 326 which defines panhandling as the activity carried out by an able bodied individual, of repeatedly begging and asking for the mercy of the public. The largest number of beggars is concentrated in Bucharest, the most economically prosperous city in the country, with the largest income per capita and a contiguous densely built urban landscape, suitable for such anti-social behavior.

Moreover, begging remains the subject of various social, urban and environmental debates. The interest in the extent of this phenomenon started in 1948, the year the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. The first scientific studies into begging appeared after 1960 in France (Silver, 1994). The focus of these first studies was defining beggars. Researchers in various specialisms took different approaches in its analysis. While psychologists associate begging with mental health problems and low self-esteem, social scientists link it to poverty (Fawole, Ogunkan & Omoruan, 2011) and social exclusion, focusing mainly on homeless individuals (Kennedy & Fitzpatrick, 2001) or the poverty afflicted lower classes of society (Jenks & Paterson, 1991). Oxford Dictionary defines a beggar as *'a person, typically a homeless one, who lives by asking for money or food'*.

If this particular definition is adopted, beggars differentiate themselves through their actions, which themselves vary according to their economic and social situation and the space they inhabit. Thus, Ibrahim (1997) classifies them into actual beggars, some of which may appear maimed, cultural beggars singing in public places, leprosy sufferers, the blind and the disabled. Adedibu and Jelili (2009) divides beggars into poor and unemployed individuals, occasional, *'un-professional'* beggars, travellers, individuals with no qualification, women with small children, fraudsters disguised as beggars and the elderly. Mexican history differentiates four types of beggars: *'desnudos'* - those lacking clothes, almost naked, *'mendigo'* - fraudsters disguised as beggars, *'vergonzades'* - poor individuals that are too proud to beg and *'verdaderos'* - the real beggars (Arrorn 2000, in Mongelluzzo, 2006).

In developed countries, socially excluded individuals are a constant concern for NGOs, governments, social services and law enforcement agencies. The wide range of laws adopted to contain begging generated debates with regards to the ownership and use of public space (Mitchell, 2003; Smith, 2005), the right to social mobility (Cresswell, 2006; Webber & Bowling, 2008) or safety on the streets (Duneier, 1999; Adriaenssens & Hendrickx, 2011). In Romania, begging has mostly been a popular subject of mass-media reports rather than a topic for scientific literature, which generally includes the phenomenon in studies addressing social exclusion and vulnerable social groups. The Quality of Life Research Institute (ICCR) offers a wide range of studies, including topics such as the position of women in society, the Roma (Gypsy) minority (Cace, 2007), street children (Cace & Sima Costin, 2003) or social policies in Romania (Zamfir & Stoica, 2006; Zamfir & Stănescu, 2007).

In this background, the aim of this study is to identify the socio-geographic dimension and patterns generated by the behaviour of beggars in the urban landscape of Bucharest. To support this aim, the following objectives have been established: (1) understanding the genesis and social background of the phenomenon; (2) identifying its dimension and spatial-temporal distribution pattern in Bucharest urban landscape; (3) clasifying different types of beggars and their actions; (4) analysing the society response seen in the interaction between beggars and ordinary citizens or civil society, legal framework for begging and drafting possible suggestions to solve this phenomenon.

Methods and data

The present study refers to Bucharest City and relies on four research proceedings. Participatory observations of the authors and a group of volunteers made in several areas, selected according to the occurrence and intensity of the phenomenon: the historical city center (including Unirea and University Squares), the North Railway Station, the areas lying along the main avenues (Iuliu Maniu, Colentina, Magheru, șoseaua Ianclului, șoseaua Olteniței, Mihai Bravu, Timișoara) and the vicinity of the Băneasa Airport. The recordings were made every three months, over a month time, between 7 and 20 hours. Likewise, between 2011 and 2013 observations were made during religious holidays in the surroundings of selected churches located in densely populated neighborhoods. The observations aimed at identifying the begging hotspots and the demographic characteristics of the beggars, such as age, gender, place of origin, ways of action, and slogans employed, in order to define the beggars' typology and to understand how they interact with the population. At the same time, the authors conducted informal discussions with some beggars who expressed the wish to expose their problems and the reasons why they were on the streets.

Spatial analysis by GIS tools which allowed us to create a participatory map made by beggars' contributions in identifying the most suitable places for begging, combining them with our observations, using Arcview 10.1©, (ESRI, Redlands, CA, USA).

Qualitative analyses based on in-depth interviews applied on a sample of 14 respondents. All these people agreed upon answering the questions and allowing us to use the information for scientific purpose. For keeping the privacy, we used letters F1, F2 etc. for female persons and M1, M2, etc. for male persons. The sample included local authority representatives, as well as NGO's dealing with social aspects of the population, representatives of the Orthodox Church, inhabitants selected ad hoc during their interaction with the beggars, and print media journalists. Likewise, we used a series of information collected from the online articles published between 2005 and 2013. Quantitative analyses based on a statistical report provided by the Territorial Authority for Public Order and on the data published online.

The information obtained during the interviews, as well as those collected from mass media, were processed with the QSR Nvivo 7 software, which allowed us to manipulate and structure large volumes of data (Iovu, 2011; Mihalca, 2013), by creating tree nodes corresponding to the research objectives. At the same time, we were able to enter the respondents' attributes in order to interrogate their demographic data in relation with the answers provided, which ultimately allowed us to understand the begging phenomenon at the scale of Bucharest City.

The study is important because it defines the area and the dimensions of this phenomenon in the urban landscape of Bucharest City from the perspective of the beggars, the civil society, the authorities, and the community. It can be a useful tool for our society as a whole to understand this phenomenon and find a way of action in order to reduce the anomy induced by begging. The analysis limitations are represented by the lack of official data regarding this phenomenon and the difficulty of its monitoring, because we deal here with a mobile group of people, the structure of which changes continuously. In addition, it was impossible to verify all the beggars' testimonies, and this was the reason why some of them, which seemed hard to believe, were eliminated.

Results

The answers to the interviews, the direct observations, the statistical data and the mass media information processed in QSR, NVivo 7 allowed us to highlight the begging environment.

The begging: perception and reality

The diversity of the begging environment of Bucharest City generated contradictory results both in what concerns the social group that includes the beggars and with regard to the causes that generate this phenomenon. Even though mass media labels it antisocial, the processed data showed a wide range of structuring, from a group exposed to social risk, to a socially disfavored/disadvantaged one, to an antisocial one and finally to a group belonging to a certain ethnicity or to all ethnicities (Table 1).

Table 1. Respondents' perception upon beggars' social status

Tree nodes	Sources	%	Respondents
Risk group	5	35,8	F1, F2,F5, F7 M7
Antisocial	6	42,9	F3, F4, M1, M2, M3, M4
Disfavored/disadvantaged	1	7,1	F8, M5
Roma's group	1	7,1	F6
All of them	1	7,1	M6

Source: Processed after Nvivo7 export.

The multiple causes of this phenomenon are sometimes seen as contradictory: poverty, the refuse to work, illness, old age, children forced to beg, delinquency, low education level etc. Thus, according to the respondents' opinion the begging phenomenon in Bucharest

“is explained by the presence of vulnerable groups, such as the homeless people, 34% of which beg on the streets” (F1, 40 years old, civil society), “is the attribute of street children who become drug addicts, of some old people who lost their dwelling, of the orphans” (F8, 45 years old, academic), “is practiced by hungry people who linger near the churches” (M1, 50 years old, church representative) or “near the large stores having no security service” (F7, 49 years old, businesswoman).

Other respondents contended that begging is the habit of those people who hate to work,

“lazy people” (F5, 76 years old, inhabitant) or “people who lost their self-esteem” (F3, 54 years, reporter).

The begging is perceived as being more common with the Rome ethnicity,

“the great majority of these people see the begging as the last method to get money for their daily bread, while others obtain large sums of money, which are sometimes used for erecting real mansions” (F6, 23 years old, student).

There are also opposite opinions, which consider that the begging phenomenon is due

“to the existence of disadvantaged persons, which are in extreme poverty, having low and very low incomes; mentally ill, people with physical disabilities, elder people, and children” (M6, 63 years old, local authority) or which contradict the idea that begging is restricted to poor people, “the poor people do not beg” (M1, 50 years, church representative; F3, 54 years, reporter).

These differences reveal the fact that despite the high education level of the respondents (71.2% were higher education graduates) the phenomenon is controversial, because the begging environment has different causes. Only the respondents working in mass media contend that begging is an offense covered by the Romanian Penal Code, inasmuch as

“the act shows similarities with the criminal offense of fraud”, incriminated by Article 215. In their opinion, the people who beg “mislead the public with regard to their work capacity by mimicking diseases or handicaps that in reality do not exist” and “work capacity defines this type of crime, the prosecution authorities are obliged to investigate these aspects and ask for medical opinion” (The Romanian Penal Code).

By corroborating the data on group membership with the causes that generate the begging phenomenon, we have come to the conclusion that begging is characteristic to the social groups that are at risk and at the same time, it is an antisocial phenomenon generated by the lack of social norms.

Dimension of the phenomenon: the spatial-temporal pattern of the Bucharest urban landscape

Field observations have revealed that although this phenomenon was somehow present in Romania during the communist regime, the centralized political system allowed a strict control of the beggars (many of them being fined or even imprisoned). After 1990, the phenomenon has grown in intensity and the beggars

spread in the urban settlements at home and abroad. However, they remain concentrated especially in Bucharest, which is the largest economic center of Romania, but they are also found in other big cities like Iassy, Cluj-Napoca and Timisoara. Their proliferation is encouraged by the fact that “they do not end up in jail any more” (www.eviz.ro, November 28, 2005), because those caught in the act have no identity documents and the trials cannot be brought to an end (POTA, 2011). The data on begging is unreliable, which proves the phenomenon is difficult to quantify and classify, but the general perception is that it has slightly declined after 2007, as many beggars migrated to other European countries. Thus, the information released by mass media show that in Bucharest are recorded every year between 17,000 and 20,000 offenses at the street level (www.adevarul.ro, November 17, 2008). The figures are confirmed by the Territorial Authority for Public Order within the Police Department of Bucharest City, but the offenses are considered to be committed both by the beggars and the homeless (POTA, 2011). Mass media also shows that *“in Bucharest there are 980 beggars, of whom 600 are stable and the rest are occasional. Of the total number of people appealing to the mercy of the passers, 200 are children”* (www.adevarul.ro, November 17, 2008). At the same time, Samusocial, one of the most active NGOs dealing with the social problems of the homeless (www.samusocial.ro), has 2,000 such people on record, of which about 34% beg on the streets. Likewise, 680 beggars are homeless, which includes them in the category of poor people exposed to social risks.

The field observations of the three years of monitoring have revealed that the number of beggars is less than 1,000. Their age largely differs, almost 1/5 are children and teenagers, 1/2 are middle-aged and 1/4 are elders, being equal females and males. These are both homeless people,

“I sleep in an abandoned house” (beggar, male, age 28), or people who live in or near the city, “in Pantelimon neighborhood” (beggar, woman, 62 years old), “in Vidra village” (beggars, age 47 and 53, females) or far away from the capital, “Resita town” (beggar age 65, female), “Alexandria town” (beggar, age 60, female) etc.

The organization is rather unclear. While the mass media stresses the idea that beggars are organized in networks, with well-established begging places, the interviews show this is not always the case.

“I have seen in the center of the city a group of people carrying a handicapped person; later on, they came back and took away the money he had raised...and those who beg around the churches have a boss” (M2, age 50, church representative). “Near the Grozavesti student campus there are two people, each begging on a side of the street. In case somebody else trespasses their territory they immediately banish him by force” (F6, 23 years old,

student); "it is very clear that they are organized" (M4, 35 years old, private guardian). "Those with disabilities belong to a zone, usually at large crossroads, strolling in their wheelchairs among the cars" (F8, 45 years old, academic). There are also cases when beggars act on a temporary basis, "they do not beg constantly" (F1, 40 years old, civil society), or when "they are accepted by sweetshops and food stores" (F7, 45 years old, businesswoman).

The incomes made by these people cannot be quantified. Online media argues that "a beggar can make as much as 5000 lei per month" (www.mediafax, July 25, 2008) and that "behind them is a genuine mafia" (www.adevarul.ro, November 17, 2008). By contrast, the population believes that

"it is certain their main desire is to gather money, to be able to make a living" (M2, 52 years, church representative), "others make a lot of money and refuse to work hard" (M1, 50 years, church representative) and "if you offer them food they turn you down" (F5, 76 years old, inhabitant).

Most respondents, like those interviewed in Bruxelles by Adriaenssens and Hendrickx (2011), consider that the beggars earn less money and beg on their own, without being part of a network. Such opinions can be also found in the declarations of many beggars (table 2).

Table 2. Economic status of the beggars in the respondents' view

Tree nodes	Sources	Data type	Gender
Rich	5	Interview	2 females, 3 males
Poor	6	Interview	4 females, 2 males
Neither rich, nor poor	2	Interview	1 male, 1 female
No response	1	Interview	1 female

Source: Processed after Nvivo7 export.

The field observations allowed us to identify a spatial and temporal pattern of the phenomenon. Thus, the beggars are concentrated at signalized crossroads, along the one-way streets, inside the public transport vehicles, near the small and middle-sized supermarkets (but never in the area of the large supermarkets monitored by security services), as well as around the North Railway Station and in the core of the city (fig. 1). The temporal pattern shows the following typology: a peak in the middle of the week, in the afternoon, near the large office buildings and another at the end of the working hours, and along the one-way streets lying in the vicinity of these buildings. On Sundays, the beggars concentrate in the core of the old town or at the churches located in the neighborhoods populated by people with middle or high incomes. Sometimes, begging is associated with religious events, the beggars crowding inside or nearby the churches. During the weekends, some beggars head to the exits of the city or to its entrances, while at night are present only near the North Railway Station. Their activity is mainly

carried out between 9 and 17 hours and only seldom outside this interval. This pattern suggests that beggars are well oriented in space and time, so as to get the most profit of their activity.

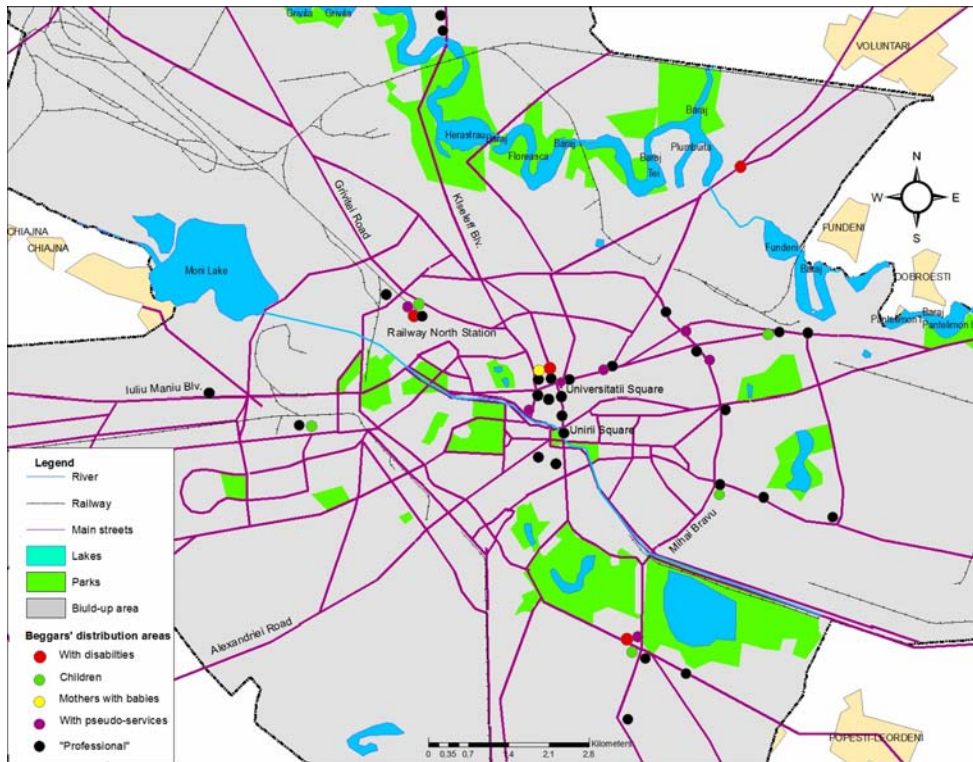


Figure 1. The spatial distribution of the begging hot spots in Bucharest (According to the field data collected by the authors). Source: Map processed after www.gisportal.ro

Typology of the beggars: from “occasional” to professional” and from “individual” to “organized network”

The typology of the beggars is rather diverse, but the study allowed us to group them according to their way of action, to their ability to draw benefits and to their work capacity and health condition.

The “professional” begging is performed by ill or healthy people. The beggars are

“ill people, usually having a visible handicap” (M1, 50 years, church representative; F8, 45 years old, academic) or “desperate persons, excluded or self-excluded from society, people having no alternatives” (M5, 56 years old, professor), “old people, who lost their dwelling from different causes and beg in other areas not to be recognized by their acquaintances; sometimes they fall mentally ill” (F1, 40 years old, civil society) and “children forced to beg by healthy adults” (M2 40 years old, church representative). “The people with serious mental illnesses are not included in this category; they do not beg, because have no patience to receive something” (F2, 45 years old, civil society). Among the beggars, there are also people capable to work “who mimick a physical disability” (F4, 48 years old, reporter) or “invent a story to impress the others” (F3, 48 year, reporter) and “speculate people’s religiosity” (M2, 50 years old, church representative). “Usually, these people do not accept food or other goods, but only money, and this leads me to the conclusion they are in fact impostors” (F5, 76 years old, inhabitant).

Thus, they are labeled “*impostors*”, who refuse to provide a social useful labor, who lack education and turn the begging into a “*life style*” and work incapacity.

The occasional begging is performed individually by people who are temporary in a deadlock of various natures. Profesional beggars are extremely adaptable and they possess empiric marketing knowledge. Their stories touch the soul and their slogans psychologically manipulate the people:

“their aim is to inspire pity to the passer-bys, their voice is whining, they tell sad stories about their families on a sorrowful melody or say prayers; they wear shabby and sometimes greasy clothes and their eyes shed tears; women hold children in their arms, making them cry, while men play different instruments like accordion and violin, either on the street or in the public means of transportation. Soemtimes, they are very persistent in asking for money, or else they become aggressive and insolent” (M6, 63 years old, local authority).

Studying their typology and their activities one can reach the conclusion that they belong to one of the main three groups: professional beggars, beggars offering pseudo-services, and occasional beggars, all use various slogans (*table 3*).

In conclusion, while mass media catalogues them only as professionals acting in organized networks, the interviews have revealed that 37% act in organized networks, 13% individually and 50% individually and in networks.

Table 3. Structure of beggars, tricks and slogans

Professional beggars	Beggars offering pseudo-services	Occasional beggars	Slogans
Who tell a story (written, in a song, spoken)	Who wash the windscreen	Who say prayers	"God bless you! Give me 1 leu"
	Who recite poetry	Young people	"I ran out of gas" "Give me money for bread"
Who show medical documents (only documents, documents supporting a real illness)	Who sell flowers of questionable quality	Old people asking for bread	"Give me money for my children"
	Who offer a car park	People carrying a baby	"Money for drugs" "Put the hand on Vasilică (lamb) to bring you luck!"
Who hold children in their arms (mothers, brothers or sisters)	Who sell magazines that are distributed free of charge	People carrying lambs on the New Year's Eve	"Give money for transportation"
Handicapped people	Who sing songs	Disabled people	"Help to buy prosthesis"
	Who offer to find a taxi	People micking a disability	"God help you!"
People who mimick a handicap	Who bear a religious image	People who sell willow twigs or other species (with the occasion of religious events)	"I need food for my baby!" "I'm diabetic!" etc.

Source: Information collected by the authors

The response of today's society

The begging phenomenon is controlled by the way society acts and reacts. In this respect, we analyze on the one hand on the interactions among civil society, population and beggars, and on the other hand on the measures they foresee and on the legislative levers that may hinder this phenomenon.

The analysis of the interactions between citizens and beggars reveals that despite the age, level of education and incomes, all the interviewed people empathized with the beagars.

"Every day I encounter at least a situation, I have come to know them and their place of origin, I am convinced that many of them are impostors, and yet I give them money because I pity them" (F8, 45 yeres old, academic). "I gave them money, especially to the old people and to the women carrying children in their arms, because they inspire me pity and compassion" (F6, 23 years old, student, F3, 54 years old, reporter). "Whenever I have something, I share with them from religious reasons, inasmuch as I consider them poor" (F5, 76 years, inhabitant). "I don't know why I give them alms, maybe because I pity them" (M5, 57 years, professor), "as a citizen, I rarely offer money, except for the situations when I consider the people are really in a deadlock" (M6, 63 years, local authority).

Field observations revealed that people seldom react in the presence of the beggars. In the case of those specialized in begging from the drivers stopped at the traffic lights, one out of 20 drivers is impressed, while in the case of those begging on the streets, one out of 100 passer-bys reacts in a positive manner.

The church plays an important part in the eradication or in the mitigation of this social phenomenon, but despite the efforts made so far, the effects are minor.

“We especially help the children; either we give them money for drugs, or we provide them the opportunities to meet both their basic necessities and those related to education” (M2, 40 years, church representative). The priest, from Ilarie Chendu Center collects children on the streets, offering them food, clothes, sleeping conditions, trying to send them to school, but they escape back on the street. We may assist 15-20 persons. We give money for health treatments” (M1, 50 years, church representative).

The foundations dealing with social problems support the efforts made by the church with the help of structural funds and partnerships. They primarily help the homeless and the persons who are at risk.

“Statistically speaking, we collected from the streets about 2000 people, providing them food at the social canteen, but only for a limited period” (F1, 40 years, civil society).

The difficulties are manifold, but the most serious are those regarding the interactions with the beggars, because of their low education levels:

“they have no basic education, it is impossible to give them a qualification” (F1, 40 years old, civil society), “it is very difficult to work with them, you cannot motivate them and they have no identity cards” (F2, 45 years old, civil society). “Through private collaborative projects we managed to build social workshops, but we had to guarantee for their reliability. Of the 2000 cases, we were able to help only 200 people to get an identity card, because most of them have no stable residence, and we succeeded in making 30 hires per year” (F1, 40 years, civil society).

Another difficulty was their denial to work for small salaries, according to their qualification, which made a lot of them to go back on the streets. The efforts are also directed to the sick people. In this respect, the NGOs receive assistance from volunteer doctors, who help as much as they can the beggars that are ascribed to a certain place (www.samusocial.ro).

The possible measures for diminishing or eradicating this phenomenon are seen differently, either in a pessimistic or in an optimistic manner. In the mind of

the plain citizen, it is not clear if the beggars are a social group prone to risk or not. It is therefore necessary to solve the social problems, so that to hinder the persons who beg as a profession to penetrate this socially disadvantaged category. The first level is education, but it is almost universally accepted that this is a very difficult, if not impossible, process.

“They need education, but to learn means for them to work and they refuse. For them this freedom is all, because they have no obligation” (M1, 50 years old, church representative).

The civil society deems that education can be improved through specific programs, such as “The Second Chance Program”, which intends to motivate people to finish their studies. Less efficient are the AJOFM offers, which address the persons who studied eight years, but without offering them a job upon graduation. Another applied measure for the homeless and beggars is

“the founding of social workshops, which implies the change of the tax regime applied to the small and middle-size enterprises that support these centers” (F1, 40 years, civil society), followed by “the increase of the guaranteed minimum income and the change of the medical insurance policies” (F2, 45 years, civil society).

Likewise, civil society considers that

“it needs to conduct a series of campaigns meant at raising the awareness of the population so that not to act according to the idea that these people deserve their faith. At the same time, prevention programs are needed in order to help the persons prone to high social risk” (F1, M6). “The begging must be supported by integrated methods, based not only on prohibition, but also on a range of job offers and on counseling the poor people to find ways of getting out of their difficult situation. The local and central administrations must conceive plans aimed at fighting social exclusion with concrete measures centered on job offer, on increasing the level of education, on improving sanitation and social services, and on finding solutions for poor people’s accommodation” (M6, 63 years old, local authority). Most respondents believe a solution could be the change of mentality both of the citizens and the beggars: “the people we have helped believe they deserve our support, they mistake us for the state” (F2, 45 years, civil society).

From the legal point of view, begging is a crime, but according to the Romanian legislation one cannot conclude a labor contract until the age of 16, which means that people under that age do not trespass the law. They can only be considered victims, abused and taken advantaged of by adults that can be held criminally

responsible for violating the liberty of the people (Article 189, Romanian Penal Code). Sometimes, this offense combines with subjection to forced labor, as incriminated by Article 191 (Romanian Penal Code), irrespective of the fact that the abused person has the capacity to work.

The main difference between the two types of criminal act consists in the fact that in the case of fraud the victim (the individual or the legal person) and the offender (suspected or accused) are not subjects to a contract. The goods or the money obtained from begging are not a material object of the crime, but an outcome of it. By dint of protecting the freedom of the person, Article 20, paragraph 1, of the Law 678/2001 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings considers that the person forced to beg cannot be held responsible for committing the offense of begging and therefore cannot be punished.

Article 20 in the Romanian Constitution, by which our country gives priority to the provisions of the European Convention of Human Rights, and articles 123 to 133 of Law 272/2004 for protection and promotion of children's rights, consider that making profits from a minor (this offense is punishable by imprisonment from 1 to 3 years), recruiting or forcing a minor to beg are aggravating circumstances (the sanctioning regime of this crime is from 1 to 5 years).

If a parent or the legal tutor of the minor commits these crimes or repeatedly use the minor to ask for financial aid (in this situation, the adult is held responsible for the begging offense, while the child is manipulated) the penalties are more severe: imprisonment is greater and the parent may be deprived of the rights of parenthood, but the child is not necessarily entrusted to an orphanage. In this last event, the provisions regarding the tutelaje become applicable, according to Law 287/2009. In case the parents have been deprived of parenthood the court has the obligation to inform the tutelaje authorities (Article 111, letter c, Law 287/2009). The citizens who come across such cases need to take action in the interest of the minor, be it for legal or humanitarian reasons, and inform the institutes specializing in children's protection. People must be aware that there is a community and social service direction within every townhall in every settlement. If the begging crime does not become a habit, an ad-hoc or a forced profession, it is not subject to criminal law, specifically to Article 326 (Romanian Penal Code) or to the law mentioned before, which refers to the aggravated forms of offense (Toader, 2008).

In this context, there were legislative initiatives (2011) that were in favor of banning the begging and institute penalties not only for the beggars, but also for those who give them money, a deed that is considered an offense. These proposals can become applicable only when the high social risks will be prevented and solved, so that to protect the beggars. Romania can use the European levers in order to combat the social problems that may generate begging phenomena. In this respect, the budget plan for 2014-2020 will benefit from important sums of

money for a number of programs, such as those meant to fight unemployment, especially among the young people, and rural poverty. A lever in this respect is the development of social economy, because it is common knowledge that “*the loss of job or the employment opportunities affect primarily the people having a lower education or social capital*” (Arpinte, Cace, & Cojocaru, 2010).

Conclusions

It is widely accepted that some beggars belong to the social groups prone to poverty, unemployment, illness, lack of a permanent dwelling, having a low education level. They may be both Romanian and Gypsy ethnics, persons capable to work, but who exploit the old people, the disabled persons, the orphans and the children raised by only one parent.

Their distribution over Bucharest and the way they act prove that they possess empirical marketing knowledge and know how to speculate the sensitivity or the religiosity of the people.

Spatially, the beggars concentrate in those places where people crowd at rush hours, where the probability to get something is high and their anonymity is preserved. During the week, they act near the office buildings or on the streets lying nearby, in the parking lots and along the one-way streets. In weekends, they change their location, going to the tourist spots downtown, to the churches and to the exits of the city, following the flows of the population to the leisure areas (Road DN 1).

A particular attention must be paid to the exploited children or to those neglected by their families, which requires “*the development of mechanisms at county level for the supervision of the way in which the rights of the child are observed and defended*” (Cojocaru, 2009).

Civil society and religious institutions engage in solving social problems, but if their efforts are not supported by government programs, their rate of success is low. The legislative levers are difficult to apply, as the beggars have no identity and therefore cannot be punished or helped out.

In conclusion, the local authorities, the citizens and the NGOs need to make a concerted effort in order to curb the begging phenomenon, which negatively impacts the urban landscape and the environment as a whole. This implies to solve the problems of the people prone to social risks, to strengthen the legislation by punishing the citizens who maintain this phenomenon, and to monitor and support the segments of population generating beggars.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank a group of volunteers, students of the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Geography, specialization Environmental Sciences, who did a great job by making observations in the field, among whom stood out in particular Iuliana Florentina Stan and Razvan Spiridon.

References

- Abebe, T. (2008). Earning a living on the margins: begging, street work and the socio-spatial experiences of children in Addis Ababa. *Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography* 90 (3), 217-312.
- Adriaenssens, S., Hendrickx, J. (2011). Street-level informal economic activities: estimating the yield of begging in Brussels, *Urban Studies* 48 (1), 23-40.
- Adedibu, A.A., Jelili, M.O. (2011). Package for Controlling Street Begging and Rehabilitating Beggars and the Physically Challenged in Nigeria: Paper for Policy Consideration, *Global Journal of Human Social Science* 11 (1), 16-24.
- Arpinte, D., Cace, S., Cojocaru, S. (2010). Social economy in Romania. Preliminary approach, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* 31, 64-79.
- Cace, S. (coord.) (2007). *Accesul romilor pe piața muncii. Aspirații, factori și strategii de reușită*. București: Expert Publishing House.
- Cace, S., Sima Costin, D. (2003). Strada între fascinație și servitute, *Asistentă Socială*, nr. 2, Polirom, FASS, Univ. București.
- Codul Penal Român –Legea nr.15 din 1968 (B.OF. nr.79-79 bis din 21 iunie 1968, republicat în B.Of. nr.55-56 din 23.04.1973, în temeiul art.III din Legea nr.6 din 1973, republicat în M.O. nr.65 din 1997 în temeiul Legii nr.140 din 1996, modificata și completata ulterior prin Legea 202 din 2010 privind unele măsuri de accelerare a proceselor-M.Of nr.714/2010).
- Cojocaru, S. (2009). Child rights based analysis of children without parental care or at risk of losing parental care in Romania, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* 24, 41-71.
- Cresswell, T., (2006). The right to mobility: the production of mobility in the courtroom, *Antipode*, 38 (4), 735–754.
- Duneier, M. (1999). *Sidewalk*, Farrer, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- Esan, O. I. (2009). Panhandlers as Rhetics: Discourse Practices of peripatetic beggars in Southwestern Nigeria, *California Linguistic Notes*, 34 (2), 1-18.
- Fitzpatrick, S. & Kennedy, C. (2000). *Getting by: Begging, Rough Sleeping and the Big Issue in Glasgow and Edinburgh*, Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Fawole, O.A., Ogunkan, D.V., & Omoruan, A. (2011). The menace of begging in Nigerian cities: A sociological analysis. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3 (1), 9–14.
- Iovu, M.B. (2011). Family Functioning in Maltreating Families: Implications for Parenting Programs, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, 34, 127-43.

- Kennedy, C., Fitzpatrick, S. (2001). Begging, Rough Sleeping and Social Exclusion: Implications for Social Policy. *Urban Studies*, 38 (11), 2001-2016.
- Kundu, N. (2003) Kalkota, India, UN-Habitat (2003). Global Report on Human Settlements 2003, The Challenge of Slums, Earthscan, London; Part IV: "Summary of City Case Studies", 195-228.
- Jencks, C. & Peterson, P. (1991). *The Urban Underclass*, The Brooking Institution, New York.
- Law No.272/2001 privind prevenirea și combaterea traficului de persoane, publicat în *M. Of. nr. 557 din 23 iunie 2003*, modificată prin H.G. 2.393 din 21.12 2004 și H.G. nr. 1.762 din 22.12.2005.
- Law No. 272/2004 privind protecția și promovarea drepturilor copilului, publicat în *Monitorul Oficial*, Partea I nr. 557 din 23 iunie 2004.
- Mihalca, I. A. (2013). The construction of the mental space in the land of Dorna, *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială*, 40, 78-93.
- Mitchell, D. (2003). *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Mongelluzzo, N. D. (2006). Street stories of Mexico: A comparative case study of elderly women beggars, *ProQuest* data base on line, accessed on 9 December 2011.
- Noul cod civil român-Legea nr.287/2009 privind codul civil publicată în *M.Of nr.511 din 24.07.2009* modificat prin Legea nr.71/2011 publicată în *M.Of. nr.505 din 15.07.2011*.
- Noul Testament, Evanghelia după Luca, Biblia, 1014.
- Ogunkan, D. V. & Jelili, M. O. (2010). The influence of land use on the spatial variation of Begging in Ogbomoso, Nigeria. *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* Vol. 3 (4), 73-83.
- Goyal, O. P. (2005). Anti-social patterns of begging and beggars, Delhi, Isha books.
- Silver, H. (1994). Social Exclusion and Social Solidarity: Three Paradigms, *International Labour Review*, 133, 5-6.
- Ruhi, Shait (2007). Social Exclusion - The Concept and Application to Developing Countries, in Stewart, F., Saith, R. and Harriss-White, B., (eds.), 2007, *Defining Poverty in the Developing World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 75-90.
- Smith, P. K. (2005). The economics of anti-begging regulations, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 64 (2), 549-573.
- Street Children Statistics at <http://www.streetchildren.org.uk>, accessed on 9 December, 2011.
- Swanson, K. (2007). Revanchist Urbanism Heads South: The Regulation of Indigenous Beggars and Street Vendors in Ecuador, *Antipode Journal*, 39 (4), 708-728.
- Toader, T. (2008). *Drept penal român .Partea specială*, Ediția a 3 a revizuită și actualizată, Bucharest: Hamangiu Publishing House.
- Weber, L. & Bowling, B. (2008). Valiant beggars and global vagabonds: Select, Eject, Immobilize, *Theoretical Criminology*, vol. 12 (3), 355-375
- Zamfir, C., Stoica, L. (coord.). (2006). *O nouă provocare: dezvoltarea socială*. Iași: Polirom.
- Zamfir, C., Stănescu, S. (coord.). (2007). *Enciclopedia dezvoltării sociale*. Iași: Polirom. www.adevarul.ro/life-style/stil-de-viata/de-umflam-buzunarele-cersetorilor-1_50acc6117c42d5a66389b4a0/index.html, accessed on 23 September, 2012.

http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?datasetâmet_e3gdp&langâen accessed on 23 September, 2012.

www.bucuresti.anofm.ro/statistica.htm accessed on 18 December 2011.

www.crestinortodox.ro/carti-ortodoxe/pravila-bisericeasca/cersetoria-81908.html accessed on 25 May, 2013.

www.evz.rohttp://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/mila-cu-de-a-sila-692965.html=ixzz2UIFs4mIR, accessed on 23 September, 2012.

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1824/83/pdfs/ukpga_18240083_en.pdf, accessed on 28 April, 2013.

www.mediafax.ro/social/campania-impotriva-cersitului-continua-2815415, accessed on 23 September, 2012.

www.samusocial.ro, accessed on 28 April, 2013.

www.legislation.gov.uk, accessed on 23 september, 2012

www.gisportal.ro, accessed in 2013