

## **Adaptive Strategies in Obtaining a New Transitional Identity Space**

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### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** *This article presents the dynamics between the identity space and the interactional methods it establishes. Therefore I have centred my research on identifying the adaptive means employed within establishing an identity-transitional space in student campuses, by means of exploring and consciously acknowledging the specific interactional methods with the space comprised of the campus dorm room.*

**Objectives:** *The main objective was centred on exploring the way in which campus students organise their transitional-identity space and we also investigated the adaptive strategies employed when establishing transitional-identity spaces as well as internalising said spaces as means of gaining maturity and interacting with a creative-adaptive purpose.*

**Methods:** *In order to study the means of establishing a transitional-identity space we have employed the method of qualitative research, which allows us to pin-point the sense and significance of the researched phenomenon. The qualitative research method is incorporated in the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in order to offer insights on how students, in a given context (students living in a campus) make sense of a particular phenomenon. Therefore we came up with a semi-structured interview guide following the life-story pattern which allowed us to identify different aspects of the transitional-identity space pertaining to student life.*

**Results:** *The statistic and qualitative analysis allowed the identification of specific means by which the dorm room space was being customised, the means of making such a transitional-identity space one's own with a consequential role of becoming more mature and entering adulthood. Through the identification of their own subjective means of relating to a collective transitional space, the students had the possibility to negotiate their own space, thus coming up with means of constructive co-habitation.*

**Conclusions:** *By researching the way in which the transitional-identity space is being configured during such an important and defining stage, namely student life, we are able to identify some means of experiential diagnosis, diagnosis which grants the possibility of a therapeutic intervention through which students might gain creative means of implementing future spaces which they will establish during adulthood.*

**Keywords:** *identity space, identity-transitional space, identity passages, adaptive strategies*

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## **I. Introduction**

From a psycho-genealogical point of view, the identity space is a key-concept through which we wish to illustrate multiple aspects pertaining to the interactional dynamics between **identity and identity space**. Exploring this interaction is centred on the genesis and identity evolution aspects associated with the space each individual has in their family of origin. Space represents the first proof of our own existence, as Le Corbusier used to say, it is the means through which we assert our identity. Building up one's space, which we call a transitional-identity space is the essential method through which all beings manifest a certain identity.

The creation of a space is a permanent or temporary necessity, in accordance with each of our own internal and external limits.

We have defined the identity space as being "the space which allows us to confirm, take on and manifest a certain identity" (Stoica, 2008, 2013, pg. 18)

Our necessity of laying down roots in a certain location, a place which would allow for the construction and reconstruction of one's identity represents both a premise and a lengthy process of drawing and redrawing the borders that stand between what we perceive as being inside and outside ourselves.

The exploration and exemplification of the problematic aspects linked to the identity space, from a psycho-genealogical perspective, has been a process of both structuring and reworking personal testimonies (of the assisted clients). These testimonies have steadily revealed relationships and links, which we observed and subsequently clarified with them. We believe that the acceptance and the confirmation of an identity or the "possibility" of it not being accepted inside and outside the family of origin is the result of an evolutionary existence of the identity space.

The psychological and psycho-genealogical approach of this space led us to questions such as: "What is the identity space?" "What do people consider to be "home"?" "How do we interact with the space around us?"

The research of the challenge posed by the identity space within the family group has allowed for the identification of aspects pertaining to the severing of roots correlated with abandonment and the loss of existential markers. Through trans-generational analysis, we concentrate on the diagnosis and intervention based on the assisted clients' discovery that they can rebuild their identity-space by means of their own identity consolidation and confirmation.

This means that the university admission

exam, leaving home and moving to the new university correspond to an identity passage necessary for the next phase of development. The identity passage consists of the periods in which an individual needs to receive family and social validation of his biological, social and spiritual existence (Mitrofan, Godeanu, Godeanu, 2009). The identity passages represent existential developmental challenges and are associated with various rituals which in our modern day society are so camouflaged, that in many cases the teenage students are unaware of them.

Failure in conquering or adopting a new identity space is associated with the emotional dependency one has in relation with the family, as well as with depression. Losing the familial identity space leads to depressive states and integration difficulties. Not letting go of parents and dependency on the family identity space makes it difficult for some students who come from outside the capital to take on the student status, to cope with the new responsibilities and to join their group of colleagues. Whether we are referring to the house we live in, the office we work in or other locations we go to, each of these places are places we feel comfortable in and where we can reveal something about ourselves. Most often, in the specialized literature, the places we live in are compared to an externally-determined space, described by its physical characteristics. Evolutionist authors have proposed theories that explain the impact that the environment has on human development.

Against this backdrop, we can give as example the special challenge faced by students of the University of Bucharest, who come to study from outside the capital as they enrol in their first year of university studies and who are faced with difficulties in "adapting to living in another city", which in this case is Bucharest. There are several aspects that generate and sustain such difficulties. Firstly, there is the provisional loss of the family identity space, the contact with other identity spaces, taking on new roles and a new status, taking on some responsibilities associated with them and fulfilling new tasks. Many students who join personal development groups complain about the fast pace of Bucharest, about the long distances they have to travel from school to their home, about the people who are constantly on the run and about those with which they have to share their living space. There are also students who complain about the behaviour of their new colleagues and professors. All of these experiences are indicators of the difficulties faced by students who come from outside of Bucharest. *The failure to conquer and adapt*

to a new identity space is associated with emotional dependency in relation to the family as well as with depression. Losing the family identity space generates issues such as depression and integration difficulties.

Loneliness and the difficulty to integrate within a group of colleagues are real issues for some of these students. The college exams and leaving their parents' home represent a chance to develop. *Without separation rituals and with the lack of parents' confirmation of the new student role, student life can paradoxically be responsible for latency in the separation from parents and in taking on the role of an adult.* The student continues to be a pupil, prolonging his or her "childhood". Some adults enlist in two or even three universities while still unable to find a job. They are being held back by their difficulty in discarding the child role.

Student emotional issues are especially linked to the absence of separation rituals, which brings about prolonged identity crises. Separation rituals are passed on trans-generationally. For example, one separation ritual might be the process of moving to a personal space or arranging a personal space during a period of identity passage such as going off to university. Assuming an identity also involves taking over a space in which one might manifest his or her said identity. In some families, a separation ritual consists of organising the child's room during the first months of life or of the young person moving into a personal space. The absence of separation rituals is responsible for a lacking in identity growth. Identity growth is associated with identity passages and represents the effect of the passage and the validation of the adult stage. The need for identity growth, separation and autonomy is profoundly human in its nature. However, the contexts in which it comes to pass can generate pathological means through which it is obtained. Smoking, drinking alcohol and heroin use are pathological means of satisfying the need for identity growth.

The traditional societies' rituals through which individuals enter a new age and life stage (one example would be the communion rituals of the Catholic communities or the Jewish Bar Mitzvah) have been replaced or have disappeared in the communities and families of the students participating in personal development groups. It is obvious that these rituals are no longer passed on within their families of origin. Thus, young people are deprived of the separation stage and they have very few possibilities under such circumstances. We have observed that within the aforementioned personal development groups, one of the outcomes is depression and a continued

dependency on parents. The "obedient", overly-adapted child role, maintains the family balance. The familial scenario revolving around such a role grants the family members an apparent balance.

The parents not confirming the *transitional identity roles* (Stoica, 2008) which prepare young people to take on the role of an adult is a phenomenon one can notice within the Romanian families in general. *The student role is the transitional identity role which links the young individual with new tasks and responsibilities, with different expectations coming from others, thus forcing him to develop in order to move on to the next life stage.* Ironically, in the Romanian family, once the adolescent or young student starts exhibiting age-specific needs and activities, the parents start panicking, increasing control and turning their children away from satisfying their needs, effectively blocking their growth. Some consequences of such parental attitudes could be emotional and action incapacity, as well as the depression we have encountered among the students within personal development groups.

As for the identity space and the way in which it is established in relation to the exterior, it is also defined by the social aspect through which we can define said space. The social environment involves physical characteristics of the environment, the rules or methods through which our actions are curbed, as well as limitations born from our interactions with others. These aspects are not to be ignored when discussing the identity space, because if they have a consistent influence or are persistent in time, they can lead to identity modification. Examples of such cases are the individuals who lived a part of their lives in prison and the experience modified their personality.

A person can have different interactions with the space he or she occupies: accept, reject, ignore or assume and customize the space, or reject, ignore, and move to other places.

A specific configuration which characterises student life is the campus life; an expression of what is called *the identity-transitional space* is the space which contains at one point different feelings, emotions and needs, un-manifested and un-confirmed identities in the daily scenario of the individual.

The configuring of the identity-transitional space started with Winnicott's studies who observed the existence of some transitional phenomena manifested during some stages of emotional development and coming of age in children. In his 1945 article "Effective Primary Development", Winnicott describes the child's tendency to surpass his

self-eroticism through the co-existence of pleasure and hatred. Later, in 1951, through the research paper “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena” the author explains how the existence of some objects that until that time were satisfied by different body parts (such as suckling on thumbs or fists) creates a form of attachment towards objects which the child associates with a securing and possessive role. The blanket or the teddy bear are transitory objects that occupy an intermediary, variable role, both loved and mutilated, allowing the child to move on to another emotional stage, through the understanding of his or her own functional autonomy (Winnocott, 1951-1953, pp. 109-125; 1971, pp. 7-39). By transitional phenomena, Winnicott refers to the neurotic and psychotic stages generated by certain traumatic events in the individual’s past.

The transition from one space to another brings about difficulties in identity acceptance and in asserting the new social status from those who are in a transitional situation. Most often, the difficulties of laying down roots in an unfamiliar space are known as the enabling of de-rooting as a familial, trans-generational nuclear-theme. The identity-transitional space is the space containing at one point feelings, emotions and needs, un-manifested and un-confirmed identities of the individual’s daily scenario. An example of one such identity-transitional space is the space organised by the students within the campus. Often, adapting to the life of student-hood implies the acceptance of a series of existential changes and challenges that involve the students’ adaptive resources. Moving in the campus space brings about the separation from the primary identity space – the childhood home - as well as the acceptance of the gained independence. This is a stand-alone process involving rituals of growing-up and becoming an adult as well as starting an intimate relationship. Through such growing-up rituals, the young adult (the student) confirms his own role-sex individuality and recreates his or her childhood identity space.

Post-adolescence, meaning the years spent as a student are thus a turning point, because they represent the transition from childhood to maturity. Gaining the independence characteristic of this period is most often characterised by the student leaving the home of his/her parents. Mostly for students leaving their cities of birth to move to university centres, gaining personal independence is an important aspect. Setting up a new residence during the beginning of a new life stage involves organising a new environment in which we might manifest our identities. During this

time, students are faced with changes to which they have to adapt by developing various adaptive strategies.

In the present research we have applied an extrapolation of the adaptive concept defined by Carl Gustav Jung. According to the author, adapting represents “the means of establishing links, of linking and balancing internal and external factors.” At the same time, adapting also involves the discrepancies between personal and collective requirements. From this perspective, Jung believed that adapting is characteristic to each individual, some having the need to be more “individual” while others more “collective” (Jung, 1937 apud Samuels, Shorter, Plaut, 2005, pg. 34).

## **II. Method**

### **Design and analysis**

In order to observe the means through which students build their transitional-identity spaces as a way to confirm their adult identities, we have used the humanist, phenomenological and clinical research approach. The present research analyses the sense and the significance of the observed behaviours and phenomena and can be catalogued as a qualitative psychological research (Smith, 2008).

The quantitative analysis we have employed in our research data management is a discursive and meaningful approach of reformulating, explaining or theorising a testimony, experience or phenomenon (Paillé, 1996 apud Mucchielli, 2002). Qualitative psychology methods are particularly valuable for in depth understanding of participants’ experiences and their subjective perceptions. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was developed by Jonathan Smith as a distinct approach in qualitative psychology research. Qualitative research is a term characterising a group of methodologies dedicated to the description and interpretation of social phenomena. Most often, qualitative studies are discovery-oriented. They are less involved in quantification and instead they concentrate on the study of “the significance, variations and experiences pertaining to the perception of phenomena” (Crabtree, Miller, 1992, p.6). Researchers employing qualitative research are trying to study events as they naturally unfold from an internal and external perspective.

We have employed the qualitative determinative research method because it allowed us to observe different types of links between the data presented, all the while being one of the most suitable methods for data showcasing, without modifying any client-presented data.

In the following part, we are going to briefly present some methods of qualitative data validation, methods to which we have also added the descriptive statistical management of the data gathered throughout the research process.

*The theoretical qualitative analysis* is a type of qualitative analysis also known as *analysis through concrete theorisation*. The theoretical qualitative analysis aims at inductively generating a theorisation of a cultural, social or psychological phenomenon by conceptualising and progressively and validly relating qualitative empirical data. It is not a method aimed at obtaining a result, but rather a method underpinned to an activity. The product has to always be supported by empirical data. *The constant comparison* between theorisation and empirical data allows for empirical adequacy. Theory generation and validation occur concomitantly.

The theoretical qualitative analysis consists of six steps: *codification, categorisation, relating, integrating, modelling and theorisation*.

1. *Codification* represents the first data analysis. We ask ourselves “What are we talking about?”, “What are we working with?” The important instrument for any analyst in such context is *the category*. A category is a word or a phrase which assigns at quite a highly abstract level a cultural, social or psychological phenomenon as it is perceived according to specific data.

2. The key question during the analysis stage known as *categorisation* is “What phenomenon am I analysing? What’s happening here?”

3. *Relating* refers to the relation between different categories. The question being asked is “Are they related?”

4. *Integrating* refers to the main phenomenon characterising the theorisation process.

5. *Modelling* refers to the properties and the consequences of the phenomenon.

6. *Theorisation* refers to the process of verifying the theoretical implications through situational complexities (Glaser, Straus, Paillé, apud, Mucchielli, 2002, pp. 38-48).

#### **Instruments and procedure**

The data collecting instrument that we used for the present research belongs to the array of qualitative approaches, a method known as “life story”. In a scientific context, life story involves an active mythology which contains symbols, motives and archetypes that describe the unique and unrepeatable way in which an individual operates. From this perspective, J. Champbell (1970) identified four

functions that life story can have in various research fields: a) the psychological function; b) the social function; c) the mystical-religious function; d) the cosmogoric-philosophical function. As Robert Atkinson (2006) also stated, through the psychological function “Life story helps us come to grips and integrate, through better understanding, our experiences and the feelings we have about them as well as their significance. Through psychological scientific research, life story can provide the researcher with a better understanding of the way in which the narrator perceives himself in relation to these elements. The entire process of psychological development is continuous and it illustrates specific dynamics. Rememorizing, modelling and sharing one’s life story, comprised of values, beliefs and personal aspirations and also of events and experiences. While the life story is being shared, one can observe the identity development process and the development of different interactional approaches between the participants and the way in which their transitional identity space is being configured. A very useful method is using life story in counselling and therapy as an incipient information collection stage, information that can be obstructed by amnesia as well as the subsequent approaches for the therapeutic intervention process.” (Atkinson, 2006, pg.23-27).

Based on how these concepts operate, we have compiled a questionnaire including 30 open answer questions, a semi-structured questionnaire based on „the life story” with a special mention of the specific means through which the students configure their transitional identity spaces (in the campus), instrument we have named „Configuring the transitional identity space and resilient adaptive strategies among campus students.” The questionnaire is made of 30 open-answer questions and it comprises 3 indicators: 1. Possession of personal belongings (questions 1-8); 2. Personalisation of one’s living-space and workspace (questions 9-14) and 3. Management of the space the student shares with the room-mates (questions 15-30). It also comprises 4 variables: 1. Not appropriating space (questions 1, 3, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16, 26); 2. Establishing the identity space (questions 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30); 3. Adapting strategies (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 26); personal adapting strategies (questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 27, 28, 29, 30) and 4. Collective adapting strategies (questions 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25). Each conceptual indicator has been correlated with adapting strategy indicators for which a question was conceived. The questionnaire has been

divided into three parts, according to the three operational indicators of the transitional identity space concept.

We decided upon successive interviews that lasted on average between one and two hours. The interviews were first person narratives through which we attempted to gather both general and specific data, as well as motivational and informational ones, formulated in such a way as to allow for a free conversation, all the while aiming to avoid the conformity of the prescribed answers as it is the case of closed questions. We used a semi-structured question interview meant to gain pertinent answers. One of the most important aspects is that any idea or concept that could have been misunderstood under other circumstances was discussed and clarified with the participant. The interview was structured in such a way as to pinpoint defining elements of the transitional identity space configuration (the campus, and more specifically the campus dorm room) – a specific stage in the students' lives. According to the qualitative research method used for the data gathered during the successive interviews with the participants, we aimed at pinpointing and evaluating the means through which the students establish their resilient adaptive strategies which imply setting up a transitional space, as they relate to the community in which they live in, as well as the interactions we have observed and the "existential actions" inherited from the family.

### **Subjects**

The research evaluated 90 participants out of which 26 men and 64 women with ages between 19 and 25 (avg. of 23.7). The participants are students of The University of Bucharest, studying journalism, foreign languages, mathematics and IT, history, law, political science, sociology, psychology, administration and business. The students lived in three Bucharest campus sites. We've selected our participants based on two criteria: (1) the participants' consent to voluntarily take part in the research and (2) the condition that the participants live in the campus during their university studies.

### **Materials and Measures**

#### **Objectives**

1. Exploring the way in which campus students configure their transitional identity space.
2. Exploring the adaptive strategies of establishing a transitional identity space and accepting said space.

#### **Research hypotheses**

*General hypothesis:* We assume that the establishment of a transitional identity space leads to the development of adaptive strategies.

#### *Specific hypotheses:*

1. We assume that the transitional identity space leads to the development of personal adaptive strategies.
2. We assume that establishing a transitional identity space leads to the development of collective adaptive strategies.

In the case of the three research hypotheses, the independent variables are: the absence of the identity space (I1) and the establishment of the identity space (I2 and I3) and the dependent variables are: adaptive strategies (I1), personal adaptive strategies (I2) and collective adaptive strategies (I3).

#### **Operating the concepts of identity space and adaptive strategies**

The research had been qualitative in nature, based on the semi-structured interview technique. We have chosen the qualitative method for this study because the objectives of the research are centred on the exploration of the "identity space" and the adjacent adaptive strategies.

Another reason would be the way in which previous specialised studies failed to come up with a scientifically valid mean of measuring this concept. Thus, in order to attain the desired research results we have drafted a questionnaire meant to explore the variables. Outlining the questionnaire was based on the indicators of the two variables, both independent and dependent. Operating the concepts started from the definitions found in specific books of the respective specialised field.

The concept – identity space construct can be analysed from two perspectives which are the components of the concept:

- the psychological space in which we shaped our identity and
- the way in which we manifest our own personalities externally.

In other words, we own a psychological space according to which we shape and develop our identity and which allows us to extend our actions outwards. This space however, is internal. It belongs to the psychical system and can be observed by ways of expressing one's identity in the external space. Therefore we can objectively measure the indicators showing how we manifest our identity in the external world.

Thus, the indicators we have used during this identity space analysis study were: ownership of personal items, personalising the individual living and workspace and management of the space shared with other colleagues.

As for this concept, we used the variable of

the establishment of an identity space. Establishing the identity space means a well formed psychological space which allows for the external manifestation of individual identity.

With regard to the identity space, we will replace the term “activities” with “methods” and will define the adaptive strategies as methods a person adopts in order to establish an equilibrium between the two components of the identity space.

The indicators used for the analysis of the adaptive strategies are: conflict management, rule establishment, adopting customs and adopting means of increasing the level of privacy.

During our research we used three different variables for each hypothesis related to this concept, namely: adaptive strategies (I1), personal adaptive strategies (I2) and collective adaptive strategies (I3).

For I1, the adaptive strategies consist of the methods a person adopts in order to establish a balance between the two components of their identity space. When there is a lack of identity space, the internal psychological space dysfunctions create a tension, diminished by the individual through personal means. When the identity space exists, the individual has an internal space which will allow him to manifest his identity externally, by adopting various means.

For I2, personal adaptive strategies refer to the methods adopted by the individual in relation to other people they come into contact in order to establish a personal identity space.

For I3, collective adaptive strategies refer to the methods created by the group the student belongs to, methods adapted by the individual in order to establish an identity space.

### **Procedure**

The second criterion needed for a subject to be eligible was the condition that the participants live in campus dorm rooms in one of the two campuses. The research group was limited to those students living in Theodor Pallady I and Theodor Pallady II because we considered that involving students from other campuses would alter the research context. More precisely, the room space of the students would have greatly varied compared to other campuses, which would have influenced the way in which the participants perceive the physical space in which their identity space manifests. At the same time, the research

did not feature participants who shared their dorm room with a smaller number of students than the highest number of students available per room. Therefore we have not included students living alone or groups of three. Other special cases of students who were not accepted were those living with their spouse or children.

The design of Campus Theodor Pallady I dorms consist of 5m by 4.5m rooms, an antechamber and one bathroom, all separated. The antechamber was used by students both as a hallway towards the room and as a kitchen. It was equipped with 2 tables, one dish board and 2 chairs. The bathroom is equipped with a sink, a mirror with shelves, a shower and a toilet. In the room there are 4 beds, 4 wardrobes, 4 nightstands, one desk and 2 chairs.

The design of Campus Theodor Pallady II dorms consist of an antechamber, a room, not separated and a bathroom. The antechamber is equipped with one table, two chairs and the room contains 2 beds, 2 wardrobes, 2 bookcase-type shelves. The bathroom is equipped with a sink, mirror with shelves, shower and toilet, according to administrative regulations.

### **III. Results**

After the research data was analysed, we discovered aspects pertaining to personal items, the space where the students live, as well as the space shared by them with their colleagues, meaning the way in which the participants relate to the indicators of the identity space, the ways in which they manage conflicts, the rules they adopt and the means through which privacy is established.

As for the participants’ answers pertaining to the items they perceive as being personal items, three types of answers were registered: laptops (38.89%), daily use items (usual objects) (32.22%) and emotionally invested items (35.56%) (Fig. 1). Among the daily use items reported we can list: clothing items, shoes, personal hygiene effects, perfumes, food, dishes, electrical appliances, mobile phones.

As for the emotionally invested items we have registered the objects that carried emotional significance for the subject, such as: photographs, precious gems, letters, flowers, cameras, refrigerator magnets, posters, received gifts, wooden box with mountain flowers.

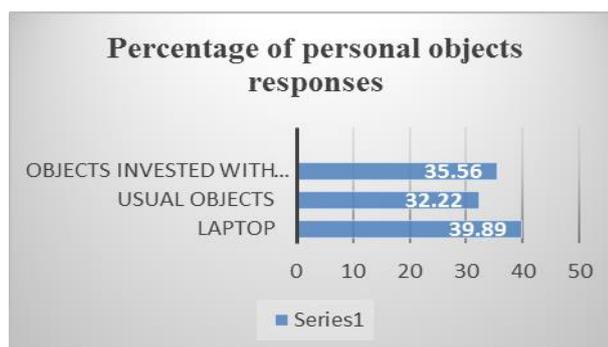


Fig. 1. The frequency of answers pertaining to personal items

The majority of the participants perceived the bed (47.78%) as being the place in which they stay and that belongs to them. Moreover, other objects that were mentioned were: book shelves, nightstands and desks. One comment worth mentioning was provided by a student: *“I stay on my bed, around my bed and under the bed. I’m kidding; I’m not staying under the bed. That’s where I keep my luggage, and nobody can go there. That space exclusively belongs to me.”*

As for the way in which participants relate to their personal space, 75.6% believed that the space belonging to them is separated by that of the colleagues’ because it is personalised. What makes it different is the fact that it contains their personal belongings, the items are arranged with a personal style, it is more orderly or disorderly than that of the colleagues or it is clearly personalised, through objects such as colourful bed linen, flowers, personal belongings, books or glued objects. A number of participants mentioned the fact that they personalise their living space in order to create an environment as homely as possible, that could make them feel comfortable, and which they call “my corner”. Moreover, some of them believe that the space they live in represents them or that a person leaves a personal imprint on the space he or she inhabits (*“You personalise them without noticing even just by placing your items on the work table”*).

Students believe that both personal items and the space they live in can be shared with their room-mates under certain conditions. 72.2% of participants mentioned various conditions under which they would share their objects or space with their colleagues. The rules for personal items are: the colleagues must ask their permission before using the items (*“A colleague cannot use one of my personal belongings without asking first”*); the colleagues have to say beforehand and after they have used a personal belonging, such

belongings are considered common items (*“It would bother me if a colleague would use one of my things that wasn’t among the shared objects I agreed to lend”*); the colleagues need their personal belongings (*“If they have an urgent need, then I agree to share”*); the relationship they have with the colleagues using their items (*“personal belongings can be shared with other colleagues, especially if there’s a compatibility between us”*); the type of object used (*“We only share the objects that can be used by several people. Of course, the objects mentioned before – laptop, jewellery, books, make-up, clothes are not shared under any circumstance”*), *“I would get more or less angry depending on the nature of the object that was used without my consent”*); the object is not being used at the moment of the request; the object must be placed back in its place after use. As for the space they are living in, the participants said that the other colleagues are allowed inside while they have common activities – watching movies or matches, working on projects, studying, while showing something on the laptop or playing games. Moreover, they stated that these spaces are being used while they are away, but that they are asked for permission beforehand and that they don’t mind that these spaces are used as long as their colleagues don’t leave garbage behind, don’t leave the space in disorder and don’t use the spaces while their owners are there. Other situations in which personal space may be invaded are the times when other people come to visit and they have to accept sharing the space because there is not enough space to accommodate guests in the dorm room. Moreover, many of the participants stated that they would mind if their bed was to be used by their colleagues all the while accepting to use the rest of their personal space.

As for the shared space, 59.89% of the participants pointed out a bordering of the space they live in for each of the room-mates. These borders are

either physical or imaginary. As for the participants who physically delimited their living space, they used: furniture that had been provided at the start of the year (“*We each have our own bed, wardrobe and nightstand*”; “*We have four parallel beds*”; “*Bed 1, bed 2, bed 3, bed 4, positioned in all the four corners of the room.*”) or they used the space that was divided amongst all the room-mates – the bathroom, the hallway, the space between the beds are all shared, the rest being personal spaces. In some cases, the space inside the refrigerator as well as the space available for shoes was also mentioned as being shared spaces, with rules being set as to how to share them. As for the imaginary delimitation of shared space, the students stated that “*the room space is equally divided*”, “*everyone has his share*”, “*the room space is arranged so that everyone can use it.*” Some of the students who live in 2-person rooms stated that “*the room space is divided in half.*” Only one student who was living in a

4-person room stated that “*the room space is divided in four equal size spaces*”.

Of all the participants, only 25.6% declared that they had conflicts based on the three indicators of the identity space, namely personal belongings, their own space and the space shared with the other colleagues. Among the sources of conflict we can name: the way in which various objects had been used, cleaning-related arguments, the way in which food had been cooked, the way in which shared object storage spaces had been used and the way in which shared consumables had been used.

We identified three types of responses based on the way in which the participants would solve a conflict surrounding personal belongings, the space in which they live or shared space management: assertive methods, aggressive methods and indirect methods (Fig. 2).

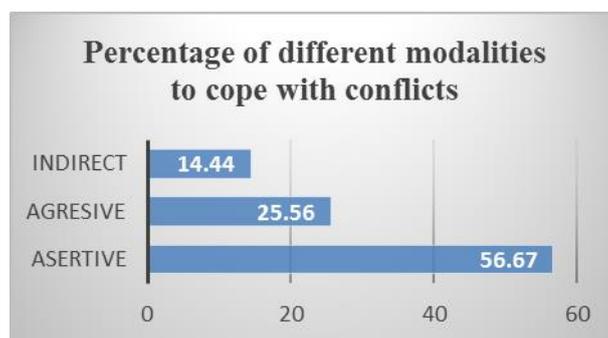


Fig. 2. The frequency of answers for adaptive strategies

Assertive methods (56.67%) aim at facilitating communication about the sources of conflict, about expressing discontent and about trying to settle the conflict by finding an equitable solution for all of the individuals involved. In this category we have included answers such as: “*I told her that I’m not against borrowing my dishes but I think it’s simply impolite not to wash them after she used them*”; “*I would tell her to ask for permission before using certain objects*”; “*I would try to talk with him/her about what’s bothering me, I would tell him/her to stop.*” ; “*We all had our say and we eventually reached a common ground: we divided the space.*” ; “*I would talk to the one involved, and would clearly establish the limits, with an assertive yet firm attitude*”; “*He used my mug and I asked him to wash it*”. Moreover, some participants stated that they had asked their room-mates to replace the objects for which they started the conflict. A note-worthy case which was resolved in an assertive way was: “*We*

*talked about it...we settled on each of us writing our grievances on little notes and then reading them together.*” Aggressive methods (25.56%) imply resolving conflicts through fights, accusations or directive expressions. In this category we have included answers such as: “*I would tell him: Get up!*”; “*I would tell him that bothers me*”, “*I would get mad and deny them access.*”, “*I would demand some explanations!*” Some of the students mentioned taking the object away as a means of resolving a conflict related to personal belongings.

Indirect methods (14.44%) aim at avoiding a direct confrontation with the people involved in the conflict. In this category we have included answers such as: “*I wouldn’t say anything, I would try to find a way to stop being affected by the situation*”; “*I usually don’t say anything, it’s not like we’re living in a rented apartment, we’re living in a campus and you expect things like this to happen*”; “*I wouldn’t do anything. I*

would wait and see if it happened again.”; “I would stop talking to that person for violating my privacy”; “I would choose to leave things slip”. We can observe that in these types of answers the students offer an argument or an explanation as an excuse for the conflict. Another indirect means of managing conflict-management was to use a password on a laptop.

As for the rules governing personal items adopted by the students, their personal space and common-space management, four types of answers were offered: personal rules- the requirement to respect a rule established out of a personal need (43.3%), collective rules – the decisions to uphold a mutually established rule (53.3%), unuttered rules – upholding certain conditions by all the room-mates, even if they were not directly expressed (26.7%) and rule-type customs – listing rules in the guise of customs (51.1%) (Fig. 3). The personal rules most often mentioned by the students were: allowing the use of personal items or spaces (“One essential rule is for one to ask permission before using my things.”) and announce every time one has used some items. Many of the conditions pertaining to personal items and space were formulated in the form of rules. Collective rules mutually established by the room-mates usually address: cleaning (washing the dishes after use, using city shoes only at the entrance, leaving items in their proper place after use; keeping

the shared-space clean), a cleaning schedule, assigning the various responsibilities to the room-mates, maintaining silence when one of the room-mates was sleeping or learning. Some students mentioned that the rules had been established at the beginning of the year. Moreover, a small number of them said that they were no longer maintained throughout the year even though they had been established at the beginning.

As for the unuttered rules, certain participants believed that establishing rules was unnecessary, because they are naturally understood. Thus, they believed there were unwritten and unuttered rules (“There are certain rules, but they are unwritten and unuttered”; “Rules are natural, ask and you shall receive”; “I don’t believe certain rules have to be established. Everybody knows the items that can be used by the others.”; “Rules were tacitly established.”), rules are dictated by common sense (“We’re talking about common sense, which is conditioned by education. You don’t need rules for something like this”; “The rules are the code of proper conduct”, we all have the same opinion about rules (“We haven’t established rules because my room-mates share my opinion on sharing items.”; “There is complete agreement amongst us.”). Moreover, participants also mentioned that the rules were not absolute or rigid.

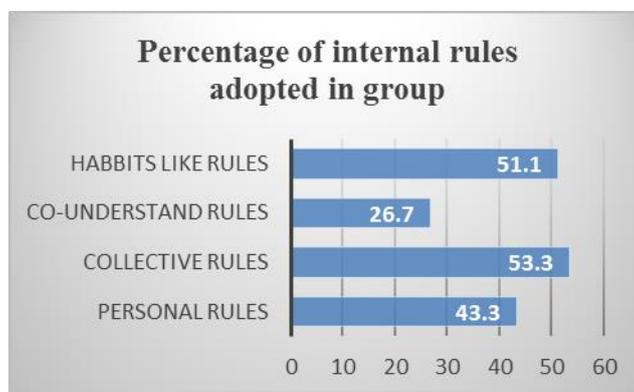


Fig. 3. Frequency of answers for adopted rules

As for the customs, we have received two types of answers: customs-activities, which the students engage in their spare time with their colleagues, such as eating, watching a movie, shopping, drinking the morning coffee and rule-type customs. The latter refer to rules which the students perceive as being customary such as: “we all clean up weekly”; “we clean up during the week-end and we share tasks”; “we clean up weekly, by rotation”; “each of us tidies up after we cook”; “each of us is

responsible for cleaning during a given week, and all the activities fall on that person”. In some cases we have observed that the students who mentioned collective rules also mentioned activity-type customs.

As for the participants’ responses on privacy, 81.11% said that they don’t feel the need for more privacy. As for instances when their privacy had been breached, they mentioned: the presence of other people (25.6%), whether these people were their room-mates (“There are just so many of us in such a relatively

*small place, especially when you are used to a relatively equivalent space back home that belongs strictly to you”; “It doesn’t feel invasive, but it is difficult to have privacy when you share a limited space with someone with whom you didn’t choose to share that space in the first place”; “When I want to listen to music or to do something that I like but which bothers the others”; “When there are four of us in one room, privacy becomes luxury”; “Their presence over*

*which I have no control”.) or about other foreign individuals (“Prolonged visits of my room-mates’ friends”; “When there are too many people in our room”; “Other room-mates’ boyfriends”) and other elements (20%) such as: noise and limited space (Fig.4.). Moreover, as an element of privacy breach the students mentioned “the impossibility of talking personal things over the phone”.*

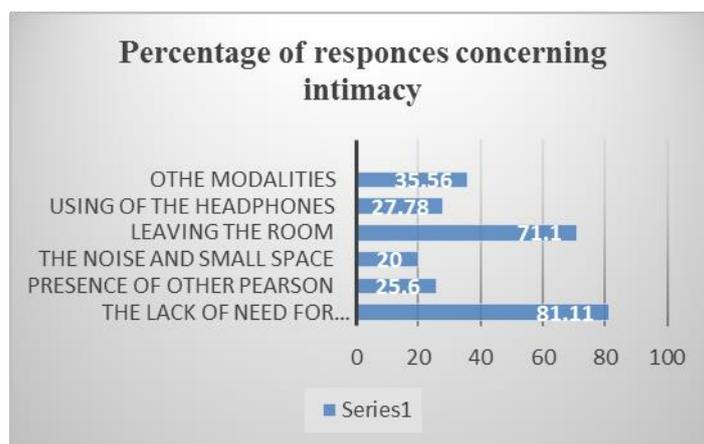


Fig. 1. The frequency of answers regarding privacy

The participants mentioned a number of privacy-enhancing methods. The most frequent of which was leaving the room (71.1%). Thus, when they need more privacy, the students choose to leave the room, either to go on the dorm corridor or to go into the bathroom, or they go out to walk alone, in the park or out shopping, they go to their friends or home to their parents. 27.78% isolate themselves from those around them by using headphones and listening to music. Other means (35.56%) mentioned by the students were: they choose activities such as sleeping, long showers, reading, watching movies, video games; they openly discuss their need for more privacy and try to non-verbally indicate that they need more privacy, by not talking to their room-mates, or putting on headphones, turning their backs on their room-mates or “pouting”. They believe that putting their headphones on and turning their backs on their colleagues shows their need for more privacy. Moreover, some mentioned the fact that they passively wait to be left alone, because under such circumstances there’s nothing to be done. Just to show a number of reply examples: *“I eventually leave the room or if I don’t have a choice, I put my headphones on or I go and sit in the kitchen if there’s no one there.”; “I sometimes lock myself inside the bathroom.”; “I tell my colleague*

*that I would want to be alone for a while and I ask her if she can help me with that.” “There aren’t that many options. Unless I wait for all of my room-mates to go home in order to talk certain personal life details over the phone”; “No matter how hard you try to isolate yourself mentally, their physical presence lingers”; “I stop talking to them and start a Cold War!”; “I go in my corner near the window and put my headphones on”).*

#### IV. Discussions

By analysing the answers of the participants who took part in the study we can observe that the vast majority of students established their identity space in the campus room where they live. The presence of the identity space can be suggested by its two components: the psychological space which allows us to mould our identity and the way in which we manifest our own identity in the outside world. As for the students, in their post-adolescence or youth stages, the psychological space is an already formed internal space which allows for their identity to manifest itself in group interactions. In order to manifest their own identity they find different means through which they project the psychological space in the outside world. These methods are considered to be identity space adaptive strategies.

81.11% of students who said that they didn't need more privacy when living with their room-mates can be perceived as an indicator of the fact that they feel at ease in their permanent interaction with the other colleagues, with whom, in most cases, were acquainted only after starting to live in the same room. As for the need for privacy, we received answers such as: *"I don't mind the presence of my room-mates"; "I don't want to isolate myself from my room-mates."; "I don't feel a lack of privacy"*. However, 25.56% of students believed that the presence of other people was a breach of their privacy and 20% mentioned other elements such as noise or the small space which they consider to lead to privacy breaches. As for the presence of other people, in some cases the students were upset by the presence of foreign individuals, such as friends of their room-mates or their partners.

Out of the total number of participants who stated that they needed more privacy, 61.12% also mentioned factors of privacy breaches. This data can be interpreted as follows: even though under numerous circumstances there are factors of dorm room privacy breach, the students are not discouraged by it. One possible explanation might be the fact that they own a psychological space through which they find the means of feeling at ease with their room-mates. Some students emphasised this aspect: *"Not invaded, but it is hard to say that you can enjoy privacy when sharing a limited room with a person with whom you did not choose to share it."* *"I'm not a prude. It is difficult to enjoy privacy in such a limited space, therefore I adapted."*; *"No, however, privacy is a luxury when living with someone else"*.

Moreover, the fact that establishing privacy limits while interacting with others resides in internal resources is underlined in the following answers: *"Lack of privacy isn't my room-mates fault; I simply don't have time to spend with myself"; "It depends on my mood."; "It depends on the situation, but usually no, only when I want to be alone."* Thus, privacy is perceived as an internal state that once threatened makes students search for means of re-establishing an ideal level, which ensures psychological comfort. Most often, the participants stated that they leave the room when in need of more privacy (71.1%). Multiple answers underlined the fact that the students left the room for more privacy or that they chose to stay somewhere that allowed some privacy such as the bathroom, the campus corridor or the antechamber. At the same time, 27.8% of students mentioned that they isolate themselves from their room-mates through headphones. Thus, when they want to enjoy more

privacy, they put on their headphones and listen to music, shutting out the others. Often times, they turn their backs on their room-mates, signalling that they don't want to interact.

Some students pointed out how using headphones is a method through which they establish a personal space, that grants them privacy: *"I go in my corner near the window and put my headphones on"; "I sit in my space trying to non-verbally show my room-mate that I want to be left alone (e.g.: I turn my back towards her and put my headphones on)"; "I put my headphones on and go out for a walk on my own."* Other students chose to wait until they remained alone or they just wished to be alone, harbouring a passive attitude.

The identity space can also be observed in the answers given by the participants about the identity space markers. As for personal items, mostly, the students chose to refer to the objects included in one of the three categories. 38.9% mentioned the laptop and for some of them the laptop was the only personal belonging. 32.2% mentioned daily-use objects or personal hygiene items. 35.6% mentioned objects that carried certain significance or were invested emotionally. At the same time, 71.85% of students who perceived emotionally invested items as being personal items believed that the space they were living in was personalised. Characteristics of the students' identities can be identified through the answers they provided on the topic of personal belongings, living space personalisation and the activities in which they engage in order to enhance their level of privacy. Moreover, these characteristics were underlined by a common element indicated by the answers.

As for the personal belongings that carry an emotional significance, their meaningfulness can be an indicator of identity. For example, a geography student chose to mention her wooden box containing mountain flowers, which shows her passion for geography; many students mentioned books; theology students mentioned icons; a mathematics-IT student mentioned the laptop and the archives stored there. Another student said: *"I like for every item to take on a bit of my personality. So that I can feel at home, to feel that the space belongs to me."*

When it comes to personalising their living space, the students stated that it was more or less orderly, which characterises them, that it is personalised because it is somehow arranged or because it contains books or other emotionally invested items such as: photographs, flowers or posters. Mostly, the objects which the students considered to

personalise their living space were also listed as personal belongings. As for the activities the students engage in so as to enhance their privacy, some of them underlined that they choose activities they enjoy, such as walking in the park, shopping, listening to music, watching a movie, playing FIFA, reading books, going to church.

Common elements were found linking the answers, elements which are identity indicators. Some of the students who mentioned emotionally invested items chose activities they enjoyed. For example, those who chose books mentioned reading, the student who chose the box with mountain flowers said she goes out in the park, those who chose the icons said they prefer going to church; those choosing the laptop stated that they preferred listening to music or watching a movie, playing video games or working on archives. Moreover, we noticed that students who chose daily-use items such as personal hygiene items or make-up mentioned personal comfort activities, such as a long shower or sleeping. Moreover, students who listed flowers as personal items believed that their living space becomes welcoming and is personalised by flowers. In some cases, those choosing books as personal items believed that their living space was personalised by books and said they preferred reading.

The fact that the participating students believed that they don't need more privacy while it was invaded by various factors shows that they found means of enhancing their perception of privacy and the links between the items they consider to be personal, the way in which their living space was personalised and the types of activities they engaged in when they wished to have more privacy, shows that they have created an identity space for which they also developed certain adaptive strategies. One possible explanation is that they have a psychological space they establish externally through means of enhancing their intimacy and by projecting it on objects and on their living space. Thus, *establishing an identity space leads to the developments of adaptive strategies*. The identified adaptive strategies are: privacy enhancing methods and projecting certain identity aspects on objects and on the living space.

Establishing the identity space is done through interacting with other people. Every individual establishes his external borders, delimiting the identity space which allows their identity to manifest. We consider that the methods of establishing these borders for the interactions with other individuals are personal adaptive strategies.

72.2% of students mentioned under which

conditions they allow their colleagues to use items they consider to be personal or to invade their living space. We can see that they establish boundaries for the other colleagues through which they condition them to respect their identity space. The conditions most often cited are: it is necessary for the students to ask permission before using personal items or their living space and it is also necessary for them to know when they are being used. Moreover, many of the participants stated that they would be bothered if their room-mates would use their bed.

63.93% of these students listed the conditions as rules which they established through interaction with the other room-mates. Out of the students who established rules about how items or the living space can be used, 71.79% stated that they had no conflicts with their room-mates. One explanation could be that the rules adopted by students helped them avoid conflict-type situations about their identity space. At the same time, 64.1% out of the students who mentioned having established personal rules and 63.07% who mentioned conditions for the establishment of the identity space adopted assertive methods for conflict resolution. 28.20% and 18.46% adopted aggressive means of conflict resolution while 7.69% and 13.84% adopted indirect means of conflict resolution.

Thus, we can consider that formulating conditions, establishing rules and adopting assertive conflict resolution methods help students establish identity space borders. We therefore consider that *establishing an identity space leads to developing personal adaptive strategies*.

As part of the interaction between the room-mates, they commonly establish means of managing the room space so as to offer each room-mate their own personal room space. At the same time there is a common space used equally by all the room-mates. We consider the methods through which the room space is managed to be collective adaptive strategies.

25.6% of the students taking part in the research said that they have had conflicts with their room-mates and 53.3% mentioned using commonly-established rules meant to manage the objects and the shared space. From among these, 39.13% chose assertive conflict management methods, 43.47% chose aggressive conflict management methods while 13.04% chose indirect conflict management methods. Under these circumstances, some students who adopted assertive methods mentioned the fact that the rules were established at the beginning of the year and some of them who adopted aggressive methods mentioned

establishing rules in a directive way. 68.75% of students who stated having established collective rules said they had no conflicts with their room-mates. Also, 69.23% of the students who established personal rules said to have also established collective rules. One explanation for the significant number of participants establishing aggressive conflict management methods could be that they established collective rules after engaging in conflicts which forced them to do so. At the same time, collective rules established at the beginning of the year prevented conflicts.

A fairly small proportion of students (26.7%) considered that there was no need for rules governing personal items or living space because they were self-implied. From among these students, 87.5% stated having no conflicts with their room-mates and 54.16% mentioned rule-type customs. Moreover, 51.1% of the participants mentioned rule-type customs, and 30.4% among them said that they have had conflicts with their room-mates. We can observe that a significant number of students who considered the rules to be self-implied or that adopted custom-type rules had no conflicts with their room-mates. This can be explained by the fact that in time, the students adopted certain conditions regarding personal items and living space, in an unconscious way, thus the rules were unanimously understood or became a custom. At the same time, perceiving a rule as a custom makes it easier to accept it. However, we must not ignore the fact that the students who chose aggressive or indirect means of conflict resolution and mentioned rule-type customs perceive the rules as customs because of their difficulty in establishing them assertively with the other room-mates.

58.9% of the students have a representation of how the room space is divided for each member. Some of them used furniture or the physical space in order to represent the room space, while others have a mental representation of its division. Respectively, they believe the space was equally divided or divided in such a way as to give each room-mate their share. Moreover, a relatively small number of students stated that there was no need for borders when dividing the room space. From among the participants who mentioned a means of dividing the room space, 81.13% stated not having conflicts with their room-mates and 54.71% established shared rules. One explanation for these percentages is that the students who had a living space representation managed to better establish their identity space.

We can observe that the students adopted collective rules in order to equally benefit from the

items and the shared space. Moreover, a small number of students respect each other's items or living spaces, without having directly established certain rules or conditions. One spatial representation for each room-mate of the dorm room leads to a better representation of their identity space. This shows that *establishing an identity space leads to developing collective adaptive strategies*. The collective adaptive strategies we identified are: methods of space distribution for each room-mate, adopting common rules and adopting unuttered rules or rule-type customs.

Among the participants' replies we have also observed some cases in which they had difficulties in establishing the identity space. For example, one student considered the refrigerator to be a personal item. Only one refrigerator is allowed per dorm-room and usually, the students decide to buy it together or that it would be brought by only one room-mate who agrees to use it as a shared-item. Moreover, in a reduced number of cases, the students stated that they feel like brothers or like a family and that they allowed themselves to use their personal items or living space, bed included, without having to establish rules. In other situations, the students adopt direct or indirect conflict management methods which involve the clear communication of intention, negotiating about the objects, the functional space and so on.

## **V. Conclusions**

Through the present paper we aimed at exploring the concept of identity space in a social context. More precisely, the purpose of the research was to underline the aspects involved in the presence of the identity space. These aspects were studied under the name of adaptive strategies. The target group on which these strategies were based were students living in campuses. The reason for choosing this group was the environment in which the students live, which represents an ideal space for pointing out the methods through which identity space is established, as well as the fact that the student years are an important stage in defining one's identity. As for the context in which the identity space is established, the students gain a space which they have to share with other room-mates. This common space is managed so as to be transformed from a simple campus dorm room in a space which defines them. The space in which they start living becomes a personalised space, in which aspects of their personalities are being projected. Thus, by observing the methods through which they establish their identity space, we find a path towards aspects of their identities.

As the definition already shows, our own

identity plays a central role in this concept. In other words, we manage to create the identity space based on the level at which we have integrated and defined our own identity. Individuals with a blurry identity have difficulties in taking on their identity space, sometimes even failing to create a space that may define them.

Throughout our lives, we all build our own more or less well defined unique identity, which we manifest in our interactions with others and the external environment. The identity dynamics become active when interacting with the spaces we inhabit and through which we move. By not separating from parents and being dependent on the family identity space, some students from outside the capital are unable to take on their student status, to cope with their new responsibilities and to integrate within the colleague group. The lack of relational availability becomes clear in the unwillingness of the student to make new acquaintances or friends and the unwillingness to take part in activities with their colleagues. In extreme cases isolation also occurs.

In the absence of an objective identity space, a surrogate identity space activates, which can be an indicator of some identity disorders. The surrogate space can be a phantom identity space, either permanent (e.g.: psychosis) or transitional (identity crises specific to human developments).

Thus, the dynamics between the real identity space and the phantom identity space can generate identity confusions of varying degrees.

The acceptance or lack of acceptance of a real identity space is strongly influenced by the process through which we form our identity, as well as by the method through which we have accepted an identity space over time and the way in which our formed

identity has been confirmed. Thus, childhood dynamics, the relationship with the parents and the family environment have a consistent impact on the acceptance of the identity space, even if we're talking about a transitional identity space, an identity passage which generates adaptive or less adaptive strategies, which can vary depending on each case.

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