

**University of Bucharest**  
**Faculty of Sociology and Social Work**  
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**Doctoral Thesis**

**Blurring and constructing boundaries: legitimising  
homeopathy in the Romanian medical landscape**

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**Bucureşti**

**2019**

## Abstract

Based on fieldwork research in Bucharest and Piatra Neamț and in online settings this thesis traces the process of legitimizing homeopathy in the Romanian medical landscape. Homeopathy is a form of “alternative/complementary medicine” that has gained institutional recognition starting with the 1980s and a growing popular support with the 1990s proliferation of alternative means of healing. I try to account for this phenomenon through developing an analytical apparatus that considers the multiple forms and resources of legitimacy. I examine the different but nonetheless interdependent routes that legitimization takes when one distinguishes between *institutional* and *cultural legitimacy*. I argue that institutional legitimization of homeopathy has taken place due to elite physicians from the medical establishment that managed to persuade important political figures at the time, to be supported by East German and Russian actors, and to domesticate the language of homeopathy in more materialist terms. Considering cultural legitimisation, I move from an emphasis on social and power relations to one on cultural congruence. Drawing inspiration from French and North-American version of pragmatist social theory I offer a central place to the work of *justifications* in the debate surrounding homeopathy and in its various articulations with biomedicine. I argue that much of the popular support for homeopathy comes from its categorization as a “naturist treatment”, an argumentative time-work that mobilizes normative dimensions of time, and its inclusion in a health trajectory that hybridizes the boundaries between biomedicine and homeopathy. I develop the concept of a *pragmatic regime of health* to account for the fact that many supporters of homeopathy are less interested in the ideological aspects and implications of homeopathic knowledge but rather see it as a medical therapy that supplements biomedicine’s limits and iatrogenic effects. As such, I argue that legitimizing homeopathy simultaneously implies a demarcation of boundaries between homeopathy and biomedicine through contrasts and binary oppositions and their blurring through hybridizations and setting of a common ground for comparability.