

The Urban Nexus: Contradictions and Dilemmas of (Post)Communist (Sub)Urbanization in Romania

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The process of urbanization in Romania was a very tumultuous and slightly different one compared to other Central and Eastern European countries, being marked by the constant willingness to increase the degree of urbanization. The communist period was the most significant from this point of view, by considering both the number of newly declared towns and urban population growth. The urbanization of communist era corroborated with the excessive and forced industrialization has generated imbalances in the urban system and created distortions in the urban hierarchy. However, the legislative inconsistency and the lack of urban regulations during the post – communist period have lead to the increasing number of new (quasi) urban units (many of which without urban amenities) to the chaotic sub-urbanization of cities and urban decline. In many cases, the ability of local authorities to manage the urban development in the early years of transition has been hampered by inadequate legislation that regulates the urban growth in a completely different socio-economic system. Thus, the lacks of specific urban policies and urban regeneration plans have determined indirectly a hypertrophic evolution and an uncontrolled suburban expansion. Bucharest, the capital of the country has been most affected by these processes determining multilayered space transformation within the city and open space conversion to commercial and residential use, both affecting the urban environment and quality of life of urban-rural communities. The paper focuses on the patterns, the driving forces and the consequences of two opposing processes: socialist forced urbanization vs. post-socialist chaotic urbanization unfolding across the national urban landscape. .

Key Words: *urban nexus, postcommunist (sub)urbanization, urban decline, urban regulation, Romania*

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Introduction

Urban planning is an extremely complex process, largely depending on the political and urban regime of a specific country. The last two elements often influence the long historical evolution of the (sub)urbanization process. But this process cannot be dissociated from the stakeholders' interest and the narrative function of urban planning. Urban planning process involves the presence of power relations and its political and conflictual nature (Loyd and Deasley, 1998). In the case of the former communist countries, which experienced rather similar urban regimes, one can distinguish between two types of planning: a socialist planning, with some rhetorical background, known, at least in Romania, under the generic name of “systematization”, which was promoted by a centralized political regime, and a post-communist planning, in opposition with the previous one, based on a competitive free market economy, which has been dependent on an open, democratic regime. The development of the cities in the Central-European countries is considered to stem from the general model of urban development, while the socialist urbanization was rather a „replicated stage of a more generally applicable global process of urban development” (Enyedi, 1996:102).

After 1989, the processes and phenomena recorded in the former socialist countries, generically known in the literature as “post socialist transformations”, have been dependent on a new economic reality (the market system) and a new political vision (neoliberalism), which has considerably influenced the urban development process.

A number of scholars have investigated the post-socialist changes in the socio-spatial and residential structure of the cities focusing on social-spatial segregation (Marcinczak and Sagan 2011), socio-economic residential differentiation (Ruopilla and Kährik, 2003), gentrification and globalization (Kovács, 1999), housing and new residential area (Tammaru et. al., 2009), residential satisfaction and revitalization (Temelova and Dvorakova, 2012). Also, other research underlined issues on reshaping cultural landscape and identity (Stanilov, 2007; Young and Kaczmarek, 2008; Light and Young 2010; Czepczynski M. 2010; Murzyn-Kupisz and Krzysztof Gwosdz, 2011) or different understanding on post socialist reform drawing the 'spirit of socialism' (Pickles, 2010).

After the collapse of communist regimes, all the cities in Central and Eastern Europe have radically changed. Lately, the researches in the field of social sciences have focused primarily on the post-socialist urban transformations and on their effects in time and space. From this point of view, they identified, as applicable, not only specific elements of these changes, but mostly common features concerning the geographical socio-spatial organization and the communist heritage (be it political, social or economic). All these changes can be included in an urban nexus of contradictions and dilemmas pertaining to the suburbanization process, which can only be understood if one takes into account the communist legacy, the specific urban policies, the administrative-territorial organization, the (forced) industrialization and the state's vision on the ownership rights.

The studies and the specialists in the field have accused the challenges and stakes of these post-socialist mutations, pointing a finger at the speed of these changes within the built-up environment and at the inadequacy of urban policies with respect to the new economic, political, social or ideological context. In almost all post-socialist countries, the development practice in urban planning in the 1990s was considered liberal (central government) and high individualized ad hoc decision by local politicians.

According to Andrews (2005:180-181), there are common characteristics of development practices in post-socialist cities:

- liberal approach by central government and local politicians in the field of regulation of development, urban planning and housing policy;
- reduced state involvement; short-term, high individualized ad hoc decisions by local politicians and administrations taking precedence over the preparation of long-term plans, strategy, or visions of city development;
- the ideological rejection of forward planning as being counter to free market activities, along with unwillingness of urban planners to identify new circumstances – this has fostered unregulated, politicized urban development practice;
- weak development control of special concern regarding regulation of redevelopment in the historic cores.

The speed with which the built environment of the largest Central and Eastern European cities is being remolded, coupled with the zest to promote, without the slightest reservation, the new patterns of urban space appropriation, has presented enormous challenges to the cause of sustainable development in the region (Stanilov, 2007:7).

Characteristics and changes of the Romanian urban system

The Romanian urban evolution represents the outcome of two different political systems: socialist-communist before 1990 and post-socialist democracy after 1990. The nationalization process of 1948 and the emergence of the centralized economic system brought about significant changes and a new vision in urban planning, the land regulation projects being called systematization projects. These included clear provisions on the “socialist reconstruction” of settlements, which led to sharp landscape differences between villages and cities, even in the case of neighboring ones. Systematization also aimed, among others, at confining the sprawl of the cities and villages, imposing clear limits to each of them, leaving no room for the development of proximity relationships or for the emergence of new habitat forms on their edge (Suditu et al., 2014). Prior to the establishment of the new regime, there were 159 towns and cities, of which nine have lost this status and become villages again.

During socialist period state promoted the country industrialization with the consequences in rural-urban population migration, concentration of the population in urban areas by increasing the number of cities and towns. The main features of socialist urbanization were excessive centralization and

industrial orientation of the city's economy. The state encouraged the development of cities economy by redistribution of central investments in urban areas and increasing the rural-urban dichotomy. The state investments were oriented through counties capitals, Bucharest city and largest cities.

The steered industrialization and urbanization process

A main theme in the constructing of the socialist city was the nature of the relationship between cities and production processes. The presence of industry in the urban areas was considered a pre-requisite for their future development. The increasing rural-urban migration and the necessity to supply labor force to the new industrial sites drew the attention on the necessity to ensure dwellings for the newcomers. Therefore, the authorities imposed new building standards, allowing the use of precast concrete slabs, and consequently, the new and grey residential neighborhoods, built for workers, became the stereotype image of socialist cities.

Until the 1970s, these specific systematization interventions led to significant differences between the core areas of the cities and their peripheries, especially from the standpoint of utilities and transport networks, because urban planning was sometimes replaced by economic programs. In order to mitigate these differences, the authorities had to reorganize the cities by modernizing their core area, starting from the idea that a central residential concentration would have created a better balance between the inner city and its suburbs. According to Cinà (2010:235) "the building of new towns and cities in place of the rural settlements was the main objective of the new political program: an urban utopia claiming that solves the historical deficiencies of the agricultural economy by a number of predetermined micro districts and civic centers".

That was the stage when parts of the urban historical heritage were demolished with the purpose of creating new civic centers, in an attempt to accomplish a massive restructuring of the core areas of the county capital cities. The civic centers were equipped with new services and residential areas. The declared objective of the communist policy was to increase the labor force employed in industry, so that to account for 55% of the total labor force.

A major territorial-administrative reform took place in 1968, when the Romanian territory was divided into 39 counties and the economic investments were prevalingly directed towards the new capital cities, which negatively impacted the medium urban settlements and the Romanian settlement system as a whole (Dumitrescu and Dogaru, 2004). Due to the administrative reform of 1968 and the policies for increasing urban population, the number of cities constantly grew to 260 until 1990. During the socialist period, settlements were declared cities mostly as a result of political decisions.

Consequently, from time to time, several villages were merged in one bigger settlement, in order to increase the number of people and to declare a new city. Some other times, the urban development of a city was accomplished by major investments in industry, which attracted the rural population from the neighborhood. The industrial model promoted for the large cities was that of building big factories, with more than 3,000 employees, while for the smaller

cities the monoindustrial model was preferred. In the 1980s, the industrial development model took into account the rural settlements, in order to create agro-industrial cities, like those emerged in 1989, shortly before the socialist regime collapsed (Popescu, 2000).

Spatial changes and restructuring in the post-socialist cities

All of the post socialist cities have experienced since 1990, significant social changes and spatial restructuring, represented largely by deindustrialization, urban shrinking and deepening social disparities. The decline of industry influence on the urban development of Romania after 1991 is well expressed by the evolution of industrial employees. At the population census of 1992, industry accounted for 35.8% of the total number of employees in Romania, while in the following decade the share of industrial employees dropped to 22.9%, with a slight steady trend until 2011, when the percentage reached 21.3% (Table 1).

The economic restructuring by cutting the number of employees or by closing several industrial units brought about significant alterations in the spatial structure of post-socialist cities. The closing of factories, often followed by their demolition or desertion, encouraged the conversion of industrial sites into commercial or residential areas, or even brownfields (Popescu and Pîrșcoiu, 2012), on the one hand, and the reshaping of the inner city (Light and Young, 2010), on the other hand. At the same time, social changes took place, highlighted by new phenomena, almost unknown during the socialist period, like unemployment or the difference in incomes among the social classes. These phenomena were responsible for the widening of social disparities both in urban and rural environments. Within the context of market economy new shrinking cities phenomena occurred, as Romanian economy become part of the world economy and every crisis or negative evolution impacts the frail urban system of post-socialist society. Especially, the population of monoindustrial cities significantly dropped, as soon as the main factory was shut down, mostly due to emigration of the young and unemployed population towards western European countries and also due to the return of elderly population in the villages where they came from with tens years ago.

After 1990, the policymakers have denied the industrialization-urbanization policy and re-oriented itself to the Euro-Atlantic structures – the EU and NATO. A direction of interest has been the raising of urban population percentage.

Table 1. Number of employees in industry in Romania

Year	Number of employees in industry	% industry share in economy
1992	3,433,277	35.8
2002	1,780,300	22.9
2011	1,951,000	21.3

Source: SNI, 1992; 2002; Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2011

Thus, in the absence of a significant demographic growth, either by natural or migratory increase, a number of villages has been declared cities. Yet, the objective of raising the share of urban population has only been partly fulfilled, because the new cities, approximately 60 after 2001, have a low number of residents. The specific aspects of the socialist and post-socialist urbanization process consist in the merging of several rural settlements in order to reach the demographic criterion of 5,000 inhabitants, while the basic function of the new cities, especially in the post-socialist period, is related to agriculture. Increasing the share of urban population was a major objective during the pre-accession period to EU and declaring new cities was the main method for reaching this objective, as long as the authorities did not find the means to attract people to the large cities.

The Romanian urban system mainly consists of small and medium cities, with population lower than 100,000 inhabitants. Although they account for 90% of the total number of cities, more than half of them have less than 20,000 residents (Erdeli and Simion, 2006). At the same time, population growth and urban sprawl make the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants acquire an increasingly important role within the settlement system, which entitles us to consider them genuine engines of the national economy (Figure 2).

According to Law 350/2001, the Romanian cities are grouped into four ranks (Erdeli and Cucu, 2007; Romanian Parliament, 2001). Rank 0 is represented by Bucharest City, the capital of Romania. Rank I includes 11 county capital cities, each having a population of more than 200,000 residents. Law 350 calls them „nodal centers” or „growth poles”, having an extensive regional influence of 60-100 km and direct access to the major national and international transport

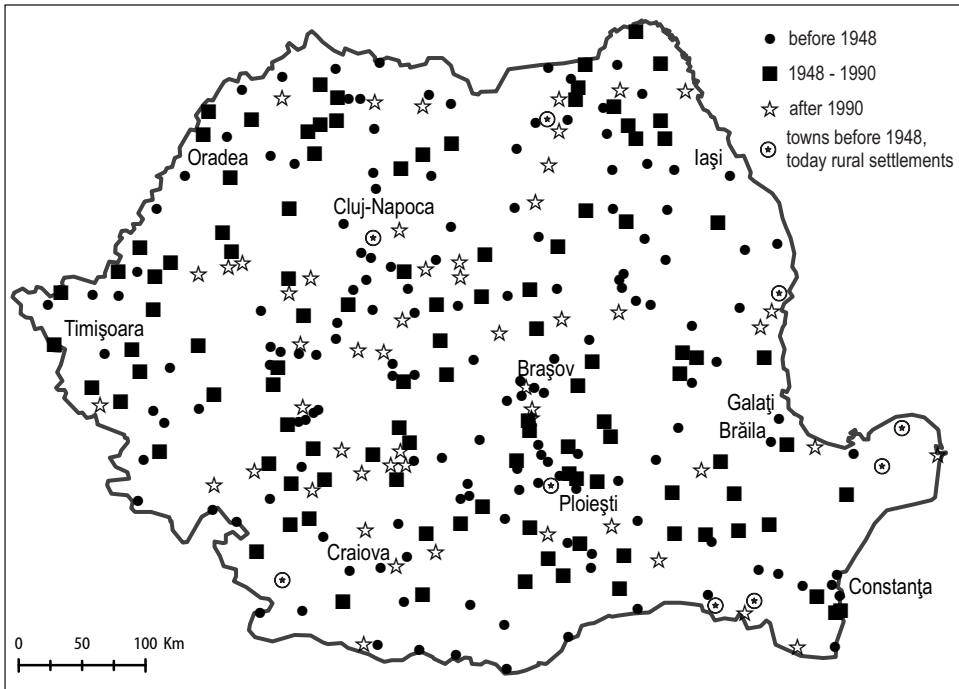


Figure 2. Historical evolution of Romanian cities

infrastructures. Rank II is represented by the county capitals and the cities with population ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 inhabitants, which have a radius of influence of 60-80 km. Their main characteristics are the diversified economy and the dense population. Rank III encompasses the cities generally having between 5,000 and 30,000 inhabitants. They exert their influence on a radius of 10-20 km, thus representing „local attraction” centers. These cities have secondary functions (industry and constructions), but also tertiary and primary ones (mining, agriculture, fishing, forestry)..

The urban hinterland covers two thirds of the Romanian territory, the areas outside the city influence being the isolated lands and the mountain realm. Despite the efforts to declare new cities and to expand the urban network, some authors contend that it continues to be underdeveloped and therefore suggest that the number of cities should be increased from 320 at present to 400-450 in the years to come (Dumitrescu and Dogaru, 2004).

From socialist pseudo-suburbanization to post-socialist unplanned suburbanization

One of the most significant processes of urban reorganization of post-communist cities has been the explosive decentralization of urban functions. While during the communist period, suburbanization was quasi-limited, starting with the second half of the 1990s it has become a defining feature of city development (Hirt and Stanilov, 2009). In the former socialist countries, suburbanization was less intensive than in the West, as the cities remained spatially compact and highly populated (Bertaud, 2006). An important distinction between capitalist and socialist cities was the absence of suburban periphery of the last (Hirt, 2007). The former communist European countries experienced an atypical suburbanization process, completely different from other European countries. During the socialist period, suburban areas developed especially due to the migration of the people from rural areas and from the cities lying outside the urban region (Kostinskiy, 2001). From this point of view, Romania was no exception; only after 1990, it has recorded a typical suburbanization process. Practically, the suburbanization phenomenon in Romania can be split into successive stages, depending on the driven factors, but also on the public policies and legislative framework, characterized by instability and even contradictions (Ianoş et.al, 2010). Thus, from the “pseudo suburbanization” of the communist regime to the “chaotic suburbanization” of the present days, Romania has gone a long way, spanning more than 40 years.

The first stage of “suburbanization” is considered to be the one prior to 1989, even though it was not a phenomenon in itself, but rather a growth of the population of suburban communes. The determinant factors of this stage were the restrictive policy regarding population mobility and the very strict regulations concerning private buildings. In addition, the lack of land and real estate markets, unconceivable during the communist regime, hampered largely people's mobility. The owners were limited to a sole property per family, while the rental market was forbidden, at least officially. Thus, Law 58/1974 prohibited the change of destination of agricultural lands, while Decree 68/1976

forbade the establishment of population in some large cities declared "closed", the change of residence being possible only on the basis of special documents and strictly for professional reasons. The same legal document stipulated that "the acceptable distance for daily commuting is 30 kilometers".

All these restrictions, together with other factors like the functional profile of the cities, their internal structure, and the urban growth, determined by the regulations of the centrally planned economy (Ulrike Sailer-Flige, 1999), led to an atypical suburbanization, in fact a pseudo- suburbanization characterized by migration of rural population to settle in peripheral areas of cities, especially in the first ring of localities, from where they traveled daily to workplaces located in the cities (Figure 3).

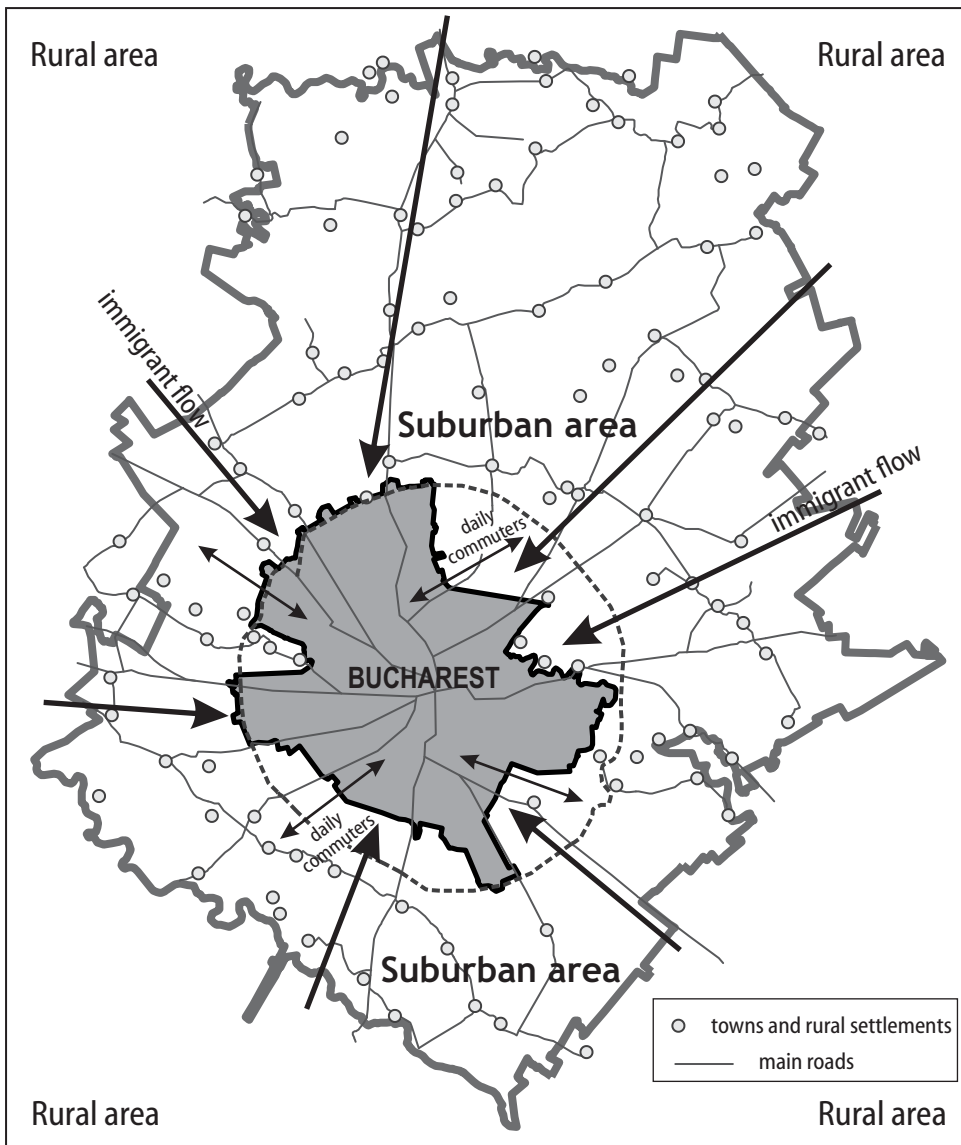


Figure 3. Romanian model of suburbanization

This explains the demographic boom of a number of rural localities adjacent to Bucharest City (Voluntari, Pantelimon, Chitila, Popesti-Leordeni, Otopeni, Jilava, Magurele etc.), the population of which, prior to 1989, was between 10,000 and even 30,000 inhabitants.

In consequence, the communist "suburbanization" was not based on people's migration from the city to its outskirts (the classical model), but on the migration of the people from the poor rural areas to the rural-urban fringe, as they were not allowed to move to the large cities. The subsequent suburbanization stages can be summarized as follows: until the end of the 1990s, there had only been a marginal residential suburbanization, limited by the low incomes of the population and by people's migration to the large cities (allowed at that time); after 2000, the residential and commercial suburbanization has rapidly developed, becoming the most important urban change process. Both stages have been characterized by legislative ambiguity and institutional instability, which has led to an uncontrolled and chaotic development of suburban area. The changes have been the result of a complex interaction between the pre-existing urban structures, the transition to market economy and the general process of change affecting economy, political system and society.

The most important factors of the communist suburbanization can be grouped into three distinct categories: political (including here the legislative and institutional changes), socio-economic (the transition to another type of economy, based on private property and free trade) and psychological (people's mentality and their yearning for a better quality of living).

The legislative changes, marked by the transition from autocratic to democratic legislation, are the ones that marked a turning point in the development of the suburban areas around the large Romanian cities. The first step, with consequences especially at territorial level, was the repeal (since December 1989) of Law 58/1974 regarding the systematization of rural and urban settlements, which was replaced only in 2001 by Law 350/2001 concerning land development and urban planning. The twenty years of quasi-legislative explain the present physiognomy of rural and urban settlements, and especially of suburban areas, which during all this time have developed chaotically.

But the main law that really triggered a construction boom was Law 18/1991 (The Land Law), which had as main objective to restore the land to its former owners or to their descendants. In addition, this law also stipulated the means by which a person was able to change the destination of agricultural lands and forestlands, which has led to a number of transformations from "agricultural field" to "construction field". For suburban areas, the most important consequences of this law have been the creation of an active land market (almost absent during the communist period) and changes in land use around the large cities. The restitution of ownership rights, even if it was a fair legal act, has been one of the factors that triggered an uncontrolled urban sprawl, encouraged by the lack of legal provisions meant to organize the urban space and its adjacent areas.

Law 50/1991, which regulated the authorization of constructions, and Law 10/1995 concerning the quality in the construction sector, were the first legal documents that tried to curtail the construction processes that defied logic and

disregarded the most elementary norms of urbanism. But although these laws were issued during the first years of transition, they encountered strong resistance from the population, who was reluctant to be controlled by anyone (and much less by state authorities). This opposition can be understood only if one takes into account the more than 40 years of communist dictatorship and the uncertain democratic process. Practically, the authorities were able to enforce the laws only to a limited extent. More often than not, people built houses without having any licence and subsequently these constructions were recognized as legal. The practice of legalizing the unauthorized constructions after they had been built created a public attitude, in the sense that people expected that all activities would be legalized in the following years (Hirt and Stanilov, 2009).

The most important legal act that tried to regulate urban sprawl was Law 350/2001 concerning land development and urban planning, which contained a number of provisions regarding “the balanced development of regions and settlements according to the principles of sustainable development”. This law was intended to be a regulatory legal approach meant to prevent problems such as the change of land destination and the chaotic placement of buildings. The weakness of this law (at least until the amendments of 2008) was the unlimited ability to increase the built-up area by disregarding the approved P.U.G (Urban Master Plan), an aspect that local authorities knew how to exploit a very long time to the benefit of real estate interests.

At institutional level, the main problem that determined the explosion of suburbanization, apart from certain political instability (the frequent change of political authority accompanied by the change of public policies in the field), was the decentralization of political power from central level to local level starting with the early 1990s. The essence of the process was to ensure a greater independence of the local authorities in managing the local business and the incomes obtained from taxes and dues (Nedovic-Budic Z., 2001). The drastic reduction in state subsidies encouraged most of the local authorities to use various methods to increase revenues, including the development of residential neighborhoods on the former agricultural lands or green parks (Hirt and Stanilov, 2009).

In many cases, the ability of local authorities to manage the urban development in the first years of transition was hindered by the inadequate legislation concerning urban growth from the perspective of a completely different socio-economic system. The lack of concrete national programs and plans for urban regeneration brought about an urban decline and indirectly led to an uncontrolled suburban sprawl. The absence of basic policies “at national level for the future development of the cities created a climate for the accomplishment of individual political ambitions”, which, in their turn, “made up and maintained the unregulated, politicized, corrupt and instable practices of urban development” (Sykora, 1999). As a result of all these legislative and institutional changes, the compact socialist cities have suffered a rapid commercial and residential suburbanization, which is responsible for their present irregular shape.

Socio-economic factors were also important for the urban expansion process. The most significant from this point of view was the economic liberalization; the

consequences of this process have been the deindustrialization and the tertiarization of the economy, as opposed with the situation prior to 1989, when industrial activities, at least at urban level, were prevailing. This shift has occurred especially due to the successive privatizations of industrial units (considered, for the most part, as being unproductive and inefficient), but also to the private initiative, which oriented itself, at least in the first years of transition, to commercial activities - the trivial tertiary (Ianoş, 2004). Subsequently, the direct foreign investments emphasized these trends (especially after the year 2000), when the banking financial system was strengthened. The emergence of private banks (of which 70% with foreign capital) led to a boom of mortgage loans, granted for the purchasing or building of new houses in suburban areas. Another important aspect was the abandonment by the state of housing construction, so that the population was forced to resort to real estate market to have their own home.

The raising of living standards fostered by the increase of population incomes facilitated people's desire to replace the "communist housing" with more spacious dwellings, lying in the suburban area, especially so because more and more people afforded a private means of transport. During the communist period, the apartments built of precast concrete slabs on the outskirts of the city and the increase of revenues after 2000 were among the main suburbanization factors. This explains the real estate boom from the peak years of economic growth (2006-2008) and the subsequent stagnation (explained by the economic crisis). The suburbanization process was more intense after the year 2000, when people's welfare increased, which encouraged the building of new dwellings and facilitated the granting of mortgage loans (Leetmaa et al., 2009). The people who used to live in the communist flats built of precast concrete slabs moved to suburban areas, thus trying to improve their living conditions (Borén and Gentile, 2007).

Economic changes (consumption increase, restitution of ownership rights, privatization and building of residences, enhanced the chances of getting mortgage loans and the demand for new dwellings) impacted many processes connected to urban change, especially in suburban areas.

The psychological factor that led to the multiplication of suburban spaces and their uncontrolled boom was represented by the borrowing (or the revival after 40 years) of a new cultural model, in which the revitalized (or born) social class that emerged after 1990 (the middle class) started to prefer individual dwellings. In addition, Romania is confronted with another problem as well, which stems from a collective mentality, in the sense that people do not want rented dwellings, but, more often than not, prefer to have their own property (maybe because this possibility lacked during the 40 years of communist regime).

One of the major failures of public policies in terms of suburbanization process was the slowness of the authorities to issue strategies of urban development at national level. The lack of concrete national programs and plans for urban regeneration in Romania brought about the decline of the cities and led indirectly to an uncontrolled suburban sprawl.

The local authorities' response to the challenges of urban decentralization and suburbanization was in line with the national government policies. Without

a sound legal base regarding the regulation of urban growth based on a coherent vision, the local authorities embraced an agenda of economic development that was friendly especially with the revenues generated by the investment proposals, without taking into account their long-term social and environmental costs (Hirt and Stanilov, 2009).

All these factors together have fostered a chaotic suburbanization process and an urban sprawl hard to control and confine. The most obvious phenomenon that can be observed by naked eye is the increase of built-up areas to the detriment of agricultural lands. This phenomenon, which is representative for many cities of Romania, depends on their demographic size and the economic dynamics of the last two decades.

Metropolis suburbanization challenges: Bucharest City

The most typical case in this respect is the Bucharest municipality, whose suburban area is becoming more extensive, despite attempts to limit or even ordering the constructions. The analysis of Bucharest's spatial dynamics shows that at present the city undergoes an intense suburbanization process, while parts of its functions are relocated to its metropolitan area (Plăcintescu et al., 2005).

After the collapse of socialist regime in 1989, one of the major elements that determined the spatial reorganization of the capital and its metropolitan area was the transition to a market economy based on private investments in all economic fields. Taking advantage of local autonomy, a number of communes offered tax incentives or modified the general urban plans in order to attract major investments in local economy. Suburbanization processes and the transition to market economy were accompanied by the restructuring and privatization of industry, agriculture and services, as well as by the encouragement of private initiatives. Other important factors that brought their contribution to the alteration of suburban landscape were the increase of social mobility and the change of cultural conceptions on housing. In agreement with the metropolitan trends worldwide, the population prefers to live in individual houses, far away from the urban crowd. This has determined an influx of new immigrants belonging to the middle urban class, followers of a Western lifestyle, whose mobility is based on their own cars (Sasaki and Kobayashi, 2005).

The competition among the metropolitan settlements in order to attract economic and residential investments has triggered a spontaneous and uncontrolled evolution of suburbanization in metropolitan areas. More than that, the general urban plans had to be modified, so that to accommodate these spatial dynamics. In many instances, the development of residential spaces was not accompanied by an adequate infrastructure development consisting of communication networks, water supply and sewerage systems, or socio-cultural infrastructures. The lack of spatial planning is best highlighted by the traffic jams occurring during peak hours of the day or during bad weather spans, when a number of suburban areas take the appearance of isolated rural peripheries. The phenomenon is specific especially for the suburban areas built in early 1990s, when the new residents bought the illusion of a life in the

countryside with all the elements of urban comfort (Simion, 2010). The dwellings erected back then have all indoor comfort, but the streets are narrow (two cars can hardly pass simultaneously) and when it rains or snows they become impassable.

Suburbanization phenomenon has implications on the local economic activities and it leads to significant alterations of land use. The immediate effect is the gradual lessening of agriculture's role in the local economy, as the previously agricultural lands are turned into built-up areas. The demand of lands in suburban areas leads to conflictual situations, when agricultural lands and urban spaces become part of the same economic system (Jung, 1971). The system is more complex in the suburban area of Bucharest City, because the urban sprawl processes are intertwined with those specific for the evolution from the centralized economic system of the socialist epoch to the market economic system of post-socialist period.

Urban dynamics is responsible for the intensification of land use in the rural areas subjected to residential pressure, as well as for the relocation of industry on the edge of the cities or in the rural-urban fringe. These ongoing processes impact not only the economy and social structures, but also the land use and physical setting. Bucharest is an interesting case of suburbanization, because the phenomenon can be explained by the extreme transformation processes, like demographic shrinking, immigration from other Romanian cities and by the unprecedented economic restructuring in terms of fastness and profoundness.

The digitization of topographic maps developed in the 1970s and the satellite imagery taken after 1990 suggest that significant alterations of land use occurred in the region lying around Bucharest (which overlaps the Ilfov County). In this respect, the share of arable lands dropped from 72.5% of the total area in 1970 to 66.5% in the year 2000. The strategy on land use demonstrates the preference of landholders for arable land instead of vineyards or orchards. The explanations for the changes of land use are related to agrarian reforms and the collapse of the former socialist farms. After the 1990s, the landholders took their land from the socialist cooperatives, but the machines for a modern agriculture were missing. The first cultures affected by this situation were the vineyards and orchards that required a lot of money for their maintenance, in order to obtain an efficient production from the economic point of view. A few years ago, the agricultural land in this area suffered severe pressure as a result of urban sprawl, which is why it became the main income source for landowners, and especially for those in Ilfov County. At that time, people preferred to leave the land fallow, waiting to sell it. At present, as a result of economic crisis, land transactions decreased and, consequently, some of the land will return to agricultural use.

The complexity of suburbanization phenomenon was sharpened by the agrarian reform started in 1991, which led to the restoration of property rights over the land. The agrarian reform entailed significant changes in agricultural land transactions, a phenomenon almost absent in the socialist period. So far, the transactions that have occurred in the metropolitan area of Bucharest City with lands for agricultural purposes have been insignificant. In this area, the share of agriculture in the local economy is lower and the agricultural lands leave the place to urban sprawl, as the property owners prefer to sell the land at

higher prices to the entrepreneurs who are interested to build residential or commercial areas. The selling of agricultural lands is limited only by the right of preemption – preferential right to equal price, according to Law 54/1998 –, which can be exerted by joint owners, neighboring owners and tenants. Most of the agricultural lands purchased were used for residential constructions, malls, industrial sites or storage units.

The suburbanization phenomenon in the metropolitan area of Bucharest City has given rise to areas with particular specialization, mostly determined by their accessibility and the orientation of economic investments. To the north, at the exit to Ploiesti City, a service area emerged; the emergence of this area has contributed to the drastic reduction of the agricultural profile of the settlements, both in terms of the number of agricultural workers and in terms of cultivated area. Instead, agricultural lands have been invaded by supermarkets, showrooms, corporate offices or residential areas. Also on the outskirts of Bucharest lie the two airports of the city and the prediction that one might be closing down offers new perspectives for area development.

Beyond the service area, new residential complexes are developing to the north, east and south. To the west – along the highway to Pitesti – lies the warehouse area, while to the southwest develop a number of industrial sites. As the distance to Bucharest increases, there is a diminishing of urban characteristics and the shaping of vegetables- agricultural areas. In order to highlight the expansion of this phenomenon, one should take into account several relevant indices such as the population growth, the increase of the number of dwellings and the change of land use (Figure 4. a, b).

The evolution of the number of inhabitants is uneven in time and space, in agreement with the dynamics of the main demographic phenomena represented by the natural and migratory movements. The present evolution of the metropolitan population of Ilfov County shows a continuous increase of the

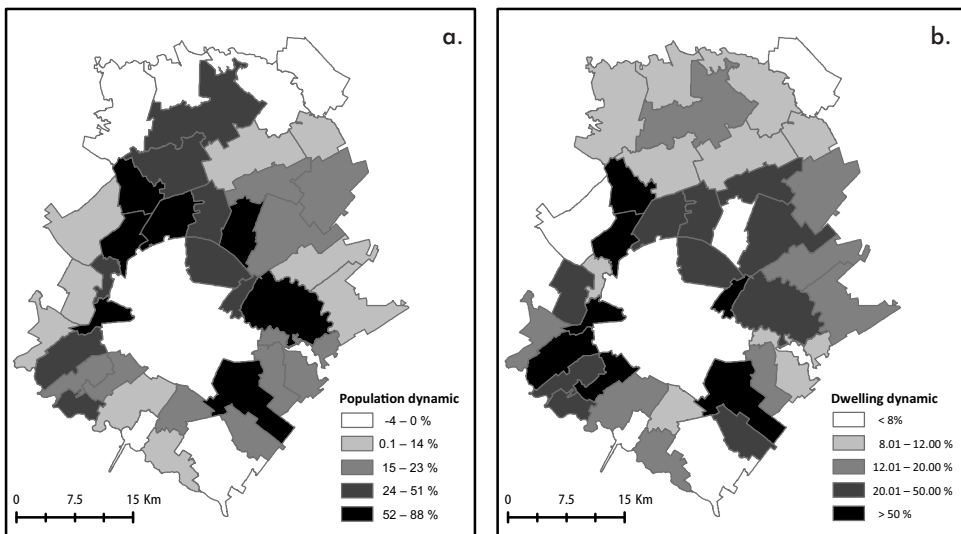


Figure 4. a. Demographic dynamic (1990-2013); b. Dwellings dynamic (2005 – 2013)

number of inhabitants of the settlements making up the first urban ring. Population growth can be explained by immigrations and to a lesser extent by natural increase, because the demographic behavior of the population after 1990 has changed and the number of births decreased mostly due to the abrogation of the decree prohibiting abortions, the main support element of pro-natalist policy during the communist period. As figure 4 show, according as the distance from Bucharest grows the metropolitan influence decreases, which slows down the intensity of population changes and the emergence of new residences.

In the case of the settlements with negative or stagnant evolutions of the number of inhabitants, the main aspects recorded around the 1990s were the rural-urban migrations, which reached a peak in 1990, once the internal migration of the population was liberalized. As a result of legislative changes concerning the residence in urban areas, in 1990 about 560,000 inhabitants across the country established their residence in the cities, of which about two thirds were recorded in the first half of 1990. The effects on the rural environment produced by people's migration to cities consisted in changes of the age-sex pyramid, meaning a sharpening of biological aging and a feminization trend. In the context of people's migration to the outskirts of the metropolitan settlements of Bucharest City, attraction poles emerged, especially in those localities that attract population as an effect of suburbanization. Consequently, residential areas arise according as more and more urban citizens give up collective housing in Bucharest and move into the individual dwellings lying in the metropolitan area.

The changes resulted from Bucharest's suburbanization are also mirrored by the population's occupational structure. The proximity to Bucharest makes the settlements around the city manifest two contradictory aspects. Some of them specialize in vegetables growing and animal breeding, while others have lost their agricultural importance, as the former agricultural lands have been sold and are presently occupied by constructions (residential areas, offices, warehouses, industrial halls and logistic buildings). According as the distance from the city grows, subsistence farming becomes the dominant feature. This is explained by the fact that rural population is aging, while the distance to the marketplace raises the merchandise price, thus discouraging trade.

As far as the share of population occupied in agriculture in the total occupied population is concerned, statistical data show a percentage of less than 6.33% for the settlements making up the first urban ring, but according as the distance from the city increases, the shares may exceed 75%. The areas with the highest percentages of population occupied in agriculture are found south of Bucharest or in the extreme north of the metropolitan area. In the natural growing season, these areas are the most important vegetable suppliers for Bucharest City. The most outstanding examples of suburbanization, with strong impact on agricultural landscape, are Pipera and Snagov. Pipera area, lying in the first urban ring of Bucharest City, to the northeast, has become immediately after 1990 the most attractive spot for building villas, which have become second residences for Bucharest's inhabitants. Thus, a whole neighborhood has come into existence, according as the agricultural lands and pastoral activities have been replaced by houses and villas. In its turn, Snagov has become an attractive

area for the people with above average incomes. After 1950, with the building of tourist and sport infrastructures, it has been turned into an elite spot. Currently, suburbanization leads to the compaction of the housing in the area, to the decrease of agricultural lands and to the reduction of agricultural activities.

The cities, as large as Bucharest, significantly influence the economic activities and the structure of occupied population in the surrounding area, either by their role of service centers or by providing jobs for the residents of suburban areas. In the case of Bucharest, the plans for the future foresee a relocation of industry to suburban areas, in accordance with the tendencies expressed by occupied population. Except for the northern sector, the share of the population occupied in industrial activities varies between 10% and 50%. At the same time, one can see the emergence of industrial centers at Bragadiru, Popesti-Leordeni and Glină. Likewise, the areas along the Bucharest ring road are in the process of industrialization.

Conclusions

Urbanization features and the spatial changes of the Central and Eastern European cities have largely been associated with post communist transformations, urban restructuring, deindustrialization, chaotic suburbanization or urban shrinking. Economic decline, deindustrialization, population decrease and suburbanization, which are interconnected processes, each one being the consequence of the others, generate the urban shrinkage phenomenon, which is considered a „multidimensional development with different pathways” (Großman et.al., 2008).

The transformations of the post-socialist cities have taken different shapes and features, depending on their adaptation to the rigors of strategic spatial planning, on the one hand, and on their responsiveness to the challenges of a triple transition, on the other hand (Tsenkova, 2011).

Thus, the socialist cities, often characterized by the absence of functional and aesthetic diversity, will change almost radically, acquiring „standard” capitalist forms and features (Sykora, 1994). Like all the other Eastern-European states, Romania has known a particular evolution of its urban system: socialist-communist before 1990 and post-socialist democratic afterwards. The nationalization process of 1948 and the emergence of centralized economic system imposed changes and a new vision in urban planning. The specific urban policies, territorial-administrative organization and forced industrialization created the premises for accelerated urbanization by declaring a large number of cities (260 by 1990). It was more like an „artificial” urbanization, based on political decisions, which forced the rural settlements to merge, so that to meet the necessary number of inhabitants for getting urban status.

After 1990, within the context of economic transition, privatization and strengthening the functional market economy, the social-economic disparities widened, unemployment level grew and urban-rural migrations intensified. After the year 2000, the functional market has strengthened and population incomes, as well as capital flows and foreign investments, have increased. Consequently, residential and commercial suburbanization has rapidly

developed, becoming the most important process of urban change.

Urban population increase was a major objective in the pre-accession period to EU, while declaring new cities was the main method for reaching this objective in the absence of other means for attracting people to urban environments. The spatial and social changes of cities implied legislative adjustments and updates of urban development plans. Unfortunately, the reaction of central and local authorities was late, while the rapid issuing of new urban development strategies was imperative.

One of the major failures of public policies concerning the suburbanization process has been the slowness of central authorities in designing new strategies of urban development at national scale. The lack of concrete national programs and urban regeneration plans in Romania has brought about the decline of cities and has indirectly led to an uncontrolled suburban sprawl. Sprawl is the physical pattern of low-density expansion of large urban areas, under market conditions, mainly into the surrounding agricultural areas (EEA, 2006). Thus, many Romanian cities are confronted with uncontrolled suburban sprawl, as the built-up areas continuously grow to the detriment of agricultural lands, an interesting example in this respect being the metropolitan area of Bucharest City.

The manifestation of suburbanization phenomenon in the metropolitan area of Bucharest has entailed the emergence of specialized areas, mostly determined by their accessibility and the orientation of economic investments.

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