

CHARACTERISTICS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Urban development is influenced by many elements specific to the society, geopolitical conditions, economic and social challenges, the clarity of urban planning and the capacity to develop strategies aimed at adapting urban life to the needs of the population and the community. Over time, authors such as Max Weber, Georg Siemmel, Henri Lefebvre, Walter Benjamin, or the Chicago School specialists. These initial efforts have been taken over and used by specialists with different backgrounds in urban planning. The results of their research revealed multiple relationships and interconnections between the dimensions of urban life. The success of urban management is dependent on the ability to identify and efficiently exploit the opportunities offered by the city. Moreover, the researches revealed that in the absence of any concerns about the harmonious development of the city, undesirable phenomena will affect the life of the inhabitants and will lead to the decline of the city, such as unemployment, crime, insufficiency or poor quality of urban infrastructure and reduced opportunities for economic and commercial activities, etc. The city is in a permanent dynamics, and the lack of a sense of urban policy will be replaced by a chaotic deployment of phenomena with negative effects.

This article discusses the main legal indicators of housing in the top ten cities of Romania. The conclusions will allow assessments of the characteristics of the urbanization processes and their capacity to increase urban life quality.

Keywords: urbanization, housing, modernization, competitiveness, life quality

Introduction

The movement of the population in the social area is influenced by many determinants. The urban environment, which is the main pole of development in modern societies, is the main territory of manifestation of many determinant factors. The population is resettled in the territory according to the migratory flows that will push on certain areas of the city, will generate financial flows and determine the dynamics of the city's internal markets. Opportunities offered to the economic and social dimensions of the city will influence the demographic structure of the city, an observable phenomenon through the migratory balance and through the aging population phenomenon.

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Another phenomenon is the functional transformation of the cities due to the reorganization of commercial premises, collective dwellings, industrial platforms, logistics for the movement of goods and merchandise. Reconfiguration of the city's functional areas is affected by the property rights disputes, economic competition, and by the capital flows influenced by the changing economic performance conditions such as the development of transport routes and links with other localities.

Urban development of cities is affected by the housing stock phenomena whose age contributes to the deterioration of the housing quality, deterioration of urban areas, loss of community spirit, etc. For example, lack of parking facilities, heavy urban traffic, lack of public spaces, lack of care for monuments and historical buildings reveals a community that is in a process of degradation and lacking a competitive management. Thus, the life quality, the economic growth affecting both the city and the hinterland, the ability to increase competitiveness is affected by the destruction of the initial functional areas, crystallized in long periods of time, amid the reconfiguration of the new functional structures sometimes too slow in relation to the dynamic of the modern world or often chaotic without a clear horizon.

Conflicts between old and new have negative effects on the natural environment through depletion of land, increasing pollution, hindering traffic, and uninspired location of commercial and economic units in urban areas.

The new state of the urbanization process

Natural disasters statistics, scientifically analyzed, highlight that urban processes generate risks related to natural and human disasters¹. Global urban development statistics are impressive by recording the structural changes that occur through urbanization: between 2000 and 2015, approximately 65 million homes were built each year, and 93% of them were built in developed countries. Along with developed nations in North America and Europe, there have emerged countries in Asia and Africa where urbanization is taking place at rhythms unprecedented so far. The urban population in Asia was 39.9% in Asia and 39.7% in Africa in 2005. In 2030, the urban population will reach 54.5% and 53.5% respectively. At the same time, urban population in Latin America will reach 80%².

The increase in size of urban settlements is due to natural population growth and immigration. The economic opportunities offered by the urban environment attract a large number of people from rural and underdeveloped societies. Cities are comprised of the competition generated by regional economic development. For example, the relocation of the industry to peri-urban areas near the communication

¹ United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *Enhancing Urban Safety and Security*, Global Report on Human Settlement 2007, Earthscan, London, p. 183.

² *Ibidem*.

routes has the effect of extending the city limits, which will be occupied by a large number of peripheral inhabitants. Increased competitiveness will attract foreign investment that will boost the pace of economic development, hindering the urban management that is unable to manage social and environmental risks with the speed of private investment, and often unable to manage the city growth.

The total number of urban residents is influenced by investment in industry. Cities that go through periods of economic growth are concentrating both a large number of businesses and a large number of people. Contributing to the gross domestic product of these cities is a stake that governments cannot sacrifice for risk reduction. Infrastructure investments are following the population growth, but they are one step behind. Large concentrations of the population are exponents of risks of any kind, especially those related to the environment³. Differences between contemporary cities can be seen in different exposure to possible dangers on continents like Africa, Asia and Latin America there are numerous risks near this cities. Instead, cities such as Paris, New York, Tokyo have developed harmoniously and the risks are controlled and much lower⁴.

The analysis based on statistical databases seeks to capture the elements specific to the urbanization of the Romanian cities, which determine the process of gentrification resulting from the population displacement due to the urban reconstruction policies⁵. The process of gentrification involves “transforming an aging urban area into a more financially potent neighborhood, with a certain social status, through the renovation of the buildings, the consequences being, on the one hand, the increase in the value of the respective properties (land and buildings in the area) and the relocation of old poor residents”⁶. The manifestation of the gentrification process is noticed by modifying the constructive features, the expansion of urban utilities and the consumption of urban services. Such changes suggest changes in the major cities of Romania, which require the decision makers’ attention due to the challenges they pose.

Theoretical perspectives regarding the cities characteristics

Changes specific to industrialization have attracted the interest of scientists. Approaches of thinkers such as Weber, Simmel, Benjamin, or Lefebvre are attempts to explain urban-specific phenomena, which have already signaled the existence of significant consequences for future societies. Based on such efforts, the whole activity of studying and developing the urban environment has developed.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Dana Corenelia Nițulescu, *Procesul de gentrificare a spațiilor de locuit urbane*, în “Calitatea Vieții”, XVII, nr. 3–4, 2006, pp. 281–293.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

Max Weber's analysis perspective⁷ of the city requires an approach in terms of historical evolution, highlighting the development of adaptive strategies of urban settlements, from the exchange and trade centers to the military functions, defense of the entire community or regions in front of the invading armies. The rise of the bourgeoisie during the mercantilism era ensured the city's preeminence as a commercial center, which gave it the possibility of economic and commercial domination outside the state or the church authority. City-states such as Venice or Genoa were stronger than many states because of the commercial power.

According to Weber, the fundamental features of the city results from the past societies. Siemmel associates modernity with the full articulation of the metropolis and the birth of a new subjectivity. It rejects the Kantian idea of an *a priori* moral law and seeks to demonstrate that moral order can be the result of human civilization. He therefore believed in the transforming powers of modernity, especially art and aesthetics, to which Siemel's focus was on the modern metropolis and urban culture in general. In the famous work *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, Simmel connects the city with the mental life of the population, an idea that has significantly influenced sociologists at the *Chicago School*⁸.

The negative features of cities cannot be ignored, but they can be compensated by parochialism. Moreover, the metropolis allows such a dense concentration of capital so that the integration of space, time and social actors achieves an unmatched complexity⁹.

The need to synchronize city activities is illustrated, in Simmel's opinion, by the sudden emergence of pocket watches that were omnipresent at the beginning of the twentieth century, just like mobile phones at the beginning of the 21st century. Simmel appreciated that city-specific businesses are characterized by complexity and variety, so punctuality is the guarantee of maintaining the whole structure of economic, social and trade relations that would otherwise collapse into chaos. If all the clocks in Berlin would work wrong ... "then the economic life and communications of the city will be disturbed for long periods of time" Discipline and punctuality are moral traits generated by urban civilization¹⁰.

Walter Benjamin adopts the idea of a city exegesis. By making sketches of the city, Benjamin tried to avoid sterile and dry investigations¹¹. The analytic inclination of philosophical origin suggests the development of a Kantian concept of experience by extending Nietzsche's active nihilism method¹². His main work,

⁷ Max Weber, *The City*, Glencoe, IL, Free Press, 1958, *apud* Simon Parker, *Urban Theory and the Urban Experience. Encountering the city*, Routledge, London and New York, 2004, pp. 9–13.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life* in Wolff K.H. (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press, pp. 409–426, *apud* Simon Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press *apud* Simon Parker, *op. cit.* p. 14.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 15.

the *Passagenwerk* or the *Arcade Project*, was a collection of writings about the 19th century Parisian urban life. The emphasis was placed on the pedestrian passages covered with arches that, according to Benjamin, created a distinct street life that generated the flutter culture.

The metropolis was an important incentive for Benjamin, helping his reflections on the nature of human experience. His reflections combined with the philosophical and literary approach inspire the study of the city in all its dimensions. In his research project, every imaginable type of urban phenomena had to be included. The themes of the research were derived from the daily Parisian life, including the facilities and inconveniences, the social relationships and morals of the Parisian society, the way the poor spent the Sunday, etc. "Arcade" was originally just one of the themes, but as material gathering became a leitmotiv of its reflection on the issues of modernity in all its aspects, both the exterior and the interior, which offer a universe of possibilities and mistakes which only the modern metropolis offers. The city is, according to Benjamin, an embodiment of the ancient dream of humanity: *the labyrinth*. The concept of *flutter* represents the nostalgia or ecstatic memory of lost time and the feelings of the past. Thus, W. Benjamin offers another fundamental perspective of understanding the city, starting from the circumscription of the urban experience to an aesthetic and philosophical commitment that inspired other authors in search of a new perspective of understanding the city as a laboratory of dynamic modernity¹³.

Henri Lefebvre is another author that includes the cultural dimension in the city's analysis¹⁴. For him, the production of urban space always follows the characteristics of the times. Thus, from autonomous cities, closed, which dominated a certain hinterland, we witness a transition to open cities in search of hinterland expansion. From organizing urban space to meet local needs, we are developing the search for profits resulting from the placement of our own products and services in as far as possible. Lefebvre appreciated that the change in production relations has influenced the changes in urban spaces.

Lefebvre considers the city to be the place where the in use value and the exchange value are met and are combined into a formal system or as a production relationship. The division of labor goes beyond the borders of the city or region to a national and international level. The different capacity to conquer the market traces the boundaries between wealth and poverty. The city is a mosaic composed of the commercial districts of central areas, surrounded by ghettos in which the underprivileged people live and the wealthy people enclaves, inaccessible to others.¹⁵ In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre's goal was to bring philosophy and epistemology of space (mental space) into dialogue with real or empirical space. According to Lefebvre, "space practically regulates life and does not create it. It

¹³ Simon Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishing, 1991, p. 44.

¹⁵ Simon Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

has no power in itself, and space itself does not determine social contradictions, but it ensures the possibility of deployment¹⁶. For example, the contradictions between forces and production relationships take place in space and at a space level, involving contradictions of space. After Lefebvre, there are two ways in which urban space can be affected and destroyed by contradictory processes: the proliferation of fast roads, parking spaces and garages, the reduction of the number of trees along the streets, green spaces, parks and gardens. Contradiction occurs between space consumption for purposes that produce plus value and those that produce aesthetic satisfaction but are unproductive.

What does the statistical data on the top ten cities in Romania suggest?

The statistical analysis provides objective data on the trends followed by certain urban processes. In the case of this study we try to notice the tendencies existing in the preferences to build. Besides these data other data are retained on the urban endowments of cities and the use of urban services.

By comparing the statistical data of the first Ten Romanian Cities, one can observe the general trends specific to the entire urban environment and those that include the regional particularities. The ten cities represent all the Romanian development regions, over which they probably influence.

The city's population was the main selection criterion. The indicator used was that of the population by residence¹⁷.

Table 1
Total population by residence.

	<i>City</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>2018</i>
1	Bucharest	2149490	2152639	2161874	2107399	2112483
2	Iași	332952	332825	334652	363312	373507
3	Timișoara	335355	333891	334764	333210	330014
4	Cluj Napoca	319222	314105	319582	321916	323484
5	Constanța	337276	328859	323748	317974	314816
6	Craiova	314375	313797	311909	305946	302783
7	Galați	318842	314440	308882	304610	303069
8	Brașov	308340	299682	293534	290955	289878
9	Ploiești	251748	246449	240292	233762	229641
10	Oradea	230357	226679	225303	222850	221796

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁷ National Institute of Statistics, Tempo Online database, 107D matrix, consulted in the period of 14–20 May 2018.

It is noted that in most cities the population is experiencing a significant demographic decline. For the entire analyzed period the population of Bucharest, the capital of the country decreased by 1.72%. In 2011 there were the most inhabitants of the city, but starting this year the population began to decrease, so that in 2018 in Bucharest lived fewer people. The second city of the country, Iasi, the largest city in Moldova, registered a population growth of 12.18%. Between 2001 and 2018, the city's population grew without fluctuations. The third city of the country, Timișoara, registered a population decrease of 1.59%. The demographic decline increased between 2016 and 2018. The fourth city, Cluj-Napoca, registered a slight increase of the population, of 1.34%. Although in the first period, 2001–2006, the city's population decreased, in time the city became attractive for the population, registering an increase that can become even more significant in the future. In Constanta, the demographic decline reached –6.66%. The pace of growth is significant, and the continuation of this trend suggests the trend of a sharp decline in the population of the city. In Craiova, the demographic decline is -3.69%. This indicates a decrease in the attractiveness of the city for the population. The city of Galati recorded a population loss of 4.95%. The rate of decline may increase in the current context. In the city of Brasov, there is also a demographic decline revealed by the population drop of 5.99%. In Ploiesti we witness the largest demographic decline: a population decrease of 8.78%. In the city of Oradea the population decrease was 3.72%.

Demographic trends indicate the existence of phenomena that decouple most Romanian cities from international and global trends. Urbanization is a difficult process, and it seems that Romanian cities are not attractive economic centers. The balance between establishing and leaving the residence, including international migration, highlights the characteristics of the Romanian urban environment:

Table 2
Settling and resident departures.

	City		2001	2006	2011	2016
1	Bucharest	Settling ¹⁸	46516	52117	52834	52979
		Departures ¹⁹	39141	44802	54143	55060
		Balance	7375	7315	-1309	-2081
2	Iași	Settling	4763	4686	5879	10940
		Departures	3753	5065	5769	7393
		Balance	1010	-379	110	3547

¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

3	Timișoara	Settling	4418	6055	5692	6449
		Departures	3238	5034	5976	8138
		Balance	1180	1021	-284	-1689
4	Cluj Napoca	Settling	2117	4124	4293	5545
		Departures	2763	2879	4077	5676
		Balance	-646	1245	216	-131
5	Constanța	Settling	3364	3869	3591	4222
		Departures	4531	4384	4543	5352
		Balance	-1167	-515	-952	-1130
6	Craiova	Settling	3277	3398	2803	3362
		Departures	2852	3570	3945	5196
		Balance	425	-172	-1142	-1834
7	Galați	Settling	2579	2394	2884	3747
		Departures	2645	3703	3701	4902
		Balance	-66	-1309	-817	-1155
8	Brașov	Settling	3148	3145	3175	4111
		Departures	4149	4424	3751	4479
		Balance	-1001	-1279	-576	-368
9	Ploiești	Settling	2487	2370	2081	2368
		Departures	2583	3061	3225	3921
		Balance	-96	-691	-1144	-1553
10	Oradea	Settling	1659	2660	2312	2845
		Departures	2029	2708	2867	3527
		Balance	-370	-48	-555	-682

Settling or departing of the population balances show that between the intervals of 2006–2011 a process of emigration started of a part of the city's population to other cities or international destinations. To the migration balance which has a predominantly negative values it is added the general negative values of the natural balance.

On the external migration background, plus the negative natural balance, we believe that the real estate market and the housing quality are reconfiguring according to the new conditions and the evolution of the concluded commercial transactions.

The housing stock of Bucharest suggests an improvement of some quality indicators. The built areas increased by 35.33%, the total housing number increased by 10.17%, and the average useful areas per inhabitant increased by 38.03%, while the average useful areas of the houses increased by 22.83%. The houses are privately owned in a proportion of 99.34%. The lack of collective public housing or public investment in the housing stock highlights that this area, important for the national economy, is only influenced by the private initiative.

Conclusions regarding the general characteristics of the housing stock in the main cities of Romania

An analysis of the urban environment in Romania highlights that investments in housing construction are made overwhelmingly only from private funds. In all cities over 98% of the dwellings are privately owned.

The housing stock has grown steadily over the last 15 years, as has the housing surface. By comparison, it can be noticed that the average areas for a house have a higher growth than the number of residences per se, suggesting a preference for houses with more generous useful areas in order to increase the comfort of the inhabitants.

Although the demographic decline affects eight of the country's ten major cities, the housing investment trend is on the rise, indicating that population decline is not yet affecting the construction market.

Analyzing the statistics on the number of building permits, we find that there is a tendency to build houses with larger living areas.

However, the studied cities are still expanding, thus revealing the permanent growth within the city areas.

Urban utilities, such as city streets, sewers, drinking water networks are increasing, but are not correlated with the growth rate of construction, which suggests that investment in living spaces resulting from private investment is not harmonized with public investment in cities modernization, which depend on the public administration. The construction market model reveals that private investment in construction is dependent on investor-owned capital, distributed according to construction possibilities and land possessions, but which is decoupled from urban planning, suggesting that there is a risk of chaotic urban development, with areas that may currently be residential but which may be exposed to market fluctuations through lack of urban comfort.

The harmonious development of cities implies a correlation between private investment and the administrations town planning. The emergence of private enclaves on the urban areas territory, where the housing stock is extended without a

link to public investment in urban infrastructure, not only to the water, sewage and urban streets network, referring to the proximity to schools, hospitals, commercial spaces and industrial platforms implies the emergence of major risks in urban development. Thus, the attractiveness of the urban environment is affected by the tendency of enclavement of urban areas where it is probably built very expensive, without associating the residential center with the specific elements of the urban environment.

Notes: *The interpretations and processing of the data contained in this article belong to the author and do not reflect the World Bank point of view.*