

The Economic and Social Development of the Metropolitan Areas

Gabriela Stănciulescu¹, Olimpia State², Gabriela Țigu³

^{1,2,3} Prof. PhD, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies

ABSTRACT

The economic and social development process of the metropolitan areas needs to provide a balance between the existing resources and the way of planning these resources. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt some coherent and unitary programs for a balanced development of the entire area.

A sustainable approach for the improvement of the quality of life in the metropolitan areas will require an action integrated on the economic and social level of the environment and of the space in order to bring an improvement of the welfare of the metropolitan areas.

The present paper tries to look through some of the important aspects of the social and economic development from the metropolitan areas. The authors research these issues in the DEMOS project.

KEYWORDS

quality of life, welfare, metropolitan areas, sustainable development, public-private partnership

JEL Classification

L83, R11

In the last years, a major trend was registered in the development process of some forms of planning which are represented by the increasing number of suburbs in the territorial urban dynamics.

In what the suburb concept is concerned, this is mentioned in the reference literature “as an invention of the middle class” which embodies the ideal of a family life (Conference on towns and sustainable development, Hanover, February 2000). The basic unit of the suburban form is the house or the household, being detached (USA) or semi-detached (Great Britain).

The contrast between the suburbs, towns and rural areas gave birth to some hot debates from the experts, as for example in 1981 a series of architects and city fathers associated the term suburb with the word “filthy”. Suburbs were thought to be “monotonous, without personality, character, very much alike, and very boring”

Early from 1876, an observer of this phenomenon expressed his “real hatred” for the London suburbs and he saw them “as something which does not have the advantages of a town, nor the liberty from the countryside, but which manages to combine the disadvantages of the two”.

In spite of these there were also positive opinions related to the positive aspects of the suburbs. In 1864, Cesar Daly talks about the suburban architecture and reveals “the spirit and the character of its civilisation”. This fascination for suburbs seems to be shared by millions of inhabitants. There is for sure “conflict of the values” between those who choose to live in the suburbs and those professionals of the urban space which they criticise.

As an answer to the continuous growth of the suburbs there were adopted a series of initiatives in order to introduce a certain degree of control on this process. What is common to these measures and proposals, no matter their origin and orientation is their anti-urban shade. A anti-urban debate was developed meanwhile in Russia, after the Socialist Revolution from September. It was argued that the large and modern cities were the product of capitalism and did not fit to the communist utopia; they were “building up” people and wealth and were therefore excluded. The distrust in large cities has evolved at the same time with the distrust in rural population considered hostile to the revolution and

¹ Corresponding author: Gabriela Stănciulescu - gabriela_stanciulescu@yahoo.com

where the production patterns and the ownership did not foster the collective utopia. The anti-urbanism tendencies led to the proposal of “drainage” for the large business centres and to the preference for small towns inhabited by workers.

After one could see from the above mentioned aspects, the main characteristics of the urban development from the 20th century were represented by the affirmation of the metropolitan areas and the expansion of the suburbs. In time the decline of the urban centres was a threat for the urban utopias. Another anti-urban trend was the gradual withdrawal of the middle class from the outskirts metropolis. Contrary to this suburbanisation, the small towns were recognised and promoted as characteristics of the collective life, offering an alternative for micro-urbanism.

From the primary steps of its development, the human society has remodelled the natural frame creating the environment called by specialists “artificial”, composed of multiple equipments which serve the current requirement of population. The most synthetic form of materialization of the artificial environment is the locality adjusted in size, structure, facilities and look, so that they may correspond to the social exigencies.

Nowadays it is more and more difficult to set a strict delimitation between the natural and the artificial environment, taking into account that their organic symbiosis has created a new qualitative phenomenon, also called in the international terminology “human environment”. This concept was adopted in the 9th Congress of the International Union of Architects from Prague, 1967 which proclaimed the universal frame regarding the objective need of integrating the two environments which are apparently contradictory: the natural and the artificial environment. It also stated the means of eliminating the causes which lead to the disparity ratios with self-destructive effects for the human society. (Popescu, R. C. et al., 2004).

At the same time one also stated the fact that the contemporary society is caused by an extremely dangerous phenomenon, that of transforming the human environment in an anti-human environment, due to the inability of the people to understand the phenomenon in their complexity and globalisation. Among the causes of this process one can mention the excessive agglomeration of harmful industries for the environment, the concentration of the population in number and density in urban areas which go beyond the human scale, the chaotic development of the communication and transport networks which waste huge surface of land, the destruction of the fertile agricultural lands, the degradation of the forest areas, the pollution of the atmosphere, waters, etc.

Taking into account these aspects one can say that the development strategy of the metropolitan areas has to refer to the improvement of the living standard, on one hand and also to a balance of the needs of all the members of the community. Under these circumstances the inhabitants of the metropolitan area has to be the main target segment by setting the urban development policies without neglecting the evolutions of the regional, national or international environment. If the town manages to satisfy the needs of the segments from outside (tourists, investors, high-qualified workforce etc.), there will be created many opportunities for employment, the direct incomes of the population will grow and also the income of the local administration; this will be able to finance new development programs.

There is sometimes the tendency to concentrate the efforts of the municipalities on the improvement of the conditions for the business environment, the problems of the inhabitants (pollution, criminality, green areas, traffic etc.) being left behind by the local authorities. That is why the modernisation of the human settlements has to be a priority for the urban strategy; the actions referring to the improvement of the living standards of the inhabitants consist mainly of providing public services and basic infrastructure, the improvement of the living standard and the protection of the environment. (Erdeli, G. & Cucu, V., 2005).

For the institutional actors from Bucharest the main advantages of the metropolitan area are expected to be on one hand the relieve of traffic congestion of the town, of the urban agglomeration, and on the other hand the economic advantages which come out of the growth of the regional attraction for investors.

The communities around Bucharest especially the rural ones, expect that the metropolitan area of Bucharest will give them advantages, due to the following facts:

- (1) it will lead to an improvement of the technical and transport infrastructure;
- (2) there will be more working places after attracting investors and
- (3) the welfare of the population will grow.

There are a series of disadvantages anticipated by the institutional actors, both from Bucharest and from the limitrophe areas. The main disadvantage for the ones from Bucharest is the emergence of some speculative tendencies on the real estate market which will lead to a burst of prices for the lands. Other disadvantages for the institutional actors from Bucharest are in the short coverage with public services (health services for example) under the circumstances when the demand for such services will be increasing as a consequence of the growth of the number of inhabitants in the limitrophe areas of Bucharest. On the level of rural communities, the expectations related to the negative effects of Bucharest metropolitan area are represented by the degradation of the environment due to the increasing number of houses and the loss of local authority.

A sustainable approach for the improvement of the quality of life in some metropolitan areas will need an action integrated on the social, economic level of the spatial environment in order to lead to an improvement of the welfare of the metropolitan areas. These inter-relational aspects can be approached by creating a Regional Integrated Strategy for Sustainable Development, produced and accepted by different interested factors from the public, private and associated sectors and carried out due to the active involvement of the public.

The development process of the metropolitan areas needs to provide a balance between the existing resources and the way of planning them. Therefore one has to adopt some coherent and unitary programs which should follow the balanced development of the entire area.

The steps undertaken for the development of the metropolitan areas I presuppose the elaboration of a policy which should contribute to a better space planning. The need for a spatial planning is manifested under two main aspects: the first is the circumstance of transferring the economic development strategy into fact. The second refers to the correction of some dysfunctions or development errors which appear due to a lack of spatial planning.

The unplanned and uncontrolled evolution of an important socio-economic phenomenon, as for example the urban development leads inevitably to disparities (Cocian, P., 2002). In Romania there are two types of disparities:

- disparities created by spatial planning carried out in the communist period when there were created industrial areas which were set in an inefficient way in the centre of the town, residential areas with a too high population density, with a lack of space between the buildings and a too large number of floors etc. The planning errors – based on ideology – create high problems in the traffic, common transport, the duration of the travel to work, the availability of the services and the quality of life;
- another type of disparities was created by the lack of urban development planning which began after 1990. This development almost without restrictions has caused some imbalances and urban errors, as it follows:
 - a degradation of the natural peripheral places and spaces;
 - the alienation of the social groups from one another;

- the emergence of some new needs which involve the increased supervised movement;
- putting in danger the budgets of the local collectivity,
- overuse of the natural and rural spaces,
- degradation of the landscape.

The elimination of these errors implies a good urban planning sustained by the political purpose on the level of the decision factors. In the competition for foreign financing which will be more and more exigent in the large development areas from the country, the correct development and the good usage of the instrument of urban planning could stand for the difference between those who are attracting and those who are loosing from the population groups (young, educated, dynamic people with high incomes) which represent the engine of the development. Thus, in order to retrieve the disparities from urban planning, one needs to provide:

- A balance between the urban modernisation, urban development controlled by the development of the rural space on one hand and the preservation of the natural area on the other hand;
- The diversity of the urban functions and the social diversity in the urban and rural environment.
- The economic and balanced use of the natural, urban, peri-urban and rural spaces, controlling the need of movement and the traffic of the vehicles, preserving the quality of the air, water, soil, under-soil, ecosystems, green areas, places and natural or urban landscapes, reduction of the urban pollution,
- Protection of the special urban settlements and of the heritage constructions, preventing the predictable natural, technological risks, the general pollution.

The degree of attractiveness of an urban area is measured through the number and quality of what is called “excellence poles” consisting of the following objectives:

- universities,
- medical centres,
- research structures,
- high technology enterprises,
- cultural, sports, entertainment, exhibition infrastructures, financial markets,
- headquarters of large European and international companies,
- a high volume of economic and financial exchange,
- affiliation to large European and international networks with the help of the European accession possibilities (highway, airport, fast train).

Taking into account the presented facts, the spatial planning process has to provide:

A) the uniform integration of the metropolitan areas in the county, regional, national and Euro-regional European territory by outlining the relationship with the polycentric regional development centres and the tertiary towns from the influential area of the municipality, the development of a favourable business environment by promoting the financial, administrative, consulting, telecommunication functions, etc. One also aims at the development of the relations of the municipality with members of the metropolitan area in order to create inter-communal systems, to adopt urban measures meant to improve the comfort and the efficiency of the functions of the places in order to strengthen the regional function of the metropolitan areas.

B) Creating a functional, balanced network of localities in the space of the metropolitan areas, where all commons play an important role and the municipality has a key role in the territorial dynamics by – reducing the discrepancy between the development stage of the municipality and the one of the towns and surrounding villages,-increasing the degree of urbanisation and comfort of the

localities from the metropolitan area in order to improve the living and working standards of the population, -the growth of the comfort degree of the localities, – the refurbishment and transformation of the central historical areas.

One also aims at the same time to provide a functional diversity and state the territorial role of the localities. The activation of some non-agricultural function in the villages having a socio-economic potential, in order to promote new towns and inter-communal centres takes place along with the balanced distribution of the productive activities related to the traditions of those places, the stock of local raw material and the distribution of the economic activities on a regional plan in all localities, – the balanced placement of the service activities in all localities in order to make the distribution activity efficient, – promoting the specialization and the diversification of the functions in all the localities of the county in order to distribute uniformly the resources and the information, – carrying out a correct report between the supra-territorial function and the local ones of the localities involved in the regional dynamics.

C) The development and the diversification of the relation between localities by increasing the mobility through communication and transport and by building and modernising section of communication networks between localities, – implementing new types of suburban transport in the areas which are highly circulated and adapting the mobility to the requirements from the surrounding places, – expanding the public transport network in the surrounding villages.

D) Creating some developed technical infrastructures related to the needs of the local communities and with the protection of the environment by – improving the accessibility of all areas by modernizing and developing the local communication networks, – planning hydrographical basins and improving the water supply, the water and waste drainage by adductions, accumulation, banking, – sustainable planning of the hydrographical basins, – efficient waste management, – reduction of the resources and surfaces of land affected by waste deposits, – creating some networks of transport and distribution of the electric energy and telecommunications which should meet the requirements, – improving the natural gas supply.

E) Protecting and planning the elements from the natural environment and reducing the natural and anthropic risks.

Taking into account the balanced development of the metropolitan areas, the guiding principle has to be a planning policy of the urban spare oriented towards growth, and sustained by the regional integration policy, and based on a sustained cooperation with the private sector and taking into account the exigencies of the environment protection through some impact studies on the environment (Neguț, S., Alexandru, D. & Suditu, B., 2000). The development of the new communication technologies might also contribute to the consolidation of the information and knowledge exchange between different urban areas. (Neguț, S., Alexandru, D. & Suditu, B., 2000).

An important role in the metropolitan planning policy goes to the private sector, which acts as a driving force for the social development and for the territorial development, one of the tasks of the territorial planning being to provide a development perspective and to guarantee a security in terms of private investors. Moreover, the territory planning policy will have to contribute, together with the adequate sectorial policies to the growth of the attractiveness of the municipalities and regions for private investments on a local and regional level. The large programs which were granted in the private sector will have to meet the global planning objectives for each region. For example, the high speed railways and their nodal points, the airports, the congress and conference centres may be an important dynamics of the economic progress contributing thus to a balanced territorial development, under the circumstance of an adequate prospective planning. Taking into account these facts, the administrations involved have to provide some positive results of the multiplicative effect of the large

projects, and urban planning has to contribute to the reduction of competition between local communities and to the improvement of the investment climate.

Beside the in-kind capital contribution, this partnership may allow for the completion of the public services which provide essential functions.

As a consequence of the lack of public finances which are unable to meet the needs of the society, especially in the field of technical and social infrastructure, and of the associated services, the importance of the private investments for the accomplishment of the territorial development objectives should be growing in the future only if the public-private partnership is sustained in the sectors which were once limited only for public activities. There are many types of infrastructures and services involved (transport, telecommunication, health care, education etc.), but also the local development sector.

An important condition for the success of the public-private partnerships lies in the efficiency of the administrative structures, not only on the national but also on the regional and local level, which will have to determine a frame for the private interests and to accompany efficiently the projects.

A central element for the general development policy of urban planning are the basic infrastructure and the public services and the preoccupations of the public authorities are to provide their citizens an adequate frame for the development of the activities so that the requirements related to the preservation of the resources and the protection of the environment could be respected. In other words, the main problems which have to be solved on the level of the metropolitan areas refer to:

- the development of the basic infrastructure and the unlimited access of the population, industrial consumers and tourists to this infrastructure,
- the promotion of some strategies related to the improvement of the houses,
- providing modern transport systems and modern traffic management,
- protecting the environment by promoting the principle of sustainable development.

Under the circumstances when the existence of a basic infrastructure is not sufficient to provide the competitiveness of a town, the low level of the infrastructure or its absence may lead to discomfort or complaints from the visitors thus contributing to the promotion of a negative image even under the circumstance where the natural and anthropic tourism potential is very attractive. An essential aspect of the investments in the basic infrastructure is that of transmitting an alarm regarding the degree of attractiveness of the towns and to reduce the foreign migration flow of the persons seeking for better living and working conditions.

Beyond the need of providing public services and infrastructure, the problems which need to be solved refer to the way of using the resources that is a reduced energy, water consumption, waste recycling, etc.

The quantities of consumed resources are influenced by the placement of the tourism places, the accessibility of the resource, the technologic facilities of the units (recycling systems, low energy consumptions systems etc.), the level of the prices for public utilities, but also the education level of the visitors.

In the accommodation industry, water is one of the most frequently used resources (cleaning, restrooms, bars, restaurants, green areas, swimming pools, etc.), and the solutions which aim the quality and the reduction of consumption may be related to the use of filters, discharge limiting devices, providing equipments which can offer a regular flow of water supply etc. At the same time saving energetic resources should be a priority in building design and urban planning. Taking into account these problems, there should be some preoccupation on the level of local authorities related to the management of the resources which involves the integration of the energetic, material, financial and human resources flow in a natural cycle, but also identifying the needs of the local communities and of its priorities according to the expectations of the visitors.

Another priority in the development of the basic infrastructure is to create some modern transport systems, but also to increase the traffic security which will lead to the growth of accessibility and mobility of the persons but also to the development of some economic growth poles.

The need for integrating the continuous development and improvement measures of the transport infrastructure in the urban development strategy resides in the pressure exerted by the territorial and economic growth on transport.

At the same time the demographic evolution, the development of the tourism sector, the organisation of the production processes, the dispersed placement of the suburbs points out the growth of the demand for transport services. That is why the preoccupations of the local authorities in the development of the transport systems has to take into account both the satisfaction of the requirements of the population and of the visitors, the presence of the tourism flows generating complaints for both types of consumers.

In order to increase the attractiveness of the town, the problems related to traffic and transport have to be included in the urban planning studies and projects, the main objective being to find the most adequate solutions to provide the access of the population and of the visitors to all points of interest. The solutions should refer to the economic activity, supply, education, entertainment and tourism attractions. The adopted measures will take into account the analysis of the frequency and intensity of the traffic, as well as the most suitable means of transport.

In what the interurban transport is concerned, the most frequently used means are the roads. The objectives will also deal with the relations between the town and the surrounding area, but also with the need for specific facilities as for example parking places and garages situated in the neighbourhood of the main facilities.

Referring to the intra-urban transport, the main objective is to provide access for all points of interest of the town taking into account the placement of the economic, commercial, tourism units etc., and of all the important traffic areas (historic centres, railway stations, and sport clubs).

Under these circumstances the solutions for the problems generated by traffic will be adopted according to the type, size and functions of the town, as it follows:

- for small towns, with historic centres which have to be preserved, one needs to plan the roads and the parking places in their vicinity, and the access should be only for pedestrians; at the same time in the central areas there should be some traffic restrictions and the traffic should be directed to the belt highways of the town;
- for the cities, the urban plans will be focused on the placement of the activities according to the transport system; the public transport is encouraged and there are introduced where it is possible traffic restrictions in the central areas.

If these preoccupations are not included in the urban development strategy, it will lead to the situation in which the traffic becomes incompatible with the structure and the function of the town generating complaints, traffic jams, the growth of daily travel costs which will also lead to the reduction of the attractiveness of the urban destination.

Taking into consideration these aspects, the size of the equipments which provide the access to the basic infrastructure is designated according to the size of the towns and to their importance in the regional development, as well as according to the priorities settled in the territorial planning. (Nițulescu, D., 1998).

The problem of living in the urban space is determined by the economic development of each country and region, by the demographic burst, by the specific cultural-historic traditions. Under these circumstances one can say that there is not uniform model for this problem to solve. In spite of these,

there are some elements which have to be carried out so that the residential complexes could provide a corresponding urban comfort:

- diversification of the tenements according to side, organization, facilities respecting the limits imposed by the incomes of the inhabitants;
- providing an additional number of tenements which should allow the families to move according to the structure of their income and occupation;
- correlating the comfort of the tenement with the complex it belongs to;
- setting the optimum level of density for the buildings;
- adapting each residential area to the architectural style of the town.

An important role for the housing policy is the integration of the buildings in the urban system and there are often discovered rejections of the new implantations in the traditional urban structure. The aspects related to the connection to the facility system of the town, the access to the areas which are of major interest (centres, technical facilities, green spaces, entertainment places, etc.) have to be taken in consideration when designing the building complexes.

At the same time the proper placement of the buildings will take into account the following:

- general characteristics of the area (precipitations, winds, earthquakes)
- placement related to the town,
- relations with the main functional areas, planning the additional areas, etc., the characteristics of the land (shape, relief, plantations, structure of the soil, phreatic waters)

Taking into account these aspects, the plan for a housing area will be integrated so that it consist of tenements (individual or collective according to the architectural design), commercial buildings, parking places, schools, necessary infrastructure for the daily needs of the residents. If there are historic buildings in the area (from the national cultural heritage), they will be rehabilitated (façade and interior) without affecting the basic project. These buildings should not be transformed or dismantled.

This housing area will have a centre which should combine the commercial functions with the civic, cultural and entertainment functions and will also include open square spaces, green spaces or parks; the open spaces will have a design which should encourage the residents to come and to improve their relations in the community or communities from that functional area. Therefore there will be large pedestrian spaces and bicycle path.

Another aspect related to the design of the houses refers to the planning of resting places, playgrounds and sport grounds, green areas, the latter contributing among other to the protection against phonic and acoustic pollution and being an adequate frame for rest and entertainment.

The socio-cultural facilities are also highly important because their placement will be carried out according to the daily use and the service area is 500 m (education, commercial, service, cultural, sanitary units etc.) or periodical use with a service area of maximum 1.500 m (cinemas, libraries, supermarkets, restaurants post office, police, etc.)

The sociological survey is used for the determination of the necessary socio-cultural facilities and their capacities pr the methods of calculations through multidisciplinary determinations.

In what the placement of the municipal facilities in concerned, these will be provided as it follows:

- the education units will be placed isolated providing the access from the whole area, the safety in traffic, the neighbouring planted spaces, the protection towards the polluting agents (noise, dust, smells etc.) the distance of the service places being almost 600 to 1.500 m.
- the commercial facilities, public foodservice, services and tourism will be places in the complex centres, situated in highly circulated and visible places, at important crossroads of the pedestrian or vehicle access areas.

Both the sizing and the placement of the socio-cultural facilities are strongly connected to the evolution of the urban comfort level, and to the growth of the living standard; that is why the urban development strategies need to seek for some flexible solution which should allow for an expansion under the circumstances of the demographic growth and of the activities.

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