

The Impact of Metropolitan Development on Recreation Areas Planning

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the intensification of economic competitiveness, depending both on the economic activities unfolded as well as on their territorial location, on the distribution and spatial relationships that these activities have with resources, on afferent workforce, on the equipment, services and sales markets, it is obvious that the urban strategy has to be directed towards the involvement of urban centers, of metropolitan areas in harnessing natural and cultural resources, thus constituting a hierarchical system of multi/zones of development by realizing competitive products and services. Having to consider all these, the intensification of the influence of the equipment and recreation areas system on the economic vitality of the metropolis, on the complexity and quality of the recreation services and equipments, enhance the reputation and image of a region and has positive effects on its attractiveness; at the same time, the recreation service system creates jobs, stimulates tourism and facilitates a series of advantages regarding the economic and social domains.

KEYWORDS

planning, recreation areas, metropolitan areas, tourism

JEL Classification

L83, R11

The explosive dynamic of society has as consequence, among others, the appearance of great urban agglomerations. But the development of such forms of social organization has to be a sustainable one, capable of harmonizing the protection and preservation of the environment with the economic and social progress, with the improvement of the people's living and working conditions.

Within this process, among the requirements that stand out more obviously there is also that of leisure; therefore, metropolitan development has to find solutions for the problems that are specific to an efficient conception and operation of certain areas intended to facilitate recreation activities.

1. Aspects regarding the development of metropolitan areas and the changes produced in economy and social life

The formation and development of metropolitan areas represent a natural tendency in urban evolution. International experience has clearly enough demonstrated that the organization of metropolitan areas has a significant contribution to economic and social development and to answering some problems regarding space management and the protection of the environment. (Arias&Borja 2007)

With respect to economic development, the vast surfaces on which the metropolitan areas are stretching, in comparison to cities and even megalopolises, the greater diversity of resources and associatedly of the economic branches represent advantages of these areas and also fundamental conditions for their progress; through their characteristics, metropolitan areas provide opportunities for a viable and prospective economic development, assure a superior exploitation of the resources and the fact that, in our opinion is a specific issue and represents an advantage, they privilege a relationship of complementarity between the various

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economic branches. Practically, in these areas we can talk about an integrated development, an evolution less dependent on other areas, having an impact at the level of the reinvestment of the benefits in order to achieve their own prosperity. (Padurean 2007)

At a social level, it is obvious that the economic development will generate an improvement of the living conditions. Besides meeting existential necessities at a superior level, the development of metropolitan areas will lead to the reduction of disparities, irregularities and social exclusion; likewise, this fact will be reflected in the growth of the level of culture, training and education, will stimulate the reinforcement of social relationships, of interaction and relationships between the inhabitants of the settlements that compose the respective area.

Positive evolutions at the economic and social levels will generate an increase of the interest for recreation and tourism activities; on the one hand, there will exist the material means necessary for these activities to be unfolded (incomes, automobile equipment, sports equipment etc), and, on the other side, more and more people will grow aware of the advantages of being involved in such activities.

The development of metropolitan areas has also impact upon the environment (Popescu 2003) and upon the use of the land, respectively; be it either the resource consumption, or the extension of surfaces with buildings or transformed in order to meet various necessities, the environment will be affected.

Irrespective of the strategy adopted for metropolitan development (Bonnet 2000) – and here we refer to the option between centralization and decentralization and the afferent models – creating these strategies in connection to the tendencies of the economic and social dynamic worldwide, determines a series of transformations with consequences on the purposes of the area and the intensity of its usage. Among the most important ones there can be mentioned:

- changes in the economic structure by focusing on the branches with intensive intelligence, on tertiary activities, on the “green” ones, the impact upon the environment being more diminished;
- modifications in the structure of workforce, of the degree of occupancy with consequences on the recreation activity;
- the development and diversification of transportation, optimizing the relationship between public and private, the surface and underground relationships, etc basically, having a negative impact upon the environment (pollution) and upon the extension of the areas assigned for these equipments (terminals, highways, railways, etc)
- spatial decentralization of the administrative positions; changing the hierarchy imposed by the direct physical relationship between center and outskirts, triggering out the increasing importance of the role of the outskirts;
- blurring the differences between the urban landscape and the rural one, etc

These directions and other associated ones have influence upon the usage of the area in the sense that the pressure on the area is rising but also that some activities, especially the industrial ones, are relocated by creating different parks (for research, production, business, commercial activities, etc), by reorganizing the land intended for residence building through creating residential areas on the outskirts, creating development corridors overlapping the transport corridors, etc.

All these transformations imply a series of changes in recreation areas planning.

2. Typology of recreation areas

Leisure areas are made up of grass plots (parks, gardens) and areas fitted out for practicing different entertainment activities (sports or spare time facilities). These areas may be located in the interior of the urban residences that compose the metropolitan area or outside these residences, in forest areas, in an area contiguous with watercourses or lakes, etc. From the point of view of the development, these may not be

developed at all or may be slightly developed (parks, forests) or simply developed (fields for practicing different sports) or having a more complex development (such as mini resorts, weekend destinations, amusement parks etc). Moreover, from the perspective of the beneficiary, these areas may be projected for the inhabitants of the metropolitan area or other categories of visitors (tourists) may as well benefit from the development of these areas.

An interesting classification, that takes into account various criteria (Minciu 1995) out of the ones previously mentioned such as: the type of activities unfolded, their size and location, the weighting and exigency regarding the protection of the environment etc, brings into discussion two main categories:

- *active recreation* areas (leisure areas facilitating sports, cultural, entertainment activities, having a wide range of activities, often with a high rate of built-up and fitted out surfaces in comparison to the natural ones)
- *passive recreation* areas (urban and peri-urban, botanical gardens, natural reservations and public access forests etc., with very few buildings and with a slight planning of the landscape).

“Active” recreation areas are intended for more complex and diversified recreation activities, that may require equipments, important buildings and plannings and/or that have large dimensions, having a higher level of usage of the field and a greater impact on the surrounding area, both because of the physical, spatial presence and because of the flow of population, traffic and parking areas, even because of the potential pollution effects. These areas have a sports, cultural or entertainment nature and are located both in the urban territory and in the peri-urban territory.

The significant population waves that these areas generate, at least occasionally (for example during the weekend, or on the occasion of certain sports or cultural manifestations) as well as the need of limiting auto mobility and the great necessity for large parking surfaces required by this mobility, determine a careful organization of accesibility in these recreation areas. It is recommended that the location of such an area be set taking into account a well organized service of public transportation, in connection with a junction (station) of a transportation network system, eventually intermodal transportation (intermodal pole) or in zones that are already wellknown as recreation destinations (note the fact that metropolitan areas do not develop on a vacant land).

At present, there is a general opinion considering that even the integrated commercial areas providing entertainment, cultural and sports services, hypermarkets, malls and multiplex units (veritable poles of recreation activities and spending spare time) are part of the category of “active” recreation areas. The concept of commercial “park” also implies the modifications of these areas regarding physical and spatial characteristics, having to consider the intensification of their recreation characteristic, leading to the increase of the rate of grass plots, to the increase of the development quality and to a greater concern for the opportunities that the landscape of these areas offer.

“Pasive” recreation areas are intended for “mild” recreation activities, that do not imply equipments, buildings and complex or great dimension planning, having a diminished impact on the respective natural landscape, on the surrounding area, on the natural or built-up patrimony. The level of protection requirements regarding the natural or cultural patrimony or regarding the quality of living in adjacent areas is very high and this fact leads to restrictive conditions regarding building-up, both from a spatial and configurative point of view (low level of land occupancy, small dimensions buildings, low degree of de anthropization etc.) as well as from a functional point of view (functional profile limited to “mild” activities, having low impact visually, auditorily and chemically). For example, large touristic and recreation equipments cannot be set in sensitive landscape areas or in biotopes of great importance and value. From a

functional point of view, “passive” recreation areas may host activities related to sports, tourism, leisure, walks, but without a “mass” nature, intensive and compatible with the characteristics of the area.

3. Problems regarding recreation areas planning in the structure of metropolitan areas

The development of metropolitan areas has a clear impact on the areas intended for recreation activities and the influences can be manifested at different levels, respectively:

- dimensions – the surfaces assigned to recreation activities
- location/position in space
- planning – specific equipment

With respect to the dimensions, there are almost unanimous opinions that admit the necessity for their extension (that is of the assigned surfaces) as a result of the increasing demand regarding recreation activities, determined in turn by the action of certain favourable factors such as (Minciu 2004):

- increase of the urbanization degree – the close similarity of the organization mode of social life in small towns and rural residences that compose the metropolitan area, with the core city (cities) has as consequence a greater density of the buildings, agglomeration, phonic pollution, air and water pollution etc, intensifying the need for escaping into the natural environment
- increasing the spare time and another purpose of this spare time during the calendaristic year
- considerable availability of material and financial resources for practicing recreation activities
- changing the consumption habits etc.

In addition, the increasing demand for recreation activities is doubled by the increasing exigence regarding the complexity and diversity of the facilities supplied, regarding the quality of the services.

Another aspect that has to be taken into account when setting the dimensions of recreation areas refers to the concept of urban development (horizontally or vertically, concentrically or in a polynuclear direction etc) and the relationship between built-up areas and grass plots. For example, excessive urban development is brought about by the reduction of surfaces representing grass plots; or the development of residential areas triggers off problems regarding redimensioning or relocation of the activities.

The issue of recreation areas and mainly of grass plots is a very important one with respect to the planning of a certain level of the quality of living, a reason for which there are established or enacted norms at an European level or at the level of different countries. From this point of view, the situation in Romania and especially in Bucharest, is a disastrous one.

In this context, more and more specialists talk about a relationship of complementarity between grass plots, for recreation in the interior and outside the urban agglomerations (as a compromise to the insufficiency of these plots in the cities), a relationship that should be taken into account especially in the development of the metropolitan area of Bucharest.

The position, location in the territory of recreation areas is another problem of the planning of these areas. Besides the option of setting the area in the interior or outside urban agglomerations there has to be taken into account the access that has to be provided both with means of public transport and with specific ones (Heyns & Schoeman 2006); moreover, an important restriction is that of the duration of the travel. It is needless to say that a location that is too far away from the urban agglomerations and/or that can be accessed with difficulty will considerably reduce its importance.

In selecting the areas intended for leisure, for entertainment, in the specific case of those located outside the cities, there appears the problem regarding the “tolerable vicinity”, the compatibility with the other activities against the background of their relocation. Setting the industrial, agricultural, construction, commercial, storage (especially of waste products) activities and those of the airports outside the cities, reduces drastically the options for the development of recreation areas.

In what concerns the contents of the equipments, in connection with what has been previously mentioned, there can be distinguished poorly planned areas or areas that are not at all planned, especially in the category of grass plots – parks, forest areas etc – and planned areas. In this second case, the equipment firstly regards the ways of access; then the recreation means or equipments, that have to be diverse (to cater for all age categories and physical condition) and accessible from the point of view of the price (gratuitous and for a fee); moreover, these equipments may be simple or more complex, such as amusement parks etc.

Leisure areas planning has positive effects not only upon the living conditions but also upon the economic field, as the production of entertainment equipments stimulates the economic development and the creation of new workplaces; in addition, the activity of entertainment areas stimulates tourism and the benefits it brings contribute to the improvement of the image of the respective destinations.

Leisure activities may also have a negative impact upon the natural and inhabited environment, upon the inhabitants, upon the ecosystems and landscapes. Consequently, the planning of the areas intended for this kind of activities has to be realized paying very much attention.

In relation to the general problems that have been mentioned, recreation areas planning as well as the development of metropolitan areas has to be adapted to the geographic, social and economic conditions encountered.

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