

PĂDUREA NEAGRĂ: GEOGRAPHICAL ASPECTS WITH A BEARING ON DEVELOPMENT¹

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Abstract: The town of Aleşd is an urban centre whose economic evolution is determining for the area it polarizes whilst playing the part of coordinator of local development. The administrative surface of the town is quite large (7,195 ha) as rural places such as Tinaud, Pestis and Padurea Neagra, the latter of these being situated at a 20 km distance from Alesd were added. Pădurea Neagră, appertaining to the town of Aleşd, holds a privileged position within the administrative territory, as it lies in an attractive mountain relief, more specifically in the Plopiş Mountains. The settlement is first linked to the setting-up of the Glass Manufacturing Factory in the early 19th century, but which has ceased its activity at present. The economic revival, which was triggered by the development of the 'lohn'-type industry that started in 1999, as a result of the inclusion of Alesd in an underprivileged area scheme, is not however apparent in Pădurea Neagră as well. So far, only the existence of some rural Bed&Breakfast pensions is to be noted. A random development, in the absence of strategies for durable development, could trigger the thwarting of drive and determination, indeed of incentive, the decrease of the offer and demand of the area, and eventually the undermining of perspectives for development in the long term. The current expansion of the town is of a rather spontaneous nature and it is being accomplished at present pre-eminently by the increase of its touristic function. The anticipation and control of this phenomenon with a view to durable development can only be achieved by planned extension that should take into account the existent potential and dysfunction. Under these circumstances, the evaluation of the inhabitable potential of the area proves crucial to the activity of territorial planning. Given that the mineral resources, as well as the human task force (i.e. the highly qualified work force) have dwindled considerably, the special touristic potential – along with the infrastructure potential – represents the main basis for future development.

Keywords: local development; territorial fitting-out, tourism

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At European level, the associations amongst local territorial communities with a view to sustaining mutual development projects have engendered inter-community structures of various sizes. As regards Romania, such forms of territorial cooperation are still incipient, the set-up of TPU's by Regional Development Agencies in collaboration with County Councils are an example of the optimization of territorial development.

The *Crișul Repede Valley* is one of the eleven territorial planning unit (TPU's) of Bihor County, having the town of Alesd as a pole for development. In its turn, the latter is subordinated to the zonal-importance centre that holds macro-territorial functions, i.e. the city of Oradea.

Situated at a distance of 38 km from Oradea and 112 km westwards from Cluj-Napoca, the town of Alesd ranks at the bottom of the urban pyramid, i.e. its population is, according to the 2002 census, 10,376 Inhabitants (out of which 7,387 in the town proper).

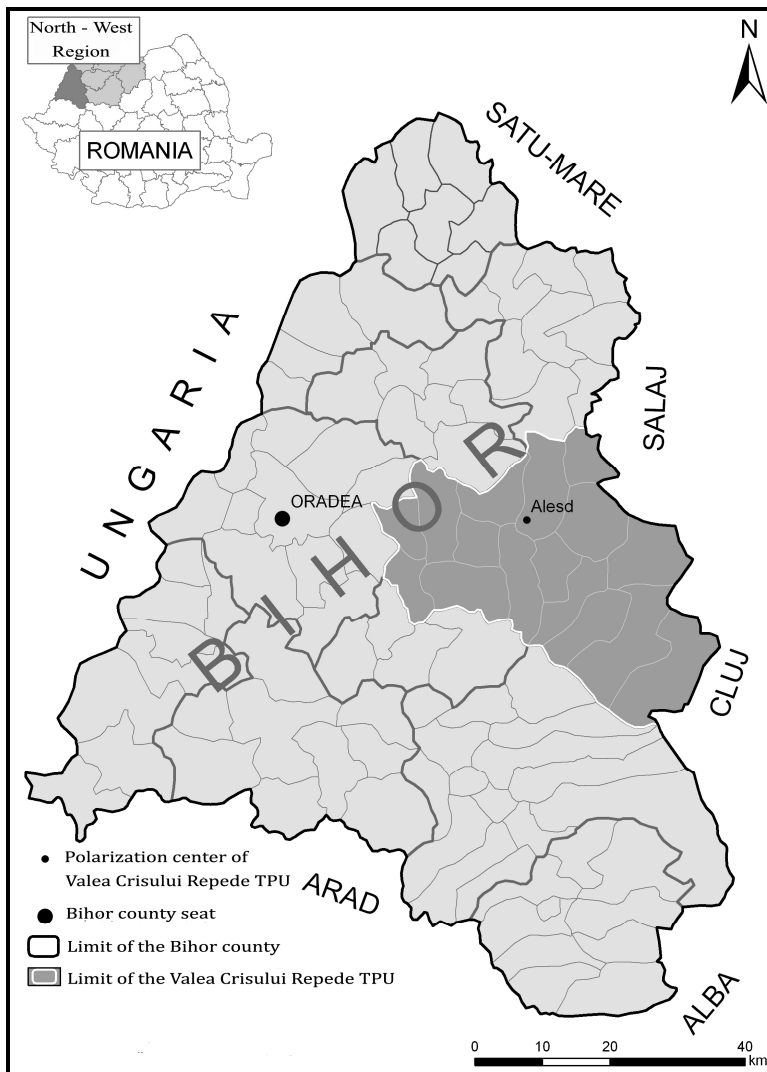


Fig. 1. The TPU's Bihor County

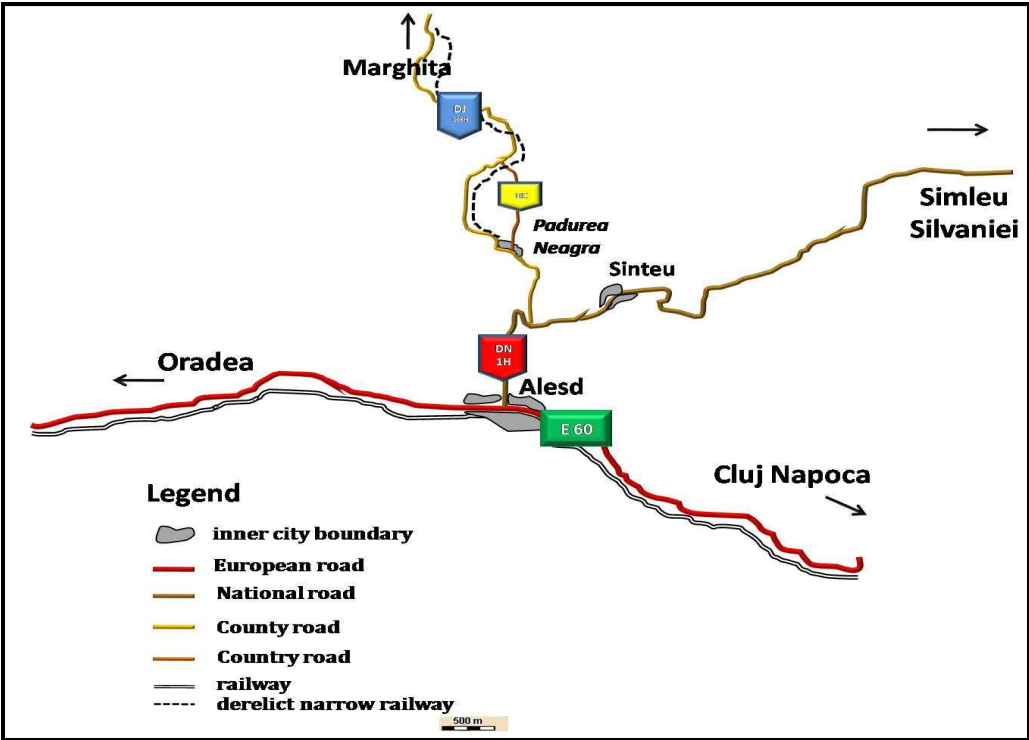


Fig. 2. Infrastructure and ways of access

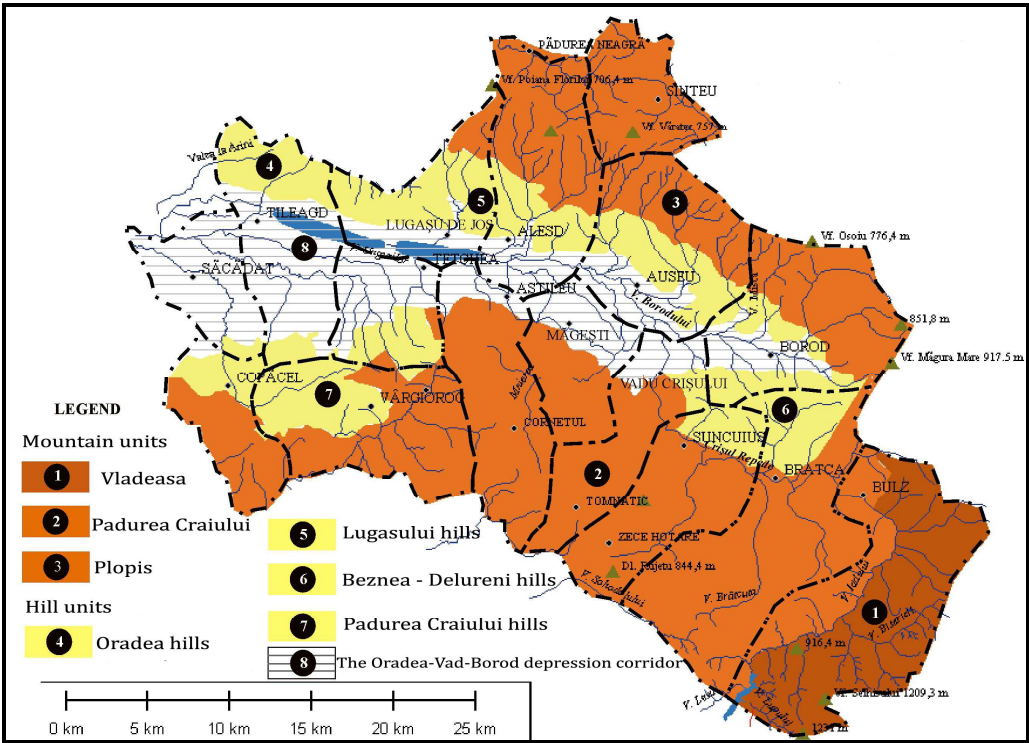


Fig. 3. Crișu Repede Valley TPU. Relief units

The largest part of the town (49%) is in the Plopișului Mountains, only 16% of it in the hearth of the depression, and 36% in Lugaș Hills. This has influenced the way the land-plots have been used, (the agricultural surfaces do not exceed 35% of the total surface of the Aleșd area, whereas the forests represent 58% of the total surface), and also the density of the population (only 150 inhabitants/km²)

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Pădurea Neagră, appertaining to the town of Aleșd, holds a privileged position within the administrative territory, as it lies in an attractive mountain relief, more specifically in the Plopiș Mountains. The settlement is first linked to the setting-up of the Glass Manufacturing Factory in the early 19th century, but which has ceased its activity at present. The Slovak population of Pădurea Neagră currently accounts for only 16% of the population at large, as most of the former have emigrated to Slovakia and Hungary seeking a job that is adequate to their qualifications.

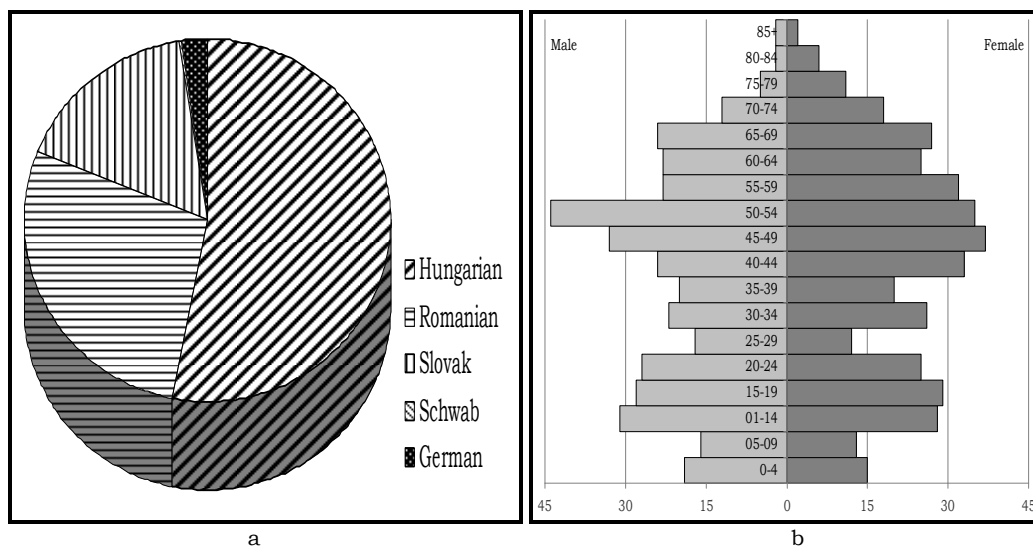


Fig. 4. Pădurea Neagră. a, Pyramid of Ages; b, Ethnic Structure of the Population

Two thirds of the current population (i.e. 769 inhabitants) is unemployed, almost half of it consists of pensioners, the employed population is merely 2%. The high values of emigration figures are determined by the departure of the Slovak population, but also by the internal migration of people to the villages in the depression. The migratory ratio, defined as the difference between the entrance and exit from the system against the numbers of the population of the area, offers a clear image of the mobility of the population. The analysis of this yields the following findings: the value of the migratory ratio is a negative one, i.e. -44.2‰. The negative value is a consequence of both the internal and external migration.

In the economy of the place, the weight of agriculture is rather non-significant, as industry overrides all. Between 1999 and 2008, the town of Aleșd was part of the underprivileged region of Aleșd-Popești-Derna (Government

Ordinance No: 24/1994, modified by Law No: 20/1999). During this period, the region benefited from several advantages with a view to making it appealing to investors and to thus ensure economic resuscitation. More specifically, investors were granted a package of fiscal facilities in the long term (i.e. customs tax exemption and VAT exemption for the machines, equipment, tools, means of transport, and other goods that are imported with a view to making investments in the area; customs tax exemption for raw material imported with a view to stimulating production in the area; exemption from payment of the profit tax during the existence of the 'underprivileged area' scheme; exemption from taxes for change of purpose or obliteration from the agricultural circuit of land plots meant for the achievement of the investment).

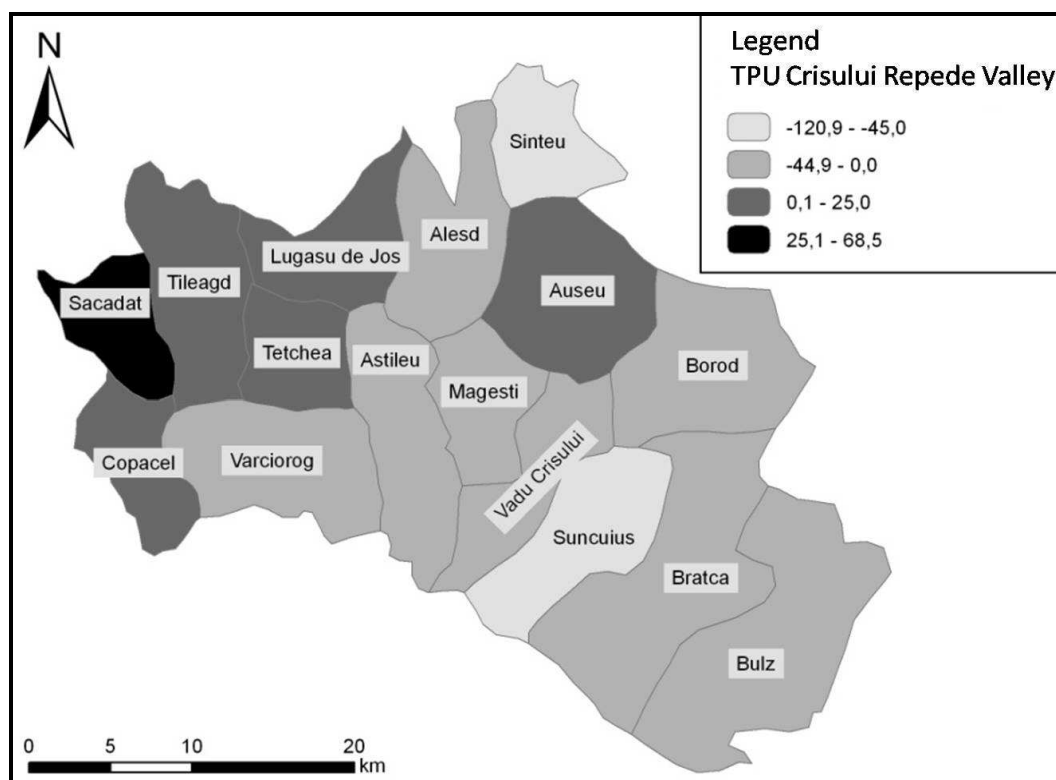


Fig. 5. The migratory balance at commune level (2000-2006)

However, the development of the area was pervaded by stagnation until the emergence of the "lohn"-type light industry. The economic boost triggered by the development of the 'lohn'-type industry that started in 1999 along with the inclusion of Alesd in the 'underprivileged region' scheme, was unfortunately non-existent in Padurea Neagra. There were only two lohn production units that only functioned for a few months. The glass manufacturing industry, which has a long tradition in the area and equally importantly, qualified work force, was only functional until 1996.

From an urban point of view, the town yields some characteristics that are less defining for the rural space it belongs to, rather falling within the category of small urban places, in point of its linear structure, dominated by

industrial mono-functionalism. Hence, numerous differences are visible at the level of the street layout, of functional area structures (the existence of an extended industrial area) and of the dwellings pool.

The straightforward street layout, highly adapted to the relief configuration, generally overlaps the roads that ensure access into town (i.e. DJ 108H and DC 146). The inner streets are pretty precariously represented; indeed they are rather alleys leading to the blocks-of-flats. A new street is being built however on the right bank of the Bistra river, to be used by the dwellers of the newly-built holiday houses in the area.

The functional area configuration of the place is characterized by simplicity: the first inner city block (RTU 1 according to GUP), upstream on the Bistra river valley, holds a double function: i.e. a residential one and one for services; the second inner city block (RTU 2) holds an industrial function and a facilities one, respectively (i.e. the water treatment plant).

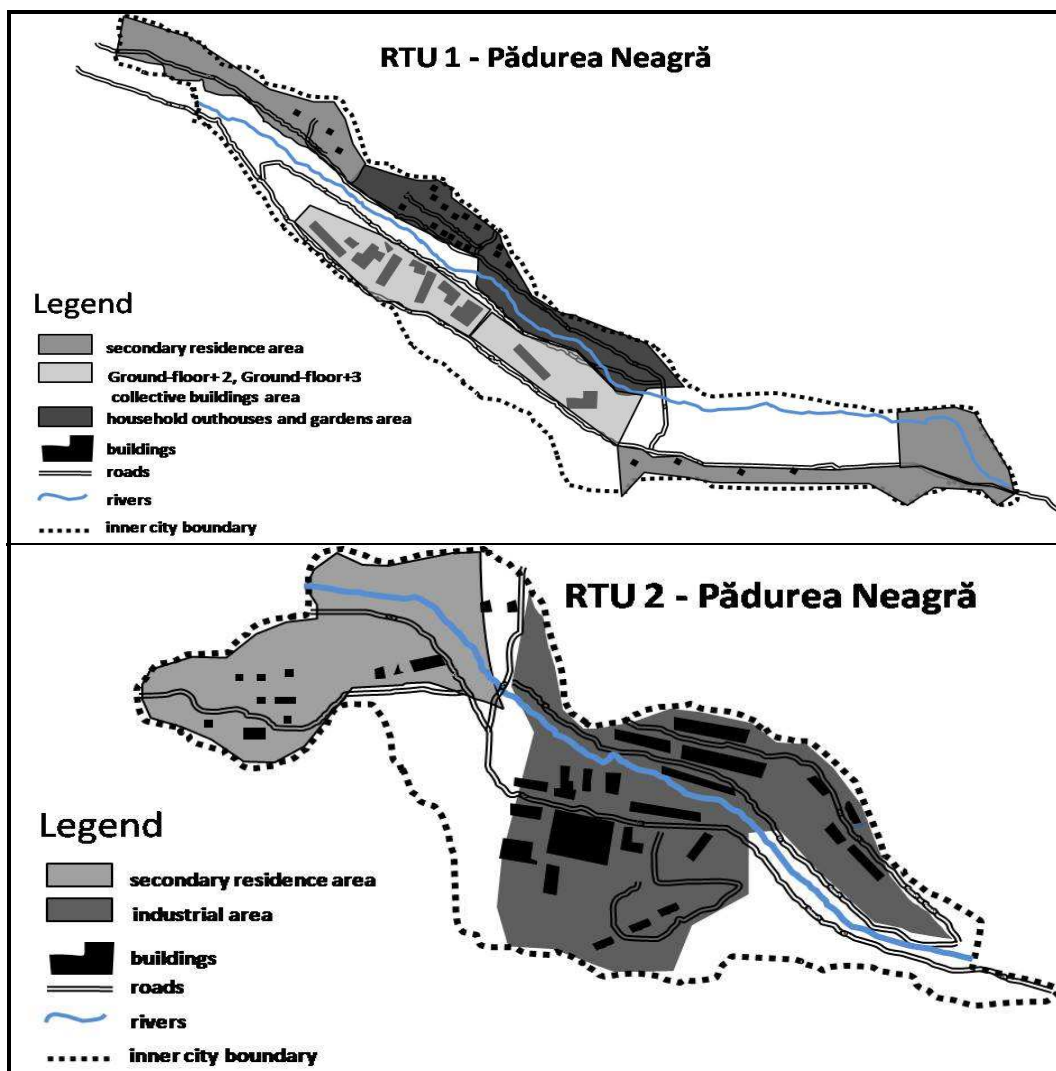
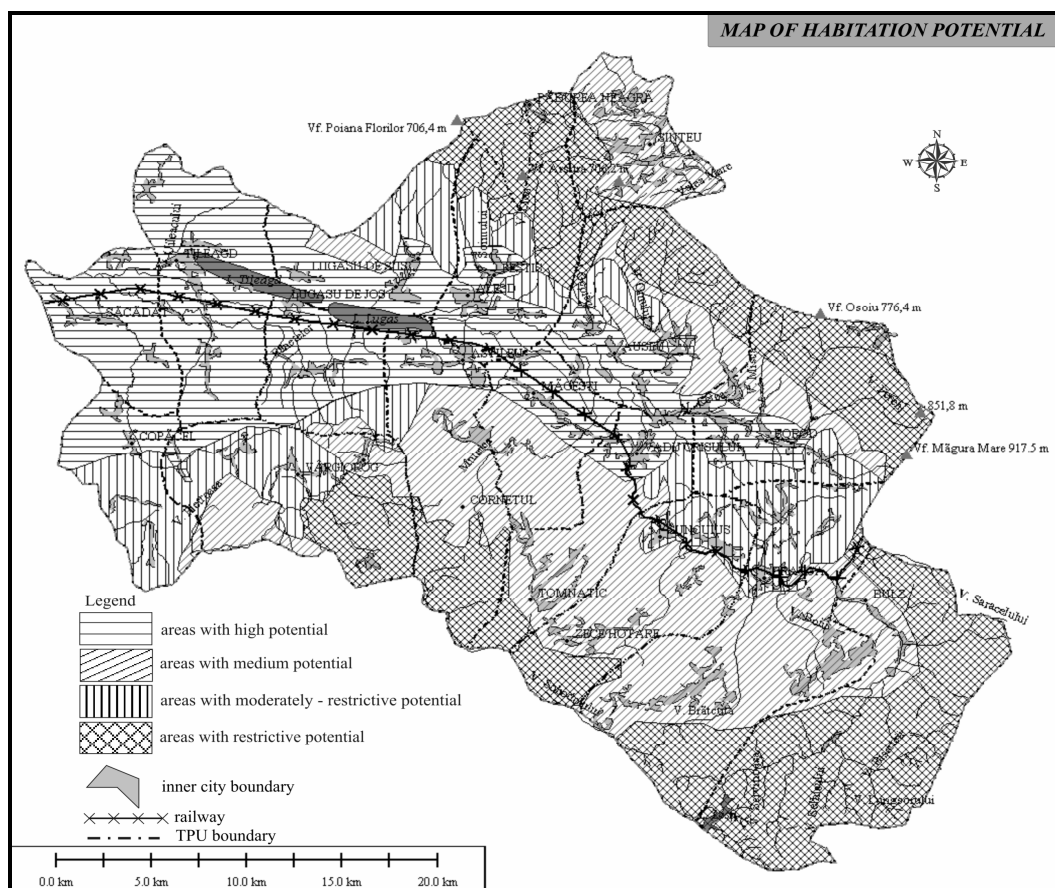


Fig. 6. Pădurea Neagră. Reference Territorial Units: a, RTU 1; b, RTU 2

The industrial area has been totally reserved for the Glass Factory, which worked from 1840 to 1991. With its buildings destined for production on the left bank of the Bistra river and with part of its administrative buildings on the right bank, the factory occupied almost entirely an enlargement of the Bistra river valley, whereupon the second block of the town is grafted. Having undergone various forms of ownership, the factory is currently in a state of decrepitude. As a particular feature, it having become an enclave to the adjoining secondary residential area is to be noted.



The existence of steep slopes, of a 25 degree, poses a major restriction for the building process. Due to morphological conditions, the town has only expanded in the narrow space of the river valley, which will, in the future as well, condition the expansion of the town. The drawback of the pre-eminently longitudinal development however, is diminished by the diminutive size of the town.

Among the dysfunctional elements generated by the relief (the narrow valley and the steep slopes), one can mention the connection ruptures of the building areas, in-between the two inner city blocks (i.e. RTU 1 and RTU 2). The constraints generated by the relief form are reflected in the elongated shape of the town, which will only get emphasized if the current development trends are preserved.

Under these circumstances, the evaluation of the inhabiting potential proves extremely important in the territorial planning activity. This is an indicator that provides information concerning: the capacity for territorial sustainability as regards the human factor, possibilities for improving the transport infrastructure, also for the expansion of the latter, and generally speaking, of the town at large. At the same time, it is equally useful for the assessment of the economically-underutilized areas. For its evaluation, the following variables have been taken into account within the administrative territory unit of Alesd: the degree of exposure of the land plots of the constituting villages; the morpho-metrical variables of the geo-morphostructures (i.e. the slope and the altitude); the facilities of the constituting villages; access possibilities that should ensure the fluency of traffic; the remoteness from rail and road communication that have an attraction axis quality (E60, the Oradea – Cluj-Napoca railroad); the distance from the main polarizing urban centers (i.e. Alesd, Oradea, Huedin); and the local resources. In the Plopi Mountains, the presence of a restrictive-type strip is atypical, at the level of the 500-650 m hypsometrical level, rather than at a superior hypsometrical level. The explanation thereof is of a morpho-metrical nature: the high slope (i.e. higher than 25 degrees) at the level of the aforementioned altimetical value, and the quasi-plane quality of the major inter-river complex. The overall analysis of the cartographic material indicates the fact that the administrative territory of the town of Padurea Neagra falls within the category of territories with a moderately-restrictive and restrictive potential.

Given the circumstances whereby the mineral resources and the human task force respectively (i.e. a highly-qualified work force in the glass industry) have been diminished considerably, *the touristic potential* of the area remains the main element which can ensure the development of the town. Apart from the many attractions of the relief, there are other natural attractions as well: the climate (i.e. large quantities of snow for long periods of the year), which is favorable to winter sports, the waters (i.e. iron mineral springs, the trout-ridden Bistra stream etc) and the woods with hunting potential (mainly wild boars). Some of the natural resources, for instance the mineral waters in Padurea Neagra, are not turned to account properly. The existent natural links between the vegetation and the fauna can be fruitfully utilized in point of recreational tourism.

At present, the one feature that mainly defines the place is rendered by a considerable number of holiday houses and hence the week-end tourism that is practiced here, mainly the sports tourism (i.e. motor cross and ATV's). The 44 holiday houses that display various architectural styles, do not impose a characteristic typology because of their diversity. An original touristic objective could result from the conservation and preservation of the old glass factory, which can yield a lot about the town's history and tradition.

The Padurea Neagra-Sinteu area reveals several elements that make it appropriate for rural tourism: i.e. low mountainous relief (under 1,000 m), which is especially favorable to mountain walking and hiking (which can be both recreational and curative), and an ethnographic heritage (i.e. traditionally-structured households, local customs and traditional Slovak wear). Even if at present, just one Bed & Breakfast pension exists in the area, several others are being currently built. The constantly increasing demand for tourism stimulates the appearance of original rural touristic offer. Therefore, a new form of rural tourism, which, we argue, should be favored as opposed to hunting game, which should be restricted, is the observation of animals in their natural habitat. The demand thereof has been on the increase worldwide, and this area definitely has a lot to offer in this respect.

The touristic potential of the place is doubled, so to speak, by its geographical position (an extra attribute of the town is that it lies in a trans-border space, at a distance of 67 km from Hungary, which indeed implies further perspectives for development); and by its infrastructure (as it is situated at approximately 20 km away from the main transport axis, i.e. the E60 motorway and at a 30 km distance away from the new motorway that is being built at the moment). However at present, the precarious state of the access roads here, i.e. the 1H and the 108H – due mainly to the large-freight trucks and lorries that pass through the town – constitutes a restrictive element.

A random development, in the absence of durable development strategies, could lead to the thwarting of drive and determination, and incentive, to the decrease of the offer and demand of the area, and eventually to the hindrance of perspectives for evolution and development in the long term.

The expansion of the town is rather of a spontaneous nature and is being achieved at present mainly due to the increase of its touristic function. The anticipation and control of this phenomenon with a view to a durable development of the area can only be achieved by planned extension, which should take into account the existent potential and dysfunction.

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