

STAKES IN CONTENTION AND MUTATIONS IN THE ORGANISATION OF THE URBAN AND PERIURBAN SPACE OF TIMIȘOARA

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Abstract: The concept of growth poles and one of its spatial effects, the urban sprawl, are realities that characterise today's cities of Romania. Since 1990, the city of Timișoara has shown considerable ability both in production and in the appropriation of space both within its bounds and beyond. This has strengthened its urban quality and integrated it more securely in its local area and region. Although from a demographic point of view it has stagnated, Timișoara has succeeded in developing relationships with other European cities and has won itself a place among those urban centres in Romania that are best integrated in Central Europe's network of communication and exchange. However, the urban renewal and suburban development of Timișoara, involving the re-forging of territorial links and the redefinition of the city's regional roles, is not taking place without problems. Will Timișoara's new national status (granted in 2008) of designated 'growth pole' be sufficient to solve these problems and kick-start the effective long-term development of the city and its zone of influence?

Key words: urban renewal, urban sprawl, regional development, growth pole, Timișoara.

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INTRODUCTION

The urban phenomenon is one of the geographical categories that have been most fiercely debated in the last fifty years, on account of its growing structural and spatial extension and the major impact towns and cities have on the balance of nature, on social and economic life and on the way geographical space is organised. The *city* is the space within which the human phenomenon manifests itself in the most complex and advanced ways. It is here that the greatest number of the values acquired by the human race throughout history are preserved, and here too that what we are accustomed to term *the future of the world* is gestated and constructed.

It is therefore natural that geographical reflection, along with that of specialists in other fields (urban analysts, sociologists, economists, historians, architects, anthropologists etc.), should concern itself with territorial assessment

and should attempt to predict the large-scale spatial developments that the various components of the urban phenomenon are experiencing. The dynamic territorial ripple effect of the urban and the structural and functional changes this brings - changes which occur in different ways in different places - have led to the employment in the specialist literature of a series of concepts such as urbanisation, suburbanisation, periurbanisation, urban influence, rural urbanisation and urban sprawl (*étalement urbain*). These have been introduced to meet the need to better understand territorial variations in the expansion of towns and of the urban lifestyle.

These ideas have been introduced in a gradual way by major players in the domains involved in reflecting on the phenomenon of the urban. Under the influence of the French and German schools of geographical thinking, questions of urban geography began to exercise the minds of Romanian geographers such as V. Mihăilescu, N. A. Rădulescu, Gh. Năstase, V. Tufescu etc. as early as the first decade of the twentieth century (Ungureanu and Țurcănașu, 2008, p. 33). Then, in the period after the World Wars, urban geographical thinking in Romania was taken further by the geographers I. Șandru (1975), V. Cucu (1970), A. Ungureanu (1980), I. Ianoș (1987) etc., following the trends set in the specialist literature of the USSR and France in particular and later of the Anglo-Saxon world.¹

The influence and territorial extension of towns in Romania were the subject of systematic research especially from the sixties of the twentieth century onwards, with V. Cucu (1970), I. Iordan (1973), N. Caloianu and collaborators (1976), I. Ianoș (1987) and others writing on this theme, and more recently it has been studied by I. Nicolae (2002), P. Cocean (2007) among others.

Thus there was a gradual move from the definition of the ideas of the *supply zones* of towns/cities and *pre-town zones* to those of *zones of influence*, *suburban zones* and *periurban zones*, and in recent years to the precise scientific definition of phenomena that go beyond the expression of the links between towns and their immediate neighbourhoods, so as to be able to deal with the transformations experienced by these neighbourhoods, or by more distant areas, under the impact of the urban - a process involving notions such as those of *rural urbanisation* and *urban sprawl*. These new ways of using and filling space are generated by complex phenomena involving the spatial redistribution of population and activities between the urban and the rural environments, including most obviously *exurbanisation* and *contraurbanisation*. And they are also fed by the endogenous development of the rural in the direction of modernisation; this is stimulated by *the effect of demonstration*, whose impact is made greater by the increased mobility of the population and by modern means of communication, especially the mass media.

The geography of the city of Timișoara and its territorial relationships has been the subject of a number of applied investigations. This process too began in the sixties of the twentieth century (V. Ardelean, S. Truți, 1966, 1970) and continued after 1990 with works dealing in particular with the way in which the city was transformed in the period of transition from a centrally planned economy to a free market one (Popa and Junie, 2000, Voiculescu, 2004, Bioteau

¹ Among authors who have had the greatest influence on the study of urban geography in Romania we may mention P. Geddes (1915), R. Blanchard (1922), W. Christaller (1933), G. Chabot (1933), Chauncy Harris (1943), P. George (1961), J. Gottman (1961), J. Beaujeu-Garnier and G. Chabot (1963), V. M. Haritonov (1983), S. Sassen (2001) etc.

and Popa, 2004, Popa and Veschambre, 2008 etc.). A series of applied studies have been undertaken by the Faculty of Human Geography of the West University of Timișoara with the aim of providing a firm foundation for the development strategies put into place in the first decade of the twenty-first century for the Timișoara Zone (2000) and the Timișoara Growth Pole (2009-2010). All these, together with research undertaken by historians, anthropologists, urban scientists, economists etc., make possible a more accurate assessment of the dynamics of making use of Timișoara's urban and periurban space and of its future development trends.

The present study starts out from the premise that the city of Timișoara has developed with the spatial anchorage that it has under the influence of a complex of historical, geographical, economic and cultural factors that have given it a strong individual identity. Its resulting and appropriated space, the way it is perceived and the use made of it, are layer by layer rewriting the symbolic history, practical exploitation and geographical organisation of this urban ensemble, with the process being subject to two constraints: that resulting from the inherited patrimony, and that stemming from what is predicted/expected from development projects. The direction and magnitude of these transformations depends on local decision-makers, on their vision and their ability to juggle the use of space and the allocation of resources. Equally important are the closeness and nature of the relationships that they maintain with decision-makers at higher (national and European) levels and their skill in making the most of opportunities and developing regional links.

The urban is winning over the rural, engulfing peripheries and occupying larger and larger areas of space. At the same time, it is constantly working upon itself, restructuring itself, undergoing morphological and functional transformation and changing its relationships with its territory and the world, at a pace and in ways that are hard to plan for or control. In the quest of the ideal, the result is not always the one that was looked for, and Timișoara, like many other cities, is tending to stay within the 'rut' of its existing identity while attempting to leave it behind.

TIMIȘOARA IN ITS 'ANCHORAGE'

Timișoara, the largest urban centre in the west of Romania, experienced functional evolution and a rise in population during the twentieth century and enjoyed significant inward investment both from within Romania and from abroad. It was characterised by predominantly endodynamic population movement. Up until 1918, the city was at the receiving end of colonising activity or attracted a workforce from various provinces belonging to the Hapsburg monarchy and to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its neighbouring territories. Germans were the predominant ethnic group, but large numbers of Hungarians, Romanians, Serbs, Jews, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, French people and others also made their homes there. During the events that led to the union of Transylvania and Banat with Romania, Timișoara lost a small proportion of its population, most of them members of the Hungarian administration who preferred to move to Hungary proper.

After 1920, Timișoara became one of the leading cities (economically speaking) in the Kingdom of Romania. Both in the inter-war period and in the first two decades of the Communist regime, the central government relied on the economic power of the few centres where industry was flourishing in order to be

able to embark upon the development of the country as a whole. As a consequence, the dynamics of the investments made in the city meant that Timișoara continued to attract a workforce, this time from Banat and from the traditionally rural provinces of Romania, especially Oltenia, Bessarabia, Moldova, Maramureș and the Apuseni region.

Table 1. Changes in the population of Timișoara analysed by ethnic origin (1900-2002)
(Source: Census figures)

Nationality	1900	1930	1966	1992	2002
Total Population	60,551	102,390	174,243	334,115	317,660
Romanian (%)	10.4	24.6	62.6	82.2	85.5
German (%)	51.0	32.4	14.4	4.0	2.3
Hungarian (%)	31.6	31.0	17.8	9.5	7.6
Serb (%)	4.5	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.0
Others (%)	2.5	9.8	2.8	2.0	2.6

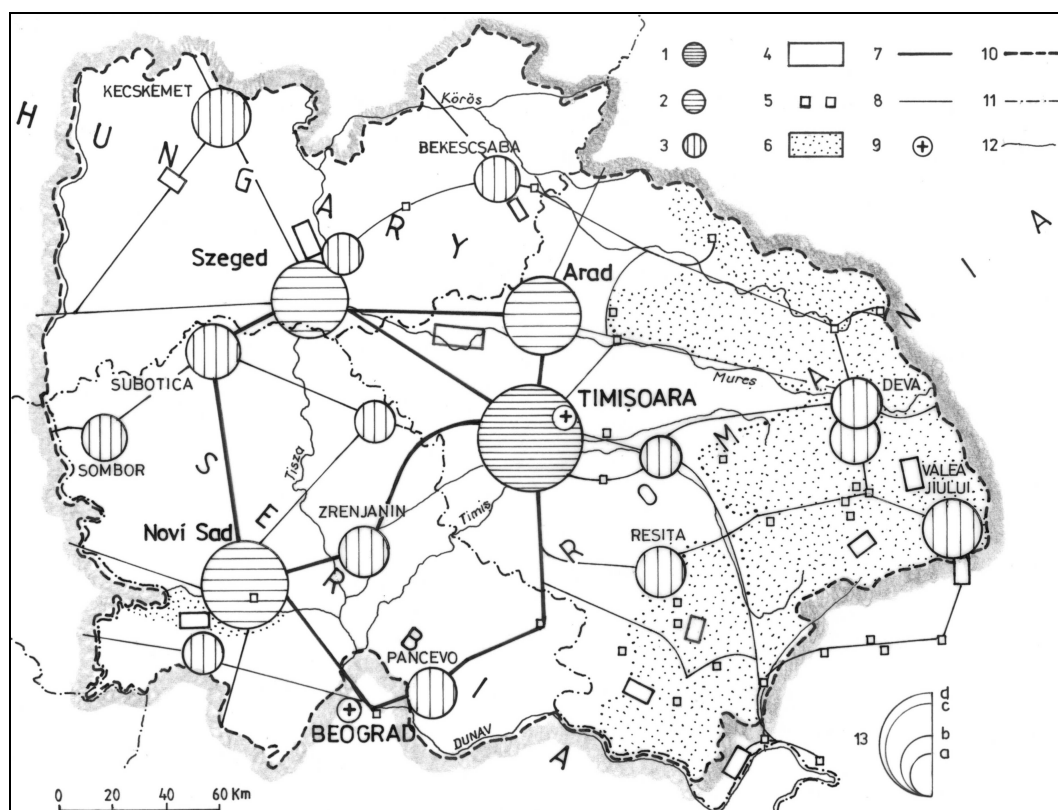


Figure 1. Regional position of Timișoara city

Main cities: regional pole (1); subregional pole (2); departamental or local pole (3); natural parks (4); natural reserves (5); mountainous area (6); basic polar network (7); other important axes (8); international airport (9); limits of the DKMT Euroregion (10); national border (11); main rivers (12); population of the cities, in thousand (13): a) 80; b) 110; c) 250; d) 320.

Inward investment and demographic growth were also aided by the administrative and political status accorded to Timișoara in the inter-war period and again in the 1950s and 1960s. Each time regional levels of administration existed in Romania, Timișoara was the administrative centre of its region,

irrespective of its geographical extent or name: the Timișoara ministerial directorate (1929-31), the Timiș County/*Ținutul Timiș* (1938-40), the Timișoara Region (three successive patterns of organisation between 1950 and 1960), the Banat region (1960-68). Timișoara's position of responsibility for its region attracted socio-economic development and led to a significant increase in the number of people living in the city, which drew well ahead of the other urban centres in the west of the country. For example, whereas in 1912 Timișoara was only 1.14 times the size of Arad, situated 60 km to the north, by the end of the inter-war period the ratio had grown to 1.26. The gap in population between the two cities continued to widen – to 1.38 in 1966, to 1.75 in 1992 and 1.87 in 2010.

As we can see (Figure 2), the time when Timișoara was drawing away from Arad at the fastest rate in terms of population was after the abolition of the regions and the setting-up of the counties (1968), when Timișoara's administrative status became the same as that of any county town in the country, that of Arad not excepted. This can be explained by the inertial effect of the concentration of population created by earlier investment, by the permanent establishment in Timișoara of certain devolved State institutions that had regional responsibility, and also by the increased attraction the city could exert on the workforce once its status as the fourth most important university centre in Romania had been established.

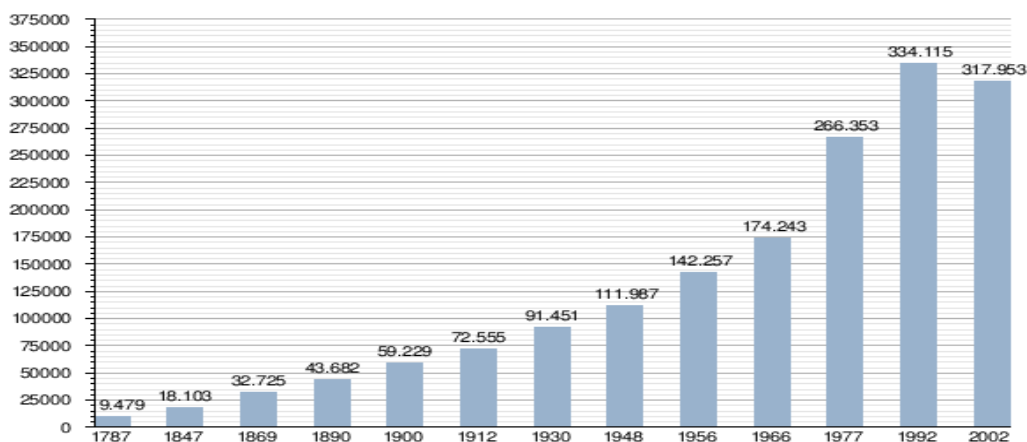


Figure 2. Changes in the population of Timișoara city, 1787-2002

(Source: <http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timi%C8%99oara>)

These changes obviously exerted pressure upon the physical site of the municipality of Timișoara, thus leading to periodic restructuring of land use within the city limits and to new relationships between the city and its periurban zone.

CHANGES OVER TIME IN THE LAYOUT OF TIMIȘOARA'S URBAN SPACE

Timișoara belongs to that small category of large settlements in Central Europe that retain nothing of their medieval urban morphostructure. It was entirely transformed from an urban layout point of view and reconstructed in accordance with plans drawn up by architects belonging to the Imperial court at Vienna.

The chief concern of the House of Hapsburg was to turn Timișoara into one of their most powerful defensive strongholds against Ottoman pressure. A

secondary aim was to provide its inhabitants with a style of life that reflected the town-planning genius of the Imperial architects.

The particular nature of the site of Timișoara, placed as it had been by its founders on the low-lying plain of the River Timiș and in the centre of an extensive tract of marshes fed by the interlacing watercourses of the Timiș and Bega rivers, forced the Imperial designers to draw up a number of plans, some of them in succession, that matched the precise purpose intended for the Citadel and for each of the historic neighbourhoods that were to form the nuclei of the new Timișoara. The city was thus multi-nuclear in its first stages, being composed of at least two urban neighbourhoods (Fabric and Josefin) and two other rural-urban ones (Elisabetin and Mehala), all gravitating around Timișoara Citadel, from which they were separated, both by natural causes and for strategic reasons, by extensive waste areas that included marshland, lakes and tracts of water (see the 1769-1772 Josefin map, the Timișoara city plan showing the works begun in 1849², etc).

At the end of the nineteenth century, the nuclei of Timișoara, situated in its eastern (Fabric), southern and south-western (Elisabetin and Josefin) and western (Mehala) parts, were still separate from the Citadel, which became a true urban neighbourhood only after the demolition of its fortifications (this took place in several stages between 1891 and 1910). After this, Timișoara developed rapidly, both at its outer limits and internally. In less than three decades, the wilderness areas between the Citadel and the other neighbourhoods were filled in with residential buildings, industrial and transport-related development, city parks etc. Throughout this period the city grew towards the south, the east and the west, while its northern section remained an area of wasteland, a reminder of the old *glacis* or *circum valatio* that had played a strategic role in the defence of the Citadel.

This space, long used for military training and as a market area, gradually filled up with industrial plants and storage facilities that were laid out along both sides of the railway that linked today's North and East stations. This section of the railway was brought into use after 1880, at the height of the period when classic industries were developing in Timișoara (Opriș, 1987). The railway and the industrial-commercial areas situated along it were to be a major obstacle in the way of the city's northward expansion. As a result, it was only from the '70s of the twentieth century onwards that the city's northern neighbourhoods (Lipovei, Aradului, Torontalului, Dacia, Circumvalațiunii etc.) were built, thus completing the ring of residential areas that together with the historic ones among which they lie make up contemporary Timișoara (Figure 3).

The welding-together of Timișoara's various urban nuclei is not complete even today, although the majority of the pieces of land that in former times separated the Citadel from the outlying neighbourhoods are now completely built over. However, new building land has become available in the form of the sites of old industrial areas and isolated plants that were constructed archipelago-like within the city limits in the period between 1880 and 1965, precisely for the reason that until the middle of the twentieth century the main way the city grew was inwards. It is these vacant spaces, which today occupy positions around the centre and are in the throes of a process of practically oriented urban renewal,

² Plan der Königlichen Freistadt und Festung Temesvar mit Benützung der im Jahre 1849, statt gefundenen Angriffs-Arbeiten gegen die Festung (Beilage zu Preyers Monografie), Pest, 1853.

that future urban development schemes will be competing for. A series of urban development proposals and studies (Massimo Tadi et al., 2007) have been carried out with a view to making use of these spaces in a modern, functional way and to improving communication between the different neighbourhoods of Timișoara, especially between those in the south and those in the north, a task made difficult by the twin obstacles of the River Bega and the railway.

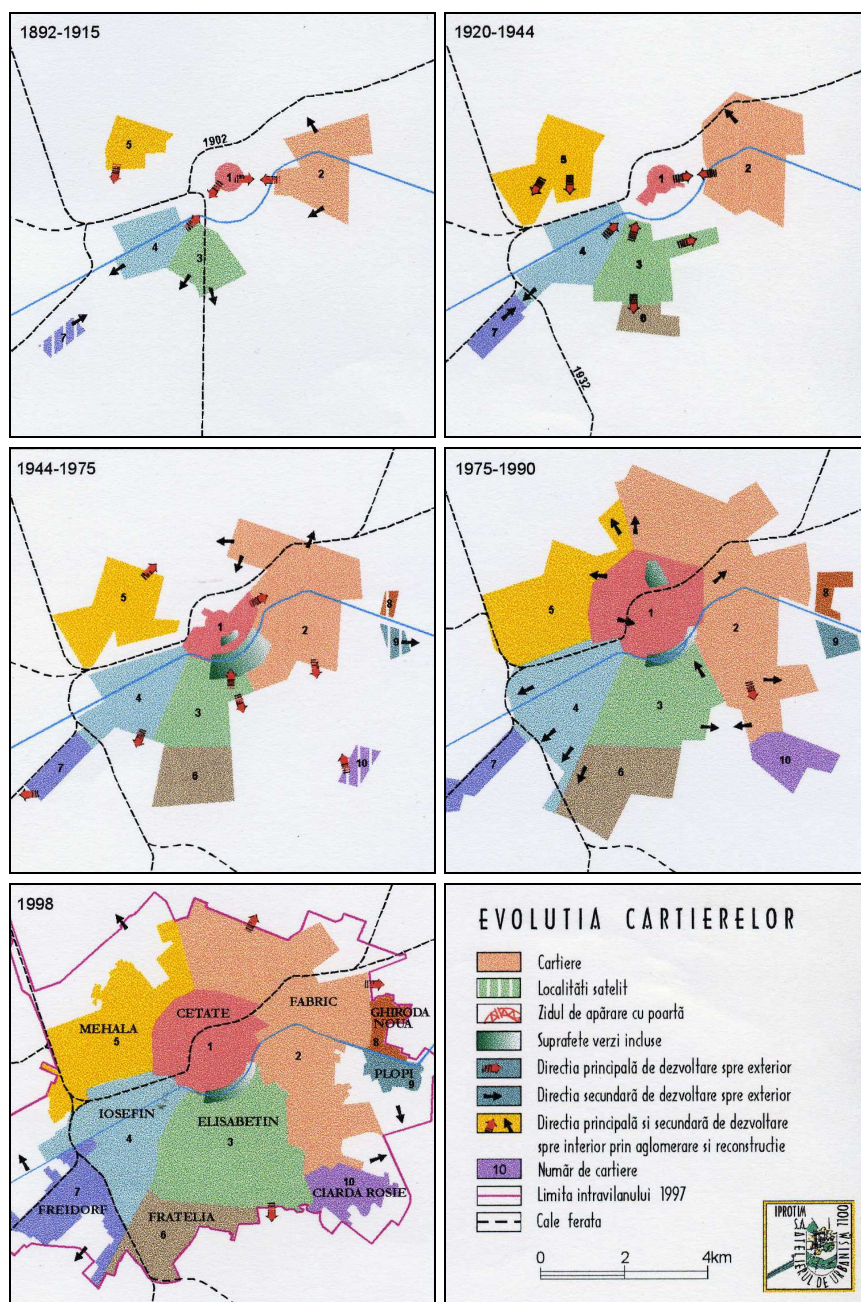


Figure 3. Geographical development of the city of Timișoara, 1892-1998
(Source: Timișoara City Hall, 2000)

The general layout of the city today still preserves the main lines of the building works carried out in the Imperial period, although these now only make up the historical nuclei of Timișoara. The principal radial-concentric street network, which encloses the different zones of the city within a grid-type street plan, is echoed in the new neighbourhoods, whose main axes are extensions of the old radial streets that traditionally linked Timișoara with the other strategic regional hubs (Petrovaradin/Novi Sad, Lugoj-Caransebeș, Szeged, Arad, Belgrad etc.) that were recognised as early as the beginning of the modern age.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE USE OF TIMIȘOARA'S PERIURBAN SPACE

The surroundings of Timișoara in their turn have experienced a series of changes over time that have left their mark on the present-day arrangement of this network of settlements, on their particular morphostructure, and also on the ethno-cultural content and socio-economic use of this space.

The network of towns and villages was reconstructed in its entirety after 1716 as the process of colonisation advanced. Systematic efforts on the colonists' part to drain the marshes and regulate the flow of the two main rivers, the Timiș and the Bega,³ also contributed to the reshaping of the local landscape by increasing the density of habitation and improving the economic potential of the land.

The goal of the process of colonisation was to increase the scope for human action upon a territory which had great development potential but whose human resources had been gravely affected by a series of confrontations between the Ottoman and Austrian armies that had taken place on the territory of Banat, their greatest intensity being between 1696 and 1716. There was also a wish to settle Catholic communities, made up as far as possible of ethnic Germans potentially loyal to the Court of Vienna, in the centre of Banat, a frontier province that was as yet fragile economically, politically and in terms of cultural identity, and that bordered on the powerful Ottoman Empire.

Consequently, the villages of colonists were placed strategically along the main communication routes that had trans-regional importance, so that they would form first lines of defence of the approach routes and 'gates' leading to the fortress of Timișoara. Thus on the Petrovaradin road we find the German communities of Săcălaz, Cărpiniș, Jimbolia etc., on the road leading to the fortress of Belgrade there are those at Șag, Ciacova, Deta etc., along the routes towards Transylvania and Arad there are the German villages of Giarmata, Pișchia and Sănandrei, and along the road leading towards Hungary there are those of Dudeștii Noi (Beșenova Nouă), Becicherecu Mic, Biled etc.. Later 'implanting' action in the nineteenth century led to the presence along these axes of Hungarian communities as well, for example those at Dumbrăvița to the north-east of the city and Ciarda and Moșnița Nouă to the south and south-east.

The ethnic structure of the villages around Timișoara was often a complex one, with several communities coexisting in the same village. As a general rule, Germans were predominant in the area north-west of Timișoara and Romanians in the land to the south and east of the city. The proportion of Hungarians

³ The embankment of the river Bega began in 1726 and continued in stages along various stretches until 1754. Later, maintenance and modernisation work was carried out in successive operations until 1916, when construction of the five locks on the canal was complete. Timișoara was the principal beneficiary of these works, since the risk of flooding was reduced, supply of raw materials to the city was made easier and above all the marshes surrounding the city dried out.

increases as one approaches the present-day Hungarian border and that of Serbs towards the modern border with Serbia, although other local anchoring centres do exist. Other ethnic communities were present too, such as Bulgarians at Vinga and Beşenova Veche (Dudeştii Vechi), where they still live in large numbers today; there were also Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, etc., generally in villages situated at considerable distances from Timișoara.

The ethno-cultural composition of the population of the settlements around Timișoara was important in defining the main lines of the rural landscape and the way the land was used. The German communities brought to Banat a new concept of village layout in which the houses were more closely grouped together, and this was further encouraged by the preference of the government in Vienna for planned settlements that mirrored geometrical shapes and structures (rectangular, on rare occasions circular, as at Charlottenburg). This preference found concrete expression from the moment (11th January 1772) when the Imperial authorities adopted the set of town planning regulations known as *Impopulationis Haupt Instruction* (Munteanu & Munteanu, 1998, p. 121). In accordance with these regulations, small, scattered villages were consolidated, with houses being 'brought into line' and placed directly on the road and on both sides of each road in a rectangular street plan. It was the old villages of the indigenous population (Romanians, Serbs etc.) in particular that were remodelled to comply with these regulations; the villages of colonists were conceived in this spirit from the outset. Each settlement was designed to have a civic centre that contained the principal buildings, institutions and public services (the church, the school, the Town Hall, the market etc.). Land occupied by buildings was clearly marked off from farmland, which consisted of a circular area around the village devoted to the grazing of small domestic animals and an area for crops, grown on the *open field system*, that occupied the remainder of the village land.

A series of water- and drainage-related works were carried out, especially in the low-lying Timiș plain, in order to reduce the extent of the marshes, stabilise the courses of the Timiș and Bega rivers, and reduce the frequency of flooding under surge conditions, the aim being to create a salubrious natural environment that would facilitate the secure development of local rural and urban communities.

This combination of administrative measures and natural circumstances led to the development over time of a network of *christallerian-type* settlements, remarkably uniform in nature: villages with definite geometric contours, usually large in size so that the people living in them could exploit their land effectively. They were situated a considerable distance apart, in consequence of not entirely ideal natural conditions and limited demographic resources. These villages gravitated around a network of towns that formed a hierarchy with the fortress of Timișoara at its centre. A degree of rigidity imposed by the town-planning regulations we have mentioned meant that the network of settlements did not change significantly in later times (the planting of new settlements to fill in the gaps, or expansion via the spreading-out of each settlement to occupy a larger area). Another reason for this was the steady natural decline in the population. This was a consequence of the Banat style of demographic model as inspired by the Swabian communities who, for economic reasons, practised a strict system of family planning (*eine Familie, ein Kind*) in order to prevent landed property from being broken up by being left to more than one heir.

After the division of Banat according to national lines and the incorporation of most of it into Romania, the inter-war period was too short for significant structural changes to take place in the local settlement pattern. Later, the coming to power of the Communist régime, which completely overturned the legal basis of all Romania's social and economic structures, only accentuated the clear dichotomy between built-up and agricultural areas, without affecting the organisation of the network of settlements in any other way. Strict control of financial resources and the priority given to agricultural exploitation meant that land within the village bounds and the hearts of the villages continued to be clearly demarcated and that outward expansion of these areas was discouraged. Instead, legally constituted building land had to be used to the maximum.

In consequence, in spite of massive immigration from other parts of Romania – aiming in particular for urban environments, but also for some of the prosperous villages in Timiș County – the rural settlements of Banat stagnated in population terms, those close to large towns not excluded (Table 5). This tendency also owed something to the slow drain over the border of some of Banat's traditional communities, in particular the Swabians.⁴ Deprived of the principal anchor that kept them in Banat for centuries – their ownership of the land and of other means of production, all of which passed into Socialist state hands after 1947 – the Swabians, like the Jews before them, preferred to return to their ancestors' native land, which in the interim had established itself as the most prosperous country in Europe (the German Federal Republic). This process of emigration intensified at the end of the 1970s after the signing in Bucharest in January 1978 of an agreement between the President of Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the German Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, regarding the annual emigration of contingents of ethnic Germans to West Germany: 11,000 per year initially, a number that later rose (Final Report, 2007, p.362).

Table 2. Population change in Timișoara's suburban communities, 1956-1992

(Source: Censuses of population and dwellings, 1956, 1992)

Administrative community	Population	
	1956	1992
Becicherecu Mic	2564	2316
Dumbrăvița	1439	2400
Ghiroda	2558	3537
Giarmata	4604	4228
Giroc	1933	2122
Moșnița Nouă	1412	1146
Remetea Mare	1220	1124
Sânandrei	2702	2482
Sânmihaiu Român	2044	1581
Săcălaz	3511	3567
Șag	2174	2586
Total	26,161	27,089

Constant demographic flux, seen in the replacement of some of the traditional inhabitants of Banat villages with Romanians from other provinces, whose cultural backgrounds and views of civilised behaviour were not entirely

⁴ According to a report published on 30th May 1980, there were 97,811 Romanian citizens of German ethnicity in Timiș county, 28,075 of them in the municipality of Timișoara and 69,737 in other towns and villages (ACNSAS national statistical archive, folder no. 13.381, vol. 19, f. 23). Of these, 37,802 had requested permanent emigration by March 1980 (S. Moldovan, 2009, p.451)

the same, has over time left its mark on the appearance of villages in Timiș county. On the one hand, the building stock has experienced a process of gradual deterioration, as has the civic appearance of these places. The rate at which new homes have been constructed has slowed down as an effect of the surplus of houses caused by the departure of the Swabians. On the other hand, the economic power of the rural part of Timiș has fallen, since it has been adversely affected by the break-up of rural communities and the difficulty of regrouping people into functioning social units in a situation in which the population stock is fluid and diverse and contains newcomers who lack local experience.

In the hinterland of the city of Timișoara, the result of three decades of socio-economic change (1960-1990) was the preservation of a rural environment that was too little touched by the processes of structural consolidation and the development of a more civilised way of life. The urbanising influence of the big city did not make itself felt; the 'country feel' of villages in its immediate vicinity was in no way different from that of other villages a long way away from the city. Thus Timișoara did not succeed in becoming an urban agglomeration but rather imposed itself as a relatively isolated macrostructure surrounded by an inert rural area whose functions were predominantly agricultural, apart from its role as a dormitory for a workforce that commuted to work in the factories of Timișoara.

In these circumstances, the liberalisation of the socio-spatial behaviour of population and economic agents that came after 1989 has led to significant changes in the urban landscape of Timișoara and above all in its relations with its adjacent space: the city is tending to become a true urban agglomeration, affected both by the dynamism and the frustration that are characteristic of new beginnings.

TIMIȘOARA: CHANGES IN URBAN PLANNING AND IN THE CITY'S MODE OF RELATING TO SURROUNDING AREAS

Timișoara's post-1989 urban-planning development shows the effects of multiple internal restructurings that have taken place particularly at the level of the private functional cells that make up the city: a significant degree of renovation of private homes, improvements in the transport infrastructure, changes of use of some industrial and service zones, the reconstitution of green spaces, the building of new residential areas and areas designed for other uses, etc. Despite this, not one of the fundamental problems regarding the use of urban space that have been facing Timișoara for decades has been resolved; the city continues to develop within the limitations imposed by these same constraints – some internal and some related to its local neighbourhood – that are the consequence of its development over history.

The most severe of these problems relate to the difficulty of moving around within the city, especially between its southern and northern neighbourhoods, because of two major obstacles: the Bega Canal, which forms the southern boundary of the central area (Citadel), and the railway between the North Station and the East Station, which forms the northern boundary of this central area. Timișoara is thus traversed in a roughly east-west direction by two elements of urban discontinuity, between which lie the historic centre of the city and its main traffic hubs. Whereas for the 8 km length of the Bega river that flows through the built-up part of the city there are eight road bridges (one per

kilometre, which is in any case too few), the railway can only be crossed at five flyover/tunnel points, plus two gate-controlled level crossings. All schemes for moving the railway outside the city have come to nothing for lack of funds, and those for increasing the number of bridges over the Bega have fallen foul of town-planning or technical problems or have failed for lack of political consensus.

There are other factors too that hamper traffic flow within the city. These include the incompleteness of some of the major concentric arteries, which are blocked by the railway (again) and by the old industrial areas around it. Another is the way the main hypermarkets (Iulius Mall, Real, Selgros, Kaufland, Billa, Praktiker) are concentrated in the northern part of the city; this leads to heavy road traffic congestion along the arteries leading to them.

Traffic problems are also made worse by the lack of a ring road to keep through traffic outside the city. December 2009 saw the opening of a 12.6 km section linking the northern and eastern (Arad and Lugoj) routes, but this represents only a quarter of the length (approximately 50 km) of the projected Timișoara ring road.

Despite these problems, Timișoara has experienced a series of changes for the better that have given it a new profile and improved its economic functioning, besides emphasising more clearly its personality as a city and changing the way it relates to its surroundings. These changes are preparing it for future developments.

The renovation of buildings and the regeneration of parts of the city whose traditional use no longer matched present-day needs are in full swing. These processes are taking account of population distribution and density in different areas, of the location of places where people congregate and to which they gravitate, of the need to change the use of some areas of the city, of criteria of economic efficiency and of modern trends in urban regeneration.

The *renovation of buildings*, a complicated and costly process, began with work on private homes at the initiative of the middle class, whose perseverance in carrying out improvements became visible in the urban landscape only at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Gradually, the proportion of houses that had been renovated grew, as did the number of new villa-type buildings inserted into the urban fabric in neighbourhoods of houses in Elisabetin, Odobescu, Iosefin, Ion Ionescu de la Brad, Ronaț, Mehala etc. Then came the renovation of blocks of flats, which benefited from a government programme to provide homes with thermal insulation (56 blocks had been insulated by March 2011, a figure that falls far short of the level of need – around 400 – expressed by associations of owners, according to data from Timișoara City Hall).

A major preoccupation is the conservation and *rehabilitation of the architectural heritage* in the historic centre of the city. This, the largest in the country, comprises around 14,500 buildings, mainly located in the neighbourhoods of Citadel, Iosefin and Fabric. In these three large neighbourhoods that are home to half of the city's population, 50% of the historic buildings are in an advanced or very advanced state of structural decay, one-third of the roofs and two-thirds of the facades of historic buildings are in a bad or very bad state of repair, and 85% of buildings are affected to a considerable or significant degree by rising damp. Four-fifths of the total usable floorspace is devoted to residential uses, and 70% of the residents own the apartments they occupy (2004 data). All the same, fewer than 10% of historic

buildings have been fully or partially renovated, a fact that may be partly explained by the high proportion of residents who have low incomes; according to a study carried out by Timișoara City Hall and GTZ and published in Timișoara City Hall Monitor no. 27 in February 2005, over 70% of these households have average monthly incomes of below 250 euros.

A number of projects have been initiated with the aim of remedying this situation. These include the *Wise Renovation and Economic Revitalisation of Timișoara's Historic Neighbourhoods* Romanian-German co-operation project, which was initiated in 2006 and has accomplished the renovation of six buildings. The year 2010 saw the beginnings of the renovation of the Theresia Bastion Complex, part of Timișoara's old fortifications, with central government, local and European funding (PHARE 2004-2006). Documentation has also been drawn up for a number of renovation projects to be financed from European structural funds through the 2007-2013 Regional Operational Programme, Priority axis 1: *Supporting the sustainable development of cities – urban growth hubs*. Success in obtaining funding for these projects would lead to the renovation of the *Banks of the Bega Canal* landscape and architectural ensemble, of the *Piața Victoriei Corso inter-war urban ensemble*, and hopefully in due course of the central part of Citadel neighbourhood, the ensemble around Piața Unirii (Timișoara City Hall, 2011).

One of the main options for urban regeneration is *a change of use for some of Timișoara's old industrial and warehousing areas*. This process began spontaneously back in the 1990s as a result of cutbacks at and the closing of many industrial plants in the Buziaș industrial area, UMT, Solventul etc.. From this point of view, the main axis under discussion for town planning intervention consists of the industrial, commercial and transport area along the length of the railway from Ronaț via the North Station to the East Station. This area, which takes the form of a corridor running WSW to ENE, has been the subject of many architectural and town planning studies. One of these, that carried out in 2005 under the direction of the Italian architect Massimo Tadi, a professor at Milan Polytechnic University, proposed a unitary vision, futuristic in places but capable of being realised: the moving of the railway line outside the city and the transformation of the space thus made available into an urban artery capable of carrying a great weight of traffic, flanked by modern residential, commercial and cultural buildings separated by green spaces and leisure facilities (Figure 4).

However, the change of use of this space actually began long ago with the closure of a large number of industrial concerns (the bakery, the dairy, the *Fructus* jam factory etc.) and the demolition of some old warehouses, which have gradually been replaced by modern commercial concerns and service and business centres. The most successful ensemble is that of Timișoara City Business Centre, consisting of five modern buildings that provide 35,000 square metres of office space, close to which we may also find the *Fructus* Tower (under construction), the Alcatel ensemble, other administrative buildings (the headquarters of Timiș County Public Finances) and modern commercial buildings (Kaufland, Billa, etc.).

A similar type of initiative would be *the regeneration of the public squares and showcase boulevards* that still epitomise what makes Timișoara the city that it is. We are thinking of the central squares of the historic neighbourhoods (Piața Unirii, Piața Libertății, Piața Traian, Piața Maria, Piața Josefin) which display buildings dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, chiefly in

Baroque style but with occasional occurrences of Art Nouveau. These areas have undergone planned improvements including renewal of surface paving, flower beds in public squares, floral features and street furniture, the erection of monuments, and in some places renewal of the facades of buildings. The civic centre (today Piața Victoriei), which took shape in the first half of the twentieth century – flanked by buildings in an eclectic mix of styles and dominated by its two representative examples of Romanian-inspired architecture, the National Opera with its neo-Brâncovanesque pediment and balcony and the Orthodox Metropolitan Cathedral in a Gothic-influenced neo-Byzantine style typical of northern Moldova – has been embellished with monuments commemorating the 1989 Revolution and is earmarked for comprehensive renovation. This square is still regarded by Timișoara people as the true centre of their city, containing as it does the most important symbols of the identity of the Romanians of Timișoara. Then come other showcase squares and boulevards with their commercial, cultural and administrative roles, such as, for example, Piața Sfântu Gheorghe, Piața Crucii, Piața Nicolae Bălcescu, Piața Romanilor, Piața Consiliului Europei, Strada Alba Iulia, Bulevardul Revoluției, Strada Dacilor.



Figure 4. Case study for the change of use of Timișoara's northern railway corridor
(Source: Massimo Tadi, 2007)

However, in recent years there has been a strong challenge to the cultural and enlivening role of the old showcase squares and boulevards from some *new commercial and entertainment areas*, above all *Iulius Mall*, to the north of the Citadel neighbourhood, and the *Student Complex*, to the south of Citadel. These areas with their many clubs, restaurants, takeaways and shops of all kinds are exerting a particular pull on young people, to the detriment of the commercial role of the central area of the city. In an attempt to counterbalance the undue concentration of high-spending life in commercial hubs outside the historic centre, the development department of Timișoara City Hall, in conjunction with the two major universities (the West University and the Polytechnic), has made plans to set up a new university campus to be sited in Oituz Street on the northern edge of the Citadel neighbourhood, so that young people will move between the two campuses (the existing Student Complex one and the new one) over an area that will take in most of the historic centre. Thus the centre will benefit from the invigorating effect of the presence of young people. This move would also cause some prestige shops and places of entertainment to maintain their role within the fabric of the city and would encourage the historic centre of Timișoara to take on new life. We would then see the city becoming increasingly upmarket – something that is felt to be vital for the healthy development of ‘Greater Timișoara’.

Over the past two decades, it is in *the renewal of the transport infrastructure and public utilities* that Timișoara City Hall has invested most heavily. This investment, despite being less visible in the urban landscape than some other changes, was judged to be essential to the proper functioning of urban life. The City Hall therefore opted to renew the equivalent of 40 km of tram track, using funds from the European Investment Bank, the Romanian government and Timișoara local council. The work was carried out between 2000 and 2006. There has also been a decision to extend the tram and trolleybus lines to suburban settlements. The first destinations envisaged under the Integrated Urban Development Plan are Moșnița Nouă - Albina (south-west), Ghiroda (east) and Dumbrăvița (north-east), with work to be completed by 2013; a later stage will see lines running to Giroc and Șag (south) and potentially to Sânmihaiu Român and Săcălaz (west).

THE TIMIȘOARA GROWTH POLE

The setting up of the Timișoara Growth Pole as a co-operative structure at local level was preceded by a number of attempts to develop co-operation between different communities regarding the planning of the social and economic development of the city and its environs. Thus 1999-2000 saw the first step towards bringing the policies of the different local authorities into line by means of a partnership between the municipality of Timișoara and six suburban communities (Dumbrăvița, Ghiroda, Giroc, Moșnița Nouă, Săcălaz and Sânmihaiu Român). The result of this collaborative action was the drawing-up of the *Strategic Plan for the Economic and Social Development of the Timișoara Area* in the medium and longer term (2000-2010). In 2004 a decision of Timiș County Council led to the formation of the first Timișoara Area Metropolitan Consultative Council⁵. Its purpose was to co-ordinate local policies regarding the improvement of the area and urban development.

⁵ The Timișoara Zone Metropolitan Consultative Council is formed of 13 administrative units, the Municipality of Timișoara and 12 periurban communities: Dumbrăvița, Ghiroda, Moșnița Nouă, Giroc, Sânmihaiu Român, Săcălaz, Sănandrei, Giarmata, Orțișoara, Remetea Mare, Șag and Parța.

In accordance with Romanian government decisions numbers 998, 1149 and 1513, taken in the period September-November 2008, which set up seven urban growth poles for the whole country, among them the Timișoara Growth Pole (Popa, 2010), Timișoara was constituted a growth pole (composed of a municipality and 15 administrative communities⁶) by Timișoara local council decision number 387/2008. Since the community of Sănanđrei did not join this association, February 2009 witnessed the founding of the *Timișoara Growth Pole Inter-Communal Development Association*, the founding members being one municipality (Timișoara), 14 administrative communities and Timiș County Council.

The Timișoara growth pole⁷ is the sixth largest urban agglomeration in Romania, after Bucharest, Galați-Brăila, Constanța, Brașov and Iași. It has a population of 375,000 (82.9% of whom live in the municipality of Timișoara – figures for 1st January 2010), and a surface area of 1172.7 square kilometres (thus occupying approximately 3.5% of the Western Development Region and 12.7% of the total surface area of Timiș county), of which 130.04 sq. km. (11%) is occupied by the municipality. On this territory around the city of Timișoara there are 38 villages, giving an average density of 3.6 rural settlements per 100 sq. km., below the national average of 5.7 villages per 100 sq. km. of rural space. However, the average population of a village is 1685 inhabitants, significantly above the national average of 745 inhabitants per village.

The low density of settlements, made up for by a higher average population in each, gives us a population density in the periurban area of only 61.5 people per sq. km., well below the usual population density of periurban areas in Central and Western Europe but above the average for rural areas of Romania (around 46 inhabitants per sq. km.). This characteristic of Timișoara's periurban area, shared in fact by the majority of periurban areas in Romania, is in the course of changing. In recent years, the population of these 15 periurban communities of which 14 are members of the Association has been growing steadily. This phenomenon was most clearly seen in the period between 2005 and 2010, during which the population grew by 17.8% to reach 64,048 (Table 3).

Through the many and various functions that it fulfils, the urban centre of Timișoara is the focal point of a much wider area, since it is the largest economic, cultural and academic centre in Romania's Western Development Region. It is here that over 30% of the industrial production and around 35% of the commercial activity of the Western Region are concentrated, as well as a large number of higher education establishments that between them cater for 61% of the region's students. The Timișoara growth hub thus represents an extremely important centre of economic dynamism in Romania, second only to Bucharest. It has an essential role in the building of long-term relationships to facilitate the integration of Romania into EU structures and the expression of Romanian values in the European Economic Area (EEA) (Planul integrat... – PIDU, Timișoara, 2010).

⁶ The geographical extent of the Timișoara Growth Pole was established on the basis of a consultancy report drawn up by the Centre for Regional Development, Cross-Border Studies and Optimal Land Use Structural Planning (CDR-START) of the Department of Geography of the West University of Timișoara and includes the communities of Becicherecu Mic, Bucovăț, Dudeștii Noi, Dumbrăvița, Ghiroda, Giarmata, Giroc, Moșnița Nouă, Orțișoara, Pișchia, Remetea Mare, Săcălaz, Sănanđrei, Sănmihaiu Român and Șag.

⁷ I have included the community of Sănanđrei (made up of three villages) in the analysis that follows, because even though it did not join the Timișoara Growth Pole Association it belongs to Timișoara's zone of influence.

Table 3. Changes in the population of Timișoara and the administrative communities that are members of the Timișoara Growth Pole Association, 2005-2010

(Source: after INSSE primary data, 2011)

Community	2005	2009	2010	2010/2005 (%)
Becicherecu Mic	2,453	2,712	2,747	111.99
Bucovăț*	-	1,423	1,455	112.26
Dudeștii Noi	2,313	2,696	2,779	120.15
Dumbrăvița	2,612	3,866	4,452	170.44
Ghiroda	4,726	5,262	5,357	113.35
Giarmata	5,583	6,099	6,202	111.09
Giroc	4,194	5,302	5,758	137.29
Moșnița Nouă	3,874	4,600	4,796	123.80
Orțișoara	3,931	4,152	4,182	106.38
Pișchia	2,813	2,847	2,896	102.95
Remetea Mare*	3,107	1,999	2,033	112.26
Sânandrei**	5,382	5,924	5,974	111.00
Săcălaz	6,394	7,037	7,316	114.42
Sânmiхайu Român	4,322	5,002	5,274	122.03
Șag	2,689	2,832	2,863	106.47
Periurban total	54,393	61,753	64,048	117.81
<i>Municipality of Timișoara</i>	<i>303,908</i>	<i>311,586</i>	<i>311,440</i>	<i>102.48</i>
Total for the pole	358,301	373,339	375,488	104.79

* For 2005, the population of the community of Bucovăț is included under Remetea Mare.

** The community of Sânandrei did not join the Timișoara Growth Pole Association.

Table 4. Changes in the number of dwellings in Timișoara and the member communities of the Timișoara Growth Pole Association, 2005-2010

(Source: after INSSE primary data, 2011)

Community	2005	2008	2010	2010/2005 %
Becicherecu Mic	823	831	833	101.2
Bucovăț*	-	437	444	104.1
Dudeștii Noi	788	798	817	103.7
Dumbrăvița	1,215	2,047	2,341	192.7
Ghiroda	1,770	1,969	2,011	113.6
Giarmata	1,643	1,674	1,694	103.1
Giroc	1,571	2,258	2,574	163.8
Moșnița Nouă	1,494	1,698	1,829	122.4
Orțișoara	1,577	1,590	1,604	101.7
Pișchia	1,141	1,139	1,151	100.9
Remetea Mare*	1,463	1,077	1,079	104.1
Sânandrei**	1,718	1,847	1,891	110.1
Săcălaz	2,060	2,206	2,261	109.8
Sânmiхайu Român	1,472	1,903	1,997	135.6
Șag	869	960	1,007	115.9
Periurban total	20,126	22,428	23,533	116.9
<i>Municipality of Timișoara</i>	<i>127,579</i>	<i>128,998</i>	<i>129,545</i>	<i>101.5</i>
Total for the pole	147,705	151,426	153,078	103.6

* For 2005, dwellings in the community of Bucovăț are included under Remetea Mare.

** The community of Sânandrei did not join the Timișoara Growth Pole Association.

The structural and functional regeneration of the area around the Timișoara growth hub can be clearly seen (as well as in other ways) in a *building boom*, especially in places in the immediate vicinity of the municipality. However, as may be observed if we make a comparative analysis of the data given in tables 6 and 7, the rate of increase in the housing stock in Timișoara's zone of influence is slightly lower than the rate of demographic increase. This is a consequence of the reciprocal interaction between a number of specifically local

geographical phenomena and processes, for example the proliferation of second home ownership and the time lag between the completion of dwellings and their finding buyers on the one hand, and the preponderance of young couples with children in this zone of influence on the other. This time lag increased in 2009-2011 because of the economic and financial crisis and the slowing-down in the rate of construction of new dwellings.

These demographic and housing-stock dynamics are a reflection of the economic changes taking place in the relationships between the urban and periurban parts of the Timișoara growth hub. From this point of view, a local *redistribution of economic functions* can be seen to be occurring, in the sense that industrial and service activities that require large areas of land are being taken over by suburban villages. The city is tending to devote itself to high-added-value activities and to those which occupy only a small surface area, since land values within Timișoara city limits increased greatly up to 2008, ranging between 120 euros per square metre towards the outskirts of the city and 800-1000 euros per square metre in the central zone. After that date, land values within the city limits fell by 20-30% (figures arrived at by analysing the websites of Timișoara real estate agencies).

All these factors have led to a redefining of the main options regarding *the use of space and best utilisation of the territory* belonging to the Timișoara growth hub. One tendency that illustrates this new vision is that of the removal from designated agricultural land of areas that are now judged to be more valuable for other purposes. In consequence, the area of agricultural land of the Timișoara hub fell by 7% between 2000 and 2008, a reduction of 7,070 hectares, equivalent to the total land area of a medium-sized community on the plain (Table 8). This cutting-back of agricultural land has occurred chiefly in order to extend the amount of built-up land, either in the area of small villa-style housing, or in that of industrial and service activity, or for the development of access and transport infrastructure.

Table 5. Reduction in agricultural land within the area of the Timișoara growth pole
(Source: after INSSE primary data, 2011)

Administrative unit	Area of agricultural land (ha)		Change 2008/2000 (%)
	2000	2008	
Becicherecu Mic	4,315	4,302	99.7
Dudeștii Noi	5,023	4,986	99.2
Dumbrăvița	1,659	1,217	73.3
Ghiroda	2,898	2,734	94.3
Giarmata	6,634	6,556	98.8
Giroc	4,501	4,314	95.8
Moșnița Nouă	5,727	5,166	90.2
Orțișoara	13,795	13,768	99.8
Pișchia	9,754	9,664	99.1
Remetea Mare*	8,897	8,851	99.5
Sânandrei**	8,557	8,178	95.6
Săcălaz	10,949	10,738	98.1
Sânmiхайu Român	6,852	6,851	100.0
Săg	2,998	2,887	96.3
Periurban total	92,559	85,910	92.8
<i>Municipality of Timișoara</i>	8,181	7,760	94.8
Total for the pole	100,740	93,670	93.0

*Figures for the community of Bucovăț are included under Remetea Mare

**The village of Sânandrei did not join the Timișoara Growth Hub Association.

Thus a number of dispersed areas devoted to concentrations of mainly villa-style housing have taken shape, the most significant being those to the north-east of the city (Dumbrăvița -Covaci) and to the south-east (Moșnița Nouă -Giroc). There is also a distinct tendency for these areas to be separate from those devoted to new industrial and service industries, which prefer to be close to the main transport axes – the extension of Calea Șagului (towards Moravița-Belgrade), Calea Torontalului (towards Sânnicolau Mare-Szeged), Calea Lugojului and Calea Buziașului (both towards Lugoj-Bucharest). The exit roads in the directions of Belgrade and Buziaș are host to mainly private businesses, whereas the routes toward Sânnicolau Mare and Lugoj and the older Freidorf industrial area are sought both by private enterprises and by publicly-funded projects for the construction of industrial and technical parks (Timișoara ITP) and intermodal logistical areas (the Timișoara-Remetea Mare Intermodal Centre). Timișoara Airport Park is also being extended. This – the result of private initiative – is a logistical centre located to the north-east of the city, with access to the ring road. When completed it will cover an area of around 260,000 square metres.

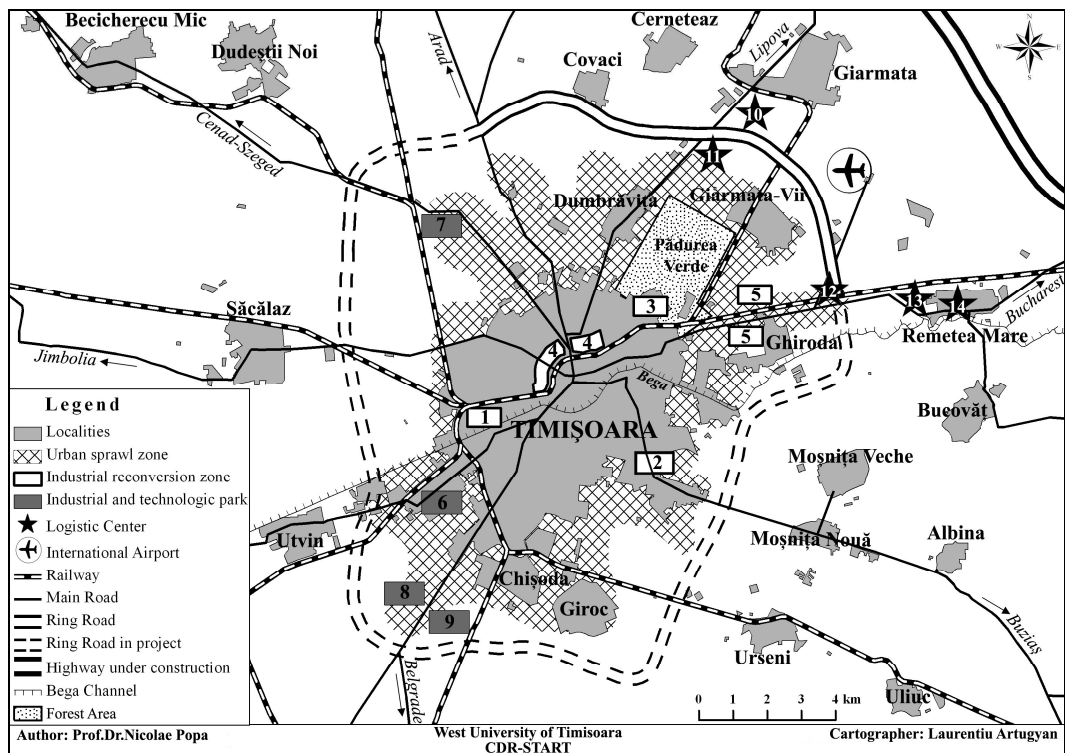


Figure 5. Changes in urban planning and in the Timișoara's mode of relating to surrounding areas

- 1 – Solventul industrial zone; 2 – Buziasului industrial zone ; 3 – UMT/ Continental industrial zone ;
 4 – North industrial zone ; 5 – Calea Lugojului industrial zone ; 6 – Industrial park Freidorf ;
 7 – Industrial and technological park of Timisoara; 8 – Monlandys industrial park;
 9 – Incontro industrial park; 10 – Timisoara Airport Park; 11 – Dunca Spedition;
 12 – Edy Spedition; 13,14 – Remetea Mare logistical parks.

Looking to the future, the completion of the Nădlac – Arad – Timișoara – Deva – Sibiu – Pitești, motorway, part of European Corridor 4, will have a major

impact. However, the local authorities view the projected route of the motorway as unhelpful for Timișoara, since it does not come close enough to the main populated area (the distance is around 12 km) and only one access road from the city has been planned, whereas in the case of Arad four such access roads are being provided (for the reason that the route of the motorway forms a tangent with the south-western edge of the city). The Timișoara residential area really requires three such access points: one to the north, towards Arad, another in the north-east, towards Lipova, and a third to the east, towards Lugoj. However, given the route the motorway follows across the local area and the relatively large distance between it and the city, an increase in the number of access roads is harder to provide but not impossible to make a case for. The motorway also passes a relatively long way (5 km) from the city's best piece of transport infrastructure, Timișoara International Airport, the third largest airport in the country in terms of numbers of passengers (1.134 million in 2010), surpassed only by Bucharest Otopeni and Bucharest Băneasa. As long as the number of access points can increase to a minimum of two, the distance between the motorway and the city will not necessarily represent a handicap, provided that there are more access points in the periurban area. If we take into account the way a motorway can pose an obstacle to the development of relationships between parts of a local area, the buffer zone to the north-east of the city reserved for the extension of various functions of the urban agglomeration, the site of Timișoara's most important infrastructural means of communication with the rest of Romania and with Europe (its international airport, the intermodal logistical centre, the ring road etc.), could instead become a magnet for investors and a stimulus to general socio-economic development. However, the difficulty of co-ordinating decisions taken by the public authorities in Timișoara and in its neighbouring communities (Dumbrăvița, Remetea Mare) is tending to deprive this part of the hub of a clear vision of how to make the most of its territory; worst of all, chaotic decision-making is imperilling the opportunity to preserve particular areas and access corridors for installations that could have strategic importance for the future of Timișoara.

In fact, Timișoara generally has very *poor transport infrastructure and services linking it with the rest of Romania* and with neighbouring countries. The railway system of Banat, once the best in the country – at least in terms of density of network and quality of provision for local communities⁸ – is today on the verge of collapse. A drastic reduction in the number of users, caused by a decline in classic economic activity and the coming-of-age of road passenger transport, has led to a dramatic increase in losses on maintenance and operating costs. As a result, the infrastructure has deteriorated, and the slowness of the trains is making rail travel ever less attractive. On the main lines (to Bucharest, Sibiu, Cluj-Napoca and Oradea) the average commercial speed of the fastest passenger train ranges from 48 km an hour on the Sibiu line to 64 km an hour on the Bucharest line (figures from the 2011 passenger timetable). In addition, there are no direct rail links between Timișoara and the capitals of the neighbouring countries, Belgrade and Budapest.

The road traffic infrastructure, likewise, is far from providing swift connections with the principal traffic arteries in this part of Europe. Throughout

⁸ Timiș County still has the greatest concentration of rail track in Romania – 91.4 km per 1,000 square km, compared with the national average of 45.2 km per 1,000 square km.

Banat, the European highways have only one carriageway in each direction, the same as the national roads. In addition, the renewal of the main routes has dragged on so badly over the past 20 years that the city of Timișoara was left almost cut off, particularly from the capital and the Balkans (Sofia, Istanbul), with the roadworks needed to renew the E70 having a serious effect on traffic flow for almost seven years (2003-2010). At present, the main transport axes in Banat are in better shape, but the majority of the county and minor roads are still unsatisfactory.

The area in which Timișoara is weakest is its provision for leisure activities – something that has become indispensable to the social life of large cities, affected as they are by overcrowding, pollution and stress. The Timișoara growth hub has up to now lacked a clear perspective on the provision and appropriate development of *areas for relaxation and leisure*. Apart from its city parks, Timișoara has not a single European-standard area suitable for periurban and weekend tourism. Within a radius of 40 km around the city there are only a few hotel or guesthouse type places to stay or eat that are situated in interesting and potentially attractive areas, and what these have to offer tourists in addition to the basics is very limited. If we make an exception of the possibilities in those periurban areas that are practically integrated into the city (Dumbrăvița, Ghiroda, Giroc), visiting which is not regarded as a real weekend outing, since they are merely extensions of the urban space, we are left with few places to visit and those with little to make the tourist wish to extend his stay. Most of them are hotels and guesthouses (at Remetea Mare, Bazoș, Săcălaz, Altringen, Șandra etc.) that are in demand for short stays, sometimes of a *teambuilding* nature, but lack broad-appeal facilities capable of providing relaxation and entertainment possibilities for a large number of people (water parks, amusement parks, etc.).

Opportunities for improvement do exist, linked with the presence nearby of forests (the Green Forest, Bistra Woods, Giroc Woods, the Bazoș Dendrological Park, the Pișchia hunting reserve etc.) and vine-growing areas (Recaș), the proximity of the Timiș valley with its potential for being developed for summer tourist activities (Șag, Albina) and the existence of thermal (Timișoara, Sânmihaiul German, Calacea, Lovrin) and mineral (Buziaș) springs, of some lakes, etc. However, in order for these to be systematically exploited, we are still waiting for the working out of an action plan at the level of the hub, with specific improvement projects that would increase the chances of attracting significant investment. There is a high demand for facilities of this kind, as evidenced by the fact that a very large number of people from Timișoara and other parts of Western Romania regularly make use of the modern recreational and leisure facilities to be found in neighbouring countries, particularly in Hungary, as a consequence of the lack of suitable in-country attractions. This high level of demand would surely lead to full use of such facilities and would guarantee a good return on money thus invested.

CONCLUSIONS

The changes that have taken place in the city of Timișoara and its neighbourhood during the past two decades point to a set of quantitative and qualitative gains which still leave the city lagging behind the present-day urban systems of Central Europe. This lag is historical in nature but also reflects recent dysfunctions that have caused the lag to persist and in some sectors even to widen. At a national level, the perception is that Banat and above all

Timișoara are some of the most developed areas in Romania, and this perception is confirmed by some economic and quality-of-life indicators. The majority of those who live in Timișoara clearly take pride in the city – a pride nourished in an inertial way by its historical inheritance, but also based on the striking progress that took place in the period from 1995 to 2005, during which numerous large foreign companies opened operating centres in Timișoara, thus contributing to the development of the city and to a rise in the income of its population and that of nearby villages. This pride is only expressed in relation to what the rest of Romania is like; when comparisons with other countries are under discussion, a realistic view prevails, made easier by the greater frequency with which Timișoara people come into contact with foreigners (the effect of proximity), whether within Banat or in countries in Central and Southern Europe (Austria, Hungary, Germany, Italy etc).

Opinion polls carried out in Timișoara show up this dichotomy, a natural one if we consider the socio-economic realities of Central and South-Eastern Europe (Timișoara City Hall Monitor no. 98, 2011). However, these studies also reveal a certain degree of inertia and a triumphalist perception of the state of affairs locally, even though in recent years Timișoara has lost some of the dynamism that characterised it in the 1990s as it has competed with other cities in Romania that are similar in size and function, most especially Cluj-Napoca. For example, even though 7.5% of direct foreign investment in Romania is in Timișoara (as a consequence of what it built up during the 1995-2006 period), the dynamic of direct foreign investment in Timișoara fell significantly after the middle of the first decade of the present century. In the past few years, including in those in which there was strong economic growth in Romania as a whole, Timișoara has not succeeded in attracting a single well-known investor or any large-scale investment that could have contributed to refreshing its image as an innovative hub with much to offer the business world. Thus, for example, in 2007 the Finnish firm Nokia chose to develop a site near Cluj-Napoca, and in 2008 Mercedes-Benz, a division of the German company Daimler AG, opted for the city of Kecskemet in Hungary, although both firms, in their quest for attractive centres for delocalising or green field investment, had also carried out surveys to gauge the potential offered by the Timișoara area.

In the sphere of cross-border links, too, in the competition between the four major hubs in the DKMT Euroregion (Timișoara, Novi Sad, Arad and Szeged), Timișoara is showing a relatively limited capacity to initiate cross-border co-operation projects and influence the socio-economic and cultural life of the Euroregion. Rivalry between the four hubs is a prevalent feature of the situation, a rivalry which in some domains (infrastructure and logistical services, research and innovation, tourism, promotion etc.) is leading to the wasting of resources, the weakening of local social cohesion and a reduction in the region's potential for social development.

The city is lacking in a number of aspects of social and urban quality and cultural breadth whose attainment would require a change in its paradigm of approach. Its claim to be in the same league as the regional metropolises of Central and Western Europe, matched within Romania by a vision based on narrow local rivalries, can scarcely these days ensure the healthy progress of a regional hub. As such, Timișoara's growth strategy should be based on the principle of excellence and also on that of socio-territorial cohesion. It has the identity-related basis it requires. All the city needs to do is to emerge from its

monadic state and surround itself with a dense network of infrastructural and relational links with its territory and with local communities. It is in partnership with these and with regard to their immediate advantage that the use of Timișoara's periurban space needs to be planned.

Because of the city's limited territorial resources, its functional reach and impact are coming to depend more and more on the prosperity of the periurban zone that supports it. Development of this zone would then feed into the strength of the entire urban area and contribute to the growth of the prestige of its nucleus, the city, whose positive external projection would have repercussions in the growing ability of the Timișoara area to attract and retain the resources it needs for its development. In this way the Timișoara Growth Pole would also have an increased ability to fulfil the objectives for which it was granted this status, namely to provide co-ordinated planning and the diffusion of socio-economic development in the Western Region of Romania.

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