

URBAN REGENERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT URBAN DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN ROMANIA. CASE STUDY: ȘTEI CITY (BIHOR COUNTY, ROMANIA)

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Abstract: The centralized planning of the economic development transposed in the territory through forced industrialization and urbanization policies was one of the most powerful transformative processes of the communist Romania space, triggering sudden changes in the traditional lifestyle of the inhabitants and causing territorial disturbances with long term effects. These policies have profiled a specific urban typology, represented by collective buildings with small surfaces, neighborhoods with high urban density, built in the close vicinity of the industrial centers. In most cases, the decision of selecting the rural settlements seen as "having high possibilities of development" to gain the urban status through forced industrialization, was conditioned by the presence of resources (especially the subsoil resources). The fall of the communist regime and the transition to market economy have initiated a metamorphosis of the Romanian urban spaces. Thus, with the disappearance of some industrial branches, imbalances shaped up at urban scale between the working-class neighborhoods lacking investments and the rest of the urban tissue. In the southern part of Bihor County the presence of mineral resources, especially uranium, subsequently represented both the chance of explosive development on the one hand, and the decline and total collapse of these communities, on the other hand. The changes brought by the uranium exploitation (the largest uranium deposit on the surface in the world) in the region were multiple and fast. The most important ones were related to the intake of manpower for whose accommodation there had been built new towns, like Dr. Petru Groza (currently Stei, built from scratch and attached to the namesake village) and Nucet (dormitory town for miners, also built from scratch). This study proposes to analyze the urban regeneration of Stei (named Dr. Petru Groza during the communist era after one of the most important Romanian communist leaders) in the context of current policies of urban development

in Romania. The aim is to emphasize the need for urban regeneration measures in the industrial towns built during the communist regime, which are in a demographic, economic, social and derelict urban structures from the communist period, with outdated infrastructure, degraded built environment and an overall poor quality of the urban life.

Key words: urban regeneration, Ștei city, urban policies, transition

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INTRODUCTION

Within operational planning field, urban regeneration represents a form of the evolution of the city which designates the action of rebuilding the city on itself and recycling built resources. That aims specifically to treat a variety of problems such as social, economic, urban, architectural of certain old neighborhoods degraded and encourage new developments including economic development (Roberts and Sykes, 2000), and to develop solidarity across the community. In the last decades, both scholars and practitioners developed a series of guidelines to optimize urban regeneration (Roberts, 2000) taking into account the existing situation and the global context. Therefore, after the two world wars was set up an urban regeneration based on reconstruction and extension of older areas of cities, often based on a master plan and suburban growth. The key actors and stakeholders in this process were national and local authorities with less involvement of the private sector. In terms of spatial action the emphasis is on local and site levels. Investments were made by the public sector and were oriented towards improvement of housing and living standards (Edgar and Taylor, 2000). Besides implants and replacement of inner areas (Jeffrey and Pounder, 2000) early peripheral development appears. In the 60s, the first signs of the need for an urban regeneration policy based on revitalisation show up. During this period were continued the suburban and peripheral growth, being realized early rehabilitation actions (Jeffrey and Pounder, 2000). Is the period when was encouraged the private sector involvement in urban regeneration. Spatial level of activity was expanded to the regional context. Concerning the economical part of the urban regeneration were continued the public investment with growing influence of private investment. Urban regeneration is oriented towards social and welfare improvement in this way increase the rehabilitation works of existing areas. The evolutions of the urban spaces in the 1970s have determined a reorientation of urban regeneration towards new policies, especially urban renewal. Urban regeneration was focused on in-situ renewal and neighborhood schemes, but at the same time the development at the fringe went on. Spatial level of activity is related to the regional and local levels initially, later with more local emphasis (Lichfield, 2000). Social content of the urban regeneration is oriented towards community-based action and a greater empowerment of local stakeholders.

Redevelopment type policy of urban regeneration started in the 1980s with an emphasis on private sector and special agencies strengthening the growth of partnerships (Carter, 2000).

In the early years the focus is on site regeneration, following then to emphasize on local level through the dominance of the private sector with selective public funds (Noon et al., 2000). In the 80's, urban regeneration starts

to focus on the social issues involving the community in this process but still at an incipient stage. During this period major works are accomplished represented by replacement and new development, often flagship schemes.

Next years have determined the rethinking of urban regeneration towards a more comprehensive form of policy and practice, placing more emphasize on integrated approaches. Partnership is the predominant approach with a greater balance between public, private and voluntary funding (Carter, 2000; Noon et al., 2000). These are the first years that outline the principles of sustainability and the responsibility being assumed partially by the community. Heritage buildings are the most covered by urban regeneration actions. Urban regeneration should start from a strong knowledge of territory by using attribute data arising from economic, social and environment analysis. To these are added various inputs by one hand, internal and external factors of change and the individuality of implementation of necessary measures according to the characteristics of urban space by the other hand.

All these measures generate some outputs that have a noticeable effect on the socio-economic and environmental development. Some outputs have long-lasting effects, as in the case of successful local initiatives which are then transposed into national or European policies. Effects of urban regeneration measures are found obviously in physical improvements and also in the community behavior educated and trained for this purpose (figure 1).

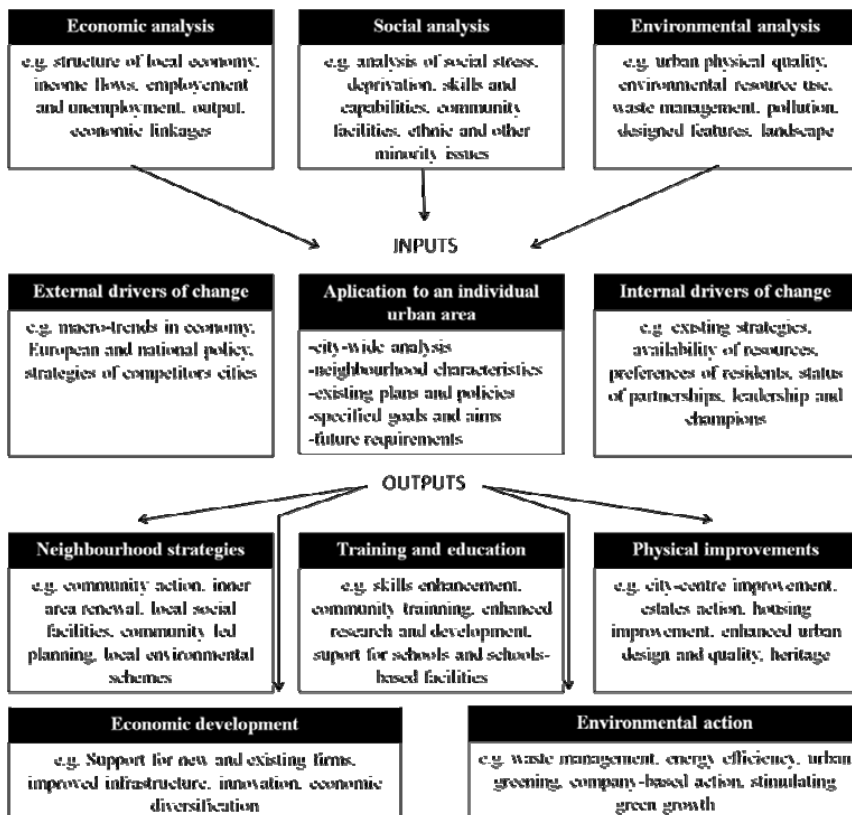


Figure 1. The urban regeneration process
(Source: Roberts, 2000)

URBAN REGENERATION PROCESS IN ROMANIA

In Romania urban regeneration has been understood mostly as a building practice carried out outside housing policies applied to the city as a whole, intended to recover traditional housing to make it available as an exclusive, rehabilitation of heritage buildings in central urban areas. Urban regeneration has acquired a less elitist character and has focused on deprived, underprivileged and vulnerable urban neighborhoods and areas, etc. (Integrated Urban Regeneration in the European Union¹, 2010). Romanian national urban policy in its current stage of development and implementation is an ongoing process which addresses a series of priorities in a comprehensive and integrated way. Therefore, the emphasis is on the efficient use of urban territory and the limitation of urban sprawl, improving housing conditions and ensuring responsible management of resources, importance of fulfilling the conditions for sustainable, competitive and cohesive cities and the limitation of the exposure of the population to natural and technological risks (EUKN², 2010).

Romania had to tackle and overcome disparities of all sorts left as a legacy by the communist on the one hand and post-socialist urban evolution on the other hand. A short retrospective analysis shows the evolution of the urban population in Romania, deducting the metamorphosis of Romanian urban space in order to meet the housing needs of residents and their related elements such as economic zones, services, public spaces, etc. In the last century the percentage of the urban population from the total population increased steadily (Benedek, 2006) from 20% in the interwar period to over 55% nowadays (table 1).

Table 1. Evolution of the urban population in Romania
(Data source: Romanian Population Census, 1930-2010)

year	1930	1960	1970	1990	-EU integration 2010
urban population	20 %	33 %	38 %	53 %	55 %

-forced industrialisation
 -emergence of new towns
 -collective dwellings

The evolution and the trends of urban development in Romania indicate an increase in population's interest for dwellings in the urban environment, especially in peripheral areas that could take advantage of the availability of certain urban infrastructure items or from the outlooks of their development (Luca, 2009). Romanian post socialist cities are forced to confront with essential dysfunctions referring to financial resources, migration of work labor, gentrification process etc., all related to the urban regeneration process which belongs to the external factors and the limitation of the urban design in order to reduce the urban sprawl and the decline of the cities. Romanian cities are characterized by the dual appearance that displays, on the one hand by the communist legacy and by urban

¹ Toledo Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Development June, 2010 Questionnaire on integrated urban regeneration policies

² European Urban Knowledge Network, Development and Urban Policy in Romania

drift of the transition period after the end of communist regime and post-integration into the European Union period, on the other hand.

Centralized planning of the communist period highlights some features visible in most cities whether it is about cities with a natural organic growth or cities resulted from the policy of forced industrialization and urbanization. This may outline a specific typology of cities represented by collective housing with small surfaces, neighborhoods with high urban density, built in the close vicinity of the industrial centers. The post communist period captures the transformation of the Romanian urban space (Ianoș and Tălângă, 1994), when cities dependent by the declined local industry has drawn the entrance of localities in crisis, unable to return to a positive evolutionary course. These cities are characterized by working-class neighborhoods with poor living conditions and socio-economic dysfunctions. Other cities have managed to revitalize their workers' neighborhoods although socialist mark remains visible. Accession of Romania to European Community space is reflected in urban physiognomy by a chaotic development especially at the periphery of city's causing uncontrolled urban sprawl.

The main goals of the current urban regeneration policies as described in a informative guide concerning the urban regeneration published by the Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing are: the rehabilitation of the historical centers; modernization of public space; modernization of the urban infrastructure and improving living conditions in residential neighborhoods(MDLPL³, 2007).

URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN REGENERATION IN ȘTEI

Ștei city is located in the South-East part of the Bihor County, surrounded by Bihorulul, Pădurea Craiului and Codru Moma mountains, at the confluence of the rivers Crișul Negru, Crișul Băița and Sighistel. The city is crossed by national road DN 76 Oradea-Deva and Oradea-Vașcău railway (Filimon, 2007). The distance from Ștei to the main city of the county - Oradea is 80 km. In the immediate vicinity of Ștei are three cities Beiuș, Vașcău and Nucet (figure 2).

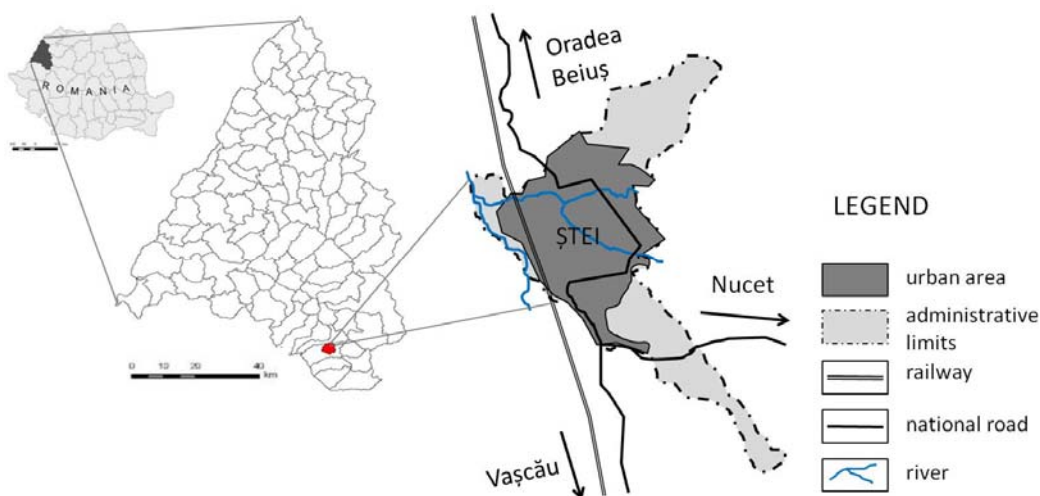


Figure 2. Localization of Ștei city

³ Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing

First mentioned around 1580, Stei was initially a village until 1986. Urban evolution of Stei city is closely related to nearby existing subsoil resources and the industry developed on this basis. The growth rate of 2190%, from just 377 inhabitants in 1880 to 8637 inhabitants in 2002 (maximum demographic population was 10,415 in 1992) shows to what extent the old village was changing. It should be noted that, although the overall level of Beius Land was facing a downward trend in population since 1966, widespread after 1977, the population growth rate between 1966 and 1977 was over 35% in Stei, and between 1977 and 1992 over 33%. Obviously, the situation is due to the role of "demographic aspirator" imposed by forced industrialization (Filimon, 2007). Only after 1992, together with the economic downturn was installed demographic decline, growth rate became negative (-17%). The negative trend of evolution rate continued for the period 2002-2010 at a rate of -29% (figure 3).

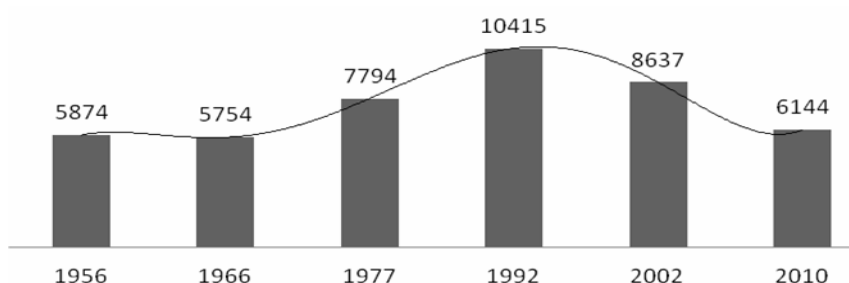


Figure 3. Evolution of number of inhabitants
(Source: Romanian Population Census, 1930-2010)

After the Second World War, the village had a characteristic mountain village physiognomy, extended along the river with wooden houses (GF, GF +1⁴). The discovery of uranium, caused profound changes in Stei village, the future new town was designed in Moscow by a Russian architect. At first they built numerous barracks of boards, grouped by neighborhoods. In the eastern part of the village was a town of barracks, arranged for the soviet army, brought especially in the village. For soviet specialists were built solid two floors blocks (Lenin Street-nowadays Unirii Street), prohibited to the circulation of vehicles (figure 4).



Figure 4. Two floors block built for the soviet elites (Lenin Street–nowadays Unirii Street)

⁴ Ground floor and ground floor plus 1 level

There followed a sports and exclusive stores, which had access only Russian citizens. Common people were living in KD (with wall panels) type blocks and BW type houses (green boxes German inspiration), these were dwelling with a floor or two, buildings for 4 families and houses for 2 families (figure 5).



Figure 5. BW type family house

During 1952 and 1956, the masses were accommodated within old buildings (with two floors) in Petrileni neighborhood.

On 10 January 1956, together with Nucet and Vașcău, Ștei is declared city by the means of a Council of Ministers Decree. In 1958 the town changed its name to Dr. Petru Groza, and in 1996 regained its former name Ștei.

The town's residential area is compact and has three distinct housing subareas. The first one is the old village, developed on the current Miron Pompiliu Street, extended along the river, near Minerul Ștei stadium with dwelling GF, GF+1 and GF+2.

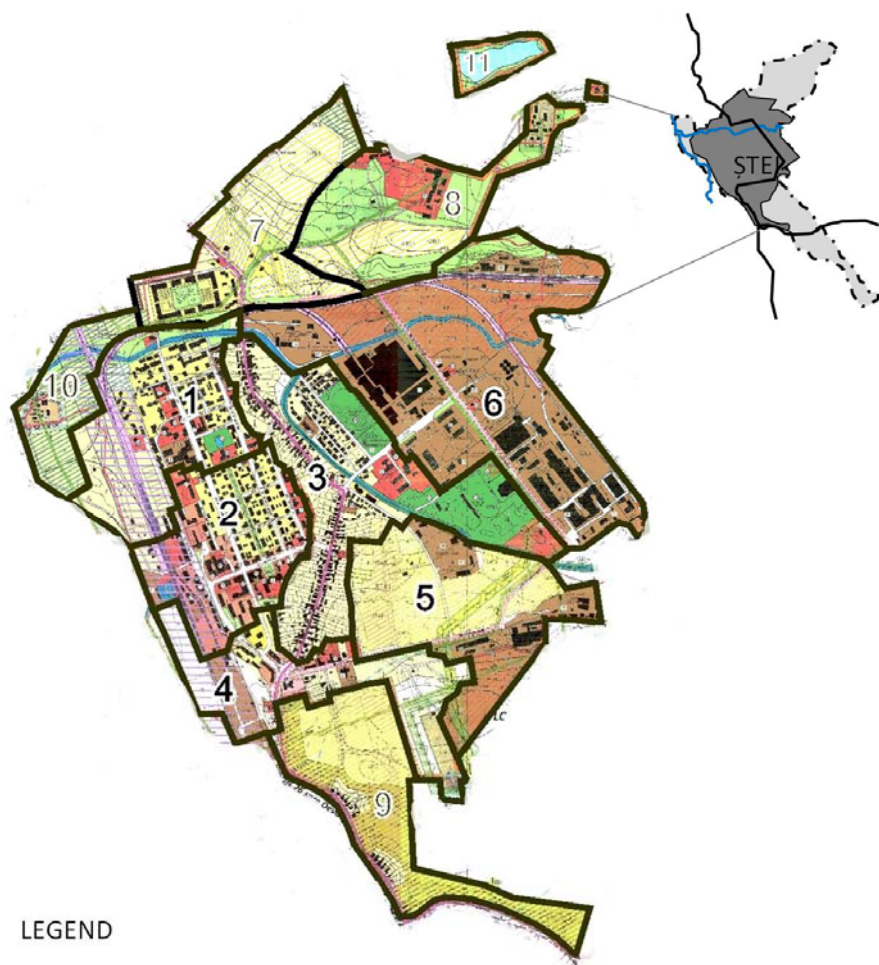
In the western part of city on the 1945-1955 plotting was developed a primarily residential area with individual and collective apartments with small and medium height GF, GF+2, GF+4.

Local architecture is specific to a Transylvanian mining settlement (eg. Jiu Valley developed in the same period), - wooden dwelling for GF and brick buildings in a classic-style for GF+1 and GF+2.

Housing has mushroomed since 1960, with concrete blocks and brick with high regime, GF+4 and GF + 9; these are similar in architecture with the collective dwellings built around that time across the country.

Most of these buildings were located in the central area along thoroughfares having commercial spaces at the ground floor. The residential areas expanded with new buildings (ANL⁵) nearby railway station and old blocks (ANL) near the intersection between Miron Popmpiliu Street and Lucian Blaga Street. Thus, 72 apartments (ANL) were completed and 36 are ongoing tender for construction (figure 6).

⁵ Agenția Națională de Locuințe/ National Housing Agency



LEGEND

- 1 - collective houses GF + 1, GF + 2
- 2 - existing collective housing in blocks, GF +1, GF +2, GF+ 2, GF + 4 with commercial and service at the ground floor
- 3 - existing individual houses and collective houses in blocks GF, GF+1, GF+2, GF+3
- 4 - existing individual houses and collective houses in blocks GF, GF+1, GF+2, GF+4 with commercial and service at the ground floor and collective housing in high blocks with GF+ 5 and GF+ 9
- 5 - proposed individual houses with GF, GF +2
- 6 - services, industry
- 7 - existing individual houses and collective housing in blocks with GF +2, GF +4; proposed individual houses with GF, GF +2
- 8 - proposed individual houses with GF, GF +2
- 9 - existing individual houses; proposed individual houses with GF, GF +2
- 10 - leisure, sports, tourism areas
- 11, 12 - public institutions and services

Figure 6. Functional zones of Ştei city
(data source: Ştei Land Use Plan, Ştei Local Planning Register)

Urban regeneration in the city of Stei is a long process, and since this is a small town resources are limited and largely dependent on national policies and European funding opportunities (Filimon et al., 2011). The inclusion of city in the nationally created disadvantaged areas, specifically by declaring disadvantaged mining area Stei - Nucet (founded by GD⁶ 194/1999) conferred it some opportunities. These areas have been created for a period of 10 years (01.04.1999 - 01.04.2009) by the decision no. 194 of 25 March 1999, published in Monitorul Oficial al României⁷ no. 134/01.04.1999. Thus, investors were installed in Ștei who developed an industrial platform one of the largest in the country. Important in this case is that these investors have contributed to the rehabilitation of heritage buildings. On the basis of the "Casa Verde" program launched by the Ministry of Environment, individuals had the opportunity to access grants to carry out works to improve their individual houses in order to achieve better energy efficiency. This program continues to be accessible to individuals. ANL had a major role in the last years urban development as can be seen by the number of apartments built in the city, over 72 apartments was built and other 36 are in progress.

The municipality is involved in projects aimed at indirectly urban regeneration, the investments targeting priority works of rehabilitation of water and sewerage networks in the city, or the creation of an integrated rehabilitation system of the water supply systems, of sewage systems, of water treatment plants and of waste water treatment. By the Environmental Fund Agency with the Local Public Fund co-financing was realized the project targeting "the green rebuilding of the Stei city" focusing on the modernization and the expansion of public lighting in Stei.



Figure 7. House of Culture Miron Pompiliu (rehabilitated)

Furthermore, there are two projects in the cultural field such as "the project for cultural cohesion between Stei and Hajdudorog" which was funded by the Programme for the Romanian-Hungarian Cross-Border Cooperation 2007-2013 and the project "the rehabilitation and the equipping of the House of

⁶ Romanian Government Decree

⁷ Monitorul Oficial al României is the official gazette of Romania, in which all the promulgated bills, presidential decrees, governmental ordinances and other major legal acts are published

Culture Miron Pompiliu” financed by the Ministry of Culture⁸ (figure 7). During this period there were also individual initiatives to rehabilitate individual houses with their own funds (figure 8).



Figure 8. Old soviet BW types houses rehabilitated

CONCLUSION

In Romania urban regeneration is focused more on the rehabilitation of collective dwellings, modernization of the urban infrastructure, improving living standards in residential neighborhoods and rehabilitation of the historical centers. Many of the major actions in recent years have been based on European structural funds available for these types of works. Adaptation of the urban regeneration concept in Romania is based on the fact that there are similarities in its application and it represents one of the program tools with high potential of revitalizing the residential areas in city centers. Romania has an obsolete housing stock that awaits rehabilitation; the programs developed are suffering from a low participation of all major actors and stakeholders. The small cities in Romania have even greater problems, their resources being limited and largely dependent on national policies and European funding opportunities.

The former mining town has been exposed to many external interventions, causing an artificial growth during the communist regime. Through forced urbanization and industrialization policies, the city has reached the peak of built area. After 1989, the city continued to grow due to its ability to attract labor force from adjacent rural areas. The city of Ștei, with an obsolete housing stock is facing a lack of financial resources to initiate urban regeneration programs. The absence of urban regeneration strategies and the lack of specialists condemn Ștei city to an opportunistic urban regeneration depending on external factors.

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