



Mechanisms of territorial governance in post-socialist periruban areas from the perspective of local public authorities. A case study on localities from the proximity of Suceava city (Romania)

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MECHANISMS OF TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE IN POST-SOCIALIST PERIRUBAN AREAS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL PUBLIC AUTHORITIES. A CASE STUDY ON LOCALITIES FROM THE PROXIMITY OF SUCEAVA CITY (ROMANIA)

Anamaria Ioana Tomașciuc¹, Mihail Eva², Corneliu Iațu³

Abstract. The disappearance of the Communist regime marks the entry of Romanian cities into a new phase of urban development, characterized by the transition from socialist-type compact city, reliant on public transportation, to unorganised, dispersed and capitalist-type city, whose spatial sprawl is dependent on the existence of market economy, the degree of motorization and individual freedom of people. At the same time, this period of urban development is marked by the transition from government to governance, within which, the local territorial actors can play the leading role in setting the development directions of their own communities. Trying to analyse the connection between two phenomena particular to postmodernity - periurbanization and governance - the present paper evaluates the way local authorities, represented by local officials (mayors or deputy mayors), perceive the territorial governance and its specific features in a periurban space of Romania.

Keywords: periurban space, urban sprawl, territorial governance, post-socialist transformations, territorial actors, local actors, post-socialist city, Romania.

1. Introduction

At the transition between two EU's financial frameworks (2007-2013, 2014-2020), the administrative environment of Romania passes through some significant events: defining the Territorial Development Strategy of Romania (MDTR 2014), in accordance with Europe Strategy 2020 (European Commission, 2010) and the Territorial Agenda 2020 (CEMAT 2011), defining the new Sectoral and Regional Operational Programmes in order to access European funds (ongoing process) and triggering the debates on the process of decentralisation and regionalisation.

In the process of defining the new strategies, Romanian cities should be viewed in terms of their contribution to fostering regional competitiveness and territorial cohesion. However, this aim overlaps with the trend of urban sprawl particular to post-modern societies. The city is no longer a simple point in space, but a territorial organism increasingly larger,

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whose dispersed boundary is lost in the adjacent rural areas. Starting later compared to similar processes in North America and Western Europe, the periurbanization phenomenon has manifested in Eastern Europe only in the late twentieth century. Romanian urban system is no exception to this rule. The areas in the proximity of its cities had to bear the consequences of an unorganised urban development without going through an earlier stage of authentic suburbanisation. Therefore, the phenomenon has taken specific forms of manifestation, as it is the case of infrastructure backwardness compared to the development of individual residential spaces or the noncompliance with the requirements of General Urban Plans and the emergence of unauthorized buildings.

Even after the start of the financial crisis, periurbanization is the main phenomenon that generates positive demographic evolutions at local level, in a country where total population has been on a continuous decline for the past 25 years. Periurban spaces are the most dynamic areas of Romania, at least from a demographic point of view (Figure 1). The phenomenon characterizes medium and large cities, having over 50.000 inhabitants, but it can also manifest in the case of the urban centres of smaller dimensions which are economically active.

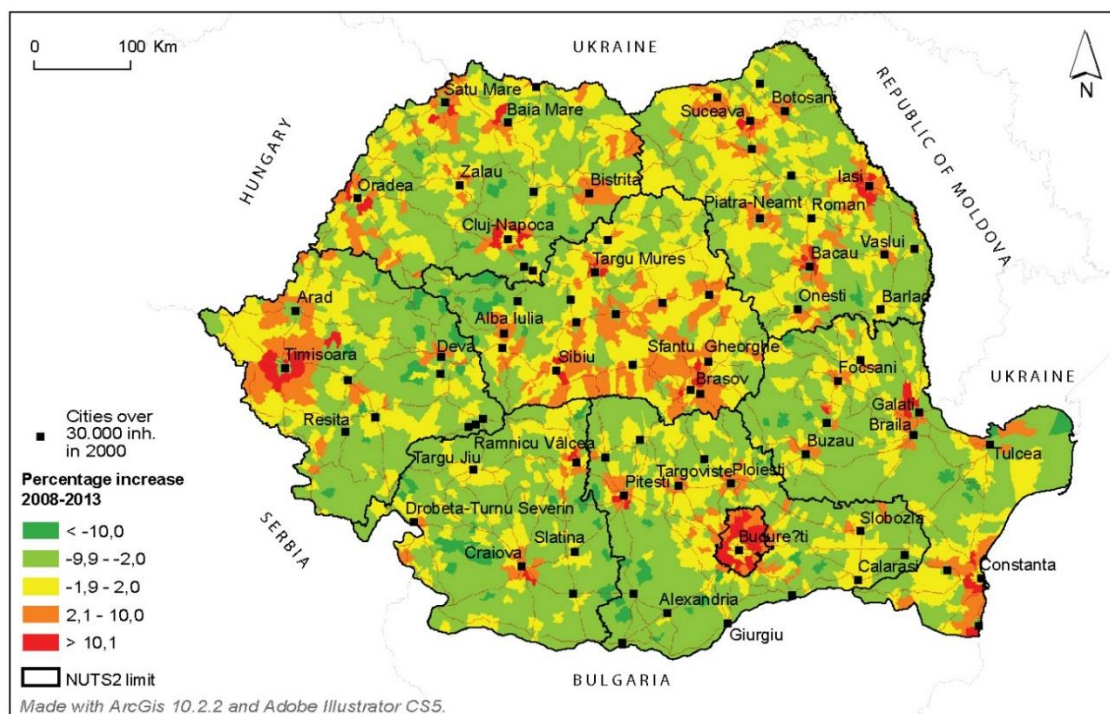


Figure 1: The percentage increase of total population in 2008-2013 (map source: authors; spatial data source: ANCP1 2012; Statistical data source: INS 2014a)

Romanian periurban space consists of urban-rural transition areas, with no political and administrative perimeter. One can think about spaces affected by multiple influences, which oscillate between preservation of rural identity and integration into the urban system. By its hybrid character, by the tensions it causes, by the lack of a clear political and administrative demarcation of boundaries, the periurban areas of Romania cannot develop in a sustainable

manner without integrating the principles of territorial governance, not only vertical but also horizontal⁴.

Chia et al. (2010) see the governance as both a central aspect of territorial development, as well as a challenge to public policy making process. In the case of Romania, boosting territorial governance is one of the specific objectives expressed together with the presentation of the Territorial Development Strategy (MDTR 2014)⁵.

The spatial development of urban systems is influenced by the action of two types of forces (Denizot, Fauvel and Tchékémian 2007). On the one hand, cities are facing a series of contingent movements generated by freedom of choice and private interests, and on the other hand, they are witnessing intentional decisions and operations emerged as an expression of the will of public authorities. In Romania, it can be observed the domination of the first force during the period of pre-accession to EU, followed by an attempt to balance the trend by strengthening state institutions, defining urban planning regulations and trying to impose their compliance. However, complying with these regulations doesn't bring about respect for the principles of territorial governance, especially as the Romanian territorial actors' behaviour is characteristic to the former communist states: less involvement of local territorial actors, less active civil society, fewer commercial companies and less oriented toward the problems of the community.

The forms of territorial governance represents both a current field of study and a principle already integrated into strategic documents. However, local public authorities' view on governance and the difficulties of local partnerships development in the metropolitan areas of Romania have rarely been a subject of research⁶. In this context, the present paper treats the relation between two phenomena particular to postmodernity - periurbanization and governance - evaluating the way in which local public authorities, represented by local officials (mayors or deputy mayors), perceive the territorial governance and its specific functionalities in a periurban space of Romania (the one around Suceava).

2. Geographical features of the study area

The study area is composed by Suceava City and 14 local administrative units in the surrounding areas (13 communes⁷ and the small city of Salcea; see Figures 2 and 3). It covers a surface of 685 km² (8% of the whole county) and includes a total population of 189.465 inhabitants, of which 106.243 (56%) are living in urban areas (REC 2011).

Suceava is affected by urban sprawl and its population has been declining since 1998 (more pronounced after 2001)⁸. The negative trend is caused by three main factors: negative

⁴ From a theoretical perspective, some authors emphasize that governance is generally understood as a vertical concept of articulation between global and local, or as a complex organization of actors from within the same territory, insisting that the horizontal dimension of the concept is insufficiently addressed (Denizot, Fauvel, and Tchékémian 2007). This horizontal dimension is even more significant in the case of periurban areas.

⁵ Objective 5.1. Enhancing the capacity of multi-level governance structures and diversification of the cooperation forms between public administration structures.

⁶ One of the few works concerning these matters belongs to Istrate and Alupului (2012). The authors develop the problem of the local partnerships in metropolitan areas, concluding that "the ability of the local government to manage and facilitate local economic development is still limited by national legislation and too restrictive administrative rule".

⁷ According to Romanian administrative structure, all communes are rural. The urban local administrative units are classified either as cities, or as municipalities (major cities endowed with facilities and utilities above a certain level defined by the law).

⁸ The city population declined from 114.448 inhabitants in 1992 to 106.243 in 2011 (REC 1992; REC 2011). See Lupchian (2006) for an analysis of the period previous to 1992.

natural increase, emigration and periurbanization. The latter factor plays the main role, as it is proven by the large number of people who have chosen to give up the collective housing within the city, in favour of individual dwellings, generally located in proximate rural areas. The population of the communes located in Suceava City's first ring increased from 38.932 in 1992 to 48.350 in 2011 (REC 1992; REC 2011).

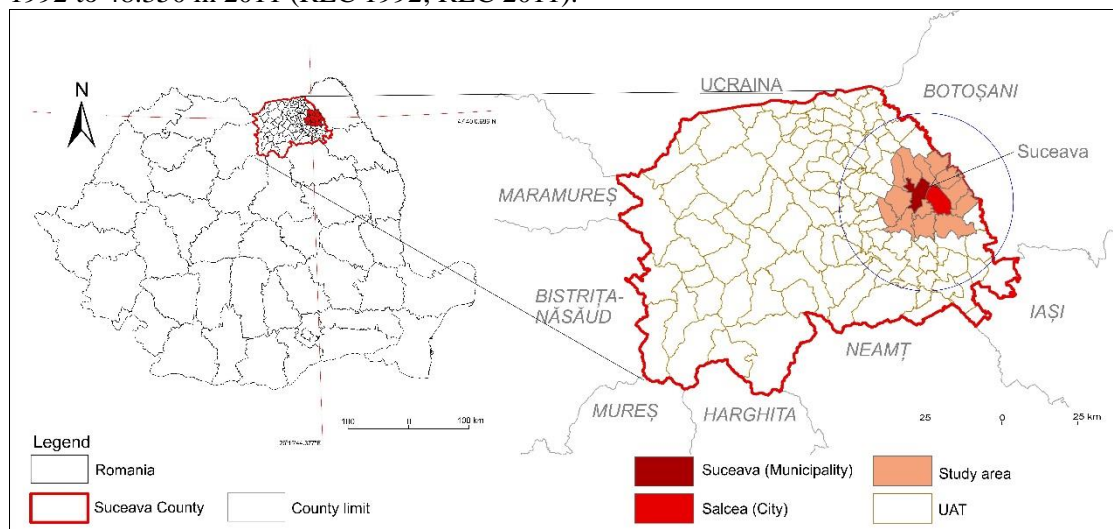


Figure 2: Geographical location of the study area (map source: authors; spatial data source: ANCPI 2012)

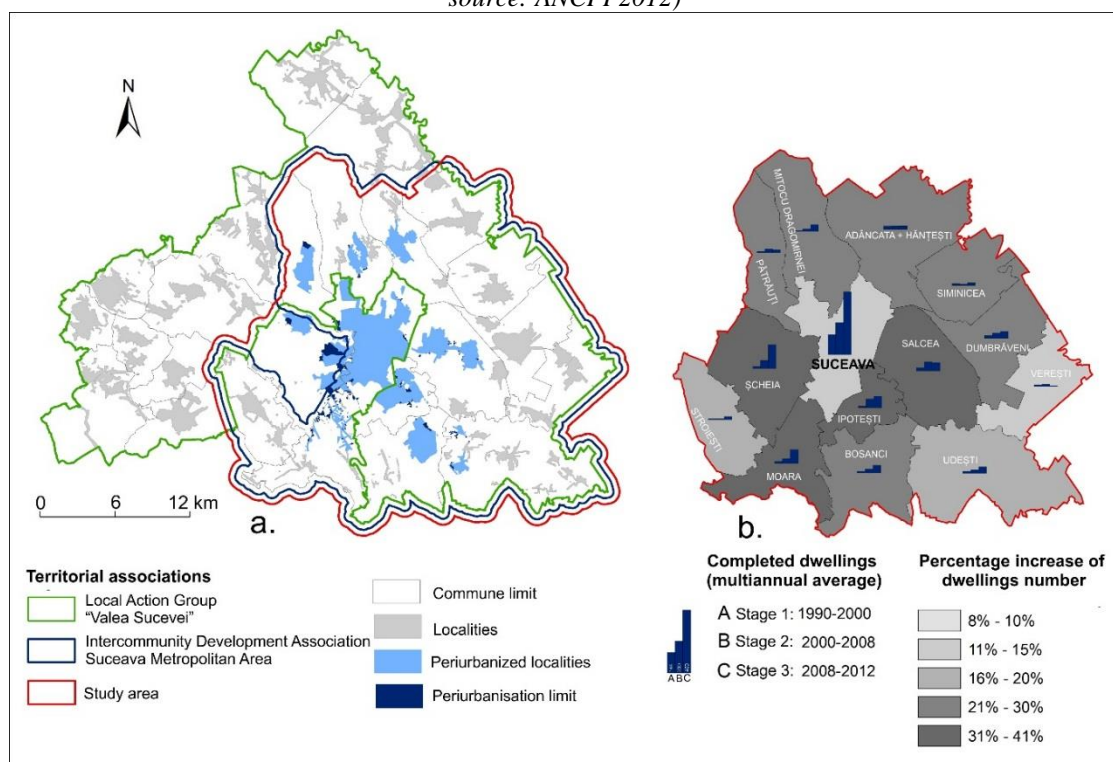


Figure 3: a. Forms of local territorial cooperation; 3.b. Increase in the number of dwellings between 1990 and 2012 (map source: authors; spatial data source: ANCPI 2012; statistical data source: INS 2014a)

Being a second rank city (Romanian Parliament, 2001a), Suceava cannot have a metropolitan area according to Romanian legislation (Law 351/2001, Section IV, art. 7). For this reason, its metropolitan area is organized as an intercommunity development association called “Suceava Metropolitan Area” (hereinafter IDA SMA). The association was founded in 2011 and it initially comprised only eight territorial administrative units: Suceava City, Salcea City and six communes: Adâncata, Ipotești, Bosanci, Moara, Pătrăuți and Mitocu Dragomirnei. Later on the metropolitan area extended two times by encompassing the six new communes: Stroești, Siminicea and Verești (in a first stage), and the communes of Udești, Dumbrăveni and Hănțești (in a second stage).

The study area is not limited to the 14 Local Administrative Units composing the Intercommunity Development Association “Suceava Metropolitan Area”, but also includes Șcheia. Although the latter is the most heavily affected by periurbanization, it refuses to be part of the association for reasons which will be detailed throughout the paper. On the other hand, certain localities of the study area are also part of a Local Action Group called “Suceava Valley”⁹.

3. Methodology

The paper partially follows the methodological model proposed by Chia et al. (2010), who developed an analysis grid of territorial governance, consisting of five methodological steps: (1) understanding the institutional framework and its devices; (2) analysing functional interactions; (3) analysing territorial and contextual interactions; (4) analysing the system of actors, representations and controversy, and (5) evaluating the practices, products and effects.

The present paper aims at completing the first two methodological steps based on two types of complementary methods. On the one hand, it resorted to quantitative analysis based on statistical and spatial data processing (related to demographic and residential trends of Suceava and its periurban area), and on the other hand, attempts have been made to understand the forms of governance by means of 11 structured interviews with local officials from Adâncata, Bosanci, Dumbrăveni, Ipotești, Mitocu Dragomirnei, Pătrăuți, Salcea, Siminicea, Stroești, Șcheia and Suceava (conducted from 22nd to 29th of September, 2014). Therefore, the focus of this research is based on the results on interviewing the local officials, in order to analyse their vision on local governance mechanisms (especially the institutional and functional interactions).

4. Institutional framework

The institutions and organizations influencing the spatial planning directions in the urban and periurban area of Suceava belong to all administrative levels, but the relations and intensity of collaboration between them varies significantly, depending on the responsibilities and efficiency of each one of them.

Superior institutional framework: brief technical presentation

At the highest level stands the Romanian Government which, through relevant ministries (especially the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration) aims at the coordination of all urban and spatial planning activities. In this respect, it is in charge of defining the National Spatial Plan and the Strategic Sectoral Programmes (in collaboration

⁹ The Local Action Group "Suceava Valley" comprises 21 villages, 10 of these overlapping with the study area. The purpose of this organizational structure is attracting European non-refundable grants in order to start shared projects which shall contribute to the development of local communities.

with the ministries and other central government bodies), supervising at the same time the manner in which government programmes and guidelines are being applied at regional, county and local level. The collaboration forms involve different relationships with Regional Development Agencies, the County and Local Councils.

The Regional Development Agency develops and promotes strategies, attracts resources, identifies and implements funding programmes. In the case of Suceava City, the North-East Regional Development Council aims to comply with the objectives of the regional development policy, ensures an equal treatment to all constituent counties, analyses and approves the regional development strategy.

The county public administration, represented by county councils, coordinates the spatial planning at the county level and defines the County Spatial Development Plan. The county administrations coordinate the activity of local councils and provide specialized technical assistance. Furthermore, within these councils operates the Technical Commission for spatial planning, an advisory body responsible for approval, technical expertise and consultancy on territorial issues.

Table 1: Urban and spatial planning documents – approval and endorsement competences (table source: authors; legislative sources: Romanian Parliament 2001b, 2006a, 2007)

Strategic document	Approval	Endorsement
Spatial planning		
National spatial plan	Government	Parliament
Regional/zonal spatial plan	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration	County Council Local Council
County spatial plan	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration	County Council Local Council
Urbanism		
General urban plan + local regulation related to Suceava Municipality	Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration Suceava County Council	Local Council Suceava Municipality
General urban plan + regulation related to Salcea City	County Council Central and local interested organisms	Salcea Local Council
General urban plan + local regulation related to the communes included in Suceava Metropolitan Area	County Council Central and local organisms	Commune Local Council

The Environmental Protection Agency, a public institution with legal personality, implements policies, strategies and legislations in the field of environmental protection at the county level. Subordinated to the National Environmental Protection Agency, its county structure provides compliance with the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, within which are defined separate chapters on regional development, land use and spatial planning from the perspective of sustainable development (based on the EU's objective of achieving territorial cohesion).

The panoply of the county institutions is supplemented by the decentralized departments of certain specialized national structures, such as, the County Office for Cadastre and Land Registration or the National Road Administration - Department of Suceava.

The local institutional framework and the challenges of organizing the Metropolitan Area

Local institutions are represented by local public administration / local councils, which are responsible for the whole urban planning activity within the basic administrative-territorial units, ensuring compliance with the provisions included in the approved documents of spatial planning. In order to draw up the Local Development Programmes, local public administrations cooperate, on the one hand, with various local territorial actors, and on the other hand, with the County Council, which offers its support in all urban and spatial planning activities.

Beyond these rigid administrative structures, promoting territorial governance also implies other official forms of territorial cooperation. At local level, these forms are represented by intercommunity development associations, local action groups and metropolitan areas.

According to the law 286/2006 (Romanian Parliament 2006b), the intercommunity development associations are defined as “cooperative structures with legal personality of private law, formed under the law by the administrative-territorial units, in order to achieve certain joint development projects of local or regional interest or the joint provision of certain public services”. In the case of IDA SMA, the main areas targeted for investments are urban and interurban transport, waste management, education, infrastructure, tourism and agriculture. The possible funding sources of the association (Romanian Parliament 2000; Romanian Parliament 2001c; Pop, Stănuş and Suciuc 2007) are represented by the members' contribution, interests and dividends earned from the placement of the amounts available in legal terms, dividends of the companies set up by associations or federations, incomes earned from direct economic activities, donations, sponsorships, resources from the public budget or local budgets and other incomes provided by law.

The establishment of the association has eventually led to the elaboration of the common development strategy. Although it has not yet been made public, from the perspective of territorial governance principles, it is important to know how its elaboration involved the local rural administrations (beyond other territorial actors not approached by the study). The participation of local representatives in designing the common development strategy helps finding efficient solutions for specific local problems (these being best-known by those facing them). Without the involvement of local representatives, this strategy would only be a general document, without application. For the particular case of the study area, Figure 5 shows the degree in which the recommendations of the local political decision-makers were taken into account in the Development Strategy.

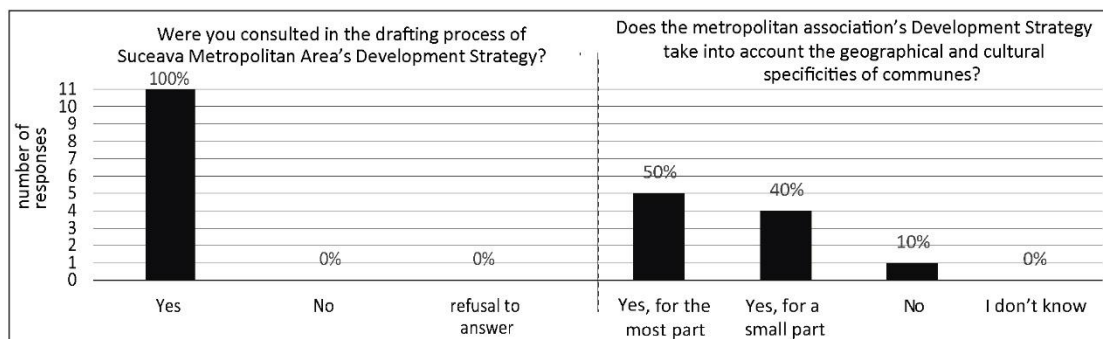


Figure 5: Degree of participation of the territorial actors to elaborate the Development Strategy
(source: authors)

All local representatives interviewed were consulted on the elaboration of Development Strategy. Six of the respondents were actively involved in developing this plan, coming up with new proposals or specific additions and four others agreed with the form proposed by the consulting firm that took the responsibility of elaborating the strategy. According to the responses received, the Development Strategy took into account, to a greater or lesser extent, the geographical, historical and cultural peculiarities of the villages belonging to the IDA SMA.

The role of different administrative levels in initiating and implementing regional projects

Generally, there are collaborative relationships between Suceava City Hall and the surrounding local administrations, either as forms of joint projects that have already been started, or as forms of discussions regarding the future implementation of projects with benefits for both sides. Strict formal relations only exist with Pătrăuți and Șcheia local administrations, the latter refusing even the association with IDA SMA (Table 2).

According to the local policy makers of Șcheia, their association to Suceava Metropolitan Area would involve advantages only for Suceava City. The first argument in this respect is related to one of the most important projects discussed within the association, regarding the creation of a public transport system for the entire metropolitan area. The local representatives of Șcheia display an exclusively financial vision, considering that the public transport system does not record additional revenues because the company's headquarters and most of the employees would belong to Suceava City (and yet each commune would have to contribute financially to the project).

Table 2: Horizontal and vertical collaboration relationships (source: authors)

	No. of responses (through mayors/deputy mayors)	
	In the case of cooperation between the Municipality of Suceava and other local administrations from within the periurban area	In the case of cooperation between the local administrations from within the periurban area and The County Council
<i>We initiated and implemented common projects</i>	4	3
<i>Discussions on possible common projects (not materialized)</i>	5	5
<i>Strict formal relationships</i> ¹⁰	2	3
Total responses	11	11

The attitude of the local authorities of Șcheia may be explained by the fact that their locality is the least financially dependent within the periurban area, as a consequence of the highest intensity of residential and commercial periurbanization. During the past 20 years, 1.246 new dwellings¹¹ were built within the administrative limits of their commune.

¹⁰ In this case, *strict formal relationships* refers to the situation when the communication level between two institutions is limited to legislative/procedural obligations, with no initiatives of implementing joint projects.

¹¹ 12% of all new dwellings built within the villages of the metropolitan area association, according to data published by INS (2014b).

Moreover, Șcheia is the only locality of the periurban area where large shopping centres were inaugurated over the last 20 years (Real and Lidl). Finally, one may ask whether we are dealing with the lack of vision of local policy makers, individualist political behaviours or, on the contrary, with certain maladjustments in the functioning of the association.

None of the respondents indicated the existence of real problems in the implementation of joint projects, and they chose either to describe the relationship between the town halls as being very close, or to declare that there were no problems in cooperation. The initiative of the projects belongs, in most cases, to Suceava City (8), but there are also cases where the initiative is shared (2) or comes from the local representatives of communes (1). As regards the relations between the town halls of Suceava Metropolitan Area and the County Council, the discussions on possible collaborations are dominant (5), but compared to the answers on the horizontal relationships between local representatives, there are more strict formal relations and fewer joint projects implemented by the County Council and the local communal administrations (Table 2).

5. Functional Interactions

The good local governance implies an increase in the variety of fields and the number of actors involved in the policy process and the need for them to be taken into account (Popescu 2011). For this reason, in order to talk of governance, it is necessary to have functional productive relationships between the various fields and actors involved in managing and organising the activities within a territory. What is the current status of the public-private partnerships? Are they being (efficiently) implemented? How does the civil society involve in the process of decision-making? How can be described the interaction between local rural population and urban immigrant one? What are the local problems consisting of and how are they managed?

Public-private partnerships

The public-private partnerships play a central role in the current mechanisms of governance, without which one cannot speak of a real process of local development. In fact, among the six essential features of the local development identified by Merenne-Schoumaker (1996), the first three points out that 1) the local development is neither a manner nor a model of growth, but a process of seeking solutions, 2) development involves the mobilization of local actors and their awareness on the need to act together (without the voluntary nature of the movement one cannot speak of local development), and 3) the process takes time. One of the solutions used for the efficient mobilization of local actors may consist in developing public-private partnerships.

Worldwide, the public-private partnerships have become a key factor for local development over the last 30 years (Metropolis 2011), but in Romania, as in most of the post-socialist countries, they are still hardly penetrating. Proof is the fact that in the localities around Suceava, the existence of public-private partnerships is reduced. From the view of local officials (mayors and deputy mayors), the legislation of Romania, concerning the public-private partnerships and governed by Law 178/2010 (Romanian Parliament 2010), is confusing and does not favour this type of collaboration. However, the reduced number of partnerships can be attributed to the lack of procedural knowledge regarding their initiation and implementation, and the insufficient efforts on the part of public institutions. At the same time, one may state that there is a lack of tradition for public-private partnerships in Romania, the 50 years of communism leaving a negative mark from this point of view.

The interviews carried out with the representatives of local public authorities demonstrate that, although they realise the importance of public-private partnerships, they do not also perceive the tangible benefits thereof. In general, the collaboration between private companies and public authorities eventually lead to importing operating principles from the business environment into the administrative environment. According to Metropolis (2011), these principles consist in the possibility of using the know-how from the private sector, which can improve the delivery of services, reduce the costs, reduce the risks associated with investments and increase the safety of local budgets.

In a context where the control and the initiative of the public-private partnerships depends heavily on the initiative and availability of the local authorities, one can recommend to develop specific policies that could promote public-private partnerships procedural knowledge and a more profound understanding of their benefits among public administration.

The role and activity of local civil society

The involvement of civil society in decision-making provides the integration of its interests in solving problems and defining priorities in the development process (Metropolis 2011). Hereof, there are numerous advantages, including: developing and delivering relevant projects; developing public confidence in the decision-making system; stimulating a higher understanding of problems, solutions and associated priorities; gaining a greater support in various initiatives; increasing mutual understanding and exchange of information, data, experience and knowledge; increasing the opportunities for bringing to a common denominator the different points of view (Metropolis 2011).

Regarding the villages near Suceava city, the concept of civil society is poorly understood by the political decision-makers. The respondents either consider that civil society is politically affiliated and has “sympathies”, or they summarize the definition of this concept in the phrase “people telling their opinion”. None of the interviewed refers, for example, to the non-governmental organizations.

Although the significance of civil society concept is confusing among the local officials (none of them was able to provide a correct interpretation of the concept), they classify its activity as being very active (3/11), active (2/11) or reduced (6/11). No elected official considers the civil society as non-existent. These responses show a rather superficial understanding of what civil society should mean and the answers cannot be considered relevant since they do not reflect reality. Actually, the role of the civil society remains a desideratum.

Interactions between new and old residents of the periurban localities

Starting with the post-fordist period, the territory appears as an original and essential form of regrouping the actors, creating discrimination between those to whom it belongs - insiders - and those from the exterior - outsiders (Pecqueur 2003). Probably one of the most interesting type of territory, in which this interaction can be observed, is the rural area in the proximity of post-socialist cities.

Only 25 years ago, the urban-rural boundary of Romania was strictly delimited and highly visible in the landscape. The transition areas were missing and the landscape was characterized by a sudden shift from the urban residential environment (relatively well-equipped with technical-public infrastructure) to the rural environment (free of such investments). But recent years have brought about significant changes, reflected in the upper-medium class migration from cities to adjacent rural areas (either to specially designed neighbourhoods built on former agricultural areas, or to new houses dispersed between the

already existing rural households). Therefore, one can speak about the insertion of an urban population, mostly highly educated and activating in the superior tertiary sector, among the rural population with predominantly agricultural activities. In this respect, Bădescu (2011) determines that periurbanization has taken the form of a residential enclave, an isolation both from the village as a natural environment, as well as from the alienated city which generated it.

Things are not very different for Suceava. In the last 10-15 years, much of the villages within metropolitan area have received a large number of residents. Between 1990 and 2012, 13.723 people had established their residence in the first ring around the city, corresponding to the 4.963 dwellings built in the same period. Figure 4 shows whether the periurbanization wave has influenced the choice of projects promoted by local administrations.

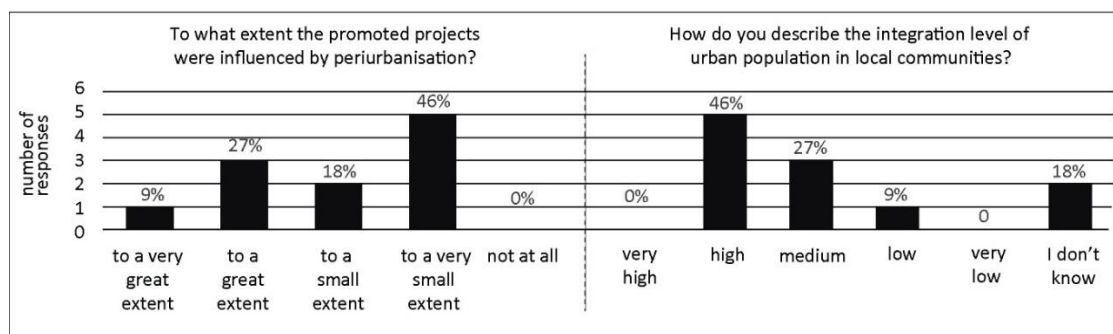


Figure 4: Viewpoint of elected officials on the interactions between the urban population installed in the periurban villages and the rural one (source: authors)

Most of the local elected officials consider that the degree of integration of the urban population in the local community is high (5/11) or medium (3/11), which goes against the conclusions that Bădescu reached (2011). Furthermore, the projects involving the expansion of distribution networks for public utilities generally concern the newcomer population. In the villages where the periurbanization process is less present, the respondents were unable to specify to what extent those newcomers are adapted to the life in the village (2/11). A particular case is the town of Salcea, where the local authorities state that the ancient inhabitants of the village and the new ones do not cohabit in harmony, issuing a series of complaints related to their presence, such as “the lack of respect” for the local authorities (Figure 4).

Major problems in the opinion of local elected officials

Some of the problems identified by the local representatives of Suceava metropolitan area coincide, notably the issues related to transport infrastructure, expansion of the water-channel network, expansion of public lighting system and distribution of natural gas. Other mentioned issues are the lack of local autonomy, the need for a mentality change, the lack of markets where local people could make full use of their agricultural production, the presence of gypsy community, the lack of jobs, the ageing population due to emigration (in the more remote villages less affected by periurbanization).

Nine respondents believe that there will be benefits for the localities that choose to take part in the IDA SMA. Three of those who were interviewed mentioned a project that aims to create a coherent system of public transportation for the metropolitan area, considering that this will be the main positive result of the association. Other potential benefits mentioned by

the respondents concern transport infrastructure, gas distribution and running water systems, sewer system, cultural activities or the possible creation of a touristic route. The most optimistic vision belongs to Suceava City, which states that signing this partnership involves “development on all fronts: culture, transport, waste management” (a point of view diametrically opposed to the one of Șcheia).

Conclusions

The present paper examined two aspects of the way in which the mechanisms of the territorial governance manifest themselves in the periurban area of Suceava, corresponding to the first two methodological steps of the analysis model proposed by Chia et al. (2010): the institutional framework and functional interactions in the periurban area from the perspective of local elected officials.

The institutional framework required to implement projects that shall respond to the specific problems of Suceava’s periurban area appeared late (in 2011) as an intercommunity development association. The start-up of the local governance mechanisms experience difficulties. The form of territorial cooperation which has been chosen to solve problems in the metropolitan area does not satisfy all local representatives (the main periurbanized locality refuses to join the association). The public-private partnerships are rare, the local authorities showing reticence in their respect because of the legislation that they accuse of being confusing. The role of civil society is seen by the local representatives as an active one, but the interviews reveal a superficial understanding on their part of what “civil society” means. Furthermore local authorities confuse governance with decentralization, seeing in it only a form of independence from the government, and not the importance of creating certain decision networks that should involve civil society, private sector and all potentially interested actors.

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