

THE COMPETITIVENESS OF URBAN SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This paper, through qualitative research, proposed a radiography of the level of competitiveness as well as the main objectives and ways of maintaining a certain degree of competitiveness used by three capital cities located in Central and Eastern Europe. Our research consisted both in exposing the efforts of Ljubljana, Budapest, and Bucharest to increase the urban competitiveness as well as presenting the actions undertaken for their urban development for better international positioning. The research was carried out by consulting publicly available documents about the three capital cities. Although they share the fact that they are European capitals, the three cities have different competitive advantages and different challenges, so it is interesting to find out which are their main directions of development concerning available resources, what are the approaches taken by the authorities in this respect and what positions each occupies in the most recent and prestigious international rankings.

KEYWORDS: *Competitiveness, Urban Systems, Urban Development Strategies, Local Development.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urban competitiveness is closely linked to the economic and social development of a city. When urban productivity increases, there are also higher incomes for the whole society: citizens, local and central authorities, and for the private sector.

Competitive cities are the ones that attract quality and capital. The Urban Competitiveness Index highlights urban welfare, poverty, and the benefits of the population, comparative on a global scale. Consequently, the decline in competitiveness is an important issue.

Globalization, the transformation of the former East European countries, and the process of European integration are the main factors that put pressure on the competition between cities. It takes place at all spatial levels, affecting the development sectors. At the urban level, cities aim to increase their competitiveness and thus get a better position in the European urban system.

Along with these trends, the European integration process has reduced the economic, social, and environmental disparities within the European Union. In particular, the adoption of EU standards and norms in candidate countries has led to the creation of a common market between countries (Giffinger et al., 2007; Van Den Berg and Van Der Meer, 2016).

At the same time, these changes in the economic, social, and institutional spheres make cities more similar, and competition is reduced at national, city, and regional levels.

This trend emphasizes the importance of local features, competitive advantages in the competition for attracting international companies, investors, and capital. Thus, the integration process requires each city to create and improve a specific urban-regional profile. Consequently, urban

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competitiveness and strategic approaches that correspond to particular goals have become important urban policy issues (Giffinger et al., 2007; Hu, 2015).

2. CONTEXT

Since 2000-2006, interest has been progressively oriented towards a vision of European cities in terms of their contribution to economic development and competitiveness, policies aimed at highlighting the major role of competitiveness in the attractiveness of urban systems (Kresl and Ietri, 2015; Ni and Wang, 2017).

Urban areas within the European Union are characterized by a high concentration of economic activity, employment alongside the daily commuting flow to Europe's cities, suggesting abundant opportunities for innovation, distribution, and consumption.

However, EU cities also have some social inequalities; it is common for people with a high level of well-being to live alongside others who face challenges from this point of view (Eurostat, 2016).

Urban policies of the European Union are essential for increasing the competitiveness of European cities (Florescu, 2013). Integrated Urban Development Policies provide a set of tools that have already proven their worth in many European cities in developing administrative structures that support an efficient and capable way of cooperating.

The cancellation of the Urban Program in 2007 has raised criticisms that underline the limitation of city-specific policy tools as a threat to the visibility of urban issues and the contribution of cities to strategy development (Kresl and Ietri, 2015). In addition, the skills gained by local governments in managing European funds within these cities may be lost after more efforts in the absorption process. The structure of EU policies is very articulated; concerning urban areas, the general policies within the Regional Development Fund are distinguished. For the 2014-2020 periods, urban policies have been introduced among the priorities to be developed through regional operational programs and national strategies through specific programs whereby cities themselves need to be involved in policy-making and fund management, even by competing with other cities, at EU level, to access funding opportunities (Kresl and Ietri, 2015).

European cities are part of the globalized urban system. They have to compete for an advantageous position in the global economy. It also needs to attract companies and investors to survive and develop (van Kempen, et al., 2005).

There are various reasons why larger cities have a stronger stance in the international city competition. The advantages of urban agglomerations and urbanized economies are considered a consequence of the size of the city or its purpose; the higher the city, the higher the productivity, the wide variety of consumer products, and the high welfare level (Giffinger, et al., 2010). From this point of view, medium-sized cities have a weaker position than large or metropolitan ones.

However, some arguments argue that medium-sized cities have specific potential in the competition with the largest ones. Firstly, the disadvantages of agglomerations such as congested traffic, high real estate prices, social segregation, environmental pollution, crime rates tend to be lower in the case of medium-sized cities and can be better controlled.

The spatial organization of cities is a fundamental factor that influences efficiency, development, productivity, and sometimes even the specialization of cities. Besides the size of the city, the development of urban competitiveness depends on the historical past of the city and the recent attempts to develop an efficient urban development strategy (Giffinger et al., 2010).

Of course, the position held by a city within an urban system is the result of an interaction of economic, geographic, and socio-cultural factors. It is also influenced by development strategies as a specific aspect of urban governance. Faced with particular problems, the governments of medium-sized cities are constantly trying to provide solutions in the form of policies and programs.

Other European cities may have encountered similar situations (Giffinger et al., 2007). Developing urban development strategies based on experience from other cities is often called "policy transfer".

These partially overlapping concepts attempt to apply experiences in other cities by learning from the trials, errors, and successes of existing policy strategists.

Capital cities have the potential to play a crucial role in urban development within the EU, are often the focal point for competitiveness and employment, and can generate innovation and development, being centers for education, science, social, cultural, and ethnic diversity (Eurostat, 2016).

3. LJUBLJANA

Ljubljana is the capital of Slovenia and the largest city in this country, with about 290,000 inhabitants. Since the 1990s, the city witnessed many international challenges such as global markets, Europeanization, and changes both inside and outside the city.

The independence gained by Slovenia in 1991 from the Yugoslav Federation has had a significant impact on the city's structure: - better administrative, financial, and commercial functions all together with the internationalization of Ljubljana; - Better cross-border connections in Central Europe with other cities and regions; the consolidation of some new political, economic and cultural connections with major cities from the European Union; the restoration of dialogue with other cities in the former Yugoslav Federation (Pichler-Milanovic and Zavodnik-Lamovšek, 2010).

Ljubljana has substantial advantages over other cities in East and Central Europe due to its geographical location, the strong points of the city and also the state's economy, the institutional ability for creating reforms, social cohesion, and the quality of the environment.

The urban development of Ljubljana was achieved thanks to (Pichler-Milanovic and Zavodnik-Lamovšek, 2010):

- Reforms at the macro-economic level and development policies of the 1990s that achieved the full integration of Slovenia as a member of the European Union in 2004;
- Localization of major economic activities and provision of public services in the capital city as a result of the increase of the city's competitiveness;
- Privatization of dwellings and land in public property, restitution and so on, a consequence of structural and market policies;
- ad hoc growth decisions taken by city authorities and municipalities in Ljubljana to meet population requirements and commercial activities for new homes, offices, shopping centers, etc., considering urban identity;
- New regulations on spatial planning and land use plans, starting with 2002, through strategic documents, laws, standards;
- Requests from investors and landlords for real estate investments, regardless of the laws that protect either public or private interests, etc.

3.1. Actions undertaken by authorities to increase Ljubljana's competitiveness

Starting with 2003, the local authorities, where we can include Ljubljana's City Hall, have been determined by new regulations regarding spatial planning and management, to elaborate and implement their strategies for spatial development along with detailed blueprints that needed to be in line with the paradigm of sustainable development, and also to consider the requirements of investors and landlords.

The ultimate scope of these spatial development strategies was to assure the development of the city of Ljubljana as a competitive and sustainable capital city in Central Europe. (Pichler-Milanović and Zavodnik-Lamovšek, 2010). The success regarding the implementation of the different land-use strategies and blueprints will depend on the capacity of local actors to sustain the active involvement of experts, local communities, citizens, and cooperation between them. Also, other important elements for the successful implementation of those strategies will be the partnership between the public and private institutions and other stakeholders to meet related objectives to the city's competitiveness and to align with new energy efficiency requirements, low carbon emissions, etc.

Ljubljana can be seen from several perspectives. Urban development is often based on the level of the economy, the social evolution, the results of the benchmarking process in similar economies, and previous experiences. This is seen as a balance between the interests of investors, citizens, tourists, and the government (Kovačič, 2009). Competitiveness, in this case, is more regional-oriented.

As a result of the macroeconomic reforms in the period 1992-2004, Ljubljana's Municipality and the Urban Region of Ljubljana have become the most sought-after locations for economic activities in Slovenia and also some of the most competitive urban regions from Central Europe, while managing to preserve social cohesion, environmental protection, and quality life for citizens.

Ljubljana is the center of the NUTS 3 Region of Ljubljana (Figure 1). It comprises 26 municipalities, a population of approximately 542 000 inhabitants, covering an area of 2 555 km² and 12.6% of Slovene territory. It is located in the center of Slovenia and is the regional economic, cultural and administrative center of the country (Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region, 2015).

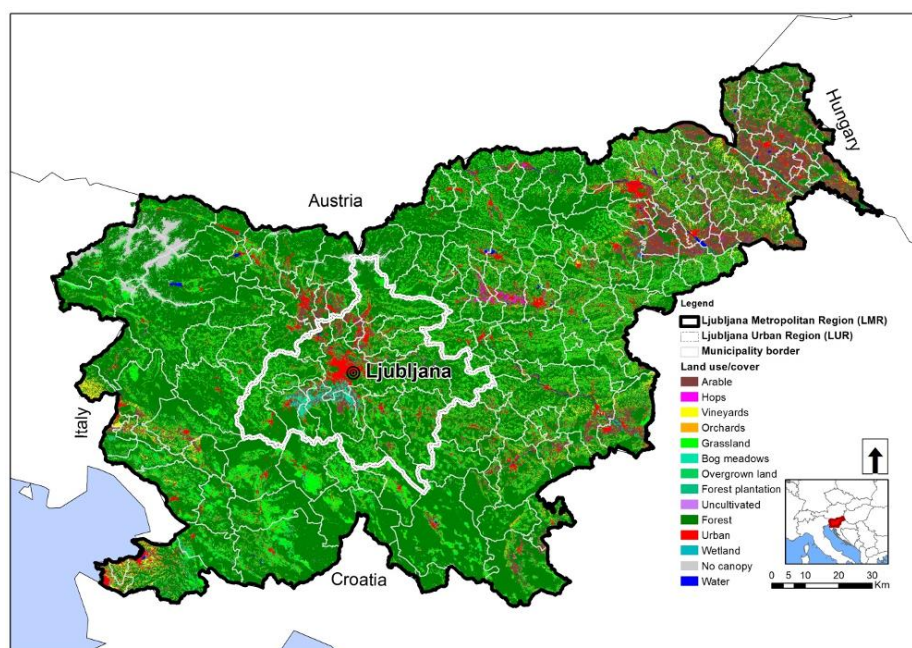


Figure 1. Ljubljana Urban Region

Source: FOODMETRES, 2018

In 2002, the Ljubljana Urban Development Regional Development Agency was set up with the main task of preparing the regional development programs (Pichler-Milanović, 2014) for 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 and of the operational programs from the list of regional importance projects, for the absorption of European funds.

3.1.1. The programming period 2014-2020

On June 12, 2015, the Regional Development Council of the Ljubljana Urban Region adopted its Regional Development Program for 2014-2020. This document aligns with the EU 2020 objectives for inclusive, sustainable, and smart growth and represents an important platform for absorbing European funds, as it includes 495 project proposals, valued at 1,838 million euros (Ljubljana City Hall, 2015).

Development goals will focus on regional operation with effective internal connections and activities geared specifically to the rational use of space, natural resources and energy, and to promote the development of knowledge, creativity, and innovation. The main purpose of this program is to create a recognized and competitive metropolitan area that can provide jobs and a high quality of life.

Objectives of this period include (Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region, 2015):

- Region effectively connected internally:

The institutions in the region will be effectively connected to assure that the region develops in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, using the most suitable techniques and various forms of collaborations, together with modern technologies. Key stakeholders in the region will engage regional connections that will lead to initiatives for sustainable development.

- A region that utilizes space, energy, and resources in a rational way:

To achieve sustainable development, the region will consider space as an exhausting resource and will grow and promote land planning at the regional level. Only the urgently needed resources for sustainable development and a combination of them will be used which guarantees the highest efficiency. It will try to be less dependent on foreign investment and act taking into account the principles of a bio-region.

- A region that focuses on growing knowledge, innovation, and creativity:

It will concentrate on marketing knowledge, innovation, and creativity, by taking into account that the Ljubljana Urban Region has the highest percentage of scientific, educational, cultural, and research institutions all together with many companies that can help stimulate the potential for development and innovation. All actors will be stimulated to spread and use knowledge helping to transform the economy, resulting in a region that developed sustainably. The activities will be creative and will result in innovation-oriented products and services with added value.

- Recognized and competitive urban area:

The urban region will be advantaged by its competitive advantages as it will be the only metropolitan region in the country. This fact will grow its competitiveness and recognition as a factor generating sustainable development, which it will achieve through its activities and establishing links at the national and international level: interregional and abroad, with Balkan countries and regions, with the European Union, and worldwide.

- A region that provides high-quality jobs:

It will support the construction of creative, high-quality jobs based on knowledge and innovation.

- A region that ensures a high standard of living:

It will assure a high standard of life for the locals and the society as a whole through intelligent and prudent management, through monitoring various indicators: economic factors, social indicators, space management indicators, and environmental indicators. The urban region will, therefore, be friendly, accessible, and a well-connected climate for living and working, as well as an attractive tourist destination.

3.2. Ljubljana in international rankings

In the Quality of Living City Ranking in 2019, Ljubljana ranks 74th (see Table 1), representing a climb with one position over 2018 when ranked 75 out of 231 analyzed cities.

Table 1. Ljubljana in Quality of Living City Ranking

Rank	City	Country / Region
69	Prague	Czech Republic
70	Saint Louis	US
71	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
72	Pointe-à-Pitre	Guadeloupe
73	Detroit	US
74	Ljubljana	Slovenia
75	Dubai	United Arab Emirates
76	Budapest	Hungary

Source: Quality of Living City Ranking, 2019

In 2017, Ljubljana was for the third consecutive time in the Top 100 Sustainable Destinations. There were 155 cities evaluated and the capital of Slovenia maintained its position for three years ranked among the top 10 cities.

4. BUDAPEST

Engines for economic development in Hungary are represented by cities around which the bulk of foreign investment is concentrated. They offer employment opportunities for many people who live in neighboring villages where economic activity is taking place less.

Cities, including Budapest, are attractive places to live. However, population growth narrows to a large extent in small and medium towns, with the largest ones gradually losing residents (van Kempen et al., 2005). It can be noticed, however, that families leaving the city still rely on infrastructure, schools, and healthcare. Budapest's inner city has become more and more attractive, especially for young people.

Budapest is a city of significant importance. It is located in the central region of Hungary, which is made up of the capital and surrounding counties. Between 1873 when it was named the capital of Hungary and 1940, Budapest was one of the cultural capitals of Central Europe. Fueled by three decades of rapid industrial growth and massive rural immigration, Budapest's cultural vitality became comparable to that of Vienna and Prague. The city has also become the center of a star-like national transport infrastructure where most motorways and railways meet (Martone et al., 2017).

4.1. Actions undertaken by the authorities to increase the competitiveness of Budapest

In Budapest, economic restructuring accelerated in the second half of the '80s. The Hungarian capital's industries have entered the crisis: between 1983 and 1993 the number of jobs in the industrial sector dropped by half. The recovery from this crisis was possible primarily through the large flow of foreign investment, the most important factor facilitating economic change (van Kempen et al., 2005).

Budapest, especially in the tourism sector, began to feel the pressure from competition with cities such as Prague, Warsaw, or Vienna. Thus, local leaders reevaluated their competitive advantages and redefined their development strategies (Corboş and Popescu, 2009).

The quality of living is the key factor for developing Budapest and plays an important role in shaping the city's image, retaining local people, and maintaining competitiveness (Urban Development Department, 2014). To determine many people to consider Budapest as their home city, they need to provide some healthy environment conditions, well-balanced services for residents, and a flexible accommodation structure for its citizens.

One major component that influences the quality of urban life is the environment that has a major influence on the health of the citizens, and their physical and psychological state, along with their performance. A qualitative urban environment is very important for determining the attractiveness and competitiveness of a city.

Living conditions influences directly the quality of life and health, as well as social mobility. Dwellings available in the city and the region affect social integration, attractiveness and competitiveness, economic performance, and the ability of the capital city to maintain its population (Urban Development Department, 2014).

A city can be considered a public space that encourages the encounter between individuals with various lifestyles, the construction of common denominators, and ideas exchange. The cultural life that emerged in Budapest, which is rooted in the streets, markets, and buildings of the city, presents some of the most important values for the society in Hungary. It is vital for tourism and attracting investors, so international events taking place in Budapest can increase competitiveness internally and externally.

The particular character and history preserved at the initial stage are qualities appreciated at the European level. A distinctive urban landscape makes it a more attractive place for both tourists and investors, fortifying its competitive and economic position. An environment that preserves past eras and integrates the present supports local identity (Urban Development Department, 2014).

The natural and built heritage of Budapest dates from the historical periods and links with a unique topography of the city. Budapest's historic quarters are spaces that integrate the urban life of the city. The city's architecture, heritage, and art are considered globally competitive.

Budapest is the main interface of Hungary with international political, economic, and intellectual aspects, and also plays an at least equally important part in the European cities network. Being the largest city in the region, and positioned on the border with other geopolitical zones, Budapest can and needs to improve its role internationally mainly through cooperation. An essential element of the role of a strong city in Europe is the strengthening of transport connections along with the improvement of the local economy (Urban Development Department, 2014).

The urban development concept of Budapest includes general instructions applicable in all the areas of the city - improving local economy and culture, encouraging climate change-friendly development, promoting and maintaining an inclusive society, coordinating and cooperating with central authorities, local authorities, and private companies, all this being objectives to be met at City-wide.

On April 24, 2013, the City Council of Budapest approved a long-term strategic urban vision - Budapest 2030 (Figure 2). This is based on other plans including Budapest Urban Development Concept, National Space Development Concept, Budapest Urban Plan, Budapest Urban Development Strategy, and Budapest Spatial Development Plan. The document attests to the fact that the city is the cultural center of Hungary and is the main reason for its international attractiveness.



Figure 2. Budapest 2030

Source: Clark, 2013

Its purpose is to turn Budapest into a leading city in the Central and Eastern European region, a center of innovation and culture. Budapest Directions 2030 (Clark, 2013): Proactive urban development; Government partnerships; A coherent Budapest; Strengthening international visibility; A healthy environment; Climate protection and efficient use of energy; Developing a unique character of the city; A city that lives alongside the Danube; Efficient and balanced urban structure; Priority over field areas; Smart mobility; Knowledge, "green" economic development; A self-sustained urban

management system; Conservation and development of cultural diversity; Improving social services; Structure of housing adapted to needs; Welcoming society.

4.2. Budapest in international rankings

In the latest research report, conducted by TH Real Estate, which analyzes the increasingly complex market dynamics and global investor requirements, the leader of Global Research, Alice Breheny, argued that it is an essential fact to understand long-term structural trends to create and maintain value and unlock performance growth in cities across Europe, the Asia Pacific and the U.S. (TH Real Estate, 2017).

Budapest received a score of 3.8 for quality of life, a score obtained by analyzing some indicators such as housing, health infrastructure, crime, education, the natural environment, the political and social environment.

In 2019, Budapest ranked 76 out of 231 classified cities in the Quality of Living City Rankings, which is the same as 2018 (Table 2).

Table 2. Budapest in Quality of Living City Ranking

Rank	City	Country / region
71	Hong Kong	Hong Kong
72	Pointe-à-Pitre	Guadeloupe
73	Detroit	US
74	Ljubljana	Slovenia
75	Dubai	United Arab Emirates
76	Budapest	Hungary
77	Seoul	South Korea
78	Abu Dhabi	United Arab Emirates
79	Montevideo	Uruguay

Source: Quality of Living City Ranking, 2019

5. BUCHAREST

Bucharest is often chosen as a tourist destination due to its cultural, historical, artistic heritage or as a business destination for organizing conferences, exhibitions. Among the attractions of the city are the Village Museum, the Peasant Museum, the Romanian Athenaeum, the Palace of the Parliament – which, after the Pentagon, is the second-largest building in the world - and the Arc de Triomphe built at the end of the First World War to celebrate the achievement of Romanian territorial unity (Montalto et al., 2017).

The capital hosts many European festivals such as the Comedy Festival, the Balkan Festival - music, arts, crafts, the International Children's Theater Festival, Europafest, and much more.

Urban competitiveness is one of the main factors in the growth of cities that generate well-being and new jobs (Charnock et al., 2014). In the current context of globalization and relocation of industries, cities with high tourism potential rely on tourism to achieve a strategic and competitive position (Pîrjol et al., 2018; Tfaily, 2018).

Even in these conditions, Bucharest does not have a strategy for tourism, and cultural tourism is not a priority. However, increasing tourism initiatives combined with increasing interest from the international media indicate an important potential for increasing the external visibility and competitiveness of the city. Bucharest still houses buildings with impressive architecture from 1920-1940 (ARCUB, 2015).

The development of urban competitiveness involves several phases (Popescu and Profiroiu, 2012):

- Defining a strategy based on the identity of the city that should include actions in different sectors. The economic reality shows that a new competitor appeared in the market competition - the state;
- Developing a coherent offer, considering what already exists and correlating this offer with external expectations;
- Promoting the use of the city by every citizen, information, transportation, access;
- The initiation of one or more urban events (holidays, festivals, congresses), which are the key instruments that can bring together the economy and culture, local and foreign actors, citizens and visitors, the economic contribution and the revitalization of the urban space
- Promoting the city.
- The decline in urban competitiveness of Bucharest over time is due to several causes (Enache et al., 2011):
- Perpetuation of a low degree of competitiveness at the European level and little affirmation as an important metropolis at regional and European level, as evidenced by the postponement of the establishment and development of Bucharest as an urban conurbation and a metropolitan area compared to other capital cities in Europe, the states in the eastern part of the European Union being in a low-growth area, unlike the other regions.
- Bucharest Metropolitan Area is "de facto" and the delay in its actual realization, together with the amplification of the economic, cultural, social development gaps. Between Bucharest and the rest of the country led to inconsistencies within the territorial structure, as well as to diminish the attractiveness and competitiveness at the international and European level (Enache et al., 2011).
- Delays in the establishment of technological and scientific parks and the formation of metropolitan functions due to unfavorable influence from indicators such as the number of residents, the efficiency of transport infrastructure and its low accessibility, development in the tourism and industry sector, etc.
- Minimizing the role of cultural function, an important indicator of competitiveness at the European level, through the reduced development of the capital city as a cultural center.
- The low degree of accessibility - Bucharest, unlike other European metropolises, has limited accessibility, which leads to reduced urban competitiveness and attractiveness. Although it has a national and European rail and road system of importance, the city is ranked in the European rankings as it does not have adequate infrastructure and is underdeveloped.
- The attractiveness of Bucharest and its capital role in Romania are affected by the low accessibility level determined by the low number of railway and road infrastructure and their poor quality. At the same time, the limited capacity of airports and the failure to complete hydro-technical projects affect the attractiveness of investors and visitors (Enache et al., 2011).
- The quality of life is affected by various environmental factors, with a high level of air pollution mainly due to toxic emissions generated by traffic and noise pollution.

5.1. Actions undertaken by the authorities to increase Bucharest's competitiveness

The development of Bucharest has been marked by a strong dynamic, especially in the period 2000-2008. This dynamic evolution has major consequences on the spatial level, but both the evolution of the capital and the territory influenced by it were: uncontrolled by the existence and consistent application of some strategic and operational planning documents; not targeted by appropriate planning mechanisms and institutions; uncoordinated as coherent, multi-annual and multi-source funding; unmonitored coherently through a system of indicators (Pătrașcu, 2012).

The Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035 (Figure 3), supported by the City Hall of Bucharest, has as a vision a city that in 2035 wants to be an influential and integrated European metropolis through its durability and character, intelligently and sensitively reinvented, an open and evolved community, a dynamic and creative capital.



Figure 3: Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035

Source: CSB 2035, 2018

To achieve the Bucharest 2035 vision, it is necessary to focus efforts on four major strategic directions:

- Creating an administrative form at the level of Bucharest and its territory of influence;
- Strengthening and revitalization of the poly-territorial system;
- Streamlining and developing the infrastructure system;
- Sustainable valorization of natural and built heritage resources.
- Establishing a Metropolitan Area is one of the priorities for the Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035. Its necessity is remarked by the urgent need for a body that supports the balanced development of settlements within the area of influence and support in Bucharest.
- The objectives of the Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035 are (Pătrașcu, 2012):
 - An educated and adaptable community - capable of meeting challenges;
 - A balanced and dynamic structure of economic activities;
 - An efficient connection to the major European transport axes and easy connection to global information flows;
 - A strong metropolitan core - strong functional anchorage in the territory;
 - A healthy living environment - low pollution, environmental footprint;
 - Responsible energy management with maximum efficiency;
 - High quality of living without segregation and low socio-economic polarization;
 - Attractive social services tailored to needs and adequately distributed spatially;
 - A strong urban identity - the result of capitalizing on history and building new features;
 - Courageously planned, well-guided, and carefully assessed urban development;
 - Performant public administration, able to build profitable partnerships for sustainable development of the city;
 - A successful capital in the system of the big Balkan cities.

5.2. Bucharest in international rankings

Bucharest is also not competitive due to a lack of experienced talent, a fact confirmed in 2018 by Romania ranking 64th globally in the Global Competitiveness Report of Talents.

While other states and cities are concerned with the development of talents and their maintenance, as they contribute positively and significantly to increasing competitiveness, economic progress, and living standards, Romania, and the capital regress - the previous position was 55.

In the latest research report, conducted by TH Real Estate, Bucharest was awarded 1.9 points for the "quality of life" factor. It includes several indicators such as housing, health infrastructure, crime

rates, education, natural background, political and social environment that are summed up in a score obtained with Economist, Mercer, and Euromonitor (TH Real Estate, 2017). According to the Global Urban Competitiveness Report 2017-2018, Bucharest ranks 188 out of 200 evaluated cities, losing 16 positions in the global ranking of urban competitiveness (Table 3). In the previous report, 2015-2016, Romania's capital was in position 172.

Table 3. Urban competitiveness ranking

Metropolitan area	The country	Economic Competitiveness Index	Rank
Busan	South Korea	0,5336	176
Yangzhou	China	0,5327	177
Akron	US	0,5291	178
Delhi	India	0,5282	179
Adelaide	Australia	0,5253	180
Gebze	Turkey	0,5241	181
Auckland	New Zealand	0,5239	182
Lima	Peru	0,5233	183
Ogden	US	0,5232	184
Bogota	Colombia	0,5214	185
Jerusalem	Israel	0,5201	186
Xuzhou	China	0,5201	187
Bucharest	Romania	0,5199	188

Source: adapted from Ni, Kamiya, Wang H. et al., 2017

In 2019, Bucharest occupies the 109th position in the Quality of Living City Ranking that hierarchies 231 cities according to this indicator (see Table 4). This is a drop since in 2018 Bucharest was ranked 107th.

Table 4. Bucharest in Quality of Living City Ranking

Rank	City	Country / Region
104	Tel Aviv	Israel
105	Muscat	Oman
106	Bandar Seri Begawan	Brunei
107	Brasilia	Brazil
108	San José	Costa Rica
109	Bucharest	Romania
110	Noumea	New Caledonia
111	Doha	Qatar

Source: Quality of Living City Ranking, 2019

6. CONCLUSIONS

The opportunities and challenges associated with urbanization are quite evident in the world's most populated countries whose cities are the largest and most dynamic cities in the world (Kulenovic and Zhu, 2016). Cities differ in many ways: size, economic orientation, geographic location and deposits, income level, history, political system, etc. Each city has its priorities in terms of development that shape its perspective and objectives (Kilroy et al., 2015).

In assessing competitiveness, it is necessary to focus on activities such as finance, tourism, the role of the informal sector, etc. because they compete with cities and places, like human resources, deposits, institutions, etc. are very important in determining how activities will be located, expanded or restricted (Webster and Muller, 2000). Assessing urban competitiveness allows a city to know its limits, disadvantages, problems compared to other cities (Ni et al., 2017). Investors and companies can understand the factors that affect certain urban systems and residents can perceive welfare status and future opportunities.

Thus, in line with the established objectives, Ljubljana has proposed a development based on innovation, knowledge, the synergy of all stakeholders and key areas, and creativity. The authorities also intend to increase competitiveness at the regional level by properly modernizing and developing transport, environment, information and communication, and social infrastructure.

Budapest wants to become a pole of attraction at European level by: Assertive community in coordinating institutional development and infrastructure; Enhanced cooperation of all governmental actors (regional, national, local, economic or non-governmental) concerned with the coordination of spatial development; An overview that takes into account the specializations of each district, where the sectors should be located; Increasing participation in the exchange of culture, talent, innovation, products, capital and know-how; Investments to improve city health; Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions according to international requirements; Rigorous preservation of the natural landscape, of the patrimony of buildings as a means of improving the city's image vis-à-vis tourists and investors; Reconstruction of industrial sites for tourism and business purposes; Compact and efficient urbanization, characterized by a mixed use of development, public transport, bicycle and pedestrian traffic; Reuse of these areas is a requirement for sustainable development; Reducing dependence on cars by transforming the urban structure; Developing export-oriented economic sectors by improving productivity; Emphasizing the diverse culture, historical and social composition of the city; Developing the identity of residents through policy-making; Variety of location, market offers, etc. .; Encourage immigration by highlighting the positive effect of reducing discrimination.

Bucharest, within the Strategic Concept Bucharest 2035, proposed the following strategic objectives for the development of the city: The capitalization of industrial sites or those recently released or releasing in the future, these being large reserves of land suitable for extensive urbanization; Supporting a multi-polar structure with center poles supported in their turn by peripheral or sub-poles, ensuring a specialization characteristic of each, with a view to balanced territorial development; Reinforcing the city center, both of the historical area and the central perimeter; Coordinated development of major city entrances; Protecting and capitalizing on the natural axis of the city; Continue to develop strategic areas; Infrastructure development, in particular the subway network.

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