

## ANALYSIS OF URBAN PLANNING IN BUCHAREST. CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

*This study is an review of urban planning in Bucharest today. The research, based on the consultation of a large number of publicly available documents, led us to the conclusion that the reality in which we live is the result of an incoherent, unsustainable and uneven development process, lacking a clear long-term vision, not sufficiently focused on increasing the quality of life of the population, being rather based on a competition of several economic, social, cultural, historical, natural and built environment factors. All this has led to a series of territorial disparities that have resulted in unbalanced and inequitable development of the technical and socio-economic infrastructure, compromised natural resources and land reserves, as well as major functional and landscape discrepancies in the country's capital. Following this analysis, we are able to express our views on the necessary and possible actions to solve the major problems related to urban planning of the city in which we live.*

**KEYWORDS:** *urban planning, city, strategy, urban policies*

### INTRODUCTION

Urban planning, a British-originated expression widely used throughout Europe, deals with the physical, social, economic and environmental development of cities and their surrounding areas through public policy. Urban planning covers different activities such as urban design, landscape and land use planning, urban regeneration, transport planning, utility provision, etc., and its overall objective is to maintain a close balance between economic development, environmental quality and social well-being (Robert, 2006, Mitrica & Grigorescu, 2016).

In other words, urban planning is an instrument of city management that involves a set of balances of interests the balancing of which can be achieved through the enhancement of the functioning of the complex individuality of the territory in question (Minea, 2007). It can be said that urban planning consists of the drafting of land and building use plans as well as local building and environmental regulations. Over time it has collaborated with fields such as architecture and civil construction in order to solve city problems through optimal physical design, and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the field of urban planning expanded to include economic development planning, community social planning and environmental planning (Robert, 2006).

Urban Planning deals with actual human settlements (urban or rural), in which the built, artificial, highly anthropized space dominates and coordinates activities within these settlements, characterised by a high population density. The British speak of Planning when referring to spatial development. They differentiate between 'urban planning' and 'territorial planning', but in some cases also use the terms 'physical planning' and 'spatial planning'. The French use the terms "urbanisme" and

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"aménagement du territoire" as we do (or we do like them). If we want to find an equivalent of 'spatial planning' it will be a little more difficult because there are many nuances and interpretations between 'aménagement du territoire', 'planification territoriale', 'spatial planning', 'town and country planning', 'raumordnung', 'ruimtelijke ordening', 'tratamiento del territorio'. It can be said that urban planning is part of spatial planning, with specific issues and characteristics. However, what needs to be emphasised is the complex and undeniable interdependence between urban planning and territorial planning (Alpopi, 2009).

Provided that urban planning provides communities with general development strategies, we can speak of strategic planning. At the same time, urban planning represents the shaping of different variants of future urban development models, estimating for each of them the positive and negative aspects arising from the adoption of different policies and strategies (Ianos, 2007).

In their evolution, cities are confronted both with the ageing of their structure and built-up areas, and with changes in their economic functions and the social characteristics of the communities that populate them. In order to maintain a harmonious living environment, a prosperous economy and a balanced social structure, a range of public (and sometimes public-private) activities need to take place at city level. Thus, the following processes need to be distinguished:

- urban renewal, which aims to intervene in deprived urban neighbourhoods and run-down/degraded areas through major projects targeting housing, services, transport systems and recreation areas, sometimes at very high costs, which is why these activities are carried out less frequently;
- Urban regeneration and revitalisation, aimed at transforming the outdated economic base of different urban areas into a more sustainable economic base by modernising the urban structure, improving the urban environment and diversifying the social structure;
- urban rehabilitation and restoration, aimed at preserving the built heritage by restoring historic buildings and urban landscapes (Robert, 2006).

The UN Sustainable Development Goals have a significant impact both directly and indirectly on local planning efforts in Romania. The direct impact is aimed at sustainable development goals with direct action on the local strategic planning process, while the indirect impact is the response to the influence that sustainable development goals have on strategic planning efforts (Patrascu, 2012).

The urban dimension is present in all the SDGs, but the 11<sup>th</sup> of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, "Development of cities and human settlements so that they are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable", focuses on the urban area, for which the urban planning process is essential. (Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, 2008, MLPDA, 2018, 2020).

## **2. CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES**

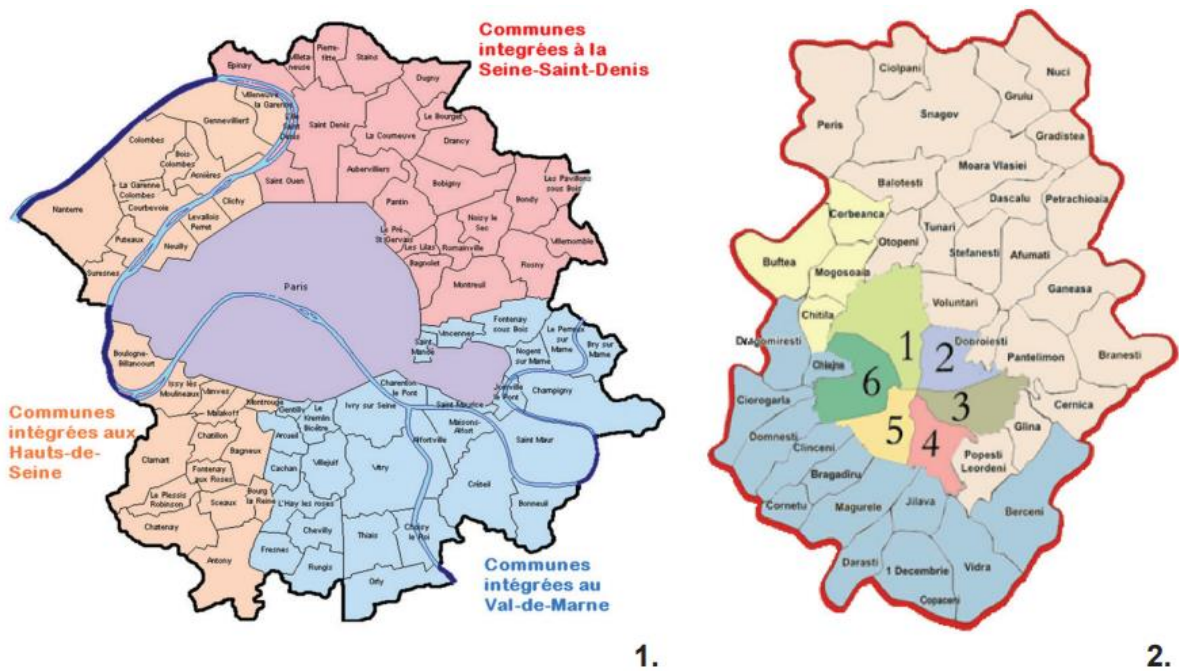
The current trend in urban development is to call future cities "Smart City", "Intelligent City", "Digital City", "Future City" etc., but whatever name we adopt, they will need better, smarter, more sustainable and safer urban planning, design (PIDU sector 6, 2019).

The problem of territorial constraints is a reality found in Romania's large urban agglomerations. But the capital of the country is the European metropolis with the smallest surface area of all European capitals with a comparable number of inhabitants. For example, Bratislava, on a smaller territory than Bucharest, has a population five times smaller, and Ljubljana, with a slightly smaller area than Bucharest, has one eighth of Bucharest's population. Budapest, with a comparable number of inhabitants, is 2.3 times larger and Sofia, which is twice the size of Bucharest, has only two thirds of our population. Other European capitals have densities between 1000 and 4000 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, while Bucharest has 8026 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. The reality is that in the Bucharest metropolis there are neither residential areas with higher densities than in Vienna, Budapest or Bratislava nor areas with denser office buildings than in London, Paris or Frankfurt. What differentiates us from the rest of the European capitals is the fact that the territory of Bucharest is made up only of built-up land. Large areas, such as agricultural land or settlements separated from the city, theoretically rural, are attached

to it, which creates functional problems. The current legislation and administrative-territorial configuration keeps the country's capital captive within its borders, penetrated by the administrative-territorial units of Ilfov county. This makes it difficult for local authorities to administer territories that functionally belong to the city and formally to neighbouring localities (Ionita, 2020).

As an example, Figure 1 shows the comparison between two European capitals, Bucharest and Paris, in terms of administrative-territorial division. It shows the Paris metropolitan area (1), made up of integrated territorial units, namely 20 boroughs, and the Bucharest-Ilfov region (2), shown as two separate entities: the Ilfov municipality and county which includes the capital (Order of Romanian Architects, 2016).

Other examples of best practice can be found in the case of Rome, divided into 15 municipalities, Berlin into 12 sectors, etc., where local administrations are linked on issues of public policies, strategies and implementation solutions (Order of Romanian Architects, 2016).



**Figure 1. Administrative-territorial comparison between Bucharest and Paris**

*Source: Ordinul Arhitecților din România, 2016*

In Bucharest case, another problem concerning urban planning is the administrative division of municipality. Currently, the city is divided into 6 administrative districts, and each of them is run by its own city hall. The districts are arranged radially and each one has a part of the centre of Bucharest under its administration (AGERPRES, 2011). The current administrative division does not allow an optimal management of the services offered by the authorities and makes a coherent urban planning impossible. There are many homogeneous areas in terms of historical evolution, economic development and urban image, being built-up protected areas, which are administratively fragmented between two or three districts. For example, the Polonă protected area is divided between Districts 1 and 2, the University Square is in Districts 1 and 3, and the areas surrounding it are divided between Districts 2 and 5. The Calea Călărașilor protected area is fragmented between sectors 2 and 3, and the Pitar Moș protected area is divided between Districts 1 and 2 (World Bank, 2020, 2021).

Dividing the city into the six Districts leads to uncoordinated and often negative actions for the city. The fragmentation of the city makes it impossible to manage the city as a whole, examples being the separation of the management of public utilities, of the services administered by the sectoral city halls such as building permits and detailed urban plans outside protected areas, the sanitation service, the

management of the street network, parks and green spaces, the management of local taxes and charges. At the same time, the services administered by the General City Hall are: building permits and detailed urban plans in protected areas or zonal urban plans in the Bucharest municipality, water supply and sewerage, public lighting, heating, administration of the street network with public transport, etc.

The lack of coordination and real collaboration between different public institutions, as well as the overlapping jurisdiction between the capital's mayoralty and sectoral mayoralties and between sectors, has led to different approaches to similar problems and to major discrepancies in functional and landscape aspects in the country's capital. At the same time, these uncoordinated arrangements deprive Bucharest, due to the inexistence of development and expansion policies, of becoming a European metropolis (Order of Romanian Architects, 2016).

### **3. KEY ASPECTS OF URBAN PLANNING IN BUCHAREST**

The 2016 Bucharest Report and the 2020 Urban Agenda bring a number of findings for our European capital:

- lacks a responsible metropolitan development institution to coordinate urban policies and city development in an integrated and transparent way;
- does not have a close cooperation relationship with the metropolitan area on issues of common interest such as: metropolitan development strategies, land policy, utilities and functions necessary for sustainable development (acquisition, management, control);
- is one of the last places in Europe in terms of air quality and noise levels, due to the continuous reduction of green areas, traffic congestion, etc.;
- mobility has not been properly managed, leading to a poor-quality infrastructure, built without urban planning, traffic injection towards the centre, lack of an integrated parking system to regulate access to the central area by car, lack of a well-designed and organized network linking residential neighbourhoods and the city centre, etc.;
- lacks quality public spaces, and those that do exist are poorly managed, without the involvement of residents, with vacant spaces often occupied by parking lots;
- there are degraded communities and areas blocked or underdeveloped due to the lack of real concern of the authorities regarding urban and social regeneration;
- does not have a housing policy that targets social housing, which is neither clearly defined nor transparently managed;
- many new buildings are located haphazardly, not integrated into the existing structure of the city, there are many degraded residential areas among those built during the communist period, or areas with buildings that present seismic risk that have been abandoned with consequences on the depopulation of the area and last but not least the depreciation of the built fund in areas such as Magheru Boulevard, Calea Moșilor, Calea Buzești etc. with adjacent streets;
- a large number of historical houses and villas, representative inactive, degraded due to their abandonment following the cumbersome retrocession and inheritance problems that have delayed the reuse and therefore the blocking of the buildings;
- the legal mechanism of retrocession in built-up areas has led to the emergence of "blocks between houses" or "houses between blocks", allowing building in areas such as parks or green courtyards of blocks and often at unacceptably small distances from the windows of neighbouring buildings;
- the degradation of the urban image through illegal thermal insulation of some historical buildings the original decorations of which are destroyed by cladding with expanded polystyrene panels, but also through thermal rehabilitation whereby some blocks of flats are given an inappropriate colour scheme;

- on the shores of Bucharest's natural lakes, large areas of green space are consumed for the construction of terraces or summer clubs, often built without a permit;
- quantitative and qualitative loss of green spaces in the last 25 years through deforestation, excessive topping, abusive felling, paving, terraces, parking lots;
- the problem of seismic vulnerability is underestimated and insufficiently documented, as many buildings are not yet surveyed; in the event of a major earthquake, the city risks losing a large part of its identity, as more than 90% of the buildings classified in seismic risk class I have architectural heritage value;
- management at the administrative level is deficient, and functioning is uneven and discontinuous and based on contradictory urban policies (Order of Romanian Architects, 2016, 2020).

In the last 30 years there has been no overall strategy for the development of the city, development being based on sectoral projects and policies resulting from the need to solve urgent dysfunctions (Order of Romanian Architects, 2020). In addition, Bucharest still does not have a new General Urban Plan (PUG), for which a contract was signed in 2013. Currently the old PUG is in force, approved in 2000, which expired in 2010, but has been extended in the meantime. The need for an updated PUG lies in the fact that it determines what can be built on each piece of land in the city, by protecting historical areas and green spaces. In the current context, for Bucharest the drawing up of the new General Urban Plan is a necessity, as it aims to develop a city that offers citizens a higher quality of life that meets their needs and supports the diversification of the labour supply (Firea, 2016). In reality, the PUG is the instrument that should be at the basis of all interventions in any city, and its construction must be based on the will of the decision-makers, the professionalism of the specialists and, very importantly, the involvement of the communities (Ianos, 2007).

The 2016 Bucharest Report also highlights the complicated association of the 2000 PUG provisions with the approved Zonal Urban Plans, often generating investment blockages and controversy and confusion in the management of spaces. An example is represented by those areas planned to be preserved under morphological and functional aspects (residential areas with low dwellings) but which have been transformed by PUZ into areas with a much-increased height regime and land occupation percentage. Order of Romanian Architects (2016) consider that, in these cases, the spatial confusion became absolute once the Zonal Urban Plan expired, when the territories reverted to the solution of the PUG, even if in some cases the change was justified.

#### **4. BRIEF REVIEW OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS FOR BUCHAREST MUNICIPALITY**

The European context for urban development is underpinned by a number of documents such as the Territorial Agenda 2030, which focuses on three pillars of EU policy making and implementation: better regulation, better financing and better knowledge; the Urban Agenda for the EU (Pact of Amsterdam) (European Commission, 2016a,b, 2020), where new partnerships have been identified in areas such as: air quality, housing, urban mobility, climate adaptation, sustainable land use, safe public spaces, etc.; the European Urban Initiative 2021-2027, an instrument to support cities in strengthening integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development and to establish stronger links with relevant EU policies; the URBACT Programme 2021-2027, the only European territorial cooperation programme working exclusively for cities in the field of integrated participatory urban development, etc. (The Bucharest City Hall, 2022, European Union, 2013).

Concerning urban planning at the level of Bucharest municipality, among the main strategic documents, the following can be highlighted:

*Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan 2016-2030 Bucharest-Ilfov Region (PMUD)*, a plan through which the European planning and management concepts on sustainable urban mobility will be implemented in the capital and its surrounding areas. At the same time, the objectives and projects provided for in

this document are also correlated with other national and regional strategic documents as well as local ones, such as *the Integrated Urban Development Plan for the central area of Bucharest (PIDU, 2010)*, which aims at strengthening the identity of the capital, sustaining its vitality and attractiveness, as well as local economic development and sustainable urban regeneration.

*The Integrated Air Quality Plan in Bucharest (PICA)* envisages a set of measures correlated with the principles of the PIDU in order to prioritize active modes of transport and infrastructure development through the redevelopment of streets and the establishment of new routes for pedestrians and cyclists, promotion of a parking policy especially for the city centre, etc.

*The Action Plan for Noise Abatement in the Municipality of Bucharest (PADZ)*, was designed in correlation with the PMUD and PICA and is mainly aimed at the development and modernization of public transport services, the continuous traffic light system on major traffic arteries and the use of alternative means of transport.

*The medium and long-term development and operation strategy for the public sanitation service in the Municipality of Bucharest for the period 2014-2030*, is in correlation with the Waste Management Plan, the Integrated Air Quality Plan, the Regulation of Organization and Operation of Public Sanitation Services and the Sanitation and Hygiene Norms of the Municipality of Bucharest.

*The Local Environmental Action Plan (LEAP)* represents the strategy for solving environmental problems, based on the principles of sustainable development in accordance with the National Environmental Action Plan and the Local and Regional Development Programmes.

*The General Transport Master Plan*, taken into account in the drafting of the Integrated Air Quality Plan in Bucharest, will contribute to the sustainable development of Romania in the long term by increasing intermodal connectivity between regions and facilitating access of the population and the economic sector to the transport network.

*The Energy Strategy of the Municipality of Bucharest* aims to reduce electricity consumption and greenhouse gas emissions by reducing fuel consumption and the effects of climate change, as well as improving the urban aspect of the city (Bucharest City Hall, 2011, 2018).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Residents value living in a city with a well-defined identity, in a safe, healthy environment, with quality housing, which may offer motivating jobs, being part of a community that protects values and respects traditions, and it's open to cooperation and diversity.

In order for Bucharest to become an influential, dynamic and creative metropolis in the not too distant future, integrated and comparable with other European capitals, urban planning issues need to be resolved. Solutions can be found through full cooperation between the Territorial Administrative Units or by merging the Territorial Administrative Units with the municipality, as is the case in many European capitals. By taking an integrated approach to the territory of the municipality of Bucharest with the Ilfov county, it would be possible to avoid Bucharest remaining the most chaotically organized European capital from a territorial point of view. The development policies at different levels should be fully correlated in order to manage the territory efficiently and to ensure economic growth and to manage Bucharest according to its status as capital, to make the infrastructure system more efficient and develop it, to make sustainable use of natural and built heritage resources, to control the territorial expansion of the city.

Last but not least, a comprehensive and integrated vision and thinking on the part of the authorities, the involvement of decision-makers, associations, non-governmental organizations, academia, private and public companies, entrepreneurs and citizens is needed in order to establish priority directions for the urban development of the city. It is necessary to collaborate between the different state institutions in the drawing up of the new general urban plan for Bucharest, of a legislative framework that will consider the maintenance and restoration of historical monuments and valuable

buildings with financial and technical support for the owners, aspects that will accentuate the identity of the city.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

*This work was supported by a grant of Bucharest University of Economic Studies for institutional projects, project title „Urban planning analysis of Bucharest Municipality from the perspective of sustainable development goals/Analiza planificării urbane la nivelul Municipiului București din perspectiva obiectivelor de dezvoltare durabilă (APUDD)”*

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