IAŞI METROPOLITAN AREA – A GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW CONCERNING IT’S REGIONAL ROLE

Dan-Ionuţ Istrate¹

Key words: metropolitan area, sustainable development, demographic decline, metropolisation, growth opportunities, regional role

Abstract. Metropolitan development represents an administrative and economic "challenge" in terms of the management and coordination of a significant number of resources, being known in well developed countries as a feature of a new phase of urban development which follows a stage of concentration of the population in the city and the formation of suburbs; such socio-economic areas are defined by specialists as metropolitan areas. These legal and regulatory barriers limit the ability of local governments to use productively the assets they control and to encourage economic growth through innovative planning measures based on market relations. The main goal of this study is an objective analysis of the functions/malfunctions that appear in the rural/urban and urban/rural relations in the metropolitan area of Iaşi concerning it’s regional influence.

Introduction.

The formation of metropolitan areas meets a need or an opportunity determined by the organic evolution of cities. This process of urbanisation on the European territory has led to the interdependent development of metropolises with localities which are within their area of influence, thus forming "metropolitan realities", which, though not referred to as metropolitan areas, function as unitary areas, relatively independent.

Therefore, the result of the process of development is the emergence of metropolitan areas, a process which is also called metropolisation and represents the formation and development of the metropolis.

Thus, we can deduce the first characteristics of metropolisation; they represent distinct forms of human settlement and consist of a large number of people living within or around a large centre of great density.

The development of metropolitan areas facilitates the integrated arrangement of the territory at a regional level so that it reduces the imbalances between the centre and the adjacent area, caused by the dispersion or marginalisation generated by the isolation of some settlements lacking

¹ Ph.D. stud."Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, istrate.dan.ionut@gmail.com
opportunities; the elimination or reduction of such imbalances leads to the improvement of the quality of life of the population.

The metropolitan area is characterized by multiple effects at a large scale: the systematic rehabilitation of the historical centre, the rebirth of the city centre through the emergence of a modern business centre (the Central Business District could be represented by the new Palas centre) and the emergence of new centres in the outlying areas. All these processes parallel a phenomenon of suburbanisation, which refers to technopoles, that is multimodal platforms, rehabilitation centres integrated in the landscape etc. The metropolitan area tends to identify with a multipolar urban tissue. It can be stated that the functions of the metropolitan area are integrated in the landscape, influencing the organisation of the territories.

The emergence and development of metropolitan areas around the main cities implies the endorsement of the applicant entities of some functions so as to stimulate not only the economic development, but also the social cohesion, thus building and reinforcing some specific roles at a local, national and international level so as to meet development processes.

The development of infrastructure integrated systems transform metropolitan areas into logistical centres, which are equally attractive and accessible, equipped for complex functions destined to ensure territorial development; since they focus on already existing functions and on the potential of the area, there appears a series of international links meant to contribute to

Fig. 1 - Urban – rural (metropolitan) Relation - Source: Vrabete Mihaela (GRASP) Zona Metropolitană Iaşi – Studiu de caz, 2004
maintaining the already established role in areas of influence, as well as to cope with the rigours of metropolitan entities existing within European networks.

Urban development is a continuous process of transformation of the urban environment that has witnessed important dimensions in the second half of the twentieth century. Seen from the sociological point of view, urbanisation expresses "a transfer of urban characteristics to rural localities". This transfer of urban features to rural areas, and therefore the appearance of urbanisation can be achieved through a comprehensive process of metropolisation.

In this context, sustainable development means a challenge for metropolitan areas, given the ability of the concept to include the whole problem, plus the observance of a set of principles leading to cautious resource consumption. In the case of metropolitan areas, where the pressure of urban factors is very strong, the main element to be protected is the area itself, and this protection is expressed through the best way to use it. Although sustainable development remains a controversial concept, especially due to political connotations and lack of operational tools, it still incorporates best what geographers have felt that should be made for the health of the geographical and natural environment.

Sustainable development aims at eliminating disparities as far as the access to resources is concerned, not only for the poor or marginalised communities, but also for the future generations, trying to provide every nation the opportunity to develop according to its own social and cultural values, without denying this right to other nations or to future generations.

Currently, a reformulation of the concept of development is compulsory, the economic component being insufficient in justifying economic policy measures. In addition, even if development depends mostly on the economy of each country, the international implications are felt at the level of the countries characterised by a high degree of industrialisation.

From an economic point of view, development has been understood as the ability of a national economy to generate and sustain an annual growth of the gross national product at rates of at least 5-7%. Another indicator is the income/inhabitant or the GNP/inhabitant so as to highlight the extent to which the growth of the GNP exceeds that of the population. In a practical way, this approach has led to favouring the measures that determined the growth of the share of industry and services at the expense of agriculture.

Relations between local development and area organisation are direct, considering the changes that occur with the implantation of new businesses in the structure of a certain system (changes of the land structure, development of transport infrastructure, diversification of services to the population stimulated by increasing income, lowering the unemployment rate, upgrading facilities etc.).
The metropolitan area arrangement seeks to ensure a balanced and sustainable development of the territory, in accordance with European Community policies (economic and social cohesion, economic competitiveness based on knowledge and in accordance with the principles of sustainable development, as well as the conservation of the diversity of natural resources). From this viewpoint, the objective to be taken into account, that is the spatial dimension, is a guideline which aims at improving the cooperation within the framework of metropolitan policies, especially those which have a major impact on the environment in the territory.

Fig. 2 - The evolution of the medium number of employees in the Iași Metropolitan Area between 1991 – 2010 (made by Istrate Dan – Ionuț)
After 1990 the city of Iaşi has experienced a demographic decline, partly in favour of the localities in the metropolitan area since a large part of the population has migrated to greater distances. The demographic growth of the metropolitan area is paramount with some differences in favour of localities such as Ciurea, Miroslava, Popricani, Rediu and Bârnova.

As regards the distribution of the workforce by sector of activity, with the exception of the city of Iaşi, focused on the tertiary, there are two localities characterised by a balanced structure of the three sectors: Ciurea and Holboca. As for the number of employees, the analysis is fairly updated (2010). Compared to 1991, the number of employees has decreased in most administrative units. The most significant increases are recorded in Miroslava and Valea Lupului. Commuting before 1990 (over 20,000 people) has been reduced significantly, assessments for the year 1996 being approximately 7,500, thus representing a decrease of direct and indirect influence of the city of Iaşi on the metropolitan area.

The geographical introspection made on the localities in Iaşi Metropolitan Area highlights visible differences; yet, they all have a genuine development potential and are seen as a supporting growth pole. It should also be noted the huge potential of development of the administrative-territorial units situated along the dominant axis of Leţcani – Iaşi – Holboca towards the Republic of Moldova.

**Malfunctions**

The main malfunctions existing in the metropolitan area are defined by the disparities regarding development, infrastructure endowment and attraction of investments. This thesis aims at carrying out an inventory of these malfunctions so as to use them for the detection of a set of appropriate methods to reduce or even stop them.

The network of localities in Iaşi Metropolitan Area comprises 76 villages grouped into 13 municipalities and one city. Its description in terms of density, size and functions is followed by a presentation of hierarchical locality systems.

The seven criteria for the classification and ranking of localities include a wide range of complex features, the results being exploited in the process of increasing social cohesion and integrated development of Iaşi Metropolitan Area. Likewise, there are highlighted the major disruptions caused by the different size, the unequal distribution and the reduced typological differentiation of the localities. A great part of the localities in Iaşi Metropolitan Area is on the verge of turning into real neighborhoods of Iaşi: Valea Lupului, Tomeştii, Dancu, Lunca Cetăţuii.
The main issues related to the network of localities of the studied area are:

- a large disproportion between the city of Iaşi and other urban categories, generating a serious imbalance of the urban population in the territory;
- the unbalanced distribution of the urban network in the territory with three localities situated on the west-east axis dividing the territory into two parts - north and south - no cities;
- a large number of rural areas, higher than the national average (7.7 vs. 5.5 villages/100 km²), on average 106 villages/city;
- a large number of small and medium-sized villages: less than 500 inhabitants (157, meaning 37.0%) and between 501-1000 inhabitants (114, 26.9%); there are 13 villages which have less than 100 inhabitants;
- the uneven distribution of the network of rural localities in the territory;
- a phenomenon emphasising a type of tentacular development and the unification of some villages (merged villages);
- the low diversification of functional typology of rural settlements, mostly with predominantly agricultural functions.

The urban agglomeration in Iaşi will determine segregated suburban relations, the city developing along the main lines connecting Europe (River Prut
and the future highway), a community satellite system of development at the local level, maintaining a more natural environment.

Fig. 4 - Iaşi Metropolitan Area - The absorption capacity of EU funds
(made by Istrate Dan – Ionuţ)

Industry, whose impact has been decisive as regards the demographic leap of Iaşi and some rural areas, has reduced dramatically its role and the emergence of
leading industries and the development of creative industries are far from offering a fresh perspective to the industrial activities in the metropolitan area. Services
represents the sector with a high capacity to attract available workforce. Iaşi - through its various functions: academic, administrative, banking and finances, business service firms, logistics - has a high potential of attraction that can impose it both nationally and internationally.

In the next figure, we have represented the absorption capacity of EU funds at the level of an administrative-territorial unit. Measured in Euro-inhabitant, it captures the extremely low value of funds raised in communities in close proximity to the city: Tomeşti, Ciurea, Valea Lupului.

The development prospects of the axis Iaşi - Tomeşti towards Albiţa derives from the advantage of the connection with one of the most important transport corridors in Eastern Europe, close to the border with a country that aspires to European Union integration and the existence of cross border cooperation programs financed by the European Regional Development Fund (Joint Operational Programme Romania - Ukraine - Republic of Moldova).

A SWOT analysis has been drawn up for each category so as to highlight the main objectives of development projects.

Ensuring sustainable development requires a strategy which takes into account the social and economic needs of the population and is based on the planning option; following an assessment of the impact, it best compensates the resource losses that cannot be immediately replaced or restored, so they do not limit the development of the area in the future. Despite recent efforts, the legal and regulatory framework for local development is far from being complete.

**Conclusions**

Major reforms are still needed in several areas. The capacity of local government to manage and facilitate local economic development is still limited by national laws and too restrictive regulations. These legal and regulatory barriers limit the ability of local governments to use productively the assets they control and to encourage economic growth through innovative planning measures based on market relations.

Although spatial planning and development play an important role in building a more sustainable future, they represent only a factor that must be integrated. Such an integrated regional strategy may pave the way for a more coherent spatial planning and development at the metropolitan level.

In a nutshell, the current article aims to represent a multifaceted geographical overview of the metropolitan area and highlight not only the shortcomings of the spatial organisation of Iaşi Metropolitan Area but also the
strengths that development strategies should use so to ensure sustainable development and territorial cohesion growth.

In the context of the development arguments and the problems it currently faces, Iaşi Metropolitan Area may represent “an organised answer and a partnership option” to solve these problems, while assuming a leading role at a regional, national and European level and making the most of its growth opportunities.

Acknowledgements. This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [Research Grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

References
Dincă, D., Dumitrică C., (2010), Dezvoltare şi planificare urbană, Editura Pro Universitaria;
Iurea, D., (2011), Axele de dezvoltare în judeţul Iaşi. Analiză geografică, Bucureşti;
Rey, V., Groza, O., Ianoş I., Pătroescu M., (2006), Atlasul Romaniei, Ed. RAO, Bucureşti;
Vrabete, M., (2004), Zona Metropolitană Iaşi – Studiu de caz, GRASP – Program de Reformă Guvernementală prin Parteneriate Durabile;

*** Schema de dezvoltare a spaţiului comunitar. Spre o dezvoltare spaţială echilibrată şi durabilă a teritoriului Uniunii Europene (1999), Consiliul Informal al Miniştrilor Responsabili cu Amenajarea Teritoriului, Postdam;