TO REDEFINE THE CENTRE. REASONS AND PREMISES FOR THE SHRINKAGE IN TIMISOARA

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Abstract. Timisoara is nowadays the 2nd city of Romania, an important economical, social and cultural urban centre. Until 1990, the city had a relatively continuous growing, natural at the beginning of the 19th century, but artificially accelerated during the communist period. After the political change, the city has started a natural process of reconfiguration, similar with the national and euro-regional trends. The decline of the Timisoara’s population was almost constant during 1990-2008. The statistical fact is eloquent: during 2 decades, Timisoara has lost 14% of its population. In this context, the relation centre-periphery into the urban space involves a renegotiation for its new equilibrium. This paper tries to identify the reasons and the premises of the city shrinking. This article is based on the partial result of the project FP7 no.225193 ShrinkSmart – The Governance of the Shrinkage into the European Context, financed by European Commission. West University of Timisoara is partner into the consortium of this project (http://www.shrinksmart.ufz.de/).

1. PATTERNS OF URBAN SHRINKAGE

Timisoara is one of the first 3 cities of Romania, an important economical, social and cultural centre. From a geographical point of view, Timisoara is situated at the cross of the 45th North latitude parallel with the 21st East longitude meridians, in the West Plain of Romania.
Banat Area, at less than 700 km of many European Capitals: Belgrade (170 km), Budapest (324 km), Sarajevo (460 km), Bratislava (522 km), Sofia (547), Zagreb (554 km), Vienna (565 km), Podgorica (571 km), Skopje (589 km), Ljubljana (692 km).

Documentary attested since 1266 as fortified fortress, Timisoara was recorded as Civitas (town) in 1342. From 1716, after the liberation from the Ottoman domination it is started a large process of modernization. In 1727, the Count Claudius Florimund Mercy emitted “The regulations regarding constructions for the city and the fortress of Timisoara” that imposed to demolish all existing buildings and to construct new buildings, obligatory from bricks, on a new rectangular streets configurations. In 1781 Timisoara was raised to the level of “free royal town” (municipality). Over the time, Timisoara has known a constant urban development, acquiring quickly and easily all Central European trends and standards (before the communist regime Timisoara was named “Little Vienna”). Following the NUTS 2 standard, Timisoara belongs to the region RO42 West and it is the seat of Timis County. From the point of view of its administrative organization, the Timis County has two cities (Timisoara and Lugoj), eight towns, 85 communes, and 313 villages. Structurally, according to the Population Census of March 18, 2002, 60.72% of the total population of the Timis County lives in an urban environment whereas the rest of 39.7% resides in the countryside. The average density of the population in Timis County (76 inhabitant/sq.km in 2002), as well as in the Western Region of Romania, has registered a slight decline in relation to the national average.

With a rich multicultural tradition, Timisoara keeps a consistent cultural life, especially with the fourth theatres: National Theatre, German Theatre, Hungarian Theatre and Jewish Theatre, and also with the cultural offer of the Philharmonic and Romanian National Opera. Complementary, Timisoara is well-known as a traditional educational centre with a notorious academic curriculum offered by 7 universities - four public universities: West University of Timisoara, Polytechnic University of Timisoara, The “Victor Babes” University of Medicine, The Banat University of Agricultural Science and 3 private universities. To talk about the shrinkage in Timisoara of 2009 is quite difficult, because the general previews have positive and optimist trends. The entire region RO42 has a well-developed profile and Timisoara is the growing centre of this area. The public administration working to the strategy for the metropolitan area of Timisoara and the idea of shrinking are completely missing from the public discourse. Despite this, the statistical fact is eloquent: during 2 decades Timisoara has lost 14% of its population. The reasons, premises and the implications of this phenomenon

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1 By NUTS, Romania has 4 macro-regions, 8 development regions and 41+1 counties
of shrinking will be discussed in the following pages.

1.1. REASONS AND PREMISES

1.1.1. Demographics (population development and migration)

Under the positive demographical policy imposed by the communist regime, the population of Timisoara has reached a peak in 1990 with 351,293 persons. The starting point of the population’s growing (at the national level) can be considerate the Decree No. 770/1966 through which Nicolae Ceausescu has forbidden the aborts. It was estimated that around 2 millions of children were “helped” to be born at the national level, in only 2 years. Due to the implementation of this law, the population of Timisoara has known the highest rate of growing, as is represented in the Figure 2:

This abusive act together with other measures (various economical advantages for the families with 3 or more children) has improved the birth rate during the 70ies and 80ies. The political pressure to increase the population volume was so high that in 1989 the official discourses celebrated the number of 23 millions of Romanian (even this level was contested by some demographers).

By other hand, after the Second World War the Timisoara’s native population (with a large German community) has suffered much political oppressions, such as forced deportations in working camps from USSR, in the Baragan champ (in South-East part of Romania) or in other forced working camps from Romania (such “The Danube-Black See Channel”). In the effort to eradicate the occidental mentality of the city, there were generated massive waves of migration towards Timisoara, from rural areas and from other parts of Romania (especially from Moldova). It is estimated that, today, here are less than 1/3 families with more than 3 generations born in Timisoara.

Complementary, the external migration was strictly controlled and generally prohibited. It was more and more difficult to cross Romania’s boundaries, even as tourists.
The free circulation of persons among foreign countries was almost a myth, especially during the last years of communism. The entire country has become a ghetto, with deep, fundamental, structural and harmful insertions of the state in the private life, with fewer options and alternatives to cross the pattern. The Ritzer’s Mcdonaldisation phenomenon was really experimented in Romania (as well as in the rest of the communist parts of Europe) but without almost any occidental contents (into a quasi-complete planned economy, the everyday life where quite strictly predictable, with very limited number of options for each citizen).

And at last, but not at least, a massive action plans regarding the control of population growing, configuration and structure was implemented in Romania. In the last years of communism, one of the main targets, in order to develop a full operational planned agriculture, was to demolish the villages (and to force the movement of rural population in the urban space). This process has represented a second stage of urbanization, after the period of the 70ies when the entire urban space was forced to artificially grow. Thus, in 1956 in Romania it was 84.4% rural population and in 1977 only 53.9% (practically, in 20 years, almost 30.5% of Romanian population was forced to move from rural to urban areas). Various studies emphasis that the urbanization process in Romania was mainly generated by the industrialization and by the cooperativization of the agriculture from the period 1949-1962. Thus, a longitudinal research about the migration of the working force from agriculture (Sandu, 1977:110) shows the following evolution:

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<td>Industrial workers within the total working force</td>
<td>+12.6%</td>
<td>–14.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peasants within the total working force</td>
<td>+17.9%</td>
<td>–21.1%</td>
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Thus, the collapse of the totalitarian regime and the rediscovery of freedom have generated a massive wave of changes in the population structure and profile. After all the restrictions and prohibitions, the Romanian society tries to recovery from a long series of gaps. Parts of them (such birth control or in/out-migration) were quickly solved, but others (such as the rural mentality from the urban space) remain a present problem. During the first decade of democracy, Timisoara has kept the general trend recorded at the national level of demographical decreasing generated, especially, by the liberalization of the aborts, the possibility of family planning, and the possibility of the out-migration.

1.1.2. Economic development

At the end of the 19th century Timisoara became a developed industrial city with more than 60 fabrics (on various domains) and 1200 stores that reflects a quick commercial and industrial progress. During the interwar period Timisoara restarted the growing trend

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3 in accordance with Demographic Annual of R.S.R. 1974 and Census 1977
4 *** Timisoara electronic article available at [http://www.timisoreni.ro/info/generalitati/Timisoara.html](http://www.timisoreni.ro/info/generalitati/Timisoara.html), last accessed 8 February 2010
after the difficulties from the beginning of the 20th century. A natural, consistent and sustainable economical development assured a valuable progress for the entire life of the city. This very favourable situation was cancelled by the instauration of the communist regime that has started by the nationalization of the any private property (fabrics, houses, buildings, land etc.), by the inhibition of the any local civic responses and by the generalization of the terror and fear. During the period between the 60ies and the 70ies, Romania has known a massive process of industrialization and urbanization. Without any scientific or strategic approach, the political goals were to achieve, through an empirical manner, with any costs and sacrifices, a “multi-lateral developed socialist society”. The Romanian society was deep affected into its structures and functions. Timisoara has passed the similar period of artificial changes with its industrialization process, without a full connection with its cultural background, tradition or specific. Thus, here were built large industrial facilities, dedicated to the income working forces. The city was put under the pressure to growing up in an eclectic and not quite natural manner, with a modern, but, artificial aspect, with high discrepancies among its neighbourhoods.

Fig. 3 The insertion of the industrial platform between residential area and agreement area

Into the 80ies, Timisoara has become a “grey” city, integrated in the centralized planned economy forced by the communist political system. The traditional famous enterprises – such “Timisoarana” (1716, beer), Elba (former “Dura”, electrical corps from 1921), Guban (1937, chemistry) etc. (all of them under the state control) were interfered with new industrial platforms more or less adequate to the profile and specific of the city. All these industrial areas were built around the residential space, without any strategically estimation of the urban development. Just an example, the Mechanical Fabric was build between the residential area and the agreement area represented by the big park Green Forest and Village Museum. The industrial platform practically blocks the access to this facilities and more than that, does not have any functional connections with these.
After the political changes, many of industrialization establishments were shutdown and lots of jobs were lost. But, contrary to other many cases from Romania, the old economical structures were quickly replaced by other new concerns. Many international corporations have considerate Timisoara an attractive city and now here there are many new companies and business (from computers and electronics to construction and tires, from clothes and footwear to statistics analyze and agriculture). All these have kept in Timisoara the lower rate of unemployment from Romania (less than 2% in 2006 and 2007). The multicultural and multiethnic profiles of Timisoara’s population have represented very good reasons for foreign investors.

Several multinational corporations have deployed a local subsidiary in or around Timisoara, such: Alcatel Lucent, Coca-Cola, Continental, Draxlmaier, Linde Gas, Nestle, Procter&Gamble, Siemens, etc. Thus, right now in Timisoara is living the larger Italian businessmen community, and also, a large community of investors from the Arabian space, and from Turkey.

1.1.3. Settlement system

In the second half of 19th century many technological innovations have improved the urban life of Timisoara: the telegraphy in 1853; in 1857 Timisoara became the first city from Romania with public illumination with gas; in 1857 Timisoara was connected to the European railroad system; in 1867 the trams with horses; in 1881 there were installed modern phone networks; in 1884 Timisoara became the first city from Europe with electrical illumination on streets; in 1895 the streets were asphalted; in 1899 the electrical trams; between 1912-1914 there were upgraded the sewer systems. Nowadays, the public transportation is assured by a network of trams (145.8km), buses (183.2km) and trolleybuses (70.46km). The streets network inside Timisoara has 574 km with a surface of 603 ha5.

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5 Data presented by the INSEE (National Statistics Institute) and available on the Timisoara City Hall web page, at [http://www.primariatm.ro/timisoara/index.php](http://www.primariatm.ro/timisoara/index.php), last accessed 15 January 2010
During 1965-1990, the urban area of the city of Timisoara is extended with residential neighbourhoods and with industrial platforms. Thus, in the 60ies, blocks of bricks have been built inside the central area. At the end of the 60ies, industrial facilities for concrete preparation have been developed, and it was begun the construction of the residential areas for workers, with a radial emplacement, around the old city fortress. Between 1970 and 1990 was reached the peak of the house’s building from the entire history of the city. The industrial areas of the city were concentrically developed (Burgess, 1925): industrial buildings surrounded by residential places with urban infrastructure, public institutions and utilities, commercial spaces etc. A large part of this urban development was based on demolishing entire neighbourhoods of houses on built on ground.

All the affected owners have received (by judicial decisions) money for the land and a block-flat apartment for the house. The high level of urbanization (1971-1980) can be observed in the following chart concerning the building of houses at national level (INSSE http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/RPL2002INS/vol3/tabele/tab11.pdf).

The prices of the houses and the rent costs in the period 1968-1990 was relative stable, but without correspondence with the real price of the building (during this period we cannot speak about a functional real estate market). The stock house and the volume of the house constructions did not relate to the demand came from the market, but to the political projections related to the industrial development and to the changing of the rural population.
in the working class of the urban “new man”. In 1985, the urban population of Romania achieves and exceeds the level of 50%; nowadays the urbanization grade is above 55%.

1.1.4. Other factors
Another main characteristic of Timisoara is its geographical position close by the borders with Hungary and with Serbia (former Yugoslavia). Thus, Timisoara was always in contact with other foreign models and its specific multicultural profile has assured a very good assimilation of all these contents (from economical local interchanges to cultural representations, from fashion to TV programs and so on). This label of “the most occidental city of Romania” has had a consistent contribution in attracting people from all around the country. By other hand, the accessibility of 2 foreign countries (Serbia and Hungary) has represented a facilitation of the perspective of international (out-) migration. From Timisoara it was quite easy to go in Europe, especially when the political condition has allowed that. Nowadays, is not a big deal to go shopping or to SPAs in Hungary, or to work in Hungary or in Germany, or even to have a house in the Hungarian villages close to the border. There are not less important the metropolitan strategies developed and implemented by the municipality. In the next several years this territory will become a metropolitan area and this new administrative status will have a major impact on the city. For around 5 years all the villages close to city have been very attractive residential neighbourhoods. Thus, we can already talk about a process of suburbanization that will have very soon an administrative and financial support from the municipal budget; even this trend will affect directly the city core.

2. TRAJECTORIES OF URBAN SHRINKAGE
Timisoara is nowadays an important urban centre, the single one 1st rang city with metropolitan area in Romanian development region V West. Until 1990, the city has had a continuous growing with different intensities. At the beginning of the 19th century, it was quite slowly because of the natural evolution and it has increased and became politically accelerated during the communist period. After the political change, the city has started another natural process of reconfiguration, directly visible in the population decreasing; this process was convergent with the national and euro-regional trends. The decline of Timisoara’s population is almost constant during the period 1990-2008 and, thus, it clearly reflects that the growing of the city under the totalitarian regime was not a functional, adequate and pertinent model. It is expected that the city would achieve its optimal population density, in the close future (since it was recorded the first post-communist population growing in 2009 comparative with 2008). In the next paragraph, we will analyze the specific pattern of shrinking for Timisoara.

2.1. Spatial-temporal patterns
The main social, economical, political and cultural changes that have affected Romania after 1989 have generated an increasing of the population dynamic. Timisoara has become an attractive destination for a lot of persons from other regions, but, in the same time, a

Conform with the Law No. 351, from July the 6th, 2001 dedicated to The National Plan for the Territorial Arrangement – The section the 6th
starting point for the out-migration towards the Central and Western Europe, USA and Canada. From 1990 until 2008 the population of Timisoara has decreased with 50,000 inhabitants (14.1%). At July 1st, 2009 in Timisoara were recorded 312,113 inhabitants.

Even if the statistical quantification of the city population reflects a descendent trend (from 1990 until 2008), the general preview of Timisoara is a positive one. At national level, Timisoara was established as the “Growing Pole” for the west Romanian region, and recently has been evaluated as the 2nd city in Romania after Bucharest (on the basis of socio-economical development criteria). The city kept an attractive image for other parts from the country. The houses’ prices were very high and the constructions of new buildings were quite consistent, both with a specific diminution because of the global crisis. But the process is not the same around the city’s influences space. All villages around Timisoara have known a significant process of development (the trend is to become a residential area, similar with West European models). Even the local administration has elaborated a sustainable development strategy for the metropolitan area. This initiative is directly connected with these demographical trends. During the last 7 years, the population from the 11 villages involved in the future metropolitan area has grown with 5,774 inhabitants - equivalent to 1.64% from the peak of Timisoara’s population (into the same period, the Timis County recorded a negative trend). Some examples of these processes can be observed in the following map: in the context of rural depopulation (specific for the entire national level) the whole growing of the villages near Timisoara represents actually a clear process of suburbanization. In the last decade, this is one of the most important causes for the shrinking phenomenon in Timisoara. After living in blocks flats, the dream of having a house on ground came true for many inhabitants by the news opportunities assured by all villages around the Timisoara. A direct consequence of this local mobility from the city to the sub-urban areas is represented by a decreasing of the pressure on the locative spaces (inside of the city) and gradually the decreasing of the population density. All over the city, many apartments from the ground floor of the block with commercial potential were
transformed from houses into shops (grocery shops). Others low conditions blocks or houses were step by step demolished or reoriented (i.e. from block flats to offices buildings).

2.2. Dynamics

Before that suburbanization trend, for the 90ies, the population decline can be explained by the decreasing of the birth rate (as a general behaviour at national level). Another cause of this manifestation was the out-migration that becomes more and more accessible after the end of the communist period and after the integration in the European Union. These demographical evolutions will be presented in the following pages. Timisoara, as a very important Romanian city, close to Central Europe, with a consistent student population (mostly temporary) has known a high level of dynamics in its demographical structure, profile and configuration. With high levels of incoming and outgoing inhabitants, the city of Timisoara has represented for a long period an occidental gate towards the Central and Western Europe, USA and Canada.

The decreasing of the population because of the low fertility rate has generated other demographical phenomenon, such ageing. In the Figure 8 can be observed the general trend of the population’s ageing: from 1990 (yellow) to 2009 (brick-colour) the age structure of the population is moving to higher levels (left):

![Fig. 9 The comparative of the age structure 1990 vs. 2009](image)

If in 1990, the peak of the trend line is around 20-24 years, in 2009 this level is increasing with 10 years (to 30-34). The differences between the two periods (1990 and 2009) are significant especially for younger ages: 0-4 ages 46.5%, 5-9 ages 58.3% and 51.8% (the decreasing in 2009 from 1990). This evolution from younger to older is also clearly visible in the following graph concerning the age structure of the population:
Thus, the values from left, drew with yellow, reflect a continuous decreasing of the younger population (0-19 years) from 27.7% in 1990 to 17.3% in 2009. The two others categories have recorded a complementary growing from 63.9% to 70.7% for the population between 20 and 64 years and from 8.3% to 12% for the elderly population. The significant decline of the younger, with 10.4% is also directly related with the decreasing of the birth rate, and represents a national trend. These continuous changes of the reports between younger and older population are represented, also, in the elderly, youth and ageing index (Figure 17):

![Figure 10](image1.png)

**Fig. 10  The evolution of the age structure**

The trend increasing the age of population is clearly reflected also in the evolution of the average age, from 33.4 years in 1990 to 38.9 years in 2009:

![Figure 11](image2.png)

**Fig. 11  The evolutions of the index of elderly, youth and**
In around 20 years, the average age of the population has grown with 5.9 years in 2008, and after that it has decreased with 0.4 years. With this trend, the average age of Timisoara’s population has a real risk to cross the limit of fertility (49 years) with all massive negative consequences for its further development. With other words, the year 2009 has a different profile or manifestation comparatively with the previous period. A direct explanation can be found in the evolution of the natural change of population (Figure 12):

Thus, from 1991 the natural spore has become negative, and the number of births was in a continuous decreasing until 2002. From 3,302 newborn babies in 1990 it was a decrease till 2201 in 2002 and after that the number increased till 3,175 in 2008. From 1992 to 2007 the number of deaths was constantly higher than the number of births. The negative spore during this period has cumulated a decreasing of population with 7,718 inhabitants (2,19%).

Another aspect, that is very relevant for this analysis, is represented by the evolution of the emigrants and immigrants from Timisoara. Due to a not so elaborated evidence regarding the migration of the population, it is still quite difficult to use some general indicators, such as: “establishing in the locality” or “leaving the locality”. The current procedure does not record the national destinations of the persons that are moving out/in the
city. So, the only available statistics with the regional migration is the census. Other relevant data that can be used is represented by the evolution of emigrants and immigrants:

Thus, from 1994 until 2007 the number of persons that are moving from Timisoara in a foreign country was constantly higher than the number of newcomers. During this period, 11,684 of Timisoara’s inhabitants have moved away and 2,763 of foreign people moved in the city. These statistics cover especially the ethnic groups (firstly the German population from Timisoara that have permanently established in Germany during the 90ies). By the migration negative balance, from 1994 to 2007 Timisoara has lost 8,921 inhabitants (2.53%).

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