# SUSTAINABLE METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT – GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES IN CLUJ METROPOLITAN AREA


## JÚLIA A. NAGY[1]


**ABSTRACT. - Sustainable Metropolitan Development – Governance Challenges in Cluj Metropolitan Area.** Nowadays the success of the urban management is largely dependent on the capacity to adopt efficient instruments that are able to deal with and adjust the complexity of urban systems to the necessities demanded under the ethos of sustainable development. Despite the various difficulties caused by the urbanization processes, there is also prospect to achieve progress in the creation of sustainable regions. Notwithstanding, sustainable development is dependent on whether the right tools and methods are used in the urban management practice. Therefore, in the paper we offer a review of the development challenges in the Cluj Metropolitan Area (CMA) and establish a framework for approaching sustainable metropolitan development from an integrated governance perspective. The mechanism relies on the fact that the territorial reality of urban sustainability can only be effective if addressed from a metropolitan perspective. The approach is analysed by the use of interviews with professional experts and public officials representing the CMA. The results show that a metropolitan wide vision, cooperation, leadership and community involvement are prerequisites of metropolitan sustainability.

*Keywords:* urban planning, Cluj Metropolitan Area, integrated governance, sustainable development**.**


## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development and sustainability have been defined in many ways (Winograd and Farrow, 2009). The concept and practical use of sustainable development has had many different purposes. When seeking the origin of "sustainable development", the credit is usually given to the report published by the WCED, Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World (Estes, 1993) which defines sustainable development as a process of change that allows current human needs to be satisfied, without compromising the

---

[1] *Faculty of Geography, Babes-Bolyai University, Research Centre for Sustainable Development, 5-7 Clinicilor Street, 400006 Cluj-Napoca, Romania; julia.nagyy@gmail.com*

possibilities of future generations (WCED, 1987). Nonetheless, the concept involves the consideration of two important dimensions – time and space – with the components of economic, social and environmental aspects and at the same time refers to a process such as development and to its condition, the sustainability (Winograd and Farrow, 2009). Nevertheless, according to Zeijl-Rozema *et al*. (2008) issues that are entirely associated with sustainable development could also be problems of the governance practice that acts for sustainable development. As a consequence, the lack of dialog among various stakeholders and the improper planning instruments used by these, can hinder the progress in implementing sustainable actions.

The specific term 'sustainable urban development' is a concept strongly related to sustainable development. However, due to the complexity of cities, sustainable urban development is much more (visibly) interrelated with other policy fields, such as housing, infrastructure, business developments. The sustainable urban development concept does not have specific indicators to make it measurable in the way that sustainable development does. Measuring the sustainability of cities and urban areas requires a set of tailormade indicators and norms yet, the lack of consensus on the selection of optimal number of indicators makes this task difficult (Tanguay *et al*., 2009). On the other hand, an urban area is enabled to achieve sustainability through good governance and integrated planning. Even so, according to Kemp and Parto (2005) much is expected from a "good governance". In the view of the European Commission the good governance is made up by openness, participation, accountability, efficiency, coherence and great attention given to the subsidiary (CEC, 2001). On the other hand, good governance is based on well-established and sophisticated public administration systems which have as their basic elements the rational specialization of tasks, transparency and accountability of instruments, highly skilled civil service and well-designed rule of law (OECD, 2002). Consequently, the answer for the current issues supported by the urban development is that the dynamics of the territorial development must be accompanied by the necessary methodological tools and new systems of decision making in order to achieve a sustainable progress.

## CURRENT ISSUES IN URBAN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA

In Romania, after 1989 two levels of territorial planning were distinguished. The urbanism, applied to local administrative units, and spatial planning, applied to larger divisions such as counties and regions; both activities result into separate urban and spatial planning documents and regulations

(Petrişor, 2010). The new determinative factors in the intensity of territorial reorganization and urban development were the political democratization, increased globalization of the economy, privatization, European integration but also severe unemployment which led to significant transformation within the settlements and change of urban spatial structures (Benedek, 2006).

Nevertheless, the urban development in the last 30 years turned into complex territorial structures such as metropolitan areas. The EU accession brought new challenges related to the urban phenomena by turning the urban – especially, metropolitan settlements into connection points at European level through the promotion of cohesion and competitiveness for polycentric urban development (Grigorescu *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand the role of certain key factors and instruments in the complex process of development and the main driving forces in the changes set off by economic, social and political processes. However, if we look back on the events of recent years, we witness a process of *internal transformation* of urban settlements. This consists in enlargement accompanied by phenomena such as relocation of the population from smaller cities to metropolitan settlements, large percentage of emigration to other countries. Next to this, we also witness *functional transformations* within communities caused by the need for commercial establishments, offices as well as residential flats and often times the reutilization of parks, green areas and waterways for unsustainable purposes that convert to a contradiction with the principles of a sustainable urban development. Hence, there is limited consistency in new residential developments which is defined by the absence of other legal and operational tools that should regulate land uses and enforce the creation of urban networks. Another significant issue in ensuring the consistency of urban development is connected to the setup of new forms of participation in financial contributions, an essential constituent for infrastructure and utility development (Suditu, 2012).

## CHALLENGES IN URBAN PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT
## IN CLUJ METROPOLITAN AREA

Territorial cohesion started to receive increasing attention in Romania, after the country's accession to the European Union. As a result, a new form of territorial governance has been introduced, the metropolitan area which aimed to enhance cooperative principles but also to facilitate better access to EU funding. Accordingly, the metropolitan areas in Romania are voluntary intercommunity associations between the urban core and the surrounding

localities situated in a 30 km distance from this. Cluj Metropolitan Area is situated in the North-West region of Romania, it covers over 1600 km$^2$ with a population of 441846 inhabitants (NIS, 2019) of which 74% represents the urban core. The metropolitan area consists of the urban core, Cluj-Napoca, and its 19 neighboring localities that joined together and are divided into two metropolitan rings. The first metropolitan ring consists of seven communes: Floreşti, Feleacu, Ciurila, Apahida, Chinteni, Baciu and Gilău. The second metropolitan ring is composed by: Aiton, Bonţida, Borşa, Căianu, Cojocna, Gârbău, Jucu, Petreştii de Jos, Săvădisla, Sânpaul, Tureni and Vultureni. According to the Intercommunity Development Agency for CMA, the strategic directions of the CMA revolve around five main elements. In particular, the better and more efficient infrastructure development, the increase of economic competitiveness, human resource development, improvement of environmental quality, development of rural economy and involvement of all member communes in the socio-economic development and planning process of the CMA. Nevertheless, the success of metropolitan sustainability is largely dependent on the synchronisation of the dynamic conditions existent in the urban-rural interdependency. Considering the fact that in the case of CMA the urban element of this duet is represented by Cluj-Napoca and the rural element by the 19 surrounding communes, the set-up of priorities and tailor-made initiatives that support sustainable development, presents a stern challenge.

Consequently, the territorial reality of the CMA brings various challenges in the metropolitan planning and governance process. Some of these realities evolve around the issue of residential development. After the 1990s, as a consequence of the restitution process, large agricultural areas were converted to built-up areas which led to the emergence of suburbanization. Next to this, after the regime change Cluj-Napoca experienced a transition from the production industries to the services sector which led to new developments that had significant effects on the labour market dynamics and also the population change. Furthermore, the first metropolitan ring experienced increased population growth not only because of the effects of suburbanization but also due to immigration from other counties. Nevertheless, the first metropolitan ring experienced a much higher increase in the twenty-year period (2000-2020) than the municipality (Fig. 1). The population of the first metropolitan ring grew by almost 133% whereas the municipality experienced 2.86% increase in the same period.

The greatest increase can be seen in the commune of Floreşti with 533% in the twenty-year period (2000-2020). This is followed by the communes of Apahida with an increase of 85% and Baciu with 59% (fig. 2).
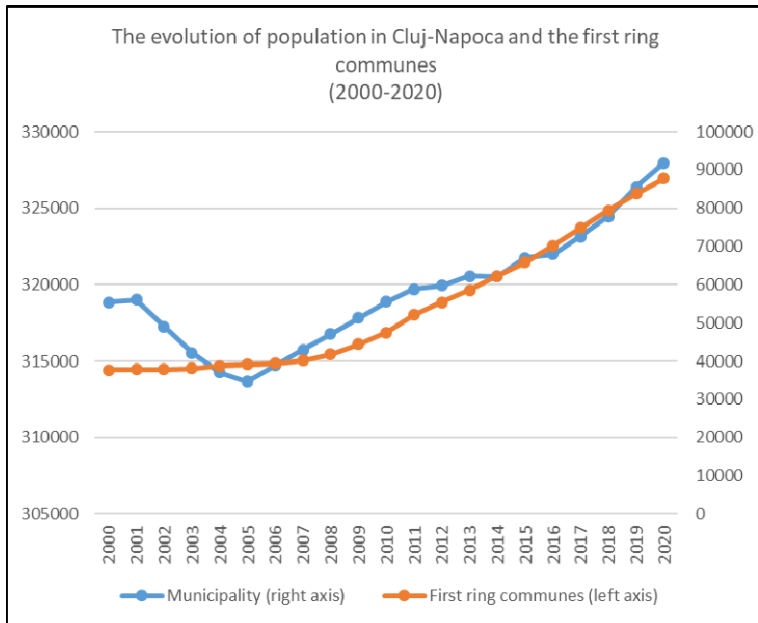
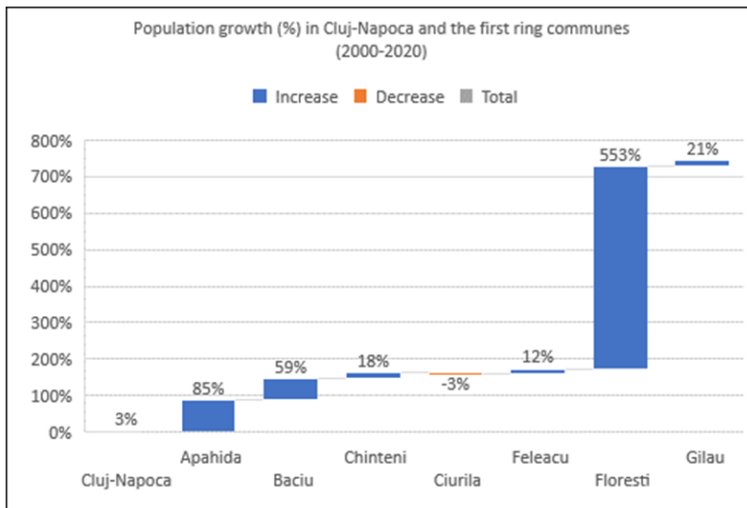**Fig. 1.** The evolution of population between 2000 and 2020.
*Source: NIS, 2021*



**Fig. 2.** Population growth in Cluj-Napoca and the first metropolitan ring (%).
*Source: NIS, 2021*

117

Further, the suburbanization prompted significant increase in the housing stock as well which manifested itself not only in the urban core but also in the neighbouring communities. Nonetheless, these rapid changes often times were taking place at the expense of the environment and brought several socio-economic implications that present a real challenge to remediate. The greatest increase of the residential housing took place in Floreşti with 121% in a ten-year period followed by Baciu with 63% and Chinteni with 39%. The municipality experienced a 27% increase of the residential housing stock in this ten-year time span. Chinteni is another example that experienced a spectacular increase in residential buildings as of 2010 to 2020, it achieved a 39% increase in a ten-year period (fig. 3).
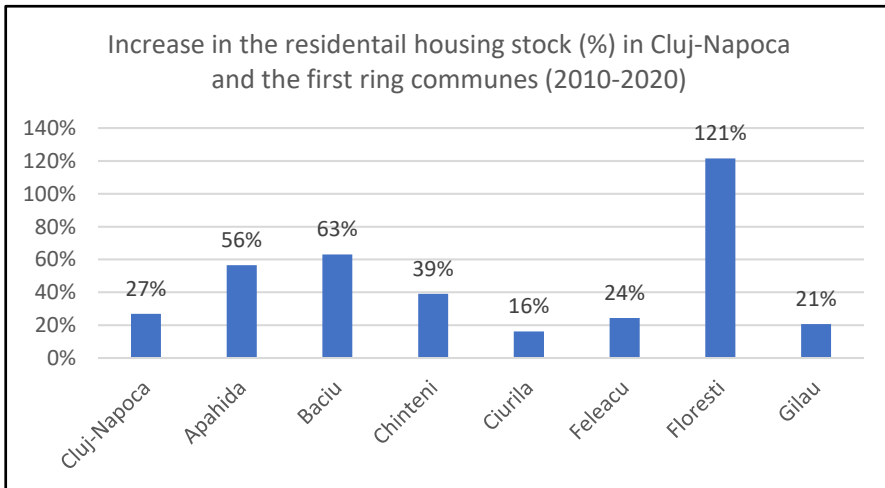


**Fig. 3.** Increase in the residential housing stock (%).
*Source: NIS, 2021*

Due to the dramatic changes with regard to demographics, the residential housing but also the composition of the population experienced by the first metropolitan ring, the face of the rural areas altered as well. New necessities arouse in terms of transport infrastructure, utility infrastructure but also in terms of healthcare, education and recreational facilities. Likewise, the negative impact of the agglomeration is even stronger in the second ring communes where deficiencies are much deeper and despite of various approaches for finding cohesive solutions, they remain peripheralized (Nagy and Benedek, 2021) in the CMA.

## INTEGRATED METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE

Over the last decades integrated governance received increasing attention in terms of bringing together different stakeholders from a fragmented environment with the aim to collectively discuss and define common objectives and take a networking approach to the public governance practice (Rydin, 2010; Le Galès and Borraz, 2010). Therefore, integrated governance became not only a new model but also a prerequisite for sustainable planning and development. Nevertheless, according to Hamilton (2014), there is a certain disconnection between governance capacity that takes place between a jurisdictional system of a metropolitan area and the governance needs that take place at the entire level of the metropolitan area. Various recurring factors have been defined in the academic discourse that improve organizational capacity and lead to effective metropolitan sustainability (Healey, 1998; Wheeler, 2000; Rydin, 2010) such as integrated territorial planning, participative planning, performance measurement, network governance, financial incentive structures, public education and learning, political organizing. Our analysis has a specific focus on several of these factors that will be discussed in the subsections below.

## SUSTAINABLE METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE –
## A STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVE

In this section we summarize the results of a series of interviews realized between April 2016 and November 2016. The interviews followed a predefined interview guide. A total of thirty interviews were connected with representatives from the civil society, representatives from the private, academic sectors as well as decision makers from most of the local authorities of Cluj Metropolitan Area. In our analysis the interviewees are grouped in two domains and therefore divided in two categories. Twelve interviewees were professional experts (PE) and eighteen were public officials (PO). In the followings we report several points about which we registered agreement and disagreement among the interviewees.

Healey (1998) claims that a strong management has the capacity to develop an integrative thinking which connects the economic, social and environmental potentials of a defined area. In support of this, Van den Berg and Braun (1999) suggest that the creation of a common vision is vital which must be translated into well-defined objectives and included into strategies and plans meant to guide the planning and development of a metropolitan area.

First, however, we must see how the idea of sustainable development is perceived by those who are active players in the everyday practice of integrated governance. Therefore, the interviewees were asked to define with their words what sustainable development means for them. Based on the answers given, we identified a total of six categories: self-sustaining projects, environmental protection, viable governance, balanced exploration of resources, community development and innovation/technology. Notwithstanding, the majority of the definitions proved the observation revealed by Basiago (1995) who indicated in his study that most professionals form an understating of sustainable development based on their professional background. Consequently, the most frequently mentioned association of sustainability was first, with self-sustaining projects, and balanced use of resources, the second.

Our actions that we take through the development projects to have a continuity, to give the possibility to be carried on even after we implement them – to follow a natural continuity (PE4).

Sustainability means the moderate exploitation of the resources at an extent that it can assure a certain degree of renewal. (PE2)

In the following section of the interview, the interviewees were asked to enumerate the most important problems and challenges at metropolitan level. After grouping the answers, the analysis shows that the most frequently mentioned problems closely correspond with the challenges discussed in the subsection above. Most of the answers reflected on subjects such as chaotic housing development and mobility, accessibility which put in the urban-rural context brought two-edged remarks. Within the urban core the issue of mobility was seen in difficulties created by traffic congestion, lack of parking spaces or bicycle lanes. In the rural context this materializes in the lack of infrastructure development as for example the road network or poor transport connection. Also, in the rural context the public utility deficiency appeared as an important issue, as one public official stated

We also need to find ways to extend the network of the water supply and there is no sewage network either. (PO30)

A principal issue that dominates over the entire metropolitan area was related to the weak governance mainly ascribed to the fact that there is no unitary and stand-alone territorial entity, a matter that deepens the fragmentation and highlights the existence of administrative boundaries. According to Wheeler (2000), this is a serious issue that undermines the capacity to create a regional thinking and demands the creation of a government structure that has jurisdiction throughout the entire metropolitan area.

One of the problems is that there is only an association on the nimbus of some administrative units and not an administrative entity that has the autonomy and the power to impose certain things in terms of development which would serve the entire metropolitan area. (PE3)

In the following section, interviewees were asked to share their views regarding the integrated planning in Cluj Metropolitan Area. With relation to the presence of integrated planning, two planning documents were mentioned as guiding principles in this perspective, the Integrated Urban Development Strategy (2014-2020-2030) and the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (2016-2030). Nevertheless, most interviewees from the group of professionals agreed that integrated planning is only present in a "superficial manner" and they questioned the validity of these documents.

There should be or there are some documents titled this way [integrated] yet, they do not formulate thorough actions that could lead to sustainable results. We create this documents in a formal way, in a short time-span so that we meet the delivery dates. (PE6)

Another aspect that reinforced this thinking was the disbelief that a viable metropolitan vision exists. A personal vision about the metropolitan area was only formulated by twenty interviewees yet, the ideas were fragmented and mostly concentrated on the geographic areas they live in. This leads us to think that the metropolitan thinking is endangered by the lack of mutual understanding that common strategic interests should be formulated and translated into the integrated planning documents. The formation of the common interest is indeed regarded as a key to the success of an effective metropolitan thinking.

The vision is built strategically through specific steps that need to be taken. I think that the most important would be to analyse the strategic interests of each of these twenty communities and perform a cross-sectional analysis that result in a package of common interest. This should be the first step in defining a vision. (PE10)

Beside the integrated planning practices, leadership and support for cooperation are also considered to be indispensable elements in increasing the organizing capacity to deliver effective metropolitan governance (Le Gales, 1998; van den Berg and Braun, 1999; Wheeler, 2000). Especially political leadership is considered to be essential in strengthening region-wide planning (van den Berg *et al.*, 1999) as it has the ability and willpower to involve a wide range of public and private stakeholders, yet leadership is not limited to political connections (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the interviewees were asked to give examples of actors that they consider to be most important in the promotion and development of the CMA. There was a general agreement that the most important actors in this process are the Cluj County Council and the Local Authority of Cluj-Napoca. These two entities were designated by the most public officials and professionals, nevertheless, there was a general

feeling that the political leadership is missing or weak. In contrast, the representatives of the civil society considered that businesses, the individual local authorities from the CMA but also the civil sphere are the ones able to show willingness to initiate and support cooperation and networking. Emerson *et al.* (2011) also highlights the fact that whoever actors take up the initiative for leadership, they have to be able to prioritise common solutions and have the skill to remain impartial when it comes to bringing together different preferences of various actors. Nevertheless, leadership is not a one-way exercise but rather an interactive process (Kirchner, 2014) and despite the traditional academic literature that suggests that is a direct control over others (Kouzes & Posner, 1989), it is a skill that can be improved and a necessary ability and rational conduct that must be up taken when there is determination for common direction. The main answer to this section can be summarized with the view of one interviewee from the group of professional experts who pointed that, leadership must be taken up by those "who usually give the direction and speed - the big players" (PE12) - referring here to the Cluj County Council and the Local Authority of Cluj-Napoca.

Another factor that contributes to effective integrated governance is the participative planning. At the question of whether the public is involved or not in the planning process, the answers were almost fairly divided. One part of the interviewees believed that public involvement exists, yet the other part was on the opinion that the public is not interested in such initiatives. At this point however, we could also see an urban-rural difference as most interviewees stated that in the urban core there is more openness from the public to participate in such initiatives than in the rural areas. The various tools of public involvement have also been brought to the discussion and it has been pointed out that the use of digital tools is much more efficient in the urban than in the rural context. The composition of the population was another element that was considered to define the openness to participate in such proceedings and it was a general agreement that the more dynamic a community, the better the participation is. On the other hand, it was also pointed that we also need to understand that the more diverse a community is, the more divergent the interests are. (PE3)

Nevertheless, there was a general feeling that for specific problems an increasing number of community members become more vocal and various groups are formed that support or intend to hold back specific projects. Some representatives of the civil society however, pointed that in order to gain openness for such participation, the local authorities must show determination to consider and implement "the voice of the public".

## CONCLUSIONS

Due to the rapid changes experienced in the last thirty years, Cluj-Napoca became an example of a sprawling city with increased dependency on resources which make it extremely reliant on the assets of the neighboring communes. Nevertheless, this is a bilateral necessity valid also for the adjacent territories that experience various socioeconomic developments in consequence of their proximity to the rapidly developing urban core. Based on our investigation, the stakeholders' understanding of the concept of "sustainability" is largely based on their occupational background. Its definition relies mainly on the viability of projects that have the capacity to sustain themselves and it is also connected to aspects of environmental protection. In terms of metropolitan challenges that should receive immediate action, the stakeholders pointed out the question of transport infrastructure and mobility, the chaotic planning that should receive the framing of more strict regulations and rules by the planning authorities. Next to this, there was a general agreement between the interviewees especially from the second ring communes that increased investments and more integrated planning is needed in the provision of basic public utility services such as water or sewage networks but also the lack of integrated planning was seen as a major challenge. The analysis shows that one of the major dysfunctions from governance perspective is the inexistence of an entity which would have decisional power in the coordination and governance of the metropolitan area. The lack of political leadership with regard to an integrated metropolitan approach has been mentioned and the effectiveness of the partnerships has been questioned. Next to this, the two integrated plans of the region were not considered to be sufficient to achieve sustainable development. Several interviewees considered that a regional vision or thinking mentioned by Wheeler (2000) as a vital element of regional sustainability, exists in the CMA. However, many were more confident in formulating a vision for their own geographic area. As a consequence, more efforts in this perspective are needed. Additionally, more integrated territorial approaches are needed and require increased attention from practitioners. Regarding the existence of participative planning, the answers were at some level confident in this respect. Participative behavior was believed to be more visible in the urban than in the rural areas nevertheless, for networking to function such condition becomes a must. As a general conclusion we can state that based on the terms of sustainability as a concept, the governance practice should aim for a long-term view and work in a balanced and integrative manner with regard to the economic, social and environmental aspects. This can only be achieved with common vision and planning aimed at the entire metropolitan area.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

# REFERENCES

1. Baciu, N., Roşian, G., Muntean, O.L., Măcicăşan, V., Arghiuş, V., Stănescu, C. (2018), *The evolution of rural clusters within the Cluj metropolitan area*, STUDIA UBB AMBIENTUM, LXV, 2, 2020, pp. 5-15.
2. Basiago, A.D. (1995) *Methods of defining 'sustainability'*. Sustainable Development, 3, pp. 109-119.
3. Benedek, J. (2006), *Urban Policy and Urbanisation in the Transition Romania*, Romanian Review of Regional Studies, 2(1).
4. CEC (2001), *European Governance: A White Paper*, European Commission, Brussels.
5. Emerson, K., Nabatchi, T., Balogh, S. (2011), *An integrative framework for collaborative governance*, Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 22(1), pp. 1-29.
6. Estes, R.J. (1993), *Toward sustainable development: From theory to Praxis*, University of Pennsylvania.
7. Galès, P.L., Borraz, O. (2010), *Urban Governance in Europe: The Government of What?* Pôle Sud, 32(1), pp. 137-151.
8. Grigorescu, I., Mitrica, B., Kucsicsa, G. (2012), *Post – Communist land use changes related to Urban Sprawl in the Romanian metropolitan areas*, Human Geographies – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography, 6, pp. 35-46.
9. Hamilton, D.K. (2014), *Governing Metropolitan Areas: Growth and Change in a Networked Age*, New York, NY: Routledge.
10. Healey, P. (1998), *Building institutional capacity through collaborative approaches to urban planning*, Environment and Planning, Volume 30, pp. 1531 - 1546.
11. Kemp, R., Parto, S., Gibson, R.B. (2005), *Governance for sustainable development: moving from theory to practice*. International Journal of Sustainable Development, 8(1), pp. 12-30.
12. Kirchner, M., Akdere, M. (2014), *Leadership Development Programs: An Integrated Review of Literature.* Journal of the Knowledge Economy, IX, pp. 137-146.
13. Kouzes, J.M., Posner, B.Z. (1989), *The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.
14. Le Gales, P. (1998), *Regulations and Governance in European Cities*, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 22(3), pp. 482-506.

15. Nagy, J.A., Benedek, J. (2021), *'Can the EU Cohesion Policy fight peripheralization?'*, in Rauhut, D., Sielker, F., and Humer, A. (eds) *EU Cohesion Policy and Spatial Governance: Territorial, Economic and Social Challenges*, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar Publishing.
16. OECD (2002), *Governance for Sustainable Development: Five OECD Case Studies*, OECD, Paris, France.
17. Petrişor, A. (2010), *The Theory and practice of urban and spatial planning in Romania,* UDK BROJEVI, 711(2), pp. 139-154.
18. Rydin, Y. (2010), *Governing for sustainable urban development*, Earthscan, London.
19. Suditu, B. (2012), *Urban Sprawl – The legal context and territorial practices in Romania*, Human Geographies – Journal of Studies and Research in Human Geography, 6(1), pp. 73-77.
20. Tanguay, G.A., Rajaonson, J., Lefebvre, J.F., Lanoie, P. (2010), *Measuring the sustainability of cities: An analysis of the use of local indicators*, Ecological Indicators, 10(2), pp. 407-418.
21. Van den Berg, L., Braun, E. (1999), *Urban Competitiveness, Marketing and the Need for Organising Capacity*, Urban Studies, 36, pp. 987-1000.
22. Van Zeijl-Rozema, A., Cörvers, R., Kemp, R., Martens, P. (2008). *Governance for sustainable development: a framework*, Sustainable Development, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 16(6), pp. 410-421.
23. WCED (1987), *Our Common Future*, World Commission on Environment and Development. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
24. Wheeler, S.M. (2000), *Planning for metropolitan sustainability*, Journal of Planning Education and Research, 20, pp. 133-145.
25. Winograd, M., Farrow, A. (2009), *Sustainable development indicators for decision making: concepts, methods, definition and use*, Dimensions of Sustainable Development, 1(1).
26. *** National Institute of Statistics of Romania (2019; 2021), Population and Dwellings Census, last accessed on 4 January 2021.