

ALEȘD: ISSUES OF ORGANIZATION, TOWN PLANNING AND GEO-SPATIAL INTEGRATION

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Résumé: *Aleșd, problèmes d'aménagement, gestion urbaine et intégration géo-spatiale.* La ville d'Aleșd, pôle de développement de l'UTP Valea Crișului Repede, est située dans le couloir Oradea-Borod, principal axe de communication entre l'Ouest du pays et la Dépression Transylvanienne. Un autre atout de la ville est sa localisation au sein d'un espace transfrontalier, ce qui amplifie ses possibilités de développement. Le plus important secteur de l'économie locale est l'industrie. L'usine de matériaux de construction de Chistag, dont les ouvriers habitent Aleșd est le plus grand employeur à l'heure actuelle. L'industrie du verre, également bien représentée par le passé, bénéficie d'une forte tradition et de la présence d'un personnel qualifié. Cependant, il ne subsiste qu'une seule petite verrerie privée dans la ville. Pendant les années 1999-2008, la ville et les alentours ont été déclarés zone défavorisée, ce qui leur a permis de mener une politique très favorable aux investisseurs, afin d'assurer la croissance de l'économie locale. Les aides accordées aux investisseurs ont facilité le développement du *lohn* (notamment vêtements et chaussures). Mais le développement de ce secteur n'offre qu'une solution de court terme. La plupart des nouvelles entreprises se sont installées au sud de la ville dans la plaine alluviale. L'urbanisme mis en œuvre au cours des dernières années ne permet pas de garder ou d'imprimer un caractère local au bâti. Pour jouer le rôle de vrai pôle d'influence sur les communes environnantes, la ville doit se doter d'une stratégie de développement bien élaborée, afin d'éliminer toutes les contraintes identifiées à l'aide d'un diagnostic de type SWOT. Finalement pour aboutir il faut avoir des projets fiables, bien en cohérence avec les objectifs de la ville.

Mots-clés: aménagement du territoire, gestion urbaine, évolution urbaine

The town of Aleșd is an urban centre whose economic evolution is determining for the area it polarizes whilst playing the part of coordinator of local development.

The *Crișul repede Valley* is one of the eleven territorial planning unit (TPU's) of Bihor County, having the town of Aleșd as a pole for development. In its turn, the latter is subordinated to the zonal-importance centre that holds macro-territorial functions, i.e. the city of Oradea.

At European level, the associations amongst local territorial communities with a view to sustaining mutual development projects have engendered inter-community structures of various sizes. As regards Romania, such forms of territorial cooperation are still incipient, the set-up of TPU's by Regional Development Agencies in collaboration with County Councils are an example of the optimization of territorial development.

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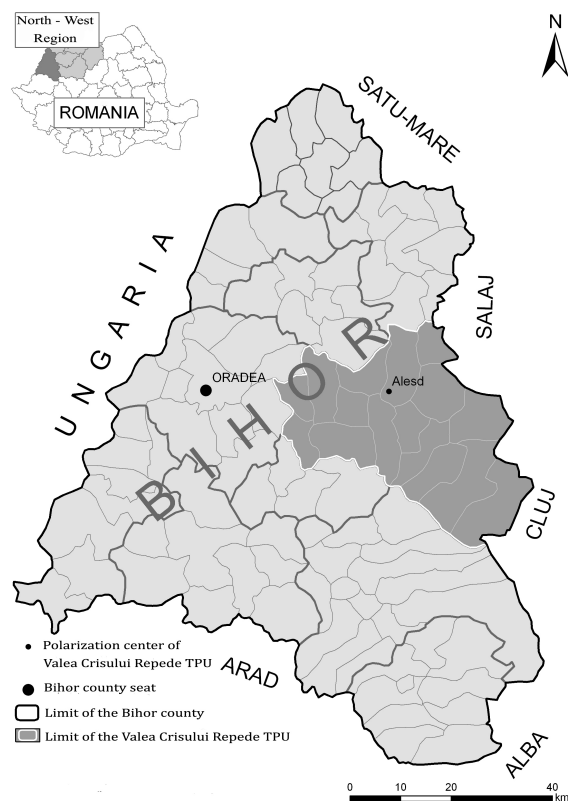


Fig. 1. TPU's of Bihor County.

Anthropic aspects

The town of Aleșd ranks at the bottom of the urban pyramid, i.e. its population is, according to the 2002 census, 10,376 inhabitants (out of which 7,387 in the town proper). The economic boost due to the development of the lohn-type industry has resulted in a slight increase in the population.

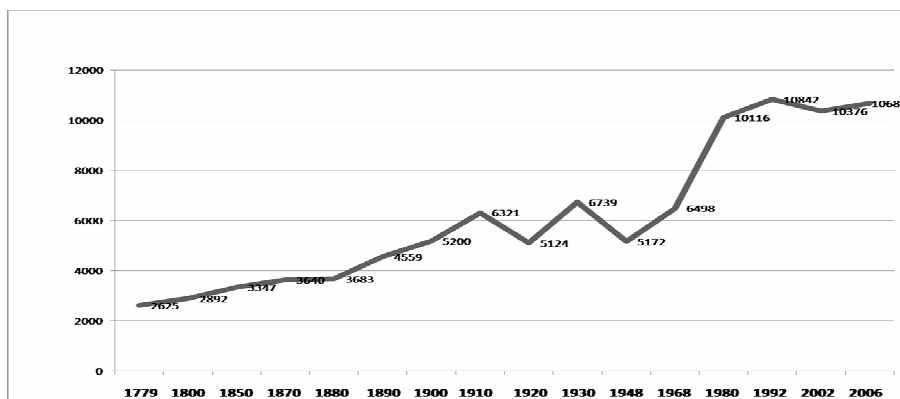


Fig. 2. Aleșd. The demographical evolution.

Including the population of remote villages in the census is bound to distort reality. The ratio between the total population of the town per se and that of the entire administrative territory, use in order to determine the degree of urbanization, is a sub-unit one: 71%.

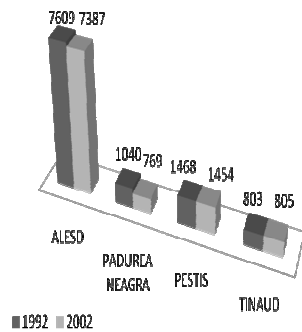


Fig.3. Aleşd. Distribution of population according to constituent villages.

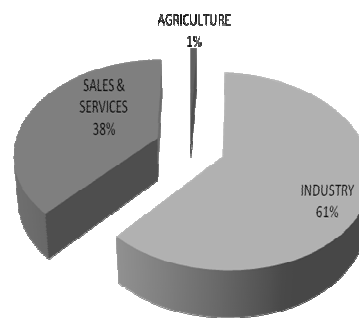


Fig. 4. Structure of employed population.

Situated at a distance of 38 km from Oradea and 112 km westwards from Cluj-Napoca, the town of Aleşd is in an advantageous position as the Oradea-Borod Corridor is the main infrastructure connection, both roadwise and railway, between western Romania and the Transylvania Plateau.

The administrative surface of the town is quite large (7,195 ha) as rural places such as Tinaud, Peştiş and Pădurea Neagră, the latter of these being situated at a 20 km distance from Aleşd were added.

The largest part of the town (49%) is in the Plopişului Mountains, only 16% of it in the hearth of the depression, and 36% in Lugaş Hills. This has influenced the way the land-plots have been used, (the agricultural surfaces do not exceed 35% of the total surface of the Aleşd area, whereas the forests represent 58% of the total surface), and also the density of the population (only 150 inhabitants/km²).

The existence of important raw material resources in the neighboring mountainous area (lime, clay, bauxite, quartz and wood) and in the depression (lignite coal), has tremendously determined the economic development of the town. Some mineral resources (the thermal water in Aleşd and the iron waters of Pădurea Neagră) are not properly capitalized.

Until 1989 the majority of the work force used to find employment in the construction materials industry, especially concrete and glass. The economic profile of the town has, to a great extent, remained an industrial one. Among the companies, the most important one is still the constructions material company of Chistag whose workers live in Aleşd and commute from there. In the glass manufacturing industry, which has a long tradition in the area, and also highly-qualified human resources, (the settlement of Pădurea Neagră is connected to the founding of the glass factory here in the first half of the 19th century), only one company still stands.

After 1999, as a result of the inclusion of Aleşd in the *underprivileged areas programme*, the lohn-type industry appeared (shoe manufacturing and garments manufacturing), the biggest such company having roughly 1,500 employees. Between 1999 and 2008, Aleşd was part of the Aleşd - Popeşti - Derna underprivileged area (Government Ordinance No:24/1998, modified by Law No: 200/1999.) During this period, the area

benefited from a series of advantages in order to attract investors and to thus ensure economic revitalization. As over the past few years there has been a gradual giving-up reduction of these facilities, the majority of the economic agents have postponed their investments in new production facilities and implicitly, in job creation.

Agriculture is rather undeveloped in the area, although within the town of Aleșd there are 2,493 hectares of agricultural land.

In the past few years, changes in the structure of the employed population have occurred, the lowest percentage (1%) being represented by people employed in agriculture.

Aspects of history and territorial development

The first settlement documents of the city go back to 1291, when Aleșd was set-up by colonization by the first masters of the Piatra Șoimului Citadel. Originally located in the Crișu Repede River meadow, the hearth of the city was relocated, in the first half of the 18th century, on higher ground, in order to prevent flooding.

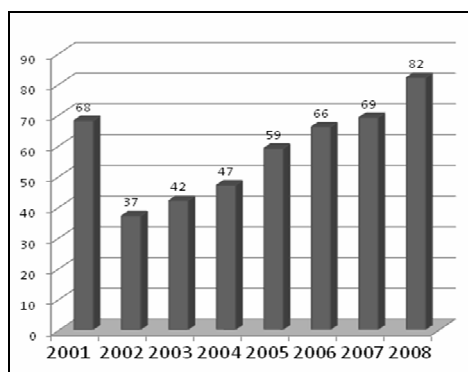


Fig. 5. Aleșd. Evolution of number of building licenses issued between 2001 and 2008.

Until the year 1900, the town only extended towards the east and the north, the southern and western low meadow areas being avoided. After the Aștileu and Lugașu de Jos dams on the Crișu Repede River were built, and after the water regulating and damming work was done, the buildings of the city were also extended to the area of the previously easily-flooded area of the meadow.

The sprawling of the city to the north was hindered by the unfavorable mountain slopes (too steep and prone to landslides) in the Lugaș Hills. In 1995, the city had clear expansion tendencies towards the west and the east, based on the meadow relief.

A close analysis of building licenses yields a decrease by half in numbers of licenses has been noted in 2002 because between 1999-2002, the great majority of industrial sites in the southern part of the town. After the year 2002, a constant increase in the number of building licenses, but most of them for residential buildings.

General aspects of urbanism and town planning

Sequential urban cycles defined by location, form, structure and various functions constitute indicators as regards periods of increase or decrease, instantiated in spatial extension, in the architectural patterns of the buildings, and, last but not least, in the types of building materials used.

The original modernist structure of the city can be discerned today despite the changes performed over time. Hence, the *old urban nucleus* is apparent; it is organized

around Unirii Square, along the west-east axis, represented by the national highway DN1, between Şoimului Valley and the hills that neighbor Plopişului Mountains. The street layout is narrow and irregular, the buildings having a GF, GF+F height regime.

19th century Urbanism.

On the boundaries of the old nucleus, there lies an urban network of the 19th century, which is dominated by functionalism, evidenced by the regularized land plots, the rectangular street layout and buildings with a pre-eminently residential function, with a GF height regime, laid out in the street alignment. This more recent urban network developed primarily in the western area of the city, on both sides of the DN1 highway, and to a lesser extent in the eastern area of the city.

70's Urbanism.

By clearing the land of the existent buildings in the close vicinity of the urban nucleus, south of the Şoimului Valley, the working class borough was set up, which is characterized by council-type blocks-of-flats, with a GF+4 height regime, structured in blocks that include parking lots, alleys and small green areas, against a backdrop of a regulated, quasi-rectangular street layout, with a width large enough to allow space for automobile traffic. This borough was specially created to cater for the accommodation demand of workers in the Cement Factory in Chistag. The living conditions here were on the boundaries of decency; the flats therein are currently in a state of physical and moral decrepitude. Hence the concept of communal living implies the delineation of common, shared space and networks; finally, these flats do not benefit from centralized heating system.

'Transition' Urbanism.

Starting with the 90's, in the aftermath of the overturn and demise of the communist regime, a new, relatively random peripheral type of urbanism emerges, which, through the ready acceptance of a too great variety of architectural styles, fails to imprint a new local typology. This results from inadequate volumetrics, building materials and colors, both in the new buildings and in the interventions on the existent buildings. These new buildings generally have the GF+A height regime and a considerable retreat from the street front. The exponents of this new type of urbanism are to be found both on the outskirts of the town, and also embedded in the urban network within the process of urban regeneration.

Industrial Urbanism

If under mono-functional communism the industry appertaining to the city was located exclusively on the Chistag-Aştileu industrial platform, the setting-up of the underprivileged area engendered heavy investment in the shoe manufacturing industry, garments manufacturing industry, glass production industry, etc. All this is now imprinted in the urban landscape of Aleşd, by the construction of industrial sheds and other buildings of industrial relevance, in the eastern and western part of the city, along the ND1 highway.

Public Institutions and Socio-cultural Facilities

Mainly situated in the old area of the town, the public institutions render the urban nucleus a central overtone, the residential area being situated around this. Hence, the public institutions are centered along the central axis of the city, and the socio-cultural facilities are disseminated throughout the urban network. This is relevant for the analysis of urban functionality, in the sense that having institutions in the centre means better attending to the population's needs.

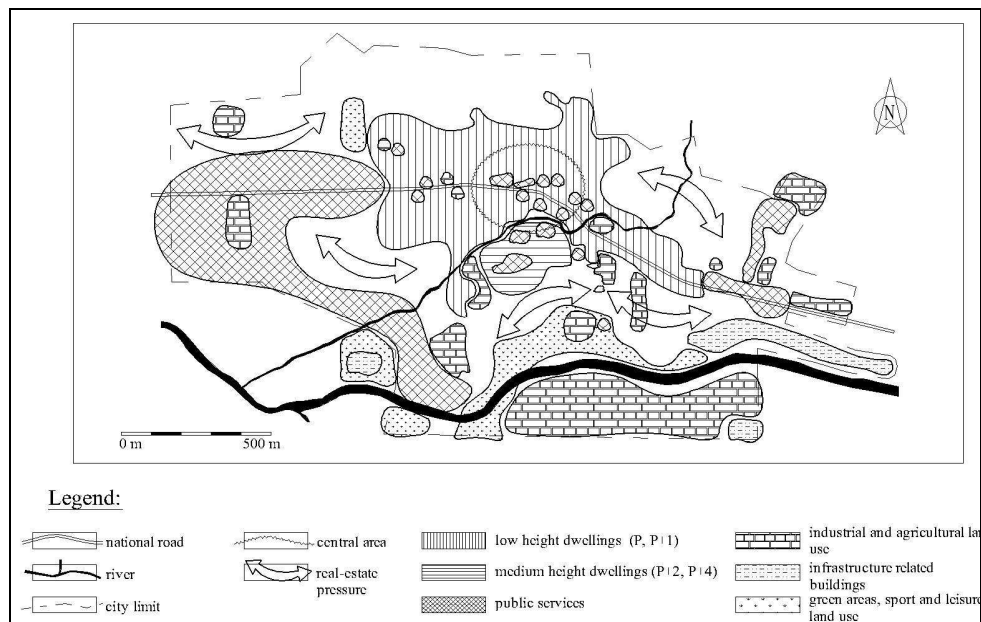


Fig. 8. Aleşd. Land use (derivative, Town Master Plan PUG 2005)

Functional Areas

The hearth of the city per se is quite reduced, i.e. 479.2 ha, as a response to local necessities and holds an insignificant habitat energy of 30 meters. The industrial area lies on 18% of the total city area, whereas the residential area covers 43% of the total area. A specific trait of the city is that the number of individual households-homesteads (1,639) equals that of the block-of-flats (1,634).

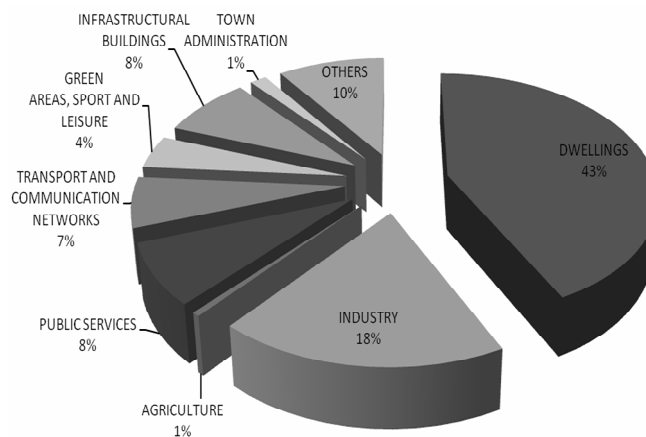


Fig. 9. Aleşd. Main land uses chart.

Dysfunctional Aspects

A close analysis of the city yields three main categories as regards the infrastructure, means of transport and the landscape/cityscape.

The impression of rush hour, typical of bustling megalopolises, is rendered here by the overlap of the ND1 (E 6) highway with the main axis of the city. The main street and national highway overlap within the city is 2.4 km, thus generating a state of discomfort.

Other drawbacks as regards transport are triggered by the long distances between the two railway stations (Aleşd railway station is at a distance of 2 km from the city, and Chistag railway station is at a distance of 7 km from the city.) Equally problematic, there is an absence of special routes for animal-traction vehicles, agricultural devices and bikers.

As regards the construction field, a series of issues are to be noted concerning the insufficient water and sewage networks. Only 77.6% of the total population is connected to the main water supply system and only 58% to the sewage network. Also, a central heating system for households is missing. Indeed, this represents a serious problem especially with the blocks-of-flats, which leads to inadequate solutions on the part of the dwellers, more often than not of the improvising sort.

Concerning the natural resources of the city, and the man-made ones, issues concerning the general look of the new buildings is to be noted (i.e. location, building materials, color), the maintenance of the buildings (the decrepitude of heritage buildings, mainly), urban advertising, but also environment issues regarding bio-diversity and urban pollution.

Conclusions

- The transition urbanism specific to the past few years fails to carry on or to place an imprint on the local typology;
- The city has undergone a timid rejuvenation over the last ten years, with the advent of the *lohn* - type industry (1,500 employed workers), but this is hardly a long-term solution;
- Pădurea-Neagră is faced with the most serious problems, in the aftermath of the closing of the glass factory, which had been in production since the first half of the 19th century;
- The great number of construction licenses, issued mainly between 1999-2002 for industrial buildings, coincides with the set-up of the underprivileged area and thus with the appeal of investors as a result of fiscal facilities;
- The extension of the hearth of the city was achieved southward during this period, based on the meadow relief;
- Between 2003-2008, the number of construction licenses issued for residential buildings has increased constantly;
- Due to the residential construction boom, more and more agricultural plots are used for construction;
- The development perspectives of the city are lined to the new role which it will perform within the Territorial Planning Unit (TPU) and to the quality of the projects envisaged in the development strategy;
- A specific trait of the city is its location in the trans-border area, which opens up new vistas for development. In order to really become a focus for the settlements which it comprises, the town of Aleşd needs a scientifically-informed development strategy, which should include both necessities and envisaged measures in order to eliminate the existing dysfunction, based on the diagnosis-analysis (SWOT); as for the accomplishment of the objectives thus set, feasible projects are necessary.

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