



Interview with PhD Lect. Arch.-Urb. Gabriel Pascariu

Solutions for the major urban challenges in Romania

Please describe briefly your activity in urban planning, territorial and regional development.

After graduating the *Institute of Architecture and Planning* in 1982, I have developed activities on urbanism and later on territorial development, first at „Project Bucharest”, then at the Systematization Centre of the *Institute of Planning, Housing and Municipal Services*, and after 1990 at the UrbanProject institute. Since 1998 I am a professor at the *University of Architecture and Urban Planning „Ion Mincu”*

in Bucharest. In all this time I have participated at the elaboration of studies, researches, methodologies, specific projects for town and country planning. My connections to regional development have started between 1996 and 1998, when participated at the elaboration of „The Green Paper of regional development policies in Romania”. Since 2003 I am coordinating a Master programme for „Territorial planning and regional development” at the *University of Architecture and Urban Planning „Ion Mincu”*.

As a professional in the fields mentioned above, which is your opinion on organizing Romania in eight development regions?

At this moment, the eight regions play a role in planning and programming, meant to facilitate the absorption of the European Union Structural Funds. Their importance is of statistical nature too, being the level at which the key development indicators are measured, which allows the ranking of the eight regions in the Eurostat "cohesion" hierarchies. The effects of the European Union cohesion policies are being monitored at the level of these regions. The present division needs to be seen as a necessary step in a long-lasting important process, related to decentralization and regionalization.

Do you believe that these eight regions represent the most viable solution for a coherent evolution of Romania, as well as to reducing disparities in the physical, economic and social environments?

The partition by itself is only one element of a complex equation, which involves the consideration of other elements, such as: the distinguishing competencies of the regions, the role and capacity of the regional institutions, the means and the instruments that they have at their disposal. One cannot neglect too, the elements of cultural identity, the human capital, the entrepreneurial activism, the general level of social and technical endowment, the general resources a region has. Last, but not least, the viability of the solution depends very much on the capacity of the different levels in the administration, from central to local, to set up coherent and interrelated development policies. At this moment, the eight regions are proven to be functional and they represent a viable premise in a long-term process, in order to reduce disparities and to create a higher level of territorial cohesion.

Each of these eight regions has a particular character depending on the geographic profile, population, socio-economic activities etc.; in these conditions, how can the growth poles generate jobs?

If we are talking about the 20 growth poles set up in 2008 by Governmental Decision nr. 1149, then the answer must be looked after in the development strategies proposed by each

one of them. Between 2008 and 2010, the public administrations of these cities have elaborated programming-documents called “Integrated Urban Development Plans”, which include besides a rich analysis of the potential of the pole and a vision, a developing strategy and an action plan with a list of priority projects too. Generating jobs will be a combined result of how each of these 20 poles will be able to absorb the EU funds by 2015, which are earmarked - a total of over 550 million – and meant to increase attractivity and to create a better environment for investments. A greater impact, with significant economic and social effects can be imagined only if these poles will be able to attract funds from other operational programs, especially from “Sectorial Operational Programme – Competitiveness through Research, Technological Development and Innovation”.

What type of solutions can be approached so that cities can repel the socio-spatial segregation?

The “Leipzig Charter for Sustainable European Cities” promoted in 2007 at the informal reunion of the ministers responsible for Spatial Planning in the member states of the EU, refers explicitly to this issue. The solution recommended and already applied in other Western European countries, in the last two decades, is an integrated approach allowing a comprehensive consideration of spatial, economic, social and environmental aspects, while tackling the urban development issues. We currently have a methodology for elaborating integrated urban projects, waiting to be enacted and implemented, which can generate a necessary change of paradigm in urban practice in Romania.

What type of methods exist or you propose that could lead to a better management of demographic change in small towns and that can also reduce labour force migration to large urban areas?

The management of the dramatic demographic changes and of the external migration cannot be made locally, but only by national policies. A recent study by professor Ghețău, based on preliminary data of the last 2011 census, warns us about the major risks of preservation of present trends. Concerning labour force migration to large urban centres, it is a normal phenomenon that has not reached alarming proportions in our country. Small and medium towns have an obvious need for support in order to set up local development plans, aimed at creating jobs and attracting private investments. This support should be directed towards increasing the planning capacity of the administration through technical assistance programs, training and process facilitation.

As you know, URBACT allows European cities to work together to find concrete solutions to urban challenges; in your opinion, which are the major urban challenges that demand your attention at the moment?

At a European and international level there are a few front-page issues, such as: good governance, climate change, urban resilience and managing post-disaster situations. In Romania, there are quite few discussions about these matters, while being more preoccupied about technical equipment and transportation issues. We are clearly in a different stage of evolution and we have specific problems. Among the most important challenges, I can mention two: the need to build a significant body of professionals in spatial planning and the reformation of the system of urban and territorial planning tools.

Regarding sustainable development how could big cities in Romania promote and successfully implement solutions that reduce carbon emissions in urban areas, while improving mobility and accessibility?

There are solutions already implemented in some Western and Central European cities. The most important measure aims at reducing car traffic, through the development of efficient public transportation systems on surface and underground, by encouraging the use of environmentally friendly ways of travelling, such as cycling and generally fostering pedestrians, in the detriment of vehicles and we are looking at a very good example, such as the Danish capital, Copenhagen. A second imperative need is regarding the good management and the increase of the green areas. Finally, measures that aim non-conventional energy use while reducing the conventional energy consumption in construction and current use of buildings. Last but not least, one should note the important role of a judicious spatial planning in an optimum and balanced distribution of urban functions, of services and points of interest.