
Urban (re)densification and/or urban sprawl? What trajectory for the Romanian city after the adhesion to the European Union? ((Ré)Densification urbaine et/ou étalement urbain ? Quelle trajectoire pour la ville roumaine après l'adhésion à l'Union Européenne ?)

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Abstract

The necessity to adapt to new consumption patterns, particularly the need for space and comfort of the population in the last two centuries triggered the phenomenon of urban sprawl which represents one of the main challenges in what concerns the management of the urban development. Defined as “the spreading of urban developments (as houses and shopping centers) on undeveloped land near city” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary), one could note the problems that could rise an intensive phenomenon of urban sprawl: the artificialization of semi-natural areas, green and other open spaces, the loss of biodiversity, increased environmental problems etc. Therefore, it comes as no surprise the intense concern of the European Union to promote a sustainable urban development, that would decrease the chances of an uncontrolled urban expansion. The compact urban form is the one that is promoted as being a sustainable one, thus reducing the negative impact on the surrounding environment of an urban area. However, for Romania a country which faced a lot of changes during the last two decades, restraining the urban sprawl is a challenge that needs yet to be achieved. Confronted with a speed-up artificialization due to the transition to a liberal regime, that translated into an increased demand of land from the private market actors, as well as the population, the Romanian cities expanded quasi-incontrollable during the last twenty years. Nevertheless, the adhesion to the European Union in 2007 should have bound the country to restrain the phenomenon of urban sprawl in order to respect the demands of the European Commission in what concerns the sustainable urban development. Therefore, the main research questions of this paper can be summarized as it follows: What impact (if any) had the accession of Romania to the European Union in what concerns the spatial urban development of the main big cities ? It is possible to observe a (re)densification of the urban core, or on the contrary the extension of the urban tissue is still uncontrolled? In order to answer these questions, the GMES Urban Atlas databases (2006 and 2012 versions) were used in order to derive the spatial patterns of land artificialization, as well as the

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changes in the general urban form in the interest of observing the trend of urban spatial development for the period 2006-2012. The methodology is mainly a quantitative one, thus a geo-spatial analysis that implies the use of GIS software in order to derive morpho-metric indicators that allow us to observe the morphological specificities of the Romanian urban areas before (the year 2006) and after the adhesion to the European Union (the year 2012). The period of study was restrained to 2006-2012, due to the availability of data (GMES Urban Atlas). Hence, the results of our analysis show that Romania still faces difficulties in what concerns the control of the phenomenon of the urban sprawl due to an increased demand of land from market actors and population, but also, because of an inconsistent legislative fundament. The cities analyzed showed a trend of expansion in what concerns their urban form (compactness Index), as well as a tendency of artificialization of green and open spaces, despite a population that increased very slowly.

Keywords: urban sprawl, Romania, sustainable urban development, city, Europe