

REGENERAREA URBANĂ A ORAȘELOR DIN REGIUNEA DE SUD A REPUBLICII MOLDOVA ÎN CONTEXTUL DEZVOLTĂRII TERITORIALE DURABILE

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Rezumat: Într-o lume actuală extrem de dinamică sub aspect socio-cultural, socio-economic și politic, afirmarea și consolidarea identitară urbană, este o provocare, în condițiile în care, elementele locale, regionale, naționale sunt influențate și se interpătrund, tot mai mult, cu cele globale. Problematika regenerării urbane este actuală, în contextul competitivității urbane la nivel regional și local, dar și a dezvoltării civilizaționale și spațiale durabile. Regenerarea urbană implică transformarea zonelor dezafectate sau în declin în spații care promovează creativitatea, inovația, cultură și dezvoltare economică. Importanța procesului este determinată de revitalizarea zonelor urbane depresive, catalizarea dezvoltării economice, creșterea atractivității turistice, reutilizarea durabilă a spațiilor, colaborarea și interacțiunea socială etc. Revitalizarea urbană a orașelor din Republica Moldova în general, și a celor din RD Sud, în particular, este imperativă, în condițiile lipsei, în perioadele istorice de dezvoltare anterioare independenței statului, a unei politici de dezvoltare regională, dar și contextul actual al implementării dezvoltării durabile - șansă reală de intrare în competitivitatea urbană într-o perspectivă europeană a țării.

Cuvinte-cheie: regenerare urbană, dezvoltare teritorială durabilă, oraș inteligent, teritorii depresive, regenerare urbană spațială, socială și economică

URBAN REGENERATION OF CITIES IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: In today's extremely dynamic socio-cultural, socio-economic and political world, the affirmation and consolidation of urban identity is a challenge, given that local, regional

and national elements are increasingly influenced and interpenetrate, with the global ones. The problem of urban regeneration is current, in the context of urban competitiveness at the regional and local level, but also of sustainable civilizational and spatial development. Urban regeneration involves transforming disused or declining areas into spaces that promote creativity, innovation, culture and economic development. The importance of the process is determined by revitalizing depressed urban areas, catalyzing economic development, increasing tourist attractiveness, sustainable reuse of spaces, collaboration and social interaction, etc. The urban revitalization of the cities of the in the Southern Region of the Republic of Moldova is imperative Republic of Moldova is imperative, given the lack of a regional development policy in the historical periods of development prior to the independence of the state, but also the current context of the implementation of sustainable development - a real chance to enter urban competitiveness in a European perspective of the country.

Keywords: *urban regeneration, sustainable territorial development, smart city, depressive territories, spatial, social and economic urban regeneration*

INTRODUCTION

Urban regeneration is a complex and strategic process involving the revitalization and improvement of an existing urban area to revitalize its quality of life, attractiveness and sustainability. This process focuses on transforming troubled urban areas, which may be affected by decline, decay, poverty, aging infrastructure or inefficient land use, into more viable, sustainable and attractive areas for residents, investors and visitors. It is an international practice that is taking shape in more and more states of the world, in which normative acts and administrative structures appear aimed at achieving change where the urban space requires it. In this article, the authors propose to identify the ways and methods of urban regeneration, taking as a reference the cities of the Republic of Moldova, in general, and those of the Southern Development Region in particular, as part of a regional study and the dr.al study. The purpose of this study is to assess the importance of the urban revitalization of the cities of the Southern Development Region of the Republic of Moldova in the context of regional and local urban

competitiveness and regional development. And among the basic objectives of the research are:

- conceptual and methodological assessment of urban revitalization;
- evaluation of the normative-legal framework regarding the revitalization of cities in the Republic of Moldova, in general, and those in the Southern Development Region, in particular;
- identifying the dimensions of spatial, social and economic urban revitalization and their manifestation at the level of urban habitats in the region;
- identifying the problems that restrict urban revitalization in the analyzed space;
- analysis of trends and challenges regarding urban revitalization;
- the formulation of conclusions and proposals regarding the prospective stimulation of urban revitalization - imperative for socio-economic development and the implementation of the smart city concept.

Currently, the Southern Development Region has 11 cities: 1 municipality and 10 cities, most of them being district centers (figure 1). The population difference between the largest city (Cahul) and the smallest (Cantemir) is 9.2 times. At the level of the 11 cities analyzed, the population density differs between 642 loc./km² in the city of Căinari and 2683 loc./km² in Cahul.

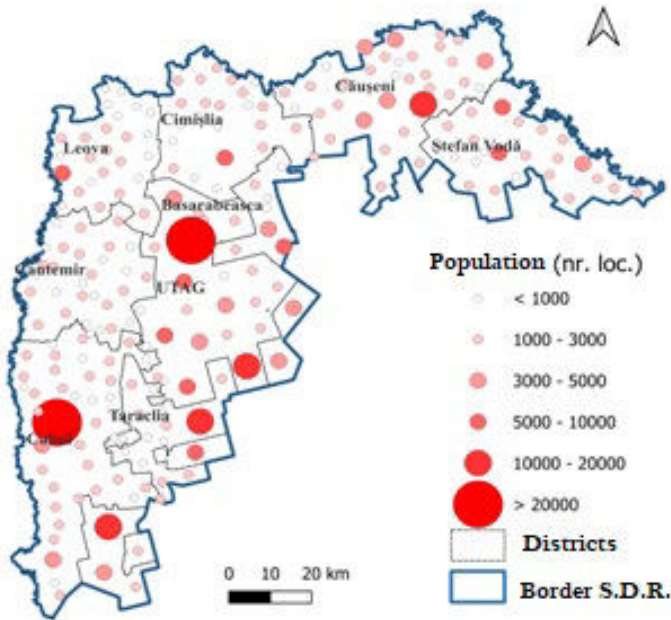


Fig. 1 Distribution of the population of Southern DR by urban and rural habitats

The share of cities in the total number of human habitats is only 3.7% of the total number of 296 localities, the Southern Development Region being the most ruralized development region in the country [6], and the Republic of Moldova is the most ruralized state in Central Europe and from the East [4]. Most of the cities in the Southern Development Region do not meet the urban requirements in terms of: technical-building, functional, urban, demographic, professional/economic specialization, etc. Currently, the human habitats of the region, including the cities, are in the process of territorial decentralization [2] - part of the applied regional development policy[1]. This implies gradual financial, administrative and patrimonial decentralization, being in search of one's own identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An important characteristic of urban identification is the demographic potential of human habitats. The Southern Development Region stands out for its small number of population among the development regions and which corresponds to the lower limit of the European NUTS²⁸ 3 criteria of territorial sharing according to the demographic threshold (figure 2). In this context, there were several opinions regarding the review of the territorial-administrative organization and the regional organization in the context of the application of the regional development policy, including taking into account the merger of the Southern Development Region and the Gagauza Administrative Territorial Unit in a developing region.

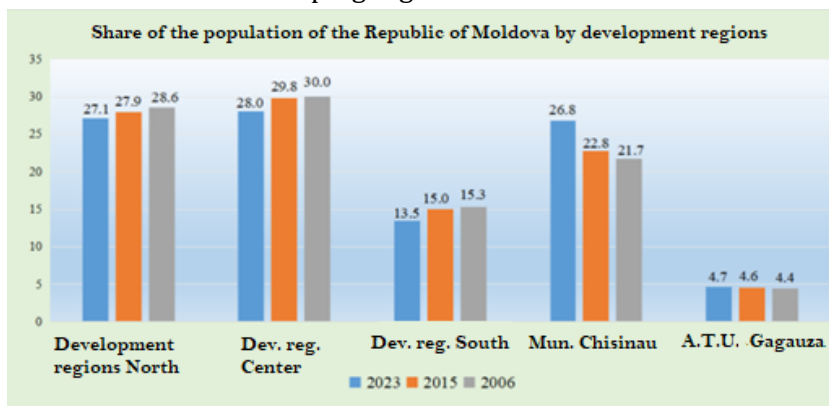


Fig. 2 Comparative characteristics of development regions in the Republic of Moldova according to demographic potential

The Southern Development Regions, as well as the entire territory of the Republic of Moldova, has a historical heritage in urban identification from the Soviet period, which had as a basic criterion the number of the population and the share of the non-agricultural population. Several

²⁸ The NUTS level to which an administrative unit belongs is determined based on demographic thresholds: NUTS 3 between 150 and 800 thousand inhabitants

localities were transferred to the urban category during the industrialization period of the '60s-'70s, through the opening of some industrial units and the creation of jobs in the non-agricultural sector, used as the basic criterion for changing the status of the locality from village to Town. The general trend during the state independence period of the Republic of Moldova was a decline in the population, and several urban localities currently have a population below the level of 5000 inhabitants.

Tab. 1 Population dynamics in the Southern Development Region districts at the censuses. Occurred in the current territory of the Republic of Moldova, including Population with usual residence from 01.01.2023

Districts	1959	1970	1979	1989	2004	2014	01.01.2023 ²	Report 2014/1989 (%)
Basarabeasca	24814	27776	29889	31612	28978	23012	15998	73
Cahul	78142	100978	114381	122008	119231	105324	78 651	86
Cantemir	46758	56466	58169	62864	60001	52115	35 584	83
Căușeni	73 691	89 073	93 656	96 467	90 612	81 185	63 905	84
Cimișlia	49624	63048	65667	65267	60925	49299	32 602	76
Leova	38809	49510	53414	55354	51056	44702	33 478	81
Ștefan-Vodă	63585	71435	73511	75436	70594	62072	46 800	82
Taraclia	39113	43953	43213	47966	43154	37357	31 283	78
TOTAL	414536	502239	531900	556974	524551	455066	338301	81

Source: Census data from 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, 2004, 2014

² present population

The population decreased, during the period of state independence, in all administrative-territorial units of the region. The biggest decline was recorded between the last two population censuses, with about 20% of the reviewed population. The decline continued in the post-census period, both on the basis of the natural balance and the negative mechanical one, with the region reaching its lowest effective population since the Second World War. The decline was recorded equally in the

rural and urban areas, the main cause being external migration. If in the past the main form of population mobility was oriented towards the urban environment, nowadays the basic migration flow is determined by external migration. Migration has determined the intensification of the imbalance between urban centers at the regional level, with small towns being the most disadvantaged (table 2).

Tab. 2 The comparative characteristic of the human potential of the cities of the Southern Development Regions (01.01.2023)

	Number of population (thousands of inhabitants)		Report of population with usual residence compared to most populated city (Cahul=100)
	<i>The population with usual residence (thousands of inhabitants)</i>	<i>Present population (thousands of inhabitants PP</i>	
1. Basarabesca	6 948	10 491	29,1
2. Cahul	23 903	35 247	100,0
3. Cantemir	2 586	4 666	10,8
4. Căușeni	13 253	17 271	55,4
5. Căinari	2 630	3 850	11,0
6. Cimișlia	8 567	11 947	35,8
7. Leova	5 695	9 600	23,8
8. Iargara	2 942	4 198	12,3
9. Ștefan Vodă	5 435	7 095	22,7
10. Taraclia	12 018	12 863	50,2
11. Tvardița	4 242	5 182	17,7

Source: calculated and adapted based on NBS (National Bureau of Statistics) data

Only two cities of the region have a population with regular residence in proportion of 50% compared to the city of Cahul, considered the capital of the southern region, although the regional center is the city of Cimișlia. In this situation, competition between the attractiveness of cities at the regional level practically does not exist. The main strategic documents of local urban planning and development are: the general urban plan, the social-economic development strategy and the urban revitalization program.

The revitalization of the cities in the Southern Development Regions is an indispensable condition of development at the current stage, in order to increase the attractiveness of the cities for the existing population and for the compatriots who will want to return to the country after a migration experience. Urban revitalization represents "a process of removing degraded urban areas from a state of crisis, carried out in a complex manner, through territorially integrated actions, carried out by local administrations through effective local, regional, national partnerships based on a Revitalization Program" [5]. At the level of the cities of the Republic of Moldova, an Urban Revitalization Program was launched, which includes four cities from the Southern Development Regions (Căușeni, Cahul, Cimișlia and Ștefan-Vodă). The development of urban revitalization programs is an important criterion for the eligibility of cities within the calls for urban development projects announced by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development of the Republic of Moldova.

So, urban revitalization is a complex and strategic process that involves the revitalization and improvement of existing urban areas to revitalize their quality of life, attractiveness and sustainability. This includes three basic dimensions: spatial, economic and social, each comprising several niches to be transformed, adjusted and/or developed to increase the attractiveness of cities as centers of economic growth and development (tab. 3).

Tab. 3 Urban revitalization: concept and examples

	Concept	Direcions and actions
Spatial urban revitalization	The process of revitalizing and reconfiguring the physical/spatial aspect of an urban area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of green spaces and territorial planning; - Promoting environmental sustainability - Strategic urban planning; -Redesign of public spaces; (improvement of parks, squares, recreation areas, etc.)

Regeneration urban social	The process of revitalizing urban areas by improving the quality of life for local communities and the residents of those areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community participation/involvement; - Promotion of affordable housing; - Education and social training; - Social and health services; - Culture and recreation; - Reducing social segregation; - Increasing public safety; - Reintegration of marginal groups
Urban regeneration economic	Process of rehabilitation of the economic sphere and its adaptation to frequent changes in the economic situation and to the existing and attracted economic potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support for start-ups - Support for the development of the economic infrastructure and the rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure -Development of local entrepreneurship capacities - Creating a local brand - Increasing the attractiveness of "brownfield" (abandoned industrial areas), etc.

Source: adapted from source [5]

The cities of the South Development Region at the current stage face a series of challenges manifested both at the national/regional and local level. In these conditions of continuous changes and adaptations, some basic trends of urban revitalization could be mentioned and which could be achieved through administrative activation, helped by the civic spirit. Among these trends and challenges can be mentioned:

- Emphasizing the "smart city" dimension;
- Inclusion of cities in European programs and projects (eg Creative Europe, Charter of European Urbanism);
- Accentuating the European and Romanian identity of the cities of the Republic of Moldova, in general, and of those in the Southern Development Regions, in particular;

The stronger connection/relationship with the European infrastructure through its modernization, the focus must be on smart and friendly infrastructure for the inhabitants and nature;

- Development of community spirit;
- Energy efficiency of the built space;
- Discouraging horizontal urban expansion, etc.;

CONCLUSION

The urban regeneration involves a series of interventions and projects, intended to contribute to increasing the attractiveness of this space for the present inhabitants or those who intend to return after a migration experience, the return can be achieved all the more intensively, as they want be created more opportunities for economic activity and living, adjusted by qualitative administrative, public and social services at the level of the states in which they worked and were active. The basic directions and actions focused on the three basic dimensions of urban revitalization: spatial, social and economic must focus on: rehabilitation and modernization of infrastructure, reconfiguration of public spaces, revitalization of living space, reduction of social inequalities, community involvement in the process of decision-making and urban planning to meet the needs and aspirations of the local population, etc. These directions and actions must be implemented in an integrated way to transform and revitalize urban areas in a sustainable and equitable way, contributing to the development of the region's cities in a harmonious and beneficial way for all residents.

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