

# „NEW TOWNS” IN MODERN URBANISM: CONCEPT & HISTORY

**Andreea PANAIT**

Associate professor, PhD architect, „Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urbanism, Synthesis of Architectural Design Department  
e-mail: andra\_panait@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** The present study highlights the “new towns” designed in the socialist period in Romania and tries to show that the inertia and indifference of the local government can only exacerbate their urban quality degradation. To counter the vicious cycle of neglect and indifference created after 1989, a coherent urban policy must combine a campaign for changing the mentality and image with new practical solutions for improving the quality of urban space. These two directions are mutually supporting in the same way that the negative perception and degradation have emphasized each other over the past 20 years. This study is primarily aimed at professionals and government policy-makers of urban revitalization, but also wants to be a minimal contribution to the public awareness of the problems faced by the “new” socialist cities and their pronounced deterioration.

**Key words:** new towns, neighbourhood units, urban planning

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, the "new town" concept is used with the meaning of a straightforwardly emerged town, built on a virtually free land (or occupied by a settlement of significantly smaller size than the new town - a hamlet or village), following an established plan and under expert supervision. The emergence of "new towns" is a typical event of modern times and especially of the twentieth century. Although towns built from scratch after an established plan, are recorded since ancient times (see the Roman towns built in new provinces, even in Dacia), what was understood by the term "town" until the twentieth century was closer to the idea of fairly large-scale human settlement, built over centuries, with the help of the entire

community. Although there were regulations which limited the chaotic expansion of a town, the form of these suddenly emerged towns was rather the result of a sum of private interests, subordinated to the general interest. In the twentieth century and given the new importance acquired by urban planning and urban planners in the modern world, a new form of town appeared: the "New Town." In this type of town, the general interest prevailed and controlled private interest to an extent never seen before.

In Romania, the "new towns" experiment started on a larger scale only with the beginning of the socialist period, in the 50s. However, the wave of urban restructuring that reached Romania in the late nineteenth

century, resulted in the almost complete transformation of towns on the Danube shore (Turnu Magurele, Giurgiu, etc.). These were the first Romanian towns planned ahead by experts and whose reconstruction was closely controlled and supervised. However, an actual planning ideology for new towns did not appear in Romania before the 50s. Heavily influenced by the Soviet Union and by the theory of the "new socialist town", Romanian urban planners created on the design board and then began to build a number of workers' towns, emerged from nowhere and usually placed near large future industrial centers.

These type of towns are the subject of the present paper.

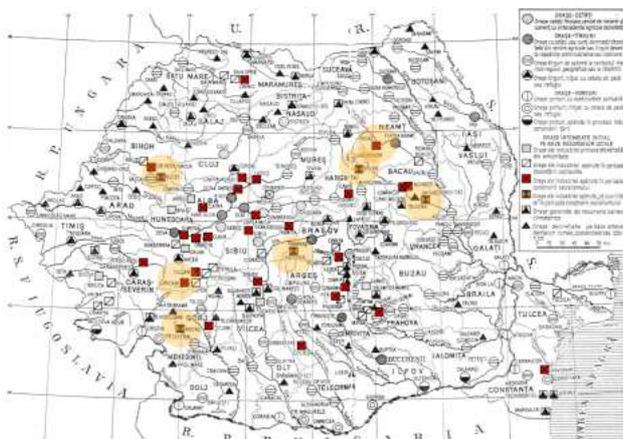


Fig. 1. Map of genetic types of cities  
Source: Cucu (1970)

A series of new towns erected during the socialist period in Romania (Fig. 1). These are: Uricani, Vulcan, Cugir, Orăștie, Zlatna, Dr. Petru Groza, Oțelul Roșu, Cosești, Fieni, Năvodari Boldedști-Scăeni, Simeria, Baia-Sprie, Bicaș, Comănești, Moinești, Bălan, Nucet, Victoria, Onești, Motru. Their obvious degradation over time contributed to the erosion of the respect and trust of the Romanian public for the idea of urban planning. As has happened in other areas of the Romanian society, the failure of socialist policies contributed to arise the excessive

suspicion of the public towards any social engineering project that was centrally controlled and planned. Following the political and social changes of the 1990-s, the Romanian society began to place a particular emphasis on individual interests to the detriment of the idea of general interest. As a result, the "new socialist towns", entering a void of power, began to decline at an accelerated rate. These towns and their inhabitants were mocked at and transformed into a sort of visual expression of the failure of the socialist utopia.

This negative image went beyond the former socialist block. The evolution of new towns began to be perceived by some as a failure of urban planning in general. This is how Sir James Maude Richards described in 1953 the failure of the new towns in England: "It is a sad moment to have reached when we have to acknowledge the failure of the new towns. [...] The fact that must nevertheless be faced is that the new towns have failed on three separate counts: socially, economically and architecturally (Richards, 1953).

Influential urban planners have developed certain ideas related to the new towns design, including notions such as self-containment, social Balance and the neighborhood unit. These parallel, to some extent, the concepts emerged from the sociology of community. However, the efforts to put these ideas into practice were unsuccessful. In the absence of more sophisticated mechanisms, of better theories regarding social interaction at the neighborhood level or of new ways to attract citizens participation, the efforts to build new towns are likely to be severely crippled (Susskind, 1973).

Without any intentions to validate or invalidate such ideological approach, the goal of the present paper is to draw

attention to these towns, in the attempt to show that the inertia of local authorities up to recent years and the overall indifference can only emphasize, in a typical case of vicious circle, the continuous degradation of these towns' urban quality.

## 2. The purpose of the study

The present study aims to investigate the specific issues and to suggest future directions of development for this type of towns. The proposed directions first of all aim at changing the profile of the new towns from monofunctional into a varied one. Thus, culture, tourism, communications and transport have to play an increasingly larger part in these towns which focus mainly on industrial goods and agricultural production. Moreover, one of the main development goals is to create better connections with the region they are located in, in order to counteract to a certain extent the isolation the towns were plunged into over the past two decades.

The assumptions on which this study operates are as follows: do these towns form a specific, separate, category? Is there need for a coherent and unified intervention at government level to help these towns? What can be done to improve the situation?

## 3. Methodology

Regarding the primary source material, a very relevant source for statistics were the village data sheets obtained from the National Institute of Statistics, based on which we performed comparative charts attached to this study. The evolution of these towns in the last period can be estimated from the main source material. Another source of information was provided by fieldwork. A number of trips, especially to Victoria town have made possible to study the situation on-site. Also, local newspapers proved to be a reliable source for a wide range of topics, from

trends, perceptions and attitudes, to monitoring the real-estate market and job offers. The auxiliary material used in this study contains information about the occurrence and development of the concept of "new town" in the twentieth century urbanism. Based on this secondary material we created a comparative database in order to integrate the case of the Romanian new towns into the wider historical framework of the "New Town" concept in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and in other parts of the world.

## 4. Concept and history

### 4.1. The birth of the concept

The idea of "new town" appeared in modern times as a reaction to what was perceived at the time as being problematic with the types of existing towns. Since the late eighteenth century and especially in the nineteenth century, European cities have experienced a period of extreme urbanization, previously unseen in the course of history. The population growth curve which had evolved constantly, having a stable, but moderate value since medieval times, started to rise almost vertically in graphs, marking the beginning of urbanization in modern times. With this unprecedented rapid urbanization another series of problems invaded the modern city. The so called "Slums" with their poor population, industry workers, families with many children, unemployment, pollution, became increasingly present on city maps (Brooks 1937). Overcrowding was felt ever more acutely. The traditional type of housing and the existing built up areas became gradually insufficient and below the standards required by modern life (Mumford, 1954).

In response to these problems, intellectuals in big cities began to think that "the city" was the source of the problems of the

contemporary world and started to imagine how to reform the cities. Many thinkers began to look at the city suspiciously, seeing it as a place of perdition where civil spirit, traditional morality and sense of belonging to a community were disintegrating under the pressure of the need to earn money, fame and power. Consequently, the thinkers of the new urban theories began to imagine a different type of city.

This city had to be small, so that people could be in direct contact with one another and also easier to manage by administration. These towns were intended to be just the opposite of the existing large cities. Instead of poverty, they would provide prosperity, instead of crowding, more space, instead of unemployment, jobs, instead of families dissolution, a community spirit, instead of dismantling families, a sense of family and social cohesion, instead of shame due to poverty and misery, pride for the place they lived in and so on.

In time, new towns have taken on different shapes and displayed various qualities, but certain features remained the same, especially the idea of the strict control over the city's development, so as not exceed a certain size considered "ideal." In this regard also, it is no surprise that urban planners insisted on the concept of limited development as a reaction to the perceived "uncontrolled" and "chaotic" development of the existing large modern cities. Other basic features of the "new towns" are: the importance acquired by the prestigious town centre, seen as an element of civic cohesion; the hierarchical distribution of districts and sub-districts; the attempt to equip each subdivision of the town with all major functions needed (housing, commerce, culture, etc.); fairly uniform and equitable housing for all residents.

#### *4. 2. The history of the concept and international examples*

All these ideas had their actual origin in an old European utopian tradition. All the utopias of European civilization, from Plato to Thomas More and Tommaso Campanella, envisioned places either nonexistent or cast in an unclear future form which all real life problems vanished. All these utopias generally take place in enclosed places, protected from any outside interference (like an island) and whose characteristic feature was their small size, in respect of space and population number. The sense of the public good and individual interests subordinated to the general welfare was pervasive in utopic towns.

These pre-modern utopias followed the ideas of modern reformers such as Fourier, Constant. For instance, such towns imagined by utopian thinkers cities are Fourier's "Phalanstère" or the "New Harmony" community imagined by Robert Owen in 1824. Many historians of modern urbanism believe that the ideas of these reformist philosophers are the basis of what we call urbanism nowadays.

##### *4. 2.1. The Garden City*

Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928), the author of the Garden City theory, is generally considered the father of twentieth century urbanism. The Garden Cities envisioned by Howard were the first experiments with the idea of new town, built straightforwardly after an established plan, on an open field and with the final goal of creating a new urban structure at regional level (Hall, 1990). Howard himself was influenced by other modern utopias. Such is the English utopian thinker, James Silk Buckingham (1849), who had the strongest influence on Ebenezer Howard. Howard took over from J.S. Buckingham many of the fundamental ideas of the Garden City: the limited size (land and population), the central square,

radial avenues, industries distributed at periphery, by-pass road and especially the idea to create a second new town at a certain distance from the first, as soon as the existing town was filled up to its "ideal capacity" (Hall and Ward, 1998).

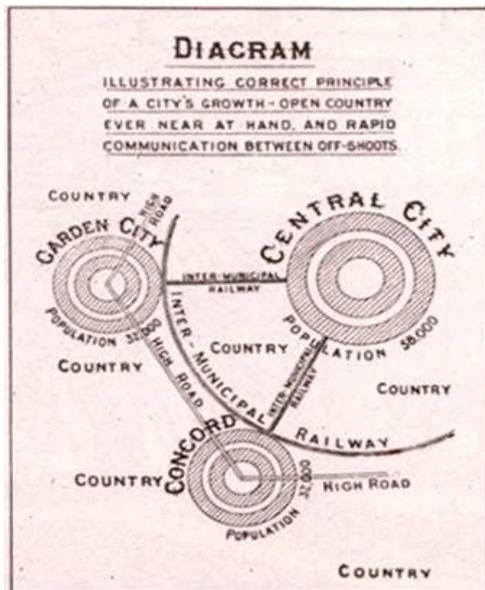


Fig. 2 Ebenezer Howard's influential 1902 diagram, illustrating urban growth through garden city "off-shoots", Source: *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, Howard (1902).

The Garden-City designed by Howard (Fig. 2) limited the number of inhabitants to only 32,000 people, had a central public garden surrounded by impressive public institutions, included fields for sports and commercial arcades (Howard, 1993). However, the Garden cities actually built during Howard's life were more or less remote from his original vision (Isaacsson, 1988). At one point, a resident described Letchworth as "a group of villages linked together, around a civic center, with a factory in the suburbs" (Wojtowicz, 1996). However, experimental cities such as Letchworth and Welwyn near London will always be regarded as positive examples for the planning of new cities (Ward, 2004). Following New Urbanism principles, another example of a successful city is Poundbury, more recently designed by architect Leon Krier for the Prince of Wales

as an extension to Dorchester. Although the city was intended to reduce car dependency and encourage walking, cycling and public transport, a survey conducted at the end of the first phase showed that car use was higher in Poundbury than in the surrounding district of West Dorset (Watson *et al.*, 2004).

In 1909, a group of 30 Russian specialists made a study trip to the UK. The main interest of these movements were the garden cities initiated by Ebenezer Howard, including the famous Letchworth. One of them, who was also an influential politician, translated and published in Russia in 1911, Howard's book "Cities of Tomorrow" (Howard, 1899). Soon after, an organization of Garden Cities was established in Russia, following the British example. In the following years, satellite-garden cities emerged near Moscow, Riga and Ostankina, being built with the help of Russian experts. These early developments in Russian urbanism were to become after the end of World War very important for defining the urban Soviet ideology regarding new towns. In the 20s, the Soviet new towns continued to be built in the Soviet Union, but the focus was shifting more on "modernity" and "technology," while the quasi-rural *passeisme* of the the garden-cities tradition was criticized for not being "socialist" enough (Fig. 3).



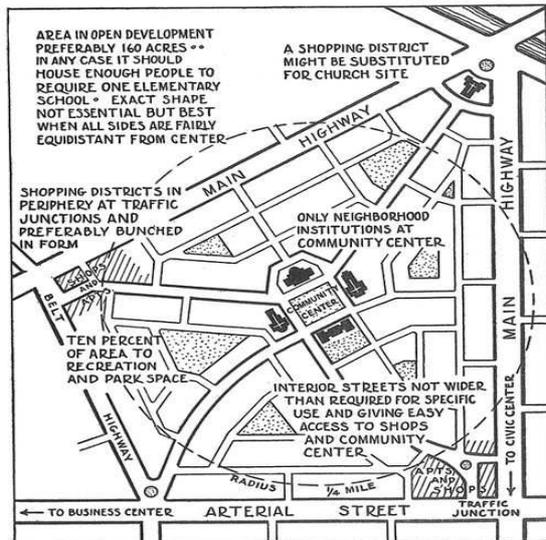
Fig. 3 Soviet planners discussing the plan of the East Kilbride new town on a study trip of the UK in 1957, Source: \*\*\*, 1957: 10

In Great Britain, the theory of garden cities changed after the Second World War and evolved into the so-called "New Towns Program" a government program to build new towns, especially near London, which was constantly growing to sizes difficult to manage. Until the late 60s this was the solution of choice. Among the best known towns occurred as a result of this new urban policy are Stevenage, Basinstoke, etc. After 1969, preservationists began to voice their claims even harder and the idea of new and radical changes specific to new towns began to lose ground. However, new towns were different from the Garden City model because they were bigger and met bigger housing needs, relied much more on state intervention. Also, they had a higher density pattern, included more apartments instead of individual houses and accommodated increasingly high-rise buildings, but often poorer community facilities. In sum, they proved less sustainable in the long term (in Europe at least) than the Garden - Cities (Ward, 2012).

#### *4. 2.2. Examples in the United States*

There are different schools and traditions which have influenced new towns in U.S. In the United States, as elsewhere, modern European utopias provided a strong stimulus to urbanism. Compared to cities in Europe, the American experiments with new towns often had a strong philanthropic component, as well. Wealthy classes, influenced by Protestant ethics, thought it was their duty to extend their protection over the poor classes of the city. From philosophers and thinkers to unmarried girls of rich families, many Americans were involved in small projects creating small ideal communities where the most poor could feel protected and work towards the general good. (Hayden, 1981). The American philanthropic trend of the nineteenth century gave rise to a

particular phenomenon, the "settlement houses", true communities organized as a small-sized ideal society, sometimes in the same building. These experiments inspired other experiments with new towns. As in the British garden-cities movement, the American model can be viewed as being something between city and country. In fact, many theorists and reformers referred to these new settlements as "Model Villages". Writer Harriet Beecher Stowe was one of the American personalities who was a big supporter of the movement. In 1868, she wrote: "The future model village for New England, as I see it, shall have for the use of its inhabitants not merely a town lyceum hall and a town library, but a town laundry [...] and also a town bakery". Besides broad-minded girls from rich families, many thinkers and philosophers tried to create ideal cities. In the twentieth century, several ideal new towns appeared around New York City, such as Radburn and Greenbelt. The "country villa" style houses were arranged in a horseshoe shape around a central space for community activities. Famous theoretician and urbanist Lewis Mumford was one of the enthusiastic supporters of these projects. Especially in the '30s, under President Roosevelt, American leaders became increasingly favorable to the "New Town" concept. Economists said it was advisable "to move away from major population congestions, to choose cheap land on which to build entire communities that can attract people to live there. Then people should go back to the cities and destroy the Slums in order to replace them with parks." (Mumford, 1947). In US, a new concept was born which was going to be used extensively throughout the modern history of new towns: the concept of "Neighborhood Units" (Perry, 1929b) invented by urban planner Clarence Perry in 1929 (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4** A diagram of Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit, illustrating the spatiality of the core principles of the concept, from the New York Regional Survey, Vol 7, 1929, Source:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neighbourhood\\_Unit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neighbourhood_Unit)

According to this concept, the town was to be divided into equal divisions and subdivisions, according to a certain matrix of the ideal number of people who needed to use more than one function of the town (housing, trade, culture, etc). Depending on this number, urban cores were created in every town in order to give each group of people access to all the necessary functions. Several small groups formed a larger subdivision, which in turn, together with other sub-divisions formed the town. At the lowest level, access to usual urban amenities was provided, such as the shopping center, kindergarten, school. At the next level, a house of culture, cinema were offered. The top level was destined to major institutions, high school etc

The principles following which Perry's "Neighbourhood Unit" was organized were the following: a central area occupied by a school, major traffic avenues located in a perimeter, hierarchical network of internal streets, shopping areas connected to the main roads, inside the unit, green areas and in at least 10% of the space public areas required for social interaction, plus the

remaining residential area for 9000 inhabitants at the most (Perry, 1929a).

In the late 1940s, the concept of Neighbourhood Unit received several critics out of which the most virulent was made by Reginald Isaac (1948-1949) which considered it unproductive and unnatural. Isaac's criticism concerned the use of the concept as a tool for separating the different racial, ethnic, religious and economic groups, by private developers who served their own interests. (Isaac, 1948). Catherine Bauer (1945) also attacked the concept as being racist and elitist, especially in the context of urban renewal. In other cases, the Neighborhood Unit received more practical critics - Dyckman (1959) emphasized the difficulties occurred when trying to insert a primary school following a rigid plan without taking into account the actual evolution of the neighborhood. Based on extensive research, Banerjee and Baer (1984) argued that people simply do not perceive the surroundings as neighborhoods, and therefore planners have misinterpreted the nature of their work. Despite these criticisms, the concept has been widely used with many adjustments and has played a key role in urban planning (Perry, 1929; Stein, 1951; Adams et al., 1974; Banerjee and Baer, 1984; Webster, 2001), in the suburbanisation process (Adams et al., 1974; Southworth and Owens 1993) and even in urban revitalization (Ascher, 1934; Brooks, 1937; Montgomery, 1965; Schwartz 2002).

In the 60s a new American experiment with a new town took place: the creation of Columbia town, in Maryland. This town was created with private funding, but was modeled after an ideal left-wing type of city, that is an organized, egalitarian and rational city. The idea that inspired the financiers was to create a town that would provide the best

possible environment for the human development of its citizens. Again, the main idea was the focus on a center reflecting the city life, both for symbolic reasons, and because of the idea of equal access to public institutions and culture for all. The town in 1965 embodied the vision of an attractive center, cumulating several types of activities, providing commercial spaces, offices, a college and a recreational and cultural center which also included a big lake. Moreover, the principle of a multi-level/ hierarchical city was employed again. Thus, several neighborhoods created a village and eight villages created a town. (Wojtowicz, 1996).

A criticism of this hierarchy is made by Christopher Alexander in his book "The city is not a tree" (Fig. 5), by contrasting the natural, living city, developed over time and having a network-like structure with the artificially city, with its hierarchical planned tree-like structure. A semilattice has a vastly larger number of internal connections than a tree of comparable size. Not only are there many connections in a semilattice, but there is a great variety among them; by contrast, trees have unique connections. If functions or regions can be neatly segregated in a city's plan, then it represents a tree, and consequently it's not alive (Alexander, 1966).

#### 4. 2.3. Capitals built from zero

Towns have not always been designed only as small towns and semi-rural areas. Important capitals of powerful countries were built even in modern times as new towns. Examples of such famous urban planning are Canberra, Brasilia, New Delhi or Chandigarh. The Australian Government decided in 1913 that the country needed a new capital that was neither Melbourne nor Sydney, but an inland capital to send a stronger message that this is the capital of the entire continent. North American architect Burley Griffin (1876-1937) was selected to accomplish this mission. Griffin

was a great admirer of the Garden City concept and also in his plan, anticipated the concept of "neighborhood unit", the hierarchical organization of the subdivisions of the city. The city was inaugurated in 1927. The new capital created by Griffin, Canberra, is often considered to be the largest example of a Garden City. Its central area is organized around a government triangle which joins various state institutions. The Parliament was placed in Griffin's design on a hill, rising mightily above the city. This part of the plan was to be achieved only in the 80s, when Australia finally built its monumental Parliament (contemporary to "People's House" in Bucharest!).

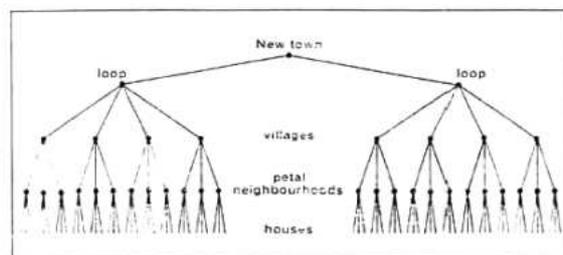
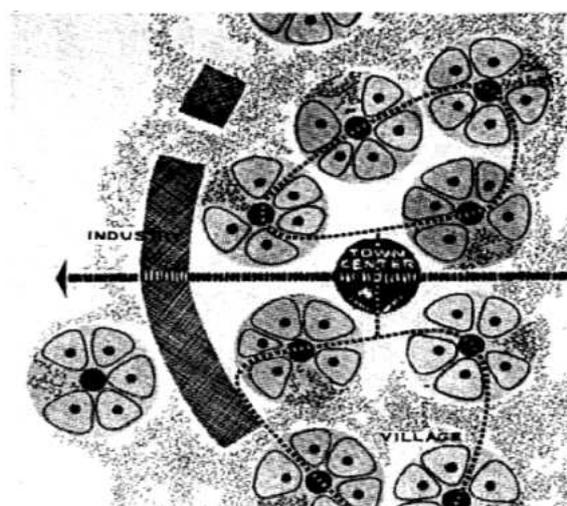


Fig. 5. Columbia, Maryland. Clusters of five form villages. Transportation joins the villages into a new town. The organisation is a tree. Source: The city is not a tree, Alexander (1966)

Le Corbusier was a big supporter of the "new town" idea. His disregard for the existing towns and his fondness for of radical transformation plans for old towns (such as the Voisin Plan for the

transformation of Paris) led him to prefer the idea of building entirely new towns. In 1929 he said: "We need to build on empty land! The city of today is dying because it is not constructed geometrically." His famous plans for an imaginary "Ville radieuse" are nothing but plans for a new town, in which planners were free to put any ideas into practice without being constrained politically or by residents' opposition or by the experts on the protection of monuments (as was the case of Paris).

Towards the end of his life, Le Corbusier finally managed to get close to his old dream of building a great city from scratch. The opportunity was given by the need to build in 1953 a capital for a new Indian state. This capital is Chandigarh, the capital of the new state of Punjab, but under direct Indian administration. Chandigarh is the newest Indian city. Although today the city looks very different than Le Corbusier designed it (its population has a 40% growth rate per decade), the city's fame is based on the idealistic and egalitarian initial project. In this city, government was given a powerful visual symbolism and the view of the downtown area was the focus in Le Corbusier's design vision.

One of the most recent capitals is Brasilia, built inside Brazil, in order to counteract the old rivalry between the coastal cities of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo. Various Brazilian writers had dreamed of a beautiful white capital in the centre of the continent even since the nineteenth century (1883).

In the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century this old dream took the shape of an imaginary, egalitarian city where class differences were erased. In a country with a long tradition of economic segregation, this goal seemed impossible. However, architect Oscar Niemeyer (1907-2013) was committed to achieve it. Taking advantage of all that was valuable in the tradition of modernist

and functionalist architecture, Niemeyer created a symbolic city, where poverty and ugliness were eradicated. As with the idealistic plans of Le Corbusier, life proved to be more complex than foreseen and Niemeyer's plan quickly transformed by Brazilian reality into something else than he intended. Some authors say that despite the original intent, the capital of Brazil became a city where economic segregation between rich residential areas and poor favelas has actually increased dramatically (Le Corbusier, 1971).

#### *4.2.4. New towns and the colonial town model*

Around 1900 the French exported their civic and municipal model to Madagascar and to other colonies (in North Africa). The main feature of this colonial city model was that the most important institutions were organized to form a prestigious center: clinics, kindergartens, orphanages, post office, city hall, culture house (maison de tous), police and prison (Lynch, 1981). After 1914, the Henri Prost, the architect of the Casablanca town, designed plans also for the new "modern" towns created by the French colonial system in the close proximity of traditional Arab towns, such as Fez, Meknes or Marrakech. The aim of these new towns was to attract the residents of traditional towns to a modern, "European" lifestyle to be found in the new town imbued with European urban values: entertainment, consumerism, civic pride.

The British also exported their new ideal town model into Commonwealth's colonies. Very small-sized capitals of this particular type emerged especially in Africa. Such African capitals are: Harare, Lusaka, Nairobi, Kampala. The central part of the town which was primarily a commercial area was surrounded by low density residential areas following the English model.

#### 4.2.5. Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, various foreign visitors made comments that the planning "ab initio" used to be very popular in post-revolutionary Russia. Most urban plans developed in the early decades were meant to be constructed on open land. Soviet theoreticians, like Nikolai Miliutin, promoted a series of new town concepts such as the Linear City (devised by Spanish city planner Arthur Soria, in the 19th century), in which industry, residential areas, commercial and recreation areas were arranged in parallel strips, following the course of a river and wind direction (Mathieson, 1969; Pensley, 1998). In the late '20s Miliutin was also for a while chairman of the State Commission for Construction of New Towns". There were ten principles that planners followed when creating new towns: population limit fixed by central authorities, state controlled housing, carefully planned residential areas, equitable spatial distribution of urban amenities, limited route from residence to place of work, strict urban zoning, rationalized traffic flow, extensive green areas, a symbolic center of propaganda, and finally, urban planning integrated into a national centralized planning (Harris, 1970).

As mentioned, the interest in Garden Cities in pre-revolutionary Russia seems to have influenced the later Soviet predilection for new towns planning. However, new towns built by political decree and decided by central powers, have long been there in Russia's urban history. What else is St. Petersburg but a new capital, erected upon the orders of Peter the Great? As many historians noted, Soviet planning actually inherited many features of the Russian imperial tradition. The grandiose projects of Socialist realism were described as "the logical culmination of an imperial Petersburg tradition that sought to symbolize the pomposity of state authority

in stone. Its neoclassical inspiration similarly testifies that the arrogant assertion of human order over nature, visible in the classicism of the Renaissance, continued to inspire imperial Russian and Soviet architects centuries later."

Especially during Khrushchev's rule, this urban ideology prevailed widely. Also in that period the concept of "agrogorod" appeared, which basically is a small new town in which people worked in a balanced way both in industry and agriculture. The concept did not survive very long. In the 70s, there was an attempt to apply in Moscow an idea that had long before been put into practice in London or New York, namely a network of new, smaller towns situated in the suburbs of large cities, created to take over the population in excess from the capital.

One of the most studied examples of this new type of Soviet town was Magnitogorsk. The town emerged in the '30s with the opening of new factories for iron mining and metallurgy in the area. In the initial phase, architects from Western countries were invited to design the town plans. German architect Ernst May worked here for a while. He suggested that the town should take the form of a Linear City. The downtown area, as in other socialist new towns, included the factory's administrative building, the building of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Supreme Soviet building, of course, with Stalin's statue in the middle.

Despite the official ideology which claimed that the new towns were going to provide better living conditions than in the past, at first, all these cities were just improvisations. Many new towns appeared simply as uncontrolled camping around a large new factory. Industry, not urban comfort dictated the shape of the town.

Sometimes, urban planners would simplify the design so much, that these new towns would often end up having a simplistic shape with the downtown area unfolding right outside the entrance to the factory, with residential areas arranged in a semicircle, fan-shaped display. Soviet civilization, some authors say, was practically a civilization of factories, metallurgy and heavy industry and not a genuine urban civilization, despite appearances (Harris, 1970).

Nevertheless, the workers' club and the culture house had always remained an important part of the central area of the new towns. In downtown, three important buildings could usually be found, in various combinations: the Party's headquarters, a hotel and a general store; or the workers club, a hotel and a shop. Apart for industrial or agricultural towns of fairly small size, there were other bigger cities which had a more marked political and propagandistic character. Often, these were old cities, almost completely bombed during the Second World War, that were intended to be radically transformed, as if being built from zero.

One such example is Stalingrad, built around the works for Volga-Don canal, but also Saporosje town in Ukraine. The central area of these cities was really impressive, crossed by a large avenue for military parades. Besides the grand center, these cities residential areas were divided geometrically and were ranked following the very popular pattern of the "neighborhood unit".

This New Town movement has greatly influenced urban planning in cities of Eastern Europe, especially in the first decades of socialism (1947-1965). It is known that the plans for the new Stalinstadt town in East Germany, were copied after

Saporosje town in Ukraine. East European experts were encouraged to copy Soviet urban plans for their own cities. The Germans developed the "10 principles of urban planning" (The Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic, 1950), after a study trip to Leningrad, Kiev and Stalingrad. Even Romanian specialists after an initial failure to create a sufficiently socialist-realist People's House, were invited to visit the Soviet Union to learn from the existing models (1953).

In Romania, the new town of Victoria was built with professionals from Kiev, while Kiev city itself was rebuilt after an older plan for the new Stalingrad city. Thus, urban design models circulated freely within the entire area of Soviet influence. Stalinstadt was one of the first East German cities built according to the "10 principles" developed in 1950. The spatial distribution of the town showed a powerful symbolism. A "large avenue" connected the industrial area to the central square. The central square, showing a strong civic component, had a Rathaus with a pitched, Gothic roof, on one side and a Kulturpalast covered by a large dome, on the other side. Between the two buildings stood the party's and the people's administrative offices, the post office, a hotel and a cafeteria. The entrance to the town coming from the industrial area had a strong monumental appearance. Such representative new towns were built in all the countries of the Soviet bloc. Dimitrovgrad in Bulgaria, Dunauyvaros in Hungary, Nowa Huta in Poland, to name a few.

#### *4. 3. The history of the concept in Romania*

The idea of new town in Romanian urban planning is generally associated with the Socialist period. Although the first new towns which followed the main ideology of those times appeared indeed in the 50s, the concept itself had been around for a long

time. During the Interwar period, many theoreticians and planners played with the idea of building new towns. In fact, any new political program, especially a radical one, seeks to demonstrate its superiority through some plan to reform existing towns, seen as not worthy enough for the new country. Such is the case for Romania, too. Actually, one of the most criticized old cities in Romania has been its capital, Bucharest. After the birth of the new unitary state in 1918, many authors considered that Bucharest was not a good choice for the new state capital. Many, such as Nicolae Iorga, or Cincinat Sfințescu proposed that the new capital be erected on vacant land or close to Bucharest or somewhere in the mountains. The idea of a capital in the mountains seemed attractive even to the leader of the Legionary Movement, Corneliu Codreanu, who, in 1940, proposed a new capital should be chosen where one could breathe more, real and symbolic, "pure air." The complicated and conflictual political situation of the Interwar period made that none of these ideas was put into practice.

At the end of the Second World War, Romania fell under the influence of the Soviet Union. Although most experts and architects who worked after the war had been educated in the spirit of modern architecture of the Interwar period, the new political orientation forced everyone to switch to the type of architecture and urban development advocated by Moscow. The idea of a radical separation from the past and from the inequalities generated by the capitalist way of life, inevitably led to the idea of reforming the Romanian towns so as to meet the egalitarian socialist ideal. Thus, a whole campaign of "socialist reconstruction of towns" began in 1952. New professional associations emerged, such as the State Committee for Architecture and Construction, managed by

the Ministry of Constructions and later, in 1959, the State Committee for Constructions, Architecture and Planning (CSCAS), as an independent body.

The first phase of socialist reconstruction (1949-1955) a "scientific" understanding of urban issues was attempted. For the first time planners and architects could experiment freely with older design concepts (Zahariade, 2011). The first new towns built were Victoria and Onesti. Experts now had total control over the residential areas and the entire town. In the early stages they favored an ideal new town with collective housing with 3 and 4 floors, with higher density of housing per square meter than in traditional suburbs. However, there several types of towns. There was the Garden City, a smaller version that was applied in Victoria town, and the compact residential block, built around an interior courtyard, which was also applied elsewhere. During the next period, 1956-1960, the "microdistrict" concept (the Soviet version of the old concept of "neighborhood unit") began to be used widely. New towns or new districts of older towns were built after this scientific design, consisting in groups of buildings concentrated around centers of different sizes. As Grigore Ionescu describes the concept, "the microdistrict is a complex residential unit, organically designed so that the inhabitants may be directly connected to socio-cultural and commercial institutions providing daily services - nurseries, kindergartens, small shopping centers, cinema - without being forced to cross the city's main access routes" (Ionescu, 1965; Ionescu, 1969).

In time, and especially after the presidency was taken over by Nicolae Ceausescu, the focus shifted increasingly on reorganizing and systematically plan the existing towns. Thus the idea of creating new towns began to lose ground. When new towns were

reported in statistics, they were rather larger villages artificially transformed into towns by decree, than new towns built from scratch. Also, a lot of interest was devoted to town centers, to significant buildings and less to the idea of egalitarian, scientific and coordinated housing on which the concept of new socialist city was based.

### 5. Case study: Victoria, Bălan and Motru towns

For the purpose, we have chosen 3 examples of new towns to be presented in higher detail in the following chapter: Victoria, Bălan and Motru (Figs. 6-8).

(1) Victoria town developed mainly between 1966-1970. In 1970, 80% of all employees worked in industry, 8% in constructions, 4% in municipal services, 4% in movement of goods and 4% in education and culture. In the following years, the number of employees grew significantly, with the largest growth in industry. Industrial activities were carried out in the main chemical plant producing nitrogen fertilizers, pesticides, glues, plastics, synthetic resins and other chemicals important to the national economy and especially for export to Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia, China, Egypt or Italy.

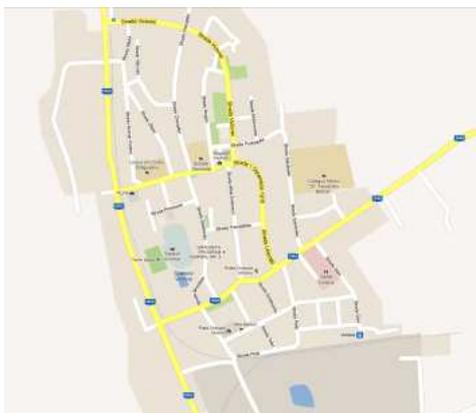


Fig. 6. Map of Victoria City, Source: <https://maps.google.com/>

A strong economic potential, accompanied by the development of other socio-cultural

activities, generated better living conditions. Thus, in 1966-1970, 364 apartments were built with state funds. Around that time, public buildings appeared and a square was built at one end of the town's axis, surrounded by public buildings reflecting the transition from the socialist-realist to the hruschevian ideology. A hotel, a store and a new culture house were also built in Victoria. Based on the noble goal of "palaces for the people" full streets of fairly good quality were also built here.

The town's image had been rather uniform until this period. The following period this image became dominated by rational ideas and economic restraints, at first insignificant, but which over time became destructive. Typical examples are the buildings with 2-3 floors with several entrances, built in the late '60s and early '70s. The style improved in the 70s style, three streets with houses with gardens were built, creating a comfortable living environment. The fastest development rate was achieved in the '80s, when other two neighborhoods are built in the suburbs. The materials used are among the cheapest, the functionality is minimalist, the outdoors is disorganized. 8 blocks with 4 floors were connected in series, absolutely identical, with a length that does not fit in a picture, forming the "walls" of the city's protection. As residents often complain, it is difficult even for them to find the entrance. By the early '90s, Victoria was the only town in Romania without a church.

One possible solution to revive the town can reside in taking advantage of the opportunities created by its geographic location. Only a few kilometers from Victoria there are some historical villages: Dragus was one of the most important ethnographic research stations for Dimitrie Gusti's teams in the 20-30es and at the Village Museum some of the first houses in

the area were brought. Also, the area includes a Roman castrum in Feldioara and Dealul Furcilor (the Forks Hill), where rebels in Bobalna historic riot were hanged. Aloes, the ruins of some fortified settlements in sec. III BCE - I C.E can be found there. Just 16 km from Victoria, over the Olt river, the ruins of the Cistercian monastery, founded in 1205-1206, remained, right before the great Mongol invasion. It is worth noting that the Cistercian monasteries were true farm models, bringing new agricultural technologies and best practices wherever they were settled (Dobre *et al.*, 2013).

(2) The destiny of Bălan town was determined exclusively by the copper mine. It is a classic example of Linear City similar to those proposed by Miliutin, unfolding along a main avenue. As in Victoria's case, the town developed rapidly, as the number of employees increased significantly in a very short period of time.

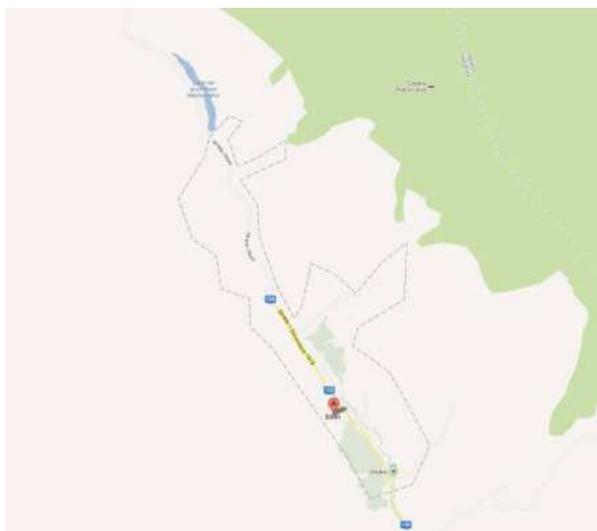


Fig. 7. Map of Bălan City, Source: <https://maps.google.com/>

People in Bălan town survived the centralized economy through "social networking", as the mine became a sort of corporation in which each person had full confidence, thus encouraging the emergence of social networks. Individuals

who formed such social networks were not very different from one another, resulting in a very unified community. Once the mine was closed, social networks lost their well-defined role, because, by losing the support from the mine, they were far less efficient, community-wise. Thus, a good portion of people lost their common cultural identity. In Bălan no collectivizations were made in the communist agriculture reform process.

At present, the town has two districts: one in the south, "Texas", almost abandoned and with derelict buildings, which was the last one to be populated and the first to be abandoned; the other district is "California", with better looking blocks of flats and some old houses which sprung before the 50s. Conditions for tourism can be created, as just a few kilometers there are a number of tourist attractions: the National Park near Bălan has the highest concentration of the rare "corner flower" in Romania; the nearby mountains actually offer conditions for winter sports, paragliding and fishing. Local economy thrives today only due to the restaurant and the sale of forest products. Thus, a possible development can arise from exploiting the town's tourism potential, provided that better services and improved access ways to neighboring towns are provided.

3) Starting September the 1st, 1968, Motru city included also Ploștina town with villages Tree Hill, Leurda, Insuratei, Horasti, Red, Rapa and Lupoita which became part of the city when the mining area opened. The lignite reserves in Motrului Valley were put to good use by the implementation of several investment projects which began in 1960 with the opening of three mines (Horăști, Leurda, Ploștina), initially, followed by the appearance of Roșița Mine and West Motru Mine and in 1976, the opening of the Lupoia Quarry.



**Fig. 8.** Map of Motru City, Source: <https://maps.google.com/>

In the years 1960-1961, the construction of the first accommodations for mining workers in Insurăței began. The first microdistrict with 2,500 apartments was completed in 1967. With the development of access routes, namely the Bucharest - Timișoara railway line, from which, at Strehăia station, a secondary line branches off, with the end of the line in Motru, the transport of coal extraction improved greatly, giving the city a dynamic development. Hence, Motru acquired a solid mining town profile. Motru city ranks second in Gorj county for its economic and social importance County Florida. In terms of services provided, in 1970 the "Progresul" Craft Complex which produced garments, shoes, carpentry, crafts opened. Requests for goods supply from surrounding villages were provided by Consumer Cooperatives through services such as: carpentry, tailoring, radio troubleshooting, hairdressing, constructions. A third unit was the Motru Commercial State Enterprise. The total commercial area occupies an area of about 6,000 square meters.

Today, the city has a large agricultural area (2955 ha) and an above average forestry real estate (780 ha). Also, there are many untapped springs. Fauna in this area includes species of fish and a wide variety of other animals. Thus, one can imagine the future Motru city as a city with agrotourism potential. Its attractiveness may come from

exploiting areas such as agriculture, forestry, agrotourism, mineral water, hunting, caving. A great bet for locals is the introduction of the city in a tour linking Mehedinți County, Drobeta and Herculane to Tismana Hobița, Targu Jiu and Hunedoara or Râmnicu Valcea.

### **6. Current status: common features**

The towns presented above are examples of urban spaces of low quality, lacking the identity, history and status of an actual "city". In terms of spatial display, the idea behind their planning was to create homogeneous and decent living conditions for all. Thus, the type of housing offered by these towns was that of small communal accommodations in blocks of up to 4 floors, sometimes with household spaces used by several families. The idea of central planning for this kind of town is visually expressed by a well-defined center, with imposing public buildings located in the most visible areas of the town. Generally, the downtown area includes a town hall, a party's county office, a culture house, a hotel, a library, a general store, etc. This is the only place in the city that attracts attention, unlike the residential areas which are designed as a homogeneous, undifferentiated mass. The industrial area is also highly developed.

What is characteristic of these cities is their small-sized architecture and quasi-classic style specific to the '50s period, followed by a sort of popular architecture which is increasingly degrading due to the requirement to make savings in housing production by an almost complete lack of interest for visual elements and aesthetics. First of all, the causes that led to this situation are complicated and are similar for many of the new towns planned: defective financial strategy; a lack of strategic goals and/or special constituency; inadequate support from the State and

local authorities; poor leadership; insufficient resources to deal with a weak national economy, the interests of private developers (Evans and Rodwin, 1979).

Especially in Romania, one of the main causes was also the failure of fast-paced industrialization policies pursued during the communist period. Secondly, the changed situation after 1989 has found these towns poorly prepared for ensuring residents a new kind of attraction, based on the services sector and not on production. Thirdly, the general lack of interest towards these towns, the low budget of the town councils and the common view that they are inferior compared to the "real" cities which emerged gradually, over time and benefited from a local identity and history.

The result of this situation is the degradation of life in these towns and of the public perception towards them. Population is dropping dramatically, especially young people with secondary and higher studies who leave town to go to larger and more famous cities. Specialized, skilled personnel is hard to find in these towns. Tourism avoids these towns and hence, the human and social potential is very low. Even if, at a first glance, tourism seems a life-saver solution, there are some obstacles to making tourism a viable economic alternative in the long-term and environmentally sustainable: although the surrounding landscape may be attractive, most of these towns are actually ugly, with communist blocks of flats, derelict or abandoned areas, thus limiting the type of tourism services that can be practiced. Another problem is the lack of an infrastructure that is easily accessible to the community. Finally, the lack of preparation in the field can also be an impediment to reviving these towns.

This situation especially is a problem for people. There is a pronounced sense of inferiority among people living in all these towns. Most of them, especially the young ones, feel imprisoned in these semi-urban areas and look forward to any opportunity to leave the town for good. The residents' identity is negative and many, once they leave the town, avoid to be identified with their place of origin. The general negative public opinion increases the perceptions of these towns as sub-cultural, semi-ghetto places.

Here are some descriptions from the newspapers, relevant to the perception of these people and places, made by representatives of the municipality:

Bălan town in the opinion of its mayor, Mr. Michael Meres: "Bălan's history is a sad succession of names and events, a series of gray images, 2 pipes, a street, people in the cold, harsh and aggressive, with guts and disarming courage which betrays their savagery and primitivism.

This seems to be our image in the minds of those who hear the story of the people in Bălan, for someone who does not know us.[...] Hungry people, poor people, people living with no clothes on, hoping to catch the next morning ... their days were labeled as a short chain of vulgar misfortunes. Sad stories about people with many children, weak, clumsy, bitter and ridiculous amid the beauty of too much common sense - a sublime stigma in the eyes of those who do not know the origin of this divine gift ... Without heroes, because their life story is too short to allow it, but with dead whose huge number and anonymity frightens any statistics...

And yet, contrary to these images, we have survived! Children of today, who are

replacing the strangers - gold seekers of the "El Dorado" of the 60s-70s, have and present another image of what Bălan town really is. Schools have become their only chance to escape from the misery which some used to see as predestined and eternal... How could one imagine and describe today a town with such a terrible history and image in the past, someone who would find out that over half of the old hamlet's residents, are today's city young men under 25 years, who have nothing in common with the past but the legends of our times, who remember some fragments of humility and the celebration of St. Varvara, a sad moment of silence in the memory of their dead parents, grandparents or siblings? I do not know how are they going to do this, I don't know what their dreams are, but what I know for sure is that we must learn to tell them, to show them our genuine, inner beauty, the beauty around us, our closeness which makes us so different, but so similar in our love for this place. We must show our children that nobody can take what is ours in any way, neither by words, nor by pictures or by the pursuit of sensational stories: the truth." (Excerpt from the article "The fortress at the foot of Hasmaș, Bălan" by mayor Michael Meres).

Major Ion Iorga about Motru town, "Motru, the cardboard city, greets you unfriendly, a communist settlement, one of the saddest, with a series of long cardboard shacks, sinister as if in a concentration camp, the last remnant of a civilization which excelled by its lack of civilization. (...) The most undisciplined workers were sent here. We called them *sandocans*. They were many and looking for trouble. (...) The town was built in a single night. The founders came in trucks, in a caravan from Hunedoara and Maramures. In the middle of a plain a market, then a school, then a city were

built. And because everything has to have a name, the city received the name of the river that flowed through the plain: Motru. (...) (Excerpt from the article "On the footsteps of the Sandocans", published in the Tourism Club magazine, 2002).

About Victoria - the town where nothing ever happens, "Victoria is the first new town appeared on the map of the Popular Republic of Romania. Everything that happens here, in the town located at the foot of Făgăraș mountains, is directly related to the existence of the chemical plant. There is no house, nor apartment unoccupied by a worker, an engineer or a technician in the field of chemistry (...) One is taken by surprise by the peace that rules the place. That is because the local people are at work." (Excerpt from \*\*\*, 1965).

As a result of this image crisis, few people outside will accept offers to work here, which affects especially the tertiary sector and the few qualified people from these towns will do their best to never return there.

In order to maintain its town characteristics, there is great need of specialized personnel in the town hall and police force, in schools and colleges, hospitals and clinics, in the few cultural centers that are still functional in these towns. If the exodus will not be stopped, the authorities will have to face in the near future a situation where the towns' population will be made up of retired and unproductive people. If the situation does not improve soon, these towns will be either abandoned, or their urban character will almost completely disappear.

The attached charts reveal a similar evolution in all areas studied: employees in industry and agriculture, equipment,

housing, population dynamics, etc (Figs. 9, 10).

## 7. Conclusions

From the comparative analysis of several new towns we can draw the following conclusions.

New Towns are the result of the forceful application of a state policy expressed by governmental decisions. New Towns have been created on the basis of an established policy concerning the purpose, role, location, and the physical characteristics of new settlements. Implementation measures, funds and management procedures are all crucial elements for the new towns' progress. Allocating the incoming future population of large urban centers in a rational manner and stimulating economic and social progress seem to have been the main reasons for establishing New Towns in Europe (Kafkoulas, 2009).

The problems of new towns are a consequence of the specific economic activities developed there over time, of the heterogeneous population, limited resources unable to ensure other degree of economic development than the existing one and of the slow adaptation to change.

One possibility that has not been sufficiently studied is supporting the natural tendency to restrict towns with problems, with an unsustainable development, up to the level at which they can re-Balance (Efrat, 1973).

The lack of urban land policies or of special policies formulated for the purpose creates difficulties for urban economy. A national policy on urban and suburban land ensures the efficient, fair

and sustainable real-estate market, from an environmental point of view. In order to implement such a policy it is necessary to eliminate distortions from the land market and to establish efficient system management tools for the use and protection of these policies (Alonso, 1960). To solve these problems, firstly a government intervention is required and then each administration unit will get involved in developing strategies to respond to specific local problems. Moreover, guidelines can be drawn up for creating future programs to make these towns more attractive. From discussions with people, with representative of official bodies and from the existing studies it is clear that these towns have potential for tourism and can be transformed for tourism purposes in the long-term. However, for the time being, until the crisis is over, these towns need help to change their mono-functional profile into a varied and Balanced one.

A vision for these towns may include: a new identity, the creation of an attractive environment for small businesses and also for large investors, a community deeply involved in the reconstruction process, better connections with the region the towns belong to, making the best use of the local natural potential, of the human and cultural local values to attract visitors, a well-developed service sector, unpolluted towns, with a solid infrastructure, with important transport networks, civil construction with modern architecture. This ideal can be achieved only through a sustained economic development, accompanied by a policy for a change of image to ensure that the central and local authorities have their well-established role.

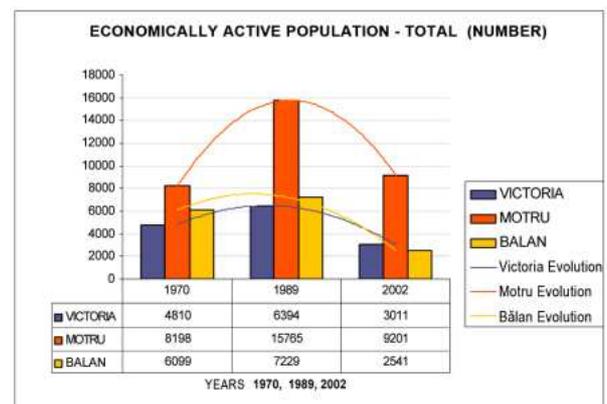
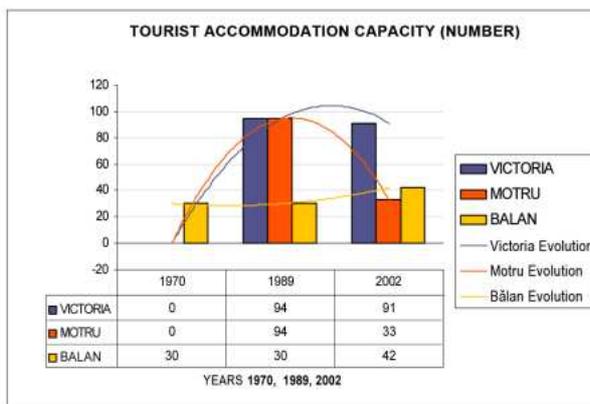
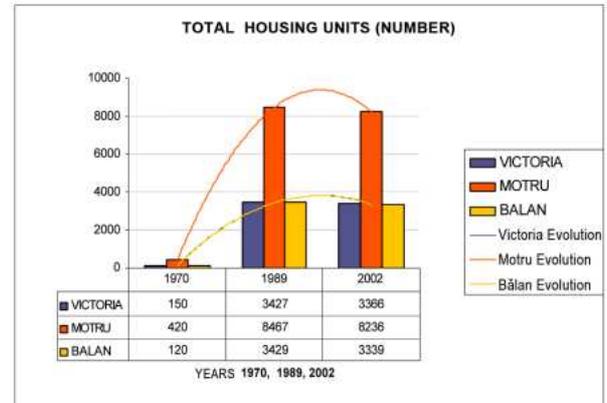
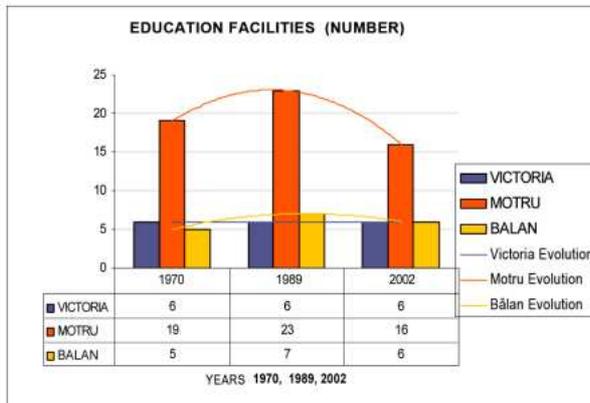
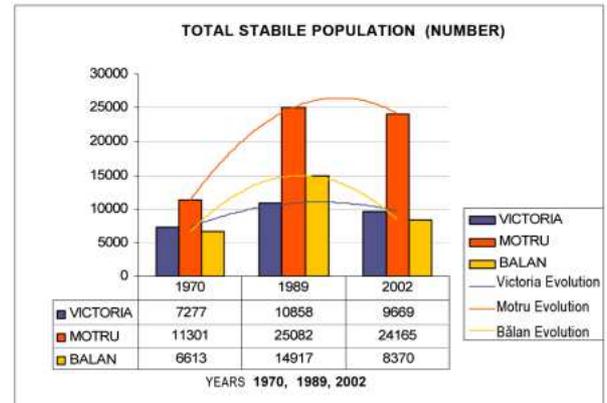
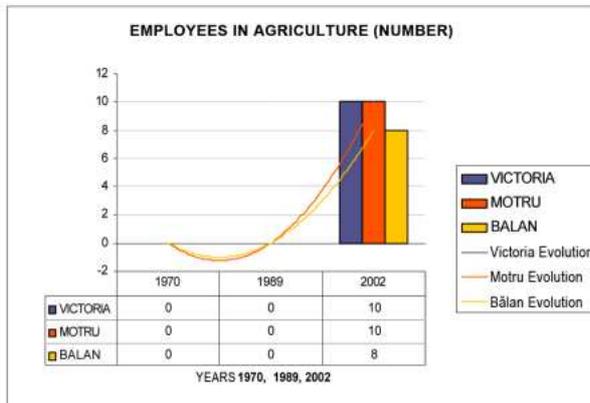
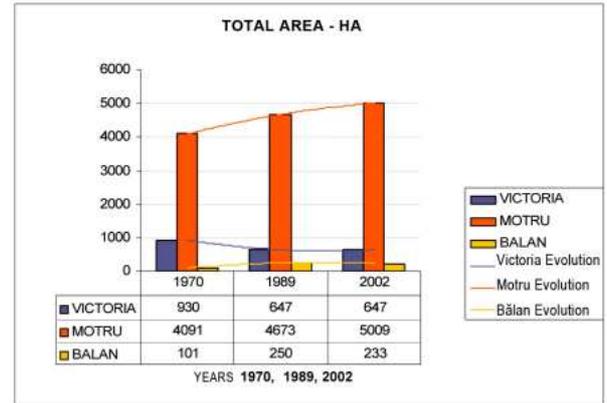
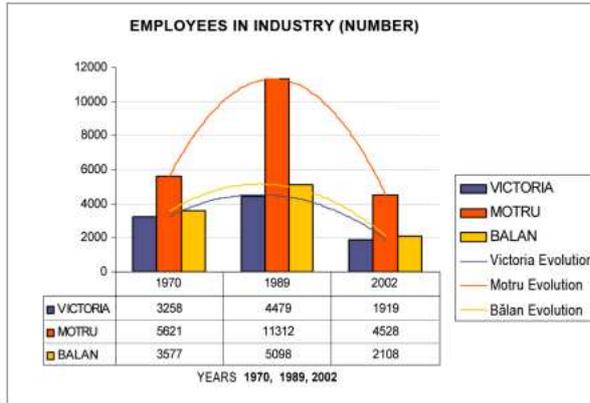


Fig. 9. Comparative study: Victoria, Bălan, Motru, Source: The National Institute of Statistics

Fig. 10. Comparative study: Victoria, Bălan, Motru, Source: The National Institute of Statistics

Also, this requires to define policies which allow intervention through regulatory and legislative measures and the allocation of structural funds (ERDF, ESF, EAGGF, ISOP etc) and other Community programs (PHARE, TACIS, URBAN II etc.): economic development policies, social assistance and work retraining, housing, land, ecology, tourism development, agriculture, urban revitalization, marketing, industrial restructuring etc. The analysis we performed revealed also some reasons as to why the efforts of several governments over the past decade have not achieved visible results. Current strategies focus more on short-term actions, for political reasons. The uncertain economic climate in which they operate prevents municipalities to pursue long term strategies. Even when funds were allocated, the money was spent ineffectively.

The solution may be to form a partnership between central and local powers, with the main goal of stimulating job creation and the development of the private sector, taking into account the existing delay in creating a business environment capable to stimulate private investment. One obvious positive trend is that a large number of town councils are united by formal twinning agreements, within an European Union program, stimulating active participation and creating opportunities by encouraging exchange of experience. Town twinning is often used in Technical Assistance Programmes and is part of the "Fast policy"- "a concept that can be usefully applied to these programs and to the broader field of interurban networking, urban mobility policy and policy transfer" (Clarke, 2009).

Besides these strategic considerations, the present paper is also an attempt to draw

attention to the subject. Although local and central administrations showed some interest, the general inefficiency of the solutions tried so far is due to a failure to bring the discussion to broader areas, beyond the narrow circles of experts. One of the fundamental problems of these towns is an image problem that is likely to undermine any current efforts. Future strategies should try to involve a larger segment of population, especially residents in these towns, because their problems can be tackled, from socio-cultural perspective, through a change of image and mentality. In this respect, if further specialized studies succeed in drawing the attention of the general public and experts, development strategies will have a better chance to be successful. Therefore, the present paper aims at being a minimal incentive towards this higher purpose.

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