

A conceptual viewpoint on the urban periphery. Craiova, Romania as a case study

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Received on <14-05-2013>, reviewed on <20-07-2013>, accepted on <23-10-2013>

Abstract.

The article target is to address real and timely issues concerning the edges of the postmodern city by providing an invitation for thought, insight and overriding action in what concerns the urban geography and urban planning in Romania.

The study addresses the scientific ingeneration to define and understand the concept of urban periphery and subsequently reflect on the characteristic elements that individuate it.

It initiates a microscalar analysis, an original element which gives an insight in the mechanisms of its genesis, then customizes its features and afterwards, by stating subcomponents, clearly delineates the periphery of Craiova, a development urban pole in Romania.

Keywords: *urban periphery (fringe), banlieue, urban sprawl, sustainable urban development, dynamics, suburbanization, Craiova*

Rezumat. Considerații privind conceptul de periferie urbană. Craiova, România - studiu de caz

Articolul subliniază câteva probleme de actualitate privind limitele orașului postmodern, adresând și constituindu-se într-o invitație la problematizare, reflecție și acțiune prioritară în domeniul geografiei urbane și planningului urban din România.

Studiul pleacă de la provocarea de a defini conceptul de periferie urbană, pentru a reflecta ulterior asupra câtorva elemente caracteristice ale acesteia, care o individualizează.

Se vizează o analiză microscalară, ceea ce constituie un element de originalitate, pornind de la provocarea științifică de a cunoaște mecanismele de geneză, de a individualiza mai apoi elementele caracteristice și finalizând, prin identificarea câtorva subcomponente, cu delimitarea periferiei urbane a municipiului Craiova, pol urban de creștere în România.

Cuvinte-cheie: *periferie urbană, zona suburbană, extindere urbană necontrolată (dispersie spațială), dezvoltare urbană durabilă, dinamică, suburbanizare, Craiova*

Introduction

The proliferation of Romanian cities' peripheries represents a present-day geographic phenomenon, a typical and challenging matter of nowadays urban development, though not very much analyzed in itself or just barely hinted at within Romanian geographical literature.

The previous scientific hiatus consists in not seeing the periphery as a distinct and clearly identifiable spatial component of the city but rather as a depositary of various geographical phenomena, usually tackled in the context of suburbanism and associated contradictions. In fact, the urban periphery should be seen as a consequence or more likely as a pattern of urban growth and ultimately, as a phenomenon itself. A self-contained entity, the urban periphery chiefly states a problem of location and geographical identity/identification and consists in an original microanalysis approach.

The American and West-European schools of urban geography, but also the few, yet significant Romanian studies provided the basis for this research and the opportunity to establish theoretical foundations for the subject. Most important, the metabolic process of understanding the concept of urban periphery imposed a permanent report to Romania's peculiarities.

What is the urban periphery? Boundaries and borders. Context. The other side of the periphery.

Firstly, there is usually a confusion made between several concepts such as area of influence, suburban area, urban fringe, banlieue and urban periphery and that is partly because both as term and phenomenon, they were transferred from a foreign context, which implied another social-economic conditioning and therefore, dissimilar emergent territorial realities.

While the American term of *suburbs* refers to the outward development and how counterurbanisation affects the village communities (Hill, 2005, 2003, Neamțu, 2012), the extended, monotonous areas enclosing the cities, lodging most part of the middle-class American society, the French *banlieue* designates a medieval judicial notion, an extra-muros territory, distinct from the *faubourg* (Derruau, 1996) and more recently, an urbanized belt depending on the center, obtained, in French statistics, by separating the city-center in the urban agglomeration. However, the term *periphery* hints at a geometrical and more mechanical definition of the city, designating the boundary of the urban agglomeration and implying the functional relations with the city-centre (Vieillard-Baron, 2006). Further, the *periurban* identifies with the areas surrounding

the urban agglomeration, facing a discontinuous urbanization, but still dependent from the centre.

The first, major confusion concerns the location of the urban periphery. Avram, 2009 points out the necessity to correctly use the terminology and distinguishes between urban outskirts (outskirts of the urban) and town outskirts by using the city's administrative limit to differentiate the inner urban from the space located out of the city.

Taken literally, we are dealing with a zone at the edge of the city centre, an area which is *not* the centre (Foot, 2000). As stated by Clark in Pacione, 1999, p. 301: "a precise definition and map are not possible, but generally, the urban fringe means those areas just beyond the built-up part of a city, although still close enough to the city to be subject to intense development pressures. The fringe is not a line on a map; it is a zone of radially diminishing urban-style activities. It is the existence of a fringe that prevents to distinguish the urban from the rural, since the fringe has features of both. Yet, it is more than an amalgam of the two; the fringe is a distinctive place with features of its own. It is, above all, a place of heightened land-use conflict, uncertainty and profit potential, hence its interest to geographers".

The amalgamating connotations of the periphery also derive from its frequent use into current language and its inoculation in the public mental representation as a marginal, pejorative spatial component of the city. Still, a city's periphery is not to be mistaken for the identity that sociologists invest it with, but, at the same time, the geographical reality does not impose a clear demarcation from it.

Though often associated with very delicate social phenomena ("Bronx/badlands/zona a rischio", Foot, 2000, Mionel, 2012, 2013) such as ghettos, social segregation, discrimination, gated communities, poverty, unemployment, the urban periphery should be mainly analyzed as part of the urban metabolism and in a broader, regional context, to render its importance and its valuable contribution in the urban domino.

In Romania, the essential question regarding the concept of *urban periphery* and its correct delineation is connected to either the appurtenance of the periphery to the urban seen as administrative entity or its inclusion into the rural area adjacent to the city. In this case, is the periphery a part or can it be identified with the settlements surrounding the city in the context of rapid metropolitan development? And if the periphery is seen as antonymous to the urban, which are the quantitative thresholds to delineate one territorial structure from another? It becomes therefore legitimate to ask: is the periphery urban or rural? And whatever the

answer may be, how is the periphery placed within the administrative clipping?

According to the Romanian Dictionary of Human Geography, the urban periphery represents "that marginal part of the cities which expanded spontaneously and anarchically, by growing beyond the initial urban territory or the walled precincts. This genetical pattern is typical for circular cities or tentaculate ones, favoured by the road and railway infrastructure, with the public transport network converging towards the city. Another genetical pattern of the urban periphery may be represented by the extension of the city by enclosing its marginal villages, which become peripheral neighbourhoods once included in the urban territory" (Erdeli et al., 1999, p. 234).

The urban periphery is viewed as a territory organized by the centrifugal and centripetal forces, the flows structuring the city; the city's prosperity is in a great measure reflected in its support-territory [...] both entry and exit for the flows of energy and matter, being interpreted as one of the city's subsystems and a subsystem of the territorial system, in which the city itself is integrated (Ianoş, 2004).

Thus, it is very important to state from the very beginning that, dynamic par excellence, vague and flexible, the periphery should not be hedged in an indisputable delimitation, but moreover seen as a phenomenon, as a conventional frontier, an interface between urban and rural (Stoica et al., 2010, Allen, 2003, Stan, 2006). Just as the terms "urban" and "rural" are vaguely and manifold defined (Hall, 2009), so the occurrence of the peripheries is impregnated with the national distinctiveness in which they emerged and developed.

Anyhow, the periphery clearly takes shape as a result of the influx of urban into the immediate rural, by the overflow of urban attributes towards the rural.

The triggers and participative factors in shaping and generating the character of the urban periphery.

The form, structure, dimensions, organization and extension of the urban peripheries experience various forms of territorial manifestation, being dictated by a series of factors. Just as the periphery in itself, the factors determining and influencing its genesis are, in turn, always dynamic and individuating, depending on the city under analysis.

While in more economically developed countries the proliferation of peripheries manifests in the context of a finalising urban transition and the enhancing of a reversed trend, of rururbanisation (Istrate, 2008), in Romania, the present peripheries of the cities are first of all due to the inflow of

allothigenes (rurals) and its immediate consequences, namely the need for space and housing.

The urban triggers (both endogenous and exogenous) which contribute to customizing the area surrounding the cities are:

- a) *economic*: economic growth and increasing income, economic profile and economic importance of the settlement, the role of the city within the region, the agricultural or non-agricultural potential of the surrounding area, price of land;
- b) *transportation*: large use of car transport and private car ownership;
- c) *demographical* (the increasing size of the city, increasing mobility of the population at a regional level-both inward/centripetal and outward/centrifugal);
- d) *social* (heterogeneous ethnical or religious structure of the city);
- e) *inner city problems*: small apartments, lack of open space, high levels of taxation, damaged infrastructures;
- f) *political-administrative and legislative* (post-communist free will of residential choice, Integrated Plan of Urban Development/PIDU-Craiova as a growth pole, Development Strategy of Craiova, National Development Plan, Leipzig Charta for Sustainable European Cities);
- g) *contextual* (geographical location, local resources, density and age of the rural settlements surrounding the city, infrastructure density);
- h) *other*: globalization.

Characteristics and aspect. In short: problematic, debatable, contested.

Varying from one city to another, from one country to another, however, the urban peripheries do share a number of underlying characteristics:

- an interface, a territory in transition between urban and rural, hybrid (Dumont&Hellier, 2010), subsidiary and always in metamorphosis; in other words, either a rural in an incipient stage of development or an urban still preserving significant rural impressions, which founded it primarily;
- a preurban/protourban territory (Hill, 2005, Majuru, 2003), the entity including a retroactive principle, which can be seen as a biunique belt: the periphery both reflects the past that has created it and expresses the germs of the city's future;
- movable, changing, unsteady, blurred, its outline being dynamic par excellence. It represents a social-spatial reality with remarkably protean forms of manifestation (Nicolae, 2002);
- vulnerable, given the exposal to both endogenous and exogenous driving forces shaping the city;
- fast paced, therefore ephemeral, as a result of its passing spatial limits determined by the permanent progression of the urban towards the rural;

- it may represent the result of the urban sprawl (extensive, uncontrolled urban growth);
- it lacks cohesion from several points of view: structural, functional, ecological, psychological, social, cultural, representing a territory subordinated to the city, as depositary for its labour force and new comers or rural origins;
- the dilution of the population density and buildings once the city overflows to the adjacent area;
- lacking the typical urban roots, the usual traditions, culture, landscape and monuments of the urban environment, without the symbolical urban buildings.

A methodology to locate the urban periphery – a point of view.

As a clearly identifiable piece of the urban puzzle and taking into consideration its characteristics, it is very interesting to establish a methodology which helps the delineation of the urban periphery.

First of all, it is important to emphasize the difficulty to precisely identify both the inner (towards the city) and the outer (towards the rural area) boundaries of the periphery as clear delineation of urban from rural is no longer necessarily antithetic in postmodern cities. The process of decentralization is mainly responsible for the post-industrial relevance of the conventional dichotomy center-periphery, not necessarily antagonical anymore.

Without claiming its infeasible completeness or that these can be definitively applied on a global scale, a series of useful variables (criteria) have been itemized in order to distinguish the perspective of the urban periphery in an analytical context:

- a. the concept of periphery firstly implies a sense of *distance* and *hierarchy*, as in horizontal perspective, the city usually defines by its centrality, therefore sets the periphery by opposition;
- b. the *structural* component induces a spatial order, by imposing a triadic succession of layers: center, pericenter, periphery;
- c. *physiognomical variables*: large areas of greenfields, barrens; the rapid scale change in the sense that the built-up area reduces its upright dimensions, determining an unexpected saltation of the urban gradient; the increasing dilution degree of the built-up area reflected in the decreasing land use coefficient (CUT);
- d. from the *functional* point of view, there is a clear tendency towards monospecialization from center to periphery and also, a clearer delineation between functions (mostly commercial and storage units, new residential areas);
- e. the *attenuation of urban characteristics*: deficient urbanistic amenities and diminishing public spaces;
- f. the *demographical* features point out changes in urban density and a typical economic structure, with

a higher occupancy degree within primary sector on the one hand or an increasing tertiary, on the other hand, when the case;

g. the *economic* development indicates greater discrepancies of the peripheral inhabitants' monthly incomes, which also reflects in the housing appearance and lower prices of the land, which constitutes an important determinant of outward flows;

h. regarding the *spatial morphology*, the dichotomic peripheries usually imply a greater distance between households, a diminished contiguity of the built-up area, a more ordered pattern of the street network;

i. nowadays peripheries highlight great *social* distances between the inhabitants of the old peripheries, traditionally living in the villages that have been absorbed in the process of urban growth and the inhabitants of the new peripheries, those citizens looking for larger spaces and less vitiated environment; moreover, the social contrasts also bring along a certain social isolation and an obvious ethnical segregation of gipsy communities.

Specific traits in the urban development of Craiova municipality.

Although at the level of the public conscience and real life experience Craiova's periphery identifies with an unquestionable mental border, usually associated with an important percent of the gipsy population or a lack of infrastructure, the analysis of Craiova's periphery is important and necessary as a consequence of the spatial events taking place in the peripheries of post-socialist cities. The case study comes to better understand the mechanisms and to singularize the general remarks regarding the notion of urban periphery.

Lying in the South-West Development Region, Craiova municipality represents one of the largest cities in Romania, a development urban pole whose frequent and intense relations with the adjacent area determined a unipolar urban agglomeration, with obvious perspectives of development along main transportation arteries. Taking this into consideration, a more interesting question emerges: how old is the periphery of Craiova and how early in the historical evolution of the city can we talk about its periphery?

Craiova reached its actual territorial extension by successively integrating rural settlements situated nearby and the transformation of interstitial spaces into urban ones. Moreover, the rapid growth of the population, together with an exponential increase in residential areas determined an intensification of the connections with the surrounding area and a spatial

development of the city, which implied the ceaseless transformation of the urban peripheries.

The geographical location was determinant for Craiova's spatial configuration and the spatial tendencies of development for the city's peripheries, through the favorability induced by: a natural contact area, between the Romanian Plain and the Getic Piedmont, the complementary resources and the initial junction of commercial roads, perpetuated to current high accessibility.

The main initial obstacle in the city's territorial development was represented by the low meadow of the Jiu river, with the phreatic waters situated close to the surface, marshes and frequent floods (Mara (Șoșea), 2010). This unfavourable territory was thus preferred by the unintegrated, socially secluded gipsy population. The railway in the north of the city was the second spatial topophobic line, at least in the early period.

Moreover, the legislative, administrative context, the political regime changes demonstrate the role of ideologies in shaping the city. Craiova suffered an ample, controversial distortion of the urban structure during the communist period, artificially inducing demographical, economic and spatial changes, thus influencing the urban fabric. The implications of different long-term development perspectives firstly implied the insertion of large industrial units, spontaneously urging for new residential. This is how the former neighbourhoods known as "mahalale" (Valea Roșie, Rovine, Brazda lui Novac) or villages (Craiovița Nouă) gained a typical communist aspect, with blocks of apartments often improper as comfort is concerned (former peripheries within the internal urban ring or pericenter in Fig. 1). The years following the Romanian revolution, a chaotic, disharmonic development of the peripheries was mainly favored by the unclear legislation and the industrial collapse.

In 2002, several surrounding villages were administratively included in Craiova, becoming its current peripheries: Șimnicul de Jos, Izvorul Rece, Rovine 2, Cernele, Cernele de Sus, Mofleni, Popoveni, Făcăi. Lately, the economic changes and the tertiary development especially along main circulation arteries determined the radial growth or ribbon development of Craiova's territory until reaching a territorial conflict with the neighboring settlements (Marinescu, 2006, Habibi&Asadi, 2011).

Structurally decomposing the urban entity into a series of concentric rings around the center, the initial "raison d'être" and faithfully following the diachronical pace of urban growth that Craiova has gone through, there was established a model of spatial internal organization of the city:

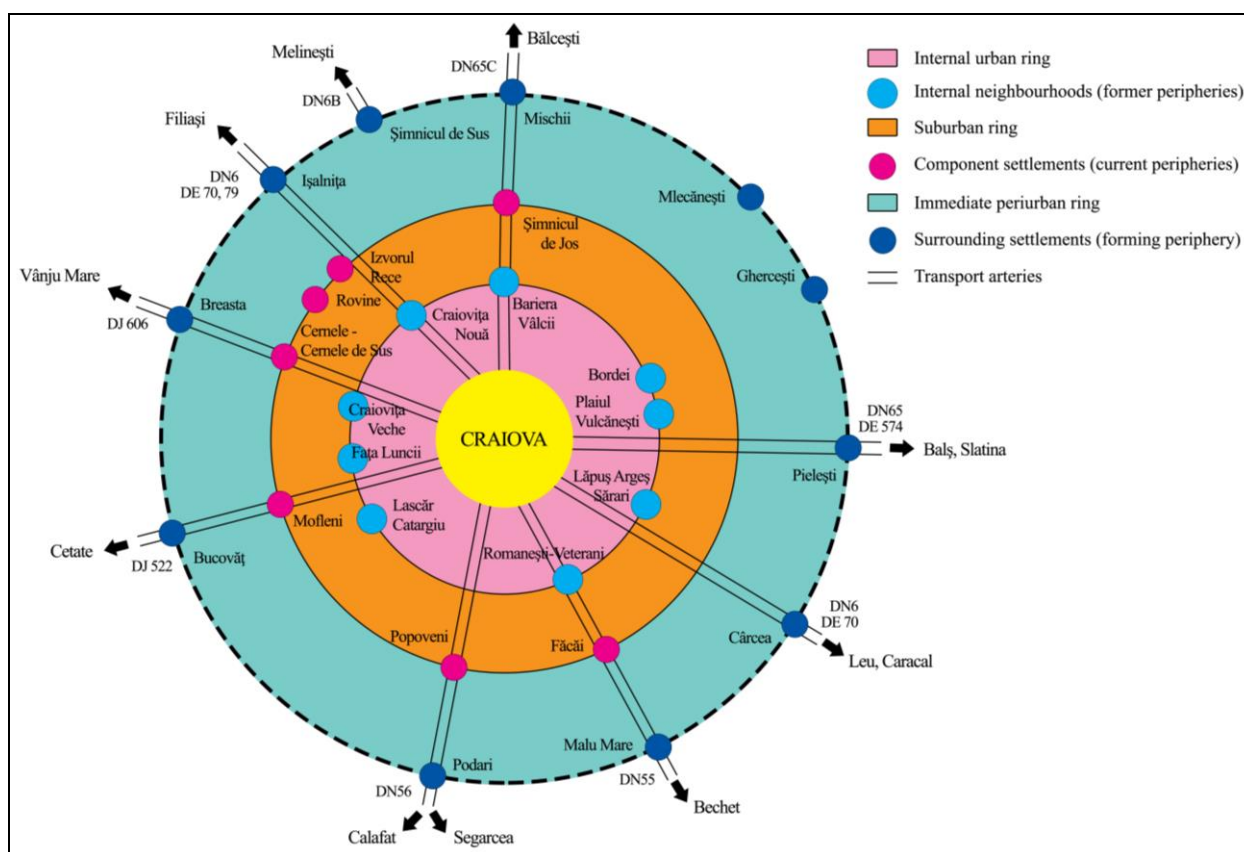


Figure 1: A model of spatial internal organization of Craiova municipality

The model also reflects a classical distinction (Foot, 2000) between former peripheries (Romanești-Veterani, Lascăr Catargiu, Bariera Vâlcii in the internal urban ring) and new peripheries (Izvoru Rece, Mofleni, Popoveni in the suburban ring).

Moreover, from a functional point of view, we can talk about: residential peripheries (Metro area in Pielești, Selgros areas in Cârcea - Fig. 2a), tertiary peripheries (radial extension of Calea Severinului, Calea București – Fig. 2b). In contrast with the comfortable peripheries (Fig. 2c), a particular place is occupied by the peripheries characterized by social segregation (Fig. 2d), in which the gypsy communities form a compact spatial corner in the South-West and South of Craiova.

Conclusion

Urban peripheries are dynamic entities that are constantly changing and evolving. Although the urban periphery represents an easily recognizable area within the city, it cannot be easily identified

using the classical criteria of a neighbourhood or a functional zone.

Much too often regarded as an intrinsic pejorative, unbecoming, marginal area, the article suggests a much more thorough understanding of the urban periphery, beyond the preconceptions that usually characterize the opinions or current language of the inhabitants. Moreover, the periphery is strongly individualized, being influenced by the historical past and the social-economic variables.

Correctly understanding and identifying the urban periphery seems the first useful step in developing the policies for controlling its problems. The solutions for the integration of the urban periphery and the future city's sustainable development will have to take into consideration Craiova's rhythm and particularities of urban growth together with its structural rural inheritance. As the youngest territory of the city, the article proposed an open interpretation of the urban periphery more as a resuscitate source for Craiova's development rather than a sinful area.



Figure 2: Typological distinctions in Craiova's peripheries: residential (a) vs. tertiary (b), comfortable - "la périphérie aisée" (c) vs. poor (d)

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