

**PRESENTS AND FUTURES OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
MULTI-LEVEL INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES WITHIN
INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT**

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Local and regional development is an important topic for both academics and decision makers which, through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, enables the connection between science and practice. The variety of issues worldwide (e.g. territorial disparities and competition, post-communism and transition, governance and spatial planning) respond to significant social and economic concerns such as: the improvement of living conditions, decentralisation, inequalities and inequities, intensifying environmental pressures (Pike *et al.*, 2011, Rodríguez-Pose, Hardy, 2015). When addressed at multiple spatial levels, these topics are capable of revealing specific processes and patterns induced by the scale and particularity of the territory. As a consequence, local and regional contexts continue to matter in shaping both patterns of development and the variety of policy responses (Pike *et al.*, 2017).

In view of it, the **International Geographical Union's (IGU) Commission on Local and Regional Development** provides an international forum of scholars aimed at advancing research, scholarship and knowledge in a variety of domains concerning local and regional development: reorganization of space, local development in the urban and rural space, and the role of institutions and agencies in developing and reshaping the settled space (<http://igu-clrd.igipz.pan.pl/home.html>).

In 2017, a *Thematic Conference on Land Use/Cover Changes, Biodiversity, Health and Environment, Local and Regional Development* gathering four commissions of the IGU – Land Use and Cover Change, Local and Regional Development, Biogeography and Biodiversity and Health and the Environment – took place in Bucharest and in Tulcea. The event was organized jointly by the Institute of Geography, Romanian Academy and the Faculty of Geography, University of Bucharest. A large number of participants, including prominent IGU members, were present. The Conference gathered representatives of science and practice involved in various research disciplines who, during subsequent sessions, presented their researches on issues such as: ecosystems, global environmental changes and socio-economic developmental challenges, and discussed jointly matters regarding the relationships between society and the environment.

This volume contains selected papers presented during the Conference within the IGU Commission on Local and Regional Development. The articles focus on the following topics: identification of local development factors with particular emphasis on demographic and settlement factors, spatial development inequalities in suburban areas, regional development potentials and barriers, the role of local authorities in the development of marginal areas, spatial relations and communication accessibility, environmental protection and extreme phenomena, the issue of ethnic minorities within a local context. A particularly valuable outcome is that the considerations presented pertain to a broad variety of areas and topics, including such countries as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia, Italy, Romania and Serbia.

In the first two papers, particular attention is paid to the development potential of the Danube Valley, a key topic of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), applied to two Danube countries: Romania and Serbia. *Mitrică et al.* identify the disparities in the territorial cohesion of the Romanian Danube Valley in terms of life, environmental and social quality based on a set of statistical socio-economic indicators through a Territorial Cohesion Index. *Milanković et al.* provide an analysis

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of the development potential of the Serbian Lower Danube Sector using an indicator-based approach completed by a SWOT analysis in order to highlight the main potentials and constraints of the region towards future economic growth.

The third paper addresses the regional disparities in the urban sprawl phenomenon in Romania after 1990 (the post-communist period) based on CORINE Land Cover database. In this study, *Grigorescu et al.* try to identify specific intra- and inter-regional differences (at NUTS 2 level) in relation to the spatial and functional patterns of built-up areas expansion and socio-economic transformations.

In the fourth paper, *Cavuta et al.* provide an integrated assessment of Abruzzo Region based on the dichotomy between vulnerability (geomorphological processes) and environmental protection (extended area under protection), essential in understanding the resilience and coping capacity of a territory. Through this two-faced assessment, the authors combined the spatial distribution of environmental hazards with the protected area in order to evaluate the effectiveness of territorial policies in supporting sustainable territorial development.

Nurković presents a research on the rural development of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the influence of local policies and socio-economic conditions with special focus on the demographic changes, agriculture and infrastructure. The author also identifies some significant development perspectives of the rural space in its transition from a predominantly agricultural-based to a multi-functional one.

In *Đukićin Vučković et al.*, the authors discuss the socio-economic characteristics as limiting factors of regional development in Kolubara District, Serbia. The assessment combines two distinctive parts, one dealing with the socio-economic characteristics based on statistical data (quantitative assessment) and the other presenting the perception of the local population of the socio-economic changes (qualitative assessment). The results enabled the authors to identify the main limiting factors of regional development (e.g. population aging, migration), as well as the awareness of local communities.

The next two papers focus on the Dobrogea Region (Romania) from two distinctive perspectives: ethnical minorities and spatial connectivity. *Damian and Săgeată*, analyse the ethnical minority communities after 1990 focusing on the structure, evolution and territorial distribution at different territorial levels in relation to the socio-political transformations and the increasing globalizing fluxes. An Ethnical Diversity Index is calculated in order to highlight the spatial pattern of the Dobrogean inter-ethnical model. *Zaharia and Taloş* have evaluated the spatial connectivity degree of the settlements network using GIS-based statistical modelling and computation of the connectivity indicators. The obtained results allowed the authors to identify the spatial distribution of the overall connectivity indicator, as well as the role of the regional transportation network in the process of the economic development of Dobrogea settlements.

In the last paper, *Nurlambang* is proposing a method to assess the effectiveness of decentralization in Indonesia. The author is measuring the decentralization process and quantifies the resulted changes using some economic indicators. The main results pinpoint the role of decentralisation in achieving a more balanced regional development which involves, in this case, less significant economic growth, but more important social and environmental progress.

Overall, the volume is aimed at providing an insight into the recent research findings in the field of geographic science, and particularly the opportunity to compare and identify different approaches to the idea of regional and local development.

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