

PARTICULARITIES OF THE FUNCTIONAL PROFILE AND URBAN RELATIONS IN POST-SOCIALIST LUGOJ MUNICIPALITY

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Quelques considérations sur le spécifique du profil fonctionnel et des relations urbaines dans la période post-socialiste de la municipalité de Lugoj. Le profil fonctionnel d'une ville est déterminé par son héritage historique, son évolution sociale et économique, par ses traditions mises en évidence petit à petit et par les effets des systèmes politiques qui l'a gouverné à diverses périodes. Le profil fonctionnel de la ville de Lugoj est le résultat de son évolution historique à partir de la vieille fonction de marche jusqu'aux fonctions urbaines actuelles, dominées par l'industrie et des services. La dynamique fonctionnelle de la ville a été influencée par la position de la municipalité en ce qui concerne le rôle politique et administratif dans cette partie du pays. Ainsi, à bref délai, ses fonctions de marché, celle commerciale, politique et administrative ont été complétées par d'autres fonctions, générées par l'évolution économique de la ville. La méthodologie de recherche utilisée est basée sur l'étude bibliographique, l'analyse des données statistiques et l'étude du terrain. On expose, d'une manière objective, quelques considérations sur le profil fonctionnel de la ville en accord avec la restructuration urbaine, de l'économie planifiée à celle de marché, spécifique pour les sociétés développées. On analyse ainsi, les fonctions urbaines dans le contexte des principaux domaines d'activité économique aussi que dans le contexte de la polarisation spatiale de celles-ci dans l'espace rural de la proximité de la municipalité Lugoj.

1. INTRODUCTION

The function of a town is the outcome of its urban activities based on the time-related traditions, the main occupations of its population, as well as on the social, economic and cultural conditions specific to the urban space. Generally, town functionality is influenced by the particularities of its geographical position, historical evolution, human and natural resources, the historical individuality of human settlements and, last but not least, by the main changes characteristic of the period of transition to the market economy in Romania. The age of a town or a city accounts for the development of industrial, social and cultural traditions, which often influence the functions of the geographical anthropic space. The perpetuation, consolidation, diffusion, dilution or disappearance of these traditions has a direct bearing on the qualitative and functional management of the town.

2. THE GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF LUGOJ AND ITS PLACE WITHIN THE LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL URBAN SETTLEMENT SYSTEM

Lugoj is a middle town situated in the western part of Romania, on the banks of the Timiș River. From a geomorphological viewpoint it lies at the contact between the Lugoj Plain and the Lugoj Hills, a location which has in time favoured complementarity between the town's main resources and economic activities. At regional level, Lugoj lies in Timiș County, at a distance of about 60 kilometres from Timișoara, a distance that conveys its spatial equilibrium between Timișoara and Caransebeș. Situated in the Danube-Criș-Mureș-Tisa (DCMT) Euroregion, Lugoj has developed important economic, social and cultural links with many towns from this region. Nowadays, Lugoj is

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an important regional urban centre (documentary attested in 1334 as *Lucas*) (Vlăsceanu, Ianoş, 1998), a competitive town (Popescu, 2007) in the western part of Romania which has recorded a positive economic evolution after 1990. This evolution is reflected in its present functions, as well as in the relations established with its surrounding area.

Lugoj holds the second rank in the urban hierarchy, a position argued by its spatial and functional complexity (Spănu, 2003). In time, its geographical and cultural position in this part of Romania have played an important role in the development of social and economic processes and, moreover, in coping with the difficulties of transition and in adjusting to the market economy.

3. THE FUNCTIONAL PROFILE AND URBAN FUNCTIONS OF LUGOJ MUNICIPALITY

The function of a town depends on the specific activities developed within the urban area, and has a higher or lower impact, or even a dominant importance for the social and economic context of a locality. The problematique of urban functions has aroused the interest of many researchers engaged in the study of urban settlements. In the specialist literature, urban functions are defined as the main human activities developed within a town or city over a certain period of time and which determine the extent and specificity of its urban development. Urban functions depend on the town's geographical position, climate, natural resources, the main environmental features and the historical evolution (Erdeli *et al.* 1999). At the same time, they are playing economic, social, cultural, commercial and other roles (Ielenicz *et al.* 2007), the idea of urban function underlying the construction of the "*whole edifice of the functional territorial analysis and, especially, of the urban one*" (Ianoş 2005, p. 55). *Types of functions in Lugoj* (cf. *General Urbanism Plan*, Lugoj, 1997): inside the urban territorial system to meet people's basic needs, such as dwelling, working, transport, education, health-care, culture, communication, entertainment, etc; outside the urban territorial system: agriculture, forestry, transport, recreation and also interurban cooperation between the local communities; *priority functions*: residential and economic-productive activities; *complementary functions*: urban management and administration, commerce, education, health-care, entertainment, etc.; *auxiliary functions*: services (sewage, water, gas and electricity supply); *special functions*: urban security and protection. All these functions make the object of urban analysis, but from a geographical viewpoint the only criterion defining the urban function is the active population (Ianoş 2005). So, in the light of the above considerations, the following functions can be distinguished even if, generally speaking, not all urban activities generate urban functions. However, according to the specialist geographical literature it is industry and services (commercial, cultural, sanitary, transport, entertainment, etc.) that are dominant urban functions.

3. 1. The industrial function

A diachronic approach to the town shows the industrial function to be outstanding. It has developed in time from old local handicrafts to the planned economy of the communist regime and currently to the market economy in the conditions of neoliberal trends in Romania. The fact that the industrial function in Lugoj has continued to exist, despite the new processes of deindustrialization, reindustrialization and tertialization, was made possible by the privatization of the industrial sector, and by foreign investments. In Figure 2, which illustrates the structure of Lugoj active population, industrial employees are seen to be the dominant segment (Voiculescu, 2004). As a matter of fact, this type of demographic structure is the only one which can objectively express the main functions of the town. A comparative approach to the evolution of this indicator shows the industrial function to have prevailed both before and after 1990 (the totalitarian regime collapsed in 1989). In 1988 industrial employees formed the majority of the active population, just like in 2006, when 8,799 out of a total

workforce of 16,727 people were employed in the industrial sector and in constructions (The National Institute of Statistics, Regional Directorate of Statistics, Timiș County, 2008).

Though this indicator has a balanced evolution, yet a significant decreasing trend has been registered in the primary sector. Statistical figures constantly show that the tertiary sector evolves hand in hand with industrial progress. The constancy of these figures is argued by the fact that local deindustrialization has evolved in parallel with urban reindustrialization through foreign investment. Thus, while old factories were being closed down, new ones opened, absorbing the free labour force. All of the town's factories were being restructured. The period of transition to the market economy has contributed to the dilution of some old and fine industrial traditions. An example is the only Natural Silk Spinning Factory in Romania, dating almost 100 years back, which had to be closed down. The old unit became S.C. Filseta S.A., specialized only in textiles, but its success is uncertain. On the other hand, new big concerns and international brands develop businesses in Lugoj municipality. The town's industrial landscape is marked by new production units that have emerged after previous ones had been restructured e.g. Mondial S.A., which became part of the Villeroy and Boch German Concern. The same situation in the case of S.C. Rieker, S.C. Lugomet and S.C. Silcom. The new industrial units, established independently of the old ones, would create the impression that new industrial areas are emerging in which S. C. Werzalit Lemn Tech, S. C. Autoliv, etc. (Fig. 1) are operating.

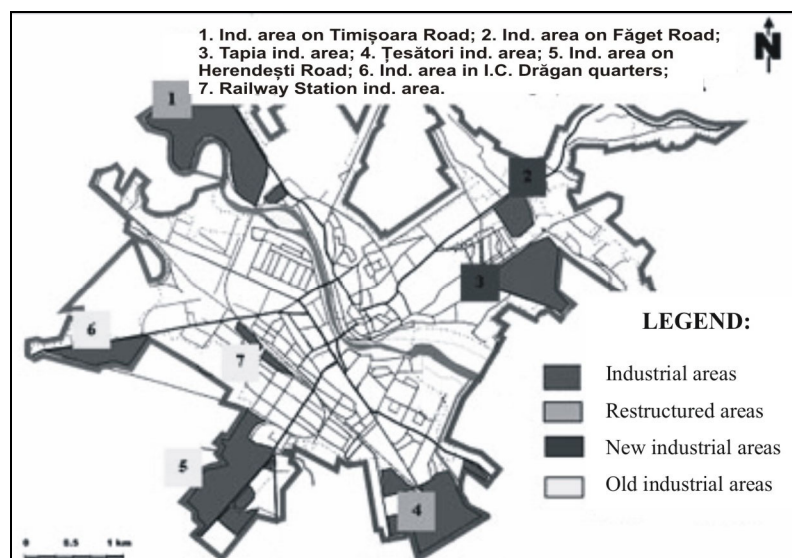


Fig. 1 – The distribution of industrial areas in Lugoj, 2009.

Summing up, we would say that the industrial function of Lugoj follows on the lines of the old traditional occupations of the local population. The industrialization drive promoted by the communist regime required a larger labour force, so that new population fluxes came to town.

For instance, in 1987 the hardcore of the town's industry was machine-building, textiles and food. Other branches were less well-represented, the industrial branches diversification index varying between 5 and 10, the industry/demography ratio being well balanced (Ianoș 1987). For all the industrial slowdown registered by Romania's towns after 1990, this function still exists (Voiculescu 2004). Beside industry, the tertiary sector (mainly commercial services) is very well developed.

Looking at the structure of the active population it appears that more than 40% work in the tertiary sector. Industrial activities are developing on industrial estates, the industry having always played an important role in the development of Lugoj. The *Atlas of Romania*, 2006, which presents a comprehensive picture of the Romanian national territory, shows that the processing industry in Lugoj

formed a major part of the town's economy. In 2002, about 60% of its economy was privately held, with 50% and 75% of the population being employed in the industrial sector. Industrial branches are: machine-building, electronic and electrotechnical items, building materials, wood processing (furniture and other wooden products), textiles, food, etc. The main fluxes of goods, raw materials and labour come from Caransebeş, Reşiţa, Timișoara, Făget and Buziaș; the surrounding rural settlements (Jabăr, Știuca, Herendești, Coștei, Balinț, Topolovăț, Belinț, Chizătău, Căpăt, Sinia, Sinersig, Boldur, Darova, etc.) being the main labour suppliers.

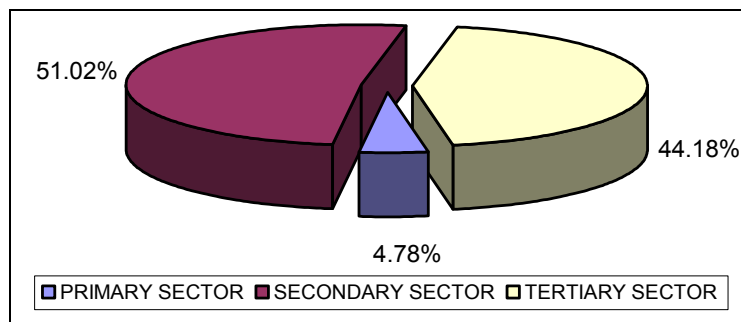


Fig. 2 – The structure of Lugoj population by economic sectors, 2002.

3. 2. The tertiary sector

Local services, particularly commercial ones, have surged, similarly have health, education, recreation, culture, entertainment, and other community services. For instance, the cultural function has attracted the interest of many authors and researchers who used to publish studies both before and after 1990, an indication that cultural topics have always been of primary interest for the local cultural personalities (Luchescu, 1975).

3.2.1. The commercial function

Commercial activities are aimed at meeting the demands of the town population and of its adjoining countryside. In Lugoj, supermarkets prevail to the detriment of retail traders and big commercial units. Major complexes are Artima, currently replaced by competitive supermarkets, such as Carrefour Express. Other complexes are Profi and Plus (Fig. 3) and a Mall is being planned to open. The main types of commercial units are: class A situated downtown, classes B and C at the town periphery or in the districts. The structure of commodities shows foods, household items and textiles to prevail. Since the range of items is pretty limited, people often go shopping in Timișoara's hypermarkets (Metro, Selgros, Real, Billa, Praktiker, Iulius Mall, etc.) (Ianoș, 2004). However, having in view the demographic size of the local population, the goods available in Lugoj's shops are fairly sufficient to meet people's demands.

The food market and the local animal fair continue an old tradition. Market days are Tuesday and Friday, attracting beside townsfolk also the neighbouring rural population who is coming to town to buy or sell different products and goods. This segment of the population adds to congestion in the downtown local market and to traffic jam. Future urban development strategies should deal with these problems in order to avoid dysfunctions, especially road traffic. The main street structures can hardly cope with the increasing number of private cars. In addition, there are numerous vehicles crossing the town to other destinations. We would suggest that future urban planning and development strategies take into account the possibility for a hypermarket to be built at the town periphery to serve both the Lugoj population and the inhabitants of the adjoining rural area.

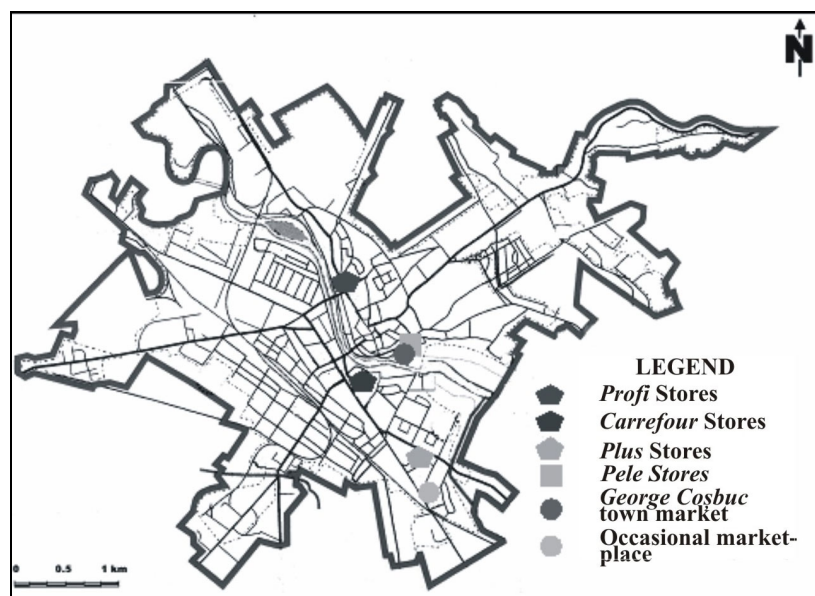


Fig. 3 – Commercial units.

3.2.2. The cultural function

As already discussed in this paper, cultural activities in Lugoj have always been outstanding. Its cultural and historical heritage, has made the town occupy a front position in this area and despite the censorship imposed by the communist regime, the cultural legacy has survived from oldest times to the present-day, reality illustrated by the works of those authors who lived in this particular geographical space, e.g. Luchescu (1975, 2004), Stratan, Muntean (1981), Popescu (1993), Luchescu, Muntean, Lăzărescu (1994), etc. Their books depict the cultural phenomenon in Lugoj, a town they considered to be the old cultural centre of Banat province. Cucu (1970) shows the town to be both an important cultural and industrial (natural silk manufacturing) centre. Numerous local cultural personalities have contributed to the process of cultural diffusion¹. Outstanding cultural institutions are: *Traian Grozăvescu* Municipal Theatre, which currently hosts four international music and drama festivals, the House of Culture, the Museum of History and Ethnography, the Municipal Library, the House of Music, many memorial houses, etc., all of which have an old tradition in the cultural life of the town.

The post-1990 period has brought about major changes in the town's cultural area, e.g. the establishment of the *Drăgan* European University, set up with the help of sizeable investments made by Iosif Constantin Drăgan, a renowned man of culture in Lugoj. Thus, the town has acquired a new status, that of local and regional university centre. His endeavour to change the cultural landscape, to transform the urban image, in the process of urban renewal and regeneration is ongoing (Voiculescu *et al.* 2009).

3. 2. 3. The educational function

Apart from culture, and often subordinated to it, is education, Lugoj being a focus of attraction for local students, for people from the surrounding rural areas and from other parts of Romania. Education has an old-standing tradition here, many local cultural personalities having learned in its schools. The town boasts all types of educational units: kindergartens, primary schools, gymnasiums, colleges and high schools, as well as a university with different profiles and specializations to meet the local job-market demands (Figs 4, 5). There are also vocational schools. Learning is delivered also in

¹ Outstanding among them are: Filaret Barbu, Valeriu Braniste, Coriolan Brediceanu, Caius Brediceanu, Tiberiu Brediceanu, Eftimie Murgu, Cassian Munteanu, Traian Grozăvescu, Anișoara Odeanu, Timotei Popovici, Victor Vlad Delamarina, etc.

German for the German population colonised on the left bank of Timiș River at the beginning of the 18th century. The German sections and classes of the *Coriolan Brediceanu* National College, *Iulia Hașdeu* National College, and *Anișoara Odeanu* Secondary School attract numerous students. In order to meet the students' cultural demands the *Filaret Barbu* Fine Arts School was founded after 1990, with a music and arts profile and specialization courses. *Drăgan European University*, founded after 1990, offers specialization courses in law, economics and public administration. Its influence has increased and enlarged over the years, developing into a local and regional centre of Banat province. In view of the above, we may say that the town discharges indeed an educational function. Other educational units are the Children's Club and a number of firms specialized in various training programmes intended to suit the local job-market and the residents of Lugoj.

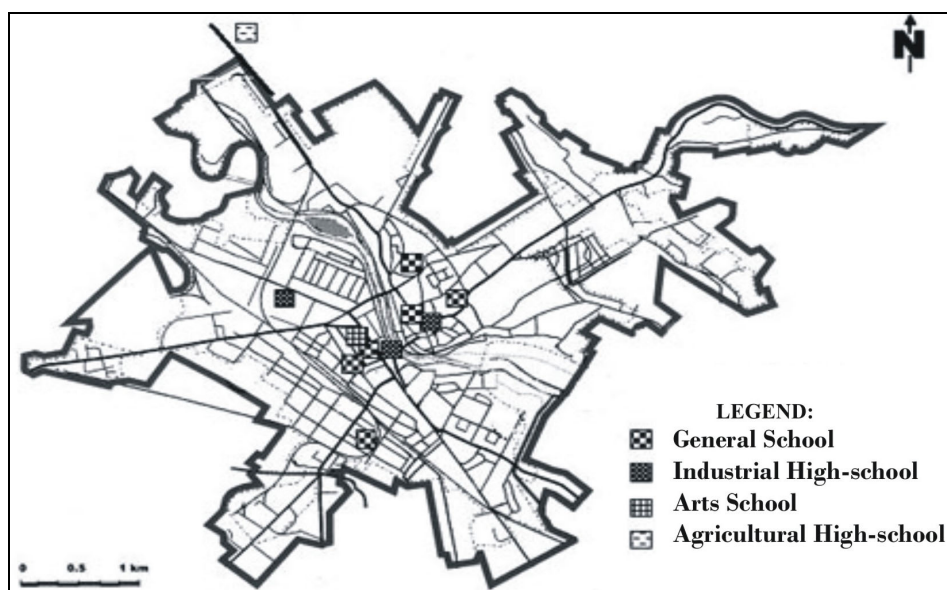


Fig. 4 – Educational and profile units in Lugoj before 1990.

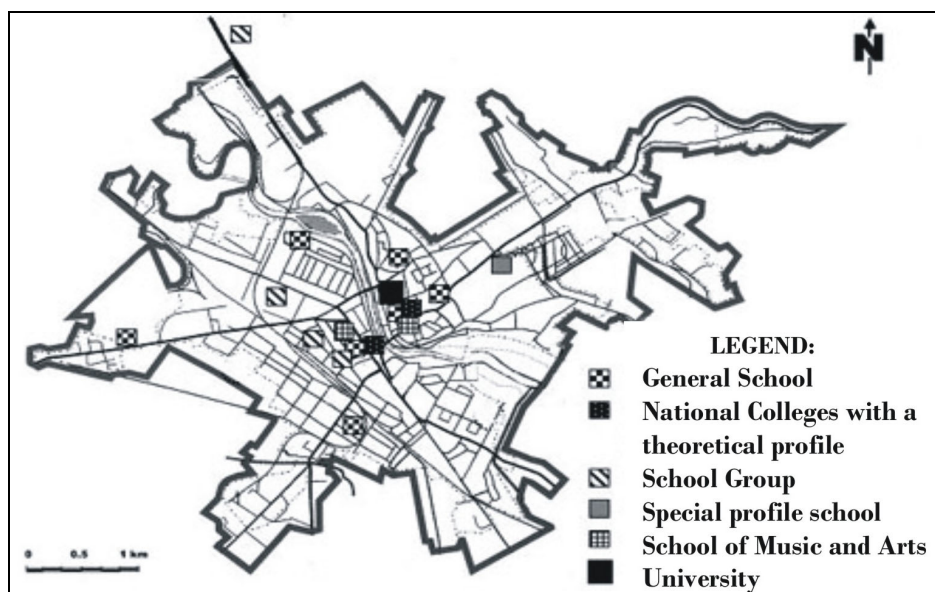


Fig. 5 – Educational and profile units in Lugoj after 1990.

3. 2. 4. Medical and sanitary services

Medical services, just as the previously discussed ones, are engaged in satisfying social needs. Assistance is offered in medical units and in other institutions specialized in dealing with the problems of the locals. There are 28 medical units, part of them (pharmacies) (Fig. 6) located especially in the central sector of the town (*source: www.cjt.ro*).

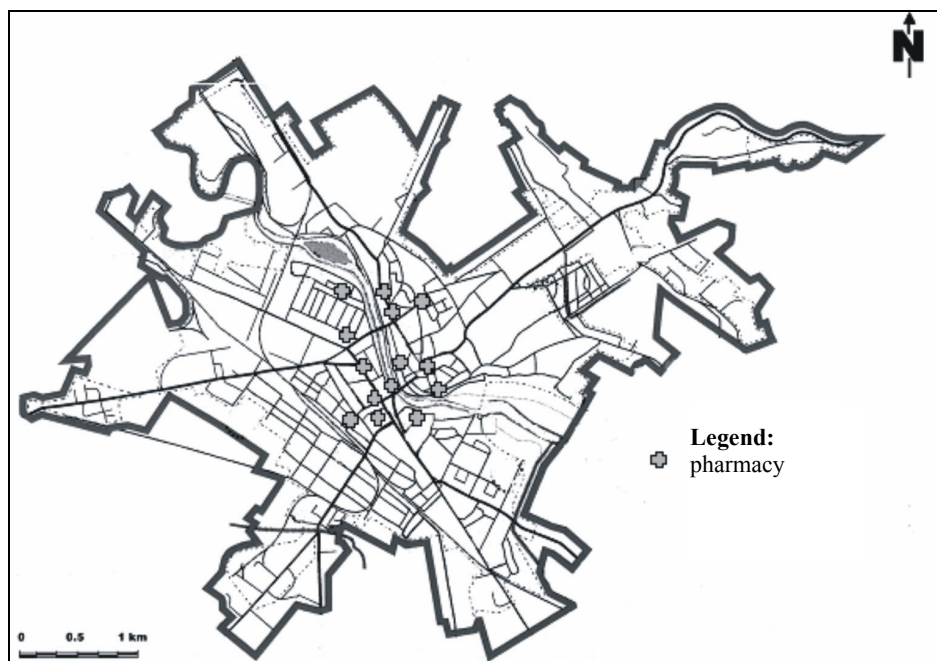


Fig. 6 – The spatial distribution of pharmacies in Lugoj (2008).

3.2.5. Recreation and entertainment

Recreation and entertainment is provided by several profile institutions, e.g. the House of Culture, the Municipal Theatre, the Municipal Library, two Sports halls, etc. There are numerous green areas close by the River Timiș, which runs through the town, as well as several parks (Table 1).

Table 1

The main green areas in Lugoj.

Type	Name	Area (sqm)
Parks	Pool District Park	21,000
	George Enescu Park	20,000
	The Railway Station Park	18,000
	The Prefecture Park	17,000
Squares	Cornet Square	8,500
	Abator Square	3,000
	Unirii Square	6,000
	Piața Poștei Complex	5,000

Source: Lugoj Town Hall, 2008

Another recreation site is Cotul Mic Island bordered by two tributaries of the River Timiș. Here are complex endowments for summer activities: sports grounds, swimming pool, beach, etc. The area still has a good potential for investments (Fig. 7).

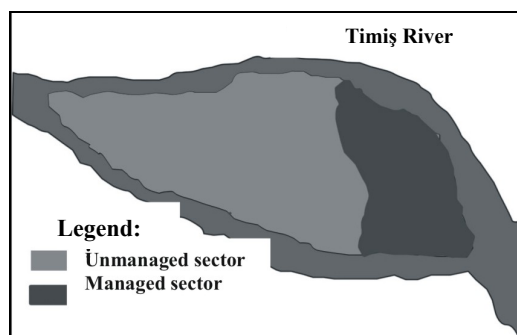


Fig. 7 – The Cotul Mic Island in Lugoj.
Source: Jucu, 2008, p. 63

3.2.6. The Public administration

The political-administrative function of the town has been analyzed diachronically by many authors interested in spatial organization at national level. In the past, the political-administrative function of Lugoj had a broader scope and breadth, the town having successively been the capital of Caraș and Severin counties. After the 1968 reorganization the town became part of Timiș County, with Timișoara as capital-city. Although Lugoj has lost this status in the territory, yet many administrative institutions (the City Hall, Social and Community Assistance services, the Court of Law, Public Finances, Political Parties, etc.) have continued to serve both its own inhabitants and those of the surrounding rural area.

3.2.7. The functional complexity of Lugoj

The functional complexity of Lugoj is emphasized by all the features of a town's functional mechanisms and by all the activities which define certain functions (see Sorina Voiculescu, 2004, in a complex study of cities and towns from the West Plain of Romania). The main function of Lugoj is the industrial one, especially the processing industry. Several diagrams show the share of industry within the urban functions of the town in terms of the structure of its occupied population (Fig. 8).

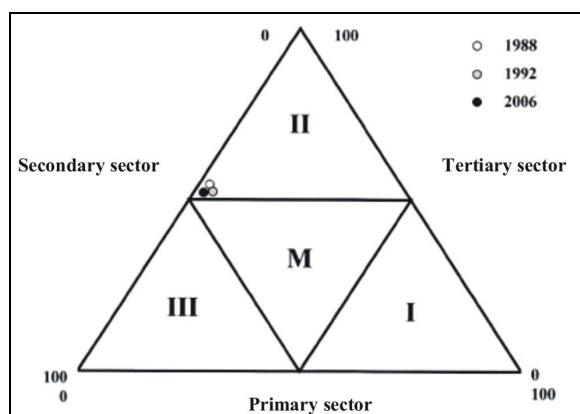


Fig. 8 – The position of Lugoj municipality on the above diagram of urban functions.

Functional complexity is created by the intertwining of all the previous functions discussed so far and, moreover, by the extent to which the town polarizes its surrounding area. Future decisions within a sustainable management context should take into account the historical background, the social and cultural particularities, the cultural legacy, and the main demographic and economic assets.

All these will help preserve the old functions and create opportunities for new ones to develop, liable to ensuring the town's spatial and functional viability.

4. URBAN RELATIONS

The relations established within an urban space represent all of the complex relationships between the functions exerted within some zones, localities, or within their influence areas; they also reflect relationships with the population, with the economic activities and with the natural environment. These relations individualize a town's urban structure. Types of relations: between population and the town functions, between the natural environment and the town functions. The following types of relations are acting in Lugoj municipality: between the town and its influence area; inside the town's administrative territory; inside the urban space and with other urban areas (*General Urbanism Plan of Lugoj Municipality*, 1997). The population of a town depends on the functions exerted by it, which respond to the needs of the community. So, the direct relations established between the population and the economic sector are job-creating and secure people's incomes.

The functions of the town are influenced by the natural environment and by its connections with the main urban activities. The natural environment represents a prerequisite for the residential framework and is the locus of natural resources. The relations existing between industry and resources, between people's daily resources of food, water and energy ensure the urban system's functionality. On the other hand, functions are interconnected by complex relations, controlled by adequate mechanisms which make a human settlement viable. So, the relations between the industrial function and the residential one are governed by the relation between the work-place and the residential place. In urban areas, complex relations develop between industrial and residential quarters, as well as between these and other functional sectors, e.g. commercial, services, recreation, education, transport, etc. The sustainability of these relations depends on the infrastructure and logistics of the town and on the particularities of the urban management at a given moment.

In the case of Lugoj, the relations established between the urban and the rural space represent the totality of relations established inside the respective localities in terms of residence, agricultural production, industrial activities, etc. Based on these well-know relations, it is easy to determine the convergent and divergent fluxes of population and goods between the urban settlement and its surrounding area; also, it is easier to decide upon transport capacities, collective services, equipments within the system, to avoid or minimize massive depopulation of some rural areas or the overpopulation of towns (Erdeli *et al.*, 1999). These complex relations are of cooperation in the sphere of production, culture, social life, administration, etc., as well as between the local urban space and other localities. For instance, Lugoj, which is a middle town subordinated to Timișoara, develops good relations with other towns, too, e.g. Caransebeș, Buziaș and Făget. At regional level, relations are more difficult to determine because they are less clearly defined.

However, there are many towns and cities in Romania which supply Lugoj with important fluxes of goods, energy and information (Ianoș, 1987). The town also develops direct or indirect political-administrative relations with Bucharest, Romania's capital, as well as regional cross-border economic and socio-cultural cooperation with towns from neighbouring countries, e.g. Vyrshet in Serbia, Szeged in Hungary, etc., and with twin towns in Europe. Spatial relations have also been developed with the rural settlements located in its proximity, as well as with small towns and cities at regional, national and European levels. Particularly important are the relations established among the town's functional

sectors. There exists a direct connection between the economic traditions of the town and its contemporary industrial development, between cultural values and the contemporary social and cultural identity, as well as between local decision-makers and current evolution trends. Important relations are established between production forces and human resources, between the local labour force and the fluxes of raw materials and goods. The viability of these relations is ensured by a specific logistic, the functionality of which is adapted to the specific of the town. For instance, the residential system is interconnected with urban utilities (electricity, energy, water and gas), with more or less specialized services, with transport and communications systems, etc. In urban areas a connection exists between residence, education, work, traffic and other services, as well as between industry, agriculture and urban utilities, or between residence, work-place, recreation and entertainment (*cf. General Urbanism Plan of Lugoj Municipality, 1997*).

Spatial relations between the urban and the rural local environments are reflected by the dynamics of the labour force going to and from town, by fluxes of raw materials, goods and information services, etc., these relations individualising the sphere of influence of Lugoj municipality (Ianoş, 1987)(Jucu, 2004).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lugoj is currently discharging two main functions and several secondary ones with a lower share in space. If before 1990 the town was a locality in which the industrial function prevailed, after the fall of the communist regime this function could be maintained due to the economic restructuring process and to foreign direct investments (Ianoş, 1987, Cucu, 1970, Cucu, 1995). In 2006, Lugoj was notable for its processing industry (Rey *et al.* 2006).

On the other hand, the upsurge of the tertiary sector enables the town to provide services not only to its urban population, but also to the village-dwellers in its proximity. Commercial activities have in time evolved from the old borough-related function discharged at the contact of the great geographical regions or at the cross-roads.

In our case, the favourable geographical position of the town at the contact between the Lugoj Hills and the Lugoj Plain and at the cross-roads of the main transport axis (Cucu 1970), has played a major role in its spatial evolution and, furthermore, in the development of commercial activities. These are argued by the convergence and intersection of some major transport axes which have facilitated links between the western part of Romania and its other regions. The cultural function of the town is discharged by profile cultural institutions which organize cultural events and festivals, as well as by local cultural personalities. *Drăgan European University*, founded after 1990, made Lugoj a university centre of local and regional importance. The functional complexity of Lugoj and its urban relations have determined its rank in Romania's urban hierarchy, directly influenced by the town's political-administrative function of county-capital held over time in different historical and political contexts (Ianoş, Tălângă, 1994, Rusu, 2007, Săgeată, 2006).

Nowadays, industrial and services functions, sustained by the complex processes of deindustrialization, reindustrialization and tertialization (in commerce, social life, financial-banking, education, culture, and other areas) are dominant in Lugoj municipality. The specific activities of the tertiary sector unfold within representative institutions which personalize the local urban space, generating a type of townscape characteristic of the period of transition from the centralised socialist economy to the market system.

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