

The Patterns of Depopulation in Timișoara – Research Note

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Abstract: *The shrinking phenomenon represents a natural trend in the evolution of an urban community. Usually, it comes together with economical decline, unemployment, house vacancy, perforation of the urban grid, local budget decreasing, and so on. Timișoara has lost around 14% of the population in almost two decades. Can this be considered a signal for the shrinking process? This paper is based on the partial results of the project FP7 no. 225193 “ShrinkSmart – The Governance of the Shrinkage into the European Context”, financed by the European Commission, Theme 8 Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities 2009–2012 (<http://www.shrinksmart.ufz.de/>). The West University of Timișoara is a partner in the consortium of this project, together with seven other European Universities. The team from the West University of Timișoara is composed of Melinda Dincă, Dan Luchea, Delia Nadolu and Bogdan Nadolu (the coordinator).*

Keywords: urban depopulation; shrinking cities; demographic changes.

Cuvinte-cheie: depopulare urbană; orașe în descreștere; schimbări demografice.

Introduction

The population decline represents a phenomenon that can affect any city during its evolution in time. In the modern and contemporary history there were recorded some urban cases with a major loss of population in a short period of time, such as: Leipzig (Germany), which has lost more than 110,000 inhabitants in almost two decades, Liverpool, which has lost more than 290,000 inhabitants in almost three decades, Grated Donetsk, which has

lost more than 180,000 inhabitants in around 15 years (according to National Census). These manifestations are usually correlated with the economical decline, job losing, and the increasing of vacancy houses and so on. If we meet these phenomena, in almost all cases we have to deal with a clear example of urban shrinking. Due to its direct relevant consequences it cannot be ignored by the public authorities and the local stakeholders. One of the main signs for the starting of the shrinking process is represented by the loss of the population.

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short research note from the first project reports concerning the case study of Timișoara was published by Melinda Dincă in JSRP no. 1/2010 (pp. 167-172) 9. In the following parts of the article we will analyze the pattern of the population decline in Timișoara, trying to get an answer to the following question: *Is the loss of population a sign of shrinking for Timișoara?*

Circumstances

Under the positive demographical policy imposed by the communist regime, the population of Timișoara has reached a peak in 1990, with 351,293 persons. The starting point of the population’s growing (at the national level) can be considered the Decree No. 770/1966, through which Nicolae Ceausescu has forbidden the abortions. It was estimated that around two millions of children were “helped” to be born at the national level, in only 2 years¹. Due to the implementation of this law, the population of Timișoara has known the highest rate of growing, as represented in Figure 1:

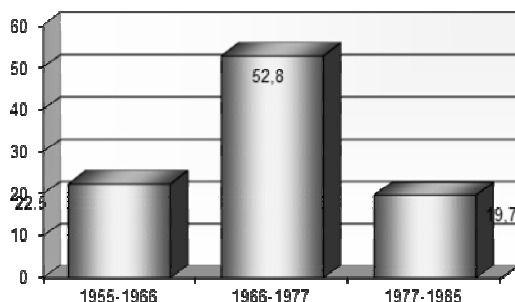


Figure 1: Population growing rate (%). Source: Statistical Yearbooks.

This abusive act, together with other measures (various economical advantages for the families with three or more children) has improved the birth rate during the 70’s and 80’s. On the other hand, after the Second

World War, the Timișoara’s native population (with a large German community) has suffered much political oppressions, such as forced deportations in working camps from USSR, in the Bărăgan

Plain (South-East Romania) or in other forced working camps in Romania (such as “The Danube-Black Sea Canal”). In the effort to eradicate the occidental mentality of the city, massive waves of migration were generated from rural areas and from other parts of Romania towards Timișoara. It is estimated that, today, there are less than 1/3 families with more than three generations born in Timișoara. Complementary, the external migration was strictly controlled and generally prohibited. It was more and more difficult to cross Romania’s boundaries, even as a tourist. The free circulation of persons abroad was almost a myth, especially during the last years of communism. The entire country has become a *ghetto*, with deep, fundamental, structural and harmful insertions of the State in the private life, with fewer options and alternatives to brake the pattern. The Ritzer’s McDonaldisation phenomenon² was really experimented in Romania (as well as in the rest of the communist parts of Europe), but without almost any occidental contents into a quasi-complete planned economy; everyday life was quite strictly predictable, with a very limited number of options for each citizen.

And last but not least, a massive action plan regarding the control of population growing, configuration and structure was implemented in Romania. In the last years of communism, one of the main targets, in order to develop a full operational planned agriculture, was to demolish the villages (and to force the movement of rural population in the urban space). This process has represented a second stage of urbanization, after the period of the 70’s, when the entire urban space was forced to artificially grow. Thus, the collapse of the totalitarian regime and the rediscovery of freedom have generated a massive wave of changes in the population structure and profile. After all the restrictions and prohibitions, the Romanian society tries to recover from a long series of gaps. Parts of them (such birth control or

in/out-migration) were quickly solved, but others (such as the rural mentality from the urban space) remain a present problem. During the first decade of democracy, Timișoara has kept the general trend recorded at the national level of demographical decrease, generated, especially, by the liberalization of abortions, the possibility of family planning, and the possibility of emigration.

Statistical facts

Timișoara is, nowadays, an important urban centre, the single first rank city with metropolitan³ area in the Romanian development region – V West. Until 1990, the city has had a continuous growth, of different intensities. At the beginning of the 19th century, it was quite slow, because of the natural evolution, and it has increased and became politically accelerated during the communist period. After the political change, the city has started another natural process of reconfiguration, directly visible in the decrease of the population; this process was convergent with the national and European trends. The decline of Timișoara’s population was almost constant during the period 1990-2008 and, thus, it clearly showed that the growing of the city under the totalitarian regime was not a functional, adequate and pertinent model. It is expected that the city would achieve its optimal population density in the close future (since it was recorded the first post-communist population growth in 2009, in comparison with 2008). By “optimal population density” we refer to a natural equilibration of the population density, concerning the social and economical resources of the city. During the communist period, the urban community from Timișoara (and not only this) was forced to adopt a specific configuration and structure (induced by political decisions) – with several generations into the same

apartment, with limited access to facilities, etc. In the democratic context, the demographic parameters of the city will follow a curve of normalisation toward optimal values (a normal trend of self-regularisation). In the next paragraphs, we will analyze the specific pattern of shrinking for Timișoara.

The main social, economical, political and cultural changes that have affected Romania after 1989 have generated an increasing of the

population dynamics. Timișoara has become an attractive destination for a lot of persons from other regions, but, at the same time, a starting point for the out-migration towards the Central and Western Europe, USA and Canada. From 1990 until 2008, the population of Timișoara has decreased with 50,000 inhabitants (14.1%). On July 1st, 2009, in Timișoara were recorded 312,113 inhabitants.

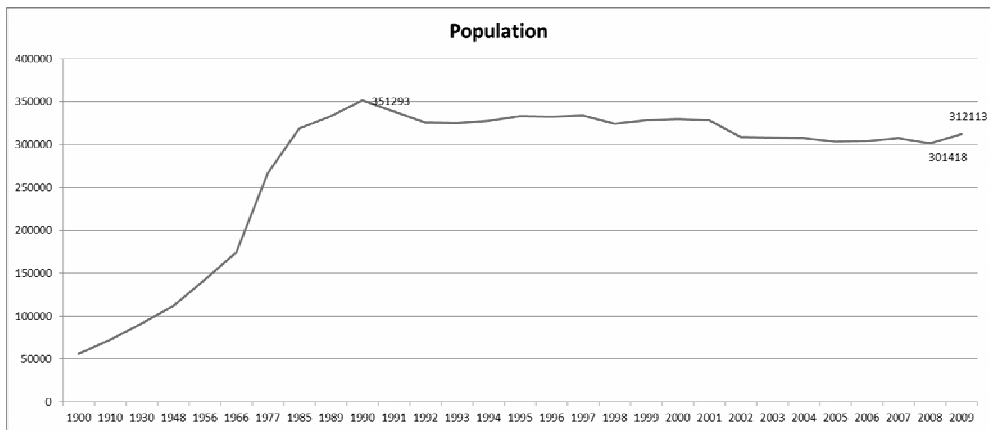


Figure 2: *The evolution of the population of Timișoara. Source: Statistical Yearbook.*

Right after the Revolution, freedom was reflected by the trend of emigrations and the increasing birth control that has significantly influenced the decreasing of the population volume. Until the second half of the 90's, almost all inhabitants that wanted to emigrate, left. On the other hand, in 2002 was recorded the smallest birth rate in Timișoara, and this can be also observed in the population decline. After that, the natural increase trended to rebalance and became positive after 2007, in a very positive context of living conditions.

For the 90's, the population decline can be explained by the decreasing of the birth rate (as a general behaviour at national level). Another cause of this manifestation was the out-migration that becomes more and more accessible after the end of the

communist period and after the integration of Romania in the European Union. Timișoara, as a very important Romanian city, close to Central Europe, with a consistent student population (mostly temporary) has known a high level of dynamics in its demographical structure, profile and configuration. With high levels of incoming and outgoing inhabitants, the city of Timișoara has represented, for a long period, an occidental gate towards the Central and Western Europe, USA and Canada.

The decreasing of the population because of the low fertility rate has generated other demographical phenomena, such as ageing. In Figure 3 can be observed the general trend of the population's ageing: from 1990 to 2009 the age structure of the population is moving to higher levels (left):

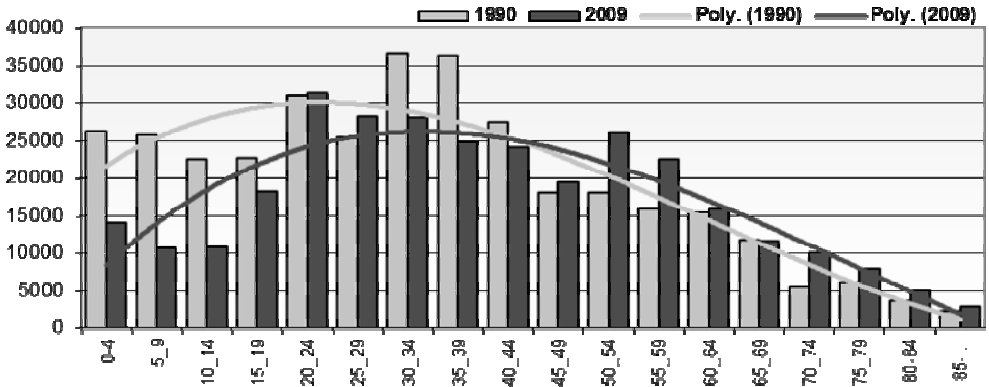


Figure 3: *The comparison of age structure: 1990 vs. 2009. Source: National Statistics Institute.*

If in 1990, the peak of the trend line is around 20-24 years, in 2009, this level is increasing with 10 years (to 30-34). The differences between the two periods (1990 and 2009) are significant especially for younger ages: 0-4, 46.5%, 5-9, 58.3%, and

51.8% (the decreasing in 2009 from 1990). This evolution from younger to older is also clearly visible in the following graph concerning the age structure of the population:

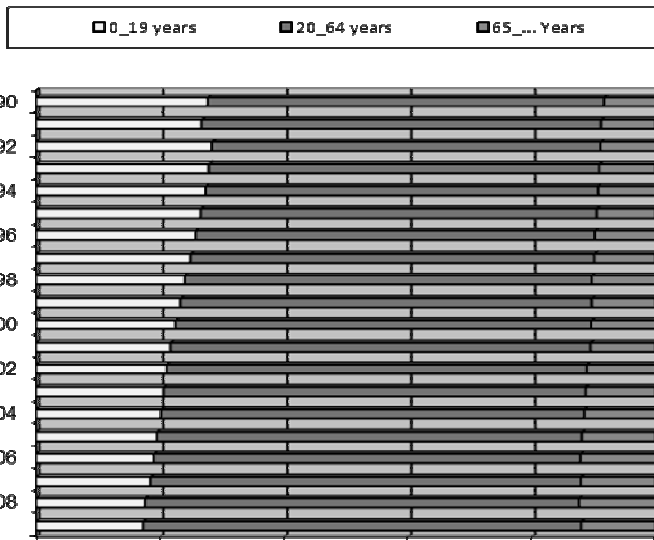


Figure 4: *The evolution of the age structure. Source: National Statistics Institute.*

Thus, the values from left reflect a continuous decreasing of the younger population (0-19 years), from 27.7%, in 1990 to 17.3%, in 2009. The two other categories have recorded a complementary growing, from 63.9% to 70.7%, for the population between 20 and 64 years old, and from 8.3% to 12%, for the elderly

population. The significant decline of the younger, with 10.4%, is also directly related with the decreasing of the birth rate, and represents a national trend. These continuous changes of the reports between younger and older population are also represented in the elderly, young and ageing index (Figure 5).

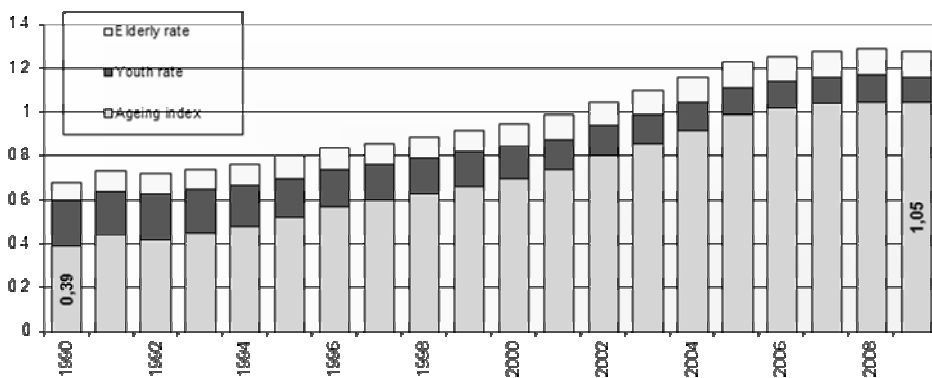


Figure 5: The evolutions of the index of elderly, young and ageing people. Source: National Statistics Institute.

The trend of age increasing of the population is also clearly reflected in the

evolution of the average age, from 33.4 years, in 1990 to 38.9 years, in 2009:

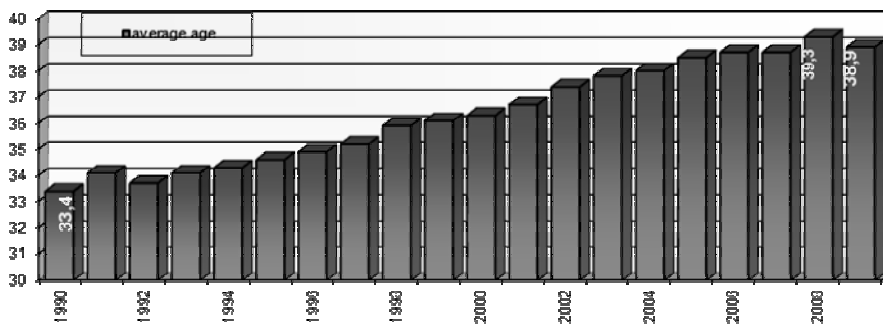


Figure 6: The evolution of average age. Source: National Statistics Institute.

In around 20 years, the average age of the population has grown with 5.9 years in 2008, and after that it has decreased with 0.4 years. With this trend, the average age of Timișoara’s population has a real risk to cross the limit of fertility (49 years), with

all massive negative consequences for its further development. In other words, the year 2009 has a different profile or manifestation, compared with the previous period. A direct explanation can be found

in the evolution of the natural change of population (Figure 7).

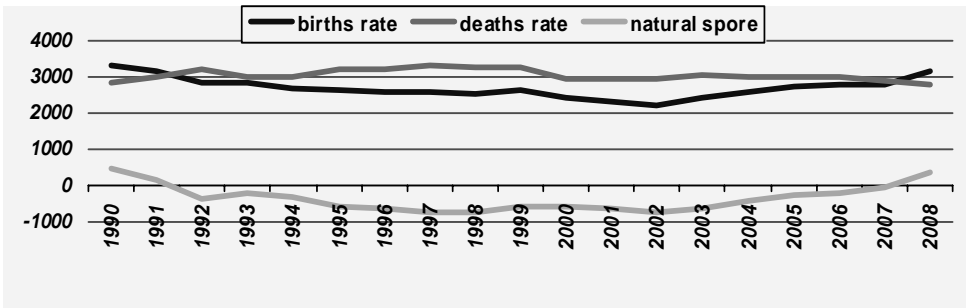


Figure 7: *The evolution of the natural change of population. Source: National Statistics Institute.*

Thus, from 1991, the natural increase has become negative, and the number of births was in a continuous decrease, until 2002. From 3,302 newborn babies, in 1990, to a decrease 2,201 was registered in 2002, and after that, the number increased to 3,175, in 2008. From 1992 to 2007 the number of deaths was constantly higher than the number of births. ***The negative increase ratio during this period has cumulated a decrease in population of 7,718 inhabitants (2.19%).***

Another very relevant aspect for this analysis is represented by the evolution of

the emigrants and immigrants from Timișoara. Due to little accurate evidence regarding the migration of the population, it is still quite difficult to use some general indicators, such as: “settling in the locality” or “leaving the locality”. The current procedure does not record the national destinations of the persons that are moving out/in the city. So, the only available statistics of the regional migration is the census. Other relevant data that can be used are represented by the evolution of emigrants and immigrants (Figure 8):

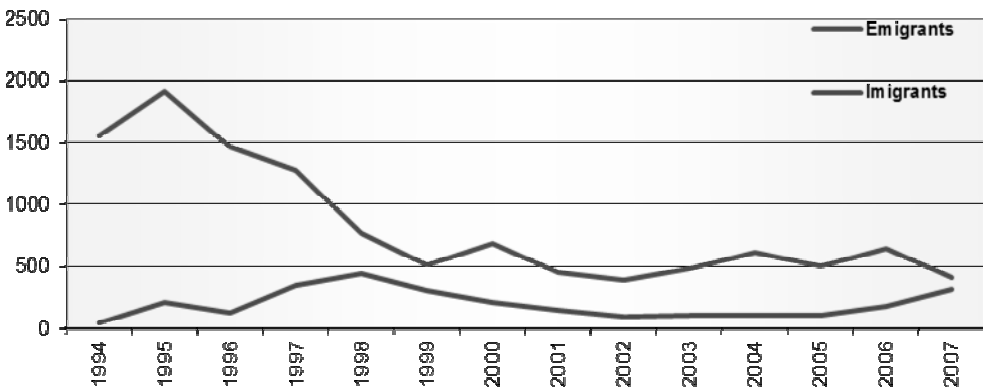


Figure 8: *The evolution of emigrants and immigrants. Source: National Statistics Institute.*

Thus, from 1994 until 2007, the number of persons that are moving from Timișoara

to a foreign country was constantly higher than the number of newcomers. During this

period, 11,684 of Timișoara's inhabitants have moved away, and 2,763 new people moved in the city. These statistics cover especially the ethnic groups (firstly, the German population from Timișoara, which constantly settled in Germany, during the '90s). *According to the migration negative balance, from 1994 to 2007 Timișoara lost 8,921 inhabitants (2.53%).*

Even if the statistical quantification of the city population reflects a descendent trend (from 1990 until 2008), the general preview of Timișoara is a positive one. The city kept an attractive image for other parts of the country. The prices of the houses were very high and the constructions of new buildings were quite consistent, both with a specific diminishing because of the global crisis. But the process is not the

same around the city's influence space. All villages around Timișoara have known a significant process of development (the trend is for then to become a residential area of the city, similar to the West European models). Even the local administration has elaborated a sustainable development strategy for the metropolitan area. This initiative is directly connected with these demographical trends. *During the last seven years, the population from the 11 villages involved in the future metropolitan area has grown with 5,774 inhabitants, equivalent to 1.64% from the peak of Timișoara's population (in the same period, the Timis County recorded a negative trend).* Some examples of these processes can be observed in the following map:

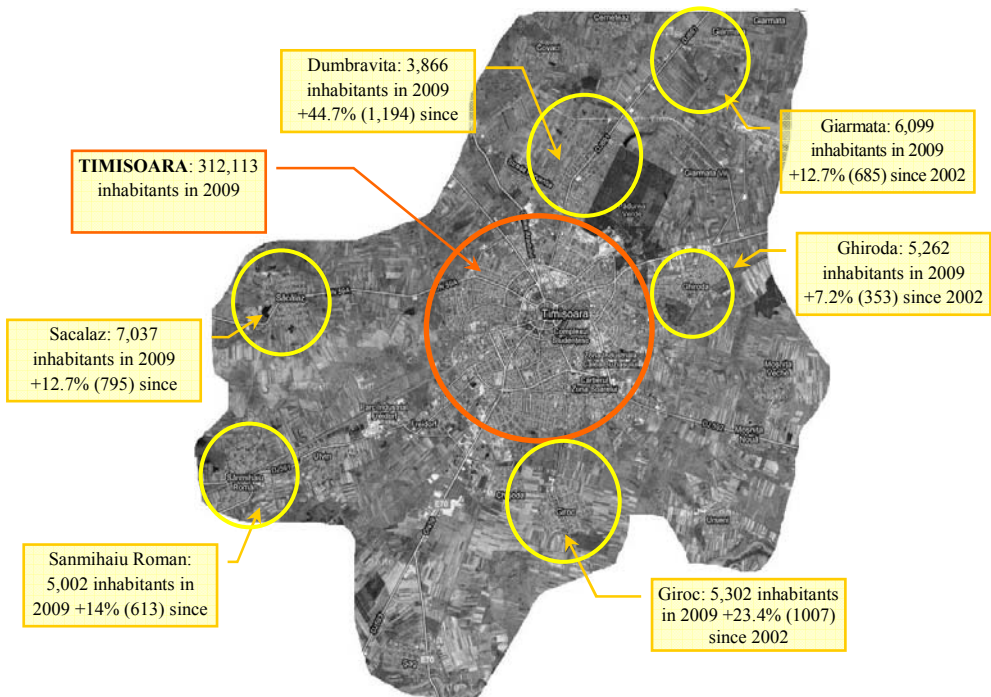


Figure 9: Timișoara and the evolution of the suburban centres. Source: Authors work, on the base of Google Map and Official statistic of Timis County Council.

Within the context of the rural depopulation (specific for the entire national level) the whole process of development of the villages near Timișoara represents, actually, a **clear process of suburbanization**. In the last decade, this is one of the most important causes for the shrinking phenomenon in Timișoara. After living in apartment buildings, the dream of having a house ‘on the ground’ came true for many inhabitants, along with the new opportunities assured by all the villages around Timișoara. A direct consequence of this local mobility from the city to the suburban areas is represented by

a decreasing of the pressure on the locative spaces (inside of the city), and gradually the decrease in the population density. All over the city, many apartments from the ground floor of the buildings with commercial potential were transformed from houses into shops. Other low conditions apartment buildings or houses were, step by step, demolished or reoriented (i.e., from block flats to offices buildings). All these factors have direct influences upon the distribution of the population density across the city. A very professional representation (elaborated by an architectural project) looks like⁴ in the following images:

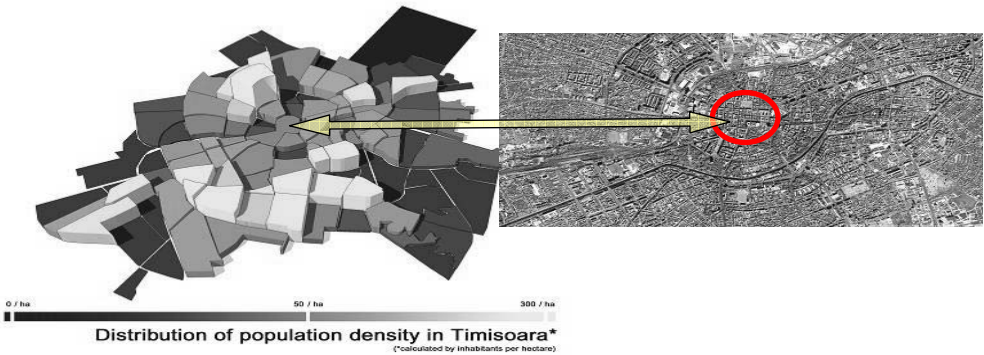


Figure 10: *Distribution of population density in Timișoara. Sources: Daniel Tellman.*

Thus, it can be observed a quasi-eclectic distribution, the neighbourhoods with high density (concrete block-flats) being quite mixed with other neighbourhoods with low density (historical houses). There are some differentiation among the districts and living styles, yet not necessary among the inhabitants. A main differentiation is among: (1) the flat buildings district – with a high density of living space, with all necessary public services; (2) the old houses districts and (3) the new buildings districts – part of them without adequate infrastructure and necessary services.

Thus, a main differentiation concerns the economical dimension: the living

standards are significantly higher in the districts with new buildings (middle to higher class) and significantly lower in some parts of the blocks districts, and also in some old houses districts (with an accentuated rural profile – vegetable gardens, fruit growing and birds breeding). Another differentiation (not so deep) is among the districts with high density of blocks (like “Sagului”) and the ones with low density of blocks (like “Soarelui”). There are visible differences among buildings, but also among the comfort level of the apartments: crowded blocks with 2nd or 3rd rank comfort (small and cheap apartments) in “Sagului” compared with quite rarely dispersed

buildings with trees and parking spaces and 1st rank comfort (large and expensive apartments) in “Soarelui” and “Aradului” (as a trend, not as a general rule for the entire districts). These differences are only among the urban configurations, and not among the urban community of people (we don't have socio-cultural segregation among the inhabitants from different districts, from N and S of Bega river, etc.).

Generally speaking, Timișoara keeps a concentric profile, with two or three waves of modern buildings around the city core, but with interactions with former villages integrated as historical neighbourhoods. Some industrial facilities that are not working any more represent a very valuable land close to the centre that can be reused in other ways (as residential projects or company buildings, etc.). The city trends to extend its influence in the surrounds (under the perspective of the future metropolitan area) and upon new and very consistent residential neighbourhoods is evident in all the closest villages.

Comparisons of the population decline manifestations

At this stage of the comparative analysis we can elaborate a descriptive statistic con-

cerning the manifestations that have come together with the population decline, for each case study. Thus, just on the base of the Pearson correlations and the coefficient of determinations we can observe several variables that have evolved in the same directions or in opposite directions with the main indicator of the shrinkage process (the population loses). We must specify that at this level of descriptive statistics we cannot differentiate on the basis of these coefficients between causes and effects. In other words, we can only talk of phenomena which have been manifest together with the de-population (some of them as causes, others as consequences and others as similar manifestations). The coefficient of determination reflects the connectivity between each pair of phenomena:

➤ in LEIPZIG, 90% of the population decline is simultaneous with the decrease of the *Migration by age 30-50*; 89% of the population decline is accompanied by the decrease of the *Total fertility rate*, 79%, by the decreasing of the *Employees* and 71%, by the decrease of the *Migration by age 50-65*. On the other hand, 64% of the population decline is manifested simultaneously with the increase of the *Intra-urban mobility rate*.

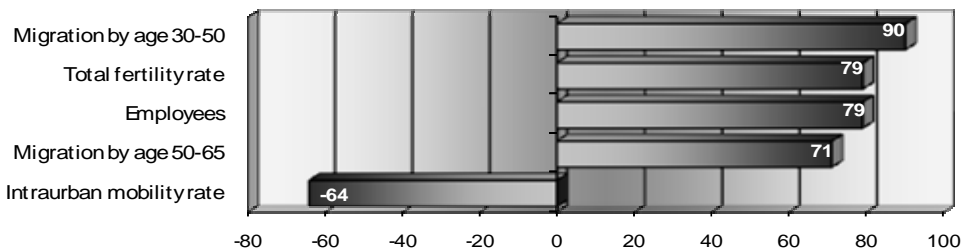


Figure 11: Population decline in LEIPZIG and colateral phenomena

➤ in HALLE, 96% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *Average age*; 94% of the population decline comes with the decrease of the *three-person households* and with the

decrease of the *Household average size* (94%); 88% comes with the increase of the *Students population* and 81% with the decrease of the *Urban population density*.

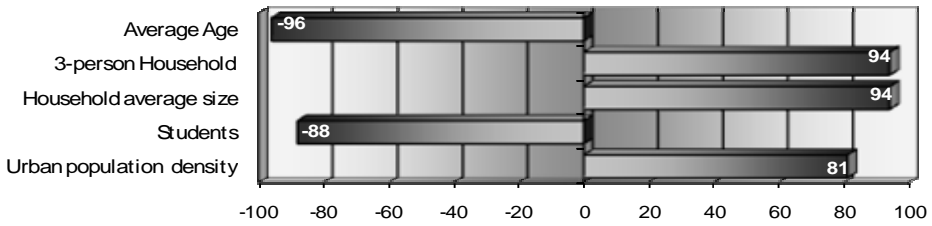


Figure 12: Population decline in HALLE and colateral phenomena

➤ in GENOA, 99% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *Average age*; 93% of the population decline comes with the decreasing of the *>three-person households*; 85% of the

population decline is accompanied by the increase of the *Total fertility rate* and by the decrease of *Youth rate* (85%); 84% by the decrease of *three-person household*;

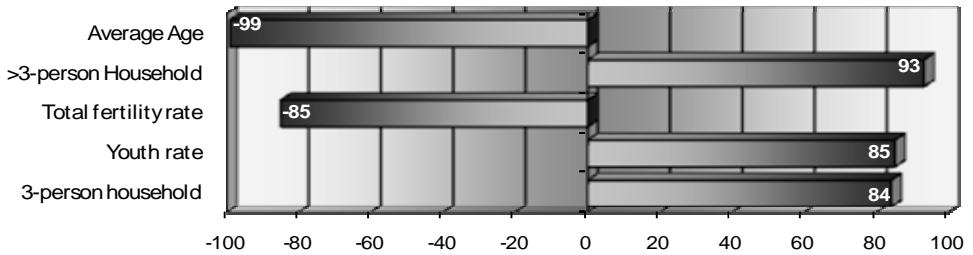


Figure 13: Population decline in GENOA and colateral phenomena

➤ in OSTRAVA, 97% of the population decline comes with the decreasing of the *Water demand*; 96% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *Ageing index*; 95% of the population decline is accompanied by the

decrease of the *Total number of nursery and kindergarten*; 95% is accompanied by the increase of the *Practicing physicians*; 83% comes with the increase of the *Total fertility rate*.

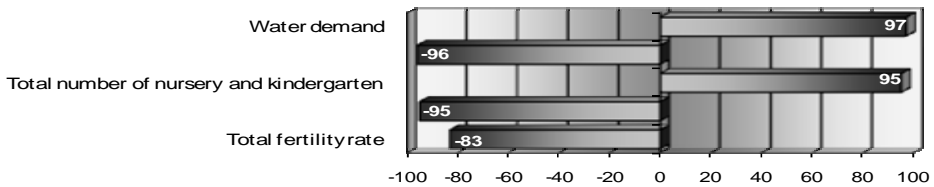


Figure 14: Population decline in OSTRAVA and colateral phenomena

➤ in BYTOM, 96% of the population decline comes together with the decrease of the *Employees*; 91% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *National GDP (Euro)*; 71% of the

population decline is accompanied by the decrease of the *Youth rate*; 70% comes with the decrease of the *Schooling (capacity)*; 64% comes with the decrease of the *Housing units/dwellings*.

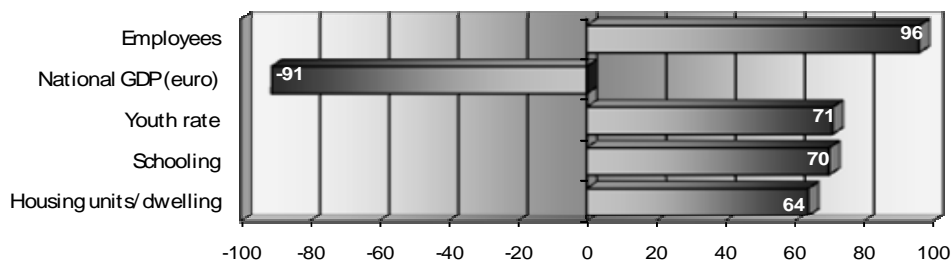


Figure 15: Population decline in BYTOM and colateral phenomena

➤ in SOSNOWIEC, 89% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *National GDP (Euro)*; 86% of the population decline comes together with the

decrease of the *Total number of nursery and kindergarten*; 71%, with the decrease of the *Housing units/dwellings*; 65%, with the decreasing of the *Employees*.

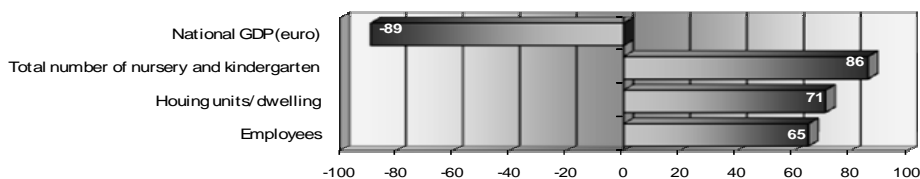


Figure 16: Population decline in SOSNOWIEC and colateral phenomena

➤ in TIMIȘOARA, 99% of the population decline comes together with the decrease of the *Urban population density*; 85% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *Dwelling space per*

person; 81% comes together with the increase of the *Age structure over 65*; 78% comes with the decrease of the *Schooling* and 78% with the increase of the *Average age*.

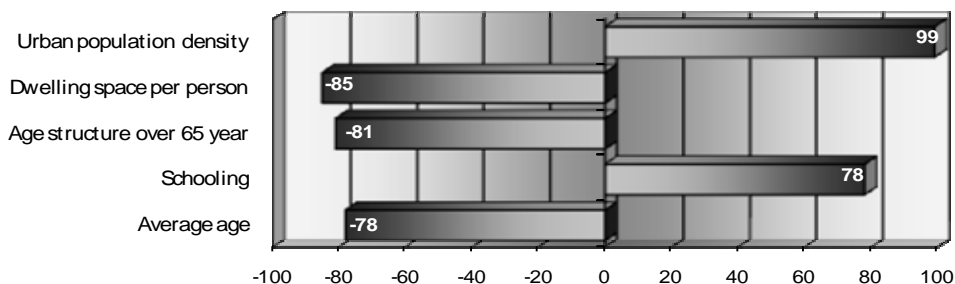


Figure 17: Population decline in TIMIȘOARA and colateral phenomena

➤ in DONETSK, 99% of the population decline comes with the decrease of the *Population density*; 91% of the population decline comes with the increase of the *Dwelling space per person*; 90% of

the population decline is accompanied by the decrease of the *Schooling*; 87% with the decrease of the *Wastewater*; 79% with the decrease of the *Total number of nursery and kindergarten*.

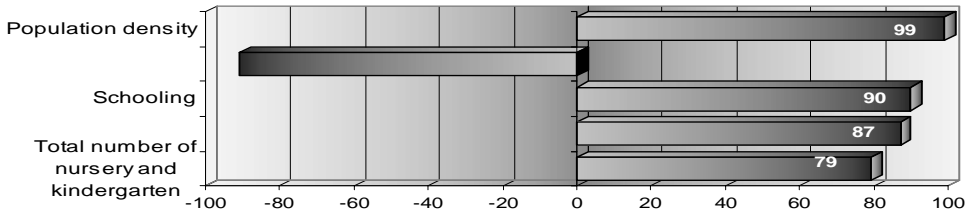


Figure 18: *Population decline in DONETSK and colateral phenomena*

➤ in MAKIIVKA, 99% of the population decline comes with the decrease of the *Population density*; 95%, with the decrease of the *Wastewater*; 91%, with the

increase of the total number of births; 91% with the decrease of the *Total number of nursery and kindergarten*; 83% with the decrease of the *Apprenticeship*.

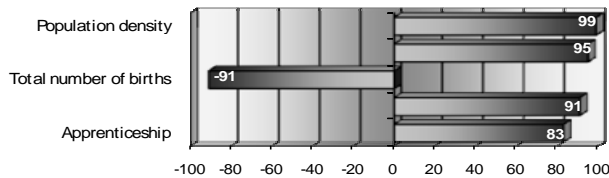


Figure 19: *Population decline in MAKIIVKA and colateral phenomena*

All these descriptive statistics will be improved into further secondary analysis. For now, they can assure a quite detailed preview (sustainable by the available data) upon the phenomenon of depopulation from each case study.

Conclusions

Even if the shrinking process is a constant reality for the last almost 20 years, the city of Timișoara does not look to be seriously affected. On the basis of the previous analysis, the artificial urbanization that has directly affected the city during the communist period has accumulated a structural pressure that nowadays is, practically, normalized. We are talking about the persons that now can move away in any foreign country; about the persons from rural areas that were forced to live in the city and which are now unemployed; about the families that now can adopt any measures of family planning; about the

persons that were persuaded to inhabit in uncomfortable block-flats and which have the possibility, nowadays, to build a house 'on the ground', even if not quite inside Timișoara but close enough (within 20 km). We must admit that for a period (1960-1970) the flat-buildings housing have assured high living standards (in comparison especially with the rural areas), mostly by the access to facilities (running water and sewage). But these block housings became the only alternative during the '80s, with a constant depreciation of their comfort (with a very limited program of hot water, with very poor heating conditions and even with a daily program without electricity, in some cities). Thus, the possibility to live in a new house on the ground (rediscovered after the political regime change) was, and still is, a very attractive possibility (of course, not so affordable).

Notes

1. „Vieți la comandă” [*Lives at command*]. Available at [http://www.civicnet.info/Procesul comunismului.asp?ID=120](http://www.civicnet.info/Procesul_comunismului.asp?ID=120). Accessed on 19 March 2010.

²Following the Ritzer’s theory, there is a trend to become non-rational because of an excess of rationality, into a process of globalisation. Thus, in Romania, during the communist period, many products, services, behaviours, values, rules, beliefs was standardized: the same conditions for living (apartments with 1, 2, 3 or 4 rooms, in blocks of flats with 4 or 10 levels), working (standard working program in fabric, in agriculture, etc), leisure (the well known summer holiday or in the rural area visiting relatives), knowledge (standard curriculum for the entire educational system) and so on.

³According to the Law No. 351, from July the 6th, 2001, dedicated to The National Plan for the Territorial Planning.

⁴Tellman, D. (2009), *Distribution of population density in Timișoara*, from the project *Studiul director privind facilitățile sportive și de agrement în Timișoara [Master Study about Sport and Leisure Facilities in Timișoara]* elaborated by the company “Plancontrol Arhitecture Office Ltd.” and the Politechnic University, for Timișoara City Hall. Available at <http://blog.plancontrol.ro/2009/10/01/studiu-director-privind-facilitatile-sportive-si-de-agrement-din-timisoara/> or at http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Densitatea_Populatiei_Timisoara_09.jpg. Accessed on 20 March 2010.

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