

RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH URBAN DEVELOPMENT. CASE STUDY: DISPARAGE AREAS FROM TÂRGU JIU CITY, ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *The analysis of urban space is a concern for numerous specialists from different fields of activity, due to the topicality and complexity of the problems generated by urban living. The present study aims to highlight the existing local problems of the city. These problems are consistent with the changes that have taken place within the municipality, with the effort of the local authorities to achieve urban regeneration by revitalizing and enhancing the city center, historical and architectural monuments, by creating a strong local, regional tourist brand based on the historical or natural monuments of the area.*

KEY WORDS: *urban development, social risk, disparage areas, material deprivation.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *J2, J6, R0, R1, Z3.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania has faced numerous social and economic problems both before and after its integration into the European Union, consistently ranking among the last countries in the EU in indicators measuring the level of social and economic development.

For example, Romania has among the highest shares of people exposed to the risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to other member states (34.5% in 2024 compared to 21.7% EU average), and the situation is even worse among children (41.5% of children under 18 in Romania were at risk of poverty, a major difference from the EU average of 24.4%). This indicator is used to monitor the incidence of poverty and social exclusion at European level until 2030.

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In relation to a systemic structure, such as the city, the quality of life requires the evaluation and adequate expression of the dynamics of that structure, assuming the balanced development of the connections between components, decided and controlled by the decision-making center. If we take an anthropocentric position, sustainable urban development can be seen as a long-term increase in the quality of life.

Table 1. Top ten cities from Romania, in terms of quality of life (2025)

No.	City	Strengths	Weaknesses
1	Cluj-Napoca	Education Air connectivity	Air quality Urban traffic
2	București	Parks Connectivity	Green footprint Urban traffic
3	Sibiu	Landmarks Historical monuments	Urban traffic Green footprint
4	Brașov	Landmark places Proximity to tourist resorts	Air quality Hospitals and doctors
5	Iași	Hospitals and doctors High life expectancy	Air quality Urban traffic
6	Timișoara	Education level Elegant places	Urban traffic Air quality
7	Târgu Jiu	Proximity to natural and national parks Landmark places	Ranking local university Airplane connectivity
8	Râmnicu Vâlcea	High life expectancy Green footprint	Landmark places Airplane connectivity
9	Alba Iulia	Quality of secondary and high school education Proximity to monuments and natural parks	Hospitals and doctors Low railway connectivity
10	Reșița	Air quality Green footprint	High life expectancy Airplane connectivity

Regarding the coverage of the needs of the vulnerable population through social assistance services and benefits, this is deficient, Romania having one of the lowest budgets for social assistance in Europe (Guță, 2024). Moreover, the social benefits provided through social assistance have a low impact on the beneficiaries escape from poverty, and the degree of coverage of people who would need such benefits is low.

Another problem, closely related to social and economic marginalization, is the unemployment rate. In social and economically marginalized areas, people without a job, with precarious or atypical forms of employment, usually without a standard employment contract, are overrepresented.

In addition to the fact that Romania has a low employment rate for the population aged 15-64 compared to the European average (61.9% compared to 69.4%), there is also the problem of the large number of employed people who are not salaried (especially in rural areas), which in the long term translates into precariousness and risk of poverty in the absence of contributions to social security or social health insurance budgets.

In addition to poverty and precarious employment, the population with a low level of education is overrepresented in marginalized areas. One of the biggest problems at the national level in Romania is early school leaving, the large number of young people who are not in education, employment or training. To this problem we can also add the low level of skills measured by international standardized tests. Romania has the highest early school leaving rate, at 15.3% compare to European average 9.8%.

2. DYSFUNCTIONS AND NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR URBAN REGENERATION

Sustainable development is more than a universal concept that is intensely circulated, in the two decades of use, it has become a true cultural model that involves profound changes in the lifestyle and mentalities of individuals and human society as a whole. Not negligible in promoting sustainable development is the role of the individual and human communities who, through access to public information and the possibility of controlling and expressing themselves on matters that concern them, take part in the decision-making process (figure 1).

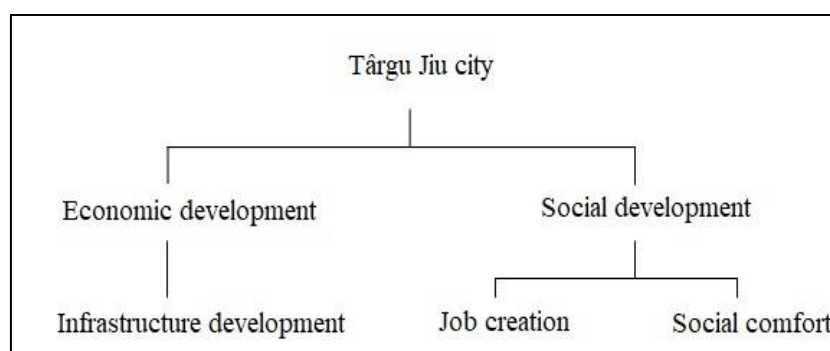


Figure 1. Measures regarding the sustainable development of Târgu Jiu municipality

The sustainable and development of Târgu Jiu city must be achieved by creating and supporting a competitive, stable, healthy and diversified economic and social environment, which ensures economic growth and the quality of life of citizens.

A clean environment is essential for human health and well-being. However, the interactions between the environment and human health are extremely complex and difficult to assess. This makes the use of the precautionary principle extremely useful. The best-known health impacts relate to ambient air pollution, poor water quality and inadequate hygiene. Much less is known about the health impacts of hazardous chemicals. Noise is an emerging health and environmental problem.

Târgu Jiu can be qualified as presenting specific pollution problems resulting from the following causes:

- emissions into the atmosphere with particulate matter and suspended dust from the Succes sorting station (located in the north of the city);
- road traffic in the city;

- construction material depots, which through loading-unloading activity generate particulate matter and suspended dust in the atmosphere.

Industrial activity at the municipal level is regulated by environmental permits issued for generators of industrial activities.

The city's green areas (ecological, leisure-recreational and complementary) represent an area in which urban planning solutions regarding the surface and distribution of vegetation within the built-up area are decisive for the comfort of citizens:

- lack of green curtains of protection between pollution sources and residential areas;
- insufficient provision of green spaces, with insufficient urban furniture;
- very large deficit of public green spaces: squares, gardens and parks, given that their surface area per inhabitant is 4.2 sq m/person, compared to a requirement of 8-12 sq m/person for localities with up to 100,000 inhabitants.

The area of green areas at the local public administration level is distributed as follows: parks: 157500 sq m (1.63 m²/person); green spaces: 248962 m² (2.58 m²/person); swimming pools 1959 m²; lakes 47981 m².

The quality of vegetation is affected by both pollution and the disinterest of some community members, which requires a radical change of perspective in the relationship between local administration and polluting economic agents, as well as in the urban planning strategy.

The transition from the current economic model based on production and consumption to the circular economy will be achieved through a change in mentality, through education, changing consumer behaviour and by developing financial mechanisms to support the transition period.

This will be achieved, among other things, by generalizing the European Union's practices of applying ecological, economic and social performance criteria in public acquisition (sustainable public acquisition), developing and implementing eco-efficient technologies and raising public awareness of the virtues and direct advantages of a sustainable production and consumption model (Ciacci & Traversa, 2021).

The transformation of Târgu Jiu city to become a smart city will have consequences on technological innovation, smart transport, increased energy efficiency, the lives of citizens, workers and businesses, through numerous changes related, for example, to remote work, e-democracy, increased transparency and facilitating more active participation in the decision-making process.

A smart city is a source of quality public services oriented towards the good of the citizen, in which all projects developed by the administration will have a single central point, the citizen, resulting in a higher standard of living and operations for citizens and businesses, offering new employment opportunities through a more innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem of increased ecological sustainability.

Sustainable development of cities is the most important driver of economic and social development and can only be achieved through an integrated approach, which addresses all areas related to urban development, information security, energy efficiency, urban regeneration and urban mobility (Nimară, 2021).

3. SEVERE MATERIAL DEPRIVATION RATE

The main types of social problems considered by local authorities as relevant and significant for defining marginalization are:

- lack of identity documents for some categories of the population, which limits access to certain types of services and social benefits;
- lack of basic elements of local infrastructure (public utilities: drinking water supply, access to the sewage system, electricity supply);
- geographical isolation indicated by significant distances from urban areas where there are education and work opportunities;
- unemployment, reduced employment opportunities;
- lack of access to educational services;
- improvised settlements and overcrowded housing in an advanced state of degradation;
- school dropout;
- employment rate in the formal economy, population aging.

An important indicator reflecting the standard of living is the severe material deprivation rate, which represents the share of the total population of people in a state of severe material deprivation, people aged 18 and over who, due to lack of financial resources, cannot afford at least four of the following situations (Sedefoğlu & Dudek, 2024):

- timely payment, without arrears, of utilities and other current obligations;
- payment of a one-week vacation per year, away from home;
- consumption of meat: pork, chicken, fish (or other protein equivalent) at least once every two days;
- the ability to cope, with one's own resources, with unforeseen expenses (equivalent to 1/12 of the national poverty threshold);
- ownership of a landline or mobile phone;
- ownership of a color television;
- ownership of a washing machine;
- ownership of a personal car;
- ensuring the payment of adequate heating of the home.

Even though statistical data indicate a decrease in the severe material deprivation rate for the South West Oltenia development region, it remains almost 7% above the national average. For the municipality of Târgu-Jiu, the study shows that 47.8% of respondents declare that they have the same level of quality of life as before the 2020 pandemic and only 25.4% are dissatisfied, indicating a lower level of quality of life than they had before the pandemic (figure 2).

According to the research, in Târgu Jiu city 80.56% of the population is located in disadvantaged areas, 3.75% of the population in disadvantaged areas by housing, 6.24% of the population in disadvantaged areas by employment and 5.62% of the population in disadvantaged areas by human capital, resulting in a percentage of 1.92% of the population in marginalized areas (Mussida & Parisi, 2021).

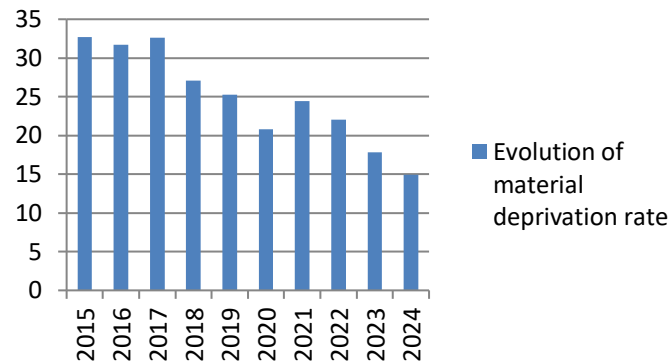


Figure 2. Evolution of severe material deprivation rate in the South-West Oltenia Region (2015-2024)



Figure 3. Map of marginalized areas in Târgu Jiu city

These marginalized urban areas (figure 3) refer to neighborhoods in Târgu Jiu Municipality where most of the population lives in inadequate housing, without access to essential utilities, which cumulate disadvantages from the perspective of human capital, employment and housing. From the analyses carried out over the years, these areas are inhabited by a population with a low level of education, largely illiterate and unemployed, mostly of gipsy ethnicity:

- Obreja neighborhood, located on the outskirts of the city at the exit to Petroșani, made up of 2611 gipsy people;
- Meteor neighborhood, located at the exit from Târgu Jiu towards Petroșani, made up of 1316 gipsy people;
- Luncilor neighborhood, located at the exit from Târgu Jiu towards Craiova, made up of 1420 gipsy people from the Rudari Roma tribe who present the

characteristics of assimilated gipsy (non-speakers of the language and non-keepers of Roma customs and traditions);

- Drăgoeni neighborhood, located at the exit from Târgu Jiu towards Râmnicu Vâlcea, made up of 852 gipsy people.

Although the areas are territorially integrated, they lack access to the developed area, are characterized by social exclusion and segregation, poverty and high crime. These areas are defined by the lack or poor quality of services (education, health, infrastructure) that drastically reduce the population's chances of escaping poverty. Such areas require integrated, immediate interventions, in order to solve specific problems and sustainably capitalize on the development potential of these communities.

People living in marginalized areas have a complex of social problems - lack of education, lack of qualifications, poor housing and hygiene conditions, health problems, etc. (Local Agenda 21 – the Local Sustainable Development Plan for the Municipality of Târgu Jiu). In order to be overcome, these problems must be addressed in an integrated manner, through efficient case management, and individualized support services are essential, for each family. Thus, the need to adopt a multisectoral and integrated strategy was identified to create a bridge between policies, on the one hand, and concrete actions, on the other hand, through complementary investments. The approach was of an integrated type, avoiding disparate, mono-sectoral measures, the effectiveness of which would be significantly diminished in the absence of effective measures to accompany the main measures and will be implemented at the level of distinctly delimited areas.

From a functional point of view, the city's structure has undergone the following changes:

- the social and economic function has been diversified;
- the residential function has experienced a sharp increase;
- the change in service functions;
- the change in the type of structure and volume of traffic, transport and communications.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Târgu-Jiu city is established as a center of convergence of human and material flows, without restrictions from the natural framework. The identification and analysis of the main components of the urban space of the municipality shows its complex structure closely linked to the territorial components. The study of the territorial organization shows the capacity of the municipality to respond to all the needs of its inhabitants and the analysis of the functional zones shows the extent and intensity of the connections at the level of the urban system.

The meanings of marginalization are rather related to the high evidence of visible material expressions of the low quality of living standards (consumption practices, lack of main utilities, precarious housing, improvised households in an advanced state of degradation, overcrowding, precarious hygiene practices etc.), to the magnitude of the cases of social assistance beneficiaries (the number of files and applications submitted for receiving certain social benefits).

The economic dimension is essential, with material deprivation representing one of the significant problems that perpetuate marginalization. Economically marginalized areas can be considered those where a significant portion of the population is below conventionally established poverty lines, with limited access to formal employment (and even less to well-paid employment), resulting in informal employment and unstable jobs and high unemployment.

Trends in urban regeneration and renewal are clearly visible, highlighting the great potential held by Târgu Jiu both in the tourism sector and in other areas and the opportunities for economic recovery.

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