

Typical and Distinctive Characteristics of Suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca

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Abstract

Is suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca typical for Central and Eastern Europe? And if not, what are its distinctive characteristics? In order to answer these questions, the paper tries to identify to what extent local features of suburbanization correspond to those considered as typical by existing studies. Thus, starting from Kiril Stanilov's ascertainment that Central and Eastern European cities have specific aspects of suburbanization that distinguish them from their Western counterparts, the paper tries to verify which of these attributes are also common to Cluj. Characteristics to be put to the test are: 1) condensed evolution; 2) simultaneous suburbanization of housing, retail and offices; 3) speed of decentralization; 4) suburbanization patterns; 5) lack of administrative separation and fragmentation; 6) social homogeneity.

Rezumat

Este suburbanizarea din Zona Metropolitană Cluj-Napoca tipică pentru Europa Centrală și de Est? Dacă nu, atunci care sunt caracteristicile distinctive ale acesteia? pentru a răspunde acestor întrebări, lucrarea încearcă să identifice în ce măsură trăsăturile locale ale suburbanizării corespund celor considerate de studii existente ca fiind tipice. Astfel, pornind de la constatarea lui Kiril Stanilov că orașele central și est-europene au anumite caracteristici ale suburbanizării care le diferențiază de omoloagele din Vest, lucrarea încearcă să verifice care dintre aceste atribute sunt comune Clujului. Caracteristicile supuse verificării sunt: 1) evoluția condensată; 2) suburbanizarea simultană a locuirii, comerțului și birourilor; 3) viteza descentalizării; 4) tipare ale suburbanizării; 5) lipsa separării și fragmentării administrative; 6) omogenitatea socială.

Keywords: suburbanization, sprawl, housing, post-socialist, Cluj-Napoca, Central and Eastern Europe

1. Introduction

Defined as "the combination of noncentral population and economic growth with urban spatial expansion" [1], suburbanization is a worldwide phenomenon that can take many shapes: "from the wealthy gated communities of Southern California, to the high risedominated old suburbs of Europe and Canada, the faux Westernized outskirts of Indian and Chinese cities, and the slums and squatter settlements in Africa and Latin America" [1].

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During the last 25 years, in the post-socialist cities of Central and Eastern Europe, suburbanization "has become one of the most visible features of the process of spatial restructuring rearranging the urban patterns" [2]. Thus, even though the phenomenon started much later than in the West, nowadays it is often encountered in the former Eastern Bloc, and, as ascertained by Kiril Stanilov, besides many similarities, Central and Eastern European cities have specific aspects of suburbanization that distinguish them from their Western counterparts. These characteristics are: 1) condensed evolution; 2) simultaneous suburbanization of housing, retail and offices; 3) speed of decentralization; 4) suburbanization patterns; 5) lack of administrative separation and fragmentation; 6) social homogeneity. [2]

In the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca, suburbanization has affected mostly existing rural settlements situated at the edge of the urban core. Communes such as Apahida, Baciu and Florești, and to a lesser extent Chinteni, Feleacu and Gilău (Fig.1), have experienced significant population and housing stock increase since 1990. But is Cluj's suburbanization typical for Central and Eastern Europe? And if not, what are its distinctive characteristics? The paper tries to answer these questions by comparing local suburbanization features to a filter consisting of the characteristics identified by Kiril Stanilov.

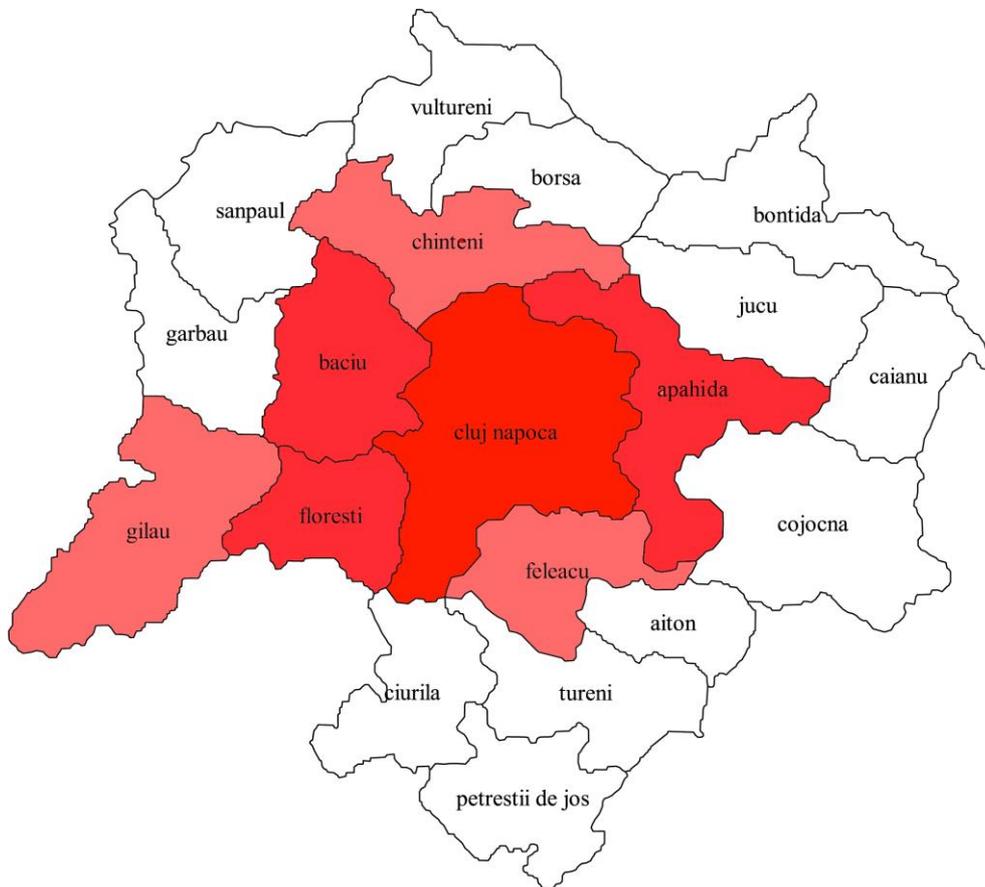


Figure 1. Suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca

2. Condensed evolution

Condensed evolution refers to the direct application of Western schemes of development that, after more than 50 years of studies and experimentation, have proved commercially successful. Imported models usually try to sell an alternative way of life, and they market accordingly by using English names that emphasize, besides the almost omnipresent ecological labels ("Park", "Green", "Garden"

etc.), a very desirable Anglo-Saxon origin. [2] Thus, it can be stated that Central and Eastern European suburbanization doesn't start from scratch, but from an advanced position on the evolution timeline of Western sprawl.

In the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca, suburban development is rather spontaneous, allowed mainly by weak regulations that characterize the period of transition after the collapse of communism: "the vacuum of power, which took place during the first years of the transition period in most countries of the region, created an environment in which an «anything goes» attitude characterized the prevailing behaviour of an emerging group of private real estate investors". [3] The only things imported from the West are English names, but there is nothing aspirational beyond these labels. Here, the key for selling housing units is the price, and, in order to keep it low, sacrifices are to be made. Urban infrastructure is kept at a minimum in order to occupy most of the land with tradeable real estate. Also, constructions are mostly of poor quality and poorly designed in order to keep costs at a minimum (Fig.2).

Although price/cost driven suburbanization might not be specific only to Cluj, it is certainly a feature that distinguishes it from the typical Central and Eastern European sprawl, that is oriented towards developing expensive real estate. Nevertheless, like in most cases of suburbanization around the world, primacy of individual and private over public or collective interest [2] is a common characteristic also for Cluj-Napoca's Metropolitan Area.



Figure 2. High Density Residential Development in Florești

3. Simultaneous suburbanization of housing, retail and offices

As opposed to the Western sequence of suburbanization, where decentralization of housing, retail and offices happened in successive waves, in Central and Eastern Europe it happens almost simultaneously. Moreover, in post-socialist countries, big boxes and malls often precede residential developments at the city edges. [2]

Cluj's suburbanization is no exception from the simultaneity rule: big-box stores, showrooms and office buildings appeared almost simultaneously to residential development (Fig.3). In Florești, some of the non-residential buildings were erected shortly before the decentralization of housing occurred (e.g. the "Metro" store). Office buildings (still scarce in the metropolitan communes) appeared mostly after residential developments, but given the short time period within which local suburbanization occurred, the process can be still considered as simultaneous.



Figure 3. Retail and Offices in Florești

4. Speed of decentralization

Typical speed for suburbanization in Central and Eastern European cities is subject to divergent opinions: while it is usually considered to be slower than in the West, this is arguable because it takes place within a general context of slow or negative population growth. [2]

When analyzing urban decentralization in post-socialist Romania, it is useful to take into account the general trend of demographic decrease highlighted by population censuses. Thus, at national level, the population decreased from more than 22,8 mil. inhabitants in 1992 to around 20,1 mil. inhabitants in 2011 [4]. Based on data from the National Institute of Statistics [4], in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca, between the years 2004 and 2013, the population of Apahida,

Baciu and Florești increased, respectively, 1.30, 1.25 and 2.93 times, while the population of the urban core hardly changed (Tab.1).

Table 1: Population Changes between 2004 and 2013 in Cluj-Napoca, Apahida, Baciu and Florești

	Cluj-Napoca	Apahida	Baciu	Florești
2004	315266	8278	7891	6771
2013	320400	10770	9885	19840
2013/2004	1,02	1,3	1,25	2,93

During the same period, the housing stock of the three communes had even greater coefficients of growth: 1.55 in Apahida, 1.77 in Baciu and 6.10 in Florești (Tab.2). This process can be considered as fast in absolute terms in any context, but it is further accentuated in relative terms by the population downtrend at national level.

Table 2: Housing Stock Changes between 2004 and 2013 in Cluj-Napoca, Apahida, Baciu and Florești

	Cluj-Napoca	Apahida	Baciu	Florești
2004	116884	3593	2613	2646
2013	136556	5564	4621	16133
2013/2004	1,17	1,55	1,77	6,1

5. Suburbanization patterns

Because of limited public financing, high prices of land and lower level of personal income, Central and Eastern European suburbanization patterns are usually denser and less sprawling than their Western counterparts. [2]

As previously shown in section 2, suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca is anything but sprawling. Far from being able to qualify as "smart growth" [2] because of the poor urban and architectural design and build quality, Cluj's suburbs have high values of population density (Tab.3).

Table 3: Inhabitants/Ha. of Buildable Land in Cluj-Napoca, Apahida, Baciu and Florești in 2012

	Cluj-Napoca	Apahida	Baciu	Florești
density (people/ha)	101,46	50,84	53,9	60,65

This situation corresponds to a type of development based on the growth of existing villages and towns at metropolitan periphery that has two categories: the first comprises small satellite settlements that grow based on low-cost attraction, while the second composed of settlements "that fall along new growth corridors formed by the expansion of metropolitan areas in directions dotted with parks and new recreational and shopping facilities" [4]. The suburban communes of Cluj-Napoca best qualify for the first category, even though they are located along the growth corridors of the Metropolitan Area. Thus, despite the corridor's lack of recreational facilities and parks, growth is ensured by relatively fast road connections between the low-cost suburbs and the urban core (Fig.4).

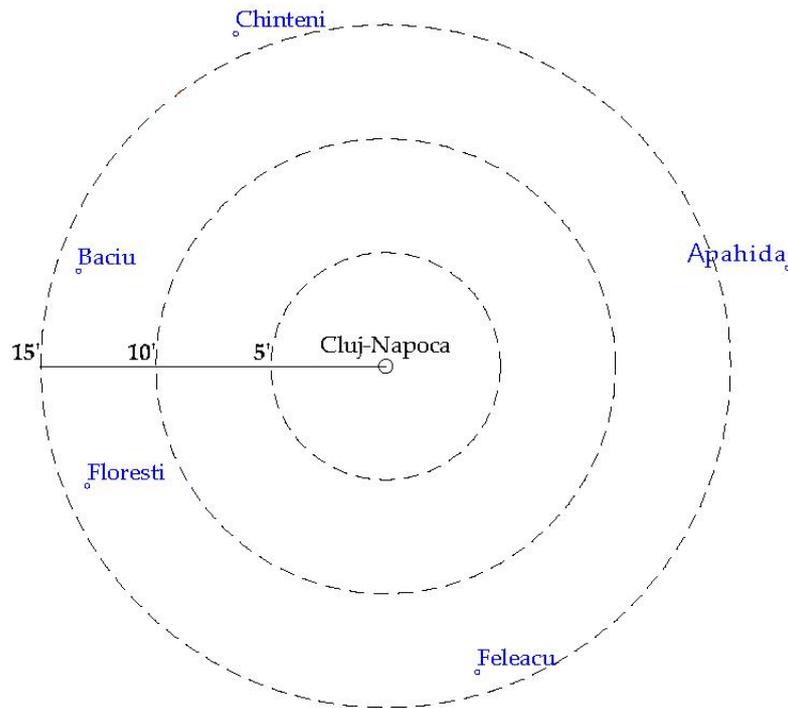


Figure 4. Road Time Distances (in minutes) from Cluj-Napoca to Apahida, Baciu and Florești

6. Lack of administrative separation and fragmentation

In most cases, Central and Eastern European suburbs lie within the existing boundaries of metropolitan areas. This situation is caused by the annexation of surrounding villages to central cities in the 1960s and 1970s in order to ensure land reserves for urban growth. Best-known cases for this type of development are Moscow, Prague and Sofia. [2]

In Cluj, the Metropolitan Association was formed only in 2008, years after the suburbanization process started. The settlements that are part of this Association remain separate administrative entities as regulated by Romanian Legislation (fourth section of Law 351/2001). The functional integration of these settlements is still an undergoing process (mostly through strategic instruments such as the Integrated Urban Development Plan), thus the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca cannot be considered neither an administrative nor a functional monolith.

Taking these facts into consideration, the situation in Cluj is somehow opposite from the typical one: the tendency is rather towards functional integration of separate entities, as opposed to processes of administrative separation within aggregated metropolitan areas.

7. Social homogeneity

Property values for Central and Eastern European suburban real estate are usually higher than those of average dwellings in the city, thus only a few of the city's residents can afford to buy properties in the suburbs. This leads to a relatively high level of social homogeneity in the suburbs, the only instances where social mix occurring where existing villages are subjected to suburbanization (their original population being of rather modest means). [2]

As shown in section 5, suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca is mostly based on

the growth of existing communes. The original population of these communes contributes, up to a certain level, to a social mix rather by its age structure (it is an aged population) and occupational profile (mostly agricultural -corresponding to the former rural character of these settlements) than by income level.

Suburban properties in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca, as shown in section 2, come at much lower prices than those in the urban core. Nevertheless, these low prices does not mean that suburban housing is universally affordable: it usually targets the lower middle class. As an effect, new developments attract a large number of skilled people (Fig.5, Fig.6, Fig.7): in the case of Florești, inhabitants that have a higher education degree count for almost 40% of the population aged 10 and above (Fig.7).

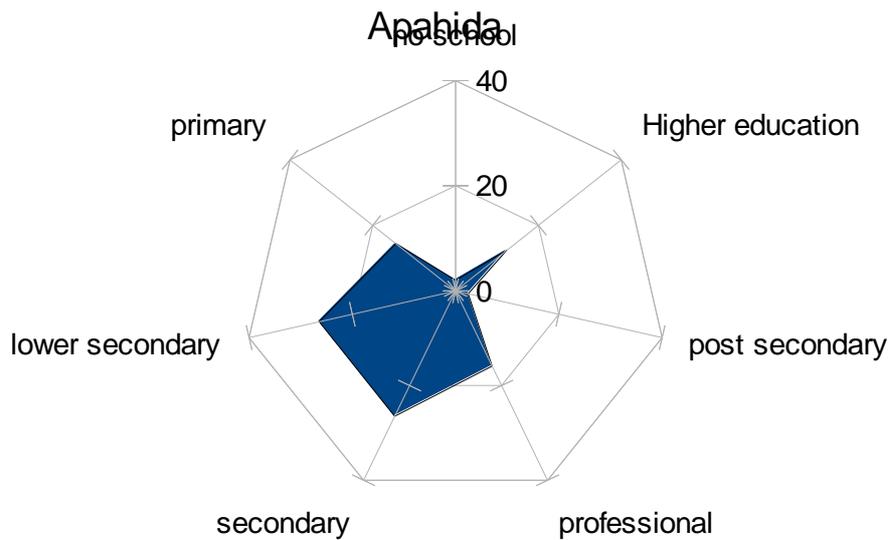


Figure 5. Population of age 10 and above by education in Apahida

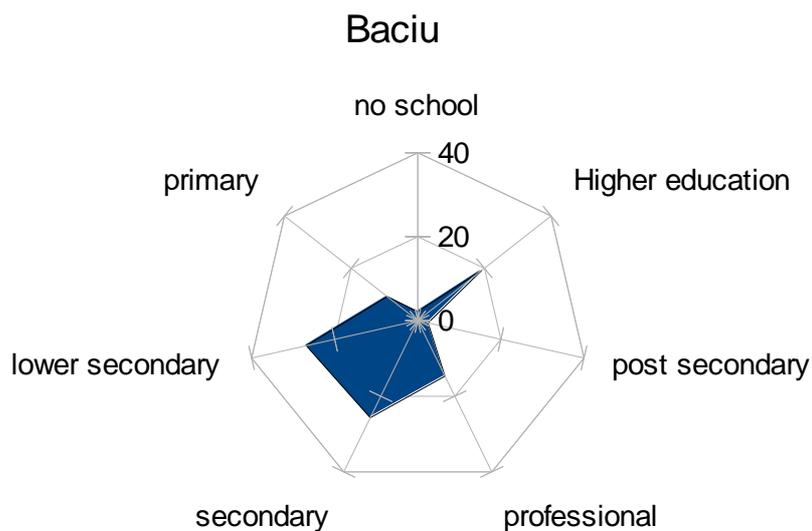


Figure 6. Population of age 10 and above by education in Baciu

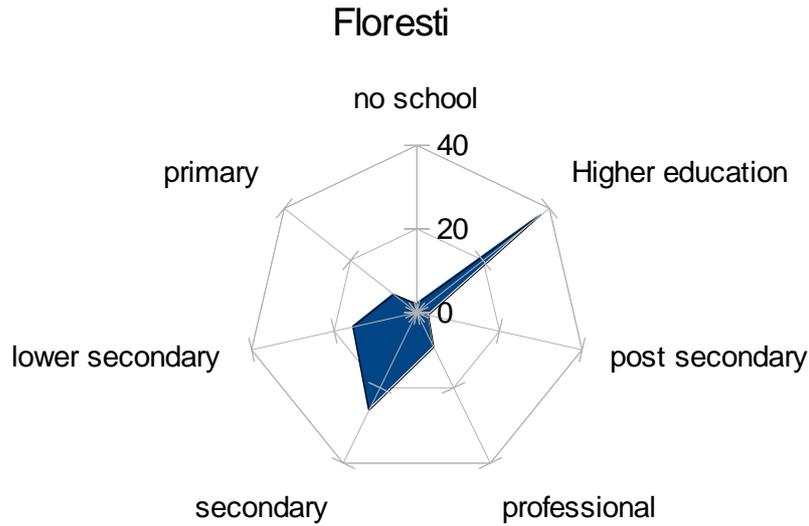


Figure 7. Population of age 10 and above by education in Florești

Also, it can be observed the most important population increase between 2002 and 2011 has occurred within the age group of 20-39 years, followed by that of 40-64 years (Fig.8, Fig.9, Fig.10). A special case is that of Florești, where, during the studied period of time, the population aged 20-39 has nearly tripled. Given the differing social structure of different age groups, it is very likely that these uneven variations contribute to structural changes that can further dilute the social heterogeneity of suburban population.

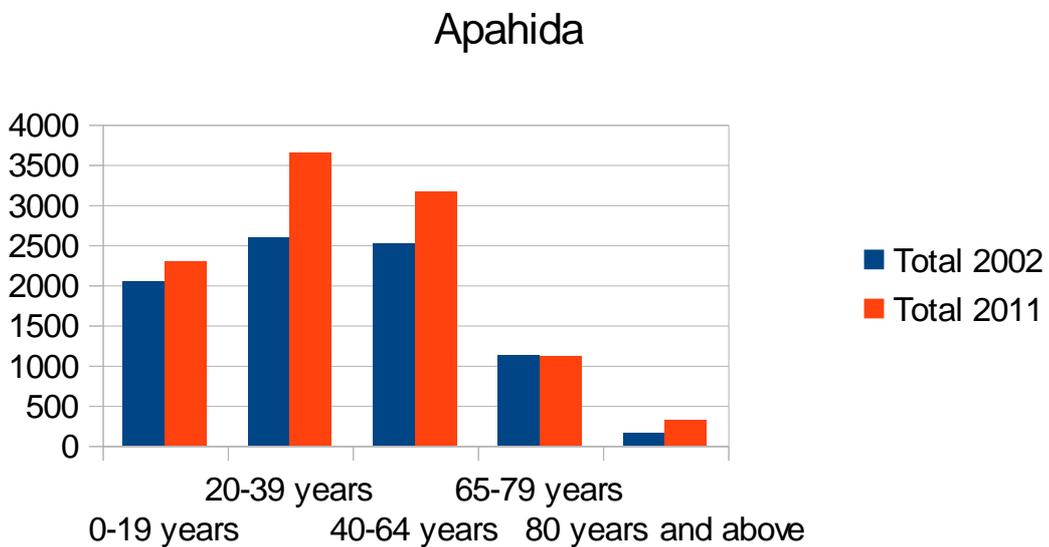


Figure 8. Population distribution by age groups in 2002 and 2011 in Apahida

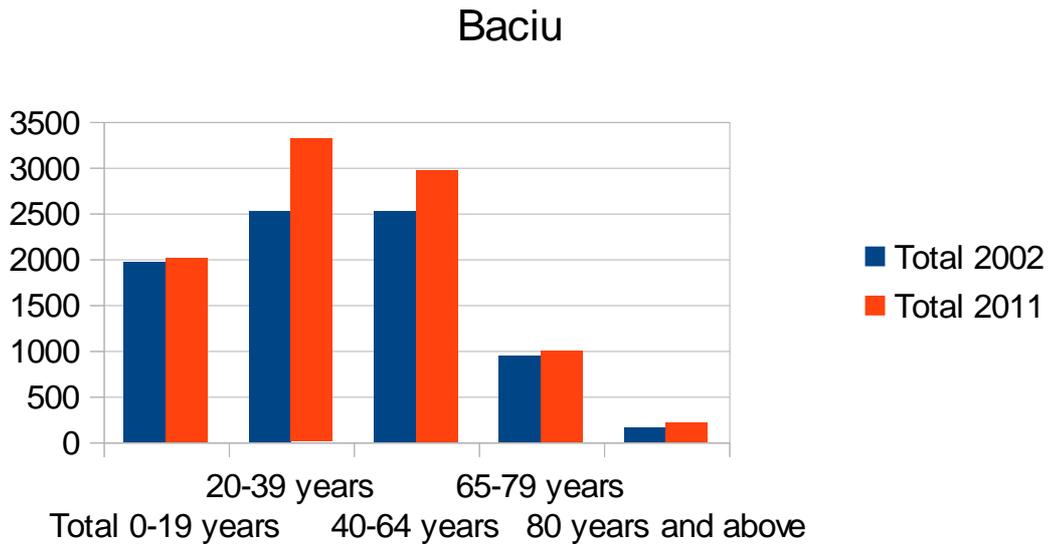


Figure 9. Population distribution by age groups in 2002 and 2011 in Baciu

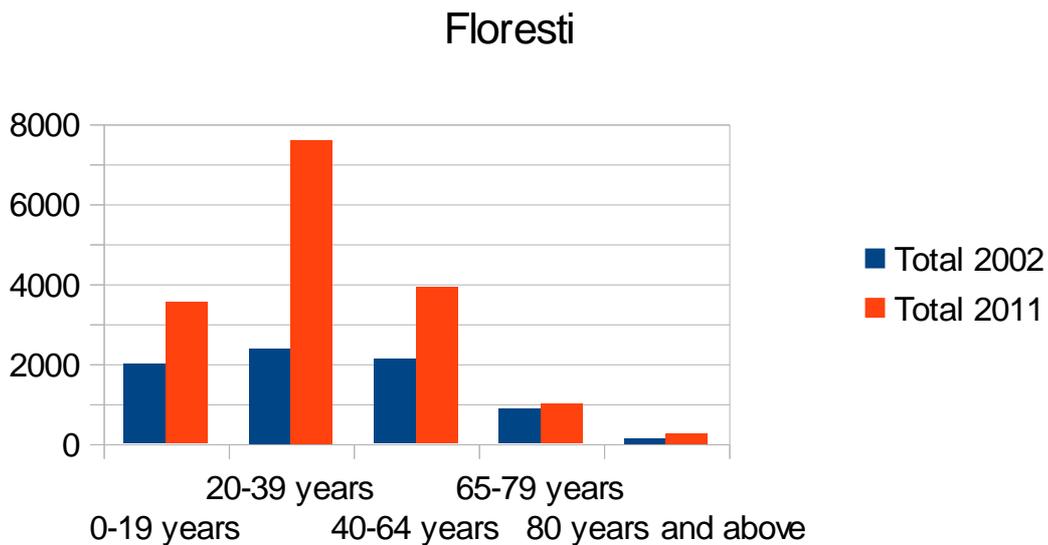


Figure 10. Population distribution by age groups in 2002 and 2011 in Florești

8. Conclusions

Regarding the condensed evolution aspect, suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca is rather spontaneous and it doesn't implement models from the West. With the price as main driving force behind the sales there is no need for advertising alternative ways of life: it's all about answering basic housing needs. Even though this type of suburbanization might be not characteristic only for Cluj, it is certain that it is different from the typical Central and Eastern European sprawl.

Simultaneous suburbanization of housing, retail and offices does check up as a common feature in

the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca. However though, office buildings are still scarce in the suburban communes, while big-box stores and malls tend to concentrate mostly at the edges of the urban core.

The speed at which decentralization occurred in Cluj is very fast both in absolute and relative terms. Florești, the main exponent of suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area has almost tripled its population between 2004 and 2013, while it increased its housing stock by more than six times during the same time period. Put in a general context of negative demographic growth at national level, this kind of evolution is even more spectacular.

In what concerns suburbanization patterns, sprawl almost doesn't exist, while high density is achieved mainly by poor urban and architectural designs. Thus, density can be interpreted in this case as a side effect of the efforts made to cut building costs without negatively affecting profit -in short, Cluj's suburbs cannot qualify as smart growth.

Regarding administrative separation and segregation, the situation in Cluj is quite different from the typical one: while aggregated metropolitan areas such as Moscow, Prague and Sofia have absorbed surrounding settlements under their administration a few decades ago, the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca works as a voluntary association between different administrative entities. Moreover, even though efforts are made in order to functionally integrate the settlements of the Metropolitan Association, their administrative independence cannot be affected.

Because suburbanization in the Metropolitan Area of Cluj-Napoca has affected mostly existing villages, social homogeneity isn't as striking as in typical Central and Eastern European suburbs. However, there can be observed patterns of homogenization: the new population (mostly urban and young) is increasing fast, while the original population (mostly rural and rather old aged) is slowly decreasing.

To conclude, most of the aspects of suburbanization in Cluj analyzed by this paper are differing from those expected for Central and Eastern European cities. However, this doesn't necessarily translate through an uniqueness of the studied situation, but rather through the possible existence of an alternative type. To confirm the existence of such a type, the same filters can be applied to other cases of suburbanization in order to identify similarities.

9. References

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