

Smart Governance, the Backbone of Smart Planning. A new Strategic Plan for the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area

Pietro Elisei, Sabina-Maria Dimitriu, Radu-Matei Cochechi

(Dr. Ing. Pietro Elisei, Urbasofia SRL, pietro.elisei@urbasofia.eu)
(Msc. Urb. Sabina-Maria Dimitriu, Urbasofia SRL, sabina.dimitriu@urbasofia.eu)
(Phdc. Urb. Radu-Matei Cochechi, Urbasofia SRL, matei.cochechi@urbasofia.eu)

1 ABSTRACT

Smart Governance is one of the six smart city pillars, as governance is widely considered to be key in ensuring the sustainable development of cities and regions. In the last decades, spatial planning has evolved from a regulatory approach, focused on the delivery of land use plans, to a holistic activity, a meta-governance centred on the coordination of different sectoral policies. According to UN-Habitat, spatial planning is now more than a technical instrument – it is an integrative and participatory decision-making process, a central element in the new paradigm of urban governance. Governance of metropolitan areas is currently one of major concerns for planners all over Europe, major cities (e.g. Berlin, Paris, Rome) are defining schemes for governing this key-scale of action and definition of urban policies.

In the case of the European Union, the changes from traditional planning to strategic planning have also been triggered by the fact that strategic plans have often become a prerequisite for accessing structural funds at local level. This was also the case for the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area, comprising Cluj-Napoca, the second largest city in Romania, and 18 rural communes, with a total population of around 400,000 inhabitants. The metropolitan area, although created through the voluntary association of communes, was an artificial structure, lacking any governance and collaboration mechanisms. In June 2015, we were appointed to design the metropolitan area's new integrated development strategy for 2016-2020 – a prerequisite for accessing funds from Romania's Regional Operational Programme.

The design of the strategic plan was based on a participative planning approach, already tested as a methodology within the STATUS Project (SEE 2007-2013)¹. As a result, a series of thematic workshops were held with local stakeholders, ranging from local and county public authorities to decentralised institutions, utility suppliers, NGOs, cluster associations, universities and private companies. The aims of these workshops were twofold: to gather information from the local stakeholders regarding the issues in the metropolitan area and potential solutions, as well as to encourage the collaboration between stakeholders facing similar issues.

The ideas expressed in the workshops were distilled by the project team into nine development axes for the strategic plan. We considered governance to be the plan's central axis, with the success of the other eight sectoral axes (housing, mobility, energy, environment, etc.) greatly dependent on its progress. Our main proposal was the creation of a Metropolitan Task Force, composed of the main stakeholders participating at the workshops, that would be in charge with monitoring the implementation of the plan and ensuring the coordination between the projects in the metropolitan area. The Metropolitan Task Force would function in a Metropolitan Center – a venue encouraging the debate on the future development of the metropolitan area and inviting all interested stakeholders in expressing their ideas on this matter.

In the end, we realized a self-assessment of the final strategic plan, rating the innovation and smartness of our proposals (flagship projects, soft projects and complementary projects) for each of the nine development axes. The conclusion was that the governance, housing and social axes were characterized by a great degree of innovation – with proposals such as the realization of a metropolitan housing plan or the creation of CLLD initiatives to combat urban poverty –, while the mobility and leisure/tourism axes were considered to be the least innovative.

The strategic plan of the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area is more than a vision accompanied by a list of projects. It is just the start of a process aimed at fostering collaboration and dialogue between different stakeholders, that need to make the transition now from the co-design of the plan to the co-implementation of its projects. Smart Governance is the backbone of Smart Planning, as our recent initiatives in the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area – mainly mobility and energy projects – highlight the fact that a wide stakeholder

¹ More information available at: www.seecityplatform.net

involvement can bridge the gap between industry and public administration and lead to integrated project ideas aimed at fostering territorial development.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Governance and planning – an overall view in the case of metropolitan areas

A transition from government to governance can be observed in the last two decades, as the former, seen as the domination of formally organized and hierarchic state power, is being replaced by the latter, fostering on complex relations through the involvement of new actors from outside the political arena (Davoudi et al, 2008). At the same time, challenges like the growth in socio-economic and demographic disparities (Walsh and Allin, 2012) has determined a transition of spatial planning from normative and bureaucratic approaches to strategic approaches focused on implementation and development (Albrechts, 2006). Consequently, urban and territorial planning becomes more than a technical instrument – *it is an integrative and participatory decision-making process which promotes local democracy, participation and inclusion, transparency and accountability, with a view to ensuring sustainable urbanization and spatial quality* (UN Habitat, 2015, p. 8).

Consequently, strategic planning is presently heading towards strategic design processes which allow both the participation of diverse stakeholders and multiple-source financing (Ciaffi, 2005). Governance allows the horizontal and vertical integration of actors and initiatives, including citizens, companies, local public administrations, through the design and implementation of common projects (Weeber et al, 2011). The focus on place and territory in regional development strategies is underlined through the concept of territorial governance, defined as the design and implementation of public policies, programme and projects targeting a specific place or territory (Janin Rivolin et al, 2014).

Smart Governance is considered to be one of the six smart city pillars, alongside smart economy, smart people, smart mobility, smart environment and smart living (Giffinger et al, 2007). In this context, planning can be regarded as a meta-governance which aims to spatially coordinate different sectoral policies level (Vigar, 2009).

In this paper, we aim to present smart governance as the backbone to smart planning, as we consider that the successful construction of governance models is key to ensuring a sustainable development of cities and regions. In this regard, we focus on metropolitan governance, as it is a matter still under considerable debate at international level.

The development of metropolitan areas is a process which can be closely related to globalization (Lefèvre, 2010), with these new structures becoming more and more attractive through their offer regarding high-tech production potential, metropolitan services or transportation nodes (Jurczek, 2008). Governance of metropolitan areas is currently one of the major concerns for planners all over Europe. In France, a series of legislative reforms undergone at the beginning of the 2000s aimed at promoting the voluntary association of LAU 2 units for the common development of services (Booth, 2009), further strengthening the existing *communautés urbaines* which have a broad range of competences (Korom, 2014). In Italy, recent legislative reforms seek to establish metropolitan cities as a new institutional administrative level (Lingua and Servillo, 2014).

Nevertheless, in Romania, strategic planning development has been mostly triggered by the possibility to access EU structural funds (Florescu and Mitrea, 2015), with the creation of metropolitan areas as voluntary association of LAU 2 units being influenced by urban development funds for Growth Poles in the 2007-2013 programming period (Elisei and Pascariu, 2012).

2.2 Methodology: previous experiences and new challenges

The design of the strategic plan was based on a participative planning approach, already tested as a methodology within the STATUS Project (SEE 2007-2013). This section presents an overview of the STATUS project experiences, as well as the context of the need for a new strategic plan for the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area in the summer of 2015.

2.2.1 STATUS project

Funded under the South East Europe cooperation programme 2007-2013, the STATUS (Strategic Territorial Agendas for Small and Middle-sized Towns and Urban Systems) project focused on the development of

strategic plans through participatory planning instruments, with the creation of Urban Task Forces for the design and implementation of the strategies closely resembling Arnstein's planning committees or the URBACT Local Support Groups (Dimitriu et al, 2015). Introducing a participatory approach was a challenge especially in post-communist countries, more accustomed to top-down approaches and being characterized by overall weak local governance systems (Elisei, 2014).

The main result of the project was the design of ten strategic agendas for ten small and middle-sized towns and urban systems in South East Europe countries – Italy, Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania and the Republic of Moldova. The STATUS methodology was centered around a participative planning approach, the strategies being drafted as a result of three workshops which encouraged the participation of a broad range of local stakeholders: public authorities, universities, NGOs, private companies. The workshops focused on: (1) *problem identification in a set of planning domains*, (2) *identification of solutions through the creation of local working groups helped by international experts in town and regional planning* and (3) *design of the final strategic planning document and graphical representation (poster plan)* (Dimitriu et al, 2015, p. 1665).

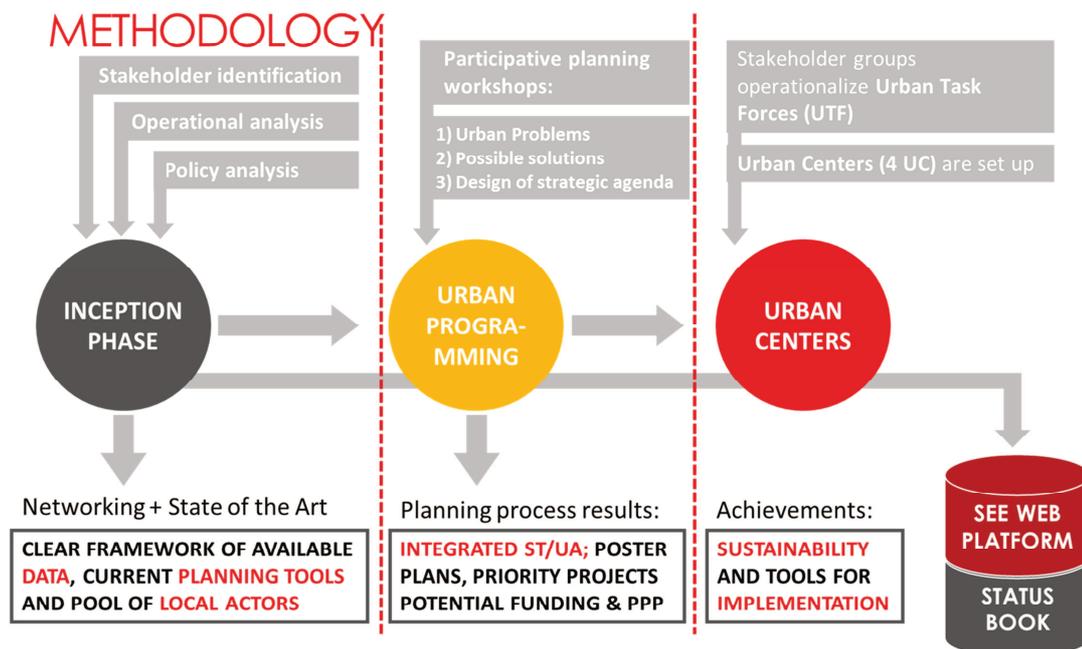


Figure 1. STATUS project methodology (Dimitriu et al, 2014)

The final step was the consolidation of an Urban Task Force, formed from the stakeholders involved in the workshops, and the realization of an Urban Center, as a physical place promoting the city's projects and programmes, collecting the ideas received from the civil society and a platform for discussing urban projects (Ginocchi, 2014).

2.2.2 A new challenge: the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area

In June 2015, we were appointed to design the Cluj Napoca metropolitan area's new integrated development strategy for 2016-2020 – a prerequisite for accessing funds from Romania's Regional Operational Programme. The metropolitan area comprised Cluj-Napoca, the second largest city in Romania, and 18 rural communes, having a total population of around 400,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, the metropolitan area was mostly an artificial construction, inherited from the compulsory Growth Pole structures in the previous (2007-2013) programming period, a structure created without taking into account the real functional relationships between settlements at territorial level.

The appointment was a chance to test the STATUS methodology within a different context – we were no longer facing small and middle-sized cities and their socio-economic development challenges, widely discussed in European literature (see OIR, 2006 or Servillo et al, 2014). The Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area represented the second most important economic center of the country, the only Growth Pole that registered both economic and demographic growth between 2007-2013 and a city with European aspirations, also being serviced by the second most important airport in terms of international passengers in the country.

Nevertheless, we also faced the challenge of a metropolitan area with conflicts between the central city and the surrounding rural communes, conflicts which mainly stemmed from the fact that most metropolitan area projects in the previous programming period had been implemented in the city of Cluj-Napoca, with the rural area being disregarded. Furthermore, the strategy had to be drafted in just six months, in order to have the strategy ready by 2016, for the first calls for projects funded through the national operation programmes.

3 DESIGN PROCESS OF AN INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL AGENDA

We based our design of the integrated territorial agenda of Cluj Napoca's metropolitan area on the same principles of the STATUS project: having an integrated territorial approach and realizing a co-design of the strategy, alongside interested local stakeholders, in order to foster a participative planning culture and ensure that the liaisons created can be also capitalized upon during the implementation of the strategy, within a newly created Metropolitan Task Force, working in the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Center.

3.1 A participative planning approach

A series of thematic workshops were held with local stakeholders, ranging from local and county public authorities to decentralised institutions, utility suppliers, NGOs, cluster associations, universities and private companies. The aims of these workshops were twofold: to gather information from the local stakeholders regarding the issues in the metropolitan area and potential solutions, as well as to encourage the collaboration between stakeholders facing similar issues.

For the first two workshops (Workshop 1: Identifying metropolitan problems and Workshop 2: Envisaging solutions for the identified problems) the discussions were organized around six major themes: (1) metropolitan governance and living, (2) environment and public utilities, (3) mobility, (4) economy, (5) social issues, education and health and (6) culture and local tourism, with facilitated debates taking place amongst relevant stakeholders identified at county and local level. Before the 3rd workshop (focused on discussing the strategy's projects), we decided to broaden our participative approach, as many important stakeholders did not attend the first workshops. As a result, preliminary consultations on the theme of metropolitan governance took place with representatives of local public authorities, as well as representatives of the clusters and universities from Cluj-Napoca. An international workshop was also organized, aiming to better explain the instrument of the Metropolitan Center to local stakeholders.

The idea of creating a Metropolitan Task Force, responsible with the implementation of the strategy and discussing project ideas within a Metropolitan Center, was sustained from the beginning and was subsequently supported by both decision-makers and representatives of clusters and other economic associations.

3.2 The structure of the strategic plan

The ideas expressed in the workshops were distilled by the project team into nine development axes for the strategic plan. These axes became the nine strategic objectives of the strategic plan, focused on the themes of: (1) metropolitan governance, (2) housing, (3) environmental quality, (4) mobility, (5) energy, (6) economic competitiveness, (7) tourism and leisure, (8) social services and (9) culture and local identity.

The strategic objectives were further developed into 26 indicative actions and more than 90 priorities, thus creating the plan's overall strategic framework. As far as the operational part of the strategy was concerned, we delimited soft projects (mostly referring to policies and plans needed to be developed by the metropolitan area in order to ensure a successful implementation of the hard infrastructure projects, including the creation of the Metropolitan Center)) from the metropolitan area's flagship projects, which enlisted the major strategic interventions for the 2016-2020 period. These included important mobility-related projects (referring to the east-west accessibility of the metropolitan area), as well as other projects such as the regional hospital, strengthening of the natural protected areas network, urban regeneration of high-rise housing estates or the Cluj IT City initiatives. While the thematic flagship projects corresponded to a single strategic objective, the transversal projects represented integrated projects tackling multiple metropolitan issues.

Overall, 9 soft projects were included in the final version of the strategic plan (including the Metropolitan Center projects for improving metropolitan governance), as well as 17 flagship projects. These projects are intended to be implemented until 2023, with the strategic plan also containing a development vision for 2035 which aims to draw out the main coordinates for the metropolitan area's long-term territorial development.

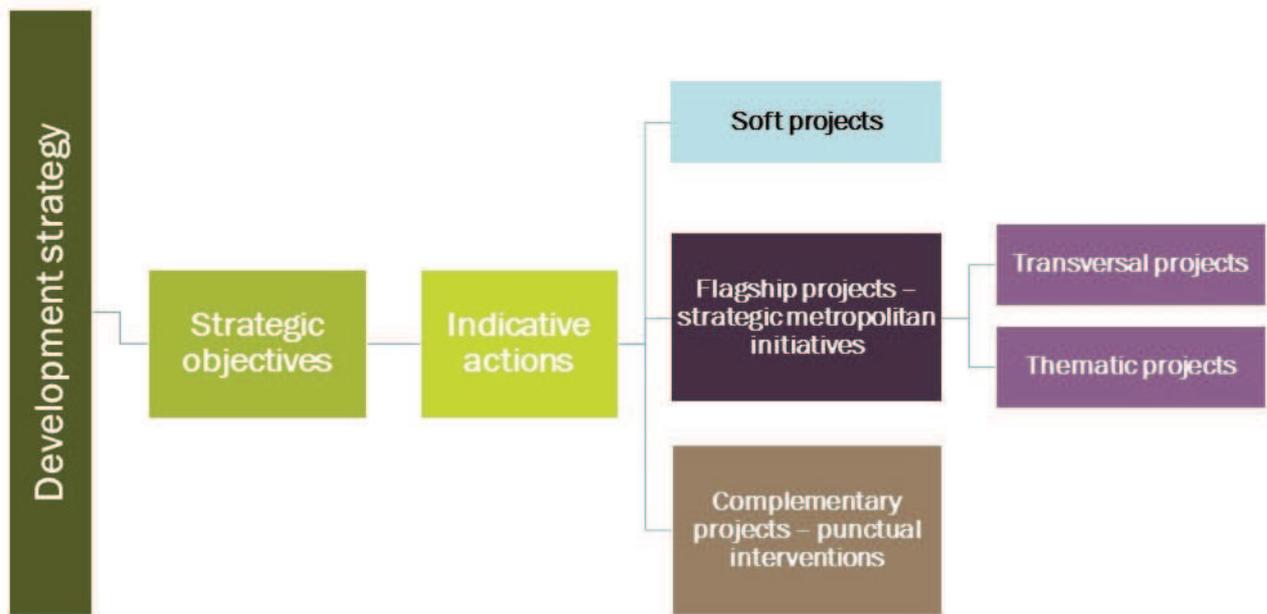


Figure 2. Overall structure of the strategic plan.

3.3 Governance as the backbone of the strategic plan

We considered governance to be the plan’s central axis, with the success of the other eight sectoral axes (housing, mobility, energy, environment, etc.) greatly dependent on its progress. Our main proposal was the creation of a Metropolitan Task Force, composed of the main stakeholders participating at the workshops, that would be in charge with monitoring the implementation of the plan and ensuring the coordination between the projects in the metropolitan area. We identified the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, the County Council and the North-West Regional Development Agency as the core elements of this Metropolitan Task Force, however other interested parties can also join this task force, either to oversee the entire implementation of the strategy or to participate in specific projects.

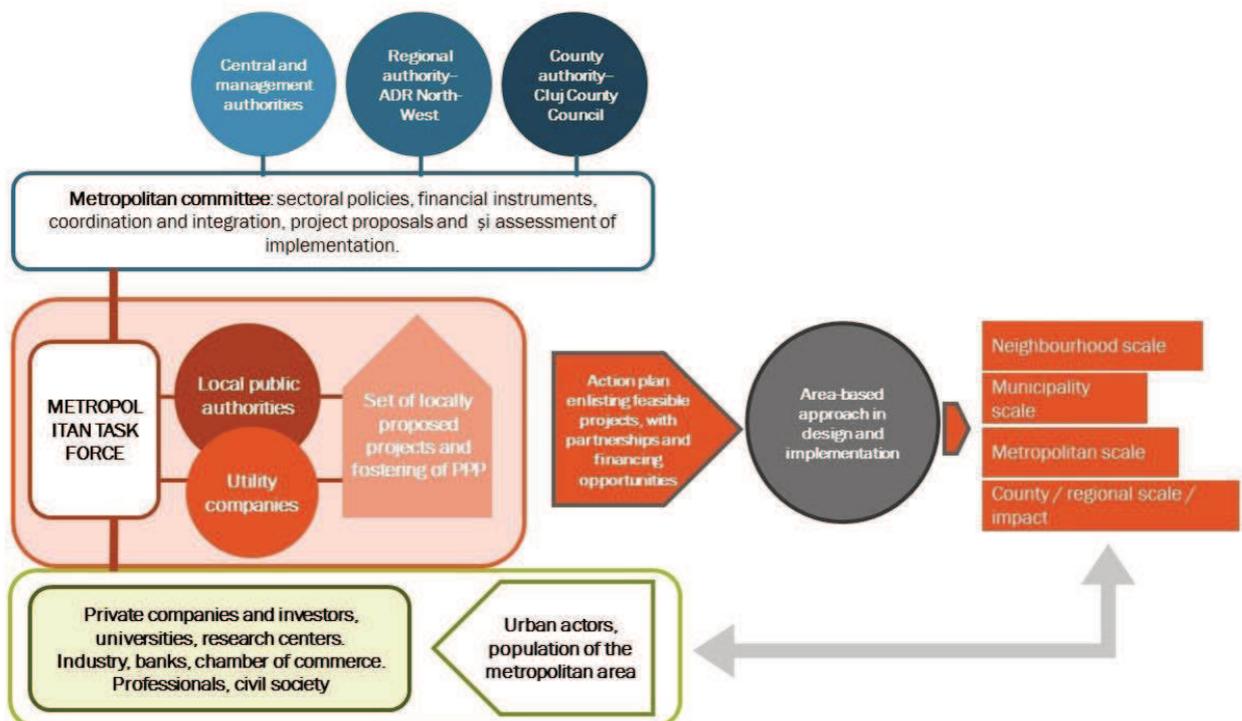


Figure 3. Proposed governance structure for the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area.

The main idea is for the Metropolitan Task Force to become a structure ensuring the connection between top-down (Ministry of Regional Development, County Council) and bottom-up (NGOs, universities, clusters)

initiatives regarding the development of the metropolitan area, while at the same time ensuring a place-based approach in the implementation of these initiatives. The Metropolitan Task Force would function in a Metropolitan Center – a venue encouraging the debate on the future development of the metropolitan area and inviting all interested stakeholders in expressing their ideas on this matter.



Figure 4. Strategic objectives – Governance at the core of the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area Strategy

3.4 Self-assessment of the plan

In the end, we realized a self-assessment of the final strategic plan, rating the innovation and smartness of our proposals (flagship projects, soft projects and complementary projects) for each of the nine development axes. We believe that the soft projects proposed – the Metropolitan Center, a housing plan at metropolitan level, an urban regeneration plan for Cluj Napoca’s historical center or an integrated GIS system for the territorial and environmental planning of the metropolitan area – have had an important role in the overall innovative character of some of the plan’s development axes.

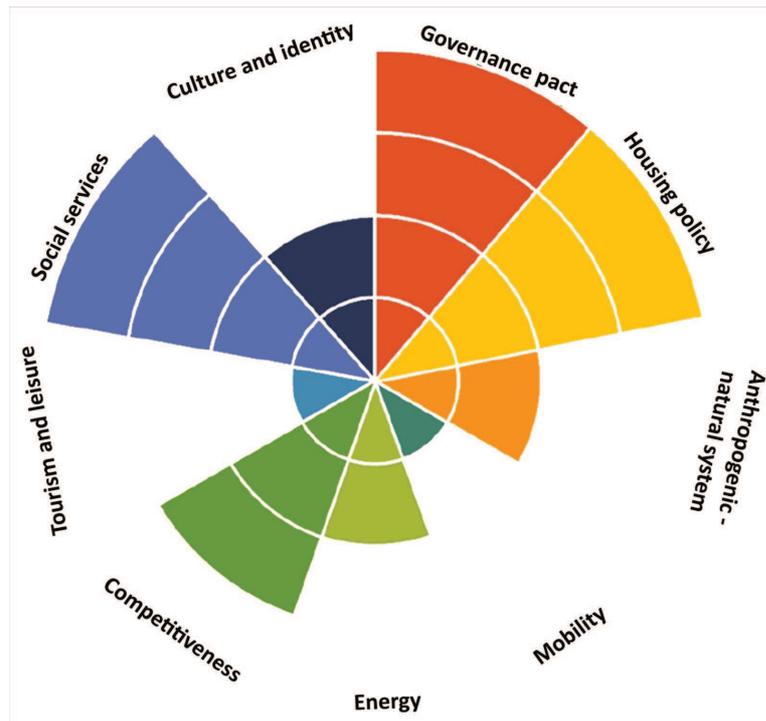


Figure 5. Self-assessment of the Strategic Plan in terms of innovation

As a result, we considered that the governance, housing and social axes were characterized by a great degree of innovation – with proposals such as the realization of a metropolitan housing plan or the creation of CLLD initiatives to combat urban poverty –, while the mobility and leisure/tourism axes were considered to be the least innovative. The reason for the latter was that, even though the plan had a strong focus on mobility-related issues, the proposed solutions were classic ones (construction of a ring-road, linking suburbia with the city center through a tram line etc.), inspired from best practice examples from Europe (for example, the tram line in Karlsruhe).

4 CONCLUSION

There are many challenges for urban governance both in metropolitan and small/medium sized towns, such as the effectiveness in limiting urban sprawl and in better ruling the urban-rural fringe development, the creation or reinforcement of socially-cohesive, inclusive and culturally diverse neighbourhoods and peripheries, the management of urban data, the management of urban functional areas that extend over several administrative jurisdictions, the resistance to change of highly fragmented institutional frameworks, the harmonization of norms, and also the role of participatory frameworks and platforms for multi-actor involvement in making effective, efficient and democratic decisions.

We tried to tackle some of these challenges in the case of a metropolitan area, but also having the support of our previous experience with small and medium-sized cities. The result, the new strategic plan of the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area, is more than a development vision accompanied by a list of projects. It is just the start of a process aimed at fostering collaboration and dialogue between different stakeholders, that need to make the transition now from a first successful step, the co-design of the plan, to the next steps that require the co-implementation of its projects.

Smart Governance is the backbone of Smart Planning, as our recent initiatives in the Cluj-Napoca metropolitan area – mainly mobility and energy projects – highlight the fact that a wide stakeholder involvement can bridge the gap between industry and public administration and lead to integrated project ideas aimed at fostering territorial development.

Nevertheless, the design of contemporary governance schemes should not just address evident phenomena such as metropolisation. It also has to consider small and medium-sized towns and cities, as they also deserve planning strategies that enable them to remain competitive, sustainable and liveable amongst new challenges such as urban shrinkage. A balanced territorial development will also require the development of governance schemes capable of mitigating rural-urban migrations, often connected to poverty issues in rural areas. As a result, urban poles tend not to create but to attract poverty – this is a challenge that governance will have to tackle in upcoming years.

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