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# Searching for Development of Medium-sized Cities in the European Union: A Study Case on Oradea

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**Abstract.** *Smaller cities from Central and Eastern Europe face the difficult task of creating a niche segment for their economies in the hopes of becoming sustainable and profitable despite their restrictions. Borders can provide an answer to some situations where the neighbouring region presents similar characteristics and development goals and as such can benefit from cross-border cooperation to grow faster. In our study case of Oradea we try to identify what attributes define a medium-sized city in Eastern Europe and what are the opportunities that provide economic benefits while creating a unique identity and an environment for growth. We explore history, demographics, development strategies, institutional and conceptual limitations and cross-border cooperation frameworks that help to define Oradea as a border city.*

**Keywords:** *local identity, multicultural space, strategic development, cross-border cooperation*

## **Introduction**

Europe has been defined for a very long time by a distinctive organisational structure that underwent frequent changes, in line with political shifts in power and redrawing of national and regional borders. This has determined certain areas within Central and Eastern Europe to face changes in terms of identity, authority and ideology; these patterns of change that have occurred in a relative short time period (19<sup>th</sup> and mostly 20<sup>th</sup> century) have had lasting effects on the population and their organisation. The generation changes have been quite few (at around 3-4) and as such the mix of old and new mentalities have developed border settlements in very particular ways<sup>3</sup>. Border cities provide an excellent study case for interactions among groups (ethnic, religious, national minorities) and the way these social connections have influenced the development of communities around them. This premise provides opportunities to also research particularities of border regions as opposed to more centralised parts of EU member states and identify what makes these cities so unique and important to understanding the developing of active mixed communities within the EU.

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<sup>3</sup> Ed Taverne and Cor Wagenaar, “Border Cities: Contested Identities of the European City,” *European Review*, ed. Theo d’Haen, 13, 2 (Cambridge University Press: May 2005): 201.

The paper will focus on Oradea, a city situated at the border between Romania and Hungary, with rich historical connections with both nations. Oradea has been heavily influenced during its recent history by political events that changed the way the city functions in areas such as economy and architecture. As part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the diverse ethnical and religious identities that lived in Oradea created a common heritage that is very much reminiscent of Central Europe<sup>4</sup>. Given the background of the city and its surroundings we will be focusing on aspects that define it terms of multiculturalism, competitiveness and unique characteristics that make Oradea stand out from other border countries in the region. This study will also cover, in brief, the cross-border cooperation initiatives between Romania and Hungary and the common goals and projects that have been a part of the development strategy of Oradea over the last years.

### ***Historical perspective on the evolution of Oradea***

The city of Oradea has a rich history that expands for well over 800 years within the region. The city has always been the centre of political, administrative and economic power within the present borders of Bihor County and has influenced the surrounding area through its cultural appeal, markets, buildings and institutions<sup>5</sup>. During the centuries, Oradea has undergone changes in terms of its regional influence and significance. It is safe to say that the city was not constructed from scratch but rather it evolved during a period of time, changing its role and function. Western and Central European influences have made their way to Oradea and created cultural, political or military focus for the surrounding area. For example, during the Renaissance period Oradea was influenced by Italian style and culture in a strong capacity, with influences that stretched farther than religion (an important pillar in the city's development during its history) to the merchants and craftsmen around the city; the city was also recognised by its Italian denomination: Varadino<sup>6</sup>. Association and integration of new and foreign cultures has always been one of Oradea's stables in terms of its cultural evolution.

While in the XIV-XV centuries the focal point of the city was on culture and religion, by the middle of the XVI century Oradea developed a lot in terms of political and military power. Local and regional borders are redrawn and fought for and as such, the city moves into a different direction<sup>7</sup>. The military operations that went on in and around Oradea since that point affected the population and the neighbouring settlements in significant capacity. The siege of the Ottomans on Oradea citadel in 1598 ended with significant changes in terms of regional politics: Oradea came under the rule of the Hapsburgs from 1598-1606<sup>8</sup>. Sieges such as these were not uncommon as one happened earlier in 1556-1557 on account of the Protestant Reformation, with changes to the social

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<sup>4</sup> Mircea Pașca, "Oradea Around 1900: An Architectural Guide" (Oradea: Arca Publishing House, 2010), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Constantin-Vasile Țoca, "Oradea oraș frontalier – o analiză istorică" [Oradea, border city – an historical analysis], *Politici imperiale în estul și vestul spațiului românesc* [Imperial politics in Eastern and Western Romanian space], ed. Sorin Șipoș et al. (Oradea: University of Oradea Press, 2010), 559.

<sup>6</sup> Liviu Borcea and Gheorghe Gorun, "Istoria Orașului Oradea" [The history of Oradea] (Oradea: Cogito Publishing, 1996), 101.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>8</sup> Constantin Daicoviciu et al., "Din Istoria Transilvaniei" [From the History of Transylvania] (Oradea: Academia Republicii Populare Române, 1960), 82.

and economic balance of Oradea: change of administration, transfer of Catholic properties and wealth, a general shift in local authority and power for the region<sup>9</sup>.

The citadel of Oradea became the subject of military mobilisation between 1691 and 1692 as well as 1703-1711 there the conflict was focused on Hapsburg imperial forces. After the events of 1711 the citizens of Oradea gained the favour of imperial forces and received additional privileges for loyal service of the crown. The fact that military conflicts became less frequent after this period meant that the city was able to look towards developing the economy and strengthening the local manufacturing branches and guilds. The evolution of Oradea was continued through the development of religious and educational rights for citizens.

Due to its multiculturalist population, Oradea had always had a difficult time in balancing ethnicity, nationality, political ideas and rights for the people that lived in and around the city. Important steps for gaining religious and civil rights for the Romanian population were achieved through the help of local religious leaders. An important contribution to civil and political rights of the Romanian community in Transylvania was given by the Greek-Catholic churches that fought for equal rights among citizens. The document *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* was drafted as a petition for Emperor Leopold the 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1791; important religious leaders that influenced this change in Oradea were Samuil Vulcan and Ignatie Darabant. Significant changes in the school system and education was the primary result of these efforts, creating more opportunities for Romanian ethnics.

Following small movements during the XIX century, Oradea was developed along the lines of administration and infrastructure. During this time the administrative structure of the city became much more compact as neighbouring settlements around the citadel of Oradea united into one single administrative construct. By the end of the XIX century the city centre area was under heavy construction. Favourable economic circumstances and changing architectural trends in Central Europe determined a period of heavy architecture change especially in the central area. Powerful businesses and wealthy influent families started to build and redesign the face of the city using as inspiration the Vienna Secession movement. The identity of Oradea as a city today is heavily influenced by the architectural style that was used at the start of the XX century. During the XX century Oradea, as well as all other cities in Eastern and Central Europe suffered through political changes, military conflicts, population rise and fall, administrative reform and reconstruction. Given its different ethnic fundamentals comprised of Romanians, Hungarians, Gypsies, Jews, Italians, Slovaks and other, the change of political borders and afterwards the closed communist system had an important impact on demographics. Oradea lost much of its Jewish population during World War II, while other nationalities declined in numbers (Hungarians, Slovaks have much lower population percentage during the second half of the XX century).

### ***The border city: what does it mean and how can it define a city***

Border cities exist in a newly defined logic of disappearing borders, characterised by a level of competitiveness much greater than previous national models<sup>10</sup>. In the context

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<sup>9</sup> Toca, "Oradea oraş frontier – o analiză istorică," 560.

<sup>10</sup> Steven Brakman et al., "The Border Effect of EU Integration: Evidence for European Cities and Regions" (paper presented at the Urban Development: Patterns, Causes, Foundations and Policy Conference, December 2010) (Rotterdam: Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Erasmus University of Rotterdam), 2, accessed October 15, 2015,

of European Union enlargement and global market competition, cities that are closer to the border will have an advantage in cross-border trading and have better chances of developing industry; research indicates this tendency to be stronger in the case of smaller cities given the historical data that links population loss and economic decline with cities that have existed in the logic of the nation state<sup>11</sup>.

Defining a city based on its characteristics is not enough to warrant the definition of a specific identity. Particularities can only be presented when put into context, in our case that of borders (or border cities), that will shape the research discourse in a way that highlights certain characteristics. Oradea, as defined through the concept of “border city”, needs to further be elaborated as a study case in comparison with other border cities within the EU in order to correctly assess particularities. In this regard we will also be taking a look at how Oradea has developed in this role of border city within the competitive national environment as well as in relation to regional and international context; this last idea will be developed through presenting the relation between Oradea and Debrecen as similar cases for Europe’s border cities and their development. These cities and their communities are required to function within a new framework that integrates that of border cities within the EU: the global city – derived from the shift from cross-border economics and development to a global market that involves actors from all over the world in the economic and social architecture of a city<sup>12</sup>. Oradea as a study case for the concept of global cities does present a number of structural differences as opposed to the one presented by Saskia Sassen, Oradea and its regional influence being on a much smaller scale with limited importance for large global firms.

The effects of institutions on local and regional organisational structures can also create context. The influence of local institutions’ initiatives and their relation with national and supranational authorities provides insight into development strategy decisions and outcomes that end up shaping the image of border city. As Yuri Kazepov points out, the primary elements that differentiate cities in the European space are linked to particular institutional arrangements that shape local actors through the implementation of structure, constraints and opportunities; the author also puts great emphasis on the city’s perspective of itself and its role on a regional, national and supranational level<sup>13</sup>. The city as a social and administrative construct is always connected to the surrounding areas and the communities that thrive in this space. In a centralised state such as Romania we find that central government, representative of the nation-state, has a heavy influence on the working institutional relations at the local level and as such the scope of local development is rather limited as long as it is dependent on cooperation with central institutions in terms of finance and economic policy<sup>14</sup>. Authors Gordon Macleod and Mark Godwin explore solutions to this issue of heavy dependence of local actors to centralised state in the form of policy networks<sup>15</sup>. Commentating on R.A.W. Rhodes study on policy

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[http://www.ihs.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/ihs/Marketing/Marketing\\_Projects/marrewijk\\_\\_brakman\\_\\_garretsen\\_\\_borders\\_and\\_remoteness\\_dec\\_2010e.pdf](http://www.ihs.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/ihs/Marketing/Marketing_Projects/marrewijk__brakman__garretsen__borders_and_remoteness_dec_2010e.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>12</sup> Saskia Sassen, “The Global City: Introducing a Concept,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* XI, 2 (Brown University, Spring 2005): 27-28.

<sup>13</sup> Yuri Kazepov, “Cities in Europe: Changing Contexts, Local Arrangements and the Challenge to Social Cohesion,” *Cities of Europe*, ed. Yuri Kazepov (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2005), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon Macleod and Mark Goodwin, “Space, Scale and State Strategy: Rethinking Urban and Regional Governance,” *Progress in Human Geography* 23, 4 (Sage Journals, December 1999), 508.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 510.

networks in the UK<sup>16</sup>, they subscribe to the existence of multiple types of policy networks, differentiated on the level of integration and prevalence of community policies at a local level. In R.A.W. Rhode's view, local and regional authorities or departments, through the implementation of policy networks, are able to define their own level of autonomy, within governmental constraints<sup>17</sup>. This is an important note in understanding the current evolution of local administration policy on mid and long-term development of Oradea.

### ***Ethnic and confessional demographics in Oradea***

Oradea shares an important part of its history with that of Hungary for around 800 years. The communities that make up the city has developed with cooperation in mind between its two main ethnical groups: Romanians and Hungarians. This level of cooperation even extended to institutionalised constructs such as the Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion. This form of cooperation is built on the principles of cross-border cooperation, diminishing differences between border regions, building strong form of civic cooperation between communities, providing models of integration, prevention of negative heritage and strengthening aspects that further cohesion and integration within the European Union<sup>18</sup>.

The cross-border cooperation aspect that links the two communities has been much stronger since the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as indicated by growing number of initiatives that target ethnic diversity, cultures and religion as well as institutional cooperation<sup>19</sup>. This new framework for cooperation is influenced by a change in perspective around the static ideas of state-nation-territory-border<sup>20</sup>. While the debate on this concept can also lead towards discussing aspects of assimilation and integration of minorities, in most cases the cities and regions of Europe are defined through another group of concepts: people, culture and history<sup>21</sup>. This association between space and heritage is more prevalent in Romania's central and western spaces as these were, for a long time, a meeting place for different nationalities, beliefs and ethnicities. It has become a staple for regions and communities in these places to exhibit diversity and plurality in ideas, forms of expression and formulas for community development.

Examples of ethnic and confessional diversity can be found by looking closer into Oradea's history over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A study by Florentina Chirodea on the Law Academy in Oradea between 1919 and 1934 indicates strong fluctuations in ethnic and confessional background of the students attending the school, in a way representative of the process of transition from Austro-Hungarian rule to Romania in the interwar period<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> See R. A. W. Rhodes, "Policy Networks. A British Perspective," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 2, 3 (Sage Journals, July 1990): 293-317.

<sup>17</sup> Macleod, 511.

<sup>18</sup> Czímre Klára, "Cross-border Cooperation – Theory and Practice" (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Kossuth Egyetemi Kiadoja, 2006), 84.

<sup>19</sup> Constantin-Vasile Țoca, "Ethnical Analysis within Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion," in *Ethnicity, Confession and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union's Eastern Border*, ed. Mircea Brie et al. (Oradea: University of Oradea Press, 2011), 131.

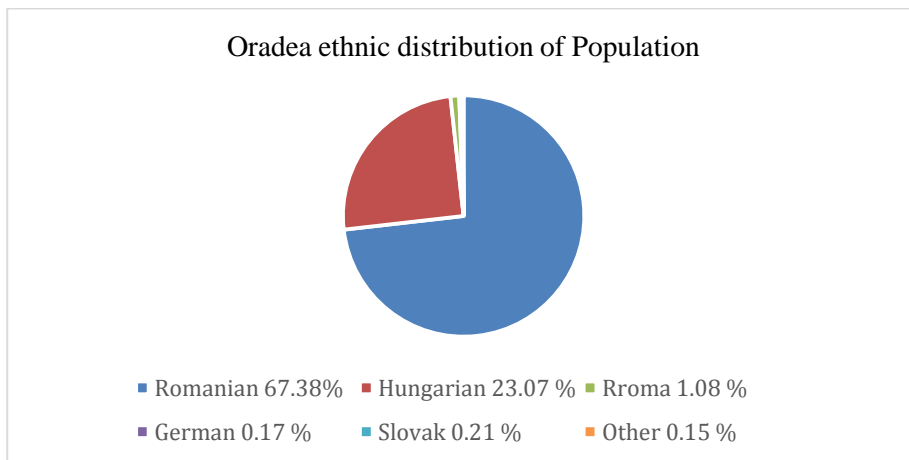
<sup>20</sup> Mircea Brie, "Ethnicity, Religion and Intercultural Dialogue in the European Border Space," in *Ethnicity, Confession and Intercultural Dialogue at the European Union's Eastern Border*, ed. Mircea Brie et al. (Oradea: University of Oradea Press, 2011), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Florentina Chirodea, "Ethnic and Religious Structure. Aspects from the Western Border of Greater Romania. The Academy of Law Students in Oradea (1919-1934)," *Ethno-confessional*

While the confessional and ethnic structure of students shifted along the 15 years of the Academy's existence, the geographical representation of the students has not changed very much<sup>23</sup>. A significant impact in developing Oradea as a city in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century was played by the large Jewish community that was part of the city's cultural landscape. Following the events of the Second World War and subsequent migration of the Jewish population outside of Romania, this community has become much less numerous with less than 300 members of the Jewish community still remaining. Their impact has remained visible throughout the city though, through architecture that preserves the image of a vibrant community. Present day demographics show a population that has remained mostly stable in terms of representation over the last two decades, with a balance of 65-70% for the Romanian population and 20-25% for Hungarian population with the rest being divided among Germans, Slovaks, Roma populations and other ethnical denominations. In terms of religious confession the balance is between 55% Orthodox, 13% Protestant, 9% Roman Catholic, 4.5% Pentecostal and 3.5% Baptist.

**Figure 1:** *Ethnic distribution of population in Oradea*



**Source:** ZMO, Oradea's local development strategy, 2014.

Multiculturalism is another aspect that defines Oradea as a city. Considering the historical exchanges between different nations that have made the city their home throughout history, there needs to be a discussion on the effects that the concept of multiculturalism has on a city's identity. Promoting multiculturalism has been part of movement in Western Europe over the last decades, a movement that aims to reduce the negative effects of population majorities (ethnic, religious, racial, etc.) in areas where civilisations and cultures meet<sup>24</sup>. Cătălin Turliuc expresses a critical view on the effects and strength of multiculturalism in opposition to nationalism; in his views, multiculturalism has created weak identity ties and has also lead to the illusion of tolerance on a societal level<sup>25</sup>. Other scholars argue that values such as diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism are

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*Realities in the Romanian Area*, ed. Mircea Brie et al. (Oradea: University of Oradea Press, 2011), 136-137.

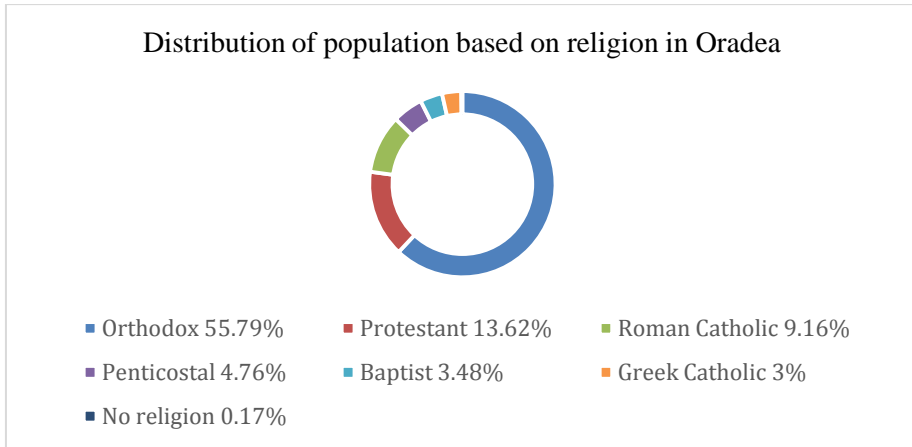
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>24</sup> Cătălin Turliuc, "Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Minorities' Rights in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Romania," *Ethno-confessional Realities in the Romanian Area*, ed. Mircea Brie et al. (Oradea, University of Oradea Press, 2011), 219.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

fundamentally European and the process of integration cannot be conditioned by the existence of cultural unity<sup>26</sup>. It is necessary for each territory, region or community to find the best way to coexist and thrive together as these are the foundations of building a local identity that can be used to great effect in defining communities and cities.

**Figure 2:** Religious distribution of population in Oradea



**Source:** ZMO, Oradea’s local development strategy, 2014.

Whether or not multiculturalism as a concept has failed has a lot to do with the historical and cultural restrictions of a given space. In the case of Oradea multiculturalism can be defined through the ethnics and religious diversity of its inhabitants, but also on a visual level through the architectural and civic heritage present all around the city.

***The development strategies that shape Oradea***

Identifying the specific nature and identity of Oradea on a regional and national level needs to start from the development strategy that has been used to build the city over time to the current state. Changes in urban development strategies have been analysed before and have also been used to determine shifts in regional and national power as well as directions for economic, social and cultural development of communities. Chris Collinge argues that one of the most important factors in determining the evolution of local governance has to do with the relative balance between state and regional power and its impact on local growth<sup>27</sup>. Other authors such as Yuri Kazepov define the context in which cities start to develop their own economic and financial identities and needs based on the increased power gained through supranational institutions (as is the case of the EU, pressing for more local autonomy and local governance) and the increased mobility of capital, goods as well as services and labour<sup>28</sup>.

In this regional and local context the city of Oradea has adopted a strategy meant to make it competitive on this level. Some of the strategic decisions have been made based on the strength of its ability to foster growth in the region (having more population and

<sup>26</sup> Brie, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Collinge, “Spatial Articulation of the State: Reworking Social Relations and Social Regulation Theory,” Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Birmingham, 1998, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/business/management/collinge/spatial-articulation.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Kazepov, 3.



stronger economy than neighbouring cities such as Satu Mare and Arad), but also on the competitiveness required to stand up to larger cities such as Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara – both cities having larger population, stronger economies and situated on traffic nodes of similar importance.

Situated very close to the border with Hungary (around 20 km to the first village in Hungary) Oradea has been shaped by its proximity to larger cities in the near vicinity that create a very competitive environment for this medium-sized city (in terms of population) and by its proximity to the border: this geographical location has somewhat marginalised the city from an economic point of view in favour of larger poles of development such as Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara – viewed as region development poles in the context of Romania's regional development strategy. Across the border, Hungary's Northern Great Plain area that neighbours this region has seen a steady decline in wealth in the last 25 years as Western Hungary became a much greater attraction point for foreign investment and concentrated qualified human resources and production facilities in the processing and automotive industry<sup>29</sup>. This trend can be seen as mirroring the developmental slope in Romania as well, with the capital city having a much stronger development rate and with growing inequalities among regions<sup>30</sup>. The similarities between the two regions across the border have shaped the cross-border partnership that has become a pillar for regional and local development.

The two main documents that we will be taking a look at are the City Development Strategy for 2015-2020 (short term) and the Masterplan for 2030 detailing the urban development concept envisioned by local authorities. These two strategies will be referenced throughout the paper in an effort to accurately assess their relevance to Oradea as a regional competitor and development pole and as distinct identity within the "border city" concept and framework we have described up until now.

The strategy for development in the next 5 years has in plan a vision for a new decade, 2020. The focus will be local economy expansion through new investments, attracting capital as well as research and innovation. The people living in Oradea will benefit from improved life and working conditions, less pollution, quality services from local administration and better-paid jobs<sup>31</sup>. This general focus is expanded further into 5 objectives: increased competitiveness, improved infrastructure and connectivity, increased life quality measures, preservation of local heritage, increased public services quality. Looking further onto the 2030 development plan we can see a more nuanced approach towards development. The 2030 strategy focuses on increasing the city's mobility and flexibility in terms of local, regional and national transport systems. It is clear that some of the current frustrations about Oradea's competitive level has to do with accessibility towards business and tourism. The focus on economy shifts to innovation and improvement of human resources, with an emphasis on research, innovation and study. The idea of globalisation and the need for constant renewal in the economic sector stands at the base of Oradea's mid-term analysis of development and change. This focus can also be a good way to describe the current problematic areas that the local economy and administration are faced

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<sup>29</sup> János Péntzes, "The Question of Territorial Cohesion – Spatial Income Inequalities in Two Different Regions of Hungary," *Regional and Cohesion Policy. Insights into the Role of the Partnership Principle in the New Policy Design*, ed. Ioan Horga et al. (Oradea, University of Oradea Press, 2011) 101.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>31</sup> Zona Metropolitană Oradea [Oradea Metropolitan Zone], "Strategia de dezvoltare locală a municipiului Oradea" [Oradea development strategy], 2014, 72.

with in their attempt to boost local competitiveness. The third objective for 2030 aims to improve local administration services, natural and man-made heritage and give citizens more options for cultural and sportive events. The fourth objective for 2030 focuses on building a better government system that includes: spatial planning and marketing, property management and instruments for finance and co-finance<sup>32</sup>.

City development is planned based on several sectors of interest, each with its own set of measures and expected results. Oradea's strategy is constructed around economic development, industrial development, increased qualification of workforce, developing transport infrastructure, administrative infrastructure, developing and improving public transport, improved urban planning, citizen safety improvements, make information more available in use for promoting and marketing tourist attractions, use local tourist attractions to their fullest potential, creating new tourist attractions, developing social heritage, developing social economy (such as start-ups or helping vulnerable groups), increase community involvement and voluntary work, access to vulnerable groups to education, improving lifelong learning, creating conditions for cultural and sports activities, better use of current cultural resources<sup>33</sup>.

Local administration is also interested in building a performance-based system for local health care. The objectives in this field range from improving qualifications for medical personnel, improving prevention systems and activities. All these sectors are complemented with environmental policies and objectives aimed at waste management and public administration policies for better quality services and increased transparency<sup>34</sup>. While most of the proposed objectives and sectors for development that are in plan for change in 2030 are detailed in some capacity, we cannot say just yet how feasible these proposed projects will be. In the end, the current development plans for 2020 and 2030 are too much connected to the present model of administration and as such will be subject to change.

### ***Impact of cross-border cooperation***

The emphasis on cross-border cooperation comes as a result of changes within the EU's regional policy that promoted new objectives with the 2007-2013 programmer. These objectives are outlined as: increased convergence, competitiveness among regions and territorial cooperation<sup>35</sup>. These changes have had significant influence on border regions that share similar economic and demographic structures within central and Eastern Europe as they boost local and regional financial autonomy irrespective of the level of centralisation of the national state; given the high level of centralisation in Romania and Hungary as well as the demographic similarities and shared cultural heritage, the development of a cross-border cooperation between Oradea and Debrecen has not been a big surprise. The benefits of cross-border cooperation have become much more evident in the context of globalised economies and markets. István Süli-Zakar and Mihály Tömöri describe this situation from the perspective of labour division; given the change from

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<sup>32</sup> Oradea City Hall, "Planul Urbanistic General. Conceptul de Dezvoltare Urbană. Masterplan Oradea 2030" [General Urban Plan. Concept of Urban Development. Masterplan Oradea 2030], 2013, 27.

<sup>33</sup> Oradea City Hall, "Planul Urbanistic General. Conceptul de Dezvoltare Urbană. Masterplan Oradea 2030" [General Urban Plan. Concept of Urban Development. Masterplan Oradea 2030], 2013, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>35</sup> Constantin-Vasile Țoca, "Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation at Various Territorial Levels, with a Particular Study of the Debrecen-Oradea Eurometropolis" (Oradea: Oradea University Press, 2013), 34.

marginal and periphery regions to a new state of function, border have, in some cases, become a cost factor for companies willing to invest<sup>36</sup>. Strengthening cross-border partnerships and cooperation provide significant leverage in managing these situations.

Increasing the level of local and regional autonomy for more centralised areas of the EU, the Euroregion model represents a voluntary association on an administrative institutional level, designed to reduce isolation as well as build frameworks for cultural cooperation and rebuilding of communities across borders<sup>37</sup>. These forms of cooperation function also as determinants for constructive exchanges between communities and positive drivers for European integration through good neighbourhood policies<sup>38</sup>. Out of the influencing factors<sup>39</sup> that affect the success of cross-border cooperation Oradea, with its unique attributes (demographics, geographical position and history), meets almost all of them:

- Geographical position – close to the Romanian-Hungarian border, Oradea and Debrecen are separated by roughly 50 km;
- Common history;
- Common culture – derived from common historical heritage and the presence of a strong Hungarian minority in Oradea;
- Economic development – both cities are present in regions that offer economic challenges in terms of competitiveness and resource management;
- Linguistic competences – strong Hungarian minority in Oradea and Bihor county presents an opportunity for learning the language and thus achieving convergence in this aspect as well;
- Common strategies – both cities have universities, thermal resources and a competitive strategy for attracting foreign investment.

Evidence of the convergence factor between the two cities and the region that they exist in can be determined through the examination of the ethnic communities that reside in the area and that have common heritage and culture:

Cooperation between the two cities has developed a lot in recent years, giving in to a European-wide trend of increased cooperation in border regions through harmonising policies in areas such as economy, services, medicine and education<sup>40</sup>. The rationale behind these focuses is given through the EU cohesion policy objectives that aim to encourage local actors to come together in order to solve common problems and set development goals that benefit more people. There are over 24 different projects that have been financed through the Romania – Hungary cross-border cooperation programme that directly benefit local administration in Oradea or institutions that function within the city. It is important to analyse the strategic impact that these projects have in developing the local economy and communities within the city. By studying the projects and their targeted areas for implementation we can begin to correlate the information with the strategic development documentation that defines Oradea's investment cycle and understand how significant is the impact provided through the cross-border cooperation programme.

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<sup>36</sup> Süli-Zakar, 142.

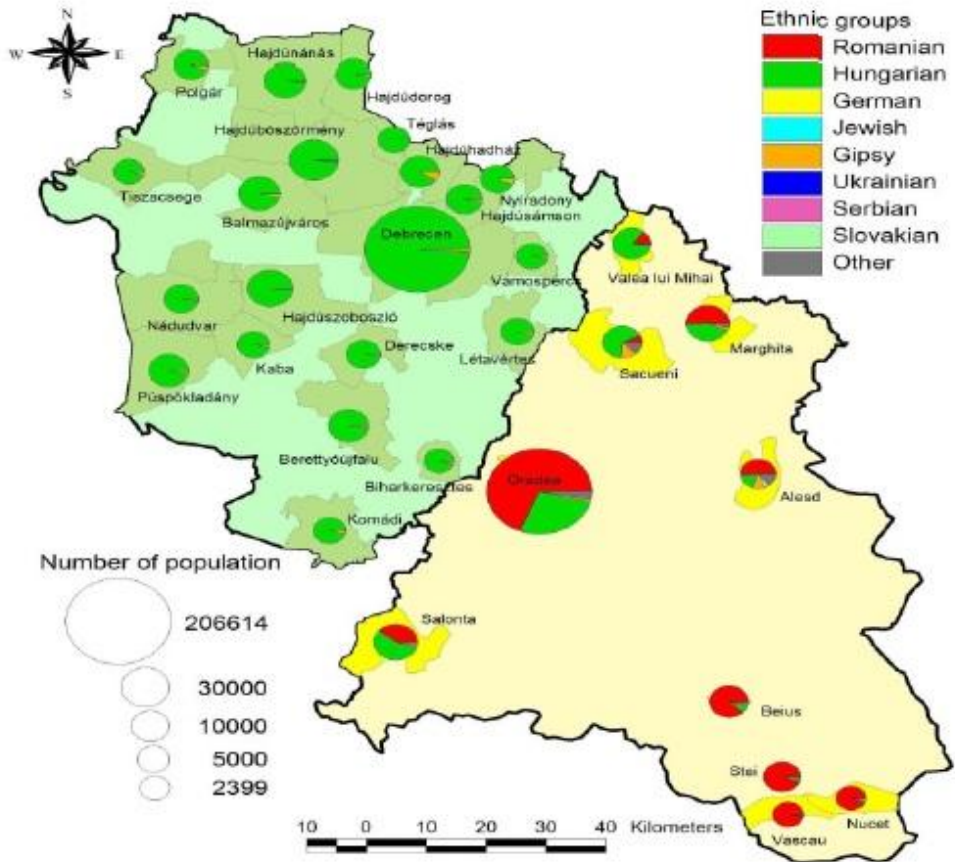
<sup>37</sup> Țoca, "Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation," 46.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>39</sup> Czimre, 84.

<sup>40</sup> Süli-Zakar, 145.

**Figure 3: Ethnic distribution in major settlements in the Bihor – Hajdú-Bihar Euroregion**



**Source:** Țoca, “Romanian-Hungarian Cross-border Cooperation,” 57.

**Table 1: Projects financed through the HU-RO cross-border cooperation programme in Oradea.**

No.	Project leader	Field of interest	Number of projects implemented
1	University of Oradea	Research, development and education	10
2	Zona Metropolitană Oradea	Infrastructure development plans, communication infrastructure	3
3	Universitatea Creștină Partium	Social integration, education	2
4	Municipality of Oradea	Communication infrastructure, health, road infrastructure, business, tourism, culture	8
5	Chamber of Commerce and Industry Bihor	Business training	1
6	County Council Bihor	Health, environment	2
7	Ordinul arhitecților Bihor	Education	1

**Source:** Own research based on data provided by the HU-RO programme, accessed October 15, 2015, [http://www.huro-cbc.eu/en/financed\\_projects/](http://www.huro-cbc.eu/en/financed_projects/).

As shown in the table presented above, the current plans that have been in development in relation to Oradea’s cross-border cooperation programme are in line with

certain developmental objectives that are part of the 2020 and 2030 strategies. Infrastructure, connectivity, business, health care and research are all part in building Oradea as a competitive environment for local and regional economic actors. The current plans for investments and development concentrate on road infrastructure, medical facilities and enhanced business opportunities in sectors that have disadvantaged for a long time in Oradea. The current level of development is very much dependent on the view that local administration presents; it is important to keep in mind that the outline we have discussed and analysed is only an outline for future progress.

### ***Conclusions***

In researching the concept of medium-sized cities in this region of Europe, we have tried to understand what are the ideas behind development in terms of community, economy, culture, society and administration. Through this research the results show that in order to gain a competitive edge in economy and society, local administration needs to match the flexibility of its projects with transparency and efficiency. Low populated areas are more susceptible to losing important demographics to other developmental poles in the region and as such must constantly find opportunities to attract human resources.

The opportunities that have developed from Romania's accession to the EU for Oradea have allowed the city to build better infrastructure and begin to build an identity for the city. The tourism sector for Oradea has developed a lot in the last 10 years and interest for future projects in tourism point towards further development in this sector. This type of research needs further investigations as the regional and local realities will change in the future. Coming back to this type of research will need to provide focus on how the city's identity has grown and what part of the current strategical decisions will pay off.

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