

DEVELOPMENT OF PERI-URBAN AREAS IN THE BIG CITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF VARNA)

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Abstract. The present article examines practical processes related to the development of peri-urban areas in major cities in Bulgaria on the example of the city of Varna. After proposing a classification of the factors influencing the development of the considered territories, the practices related to the influence of four factors from the group of the local ones used in the city of Varna are described. On this basis, proposals have been made to optimize the administrative procedures conducted by local authorities and the court administration.

Keywords: administrative procedures, development plans, peri-urban areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of urban areas is a continuous process in principle in any country, and in particular, including Bulgaria. The direction and pace of development are determined by a multitude of factors of an economic, social, demographic, and other nature. In this regard, the specificity of the development of our country in recent decades determines the very interesting dynamics of the changes in the image of urban areas in our country. For example, industrial areas have moved away from the administrative centers of large cities to free up spaces for the development of functions such as education, culture, administrative services, trade, etc. Residential areas are developing rapidly in large cities such as Varna and these areas have a different appearance, organization, and investment attractiveness. In this sense, the choice of the city of Varna as the object of the study is not accidental, because its geographical location provides many advantages for the development of peri-urban areas. We are referring to the presence of the sea and the convenient suburban areas, which allow the development of tourist service, better recreation, and conditions for permanent living.

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Our aim in this paper is to uncover the influencing factors in this process and attempt to classify them.

We will achieve this by finding a solution through the following tasks:

- Proposing an appropriate classification of factors influencing the development of peri-urban areas;
- Analyzing the state of the suburban areas of the city of Varna through the selected system of indicators and proposing measures for improvement of the development process.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE PERI-URBAN AREAS IN VARNA

Considering the classifications of the factors influencing the development of urbanization processes known in theory, we can share that all of them are justified and fully consistent with the goals and scientific objectives of the research for which they are used and in which studies are applied. This is also the case in [1], where the factors are divided into six groups – economic, microeconomic, social, transport, political and regulatory. Of course, the factors concerning the growth of all settlements are examined, including entire towns and villages located throughout the country. In this sense, given our study, it is quite reasonable to propose a composition and structure of factors that are, in our opinion, relevant to the current period of development of peri-urban areas. It concerns factors such as globalization, the dynamics in economic development, the dynamic development of large cities, the increase in risk in the urban environment, European integration, pandemic conditions, spatial planning, investment attractiveness, infrastructure provision, etc. [2–4].

The mentioned factors, in our opinion, can be divided into groups depending on the scope as follows:

- A. Pan-European factors – to which group belong some of the factors mentioned such as globalization, European integration, etc.
- B. National factors – which group includes the factors: the level of risk in the urban environment, pandemic conditions, etc.
- C. Local factors – infrastructure provision, attractiveness of investments, administrative provision, spatial planning.

In this article we do not claim to be exhaustive in the enumeration of the factors and their classification, but rather, following the stated objective, we will focus our attention on the local factors, given the chosen object of study, namely the peri-urban areas of large cities in Bulgaria – with the example of the city of Varna.

2.1. The factor spatial planning

As far as spatial planning is concerned, it can be noted that this factor is very important and determinant concerning other local factors. In fact, the spatial planning activities in the suburban areas have increased their pace of development in the last 10–15 years. This is certainly the case in Varna. In the indicated period for most of these territories the general spatial plans are being considered and processed.

For this purpose, a legal framework has been introduced, on which basis the necessary administrative procedure has been established. However, the work on spatial plans in peri-urban areas is characterized by high complexity, given the large number of stakeholders – legal and physical, and the resulting problems of balancing all interests. Due to the large number of complaints and especially their judicial treatment, the problem leads to delays in the procedure for certain territories. As a result of these difficulties, there are still several peri-urban areas with Unenacted Development Plans (UDPs). Undoubtedly, the lack of UDPs reduces the attractiveness of investment and this slows down their development. For the city of Varna, the following areas of this nature have not entered into force: “Borovets–Sever”; “Izgreve”; villa zone “Lazur”, etc.

What is special about the spatial planning factor is the cumbersome procedure, as we said above, and the possibility of multiple disputes. The necessary measures should be taken to speed up the process.

2.2. The factor administrative provision

The factor administrative provision is the next in importance, according to our classification for the development of peri-urban areas. It concerns the procedures, especially the time involved, for drawing up and approving detailed development plans for each property, as well as the drawing up and approval of all construction documents up to the granting of a building permit for each property. The issue is also valid for any infrastructure facility in peri-urban areas.

The average period for the development of a Detailed Site Development Plan (DSDP), and the period from designing to obtaining a building permit is in the range of 2–3 years. If the site is public, such as the construction of an electricity supply, the time frame increases by further 6 to 12 months. The reasons for this are the lack of administrative capacity and in Varna the continuous transfer of competencies in the procedure between municipal and district administrations. The local administrations – municipal, district,

and town halls – have difficulties in servicing this process, while working in a traditional way. It should be borne in mind that the number of investment projects is constantly increasing, especially now in pandemic conditions. It is imperative to mention that in the city of Varna, many of the peri-urban properties have not been subjected to street regulation and this is initiated following a declaration of investment interest, the costs of which are financed entirely by the interested party, i.e. the property investors. The circumstances briefly described above show how the process of development of peri-urban areas is severely hampered, which implies the need for immediate measures to speed up the administrative process.

2.3. The factor infrastructure provision

This factor, in this case, is fundamental about the development of the territories under consideration. The absence of infrastructure provision is a serious obstacle to investment intentions for at least two reasons:

1. In the absence of the necessary infrastructure, there is uncertainty as to the time frame for the implementation of any infrastructure element – electricity, water, road, etc., because very often the process encompasses plan preparation, approval, and implementation, i.e. a time that always exceeds the time of investment in a particular investment property. Undoubtedly, this influences the decision to launch investment projects related to the development of properties in the areas under consideration.
2. In many cases, the cost of designing and implementing infrastructure projects is borne entirely by the investor concerned or, at best, the investor bears the cost of at least one of the infrastructure elements mentioned. Clearly, in both cases described, the consequences are at the expense of delaying the development of peri-urban areas.

2.4. The factor investment attractiveness

The last of the factors considered, investment attractiveness, summarizes the degree of development of the three factors already considered. Any investment decision would be more justified if spatial planning, better administrative provision, and better infrastructure were in place. This is because, in this case, both the cost and the time to implement the investment project would be reduced for any investment decision for a specific property in peri-urban areas, i.e. the level of investment attractiveness would be increased.

Proposing effective measures in terms of the investment attractiveness factor to improve the peri-urban development process is linked to the considera-

tion of another important cause. The main reason for the increase in investment interest in peri-urban areas in large cities, including the city of Varna, is precisely the interest of households in purchasing houses for living or houses for investment purposes in the areas near large cities.

Households have this interest driven by:

1. Risk reduction, which obliges them to seek security for their finances on the one hand, and to preserve their purchasing power on the other.
2. The conditions created by single-family houses, not only in a pandemic setting but at all other times. This is now being recognized as an established trend by the real estate market.

All the factors considered, especially the investment attractiveness, outline an undeniable trend of increasing interest in the development of peri-urban areas in large cities. This has been noticed by local self-governance Varna, and by forming such territories, they have created conditions for meeting this public need. Along with this, however, several weaknesses of a mainly organizational nature have been committed. In this sense, to overcome the mistakes made by municipal peri-urban areas, and based on the brief analysis of the studied object, the following proposals can be summarized for accelerating the development process, namely:

1. Provision in the municipal budgets for capital expenditures for the design and implementation of infrastructure projects in peri-urban areas.
2. Optimization of the time for approval of construction documentation by refining administrative procedures in order to reduce the time for their servicing.
3. Strengthening public and institutional control of the assignment and execution of projects, related to infrastructure provision for these areas, especially in terms of reducing the time required to do so. The affiliates are pursuing a policy against the public interest in this matter and this has remained beyond public scrutiny.
4. Many of the disputes that have arisen concerning development plans are of a repetitive nature, which allows for the application of what we believe is an already established case law, which would lead to a reduction in the period for court decisions.

No doubt implementing the made proposals will bring the conditions for the development of peri-urban areas in Bulgaria closer to those of countries such as Slovenia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, etc.

3. CONCLUSION

Accelerating the process of peri-urban development is an indisputable necessity that will improve living conditions in large cities. A significant part of residential and recreational areas will be moved out from the central territories of large cities, and this will lead to a decrease in the congestion of administrative centers, caused by the concentration of activities and intense human traffic. Such a trend can be observed in the development of modern global cities.

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