



**DANURB+ DANube Urban Brand + Building Regional and Local  
Resilience through the Valorization of Danube's Cultural Heritage**

# **D+Atlas**

**ATLAS of Hidden Urban Values  
along the Danube**

**Editors // A. Djukić, B. Kádár, A. Stan, B. Antonić**



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the Valorization of Danube's Cultural Heritage



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**ATLAS**  
**of Hidden Urban Values**  
**along the Danube** — 2022

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DANube Urban Brand + Building Regional and Local Resilience through the Valorization of Danube's Cultural Heritage

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### 3.3

## POST-SOCIALIST SHRINKING CITY IN THE BORDERLAND DANUBE REGION // INTRODUCTION

Ana-Maria Branea

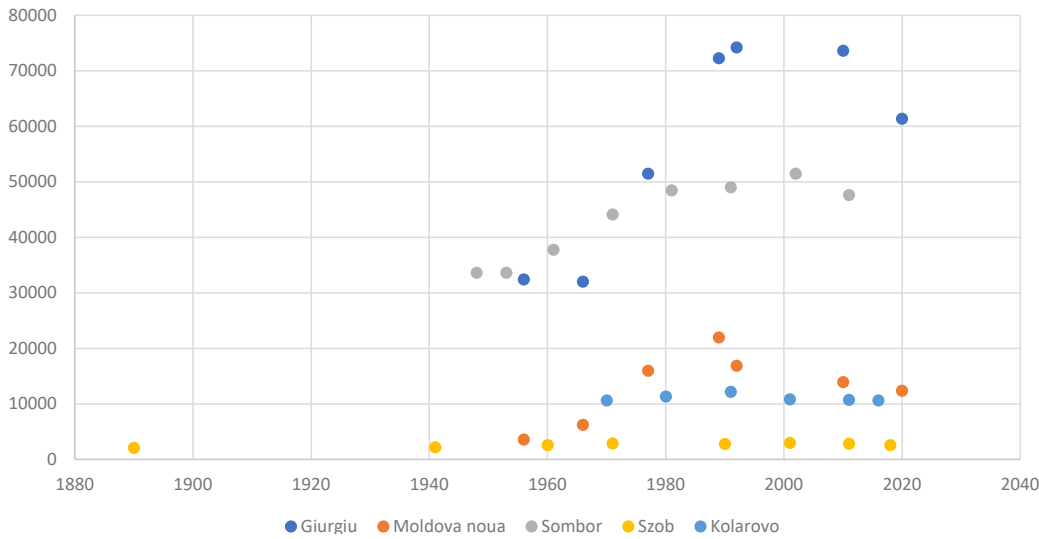
**Border cities are particularly susceptible to urban shrinkage. The EU territorial documents consider borderland cities and regions as more vulnerable ones (EC, 1999).** The border effect manifests itself in a two-fold manner, on the one hand, cities can be affected by accessibility issues, having few connections to their own country or be under the pull of larger nearby cities. On the other hand, they might experience an economic boom due to the border proximity, but once the connection is disrupted the effects are acute (Fig. 169).

**Fig. 169 /** Silistra in Bulgaria seen from nearby Romania: the negative effects of the city border position on local urban fabric (Author: A. Radulescu, 2022).





Demographic evolution



**Fig. 170 /** Comparative demographic overview of five selected cities-case studies (Author: A-M. Branea, 2022).

All five case studies presented below have experienced a worsening of their economical and demographical situations after the year 2000 (Fig. 170) - due to lost connectivity, damaged bridge by flooding in the case of Szob, mine closure in Moldova Noua, a “hard border” effect in the case of Sombor, emigration or the pull of larger cities. While some may be on their (slow) way to redress, others are visibly scarred by urban shrinkage, easily noticeable in their built environment, abandoned buildings and industrial areas or the poor condition of residential and commercial ones.

For all, a solution can be found in cross-border cooperation. In the case of the Danube, sustainable tourism is promising, taking advantage of natural environment and local heritage. Agro-, velo-, ethno- and gastronomical tourism represent the untapped potential of these areas, although difficult to establish (Fig. 171-172). Reorienting towards tourism and services is a challenge for many Danubian towns and their citizens. Their tourism occupancy rates, the type and price range of offered accommodation and services clearly demonstrate this problem. The COVID-19 pandemic has not made thing easier, closing borders and businesses, but it has created an opportunity to discover local tourism destinations.

**Fig. 172 /** Multi-ethnic Busójárás Celebration, protected by UNESCO, in Mohacs, the southernmost Danubian city in Hungary, as a potential accelerator for cross-border ethno-tourism (Author: D. Siljanović Kozoderović, 2022).



**Fig. 171 /** Gulyantsi, Bulgaria: Agro- and gastronomical tourism (Author: BlueLink, 2022).



**R**

European Commission – EC (1999). European Spatial Development Perspective – ESDP. Brussels: EC. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/pdf/sum_en.pdf).

### 3.3.1

## CASE STUDY 1 // KOLÁROVO, SLOVAKIA

Lubica Vitková

#### POPULATION:

1991: 12,146

2001: 10,823

2011: 10,696

2016: 10,591

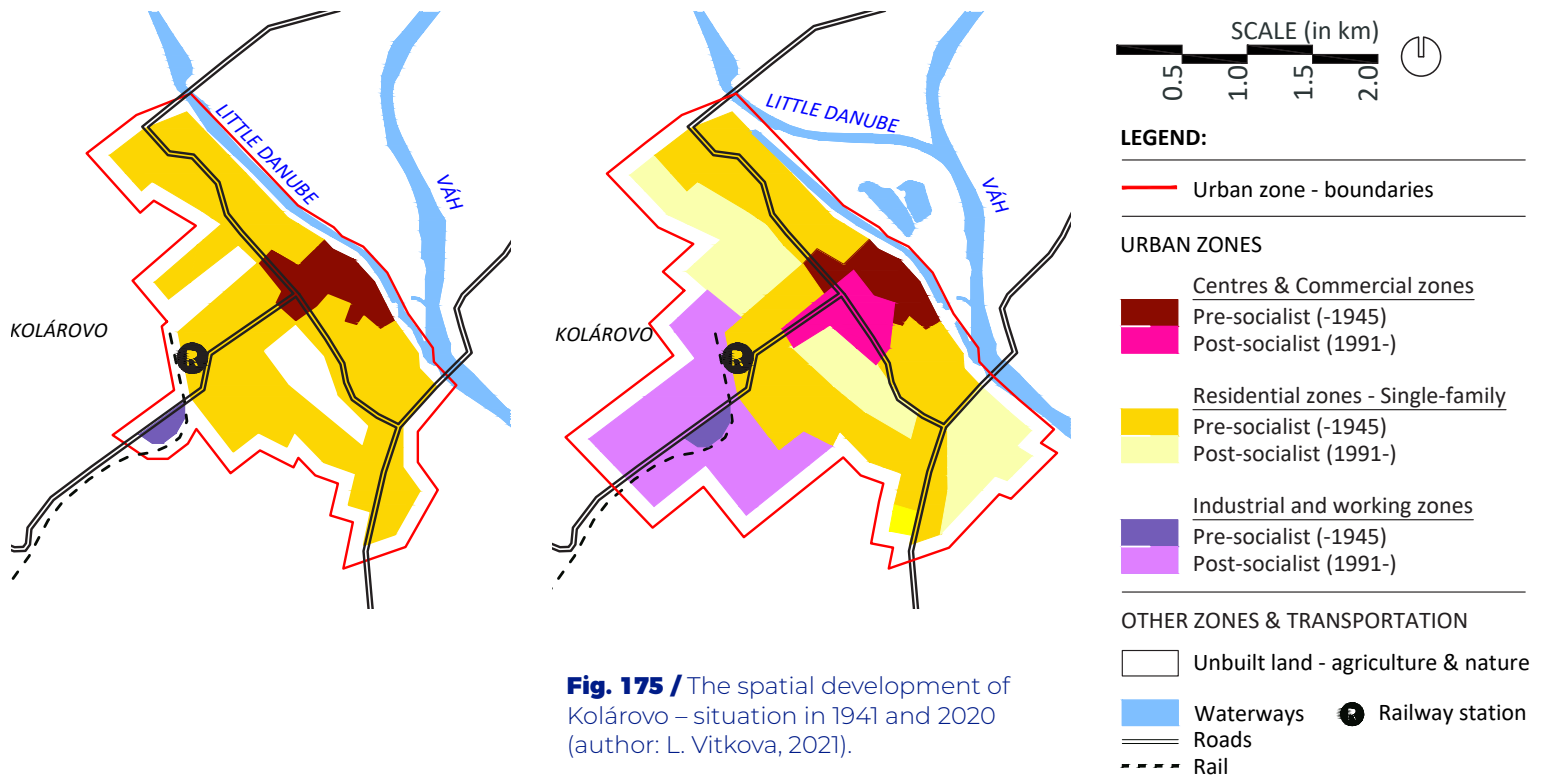
**Kolárovo is one of the largest urban settlements in the lower part of Žitný ostrov in Slovakia. From the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Kolárovo, or previously Guta, developed as a market town with a right of fair.** Local economy was strongly connected to the Little Danube – the peculiarity of the area is the floating water mill on this river that resembles this period (Fig. 173). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the railway connection, as well as the bridge over the Little Danube, helped the town development. However, the character of Kolárovo, as a local agricultural hub, was preserved even in socialism. A rarity is the construction of a “youth village” in the 1950s, based on collective land management. Kolárovo gained the status of a town only in 1967 (Fig. 174).

**Fig. 173** / Kolárovo – old water mill on the Small Danube (author: L. Vitkova, 2021).



**Fig. 174** / Central square in Kolárovo, formed during socialist era (author: L. Vitkova, 2021).





Kolárovo represents the town with the lowest degree of centripetence in the hierarchy of the towns in Slovakia. It is without connection to major transport routes, only with a connection to Komárno (STAPRING, 2004). The population decline of the town is not dramatic, but rather gradual. However, it does not reflect the degradation of the urban structure (Fig. 175-176). Local economy is based on several companies, which are mainly operating in the town industrial zone, formed during socialist period.

The potential of Kolárovo lies in the development of sustainable tourism, given the unique natural environment – around the Little Danube and Váh, with accompanying floodplain forests, water areas and characteristic canals, which drain swamps or provide irrigation. The added value and hitherto untapped potential, especially for the development of agro-tourism, have “scattered farmsteads”, tied in the past to agriculture and livestock, which was suppressed during the period of collectivisation. The surroundings of Kolárovo provide excellent opportunities for hunting and fishing.



**Fig. 176 /** The morphological map of Kolárovo (author: L. Vitkova, 2021).

R

STAPRING (2004). Územný plan mesta Kolárovo / Territorial plan of the Town of Kolárovo. Kolárovo. Retrieved from <https://www.uzemneplany.sk/upn/kolarovo>.

### 3.3.2

## CASE STUDY 2 // SZOB MICROREGION, HUNGARY

Bálint Kádár

**POPULATION SZOB  
TOWN/MUNICIPALITY:**  
1990: 2,746  
2001: 2,965  
2011: 2,794  
2018: 2,566

\* Szob district includes the following municipalities/communities (Fig. 177): Bernecebaráti, Kemence, Peröcsény, Vámosmikola, Nagybörzsöny, Ipolytölgyes, Letkés, Ipolydamásd, Márianosztra, Kóspallag, Zebegény, Nagymaros, Kismaros, Verőce, Szokoly. Underlined communities are the part of Szob Microregion.

**POPULATION SZOB  
DISTRICT:**  
1990: 23,235  
2001: 24,363  
2011: 24,875  
2018: 24,818

Szob and its district lies between the Börzsöny hills and the rivers Danube and Ipoly. The western part of this area is still part of the developing tourism region of the Hungarian Danube Bent. The municipality of Szob also lies on the shore of the Danube, but at the influx of the border river Ipoly. Therefore, it shares the faith of the villages along the border in strong decline: some lost half of its population in the past 30 years.

**POPULATION SZOB  
MICROREGION:**  
1990: 12,832  
2001: 13,632  
2011: 12,708  
2018: 11,823

The district anticipated a period of growth after the end of the state socialism due to the possibility of decreased isolative effect of the Slovak-Hungarian border. But the bridge built between Ipolydamásd (HU) and Chľaba (SK) in 1989 was destroyed during the flood in 2000. Other factors also kept this area on the level of shrinking peripheral district (Fig. 177). For

example, the decline of fruit orchards and the privatisation and closing of the “Szobi-szörp” fruit processing factory (Fig. 178) contributed to this condition. This was a key source of income and local pride since 1967, with the famous syrups of berry fruits. This industry was reactivated in 2009, but the former market-share is hard to rebuild.

**POPULATION SZOB  
DISTRICT WITHOUT  
SZOB MICROREGION:**  
1990: 12,832  
2001: 13,632  
2011: 12,708  
2018: 11,823

**Fig. 179 /** Former concrete production line, another industry left in decline in Szob (Author: B. Kadar, 2021).



LEGEND:

- ..... National border
- Urban zone - boundaries

URBAN ZONES

- Pre-socialist development (-1945) - historic core
- Socialist development (1945-1991) - peripheral urban sprawl
- Socialist development (1945-1991) - weekend house zones
- Post-socialist development (1991-) - peripheral urban sprawl
- Post-socialist development (1991-) - former weekend house zones as new permanent housing zones

OTHER ZONES & TRANSPORTATION

- Unbuilt land - agriculture & nature
- Waterways
- Rail
- Fun rail
- Ferry line
- Roads
- Bike path
- Port, dock
- Railway station
- Ferry boat

Szob also tried to use its borderline military infrastructure and mountain mining infrastructure for tourism (Fig. 179), but the Szob-Nagybörzsöny mountain railway line never attracted the originally planned number of tourists, even with the increasing numbers in recent years. The recreational railway network in the Börzsöny Mountain is divided into four different operations with different ticketing. Therefore, once much larger network transporting wood and stone (active since 1910) is still fragmented, showing one of the main reasons of stagnation – the lack of regional cooperation.

Szob and the Ipoly Valley have the potential for cooperation based on tourism and local products, e.g., products made of local berries or local vines in the Slovak side. The reconstruction of the bridge near Szob began in 2021, and two regions – Pest County and Nitriansky kraj – have started cooperation for an integrated cross-border region in the EGTC Pontibus.

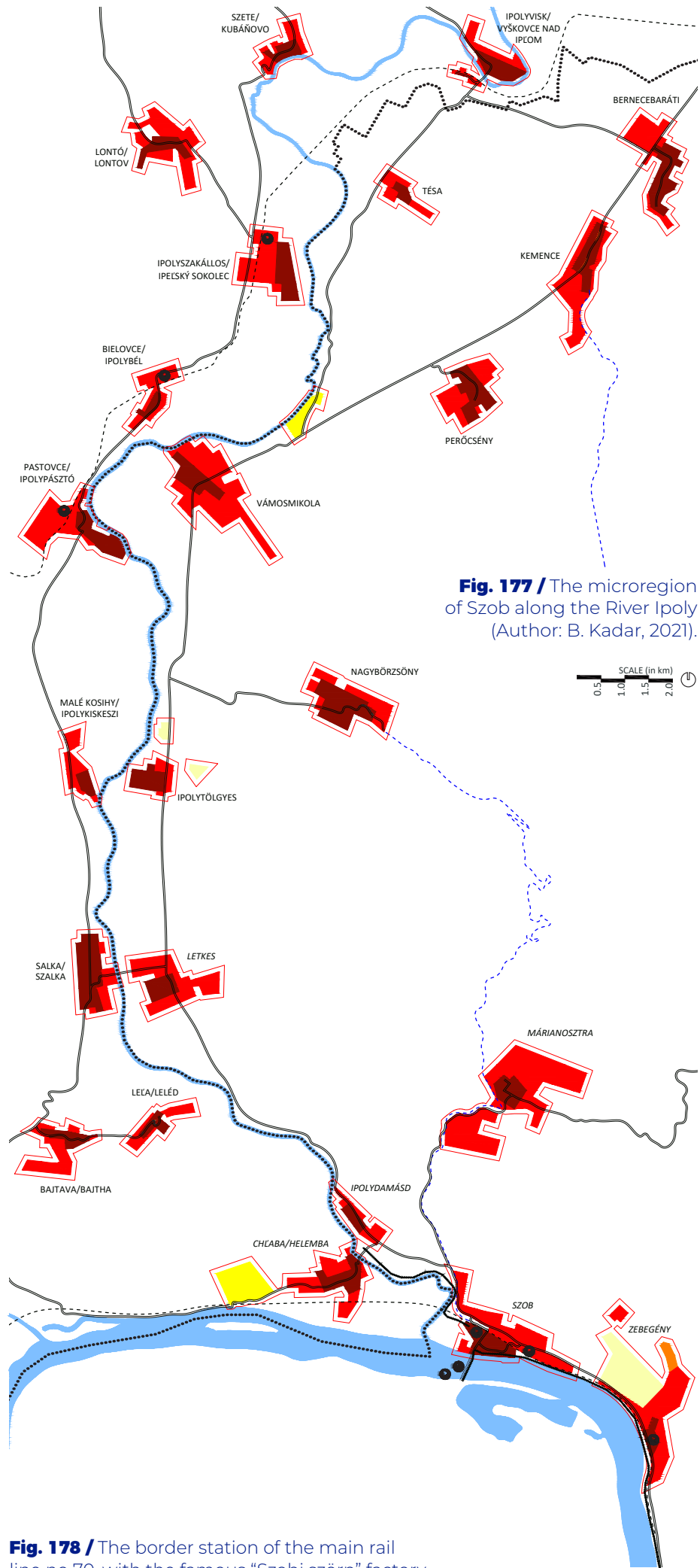


Fig. 177 / The microregion of Szob along the River Ipoly (Author: B. Kadar, 2021).

Fig. 178 / The border station of the main rail line no 70, with the famous “Szobi szörp” factory in the background (Author: B. Kadar, 2021).

### 3.3.3

## CASE STUDY 3 // SOMBOR, SERBIA

Nikola Mitrović  
Milorad Obradović

**POPULATION:**  
1991: 48,205  
2001: 51,471  
2011: 47,623

**Sombor experienced several bright decades during the socialist period, with industrial progress and demographic growth. However, this growth was relatively small compared to other district cities in ex-Yugoslavia - less than 50% during 45 socialist years.** Conversely, such a slow development had a positive impact on the preservation of the built heritage (Djukić et al, 2018). Hence, the historic core, known as “Venac/Coronet”, is the best preserved among the middle-sized cities in Serbia (Fig. 180).



**Fig. 180 /** The axonometric picture of Sombor historic core, known as “Venac/Coronet” (Author: B. Jovin; credits: City of Sombor).



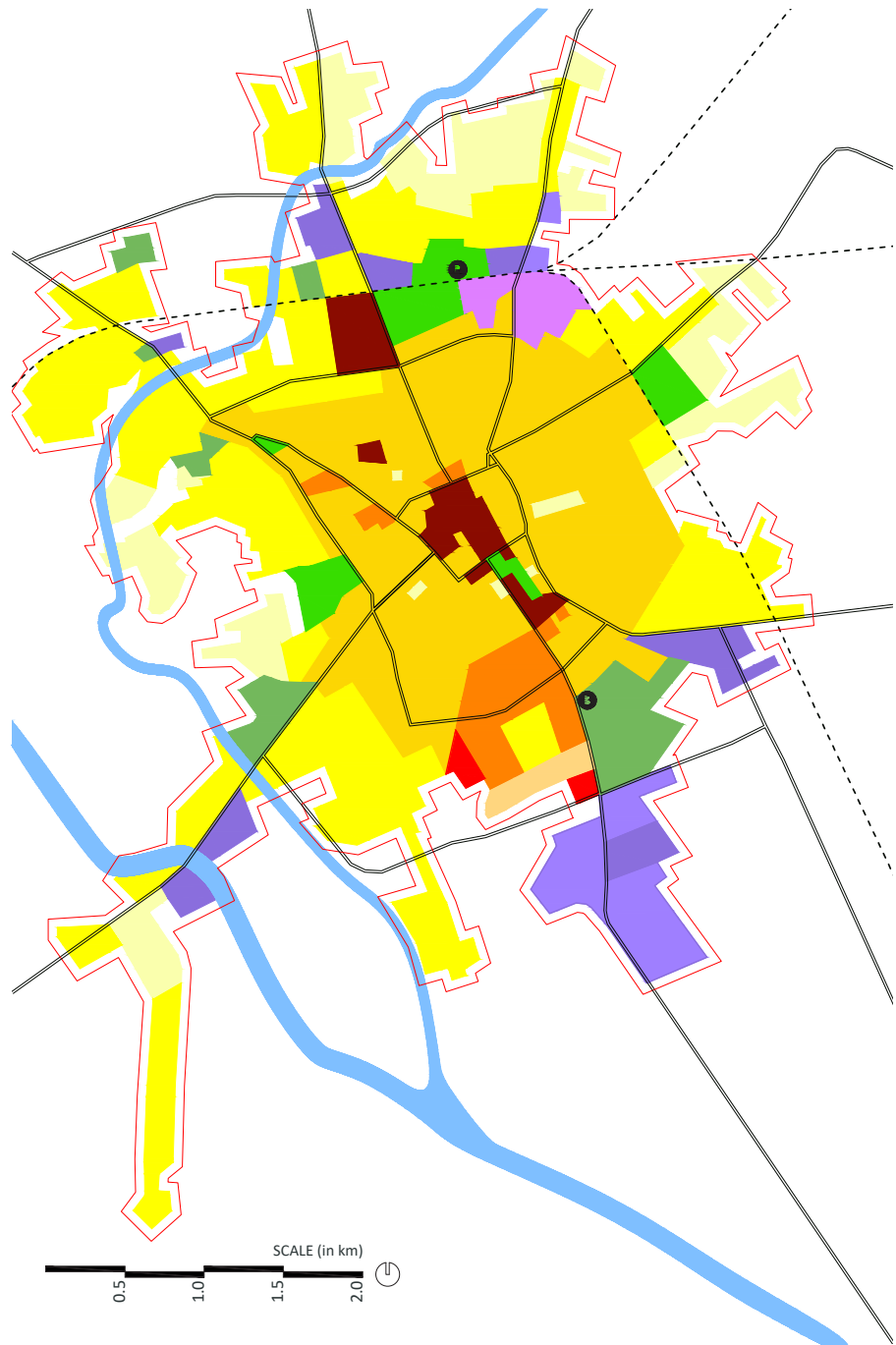
The fall of socialism was followed by the Yugoslav Crisis in the 1990s, which significantly influenced post-socialist Sombor. The city hosted a lot of Serbian refugees from nearby Croatia and became even more a border city due to the newly-established border on the Danube. Ultimately, most of the local industry collapsed and the city image lost its vitality (Fig. 181) entering into the period of decline (early 2000s).

**Fig. 181 /** The poor state of Kronić Palace, which houses a regional trade court today (Author: D. Siljanović Kozoderović, 2021).

LEGEND:

- National border
  - Urban zone - boundaries
- 
- URBAN ZONES
- Centres & Commercial zones**
    - Pre-socialist (-1945)
    - Socialist (1945-1991)
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - reuse
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - sprawl
  - Residential zones - Single-family**
    - Pre-socialist (-1945)
    - Socialist (1945-1991)
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - sprawl
  - Residential zones- Multi-family**
    - Socialist (1945-1991)
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - reuse
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - sprawl
  - Industrial and working zones**
    - Pre-socialist (-1945)
    - Socialist (1945-1991)
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - sprawl
    - Post-socialist (1991-) - brownfield
  - Urban green zones**
    - Pre-socialist (-1945)
    - Socialist (1945-1991)
    - Post-socialist (1991-)
- 
- OTHER ZONES & TRANSPORTATION
- Unbuilt land - agriculture & nature
  - Waterways
  - Roads
  - Rail
  - Bus station
  - Railway station

In these challenging circumstances, Sombor has slowly shifted its development toward the pre-socialist period when it represented an important administrative seat, a cultural centre and a marketplace for rural surroundings (Fig. 182). The old historic core is in the process of both physical and functional regeneration, with many new small-scale developments in service sector: cafes, restaurants, thematic shops, agencies, clubs, guesthouses, etc. Major administrative and cultural palaces, such as Županija Building (district court) and Grašalković Palace, have been refurbished. The later one is currently prepared to become a new cultural and creative hub (Fig.183). The traditionally developed small-scale industry (Fig. 184) and local crafts have been



**Fig. 182 /** Post-socialist development of Sombor: situation 2021 (Author: N. Mitrović, 2022).

rediscovered and reinvigorated by new local associations and promotion. Nevertheless, the pace of the urban revitalisation of Sombor is still slow and the local authorities and citizens expect more support from the provincial and national levels, as well as from the development based on the proximity to the Danube.



**Fig. 183 /** Grašalković Palace, a planned cultural and creative hub of Sombor (Author: B. Antonić, 2021)



**Fig. 184 /** A 19<sup>th</sup>-century damask silk weaving manufacture of in Bezdan, near Sombor – both tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Author: D. Siljanović Kozoderović, 2021).



Djukić, A., Stupar, A. & Antonić, B. (2018). The consequences of urban policies in socialist Yugoslavia on the transformation of historic centres: the case study of cities in Northern Serbia. *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment*, 33(3), 555-573. DOI: 10.1007/s10901-018-9612-7.

### 3.3.4

## CASE STUDY 4 // MOLDOVA NOUĂ, ROMANIA

Ana-Maria Branea

**POPULATION:**  
1991: 16,874  
2001: 13,917  
2011: 12,350

**Moldova Nouă, the town located in the southern part of Romanian Caraș-Severin County, is the site of the former Dacian fortress and Roman castrum Mudava. Medieval fortress was built between 1427-1428, and destroyed by the Turks in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The current town is formed mainly during socialist period as a mining community.**

Ranked fifth in Romania as the most affected town by urban shrinkage, Moldova Nouă lost 43.79% of its population between 1989 and 2016, of which 36.65% left before 2002. (Păun Constantinescu, 2019). Even the latest 2011 official data showed 12,350 inhabitants, local authorities estimate that only about 8,000-9,000 people are currently living in the town. For instance, common living cost boards posted at residential building entrances show an approximate 50% occupancy, as the large part of the population working abroad is still registered as living in Moldova Nouă.

The economic causes of this downgraded situation include the copper mine closure in 2006 (Fig. 185) and the lack of employment opportunities since. This severe economic and demographic shrinkage can easily be observed from the advanced state of degradation of some of its, still in use, multi-family housing buildings (Fig. 186). The town peculiar urban tissue, made up of two distinct areas, informally known as the Old and New Moldova, separated by 2.6 km of empty field further impedes its coherent urban development (Fig. 187). The town's peripheral character is exacerbated by its low accessibility,

**Fig. 185 /** Former copper mine (Author: A-M. Branea)

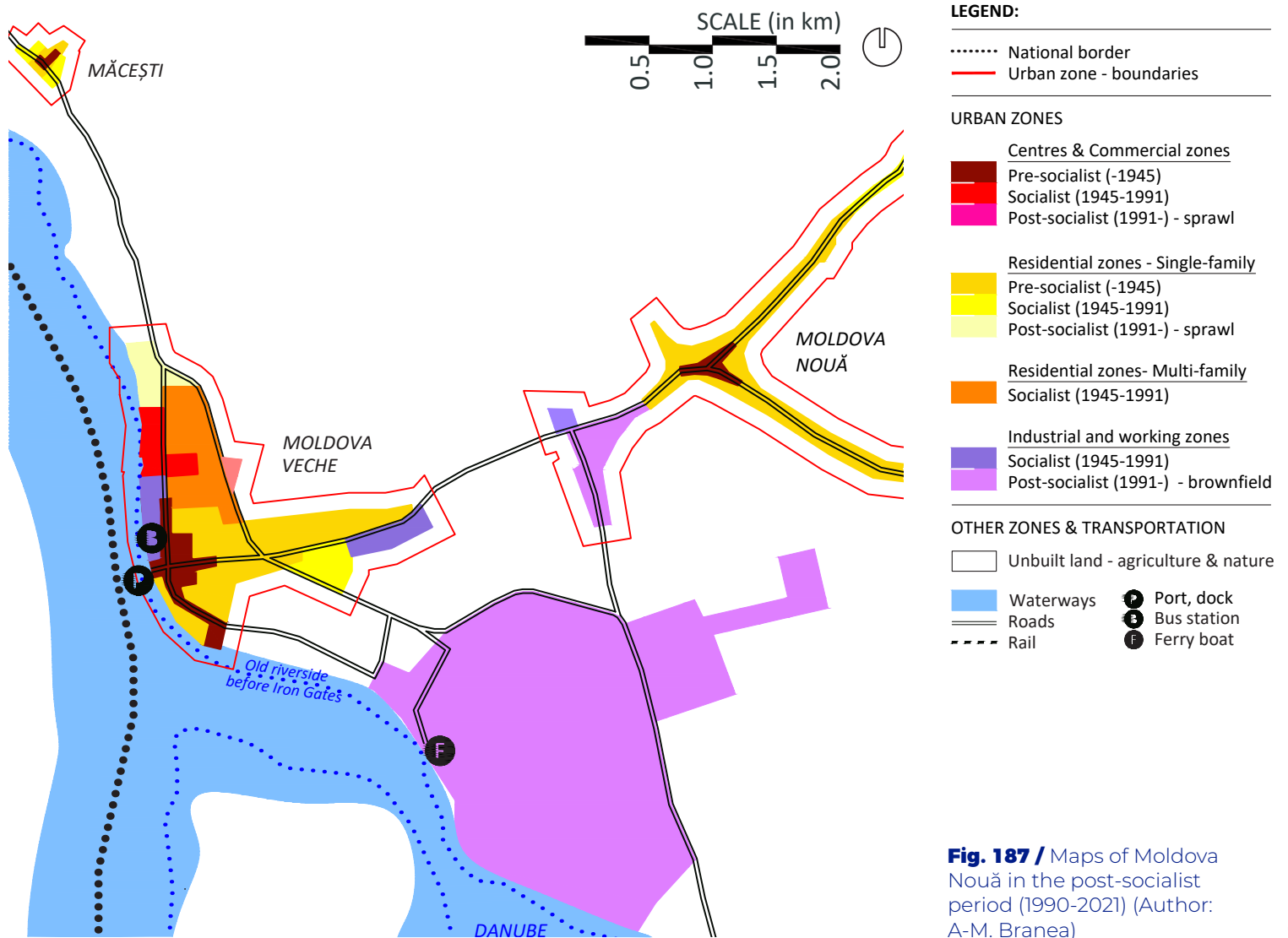




**Fig. 186 /** Partially abandoned apartment building in central Moldova Nouă  
(Author: A-M. Branea)



an issue addressed by the introduction of a ferry connection between Moldova Nouă and Golubac, Serbia, funded by a cross-border European project. The redevelopment potential of Moldova Nouă can lay, however, in either its rediscovered productive past as efforts is made to reopen the copper mine or a shift towards tourism on the Danube, for which the area needs support and preparations.



Păun Constantinescu, I. (2019). Orașe românești în declin / Shrinking Cities in Romania. Berlin & Bucharest: DOM Publishers.

3.3.5

CASE STUDY 5 //  
**GIURGIU, ROMANIA**

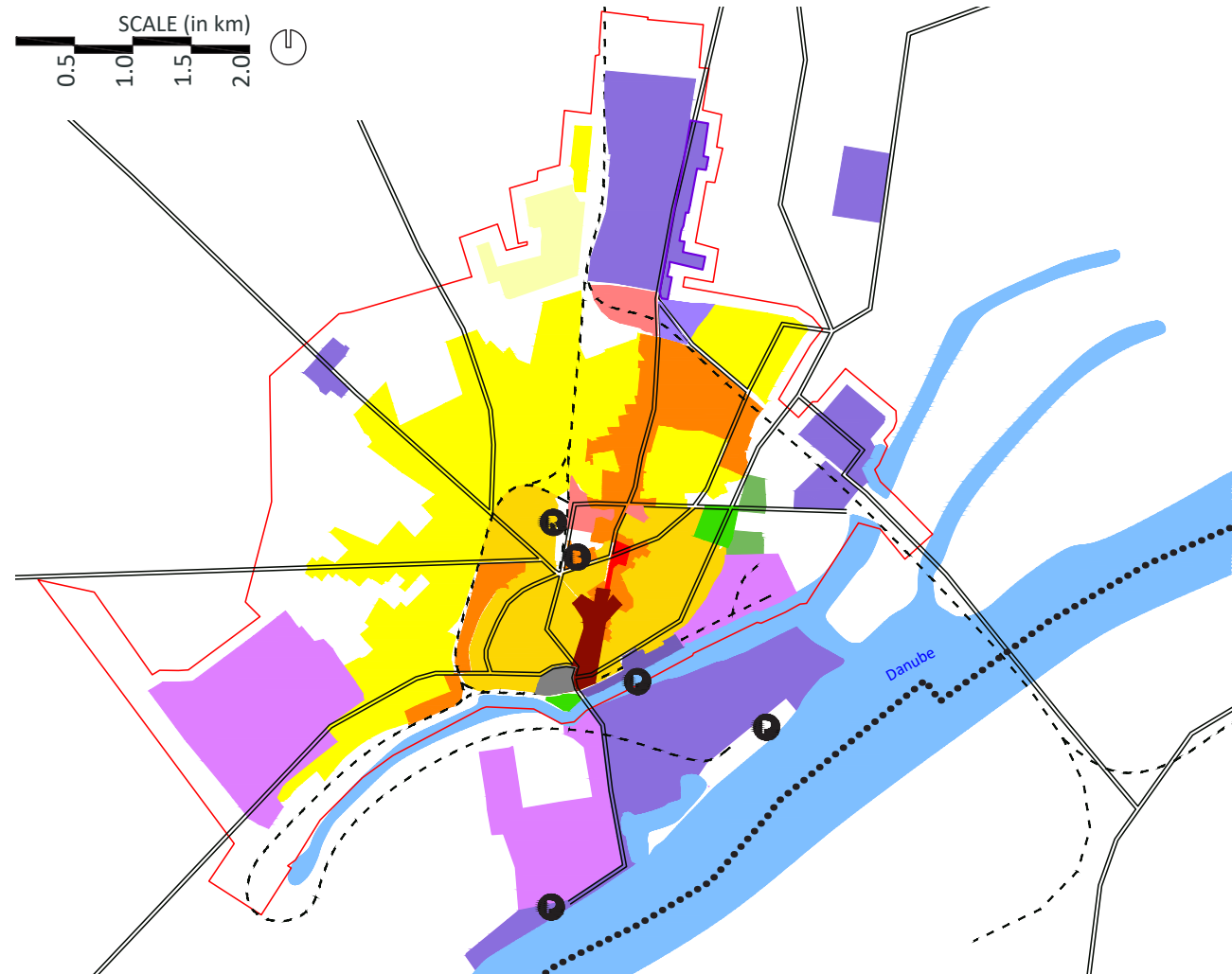
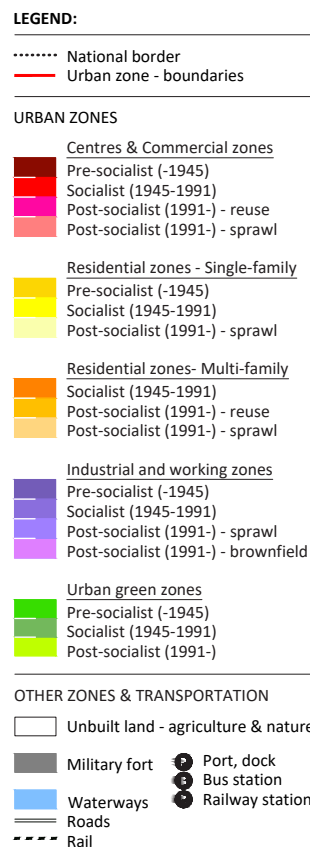
Angelica Stan  
Sorin Manea

**POPULATION:**  
1992: 74,000  
2002: 69,345  
2010: 61,353

Considering the various periodisations done to delimit more precisely the period after 1990 in the development of Danubian cities in Romania, within the geo-political context marked especially by the accession Romania to the EU in 2007, we defined three major sub-periods between 1990 and 2020 (Stan, 2015):

- (1) First period (1990-2006), defined by a great enthusiasm, but also by a deep confusion due to a melting system between communist remnants and new capitalist elements;
- (2) Second period (2007-14), defined by the worsening of discretionary private pressure of real estate sectors for the large parts of the city, especially in periphery, for new retail zones; and
- (3) Third period (2015-20), marked by the effort to overcome the economic crisis and to better adopt the European policies.

All these three periods are also in a continual demographic and social shrinking process, since the attraction of places abroad is very high, and local offer is insufficient in smaller cities such as Giurgiu (Fig. 188).



**Fig. 188 /** Map of Giurgiu in post-socialist period (1990-2020) (Authors: A. Stan & S. Manea)



**Fig. 189** / Giurgiu Shipyard on the Danube (Author: C. Vărzaru)

The current general aspect regarding the urban development of Giurgiu is of a more conscious attitude of the public authority on the existing potential and development opportunities, but also of a crass inability to implement feasible, necessary projects. There are still very few public investments and those that generate attractive jobs, such as still active Giurgiu shipyard (Fig. 189) with nearby free-trade zone (Zona Libera).

The shrinking phenomenon is deepening, especially expressed in the abandonment of large urban territories of former industrial areas



**Fig. 190** / Giurgiu, green resources, and potential for leisure development resources (Author: C. Vărzaru)

re-taken over by nature, spontaneously vegetated and perhaps in this way, more attractive for wild animals than to citizens (Fig. 190). The shrinking pattern is expressed in the spatial plan by a disorganisation of the peripheral space, with sprawling developments melted with large abandoned areas, and intense development in retail on the direction of dependence/influence exerted by nearby Bucharest (Stan, 2019). In the meantime, many valuable buildings are still neglected, such as the city railways station (Fig. 191).



**Fig. 191** / Giurgiu railway station in a neglected state (Author: C. Vărzaru)

- R**
- Stan A. (2015). Urban expansion in Bucharest, after 1990: errors and benefits. In: Doytchinov, G., Djukić, A. & Ionita, C. (Eds.), *Planning Capital Cities: Belgrade, Bucharest, Sofia* (pp. 224-233). Graz: TU Graz.
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