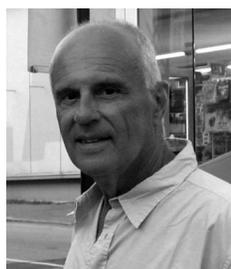


МЕТРОПОЛИТЕНСКА ПОДРУЧЈА И ИНТЕЛИГЕНТНО УПРАВЉАЊЕ У ЗЕМЉАМА ДОЊЕГ ПОДУНАВЉА

METROPOLITAN AREAS AND SMART GOVERNANCE IN LDA COUNTRIES



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ABSTRACT

Key words:

LDA, city, smart
governance,
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cooperation

The Lower Danube Area (LDA), which covers 4 examined countries (Ukraine is the fifth), is specific in terms of general competitiveness in comparison to the western, more developed parts of Europe. Large cities, which carry a heavy burden of national development, have crucial responsibility in defining a new governance model which would contribute to a more efficient and sustainable mode of local development. One of the challenging opportunities is the concept of metropolitan areas (MA), that is, functional, non-administrative regions, where the city cooperates and uses identified functional links with the surrounding local communities in a self-organized way. The concept of MA in these countries, with the exception of Romania, has been based on identifying functional links for the cooperation of cities and their surroundings, in the form of virtual space which has been defined in local strategies or spatial plans so far. On the other hand, the city governments show no serious initiatives towards their functional networking, and do not support active role of stakeholders' in the urban policy making process. The national legislative does not react to the same concept either. Therefore, academia (planners, economists, engineers, etc.) sees smart city governance as a mode and possible opportunity to enhance the competitive position of LDA large cities, with the concept of MA included. The threats are on the side of urban policy makers and inappropriate capacities of their administration, traditional mode of governing which has not registered the significance of the intelligent city so far, with pale reactions to proposals of academia. The article will enlighten some referent practices in the LDA countries as well as some ideas for the future, as notified in some deeper analyses elaborated during debates between the LDA experts and policy makers on the concept of smart city governance between 2013 and 2015.

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Доње Подунавље (ДП) које обухвата четири испитане земље (Украјина је пета) специфично је у погледу опште конкурентности у односу на западни, развијенији део Европе. Велики градови, који носе тежак терет националног развоја, имају и кључну одговорност код дефинисања новог модела управљања који би допринео ефикаснијем и одрживом начину локалног развоја. Једна од изазовних могућности је концепција метрополитенских подручја (МП), тј. функцијских, неадминистративних региона, где град кооперира са локалним заједницама у окружењу на самоуправан начин. Концепција МП у овим земљама, са изузетком Румуније, заснована је до сада на идентификацији функцијских веза за сарадњу градова са својим окружењем у виду виртуелног простора за сада дефинисаног локалним стратегијама или просторним плановима. С друге стране, градске управе не покрећу озбиљнију иницијативу за функцијско умрежавање са другим градовима, и не подржавају активну улогу актера код дефинисања урбаних политика. На исти начин ни државно законодавство не реагује на ову концепцију. Стога планери, економисти, инжењери и други, виде интелигентно управљање градом као начин и једну од могућности за унапређење конкурентности великих градова у ДП, укључујући и концепцију МП. Претње су на страни оних који дефинишу урбану политику, уз неодговарајуће капацитете администрације, застарео модел управљања који још није регистровао значај *интелигентног* града и слабо реаговање на предлоге стручњака. Чланак ће осветлити неке од референтних пракси у земљама ДП као и неке од идеја за будућност, онако како је то уочено у дубљим анализама обрађеним у дискусијама стручњака и политичара са централном темом концепције *интелигентног* управљања градом (Smart City Governance) између 2013 и 2015. године.

INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth of urban settlements in Europe of the 20th and 21st century, and large cities in particular, with some serious threats such as climate change, urban fragmentation and segregation, growing economic and social demands increased by the critical appearance of the current enormous immigration to Europe, now urgently asks for a more sophisticated system sustainably related to economy, social and ecological sensitivity. The diversity of the political status (EU membership) and governing heritage, multi-cultural characteristics or still lagging economies, bring some additional threats to the South-East European (SEE) countries, i.e. the LDA

countries in particular.¹ The time after nineties in the 20th century is the period of obvious dynamic structural changes in SEE, formerly socialist countries. Several reasons seem to be beneath these changes: (a) the shift of a single-party political system towards pluralistic democracy, (b) the transformation of the centrally planned economy to the open and liberal market-economy, (c) succumbing to the irrepressible process of globalization, with the direct impact on communication and spatial structuring and distribution of activities, (d) the flowing process of adapting legislative, economy and value systems according to the ones in the European Union in the process of

¹ Four countries of LDA, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova, with their substantial relation within the Danube region, will be analyzed in this article.

accession and membership accommodation, and (e) the fast changing technology which influences behavior and mentality of private development actors, the economy transformation and the mode of city governing in particular. During such a change the status and the role of cities have been changed due to these few reasons, bringing urban issues to the top of national and regional agenda in the LDA countries. Demographic change (migration to cities, population shrinking and ageing, shift from industry to service activities, etc.) contributes to the change of social status in urban areas as much as in rural ones. *Geographically concentrated prosperity differentials have fueled the region's recent and current migratory and fertility trends and resulted in decelerating city growth and, at times, significant depopulation of smaller cities and rural areas...* [1]. Generally, large cities are becoming national hubs or *the development engines*[2] with the paramount role in generating culture, services and economy, but with new responsibility for their rural hinterland too. A complex nexus of still undiscovered connections between cities, with their functions as the foundation for cooperation or networking, with the growing appearance of large metropolitan areas as functional regions, and polycentrism as some of national spatial policies, will emerge as critical and challenging issues for countries and cities of the LDA in particular. Therefore, that would be one of crucial challenges for the advanced city governance in this part of Europe, and its responsibility for advance city competitiveness and the life quality.

The functional change and consequent changes in the city structure bring the LDA cities to other phenomena during the period of transition. Instead of former functional groupings (housing, industry, recreation, and transportation), class stratification or the collective identity in the industrial era, thanking primarily to new technologies and the system of communication, the city in the LDA is rapidly approaching the polycentric atomization coming out of the new production, service and information systems, and completely new life style. Dominant economic, administrative or

religious functions, symmetric or asymmetric city matrices, functional zoning or class segregation and other appearances of industrial and post-industrial cities are influenced heavily by functional, productive and behavioral changes. In comparison to the developed European cities, capital cities and other large cities, the cities in the LDA are still lagging behind: Belgrade with enormous illegal constructions, Sofia with the increasing attack of private capital on public goods, Bucharest with the unresolved mix and confrontation of old and new urban tissue, and Chişinău with the undefined functional and physical profile [3]. Polycentrism is still *tabula rasa* due to the inherited policy of centralization, and metropolitan areas (MA) are still in a fuzzy form of urban sprawl. On one hand, the individualization, with private interest domination, combined with globalization processes on the other and pursued by the new communication and information technologies inevitably produce transformation, atomization and multiplication of the city structure. The city territory is becoming an instrument of the new type of service economy, a field of dynamic flows of money, people, goods and information, often without proper urban economic reasons and firm public control. Large cities in the LDA, with their functional surroundings, have harsh problems coming into focus of immigration and settling the people from rural areas, thus generating a vast number of social (poverty, no employment, housing, etc.) or ecological (infrastructure, illegal housing, pollution, etc.) problems. In such a situation the responsible task of governing large cities in the LDA has delivered three powerful instruments to cope with such threats: a new mode of city governing, new technologies, and smart metropolitan area.

(1) **New mode of city governing**, introducing active participation of stakeholders, more technically qualified, reliable and efficient administration, ready to organize more resilient urban system, horizontally coordinated internally (within the city territory) and externally (with immediate, i.e. MA, and wider surroundings). The European vision is *to develop governance systems*

capable of building shared visions reconciling competing objectives and conflicting development models; and to cooperate in order to ensure coherent spatial development and an efficient use of resources [4].

- (2) **New technologies** and their use for better efficiency and optimization of cities and their economic, social and environmental systems, with positive consequences for the life quality. According to new researches, *information and communication technologies can be used to make cities more efficient, environmentally sustainable, economically attractive and socially inclusive* [5].
- (3) **Smart metropolitan area** organized in a way of connecting a large city with its surroundings by intelligent governance, cooperative public services, *intelligent* mobility, water management and energy use, thus contributing to sustainable use of resources and more efficient and rationale economic performances. In spite of the problem of negative externalities with some of the connected players (local communities) some authors emphasize the *establishment of formal or informal methods of combining local governments in metropolitan regions to promote cooperation across a range of issues on the theory that such cooperation will enable regions to be more competitive in the global economy* [6].

The future threats are serious and need better understanding and an additional education of city administration and relevant stakeholders on possible effects and opportunities of the MA concept, the role and new responsibility of local governments in the European competition of cities and the concept of smart city or smart MA. The European policy of city development in the future points that *horizontal and vertical coordination is required as cities have to work with other governance levels and reinforce their cooperation and networking with other cities in order to share investments and services which are required at a larger territorial scale* [4]. The present situation in the LDA countries is diverse in terms of applying concepts of both MA and smart city or metropolitan

governance, and a number of weaknesses in terms of horizontal/vertical coordination and cooperation or networking with other cities. Some of the facts should contribute to understand this statement better.

METROPOLITAN AREA AS THE PLAUSIBLE FUTURE OF SEE LARGE CITIES

The LDA cities are in the position of searching and coping for their position in the European and World economies today, with few of them satisfying basic standards and criteria to compete and integrate in a wider economic system: Chişinău, Bucharest, Sofia and Belgrade as the capital cities of their countries,² and a few regional centers (Novi Sad, Constanta, Vidin, Braila, etc.). All of them have good perspectives but with different problems to be solved in due time: communal systems improved, environment sustainably enhanced, nature and cultural heritage well protected and activated as an economic resource, infrastructure completed and rehabilitated, economy specified and directed towards advanced value added industries, cultural and scientific capacities developed, etc. The competitiveness of the LDA cities is a new issue for most of them, having been formerly closed within introvert socialist political and economic systems and now being confronted with a challenge in the wider European context and constellation of the European cities. The more successful results depend largely on further adaptation of national and eventually regional legislative, macro-economic policies, power redistribution in decentralized countries, and the improved mode of governing. Nowadays, when the countries of the LDA have different status related to the European Union, the EU member countries Bulgaria and Romania and their cities have some advantages in terms of new legislative and governance combined with a good position on the European Transport Corridors, and the polycentric network of large cities. *Achieving the potential of the sub-region*

² Measured by Green City indexes these three capital cities are at the very bottom of the list with 30 calculated European capital cities: Belgrade is the 27th, Bucharest is the 28th, and Sofia is the 29th (See: Green City, 2012, p. 15, Siemens, Munich).

(South-East of Europe – B.S.) will also depend on significantly improved cooperation between regions and particularly cities [1]. Other large cities in this part of Europe, where Serbia is the candidate country and Moldova is in the initial phase of accessing, are in the take-off position with serious challenges coming from the political umbrella. The national policies will have to be clearer in terms of defining new roles and competencies of cities, supporting intra-regional and interregional cooperation and functional clustering of local communities, but a critical issue is their relation to the EU membership rules.

The idea of MAs is a new one in these countries or, at least, known to planners but not properly or generally implemented in national legislatives and local administrative practice. As mentioned, Romania has advanced with the MAs concept, which has already been enacted and practiced, with Bulgaria and Serbia still in planning discourse only, and Moldova lagging far behind. Thus, the different political status of four countries in terms of the EU membership, and consequent *acquis communautaire* applications, bring these countries to diverse positions related to city administrative and planning practices.

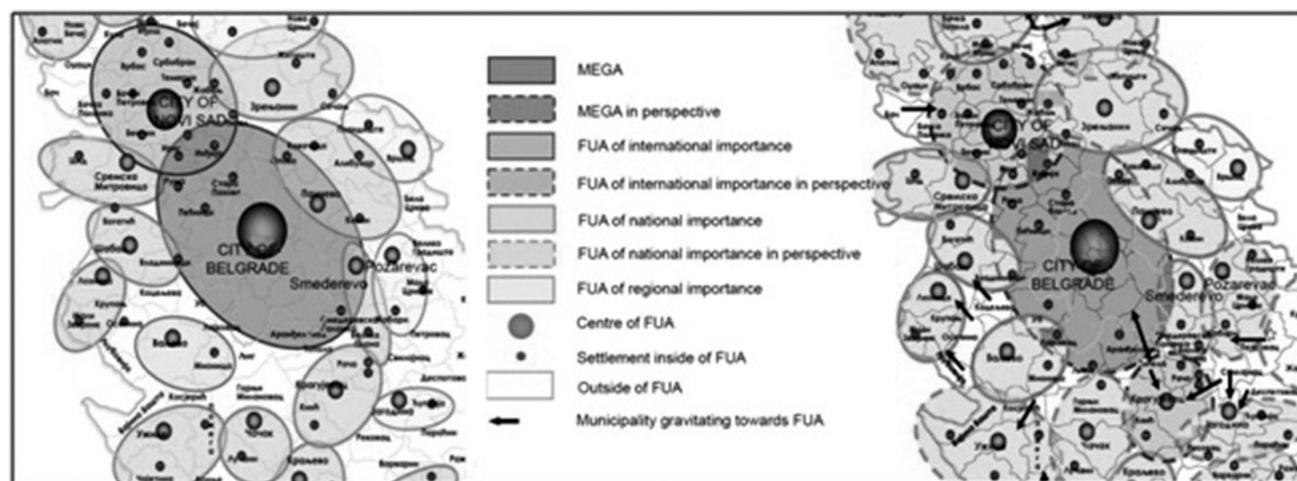
A few different interpretations of MA's meaning take place around the LDA. At this moment and for the future of the LDA countries, some definitions of functional urban

areas (FUA) could be of some use. The ESPON project on polycentric development in Europe points that *FUAs have been identified in various manners by the European countries as functional urban regions, districts, travel to-work-areas, local labor market areas, daily urban systems, commuting zones and sub-regional units as well as other* [7]. Metropolitan area (MA) is the synonym for FUA, with a large city in its core and, therefore, this definition is useful.

Going downstream the river Danube, according to the EUROSTAT methodology for MAs, Serbia has only three cities/metropolitan areas with more than 250,000 inhabitants: cities of Belgrade, Novi Sad and Nis. The Spatial Plan of Serbia defined the set of strategic priorities related to large cities. The one of them pointed to the *networking MEGA³ and FUAs with similar metropolitan areas outside Serbian borders* [2]. This priority is of specific significance for the cooperation or networking of Serbian with other LDA cities.

In Romania there are 8 functional metropolitan areas and a few others are in the process of being established. Each of these metropolitan areas has more than 200,000 inhabitants. Three of them are situated along the Danube: Craiova, Constanta and Galati-Braila. Bucharest is close to it and it is connected

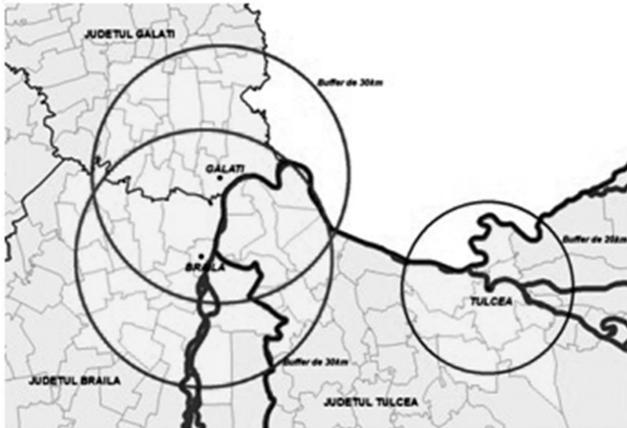
3 In European statistics MEGA means Metropolitan Growth Area with four categories: Belgrade, Sofia and Bucharest are MEGA 4, and Novi Sad, Vidin, Constanta etc., are FUAs of international significance.



Source: Spatial Plan of Serbia 2010–2020

Figure 1. Informal clustering of local communities around the City of Belgrade in 2010 and 2020

with Giurgiu on the Danube. In Romania, the metropolitan area is, theoretically, the cities' functional area. Bucharest, Constanța, Craiova, Brăila and Galați, and Drobeta –Turnu Severin already have the status of metropolitan areas enacted by the Law, with other 37 cities which allowed defining it. In practice and officially, these are the synonyms of Voluntary Associations/Partnerships.⁴



Source: URBANPROIECT ongoing study

Figure 2. Braila – Galatz metropolitan area

In Bulgaria there is no official definition and determination of MAs. Understanding MAs as functional areas around large cities (cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants), i.e. areas of 45-minutes isochrones of daily population commuting to and from a city, three MAs are located along the Bulgarian Danube riverside (Vidin, Ruse and Silistra), together with the MA of the capital Sofia as it is the key point of the main development axes in the country, close to Vidin on the Danube. The MAs in Bulgaria comprise the territories of municipalities or parts of municipalities, linked territorially and functionally to the city core.

Albeit not formalized, the concept of MA in Moldova could be applied to three municipalities plus two in the separatist region of Transnistria. In these municipalities approximately one third of the population is concentrated. Understanding MAs as functional

areas around large cities (cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants), i.e. areas of 45-minute isochrones of daily population commuting to and from a city, five cities with plausible metropolitan surroundings are: Chișinău, Bălți, Tiraspol, Tighina, Comrat. Some of them have less than 100,000 inhabitants but have the status of a city due to some other (mainly political) reasons [7].



Source: General Urban Plan of Chișinău

Figure 3. Chișinău municipality - internal territorial cooperation

The issue of common interests offers a dominant opportunity in implementing the concept of cooperation and networking of MAs along the LDA. Large cities, from Novi Sad to Constanta at the Black Sea coast, with the official status of MA or without it, have their specific resources and capacities and some of them express the common interest (port cities, touristic hubs, universities, cultural paths, innovative industries or sport manifestations). It is enough for pursuing the development of cooperation projects, based on more or less formal agreements. So far, the cooperation in the field of energy or technical infrastructure has been the exclusive right of the state jurisdiction and not of the cities with their local autonomy and self-government interests. The new political constellation and different EU membership status in this part of Europe, with state borders still functioning, make an obstacle for the

⁴ All data and information for Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova are selected from national reports coordinated by B. Stojkov (Serbia), Oana Popescu (Romania), J. Spiridonova (Bulgaria) and V. Miron (Moldova) for the project listed in the references at the end of this article.

complete freedom of cooperation,⁵ but some forms are possible even now due to the existing joint interests.

The European and USA experiences point to the powerful political, cultural and socio-economic impact of large cities, their metropolitan areas and metropolitan regions. *Large cities or metropolises have been recognized as places for the mobilization, concentration and canalization of creativity processes, with results in technical and cultural innovations, new business, services or societal values* [9]. It also points to significant impact on cooperation and networking among large and also smaller cities, on their economy, solving some social, cultural and ecological problems. Dependence on the mode of governing at municipal, metropolitan and regional tiers is more than evident, where large cities are equipped with social and technical infrastructure and highly educated professionals and creative industries to some extent. Four categories of metropolitan functions could be delineated for large cities: (a) *the function of decision-making and control*, (b) *the function of innovation and competition, not only in economy but in culture and social services as well*, (c) *the function of gateway, where the nodal role and position of cities have arguments in open access to large number of people, knowledge and market*, and (d) *the symbol function with creative production and promotion of goods, objects and events (culture, sport, entertainment) of large cities to a wider area* [9]. On the other hand, smaller towns have different scale of urban functions, mainly established on locally based economic functions and on the social economy framework. Therefore, organizing MAs in the LDA (functionally self-organized or administratively organized) seems as the inevitable future of large cities, reflecting joint interests of local communities to use their resources more rationally and affectively, and solve their common problems together.

⁵ The Craiova Agreement (2015) signed by prime ministers of Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania, has opened gate to cooperation but with weak implementation results so far.

FROM OUTDATED TO SMART GOVERNING MODELS IN LDA LARGE CITIES

At the first glance the structure and organization of local governments in large LDA cities are: (1) too large and complicated, with fuzzy organizational ideas, (2) missing important elements in terms of urban economy, with social thematic domination, (3) in many cases ignorant in terms of cooperation, regional issues or foreign links, (4) missing the MA concept, and not implemented either in legislative or practice, (5) with smart governance concept generally neglected, and regional governance concept in particular. A comprehensive analysis of the governance models in the LDA capital cities Belgrade, Sofia, Bucharest, and Chişinău [8], shows that critical problems are:

- pluralistic political arena has no fair play practice of acting;
- party coalitions manage cities in a mode that generate permanent tensions, with the opposing actions with no practical results;
- latent confrontation between local and state powers depending on (in)compatibility of political parties in power, often hampering capital projects and their realization;
- incomplete, unstable and often not coordinated legislative, with public enterprises still not privatized, and public-private partnership seldom practiced;
- insufficient capacity of administration staff and weak position of urban institutions;
- not coordinated planning, programming and budgeting systems; and
- the concept of MA not existing albeit present in some planning acts [3].

The first conclusion is that something has to be done if criteria of good and smart governance are to be implemented for more successful development of smart large cities and their metropolitan areas. The governmental staff are not properly educated and technically equipped for the smart mode of operation. The strategic documents are still being prepared in the old-fashioned way of land use, without integral methodology applied, except for some Serbian and Romanian cities. Functional

horizontal links connecting city offices are still missing with e-governance in the initial phase in some cities. The transparency and stakeholders' participation is more or less formal and citizens are too far from decision making processes, with the information system rather obsolete. Besides, complex functional connections between the cities (tourism, business, culture, high education, transport, energy, etc.), standing as the foundation for cooperation or networking, urgently need modern ICT applied. The growing appearance of potential functional regions (MAs) of large cities, but without the concept of metropolitan area formally implemented so far, will emerge as a critical and challenging issue for local governments in four countries, with some advantages of Romanian cities and their more advanced legislative in terms of smart metropolitan areas. Understanding the meaning of multi-jurisdiction territorial structure such as the one where the set of self-government units wants to cooperate or make networks by the means of smart governance, is necessary for the implementation of the concept of smart governance in MAs along the LDA. The definition of the American researcher William Barnes offers the idea how to explain so called regional governance concept better:

- *crosses borders, by definition jurisdictional, and also usually sectoral (public, private, non-profit, civic) and/or functional (e.g., environment, economic, social);*
- *encompasses, but goes beyond, the institutions, tools, or structures that may establish and implement decision-making and action;*
- *involves purposes and goals – solving a regional problem or seizing a regional opportunity – as the object of a regional governance effort;*
- *is a kind of politics and does not assume consensus or cooperation as a dominant mode, but does assume the attempt to exercise power on behalf of interests, ideas, and values*⁶[10].

According to this definition, the low level of integrated, interconnected development in

⁶ William R. Barnes with his USA experience about metropolitan areas, at the September 2012 conference of the European Urban Research Association in Vienna, gave an impetus to European researchers on the subject of regional governance.

the LDA countries, with lagging competitiveness as a result, compared to the upper part of the Danube has to be improved by introducing a new, smart governance model. That is not an easy task due to the inherited experience of traditional, socialist models of governing and the mentality of central, hierarchical government behavior even at the local level. A possible project in the future would be devoted to the smart governance model, after a careful analysis of local possibilities, capacities and constraints, with the idea of introducing metropolitan issues in both national and local policies and legislative. New economic (port activities, industry, business), social and cultural activities, together with environmental issues should be in focus, defined by relevant development strategies and their careful and systematic implementation.

Particular attention has to be paid to the problem of cooperation and networking of either metropolitan area (if *de iure exists* like in Romania) with the crucial role of the metropolitan smart governance concept. The specific metropolitan governmental structure and organization, with the careful selection of properly educated staff, adequate development strategies with the concept of smart region/MA included, active participation of stakeholders, and with the political will towards the cooperation with other metropolitan areas, will be a prerequisite for the new model of governing and for improving the level of economy using primarily all advantages and resources of the Danube area.

Objectives of the governing model modification in the LDA large cities would be as follows:

- *acquainting and better mutual understanding among cities along the LDA, and their institutions responsible for the cooperation and networking (matter of the political will);*
- *guiding towards the model of integrated spatial planning methodologies in MAs or large cities along the LDA (matter of development strategies);*
- *enhancing governance models in MAs along the LDA, with focus on the concept of smart governance (matter of methodology);*

- promoting horizontal links and cooperation of MAs along the LDA, resulting in the established cooperation and platform for joint actions of common interest contributing to better performances of MAs along the LDA (matter of implementation);
- exchanging the best practices and expertise of the developed MAs in the upper Danube Area and reasons for that beyond political ones (matter of education);
- understanding the reasons and ways to connect economy and business of MAs along the LDA for concrete problems solving (subject of education);
- establishing information capacities and meta-data base for e-linking MAs along the LDA (matter of organization), and
- promoting gender equality in the governance system for MAs networking issues together with an active role of civil sector.

CONCLUSION

Finally, enhancing the governance model towards the smart concept would have a spill-over effect on the multitude of various stakeholders: businesses, financial institutions, civil sector, and general public. Besides, the further

researches on MAs and cities in the LDA on their key characteristics, their development potential, administrative organization models and institutional capacities for MAs networking, should be elaborated. The last but not the least is the role of development strategies in the context of smart MA governance. The experience with LDA countries and cities is that *strategies are rarely developed or not implemented if developed. Activities in the public sector are not coordinated, and frequent political changes and a shifting of responsibilities as well as persons create an unreliable partner over time* [11]. That is also one of the key challenges for cities and MAs in the LDA. The crucial question is how to move local government of large LDA cities and their top officers to start thinking beyond their particular introvert interests, and what incentive would move them towards the metropolitan mode of behavior with the cooperation and smart MA governance in focus. Understanding the rational reasons for cooperation and networking among the neighbors as well as the role of urban functions will be important for implementing smart metropolitan governance.

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