

# SUSTAINABLE URBAN STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN'S POVERTY PROBLEMS IN TIMISOARA'S NEIGHBORHOODS- KUNCZ

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**Abstract:** The suburban area, not the most attractive part from a city, it represents one of the most important zone for future development of the city. Usually, the highest level of poverty in a city is reached in suburban area. In this way, the development of the city it's powerful influenced by poverty. That is why it's essential to elaborate sustainable urban strategies for this areas, taking in consideration all the determinant factors, including poverty. The suburban neighborhoods from the biggest capitals of the world are the most poor ones from the entire cities. This neighborhoods don't have enough, or sometimes at all, hospitals, cultural buildings, parks, special areas for children, schools, kindergarten, etc. In this environment, children are growing and form themselves for the future. Not doing anything for this areas, to improve the quality of life, we neglect the formation of the children who grow up in an improper environment.

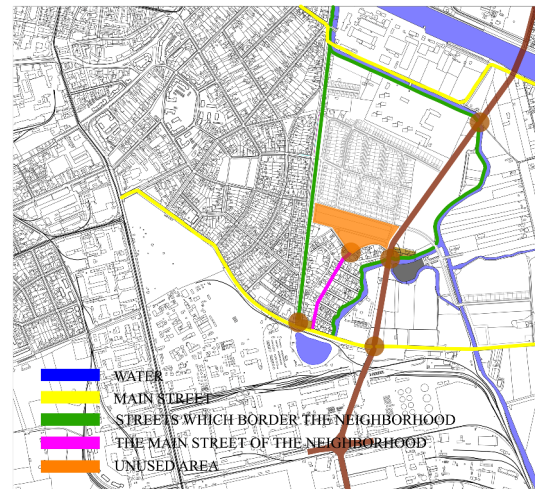
This article discusses the problems identified, in a suburban neighborhood from Timisoara, Romania, named Kuncz, the way this problems affects the urbanization of the city and how because of the poverty, this neighborhood is the source for lots of problems including for the problem of the street children. In conclusion we will try to put on the table some different strategies for an sustainable urban development of this suburban zone of the city.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, suburban area, poverty, Kuncz, Timișoara, street children

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Almost all the suburban areas are problematic zones for the big cities. Kuncz is a neighborhood in the South-West of Timișoara and we can call it a problematic neighborhood for the city, because of the multitude problems identified there. At the end of the year 2010, Politechnical University from Timișoara-Faculty of Architecture, the sixth year of study in that period, had made a study regarding the urban problems identified in this part of the city. Acknowledging the problems, we tried to define some sustainable urban strategies for this neighborhood in order to improve the situation.

### 1.1. URBAN CONTEXT



**Figure 1 – Kuncz neighborhood- urban context**

The neighborhood's name was given after the owner of the brick factory - Joseph Kuncz. The evolution of the district was powerful influenced by the brick factory, the first houses were built in 1920, for the factory workers.

After the revolution of 1989, the economic situation from Romania changed, and the agro-industrial department faced a major crisis. The brick factory was closed and the population from Kuncz, which predominant worked in the productivity department, became unemployed. The land had lost its value, and lots of poor people moved in here, the district was transformed in one of the most poorest neighborhood in Timișoara. People have settled in Kuncz without buying the land, and now, the Kuncz neighborhood faces a major problem regarding the documents for the houses which were made.

The Kuncz area maintained its characteristics, nowadays being an rural island inside of an urban area.

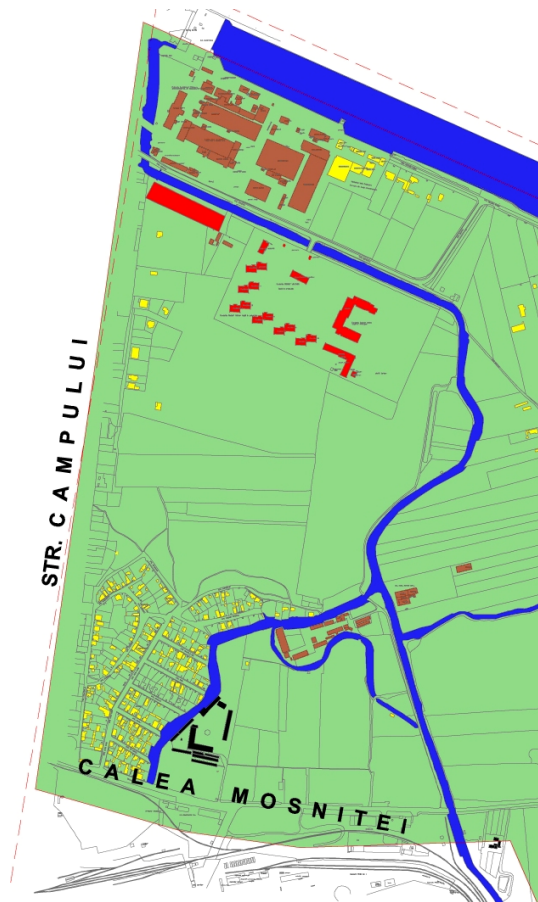
### 1.2. IDENTIFIED PROBLEMES

During the in-situ surveys, we identified the major problems from Kuncz's neighborhood.

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Old industrial neighborhoods from Timisoara developed in different ways, but almost all of them had the same result.



## Legenda

<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: blue; margin-right: 5px;"></span>	water
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: yellow; margin-right: 5px;"></span>	residential area P, P+1
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: red; margin-right: 5px;"></span>	service area
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: brown; margin-right: 5px;"></span>	industrial area
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 10px; background-color: green; margin-right: 5px;"></span>	sport and recreation area

**Figure 2 – Kuncz neighborhood- functions map**

One of the major problems of Kuncz neighborhood is the property issue. Lots of people don't have legal documents to sustain their property. The problem of the legal documents influence the problem of investments in the area.

In order to find sustainable urban solutions for this neighborhood I tried to identify and order the main problems of the district.

According to the in-situ survey realized by the sixth year of study (2010-1011) from the Faculty of Architecture, Politehnica, Timisoara, there were identified the following problems:

- The absence of the *public utility*: gas, the absence of sewerage, etc.
- *Infrastructure*: The neighborhood has only a main road with no sewerage, sidewalks, or bicycle lanes.

- *The security problem*: they don't have a police station, pharmacy, and every day they confront themselves with safety problems.
- *The educational problem*: in Kuncz neighborhood there are 54% from population, children, but they don't have kindergartens, schools, healthcares or other centers for children. The percent of school drop-downs in the poor neighborhood is very high, and the absence of schools in the neighborhood makes it to get higher.
- *Public spaces*- we can notice the absence of the main function for a neighborhood like: parks, playgrounds for children, markets, etc.
- *Public transport*: there is a problem reaching the neighborhood, there are no buses for children to take them to school or to take people to work.
- *Economic problems*: lots of Kuncz inhabitants are unemployed, and the income in a family is very low.
- *Property issues*: lots of inhabitants don't have documents on their houses or land.
- *Ecology*: a big ecological problem is the canal who crosses nearby the neighborhood. Because the water is full with garbage, dirt and inappropriate vegetation, the canal spreads an terrible smell throughout the district.[1]

The main purpose of the survey was to identify the issues that inhabitants have, in order to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood.

## 2. THEORY AND METHODS

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In order to discuss sustainable development strategies is essential to familiarize with the concept.

Sustainable development was defined in many ways, including the definition which appeared in 1987:

*“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs.”*[2]

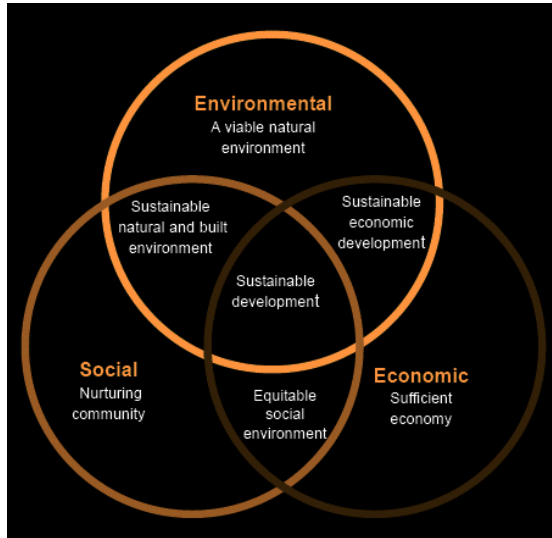
Sustainable development consist in how well we realize to manage the balance between the social, economic and environmental elements. We can't talk about one without taking in consideration the other two.

In this article we proposed to elaborate sustainable strategies for children in Kuncz. In order to give solutions to this social problem we have to analyze the entire context and the solutions we elaborate are architectural, urban and economics one too.

Before we solve the problem of children we have to find out sustainable solutions for the environment

where they live and grow up, and to try to make to disappear as many urban problems as possible.

The sad situation for children who live in Kuncz neighborhood has as a cause the urban, economic and social problems identified there, solving this problem we influence the way this children live and form themselves.



**Figure 3 – the three important elements to take in consideration when we talk about sustainable development: Environmental, Economic and Social**

## 2.2. SOLUTIONS FOR KUNCZ

As a result of the survey and the study realized on the Kuncz neighborhood we proposed a six steps strategy to improve the quality of life in this district.

First step of the strategy is to create a neighborhood center, and an ONG in order to support the neighborhood vision.

The second step is to give life to the canal, creating a green corridor along the water, and bike lanes.

The third phase is to give a function to the land unused in the northern part of the district, and we proposed the parceling of the land.

The fourth phase of the strategy is to connect to utilities, and the insertion of a major function between the river and the road.

The fifth phase is to redefine the area of the northern district.

And the last step is to create special centers for the children of the neighborhood in order to stop and to prevent the drop-down from schools and the appearance of the new street children.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. STREET CHILDREN

The "street children" represent the most affected part of the category of children with problems, having the lowest degree of recovery, under 1%.

The poor neighborhoods are the main source of the street children. Children from Kuncz spends almost all day long on the streets, the absence of schools and special centers dedicated to children influence the appearance of new street children.

In order to find out a solution, for this children in need, I will try to familiarize with the concept of street children and their situation around the world.

Even if impressive and varied information regarding the number of children living in the street is spread, it is almost imposible to tell their precise number, because of their nomadic and disorganised way of life. In 2005 the numbers were estimated as follows: 40 million of street children in Latin America, 25 million in Asia, 10 millions in Africa, 1.5 million in the United States of America and 500 thousand in Europe.[3]

According to data from Youth Advocate Prop. Institutional [4] 100-150 million children live or work on the street: 40% of them don't have a home and the street represents their dwelling and 60% of them work on the street during the day in order to help their family to survive.[5]

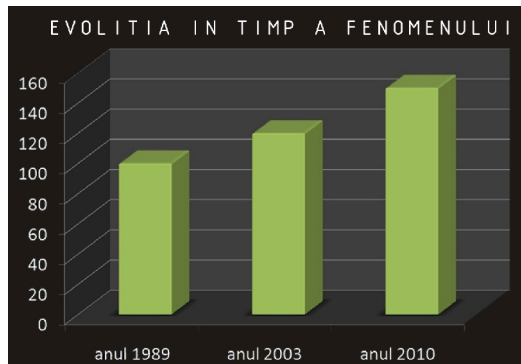
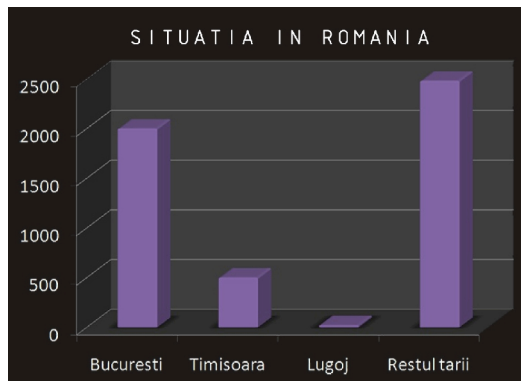
This category of children in need known as "street children" is divided into three categories:

- *Children in the street*- represents that category of children that keeps permanent contact with the family but mostly spends all day and sometimes nights in the street because of poverty or abuse in their families.
- *Street children*- are those children who don't have a stable residence, the only home they have is the street.
- *Children of families living on the street*-represents those children who live with their families on the street [6]

The main reason that this category of children exists is poverty. Most of the children who live on the street are not orphans, they are sent there to make money. They beg, sell flowers, polish shoes or rob in order to ensure their existence, these children rarely have access to education. The high rate of abuses in the family, the decline of living standards, the increasing rate of disintegration of families represent key factors for the large number of street children.

### 3.2. THE SITUATION OF STREET CHILDREN IN ROMANIA

The problem of street children, from Romania, was heavily publicized in the country and in the European Union. Along with the restructuring of the orphanages, and the attempt of integration of children in families, between 2004-2007 there is an increase in the number of children living in the street. In december 2004 there are registered 54 street children, and in december 2007 the number goes up to 65 children in Timișoara, their increase is visible in the statistics compiled by the Department for Child Protection in Timiș County. [7]



**Figure 4 – Numerical situation of street children in Romania and their development over time between 1989 to 2010. The charts were made in accordance with data from the Department for Child Protection in Timiș County and Consortium for Street Children. [**

### 3.3. THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN KUNCZ NEIGHBORHOOD

According to the survey made by the students from the Faculty of Architecture Timisoara, in Kuncz neighborhood, 38% from population are children. In Kuncz we can find children from the age of one year old to 18 years old. The situation of children by age is like this:

- Children between 0-2 years old- 10%;
- Children between 3-6 years old – 39%;
- Children between 7-14 years old- 37%;
- Children between 15-18 years old- 14 %.

We can notice that the biggest percentage is reached for children with the age between 3-6, and 7-14 years old.

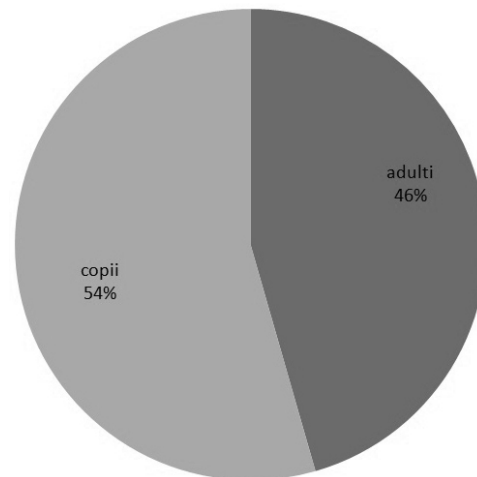
The real problem starts when we analyze the statistics regarding the level of education for this children. Educational problems are influenced by the long distance children have to travel in order to go to a school or a kindergarten. So if we analyze the statistics we can notice that only a very small part of children are going to school or kindergarten:

- for the age group of 3-6 years old only 30% of them are going to kindergarten;
- for the age group of 7-14 years old- 25% of them are staying home, and are not going to school;

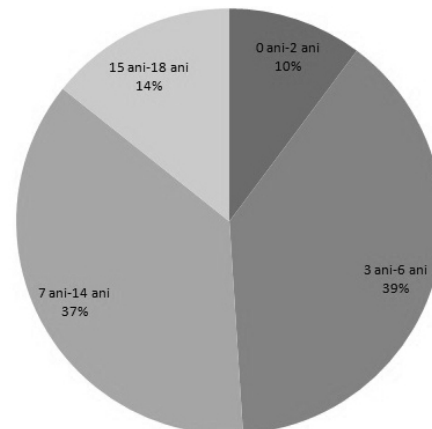
- for the age group of 15-18 years old – 50% of them are going to high school and the rest of them are staying home.

A very significant number of children have no access to the educational system, and for this problem we have to take into account several urban factors. The absence of schools or other educational centers in the neighborhood it's one of the main cause for the very high number of school drop-downs.

In order to improve the life in the neighborhood we have to take into consideration the social factor and the need of schools, kindergarten, hospitals, pharmacies, and other cultural, educational and recreational function.



**Figure 5 – Numerical situation of people- children and grown-ups in Kuncz neighborhood. The charts were made in accordance with data obtained from the survey made by the Faculty of Architecture, Politehnica, Timisoara. [9]**



**Figure 6 – Status by age group for children in Kuncz neighborhood. The charts were made in accordance with data obtained from the survey made by the Faculty of Architecture, Politehnica, Timisoara. [9]**

During the research I could notice that almost all the children from Kuncz's neighborhood are spending all the day-long in the street, playing in an inappropriate environment. They don't have parks

where to play, no sports area or special centers after school.



Figure 7 – Kuncz’s children.

### 3.4. ARCHITECTURAL AND URBAN SOLUTIONS

In almost all Romanian cities, the facilities for children are organized in the center of the city in order to be the most effective and reachable. As an example in Timisoara all the centers for children (after-school centers) are organized in the city center: Children’s Palace, Popular Art School, etc, and the most important park dedicated to children-“Parcul Copiilor” is the same in the center of the city.

In order to develop the suburban area we have to take into consideration urban strategies to attract investments and people there. So if children from poor neighborhoods can’t reach the facilities from the center of the city, let’s bring the other children to them, by creating centers for children in the suburban neighborhoods like Kuncz.[10]

By proposing youth center in the suburban areas, we give a chance to the poor children and in the same time we give space for children where to play and interact and a chance for the neighborhood to develop in a sustainable way.[11]

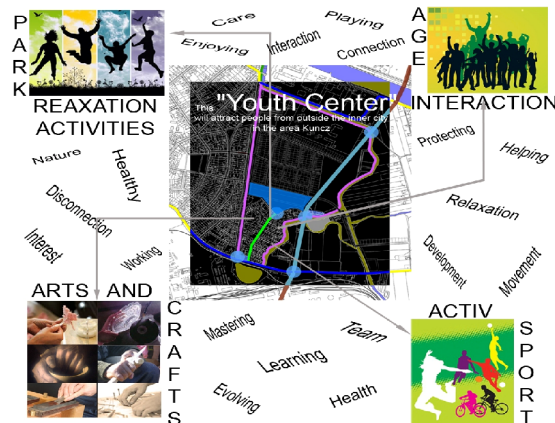


Figure 8 – The main facilities for a children center.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Approaching the problem of the suburban neighborhoods from the sustainable development point of view, we can transform this poor districts in new poles of interest for children and families.

Taking into consideration children’s perspectives, I consider necessary to create spaces that have elements from their previous life in the street, in order to make them feel at home and in this way the child comes to experience, in a single center, the feeling of having activities in the street (feeling that was commonsense until now), but also the feeling of having an educational environment according to their development needs.

Applying the theory of creating educational poles of interest for the city in to the poor neighborhoods, we give them a chance to a sustainable development but also we give a chance to the children who are living there, for a better future.

### 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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