

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS OF THE NORTH-WEST REGION FROM 2014-2020 AND 2021-2027

A. I. BOGDAN

Adrian Ionuț Bogdan

Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca & Agora University of Oradea, Romania

E-mail: adrianionutbogdan@gmail.com

***Abstract:** The paper further scrutinizes the transformative journey undertaken by the region through its Development Plans, specifically analyzing the periods of 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. The comparative analysis of the two Development Plans highlights both continuities and differences (Counsell, Kate. 2008). Infrastructure development, economic diversification, innovation, education, and sustainability emerge as consistent themes. The differences, notably the intensified focus on environmental sustainability, digitalization, and social inclusion in the 2021-2027 plan, signify the region's adaptive response to evolving challenges and opportunities.*

***Keywords:** North-West Region, Development Plan, Sustainability, Digitalization and Inclusive Growth.*

INTRODUCTION

The North-West Region of Romania is one of the historical and geographical divisions of the country, comprising a diverse landscape, rich cultural heritage, and economic significance. Encompassing both urban and rural areas, this region plays a crucial role in the country's overall development. With 446 territorial administrative units (UAT) from which 403 rural communes, 28 cities, and 15 municipalities that are situated in the northwestern part of Romania, the North-West Region is characterized by a varied topography. The region is surrounded by the Carpathian Mountains to the east, the Apuseni Mountains to the south, and the borders with Hungary and Ukraine to the west and north, respectively. The region's terrain includes mountains, hills, and plains, contributing to its ecological diversity.

The North-West Region is home to several important cities, each with its own cultural and economic significance. Cluj-Napoca, the regional capital, is a vibrant urban center known for its historical architecture, academic institutions, and dynamic cultural scene. Other significant cities include Oradea, Satu Mare, Baia Mare, and Zalău. The North-West Region boasts a rich cultural heritage shaped by its historical background. The area has been influenced by various cultures and civilizations, including Roman, Austrian, Hungarian, and Ottoman influences. This diversity is reflected in the region's architecture, traditions, and local customs. Historical sites, such as medieval castles, churches, and fortified villages, contribute to the region's cultural allure.

The presence of reputable universities and research institutions adds to the intellectual vibrancy of the North-West Region. Cluj-Napoca and Oradea, in particular, are known for their academic excellence, attracting students and researchers from across the country and beyond. The emphasis on education and research has contributed to the region's capacity for innovation and

technological development. In summary, the North-West Region of Romania is a dynamic and culturally rich area, marked by a mix of tradition and modernity. Its strategic location and commitment to education and innovation position make this region a key player in the country's overall development (Finn. 2018).

The economy of the North-West Region is diverse, comprising various sectors that contribute to its overall development. Cluj-Napoca, in particular, has become a major economic hub (Cluj-Napoca City Hall. 2022.), known for its focus on information technology, research, and innovation. The region's economy also includes manufacturing, agriculture, mining, and services. Cluj-Napoca has also gained a reputation as a leading IT hub in Romania, attracting both domestic and international companies. The city hosts numerous tech-related events, startups, and research centers, contributing significantly to the regional economy (European Investment Bank. 2018). The North-West Region has a well-established manufacturing sector, producing goods ranging from automotive parts to textiles. Several industrial zones contribute to the region's economic output. The fertile plains in some parts of the region support agricultural activities, with a focus on cereals, vegetables, and livestock. The region's natural beauty, historical sites, and cultural attractions make it a popular destination for tourists. The Apuseni Mountains, Maramureș wooden churches, and historical cities like Cluj-Napoca and Oradea (Oradea City Hall. 2019) are significant draws for visitors. While the North-West Region has seen economic growth and development, it also faces challenges such as regional disparities, infrastructure needs, and environmental sustainability (European Environment Agency. 2022). The development plans for the region aim to address these challenges and capitalize on opportunities to ensure balanced and sustainable growth for the coming years.

1. THE NORTH-WEST REGION DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2014-2020)

The North-West Region of Romania embarked on a transformative journey (North-West RDA. 2013) between 2014 and 2020 with its comprehensive Development Plan, a strategic roadmap designed to foster economic growth (Haan. 2019), enhance infrastructure, and promote social cohesion. This remark delves into the key components, achievements, challenges, and the overall impact of the North-West Region Development Plan during this period. The primary objectives of the 2014-2020 Development Plan (North-West RDA. 2013) were rooted in aligning the region with European Union (EU) policies (Borragán, Michelle. 2019.) and fostering sustainable development (Ukaga, 2019). The plan aimed to enhance competitiveness, encourage innovation, improve infrastructure, and address social disparities within the region.

A cornerstone of the plan was the improvement of infrastructure, particularly in the areas of transportation. Investments were directed towards upgrading roads, railways, and other vital transport links, enhancing connectivity both within the region and beyond. This initiative not only facilitated the movement of goods and people but also positioned the region as an attractive destination for investment. Recognizing the importance of knowledge-based economies, the plan placed a strong emphasis on innovation (Drucker, 2014) and research (European Commission. 2020). Funding and support were provided to universities, research institutions, and businesses

*COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS OF THE NORTH-WEST
REGION FROM 2014-2020 AND 2021-2027*

engaged in research and development activities. This focus aimed to propel the region towards a more sustainable and competitive future.

Investments in education were pivotal for the long-term development of the North-West Region. The plan sought to improve educational infrastructure, enhance curriculum quality, and promote lifelong learning. By focusing on human capital development (Brian. 2008), the region aimed to build a skilled workforce capable of meeting the demands of a dynamic economy. The 2014-2020 Development Plan yielded significant achievements that contributed to the overall advancement of the North-West Region. Infrastructure developments, including the expansion and improvement of road networks, led to increased connectivity. This not only benefited the movement of goods and services but also facilitated tourism and cultural exchanges within the region. The plan successfully stimulated economic diversification, with an increased focus on sectors such as information technology, manufacturing, and services. Cluj-Napoca, in particular, emerged as a thriving IT hub, attracting national and international businesses. The investments in education and research bolstered the region's academic standing. Cluj-Napoca, with its renowned universities, became a focal point (Cluj-Napoca City Hall. 2022.) for students and researchers, contributing to the knowledge-based economy (European Investment Bank. 2018). Oradea (Oradea City Hall. 2019) also needs to be mentioned for the major investment in research and development.

Despite the successes, the North-West Region faced challenges during the implementation of the plan. Disparities persisted among different areas within the region, highlighting the need for more targeted interventions to ensure more equitable development. While economic growth was evident, sustainability concerns arose. Striking a balance between development and environmental conservation (Vig, Kraft, 2015) became an ongoing challenge.

The North-West Region Development Plan for 2014-2020 (North-West RDA. 2013) stands as a testament to the region's commitment to sustainable, inclusive, and innovation-driven growth. By focusing on infrastructure, education, and economic diversification, the plan laid the groundwork for a more competitive and resilient North-West Region. The lessons learned from this period will undoubtedly inform future development strategies as the region continues its journey towards prosperity and sustainability.

2. THE NORTH-WEST REGION DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2021-2027)

The North-West Region of Romania embarks on a new phase of development between 2021 and 2027 with its comprehensive Development Plan (North-West RDA. 2020), marking a strategic shift towards sustainability, digitalization, and resilience. This detail explores the key pillars, objectives, and anticipated impacts of the North-West Region Development Plan for the specified period. The 2021-2027 Development Plan for the North-West Region outlines ambitious objectives (North-West RDA. 2020) aligned with both national and European Union strategies (Borragán, Michelle. 2019.), emphasizing sustainability, digital transformation (Siebel. 2019), and resilience to external challenges.

A central focus of the plan is the region's commitment to a green transition. Investments are directed towards environmentally sustainable practices (Ukaga, 2019), renewable energy sources, and the reduction of carbon emissions. This approach aligns with the broader European Green Deal (European Union. 2014), emphasizing the region's dedication to environmental stewardship. Recognizing the transformative potential of digitalization, the plan places a strong emphasis on upgrading digital infrastructure, fostering innovation (Drucker, 2014), and promoting entrepreneurship in technology-driven sectors. This initiative aims to position the North-West Region as a digital leader (Siebel. 2019), contributing to economic growth and global competitiveness.

Building on the foundations of the previous development plan, the 2021-2027 strategy aims for more inclusive growth (North-West RDA. 2020). Policies are designed to address social inequalities, support vulnerable groups, and ensure that the benefits of development are distributed equitably across the region. The plan incorporates measures to enhance the region's resilience to external shocks, be they economic downturns, global crises, or unforeseen challenges. Diversification of economic activities, adaptive industries, and robust social safety nets are key components of this strategy.

The North-West Region Development Plan for 2021-2027 envisions a range of positive impacts (North-West RDA. 2020), fostering a holistic and sustainable development trajectory. By prioritizing the green transition, the plan aims to reduce the region's environmental footprint, contribute to climate change mitigation, and promote sustainable practices in various sectors. Investments in digitalization are expected to position the North-West Region as a leader in the digital economy. The plan anticipates increased innovation, a thriving startup ecosystem, and enhanced competitiveness in the global marketplace.

The emphasis on inclusive growth seeks to reduce social disparities within the region, ensuring that economic benefits reach all segments of the population. This inclusive approach is essential for fostering social cohesion and sustainable development (Brian. 2008). The measures implemented to enhance resilience will contribute to a more robust and adaptive regional economy, capable of withstanding external shocks. This, in turn, will create a stable environment for businesses and improve overall economic well-being.

The North-West Region Development Plan for 2021-2027 (North-West RDA. 2020) represents a forward-thinking and holistic approach to regional development. By prioritizing sustainability, digitalization, and resilience, the plan reflects the region's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges while fostering a future characterized by inclusive prosperity and environmental responsibility. As the North-West Region navigates this new development trajectory, the success of the plan will depend on effective implementation, collaboration, and adaptability to emerging opportunities and challenges.

3. THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (SIMILARITIES)

The North-West Region of Romania has been a focal point for strategic development, with consecutive development plans guiding its growth and evolution. This part of the paper explores

*COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS OF THE NORTH-WEST
REGION FROM 2014-2020 AND 2021-2027*

the similarities between the North-West Region Development Plans for the periods 2014-2020 and 2021-2027, highlighting the consistent themes that bridge these two distinct phases of regional planning.

One of the enduring themes across both development (Brian. 2008) plans is a strong emphasis on infrastructure development. In the 2014-2020 period, investments were directed towards improving transport networks, including roads and railways. Similarly, the 2021-2027 plan continues this focus on infrastructure, recognizing its pivotal role in fostering economic growth and enhancing connectivity within the region.

Both development plans share a commitment to economic diversification. The 2014-2020 plan witnessed efforts to stimulate growth (Haan. 2019) in various sectors, including information technology and manufacturing. This theme persists in the 2021-2027 plan, with a continued focus on diversifying the economy, albeit with an increased emphasis on environmentally sustainable and digitally driven sectors.

The promotion of innovation and investment in education is a common thread in both plans. The 2014-2020 plan sought to bolster research and development activities, while the 2021-2027 plan takes this a step further by explicitly emphasizing digitalization, innovation (Drucker, 2014), and the enhancement of digital skills. The continuity of this theme underscores the region's commitment to staying at the forefront of technological advancements.

Addressing social disparities and promoting inclusive growth has been a consistent goal across both periods. The 2014-2020 plan aimed to reduce economic and social inequalities, and the 2021-2027 plan builds upon this foundation, placing an even stronger emphasis on inclusive policies to ensure that the benefits of development are equitably distributed among the population. While the degree of emphasis may vary, both development plans acknowledge the importance of sustainable practices (Ukaga, 2019). The 2014-2020 plan included measures to improve energy efficiency, and the 2021-2027 plan takes a more pronounced step towards a green transition, aligning with broader European environmental goals (Vig, Kraft, 2015).

The similarities between the North-West Region Development Plans for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 underscore the region's commitment to continuity, adaptability, and a long-term vision for sustainable growth. Infrastructure development, economic diversification, innovation, education, inclusive growth, and sustainability are enduring themes that have shaped the region's trajectory across these two distinct timeframes. The evolution from one plan to the next reflects a responsiveness to changing global trends and challenges while maintaining a strategic focus on the fundamental pillars that drive the Region towards a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable future.

4. THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (DIFFERENCES)

The North-West Region of Romania has undergone a transformative journey in its pursuit of regional development (Brian. 2008), transitioning from the 2014-2020 Development Plan to the updated strategy for 2021-2027. This part explores the notable differences between these two phases, highlighting shifts in priorities, emerging challenges, and the region's adaptive response to a changing global landscape.

One of the most significant differences between the two development plans is the heightened emphasis on environmental sustainability (European Environment Agency. 2022) in the 2021-2027 strategy. While the 2014-2020 plan acknowledged the importance of energy efficiency and sustainability, the new plan places a stronger focus on the green transition, aligning with broader European goals for climate action and ecological resilience. Investments in renewable energy, circular economy practices (European Investment Bank. 2018), and eco-friendly initiatives mark a distinct shift towards a more environmentally conscious development agenda.

The 2021-2027 plan exhibits a more pronounced emphasis on digitalization (Siebel. 2019) and innovation compared to its predecessor. While the 2014-2020 plan acknowledged the importance of research and development, the updated strategy explicitly prioritizes digital transformation. Investments in digital infrastructure, the promotion of technological innovation (Drucker, 2014), and the development of digital skills underscore the region's commitment to becoming a leader in the digital economy (Eurostat. 2023).

The concept of resilience to external shocks is more explicitly addressed in the 2021-2027 plan. This marks a response to the evolving global landscape, which includes challenges such as economic uncertainties, public health crises, and geopolitical shifts. The emphasis on economic diversification, adaptability, and strategies to mitigate external risks reflects a more forward-looking and proactive approach in the new development plan.

While both plans share a commitment to inclusive growth, the 2021-2027 plan places a greater emphasis on addressing social disparities. Policies are more explicitly designed to support vulnerable groups, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and foster social inclusion. This heightened focus reflects an evolving understanding of the need for a more socially conscious approach to regional development. The 2021-2027 plan aligns more closely with overarching European Union strategies, notably the European Green Deal (European Union. 2014) and the Digital Europe Program. This alignment ensures the region's eligibility for EU funding and positions it within the broader context of European policy objectives. The increased focus on European and global alignment reflects a strategic commitment to international cooperation and shared objectives.

The differences between the North-West Region Development Plans for 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 highlight the region's capacity for evolution, adaptation, and responsiveness to changing circumstances. The heightened focus on environmental sustainability (European Environment Agency. 2022), digitalization, resilience, and social inclusion in the new plan underscores the region's commitment to addressing contemporary challenges while capitalizing on emerging opportunities. As the North-West Region navigates this new phase of development, these differences signify a strategic response to the dynamic and evolving nature of regional and global dynamics.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the North-West Region of Romania stands at the intersection of tradition and modernity, with a rich cultural heritage, diverse landscape, and significant economic

*COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS OF THE NORTH-WEST
REGION FROM 2014-2020 AND 2021-2027*

contributions. As a key player in the country's development, the region has outlined its growth trajectory through comprehensive Development Plans, spanning the periods of 2014-2020 and 2021-2027.

The 2014-2020 Development Plan laid the foundation for the region's progress, focusing on infrastructure improvement, economic diversification, and education. Achievements in enhanced connectivity, economic growth, and academic excellence showcased the effectiveness of the plan. However, challenges like regional disparities and sustainability concerns were acknowledged, providing valuable lessons for future strategies.

The 2021-2027 Development Plan represents a strategic shift, embracing sustainability, digitalization, and resilience as key pillars. The heightened emphasis on environmental consciousness, digital transformation (Siebel. 2019), and addressing social disparities reflects the region's adaptability to emerging global trends. With a focus on inclusive growth, the plan positions the North-West Region to thrive in the face of external shocks and aligns closely with European and global strategies. The comparative analysis reveals both continuities and differences between the two development plans. Infrastructure development, economic diversification, innovation, education, and sustainability remain consistent themes. The differences, such as the intensified focus on environmental sustainability and digitalization in the 2021-2027 plan, illustrate the region's proactive response to evolving challenges and opportunities.

As the North-West Region moves forward, the synthesis of past successes, ongoing commitments, and adaptive strategies positions it as a dynamic and resilient contributor to Romania's overall development. The lessons learned from previous plans, coupled with the innovative approaches of the current strategy, underscore the region's commitment to achieving sustainable, inclusive, and forward-looking growth (Haan. 2019). The North-West Region's journey serves as a testament to its ability to evolve, adapt, and thrive in a rapidly changing global landscape.

REFERENCES

1. Cini Michelle and Borragán Nieves Pérez-Solórzano, "*European Union Politics*", Publishing House: Oxford University Press, 2019.
2. Cluj-Napoca City Hall. *Cluj-Napoca Development Strategy 2021-2030*. (2022).
3. Counsell David and Theobald Kate, "*Strategic Planning for Regional Development: Principles and Practice in the UK*" Publishing House: Routledge, 2008.
4. Drucker Peter F. "*Innovation and Entrepreneurship: Practice and Principles*", Publishing House: HarperBusiness, 2014.
5. European Commission. *Digital Europe Program*. (2020).
6. European Environment Agency. *State of the Environment Report*. (2022).
7. European Investment Bank. *Smart Regions: Building Tomorrow*. (2018).
8. European Union. *European Green Deal*. (2014).
9. Eurostat. *Regional Statistics*. (2023).

10. Finn Laursen, "*Comparative Regional Integration: Europe and Beyond*", Publishing House: Routledge, 2018.
11. Haan Arjan, "*Inclusive Growth, Development, and Welfare Policy: A Critical Assessment*", Publishing House: Routledge, 2019.
12. North-West RDA Official Website, Northern Transylvania Region Overview, accessed on December 15, 2023, URL: <https://www.nord-vest.ro/regiunea/>.
13. Northwest Regional Development Agency (RDA), Northwest Regional Development Plan 2014-2020, 2013, accessed December 20, 2023, URL: https://www.nord-vest.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/7r238_PDR_2014_2020.pdf.
14. Northwest Regional Development Agency (RDA), Northwest Regional Development Plan 2021-2027, 2020, accessed on 19 December 2023, URL: <https://www.nord-vest.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/PDR-Nord-Vest-2021-2027-1.pdf>.
15. Northwest Regional Development Agency, Vision (2034), accessed on 10 December 2023, URL: <https://www.mdlpa.ro/uploads/articole/attachments/5dc2dab8dc77b453198179.pdf>.
16. Oradea City Hall. *Oradea Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan*. (2019).
17. Robson Brian, "*Regional Development Planning: A Reader*", Publishing House: Routledge, 2008.
18. Siebel Thomas M. "*Digital Transformation: Survive and Thrive in an Era of Mass Extinction*", Publishing House: RosettaBooks, 2019.
19. Ukaga Okechukwu "*Sustainable Development: Principles, Frameworks, and Case Studies*", Publishing House: Routledge, 2019.
20. Vig Norman J. and Kraft Michael E., "*Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*", Publishing House: CQ Press, 2015.