Interaction and Co-Participation in Generating the Urban Form. The Case of Oradea City Center

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
          	This study explores the multicultural heritage and urban greenery of Oradea City Center through site visits, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. It examines how historical landmarks and green spaces contribute to urban conservation and sustainable development. The findings highlight the importance of community engagement in preserving cultural heritage and enhancing urban resilience. The paper analyzes the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach as a means of achieving sustainable urban development in an Art Nouveau city. The rapid development today leads to constant investor pressures on public institutions, such as the City Hall, Local Council, and Culture Directorates, putting the built heritage at great risk. Urban heritage is vital to our cities now and in the future. As architectural heritage represents irreplaceable spiritual, cultural, economic, and social capital, it is the duty of each generation to preserve this legacy, interpreting the past through its own perspective. Preservation must go beyond the material substance of buildings, as focusing solely on the physical aspects can alter the building's spirit. Additionally, the surroundings of built heritage are essential for keeping the urban fabric alive. A more comprehensive and accountable approach from all involved parties is necessary. In the city center, where built heritage is dense and land value is high, there is significant pressure to convert green spaces into developed areas. Livable cities are green cities, and for this reason, built heritage and public green spaces must play a central role in community life, with active community participation in urban development planning to ensure a sustainable environment.

1. Introduction
1.1 Background

Cities, as dynamic and open systems, differ fundamentally from monuments, individual buildings, or archaeological sites. Regardless of their historical significance or the level of protection they

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receive, cities cannot be isolated from change and the inevitable evolution of the urban context (Bandarin & Oers, 2015, p.2). Urban conservation faces limitations in addressing new challenges due to the unitary approaches of the Modern Movement of the 1920s and 1930s, which promoted a radical approach where the historic city was not perceived as part of modernity or as an element to incorporate in development plans, but rather erased from the urban planning landscape. Today's rapid development exerts constant investor pressures on public institutions (City Hall, Local Council, Culture Directorates), endangering built heritage. Urban heritage is of vital importance to contemporary and future cities. The failure to integrate urban vegetation and green spaces into the urban development framework reflects the influence of modernist and postmodernist approaches, exacerbating the inability to meet the biological and social needs of urban life (Hosseini *et al.*, 2021, p.1).

The rapid expansion of social and economic prosperity has triggered a significant social transformation in the city within just few decades. Numerous challenges persist in achieving sustainable development, with various urban issues resulting from economic globalization presenting new obstacles to urban heritage conservation. These challenges underscore the importance of comprehensively protecting urban heritage during urban development and recognizing it as pivotal for preserving the city's identity and integrating it into the planning process (Jiang *et al.*, 2022, p.1).

This paper investigates the utilization of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach as a framework for achieving sustainable urban development within historic cities, focusing on Oradea, Romania, renowned for its Art Nouveau architecture. It explores into the symbiotic relationship between heritage preservation, community involvement, green infrastructure, and transparent governance, elucidating their collective role in fortifying the resilience and vibrancy of these culturally rich urban landscapes. Oradea, known for its rich multicultural heritage and urban greenery, faces challenges in balancing historical preservation with modern development. This study explores these challenges by examining the significance of Oradea's cultural landmarks and green spaces through site visits, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis.

1.2 Evolving Strategies in Urban Heritage Conservation

The social structures and needs of society evolve alongside the fabric structure of a city, which adapts continuously, akin to a dynamic organism. As society evolves, every historic city worldwide also undergoes continuous change, to varying degrees. Therefore, conserving traditional structures within historic cities remains an aspiration subject to ongoing compromise and adjustment (Bandarin & Oers, 2012, p.ix).

To bridge the gap between theory and practice, urban conservators are advocating for new approaches. In October 2005, the General Assembly of States Parties, under UNESCO, passed a resolution urging the creation of a new international standard-setting instrument. Following this resolution, an international framework was established for the formulation of a new UNESCO recommendation, serving as a non-binding 'soft law'. This framework was developed collaboratively with a diverse group of international experts. The culmination of this process occurred with the adoption of the Recommendation of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) in November 2011 (Bandarin & Oers, 2012, p. xiii-xvi).

The Washington Charter emphasizes that the preservation of historic urban areas should seamlessly integrate into economic and social development policies at every level, acknowledging their symbiotic bond with the surrounding environment and recognizing its multifaceted roles over time. The relationship between buildings and green open spaces is one of the five major qualities that a historic town has, without which the authenticity of it would be compromised. Another crucial aspect of the success of the conservation programs, as mentioned in the Washington Charter, is the involvement of residents (ICOMOS, 1987a).

In his 2010 article "Notes on the Definition and Safeguarding of HUL", Jukka Jokilehto links the meaning of Historic Urban Landscape HUL with the verb "to develop", which involves unlocking and

optimizing the cultural and environmental richness inherent in a particular area. Development strategies should be based on resource management, not necessarily financial, to safeguard the existing building stock and the environmental heritage from insensitive development.

The Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), launched by UNESCO in 2011, features a systematic approach to city development that integrates historic urban areas by considering social functionality, structural historicity, and visual coherence. This approach encompasses not only urban elements but also the intricate interplay between urban, rural, and natural elements (Jokilehto, 2010; Kırmızı & Karaman, 2021).

A comprehensive framework known as the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach has been created to safeguard historic areas in urban environments more sustainably. This approach considers various parameters, including landscape, culture, stakeholder engagement, diversity, sustainability, interdisciplinary collaboration, equity, participation, and capacity building. This innovative approach aims to ensure a more sustainable and integrated approach to heritage conservation, serving as a management tool to support comprehensive Site Management Plans for historic and cultural sites (Kırmızı & Karaman, 2021, p. 1; UNESCO, 2012, p. 52).

1.3 Oradea's Historical Context.

Oradea's urban evolution is characterized by three main phases: the Medieval period (11th century-1692), the Secession period marked by the rise of industry and commerce (1880-1918), and the era of Socialist realism and Socialist modernism (1945-1989). These periods were delineated by architect Emődi Tamas in a study commissioned as an essential part of Oradea's General Urban Plan, aimed at uncovering the city's historical development.

Fig. 1. Map of Oradea by Joris Hoefnagel, 1617 (Badiali *et al.*, 2018, mentioned in Baldescu, 2008)

The Oradea fortress was strategically positioned near the Fast River/Crișul Repedeand the Pețea River, ensuring its defensive moat remained filled with water, aided by the hot springs that prevented freezing. Over time, the city's development was significantly influenced by the Crișul Repede River, a crucial transportation route. Initially, Oradea expanded on the most suitable landforms for construction, primarily the lower floodplain of the Crișul Repede River. Geological factors, such as the steep slopes and frequent landslides in the Oradea hills, constrained the city's northward expansion until the 1990s, when modern neighborhoods began to emerge in the southern parts of the Oradea Hills (Badiali *et al.*, 2018).

In 1617, Jacob Hoefnagel reproduced a bird's-eye view of Oradea (Varadinum), originally drawn by his father Joris during the Turkish siege of 1598. The map details Oradea's road network, the marketplace between the fortress and the town, and surrounding rural land use, including fields, vineyards, and forests. The illustration highlights three key areas: the medieval fortress centrally located, the cityscape corresponding to the present 1st of December Park, and a larger settlement beyond the brick walls. The fortress features a cathedral surrounded by circular walls and bastions. An artificial channel linked the Fast River (Crișul Repede) to the north and the Pețea River to the south, encircling the city and fortress with water, which supported artisan industries. According to Badiali et al. (2018), the extensive water system, with numerous channels crisscrossing the town, led to Oradea being known as "the City of Water."
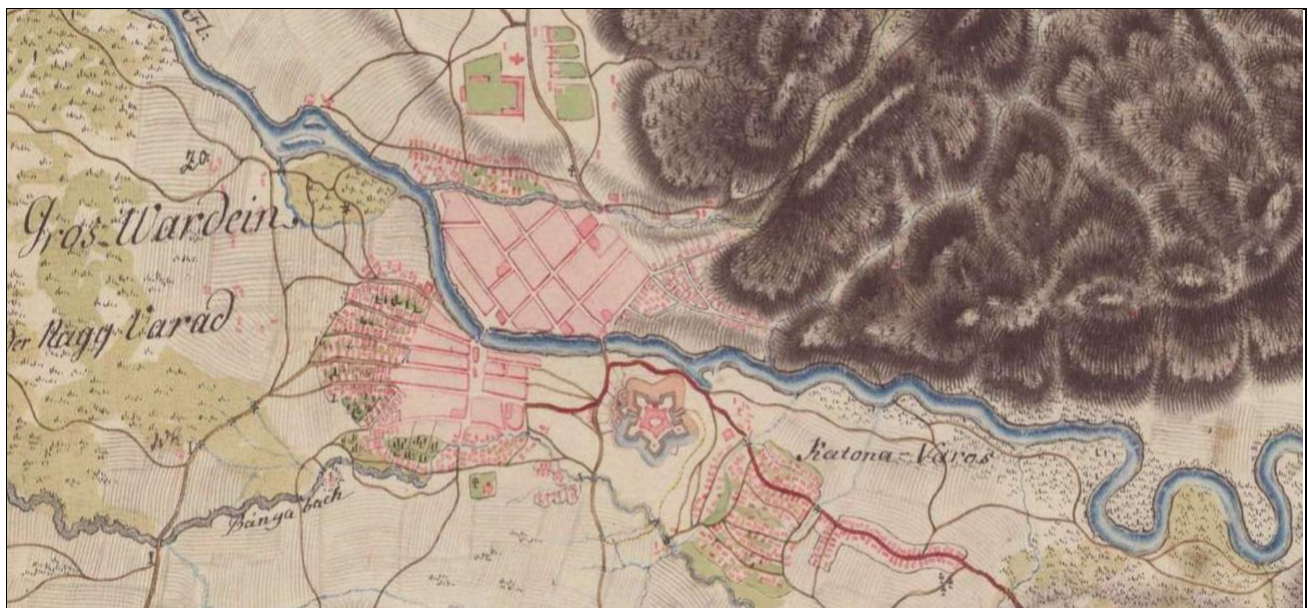

Fig. 2. Königreich Ungarn (1782–1785) - First Military Survey

With the decline of hydraulic energy in the 19th and 20th centuries, many channels and factories vanished, and the Pețea River was redirected. The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st marked a significant period in Oradea's evolution, associated with the development of industry and commerce and the Art Nouveau / Secession period.

Pașca (2015) highlights that at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Oradea experienced significant economic growth. During this period, its inhabitants played a crucial role in shaping the city by constructing dwellings that reflected their aspirations and financial means. Known for its cosmopolitan character, Oradea had a diverse population, including 44,750 Hungarians, 3,335 Romanians, 1,404 Germans, and 188 Slovaks. This diversity was further enriched by religious affiliations: 15,391 Roman Catholics, 14,984 Reformed, 12,294 Jews, 2,884 Greek Catholics, and 3,638 Orthodox individuals. This demographic mosaic contributed to the city's rich cultural and religious heritage.

The map in Figure 3 highlights the presence of the railway, two major squares located on the west side of the fortress, and numerous churches scattered throughout the area. The churches are marked with round circles and crosses, regardless of their denomination. This abundance of churches serves as a testament to the city's multicultural identity.

Fig. 3. Habsburg Empire (1869-1887) - Third Military Survey. Source:
https://maps.arcanum.com/en/map/thirdsurvey75000/?layers=43&bbox=2432070.788505524%2C5946898.85
9093736%2C2453310.727740267%2C5956071.302487957

Despite their varied backgrounds, the city's economic growth continued toward the end of the 19th century and into the early 20th century. Additionally, Oradea's urban fabric extended beyond its central districts into peripheral zones, which were often characterized by predominantly single-story residences. This contributed to its low-rise architectural profile. The early 20th century also saw aspirations for urban expansion and modernization in Oradea, though these were often constrained by economic realities.

Post-World War II, Oradea underwent transformative urban and architectural changes due to Romania's shift to communism and Soviet influence. The city's population surged significantly as a result of forced industrialization policies, reaching 83,830 in 1948, 170,531 in 1977, and 229,823 in 1989, leading to fundamental changes in the townscape (Emődi, 2014).

The post-1950 restructuring of Oradea was characterized by expansion, the establishment of new neighborhoods, and the construction of residential blocks and factories. Peripheral areas were demolished, and central buildings were removed without altering the central area's appearance. This period also saw the emergence of industrial facilities and isolated housing blocks and small complexes (Emődi, 2014; Culiciu, 2020).

Around 1960, Oradea's economy shifted towards intensive industrial development, leading to the completion of its first urban systematization plan. Culiciu (2020) notes that this plan, based on a 20-25 year development strategy, outlined the city's boundaries, functional zones, green spaces, building regulations, and socio-cultural amenities.

The largest districts established during this period included the Nufãrul district, founded in 1950 on the former Seleuş village lands. Known for its dense population and extensive urban development, it was achieved through the demolition of old village houses and the creation of block quarters. Additionally, the Rogerius district, developed incrementally from around 1965/1966, features systematically arranged housing blocks on repurposed vacant land along the Crişul River's right bank (Emődi, 2014; Culiciu, 2020).

The systematization of Oradea was driven by the need to provide substantial housing for newcomers amid massive rural-to-urban migration. Many families, deprived of land in the countryside, migrated to cities for employment opportunities in industrial, commercial, or public institutions. This influx created numerous challenges for local authorities, who had to find effective accommodation solutions. Enterprises were involved in creating housing for newcomers, both temporary and permanent, through the construction of individual houses, hostels, and dormitories. Neighborhoods such as Zona de Vest, Cvartalul 23 August, Piața București, and Splaiul Crișanei provided homes for thousands of families starting in the 1960s, with apartments allocated to various categories of people, including workers, law enforcement officers, and officials. Preliminary proposals included the development of housing on the hills near the railway, which required a geotechnical study due to occasional sand pockets that could cause structural shifts. The construction of a "neighborhood of villas" on the Oradea Hills was discussed in the 1970s, expanding the city's residential area. The true test for the authorities came in 1979, when a significant number of apartments needed to be delivered. Transitioning to the total reconstruction of Oradea's neighborhoods necessitated revising the systematization plans.

As Culiciu (2020) mentions, during the communist period in Romania, urbanization and systematization impacted millions of citizens amid rapid industrialization and population growth. This transformation was driven by a combination of intensive industrialization, increased housing demand, and the ideology of the "new urban man." The process evolved against the backdrop of rural-to-urban migration, leading to increased urban population and complexity. New industrial platforms emerged both near and within major cities, with housing demand partially met through the construction of "blocks," which were the fastest and most economical solution. According to Marxist-Leninist ideology, this "new urban man" lived in the superior form of community organization—the city.

Following the fall of the communist regime in 1989, Oradea experienced a 13.04% expansion of urban areas from 1990 to 2008, accompanied by declining population densities. This shift indicates a migration towards peripheral communes and looser urban planning. This approach, which neglected essential public infrastructure needs, led to visible dispersion of housing and economic activities, exacerbating urban sprawl and straining municipal resources (Carrière *et al*., 2018).
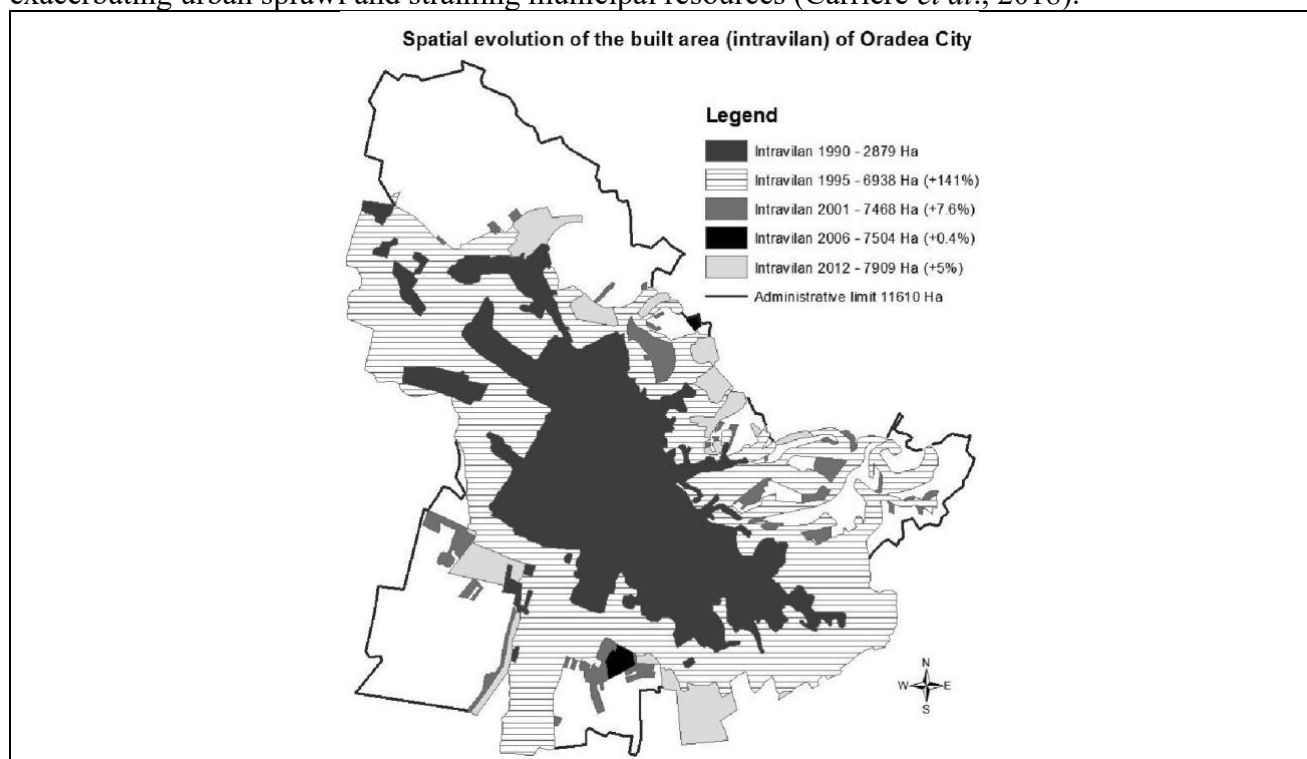

Fig.4. The extension of Oradea's intravilan between1990–2012. (Source: Oradea City Hall cited in Carrière et al., 2018)

2. Methodology
2.1 Exploring the Definition and Features of HUL

Managing a Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) involves more than mere protection; it necessitates enhancing the inherent qualities of the area. This enhancement includes implementing corrective measures, such as restoring distant vistas or spatial relationships to maximize the site's potential (Jokilehto, 2010).

Addressing HUL requires considering dimensions beyond mere spatial planning, including temporal factors. While HUL may encompass protected areas, it does not need to be a singular, unified protected zone. The emphasis is on identifying and preserving the notable features and attributes scattered across different parts of the urban environment (Jokilehto, 2010).

The connection between social evolution and physical form, as outlined in the Vienna Memorandum, is central to the HUL concept. It defines historic cities as complex systems that integrate natural and human-made elements over time, reflecting a layered historical narrative. This concept values cultural diversity and views social and economic dynamics as drivers of change and adaptation in urban values and forms. As a result, contemporary architectural contributions are recognized as part of the historic city's significance. However, maintaining the integrity and continuity of historical design elements is a crucial principle that contemporary architectural creativity often overlooks (Bandarin & Oers, 2012, p.72-73).

Designs that incorporate place attachment values foster empathy and environmental awareness, which can challenge economic considerations while promoting community involvement and stewardship (Hosseini *et al.*, 2021, p.3).

The research employed a mixed-method approach to investigate Oradea's cultural heritage and urban development, comprising three main steps:

Site Visits: Comprehensive visits were conducted to historical and contemporary landmarks. Key sites were selected based on their significance to Oradea's multicultural heritage. Observations were documented through photographs and detailed notes, capturing architectural features and current preservation status.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders. A carefully designed questionnaire with open-ended questions facilitated in-depth discussions. Participants were chosen from various backgrounds to ensure a broad range of perspectives. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy and depth.

Thematic Analysis: Data from site visits and interviews were analyzed thematically. The process involved coding segments of data with meaningful labels, identifying patterns and recurring themes, and synthesizing these into coherent findings to provide a nuanced understanding of Oradea's cultural heritage and urban development.
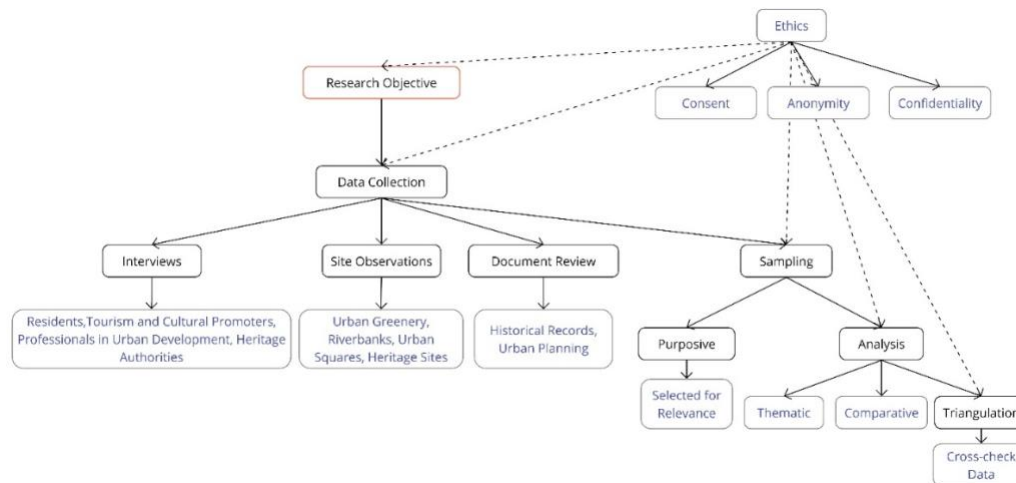
Fig.5. Methodology Diagram: This diagram outlines the research methodology used to assess the cultural and social value of Oradea's urban spaces. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews. The analysis involved thematic and comparative methods, with triangulation to ensure validity. Ethical considerations, including consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, were upheld throughout the research.

2.1.1 Site Specifics and Observation

Oradea, located in Bihor County in northwestern Romania, has a population of approximately 200,000. It is positioned on the eastern edge of the river plain extending towards Hungary, at the boundary of the Apuseni Mountains, which are part of the Carpathian range. The city is about 140 meters above sea level on the fluvial plain of the Crişul Repede River, where it intersects with the Apuseni Mountains. The plain features a dense network of former river channels. Both natural factors—such as geology, geomorphology, hydrology, vegetation, and soil—and socio-economic factors have been crucial in shaping Oradea's settlement patterns and its evolution (Badiali *et al.*, 2018).

Fig.6. Oradea in Spring. Piața Unirii (Uniri Square)

The city is divided by the Crişul Repede River, with the Peţea River being another significant watercourse. According to Badiali et al. (2018), the Peţea River is a secondary stream that originates from thermal springs in the Băile Felix and Băile 1 Mai areas, approximately 10 kilometers from Oradea. These springs have been valued and utilized since Roman times. However, during the early 20th century, the Peţea River's course was artificially redirected to the southern outskirts of the city between 1897 and 1910, as noted by Paşca (2015).

Oradea features a wealth of landmarks that define its unique character and appeal. Union Square, a lively focal point in the city, hosts numerous events and cultural activities. The Black Eagle Palace, renowned for its architecture and the vibrant Black Eagle Passage, stands nearby. The Baroque Palace further enhances Oradea's architectural heritage.

The Fast River/Crişul Repedemeanders through the city, with its picturesque banks offering a peaceful respite from urban life and providing a tranquil retreat for both residents and visitors. Meanwhile, Republicii Street, a bustling pedestrian thoroughfare, weaves through the city's historic center, adorned with charming shops, cafes, and historic buildings, making it ideal for leisurely strolls and exploration. Nearby, the Oradea Fortress stands as a symbol of the city's resilience, reflecting its rich history and enduring spirit.
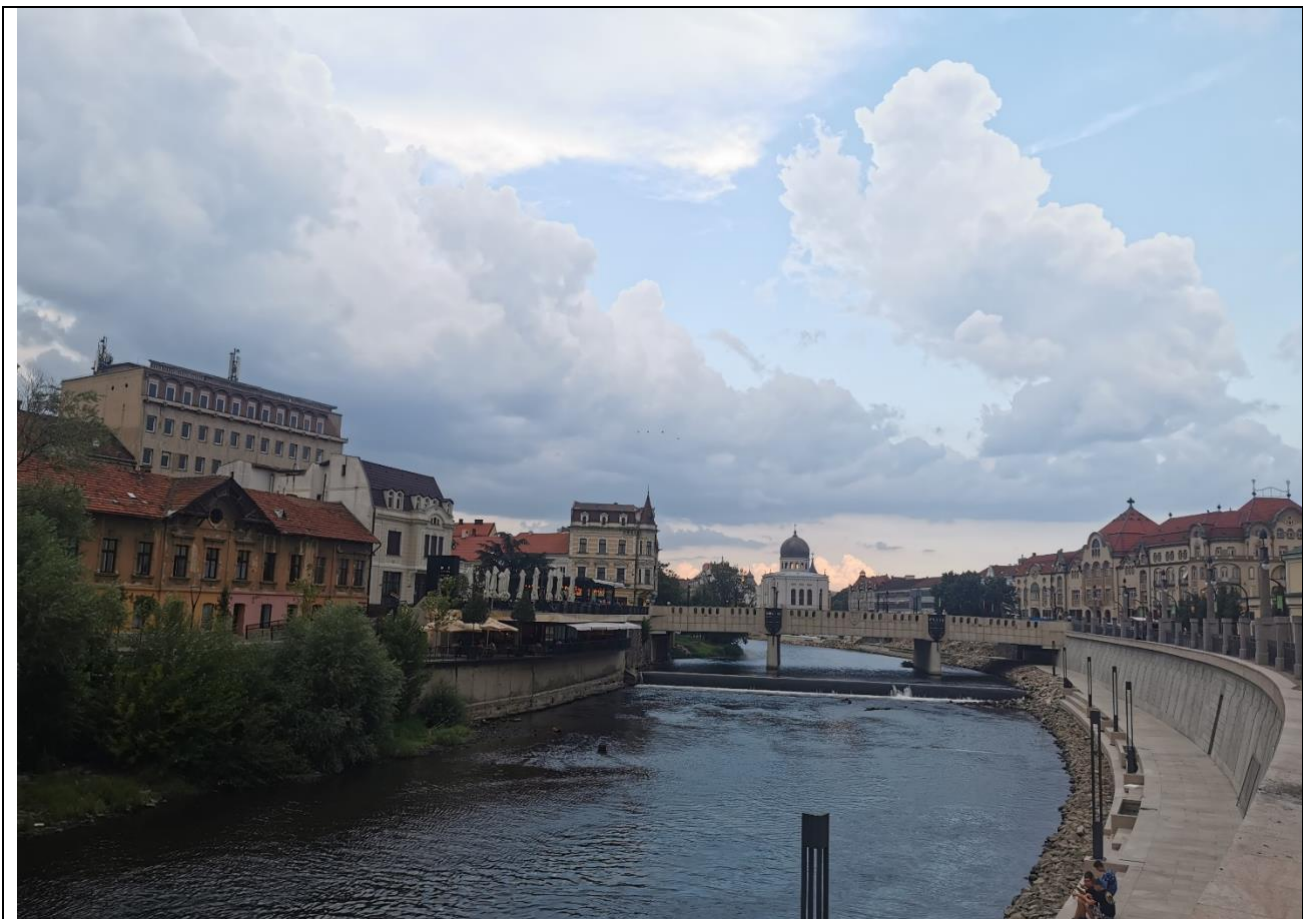

Fig.7. Oradea in Summer. The River Crişul Repede facing Piața Unirii

The university campus, which is currently undergoing development and expansion, serves as a vibrant center of academic and communal life. However, its connection to the city center is still underdeveloped, presenting an opportunity for improved integration and collaboration between the campus and the surrounding urban environment.

Within the city's diverse array of landmarks and locales, long-established establishments like Petit Café and Lokal are significant social hubs. These venues serve as gathering spots where locals enjoy

moments of connection and camaraderie. Each contributes to Oradea's multifaceted identity through its architectural character, cultural vibrancy, and natural charm, collectively enhancing the city's rich historical and cultural tapestry.

2.1.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders involved in Oradea's urban conservation and development. This inclusive approach engaged city officials, local historians, residents, city guides, and teachers to gather valuable insights into various aspects of Oradea's urban landscape and capture diverse perspectives on its conservation and development efforts.

These discussions aimed to explore the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by individuals in Oradea's urban environment. By engaging with these stakeholders, the research sought a comprehensive understanding of Oradea's heritage and ongoing conservation efforts, contributing to informed decision-making and future development strategies.

Participants were invited to share their personal connections to the city, including early memories, impressions, and preferred seasons. The conversations also covered reflections on Oradea's current landscape, distinctive characteristics, and views on public services and safety. Additionally, participants addressed perceived deficiencies in the city and key elements for preserving its identity. Their nostalgia and attachment to specific locations were examined, and they were encouraged to suggest further questions.

Overall, these discussions provided a deep and nuanced understanding of participants' feelings and experiences, highlighting core aspects of Oradea's heritage.

2.1.3 Data Analysis

The semi-structured interviews involved 10 participants chosen for their deep cultural understanding and extensive travel experiences, particularly to culturally and historically significant destinations. Notably, most participants were women, which may be relevant for analyzing perceptions of safety in Oradea.

Thematic coding was rigorously applied to interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns. Key themes included participants' connections to Oradea, views on the city's current characteristics, opinions on safety and public services, knowledge of Oradea's heritage, and suggestions for improvement.

The analysis examined connections between themes and explored how demographic factors, such as education level and travel experience, might influence participants' perspectives. This approach aimed to reveal correlations or discrepancies between themes and demographic variables, highlighting the nuances in participants' viewpoints.[2]

Interview questions were designed neutrally to prevent bias in responses. Participants were invited to interpret questions broadly, covering places, people, or feelings, without specific suggestions. Additionally, some questions were open-ended to allow participants to express their views in greater detail. This approach ensured that participants could freely share their authentic perceptions and experiences.

Combining these findings with data from site visits and literature reviews provided a comprehensive view of Oradea's heritage. Triangulating data from multiple sources validated findings, identified patterns, and addressed gaps.

Results were presented with descriptive narratives, quotes, and visual aids. The analysis acknowledged limitations, such as the small sample size, and suggested future research directions.

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[2] For example, when asked 'What characterizes Oradea?' participants were encouraged to interpret the question broadly, whether in terms of places, people, or feelings, without any predetermined suggestions.

Insights from these interviews will guide the development of a larger questionnaire to gather diverse perspectives from a broader audience, enhancing the understanding of Oradea's heritage and community ties.

2.2 Stakeholder Engagement and Management

Engaging community stakeholders is crucial for enhancing the quality and long-term viability of management plans, particularly in urban planning and development. Participatory decision-making allows society to influence factors directly affecting their well-being (Kırmızı & Karaman, 2021).

As outlined in the Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance (2013), conservation is fundamental to managing sites with aesthetic, historic, scientific, social, or spiritual value for past, present, and future generations. Conservation requires a cautious approach, making necessary changes while minimizing alterations. It involves using various knowledge, skills, and disciplines to study and care for the place. Understanding a site's cultural significance is best achieved through a systematic process of collecting and analyzing information before making decisions. This process prioritizes understanding cultural significance, followed by policy development and management in line with established policies. Adaptation is allowed only when it minimally impacts the place's cultural significance. According to the Charter, interpretation includes all methods used to convey the cultural significance of a place. Thus, any new developments or alterations should be recognizable, ensuring they uphold and minimally impact the site's cultural significance, preserving its interpretation and value.

Dialogue with all actors and stakeholders in city development is crucial for positive responses to development dynamics necessary for socio-economic changes and growth, while respecting the inherited townscape and landscape (UNESCO, 2005). Stakeholders and authorities involved in planning and managing HULs need good communication skills. Integrating communication into the management system and plans is essential for effectiveness (Jokilehto, 2010). This approach fosters inclusivity, informed decision-making, conflict resolution, community ownership, heritage preservation, and adaptability, ultimately contributing to sustainable urban development (UNESCO, 2005).

HUL facilitates tourism by offering visitors an authentic experience of local life and culture. Increasingly, people seek immersive experiences rather than mainstream tourism. Tourism management is crucial for sustainable development but is a double-edged sword. It brings people and communities together, facilitating cultural dialogue, but can also overrun local communities, disrupting their natural surroundings and traditional ways of living (Bandarin & Oers, 2012, p. 101).

Local green spaces in cohesive neighborhoods enhance social bonding, making place bonding integral to community belonging (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.11). Additionally, having green spaces, trees, or urban parks in a historic and dense urban context is a privilege. They help reduce environmental pollution, offer climatic comfort and ecosystem services, and provide shade and rest for residents or passersby, particularly in the summer (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.12).

The emotional bond in historic neighborhoods, tied to green spaces and natural features, is strengthened by ancient trees that symbolize the neighborhood's identity. These trees infuse vitality and a sense of ownership among residents, who often retain vivid memories and cherished photographs of neighborhood life (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.13). Moreover, the functional aspects of green spaces and trees include their ability to reduce vehicle speeds, promote relaxation, and enhance pedestrian orientation, while also contributing to environmental comfort and identity (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.12). Individuals and communities deeply connected to their environment are often more inclined to enhance local quality of life through social engagement and environmental preservation efforts (Lewicka, 2005, as cited in Hosseini *et al.*, 2021, p.13). Active involvement in neighborhood preservation serves as the primary emotional aspect of place-related actions (Manzo & Perkins, 2006, as cited in Hosseini et al., 2021, p.13).

Numerous policymakers advocate for changes in the built environment, such as incorporating urban green spaces, to foster a healthier population. Utilizing urban green spaces as an intervention offers many benefits encompassing health, social, and ecological aspects (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.14). attachment describes the emotional and sensory bond individuals share with specific locations, representing a significant and constructive influence, especially within communities with a distinct local identity. For enhancing place attachment, the "emotional bond" had a greater effect than "place bond" Place bonding is central to the social sense of belonging to the place (Hosseini et al., 2021, p.3,11).

The statement from ICOMOS in 1994 emphasizes the importance of prioritizing the authenticity of unique urban fabrics, particularly in multicultural cities. This perspective aligns with heritage conservation principles, recognizing that preserving the authenticity of urban environments is crucial for maintaining and enriching the collective memory of humanity.

3. Results

3.1 Importance of Multicultural Heritage in Oradea

The findings regarding Oradea's multicultural heritage, derived from site visits, observations, and semi-structured interviews, reveal a complex and richly layered perspective. The insights gathered from city advocates, heritage enthusiasts, tourism authorities, and grassroots observers contribute to a nuanced understanding of Oradea's historical narrative, its current state, and future trajectory.

Oradea's distinctive character and identity are profoundly shaped by its multicultural heritage, influenced by contributions from Hungarians, Jewish people, Germans, and Romanians. This diverse heritage plays a crucial role in defining the city's unique identity.

The collected data reflects a wide range of viewpoints on Oradea's multicultural heritage, obtained from individuals of various ages, occupations, and levels of connection to the city. While respondents' identities are kept confidential to protect privacy, their perspectives offer valuable insights. The interviews capture a rich tapestry of memories and personal connections to Oradea, spanning from childhood experiences to significant life events. These reflections underscore the deep emotional bonds residents have with the city, painting a detailed picture of its heritage. This portrayal blends positive reflections on cherished landmarks and cultural traditions with an acknowledgment of challenges and areas requiring attention.

The analysis of these semi-structured interviews provides a comprehensive set of insights into Oradea's cultural heritage, community engagement, and urban development. By exploring these diverse perspectives, a clearer understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the city's evolution emerges.

Participants offered significant insights into Oradea's cultural heritage in various ways:

Personal Perspectives:

Participants shared deeply personal reflections on their connections to Oradea, drawing from childhood memories, family ties, and professional experiences. These narratives highlight the profound emotional significance of the city and its role in shaping the identities of its residents.

One illustrative account comes from a 40-year-old female heritage guide, who recalled, "I used to see the Crișul Repede from my apartment, which had a view of it, and I remember walking along the river with my grandparents. The river has always been a symbol of home for me." This reflection underscores how Oradea's landmarks are deeply woven into personal identities, demonstrating the integral role of the city's cultural and physical landscape in shaping individual experiences.

Such personal anecdotes reveal the deep emotional connections residents have with Oradea and emphasize the necessity of preserving these historical and cultural ties. Many respondents also conveyed a strong sense of pride in the city's multicultural heritage, often citing family histories that span multiple generations and ethnic backgrounds. As one participant observed, "My family has been here for over a century, contributing to the Jewish and Hungarian communities. Our stories are

interwoven with the city's fabric." This pride highlights how personal and familial histories are crucial to the city's collective identity.

Overall, these narratives collectively underscore the importance of preserving Oradea's historical and cultural connections, as they significantly contribute to residents' sense of belonging and identity.

Historical and Architectural Appreciation:

Participants expressed strong appreciation for Oradea's architectural diversity, historical landmarks, and cultural traditions. They highlighted several significant sites, including the Black Eagle Palace, Union Square (Piața Unirii), the Crișul Repede River, Republicii Street, Muzeul Țării Crișurilor, the Baroque Palace, and various palaces in the city center, and the Oradea Fortress. These sites are pivotal in shaping the city's identity and character.

However, several citizens raised concerns about recent changes in three parks: Petofi Park, 1st of December Park, and Magnolia Park. These interventions prompted discussions about the need to preserve the architectural and historical integrity of these public spaces.

One participant, a young architect, emphasized the importance of this preservation, stating, "The Art Nouveau buildings are not just beautiful; they are symbols of our city's resilience and creativity. Preserving them is crucial for maintaining our unique character." This comment underscores the broader sentiment that safeguarding Oradea's architectural heritage is essential to preserving the city's distinctiveness and historical continuity.

Challenges and Opportunities: Through their observations and experiences, participants identified several challenges facing Oradea's cultural heritage. These include pressures from urban development, issues related to conservation, and the need for improved communication among stakeholders. One participant remarked, "It's not just about preserving old buildings; it's about finding a balance between preserving our past and embracing modern development." This comment underscores the delicate balance required in urban planning to harmonize historical preservation with contemporary growth.

Participants also highlighted the importance of integrating green infrastructure into urban planning. This approach is seen as essential for maintaining Oradea's unique identity while supporting economic development. Concerns were voiced about the potential loss of historical sites due to new developments, with some advocating for stricter regulations and better enforcement of conservation laws to protect the city's heritage.

Suggestions for Improvement:

Participants provided practical suggestions for improving public services, urban development strategies, and cultural preservation efforts in Oradea. They stressed the importance of enhancing citizen engagement, supporting local businesses, and preserving green spaces to protect the city's cultural heritage for future generations. Additionally, they advocated for the municipality to provide more assistance to those in need and called for a stronger partnership between the municipality and the university.

There were also calls for increased funding for cultural projects and events that celebrate Oradea's diverse heritage. As one interviewee suggested, "We need more festivals and exhibitions that highlight our multicultural history. These events can educate the public and attract tourists."

Themes and Patterns:

Common themes emerged across the interviews, highlighting the importance of heritage preservation, the pivotal role of local leadership in conservation efforts, and the need for active community involvement in shaping Oradea's future. These recurring themes create a cohesive narrative, reflecting shared concerns and priorities among participants.

A consistent point raised by interviewees was the need for educational programs in schools to teach young people about the city's history and the importance of preserving its cultural heritage. As one 49-year-old female respondent emphasized, "Our children need to know where they come from and why these buildings and traditions matter."

Overall, the interviews offer a rich tapestry of insights into Oradea's cultural heritage, capturing its significance, challenges, and opportunities from the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. By integrating these viewpoints, policymakers, urban planners, and community stakeholders can deepen their understanding of Oradea's socio-cultural fabric and collaborate effectively to safeguard and promote its distinctive heritage for future generations.

3.2 Urban Greenery in Oradea

The interviews underscore the critical role of urban green spaces in Oradea—such as parks, riverbanks, and gardens—in enhancing the city's aesthetic appeal and providing essential areas for recreation and relaxation. The discussions trace the historical evolution of these green areas, from ancient parks with historical landmarks to modern urban expansions, and highlight their cultural significance.

Green spaces are also emphasized as crucial for fostering community interaction and social cohesion, serving as hubs for cultural events, recreational activities, and gatherings. Respondents noted the need to increase tree coverage to mitigate high summer temperatures.

Oradea's green spaces hold deep nostalgic value for residents. For instance, a tour guide fondly recalls the view from her grandmother's balcony overlooking the Crișul Repede River, illustrating the spaces' significance as cherished memories. Similarly, a lifelong resident values these areas as a connection to nature and a tranquil retreat from urban life, while also recognizing opportunities for further development.

The importance of these spaces extends beyond leisure to environmental sustainability and public health. An architect calls for integrating Oradea's industrial heritage with its natural landscape, advocating for green corridors to enhance both aesthetic appeal and environmental health.

Despite their historical and current value, there is a consensus on the need to expand and improve Oradea's green spaces. Issues like urban heat islands have led to calls for more street trees and shaded areas. Residents also desire more evergreen trees and improved green spaces in newer city areas, a concern echoed by a real estate developer who highlights the neglect of natural elements in new urban developments.

To ensure ongoing benefits from these green spaces, the community advocates for proactive urban planning. A local tourism manager suggests increasing the frequency of local markets and incorporating more green spaces into urban events to enhance both resident well-being and the city's appeal to tourists.

Integrating community feedback into urban planning is essential for preserving Oradea's cultural legacy. While significant progress has been made in preserving architectural heritage, more efforts are needed for green space management and sustainability. The collective vision is a city where green spaces are preserved, expanded, and integrated into urban planning, ensuring future generations can enjoy Oradea's natural beauty and cultural richness.

Residents' perspectives reflect a deep connection to their city's green spaces and a commitment to ensuring their continued vitality. Through thoughtful planning, community engagement, and sustainability, Oradea can build on its legacy as a city where nature and urban life coexist harmoniously. Engaging diverse stakeholders and incorporating their feedback will be crucial for preserving and promoting Oradea's rich cultural heritage.

4. Discussion

4.1 Urban Conservation and Sustainable Development

The research findings, drawn from the perspectives of city promoters, heritage advocates, tourism authorities, and local observers, reveal the complex interplay between urban conservation and sustainable development in Oradea. One participant highlighted that Oradea's cultural heritage

involves more than preserving old buildings; it requires a balance between historical preservation and modern development. This perspective underscores the importance for policymakers to assess how urban growth impacts historical landmarks and green spaces. Another respondent stressed the need to "integrate green infrastructure into urban planning," emphasizing sustainable practices that uphold Oradea's unique character while supporting economic growth. These insights can guide authorities in developing comprehensive strategies that balance conservation, promote architectural diversity, and enhance the city's resilience to environmental challenges.

4.2 Community Engagement and Heritage Preservation

Community engagement plays a vital role in preserving Oradea's cultural heritage and promoting urban greenery. One participant highlighted the deep connection residents have with the city, emphasizing their responsibility to safeguard its heritage for future generations. This involvement is crucial for protecting historical sites, hosting cultural events, and supporting environmental initiatives. By integrating community input into urban planning, authorities can leverage local knowledge of the city's history and landscapes. An interviewee recommended "community-led projects, such as neighborhood clean-up drives and heritage walks," as effective ways to foster local pride and ownership.

Collaborative efforts between government agencies, local organizations, and grassroots initiatives can guide Oradea toward sustainable development that honors its cultural heritage and natural beauty. This research reveals the complex fabric of Oradea's cultural legacy, urban evolution, and community cohesion, drawing on diverse perspectives from advocates of historical conservation and everyday residents.

There is also a call for increased municipal support for those in need, more job opportunities for university students, and addressing the shortage of skilled workers for new businesses. Strengthening ties between the municipality and universities is crucial to address these challenges, facilitating student work experience and meeting business demands.

Balancing urban preservation with development, community involvement is key to protecting Oradea's heritage and green spaces. Historical precedents, such as the urban systematization concepts discussed by Bucharest planners in the 1920s-1930s, reflect broader trends seen in Western cities like Paris (Badiali *et al.,* 2018). By involving locals as stewards of its cultural and environmental assets, Oradea can harmonize tradition with innovation, fostering a vibrant urban environment.

While new developments are necessary, current architectural projects often lack integration with historical contexts. The Salca Park is a notable exception, positively impacting areas outside the city center. However, preserving design integrity within historical settings is sometimes overlooked in modern architecture.

Oradea's narrative reflects cherished memories, shared aspirations, and a unified vision. Historical interventions have significantly shaped Transylvanian cities, with Romanians now forming the majority, though historical landscapes have undergone fewer changes than in other regions (Badiali *et al.,* 2018). By honoring its past and embracing future opportunities, Oradea can bridge temporal boundaries to maintain cultural vibrancy and environmental stewardship. Reevaluating the role of natural elements in urban planning remains essential, as the significance of water is often underestimated today (Badiali *et al.,* 2018). Through this approach, Oradea can preserve its heritage while building a future of potential and harmony.

5. Conclusion
5.1 Summary of Findings

The insights provided by interviewees significantly deepen our understanding of Oradea and set the stage for future research into its broader metropolitan area. Their contributions illuminate key

aspects of the city's history, cultural significance, and societal dynamics. The involvement of these individuals in designing interview structures and suggesting new research avenues ensures alignment with Oradea's diverse perspectives and complex realities.

5.2 Expanding the Focus: The Metropolitan Area

As the research broadens to encompass the Oradea Metropolitan Area, it is essential to build upon the insights gained from the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach by integrating the Protected Landscape Approach (PLA).

The HUL approach is effective for managing and preserving the city's historical and cultural assets at a detailed, smaller scale. It focuses on incorporating heritage conservation within urban planning, ensuring that Oradea's historical landmarks and urban fabric are maintained amidst modern development.

To address the broader, regional context, the PLA operates on a larger scale, extending the focus to the metropolitan and regional levels. The PLA emphasizes the integration of cultural and natural landscapes across extensive areas, aiming to balance urban growth with ecological sustainability. It considers the broader impact of development on the region's overall environmental and cultural resources, seeking a harmonious relationship between urbanization and conservation efforts.

By combining the HUL approach's detailed preservation strategies with the PLA's broader regional perspective, we can ensure that Oradea's urban growth respects both the city's historical character and its surrounding natural environment. This integrated approach supports sustainable development while preserving the rich heritage and ecological integrity of the entire metropolitan area.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:
- **Sample Representation:** The interview sample, though diverse, may not fully capture the full spectrum of perspectives within Oradea's population. This limitation could affect the comprehensiveness of the findings.
- **Interview Format:** The semi-structured nature of the interviews, while facilitating depth and flexibility, may have introduced some degree of interviewer bias, potentially influencing the responses and outcomes.
- **Focus Areas:** The study's emphasis on urban green spaces and cultural heritage, although essential, may have inadvertently overshadowed other critical aspects of Oradea's urban development, such as transportation infrastructure and economic diversification.

5.4 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings from this research have significant implications for urban planning, heritage conservation, and community engagement in Oradea. The strong emotional and cultural ties that residents have to the city's green spaces underscore the need for policies prioritizing preservation and enhancement. Urban planners, architects and local authorities are encouraged to integrate green spaces more effectively into future development projects, ensuring these areas continue to serve as vital hubs for social interaction, cultural events, and environmental sustainability.

Involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes is crucial. Their firsthand experiences provide essential insights that can guide more inclusive and culturally sensitive urban development strategies.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Looking ahead, future research should aim to:

- **Broaden Participant Representation:** Include a more diverse range of participants, particularly from underrepresented communities, to capture a more comprehensive picture of Oradea's urban dynamics.
- **Integrate Qualitative and Quantitative Methods:** Combine qualitative insights with quantitative data to achieve a more balanced and comprehensive view.
- **Explore Emerging Challenges:** Investigate emerging issues such as the impact of climate change on urban planning, the role of technology in heritage conservation, and the effects of migration on Oradea's socio-cultural landscape.
- **Conduct Longitudinal Studies:** Track changes in the urban environment and community attitudes over time to assess the long-term impact of development and conservation efforts.

5.6 Final Thoughts

This study highlights the crucial role of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach in preserving Oradea City Center's cultural heritage and urban greenery. By involving the community, Oradea can better balance modern development pressures with the need to maintain its historical and natural assets, fostering a stronger connection between residents and the entire city. The findings emphasize the importance of collaboration among public institutions, residents, and urban planners in safeguarding Oradea's unique identity. As the city grows, this study—and the future research it inspires—will help guide policy to ensure that Oradea's rich heritage and green spaces are preserved for generations to come.

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Figures

Fig. 1. Map of Oradea (Varadinum) by Joris Hoefnagel, 1617 (Badiali et al., 2018, mentioned in Baldescu, 2008)

Figure 2. [Online] Available at: https://maps.arcanum.com/en/map/firstsurvey-hungary/?layers=147&bbox=2433734.031839212%2C5947300.825371525%2C2452776.406510757%2C5956473.268765747

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Fig.4. The extension of Oradea's intravilan between1990–2012. (Source: Oradea City Hall & Carrière *et al.*, 2018)

Fig.5. Oradea in Spring, Photocredit Mara Vida

Fig.6. Oradea in Summer, Photocredit Mara Vida