

# A PROPOSAL FOR ROMANIA'S ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION BASED ON FUNCTIONAL RELA- TIONS IN THE TERRITORY

Radu SĂGEATĂ

**Radu SĂGEATĂ**

Researcher, Institute of Geography, Romanian Academy,  
Bucharest, Romania  
Tel.: 0040-213-135.990  
E-mail: radu\_sageata@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

Having in view the low absorption of European funds, it is extremely necessary to have a regional administrative system put in place. The present paper, based on a many-sided critical study of functional relations among human settlements, offers a viable alternative to current controversies concerning Romania's administrative-territorial organization. Proceeding from regional, county and local polarization cores, a four-level type of regional administration has been devised, namely, the region, the county, the small rural district (Rom. *plasă*) and the town/commune, among which clear-cut hierarchical relations of decentralization and concentration of services are to be established. What has emerged is a number of eleven administrative-territorial structures worth being vested with regional administrative status. These structures are based on the historical regions developed over time as homogeneous mental and functional spaces.

**Keywords:** administrative organization, regional converging centers, relations, territory, Romania.



## 1. Introduction

Regional development over the last twenty years has been focusing the interest of scientific research, becoming a major topic of discussion for the central and local authorities, for entrepreneurs and public opinion alike. The reason for assessing the economic and social disparities of regional development is twofold. In the first place, the official documents elaborated in Romania after 1990 show that inter- and intra-regional gaps have widened because, despite all the policies trying to equalize development opportunities, regional polarization is still powerful. In the second place, traditional regional disparities across the Romanian territory continued to exist in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century despite declared efforts to attenuate them (Antonescu, 2003). The steep economic decline of the 1990s was amply reflected also in the political-administrative decisions which shifted from the ideological perspective to a dominantly economic one. A first step in this direction had in view the principle of *restitutio in integrum* which characterized most political decisions in matters of legislation up to the mid-1990s, when a number of laws were passed regulating the situation of nationalized houses, rehabilitating some political personalities of the inter-war period, stipulating the objective presentation of Romania's contemporary history and of the communist system, in an attempt to correct the arbitrary decisions made by the regime abolished in 1989. In line with this rehabilitation policy, they decided to re-establish the administrative-territorial structures dismantled in 1950 (Săgeată and Simileanu, 2007).

Romania's official request for EU membership lodged on June 22, 1995 opened up the road to negotiations for assuming the European Community Aquis. As regards the administrative-territorial structures, that moment marked the development of initiatives to set up territorial units comparable in area and demographic size to regions in Europe. The idea of integrating former administrative structures gained ground against proposals of fragmentation based on the former county pattern. As a result, the eight development regions emerged in 1996 constituted the territorial framework for the implementation of development policies. They were mentioned in the *Green Paper. Regional – Development Policy in Romania*, elaborated by the Government and the European Commission, the 1997 PHARE Program and sanctioned by Law no. 151/1998 on Regional Development in Romania (Benedek, 2004; Bakk and Benedek, 2010).

Now and then, the regional development policy catches public attention and fundamental questions are being raised concerning the legitimacy, representativeness and functionality of these regions. Those contesting these attributes are reminded of the necessity to have a regional framework capable to meet also EU requirements. Supported or criticized, regional development still poses many questions that need to be answered, moreover so, as the process of integration will turn the Continent into a 'Europe of regions' (Labasse, 1991).

The poor absorption of European funds at local level has re-opened the polemic about the viability of existing counties. Within the current territorial pattern, counties

are not large enough to allow small, local projects to become part of comprehensive regional strategic projects. Besides, a more efficient absorption of European funds devoted to local development projects requires the substantive reduction of costs and of public administrative bureaucracy, a better correlation between public decision-making, the specific needs and problems of local communities and their particular development opportunities distinctively different for each of them (www.advocacy.ro). Attaining these goals implies forming regional territorial structures (NUTS 2) by amassing existing counties or new ones, the viability of which depends on creating administrative regions matching territorial functional relations and fluxes among the regional settlement system.

Proceeding from the European and Romanian experience in the political-administrative regionalization of the territory, the work suggests an administrative-territorial outline of Romania based on the functional relations between settlements and the distance between polarization cores and subordinated settlements. The main administrative-territorial regionalization models of EU-member states according to their particularities, as well as the main post-1989 directions and trends of manifestation within this area have been considered. In view of it, the author advances an alternative solution for Romania's administrative-territorial regionalization, relying on the functional relations set at the level of the human settlement system.

## 2. European experiences

Regions in the EU vary widely in terms of origin and structure. The great territorial and demographic disparities between regions in the EU Member States, as well as between those within individual states are the outcome of the specific way in which each of them was formed and evolved in the course of history. In view of this reality, some unitary principles of regional development policies were being elaborated for the entire space of the European Economic Community (EEC) as early as 1972; in 1975, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was created with the aim of implementing regional development and eliminating territorial unbalances (Antonescu, 2011). A unitary basis for analysis of all the economic and social phenomena throughout the EEC space was developed as late as 1988, when the European Statistical Office (Eurostat) issued the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS). Initially, it contained three hierarchical levels (NUTS I – macro-regional, equivalent to federal; NUTS II – regional, and NUTS III – department or county level) distinguished by certain demographic thresholds (Table 1). This working tool facilitated the correspondence between regional levels in the EU states, on the one hand, and between them and the administrative structures of national states, on the other (Alexandru, Ivanoff and Gilia, 2007).

This standardization has led to distinguishing two categories of regions:

- Administrative or political-administrative regions with a deeply-rooted regional identity built over some long periods of time, that also have a unitary cultural, ethnical and linguistic background (the *Lands* in Germany, the *regions* and *depart-*

**Table 1:** The demographic thresholds of the first territorial-statistical levels

Statistical territorial levels	Demographic thresholds (inh.)	
	Maximum	Minimum
NUTS I	3,000,000	7,000,000
NUTS II	800,000	3,000,000
NUTS III	150,000	800,000

Source: EEC Report (1991)

ments in France, the *regions* and *provinces* in Italy and Belgium, the *autonomous communities* in Spain, etc.);

- Statistical-territorial regions, kind of artificial make-up, devoid of any regional personality or historical antecedents, the outcome of the aggregation of existing lower-rank territorial-administrative units (ZEAT in France, *regierungsbezirk* in Germany, *landsdelen* in The Netherlands, standard regions and *groupings of comitats* in the United Kingdom, *amter groupings* in Denmark, *groupings of development regions* in Greece, *groupings of autonomous communities* in Spain, or *development regions* in Romania) (Săgeată, 2008a).

Later on, this hierarchization was supplemented with other two statistical-territorial levels: NUTS IV, based on inter-commune structures, and NUTS V, based on the commune. At present, the Romanian regional system has the following statistical-territorial levels: NUTS II (sanctioned by Law no. 151/1998, comprises 8 development regions without administrative and juristic person status, average population number / region 2.8 million inhabitants); NUTS III (41 counties and Bucharest Municipium, represents Romania's administrative-territorial structure) and NUTS V (320 towns, among which 103 *municipia* (except Bucharest) and 2,859 communes with 13,285 villages (on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013).

The Romanian regional structures, patterned on the British model of inter-communal association, are marked by higher inter-regional disparities than the intra-regional ones, a situation that restricts the degree of territorial cohesion and implicitly of functionality. Therefore, in the author's opinion, a regional outline based on historical regions, which in time have developed individual traits according to traditions, urban polarization areas, complementary social-economic particularities and a homogeneous cultural and spiritual heritage, would be the solution (Săgeată, 2004a).

The functional attributes of these regions are embedded in the inhabitants' psyche, the region becoming actually a mental space, a space of reference for the locals, of communion between man and his life environment, a fundamental element for any space structure to be sustainable. Mental spaces are also functional spaces, as well as homogeneous ethnical and cultural spaces, structured from bottom to top according to the relationships established among the local communities (Cocean, 1997, 2002). Most regions in Europe are largely mental spaces, shaped by a long-lasting historical process (Duby, 1995). There are cases when the locals' regional identity is stronger than their national identity (*Flanders* and *Wollonia* in Belgium, *the Länder* in Germany and Austria, *the regions* in Italy and France, or *the autonomous communities* in Spain).

Therefore, we would say that the regions which have become mental spaces are also the most viable ones for getting administrative status. Romania's territory has three types of mental spaces corresponding to three distinct spatial levels: macro-territory – the historical provinces; middle territory – the historical lands (the former small rural district seats, e.g., the Land of Vrancea – *Țara Vrancei*), and micro-territory (communes) (Cocean and Ciangă, 1999-2000).

### 3. An administrative-territorial history of regions in Romania

The territorial evolution of Romania has been very much influenced by the country's geographical position at the cross-roads of Central, Southern and Eastern Europe. In view of it, the geopolitical context of the evolution of the Romanian national state has been a complex and unstable one. Having as neighbors the most powerful empires in mediaeval and contemporary times (the Habsburg Empire in the west, the Ottoman Empire in the south and the Russian Empire in the east), the country inevitably fell into their sphere of influence. The mix of population and the geopolitical pressure produced multiple cultural influences of different origin and impact: Graeco-Byzantine, Slav and Turkish in the south; Turanian and Russian in the east; Polish and Austrian in the north; Hungarian and German in the west and center, adding to the Romanian people's Latin and Orthodox substrate.

Like in many other states, and especially in those of Central and Eastern Europe, Romania's territorial make-up was a stagewise process that began in 1859 with the unification of the two Romanian Principalities – *Moldavia* and *Wallachia*. As early as 1862, the first legislative initiative concerning the administrative-territorial organization expressed the necessity for the creation of some space units, the size of regions, capable to administer the territory efficiently. The bill drafted by Barbu Catargiu had in view to establish a better link among the country's regions, between the central power and the local administrations. It provided for the establishment of four general prefectures (North, Maritime, Central and East) including 6-9 counties (Rom. *judete*). The idea of delimiting some regional areas is constantly advanced in most of the future administrative-territorial units (Rom. *general căpităni*); in 1907 and 1912, P.P. Carp suggested still other units (Rom. *dregătorii*), and regional circumscriptions, respectively (Erdeli, 1997).

In 1918, as a result of the Peace Treaties signed at the end of the First World War, The Greater Union added new provinces (*Basarabia*, *Bucovina* and *Transylvania*) to the national territory, fact that highlighted inter-regional disparities not only in the economy and in the social and transport infrastructure, but also in the administrative-territorial divisions. The long period of time in which the Romanians cohabitated with other nationalities in territories administered by different imperial capitals made them have different opinions on administration than the central-based ones promoted in the 'Old Kingdom' of Romania (formed of Wallachia and Moldavia). As a consequence, the political class, the representatives of the national minorities and the Romanians who lived in Transylvania, Basarabia, Bucovina and the Cadrilat-

er (South Dobrogea) sustained that the best environment in which national cohesion and a climate of tolerance between the majority population and the minorities could develop was a decentralized administrative structure that would allow inhabitants from different parts of the country to keep their old institutions, distinguishing their culture and traditions from those of neighboring regions. They considered that true unity could not be attained by ignoring the differences existing between various parts of the national territory, because they had evolved under distinct political systems; neither by trying to equalize all existing systems, because the main goal of government should be to ensure national unity in diversity (Săgeată, 2006).

This distinct legacy reflected in the administrative map of Romania (1918-1925) on which the heterogeneous administrative-territorial structures that were formed and developed under different political-administrative systems were associated (Săgeată, 2008b).

This is why, in the inter-war period, almost all the important political parties and the scientific elite used to elaborate projects of administrative unification; some of those projects had in view the creation of a centralized system, others promoted administrative regionalism based on decentralization and local autonomy. This desideratum was passed into the 1925 Law for Administrative unification which established that Romania's territory would be divided in 71 counties through the unification of six counties in Bucovina (Cotmani, Gura Humorului, Siret, Vășcăuți, Vijnîța and Zastavna) and the separation of Caraș-Severin into two counties: Caraș and Severin.

The existence of a large number of counties whose area, economic potential, demographic potential and number of first-rank administrative-territorial units was distinctively different, made it imperative to associate in order to create the optimal environment for a better collaboration in setting up, or maintaining, social-economic and cultural institutions (Săgeată, 1999). Association did not imply territorial merging, but the creation of a judicial and institutional framework to attain a series of specific objectives. This process materialized in the inter-war period by the successive formation of macro-regional administrative structures through the aggregation of counties: *ministerial directorates* (1929-1931) and lands (Rom. *ținuturi*) (1938-1940).

When, on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1945, the first pro-Soviet communist political party came to power, ample mutations in the administrative-territorial organization of the country took place. They did not constitute an immediate priority as the 1948 Constitution preserved the former classification into communes, *plase* (small rural districts) and counties. The political subordination of the territorial-administrative structures became a reality only on September 8, 1950, when the law stipulated that the country's territory was to be divided in 28 regions and, following the Soviet model, in *rayons* (districts) and *communes*. These divisions were not based on geographical or historical criteria as in 1929, but only on considerations of 'social-economic complexity'. The only units that met this criterion were those 'directly supporting the state's central bodies in implementing state or party policies' (Oroveanu, 1986). Their configuration

did not resemble the former counties, which had been delimited mostly by natural borders, basically the Carpathian Arc and the Danube.

The rationale behind setting up administrative units twice larger than the former counties was to subordinate the agricultural regions to the larger urban centers and in this way achieve an integrated agri-industrial complex and strengthen the influence of the proletariat over the peasantry who was reluctant to accept the 'reform' imposed by the communist political class. The establishment of large administrative divisions instead of the 58 counties had considerably reduced the number of administrative centers, so that investments were to be earmarked mainly to the former units.

The 28 regions were outlined on economic criteria, in line with the Soviet administrative pattern, but they soon proved to be a much too fragmented structure, incapable of coping with the political requirements of the time. They could not survive the 1952 Constitution which, more than the 1948 one, copied the Soviet model. Thus, different processes of unification caused the disappearance of 12 regions, two new ones being formed: *Craiova* through the merging of Dolj and Gorj regions, and *The Hungarian Autonomous Region*, a copy of the *oblasts* (Soviet administrative units), bringing together the territories inhabited by the Szecklers of Covasna, Harghita and Mureș.

These new regions were not large enough, so that four years later, in 1956, two of them, Arad and Bârlad, were dissolved. At the same time, the former pattern suffered some changes, in that districts from one region were incorporated into another.

After the retreat of the Soviet troops from Romania (1958) and the elaboration of a policy pinpointing on national values, old national names reappeared on the country's administrative map.

The transition was thus made from a Soviet-type communist stage, characterized by Stalinist uniformity and rejection of the 'bourgeois' past, to a nationalist communist stage of respect for the national past and its connotations, rejecting the Russo-Soviet cultural model of Stalinist inspiration. So, the year 1960 witnessed a new administrative reform that modified once again the structure and configuration of the 16 regions, by eliminating some of them or shifting some districts from one region to another (Helin, 1967).

The idea of regionalization had been accepted and debated ever since the foundation of the Romanian national state until the communist political system came to power. It appears, however, that the region was a space unit Romanian rulers were not familiar with, nor were they ready to administer it. Larger than the county (deemed to be the traditional administrative-territorial unit in Romania), the region failed to become an operational notion. Moreover, being patterned on the Soviet model contributed to its loss of popularity with both planners and public opinion (Enyedi, 1992).

The administrative organization into regions and *rayons* (districts) in 1960 and 1968, had in view a series of particularities of the Romanian territory, such as traditional relationships between the regions in terms of efficient subordination to the central political authorities. This would explain recurrent 'administrative readjustments'

of a non-viable structure. It was a situation artificially maintained by the Sovietization of the entire cultural, economic and social life given that the Red Army troops were stationed on Romanian soil. The political events that had marked the former Communist Bloc between the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> decades, correlated with the retreat of the Soviet army from Romania (1958), enabled Bucharest's policy to distance itself from Moscow and revert to national values.

Against this background, the premises for a new administrative-territorial organization of the country were in place and the law for the administrative organization of the Socialist Republic of Romania was passed on February 17, 1968; it stipulated a two-level territorial organization, an upper level, the city and a lower, local level, the commune (Oroveanu, 1986).

The 39 counties were based on the inter-war pattern inspired by the French department model. Whereas the regions created in 1950 were based on the principle of a homogeneous economic potential, the counties established in 1968 were intended to be *functional structures*, including several types of geographical units with varied resources liable to facilitating *economic complementariness* (Argeş, Dâmboviţa, Buzău, Prahova, Vrancea, Gorj, Bihor, Timiş, Satu Mare, Maramureş, etc.) (Stahl, 1969). Even the counties with an apparently uniform relief, such as those situated in the lowland, had a variety of microforms on their territory, resulting from the association of meadows and of the two lakes formed by the Danube. The counties were conceived to be, in theory at least, different in terms of structure and potential (*Judeţele României Socialiste*, 1969).

As far as surface-area was concerned, the counties did not vary so much as they had used to (the ratio between the two extremes – Timiş and Covasna being 2.37 to 6.6 at the administrative organization of 1925), but significant numerical differences among communes did exist: e.g., 33 communes in Covasna County and 125 in Ilfov County. The oversized Ilfov County, conceived to be polarized by Bucharest, the capital of Romania, was not viable, being reorganized in 1981.

The absence of major administrative decisions between 1968 and 1988 led to the accumulation of tensions in inter-settlement relations when, at the beginning of 1989, the urban network was enlarged and 23 settlements were raised to town status, most of them discharging agri-industrial functions. These new towns were situated in poorly polarized areas, deeply rural, and the counties they were part of had no urban network of their own. Suburban communes, arbitrarily included into the urban area, were to become rural communes. After 1990, several currents of opinion on the administrative-territorial organization of Romania would emerge. One of them, vocal right after that year, upheld the multiplication of the number of counties by re-establishing the 'counties dismantled in an abusive manner' under the 1950 administrative reform which copied the Soviet model (Jordan and Alexandrescu, 1996). Others contended that the number of counties should be halved, in keeping with EU NUTS, otherwise they might 'suffocate local autonomy, turning counties into poorer territorial communities, hence more state-dependent' (Popescu, 1999). A third set of opin-

ions, solidly substantiated by geographical studies, maintained the delimitation of the administrative-territorial structures proceeding from the main polarizing centers (which could be assigned an administrative function), and the relations among them (Săgeată, 2000, 2006, 2011a, 2011b).

#### **4. An analysis of the main post-1989 opinion currents concerning regionalization in Romania**

While before 1989 stress was laid on the fragmentation of administrative-territorial structures and a comeback to the interwar pattern (Jordan and Alexandrescu, 1996; Jordan, 2003) in 1995, when Romania became a EU candidate state, the situation was reconsidered, the majority of options being for macro-regional structures larger than counties, comparable in terms of surface-area and demographic size with the regional structure of most European Union Member States. So, Law no. 151/1998, modified and updated by Law no. 315/2004, sanctioned the formation of eight development regions. However, they have no administrative status, being now simply statistically reported territorial units (Dumitrescu, 2008).

What current polemic is about is just the transformation of these units into counties. Swift proposals, underlain by political reasons, have been made without specialist advice or public opinion views.

##### *Proposals to amass present counties into regional structures (NUTS 2)*

Two political parties have already advanced proposals in this direction:

1. the Democrat-Liberal Party wishes the present development regions to be given administrative status (Cozmei, 2012);
2. the Magyar Democratic Union in Romania and the Magyar Civic Party, agreed by Hungary, insist on the formation of a 'Szekler' Land patterned on the former Magyar Autonomous Region (1952-1960), and a new administrative delimitation at Romania's north-west frontier similar to the 1940-1944 one (Vulpe, 2011).

A much more realistic proposal, fitting into the present-day economic-social realities of this country, upholds an administrative re-organization into 10 regions (Șoica, 2012; Cocean, 2013).

This regionalization model proceeds from the historical regions, which had been functional territorial structures, a quality acquired by a long experience.

With a few exceptions, this proposal suggests amassing existing counties into regional territorial structures that do not coincide with the polarization areas of county-seats. In our view, an administrative-territorial organization should partially overlap with the historical provinces, without ignoring the hierarchy of administrative centers of urban polarization areas, nor the functional relations established among them, either. As a matter of fact, except for the last proposal (Cocean, 2013), all the other proposals have been made by the representatives of some political parties. Thus, the Liberal Democratic Party – PDL suggested reducing the administrative apparatus and have a better control over the central administration in the territory; the

Magyar Democratic Party – UDMR and the Civic Magyar Party – PCM would like a Magyar minority-dominated administrative structure.

### **5. A proposal for an alternative solution of regional delimitation based on functional relations in the territory**

The evolution of the Romanian urban system in the last 50 years gave birth to ample mutations in the relationships between human settlements, because investments were preferentially directed towards certain urban centers (first towards county-seats and, after 1968, towards the newly-appointed county-seats), a situation that contributed to increasing the influence of urban areas.

At macro-territorial level, in order to simplify the implementation of regional development policies, adjacent administrative units with similar social-economic profiles had to be identified and grouped into historical provinces, well individualized by common traditions, socio-economic complementarities, as well as cultural and spiritual heritage. Since their functional particularities were reflected in the inhabitants' psychology, the region became a *mental space*, the space which the inhabitants used to refer to for their identity and communion between man and his/her environment, as a fundamental element for the sustainability of any spatial structure (Cocean, 2002).

In view of it, the present article aims at establishing a regional-based administrative planning system of Romania's territory, based on the historical provinces which correspond to well-established mental frameworks, and have specific functional relations (infrastructure and human interaction systems) that should be augmented.

The proposals put forward herein suggest an administrative organization of the Romanian territory proceeding from a regional system. Thus, the intermediate (department) level would be represented by counties (some of them divided in smaller units of the inter-war *plasa* type), and the lower level by towns and communes. Clear-cut hierarchical relations will be established between these levels, namely either decentralization, or deconcentration of services: 1) *decentralization* between the national and the regional levels and, wherever possible, the principle of subsidiarity will be applied; 2) *deconcentration* of relations between the intermediate levels and the lower levels.

While previous proposals proceed from historical or ethnical arguments, studies of regional boundaries, established on the ground of inter-settlement relations, are much fewer, and they are authored by geographers (Săgeată, 2000, 2006; Ilieș and Wendt, 2012; Cocean, 2013), or economists (Oțiman, 2013; Oțiman *et al.*, 2013). The findings reported in the latest studies, in particular, are questionable insofar as the validity of ensuing territorial structures is concerned, and have already been commented in detail elsewhere (Săgeată, 2011a, 2011b). Besides, all these studies have preserved the current county boundaries, their authors proposing only various ways of amassing regional-type territorial units. Our study is among the first that goes beyond this level, suggesting corrections of the dysfunctions existing in the present county system.

To this end, regional, department and underdepartment convergence, as well as the respective theoretical polarization centers have been identified on the basis of the distances between these centers and the subordinated settlements along the main routes of access. In this way, the bounds of urban influence zones, and implicitly of the polarized administrative structures, have been delineated (e.g., if subordinated settlement X, situated between A and B polarizing centers, lies at 15 km from center A and at 16 km from B, it will fall into A polarization area; subordinated settlement Y, situated between the same polarization centers, lying also at 16 km from center A and at 15 km from B, will be included in area B, between the two subordinated settlements X and Y – transcending the boundary between the polarization area of A and B and implicitly of the administrative units established on their basis).

Furthermore, polarization areas were hierarchically ranked by the functional relations existing between polarizing centers. The outcome is the creation of administrative levels (e.g., if settlement X is polarized by center A which, in its turn, is subordinated to B, which discharges territorial functions- regional metropole, then settlement X is part of a county-type administrative structure (department) co-ordinated by center A, but included into a regional administrative unit co-ordinated by center B).

### *5.1. Methodology*

In order to establish the configuration of the proposed administrative pattern, three distinct stages had to be covered:

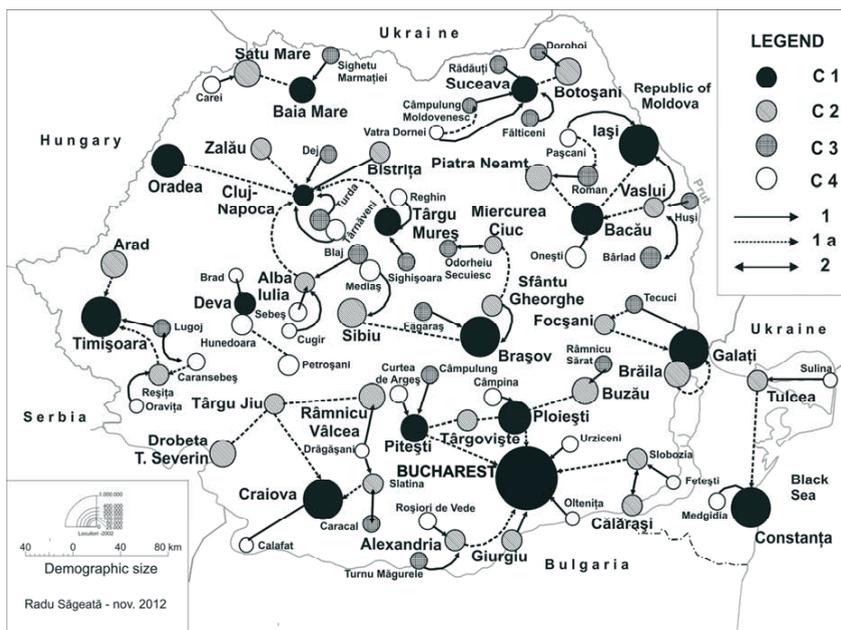
1. The identification of regional and local converging centers capable of being vested with an administrative function, by hierarchical levels, in terms of their polarizing potential. Assessing the polarizing potential was based on three categories: demography, economy and localization, selected in the light of historical records and their present geographical position within the urban system. In this way, four samples have been outlined (C 1 – C 4) (Table 2 and Figure 1):
2. Polarizing areas of selected urban centers were established based on the traveling distance between them and the adjacent settlements. When inter-settlement distances could be covered by several routes (motorway, highway and railway), the better ones have been taken into consideration, having in view natural favorable and restrictive factors (relief pattern and water network).

Depending on the distance to the polarizing urban cores, the polarizing administrative units have been grouped into several categories: Administrative units situated in the immediate vicinity of the polarizing urban center (less than 10 km away), most of them being former suburban communes; Strongly polarized administrative units (less than 25 km from the polarizing urban centers), their polarizing degree depending on the polarization potential; Moderately polarized administrative units (between 25 and 50 km from the polarizing center) include rural settlements and small towns, secondary local polarizing cores also emerging from this category; Poorly-polarized

**Table 2:** Regional converging centers suitable to being vested with a political-administrative function (C 1 – C 4)

City samples	City names	Observations
C 1 : Former county-seats (1960-1968)	Bacău, Baia Mare, Braşov, Bucureşti, Constanţa, Craiova, Cluj-Napoca, Galaţi, Deva, Iaşi, Oradea, Piteşti, Ploieşti, Suceava, Târgu Mureş, Timişoara.	This category of urban centers continued to be first-rank administrative centers throughout the 20 <sup>th</sup> century
C 2 : Current residential seats	Alba Iulia, Arad, Alexandria, Bistriţa, Botoşani, Brăila, Buzău, Călăraşi, Focşani, Giurgiu, Miercurea Ciuc, Piatra Neamţ, Reşiţa, Râmnicu Vâlcea, Satu Mare, Sibiu, Sfântu Gheorghe, Slobozia, Slatina, Târgovişte, Târgu Jiu, Drobeta-Turnu Severin, Tulcea, Vaslui, Zalău	All these towns lost the regional or department administrative center status, with negative consequences for their socio-economic development
C 3 : Former underdepartment seats (1925-1950)	Bârlad, Blaj, Caracal, Câmpulung, Câmpulung Moldovenesc, Dej, Dorohoi, Făgăraş, Fălticeni, Huşi, Lugoj, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Roman, Rădăuţi, Râmnicu Sărat, Sighişoara, Sighetu Marmătiei, Turda, Tecuci, Turnu Măgurele	For most of them, the result was stagnation, even regression, despite of rehabilitation attempts to assign them municipality status and/or preferential industrial investments, which actually imbalanced the respective towns
C 4 : Potential administrative centers are local polarization towns suitable to gaining local administrative center status <sup>1</sup>	Brad, Calafat, Caransebeş, Carei, Câmpina, Cugir, Curtea de Argeş, Drăgăşani, Feteşti, Hunedoara, Medgidia, Mediaş, Olteniţa, Oneşti, Paşcani, Petroşani, Reghin, Roşiori de Vede, Sulina, Târnăveni, Urziceni, Vatra Dornei	These are generally urban centers with more than 30 000 inh. which, with a few exceptions, became municipalities after 1990 due to their location potential (in depressions, deeply rural, or hardly accessible areas – Sulina, Calafat, Brad, Vatra Dornei, Urziceni, etc.).

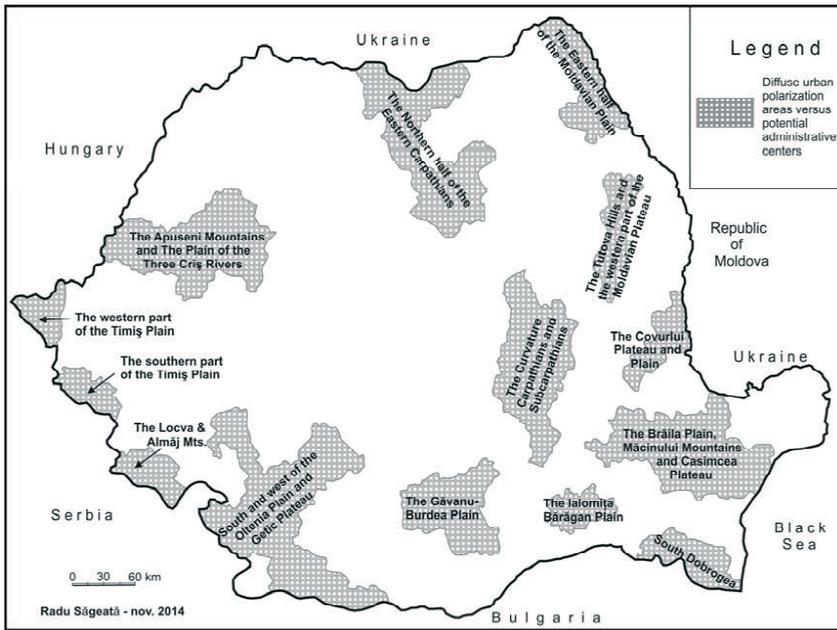
<sup>1</sup> Urban centers with a restrictive location potential (Mangalia, Câmpia Turzii, Aiud, Orăştie, Năvodari, and Mioveni), situated close to regional or local polarizing centers have been eliminated from this category.



**Figure 1:** Regional converging centers suitable to being invested with political-administrative function (C 1 – C 4) and their inter-relations

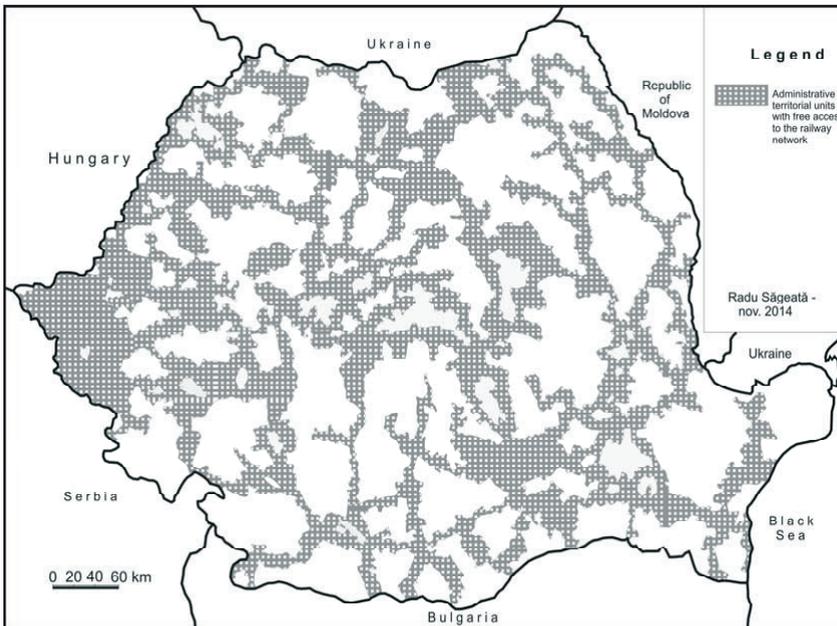
C 1 – County-seats between 1950 and 1968; C 2 – Current residential-seats, gaining or regaining this status after the 1968 administrative reorganization; C 3 – Underdepartment seats between 1925 and 1950 not regaining this status afterwards; C 4 – Potential administrative centers, local polarization towns suitable to gaining underdepartment administrative center status, 1. Subordination, 1 a. Diffuse subordination, 2. Competition.

administrative units (more than 50 km from a polarizing urban core), define deeply rural areas with diffuse polarization (Figure 2) (Săgeată, 2004b).



**Figure 2:** Diffuse urban polarization areas versus potential administrative centers

In order to assess the influence areas of potential administrative centers, the road-distance model has been correlated with accessibility to the railway network (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Administrative-territorial units with free access to the railway network

Since some towns, selected as potential administrative centers, are situated at the periphery of the current counties (especially those in samples C 3 and C 4), their influence areas transcend the limits of current administrative structures. Besides, the percentage of intra-county and inter-county polarizing cores is sensibly equal.

3. The quantification of existing relations between urban centers considered viable for being vested with administrative function (samples C 1 – C 4).

Three types of relations have been distinguished, namely, *subordination*, *competition* and *indifference*, whereby the resulted territorial structures, based on polarizing areas, have been hierarchically organized by administrative levels. Thus, subordination relations at the level of the urban centers determined integration relations at the level of the polarizing territorial structures, which, in turn, generated administrative department and local levels; competition and indifference relations produced fragmentation relations that outlined the limits among regional administrative structures.

## 5.2. Results and discussions

On the basis of historical regions formed in the course of time as homogeneous functional and mentally-perceived spaces, and proceeding from the relationships established at the level of regional settlement systems, as well as from the road distance between communal centers and the local polarizing cores, a number of eleven macro-territorial structures, considered viable to have regional administrative status, have been distinguished. The administrative structures, relying on regional converging polarizing cores and the relations among them, could be named after the historical provinces they are located in: *Bucovina* (*Northern Moldavia*), sustained by co-operation between the towns of Botoșani and Suceava; *Central Moldavia* between Iași and Bacău; the *Lower Danube* centered on the Galați-Brăila conurbation; *Dobrogea* on Constanța; *Muntenia* on Bucharest; *Oltenia* on Craiova; *Banat*, primarily on Timișoara and secondarily on Arad; *Maramureș*, relying on the co-operation between Baia Mare and Satu Mare; *Transylvania*, including Crișana, centered on Cluj-Napoca; *South-Eastern Transylvania*, based on the co-operation between Brașov and Sibiu (Figure 4).

Regions are formed of counties, themselves delimited by zones of influence polarized by regional centers given county-seat status. At a lower level, counties include smaller units of the so-called *plase* type, corresponding to the influence zones of major towns subordinated to county-seats; at the base-level, counties consist of the present-day communes.

Changing inter-communal boundaries could be done in a second phase of administrative reform and only at the proposal, or with the agreement, of the respective local communities.

Since both the local level (commune) and the number of existing counties, and therefore of seats, are being maintained, implementing the model proposed by us does not imply great costs, because no new locations for mayoralties, prefectures, etc. are necessary. What is important is the clear-cut delimitation of the tasks, devolving on the regional authorities, from those assigned to county and local authorities.



**Figure 4:** Proposed administrative-territorial reorganization based on relationships established among regional settlements

The main advantage of our model is its functional capacity in the territory, given that distances between administrative centers and subordinated settlements are being optimized, which is an essential prerequisite for a more efficient administration. The map in Figure 10 is the only administrative-territorial outline of Romania achieved by measuring all rail-and-road distances between administrative centers and subordinated settlements, established by hierarchical levels in terms of subordination relations in the national settlement system. That is why, this proposal is fundamentally different from other proposals based either on political affinities, or on a desire to re-establish the former territorial structures, but without adequately assessing the changes occurred in the Romanian urban system over the last fifty years.

A first step to inform decision-makers on the advantages of this empiric model was the publication of a comprehensive synthesis study (*Romania's administrative-territorial organization. Evolutions. Optimization proposals*) on the Internet site of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, in which a critical-objective analysis is made of the advantages and disadvantages of each model of Romania's administrative-territorial reorganization proposed after 1990.

## 6. Conclusions

Having in view previous experiences both in Europe and Romania, as well as the current features of the country's urban system, the present work advances a new

three-level administrative-territorial hierarchy, by region, department (Rom. *county*) and underdepartment (Rom. *plasă*) based on polarizing cities, themselves arranged hierarchically by levels and influence zones.

This is one of the first scientific studies in Romania which goes beyond the aggregation of present-day counties into regional units, arguing the delimitation of new territorial-functional structures so as to bring administrative institutions closer to the citizens' needs. This approach falls in line with the Strategy for Strengthening Public Administration, 2014-2016, which is one of the priorities set in the Governance Program, 2013-2016, to create greater local autonomy and consolidate the capacity of public administration in order to promote and sustain local progress by reducing development disparities (Objective IV) through administrative-territorial reorganization (specific Objective IV 3), improve the quality of and access to public services (Objective V), make them cost-effective and shorten the time in which public services are delivered (specific Objective V 1).

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