
The Romanian Urban Network

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The paper is aiming to provide a comprehensive outlook of the Romanian urban network from the beginning of the second half of the 20th century onwards, still emphasizing the recent urban developments. The study briefly reviews the long-term evolution of the geographical distribution of towns by demographic size. Major shifts in urban dynamics have occurred after 1990 due to deep on-going social and economic changes. Comparative advantages of urban areas have dramatically declined halting the half a century-long rural to urban transfer of population. Recent urban developments have slightly changed the concentration pattern of the urban population and the size and shape of urban polarization areas, but have determined profound changes of intra-urban relations. Dramatic changes occurred in the urban functional types. Finally, the content and the impact of the latest urbanization wave are discussed.

Long-term urban dynamics

In the second half of the 20th century, Romania recorded radical changes of social and economic development due to the ideologically driven policies. During this period, there were two turning points into the main trends of urban development: the first one was in 1948 that marked the passage from the capitalist economy to the centralised plan-based socialist system and the second was 1990 when the socialist economy began being replaced by the market economy.

The 20th century witnessed an impressive increase in town number, an over twofold growth recorded at different stage in time and intensity: 23 new towns were declared in 1930 and 1989 each, 49 in 1968 and the most recently, 53 in the period following the year 1990. The consequence of this increase was, among others, the strengthening of the county urban net-

works and their better balanced distribution within the national territory (Urucu et al., 2005). All along this period, the numerical increase of towns was achieved either by changing the legal status of some localities which boasted a new, dynamic economic and socio/economic life, or in a few cases by the construction of new towns planned mainly to perform industrial activities. The involvement of the political factor played a major role in the distribution of towns by category of size, in their balanced territorial spread and the formation of an urban network comfortable with the goals set by the central power (Urucu et al., 2005). For example, the new administrative-territorial division set up in 1968 was the best evidence of such a policy. Urbanisation was conceived as a political tool for the implementation of politically influenced development strategies. After 1950, industrialisation appeared to be the most important objective of the eco-

conomic policy, thus the emphasis was placed on emergence of new towns. Boosting productive activities was a must for any urban centre, so the majority of the new towns was specialised in industry. Many small towns appeared as a consequence of previous industrial location and expansion. Their subsequent socio-economic dynamics showed a closed dependency on industrial evolution which became a source of vulnerability after 1990 when industrial decline hit mostly the small towns. Since 1990, the overall population of Romania has been in steady but slow decline due to mainly, a dramatic natural fall and, secondary, an increasing outward migration.

The pace of urban demographic evolution in the latter half of the 20th century differed with each category of town and stage, in line with the objectives set by the central power, to balance the county urban network by increasing the number of new towns. It also reflects the economic and social level attained by the urban system in various stages. According to in-

creases or decreases of urban population, a certain regional grouping of towns can be observed. For example, in the last decade of the 20th century, towns with a growing population were located in Central and Northern Moldavia, Southern Dobrogea, the Getic Piedmont and North-West Transylvania. Negative rates were recorded mainly by the Braşov Depression and the Prahova Valley, the Western Plain, parts of the Romanian Plain, the Subcarpathian depressions and the south of the Moldavian Plateau. Romania's recent demographic evolution is similar to that of other former socialist Central and Eastern European countries. The urban population is following the same trend because of the social and economic restructuring of urban economies. The urbanization rate, of 53.4%, has registered a slight increase recently, but still is one of the lowest in Europe. This explains the latest urbanisation wave, started in the late 1990s and continued at higher speed after 2000 (Fig. 1).

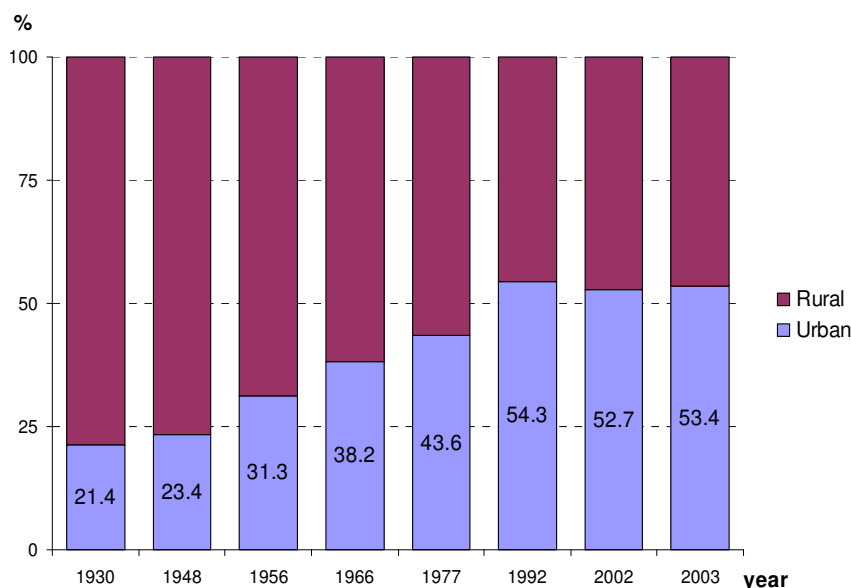


Fig. 1. Urban and rural population ratio

During the second half of the 20th century, the urbanisation rate has doubled, passing from 30% to more than 50%. The evolution was slower in the first half and faster in the second one due to political-driven urban development, followed by a slight regression at the beginning of the 21st century. The maximum value was reached in 1997, when the urbanization rate was of 55%, but the trends afterwards were of slow but steady decline. The growth of the urban population was the outcome of a number of factors, such as natural increase, rural inflows into the town, the urban status granted to some communes and the inclusion of some villages within the administrative extent of towns. The intensity of this process depended on the geographical region and the type of town. Although the ratio between these factors registered temporal changes, yet the high proportion of villagers adding to the urban population growth was a constant of the 1960-1990 period. After a long period of industrialisation-induced urban growth, the Romanian towns are facing a structural and functional crisis, due to cumulative effects of natural decrease, dramatic reduction of rural to urban migration, economic slowdown, reduced potential to diversify the urban economy and to attract dynamic activities. The severe impact of recent economic and social turmoil has been recently acknowledged by the United Nations population forecast. The 2000 projection is less optimistic than the one worked out in 1990, announcing a rate of 66.9% instead of 72.3% as previously projected (World Urbanization Prospects, 1990; UNO, Division of Statistics, 2000).

The distribution pattern of towns has recorded substantial changes during the second half of the 20th century. In 1966 the urban system still preserved the regional heritage from the beginning of the century, with higher densities of towns in the central and western part of the country. Larger concentrations of big towns are specific to Transylvania, whereas in the former Romanian kingdom their position is peripheral. Small and medium-sized towns largely outnumber the big ones, with dominantly agrarian functions and acting as basic services suppliers for large rural areas. The regional cities attracted major investments and contributed the most to the urban growth before 1966. In 1968 a new administrative territorial division was put in place, with counties replacing the former regions. A number of medium-sized towns turned into county-seats and concentrated the major part of the nation-wide urban dynamics. The centralized policy promoted the balanced development in the view of bridging the regional gaps in terms of towns' distribution. Huge investments were directed to lagging behind regions, as Central Moldavia, Central Muntenia and Maramureş. Along with the urbanization process, the town system tended to a relative stability, functioning in a politically homogeneous environment. Just before the end of the socialist period, in April 1989, a number of 23 communes were granted the urban status. Most of them recorded socio-economic values below the average of those particular to big villages. From the functional point of view, the emphasis has been put on agricultural and industrial activities, ignoring mostly the tertiary sector. The selection process of

new candidates to township was aimed to enhance the even distribution of towns and not to meet the requirements of urban development. The urban network, counting 260 towns and cities, was characterized by: insufficient number of big towns (9% of the total) but they are dominant in the urban population break-down (45% of the total); the over-representation of small towns accounting for 70% of the total in number; and last but not least, the substantial proportion of county-seat towns because of their role in transmitting the political decisions at the regional level. So, the urban hierarchy was closely linked the administrative-territorial structure. The large cities with over 100,000 inhabitants are represented by the majority of the county-seats, important industrial and services centres, major national transport knots, university and cultural centres. They have a distinct impact on the country's social and economic evolution: every second town-dweller and every fourth inhabitant of Romania is a large city dweller. Their population dominates the urban settlement system and the territorial structure of the national economy. The concentration of population into large cities is the outcome of industrial production concentration. Medium-sized towns represent one third of the total number and play a major role in the national urban structure as a quarter of them are assigned the coordination of the counties. Their huge industrial units made them quite vulnerable and the lack of functional flexibility enhanced the slow development of services. Small towns account for two thirds of the number but they have a low demographic potential. They have registered a continuous increase in number, but they reduced their share

into the total urban population to a half from 1930 to 2002. They are very different in functionality, including agro-industrial, industrial, spas and health resorts with a relatively well balanced distribution in space. Unlike the other two categories of towns, the small ones stayed at the periphery of the industrial and social progress and had to cope with many hardships in the course of their development. As a result, they are a pool of migrants for large cities (Urucu et al., 2005). After 1990, a new generation of towns has emerged, totaling 53 units up to the beginning of this year, and the process is in progress. Although relatively dispersed across the national territory, the new towns cluster in particular parts of the country, rendering greater the gaps in terms of geographical distribution at the county level. As regards the demographic evolution, there is a clear-cut distinction between the cities where company headquarters, research activity and education and cultural facilities are concentrated on the one side and the medium-sized and small towns with limited opportunities of economic development on the other side.

The main characteristics of the urbanization process have generated important hierarchical distortions over time. The rank-size relations revealed a decrease in the median and upper sectors of the hierarchy as against the optimal line in 1948. The context was a special one, immediately after the Second World War, followed by a long lasting famine, an intense emigration flow including especially the Jewish population and the turmoil determined by the transition to the communist rule. Important changes have occurred afterwards. In the mid 1960s most medium and small

towns were grouped under the theoretical adjustment line, whereas at the beginning of the 1990s they were above it. The medium-sized towns were disturbed in their demographic evolution in the 1970s when many of them became county-seats and received huge flows of capital and investments. The inflow of labour force was a response to the economic explosion of this category of towns. This impressive leap was due to rapid industrialization associated with infrastructure and social developments in order to host the rural to urban exodus. The demographic increase of the county seats lays at the basis of the hierarchical distortions: during 1966-1992 they contributed with two thirds to the total urban population growth. Nevertheless, one can distinguish some differences among them: the former regional capitals with slower evolution and the new county-seats established in 1968 with faster increase. In fact, the explosive growth of the county seats was responsible for the over-sizing of the median sector, and hence underdevelopment of the upper and lower ends of the national urban hierarchy (Ungureanu, 1996). The recent urban developments have slightly changed the rank-size distri-

bution of towns. The pattern still shows the same features as before 1990: very small number of cities but with a higher share in the urban population; medium-sized towns acting as a buffer in the middle of the urban hierarchy; an increasingly large number of small towns undergoing a drop of population. In comparison with early 1990s, when the most of medium and small towns were grouped above the theoretical adjustment line, due to their intense industrialization and demographic growth, in 2002 the most of them are found under the line because of the economic restructuring and population fall. The concentration pattern of urban population shows the dominance of the capital city and the county seats in the detriment of the small towns. The latter category represents two thirds of the total number but hold the same proportion of population as București. The recent increase in the number of towns has no important impact on the rank-size relation. Although significant in number, the new comers in the urban hierarchy are exclusive representatives of small towns whose population is generally up to 10,000 inhabitants (Fig. 2).

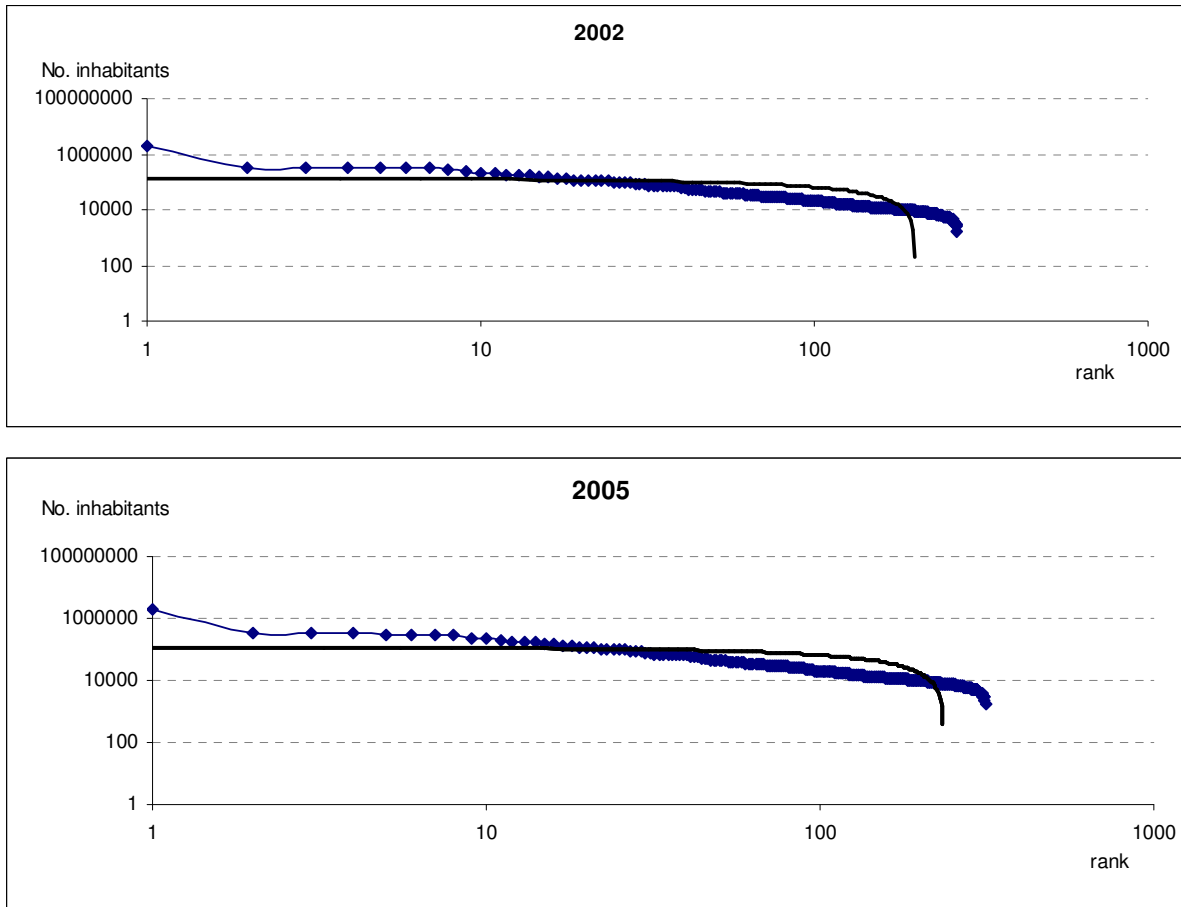


Fig. 2. Rank-size distribution of towns

The shape and the size of urban polarizing areas help us to distinguish the main pillars of the urban network: first of all, Bucharest is one of the finest examples of primate city in Europe; the ratio with the second ranked city in the urban hierarchy has been increasing in the last period from 5.9 in 1992 to 6.1 in 2002, although Bucharest is recording a demographic decline as well. Anyway, the regional cities are undersized in terms of population number. To efficiently coordinate the national territory they should reach 500-600 thousand inhabitants. Secondly, the regional cities seem to regain their coordination role of the national urban system. Before 1990, this role belonged to county-seats, considered to be at that time as the

main cores of the economic structures. As a result, the urban system has been split into a federation of subsystems made up of small towns acting as urban cells subordinated to the county seat. The small towns used to act strictly inside the county frameworks, their urban vitality being compromised at the expense of the county seats dynamics. About 85% of the settlements have evolved within the closed county urban structures. Two features were outstanding: the strong fragmentation of the national urban system and the territorial intra-urban competition has been annihilated in the favour of administrative competition. The general morphology of the regional subsystems of settlements indicates the dominance of the monocentric

type, gathering around one single coordination centre, such as those in Oltenia, Banat. The Moldavian system shows obvious bicentric trends, and the policentricity is well marked in Transylvania.

Urban functionality

Analysing the economic and social activity of Romanian towns in the post-war period reveals that the dimension and characteristics of the general urbanization process suffered radical changes comparatively with the pre-war period and with the particularities of this process in Europe. In the first half of the 20th century the Romanian towns had a specific functional structure, dominated by agriculture, mining, industry related to natural resources processing and traditional handicrafts, services especially trade and transport. After the Second World War, the traditional town as the place of production and exchange of non-agrarian products was replaced by the industrial urban centre. The 1956 Census data show an over 25% growth of industrial workforce, with almost 50% in the large cities and up to nearly 75% in the industrial towns. The 1970s and 1990s featured extensive industrialization, nearly all the Romanian towns being intensively developed and growing into economic centres, the medium-sized towns performing mainly industrial functions. In that period, more than 90% of the industrial output and value was supplied by towns. Over 45% of the active town population worked in industry. In the whole, the post-war functional profile of towns has changed as a result of late industrialization from the pre-war services-industrial and agrarian-services type to the dominantly industrial

and mixed (industrial and services or industrial and agrarian) types but very seldom services (Urucu et al., 2005). From the functional point of view, the most of the towns, including the big ones, developed industrial functions all along the second half of the 20th century. In this respect, striking similarities between the urban and industrial hierarchy came to define the urban network. The contemporary period, subject to a state-controlled industrialization policy, brought about dramatic changes in the orientation and rate of urban population dynamics, due to inconsistent socio-economic solutions, and gradual exhaustion of specific natural resources. According to different authors (Ungureanu, 1996), there are three successive stages in this period:

-1948-1966, the urban population nearly doubled (+96.8%), and heavy industry centres located preferentially in the central-western part of the country surged (Hunedoara, Baia Sprie, Baia Mare;

-1966-1977, the industrialization drive targeted some towns in the Romanian Plain (Slobozia, Alexandria, Urziceni), Getic Piedmont (Slatina, Balş, Filiaşi), Siret Passageway and Northern Transylvania. This new orientation of the industrialization policy highlights the growing importance of relational functions and the efforts to re-balance economic activities in the country. However, this policy shift did little to stop the decline of some small towns, such as those located in the Moldavian Plain;

-1977-1992, is marked by a visible decline of urban dynamism (only a 31.9% increase) and only few small and medium-sized towns (Mioveni, Năvodari, Rovinari) continued to attract the labour force. At

the same time, ever more urban centres (35, i.e. 13.4%) recorded demographic losses, particularly the mining centres, where natural deposits kept exhausting (Cavnic, Anina, Zlatna).

Another specific stage can be added after the radical changes brought about by the early 1990s:

-1992-2002, the general trend is that of moderate decline due to socio-economic changes (industrial restructuring, worsening of the living standard). The result was the dramatic decline of the natural increase of the population due to extremely low fertility and birth rates, and above all the reduction of in-migration flows. Only 10% of the total number of towns has registered a population growth, mainly young towns declared in 1989 and some others in the surroundings of București or local centres of food production.

As recently synthesized, according to the evolution of the urban economic activities, there were several successive stages during the second half of the 20th century: the development of regional capitals and the creation of new industrially specialised towns (1950-1970); the industrialization of county seats and medium-sized towns especially by big industrial units (1970-1980); the industrialization of small towns and rural settlements planned to become agrarian-industrial centres (1980-1989); the industrial decline after 1990 with various intensities according to the former industrialization level, age, size, and position within the settlement system. At the beginning of the 1990s, the industrial employment exceeded 50% in half of the total number of towns and 40% in three quarters of them. The agricultural employment was dominant in 3% of the

towns, in two exceeding 50% and others four exceeding 40%. Constructions were still important in many towns where huge industrial investments were in progress (Cernavodă due to the nuclear power station here under construction, ports along the Danube and the Black Sea coast, towns located along important rivers where hydroelectric power stations were to be built. Employment in trade was really significant in a small number of spas and employment in education was the best represented in big cities, in particular.

Nevertheless, 73% of the towns had an industrial function classified in three subcategories: industrial specialized (9%), industrial complex and of services (60%) industrial jointed (4%), followed by the mixed-economy (20%), of services (6%) and agriculture (1%) (Pop, 1997). The share of industrial employment ranged from 25% to more than 80% - some small towns dominated by different industrial sectors (Fieni, Zărnești, Azuga, Bălan) were dependent economically and socially on huge productive units. Only two of the 260 towns and cities in 1992 scored less than 25% of the total employment in industry (Insurăței and Negru Vodă). In the category of industrial towns one can distinguish several subcategories, such as: complex industrial and services urban centres (the most numerous, 156 out of 189 in total) comprising usually the county seats, so the biggest towns and cities in terms of population at county level: București, Tulcea, Alba Iulia, Călărași, Vaslui, Alexandria, Râmnicu Vâlcea. But the majority of the components is made up by medium-sized and small towns, such as: Abrud, Borșa, Adjud, Dej, Zalău, Gheorghieni, Rădăuți. The most of them are dominated by only

one industrial sector or even by one huge industrial unit. The latter ones, the so called “company-towns” are extremely vulnerable because of their entire economic and social life is related to one economic activity (Vlahita, Balan, Bocsa, Brezoi, Bumbesti Jiu). The biggest cities in the country have a complex and diversified industry, usually being represented by Ploiesti, Pitesti, Craiova, Braila (in the south), Iasi, Bacau, Galati (in the east), Timisoara, Arad, Oradea, Baia Mare (in the west) and Cluj Napoca, Brasov, Sibiu, Targu Mures (in the central part of the country). The demographic size of these cities would have suggested a tertiary functional profile, but even Bucuresti despite its main administrative, cultural, political, social functions had 51% of its labour employed in industrial activities. The second subcategory is that of specialised industrial towns whose total employment is at least 75% concentrated in industrial activities. They were specialised in natural resources processing (Aninoasa, Petrila, Uricani, Vulcan, Rovinari, Balan, Ticleni), engineering (Bumbesti Jiu), car industry (Mioveni), glass industry (Boldesti Scaeni), textile (Cisnadic and Buhusi), ferrous metallurgy (Calan) and non ferrous metallurgy (Copsa Mica), pulp and paper (Zarnesti). Very few towns are industrial mixed in which to the dominant industrial labour is added agrarian and tertiary employment. There are mainly small towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants with one or two industrial sectors: Talmaciu (wood and textile), Avrig (glassware), Nehoiu (wood and ready mades), Scornicesti (engineering, ready mades) and so on. The most interesting is that only two towns were classified as agrarian having more than 50% of the employment in agri-

culture (Mihailesti and Insuratei), both small towns located in the south-eastern part of the Romanian Plain. Romania has one third of its territory represented by plains with very good climatic conditions and soil cover and only two small towns specialised in agricultural functions. Services towns accounted for 6% of the total number of towns and could be included in the subcategory of industrial and services type. They are represented by spas and resorts located along the Olt, Prahova, Cerna valleys and along the sea shore. They had different specialisations in trade, tourism, transport. There are some examples of towns that should have been included in the same category of services towns but because of the industrial development the tertiary sector is less important (Borsec, Vatra Dornei, Sovata, Buzias). About one fifth of the total number of towns consisted of mixed urban centres enjoying a balanced structure of employment. They were different in terms of population size, although the small and medium sized towns prevailed. They had almost equal agricultural, industrial and tertiary functions, playing a special territorial role and polarizing large rural areas. Some examples are Lipova, Tecuci, Videle, Ineu, Rupea, Campeni (Pop, 1997). A more detailed classification of industrial towns distinguished at the beginning of the 1990s 12 types of mining and manufacturing centres as compared with the national average profile. Almost 10% of the towns were specialized in metallurgy, having more than 60% of the industrial employees hired in this sector. Some examples are Calan, Zlatna, Vlahita, Campia Turzii, Otelu Rosu, Abrud, Hunedoara. Pulp and paper is another industrial sector that contributed

to the urban economy of some towns (Adjud, Busteni, Dej) dominated by big enterprises. About 45% of the towns were specialized in engineering (tools, machines, equipments) and some of them had more than 90% of the industrial labour force concentrated in one big company (Bals, Colibasi, Cugir, Bumbesti Jiu). In terms of population with only two exceptions, Ploiesti and Brasov, all the others belong to the small and medium-sized categories. Two subsectors of engineering, according to the national classification of economic activities, electrotechnical and mechanics, have also contributed to defining strictly specialized towns. The former was found in 14 cases, very different in population size, some very small (Fieni, Sacele, Titu, Filiasi) and some very large (Bucuresti, Timisoara, Craiova, Cluj Napoca). The latter generated industrial specialization in a number of small and medium-sized towns, such as Sinaia, Barlad, Ocna Sibiului. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, a major part of investments has been channeled to chemical industry. Huge chemical complexes used to concentrate important volumes of labour force in towns as Victoria, Marasesti, Navodari, Ocna Mures, Onesti, Fagaras. Ten towns were specialized in glassware, including some dating from the beginning of the industrial development (Azuga, Alesd, Avrig) and some others belonging to the socialist period (Dorohoi). Textile towns are also specific to early industrialization (Buhusi, Cismadie, Talmaciu) as well as to later stages of socialist industrial development. In this case, the textile industry was used to balance the labor force market of towns specialized in heavy industry or to transform small agrarian centers into dynamic industrial towns. That

way, new textile towns have emerged: Draganesti Olt, Darabani, Mihailesti, Isaccea, Siret). Located in the mountain and hilly areas, the industrial towns specialized in wood processing are mainly small towns (Intorsura Buzaului, Brezoi, Huedin, Deta, Pancota). Food industry enjoys the most dispersed spatial distribution and the least specialization level, dominating the small towns in agrarian, touristic or mining areas (Solca, Beresti, Macin, Ianca, Valea lui Mihai, Fetesti, Segarcea). Leather industry is dominant in the workforce structure of some small and medium-sized towns such as Dragasani, Targu Frumos, Agnita, Marghita. Finally, the last type of specialized industrial towns is represented by those whose local economy is dominated by the industry of building materials. Some towns registered above average shares of employment in this industry (Medgidia, Jimbolia, Bicaz, Comarnic).

After 1990, the in-migration as the major source of urban growth has scored a dramatic fall. The towns, especially small and medium-sized, have gradually lost their attraction capacity for new comers. Their former industrial profile, limited capacity to diversify the local economy, the imbalances on the urban labour market, reduced entrepreneurship and attraction for foreign investments, lack of high order services are the main factors that influenced the "return to the village". From huge disparities in early 1990s, the in-migration has almost equal values in urban and rural areas in 2003 whereas the out-migration is higher from towns and the main losers are the small and medium-sized towns. The predominant shifts of population are increasingly those from urban to rural and within the urban network. The rural to urban

movement has constantly decreased in volumes, although with a slight growth in the last years, it seems to be a long term

feature of the geographical pattern of population mobility (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Structure of urban and rural internal migration flows determined by permanent residence changing (rates per 1,000 inhabitants)

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Total	12.9	10.6	11.7	12.8	13.0	13.4	12.3	12.3	10.9	12.7	14.7	15.3
Rural to urban	9.4	6.9	6.6	5.9	5.9	5.6	4.9	4.7	3.9	5.7	6.2	6.6
Urban to urban	5.8	5.0	5.6	6.1	6.5	6.1	5.9	6.0	4.7	6.4	7.2	7.8
Rural to rural	6.3	5.7	6.5	7.8	7.0	7.6	6.4	5.9	5.5	5.6	6.8	6.3
Urban to rural	3.8	4.4	4.7	5.8	6.7	7.9	7.7	8.3	8.1	7.8	9.5	9.8

Source: Statistical Yearbook of Romania, INS, different years.

The functional classification of towns in 2003 looks very much different, especially because of the steady and important decline of industrial activities and workforce. A recent analysis (Popescu et al., 2005) showed that according to the employment breakdown the number of industrial towns have halved in the last ten years. Less than 40% of the total number of towns is still dominated by industrial activities but the degree of specialization has been diminished largely. There are still some small towns specialized in only one industrial sector: Ticleni, Cugir, Zarnesti, Mioveni, Copsa Mica). Many of the former industrial towns are now characterized by complex industrial and services functions. Almost an equal number of towns, as previously, represents the towns that have already shifted to tertiary sector. Although industry is far less important than before, many of the towns are dominated by one or two sectors, such as Petrila, Vulca, Lupeni (coal mining), Balan, Cavnic (extraction of non ferrous minerals), Mioveni, Plopeni, Bumbesti Jiu (engineering), Cismadie, Talmaciu (textile). Only four county seats still joins this functional category in comparison with 39 (out of 41) in 1992,

the majority being now services and mixed towns. Specialized industrial towns have registered a dramatic fall, from 29 in 1992 to only one in 2003. One third of the total number of towns is now made up of services towns, five times more than in 1992. They are very different in population size, ranging from small ones to some of the biggest in the country. Thanks to the recent industrial decline, some of the small towns regained their normal functionality: for example towns located in important touristic areas turned from industry to services, or those situated in the middle of the plain region became agrarian once again. The mixed towns, whose labour force is almost equally distributed among agriculture, industry and services, increased in numbers, to about one third of the total. They comprise different towns in size and administrative role. In 1992 there were only two county seats scoring less than 50% employees in industrial activities, ten years later their number increased to 29. The on-going industrial restructuring will enhance the trends already obvious in the urban functionality and, probably, the agrarian, services and mixed towns will

take the lead in the detriment of industrial towns.

Recent developments

The approaching date of accession to EU, in 2007, acts as an impetus for the urbanization process. Partially, in this light should be seen the recent urban developments and the emergence of new towns after 2000. The legal framework is represented by the law on national territorial planning updated in 2001. The provisions of the law settle down the demographic and economic criteria, the basic infrastructure a commune should have in order to be given the urban status. Additionally, location criteria are made clear: 25-30 km large areas lacking towns are privileged. This is an important progress in defining the basic requirements for the urban status in comparison with the period up to 1990. A study worked out in 2001 (Muntele, Iatu, 2001) reached interesting conclusions by comparing the employment structure of small towns and big villages. In fact, no significant differences were noticed, proving that in most of the cases, the urban status has been granted randomly. This is the case of older towns such as Nadlac, Segarcea, Beresti, Targu Bujor and newer such as those belonging to the last socialist industrialization wave in 1989 (Pogoanele, Mihailesti, Basarabi, Insuratei). Some of the most industrially specialized small towns registered less tertiary employment in comparison with some big villages (Copsa Mica, Aninoasa, Fieni). In exchange, there were 86 communes the same sectoral structure of employment as the average of the small towns, being located mainly in the outskirts of big cities. In

practice, most of the new towns, declared after 2000, do not meet both economic and location criteria. Only a small part of them are located in large rural areas, and at most a half is capable to polarize the neighbouring villages (Fig. 3). Basically, the new towns are the result of political decision-making process, as in the socialist period. Although the urbanization process is slowly progressing in terms of number, the content and the significance of urban civilization and urbanity are still to be built in the long run. Some of the recent studies raised questions related to the present features of the urbanization process. At least in the case of small towns located in the plain areas there is a significant return of the workforce to agricultural activities. This could be a normal trend but the increasing numbers of employees are recorded by the subsistence agriculture and there is a general degradation of social and economic life. This tendency of "urban ruralization" is one of the most negative impact of the transition period and should be tackled carefully. It is questionable if the quantitative urbanization is the main road to be followed or qualitative changes are needed in order to sustain the urban development. Generally speaking, towns are the engines of regional development, so urban imbalances could have a negative impact on territorial cohesion. This is felt at three different scales: at national level – a persistence of pronounced imbalances between the main metropolitan areas and the rest of the country in terms of economic development; at regional level – a widening or at least the maintenance of a number of territorial disparities beyond those measured by GDP and unemployment. In particular, economic development

is accompanied by growing congestion and social exclusion in the main urban areas whereas a number of rural areas are suffering from inadequate economic links with neighbouring small and medium-sized towns and their economies are often weakening as a result. Larger urban areas are tending to sprawl outwards encroaching into the surrounding country-side as economic activity is increasing and the living standard is rising, creating what have to

be known as “rurban” areas. In the meantime, rural areas where there are no towns of any size in the neighbourhood, are experiencing falling population and a decline in the availability of basic services; within towns – the development of poverty pockets and social exclusion areas with often only limited availability of essential services, mainly in towns placed at the bottom of the urban hierarchy.

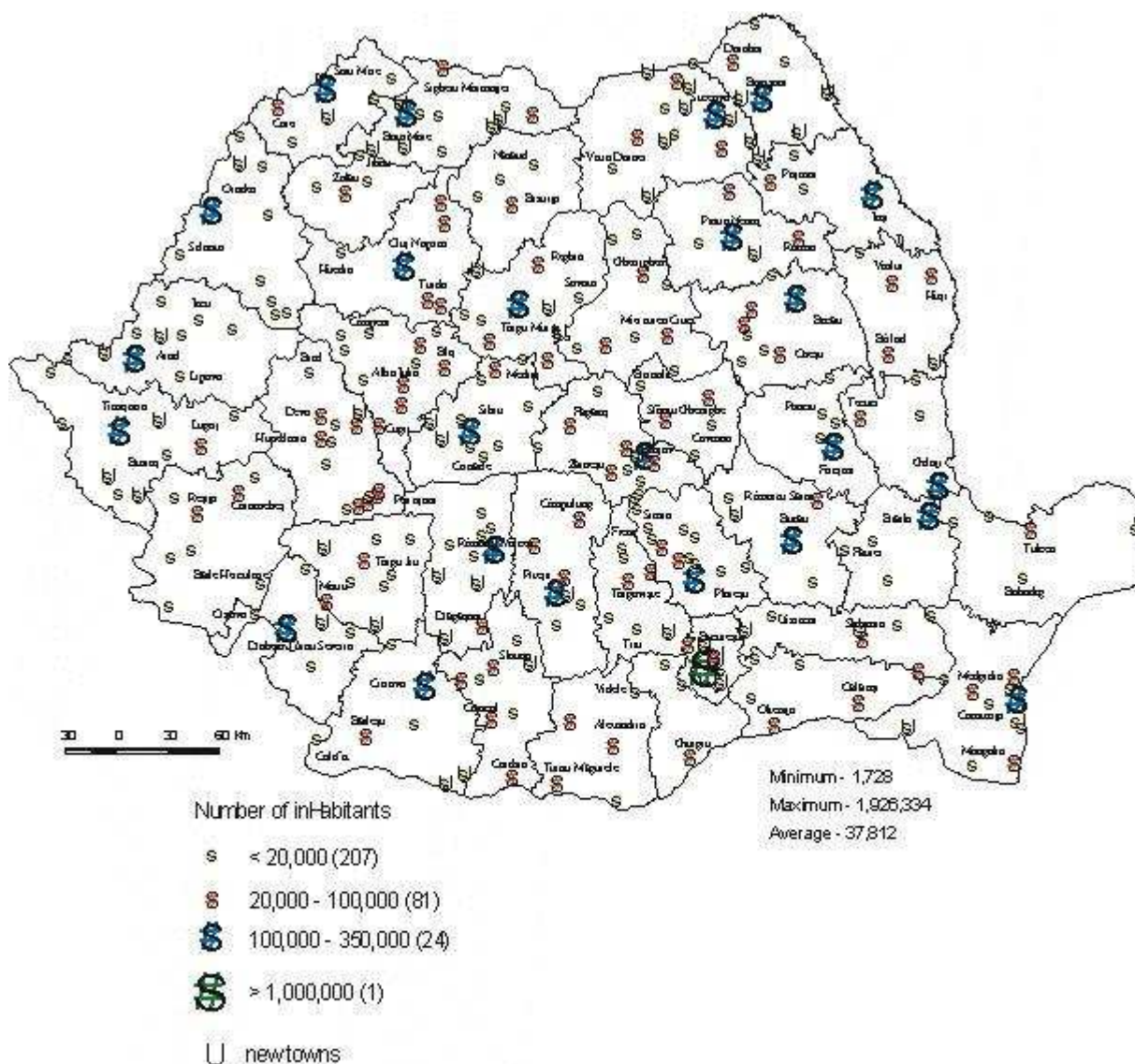


Fig. 3. Romanian Towns by demographic size

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