

THE ADMINISTRATIVE – POLITICAL FUNCTION OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND THE ROLE IT PLAYS IN ORGANIZING GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE. CASE STUDY – ROMANIA

Radu Săgeată^{a*}

^a *Institute of Geography, Romanian Academy, Romania*

Abstract: The functional typology of human settlements is shaped, among others, by their political-administrative function. Its distinctive place is determined by subjective factors, such as the political-administrative decisions, which have changed the course of some settlements to the benefit of others, or reverted them from their normal, natural evolution. That means outside involvement in space organization to the detriment of self-organization, the latter being the outcome of the permanent tendency of territorial systems to rebalance from exogenous factors-induced dysfunctions. Lately, the country's territorial-administrative organization has been steadily challenged years over the past few based either on the 1925 administrative map, or on the disparities in the structure of the present counties and the economic and social fluxes going on at the local level of the settlements system. In view of the above, we have attempted to work out an optimal model for the administrative organization of Romania's territory by proceeding from the distance between communal seats and the town towards which they gravitate. The latter's capacity for discharging an administrative function, and the relations of subordination or competition amongst these towns in also discussed.

Key words: Political-administrative function, Human settlements, Territorial-administrative organization, Romania.

Human settlements and the organization of the geographical areas

Among the hierarchies that determine the functional typologies of human settlements, a special place is given to the political-administrative one. Regardless of its function, be it industrial, commercial, tourism or military, a settlement is the product of the *natural environment* it is located in, which has conditioned its development through a series of restrictive or incentive factors (geographical position, natural resources, labour force, etc.). On the other hand, in the case of settlements that gained a political – administrative function, the determinant factor that shaped their development trajectory either naturally

or contrary to their normal course, is a *subjective* one and it is represented by the decision – making bodies of that territory.

At a macro-territorial level, the administrative decisions resulted in a *territorial-administrative organization* that can be consistent with the reality on the field or, on the contrary, the result of a series on subjective, arbitrary factors. The placement of an industrial objective associated with the industrial exploitation of the resources from an area represents the main vector that accompanies the political-administrative decisions. The administrative units grow from being local communities bound together based on historical affinities due to the complementary attributes of their natural potential and the type of traditional economy, of shared cultural and spiritual heritage to becoming units of industrial development or

*Corresponding author:

Email: radusageata@yahoo.com

centres for exploiting the local natural resources. The administrative centres develop in a hypertrophic manner due to the migratory stock; thus giving birth to inequalities in the insertion of newly arrivals which lead to marginal social phenomena; industrial cities are formed (particularly socialist ones) with their specific architecture and attributes, and in the rural areas the collectivization and systematization undermines the traditional social and production system, emphasizing migration towards the larger cities. These are phenomena that profoundly marked the Romanian territory and whose consequences both at a territorial and psychological level are difficult to eliminate. New macro spatial links were created between human settlements as well as new areas of influence and polarization, which were many times artificially amplified by changing the administrative status of some settlements.

With the exception of smaller states, which are made out of only one human settlement and whose territory isn't larger than a few kilometres (Vatican, Monaco) each state is made out of a certain number of human settlements which constitute polarization nuclei for the neighbouring rural areas. This results in centres where these flows converge represented by human settlements and areas where the flows diverge (peripheral) that form areas of discontinuity. These flows make for a state's territory more or less homogenous to be crossed by a series of borders that divide it into a series of subdivisions. A territorial *functional organization* is thus sketched that corresponds to the functional homogeneity of the social areas and has a dynamic, transitory character determined by the evolution of the human settlements. On the other hand, the necessity of exercising centralized government over the entire territory of the state demands a *political-administrative organization* so that there are no privileged areas with extra-constitutional attributions (Figure 1).

As a result, the territorial organization is the result of two categories of processes: ones based on *volunteering*, that result from the impact of the political – administrative decisions and those based on *self-organizing*

derived from the permanent tendency of the territorial systems to rebalance themselves according to the inequalities produced by the exogenous factors. In this network of interactions, the human settlements play an important role as they constitute structural nuclei for the adjacent areas.

The functional organization of a territory is based on complex genetic and evolutionary processes of the social areas that first materialize in the apparition of new types relationships between the pre-existing human settlements, after which this process spreads onto a given area. In time, the social, cultural, economic relations territorialize as they are associated with an entire machinery of institutions, forms, symbols, expressions and languages, etc. Thus *mono-ethnic* and/or *mono-cultural* areas appear where the inhabitants have a strong sense of belonging to that space (also known as “local patriotism”) and have a powerful resistance to change. These are nonetheless the most coherent regional structures that have proven their unity and viability over time. On the other hand the areas formed solely on economic and political grounds or based on the homogeneity of the human and natural potential have a lower emotional content.

The influence of the political factor in organizing geographical areas the concept of territorial - administrative organization

The intervention of the political factor is bound to these organization patterns. The authoritarian and dictatorial governments will try to create administrative structures that have a political orientation and thus cannot become strongholds for the opposition but they will manipulate the supporting areas. They will avoid aggregating territories that have strong historic traditions or contain social groups bound together by the feeling of belonging to a certain community, looking for separating these entities through administrative borders (Helin, 1967). On the contrary, the democratic political systems shape their administrative territorial units

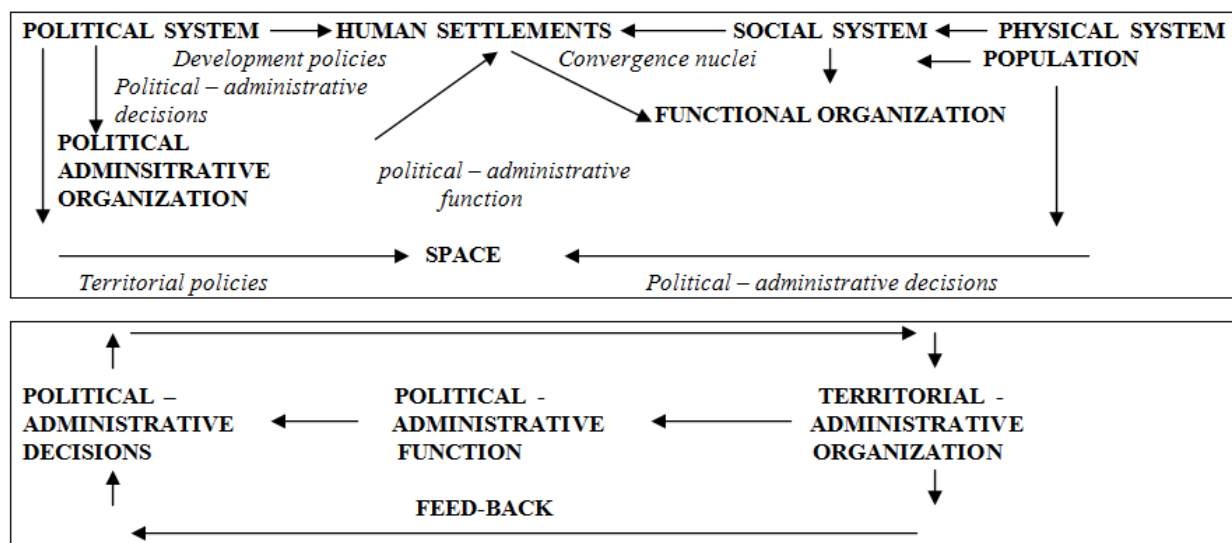


Figure 1. The role of human settlements in organizing the geographical territory

according to the cultural groups that were crystallized over a long process of historical evolution. That's why major political changes, alternations between democratic and authoritarian governments lead in many cases to changes of the territorial-administrative organization the same way the administrative units shaped after economic criteria are tributary to economic changes. History proved that, in general as well as in Romania's case, these types of structures are short lived: the interwar regions lasted as long as King Carol IInd ruled, while organizing the country's territory into regions and districts with double standard (economical and political) disappeared with the soviet influence. In the case of the bureaucratic governments the ideal type of organization is made out of structures that have roughly the same surface, population and manner of administrative organization and proficiency. A well administrated system made out of homogenous divisions creates the perfect environment for the locally implemented central government (Helin, 1967).

The territorial – administrative organization as a form of social-political regionalization is a consequence and in the same times a premises for the social-economic development of a country. Transforming a geographical area into a territory by making it the possession of that community's members is the base for any administrative-territorial organization.

By *administrative – territorial organization* we refer to the division on a territory into administrative units in order to establish the bodies for central government at a territorial level with the purpose of implementing efficiently and homogenously the general and local tasks onto the entire state. In the same time, the *administrative – territorial units* are portions of a state's territory limited by normative laws in which the authority that governs upon the social-economic activity is exercised by an administrative institution that is subordinated to the central power. The degree of subordination is regulated by the Constitution and is express through *administrative tutelage*. Its aim is to protect the state's public interests and uphold the law, its presence constitutes the main distinction between the unitary state that acknowledges local autonomy and the federal state where the tutelage institution is unconceivable for the relations between the federation and its components (Popescu, 1999). The administrative – territorial organization represents a method through which the political-administrative decisions are reflected in the territory as it is an expression of political aspects being promoted at a central level.

The concept of *administrative – territorial unit* has two distinct meanings:

- **Territorial**, that of an *administrative constituency of a state*, that expresses the area in which the bodies of the central government exert their influence. This meaning only

considers the policy of administrative demobilization, as the administrative – territorial unit is seen merely as a portion of the state's territory;

- **Human**, as a *local territorial community*, respectively the entire population that lives on a certain area of the state's territory and have their own distinct local public interests that are expressed through a judicial and administrative organization.

Unlike the above mentioned concepts, the *political-administrative function* refers to human settlements, and namely those that host institutions of central or local administration (mayoralities, prefectures, branches of political parties, headquarters of development agencies, etc.) through which the central or local government exercises their attributions in territory. The relation between the political and the administrative is emphasised by the structure of the state itself: the role of the political factor is vital in federal states, whose authority is transferred at a local level while in states that have a centralized structure based on delegation of authority the role of coordinating local centres is mostly administrative.

Hence, the *political-administrative* units are forms of administrations within a federal state (states, provinces, territories, etc.), unlike the *administrative* ones that correspond to a unitary state whose territory is established through a Constitution as indivisible. Such is the case of Romania.

The main characteristic of the political – administrative function is given by the presence and particularities of the political system. In authoritarian political systems, based on centralized and arbitrary decisions making processes, the dynamic of the units that have this function and respectively the areas under their influence is dictated by the political factors; in democratic systems, where the political decisions are motivated by the territory's functionality, the role of local communities is more prominent and these settlements have a natural dynamic conditioned by the physical and social-economic environment.

The structuring of the Romanian administrative system on two levels lead to the apparition of two types of settlements with

administrative role: county residential seats and rural residential seats and cities/municipalities on which other settlements depend administratively (that take the form of constituting localities or villages that belong to a municipality/city). In addition to all these, the Capital represents the main coordinating centre that subordinates the entire national administrative system.

The political-administrative decision – making bodies aimed that in time they would achieve a better leadership of the state and social life by a more appropriate territorial organization. That is the reason why history registers administrative organizations and reorganizations that reflect the social development degree at any given date. During a first phase of its evolution, the political – administrative organization had a military character, the administrative centres were also important military bases, departure points for campaigns for conquering and exploring the adjacent areas. Over time, when states were established the military aspect was doubled by the administrative one, first exploring (appointing imposts, tributes, taxes, income taxes, limiting properties) and then looking for better and more efficiently administrating the territory. The political character was added as well as the legislative and the socio-economic one after the two Principalities were united (Figure 2).

The Romanian administrative – territorial system between 1918 and the 1968 administrative reform

The formation of the Romanian unitary state at December 1st 1918 brought together 4 different administrative regions that inherited administrative features dating from the medieval period that evolved under different historical and political factors: the administrative regime of the *Old Romanian Kingdom* (established by the *Law for the County Councils* from April 2nd 1894); The Administrative Regime of Transylvania (established through the No. 3632 *Decree for introducing public services in Transylvania*

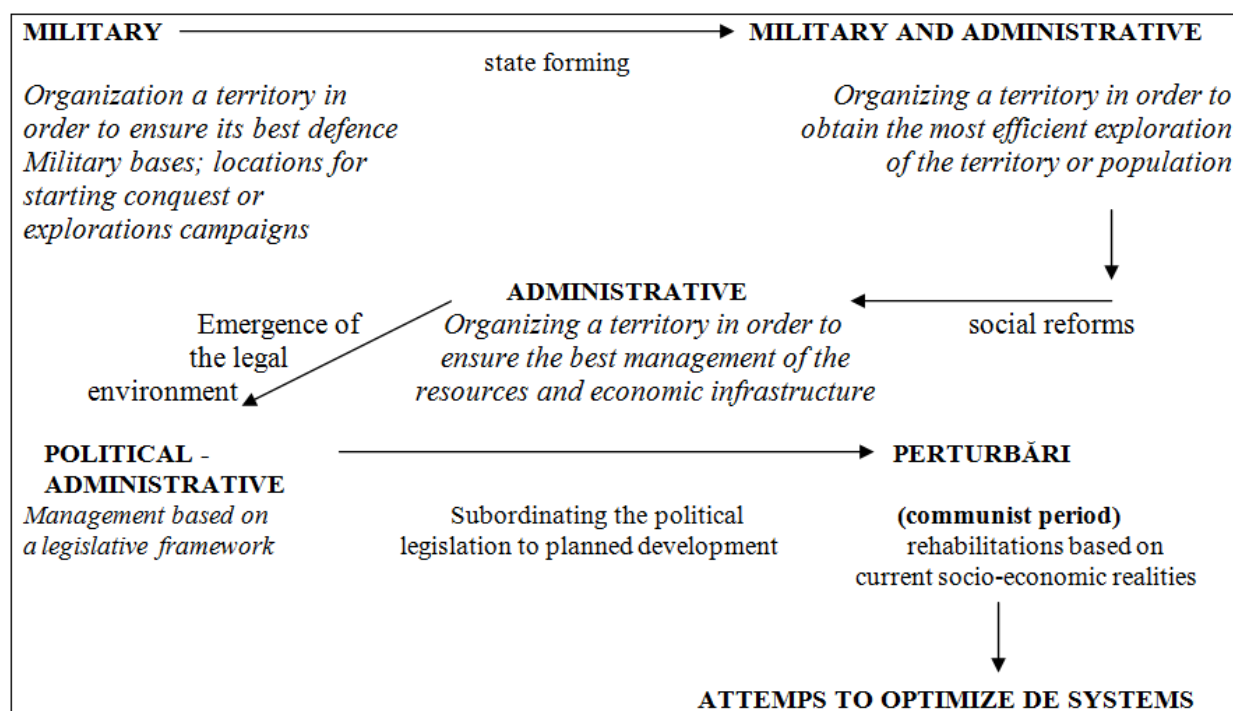


Figure 2. The evolution of the administrative – territorial organization concept

from December 11th 1918); the Administrative Regime of Basarabia (established through the No. 852 Decree for introducing public services in Basarabia from April 9th 1918) and the administrative Regime of Bucovina (established through the No. 3 715 Decree for administrating Bucovina from December 19th 1918).

Because they were set up under different systems and political and economical circumstances the 4 administrative regions had specific characteristics and thus introduced inequalities into the overall system in matters of demographic and territorial size, shape and position of the county seats within the county and degree of accessibility. Thus, as far as area goes the counties in Bucovina were 7 to 10 times smaller than the neighbouring counties in Basarabia or some counties from Transylvania or Banat (Caraș-Severin, Hunedoara, Bihor, Arad, Timiș - Torontal); even in the Old Kingdom there were significant differences between the former Moldavian counties and some counties from Muntenia, Oltenia or Dobrogea while the administrative organization of Transylvania based on ethnical criteria also had large discrepancies.

The prefects and the administrative bodies had different tasks at hand: if the ones from counties such as Bihor or Caraș-Severin had to manage a population larger than 450.000 inhabitants, those from counties in Bucovina managed a population that was ten times smaller (Vășcăuți – 25.000 inhabitants) which is the equivalent to a middle ranged town lead by a mayor. To all these we have to add the big differences concerning the communication network that limited the degree of accessibility in some peripheral areas of some counties. If normally the larger counties should have had a better transportation infrastructure that would ensure a more fluent circulation and better administration and contrary to this the situations where the railway networks were missing or had a smaller density the counties should have been smaller, the reality was exactly opposite: Basarabia had very large counties although it had a poor transportation network while in Bucovina where the road and railway networks were very well developed the counties were very small (Meruțiu, 1929, p. 192-193). If Basarabia would have been organized based on the size of the counties in Bucovina it should have had 9 counties not 49! In addition,

some counties (Cojocna, Turda - Arieș, Suceava and Tecuci) had a strong elongated shape that didn't correspond to the main transportation axis which considerably diminished the efficiency of the administrative organs in exercising their attribution in the bordering areas with a smaller accessibility degree. Some county seats (Râmnicu Vâlcea, Pitești etc.), were situated very close to the border of the administrative structures they belonged to. The rural areas that were not polarized or poorly polarized due to the fact that they were situated on the opposite side on the county than the county seats tended to gravitate towards the county seats from the neighbouring counties. The configuration of the transportation network amplified these dysfunctions so that travelling from the peripheral areas of the county towards their residencies became very difficult.

Despite all this, the long period of time in which Romanians cohabitated with other nationalities in territories managed by different imperial capitals resulted in this population having different opinions regarding administration then the centralist trends promoted in the Old Kingdom. As a consequence, the political class, representatives of national minorities and Romanians living in Transylvania, Basarabia, Bucovina and Cadrilater sustained that the best environment in which one would obtain national cohesion and a tolerant climate between the majority population and the minorities would be a decentralized administrative structure that would allow inhabitants from different parts of the country to keep their old institutions that distinguished their culture and traditions from the ones in neighbouring regions. They considered that a true unity could not be obtain by ignoring the differences between parts of the national territory that evolved under different political systems or by trying to equalize all existing systems because the main purpose of a government is to ensure the national unity through diversity.

This differentiated legacy reflected in the first administrative map of the Large Romania (Figure 3) through which heterogenic administrative-territorial structure that were

formed and evolved under different political-administrative systems were associated. This is why in the interwar period almost all the important political parties and the elite representative of the scientific domain drew up projects that dealt with administrative unification; some of those were oriented towards creating a centralized system, others were based on an administrative regionalism founded on decentralization and local autonomy. This desideratum was officialised through the *Law for administrative unification from 1925* which established that Romania's territory would be divided into 71 counties (Figure 4), as a result of the disappearance by unification of 6 counties in Bucovina (Cotmani, Gura Humorului, Siret, Vășcăuți, Vijnița and Zastavna) and partition of Caraș - Severin County in two: Caraș and Severin. In the same time the borders of some counties particularly from Transylvania, Basarabia and Cadrilater were readjusted and the eastern part of the Torontal County that had mainly Romanian population was included in Timiș County.

Although somewhat diminished, the contrasts were still strong both from a *demographic* perspective (while Ilfov County, due to its proximity to the Capital has almost one million inhabitants and other counties like Timiș, Bihor, Prahova or Dolj had over 500.000 inhabitants other counties didn't even reach the 100.000 inhabitants level: Făgăraș - 86.461, Câmpulung - 95.174), as well as a *territorial* perspective (between 1.309 km² - Suceava County and 8.626 km² - Timiș County). In the same time the imbalances produced by the eccentrically position of the county seats from some counties (Râmnicu Vâlcea, Slatina, Pitești, Miercurea Ciuc or Turnu Măgurele) were maintained by keeping the county's configuration and in the newly established Severin County the county seat was set at Lugoj, very close to the north-western border that gave for a poor gravitation of the rural areas from the southern part of the county (the Danube clisura) towards Drobeta-Turnu Severin (called Turnu Severin until 1972).

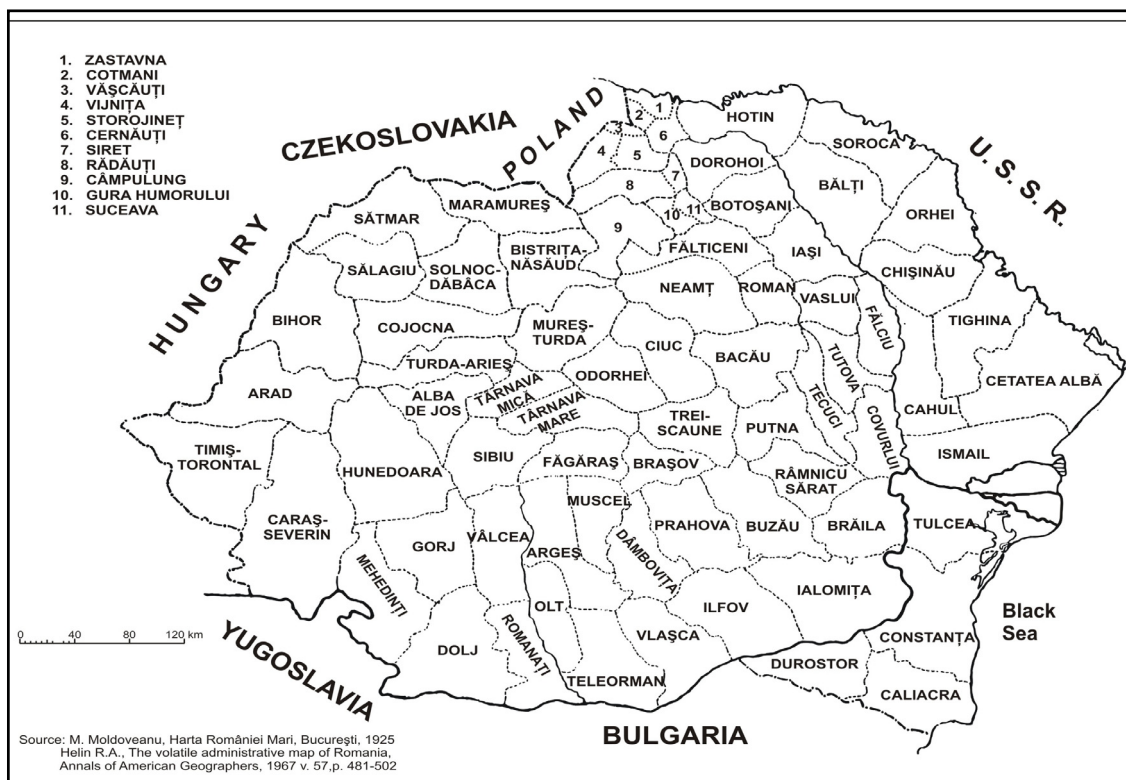


Figure 3. Romania's counties between 1918 and 1925



Figure 4. Romania's counties between 1925 and 1950

Considerable differences existed as far as the human settlements structure and configuration, urbanization degree, infrastructure etc., went. For example counties such as Prahova, Constanța, Hunedoara, Putna, Dorohoi, Vâlcea or Tulcea had well established urban systems that included 5 to 7 cities, while other 25 counties didn't have their own urban system as the county seat was practically their only city. Most of these counties registered a small percentage of urban population; a strong emphasis fell on the counties from Basarabia Hotin (3.9%), Soroca (4.7%), Orhei (5.5%) and Bălți (7.9%).

The demographic size of some county seats (Făgăraș – 7.841 inhabitants, Odorheiu Secuiesc – 8 518 inhabitants or Slatina – 11.243 inhabitants in 1930), made it impossible for them to take on the task of first rank polarizing centre for an administrative unit as large as a county especially if they were the only urban dwelling from that respective administrative unit. This inconvenient was resolved in a certain degree by delegating some administrative functions towards rural settlements that functioned as central units and whose role were confirmed by electing them as a residential *plasă* (*plasă* – administrative unit, plural *plase*, according to the *Romanian Dictionary*, Academia Română, Institutul de lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan”, Edit. Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1996, page 803).

At the opposite end there were counties like Ilfov or Covurlui that although having a single city, had an urban population percentage of around and above 50%, or counties whose urban system was very well developed both quantitatively and qualitatively (counties such as Prahova or Constanța).

The existence of a large number of counties whose area, economic potential, demographic potential and number of first rank administrative-territorial units are different, compelled their association in order to create the optimal environment for a better collaboration in executing, constituting or maintaining social, economic or cultural institutions or works. Therefore the association didn't imply a territorial merging but creating a judicial and institutional

framework that would achieve a series of well determined objectives. This process materialized in the interwar period by the successive forming of administrative structures at a macro-regional level that resulted through aggregation of counties: *ministerial directories* (1929-1931) and *lands* (1938-1940).

When, in March 6th 1945, the first pro-soviet communist political party came to power ample mutations of the administrative – territorial organization of the country took place. They didn't, however, constitute an immediate priority as the 1948 constitution kept the former classifications of *communes*, *plase* and *counties*. The political subordination of the territorial – administrative structures became a reality only in September 8th 1950 when the No. 5 Law enacted that the country's territory should be organized in 28 *regions*, and, according to the soviet model, in *districts* (177) and *communes* (4.052). These were not classified after geographical or historical criteria as in 1929, but only considering their 'social-economic complexity', the only units that met this criteria were those that 'directly supported the state's central organs in fulfilling state or party policies' (Oroveanu, 1986, p. 211). Their configuration didn't resemble at all the former counties as their delimitation was mostly based on natural borders like for example the Danube or the Carpathians (Figure 5)

Constituting administrative units two times larger than the former counties was based on the idea that the agricultural regions would be subordinated to the larger urban centres by realizing an integrated agro-industrial complex and thus reinforcing the proletariat's influence over the peasantry which was reluctant to accept the 'reform' imposed by the communist political class. The naming of the newly established units was depersonalized as in many cases the name of the county seat was used as the name of the county. On the other hand, creating large administrative divisions instead of the 58 counties lead to a considerable diminishing of the numbers of administrative centres and thus orienting the investments mainly towards them.

The 28 regions were delimited on economic criteria, after the soviet *oblasts* (soviet administrative unit) but they soon proved to be

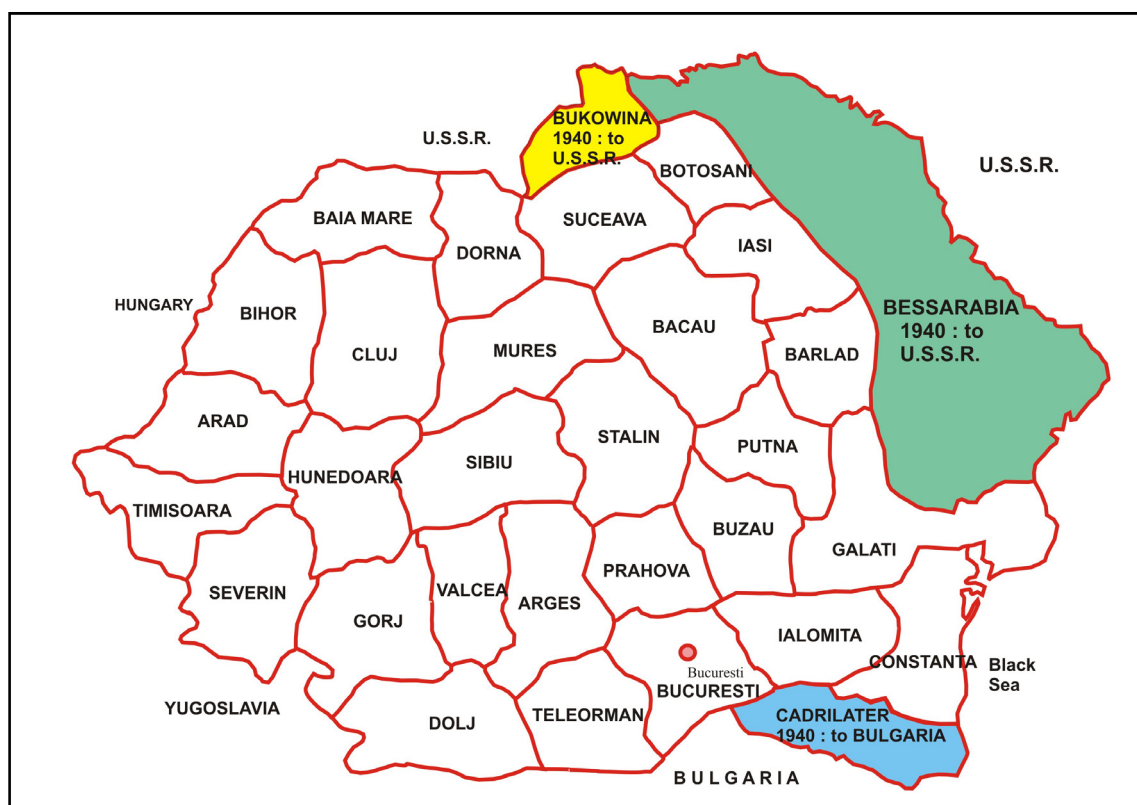


Figure 5. Romania's administrative regions (1950-1952)

a much too fragmented structure, incapable of coping with the political requirements of that time. They weren't able to survive the September 24th 1952 Constitution which, more than its predecessor from 1948, copied the soviet model. Thus, 12 regions (Botoșani, Buzău, Dolj, Gorj, Ialomița, Mureș, Putna, Rodna, Severin, Sibiu, Teleorman and Vâlcea) disappeared by different processes of unification, two new regions were formed: Craiova by merging Dolj and Gorj regions and The Hungarian Autonomous Region following the model of the Russian *oblast* by unifying the territories inhabited by Székely from Covasna, Harghita and Mureș. Pitești region was formed by uniting Argeș and Vâlcea regions; Severin was formed out of Prahova and Buzău regions; Putna was included in Bârlad region etc. Some of the consequences included the fact that the new regions were considerably large and the disappearance from the administrative map of some old Romanian names that had been in the collective consciousness for centuries and their depersonalization by replacing the region's name with the name of the county seat or 'imported' names (Stalin) (Figure 6)

These new regions didn't prove to be large

enough, because four years later, in 1956, two more regions were dissolved: Arad and Bârlad. In the same time some modifications were brought to the old configurations by moving some districts from one region to another (Figure 7).

After the retreat of the soviet troops from Romania in 1958 and as a result of the politics led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej that praised national values, the old national denominations reappeared on the country's administrative map. The transition was thus made from a *soviet communist stage*, characterized by a Stalinist uniformity and rejection of the past due to its 'bourgeois' features, to a *nationalist communist stage* where the past was respected due to its national content thus rejecting the Russian-soviet cultural model of Stalinist inspiration. This led in 1960 to a new administrative reform that modified once again the structure and configuration of the 16 regions, as a result of eliminating some of them or moving some districts from one region to another (Figure 8).

During 1960 and 1968 the administrative organization into regions and districts was

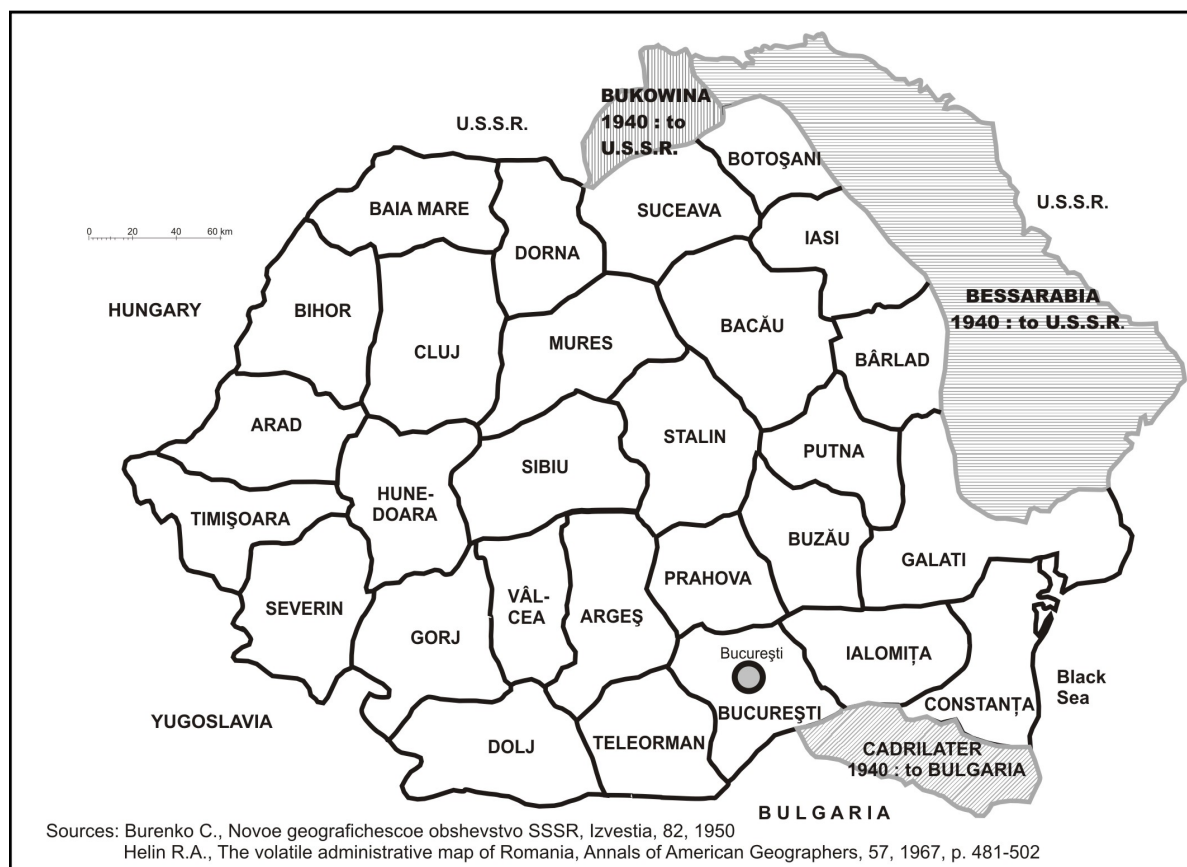


Figure 6. Romania's administrative regions (1952-1956)



Figure 7: Romania's administrative regions (1956-1960)

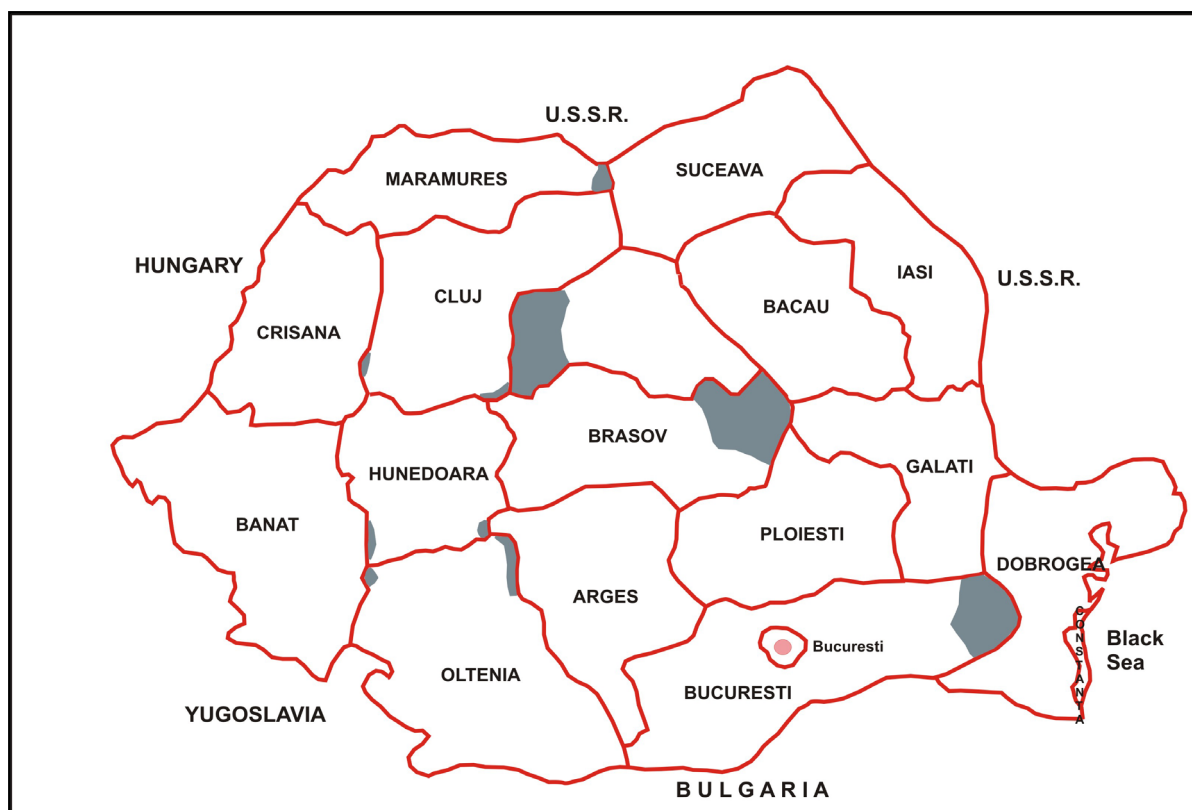


Figure 8. Romania's administrative regions (1960-1968)

considering a series of concrete features of the Romanian territory like the traditional relationships between its regions but only their most efficient subordination to the central political authorities lead to repetitive 'administrative readjustments' of a nonviable structure. This situation was artificially maintained as a result of the sovietisation of the entire cultural, economic and social life due to the presence of the Red Army troops on Romanian soil. The political events that marked the former Communist Block between the VI and VII decades, mainly materialized by social tumultuous in Hungary (1956), then Czechoslovakia ('The Spring from Prague' in 1968), correlated with the retreat of the soviet army from Romania (1958) all contributed to Bucharest's politics distancing itself from Moscow and its orientation towards national values.

In this context the premises for a new administrative – territorial organization of the country were created and it became effective in February 17th 1986 when the law for the administrative organization of R.S.Romania's territory was applied; it established that the national territory would be organized based on

two categories: the county as a superior level respectively the city and the commune as an inferior level. The counties (39) were constituted based on the ones existing in the interwar period inspired by the French departmental model. While the regions created in 1950 were based on the *principle of homogeneity* of the economic potential, the new counties aimed to be *functional structures* whose territory included several types of geographical units with varied resources and potential that generated *economic complementarities* (Argeș, Dâmbovița, Buzău, Prahova, Vrancea, Gorj, Bihor, Timiș, Maramureș, Satu Mare etc.). Even the counties with an apparently uniform relief like for example the ones situated in areas with plains had a variety of microforms given by the association of meadows and the two lakes the Danube formed, that would, at least theoretically give a differentiated structure and potential (Stahl, 1969, p. 17).

As far as surface was concern the counties didn't vary as much as they used to (the extreme counties were Timiș and Covasna with 2.37 and respectively 6.6 and the administrative organization from 1925), but the number of constituting communes was

quite different from one county to another: 33 communes in Covasna County compared to 125 communes in Ilfov County. The extreme dimension of Ilfov County was thought reasonable as it constituted a polarizing area for the Capital city but proved to be unviable as it was reorganized in 1981 (Figure 9).

The administrative function was given to smaller urban centres, with a weaker economic development, based on their central feature, and afterwards investments were made into these settlements in order to justify their role as coordinating centres and polarizing nuclei for the settlements systems constituted at a county level. This is the case of Vaslui, chosen as an administrative centre instead of Bârlad, Slobozia instead of Călăraşi or Alexandria instead of Turnu Măgurele. Although chosen as county seats they only became municipalities in 1979. On the other hand this set of measurements generated other inequalities: apart from a stagnant even

regressive dynamic of the urban centres that didn't earn back their administrative function, other imbalances appeared at a macro-territorial level. For example by choosing as county seat Vaslui the polarizing area of Bârlad was considerably reduced and the settlements from the northern part of Galaţi County gravitated towards Galaţi even if it was further away.

The lack of important administrative decisions between 1968 and 1988 led to the accumulation of tensions in the relationships between the settlements that appeared when the urban network was enlarged, in the beginning of 1989, with 23 cities, mostly having an agro-industrial function situated in areas poorly polarized and with a strong ruralisation degree and in counties that didn't have a proper urban network. The same law dictated that the sub-urban communes that were arbitrarily included in the urban area became rural communes.



Figure 9. Romania. Current territorial – administrative map

The 1968 territorial – administrative organization had a disruptive effect on the national urban system especially by orienting investments towards the new administrative centres regardless of their being economically justified or not. The effect of this policy that promoted an egalitarian development was an increased industrialization and a rapid demographic increase in medium or even small urban centres underdeveloped in terms of social-economic infrastructure, at the expense of more developed ones. The result consisted in modified migratory flows, which led to a strong decrease in the population number from adjacent rural areas, along with their demographic aging, which greatly contributed to an increasing 'dependence' of rural areas on urban ones. The cities that lost their administrative function were the ones that had the most to suffer, as they dropped down considerably on the urban hierarchy (Oravița, Huși, Rădăuți, Sighetu Marmăției etc.). This modified the relationships between the newly promoted county seats and the former towns holding this function in the sense of transforming the subordinating relationships into competition ones (in cases when at the moment when the county was formed its county seat was the second town in the county urban hierarchy) or by accentuating the subordination status in cases where former county seats with lower positions on the national urban hierarchy were included in counties coordinated by a large urban centre with macro territorial functions. The first category could include the following pairs of towns: Vaslui - Bârlad (from the current Vaslui County); Miercurea Ciuc - Odorheiu Secuiesc (Harghita County); Slatina - Caracal (Olt County) and Alexandria - Turnu Măgurele (Teleorman County), and in the latter one Suceava - Câmpulung Moldovenesc - Fălticeni - Rădăuți, Galați - Tecuci, Vaslui - Huși, Botoșani - Dorohoi, Alba Iulia - Blaj, Timișoara - Lugoj and Cluj - Dej – Turda etc. (Table 1).

The evolution of the Romanian urban system in the last 50 years gave birth to ample mutations as far as relationships among human settlements went, by preferentially orienting investments towards certain urban centres (in a first phase towards the county seats and after 1968 towards the newly

appointed county seats), which contributed to a resizing of the urban influencing areas. At a macro-territorial level, in order to simplify the implementation of the regional development policies, it was necessary that the adjacent administrative units with similar social-economic profiles would be identify and grouped into historic provinces that were well individualized due to their common traditions, social-economic complementarity and cultural and spiritual heritage. Their functionality is projected in the inhabitants' psychology; the region thus becomes a *mental space*, the space to which the inhabitants report to for their identity, of the communion between man and his/hers environment, fundamental element for the durability of any spatial structure.

This is why the current article proposes the establishment of an administrative structuring of Romania's territory based on a regional system, going from the historical provinces, that correspond to well established mental spaces, with specific functional relations (infrastructure and human systems of interaction) whose role should be amplified. The departmental level (county) should be the medium one; in some cases a sub-departmental one similar to the interwar 'plase' and the inferior level should be communal (communes, villages, cities and county seats) the role of the development regions should remain strictly statistic-territorial and not administrative. Clear hierarchical relations will be established between these levels and they will either be of service decentralization or demobilization:

- *decentralization*: between the national and regional ones, departmental (services decentralization) and local (when possible the principal of subsidiary will be applied);
- *demobilization*: for the relations between the departmental level and the inferior ones (sub-departmental and communal ones).

In order to establish the configuration of the proposed administrative collage three distinct stages have to be covered:

- I. Identification of the regional and local converging centres capable of being invested with administrative function, on hierarchical levels, based on their polarizing potential. Evaluating the polarizing potential was done

Table 1: The current administrative – territorial organization. SWOT analysis

<p>A. STRONG POINTS</p> <p>A.1. Considering the political-economic situation from that period, the 1968 administrative – territorial organization was correcting a series of imbalances that appeared in the relationships between certain settlements and it foreseen the emergence of some urban systems of departmental level with a smaller surface based on the coordinating function of a county seat; A.2. By multiplying the number of administrative units of superior rank, the administrative collage implemented in 1968 acknowledged the comeback in a certain degree of some counties from the interwar period which were considered viable according to the traditions and specifics of the Romanian administrative system; A.3. The decrease in the number of administrative levels by going from a regional system to a departmental one was motivated by the reduction in bureaucracy justified in a local autonomy which was purely formal where local administrative organs were entirely subordinated to the politics of the central commandments; A.4. The 1968 county configurations corrected some shortcomings of the old counties from the interwar period as the new ones were more balanced as far as shape, area or population are concerned. When the current counties were constituted one of the factors that were considered was the fact that the variety of relief forms translated into different types of potential which completed each other.</p>	<p>B. WEAK POINTS</p> <p>B.1. The decrease in the number of counties compared to the interwar administrative system lead to a socio-economic recoil of the towns that used to be county seats and lost that status. This materialized into a loss of the polarizing area in favour of the current county seats which most often developed in a hypertrophic manner. From an administrative point of view, the government tended to correct this situation by investing the 'municipal' status to some towns that were county seats: Călărași, Odorheiu Secuiesc, Sighișoara, Mediaș, Sighetu Marmației, Dej, Turda, Tecuci, Roman etc.; B.2. The differentiated dynamic of these towns imposed by the change of administrative status determined changes in the inter-urban relations either by transforming the subordinating relations into competition ones (when the former county seat was better placed in the urban hierarchy than another departmental polarizing centre), or by accentuating the subordination relations (when the former county seat was placed on a lower hierarchical level); B.3. The development in a hypertrophic manner of the new county seats by attracting massive industrial investments generated strong migratory flows from the rural areas, with negative consequences both on the rural patrimony (depopulation, demographic aging) and their insertion in the urban environment (the increase of marginal social phenomena, the decrease on the quality of the built – in environment, etc.).</p>
<p>C. OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>C.1. The 1968 administrative organization, through the new territorial structures, created the premises for the development of the urban system by declaring 49 large communes into cities and in the same time local polarizing centres. This decision was essentially political as increasing the urban population was seen as an indicator for increasing the living conditions. Through this edict the urban systems for each county started to form; C.2. Going from a regional administrative system to a departmental one was necessary in order to decentralize the system and reduce bureaucracy and it overlapped with the administrative systems of most of the CAER states and ensured their being able to work together.</p>	<p>D. POSSIBLE ISSUES</p> <p>D.1. Going from a centralized economic system to an economy based on open competition created the premises for the reorientation and the re-dimensioning of the flows circulating between human settlements which reverberated in the relations that occurred among them as well especially in the case of the regional and local polarizing nuclei. Under these conditions the administrative structures formed based on the 1968 social – administrative situation would have been unviable and it needed to be corrected according to the contemporary evolution; D.2. The administrative – territorial organization at that time was characterized by an increased fragmentation both at a departmental and communal level, and the tendency was towards accentuating it by going back to the interwar administrative structures which didn't follow the general trend of the European scene of constituting powerful regional administrative units capable of being invested with real local autonomy. Thus the necessity of establishing a regional administrative system, by constituting a superior level administrative hierarchy, of regional level macro-territorial structures (NUTS 2), build on polarizing centres with regional functions.</p>

based on three categories of potential: demographic, economic and location. The selection was made based on historic records and their present location in the urban system and thus four samples were chosen (E_1 - E_4) (Figure 10):

- E_1 – former county seats between 1950 and 1968, excluding cities that lost this status between 1952 and 1956. This is the category of the urban centres that had through the entire XX century the role of a first rank administrative centre;
- E_2 - current residential seats, which were invested or reinvested with this status through the 1968 administrative reorganization. Most of them were administrative centres in the interwar period as well, some of them regional seats between 1950 and 1952 and even between 1952 and 1956 (Arad and Bârlad). All of them lost the status of regional or departmental administrative centre which had a negative

impact on the socio-economic dynamic;

- E_3 – former county seats between 1925 and 1950 that didn't received this status afterwards. For most of them this resulted into a stagnant dynamic, even a regressive one, in spite of the rehabilitation tries that were made by investing them with the municipality status and / or preferentially locating industrial investments, which determined imbalances in the respective urban ecosystems;

- E_4 – potential administrative centres, cities whom the current potential could allow them to officialise from an administrative perspective as well their local convergence centre. They are generally urban centres with more than 30.000 inhabitants that become, with a few exceptions, municipalities after 1990 and that due to their location potential (in depressions, in areas which are mostly rural and have a low accessibility degree - Sulina, Calafat, Brad, Vatra Dornei, Urziceni etc.) they can

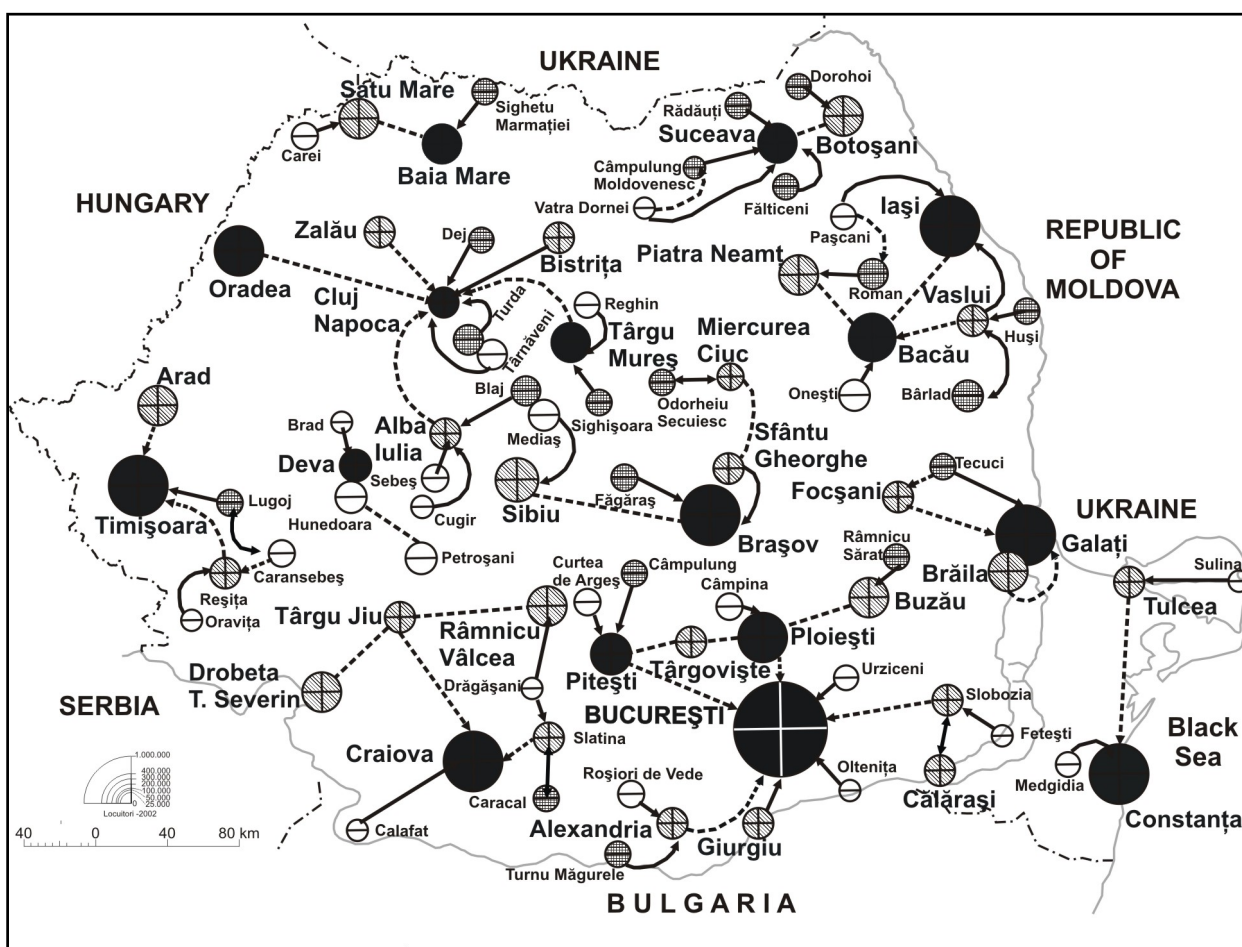


Figure 10. Regional converging centres capable of being invested with political - administrative function and their inter-relations

constitute polarizing nuclei for large areas. The urban centres that have a restrictive location potential, located near a regional or local polarizing centres (Mangalia, Câmpia Turzii, Aiud, Orăştie, Năvodari and Mioveni) were eliminated from this category (Table 2).

II. Establishing the polarizing areas of the selected urban centres, based on the travelling distances between them and the adjacent settlements. When connections between settlements can be achieved through multiple routes, the distances on the superior access roads were considered. The natural favourable factors and restrictions (configuration of the relief and the hydrographical network) that determine the configuration of the communication network were also indirectly accounted for.

Depending on the distance to the polarizing urban nuclei, the polarizing administrative units were grouped in several categories:

- Situated in the immediate vicinity of the polarizing urban centre (less than 10 km away),

most of them being former suburban communes;

- Administrative units intensely polarized (less than 25 km away from the polarizing urban centre), with the polarizing degree depending on its polarizing potential;

- Administrative units with a medium polarizing degree (between 25 and 50 km away from the polarizing centre). Most of the rural settlements and small towns enter in this category and from among them secondary local polarizing nuclei appear;

- Poorly polarized administrative units situated more than 50 km away from a polarizing urban nucleus, which define profoundly rural areas with diffused polarization.

There were thus individualized 14 areas with diffused polarization in regard to the potential administrative centres: Brăila Plain, Măcin Mountains and Casimcea Plateau, South Dobrogea (south of Casimcea Valley), the part of the Bărăgan situated in Ialomița County, the Găvanu – Burdea Plain, the south and west of

Table 2: Regional converging centres capable of being invested with administrative function

E ₁	E ₂	E ₃	E ₄
Bacău	Alba Iulia	Bârlad	Brad
Baia Mare	Arad	Blaj	Calafat
Braşov	Alexandria	Caracal	Caransebeş
Bucureşti	Bistriţa	Câmpulung	Carei
Constanţa	Botoşani	Câmpulung	Câmpina
Craiova	Brăila	Moldovenesc	Cugir
Cluj-Napoca	Buzău	Dej	Curtea de Argeş
Galaţi	Călăraşi	Dorohoi	Drăgăşani
Deva	Focşani	Făgăraş	Feteşti
Iaşi	Giurgiu	Fălticeni	Hunedoara
Oradea	Miercurea Ciuc	Huşi	Medgidia
Piteşti	Piatra Neamţ	Lugoj	Mediaş
Ploieşti	Reşiţa	Odorheiu Secuiesc	Olteniţa
Suceava	Râmnicu Vâlcea	Roman	Oneşti
Târgu Mureş	Satu Mare	Rădăuţi	Paşcani
Timişoara	Sibiu	Râmnicu Sărat	Petroşani
	Sfântu Gheorghe	Sighişoara	Reghin
	Slobozia	Sighetu Marmaţiei	Roşiori de Vede
	Slatina	Turda	Sulina
	Târgovişte	Tecuci	Târnăveni
	Târgu Jiu	Turnu Măgurele	Urziceni
	Drobeta – Turnu		Vatra Dornei
	Severin		
	Tulcea		
	Vaslui		
	Zalău		

the Oltenia Plain and the Getic Plateau, Locvei and Almăj Mountain, west and south of the Timiș Plain, Apuseni Mountains and Crișurilor Plain, northern half of the Orientali Mountains, eastern and southern half of the Moldovei Plain, Tutova Hills and the western part of the Central Moldavian Plateau, Curburii Carpathians and Subcarpathians, Covurlui Plateau and Plain. In order to realize an evaluation of the influence area of the potential administrative centres that would respect reality as much as possible, the collage resulted based on the road distances was correlated with the accessibility degree to the railway network.

Due to the fact that some of the selected cities as potential administrative centre are situated in peripheral areas of the actual counties (especially from the E_3 and E_4 samples), their influence areas transcend the limits of the current administrative structures. Apart from all these, the percentage of the intra-county

polarizing nuclei is slightly the same with the inter-county polarizing nuclei.

III. The quantification of the existing relations between the urban centres considered viable for being invested with administrative function (samples $E_1 - E_4$). Three types of relations were individualized: subordination, competition and indifference, based on which the territorial structures resulted from their polarizing areas were hierarchically organized on administrative levels. Thus, the subordination relations existing at the level of the urban centres determined integration relations at the level of the polarizing territorial structures, them in turn generating sub-departmental administrative levels, and the competition and indifference relations, were fragmentation ones that sketched the limits between the administrative structure of departmental (county) level (Figure 11).

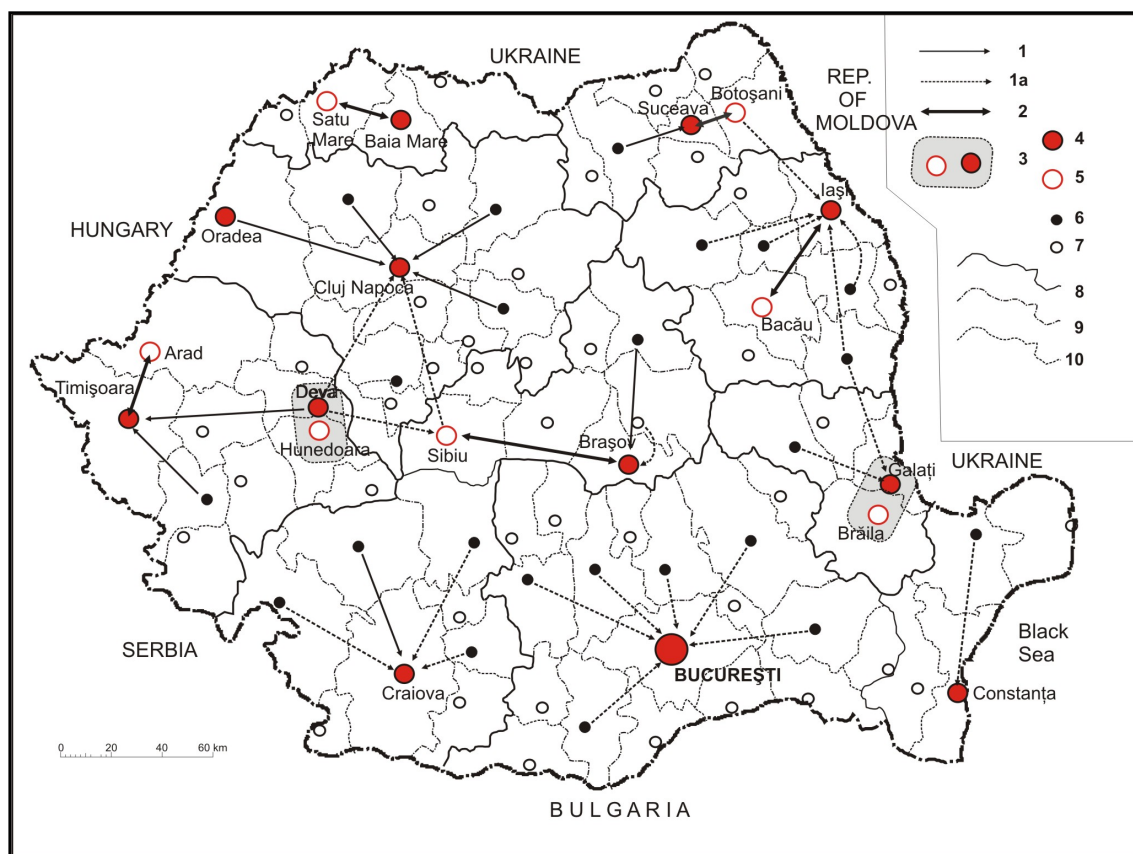


Figure 11. The proposed territorial collage based on the relationships established at the level of the regional human settlements

1. Subordination, 1 a. Diffuse subordination, 2. Competition, 3. Conurbation, 4. Primary regional convergence nuclei, 5. Secondary regional convergence nuclei, 6. Primary local convergence nuclei, 7. Secondary local convergence nuclei, 8. Regional borders (NUTS 2), 9. Departmental (county) borders (NUTS 3), 10. Sub-departmental borders (NUTS 4).

Based on the historic regions that formed over time as homogenous functional spaces, as well as mental and perceived areas (Cocean, 2002, p. 56-60) and starting with the relationships established at the regional settlements systems and the road distances between the communal centres and the local polarizing nuclei there were individualized 10 macro-territorial structures which we considered viable for receiving a regional administrative status. The 10 administrative structures established based on the regional converging polarizing nuclei and the relations between them, can be denominated based on the specificity of the historic provinces in which they are located: *Bucovina* (Northern Moldavia), based on the cooperation between Botoșani and Suceava, *Central Moldavia* based in the cooperation between Iași and Bacău; the *Lower Danube* centered on the a Galați - Brăila conurbation; *Dobrogea*, centered on Constanța; *Muntenia*, centered on Bucharest; *Oltenia*, centered on Craiova; *Banat*, centered on Timișoara and secondly on Arad; *Maramureș*, based on the cooperation between Baia Mare and Satu; *Transilvania*, which includes Crișana and is centered by Cluj-Napoca; *South - Eastern Transilvania*, based on the cooperation between Brașov and Sibiu.

The denominations of the two northern regions (*Bucovina* and *Maramureș*) are highly relative, as they are given to macro-territorial structures that go far beyond the actual historic regions. The traditional regional specificity of these spaces makes us choose these denominations to some impersonal ones like for example 'North-East Region' or 'North-West Region'.

Bibliography

- Cocean, P 2002, *Geografie regională*, Edit. Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Helin, R 1967, 'The Volatile Administrative Map of Romania', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, t. 57, no. 3, p. 481-502.
- Ianoș, I 1987, *Orașele și organizarea spațiului geografic*, Edit. Academiei, București.
- Ianoș, I 2005, *Dinamica urbană. Aplicații la orașul și sistemul urban românesc*, Edit. Tehnică, București.
- Ianoș, I, Pumain, D & Racine, JB (edit.) 2000, *Integrated Urban Systems and Sustainability of Urban Life*, IGU, Edit. Tehnică, București.
- Ianoș, I & Heller, W 2006, *Spațiu, economie și sisteme de așezări*, Edit. Tehnică, București.
- Iordan, I & Rey, V 1993, 'La carte administrative de la Roumanie d'avant guerre: probable ou impossible retour?', *Bulletin de la Société Languedocienne de Géographie*, t. 116, no. 3-4, Montpellier.
- Nistor, I 2000, *Comuna și județul. Evoluția istorică*, Edit. Dacia, Cluj Napoca.
- Oroveanu, M 1986, *Organizarea administrativă și sistematizarea teritoriului R. S. România*, Edit. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București.
- Popescu, CL 1999, *Autonomia locală și integrarea europeană*, Edit. All Beck, București.
- Rey, V, Coudroy de Lille, L & Boulineau, E 2004, *L'élargissement de l'Union Européenne: réformes territoriales en Europe Centrale et Orientale*, L'Harmattan, Paris.
- Rey, V, Groza, O, Ianoș, I & Pătroescu, M 2006, *Atlasul României*, Enciclopedia Rao, București.
- Săgeată, R 1999, 'Evaluarea impactului generat de posibila revenire la organizarea administrativ-teritorială interbelică asupra sistemului urban din România', *Revista Română de Geografie Politică*, t. I, no. 1, Edit. Universității din Oradea, p. 98-101.
- Săgeată, R 2000, 'Organizarea administrativ-teritorială a României. Model de optimizare', *Revista Română de Geografie Politică*, t. II, no. 1, Edit. Universității din Oradea, p. 61-68.
- Săgeată, R 2002, 'Evoluția organizării administrativ-teritoriale a României în perioada interbelică (1918-1940)', *Revista Geografică*, t. IX, Institutul de Geografie, București, p. 158-166.
- Săgeată, R 2002-2003, 'Evoluția organizării administrativ-teritoriale a României între 1950 și 1968', *Studii și Cercetări de Geografie*, t. XLIX-L, Edit. Academiei, București, p. 133-144.
- Săgeată, R 2004, *Modele de regionare administrativ-teritorială*, Edit. Top Form, București.
- Săgeată, R 2006, *Deciziile politico-administrative și organizarea teritoriului. Studiu geografic cu aplicare la teritoriul României*, Edit. Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, Edit. Top Form, București.
- Săgeată, R 2008, *Regiunile Europei. Metodologie de analiză regională*, Edit. Fundației România de Măine, București.
- Săgeată, R, Guran-Nica, L, Dumitrescu, B, Damian, N & Baroiu D 2004, *Soluții de optimizare a organizării administrativ-teritoriale a României în perspectiva aderării la Uniunea Europeană*, Edit. Ars Docendi, București.
- Stahl, HH 1969, *Organizarea administrativ-teritorială*, Edit. Științifică, București.