

## GROWTH POLE DEVELOPMENT AND 'METROPOLITIZATION' IN POST-SOCIALIST ROMANIA

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**ABSTRACT.** – **Growth Pole Development and 'Metropolization' in Post-Socialist Romania.** During the transition period the spatial planning institutions of Romania have undergone a constant and radical change from the communist system, based on state led industrialization and urbanization to a more flexible and democratic system. Among these changes are those induced by the creation and implementation of new forms of territorial governance, like the metropolitan areas, initiated in 2001. Since then the 'metropolization' process has advanced, more than 10 metropolitan areas being created, while many others have been proposed and are still in a pilot phase. One of the main features of this new spatial category is that it is based on major urban centres, which plays also the role of national growth poles. Therefore, we are asking in this paper for the linkages between the construction of metropolitan areas and the selection of growth poles, two questions which apparently differ, but they proved to be strongly interconnected in Romania.

**Keywords:** *growth poles, metropolization, polarization, spatial planning, regional policy.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the planning system in Romania has undergone a strong europeanization process (Stringer, Scriciu and Reed, 2009; Tănăsioiu, 2012; Benedek, 2013). As part of this process the general guidelines and principles of the European spatial planning documents have been overtaken in the Romanian spatial planning system (Puşcaşu, 2009; Cotella, Adams and Nunes, 2012; Benedek, 2013). One of them is represented by the growth pole concept which was widely used not only in the selection process of the urban centres as growth poles but in the delimitation of the metropolitan areas as well. The Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2007-2013 has incorporated the above logic, with the priority axis 1 sustaining the urban growth poles with 30% of the total budget (MRDT, 2012).

In fact, the combination of these two concepts: growth poles and metropolitan areas, among others, gives a certain specificity to the Romanian spatial planning system. Therefore, the main aim of the paper is to analyse the introduction and development of the concept of metropolitan areas in Romania.

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Among the investigative themes for metropolis building: policy, democracy, governance, space, planning and finance (Jurczek, 2008, Bunker, 2009) we will focus on questions related to space and territorial planning, assuming the hypothesis, that there is a distinctive style of using the concept of metropolitan areas in the Romanian spatial planning practice. In a different context Bunker considers that metropolitan strategies may have different features reflecting space, society and governance (Bunker, 2009). He argues that these three characteristics shape spatial discourses embodied in metropolitan plans, or, in other words, in the planning practice. We assume in this paper the same logic, rooted in the institutional arrangement of Romania, where urban space development and metropolis building are embedded in the wider planning institutional practice.

The conceptual debate about metropolitan areas started late in Romania, following the adoption of the Law nr. 315/2001 for Spatial Planning and Urbanism. In the last years it has meanwhile become a constant in spatial planning and urban geography research (Groza, Coudroy de Lille and Paftală-Ciubotărița, 2010; Popescu, 2011; Ianoș, Peptenatu, Drăghici and Pintilii, 2012; Rusu, Moldovan and Petrea, 2012; Georgescu I., Mitrică B., Kucsicsa G., Popovici E.A., Dumitrașcu M. And Cuculici R., 2012; Benedek, 2013). While in the past geographical and spatial planning studies areas of metropolitan character were described as 'conurbations' or 'systems of cities' (Cucu, 1970; Ungureanu, 1980, Ianoș, 1987; Ianoș and Tălângă, 1994), the concept of 'Metropolitan Areas' first has been introduced in 2001 in the New Spatial Planning and Urbanism Law. They are defined as 'territories surrounding major urban agglomerations, where strong transportation, economic, social, cultural and infrastructural interrelations are established' (RP, 2001a). They differ from the 'Suburban Areas', which are 'territories surrounding cities, where economic, infrastructural, commuting and leisure interdependencies are established' (RP, 2001a). With other words, major cities are considered as cores of their influence zone, being able to form metropolitan areas, while medium-sized or smaller cities can build suburban areas.

Following the EU admission of Romania the Law of the Urban Growth Centres prescribes new role and responsibilities for the metropolitan areas of the Capital and 1 tier cities. In this new context, Romanian urban growth poles are defined as polarizing cities, transport hubs, concentrating economic and cultural activities, which will benefit with priority from European and national financing (MDRPA, 2008, MRDT, 2012). This process of institutionalization of certain urban agglomerations in Romania as metropolitan areas and growth centres reflects the dynamic characteristic of the definitions. On this legal basis the metropolitan areas have been assigned in a bottom-up approach, as local initiatives, unlike in Germany, for example, where they have been appointed by a central body (Jurcek, 2008). Although the Law 350/2001 foresees explicitly that metropolitan area in Romania should be 'delimited on the basis of special studies', there is no such empirical foundation.

But taking a further critical view on the unreflected and uncritical takeover of planning instruments like the metropolitan areas, we can note that Romania has one single urban agglomeration (Bucharest) corresponding to the international standards of the metropolis definition. For the rest of the urban centres the most appropriate concept would be that of urban regions, as defined by Jerome Pickard: regions with high concentration of urban activities and urban population (Pickard, 1966).

Although some coliding tendencies are evident in the case of some larger cities (Galați-Brăila, Hunedoara-Deva, Arad-Timișoara), facilitated by short distances between them, as are in the case of conurbations dominated by a larger urban center (Brașov and

Valea Jiului conurbations), but we are still far from the „megapolitan regions as integrated networks of metropolitan areas, principal cities and metropolitan areas” (Lang, Knox, 2009, p. 795) of the post-industrial societies like the USA.

In the following parts we will give an overlook about the major transformation processes (concentration, polarization, local and regional cooperation) which affected the urban space in Romania (part two); the building process and current legal status of the metropolitan areas, understood as a process of institutionalization of multiple relations established between major urban centres and their suburban rural area, resulting in the creation of metropolitan area („zone metropolitane” in Romanian), as a tool of territorial governance and spatial planning (parts three and four); and finally we conclude with the future prospects related to the use of this concept in spatial planning and regional policy (parts five and six).

For the empirical part of the paper we use the data offered by the National Statistical Institute, but the paper highly relies on the analysis and evaluation of spatial planning documents, legal framework and regional policy document.

## **2. TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROMANIAN URBAN SPACE**

Following the collapse of socialism in 1989, as in all Central and Eastern Europe countries, the conditions of urban development in Romania have changed radically. In the 1990's the transformation of the cities was determined by processes like the political democratisation (stronger local power over the economic development), the increased globalisation of the economy, the privatisation of the enterprises and of the real estate market (market forces becoming predominant in the transformation of the urban space), European integration, deindustrialisation and structural transformation of the economic base (Benedek, 2006). The transformation of the society followed the changes in the economy: there is a significant social polarisation between large marginalised social groups (retired, unemployed, Roma) and an emerging middle and upper class.

The ensemble of these significant processes lead to the transformation of the settlement network and a significant change in the spatial structure of towns in a very short time. The major shift is represented by a strong differentiation in the hierarchy of urban settlements. This major changes led to the dismantling of Romanian cities, to the dissolution of compact cities with more varied housing forms, and mixed land uses, varying densities, increasing car ownership and use, high reliance on the car in the urban transport, lack of a good urban design and shaping places in suburbia.

In the same time - after a long period of non-planning when urban planning was in the doldrums - we assist to the revival of a controversial urban planning, with two generations of plans (1999 and 2012), trying to counterbalance the dominant market forces of urban development. The urban development plans are prescriptive, dominated by land use considerations, and lacking considerations for the infrastructure needed.

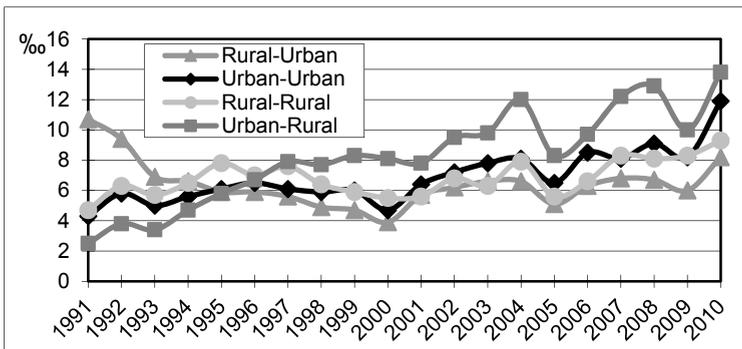
The cities has chosen different adaptation ways to the new macroeconomic and political situation, according to their potential and the development level of their institutional network. The geographical location has played an important role in attracting foreign investments, which are concentrated in Bucharest, in the large cities in the Western part of the country (Transylvania) and in a few large cities concentrating innovative and attractive large industrial enterprises (Galați-Mittal Steel, Pitești-Renault, etc.). As a consequence, a strong differentiation in the settlement hierarchy has emerged: the large

cities (Bucharest, Timișoara, Cluj, etc.) with developing services are in a favourable position and can be considered the winners of the transition period, as well as the towns where the manufacturing industries producing a high added value are dominant (Pitești, Sibiu, Târgu Mureș, Alba Iulia etc.), the seaside urban agglomeration (Constanța-Năvodari-Mangalia) and the urban regions at the western border. On the other hand, the small and medium-sized towns, the declining industrial centres, the mining towns and the county centres with artificially inflated population, with limited local resources are in an unfavourable position.

The morphology of the cities is still characterised by the dominance of nucleated forms, with clear tendencies to a deconcentrated development in the post-socialist period, especially at their edges. We can identify in metropolitan areas all of the six types of nodes identified by Hall (Hall, 2001): historical centres (traditional downtown centres by Hall); newer business centres, developed at the city edges or in older residential areas with high population densities and, therefore, with an important local consumer market; new residential districts (internal edge cities by Hall) as a result of pressure for space; suburban centres (external edge cities), situated alongside of major transportation axis, which permits facile linkages to the urban centre; outermost edge city complexes, situated at 10-20 km from the main urban centre, near to major transport axis, in form of large space consuming logistical centres or offices for research and development; specialized subcentres for entertainment and sporting complexes. This is an expression of the intensifying polycentricity of the metropolitan areas and the „valorization” of certain residential or old industrial districts.

New types of **connectivities**, new **commuting patterns** between urban centres and the rural countryside has emerged, resulting in the suburbanisation of population and services. There have been major changes in the real estate investment, the spatial structure and functions of metropolitan areas. New urban and suburban landscapes have emerged driven by neoliberal policies, demographic shifts, economic restructuring, spread of digital telecommunication, **increased automobility**. As a consequence, the functional relations, the economic interdependencies of the urban networks have been reshaped, the classical policentricity models have been contested and challenged.

Parallel to the economic restructuring of the cities, a counterurbanization process has emerged, a process of population deconcentration, starting with the year 1996, when the urban-rural migration become the dominant form of internal migration (fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Intensity of internal migration by settlement categories  
 Source: National Institute of Statistics, TEMPO-Online time series

Generally, the demographic conditions for the development of the Romanian cities during the transition period were not favourable. The strong fall of the total population of the country, from 23 millions in 1992 to 20 millions in 2011, has influenced the cities population as well. The dynamic of urban population has been marked by constant negative natality rates (under 9‰) since 1995 and mortality rates (over 9‰). As a consequence, all cities have lost population, but the most affected have been the medium sized cities (20 000-100 000 inhabitants), where the industry has lost many workplaces and the most cities from this category are unattractive for new residents. The forecasts are showing in the same direction: while the urban centres will loose population their suburbs will gain new residents, strenghtening the metropolisation.

### **3. THE "METROPOLIZATION" PROCESS, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE METROPOLITAN AREAS**

The spatial organization of Romania has undergone major transformations during the past twenty years. The new demographic trends (international out-migration and urban-rural internal migration) and the structural changes in the romanian economy resulted in a new territorial distribution of population and economy. The dual character of the Romanian spatial structure (capital city/provinces) has been further strengthened, dominated by the core regions of the capital city Bucharest and a few regional urban centres (Timișoara and Cluj in particular), which are regarded as the main engines of the deepening regional disparities. As a consequence of the post-socialist urban territorial expansion and of the establishment of the supralocally administrative cooperations they form the basis of the 'metropolization' process.

We assume that the 'metropolization' in Romania has taken a particular character reflecting the distinctive features of the Romanian society, space and governance. Under the circumstances of neoliberal economic measures (privatization, market liberization, etc.) an important factor of the metropolization is represented by the increasing transportation, the development of the tertiary sector (retailing played a crucial role), the upgrading of the suburban settlements.

The key moment of the 'metropolization' process in Romania is considered to be the adoption of a new territorial planning document in 2001, *National Spatial Development Plan – Section 4: The settlement network*, (Law no. 351), which has differentiated 12 cities in Romania ranked 0 and 1, that are allowed to establish metropolitan areas. The list of such cities includes the capital-city Bucharest (rank 0) and another 11 cities ranked 1, namely: Cluj-Napoca, Iași, Timișoara, Constanța, Craiova, Galați, Brașov, Ploiești, Oradea, Brăila și Bacău.

Since 2008, on the basis of a new legal document, the local public authorities have gain a new plan-making authority, being able to elaborate territorial development strategies - considered as integrated spatial planning documents - for metropolitan and suburban areas. The latest aims to assure coherent and sustainable development, the correlation of development priorities, the use of natural and cultural resources, and to assure the efficiency of public investments (GR, 2008).

Few weeks after adopting the New Spatial Planning Law, the Law of the National Spatial Development Plan, Section 4: Settlement Network defines again the Metropolitan Areas as "areas formed through the voluntary association between the major urban centers (the Capital and tier 1 cities) and urban and areas areas situated at maxim 30 km from

these urban poles, with strong cooperation in many fields" (RP, 2001b). Furthermore, the modification of the Law of Local Public Administration (RP, 2011) have extended the right to form metropolitan areas from the capital and tier 1 cities to all cities, which are county seats.

At the moment, only 9 of these cities have established functional metropolitan areas that are NGOs of public interest, the so-called "*intercommunity development associations*", created through the voluntary association of the cities and of the surrounding settlements. The only cities that have not established metropolitan areas are Bucharest, Galați and Brăila, the last two actually forming one conurbation since they are located at a distance of about 20 km from each other.

The definition of the 9 functional metropolitan areas in Romania was made, in most cases, without a sound scientific basis, but starting from the existing cooperation relations between municipalities and even the mayor's political affiliation. The only metropolitan areas that were established based on the previous feasibility or strategic planning studies were Oradea, Iași and Ploiești. Most of the metropolitan areas were created after 2007, since the 7 growth poles designated by the Romanian Government (Law 1149/2008) were obliged to establish such associations in order to apply for ERDF funding, through the 2007-2013 ROP for urban integrated development projects. The fact that is requirement did not apply in the case of Bucharest, Galați and Brăila is actually one of the explanations for which the corresponding metropolitan areas were not established by this moment.

The analysis of the population growth rate between the last two censuses (2002 and 2011) indicates a trend of concentration in metropolitan areas, since their share in the total population of the country increased from 15 to 15.4. However, this concentration phenomenon could be noticed only in the case of the Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara Metropolitan Areas, fast growing economic and university centers, benefiting from significant inner migration, whereas the other 7 metropolitan areas saw a demographic decline, resulting from massive inter regional migration (especially Bacău, Craiova, Ploiești și Brașov). Economic structural differences can also be noticed between the growing metropolitan areas, with a smart specialization tendency (software development, engineering, automotive, financial services, high-tech industries, etc.) and the declining ones, dominated by low-competitive sectors (apparel, machinery building, clothing, wood processing, agro-food, etc.).

The housing boom in the mid 2000s was also concentrated in metropolitan areas, together with the capital-region, București-Ilfov. However, it was more pronounced (and even higher than in the capital-region) in the case of the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, supported by a large share of young population, increasing number of jobs and revenues, but also by a speculative market. On the other hand, cities with ageing and declining population (Craiova, Ploiești, Brașov) saw only a very small increase in the number of new dwellings, caused by low demand. The real estate market has yet a significant growth potential since the average living floor per person in metropolitan areas is still below the national average.

The job market had also a differentiated dynamics in the last decade, showing a tendency towards a concentration of jobs in growing metropolis – such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara, with a strong tertiary sector (IT&C, financial services, real estate, higher education, etc.) and restructuring local economies in cities with a traditional industrial background (Brașov, Ploiești, Bacău, Iași).

Table 1.

**The main demographic and socio-economic indicators  
at metropolitan level, 2011 vs 2002**

The metropolitan area	Total population	Population growth rate	Density (per km <sup>2</sup> )	% of the county (NUTS 3) total population	Internal and external migration balance	The number of dwellings	The number of employees
		(%, 2002 = 100)		(%, 2002 = 100)		(%, 2002 = 100)	
	2011	2002-2011	2011	2011	2002-2011	2002-2011	2002-2011
Cluj-Napoca	418,153	108.3	272.0	60.5	25,034	121.5	110.7
Timișoara	384,609	104.7	359.3	56.3	17,262	107.9	108.4
Iași	382,484	96.1	459.6	49.5	-15,316	110.2	90.0
Constanța	425,916	95.4	420.2	62.3	-20,679	105.8	100.3
Brașov	406,611	92.5	297.1	74.0	-32,966	103.2	83.9
Ploiești	318,192	90.1	665.7	41.7	-34,808	102.0	92.5
Oradea	245,537	97.6	317.6	42.7	-6,060	107.4	99.7
Craiova	306,930	89.8	527.6	46.5	-34,743	102.2	100.1
Bacău	216,649	86.4	309.3	35.2	-34,127	105.1	83.6
<b>METROPOLITAN AREAS (Subtotal)</b>	<b>3,105,081</b>	<b>95.8</b>	<b>371.6</b>	<b>52.1</b>	<b>-136,403</b>	<b>107.3</b>	<b>96.6</b>
<b>BUCUREȘTI-ILFOV</b>	<b>2,172,163</b>	<b>97.6</b>	<b>1,199.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>-54,294</b>	<b>107.6</b>	<b>122.9</b>
<b>ROMANIA</b>	<b>20,121,649</b>	<b>92.8</b>	<b>84.5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-1,159,325</b>	<b>103.6</b>	<b>95.2</b>

Data sources: *Own calculations based on the National Institute for Statistics databases*

The motorization rate saw a significant growth in the last decade, based on the growing average revenues and massive imports of second-hand cars from Western Europe. However, this growth was not accompanied by sufficient investments in urban infrastructure resulting in frequent traffic jams, air and noise pollution and the lack of parking lots.

The office area stock is highly concentrated in the capital-region, where most multinationals and Romanian companies have their headquarters, followed by Cluj-Napoca, with a growing demand for office buildings coming from the IT&C sector, whereas in cities such as Bacău and Craiova there is a very low demand for such infrastructure.

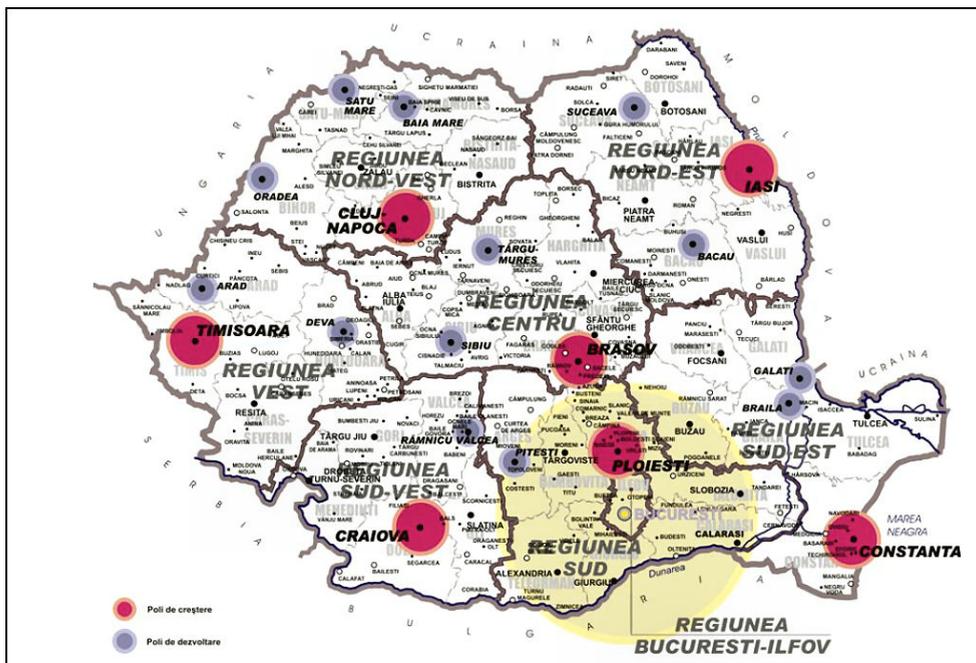
In what concerns the governance of metropolitan areas in Romania, most of the inter-community development associations that were created in this respect (excepting Oradea and Brașov) do not have their own financial, human or informational resources, as they depending on the resources made available by core cities. Moreover their lack of administrative and financial capacity is accompanied by a scarce number of attributions delegated to them by the members, but also by a lack of planning documents (such as

spatial plans, development and promotion strategies, etc.). Even if some steering committees for these metropolitan areas were created, they still function as artificial financial vehicles for core-cities.

#### 4. IMPLEMENTING NEW REGIONAL POLICY INSTRUMENTS IN ROMANIA: THE GROWTH POLES

As indicated above, the Romanian Government designated in 2008 a list of 8 urban growth poles (including Bucharest), 13 urban development poles and 170 urban centers (above the threshold of 10,000 inhabitants), in a polycentric regional development policy. One criteria for selecting these growth poles was the fair distribution of EU funding for urban development under the 1<sup>st</sup> Axis of 2007-2013 ROP between the 8 development regions (Law 1149/2008).

The selected growth poles received ERDF financial support to implement the so-called *Integrated Urban Development Plans*, planning documents that were supposed to identify the urban and metropolitan areas in need of urban integrated development investments (urban, transport, social and economic infrastructure).



**Fig. 2.** The urban growth poles in the 2007-2013 programming period  
 Source: *The Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration (2012)*

The projects were implemented in the framework of the 2007-2013 ROP, Axis 1, and the total budget allocation was of around 2.26 billion Euros, out of which 621 mil. Euros only for the 8 growth poles, one in each development region. As Table 3 shows, Iași and Craiova have benefited from the largest amount of investments co-financed by the ROP, with around 200 mil. Euros each, whereas Constanța and Ploiești have managed to attract only 50 mil. Euros. The different rate of EU funding absorption can be explained by the number and size of projects (big infrastructure projects are harder to implement compared to the smaller ones), but also by the fact that the allocation of EU funds was bigger for growth poles located in regions with a lower GDP/capital than the national average (such as Iași and Craiova).

As concerns the structure of these investments, we can distinguish 4 categories of metropolitan areas:

- metropolitan areas investing especially in business infrastructure: Oradea and Timișoara;
- metropolitan areas investing especially in urban renewal and support for SMEs: Constanța and Ploiești;
- metropolitan areas investing especially in transport and urban infrastructure: Cluj-Napoca, Brașov, Craiova;
- metropolitan areas investing especially in transport and tourism infrastructure: Bacău și Iași.

This distribution is especially relevant for evaluating the development stage of each growth pole but also for its strategic vision.

**Table 2.**

**Projects co-financed through the 2007-2013 ROP in metropolitan areas,  
by type Thousand lei**

Project type	Iași	Timișoara	Constanța	Cluj-Napoca	Brașov	Craiova	Ploiești	Oradea	Bacău
Transport infrastructure	457,700	88,702	33,672	220,639	161,551	377,364	43,912	28,605	170,442
Urbane space planning	0,0	75,745	90,047	40,055	68,141	76,079	93,685	25,070	0,0
Health services	3,100	6,965	33,577	5,889	0,0	34,506	0,0	4,482	0,0
Social services	10,600	6,708	20,721	26,310	26,340	18,294	21,206	22,181	10,996
Educational infrastructure	66,500	0,0	8,267	13,118	14,772	71,103	0,0	21,819	0,0
Business infrastructure	84,200	190,423	25,463	88,220	0,0	138,618	0,0	162,748	0,0
SME support	63,600	56,152	41,371	47,636	34,941	66,712	39,051	30,923	26,999
Cultural heritage	90,300	52,488	10,559	0,0	10,972	82,313	7,949	36,780	0,0
Tourism infrastructure	229,300	0,0	20,395	0,0	19,975	86,066	0,0	96,492	85,034
Tourism promotion	2,800	0,0	6,612	5,436	7,051	3,763	10,374	4,005	2,940
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,008.1</b>	<b>477,183</b>	<b>290,684</b>	<b>447,303</b>	<b>343,743</b>	<b>954,818</b>	<b>216,177</b>	<b>433,105</b>	<b>296,411</b>

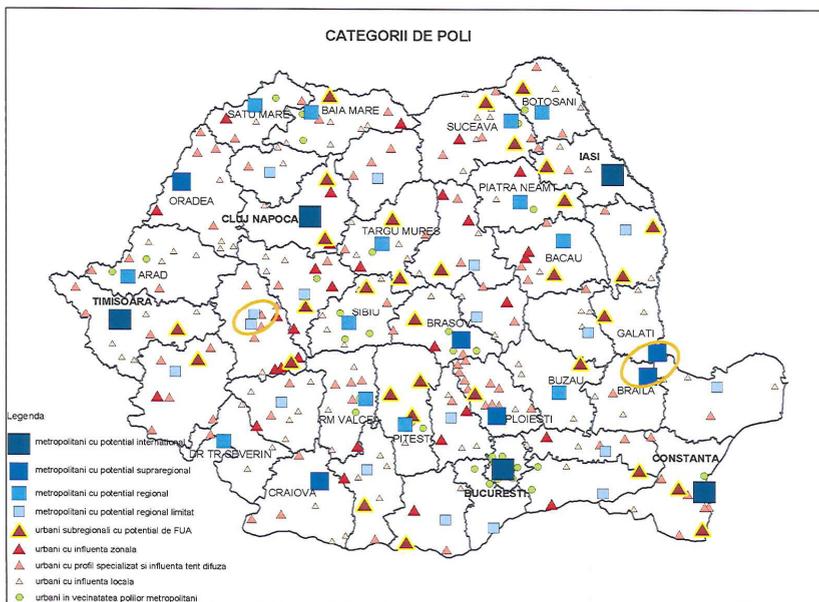
Data sources: *The Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration. 2012*

Since most of the urban development projects are still in the implementation phase (until 2015), it is difficult to evaluate, at present, the impact of the ERDF support on the socio-economic development of the metropolitan areas. However, it has to be noticed that the 2007-2013 ROP has represented the most important source of public investment for most of the metropolitan areas in Romania after 2008, when public budgets started to shrink. In this sense, an impact analysis after 2015, once all the projects would have been implemented, will likely indicate growing disparities between the growth poles and the other settlements in Romania.

On the other hand, the analysis of the projects supported by ERDF at metropolitan areas, shows that more than 90% of the investments were made inside the city, whereas the surrounding settlements will benefit largely indirectly from their effects. This state of art raises concerns about the viability of the metropolitan areas in the future, considering the high level of dissatisfaction of local authorities and citizens in the small communities with their marginal position inside the metropolitan area.

## 5. FUTURE PROSPECTS: METROPOLITAN AREAS AND GROWTH POLES IN THE NEW PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Considering the raising criticism with the concentration of public resources in a small number of growth poles in the 2007-2013 programming period, the Romanian Regional Development Strategy for the 2014-2020 cycle proposes a new approach, in which more attention is given to medium-size cities, especially the ones with the capacity to spread growth in their surroundings.



**Fig. 3.** – The network of urban poles proposed for the 2014-2020 programming period  
 Source: *The Romanian Ministry for Regional Development and Public Administration (2012)*

In this sense, a new urban ranking methodology was suggested by the Romanian Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration, the one in charge with the implementation of the 2014-2020 ROP, but also with the territorial cohesion policies.

The main criteria for the urban settlements ranking are:

- the total population and the population growth rate;
- the history / continuity of the administrative functions (county seat, etc.);
- the functional diversity – specialization (the structure of labor force);
- the accessibility to major transport systems (TEN-T);
- the level of general services provided to the surrounding areas (e.g. high-school and university education, medical services, etc.);
- the availability of RDI units;
- the geographical position and the distance to other urban areas;
- the existing rank, according to the National Spatial Development Plan.

According with the new classification of urban settlements, Romania will have a network of growth poles comprising:

**I. Metropolitan Poles** (including metropolitan areas – maximum 30 km around the core city) – divided in 4 categories:

- with international potential: Bucharest, Timisoara, Cluj-Napoca, Iasi, Constanta;
- with supra-regional or inter-regional potential: Brasov, Craiova, Galati-Braila (urban system), Oradea, Ploiești;
- with regional potential: Bacau, Arad, Sibiu, Tg. Mures, Baia Mare, Satu-Mare, Suceava, Drobeta Turnu Severin, Pitesti, Buzau, Botosani, Rm. Valcea, Piatra Neamt;
- With limited regional potential: Resita, Tg. Jiu, Slatina, Alexandria, Targoviste, Giurgiu, Slobozia, Calarasi, Tulcea, Focsani, Vaslui, Deva-Hunedoara, Alba Iulia, Zalau, Bistrița, Miercurea Ciuc, Sfantu Gheorghe.

**II. Urban poles/centers** (a total number of 243) – generally towns with less than 50.000 inhabitants.

New financial instruments and investment priorities for metropolitan areas are also envisaged for the 2014-2020 programming period, namely:

- the **Integrated Territorial Investment** – a new financial tool that will allow local authorities to combine different programmes and axis (for example ESF and ERDF), in order to tackle the specific needs of an urban area (for example a deprived neighbourhood);
- the implementation of the growth poles **mobility plans** – under elaboration with the support of JASPERS;
- a special attention given to inclusion and poverty reduction in urban and metropolitan areas, also by **urban renewal** projects;
- increasing the **energy efficiency of public and residential building**;
- etc.

We have to note here that the 2014-2020 Romanian Regional Development Strategy is still under consultation and negotiation with the E.U. structures and changes to the criteria, urban ranking and investment priorities can be operated until the beginning of 2015.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

We have seen in the paper that there are two major metropolitan areas in Romania. One is represented by the capital city, Bucharest, the only metropolitan area of the country in European comparison, and a varying number of regional centres, including cities like Cluj, Timișoara, Iași, Craiova, Constanța etc., where 'metropolization' in form of urban expansion and emerging governance was an important spatial process in the post-socialist period.

At the beginning of the transition period from state socialism to market economy Romania has inherited an uneven spatial structure, with the capital city in dominant position. During the transition the country has rapidly taken over the European discourse and the instruments of European spatial planning. The connection of such two planning concepts like the metropolitan areas and the growth centres to few major urban centres represents a specific feature of the Romanian planning, resulting in increasing regional disparities (Benedek, Kurkó, 2010), and failing in this way the achievement of the main goal of regional policy: the reduction of regional differences in the development level.

The current round of strategic planning suggests that urban agglomerations in general and metropolitan areas in particular remain in the focus to the detriment of peripheral regions. The high prioritization of the urban growth poles development has increased the level of regional disparities in Romania. As a recognition of this fact the new prospects for the following programming period are proposing a new view by keeping the old concepts: growth poles will include a larger number of urban centres. In fact, each county (NUTS 3 level) will have one metropolitan pole, including a metropolitan area, and a varying number of urban poles. The allocation of different financial instruments for supporting this new spatial planning categories should be a powerful instrument for the reduction of regional disparities.

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