

THE GROWTH POLES: A BALANCED OPTION FOR DECENTRALIZATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIA?

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Abstract: In lack of an efficient strategy and as a result of limited resources, in Romania was applied the model of decentralization implemented in France in the '80s, renewed and adapted to Romanian realities. After a preliminary phase (2001-2007), at the end of 2008 the Romanian Government retained 7 cities (except Bucharest), known as „growth poles”. Such poles represent the engines of Romania’s economical growth and in the future they are to consolidate their role as regional ferments for the surrounding territories. The present article is a critical approach of the application of the polar development concept in Romania, insisting on the strong and weak points of the 7 growth poles. Also, it is a comparative analysis of growth poles, of their dynamics and relations with similar cities situated in their close neighborhood.

Key words: decentralization, social and economical disparities, regional development, growth poles, development poles, Romania.

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INTRODUCTION

Romania has a long tradition of centralized organization, which increased during the socialist period mainly at the level of the political decision and of the public resource administration. Its reverberations have also extended in the last decades, when to national routines there were added the mechanisms of a “libertine” market economy which favoured central areas, well populated, especially the ones with a high concentration of political decision power of great economical impact.

One of the possible solutions to ensure a certain territorial balance of the social and economical development is *decentralization*. Theoretically, it can be achieved under different forms, from the federal or confederal model (Germany, Switzerland, Belgium etc.), to the least radical ones, which preserve the unitary character of the state, but facilitate a larger administrative, economic and financial autonomy, at a regional and local level (Italy, Spain, Great Britain, France, Sweden etc.).

Applying decentralization in Romania should take into consideration the traditions regarding the organization of the Romanian cultural and political background, the current characteristics of the national and regional context, but also the need to determine supplementary administrative levels, favorizing the local social and economic development.

In addition to initiating legislative steps with a view to decentralization, through the local public administration law of 2001 – as yet without obvious effects on the consolidation of territorial balances – , after Romania's adherence to the European Union (January 1st, 2007) it has been proceeded to a new phase, marked by the access to European structural funds and their decentralized administration, at the level of development regions. Under such circumstances, it came as a possible solution to reduce territorial discrepancies, the priority fund allocation to a limited number of big urban agglomerations (growth poles) able to irradiate development, to involve the increase of the regional social and economical performances, to contribute to the development of social cohesion and of the population living standard. Development spreading should also be facilitated by levels two and three of the urban network, represented by *development poles*, respectively by the *local urban poles*.

The father of the polarized development and growth poles' theory is considered to be Francois Perroux, who even in 1955 stated that „Growth does not appear everywhere at the same time; first, it occurs in points or growth poles with fluctuant intensities; then, it spreads on different channels and with variable final effects for the whole economy” (Perroux, 1955, in Ianoş and Humeau, 2000, pg. 56). The concept was, afterwards, developed by other researchers as well, among them being J. Boudeville (1964, 1972), J. Paelinck (1965), B. Higgins (1963), A.R. Kuklinski (1970) and others (in Ianoş and Humeau, 2000, pg.57-58); they outlined different types of polarization: technical, applied on incomes, psychological, geographical, and also the main pole categories, among which the natural poles and the equalizing poles (Ianoş and Humeau, 2000, pg.57-58).

The polar development model was tested in Europe, among others, by France, where it was designed in the '70s and implemented starting from 1982 (Bouclier, 1999). Such model had good results in the transfer of abilities, means and responsibilities to the regional and local levels, but less spectacular in the field of economic and financial decentralization (Dumont, 2004).

Compared to other experiments, the regional pole French model is considered compatible with Romanian realities, because it observes a somehow similar state structure and legislation, if we take into account the fact that the modern Romanian state was organized and has developed according to the French model even since the Principality Union, in 1859. It is expected that its application should consider both the territorial characteristics of the national space, and the current European context, where the *social cohesion* is emphasized. Thus, the recent vision that Romania chose, the one of the polar development, can contradict the prevailing tendency from the European Union countries, where the increase of social cohesion is considered the development ferment, respectively the mechanism which can provide the reduction of discrepancies among the different regional and local communities.

IS THE INCREASE OF INTER-REGIONAL DISCREPANCIES AN EFFECT OF THE ECONOMIC LIBERALISM?

As a result of the conjugation of the Romanian state centralized tradition with the behavior of economical agents under conditions of free market, it is being noticed the increase of the detachment tendency of more developed regions, respectively the performance decrease of the regions which traditionally regressed, which descend in the hierarchy of the economic and social indicators.

In the first category, the best example is the region Bucharest-Ilfov, dominated by the Capital, which consolidated its position at a national level, clearly detaching itself from the second group of Romanian central areas, made up of the cities which count around 300 thousand inhabitants. If the Capital demographic weight did not experience obvious mutations (9 % of the country population), its economic weight is much higher today than it was two decades ago. Bucharest contribution increased from 13 % of Romania's G.D.P. in 1989, to over 22 % in 2007, and the tendency seems to continue.

At the same time, there have been noticed regions which gathered a remarkable demographic potential, however associated with a precarious general economical state, inherited from the historical past and certified again in the present, inspite of the industrialization promoted in the '70s and '80s of the 20th century. In the last two decades, their situation became worse because of the local communities incapacity to restructure their economy, in other ways than by closing industrial units and returning to the subsistence agriculture or to the most common services. This is the case of a great part of the North-Eastern Region. Despite of the reduction of its demographic performances, the weight of this region in Romania's total population has continuously been increasing during the last 25 years, from 16.45 % in 1992, up to 17.29 % in 2008. At the same time, its weight in the country gross domestic product has continuously been decreasing after 1990, when it counted 12.9 %, reaching 12.7 % in 1992 and 11.1 % in 2007 (processing based on the Romanian Statistical Annual, 1991, 1993, 2008). As a result, the local population living standard also experiences more and more significant discrepancies compared to the one specific for the more advanced country regions. The quick emphasis of polarization is also underlined by the gap increase between the development region nationally situated on the first place in terms of the G.D.P./inhabitant, the Bucharest-Ilfov region, and the one situated on the last place, the North-Eastern region. Thus, while in 2005 the gap was 1 / 3.1 (table 1), in 2007 it already reached 1 / 3.48 (according to TEMPO-Online, INSSE, 2009 data)¹.

Table 1. Evolution of the regional gross domestic product in Romania (2000, 2005)
(Source : Romanian Statistical Yearbook, INS, 2007)

Region	Total GDP				GDP / inhabitant	
	2000		2005		2000	2005
		%		%		
North-East	9,634.8	12.0	34,037.4	11.8	2,506.8	9,114.2
South-East	9,286.8	11.6	33,096.7	11.5	3,185.3	11,627.7
South	9,807.1	12.2	36,322.1	12.6	2,920.7	10,908.3
South-West	7,488.9	9.3	24,126.3	8.4	3,001.0	10,460.4
West	7,526.8	9.4	28,880.5	10.1	3,676.7	14,960.4
North-West	9,501.0	11.8	34,620.4	12.0	3,331.3	12,647.2
Center	10,177.5	12.6	34,286.1	11.9	3,838.6	13,549.2
Bucharest-Ilfov	16,879.2	20.1	62,553.6	21.7	7,408.2	28,325.7
Total	80,377.3	100.0	288,176.1	100.0	3,582.6	13,326.8

¹ We underline that regional discrepancies are relevant for all the European Union member states. In most of the states, the discrepancies between the NUTS 2 regions used to be, in 2006, smaller than in Romania, as for example in Slovenia (1/1.5), Ireland, Sweden and Denmark (1/1.6), with values generally not exceeding 1/2.5, and in others the discrepancies are higher, as in France and Slovakia (1/ 3.5) or the Great Britain (where between Inner London and West Wales and The Valleys, the gap amounts 1/4.4), (*Eurostat, Main tables and Database, 2009*).

This spontaneous increase of the discrepancy between center and the peripheral areas is making the European responsible anxious, and also Romanian authorities, which even since the '90 have been talking about *decentralization*, without yet obtaining concrete results. However, consolidating the direct inter-regional dialogue at a European level imposes the multiplication of voices in dialogue and of forces in *cooperation*.

CENTER AND PERIPHERY AT A REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL: IRREVERSIBLE DISCREPANCIES?

If inter-regional discrepancies have become deeper in the last two decades, the intra-regional ones are even more profound. They mainly underline the discrepancies accumulated between the urban environment, much more dynamic – especially that of county capital cities – , respectively the rural environment, extremely conservative, with a high degree of demographic ageing and often aggressive economic dynamics.



Figure 1. Development regions of Romania
(Source: www.adrvest.ro)

Every region of Romania has its center (multipolar in the best case) and its periphery, dissimulated in the regional statistics, by the media's leveling role. For example, between the neighbouring counties from the North-Eastern Region, situated in the outskirts of the region (Bacău and Vaslui)², the proportion is 1/1.8 ; also, between the Timiș and Caraș-Severin counties, the proportion is 1/1.6, but at another level³. But analyzed at a national scale, the discrepancies

² Bacău County used to have, in 2005, a GDP per inhabitant of 11,151 lei, while Vaslui only 6,244 lei.

³ Timiș county used to have, in 2005, a GDP per inhabitant of 18,350 lei, while Caraș-Severin county only 11,664 lei.

among counties are alarming. Thus, the G.D.P. per inhabitant in Bucharest is nearly 5 times higher than in Vaslui County⁴.

Analyzed even more deeply, through extrapolation of data, available in the current statistics only at regional and county level, the identified discrepancies are really high. For example, the city of Timișoara realizes only by itself around 78 % of the Timis county GDP. Thus it comes out that, in 2005, the GDP/inhabitant of Timișoara used to lightly exceed 30 thousand lei, meanwhile in the rest of the county it only counted 7,560 lei. Finally, the rural environment and the small cities from Vaslui county (except the cities of Vaslui and Bârlad) used to have, in the same year, a GDP of hardly 2,750 lei/inhabitant, that is about 11 times smaller than the one from Timișoara or Bucharest. Such discrepancies point out the existence of real *poverty bags* in certain regions of the country (the counties of Vaslui, Botoșani, Giurgiu, Ialomița, Teleorman etc.), where social tensions are created and a state of regress from which, across a certain limit, one will hardly go, because of the deep undermining of the local human potential.

In compensation, the most dynamic poles increase their attractiveness and must face the increasing number of outer solicitations, for jobs and houses. Thus, there is a tendency to re-activate population flows from disadvantaged areas towards the dynamic ones (very strong in the 70s), tempered for the moment by orienting such flows towards external markets (in Spain, Italy, Greece etc.) ; it is also added the low capacity of the Romanian big cities to offer an acceptable ratio between the incomes that the new comers could obtain and the living cost in the big cities, which is higher and higher.

METROPOLITAN AREAS, GROWTH POLES AND DEVELOPMENT POLES : SUPPORT CENTERS FOR TERRITORIAL DISCREPANCY REDUCTION ?

One of the solutions taken into consideration in order to get out of the chaotic social and economic evolutions' trap and for the better use of the development potential of every region is considered to be *decentralization*, by granting a plus of economic, financial and decisional autonomy to regional and local levels.

This is mainly the reason why a new decentralization model is about to be implemented in Romania, well known in Europe, the French model of the '70s, renewed at the European Union level and adapted to the current Romanian realities. Recently initiated, through several governmental decisions⁵, it generated fears and hopes, it supplied competitions among the big cities from the country, it also gave birth to political rivalries difficult to harmonize at a local level. In a preliminary phase (2001-2007), according to the law of local public administration no. 215 /2001, 8-12 big cities were retained (including the capital), as potential regional big cities. Each of the latter ones would associate with the communes from its relevant area of influence, upon the special agreement of local councils from the aimed administrative units, with the view to facilitate the development of infrastructures and development objectives of

⁴ The city of Bucharest used to have, in 2005, a GDP per inhabitant of 29,469 lei (together with Ilfov county 28,183 lei), while Giurgiu county, from its close neighbourhood, only 7,240 lei.

⁵ Romanian Government Decision, No. 998 / September 8th, 2008, *for the assignment of the national growth poles where investments are prioritarily made from the community and national funding programs*, altered through G.D. no. 1149 / September 18th, 2008 and amended by G.D. no. 1513 / November 19th, 2008.

common interest. The law stipulated that the deliberating and executive authorities from every constituent administrative and territorial unit would entirely preserve its local autonomy⁶.

In the second phase, regulated at the end of 2008, after Romania's integration in the EU, the government named 7 *national growth poles*, as follows: *Constanța, Craiova and Ploiești* in the South of the country, *Iași* in the East, *Brașov and Cluj-Napoca* in the center and *Timișoara* in West. Such poles represent the engines of Romania's economic growth, which, in the future, will consolidate their role as regional ferments for the surrounding territories⁷.

The same regulatory documents also assigned the 13 *urban development poles*, from the category of cities which count more than 100 thousand inhabitants, with a convergent territorial position and with a high impact potential on the settlement network (*Bacău and Suceava* in the North-Eastern region, *Galați and Brăila* in the South-Eastern region, *Pitești* in the South of Muntenia, *Râmnicu Vâlcea* in the South-Western region, *Arad and Deva* in the Western region, *Oradea, Baia Mare and Satu Mare* in the North-Western region, *Sibiu and Târgu Mureș* in the central region). The urban development poles will have the role of bonds among the growth poles and the other middle and small cities of the urban system, in order to attenuate and prevent the development tendencies of unbalance within the region that they belong to. Also, they will contribute to the reduction of the population concentration level and of the work force in the big urban centers and to the creation of a spatial structure which would encourage a balanced territorial social and economic development.

The statute of member in the *growth poles'* group represented a special stake for all the big cities from the country, because it facilitates the access to approximately one billion of euros, money especially granted through the Regional Operational Program, funded by the European Union until 2013.

The implementation of *growth poles* and *development poles* is the result of the national political will, which intends to federate the local resources around big cities, in order to facilitate them a better territorial anchorage, more chances to access European funds and a coherent territorial development.

THE LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY SUPPORT

The legal context for the incorporation and operation of national and regional poles is supported by the provisions of the Local public administration law, no. 215 from April 23rd 2001, subsequently amended. Extremely important for the regulation of later government decisions concerning the incorporation of growth and development poles is especially Section 1 of the law (mainly articles 6, 11 and 13), regarding the general regime of local autonomy⁸.

⁶ As the provisions were rather denotive, not normative, and did not stipulate specific funding mechanisms, during 2001-2007 almost all the cities assigned as potential metropolitan area centers held discussions and negotiations with the administrations of sub-urban communes, but only three cities succeeded to found community associations with legal personality, namely : Oradea (2002), Iași (2004) and Constanța (2007).

⁷ Studies on Romanian cities' hierarchization, with the structuring of an urban level with cross-county influence, have been carried on by several Romanian geographers, among which: V. Cucu, 1976, A. Ungureanu, 1980, S. Neaguț, 1984, I. Ianoș, 1987, N. Popa, 2000, A. Ungureanu, G. Țurcănașu, 2008 etc.

⁸ In detail, the main law provisions concerning the right of inter-community association are stipulated under: Art. 6. - (1) The relations between the local public administration authorities from communes, cities and towns and the county public administration authorities are based on

Thus, legal provisions stipulate the autonomy principle of every local public administration unit, without admitting subordination relations among them, which brings the local authorities in the situation to negotiate every initiative of inter-community cooperation⁹.

In lack of a more regulatory law, the communes around a big city (growth pole or development pole) reunite with it into an *association of public right*, according to their interests (often diverging), in order to form an urban agglomeration with a high potential of development and urban character spreading within the territory. In every single case, reunions and negotiations are being extended and are more difficult as the local political structure is more composite.

In such conditions, applying the governmental decisions from 2008 for the incorporation of growth and development poles (see above, the foot note) lead to inter-community associative structures with a territorial configuration which does not always correspond to the one resulted from the scientific studies.

PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA OF SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATION, LEVERS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The effective incorporation of growth and development poles is generally made after some scientific research applied within the territory, which must be based on one ***set of principles*** relevant for the regional development, especially the principles of subsidiarity, processuality and sustainability of the territory development decisions.

The principle of subsidiarity refers to the decision proximity to the level on which such decision is to have the most significant effects. Its application materialized in the *decentralization* and *deconcentration* of the executive act and in the local increase of the *administrative – financial autonomy*, processes in course in Romania.

the *principles of autonomy, legality, responsibility, cooperation and solidarity* for the solution of the entire county problems.

(2) In the relations between the local public administration authorities and the county council, on the one hand, and between the local council and the mayor, on the other hand, *there are no subordination relations*.

Art. 11. - (1) Two or several administrative – territorial units have the right, within the competence of their deliberative and executive authorities, *to cooperate and to associate*, according to the law, forming *associations of inter-community development*, with legal personality, of private right and public utility. (...).

(2) Inter-community development associations are incorporated according to the law, *in order to commonly accomplish development projects of local or regional interest* or to commonly provide public services. The metropolitan areas and urban agglomerations incorporated with the express agreement of the local councils from the constituent administrative – territorial units intend to develop infrastructures and development objectives of common interest. The deliberative and executive authorities at the level of every constituent administrative – territorial unit preserve their local autonomy, according to the law.

Art. 13. - (1) Inter-community development associations are *run by a board of directors* made up of representatives of the constituent administrative – territorial units, assigned by the local council or by the county council, at the mayor's proposal, respectively at the proposal of the county council president, and also of the local or county counsellors, as the case may be.

⁹ The effective accomplishment of a functional decentralization, involving development, supposes to run through legal steps which should lead at least to : the transformation of the administrative tutelage a priori, in control a posteriori ; the formation of the region with the position of territorial collectivity, with chosen bodies and administrative positions ; the transfer of competences (planning, training, management of local issues etc.) ; the transfer of means (fiscal, financial, making available state services etc.).

The principle of processuality has in view the open character of territory development options and decisions. The functional territorial structures (non-administrative) can be designed with a *progressive character*, both in time and in territory, so that they reflect as functionally as possible the territorial reality and the mutations induced by the social and economic development and by the urban character spreading.

Thus, the assignment of *national growth poles, respectively regional development poles* (preceded by the incorporation of *several metropolitan areas*), was launched as an open process, without being limited by precise legislative regulations. The application of such ideas is stimulated through market economy mechanisms (for example, the preferential access to funding programs). However, it is the local communities' option whether to organize themselves, to complete forms of cooperation for territory development and infrastructural fitting, so that development projects could include areas sufficiently extended to be viable.

On the short term, the viable character of territorial development projects is first materialized in *their capacity to draw and fix resources* (mainly financial, but also human, technological etc.). On the other hand, the projects are viable only if they *involve local resources and energies*, so that, on the long term, the development should be endogenous and should answer to the third principle, which is the *principle of sustainability (persistence)*.

The spatial configuration and structure of every pole should be based on the application of ***scientific criteria for the demarcation*** of areas of influence, recognized over time through the research in the field of space development, territory development and regional development¹⁰. Among such criteria (quantitative, structural, functional and dynamic), the following are of extreme importance (Beaujeu-Garnier and Chabot, 1963, Iordan, 1973, Ianoș, 1987, Nicolae, 2002 and others):

- the distance-time to the center of the urban agglomeration;
- the population evolution (positive);
- the population migration, mainly commutation;
- the structure of the active population (increased percentage of the second and third sectors)
- the evolution of house buildings (significant increase in the area of influence);
- the increase of service provision;
- the presence of the industrial function;
- the transport development (infrastructures and services);
- the structure and dynamics of agricultural production (the significant representation of vegetable gardening and animal breeding);
- the representation of the recreation and amusement function;
- the fitting with technical and town utilities;
- etc.

The practical application of such criteria supposes the determination of limit values, suitable for every single case, according to the demographic size, economic force and capacity of big urban centers to irradiate development and the urban character (Ancuța, 2008).

¹⁰ In Romanian geography, significant contributions to the analysis of town areas of influence have brought: Iordan (1973), Ianoș (1987, 2006), Neguț (1997), Nicolae (2004), Cocean (2007), at a national level, and also other authors, with sectorial studies on the town supply areas, applied locally.

The growth poles are defined as areas including urban nuclei (centers) and their surrounding areas, which have the ability to spread economic development in the adjacent places and where public investments will concentrate with a view to maximize the impact on regional development. Thus, it is considered that the national growth poles will significantly contribute to the territorial development of the entire country.

The areas of urban influence must contribute to the consolidation of growth poles and development poles. Not all the growth / development poles benefit within their urban borders from the necessary space, human resources and proper conditions to preserve and strengthen their position and to have the certitude of a sustainable development in the future. Because of this, it is preferable to collaborate with the neighboring communities. At the same time, such communities benefit, in their turn, from the proximity to some solid growth poles, able to „disseminate” development (Junie, Stampar, 2009).

In order to accomplish such objectives and to consolidate the growth and development poles, there has been launched through Axis 1, within the Regional Operational Program¹¹, a special supporting program for the urban growth poles and the areas of urban influence associated to them¹².

The ROP strategic objective consists in „supporting a lasting and balanced economical, social development from a territorial point of view, of all Romanian regions, according to the specific needs and resources, with focus on supporting the lasting development of urban growth / development poles, the improvement of business environment and of the basic infrastructure, in order to turn Romanian region, mainly the less developed ones, into attractive areas for investments“ (Junie, Stampar, 2009).

PRACTICAL MOTIVATIONS AND POLITICAL INTERESTS : TOO MANY OR TOO LITTLE TERRITORIAL POLES ?

An analysis applied on the distribution national territorial complex of **growth poles** and development poles allows us to relate a series of problems to the principles and practical criteria that the assignment of various big cities into one category or another was based upon. A preliminary observation is that Bucharest was taken out of the growth poles list, on which it was registered in the previous regulatory documents, through which 8 metropolitan areas were established. Later, it was considered that, given the international habits, assigning metropolitan areas for agglomerations of only 300-400 thousands of

¹¹ The Regional Operational Program (ROP) is the strategic document implementing elements of the National Strategy for Regional Development within the National Plan for Development (NPD) and contributes, together with the other operational programs (e.g. The Sectorial Operational Program Transport Infrastructure, The Sectorial Operational Program Increase of Economic Competitivity), to the accomplishment of the objective of the National Strategy for Regional Development and of the Reference Strategic National Context, respectively to the reduction of economic and social development discrepancies between Romania and the development average of EU member states.

¹² In order to fund growth poles it is allocated a maximum percentage of 50 % (respectively max. 20 % for the urban development poles) from the financial sources relevant for the priority axis 1 «Supporting the lasting development of towns – urban growth poles» of the Regional Operational Program 2007-2013, as defined through the European Commission Decision no. 3.470 from July 12th 2007 (G.D. no. 1149/2008, articles 3 and 4). We underline that, in case of *growth poles*, the funding is intended both to the coordinating urban center and to the communes from the area of influence, meanwhile in case of *development poles*, the funding line is only intended for the urban center.

inhabitants would be unfit, as in Romania there is only one town with the features of a metropolis, Bucharest. That is exactly why, the capital was taken out of the growth poles list, and it continues to develop with a distinct statute, without interfering with the community funding lines reserved for the two categories of poles.

The second observation is that it was preferred to assign one single growth pole for every development region, being chosen the town with the highest demographic and economic concentration and with an important strategic position for the assurance of the national territorial balance and of the relations with neighboring countries' territories. However, we consider that the consistent application of this principle, regardless of the territorial reality evidence, lead to the injustice of one city, namely *Galați*, which was not retained among the growth poles, through a political decision which collides with the meaning itself of the territorial development. With a high development potential, due to its location into a convergent area of great strategic interest for Romania¹³, the urban couple Galați-Brăila could have been a unitary and very strong *national growth pole*. Moreover, Galați together with Brăila, through a comprehensive and intelligent management of the local rivalry relations, could be guided towards a conurbational evolution. The measure of assigning one «pole coordinator» for every established center, stipulated by the G.D. no. 1513, from November 19th 2008, would facilitate such a behavior, which would value the largest urban agglomeration in the country (around 600 thousand inhabitants), after Bucharest.

We also see the option to assign as a growth pole of the city of *Ploiești*, an urban center which, for several decades, seems to have been limiting its development potential. On the one side, we consider this decision as justified, Ploiești being the biggest city in the Region South – Muntenia and being situated in the center of the « economic dorsal » of Romania¹⁴, the one linking Bucharest to Brașov. On the other side, compared to the couple Galați-Brăila or even only with Galați, the city of Ploiești has less advantage to operate as a growth pole, of the functional scope of the other centers from this category. Even if it is favored from the infrastructural and traffic flow concentration points of view, its proximity to the Capital deprives it of a significant part of the third and fourth grade functions of a genuine growth pole, as the city of Ploiești rather operates as a Northern extension of Bucharest, through which the capital infuses and consolidates the above mentioned « economic dorsal », in order to better anchor itself in the national space.

As for the other growth poles, assigning them is completely justified, every one of the cities of Iași, Constanța, Craiova, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca and Brașov operating as undeniable regional leaders, with a high development potential and regional impact.

¹³ As for us, we have been admitting for a long time, in various papers (1994, 1997, 2006, 2007), the need of a coherent support of the urban group Galați-Brăila, in a space of a remarkable national social and economical convergence, with a high potential of cross-border spreading of the urban character, marked by a triple border alignment, convergent in the close North-Eastern vicinity, in the area of Giurgiu-lești-Reni, where Romania has first degree economical and cultural interests.

¹⁴ Through analogy with the „European economic dorsal”, superposed to the axis London – Ranstad Holland – Ruhr –Rhin Valley – Milan, the „Romanian economic dorsal” covers the area of maximum concentration of population, of economic activities, infrastructures and traffic flows, in Romania, on the axis Bucharest – Ploiești – Brașov.

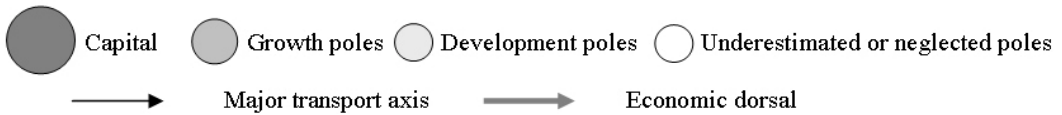
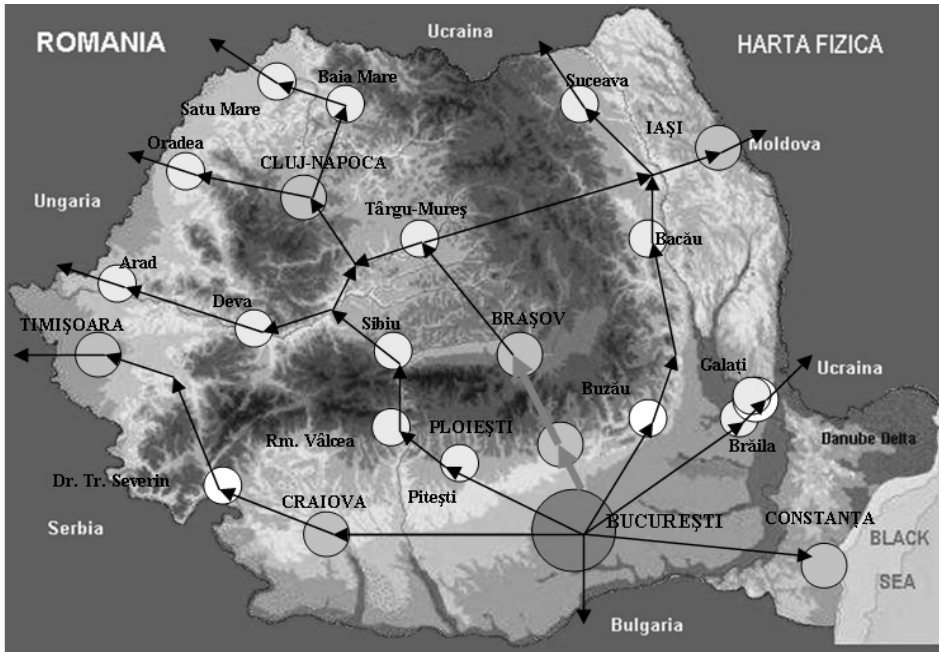


Figure 2. Growth and development poles in Romania (2009)

Upon the incorporation of the second level, the one of **development poles**, the principle of the equitable regional distribution was no longer observed, either from reasons which are related to the regional consistency of the urban phenomenon, or as a result of difficult balances from the political negotiation field. Analyzed in detail, regional situations reveal certain inconsistencies and even deficiencies in the configuration in prospect of the national territorial balance. For example, in the South-Eastern region, the assignment of *Buzău* as a development pole would have been justified by this city’s role as center of balance between the urban network of Moldavia and that of Muntenia, moreover *Buzău* has succeeded during the last two decades to preserve a significant population (132,210 inhabitants in 2009, however less by 10.7 % compared to the year 1992).

In the South-Western region (Oltenia), if *Râmnicu Vâlcea* was chosen as a development pole (in fact, the only one from the region), important pole of support on the axis across the Carpatians of the Olt River and on the 4th European corridor¹⁵, the Western part of the region is practically missing a coordinating center. The city of *Drobeta-Turnu Severin* was not retained among the development poles, even though its demographic decline was less abrupt than the one of other cities from the country (106,507 inhabitants in 2009, with 7.6 % less than in 1992). Thus, it is reconfirmed the tendency at the level of the national political decision to marginalize one of Romania’s most important development axis, the

¹⁵ The city of *Râmnicu Vâlcea* had one of the best demographic behaviours in the Romanian urban system after 1990, its population only decreasing by 2.3 % during the period 1992 – 2009, at the end of which it counted 110,901 inhabitants.

one from East to West, from Bucharest, through Craiova, Drobeta-Turnu Severin and Timișoara, towards the Western Mediteran and alpine Europe, with the central authorities favoring the axis which cross Transilvania (see the option for the «Bechtel» highway¹⁶, the 4th cross-European corridor¹⁷ etc.).

Table 2. Numerical evolution of population in the Romanian big cities (1992-2009)
(Source: adaptation from INSSE, 2009)

City	Number of inhabitants				% in 2009 compared to 1992	% in 2009 compared to the maximum reached after 1989
	1992	2000	2009	Maximum reached after 1989 (year)		
Bucharest	2067782	2010050	1944367	2366678 (1991)	94.0	82.2
The urban growth poles						
Timișoara	334134	330666	311586	334863 (1991)	93.3	93.0
Iași	344415	348124	308843	349605 (2001)	89.7	88.3
Cluj-Napoca	328610	334543	306474	334543 (2000)	93.3	91.6
Constanța	350605	339250	302171	357310 (1991)	86.2	84.6
Craiova	303954	314114	298928	314920 (1999)	98.3	94.9
Brașov	323710	311059	278048	352426 (1991)	85.9	78.9
Ploiești	252697	250748	229285	255639 (1994)	90.7	89.7
The urban development poles						
Galați	326135	327609	291358	332154 (1998)	89.3	87.7
Brăila	234119	231974	212501	248350 (1991)	90.8	85.6
Oradea	222787	221953	204477	228258 (1990)	91.8	89.5
Bacău	205011	209121	177087	210469 (1999)	86.4	84.1
Pitești	179306	187107	166893	179306 (1992)	93.1	93.1
Arad	190143	183928	166003	197861 (1991)	87.3	83.9
Sibiu	169633	168263	154548	182614 (1991)	91.1	90.5
Tg. Mureș	164435	164035	145151	170685 (1991)	88.3	85.0
Baia Mare	149204	150506	139154	152916 (1991)	93.3	91.0
Satu Mare	131981	129832	112705	137936 (1990)	85.4	81.7
Rm. Vâlcea	113620	120497	110901	120497 (2000)	97.6	92.0
Suceava	114448	118011	106934	118670 (1998)	93.4	90.1
Deva	78449	75918	66664	82582 (1991)	85.0	80.7
Other cities comprising over 100 thousand inhabitants						
Buzău	148087	147007	132210	150546 (1996)	89.3	87.8
Botoșani	121351	127125	116110	129834 (1996)	95.7	89.4
Piatra Neamț	123338	124607	107504	126323 (1995)	87.2	85.1
Drobeta Tr. Severin	115250	117268	106507	118807 (1996)	92.4	89.6

In the Western and Central regions, the allocation of development poles is socially and economically justified and balanced from a territorial point of view. However, assigning the city of Deva (66,664 inhabitants on January 1st, 2009) within this category may seem surprising, if we do not count the potential of this town to form a local conurbation with the cities of Hunedoara and Simeria, for a

¹⁶ The formal name is „Transilvania highway”, the work being assigned for execution to the American company Bechtel, in collaboration with the Turkish company Enka Insaat ve Sanayi A.S. The highway route, 415 km long, starts from the South-Western area of Brașov (where it joins A3, towards Bucharest, on the Prahova Valley) and crosses the central parts of Transilvania, from SE to NW, passing by the cities of Făgăraș, Sighișoara, Târgu Mureș, Turda, Cluj-Napoca, Zalău and Oradea, up to the border with Hungary. The works, started in 2004, should be completed in 2013, but they progress with difficulty, because of financial problems.

¹⁷ On the Romanian sector of the 4th European corridor it is designed the building of the highway which starts from Banat and crosses the South of Transilvania, to cross the Meridional Carpatians on the Olt Valley, towards the Capital; the highway will follow the route: Nădlac – Arad – Timișoara – Deva – Sibiu – Rm. Vâlcea – Pitești – București.

demographic potential of approximately 170 thousand inhabitants. This is about a principle which for Deva-Hunedoara quietly worked, but which unfortunately was not applied to the urban group Galați-Brăila, with at least the same integration potential, but with a possibly much more significant national impact.

Compared to the other Romanian development regions, the North-Western region seems to be the most favored, being the only one which has a growth pole, Cluj-Napoca, and three development poles, Oradea, Baia Mare and Satu Mare. If assigning Oradea is not at all questioned, the city being very dynamic, the fact that both Baia Mare and Satu Mare are included among the development poles confirms the local competition between the two cities and the difficulty to choose one of them as a local coordinating pole, even though such an option would be benefic for the functionality of the urban system. The option for Baia Mare could be argued by the more central geographic position and by its demographic consistency (139,154 inhabitants in 2009, only by 6.7 % less than in 1992). On the contrary, Satu Mare is an important center of support in the cross-border competition with the cities from the neighboring countries (Nyiregzhaza in Hungary and Mukacevo in Ucrain)¹⁸, even though its evolution after 1989 is, for the moment, rather disappointing (112,705 inhabitants in 2009¹⁹, by 14.6 % less than in 1992).

In conclusion, we can declare that, if the number of the poles assigned at a national level is justified, their assignment and their appointment on the two hierarchical levels are not in all the circumstances rigorously enough substantiated. In the growth pole category we cannot find a big city, which was defavored, Galați, meanwhile the development pole group could have been completed at least by other two cities, Buzău and Drobeta-Turnu Severin.

DIFFERENT POTENTIAL AND DYNAMICS IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE ROMANIAN GROWTH POLES

The potential analysis of the 7 growth poles assigned in Romania through a governmental decision allows pointing out some similarities, but also some specific discrepancies. They are mainly generated by the degree of favorability of the geographic position, respectively by the capacity of every pole to draw investments and to ensure higher social and economic performances.

First of all, it is ascertained that the *reaction to the inter-community cooperation tendency*, encouraged by the European Union and allowed by the local public administration law (2001), differed and depended mainly on the openness of the local authorities towards the new way of appreciating development. An important role also had the local political homogeneity or heterogeneity. Consequently, the first inter-community associations, materialized in the territory under the name of *metropolitan areas*, were incorporated in Oradea (2002), Iași (2004) and Constanța (2007). In the first case, we notice the very rapid reaction, facilitated by the openness towards new things and the special social and economic dynamics showed by this city during the last decade. In the case of Iași, a supporting role had a certain homogeneity and political continuity of the local authorities, the intellectual openness of the big university center (60 thousand students) and the demographic pressure,

¹⁸ Nyiregyhaza – 116 thousand inh., Mukacevo – 94 thousand inh., in 2008.

¹⁹ The city of Satu Mare used to have in 2006 even less inhabitants than Botoșani (116,110 inh.), center situated compared to Suceava (development pole) in a similar position to the one of the city on the Someș River compared to Baia Mare. Certainly however, the economic force of the two cities cannot be compared, the center of Satu Mare being the favoured one.

higher than in the case of other growth poles. Finally, Constanța benefited, as well, from the political solidarity of local authorities and from the habit of collaboration, exercised in managing the seaside tourism issues.

In the case of the other potential growth poles also occurred explorations, initiatives, projects of this kind, but which did not materialize until the moment of government's decision to allocate them their own funding mechanism. Under the pressure imposed by the obligativity of association in order to have access to the funds available through Axis 1 of the Regional Operational Plan, all the 7 poles advanced in the incorporation process of *inter-community development associations* and in the execution of the *urban development integrated plans* (UDIP).

As for the **position potential**, there also are situations with different degrees of favorability. The most advantaged seem to be the poles well served by radial communication networks, which closely link them to the other big urban centers. It is the case of Brașov and Ploiești, which also benefit from the proximity to the capital, respectively from the opportunities of infrastructural fitting encouraged with priority from the center. Also, Cluj-Napoca has the advantage of regional convergence of communication lines, consolidated by the Transilvania's tradition of intellectual capital. Other poles, even if located in marginal positions within the national territory, value their frontier position, either by drawing foreign investments (Timișoara, favored by the multi-cultural tradition and by the faster access to modern transport infrastructures from Central Europe), or by the consolidation of the strategic importance for the entire country (Constanța, the main Romanian gate to the sea and the biggest port in the entire basin of the Black Sea). Iași, as well, with a less generous position because of the modest connection and vicinity to the Eastern external border of the European Union, slightly permeable, benefits from a special attention as a result of its cultural prestige and of its function as main pole of support in the cross-border collaboration with the Republic of Moldavia.

Consolidating such genuine social, economical and cultural bulwarks, situated towards the edges of the Romanian space, has represented a foreground objective of the regional development even since the inter-war period (Vulcănescu, 1937). Moreover today, when state borders have no longer the role of separating membranes between the European Union countries, the regional policy encourages the affirmation of big border cities, in order to be able to strengthen their position in the competitive dialogue with the regional capitals from neighboring countries, like Novi Sad (290 thousand inh.) and Szeged (169 thousand inh.) in case of Timișoara, Debrecen (205 thousand inh.) in neighborhood of Oradea, or Varna (352 thousand inh.), a strong competitor of Constanța at the Black Sea.

The **demographic potential** of the urban nuclei of the 7 development poles is very close. Practically, their population used to count, on January 1st 2008, between 312 thousand inhabitants (Timișoara) and 278 thousand inhabitants (Brașov), only Ploiești having a slightly more reduced population (230 thousand inhabitants). On the contrary, the contribution of areas of direct influence, that such cities form the growth poles with, performs a much larger range of situations.

A first ascertaining is that, in general, the *areas of influence* of big Romanian cities are traditionally slightly outlined, an evidence being the reduced density of the population. The development planned since the socialist period, excessively preoccupied to concentrate the urban area (in order to make economy of resources, to control it easier etc.) and to clearly demarcate it from the rural space, mainly intended for agricultural production, has lead to the

detachment of Romanian cities from their support base. Consequently, the villages around cities did not differ from the other villages in the country; the demographic density of peri-urban areas is sometimes even smaller, because of the fact that polarizing cities had absorbed their vitality.

The second ascertaining is that related to *regional disparities*. Thus, on January 1st 2009, three of the growth poles had demographic densities in the areas of influence of less than 70 inh./km² (Craiova – 66.9; Timișoara – 65.0; Cluj-Napoca – 53.0 inh./km²). The other four poles had in their areas of influence densities which exceeded 100 inh./km² (see Table 3), but from different reasons: Constanța, because of the big investments performed after the Second World War in port infrastructures, in the economic and tourist fitting of the seaside area, which draw a significant number of inhabitants from other regions of the country; Brașov and Ploiești, as a result of the strong industrial success, also disseminated in the surrounding locations even since the beginning of the 20th century; Iași, because of the traditionally strong natural growth of the population, locally preserved by the employment offers provided by the big city.

Under such circumstances, *the demographic contribution of areas of influence* to the incorporation of growth poles is differentiated, counting (on January 1st, 2009) between 38.4 thousand inhabitants for Craiova and 144.4 thousand inhabitants for Constanța. The percentage of the area of influence in the total pole population is higher in Ploiești, Constanța, Brașov and Iași, counting between 34.5 % and 22.9 %, and smaller in Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara and Craiova, between 19.2 % and 11.4 % of the total population of every pole (Table 3).²⁰

Table 3. The Growth Poles of Romania

(Source:Adaptation from TEMPO-Online data base, INSSE, Bucharest, 2009)

Growth pole	Population (2000)	Population (2005)	Population (2009)	Population % (2009) 2000=100	Population % (2009) 2005=100	Surface (km ²)	Density (inh./km ² /2009)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
CONSTANȚA	339,250	306,860	302,171	89.1	98.5	124.89	2,419.5
Area of influence	128,648	134,397	144,424	112.3	107.5	888.61	162.5
Area of influence %	27.5	30.5	32.3	-	-	87.6	-
Total	467,898	441,257	446,595	95.4	101.2	1,013.50	440.6
BRAȘOV	311,059	283,328	278,048	89.4	98.1	267.32	1,040.1
Area of influence	120,336	118,280	123,993	103.0	104.8	1,101.26	112.6
Area of influence %	27.9	29.5	30.8	-	-	80.5	-
Total	431,395	401,608	402,041	93.2	100.1	1,368.5	293.8
IASI	348,124	307,783	308,843	88.7	100.3	93.9	3,289.1
Area of influence	75,419	83,506	91,504	121.3	109.7	738.36	123.9
Area of influence %	17.8	21.3	22.9	-	-	88.7	-
Total	423,543	391,289	400,347	94.5	102.3	832.26	481.0

²⁰ We point out the fact that only with the growth poles of Constanța, Iași, Ploiești and Timișoara the calculation was made for the administrative units which effectively adhered to inter-community associations. For Cluj-Napoca there have been considered the communes included in the metropolitan area project, and for the other poles, there have been retained the communes or cities considered as eligible by applying the scientific criteria presented above, at point 4.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
CLUJ-NAPOCA	334,543	311,528	306,474	91.6	98.4	165.2	1,855.2
Area of influence	64,089	68,777	72,707	113.4	105,7	1,372.3	53.0
Area of influence %	16,1	18,1	19,2	-	-	89.3	-
Total	398,632	380,305	379,181	95.1	99,7	1,537.5	246.6
TIMIȘOARA	330,666	303,908	311,586	94.2	102.5	130.04	2,396.1
Area of influence	54,296	54,391	61,753	113.7	113.5	950.28	65.0
Area of influence %	14.1	15.2	16.5	-	-	88.0	-
TOTAL	384,962	358,299	373,339	97.0	104.2	1080.32	345.6
PLOIEȘTI	250,748	234,739	229,285	91.4	97.7	58.3	3,932.8
Area of influence	118,900	119,434	120,855	101.6	101.2	553.4	218.4
Area of influence %	32.1	33.7	34.5	-	-	90.5	-
Total	369,648	354,173	350,140	94.7	98.9	611.7	572.4
CRAIOVA	314,114	299,494	298,928	95.2	99.8	81.41	3,671.9
Area of influence	38,398	37,450	38,351	99.9	102.4	573.39	66.9
Area of influence %	10.9	11.1	11.4	-	-	87.6	-
Total	352,512	336,944	337,279	95.7	100.1	654.8	515.1

We also point out the fact that the *demographic dynamics* of the growth poles presents a series of differences, in the general context of the urban centers percentage decrease and of the importance increase of areas of influence. The best demographic resistance (in percentage, in 2009 compared to 1992 – see Table 2) was proven by the city of Craiova (98.3 %), and the weakest performance was experienced by the cities of Brașov (85.9 %) and Constanța (86.2 %). With big enterprises of heavy industry and building grounds, these two cities had drawn a big number of employees from other country regions, especially from Moldavia. A part of them would progressively return in their land of origin, after 1989, at the same time with the decline of urban industry and with the recovery of the property over agricultural land (in application of law 18/1991).

Table 4. The migrating movement of the population in the counties with urban growth poles (2004-2008)
(Source: adaptation from the TEMPO-Online data base, INSSE, 2009)

County	Removals (2004-2008)			City	Removals (2004-2008)		
	Installed	Departed	Balance		Installed	Departed	Balance
Brașov	47,115	48,123	-1,008	Brașov	15,485	22,405	-6,920
Cluj	52,224	46,355	5,869	Cluj-N.	18,173	16,666	1,507
Constanța	68,381	62,373	6,008	Constanța	18,489	23,357	-4,868
Dolj	53,094	52,927	167	Craiova	15,943	19,579	-3,636
Iași	63,338	67,118	-3,780	Iași	20,004	26,272	-6,263
Prahova	55,369	57,187	-1,818	Ploiești	11,160	16,631	-5,471
Timiș	71,814	55,759	16,055	Timișoara	25,703	26,640	-973
Ilfov	49,291	19,726	29,565	București	238,263	224,459	13,804

In compensation, the peri-urban areas have experienced positive evolutions during the recent years, within all the poles, due to the local reallocation of the

population, to which there were also added cross-county migrating flows, more obvious in case of Timiș, Constanța and Cluj counties (table 4). Consequently, the general demographic situation of the growth poles is rather balanced.

Finally, corroborating the above mentioned various data, we reach the conclusion that the growth poles with the *biggest demographic agglomerations*, thus with the biggest markets, are, in order: Constanța (almost 445 thousand inhabitants), Brașov (402 thousand), Iași (400 thousand), followed at a distance by Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara, Ploiești and Craiova (see table 3). Such agglomerations are also the most attractive for investments, especially in the trade field.

However, the order of growth poles is different, if we take into consideration the **economic criteria**. Difficult to locally analyze it because of the lack of statistical data, the economic potential of growth poles could be evaluated based on the local budgets of the constituent administrative units, even though they not only include local incomes, but also the funds drawn in order to complete local investment programs.

Thus, it is ascertained that the cities (nuclea of the growth poles) which had proposed the biggest local budgets for 2008 had been Timișoara (246 bill. euro) and Cluj-Napoca (237 bill. euro), followed at a big distance by : Iași (133 bill. euro), Brașov (130 bill. euro), Craiova (122), Constanța (118) and Ploiești (117 bill. euro)²¹.

An indicative image over the social and economical dynamics of the Romanian growth poles and over their regional vocation can also be provided by their hierarchy in the *passenger airports traffic*. As we are dealing with the Romanian space, standing in full progress of affirmation of the capitalist economy, the dimension and direction of the passenger air traffic are directly related to the internationalization of the local and regional economy, respectively to the affirmation of the middle class, whose incomes and spatial behavior explain the setting-up of long-haul traffic services, expensive but rapid. From this point of view, the big cities situated close to Bucharest are under-privileged, the Capital taking over the majority of the air transport request from the South-Eastern part of the country. On the other hand, the airports situated far from Bucharest, but close to the Western border of Romania (Oradea, Arad, Satu Mare etc.), are also in competition with the big airports from the neighboring countries, especially with the Budapest airport, which benefits from regular bus transport services.

Even considering such conditionalities, at a regional level only *Timișoara* and *Cluj-Napoca growth poles* can be distinguished, with airports, served by regional companies (Carpatair) and by some low cost companies (Wizz Air, Blue Air etc.), which used to have a 950 thousand passenger traffic, respectively 750 thousand passengers in 2008, thus covering a significant part of the air transport request from the Western and North-Western part of Romania. Except these two, none of the other Romanian big cities does not prove, through the recorded air traffic, to have a real regional dimension (Table 5). Even the municipalities of Iași and Constanța, which benefit from a remarkable growth

²¹ The hierarchy of the big cities, according to the local budget stipulated for 2008, presented by „Ziarul financiar”, also comprises the following cities: Oradea (140 bill. euro), Arad (138 bill. euro), Galați (135), Sibiu (104 bill. euro), Bacău (98), , Pitești (81), Buzău (74), Brăila (64), Baia Mare (61), Focșani (57), Satu Mare (56 bill.), Rm. Vâlcea (54bill. euro) (*Ziarul financiar* from 07.05.2008, the article „Bătălia pentru 10 miliarde de euro” [*The Fight for 10 Billions of Euros*], signed by *Doina Anghel*). We underline that the above figures refer to the budget project for 2008, the subsequent budget execution being, generally, below the initially proposed level, as a consequence of the economic downturn, whose effects have begun to be felt during the last quarter of 2008.

potential, are, each of them, servient of specific weakness, which prevents them to play a regional role within the air traffic. Iași, situated in an intensely populated area, is penalized by its marginal position in the North-East of the country, at the EU outer border, by the low social and economical development of its supporting region and by its reduced ability to draw foreign investments. Constanța, situated too close to Bucharest (250 km), could be favored by the traditional coordinating role of the balneary tourism from the Romanian Black Sea resorts. However, unfortunately, such resorts have lost during the last years theirs force of attraction over the Romanian middle class and over the Central European foreign tourists, in favor of the balneary resorts from other countries.

Table 5. Passenger traffic of the Romanian Airports (2008)

(Source: Author's personal documentation, 2009)

Airport	Passenger traffic (thousand)	Main destinations
București-Otopeni	5.064	<i>Romania:</i> Bacau, Baia Mare, Cluj-Napoca, Iasi, Oradea, Satu Mare, Sibiu, Timisoara, Targu Mures. <i>Other countries:</i> over 50 destinations in 32 countries
Bucharest-Băneasa	1.768	<i>Romania:</i> Arad, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu. <i>Other countries:</i> over 35 destinations in 15 countries.
Timișoara	957	<i>Romania:</i> Bacău, București, Cluj-Napoca, Constanța, Craiova, Iași, Oradea, Sibiu, Suceava. <i>Other countries:</i> Ancona, Bari, Bologna, Florence, Forli, Milan, Perugia, Rome, Torino, Verona, Venice; Dusseldorf, Dortmund, Munchen, Stuttgart; Vienna; Athens; Budapest; Chernivtsi, Kiev, Lviv, Odessa; Chișinău; Barcelona, Valencia; Paris; London.
Cluj-Napoca	752	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Forli, Milan, Pisa, Rome, Torino, Venice; Barcelona, Madrid, Palma de Mallorca, Valencia; Lyon, Paris; London; Dortmund, Munchen; Vienna; Budapest.
Sibiu	165	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Targu-Mures, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Vienna; Munchen, Koln, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Dusseldorf; Madrid.
Iași	146	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Vienna; Budapest.
Arad	130	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest. <i>Other countries:</i> Valencia; Verona.
Bacău	119	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Bergamo, Catania, Rome, Torino; London.
Constanța	80	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Brussels; Pisa.
Oradea	50	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara.
Târgu Mureș	47	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest. <i>Other countries:</i> Budapest; Copenhagen.
Suceava	25	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest, Timisoara. <i>Other countries:</i> Vienna; Venice.
Baia Mare	22	<i>Romania:</i> Bucharest. <i>Other countries:</i> Vienna; Rome, Venice.
Satu Mare	10	Bucharest
Craiova	6	Timisoara

A special role in sizing the urban centers was held, over time, by **creative services**, the ones which represent the so called quaternary sector. Education, mainly upper education, health, cultural, administrative services etc., which highly amplify the external influence power of a city, but also its power of attraction, are differently concentrated and represented in the 7 growth poles. The most prestigious, from this point of view, is Cluj-Napoca, closely followed by Iași.

Old university centers²², with prestigious cultural and art institutions, with excellent gathering of values, with a large regional health provision system, the two centers were advantaged by the political and administrative role that they accomplished during certain historical periods and by the synergic effect from among all these on one hand, the economic and financial factor and demographic increase on the other hand. Timișoara, then Craiova, Constanța, Brașov and Ploiești also benefit from a remarkable cultural prestige (Popa, 2000, p. 45)²³.

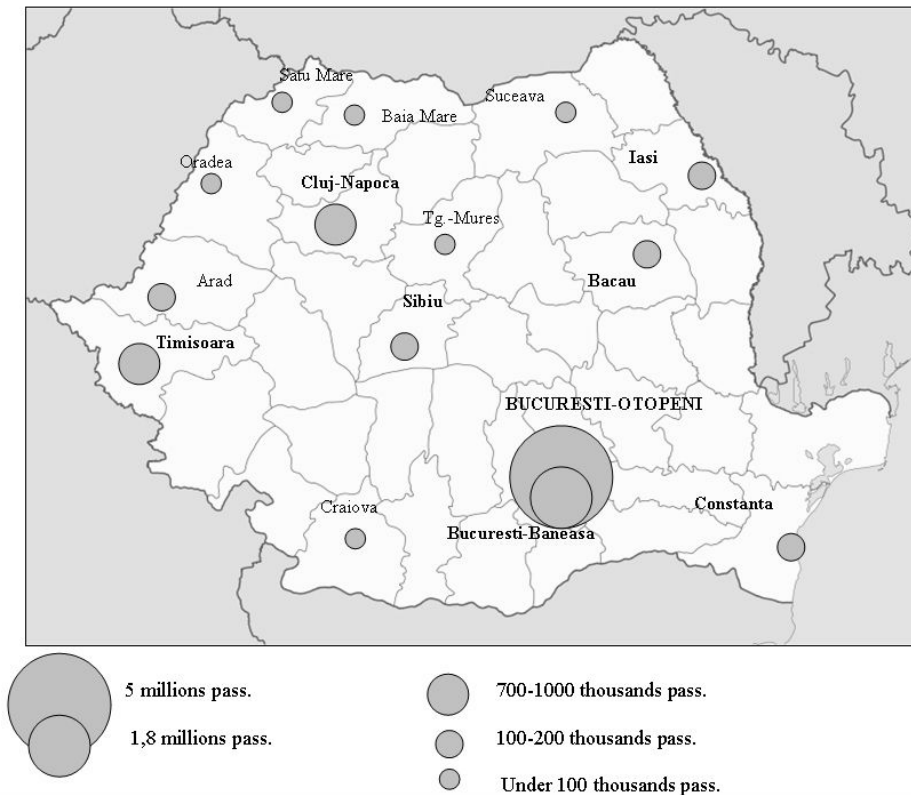


Figure 3. Air passenger traffic of the airports in Romania (2008)

The future social and economic development of growth poles shall be supported by the financial allocations available through the Regional Operational Plan 2007-2013. After the negotiations between the central and regional authorities, it has been agreed that up to 50 % of the funds relevant for the priority axis 1 « Supporting the lasting development of towns – potential growth poles » should be allocated to the 7 growth poles²⁴ (approx. 621.27

²² In the university year 2006/2007, in the university center Cluj-Napoca there were registered 66,033 students, and in Iași 60,102, representing over one quarter of Romanian students (except Bucharest). The two centers were followed by Timișoara, with 48,541 students (*Romanian Statistical Yearbook, INS, 2007*).

²³ For the execution of this classification, the following elements have been quantified: higher education establishment, a no. of students, a no. of university professors, a no. of highschools, a no. of research institutes, a no. of hospitals, a no. of cultural institutions (operas, theatres, philharmonics, cultural houses etc.), a no. of libraries, a no. of locally edited newspapers and magazines, a no. of bank agencies.

²⁴ According to the Government.Decision no. 1149/2008, article 3.

millions of euros from EFRD and co-funding from the State budget), which would receive the funds in a differentiated way, according to their degree of social and economic development. The poles with a lower income per inhabitant shall benefit from bigger amounts, and the developed ones shall receive smaller allocations, that they will be able to absorb through projects, as follows : Iași (114 millions of euros), Ploiești (97 millions of euros), Craiova (95.5 millions of euros), Constanța (90.32 millions of euros), Cluj-Napoca (82.41 millions of euros), Brașov (74.30 millions of euros) and Timișoara (70.49 millions of euros) (guiding allocations, according to MRDH, 2009).

In order to absorb such funds, there had been executed, at the level of each pole, during 2009, *an urban development integrated plan – PIDU [UDIP]*, which stipulates a development strategy, based on concrete projects, prioritized according to the principle of their integrating role at the pole level. The implementing authority would coordinate the investment process, so as to provide a good coherence in the social and economical development of the agglomeration, both quarterly and spatially.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of the principles mentioned in the various documents of legal foundation and normative regulation of the *growth / development poles* settlement hustles against a series of *objective and subjective obstacles*, which belong to: the European level (the limitations of the European funding programs); the national level (the incoherence of the national contracting authority, the frequent changes of regulations and eligibility requirements); the local level (characterized by stagnation, traditionalism, lack of planning competences, individualism, limited spatial vision, political blockages etc.); the difficulties of communication and understanding between the different involved levels.

However, beside all these, some *basic vices* need to be imposed, vices which are related to the national strategy for the promotion of development through the urban poles. They derive from the defective conceptual foundation and empirical check of the adopted solutions.

On one hand, the national strategy must provide the development funding of the centers with the highest dissemination potential of urbanism and social and economical performance within the territory, so as to create a *network of national competition poles*, able to face the European and extra-European regional competition.

On the other hand, this strategy should prevent the potential increase of the pole centripetal behavior in their supporting regions, behavior which would lead to the demographic and economic disruption of regions and would contradict the *principle of social cohesion*, considered essential in the increase of social and economical performances, in the accomplishment of a sustainable local and regional development.

Under the conditions of the market economy, this balance is difficult to obtain, as a result of the natural tendency companies to place themselves so that they take the best of the *agglomeration effect*, of the access to information, of the maximum accessibility and connectivity, which can be found, naturally, within the most powerful and dynamic growth poles. The financial infusion through structural funds should point this aspect, of supporting the projects and activities able to reduce the excessive polarization, inside and outside the growth / development poles, to create conditions for the valuation of all the local potentials and for the dissemination within the territory of the economical and social success models.

Finally, we mention that the fulfillment of this article (especially the access to the official data bases) would not have been possible without the financial support provided through the National program for exploratory research PNCDI-II-ID-PCE, through the Research program, code CNCSIS ID_1067, on the subject „Advanced research regarding the dynamics of identity structures and of the social and economical disparities from the Western Region of Romania and its cross-border area”, project financed by CNCSIS through the agreement no. 1020/2009, closed between the Western University of Timișoara and UEFISCSU. I also thank Prof. Dr. David Turnock, from University of Leicester, whose observations and suggestions allowed the completion and the better definition of some of the issues approached in this article.

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Submitted:
May 10, 2010

Revised:
September 6, 2010

Accepted:
October 13, 2010

Published online:
November 12, 2010