

THE HIERARCHICAL SYSTEM OF SETTLEMENTS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: Nowadays, in Romania are being distinguished 10 systemic categories of settlements, of which 7 are polarizing urban centres and 3 of them polarizing the rural.

The systemic categories with a polarizing urban centre are:

- The capital*
- The provincial metropolis*
- The regional centres(out of county)*
- The county centres*
- Urban centres with zonal influence*
- Urban centres with local influence I*
- Urban centres with local influence II.*

Those with rural polarizing centres are the following:

- Rural centres with supracommunal polarization*
- Commune centres*
- Sub communal centres.*

Key words: *settlements, regional centres, Romania*

Romania's surface is of 239 321 sq km and the population number is about 21, 5 million inhabitants.

In 1990 in Romania there were 262 cities and 2686 communes with 13 099 villages. Between 1990- 2005, 58 new cities were declared and there were founded 176 communes, (the commune being the territorial form of organizing the rural space).

From the administrative point of view, in Romania, there are three territorial categories:

- The commune*
- The city*
- The county*

In average, there are 5 villages to one commune, one of them having the position of a communal centre. The medium number of people in a commune is of 3 875 persons, but with big differentiations between regions. For example, nearby Bucharest, some of the communes have over 10 000 people, as well as in Apuseni Mountains these are frequently under 1 000 people.

There are two categories of cities, that is:

- Simple cities*

– Municipal cities

Second type cities have a more numerous population and more complex urban utilities.

Counties are the administrative units of higher level. The centres, which are county residences, are, without any doubt, cities with municipal position.

Today (2006, March) in Romania there are 2862 communes, 13098 villages, 320 cities and 41 counties. Out of the 320 cities, 93 have the municipal rank. The medium surface of a commune is of 80 sq km, and that of a county is 5842 sq km.

The national overall of communes, cities and counties associates itself with systemic structures of various ranks and complexity degrees.

The settlements system is defined as a "liberated association of two or more neighboured settlements, within which, there are established collaboration relationships, based on distinguished distribution, qualitatively and quantitatively, of the functions in the territory" (V. Surd, 2004). Whichever territorial system supposes the existence of a polarization and coordination centre that usually gathers together the most favourable qualities from the positional, functional and demographical potential point of view. The polarization centres of the settlement systems functionally distribute in hierarchical order and fulfill themselves, resulting in a mixture of complex territorial circumstances, capable of satisfying human and social needs of an inherent diversity, sometimes taking into account the hierarchical order from the qualitative point of view. Each hierarchical system of settlements is defined by the existence of a territory for sustaining and polarizing, which logically grows in surface in connection with the rank of the polarizing centre, in a historical- systemic- recognized hierarchy.

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The systemic categories with a polarizing urban centre are:

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Provincial metropolises are urban centres of rank II, in the national hierarchy. These, without any doubt, have a number of population under 400 000 inhabitants, at a significant distance- in this respect, in connection with the capital. According to the rule rank- size, the population of provincial metropolises should be of 1 million inhabitants.

In the category of provincial metropolises there are included the following cities: Craiova, Constanța, Galați, Iași, Brașov, Cluj-Napoca and Timișoara. The medium distance between them is about 300 km, each one covering a polarizing area of 35 000 sq km and with 2, 8 million inhabitants.

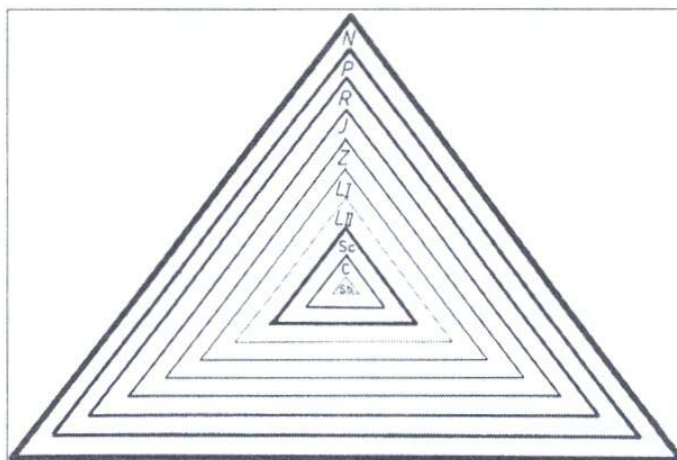


Figure 1. The hierarchy of settlement territorial systems (N-national, P-provincial, R-regional, J-county, Z-zonal, Li-local of the first rank, Lii-local of the second rank, Sc-supracommunal, C-communal, Sb-subcommunal).

All these cities are characterized by a remarkable territorial conscience especially about the level of the historical provinces, even from medieval period. (Iasi for Moldavia, Cluj-Napoca and Brasov for Transylvania, Timișoara for Banat, Craiova for Oltenia, Galați for the south of Moldavia and eastern Muntenia, and Constanța for Dobrogea).

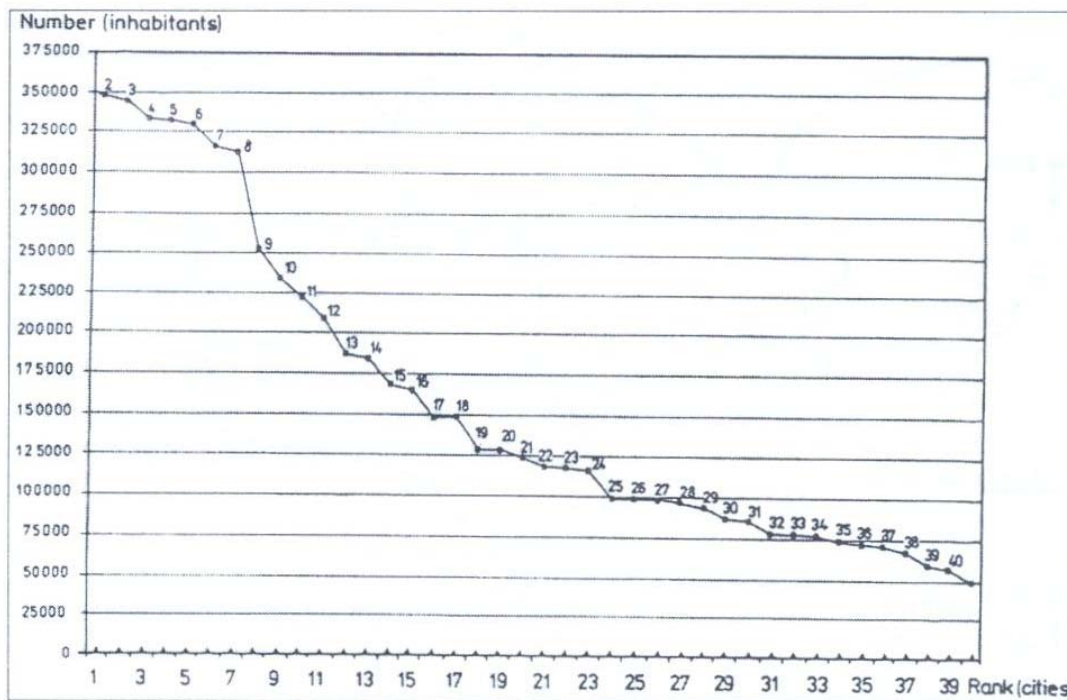


Figure 2. Relation rank-size of county residence cities.

On the third place in the national hierarchical system stand the regional centres which have influence out of the county. They have a demographical potential under 200 000 inhabitants and a good quality industrial tradition. In the last 15 years they also improved their education functions, through strengthening and diversifying the higher education. They find themselves at a medium distance one from another, of about 200 km and polarize territories of about 15 000 sq km.

The fourth step is occupied by the county centres. The medium distance between them is 140 km, and the medium polarized surface is of 6 000 sq km.

On the fifth stage are situated the cities with a zonal influence. These ones exercise their judiciary control, sanitary and bank services, over the neighbored villages and they also take over the education functions (for example: Huedin, Cluj County; Luduș, Mureș county; Gheorgheni, Harghita County; Jimbolia, Timiș County; Negru Voda, Constanta county, and others).

The sixth level of this hierarchical system is formed by the old cities, usually balneary and climatic resorts or centres of extractive industry, which polarize only their administrative territory. Most of them find themselves in an advanced economic and demographic regress (for example: Nucet, Bihor County; Sângeorz-Băi, Bistrița-Năsăud County; Toplet, Caraș-Severin County; Bălan, Harghita County, and others).

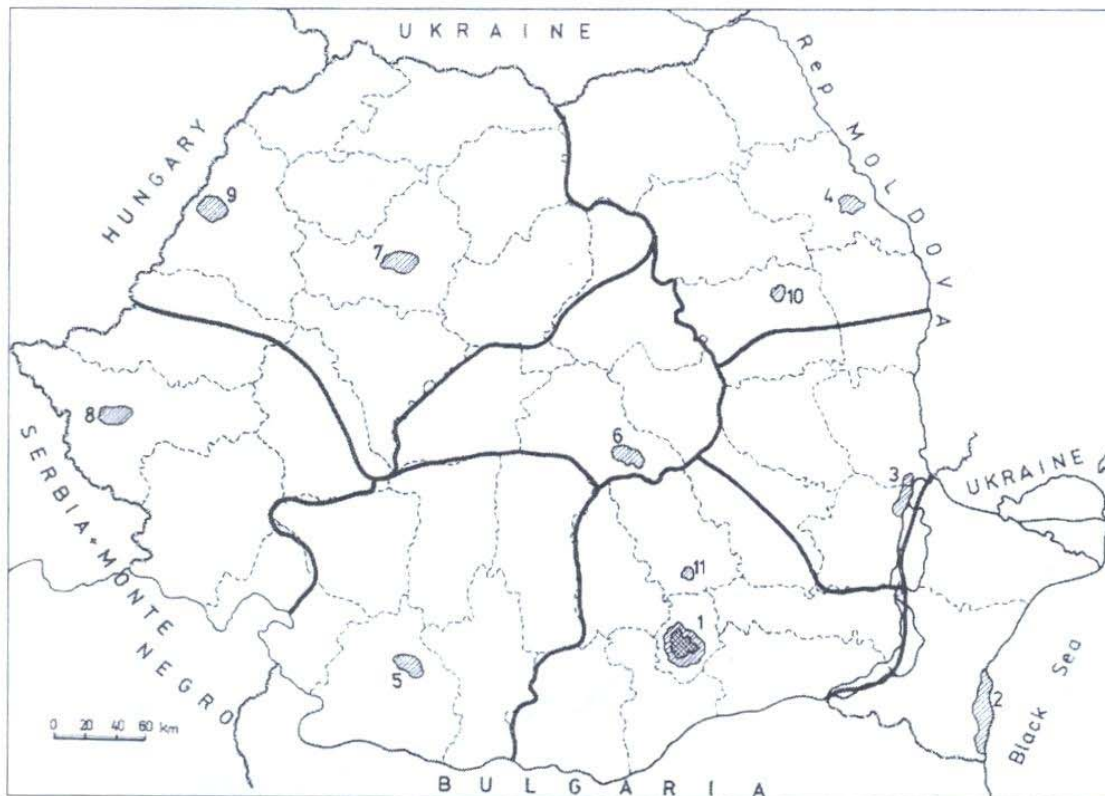


Figure 3. Provincial polarizing centres (1-8) and metropolitan areas (1-11) in Romania: 1. Bucharest; 2. Constanța; 3. Galați-Braila; 4. Iași; 5. Craiova; 6. Brașov; 7. Cluj-Napoca; 8. Timișoara; 9. Oradea; 10. Bacău; 11. Ploiești.

The seventh step is created by the new urban centres declared after 1990. They are former commune centres with a better location potential, which polarize their affiliated villages. Some of the local communities of these cities are unhappy with their “urban”

position, because they cannot access European funds for rural development anymore. Building up new cities and communes represents some kind of political “do something”. As it was said before, most of the new declared cities don’t have a minimal infrastructure and do not respond convincingly to the demands urban life has (current water, sewerage system, physiognomy, functions, etc). For proving the misplaced interventions of the political factor, we give as examples two cities from Maramureş County, Dragomireşti and Săliştea de Sus, which were two villages that overnight transformed into cities, situated at a 3 km distance from each other.

Supracommunal centres attract small villages by their educational, administrative, sanitary and commercial functions. Within their bound the supracommunal influence centre detaches itself. These are bigger rural settlements, which concentrate the administrative function, and also have sanitary services, commercial and higher educational functions (hospitals, drug stores, stomatology, high- schools, vocational schools, restaurants, and others). They are planned to also have judiciary function.

Communal centres enjoy themselves of a standard system of endowments (primary and secondary school I- IXth grade, city hall, post office, police and medical centre). In Romania, the medium number of population of a village is about 775 inhabitants, and the polarization potential of a commune is a medium number of 4 villages. There are also cases when one commune is formed of one single village, which is itself a communal centre, for example Sic, Cluj county – large village with over 2 000 inhabitants.

Subcommunal polarizing centres are intermediate villages, between the small ones and communal centres. They have primary schools, I-IVth grade, shops, and some workrooms and production unities. They polarize one or more neighboured villages, which usually have a fragile demographical potential (under 200 inhabitants) and frequently have only a church. Most of them (approximately 6 000) evolve naturally to a falling into disrepair.

With a view to optimizing the administration and territorial exploitation they have in plan the creation of some metropolitan areas, which results in an inclusion within the bounds of these systemic formations, of new peripheral communes of the large urban centres, provincial or regional. “The base of their founding is the crisis of space and large demographic densities in big cities in connection with excess of territory and of population in peripheral villages. Besides this, these urban centres have big local budgets, whereas marginal communes at their most are poor. Hence there are created the premises of a territorial optimization bringing into account the surplus of land in peripheral villages and the financial and demographical potential of bigger cities and creation of new spatial structures, with higher functionalities.”(Săgeată R. and all, 2004). According to Law no. 351/2001, M. P. N. T. (The Management Plan of National Territory) IVth section - “Localities network”, the metropolitan area is defined as being an area made through association, based on voluntary partnership between larger urban centres and urban and rural localities situated just about 30 km away, in between which created cooperation relationship on various devices. Consequently, besides the capital, Bucharest city, another 11 large cities are named, as having municipal rank: Constanţa, Brăila, Galaţi, Bacău, Iaşi, Ploieşti, Craiova, Timișoara, Oradea, Cluj-Napoca and Braşov.

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