



---

# North–West Region and South–Muntenia Region – Romania. Comparative Analysis

Cristina Monica MITRAN  
„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

---



The regional issue is always present in Romania, especially if we consider that Romanian development regions are not legal persons, do not have legislative power. Nevertheless, they are repeaters for the allocation of the European Union funds. The regions, however, make progresses in the coordination of a range of regional development projects, collection of regional statistics and finding out solutions for regional problems through an intra-regional collaboration.

The present study analyses comparatively North-West region and South-Muntenia region level of development by analyzing key indexes of development, intra-regional and inter-regional disparities, their choremes and their regional strategies.

A comparative analysis of the two regions considered can be realized examining comparatively several domains: natural environment, human resources, environment, infrastructure, economy. One must also take into consideration important indexes from various domains and draw a comparison. It is also important to analyze the inter- and intra-regional disparities. Interesting conclusions can be drawn by comparing the choremes (Rey, 2002) for the regions in question.

At a first level of comparison of the two regions, a certain resemblance is relatively obvious as it concerns their internal structure: *both of the regions are characterized by heterogeneous development within the counties (intra-regional disparities)*. They both have a *superior degree of development* in some counties – in the North-West region the counties of Cluj, Bihor, in the South – Muntenia region Prahova and Argeş counties, some *medium developed counties*: Satu Mare and Maramureş (North-West region), Dâmboviţa (South – Muntenia region). There are also some *underdeveloped counties* which act as the ‘weak chain’ of the two regions: Bistriţa-Năsăud and Sălaj counties in the North-West region, Ialomiţa, Călăraşi, Giurgiu and Teleorman. These counties prevent the regions to go up and move to a superior level in the regional development hierarchy: South – Muntenia region is on the 7<sup>th</sup> level as development is concerned, while the North-West region has a good position, yet it is still behind the West and Central regions. These positions are precisely the consequence of the presence of those very low developed counties within the regions.

## Comparison

*Geographical characteristics.* Their areas are comparable (34.159 sq km North – West region and 34.453 square kilometers South – Muntenia region – in 2003), both of them occupying an analogous area from the total area of the country (14,32% the former region and 14,45% the latter). The South – Muntenia region is largely a plain (70,7%), even though it also has hills and mountains, while the North – West region is predominantly mountainous even though it has also hills and plains. Inside the first region mentioned there is a topographic hierarchy of the relief forms, while in the latter they are interposed.

Both have important hydrographic resources with two important rivers: Danube and Tisa respectively, which are each collectors for their regions.

The regions are both wealthy in natural resources due to the variety of relief forms and their geological complexity.

*Human resources.* The difference in number of the population (approximately 1 million people in favor of the South – Muntenia region) can be explained by taking into consideration the number of counties that form the regions (6 counties versus 7 counties) and the migration phenomenon more severe in the North – West region.

Both of the regions' demographic structure in terms of age reveals the presence of a slow but steady population *ageing process*. In the North – West region, the urban population predominates (51,2% - in 2003), comparative with its counterpart where only 40,7% (in 2003) of the population lives in an urban environment.

*Environment.* The quality of the environment measured against the evaluation of the pollution of individual components (air, water, soil, forests etc.) varies considerably along the territories of the two regions considered.

After 1990 there was an improvement because of the legislation reinforcement. The high industrialization levels in certain areas of both regions and the concentration in these areas of some polluting industrial activities are resulting in a negative impact on the quality of life and on the living conditions.

The agricultural areas in both regions, due to the decreased degree of industrialization are less affected by the characteristic polluting factors, but instead, they suffer from erosion, poor nutritive substances content and chemical pollution. A remarkable problem is represented by the storage of the domestic and non domestic waste. Until now, there aren't available within the regions some complex and modern systems, able to achieve the separation, processing, use and destruction of the waste, including their cremation.

We can also analyze some *indexes which characterize the level of development and the economic potential*. The indexes chosen are from different fields of economy:

- GDP per inhabitant (2002) – this is one of the indexes which show the general level of development;
- unemployment rate in December 2003 – it gives important information on the unemployment phenomenon;
- settlements with drinking water installations (2003);
- settlements with public sewerage installation (2003);

These last two indexes show the life quality of the people and they are indicators of the stage of development in which the settlements are. Economically active population in 2003 calculate as percentage of the total population aged 15 years and over - it's a very important indicator of the occupied workforce, of the level of coverage of work on the work market related to the supply of work places on the work market.

**Table 1. Key indexes for development and economic potential.**

Region	INDEXES				
	GDP per inhabitant 2002	Unemployment Rate (2003)	Number of settlements with public sewerage installations (2003)	Number of settlements with drinking water installations (2003)	Economically active population in 2003 (thou persons)
South- Muntenia	55.626.987	8,3	94	557	1.563
North - West	65.381.319	5,4	107	785	1.228
<b>Romania</b>	<b>69.500.586</b>	<b>7,4</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>3.375</b>	<b>-</b>

(Source: Adapted from the Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2004).

Analyzing the data in the table we can conclude that:

- North – West region's value of GDP is very close to the national value, while the South – Muntenia region has a GDP value which is one of the lowest;
- North – West region is characterized by a lower value of the unemployment rate, while South – Muntenia region has a very high rate – one of the highest in the country;
- the number of settlements endowed with public sewerage network and the number of settlements with drinking water installations – show the life quality in the regions. The difference between the two regions is important especially as it concerns the drinking water system;
- last index considered – economically active population favors the South region.

## North–West Region and South–Muntenia Region –Romania. Comparative Analysis

As *inter-regional disparities* are concerned, analyzing *geo-demographical structures on regions*, South – Muntenia region is characterized by a high *rate of the population over 65 years old* (15,7% in 2002) from the total number of population. Their predominance within the population structure on age and age groups is determined by a very high *mortality rate* (13,6%). The predominance of the population being 65 and above determines, at its turn, a high *pressure of this age group on the young population* (23 old people depending on 100 adults).

As it concerns the *average life span*, the minimum value is 70,2 in the North – West region.

The urban-rural disparities analysis reveals a very low *degree of urbanization* in the South – Muntenia region. Here, there predominates the rural population (59,3% in 2003), as this region is mainly a plain one – as the geo-morphological aspect is concerned – and thus agricultural activities are predominant.

The *migration phenomenon* is an important one being visible mostly in the North – West region, where whole villages lack the active population – as it emigrated for good in other countries or just emigrated for work for a determined period of time. Some of them come back and change the façade of the villages by building very large houses with modern facilities and these persons are themselves changed. Meanwhile their lands have been worked by persons hired from other regions of the country.

A very interesting index is that of the *average number of state social insurance pensioners* which shows an important difference between the two regions: in the South – Muntenia region there are 743.850 persons in 2003 that benefited from the state pension, while in the North – West region there are 600.439 persons.

Comparing the *expenditure for unemployed social protection in 2003* in thou lei the South – Muntenia region totalizes 2.351.374 while in the North – West region these expenditures totalize 1158733 thousand lei in the same year.

*Economical growth* had a West - East direction in Romania, thus the North – West region is more advantaged than the South one. Thus, one can say that economical growth has an important geographic valence presupposing a higher economic growth in the regions situated on the direction of this economic wave. South – Muntenia region is usually associated with under-development as a cause of un-employment and the predominance of rural activities.

South – Muntenia region is greatly dependent on agriculture and most of the indexes values in the table below are influenced by this; also the Danube plays the role of a barrier for trans-border commerce. North – West region has been advantaged by its position very close to the West markets and their low dependency on the primary sector.

The table below shows the values of some key indexes which determine development.

Table 2. Key factors of regional development (national average=100).

Region	Foreign Direct Investments (2002)	Small and Medium Size Enterprises (2002)	Rural population (2002)
North – West	70,8	108,1	104,7
South - Muntenia	51,9	72,9	127,2

(Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2003).

These *inter-regional disparities* have various causes:

- localization and degree of foreign direct investments;
- agricultural tradition;
- infrastructural potential;
- migration phenomenon;
- closeness to external markets;
- existence of underprivileged areas.

*Foreign Direct Investments* have been oriented towards those regions which were accessible and had potential, yet a very important aspect is also the mentality of the businessmen involved in this area in and the tradition in this field.

North – West region is the beneficiary of an important participation of the foreign capital in the process of development. This because there was a tradition in this field and there is an open-mind ness towards foreign investments, a continuous adaptation to the international environment.

From this respect, North – West region is situated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> place nationally as it concerns the total number of small companies which are beneficiaries of Foreign Direct Investments (9,7% represents the total number from 100 % nationally), South – Muntenia region being on the 7<sup>th</sup> place nationally (3,7% of small companies which are beneficiaries of Foreign Direct Investments).

An important index which has an important role in determining the regional competitiveness is the *number of employees from Research and Development activity at the end of 2003*. The comparison of the two values favors South – Muntenia region with 4205 employees as compared with the 2.742 employees in the North – West region. The change in technology is mandatory for regional development and this change is determined by the intensification of the innovation activity. A study of the situation of the *work force* reveals a 51,2% of *labor employment rate* in 2003 for South – Muntenia region, very close to 50,9% in the North – West region for the same year.

During the period 1997-2000, statistics show an important increase of the *population working in the third sector* in the North – West region (34.600.000 persons).

By analyzing the levels of *education* in the period 1995-2003, statistics show that the *number of high-school pupils* has decreased in both regions under question with the same rate. As for the *tertiary education*, the data registered reveal a very big difference between the number of the persons engaged in a superior level of education in South Muntenia region (40.645 persons) and North – West region (87.042 persons).

Although from the previous statistics, most of the indexes showed South – Muntenia region as being under-privileged as compared to North – West region, it is the beneficiary of a good access to *transport infrastructure*. It has almost all of the national roads modernized, 4 international roads cross it and it has good access to the national and international road network.

*Environment infrastructure* is problematic in both regions as the national background is the same. This is because the rhythm of waste generation increased rapidly and there is a low capacity of waste management. There are ecologic deposits but a very small number, as the table below shows.

Region	Number of ecologic deposits	
	Existent	Under construction
North – West	0	0
South - Muntenia	3	0

**Table 3. Ecologic deposits.** Source: RDAs analyses.

We see again, a domain where South – Muntenia region is better equipped than its counterpart.

*Business infrastructure* consists of industrial parks, technological parks and represents a new thing for Romania. There are 8 projects for industrial parks in South– Muntenia region and 6 in its counterpart.

Violette Rey in her 'Atlas of Romania' draws some models made of *choremes* for each of the 8 regions. By their help geographical space is synthesized using these elementary structures.

We can analyze comparatively the two regions also by considering their choremes. Because of their very transparent and clear way of representing how space is organized within the regions we can draw some conclusions that are more evident than when indexes or general description are analyzed.

*Similarities:*

- both regions are characterized by a *phenomenon of a-centralization of the regional capital* – Călărași and Cluj-Napoca are both situated in the South extreme of the region;
- both have *important industrial sites* in the Northern part of the region;
- both of the regions have a *natural border - the mountains* – in the South-West and Eastern parts for the North – West region and in the Northern part for the South–Muntenia region;
- both have *natural external borders* for a certain length (Tisa and Danube respectively);
- North – West region has *external borders* (with Hungary and Ukraine) with different degrees of permeability (permeability being discussed in terms of foreign investments) – with Hungary the border is open for foreign investments, even though

on a general level the frontier is not so active economically; South– Muntenia region also has an external border with Bulgaria;

**Differences:**

- Cluj is already a central place (industrially, culturally, for health services, regionally, provincially, administratively etc.) while Călărași became ‘central’ precisely because the Regional Development Agency ‘headquarters’ have been placed here. In a way, we can say that Cluj has a natural-historical centrality, while Călărași has an artificial-attributed one;
- all the roads meet in Cluj while Călărași hasn’t major goods, energy and informational ‘roads’ to link it with the other important towns from the region;
- the fact that Bucuresti-Ilfov region is included in the South-Muntenia region has a major influence on each and every aspect of regional development in the South–Muntenia region. This can be a push-up or a draw-back for the region, as the presence of Bucharest may ensure impulses for development for the ‘sister region’ or may induce a situation of lagging behind. Foreign Direct Investments can be a good example for both cases – they are concentrated in Bucharest even though South– Muntenia region needs them more at this stage of development, but also when investors come to Bucharest as it is inside another region they may become interested in investing in the latter, too;
- even though drawing a choreme is a very subjective operation and maybe drawn by other persons the shapes and the internal structures of both choremes would not have been the same, even the shape of both of the choremes say something about the regions in questions. North – West region has a more homogenous shape, while South– Muntenia region has a protuberance in the South-Eastern part consisting of Calarași county and an ‘enclave’ containing Bucuresti-Ilfov region;
- for the South– Muntenia region spatial organization reproduces the topographic hierarchy: the ‘heights’ under the Carpathians, piedmont plain and the steppe like plain, while the North – West region has mountainous relief at two sides from which the heights descends towards the Transylvanian plain.

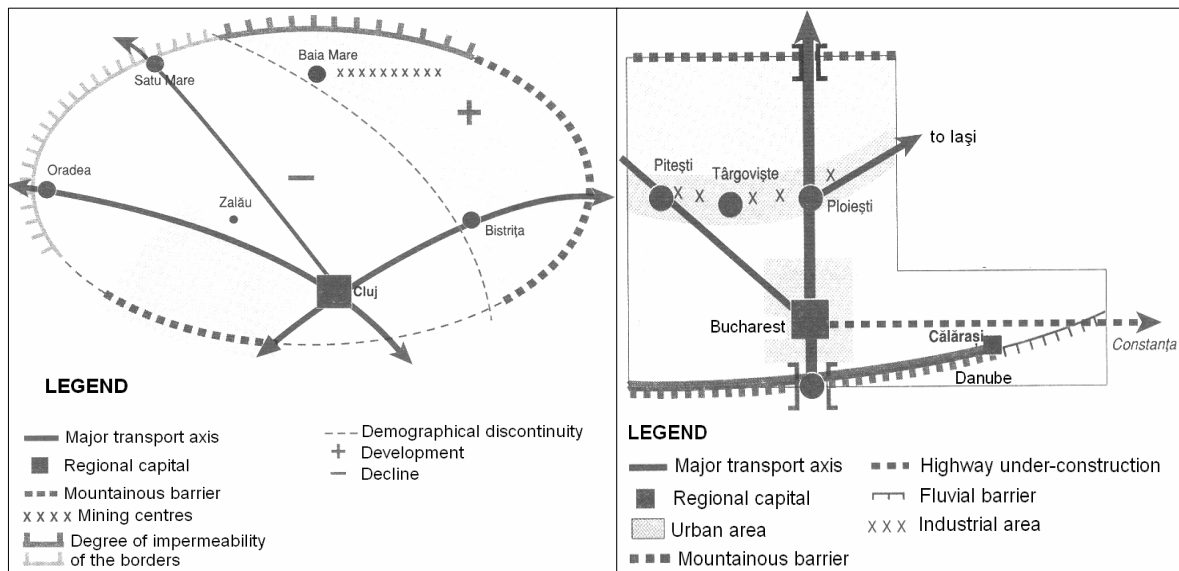


Figure 1. North–West region and South – Muntenia region. Choremes (source: Rey, 2002).

The path for development of the two regions is represented by the strategy they each established the priorities and measures their 2004-2006 regional development plan proposes. Important conclusions can be drawn by analyzing the two regions’ strategic objectives, measures and priorities of regional development. South – Muntenia region groups its priorities and measures in four domains: infrastructure development, business development, rural development and human resources development. Roughly, they correspond to the domains the North – West region aims to bring improvements at. At a close analysis of the main objectives

there are *differences* as it concerns the North – West regional plan – it focuses on a socio-economical integration of the under-privileged communities and on the promotion of an economy based on Know-How and lifelong learning. The under-privileged communities – a marginalized population, either disabled or rom, are facilitated the acces to public sevice (health, education etc.), thus complying with the rigths of all people and working towards a mentality change. Know-How and lifelong learning imply again a change in mentality and in attitude as they involve flexibility, adaptation, keeping pace with the changes in economy, a permanent innovation. They also mean investing in research and development activities, intensification of the innovation activities that generates an increase in the Knowledge which a region poseses ensuring the development of the region.

Analyzing the concrete measures each region plans to take in order to put in practice the objective and to realize the strategies there are a lots of *similarities* of the actual interventions in territory as it concerns both regions' action to:

- improve the infrastructure;
- develop the tourism;
- increase the workforce skills;
- diminish the negative impact on the environment of the polluting sources;
- develop the SMEs;
- take active measures for employment;
- ensure assistance and consultancy infrastructure;
- adaptation and structuring of the education and vocational training system based on the labor market demand;
- develop the IT domain etc.

Yet, there are also *differences* in the in the way they plan to apply these measures. There are some important aspects which have to be noticed within the *North – West region's measures*:

- an emphasis on developing regional specific products;
- blending financial and non-financial investments (tourism – promotion of the cultural heritage) thus ensuring a more complex development;
- an e-economy, namely involving IT in more and more domains in order to develop e-commerce, e-banking etc. thus enlarging IT usage and providing more services for the population;
- very important for the change of mentality and attitude I mentioned above are the awareness campaigns used as environmental measures organized in order to reach the public conscious and make the public aware of the environmental problems;
- relief of the traffic to increase the efficiency of the transport system;
- the modernization of two international airports.

The *specificity of the South – Muntenia region* consists in:

- emphasis on increasing the competitiveness of the region;
- the development of infrastructure in the ports;
- the promotion non-agricultural economical activities. This measure is considered by specialists one of the solutions for the reconstruction of the rural space as these non-agricultural activities would save it from the continuous process of agrarization which characterizes it presently.

The analysis above is not done to proclaim a 'champion' region and a 'loser' one. The present study analyses how both of the regions use their natural, economic, human heritage in the process of an intra-regional development, how they each planned the regional strategy to best suit the specificity of the region, what measures they intend to take to ensure development and accomplish the objectives proposed. There are cases in which analyzing the indexes one or the other region proves to have a better condition. The present situation of higher stage of development in the North – West region is also the result of geographical position (closer to the West markets), of historical conditions and of traditions established during centuries-influenced by the former elements. All these created a certain mentality of the population and a specific course of action. These are internal aspects to be considered when 'judging' the two regions and their level of development, aspects unseen and yet so evident through the outcome they produce. There proves to be, indeed, a difference in the level of development sustained by a series of compared indexes in favor of the North – West region, yet efforts are made throughout the country at regional and national level to eliminate these un-balances among regions. It also depends on the regions themselves to improve their competitiveness and eliminate as many obstacles in their development as they can. Both regions are on a good path, each in a specific way that derives also from the resources (human, natural, environmental, economical etc.) they have. Analyzing the strategy, the objectives and the measures planned for development of each of the regions under discussion the differences are not many or they depend also on the way the agencies formulated their objectives and planned their measures – so it is sometimes a linguistic difference, a matter of putting together the words. Yet, at a closer analysis, the strategies with their objectives and measures reveal a different focus of the two regions: a

## North–West Region and South–Muntenia Region –Romania. Comparative Analysis

certain transition process from the third sector to a fourth one (research and development) and an emphasis on modernization, innovation, changing attitude and shaping mentalities in the North - West region's objectives and measures and a planned process of tertialization and which aims to increase the efficiency of the agricultural and industrial units in the South Muntenia region.

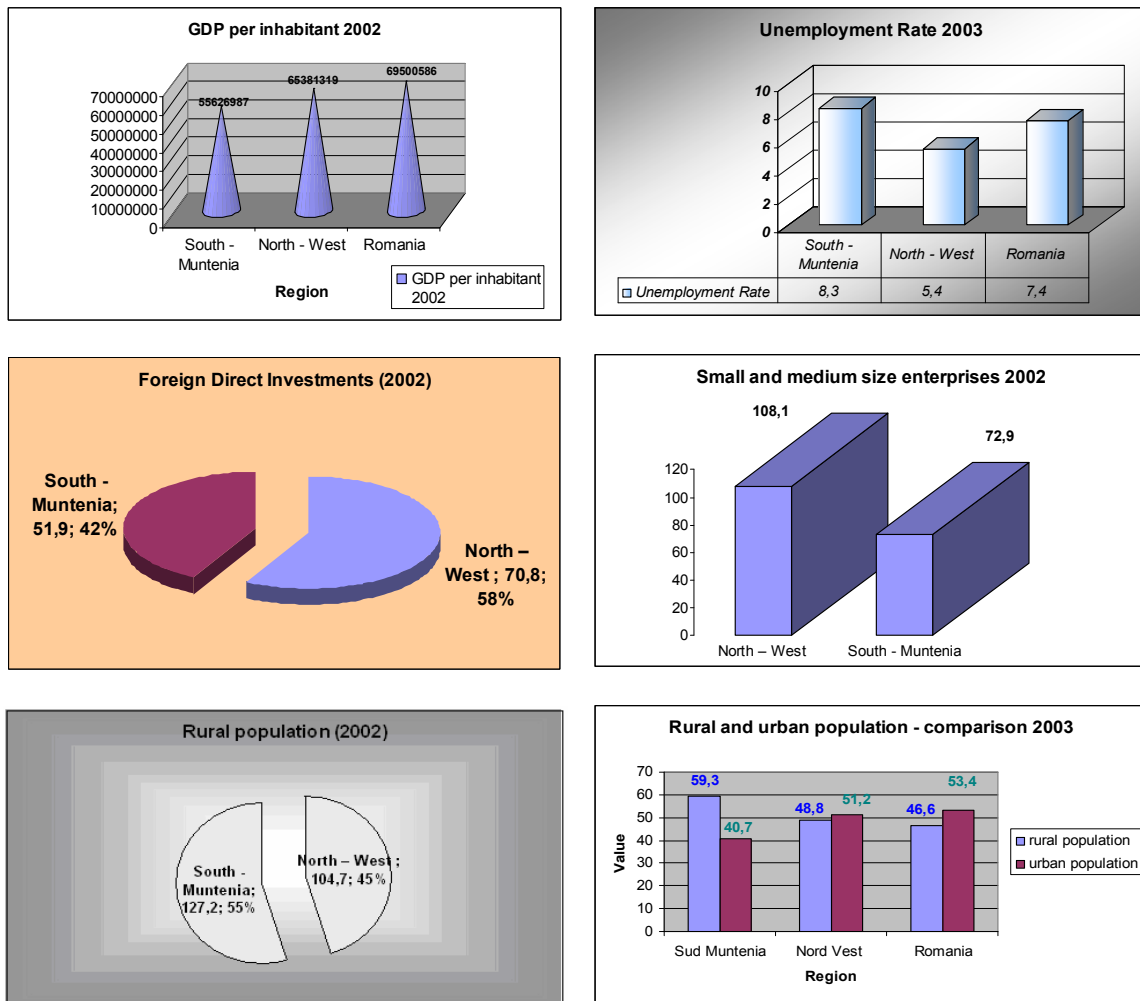


Figure 2. Indicators of development.

## Bibliography

- Benedek, J.** (2004), *Amenajarea teritoriului și dezvoltare regională*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- Gruber, K.** (1990), *Regionalism, state națională, integrare europeană: perspective vest-europene și central-est-europene*, Altera, 10, V.
- Kolumban, G.** (1998), *România într-o „Europă a regiunilor”*, Altera, 9, IV.
- Rey, Violette, Groza, O., Ianoș, I., Pătroescu, M.** (2002), *Atlasul României*, RAO.
- Vincze, Maria** (2000), *Dezvoltare regională și rurală. Idei și practici*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, Cluj-Napoca.
- \*\*\* *Anuarul statistic al României 2003, 2004*, Institutul Național de Statistică, România.