



The Tendency towards Division of the Romanian Territorial-Administrative Units. Dysfunctions of the Present Administrative Model

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Changes in the Romanian territorial-administrative organisation after 1990

The territorial-administrative organization of Romania in counties, towns and communes laid down by the new constitution and by Law no.2/1968 with all its changes, established the county as a superior-level administrative unit, that had legal status and that became a tradition, as it had a relative stability as an administrative unit in 39 years. At this administrative level, there were no changes after 1990.

At the other inferior administrative levels, all the changes of Law no.2/1968 done in 1992 and in 2005 emphasized the tendency to establish new communes, to grant the status of town to some communes that proved to be more developed as infrastructure is concerned, to transfers and to set up towns. These phenomena is differently marked in the territory, as there are counties that did not experience any change - Caraş-Severin county, as compared to counties that experienced a lot of the process of establishing new communes: Dolj county – 12 communes were set up, Ialomiţa county – 12, Olt county – 11, Suceava county – 15, Timiş county – 13, Vaslui county – 11. During this period, a total number of 161 communes have been established (there were 2865 at the 1992 Census, as compared to 2846 communes at the end of 2004) and some communes became towns. Yet, this last category “is very far regarding the qualitative parameters imposed by the contemporary urbanism principles”¹ and the town established are not the result of a systemic approach, as the political side is governing.

Regarding the setting up of new towns, the following data are important: there were 260 towns at 1992 Census, five new towns were set up between 1992 and 2002 (Făget, Teiuş, Baia de Arieş, Geoagiu and Otopeni) – totalizing 265 towns. Between March 18, 2002 and December 6, 2004, 49 new towns were established, counting 314 in total. This general trend of setting up new administrative units was based on vanities and local nostalgia or political reasons where the steak was the formal and especially the informal influence on the results of local and legislative elections. The fragmentation of the fundamental administrative units can weaken the budget, the institutions and also the legitimacy of one of the commune or of both the communes that were previously just one administrative unit. The problems multiply if some estates and institutions that have been considered as mutual patrimony (Community Centres, meadows) are to be divided among the parts.

After 1990, there was an increased prevalence of the process of establishing new communes. *Establishing new communes* by dividing the existing ones is almost always determined out of political reasons. The fact that the persons coming from the villages that are for the split represent some local authority induces frustrations for the inhabitants of the root commune, thus ensuring the success of a legal course of action by the organization of a referendum. The newly-formed commune that splits from the other one can be endowed with a superior number of population, endowments and economic potential as compared to the root commune that will “inherit” all the problems.

¹ Surd, V., Bold, I., Zotic, V., Chira, C., *Amenajarea teritoriului și infrastructurii tehnice*, Ed. Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2005, p. 368.

In this way, out of a viable administrative unit, there will result, after the process of division, two units, out of which the best case presents one of them with at least some economic potential which to ensure its subsistence. The communes that remain (the root ones) – are sometimes under the minimum dimensions and have low incomes, in this way needing assistance from the County Councils of those counties – from the special funds for a balanced development.

The division of the root administrative units having as reason the relatively big distances and the difficult access to the centre of commune represents, in many cases, a false problem. To solve the problem of access a solution would be to modernize the commune road or the county road – an aspect more and more difficult to be put in practice taking into account the degree of fragmentation of the communes, due to their low technical and economic capacity to access funds.

Here are some examples of communal divisions and the effects they induced at functional and administrative levels: Dresca commune located in the North-West of Botoşani county, towards the North-Eastern border of Suceava Plateau, a small commune, included three villages: Dersca, Lozna and Străteni. It was reorganized administratively in two very small communes: Lozna with Lozna and Străteni villages, and Dresca – the other commune with the village bearing the same name². The two communes have approximately 2400 ha each and as population is concerned: 2.180 inhabitants in Lozna and 3.800 in Dresca. To solve the problem of the administrative buildings in Lozna, a Community Centre was transformed in Police Station and a pub in Commune Hall.

The turf moor and the lake resulted from its exploitation were divided between the two communes. The agricultural area of Lozna is 1.797,7 ha, out of which 1.491,97 were arable land. The transport infrastructure is not a modern one (29,6 km, out of which 14,6 are paved with stone and the rest are not). Railway does not exist, nor does drainage or water supply systems. There are five commercial agents and two agricultural associations.

Dersca commune is surviving because of the many natives – especially the young category – that are working in Italy and then a part of the capital is invested in the commune.

This trend of administrative division of the rural areas takes place in the general context of a decrease in population, which in 1998 as compared to 1996 reached alarming values: it decreased with 30-50% in 26,2% communes out of the total number of communes and with over 50% in 5% of all communes³.

As an example from Cluj county, we should mention Negreni commune that was formed by three communes that were part of Ciucea commune. This event was just one example of a more general trend promoted during 2000-2004 when 222 new communes were established.

Negreni commune with Negreni, Bucea and Prelucele villages, counting 2.706 inhabitants took over on its territory all the economic units that are profitable: the chair factory from Bucea, the traditional fair in Negreni, the terrains along the National Road no. 1 on which a lot of motels and restaurants are built. Yet, the establishment of the commune meant important financial strives as the specific institutions had to be set up: Police Station, health care unit, veterinary unit, library along with the hiring of personnel: 13 persons for the Commune Hall and a local development agent.

Ciucea commune, with two villages: Ciucea and Vânători, with 1.751 inhabitants inherited only the problems: low incomes, a lot of tax-free inhabitants on the basis of the legislation concerning gads, difficulties in supporting financially the local administrative institutions.

An analysis of the incomes in 2003 – the first year after the division of the two administrative units – highlights an income per capita of 301.070 lei for Ciucea commune and one of 400.279 lei for the newly-established commune: Negreni.

A new Community Centre was built in Negreni so far and there are systematization projects ongoing, while the Commune Hall in Ciucea is waiting for money from the County Council in conformity with Ordinance no. 45/2003 concerning local finance⁴ and hiring an agriculture professional represents an old issue.

² Law no. 342/July 8, 2003 for the setting up of Lozna commune, Botoşani county, through the reorganization of Dersca commune.

³ in conformity with Law no.351/2001 concerning the aproval of the Plan for National territorial Planning (P.A.T.N.)

⁴ Official Bulletin no. 431, I, June 19, 2003 (Monitorul Oficial nr. 431, Partea I, din 19 iunie 2003)

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These were examples to prove that irrational decisions concerning territorial-administrative organization can lead to important territorial unbalances. Based on local political interests, these centrifugal tendencies go against the principle of territorial balance and the tendency of union, of association of the communes in order to administer the problems that exceed their administrative capacity.

The abuse of the *establishment of new towns* is the result of the merging of local political ambitions with the desire of the central level to improve present statistics, the ratio of rural population placing Romania next to Albania – on the last places in Europe. During 2002-2004, several communes characterized by a certain level of economic development and endowments were declared towns. Most of these are still far from the provisions concerning the urban areas included in the law.

Thus, the following settlements were granted the statute of town: Pecica and Sântana – Arad county; Bucecea and Flămânzi – Botoşani county; Bechet and Dăbuleni – Dolj county; Popeşti-Leordeni and Voluntari – Ilfov county; Şomcuta Mare, Tăuţii Măgheruş and Ulmeni – Maramureş county; Sărmaşu, Ungheni and Sângeorgiu de Pădure – Mureş county; Arduş – Satu Mare county; Broşteni and Frasin – Suceava county; Gătaia and Recaş – Timiş county; Bălceşti, Berbeşti and Băbeni – Vâlcea county which are just a few examples.

There are also requests for *re-establishing some of the counties* that have been dissolved during the Communist regime (Bârlad, Tutova, Muscel, Turda, Someş, Tecuci etc.). The League Representing the Counties Abusively Dissolved claims the re-establishment of 19 of the former counties. We think that this issue must be carefully considered, at least having in mind three aspects:

- firstly, *the budget* should be considered - it would mean a lot of money to divide some of the present counties. Territorial reorganizations are usually initiated during periods of advanced development so that the complex problems that appear can be financially covered;
- secondly, one should also consider the functional aspect of such an issue. Local pride is hidden behind arguments that are no longer valid, as the relative stability of the present administrative organization determined, in time, changes within the relationships among administrative units, thus a revival of old administrative units must be considered carefully because they might not be practical solutions for the administrative organization;
- thirdly, the present context favours the debates related to a superior level of organization in NUTS – dividing the present counties being an opposite action.

On the other hand, by advancing just some cases without a strategic plan for a longer period of time represents a risk to generate administrative units that are ephemeral and non-practical.

Dysfunction of the present administrative model

Concerning the divisions of the counties within the present administrative model, there were several dysfunctions that appeared in time demonstrating the fact that the present administrative model is far from being perfect. These dysfunctions suggest the necessity of a study of the advantages of *dividing some of the counties and uniting others* – by considering the areas of polarization of some local centres.

Maramureş and Alba counties are examples from the first category. In Maramureş county, the mountainous area represents 43% of the county. Maramureş Depression - one of the largest ones in Romania - lies between Rodna Mountains and Maramureş Mountains - on one side and Gutâi Mountains and Țibleş Mountains - on the other. The access of the population to the county seat – Baia Mare is very difficult as it implies a detour of about 150 km because of the orographic barrier, thus appearing the issue of investing Sighetu Marmatei with administrative functions to represent this area.

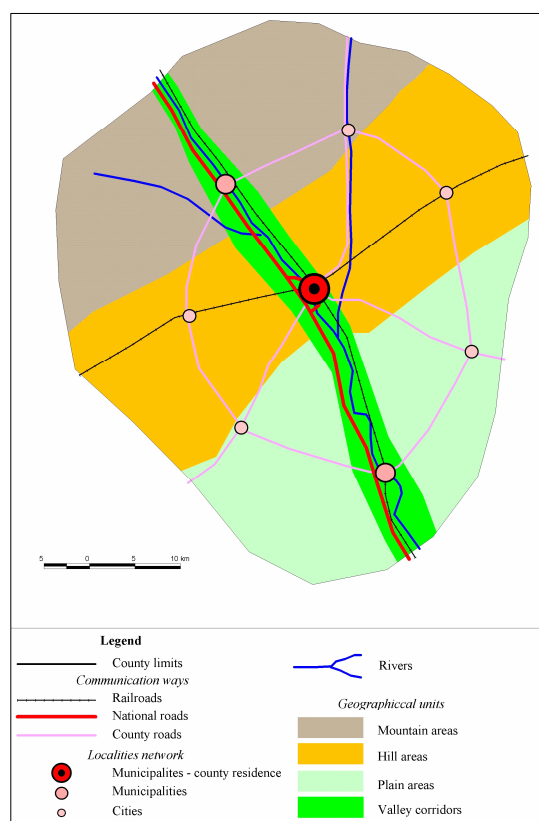
A similar situation is to be found in Alba county, where all the settlements from the mountainous area - the North-Western part of the county – have a difficult access to the county seat – Alba Iulia which serves better the other relief units - Târnavă Plateau and

Mureş Valley. This mountainous area experiencing problems characteristics for a mountainous civilization suggests a different approach, maybe by setting up a county which to include the Arieş water basin.

Botoşani, Tulcea, Galaţi and Brăila counties would form the other category. Botoşani county, marked by a process of under-development, proves to be unacceptable from an economic point of view, a suggestion being to divide it between the neighbouring counties: Suceava and Iaşi. Tulcea county could represent together with Constanţa county a functional unit - the former county could benefit more from the proximity of the seaside, thus eliminating the disparity between the two counties. Uniting Galaţi and Brăila counties would represent a chance for a functional Galaţi-Brăila conurbation with benefits for both of the counties.

Considering the fact that the present administrative organization is a perfectible one, discussing these issues and considering the possible measures that can be taken should not observe the politic criteria, in our opinion.

Consequently, a choremic model for an optimal county would be appropriate, structured on geographic, politic and economic relations which to serve further as a model for certain changes of the territorial-administrative organization (map 1).



Map 1. Choremic model of an ideal county.

The choremic model for an optimal county would have the following characteristics:

- *area: 5,700 km²;*
- *population: 500.000 inhabitants;*
- *network of settlements (observing the principle of correlation between the total number of population and the rank of the towns): municipalities – 3 (150.000; 75.000; 50.000 inhabitants, respectively), towns – 5 (25.000; 13.000; 10.000; 7.000 and 5.000 inhabitants), communes – 69 (2.390 inhabitants at average), villages – 330;*
- *allocation of major relief forms: 1/3 mountain, 1/3 plateau, 1/3 plain or 1/3 mountain and 2/3 plateau or plain;*
- *to be connected to a major transport infrastructure which to overlap a major waterway;*
- *an equilibrium in the presence of the major development resources;*
- *a geometrical form, without*

protuberances;

- *a balanced distribution of the towns having the county seat in the centre of the county;*
- *history, tradition, legitimacy;*
- *qualified workforce;*
- *endowments within the county seat, the municipalities and the towns:*
- *county institutions which to represent the ministries; Court of Appeal, Law Court, Trial Court, Prosecutor's Office;*
- *county institutions which to represent political institutions, trade unions, NGOs;*
- *universities, research centres;*
- *museums, theatres, a polyvalent hall;*
- *clinics and hospitals;*
- *business centres, commerce, industry and agriculture centre, publishing houses, press agencies, TV stations;*

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- *religious centres (for the religions recognized by the state);*
- *international airport, stations, postal offices having international coverage;*
- *stadiums, sports centres, skating rink, touristy and recreational complex;*
- *banks and international companies.*

Considering this model, one can notice several present counties that are similar in *area*: Bistrița-Năsăud, Brașov, Giurgiu, Iași, Neamț, Olt, Teleorman and Vâlcea. Other counties have larger areas (with approximately 50%): Timiș, Tulcea, Suceava, Caraș Severin or smaller: Covasna, Sălaj, Ilfov.

Concerning the *allocation of major relief forms*, one can notice a great diversity in the counties as compared to the choremic model. The counties that are similar to the optimal county are situated at the limit between the mountains or the hills with the plains or between the mountains with Subcarpații Getici (Arad, Bihor, Gorj, Vâlcea, Argeș, Dâmbovița, Prahova, Buzău, Vrancea, Bacău and Neamț). Many counties are characterized by the existence of just one type of relief: plain in Dolj, Teleorman, Giurgiu, Ilfov, Călărași, Ialomița, Brăila and Botoșani counties or mountain in Covasna, Harghita, Brașov, Bistrița Năsăud and Hunedoara counties.

Some counties (Bacău, Caraș Severin, Maramureș and Suceava) have a *network of settlements* similar to the model presented, yet there are also counties (Prahova, Hunedoara and Vâlcea) with a larger number of towns and municipalities or a smaller one (Ilfov, Giurgiu and Bistrița Năsăud). As compared to the 69 communes considered optimal, some of the counties have a larger number of communes: Olt (104), Dolj (104) and Suceava (97) or a smaller one: Brăila (40), Covasna (39), Ilfov (36) and Tulcea (45). A similar situation can be found in Caraș-Severin and Botoșani counties.

Considering the *shape*, Sibiu, Teleorman, Prahova, Botoșani and Gorj present a regular shape, without protuberances or prolongations which to result in problems of function, as compared to Maramureș, Mehedinți, Alba and Mureș counties that have an irregular shape.

Related to the *population*, Hunedoara, Maramureș and Olt counties are very close to the threshold suggested by the choremic model (500.000 inhabitants), while other counties have bigger values: Prahova (with 66%), Iași, Timiș and Suceava or much smaller: Ialomița, Ilfov, Mehedinți, Sălaj and Tulcea counties.

During the modern and the contemporary period, Romania did not have a stable administrative organization which to prove its validity and effectiveness in time. The permanent search for the territorial-administrative model that would serve the momentary benefits of the internal and external political power, as well as the historic conditions did not facilitate a stable and long-lasting administrative model which to represent a suitable local administrative organization that would suit perfectly the social and cultural specificities, the specific administrative and political traditions.

Having the stability factor in focus – so necessary for a long-term strategic planning, it is a must to benefit from the experience of the present administrative organization on counties – which has a history of over 38 years – changing only those elements that proved inefficient.

The excessive fragmentation of the administrative organization which resulted in administrative units that do not function leads to expenditures from the state budget that are not justified and do not necessarily result in the welfare of the inhabitants.

The imperative of establishing the development regions in order to make the Romanian administrative organization compatible with the European one led to an artificial organization of the eight statistical regions as optimal regions for the implementing of regional development policies and their financing on programs and projects. The development regions group counties that are in a relation of functional complementarity, yet they are characterized by homogeneity not legitimacy supported by common historical experience (with two exceptions: West Regions and South-West Region). Making the present regional units valid as legal persons would surely be an error because of the dysfunction which foreshadow: the borders among the development regions divide water basins which need a unitary approach (for example Arieș water basin) or counties that developed, with time, powerful economic relationships.

On the other hand, all the debates on the issue of introducing a regional level within the administrative organization that might have a debatable legitimacy as it will introduce centrifugal forces – thus infringing the provisions of the Constitution, completes the image of a framework of debates on the issue of “marking the territory”.

We are of the opinion that the issue of administrative organization must go over these debates and it must consider the setting up of functional administrative units which to reunite strategic resources within the framework of a normative system focused on a real decentralization, on the strengthening of the administrative capacities at the level of major administrative units.

Having at its core a coherent administrative code, this system must allow multiple forms of cooperation among the territorial communities and among various human communities within its framework. The internal borders should not represent barriers in the development of the Romanian territory – “an insufficiently exploited deposit”.

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